



ICCUE 9

FALL 2017



Table of Contents — Issue 8, Fall 2017

COVER ART BY PAT LANDECK
LAYOUT AND DESIGN BY MIKE LAMBERT

2017 EDITORIAL BOARD:

CHARLIE BROWN JASON PECK

MEGAN BUSHEY JESSICA SIMMS

Mike Good Martin Van Velsen

Mike Lambert David Villaverde

CURATED BY

the hour *after* happy hour

WRITING WORKSHOP & JOURNAL

FICTION

The Knowledge at High Rocks by Andrew Barrer

The Ghost Train Orchestra by Howie Good

The Beyond by Nick Gregorio

56

Uncle Jonny Wins the Lottery by Dana Scott

67

CREATIVE NON-FICTION

Brigadeiros and the Mail by Amanda Catarina Leong 35

POETRY

Red by Talal Alyan 6

Kurt Says There's No Such Thing As Infomation Loss by James Croal Jackson
Got Milk Anymore? by William Repass 9

Conjugations of My Tia's Back by Antonio Lopez 10

Prayer by Talal Alyan 12

Ode to Salt by Stephen Massimilla 40

The Water Mirror by Stephen Massimilla 42

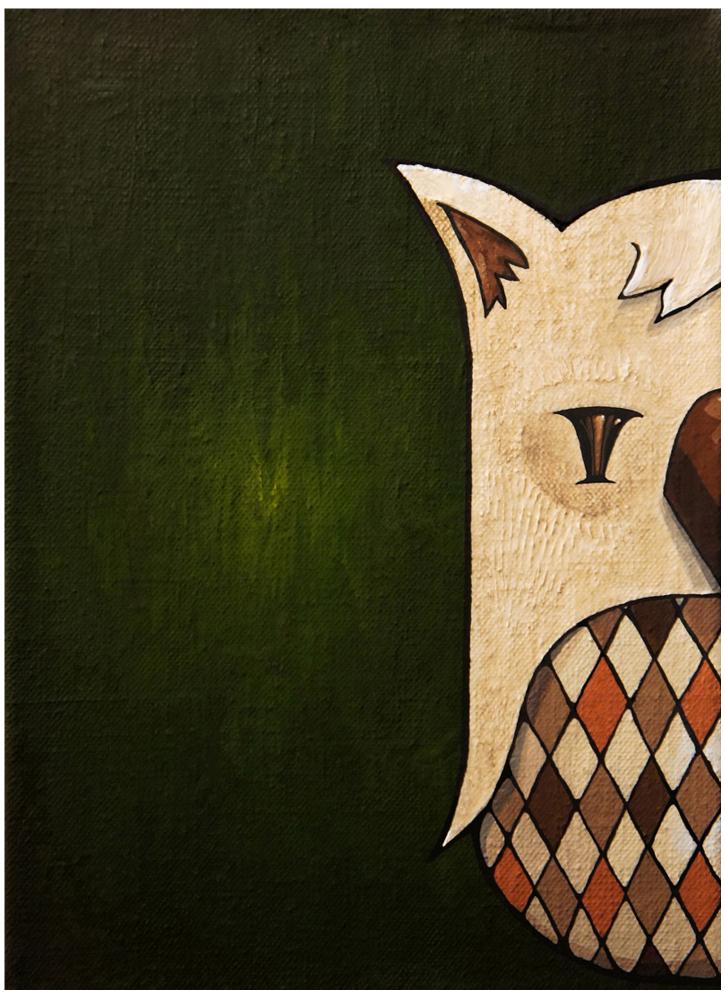
Abandoned Bicycles by Andrew Miller 44

The Swarm by Andrew Miller 46

The Curtain of Parrhasius by Andrew Miller 49

53

Robert Campin: Mérode Altarpiece by Lynn Hoggard



PAT LANDECK

FOREWORD

Dear Reader,

Hello and welcome to Issue 8 of the *After Happy Hour Review*. We editors have the happy task of sifting through the many submissions we receive to select the poetry, prose, and visual art you will experience here. We are consistently impressed with the talent and diversity of the work that comes in, and Issue 8 showcases exactly that. I find joy in seeing what other people have been working on, and on more than one occasion I've found inspiration too.

The following pages contain a huge variety of themes, our pieces being as varied and unique as we all are. Still, there is a pervasive thread of community throughout this issue — and after the year we've had, those connections are more important than ever. These collected works speak for themselves, and you will find your own truth in the beauty of the words on these pages. We're all in this together.

So sit back, relax, grab your favorite beverage and unwind with us. Hopefully in reading you will find your own inspiration, too.

Keep on writing,

-Megan Bushey, After Happy Hour Review fiction editor

Red

BY TALAL ALYAN

I.

if you want to be heard, push against the black curtains that whips across the windowpane

swing until you fall fall until you land and when you land:

red plains inside a world of no beasts, no rhythm but your own

throbbing across the high grass.



II.

if you want to be seen, do it in dark light. sharp teeth exposed to an audience or the camera of a lover

that will keep it in a tin box for a dozen years.

it will sit in a landfill:

brittle red metal

powdered into hail.

JANELLE CORDERO

Kurt Says There's No Such Thing as Information Loss

BY JAMES CROAL JACKSON

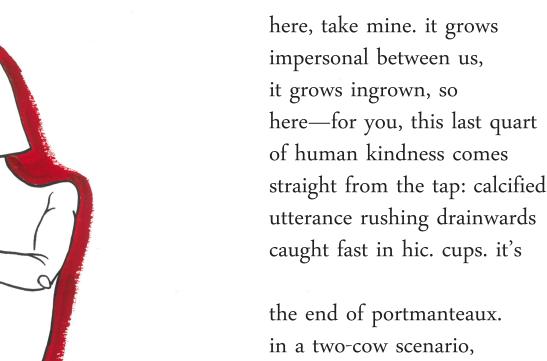
You can recover anything. If you can't, you will. What you seek exists but has left for the black hole of knowledge rotating at the center of the galaxy. You will become a different person, renovate the house but keep the windows. You will find a new lover but process bits of data still there— the comparisons and air hurtle toward end-time, the end line unquantifiable by any metrics of the heart, of time complete and incomplete starts. There is a long black hair lodged in your beard from a lover though the body has moved on. You forget the names of things you know but know what they are, how you can have mind without soul but no soul without mind. You can have a new life without losing the old.



JANELLE CORDERO

Got Milk Anymore?

BY WILLIAM REPASS

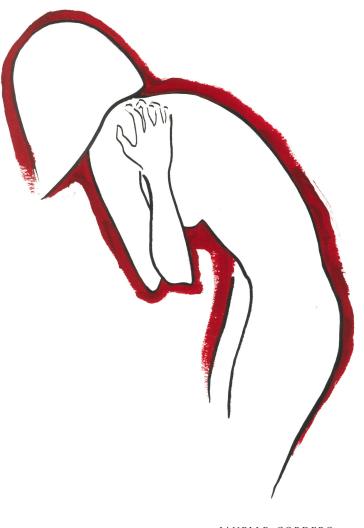


the end of portmanteaux.
in a two-cow scenario,
got used to using one
another's usages:
a kinship synechdoche.
but if you're craving honey,
honey, j'accuse
Colony Collapse Disorder.
now debranchez

& coil up in a warm gray. lachrymose, too, I am water -boarding our pet cactus and, and, and, or, and time's up. were we only pretending to be asleep?

Conjugations of My Tia's Back

BY ANTONIO LOPEZ



JANELLE CORDERO

Ella	Yo	Nosotro
Ay mi	Fill a chipped	Saw thi
espalda	white bookshelf	Two w
Aymi'jo	con The Republic	attache
no ya comí	y Madame	like a c
gracias	Bovary	
		The gu
Lo sobo, y	y ay, her back	played
sobo y	hurts.	affirma
sobo.		extra 6
	Debate the line	
Quisiera	break.	I might
regresar a	Perfect	
México	its vertebrae,	La nov
con estos	healthy columns.	I look 3
dedos		10 if I ₁
de amonia,	I said her back	What if
y grasa de	hurts!	Girl do
torta,	G	G. 35
y no, no	Craft exercise 1:	Saw 37
me han	use chiasmus	'16. Th
llamado	twice.	at Liber
del	I workshop, they	Ten dro
consulado.	shop for work.	for "ou
¿Qué hay acá	In this poem:	Papá as
para mí?	Four Mexicans	for her
	already offered to	las llen
	fix stanza's roof,	
	drywalled all	"¿Qué
	negative space,	Shuffle
		twice,
	my tía <i>breaks</i>	squeeze
	<i>line</i> —asks for	silver k
	work comp.	just laid
	Craft exercise 2:	
	use irony.	
	Her name's	
	Dolores.	
		l

os	Ustedes	Tú
ree Mexicans at bus stop.	Tan learned.	Will spend 3/4 th s
ear neon green, orange cones	Tan pinche leaned.	of time commenting
d to limbs. Fight against la vejez		on the use of
ement mixing truck.	(Apá it's learn-ed.	bilingualism.
	¿No qué is lurn-duh?	- Maybe this
y who picked me up at Reno	Sí es, pero aquí, you	line's too
Santana. I cashed in my	pronounce the extra "ed."	aggressive?
tive action when he waited an	¡Ay puto inglés!)	
minutes for my luggage to arrive.		As if no other aspect
	In this context,	of craft existed.
've seen an/other in the mirror.	pinche means "fucking."	
		As if the poem is too
ia says when I cut my hair to a 0,	Well not "fuck" exactly,	ethnic? You know,
35% more Chicano, adds an extra	not in the sexual sense.	like ethnic ethnic.
put on a purple plaid.		- Maybe, you
you just button the to-	Tiene más que ver	should throw
n't even start.	con exasperation.	some German,
	con estar desesperado	quote
Latinos lost in 1300+ of Class	that you feel the need to	Nietzsche. Or
ought of <i>Invisible Man</i> scene	understand everything	Husserl, or
rty Paints Plant.		Sartre, or Lévi-
pps of black chemical	de Dolores	Str-
r white so white."	cruzando la frontera	
	tres días sin comer, sin	Is this poem smarter
sked if she needed extra pillows	agua, sin sins! Sus	now?
back. Nine free hours now—	cuentos embalmed	
a con preguntas, con	in the mahogany varnish	Can it be an expat too?
	of a 11 pm dinner.	Can it be abstract too?
quieres que te prepare amor?"		Can it be too?
s tostada brands, lava el apio	Su historia will die if I	
	don't write it	Can <i>you</i> fix her back?
es la tortilladora, palm-pressed		
tept from Cortés and the boss who	and her back hurts!	¿Qué piensas? ¿Qué
d her off.		has pensado? All these
	¡Conyo!	centuries?
		(The tú is informal)

Prayer

BY TALAL ALYAN

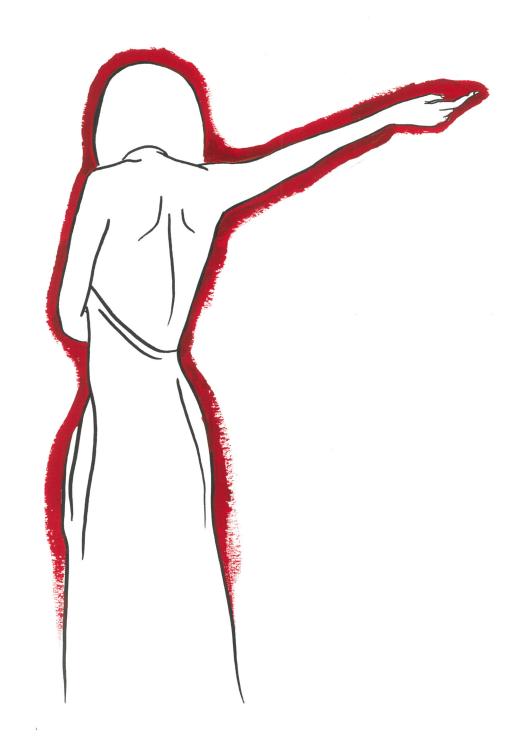
this winter premiers with pickaxe and pneumonia. he climbs out of sleep like a window, curls his arms across a naked mattress, keeps his eyes shut and pleads: return what is mine. this is how he barters. this is how each day greets him: with theft.

the weather recast in front of him. It is December and he had no idea. although beneath the overpass he can explain what came before this: roar, arc light, tremor. all the milestones lining the curbside, spoiled and sheer. be delicate, he whispers, they are clues.

it is a two decades prior. there was a surgery removing his tonsils. the boy lays recovering on a sofa watching Aladdin. in his periphery he sees his sister outside, playing flash tag in the dark with the neighborhood children. he turns his head, watches their figures rushing across the backyard.

the man now seated on a bench closes his eyes -return to me, return to me- the whiteness of his sister's sneakers, even a faded purple shirt she once owned, reappears with such clarity. he hears their thrilled voices, the sharp ring of her prepubescent laughter against the warmth of the television color.

show me a man who knows better than to search for what is lost, to forgo the toil of this prayer: the arch of his back, a galaxy of scrambling fingers.



JANELLE CORDERO

The Knowledge at High Rocks

BY ANDREW BARRER



MANIT CHAOTRAGOONGIT

KEROUAC: What happens when you separate the people from their rivers? BURROUGHS: Bureaucracy.

-From a conversation in On The Road

For the most part, Tohickon Creek ambles old and fat along the floor of Ralph Stover State Park in humble Bucks County, Pennsylvania. But here and there along its cut through the forty-five acres of Plumstead and Tinicum Townships, it works itself up and hustles into a fairly cantankerous gash. In the spring, after the snows melt, conditions get downright sporty. Especially if winter was deep.

The Lenape named her before they were shoved west by smallpox and the Revolution. In other words, by Yours Truly. Back then, the Lenape divided themselves into matrilineal clans. That means children got their name and station from their mothers. I'm just guessing, but I figure blessing the empty landscape with names probably fell to the women, too. If so, the lady Lenape named the river To Hick Hanne. Deer Bone Creek. A damply classic moniker, if you bothered to ask my opinion.

Running along the lip of the hiking trails across from Tory Road, there's a healthy batch of Triassic sandstone called High Rocks Vista. From up here, you're looking down on the Tohickon some two-hundred feet, give or take. People come to walk and spy on the hawks doing their hungry circles over the ranges of spruce, pine and cedar.

If the moody Tohickon is the mama in this matrilineal landscape, the rough-hewn rock face of High Rocks is the papa. Stone above and water below, the two of them pushing against each other like a couple of teenagers trying to decide which one's fit to inherit the world.

Some folks call the whole place High Rocks State Park. Due, I have no doubt, to the robust ring in the name. But the Stover Family sold most of the land that would become the park to the Commonwealth way back in '31. The parcel fell under the concern of the Federal Works Progress Administration - that great big baby of the Great Depression - and it wasn't until a scribbler of note called James A. Michener donated the High Rocks portion that some locals started giving the name a shot. But it never caught on with the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. So, on paper, Stover it was and Stover it shall remain.

Though, every name is really only a name on paper. Figuratively

speaking, of course. The Lenape didn't have any paper. They sat and told their stories the old-fashioned way, kind of like how I'm doing right here and now.

We locals, perhaps out of some inborn sensitivity to the music trickling quietly down the main artery of this little patch of Creation, are wont to call the whole shebang after its river. When I'm headed out on a walk with my pup - a jocular little Jack Russell called Buster - I tell my wife Helen I'll be over at the To-hick, tossing sticks for Buster into the mossy shallows.

The park and its river were never quite famous. You couldn't call them National Treasures, or any such thing. But people fancying themselves hikers, climbers or birdwatchers would happily drive an hour on a nice day to come and spend some time.

Of course, that was then. And this is now.

Their names were Allen Derrit and Betsy Dylan, a couple in their early-thirties, cohabitating about twenty-five minutes south in Doylestown. He was a writer. She was an office manager at Rolling Hills Assisted Living Facility, an old folks home out in Feasterville. And one temperate Sunday afternoon they parked their car in the lot off Tory and went for a walk into High Rocks. When asked later about their chosen route, they would explain that they couldn't make much sense of the "yellow trail" - it's poorly marked - and decided instead to scale down the slope to the edge of the Tohickon.

The slope is mostly loose rock and crumbling shale, so Allen and Betsy hopped and slid their way to the bottom, clinging to sturdy branches and exposed root systems for purchase. They edged their way along the right side of a jutting rock face and passed an extended family of climbers set up at the base. A woman in her forties was overseeing the climb of a man about her age - there was no way of telling the relation - holding the rope pulley while the man faltered and swung. Allen would later recall he heard the man say, "This isn't the sport for me," before he and Betsy fidgeted down the next shale slide and left them behind. The identity of the "Climbing Family," as they would come to be called in some circles, was never determined. Given the hubbub that followed, I wouldn't be surprised if they made the conscious decision to keep it that way.

Allen and Betsy reached the bank in one last shale-strewn bound, Allen holding Betsy's hand to help her stick the landing on the damp flat of rock protruding from the subtle flow of the Tohickon like a tooth. There, they sat for a small lunch of sandwiches and a marijuana cigarette.

Satisfied, they readied themselves for the reverse shuffle up the slope. But as they yanked themselves up and over the exposed roots at the creek's abutment, Betsy stopped short at the sight of a maple leaf lying pressed in the mud.

The Maple Leaf.

People always ask me if it was really as big as Allen and Betsy said it was. Well, let me set the record straight. I saw that leaf with my own two eyes and it was two feet across if it was an inch. Maybe that's not a world record. I really don't know. But out here in Southeast PA? We just don't see leaves like that. So, on that temperate day by the Tohickon, that was a leaf that would have stopped anyone short.

(When public curiosity was at its peak, the Bucks County Department of Parks and Recreation briefly threw together a little museum out-

side the park's tightly-guarded fence and charged admission to see the leaf in the flesh. I was walking by outside once and I heard a young boy, must have been ten-or-so, exclaim to the world that the leaf was "awesome." I would tend to agree with him. It was indeed awesome. In the Biblical sense of the word.)

They never told it this way, but I like to think Allen and Betsy shared a little glance in that moment. Maybe they looked at each other, locked eyes and smiled slightly at the corners of their mouths. Maybe not. What they definitely did do was look up, and what they saw was the root system at the edge of the creek was sucking water up into a maple tree so big and bright, it looked like it was right out of a picture book.

Allen and Betsy both described an overwhelming feeling of well-being looking up at the tree. Like they'd been pulled into a deep and satisfying mystery. And the thing was, the whole spot seemed to agree with them on the subject. The creek deepened under the root system, and the water in the pool just looked... nice.

(When it comes to descriptions of momentous things, sometimes only the simplest words will do.)

There's usually carp swimming around in the pools along the banks of the creek, but the carp swimming in that pool looked fat and happy. Now, brace yourself, because here's the wonkiest part of the whole story: Allen swore up and down that one of those carp looked up at him and winked. Take it or leave it. I'm just telling it the way they told it to me.

Allen and Betsy were so overcome that they waded in up to their thighs and bent to drink. Amoebiasis, Cryptosporidiosis, and Giardiasis aside, they took heaping gulps of that water until their bellies were full.

Maybe they felt drunk doing it, maybe they didn't. They never told what they talked about right after, or what their shimmy back up the slope was like. They never told how they felt when they got back in their car in the lot off Tory and drove the twenty-five minutes south to Doylestown.

Allen's book agent, Nancy Jones, was the first to see the change. At the time of his visit to High Rocks, Allen had been promising the delivery of a spy-thriller manuscript that was to be the followup to a reasonably successful book released the previous year. The manuscript did come in, mere days after Allen's brush with the Tohickon, and it was indeed a spy-thriller. But as Nancy perused the pages of the story, she found herself confronted with, "A finely-wrought, exhaustively-detailed and easily-digestible treatise on the structure of the Central Intelligence Agency, with an eye drawn sharply on the potential for groundbreaking legislation that could satisfy the need for heightened national security in a volatile age while instituting an unprecedented system of checks and balances designed to enhance both efficacy and transparency."

In English: Allen's little spy-thriller had grown into something a tad bigger.

Of course, there was nothing in any of this to suggest something was amiss. Was it a surprise that Allen, previously nothing more than a writer of precise but derivative fiction, should suddenly emerge - in a sequel, no less - with a work that Dr. Martin Hallifax, Chair of the Department of Government at Harvard University would describe as, "A frantically allegorical masterpiece with enough power and verve to exorcise the demon gnawing at the soul of the American Dream"? Yes, it certainly was. But it was a most welcome surprise.

You've probably heard of Allen's book. It's called *I Spy with My Little Eye.* It was a New York Times best seller for months on end. They're even making a movie out of it, starring one of those Australian actors who are so much better at playing the idyllic American tough guy than American boys are these days. Allen's stroke of genius earned a lot of folks a lot of money. I wonder how many of them care that Allen isn't around to collect on any of it?

At around the same time Allen's agent was flipping hungrily through the pages of his manuscript, Betsy was developing a surprising reputation of her own. I myself have never worked in an office, but it's been explained to me that, accompanying the many items on an office manager's official to-do list, there's a slew of unofficial expectations that includes hearing people out when they come in to bitch-and-moan. The way I understand it, running an office is a bit like running a bar. One gets paid to oversee workflow and the other to pour the drinks, but both pay a good deal of it back in their sidegigs as pro-bono head shrinkers.

Hannah Fehn was a nurse at Betsy's old folks home. Hannah would later tell how Betsy was always a good listener, always making an honest effort to help with a bit of well-intentioned advice. But then, rather suddenly, Betsy's advice started getting really good.

"Like, freaky good."

Hannah's story goes that she was sitting with Betsy in the break room during their lunch hour. Betsy, usually talkative and game for friendly gossip, was quiet and preoccupied. Finally, after a long moment, Betsy looked up at her and asked, "Why are you breathing like that?" Hannah hadn't been aware she was breathing any different than usual, so she said she

didn't know what Betsy was on about. Betsy gazed at her for a good long moment, seeming to consider something, and said, "I don't think you should go home tonight, Hannah."

Hannah laughed it off, but Betsy's words unsettled her. She'd been arguing with her live-in boyfriend, Jackson Roker. Bad arguments. The kind that ended in pushing and shoving, and just the night before, Jackie punched Hannah in the gut. Hannah hadn't told a soul about it, not even Betsy. So, unable to shake the heavy feeling she got from Betsy's inexplicable warning, she decided to sleep at her mother's. The cops woke her up in the middle of the night with the news: Jackie got in a dustup at a bar and the guy followed him home, busted in the front door and shot Jackie dead in the living room.

Word got out at the old folks home, and Betsy didn't disappoint. Over the following weeks, she saved Sal Yusti, the whiz behind the facility's surprisingly good cuisine, from a potentially devastating property investment (the modest house he was eyeing burned down in an electrical fire); she convinced Abigail Dutch, a nurse, to break off her engagement (he was cheating on her); she implored Devin Hart, another nurse, not to drive home on Bristol (that evening, a poor soul crashed into a prancing buck and was impaled by its antlers); and she told Gabby Lockrum, her own supervisor, to keep an eye on her son's doctor-prescribed Adderall (he was selling it in school).

Betsy also took to sitting for long talks with the residents. No one knows what she talked about with them, but Hannah says there was a noticeable change in the home's normally recalcitrant population. Residents were chatting more, smiling more, and walking with a little extra pep.

Holden Arias, a veteran of the Pacific island hopping campaign in the Second World War, would say later, "I don't know what came over little Betsy, but talking with her made if feel like a weight was lifting off my old, broken shoulders. She would listen to my stories and say things that made me look at 'em in a whole different way. She had perspective, I guess you could call it. This old Marine still had some open wounds. Betsy wasn't a nurse, but she helped close 'em up."

Hannah put it more emphatically: "Betsy's empathy was, like, total."

The ball got rolling on what came next when Louis Teller, a reporter for the Philadelphia Inquirer, came out to Rolling Hills on an anonymous tip. ("It was me," Hannah admits.) Louis expected a puff piece, but quickly began to suspect Betsy's abilities were rooted in something a trifle more newsworthy. "I couldn't believe it," he recollected recently in an NPR interview about his new book, The Cost of Miracles. "I'm not a superstitious guy, but Betsy Dylan was just... intuitive. She was prescient. I mean... actually."

It wasn't long before Louis put two-and-two together regarding Betsy's significant other. Suddenly, Louis was confronted with a seemingly psychic woman who lived with a man just then taking the world by storm with a work of literature that R.J. Temple, the Inquirer's own book reviewer described as, "A work of literary completeness and political omniscience." That's when Louis took a step back and thought to himself:

"Wait a second."

If Allen and Betsy made a mistake in any of this, they were perhaps a little too forthcoming with Louis Teller. The heady brew of excitement surrounding the spike in their talents and abilities had them feeling rosy and grand, so they smiled their way through the interview with Louis and told him point blank: there was something special about the water pooling in the Tohickon at the bottom of the shale slope at High Rocks.

Louis quotes Allen in the article as saying:

"I couldn't tell you why we were drawn into the water. If I tried to explain, I'd have to use anachronistic terms that would make it hard for your readership to take this piece seriously. I know a lot of things at the moment, things I have no business knowing. I know what time it is every second of the day. Not every minute. Every second. I know what 34,981 multiplied by 72,495 divided by 99,101 comes out to. It's 25,589.5258, by the way. I can tell you how much oil the United States is going to need to keep things business-as-usual for the next one-hundred years, and I can tell you the fracking-to-foreign-war balance we're going to have to strike to get all of it."

Allen continued:

"Betsy? Shit. She can tell you what you had for breakfast, and how you felt the first time your mother let you down. She can tell you how many times you've cried this year, or whether you're going to need to replace your roof. She can tell you where your wife's necklace is - the one she lost seven years ago - and she can tell you how many times your wife thought about other men in that same stretch of time. She can tell you how many bones you've broken, and how many bones you have left to break before you die. And, get this, she knows when you're going to die. But don't ask, because she won't tell you. She won't even tell me. If you need proof, ask her what color underwear you're wearing."

Louis did ask her. Betsy, who had seemed lost in thought, immediate-

ly perked up and stated with utter confidence that his underwear was red with white polka dots. She was dead on.

You know what happened next.

The morning after the story ran in the Inquirer, the Bucks County Department of Parks and Recreation closed Tory Road to all but local traffic. Even us locals had to show I.D. to get through a barricade manned with local cops. That night, they had a team of scientists down there, wading in the water with mobile chemistry sets. They were wearing hazmat suits. That was the first sign of things to come.

They tried to keep the official visits quiet. But, if there's one thing you can count on people to do, it's talk. So, people talked. And it wasn't long before the list was being published by your friend and neighbor, Louis Teller, in the very rag that kicked the whole thing off.

The first was Jean Alouette, a smartly-dressed representative of Danone, the French multinational corporation responsible for bottling Evian Natural Spring Water. Then came Allison Ho, the managing partner of Orchard, a venture capital firm specializing in pharmaceuticals, biotech, medtech and healthcare services. After that there was Jan Adler, a German hotelier; Gary Hill, a land prospector in the employ of ExxonMobile; Emily Fortenbrau of the Walt Disney Corporation; and the list goes on. There was even a poorly kept secret late-night visit from unidentified representatives of Halliburton.

This sort of thing has its precedents. Just take Jean Alouette's economic concern as an example. In 1789, the Marquis of Lessert took a knee and a sip at the Sainte Catherine Spring on the private land of a fellow named M. Cachat. At the time, the marquis was a sick man - suf-

fering from ailments of the kidney and liver - and he claimed the water from the spring performed a miracle, curing him of his afflictions. On the heels of Lessert's claim, local doctors rushed to collect water from Sainte Catherine and began prescribing it to their patients as an elixir. It was a craze. So, of course, M. Cachat made the lucrative decision to fence off the spring and sell the water at a premium.

Boom. Evian.

Maybe Bucks County Parks and Rec did their research, because that's exactly what happened. In light of the tremendous interest displayed by industry leaders to own the "discovery" in the Tohickon, they reckoned it would be more valuable over the long haul if they politely declined the undisclosed offers and kept it for themselves. Which is to say, they fenced off the entire park and rented out access to the few who could afford it.

(The backroom dealings remained private, but humble Bucks County got fat off the exorbitant fees that flooded in. I'm sure a good chunk of that change made its way into private pockets, but what was left over after the ensuing meltdown went into keeping the re-humbled county afloat, so there haven't been many complaints.)

They couldn't take reservations fast enough, and the first year of access was booked solid within a couple days of open bidding. There was some predictable chaos, of course. There were the interloping gangs of protestors, asserting with vehemence that the land should remain public and the miracle water made available to all. And there were the bandits who didn't have the patience for protest, scaling the fences after hours on a mad dash down the shale slopes to the water. A few of these brave souls tumbled off the rocky descent to their deaths. Others were shot dead by

the increasingly militarized park rangers.

And the result? Hot damn. In the words of Dr. R. Henry Richardson, professor emeritus of History at Columbia University, "Not since the Renaissance has a burst of creative and intellectual energy altered the cultural landscape with such deliriously irreversible ramifications." In fields ranging from cancer research to solar energy to literature to hip-hop music, an elite class of human beings were darting forward at a speed that seemed, from a distance, almost evolutionary in scale. And they were leaving everyone else in the dust.

What a year. What a big and terrifying year. Fortunes were made. Barriers were broken. Brilliant minds made priceless contributions to the ceaseless forward march of human progress. There were some downsides, sure. Countless violent demonstrations, three assassinations and yet another iteration of Middle-Eastern war. But, if one were compelled to tally the balance-sheet of pros and cons to slither forth into the world in that historic year, you'd be hard pressed to suggest the magic of the Tohickon was, at least at face-value, a "bad" thing.

But what a fleeting thing a year can be.

When Allen Derrit submitted his followup to I Spy with My Little Eye, Nancy Jones thought it was a joke. A tomb of over 2,000 pages, the book was a study of the wood surface of the writing desk in Allen's office as it - to use Allen's own words - "underwent alterations in both form and purpose throughout the course of the sun's movement through the sky over a 24-hour period." In other words, Allen's book was a tireless study on how the natural light through the window changed the texture of his desk. I've read the book, and my favorite passage comes from Volume 2,

Chapter 3: Back Left Corner at 5:00 AM. It reads:

"The sun is showing signs of rising in earnest now, and the texture of the back left corner of my writing desk is beginning to come alive. I'm noticing subtle variations in the brown shades at the heart of the knot there, and it's giving me the sneaking suspicion that, in the course of the tree-source's living history, a woodpecker searched for sustenance there. I close my eyes and hear the honest thrumming of her beak against the dampness of the wood, as it was surely raining that day, and I smile knowing that she did, indeed, find a bite to eat."

The book was called *Time Will Tell*. Imagine Nancy's surprise upon discovering Allen was quite serious.

Meanwhile, Betsy Dylan, ordinarily tireless in her ongoing consultations with both the staff and residents of Rolling Hills, began showing signs of fatigue following a marathon conversation with Vincent Ferrari, a man dying of Parkinson's Disease who desperately wanted to unburden his soul before meeting his maker. A retired union organizer on paper, Vincent had been a career criminal in the employ of Philadelphia's Bruno Crime Family in the '70s, and the Scarfo Crime Family in the '80s. During his tenure, he presided over certain activities that rankled his conscience these many years hence. His "conversation" with Betsy lasted 18 hours, and all present claim she brought him great comfort. But, perhaps she gave a little too much of herself in the process.

In the words of Hannah Fehn: "Betsy kind of just drifted away after that. She wasn't the same happy girl. I missed her in my life immediately. I still do."

Two weeks later, Betsy locked herself in her office, dumped the con-

tents of her file drawers into a pile and lit them on fire.

No one was harmed in the conflagration. Not even Betsy. But she was placed under arrest and charged with destruction of property, reckless endangerment and, controversially, attempted murder. The staff of the facility rushed to her side and were paraded through the courtroom of the bail hearing, offering one impassioned defense of Betsy's remarkable character after another. As you well know, it worked.

Betsy Dylan was granted bail. She walked out of the courtroom, embraced and thanked her friends and supporters, and went home. Neither she, nor Allen Derrit, were ever seen again.

Wherever they went, they didn't pack any bags. They didn't even take their car. They did, however, leave a note. Written in pink pen on a napkin in their kitchen, the note was short and sweet. It read: "They say: knowledge is power. We say: in doses."

Most people assumed it was a double-suicide. Parks and Rec was even compelled to search the waters of their precious Tohickon for the bodies. But the bodies never turned up. They were just... gone. Conspiracy theories abounded. Some say, perhaps reasonably, they were kidnapped, either by the government or an even less savory entity looking to harness the good-natured couple's abilities.

My personal favorite originated with Billy Wolfson, a retired fisherman living just outside Charlestown, South Carolina. According to Billy, a young man calling himself Adam Planter purchased his used houseboat for ten-thousand dollars, cash. Billy would later say, "He meant to set sail down Cooper River with his pretty little wife. They were sweet as hell, those two. Quiet, but decent. My wife, Enola, invited them for dinner and

they accepted. We grilled some burgers, drank some beers and had a good laugh, or two. I guess, looking back, they seemed familiar. Maybe that's why I liked them so much. It wasn't until I saw pictures of Allen and Betsy a couple days later on the news that I realized." Why didn't Billy call the police? Again, his words: "They gave me no cause to wish them anything but well. If the police are looking for kids as decent as those two, the police oughta get their priorities straight."

There was another, more unsettling theory that gained some attention out of the Gerald Keller Institute of Advanced Physics in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Dr. Lucian Cain suggested - in highfalutin mathematical terms I won't trouble you with - that the human brain, essentially an electronic device made of meat and tissue instead of wires and cables, has a ratio of potential versus kinetic energy that keeps the body in electrical stasis. Dr. Caine argued that drinking the water in the Tohickon set the potential energy in Allen and Betsy's brains into motion, throwing their electrical stasis out of whack. In plain English: they vibrated out of existence.

Of course, there would be many more disappearances to come, but none quite so total as Allen's and Betsy's. So, I don't think Dr. Cain's dog will hunt. If you ask me, I say they went the way of the Cooper. And, like Billy Wolfson, I wish them well.

There would soon be plenty of bodies, too. Bodies in conventional graves. Bodies in shallow graves. Bodies burned in fires and locked away in asylums. And, yes, bodies at the bottoms of rivers. But you don't need to hear about all that. Most of you were there. And, if you weren't, you probably wish the rest of us would shut up about it already.

Society didn't collapse. It lost its head.

Heads of companies. Heads of industry. Heads of state. Like so many prodigious dominos, they collapsed swift and rigid, and they brought the rest of us down with them. What happened to them? That's hard to say. No one who experienced what came to be known as the Derrit-Dylan Effect retained the capacity to put it into words. Yes, there were medical examinations, batteries of tests and, eventually, autopsies. But there was no discernible physical condition that could be associated with D-D in terms of a good-ol'-fashioned causal relationship. There were plenty of commonly-occurring symptoms: elevated blood pressure, muscle twitching, vertigo, tinnitus, depression, dissociative disorders and bouts of violent aggression, to name a few. But there was nothing the doctors could pinpoint and yank out. The Effect was inoperable.

Did they know what caused it? Sure as shooting, they did. It was the enchanted creek water flowing quietly down the Tohickon in the shadow of High Rocks Vista. Each and every one of the rich and famous who paid their way to the banks of the creek for a sip of magic would ultimately develop D-D. The problem was, no one could figure out why.

In my mind, there was only one commentary to emerge from the D-D community that came anywhere near the explanatory power of Allen and Betsy's note. It was written by Delia Rowbotham, a fast food heiress who swallowed her undoing at the tender age of eighteen:

"I can hear everything Poe hears. No wonder her little ears are always so perked and nervous. I was reading in the park today and I thought I heard the wind rising. Thinking there would be a storm, I looked up. But it was only a man sitting on a bench. I could hear him

breathing with these rustling ins and outs, and suddenly I knew his wife was dying. I've been wanting to believe this is all in my head. But mom and dad are changing, too. Yesterday, mom told me she quit meditation class because she's achieved full loving kindness. She was holding back the tears but I could see them shining in the corners of her eyes. I'm going to leave before I start hearing thoughts. A girl has to draw the line somewhere."

For what it's worth, Poe was the name of Delia's chihuahua. And unlike the one with the pink ink left behind in Allen's and Betsy's kitchen... Delia's was a suicide note.

Humanity took a big hit. Multi-national conglomerates collapsed. Millions lost their jobs. There was political and economic confusion on a massive scale, some of it quite deadly. The Big Shots really were too big to fail. But they failed anyway, and we cleaned up their mess. We bounced back, just like we always do. I mean, the human race survived the Black Death and National Socialism. Did you really think we couldn't survive the mental collapse of a few thousand oligarchs?

What did we do about the Tohickon? We didn't do anything. The locals who've been walking the banks of the creek for generations argued - wisely, if I do say so myself - that if the water made people go crazy, maybe people should stop drinking it. But, as you well know, the Powers That Be don't do anything in half-measures.

The real Tohickon "hot spot" was believed to be the small inlet at High Rocks where Allen and Betsy stumbled upon the Maple Leaf, but they paved her over from one end of Ralph Stover to the other. Precaution, I suppose. Oh, well. At least they took down the fence.

The thing is, most people have a short memory. The pavement was an act of aggression, as anthropomorphically punitive as Xerxes whipping the Hellespont. But as soon as they packed up their trucks and headed for safer harbors, well... High Rocks was ours again. And, over time, pavement crumbles. Shocker, it can even be chipped away.

They say there's a silver lining to every cloud. In my more benevolent moods, I'm inclined to agree. But I'd be lying if I said I didn't suffer bouts of bitterness, and I'll admit I've even stooped to gloating. See, it really shouldn't be all that surprising that people got sick from drinking tainted water. People get sick from drinking water all the time. If I were to travel down to Mexico, for example, I could expect to catch a mighty case of the trots if I waltzed around drinking the local water like it was mine by birthright. There's a reason they call it "Montezuma's Revenge." Montezuma II was emperor down there before Yours Truly decided his land was up for grabs.

Could be, local water is for the locals.

While we're being honest, I'll tell you I've never been a Man of the Good Book. But I dusted the old thing off recently and took a glance by the fire, with Helen knitting on my one side and Buster cozying up on the other. A thought occurred to me in the first couple pages of Genesis, while I was reading about the bad luck of poor old Adam and Eve.

What if the poison of the Tree of Knowledge wasn't in the fruit? What if it was in the water that fed the tree?

All in, the Tohickon stretches for 29.5 miles, never veering outside the confines of Bucks County. It rises some in Springfield Township and passes through the heart of Point Pleasant Village before it melts into the Delaware River. From there, its waters tumble and churn out to sea.

Take a step back and look at the world.

Would you just look at all that water?

It might be all the same to you, but every atomic spec of that vast lattice of lakes and rivers and creeks is a Thing Unto Itself. Just like you and me. Not even the endless masses of ocean can rob it of its Unique Being. And, like most things, that's just the beginning. We could dive deeper, look closer, but it's dark down there, and each droplet of water is home to quantum histories so unknowable, that if God were to speak a single word of them, the oceans would evaporate in a wave of fire and there would be nothing to speak of ever again.

Just as human flesh can share the same material history as an exploded star, a drop of water can remember the day it danced down the veins of a leaf and dropped onto the milky ear of a coquette in the Garden, only to be licked away by a gossiping snake.

If I had to guess, I'd say the knowledge at High Rocks is on the move. Just passing through, like the rest of us.

But, hey. What do I know?



MINDY MASTRUSERIO

Brigadeiros and the Mail

BY AMANDA CATERINA LEONG

"Every story starts with food and we unpack it."

-Eddie Huang, interview with Hot 97

Not only does Sam bring me my mail this time, but he also brings me chocolate truffles, no brigadeiros. He takes the brigadeiros out of his canvas bag, from their thin rice paper packet tucked in between mail packets for 20B: two letters from Capital One asking us to apply for credit cards, my John Berger book for class next Tuesday, and Xingyu's new spring tops from Zara. Xingyu is one of my four roommates. She's from Sichuan, China, land of spicy hot pot and pandas. Xingyu is also a PhD student in the QBS program here at Dartmouth. Her real passion is fashion. We get boxes of clothing delivered to us in Hanover all the way from LA to Seoul every week. That was how Sam got to know us.

But this is not how I got to talk to Sam, my postman. I got to talk to him because last winter, in my hurry to get my Amazon package, I broke the communal mailbox and needed his help to get it out. Hockey season was starting and I needed my Toronto Maple Leafs paraphernalia. I invited Sam over for tea and gave him a jar of maple syrup to show my gratitude. He tells me he had a brother-in-law who had a not-so-good radio show about hockey affiliated with ESPN. Talk about breaking the ice with ice.

"I got the brigadeiros for free in the basement bakery place in Main Street where I was delivering a package. The lady and I were talking about how to run a business." The brigadeiro is a national icon in Brazilian culture. Made with sweet condensed milk, butter and cocoa butter, it's the definition of democracy to Brazilians. Anyone and everyone can eat them anytime—from children in the North watching Neymar on TV to future mothers having baby showers in the West to boys getting over heartbreak in the South. It's a dessert of sharing.

Sam asks me whether my roommates are home so that "we all can enjoy free food together." I tell him that only Star Rain is here. Star Rain is what Sam calls Xingyu. Since Sam can't pronounce Xingyu's name in Mandarin, he calls her by direct translation in English. Xing is star in Chinese and yu is rain. Sam carries her name around with him in his canvas bag on a post-it note with different Chinese characters and their English translations. He tells me how he hears sounds and asks his Chinese neighbor living one floor below him in Woodstock for their meaning and shape. I see píjiù: beer; qián: money. He shows me how he knows a bit of Setswana from some African girls living in 16A as he unfolds the rest of the post-it. Kotsi: danger; Nxe: Excuse me.

I tell Sam I wish I had his drive when it comes to learning new languages. What was now again in German? Germany was one summer ago and I think I'm beginning to forget. It's so easy to forget what makes you happy: walking under the summer rain with Linis in Bonn, the way Paula curses in Spanish when she's indignant on my behalf, the taste of Emilie's spaghetti because let me make you food. I know this is Germany but you can't survive on beer for lunch and dinner, how Kinga wakes up early in order to wake me up in time for 8 am German classes, Camille and I cheering for Adrian Silva, for Ronaldo, for Portugal wining the 2016 World Cup in Pontstraße's Papillion Bar. I want to be able to carry mem-

ories with different people on a post-it note like what Sam does. I want to always be happy.

Xingyu comes down from her room. We start off with the Crunchy Crunch brigadeiro. Sam is 38. He talks about growing up as the son of a border patrol agent in Northern Maine, in "a tiny little town with nature all around. Just behind houses were forests and rivers." Sam speaks of how Northern Maine is beautiful but beauty can be too isolating when your only contact with other cultures was through the border patrol. We are all aware of how border patrol agents deport Mexicans. But no one speaks of how often they marry Mexicans after their initial training in California and bring them to wherever they're posted. "Whoever you're with is relative to whoever's around you. In Northern Maine, you're not gonna meet Chinese girls because there is none. You're not gonna meet Mexican girls unless it's the half-Mexican daughter of another patrol agent or his Mexican wife." But what fascinates Sam about growing up in Northern Maine was "how people weren't mean—it was just there was no exposure." Sam, berry blue eyes, wooden brown hair laughs at the irony, and I wonder how he is able to see the forest not as isolation but as an ecosystem—how we are all interconnected, complicated, living creatures sharing one shelter.

We slice open the next brigadeiro—dark chocolate with blue, yellow and red sprinkles. Circus colors. The summer he was 14, Sam started traveling with the circus. I've never been to a circus. Neither has Xingyu. We want to hear more when and why and how. Sam tells us how he's never been a good learner: "My brain doesn't work like yours when it comes to academic stuff. I had a hard time reading. I don't understand easily when I read things. But with juggling it all clicked—just focusing and watch-

ing the same patterns play out. I could do it for hours. All I wanted was to make it big in the circus." It was only till he was 21 when the world started to "make sense." But it was too late—for the SATs, for college, for white collar.

Xingyu and I want to know whether his family wanted him to catch up. "They were happy I was focusing on something and not getting into trouble. They saw juggling as something positive and constructive unlike my other friends, whose passion was stealing beer. And every summer after I was 14, my mum would drop me off at Circus Smirkus—a circus produced by kids and teens all the way from Netherlands, Latvia, Mongolia—with a smile and a wave." As a child, I remember the ballet lessons I skipped, the piano lessons, the swimming lessons at which all I did was cry. And then there was basketball games in which my dad watched me play with the neighborhood boys, the skate parks my mum took me to, and too many books my mum would always buy for me. The world quieted down into 3 pointers, kickflips and plot structure. It all clicked.

Sam's thirty-minute lunch break is about to end. I ask Sam what is the number one rule all postmen live by.

"The first rule about being a postman is to never leave the mailbox unlocked."

We still have one caramel brigadeiro left. We still haven't heard about his exposure in Circus Smirkus and how I found him on YouTube performing in America's Got Talent 2013 Season 8. It's hard to think of Sam following rules now when he has bent the laws of physics. For America's Got Talent, he did a high balance handstand on an 80-foot pole. He was known as "Flatwire Sam" to the crowd. Howie Mandel called him

nuts. Heidi Klum told Sam how she would love to see him again in Vegas. But Sam never went to Vegas.

I still don't know why Sam's a postman now. When he is gone, I try juggling, a classic circus trick. I pick two of the cocktail limes lying on the kitchen counter and toss them in the air. I see both of them. Bright green, too small tennis balls hurling down—but I am only able to catch one. One of the limes lands into the soft of my palm as the other crashes onto my salmon colored kitchen floor.

Perhaps that's what living is—finding the right lime to catch.



Ode to Salt

BY STEPHEN MASSIMILLA

This salt in the shaker— I once saw it in the salt mines. I know you won't believe me but it sings, salt sings, the very skin of the salt mines sings with a mouth drowned in dirt; when I heard the voice of salt in the desert near Antofagasta, I shivered in those solitudes where the entire nitrous pampa resounds: it's a voice, a broken, mournful song.

In its caverns the rock salt moans, a mountain of buried light, transparent cathedral, glass of the sea, oblivion of the waves.





MINDY MASTRUSERIO

And then, on every table in the world salt, your agile substance sprinkling vital light over our food. Preserver in the ancient storehouses of ships, you went out on the ocean, earliest explorer of the unknown, matter foretold in half-opened paths of foam. Dust of the sea, through you, the tongue receives a kiss of the ultramarine night: taste establishes in every seasoned dish your oceanic essence; this way even the minimal, the most miniscule wave in the saltshaker signifies for us not only your domestic whiteness, but the essential savor of the infinite.

The Water Mirror

BY STEPHEN MASSIMILLA

It makes us into what we recognize of ourselves but supposedly are not, which means suppressing... how this time, the reputedly reflective monologist was rippled so strangely that he didn't even think he resembled the double—a phantom as unaware as the hair the hand runs through, seen from such an angle that it was jostled by blackbacked gulls shadowboxing across the docks and shivered by prismatic sun slipping into Gravesend Bay—as if some brilliant sweat had been swept off the brow into the ocean, becoming part of everything dissolving. So he thought about something else.



BILL WOLAK

Abandoned Bicycles

BY ANDREW MILLER

Covered in a coral of rust, tires

Spent like hopes,

They lay on their sides

Where their thieves or drunks have left them:

Below railway bridges, along highways, Under overpasses, Among the Judas-fields Where oil birthmarks the earth.

Who can talk of distance now? Brand-names luster in the ivy. Forks gape. Fallen chains coil, Adders in the grass.

Someone has dog-eared this wheel.
Someone's bent that seat cruelly.
And this Schwinn and Raleigh how
They lie together in some twisted pile

That mocks the act of man and wife
In the milkweeds. It's my daughter,
Of course, who makes me kneel, or almost,
Beside the wrecks;

Who makes me nod, or almost,

To their bent forks;

Who, on the way to her mother's house,

Insists we stop beside some harp-shaped frame,

So she can point it out to me,
And then call it a friend,
And, if I let her, she will ring
The cast-off bells of tasseled handle bars.

I do not know when we began to dole-out names To the abandoned bicycles. I do not know how long this tandem-bike, Sunk in the reservoir has been called "Mary,"

Or this racer stripped of both its wheels
Has gone by "Joe."
Habits, like falling out love,
Come on strange and slow;

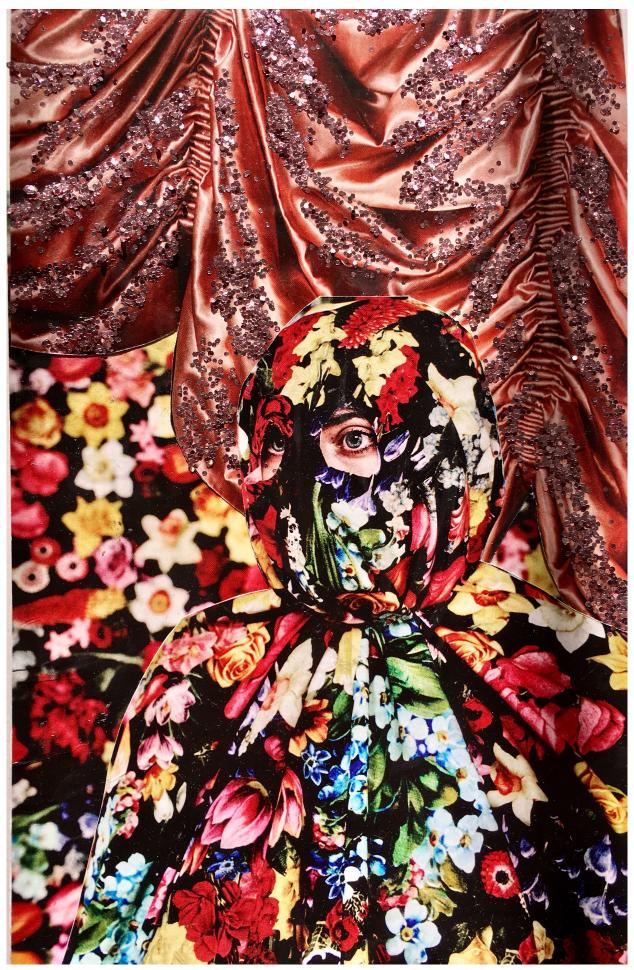
The barren mother of twins;
The mad, double amputee.
Thrown down among the ice-blighted weeds,
See how they reach for me.

The Swarm

BY ANDREW MILLER

And she was like a fly, all night buzzing around The night-reception desk with ancient news About her life. Youth had left her like a husband And she remained having lived one of those lives In which one volunteers for loneliness. I should speak well of her, who labored years In China after Mao came to power. Working With the Red Cross in Shanghai, does that Warrant the respect a young man must give Once now he himself is no longer young? Dead tonight, her ghost must hear how I can't even do that. Instead, I go on hearing The buzzing of her voice, droning, reciting The dates and whens, the idle hardships And impossibilities she had survived to tell. You cannot die from listening. That was The problem. Grey-haired now I know: It still is, for I can still feel youth's impatient ghost Haunting me, as she goes on and on, And I go on and on praying for the phone To ring there at that sad night-porter's desk The typewriter smiling its skeletal smile. Even when the phone did ring, after I placed The call up to the proper room, Miss Podd (Caught as she was between the subject

And verb of the next sentence) continued: "Was in '50 that the Great Fly Hunt was on In Shanghai. Disease was ramped just after The Revolution, so Mao ordered the children To go to war with the flies (the spreaders Of disease). We stood on the high balconies Of what had been The Hotel European And watched the processions go by below: Fire breathing clouds of fireworks showered From off the hoods of a hundred dump-trucks Each brimming the bodies of dead flies, and In between the children marching four abreast In their fresh Zhongshan suits, the mothers Crying under a clouds of confetti and smoke." Her eyes lost in that backward-looking glance It took her time to rally and return From the swarms of that past. When she'd done, We were both back in the London in that June Or July in the late years of my indifference. I am doomed to remember you, Miss Podd: Stubby washed-out spinster who brought The scraps from her long-lost life, laying Them in front of me. Bones without meat: They are the meal my thoughts swarm Back to tonight. I, like you, who cannot sleep.



MEGHAN HIPPLE

Curtain of Parrhasius

BY ANDREW MILLER

Behind this curtain, limbs and leaves fuse in a copper dawn.

Adroit birds loop and gyre,

And the coins of amber, which are water

In the first light, transform the sea.

I am speaking of quorums of wings, fire and water

Pouring into a white vision

Just past this curtain.

Come, then. Stand close to it. Admire its fabric.

See how it keeps the world behind it

And remains cool, easy, motionless.

Don't touch it.

Let desire load each of your fingers with a livid patience, so that (When the time does come)

Your hands will throw wide the curtain.

For now, wait.

Smell the morning coming in. Under the hems,

A breath of two seasons—or is it three? or four?—arrives

In the static scent of linseed.

There are tulips and safflower,

The darlings of sage,

The brackens awakened from the ideals of autumn,

Also a hint of ozone latent with thunder,

A fume of methane.

Even winter sends its essence

In the blue-cold that haunts this aporia of velvet.

In these ways,

Here before the curtain,

We stand on the verge of promises:

A fabric perfumed with visions.

For, hidden behind the curtain, the vista is loaded with farms:

Orchards expensive with peaches, fields

Where red harrows drag the earth corduroy for miles.

Also, there are cites:

Each august with golden panes under the moon great

With its blackening child.

You say you cannot hear these things.

The cloth is quiet, the room

Where we are as though windowless.

Still, they are there, lying

Tensed beyond the curtain:

A siren bellicose,

The grinding diesel traffic and electric buses,

The frantic call of a woman whose child is lost in a market.

They are there.

While these canvases that surround us mean nothing:

Hung up to mock the sparrows, painted grapes

Do not temp a second time.

All is behind the curtain:

Bull's blood standing lush with patterns of juniper and stars;

Daylight like molten bronze along its tasseled bottom.

Go ahead then.

You are ready.

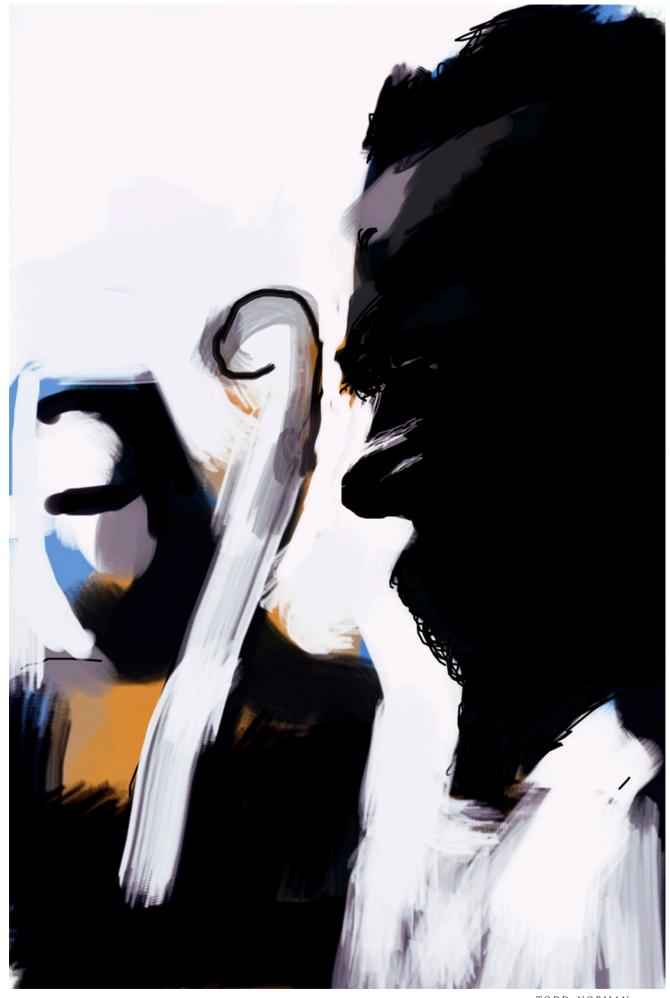
Draw back the curtain. Only,

Before you do, notice

The small toes edging their ways out from under its hem.

As white as pearls, they belong to the child

Whose mother is still calling.



TODD NORMAN

Robert Campin: Mérode Altarpiece

Flanders, c. 1426

BY LYNN HOGGARD

For this painter, the robust physical world carries its own reason for being—
from the sturdy, polished kettle in the left corner; to the wooden casement windows, partially ajar; to the carpenter's drill that Joseph, at right, uses to craft his mousetrap that will catch the devil.

Mary, and even the winged messenger beside her, glow with healthy freshness in fulsome robes.

But in the Flemish Renaissance, the real carries more than physical heft. Objects overflow into a spiritual becoming, organic and invisible, in the way a pine tree cradles its destiny in the seeds of its cones, the way the painting's canine finials breathe steadfastness, or the way the candle next to Mary whispers the light of Christ.

The physical world, in this Annunciation, ripens before us into divinity's rich womb.

Note, near the left window, the astonishing form of a tiny man riding on a sunbeam who holds a cross and flies with clear intent straight toward Mary's abdomen:

He is the promised seed soon to be planted.

The Ghost Train Orchestra

BY HOWIE GOOD

Doo-dah Day

None of it makes sense. It's like my legs have carried me here by themselves. We don't have a grasp on what the mechanism is yet. The real soldiers wear rags on their faces. I'm looking, but I don't see my child. Things happen to people, and people don't really understand how easily those things can happen. First they're an animal, then they're a volcano, then they're playing with their cat, then they're making songs, then they don't finish the song and they're jumping into the void from an elevated point.

Panic City

People were screaming; people were throwing up because the smoke was so thick. Panic killed those people. The wind was dangerous. We knew it was dangerous, but people wouldn't listen and more kept coming. They had a vacant stare. They had a stumbling gait. Their heads were drooping. You could see thick saliva dripping from their mouths. Soon they were screaming for help. We saw bodies everywhere. So many were just skeletons. I was standing behind that tree over there. I just kept thinking that it's so easy to run in a dream without getting out of breath.

After the Fourth

It started off as a kind of tongue-in-cheek thing. He kept saying he was going to kill someone. Yeah, well, that comment got condensed into a sound-bite. I received the news from afar. We were chilling, shooting fireworks,

and then we saw the cops coming. I remember thinking, "Do we belong here?" Here everyone is special and so no one is, even the dead ones we love. Yesterday was supposed to be a holiday and a celebration. But just taking a picture of explosives bursting in the air doesn't mean anything. The whole century suddenly came together for me as these wispy little clouds behind this barbed wire.

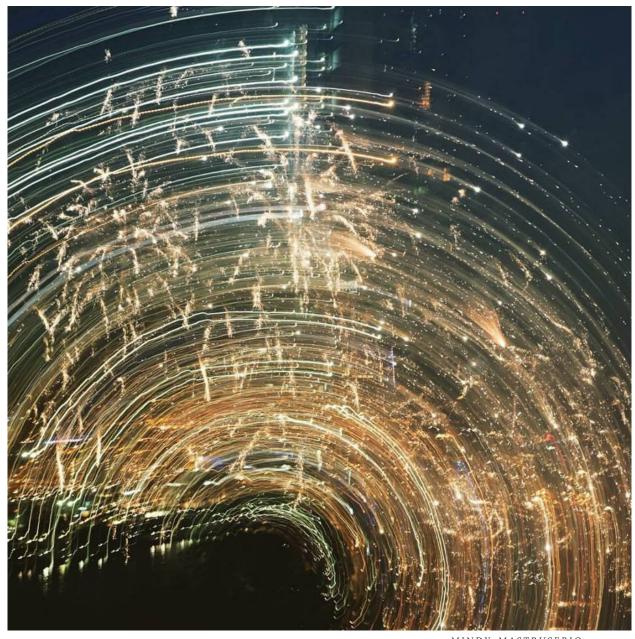
Monkey See

It looked like a nice day. You could leave fake voice messages posing as someone's mom. Or defame someone and post the audio samples online. People realized that Grandma's jam isn't so bad after all. Nobody's outside of a system. What's most challenging is seeing the same story repeated over and over again. We've got lots of statues for 19th-century figures. This time could be different. Why not one for George Orwell? He knew that monkeys love to suck on sugar cubes.

The Worst

We're trained for Armageddon. We're trained for the worst. And yet I can barely make it day to day. I didn't expect this at all. I don't even know what it means. We're not meteorologists or God. This whole place used to be green with a lot of pasture. I used to see seagulls everywhere. Today there are none. I visit places to ask for help. The conversation doesn't go any further. We know we will have to move. Will we live nearby or be scattered? Will we even be allowed on the lake if it's all lined with offices? It's heartbreaking. But we have no option. Salvador Dali is forever.

The Beyond By Nick Gregorio



MINDY MASTRUSERIC

Jordan has two hours before she has to step into the Beyond. She says she wants to go for a walk to pass the time. We haven't been on a walk together since she applied for her portal date just after her status changed to terminal. I've been more worried than she's been through this entire process. And now I'm more worried about how she'll feel bouncing about the still, white dust outside.

We both put on weight after the wedding. You say you won't, but you do. She's since lost all of hers. More.

If I didn't know any better I could swear that I see her pale bony hips and shoulders through her pressure suit. It hangs baggy around her breasts, her butt, her belly. But she's not that thin, can't be that thin. I'm certainly not. My suit pinches me in all the places hers leaves to the imagination. In the cold black I'm afraid all the weight I've put on will split my suit open, send me spinning through space like a balloon through the air back home. But I know that couldn't really happen just as I know I can't see Jordan's bones through her suit, just as I know the Beyond will be good for her.

She said Heaven used to work for some people, but the Beyond is indisputable fact.

Told me that it'll be good for her.

She struggles with the zippers, magnetic clasps, and straps on the back of her suit.

I don't help her, keep checking that the maglocks on my boots are glowing green for connected. But when she asks for a little help please, her voice a bit curved toward snappy, I can't help but breathe out some relief. I buckle, snap, zip, and secure with my lips pursed into a tiny smile that I know she knows is there, but says nothing about.

After Jordan got her Beyond date I'd waited for her to ask me for something, anything. Helping only when she needed me. All proud of myself for not forcing my way into things she felt she could still do herself. So we've kept conversations mostly pleasant since. But there were plenty of nights I holed myself up in the bathroom and turned into a sniveling wreck until she knocked on the door and asked me to watch all the pro-

motional materials with her again, to help her please.

The way the science works is definitive, accurate. Cold.

But the short film was mesmerizing. Everything was shiny. Everyone was sick, but smiling. And we were told everything would be just fine. Jordan would step through a portal into a collective soul of humanity in a pocket dimension that exists outside time and space, and houses all human energy that was ever created ever. She'd be her and she'd be everyone and everyone would be her and so on and so forth, like a quantum physics funhouse. She'd be more at home than she'd ever been.

After the video, Jordan asked me what I was thinking. All I could do was nod, tell her how lovely everything seemed. I did my best, kept the tears in, my bottom lip from shaking, my stomach from turning itself inside out. She was going and I had to be brave and make her feel like everything was going to be okay and show her that I would be fine one day and that I was looking forward to following her through the portal when it was my time. Sick or old, whichever came first.

Now, buckling her helmet, under two hours left, the lines on her face are deep, the bags under her eyes are dark, her lips look like they'd never been pink a day in her life, and I'm asking her where we should go on our walk with a smile. I say Tycho, or Wargentin, or Stöfler. When Jordan tells me to pick I say Tycho because that's the first place we visited after we moved up here. It's a tiny little town at the bottom of the crater. Shops lining the walking paths with signs inviting us to come on in through the airlocks and try the solar system's famous Martian chai tea, or zero G-raised cattle steaks, or fresh moon-soil potatoes.

Jordan smiles, nods in her fishbowl helmet, says, "Your favorite."

I cock an eyebrow, laugh a little. "Our favorite, remember?" "I remember."

We leave our apartment pod through the back airlock so we won't have to waddle our way down the road, around the corner through the no leaping zone.

Outside is stars over our heads, billions of billions of them, and soft white under our feet stretching from our colony to the next in long fields of foot-printed perfect, clean dirt. Jordan, through my earpiece, breathes deep, lets it go. Then she looks to Earth. That big blue, white orb that our kids, if we'd had enough time to have them, would've figured is the Moon's moon. And before I can ask if she's ready for this, Jordan bends her knees and flings herself into open space, the retrorockets on her boots firing a bolt of light. She floats up, up, up, slowing as gravity regains its light grip on her. For a moment, a second, she hangs up there, the sun catching the glass on her helmet, and I'm breathing heavy and deep with my heart beating in my temples.

When Jordan lands she asks me if I'm okay, if I'm having an attack. I don't answer. I jump into space.

The stars are bright and white and glittering, but I can't look at them. Can't be bothered with them. Jordan shrinking away below me and I'm supposed to admire things that have been around for a billion years. Doesn't make a whole lot of sense. Not really. Because if science has told us anything about them it's confirmed that most of the stars we spend so much time gazing at are already dead and gone. So I keep my eyes on Jordan through my puffy, red-faced reflection in my fishbowl as I reach the top of my arc, stall, and fall.

Jordan's always been more graceful than me. She always lands on

the surface, bends her knees, takes, one, two, three steps and comes to a stop. I collapse into the white, flip, bounce off my back, my front, and come to a sliding stop on my butt. Over the radio Jordan asks am I okay, am I okay. I turn, smile, give a thumbs-up, and almost laugh at the trail of dust clouds hanging feet off the ground that leads to Jordan as she heads my way.

Jordan has tried so hard to make me believe she's doing fine. She never slowed down. Kept going to work. Kept helping around the house. She even took care of my laundry after I'd forgotten for two weeks and wore the same underwear and socks to work three days in a row. She even made me dinner on days when work was awful enough that I wouldn't say anything when I got home besides hello, besides how are you, besides good, great to hear. She even started going with me to my own doctor's appointments just to listen to me talk about how I'm feeling so she could better understand.

Now I tell her I'm okay, I'm okay as I dust moon gravel off my suit. One hand on my bicep the other on my air pack on my back, she asks me if I'm sure. Sure-sure. Really sure.

"I'm sure," I say.

"I don't know if you are," Jordan says, her breath fogging up the glass in front of her mouth.

"Why do you say that?" I say.

"You worry me sometimes."

I take Jordan's fishbowl between my gloved, pressurized hands, say, "You don't have to worry about me."

We say nothing for a while, then continue our bouncing walk toward Tycho.

Our first night out after we settled in up here was at a little Tycho

pub named for what it was. I'd heard it had good soup, the best burgers. We'd decided to meet there after work. I was late like always. I kissed her when I showed up, then blamed everything else for why I wasn't on time. Goddamn airlock at work. The shit rover I'd gotten on the cheap—should've just walked. The parking lot attendant wouldn't take credits—no one carries chips anymore.

She smiled, ordered me a drink, stared at me while I spoke long enough that I started feeling self-conscious. Like there was gunk in the corner of my eye, or something hanging from my nose.

Then she laughed a little. Drank from her bottle. Shushed me.

When my beer came I asked her who did she think she was shushing.

She did it again. And we laughed.

We forgot about the soup, the burgers, just kept drinking, laughing, drinking after that. Enough drinking that Jordan took the keys to the rover from me outside, stuffed them into her pressure suit pocket.

"I'll have to pay for the night," I said.

She rolled her eyes, said, "I feel like if I weren't here you'd drive home, take a hill too fast and fling yourself and the rover off into space."

"Piece of shit deserves it."

"Yeah, but you don't."

"Don't you talk about my rover like that."

We waddled home talking, laughing, talking.

Now, the pub's closed.

We stand out front. I'm knocking on the airlock widow, staring through it. All the chairs upside down on the tables. The lights dimmed. The televisions off. The taps covered.

Through my earpiece Jordan tells me they're not opening for another hour. I'm pounding on the window saying if they knew the circumstances they'd open for us, I just need to get someone's attention. I punch the window again and again until Jordan takes my other hand, says, it's okay, it's okay all tinny and distant.

Through her helmet her forehead's wrinkled, her eyes are wide and glassy, she's saying something but my coms go in and out. All I hear is, "You're...out...time..."

I say, "Say again? What?"

"It's...over...go."

"What? What's that?"

"...still got time."

Before I can ask her what again my ass is in the dirt and I'm breathing but not really. I check my O2 levels, all the hoses running from my tank to my filters to my helmet. They're all fine, but I'm sucking down nothing, feeling my eyeballs bulge out of their sockets.

Jordan, she tells me to relax, her voice coming in loud and clear now. Following me up the road, she says it's not my suit, it's me, and I need to concentrate on her voice.

Her voice saying, "Shh."

Saying, "You're okay, you'll be okay."

Saying, "Look where you are. It'll be some life."

Between the moon's dusty surface, Earth hanging over us, spinning, spinning, and a sky-full of stars all reflected on and around Jordan's face in the glass, more air makes its way into my lungs breath after breath. The first one of these I'd had I was able to get over myself. Each one after that turned from panic to complete lunacy to wall-punching violence. Until Jordan worked out the techniques that could bring me back.

Focus on something else.

A voice.

An image.

Something that'll pull me out.

I tell her I'm good. Please not to look at me that way, I swear I'm fine.

But all I can think of is the Beyond when she walks up the slight crater slope, drops to the ground, sits in a cloud of moon dust clunking a gloved hand on her helmet like she was hoping she could use it to clear her eyes. The Beyond. The place I can't go yet. The place I'll watch her dissolve into her most basic parts soon. Atoms, protons, neutrons, electrons, all the bits I can't see that made the soul I've followed around for the better part of a decade.

If I push past the scientists in their lab coats and black goggles, manage to widen the portal to fit two, or even ask why the fuck can't I fucking go with her, maybe I could go too. But even as a multidimensional wavelength of celestial intent, Jordan would never let me live that one down. It's not for healthy people, she'd say. Somebody else needed it, not you, she'd say. For infinity.

Sitting next to Jordan, our helmets keep our heads from each other's shoulders. But it's the thought. And it works.

We sit a while, watch people make their way through the Tycho streets. Maybe on their way home from work. Maybe heading out for the night somewhere fancy for dinner, somewhere dingy for booze and cigarettes. And Jordan's sniffling becomes more and more infrequent until she pushes away from me, struggles to her feet.

I look away, try to not react to the small sounds she makes in her throat with the pain shooting through her as she moves. She says hey, breathing heavy. "Look at me."

Her hand reaches down for me to take. "Come on."

I get up slow, hope that it makes Jordan feel that she's helping me even though she and I both know she barely has strength enough to pull the refrigerator door open anymore.

Standing, facing her, through my earpiece she says, "Hold on."

I reach around her helmet, rest my arms on her pack.

She wraps her arms around my ribs, my belly smiles, eyes all shiny and wet.

And then we're five feet off the ground, ten feet, twenty.

Below, when the light from Jordan's retrorockets blinks out, a cloud of dust, all of Tycho. And we're still floating up, up, up with the momentum. All around, there's nothing but me, Jordan, and a black, sparkling curtain of space.

When we reach the top of our arc, there's that pause. That moment between gravities. Suspension. No push or pull from anything. Just Jordan and me and black. Just before the Moon tells us enough's enough.

We use the retrorockets to slow us down, land on the dusty surface without a sound.

Jordan doesn't look me in the eyes, hides hers, looks past me. "The bar's open," she says.

I grab her arm before she can walk away. Tell her to wait. Say we should go again.

And then we're blasting off into space. Stuck in the in-between for one minute, two, three. And when we're up there, star maps on our faces, I'm breathing fine. Jordan's face isn't angled and creased, her eyebrows aren't cocked, her forehead's not wrinkled. Her tired, bloodshot eyes are wide open. Like they used to be.

Just before we go back up a third time, an alarm goes off in our earpieces.

Jordan says, "I have to go."

She lets go of me, waddle-walks away back toward Tycho's town center.

"Just wait," I say.

I wrap her up, tell her to hold on, and we're up in the black again.

Tycho spins away beneath us. Earth gets larger above us even though I know it doesn't, not really. I hear her through my earpiece. I see her through two layers of starry glass. And I'm the one saying things that Jordan would say to me.

I'm carrying her for once.

We're going up, up, up.

And when we're in that nothing space I keep us pushing through it.

We don't have enough momentum to go anywhere. Not really.

This—wherever this is—it'll lose its hold on us. Soon enough. But with bolts of light under my feet, with Jordan still here, and with enough fuel to stay suspended for however long, we're not going anywhere.

Not for a while.

The Beyond can wait.



PAT LANDECK

Uncle Jonny Wins The Lottery

BY DANA SCOTT

Everybody liked my Uncle Jonny. When he went to the bar, he could sit at any table and be welcomed with open arms. He'd sit out on the front porch in the evening and pretty soon, Stu, Skid and Big Nicky would make their way over. Those nights, you can hear them laughing so loudly at three in the morning that they wake Mrs. Kelly up for the third time in a week. And, since Jonny was a temp worker, every time someone missed a shift, or when the holidays rolled around, he was the first person bosses would call, because everybody knew him and everybody liked him. Well, not always. Not when he would spend mass sitting in the pew closest to the doors so he could be the first one out, or when he only gave a penny to the church's donation box because he'd lost his wallet somewhere again and that was all he'd had on him. If you hear someone singing "Desperado" off-key at three in the morning, it's probably my Uncle Jonny.

All in all, though, he's an amiable guy. But, even though everybody likes Uncle Jonny, his reputation was never that he was kind or dependable. Uncle Jonny is known for being the unluckiest person in the whole town. And it was true, too. I would sit on my dad's lap and hear all the stories of Uncle Jonny's mishaps from when they were a kid.

He would lose at Risk! every time they invited him to play. He quit Little League baseball for good when the older boys declared him a jinx and when they won the championship that season, Jonny thought they might have been right. He hadn't gone to college, hadn't had a degree in anything he'd started. He was in the middle of his first semester and he was picking up jobs fixing roofs, and then he fell off a really tall ladder, broke his leg and his arm, and had to take three months off of college. Well, he never really bounced back from that, and he never went back either. Big Nicky and Skid were his roommates, and they still kept in touch. You hear them talking, and it sounds like they're in high school still, laughing at dirty jokes and Old Miss Jackson's cheap wig.

Now, I don't want you to get the wrong idea. Uncle Jonny's not upset about any of these things. He's more than happy with how life's turned out for him. When you think about it, he's not all that different from everybody else in town. We've all lived here for generations, and we'll all probably live here for at least a few more. Doesn't matter if you leave, because you're still a member of town at heart. At least, that's what my dad tells me. The real difference between Jonny and everyone else in town is that he wears this fact on his sleeve. He never pretends he's going anywhere else like most of us do. He never made any plans to go to Los Angeles or Cincinnati, or some other big city.

"Everything I could ever want in the entire world, right here in town," he would tell me when I was younger, with a boyish smile on his face. Now, I know he didn't really mean that, even if he thought he did. There are plenty more things a man could want that you just can't get in a small town. But I don't think Jonny was lying, either. He loved the town, even if the town didn't always love him. Especially not when he'd come into church in the middle of the choir's set because his good pair of shoes broke, so he had to wear his sneakers, and he'd told us he'd grab a bus, but then he got the schedule wrong because he still had the old one

and he'd barge in just as the altos were starting in on the second verse of "This Light O' Mine,"

Like I said, Uncle Jonny was never the luckiest guy. That is, until he won the lottery.

We were at Big Nicky's barbecue. It sounds like a special thing, but it's not. He has it once a week and anyone who's a little hungry can stop by as long as they bring their own steak or burger. "If there's just one thing worth a damn in my life, it's my grill," Big Nicky would tell me. And then, he'd add, "don't tell Debra," with a wink. She knew, of course. Nicky would tell everyone at the party that joke, he thought it was hilarious.

But there we were at Nicky's barbecue, and Uncle Jonny was in the corner with Skid, smoking another one of the cheapest cigars he could find, drinking a watery can of beer and tossing a lottery ticket. Eventually, as the night wound down, we would all gather around in a makeshift circle, telling stories about this, that and the other thing. My Aunt Emma and my Aunt Betty, Jonny's sisters, would always sit next to each other.

"You, know, Jonny," Lenny was saying that night, "I think you're just about the unluckiest guy I ever met." Everyone laughed at that. Unlucky Jonny stories were often the highlight of the night. No matter what happened at the barbecue, it always ended with stories about him.

"Remember when you missed the bus almost every day last year?" Butch, the town cab driver said. "You called me all the time. I think you might have paid off my son's college fund!" Everyone went around the circle, telling various Jonny stories. Now, don't get it twisted. They

weren't trying to be mean to him - well, except maybe Aunt Betty. She's always been a little embarrassed by Jonny. But Jonny was never hurt by the stories they'd tell. He would just laugh along with everyone else, even chiming in with his own story every now and then.

"C'mon, guys, what about the time he saved Mrs. Rogerson's cat? That was pretty lucky, wasn't it?" Aunt Emma would always try and bring up something positive about Jonny. As his big sister, she was always a little protective of him. She would always tell me she found his misfortunes "charming" or that, it's what makes him "unique." According to my dad, she'd dote on Jonny every chance she'd get when they were kids. I can never quite tell if she can tell we're just poking fun or not.

"Yeah, I guess that was lucky enough for her, but remember what kinda shape he was in afterwards?" Skid said, eyebrows raised. "Show them the scar, Jonny."

Jonny shrugged, pulling up his sleeve to reveal a long white curve running from his elbow to the middle of his forearm. Course, we'd all seen that scar a million times, but Skid still thinks it's the coolest thing there is.

"Well, boys, it's getting late. Don't wanna miss the numbers," Jonny said and Big Nicky laughed.

"Why on earth do you keep buying those lottery tickets? You really think you're gonna win one day, Jonny boy?" Jonny chuckled, pushing himself off the chair.

And then, just like he always says, Jonny said, "Well, just you see, tonight's the night I'm gonna win."

So, I should probably tell you the truth. Someone did win the lottery that night, but it wasn't Jonny. Jonny won the big four. To him, though, that was the greatest thing ever. I watched him run out on the porch, laughing and hollering.

"Stu!" He shouted at our neighbor from across the street. "I won the lottery! I just won the lottery!"

"No, you didn't!" Stu laughed back.

"Sure as hell I did!" He yelled. Stu just laughed, so Uncle Jonny puffed up his chest, stamped out his cheap cigar and went into the corner store, just down the road from our house. After about two minutes, he came out holding one of those expensive cigars in the really nice cases, taking great care to make sure Stu saw. Jonny would always tell me that he'd have one of those fancy cigars one day, even if it killed him. And finally, his wish came true.

After Stu picked his jaw up from off of the ground, he ran up to Jonny, grabbing the cigar and inspecting it. Then, as if his confirmation was the final word on the matter, he said, to no one in particular, "Well, I'll be darned, he really did!" Jonny gave a satisfied little smile, and went back into the house.

I don't think Jonny cared too much about the thousand dollars. I think he was just happy to win something, to have luck go his way for once in his life. But by the time we woke up the next morning, the whole town had heard that Uncle Jonny won the lottery. And nothing was quite the same the whole week after.

The Jenkins twins, Fat Frankie and Slim Jim, called Jonny up say-

ing that it's just been far too long since they'd gotten a beer together, and they should catch up sometime. Say, Saturday night maybe? The ladies from the church choir who'd always glare at him because he'd talk through their whole set stopped by and asked if he would be interested in being their guest of honor at the block party they were having the next weekend. There wasn't one person in town who didn't say hello to Jonny when they passed him on the street that day.

Uncle Jonny was loving it, though I don't think he really put two and two together. He must have known in some way that it was about his money, but I think a bigger part of him thought that people were treating him differently just because he was lucky now, as if that was enough to change thing. Plus, he liked being the most popular man in town. And besides, he'd only won a thousand dollars. What would people want with that?

That night at the bar, Jonny, who was still reeling on the high of his lottery win, shouted to the whole bar, "drinks on me!" Everyone just about went wild. Well, all ten people in the bar that night. He was at his usual bar. Usually, he had to persuade Young Jimmy to give him another drink at half price. The more popular bar, the one on the corner of Taylor Street, was too expensive. So, Jonny only paid for ten people's drinks that night. Still, he felt like he'd won a million dollars, he told me.

And then, apparently on the walk home, the Reverend asked Uncle Jonny if he would say a few words at the Charity Social that Saturday, per the church ladies' requests. Can you imagine that? On the best of days, Jonny sits in the back pew picking at his fingernails and not hearing a blessed word being said by anybody. Sometimes, Big Nicky sits next

to him, and they whisper so loudly that they have to be kicked out. And here was the reverend themselves, asking Uncle Jonny to give a grand old speech.

Of course, Jonny accepted. He made me help pick out a nice suit and tie for him to wear. I could hear him practicing in the mirror in his room. He shooed me away, saying, "I want you to be surprised." I don't remember the last time I'd seen him that excited - if I ever had. When I went home that night, I was a little excited too. And a little worried. You see, no one was quite sure whether his luck had changed. I think we were all expecting something to go wrong. And something did. But it wasn't Uncle Jonny's fault.

I'm gonna be honest. I don't really remember what he said. It was a nice speech about how he had God to thank for his bout of luck and how he was very grateful that they were having him today. Really, it was a real nice speech. But I doubt anybody else remembered that part either. Not after his last few lines.

"And, so, I've decided to give half of my winnings to the church." Well, instantly the room lit up with the murmuring of so many people, it almost sounded like it was a summer night and the heat bugs were out. LeeAnn Smith, president of the St. Joseph's Ladies Auxillary, went up to Jonny, and with both hands, grabbed one of Uncle Jonny's, grasped it tight and said, "Thank you, Jonny, thank you." Uncle Jonny got a little red at that and scratched the back of his head, smiling. Aida Jones, first soprano in the church choir started crying, she was so happy.

"You know what? I'll write a check right now," he said, and pulled a

checkbook from his coat pocket. Now, I knew that bit must have been rehearsed because Jonny never carries a checkbook around on him. He scrawled out something on the check, and handed it to President LeeAnn Smith. I saw her face drop entirely. And I guess so did everybody else, because everyone quieted down and looked at him.

"Jonny, this is a check for five hundred dollars." Jonny furrowed his eyebrows, nodding.

"Yeah, that's right."

"But the lottery was for four million dollars." Jonny still looked confused, and then his face lit up with understanding. He let out a loose chuckle, which only seemed to raise the tension in the room.

"Oh! Well, I'm sorry, Church Ladies, I didn't mean to confuse you. I didn't win the lottery, I won the big four!" It was so quiet, I was afraid to breathe.

Then, the first soprano in the church choir who was crying, yelled a yell to shake the rafters, "You lied to us!" Poor, poor Uncle Jonny. He hadn't even realized they would be mad. He didn't know they thought he won the lottery. He thought people genuinely wanted to be nice to him, that they genuinely liked him. The entire choir blew up, some muttering to themselves, and others yelling at Jonny. The families sitting in the pews with their hands neatly folded lost their graceful composure and joined in. It was a madhouse in church that day. The reverend was waving his hands wildly, trying to calm everyone down, but no one was looking at him. They were all looking at Jonny, who was looking beet red in his nicest suit and tie. Well, I nudged my dad and he nodded at me, and he stood up and grabbed Uncle Jonny's shoulder and we all walked out of church be-

fore Uncle Jonny could get yelled at any harder.

He was real quiet on the walk home. I felt bad for him. Jonny loved this town more than anybody, and for one day, he thought the town loved him too.

I didn't see Jonny the whole rest of the day. He holed himself up in his room and didn't come out, not even for Big Nicky's barbecue. I could imagine him in his room, sitting on his bed and wringing his hands like he does sometimes when he's nervous. I felt so sorry for him then, I remember, because Uncle Jonny just wanted to get along with everyone. Hell, he'd put up with being a punchline for years. He deserved better than what they were giving him.

Everyone in town was still hopping mad. I heard that Fern Sherman declared to the Ladies Sewing Circle that Uncle Jonny was never welcome in their houses again, goddammit, because that was a lousy trick he pulled, lying like that! Old Annie Phillips from the library made sure to tape Uncle Jonny's late notice on our door, with an angry note scrawled in red at the bottom reading, "If you're still able to pay it, now that you're not a millionaire!" with a giant blot where the dot of the exclamation point was.

Big Nicky came over around eight with a few burgers on a paper plate. He told me he couldn't stay long, because Debra didn't know he left and, well, she wasn't exactly on Jonny's side, either. He knocked on Jonny's door, but nobody came out, so he just sighed and set the plate on the ground. By the time I came up to check on Jonny, the burgers were gone.

The members of the Ladies' Auxiliary Club were real embarrassed.

Apparently, after we left, everyone was so upset, they had to call off the whole Charity Social they'd been planning for a month. So of course, they were real mad, too. And because they were mad, their husbands were mad.

Young Jimmy, the bartender might have been the most mad out of all of them. See, he'd been letting Jonny run a tab all week long, because Tuesday he'd ordered a drink and realized he'd forgotten his wallet. But Jimmy just smiled real easy-like and said, "It's okay, Jonny. I'll just add it to your tab," because Jimmy thought Jonny was the kinda guy who could afford to have a tab. And the thing is, Jonny likes to come into the bar just to hang out with the guys, even when he's broke. But all that week, whenever Jonny sat down, Jimmy would slap a pint of beer in front of him and say, "Put it on your tab, Jonny boy?" And Jonny would just shrug noncommittally, because why turn that kinda offer down? Anyways, Young Jimmy kept telling everyone how Jonny had cheated him and the bar the whole past week.

Not everybody was mad, though. Stu thought the whole thing was a riot. He made his way to our front porch around eight o'clock, filling us in on everybody's reactions. He kept saying he couldn't believe Jonny fooled everybody and how he didn't think Jonny had it in him. It seemed he'd completely forgotten his own part in the misunderstanding.

Around nine o'clock, Skid came over, too, already chatting up a storm. "Can you believe it? Our Jonny's even more famous today than he was this whole week!" We tried to tell him Jonny wasn't seeing anybody that night, but he and Stu just kept talking, so we all went inside and let them go on. They stayed late, too, even after we turned the porch light

off in an attempt to shoo them away.

Zach Karsten, one of the usual members of the bar was saying the nastiest things about Jonny and how "he knew Jonny was a rat all along," and "you should never trust a snake." I thought that was real unfair of Zach, because who was it who had bought him a drink the night before? Even Ronny Brig, one of Jonny's high school buddies brushed off conversation about Jonny with a brisk, "I don't want to talk about a man who doesn't keep his word." It seemed to me that everyone only wanted to think about the personal wrong they thought Jonny had done them. No one even thought about the whole story, really. They just got indignant and righteous and stayed ignorant all along. I suppose it's more fun to stay mad than to really think about what there is to be angry about in the first place.

We heard about all of this - mainly because news travels fast in our town and we live next to Stu - but I don't know if Jonny ever did. If he found out, he never let on. His door was closed and his room was quiet from the moment we got home all the way to church the next day.

Church was really tense the next morning. Jonny was nowhere in sight. The ladies in the choir still looked like they were fuming, but some of the families looked a little guilty. I couldn't blame them for being disappointed, but it wasn't Jonny's fault. They'd all just assumed he won big, and when they found out he didn't, they made him feel like dirt. I was angry, too.

Now, the reverend's speech I do remember. Slowly and solemnly he made his way up to the podium. "I'm very disappointed in how the events

of yesterday unfolded." He looked at us, and even though I didn't do anything, I felt myself squirm. "I understand you all wanted the money. I wanted it too. But we can't blame Jonny for our own misunderstanding.

"Jonny is a man who started with nothing. And once he got something, the first thing he decided to do was share it with us. Well, that's as Christian as it comes. We should thank Jonny for his generosity, instead of persecute him because we wish he had more to give. Let us value and appreciate the kindness he showed and vow never to take it for granted again. Let us banish the greed from our hearts as our dear friend Jonny has."

Now, I know, this must sound like a real cornball speech. But I can't tell you what it felt like in that room. Everyone in the church choir was bawling their eyes out. The wives all weeped into their hands, and sitting in the back pew, I could see Big Nicky and Skid clutching each other's ratty jackets and sobbing. And, because I was already looking back there, I could see Jonny sitting in the corner of the church, nearly hidden behind a big post.

He was wearing big black sunglasses and his favorite black fedora and big, fat tears were rolling down his face. I think, in that moment, whether he knew it or not, he really was the most loved person in the town.

It didn't last long. That kind of stuff usually doesn't. By the next week, the whole issue was old news. Jonny still missed the bus and lost his wallet. I guess nothing much changed. I still remember finding him on the walk home, though.

"Uncle Jonny," I remember saying, "I'm real sorry about what they said to you yesterday." He just grasped my shoulder tightly and smiled without showing his teeth.

"Oh, don't worry about it. They're good people. Every last one of them."

"But what about your money? You don't have any left, do you?" He'd spent it on the drinks and the church and the nice cigar, and it made me sad that there wasn't anything left over him.

"I don't need the money," he told me, the light dancing in his eyes. "Everything I could ever want in the entire world is right here in town." Looking back, I guess it was silly. But, I swear to you, in that moment, I believed him.

He did have little bit left over, after all. Just enough to buy himself a custom-made pin from the corner store reading "Mr. Lucky." He still buys a lottery ticket every week, of course. He hasn't won again yet. But who knows? I don't know if Jonny cares. All I know is that when Jonny says he's gonna win the lottery, no one'll ever doubt him again.





THOMAS GILLASPY

POETRY & PROSE

Talal Alyan is a Palestinian writer based in New York. He has written about politics in the Middle East for various publications including Vice News, Al Jazeera English, Huffington Post and Daily Beast. The poems in this issue are from an ongoing project on the intersection of narrative and noise.

Andrew Barrer is a screenwriter living between Rockaway Beach, NY and Doylestown, PA. His work in film includes *Haunt* and Marvel's *Ant-Man*. He has previously published fiction in *Punchnel's* and *HelloHorror*.

As arts writer for the *Times Record News* in Wichita Falls, **Lynn Hoggard** has published more than six hundred articles, features, and reviews. She has published six books: three French translations, a biography, a memoir, and a poetry collection (Bushwhacking Home, TCU Press, 2017). Her poetry has appeared in more than forty literary journals, including *Atlanta Review, Forge, Edison Literary Review, FRiGG, The Healing Muse, The MacGuffin, New Ohio Review, Schuylkill Valley Journal, Tower Journal, Weber: The Contemporary West,* and *Wild Violet*.

Nick Gregorio lives, writes, and teaches just outside of Philadelphia. His fiction has appeared in *Crack the Spine, Hypertrophic Literary, 805 Literary and Arts Journal* and many more. He earned his MFA from Arcadia University in May 2015. His debut novel, *Good Grief*, is forthcoming from Maudlin House, September 2017.

Howie Good is the author of *The Loser's Guide to Street Fighting*, winner of the 2017 Lorien Prize and forthcoming from Thoughtcrime Press. His latest books are *Still Running* from Right Hand Pointing and *Hitchhiking Through the Apocalypse* from Grey Book Press.

James Croal Jackson's poetry has appeared in *The Bitter Oleander, Rust + Moth, Isth-mus*, and elsewhere. He lives in Columbus, Ohio. Visit him at jimjakk.com.

Amanda Caterina Leong grew up in Indiana, California, Lisboa and Macau. She is currently a creative writing major in Dartmouth College.

Raised in the San Francisco Bay Area, **Antonio Lopez** received a double B.A. in Global Cultural Studies (Literature) and African-American studies from Duke University (Class of 2016). He's an inaugural John Lewis Fellow, a recipient of Rudolph William Rosati Creative Writing Award, and a finalist for the 2017 Nazim Hikmet Poetry Prize.

His nonfiction has been featured in *TeenInk*, *The Chronicle*, *PEN/America* and his poetry in *Gramma Press*, *Eclectica*, *Hispanecdotes*, *La Bloga*, *Acentos Review*, *Sinking City*, *What Rough Beast*, *By&By*, and *Permafrost*. He is currently pursuing a Masters in Fine Arts (poetry) at Rutgers University-Newark.

Stephen Massimilla is a poet, scholar, professor, and painter. His new 500-page multigenre co-authored tome, Cooking with the Muse (Tupelo, 2016), won The Eric Hoffer Book Award, The National Indie Excellence Award, and others. Acclaim for his other books includes an SFASU Press Prize for The Plague Doctor in His Hull-Shaped Hat; the Bordighera Poetry Prize for Forty Floors from Yesterday (CUNY); the Grolier Poetry Prize for Later on Aiaia; a Van Rensselaer Award, selected by Kenneth Koch; and other honors. He has work in hundreds of publications, recently Agni, Barrow Street, Colorado Review, Denver Quarterly, Poetry Daily, The Southern Review, Tampa Review, and Verse Daily. Massimilla holds an M.F.A. and a Ph.D. from Columbia University and teaches at Columbia and The New School. For more info: www.stephenmassimilla.com and www.cooking-withthemuse.com

Andrew D. Miller is a poet and translator with over eighty publications to his name. His poems have appeared in such journals as *The Massachussett's Review, Ekphrasis, Iron Horse, Shenandoah, Spoon River Reivew, Laurel Review, Hunger Mountain, Rattle* and *New Orleans Review.* In addition, he has had poems appear in such anthologies as *How Much Earth, Anthology of Fresno Poets* (2001) and *The Way We Work: Contemporary Literature from the Workplace* (2008). Finally, he was one of the co-editors of *The Gazer Within, The Selected Prose of Larry Levis* (2001), and he is the author of *Poetry, Photography Ekphrasis: Lyrical Representations of Photography from the 19th Century to the Present* (2015).

Originally from Los Alamos, New Mexico, **William Repass** lives in Pittsburgh and works as a projectionist and film librarian. His work has appeared in, or is forthcoming from, *Bennington Review, Denver Quarterly, Hobart, Otoliths*, and elsewhere.

Dana Scott studies writing at the Chicago Academy for the Arts, and has received several awards for fiction, screenwriting and poetry. This is her first publication.

VISUAL ART

Manit Chaotragoongit was born in Bangkok, Thailand. He received his Bachelor's Degree in Political Science and Public Administration.

Thomas Gillaspy is a northern California photographer. His photography has been featured in numerous magazines including the literary journals *Compose*, *Portland Review* and *Brooklyn Review*. Further information is available at: http://www.thomasgillaspy.com.

Meghan Hipple graduated from the University of Pittsburgh with a degree in the History of Art and Architecture. She has always loved art, but only recently started to actively create works herself. She enjoys collaging because it allows her to deconstruct the meanings and ideas embedded in all things visual. Her images are taken from old Vice and homemaking magazines people have donated to her, as well as from old Zines she has collected.

Todd Norman is a writer and painter living in Holland, Michigan. He teaches a Montessori classroom ages 6-9, and is inspired by the way they talk, write, draw and laugh.

Bill Wolak has just published his fifteenth book of poetry entitled The Nakedness Defense with Ekstasis Press. His collages have appeared recently in Naked in New Hope 2016 and The 2017 Seattle Erotic Art Festival. Mr. Wolak teaches Creative Writing at William Paterson

Janelle Victoria Cordero's expressionist portraits are distinguished by dominating contour lines and sparse watercolor highlighting. Her subjects are often disjointed and unfinished, missing a neck or a limb or a torso, which emphasizes the disconnected nature of the human condition. Her work has been featured in galleries from Washington to West Virginia, as well as published in numerous journals and anthologies. Janelle's artistic priority is to collaborate with other creatives to push for social and political change. Stay connected with Janelle's work at www.janellecordero.com.

Born in Benton Harbor, Michigan and raised in the foothills of North Carolina, **Patrick Landeck** currently lives in Pittsburgh, and has been practicing fine art and illustration for over 20 years. His Academic focus was illustration. His unique style, lovingly dubbed "Post-toon", often takes serious subject matter and presents it in his unique way.

Mindy Mastruserio is a psychotherapist in Pittsburgh. Her photography often reflects her interest in exploring the duality of human nature via exposures featuring contrasting light and darkness. Email the artist at mindy.mastruserio@gmail.com for inquiries.



PAT LANDECK