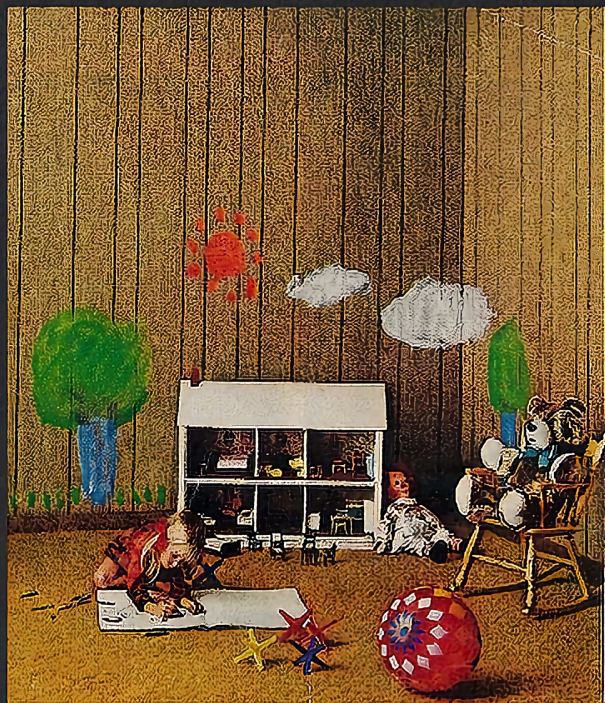


“ Y O U T H ! ”



W a Y N E  
L I T E R a R Y  
R E V I E W

2023



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## *Letter from the Editors*

Dear Readers,

To us, youth means so much more than just being young. It transcends any specific age or time-period and exists instead as a perpetual embodiment of free-spiritedness and wonder. Youth finds us every day in passing moments large and small– and it’s these moments that we as writers cling to and try so desperately to immortalize.

This year, the *Wayne Literary Review* contains over 20 works from 17 exceptional writers of all ages who entranced us with their youth.

Take care and don’t grow up too fast,

The editors

# Table of Contents

## I. Poetry

### *Michael Olsen*

Suburbia.....	5
---------------	---

### *Kris Nesbitt*

Vampirism Begins at The Imperial Motel.....	6
Help.....	7
Lampless.....	8

### *Luna Xiong*

Potato Expectations.....	9
--------------------------	---

### *Alan Elyshevitz*

Bird in Hand.....	11
Our Saturdays.....	12
Baritone.....	13

### *Bart Edelman*

Tunnel of Love.....	14
---------------------	----

### *Antonis Balasopolous*

The Founding.....	15
The Future.....	17

### *Taylor Boelk*

Fleeting.....	18
---------------	----

### *Jeneva Stone*

Delivery.....	20
Cervix.....	21

Rosary.....	22
<i>Peycho Kanev</i>	
Snowfall.....	23
Past.....	24
<i>Adina Polatsek</i>	
Old Returning Daughter.....	25
<i>Elizabeth Curley</i>	
Tin Anniversary.....	28
<i>II. Short Stories</i>	
<i>Bill Gary</i>	
“#12, ‘Don’t Stop’”.....	31
<i>Ken Jackson</i>	
The Dollhouse.....	37
<i>Adeline Navarro</i>	
Nine of Swords.....	39
<i>Suzanne Willett</i>	
Lavender Blue.....	41
<i>Sarah Coll</i>	
Needle In a Haystack.....	53
<i>Michael Brooks</i>	
Mask.....	56

# Suburbia

*(with apologies to Allen Ginsberg)*

*Michael Olsen*

Suburbia I love you but I only have \$51.18 for this electricity bill  
Suburbia I love you but you only leave one sapling in the nature strip  
Suburbia I love you but you take a million dreams and make them one  
Suburbia I love you but there is nowhere else to go

Suburbia the old graffiti fades on paling fences  
Suburbia the children make their own secrets  
Suburbia I've forgotten my neighbour's name  
Suburbia are there chains or bodies next door under his house?

Suburbia you will always hide the stars  
Suburbia you hide the truth in so many faces  
Suburbia your names come from an ancient people you've forgotten  
Suburbia we need our nostrils in your dirt to understand

Suburbia you started in Rome and never stopped  
Suburbia in a thousand years will you still be here?  
Suburbia I could walk for days and still not leave you behind  
Suburbia when will you let me go?

Suburbia my mouth is full of midnight kebab  
Suburbia at 2am the indifferent streets are finally empty  
Suburbia you are everywhere but leave us wanting more  
Suburbia you will never let me go

# Vampirism Begins at The Imperial Motel or pretty little grave flowers

*Kris Nesbitt*

seduced by consumerism free sex and surveillance dossiers  
how her own story went so wrong  
she fails at being as wicked as expected  
future divided life in a grim vast metropolis  
not everyone is meant for it  
a thrilling staring contest eavesdrops how broken their society  
traumatized and downtrodden first love terminal illness cause and cure  
revenge  
repair  
gossip befriends another  
when their world starts disappearing  
to the detriment of their future selves  
the grave of his girlfriend  
a part of another for years  
equally relentless women  
everyone she loves makes up lies  
an accident fragmented her  
the future terrifying dates  
romance espionage undercover lives  
and the apocalypse moving to San Francisco

# Help

*Kris Nesbitt*

some quiet conscious tendency  
beautiful but dependent  
desires adjustment  
observation narrows trouble  
death gives loss comparison  
plough doubts deep between cause  
bad behavior bitter behavior  
family distance father fiction  
delicate yesterday  
only tomorrows please  
down again  
kiss hope with wine  
waste now with wine  
exchange existence with wine  
again



# Lampless

*Kris Nesbitt*

different shiny floors  
the cat congratulates me for not starting to drink yet  
take a drink from drinking  
I'm having a water after this  
I'm having 2 waters after this  
akathisia—abulia—senescence and my other hard to pronounce problems  
in the jurisdictions that I live in  
no duty to retreat just the temptation  
be warm beside me  
authentic decay  
null achievement  
witness to wills  
read it in the rain  
crowbar out of me what none hammered heart

# Potato Expectations

*Luna Xiong*

I have a bag of some Yukon Gold potatoes,  
Never cooked potatoes, wanted to try some potatoes,  
Don't know what to do with my potatoes. I have  
many potatoes.  
I think I would like to have it plain.

You have so many Yukon Gold potatoes,  
Why don't you cook the potatoes, boil and salt  
the potatoes,  
Scrape them, smash them, just make some mashed potatoes.

I think I would like to have it plain.

Listen, you have some sliced Yukon Gold potatoes,  
Make them tasty potatoes, don't waste your potatoes,  
Bake them, cheddar them, just make some scalloped potatoes.

I think I would like to have it plain.

No. You have some baked Yukon Gold potatoes,  
You'll starve without making good potatoes,  
And be a failure without the best potatoes, just make some stuffed potatoes.

I think I would like to have it plain.

Then you're wasting time with your Yukon Gold potatoes,  
Can't find a reason for your potatoes, don't bother eating potatoes,

You'll be poor and miserable without potatoes,  
just throw away your potatoes.  
I think I would like to have it plain.

I gave you money for your Yukon Gold potatoes,  
I'm disappointed you made nothing with your potatoes,  
In life, no matter what, you'll be nothing  
without potatoes.

I think I would like to have it plain.

I have a bag of some Yukon Gold potatoes,  
I'll eat them raw like apple slices, and be  
a couch potato,  
These are my potatoes, fuck you, no one likes  
your potatoes,  
I think I'm going to have it plain,  
but with ranch on the side.

# Bird in Hand

*Alan Elyshevitz*

I was a boy she older played percussion  
drums piano in a sloppy band babysat  
for extra melody and cash permissive  
she let me watch wrestling on tv  
her sister local beauty worked late  
our apartments were cold hot uneven  
one time in the courtyard she summoned me  
had made a finger cage would not let me see  
until the bushes the bird in her hands  
so much quieter when she opened up

# Our Saturdays

*for Kevin, in memoriam*

*Alan Elyshevitz*

the poem first appeared in  
*Voices Israel Anthology*, 2022

In the basement temple I stowed my legs and teenage spine.  
Men of the Book honored a multilateral pact  
to bow and re-bow  
like weak stalks of grain to the syllables  
of a left-leaning language.  
Dentist, milliner, occupants of deep-cuffed pants rocked  
from the waist to earn their cake. I wore my one suit  
of infiltration, a skull cap, a blankened young face. Afterward  
a ritual of handshakes and a coffee pot from a realm of oilcloth.

Later that day I was the Jew boy on the steps of St. Thomas  
not daring the muscle-car street, halfway through a November  
of flurries, windless, almost warm. You wore tiny Christ  
on a chain. Your confessor I imagined in a booth like an outhouse,  
white-haired and dry as our cultures. His blessing delivered  
cornstarch thick, he consolidated your sins into beads, your  
sheepish lies and self-indulgence packaged and expelled.

At last you burst forth through saturnine doors, intelligent and lively  
once more. Only then were we free to receive a million kisses of snow.

# Baritone

*Alan Elyshevitz*

With whom do I grapple but myself, having slipped  
into baritone like a bald tire? I shall not be colloquial.  
I shall lug my good English from high school exile  
to unemployment. During protracted afternoons  
I shall ruffle the pantry for crackers while infection  
blossoms in the water I drink. Black boys at least  
have their grandmothers' oils. Already time's dint  
of friction has marked me with freezer burn. This,  
I've learned, is smash-mouth life. In the dark my mother  
toils on the highway to extrude a living wage. She  
mothers roadkill all night long; her orange vest lacks  
inherent light. In summer her din climbs rungs of hot air  
to accompany my jack-hammered sleep. In autumn  
I decline vaccination and hum the tunes of insomnia.

# Tunnel of Love

*Bart Edelman*

The poem first appeared in  
*Tipton Poetry Journal*, Fall, 2022

Born in "The Tunnel of Love"—  
Palisades Amusement Park, July, 1961.  
Mother did not wait for ride's end,  
Dispensing me by darkness,  
On the metal floor of the car,  
Before I could witness light.  
The event made national headlines—  
Caused quite a stir in the family,  
Since Father ran off, hours later,  
With a woman who swallowed swords,  
And refused to take no for an answer.  
I reveal this tidbit of information,  
Merely as historical fact alone.

My sudden entrance into calamity,  
Came at a costly price—  
An admission ticket I've yet to cash,  
If I could only gauge its worth.  
That I find I'm constantly drawn  
To tight quarters and little space,  
Should arrive without surprise.  
I'm far more comfortable in places  
Where others squeal or scream—  
Unsure of the destination ahead.  
This, then, is cargo I carry;  
Safe passage through a curious life.

# The Founding

*Antonis Balasopoulos*

Balance was the first thing we lost.

The eternal deposited us  
in the lining of its pockets  
along with the sand and the salt.

Glow of teeth, silken mantles of cherry,  
the eye appropriating,  
rolling in sweetness.

We were trying blindly  
to remember what was  
on the tip of our tongues.  
We were getting scratched  
like the skins of fruit  
from the fall.

An angry, red wind  
was pushing us  
deeper into the night.



The day put a cold  
palm on the temple of our spasms.  
The sun tore us apart  
peering from the blinds,  
the silence of the morning  
stitched us back into one,  
desire left us  
halved. The contract  
was founded, and the minimal  
Demos, this blind consent  
to believe in the unknown.  
A truce was called  
between our clans, among the scattered seeds  
of our progeny.  
Then, offerings in the steaming  
kitchen. The world a porcelain,  
ornate with flowers, fragrant.

# The Future

*Antonis Balasopoulos*

The future is a hungry dog.  
Pull out a bone  
from your rib cage  
and offer it.  
Creation takes place  
within an economy of scarcity  
because nothing can be  
made from nothing  
and there is something  
and not nothing. So, there is  
something inside you that you can spare.  
Give it away.

Become less here,  
increase your shadow,  
count your length in your absence.  
Here, now,  
is all you need.  
Take out your eyes and examine them.  
Take out your heart and examine it.  
Take out your gall and examine it.  
Leave your things here.  
Be synoptic. Man  
used to be five sticks in your childhood  
drawings. Break one  
and throw it up ahead.  
The dog is waiting.

# Fleeting

*Tayler Boelk*

You know the cashier at the grocery store  
who works every Wednesday, that's when  
you shop because your boss lets you off  
early so he can watch his daughter's soccer game,  
the same team you used to play on, and without fail  
you bump into one of your mom's friends from work  
once weekly, twice monthly someone asks  
about your high school sweetheart that left  
last summer as if you are expected to be in touch.

Your fitness instructor is always at the gym  
no matter what time you go and you know  
he's going to ask, why you haven't been in class,  
so to avoid him, you cut the workout early,  
resigned to stay fat and pick up some pizza  
at the parlor down the street where your  
middle school bully works, he sweeps,  
and you feel like you've won because you've got  
a desk job and yet - you're both still here.

So you get in your car and drive away,  
to another state, another place,  
where no one recognizes your name,  
a new school, a new job, a new apartment  
that you live in by yourself and when you shop  
at your new grocery store you find yourself

scanning the aisles for your local brand  
of hand-crafted ice cream or perhaps a familiar face  
and are disappointed to find neither.

# Delivery

*Jeneva Stone*

Water and light and salt. Something moves within me.  
Wherever there are inroads a mountain slowly turns to  
dust. Eons of course.

I'm filled with rubble of contemplation. Self craters self. A  
face buckling. My mother calls it "mindlessness," when  
speaking of meditation. She also told me childbirth was  
pain I'd forget.

# Cervix

*Jeneva Stone*

Last night's empty wineglasses sit out, red dot dried in a crystal pit. Birth is a wound that never heals. Otherwise we would not care for one another.

I used to think the antidote to pain was altered consciousness. But there are places I can never go now.

Time itself is an artificial construct. A measure of passing or passage. But toward what or from what? You see, one needs to mark a place, like a blue ribbon in-between the layers of a book.

Pale nothings. I'm gathering ghosts in my arms, delighting in whatever's insubstantial. Letting whole childhoods out to play, shrieking gleefully, roughshod among amber orange drifting leaves.

# Rosary

*Jeneva Stone*

Here's a moment. And another, low-hanging fruit, weighty in a cupped palm. The sky ripens with accumulation. Rain hushes through the trees, sifting the leaves, souging the earth beneath.

Tines of a fork stand at attention. A napkin, white linen, folded against itself, as if settled into ordinary. What is ordinary? Enumeration, a passage forward.

Calm and yet more of it. My mind confuses itself, thoughts tumbling round, memories forming like small beads on the string of my tongue.

See the *beautiful lights*, said my baby girl. *Mommy* hangs in the air between us, appendant, dangling, reaching a hand to me.

# Snowfall

*Psycho Kanev*

Snowflakes are falling slowly and looking to land on something warm, but there are not any people around, just this lonely cherry tree with twisted body, the empty dog house and the grey sky above with a few brighter patches. Everything around is already white, but somehow seems smudgy. Soon the darkness will come with its black dogs of constant fear.

The beggar who lived in the shack at the end of the street won't come around today. His corpse lies under the collapsed roof. The wind tries to take the shape of the white trees along the street and just pushes further into this day of sirens, craters and bombed houses in our torn, mad world.



# Past

*Psycho Kanev*

All children got out of school and began to run  
around the field, began to run toward the sun.  
The movement is amplified through the empty room  
where the moon rises over the Arab carpet.  
From one of the billions of things  
in the ocean are born billions more.  
I touch the glass in this place  
where the fingers leave no prints.

# Old Returning Daughter

*Adina Polatsek*

Old returning daughter, come see  
the cracked mouths of the earth, run your  
fingers down the spine of the half-axed  
oak tree, lift the eggs from the nests  
of the mourning doves and remember  
every worst day spent in every small corner,  
breathe in the dirt, the dust, the dozing  
pictures, watch the slugs make their determined  
trip across the yard, look through the gate  
to the cats and only from afar, scare them off  
with an outreached hand, call for your  
mother, cry, eat off a tableclothed  
table, spill the water, run up to your room  
to hide, open the window and wonder if  
you'd reach the pool when you jump, if you could die  
from twenty feet up, lie on the floor, head  
pressed against the cold, crawl under your  
bed: has anything changed? All the dead has  
been swept away. The lizard you killed out  
the kitchen window and couldn't look to till  
it was gone; the eggshells under the tree; the caterpillars  
left on the doorstep. But they hang, they all hang, in the  
whispering cabinets and dirty grout. Are you happy  
you came home? Go stand at the top of the stairs,  
a blanket wrapped around your shoulders, the first  
one awake. Hear your father tell you he is coming

from the hospital. Do you like to do it again? Go put on your rollerblades and scrape your knees on rocky pavement and cry like you don't enjoy the sight of blood. Is this right? Go laugh out of trees and watch the neighbors pass from above, ride a scooter singing some croaky kind of song, hide away in the closet under tulle dresses. Do you understand yet? It's not home that carries the heavy footsteps of the years. All that's hanging holds to you.

I wake up at night and wonder what I felt when I was six months and crying every day, rocked to sleep by my mother, my father, as old as I am now. If that which I believed in—breastmilk and coos and eyes wide at a rock, a toy, a worm—was more meaningful than all the times I've begged to God. If, when the sun went down, I knew only the tides of sleeping (perhaps dreaming), waking, crying out for reaching arms, being lifted from the crib. There was someone to carry me and I knew none of it, except that it was as natural as I now hold the bad days to be. And when I was three—were my arms, pudgy, soft, reaching out to touch counters, hair, everything too far up? Ring finger in my mouth, silkie in my hand; those I see in photographs. I want to be that child and I want to be the one holding her and I miss myself.

One night, it was late, and I was six  
One night, it was late, and I was six, and  
I was in the backseat of the blue family minivan,  
and I was tired; I closed my eyes and leaned  
my head against the window and felt  
every bump on the road; but when we pulled  
into the driveway of that house that sat on a hill  
and seemed so humongous, I was not asleep. The car  
turned off but I left my eyes shut in orange-black,  
listened to the sounds of my father  
opening the car door, my mother  
taking the stroller from the trunk. I knew  
they were coming to carry me out, so I breathed  
as steadily as I knew how, let my head droop,  
tried to keep from blinking. "Adina's asleep,"  
said my father and then I was being unbuckled,  
lifted, taken into his arms, my head against his chest.  
I was no good at not blinking but I wanted  
to pretend. Maybe he knew I was pretending. I was six and no good at  
not blinking and no good at fooling anyone and that was right.  
He carried me out. Tucked me into bed. I was  
so glad not to do something so simple  
alone. So glad to be picked up and to let my father  
treat me gently while he thought I was knocked out.  
I never had to open my eyes. I remember the walk  
like I saw it. I remember when he let go and I still  
felt him there. I didn't know how lucky I was  
to be six and small and get away with things like pretending  
to be asleep so my father carries me out. I am now too old  
to be held.

# Tin Anniversary

(2013 – 2023)

*Elizabeth Curley*

My parents always told me, “don’t wish your life away,”  
But the birthday cakes demanded it,  
my heavy sighs falling over an audience of candles  
each shrieking, “what do you want for yourself?”

I buried the shoulda-woulda-coulda’s in a time-capsule  
during the age of Tamagotchi hopes and Skip-Bo conflicts  
for a speculative future that could only be read backward;  
I thought they would decompose long before  
they would ever grow into regret.

Now I celebrate every anniversary with a metal detector,  
a new-found passion for self-archeology,  
and sticking my tongue to my bones,  
wondering when I will fossilize.

No one is immune to these unstoppable forces,  
the sun still hoists uncertain sprouts into the sky,  
and I have traveled the first long-leg of this road trip,  
half-willing on a bumpy ride in the sidecar of time.

I only found this interest in history when  
its hands were around my neck,  
when it left trails around my eyes.

I drive memory lane and rue the redevelopment:  
the homeless shelter is a weed store now,  
the tiny-homes take over trailer parks,

everything is black and white and grey and worse,  
the mall hallways only echo the laughter of 2006,  
top 40s tracks rebounding against temporary walls  
like the shudders of a racquetball court,  
I am sitting alone in the food court at 9 pm,  
the automatic lights are shutting off around me.

A smaller me is somewhere solidified  
in time like fruit juice in popsicle molds,  
when the backseat of car rides were still magic,  
with sleepy eyes tracing only the tops of trees  
or quietly racing raindrops down to the rubber.  
It wasn't just mudpies and soap-potions  
but the universe was a puppet show  
and I was a spaceman floating -  
a captain in my cardboard spaceship.

Now the strongest protests can be  
khaki-colored, a small regularity  
to interrupt the never-ending chaos  
of what-could-be and although  
my dreams have gotten thinner  
they're also somehow brighter,  
like the rainbow sheen of bubbles  
just before they've stretched too far to stay.

Aging is a grief by many names  
but mourning is always done  
looking backward,  
may we all learn to look up  
and see the constellations of accidents  
that draw out our place in the sky,  
the small legacies that we may leave,

and find comfort in the feeling of being vincible,  
this chilly draft in a loose-knit Afghan  
cutting through the warmth of the only  
home that you've known for 28 years.

# “#12, ‘Don’t Stop’”

*Bill Gary*

*Tuesday, August 30, 1977, Fleetwood Mac’s “Don’t Stop”  
was at #12 on Billboard’s Top 100.*

If it wasn’t for the image of Lewis reaching for the concrete walls and fighting the heaving flotsam of so much metal and treetrash, Liam would not have been awake. He sat outside feeling the coolness of the stoop through his pajama pants and waiting for whatever breeze might pass by and evaporate the sweat from his naked torso. The night’s resonance filled his head now, an echoic roar that slammed repeatedly against the fence. He could hear lumber and tree limbs and bushes churning with spent furniture, and bicycle skeleton, and sheets of metal chain and barbed wire that no longer offered visible purpose but carried only the reverberation of the water’s relentless energy.

The sun broke enough to douse the mercury light and reveal the paper that lay in the grass, double-bound with a green rubber band that looked black in the early graymist. There would be a story and a picture, Mom had warned. It’s not anything you want to see. But he’d seen it, was seeing it now, was seeing it whether awake or asleep. What else could the paper show him? He stared at it and contemplated his bare feet and the wetness of the grass and the hidden information of news and the cool relief of the stoop. He knew if he moved, this moment of safe immobility from the surging depths of knowing would slip away. And yet movement might advance the movie reel in his head which seemed forever suspended, jerking repeatedly in its sprockets the same scene of Lewis’s body wrapped in chain link, save one red-streaked arm twisting skyward through a jagged hole, and the movie, looping the same sound of his scream, a susurrus against the din of the wash.

Liam’s fingers traced the outline of the bandage stuck to his cheek with paper tape and dried blood. He leaned with his chest against one leg, resting his chin on his knee and clutching a foot. The back of his hand accepted the crispness and the insensitivity from the rough-poured aggregate.



The rubber band shot off into the yard and the paper uncoiled redolent Sunday color photos and comics and the greenpapered full week TV guide and full-color advertorials and coupons racing out twisted and sliding wherever they could. The grayness of the morning gave way and his night terrors' setting stared back at him: the ditch's swollen water seen through the chain link fence with yellow police tape laced catenary through, another scene from the spasmodic movie that played throughout his night. Captures of couples holding one another. Helpless firefighters staring off. Eight feet of the waterlogged tree trunk.

"Southside youth drowns in stormwater runoff, neighbors mourn."

After the third try, he kept reading.

"A 10-year-old westside youth drowned in Bellevue Canal near Kettlewell Drive. The week's heavy rains washed debris into the high-walled ditch. According to TPD investigators, the torrential runoff pushed the debris through checkgates designed to keep trash from entering the canal. 'We're not certain why the boy was inside the canal,' said Sgt. Raney Slocumb, TPD detective. 'Kids are curious and they [were] probably just exploring when the boy slipped into the water.' The investigation determined the drowning accidental."

\*

Sgt. Raney Thomas Slocumb, detective third grade, perched on the Barco with his elbows on his legs and fingers laced. His khaki cuffs were rolled inward and gripped tightly mid-forearm. All was practiced and served to feature badge and brawn as well as what he considered a countenance of professional fortitude and southern compassion. He tapped the badge. Its brassy dull highlights and silver crenate margins struggled to glint in the buff light.

"See this? It means you're safe with me. It means you can say anything to me. 'Kay, buddy?'"

Liam filled his mother's lap and his arms draped simian around her neck. His eyes moved from Slocumb's arms to his badge before turning away and staring through the jaundiced plaster behind the front door. He rested his head on her shoulder and reflexively kept his bandaged cheek from meeting fully her neck.

"You see we just don't know what y'all was doing in there."

"I told you: he wasn't 'in there.'"

“That’s right, buddy. You tried to get in but couldn’t. You told your momma that,” Slocumb said more to Liam’s mother than to Liam.

Slocumb softened his voice, “Can you tell me now, buddy? Why were you trying to get in?” Liam was still aimed at the corner of the room, but his eyes were now closed. Slocumb cut short the urge to add the compulsory smile.

“He’s done in.” She moved her shoulders from side to side, rocking him like she did a decade before.

“Let me.” The detective lifted the boy from her and carried him down the hall.

\*

Liam looked back down at the half-curved page’s photo. It whispered something about the solemnity of neighbors and the coming together of those more colleagues than friends, all gathered in a corner yard, pressing against each other and fixing their stare on the same point just out of frame. Their gaze swept past the steel-gray fencing that curtain-gaped before the roiling waters where rescuers had cleft it open. They looked beyond the grappling-hook tree swathed in its own fence wire, a deadly giant once swollen with kinetic energy now laying in the street, motionless and as harmless and dead as a child, and beyond the crumpled shopping cart upturned on the pavement, and beyond the long-spent Goodyear with its broken and flesh-piercing steel hairs, and even beyond the eight-foot length of rebar that had punctured Lewis’s tiny abdomen as the iron rod’s antipole footed the ditch meeting the fence-wrapped behemoth as fulcrum to extrude the boy’s viscera into the wash.

She didn’t want him to see a photo or read the story, but what she didn’t want him to see wasn’t even in the photo, not really. But he knew. Knew where it was from the amorphous off-white sack that reached feebly into the frame. And so, he was as static as the grainy bystanders whose stare also rested on the shapeless end of the vinyl bag. He could see again Lewis being pulled from the ditch and detached from the tree. He could see his skin white like art paste and his side yawning fishmouth, a dark hole gasping in a world it was never meant to breathe. Liam heard again the men asking about the boy’s eye and the fence wire and a small recovery bag and the one firefighter who gagged loudly as he attempted to pluck the membranous ball of fluid from a metal barb. His memory attended once more a kneeling firefighter crying and cursing

against the water's clamor and against God's purblind care for His children; he heard the screams of the ambulance and squad cars, and the wail of the black station wagon as each crawled down Yorkshire Drive toward the ebbing ditch where his friend waited snugly limp in the ashen bag.

Liam flipped the paper over startling himself. His hand went back to his foot, and he turned his head to look at the ditch. He could hear Lewis screaming his name under the flowing roar as the movie reel began to pull again, stuck somewhere between life and death. The fence, he thought, too high to climb. And the barbed wire. He recalled pulling futilely at the bottom of the fence where it mantled the curb's edge and raked into the asphalt, but he wasn't strong enough. He fell to his knees at the center of each panel and pulled at the bottom diamonds to open a hole beneath. He moved quickly from one to the next, searching for a panel he could pull from the curb while watching for Lewis to resurface. Sitting on the blacktop, he pushed his feet against the curb and pulled at the fencing. The selvedge twists and wire's imperfections scraped his palms and fingers. Finding a loose enough section, he held the fencedrape up and slid his head and shoulders in, wriggling tightly on his back until the wire-netting caught the pockets of his jeans and held his pelvis down with pinching galvanized fingers. He writhed his hips from side to side and tried to pull the fencing from himself, but it dug deeper toward his pubis. He tilted onto his crown and rolled his head to one side to see where Lewis was. A shoeless left foot rose with the trunk of the steel wire tree. The bony leg rose higher out of the water exposing crisscrossed lacerations, and it wheeled toward the side of the ditch, inches from the concrete spate that separated the ditch wall and Liam's skull. He knew he could grab Lewis by the leg and pull him to safety if only, he thought. He gripped the fence more tightly and pushed its jagged teeth from his hips and across his groin and inched his shoulder blades and buttocks closer to the edge of the canal. At once the fence raised up and a co-ed from the rental house had him by the waistband. The twisted selvedge first clawed two short scratches in her forearm and then caught Liam, scoring a chevron from his temple to his cheek as she slid him back outside. Remembering, he heard again his own broken plea for Lewis's life and felt again its ineffability deep in his gut. He remembered feeling that his inability to get under the fence allowed any chance of saving his friend to slip away. Liam reached up and felt the pooched cotton gauze on his face. He remembered his mother taking him from the

girl, the blood on girl's tee shirt, and the transfer that dappled Mama's face and white blouse.

"Mama, I couldn't get to him," he whispered, his small voice quavered close to her ear.

"Thank Jesus you couldn't." Over his shoulder, she eyed the brutal colloid hoping to see a sign of the boy who fell in but all she saw was that she heard: the gnashing water working the trash vigorously. "He's gone," she said.

\*

Liam recalled what Officer Slocumb had said after putting him to bed: "I know your old man. Sorry he ain't here." Liam rolled over and stared at the small space between himself and the wall, the space that always grew in night-terror proportions whenever he tried to focus in the graydark of his room. The hilly blanket became a landscape in miniature of shadowed valleys and ridges. If this was real, how small of a thing could live here? Is anything even there? He knew that when the yellow sunlight lit up his room, he could see dust pieces floating in the air. Some of them more charged than others would shoot out of the flow and leave the others to their predestined journey to the floor. Were they always there? Are they there now, in the dark, floating above the snowcapped sheets? He wondered if some of them rested at night, tumbling softly into the bed without the heat of the sun to turn them over and over, having no force of their own but moving only by the force of something else's energy, drowning in a midair fall and slipping to the floor.

"Don't fret about the paper," Slocumb had said. "Them's only gonna be words, and words don't matter, buddy. What matters is the truth, what's in your heart and mind. If you know he was a good boy, then there ain't nothing nobody can do to change your mind. Everyone will know what a good boy and good friend he was because of you, because of your memory. Words. They ain't nothing but printer's ink on outhouse paper. There's a whole lot you can do to keep his memory living. You understand? Don't waller too long in today. You got to start thinking about tomorrow. And you got to know you done all you could to help your buddy." Slocumb paused and looked more like he was talking to some invisible audience hidden in the darkness than to Liam: "Yes, how you choose to see the world from here on is up to you—for its good or for its ills, and it don't get much more ill than this.

But yesterday's gone, buddy. Know you done all you could and keep remembering all the goodness that boy had."

\*

He tried to make something else of the picture in his head. He had wanted the day to have been a dream that he would wake up from not knowing who Sergeant Slocumb was or having a bandage on his cheek or having ever seen the tumbling tree or hearing Lewis's raspy mewling. But he knew that was merely the impracticality of his age, that the present was real and irrevocable, and hoping for God to intervene and offer a different outcome for Lewis was somehow irresponsible, childish. He knew it was too late to hope for a different day, just like he knew it was too late for prayer. Slocumb said "it'll get better," but Liam knew better: the dust pieces would simply keep slipping away down past the shadowed village, further and further out of sight, and no one would realize. No one in the village or in the larger world around would hear a thing, not even after their delicate bodies reached the floor once and for all.

# The Dollhouse

*Ken Jackson*

Doris McIntire always loved dollhouses. When she was a little girl, she had a Duracraft Linfield Dollhouse that her father, Aaron McIntire, gave her for Christmas. It was pink and white, with two levels and four rooms. She liked to get new furniture and create the type of house she always dreamed of living in. All of her dolls had their place. It was Doris McIntire's dream to grow up and get a house exactly like the Linfield Dollhouse. She wanted her family to match the clan of dolls she decided would live in that house.

As she grew older, people came and went. Her mother died of a heart attack and her father lung cancer. With her parents both gone, Doris McIntire wanted nothing more than to have everything stay the same, just like her Duracraft Linfield Dollhouse. She wasted no time in getting the house she wanted. The combined income that both her parents' deaths provided for her was more than enough to bring her dream into reality. She hired an architect to design a house just like that Duracraft Linfield Dollhouse she played with as a little girl. Doris had it painted pink and white, decorated with the same furniture her father had picked out for her dollhouse all those years ago. Everything was exactly how she wanted it to be, except... there were a few things missing. Doris McIntire had her real life dollhouse, but no dolls.

Everybody in town knew Doris McIntire. Her obsession with perfection had followed her from infancy through grade school and into the workplace. The blazer she wore over her blouse always matched her skirt and shoes. You could see her long, smooth legs gliding through the air as she walked through the office. Her makeup was always impeccable, not too gaudy, but just enough to accent her best features. She was in perfect shape, with that classic coke bottle figure. There were tons of men she could choose from, to build her perfect family for her perfect house.

Doris McIntire chose Ted Harrison. He was the Ken to her Barbie. His physique was like the perfect Aryan male you saw on all the Nazi propaganda posters.

Together, they produced a baby boy, who they named Aaron. There was supposed to be another, a baby girl to complete her set, but despite all of her careful planning, her perfect husband and perfect house, Doris had a miscarriage.

It didn't take long for the disappointment to spiral into something else. Doris McIntire hated change. She wanted everything to stay the same. Everything needed to be perfect and remain perfect. Doris knew she couldn't stop death, but she could stop life. Ted was the first to go. She put her perfect pillow over his perfect face and pressed her perfect hands down until he stopped struggling. She picked out his best outfit and dressed him, careful not to wrinkle her favorite suit as she dragged him down the stairs. Doris propped Ted up on the couch and curled up in his lap. Aaron was a challenge. Doris wanted him to stay a 3 year old forever. She knew that one day he'd grow up, get a girlfriend or a boyfriend and leave her perfect house. She'd be too old to make another set... another husband, another son. All she wanted was for him to stay a boy forever, to always love her and never leave her for another woman, to make his own family.

Getting him to sit still while she sliced open his scrotum was surprisingly easier than changing his diaper. She was careful, though, doing it as he lay on a sheet of plastic, so as not to mess up her perfect floors and furniture. The little kid couldn't help it, though... he just bled out, soaking his diaper as he played with his Tonka Trucks on the perfect floor of Doris McIntire's perfect house.

# Nine of Swords

*Adeline Navarro*

You are 22. 23? 27? You are twenty-something. Everyone tells you that you really are still young – but you do not believe them. The skin on your face has become a telephone line for crows, they talk, they gather, they sit deeper and deeper in your flesh. The crows are the ones responsible for telling the people to add these adverbs to their reassurance; it is so much worse than having birds perch on your shoulder, you used to be able to shoo those away, with a word or a hand.

Now it feels as if your life is halfway over, has the life expectancy of women shortened so drastically? No – not yet. But this feeling overtakes you like a recurring cough, cutting your oxygen off at random hours, a reminder of your mortality. It happens when you're on the train, in its gentle motherly rocking which cathartically yearns for Michigan. It happens in the missed calls from your sister. It happens when you and your partner start going to sleep right after dinner. It never stays for long, always in a hurry, coming back when you start to bask in its absence, putting a veil over the birdcage.

“I’m still working on the manuscript now, yeah, it’s the seventh draft. It just... It feels like it’s too late regardless, it’s like everyone is a prodigy now, that’s the thing. There are even prodigies at being a prodigy now. It’s ridiculous! You can’t be a prodigy at....” You uprooted yourself to be a writer, now your colleagues laugh, the women tell you that you really aren’t old. This does not help you like it used to, now it really has sympathy behind it.

Maybe it was easier to age years ago. Your grandparents were always old, in a way that you will never be. Your mom said when she was a child, she thought they were having screaming matches, violent arguments over cheap tableware. It would get so loud the cops were called; the situation would be explained; and repeated like a rehearsal. Eventually, the police stopped coming. Your mom said she complained about this years later, and your grandpa said, “I yell at your grandma because I want



her to hear me, I've only ever wanted her to hear me." Age was never a threat to them, just a bodily process. You forget your body when you are young, the path to an old childhood house. Directions dismantled by time; a wrong turn taken around a familiar corner.

Something has happened to you since you moved into the city, people don't write letters anymore, there are no skeletons to keep in a drawer; there is no knife to hurt yourself on. There is just yourself lying next to a body that is asleep. You want to love someone loud enough for them to hear you, but you do not know how. You are shouting into the different heads which occupy your expensive pillowcases, you read somewhere that they will fix your sleep, they haven't; but you put them on anyway to impress your visitors, to impress yourself; when people ask if you sleep better now you say "Yes, yes of course," and let the crows, your faithful listeners eat your shiny lies.

# Lavender Blue

*Suzanne Willett*

## CHARACTERS

MARIE 7, F, any ethnicity

MOTHER F, any ethnicity

FATHER M, any ethnicity

BULLS-EYE, a dog, M/F, any ethnicity

THREE ANGELS, F, any ethnicity

## NOTES

This is an immersive experience. Audience sits in the middle of the room/area. Monitors/mirrors surround and are some height above the audience, displaying Marie whenever she is in the middle of the field. When Marie exits the field, she enters the room/area.

Bulls-eye does not necessarily act like a dog.

Scene 1

*Marie, a child, lays in the middle of a wheat field. The wheat is above her head. We see her through the monitors. Amber and blue. It hasn't rained recently.*

MARIE

Hmmm mmm mmmm mmm hmmm

*Buzzing. Marie's hand waves through the wheat, bending it. A faint jingle.*

MARIE

Hmmmm hmmm lavender blue, hmmm hmmm hmmm

*She steps, the wheat crunches. And jingles. Marie crunches again, enamored of the sound. A bee buzzes by. She crunches.*

MARIE

Hmmm mmm hmmm lavender green Hmmm hmmm--

MOTHER

Marie

*Marie stops breathing. A loud fly buzzes by.*

*Mother appears on the edge of the field.*

MOTHER

Marie

*Marie barely breathes.*

MOTHER

You have seen both dolls and birds today!

*Marie lets out little puffs of air. A fly buzzes near her. She puts her finger to her mouth: Shhh!*

*Her Mother's voice fades as her Mother moves away from her.*

MOTHER

I have a great deal to do today

*The fly stops buzzing. Marie smiles.*

MOTHER

I have a great deal to do!

*Marie holds the fly still.*

*Mother and her footsteps recede.*

*Marie listens. She listens for a while. She releases the fly.*

MARIE

Lavender blue baby

hmm hmmm hmm hmm

Lavender green

if I were a king

hmmm mmmm hmmm--

*Marie rises and dances in the wheat until she disappears into gray.*

*Scene 2 - Rainfall*

*Rain falls. The rain begins slowly, then steadily until it is a crunchy spring rain. Sometimes the rain taps. This goes on for a while.*

*A child's footprint fills and overflows.*

*The rain taps morph into*

*Scene 3 - Father*

*Father's footsteps. The evenness of the rain is replaced by his uneven gait from a significant prior injury. Perhaps it is a dragging or a scuffing.*

*Marie lies down in the wheat. She tries to stop breathing. She moves her arm so slowly that she cannot be heard.*

FATHER  
Cuttin'  
n Curlin'  
n Shavin'  
n Slaughterin'

*Father moves the wheat. It jingles. At first, when he moves the wheat Marie stops moving her arm, but as she becomes aware of the tempo of his anger she slices her hand through the air in sync. This goes on for a while as Father continues:*

FATHER  
Slittin'  
n Splittin'  
n Slicin'  
n Seeping'

*Father grows tired.*

FATHER

his whole delight was in his trade  
his whole delight was in his mouth  
his wholesome mouth was his delight

*He stops. It didn't work.*

FATHER

Cutin'  
n Curlin'  
n Slitherin'  
n Slaughterin'  
n Gnashin'--  
Teeth!

*Father stops. He listens.*

FATHER

A queen  
who told you so?

*He whacks the wheat one more time. It jingles chaotically. He walks away.*

*Scene 4 - Outside the Field*

*Marie dances and sings outside the wheat field under golden rays of late afternoon sun.*

MARIE

Lavender blue, dilly, dilly

Lavender green

If I were king, dilly, dilly

I'd need a queen

I shall be safe out of harm's way

I shall be safe out of the way

I shall--

I shall be loud in the way

I shall be scared in the usual way

I shall be seen out of the way

I shall be--

'twas my own heart that told me so

'twas my own ear that heard me so

'twas my own mind that wore me so

'twas my own limb that tore from me so

Lavender blue, dilly, dilly

Lavender green

If I were queen, dilly, dilly

I'd need a king

Who told me so? Dilly, dilly

Who told me so?

I told myself, dilly, dilly

I told me so

*Scene 5 - Marie and Bulls-eye*

*Marie and Bulls-eye sit in front of the field. Noon yellow. Marie pets and feeds Bulls-eye snacks. They sing.*

BULLSEYE  
What light through  
Yonder window breaks?  
It is the east yet

BULLSEYE AND MARIE  
youoooo...

*Marie flicks a stalk of wheat. It faintly jingles.*

BULLSEYE  
... are the sun

*Bulls-eye looks into her eyes.*

BULLSEYE AND MARIE  
You-oooooh are two-oooooh

*Bulls-eye flicks a stalk of wheat. It faintly jingles.*

BULLSEYE  
of the fairest stars in all the heaven  
twinkle in their

BULLSEYE AND MARIE  
sphear ears

*Marie flicks Bulls-eye's dog tag. It faintly jingles.*

BULLSEYE  
and yet  
the brightness of your cheek shames those stars  
the birds sing thinking it were not night



*He nuzzles her. She hugs and feeds him.*

BULLSEYE  
Retain that dear perfection  
And for that name  
Take all thyself

*Marie feeds him again.*

BULLSEYE  
Tastes like wheat

*Marie takes one of the snacks and chews. She gives another one to Bulls-eye. He gulps it down. He licks her hand impatiently.*

*Sensing her Mother, Marie holds her finger up to Bullseye: Shhh.*

*Mother searches.*

MOTHER  
Bulls-eye! Bulls-eye!

*Mother whistles for Bulls-eye.*

MOTHER  
If you were shown a flock of birds unable to fly, you would  
strip them to your own advantage!

*Mother's footsteps pass in front of them, stop, then recede.*

*Scene 6 - Mother and Bulls-eye*

*Mother and Bulls-eye come upon the field, searching. Bulls-eye pants. Marie lies down, silent.*

MOTHER

What the devil do you do in there?  
you would shout and shed tears for anything

if you were shown a great heap of dolls  
you would pick out the richest and the gayest!

*Bulls-eye sniffs. He stops, sniffs, and tenses. Mother creeps up behind him, her body like an elastic band.*

*Bulls-eye sneezes and returns to sniffing around.*

MOTHER

I have a great deal of things to do!

*Scene 7 - After the Beating*

*Marie stops in front of the field. She is tattered, bruised and bloodied. She walks with the gait of someone who has had a significant injury, perhaps with a foot drag or scuff.*

MARIE  
Cuttin'  
n Curlin'  
n Slitherin'  
n Cuttin'  
Curlin'  
n Slitherin'  
n Slatherin'  
n Simmerin'  
n Smotherin'

*She straightens.*

MARIE  
When I am queen I shall need a king  
when I am fine I will leave you alone  
When I am well I will do you wrong  
when I am lost you will not be found

Scene 8 - Father 2

*It darkens like a solar eclipse. Marie jumps in the bushes. We hear the uneven gait of her Father.*

FATHER  
A queen, eh?  
who told you so?

*He trudges past the field. Marie slices her hand in sync with his voicings.*

FATHER  
Simmerin'  
Smotherin'  
Slatherin'  
Slitherin'

*He trudges. He struggles against losing energy. Marie slices her hand in sync with his voicings.*

FATHER  
CUTin'  
n GUTtin'  
n GNASH hin'  
GNASH hin  
GNASH hin  
Teeth!

*Marie stops her hand slicings.*

FATHER  
Ta ta  
sssssss  
ssssssssssss

*He listens.*

FATHER  
SssssssT'TT'T!

*The TTT! hits the wheat. It lightly jingles.*

*Marie lies still.*

*Scene 9 - Marie Is Lifted Up by Angels*

*All the wheat has been pressed down. White. Marie lies in the mud, eyes closed. Three angels filter through the audience.*

THREE ANGELS

call up your men set them to work  
call up your rules set them to lines  
call up your lines set them to arms  
call up your arms set them to war

*They move to Marie. Their wings begin beating, a faint jingle.*

THREE ANGELS

call up your will and set it to work  
call up your will and set them down  
call up your will to see it to drown  
call up your peace and set it to bear

*They right her. Marie smiles.*

MARIE

I have a great deal of things to do.

*It gets whiter.*

# Needle In a Haystack

*Sarah Coll*

Dinner, drinks, dancing. Small talk. Wine, maybe champagne. Dinner, drinks, and dancing. Appetizers, canapes. If you're lucky, perhaps there will be a small, unoccupied room to hide out in after one older man or another gets a little too frisky under the safety of dim lighting and those who will turn the other cheek. White dress. A live orchestra playing a flawed tune in B minor– or maybe A sharp, I can't exactly tell. I float, I glide, and I hope my makeup isn't smearing. Madame Rothko would never let a hideous thing like that go. Gnats, all of them. But oh, I love a good dinner party.

Laughter carries, but voices echo. When the laughter dies on frozen lips, the words stick around. So I try to keep quiet these days. It doesn't bother me much, it's only a few hours. That's what Percival promised, and Percival is getting better at keeping his promises. Just a few hours, and we'll be back home. And the silence will settle in, and I will settle into the silence, and Percival will brood in his study. The waves will lap at the shore below the terrace, but I haven't been to the beach in years. I used to wear a red bathing suit. I would leave my hair down. I would run in the sand. Tonight, I will close the curtains.

"Oh, darling, your dress—" Madame Pollock doesn't need to finish her sentence. My dress is exquisite. It's magnificent. It's lovely. She could use any word in the dictionary and I'd agree.

I nod my head. "Yes, well... you know how Cherie does it."

"I've been trying to get a dress off of her for months now, but every woman in the country seems to have discovered her." Madame Pollock eyes my dress like she'd rip it from my shoulders the second I turn my head.

I smile, and hope my eyes are not too dazed. I am not drunk, though Pollock always seems to think I am. "Yes, the best dress-maker in the country."

"Quite."

Madame Pollock flutters off to chat with my husband. Percival shows no reservations, and hardly gives me a second look. Gnats, all of them. The two of them fade into the crowd.

The crowd. One massive body, one humming machine. One circadian rhythm, one beating heart, two legs to move it from place to place, always together. A girl who looks like a coral princess runs past, her dress fluttering in the stale air. Why do they let children into these things? Surely they, at least, have better ways to spend their time. I follow her outside.

To the garden. The body continues to breathe. The body rarely rests. We are hard-working, all of us. We must always be moving. The footsteps remain, never to be blown away. My own prints will be gone by morning. Gone by the end of the night. The archway is covered in ivy. The gardener should've cut it away, the ugly green weeds. Monsieur Debuckly leans from a corner, a corner where men are smoking cigars. They are industrious men, they are artists. They are terrible. If the smell of tobacco and shame gets on my dress, Percival might think I joined them. What a pity.

A scream. The body quakes. The girl has found a friend. They run and they shriek. A smile nearly wrinkles the skin around my mouth. I am too close now to old age to allow that to happen. But oh, back in the day, I would laugh. Instead, I frown at the little girls acting how I used to wish I could. The fathers quench the fire when it is still kindling. Douse it while it's young. Don't let it grow.

He is standing under the arch. He's a shadow, dressed all in black like that. Oh, how Madame Rothko would give him hell. And He looks up. And His eyes meet mine. And the body shatters.

I can hear the shards falling to the floor. I can hear the heart stop beating. I can hear... for the first time... I can hear.

I approach. He smells of whiskey burning up in a house fire.

"I haven't seen you before," I say. I whisper.

The ivy clings to his hands. Intertwines with his fingers. Wraps up to his wrists. He smiles, nonchalant. "And who are you to know what you've seen and what you haven't?"

I used to spend my nights in the forest. I used to step barefoot on the grass, in the dirt. The fringes of my dress are stained. The ivy crawls up his arms.

"I haven't seen a thing," is what I say.

‘Till thou return unto the ground; for out of it was thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return. The body is shuttering. Quaking. Wine stains on the fabric, wine stains on my face.

He is unsympathetic. He has not been in the body long enough. He never was in the body. “But what do you care?”

“I don’t.”

The smile never wavers as the ivy creeps to his neck. Wraps around once, twice. A brushing at my feet. Around my ankles. Up my legs. Into his mouth. My hands bleed from the shards of the body, sticking from my skin, shredding my lungs.

Blood pools. Skin rips. Green ivy around my thighs, gripping my torso, reaching towards the neck. Leaves stem from his hands, but he reaches out anyhow. His hand in mine, his eyes to the grass sprouting from between my toes. My eyes are to the stars. Fire oozes from the sky. If I am burned alive, I hope the flames take my eyes last. I want to see. I want to see it all.

I used to swim in the ocean. It used to be so cold. I used to duck my head under the waves and hold my breath until the very last second. I used to open my eyes underwater and try to see fish. I would come up burning, my lungs, my face. And on my lips, a smile. He smiles. The ivy pulls him until he is locked against the archway. He pulls me with him. I have no reason to say no. I cannot say no. The body has shattered, and with it, the ground beneath us.

A marriage. A marriage between two hands clenched together in vines. A marriage between a white dress and a black suit, stained with envy. A marriage between mere animals, a body to another body. The body shivers. The body stings my tongue. My dress clings to my legs, turning red, turning white, turning green.

The folds of the leaves envelop us in blissful honeymoon. A kiss from the darkness, a touch of love from the vines to the dirt. From the dirt to the roots. From the roots to the stone, and so forth. A body to a body. An eye for an eye. And the whole world goes blind.

My voice. Choking. Clenching. Clawing. One last attempt at painful niceties. “Sir, I never did catch your name...”



# Mask

*Michael Brooks*

In the green radio light, the hairs of the dark pelt danced like a grassland. The costumes were Garrett's idea. They hung like loose skin from our bodies—flesh demanding to be filled—and their masks sat in a hairy heap between Courtney, Zach, and the crumpled Red Bull cans littering the Mazda's backseat. The road to the sand dunes wound through a thick forest, and tall trees let little moonlight pass. It made midnight all the darker. I slumped in the front seat, glancing through the sunroof, at branches thicker than arms, and at the rearview reflection of Courtney's breathing chest.

A red light blinked to life from Zach's camera, which he leveled like a megaphone and swept a slow panorama. "Tonight! On Sasquatch Files..." he said. "Can one vengeful sophomore and his peer-pressured pal strike fear in the heart of the Hive?"

From the wheel, Garrett flashed his half smile, the one that meant trouble. I unclasped my hands and swiped blindly behind me, but Zach ducked and kept the camera rolling. "Find out, as they try to convince a half-drunk jock pack that Bigfoot is real!"

He panned the camera toward Courtney. "Hey!" she said. "I told you not to put me in there." Zach moved the camera closer until she turned and swatted it from his hands.

"The Drone, Zach," Garrett said from the wheel smacking his gum. "Not the colony. Just the Drone."

In the rearview mirror, Courtney brushed her hair behind her ears, but a spiral of it swung back across her face. It fell like a pendulum, like the arm of some galaxy unfurling, spilling worlds across her milky skin. It made my heart batter so hard, I feared the others would see it through the gorilla costume, like an erection, like something I had to hide.

“All because he tripped you in the cafeteria?” Courtney asked. The corner of her mouth raised in sass, and her piercing eyes angled off the mirror into Garrett’s.

He snickered.

“Of course not, Courtney!” Zach said. “It’s about generations of tear-stricken wimps striking back at their aggressors. Garrett’s their figurehead, nay! Their Robin Hood! Can’t your simple girl-mind understand that?”

“You’re about to be a ‘tear-stricken wimp,’” she said, tossing an empty Red Bull can at him.

Garrett pulled onto the road’s shoulder, the tires crunching over gravel until he jerked to a stop.

He turned to me with a playful jab at my arm.

“Ready, soldier?” he asked, and before I could answer, he unbuckled my seatbelt, which slithered up my chest, through the fur. I reached for the door handle and stepped into the night.

From the opposite side, Zach popped out of the backseat. He threw something that sailed over the Mazda’s roof and slapped me on the cheek. It was the mask. The loose face oozed in my hands. It reminded me of the melting clocks in that famous painting—the one my mom always loved.

Courtney emerged from the Mazda with a cat stretch, snorting. “You guys look ridiculous.”

My face grew warm. I slipped the mask over my head and pulled it down until I could see through its eye holes and smell the dried sweat of past wearers. Garrett stashed the car keys on top of one of the wheels. His mask hung from one hand. He kicked a rock and began up the road. We followed. The white line that marked the road’s shoulder glimmered in the dark. It bisected my steps: one foot on blacktop, the other on gravel.

Zach trotted up to Garrett’s side. “You really think he’ll fall for this?”

Garrett glanced over his shoulder at me. “We look enough like Bigfoot, don’t we, Jake?”

“You look like two anorexic orangutans,” Zach said.

I gave a curt laugh. Courtney stayed silent.

“Drunk people get stupid,” I said. “He’ll fall for it.”

“Or beat the shit out of you,” said Zach.

“Either way, we’ll have a good video.”

We journeyed another half mile up the road to a break in the forest, where the trunks of downed beech trees curved like an open mouth, their pointed leaves a thousand tiny teeth. Logs meant to barricade the entrance only landmarked it. The fresh footprints of our peers pocked the sand.

Garrett scampered over the dead wood and disappeared into the darkness. Zach’s gaze raced back and forth between the trees. The camera dangled from its strap.

Courtney gave him a playful push. “Are you scared the real Bigfoot’s in there?” she teased.

“You never know,” he said. “I saw this TV show once—”

Courtney pushed him again.

“Alright! Alright! Watch the camera. Jeez...”

I stood at the edge of the road, one foot over the white line, and watched them climb. Courtney turned toward me, half her face in shadow. “Are you coming?”

Moonlight crisscrossed her body, her left eye trapping its glow. Between us was the wood pile, a gulf of crushed grass, and the first few trees of what looked an endless forest. I wished she would come to me, grab my hand, and pull me past the dark maw. Instead, she blinked twice, turned, and disappeared over the logs—the same way my mother had vanished with Dr. Charlie from Wisconsin at the beginning of the summer. Here and gone. Just as quick.

The mask trapped my breath, wetting my nose and the skin above my lips. Over my shoulder was the Mazda, parked on a road that led to a town of lights and houses and concrete. The keys were on the wheel. Even if I didn’t drive away, I could sit behind locked doors and listen to familiar songs on the radio. But her voice came over the woodpile, saying just my name, in a question, in a near song that deepened and echoed in the gaps between trees. “Jake?” I stepped off the road and its white line toward the mouth of the forest. Being careful not to catch the costume on the wood, I pawed my way over the logs with my furry, animal hands.

They waited for me on the other side. Garrett’s feet drew wide circles in the dirt. Zach cocked the camera up at the logs.

“You’re a slow climber for a monkey,” he said.

“Careful, Zach.” I said. “The real Bigfoot might hear you.”

“That’s not funny...”

Courtney's gaze traced the tall trees, the oaks and maples that rose like the pillars of an ancient temple. She smiled.

I hopped off the logs onto the trail snaking across the dark ground.

"Let's move, troops," Garrett said.

The others went ahead as I adjusted my mask. A new sight came into view: fireflies. Their bodies blinked amber, glowing like Christmas lights, illuminating the slow steps of Courtney's silhouette.

Beyond her, the hills made strange shadows, as though they were unconscious monsters that could wake without warning and swallow us whole. In the forest, the trees barred most of the moonlight, turning the sand to a soot that gathered in my tennis shoes, making every step heavier, reminding me of an hourglass. Twigs snapped. I attended to every noise: the September breeze, our muffled footsteps, my breath. We ventured farther from the road, and the fireflies blinked faster. Under the fur my heart raced. For a breath or two, it synched with the blinking.

The dark road curved, the maples and oaks giving way to crooked pines that littered the path with dead needles. Zach glanced over each shoulder at the sound of snapping sticks, but Garrett didn't seem bothered. If anything, there was a bounce in his step. The path spilled us onto the backside of a giant dune we called the Bowl. We climbed it, lurking like predators in its grasses, and soon heard the sounds of the Hive: the laughter, the fizz and pop of beer cans, the hisses from the fire burning at the bottom of the hill, tucked behind another dune lest any Coast Guard officers patrolling Lake Michigan spot its forbidden glow.

I pulled off my mask for a better look. The firelight caught on the shells of discarded beer cans and made the earth sparkle. We crept downward along the side of the dune. Below us, figures swayed back and forth around the fire: the Hive, we called them, for the way they swarmed the halls of our high school, stinging at will, always looking to pollinate. Their shadows pancaked overtop of the pale sand, and they droned louder than the Lake's breaking waves, buzzing around drunk sophomore girls. And then I saw him: the Drone, close to the fire, bobbling a beer, surrounded by look-alikes. He pulled a girl to his side who spilled her drink and gave a nervous laugh.

"Target acquired!" whispered Garrett.

"Now what?" Zach asked, readying the camera.

"Now we wait," Garrett said.

He and I pulled at the costumes, at the fur.

Courtney said, “You’re coming undone, Jake.”

“What?” I said. My throat felt dry.

“Your costume. It’s coming off in the back.

Here, let me...” Her small hands slid down my back until she found the costume’s straps. I couldn’t see her face, but her light hair perched just above my shoulder. The tips of it touched the skin of my neck, and stealing a sideways glance, I saw how it meshed with the costume’s dark fur. I didn’t breathe until her hands evaporated from my back. When they did, I put on my mask.

We sat in the cool sand, looking beyond the fire, beyond the hill, to the black infinity of Lake Michigan. Its waves rose and fell, igniting in reflected light, paving a moonstone path across the water to where Mom lived with Dr. Charlie. The moon was a waning gibbous, a fraction, something incomplete. Bright light and dark void pressed together as one. Courtney crouched beside me. I could smell her strawberry lotion, along with the breath and latex my mask trapped. We waited. We waited for our moment, for a gap in the slurred shouting, some break in the buzz of bees.

Finally, the Drone excused himself, kicking up sand and stumbling to the edge of the forest, right toward us. His zipper murmured open, followed by the universal pause and the sound of streaming liquid.

“Eww...” Courtney mouthed.

Zach clicked a button and held the camera upright. It made no noise, but the tiny red light appeared.

Garrett slipped on his mask and whispered, “Carpe Diem, bitches!”

With a loud grunt, he broke through the tree line, only feet from the Drone.

“What the fu—” the Drone began, but he didn’t finish. Garrett shoved him, the Drone staggering backwards, tripping over a log, and timbering into the sand.

Garrett beat his chest and roared a gorilla grunt. He leapt next to the Drone, looming over him, expecting him to stay flattened against the earth. He didn’t expect the right hook that shot up and clocked him in the gorilla mask. Garrett stumbled backward and fell over. I stood frozen in the trees. The Drone shouted something slurred. He jumped up, zipped his pants, and turned toward Garrett on the ground.

My stomach churned like magma. Courtney shifted beside me, her mouth open in a tiny “o” of horror. She had dropped to a crouch, her legs coiled and tense, as

though ready to run. And at the sight of this, I erupted into action. I charged from the woods, channeling my skinny limbs into an uppercut that struck the Drone's solar plexus. Caught off guard he fell in a crumpled heap. I ripped Garrett off the ground and pulled him into the dark forest. He'd just been socked in the face, but he was laughing.

"I'm gonna find you!" came the drunk bark of the Drone, who in no way believed us to be Bigfoot. We slipped and stooped over the thick grasses and fallen branches blanketing the floor of the woods.

The gorilla mask trapped my breath. It made my panting as loud as the sounds of the snapping twigs and swearing that followed us. A red light in the bushes told us where Zach hid with the camera.

"We swatted the Drone!" Garrett squealed.

Zach said, "I got the whole thing on—"

"Not now!" I hissed. "Go. Go!"

Garrett howled the craziest laugh I'd ever heard—a full zoo's worth of sounds—and bolted. Courtney said nothing. Her face flushed with the moment every teen dreams of: that hurricane of shared trouble and adventure. It froze her wonder in a wide-eyed smile—one I had only a moment to capture and hide in my memory before we had to sprint like hell out of there.

We stole into the woods, scampering back across the dune and down the trail in swift strides. My friends seemed drunk in a muffled hysteria. I sprinted to keep in step with Courtney. Her legs pumped, and she gazed skyward in an elation I tried to share. But the tree shadows turned her hair indigo black, the color of my mother's. And in Courtney, I saw her: my mother's hunched figure and mousy mannerisms, given way to sprinting youth, running off the middle-aged fatigue that crooked her shoulders and shadowed her eyes, light-footed now, laughing at the top of her lungs, near dancing over roots and sand under stars, fleeing with Dr. Charlie from my father's loud opinions, from a sink full of dishes, from a gossipy town where nothing happened and everyone drank, from the burden of motherhood, from me. Was this what she looked like when she left, face grinning and glowing? I tried to shake it off, but I couldn't. I fell back from Courtney, growing nauseous and winded.

Behind us, the onslaught of swearing waned, until in the woods, in the dark, in the skin of fur, we lost him. Garrett's hyena laugh sang over the trees, and skipping along the path, he ripped off his mask. I glanced behind me.

"Relax, Jake," Garrett said. "He's drunk. He'll never find us."

My shoulders slumped. I took a deep breath and looked sideways at Courtney. She wore a wide smile that didn't fade with the fireflies as we trekked back to the Mazda and the sand-blown road.

Zach punched me in the arm.

"Nice work, King Kong! You went ape-shit back there."

Courtney laughed. She opened the door of the car, its courtesy lights splashing across her face. The run had tossed her hair wild and colored her cheeks scarlet. I could see blue veins on her temples, ears, and hands—rivers that flowed with the same fluid ease of her flight. I crossed my arms over the sagging chest of my costume. My eyes began to water. I didn't take off the mask.

## Contributors

### **MICHAEL OLSEN**

In 1993 Michael wrote, produced and directed his first play, *Cannibals of the Heart*. Since then, his plays have been performed across Australia, New Zealand, the UK, Europe, Africa and the US. *Two Women & A Chair*, probably his best-known play, has been performed at the Edinburgh and Prague Fringe Festivals. He has been writing poetry off and on for over thirty years. His work has been published by *Assisi Journal*, *Quadrant*, *The Nillumbik Shire*, and *Farrago Newspaper*. All he thinks he's doing when he sits down to write is waving to strangers—you, his readers—and hoping in some small way you are all waving back . . .

### **KRIS NESBITT**

Kris Nesbitt is a 2019 graduate from Russell Sage in Writing and Contemporary Thought. Kris lives in a small New York village and works in a slightly-larger Vermont town. She has been previously published in *Talent Unlimited* and *Vernacular*.

### **LUNA XIONG**

I'm Luna Xiong and I aspire to become the ruler of the world. Those weaker than me will kneel and perish, those stronger will cease to exist, and those who seek to join me will be guided towards triumph.

### **ALAN ELYSHEVITZ**

Alan Elyshevitz is the author of a collection of stories, *The Widows and Orphans Fund* (SFA Press), a full-length poetry collection, *Generous Peril* (Cyberwit), and four poetry chapbooks, most recently *Mortal Hours* (SurVision). Winner of the James Hearst Poetry Prize from *North American Review*, he is a two-time recipient of a fellowship in fiction writing from the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts.



## ***BART EDELMAN***

Bart Edelman's poetry collections include *Crossing the Hackensack*, *Under Damaris' Dress*, *The Alphabet of Love*, *The Gentle Man*, *The Last Mojito*, *The Geographer's Wife*, and *Whistling to Trick the Wind*. He has taught at Glendale College, where he edited *Eclipse*, a literary journal, and, most recently, in the MFA program at Antioch University, Los Angeles. His work has been widely anthologized in textbooks published by *City Lights Books*, *Etruscan Press*, *Fountainhead Press*, *Harcourt Brace*, *Longman*, *McGraw-Hill*, *Prentice Hall*, *Simon & Schuster*, *Thomson/Heinle*, *The University of Iowa Press*, *Wadsworth*, and others. He lives in Pasadena, California.

## ***ANTONIS BALASOPOLOUS***

Antonis Balasopoulos was born in Thessaloniki, Greece in 1970 and is Associate Professor of Comparative Literature at the University of Cyprus. He has published two volumes of creative prose and aphorisms (*Through the Loophole* and *The Book of Brief Reflections*), four poetry collections (*Multiplicities of Zero*, *White on White*, *The Book of Creatures*, and *The Book of Hands*) and a collection of short fiction (*The Cube and Other Stories*). In 2022, he received the National Book Award of the Republic of Cyprus for best short-story collection for *The Cube and Other Stories* and was shortlisted for best poetry collection for his *The Book of Creatures*. His poetry, fiction and translations have been published in several printed and online periodicals in Greece, Cyprus, the UK and the US. He is also a literary translator; his first book of translations, an anthology of select poems by Emily Dickinson, Robert Frost and Wallace Stevens, was published in 2022.

## ***TAYLER BOELK***

Taylor Boelk is a higher education professional and MFA Fiction student at Western Michigan University. Her poetry and short stories have appeared in *The Oakland Arts Review*, *The Freshwater Review*, and *The Crucible*. In her free time, she manages both a fiction book club and an online fantasy/sci-fi book club.

## **JENEVA STONE**

Jeneva Stone (she/her) is a poet, essayist and disability advocate. She's the author of *Monster* (Phoenicia Publishing, 2016), a mixed-genre meditation on caregiving, disability & medicine. Her work has appeared in *NER*, *APR*, *Waxwing*, *Split This Rock*, *Scoundrel Time*, *Pleiades*, and many others. She is the recipient of fellowships from MacDowell, Millay Arts, and VCCA. Her opinion writing has been featured in *The Washington Post* and *CNN Digital*. She holds an MFA from the Warren Wilson Program.

## **PEYCHO KANEV**

Psycho Kanev is the author of 12 poetry collections and three chapbooks, published in the USA and Europe. His poems have appeared in many literary magazines, such as: *Rattle*, *Poetry Quarterly*, *Evergreen Review*, *Front Porch Review*, *Hawaii Review*, *Barrow Street*, *Sheepshead Review*, *Off the Coast*, *The Adirondack Review*, *Sierra Nevada Review*, *The Cleveland Review* and many others. His new book of poetry titled *A Fake Memoir* was published in 2022 by *Cyberwit*.

## **ADINA POLATSEK**

Adina Polatsek is a writer from Houston, Texas. She is currently studying at the University of Texas at Austin and has poetry published or forthcoming with *Apricity Magazine*, *Soundings East Magazine*, *Welter*, *Figure 1*, *Ligeia Magazine*, *MSU Roadrunner Review*, and *Moot Point Magazine*.

## **ELIZABETH CURLEY**

Elizabeth Curley lives a dual life as both a poet and a social work researcher. Elizabeth received a Silver Medal from the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards in 2012 and is still writing a decade later. Elizabeth's time is spent consuming, collecting, carrying, crafting, and quantifying the human experience.

## ***BILL GARY***

Bill Gary is a writer living in Corydon, Kentucky. His work has appeared in *The Heartland Review*, *Vermilion*, *The Riverbend Review*, and others. He is also the co-author of three college writing textbooks.

## ***KEN JACKSON***

Ken Jackson was born in Detroit and raised in the village of the world. As an undergrad, he interned in Marvel Entertainment, Inc.'s editorial department and later went on to create such titles as *City Hare* and *The Planet* for his company, Blank Komix. He received his MA in English Literature from WSU in 2022.

## ***ADELINE NAVARRO***

Adeline Navarro is an undergraduate student at Wayne State University who is studying the big three... English, Philosophy, and Creative Writing. She spends her time reading, watching documentaries, and watching her cats watch other things.

## ***SUZANNE WILLETT***

Suzanne is a 2021 Samuel French OOB Short Play Festival Winner, a Eugene O'Neill Playwrights Conference, Bridge Award, Women's Works Short Play Lab and Fresh Ground Pepper Play Ground Play Group Finalist. Her NY Productions include: *Quantum Debt* (Players Theatre 2021), *Life* (Players Theatre, 2019) *Chaos/Absolute Zero* (Players Theatre, 2018), *Rock, Paper, Scissors* (Arctic Fridge Fest, 2017), *Wonder Company* (Dixon Place, 2017) *Fall Pieces*, a collection of experimental shorts (Dixon Place 2015); *Tompkins '88*, a play about the Tompkins Square Park Riot in 1988 (Metropolitan Playhouse 2015); and *Robert McIntyre*, a man's struggle with his paralyzed hand (Manhattan Rep 2014). Suzanne has received a Players Theatre Residency, an LMCC Creative Engagement and ART NY Space Grant for her work. She has her MFA in Playwriting from Hollins University and is a member of the Dramatist Guild and founder of the Experimental Theatre Writing Workshop.

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