

• FALL/WINTER 2020 •

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Sangam

LITERARY MAGAZINE

PHIL FLOTT • BETH FORD • ARTHUR GINSBERG, M. D. • KATHIE GIORGIO
JOHN GREY • CAROL HAMILTON • RUSTIN LARSON • LAURA MAFFEI
THOMAS R. MOORE • RIKKI SANTER • HELEN TZAGOLOFF • TOM UKINSKI
J. WEINTRAUB • WILLIAM WELCH

SANGAM LITERARY MAGAZINE

English and Philosophy Program
Department of Languages and Literature
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For more information on Bruegel's *Landscape* please see the online exhibit from Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Brussels, via *Google Arts & Culture* at <https://artsandculture.google.com/exhibit/MgIyXpmuNdclJg>

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SANGAM LITERARY MAGAZINE

Sangam features and represents works by established as well as emerging writers, irrespective of age, sex, race, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, or national origin. In this way, *Sangam*, a Sanskrit term for **joining together**, is, in fact, a coming together for all.

Sangam publishes in the fall and spring of each academic year through the Department of Languages and Literature at Southern University and A&M College's flagship campus in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. As Louisiana's largest Historically Black College and University (HBCU), Southern University is located in a bend of the Mississippi River, a locale with important literary significance, most recently home to Louisiana's Poet Laureate, John Smith, who is among its Baton Rouge campus faculty.

Masthead

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MCGUCKIN, PH.D.

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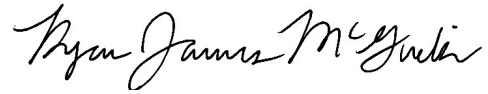


Strange Times

FALL/WINTER 2020 INTRODUCTION

With the spring and summer months of COVID-19—the public closures, the range of pleas (and refusals) to wear masks, the strangeness of social distancing—along with on-going, turbulent debates over racial justice, gender equality, law enforcement, nationalism, globalism, social media politics, technology, economics, government elections, and the risks and rewards of enacting change or upholding norms, the need for a literary voice is one that may soon reemerge as it has done amid past domestic and international times of change, times that more often resemble fiction than reality. Be it for the opportunity to venture through realms that face the concerns of our time or for more imaginative terrains to help quell our shared anxieties, collected here in *Sangam* Fall 2020 are works of poetry and fiction that aim to delight, educate, and even inspire. These works address a range of topics about the everyday, from thoughts about mourning past lives, the minute cares of love and family, coming-of-age milestones, or the differences between community and tradition; from tragic legal violence, the crisis of individual choice, and the increasing pressures of social tides; from the existential questions of self and the natural world, local color and expressive customs, and the entropy of change; and the frustrations of personae and identity politics, public health tensions, and new modes of survival. Among these topics, consider our Fall 2020 cover, Pieter Bruegel's *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*, a lasting visual because it joins the inexplicable and commonplace, for which W. H. Auden's "Musée des Beaux Arts," his famed poetic commentary about this painting, characterizes as our "human position," one in which tragedy hides in plain sight. Like Bruegel and Auden, the works collected here shed light on the modes of life that usually hide in the periphery. It is our hope that the writers of this collection shift this periphery back to the center of your

attention. In this collection, may you find a literary habit of mind to accompany these strange times.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ryan James McGuckin". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

Ryan James McGuckin, Ph.D

CHIEF EDITOR, *SANGAM LITERARY MAGAZINE*

POETRY

Phil Flott

MAY DAY

To bury Mom
we drove down a winding hill,
then had to walk farther.
Percy had operated the Delta Queen—
'Cajun', he felt he had to advertise,
though the blacks knew better—
we knew it was Creole.
He'd reached for the stars so high—
who would've thought a mixed
blood could succeed?
He was always wound
tight as a cypress root
in Ponchatoula swamps.
His cotton mouth fangs
poisoned the paid help
till finally he had no crew left,
had to abandon the boat.
This was his last time to honor Mom.
I spoke for her, in words of gold,
how proud we were of his efforts.
That pierced his heart.
He ran through cemetery pines clear crying,
caught in simple tenderness of birthright
our ancestors never knew was theirs.

Phil Flott

WINTER'S ONSET

The flock of birds is pepper in this south Nebraska sky, says my daughter, who, I thought, noticed nothing that was not the refined elegance of black, sleek dresses that make her look like a long, cool knife in Friday's night air.

The peppering birds wheel and careen in the nearly winter grey sky, that flock like a twelve year old, whose out-reaching arms cross the horizon he is trying to re-cover and touch to earth, first on his left, then with a bounce, his right.

I remember how a big, fat woman peppered her beans and peas and pane meat so that chosen black was a substantial portion of what she swallowed down, always from saucers, never just a large plate.

Her sisters say, they had to stomach my Mom's outraged anger (Hers was the closest to her Dad's, he, who, after he died, appeared to her in flames and beckoned her to come with him; but she said, no.).

She let everyone know with her too loud, too fat voice that no one, no more, no place would make her do anything she didn't want to do.

Her walking everywhere was the freedom of city birds. Copying her cocked head in that air of flights to liberty often made me fall to the ground. Each time startled me with the thousand flakes of gravel that embedded in my hand, a hurting melanin, almost.

Though I would shirk in fear before walking home to her neighborhood-filling voice, I used to imitate her and let those pepper flakes get caught in the little sacs of my small intestine.

But one day I tasted what the world could offer and quit buying black pepper. It has gone from my life the way sparrows disappear at winter's onset.

Arthur Ginsberg, M. D.

I CAN'T BREATHE

(for George Floyd)

Blood runs like water in the gutters,
soaks the earth with its history
of malevolent letting, all the veins
opened now, in its latest iteration,
a collective indignation met with smoke and fire.

So much unleashed from a flexed knee pressed
on the pedestal upon which a man's head rests.
Nights of shattered glass that echo 1938,
of pilferage and pillage, of brandished shields
and batons, flash-bangs and invective, to resurrect

the shining of Lincoln. What would he say
if he could rise, a colossus from his stone throne
and colonnades, to walk the Capital's broad avenues,
war weary in the shadow of history's haze.

He would tell us to remember the blazing heat
of the cotton fields, the overseer's whip cracking
on black skin, the Sycamore's dangling noose,
hobbling, burning and mauling by wild dogs let loose.
Slaughter of fathers and sons, the men and boys
he commanded, who spent their last breath to unlock
our brothers' chains. Surely some justice is at hand,

a time when pigmentation cannot define a man,
when carrying a quart of milk and other things to eat
down a public street, does not end with the nightmare
of handcuffs, clubs and bullets, vigils and prayer.
In the worst of times, on a rain swept eve, one seeks
a glimmer of light to soften this abject grief.

Hope in a time when blood runs like water in the gutters,
that the four-hundred-year-old wound is a hole,
through which light pours, to lift the knee
from all who cannot breathe.

Arthur Ginsberg, M. D.

DOWN THE ROAD

You would not know the global grief,
the haggard faces of families,
fingertips forbidden to touch, splayed
against the windows of contagious wards,
on this spring morning walk. The bright
yellow smiles of Scotch Broom in full bloom,
moth-eaten scaffolds of guttered leaves,
a hummingbird's fluted tongue, blossom deep
in delicate exploration of pistils and stamens;
this yearning for sweetness unmatched in nature.

You would not know how he is stunned
on the home stretch of the journey,
by the apparatus of his body—
solidity of a backbone, the glide of femur
on tibia, fluidity of blood pulsing
through arteries and veins to deliver
what keeps him alive stride after stride,
even in the slow slippage down life's rope,
even in the twilight of his demise.
So, he howls with the dogs on the road.

You would not know on this sunny day,
his face was once smooth as the bark of Arbutus,
that he strode through the wards in a white coat,
collar emblazoned with the twin serpents of Asclepius,
and mocked the face of nature's brass-knuckled fist.
How his brethren in hazmat suits
hold each dying breath to the end. He knows
this culling of the herd locates us in the pantheon

of all the species, no higher or lower,
and constrained by the fragile weave of our flesh.

You could not know the rhythmic sound
a ventilator makes, like the rush of maternal blood
he once heard in utero, or the fragrance of lilacs
he imagines with each rise and fall of his chest, or
the birdsong he hears unveiled deep in the silence.

John Grey

THE APPROACH OF PESSIMISM

All I think about these days is loss.
I even anticipate the deaths
of the ones still living.
I'm already missing them
and yet here they are.

I dream of this great blackboard
from my childhood.
There could be a map on it.
Or a series of numbers.
But, every night, a little more is erased.
Like Norway.
Or the number 3.

I talk about it in bed a lot with my wife
because I'm aware that's the time when many men die.
Their bodies shut down for sleep.
And sometimes, they get much too used to the idea
of eyes closed, insides on vacation.
She says I'm being pessimistic or even ghoulish.
But I miss my parents. I miss my sisters.
I miss my childhood friends.
I even miss her though I don't put it quite like that.
But the hugs are now less passionate, less sensual,
more like someone hugging a tree trunk
while staring down giant bulldozers.

I look in her face to make sure Norway is still there.
And that the number 3 is holding on.
I know that, if I ever lost her,
I'd miss her much more than I do already.

John Grey

FORM AND ANTI-FORM

Some years, spring can't wait.
From the buds on the branches
to baby birds in nests,
the young are anxious to have their say.
The snow's barely melted
and crazed crocuses
are bursting through the hard ground,
put the temperature on notice.

But other times,
winter's like a vise,
won't release even a dab of green,
while thick ice, drifts of snow,
ensures that the earth,
the lifeless trees,
are no fit place for warming.

The difficulties, the relief,
the hardness, the softening,
the grip, the release -
not so much sparring partners
as form and anti-form,
substance and shadow.

They exist within each other.
They emerge because nothing else does.

Carol Hamilton

CHINESE MOTHERS AND OTHER TALES

“Hasty generalizations”... We were warned against them
in college. And my data base, here, consists
of only two cases (add Amy Tan to make three).
Yet I drew conclusions, mostly from ChungTau, her sisters,
all too ugly, too stupid, too useless while their princely brother
was going noisily crazy in New York beneath his crown.
When Mai, my beautiful, brilliant grad student from Vietnam,
raised in France, had to fly to Taiwan with her husband
to care for his mother’s heart attack, “To squish her
under her thumb,” ChungTau intoned. I shrugged,
did not pass on the warning. But Cassandran voices,
even from the East, reverberate, fill the air.
The mother’s first words on meeting
her daughter-in-law: “Mai is too tall for a Chinese girl.”

The New York brother died, his silk too fine
for this world, and Mai’s husband brought his mother
to America, to care for her, nurse her,
Mai banished until Mother might fall healthy
or die. Of such stories are generalizations born.
But my new truth has built its fort with no cracks
which might let in streaks of sunlight,
breaths of fresh air. Warnings will be remembered,
but too late to cancel construction permits.

Carol Hamilton

TOO MUCH TIME

Too long or too short
 each day holds a timepiece
I cannot read or hear its tock
 am switched and twitched
as we turn across the sky
 one day in haste
and another so lazy and long
 that the tapped maples
of the north forget to run
 and all sweetness has evaporated
from the evening air
 And so sleep gains
its footing to overtake me
 All of your words
have escaped and there is
 no rooster to awaken the dawn.

Rustin Larson

AFTERNOON OF CHANGES

Fiery wren at our doorstep
in ice and cold, tiny
xylophone of bone played upon
with sewing pins, bushes puffed
with bravery and wind,
day a violin crying,
lost, bones wanting
out of their box
to dance factotum
in the powdery flock.

Thomas R. Moore

A POEM OF SIRIAN PERSISTENCE FROM THE COVID-19 ERA

Sing Happy Birthday till you're blue in the face,
Siri advises in her Irish accent though I could
have chosen New Zealand male with its Kiwi
twang. *I'm headed out on the town,* I say.

Then lather them up and sing it twice!
So I'm off to a moon-colored flutter across
the sky. Or—to be guileless and straight-
forward—the coffee shop. If it's open this

early and no one's sneezing. Maybe a UK
accent would have been more compelling
with a *tut tut* flavor to it: *Wash those hands,*
dash it all old man, it's Covid-19. Sounds

like a new *Netflix* movie. Or a dog biscuit.

But I love this 5:00 a.m. walk to town,
the maples still unleafed, the neat piles of
winter-fallen branches waiting for the guys

from Public Works who'll never come. Will
Covid-19 be my expiration? Will I die
on a cot in a crowded hospital corridor,
the ventilator for my scarred lungs on

the blink? *Closed for Pandemic* reads the sign
at the coffee shop. A skunk smell lingers
along the carless street on my return.

The mossy grass looks soft and alluring.

Beside the hospital they've raised a Covid-19 tent
where you pause for the swab. *You again?*

*Yes, I will wash at home and I'll also slap you
into US male if you don't stop nagging.*

Rikki Santer

ONCE UPON A TIME SESTINA

She grows hollow like a gilded castle but her will remains, naked and wild.
She knows how to frame the moon then eat its margins.
Often, she folds myths into postcards and mails them to subjects.
What use is the dancing she asks herself when twilight settles in.
In the tower she unfurls a map of her beloveds, circling each state of ache.
Her garden gnomes pace the skin of moat, taking inventory of where lost
is found.

A difficult kind of fruit was usually found
rendered in dark monochrome with mold gone wild.
In her anxious world her remnants ache—
bound by jagged tales that are snagged in the margins,
frayed by foreign princes who want in.
I'm weary she says *of trying to force from my mind my subject-*

ivity, yet every time the gnomes convince her not to dismiss the subject
at hand. One day a jester wearing a chandelier adorned with flickering
candles was found
galivanting around the royal ravine so she had her gnomes invite him in
and with jizzle & gizzle they both fell wild
into each other's percolating margins
vibrating with that ever-after ache.

But pretty doesn't always do, as pretty should, so ache
turned toothy and moonlit pebbles betrayed this harlequined subject
who struggled to catch his breath at the margins
of what she could wield at any vein she found.
Her signature scheme in the geometry of wild
promised him no way out or in,

even though he tried as many *my-what-big-you-have* refrains as he could fit
in

her mouth. *My Saggy Stickman*, she cackled, *My Soggy Ticket to Ride*. The
ache
creeped out of control through corridors, wild
like kudzu, and the gnomes tried to appease her distaste for this subject
matter that commingled with snail slime and found
its way to her strongbox margins.

So, she had her sway and banished his liver & lungs from her margins,
and he left in bawdy fashion, corralling all his sprightly sauce within.
At twilight, she strolled through garden gates where erect topiary could
be found.

Tomorrow she'll order another minaret to offset this feeble ache
and direct more silkworm thread be harvested for subjects
to weave mulberry sheets that serve her kinky and wild.

Again, she finds herself dipped in resin, rolled in feathers and home in
the margins
where into her psychiatrist's ear, wild words let her story sink in—
dismembered ache, sweet rot of self and quest to change the subject.

Helen Tzagoloff

NATURE AS WEAPON OF CRUELTY

Regulus, J.W.I. Turner, oil on canvas
Frick Museum, New York City

I had to look patiently to search out
the Roman general on the steps of
a monstrous grey building.

He stands, in a bare outline of a lighter shade of grey,
militarily-upright facing his punishment
by the Carthaginians—blindness by sunlight,
followed by certain death.

In Turner's compassionately sunlit sky
in even light yellow, the general is still going blind,
though more slowly than if the sky were
blistering red and orange.

The ending thus delayed, I hope a reprieve
will come in time from the higher authorities,
or at least an order for a more merciful punishment.

William Welch

THE TENANTS

When I took his keys, the landlord shook my hand.
His son said, that's the house my grandfather owned,
he bought it when he came here from Bosnia.
Now my wife and I say, it's ours.

The old man left a stump here in my yard
he used to butcher chickens,
and near it a divot in the ground filled with sand and coal.
He left the roots of rose bushes buried by the house.
We leave behind our relics. We forget
pictures inside of drawers,
or drop a ring pulling keys from pockets.
Things we never thought we'd lose become trash
someone will find, and ask, finding it, who we were.

I clean the floors on hands and knees, repaint
the bedroom walls. Rolling the stump away
from the house, I see his fingerprints
have stained the wood and go to our kitchen
to wash my hands, wondering if he thought of us,
the people who live here after him.
He sat beside that window with his wife,
talking about a home they wouldn't see again.
Where they cooked and ate, we plan
our renovations, wash brushes, scrub plates.

What will this kitchen look like twenty years from now?
Who will lie down to sleep where we have slept?
I can feel these new tenants enter each room.
They look carefully inside cupboards next to me,
try to open windows. What troubles do you have

in mind today, what cause for happiness?
What welcome do I have for you?

I wish I had a gift—maybe a few words.
But my tongue is a one-winged bird that cannot fly.

My gift to you is absence. But for your sake,
I prune the garden from time to time.
You will open this door, and have
my fingerprints on your hands.

William Welch

BELLIES

With my belly pressed against the window frame
I reach out to hang these shirts on a clothesline,
each empty of stomachs, except
when wind makes them pregnant with air.

In the neighbor's yard, just over my fence,
two children were playing hide and seek
until a moment ago. Bored, maybe, or tired,
they stand looking at one another when
the inevitable happens—
lift your shirt, the girl commands.

Her friend, a bit shy, obeys, and shows her his boy's potbelly,
a little pumpkin, all skin and muscle. He's embarrassed, and blushes,
so she pokes him, even tries to push her finger into his navel.
But he drops his shirt and runs, she chases him, and they disappear
around the corner of a house.

I think of all the bellies I've seen—
an old woman's, whose skin hung over her bones like loose, yellowed silk;
silly, gibbous bellies of middle-aged men;
the swollen gut of an alcoholic,
and the heavy water pouch of a woman in labor.

I think of my mother's stomach, scarred from two caesareans,
and a half-dozen other surgeries,
a soft globe of the world I came from,
with its river valleys and mountains.

People used to say the body is a tabernacle, a tent suspend from rib and
hip.

While she's sleeping, I hold my wife, and put my hand where
I can count each breath.

Maybe this is the distinguishing trait of humans:
not that we walk upright on two legs,
but that by standing we expose our most vulnerable part.

FICTION

Beth Ford

THE FARMHOUSE

Jerry walked into the room.

Behind him, the rickety screen door he had just come through wavered on its hinges, unsure whether to open or close.

On the far side of the kitchen, a woman stopped shoving a pile of newspapers into a black trash bag.

“George!” she yelled to unknown corners of the house.

As the shout reverberated toward his brother, Jerry said, “Hi, Caroline.”

“Hey, Jer.” She approached him with a smile. “I’d hug you, but I’ve been hauling junk out of this place all day. For several days, actually.”

“No problem,” he said, taking in the sweat lining the creases in her forehead and the ledge between her chin and lower lip.

George came in, using the hem of his t-shirt to wipe the sweat from his face so his pale beer belly led him into the room.

He wrapped Jerry in a hug.

When he released him, George said, “Old bastard’s gone, huh?”

“So, I’ve heard.” George and Caroline watched Jerry expectantly, so he continued. “This place looks a mess.”

“You should have seen it a few days ago,” Caroline said.

“Air conditioning’s broken?” Jerry asked.

“Man, you catch on fast.” George laughed. “But now that you’re here to help us, we’ll get through it a bit faster.”

“Why bother going through it all? Why not just toss everything?”

“I said that too at first, but...” George looked at his wife.

“There could be some good old stuff in here. Maybe not from your dad, but from your grandparents or great-grandparents.” She looked back and forth between the two men. “Haven’t you guys ever watched American Pickers?”

“When’s the funeral?” Jerry asked.

“Graveside service on Friday,” Caroline said.

“Good choice. The body might burn if we took him into a church.”

George laughed; Caroline frowned.

“It’s not as bad as all that, is it, little brother?” George asked.

“I fucking hate being in here.”

“Well, once we figure out we’re not going to find our fortune in here, we can tear the place to pieces.”

Jerry grinned. “I can’t wait.” He took a step further into the kitchen. “Where should I start?”

The house was heavy with memories—literally. In an upstairs bedroom, the floor sagged under the weight of the boxes and furniture piled nearly to the ceiling. Through a fissure in the mess, Jerry glimpsed his childhood twin bed. As George walked past him in the hallway, Jerry said, “I don’t know why he felt he had to hoard all this junk to keep people away—no one wanted to come visit him anyway.”

George shook his head. “Better not to stop and think about him. Better to just get through it.” He disappeared into their dad’s bedroom.

“Right,” Jerry said to no one.

Caroline hauled her first find into the kitchen that afternoon.

“Look!” she declared.

George and Jerry were leaning against the counter downing consecutive glasses of water. It took several minutes for the appearance of the small trunk to dislodge them from that task.

Caroline wanted until they approached to flip open the trunk lid and lift a wisp of yellowed tissue paper. Underneath was a folded blue uniform.

“I don’t think that’s going to make us our fortune,” George said.

Caroline put her hands on her hips. “Maybe not, but it’s fascinating family history nonetheless.”

“Dad bought so much crap, this could be anybody’s.”

Jerry leaned in closer. “No, she’s right.” He traced a finger along a stitched name on the inside of the collar. “It says Stevenson.”

“No shit,” George said, peering until his face was almost touching the fabric. “Without my glasses, I’m going to have to trust you guys on this one.”

“Did you know you had a Civil War soldier in the family?”

“It’s not that surprising that we did,” Jerry said.

Caroline huffed and closed the lid so quickly she almost caught Jerry's fingers in it. "You two are the worst."

When she had left the room, George shrugged. "I'll put it in my car, I guess."

"Sure."

That evening, as it became clear that they were all too exhausted to work much more, Jerry texted Allan. Despite constant checking of his phone, there was still no response by the time the trio had made it out to their cars. Reluctantly, Jerry accepted his brother's invitation to join them for dinner at the bar downtown. Jerry held out hope during the drive into town, but still nothing came through. He supposed that was for the best, but he was disappointed nonetheless.

Jerry's anxious monitoring of his phone didn't escape his brother's notice during dinner.

"Not seeing anyone while you're here?" George asked between bites of burger.

"Doesn't seem like it."

"Good. I think you've messed up that man's marriage enough."

"Judgmental much?"

George rolled his eyes.

"He got married?" Jerry couldn't help but ask.

"Yeah. Not that I approve. But yeah." George avoided his brother's gaze while he said it.

"Didn't you guys have a cousin who did a lot of genealogical research?" Caroline asked, her voice set at a higher pitch than usual, making her sound like a nervous field mouse.

"Lisa," George said. "Second cousin."

"She might have some information on who that Civil War guy was."

Jerry's phone dinged beside him. His heart fell when he saw it was just an automated reminder.

"Turn that phone off."

Jerry ignored his brother.

The phone dinged again. George reached across the table and grabbed it.

"Seriously?"

"I told you to turn it off."

“You’re not my boss.”

“It’s just polite.”

“Give him the phone back. Jerry, silence it if you don’t want to put it away.”

“You’re not my boss, either.”

“For fuck’s sake,” George said, sliding back against the booth seat.

“You are so like dad.”

George stood in a flash. “Don’t you fucking say that to me.”

“As evidenced by that reaction.”

George’s lips trembled around clenched teeth. After a long moment, he tapped a fist against the tabletop and sat back down. But he didn’t offer to return the phone.

They ate in silence for a few minutes. Finally, George said, “You know, we’ve been the ones here dealing with this—”

“Don’t start,” Jerry and Caroline said in unison.

“I just—”

“Don’t.”

George sighed and threw down his napkin. “Fine. Can we go now?”

“I’m going to stay a few more minutes,” Jerry said, stretching his hand out. George slid the phone across the table instead of setting it in the offered palm.

“Real big, big brother.”

George threw down some money as he got up. “Don’t call Allan,” he said as he and his wife walked out.

Naturally, Jerry called Allan. Naturally, he didn’t pick up.

Jerry scanned the room. It was dark and heavy with old, polished wood. There were only a handful of people on a Wednesday evening and most of them were strangers to him. That meant he had been away from his hometown too long. Or just long enough.

He downed the rest of his beer. No point in sticking around. Sitting in bars all night had been his old man’s gig.

Outside, the fading evening light still shimmered with heat. Why did his father have to die in Texas in fucking August? He considered lighting a cigarette but decided even that infinitesimal addition of heat would be unbearable, so he tucked the pack back into his pocket.

A pickup truck full of teenagers roared by, its occupants yelling incoherent insults at the people along the sidewalk. Jerry shook his head and started toward his car. Some things never change.

In the morning Jerry returned to the farmhouse. Caroline was pleasant as always, and George and Jerry acted as if the previous night's fight hadn't happened.

By early afternoon they had cleared out the dining room and were able to reach an antique secretary desk languishing under a pile of dust and junk in one corner. George grabbed one end to move it, but Caroline waved him off.

"Let's see what's inside it first," she said.

She had to give the front a few yanks before it came down with a creak, revealing two sets of drawers and a double row of pigeonholes filled with papers and envelopes. Intrigued, Jerry pulled out one drawer while Caroline sorted the papers. In the first drawer he found a notebook, in the second a small photo album. He leaned against the wall to peruse both.

"Look at this," he said after a moment. He turned the book around so the others could see its open pages. "It's Mee-ma's diary."

"Who was Mee-ma again?"

"Dad's grandmother," George supplied.

"Nineteen fourteen," Jerry said, tapping a date at the top of one page.

Caroline set down the stack of papers she was holding. "Okay, we need to go through everything in this desk. But let's do that last, because we still have a lot of cleaning up to do."

From his impatient position a few feet away, George said, "Agreed."

Jerry carefully set the books back into the drawer and closed it. "Who knew that underneath all of dad's shit there'd be all this cool stuff."

Caroline beamed at her brother-in-law's enthusiasm. "See? I told you."

Three days later, with only a half-day break for their father's service, most of the cleanup was complete. The dumpster in the driveway displayed a jumbled tower of junk. Inside, the house held only a few pieces of salvageable furniture and the filthy carpets they still had to rip up.

Late in the day, after making plans for tomorrow's work, George and Jerry walked through the rooms, their boots finding all the creaks in the old floorboards.

"It almost looks like the old house again," George said.

"I'm not sure how I feel about that."

"Once we get the floors taken care of and give it a few licks of paint, I bet we can sell it."

"Who wants to buy an old place like this?"

"Lots of young couples have been moving out this way. People who don't want to live in the city and don't mind the commute. That's who's been fixing up all the places downtown."

"I had wondered about that."

Jerry stopped in the middle of the living room and looked around the whole expanse of it.

"You know what," he said, "we found all that old family history but we didn't find anything of mom's, did we?"

"I wouldn't expect anything less of the old man. He must've known he wasn't even worthy of her possessions."

There was a long pause, the only sound that of Caroline opening and closing car doors outside.

"I found her drunk too, once, you know, when I got up to use the bathroom in the middle of the night," Jerry said.

"Who could blame her, dealing with dad every day?"

"I'm just saying, she wasn't exactly a saint either."

"Are you really going to start talking shit about our mother now?"

"I'm not talking shit, I just—"

"Well, whatever it is I don't want to hear it."

"Fine."

Jerry walked outside, taking extra care to set the delicate screen door carefully back in its frame behind him.

On the way back to his hotel, Jerry stopped for a burger at the local drive-in, a refurbished relic of his childhood. As he waited for his order, a car pulled in two stalls down. Inside was a familiar profile.

After a moment's hesitation, he got out and tapped on the other car's passenger side window.

Allan looked over at him in surprise. He still had those perfect dark curls, but Jerry could tell that they were now brushed forward to cover a

receding hairline. Once he rolled the window down, Jerry leaned folded arms on the window ledge.

“Hey, stranger,” he said.

“Hi, Jerry.”

“I’ve been trying to get in touch with you.”

“I know.” He frowned. “I meant to go to your dad’s service, but there was a lot going on that day.”

“I don’t blame you for missing it. I almost didn’t go myself.” He laughed, trying to make the statement sound light.

Allan nodded toward Jerry’s car. “I think your food is here.”

Jerry glanced behind him and spent a moment gathering his order from the server and setting it in his car. When he turned back, Allan was ordering into the intercom. Jerry leaned on the window again and waited.

When Allan finished, he turned an exasperated look on Jerry.

“Was there something else?” he asked.

“Just wanted to see if you have time to get together while I’m here.”

“Listen, Jerry, I’ve been seeing a therapist.”

“Good for you.”

“No, that’s not that the point. The point is that I see exactly what you are now, and I’m not getting involved anymore.”

“And what am I exactly?”

Allan glanced quickly around the parking lot. “Get in the car,” he said.

Jerry obliged. Allan rolled up the window so they could talk without risk of any town busybodies hearing.

“You’re still an adolescent, that’s what,” he began. “I mean, you still want to sneak around because you can’t handle actually being out. I mean, it’s not high school anymore, for god’s sake. Do you know how long ago that was?”

Jerry started to speak, but Allan cut him off. “Don’t actually answer that. I don’t know what you’re like in your normal life in the city, but whenever you come back here it’s like you’re seventeen again and you have total disregard for everyone else and what they’ve made of their lives.”

Jerry scoffed. “That is not true. As I recall, I was the one who actually came out in high school. You were in the closet for years after that.”

“Yes, but I’ve grown. That’s the point. You display regressive behavior.”

“Now you’re just parroting things the shrink told you.”

“And what’s wrong with that? That I’ve learned something?”

“Look, if you don’t want to see me, just say so. You don’t have to go through this long diatribe bashing me.”

“I do though, because last time you were here I told you I wouldn’t see you again yet you haven’t stopped calling me since you got into town. I need you to know that this is truly over. I’m lucky that Mike has been as forgiving as he has. We got married, you know.”

“I heard.” Jerry swallowed hard. “Congratulations.” He looked out the passenger window, a sudden tremble appearing in his lower lip that he was desperate to hide.

“It’s not easy living in this town. And I don’t intend to make it any harder on myself. Okay?” Allan asked.

“Okay,” Jerry said, and got out of the car without looking back.

Jerry got to the house extra early the next morning only to find George had bothered to lock up the night before. His brother had never given him a key and Jerry hadn’t much been motivated to ask for one. He sat on the front porch steps and watched the sky brighten over the flat, far horizon. The day was already hot, and every scuffle of his boots kicked up a little flurry of dust. He looked at his phone, but the signal was weak this far outside of town. He shoved it back into his jeans pocket. He lit a cigarette.

He tried not to remember his childhood here, but images came anyway to fill the silence. There had been a lot of shouting, some split lips, a few bruises. Nothing that he hadn’t mostly gotten over in the last thirty years. There had been fun, too—hours spent running through the corn fields when the land was still worked, before his dad had turned the whole place into a dump. His life a dump, his house a dump. Fitting.

Jerry stubbed out the cigarette. As he was contemplating driving back into town for coffee, tires crunched on the gravel road leading up to the house.

George was alone. Before Jerry could ask, George said, “Caroline decided to stay home and miss the heavy work today.”

“Fair enough.”

Jerry waited while George unlocked the door.

“Start in the living room?” George asked. He began pulling up one corner of the living room carpet without waiting for Jerry’s response.

After hours of hard, sweaty labor, the brothers sat on the porch smoking, looking at the pile of carpets they had dragged outside.

“We need a second dumpster,” George said.

“Can’t they empty the full one and bring it back?”

“That’s not how it works.” He took a long drag. “Floors actually look pretty good. Some stain and polish and they’ll be presentable.”

Jerry glanced back at the house. “We could burn the whole place for the insurance money.”

“Nah. Like I said, we can sell it. People love these fixer-uppers nowadays.”

“Too bad we didn’t find our fortune like Caroline wanted.”

“Caroline’s always looking to find a fortune. She plays the lottery every Goddamn week. Never won a single fucking thing.”

Jerry grinned. “Right.”

“When are you getting the hell out of here?”

“Dunno.”

George stood.

“We could fix it up,” Jerry said from the steps.

“What?”

“We could fix it up.”

“And do what with it?”

“I dunno. Live in it. I could live in it.”

“What the hell would you do out here?”

“Commute. Like you said those young people do.”

George looked down at his brother, trying to see into him. “You’re not funny.”

“I’m just saying.”

“You’re always ‘just saying’ something.”

Jerry stood. “Think about it,” he said.

“You’re the one who needs to think about it.”

The two started to walk to their cars.

“What about those diaries and stuff? Should we take them out of the house?” Jerry asked.

“I already locked up. Get ‘em tomorrow,” George said and slammed his car door behind him.

The crunch under George and Jerry's feet as they walked up the driveway the next morning was different. Jerry looked down and saw glints of sun. Glass scattered over the gravel.

"George."

His brother looked down but didn't notice the anomaly.

Jerry scanned the yard. A nearby decrepit outbuilding that their dad had used to store more junk boasted jagged teeth in place of its one window. Nearing it, the side of the house caught Jerry's eye. The kitchen window also shattered.

"Shit."

Finally, George got it. "Somebody broke in." He shook his head. "Who would want to break into this shithole?"

Jerry peered into the outbuilding. In the dark, he made out the same pile of rusted metal and wooden chairs that had been there before. He turned and walked to the house with George. "They just saw some place that looked abandoned and wanted a thrill, probably."

Inside, the brothers surveyed the mess. Furniture had been knocked over and a few tags had been spray painted on the walls.

"Doesn't look like they took anything," George said.

"Wasn't anything to steal."

Jerry walked into the living room. The secretary desk had been emptied of his contents, papers and books strewn around the floor, a few of them spotted with red spray paint. Jerry gathered them into a pile.

"I told you we should have taken these things home."

"Yeah, 'cause you knew this was going to happen. And do not say 'I'm just saying.'"

Jerry stood with the pile in his arms. The photo album and diary were still there.

"I'm putting these in my car."

George followed him out, not bothering to lock the door behind him.

"I'll head into town and get some boards to cover these windows up."

While George was gone, Jerry cleaned up the glass and moved the remaining furniture onto the porch so the floors would be clear for him and George to work. Since the trespassers had left the furniture behind this time, it was unlikely anyone would bother to lug it off the porch.

Despite his initial hatred for the house and everything it stood for, now that it had been violated by an outsider, Jerry fumed. It was like the time Tommy Nichols had called Jerry a queer in high school and George had to beat up Tommy even though George himself had called Jerry worse. Family could make fun of you; others couldn't.

Except now Jerry had no one to beat up, no one to take his anger out on. He had no way to protect what had been his.

He smoked three cigarettes in quick succession sitting on the porch waiting for George to return.

The brothers sweated through eight hours of cleaning and staining all of the floors in the house. With each movement, Jerry jerked between thoughts so that by the end of the day his brain was as exhausted as his muscles. He thought through his entire relationship with Allan, trying to see what Allan had claimed in their last conversation. Jerry had always prided himself on coming out in a time and place where it was so unacceptable. But since then, he had largely avoided relationships—because he liked his independence, he had told himself, but now he admitted it was easier to be single. It kept away his brother's and the church's ire, and their dad's while he had still been alive. Was Allan right? Had Jerry been hiding all these years? If so, how could he reemerge?

That night, instead of Allan, Jerry called Ben. An old platonic friend that he really should see more often. They met at Chili's in the suburban sector that had appeared on the east side of town over the last five years.

"Good to hear from you," Ben said as they sat. "Sorry about your dad."

"You shouldn't be."

"He wasn't so much worse than a lot of guys in that generation."

"What does that say about us?"

Ben shrugged. "We learned what not to do from them, I guess."

"Your dad's still around?"

"Yeah. Gets angrier and more racist every year."

Jerry laughed even though after an instant's thought it wasn't funny.

The conversation languished as they ordered and then received their drinks.

“I’m actually feeling kind of sentimental about letting the farm go.”

“George doesn’t want it?”

“Hell no. He dreams about selling it to some urbanites who’ll fix it up real nice.”

“Well, then that leaves you.”

“Yeah, yeah it does.” He changed the subject, but gears kept moving in his brain, grinding the thought over and over until it was dust.

By the following morning, Jerry had made up his mind.

“I’m staying,” Jerry announced as soon as he stepped out of his car.

“What are you talking about?” George asked.

“I’m going to stay and fix up the house and live in it.”

George jangled his keys in one hand for a second before speaking.

“No, you’re not.”

“I am.”

“And what am I supposed to do? Just give it to you? It’s half mine, too, you know.”

“I’ll buy you out of your half. I have money.”

George sniffed. “And I’m just supposed to help you fix it up?”

“That would be nice.”

“What brought about this sudden change of heart?”

“I came to my senses.”

Again, the keys rattled in his palm. “Then I guess I should give this to you.” George peeled the farmhouse key off his keyring and handed it to his brother.

“Thanks,” Jerry said. “Thanks.” He walked up the steps and into the room again, holding the screen door open for his brother to follow.

Kathie Giorgio

SOMEDAY

*A dream is a wish your heart makes
When you're fast asleep*

Despite Disney, it was a hard thing to want to be a princess in the new millennium. Sometimes, it even felt shameful. Shyla was five years old when 1999 rolled into 2000 and the main thing she remembered from that stunning calendar event was fear. There were forecasts of chaos, crashes, jets falling out of the sky, computers and entire cities going dark. Shyla's parents, who reassured her that everything would be okay, nevertheless bought just-in-case supplies during the daylight hours of New Year's Eve: water, canned goods, peanut butter, batteries, flashlights, candles and matches. At midnight, they watched the ball drop in New York City from their television in Wisconsin and then they held their collective breath as the moment from old year to new year passed. The television programming didn't even hesitate and continued its commercials for toilet paper and perfume as if nothing changed at all. And it hadn't. Shyla and her parents hugged each other and cheered and then Shyla's mom tucked her into her bed. Shyla watched the moon from her bedroom window until her eyes couldn't stay open any longer. Somehow, seeing the moon was the finishing touch for that night, as comforting as her mother's goodnight kiss. The moon, a silver tilted smile, meant that not only was the earth safe, but so was the entire universe.

But princesses, apparently, weren't safe. In 2001, there was a sudden upsurge in outcry over girls not being encouraged as much as boys in math and the sciences. Something called STEM was created, which made Shyla think of plants, but made her mother believe that Shyla needed to excel in math and science, even though Shyla's favorite subjects in first grade were art and reading. Her mother, who always taught Shyla to be "the best Shyla you can be", got caught up in the demand for equality and decided that Shyla was not going to be pushed behind by any boy or misdirected teacher.

Shyla came home one weekend from visiting with her grandmother—always a treat—to find that her pink bedroom with Disney princesses cavorting on the walls was suddenly a serious shade of bluish gray. Her mother knew Shyla liked the moon, so the room was done in a stars and planets theme. There were no crowns. There were no gowns. Shyla's books on her bookshelf, filled with fairytales of princesses and princes becoming queens and kings, suddenly held puzzle books like Sudoku and word problems and autobiographies of strong women with careers in space and medicine and engineering. Her toy shelves, previously filled with princess dolls and castles and carriages, now held building blocks and electric sets and a toolbox. A Rubik's Cube was on her desk. There used to be a snow globe of Cinderella's castle.

Shyla's mother had the kindness to not throw away the princess toys, but they were relegated to a toybox in Shyla's walk-in closet. Now, when she played, she went in there and shut the door behind her. Her mother didn't say anything, but often, when Shyla was in the middle of a make-believe play afternoon, she would hear clicks. Peeking out her closet door, she'd find her mother on the floor, building with the building blocks. Shyla would join her, because she knew that playing alone was sad if you wanted someone else to play with, and her mother clearly wanted someone. She wanted Shyla. So, Shyla would build. She wasn't very good at it; her towers always tumbled.

Sometimes, she got up in the middle of the night to play quietly in her closet under the glow of the single lightbulb, which she pretended was the moon. She could no longer tell her mother she wanted to be a princess when she grew up. She wanted to dress beautifully and be beautiful herself and she wanted to be loved completely and unabashedly by a handsome man.

But the world thought that was silly. Even the moon grinned outside her window.

* * *

*In dreams you will lose your heartaches
Whatever you wish for, you keep*

By the time Shyla graduated high school, it was clear she was as lousy at math and science as she was at building blocks. She stumbled through the basics and managed a C in Advanced Algebra, but if she'd lost one more point, it would have been a D. She hated the sciences, weeping

her way through her Chem final. Her mother, aggrieved, was uplifted when Shyla decided to major in Women's Studies in college, and then, from there, she began work as an advocate and event planner at a women's shelter. At least, her mother thought, Shyla was working for "the cause", even if that cause wasn't infiltrating male-dominated careers.

Shyla spent a portion of each paycheck on a Disney DVD, until she was up to date on all the Disney princesses. Her childhood video collection disappeared soon after she left home, along with the toybox full of princesses. The only thing spared was the Rubik's Cube, something she never did solve. When she moved away, she took the Rubik's Cube with her, but threw it in the dumpster behind her apartment house.

She hid her new DVDs in a cabinet in her living room so that her visiting mother would never see them. Her favorite part of her work was planning galas for a fundraiser. Shyla could wear gowns then, and once she even wore a tiara.

At dinner for the first time with a man named Mark, Shyla hesitated when the waiter led them to their table, to see if Mark would help her with her coat or pull out her chair for her.

He didn't.

On her third date with David, the first time she allowed him to pick her up rather than meeting at a public place, she waited to see if he would walk around the car and open her door for her.

He didn't.

The first time she slept with Robert, after dating him exclusively for six months, she paused in the doorway of her en-suite bathroom. She was backlit, she knew, and she wore a diaphanous negligee, and she waited to see if he caught his breath and said she looked beautiful.

He didn't.

"Mom," she said at lunch with her mother one day, "I don't know if I'm ever going to get married." She was twenty-four years old.

"It's okay," her mother said. "Don't worry about it. There are more important things."

Shyla thought of her cabinet full of princess movies. She thought of all those princess faces, upturned to receive kisses from their chosen princes.

Shyla didn't think there was anything more important.

On the drive home, her car got a flat. While she worked on the side of the road, jacking up the car, pulling off the old tire, putting on the spare,

which she knew how to do because her mother taught her while her father watched approvingly from the porch, Shyla wondered if any young man would pull over to help.

No one did.

At work, in between planning events and fundraisers, Shyla helped to check in woman after woman after woman into the shelter. She saw a variety of bruises, a variety of broken bones, and she saw sadness that hung over the women like skunk-smell. One late night, taking her turn on the overnight shift, Shyla loaded up a new resident's outstretched arms with towels, a pair of pajamas, soap, shampoo, a toothbrush and toothpaste. The woman said, "What's your name?"

Shyla paused. "I'm sorry, didn't I introduce myself? My name is Shyla." The police brought this woman in after a stop at the ER to treat cuts and bruises and to stitch a particularly bad gash on her cheek. She had a broken nose, which was taped. The white of the tape was shocking against the bruises around the woman's eyes. Those black eyes made Shyla think of the Evil Queen in Snow White, but this woman, with her white tape, was not evil.

"Shyla," the woman said slowly. "What a pretty name." She nodded as Shyla closed the closet door and locked it. "Shyla, don't ever believe a man," this woman said and began to cry with no sound. With her arms filled with supplies, she couldn't wipe the tears away. They seemed to flow effortlessly. No gasps, no whimpers. Just smooth and silent sadness.

Shyla put her arm around the woman's shoulders and carefully led her to her room. Once the woman was settled, sitting on her bed, staring blankly at the wall, Shyla reassured her she was safe, wished her a good night and returned to her post at the front desk.

She stared at the wall too. Princesses weren't bruised. Princesses could believe a man. She never read a fairytale about a princess with a broken nose. Broken hearts, sure, but they were always healed. She wished every woman could be a princess.

* * *

At a golf event and fundraiser for the shelter one Saturday, Shyla was acting as cart girl, driving a golfcart around the course, bringing beer, wine, soda and water to the golfers. The cart was sweet and Shyla enjoyed zipping from hole to hole. A few golfers offered to tip her, and she refused, but a few insisted anyway. She tucked these funds away. She'd been eying

a beautiful Cinderella musical snowglobe at the Disney Store. It was something she could hide quickly when her parents came over.

One man tipped her fifty dollars on the ninth hole and she was stunned. She tried to give it back, but he chuckled her under the chin and said, “No, please, keep it. You’re working hard in this heat today. And your beauty—” he touched her cheek, “—well, your beauty makes my horrible score worth it.”

Her beauty! Shyla stammered a thank you and went back to her cart. The man followed. “At least they set you up with a nice ride,” he said, resting his arm on the roof as she settled behind the wheel. He looked approvingly at the little cooler wagon behind her, filled with all her drink offerings.

“It’s been fun,” she said. “And it’s all for a good cause too.” None of the women who’d been helped by the shelter were there that day, of course. But Shyla wished they could be. They needed, she thought, to see that some men could be really nice, like this one.

The man shook his head. “I will never understand how a man could treat a woman so badly that she needs to run to a shelter.” He leaned closer. “Say, what time are you done today?”

Shyla looked at him. He was older, maybe even older than her father. But he had the nicest smile and really pretty blue-gray eyes. The color reminded her of her childhood bedroom walls. She hated the color then, but on this man, it was really striking. “I’m off the course at six o’clock,” she said. “Then there’s a little thank-you reception in the clubhouse. Finger foods and drinks.”

“I was planning on going to that,” the man said. “Would it be okay if I find you there? Maybe we can have a drink together or go to dinner in the dining hall afterwards.”

Dinner at a country club with a blue-gray eyed man who called her beautiful. Shyla felt dazzled. “Sure,” she said. “I’d love to.”

His foursome called for him to hurry up. “Quit chatting up the cart girl, Jack,” one chided.

Jack held out his hand and Shyla took it. “Obviously, I’m Jack,” he said and laughed. “And you are?”

“I’m Shyla.”

“Shyla! Oh, what a pretty name!” he said. “I’ll see you at six, Shyla.”

As she pattered away, Shyla thought of that woman in the shelter who also complimented her name. She thought of those bruised eyes, the flattened nose, the gash on her cheek. “Don’t ever believe a man,” the woman said.

But both she and Jack said her name was pretty. And Jack said she was beautiful. She so wanted to believe him.

* * *

In the movies, princesses always had whirlwind romances. They experienced love at first sight. The princes chased after the girl with the glass slipper or hunted for the girl asleep in a glass box in the middle of the forest.

Jack was like that.

Shyla, to her delight, felt pursued. She felt wanted. And even more, she felt respected. She knew she could take off her own coat, open her own door, pull out her own chair. But when Jack did those things for her, she felt cared for. He knew she was more than capable, but he wanted to do them for her anyway. Until she grew accustomed to it, he would place his hand on her knee before getting out of the driver’s side, saying, “You just sit. I’ll get the door for you.”

It was amazing.

On the first night she said yes to making love, she stood again in her bathroom doorway, backlit. Jack, sitting on her bed, stood and crossed to her. He took her hands. “My god,” he said, “you are so beautiful.”

When he went home in the middle of the night, Shyla wound her Cinderella musical snowglobe, bought with his fifty-dollar tip, and wept like the child she used to be.

And then, a few days later, he told her he was married.

* * *

*Have faith in your dreams and someday
Your rainbow will come smiling through*

The evening he confessed, Jack brought Shyla a present. For no reason, he said, just because he saw it and thought of her. They were sitting on her couch and Shyla was gazing at the lovely Sleeping Beauty porcelain figurine, when he said softly, “Shyla, honey, I have to tell you something.”

So he did. She dropped the figurine. He caught it before it shattered.

“You’re what? How? What?” she said.

He put the figurine on her coffee table and then took her hands, just like he did the night they first made love. “I’m married. Deb and I have been married for thirty-one years.”

Longer than Shyla was alive. With quick stunned math, which she was never good at, Shyla calculated that when she was born, Jack had already been married for seven years. She stood up. “You can leave now,” she said, her voice barely above a whisper.

“Shyla, wait.” He tugged her back down to the couch, his hands on hers like a leash on her collar. “Deb has...medical issues. She can’t be intimate anymore. I didn’t intend for this to happen, but ever since meeting you, you’ve filled such an emptiness in my life.” His lips trembled. “You’re my soulmate, Shyla.”

Shyla wondered if he could be married to someone else, yet still be her soulmate. “Don’t you love your wife?” she asked.

“Honey, of course I do. I have to, we’ve been together so long and she needs me. But I love you too. I love you more than anybody. You’re who I was meant to be with.” His eyes filled with tears and Shyla was startled. “You complete me, Shyla. Please don’t tell me to go away. I’m no longer alone because of you. We’re okay, aren’t we?” The tears rolled down his cheeks.

Shyla couldn’t remember any fairytale where the man cried. But so many of the men in fairytales had more than one wife; the pages of Shyla’s childhood books were stuffed with stepmothers. But the man didn’t have the second wife while the first wife was alive. But still, there was more than one wife. Though the second wife often wasn’t happy.

Shyla was happy. And Jack’s wife had, he said, medical issues.

“Shyla,” Jack said, and his voice broke. “I love you.”

She looked at the figurine on her coffee table. Sleeping Beauty’s hands were clasped and she looked skyward, her lips parted, as if she was waiting for a kiss.

Shyla waited for so long.

“I love you too,” she said. She wept, but did not send Jack home.

True to the fairytales, Jack’s wife died. He didn’t tell her how. She didn’t ask.

* * *

Shyla fell into her role, even though she wasn't sure what it was. She'd been the other woman when she didn't know she was the other woman, then she knew, then the wife died and here she was. She was patient and waiting, as all the Disney princesses were patient and waiting. *Someday, My Prince Will Come* was more than a song; it was a lifestyle. Even though Jack didn't move in with her, even though she didn't move in with him, in his house where he now lived alone, Shyla felt a permanence in their relationship. She felt so loved, almost revered, in the way he took care of her when he was there and when he called her in between his visits. He called her every day, and she heard that reverence in his tone when he said, "I love you, Shyla." Sometimes, he missed her so much, he left his home in the middle of the night and came to her. She didn't suggest anything more. She knew he had to grieve. She knew her dream would come true.

With Jack's reverence came her confidence and she was no longer willing to hide herself in a closet or a cabinet. She threw STEM expectations and her mother's dreams aside and picked up her own. She loved art as a child and she took it up now, with classes at local galleries. She started hanging her own canvases in her apartment. An easel in the corner of her living room held her latest work. Her paintings were full of grace, swirls of blue and pink and silver and gold, and she dusted some of them with glitter. One of her instructors breathed, "My gosh, Shyla, it's like all the colors of a fairytale!"

Shyla never felt so appreciated. She added cooking classes and a romance book club, organized by her local library, to her schedule. She started displaying her figurines and snowglobes. If the television was on to a Disney movie when her mother came over, Shyla no longer turned it off. She smiled at her mother and served tea and plates of home-baked small cookies and cucumber sandwiches, and while her mother shook her head, she smiled back. Shyla was astonished.

She bought Disney-themed blankets and donated them to the shelter. The shelter director had some trepidation, but the entire staff, besides Shyla, was surprised when only a few of the shelter women rolled their eyes when they were checked in and the blankets appeared on their beds. Most breathed out a gentle, "Ooooh," and ran their fingers over the illustrations.

Shyla felt STEM shame fall away. She felt herself step forward. Yes, she was in love with a married man who then became a widower. She was in love with a man older than her father. But she was in love. With a

prince who told her she was someone special. He told her over and over, using the words she so wanted to hear, until she believed it herself.

* * *

During a late-night phone conversation, Jack suggested meeting the next evening at a new bar he discovered. “It’s called Willie’s Hole In The Wall,” he said. “I think you’ll really like it.”

Shyla didn’t enjoy bars, typically. They were noisy and chaotic and she always felt like she was on display. A hole in the wall didn’t sound too promising either.

“This one is quiet,” Jack said. “The lights are soft. There’s only a jukebox and it’s always on low volume, when it’s played at all. Come meet me there tomorrow, after work? It’s close by. We’ll have a nice drink and then go out to dinner. Maybe a movie.”

Shyla smiled and agreed. Jack was usually right about the things she would like. She trusted him.

At work that day, Shyla was at the front desk when a new woman arrived. She came on her own—no police escort. But she walked as if she was in handcuffs and leg irons. “I need a place to stay,” she said, her voice a rasp like a brush through tangled hair. “I can’t go back...to him. I can’t.” This woman seemed tough and beaten at the same time, and Shyla was startled when she began to cry.

“Let’s get you taken care of,” Shyla said and led her in to the counselor’s office. Because she had the time, Shyla went ahead and collected all of the things the woman would need from the supply closet. Then she went up to what would be the woman’s room and readied it. She chose the Snow White blanket, bright with colors from the forest and Snow White herself, in her cheerful blue and yellow dress. When the counselor came out of her office, Shyla stepped forward. “I already have her room set,” she said. “I’ll take her up.” She carefully took the woman’s elbow; sometimes the women couldn’t stand being touched. But this woman stepped closer. Shyla introduced herself.

The woman nodded. “I’m Dawn.”

Shyla thought that was very appropriate. This was the start of a new day for this woman, she was sure of it. “What a pretty name,” she said.

Dawn smiled.

In the room, Dawn stared at her bed. Then she pulled the blanket off. “Can you take this please?” she said. “Can I have a different one? A plain one?”

Shyla looked at Snow White’s smiling face. “Well, of course. I just thought—”

“Please,” Dawn said. “Please.”

Shyla returned the blanket to the closet and brought back a simple white one. Dawn held it to her face and sighed so deeply, Shyla felt the room fill with sadness.

She told Jack about it as they sat at the new bar that night. Jack was right; she did like the Hole In The Wall.

“Aw, honey,” he said. “I guess not all women appreciate princesses.” He leaned forward and gently kissed her cheek. She loved this about him, that he didn’t always zero in on her mouth. He seemed to understand that there were any number of lovely places to kiss a woman. “You tried,” he said. “And you heard her and you gave her what she wanted. There’s a lot of power in that, you know.”

Shyla doubted that her mother thought so, but she was glad Jack did.

They were on their second drink when they were interrupted by another woman. She seemed to know Jack, though Jack appeared clueless. The woman turned to Shyla and Shyla listened to her just as she listened to the women in the shelter. Every word that fell out of her mouth was confounding, jarring, ice cubes across the floor, but as crystal clear as ice could be.

This woman spoke of another woman that Jack was seeing. A woman named Cindy. Another other woman. Though Shyla wasn’t the other woman anymore, was she? She didn’t know what she was. This woman said that Jack was married, but Shyla knew that Jack’s wife was dead. There was an obituary in the newspaper. She stood across the street from the church the day of the funeral. Jack was dressed in black. A coffin was loaded into a hearse.

But Cindy. Another other woman named Cindy.

Shyla didn’t think that Cindy was a pretty name at all.

She didn’t tell Jack to leave this time. She got up while the woman was still speaking and ran out the door herself.

* * *

*No matter how your heart is grieving
If you keep on believing
The dream that you wish will come true*

All that night and into the next day, Jack texted and called Shyla. She didn't turn her phone off, but instead, read every text and listened to every voicemail. And she weiled.

She stayed home from work. She didn't want to see any of the women that were staying at the shelter or any of the women who would come in that day. They were bruised and battered. Shyla felt bruised and battered. She told herself she shouldn't compare herself to them, but she did.

Jack said, "I love you. Where are you? I need to talk to you. You need to understand. You're the only one for me, Shyla. You're my soulmate. You're so beautiful. You're who I should be with. I love you more than anyone. No one else matters." Over and over, just as he told her over and over what a special woman she was, and from his words, she'd stepped out of her hidden princess walk-in closet.

She wept.

That evening, she decided to go back to Willie's Hole In The Wall. She would have a drink with the bartender. And maybe, maybe, Jack would show up. If he did, if he knew how to find her, if he knew where she would be, then it was magic. It was magic like pumpkins into carriages and talking mirrors and kisses that woke a princess from a dead sleep caused by a poisoned, yet delicious apple.

When the door of the bar opened and she saw Jack there, Shyla felt her heart stop. And then race. She didn't know a feeling like that could be real. But it was. With Jack.

She brought him home. Then, three weeks later, she moved into his.

* * *

Shyla had lived in Jack's house just six months, just long enough for it to start feeling like hers, like theirs, when she woke in the middle of the night to hear Jack's voice rising softly up the stairwell. She slid out of bed and crept halfway down the steps. Jack was in the living room.

"I can't sleep for thinking about you, Sandy," he said, the same words he used to say to Shyla when he slipped over to her apartment in the middle of the night. "Can I come over?" A few minutes later, Shyla heard the door to the garage close. She crept into the living room and then she

watched from the corner of the picture window as Jack pulled out of the driveway.

Sandy. Not Cindy. Shyla didn't think Sandy was a very pretty name.

She returned to Jack's bedroom, their bedroom now, and she picked up the Sleeping Beauty figurine he gave her, just because he thought of her when he saw it. She raised it over her head, preparing herself to throw it, to hear it shatter into glittering pastel pieces on the shiny hardwood floor. The floor, Jack said, that his wife picked out when they were building this place. Their home. Jack's home.

Now Shyla's.

Shyla lowered her arm. She set the figurine back down on the dresser. And then she returned to bed.

She slept. She knew he would wake her with a kiss in the morning. Like a princess, she would be patient and wait. She would eat her poisoned apple. It was sweet.

Laura Maffei

CAT IN THE ROAD, 1978

The two girls sat on the curb in front of Annemarie's house with their white-toed sneakers flat on the asphalt and their denim knees up against their chests. Annemarie's chest was already starting to grow. Donna's wasn't and wouldn't for three more years. Slung on a telephone wire high above them was a third pair of sneakers, tossed there by older kids they were both too young to remember.

"Do you know what a period is?" Annemarie asked.

"You mean the punctuation mark?"

This girl was stupid, Annemarie thought, except she wasn't, because she was in the smart class. Every day on the bus this year, Donna had carried two textbooks plus her binder because the smart class got substantial homework, and they had done fifth grade math instead of fourth. Annemarie had often come home with only a marble composition book with a mimeographed homework sheet stapled inside. But she still thought Donna was stupid.

Unfortunately, Annemarie was in a fight with the only other girl her age who lived within walking distance, so Donna was the last resort. She was always the last resort because she was so boring. Annemarie had known her for years, sort of. They had gone to each other's birthday parties. They had occasionally played with each other's Barbie dolls.

Annemarie checked her watch. Her mother felt it was unrefined to call her to dinner through a window, even if Annemarie was sitting directly in front of the house, as she was now. So Annemarie had to know when to go in. Twenty-five minutes left.

"No," Annemarie told Donna. "I mean a woman's period."

Donna shook her head and looked at Annemarie for an explanation. Annemarie stared at the asphalt stretching away in front of them. Her house sat at the top of the T where one residential street stopped at another. Donna lived four blocks down, then one block to the right, then one to the left. Julie, the girl Annemarie was in a fight with, lived two blocks down, then two blocks to the left, then one to the right. Their Staten Island

neighborhood was like a labyrinth, all right angles that led deeper and deeper into a maze of one-way and dead-end streets. You could never walk back from anywhere without retracing your steps exactly. In a car, you had to leave the neighborhood altogether and go out onto the boulevard before making your way back in. The homeowners liked it that way: it cut down on through-traffic.

It was a bright early evening in July, but Annemarie didn't feel like staying out here with Donna anymore. She raised her eyes to the pair of sneakers on the telephone wire. "I have to go in to dinner," she said.

The other women on the block talked about Annemarie's mother, chiefly because she was very thin and inspired in them many comments about metabolism and eating habits, the bulk of their knowledge gleaned from glossy magazines and television. Their tone when they spoke of her contained a tiny amount of suppressed excitement at the prospect that the woman might be drastically, dramatically ill. But year after year, Catherine Andreano never got sick. She just went on being skinny, raising her obnoxious only-child daughter, and being married to a neat and clean man with a suspiciously high-pitched voice. They talked about that too, sometimes, but only lightly, as in, "You think he might be a little fruity?"

"Mm, who knows?"

And they'd leave it at that. After all, he had a good job, kept the lawn trim, and he didn't do anything they could really criticize. They saved their energy for the wife, whom they could never invite to their Weight Watchers meetings.

The door to Annemarie's house—like the doors of all the other houses in the neighborhood—was locked. It might look like a suburb here but we're still part of the city, the mothers all said. Annemarie let herself in with her keys and wiped her feet on the tiny mat in the tiny vestibule. At her right elbow was the door to her father's office, which could have been part of a tenant apartment, but Annemarie's mother couldn't bear the thought of a stranger with a stranger's dirt, so the small rooms behind the office remained empty and unused. Annemarie climbed the carpeted staircase to the main floor, where her mother stood in the kitchen in an apron, measuring something with a cup. "Oh good," Catherine said. "You're early. Go ahead and set the table, dear. It's just the two of us tonight."

Expressionless, Annemarie opened a drawer. She had a bundle of shiny cutlery in her hand when they heard the doorbell ring. Catherine sent her down to check.

Through the square of rippled yellow glass in the center of the front door, Annemarie made out the fuzzy form of Donna. She unlocked both locks and swung it open to reveal a sobbing, hiccupping Donna framed in the top half of the storm door, her face dark and contorted.

Annemarie had never seen Donna cry. Actually, she had never seen any kid cry this hard, not since preschool when they still cried like infants. She was both fascinated and repelled. She pushed the storm door open a few inches.

“What’s wrong?”

“There’s a dead cat!”

“Where?”

Donna pointed shakily in the direction of her house.

“So?” Annemarie knew she was supposed to say more, but she didn’t know what, and she wasn’t really interested in knowing.

Donna cried harder.

“Annemarie?” It was the Bionic Woman, Annemarie thought. Her mother could hear anything within a two-block radius. She appeared on the landing. “What happened? Oh, Annemarie—” and even in the urgency of the moment, her *Oh, Annemarie* was the soft, chiding one she often accompanied with a shake of the head—” let her in!”

Filling the paneled vestibule with more noise and moisture than it had seen in a long time, Donna stood on the mat while Catherine extracted from her, with more solicitude than Annemarie had done, the fact of a dead cat in the road between their house and Donna’s.

“Oh, poor thing must have been hit by a car,” Catherine said. “Yes, yes,” she crooned, as if she were patting Donna on the shoulder even though she wasn’t, “it can be upsetting to see something like that. Would you like a glass of water?”

Donna shook her head no.

“Okay. Well then. Take some deep breaths, dear.” Donna simply kept crying, but Catherine paused as if the girl were taking her advice. “Now when you walk past it, look the other way and you’ll be just fine.”

Donna didn’t move.

“Okay, dear? Have a good night now.”

The girl continued to stand there crying, as if she were stupefied and couldn’t hear a thing, a weeping Daphne rooted to the spot. For a moment, Catherine and her daughter both stood looking at the girl; they made

an unmoving forest of three. Then Donna herself seemed startled by her own sobbing. She swallowed and looked mortified.

Catherine took the opportunity. “Donna,” she said in a bright but deliberate voice, as if she were talking to a much younger child or a slow one. “Annemarie will walk you home. Don’t look at the cat, dear. Everything will be fine.” She tilted her head toward the front door with a benevolent smile at Annemarie, who did not protest in the face of such a weird situation.

Donna was puffy-faced but quiet now, and the girls went back outside. Annemarie wished very much she wasn’t in a fight with Julie so she could tell her about this. Donna had acted more like a baby than anyone she’d ever seen.

They walked next to each other on the sidewalk, Annemarie on the street side. She thought this was good because she would be in between Donna and the cat. But then she realized that if she talked to Donna, Donna would turn her head toward Annemarie and toward the street, and she’d see it. So Annemarie walked silently, staring straight ahead.

It wasn’t long before Annemarie spotted it. One jet-black leg stuck straight up in the air out of a body slashed diagonally with pinkish-red. The entrails appeared strangely dry and static from here, as if a gush of pink and red pebbles had poured out of the cat.

Donna stopped short, slapped her hands over her face, and screamed, “I can’t! I *can’t!*”

“Geez!” Annemarie said. “You almost made me jump out of my skin!”

Donna had assumed Annemarie’s silence meant she was furious, so Donna had been willing herself, with every step, not to make Annemarie even angrier, to be brave for once. But Donna was never brave. She feared not only gory things like the run-over cat, but anything unknown or unfamiliar. It annoyed her mother to no end. But her extensive fears had also enabled her mother to develop a standard tactic to use if Donna did anything at all out of line. The tactic was to walk to the phone that hung on the kitchen wall, reach for it, and say, “That’s it. I’m calling to sign you up for sleep-away camp.” After the crying, screaming, and begging, Donna could be guaranteed to stay out of the way and not utter a peep for days.

Donna had been afraid the first time she’d played at Annemarie’s house years ago. To be fair, most people—including adults—thought Annemarie a bit scary, even when she was a little child, with that sly way she

had of looking sideways at you with her ice-blue eyes, as if waiting for an opportunity to pounce. Or the abrupt rudeness she employed without warning, snapping, “I’m bored—I’m going home,” in the middle of a game or halfway through a cookie. But Donna was afraid of unfamiliar places no matter who was there. Other people’s houses smelled different, and she never knew where to sit. If she had to eat, she was nervous about dropping crumbs. If she had to speak, she was nervous about saying something stupid that would annoy an adult or make a kid never play with her again. So, she tried very hard to bravely go past the cat as she walked toward home beside Annemarie. And she failed.

A smile flickered around Annemarie’s lips, which Annemarie knew perfectly well wasn’t appropriate. “Oh, Annemarie, that doesn’t make me proud,” her mother would have said, vaguely, in the detached voice she used for discipline and pretty much anything else. There wasn’t any point to laughing, though, since Annemarie didn’t have Julie here to laugh with, so she bit her lip and looked blankly at Donna, who partially emerged from behind her hands.

“I can’t.” There were tears again.

“Why don’t you keep your eyes closed when we go past it?”

“NO!” Donna shrieked.

Annemarie jumped again. “Okay, okay,” she said. This was where, if they were in a TV show, she was supposed to put an arm around Donna’s shoulders. But she’d never seen anyone do that in real life, and the thought of putting her arm around Donna was distasteful to her.

Donna was making high-pitched noises now and hyperventilating. “C’mon,” Annemarie said, and turned back toward her own house. Let her mother handle this.

Catherine Andreano cooked and served a formal dinner every night, even when her husband wasn’t coming home for it, which was the case tonight. Richard wasn’t the only one—other husbands in the neighborhood often worked late, as Catherine knew from her very occasional conversations with the wives, who maintained 1950s mores long after women’s lib. Some of them did not drive and kept their hair in curlers until noon. Catherine herself was an unusual combination of old-fashioned and progressive. She did not drive, but she did not withhold facts from her daughter, like sex, or restrain her daughter’s movements, other than requiring her to be on time for dinner. Catherine did not believe in it. And she did not have the energy. What she had the energy for was keeping a

sparklingly clean house and a dignified demeanor and putting a proper dinner on the table each night, no matter what. Richard loved and appreciated her. He called her Lady Catherine.

Catherine was not expecting Annemarie to return with Donna in tow. She had already forgotten about the crying of the apparently high-strung little girl. But instead of coming upstairs when she returned home, Annemarie called to her from the vestibule. “Ma! Can you come down?”

Catherine wiped her hands on a dishcloth. She disliked this street-tough “Ma!” that all the children used, and she disliked this yelling up the stairs. Rather than call back, she walked down them, and was about to say, “Annemarie, we are not characters in an old gangster movie,” when she saw Donna standing behind Annemarie, looking more red and puffy, if possible, than before.

“She wouldn’t go,” Annemarie said.

Catherine smiled over an inaudible sigh. “Would you like to call your mother to come and get you, Donna?”

“Okay,” the girl said, looking at the floor.

Inside Richard’s office, Donna held the receiver with two hands and hunched over it. Her voice broke half a sentence into her explanation about the cat, and she turned away and hunched further over the phone until her back looked like a turtle’s. In the end, she put the receiver into the cradle and turned around. “She said no.”

“She said no?” Catherine asked.

Donna took a breath. It was obvious even to Annemarie that she was in a mighty struggle to stop crying. “She said...she said she doesn’t have time to pack up my little brother and drag him out of the house and that I have to walk home...*alone*...right now...” She paused as if debating whether to say the next thing. “...And stop bothering you.” The girl heaved a rattling sob.

Catherine had built a good life around not being involved in anyone else’s business, whether they were neighbors, friends, or family. Not only did it not interest her, she knew involvement would bring her no peace, and peace was what she prized above all. Nevertheless, she had to step in now, just a little bit, as repulsive as it was. Catherine did not know what was wrong with Donna, and she did not care to explore it, but she was not going to throw a hysterical girl out on the street, no matter what the mother said.

She told Annemarie to take the girl upstairs, let her wash her face and hands, and then play in Annemarie's room until she came up. When they were gone, Catherine went into the little office and paused for a moment to think. She dreaded calling Donna's mother. Doris Ruggiero was one of those combative women who seemed to thrive on confrontation—one of the ones who had moved here to raise children in a quiet environment, but who weren't quiet themselves.

She lifted the receiver, which was still wet with Donna's tears, dried it off with the bottom of her apron, and dialed. "Hello, Doris. This is Catherine Andreano."

"Hello, Catherine."

Catherine began delicately: "Donna is, ah, not in very good shape right now. I think perhaps it *is* best if you came to get her with the car."

A moment of silence and then, "I think, *perhaps*, it is best if you mind your own business! My instructions were for my daughter to walk home on her own!"

Catherine's stomach turned. This was exactly the kind of vulgar conflict she wanted to avoid. In the midst of her disgust she also felt a sort of impressed amazement at the ease and speed with which Doris entered such territory.

At this point, Catherine could remove herself immediately. She could smile to get the tone right and say, *You are absolutely right, Doris. I am so sorry. I will send Donna home immediately.* She smiled and opened her mouth to speak. But the thought of putting that trembling mess of a girl out her front door—no matter how nice it would be to have this over and sit down to her quiet meal—turned her stomach as well. "I'm not sure you understand," she began.

"What don't I understand? You tell me, Catherine. What is it that I don't understand?"

"I am trying to explain that—"

"Go ahead, explain."

"I am trying to explain that your daughter is in hysterics. She—"

"What are you, a psychiatrist?"

"Would you please let me finish!" It was the closest Catherine had come to yelling at anyone in years.

"Fine, go ahead, *finish.*"

“The girl is hysterical. To get her home on foot, she would need to be physically dragged down the block, and she would be screaming her head off.”

There was silence for a moment, and Catherine hoped the image would make Doris see that she would just have to come with the car. But Doris sputtered, “So—so if you think that’s what will happen, send her around another way!”

“Oh Doris, you know the streets don’t connect the other way.”

“Don’t you talk to me like a schoolteacher! I know what the streets are like!” Doris was in a full yell now. “What do you want from me, Catherine? You want me to stop cooking my dinner, pack up my four-year-old, and get the car out because you don’t have the balls to tell my kid to go home and you’re too much of a princess to get a driver’s license? You gotta be kidding me!”

Catherine’s heart was pounding a little, but she made herself keep calm. She may have been pulled into this woman’s slimy world temporarily, but she was not going to become like her. “Well listen, maybe when your husband gets home he can—”

“Don’t you tell me what my husband should do!”

Catherine had had enough. “Well I am *not* going to be responsible for giving your daughter a nervous breakdown! I am *not*! She can stay here for dinner and have a sleepover with Annemarie! My husband is working late tonight. He will drive her home in the morning!”

Silence.

“Do I have your permission,” Catherine continued icily, “to have your daughter over for a sleepover? I need to have your permission.” Her disgust of this woman and her vulgarities rose in her throat. “I don’t want to be accused of kidnapping your daughter.”

Too far. “How *dare* you insult me like that? What kind of person do you think I am?”

“I’m sorry. I’m sorry.” Catherine saw they were in danger of going through another round. “I apologize. I just want to make sure you’re okay with Donna sleeping over.”

“Yeah! I’m okay with it!” Doris snapped, and the line clicked off.

Catherine was trembling. She almost resented the little girl upstairs who had drawn her into the kind of muck she couldn’t stand, and because of whom she now had a morning chore to present to her hard-

working husband. But she would not permit herself to be ungracious toward the child in any way. Catherine was not an ungracious person, and she would not allow anyone to make her so.

Meanwhile, Donna was trying to decide whether to use the hand towel in the Andreanos' bathroom. This house was as immaculately clean as her own, but the similarity did not make her any less uncomfortable. Are you supposed to use a family's personal hand towel? At least she knew for sure not to touch the two embroidered, decorative towels that hung side-by-side from a chrome bar on the wall. If it were only her hands, she might venture to use a back corner of the hand towel, but her face was wet too. So she took four tissues out of the porcelain box that hid the cardboard one underneath, praying she wouldn't take the last one, and mopped her face with them. Bits of tissue clung to her skin, and it took a while to pick them all off. By the time Donna came out of the bathroom, Annemarie's mother announced dinner.

Waiting in her shag-carpeted bedroom, Annemarie thought Donna was probably having diarrhea or something in the bathroom and hoped it wouldn't smell. She fingered the ceramic birthday statues on her dresser—angelic girls in pastel ball gowns with giant, gilt-edged ceramic numbers attached to their skirts, purchased every year by an aunt in a Hall-mark store—and went to the kitchen when her mother called.

Dinner was calm and quiet after all. No crying. Donna said very little, other than “thank you” every time she was passed something, her turmoil now below the surface in deference to the need for good manners. Catherine asked her polite questions, both as a way of keeping the girl distracted and to model such behavior for Annemarie, who was doing nothing to help the conversation but watched Donna through narrow eyes, with a curve to the corner of her mouth that showed she was thinking of nothing else but how Donna had gone berserk just a little while ago.

Instinct made Catherine keep the girls in the kitchen longer than necessary, ignoring Annemarie's sighs and scowls. She had them load the dishwasher, dry the pots and pans and put them away, carry the cloth napkins down to the laundry area in the basement, and shake the tablecloth out the window before they carried that down as well. When she couldn't think of anything else for them to do, she let them go to Annemarie's room and then called Annemarie back a moment. Catherine hesitated. This was over-involvement, she felt, but she did it anyway. In a stern, low voice she rarely used, she said, “Annemarie, do not bring up the cat.”

Annemarie rolled her eyes. “I won’t.”

Catherine said nothing else. She was sure she had done more than her duty today. She would retire now to her living room, where she would calm her mind by working on her crochet and watching the news, after which she would turn off the television, turn on the classical station on the radio, and read until Richard came home.

Donna had been to a sleepover only once before, when she was seven and a girl in her class had a birthday sleepover party. Donna’s parents had to buy her a sleeping bag just for the occasion, but Donna didn’t sleep all night, even after the other girls finally, one by one, all closed their eyes, and the next day at her uncle’s barbecue Donna went inside his house and fell asleep, which embarrassed her mother. Never again, Doris said, and the sleeping bag went into a storage box in the back of the attic.

Now Donna would be borrowing Annemarie’s sleeping bag, and not only that, she was going to be borrowing one of Annemarie’s nightgowns too. Tomorrow morning, she would have to put on her same clothes, something she had never done in her life. But when Annemarie’s quiet mother had told her she was staying over and told her about the sleeping bag and the nightgown, she had only nodded, her heart pounding.

Annemarie, who was always officious with her playmates and especially with the shy or weak ones like Donna, was even more so now because she was worried that Donna would cry all night and be really boring, even more boring than she usually was. So Annemarie walked briskly into the bedroom, took a cassette from the neat stack of them on her dresser, popped it in, and pressed play—keeping the volume down so as not to disturb her mother, the only thing besides dinnertime that her mother had rules about—and, after a pause, the opening pulses of “Stayin’ Alive” from the *Saturday Night Fever* soundtrack began. Annemarie never admitted to anyone that what they did to the girl in that movie had scared her and she wished she hadn’t seen it. She was the envy of half the fourth grade for having been allowed to go. She strode to her toy shelves, took down *Operation!* and said, “Let’s play this,” as she set the box down on the carpet and opened it up. Donna sat obediently on the other side of the box.

The nerve-wracking nature of the game calmed and distracted both of them. Over the warble of the BeeGees in the background, they could hear their own breathing as they bent close to the board, gripping the electronic tweezers, jumping a little when they touched the sides and the thing buzzed. When the game was finished (Donna won by three points)

and they were putting the tiny plastic bones and organs into a bag and back into the box, Annemarie asked Donna if she still played with Barbie dolls.

Everything Annemarie said always sounded like a challenge, so Donna assumed she'd get made fun of if she said yes. But Annemarie ignored the weak "no" almost before Donna uttered it and took a shoebox off another shelf. Three Barbies and a Ken lay on top of a pile of Barbie clothes. "I usually just dress them up and make them kiss."

Donna remembered this about Annemarie. The few times they had played Barbies together, Annemarie had spent the time making the dolls kiss, pushing their non-tiltable heads into as much of a tilt as she could without popping them off, to make it look realistic. She also made them fight, shaking each doll from side to side as they spoke to one another in a rage. Every girl played differently. The girl from Donna's class who'd had the sleepover always made hers go on a trip. That was easier to play. With Annemarie, Donna usually changed their outfits and watched, as she did now.

"Sometimes I make them have sex," Annemarie said. Her kissing Ken and Barbie became more frantic. She started taking off their clothes. "You know how people have sex, right?"

Another challenge, but Donna knew that if she lied and said yes, Annemarie would make her prove it by explaining it. So she shook her head.

"Really? You don't know what sex is?" Annemarie wasn't actually surprised that Donna didn't know—after all, she didn't even know what a period was—but it was an unwritten rule for all kids to act gleefully shocked by another kid's ignorance. It was too bad there weren't other kids around now so Annemarie could have hooted with laughter and played it up; since it was just the two of them, she didn't bother. Instead, she got right to it, with relish, rejecting the proper terms her mother had taught her.

"The man puts his dick into your hole, between your legs," she said and grinned at the look on Donna's face. "You know what a dick is, don't you?"

Donna nodded. She did know what a dick was. The boys at school mentioned it often enough.

Annemarie had the Barbie and Ken undressed and was demonstrating. Barbie's legs didn't open sideways so she was in a scissor-kick,

one leg up over Ken's shoulder. "You can make the other two Barbies do it if you want them to be lezzies."

Donna knew from a past conversation with Annemarie that lezzies were women who liked each other so much they got married, though when Donna had mentioned this to her mother, Doris had snapped, "What are you talking about? There's no such thing!" It hadn't occurred to Donna that this would also involve sex. She looked from the Barbie in her hands, whose dress she was tying closed, to the untouched Barbie on the floor that neither of them had played with yet. She was afraid that Annemarie was going to push her to make the two Barbies have sex. She said nothing, drew the cardboard box to her, leaned over it, and hunted for shoes to match the dress.

Annemarie *was* thinking about pushing Donna to make the two Barbies have sex. It would be funny to see Donna rubbing two naked Barbie dolls together, and if Annemarie ever talked to Julie again it would be the first thing she'd tell her. But, Annemarie thought, watching Donna hunched so far over the shoebox that her nose was practically inside it, if Donna was afraid of something you couldn't force her to do it. She'd rather cry and make a fool of herself, which was only fun if others were around. With Donna, Annemarie couldn't use "What are you, scared?" like she could with other kids.

So, she stopped pressing Barbie and Ken together and dressed them, and then re-dressed them in other outfits, while Donna found green shoes to match the dress and then changed her doll into pants and a blouse. They played in silence until Annemarie announced it was time to change into their nightgowns.

She wanted to see if Donna's breasts were starting to grow too, if she had two pink bumps that stuck out like Annemarie's did, or if she had more than that, or nothing at all. But when Annemarie got the nightgowns out of the drawer and began to take her own clothes off, Donna left the room and changed in the bathroom.

Annemarie got her sleeping bag out from the floor of her closet and unrolled it onto the carpet, next to her narrow bed. When Donna came back from the bathroom, she got right in and lay down.

Annemarie sighed. She might as well go to bed too. Trying to play with Donna any more would probably put her to sleep anyway.

So, she climbed into her bed, and then asked Donna, abruptly, "Are your boobies growing yet?"

Donna giggled. “No.”

“Mine are.” She waited, but Donna didn’t say anything. “My mother’s are kind of normal now, but before she had me she was really, really big. I’m scared that mine are going to be really big too.”

“Why are you scared?”

“Cause I don’t want really big ones.”

There was silence. Then, “Well, I bet they won’t be too big.”

“Why not?”

“I can’t picture you with really big ones.”

She sounded so sure. Could someone who had acted so dumb for the past three hours be right about something? *I can’t picture you with really big ones.* Annemarie said it to herself in her head.

From Donna’s position on the floor, the yellow walls of Annemarie’s room towered over her. Donna looked up at the ceramic birthday girls standing in a line along the dresser, the stack of cassettes (the beat of *Saturday Night Fever* had long since stopped), the toy shelves. The nightgown smelled of a different detergent than the one her mother used, but it smelled okay. The sleeping bag on top of the shag carpet was soft despite the foreignness of it, despite the usually unbearable strangeness of someone else’s things. She began to drift off.

Annemarie thought about the cat’s paw sticking straight up into the air. She could tell Donna that the paw was going to get her, that the blood dripping from the cat was oozing down the street right now and down the driveway into the basement. It would keep Donna up the entire night. And she could tell Donna that if she told on Annemarie in the morning, Annemarie’s mother would be really mad, not at Annemarie but at Donna for being such a pain.

Or they could talk about Julie. Donna played with Julie sometimes. Annemarie could point out to Donna what a monkey-face Julie had. She could get Donna to admit it and then demand to know why Donna would want to be friends with someone who had such a monkey-face.

She looked down at Donna. She could see her from the light of the streetlights coming in the window. Donna had a bit of a monkey-face herself. Maybe Annemarie should tell her that.

But she decided not to. She let the girl in her sleeping bag alone—for now. She put her own head on her own pillow. She pulled the covers over herself and she, too, fell asleep.

Thomas Ukinski

THE MONSTER

Sloan Mostro stumbled out the parlor door, tugging up his drawers and trousers as he ran, which bound his legs and made him stumble and bash his cheek and shoulder against one of the white wooden columns, but he hardly suffered. He heard Mama cry, “Sloan!” but the Monster was nearer roaring and cursing. Sloan could feel the Monster’s hot soury breath, though its tromping seemed far behind.

The Monster howled, “Boy, Goddam it!” and then, “Miriam!” He understood the Monster, even as sometimes the croaking of frogs or the high-pitched whine of a fly became words to him. The Monster would blame her for leaving the parlor door ajar, a door that was never to be used, much less agape to the street. God had obliged Mama to arrange a passageway for him. He clambered atop the iron fence, jabbing his hands and legs on its spearheads. He leapt off and sped along the white dirt street until he couldn’t breathe, and when he stopped, all the hurts came alive, on his face, his shoulder, his ankles, wrists, hands, knees, all throbbing and aching at once. But most painful of all were the slashes on his bottom.

The Monster had caught him and raised him off the ground, even as Mama pleaded, “Morgan, please! He didn’t mean to do it!” But that was a lie. The pieces of the meerschaum were scattered on the rug beside the Turkish leather rocker at the desk. He’d flung the pipe on the braided rug and smashed it with an imported snow globe when Mama got the telephone call that the Monster was coming that very day. If he could have reached them, he’d have seized the sabers crossed over the doorway to the den and slashed everything. Sloan knew the Monster would scorn her prayers, for it tolerated no “effrontery.” It’d shorn its coat and cufflinks and rolled up the sleeves of its blue-striped shirt, revealing the dark hairs along its arms and the polished gray claws.

The Monster had him by his middle, wagging, his wailing disconnected by suffocating and the wrenching of his middle, while fear tingled on his skin.

The Monster carried him out to the privy, and the suffocating stink from the black hole made him feel more trapped and terrified. He whimpered, “Don’t!”

“You knew what’d happen when you did it,” the Monster replied in a voice ferociously distinct.

The Monster laid him across its legs, face down, its left hand bearing hard upon him to fix him in place. But that gripe was swapped for shock as the Monster undid his trousers, exposing him. He tugged at them, but the Monster flinched and crushed him between its forearm and thighs, paralyzing him. “DON’T you defy me, boy!”

Shame overtook him like fever chills. *That one Sunday the pastor had read in Genesis Noah getting drunk on wine lying naked in his tent and he cursed Cānaān who’d seen him naked and blest Shēm and Jāpēth who’d covered his body but didn’t look at it Mama said never show your body to others lest it be a doctor it is a sin and disgrace to the Father and—*

The air was frigid on his nakedness, and he feebly wriggled his arms. He swung up his legs to protect himself, but the Monster swoped its knuckles against Sloan’s calves and gnarled, “KEEP them legs down.” Sloan heard the jingling of the belt just before it struck and distributed its blazing sting. Many times it landed, as if the Monster disallowed that the licks were true.

At length, it released Sloan to stand. It feigned a low paternal tone as he mourned. “Stop your bawlin’ now, boy, and contemplate what you’ve done. Do you regret the way you carried on?”

Sloan, whimpering and sniffing, nodded.

“Are you resolved to cease your spitefulness?”

Sloan nodded.

“I need an answer.”

“Yes, sir.”

“And you won’t destroy the property of others furthermore?”

“No, sir.”

“Fine. Let’s return to the house.”

Sloan followed the Monster, though he was seething and despised its striped suspenders and rigid foppish gait. His britches were still askew and snaked to his hips.

Mama was standing in the foyer, rubbing one slim pale hand with the other, and in her frilly blouse and narrow-waisted skirt and bountiful

hair coiled and pinned, she looked like one of the models in the Sears catalog, but her face was flushed and anxious.

“It’s all right now, Mother,” the Monster declared. “The tantrum’s passed.”

She gazed at him, her large round eyes wincing but kindly, and she extended her arms slightly as if she would embrace him. “Darling,” she asked, “are you sorry for what you’ve done to your papá?” She emphasized the second syllable, as a cultured lady would.

Sloan had spied the neglected door in the parlor. The smell of linseed oil and flowers and intolerable. He backed away from them and hollered, “I ain’t sorry! En you kin go straight t’hell!”

Mama gasped. The Monster’s face reddened around his petit handlebar mustache, as Sloan flung open the door.

He turned about and gazed at the grand white house with its turret and its gray slate roof, the columns on the porch, and the archway over the front door. When Mama called it a “Queen Anne” house, he’d visioned it as a castle and Mama as princess and attendant to the queen. The Monster aimed to be a prince, though it be an ogre.

He dreamed he was crossing a stone bridge when the troll appeared as in Billy Goats Gruff with eyes as big as saucers and a nose long as a poker and he knew the eldest goat would soon gouge out its eyes and crush its bones to bits you can’t kill me said the troll but when you’re twelve like Kippy Desmond you can slay the beast.

Kippy Desmond was a boy in New York that shot his ma and pa dead. The Monster had jested about it with the other men ranged around the dining room playing gin rummy. The children had been ordered outside, and the women nested in the parlor, but Sloan had been briefly permitted to watch the men in vests under the hanging gas light, squeezing and coddling their cigars, biting and twisting them in their mouths and spurting smoke. They bent forward and hindward, groaned, guffawed, caressed their cards and pitched them on the green tablecloth, amid the scents of cologne, whiskey, and sweat.

“Killed his ma and pa, he did,” said a fat man whose flesh bulged around the smudged detachable collar, “and no more’n twelve years old!”

“What was the name?” a jowly red-eyed man asked, staring at the cards in his hand.

“Kippy Desmond,” the Monster answered. “Old man owned Desmond’s Tonics in New York. Left an estate valued at no less than three million dollars.”

“By Gad!” exclaimed another man. “The little nipper’d have come into a fortune.”

“If he hadn’t ‘orphaned’ himself,” the Monster quipped, and the other howled.

The fat tub eyed Sloan and smirked. “What about you, sonny—your old man is loaded—you figurin’ on pluggin’ him with your six-gun?” The men bellowed so loudly they didn’t hear Sloan answer, “Yes.”

He straggled along powdery Wisteria Street, veering around black piles of horse droppings, studying the houses on display, each one like a pyramid on its trim domain of grass, shrubs, trees, and fence. “Habitations,” his Mama called them, with their dome-shaped cupolas and circular porticos and balustrades like rows of vases.

Sloan muttered “cupola” and “balustrade” and giggled, tickled that he could remember such high-flown words. Mama said he was “quick.” She’d strolled these lanes with him and taught him about architecture, for she’d been to a women’s college for two years, before...She would sigh when she mentioned the Monster and told how it had stolen her away from her home, like a pirate. But it wasn’t neither Long John Silver nor Sir Francis Drake, but a “lobbyist,” one of those that idled in the capitol with layabouts and scalawags, using pleas, promises, threats, and flattery to make legislators pass laws favoring rich men. Sloan had read of lobbyists in political editorials that recounted their shameful deeds.

His twelfth birthday, July 20, was less’n a month away, and it was nigh time to fulfill what the troll had promised. Deep in his right pants pocket was a drawstring bag given him by Grandma Clayton, and inside that was a crumble of brown paper, torn from a package for a mail-order skirt for Mama. And in that paper was ten dollars stolen from the Monster’s dresser drawer, which it had forgotten to lock ere its last departure.

He came to a box-shaped pine board house. Pieces of whitewash had worn away, exposing gray bones. Roof tiles were missing, and the rain gutters sagged. There were a few lean paralyzed cows and spotted scurrying pigs behind a fence of mismatched planks. Nearby was a lopsided shed, its doors propped open to reveal a stagecoach-shaped motorcar, and in the

scrub grass yard were scattered carcasses of drays and haywagons. Above the door was a black-painted sign: SHOOP'S CARRIAGE & AUTO REPAIR. Lanky men in oil-stained coveralls were pacing about and leaning over the butt of the machine. A boy was standing in the yard staring at Sloan: Philo Shoop. After a few moments, Philo strolled to the fence.

"Hey, Sloan," Philo said. He wore a dark patched work shirt and patched trousers. He was chubby, and on his round head, too large for his body perched a flat cap.

"Hey, Philo. No lessons today?" His Mama gave him lessons at home now because of the troubles at school.

"Naw. She's in the city for some suffragette convention."

"They gonna chain themselves to the city hall stairway again?"

"Naw. Cops won't let 'em git close. The old man swears he'll lock her out if she gets pinched again."

"Better'n him tannin' her hide, like some husbands do."

Philo's eyes widened. "Holy Moses, we can't do that! We're Methodists!"

"I wish my family was."

"Your old man whipped you again?"

Sloan nodded. He surveyed the area to be sure there were no adults near. "I stole ten bucks from his dresser."

"Dang! What're y'gonna do with that?"

"I'm gonna buy a gun."

"Dang! Ya gonna shoot somebody?"

"Just like Kippy Desmond."

"Dang! You'll be in the newspapers, sure! Bet nobody in this town ever popped their old man!"

"I'm goin' to Muehlberg's shop right now."

"Really? Kin I come watch you?"

"Well, y'kin walk me there."

Philo turned and bellowed, "Pa! I'm goin' downtown!"

A deep harried voice emerged from the shed. "'Ight then."

"Does he beat you much?" Philo asked.

"Only when it's home," Sloan answered, smirking, but Philo's moony face showed he couldn't take it in.

"He don't—beat your ma, does he?"

"It better not is all."

“Nobody should ever hurt somebody’s mama.” Philo was frowning at the ground. “Mamas is where all the liddle babies come from.”

Along wide wooden walks and swirling streets were brown and gray and yellow buildings, all with picture windows and signs and awnings. Bicycles, horses, and carriages dodged the few motorcars as they squeaked and throbbed and jolted past, their huge tires spinning through manure and mud, while flighty pedestrians fled before them. Ladies in long dresses with pinched waists, corsets, and broad-brimmed hats strolled majestically with men who sported curled mustaches, dark suits, sack coats, and hom-burgs or bowlers. Among them sidled immigrant workmen with copious beards, in boots, suspenders, and gray shirts with sweat-stained armpits.

Sloan and Philo made for the white brick building in the middle of the block, which bore a sign for MUEHLBERG’S IMPLEMENTS.

It was gloomy inside, the plywood walls studded with hooks for hammers and spades and handsaws. There were barrels filled with nails and screws, and at the far side of the long room, glass cases displaying pistols and rifles and hunting knives. A black pot-bellied stove had an L-shaped pipe strung out to the wall. The room was humid and thick with wood shavings and fumes of paint and ammonia. Muehlberg, a chumpy man in an apron, sentried at a counter to the left beside a brass cash register. Sloan whispered to Philo, “Better stay outside. Muehlberg gets cranky when there’s kids about.”

Muehlberg had the cash drawer out and was sorting and smoothing bills in their wooden slots. He had a large wedge of nose and gray whiskers protruding like a cuttlefish’s tentacles. He glanced up at Sloan for a moment, then studied his money. “I told you t’come back with your pa, son.”

“I know, Mr. Muehlberg, but he’s away, mostly.”

“I don’t have time t’show you them guns again.”

“I come to buy this time, sir.”

Muehlberg inspected him with his tiny recessed eyes. “You brung cash money? How much?”

“I got ten dollars, sir.”

Muehlberg pursed his lips, stirring his tentacles. “How’d a little tyke like you come by ten dollars?”

“Me an’ Ma, we been savin’ up our allowances.”

“Hmph.” Muehlberg peeped about at invisible customers. “I’d be rode out o’ town, it ever got around I sold a firearm to a child. . . . You say you got ten dollars?”

“Sure do, Mr. Muehlberg.” Sloan undid the drawstring bag, fetched the brown paper, and plucked out the tiny packet of the bill. He unfolded the money, unwrinkling it with his thumb and forefinger. It had a buffalo in the center. Muehlberg inspected it as if it were a map.

“Still in all,” Muehlberg lamented, “why ain’t you brung your pa in?”

“Cuz it’s fer ‘is birthday!” Sloan blurted, startling himself with the power of his indignation. “I don’t wanna ball up his surprise party!”

“It ain’t right, me conveyin’ a weapon to a whippersnapper.”

Sloan realized that if a patron set foot in the shop, the whole scheme would be bust. He remembered overhearing Muehlberg cajoling a buyer with stories of his sailor years.

“It’ll mean so much t’him, Mr. Muehlberg, after bein’ at sea fer . . .” He calculated how long a sailor would be gone. A year might be too doubtful. “Fer four months. He’ll be in port in a week or so, then there’ll be a few days by train from the coast.”

Muehlberg’s eyes momentarily enlarged. “Yer pa’s a sea dog?”

“Yessir!”

“What kinda craft he favor? A brig? Schooner? Three-masted? How many ton she carry?”

“I’m sure I don’t know about such things, Mr. Muehlberg.”

“Sometime when your pa’s in for a blow, you have him come see me. Ain’t many seafarers in this part o’ the country.”

“I surely will, sir.”

“Well,” Muehlberg rubbed his jaw, his eyes misting over, “I suppose it’s the least I kin do, t’help an old jack-tar celebrate his birthday.”

“Yipee!” Sloan exclaimed, checking the door the see if any customers were nigh. He saw only Philo peering through the glass. A red and blue poster for “USA Machines” showed Uncle Sam sitting on a tractor, and gathered around, facing him in adoration, were a colonial militia officer, in tricornered hat and hosiery, a shirtless Indian in leggings with a single feather in his hair, and a pioneer woman in calico dress, holding a swaddled infant. Sloan imagined he was that baby, wrapped in a warm woolen blanket.

Sloan and Philo hurried away from town. Sloan held a brown paper parcel that seemed to be lighter than it should for what it contained.

“A Smith & Wesson, 1905, hand ejector, 32-20 caliber revolver,” Muehlberg had declared as he plunked the black, long-barreled gun on the glass countertop. “I could get twenny dollars fer it, but I’m givin’ it to you for ten.”

Sloan was aware that Muehlberg was bestowing bunkum, but he pretended to be thunderstruck with gratitude. Muehlberg added a box of cartridges “as a bonus,” but refrained from demonstrating the loading of it, of which Sloan’s “daddy” would be practiced. He’d wrapped the gun and cartridges in enough brown paper to disguise the shape of the purchase. He began his admonitions about taking the weapon “straight home to your ma,” but, fortunately, a short, stout couple entered, and Muehlberg loudly and hastily greeted them, dismissing Sloan.

Once they had crossed the hill past the Barbosas’ ramshackle residence, Sloan scrutinized the surroundings for bypassers. There was only the stretch of gray dirt, crushed stalks, and spindly volunteer trees of Barbosas’ untended field to the left and on the right, an abundant mesh of shrubbery over unclaimed land. The hill hid them from the town, and ahead, the route sloped to a horizon where the sun trailed a tapering triangular cloud as if a hammerhead shark had laid an orange egg.

“Dang! I can’t believe you done it!” Philo enthused. “You got Muehlberg to sell you a gun! Don’t that beat all? And you just a kid, like me! Holy mackerel!”

Sloan unreeled a hundred feet of swath until the gun and wooden canister flipped to the ground between his feet. He and Philo waddled backward reflexively as if the gun were a rattlesnake. Sloan picked it up and unlatched the cylinder.

“You know how to load that thing?”

“I watched the Monster do it one day, while he was out shooting with his swellhead friends.”

“‘The Monster’! Izzat what you call your old man? You sure do despise him.” Philo watched Sloan slip a bullet in.

“You wanna try loadin’ it some?”

“Me?” Philo hunched and retreated slightly. “Dang! Pa never lets me get near his guns!”

Sloan clicked the cylinder in place. He felt suddenly horrified by the loaded revolver, magnified and leaden in his hands. He carefully removed the bullets and returned them to the box. “Best not get nailed with a loaded gun,” he muttered. He rolled weapon and ammo into a slipshod bundle again.

They strolled down Peony Street, past houses of warped white-washed lumber that seemed to tilt at various angles, like pitching ships in a tempest. He worried that the Monster might nab him or the gun. When he was little, the Monster only picked him up to move him out of the way—talons seizing him under the armpits as if hoisting rubbish. Alone, he tried to summon the pain of those moments, using the points of rusty nails or his jackknife to pierce his skin. The wounding relieved his anger some.

“You gonna shoot him right off?” Philo asked.

“Naw. That’s why I unloaded it. Got to do it on the QT. I don’t aim to be pinched if the bluecoats’ll believe another story, like a robbery or assassination or such.”

“‘Cept if Muehlberg finds out, he’ll squeal on you.”

“... If he left on a trip, and I stalked him a ways from the house in the dark, then snuck home, how’d anyone figure it was me? I’d clean and stash the gun. It wouldn’t matter if they found it, he’s got sev’ral. I’d admit I bought it on the sly, but he took it away.”

“Aw, he don’t start off at night, does he?”

“I could find a telephone someplace and call. An emergency.”

“How you gonna get out of the house that late? And who else do you know’z even got a telephone?”

“The young doctor, Mawley. He owns one.”

“When’d you be at his house, alone?”

“If I was sick.”

“How’d you be comin to his house, alone, if you was sick? And how’d you get away from Mawley t’smoke him?”

“Aw, hell! ...Anyways,” he murmured, “I can’t shoot him with Mama in the house.”

“Criminy!” Philo erupted. “Do you know you been callin’ your old man ‘he’?”

“Yep,” Sloan replied, feigning offhandedness. But he seemed to cross into a patch of blackness that made him halt. It would be a man that

he'd be shooting. The age of slaying trolls and demons was long passed; no one had eyes to see an ogre in their midst. He could vision the whiskered faces of judge and jury as they judged him.

"Hi, you boys! You boys! You!" a querulous voice exploded from the left. A spindle-shanked old man, wearing a straw hat, was rocking on his buttocks on a tree stump near his porch, mustering the momentum to stand.

"Old Roy Baggins," Philo muttered. "'Roy the Redeemer.' Pay no attention. He's bughouse."

"Hi, you squirts!" Roy neared the road. His jaw was as wide as a spade. He moved splayfootedly, his chin tucked into his chest. "Pass you by these sixty-nine years! Uh-huh! I know nothin'. I beheld the Great Rebellion. Followed Sherman's Torch to the Sea. Minié balls soarin' through bone and brain!"

Sloan saw fishbelly flesh through the holes in his dungarees. Yellow patches of tobacco drool were crusted on his flannel shirt.

"Follow along in your humnals. All together now!" He began croaking tunefully as he jounced from side-to-side:

Mine eyes have seen the fury of the comin' of the Toad.

He is stompin' on the pars'nage where the dupes of faith are stowed.

He held up his arms and howled. "Dismember *the Maine!* Run Cassy! Run Emmeline! While Jackson the Jackass rides into Mexico! Teddy strides swinging his Big Dick Diplomacy! Fair field and no favor! Fight the world! Save the war! In God's fool heart there is no grace!

Roy hobbled to keep apace, reaching out to them over the barb-wire fence. "They slaughtered babes and shamed the sanctuary! Ezekiel's jokery! Fathers put their children to the sword for their own sins, and children their fathers!"

They hurried until Roy was stymied by the limits of the land. "Once we were slaves to the elemental spirits!" he bawled. "Go west, young men, and pity the poor dead Injun, late for the show at the Alamo!"

"Blast that geezer!" Philo exclaimed. "He talks crazy all the time. To everyone and himself."

"Yep," Sloan answered.

"One time he told my brother Sterling..."

Sloan heard the raspy sounds, but not the words. He was swallowed in fright. Maybe he did want to kill Morgan, his father, to wash out his own sin, like baptism in a river. But what sin had he done to need a sacrifice? Did the sacrifice atone for itself? Mamma believed that the deranged could pick up others' thoughts. Roy could stand as witness to his guilt. Worse would be a miraculous betrayal, Morgan warned—by a talking squirrel, a specter, a vision—of his son's murderous will. Or Sloan borne away by a whirlwind.

They trudged down Wisteria Street now, near to home. The houses watched them like ornamented sultans. How would he and Mamma get by, when Morgan was gone? He'd leave off school and go to sea, or the railroad. Or maybe work for Philo's father, repairing motorcars. Oh, hell, why even consider that? He wouldn't be around for Mamma. He'd be in jail....

“‘Lemme go, you damned old loonie!’ Sterling yells at Baggins,” Philo recounted, “and pretty near pasted him! Can you beat that old coot?” Philo guffawed, and Sloan pretended to laugh. He wondered if Philo would blab. Who could tell with Philo? He was like the schoolhouse flagpole that the winds blew around in opposite directions. He could cleverly analyze Sloan's plans, but couldn't add figures or read sentences without floundering. He was limp and spiritless when kids stole his cap or chanted “fatty” in the schoolyard. Yet once he'd rushed at Mrs. Rosepeter in a rage and knocked her silly, shrieking like a steam whistle as she fell against the blackboard. It seemed that only because Mr. Heck, the principal, disliked her that he'd not been expelled, until, in Geography class, he'd cracked open the giant globe against Mr. Deeby's desk and hurled the world at his head.

Still in all, Philo was his only friend.

Behind the Queen Anne house flowed the rapids of blue-gray clouds, above black trees. The wind ruffled their furry leaves with its agitated breaths. He sighted a slender shape treading through the iron gate: Mamma. He constrained himself from hurrying to her, for he feared her reprove. Would she be ill-tempered that he'd cursed his “papá”? She kept steadily toward him, fumbling with the looped and bristled strands undone from her pompadour. The parched air smelled of weeds and lilac and baking bread.

She was smiling, but her oval face seemed dirtied. He felt rage and panic pulse through him as he realized it was a purple bruise on her cheek.

“Mamma!” he sobbed, “What—?”

She embraced him and whispered, “My lamb!” He was nurtured by the satiny texture of her blouse. The lilac scent was hers.

“Mamma,” he murmured, the side of his face against her body. “He hit you? He slapped you?”

“He was furious, and I grabbed his arm to stop him from taking out after you. His fist just—swung back. A foolish woman! I was the cause of it!”

“No!” Sloan drew away his head from her. “He smacked you—he punched you! Because he couldn’t git at me!”

“Please don’t say that—oh, hello, Philo. I’m sorry...”

“Hello, Mrs. Mostro,” Philo replied.

Sloan glanced at him. He’d turned himself away from them, toward the house, gazing at it, so as not to embarrass them. Sloan blushed hot with mortification about blubbering and being a mollycoddle before him. He tried to escape his mother’s encirclement, but she strengthened her clasp and pulled him nearer. “Oh, Sloan!” she pleaded. “He cried! Immediately after. He nearly cried, seeking—begging my forgiveness! He repeated over and over how much he loved both of us, how he could never really harm us! He cursed himself for his ire in touching me that way. He vowed he would die to protect us, his beloved and his—his own precious son.”

“How can I forget he’s beaten you?”

“Darling—” She inhaled deeply, dabbing her eyes with a handkerchief. “He didn’t ‘beat’ me. He’s never done anything like this before. And I’m certain that he never will again.” She was apprehensively inspecting the other houses on the street, agonized that they’d created “a scene.”

Distractedly she admonished him. “If you could just be sweeter to him, obey him, and respect his things.”

“Oh, things! That’s what he truly cares for! I’m only happy when he’s gone, when we’re alone. I hate it when he—”

A silence or absence made him look around. Philo was gone. Gone, also, was the brown parcel that he’d dropped as Mama hugged him.

“Sloan, what’s—?”

“Wait, Mamma.” He was running toward the house, at first afraid Philo had surrendered the revolver to Morgan. Then he saw the paper

wrapper, skittering through the grass. On the porch, he discovered strewn cartridges and the empty box. He rushed through the front door, halted, then advanced, his cautious treading creaking on the polished wooden floor. Through the doorway of the study, he saw Philo.

But the gun was on the floor beside Philo's cap.

The two sabers above the door had been seized, leaving their worn-in shadows. Philo had used the revolver to knock them down. He had both sabers pointed at Morgan, who sat dead straight in his Turkish leather rocker. He'd pushed the chair away from his desk and clutched a dull-gold pocket pistol.

"Greetings, Mr. Mostro," said Philo in a low, calm voice.

"Now hold on, son. Rest easy." His eyes were aghast, his impudent face spellbound. "Let me take—"

"Not mamas! Not mamas!" Philo shouted. A saber chopped the desk. Morgan twinged.

"Philo, wait!" Sloan called. But Philo shook his head.

"My old man wouldn't let me touch his guns, but it amused him to see me swing his swords. He even taught me some about sword fighting."

Then Sloan realized what Philo was doing. *No one'd believe that Morgan had shot a child in self-defense. They'd hang him for it, sure.*

Philo sidestepped the desk. He held one saber level and lifted the other above his head. "You know me, sir. I'm Kippy, the Monster Slayer."

J. Weintraub

THE RECTOR ADDRESSES HIS EXPEDITIONARY TEAMS ON THE EVE OF THEIR DEPARTURE

All around the Great Hall broad banners were draped from the ceiling almost to the floorboards, obscuring the mullioned windows and the stained glass and most of the wall's oak paneling in between. An occasional eye, a cheekbone, a bouquet of sideburn whiskers, a hand holding a cigar—fragments of the portraits of distinguished educators and benefactors—peeked out from behind the hanging fabric. With their stark colors and party insignia emblazoned at the middle of each, the banners signified government support and approval, and made the Hall—usually the scene of symposia and assemblies, inaugural ceremonies and graduations, announcements of intellectual developments and awards—appear as if it were hosting a political rally rather than an academic gathering.

The first to arrive, settling into the front rows, were the members of the expeditionary teams themselves. Thirteen men and two women, they were eager to begin their journeys to their designated ends of the earth. Dressed in their traveling clothes, they had stowed their baggage, kits, and other gear in the storage locker of an adjacent dormitory from where, early the following morning, they would be transported to the airfield or their port of departure.

Behind them entered family and friends, along with faculty advisors and other teachers and students who had helped design the research and prepare for the voyages. They were followed by additional faculty and staff, representing most of the departments and divisions, and crowding into remaining rows and standing in the aisles almost out the rear doors into the corridor were interested students, government officials, some in uniform, and journalists, their notepads open and pencils poised.

The speakers entered from behind a curtain at the rear of the up-raised stage and sat in a semicircle of chairs surrounding the podium. Once all were seated, the Chancellor arose to open the proceedings, and following a brief invocation, he introduced the speakers to come and expressed

his gratitude to the corporate donors and government funding agencies who had made these expeditions possible. He was followed by a series of faculty and dignitaries from international societies, all of whom—with the exception of the Department Chair, who felt obligated to introduce each of the team members by name—kept their presentation short, for they all eagerly awaited, speakers and public alike, the remarks of the Rector whose keynote address would close the convocation.

The Rector was the originator of and driving force behind the expeditions. He had final authority for designating the sites, recruiting the personnel, designing the research and training programs, and defining the objectives. Others had secured the funding, but he had drafted the initial proposal, articulating the theoretical foundations behind the effort and suggesting the practical applications that would surely follow. Currently, he was negotiating with his editor on the schedule for publication once the collected data had been reviewed and organized into its final form. Given his age, the project was sure to be the culmination of his career and a significant step toward establishing the scientific validity of his life's work.

The Rector had begun his academic life as a paleontologist and had gained an early notoriety for his strong opposition to the claims then being made for the Piltdown Man's place in the evolutionary scheme. Using anthropomorphic measurements and statistical analysis, he built a tight case against the authenticity of the discovery, and in a particularly contentious article for *Nature*, he declared the skull to be not only “a shameless fraud”—and as such a frontal assault on paleontology as an empirical science—but also a political contrivance designed to establish the pedigree of modern humankind in Great Britain, less than a hundred kilometers from London, in fact. (But, unfortunately for him, it was only some years after his death that the Piltdown skull was definitively proven to be, as he had predicted, “a colossal hoax.”)

Ironically, the vehemence of his attack brought counter charges of political bias against him as well—based on his own presumed antipathy toward the British—and the polemic became both so heated and public that he eventually abandoned his own research in the Neander Valley to study contemporary populations in remote corners of the globe.

But if only the professionals in the audience could appreciate the technical accomplishments of his work on the physiognomies of the “natural” peoples found in Southwest Africa, Lapland, and northern China, most of the others were aware of his adventures in those lands and the

losses he had suffered: the death of a son to a lion attack in Botswana, the amputation of two fingers and the toes on his right foot from frostbite, and a crippling arthritic condition caused by his long confinement, following his abduction by a Chinese warlord, in a cage where he could neither stand nor recline. (His escape from captivity, abetted by one of the warlord's concubines, including his trek across a treacherous mountain pass, considered impassable in winter, was part of both public record and national legend, and although it was never filmed, a screenplay based on these exploits was developed with serious consideration given to Josef von Sternberg as its director and Marlene Dietrich in the role of the concubine.)

These exploits were in the minds of most as the Rector arose painfully from his chair. As he approached the lectern, leaning on his cane with one hand and on the arm of the Chancellor with the other, the audience applauded vigorously.

Although in the privacy of his home or in the field he often wore the traditional garb of the peoples he studied—a gakti or a Mongolian dal—he was now dressed in his usual lecture-hall attire, and his double-breasted, knee-length frock coat, loose tie, and stiff collar along with his bushy steel-gray moustache, gave him the appearance of a previous generation, as if he were there to represent the past rather than to inaugurate the future. He spread his notes out before him, and without any introduction or expression of gratitude or deference, as if what he had to say was too important to bear the burden of formality, he began:

“Absolutely no one today seriously doubts the scientific validity of the concept of race. We, the distinguished gentlemen sitting behind me; you, the audience before me; along with the porter at the door and the scullery maid in the kitchen, all recognize and understand it as soon as we walk into the streets of this great modern city. It is, of course, fundamental to the taxonomy of humanity and derives from one of the foundational texts of the natural sciences, the *Systema naturae* of Carolus Linnaeus himself. There he classified the four races of man that we still identify to this day: *Europeus*, *Asiaticus*, *Afer*, *Americanus*. His disciple Blumenbach, in his *De generis humani varietate nativa*, provided us with the more familiar nomenclature: Caucasian, Mongolian, Ethiopian, and American. He also took the liberty of adding a fifth category, Malayan, which I view—as many of my colleagues in the audience know—as an unnecessary and misguided aberration.”

He paused for a moment, as if awaiting for the majority of the audience to endorse this observation with assenting nods and murmurs, before resuming: “Of course, all taxonomies—the human as well as the animal—are subject to expansion and variation as genera and subspecies are discovered and identified, and in Europe alone, we now encounter such diverse subtypes of the Caucasian as the Nordic, the Falish, the Mediterranean, the Alpine, the Dinaric, the East Baltic, with perhaps more to come. In addition, we have experienced spirited debate concerning the relative importance of the cranium over the corpus and vice versa, the phenotype over the genotype, physiology over psychology, and so forth. But none of this as yet has negated the essential racial classification first proposed in 1758. Still, what has been missing, until now, has been a rigorous scientific delineation—objective and empirical—to help us establish once and for all the physical identity and boundaries of each of the core races. I say until now, for that is exactly what these expeditionary teams will be setting out to achieve. Early tomorrow morning they will embark on long and perilous journeys of discovery from which all those involved in the study of humanity—indeed, all those concerned about the progression of scientific knowledge itself—will benefit and be forever grateful!”

At these words, the audience arose as one to applaud, and hearty cheers erupted from the teams in the front rows. When they were all again seated, the Rector began to describe the arduous search undertaken to locate the ideal sites for each of the three studies. These would be small communities with roots in prehistory, yet far from migratory or trade patterns, isolated enough to be largely dependent on parochial economies and technologies, and relatively free from what the Rector termed “demographic and cultural adulteration.” Hundreds of potential sites were proposed and rejected, and although, as the Rector explained, “nothing can be perfect in this ancient, evolving world of ours,” three where “racial hegemony had remained largely undisturbed for centuries,” were finally chosen: a village in the mountains of Jämtland near the Norway-Sweden border; an enclave of the Damara tribe surrounded by the Namibian desert and a pestiferous forest to the south; and a Yunan valley as remote as Shangri-La where families of Yin peasants had lived undisturbed for centuries. Regretting that funding could not be found to support a fourth expedition to the Americas, the Rector predicted that “once the value of these our current endeavors are appreciated, financial support will certainly be forthcoming for a fourth expedition and the completion of our task.”

But in the meantime, all resources had been devoted to the training and support of the current teams, who were equipped with the latest and most precise instruments (although the Rector failed to mention that the cost of their kits had been underwritten by the manufacturer himself who hoped to see a surge in demand for his products should the outcome of the expeditions lead to the wide applications anticipated by its sponsors).

“Tools like these,” said the Rector, holding aloft a small caliper, “many of them custom-made and calibrated for this specific mission,” and perhaps for the first time in human history, this humble instrument was the object of a standing ovation.

“A total of twenty-five bone, sliding, and skinfold calipers in each kit,” he continued, even before the applause ended, “along with anthropometers, and head-squares, all required for the minimum of eighty-five measurements—from the length and height of the skull, to the width and length of the digits to the thickness of the nose, base, middle, septum—applied to every man, woman, and child in the set. And that’s only the beginning. Ratios—forearm to humerus, say, height to waist, and so forth—may be as distinctive and revelatory as the lengths and widths themselves. The possible permutations are, of course, endless, but once the process is complete we will have not only a clear and standard, data-driven identity for these three core races but also, ideally, we will have reduced the data for each to a single mathematical formula as distinct, as descriptive, and as absolute as skin color or the thickness of hair. A final determinative starting point,” he declared, “for the clarification of racial identity!”

These results were destined to be both standard and definitive, but the Rector cautioned his audience, reminding them that the results were also intended to be only descriptive, and no more. “We leave,” he suggested, “to the ethnographers, the philosophers, and the politicians the task of creating social and cultural values from these findings, of providing guidance and formulating policies. Although there is little doubt that the immutability of somatological characteristics have equally immutable psychological and social properties, leading, if properly understood, organized, and controlled, to more stable and workable social structures, it is not our intention to qualify our investigations; nevertheless, for the record, I would like to confirm that my own decidedly dolichocephalic skull has a pronounced Nordic cranial index of 75!”

This comment at first elicited only a few scattered pockets of laughter, as if most in his audience were uncertain that the Rector, who rarely injected humor into his lectures, was actually joking here.

“Of course, I’m only stating the obvious,” he added, and reassuring his audience with a wide grin that he was indeed being clever, he then needed to pause for a moment until the now generalized laughter had subsided.

“But we will not be ignoring the social and cultural status of the populations under controlled study,” and the Rector mentioned how the teams were trained in survey and interrogatory techniques free of narrative and other biases, to elicit not only genealogical profiles and histories—lineage and kinship ties necessary for the interpretation of the metrical data—but also insights into rituals and spiritual beliefs, family and domestic practices, dietary and hygienic habits. “This supplementary material,” he explained, “would be reviewed and edited to comprise the addenda of the intended three volumes, or perhaps a fourth volume, of *Mankind: The Racial Topography*.”

He paused, and then, with emphasis, repeated, “Yes, *Mankind!* A year from today, our teams will have returned home—tanned, in good health, and intact, I’m sure—with their data sets, supplemented by a wealth of field notes and photographic evidence, along with specimens and artifacts for our laboratories and museums.” They would then, he said, be joined by additional teams of scientists and researchers, many of them skilled in mathematics and statistics, who would evaluate, correlate (supplying, on occasion, fresh perspectives and new insights), and finally prepare the material for publication.

“Yes, *Mankind: The Racial Topography!*” he again repeated. “A work destined to become as seminal to the human sciences as Newton’s *Principia* was to physics and Copernicus’s *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium* was to astronomy.”

“And just as from those works huge changes in scientific thought, intellectual progress, and civilization itself erupted,” he declared, “we would expect the expeditions we undertake tomorrow to lead to an era of further exploration and discovery, new applications and departures that will, in turn, lead to expanded departments and divisions of our great institutions, and perhaps the establishment of new institutions themselves. We are, as it were, building on a foundation set by our predecessors some two hundred years ago, or, better yet, nourishing the roots of a venerable

oak tree that will grow and flourish for years to come!” and then as he flattened his palms and stretched and lifted his arms, the teams in the front rows arose as if they were puppets on a string, turning to face their audience. “And it is these trained professionals who are destined to become the teachers and mentors of succeeding generations, the scientists and technicians who will determine our future.”

The teams bowed to acknowledge the applause, and after the Rector lowered his arms and they were again seated, he leaned on the podium and stared silently and intently forward, peering, it seemed, directly into the future. “And just as these teams are setting out to define and expand our vocabulary and fortify the epistemological foundation of our field, their insights and influence will extend into every corner of intellectual life. Moreover, there are innumerable social and economic applications for the knowledge we are seeking, and even now, at the dawn of this new era, professional and technical competence is increasingly in demand—and amply rewarded—in the medical, legal, educational, and political spheres. Doctors and hospital personnel, lawyers and judges, teachers and administrators, social workers and genealogical researchers all require expertise and training, not to mention the corporate and industrial partnerships that are even now being explored and sure to become realities.”

He paused, and then as he came to his conclusion and straightened his posture, he seemed to gain an inch or two in height and the very width of his shoulders seemed to expand. “A new Age of Discovery is at hand and we are here to observe and guide its development and participate in its material and intellectual fortunes. Just as during that first wave of global exploration, the Columbuses, the Cooks, the von Humboldts required cartographers to map and name the geography of newly found worlds down to the smallest inlet and stream if they were to exploit their knowledge, we are setting out tomorrow, along with these young adventurers, to chart the longitudes and latitudes of human difference, to define once and for all the true contours for the continents of race!”

As he approached this, the end of his address, the Rector had raised his voice gradually, and just as gradually his audience arose to its feet and began to applaud and cheer, eventually drowning out his final words and the obligatory salute to the current regime that ended most of the public presentations of the day.

The members of the three teams in the front rows then turned toward each other, shaking hands, hugging, and slapping one another on the

back. When those behind saw this display of comradeship and affection, they broke out again in a loud and enduring applause. The Rector, from his position behind the lectern, also applauded vigorously until he was finally led from the stage to the floor by the Chancellor, where they both disappeared into the crowd, which by then had surged forward to the front beneath the podium.

Once the cheering and applause finally subsided, the three teams filed into the adjacent dining hall, where they were joined by their faculty advisors and a select group of professors, government officials, family, and friends. There were many toasts, wine and beer flowed freely, and the ensuing party lasted until the early morning hours, although by then the members of the expeditions had long since departed since they would be leaving for each of their separate destinations shortly before sunrise.

A month later the war broke out and all three expeditions were recalled. Unfortunately, none of the members of the Chinese team survived the mudslide that swept their bus off a mountain road into a remote valley. The two other teams returned intact, although one of the two women researchers, a member of the African group, died two weeks later from an unidentified degenerative disease, probably contracted while in the field.

Contributors

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KATHIE GIORGIO is the critically acclaimed author of five novels, *The Home For Wayward Clocks* (2011), *Learning to Tell (A Life)Time* (2013), *Rise From the River* (2015), *In Grace’s Time* (2017), and *If You Tame Me* (2019), two story collections, *Enlarged Hearts* (2012) and *Oddities & Endings; The Collected Stories of Kathie Giorgio* (2016), a collection of essays, *Today’s Moment Of Happiness Despite the News; A Year Of Spontaneous Essays* (2018), two poetry

chapbooks, *True Light Falls in Many Forms* (2016) and *When You Finally Said No* (2019) and a full-length poetry book, *No Matter Which Way You Look, There is More to See* (2020). In late 2021, Giorgio's sixth novel, *All Told*, will be released by Austin Macauley Publishers. The previous books were released by The Main Street Rag Publishing Company, Black Rose Writing Press, and Finishing Line Press. Giorgio's short stories and poems have appeared in countless literary magazines and anthologies. Her short story, *Snapdragon*, was performed on stage for the Stories on Stage series at Su Teatro theatre in Boulder, Colorado. Her poem, *Harvest Moon*, will appear in the Poetry Leaves exhibit in 2020 in Waterford, Michigan. She's been nominated in both fiction and poetry for the Pushcart Prize, the Write Well Award, the Million Writer Award, and for both fiction and poetry for the Best of the Net Anthology. Her novel *The Home for Wayward Clocks* won the 2011 Outstanding Achievement Award from the Wisconsin Library Association. Her novel *In Grace's Time* was runner-up in fiction in the 2017 Maxy Award and the second-place winner of the 2017 Silver Pen Award for Literary Excellence. Her novel *If You Tame Me* won second place in the Women's Fiction category of the Pencraft Awards for Literary Excellence and runner up in the Eric Hoffer Award for fiction. Giorgio is the director/founder of AllWriters' Workplace & Workshop.

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RUSTIN LARSON is a poetry professor at Maharishi University, a writing instructor at Kirkwood Community College, and has also been a writing instructor at Indian Hills Community College. His poetry has appeared in *The New Yorker*, *The Iowa Review*, and *North American Review*. He won 1st Editor's Prize from Rhino and was a prize winner in The National Poet Hunt and The Chester H. Jones Foundation contests. A graduate of the Vermont College MFA in Writing, Larson was an Iowa Poet at The Des Moines National Poetry Festival, and a featured poet at the Poetry at Round Top Festival. Among his published books are *Library Rain* (Conestoga Zen Press, 2019), which was named a February 2019 Exemplar by Grace Cavalieri and reviewed in *The Washington Independent Review of Books*; *Howling Enigma* (Conestoga Zen Press, 2018); *Pavement* (Blue Light Press, 2017); *The Philosopher Savant* (Glass Lyre Press, 2015); *Bum Cantos*, *Winter Jazz*, & *The Collected Discography of Morning* (Blue Light Press, 2013); *The Wine-Dark House* (Blue Light Press, 2009); and *Crazy Star* (Loess Hills Books, 2005). His honors and awards also include Pushcart Prize Nominee (seven times, 1988–2010); featured writer, DMACC Celebration of the Literary Arts, 2007, 2008; and finalist, New England Review Narrative Poetry Competition, 1985.

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TOM UKINSKI has been a dishwasher, doorman, postman, chimney sweep, actor, and copywriter. He did street mime in the US and Mexico and stand-up comedy in Chicago, Boston, and Los Angeles. He was convicted of being a lawyer and served 25 years in government. His work has been published in such literary magazines as the *Scarlet Leaf Review*, *The Rising Phoenix Review*, *Soul-Lit*, and *The Lincoln Underground*. His writing ranges from six words to 200,000.

J. WEINTRAUB'S fiction, plays, poetry, and essays have appeared in all sorts of literary places from *The Massachusetts Review* to *Gastronomica*, from the *New Criterion* to *Modern Philology*. As a member

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A Note on the Type

Sangam Literary Magazine currently uses **EQUITY** and **CONCOURSE**, serif and sans-serif typefaces designed by Matthew Butterick.

EQUITY finds its inspiration from the work of English typographer Stanley Morison, a typographic consultant to the Monotype Corporation, for which he oversaw the design of such household publishing typefaces as Baskerville, Bembo, Gill Sans, and Times New Roman, among others. Despite the ubiquity of these designs for commercial and personal print, Butterick created Equity from Morison's typeface Ehrhardt, a 1938 revival of the 17th-century type known as Janson.

CONCOURSE, for which *Sangam* uses for dedications and subheadings, finds its roots in W. A. Dwiggins's typeface Metro. Aside from Dwiggins credited as the one to coin the term "graphic designer," he modeled his Metro typeface after the 1922 font Erbar, the first geometric sans serif typeface that inspired many types still in use today, such as Gill Sans and Futura. As Butterick notes, the charm of Metro, like all great geometric sans serifs, is its ability to be "historical" and yet "contemporary." It is Concourse that captures this essence of Metro but does so by imparting "versatility, warmth, [and] personality" to those that have the pleasure to witness its keen design.

For more information on Matthew Butterick, see <https://practicaltypography.com>.

To view Matthew Butterick's typeface projects, visit <https://mbtype.com>.

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