



*Nude*

*Bruce*

*Review*

# NUDE BRUCE REVIEW

*Issue 10*

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&  
**Claire Pongonis** – Cover Illustration  
(image remixed by Mobbs)

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*In memoriam*  
Jacqueline Winter Thomas  
1991 - 2019

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(&)

Dear Brucelings,

At the time of this writing a pandemic virus is churning through the lungs and blood of readerwriterthinkers across the globe; at the time of this writing the streets of all 50 states bear witness to an emancipation yet to be accomplished; at the time of this writing the Earth runs a fever and fire season beckons; at the time of this writing a police officer is somewhere stroking his baton; at the time of this writing a poem is somewhere being born, thrown footlong into a world that does not want it or expect it but cannot do without it.

We're happygiddygone to bring to you the snapcrackling 10<sup>th</sup> issue of *Nude Bruce Review*. Here you'll find poems and stories from writers far and wide. Here there are morsels aplenty for your literary diet. Take and eat. And eat to the very end to catch a couple scrumptious crumbs from poet Cameron Morse, who has been kicking a cancer's ass for half a decade now.

Our Issue 10 cover is a COVID-19 remix (h/t Andrew A. Mobbs) of Claire Pongonis's Issue 9 cover image. Mask up, folks. It helps fight infection and state surveillance. All power and glory to the radicals in the streets. Black Lives Matter.

Brucefully,

Andrew & Tim  
Editors-in-chief

# Anatomy

by Maria McLeod

I consider getting a tattoo  
of the word *DRAT!* in comic sans  
directly over the not-so-insignificant  
three-inch scar, a corporeal underline,  
reddened slice mark reminder  
of my mortality highlighting the joke  
I'd like to make of my demise, *DRAT!*  
newly inked into the skin  
to the right of my nipple  
on my right breast.

I think of dying, not of cancer, but of some  
other malady that results in my naked,  
but still whole, corpse  
atop a stainless steel table  
in a room with a black-and-white tiled floor,  
like the Wayne State University morgue  
I visited with my anatomy class at age 19 — a field trip  
from Port Huron to Detroit — the semester I decided  
not to become a nurse, the white sheet  
draped over the woman's body,  
a woman the age I am now.  
Her long, white hand hanging over the side  
of the embalming table, sticking out from  
under the cloth, her blood pooled  
purple in her fingertips.

I imagine myself

as this woman, awaiting  
my dissection, the lowly med student sent in  
to the body, my body, my story  
told to her in these scars  
and perhaps this word etched  
into my breast, funny —  
oh, how I hope she'd find me funny —  
as she considered which scalpel  
to take to my cold flesh,  
my parting gift,  
the last I've got to give  
when I didn't intend to die  
but die I did.

# The *H* of Hate

by Maria McLeod

The *H* of hate festers  
in the pit  
of my bowels, steaming  
like a fat man in Hell's sauna,  
a dingy towel stretched  
across the vast expanse  
of his gut.  
Clamped in lower case, *a* is the anus  
of every person who's done me  
wrong. *T* is the secret tooth-  
clenched door to the storm cellar  
of my revenge where a crooked bell hop  
recites Charles Bukowski in a piercing wail.  
*E*, evil eye, casts an annihilating gaze,  
sending its prisoners  
to my innards—foul enemies  
*Hate*, I carry you like a devil mother.  
I feast upon the corpses  
of those who've crossed me. I refuse  
to spit them out.

# Robot Interfaith Festival

by Joddy Murray

Gather around against the wind.  
Into what portal is peace, grace,  
replacements? Come experience

as much as you experience anyway.  
After, before duty bound again,  
when the sun is at some place

(doesn't really matter) in the sky,  
and you return to the regularly  
muddled program, pay attention

to non-attention. What is between  
or among the known: this is how  
mechanics discover organics,

how the diffuse reorganize,  
like iron pilings in a magnetic  
field, like sand under waves.

# Presenting

By Anthony Lapwood

1.

Backed into the corner of the makeup room in order that she not complicate his vision of himself in the silvered glass, Lucy watches the reflection of Harry Harris bare its teeth at her in a broad grin.

“Impeccable,” Harry Harris says. He extends his arms from beneath the black nylon cape and runs his open palms up the sides of his clipped head.

“Weekly’s not too frequent, Mr Harris?” Lucy asks, approaching the hair and makeup station.

“Not in the least, little Lucy,” Harry Harris says, his attention still directed at her through the proxy of his reflection. “A fresh format requires a fresh look, even of its familiar faces. ‘Look sharp. Think sharp. Stay sharp.’ A man’s brand has to remain bankable. One can’t sit around gathering dust and mildew in some far-flung corner of the studio.” Harry Harris smiles, his mouth closed bar one nugget of toothtip glinting through a chink of parted flesh. “I’m not so time-worn—am I, Lucy?”

“Quite fresh, Mr Harris,” Lucy says, in a practiced way.

The revamped news show has been on air for five weeks. Ahead of Day One, Lucy had studied the flipbook of makeup references for the lead talent, Harry Harris and Caroline Hopper, but before then she’d only glimpsed larger-than-life pictures of Harry Harris on the backs of buses and sides of buildings, and smaller-than-life ones in magazines. And of course occasional clips did the rounds online—controversial interviews, mischievous remarks, mocking

looks. *Ratings fodder*, she's since heard it termed. Even so, back then, although Lucy had never sat down to watch Harry Harris at his regular dinnertime slot, he'd felt like part of her world—like a popular film she'd never seen but still felt she knew by heart. Was that sense of instant familiarity what Harry Harris meant by *his brand*?

Lucy picks up a can of *noir de jais* hair-loss concealer and shakes it, then begins spraying around his crown, using a paper towel as a guard. It won't solve the real problem, but it will lessen its obviousness. Seated in the makeup chair, Harry Harris now seems like less of a figure at large. Because now he really is a part of her world. Because now he's no longer a wrong-sized man of pixels and ink, but a right-sized man of flesh and hair, bearing imperfections that she's been entrusted to mask. Though who is this person really—with his head and arms poking out of the flowing black cape like a life-sized hand puppet—is he Harry Harris the man or Harry Harris the brand? Or something in-between, a hybrid manbrand?

Harry Harris swivels rightward, until the outer edge of his crown comes into view in the mirror, then swivels as far again leftward.

“Did you watch the playback?” he asks.

“Uh-huh,” Lucy says. “It's helpful seeing how my work looks on screen.”

“What did you think of the opening, after the graphics, when it cuts to the studio, when the camera comes whooshing across from the side of the stage?”

“Uh. Quite dramatic.”

“The camera captures a touch too much of me, don't you think?”

Harry Harris swivels rightward then leftward again, and Lucy watches him tracking the changing projection of his

image in the mirror. How many years has he spent examining himself in mirrors like this one, questioning whether the results are up to muster? The hairless portion of his pate is almost perfectly circular, the same diameter as Lucy's palm, and the unevenly thinning hair around it looks like a patchy blend-job. The shortness of the haircut helps de-emphasise the overall thinness of the hair—by not allowing length to betray the absence of volume—but without exposing too much scalp and thereby revealing more harshly the underlying truth. Lucy wonders if she should spray his crown with more *noir de jais* concealer. She knows if she suggests it, he'll say yes. Lightly tapping his scalp with a finger she notices that it feels too tacky, that the concealer isn't drying quickly enough, like a too-thick coat of paint.

“Look sharp. Think sharp. Stay sharp’,” Harry Harris repeats. “Your talents underpin the very motto of the show, little Lucy. I may not be everyone's cup of tea, but a sharp edge is needed to cut through all the politicking and the touchy-feely, namby-pamby nonsense—and through the ratings! A blunt tool achieves nothing. If I don't *look the part*, the punters will simply tune out. It's sad but true. No one takes a shabby-looking man seriously.”

“I quite like Caroline's style,” Lucy says. “Also.”

“Caroline provides a softer touch,” Harry Harris says. “She has that homely look. It helps viewers feel warm and safe. We're a modern newsroom version of the classic good cop, bad cop act.”

“I suppose that's true,” Lucy says, the practiced tone in her voice giving way. She looks at her hands. Dusted with clipped hairs from the head of Harry Harris, her hands are like finely fractured porcelain. Perhaps it's only Harry Harris's insistence on calling her *little Lucy* that makes her think as

much. She brushes her hands on her jeans and collects a terrycloth flannel from a neatly folded pile, then offers it to Harry Harris. He delicately sweeps it across his forehead, his nose and cheeks, his jowls. He tilts his face upwards, his eyelids closed and lightly trembling.

“Did I catch them all?” he asks.

Lucy inspects his reflection, and then his flesh, his delicate facial epidermis.

“Looks like it, Mr Harris.”

“You must call me Harry,” he says, opening his eyes. “If we’re going to spend time together like a little family, then we must stop acting like strangers.” He offers Lucy another bright toothy grin.

Terribly bright. Is it maybe the lighting? The vanity mirror is bordered with halogen bulbs—warm and natural, the best option in the absence of daylight. It’s UV-A that makes whites glow fluorescent, Lucy recalls. Does he use a home application kit? Because would a dental professional agree to provide treatment this aggressive? Harry Harris’s tooth enamel is looking a little chalky and his famously pink gums are speckled with crimson. Better that he lay off the cigarettes and red wine, she should say. Better that he stop worrying so much over things he can’t control, things already lost.

Saying as much would surely upset her job trial. Though does Harry Harris know she’s on a job trial? An upset job trial would be a disaster in terms of income required to cover the rent and pay down her student loan, and all the rest. However, it’d be helpful regarding other matters—such as no longer being called *little Lucy*. And such as freeing her and her somewhat hesitant semi-colleague to venture to new romantic

levels. On a job trial, is anyone strictly speaking one hundred per cent your colleague, even the producer?

“Okay—now, make me up,” Harry Harris says.

Lucy snaps open the locks on the tray of liquid foundation bottles and passes her hand over the lighter tones—the ones that Harry Harris had complained all last week were, “Too light, too light! Not radiant enough by far!” She touches a bottle containing a bronzer shade and Harry Harris assents with a nod. “All right,” Lucy says, then dabs an incautious amount onto a clean wedge-shaped sponge.

## 2.

“Keep it static,” Craig instructs Gavin. His preference is to update the team about any altered rules of the game upfront, at the production meeting, but the word came to him late. And perhaps this is better. Speaking directly, one on one, with Gavin in a quiet, unpopulated corner of the studio.

“Sure, no more big sweeps,” Gavin says. “Canned those already.”

“Right. But also no little sweeps. Not from the left. On Caroline’s side, do what you like. But on his side, it stays static.”

“Static is un-dynamic.”

“Static is the new rule.”

“We’re a dynamic show. We’re a show that ‘moves and shakes’, if I may quote our own promo copy. Dynamism requires motion. Stasis is anathema to the foundational values we wish to project.”

“Don’t talk back so much, please, Gav.”

“It’s my job to keep us interesting.”

“Keep us interesting from Caroline’s side.”

“Does he get motion sickness looking at the camera? Tell him to keep his eyes focussed straight ahead. I’ve tried telling him—the last five weeks I’ve tried telling him—but he doesn’t listen. It’s no good when his eyes follow the camera. It distracts the audience. It breaks the fourth wall.”

“Delivering the news breaks the fourth wall, Gav. It breaks right into people’s living rooms.”

“That opening sequence is theatre, Craig.”

“Don’t move the camera.”

“It’s literally the only mobile manned camera on set. Everything else, we’ve got remotely covered from the control room, right? Eighty-five per cent of that one camera’s active use is on those sweeping shots. We are specifically paying for that to be the case.”

“Gav.”

“Craig, I admire your diligence. I admire the inconceivable number of hours you put into this shitshow. But if you’re going to hold me back from doing my job, you need to specify why.”

“Don’t call this gig a shitshow, Gav.”

“No joke—it’s a privilege. But tell me. Why is my contribution to this world of televisual magic being forcibly impaired?”

Craig glances along the narrow space at the rear of the set. From this side, the set is a blank wall of powder-coated steel panels and timber struts—the back of the curved B backdrop, whose branded front side reveals itself to the camera array in carefully calculated ways through the curved, partially frosted glass panes that form the A backdrop. Craig spots Shirley, the floor manager, at the far end of the set, shuffling out of the green room with a stack of salmon crêpes on a paper plate. She disappears around the far curve of the B

backdrop. Craig counts off three seconds, then cups a hand around his mouth and lets the words slip out.

“Huh?” Gavin says.

Craig whispers again.

“Bull spit?”

Craig leans in closer and repeats himself.

“Bald spot!”

“Not a peep!” Craig hisses. “Stick to something about motion sickness, if anyone asks. Or give a more artistic reason—motion sickness isn’t right either. Don’t make this about Harry. Tell people the camera’s catching glare from the A set. Tell them the two sets are creating a nauseating gestalt shift for test viewers. Make something up. Just remember, the rule is a three-quarter profile *maximum* on Harry at any time.”

“His bald spot, Craig.”

“Gav.”

“We’re compromising the whole flare and flavour of the opener to appease—”

“Zip it. Yes.”

### 3.

Harry Harris regards the updated hardcopy script, freshly plonked in front of him on the expansive presenting desk by Shirley, who had said nothing but had sucked on the fingers of one hand. He notices on the script’s cover page what appears to be a smear of crème fraîche. Harry Harris flips through the sheaf of papers and stops at page four.

INTERVIEW W/ ARUNA KAUR (DIPLOMAT)  
OC, CAROLINE

And staying sharp with us now... is the recently appointed British foreign minister—

Can that upstart producer not read? Harry Harris had clearly indicated in blue biro with a yellow sticky flag that OC, CAROLINE ought to be reverted to OC, HARRY, owing to reasons of his established competency in handling tough biscuits like this new British minister. Professional courtesy required that he not scribble down those precise words, though he will have to use words very much like them, or stronger, in a follow-up conversation with that young producer in a private room once tonight's show has wrapped, and it will remain to be seen whether other words may be called for, however so often with whomever so required, as well. And Heaven help all those around him if that ridiculous camera does not cease to whoosh.

Harry Harris glances over at Caroline, looking alert but slightly dowdy for her relative youth, in a bad shade of ivy green. She is making notes in the margins of page four of her copy of the script.

“Good luck handling that foreign one,” Harry Harris says.

#### 4.

Craig buzzes Lucy into the smallish control room and Lucy takes a seat and touches his elbow. Craig angles his headphones down around his neck, keeping one over-ear cup pressed against the side of his head. Lucy tells Craig he looks tired—sweaty, also. This is despite the cool AC breeze creeping into the control room from the long, narrow vent above the bank of flat-screen colour monitors that offer views of every filmable angle of the set. Further monitors are arranged at both ends of a large black console—which is festooned with switches and buttons and dials and meters

with swaying needles and which spans almost the width of the room—and these monitors provide black-and-white views of key locations around the studio floor.

“Sweaty? It gets hot under the studio lights, Luce,” Craig says. “It gets hot running around after the sick and infirm. It gets hot arguing with certain individuals about the artistic benefits of retaining our jobs. It gets hot making the magic happen.”

Craig points to a colour monitor showing Harry Harris seated behind an enormous desk of opaque white glass as lustrous as a pool of cream. A label across the top of the monitor, written in black Sharpie on masking tape, reads CAMERA B. The view of Harry Harris is replicated on a larger, central monitor with LIVE taped across the top.

“Does Harry look different?” Craig says.

“Different?” Lucy says.

“He looks really tanned,” Craig says.

Craig presses a button on the console and a light above Camera B’s monitor turns from green to red, while a light above the monitor corresponding to Camera C, holding a steady shot on Caroline, turns from red to green. Caroline’s mouth begins moving as she reads from the autocue.

Craig points at Camera B’s red-lit monitor.

“Watch when he brings his hands up,” Craig says.

“When he shuffles his printed script. Look—comparatively normal. But his face—really, really tan.”

“He looks healthy?” Lucy suggests.

Caroline introduces the commercial break into Camera C and Craig flips first one switch, then another. The light above Caroline’s monitor turns red and then the show’s playoff graphics shoot across the central monitor in a burst of pastel-tinted lens flares, followed by a wide establishing shot

of a sleek red car racing through the verdant countryside. A quarter of the screen is overlaid with a timer—02:30, 02:29, 02:28...

“Jesus!” Craig shouts. He presses down a button labelled FLR MGR and barks “Camera A!” into a long stamen-like microphone protruding from the centre of the console. On one of the black-and-white monitors, Gavin touches a finger to an ear, then begins waving his arms above his head and moves out of frame. He reappears on an adjacent monitor, where a second man is manoeuvring a camera towards the left of the stage, towards the left of Harry Harris, in preparation for a big sweeping post-commercials bumper shot.

“Shouldn’t Gavin be in here with you?” Lucy asks.

“I need him on the floor,” Craig says. “I need him to wrangle the horses tonight. You hear about Shirley? That fancy-pants catering company is officially on notice. Shirley’s been barfing her guts out since she scoffed a bunch of their premium salmon crêpes. I had to phone her husband to pick her up. Has Shirley gone, do you know, Luce? Have you heard or seen Shirley barfing?”

Lucy shakes her head.

“Hey, how’s the Brit—the diplomat?”

“Makeup’s done. I left her sipping ginger beer in the green room.”

“Ginger beer? She queasy—she touch the catering?”

“Uh. Maybe the melon? I think she’s just nervous.”

“A nervous diplomat.” Craig sighs. “At least Caroline’s leading the interview segment tonight. You’re sure the diplomat wasn’t queasy?”

Craig toggles another switch and the show’s playon graphics rush across the central monitor and Harry Harris

appears, smiling face-on into the motionless barrel of Camera B, teeth like gleaming jewels set in his effulgent face.

Lucy says, “I think she just likes ginger beer.”

5.

“And staying sharp with us now... is the recently appointed British foreign minister, Aruna Kaur,” Caroline’s voice says through Craig’s headphone ear-cup. Caroline turns away from Camera C. Her figure comes to rest in perfect profile, facing the diplomatic guest, who is captured by the trained focus of Camera D, which Craig now cuts to.

“Welcome Missus Kaur to tonight’s show.”

“Thank you, Catherine.”

“Your appointment follows a bumpy ride in British politics. Most recently the tensions between your predecessor and key figures of the American administration, which—”

“—I cannot, as you must appreciate—”

“—and it’s interesting to observe—”

“—I cannot speak for my former—”

“—with at least a sense of distance, from an antipodean perspective—”

Craig violently depresses the FLR MGR button.

“What the hell is going on?” he barks into the jutting mic. “Gav, what the hell is Harry doing?”

A black-and-white Gavin unclips a walkie-talkie from his belt and backs away from the set’s camera array, passing from one monitor screen to the next. A walkie-talkie on Craig’s hip emits a burst of static. He unclips it and holds it to his free ear.

Gavin says, “What’s that?”

“Is Harry having an issue?” Craig says. “He appears to have collapsed onto the desk. He appears to be—his body is shuddering, Gav.”

“We’re mid-interview, Craig.” Gavin says, his voice crackling through the air of the control room like a small firework. “Keep the cameras rolling on Caroline and Miss—ah—what’s her name, the interviewee.”

“Is he dying, Gav?” Craig says. “Is Harry Harris going into death throes live on national television?”

“Well, Craig, if he’s not on a hot camera then no—technically he’s not.”

“Jesus, Gav,” Craig says, toggling a switch labelled HRRY and pressing the ear-cup firmly against the side of his head. “Is he laughing—is Harry laughing?”

Gavin cocks his head, then steps cautiously across the studio floor, his figure reappearing for a moment in the monitor displaying one half of the camera array. He edges back into frame on the previous monitor and raises the walkie-talkie to his face.

“Sure. Affirmative on the laughter.”

“Could you possibly ask him to stop laughing, Gav?”

“Can anyone ask Harry Harris to do anything?”

“Cut the philosophical questions, Gav.”

“Well, you’re in the control room, Craig. You’re in control.”

“Thanks, Gav. I think I’ll—yeah,” Craig says, and stabs a button labelled HRRY. “Hello, Harry, what’s up, buddy? Ground control to Harry Harris, do you read me? Hello—ground control to Mr Harry Harris.” Craig releases HRRY and presses down FLR MGR. “Gav, is Harry’s earpiece loose? He’s unresponsive.” The walkie-talkie crackles and Craig detects in the coarse pattern of noise maybe the word

*dino* or *dinner* or *dunno*. “Gav, I’m cutting to a commercial.” Craig holds down the button for CRLN. “We’re going to a commercial, Caroline. Tell viewers that we’re taking a short break.”

The central monitor cuts from Aruna Kaur, her concerned eyeline matching a point somewhere behind Caroline’s shoulder, to Caroline turning in her chair to stare, it seems, squarely at Lucy and Craig.

“We’ll take a short break now,” Caroline says. “Then we’ll be back with more from our special guest, British foreign minister Aruna Kaur.”

Craig cues the playoff graphic.

“Back in ninety seconds,” he says to Lucy, then dashes out of the control room.

Lucy watches Craig’s black-and-white figure dart across several of the studio floor monitors. She puts on the headphones and adjusts the cups over her ears. “I’m not sure,” Caroline’s voice says. “He must... I’m not sure....” Lucy flips the switch labelled HRRY and her ears fill with a staccato hiss like a snake with a stutter. She recognises the famous laughter of Harry Harris. In full colour, on Camera B’s red-lit monitor, Craig stands behind Gavin who is bent at the waist with his face near Harry Harris’s, whose forehead is pressed onto the desk. Gavin’s voice can be heard dimly through Harry Harris’s lapel mic. He is asking Harry Harris what’s going on, man—the commercials will be done in a minute, so what the fuck?

“Catherine!” Harry Harris spits out, as his torso soars upright. He slaps the glass top of the desk with his hands. “Catherine, Courtney, Chloe, Caramel, Cocoa Communism, Kumquat!” he shouts, and begins laughing again. “What’s in a name? Nothing, if you’re a nobody!”

Lucy switches back to the audio channel for CRLN.

“Shit, shit, shit,” Caroline, publicly anointed six years prior as the Voice of National Compassion, mutters. “I’m very sorry, Missus Kaur. I apologise, on behalf of the station and my—hmm, co-host...”

The diplomat speaks but is mute to Lucy’s ears.

“By all means, yes. It’s not a problem,” Caroline says.

Gavin is gripping Harry Harris by the shoulders, and Harry Harris has his hands raised in front of his chest in apparent surrender. Craig is no longer standing behind Gavin. Craig’s black-and-white body is cutting across the studio floor.

Lucy removes the headphones and places them back on the pan of Craig’s seat. On the central monitor, the numbers decrease inexorably—00:20, 00:19, 00:18—like a ticking bomb in a made-for-TV movie. Maybe Craig will slam open the control room door and slide dramatically across the carpet, reaching the console just in the nick of time. Or maybe she’ll need to help Craig out. Craig’s going places in the television world. She could help him over this hurdle. It would mean putting her neck on the line and it could definitely upset her job trial. But maybe her heart’s not in this game. Craig’s is, but maybe hers just isn’t. And would anybody know it’s not Craig back behind the console? Would anybody know that it isn’t Craig still making the magic happen? Does anybody even know she’s inside the control room, because wasn’t *sneak* the operative word when Craig texted her: *sneak peek babe, cntrl room bck of studio xo?* Which button was it that made the graphics whiz across the screen? And wasn’t there a different button to cross back to the news set? Is the control room soundproof, because shouldn’t Craig’s footsteps be landing within earshot by now?

6.

In close-up a woman smiles with her teeth exposed and eyes closed, her neck overlaid with the translucent SensaSatin™ logo, her hair richly lathered. A disembodied female voice, the woman's own, remarks breathily, "Can't beat the feeling of satin, the sensational feeling of SensaSatin."

Then, an abrupt cessation of sound and light.

A quadrangular void.

Power cut? Nope, kitchen spotlights are still on.

In the void, a pinprick of light.

In the void, a rapidly expanding radiance, a coruscation of pastel lens flares.

The newsroom recommences streaming.

A man in a denim shirt is speaking into a walkie-talkie while trying to direct Harry Harris towards the rear of the stage, their backs to the camera. Harry Harris is tearing at an assemblage of cords tangled around his shirt collar. In the seconds before he succeeds in detaching them from his clothing, he is heard saying, "Where'd that sprat producer go? Little fish in a big ocean. Scoop him up with a wee net, feed him whole to the family cat."

"Weird," Dylan says to Ashton in the living room of their snug Wellington apartment.

Ashton says, "Never noticed Harry Harris has such a chrome dome. It looks like they've spray-painted it, but there's clearly not one follicle of hair. Is it, sort of, dripping off?"

"I was speaking with a Catherine during an appearance last week," explains the show's guest, a British politician of some sort, speaking to the other host, the pleasant one, Caroline Hopper. "Is that reaction usual?" the guest asks, as

Harry Harris and the denim-clad man move out of sight, through an egress between the two layers of the set.

“No,” Caroline says, following the guest’s gaze. “Well, sometimes.”

“It seems a little out of hand,” the guest says.

“It’s not always like this.”

“He would suit public office. Although he appears to think that you’re the opposition.”

“People like him. He was voted the King of Popular Opinion. He’s considered good for ratings.”

“Is that right?” the guest says.

Dylan says, “Poor Caroline.”

Ashton says, “It’s incredible they haven’t put the ads back on.”

Dylan says, “I think Caroline doesn’t even know. None of them even know. A technical glitch?”

“And what is he in your honest opinion?” the guest says, pressing Caroline.

“You know... Look, he’s a bit of an old fool, I suppose,” Caroline says. “But for all his rude jokes and general noise, I’ve learned to more or less ignore him.”

“Sounds rather tiring,” the guest says with a sigh.

Ashton says, “This is the best live television since Thingee’s eye popped out.”

Dylan says, “Whose eye?”

7.

Caroline’s gaze drifts away from British foreign minister Aruna Kaur and floats to its naturally tending position—dead-ahead towards Camera C—in a bearing fixed in her muscle memory through years of broadcasting from sets less aesthetically overcooked though functionally no different

than the one she occupies in the present moment, in which coming into ocular focus just above the inky maw of Camera C's boxed lens is a small red orb so instinctually troubling to Caroline that her already numb body seizes up in what feels like a state of premature rigor mortis.

8.

"There is a tally light on every camera to indicate it is live or not live, you understand this, yes or no?"

Caroline, taking a seat, tells Craig, whispering, she did not see the light.

"That's what you're sticking with?" Craig says, also whispering.

"Yes, Craig."

"Good for you." Craig limps across the bare stretch of carpet around which a few chairs and potted plants are arranged to create the impression of an anteroom in the open space outside the offices of the Executive Producer, Director Programming, and Director Content. "I'm sticking with the story that I'm a fucking idiot who never wants to work in this business again." Craig eases into a seat beside Gavin and shifts his right leg to relieve the pressure from his swelling ankle. "I'm also working on an alternative story, though, so nobody hold me to that one."

Caroline indicates Craig's foot with her eyes.

"Sore?"

"Very," Craig says. "Took a real spill. I was in a rush, yeah?"

"Craig," Gavin says, pausing to suck in a breath. "How long have you and Lucy been doing the funky monkey?"

"That's none of your beeswax, Gav. And keep your voice down."

“It’s kind of crucial to this whole situation though, isn’t it?”

“Gav.”

“You allowed her into *the control room*, Craig. You gave her free access to the room from which the whole show may be controlled and then you left her there, unsupervised. And she totally blew us all up.”

“Gav, zip it. Not a peep, please. That heat’s on me.”

“Where’s Harry?” Caroline asks.

“Who fucking cares,” Gavin says.

9.

Caroline pays for the three beers and carries the pint glasses, gripped in a triangular formation, across the barroom to a corner table where Craig is tearing up a serviette and Lucy is staring at Craig’s growing pile of torn paper, her hand on his elbow.

“Cheers,” Caroline says, setting the beers down.

“Yup,” Craig says.

“Okay, poor call,” Caroline says.

“You’re right to feel exalted,” Craig says.

“Congratulations,” Lucy says.

“Well, you too, perhaps,” Caroline says.

“Huh?” Lucy says.

“We need someone skilled like you in hair and makeup, on the refocused team for the Hopper Hour,” Caroline says.

“That’s what we’re calling it.”

“I almost ruined your career,” Lucy says.

“You almost ruined nobody’s career,” Caroline says.

“Craig and Harry ruined their own careers—sorry, Craig—and you gave me a fresh start. Do you know how well that fiasco rated?”

“Extremely well?” Craig says. “People are vampires.”

“Beyond dreams,” Caroline says. “We’ve trialled scenarios. I’m not going to literally eviscerate anybody on screen, which one test viewer suggested. I’ll pull no punches, of course, while maintaining a certain level of generosity and compassion and so on and so forth. Our leading edge will be about owning an empathetic yet hawk-eyed and uncompromising acuity. With a healthy dose of humour to build a social cachet and a sense of rapport with the audience.”

“Good for you,” Craig says, sipping his beer and poking at his small pile of serviette tatters. “I suppose Harry will be back on someone’s payroll soon enough.”

“Is there a job trial?” Lucy asks.

“If there is, don’t worry,” Caroline says, and then reaches out, touches Lucy’s hand.

# Carousel in Winter

by Judson Simmons

All is  
still.

No one is here,  
and I find myself  
glad.

Stolen from measured motion,  
their unhurried gallop,  
I stare at these  
riderless horses, their majesty  
of colors  
                    contrasting winter's ache.

The looping tune                   *which plays in my head*  
is absent from the air.

Everything, for now,  
                    paused.

I am witness  
to a pageantry that remains  
still.

# Road Rage in Your Eye

by Judith Cody

Two mattresses were strapped together on lust-yellowed edges in the borrowed, too-small truck; stains were here and there, even torn spots where teeth broke into the striped cotton covers, so much anguish and howling sex and bitter tears together with everyone's broken revenge plots shown up distinctly in the California noon light—brighter than a B-minus movie. Such stuff was never meant to be stacked before the dozens of impatient eyes, charged with labors, beginning with annoyance, finally climaxing in cold fury as the traffic hesitated then groaned to dead stall—drivers struggled, honked, and hollered at the inert, too-small truck to “get the hell out of the way.”

# Imogene's Plan

by Mike Wilson

Their living room was territory divided by boundaries hammered out over years of marriage. The easy chair in the corner was the capital city of Samuel's domain. The shape of his wiry body impressed into it day after day had modified molecules in that chair in ways re-upholstering could never undo. Similarly, the cushion at the far end of the couch was crushed from holding, like Atlas holds the sky, Imogene the bride, Imogene the mother, Imogene the middle-aged grandmother-to-be, Imogene mourning the miscarried grandchild and then mourning their daughter's subsequent suicide. Samuel's chair and Imogene's couch cushion carried the distilled essences of the lives they'd lived together. Between the two sitting spaces was a coffee table, and above the coffee table the atmosphere swelled with a sad gray cloud – Imogene's obsession with the suicide of their daughter, rotating slowly, a tornado about to be born.

And on the coffee table was a gun.

“Are you sure?” Samuel asked.

His hands rested motionless on his knees. Imogene was looking at him with a mixture of blankness and disdain, a strand of her gray hair dangling across her forehead. The grandchild had been a full person to Imogene from the moment she'd learned of its conception. It hadn't mattered to Imogene that Cindy, their addicted daughter who traded sex for drugs, didn't know who the father was or whether she should have an abortion. Imogene had imposed her will on Cindy – *You have to keep it*. Neither had asked Samuel what he

thought, but Samuel's opinion never mattered if Imogene had one.

Cindy had submitted to Imogene's vision, grudgingly at first and then with enthusiasm as uncontrollable as her addiction. Imogene wrangled Cindy into rehab and Cindy stayed clean after she was released thirty days later and, for the first time in a long while, walked with her back straight and her head held high. Cindy moved back into her old room at Samuel and Imogene's house, the corner bedroom upstairs with a queen bed and music star posters on the wall that Cindy had pinned there as a teenager. Having Cindy in her grip this way flushed Imogene's cheeks with vigor but somehow made Samuel even more invisible in Imogene's eyes.

Samuel had to admit that Cindy seemed to be becoming the person he'd thought she would become had she been raised in someone else's home. Cindy had grown up in a mother-daughter death dance, nonstop screaming from the onset of Cindy's puberty until Cindy took to the streets at age seventeen, streets Samuel spent many a night searching without finding his daughter, only collecting third-hand accounts from seedy characters saying Cindy had entered "the life."

The pregnancy had changed everything. As the precious fruit grew inside Cindy, mother and daughter spent hours each day talking about the baby, dreaming about the baby, and buying for the baby – a crib, clothes, toys, an entire arsenal of accoutrements for beginning life. Imogene converted the guest bedroom into a nursery, adding it to the territory in the house that counted as hers. Samuel wouldn't have been surprised had Imogene and Cindy perfumed the nursery with frankincense and myrrh for this little Jesus

coming to deliver Cindy from drugs and Imogene from a midlife crisis. Imogene was ecstatic, but in a perverse way – Cindy had become the horse that Imogene had finally broken. But after the pregnancy miscarried in the twentieth week, Cindy had shot up enough fentanyl to kill a thousand elephants, and that had altered Imogene irrevocably.

“Isn’t it better if we join them?” Imogene asked.

It was a rhetorical question. Imogene had become a vigilante against herself, a strict nun who would brook only one answer. She guarded her grief so fiercely that she preferred to die owning it rather than live and lose it. Samuel studied his wife’s exhausted face. It was pale and emptied out, the ghost half-gone already. Once Imogene set her mind on something, even death, she never turned back. She’d always been like this. Decades ago, when they’d first started dating and it could have gone either way, Imogene had decided Samuel should marry her. She never told him, nor did she do anything overtly tricky, like not take her pill and literally conceive a reason for marriage. She’d simply imposed her will on Samuel with flattery and smiles, good food and better sex. She’d only revealed her plotting to him on their first wedding anniversary, presenting it as a testament of her love, like a bouquet of roses or a romantic greeting card, but it had made Samuel feel like a roped calf. Gradually, their union split into bordering states, Samuel’s and Imogene’s. The kitchen was hers, the office was his, the bedroom was a demilitarized zone, and the living room had a line down the middle that ran through the coffee table between Samuel’s chair and Imogene’s couch, a coffee table where the Smith & Wesson that Imogene had purchased at a local gun store, loaded with hollow points and fitted with a silencer she’d had to get licensed to purchase, lay waiting to be picked up.

Samuel leaned back in his chair. As if they were tied together with a string, Imogene leaned forward to maintain the distance between them.

“Why are you getting cold feet?” she said. “This was *your* idea.”

She was partly correct. He hadn’t actually proposed that they kill themselves. He’d just put the notion out there, casually, in the way people express overwhelming grief, something like *I wonder if we should just...* or *We might as well just...* He’d been surprised at how quickly she’d grabbed hold of the idea and made it her own, taking charge with the same gusto that she’d commandeered Cindy’s pregnancy. Imogene had set about researching the best ways to commit suicide, discovering that Nembutal, used for euthanasia where it’s legal, is ideal, but impossible to obtain; that Cyanide is 97% effective but makes death exceedingly painful; that overdosing on street drugs works less than half the time; and that the effectiveness of wrist-slitting is in the single-digits. *A gunshot to the head is the way to go*, Imogene told him. Properly aimed, success approaches 100% and, in America, any fool can buy a gun. When she’d explained all this to Samuel, he’d suggested the silencer, since the sound of a gunshot might prompt nosy neighbors to phone the police. Even with a shot to the head, he’d told Imogene, dying takes time and medical intervention could thwart the plan. Imogene’s plan was for Samuel to shoot her and then shoot himself. That was *Imogene’s* plan. She was as gung-ho on death as she’d been on Cindy’s pregnancy. Samuel understood mourning – he mourned Cindy, too – but Imogene’s determination to die wasn’t despair, it was revenge, but for what or against whom Samuel didn’t know. He’d suggested seeing a counselor, but Imogene had looked at him like *he* was crazy. Once Imogene

made a decision, the issue wasn't up for reconsideration. He cleared his throat.

"How will you feel watching me kill you?" he asked.

Hearing those words tumble out of his mouth, he was amazed at how evenly he'd uttered them. *How will you feel watching me kill you?* The woman he'd lived with for three decades wanted him to shoot her in the head. She was oblivious to the message she was sending – that she preferred to die rather than continue living with a man willing to love her with all of her faults. That Samuel's life mattered so little that he should give it up in service to her to corroborate the rightness of her decision. It had been hard for Samuel to come to terms with the implications of Imogene's plan. But he had.

"I won't feel anything," she said.

*I won't feel anything.* Her tone was flat. Maybe he'd been dead to her for years, and she to him, but the disappointment he felt hearing her answer cut too deep for that to be *completely* true. He'd hoped, even in this final scene, that Imogene would say something to ward the storm away, sparing them both. But it wasn't going to happen. The ball was in Samuel's court. Now he was going to speak lines Imogene had not written. He summoned his nerve and looked her in the eye, noticing for the first time tonight that she'd made herself up with lipstick and mascara as if they were going out to dinner.

"I won't shoot you."

"Pick up the gun, Samuel."

"I can't."

He could feel that sad gray cloud in the room begin to rotate.

"Pick up the gun, Samuel."

“No.”

The pupils of Imogene’s eyes constricted like a boa squeezing a small bird. Samuel had given up resisting her will years ago but now, at this important moment, he was rebelling. That’s what Imogene would be thinking. He watched her take a breath and exhale slowly.

“Samuel,” she said, “here’s what you’re going to do. You’re going to pick up the gun. You’re going to come over and sit beside me on the couch. You’re going to put the gun up to my head and aim it at my brain stem. You’re going to pull the trigger. Then, without going into a panic or looking at the wound or waiting for me to die, you will immediately – *immediately* – put the gun in your mouth and pull the trigger. There will be a brief moment of pain and then it will be over. We both will finally have peace.”

She made Samuel sound like a hero rescuing them from a burning building, not a crime but a profile in courage. It was the sort of flattery to which Samuel was susceptible. Even moments before her death, Imogene still had her wits about her. Her self-discipline never flagged.

“Don’t you want peace, Samuel?”

There was nothing in the world Samuel wanted more. He’d wanted peace long before their daughter died, but he wasn’t going to say *that*.

“Yes, I want peace.”

“So do I,” she said. “Everything comes to an end, Samuel. Assisted suicide is legal in Europe. It’s even legal in some states. We’re just cutting out the middleman. No doctors, no third parties. We have a right to control our own lives, and that includes our own deaths. You agree, don’t you?”

“Yes,” he said, truthfully. “I agree.”

“Very good,” she said. “You’ve always been a good husband to me, so be a good husband tonight. Pick up the gun.”

Samuel took a breath. Slowly, he stood. Then he backed away from his chair. Imogene’s eyes grew wide with surprise.

“What are you doing, Samuel?”

He didn’t answer, just looked at her steadily.

“Samuel!”

Her voice was like the crack of a whip. Inside, he jumped. But not outside. Not anymore. He watched, trembling a little when Imogene leaned over the coffee table and picked up the gun. She extended it toward him.

“Take it, Samuel. Be a man. Don’t be a frightened little boy.”

He wasn’t going to touch the gun – *that* was for sure.

“Samuel!”

“I won’t have your blood on my hands,” he said. He couldn’t impose his will on her but he could make himself into an immovable mountain, a soldier standing at attention, but not a soldier in Imogene’s army. Not anymore. He watched carefully as the angle at which she held the gun seemed to shift from something being handed to him to something being pointed *at* him. He was about to find out whether he would live or die tonight. Imogene lowered the gun. He felt his gut unclench a little bit. He’d calculated that she would not kill him if he refused to play the part she’d written for him, but he hadn’t been sure. Now, the ball was in Imogene’s court. It could go either way. Samuel had resolved to remain neutral. He had exercised his own free will. He couldn’t deny her the same privilege. He watched her staring at him and saw the eyes of a stranger, realizing it was no

different than what he'd seen for years, just emptier since Cindy's death. He chided himself for feeling surprised.

"Okay," she said. "I'll go first."

Imogene turned the gun on herself, sticking it in her mouth. When she pulled the trigger, the silencer made the shot sound like a muffled nail gun, but still rather loud. The blood splatter on the wall behind her looked like a bottle of ketchup had exploded. Samuel, following Imogene's earlier advice, didn't dwell on the blood splatter or her wound – getting sucked into the horror would only induce panic and he needed to remain level-headed.

Samuel checked himself to make sure none of Imogene's blood had spattered on him. He looked at his easy chair where he'd sat across from Imogene for much of his adult life. There was no blood spatter on his chair. The integrity of their boundaries had been preserved even in death. Not that it mattered now. He pulled a note out of his pocket and placed it on the coffee table. Later, when they discovered Imogene's body, they would unfold the note and read *I'm leaving you. I found somebody. Samuel.* It would account for Imogene's suicide and why Samuel wasn't present when it happened.

Samuel went upstairs, pulled a suitcase from the back of the bedroom closet, and packed some clothes, toiletries, and his blood pressure medicine. He decided to take the tube of Tinactin, too – he was free of Imogene but he would never be free of athlete's foot. He marveled to have such thoughts at a time like this and wondered if he was in shock.

He carried the bag downstairs and turned on the front porch light. The next time Lola circled the block, she would see the light, a signal that he indeed did need her to pick him up. He watched at the window until Lola's car appeared,

slowing and then coming to a stop. He reached for his suitcase and, without looking back, opened the front door and stepped out into the pitch-black of the night, feeling the cool, wet air condense on his cheek like tears. He locked the door behind him.

As Samuel walked to the curb, he quickly surveyed the houses near his own. Blinds were down and the lights were off. This was to be expected at two o'clock in the morning. As he reached Lola's car, the lid of the trunk sprung up. Samuel put his bag in and closed it. He opened the passenger door and climbed in beside Lola. She kept her face forward and he studied her profile, a young face like Cindy's, and smelled her perfume. Imogene had never been much for perfume. Lola shifted into drive and pulled away from the curb.

They rode in silence. Samuel mentally assessed the event, beginning two days ago, when he'd left his car parked at Lola's apartment complex, something her neighbors hopefully had noticed, to create evidence of moving in with Lola before Imogene's suicide, explaining to Imogene that his car was in the shop. He'd also left his phone at Lola's with instructions for her to use the texting and internet functions to order a pizza large enough for two and to buy some athletic socks on Amazon using his credit card to generate an electronic trail that, with GPS tracking, would place the phone and, inferentially, him at Lola's on the night of Imogene's death. There was nothing to connect Samuel to the gun – Imogene had purchased it. Gunshot residue would be on Imogene's fingers. Only *her* fingerprints would be on the Smith & Wesson.

When Lola's phone rang, Samuel's whole body jerked. A tsunami of panic swept over him – had Imogene survived?

Was that her phoning? Or the police? He was too overwhelmed to discern what even made sense. He listened as Lola took the call. “This is Kathy,” she said. Samuel waited while she listened to whoever was calling. Then she said, “Okay” and hung up.

“They’re changing my schedule at work next week,” she explained. She meant The Pink Cadillac, where she and Samuel had met. Samuel had been hunting for Cindy and knew that Cindy sometimes danced and solicited men in such clubs to get money for drugs. Lola had recognized Cindy when Samuel showed her the picture, but had said she hadn’t seen her in a while. Samuel returned to the club from time to time, still looking for Cindy, and he and Lola struck up a friendship. When he continued to visit even after Cindy returned home, Samuel realized that hunting for Cindy had become a pretext for visiting The Pink Cadillac, and he began thinking about how his life could be different if he only had the gumption to change it.

“I thought your name was Lola.”

“Lola’s what I use at the club. My given name is Katherine. But Lola, Kathy, Katherine, does it really matter?”

Samuel allowed that it didn’t. Lola, Katherine, whoever she was – she and Samuel had an understanding. At his age, Samuel didn’t require overmuch from a woman, but he did need an alibi and Lola was willing to provide one because she liked money and Samuel had plenty of it. Even more, now – the suicide exclusion in Imogene’s life insurance policy had expired years ago.

“So,” Lola said, “did everything go according to plan?”

That wasn’t an easy question to answer. Everything hadn’t been planned. Samuel had facilitated a scenario with two possible outcomes and had gifted Imogene the freedom

to choose for herself. But since she'd decided, Samuel supposed that, technically, it did go according to plan. And now they both had peace, just like Imogene had wanted.

"Yes." His voice seemed to reverberate in the passenger compartment.

In a few weeks, after the police finished, Samuel would hire a painter to repaint the walls. He would phone an auction company to cart away the easy chair, the couch, and the coffee table. He would pay Lola, and they'd shake hands and say goodbye. Then he would buy new furniture for the living room and live in peace in a home where every square foot was his.

That was Samuel's plan.

# In the Morning, Everything Looks Better

by Robert Beveridge

We ask, we listen, we survey, we mull,  
we cherish, we do things and we leave  
things undone. What do we not do? Sing.  
Why don't we sing? The music wells  
in every drop of blood from the hand  
we cut when the mackerel slipped  
from our fingers, it bubbles beneath  
the water when we drop the spaghetti,  
it whispers—but it never *more*  
than whispers—in the stubbed toe,  
the table leg, the cascade of papers  
that drift to the floor. So we get  
on the bus, put in the earbuds,  
cue up the Old Radio Dramas playlist  
on YouTube, and ride loop after loop,  
ask random passengers whether they  
prefer cherry jelly or apricot, what  
they think the gift is for the eleventh  
anniversary, if they have ever soared  
above the clouds on the wings of great  
black creatures whose names cannot  
be pronounced by human tongues,  
what time the next screening of the new  
Lucile Hadzihalilovic movie is,  
and whether they'd care to accompany us.

# Vivid As

by Christopher Fettes

October 26, 54 degrees  
Throughout the garden  
There unfurl  
The last desperate blossoms  
On loofahs and cucumbers  
Brilliant yellow  
Vivid as *printemps*  
Half the foliage  
Withered and grey, but  
Verging blooms push forth,  
Ready to open into  
Cold and misty mornings  
Hurling toward first frost  
With the tenacity of spring

# The Delusion of an Illusion

by Camille Paldi

As I checked out of the Stanford University Psychiatric Hospital after a \$500,000 five-week stay, I realized he was gone and the marriage proposal was just a fleeting illusion, like the delusions and hallucinations I had been having for the past three years. How did I manage to live alone in Dubai for the past three years and run my own Islamic finance business, FAAIF, traveling the globe in the promotion of Islamic finance, and secure a marriage proposal to be the second wife of the heartthrob of the Pakistani-Islamic academic world all while having schizoaffective disorder, or a form of schizophrenia, which led me to have some serious visual, sense, and smell hallucinations, delusions, and feelings of grandiosity? The romance was doomed from the start because of my undiagnosed condition, and my last chance at love melted like I melted down from the symptoms, which manifested slowly into a series of hallucinations and delusions, leading me from Dubai to Hong Kong to Japan to Hawaii to Los Angeles and finally to Palo Alto where I was admitted to the hospital by force of police order. In this whirlwind of my delusional reality, I believed that I was being pursued by an international police force that was using all measures to stop me from spreading a positive image of Islam and Islamic finance. I believed that the international police force would follow me on airplanes, cars, and trains to all places where I was traveling and alter my food and drinks to make them inedible and undrinkable, causing me to drop from a size 14 to a size 6. I would not eat or drink for many months as I thought all food and drinks were contaminated.

Unfortunately, it was inked in my mind that my new fiancé, Muhammad, was the ringleader of this international operation and an undercover US Special Forces agent along with his first wife, who acted in coordination to contaminate my food and drinks, and whom I falsely thought to be depleting my bank accounts by controlling the international banking system and credit card facilities. In fact, I wrote several social media posts detailing Muhammad's supposed role in my delusional fantasy of being targeted by the international police force, whose mission it was to stop my inevitable fame for Islamic finance.

Muhammad was quick to delete and block me from all social media rather than seeing if I needed medical attention. In fact, for three years, despite my odd behavior, hallucinations, and delusions, no one took me to a doctor, not even the two psychologists I consulted in Dubai regarding my delusions about being followed by the police. It was not until I started to believe that the police were raping me and trying to capture me in vans to disable me that I fled Dubai, not sure of where I was going, but flying from country to country with no plan other than to save the world from the New World Order conspiracy to enslave the world and to promote the financing of Islam, which I believed would turn me into a famous, philanthropic millionaire. Upon my admission to the Stanford Hospital emergency room, I thought that the police had finally won and were going to send me to the chopping house to be disabled. After five weeks on Olanzapine, an antipsychotic drug, I came out of the delusional fantasy world, which had been my life for the past three years, and realized that the love of my life had actually left me long ago.

I was the first American to graduate from the Durham

University (UK) Islamic Finance Program and recently moved back to Dubai in 2013 after previously working in an Arab law firm there from 2008 to 2011. I was returning with an LLM from the University of Hawaii, an MA in Islamic finance from Durham University, and the UK's Qualified Lawyers Transfer Test, which I completed and passed in full in 2013 while at Durham University. Soon after returning to Dubai, I jetted off to Pakistan to a conference on Islamic business in Islamabad, where I made my debut Islamic finance presentation in the Islamic world near Faisal Mosque, one of the largest mosques in South Asia. Muhammad was in the audience and said to me later, "It was love at first sight."

In my next foray into Pakistan, at an Islamic finance conference at the Pearl-Continental Hotel Lahore, I was sitting solo at an empty table when Muhammad approached with his three young children. It was unusual that he would attend an Islamic finance conference with his children, but he was having marital problems with his first wife and she had fled the family home to her parents' house, leaving him to care for their three children alone. He started a conversation with me, appearing slightly nervous. He handed me a flyer for his upcoming Islamic finance conference at the university in Islamabad where he was a finance professor. I immediately planned to attend the conference out of my passion for Islamic finance. I watched his children as he stood up to the podium to give his presentation to the crowd. We snapped a selfie with Muhammad's cell phone and then I left to go back to my room before he finished and stepped down from the podium.

Muhammad sent me the selfie of me and his children, which I then posted on Facebook with the caption: "Hanging Out with Muhammad's children at the Lahore Islamic

Finance Conference.” Soon after, my paper submission to Muhammad’s Islamic-finance conference in Islamabad was accepted. I was excited even though I would not receive any type of financial assistance to attend his conference. Upon landing in Islamabad, Muhammad arranged for me to be picked up at the airport by his university staff and transported to my hotel. As we approached the university and I saw Muhammad standing at the entrance, I felt nervous. He was so handsome in his suit. He was admired by all the female students of the university—and probably by the female staff as well. Muhammad made sure that I was comfortable, and I successfully delivered my presentation on Islamic finance to the university crowd. I was at times acting odd and still had my belief that Muhammad was acting for the police, but my odd behavior seemed to go unnoticed. As I was preparing to leave Islamabad, I received an e-mail from Muhammad, asking if I would like to receive his hospitality and see Murree Hills. I was so excited at this point that I agreed and requested my travel agent to change my plane ticket back to Dubai for the following day.

Muhammad stood in the lobby of my hotel with his three small kids, ready to take me on an adventure into the hills above Islamabad. He was nervous and it showed. I felt so elated entering the passenger seat of the car next to him with his three kids in the back seat. We first picked up something to eat and then slowly headed up the Murree Hills until we reached a remote hotel, where we parked for the day. Love was blossoming all around us. We ate lunch peacefully around a bed in the hotel room where Muhammad talked of an American woman who had moved to Pakistan and married a man who, like him, already had a family. It was an interesting topic to bring up at that moment and time. He

soon left to take a short nap while I played with and photographed his three kids. When he awoke, we left to wander outside the hotel with the kids, which ended up being a romantic encounter with the woods. I could see him looking at me with desire in his eyes and unexpressed feelings. We walked and he led me down a steep hill, allowing me to grab his arm as we managed our way down the winding slope. We reached a plateau where I snapped a picture of him and his kids with an incredible view behind them. As we returned to the hotel, we decided to head back to Islamabad. I was incredibly content to sit next to Muhammad on the drive back. He offered to take me to his house to stay the night, but I insisted on staying at the hotel. In the middle of the night, I texted Muhammad, “Can you see my heart beating?” We agreed that he would take me to the airport very early in the morning. Muhammad was nervous when he came to pick me up without his kids to take me to the airport. He talked the whole way to the airport and when it came time to part ways, he said, “I will come to you in Dubai.”

We planned that he would be a speaker in an upcoming Islamic finance event in The Hague, Netherlands, where I was to attend the International Law summer session at the Hague Academy of International Law. We successfully pulled off the event and I returned to Dubai and he to Pakistan. He still did not notice my unusual behavior regarding the fact that I felt like I was being followed by an international police force that would warn everyone that I was a terrorist before I arrived.

We next decided to hold an academic conference in Dubai in the following months. The conference turned out to be a success and Muhammad stayed in Dubai for an extra week to discuss marriage and get married. Muhammad also

went on several job interviews in the UAE to try to relocate from Pakistan to be near me. Unfortunately, my condition started to worsen. We planned to actually get married in Ras al Khaimah on his last day in Dubai. We had a misunderstanding, a falling out, and in my worsening condition, I unintentionally insulted his first wife and disrespected his family. We didn't get married on his last day. In fact, the night of the disagreement was the last time I would ever see Muhammad. He got the job in Ajman, UAE.

# Wearable Inheritance

by Jim Ross

Decluttering experts suggest that, if you haven't worn an article of clothing for six months (suggested time intervals vary), you should throw or give it away. "Don't hold onto clothing merely because it carries memories," they suggest. This perspective is consistent with our disposable economy and the demands to keep up with rapidly changing styles. However, there was a time when inheritances were eminently wearable.

## **Clothing Worn Only for Rituals**

We still have my wife Ginger's grandmother's Christening dress fashioned of handmade lace. Created in 1894 by Ginger's great-grandmother, it was subsequently worn by Ginger's mother in 1913, Ginger's older sister in 1936, and Ginger herself in 1952. A photo shows the Christening dress was four times Ginger's body length! No other newborn has worn it since then. Our daughter didn't wear it in 1979 because she was born bigger than the dress.

Wedding dresses were historically passed from generation to generation on the once-accurate assumption that fashions didn't change. We still own four generations of wedding dresses, including Ginger's grandmother's from 1911; none have ever been re-worn. My daughter who couldn't fit into great-grandma's Christening dress wanted to wear her wedding dress but, no surprise, it proved too small.

## **Dad's Wearable Inheritances**

When Dad turned 20 in 1935, his father Josh, who happened to work at a men's haberdashery and appreciated quality clothing, gave him a square-necked, stockinette-stitched, burgundy sweater. Dad wore the sweater for 20 years, put it on mothballs, and turned it over to me as I turned 20 in 1967. I wore it for 15 years until my wife said, "We need to preserve it. I'll knit you a clone." I wore the burgundy, square-necked clone until I outgrew it. I planned to give our son Alex the original when he turned 20, but due to a phenomenal growth spurt—ten inches in one year—he outgrew it at 15 while I was blinking. We still own the original and the clone, waiting to be worn again. Alex says he's already planning to give the original burgundy sweater to his son Henry in 2035, as Henry turns 18 and the sweater turns 100.

Similarly, Dad wore Josh's grey-to-lavender sweater on and off for 64 years, from Josh's death in 1936 until his own. Already 100 years old, the grey to lavender sweater looks not so much threadbare as something an old bank clerk would wear in a silent film. In wearing it, Dad preserved everything Josh represented to him. Impervious to the ravages of time, the sweater hangs in Alex's closet, making him the fourth generation to own it. Its hanger is marked Lambert's, the name of the haberdashery where Dad's parents worked, and where they first met.

Dad also wore Josh's lavish blue robe with red trim and a golden-tasseled sash for 20 years. He relinquished it to me when I was 8. I wore it in a play sponsored by the Cub Scouts. While I was away at College, Mom decided we no longer needed it. Meanwhile, she bought Dad a replacement,

which he wore for over 40 years. Upon Dad's death 19 years ago, I took it over.

### **Mom's Wearable Inheritances**

Mom left behind scores of simple, inexpensive dresses that she had stored with mothballs as they went out of style. We stored her collection of dresses spanning the 1930s through 1990s for a decade before culling. The keepers we returned to moth balls, knowing a future generation will have a field day with them. They can't wait to be worn again to remind us that style never goes out of style.

Mom's dress collection included a sleek, almost austere, tan dress with turquoise trim about which Mom told me when she was 33 (I was 14), "Remember, some day, I want to be buried in this one." When she died 52 years later, it was out of style, her shape had changed (though she weighed the same), and only I knew this was *the dress*. Mom was buried in something more suited to her age and prevailing styles, so people would say, "That's so her."

### **Clothing of the Deceased**

After the death of a loved one, many people clear the air by disposing of or donating the deceased's clothing after a brief mourning period. I knew one woman who after her husband died cursed the sun for having the nerve to rise and repeatedly breathed in the scent from her husband's clothing to experience his presence. Then one day she suddenly cleared out his closets and dresser and disposed of his clothing. We might've tried the deep breathing technique with Mom's and Dad's clothing, but because they typically kept them on mothballs, the prospect was not inviting.

## The Future of Inheriting Clothing

In our throwaway economy, people rarely regard clothing as something to be passed from generation to generation. Even though baby clothes are almost universally passed from child to child within or between families, this usually occurs within a condensed time period, not across generations. Similarly, women might hand off or exchange dresses with friends or family members while they're still considered in style. However, not long ago, when someone bought a new sweater or dress, they expected to use it for years to come. Clothing, like almost everything else, was built to last, and consumption habits weren't driven by rapidly changing styles. The looming climate crisis has caused climate activists to encourage the public to buy used clothing, exchange used clothing with others, repair clothing to keep it in service longer, and pass clothing along from generation to generation.

Clothing can be most readily inheritable if gifted from generation to generation by the present owner while still alive. Articles of clothing are more likely to stay "in the family" if the relationship between the giver and inheritor was strong and the item symbolizes the nature of that relationship. Even if they smell of mothballs, inherited clothing keeps connections to past generations alive.



# Defensive Indifference

by Bill Carr

(this story was originally published in the *Sweet Tree Review*)

Allison is the smartest person we know. Now sixty-six, she's a handsome woman, tall and blond, and speaks with a slightly clipped enunciation that's probably the influence of her British father. She can put on weight occasionally, but seems to have the ability to suddenly lose it when so inclined.

She has not been lucky with husbands. There have been four of them. We liked the first one, Glen, the best. He was the father of her two children. Early in their marriage, he was diagnosed with an inoperable brain tumor. That was before hospice care came to our area. The hospital sent him home with Allison, essentially saying, "There's nothing more we can do. He's your problem now." I don't like to even think about what she went through.

After Glen's death, she became a registered nurse, and a good one. She's never really had any financial worries. We never knew the second husband. She met him when she was a nurse in Birmingham, Alabama. We heard he was an alcoholic. We did meet the third husband and went to their wedding. It was evident from the start he abused her psychologically. I don't know about the physical. That marriage lasted about a year.

The current husband, Jerry Branscomb, is an enigma. She met him in Florida, where he was popular as an ex-Major League Baseball player. I kind of like the guy. My wife, Marilyn, does not. "A little rough around the edges," she says.

Jerry has the muscular build of a law enforcement officer, which is fitting because he says his post-baseball

career job was with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms. He tells colorful stories about both careers.

When Allison told Marilyn of her return to the Atlanta area, we first got together at a restaurant in Marietta. Marilyn then invited them to our home for a pre-Rosh Hashanah dinner. Allison is Jewish; Jerry is not. Marilyn also invited our longtime friends Dave and Beth Silverman. Jerry told a lot of stories about his six years in the major leagues, the three teams he played with, his teammates, and the managers he played under. Dave was unusually quiet.

I stopped playing baseball a long time ago, but I still follow the pennant races. After everyone left, I got on the computer. It would be interesting to see Jerry's stats—his career, right in print. The Internet contains records of everyone who ever played in the major leagues. Nothing on Jerry Branscomb. There was a pitcher with the Cubs in the 1973–79 period named Chip Branscomb, but he was left-handed. Jerry is definitely right-handed.

After the morning Rosh Hashanah services, the Silvermans traditionally invite us to their townhouse for an afternoon snack. Right on the coffee table in their living room was the very thick Major League Baseball players' almanac. I wasn't the only one looking at stats.

I kept thinking there's something I'm missing in my search—a nickname or a misspelling. That is, until the night at a restaurant when Jerry described how in 1975, pitching against the Yankees, he struck out Tommy Tresh, Joe Pepitone, and Bobby Murcer, all in one inning.

“There's a problem with that,” I told Marilyn after we got home. “Tommy Tresh retired in 1969, Joe Pepitone was out of Major League Baseball in 1973, and Bobby Murcer spent the 1975 season with the Houston Astros.”

“Do you think Jerry might just have gotten the year wrong?”

“I think the guy never spent a day of his life in the major leagues.”

“Should we tell Allison?” Marilyn asked.

“I don’t know.”

\* \* \*

We’re invited to the Branscombs’ home for a Sunday dinner. They’re renting a small two-bedroom house in Cartersville. We have a little trouble finding the place. It’s a nice development. The Branscombs’ lawn is immaculate, not like ours, with their grass cut and hedges trimmed. Jerry greets us from the front porch.

“Good news,” he says. “I got my first Major League Baseball pension check Friday.”

I know he turned sixty-five a few days ago. I’m tempted to ask to see the check. Hey, I’ve never seen an MLB pension check before. Too obvious. Guests don’t normally request to see the host’s pension check.

The house is a front-to-back ranch. The kitchen, dining room, and living room are all open. There’s a master bedroom off the kitchen, and another small bedroom in the front which they use as an office.

Allison is an excellent cook. She’s prepared roast duck, which is one of my favorites. She and Jerry seem to have a really good life together. He does all the outside work and the indoor cleaning. She does the cooking. He colors her hair. They enjoy shopping together. He gets out from underfoot by occasionally playing golf and poker.

Jerry clears away the dishes, and Allison brings out the strawberry rhubarb pie Marilyn and I brought for dessert.

“Don’t you think baseball should have included in that

pension something for those years Jerry spent as a POW?” Allison asks.

“No, hon,” Jerry says. “The Cards were really straight up with me. I wasn’t even in the majors yet, but they honored the contract they’d offered me.”

“Wait a minute,” I say. “You were a POW?”

“Yep. Hanoi Hilton. Spent three years in prison. When I was liberated, my weight had gone down from 180 to 105.”

His upper lip quivers and his left arm starts to shake. Allison puts her hand on his arm. “You see,” Jerry goes on, his voice breaking, “before I enlisted, I was just out of high school when the Cardinals offered me a contract and a small bonus. But my mother needed money to live on, and I knew I could make more in the service. So I enlisted, went to Officer Candidate School, and became a helicopter pilot. Then my chopper was shot down. The gooks captured me and threw me in prison. Three years. Somehow, during my rehabilitation, the Cardinals found out about my situation, and the general manager visited me in the hospital in Germany. They offered to honor the original contract, and even sweetened it by a few bucks. I spent two years in the minors, and then was up in the bigs.”

Jerry and I adjourn to the living room to watch the football game, while Allison and Marilyn remain talking at the dining room table.

“Hey,” he says during a commercial break, “want to see my medals?”

“Sure.”

He goes into the office and brings out a small display box. The medals are arranged on a black cloth. I recognize the captain’s bars, Purple Heart, sharpshooter medal, and the good conduct medal. There are a few others that I don’t

recognize.

Marilyn comes in from the dining room and looks over my shoulder.

“You went through a lot for these,” I say to Jerry.

“I sure did.”

\* \* \*

It’s dusk when Marilyn and I start our drive home.

“What do you think?” Marilyn asks.

“The roast duck was excellent.”

“You know what I mean,” she says. “About Jerry.”

“I have a new theory.”

“You know, I’ve seen medal displays like that for sale in flea markets.”

“I have too,” I agree. “Here’s my theory. I think he hallucinated this whole baseball experience when he was a POW and now really believes it to be true. You know, when I was in the hospital with pneumonia and that 106-degree fever that the doctors couldn’t get down, I couldn’t distinguish between dreams and reality. I dreamt I got that promotion I wanted at work and then couldn’t figure out whether I really got it or not. It was all academic because I got the promotion three months later, but until that happened, the not knowing was scary. I kept on thinking I could figure it out. I should have requested psychological help. I think Jerry really believes that this baseball thing actually occurred.”

“I suppose it’s possible,” Marilyn says.

\* \* \*

We knew Allison and Jerry had this dream of returning to Florida, but were surprised to learn that they’ve taken steps to fulfill it. They’ve already gone on a house-hunting trip, and decided on the condo they want. It’s on the Atlantic side, outside of Boca Raton. Allison says she’s tired of paying rent

and making mortgage payments, and wants to buy the place outright. Marilyn suggests that they make a large down payment and carry a small mortgage, but Jerry agrees with Allison. They're each going to put up half of the purchase price.

The closing is in a week. It's hard to believe that in the future we may not see them that often. I'm less inclined than ever to say anything to Allison about Jerry. She seems really happy these days.

\* \* \*

I remember the date: August 5, 1956. I'm coming up the dirt road that leads from the waterfront to the campground. I see this guy in street clothes talking to Earl, my junior counselor, in front of cabin six. For a moment, I think that Alton Brand, the old white-haired owner of the camps, has hired someone to forcibly remove Earl from my camp. I know Brand is pissed that I refused his order to transfer Earl to Seneca, the younger kids' camp. It's a job Earl doesn't want.

I'm working this summer at a children's camp in Connecticut. I've wanted this job, but it's not my dream job—too temporary. After the summer, I'm going to enlist in the army. Over the years, I've experienced every phase of summer camp—from a camper in Seneca, to Mohawk, for older kids, and on to being a dishwasher, junior counselor, athletics counselor, and now head counselor of Mohawk. Head counselor, I know, is a misnomer. It's more like being a group leader in larger camps. The population of the camps has gone down steadily since a kid in Seneca died following a boxing match. Mohawk has been the hardest hit, mainly because it never had too many kids in the first place. We can't

afford to have any kid leave because he's not having a good time. We only have eighteen this year, barely enough for a ball game.

I think I know what kids want from a summer camp. I also realize that I'm young and headstrong—I just turned twenty-one—and probably have a bit of an “I don't give a shit” attitude because I'm going in the army in the fall.

My main problem is that the camp is really understaffed. It's just the swimming counselor, Earl, and me. Two of the cabins have no counselor at all.

The campground is picturesque, but its shape is like a golf fairway. As you come up the dirt road by the waterfront, there's a small lodge to the left, four green cabins straight ahead, a long expanse of open area ending in a rise, and three more cabins at the top of the hill. As a baseball field, it's got a few problems, so we only practice there. Left field is enormous, there's a large tree in right center, and right field is very short. Unlike the other camps, which have bigger, two-story lodges, ours is used only as the camp nurse's station when she makes her morning rounds.

Earl points in my direction as he sees me approaching. The visitor walks over and extends his hand.

“Hi,” he says. “Are you Jon? I'm Dennis Hale, the new counselor.”

Really? I'm dumbfounded. Instead of one less counselor, I'm plus one. Only one counselor-less cabin left now. There's a fourteen-year-old in that one who's probably going to be a junior counselor next year anyway.

Dennis Hale is a big guy, around 6' 2", muscular, with sandy hair, rugged features, and a friendly smile.

“Well, that's great,” I say. “Where are you from?”

“Originally from Norwich, but I just got in from Port

Arthur, Texas. Pitched in the Texas League. Developed a dead arm, so they sent me back home to recuperate.”

“Sorry to hear that, but glad you’re here. Let’s get you set up in cabin five.”

The cabins are primitive, with metal cots, thin mattresses, screens instead of windows, and no bathrooms. The bathrooms are in an outbuilding shared by the two boys’ camps.

Dennis helps me make up the cot. “Where are the kids?” he asks.

“Swimming. Rest hour is 1:30 to 2:30, afternoon activity is 2:30 to 4:30, and swim time is 4:30 to 5:30.”

“Want to have a catch?” he asks.

“Uh, sure.”

\* \* \*

The fastball and slider are good, but not exceptional. Maybe he’s being careful with that arm. The curveball is amazing. It’s just like a ball rolling off a table. If that’s a dead arm, I’d hate to bat against it when it’s alive.

After fifteen minutes, I walk over to him. “Maybe you’d better take it easy with that arm.”

“I feel okay.”

“That curveball is something.”

“Yeah,” he says. “It’s my best pitch. Here’s the way I grip it.”

His fingers dance over the ball. “Here’s the slider. And the four-seam fastball. And the two-seamer. I even experimented with the knuckler.” He smiles. “My old-age pitch. You just grab it by the fingertips, like this.”

I place my fingers on the ball like he shows me. “I once struck out Mickey Mantle when he was in the minors,” Dennis says.

“With that curveball, I can believe it.”

Over the next week there’s plenty of baseball: drills, practice games, and batting practice. I take a few swings during batting practice.

“Hey, you can hit,” Dennis observes.

“You know, I grew up in Brooklyn, where the national pastime is not baseball but stickball. If you can hit that little pink Spalden with a broomstick, you develop a pretty good eye.”

I don’t say anything about field positions, and Dennis doesn’t pursue it.

\* \* \*

I have a car at camp. It’s an ancient 1935 Chevy, and the first one I’ve owned. My father found an ad for it in the *Norwich Bulletin*. The upside of the car is that it runs. It kind of putt-putts along, but the engine doesn’t die. The downside is that it has four completely bald tires. I don’t have the money to buy new ones. Since I have no intention of keeping the car beyond the summer, I may not buy new tires at all. Until Dennis arrived, I used the car only for transportation to Norwich or Colchester on my day off.

\* \* \*

“You on duty tonight?” Dennis asks during the kids’ rest hour.

“No. I think Skip has it tonight.” Skip is the swimming counselor. He handles only the waterfront activities, but does take a turn for night duty.

“Listen to this. I got this note from the office today. There are two women here from Romania, and they’re looking for male companionship. Can you double-date with me tonight?”

I’m aware that Dennis knows a lot of women in

Norwich, but the staff in the camp office doesn't usually do things like that. Maybe it's because he's a local and a star ballplayer.

"I don't think I can," I reply. "Sara and I usually see each other when I'm not on duty."

"The camp nurse? I didn't know you were going together."

Normally, the camp nurse is motherly, universally loved by the kids, and about twice the age of the average counselor. This year the camp nurse is motherly, young, and pretty. Maybe it's part of this year's youth movement for staff.

"I mean, do you think you'll get engaged?" Dennis asks.

"Well, we've just started seeing each other."

"Come on, man. It's the chance of a lifetime. Help me out here."

At dusk we meet the women in front of the camp office. They're pleasant and speak virtually no English. Dennis has selected the tall one for his date. She's obviously the instigator for this venture. Her friend is short, stocky, and painfully shy. Dennis suggests we explore the campgrounds separately and meet back in an hour and a half.

Flashlight in hand, I feel more like a tour guide than a date. Fortunately, my companion is very interested in the stone houses on the campgrounds, as am I. There are two of them: the camp office and the one-room craft shop. We start with the camp office. It's a fairly elaborate stone building, with an administrative area, an archival room, a one-room infirmary, and a bedroom upstairs. As a fourteen-year-old camper, I spent a whole week in that infirmary with a severe case of poison ivy on my face. There was no TV or radio there, and I'm not sure how I survived the boredom of that week. I remember looking forward to visitors, meals, and the

once-per-day visit of the camp nurse who removed the calamine lotion on my face and put on a fresh layer.

In the dark, we push on to the craft shop. The area is very hilly, with thick brush on both sides of the dirt road. The camps are not doing well, and it occurs to me that this whole camping era, in existence for so many years, could come crashing down—literally crashing down, with drastic changes to the topography. But, I remind myself, those stone buildings would survive—like vestiges of a bygone culture.

The four of us meet back in front of the office. Dennis and I say goodnight to the women.

“How did you make out?” Dennis asks on our way back to our campground.

“Never even got in the game. How about you?”

“Struck out completely.”

\* \* \*

When he doesn't have night duty, Dennis has been borrowing my car to go into Norwich to pitch in night games for the Norwich Tigers, a Class A affiliate of Detroit. I think it's great. From what he tells me, the dead arm is coming back to life.

Going up the hill to lunch one Tuesday, Dennis asks if I want to go into Norwich that evening to play with the Tigers. “Their center fielder is sick and they need an outfielder real badly.”

It's confession time. “I have to tell you,” I say, “I go to the batting cages at home, but I've actually never played a single game of hardball in my life.”

He's undeterred. “Big deal,” he says. “I see guys make the transition from softball to hardball all the time.”

It's worse than that. There's no position I can play on a hardball team. As a kid, my curving throw from the infield

drove first basemen nuts. I've always loved to play the outfield, dashing back to make an over-the-shoulder catch, or racing in to make a shoestring catch. Unfortunately, more often than not, while racing in I noticed the ball was ten feet over my head. By a process of elimination, I became a softball pitcher.

I know that playing center field at night in a Class A professional hardball game is going to be a complete disaster.

"Can't do it," I tell him.

\* \* \*

Can you believe there's only seven days of camp? The next day it's down to six. I hear the kids say that a lot. They're saying it wistfully, and that's good. It means they've had a good time at camp this year.

The morning of that sixth day before the end of camp, I get a note from the camp office telling me to be up there at 2:00 in the afternoon. It doesn't say why. My immediate guess is that Alton Brand is going to chew me out for my earlier insubordination regarding the junior counselor. Look, as long as he doesn't try to dock part of my pay.

To my surprise, I'm ushered into the archive room. It's a small room, maybe 10' by 10', with a table and chairs in the middle. The walls all have bookcases filled with pictures, photos, books, and scrapbooks. By the table, with a scrapbook in front of him, is not Alton Brand but a sixtyish, red-faced guy named Clive. He's one of a group I call the hangers-on—old friends of the owner who do various small tasks during the summer in return for room and board.

"I want you to take a look at this," Clive says, with no fanfare at all. He opens the scrapbook to a short article from the *Norwich Bulletin*:

## BALLPLAYER BANNED FROM TEXAS LEAGUE

Dennis Hale, a former star pitcher at Norwich High, was permanently banned from the Texas League when an investigation showed a constant pattern of gambling on games in which he was involved...

My first reaction is anger, like what you'd feel from hearing someone bad-mouthing your friend. But there's something weird about this revelation. Obviously, Brand is behind it. I've seen Clive around, but I don't know him from a hole in the wall. Maybe some sort of misplaced paternalism on Brand's part? *I know you gave me a hard time this year, but you are a longtime part of the camping family, and I thought you should know about this.*

I mumble a thanks to Clive and head back toward camp.

\* \* \*

End of camp minus three. I've never said anything to Dennis about that article in the scrapbook. He and I are standing by the first base line, watching a practice game.

"I hear you're not taking your car home," he says.

"Right. I'm going to try to sell it here. When I get home, until I enlist, I can use my dad's car."

"How much do you want for it?"

"Fifty bucks," I reply. "I got a real good deal on it, and I think I should get what I paid for it."

"I'm not questioning that," he says thoughtfully. "But you paid fifty for it, and you got at least ten dollars' worth of use and enjoyment out of it. Now you should pass it on to someone else. I'll give you forty for it."

Hmm. The bald-tired car as communal property. The

guy may have a gambling problem, but he's a pretty good negotiator.

I don't counter. "It's yours for forty," I tell him.

\* \* \*

The last day of the season. The trunks are stacked by second base, waiting for Railway Express to pick them up. The kids are all gone, having been picked up by the bus, after the handshakes, hugs, and vows of "see you next summer," which I can't say this year. I'm going to stay a few days in what they call postseason, help clean things up, and then get a ride to New London to catch a train home.

Dennis and I say good-bye. My last image of him is sitting very straight behind the wheel of his newly purchased car as it putt-putts down the dirt road leading out of the campground.

\* \* \*

Allison is really excited about purchasing the condo. She's called Marilyn twice from Florida to give a play-by-play account of the buying process. The third call is at 2:00 in the afternoon rather than the morning. Marilyn is at her exercise class. I answer the phone.

I can't understand what she's saying. She's crying.

"Allison, take a deep breath. I can't understand you. What happened?"

"He's gone! Vanished."

"What?"

"Disappeared. The real estate agent called us at the hotel early this morning and said there was a problem with the funds for the purchase. I figured there was some screwup with the account numbers. Jerry was still sleeping. 'Jerry, get up,' I said. 'We have to get down to the agent's office. They're not postponing the closing date, but there's some

problem with the account numbers. I'm taking a shower and then we have to leave.' When I got out of the shower, he was gone."

"Are you sure he didn't just go out for a quick breakfast?"

"I looked all over the hotel for him. Then I got in the car and drove around the hotel neighborhood. Absolutely no sign of him. The only thing he took from the room were the clothes he wore yesterday. He even left his teeth in the bathroom."

So much for the breakfast theory. She called her kids, and they gave her good advice. "Shut down all the joint accounts. And fast, Mom." As it turned out, not fast enough. At a nearby ATM, he had withdrawn the maximum \$500 from their joint account.

"I just don't know what to do, Jon," she sobs. "I can face the fact that he's run out on me and I've lost the condo. I just can't go back to the house in Cartersville, and yet I have to go back there. I've got to get my passport and my jewelry."

"Look, why don't you come back here and stay a while at our place. I'll drive you tomorrow to your place to get your things."

"That's really nice of you and Marilyn," she says. "But I'm scared, Jon. Maybe we should ask a police officer to go there with us."

Theoretically, anyone who bolts from a marriage and forgets his teeth cannot present too much of a danger. But considering Jerry's background, Allison's idea is a good one.

Allison arrives at our place that afternoon, and emotionally she's still in bad shape. We put her up in my middle son Josh's old bedroom. The next day we drive out to Cartersville, followed by a squad car from the local police

station. The police are not necessary. There's no one in the house.

That evening at dinner, Allison says, "I found out what the problem was with the purchase funding. Care to guess what it was?"

I'm sure the problem was not with Allison's half of the \$70,000 purchase price. If Jerry's account had been anything close, the agent would have tried to work something out.

"His account had only fifteen thousand," is my guess.

"Zero," Marilyn says.

"Very close, Marilyn," Allison says. "Fifty-seven dollars and twenty cents."

Allison says Jerry again tried to withdraw the maximum \$500 from their joint account, this time at an ATM near Tallahassee. The transaction was blocked.

"Tallahassee is good," I say. "That means he's headed west."

The next evening Allison's grief turns to outrage. Maybe, I think, this is therapeutic.

"I just called his sister," Allison says. "I hadn't spoken to her in about two years. Can you believe this? She was actually flippant. 'Did he do that again? It's all a bunch of lies. There was no baseball career, no Vietnam, no working for the ATF. He was a used-car salesman.'"

\* \* \*

After two weeks at our place, Allison left to spend some time with her daughter.

"You know," I said to Marilyn as Allison drove off, "I'm bothered by one thing. They had a pretty good life together."

"Based on a pack of lies."

"True. But if I ever meet him again, I'd like to ask him,

‘Was it worth it? Did you ever even consider that people might like you for what you are, not for what you claim to be?’”

“It wouldn’t work,” Marilyn replied. “Probably, as we speak, he’s going after his next victim.”

Allison said the only thing she ever heard about Jerry afterward was a bill she received from a doctor in Biloxi, Mississippi. After the divorce came through, she did return to Florida, buying a condo in Del Ray Beach by making a large down payment and taking out a small mortgage. She’s met a guy down there—a retired college professor. He’s on the level—according to Rate My Professors, his students gave him good grades. I don’t think Allison will marry again.

\* \* \*

I’m getting to an age where I don’t like to look up old friends on the Internet, fearing what I might find. My fears are justified when I do a search on Dennis Hale. He died six years ago. The article in the *Hartford Courant* said he was survived by a wife of forty-seven years, two daughters, and five grandchildren. He had a successful career as a real estate developer in the Hartford area. Three years before his death, he was elected to the Connecticut Baseball Hall of Fame. And, the article added, in the minors he once struck out Mickey Mantle.

# Serendipity and Vitamin C

by Alissa Oliverson

close your eyes and imagine this everyday scene  
there's mustard on your suit and you just had it cleaned  
you finished lunch solo at your favorite little diner  
where your sandwich was soggy, and the service could have  
been finer

you're walking downtown with your head in your phone  
hoping to hear that magical tone  
anticipation's high, you've been waiting all day  
but every *ting! ting!* has been spam, for fuck's sake  
and it's too hot

you swipe away the junk mail and wipe away the sweat  
"be patient" you tell yourself, "good news will come yet"  
you notice your shoe has started making strange noise  
is it clicking? a loose sole? oh, what a joy  
but they're brand new, it can't be, you just got them last  
week

and they cost a pretty penny, so you start to freak  
phone in one hand you don't even break stride  
contorting your foot to check the underside  
one hop, missed it  
two hops, not quite  
third hop, eureka, yet another delight  
gum

so, the clicking was sticking, of course, just your luck  
ever since you got up this day's run amok  
phone into pocket, eyes on the roll  
you chicken scratch concrete and pray for your sole  
but it's too hot and the gooey gum merely smears

you're stuck in place now, and this stagnation brings fear  
"what next?" you sigh loudly  
then suddenly *ting! ting!*  
your dopamine triggers a fluttery belly dance thing  
pupils dilated you think "Oh my god, holy shit,  
there's no way in hell that this isn't it!"  
fumbling for your phone you tap for the news  
"Dear applicant, with thanks we regret to inform you..."  
a bead of sweat falls on the screen and your eyes fill with  
tears  
you've been waiting for that position to open for years  
but before you can cry or chuck your phone at a wall  
a stranger approaches and tweaks your downfall  
dressed in a shirt that reads "LIFE" in block letters  
they look at you like no day has ever been better  
from their bag they pull a lemon and hand it to you  
you stand there, flummoxed  
what do you do?

# Gimme a Break

by Bruce McDougall

Rico trudged to the front door of the probation office. The slush on the sidewalk had soaked his Italian loafers and chilled his feet to the bone. The slush was brown. The walls of the two-storied brick storefronts were the color of dried blood. The sky was grey. His hands felt raw. He stuffed them into the pockets of his leather coat and glanced at a streetcar rumbling along Lake Shore Boulevard.

Rico had driven last night into the city from the suburbs, where he lived in an apartment with his mom and dad. He'd lived there for the last three years, ever since he'd tossed three hundred pounds of high-grade marijuana off a bridge into the Ohio River, his marriage had broken up and he'd moved back to Toronto from Cincinnati. The apartment had three bedrooms, and there was a gym and a swimming pool downstairs, where Rico worked out after he got out of bed. Rico's father had given up on his son long ago. Before Rico got out of bed, his father had already driven to the furniture store that he owned in a run-down neighbourhood in the east end of the city, where a few old Italians still tended to their vegetable gardens on streets teeming with Jamaicans, Sri Lankans and Pakistanis. By the time he got home, Rico was usually gone for the night. Rico's mother was happy that her son had moved home. She liked to coddle her only child, and she'd missed him when he'd moved away. She made his bed, washed his clothes, took his sports coats to the dry cleaners, ironed his shirts, prepared his meals and tried to stay out of his way when he was busy watching television. If he came home at night, he usually found a snack of soppressata on a

slice of ciabatta on a white plate that she'd left for him on the kitchen counter.

Rico had met his cousin Carmen last night at a bar downtown, where they drank shooters and discussed Rico's scheme to import container-loads of counterfeit designer blue jeans into Canada from Milan. Carmen was about the same age as Rico, and they'd known each other for most of their lives. Carmen was married and had two young children. He imported women's clothing from Italy and knew people with contacts in the counterfeit rag trade. But Carmen liked Rico. Besides, they were cousins. That was all the advantage Rico needed to get what he wanted.

After they left the bar, Rico and his cousin had returned to Carmen's apartment on the waterfront, where they continued their conversation over a bottle of Islay Scotch that Rico had bought for his cousin. At some point, Carmen pulled out a bag of cocaine. Their conversation lasted all night. Rico insisted that he could pull off his deal with only five thousand dollars upfront to pay for the anti-counterfeit medallions that he'd need to authenticate the jeans. Unfortunately, no matter how much booze and coke they consumed, Carmen remained a stubborn cheap prick. Even after they'd discussed every detail of Rico's scheme, Carmen wrote a cheque to Rico for only a thousand dollars, which Rico stuffed into the inside pocket of his leather coat and carried with him now along the slush-covered sidewalk.

Rico had slept for about an hour. Then he'd driven here in his eight-year-old Buick. He knew that he'd violated a condition of his probation and that his probation officer could send him back to jail if he discovered that Rico had used cocaine. But this was Rico's first meeting with the guy.

Even a probation officer would give him a break at their first meeting.

The probation office was on the second floor, above a clothing store. To get to the front door, Rico passed a grocery shop whose window displayed dusty yellow squash that resembled dinosaur eggs. Farther along the block, a sign that looked hand-made advertised a bar called the Alibi Room. He passed a barber shop with one chair and a dust-covered plant in the window; a hardware store that sold chrome-plated ratchets, crock pots and sixteen-piece dinner sets made in China; a shoe store whose owner tried to entice pedestrians inside by placing multi-coloured rubber flip-flops in a wire basket on the sidewalk in the dead of winter; and a toy store that sold balsa-wood airplane kits wrapped in paper like the ones that Rico used to buy thirty years ago with money that he'd lifted from his mother's purse. It was ten o'clock in the morning. None of the stores was open yet, and the sidewalk hadn't been shoveled. Rico wondered how anyone could live in such a shithole of a neighbourhood.

Rico opened the door, stamped the slush off his shoes and started up the stairs. Puddles of melted snow had formed on the linoleum-covered footpads, and the steps creaked under his feet. He held onto the railing and used it to pull himself upward to the tiny second-floor landing. Cheap black lettering glued to the hollow wooden door said "Probation Office" and "Enter".

When he opened the door, Rico's heart sank. There were three mismatched chairs in the windowless waiting room, each occupied a man in a cheap winter coat. Rico checked his fake Cartier tank watch. It said ten o'clock. Rico had a thing about punctuality. If someone called a meeting for ten o'clock, he expected the meeting to begin at ten

o'clock. It seemed rude and inconsiderate to keep people waiting, but everyone with any authority seemed to do it all the time. Doctors, lawyers, dentists, bankers, government employment agencies, probation officers – they had you by the balls, and they knew it, so they left you sitting in their stupid fucking waiting rooms leafing through stale magazines and never once apologized for their bad manners. As soon as Rico saw the other three men, he wanted to turn around and walk back down the stairs. But it was ten o'clock on the first Monday morning of February, and Rico knew that, if he didn't keep this appointment, he would go back to jail, where no one had any manners and his choices would become even more limited.

Rico gritted his teeth and looked around for a place to sit down. When he didn't see an empty chair, he stood by the door and wiggled his damp toes. He avoided the eyes of the other men, and they avoided his, while he tried to get the blood flowing again through his feet. Across the room, a wiry red-haired kid who looked about eleven years old tapped the toes of his rubber-soled sneakers against the wet linoleum floor and gripped his knees as if he thought they might fly up and hit him in the chin: tap, tap, tap, went his feet. To Rico's left, an overweight balding man who looked about sixty but was probably closer to thirty-five wore a dark blue ski jacket patched with duct tape. The man sat next to a closed door, muttering to himself and concentrating on the tattoos on the back of his hands. To Rico's right, the third man, a black guy with matted dreadlocks under a multi-coloured touque was dressed in some kind of purple jumpsuit that made him look like a Formula One race-car mechanic. The black dude had fallen asleep with his mouth open and his gold fillings showing. All three men looked like chronic losers, the kind of

deadbeats who'd regard a pair of ninety-nine-cent flip-flops from the shoe store downstairs as the deal of a lifetime.

Rico figured these guys were on probation for crimes like shoplifting a T-shirt, stealing a bicycle or selling a hot cell phone to an undercover cop. They didn't live on the edge like he did; they lived on the bottom, wearing their destiny like a layer of dust, too lazy or stupid to give themselves a shake.

Rico was different. It was just bad luck that brought him here this morning. Driving his Buick home one night before Christmas, Rico had been stopped by the police because one of his brake lights wasn't working. The police had searched him and his car and found a gram of cocaine. Rico had just bought the gram from a dealer he'd known for several years, a Chinese university student named Adam. Rico often visited Adam at his apartment. They occasionally played chess together. When the police found the coke, they told Rico that, if he didn't identify his dealer, he'd spend the next three years in prison. Rico didn't hesitate. He gave them Adam's name and address. In return, the police persuaded the Crown attorney to negotiate a light sentence for Rico: a night in jail, a three-thousand-dollar fine and six months' probation. Rico still hadn't paid the fine. He'd hoped that his cousin would give him enough to cover it. The only alternative was jail, unless he told his parents or found the money elsewhere. He'd find the money, he thought, as he stood beside the door. He had good connections, people with jobs and steady incomes. Not like these losers slouched in the room with him.

Rico unbuttoned his coat and rolled his shoulders to adjust the way the coat hung on his back. He ran his fingers around the waistband of his tailor-made black wool slacks, tucking in the tails of his black silk shirt so the fabric

remained flat against the tight muscles of his stomach. He shoved his hands again into the pockets of his coat, feeling with his fingers the check in his left pocket and the pack of cigarettes and the Dunhill lighter in right one. He debated pulling out a cigarette and lighting it with the fake gold lighter, just to see what would happen. But before he did, the door to his left opened and a short man stepped into the waiting room. He wore blue jeans, a white T-shirt, a cheap nylon windbreaker, and the unmistakable expression on his face of a con who knew enough to keep his business to himself. Without even glancing at the others, the short man headed straight for the door beside Rico, pulled it open and walked out.

To Rico's surprise, a dark-skinned woman appeared in the inner doorway, black hair to her shoulders, not bad looking, Rico thought, probably mid-thirties, a little plump around the hips, although he couldn't tell for certain because she wore gray pleated trousers that billowed intriguingly over the body underneath. Under her black turtleneck sweater, the woman had firm breasts. That much Rico could tell. The woman was holding a clipboard. Rico tried to see her hands, checking for a wedding ring, but she caught him looking and he turned his gaze away to stare at the wall behind the head of the snoozing Rasta-man. The woman said, "Mister Pistol." It wasn't a question and it wasn't a command. Just a neutral observation, as if she was reading the name from a business card that she'd picked up from a seat on the bus.

"Pistol-e," Rico said. "Three syllables."

"Come in," said the woman. She turned and walked back into her office. Not a bad ass, Rico thought.

Rico looked around the waiting room. The other three me

stayed in their chairs. None of them looked at Rico, and no one seemed prepared to argue. Just a bunch of cowed rounders, Rico thought, who'd been caught too many times to struggle against the unavoidable consequences of their own inertia.

The woman was sitting behind her desk and had placed the clipboard in front of her. She folded her hands and looked at Rico.

“Shut the door,” she said.

Rico did as he was told, then sat down.

“Mister Pistole,” the woman said. This time, she pronounced his name right. Rico felt an urge to smile, as if he'd won a small victory.

“Rico,” he said.

“I'm Ms Tyagi,” the woman said. She glanced at the clipboard. “You'll be coming here every week.”

Rico nodded. The woman had withdrawn behind a shield of authority. He wondered if he could draw her out again. He sat back in his chair and crossed his legs at the ankles. He nodded. “Unless you want me to come more often,” he said.

He checked Ms Tyagi's eyes for a flicker of interest, but his words had skidded like pebbles across a sheet of ice. Ms Tyagi looked back at him with such cold indifference that he uncrossed his ankles and sat up straighter in his chair.

Ms Tyagi observed that Rico had yet to pay his three-thousand-dollar fine. Rico said he was still trying to get the money. “You have three days,” said Ms Tyagi.

Ms Tyagi asked Rico if he'd found a job. Rico said he hadn't, but he was looking. Ms Tyagi asked to see the form that Rico carried with him when he went looking for work. A potential employer was supposed to sign the form, even if he

didn't offer Rico a job. At lunch last week, Rico had obtained the signatures of two of his uncles, one uncle's brother-in-law and a cousin. Last night at the bar, he'd asked his cousin Carmen to sign the form, as well. Altogether, it had taken him about five minutes to collect the five signatures. Rico reached into his pocket. His fingers touched his cousin's thousand-dollar cheque. How many cons sat in this chair with a thousand dollars in their pocket? he wondered. He laid the employment form flat on the desk in front of Ms Tyagi.

Ms Tyagi looked briefly at the form, then handed it back to Rico. "Keep trying," she said.

"I know I can do it," Rico said.

The interview lasted about two minutes. "Sure I can't interest you in a drink later?" Rico said.

"See you in a week," said Ms Tyagi, removing the top sheet from her clipboard and tucking it into a folder on her desk. She opened a drawer beside her and slid the folder into a slot. As she bent over the drawer, her black hair fell over her shoulder and Rico could see the smooth dark skin of her neck.

Rico stood up and went to the door. Ms Tyagi said, "Mister Pistole."

Rico turned around, wondering if she'd changed her mind about meeting him after work.

Ms Tyagi held out a clear plastic container. "There's a washroom down the hall," she said. "Leave this on the shelf outside the door when you're done."

Ms Tyagi called Rasta-man into the office and closed the door. In the waiting room, the old guy in the duct-taped ski jacket was still staring at his tattooed knuckles. The red-haired kid was still tapping his toes against the linoleum. Rico beckoned to him. In the washroom, he gave the container to

the kid. The kid stepped modestly into the toilet stall. When he came out again, he handed the container to Rico.

“Wash it,” said Rico. “And your hands, too.”

The kid went to the sink and turned the hot-water tap. It released a thin stream of water. The kid held the container under the water for a few seconds, then handed it to Rico.

“Dry it,” said Rico. “Shit, don’t you know anything?”

When the kid did as Rico told him, Rico told him to stay in the washroom until he came back. He took the container and handed the kid ten bucks. “Buy yourself a coat,” he said.

Rico walked down the hall and placed the container on the shelf outside Ms Tyagi’s office door. It wasn’t Rico’s fault that he’d spent the previous evening snorting coke with his cousin. Entrepreneurs like him did what they had to do to raise money. You had to be fearless and self-motivated to succeed in this world. Donald Trump didn’t go to bed in the middle of a deal, and neither did Rico. If he had to stay up all night snorting lines to woo an investor, he’d do it. It was just bad luck that Ms Tyagi had chosen today, of all days, to ask Rico for a urine sample. Why should he pay a penalty for showing some initiative? Besides, Ms Tyagi liked him. Rico could tell. She’d go easy on him, once she realized that he was on the level.

Rico headed down the stairs, turned up the collar of his coat and waded into the slush-covered street. The sky was as gray as an old T-shirt. Rico walked in the path made by other people’s footsteps to keep his loafers dry.

On his way downtown, Rico thought about Ms Tyagi. A bit heavy around the hips, firm breasts, smooth skin, not a bad dresser, and she had a straight nine-to-five job. Yet how straight could you be when you spent your whole day talking to low-lives and ex-cons? Sooner or later, their breath would

mix with yours, their odours would settle on your clothing and your attitudes would mingle like snowflakes on pavement. Ms Tyagi must have been happy to see a guy like Rico for a change.

Accelerating up the ramp to the freeway, Rico decided to resist Ms Tyagi's overtures no matter how strongly she came on to him. Ms Tyagi really wasn't his type. Besides, Rico thought, until he made some money to buy himself some new clothes, take a woman to a decent restaurant and move out of his parents' apartment, he couldn't really afford to get seriously involved with anyone. Maybe he'd give her a call after he got this deal off the ground. Women couldn't resist Rico, not when he had money.

# Classicals

by D.S. Maolalai

it's ex-  
boyfriends; the minotaur  
to be strick. and jealousy;  
hanging from your ankle.  
maze-following,  
a guide. *I*  
*will battle*  
*beast, weather*  
*and horned god - and anyone*  
*who has ever*  
*put his cock*  
*near you.*

# Vogue Words for an Astroturf Infrastructure

by Colin James

Please except my apology  
I thought our hero had flown south,  
now see him still here the late  
autumn camouflage well apt.  
I'm up for a moonlit walk  
to any golf course pond  
that reflects your willingness.  
It seems you are as representative  
as the Bishop Of Salisbury.  
I still can't get my pants to admit  
their preponderance for pleasure,  
until I roll them down  
and past your prophetic eyes.

# Curbside Swap

by John Tavares

Greg had a girlfriend who was a registered nurse, who liked to remind him she was not a registered practical nurse, or a personal support worker, but she had a university degree with honours, a bachelor of nursing science, and even a master's degree in public health. Greg possessed only a diploma, but Ellen told him as a journalism student, recently graduated from community college, he should be able to find work in Beaverbrook, since there were many unfilled positions and job vacancies. He thought she believed in him, and nurtured high hopes for their future together—so she persuaded him to move from Toronto to Beaverbrook.

Later, he would blame her: love made him blind; she became the reason he ended up stranded in Beaverbrook. Within three months of moving to Beaverbrook, his girlfriend asked him to leave and move from their two-bedroom unit domicile in the only apartment block in the town, since, she revealed, she was having an affair with Doctor Money. He decided to stay in Beaverbrook since Ellen was still the love of his life. Also, because of the high rate of diabetes among indigenous peoples from reserves up north, in the catchment area of Ellen's regional hospital, he found the health-care for his Type 1 diabetes, the counselling, the treatment, better than anyplace he lived before. Still infatuated and preoccupied with Ellen, he hoped to reunite.

Meanwhile, he continued to search for work. The local newspaper was a family owned business. The editor-in-chief and advertising manager warned him not to call again. The free weekly community newspaper was not hiring. The owner

had not hired any new reporters or editors in five years; in fact, their editorial staff consisted of only an editor/writer, a reporter, and a copy editor/production manager. In any event, the owners planned to fold or sell the newspaper in the not-so-distant future, unless they found a white knight, or found some method to earn money from their online edition.

He applied at the regional hospital, which, after the great recession and closure of the sawmill and the Cody Springs Nuclear Disaster and the shuttering of the uranium mine, became the town's leading employer. The hospital's human resources department did not return his phone calls or respond by mail to the application and resume he filed at their website online. When he tried to call the housekeeping supervisor, the kitchen, or the maintenance department about the vacant positions, to which he applied online, by snail mail, and in person, they either never bothered to answer the telephone. When he pestered them, they advised him management filled the positions and insisted he not call or visit again. An administrative assistant warned him not to keep his hopes up and urged him to contact human resources department, which pleaded with him to please stop calling.

The railroad gave him an interview and a test for a freight train conductor and engineer. He was told he passed the interview and the multiple-choice test, whose railyard questions kept reminding him of the video game Tetris, but he was up against a very competitive field.

“Are you native?” the HR guy in faded denim asked.

“Native?”

“As in Ojibway, indigenous?”

“No, I'm Italian on one side and Portuguese on the other.”

“You look like you might be native.”

“I darken easily in the sun.”

“That’s too bad; if you were, I could’ve hired you on the spot.”

He applied for work at the sawmill, but he did not receive any reply. When he called the front office because he did, indeed, want a job and was not applying to improve his job interview skills, he was warned management expected the sawmill faced permanent closure soon. When he bicycled to the mill, the security guard at the gatehouse greeted him suspiciously and warned him he would be charged with trespassing if he did not leave sawmill property promptly.

When Greg asked Spencer, the host of the male coffee klatch in Moose Knuckles Coffee & Donuts, he was warned by Spencer and his crew he probably would not be hired at the sawmill. “You don’t have any friends or relatives, my fair brethren, who laboured at the sawmill, friends or relatives who acted as foremen, supervisors, or in management.” Spencer also warned, “My fair brethren, you are not a long time local or lifer. Oftentimes even so-called lifers are not hired if they are not old stock Canadians or if they are considered outsiders—for example, they come from so-called uppity, immigrant, or indigenous families.”

Greg dropped off an application at the uranium mine administration office downtown, but the human resources officer told him she did not expect to hire anyone until there was a steep upturn in uranium prices, which the company projections indicated would not occur anytime soon after the Cody Springs Nuclear Disaster.

As Greg sat at the edge of the coffee klatch surrounding Spencer, in the Moose Knuckles Coffee & Donuts, browsing about for an artificial sweetener for his coffee, a furloughed

miner warned him, “You’re probably not going to be hired. You don’t have friends or relatives working at the mine.”

“This is the manner, my fair brethren, in which business in Beaverbrook operates,” Spencer agreed. “You are also totally unfamiliar with anyone in management: you have no friends or relatives in the upper echelons.”

As Greg drew down his savings, he barely managed to eke out a living by picking up items from the curbside swap. He kept coming across Geiger counters, remnants of uranium mining and refining from laid off or retired uranium miners who quit or gave up hope of ever returning to work. He tested the Geiger counters by bicycling to the mine site. The closer he peddled along the highway towards the uranium mine and processing and refining facility, the faster and louder the clicking and warning noises emitted from the hand held devices occurred. He sold the Geiger counters online and managed to net a pretty penny for each of them, selling most of them to hardcore, diehard survivalist at remote outposts and locations in Utah, Idaho, Oregon, Colorado, and British Columbia. He began to think of himself as a leading supplier of second-hand Geiger counters online. He discovered the Internet was still a novice technology to most residents of Beaverbrook and internet speeds were very slow, but he still managed to post pictures of the items he recovered from curbside swap and sell and auction them online.

A few weeks later, though, early morning in the morning, on the last Saturday of the month, curbside swap day, as he cycled down the residential streets near his apartment on the morning of curbside swap, he realized he probably wouldn’t come across another Geiger counter and wondered to which neighbourhood Ellen had moved in with

her doctor friend. Then he thought he hit the motherlode. Someone at a gabled and turreted house, which he nicknamed the Castle of Floatplane Street, down the thoroughfare from where he lived, was leaving first editions books in mint or excellent condition in their blue box. In the rigid plastic recycle bin he spotted first editions in good condition, albeit there were signs of wear and tear, of having been read by someone who respected books. He noticed a few of the hardcovers, autographed on the title page by Margaret Atwood and Alice Munro, among other contemporary authors. When he checked the condition of the hardcover books, inside the cover beneath the dustjacket, he found they were delicately signed in pencil by Marvin Money. He would have been more comfortable if there was a sign indicating the books were free, but this was the curbside swap day, and they were in blue box recycle bins on the curb. He took a few books, dumped them into his backpack, and peddled away.

In more prosperous times, he probably would have bought these books, if he could afford them, but he needed the money and storage space was now at a premium. When he checked their potential value online, he was astonished. He started auctioning the first edition hardcover books online. The price he received per volume proved enough to survive for one week, if he remained thrifty and frugal, and shopped at the dollar store for groceries. So, he limited himself to auctioning one volume per week.

At the Moose Knuckles coffee klatch, Greg asked, “Who lives in the brick house at the end of Floatplane Street?”

“My fair brethren, that’s Doctor Money’s humble abode,” Spencer replied.

“Did you say, Doctor *Money*?”

“I said Doctor Money, not related to the famous Doctor Money of sexology fame. She lives with her father, a retired English professor suffering the debilitating effects of Parkinson’s disease.”

As Greg listened to Spencer explain the difference between Parkinson’s disease and other forms of dementia, he wondered how a retired professor wound up in Beaverbrook, but he thought his situation explained the impressive book collection—first editions discarded like stale newsmagazines and last week’s newspapers. Then the following month, on the Saturday morning of the curbside swap, he visited the same boulevard outside the Castle of Floatplane Street. A woman, bare foot, wearing a hoodie over an athletic bra and thong, quietly stepped onto her backdoor steps, and sat down with her cup of coffee and a magazine, *The New England Journal of Medicine*. She watched him for several moments while she smoked a cigarillo. When he noticed her watching him, he felt like a target had been drawn on his back but he resisted the urge to bolt.

“You’d be doing me a favor if you took those books. My father was a university professor and a book lover, but now he’s in his nineties, half-blind, with dementia, and can’t read.”

“Will do,” Greg said crisply. He fumbled with the books as he loaded his backpack and sped off on his bicycle.

“See you next month, handsome!” she shouted. “Curbside swap, baby! Last sat Saturday of each month! The early bird gets the worm!” she clapped her hands and blew him a kiss.

As he peddled, he turned back and shouted, “Thanks!”

Her early morning exuberance puzzled him, causing him to wonder if she had been drinking, as he cycled down

Floatplane Street. Possibly, she had been partying since late Friday night and had not been to bed yet. A doctor who smoked cigarillos also made him wonder. Then he considered the possibility this woman could be Ellen's girlfriend. On the day of curbside swap, the following month, as he rummaged through the books in her rigid plastic blue box on the boulevard, Ellen stepped out of the house, leading an elderly man out of the house, into a Mercedes SUV in the driveway. Saying nothing, she blushed, but Greg did not think he could ever recall the woman he knew as so confident and assertive ever looking so embarrassed or her cheeks so red, since normally nothing fazed her. He thought he was the person who should feel abashed and ashamed. Instead, when he discovered in the recycle bin, the blue box, the first edition of a famous World War Two novel, *The Naked and The Dead*, by Norman Mailer, worn, with a tattered dust jacket, but still in excellent condition, he marveled and gasped. He double checked the publisher's copyright page and confirmed the book was indeed a first edition as well as a first printing.

When he auctioned the classic collectable online, he figured the proceeds would pay his rent and groceries for the next month. In any event, during the following year of his life in Beaverbrook, he thought, the curbside swap and this depot saved his life. Meanwhile, at the coffee klatch in Moose Knuckles Coffee & Donuts the locals and minions continued to congregate around Spencer, who had earned an honors bachelors degree and a master's degree in forestry. During a conversation he had with his ex-girlfriend, at the coffee shop, during which he pleaded with her for the return of his laptop and compact disc player, she tried to warn him about Spencer.

Greg thought Spencer was harmless, an intelligent local guide, but she said he quit his job in shame as a forester at the Ministry of Natural Resources after a forest fire fighter accused him of sexual harassment. Over the next several years, the skinny man gained over a hundred and fifty pounds. She sniped cattily he had not been gainfully employed since the allegations.

When she left the Moose Knuckles café, he went to sit at Spencer's regular table and asked about curbside swap.

"The curbside swap in Beaverbrook has been a success since the nineties, my fair brethren," Spencer said. "As volunteer chair for the environmental committee for municipality of Beaverbrook, I helped set up and implement the program."

"Isn't this town kind of remote and isolated for recycling to work economically?" Greg asked.

"A new era of environmental consciousness arrived town with the dawning of a millennium. Local activists contributed to new initiatives in recycling, composting, and reduction of waste. The population of the town of Beaverbrook has always been transient. When people are moving, or during spring cleanup, curbside swap helps." Spencer paused to catch his breath. "It took, my fair brethren, years to persuade municipal public works to implement the plan for a curbside swap. All those residents downsizing, spring cleaning, or, more likely, moving, who cannot sell their belongings or dump them excess cargo at the garbage dump or landfill can simply leave them on the curbside on the last Friday of the month. That leaves an opening for a neighbour, a friend, another resident of the town, a newcomer to Beaverbrook, a rate payer, anyone, to help find repurpose that discarded chair, cast off office

furniture, boards, wood, the old door or window, the sofa, the boxes of cassettes, compact disks, and DVDS, books, comics, magazines, even vintage Playboys. Clothes, dish ware, kitchenware, and dish towels, tools, used car parts, plumbing supplies, surplus wood—you name it, these carpetbaggers leave it, my fair brethren. The social experiment, the mutually beneficial selfless act of community recycling and sharing, is a stupendous success. The local curbside swap was even featured in regional news coverage on Thunder Bay and Winnipeg news telecasts and newspapers. The Winnipeg *Free Press* and the Thunder Bay *Chronicle Herald*. Meanwhile, retailers in town are not affected by curbside swap, because Front Street and Railyardside Street has lost all its hardware stores, furniture stores, and department stores to the big box stores in nearby Northcliff.”

The curbside swap was a co-operative community success, Spencer explained, but societal ills and associated domestic problems, and chronic physical and mental illness continued to plague the town. Then Spencer started to quibble and quarrel when Greg opined that, even though many claimed there were plenty of jobs in Beaverbrook, a plethora of unfilled positions, Greg was unable to find steady, regular work that paid a living wage.

In any event, no one was certain how the curbside swap reached the ultimate level. A few prominent locals, pillars of the community, and even Spencer believed the transformation occurred in the midst of the high school graduation ceremony, following a wild party, at a time when so much hope was instilled in a bright future, progress, and better living through technological advances, improved education, and practicing the three R’s of waste management: reduction, re-use, and recycling. After a party that left them

with vomit stained formal attire, rumpled, wrinkled three-piece suits and tuxedos, elaborate and ornate prom dresses gowns, several hung over graduates milled and loitered about outdoors, outside the house where the after party occurred. The mother of a graduate, expressing her disgust and dismay, took her broom, started swatting, and asked the partygoers to leave her house before she called the police. Hurting, hungover, outside the house, the graduates rummaged through the cardboard egg boxes of clothes outside the neighbour's house at the street corner and changed from their formals into streetwear—Kenora dinner jackets, distressed jeans, sports t-shirts, before they plopped down on the chairs and sofa, also left on the boulevard for curbside swap.

Greg managed to shoot video of a few locals scavenging during curbside swap, picking up the tuxedos and prom dresses the graduates discarded. That was before the graduates changed into the jeans, t-shirts, hoodies, and scuffed shoes they themselves found in cardboard boxes on the boulevard. Then, as if they were left out for curbside swap themselves, parents and guardians emerged from nowhere in urgently driven cars and starting retrieving their offspring.

A pair of freshly minted graduates of the Beaverbrook high school graduates never returned home, as they went to live together, as boyfriend and girlfriend, in Winnipeg. That morning, though, most parents arrived promptly to pick up their children, whose chaperones were long gone, when they received calls about vomiting, hungover teenagers slumped in the recycle bins, amidst the curbside swap materials, outside the house beside the Baptist church.

Then, at the curbside swap, the following month, wives were duct taped to discarded kitchen and office furniture.

Husbands were strapped to their broken-down snowmobiles, abandoned motorcycles, and discarded car seats, alongside blown engines, and broken and worn parts from backyard garages and junkyards. Disconsolate, downtrodden, ex-boyfriends sat in the centre of worn out truck tires in their pajamas and housecoats. Ex-girlfriends and ex-boyfriends stood smoking cigarettes beside their suitcases, pacing back and forth outside their partner's houses, mobile homes, and recreation vehicles. Was it safe to assume, Greg wondered, as he bicycled past, they wished and hoped someone scavenging on the day of curbside swap would rescue them—recover them for recycling. A pair of baby twins were left in their infant car seats outside the house by a young couple, suffering from opioid and methamphetamine addiction, who had recently lost their jobs as pharmacy technicians at the big box stores to which they commuted daily in Northcliff over one hundred kilometres away. A pair of family physicians, clinicians at the local clinic and regional hospital, new to town, who had attempted to conceive for the past twelve years, spotted the twins beside discarded chairs, promptly picked up the infants, and sped away. A middle-aged man, the former principal of the Beaverbrook High School, who was suffering from premature dementia, was left in his housecoat in the reclining chair, beside a discarded stationary bicycle, with a broken foot pedal, a hand printed card attached to a lanyard around his neck. A student nurse took him by the arm and helped him into the passenger seat of her car. She drove off in a hurry, pressing down accelerator pedal, racing through the quiet residential street, before, she feared, his wife changed her mind. At the very least, she figured, with this aged man with Alzheimer's living at her home she would in a position to collect the caregiver tax credits. Far more

importantly, she figured the elder would help her improve her nursing skills and acquire real time, real world practical nursing experience.

So, it went: the adult son living in the basement of his parents' house was abruptly awakened at sunrise on his thirty-third birthday, the morning of the curbside swap. Despite his protests and pleas, his parents dumped him, with his desktop computer, wide screen television, game console, and computer desk, and chair, at the curbside. Unemployed for the past decade, after the sawmill shutdown forever, and then the uranium mine shuttered after the Cody Springs nuclear reactor disaster, his parents surrendered their hopes and dreams for him: they realized he would never return to college or university; he might not find another job that paid a living wage for a long time—at least while he was living with them. Having downloaded countless digital files of music, videos, games, graphic novels, and comic books from the internet, he spent his days stuck in the eighties, listening to his collection of pop songs, watching movies and porn, with undepilated bodies and big hair hairstyles. A lab technician, single, despite her best efforts over the past decade to find a boyfriend, downtown, at work, at some of the bars and lounges down, and more recently, online, had nearly surrendered expectations of ever finding a suitable mate for herself in Beaverbrook, until she saw him, sitting beside his computer chair at the curbside, wearing a housecoat and pyjamas. Slouched in an aged worn Lazy Boy chair, which his parents also put out for the curbside day, he rubbed and picked his nose and scratched his crotch as he absently read a science fiction paperback. Feeling something akin to love at first sight, she held his hand as she led him to her car and loaded his belongings into the back seat and trunk

and drove him across town to her house in a new subdivision. She set him up in her guest bedroom.

Still into street photography, a remnant of his journalism days, Greg inauspiciously took candid pictures, and even posted some images on his social media accounts, but hardly anyone noticed. Still, the local social transformation continued, he thought, due to curbside swap.

The pregnant teen sitting at the curbside smoking and drinking coffee in her pyjamas was picked up by a pair of lonely grandparents, driving home, returning from volunteer service, vacuuming the carpets and cleaning the pews and aisles of Sacred Heart Church.

On another last Saturday of the month, a widow cruising around town in her pickup truck, sipping takeout coffee, listening to country and western music on the local FM station from her dash radio, picked up a lonely, long-time widower, sitting in a broken reclining chair, outside his house, which needed a fresh coat of paint, new siding, new shingles, and clean windows.

An alcoholic, sitting on an upside down milk crate, beside a garbage pail full of empty beer bottles and wine and liquor bottles, and clear plastic bags of empty beer and liquor bottles, which could be refunded at the beer or liquor store for cash, shivering outside the house he shared with his common law wife, went into the back seat of a luxury SUV driven by a stern evangelical, one of the first female born again priest in Northwestern Ontario. The juvenile delinquent, napping on clear blue plastic recycle bags of discarded quilts, pillows, comforters, and duvets, went to a retired army major.

The number of castaways left at curbside swap some Saturday mornings was astonishing, but by evening these lost souls were gone, conveyed into new homes.

Meanwhile, senior officials and bureaucrats at the Ministry of Human Services in Ottawa got wind of the potential media and public relations disaster looming on the horizon—humans left out for curbside swap in Beaverbrook and expressed dismay at what they called a social experiment. Off the record, they expressed shock and dismay, after a few locals protested to their member of parliament about persons left alongside discarded furniture, appliances, books, compact discs, scratchy vinyl records, cassette tapes, and worn out clothes. Human were beings picked up like regular recyclables. A few senior bureaucrats made their discoveries independently—from monitoring postings on websites, bloggers, and social media, grew apprehensive, and alarms went off. The public relations, corporate communications, and political consequences were considered grave and ominous by the communications apparatus and officers and senior bureaucrats, although they realized they had breathing room since mainstream media did not dare venture that far north, into an isolated part of the hinterland. A super secret war room session was convened in an operations room, located in underground bunkers in Toronto and then Ottawa, involving provincial and federal government officials.

The federal government became involved because the community had a large indigenous population. Bureaucrats, planners, academics, consultants, politicians, and public relations and corporate communications officers formed several select committees and subcommittees to investigate and report on the problem and then convened a special session in a confidential situation room located in

Department of Defence headquarters. Shortly thereafter, an army of bureaucrats, social workers, counsellors, psychologists, students, medical doctors, police officers, nurses, psychiatrists, doctors, and security guards was mobilized. The modern army descended upon the relatively remote and isolated northwestern Ontario town, during the forest fire season, landing in successive waves of Hercules military aircraft. The emergency intervention resembled a predawn raid. A few war veterans and history buffs were even reminded of the air convoys and formation of gliders and troop transports of Operation Market Garden.

When Greg saw the convoy of military aircraft landing at the airport from the street, outside the basement room he rented, after he heard the droning noise of squadrons of aircraft, which sounded like a war bombing raid, he remembered his journalism training. He bicycled to the airport with the video camera he managed to hang onto and the digital camera, which he cleaned and dusted, after he found deposited in an SLR in a recycle bin during curbside swap.

Army personnel, in body armour, brandishing automatic rifles, descended from the ramps of heavy lift aircraft onto the airport tarmac, and then patrolled the town on foot and armoured personnel carrier as a dusk to dawn curfew was declared. Civilians violating the curfew would be shot on sight. With the mayor and councillors removed from office by provincial decree, teams of social workers and mental health counsellors, guarded by the provincial police, patrolled the abandoned streets of Beaverbrook, shouting through megaphones house dwellers and residents emergency measures were in effect until further notice and no-one was to leave their houses until teams of healthcare workers and

administrators deemed the town safe and the curfew was lifted. Counsellors, social workers, medical doctors, psychiatrists, and psychologists examined and interviewed virtually every member of the community in special popup offices set up in the gymnasiums of the public high school.

The police and military took control of the streets and public venues like the seniors activity centre, the hockey arena, the town hall, the library, the homeless shelter, the firehall, the elementary school, the high school, the auditorium, the civic centre, and even the hockey arena. Within weeks, though, the intervention was declared a success, as everyday activity and routines in the community were resumed, curbside swap aside. After a decade long ban, curbside swap was resumed. By then the best Greg, who still occasionally foraged during curbside swap Saturdays, on the boulevard outside a Doctor Money's house was a complete, intact, worn and faded Tupperware collection, with difficult to wash pasta sauce stains.

Meanwhile, Greg managed to find work on the graveyard shift at the local Moose Knuckles Coffee & Donuts. Earning slightly above minimum wage, he manned the drive through window from midnight to eight am, serving motorists their takeout coffee, lattes, hot chocolate, donuts, muffins, and breakfast sandwiches. He still sends out the odd resume and application to community newspapers and local radio and television stations in Southern Ontario marketplaces, where, apparently, the employment listings and recruiters say the news media, struggling to join the digital revolution, is still hiring. The video and photographs he took during the intervention he considered the best part of his ragtag portfolio. In the end, though, he has mostly given up hope of ever working as a journalist or in the media. He is

content to post as a citizen journalist on social media. It is safe to say he is happy and has found a sweet spot in life finally: coffee has always been his favorite beverage, and now he lives for the drink.

Sometime around the time of the first snowfall, Ellen drove her girlfriend's Mercedes SUV past his drive through window. As he served her pumpkin spice latte through the drive thru portal, Ellen could barely contain her laughter. Then, enroute to pick up her partner at the Thunder Bay airport, her SUV skidded out of control, as she slammed the brakes and the front wheel drive locked up and the tires skidded on glare ice. She was seriously injured in the subsequent crash, a head-on collision in the northbound lane with a compact sedan on Highway 72. After several surgeries, she was transferred to the hospital in Beaverbrook for further recovery and rehabilitation.

Greg left his free quota of daily goodies from Moose Knuckles, a fresh coffee and a box of maple glazed moose knuckles, honey cruller bear claws, and sour cream glazed deer tails, and blueberry and wild rice muffins for her at the nursing station every morning, after he bicycled from work at the coffeeshop around the time of sunrise. He did not know if she or the nurses drank the foamy freshly brewed coffee and ate the doughnuts and muffins, but he thought it was the thought that counted, and his heart was in the right place, and all those other clichés and canned greeting card sentiments.

# State Farm

by Camerson Morse

Mom reaches across the butcher  
block's varnished pool of amber light  
and removes my glasses.

I can walk around all day not knowing  
how dim the world is to me.

My sleepiness is a secret  
compartment, a void behind eyelids  
where my name once read, my four names,  
my SSN. State Farm's already  
anonymized me. It's removed my personally  
identifiable information. It's one thing  
to wake up slow in the morning.

I've been waking up slow my entire life,  
coming so late into myself, it's as if  
I were already gone.

# Day Without Sun

by Cameron Morse

Fog machine morning  
our frog figurine lounges

in absolute recline, snail  
facedown in the flowerbed's

understory of oak leaves,  
its whiskers of catmint.

Theo rolls over the happy turtle  
below blown-out garden mums.

Real oak leaves dock  
in mock vegetable garden slots

for rubber carrot, plastic onion,  
and radish in the Little Tikes

cottage. Canadian geese,  
hidden in cloud, creak like swings

in the playground of one cloud  
smothering the daylong sun,

a dark station poised like a curse,  
hollow culm that I am. Somewhere

in the whiteout, sirens blare.  
Silence, somewhere, is making

a bed for me. Climb in, says  
silence, be tucked in

calm, earless on your hands  
scrabbling the braille out of acorns.

# Contributors

in order of appearance

**Maria McLeod** writes and publishes poetry, fiction, monologues and plays. Honors include three Pushcart Prize nominations and the *Indiana Review* Poetry Prize. During her formative years, she tended bar in Ypsilanti, Michigan, next to a porn shop featuring a storefront display of mannequins in edible underwear. She now resides in Bellingham, Washington, where she teaches journalism to unsuspecting undergraduates at Western Washington University.

**Joddy Murray's** work has appeared or is forthcoming in over 70 journals, including, most recently, *The Adirondack Review*, *Caliban Online*, *Crack the Spine*, *Diverse Voices Quarterly*, *Moon City Review*, *OxMag*, *Painted Bride Quarterly*, *Pembroke Magazine*, *Sou'wester*, *Southampton Review*, *Texas Review*, and *Westview*. He currently teaches writing and rhetoric in Fort Worth, Texas.

**Anthony Lapwood's** writing has featured in various literary journals and on national New Zealand radio. He has a Master of Arts from the International Institute of Modern Letters. He lives in Wellington, New Zealand, and you can find him on Twitter @antzlapwood.

**Judson Simmons** is a graduate of the Sarah Lawrence College Writing Program and holds a BA in Writing/English from the University of Houston. He also holds an MEd. in Higher Education Administration from Baruch College in New York City. His chapbook, *The Hallelujah Hour*, was published by Amsterdam Press in 2010, and his work has appeared in *Pebble Lake Review*, *Evergreen Review*, *Folio*, and other journals.

**Judith Cody's** new poetry chapbook is soon to be published by Finishing Line Press. Her poetry is published in over 150 journals and has won many national awards, including second prize in the national Soul-Making Keats Literary Competition. Her poem is in the Smithsonian's permanent collection in Spanish and English. Centre College's Norton Center for the Arts selected her poem from a competitive group from around the world for exhibition in a featured art gallery installation. Her poetry chapbook was a finalist in Bright Hills Press's national competition. She has won Atlantic Monthly and Amelia awards; her poems were quarterfinalists in the Pablo Neruda Prize in Poetry and were cited for honorable mentions by the National League of American Pen Women. She edited the PEN Oakland anthology *Fightin' Words* and wrote the internationally notable biography of composer Vivian Fine: *A Bio-*

*Bibliography and Eight Frames Eight*, poems. Her work is seen in many anthologies and poems appear in journals such as: *Carbon Culture Review*, *Nimrod International Journal*, *New York Quarterly*, *Stand*, *South Carolina Review*, *Texas Review*, *Fugue*, *Clare*, *Green Hills Literary Lantern*, *The Montreal Review*, *Fox Cry Review*, *Louisville Review*, *The Offbeat*, *Neologism*, *Madison Review*, *The Paragon Press*, *Phoebe*, *Quiddity*, *Primavera*, *Poet Lore*, *Poem*, *Xavier Review*, *Hiram Poetry Review*, *The Cape Rock*, *Citron Review*, *Ignatian*, *The Brooklyn Review*, *Penmen Review*, *Splash of Red*, *Soundings East*, *Vox Poetica*, *Westview*, *Caduceus*, *Chaffin Journal*, *Arabesques Review*, *Laurel Review*, *Androgyne*, *Chaparral*, *Forge*, *Abstract: Contemporary Expression*, *Qwerty*, *Tiger's Eye Journal*, *The Tower Journal*, *Lyrical Passion Poetry E-zine*, *Cloudbank*, *Vending Machine Press*, *Willard & Maple*, *Third Wednesday*, *The Courtship of Winds*, and others.

**Mike Wilson's** work has appeared or will be appearing in *Appalachian Heritage*, *Solidago*, *The Seventh Wave*, *Fiction Southeast*, *The London Reader*, *Narrative Northeast*, and *Apeiron Review*. He lives in Lexington, Kentucky.

**Robert Beveridge** (he/him) makes noise ([xterminal.bandcamp.com](http://xterminal.bandcamp.com)) and writes poetry in Akron, OH. He has recent and upcoming appearances in *The Virginia Normal*, *Credo Espoir*, and *Chiron Review*, among others.

**Chris Fettes** is a Little Rock, AR, native who writes poetry and fiction. He is the author of one novel.

**Camille Paldi** is the author of the chapter “Unlocking the Islamic Finance Industry Through Dispute Resolution” in the *Handbook of Research on Theory and Practice of Global Islamic Finance*, and her work is forthcoming in the *Handbook of Research on International Islamic Banking*. She holds degrees from Colgate University, the London School of Economics, University of Sydney, University of Melbourne, Kansai Gaidai University, East China University of Political Science and Law–Shanghai, The William S. Richardson School of Law at University of Hawaii at Mānoa, and Durham University. She was voted #24 on the WOMANi Report on the world’s most influential women of the Islamic Finance Industry in 2018.

**Jim Ross** jumped into creative pursuits in 2015 after retiring from public health research. He's since published nonfiction, poetry, and photography in over 100 journals and anthologies in North America, Europe, Australia, and Asia. Publications include *Columbia Journal*, *Ilanot Review*, *Lunch Ticket*, *Kestrel*, *The Atlantic*, *The Manchester Review*, and *Typehouse*. In the past year, he wrote and acted in his first play; and, a nonfiction piece led to a role in a soon-to-be-

released, high-profile documentary limited series. Jim and his wife—parents of two health professionals and grandparents of five preschoolers—split their time between Maryland and West Virginia.

**Bill Carr**'s short story "Exquisite Hoax" was published in the *Scholars & Rogues* online literary journal, and his short story "Execute Eric Smith" was published in the *East Bay Review*. His work has also appeared in *The Furious Gazelle*, *Good Works Review*, *The Ham Free Press*, *Menda City Review*, *Oracle Fine Arts Review*, *The Penmen Review*, and *Riggwelter*. He has had several articles published relative to online education and the computer industry. He has also taken various courses with internationally known Shakespeare scholar, Professor Bernard Grebanier, as well as Professors Marion Starling and Seymour Reiter. Many of his stories, including "Transcendental Tours" and "Exquisite Hoax," are satiric; others contain athletic themes. He has been ranked statewide (North Carolina) and sectionally (Southern) in senior divisions of the United States Tennis Association, and he played industrial-league basketball for thirty years, including three overseas. He received his master's degree in English from Brooklyn College, and he currently serves as chairperson of the North Carolina B'nai B'rith Institute of Judaism.

**Alissa Oliverson** is a left-handed Aquarius who believes in magic and laughs at her own jokes. She is a freelance writer with a bachelor's degree in English; she's also an aspiring master of ESP. Alissa has been published in online and print haiku journals. She self-published her first book, *Hooray! HighKu!* in 2015 and plans to release an updated volume in 2019. Alissa is obsessed with funky house music, collects rocks, and gives honorary names to the deer that roam her neighborhood. She tries to take life as un-seriously as possible and lives happily with her husband in the Pacific Northwest.

**Bruce McDougall** has worked in Toronto as an airport attendant, bouncer, taxi driver, social worker and newspaper reporter. He graduated from Harvard College and attended the University of Toronto Law School, twice. His short-story collection, *Every Minute is a Suicide*, and his non-fiction novel, *The Last Hockey Game*, were published in 2014. And his name is Bruce. How could he resist? A collection of his short stories called *Urban Disturbances* will be published later this year, and his novel, *The Lizards of Palm Beach*, will be published in 2021.

**DS Maolalai** has been nominated four times for Best of the Net and twice for the Pushcart Prize. His poetry has been released in two collections, *Love is*

*Breaking Plates in the Garden* (Encircle Press, 2016) and *Sad Havoc Among the Birds* (Turas Press, 2019).

**Colin James** has a book of poetry, *Resisting Probability*, from Sagging Meniscus Press. He lives in Massachusetts.

**John Tavares'** previous publications include short fiction published in various alternative magazines, literary journals, quarterlies, and anthologies, online & in print: *Blood & Aphorisms*, *Plowman Press*, *Green's Magazine*, *Filling Station*, *Whetstone*, *Broken Pencil*, *Tessera*, *Windsor Review*, *Paperplates*, *The Write Place at the Write Time*, *The Maple Tree Literary Supplement*, *The Writing Disorder*, *Gertrude*, and elsewhere. Also, over a dozen of his short stories and some creative nonfiction was published in *The Siren*, then Centennial College's student newspaper. Following journalism studies, his articles and features were published in various local news outlets in Toronto, including community and trade newspapers such as the *East York Times*, the *Beaches Town Crier* and *Hospital News*, where he interned as an editorial assistant. Born and raised in Sioux Lookout, Ontario, John is the son of Portuguese immigrants from the Azores. His education includes graduation from 2-year GAS at Humber College in Etobicoke with concentration in psychology (1993), 3-year journalism at Centennial College in East York (1996), and the Specialized Honors BA in English from York University in North York (2012). He worked as a research assistant for the Sioux Lookout Public Library and as a research assistant in waste management for the SLKT public works department and regional recycle association. He also worked with the disabled for the Sioux Lookout Association for Community Living.

**Cameron Morse** was diagnosed with a glioblastoma in 2014. With a 14.6 month life expectancy, he entered the Creative Writing Program at the University of Missouri—Kansas City and, in 2018, graduated with an M.F.A. His poems have been published in numerous magazines, including *New Letters*, *Bridge Eight*, *Portland Review* and *South Dakota Review*. His first poetry collection, *Fall Risk*, won Glass Lyre Press's 2018 Best Book Award. His latest is *Terminal Destination* (Spartan Press, 2019). He lives with his wife Lili and son Theodore in Blue Springs, Missouri, where he serves as poetry editor for Harbor Review. For more information, check out his Facebook page or website.

