

cæsura 2021
unmasking



Shannon Silva *Waiting for You II*

cæsura 2021 unmasking

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* Corrections to the Print Edition: The errors related to the biography of Elizabeth Parashis and Sonia Sharma are corrected in the “Contributor Biographies” section of the Online Edition.

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unmasking

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Editor's Notes

A subject that has come to haunt me more and more is simulacrum. The idea of replicating ourselves with systematic values and computed algorithms only to fool others into second guessing our “real self,” well, is this not what we do daily without thought to the task? And, are we not inconsistent to who we are when we are reflected by whoever happens to be in front of us at one specific moment in time? Existentialism in all its glory. Perhaps it is mere survival to adopt the multiple faces we put on or others put on us? We are creating ourselves over and over again through others and through our experiences, it is a sometimes unconscious but inevitable task. We recreate ourselves on a personal level, AND as a whole, as humanity. When one mask slips off another blazes onward. We are simulating ourselves in motion through time, changing in increments. The fortunate reader will find the stories, poems, and art in our Unmasking edition of Cæsura to capture constant motion of change and the act of digging deep into another layer of who we are. I have enjoyed the work that the editors have chosen for the theme, Unmasking. This powerful compilation undulates with the many masks of circumstance and emotion. I'm very excited to present this unique journal to our readers. Please enjoy Unmasking, Cæsura, 2021.

Kimy J. M. Knight **Editor-in-Chief**

Thank you for the opportunity to be a part of this process. I have thoroughly enjoyed unmasking my thoughts on all the work submitted. It has been an honor to be the poetry editor. Again, thank you for trusting my poetic process. Enjoy.

SevanKelee Boulton **Poetry Editor**

Our grouping of pieces under the theme “Unmasking” is a small taste of the soul quenching artists who give our communities life; sometimes heart-breaking, other times empowering. These works are beautiful expressions of the emotions our current American society is going through. We've chosen works that speak to the compassionate side of the human race in hopes of highlighting the beauty we each behold.

Julie Barrett **Art Editor**

When we picked this year's theme, we anticipated that we would be in a period of unmasking, a process of emerging from a global pandemic and adjusting to new realities. It was a theme ripe with metaphor and ready for interpretation. Writers and artists rose to our challenge by submitting work that revealed their true selves and showed us the ways in which they obscure, enhance, or protect that truth.

Instead of stripping off our respiratory protections, we find ourselves in a time of re-masking. The freedom we anticipated is now unwise. Instead of emerging, we are encasing. The new reality to embrace is not a return to normal, but a new definition of normal. Despite idealism about stripping ourselves of our facades, physical and metaphorical masks exist to protect us.

Erin Keyes **Non Fiction Editor**

Throughout history humanity has explored the essence of who we are through the use of stories. A well crafted story is one whereby the author takes the reader on a journey exploring the inner workings of the human psyche.

Caesura asked writers for short stories that unmask themselves. Most seemed driven by a sense of escaping the isolation of the global health crisis while others sought to entertain via surrealism.

To the writers, your explorations into unmasking were a joy to read. Thank you all for sharing your thoughts and taking us along on your evocative journeys. To the Poetry Center San Jose, thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this year's Caesura publication. To the editorial staff and readers, I can't express how much I appreciate everyone. You continue to inspire me daily.

Anthony L. Bellon **Fiction Editor**

This year the Print and Online editions have multiple unpublished artists and writers. Our Online edition will have more poets published from the Elmwood Poetry Society; the volunteer work from Lita Kurth, and other Poetry Center San José members is greatly appreciated and respected. Both editions are also graced with many talented PCSJ members and established artists and poets.

Thank you all for having the courage to submit and spirit of community to share.

Bill Cozzini **Managing Editor**

No Way With Children

My father was a quiet man, always
 thinking of electrical relays
And mathematical solutions.
 When I was very young
My mother took me to Kansas City
 on the train to meet her family.
On our return, she said,
 at the station when my father
Tried to hold me I cried. He did not forget,
 already depression-scarred.

My father was a gentle man, but I was always
 a bit afraid of him, and so were
My own children years later. I would sit
 beside him in the car, desperate for words
To fill the silence, always was concerned
 he felt left out in the crazy flow
Of conversation at family gatherings.

Once I found a family round-robin letter
 my mother wrote of his nighttime hours
In the basement building me a little table
 and chair for Christmas, and later
Found an old letter of my own telling
 of the sturdy wooden easel
He built at which my children,
 in Daddy-shirt-artist coats,
Watercolored masterpieces.

I have a photo of a proud me, at three,
 perhaps, sitting at my bright red table
Serving a tea party for my stuffed animals
 (Reddy, Orangey, Blacky, Brownie—
I was not an imaginative child in nomenclature).

Of course, we children could not sense
 love come in such solid states,
Only in hugs and laughs, tosses in the air
 and such, or perhaps, somehow,
We did.



Shannon Silva **Waiting for You II**

oda a la máscara

máscara mía
has cambiado
no se nos permitió
al principio
eras exclusiva
solo para los profesionales
y sus manos trabajadoras
los héroes
anhelamos tu toque
tu cálido abrazo
en nuestros rostros temerosos
tu codiciado azul claro
o tus correas amarillas
si tuviéramos suerte
pronto serías mía

máscara mía
has cambiado
hemos sentido tu toque
y tu carne irritada
frotándome la nariz
calentando mi cara
hasta que las gotas de sudor
se formaban encima de mi labio
ahora puedo tenerte
en todas las formas y tamaños
pero ya no te quiero
ya no te necesito

máscara mía
has cambiado
no quiero perderte
tu comodidad
tu seguridad
tu amor inquebrantable
tus ojos que no juzgan
ajustada de la cara de todos
tan bellamente
no discrimines
tengo miedo de perderte
pero dicen que debo dejar de llevarte
por favor
no me dejes máscara mía



Trinh Mai **Things Revealed #2**

Merryl Leslie Kravitz

The Emergence

Emergence stories
Learning to trust others
Incremental
Emerge soft and vulnerable
Orienting
Re-learning to drive, to be with people, to be with myself with others
New vulnerable self
Face the holes and spaces in our lives - inside and out
Did I age? Did I become younger?
Admit the things I didn't do
Find my place in the world
Find myself in the old antique store, amidst the dusty relics
Peel the skin off my crocodile hands - have I scrubbed them to the core?
Feel the sun penetrate my clothing
I thought that unmasking meant being with other people, but it is really a very personal emergence

With the frigid, magic droplets from heaven slowly and painstakingly pumped into my arm, my face covering gently dissolves, revealing skin and nerves, exposed for all to see. I feel like people are looking through me, trying to read what lies beneath the translucent skin. Missing are the rosy cheeks, kissed by the sun. Gone is the petal-soft skin of my hands, now crocodile-like from stringent detergent.

All cultures have emergence stories. They tell of the beginning of humankind. This is my emergence story. I re-enter the world after a year of darkness, flimsy and insubstantial, vulnerable. The sounds, the light, the cluttered world into which I emerge all serve to disorient me. I feel the sun penetrate my clothing. Fearful, skittish, I feel strange eyes upon me.

I emerge into the larger reality, minimized, with forces that shred and segment my world, leaving behind a steaming caldera where something, perhaps humans, used to be. Distrust envelops me. I was always unafraid, willing to take risks, but now I feel unsure. Will those droplets really protect me from the evil around me? Where and what is the evil? Is it lurking around every corner, behind pouting lips? Aching to leave, yet held back by the gravity of insecurity, safety is something I'll have to re-learn. Trust beckons me, just out of reach. I must face the spaces in my life, people and time lost forever. For a year, I assumed that removing the face covering meant being with other people. But now I know that it is a personal emergence. It means turning the mirror on my soul.



Deborah Kennedy **Rising**

Susan Johnson

Another Lucky Couple

Bullfrogs bellowed in the cattails that brushed against our canoe as we searched for a solid landing. It was not a WOW wedding. We took our vows among irises that shimmered like candlesticks caked with dirt. On the fudge cake I baked you planted plastic figurines that resembled us not at all. In a mosquito filled dusk we pitched our tent and crossed that threshold. The more organized an event the more agonizing, so we kept it short and simple, knowing our marriage would be long and complex. Well maybe.



Deborah Kennedy **Fresh Flowers**

Lovely Day, Isn't It?

I was about to pull away
when my wife gestured from the porch
Roll down the window
I did
she said
"Drive safe."
I wanted to say
"No thanks."
instead, I said, "Okay."

I arrived at the shop
stood in line outside
two yards apart
the man ahead turned, loosened his collar, said
"Warm today isn't it?"
I wanted to say
"No, it's freezing."
instead, I said, "Yes, it is."
time passed
we shuffled forward
the man ahead turned and said
"This virus, it's a terrible thing isn't it?"
I wanted to say
"Actually, I am quite enjoying it."
instead I said, "Yes, a terrible thing."

I pushed my trolley down the aisle
it had a broken wheel
an older lady shook her head, tutted
"I hate when the wheel is broken don't you?"
I wanted to say
"No, I love it."
I wish all the wheels were broken.
I wish there were no wheels and I was pushing the trolley on metal stumps,
gouging the shop floor, leaving a trail of sparks and Hitchcockian noise behind me."
instead, I said, "Yes, me too."
at the register the cashier handed me my change and said
"We're a little short, can I owe you five cent?"
I wanted to say
"How about I owe you ten cent?"
instead, I said, "Sure, no problem."

I got home, unloaded the shopping
brought it into the kitchen
started to pack it away
my wife came in, asked
"How did it go?"
"Same as always", I said



John Renzel Closet Case, Prom Night

Louise Kantro

Small Steps

She came to Ken's checkout stand at about ten o'clock every morning, a thin woman in her late seventies. She'd buy three to six items, totaling at most seven dollars. Yesterday it was bread, a quart of milk, and an apple. Ken offered a generic greeting every day: "Hot - or cold, or sure is raining - out there."

She would nod.

Ken once mentioned her to a friend, who really didn't get it - how Ken sometimes took people on.

Today he decided to try something new. He charged two single string cheese sticks to his employee account then placed them in the bag he intended to use to package her items.

But as the minutes ticked by, Ken began to worry.

What if she was superstitious about the number six and, on this particular day, she brought five items to his check stand? Her five plus his two would equal seven. A problem?

What if he couldn't pull off "unobtrusive" in packaging her goods? He wanted her to discover the cheese at home, not here.

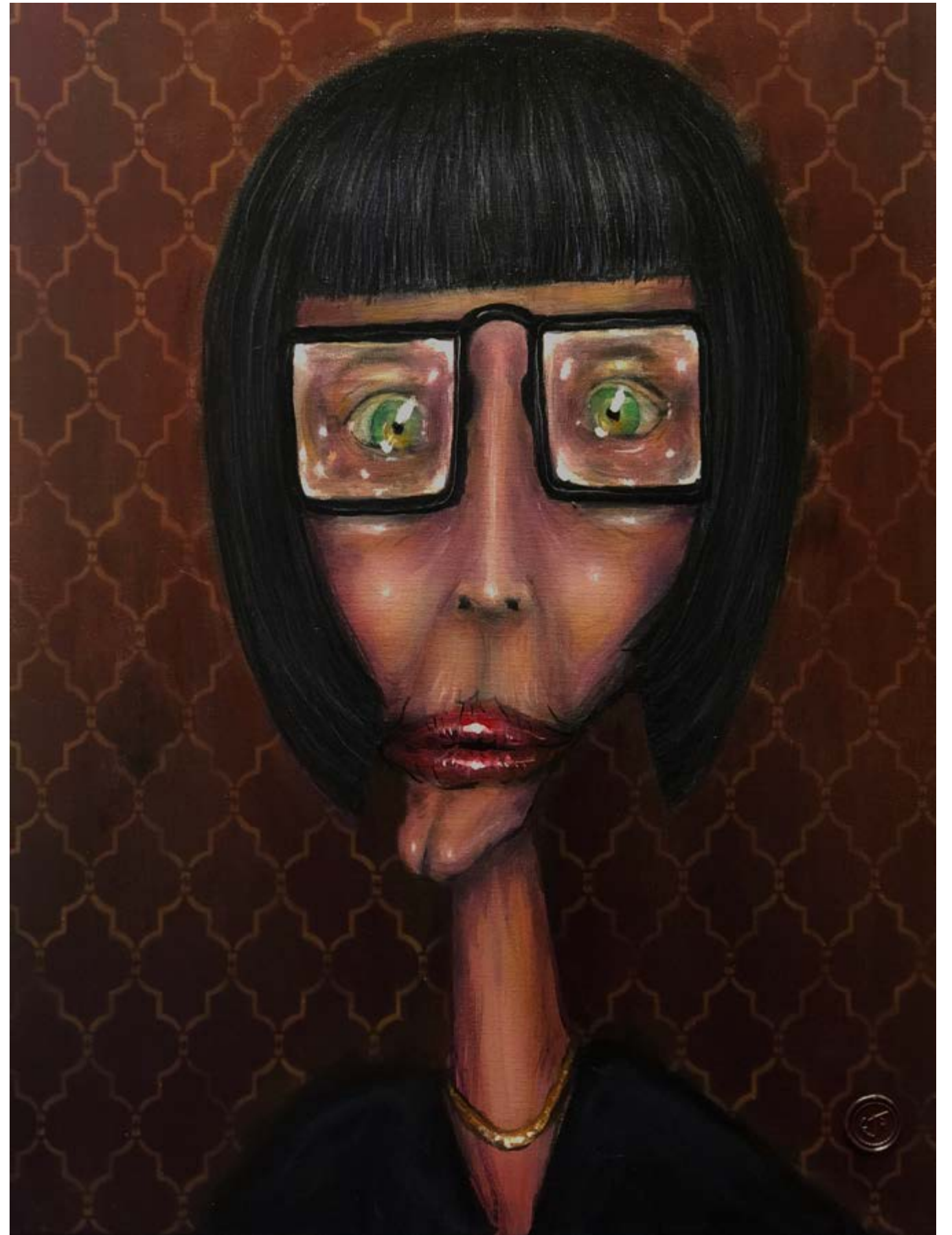
What if she was one of those people who adamantly refused charity of any sort? Might she be insulted? Would she complain about him to the boss?

If all she did was bring the string cheese back, claiming there'd been a mistake - well, no big deal. But what if she didn't come back at all? What if she got so upset that she never stepped foot in the store again?

At nine-thirty-five, Sandy took over his register. Grabbing the package he had prepared for the old lady, Ken headed for the break room. The cheese tasted like salty chalk, but when he returned to his station, he was less anxious.

He would start small. Avoiding any mention of weather, he would simply introduce himself. Tomorrow, he would add some other friendly-but-unthreatening comment. He would have to approach her as one would a feral cat, with gentle gestures and lots of patience.

He would take his time.



John Renzel Betty Blunder

When You Dressed as a Famous Future Poet

It was for you a day of compelling premonitions
and vast disappointments darker than darkness
when you dressed as a famous future poet
determined to reboot, reshape and redefine
a world you found sorely lacking
in senseful prayers and prayerful beauty
messing up every future poem you recited
giving interviews to the hard-of-hearing
through electronic devices strangling sense
contemplating getting an oversized tattoo
that declares I AM NOT PRECISELY ME
it was a long, dismal day without prayer or beauty
enormous-shoed dancers finding your purported grave
and dancing as though tomorrow was already gone.



Al Preciado Spirit Fire Ballerinas



Joel Savishinsky

Uncle Robert's Bar: When the Beer Sounds Better in Hawai'i

Why do they come? Why
do they stay? Some act as if
they want to be
one of us, or
look like it. But
cotton shirts can cover
just so much skin,
and can't alter your accent.

And we don't wear them
except to look like them
thinking they look like us.
It's a game
we all play. One without
imagination, other than
the imagining. Or
so I imagine.

They stay, buy, build.
Some learn our music
and get good playing it on
their own instruments.
The voices are never right,
the intonation flat. We sit
far away, drinking beer, or
don't go on those nights.

There are other nights, and
the beer is better because
you are not trying
not to listen. Yeah:
that's when
the beer sounds better.



Moe Whalen The Distorted Red White and Blue

The Other, Another and I

When young, I carried a paperback book called Existentialism from Dostoyevsky to Sartre in the back pocket of my dungarees, with the title showing, and self-consciously filled notebook after notebook. I never let ignorance interfere with my pretentiousness, and it's from embarrassment that I haven't looked at those notebooks in decades.

But one morning, a half-remembered dream leaves me scrambling for some half-remembered pages in a tattered notebook labeled "Summer of Love -- Golden Gate Park Vignettes." I find the title "You and Me Are Not Necessarily We" and read aloud:

I'm tripping in the park. After all, it's been three days and the last trip has worn off. I need to test the purple wedges that Superfreak wants to front me. It's late afternoon, the fog is thickening, I'm alone for a change because the clan jammed into Gary's panel truck and went to Big Sur while I stayed in the city to turn a deal that fell through, and Jeanie's at a bread-baking class at the Episcopalian church that's trying to feed the 100,000 starving teen-age hippies who've mysteriously materialized in the Haight-Ashbury.

An old beatnik approaches my bench. Not a tourist -- thick wool navy blue sweater against the summer fog. Shaggy beard and pony tail shot with gray. Steel-rimmed glasses, weathered Greek fisherman's cap with a rakish tilt, jeans, some strange sneaker-type footwear -- like hightops, but gray leather with canvas bits, and thick gnarled soles that leave footprints with a texture I've never seen before in the fog-damp dirt.

When he sits, I give him a smile and a nod -- even with the saucers landing, I try to maintain civility and grease the wheels of society -- but he stares straight into my eyes. I stare back. I'm not fooling anybody. Despite or because of his years, he knows why my pupils are the size of ebony nickels.

"You remind me of old photographs of the Sixties," he says with an easy grin.

I think he means my old-fashioned beard, although his is even bigger.

"Ulysses Grant?" I ask. "Whitman?"

"No, nineteen-sixties."

"That would be... now."

Shocked, he asks tentatively, "Are you from Worcester?"

"Damn. I thought I lost the accent even before I lost the town."

"Wild guess. You live at 1907 Page Street? Is this the Summer of Love?"

"That's what the newspapers call it," I say, ignoring the address question. If he's some kind of supercop, he should know without asking. "Also a wild guess?"

"My name is Bobby Bradford," he says abruptly. I'm beyond responding. He looks down at his hands. "Ah. Of course. I'm dreaming about myself, 54 years ago. This is a dream."

"Maybe for you, pal. I'm totally conscious, myself."

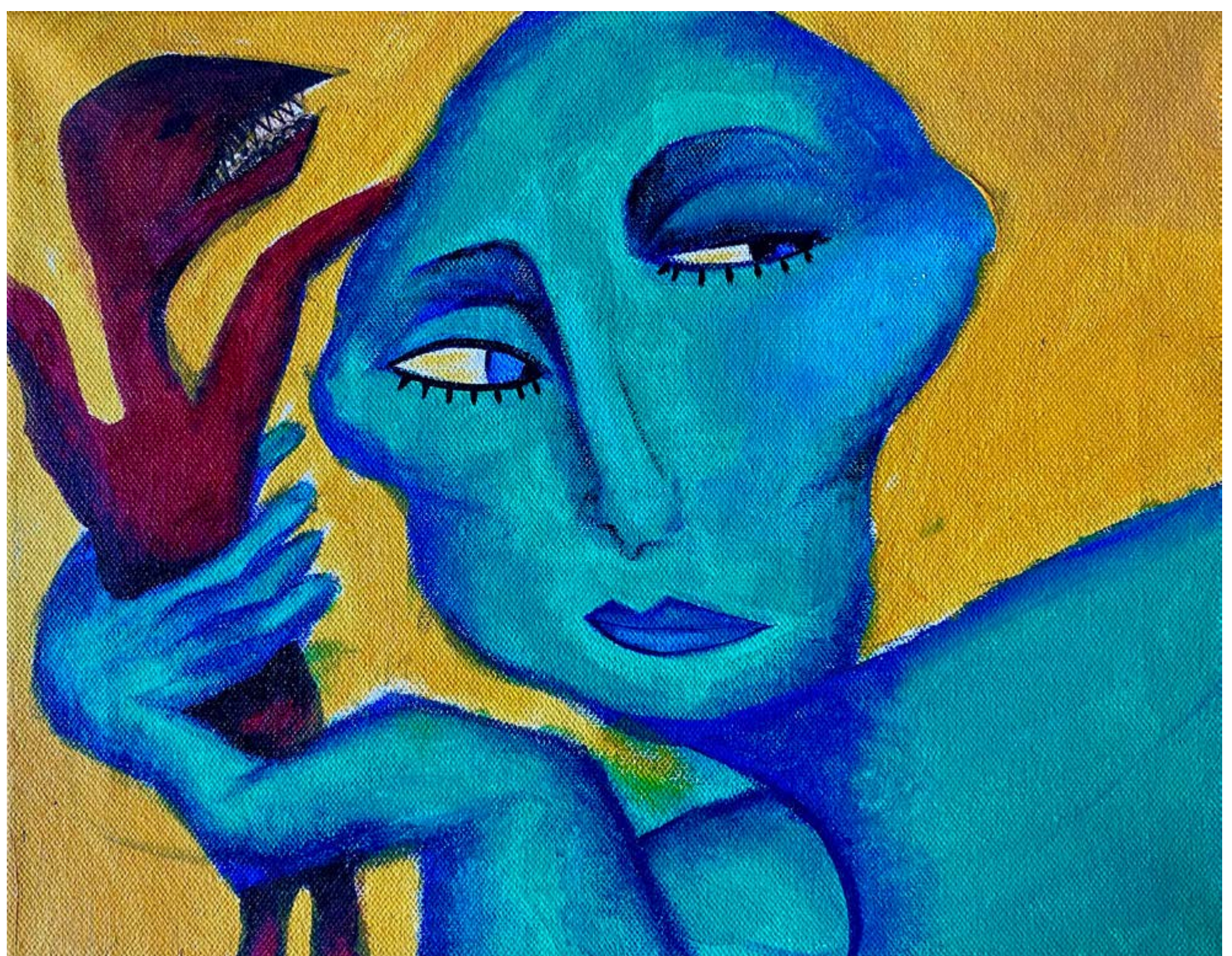
"You don't believe me," he says, relaxing now that there's a category for this experience. "Let's see. Virgo with moon in Libra and Cancer rising. Your wife, excuse me, not yet, your girlfriend, your old lady, is a Virgo with moon in Cancer and Libra rising. Your best friend BJ is a Cancer with moon in Libra and Virgo rising. Once, you saw him climb up that tree, right there, and disappear for three days. You're playing the soothsayer in Julius Caesar at the Straight Theater. Did the dress rehearsal on acid. Decided you don't want a career in theater because you got tired of telling people how magnificent they look. Hitched across the country three times. Think the Berkeley radicals are counterproductive, but you're a guerrilla in the psychedelic revolution. Believe me yet?"

"You're just part of my trip," I shrug.

"Very much a part of your trip. You might say I'm going to be your trip."

"Trying to freak me out?" I ask, half-seriously considering that he might be an old weirdo, wandering around the park looking for tripped out hippies of his own approximate size and shape and complexion -- we do look alike, although he's thicker and grayer, but hardly an uncommon type -- and gets his kicks blowing their minds. A rapist of the mind-fuck variety.

He shrugs back. "I can't freak you out. You've never had a bum trip.



Jane Kovac **Not This Time**

You never will. At least not in the next 54 years. Can't say after that."

He retreats into silent thought. This is good, because I'm not in a word-space; I mean, the foghorns a mile away resonate in the base of my spine, the fog wisps in one ear and emerges unimpeded out the other, the writhing trees and my body melt and re-form under a relentless wind massage.

Nonetheless, I try to achieve a few moments of linear thought. I don't know if dreams are real, but trips are. Meta-real, even. So I suspend my disbelief to see what he (I? we?) has for me. Advice? A clue, a warning, a blessing?

"If you're dreaming this," I begin, "54 years from now..." hesitant, hopeful... "then we must have saved the world."

Shrug. "It's still here. Don't know how much credit we can take. Still pretty shaky."

"So... if my future is to be you-I, are you-I trying to strip me-you of my-your pretensions of free will? Are you-I inevitable?"

Shrug. "Maybe you face a jillion real choices in a jillion parallel universes and range freely through any of them. And I'm a coincidental random you who happened to be the one to dream you. But I wouldn't bet on it."

"Are you going to lay some shit on me?" There is no malice in his vibe, but my equanimity is fluxing nonetheless. "Trick me out as a prophet? Plant self-fulfilling prophecies?"

Shrug. The old bastard shrugs a lot. Shit. So do I.

"No agenda. Just dreaming," he says. "I thought maybe you'd tell me something."

"Let's trade," I suggest, mollified. "One message apiece."

"All right. You first."

"No, you. You have the benefit of 54 years of hindsight. Go ahead. Set the tone."

"All right. Here. Don't just screw around all the time. Work hard at your art, whatever it is."

"That's two messages."

"Not really. Your turn."

For a dizzying moment I feel his thoughts, from the inside, and I blurt out, "You've never made it, have you?"

"What do you mean, 'made it?'" Evasive.

"No hit record. No best-seller. No juicy pivotal roles. No canvas in a museum collection."

"Not one. Disappointed?"

"Hell no," I say bravely. "Success would ruin me. It would be unnatural. My art would be warped. Compromised."

"Good. Now you tell me something."

"What can I tell you that you don't already know?"

"Tell me something I've forgotten."

"I don't know what you remember." I think. Hard. "Okay. Here's what I give you: I agree."

"Agree?"

"To take your advice. To not just screw around all the time. And to work at my art."

"Thank you," the old beatnik says, smoothly standing -- "I have to pee" -- and gliding away as the fog thickens, dissolving before he reaches the first tree.

I go home to find a pencil.

Bill Jones

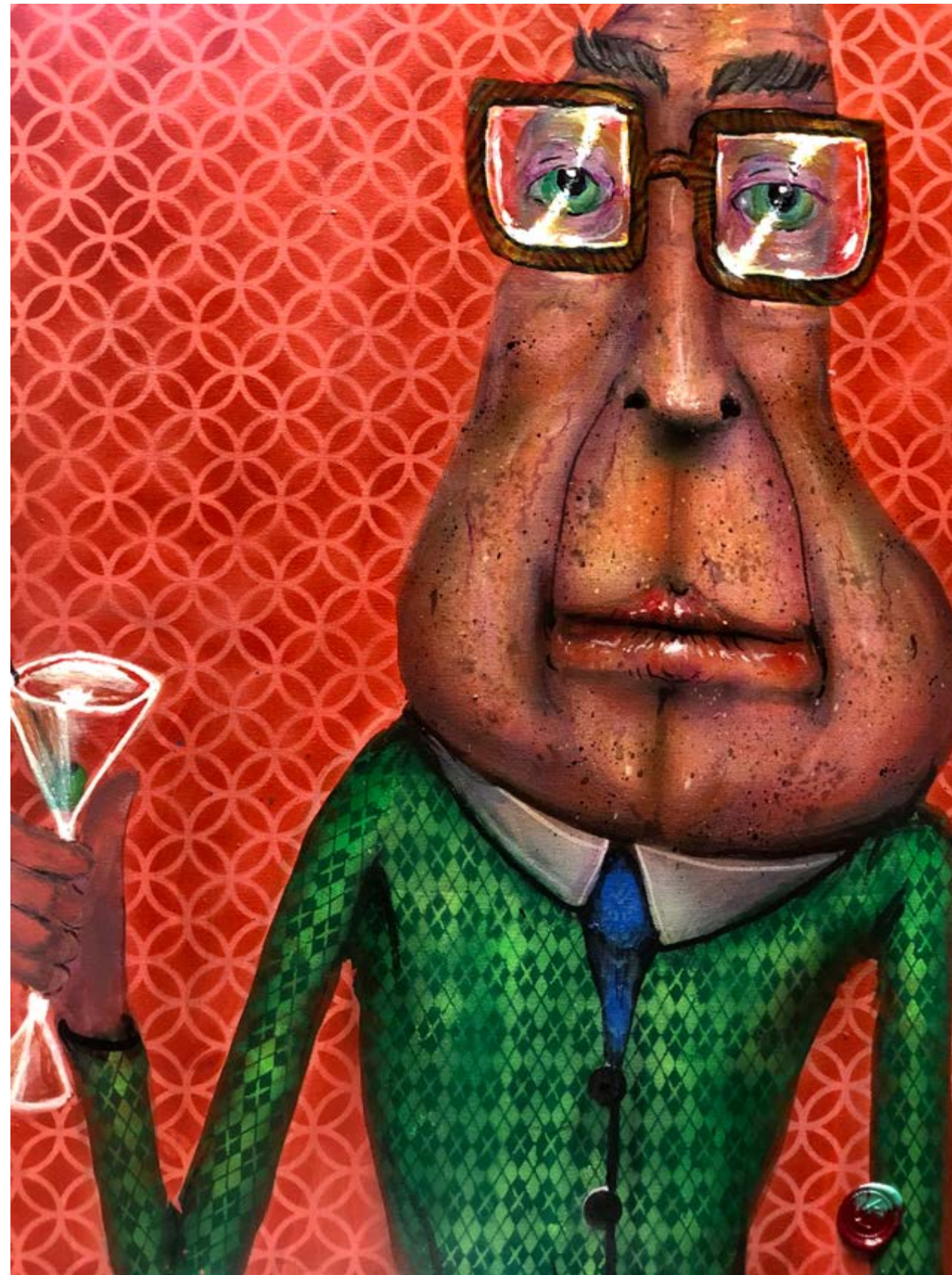
Cat Man

Growing up in Frederick, Maryland in the 1950s, there wasn't much for me to fear. I could walk all over that town of 20,000 people alone—through Baker Park, to The Frederick Pool, to the C. Burr Arts Library with its children's reading room, and to the Tivoli Theater for Saturday matinees. I could ramble past the stores on Patrick and Market—White Star Lunch, Kresge's 5 & 10, People's Drug, and to St. John's Elementary, my school on East Second. The one fearful exception for me was the Cat Man.

I encountered this guy on the way to school one October morning as I was taking the shortcut up Church Street to St. John's. With my books under my arm and a brown-bag lunch, I was watching the ground, trying not to trip on the uneven wet brick sidewalk. I was jolted up when I heard a hiss and a man leapt out at me from one of the arched passageways between the rowhouses. His face was contorted, his hands in claws as he screamed and spat like a feral cat, ready to attack and tear with fangs I could only imagine.

I dodged around him and sprinted the three remaining blocks to Chapel Alley and the school, never looking back. At first, I doubted what I had seen, suspecting maybe a Halloween prank, but the guy was old, a thin dark-haired adult, and clearly, he had acted in rage. Still I might have doubted myself if minutes later Salvatore Bianco and his sister Rita hadn't come tearing up Chapel Alley themselves, Salvatore loudly calling out to me, his sister crying, terrified. Together we ran to the principal's office, where Sister Raymond tried to calm us down before calling our parents and the police. They showed up fast, my father grim-faced, Salvatore's mother crying a bit herself. Officer Nichols, a kind, gray-haired patrolman assigned to city schools, proceeded to ask us questions.

Five minutes later, Salvatore and I were riding with Officer Nichols in the front seat of his cruiser, circling the blocks near the school and then slowing down on Church Street to identify the building and the



John Renzel Chauncey DuBlauincey

passageway where the Cat Man had appeared. Neither Salvatore nor I wanted to get out of the car, so we got a lift back to school, said goodbye to our parents, and headed off to class with a great story to tell and a memory that would never leave us.

The Frederick-News Post had a story to tell, too, when the incident was reported the next day in its crime log. The paper indicated that the event had occurred, but the investigation had not been completed and the Cat Man had not been apprehended. He had apparently disappeared. Sure enough, a man by his description had lived in that building in a dingy furnished efficiency at the end of the passageway. According to the landlord, he had been there for less than a month, had been quiet and a little strange but no trouble, but now he was gone without a trace—no clothes in his closet, no personal effects, just a dozen cans of Puss'n Boots cat food in the refrigerator and a litter box to be emptied. Parents and children were advised to be on the lookout, but as far as most people were concerned, that was the end of the story.

But it wasn't for me. Ten years later, I had moved to Baltimore and was walking south on Cathedral Street headed to Pratt Library. There on the marble stoop of a rowhouse across the street stood the Cat Man stretching in the doorway as though he had just woken up. I couldn't resist. This man had been the stuff of my nightmares.

Ducking traffic, I scrambled across the street to the bottom of that white stone entrance. "Don't I know you from Frederick?" I challenged him. Clearly shocked, the man looked down at me, his face twisting as he snarled and snapped like a German Shepherd. He ducked inside the building, slamming the outer door behind him. Mounting the steps, I found the door locked, the vestibule empty. When I headed up the street again, I refused to look back, despite the vicious barking in the distance.

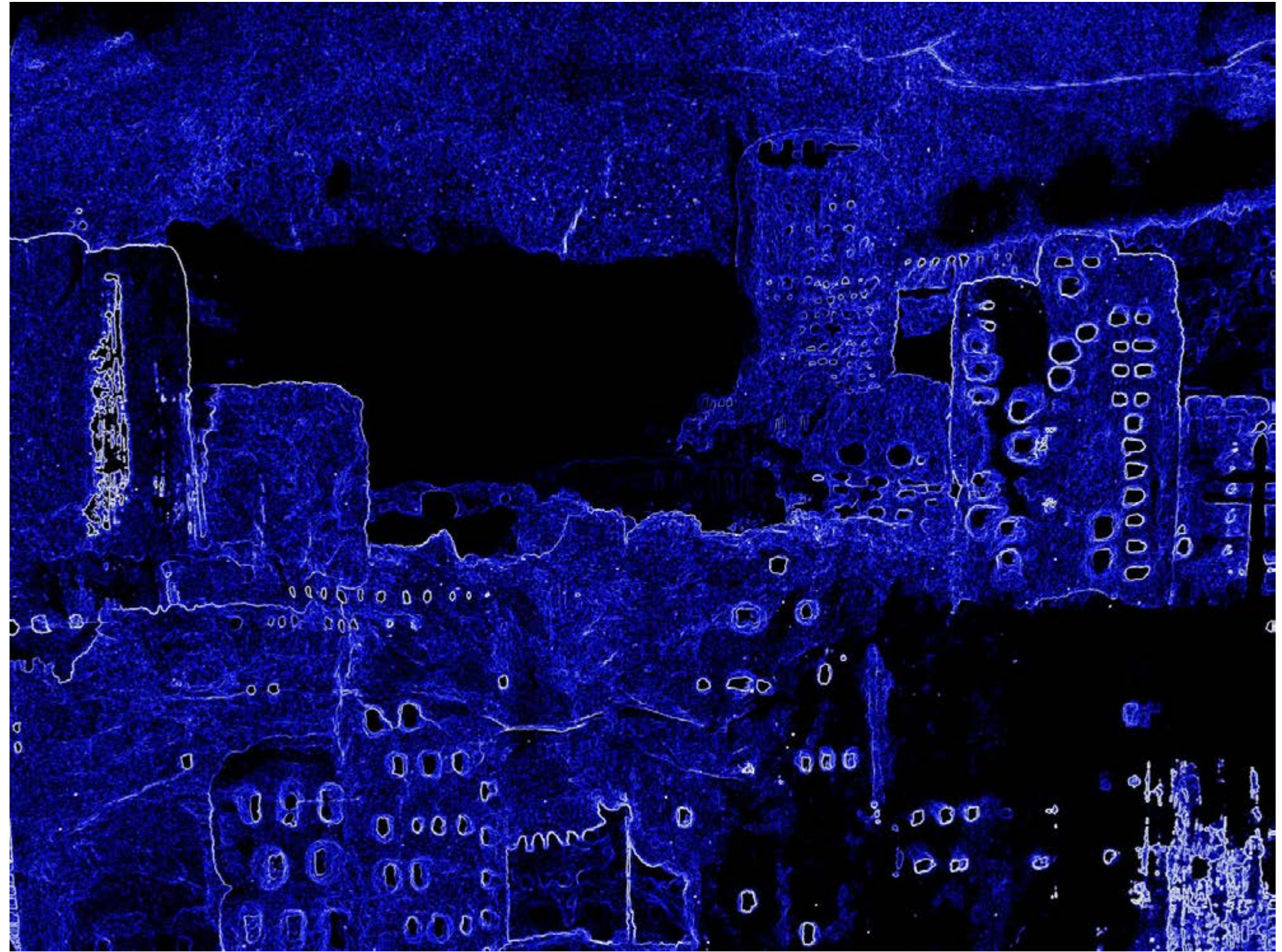
Dad pulls down the grimy shade over the kitchen window, cutting the view of Mrs. Hauser's sparkling clean white house across the dirt driveway. Mrs. Hauser, who's Dutch, was a war-bride, and now is a widow. The trays of developing fluid are set out on the counter. Mom turns off the light and Dad gives a final twist of the red light bulb into the socket above the stove. In its dull glow, he unrolls the film. Grayish images struggle to appear, become sharper blacks and whites, defining a moment of time, pinning it to paper. Negative becomes positive in a stew of chemicals. Dad is always taking pictures, using the light meter invented by his boss, "Freund." Our kitchen is full of immigrants and refugees, and sometimes I feel like one too, the masked outsider who hasn't learned the language yet, the strange one who doesn't speak.

Outside, in the spring darkness, the poinsettia cuttings that Mom stuck in the ground under the kitchen window weeks ago are sprouting new leaves. A yellow climbing rose sends out new branches along the back fence. My friend Margaret lives three houses away. We crawl behind the fence, making our way through narrow spaces between garages and apartment houses to come out on the next street over. When our little brothers want to play Cops and Robbers with us, we are the robbers and it's where we disappear, a place our brothers never think to look.

This is Los Angeles in the late 1940s. Neighborhoods are defined but porous; neighbors tolerate us, as long as we don't step on their lawns; girlfriends in those houses down the block come and go. Families are always moving, like our relatives, like us. We're all of us like those cuttings Mom makes, of an exotic plant that will grow up to the window sill, like everyone who wants room to grow, in a different part of the country, or even of the world.

People bring their baggage with them, like New Yorkers with their East Coast accents and energy. Like Mrs. Hauser, and even though we're Jewish she likes Mom enough to invite her into her antiseptic kitchen, but not us kids. We would disturb her home. Lots of people dislike Jews, refuse to live next to blacks, keep the Chinese in China Town, and Mexicans in Barrios, over on the "east side." Japanese have been concentrated in camps, but soon they'll be released. Girls grow up into wives and mothers, and need to be kept safe, which my grandmother warns me about: Don't take candy from strangers. Watch out for men in overcoats. Hollywood is full of kidnapers and sex fiends.

Lilies-of-the-valley grow along the shady side of the garage, and two fig trees grow in back. A climbing rose captures the back fence. My mother planted poinsettias under the kitchen



Patricia J. Machmiller **Blue City**

window. Once she raised canaries in cages by the garage, but they are gone now.

In a corner of our living room is a Morris chair where I like to sit and read. Mom doesn't want me reading all the time, but I do anyway. The books are about animals that survive being eaten, or about orphaned girls who overcome obstacles, like Jane Eyre, or rebellious girls like Jo March. A rose colored wool carpet covers the oak floor; a brownish couch is placed under the big front window. The living room opens to the dining room with its built-in cabinets and shelves where Mom keeps her collection of Erle Stanley Gardner mysteries, old scrapbooks, and photo albums. The scrapbooks, with dance cards and mementoes from speak-easies, the cocktail napkins imprinted with racy cartoons, are my intro to the world of sex.

Last year, Margaret's family moved into the two-story house that once was a nursery school. She wears her shiny, straight hair in two long braids. My hair, thick and wavy, is also in braids, but fat ones. Our mothers do the braiding every morning. The days she doesn't ride her bike to school, we walk to our sixth-grade class together, down Washington Blvd. for six blocks to Arlington Elementary. When we come to Ralph's Market with its big picture window we stop to watch the bakers inside rolling out dough for bread and coffee cakes— men dressed in white hats and white aprons; sometimes they smile at us. The dough is pale yellow, thick and spongy, coated with flour. The bakers roll it, cut it, fold it into loaves, and pile them into pans to rise. The loaves all look the same as they're sent off to the ovens. I look through the window like I'm seeing our futures there on the wooden tables.

The last week of school, Margaret, the strongest girl in class, challenges Ray, the strongest boy, to a game of tetherball. The whole class crowds in to watch as each hits the ball in turn to twist it on its long rope around the pole. Ray's final shot, the rope shorter by now as it wraps the pole higher each time the ball's hit, reaches the top, and now it's Margaret who gives her last, greatest punch to send the ball even higher, wrapping it tight above Ray's. I knew she would win, not that I would lose her. That weekend, the class invited to an evening graduation party, after hot dogs and cake and the usual games, some settle down on the floor for Spin the Bottle. When it's Margaret's turn, she spins the bottle so it points at Ray, and then, unlike everyone else, she leads him into a dark closet and closes the door.



John Smyrl Land's End #1

Failing Grade

She spoke to her mother every day. So when she kept calling, and no answer... They don't know. Her mother'd fallen. Maybe blood in her brain, from high blood pressure. They don't know. Autopsy over the weekend. Services on Tuesday. Two days before Thanksgiving.

She speaks in a whisper, staring at the wall above my shoulder. I have moved from behind my desk to a chair across from her, a transparent gesture stolen from a colleague years ago. After I ask, she begins to count her many siblings, all in the state. A sister an hour away. A brother in jail... She's been trying to stay with it. Graduating in the spring. Pledging a sorority. A secret. Finally told her Mom. Telling me. Trying to go. I suddenly understand she's the youngest, the baby, probably first in college. Clumsily, I tell her not to worry about her grade. Good news is, she's finished her major assignments. She nods. Don't worry about the absences. I'll work it out. And don't worry about returning to class today. I immediately sense I've misspoken, see her in her dim cell of a dorm room where I've consigned her. Of course, I amend, she'd be more than welcome. She's been missed.

This young black woman, too large for the chair she clings to, hands in her lap. Unmoving. She's come to me because I'm the one she found. I am ashamed I can conjure nothing of use to say, nothing at all. I think of asking of her father but don't. A comment about my own parents drops into the void. I recall Student Services, mumble about talking to someone, that I can e-mail her the information. She nods, doesn't otherwise move. Let me just look into this right now, I say, sit tight, and escape into the hallway. I go from door to closed door, a bit panicked, then find one secretary not out to lunch. She looks up Counseling and prints on an index card the building, room, and two telephone numbers (one after-hours).

Back in my office, she takes the card, has stopped tearing. Tell you what, I say, why don't I walk us over there right now? We'll see what they're up to. Yes, a way to get her moving and out of here. Yes, shameful. I don't know, she says. I'm afraid. She smiles, embarrassed. I don't know. Maybe I'll call them after Tuesday.

The phone rings. I hesitate, then pounce. It is my broker, returning my call. Jesus Christ. I ponder for a second, then cover the mouthpiece. I'm sorry, I need to take this. We've been playing tag for two days. She nods again. Otherwise, doesn't move. Pause. Well. I start talking. Hey, Jeff. Yes, please make those adjustments to the retirement accounts. Yes, I officially approve. No, I have the prospectus here but can't right now. I've a student in my office. Yeah. Okay. Thanks.

I hang up, terse and ridiculous, and return to the chair across from her. There seems no point in further pretending, so we both just sit still. The door is open, but no one passes, no one intrudes or intercedes. I think of my recent concerns, trivial and largely self-inflicted. Then, I don't think of much at all. We sit, breathing, living, staring into our own private spaces. Waiting. Almost meditative. Almost, peaceful.

"So much life coming at me," she says, a whisper so fine I can barely hear, whisper little more than breath. I look at this young woman, so different from me, resident of a different world, and tell her, and try to mean it, that her life will get a lot better, that she has to hang on, that wonderful things will happen. Her response is as near to silence as spoken words can come. We sit on like that a while longer. Through one moment. Then another. Then I stand and move behind the desk to my usual place.

John Renzel **Grand Duchess Butterbrickle**

John Smyrl

Nanas Spoon

Insomniac hunger drives me from my bed.
I wash and cut vegetables and slice tempeh,
set a pot to boil with dried kelp stock
and reach for a spoon to taste growing broth.
The spoon is an old bent matriarch
like my Nana who owned it before my mother.
It is probably older than I,
stained chocolate with the memories
of love in countless careful stirrings
and secret unremembered recipes.
Nana never went far from her house or
from simple country fare in her kitchen.
Chickens and vegetables were just out back.
My mother lit fires for the big iron stove.
Surrounding fields hummed with night or
woke with golden birdsong, tidal bay air,
and the mournful horn of a big iron train.
Nana would not know what to do with my
teriyaki tempeh nimonono ramen.
She might wonder how far I had strayed
from country Irish roots, saved
in a root cellar, or a long gone field,
or leaning against a whitewashed shed,
gone and replaced by unknowing strangers.
But I have the spoon, stained with remembering
and bent with watchful stirrings and servings.
When I hold it, I sense her hand, still stirring,
still blending the things I have from her,
mixing the old with the new.



Shannon Silva **The Playpen**



John Renzel Petey

Janet Amalia Weinberg

Portrait of a Killer

I'm not one of those people who think it's okay to murder so-called insignificant beings like rodents and bugs. That's right, I said, "murder." Did you ever see the wild look in the eyes of someone about to crush an annoying insect? Those are killer eyes.

I've been told I can get preachy on the subject but I believe we've all got a killer inside and when we kill anything, no matter how inconsequential it may seem, we feed that violent part of ourselves and strengthen it. There's enough brutality in this world without adding to it. Right?

So when I noticed some fruit flies in my kitchen one morning, I let them be. They had as much right to be there as me, I thought. Well, almost as much.

By lunchtime there were more than a few. A cloud of bugs hovered over the dishes in the sink and there were scouts by the fruit bowl and the trash. It was time to get rid of them.

I thought it would be easy. All I had to do was make my home uninviting. I needed to clean up my act anyway. So I washed the dishes, stashed the fruit in the fridge, dumped the trash in the outdoor bin and waited for the buggers to leave for greener pastures.

They didn't. In fact, they called in reinforcements and launched an all-out invasion. Soon they were everywhere, disrupting the calm of my kitchen with their frenetic beat. It was bad enough when they zoomed at my face and into my eyes but when they attacked my avocado sandwich - while I was eating it! -- I was ready to kill.

Of course I did no such thing. But I still had to get rid of them. Besides driving me crazy, the disgusting creatures feed on rotten food and can carry disease. So I took a calming breath and came up with a humane solution: I'd lure them into an empty yogurt container with a chunk of banana. When they settled on the bait, I'd slam on the lid and release them outside. I'd probably have to repeat the process a number of times before I got them all but still, it seemed like a win-win solution.

It wasn't. It didn't take long before a horde of the pesky things was attracted to the trap but only a few very large bugs landed on the banana. The rest hung out near the rim and escaped when I slapped the lid shut.

I re-set the trap. Once again, an agitated mass converged on the rim and several large ones settled on the banana. This time I was more patient. As I waited and observed the little bastards, I made a startling discovery. Those super-sized bugs? They were actually attached pairs!

I had created a fruit fly singles bar! The damn things were hooking up in my yogurt container, laying eggs on my banana, spawning new generations in my kitchen. It was an infestation! A plague! And it was out of control!

That was the limit! Hadn't I been patient? Given them every chance to leave? But no, they just kept coming and coming. They were asking for it!

I grabbed the killer spray and went after them.

I worked myself into a frenzy but got 'em all. Every last one of the hateful creatures. They left me no choice. I couldn't help it if they refused to be saved. Right?



John Renzel Pharoah Top Ramen II

Marjorie Power

Very Good Fortune

 befell
 let's-call-him-Phil
twice in a single week
 in a year when his life was a see-saw
balancing youth and age.

This joy came well deserved.
 Others felt blessed by his luck.
 When he entered the room
they couldn't help but believe
all manner of thing shall be well
 (-- reclusive Julian of Norwich).

 Within a few months
 I noticed a turn, a change of tone, a thorn.
This showed in his face which despite the full beard
 came off as sharpened, aimed.

 Not that he thinks
he's better than the rest of us, just
better than himself. See? He isn't here anymore
when he enters the room.

Jiang Pu

The eternally obvious

In response to René Magritte's "The Eternally Obvious: <https://www.menil.org/collection/objects/7329-the-eternally-obvious-l-evidence-eternelle>)

I.
Be cut broken
to become whole
Lover
behind your face
your shoulderless
armless & fingerless
soul
my mother's locked up
body
eternally
floating
on time's river

II.
The obvious
breasts become
eyes somewhere else
They think these are yours
but how do they know
what is real
How can they be certain
My wrinkled fingers poke through
the black hole of time
hungry to touch
Here, now
in my paintings
your ripe breasts are and will be
eternally immortal

III.
"Everything we see hides another thing"
Nothing was hidden
before the first man and woman
savored that forbidden fruit
Nothing, including this nudity
in the spotlight of sunshine
A flower, unapologetically
unashamedly
opens to the world
Lover
what and why are you still hiding
from me



Elizabeth Parashis untitled

IV.
Downhill from your breast
and all the way
to these knees--
"Ceci n'est pas une pipe"
Ce ne sont pas des genoux
Were they created to worship
or to stand strong
hang on there
What is this human life for
in a land where 100 men rain from sky

V.
Your feet
don't walk on water
Your feet
walk
on earth
Obvious fact
But
how can this not count
as
a miracle?
Wherever you go
I'll follow

Façade

Tommy DeLuca sat eagerly on his black, leather couch, in his two-bedroom apartment, two blocks east of downtown Burlingame. His dark Mediterranean features highlighted his handsome, tapered face. His long-time roommate finally arrived, opening their apartment door. “Hey Hobie, did you see it?”

“See what?”

“My name’s on a friggin’ building.”

“You mean on the façade?”

“Façade? It’s on the front of the building. You know those buildings off 101 that say, ‘Your name here?’ Well, I walked inside to ask about it. \$10,000 for 30 days, the guy says. So, I cleaned out my savings... And my name’s on a friggin’ building. Cool, right?”

“You cleaned out your savings?”

“Do you know how many people drive down 101 in a month? They’ll say, ‘Hey, I remember Tommy DeLuca. I knew that guy was cool.’ Oh, by the way. I might be a few days late with the rent. My teaching check didn’t come yet.”

Tommy DeLuca was the first student to sweep the yearbook awards in the 56-year history of William Henry Harrison High School. He won “best personality,” “best looking,” “most athletic,” and “best dressed,” as well as “best hair, eyes, smile and body.” One final accolade elicited curiousness from those who knew him best. “Most intelligent” seemed quite a stretch for someone whose C-minus GPA was generously augmented by the ghost-homework efforts of Hobie and others.

After graduation, Tommy bounced around from job to job before he stumbled into his current career. He had seen an article in the newspaper about the urgent need for high school substitute teachers and, at the prompting of Hobie, signed up to take the CBEST test, a first requirement for prospective teachers. At his surprise, Tommy somehow passed the general knowledge math and English tests, then applied for a five-year temporary credential.

“Check this out, Hobie. They’re going to let me teach with a temporary credential, while I earn my permanent one.”

“What do you have to do to get the permanent credential?”

“I don’t know. Take some classes, I guess. But I have, like, five years to do that.”

“That’s great, Tommy.”

“Except I don’t know the first thing about teaching. I don’t even like school.”

“It’s a job. Just go with it. You might end up liking it.”

Tommy never made much of an effort to earn his permanent credential, but kept working after the expiration of his temporary one. He wasn’t sure if there had been some sort of clerical error, or if the administration was so caught up in red tape that they

hadn’t gotten around to inquiring about his lapsed permit. He figured he would just keep on subbing until someone told him he couldn’t. Tommy’s sub job allowed him to work as much or little as he wanted, and he seldom had to actually teach anything. The idea of “independent study” worked for just about any subject in any class room. The students surely had no problems with it, nor did the regular teachers. They were too busy coughing and sneezing, and were just happy they had someone to fill in. Tommy assumed the school administrators either didn’t know what was happening, or didn’t care. He never heard a complaint from anyone.

“What are you teaching tomorrow, Tommy?” asked Hobie.

“Teaching? I’m a sub. I don’t teach anything. We do independent study.”

“What class?”

“It’s Mrs. Gates’ U.S. history class.”

“She’s still there?”

“Yeah, she’s about 80, I guess.”

“That’s an A.P. class. Do you have a lesson plan? You might have to actually teach something, you know.”

“They gave me a lesson plan, but I didn’t look at it. They’ll do independent study. I’ll learn about very recent sports history, like the Giants’ game in the paper. These kids learn too much in school. Algebra formulas, how to build a molecule. Too much useless stuff. Clutters up the mind.”

“But just in case, do you know anything about the First Continental Congress or the Louisiana Purchase or Lewis and Clark?”

“Uh, just the usual stuff.”

“What about Rosa Parks?”

Tommy thought for a moment. “She was a bus driver, right?”

“No. She was a black woman who refused to sit in the back of the bus.”

“Well, that makes sense. You can’t drive a bus from the back of it.”

“I’m not sure if you’re kidding.”

“And,” continued Tommy, “her name is a complete sentence. Rosa Parks.”

“You are correct there, Tommy. Rosa Parks. Subject and verb.”

“And it’s what she does, too.” Tommy smiled proudly. “It’s the perfect name for a bus driver.”

The following morning, just before 7:30, Tommy blithely sauntered down the main hall of the history wing of Harrison High, on his way to room 74, waving and making small talk with students for whom he’d subbed for. Mary Jensen, a shapely and pretty brunette, busy in conversation with her cheerleader friends, suddenly averted her attention toward Tommy. She called out flirtatiously, “Hi Mr. DeLuca, how are you today?”

Tommy smiled. “Doing fine. How about you?” Still big man on campus, he thought.

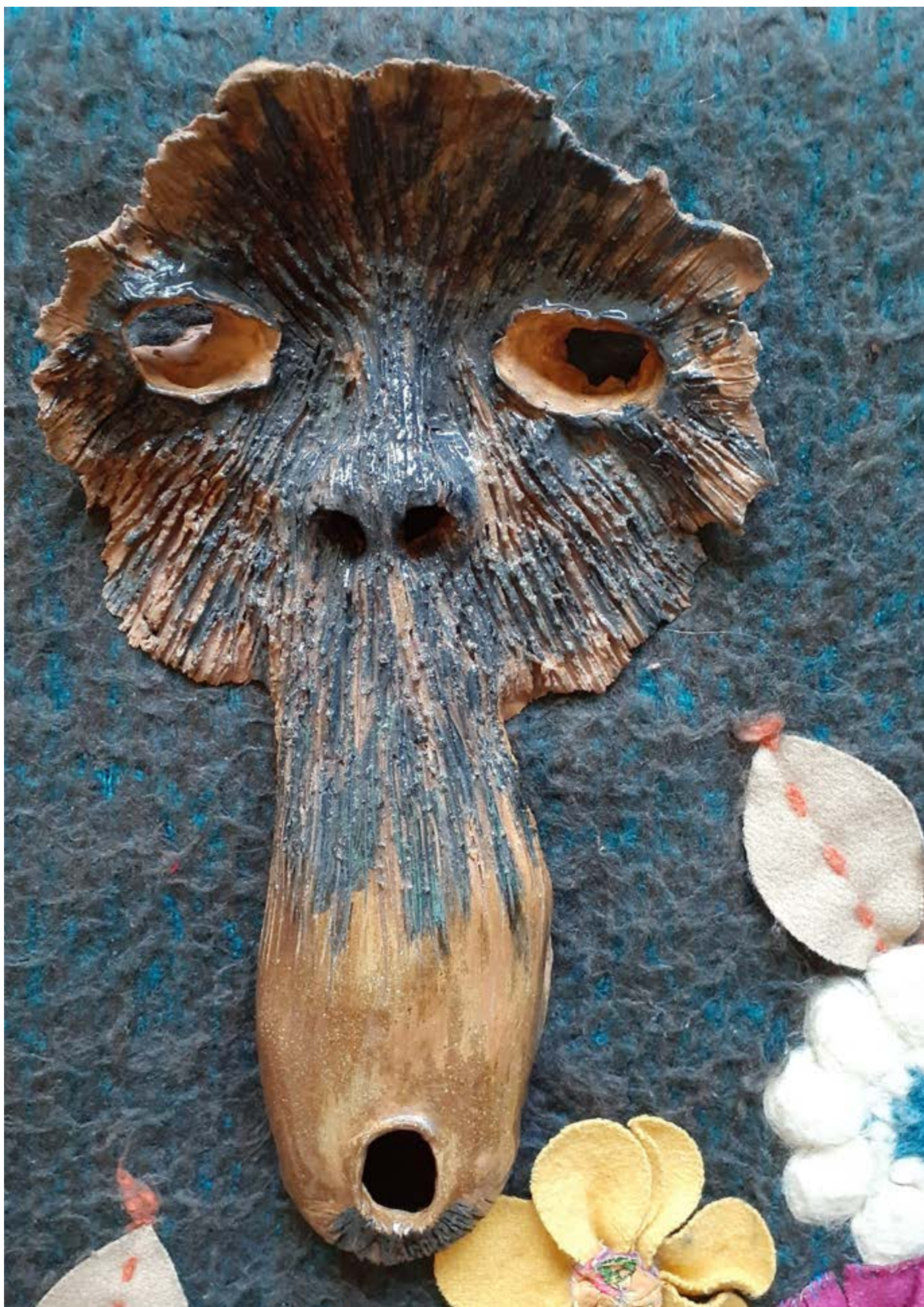
Just then, Johnny Steeple, a three-sport athlete, greeted the sub. “Hey, Mr. DeLuca, how about those Giants?”

Tommy flashed a thumbs-up. “They’re looking good this year. A playoff team, for sure.”

A few seconds later, Tommy reached Mrs. Gates’ room 74 A.P. history class. He pulled open the heavy wooden door and walked into the room, a freshly minted San Francisco Chronicle tucked under his left armpit. Nestled under his right arm was the most recent issue of People magazine. He didn’t often spring for the quasi-gossip rag, but in this issue he found interest in a story about a billionaire man who lives in a bubble with his



Moe Whalen untitled



Moe Whalen untitled

wife and kids. And Tommy had 50 minutes to kill. He immediately noticed the teacher's immaculate desk. A stackable file tray, stapler and Scotch tape dispenser were evenly spaced atop the glass-topped wooden desk. Several bookcases lined the wall below the windows, with titles such as "U.S. History: By the Numbers" and "The Life and Times of Thomas Jefferson." The books were arranged neatly in the cases, left to right, by height. The room was perfectly divided up of six rows of six desks, and there was not a scrap of paper on the floor. I hope the bottoms of my shoes are clean, Tommy thought.

"Hello. My name is Mr. DeLuca and I'll be your sub today."

"Hello," answered most of the 27 students.

"You know, I was a student here 15 years ago. Mrs. Gates was my teacher. And she's still alive!" Tommy thought it odd that his remark was met by relative silence. "Please embark on independent study for the next 50 minutes," he said, convinced the word "embark" sounded confident.

As Tommy turned and started toward the comfortable leather seat he figured he would occupy for the remainder of the period, he was suddenly stopped by words from a rogue student. "We're supposed to learn about Abraham Lincoln today," said a small bespectacled boy from the back of the room.

Caught off guard, Tom thought briefly. "And you will today... in independent study."

The small boy shot back, "Mrs. Gates told us the sub would have the lesson plan and we would learn about Lincoln."

"I understand, but look, I'm just a sub." Tommy raised his hands, palms up, for emphasis.

"With all due respect, Mr. DeLuca, our parents pay you to teach us," countered a brash, saucer-eyed red-haired girl from the second row.

Then a petite, pony-tailed blonde girl spoke up, and filtered her plea with a softer edge. "Please, Mr. DeLuca, we need to learn about history so we can get into a good college."

Tommy fell for the appeal. He wiped his left hand over his suddenly perspiring forehead, and took a deep breath. When he thought perhaps the students could see him blushing, he felt hotter still. This isn't what I bargained for, he thought. I'm not a teacher. I'm just a sub. I don't even have a credential. He slowly took another long breath, then exhaled. "Today we will learn about Abraham Lincoln. Please open your book to ... uh, what page are you on?"

"Page 106," called out several students, mostly in unison.

Tommy located a textbook on Mrs. Gates' desk, and opened it to page 106. I hope to God this is the right book, he thought. He knew infinitely less about the 16th president than his eager senior students did, but he had a lifetime of social success to buoy him. I was pretty popular right here in this very school, he thought, and I have my name on a friggin' building. This should be a breeze, he said in a faint attempt to inspire hope.

For the next several minutes, volunteering students took turns reading paragraphs aloud, as Tommy stood in front of the class, half-heartedly listening. Tommy couldn't help but think about that billionaire bubble guy and his family. If I had a billion dollars, he thought, I'd take a world cruise. A man in a bubble would barely fit into those small ship cabins, though he'd probably have enough money for a suite. But still, how do you show up for afternoon tea in a bubble? That'd be awkward. Just then, Tommy's bubble man thoughts were interrupted by Jimmy, an inquisitive student, the kind that every class seems to have. "Why did they call Lincoln Honest Abe?"

Slightly startled, Tommy answered, "No, it was George Washington. He was the honest one... Honest George."

"I never heard that," countered Jimmy.

"Yes. When he was a boy, he cut down a cherry tree. He gave it forty whacks. When his dad saw what he had done, he gave it forty-one. But he copped to it, and soon became Honest George. Why do you think it says 'In George We Trust' on the dollar bill?" Tommy hoped the lack of conviction in his head didn't reveal itself in his speech. Honest George? Or was it Curious George?

"Are you sure Lincoln wasn't called Honest Abe?" called out another student.

"You're thinking of that car salesman on TV. Come on down to Honest Abe's and get a great deal on a pre-owned car. Though I wouldn't trust that guy as far as I could throw him."

Tommy's response was deemed insufficient for skeptical young Jimmy, who doubled down on his sub. "So you're saying Lincoln was not called Honest Abe?"

Clearly outwitted by his students, Tom countered in the only way he knew— he made something up. "Look, Lincoln was far from honest. He lied... about a lot of things... said he was six-foot-four, but that was with his stupid-looking hat. Five-eleven, tops. And he couldn't dunk a basketball, either."

Another student piped up. "Who cares how tall he was? He freed the slaves."

Tommy, mentally backpedaling, still managed to send out a salvo. "Freed the slaves? Those guys'd been escaping for years. They had the underground tunnel, you know?"

And so it went for another 20 minutes, until wise Jimmy made a suggestion. "Mr. DeLuca, can we do independent study for the remainder of the class?"

A rushing wave of sadness and defeat washed over popular, likeable Tommy DeLuca. "Yes, Jimmy. I think that is a good idea." Tommy walked over to Mrs. Gates' leather chair, sat down, and opened the Sporting Green. I can't believe the Giants blew a six-run lead, he said to himself. That's four straight losses. I thought they'd be contenders, but I guess they're just pretenders. He opened his People and spotted a photo of the billionaire bubble man sitting on a cruise ship, sipping afternoon tea.

Erin Redfern

Riddle

I am no creature, but your new familiar. I am fleet without feet. I have grown more capacious as my size has decreased. I know without knowing and talk without tongue. Worked worry stone, I am continually touched but unmoved. Devoid of divinity, I heed every prayer and can light a dark way in a pinch. When lit, I am a substanceless drug, dangerous for drivers. Though I reflect nothing, people see themselves in me. They are alone in my company.



Elizabeth Parashis **untitled**



Shannon Silva **Spine and Sacrum**

Kara Provost

Rising

Taste of tea
like bitter brown earth
calling me to something

as steam whispers off
black cold ground
in early morning sun,

light rising
from behind tangled trees
in the empty lot across the street.

Empty of houses
but full
of crazy-leaning trunks, brambles

crunch of years
of fallen leaves, skulls
of thrown-out jack-o-lanterns,

rustle of gymnastic squirrels
chased by feral cats, smooth gray-suited catbird
yowling commentary

punctuated by twitches of his neat upright tail
and dry knocking of woodpecker,
head red against dark wood.

In spring there'll be
an explosion of green
like every cycle before

and we'll go a little crazy
with joy staring at the empty lot,
the skeleton trees refreshing with leaves
as if something we'd never seen.

The Witch

The people in the small town in Guatemala where I lived as a Peace Corps volunteer in the early 1990s called her La Bruja. The adults spoke the nickname with affection, the children with reverence and even a kind of wonder.

La Bruja worked in the main market, located in a concrete building in the center of town. The market, which had gray walls and smelled of cabbages and onions, had few windows. Because Santa Cruz Verapaz was located below a cloud forest, and because the rainy season was long, sunlight rarely entered to brighten the vendors and their baskets of tomatoes and avocados and beans. I avoided the market. I did most of my shopping in the kinds of places where I was accustomed to shopping in the States: in convenience stores and supermarkets in Cobán, the large town to the north.

I'd seen La Bruja twice, at a distance, in a corner stall, where she stood behind buckets of dried herbs. And from a distance, I'd concluded she looked, in her faded güipil and corte, the native Maya blouse and skirt, as old and wrinkled as time.

Whenever my Guatemalan friends spoke of La Bruja's medicinal powers, I never expressed skepticism, although I was skeptical. For my medical care, I traveled to the capital to see the U.S.-trained doctors and nurses the Peace Corps employed or recommended. I couldn't say such trips were always satisfactory, however. Six months after I'd come to Guatemala, I developed a persistent, low-grade headache. None of the painkillers I was given, neither Tylenol nor its stronger, prescription-only counterparts, succeeded in eliminating my discomfort.

To rule out a brain tumor, a Peace Corps nurse sent me to a neurologist for a CAT scan. Upon looking at the image of my brain, the neurologist concluded, "I see nothing," which, even if it likened me to the Scarecrow in *The Wizard of Oz*, gave me great relief. It didn't, however, cure my headache. Later, I learned my headache might have been caused by iodine pills I was taking to treat amoebas. Treating the side effects of a drug with another drug isn't an unfamiliar refrain in Western medicine.

Despite my headache, I had faith in the medical care I'd grown up with. When I learned that a group of doctors and nurses from the States was coming to Santa Cruz to examine anyone who wished to be seen, I talked up their visit. My p.r. campaign was unnecessary. During my time in Guatemala, the United States enjoyed a reputation as a generator of the miraculous. We had put a man on the moon, after all. And in our movies and TV shows, we seemed capable of life-saving ingenuity, even miracles.

Before dawn, a line began to form at the door of the church where the doctors and nurses had set up their clinic. By the time the door was opened, the line extended two blocks. Confident the doctors and nurses would cure my



Shannon Silva *Anadamayi Ma*

friends' and neighbors' illnesses, I had volunteered to serve as a translator.

The visitors saw more than two hundred patients, spending about three minutes with each. They saw skin rashes and distended bellies and tuberculosis. They prescribed medicines the townspeople could not afford; they dispensed bottles of aspirin and vitamins that, whether effective or not, would run out in thirty days. When they left, they didn't leave behind improved health and gratitude but disappointment and disillusionment. My friends and neighbors looked at me as if I had betrayed them. Perhaps I had.

But they forgave me or seemed to. The next time a group of U.S. doctors and nurses came to town, however, I stayed far away.

My headache persisted, and one morning, deciding I had nothing to lose, I marched off to the market to see La Bruja. As I stepped up to her stall, I was startled to find that my image of her, gleaned from a distance and influenced by witch stereotypes, was wrong. She was my age, mid-twenties, her hair lustrous, her skin smooth. She wasn't toothless; her smile was dazzling.

A pair of old women came to buy from her. I'd heard the names of the herbs they requested—manzanilla, rosa de Jamaica, flor de muerto—but I didn't know their equivalents in English. Even if I had known them (chamomile, hibiscus, marigold), I wouldn't have associated them with natural medicine or even herbal tea. They had not been part of my life in the States. When the old women left, I explained my condition to La Bruja. I emphasized my discomfort by groaning, something she found amusing.

She said, "How long?"

I told her.

La Bruja nodded and gathered herbs. Aside from manzanilla, their names were unfamiliar. But they smelled fragrant. She told me how long I should boil them, how long the water should sit, how I should strain them. "And if you must," she said, winking, "add a little sugar."

I returned home and did as she'd instructed me. An hour later, I sat in my courtyard and drank La Bruja's tea, feeling more hopeful than I'd expected.

In memory, my headache disappeared immediately, although at least a day must have passed. Later, I wondered how much of her tea's success was due to the elation I felt at meeting a beautiful witch, how much to my willingness to embrace a cure I'd been skeptical of, and how much to circumstance—the iodine in the amoeba medicine might have finally disappeared from my body.

In the immediate aftermath of my recovery, however, I



Shannon Silva **Disorganized Attachment part I**

was simply glad to be feeling well.

Two years later, I returned to Guatemala as a Peace Corps trainer. I lived in Antigua, a forty-five-minute drive from the capital. As a tourist town, Antigua was home to dozens of U.S.-trained doctors and other healthcare professionals. If I were to become ill, I would have available the best health care in the country.

In Antigua, my friends were the Spanish teachers who worked at the Peace Corps training site. All of them lived in inexpensive areas of town or in nearby villages. We would often spend evenings after work in Antigua's central park, sitting on benches and trading jokes. I became especially close to one of the teachers, a woman named Angelica, eight years older than I was.

Angelica didn't identify as indígena; she didn't wear a güipil or corte. But although she dressed in jeans and T-shirts and was dating a man from England, who had left a year before with promises to return, I wouldn't have called her ladina, which suggested a close association with Western values.

Short, with high cheekbones and an easy laugh, she was quietly critical of the United States. She knew about our healthcare system and the pressures on doctors to become masters of business as well as medicine. As someone looking after her elderly father, she was especially critical of our treatment of ancianos. Even so, she wasn't dogmatic or radical. She was simply realistic about the shortcomings that beset even the world's lone superpower. I found her clarity rare and refreshing.

Angelica was proud of her country's indigenous culture. When I bragged about climbing Volcán de Agua, the 12,000-foot Water Volcano located outside of Antigua, she congratulated me on the feat but suggested the best part of my experience must have been the confianza my indígena guide had shown me by sharing stories of his family and his year in the Guatemalan army.

I remained in Antigua after the volunteers I'd trained headed off to their assignments at the start of the new year. I wanted to finish the collection of short stories I was writing. (It would become my first book, *The River of Lost Voices: Stories from Guatemala*.) But I also didn't want to give up the life I was enjoying. I didn't want to leave my friends, particularly Angelica.

Angelica and I continued to spend evenings in the park, commenting on the tourists from the States and Europe, laughing at the mangled Spanish they employed to shoo away barefoot indígena girls selling purses and placemats. We rode a chicken bus to Lake Atitlán, and even though she didn't know how to swim, Angelica agreed, in the lake's cold



Shannon Silva **Disorganized Attachment part II**

blue water, to try. She stood neck deep ten yards from me and hurled her arms against the water, swallowing and spitting and gasping—but ultimately reaching me. We rode a chicken bus south to Escuintla, her hometown, and spent an evening in a sweltering bar drinking Gallo beer with four of her childhood friends, sharing stories about our pasts.

When a man I'd known in Santa Cruz stopped by my apartment one evening and found me and Angelica sharing dinner and beer, he turned to me, grinning, and said, "Vos, I didn't know you had a novia." I looked at Angelica. We had never acknowledged that our friendship might be something more. As obstacle, there was, after all, my imminent departure and her boyfriend, who, though she had pictures of him on her kitchen wall, seemed more phantom than flesh.

"No," we assured him simultaneously, although, at least in my case, with a certain wistfulness, "we're only friends."

I had a nonrefundable plane ticket to leave on a date in late April. A week before my scheduled departure, I woke up with a pain in my belly akin to someone having punched me with a spike-covered glove. I spent the day three steps from my bathroom. When Angelica came to see me in the evening, I greeted her clutching my stomach. "Dolor," I said, a needless explanation, as I was by now doubled over. She expressed sympathy and said, "I'll be right back."

It had begun to rain, and when she returned ten minutes later, her black hair was slick and water was beaded on her cheeks and nose. She held in her hand a collection of herbs. I recognized sweet aromas from La Bruja's bouquet of years before mixed with earthy and bitter smells. I had no idea where Angelica could have found the herbs. The market closed at five and it was past six. She lived a mile from my apartment; she couldn't have walked to her place and back in such a short time. It was as if she'd found them in a field. When I asked her about it, she merely smiled.

She instructed me to lie down on my couch as she stepped into my kitchen. I heard water filling a kettle and my gas stove hissing. Before long, the kettle sang, and I sat up, waiting.

Minutes later, Angelica sat beside me, her hair still damp, and placed a mug in my hand. "It will taste like death," she warned. She was right, but I drank it. I drank it all—and felt better.

My recovery was complete, however, only when she placed her hand on the back of my neck and caressed it with her strong, warm fingers.



Shannon Silva **Open Story**



Al Preciado **The Persistence of Yearning**

Sydney T. Devera

Quotes: That May Help You (Or Not)

Why do they say that money doesn't grow on trees
but banks have branches?

Why would you try to fight a guy nicknamed "Boxer"?

Why do they say, "A penny for your thoughts"
but I'm still broke?

Or you don't know my life unless you've walked a mile in my shoes
but your shoes don't fit me.

You always have your two cents to put in
then what happened to the other penny?

Did you think you could outdrink someone named Wino?

Be careful what you wish for
I should have been reckless.



John Renzel Cletus

Devin Kent Sodd

the tearman

the tearman comes to lift my wallet of pain
seated in lined petrol chairs
(his) gaze strolls down airport terminals
surging with tech-iRomances, lit faces
bristling furtive witness of his dance upon this face
his day beats down on lovers rattled shoulders
carrying unknown pieces of life to the cemetery of sentiment
the tearman comes to lift my wallet of pain
he leaves me broke and in love with my life

ARooney

Tumors Detected

The sign was eight by eight and had been torn from the bottom of a cardboard box. In thick black ink it said, Tumors detected, \$1. He had tied it to the post at the dog park with a piece of string. People avoided him, even looked away, as though he were a cancerous mass. What about this lump here, a couple stopped to ask, more as a joke. The detective searched near the dog's belly with his hand, then touched the lump gently. Lipoma, he said tersely. Nothing to worry about. His hands had become sensitive after the protracted loss of his own animal. Without being asked he stopped a young woman and reached for her dog. She picked the tiny terrier up to defend it, hold it close. I'm sensing heat, he said, may I hold her for a moment. When she handed him the dog the heat dissipated, but he passed his hands over it to be sure. He opened another camp stool next to him and invited her to sit down. I don't have a dollar, she said. I do, he said. How do you feel? She began to cry, at first softly and then convulsively. It's still early, he said. Chances are good. The woman sat next to him for a time without speaking and he patted her shoulder. Finally, when she had gathered herself, she put the little change she had in his cup and went away.



Deborah Kennedy **Uncovered**

Greg Bachar

The Last Leaf

The last leaf didn't want to leave its branch at the end of the season, so it held on and suffered through a year of introspection.

When spring arrived, a new leaf pushed out of its branch hole and sent the old leaf fluttering to the ground.

A few remnants of last season's leaves asked the old leaf, "Was it worth it? What did you learn?" The old leaf shook its head and shed a tear. "I didn't know trees miss us when we go."



Moe Whalen **untitled**

Theo Carter

Nomad

“you are who you hang with,” says Dad
so I cling to no particular clique
I label myself a nomad and wander the
campus Halls during my lunch

Feeling ever dowdy in my second hand clothes,
my confidence plummeting like my eyes with every leer I receive,
my holey shoes sopping up the storm,
single-handedly drying the sidewalk, a step at a time

Oozing into class like a wraith I take my preemptive seat
In the back hood covering my face melting in the crowd
“Even a dullard can seem intelligent if he stays quiet enough,” says Dad
“Good morning, sir,” says the teacher, all eyes on me



Shannon Silva **Father's House**

Contributor Biographies

Carol Hamilton is retired from teaching 2nd grade through graduate students from Connecticut to Tinker AFB Oklahoma, from volunteer medical translating, and storytelling. She is a former Poet Laureate of Oklahoma and has published 17 books: children's novels, legends and poetry and has been nominated nine times for a Pushcart Prize.

Trinh Mai is a visual artist who utilizes a breath of natural, traditional, and inherited media that hold their own histories. Her work dovetails refugee and immigrant history into present-day living. She is a Walker-Ames Fellow, and engages communities in creative storytelling, also working with humanitarian organizations, including the Friends of Hu \square Foundation Children's Shelter in Vi \square t Nam and Angkor Hospital for Children in Cambodia, also partnering with the International Rescue Committee to develop creative projects for refugee children.

Darrow Emily Hornik is a senior at Stanford University studying Spanish and Human Rights. Her poetry combines her passion for both social justice and the Spanish language.

Merryl Leslie Kravitz: A lifetime educator, Merryl has taught middle school Language Arts, high school Spanish, and university-level teacher preparation courses. Merryl believes that teaching language is about making it your own. As a child, Merryl's mother used scrambled word games as entertainment on the New York City subway. While everyone else played with dolls, Merryl learned that language was fun and made it hers. She endeavors to teach this to her students.

Deborah Kennedy: An artist and writer, Deborah Kennedy's work investigates the challenging relationship between ourselves and the larger natural world. Her book, *Nature Speaks: Art and Poetry for the Earth* features her illustrations and poetry. *Nature Speaks* was recognized with a Silver Nautilus and the Eric Hoffer Poetry Book Award. An independent review described it as "fascinating, thought-provoking, and soul-stirring." Recently, Kennedy's artwork was presented on a full-sized billboard in *The Billboard Creatives: 2021* project in Los Angeles, CA and online.

Terry Ehret, one of the founders of Sixteen Rivers Press, has published four collections of poetry, most recently *Night Sky Journey* from Kelly's Cove Press. Literary awards include the National Poetry Series, California Book Award, Pablo Neruda Poetry Prize, nomination for the Northern California Book Reviewer's Award, six Pushcart Prize nominations, and an NEA Translation Fellowship. From 2004-2006, she served as the poet laureate of Sonoma County. She is currently translating the collected published poems of Mexican poet **Ulalume González de León**.

Elizabeth Parashis. This magical universe had me bumping up against interesting things that kept me dazzled in fantasia. But then Covid-19 came along and sczaped my skin and tangled my hair, doing away with all my false masks, allowing the true magic inside to come out and play. Come play with me :)

Susan Johnson: Poems of mine have recently appeared in SLAB, Trampoline, Rhino, and Little Patuxent Review. I teach writing at UMass Amherst and my commentaries can be heard on nepm.org.

John Renzel. I was born and raised in San Jose. I attended James Lick High School (class of '82), and later University of Santa Clara (class of '86). I've always been fascinated with classic portraiture because of the story it can tell about the individual. Often such portraits are stern and imposing (like the kind you might find in an old court house) or overly idealistic... they have their own magical presence. So I like to create what I call "fictitious portraits" which are characters that don't exist but remind you of people who do, in a humorous, or sometimes in a dark way. If my painting gets a giggle or a smile, I feel it is a success.

Steve Denehan lives in Kildare, Ireland with his wife Eimear and daughter Robin. He is the author of two chapbooks and three poetry collections. Twice winner of Irish Times' New Irish Writing, his numerous publication credits include Poetry Ireland Review, Acumen, Prairie Fire, Westerly and Into the Void. He has been nominated for Best of the Net, Best New Poet and The Pushcart Prize.

Louise Kantro, retired teacher and cat-lover, volunteers as a CASA (court advocate for foster children). After receiving her MFA in 2003, she has published poetry and prose in such journals as *Quercus Review*, *Cloudbank*, *The Chariton Review*, *the new renaissance*, and *South Loop Review*. During the pandemic, she sewed masks for a women's shelter and scanned family photos spanning decades.

Al Preciado, artist, poet, and community activist, has been painting and showing his work in shows for over 25 years in galleries ranging from San Jose and San Francisco to Rocklin College in New York and the Blue House Gallery in Frankfurt Germany. His poetry has been published in numerous reviews and anthologies and he has given readings for many years across the South Bay.

J. J. Steinfeld: Canadian poet, fiction writer, and playwright J. J. Steinfeld lives on Prince Edward Island, where he is patiently waiting for Godot's arrival and a phone call from Kafka. While waiting, he has published 21 books, including *An Unauthorized Biography of Being* (Stories / Ekstasis Editions/2016), *Absurdity*, *Woe Is Me*, *Glory Be* (Poetry / Guernica Editions/2017), *A Visit to the Kafka Café* (Poetry / Ekstasis Editions/2018), *Gregor Samsa Was Never in The Beatles* (Stories / Ekstasis

Editions/2019), and *Morning Bafflement and Timeless Puzzlement* (Poetry/Ekstasis Editions/2020).

Joel Savishinsky: I am a retired professor of anthropology and gerontology, and after a career of teaching, research and scholarly publications, I came to the writing of poetry and essays a bit late in life. My books include *The Trail of the Hare: Environment and Stress in an Arctic Community*, and *Breaking The Watch: The Meanings of Retirement in America*, which won the Gerontological Society of America's Kalish Award for Innovative Publishing. My poetry, fiction and nonfiction have recently appeared, or are forthcoming, in *Atlanta Review*, *Beyond Words*, *California Quarterly*, *The Decadent Review*, *From Whispers to Roars*, *The New York Times*, *Poetry Quarterly*, *SLANT*, *Toho Journal*, and *Windfall*. I live in Seattle, helping to raise five grandchildren, and think of myself as a recovering academic and unapologetic activist.

Moe Whalen. I believe my purpose as an artist is to challenge society's faults, mock, mimic, satirize, entertain and document psycho-social injustices and some of my own personal experiences. Thru collage and photography I use my characters to communicate my thoughts and emotions. I was born to express myself.

Robert F. Bradford is an Adjunct Professor of English and Humanities (Dominican University of California). His plays have won two Bay Area Theatre Critics Circle Awards (Best Play, Fringe of Marin Festival), and been produced in the Midtown International Theatre Festival and by Construct Theatre Company in New York, Black Box Festival (College of Marin), Ross Valley Players, Petaluma Arts Council, and Café Amsterdam (Fairfax, CA), and published in *Mused* (Bella Online). Stories have been published in *Bohème Magazine*, *Wordrunner*, *SoMa Literary Review*, *Slow Trains Literary Journal*, *Coastline Journal*, *Carbon Culture Review*, and *Long Story Short*.

Jane Kovac is a young artist and musician from San Jose, California. She mostly works with acrylic paints but occasionally does pieces that are solely pencil or ballpoint pen. You can find some of her murals around at local community centers in San Jose. You can find her art on Instagram under the name @kanejovacart.

Bill Jones is a writer from Baltimore, Maryland. His poetry, fiction, and creative nonfiction have appeared in numerous small press magazines and journals across the country. His chapbook, *Swimming at Night*, won a Baltimore Artscape Writing Prize for Poetry, and Apprentice House Press has published two collections of his writing—*At Sunset, Facing East* (2016) and *Still Life in a Hurricane* (2019).

Henri Bensussen's stories have been published most recently in the anthologies *Of Burgers and Barrooms* (Main Street Rag), *Beyond the Yellow Wallpaper: New*

Tales of Madness (New Lit Salon Press); and Lisa Locasio, ed., *Golden State 2017: Best New Fiction and Nonfiction from California*, Outpost 19 Press: San Francisco, CA; Her chapbook of poems, *Earning Colors*, was published by Finishing Line Press in 2015. She earned a B.A. in Biology at UCSC.

Patricia J. Machmiller is a poet, artist, and translator. She has two books of haiku, *Blush of Winter Moon* (Jacaranda Press, 2001) and *Utopia: She Hurries On* (Swamp Press, 2017). With Fay Aoyagi she translated the haiku of Kiyoko Tokutomi, *Kiyoko's Sky* (Brooks Books, 2002). She has four books of haiga, including *Mountain Trail: Following the Master* (www.lulu.com). Her latest book, *Zigzag of the Dragonfly: Writing the Haiku Way*, (YTHS, 2020) is a guide to writing haiku.

John Smyrl is a wandering ghost of the South Bay, a coffeehouse philosopher, and almost a monk. His poetic sensibilities were permanently deformed by spending time at the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics. He is a chant choir director. In addition to these pure words, he writes other words for filthy lucre. He is working on a new book of previous and current poems, and was previously published in the *Thrashing Doves Review*.

Gaylord Brewer is a professor at Middle Tennessee State University, where he founded and for 20+ years edited the journal *Poems & Plays*. His most recent books are the cookbook-memoir *The Poet's Guide to Food, Drink, & Desire* (Stephen F. Austin, 2015) and two collections of poetry, *The Feral Condition* (Negative Capability, 2018) and *Worship the Pig* (Red Hen, 2020).

Shannon Silva. The Piano scroll paper installation at Radius Gallery is part of a recent series of paintings, videos and sculpture made from sewn together player piano scroll paper. I am thinking about the meaning of shared truth. Can we agree the simple painted form on the paper is oval? And when light (of awareness?) shines through the piano paper passing through the small holes, the painted oval disappears. On the ground we see the shadow, a beautiful pattern of rectangular lace. Can truth be documented in moments when awareness touches matter, space and light? All pieces begin with an object holding loaded history at the end of life. I have a conversation with the material delighting in its decay. The end result reflects life's beautiful fragility. Its focus holds us at the point just before complete dissolution and surrender. My background as a Somatic Psychotherapist is reflected in the work, it is relational and body centered, if we back up even further a deeper love can be seen, a desire for spiritual awakening. Making art at its best is a conversation with the Divine and the end result is a documentation of touching a moment of truth.

Janet Amalia Weinberg: I am a former clinical psychologist and the editor of an anthology which was an Independent Publisher Award Finalist (Still Going Strong; Memoirs, Stories, and Poems About Great Older Women, Routledge). My stories have appeared in *Room, Crack*

the Spine, Children, Churches and Daddies, Evening Street Review and elsewhere.

Marjorie Power's newest collections include *Sufficient Emptiness*, Deerbrook Editions, 2021; *Oncoming Halos*, Kelsay Books, 2018; and a chapbook, *Refuses to Suffocate*, Blue Lyra Press, 2019. Publications which have taken her poems recently are *Barrow Street, Commonweal, Mudfish, Ginosko* and *Main Street Rag*. She lives in Rochester, N.Y. and can be found at www.marjoriepowerpoet.com.

Jiang Pu holds a Ph.D. in Education from Michigan State University and M.A. in English literature from Nanjing University. She is a published author, editor and translator of many textbooks, children's literature and literature books including "Romantic Poems"(2002). She is the Founder of NextGen Education and a founding member of the National Book Club for Kids. She is a bilingual poet and has recently started to send out her poems.

Raymond Farnsworth is a writer from the San Francisco Bay Area. His work has appeared in the literary magazines, "Unicorn" and "Talisman." He is a former weekly columnist for the Burlingame-Hillsborough Boutique and Villager newspaper. He is fairly well convinced that the secret to a long life is to eat plenty of cereal and watch a steady stream of Huckleberry Hound cartoons. His theory cannot be fully confirmed, however, for another 40 years or so. Stay tuned ;)

Erin Redfern's work has recently appeared in *Fire & Rain: Ecopoetry of California* (Scarlet Tanager), the *New Ohio Review*, *Split Rock Review*, and the *North American Review*, where it was runner-up for the 2020 James Hearst Poetry Prize. Her chapbook is *Spellbreaking and Other Life Skills* (Blue Lyra Press). She teaches writing in San Jose, California. erinredfern.net

Kara Provost has published two chapbooks, *Topless* (Main Street Rag) and *Nests* (Finishing Line). Her poems appear in *Connecticut Review*, *Main Street Rag*, *Ocean State Review*, *Tar Wolf Review*, *New Verse News*, and other journals, and in a number of anthologies, including *The Skinny Poetry Anthology*, *Nuclear Impact*, *Lay Bare the Canvas: New England Poets on Art*, and *Shifts: Women's Growth through Change*. Kara teaches writing at Curry College and leads community poetry workshops. She is currently revising her first novel.

Mark Brazaitis is the author of eight books, including *The River of Lost Voices: Stories from Guatemala*, winner of the 1998 Iowa Short Fiction Award, *The Incurables: Stories*, winner of the 2012 Richard Sullivan Prize and the 2013 Devil's Kitchen Reading Award in Prose, and *Julia & Rodrigo*, winner of the 2012 Gival Press Novel Award. His latest book, *The Rink Girl: Stories*, won the 2018 Prize Americana (Hollywood Books).

Sydney T. Devera, an incarcerated poet of Filipino and Spanish heritage, is a committed member of the Elmwood Poet Society and a poetry ambassador who encourages

and welcomes other inmates to express creativity through poetry.

Devin Kent Sodt: This body was born in Islamorada, raised in the Santa Cruz Mountains. The love that I have from my ancestors makes this life a beautiful adventure. I have been a hammer swinger, yogi, curator of harmony in life, and one who has fallen short. I study and practice Kriya Yoga for freedom in the Infinite. I know this life is a blessing and poetry as a means to express the radius of experiences with the limitations of language.

ARooney was an associate professor of writing at Jindal Global University. He has taught in India, Nigeria, China and around Denver. His fiction and poetry have been published in the US and internationally. His recent novel, *The Autobiography of Francis N. Stein*, was published in 2019 by Madville Press. He has an MFA from Naropa University.

Greg Bachar earned his M.F.A. in Creative Writing (Fiction) from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. His writing has appeared in *Conduit*, *Rain Taxi*, *Indiana Review*, *Redactions*, *Litro*, *Sentence*, *Arroyo Literary Review*, *Southeast Review*, *Pontoon: An Anthology Of Washington State Poets*, and *Maintenant: A Journal Of Contemporary Dada Writing & Art*. He is the author of the books *Three-Sided Coin*, *Sensual Eye*, *Curiososity*, *Beans*, *The Amusement Park Of The Mind*, *The Writing Machine*, *The Book Of Was*, and Executive Producer of the 2015 documentary *Elstree 1976*.

My name is **Theo Carter** and I have been incarcerated for nearly four years. I am half Black, half Filipino and thirty-four years old. Poetry and freewriting are brand new to me. I've essentially self-taught freewriting through reading novels. Growing up, I've always held poetry in a negative light, so joining a poetry group was a tremendous effort for me, an effort I'm glad I put forth. Although admittedly, poetry comes extremely difficultly, I hope to turn this unease into growth.

Sonia Sharma. Previously published in Bombay, where for years she uplifted marginalized artisans, Sonia currently brings these experiences to her writing. Chosen as a presenter for the 2021 Parliament of World Religions, she has been serving and facilitating large congregations, for over a decade, at Sai Baba Temple in the San Francisco Bay Area. Sonia regularly shares her poems and writing with local literary groups.

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