AFTER HAPPY HOUR REVIEW

ISSUE 11 // SPRING 2019

After Happy Hour Review

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CURATED BY

the hour *after* happy hour

WRITING WORKSHOP & JOURNAL

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ANDRES ORTIZ-FERRARI

Foreword

Dear Reader,

Welcome to the 11th issue of the After Happy Hour Review. Sorry we're late. More on that in a minute.

But while it may be late summer as this "Spring" issue finally rears its head, we hope you'll find the contents are still just as invigorating as the first truly green day after winter's end. We thank our contributors for bearing with us during the unexpectedly long winter, and are proud to finally be able to share their work with you.

As we are now a five-year-plus running journal, we've found more and more difficulty in keeping up with the influx of year-round submissions, especially as our purely-freelance, purely-voluntary group of editors' have gotten married, moved to new cities, and generally continue to surf the changing waves of their lives. And as our lives and the demands of running the journal have changed, we've decided we'll have to as well.

What does that mean? We're not sure yet. But for the rest of the summer, we'll be closing submissions to give ourselves both a much-needed break, a chance to reorganize our process, and a head start for when we do open back up. Hopefully, that will be soon and with new resolve and new strategies in order to make sure we're never late to a season again.

Until then, happy reading, fruitful writing, and thanks as always.

—Mike Lambert, *After Happy Hour Review* editor

Rock Scramble Haibun

by Sarah Giragosian

Le canyon des gueulards

To scramble: to clamber over rocks with one's hands, to
splayed and scraped by rubble. Hello blisters. Hello jagg
etched in our hands. Still we go beetling through canyo
of giraffes stretch, naked, their lives tangled up with dee
reach for metaphor, a scale I can work with. I'm not in
flinty and sloth-like in her coat of algae that is really th

Meanwhile, you—conscious of echoes and the silence as
whispering, *Our new home*, and I can picture us going
in the limestone and clay, turning the ledges and rhythr
all the animals, historic and forthcoming, on the walls, a
caught up in each other while we read stonework and fo
say erstwhile rapids, and in between bird trill and crag,

(The Canyon of the Yellers)

muscle up and across the floor of this crevasse with hands
ged bedrock. For days we'll keep these memories of grit
n rooms, while above, half-locked in rocks, roots the height
ep time, a time my mind tries and tries to plumb. I fail and
a pocket of time, but in the maw of a wooly mammoth,
e bright shine of Spanish moss knitting the trees above.

tonishment commands—point out a cave, not yelling, but
domestic in this tiny seat of primal time, nesting together
ms of water-writing into bookshelves, painting with ochre
and spooning spider-style in our archive-abode, sixteen legs
ossil: giant's calligraphy that says former falls, curves that
the finer, inscrutable scribbles of love.

A body of stone
marries another body.
Down she lays her roots.

Don't be Fooled

BY SARAH GIRAGOSIAN

by my beauty.
From the flower hat jelly,
I've learned to flaunt
my stingers, to float
crown-like through black
waters, to be to fish a mouthful
of killer ghost. From the hair jelly,
I've learned to be more than frills;
I've crammed and learned how to inflict
pain and panic in an instant, to protect
under the drifting islands
of my tentacled lobes medusa-
fish and harvestfish, prowfish and shrimp.
I've studied, and the blue
blaze and throb of me, is cut
from the ocean—equal part flourish,
equal part crypt. I'm the ache
of place, the keeper
of weaker bodies,
the salt in the wound.

Cassandra's Testimony After Apollo's Kiss

BY LAURIE REICHE

After the kiss I glowed,
his brilliance burned, his spittle
sizzled my cells so that every atom in me
became a telescopic hole of knowing,
and everybody's future was a luster aching under my skin
ringing, ringing with the cacophony of worlds
at their beginning and at their end.

After the kiss every word and pronouncement that flew
from my bedazzled tongue became a diaphanous
utterance of disbelief. My brain
radiated rage and sorrow to be such a vessel of knowledge
no one could acknowledge, to be a blind bird
lurching toward the sea. Do not deceive a god, do not

recoil from his fiery hands or he might disrobe
and kiss you with a curse. And yet,

burdened with the truth, glistering
with secret revelations, still I stand under the stars, a star myself,
dead thing echoing lost proclamations, agonizing
warnings all in vain, an etheric wraith, white
beacon whispering into the always ancient wind an anthem of
eternal wisdom, the gift of redemption that was, in fact,

my only reason for being:
that you might learn to see as I see and then
believe me.

Nosebleeds by Stephen Wack

She feels no shame for her frequent nosebleeds, or at least not anymore. Triggered by the most innocuous small talk with strangers, struck up at random while waiting at a crosswalk, or in line at the department store, the most menial exchange about the weather—catching her like a right hook, completely off-guard.

They first began some odd years ago, out of nowhere. No such history of past nasal trauma, seasonal allergies, chronic sinusitis, congenital blood disorders, irregularities, nor even hypertension—she just "gets them," these nosebleeds, always mid-interaction, with no predictive pattern to their onset. They are not brought on (as far as she can tell) by any sort of inherent fear, impromptu anxiety, or stumbling awkwardness from these sudden thrusts into conversation. She has never been socially ill-equipped to handle these ad-libbed interactions with strangers bold enough to engage other strangers on a whim, out of kindness, curiosity, boredom, or all of the above.

Her first year out of college, having relocated to a new city for an adult job in a downtown office right at the heart of it, her nosebleeds hit

a fever pitch—in taxis, bathrooms, elevators, on busses, stairways, video conference calls—some days encountering as many as four separate instances of stained shirt collars and sleeves. Increasingly, she finds herself ducking her eyes down in public, stuffing her ears with headphones more, picking up her pace through crowds, keeping her distance, if only to appear less outwardly inviting.

Yet still, they do not stop. These strangers, despite her best dodging efforts, never fail to single her out as the one to ask for directions, to watch their stuff while they are gone. She simply has, they all say, helping then to blot tissues at her gushing nose, one of those "friendly faces... the look of someone you can trust."

And so ultimately, eventually, with a purse full of wet wipes and a wardrobe forsaken to only dark clothes, she comes to accept her fate. Which is when the first predictive pattern to her nosebleeds begins to emerge—though, not in their onset, but rather their outcome. That is, how such spontaneous talks with strangers that had resulted in a nosebleed would generally lead to more lasting connections than those that had, otherwise, not. Instantly thrust past all social formalities into something intimate, shared, how eager were these strangers to then drop everything to help, to run off and retrieve a warm washcloth from behind the bar, to

offer advice on where to pinch and hold and just how far back to lean.

Naturally, she can't help but read into it. She develops a theory that the impetus behind her nosebleeds is a fated indication of a strong, human connection to come, that these are the people the universe intends to bring into her life's fold. Her best friend (similarly met with a face full of blood), however, isn't buying it. She tells her she's mistaking "correlation for causation." Argues that fate has nothing to do with it, that this sudden, mutual effort between two complete strangers to stop a nosebleed is like sharing in some sort of pint-sized tragedy, an instantly bondworthy experience. Which is, she, in turn, responds, the exact occasion of fate she's talking about.

But then, there are the moments when fate undeniably misses its mark, and she's left to question this whole grander-design thing. Like with the man from Lowe's last weekend, who she has yet to shake loose from her head. She imagines him now, likewise perusing the same set of discounted patio furniture, as he turns and asks her something casual about the Memorial Day weekend sale. She looks him right in the eyes. Returns an answer. Her heart flips inside out like a washed sock, but no nosebleed.

Each go on their separate ways. She paces between aisles in a

post-adrenalized fog. A pressure builds behind her nose, knotting her head off like a balloon—she can't make sense of it. Beyond hurt, confused, by these nebulous tangles of fate, she ponders the thought now, over a week later, still amongst this vacuum of logic that accompanies, if not defines, love at first sight, whether to have steered her fate correctly then by punching herself in the face.

The Rotting Brain BY DANIEL DAVIS

It was like one of those old science fiction movies. An alien blob invaded a quaint Midwestern town, killing senselessly, until a perky young hero and his perky young girlfriend with her perky young breasts managed to find the creature's one weakness and kill it just before the government bombed the town into the next century.

Except in Dale's case, the blob was his brain, the town his body, and no amount of radiation could kill the beast. Sorry, not-so-young hero. Too bad you don't have a girlfriend to fight by your side. She couldn't handle it, could she? Your mood swings, your patchwork memory. You know what really drove her off, though, the final straw that broke that particular camel's back? The twitch above your left eye. Reminded her too much of the monster shows she watched as a kid. Those monsters' faces all twitched and now yours twitches too and you didn't even know it until she told you.

So Dale stopped the treatments. With Melinda gone he only had one mouth to feed, and hell, he barely ate anymore. Except about a week after he flipped off the doctors and their false promise machines, his stomach came rearing back, wanting all the food he'd turned away. So he ate cheap. McDonald's, Arby's, Burger King. All the greasy burger joints in the county. He ordered pizza and frequented the Chinese buffet, and wouldn't you know it, he didn't gain a pound. Not one damn ounce. Of course he threw most of it up afterwards. He found he liked it when it

tasted the same on the way up as the way down. Sort of got to relive the same meal twice. If you wanted to see it that way. Which he most certainly did.

He quit his job at the paper plant, too. Everyone pretended to be sad, and maybe on some level they really were, but he knew they were relieved to see him go. Melinda hadn't been the only one. He had become a difficult man. And not from some outside invader, either. The thing in his brain was of his own making, wasn't it? His own flesh and blood. Cancer, the ultimate biological weapon, created by its victims. A renewable, sustainable killing product. He wondered if the government had tested cancer patients to see if they could harness the disease, maybe make it into an aerosol and spray it in the skies over Iran or Iraq or wherever the war was now. Dale figured they had. He also figured if they wanted him for testing, there were a couple barrels of buckshot standing in their way.

Instead of working, he fished. Bought a foldable lawn chair at a yard sale, stained with sun and sweat and tobacco juice, and took it down to the creek in the forest behind his house. Bought a cheap fishing rod at Walmart. The clerk trying to sell him on aerodynamically designed lures specifically tailored to one species or another, until Dale said, "Look, my brain's rotting away and I just want to catch a fucking fish before I die." Felt bad in the parking lot afterwards, bought not too bad. It's not like he could control it. Like those people who cussed all the time. Except for Dale it was more like a tiny pocket in his brain had burst, and whatever had been stored there was now gone forever.

He had a particular spot he liked to go to, a place where the forest opened up and the sun came down and he could set his chair flat and not have it rock one way or the other. He baited his hook with nightcrawlers he also bought at Walmart and tossed out a line. The creek wasn't deep, but the fish had to swim through to get to the reservoir, sunfish and small catfish and even bass, or so he'd been told by his old drinking buddy, Will, who come to think of it had also caught cancer a few years back and died. That was from smoking though, the dumb bastard. It was almost like he'd wanted it.

Dale didn't have a history of fishing. He and his father had occasionally tossed a baseball in the backyard, but that was it. The old man passed—motor vehicular accident, which is what you call it when an SUV runs a red light and rolls right over your motorcycle—when Dale was eight. They hadn't been particularly close anyways. He sometimes thought maybe they would've gone fishing eventually. But his father had been a sports-and-beer man, not an outdoorsman, so maybe not.

Fact was, at fifty-six years of age, Dale had to figure out how to bait his own hook. The thought amused him to no end. Here he was, losing a small piece of himself every day, and he was bothering to learn something new. His old doctor would be proud. Fight it, Dale, don't give up. His doctor was a big fan of not giving up. To Dale, it seemed pointless. Why fight a losing battle? It's not like he'd be around afterward to boast about how he stood up to the thing in his brain. Who was he gonna brag to, Saint Peter? Like that old bastard gave a shit.

Dale fished and he never caught anything but still he fished because it kept him outdoors, in the sun, and there listening to the creek ripple by, what was left of his mind drifted. Into the shadows packed densely around the trees, beneath the moldy leaves cluttering the ground, weaving through the branches. He didn't think; he didn't do anything. He just sat. His eyes may have closed; he could never tell. He let the world unfold around him, let it exist, as piece by piece he fell apart inside. He didn't miss his wife, he didn't miss being whole. He was what he was, not what he had been before, and in the stillness of the forest he realized this was okay. He realized you could only be yourself, even if you weren't a whole person anymore, even if you'd come to be defined by that part of you that wasn't really you. This wasn't surrender, this was truth. Of course, with his brain of sinkholes and wastelands, who was he to know for sure?

JEREMY SZUDER

Homework

BY EVA-MARIE SHER

On Mondays she sweeps,
And locks
The house to keep
It clean. She cooks
On Tuesdays, airs her gripes
On Wednesdays, gathers rocks

On Thursdays, gently rocks
Herself to sleep on Fridays, sweeps
Whirling dust bunnies, gripes
Yet again (about who knows what) on Saturdays, unlocks
The tinderbox that keeps
Her grudges safe (and that prizewinning nettle-recipe she cooks

On Sundays!) She keeps
All fist-sized rocks,
And while she cooks
And sweeps,
She schemes to lock
Horns with the object of her gripes.

(Such utterly delicious gripes,
Such a bouquet of grievances she keeps!)
And while she combs her golden locks,
She dreams up plans to rock
The lifeboat of her foe, vacuums her rugs to sweep
Him under—and, catches at last his goose to cook.

But, as a vegan, never having cooked
A goose, she's at a loss, adds a new gripe
(This time against herself), sweeps
All cookbooks from the shelf, just manages to keep
From hurling her supply of fist-sized rocks
Through her own window, but keeps h

And key. Now that the lady's locked
Herself into a corner, she cooks
In her own juices, rocks
Her own boat, and not too gently gripes
Against her idiot self, keeps
(After all, what's left?) on sweeping.

But never mind cooks, locks or rocks,
Dust-bunny gripes are well worth keeping—
Sweeping, sweeping, keeping sweeping.

1965: A Blessing BY JENNIFER WANG

It was dark now, the shrill cries and wailing of his wife finally over. He crouched in a corner of the tiled floor on his haunches, no longer alone. In his arms, a tiny form slept, oblivious to the significance of her existence.

He was grateful for the flurry of women around him, wiping down the sweat from his wife's body, soaking up the blood with rags, wrapping up and tossing away the remains of childbirth, which looked like the goat offal the butcher threw to the street dogs. They catered to her, who still lay in a lifeless and dazed heap on the bed, so he did not have to. Labor had taken over thirty-six hours, and in all her distress, he realized more starkly than ever how little he felt connected to her. He watched her face, contorted and unrecognizable, without emotion, yearned for her screaming to stop not because her suffering pained him, but so peace could be restored.

Mung Sung's marriage had been arranged a year ago. At first, he looked forward to it as a change in a life that had grown bleak and tiresome. The eldest boy in the family, he dropped out of school at the age of eleven, soon after his father joined the crew of a cargo ship, one of many Chinese men driven out of Bombay before the war. His father's last words were, "You're the man of the house now." Yet even though Mung Sung accepted every odd job he could scrounge up—delivering soda to stores in milk crates balanced across his shoulders, the yoke from which they hung cutting welts into his back or carrying sacks of vegetables and fruits that

weighed more than he did, learning to walk hunched over—his brother and sisters still went hungry. His father's remittances, as sporadic and unpredictable as his visits home, were of limited help.

It was not long before Mung Sung took up smoking beedis, tobacco flakes wrapped in tendu leaves, with the older kids in the neighborhood and learned to steal to satisfy his addiction. He was only twelve the first time he was caught, but that didn't stop the store owner from beating him senseless. When the police officer arrived, he poked a baton into the tormenter's soft paunch and announced, "That's good enough. His father won't be paying me anything for a maimed boy." But the store owner only jeered, revealing teeth stained orange from chewing paan all day, "You'll be lucky if you get a warm samosa from the likes of his family." And just as the ruthless old man predicted, Mung Sung's mother could only wring her hands and weep as the officer tapped his baton impatiently against the palm of his hand. For she had nothing to give but the sari she was wearing, the threadbare cotton revealing every curve of her bosom, which the officer had already noticed with intrigue.

Mung Sung's failures were only magnified by the achievements of his brother Vijay, who ranked first in his class, eliciting a pride their illiterate mother had never felt before. When others suggested Vijay drop out of school to work, Janakibai wouldn't even indulge the conversation, preferring to sew pillowcases every night by the flickering light of a candle than risk the family's only hope at a better future.

And so by the time Mung Sung turned nineteen, the prospect of marriage was a beacon of light, a dowry offered so generous it might allow him to start a small business. A more calculating mind may have tried to pin down

the details of his father-in-law's offer. But that never occurred to Mung Sung. Like the earthworms that surfaced in the hundreds after the first monsoon, he had spent his entire life digging slowly and steadily through the dirt, doing work that went unseen. At the end of all these years, he looked back and could only see a network of empty tunnels leading nowhere. Now he had finally been given the chance to prove himself.

But after the frenzy of wedding activities subsided, the endless days of feasting, dancing, and praying, receiving blessings from elders and exhorting the many gods of their faith for good fortune, reality settled over him as suffocating as the veil of flowers that had masked his face. His in-laws informed him that the dowry would be used to buy a new home for their daughter even though custom dictated she should move into his family's chawl on the edge of the slums. Mung Sung didn't have the will or the words to resist, conditioned as generations before him to accept that the poor did not protest against authority. He only nodded meekly, prompting his father-in-law to clap him heartily on the back before lowering his voice to a hush, "Don't worry, I would never leave you without a way to support your family. I've already made all the phone calls. You'll be starting as a salesperson at my biggest furniture store on Monday. I had to let go of one of my best employees, but that's a small price to pay for securing a good job for my daamaad."

Yet Mung Sung could not have found the work more loathsome. His English was mediocre, and he endured the daily embarrassment of having to answer questions from Bombay's wealthiest residents about the durability of this material or the quality of that wood. When he was not on the sales floor,

he would be holed up in the tiny, windowless office counting money because, as his father-in-law always liked to remind him, bending close as if confiding a secret, "You can never trust anyone but family." All his life Mung Sung had worked with his hands outside, sweating under the sun, the tangibility of hard labor keeping him rooted in the world. Now he was adrift.

But standing in his lavish apartment that night, a home where he still felt out of place, the weight of his new daughter was undeniable. Her head was still wet and downy, already covered with shiny black hair. He studied her tiny curled fingers and toes, the nails pink and crescent-shaped, and the thick sweep of her lashes, which fluttered as she indulged in grandiose dreams. He felt awed that he helped to create something so magnificent.

Suddenly, she opened her eyes and emitted an unhappy wail, disrupting his contented thoughts. Startled, he began to bounce on his heels as he had seen his sisters do when soothing babies, but her crying only intensified to a furious pitch.

At a loss, he looked around only to realize that all the women had left for the night. He was alone in the room with his wife. She stirred, awakened by the cries, and gestured for him to bring the baby, cooing as she unbuttoned her shirt. The baby instinctively opened her small mouth wide to suckle. He marveled at the power of his wife's breasts, which once struck him as unnecessarily large and clumsy, but now instantly satisfied his daughter as she guzzled milk in loud, frenzied gulps.

He broke the silence, unable to resist asking, "Isn't she perfect?"

"It would have been better if she were a boy, but at least she will be pret-

ty. You can already see it in her face."

He appreciated her candor, and for the first time, felt a warmth towards his wife, a relief that he would not be charged with nurturing this tiny, complex life form by himself.

That night, Mung Sung stayed awake until dawn. All he wanted to do was gaze at his daughter's sleeping face and cradle her tiny body, so vulnerable and yet already so demanding. He noticed her gentle sighs as her chest rose and fell and touched the curly wisps of hair around her ears. And when he bent his nose to her head, her smell made him feel thrilled to be alive.

In the morning, oblivious to the fatigue that weighed down his eyes, he kissed her dimpled forehead and reluctantly handed her to his mother-in-law, who had arrived to help his wife. "Don't worry," she cajoled, patting his arm. "She will still be here when you get home." At work, he was congratulated by many, including his father-in-law, who thumped him on the back and said next time he was sure it would be a boy. Nothing could dampen his joy though. When the clock struck 5 PM, he was the first to exit the store and jump on his motorbike, dodging rush hour traffic with the nimbleness of a ferret rushing away from a shadow in the sky.

As he walked up the concrete steps through the courtyard, heavy with the fragrant breath of blooming jasmine, he realized he was happy to be home. It was a strange feeling when for so long he had tried to avoid being here, always making an excuse to visit his mother, saying she wasn't feeling well or that she needed help to fix this or that. Otherwise, he would feel constantly ill at ease, never seeing his wife but always knowing she was there, in the kitchen preparing dinner or in the bedroom watching Hindi soap operas.

She sensed that he preferred they were in the same room as little as possible. She had no expectation of anything more, confident that being bound together only by cultural tradition and no other emotion or desire was not only normal, but proper. Around other people, both of them came alive, loved to tell jokes and kept the endless numbers of their relatives entertained for hours. But around each other, an awkwardness stifled their conversations, and they would only speak when practicality dictated, asking where the pitcher of milk was or whether eggs had to be picked up at the store.

He jumped up the stairs two at a time and burst through the front door only to find the living room empty. He listened intently for sounds of the baby or the murmur of voices, but there was only silence. Anxiousness gripped him, but then he came upon her, both of them, asleep, their figures nestled together on the queen bed, lying on their sides—her body curved around the baby as if still trying to protect her, the baby's back against her belly, now outside instead of in.

He felt like an intruder and began to step back, when his wife called to him, "You are back early today. Is anything the matter?"

"No," he said quickly, a little embarrassed. "Did I wake you?"

"It's time for me to start dinner anyway. My mother cut all the vegetables before leaving. She was giving me ideas for her name. My favorite was Aaina."

"Mirror?"

"Yes, it's fitting. Looking in her eyes, I feel I can see into my own soul."

"What about your father?"

"He will want to name the first boy. For her, anything will be fine."

He nodded. “Aaina,” he murmured, the soft syllables rolling off his tongue. “Yes, I like it.”

She smiled, and he left, feeling vulnerable before her for the first time.

That night it started to rain and didn’t stop, and he once again held Aaina in his arms, only releasing her to let her nurse when she was roused by hunger. In the morning, the skies were still gray, but there was a fresh earthy odor in the air, the smell of the world renewing itself.

“You will spoil her.” His wife walked in, dark circles under her eyes.

He looked down at Aaina still curled in his arms. “There will be plenty of time for her to sleep by herself when she is older.”

He paused then, realizing that the rich brownish-black locks cascading down his wife’s back were exactly the same shade and texture as Aaina’s hair. He wondered for a moment if they also shared the same smell, then felt embarrassed for thinking in such an intimate way about his wife.

“I thought we could go to Borivali National Park for your birthday. I could invite Naeem and Nasrim. Pumah could use the break.” An image of his eldest sister’s weary face came to mind, momentarily saddening him. She had just given birth to her fourth child, but her husband still required her to work from dawn to dusk cooking and cleaning, the consequences for disobedience harsher than if he were disciplining an animal.

“But there’s an entrance fee.”

“It’s not much,” he said, knowing that paying for the entire group would easily be a day’s wages. “Besides, we have much to celebrate.”

On the day of her mother’s birthday, Aaina’s eyes were open, alert

and swiveling from face to face as she lay on the picnic blanket. Next to her, Nasrim was beside herself with joy, studying the tiniest and most delicate of dolls. Naeem hung back, though even he occasionally smiled when Aaina gurgled at him and at one point took her finger in his as if wanting to test that she was real.

"May I hold her?" Nasrim asked.

Mung Sung's wife looked alarmed.

"How about while you sit down?" Mung Sung guided Nasrim's knees into a cross-legged position, then folded her arms into a cradle. Her face beamed as the tiny bundle was placed on her lap.

"Will she get big like me?"

"Yes, Inshallah." Mung Sung noticed his wife's disapproving glance, but he knew the children's father, a Kashmiri Muslim, spoke Arabic at home.

After buying thali lunches from throngs of street hawkers at the park's main entrance, they hiked along a dirt path under the shade of thousand-year-old guanacaste trees. Deep in the ancient jungle, the noise of the city faded so that only the skipping chatter of Nasrim and Naeem's voices could be heard, the babble of the stream running to their left filling in the gaps.

"Dede, do you see the chital?" Naeem pointed, but the spotted deer sensed their presence and leapt away. "You were too loud," Naeem chided. Mung Sung gazed at the children scampering ahead and imagined Aaina chasing after them in a few years, maybe leading her sibling by the hand the way Naeem guided his sister now.

Suddenly Naeem's shrill voice caused them all to look up at the same time.

"The karvi have come!"

There on the hillside where the Kanheri caves started, a brilliant field of lavender unfolded in waves rippling to the blue horizon. As they drew closer, they could make out the five ridged petals of every flower, an eye of white at each center, a blurry tapestry of overlapping stars.

All the locals knew the story of the karvi, wildflowers that blossomed only once every eight years. Once the monsoons arrived, the dried fruits split into two halves, dispersing seeds into the air with a loud pop. Then the karvi died, disappearing into the ground until eight years later, the next generation sprouted. It was considered a blessing to see the bloom in its full glory. Watching his nephew and niece run barefoot through the flowers and feeling the small body still lying on his chest, her tiny hands clenched shut around his collar, Mung Sung felt it was no accident that his entire life—one interminable sacrifice for others—had culminated in this moment of happiness.

The next few months Mung Sung felt the rays of the sun warm him long before sunrise and after sunset. His joy at spending time with Aaina increased day by day as he watched her grow and become more alert, swiveling her head at the sound of his voice, and that ultimate moment, meeting his eyes and smiling. Mung Sung kept a small photo of her in his wallet and delighted in showing it to customers at the store, the glossy surface soon worn and faded from so many hands touching it. For the first time, he looked forward to speaking English as an opportunity to learn. He yearned for Aaina to be proud of him as she grew up.

After work, he often brought her to visit his mother, where Aaina would be showered with kisses and passed from lap to lap, as there was always a

crowd of people in the one room chawl. On these long summer nights, Mung Sung would give in to the pleas of the children and let them ride around town with him on his bicycle. Once Aaina learned to sit up, he would put her on the handlebars, and her cousins would jump on behind her, holding onto each other as they balanced on the frame. Janakibai would scold Mung Sung for taking such risks with a baby, but while he would never trust anyone else with Aaina, he was always confident that he could ensure her safety.

Gradually and imperceptibly the way children outgrow clothing from one year to the next or spring folds into summer, Mung Sung noticed changes at home. He would return from work to find the TV off, and his wife singing to Aaina or reading her picture books. She even began joining him at the dinner table with Aaina in her high chair. Yet he no longer felt ill at ease around her for Aaina's presence had miraculously breathed a red glow in cold embers, connecting strangers who once had nothing in common. And over time, he even noted that despite her wide face, her features were all very pleasing and her figure, while solid, had a substance that reflected stability.

Then one night just after the monsoons ended and the world outside their apartment was beginning to dry, he discovered she was awake in their bed when he finished his shower. He put on his night clothes awkwardly, turned away from her, sensing that she was watching him.

"You seem different now. Maybe you've fallen in love. That can happen to new fathers."

He looked up with surprise at her directness, wondering if she felt any

ill will towards Aaina. But her face was relaxed, a girlish smile hidden behind locks of hair unbrushed and wild after her bath.

"God decided to give us a gift, a blessing. That is something to treasure."

He fell silent as he prepared for bed and then climbed into his side. He was painfully aware of the heat emanating from her body just a few feet away. He had never felt any real desire for her after his marriage, their lovemaking more utilitarian than anything else. Relatives on both sides of the family were expectant, making statements pregnant with suggestion or in his father-in-law's case, just bluntly demanding results. After his wife announced she was with child, he felt more relieved than happy the burden was over, and he would no longer have to perform acts he felt to be unnatural and awkward despite the brief explosion of pleasure at the end.

He closed his eyes and tried to relax, not wanting to admit that he was too unsettled to sleep. Suddenly he felt her bare foot brush his leg. Was it an accident? Now her hand was on his arm, a brazen gesture that made him feel taken aback yet exhilarated. He turned towards her, unable to resist what his body wanted him to do, and began taking off her nightgown, revealing her breasts swollen with milk. When he touched and kissed them, he could feel the warm liquid dribbling down her nipples, tasted its sweetness, and he thought of how Aaina nursed everyday, sustained by her body. For the first time, he placed his large hands around his wife's hips and lifted her on top of him, desiring to feel her weight pressing down on him, interested in her pleasure. And when they were both finally done, he didn't get up to clean himself as he usually did, but lay back in his bed feeling so content that he fell into a deep sleep.

When he came home from work the next day, he felt almost shy to see his wife again, wondered if last night would be repeated, the prospect undeniably exciting him. But as soon as he stepped through the front door, he felt the air thick with dread. His wife paced the living room floor, bare feet pummeling grooves into the slick vinyl tiles.

"Aaina has had a fever since lunchtime."

Mung Sung immediately walked to their bedroom where Aaina slept in her crib, her tiny face reflected endlessly in the mirrors on the closet and dresser. When he touched her, he flinched she was so hot. He phoned his mother and her advice was to boil ginger and honey and drip the cooled mixture into Aaina's mouth. "Let her nurse as much as possible," Janakibai added. "Nothing can cure her as quickly as her mother's milk." He carried out the instructions solemnly. But by nightfall, he too was pacing, deepening the grooves in the floor, checking on Aaina every half an hour, and praying. It was not until the middle of the night, when his wife had already fallen asleep from fatigue while he continued to keep a vigil, that he could discernibly feel Aaina's temperature go down.

By the next day, Aaina appeared normal again, calling to her father in uhhhhs and awwwws as he dangled toys in front of her. Soon Aaina began to crawl, picking up every object she could reach and gazing at it with her large, inquisitive brown eyes before heaving it across the room. Mung Sung found the greatest entertainment in taking out pots and pans, blunt kitchen utensils, and hard fruit that could withstand Aaina's strong fists and watching her bang them together and shriek with delight.

One morning as she inched across the floor, one leg bent and one ex-

tended like the cripple that lived in the alley, she looked up at him and grunted. He peered down at her lovingly and asked, "What is it, Beta, are you trying to speak?" But he soon realized she was coughing, very gently, as if trying to clear her throat of an annoying crumb. It didn't seem to bother her though, and soon she reached the window and pulled herself to her knees to grab at the curtain tassels. And as Mung Sung observed her resolute stubbornness, her small brow furrowed in concentration as she wobbled to keep her balance, a sliver of sunlight turning her black hair into soft shades of amber, he too forgot about the sounds so mesmerized was he by her every action.

But weeks turned into months, and Mung Sung would continue to hear it, as Aaina rolled from her tummy to her back, explored her own body by grabbing at her eyelashes, or slept, the coughing interrupting her deep breathing like snores would wrack her grandmother's chest. His wife dismissed it as a cold. And because the coughing was so faint, he sometimes wondered if he was just imagining it, the delusion of an overprotective father.

Since Aaina was born, she enjoyed a penchant for food: first her mother's breastmilk—nursing every hour and a half and inconsolably protesting when her mother, following Janakibai's advice, lengthened the time between feedings—and then the wonderful world of table food, which included everything from plain daal and rice to shredded curry chicken and chapati. At nine months, her cheeks and legs were so round and pudgy that they were in constant danger of being pinched.

That's why it surprised Mung Sung when at Aaina's Mundan ceremony, held in her grandmother's one room chawl so that relatives and friends

poured out the doors into the common balcony and peered in through the windows, Janakibai first observed, "Aaina must be growing up. She's getting skinny." But it was time to shave Aaina's head, a rite that would purify her soul, and Mung Sung was called to chant the sacred hymns and make the first cut. As he watched Aaina sitting in her mother's lap, both of them facing west of the sacred fire, that uneasiness drifted into his mind again.

A week later, Mung Sung stood in the kitchen using a tone that was almost accusatory. "She's growing thinner and thinner."

His wife also could not mask her irritation anymore. "I give her everything she loves to eat most, fresh curd, tandoori chicken, curried fish, but still she leaves food on her plate. I don't know what else I can do."

Mung Sung was quiet. "Maybe we need to bring her to the doctor. We can borrow money from your father."

"My father already pays most of our bills. I don't want to ask for any more. Children go through phases as they grow up. Aaina will be fine."

Mung Sung did not need to hear anymore to end the conversation. He could have salvaged more pride if his father-in-law just raised his meager salary, but his father-in-law liked this arrangement, which gave him visibility into exactly what Mung Sung was spending.

As everyone else went about their lives, Mung Sung also began to lose weight. He stopped sleeping, once again cradling Aaina in his arms and watching her face as she slumbered, wanting to savor every moment of her presence. Bending towards her and smelling her fine downy hair still made him feel breathtakingly alive, but now there was always a lingering dread. For he alone sensed that her sickness was not normal, that it was something unimaginably

terrible, and that he would be forced to stand by helplessly and watch it ravage her. Finally, as Aaina began to throw up phlegm the color of fresh blood, as her voice turned hoarse so that Mung Sung could not discern her first words, and as she began to lose the tiny hairs that just started to grow back after her Mundan ceremony, Mung Sung's father-in-law offered to take her to the hospital.

From the moment Mung Sung told his mother, she began to sob, and this brought Pumah and Mimi running, and soon wailing themselves, so a chorus of their sorrow echoed through the neighborhood. News spread quickly among the tenements, and by the time Vijay arrived home from school that evening, his neighbors all spoke in hushed voices and gave him secretive glances as if they had heard the sun would not rise again, and he was the last to know.

Mung Sung's wife also cried, but softly and to herself, knowing that she, Aaina's mother, had missed all the signs. And her parents wept too, for even though their love for Aaina had always been reserved, it was still a terrible tragedy to lose a grandchild. The only person who didn't cry was Mung Sung, for his grief had already been welded into him, could not be shaken or expressed.

The doctors said it was tuberculosis, and that Aaina only had a few months to live. The disease was caught too late to treat. Even Mung Sung had to agree maybe it was for the best. Treatment would have been expensive, and the battle to convince his father-in-law that her life was worthy of such sums difficult.

After the news was announced and absorbed, life almost returned to

normal. But no one, not even Mung Sung, was prepared for what was to come. As the disease attacked Aaina's organs, she could no longer digest solid foods. It was like time reversing itself as her mother prepared kitchadi, a rice and daal porridge, to drip into Aaina's mouth, and Aaina stopped crawling and exploring her surroundings, only having the energy to sit or lie still. Once again, there were many nighttime awakenings, but her father insisted on changing the diapers as Aaina's intestines began to fail, letting his wife sleep and bearing the pain of watching Aaina suffer alone.

But Mung Sung never cried until the night Aaina could not sleep, whimpering pitifully in his arms. No amount of rocking, bouncing, or walking could comfort her, and finally he had to leave the apartment just to escape the chaos in his own head. As Aaina's weakened cries rasped out of her throat, softening as she used up the last bit of her energy, Mung Sung wept too with wild abandon. He roamed the empty streets where only the city's beggars were still awake, huddled around cooking fires by the roadside or sifting through trash dumps. Seeing them calmed him, made him feel a sense of camaraderie with other human beings on the very edge of existence. Mung Sung let his feet guide him, walking miles across the city towards the slums, and finally as gauzy layers of the dark horizon began to peel back with light, Aaina fell asleep.

As the familiar smell of sewage in open ditches greeted him, he knew he was home. Everyone was just awakening, vendors setting up their merchandise and produce on tarps, stray dogs taking the opportunity to play with each other in the streets before the onslaught of traffic scattered them. As he approached his mother's chawl, he glimpsed Pumah and Nasrim carrying water

up the stairs in large buckets they had filled at the communal spigot. Naeem was in the midst of chasing a rat when he caught sight of his uncle and came bounding over.

"Maamuu Ji, what's wrong?" He asked, his piercing blue eyes troubled.

"Nothing's wrong, don't worry. I just had to walk Aaina around to put her to sleep."

Naeem was only five, but he could read his uncle's face like a fortune teller, knew his body sagged with more than just weariness.

"I know where she is going, Maamuu Ji," Naeem reassured him with the certainty that only children can have. "It will be a good place."

"Inshallah," Mung Sung murmured. He patted the boy's shoulder, then led him back to the chawl, feeling the lightness of Aaina's body, so airy now it felt like he was carrying nothing.

The day Aaina turned one, her mother tied a bright red ribbon around her head and dressed her in the sequined lehenga she had sewn by hand. They decided not to throw her a party or buy toys she could no longer play with, but Mung Sung still cradled her like she was a newborn again, crooning her favorite lullabies in her ear.

That evening, after walking until the soles of his feet hurt, he stopped when he reached Marine Drive, lined with posh hotels and warm yellow street lamps that stretched along the ocean like a queen's necklace. He scrambled over the sea wall and crept down to the water's edge into the shadows.

Tonight Aaina had stopped crying much earlier than usual, her breathing becoming slow and shallow. Her very skin seemed to be evaporating, the

veins in her eyelids like a crazed artist's painting, a maze of spider webs that could not be navigated. Mung Sung gazed at the endless darkness that stretched out from the shore. The blackness masked all lines and shapes, its anonymity comforting him, consuming him. The sea breeze felt so cool in the humid night. In his arms, Aaina stirred for a moment, and then slept on. Mung Sung felt his eyes grow heavy and gave in to the fatigue that racked his body. He bent his head over Aaina until his forehead touched hers and then slept for the first time in over a week, breathing in her smell.

When he woke with a start, the world was very still and quiet. He realized that there were no vehicles driving by, the street hawkers that sold food and snacks late into the night had all gone home, and even the beggars and street dogs had retired. Then he looked down at Aaina and felt a strange swelling of emotion. She was not breathing, her tiny chest still and now that he felt her, she was a little bit cold, as if not wearing enough clothing on a wintry day.

He cradled her tenderly, putting his face against her cheek, wanting to warm her skin but realizing with a start that her smell was already gone. He felt baffled as to how to say goodbye, unable to grasp that he would never see her again. For so long, he had lived from one day to the next feeling numb, but now grief overcame him.

He did not really remember the details of what happened afterwards, his feet instinctively taking him back to his mother's house, Janakibai and his sisters embracing him, holding him up when he could no longer stand, wiping away tears he thought he no longer had. They bathed her and performed the rites to ensure her passage to a new and better life, and then

made arrangements for her wake and cremation. He was grateful then for the customs of his ancestors, for the knowledge passed down from generation to generation so that there was no uncertainty as to what should be done when he felt such a vacuum, unable to think or act.

After all of their family members gathered at Janakibai's home, even his in-laws, who tried to hide their distaste for having to walk through the unpaved, dusty streets and stoop to enter the one room chawl, they each touched Aaina's tiny body and bid her farewell. His mother said a prayer and asked the gods to watch over her. Then carrying Aaina wrapped in a blanket, Mung Sung and his wife walked to the local crematorium, as rickshaw and taxi drivers, too afraid of evil spirits, would have refused to transport a dead body, and only the wealthy could have afforded a private ambulance.

When it came time for Mung Sung to hand over his daughter to the uniformed staff person, he hesitated, wanting to cling to the only tangible form left of her. But the masked woman seemed in a hurry, and his wife too waited expectantly, so he took a deep breath and put her on the steel gurney, far too large for her tiny body. He watched as she was rolled away, afraid she would fall off, feeling an impulse to run after her and put a hand on her chest to steady her.

Mung Sung was never able to go back to his apartment, preferring to stay at his mother's chawl and sleep on the floor with Vijay and Mimi. Each night he would feel the warmth of their bodies on either side, remembering a time when he was too young to know the obliterating sadness and despair that now permeated every waking moment.

Only a few weeks later, his wife discovered she was pregnant. His in-

laws called Mung Sung to tell him the good news. She was carrying his son. Mung Sung feigned happiness, but his voice was strained. His father-in-law pressed, "A boy needs his father. I know losing Aaina was difficult for you, but life must continue." Mung Sung said nothing, thanked him for the call, and hung up.

In the months and then years to come, what few people realized was that life had not continued for Mung Sung. The passage of time did not change this. In fact, the older he became, the lonelier he felt as he watched his family move on with their lives. As the days faded into one interminable reality, he became consumed with the desire to see Aaina just one more time, to feel and smell her, and as so often happens in life, it was a yearning that would never be fulfilled.

No one but Naeem, the boy with the piercing blue eyes, knew that Mung Sung, that man who had laughed and piggy backed all of the neighborhood's children and took them on bike rides late into the night, had really died too that year, disappearing into the ground with the karvi blossoms.

After Years and Years

BY LAUREN BENDER

you are bored by how little turbulence there is
today, even think of causing your own
as the flight attendants push food carts closer

and closer. the tops are clustered with cans
of soda, empty cups, bottles of water, coffee
pots, a stack of napkins. snacks on the second shelf:

it looks as though you have a choice between
pretzels and cookies. savory, sweet. when
have you ever eaten on an airplane? must have

once, long ago, as a child, headed to California:
seven hours if lucky. if you break apart solids
with saliva, if you suck down sugar,

relish the burn of swallowing, and finally,
finally taste in the presence of others, aftertaste
will follow, a sort of sub-nightmare under

the larger nightmare's umbrella, or like a daughter
company run from a home office. impulsively
you want to expand. you want to explore

a franchise model. you are staring out the window
at clouds and towns and the unbelievable suspension
of self above the world, self above historical

self. it seems nothing is moving or changing,
and how high and weightless can you become
before you need to fall again? your mouth is

as empty and dry as a cardboard box. you have
not panicked today, but you have not been
satisfied either. the flight attendant stops,

palm extended, small plastic bag resting. nothing
for me, thanks. it's not worth it. but your mind:
still cruising, calmly asking to know what is.

What Makes a Mountain

BY KAMI WESTHOFF

You only had fourteen years to learn why the body
bothers with birth, yet everything about you is ancient.
The way your skin expands for the swell of other miracles,
how your bones go unnoticed as stones as you wince
through the world, the way you offer your mouth to oceans,
swallow shores, feast on the stars of lesser planets.

Your stepfather had nothing to offer the sky, the mountains,
or your mother so he took you with him so he could say
he mattered. Now, you are nowhere because you are everywhere.

A man looks out at the world and sees all the ways
he can rubble it: the slow hope-effacement of his
constant threat, his insistence upon catastrophe.

A woman sees herself in the earth's architecture:
her bones lonesomed by the trees craving for sky,
her blood, rivers droughted by the bloom of banked
blossoms.

Maybe it's the mountains that make men go mad.
Struck stupid beneath her shadow of shale, dwarfed
by her sky-thrust earth, seared by the fear of her hot
heart of lava, her ancient, inevitable eruption.

A Woman is Shored

BY KAMI WESTHOFF

and of course she's dying:
noose of seaweed, carve
of clamshell, barnacles pock
her body with their feathery
bullet mouths.

She's centuries dead, or another
woman last seen alone, eyes like
onyx stabbed into sand, skin
the shade of slate.

Still, he'd like to kiss her lips,
slick her tongue with his own
and call its wet desire. If he holds
her just right, she'll bend herself
backwards to blow his mind.

On the morning she's found,
jellyfish scatter the shore, blob the sand
with the miscarriage bodies he will blame
her for.

A man consumes a woman like the night
blinds the day with its dark. A woman offers
herself to the day, prays for its swallow
before another dusk.

ANDRES ORTIZ-FERRARI

Grape Pop

BY CARL BOON

Grape pop was a thing, Winnebagos,
salad bars with sneeze guards,
and squeezable ketchup.
The mall was a thing, and middle school boys
who never tied their high-top sneakers.
Diaries with locks, fire extinguishers
at home, and the *World Book Encyclopedia.*
Cheesecake from scratch got popular
for a while, and I can't recall
if Mountain Dew hit the scene later or before.
Bangs always came and went, depending
on the magazines the babysitter brought,
then one day magazines themselves
were nothing at all. My father bought
a dozen turtlenecks one year,
and then it was sweatshirts
with the names of foreign countries—
even the USSR. And of course more
serious things—stents and self-cleaning ovens,
and one day in January the space shuttle exploded.

We were flabbergasted, downtrodden,
untrue to our wives and husbands
in horn-rimmed glasses. Mork was gone,
Alf a sad impostor, then suddenly,
as if God Himself had willed it, we all
started saying NORM when this or that uncle
emerged in the room. Black people
got more famous than ever, more
than Miles Davis, and we were overjoyed
when Cliff Huxtable danced the dorky
dance of your father or mine.
For me, it all changed when Sugar Ray Leonard's
retina got detached, but my children tell me
that was long before, before Space Invaders
and Cabbage Patch Dolls and people
started deep-frying mushrooms
and growing nostalgic about their parents'
Sunday afternoons in cars just waxed and how
Lake Milton appeared to them Septembers.

Egypt

BY CARL BOON

The morning after
the coup, Mustafa cut my hair
and I bought seven cans of Tuborg
and drew Whitman verses
on my postcards of the pyramids.
Cairo was a flame of women
tearing apart bedsheets and books
and their grandmothers' hair,
men fearing the swerve of taxis,
convinced their lovers
would be coming with knives.

I took the sideroads
to Tahrir Square and watched
the shopkeepers staple notices
on their doors: A Wedding in Giza,
A Funeral in Beni Suef. My favorite
barman had disappeared
with a broken arm. To be alone
is to never have the nerve
for questions, to wish day
were night and to become
inanimate: a clocktower, a rock.

My boyfriend called from Port Said:
we need plane tickets and pliers
wide enough to break the sky.
We need to hide the pornography
and Is there water where you are?
I had 12,000 Egyptian pounds
in my sock drawer with the Bible
and pictures of him. I had dice,
a rabbit's foot, and black-market
fiction that became so real
so fast that I could read the cops' faces
as they asked me my hurry.

Still, Life BY PETER LAUTZ

Bent over, he's reeling like a has-been
Southern sheriff and wobbles into Wal-Mart
"for just a couple things" on a gray Monday
afternoon past the dented cars, crushed cups

and homeless shopping carts left for dead
on the outskirts of the mall.

The air, sticky as wet flour, bruised
peaches leak onto his hands.

He shuffles past tenements of papaya stacked
next to purple plums hard as stone.

This *still life* reflects back at the old man
making his way through onions and rhubarb
and chard and on toward the gallon of whole milk

and, later, four jars of Metamucil before unfolding
ancient paper sacks at the cash register.

Outside behind the steering wheel of my parked car
I wait for dad and write down these lines searching

for some story to tell of shared life, *of our love really*,

before the wordless drive home, before the slow
veer up the concrete stairs.

DAVID WEINHOLTZ

Zoology by Robin Jeffrey

I take my little girl to the zoo once a week. She likes animals. I'm frightened to think that this represents the bulk of my knowledge about the living thing I carried inside myself for nine months, but it is what it is; life doesn't always work out the way we want.

I take my little girl to the zoo once a week. I try to believe that an injection of cotton candy four times a month will make up for the six years of her life that I missed while I was inside; that a weekly viewing of smelly, 'exotic' animals will make up for the fact that my insistence on breast feeding her after I shot up made her wrong in the head.

I take my little girl to the zoo once a week. A social worker follows us as we maneuver the city streets, stopping and waiting for the lights to turn in our favor. A rabbi on the corner talks with a young Hasidic man about the Torah's decree on the transcendence of the soul. I try not to laugh. My little girl does it for me, giggling at some unspoken joke as she bends down to play with half of a teacup that someone intended for the trashcan. I yank her upright – the teacup comes with her. I take it from her and throw it over my shoulder. It shatters, smooth china slivers firing out into the crowd of pedestrians like a grenade, flustering the great herd of humanity. The social worker frowns.

I take my little girl to the zoo once a week. The monkeys are the worst. They screech from their barred cages and I feel sick. My little girl

thinks they are smiling instead of growling. I look away and my eye catches sight of a discarded syringe tucked away in a pile of leaves next to the cage. It's like seeing your ex out in public after a bad break-up. You want to go over and shout at them, tell them how much you don't need them anymore, but you know that if you start talking to them again, there's a fifty/fifty chance you'll end up in bed with them.

I take my little girl to the zoo once a week. I have ever since I won back visitation rights from the state. She likes animals. I hope that she likes them enough not to notice the social worker that follows us everywhere we go, the same one that collects her when our three hours are up. My little girl is a little wrong in the head, but she's sweet and she's beautiful. She believes me when I say that one day we'll live together forever, and she won't have to go back to the youth home anymore. She believes me when I say I'll never use again. She doesn't know how many times I've said that before.

I take my little girl to the zoo once a week. I hate seeing all the animals in their enclosures. The zookeepers explain that the animals are happy here at the zoo. They're rescues, unable to live in the wild. I look down at my little girl and I wonder if she'll ever be able to live in the wild. I wonder if I want her to. Look at what the wild did to me.

Lauren Bender lives in Burlington, VT. Her work has appeared in *IDK Magazine, The Collapsar, Gyroscope Review, Pittsburgh Poetry Review, Yes Poetry,* and others. You can find her on Twitter @benderpoet.

Carl Boon's debut collection of poems, *Places & Names*, will be published early this year by The Nasiona Press. His poems have appeared in many journals and magazines, including *Posit* and *The Maine Review*. He received his Ph.D. in Twentieth-Century American Literature from Ohio University in 2007, and currently lives in Izmir, Turkey, where he teaches courses in American culture and literature at Dokuz Eylül University.

Daniel Davis is a native of rural East-Central Illinois. His work has appeared in various online and print journals. You can find him at Facebook.com/DanielDavis05, or @dan_davis86 on Twitter.

Donna Emerson writes poetry and prose. She is recently retired from college teaching and her practice as a licensed clinical social worker. Emerson's work has received numerous prizes and awards including being selected as a finalist in the 2016 Trio House First-Book Awards and the 24th Annual Tom Howard/John H. Reid Fiction and Essay Contest, Editor's Choice in the 2017 Allen Ginsberg Poetry Award and honorable mention in the 2015 Allen Ginsberg Poetry Award. Her first full-length poetry collection, *The Place of Our Meeting*, was published by Finishing Line Press in January 2018.

Sarah Giragosian is a poet and critic living in Schenectady, NY. She is the author of the poetry collections *Queer Fish*, a winner of the American Poetry Journal Book Prize (Dream Horse Press, 2017)) and *The Death Spiral* (Black Lawrence Press, forthcoming). Her poems have recently appeared in such journals as *Ecotone, The Missouri Review, Prairie Schooner*, and *Denver Quarterly*, among others.

Robin Jeffrey was born in Cheyenne, Wyoming to a psychologist and a librarian, giving her a love of literature and a consuming interest in the inner workings of people's minds. Both have served her well as she pursues a career in writing. Her flash fiction piece "Season of the Dead" won second place in *The Molotov Cocktail*'s Flash Phenom Contest and her creative nonfiction piece "Band of Red" won the *Silver Needle Press*' Nonfiction Contest. Other works of hers have been published in *Sky Island Journal, Cagibi,* and *The Mary Sue*. She currently resides in Bremerton, Washington

Peter Lautz is a diehard Cubs fan and has had his work published in the *San Diego Poetry Anthology, San Diego Writers INK* annual anthology and various online poetry journals. He also likes to paint, to travel and explore the wilds off trail, to take copious color photographs and once wrote a poem a day for a year and a half. He knows words

can obfuscate as well as reveal, enshroud as well as enlighten, can ease as well as disturb. There's such satisfaction when putting down the right words rings true in the gut.

A writer, photographer, painter, and creative writing facilitator, **Laurie Lessen Reiche** lives part time in London, where she concentrates on photographing the city, particularly Virginia Woolf's Bloomsbury. Reiche is the author of The Dance of the Carbon-Atom (Mellen Poetry Press, 1996) and has won first place in several contests, including the Riverrun Literary Publication of the University of Colorado Poetry Competition, the national Charlotte Newberger Poetry Prize sponsored by Lilith, and the Mendocino Coast Writers Conference Contest. Reiche is also a member of the Community of Writers at Squaw Valley.

Born in Germany at the end of WWII, **Eva-Maria Sher** was already writing poems as a child. At seventeen, she emigrated to the United States and has since studied literature, taught, and raised three children. She lives on Whidbey Island, WA, where she offers workshops for children and adults in poetry, book-making, collage, and puppetry. She recently published *Chewing Darkness,* her first book of poems, and is working on a second one. She has written and composed an album of lullabies, and is the author/illustrator of *The Scintillating Little Dragon*, a coloring book about nurturing the creative spirit.

Stephen Wack is an Atlanta-based writer/reigning champion of his own self-defeat. He earned an undergraduate degree in Neuroscience from the University of Georgia, where he briefly interned at the college's literary magazine, *The Georgia Review.* His work has previously appeared in *FIVE:2:ONE* and is forthcoming in *Cleaver Magazine* (though he's hoping *The Georgia Review* eventually throws him a bone for all that free work he did for them that one semester). Stephen is funny and cool and definitely going places.

Jennifer Wang's short story "A Blessing" tells one of many stories about her Indian-Chinese family members and their struggle to survive the slums of Mumbai. As a creative writing major at Stanford, Jennifer was advised by Tobias Wolff and her work was published in the school's literary journal, *The Mind's Eye*. Years later, after graduating from Harvard Law School and starting a family, Jennifer gave up a legal career to dedicate herself to writing full-time.

Kami Westhoff is the author of *Sleepwalker*, won the 2016 Dare to Be Award from *Minerva Rising* and the collaborative chapbook *Your Body a Bullet*, with poet Elizabeth Vignali, from Unsolicited Press. Her work has appeared in journals including *Meridian, Carve, Third Coast, Phoebe, West Branch, the Pinch,* and *Waxwing.* She teaches creative writing at Western Washington University in Bellingham, WA.

VISUAL ART

J.E. Crum is a fantastical artist who creates vividly abstracted variations of self-portraits inspired by mythologies such as dragons and mermaids – just to name a few. Working intuitively, Crum creates personal narratives related to thoughts about fate, destiny and the meaning of dreams. J.E. also has an exciting career as an elementary art teacher of nearly one thousand children a week between the ages of five to eleven in rural locales of central Pennsylvania. Crum believes in the power art possesses to make others happy.

Jeremy Szuder is a born and bred California native, raised with a tender and dedicated loyalty to the arts. His works have been published in *Fine Print Literary and Visual Arts Publication*, several issues of *L.A. Record Magazine* as well as the 15 years of art shows from galleries and organizations such as Cannibal Flower, La Luz De Jesus, Copro Nason, CoLab Gallery, and many more. Szuder lives in Glendale California. Jeremy Szuder can be reached at jeremyszuder@gmail.com

David Weinholtz has exhibited and sold work throughout America, in private and juried shows. Additionally, he is frequently commissioned by patrons to create anything from abstract pieces to portraits and landscapes.