

NUDE BRUCE



KYLE
BLAIR

REVIEW

NUDE BRUCE REVIEW

Issue 8

**Andrew A. Mobbs &
Timothy Snediker** – Editors-in-Chief

&
O.G. Kyle Blair– Cover Illustration

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Nude Brucians!

We hope you've had some raucously good times in 2018 thus far. It's safe to say that this year has proven to be a rapid-fire roller coaster with a jammed activation lever. In spite of increasingly asinine political and social climates, a Tide PODS consumption epidemic, and the passing of some decent humans who made this crazy world the right kind of crazy, it's our sincere and humble hope that some of the literary brilliance we strive to provide you will knock your damned darned socks off.

That said, in the name of all that is nude and Bruce, we are pleased to release the eighth issue of *Nude Bruce Review* on the 242nd birthday of the United States of America. O.G. illustrator Kyle Blair of the Jeb Kennedy clan has graced us with a patriotic cover image and the contributors have graced us with hilarious, heart-stomping, and simply well-crafted poems, stories, and essays: these are the musculature of *Nude Bruce Review*. To them we say thanks. Of the USA we can only say, after the Southern fashion, "Why, bless your heart."

Folks, we're opening submissions straightaway for *Issue 9*. Shoot your shot. Give us all you got. We love you, and we're mighty grateful for your readership. Now, buckle up.

The Editors,
Andrew A. Mobbs
Timothy Snediker

The Way Back

by Cameron Morse

On the first of September, I break the seal
of cobwebs in the storm door
to my study and push the closer slide
toward the cylinder. Torn ends of web waft
in air cold as a stone
on the riverbed. Crab apples thud
in the grass. I work my way back
to the bird bath I was born in, to its eyeful
of rainwater shimmering above the drowned
oak leaves. Back from Ophelia
to the raucous cricket and his insistence
on sex, to my wife pregnant
and the night she spent throwing up
into the toilet.

The Housefly

by Cameron Morse

When my best friend growing up leaves his wife,
15-weeks pregnant, and his three-year-old
daughter for a Chicago mistress on a cold October
morning, I catch a housefly jittering on the storm door
to my study. *The Rule of St. Benedict* says
not to kill and not to commit adultery are instruments
of good works. Also, to see death before me daily,
I must examine myself in the light of a dying star,
the same light my fly sponges off the glass.
“Would you ever have called this?” she asks.
While my married father fingers press
out of the keys a treatise of hindsight and warning signs
for the abandoned wife, a spider wraps its legs
around my fly and softly kisses its neck.

Intervent

by Linda Spolidoro

I bend at the elbow
but only like plastic and screws
and never let my lovers go—
wrap them 'round my feet
like scraps of muslin
misery willful darts
that fall too short
become tired
and turn around—

unbent, I kneel
on marble steps
like St. Seraphim
but not marble, bees
and not kneel, but feed
and in October
the abortion dream
drops leaves from
the window tree
and I un-pray
when the un-sky
picks me down into
your porn and pillory

I am not un-laughing
the reckless pang of
the interventionist

deity — grown weary
he drops the act, doffs his hat
click, clicks heels or hooves
hangs the baby over
the bridge by
it's ankles and
threatens
a flood

The Imp of the Perverse

By Linda Spolidoro

A woman in Kentucky makes little coffins for women who
have miscarriages.

Her husband would like to give them names and birth
certificates, too.

Had I known this 17 years ago, I might have buried upwards
of 8 tiny coffins,
run out of all the good baby names, and spent more time
veiled and in black

than is necessary for the normal, everyday, interaction
avoidance I've perfected.

I once cut clear through my hand with a bread knife. Holding
the roll lengthwise

in the palm of my hand, the voice of my father pulsing in my
ears, "*put it on the counter and place your hand, fingers lifted, on
the top, not too much pressure,*

and watch the knife, always watch the knife." I remembered this
'deli counter'

wisdom as I wrapped the hand in a towel, slid cool down the
door of the

metal-like refrigerator and thought about all the times I had
peeled and chopped

vegetables for stew, or soup, or company, imagining my
fingers were carrots.

I'm sure there is a name for this urge to cut off one's own
fingers, but I don't
know what it is. So for now, I'll give each carrot-finger a tiny
coffin.

The Space Below

by Finley J. MacDonald

A CURRENT LIFTED columns of yellow steam from rows of shad lined up across coal pots, unveiling the basalt terrace and guttering expanse that followed a promontory studded with blunt, colorless buildings. The opposing heave of St John's-bread trees emitted a grouching of old women, a scraping of boots. The friend (who never breathed what he did for a living) scratched his head. His hand swept down two-fingered like a pepper box, aiming at turret snails. One of the cooks tossed his cigarette. He touched his nose with his apron and rattled up a full dipper. He clattered them into a metal bowl and dashed in saffron.

“Think,” said the friend, “that I shall have a spirited lager. I might like to get slightly poached.”

“Just rose bitters for me.”

She watched snails hiss and jump. He lifted his elbow, and she laid her hand in the crook, and they went onto out the terrace, her pumps skidding on greasy stone. A woman—fugitive, craven, stamped with penury—was wiping strap-metal chairs. Burly and bent, she rubbed away every drop, then flung white cutwork over the table.

He said, “How about clawfish?”

“Well.”

“I'll fetch two.”

“I think I'll wait here, if you don't mind.”

She laid the haversack in a chair, folding the strap. She sat down and smoothed her evening robe. The friend shook his satchel. A seam ran down the center of his jacket, splitting below the belt, and the elbow showed wear. He pocketed a billfold, and his fingertips grazed her arm as he passed. While he strode along coal pots, she was counting the ways he was unlike Old Nean. He carried his head like a choirmaster and stepped long. But you'd have to disassemble the form entirely, make a stack of parts. Feet, calves, thighs, head, arms, hands. Shake each hollow section. Below dark boughs, he was holding steam buggies at bay. Upon the table, the bottles made two small explosions.

High above St John's-bread trees, shuttles nosed from the blue, smoldering metropolis, crying like hurt beasts, brightening as they came. She reached out with both hands and pulled the bottle to her. Smooth against the hollow of her hand except for a ring of text, like words for the blind. The label met the glass unevenly, puckering under her thumb. *Koko-Qulao Soda Rose Seltzer. It sparkles! Pure volcanic spring water with fresh rose petals. Rose bitters with quinine.* His: *Mountain Peak Old Style Spirited Lager.* She tilted the bottle, and it made a *glug*, and bubbles whirled. The actress's top lip curved like a bird in flight. Pink Captiva stained the neck. They called her "Won," short for "Wonderful." Look at the bottle, said the director. What color is it? What shape? Notice the design. How does the light strike it? Pick up the bottle. Is it cool? Hold it in different ways. Put your face to the curve. Speak

ardent gibberish. In tones of worship. To murder sunlight. To fashion life and gift it. To accomplish, to embrace, to continue to breathe, see trees, feel wind, and search. You don't become the character. Find the space in you that overlaps.

Across the stone deck, a dozen tables sat empty but for two Koko-Qulao marines, leaning conspiratorially, buttons on their caps. An unfinished framework, under vibrating palms, banged and rattled. A figure was stringing wire. Fog stirred. An islet crowned and vanished. A boat sputtered, the woman trailing a scarf, the fisherman erect. In shallows, a ship tilted: a scribble up a curved flank. A fluid wild sedate spillage and glowing. Witness to the adage that no man is an artist, being too specific, like a hammer or a bottle opener.

The fluctuating, weltered, fog-hooded sea mounted and flattened, consolatory and unremitting, from abeyance to stentorian rush. During halcyon weather, sleek, flat trails would branch among islands coal-green and faded like hillocks of ante-Armageddon painters. Thou immeasurable viscous jelly. Every eon, answering a summons to ingurgitate. You'd have to go right down to it, wouldn't you? You'd have to know that death fell short of the worst that could happen, and then you could carry it, hold it in different ways. You could step like a blindfolded funambulist, crossing over some gloom in which a half-created arch-demon was mewling, trailing to nothingness. Swift birds were darting over hungry, groping St John's bread trees. The friend came across the

street, the netted clawfish changing hands. In the fluttering jacket, he paused at the coal pots and passed the clawfish to a cook. He was stepping toward her, slipping a little, leaves whirling about his heels. He dropped the billfold, buckled his satchel, and sat. A deep line ran down his cheek. Another, diagonally on his forehead.

“Roast them up taste like food for the gods.”

“I can’t wait.”

On the table, shreds curled, and she scratched the residue on the bottle. A dog dashed along the beach while pigeons hove among white drifts of shells. Children with sticks galloped across an onyx band.

“Would you like to wear my jacket?”

“Thanks. I’m not cold.”

“You look cold.”

“Really, I’m not.”

A wicker tray of napkin bread settled on the table. The stiff skirt of newspaper read *I Did it and I'm Sorry*. Steam buggies glided in motorized gasps followed by a rattling, babbling torrent of two-wheelers. The turret snails arrived on a long platter. The friend gouged into a shell with a skewer, vein forking on his temple. Along the edge of the platter, he lined up greasy, grooved cathedrals, older than men, bell to torsion. She placed her shells in a neater line. Along her ribs and between her thighs, her skin was slick. But are we not, after all, dark, autonomic prey, aspiring to sing like whales, to learn ballet on a slow rise? She popped her haversack, drew

the mirror—a red tree on a blue cover, limbs coiling and bird-filled. She brushed about her eyes and snapped the lid.

From the St John's bread trees, birds whooped, buzzed, or warbled, and a cockerel groaned in harridan clutches, and wood-oil lamps shot beams through buggy steam. She slid the plate and rest her chin on the back of her hand. With his thumb, he rubbed lines of his forehead. The woman came on pigeon-toed, lifting fresh bottles. She pried off the caps. Upon a windless sea of time, she stood haunting the silent present. (Returning, you lose substance. You paw faces, strain at door knobs and hasps of wooden chests, leaving faint footprints, crying aloud and unheard like the sequestered mad. You'd locate the harpy by the sound of her chanting. She would be pushing her face close to your younger brother's face, speaking an unknown language. All at once, she had gone grappling, as if to heave up a long-rooted stump, and his eyes, like pupils of a gaffed bone fish, blackened as the raptorial presence was drawn from him. The lids of pots rattled, and the harpy fell back and caught herself with the post).

In the street, iron wheels were rumbling. A gust jerked her hair, and she brushed it back. The sea roared what the earth refused to attend. That it wearied of the blind passion play. The towers of babel, the grandstanding of every conceivable election of sadism, thralldom, and mortification. It pledged black and ruinous bulls with hooves mortaring to marl the bones and gadgetry of an age. From the

construction came a rattling shriek, a crucifixion of monkeys. Under clawing brows, a feeble smile contested the webbed cast of the friend's face. The flat, intentional male eyes, leonine and obtrusive, hiding barbed artifacts, whereas the female eye would be lucid and softy magnetic. The gaze held until she grew buoyant, as if she might rise out of her chair. She looked down at a small white dog, chin on his foot, twitching his ear. A cook rained pineapple bark upon dirty stone. The friend stretched the wing of his jacket. At his shoulder, the legs of indurate men cast wobbling shadows. He laid down a cigar case, scuffed and shining. He raised a cigar and rolled it.

A puff of gray whipped from his cupped hands, followed by another, like smoke signals. He raised his bottle, and she clicked it. Across the terrace danced crescent-shaped leaves, copper and carob and russet and canary and olive, and under a black tea tree on the beach, a geezer staggered past crab baskets, popping his palm like the harpy. The woman came and lowered, like a coffin on ropes, black-eyed clawfishes, tail-to-nose, taro heaped up between, finger limes at the coral-red claws. He dropped and trod the cigar. He cracked off a claw. He laid it down and spoon-hammered one side and snapped the shell. He placed a speckled lump upon her saucer. A pile of garnished oysters in a fence of goat-meat skewers settled between them. They yanked skewers and mined clawfish, squeezing finger limes and piling armor like broken ceramics. A clamoring gaggle of workers

settled down. Between the lunch pails and iron hats, lines of bottles formed. The workers pumped wiry arms tattooed with symbols from old Hoggormurin, protections against harbor ghosts: naked, stranded, speechless, glowing sylphs who lured sailors by knocking stones.

The friend dug into his satchel and pulled his chair round and set down a camera, a goggled-eyed little man-head, *Ace-Eikon* across the chin. He stroked the leather and tapped different points, explaining functions. He pushed back his chair and raised it. Workers cowered and shielded their faces, as if they could be captured in secret metallic entrails where dehydrated selves were pressed, folded, and billeted. The cook came wiping his hands in his apron. He pressed the bill to the table, licked his thumb, and counted change.

A hand's breath between their shoulders, they strolled beneath undulating, leaf-flinging St John's-bread and Charybdis figs. Between concrete posts with rusty beards, the surf towered, and droplets splattered like grapeshot. Streams gushed off boulders. Arrayed in clattering fronds, palms bent seaward, ribbed and supplicant and phallic. The roar increased as they descended step-by-step, and his hand slid along her arm. A smut-green wall was plowing a white furrow, and waves like fanned conflagrations answered each other down the beach. They passed over dark-veined sand, rolled heaps of vegetation and trash, and lines of windowed, wafer-thin shells.

“It's going to rain,” he said.

She kicked off her shoes and carried them, and the sand scratched her feet but became damp and firm deeper in the ocean mist within which children were crying out, flinging sand, engineering walls, pools, channels. A tall geezer gazed seaward (it would transpire now more often, the conviction that a man was a selection of folded, superimposed phantoms). A crippled shelter trembled on last legs, burnt spots all round. Fisherman's gloves. Buoys of net-wrapped foam. Old boats webbed and water-filled. They were approaching now an immense, stony, thrusting shambles. In the integument of vapor, vague and lurid buildings hovered and flashed, advertising hotels in haloed amber. They entered a forest of pillars and worn nubs and gargoyles, and he walked round and round a colonnade.

“You grew up here?”

She put an arm off into the fog.

“You can't see just now where I grew up.”

“One of those islands?”

“Yes.”

He folded out the umbrella, black spines under bat skin. The city rushed out to them like a woman with a shining platter capturing long reflections. Under clattering leaves and shrieking, nameless birds, crones stooped and scurried, filling baskets with kapok blossoms, and tin panes drummed on high before the ground crackled and blue cords wobbled from canopies. Wavelets fanned, and steam buggies carved long sighs in rolling wash. A team of drays stood bright

under wood-oil lamps, and figures in raincoats bent to the tangled harness near a tilting, house-sized wheel.

She jerked open the curtain. Between walls of chalk, the fan stirred perfume and leather and mildew. From sides of buildings, white torrents were billowing. She reached through the iron bars to lift the screen. She held it and pushed the pane out, angling it alongside blue concrete faces and flat, weedy roofs. The screen clapped, and cool air gushed. In the soft roar, voices echoed: rustics round dung braziers. She turned, a vase of white carnations and his satchel and camera at her fingertips. He awaited her on the bed, legs drawn, a glass at his elbow, trousers draped over the back of a chair. She brushed the camera.

“May I take a photo?”

“Any. Thing. You. Want.”

She took up the slick box, heavy with metallic innards. The leather exterior was sleek but textured and smelled of perfume and linseed oil. She raised the band and laid it behind her head, across the collar of his shirt, which was damp and carried his scent.

“This button?”

“Yes.”

She lowered her eye to the hole. The risk was that a door would slide behind you, and you would be spun down a gleaming throat as if by a giant magneto. You might come down anywhere. Or shades of you might be flung into space. His silver watch band shone as he plugged the cigar to his lips,

his arm across his paler stomach. Above him hung a trapeze artist on a swing, the two arms a V on a black background. She cradled the box in both hands and framed him until she could hear a cavalcade of future selves, shuffling, singing, *to fashion life, to gift it.*

A Mine Collapse in Beaconsfield, Tasmania

by Jake Sheff

*The sun, the air and sea
will bow their heads to me!*

— fragment of a lost miners' song

The teleloader basket transported
two men like a minor chord. Pathos
shook the earth to heal her wounds;
potholes and all. Gorgeously deformed,
the cage around them forfeited
its shape to fortify a small space
for big questions. Robust focus, on
inches beforehand, marked relief by
out of reach itches. An outburst of
laughter, like raise borers, befriended

the two. Groundwater seeped between
the right rocks in the right order
to serve their good strife's survival
between verses of Kenny Roger's
The Gambler. (Life, meanwhile, was
sung above and never to be had
by heart.) The rugged rescue crew
elected to drag the sole corpse
from the cleared shaft with a cleated
robot; compassion was unearthed
between shifts. Explosives created

a rock and roll concert in their dark,
hypoxic zone: a brocaded vision
turned to a barcoded soul too soon.

Letters written on clothing as last
words to family might benefit in
beauty's posthumous gestation, they
figured, as the green breath of death
closed in. They saw meanings unsupported
by fact or beams until light broke
through: at dawn a pilot hole let in
a voice like dawn; and later, PVC-lined,
delivered images of faces like horns
and torchlight. (Fakes to serve authentic
needs.) Nature, sole possessor of all

blameless faults, was not indicted
by the media. Between conferences
and agitated conifers, the miners found
the ugly miracle below did not define
a harmful charity, as some argued; rather,
noticing the ground was not ice, they
understood the trees like crowbars in
the ajar sky and the raised arms
of tuning forks. Except the earth on
how to get away, nobody around learned
a thing. Motives still only mattered in
the courthouse and outhouse, where
the lesser of two coefficients wasn't
coiffed or coughing.

Dinner with an Ex

by John Grey

Ex-love denies the mitochondria
and chloroplasts of reality.
It eats well so don't be afraid to serve
its favorite meals, especially dessert.
But there's an interplay of forces at work.
Not just the wine is the result
of a chemical reaction.

Ex-love may require the help
of more than just memory.
Invite friends to the occasion.
Even if they sit as still as the non-living,
their presence will make sure
you're not left alone with
such imperfect company.

Ex-love may still exhibit traces of charm.
This is a result of enzymes, not feeling.
And the conversation may appear
to be nothing more than repetition.
But it's shaped differently.
It's more of a game, the tension
in a muscle before release.

Ex-love can pick out incidents from the long past.
But it's very selective. And even some
of the times chosen are a reach.

Yes it can be disarming.
But think of it as a neuronal coding
taking a human form.
Whatever it suggests,
remember all the mistakes you've made,
divide them by all the mistakes you
could be making in the future,
and don't be surprised if the answer is one.
That one is ex-love.

On Meeting Future In-Laws for the First Time

by John Grey

Those who have
been in similar situations
report that the best
that could be said of the situation
was that the pressure
remained unrelieved -

that is,
many guns were pointed,
no trigger was pulled.

Thoughts While Baking Banana Bread

by R. Loveeachother

I HAVE BANANA bread in the oven. I am committed to not burning it. Three bananas, no sugar. Stevia, this fake sweetener from the Amazon, that Amy the barista who pursued her calling in Atlanta left at the coffeeshop. I won't burn it. I don't forget about things in the oven.

No eggs, because we're all out. My father celebrated 24 years of sobriety a few days ago. I did one year sober, and then I had a beer after skiing A-Basin. The snow and hops and thawing fingertips. Since then, I've learned to manage my addictive propensities.

There is not a chunk of pot cookie cascading somewhere inside my digestive tract. Weed is illegal and the police are coming. My wife left for Aldi with a list, which is good. She wants to buy dog shampoo. I told her that was absurd. Dogs are animals and animals don't bathe. She asked if everything was alright. I said yes.

The dog is asleep on the stoop, in the shadow. The cat is asleep upstairs, in the bed. It is Sunday and 11:27 AM. My dad's dog has died. Her name is Dakota. My mother died of a heart attack.

There are no oats left, my wife used them all for the granola. She forget about it in the oven, so it's hard on the teeth, tough chewing. I told her we didn't have dental insurance.

My wife is so pregnant it looks like there is a watermelon inside her stomach. She says her back hurts and she feels faint. On the phone, her mother told her to call the doctor—

and drink more water. She repeated herself several times. Call the doctor. Drink more water. My wife repeats herself, too. My mom repeated herself, too.

Four or five years ago, I characterized myself as an alcoholic. Took a year off from drinking. Now I don't know what I am. On probation maybe. I tattoo myself an ankle-cuff, call it good.

Bananas. Stevia. Flour. Cinnamon. Peanut Butter. Regular Butter. Coconut Milk. And Flax. Mix and bake. I'm baking, too. The cookie has that melancholy, melatonin, mellowing effect.

My wife and I just got the dog a few weeks ago. The cat we've had for a year. The dog is a handful. A puppy. Moves constantly.

I used to be OCD about writing everyday, for hours. Same intensity as an alcoholic, just different obsession. Now there's no time. The dog is drinking from the toilet bowl. The dog is eating the plants. The dog is chasing the cat.

Finally the dog is asleep and my wife is at Aldi with a list. She'll probably leave the list in the car. You're wondering whether I trust my wife. Of course I do.

I don't trust Aldi advertising. Is that fair? It is not fair, I know. The therapist has told us this. But we've stopped going to marital counseling. Too busy. The dog must be walked.

My father's dog died. Cancer in the leg. Not good. Moaning. Couldn't take herself out to pee. Wondered when to put her down.

Is this how it is in the end? This is the last can of carbonated water. I asked my wife if she wanted me to go with her, to help carry the carbonated water. No, she said. She'll bring a quarter and get a cart.

Time apart is useful. I did a guy's dreadlocks the other day, tightened the roots. He said that herbs work different systems. Said that mushrooms and marijuana are medicine. I'm considering the proposition, keeping in mind my propensity for addiction.

The other day my sister texted me "18,270" and asked me if I knew what it meant.

I said I did not.

She asked if I had any guesses.

I said I was clueless.

She said it's the number of days my mom lived.

I wonder what I was supposed to feel.

Because for me, my mom is dead, and she is buried inside me and because of that there is no fear of losing her and therefore no need to carve out these memories.

My sister, a different sister, is also pregnant. Like my wife, looks like she's housing a watermelon inside of her.

The two women, my wife and my sister, believe both babies were conceived on the same night. My birthday. September 24.

I'm not a narcissist, mostly, but I did design t-shirts with my last name on them. Sold them to raise money for reusable Bum Genius diapers. At first nobody bought them. Then I pushed. Knocked. Knocked again. If you keep knocking they will answer.

My brother-in-law and said no. My sister too. They said they had too many t-shirts and plus the stock market wasn't doing well. I asked again and they donated money to the cause, but said they still didn't want the t-shirts.

My mother-in-law never responded when I asked if she wanted a t-shirt. People are very busy. If I ask my wife about this, she'll say that I should let it go. People are busy. They

don't like t-shirts. They're not t-shirt people. They have a lot going on. They support us in other ways.

And indeed she's very right. My wife is infinitely smart. I am the luckiest one.

Our insecurities creep up, don't they? Manifest themselves in t-shirt sales.

My dad said a company came to facilitate a conversation between him and his dog about the end of life. My mom died of a heart attack in October. She was barely 50. I wasn't there.

I saw photos of the days before. Wild autumn leaves, fire on the trees. She was smiling.

I have a picture of her on my desktop.

Everything else is organized into folders

The bread is beginning to smell like something.

The dog is stretched out at my feet.

Alive and young.

My wife just butt-dialed me.

I said hello? Hello? Hello?

The great ones will say suffering is the door to enlightenment.

The ego must be ripped off, one band-aid at a time.

Somewhere there are people dying.

Animals moaning.

Banana bread burning.

If you allow for the mental possibility of interchanging parts

Transferrable circumstances

I'm the dog

The bread

The wife

The father

The mother
The watermelon child-to-be
Then there is cause for rejoicing and mourning
And the sum total is neutrality.
I'm going to check on the banana bread
In the cast-iron pan
I'm going to open the oven door
Which is an old woman telling her grandson not to ask
about happiness Because when he does
She does not have an answer
Which is where I am
Opening the door quickly, to keep the hot air in.

Trucker

by Elaine Barnard

HE TOOK THE job because it paid overtime. He could work the night shift, twelve hours. Home for sleep when the sun came up. He felt like some kind of mole. The sun blinded him after all those hours driving in the dark, transporting flour, white, wheat and rye to the bakers who would transform it into bread. He wasn't religious, but there was something about that process that seemed almost mystical. He never tasted the product. He was long gone before the bakers performed their magic.

He liked driving at night. He used to drive during the day like the rest of those sorry guys weighed down with families, wives and kids. But he had none of that. He wanted none of that. He thought of himself as some kind of Latin cowboy brought to the USA from Mexico when he was in his mother's womb. He loved his mother. She flipped houses now between husbands. Did pretty good for herself. That is, she survived, wanting her son to do more than that, to go to college, to be something important. She wasn't sure what but it certainly wasn't to be a truck driver. He hadn't wanted to be a truck driver either. He'd gone to a for-profit college, taken out a big government loan. Ended up with a questionable degree and a crummy job running the computer in a Mexican candy factory. They let him go after six months. They never

said why. None of them ever say why. Maybe he spent too much time checking his phone, hoping for some kind of message from someone. Anyone. He didn't know who.

Recently, with the money he'd saved working overtime, he bought a small lot in Mexico near the California border. His mom said that was foolish. He had that huge student loan to repay. But he was hoping the US administration would change and his loan would be forgiven. His mom said that was wishful thinking. But what the hell, sometimes you do get what you wish for.

His lot was near the beach. Not right on the beach but near it. He gave them a down payment. After that the monthlies started. They told him they'd build a house on his lot anytime he wanted. His house would be one of many houses they were building. He saw his future living the life in Mexico, driving to the beach, barbecuing shrimp, drinking Tecate with a stiff shot of tequila as he watched the sun rim the Pacific.

In the meantime he would be a mole, drive through the darkness with his flour, white, wheat and rye, the holy trinity, God the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. And he the appointed messenger on his journey to bring to the world nourishment for their bodies as well as their souls.

His truck swayed, horns beeped. Christ, he'd almost had a collision. Thank God no cop around or he'd have had it. One ticket and he'd be out of a job. His company didn't tolerate losers. No excuses. They'd dock his salary to pay the

fine. He'd lose the lot in Mexico and be right back where he started. Nowhere.

He pulled up to the bakery. "Panaderia," the sign lit the street like Christmas in old Mexico. Only this wasn't Mexico. This was the poor part of Santa Ana where illegals hovered on every corner. He'd been stopped many times himself. He looked Mexican, at least the cliché of Mexican, swarthy skin, black eyes and hair. He was grateful his papers were legal.

He had to be careful unloading the flour. He strained heaving the sacks. It was tough work. He prided himself on his ability to swing the sacks, slide them onto the dolly, then unload them in the back of the bakery without bursting a single sack. He couldn't understand why his mother didn't see the importance of this job. It was so much more important than sitting at a computer keeping candy accounts. Any guy with half a brain could do that. But how many could drive all night so that kids could have fresh bread in the morning. Without his flour there would be no bread. There'd be nothing wholesome for the kids of Santa Ana, the many kids of Santa Ana living in leaky motels, and derelict doorways, praying for bread in the morning, something to fill their bellies, to quiet the rumble that woke them at night. Why couldn't anyone see this? Why was he afraid to tell every girl he met that he was a trucker? He knew why. He didn't have to spell it out. His T-shirt clung to his back, huge sweaty stains, his nails grimed with flour, his hair a mass of flour dust. Even his eyelashes were sometimes white. Girls

preferred computer idiots with clean shirts and manicured nails. Maria, Christina, Sophia... They all turned him down. Even his mother seemed to despise his work, turning away when he came home at sunrise. Wouldn't speak, wouldn't ask him if he was tired or wanted a beer before bed.

He felt an anger rise inside him as he slammed the sacks of flour onto the bakery shelves. He wanted to explode. He wanted to drown all the computers in the world. And suddenly he did. The room began to fill. He was choking. The sacks were vomiting flour. He could hardly see. He could barely breathe as the flour mounted ever higher.

"Buenos Dias, Alejandro," a voice called as the lights went on in the front of the shop. "I saw your truck outside. Gracias for getting the flour to me so early. The children will be grateful."

Abduction Envy

by Matthew Byrne

Another night of peaceful dreams
instead of torturous implantation.
Another night of self-administering
my reproductive fluids out to hasten
sleep while others all over the world
are the beneficiaries of forcible needle
extraction. It really begs the question
what's wrong with me that they would
pass over my home to alter and track
the central nervous system of another,
possibly my neighbor Phil, who has
that smug air of having been shown
his hybrid offspring from the Pleiades.
To get by I will fabricate some theory
rationalizing their interplanetary cold
shoulder. I'm too evolved to necessitate
contacteeism. Oh let's get real here,
when it's time to evacuate there's no
place for me on the mother ship.

The Elements of Style

by Larry O. Dean

If I could be any punctuation
mark, I'd be the semicolon.

Much as I love the decisive
period; and respect the comma
for its cool calm and level-
headedness; and admire
the hyphen, the most congenial
of clarifiers, holding the door open

and showing the path for wayward,
syllable-sliced halves crowded
out of line and displaced,
uprooted; and appreciate

the exclamation point for its
forthrightness and confidence,
the way it unabashedly
and unashamedly declares
its intentions, though at the top
of its lungs—

and if repeatedly,
how that bravado sounds
like a drunk uncle venting
to no one in particular—

brings me back to the semicolon,

slyly winking, saying, “listen
to this, and this, and that”
in a conversational tone,

less like a lawyer pleading their case
than a storyteller stacking
fact upon fact the way
bricks build a house
into which we step and think,

“This is not just a house,
it's a home,” feeling less alone.

Members Make News

by Larry O. Dean

*Bob Hendricks and his wife
of thirty-two years, Doris are seen here
accepting the Arthur Tucker™ Award.*

The award is heavy and later,
Bob complains of muscle strain
but much worse than that
is the doubt, creeping in like fog
over a bog, that they are un-
deserving of such an honor.

The doubt is crippling, eclipsing
Bob's body aches and pains
from lifting and then carrying
the Arthur Tucker™ Award,
alleviated if not eliminated
by two Tylenol® and a heating pad.

Finally, he drops it in the pond out back
and says to anyone who asks
it's in a safety deposit box
at the bank.



*Lorraine McGuire
receives Teller of the Year
for sixth year straight.*

Six years
is unprecedented; Brad Bailey got it
for five, Miguel Cruz and Martha
Akalian each for four. Lorraine
pretends to be surprised, but how

could she? She's not superstitious
but if she believed in such things,
she would do something crazy,
such as drive blindfolded
or take parachute lessons.
She pictures herself stepping
out from a limousine
at the Indian casino, flashbulbs
popping and reporters yelling,
pushing a foot-high pile
of hundred dollar chips
onto 22 black and waiting
while the wheel spins.



Student,
22, accepted into prestigious
scholar program, to spend year
abroad in Spain.

Growing up
in Duluth, Josh was used
to hot summers but nothing
quite like the impenetrable
Mediterranean mugginess

of Madrid. After *almuerzo*
in the Universidad Autónoma
library he drifted
off to sleep, head buoyed
by piled books pulled
from the stacks, dreaming
of Nicolás Cabrera
in a flowing white lab coat,
descending crystalline

“staircase-like structures
of steps separating
terraces” that “move
by absorbing or emitting
flux of adatoms.” Every day
the same dream—Cabrera
tipping his top hat Fred
Astaire-style as if alluding
to a breakthrough
in electrogravitics,
or perhaps the result
of a clinical over-
indulgence in fried squid rings
or the spicy tomato
sauce of *patatas bravas*.

Hammer in the Spice Cabinet

by Grey Creed

EVERYBODY WAS PARANOID and so was I. It wasn't a bad place to live really, but after last few weeks I found myself on edge. I'd moved in from Rossville, Indiana a small rural community. There were guns there, sure but I never saw them and nobody used them on each other. The worst we ever saw in Rossville was a bunch of punk high schoolers thinking they were a gang. They kept thinking they were a gang until one night they spray painted the wall of an old widow's house and her son taught them some manners with a hickory ax handle.

At any rate, I wasn't used to hearing gunshots or seeing people hauled out on stretchers. I hadn't been in the building long maybe a few days or a week. It was a college dump on Sheetz Street in West Lafayette. Purdue University could spit onto this place and it looked like it had been for years. The floor tiles were cracked and worn. The carpet had track marks through it where you could see the floorboards beneath. The kitchen was missing four brown tiles. Maintenance fixed this by painting the floorboards white to fill the holes. I was sitting on an old sunken couch when I heard the bang. Then some yelling. Then sirens. I turned up the tv and closed the blinds.

Details were sparse after it all happened. I never talked to my neighbors and they never talked to me. I'd overhear some things, but I wasn't big on the newspaper so I kept out of it. For all I knew the guy shot himself. It was a fluke. One shot isn't a trend.

Until the next week. A guy got mugged a street over. He came home and walked into his place. A couple guys followed him into the kitchen and one pulled a knife. They cleaned the place out dishes, TV, spice cabinet, and all. (I couldn't avoid hearing this story. I worked with the guy who got robbed.) I went home after hearing all about it around 75 times during my shift and pulled a hammer from the cardboard box of tools I kept under the bed. The place was built in the '60s and still had an old spice rack built into the side of a cabinet in the kitchen. I was a bachelor with no spices and it was empty so I stashed a hammer there. It seemed like the thing to do.

It really wasn't a bad neighborhood all told. A robbery and one gunshot wound isn't so bad in a big city. The vandalism was minimal. A few smashed bikes and busted windows. I didn't own a bike or the windows so it wasn't a deal to me. There were fights in the back lot every night, but people were drunk and it wasn't a bad place to live. I could walk to campus and to the small Indian grocery to grab some smokes and food. I didn't need much more than that.

I was woken up by a scrap sometimes in the night. I'd hear a bottle smash against the wall in the neighbor's place or a drunk tumble down some steps. It didn't get to me and I didn't think over it much. For a few nights I had suspicions that the upstairs neighbors had installed a bowling alley that only opened at 3:20 am, but I let it slide. It stopped after a few weeks.

There was only one thing that really got me. The apartment below. Every night people came in and out and every night I could hear people laughing. They weren't paranoid. They weren't checking locks. They weren't throwing bottles or firing guns at each other. They were

laughing and laughing and laughing. I couldn't take it. It was the worst thing in my living room. I'd kick on the TV and there'd be the laugh crawling up between the floorboards and leaking into the room. I'd sit on the balcony to smoke and there'd be the laugh climbing the railing. I'd try to sleep and I'd still hear it like it was laying next to me in the bed and breathing heavily on my neck.

This lasted for months. There were only a few more break-ins and campus police reported an explosion in emergency alerts. (I may have been culpable for that last one.) Summer drowned red into fall and before I knew it October had come and gone. The laughter stayed. It followed me through the apartment.

It was early November and a Friday night. It was too much. I cranked the TV up as loud as it would go and that laugh kept slamming through the ads and the voices and the canned TV applause. I left the TV going and cranked up the stereo full blast. Still the laugh. There was a knock on the door and I answered it.

"Hey man. Everything alright?" said somebody in a Hollister shirt who smelled like Smirnoff Ice. I had no idea who he was except that he was standing in my doorway and everything that made noise in my house was booming.

"Yeah."

"Well it's awfully noisy, man. Just wanted to be sure!" Then he laughed that laugh. As he turned to go I looked across the room. The spice cabinet was open and the hammer was beautiful. He headed back downstairs and forgot to take his laugh with him.

The stereo was still rattling windows and that laugh was still rattling my mind. I hadn't been home long and my shoes were still on. I grabbed a sweatshirt and walked out the door.

I figured I'd grab a cigar and something to eat at the little grocery up the block. There are worse things to do alone. The night was cold and West Lafayette has a corn syrup factory that leaves the air smelling like four different kinds of wrong. I made it to the store and grabbed a cheap pre-made sandwich. As I walked to the door a clearance rack with a big fake spider missing a leg zip tied to the top. I had nowhere to be except home and laughed mad, so I stopped. It was the usual stuff. Torn packages of black and orange streamers, fog machine solution, candy that was stale and looked like it fell from the forklift and sat in the back of the stock room for a few years. My eyes fell on a cheap plastic bottle and I grabbed it. Fake blood. It was marked 85% off. I walked to the register and bought it and the sandwich.

I was back home and that guy was laughing in the apartment below me. Without taking even stopping to open my door I walked down to his apartment. I grabbed the bottle of fake blood slashed a huge X across the door. It was a cheap omen I ripped off a made-for-cable mob movie. It meant you were marked. You were going to die. I didn't think about it much. I walked back up to my place and ate my sandwich as the laugh sat on the couch next to me and stared as if about to ask me to change the channel.

Three bites into my sandwich when the laugh was gone and a girl was screaming drunk. I took another bite walked over and turned off the tv. The walls were thin and I heard some crying. I took another bite, groaned, and stepped outside. The sounds were coming from downstairs so I walked down. Smirnoff Ice/bad laugh was standing there with a girl in a sweatshirt. She had mascara trailing down her face black like scratches of crayon on construction paper.

“It’s fake,” he said to her. “It’s no big deal. It’s gotta be fake.” The fake blood had left the X dripping. Between her sobs I got that she was upset and scared.

“What’s up? I asked.

“Hey, you’re the guy with the loud stereo,” he said. “Some prank.” He pointed at the door. He looked at sweatshirt girl. “She thinks somebody used real blood.” I walked upstairs without a word. I grabbed a spray bottle of off-brand 409 and a shop towel I used to carry to the gym. I rummaged around and found a box of tissues. I walked back down handed the girl the tissues and the guy the rag and bleach.

“This ought to do it,” I said. The girl smiled and I noticed a little mascara around her mouth. Hollister shirt stuck out his hand.

“I’m Paul. That’s Lacey.” I shook it. “John. Nice to meet you.”

I walked back upstairs and as I was leaving I heard Lacey say “He seems like a great guy.”

I swung open the door of my place, walked across the room and dropped the hammer from the spice cabinet back into the toolbox. Then I laid on the couch and enjoyed the silence.

The Marriage Proposal

by Daniel John

JANICE AND I sat on the steps of the church. My marriage proposal hung between us like an old, raggedy sheet on a backyard clothesline. I wrestled with a sweet sadness. She had come directly from a session with Sara, our fellow student in movement therapy school. Sara had taught Janice to bend from the front of her heart, something she had never done before. At the end of the session, she'd told Janice, "You need your tenderness to be affirmed. I hope your boyfriend is doing that."

"Por Nat!" Janice had exclaimed, rolling her eyes. Her oddly named boyfriend was a legend of tough.

"Well, then you'd better find someone who can," Sara said.

Janice had come to me. "You turned me down," I pointed out.

"No, I didn't. I just said I wasn't ready yet."

Like bits of dust in the wind, melancholy swept me up. "I can't have a marriage proposal floating around."

"Yeah, I guess not."

"I think that's what my melancholy is about," I said, confused and angry. "I had my proposal all wrapped up in 'you turned me down,' and now you've untied it by coming to me to affirm your tenderness."

“So why’d you want to marry me then?”

“Let’s walk to the massage studio.” It was part of our ongoing trade. It was my turn to play client. “I don’t know if I still want to marry you.” I tried to remember why I’d proposed. My mind went blank.

“Well, maybe you don’t want to get married! Look at that for a change.”

“But I don’t know what I really want. If I did what I thought I wanted, I’d be a hitchhiker, a pretentious mystic, or a celibate. What I really want is to get married—” I burst into tears in the street next to the Catholic church. “Why am I crying?” I sobbed—then I knew: “I want to marry someone who threatens me with sexual love.”

She hugged me in the middle of the street in the dark. I just wept. My heart was ejaculating years of unshed tears. I stopped crying and looked at Janice. She was amazingly beautiful.

“What are you doing here?” I began to cry again. “And why are you looking so pretty?”

We walked in silence. I was stunned. I hadn’t known I was a weepy-type person.

“Lots of people could love you sexually.”

“Oh, yeah? Who?”

“Well, lots of people. I told Sara I was falling in love with you, and I said I didn’t care if thirty other women were in love with you, that when you’re with me you’re all the way with me, and that was enough.”

“Thirty women? Do you have their phone numbers?”
She laughed. “Wait a minute. What you’re trying to tell me is that there’s a lot of Janices out there, so I don’t need this one?”

She laughed, embarrassed. “Yeah, I guess so. I’m so new at heart stuff. I’m a baby at love.”

“So? I’m a baby at sexual love.”

“I’m jealous of a lot of people. People who can speak in full sentences. For example.”

We walked into the massage studio. I hesitated. We were both nervous.

“My turn,” I said, and stripped and lay down on my back on the table. I got erect immediately.

“Well...um...what will we do with this fellow?” she asked, grabbing it. “Do you want a sexual massage or a regular massage?”

My heart sped up and my erection went away. A large stone settled on my upper chest. I had to say something, I didn’t know what. Something about her being my wife. *Shit. I can’t say that...I have to.* “Janice,” I began, stopped, then started again, “Janice, do you want to marry me?” The weight on my upper chest vanished.

Her face filled with confusion and sadness. “I don’t know,” she muttered.

I burst into a flood of tears. It felt like they were baptizing me in the water of life. Janice climbed on the table and lay on top of me. We started to kiss. Tears dripped down

the sides of my cheeks and collected in my ears.

“Want to go upstairs?” I asked her.

She was amazed there was a mattress up there in the alcove. I popped up top.

“God, how did you do that?” It took a long time for her to figure out how to climb up. I finally had to lift her up by the armpits. Then I took her dress and panties off and we were naked together. Happiness held us in an unbreakable grip.

“Our bodies are so happy when we finally do what they want.” I kissed her breasts. “Do I get to get a drink now?”

“Okay,” she said, grinning.

Delighted, I nibbled on down her belly to her pubis.

“God, you’re unusual. A lot of guys do it, but they don’t like it.”

I hummed as I licked her clitoris and tickled the sides of her breasts. After only a few minutes she got stuck, getting kind of stiff. My tongue was unrelenting. I hummed into her clitoris and licked and sucked and reveled in it. Then she came, calling out my name. Heaven, to hear my name when she came. She pulled me up.

“Already? I just got going.”

“But I want you up here,” she said and kissed me hot and yummy. Suddenly I was entering her. She gasped with pleasure. “I was almost done with my period. It was a strange one.”

It felt so good being inside her skin to skin, I almost

came. I lay very still, and so did she. I was glad she had a lot of experience with men. Then we began to move, like thunderclouds pummeling the mountains. She rolled on top of me and began to come again.

“It’s so happy!” she exclaimed.

I lay still while she moved up and down on me. I concentrated on the little electric wires connecting us, pubic bone to pubic bone. She came again in that infinitely sweet crooning voice. Then she stopped moving, and suddenly I was on the trigger edge of ejaculating. *Should I? But I don’t want it to end!*

I concentrated on my breath dispersing, dispersing, while my penis quivered and fluttered, and squeezed out a few drops of lightning. I almost fell asleep, in the Tantric way I’d trained myself. Right before I lost consciousness, I thought, *Uh-oh. Will I be able to come now?*

I woke all the way up and rolled us over so I was on top. I tried to come, but couldn’t. I fell into anxiety, then fear. I worked away at it, but it was useless. Finally, I gave up. *No errors in the past*, I told myself, but I didn’t believe it.

We kept on moving for a long time. The peak had passed but we were still held tight in the grip of happiness. My penis contracted like it does when I’m done peeing, and I knew this was what the Tantric books recommended, for a man to absorb the female liquid instead of ejaculating. *I’m not too sure I want this.*

“What time is it?” she asked.

I hopped down and saw the clock, but wouldn't tell her the time. I jumped back up. I wanted her to stay the whole night with me.

“Do you want me to stay the night? I will.”

I started to cry: She had offered to do just what I wanted. I knew we would make love in the morning and I would finally come and everything would be all right. I cried and laughed and cried again. “I'm such a crybaby!” I said, laughing, and then my face wrinkled up again into tears. Each tear that came out of me let in her sexual love, joining my genitals to my heart. I couldn't get over how much I loved this woman. She called Por Nat to tell him she wouldn't be home, but the phone was busy. We slept.

I dreamed of being happy—then woke with a start to the phone ringing. The answering machine sent her voice out into the room. “Hello, this is Sara. Is Janice there?”

Fear settled on us like a black cloud. I helped her down from the alcove. She phoned Por Nat. He was badly frightened, with gruesome images of rape and murder on his mind. He'd called Sara and Ellen in a panic and was on the verge of calling the police. It was 2:30 a.m. Janice called Sara right away and then I called Ellen. God! What a mess! I was mortified to be in the middle of it. She called Por Nat to tell him she was going to stay the night with me...then apologized and said she'd be home soon.

“Why?” I asked her after she hung up.

“Well, he said I owed it to him as a friend.”

“Janice. He’s manipulating you.”

“Well, I did cause him a lot of upset.”

“Janice! You do not cause anyone else’s feelings.”

She was going back to him, though, and nothing would stop her. We ate cookies and apples and talked for another hour.

“Now remember,” I told her as she left, “say ‘Tough shit!’ instead of ‘I’m sorry.’”

She laughed and walked away into the cold, windy night.

I shivered. I was all alone. I didn’t understand why.

The sun came up like a brick.

Love Tokens

by Winston Plowes

We are two carriages in a train wreck,
links in a chain buckled back
locked by their weight

We are a heap of stringless puppet limbs
unable to go back to their linear lives
the lines they once knew

We are a tumble of sacred things,
confessions peeling back
our lustre, layer by layer

We are relics of the humdrum
lying still at the scene of
a crash of body heat

Weed & Binkies

by KG Newman

Four in the morning.
Little bud across the hall
is shouting *DA-DA* from his crib,
static on the Vivaldi
in my nearly snuffed dream where
a hall of doors
open and shut in unison.
The subtitles are Arabic,
the connection hot-wired
from my neighbor's apartment.
Behind my couch the line grows
through the wall to watch
the training video, a collection
of scruffy-necked slims
who believe fatherhood,
with its weed & binkies,
is something
that can be taught.

The Sweetwater River Story

by Steve Carr

THERE BENEATH A pale blue sky, beneath the tufts of clouds racing westward, beneath the swirling starlings racing with the clouds, Luke laid upon the bank of the Sweetwater River. In the height of the day, past the brightness of glaring noon day sun, well before the rising of a full white moon, Luke laid looking upward, eyes fixed on the nothingness filled with all those things: blueness, clouds, birds. He felt the steady passing of the prairie breeze across his naked skin.

In that moment, another moment much like the ones before it, he heard the rustling of the tent flap, the flap to his tent also there along the bank of the Sweetwater River, the tent flap being tickled by the breeze that knew the feeling of his naked skin, and the feeling of the prairie grass, and the bare rocks, and the coolness of the water, the narrow stretch of river, no bigger than a stream, flowing westward like the clouds. It had welcomed him, this spot, this place of sparseness, and allowed him to be its guest; a guest alone and without recall of how he had arrived there.

To be there where he was, and know who he was, that he was Luke, and nothing else, no longer gave him that feeling, that feeling he recognized as panic, that had drifted on with the passing days and passing breezes. He was alone by a river bank, having arrived from a place or places he couldn't remember, and going to a place or places which also

he couldn't recall. The sky and his mind were very similar, full of nothingness, a nothingness filled with passing things that left no impression, things there so briefly, clouds and birds and a sun and moon, in the passing of the minutes, hours, days, that they, like Luke's memories, did not take hold, other than as passing things.

But unlike the things in the sky, he didn't recognize his memories, in fact, other than his name he remembered nothing at all. He did recognize the feeling of panic, what it was, and he recognized when it was gone. At peace and in calmness in the soft prairie grass there beside the river the panic had gone, and he had no idea why he had felt it at all and he knew too little to fear it might return.

There naked, he looked down the length of his body, a good body he decided, strong and lean, tanned and uninjured, no markings other than a tattoo around his belly button. That tattoo, sun rays encircling his navel like a ring of fire, provided a sort of boundary, everything above it helped him live, and almost everything below it helped him move. While his mind had become detached from who he was, or how he had arrived at this spot along the river, or where he was going, he remembered his body, but he didn't remember the tattoo. He didn't recall when he got it, where he got it or why, or the significance of it. He did remember it was called a tattoo, just as he remembered a bird was called a bird, a cloud a cloud, a tent a tent, and his name was Luke. He didn't remember the word for not remembering, he just knew that it

was something he couldn't do anything about.

When the breeze rustled the tent flap again, he sat up and pulled his knees up to his chest, and wrapped his strong arms around his lean legs and watched the flowing water of the river; such clearness, cleanness was the water that rushed along between its muddy and grassy banks. The rocks and stones in the water's bed were so clearly visible, almost glistening, passed over by the cool water, swam over by an occasional small fish, the water too clear and rapid to even catch the reflection of the sky or clouds or birds. The water looked so sweet, visually sweet if that is possible, and then Luke recalled that he knew the name of the river, the Sweetwater River. And the water was sweet, refreshing and clean and cool. Each time he had drank from it the water always tasted the same, sweet. He knew it's name but he didn't know why he knew. He just did. He didn't think of the sky being called blue. It was just the sky. The river was sweet and it was the Sweetwater River, he knew that.

He stood up, stretching his very good naked body, reaching his fine big tanned hands toward the sky, wiggling them at some starlings in pointing range of his fingers. Holding that pose for a moment he thought how good it was, to stretch, to see the birds, to know the specific names of two things with certainty, his own and the river's. It was a start, a start toward being certain that he remembered his own name for a reason, just as he remembered the name of the river for some reason. He was more than just a thing, he was Luke,

and the river water wasn't just sweet to the taste, it had been named just like he had been named. Lowering his arms to his sides as the starlings flew, swirled, circled, dove and rose into the distance beyond finger-pointing range, he felt the pangs of hunger that reminded him that his very good body needed to be fed.

Knowing what hunger was, was like knowing the sky was the sky; it was something that couldn't be forgotten. There was no food in the tent, only a sleeping bag and a backpack with his clothes, and certain that he had been eating, if only a little, over the past couple of days or for whatever length of time he had been there by the river, he wondered why there was no sign of what he had been eating, no containers, no cans or bottles or trash of any kind. He bent down and scooped water into his cupped palms and put the water to his mouth and drank. It fed his thirst, but it did not feed his hunger. Then a voice called out to him.

“The misses thought you might be getting hungry, Luke.”

Luke saw standing in the tall yellow prairie grass, grass that swayed even in the slightest breeze, an elderly man, an old man, with a long white beard and long white hair, a man he recognized but didn't know, or know why he recognized him. The man was holding a paper plate covered with tin foil, holding it in his outstretched hand, like an offering, offering it, holding it out to him. Luke knew he should know this old man and why the old man had brought him food, but he

didn't. He knew the old man's smile, a welcoming, friendly smile, but he didn't know, couldn't remember the man. He couldn't remember the old man's name either, even though the old man remembered his name was Luke.

The old man stepped out of the tall grass that swayed into the shorter grass along the river bank that did not sway, coming nearer with the tin foil covered plate in his hand, nearer to Luke, offering the plate. "I see you're still not partial to wearing clothes," the old man said.

Thinking about it, about having no clothes on, that the old man knew him from a time before, a time before when he apparently had no clothes on that time either, he searched his thoughts, searched his feelings, about his nudity in front of the old man. It was like looking up at the pale blue sky, there was nothingness with fleeting thoughts passing like birds and clouds, and he looked down at his naked body, then looked back at the old man offering the plate. "I could put on clothes."

"Don't make no never mind to me," the old man said, "but the misses wasn't too keen on seeing you out here naked as a jaybird again. She sends her hellos and this food, but she didn't want to embarrass you or herself again if you were naked, which you are."

"Yes I am," Luke said, reaching for the plate of food. "Thank her for the food."

Luke sat down again in the grass now smashed against the river bank from the weight of his body and took the tin

foil off the food and put his nose to it and inhaled the aromas, of beef, of potatoes, of carrots, a yeast roll, melted butter. He took the plastic fork that was on the sliced beef and stabbed it into the beef and then put the beef into his mouth. As he ate, lost in the sensation of eating, erasing his hunger, he thought about the names of the things he was eating: beef, potatoes, carrots, butter, roll. He knew these things, their names. Everything he had seen that day so far he knew what it was or what it was called, except the birds, he knew they were birds, but he didn't know they were starlings. With a forkful of carrots in his mouth, Luke looked at the old man. "Do I know your name?"

~

Luke recognized the look on the old man's face, and now recognized the man, but didn't remember the man's name. It was that look, a flash of concern, something new in the man's otherwise smiling wrinkled, tanned face, that Luke remembered. He recalled it from somewhere, on a different face, a face he couldn't remember other than the look. The same look, concern. The look on the old man's face was like the appearance and sudden disappearance of a starling in the blue sky, a change, a shift in the things in the pale blue sky. Then it was gone, that look, the look of concern.

"I'm Ben. Not a name you would have any reason to remember. It's just a name."

As the breeze tousled Ben's long white hair, Luke repeated the name, Ben, in his head several times. Ben. Ben.

Ben. He wanted to remember the old man's name like he remembered the name of the river, and the names of other things that didn't really have names but were called something. Tent. Bird. Cloud. Ben.

“Thank the misses for the food,” Luke said, handing the empty plate, plastic fork and tin foil to Ben. “Ben and The Misses,” Luke said aloud as if he had discovered a memory from long ago.

“Her name is Julie,” Ben said. “It's Ben and Julie. Can you remember that?”

Looking down, down at his naked, tanned, dirty feet, avoiding looking into Ben's eyes, at Ben's face, he watched a red ant scurry across the top of his naked foot and off into the dirt and grass where he was standing. It was an ant. He remembered that, and it wasn't the color of some other ants, the black ones.

In his chest, Luke's shirtless bare chest, there was a sudden heaviness, the sudden sensation of feeling sad, so incredibly sad.

“Julie said we should get you to some help. Do you want me to take you to someone for help?”

It was Ben's voice, the raspy voice of the old man, and Luke heard Ben's voice as if hearing thunder rumbling in the night sky some far distance, like the thunder from the previous night. There was something comforting, something also frightening in the sound of the distant thunder, in the sound of Ben's voice. “How long have I been here?” He

looked up at Ben's face.

There was that look again, the look Luke remembered from another time, another place, on a different face. “We don't know for sure Luke. We found you here a few days ago, naked just like you are now, sitting on the bank of the river with your feet in the currents. You didn't tell us much other than your name, but you're a nice young man and you're not causing any trouble even though you're trespassing on our land. Julie didn't like it much that you go around naked, but it ain't hurting anyone.”

“Did you tell me the name of the river?” Luke asked glancing over at the water, seeing a daddy long legs try to navigate a current on its long spindly legs and being swept along to wherever the river would take it. “Did you tell me it is the Sweetwater River?”

After a moment, scratching a patch of short stubble on his cheek above the hairline of his beard, Ben answered. “I don't recall that we did.”

In the distance there was the brief warbling song of a meadowlark. Luke looked in its direction, toward the meadowlark, the song of the meadowlark. He sat down on the bank of the river and put his naked dirty feet into the water and kicked them back and forth kicking water up onto his naked legs. “My name is Luke and this is the Sweetwater River,” Luke said, not looking at the old man, the old man whose name he could not remember, that he didn't know, although he thought he should.

“Should we get you some help?” Ben said.
Luke looked at the Sweetwater River and didn't answer.

~

When the sheriff put Luke in the back of his car, he turned to Luke. “Your name is Luke, is that correct?”

“Yes,” Luke said, certain that was his name. It was his identity, his name. He wasn't called a blade of grass or a leaf. He was called Luke, so he repeated it often so that he wouldn't lose that part of his identity also.

“Where are you from Luke?”

“The Sweetwater River,” Luke said.

“Don't worry, Luke,” the sheriff said. “We'll get it figured out.”

“Thank you,” Luke said. “I'd like that.”

Recipe for Life

by Cat Dixon

Soak the kitchen with lemon juice
and milk. Make the counters sticky
like chocolate banana crepes
sopping with melted butter.

Throw dozens of purple water balloons
against the bathroom wall. The water
runs down the wallpaper until mold
blooms. Spit on the razor.

Lick the fuzzy latex-flavored sink.
Sew pastry-filled napkins
and blueberry baby blankets
for the guest bedroom.

Milk your bellybutton.
Open your foaming mouth
wider for a rotten apple.
Leave the core in the mailbox.

Horology

by Vivian Wagner

I have a store of watches,
ticking and turning, marking time.
Gold and silver,
wheels and gears,
numbers and hands,
crystals and crowns.
Each has its own
secret, individual language.
Maybe there's something
about fifty that leads
to a reckoning of
what we have,
what we need,
what we don't.
I don't need these watches, but
I like that they count
the moments of my life,
even when I can't
find the time.

Bone Tunnel

by Robert Beveridge

*Je vois dedans le Paradis
miserere profundis...*

– Tristan Corbier, “Cris d'Aveugle”

live flesh gouged
with tumor
removed at last
from between ribs

squirms, cries
on the floor
inseparable from that
cancerous mass

it is a baby
or perhaps
it is the head
of an old lover

without that weight
I can climb
the sternum
remove myself
see daylight again

Contributors

(listed according to their order of appearance)

Cameron Morse taught and studied in China. Diagnosed with a brain tumor in 2014, he is currently a third-year MFA candidate at UMKC and lives with his wife, Lili, in Blue Springs, Missouri. His poems have been or will be published in over 50 different magazines, including *New Letters*, *pamplermousse*, *Fourth & Sycamore* and *TYPO*. His first collection, *Fall Risk*, is forthcoming from Glass Lyre Press.

Linda Spolidoro is a writer, poet, melancholic, and dedicated yogi. Although she exhibited early literary promise, she gave it all up for a boy with a crooked leg and a leather vest. After years of questionable decision making, she found the yogic path, gave up smoking, drinking, swearing, and sex...well, she gave up smoking.

Finley J. MacDonald grew up in Sun River, Montana. For the last decade, he has lived in China, currently in Zhuhai with his partner Yang Meiting, where he teaches English writing and speaking at Sun Yat-sen University. He is the author of a work of speculative fiction entitled *Angels, Delirium, Liberty*. His work has been accepted by *The Shanghai Literary Review*, *Anomaly*, *Embodied Effigies*, and *Near to the Knuckle*, among others.

Jake Sheff is a major and pediatrician in the US Air Force, married with a daughter and three pets. Currently home is the Mojave Desert. Jake's poems are in *Radius*, *The Ekphrastic*

Review, *The Brooklyn Review*, *The Cossack Review* and elsewhere. He won 1st place in the 2017 SFPA speculative poetry contest. His chapbook is “Looting Versailles” (Alabaster Leaves Publishing).

John Grey is an Australian poet, US resident. Recently published in *Examined Life Journal*, *Studio One* and *Columbia Review* with work upcoming in *Leading Edge*, *Poetry East* and *Midwest Quarterly*.

R. Loveeachother is an adjunct English teacher in the sweaty palm of the confederacy, a former attorney, and a daily diarist at altdaddiary.com.

Elaine Barnard's stories and plays have won awards and been published in numerous literary journals such as *Fixional*, *For the Sonorous*, *Zimbell House*, *Lost River Review*, *Crux*, *Lowestoft Chronicle* and many others. She has been a finalist for Glimmer Train and Best of the Net. Recently she was nominated for the Pushcart Prize and Best Small Fiction 2017. She received her BA from the University of Washington, Seattle and her MFA from the University of California, Irvine.

Matthew Byrne had a poem accepted/included in *The Best American Poetry 2007*, effectively making him a one hit wonder, the Dexys Midnight Runners of modern poesy.

Larry O. Dean was born and raised in Flint, Michigan. He attended the University of Michigan, where he won three Hopwood Awards in Creative Writing, an honor shared with fellow poets Robert Hayden, Jane Kenyon, and Frank

O'Hara, among others; and Murray State University's low-residency MFA program. He is author of the full-length collections, *Activities of Daily Living* (2017) and *Brief Nudity* (2013), as well as numerous chapbooks, including *Basic Cable Couplets* (2012), a series of 'found' poems with text adapted/modified from, and/or inspired by listings for TV movies; *abbrev* (2011), a short series of poems based on abbreviations and acronyms culled from popular culture as well as technical and business jargon; *About the Author* (2011), which “displaces the focus of auto-referentiality from the text to the author as the para-textual 'author bio' becomes the matter of the poems”; and *I Am Spam* (2004), poems “inspired” by junk email. His poetry has also been internationally translated and anthologized. Also a critically-acclaimed songwriter, Dean has numerous releases to his credit, including *Good Grief* (2015), *Fun with a Purpose* (2009) with *The Injured Parties*, *Gentrification Is Theft* (2002) with *The Me Decade*, and *Fables in Slang* (2001) with Post Office. He was a 2004 recipient of the Gwendolyn Brooks Award. Seek him out at larryodean.com

Grey Atlas Creed is mostly human and possibly the ghost of a writer named John Mitchel. He is the author of the eBook *Texts to God* and writes the poetry blog throwaway-poems.tumblr.com.

Daniel John's work has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Amherst Review*, *The Comstock Review*, *Drumvoices Review*, *Mindprints*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *The Owen Wister Review*, *Phantasmagoria*, *Rio Grande Review*, *Soundings East*, *Smoky Blue Literary and Arts Magazine*, *Thin Air*, and *Valdosta State University Voice*, among others. His essay “Dust to Dust,

Ashes to Ashes” won third place in the 2001 Campbell Corner Essay Competition. He was also a finalist in the Hunger Mountain Ruth Stone Poetry Prize and the Comstock Review Annual Poetry Contest. By trade, he is a garden and landscape designer, but he can also be described as a dancer, massage therapist, writer, actor, and playwright.

Winston Plowes is a poet from the Orkney Islands.

KG Newman is a sports writer for The Denver Post. His first two poetry collections, *While Dreaming of Diamonds in Wintertime* and *Selfish Never Get Their Own*, are available on Amazon. He is on Twitter @KyleNewmanDP.

Steve Carr lives in Richmond, VA. He began his writing career as a military journalist and has had over a hundred short stories published internationally in print and online magazines, literary journals and anthologies. His plays have been produced in several states. He was a 2017 Pushcart Prize nominee.

Cat Dixon is the author of *Eva* and *Too Heavy to Carry* (Stephen F. Austin University Press, 2016, 2014). She is the managing editor of The Backwaters Press, a nonprofit press in Omaha. She teaches creative writing at the University of Nebraska, Omaha. Her poetry and reviews have appeared in numerous journals and anthologies including *Sugar House Review*, *Midwest Quarterly Review*, *The Black Napkin*, *Coe Review*, *Eclectica*, *The Lake* and *Mid-American Review*.

Vivian Wagner is an associate professor of English at Muskingum University in New Concord, Ohio. Her work has

appeared in *Muse / A Journal*, *Forage Poetry Journal*, *Pittsburgh Poetry Review*, *McSweeney's Internet Tendency*, *Creative Nonfiction*, *The Atlantic*, *The Ilanot Review*, *Silk Road Review*, *Zone 3*, *Eyedrum Periodically*, *3QR*, and other publications. She's also the author of a memoir, *Fiddle: One Woman, Four Strings, and 8,000 Miles of Music* (Citadel-Kensington), and a poetry collection, *The Village* (Kelsay Books).

Robert Beveridge makes noise (xterminal.bandcamp.com) and writes poetry just outside Cleveland, OH. Recent/upcoming appearances in *Pulsar*, *Tessellate*, and *Scarlet Leaf Review*, among others.

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