By chance I came upon a holy man
Amidst the mist-wrapped mountains piled
Peak on peak.
He pointed out for me the road home,
The moon hung out its simple round lamp.

Han-shan
LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome to the first issue of Queensborough Literary Beacon, the first magazine at Queensborough Community College to feature the works of faculty in all areas of creative writing, short story, poem, essay.

It is hoped that the selections contained in it will give the QCC reader pleasure (the first and foremost function of literature) and also insight into the human condition generally and particularly with reference to modern times, sustaining the dialogic process underlying all intellectual and artistic progress.

The contents of the magazine are wide and varied in scope in terms of subject matter, approach, style, genre, technique, etc., though united by clarity of vision, technical skill, and inspiration, the common elements of the creative imagination. In inviting contributions, the magazine has been careful not to provide a WANT and DO NOT WANT list—a list of what it expects and does not expect. Instead, it has tried to look at each piece sui generis on its own autonomous terms, without its fitting into a prefixed procrustean mold. If a piece fits our traditional literary expectations, fine—there is no rigid editorial expectation of heresy and counter-orthodoxy, of “avant-gardism” in and for its own sake. But if it does not, challenging our assumptions of what literature should or should not be and expanding the boundaries circumscribing our sensibilities in the process, that is equally acceptable.

Appreciation is acknowledged to David Humphries, English Department Chairperson, for his consistent and helpful support for the project throughout its duration as well as to Tim Hillis and the Office of Publications for the effective and artful manner in which the design and layout were executed.

With this note of editorial welcome, the magazine is launched on its maiden voyage, and hopefully will reach the port of reader acceptance and credulity, the ultimate test of literary success.

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From her bedroom window Marjorie Wallace watched the moon drift behind a cloud. Outlined in gold, it looked like a giant wedding ring in the sky. Even the heavens mocked her. For a brief and glorious moment she forgot that Tony was dead and reached out for him, but found his side of the bed empty and cold.

She'd been numb for most of a year but now she began to thaw. It was a jungle for single women her age; she had no illusions in that regard, but she couldn't go on being miserable and alone. Her vulnerability infuriated her.

She reached under the bed and patted her hand about the dusty carpet. Where was that damn card? Olive Henley had handed it to her a few weeks after the funeral. She had been affronted, but hadn't been able to throw it out. Found it: a glossy business card with a picture of a man’s flexed biceps and the caption ‘Discreet Escorts for Ladies.’

“Forgive me, Tony.”

“You’ll get a divorce,” Andre, the escort said. ‘Maybe not now, but soon enough. I’ve seen it before. Women aren’t men. A man can keep up an arrangement with a pro for years without affecting his home life.”

He paused and examined her. His grin revealed shamelessly healthy gums and square teeth. A wide gap between the front two let her see his pink tongue moving. His cheeky, sensual mouth mesmerized her.

“I know you’re trying to keep your marriage going by coming to me instead of having an affair, but it won’t work for long. Even the modern woman wants more from sex than sex, and soon you’ll be just as restless as ever. I dunno what’s the matter with blokes nowadays. They’d rather lose everything than kiss their wife. Makes no sense at all.”

“You seem to know a great deal about my husband and I, Mr. err… Andre. What makes you so sure I’ll get a divorce? What makes you so sure my husband doesn’t kiss me?”
He grinned.
“Well, you wouldn’t be here if your old man took care of you, would you?”
“Is that right?”
“Yes, Missus, it is. Now the reason you wanted this meeting was to find out exactly what services I provide. Right?”
“You asked the question.”
“I use me tongue.”
Marjorie gulped. She pressed her finger tips onto her eyebrows, and watched him through her spread fingers, “Surely all professionals do,” she said, opening her hands to let the words escape.
“No you’re wrong about that. I specialize in married women. I’ve got a mate who specializes in lesbians, and I can tell you those dykes got no need for the sort of stuff a bloke can do with his tongue. Married women are generally getting plenty of stick, it’s the icing on the cake they’re missing. I use me tongue – above the waist and below.” On the final few words he nodded, his mouth twisted into a salacious grin.

Large gold necklaces hung round his neck, several bracelets clung to his wrists, and a moonstone ring the size of a quail’s egg adorned his right hand. She guessed he was in his mid thirties. He wore a sports jacket and a turtleneck. His pumped-up chest looked like women’s breasts under the fabric. It made her shudder. He was repugnant, yet irresistible. He must have read her thoughts. “Blimey, you’re panting for it. Your old man’s really neglecting you.” He slid his hand onto her knee.

The sizzling sound of a branding iron on rump popped into her head. She could almost feel rising steam and smell burning flesh. “So it’s all settled then. Monday 10 a.m.”
How would she last that long?

The prospect of Olive Henley’s dinner party loomed like a dark cloud at a Sunday school picnic. By the time Marjorie found herself ensconced at Olive’s table consuming tapenade-crusted chicken breast (last Tuesday’s Epicure: Recipe of the Week), her mood moved from gray to black. The guest of honor was Tiffany Johns, a supermodel who had recently joined the tennis club. Tiffany was guarded by Paul Sandon, whom Marjory assumed was her boyfriend-cum-grandfather. Was it really over a year since Marjorie and Tony had had dinner at Olive’s? They’d been the guests of honor back then. She hadn’t wanted to go that evening either, but Tony had jollied her along. He said that Steve and Olive had raised conventionality to an art form and who
could possibly resist a private showing. As a widow, Marjorie was reduced to being a witness to Olive's social triumph. Olive's stream of requests: “Can you get the ice darling? Do watch the dips, it so hard to keep an eye out when one's hostessing,” convinced Marjory she had been invited to save hiring one extra maid. Unbearable.

Not entirely standard form, Paul Sandon had a comfortable face, the rough edges worn smooth by experience, which appealed to Marjory despite her disapproval. There was a watery sadness about his blue eyes. Olive had alluded to his wife having been killed in a terrible accident three years ago. Despite his shameless displays of affection for Tiffany, Olive kept referring to poor, sad Paul, and tragic Tiffany. Tiffany’s tragedy was obvious; Paul was thirty years her senior. Eyes aside, there was nothing either poor or sad about him. Perhaps excess kindness needed to be added to Olive’s long list of faults. True, Marjorie had the bejeweled Andre, but she also had the grace to feel ashamed, and the good sense to keep him secret.

As the talk turned inevitably to the Australian Open, Olive’s husband, Steve, winked lasciviously at Marjorie. She scowled at him. Paul must have seen this because when Steve left the table he rolled his eyes. Marjorie smiled despite her resolve to dislike him.

Flight won over fight and she excused herself and headed for the bathroom. When she got there, Steve was coming out. Instead of returning to the table, he pulled her into the room and shut the door. He wedged her up against the vanity basin, his mouthwash minty breath on her cheek.

“Excuse me!” she said, pushing him aside.
He squeezed her breast.
She slapped his hand away.
“It’s a shame to see a beautiful woman like you go to waste. I’ve always had an eye on you, Marj. Don’t tell me you can’t use it.” His hands were all over her.
“You’re right,” she whispered and leaned into him. She slid her knee between his legs, then jabbed it hard upwards.
She followed him down, tightening her grip on his collar. “Touch me again and you’re a dead man.”
“What’s the matter with you, you psycho?”
“You think I’m a psycho? Let’s ask Olive, shall we?”
“You wouldn’t dare.”
“Try me.”

* * *
Andre was already up and in the shower. Three encounters with him and all she could think of was Tony. To her disquiet Tony began to resemble Paul Sandon in her memory. She and Tony might have had a pedestrian love life by today’s standards, but at least he didn’t jump up and leave afterwards.

True, Andre tended to her lust. He kept the sexual wolf from the door, and spared her from becoming one of those tragic older women who hurl themselves at men without even realizing it. Marjory was nothing if not practical. Sexual satisfaction served as a suit of amour in the battle of the sexes. Imagine that bathroom encounter with Steve had she still been lonely. The thought of taking him up made her shudder.

And yet, with each session with Andre the empty after-feeling grew sharper. But what was the alternative? Paul Sandon had Tiffany. It was so unfair.

Andre came out of the bathroom rubbing himself vigorously with a towel.

She leaned her head on her hand. “Maybe we should leave it for a week or two.”

“Not happy?”

“No, it’s great, really. It’s just . . .”

“Old man’s suspicious? Honestly love, what’s wrong with blokes? I can’t believe a guy’d neglect a bird like you. Believe me; I spend a lot of time keeping my wife happy.”

Marjorie sat all the way up. “What? You’re married?” Instinctively, she pulled the sheet over her naked body.

He laughed good-naturedly. “Course I am. Don’t worry about it.”

“But that means we’re committing adultery.”

“Come again? You’re the one cheating on your husband.”

“My husband’s dead.”

“Ah ha. That’s why you were panting for it. You should’ve told me. I give a discount to widows. It’s the least I can do.” He clicked his tongue. “And here I was thinking your hubby was either a fool or a bastard.”

“He was neither. He was the best man I’ve ever known.” With that Marjorie burst into tears. Andre moved towards her.


At the opposite end of the court Olive and Steve Henley masqueraded as a happy couple. What if people knew Olive fulfilled her more exotic urges with ‘Discreet Escorts for Ladies,’ or that Steve
groped widows in their family bathroom?

Paul Sandon took his position on the court. He waved his new Yonex racket at Marjorie.

He and the Henleys must have hit it off. Sandon had been hovering around them everywhere Marjorie went lately. She knew him quite well, and the more she knew, the more bitter she felt.

“Steve tells me you’ve got a wicked backhand,” Paul said.

Marjorie almost choked. “I’m sure he did.”

She mimed several shots. Her eyes scanned the clubhouse, the other courts and the spectator seating.

“What, no Tiffany?”

“Not yet,” he said happily, “But she’ll be along soon. She’s quite taken with you.”

“How charming. Though I can’t imagine why.”

After touching his toes several times Steve began leaping in the air and circling his feet as if running. To Marjorie’s horror Olive progressed from in-place jogging to stretching. With her back to Marjorie she bent down and bounced her hands towards her toes. Marjorie was confronted by the half moon of her panties – a pair specially made to match her skirt. Spiderous varicose veins marched in columns towards the panties. The tops of Olive’s legs resembled lunar topography: there were troughs and valleys, plateaus and dried out stream beds.

Paul appeared unable to look away. Marjorie grinned; the sight was mesmerizing. Sensing her gaze, Paul winked. He sauntered across to her. “I’ve been invited to Olive’s next pool-party and I hear she wears a bikini.”

Marjory was about to join him in a giggle at Olive’s expense when she remembered her early resolve to dislike him. How dare he? Something inside her snapped. How dare this Peter Pan Complex, mid-life, make-a-fool-of-himself man ridicule Olive’s appearance (however grim)? He who dates women half his age. Relatively speaking, Olive had aged well. When Tony was alive Marjorie would never have been sucked in by a Paul Sandon. Olive couldn’t help her varicose veins. Paul’s debauchery with Tiffany was a matter of self-control.

Knowing that a man who went for a girl like Tiffany would never go for a woman like Marjorie, hurt more than she could bear. Tiffanyising aside, she was drawn to Paul. He was intelligent, charming and witty. It was too much. She strode off the court.
Olive called to her, but Marjorie kept going. What she and Tony had was an aberration, a blip, something odd that was destined by its beauty to end tragically. Marjorie had been all for the sexual revolution in her youth, but all that idealism had grown old and ugly. People behaved like animals. Lone females raised their young and then fell prey to dangerous, marauding males, like Steve and Paul. She stumbled through the tennis club gate out into the park.

She sensed a presence behind her, then someone strong gripped her arm. She turned. It was Paul. Bitter tears flowed down her cheeks. She ordered herself to stop crying but it did no good.

“You needn’t bother about a tearful widow.”

“Hardly how I think of you, Marjorie.”

“How do you think of me Paul? Or should the question be: do you think of me?”

“Are you blind?”

“No Paul, I’m not. Tiffany’s no phantom.”

She tried to pull away, but he held her arm. He looked confused.

He rubbed his chin, then a knowing smile crept across his lips.

“Ah, Tiffany and me. Me and Tiffany?”

He slid his arm through hers and continued along a concrete path that ran through a stand of old sycamore trees. To avoid a struggle Marjorie fell in step.

“Do you remember a few years back a helicopter crashed in the Blue Mountains carrying a businessman and his sister?”

“What?”

“The businessman was Tiffany’s father, and his sister was my wife.”

Marjory turned towards him. “Oh Paul, I remember now, it was all over the news. I’m so sorry.”

“So am I, Marjorie. Shall we keep walking?”

Dappled light fell through the sycamore leaves and formed patterns on the ground. A fog seemed to be lifting inside Marjorie. She turned to Paul.

“So,” he said squeezing her hand, “Do you think I’d have a chance with girls like Tiffany?”

“Not while I’m around.”

THE END
NEW

Tarlika Desai

New doors to the
   New mystery
Are opening up
   At the arrival of each
   New day!
New energy is added
   In every atom
   Of the air
   Filling with freshness
   And vigor.
New colors are beaming
   In every inch
   Of the sky
   Making us wonder
   With delight.
New beauty is blooming
   In every bit
   Of Nature
   Creating a land of
   Romance and dream.
Let the new mystery
   Thrill us forever,
   Our life be enriched,
   By the bliss of
   This newness.
THE ADJUNCT

Beverly Fenig

I'm a note in the margin—
Sometimes read sometimes
Dead paper discarded.
Not here nor there
But everywhere
Oxy—
Moronic,
Moving like air
Through corridors unnoted.
And yet
When hand moves to pen,
The paper marked,
Stares back,
Sticking out its tongue.

WANTING

Beverly Fenig

Wanting to be frugal,
She chooses the brown banana,
Passes over the ripe one,
Proud of her thrift, remembering her mother,
Who drank sour milk, curdled in her coffee,
The daughter disdainful,
Her mother a mixture
Of mildness and anger,
Who defended the sour
Swirl in her cup, good enough
For her, who wasted nothing.
Once promising herself better,
The daughter peels the fruit oozing
And consumes what's bruised.
ROSA

Beverly Fenig

Grandmother of my childhood,  
Stranger of my musings,  
Florida called you  
Away from the Bronx, Brooklyn,  
The shtetls of Poland,  
Away from the son whose name  
You could not say,  
You, with your mink coats  
And a house made of marble,  
A regular Zsa Zsa Gabor,  
The neighbors said,  
With your unkosher pots  
And bottle-blonde hair,  
Your husband a fix it man  
With a broken boy he couldn’t bear,  
Who, ravaged by illness,  
The dream called America betrayed.  
But Boca beckoned  
With sun that glittered  
Like the gems you wore,  
With its sandy beaches  
Clean as your posh beige carpets,  
Away from the son you once hid  
In back rooms when guests came,  
His misshapen frame the bane  
Of an evil eye.  
Your other child,  
A self-made man  
Proclaimed his state  
As the one true son.  
The day you died, he by your side,  
Called to announce  
You left us  
Nothing.
THE FAITHFUL

Beverly Fenig

In Auschwitz, men of faith
Facing death,
Formed a tribunal
And put God on trial.
They found Him
Guilty of the most unspeakable crimes
And acts against humanity.
At its conclusion
Outraged, broken, the faithful
Shook their feeble fists
Against the sky,
And at sight of the setting sun
Cried
That it was time
For their evening prayers.
TWO SPRINGS

David Humphries

We left our parents
in front of the television, took the catwalk
across the interstate, passed Indian-style
through the high grass, jumping one by one
a swollen root cutting across the narrow path;
and behind the swamp we found a stream,
following the stream, two springs—

one set in old stones topped with moss,
the other gurgling gravel as it surfaced and brimmed.
And beyond the springs, in a dry field, a dozen or more
twisted apple trees. That was April, and with summer
we grew to know the trees, the way a family settles
piece by piece into the next house—
not that we said much, with our jack-knifes
and muddy projects—a dam, a tree house—
and insects rising louder
than the distant semi-trucks. When school started,

we collected our windfall of apples
on weekends and cut the bruises
away, one by one. We savored
their sour green flavor, something different
from the marble polish of the ones that worked
their way to the bottoms of our lunch bags.

When we left the two springs, we pocketed twigs
to empty the thick black mud from the grooves
of our sneakers, sour tar traces
left on the cracked cement steps
of our back porches.
The muddy swamp around the spring spread with leaves and fall’s late rain. Until the ground froze, there was no way to go to the trees. Then we went across the ice and snow, our breaths steaming: The soot-colored steel mills huddled closer, visible across the bare hills, and we could hear the guard directing trucks through the gate: His microphone voice bounced unchecked across the snow, his orders to us,
somehow, as if we had just arrived and should be careful pulling in and out. Streams of twin headlights passed, line upon line in the early gloom, as we made our way toward the bare apple trees twisted in their cluster among other, straighter trunks. Along the stream,
we found strange red berries clinging to some curled shrub, more red against the snow than anything we had seen.
The springs had frozen on the surface in fanciful spurts of ice. We packed snow into a low fort, tumbled down the hill, and slid wildly across the iced-over stream. We didn’t notice at first how quietly the new flakes fell.

Too young to plan, we were already learning to remember as we reclined among the leaning trees. When the mill’s whistle sounded, we trudged home as if we knew how to carry a dull year on our shoulders and the day’s work had been done.
How lonely one word looks when lost, like a single bee
dropped by the first cold of autumn to crawl
on some suburban driveway, shunned from the hum
of the hive and vulnerable to children’s shoes.

Convalescing alone at the ragged end of the Golden City,
in Braník, a long chill, persistent dizziness, and a certain prescription
began to drop words all around me. I first lost “blunder”; at once,
it was a stranger. Then I forgot the adjective for ape-like, knowing

that “apiary” wasn’t quite it. I dwelled as I had been directed
on the “h” in whale, but my reading was more off
beat each day. A week without a spoken word of English,
and meaning slipped from the pages of my books, dissipating

into signs in the weather, the gestures of old lovers’ quarrels,
and the passing of trains; I accustomed myself to the long quiet time
after breakfast and the return of last night’s dreams,
mostly imported from Ohio; I watched the tracks

just behind the back yard and the old ladies
tumbling out on our local stop; I hoped some would look up
from the conductor, to me, but I never waved.
Had they looked the other way, they would have seen

Jesus on his throne, rising on the insignia of the brewery.
But he had been stuck there for decades,
and so they ducked as if expecting rain.
Sometimes, after the last train, I tried to explain to myself

my day as a wayward monk. Finally, I took the #3 tram
to the Globe, enjoying the slow winding passages and the shuffling
of people. When I peered into the dictionary
kept in one corner for all kinds of emergencies, “blunder”
was waiting there, having come from Northern Europe and going blindly. No one minded me as I flipped through the “As” – a dozen budding writers had their own pencils to chew – but when some friends arrived, they said “simian”

and laughed at my inability to follow a funny story about a policeman threatening to throw a rock and another about an Australian come back for his castle. In the blossoming afternoon of another café, Blatouch, I continued to translate a German children’s book

about a dragon’s adventure mountain as a way to number the days and praised “umarmen” to the future German professor. He declared that I could find the same warm arms in “embrace” had I learned Latin properly. Although I bought the Becherovka, he was worth a tram ride, too, and I wrote my most clever postcards when we were together, mostly to people I never saw again. Lately, when the top third of the red brick buildings are cast in a brassy New York winter twilight and ragged strangers take to the public library for the free heat, words sometimes appear for an introduction or, occasionally, tumble for reasons of their own, mute and humble, as they did when I lived along the rails in Prague. And so I can't help but think of that collection

of aimless afternoons and those of us who came into this century reluctantly, after dallying over coffee and Kundera novels. I know we all keep words in our own way, though there are no letters anymore and no need for the musty lump in the corner. It's a familiar stroll for some of us,

to the shared dictionary, a different kind of pause: And so I put my thumb on “blunder” again before flipping through the alphabet for something unfamiliar or lost; time to remember those wonderful stories that don't travel so well, having had their afternoons and their one full season of flight.
BIRTH OF THE POEM

Danielle Izzo-Buckner

I feel it coming on—
the birth of the poem, the be-bop hip-hop flop-top- one woman hot shot stop
I feel it moving up my lungs—
the birth of the poem
cooooling and breeeezing
alert tick tock tune tantric tingles
like crazy demon fire
like weary drunken stars spitting
like leaking cantinas of the cantos
like dripping bloody sweat seeping out of lotus sutras squirming

I feel it—
the birth of the poem
a tic tac totem tug teething teetering mess
of deedle dee dee da du wop

the birth of the poem—
dirty and greasy
gritty and grizzly
feel it
feel it
crawling like tiny white spiders
crawling like junkies arms outstretched across busy lonely streets
against the backdrop quick pacing important leather feet denying
their denials of need and lust and the insipid romance of the
pavement and loose change
crawling like babies with heavy diapers weighing them down
weighing them down
so connected to being weighed down
beaten down
content with down
gripping to what’s down
I see it—
that ol’ birth of the poem
sliding out canals
through the annals
and channels of tight jaws
carnal caverns
caressing the wham bam
double slam
scam jam
enjambment
jabbing through shocking sockets
the birth of the poem
charging through quiet midnights
erupting dawn
among thick unforgiving
streams of smoke
singing of self
hiding all the beauty
and pain and shame and struggle
and suffering and beauty
around the pen and the poem
that insists Beauty!
that insists Beauty!
that insists on every second of sour
bitter bashful moments
to be hailed—Beauty!
to be forgotten—Beauty!
to be remembered—Beauty!
that whole birth of the poem—

I feel it—
the birth of the poem
in eternal turns of burns
beating tapping trapping tipping turns
in collages of couplets
in streaks of stanzas
shouting—You need me!
Shouting—You need me!
Feed me—
That birth of the poem
groaning to groom and tailor
and trim and grope and hope
the dip dap dribble drip
slides through
talking about justice
telling about justice
whispering about justice

that birth of the poem—
the mangy mangled muck
warring like thieves
warring like angels
warring like the cosmos
warring like the ethos
of danger daggers dragging
through love and through love
and through…

the birth of the poem
pointing reckless fidgety fingers
like accusers
abusers losers
losing everything they never had
losing the great battle between the me
and the he and the she and the we
losing
losing

Screaming: Be born poem!
Be born poem!
Screaming: Give me my poem!

I’ll tell you about that birth of the poem—
it comes in stages
it comes when the struggle climaxes so great
you have to heave and moan to every
stripping away beating away
at your thin thicked flesh meshing over your piped organs
it follows you when you’re needy
when you’re desperate
when you’re in disbelief to all the uproarious
outrageous madness and sadness
that plagues each soured grin
forcing to be entered
forcing you to abide to the violent fury that insists: Beauty!

the birth of the poem—
it slips up and slides into you
injects you
with the awareness that every birth is painful
and ugly and violent
that every birth still insists: Beauty!

that birth of the poem—
riddled with rage
with thunder
with the procession of coming out
stepping out beyond shadows
deceiving disguise
posing progress
screaming

screaming: GIVE ME MY POEM!
RATIONS OF RATIONALITY

Danielle Izzo-Buckner

Recycle your plastic-surgeon
Conserve your power-trip

Question how we got into this mess ‘aye UH
‘cause you’re an agricultural aggravation
implanting Poe ta-ta toes through our sandaled
feats of strength
a Poetess-timony
Telling tall
Tales trembling
Heart tainting

The laws of carnival carnivore circus mirrors
back the fall city of village vanity
the mock try-als of reality

You swing like a monkey without a family tree
with an a(h)pe tight for Abba nana’s
half baked ample pie
api-ologizing
your cordial primordial-tone is busy
bee-ing lost in trans-lating
delaying legitimating notions of self

And in your Disney day dreams,
your deep bleu seas are bare
you’re finding nemo
and mo’mental problems of prosperity

Your nothings ain’t nothings
Your somethings ain’t no nothings
Your low-rise Tides
attempt to clean your denim genes of levi-athan
sea monstrosities of hypocrisy
believing Thomas Hob-nobbing with aristocracy

Toys and trinkets of survival
mashing dinner ration-ality
morale-ity of troops and hoards and gourds
vehicles of vulgarity
beeping and bleeping
my sovereignty

So choke on your cloak, bloke
Burn.
    for your Grecian earn.
SPARK

Danielle Izzo-Buckner

Let me linger in the longing
the song that comprises
the sizes of silos
holding in the essence of our beings

Let me linger

tasting the tongues
of eloquent soliloquists
questing for meaning

tasting tapestries
transparent visions
viscerally
wrapped in this misery

And I burn for your lips
to emit strawberry smoke
sweet memories of fire
desire to capture this longing
this impatient incessant
longing

for you illuminate the breath
of beauty
incomparable
your hair glistening
under barlight
where creatures of the nocturne burn and lust for you

Let us dance
wild and negligent
in our nexus
drown in the dawning of selves
lusting and starving
mad stoned drunk in love
challenging the void
of faceless fantasies
and find us

a poem.
CRIMES

James Kenney

1.

“Yes. No. That’s great, honey. And. Yes, the fish flavor, she likes it. So you noticed too. Eats it, hungry little smacks, yeah.”

Morales peered at me from his desk with a kind of lust, a lust for information; he was oddly interested in this call. Christ, he must have been bored.

“I know it’s not on sale this week,” I continued. “But the other stuff has all that filler. Half and half, sure. Oreos, I know. OK, I think I better – what? Mockingbirds nesting on the fence again? Funny. Well, tonight, show me what you made tonight, yes, lots of work to do, closing things down, clearing the books,” I said, trusting Honora would mark my note of impatience.

She did. She knew she was keeping me from my important work, and apologized a bit before we disconnected. Honora was a good woman.

I put the phone down and considered Morales. That dandy. There was some small danger to me in him. All good-looking and stylish, taut and jumpy, always smelling like Lemon Pledge, he was smiling at me from behind his desk. He was a smiler, all right. His fingers drummed softly on the manila file folder before him.

His expectant look meant I should say something. Morales was well aware I hadn’t been doing anything but playing solitaire on my computer. I rummaged in my pocket for a cigarette, something I kept doing, damn it, ten years after they banned smoking in all Church Point city buildings. I popped the crusty mint I discovered instead, and reasoned the quicker I laid it all out the quicker I could get back to ‘clearing the books.’

“Honora, she’s auditing a class. At Saint John’s River,” I said. “Making ceramic coffee mugs, that sort of thing. Finished something last week, I was at a loss figuring it out. She brought it home, very enthusiastic. So I punted, murmured approval, said it would make a great paperweight.”

I gestured slightly at my untidy desk and Morales stretched his neck to peer over his monitor. He tuttled in acknowledgment of the mysterious stoneware mound keeping some official procedure reports
safe from the nearby fan (currently turned off).

“You got seven days to clean that desk,” Morales said in a confiding tone and a wink as he started in on his lunch. “But El Capitan said you aren’t a welfare case, so you’re on regardless. He gave me a great ‘talking to,’ making sure we didn’t file you away with missing persons, your final week and all.” He chucked the folder on my desk and then got up and turned, peeking over some metal cabinets to see if Charlie (El Capitan) was in his office.

I exhaled sharply, picking up the unwelcomed offering. I skimmed the report it held inside quickly. I knew how to skip to the good parts after all these years.

“How long you two married?” Morales asked over his shoulder, taking a bite of the sandwich his wife made him. “You and Honora?”


“Long time. I’m at seven.”

I labored silently over the report. I didn’t want to encourage him. I heard dim, customary communication between the desk clerk and a mature black man in the outer office.

“Never had kids, huh?” Morales asked after sitting back down behind his desk.

I didn’t say anything. I untwisted the telephone cord while I studied a page. I was not his mentor, he was not my confidant. But he was generally well-mannered, if not really my kind of fella, and he’d already gotten his foot in the conversational doorway, so I figured I’d best respond.

“No,” I replied, and fortunately he offered no more on the matter, sipping slowly from a coffee mug with “World’s Greatest Dad” printed on it, studying me. He appeared to be thinking, purposeful, waiting for me to finish reading. I held faith it was now mutually understood this conversation was not going to be a transforming spiritual experience.

Still. “How old is that big ol’ cat of yours?” he asked, dabbling his mouth on a blue napkin with a picture of Spider Man on it.

“She’s eleven,” I said, my mouth already dry again. I’d swallowed the mint instead of sucking it, like always. “How old are the little ones?”

He sat up in his chair. “Maria is four and Victor turned two last week.”
I murmured approvingly, and then frowned as I reached the end of the report. Seven days from retirement and this was on my desk? A suspicious fire at Granny’s Gourmet Donuts? A final chance to take on a loser, I thought.

All the cops, my generation, ate at K-May’s Doughnuts (“Great Steaks After Twelve”). I don’t think cops of Morales’ generation ate doughnuts at all. Not that K-May’s was good, the doughnuts were sugary chew toys and those fabled afternoon steaks tasted like scrunched kleenex stuffed in kerosene-dipped socks. Well, how I imagined them to taste, anyway.

But Kevin Mac Carson, the proprietor, well, he was a spot-on original. Absent one leg (mislaid somewhere in the Mekong Delta and as of yet unfound), and his jaw in ruins, with the right side of his face peculiarly contoured, a scar like a railroad track across his cheek. The jaw was a result of his jealous wife number two, Gracie, (who I liked), exacting revenge for a litany of poor choices on K-May’s part. She sewed him up drunk and unaware in a bed sheet and went to work on him with a pry bar in 1988.

K-May permanently talked funny, like he had an outsized mouthful of tobacco and nowhere to spit, but he let the noble men of the Church Point Police Department smoke inside, even today, and lively 1970s movie posters covered the pale green walls: Brannigan, Soylent Green, Burt Reynolds Is Gator! He’d obtained them from his brother-in-law (since deceased, don’t ask me his name) who ran the grand old theater (balcony, chandelier and artificial butter) that closed in the mid-80s, replaced by a Freedom Savings and Loan which folded the year after It had since been replaced by condominiums.

“The owner did it, insurance, whatever,” I said without interest, dropping his file and reviewing the Saratoga Kennel Club races for the day (which I had printed out first thing that morning, like all mornings).

Me, I was a dog-boxer. I would pick three dogs, and if they came in first, second or third, any order, I won. I never could pick just one, I liked dogs too much. Me and Honora, we had to put down our Chiba last year, it was tough. But her time had come. We still hadn’t got another, I wasn’t exactly sure why.

“You got it, Fact!” Morales said, as if I was his straight man. He turned back around, his eyes telling me he was eager to enlist me in some cause. He pulled a creased photocopied document from the inside breast pocket of his linen jacket and dropped that on my desk,
too. “The chain of ownership is somewhat intricate.”

I nodded, hoping to equally transmit responsiveness and disinterest. Mob survivors up north consistently retired down here, figuring sluggish locals like me wouldn’t bother them as they grew old and died grey and fat like the rest of us.

“Gianni Scarfo owns Granny’s Gourmet. Through a tortuously indirect investment, but...”

I considered this.

“Baby Shanks Scarfo.”

It figured that wealthy, devious, and rather overweight man with undersized legs would have an interest in baked goods. I at times enjoyed Baby Shanks’ king-size personality, but he was a bad, bad man.

I weighed my ability to get to the track for the first race versus pestering Scarfo in the spirit of once more. Maybe I could clean up one final spill before figuring out what Honora and I were going to do together all day upon my leave-taking from work. I really didn’t know. She didn’t go for the races. I had no patience or gift for arts and crafts. We both liked the cat, but Rainbow didn’t do much anymore except sleep a lot and eat a little bit. I sat up like a slingshot.

2.

We found Baby Shanks practicing his long game in a public park near his home on Swedish Hill. His was a measured approach, showing decent form as he repetitively slapped balls over a group of turkey oak trees into the sprawling condominium development at the hill’s base.

“You could hurt someone, Baby Shanks,” I said, sheltering my eyes from the sun almost directly above with the folded dog track printout.

“If it ain’t Mike Fact,” he said in that wet gravel voice of his. Scarfo had soft blue eyes that looked misplaced in the coarse flesh around his cheeks, but they could widen darkly, as they were doing now. “That’s Mr. Scarfo to you, Fact,” he added, with dry humor, while lining up a shot. His anger was short-lived. “I got a good stroke. Every ball is landing square in Tony Laplante’s swimming pool.”

He swung. The ball covered some distance in an elegant arc, vanishing behind the tree line. A faint splash was heard.

“Tony wants my life. He’s got an unwholesome obsession with me. I get into garbage hauling – this is off the record, right?”
I jiggled my chins slightly in affirmation before Morales, the untried hero-in-training, could protest.

“And he develops interest. I get my hooks in Staten Island ferry maintenance, he sets up shop. I marry Maria Vetere, he marries her unpleasant younger sister. I move down to Florida? Look who’s here. My house, on this hill? His just below. I drop dead next week, he’ll die the day after, just to take attention.”

“You think Tony set your shop ablaze?” I asked amiably.

“You ain’t paying attention, Fact. He’s already in full swing with his own chain. That Sweet Temptations shit, popping up all over the coast? That’s his. Outdid me again, got on that food channel. He don’t wanna burn me out, he wants to graze on my fields, in some I-don’t-know-what-the-fuck way. He’s got a mania on all things ‘Baby Shanks.’ You wanna investigate something on your way out, investigate that.”

“What about you?” Morales said abruptly, as if a small alarm had rang in his head.

“Me? Burn up my own joint?” Scarfo sounded incredulous. “That place is essential for my survival, plain and simple.”

“For money laundering?” Morales said demurely, like an underage school girl stepping up to the bar. Just kidding, he was as delicate as William Shatner lecturing high school kids to stay off drugs. No, I wouldn’t really miss Morales much while I and Honora sat on the front porch eight additional hours a day, staring meaningfully into each other’s eyes (best-case scenario).

Scarfo scoffed. “For the doughnuts. I won’t go near Laplante’s place, it’s all girly cronuts and rainbow sprinkles. And you eat at that, whassicalled, K-May’s? Glazed auto parts, that crackpot’s specialty.”

We both studied him for a moment as he drew a little circle in the grass with his club. His wasn’t a first-class mind, but he was pretty good at lively back and forth.

“There ain’t nothing to do here, officers, except play golf and eat doughnuts,” he added, then shuddered melodramatically and swung.

The ball disappeared behind the tree line.

The dim sound of breaking glass followed.

Scarfo scowled. “You gentleman are screwing with my long game.”
3.

“You gonna miss all this?” Morales asked as we walked back to our car.

“It’s a dull and empty world that awaits me,” I said sardonically. At least I hoped it came off sardonic. My cell phone rang and I fished it out of my jacket pocket. I might have rolled my eyes as I answered, a little theater for Morales.


I hung up, and without looking at Golden Boy said “She’s made a really nice ceramic elephant, this morning’s class. Came out like a dream, she says.”

I stopped short at the driver’s side door and released air, sharply. It simply hadn’t registered when she said it.

Honora herself didn’t know.

Didn’t know I still had that tatty elephant I won at some fleabag traveling carnival in the parking lot of that Catholic school our boy never made it to. She’d sensibly thought we’d given it to charity, with everything else, some twenty-five years ago. But no, there it sat, untouched, in the back of my bottom drawer at work. No one knew but me and El Capitan. Well, me and Charlie were the only ones left, after all.

“You think Scarfo torched his own place?” asked Morales, pulling open the passenger door.

“Sweet-tooth or not, if there’s money to be made, he’d do it,” I said, for once grateful for Morales’ interruption, getting in the car alongside him. I considered my next move for a moment.

“You go and check out the Mel-o-Dee restaurant. On Pine.”

“Isn’t that place closed?” he asked.

“Indeed, and since closing down, it’s like a little bed and breakfast there. Illegals, runaways, all sorts of riff-raff desperate enough to need a little quick cash hole up in there. So do some of the working girls. If nothing is doing, check out the car detailing place on Leonard Avenue. Dexter Jackson is of the wrong persuasion to be a close personal friend of Scarfo’s, but he’s been known to light a match. If he proves Unable to Locate, we’ll meet up back at the bullpen and work out a plan for tomorrow.”

“I’m gonna miss you,” he said. “This is a sad, sad story, your retirement.”

“No happy endings, Morales” I said. “Not in this life.”
I recalled seeing Morales at the firing range when he first arrived with his attractive, petite brunette wife. They had materialized one day, after he transferred from somewhere in Dade County. I watched him shoot—the left foot in front at a slight outward angle, the right pointed forward, shoulder-length apart. Both hands on the gun, feet planted. Fire! Me, I was a crummy shot. Run, stop, and shoot wildly. Poles apart, me and him. I guess we both aimed for center mass, true. But that day (and I still had five years to go before I could put in for retirement) I understood then I was a deep-rooted tree that these young, well-trained monkeys were gonna start swinging all over soon enough.

“And where are you going now?” he asked.

“I’m hungry,” I said. I simply didn’t want to work anymore today. Honora’s ceramic elephant comment triggered twenty-five years of uneasy dreams to fill my head instantly, whispering grimly, like condemned men saying grace before the final meal. My eternal dream-life was made up of children I didn’t know (and one I did) pointing lean fingers at me, their eyes confused. I’d be taking an early morning walk, in some part of the world I didn’t know, and these wraithlike boys would step out of shadowy doorways and confront me. Not say anything. Just point. And he’d always be in the mix, and he’d always step up, the others around him, and wait, his eyes filled with elaborate patience. For me to say something, to explain to him what a hidden occlusion was. And I could never come up with a thing. The stuffed elephant that I gripped in the dreams never was enough, for him or me.

I had that dream again just last month, for Chrissakes. Still never told Honora about them, not once. She had her own dreams, I know.

4.

A half an hour later, I parked in K-May’s near-empty lot, noting the goose grass pushing through the frequent cracks in the fading asphalt. A half-lit neon sign sputtered the message “Fresh baked goods daily” for no one but me to read.

Exiting my car, I looked up and saw Tino, the youngish Mexican who worked the kitchen, but now up on the roof, fiddling with a satellite dish. I signaled hello. He responded in kind. I could hear a truck accelerating somewhere in the distance. An empty K-May’s coffee cup made a hollow scraping sound as it rolled in small circles close to the entrance. I pulled hard at the balky glass door, and it thumped shut behind me.
The faint odor of stale grease and the dull hum of a refrigerated pastry case holding cinnamon-drenched rice pudding and blueberry pies greeted me. The outside walls were lined with empty booths squatting back to back in their avocado-colored vinyl upholstery. I approached the splintered-Formica counter and slid onto one of the bolted seats, which responded with a girlish squeal at my weight. K-May, wearing a Saigon, Vietnam t-shirt, inattentively wiped the counter with a rag. He didn’t acknowledge my arrival, scrutinizing the static on the television screen answer to Tino’s fiddling on the roof. The TV, which hung over the out-of-order Bar Vegas slot machines adjacent to the front door, always had annoying tiny dots on the screen even when functional.

“Granny’s Gourmet burnt,” I said, conversationally. “To the ground.”

No response.

“You could be next, if this is Dunkin Donuts’ work, looking to wipe out the competition.”

He grunted.

A clatter and thump from directly above us.

“Tino cooks. Tino cleans. And now Tino does satellite installation?”

“He ain’t such a good cook. And clean? Look at this place.” He shrugged and turned to pour me a coffee. “He’s Mexican. You ride ‘em, they work hard, everyone’s happy.”

“As a kid, I helped dad and my uncle mount antennas.” This was true, and of momentary importance to me. “I’m going to go up, give a looksee.”

K-May eyed me wearily, and then looked at his watch.

“I’m remarkably nostalgic about certain odd things. Comes with age, I guess. It’s all behind us now, huh?”

“I doubt it,” he said thickly, turning toward the kitchen. I could hear something slap against the grill behind me as I headed out and spotted in the near distance a young mom playing Frisbee with her boy, maybe seven, in the lot of one of the section-eight motels that littered the immediate area. The boy laughed brightly as he fumbled with the disc. I watched for a minute, but I felt something sag in me. I wanted to go take a nap on my sofa, listen to the Weather Channel and Honora working happily in the kitchen as I fell asleep.

Morales didn’t need to know all there was to know about me.

I went up the shaky ladder with surprising quickness. I had indeed done a lot of roof work with my dad when young which had removed all fear of such effort, even at my advancing age and with my
unwanted weight.

“Tino,” I said with a grunt as I navigated clumsily off the ladder onto the roof, placing a knee on the sloped shingles below where Tino was working.

He looked down at me, alarmed.

“You shouldn’t be here, Fact, isn’t safe,” he said in his sing-songy way. He then looked at the dish and back at me, as if he was wondering what to do.

I hoisted myself up, acquainting my package battered by 53 years of careless living to the wobbly surface beneath my feet. It wasn’t particularly safe, but I didn’t care. I was going to pretend to be someone else for the next few minutes, someone younger, someone eager, with no history, it all still in front of me.

“I take my hat off to you, Tino,” I said, feeling a peculiar connection to him because of current circumstance, like we were two respected scholars sharing research gathered in ancient libraries. “You stay loyal to K-May beyond all reason.”

He didn’t answer, looking far beyond me at something.

“He should hire someone out to do this,” I added. “But I think the tower you’re looking to connect with is in the other direction. Also, kind of windy up here today for this kind of work.”

I was dumping all my knowledge of antenna installations into the sink at once. I didn’t want him thinking I was some carpetbagger with a fetish for rooftops.

“Ah, I like the midday sun,” he said, peering up at it and wiping his brow with his left hand. I attempted to work my way up to his position at the apex of the roof. I was a bit too spirited in my approach, and I knew I had mistimed something as my toe caught on a tile and I dropped hard to a knee.

“Ten cuidado,” he said, as my other foot skidded on a slippery blotch of tar and I felt myself heading over the side.

Tino flew down the sloping roof, how I still do not know, touching down hard near me with a grunt and grabbing at me with a sweat-soaked, powerful arm. I snatched at the offered hand as my weight took me over the edge, my thickset thighs roughly hitting the stucco wall, my floundering causing the ladder to crash over on a dumpster. The satellite dish skidded down and off the roof, as if using the opportunity to escape, and shattered on the hard concrete below.
Tino yelped and flinched; my chubby fingers were digging into splotchy, raw, untreated pink wounds on his right hand and wrist. Burns. I had a spasm of memory, of Honora telling me three or four hours earlier to cut my nails, as Tino grabbed my wrist with his other hand, and, with a cry, pulled me far enough up so that I could flip a leg back onto the roof and secure myself.

K-May was now below us, straining to see us, and then appraising the mess we made in the otherwise unpeopled parking lot.

“Not safe up here, Fact” Tino mumbled diffidently, sitting up. K-May was cursing under his breath as he noisily replaced the ladder against the roof with indelicate haste.

Tino acknowledged my eyeing the swollen red wounds on his right hand by sliding the hand out of sight, wincing as he faintly skimmed it against his leg.

“You been working out, Tino?” I asked, my face flushed crimson, my breathing short and strained. “Takes a strong man to keep me from falling off a roof.”

He shrugged. “Spend my weekends doing roadwork.” He then laughed low, not meant for me. “Non-union roadwork,” he added quietly, barely heard by me above the softly moaning wind.

I nodded, my upper body heaving a bit less. I was very much alive, and my coming heart attack wasn’t coming today, it appeared. I looked down. K-May was back inside.

5.

I eventually went back in, and found K-May sitting in a booth, a glass of Pepsi untouched before him. I heard and smelled a steak sizzling on the grill in the back.

“Tino deserves a raise,” I said, sitting across from him and lighting with a trembling hand the cigarette he offered me. “Give me a fresh coffee.”

“Is he going to rebuild?” K-May asked, with surprising softness, when he returned with my coffee.


K-May positioned the coffee before me on the table, along with a glazed donut I hadn’t asked for but we both knew would soon be taken care of. I gulped down some of the strong bitter black liquid.

He returned behind the counter and put on the radio. It was music I wasn’t familiar with and didn’t enjoy. He turned it off again, and sighed.
“I don’t know what I’m going to do,” he said.
“He’s taking your business?”
K-May shrugged.
“And now Tino’s only got one good hand left, and we ain’t even gonna have no TV now,” he muttered, limping away towards the back of the kitchen. I observed Tino through the window, carrying a piece of damaged satellite dish over to the dumpster. He guardedly eyed me on his return trip to pick up the fragments still littering the pavement.

The coffee was tolerable. I must have drunk a wheelbarrow of this stuff a week, at any rate. Hadn’t killed me yet. The donut? It was underfried and doughy.

I looked up at a poster for a John Wayne cop film, one that I liked, the one where he went to England: “Detective John Brannigan takes on London – Chicago Style!” screamed the caption. One week, I thought, unfolding my crumpled dog race printouts and smoothing them out on the table. I had picked Boston Dancer and Lala Expedition but hadn’t yet identified a third I liked for the final run of the afternoon. Had to pick a third.

Seven days.

I glanced over the listed runners, but I wasn’t really thinking about them. Or even Tino, or K-May. I was thinking about an elephant.

I flashed on some Alan Alda program I had seen on PBS about the Greeks. As the Greeks understood it, we visit the underworld in our sleep. Where else to see the dead?

The mockingbirds. They would go, but they would return, too.

What would I do about the hidden item in my desk? Hidden, not silent. Spoke to me every day.

My phone reverberated on the table. Sometimes Honora knew exactly when to call. I fumbled for it, expectantly.

But it wasn’t her; it was Morales.

I knew I had reached the end of something, but I didn’t know where or how to start something new.

I let it go to message. I then dialed my wife of twenty-nine years.

“Refill, please,” I called out to K-May as Honora answered on the first ring.
DAD’S POEM

Andrew Nguyen

1975

Because the circumstances, homeland was separated
Yet the heart still yearned toward homeland
Half way around the world quite far
Yet the love for motherland was still attached.
We remember his dream quite well
The long May month anxiously waiting within
Wanting to return to homeland for a visit
For the solitary memory completing the circle of love
He still remembered the village's love and hamlet's values
Remembered all the dear relatives
The bird shadows, the village roof
The bamboo silhouette,
The rice field continuously flushing the memory.
Yet dear Father!
Old age does bring dangerous illness
How many years of every possible treatment
Good medicine, wise herbalists were all available
Yet it was not enough to lessen, the illness got worse

Alas!

Who knows how Godly artist creates nature
To calculate what tomorrow brings
Today he has returned to the Western front
To remember tenderly a place where tears flow
Thinking of the love for Mother and us from here on
Lancing a sail with a broken oar
With mourning cloth, the wife grieves for the husband
Alone, in the middle reaching repeatedly
Looking at images behind that writhe in pain
Sadly for us from now on
To continue to visit day and night
To hear advice teaching and admonishment
Who is going to tell us stories of homeland
our roots, our hamlet and village
Far from motherland yet still looking toward our origin
He was like a Rhamnoneuron plant storing up its resin
transforming it into a wonderful maleness
Determined to spread pollens within to the pistils
Fortune kept up, home steadily built
Solid gratitude to nine islands of hard-labor
His passing leaving within me an abrupt deed of youth
that of which cannot be replaced
Oh! Time may lessen such intense pain
Though it might subside it can never be forgotten

Father.

If we can extend
our longevity
offer a possible life of 100
Then there wouldn’t be a dutiful son’ deep grief
With a weeping house forever, one last look
Image of him in me is like a faithful loyal husband
creating a safe and sound
no–matter–what environment for Mother
a man of kind and
generous element,
a magnanimous man
Image of him in me is a Vietnamese with great manner,
continuously and quietly volunteering oneself
accepting every fate,
in charging with wife,
brides and bridegrooms and
grandchildren
of their health,
in hardship
without grievances,
struggling to live with a soul
of fullness
Image of him in me is a rustic farmer
gentle like the earth, nursing every vein to
nourish the children to study,
with eyes look past beyond the village
bamboo rampart,
past beyond destiny,
    teaching the younger generation
to live forever peaceful dream
HE PRETENDS
Marc Prinz

He pretends

he pretends the deck is a café
in paris
on st. michel
by the metro
on the corner
across the seine
from notre dame
he is convinced
all his sadness
is in the wood
and rubs his fingers
lightly across the banister
then steps firmly
onto the arms of his chair
he sees nothing more
than he ever saw
from this deck
that covers ground
he used to walk

his glass has wine
of course
and though he poured it himself
he swears
he hears clanking and clinking
in the house
and senses gitanes infusing a French phrase
l'addition si vous plait
excuse monsieur, un autre vin
merci
his stars are everybody’s
bright on the first look
graying toward dawn
he wakes with the nasty chill
of morning

2012
TO BE OLD

Marc Prinz

to be old
is to be (working) in a toll booth
with skinny spindly ankles
that that morning,
as always,
thread each pants leg
(pants disapproved of)
into sneakers (of course).

no soft beauty w/young cologne
will stop for directions and wink
(who winks anyway?)
or suggest I leave the barrier down
and switch from green to red
redirecting annoyed drivers
and join me
unconcerned with rubbernecks
or authority
for the few minutes before we’re stopped
just with me—oblivious
jammed
in my high, shoddy, imposed wood compartment
signaling passage.
THERE’S A SEMICOLON IN MY HEART FOR YOU

(Epithalamium for Lillie & Jeremiah)

Jessica Rogers

Before I say “I love you,”
let me say
how I love punctuation,

envy the quiet of those
smooth stones
more certain than me
at the ends of phrases.

But you; you remind me
of a semicolon

in the way
that we are like
two clauses

elucidated all the more
beside a single purpose.

Like the pull of a star
on the curl in a wave,

or a moth
who hungers for light
and the height
of the moon at midnight.
My hands like snapdragons
yield to your landing
soft kisses like soft bumblebees
on each of my fingertips.
As an evergreen bows
so that the wind may caress
its back, its neck,
so do I bow
in your presence;

my love always
be here
to serve you.

As the white flowers
call to night’s sweet bats,
our love glows in the dark.

And yet,
always provides shade
on those very hot days

like tall branches cover
such a delicate moss;
may you never know
what it means to be afraid.

May I always remember,
by candlelight
how you appeared arriving
beautiful, late in the evening

but having always meant
to arrive, and you told me then

when we first met
how we had always been,
after all, waiting for one another.
Like the perfect
color of that evening,
and a side street
in the West Village;

like the sight
of you

the next morning
and knowing everything
will always be.

We’ll always remember
those illuminated days,
as if poured into the mold
of our weathered creases;

because that’s how much
I love you—enough that it will
fill all our eventual wrinkles,
that it will fill every home
built to hold us.

May a waxy semicolon
join the love between us,
closer than the pause
of a breath.
Being an only Child
I had no easy access to siblings:
Mother and I should have had
A strong rapport;
But mother’s sense of life confined me
To a world both sheltered and narrow.

Being an only child
I read sitting at the window of the kitchen
Above the schoolyard where other children
Played kick-ball after school;
Father gave me a set of The Book of Knowledge,
Dark brown, covered in cellophane wrappers
Over shiny green dust jackets;
His death made me into a deck of cards
Shuffled by giant unseen hands.

Being an only child
Shielded by my parents’ presence
From a sense of my own doom,
I avoid the fact of my mortality
As long as one of them exists.

Perhaps only children should be brought up
With other only children
So we do not someday have to reminisce alone.
For friendships sometimes require
The consistency of blood:
Where to have dinner becomes a major theme.
But indecision is in my genes
Like big feet and a high forehead.
Decisions sometimes depend
On how my hair looks that day;
Often I’d rather a musical
From which I can emerge humming;
Life is hard enough
Without playing “Krapp’s Last Tape”.

Benyonne Schwortz
WINTER

Benyonne Schwortz

Walking along the river’s edge
I remember a boy and I played
horseshoes in this park not long ago;
I can not remember who he was,
what season of the year. I recall
the last time I was here
I stopped at a little store
where I bought a blue windbreaker;
I sat on one of these benches eating ice cream.

Now chunks of ice skirt the river,
No excursion boats are docked,
The sun shines,
Shadows are longer,
Gulls dive deeper but less often.
THE CIRCLE

Benyonne Schwortz

One summer at 3 The Circle
I helped his mother plant a rock garden
Behind the house his grandfather built
When the Taconic was a dirt road
And C.C.C. boys dug holes three feet apart.
Two pines, now reaching over the windows
Above the eaves, were tiny things
Before the New Deal had reached
Hawthorne, and nature
Not human beings made economic laws.

Sunlight never reached inside
The two room house shaded
By those pines, whose branches
Bumped and bruised the slanted tar-paper roof.
Dark and damp seeped into every corner
Leaving stains like strawberry patches
Upon a linen cloth.
Stunted pink tomatoes, pale yellow peppers,
Weeds grew thickly in the front yard
Under those pines.

I wore his old blue jeans, a green T-shirt,
Got my hands dirty. A few phlox
Crept along the edge of rocks
That summer. In the old cemetery
Behind MacMillan's place,
Broken headstones half-covered with tumble-bush,
Served as hard cold beds
For lovers no longer joined in love.
In the stale brittle light of morning,
I washed, ate quickly and drove away.
AUTHOR BIOS

Jillian Abbott is an adjunct lecturer in English at Queensborough Community College, City University of New York and the C.W. Post campus of Long Island University, specializing in teaching digital writing. Her short stories have been published and won awards in Australia, India and the United States, including a story in Queens Noir.

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