

On the Rusk



Issue Six

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Jeff Burt

Hinge

My wife liked the gate,
just a push for out
and a simple pull
to let someone in,
but I was stubborn,
fearful, possessive.
She told me the universe
does not hang together
by a nut and bolt,
nor by threads like a screw,
and if the hinge worked
one way only
it was sure to let things in
that couldn't be let out
once they got in,
or things would get out,
like children,
and we'd never get them back
not wanting the joy
of merely letting the gate go
swing closed.

Holly Day

Wednesday Night

I'm washing my daughter's hair and she tells me there's a boy

She likes in school, he's nine years old, he says he doesn't like her

He told her best friend he doesn't like her, she's upset now and I

Don't know if I should laugh or cry. I carefully

Rinse the shampoo out of her hair and resist the urge

To wrap my arms around her tiny, bony chest and hold her

Like I did when she was tiny, she wants me to give her some sort of

Womanly, adult advice and I am not ready for this.

Mark Nenadov

Ivan Denisovich

It's cold outside.

I must confide,

my bread is sewn

into my mattress

like Shukhov.

And like Alyosha

I've skillfully hidden

my Bible

in the wall.

This is my day

in the life

of Ivan Denisovich.

Still Pool

At the foot of the mountain

filled with envy

green like the ivy

that leads to the pool where he sits

The carriers

of his genes

float over there

in the still pool

huddled together

thriving

not yet hatched

into a world of strife.

He dashes away

from the path of a

greedy lunging hand.

Another day

at the pool

Sabrina Li

Tight Smiles

When someone tells you to try harder, there is the underlying sentiment that you are capable of achieving something greater—that you are just not trying hard enough. Effort is what separates you from your goals. So you try harder and harder. You become more desperate to achieving this new goal. But the inevitable happens: you fail. You fail and fail and fail. And that is what it means to be mediocre. It is not drive or ambition that separates you from your objectives; it's *you*—you are your own obstacle. And that is something impossible to fix.

When my daughter couldn't read at two, I switched from colorful board books to Hooked on Phonics tapes. When she couldn't read at three, I made flash cards of vowel sounds and consonant blends until she started ripping and trying to eat them. When she couldn't read at four, I sent her to daycare across the street. When she couldn't read at five, I convinced the same private day school that I had attended for ten years that my daughter had untapped potential. I assured the admissions officers that, being an only child, my daughter was not given the proper social tools to share her brimming intelligence with the rest of her peers. As I lied to get my daughter into kindergarten, she sat in the corner of the admissions room chewing on a Lego piece. My eyes followed the string of drool dripping from that sad red piece.

The school believed me. And by the end of her kindergarten year, she was reading. After that, Cassy and I stopped setting a timeline, there were no longer any due dates for our daughter's accomplishments. We tried not to be demanding parents. We took our daughter regularly to the park. But every time she pumped her legs on the swing set, I couldn't help but notice that her seat never flew as high as the others. As I followed her to the sandbox and watched her struggle to pack the damp sand into the bucket, I couldn't help but look at the other six-year-olds' castles. At the end of each park visit, I would circle my daughter's creation. And while her castles remained structurally sound, for the most part, there was nothing special about them—no fancy towers or moats, just lumps. As we drove back home, I would gaze at my daughter's reflection in the rearview mirror, and in my mind, I couldn't help but draw a thick black line through the word 'architect'.

And then she was ten. We were gathered in the car once more, with my daughter in the backseat wearing her skating dress, a short little thing made out of pink fabric that looked like it had been rolled in silver glitter. We needed to get to the rink two hours early for her warm up. My daughter chattered excitedly the whole way there, and then skipped into the rink between Cassy and me.

My daughter is not a natural-born ice skater. She is competing in the eight to ten year old age bracket, instead with the ten to twelve year olds. It takes her weeks to learn the choreography for a program, while some kids have it mastered within days. She can't jump as high as others, or spin as fast as most. There are many things she can't do as well as others. My daughter is not a natural-born anything.

My wife headed to the bleachers, while my daughter and I took a seat in the rink's lobby. Her leg shook as I tied up the laces on her skate.

"Daddy, what if I forget my moves? Do you think I will make my jumps?"

"Of course, sweetie! You've worked so hard—just have fun out there! You'll do great!"

But she wasn't going to do great. My daughter was too tall and lanky to be graceful. Her recent growth spurt had thrown her center off balance, and her landings were predictably wobbly. She was afraid of

skating fast and so her spins lacked power. My little girl wasn't going to get first place. She probably wasn't even going to get second. But still, I filled my daughter, and I suppose myself, with meaningless hope.

"Really Daddy?" my daughter asked with bright eyes.

"You are a spectacular ice skater."

She shifted her gaze.

"Hey, look at me," I said, "Why are you worried? You're gonna be the best skater on that ice by far."

"You mean it?"

I smiled back.

Of course I didn't mean it. I had let my own fantasies escape my lips and had imposed them on her. I am a horrible father.

I made my way back to the bleachers where my wife stood. As the warm up ended and the music of my daughter's program started, my wife and I looked at one another.

"You can do this honey!" my wife yelled, as my daughter skated onto the ice and took her starting position.

Thirty seconds into the program, my daughter stumbled. Cassy nudged me. I shrugged. Another minute in, after completing her waltz jump, she fell. My wife squeezed my hand. I just stared blankly out onto the ice, counting the seconds until the song ended. A scatter of claps echoed across the rink.

I know that my daughter's unexceptionality should comfort me. She is not a failure at anything. But sometimes I think that even her being a failure would be better than being mediocre. Mediocrity does not make headlines. Mediocrity does not make people laugh or cry. And what will happen when the day comes that my daughter realizes she is absolutely, truly, painfully mediocre? Then what will I, her father, say? The only comforting words that I can think to say are that it's not just her, it's so many of us, so many of our un-excellent selves that populate this earth. And I will tell her that she might be ordinary in every aspect of life, but that will never change the fact that she is undeniably mine—that even though she is the mediocre daughter of a mediocre man, that has got to mean something.

My little girl will get older. She will get mostly Bs in high school. She will always be too tall and a little too wide to be considered graceful. She will never be able to jump more than two revolutions and after a while, after too many falls on the ice, she will give up. She will graduate from a mediocre college and we will be there, Cassy and I, smiling too largely as we take her photos. She will find a job that she will never excel at and will never love completely. She will meet a stock broker who already is balding at 30, and Cassy and I will be introduced.

My daughter will get married. We will be there. She will give birth to a little daughter of her own. We will be there too. My daughter will cry with that baby, fall asleep with that baby, and fall in love with that baby. She will eventually get promoted at work, and while she may wish to quit at times, she will stick to it. And one day, when her hair is beginning to gray, she will find herself sitting on one of the cold metal

benches facing the ice skating rink. She will run her fingers through her hair and out of one of the rink's windows she will see her average-sized house among all of the other average-sized houses. Her daughter falling on the ice after a jump will break her reverie. My daughter will learn the art of the tight smile. Behind that tight smile, she will think to herself, how did I end up here?

I stand to clap as my daughter is announced fourth place in her division of seven. I watch her head rise as her name is called, and I give her a tight smile of my own. This is the same smile that my father gave me after I missed the ball in Little League, and the same smile that my boss gave me when he denied me a promotion after ten years. We are a history of tight smiles—the miserable medium between a true smile and a frown.

My daughter is mediocre. She will always be one of those insignificant air breathers on this Earth. I know I'm right, but I know that there's something more. Despite my mediocre college, my mediocre wage, my mediocre job, my mediocre house, my mediocre potential, I was given her. I have a daughter and she has a father. And that means something.

M.A. Schnaffner

Le Lapin

My coffee mug with the rutting rabbits
graced many a conference table in the day
with nary a comment as I recall.

Too many printed Powerpoint slide decks
increasingly used in lieu of narrative,
too many postures of status and role.

In time I hardly noticed it myself
unless a new colleague's eyebrows raised.

By then I had rank. Contractors feared me
in front of my face, and snickered behind.

But rabbits do their work as well as us
without pensions or shields from predators.

It's now on my desk at home while real rabbits
slip through the garden having helped themselves
to every bit of pay I never earned.

Simon Perchik

And though the shoes are black
you add a glow to your lips
that opens by itself, spreads
the way a simple kiss
is scented with wood catching on
just once –this coffin
needs it dark, is closed
and the door to each room
guttled to find the evening
that came here to stay
to hear it from you
it was a fire, just a fire.

*

These sheep have no choice either
though even in summer
they still want to hear the truth
just by staring back at the grass
lifelike –it's not for you
they hold power here, let go
nothing, not their fleece
not these sleeves, face to face
–you have no right to stand so close
as if a second sky would wave you past

make room, gather in the Earth
and lift :a small hillside
anything! to mourn –the dead
are here somewhere
not yet marble, not yet enough.

*

This path so like the others
doesn't know where else to go
and for each funeral
you build another hallway
in another mountain, the palaces
filling with a great rockslide
though you're never sure, the shovel
is bent from sunsets and distances
has hands already coming due
and what chance has the small room
this frail stone gives off
coming here to die.

*

The ground so slow to heal
has yellowed though the camera
injected a faint gloss
calmed the family and friends
still afraid to move the body

–not too close! Your cheek
could scare her off and the snapshot
tree and all, left empty
cared for by the sun alone
can't get a hold :each evening
hides in front with the small lake
pressed against her forehead
that has nothing to warm
and though the frame is wood
you shake it the way leaves
once left in place tell you
here! among the kisses
with no time to lose.

*

You still use rain, breathe in
till your mouth is full
–you can't jump clear, grow huge
on a sky that has no holes, no Earth
–what did you say, what words
were helped along, holding on to the others
all the way down, facing the sun
though who know where this thirst
first as ashes, now your own
is kept warm for the whispers

not needed anymore –only rain
as necessary as bending down
comes this close and your voice
more and more feeble, bathes you
lowers you, covers you.

Darren Demaree

WEDNESDAY MORNING #64

Children on my chest,
today is already mine,
they know it
to be their own victory.

WEDNESDAY MORNING #65

Empty parking lot,
you are sea
& fruit, everything
born dreaming
of absolute freedom
without consequence.

WEDNESDAY MORNING #66

The butcher's knife
is a wide world,
I say out loud.
My children,
graciously nod,
impressed.

Jeffrey Zable

THE WOMAN I NEVER MARRIED

I'm parked on Haight Street waiting for my wife when I notice a woman standing in front of a store close by, talking to someone. Immediately I recognize that she is a woman I asked out on a date about twenty years ago, but was told 'no thank you' because she had a boyfriend at the time. Then, she was a slim, exotic looking woman who had recently moved here from Thailand. Now I see that she has put on about fifty extra pounds and has a huge behind. Her face looks puffy, and her smile no longer stands out. As I'm watching her continue to talk to the person in front of the store I begin to feel guilty for thinking what I'm thinking: that I'm glad I didn't go out with her because maybe we would have fallen in love, got married, and then she would have put on all that extra weight. I'm thinking these thoughts while at the same time I'm telling myself that it's not fair to think these thoughts because who knows what would have happened if we had gotten married. And besides, looks aren't everything. She was a very nice woman then, and is probably a very nice woman now. After a few more minutes, my wife jumps in the car and I give her a long look before turning the key in the ignition. "What's up!" she says. "Is there something you want to tell me?" "No," I respond. "I was just wondering what took you so long." With that, I pull out and drive past the woman I never went out with on a date, and in the end, never married.

FACING THE MUSIC

It was about 35 years ago, yet I still remember it as if it was last night. I was sitting at the bar in one of my regular hangouts waiting for the music to start. Sitting two seats down from me was a guy in an overcoat, wearing a forties style hat. It was rainy and cold outside yet the door was open letting in some fresh air from the street. He and I started talking and I remember that about ten minutes into the conversation he informed me that he was a hitman. He said he was in town to take someone out who had double-crossed someone else. Shocked by such an admission, yet maintaining my composure, I remember asking him if he had already killed the person, and he responded, "Not yet," as casually as if 'not yet' could have meant he hadn't yet bought Christmas presents for his kids. I remember him telling me that he only 'hit' people who cheated others in business, that he never did a job for someone who was angry at their spouse. I knew without a doubt that this guy was for real. I could see it in his eyes and by the way he carried himself. He would do the job just as he said and get out of town without leaving a trace. It's some thirty-five years since my encounter with the hitman, yet I think of him whenever I pass by that bar, which probably has changed hands a few times, and no longer has the same name. I stopped going there soon after the experience-- even though I really enjoyed the music.

Michael Christani

Green

Buds unfurl in their tender green,

The delicacy of things new.

You wait by the arbor

For her to come

In the drizzling mists,

And you feel happy

And brush your damp hair

From your forehead,

And the day darkens,

And you wait, quiet and damp.

Stephen Clark Okawa

crazy on crazy

for 25 years i faked it,
faked it a little less the last 4.
i won't be authentic, complete,
until a final breath screams truth
at last,
the sounds little yellow birds make
when only seconds old.
darkness is genuine and generous.
what a gift:
to let the brain rot
to let it forget all it knows.
it's why i use you to make this gray deposit
in my chest turn bright red,
heat up,
dunked and cooled in your pink ocean
where the myth of my life
becomes real,
baptized
and true because it passes through
the lips of a fuckable twin.
crazy on crazy,
we ride out the lies like wild stallions.

die walden pond

the most honest thing we can do
 is sit in a dark room for hours,
 say nothing, and wait
 until even that's
 just another cliché—
 something else we passive ants
 can judge and criticize, we,
 who can't follow our own wisdom,
 which is why wise men shant be trusted,
 for, if they were truly wise, they'd admit:
 wisdom is only words, repurposed as salve
 for the gluts who intuitively see a door
 and can't fathom that more – something,
 anything –
 isn't waiting on the other side;
 and so, my friend, we, who were witnesses
 to our doppelgangers at die walden pond,

who overheard two men pontificating
 “look how commercialized this place has
 become;
 thoreau would thor-row up!
 har, har, har!”;
 who knew we were part of the problem;
 should go away immediately,
 scat,
 scam
 vamoose,
 isolate and be honest...
 never to know if our absence was noticed
 or meant very much;
 or if we're really just the individual particles
 of a decaying god,
 the collective memory of a fatherless universe,
 billions of bastards, we.

the parallax view

an older gent is literally watching the grass grow,
standing over it like a god of nothingness.
a mini doberman dumps his stuff on the lawn
and, like a hero to me, simply walks away.
there was one black frog in each of her eyes.
when she was mad, they leapt out, croaking with alacrity.
when she was horny, their throats beat faster and faster.
cars whizz by but i see no people driving them.
i should mention a rare flower, right about now,
to really tie this poem together, but i don't wanna.
i wanna be that dog, know what that older gent knows,
become the wind passing through the grass, a lone cloud
tiptoeing through eternity, unable to show you what i see,
so i write it down for you instead.

Jason Irwin

An Ordinary Morning

In the front room
of the yellow house
a little girl in pigtails
marches with a baton
in one hand,
her favorite doll
in the other, singing
I'm in the Lord's Army.
In the kitchen near the stove
her grandfather sits
in a low backed chair,
dressed in pin stripes
and shoes that don't
quite fit, his milky eyes
stare blankly at a space

on a far wall
as the girl's mother trims
his long white hair.
Locks, like feathers hover,
then fall to the ground
around him
like so many years.
It's six o'clock
in the morning,
last night's rain drips
from the branches
and leaves.
A shroud of valley fog
covers the town,
quiet as a funeral.

SELF MUTILATION 1

My work is quiet,
delicate like a surgeon's,
or a bird's –
picking flesh from fingers: nails,
cuticles, thin as scripture.
They peel away in oily layers
like fruit,
flowering into blood.
I imagine I know how God must feel,
torturing us from the safety
of Heaven's high balcony.
Maybe it gives him the illusion
of control,
a sense of purpose. Maybe,
he even flushes, losing himself
in moments of ecstasy.

Laura Grace Tarpley

I Can't Even Focus on Fooling Around

In his bed,

he lies facing me,

and I am on my back.

He eagerly places his hand on me,

but retreats

as I inch away.

I stare wide-eyed at the ceiling.

I tell him

I'm afraid to die

and ask

if he believes in God.

Kathie Giorgio

WHEN THE FULLNESS OF THE TIME WAS COME

“Jesus found the curse of the sojourner lifted from Him, and, in reversal of His own description of His loneliness and penury, found where to lay His head.”

* unknown author

Between the time when God sent Jesus to inform the dinosaurs of their mass demise and Jesus' own birth to a human mother, Jesus found himself feeling blue. He denied it, carefully hiding his sadness behind a countenance he thought would be identified as patient. The evolution of the human species was slow, and it was many millions of years before Jesus was slated to be born to a woman named Mary, a woman who was to be reincarnated from an apatosaurus who Jesus was particularly fond of. She died at his feet as Jesus stood firmly on the surface of the oily tar pit while all the great beasts around him sank to their deaths in good faith. And then, Jesus was told, after he was born to Mary, to the apatosaurus-turned-woman, he would

only live thirty-three years on Earth. After waiting for millions. He was going to accomplish great things, his Father said.

An eye-blink after waiting forever, Jesus thought. What could he accomplish in thirty-three years? He wasn't going to accomplish anything in these millions.

He was blue. Kachol.

Late at night, when denial dissipated with the darkness, Jesus told himself it was perfectly normal to be this sad. He had the blood of an entire species on his hands. It was God's command, but Jesus was the one who spoke the words. And it was Jesus who saw their eyes just before they filled with black and their bodies became heaps of oil and flesh and bone. The largest heap belonged to the one who would be his mother. Jesus stood by her stinking tarry grave for a long while.

When Jesus told God that he couldn't sleep, and when he did, he had nightmares, God said, “Get over it. This needed to be done. There's nothing for it now.”

Nothing for it. But Jesus kept seeing the dying eyes that would one day belong to his mother. Eym. Those shocking blue eyes didn't blink once when they were slowly being overcome with black. They never left his face.

Kachol.

Jesus spent part of every day standing to the right of God, watching what God did. Mostly, God manipulated whatever was happening naturally on Earth that didn't please Him. Jesus wondered about some of the things that didn't please God – too many pink flowers in the part of Pangaea that would break off and become North America, humans still dragging their hands on the ground when God wanted them to walk tall, too large a ratio of flying creatures to land creatures in Africa, a continent that God planned to lift out of the water and that God said

was just crying out for large lumbering land creatures. But Jesus never said a thing. There were many days that Jesus just didn't have the energy to speak at all. He was just too sad. Atzuv.

Kachol.

Though if he did speak, he knew the first thing he would ask was why the dinosaurs had to die if the future Africa was just crying out for large lumbering land creatures. Couldn't the dinosaurs have migrated there?

So Jesus spent some time every day watching God. In his free time, which was considerable, he wandered Heaven.

Wandering Heaven had no entrance and no exit, no sense of in-between. It was infinite. Jesus could spend all these millions of years wandering, and then all the years that would come after his thirty-three on Earth, and he would never see all of it. Never. Heaven stretched out even more than the sea that surrounded Pangaea, Panthalassa, which seemed to go on forever. But Jesus knew what forever really looked like. It looked like Heaven, with all its curves and climbs and hidden valleys and broad long plains that went on and on to the point where Jesus couldn't remember ever seeing anything twice, outside of his living space.

Somewhere in all this forever, there was an apatosaurus who was waiting to be a human woman named Mary, and who would welcome Jesus into her womb, when God curled him up and tucked him there. Jesus couldn't quite picture that process. But he knew he didn't want to wait millions of years to meet his mother. To see her again.

Eym.

He missed her.

Imagine millions of years without seeing the being who would be your mother. Who was your mother.

Her blue eyes, locked on his face, stayed with him always.

Kachol.

Jesus asked God once where the apatosaurus was, but God said she was hidden away. She had a special role to play on Earth, and so she was being prepared. Jesus wondered why her preparation would take so long. She'd appear on Earth only a few years before he did, so her stay in Heaven amounted to millions of years too.

Though she would live, God told Jesus, for another twenty-four years after Jesus' death and subsequent return, alone, to Heaven. Add twenty-four years of separation to those millions. With just a sparse thirty-three in between. An eye-blink. Jesus didn't want to think about that.

L'vad.

One day, while wandering, after leaving God mumbling something about animals that were reproducing at a rate He didn't predict, Jesus' heart nearly came to a stop when he saw a long neck in the distance. It

was curved and slender and at the top, there was a tiny head, a head that was so familiar. Jesus broke into a run.

As he drew closer, he saw it couldn't be the apatosaurus. There was water all around, one of Heaven's many oceans, and this creature was sunk in up to her shoulders. Jesus never saw the apatosaurus standing in water before, and he doubted she would be in up to her shoulders so close to the shore. Her height would require her to be further out to be so sunken. As he came to the edge of land and sea, he saw that this dinosaur didn't have legs, but flippers. Four flat flippers that spread to the left and the right, and had this dinosaur's belly grooved into the sandy floor just beneath the surface.

A mauisaurus, then. A swimming dinosaur. In the thickness of the tar pit, the mauisaurus' fins were of no use, and it died like all the others. Nothing was of any use in the thickness of the tar. Except, of course, for Jesus' own feet.

The mauisaurus was smaller than the apatosaurus too. From the top of her neck, arched graceful against the sky, the mauisaurus looked down at Jesus, but not from nearly as great a height as Mary. Like the apatosaurus, the mauisaurus' eyes were heavily lashed. Her fish-sieving lips curved upwards, in what could be a smile. Jesus felt at once wretched with recognition, and with grief and loneliness.

What had he done? Why hadn't he chosen to hold his tongue on that day, the day of death and tar pits and the silencing of massive hearts?

Without thinking, he splashed into the water and leaned against the mauisaurus' breast. "I'm so sorry," he said. "I'm so sorry." And he cried.

When his tears stopped, he found that the mauisaurus had dipped her head, coming as close as she could to embracing him with her neck. He pushed away from her, wiped his eyes, and looked around. There were no other dinosaurs there. This one was alone. Just as, Jesus assumed, the apatosaurus was alone.

Just as he was. L'vad.

"Do you know where she is?" he asked. "The apatosaurus. I can't find her."

The mauisaurus only smiled.

She wasn't his mother. But she was close. Jesus sat on the damp sand. Carefully, she lifted a wet flipper and wiped his face, its broadness acting like a rubbery washcloth. Then she rubbed her head over his shoulders and across his chest, nearly knocking him down. Jesus realized that she was trying to tidy him up, knock the sand granules from his clothes, the tear

tracks from his face. He laughed and succumbed to her care. It was, he thought, nice to be tended to. The apatosaurus always stood close by him, looking down at him with what he recognized as love, or looking up at him with the same adoring expression when she rested her head at his feet. While the mauisaurus looked at him with almost that degree of devotion, just a shade off, she tended to him as well.

Tended. Took care. L'tapel.

When she was satisfied, she rested her head on his knees and looked at him with those eyes. Oh, those eyes, so similar, as wide open as the sky and as improbably blue too. Jesus was soothed, surrounded and blanketed. Loved.

Ahava.

Even though every dinosaur's eyes drowned black with tar, black right in front of Jesus on that awful day, here, the eyes were clear. In Heaven, they were restored. Jesus remembered promising the dinosaurs a place in his Father's house when they died. He worried that it was an empty promise, but he needed to offer comfort, just as he found comfort now. He promised them Heaven. Shemayim. And they were here.

Though he just couldn't find that one. That particular one.

Eym.

He wondered if this mauisaurus and the apatosaurus were cousins somehow. Sisters within a species.

Maybe now, with the swimming dinosaur, he wouldn't be alone here. Maybe, between now and those thirty-three years, she could be a bridge. Gesher.

The mauisaurus lifted her head and looked at the sun. She turned to swim away, her body brisk and purposeful. Jesus stood to wave. "I'll try to find my way back here," he said. "To you." She looked over her shoulder at him, smiled, then dove and disappeared.

And Jesus was alone again. L'vad. But there was hope.

Tikvah.

When he returned to the right hand of God, he told Him about the mauisaurus and how she made him feel. How they all felt connected, the apatosaurus, the mauisaurus, and himself. How their eyes were gentle, how their hearts beat against his ear, and how, when he was with them, his spirits lifted. He also spoke of how with one, he felt loved, adored, protected beyond all measure. With a love that even a steady sinking in the tar couldn't end. And with the other, he felt loved as well, almost as completely, and tended to besides.

"It was so nice," Jesus said.

Yesha. L'tapel.

Ahava.

God looked thoughtful, and then said, "I planned on having another woman with Mary. A sister. Her name is Martha. She was to be a natural-evolved woman, coming up from the ranks of evolution, but maybe this mauisaurus needs to reincarnate too." He nodded. "That could work. You will be well loved and well cared for. You will be watched over. I will make sure of that. There is a home for you on Earth, with Mary and Martha, just as there is a home for you here, with Me. You will accomplish great things."

But not, apparently, for millions of years. After that day, Jesus couldn't find the mauisaurus again.

Alone. L'vad. Silent. Shahket. Sad. Atzuv.

Kachol.

God said He would make sure of Jesus' care. He would make sure of Jesus' comfort. He would send Martha and Mary, to be there during the time of the eye-blink.

But where was the care now? Where was the comfort?

Yesha. L'tapel.

At night, in the dark, Jesus whispered, "Where is my mother?" Eym.

Ahava.

Eventually, he stopped standing at the right hand of God. Eventually, he stopped wandering Heaven. Eventually, he just stayed in bed. Sleeping infrequently, and then dreaming of those eyes. Being awake mostly, and still seeing those eyes.

The eyes of an entire species. And the blue eyes of that one.

Eym.

Blue. Warm. Loving. Eyes that let him know who he was. Eyes that let him know he was loved above all others. That there was someone who loved him best.

Ahava.

He saw those other blue eyes too, those eyes that came so close to what he needed. That would have provided him with a bridge to wait on, until his time to cross over. Those eyes that disappeared after God's promise to provide a home on Earth. Just as Jesus promised to provide a home in Heaven.

Shemayim.

But it was taking millions of years for Jesus' Heaven to be restored. And then it would only be for an eye-blink. After that, twenty-four more years before Jesus' mother died and returned to Heaven.

Heaven wasn't forever. Waiting was. Netzach.

It took a week for God to notice that Jesus was missing. He came to Jesus' bedside and asked what was troubling him.

"I'm not sure," Jesus said. "I'm just blue, I guess."

Kachol.

Somehow, saying blue wasn't the same as saying depressed. Depression felt like an affliction, a weakness that Jesus didn't want to admit to, especially in front of his Father, who expected him to do great things. How could you do great things if you were sad?

But he could have said it, out loud, to the apatosaurus. His mother. He could have said it, then stood between her front legs and leaned against her. She would have kept the world at bay. She would have placed her bulk between him and any danger.

He could have said it to the mauisaurus too. And then leaned his head on her breast and felt her neck again rolling around him, felt her rubber flipper, wiping the tears away, straightening him up, then sending him on his way. To do great things, as his Father expected.

God's mouth twisted. Jesus wondered if He was about to scold again, to tell Jesus to get over it, but He stopped Himself. Held His tongue. Jesus was glad for that, because he knew that getting over it wasn't that easy. He wished it was. But even for Jesus, just wishing it didn't make it so. Jesus wondered sometimes if there were any benefits at all to being the son of God.

"Wait here," God said finally. "Rest."

Jesus did. And in another week, God was back by his bedside. "Please sit up," He said.

Jesus obeyed. He felt weak from so much time lying down; he was struck with how his limbs shook. He wondered, for a moment, if you could die in Heaven. He wondered if you could die from sadness. For the first time ever, Jesus wondered if he could die and disappear

completely. Be no more. He thought that he might want to. He thought, with the millions of years ahead of him, that he might already be so.

Kachol.

God held up something small and white. "Open your mouth," He said.

Jesus did. One never argued with God. Shahket.

God said, "Take this and eat it." He laid something gently upon Jesus' held tongue.

Jesus swallowed. The taste, though quick, was bitter. "What is this?" he asked.

God smiled. "Blessed are you," He said. "Through My goodness, I have this cure to offer, which Earth has given and My hands have made. It will become your spiritual tincture. I made this for you, and for all humans, so that sadness may be forgotten. It is for your good, and the good of all our Church."

But Jesus didn't feel any better. "What is it called?" he asked.

"I call it fluoxetine," God said. "Soon, it will make all the difference."

It didn't, at first. But Jesus took it every day when God laid it upon his tongue. And every day, God told him it was for his own good.

And then slowly, Jesus was better.

He began to get out of bed and watch God's manipulations again. And he began to wander. He didn't see the apatosaurus and he didn't see the mauisaurus. After a while, he didn't really look anymore. He

watched, but there was no intent. He just waited. And after a while, it became enough to stand silently by God's side. Jesus knew he used to yearn for something. But it no longer seemed so important.

Except at night. At night, Jesus would still wake up sometimes, in that special dark when the sun was so far away, even far away from Heaven, which you would expect to be sun-filled all the time. But it was dark, and it was that particular dark that stripped away denial still.

Jesus saw those eyes in the darkness. So blue. Kachol. Those eyes that would look at him and him alone. Those eyes that held his own reflection, and held it dear. And those other eyes that would take care of him in his mother's stead.

Yesha. L'tapel.

Ahava.

But when he opened his mouth again and again and again, held his tongue in communion and hope and sorrow, and then when he swallowed, the eyes were gone. Gone in the daylight of denial, the white offered peace of fluoxetine. Gone in an eye-blink.

God told Jesus it was good.

And so it was. Except in the middle of the night, in the fullness of the dark.

Brian Snell

A Vision of Saint Anthony

One morning I saw Saint Anthony of the Desert
dancing like a hangman above a field of wild garlic.

He said to me

My Son, you are one of my children,
and like all my children you are the roadkill
on the highway of this world.

You are the fruit that rots on the counter
and is thrown away.

His bronze undulations were
a warm blanket on my shoulders,
and in that moment I knew I was
a burlap sack filled with dizzy moths.

When he split me open at the seams
it felt like breathing air for the first time.

Howie Good

Track 33

The train rocks from side to side as it gathers speed through an industrial wasteland that should be accessible only in nightmares. Something about the sullenly silent woman sitting across the aisle from me recalls my dead mother. There was a time when philosophy argued that the soul is like a pair of horses, one dark, one light, harnessed to the same heavy wagon, but each pulling in its own direction. If you ask me, the soul is more like Chagall's horsehair paintbrush loaded with the whitest shade of blue – white crucifixion.

Patrick Hallissey

bedlam mystery

Bliss diminished

liberty's tapestry

on my threshold

destruction's ink

did fall, did fall

night was prison skinned

day a liar

a season-threaded wing

suspended

until the half-breathless sun leaned

from his chariot to breathe

blue, breathed

upon the embers

and became the sequence

to right and wrong

to light and strong

to mutiny and unity

to a bedlam mystery

like a green submarine

I'm walking through a meadow

crushing grass yellow

many a shadow changes to a shape

then a shade

yes, there's a tree in this meadow

and when it rains it's like

a green submarine

peace upon a hundred winter shade

There is a stillness and its edged with war

let white revelation waves grow puce and wall it

with rainbow and shape it of stairway upon

the battlefields of a hundred winter shade

too many white crosses have taken root already

a drumming came when the sun

slung over her shoulder a road of peace

it moves within the spin of an angel ore

over miles of arabian drum

too many white crosses have taken root already

the eyes of the soldiers, ornamental storms

were unscrolled within the flicker that folded

their flags of tanks

and placed their pistols down low

until they were frozen in snow

where mysterious things can now grow

R.W. Haynes

A Simple Statement of Approval

Even if the morning light reveals the enemy's lines,

It brings the comfort of what we understand,

Clarifying hope of what's at hand:

Perplexities of ordnance and hidden mines.

So the great metaphor arises, banishing

Love's laggard lackies from various beds;

Lamenting dawn, they shake their guilty heads

Against the apocalypse of heaven's king,

Whose gentle radiance reassures the wise--

Though they awaken from dreams of fear

Pursued by Lucifer, grinning ear to ear--

That no injustice escapes eternal eyes.

Good morning, then, let the blessed sun

Do its good work now, if darkness is done.

J Reich

Your Life In A Picture Puzzle Frame On The Wall

I want to live
in the old dead
woman's home
fully furnished
dead woman
included
with all
that drab
opaque
furniture
going
through
the same
daily activities
and routines
and rituals
those little
portholes
in which
to catch
every
season

watching
the build
up of clouds
and downpour
of rain and drizzle
observing every
last leaf fall
one by one
by one
by one
helping
myself
to tea
and scones
and at day's end
turn off that lamp
cramped in the corner
which will be that old
antique tourist souvenir
fisherman looking
like he's eternally
winking giving him
only a slight tug
at the noggen

as your dreams
will be all those
old time reel to reel
home movies before
they had sound
to them which
made them
and all its
characters
proportionately
that much more
animated with
everything
in the world
to look forward
to without all
the bullshit
and betrayal
and drama
and damage
all those fake
and phony
bastards
constantly feed you...

Mathew Serback

During the Baby Shower

The infants were falling from the clouds at an alarming rate. The wiper blades dragged across Montgomery's windshield, leaving streaks of mud and blood colored tread marks across the glass. The blades, like everything, had dulled over time; Montgomery presumed this happened to windshield wiper blades because it was tough to remove skin and hair from the glass. Montgomery had grown accustomed to the hmphing sound the babies made as they cut through the shimmering breeze and slammed into cars or the sidewalk – usually leaving a kaleidoscope of blood and guts smeared across the pavement.

Montgomery found it odd that the lighter complected babies were easier to distinguish when they were falling out of the black sky. He wondered if that's what the Gods created race for; this very specific scenario – where the infants catapulted themselves to Earth with a vengeance against life.

Montgomery clicked the dial through the FM airwaves, trying to find an emergency storm report. His autumn colored hair splashed over his eyes like dead leaves. He flicked a cigarette out the window of his car, freeing up a hand to brush the hair away. Montgomery hadn't been able to make out a speed limit sign for miles and had been too distracted by the bodies that began to pile up in the street. It wasn't unusual – the raining of babies – drivers just had to be strangely careful to not let a falling baby get stuck in the fender of clip the side mirrors.

Everyone had become more cautious since it started raining babies.

Montgomery's GPS disturbed the sanctity of silence in the car, interrupting the numbing static, "Destination approaching on the left, point four miles." Montgomery had been traveling the country side of Idaho, just transitioning from one place to another, without purpose, without

want or need, but he knew in the storm he would have to get off the road. He anticipated the government would be putting out another "In House Suspension" alert to protect everyone from the children.

A beacon of light forced Montgomery to strain his eyes against the flesh of midnight. He saw the illuminated parking lot of The Step Back Inn. He was taken aback by the fresh, stark-naked, paint job of ocean trench blue. The Step Back Inn looked like it was repainted every other day so not a single grain of wood would be noticed as chipped or dulled away – no person could see the imperfections. There were only two cars in the parking lot. The Step Back Inn did not seem to be retaining business to match the upkeep it projected. Montgomery's 1987 Hyundai Excel, ocean teal colored, fish tailed around a pile of babies that had pooled in the middle of the parking lot and his car came to a heaving halt outside the confines of the marked yellow lines of the parking space. His left front tire propped his car up about six inches as it had become wedged into the back of one of the babies. Montgomery placed the car into neutral to allow it to roll forward – bones creaking and cranking beneath the weight of the wheel. He didn't imagine anyone would care if he didn't park between the lines.

Montgomery unhinged his safety belt; his beaten suit jacket that was bruised from over-use fell loosely away from his thinning body. He was a mess of a man; each follicle of hair was being pulled by gravity in a different direction. He had begun his travels as a salesman – but he was awful, couldn't sell candy to a child – and was fired. He was so aimless he continued travelling and selling the knock off Prozac, he once was commissioned to do, to housewives and new mothers. This was how he sustained money to sleep and eat, both things he did only once a day. The depletion of funds as well as the travel without end had left him 35 pounds lighter as

well with a bad habit of grinding teeth. His bones seized together with every breath – he was withering away.

Montgomery knew he would have to make a run for the entrance of the hotel; he was just waiting for the right moment – the perfect time to sprint through the screams. A light peaked in front of the Victorian styled white shutters of the hotel – blue with grey accent crescent moons carved into the top halves of the shutters. He assumed the light peeking out was being caused by a staff member who was outside securing the shutters from the storm. This was going to be his best opportunity to run. If he was hit by the cannonball of a baby's body while running for the entrance the person outside might be able to help him from getting stuck in the pile of babies.

Montgomery balanced, a ballerina on the tips, creases, skin folds of his toes, as he doggedly tap danced over the black top – his feet trying to find small cradled spaces between the bodies. His voice, shrill, as if they were the first words he'd spoken, called out to the stranger who was fussing the shudders, "Makes you miss the cats and dogs doesn't it?"

The stranger didn't budge, didn't turn to look; they just continued adjusting the shutters and windows. Montgomery slowed his run as he was within five feet of the person, "Just fixing the shutters up? So they don't get blow open by the storm?" Montgomery peered back into the parking lot; the ground was rapidly filling with bodies. Even the worst water-rain storms were preferred over a light baby shower; people pleaded with the God behind their eyelids for flooding over the babies. When it showered babies, there tiny bones would stack up in the street; everyone would stay inside. The government mandated all cities send out meat churners. Workers would chuck the babies bodies inside the meat churners – instantly changing the beautiful gift of stork myths into slop. That's how the world worked around the horrific inconvenience.

"Yeah. Fixing the shutters for the storm. You're a sharp one. Too bad you weren't one of those babies – probably would have done us all a favor." The person fixing up the shudders was a woman. Her voice was like lettuce, bland and uninterested in Montgomery. She had turned her head backwards to Montgomery, craning her neck allowing him to see her for the first time. She was young – very beautiful. Her hair was brown like the burnt crusts of toast you flake away with your fingertip before eating it in a lonesome morning. Her hair had a red stain – streaks of impassioned embossed on the tips of the strands of her hair. Her tiny wrists struggled with the shutters.

"Doesn't ever get old...the babies I mean," Montgomery said raising one eyebrow higher up on his forehead than the other. "Not that there are babies that are dying...I mean that it rains babies. Obviously, it's just an awful thing." He paused – babies whaling and crashing in the night. The blood of the babies splattered around them, there world looked like there was a lunatic waving a paint brush in an open field. Montgomery didn't notice until he was resting outside the hotel but during the run from the car to the canopy his shoes became caked in clumps of hair and skin. "Do you ever think about picking one of them up? The urge to save them? For science? From fate?" Montgomery could see her eyes glare at him in the reflection in the window, "I just mean, aren't women supposed to have that maternal instinct? It's one of the things I imagine being hard about being a woman; watching the babies rain down and there isn't anything you can do about it."

The woman turned her whole body to face Montgomery – her eyes flared in the night – you could see the intensity in the fog of her breath. He was riveted by the way her lips slightly quivered beneath the weight of her words, "Nope. Never considered it, actually. Hard to believe I had the audacity to find my way out of the kitchen, right? It was probably all your testosterone that

drew out here tonight. Can barely keep my ovaries on.” She was so rigid in the moment; her spine looked weird all straightened out.

“I didn’t mean...like tha...I mean it as more of a joke.” She had turned to face the shutters again, her back breathing and heaving, her shoulder blades tensed. “How do you learn to deal with these nights?” Montgomery continued.

“You’re pretty direct for a stranger – do you often stop in the middle of these storms to harass young woman – attempt to make us feel bad for not saving all these orphaned spawns?”

Montgomery tapped on the tough cardboard of the cigarette box; a single lucy fell through his fingertips. He let her words sting the conversation for a moment, “There was a time when people actually enjoyed the rain, the thunderstorms – they thought it was romantic.” Montgomery lit his cigarette.

“Thinking about it now still sounds slightly magical – from the safety provided inside the comfort of your own head. The steadiness in the rhythm of something outside us – a pure manifestation for a reason...to be quiet. It isn’t romantic sounding. Any protection from a world without this is romantic,” the woman with the shutters said.

“But this...the babies...this is dig your eyes out with a spoon and eat them so you ensure you never have to see this shit again kind of disturbing. It’s that disturbing every time,” Montgomery said. Her mouth unfolded and let loose a laugh that could have passed for a child imitating the sound of a fart. She turned, brought herself next to Montgomery’s cigarette, gazed out into the parking lot with him. “This isn’t romantic,” Montgomery said.

She saw the skepticism in his bones, “Babies raining from the sky must terrify men.”

“Why would that terrify men?” Montgomery asked.

“The babies make everything else seem trivial – or the same. Men and women are sort of all bent up in some gender blender that isn’t distinguishable anymore. Women aren’t the baby farmers and men aren’t the seed sewers anymore. Our reality is different. That’s why you don’t the baby showers romantic. Suddenly I’m not just all tits, ovaries and eggs,” the woman recalled from the safest part of her soul.

“Pigs are still bacon,” Montgomery replied, ashing his cigarette all over his shoes.

Her cheeks carried the weight of her frustration, her skin sinking lower with a sigh, all pink and sweaty, “It doesn’t matter anymore. None of it. You aren’t a pig just like I’m no one’s hunny or dear; men can like women or women can like women – we have this world of positivity now – where anything is possible.” And she paused to smile, Montgomery noted that she looked beautiful – as if she was within her element; she continued, “And I’m sure you men just hate all the freedom and positivity the rest of us have now.”

“That’s an awfully negative way to see men, don’t you think? You think I have a problem with a woman’s right to choose or something? Let a woman choose and you know she’ll end up with the guy with money. But that may not matter to you, I guess; let me ask, are you a lesbian?” Montgomery questioned, his head turning to scan the sides of her eyeballs.

“There goes man again, talking with his dick’ll’due. Everyone has to be a category for you huh? Put this person in this box and this person in this box. Look at me, I am man, and I understand the category I created for you,” she said.

Together they stood in silence, infected by humanity together. They stood there as gender’s bent and babies whaled before crunching, strawberry jelly oozing from sides of their bodies, right in front of them.

“I guess I just don’t understand why any of the categories mattered in the first place? Did the downpour of children really free anyone? You act as if there always an invisible rope around your throat – but some people were already free. Someone much wiser once said The enemy is always within you.”

She watched a baby slam head first into the pavement, its thoughts spilling out, “Who said that?”

“I did, actually,” Montgomery explained. “I just made it up. I didn’t think you’d take it serious if you knew it came from my body made of semen.”

He let a smirk start to ascend over his face, for a moment the categories floating away, as they watched, together, a full grown woman – wearing a sparkling ball gown, as if she was waiting in the clouds for a man to sweep her off her feet – was seen falling from the sky. She shimmered like a satellite waiting for a programmer to tell her what her purpose was.

The woman from the sky looked like Montgomery’s mother. Her hair was tied to her hands like a parachute. Her jaw bone had thinned considerably since the last time Montgomery had seen her. The woman in the sparkling ball gown – shimmering like a satellite – was a fireball out of the fetus of heaven. Montgomery noticed her gown was burned around the edges – he figured she was catching fire. She slammed right through the windshield of his parked car.

The hotel worker let out another fart laugh, “The enemy may be within us but today it is holding hands with the evil that already exists in this world.” She spun the door handle in her hand before asking, “Do you need a room?”

Montgomery stood in front of the shutters looking out into the hole in the glass from about twenty yards away. The woman’s body, except for the jaw bone, was exactly how he

remembered his mother’s –broken and dissolved. It was crumpled across the front seats, jagged pieces of meaty bone jetting out at all angles.

“No, no thank you,” he said. “I think I’m going to stay out here for a while.”

Mark Antony Rossi

Mindless Nomes

Most people live lives of regret. I call them mindless nomes. They marinate in the chop meat of compromise and pretend to serve steak. Then everyone eats the lie and drinks the denial for desperate fear of losing a seat at the table. You are not missing anything! I want nothing of the sort. I mock you bastards in the mall and dream of a day when I can afford to screw your sister in my Jaguar. I don't plan to respect her any more than you but at least when I kick her ass into the street she'll know where I stand. No one deserves dishonesty. Not even that backward bimbo. I haven't settled for shit and paid a terrible price. Few friends. Fewer enemies. I only exist in print. And there I wait for a merry band of fools, some call historians, to proclaim I arrived. Imagine what they will murmur when discovering I held on long enough to enjoy banging the dead spirits of their ancestors. My fame will be complete because most people live lives of irreversible regret. I call them mindless nomes. You might call them family. You might call them frequently. I call them mindless nomes. Mindless and mediocre nomes breaking the hearts of every sucker who believes in them. No one bothered to inform them that surviving ain't living, And all they want to do is linger. And linger. And linger on. And all I want to do is live a full life and find the time to piss on their graves.

Tom Montag

AND THEN

Hawks, my friends. Sadness rising with the wind.
Fields and fences. The corn just starting to
show through moist soil in this late spring,
after the hard winter, after the hard
sorrows had knocked me down and laid me out,
after I had entered into silence
as into a lair where some great bear
would kill and devour me and I would be
gone, gone and forgotten, gone and alone
in whatever loneliness comes next. And then
came sun. And then hawks were riding on the wind.
And then finally spring came blowing in.
Then the corn was showing through, as if hope
could make it one more year, as if fences
want to be mended and fields to be walked,
as if there's a reason for all of this,
a reason for every blessed thing.

Brandon Stanley

Head of the Buddha

I've opened the head of the Buddha

Now you are swimming in pain

its is through wounds that the numb man finds he still feels

You tell me to communicate

And I tell you to self-copulate

I'm in hate with the world

Absolute only in ambivalence

Every breath

Is the rush of the charge

Sleeping reason breeds madness

AM Spence

On the Road

I followed the wet tar-road
dead centre of the thin line
in my view through my
eyesight that showed me
the view ahead whilst
the mild wind past through

cropped corn crops either
side of the tar-road under
an electric-sky of white,

greyish-coal, and yet all
the time at the back of me
the road, crops, sky felt
warmer when my body lit
from the gigantic sunrise.

Roberta Borger

The Victory

A traditional tree tries to trespass on a trellis' territory with a trifling trot over the transitional terrain. But the trimmed trellis is not tranquilized by the tree's trivial trajectory, translating the intrusion as a type of treachery. And so, she treats the transgression as a troubling threat to the treaty for truce the tree and the trellis had traded. With trust trampled over, the tricky trellis triggers a tremendous strike, trekking its trained troops over the traitor's trunk, until tragically, the tree is trounced and traumatized, and the triumphant trellis trods over the tree's trails.

Mel Waldman

BETWEEN ALEPH & TAV

Between Aleph & Tav,

the boundaries of Being,

I am.

Ensnared in the holy letters

of creation,

the first and the last,

Aleph & Tav,

I am.

I cannot count my deaths.

I die in life as often as the

birth of anguish, a wounded

butterfly nestled in my

nothingness.

And after each death, I look

inside the oval mirror of

Tav and mourn,

and become.

I swirl around a sea of emptiness

and in the solitude of the Void,

I vanish.

In my merciless death, I discover

the mirror of Aleph,

the first,
after the last,
and begin once more,
in the sacred circle of
Aleph & Tav,
where I am,
and
come into being.

Jim Piatt

Leaden Thoughts

Leaden thoughts

In the corroded pool

Of my metallic nightmares,

Float in the sea of absurdities...

And beyond, into the ending of

The beginning of the day

And far away...

Hopefully someone will illuminate the

Starting and non-starting of the night

Of darkened fright...

Bullfrogs will croak, in the twilight of

Yesterday...that was today...will be

Tomorrow...

In someone's sorrow,

Shattered thoughts will rise

From the lonely

Ocean when they are free...or will

Start to be...

Sanity pulled through dripping lies,

Swallow my heavy thoughts...or perhaps

My notes...

Will soften the anger traveling through

My throbbing brain...with

Its lonely pain...a place

That contains my leaden thoughts...

Or not.

Deborah Mattila

6 am Most Mornings

I do my writing in a coffee shop the same coffee shop I've been going to over the past 14 years the one with the barista who knows me by name knows I like my espresso with velvet-like foam and because I arrive at the same time most mornings the same square table and red peg-leg chair wait for me up against the wall faced away from the window a good five to six feet from the next nearest table just far enough for me to ignore idle chat feel the same sense of space I need to create send the message I'm busy except when Tel the same man I see in the coffee shop most mornings this morning walks up to say that the woman at my table mustn't 've known I was coming

Celena Diana Bumpus

LATE NIGHT SUCCOR

(a poem read horizontally and vertically)

For S.

I.

| | | |
|----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| Late night succor in | slide of bow | spine arches |
| edges of songs | meets every wild note | drum pounds |
| yet the music | to contain | fire within |
| to writhe | fights | its careful confines |
| This is not a waltz | dip | and reel |
| | but music that | begs the |
| | glimpse of a | curved calf |
| | toss of | an untamed mane |
| | the curl | of an auburn lock |
| | over a dark | hazel eye |

II.

| | | |
|-------------------|--------------|---------------------|
| It is here | within these | wee hours |
| brisk air | cooling | my infernal skin |
| I will dream | of you | most often |
| my sorcerer | with eyes | so clear they cut |
| the music | burst | inside my ears |
| the words | from | my lips and |
| find | themselves | without struggle in |
| between the lines | on | these pages |

III.

| | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|
| It is here | I find how much | I care for you |
| all anew as | I discover | and rediscover |
| | all of the reasons | I love you |
| my Golden Eagle | so sleep long | my Golden Eagle |
| | and rest hard because | when we awake |
| there will be no rest | | |
| for the wicked and | sleep will be a mere | |
| | memory | again |

My Dearest Cousin

As usual it is late. I can't sleep and I have way too much to do tomorrow. I slipped away for a salty indulgence, returned with a guilty conscience. No sweets for my sweet mother.

On the short drive through my blessedly quiet neighborhood I kept glancing at my purse--the cds I now tuck away (finally learning after losing over a hundred burned cds to my loving neighbors). Silence. No silence. Nothing. I have finally become decision-less.

So many decisions and memories have crowded my waking moments. Even the brief moments I've stolen for myself; after my fall, after my head injury, after my promised appearances, after my final tears, after my closing obligations, after my near collapse, after my nights of sleepless snatches--I know that my day is never done.

I've stopped making "to do" lists. The pages have turned into books of things I still must find time to do. Rest. I don't think I remember what it is. I simply work and write until my eyes give out or I collapse or my eyes give out as I collapse.

The peace I find in music strains of Gregorian Chant music offer some moments of relief until my phone stops running the Pandora station and I am left alone and awake with my thoughts in the middle of the night yet again.

Years ago you were my sanity--when the reality of the world broke me, broke my heart and my mind. Your love and the love of your two young sons breathed life back into my broken psyche.

God! You were so shining and strong and certain and powerful. I took one step off of that bus

and I could go no farther all I could do was look up at the face that so mirrored mine and collapse into you. I was so weary it was a miracle I'd made it across the country.

But there you were: shining and strong, the same forehead, the same eyes, the same nose, even freckles like mine when you look really closely and yet so much more powerful. If I had been born a male, I know I would have been you.

My arms did not go around you, my face didn't reach above your sternum. But I clung to you

like the child I wished I could have been. The innocent that had been battered away by years of interviewing broken babies.

You asked nothing of me. You didn't need to. I was kin, that was undeniable, and I was as near death as any walking and waking person could be...

Before I left for the west coast once again, we spoke of promises. I made you one I swore on my future I would keep.

Honorable man that you are, even now you ask nothing of me. But I remember my promise. I remember my words to you. I remember our bond and the strength you gave me without reservation. The belief you had in me without hesitation and I remember my vow

My strength all that I have left, everything I have in reserve. All the strength I have for the future, I give to you--my belief, my faith, my magic, my essence, my prayers.

I will be what I vowed to be for you. I will give you what I promised unconditionally. Because I love you and we are family.

If I could scoop out my heart

pare it into pieces

and roast it over a fire

consume it with a nice

glass of White Zinfandel

and perhaps a Granny Smith apple

will the choice of my infatuation

become more clear to me

If I could scoop out my brain

cut out only the part that rules over my heart

chop it into a pesto

eat it on a heart shaped

piece of cracker bread

would it make my choice seem wiser

Mary Pauer

LOOP DE LOOP

In 1966, my father left for Vietnam as a civilian. He was forty-eight years old and I was sixteen years old. He worked in the jungle, near Cambodia, and trained mechanics, on site, to detect imperfections in the helicopter blades manufactured by Boeing-Vertol. This field application apparently eliminated the necessity to remove blades, ship them to Saigon for inspection, and avoided the long wait for them to be sent back upcountry to the remote air bases for reinstallation. My father had been part of a team that insured a safer and faster way for helicopters to dominate the air war and to reduce loss from factory imperfections. Check the blades in the field while still attached to the choppers. This is what my father said he did while he was in Vietnam.

1966 was still early in the war; we hadn't heard of the Hanoi Hilton, we had known how long hostilities would drag on, no one knew the cost, in dollars, in lives and relationships. By the end of the war, in 1975, 5 million were dead: ours, theirs, others in Laos, the 3 million killed by the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, and the animals: dogs, oxen, elephants, monkeys whose faces peering from the jungle canopy looked too closely human.

Fifty years later, I still have Daddy's expired passport, stamped and officially emblazoned, along with the record of his inoculations written in fountain pen ink: typhoid, malaria, influenza, a polio booster, tetanus, and small pox. His photograph is stern, straightforward, a man looking past the cameraman, perhaps into another world. All my father's pictures share that otherworldliness, and this is how I would describe him to you today: a man who saw past himself.

After so many months away, and as I recall, very little communication, upon his return in the summer of 1967, my father made a single comment. "Saigon is the filthiest city I have ever seen." After that, he never again referred directly to his time in Vietnam and it was clear he was not open to questions. Even with long over-due government statistics, my own generations' final response to that war, I am still dissatisfied with explanations of that time in our lives, and perturbed that I don't know more about the most mysterious of all his travels. I used to call him 'Secret Frank'. I regret not having asked him more, having accepted his avoidance, holding myself away from him. He did not die until he was in his mid-sixties, so I had ample opportunity to comprehend how a man could have left his family, how a man could have lived up country for so many months, many years to ask him about his real work there. I did not do that.

At first I believed he did not have to speak of what he had done, what he had experienced, because a part of me understood. He was thinner, more wary, yet exhilarated. If I examined him closely I could see how the freedom of war had wrapped around his heart in a way our family had not. In Vietnam, my father spread his arms wide and let the air rush through side to side. He suffused his spirit with the thrill of not quite dying. He had opened himself to death and snorted the high of inhaled danger. He had tricked all the apostate angels and laughed. I could see this on his face, but more telling is how he behaved when we were alone.

Even before he left, we had flown together in many private planes. I hung out at Teterboro Airport when the A&W Root beer stand was our favorite stop. I knew much about my father from those close times, and after he came home, we flew together in his small two-seater, a souped-up homemade airplane with rusted spots on the floor.

As usual, I sat in the right hand seat of the plane, adjusted my headphones, although there was no tower, no one telling us what to do. We wore the sets to speak with each other, even that

language limited and almost unnecessary, as often as we had flown together. It seemed natural to be next to him as we rattled down a private grass runway near the Brandywine Battlefield, which dropped off, after only 1000 feet, into a vast chasm.

We had flown there before, been to airshows with gliders and huge pits of grilled chicken, and tail gate picnics. When I tell you it was not much of an airstrip, you should envision port-a-potties, and perhaps an old geezer monkeying with a dismembered World War II engine. Or maybe no one around except for us and the Black-eyed Susan's and the Queen Anne's lace, waving in the high grasses. Someone had run a mower down the field and from the tire tracks, I knew we weren't the only aircraft that played in that field on lazy afternoons.

Before take-off, the aircraft gathers speed, sufficient to lift it into the wide expanse of the sky. While the wheels were still on the ground, the earth rushed underneath and my body smashed hard against the sprung seat. The noise around us shrieked in high pitched whine. We probably weren't going more than 80 miles an hour, just sufficient to lift the plane into the air. As we moved to rotation, that speed fast enough to allow levitation, for us to become airborne, I peeked at my father's face, as I had done as a kid during my first bumpy ride. I had been five, and we had been in a hail storm. I think I will always remember him with that expression of attention, concentration and a pleased smile on his lips. He controlled the aircraft, and his own demons.

When I was young I could not see out the windshield, I had to believe in him entirely, and now I too placed my faith in him, in his skills, in whatever lesson he wanted to teach. My father was fond of lessons of life, always taught in oblique ways. His favorite sport when I was really young was to spin me around, set me down and ask me to point to north. In the evening, he would take me outside, wait for my night vision to kick in and demand I showed him first, the

North Star, then the constellations, not the easy ones like Orion, those more complicated and less well known. Once he took me to Henry Hudson's grave in lower Manhattan and told me how his men had left him, alone, to freeze on his boat, The Half Moon.

Often I thought I understood what he wanted me to notice, what he was sharing of himself with me. We, specks in the universe should expect not to be taken too seriously. Most often it took me time to process what he might have meant, and I think the not knowing was part of the experience. I think as much as he enjoyed control, he loved ambiguity more.

I sometimes awaken, even now, years later, wondering if I learned what he had hoped, if he would be pleased at who I have become as an adult. I still lay on the grass in the winter and stare into the darkness until the beams of light tell a story; I play with a slide rule, and I read his mechanics handbook from 1947.

But that hot August day upon his return from Vietnam, I looked through the smeared windshield, at the shortening runway. The metal capsule sped fast, faster and faster, defying the pull of gravity, and my stomach was not entirely where it normally sat. I recognized our danger was of a deliberate sort, one he had created for the excitement, the delight, the ecstasy of lingering on the edge until the last moment, I still believed in him, but this was another of his inexplicable lessons.

I suspect he was encouraging me to get on with adulthood, to remember not everything stays the same, to take the ultimate risk, no matter the consequences. I am not certain this is the type of father-daughter conversation most families had before college, but my father pulled the yoke hard.

He acknowledged me with a quick nod of his head, a toothy grin. “Hold on, baby girl,” he said.

And so began the game of chicken we played all that summer.

The first phase of the sport was to run the airplane as close to the edge of the airstrip before take-off. The brink of the land loomed at the nose of the airplane, and like magic, we lifted to head into the clouds. Up we rose, almost a vertical ascent, hanging just before the engine ran out of gas, just before the aircraft stalled.

Stunt planes are equipped with special devices to allow the gas to flow no matter what the position. No so with our plane. As the plane stuttered, he pulled back and the second part of the game began. We circled around to return to the airstrip, again landing as close to the edge of the field as possible before the next take off.

All pilots know these maneuvers, and practice them as students. They are called touch and goes.

These were not the first I had experienced; although we normally had more runway left when it was an exercise, not a game. I had been flying with Daddy since I was a child. I was reminded of somersaults we did as children, rolling faster and faster until the dizziness consumed us, and we dissolved into laughter, hugging ourselves in pleasure.

Our second touch and go was perfect. My father jammed back the throttle. The aircraft rose, rotated almost vertically and the plane hung at a right angle to the real ground. Inside, I glanced at the dial indicating the artificial horizon: an instrument pilots use to orient themselves to the real earth. Flying through a cloud, into a storm, flying where the ground was not available can confuse a pilot, disorienting their sense of space. Our dial was tilting, tilting, and trying to find itself. The engine lost a bit of fuel. I felt the pause, as the plane seemed to wait in mid-air and off we went again.

Maneuvering the airplane at the edge of the runway, while a precision move, and done as

rapidly as possible, is the first part of the chicken game, but is not the inner head game that gives the real thrill. Daddy had improved the game with the touch and goes, just for the added rush.

The high is from the presence of the second pilot, in the second plane, sixty seconds behind you, doing the exact same thing, racing faster and faster, pushing you to the edge, leaving no room for mistakes. The real buzz; the real test of nerve; the real relationship between man and machine was that second pilot racing behind us, perhaps forcing us to make an avoidance maneuver. This was my father’s true statement about Vietnam.

I look back now and wonder why I was not scared out of my mind. All I can offer is my belief in him as a pilot, as a father, who while risky, and often away from the family, was not the type of man to frighten me more than I could bear. Even now however, I am not certain that I comprehend what he wanted me to feel as we were whirling in the air. When I tell friends we used to fly like this, most often their expression is of horror. Their question, “How could a father do this to his daughter?” I want to answer, he was showing me how precious life was, how precarious life was, how much he needed from life he still had to live.

Challenging the skill of the pilot close on our tail was the real challenge for my father. Pilots call these sorts of games, flat hatting. I supposed of all the jargon from that war, that terminology speaks for itself. Screw up and you are a pancake, the jaunty pilot's billed cap smashed into the dirt.

Daddy cut down wind; arced in the pattern of a circle, and swung around. Every landing was closer to the edge than before. This time the airplane almost skittered off, but at the last moment he yanked us from the downward spiral into the thermals.

After flying about six or seven touch and goes, my father took me to Hurley's bar, and shot boilermakers, matching it seemed to me the number of landings. On a typical afternoon, he

might drink six or seven. Sometimes we stopped before we flew, another nuance to his game of chicken.

Before he went to Vietnam, my father was a middle-aged man with no military experience. What made him special was his array of self-taught aeronautical skills, and his creative electronic mind. He worked in avionics and had built his own airplane when I was much younger. Now, he had developed a portable device to detect flaws in helicopter blades before take-off. An imperceptible ionic flaw could cause stress, cracking the blade, causing crashes, injuring our soldiers and ruining the helicopters, so important because helicopters moved not only the injured, as in Korea, but also troops and supplies. The whirlybirds had become important participants in air strikes. The helicopter had developed in Vietnam much as had the tank from World War I to World War II, at first a novel idea, than an indispensable element in the barrage against the North Vietnamese.

My father's invention was portable, based on the principle of the whetstone bridge, assessing invisible ionic alignment, thus knowing if the blade was healthy. In my mind, the test unit was the size of a doctor's black bag.

Two weeks before he left, he told my younger sister and me, as we sat in the living room, in our house in New Jersey. Daddy sat in his favorite winged armchair, the lamp on the drum table turned on the low setting.

"Too many needless crashes." As an aside, he mentioned he would be away for the longest time, ever. He figured at least nine months, maybe a year.

We sat on the floor of a moss green carpet with a close nap, children around a storyteller. I did envision my father like Johnny Appleseed, wandering from helicopter to helicopter, using this wondrous apparatus, sowing his knowledge.

"No one ships to Saigon for inspection. I'll be in the field."

My image of living in the field was not dissimilar to a Girl Scout Jubilee: tents, wood-burned markers on the paths, a long and cool mess tent. I was a rising senior in high school, who ironed her hair to keep it straight and set it with used orange juice cans at night. I could only imagine so many types of fields. My sister was moving to the new junior high school in the fall. She probably thought of a hockey field.

"This will save lives," he said. A deceptively simple explanation for his new job.

We shook our heads in awe. My father did not often speak to us without our mother around. She was at the hairdresser's, and I wonder if she had chosen this moment to let him tell us in his own way, that she

might not have been able to hear, again, how long he would be absent from the home. Barely able to understand old history lessons, I was certain war was not a preferred answer to anything; already pockets of protest had begun.

I thought if we just ended the war and found peace, more lives could be saved. “So you’re really a peace-loving combat guy,” I said. I wanted to scream how unfair this trip of his was, leaving me with responsibilities far beyond my abilities, nor did I want to part with my boyfriend who had just been drafted. It seemed that the universe conspired to make my senior year miserable, and I blamed him. On that day though, Daddy was in no mood to parry with my adolescent angst, although he was going to be spending his time with guys just a bit older than I was; another unfairness. They had him, and I did not.

I remember his chin lifted as he told us he needed special clearance for access to military information. I smelled the starch of my father’s shirt and a hint of airline fuel. His perfectly erect posture reset itself. “I’ll have a high rank, with no authority or troop command, just this special assignment,” he said.

There was a tone of respect in his voice. I took it to mean he was proud that he was tough enough to be chosen. As I look back I recognize the tone was one of anticipation. I think I understood that, had known that about him, that he enjoyed every trip he took for business, and that this was another of those extended excursions. I had not even left the state of New Jersey, not even on vacation, although through the years I had begged and begged to accompany him on one of his business trips, to someplace safer, like Switzerland.

Jealousy too found its way into my heart. He was leaving my obstreperous mother, fueled by her drink and prescription medications and my ridiculous sister who was fueled with her emerging adolescent hormones. And I was in the middle, the one to hold it together for those many months.

Within the week of Daddy’s announcement, I was interviewed by a man in a brown suit, with brown socks and solid shoes, who sat in the chair opposite our fireplace in our living room. His broad tie was brown, with a pearl tie tack.

I sat in the wing chair, checked out my Weejun loafers, secretly, held one foot at an angle, and examined the shine. I smoothed my Villager knee socks, so the cable stitching was even along my calf muscle.

The brown suited man opened his notebook and read his questions. “Have you now, or have you ever been a member of the Communist Party?”

“No.”

“Been associated with organizations which advocate the overthrow of the United States?”

“No.”

I felt sassy, refusing to add details to my answers, playing with this nameless man in

brown who if he was half as smart as he thought, would have known all about me, because there was nothing to know. But his tone was serious, as if he believed I might be poised to infiltrate the secrets of the Viet Cong Army.

I think the ten-minute interview, including his hello and good-bye, was my first inkling that my father was embarking on a real mission, taking on the dangerous world; placing himself in a position to be tested. Mettle is the word I would have used if I had understood. My father had been offered and taken an opportunity to release himself from the family, to explore and enjoy his risk-taking self. My father had been that man all his life, but he had held himself in check for us, and he had used all his energy to salvage a deteriorating marriage. I think I always sensed this. I think this is why I worried while he was away.

After he left for Vietnam, I imagined he had run away from home as I had when I was five. I took my rock collection, and crossed Carmita Avenue, which I was not allowed to do. My mother, my sister and I, we were my father's rocks. In signing on for the mission in Vietnam, he too crossed to a place he had not been allowed to go.

Back stateside, after his return from the conflict, we took his plane out in late afternoon, with the sun cresting, almost blinding the eye, a dramatic backdrop for every pass. Before we taxied off the grass runway he held his hand to help me from the wing step into the seat. His touch was warm, dry, confident, and I was ashamed, for a moment, that mine was damp with sweat.

I did not think I had changed while he had been gone, but I must have. I had never been nervous flying with him before. Even as a kid during a hail storm from northern Teterboro to Atlantic City, while the plane yawed and jawed, I felt safe. Now my father felt dangerous. The

day felt dangerous. Our life as a family felt in danger.

Later that same afternoon, at Hurley's Bar, with the lights dim, in the sooty air, in the booth near the back, my father swallowed a shot of Jim Beam, set the glass on the Formica table, stared into my face and said, "I'm leaving."

My father had always traveled as an airline navigator. His absences were as much a part of our family as Scampi, the mutt dog with crooked teeth. When my father left for long weeks, my mother stayed in their bed, in the room, with the door closed, drinking from a green bottle of Gilby's Gin tucked under the pillow. My sister and I ate our meals on a tray, watching Miss Kitty on Gunsmoke.

At the time, that afternoon, I did not realize he meant he was leaving permanently. "Already another assignment? You just got home."

After my father told me he would be leaving, we moved from our home in Northern New Jersey and traveled almost three hours away, to live closer to his Boeing job. Then we settled in a brand new house, in northern Delaware, he went to work, leaving my mother in a strange place with her familiar bottles. Sometime during that summer he flew to Mexico, bought a divorce and served it almost to the day I was packing for college. At the end of that summer, barely three months after the first move, my father drove my mother back to her aged parents, who kept her safe in New Jersey.

And before the end of that year, almost at the same time as the divorce became final, Daddy was laid off from Boeing. But I was a freshman in college in New York by then. I had my own worries.

The first month of college, the first semester, in mandatory class on art appreciation, I met a boy named Tommy. When he sat, his leg stuck out into the aisle, and when he walked, he

slid his left leg along the floor, leaving a toe mark trail with every step, the obvious evidence of his wound. He wore his fatigue jacket every day, with a Black Panther button that read, "Free Hewy P."

I turned eighteen in November. When I told Tommy of my upcoming birthday, he invited me to a bar. "Just around the corner, it's happy hour," he said. "You should be happy. A celebration."

It was the first drink I tasted, a whiskey sour with a cherry, both sweet and tart. I looked at the impressionistic remains of my almost pink lipstick on the glass that winked back at me. The DJ booth played Young Girl by Gary Puckett and the Union Gap.

The dance floor was parquet. He held his hand to me, and I stepped into his arms. I was the first girl he slow-danced with since the shrapnel in his leg. I swiveled my hip against his and we swayed with the other couples. He leaned heavily on me; I wondered if he were trying to cop a feel.

He increased the pressure of his hand in the middle of my back, his fingertips splayed open slightly; and then his hand was lower, not really on my back at all. I moved away, but his arm was stronger than I had anticipated. "Who's leading?" he asked.

"You are," I said. He held his inert leg steady, moved me around, and then he dragged his limb halfway, slightly off the beat of the music.

I did not lean back against the cushion of the chair as I sipped my second drink and sucked on the cherry. When he asked if it was a nice dance, I told him. "Yes, that was a nice dance, a very nice dance." I knew I would always be able to recall, even without a mark, the pressure of his palm on that spot, just down from the curve of my vertebrae.

Later, we went to his car in the parking lot. He showed me his dented Army helmet,

decorated with indecipherable writing, messages from his buddies, some now bodies, some missing in water logged fields, others wandering the Ho Chi Minh Trail, others taking classes in colleges on the GI Bill.

He rotated the helmet on his head, placed my index finger on the centered bullet hole, a perfectly round dark spot, and smack in the middle of the metal cap. He told me about a kitchen sponge set on top of his head, underneath the helmet. Everyone used them to absorb sweat, and just that inch save him from being killed.

He set the helmet on the back seat. "I keep it there, all the time. So I don't forget," he said. "A tiny ping and I could have been gone." He leaned closer to me, "But I was saved just for you."

He moved his hand from the steering wheel to inch along the top of the bench seat of the car. "You want to drive out to the ocean, to Montauk Point? We could sit on the dunes."

I would have liked to share a blanket, stare at the stars, smell the salt air, and be in his arms again. Still I said, "Curfew. I have to sign in."

In the parking lot of the college, I kept my hand on the handle of the door as I leaned to kiss Tommy on the cheek. I held the door tight, like I did when my father played chicken. I defended against the

temptation of the craziness of a guy who carried the war with him as readily as I carried my book bag, and who wanted to remember it.

I resisted feeling too much for such a man.

I inked the dormitory ledger at 11:05 pm.

Ogebe Abraham

CHIBOK GIRLS

The streets are bare and empty
windows of houses; dark,
covered in gray cobwebs
homes vacated of hope
laughter lost in tears
dreams deferred
candle light vigils stretch till dawn
muted cries reach up to heaven:
Boko Haram, the grim reaper!
Where are our girls?
why are their voices so silent,
has every soul departed?
What is left of the school is rubble, charcoal, filth,
rabid dogs covered in ticks, cats scavenging,
skeletal bunk beds well lined as if their ghosts are on them,
burnt,
Always Sanitary Pad littered over brown earth
echoes of virgins cry out from Sambisa forest
forced to roll in shit and vomit
bathed and refreshed
ravaged in turns by randy savages
blood, sweat and tears

pregnancies aborted by scissors wielding Mallams

life under threat

they would be given to octogenarians with queer tastes for a fair price

they would rather die

than continue to live in hell on earth.

THE CONSPIRACY OF YOUR SILENCE

What are the odds that I would scream so loud that my throat would go sore
and I would not be heard?

What is the ramification of your silence even as I cry desperately for help?

Do you hear them? The innocent souls lying to waste in Bama?

The Fulani man wailing over the carcass of his run down Cow?

The destitute on the street begging you for something to eat?

Tell me your dreams

Your hopes and aspirations

Your innermost heart desires

Share your life with me

Why are you so silent?

Do you not hear the deep breath before the plunge?

The calm before the storm?

The moment before your love broke upon my heart like water on rocks?



Tobias Oggenfuss

Gold Flyer

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About the Authors

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Dr. Piatt is the author of 2 poetry books, “The Silent Pond,” (2012) and “Ancient Rhythms,” (2014), 2 novels, “The Ideal Society” (2011), and “The Monk,” (2013), and over 570 poems. His third novel and third book of poetry are scheduled for release in 2015. “His poem, “The Night Frog” was nominated for best of web 2013. His books are available on Amazon, and Barnes and Noble.

Dr. Mel Waldman is a psychologist, poet, and writer whose stories have appeared in numerous magazines including *HARDBOILED DETECTIVE*, *HARDBOILED*, *DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE*, *ESPIONAGE*, *THE SAINT*, *DOWN IN THE DIRT*, *CC&D*, *PULP METAL MAGAZINE*, *INNER SINS*, *YELLOW MAMA*, and *AUDIENCE*. His poems have been widely published in magazines and books including *LIQUID IMAGINATION*, *THE BROOKLYN LITERARY REVIEW*, *BRICKPLIGHT*, *SKIVE MAGAZINE*, *ODDBALL MAGAZINE*, *POETRY PACIFIC*, *POETICA*, *RED FEZ*, *SQUAWK BACK*, *SWEET ANNIE & SWEET PEA REVIEW*, *THE JEWISH LITERARY JOURNAL*, *THE JEWISH PRESS*, *THE JERUSALEM POST*, *HOTMETAL PRESS*, *MAD SWIRL*, *HAGGARD & HALLOO*, *ASCENT ASPIRATIONS*, and *NAMASTE FIJI: THE INTERNATIONAL ANTHOLOGY OF POETRY*. A past winner of the literary *GRADIVA AWARD* in Psychoanalysis, he was nominated for a *PUSHCART PRIZE* in literature and is the author of 11 books. Four of his mystery, fantasy, and horror stories will be published by *POSTSCRIPTS*, a British magazine and international anthology, in October/November 2014. He recently completed an experimental mystery novel inspired by one of Freud’s case studies and is looking for an agent. He has been inspired for decades by his patients and their heroic stories of trauma and survival.

Roberta Borger is originally from São Paulo, Brazil, where she studied Filmmaking and Screenwriting. After moving to the U.S. in 2008, she earned a second Bachelor's in Creative Writing from SUNY Purchase, and an M.F.A from Chatham University. Borger is currently pursuing her PhD in English at Binghamton University. Her poems, short stories, and photographs have been published in *Lux*, *The Acentos Review*, *K Magazine*, and others.

AM Spence was born in Manchester and read literature as an undergraduate at The University of Manchester UK. In 2009 she completed her MA in creative writing in poetry at the same university.

Tom Montag is most recently the author of *In This Place: Selected Poems 1982-2013*, as well as *Middle Ground*, *Curlew: Home*, *Kissing Poetry's Sister*, *The Idea of the Local*, and *The Big Book of Ben Zen*. Recent poems will be found in *Hummingbird*, *Stoneboat*, *Split Rock*, *Riding Light Review*, *The Chaffin Journal*, *Foliolate Oak*, *Hamilton Stone Review*, and *Digital Papercut*. He blogs as *The Middlewesterner* and serves as the Managing Editor of the *Lorine Niedecker Monograph Series*, *What Region?*

Mark Antony Rossi's poetry, criticism, fiction and photography have been published by *The Antigonish Review*, *Bareback Magazine*, *Black Heart Review*, *Collages & Bricolages*, *Cerebrus*, *Death Throes*, *Ethical Specacle*, *Deep South Journal*, *Flash Fiction*, *The Magill Review*, *Japanophile*, *On The Rusk*, *Purple Patch*, *The Journal of Poetry Therapy*, *Sentiment Journal* and *Wild Quarterly*. He currently writes a weekly science humor column for *The Magill Review*. His most recent play "Eye of the Needle" was produced by Grin Theatre, Liverpool, England and its youtube recording is available at the link below.

Mathew Serback is the winner of Neal Chandler Creative Writing Enhancement Award. He currently resides in Cleveland, OH where he systematically destroys everything he likes one day at a time. He also hosts a podcast, with two of his arch enemies, entitled "The Easily Digestible Podcast."

Joseph Reich has been published in a wide variety of eclectic literary journals both here and abroad, been nominated four times for The Pushcart Prize, and his most recent books include, "A Different Sort Of Distance" (Skive Magazine Press) "If I Told You To Jump Off The Brooklyn Bridge" (Flutter Press) "Pain Diary: Working Methadone & The Life & Times Of The Man Sawed In Half" (Brick Road Poetry Press) "Drugstore Sushi" (Thunderclap Press) "The Derivation Of Cowboys & Indians" (Fomite Press) "The Housing Market: a comfortable place to jump off the end of the world" (Fomite Press) "The Hole That Runs Through Utopia" (Fomite Press) "Taking The Fifth And Running With It: a psychological guide for the hard of hearing and blind" (Broadstone Books)

R. W. Haynes, a professor in South Texas, writes poems, plays, and stories in addition to academic stuff.

Patrick Hallissey lives near Bandon in West Cork, Ireland. His work has been accepted for publication this December in the online literary journal 'Brain of Forgetting' and he has also had work published in a local journal, 'Bandon Opinion'.

Howie Good's latest book of poetry is *The Complete Absence of Twilight* (2014) from MadHat Press.

Brian Snell is a writer based in Western Massachusetts. His State-issued biography says he was "born in a thunder-clap that was heralded by the call of a thousand swans." He is also an editor at farmergeneral.com.

KATHIE GIORGIO'S fourth book, a novel titled "Rise From The River", will be released by the Main Street Rag Publishing Company in early 2015. Her first three books, two novels, "The Home For Wayward Clocks" and "Learning To Tell (A Life)Time", and a short story collection, "Enlarged Hearts", were also released by MSR. "Clocks" received the Outstanding Achievement award by the Wisconsin Library Association Literary Awards Committee and was nominated for the Paterson Fiction Award. "Lifetime", the sequel to "Clocks", debuted to a standing-room only audience of over 200 people at the SouthEast Wisconsin Festival of Books, where Kathie was the welcoming Keynote.

Giorgio's short stories and poems have appeared in over 100 literary magazines and in many anthologies. She's been nominated twice for the Million Writer Award and twice for the Best of the Net anthology. She is the director and founder of AllWriters' Workplace & Workshop, an international studio offering online and on-site classes in all genres and abilities of creative writing. She also teaches for Writers' Digest and serves on their advisory board.

Laura Grace Tarpley graduated from Young Harris College in May 2014 with a BA in Communication Studies. At YHC, her poems were published in *Night* and *Mosaic: Reflections on faith and spirituality*. She currently resides in Little Rock, Arkansas, and is in preparation to move to New Zealand in November to travel for a year.

Jason Irwin is the author of *Watering the Dead* (Pavement Saw Press, 2008), winner of the Transcontinental Poetry Award, and the chapbooks *Where You Are* (Night Ballet Press, 2014), & *Some Days It's A Love Story* (Slipstream Press, 2005). He grew up in Dunkirk, NY, and now lives in Pittsburgh. www.jasonirwin.blogspot.com

Stephen Okawa is a garbage man from Dorchester, MA. His work has appeared in *The Main Street Rag*, *WordEater*, *Breadcrumb Scabs*, *Boston Poetry Magazine*, and others.

Michael Christani is a native of Massachusetts. He has been published by *Emerge Poetry journal*, and a story in *Empty Sink publishing*. He attended UMass for a short time but most of his education has come from books and writing.

Jeffrey Zable has been appearing in literary magazines and anthologies since the mid 70's. He's published five chapbooks including *Zable's Fables* with an introduction by the late great Beat poet Harold Norse. Present or upcoming work in *Toad Suck Review*, *Clarion*, *Lullwater Review*, *Owen Wister Review*, *Clackamas Literary Review*, *Chaos Poetry Review* (featured), *Dreginald*, *One Trick Pony* and many others.

Darren Demaree is the author of "As We Refer To Our Bodies" (2013, 8th House), "Temporary Champions" (2014, Main Street Rag), and "Not For Art Nor Prayer" (2015, 8th House) as well as the Managing Editor of the Best of the Net Anthology.

M. A. Schaffner has had poems published in Shenandoah, Prairie Schooner, Agni, Poetry Ireland, Poetry Wales, and elsewhere. Other writings include the poetry collection *The Good Opinion of Squirrels*, and the novel *War Boys*. Schaffner spends most days in Arlington, Virginia or the 19th century.

Sabrina Li is a junior at The Lawrenceville School from Princeton, NJ. She thinks that one of the greatest ways to publish is with three staples and construction paper. From the age of five, Sabrina has always aspired to be an author and has marveled at the manipulation of words and language. When she is not writing, she is reading stories by Steinbeck or Murakami. One of her greatest goals as a writer is to make her words accessible to others, and by submitting to *On the Rusk*, she firmly believes that she will be able to touch others through text.

Mark Nenadov is a poet from Essex, Ontario, Canada. He lives with his lovely wife and their two young daughters. Mark's poems have appeared in publications in the United States, Canada, Pakistan, India, Australia, England, and Ireland. He also has poems in several anthologies. See <http://www.marknenadov.com> for more details.

Holly Day was born in Hereford, Texas, “The Town Without a Toothache.” She and her family currently live in Minneapolis, Minnesota, where she teaches writing classes at the Loft Literary Center. Her published books include the nonfiction books *Music Theory for Dummies*, *Music Composition for Dummies*, and *Guitar All-in-One for Dummies*, and the poetry books “Late-Night Reading for Hardworking Construction Men” (The Moon Publishing) and “The Smell of Snow” (ELJ Publications), while her needlepoints and beadwork have recently appeared on the covers of *The Grey Sparrow Journal* and *QWERTY Magazine*.

Jeff Burt lives in Santa Cruz County, California. He has published in *Thrice Fiction*, *Star 82 Review*, *Windfall*, *New Verse News*, and other publications.