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As a teenager, I took my parents car more than once, late at night when everyone slept. There were the usual drives around my little Willamette Valley college town, and drives through the night grass and star fields of the countryside nearby. But now and then, I felt a deeper pull, and before I could even catch myself, I was heading out to the sea. It was an hour’s drive west, winding through the forested passes of the Coast Range mountains, mile on mile of fir trunks stark and silent in the headlights, and time always failed somewhere along the way. I would crest that last rise, and slide down that last long slope, and in the dead of night I couldn’t see it, of course. More often than not the Oregon fog hemmed close; I didn’t approach a presence but rather a sense of absence, feeling but not seeing a line ahead where the land simply stopped. I would slip through the somnolent town of Newport, I’d go straight at the highway junction, bearing direct and true for that line. The highway became a town street, down past beach houses, their cedar shingle monochrome in night shadow or in the light of day. Past the tall county jail with million-dollar ocean views, past the community playhouse. When the road finally J’d just before the bluff, I would park on the street, climb over that split wood railing, and walk out to the edge. I sat down there on the soggy beach grass, knees pulled to my chest, and listened. The night mist and the light ocean rain swallowed everything. The wan streetlights barely touched the beach below, and I could see only a rill of a wave tip flash now and then within the margins of the cloud, its engrossing black truly depthless, the manifest void clear, close and awful. But there was still the sea. Nowhere and all around me. As I sat there on the cliff, the misty grass
soaking through my jeans, I truly felt it, deep and heavy, in my bones, striking all the clearer for the blindness and the cloud—that irresistible, eternal crash of surf.

After a time, I would climb back into the car and simply drive back home. The fir trees took on a different meditative cast as I drove back over the mountains, back to the bounded and settled valley, the close and comfortable hills, the placid farms and fields. I would park finally back home, at 3 a.m. or so, naively failing to realize that 100 miles on the odometer and a half-tank of gas burned might be noticed.

Sorry Mom.

As we put together our second issue, we couldn’t help but feel a theme of sea flowing through the works that we selected, in ways subtle and overt, intrinsic and extrinsic. If you will forgive a few clichés, since the beginning of time the sea has been a giver and a taker of life. It divides us and connects us. It is a timeless force that insists on the ineluctability of time, and that reminds us always of the humble scale of our own lives. It is of us, we are of it, with our blood apocryphally attuned to the brine from which our distant ancestors crawled. And we have been so fortunate for the chance to publish a collection of stories and poems that, in ways large and small, invoke, we think, shades and facets of this force and presence in our world, too grand in scale for any singular definition.

With all that in mind, we must express our sincere and earnest thanks to our wonderful authors and submitters. And we hope that our dear readers might keep an ear tuned, now and then, that they might catch a shiver of that vibration, that eternal roll, that rattling in the old bones.
January 10, 2001

by Lana Bella

You had stopped here searching
for oceans, bordered by shorelines
and blue herons with slow, deep
wingbeats, where flight of winter’s
yawns locked jaws on supine stones
against waves, tucked-in plumes
and long legs trailing behind.

That January, lapful of sea water
snow sent your teeth chattering,
words throttled like gunk fed heavy
through old lead pipes. It was night
in the cave of the sea, mitered between
sky and earth, just there, traces of
your lives worn smooth from saltwater
over cinder rocks, whirling through
the tranquility of being bereft.
the evening is a deep lake quick
where bottom feeding fish leap onto
my rowboat
like drowning stars
waiting to die—

I push my body up from the stern seat
with both hands
letting go of the twin oars,
as the tides steer on my weatherly sloop
toward the liquid landscape
beneath a ghost of a breeze,
the narrow vessel crawls into a farther strip
of darkness that
lulls without letting go—

and it is in this euphonious mural of air,
water and tall reed beds,
I realize I am drifting, gravitating three ways:
in the mist of red-winged blackbirds,
stirring water and
chenille peignoir of sky—
An airborne leap headfirst, back arched, leading with her chin as though she is an Olympic athlete and the judges are about to award her a perfect ten.

You never learned to dive. The one time you tried, it hurt your belly so much it felt like slamming into concrete. You never even learned to swim correctly. Never made it past Upper Minnow at Camp Somerset. The lake water clogging your nose and ears, your eyes clamped shut so you couldn’t see the slimy bottom.

But this woman who lives across the street does it with ease. You think she’s showing off for her guests. But that can’t be right. She’s not wearing a bathing suit. Just shorts and one of those annoying T-shirts that says Life is Good. She kicks off her sandals and dives right in.

The birthday party pauses. Moms glance up from their pasta salad. Children scatter at the splash, paddling out of the way. You’d been talking about snow blowers, which are not usually discussed in July. But important nonetheless. There are electric ones now and the question is: are they better than the models that run on gas and should you buy one when they return to Home Depot in the fall?
The woman dives into the pool and disappears underwater and the only reason you know this is because everyone’s looking in that direction and it reminds you of Sea World. Sitting on the bleachers to watch a performance. Dolphins leaping out of the pool to snatch fish from their trainers’ hands. The dolphins were smiling and you wondered if they did that naturally or whether they were trained to do it and how long that must have taken and how many fish were involved and how funny it would be if the woman next door jumped out of the water and grabbed a hot dog out of someone’s hand with her teeth.

The water shimmers with chlorine, a fake impossible blue, and when the woman surfaces she’s holding your daughter in her arms, a child who hasn’t yet learned to float and was supposed to have stayed in the shallow end of the pool, separated from the dangerous part by a braided rope. No coughing or spluttering. Still as granite.

The woman swims to the edge of the pool, lays the girl on the grass, like a mermaid retrieving a forgotten prize, hauls herself up and kisses her hard on the mouth and right before you run over spouting apologies and appreciative remarks to make sure everything’s all right—it has to be all right, doesn’t it?—no one dies at a birthday party in the middle of July, you see the slick, grinning face of the dolphin, its dull gray sheen and this is the image that sticks with you always.
Lyrebird Keeps the Peace
Between Moon and the Lover

by Kelli Allen

Damage doesn’t know what debris spells
when the cedar floors occupy a chest
and not the house we don’t live in
together. We believed in ghosts

in the village, and again in this city,
when the streets are a dream, too large
for closing distances. Walking through
landscapes means hearing frogs on concrete,
in rough puddles, and under the wood
wrecked steps leading everywhere.

The birds are probably correct to assume
fallacy anyway. They repeat and sing
for what decomposes beneath such notes.
I handed my sword to the second watchman
while he hummed along, vocal trajectory
as snow slow collecting over hothouse orchids.

We imitate teachers regardless of temperature.
Did you know that the sun has been stolen
exactly twice? The story turned its back,
not away, but to the hard ground, and we left
tiny copper rings at each tree’s thick base,
making promises to write new vows
for what slips into adoration. We are bodies
ever flexing for meant declarations.
The woman stepped carefully off the dirt road, passed through the dust-covered shrubbery that lined its edge, and worked her way to a thicket of raspberry bushes that lay a short distance away. She was wearing a loose-fitting plaid shirt, dark green pants, sandals, and a straw hat. The hat’s weave was broken in several places, but its broad brim was still sufficiently intact to shade her pale face.

In the thicket, she bent down and, with a skill born from years of picking, quickly found the biggest, reddest, ripest raspberries on the bushes. She placed them gently into the container she had brought, so as not to bruise them. When she came across a particularly desirable one, she would pop it into her mouth, chew it slowly, savoring the explosion of sweet and sour. Every so often she would stand erect, roll her shoulders front to back, then stretch, slowly bending backwards with one hand on a hip. Before resuming her picking, she would shade her eyes with her free hand and look out at the sea. She could see the dog running back and forth along the shore, chasing gulls, and sometimes rushing into the water up to his chest.
Finished berry picking, she exited the thicket and walked to the foot of the road that led up the hill to the cabin. The past winter, the road to the cabin had washed out, and she had had to have it rebuilt. At its foot, she paused to call the dog. The dog took one last lingering look at the sea, turned, and ran to join the woman. The two of them started up the hill to the cabin. The dog would go off the road at spots, catching the scent of some nighttime creature’s journey. The woman remembered how one summer the dog had returned to the cabin with a nose full of porcupine quills. Their removal had been a slow and painful process.

Halfway up the hill, she stopped to rest in the shade of two weathered apple trees that grew on the sea side of the road, remnants of an orchard abandoned over a century before. She looked at the sea again. Shadows were moving over its surface. She glanced up in time to catch their source, a bank of clouds being rapidly blown across the sky. She looked again at the sea. She saw the head of a seal break the water just outside the weir, hoping to find a hole, or to make one, in the weir’s net that would allow it into the area where the herring were trapped, swimming in circles. She remembered how three summers ago the weir’s owner had taken a row-boat into the center of the weir and spent the afternoon shooting seals, protecting his livelihood he had said. In her mind, she could still see the shiny black bodies of the seals floating inside the weir.

She walked up the steps of the cabin’s side porch and entered the kitchen. She hung her hat on a peg behind the kitchen door, took down a colander, put the berries in it, placed it under the faucet, and turned on the water. She interrupted the washing to fill and drink a cup of the cold well water. She shook the colander, put the berries in a bowl, poured some cream on them, and walked through the cabin’s front room out onto the porch that faced the sea. She sat down in the middle of a bench that ran the length of the porch along the cabin’s rear wall, and began to eat the berries. She would pause at intervals to breathe deeply. She loved the smell of the sea air, its feel, the afternoon light.

Finished, she placed the bowl on the bench beside her and walked
to a large wooden cable spool, turned on its side at the far end of the porch. The spool had washed up on the beach years ago and she and a friend had rolled it up the road to the cabin to serve as a table. Beneath it, against the wall, was a hardwood box containing her sketchpad, some drawing pencils, a set of paints, brushes, a palette, and various sized canvas boards. She removed the sketchpad and took out a pencil. She sat down on the bench, looked at the sea, and began to sketch. She quickly outlined several views. At last, satisfied with one, she set up her easel and began to paint.

The dog lay on his side sleeping, dreaming of chasing gulls. At times his legs would twitch, remembering the shock of the cold water. Inside the cabin, the phone rang, but the woman, focused on her painting, did not hear it. She worked all afternoon, until twilight, when all she could see were the outlines of trees on the far side of the bay, and the last bits of sunlight reflected on the water. Her back ached. She rose, stretched, and put away the paints and brushes. When done, she roused the dog.

“Time to go inside,” she said. “It’s getting cold out here.”

The dog opened his eyes, but did not move at first. He yawned, stretched and only then rose. The woman held open the door for him. Following the dog, she entered, walked across the unlit room, and placed her painting on the fireplace mantle. The red light on the phone was blinking. She switched on a lamp. There was a message from Richard asking her to call him. She didn’t want to call him. He always needed something—something she didn’t have, couldn’t do, couldn’t say, didn’t know, didn’t feel.

She built a fire, and poured herself a glass of wine. It was always easier to speak with Richard with a glass of wine. She sat down in the chair by the fireplace. She didn’t want to call him, but didn’t know how not to. She picked up the phone, and pushed callback.

“Hello?”

“Richard, it’s Karen.”

“Thanks for calling me back,” he said.
“What do you need?”
“Do I have to need something to call you?”
“No, but usually you do need something.”
“Well, this time I don’t need anything,” he said. She could hear his breathing. “I was wondering, though.” He paused. “Do you mind if I ask you a question?”
“Not as long as I don’t have to answer it.”
“Fair enough,” he said. “Did you ever paint the field, the one that...?”
“No. I didn’t.”
“Why?”
“That’s a different question,” she said.
“Well...”
“I don’t know.”
“Could it be because I wanted you to?”
“Richard, I just told you I don’t know. I don’t know why.”
“Karen, I can pay you for it. It would mean a lot to me.”
“Richard, I don’t want any money from you. I haven’t painted the field. If I do, I’ll let you know. Look...I’m tired. I really need to get some rest.”
“Sure. You’ll let me know?”
“Yes. I’ll let you know.”
“Thanks Karen. Good to hear your voice. Good night.”

She hung up. She sat, sipping her wine, for a long time. She didn’t know why: why she always called him back, why she had painted the field, why she couldn’t tell him. She reached into the basket beside her chair and pulled out a photo album. It was Richard’s and her wedding album. She turned to the picture of the two of them leaving the hall after the wedding. She had changed into her gray traveling suit. Richard was still wearing his navy blue suit, the one her mother had picked out for him. She looked at Richard. What had happened? She didn’t know. She felt like she didn’t know anything.

She closed the album, and put it back in the basket, rose and switched
off the lamp. Crossing the room in the dark, she passed through the kitchen, and turned on the hall light. She walked past her bedroom, to a room at the end of the hall where she kept her paintings. Pushing open the door, she turned on the light. In the center of the room, on an easel, was a painting in gold, and green, and blue, and yellow, and red, and brown. She looked at it for several minutes. The dog came to her side and pushed his nose against her hand. She looked down.

“Ready for bed are you?”

The dog wagged his tail. The woman turned off the light and pulled the door shut. In her bedroom, she undressed. Before lying down, she pushed open the sliding window. The air was cold. She could hear the waves against the rocks on the beach. She could taste the sea. She lay down and pulled the comforter over her. Through the open window came the long mournful wail of a loon on the Point’s lake calling its mate. She turned her face to the window, and listened.
And then at times
the dips of our marriage are
no different than the falling
into love in Richmond Park
before we started home, and I
wrote every day until the motion
of the ship made me certain that
for every berth going out,
new souls put in, spit from
foam. If I could read Greek or
understand the errand of the
cardinal we watch for with coffee
in our hands, I could make poetry
on the tips of fence spears where
he stops and the fire of you would
go urgently from land to land.
PLEASE

by Gayane M. Haroutyunyan

I woke up one day
My dress had left without me
It trotted the streets looking for people
Dressed in white
And cigarette butts
Until a small puddle invited it in

Just when I was about to name my poem
It came back wet and wrinkly
And sat on my bed

It did not tell me what happened
Cried unstoppably
Asked for a warm apple
And life advice
A heart can’t take a stained white dress,
a pair of empty shoes, and a small bird
so why are you writing them
into your poems?

Take a violin,
a window, a single string
and find a melody that speaks
about the vacuum that silence
will bear gladly.

Call it “a poem with a name”
let the reader wonder,
if something is missing from the page
and if a lonely woman is sitting there
waiting for you to finish it.
You awake with a groan. Your windows are open and a ticking sound is wafting through the screen. Someone is hoisting a ladder. You glance at the red numbers on the clock next to you: 6:48. You have the day off and you wanted to sleep in.

On the edge of your bed, your dog is panting next to your arm. You shove her aside and place your feet on the floor. Fully awake. Disgusted.

The hardwood floor feels cool on the soles of your feet. The dog’s tail wags. You take three steps to the window. Her tail slows down. You live in a Baltimore rowhouse and you can see eleven homes across the street from your bedroom window. The house furthest from you on your left has a crowd of men walking on the roof. Two of them are crouched near the peaked top that slants toward you. You hear hammering as you step back and the dog jumps up, placing her paws on your chest. You push her off.

Your disgust at the hammering masks an awkward, uncomfortable
ache. Like a tooth that is throbbing. You think of the call you got last night when you pulled the back door closed, home from work.

Your stomach flipped. You knew why he was calling.

You used to think only of him.

At a Halloween party four years ago, you saw the woman who became his wife. She was a ballerina. He wore a tuxedo and a gorilla mask. You were in a leopard leotard, orange/yellow with black spots, black velvet cat ears and a tail.

- 

Downstairs, you feed the dog and take two calcium tablets with vitamin D, wondering if they really do prevent osteoporosis. You put the dog’s leash on and open the front door.

The pansies in a pot on the porch’s top step have grown stringy, yellow. The blooms are almost gone. But the impatiens you planted are starting to spread and bloom. The grass in your front yard looks tidy, too. You smile. But the roofers across the street are hammering. You count at least four of them. It is an end-of-group house, which means there is more of a roof to cover.

You follow your dog, your eyes on the pavement. No one else is out. Passing the house replacing its roof, you turn the corner. The roofers have parked their truck on the side street and a fifth roofer heads toward you with a big box in his arms. He has a cigarette between his lips. As he passes you, smelling of perspiration, he nods, “Good morning.” The smoke stings your eyes.

You do not reply.

Warm summer mornings usually cheer you. The silence of the winter has ended. Birds of different voices accompany you. But the roofers’ hammers are echoing and the sound follows you. Exhaustion creeps. You notice an unpleasant taste in your mouth. Stale. Smokey. Running your tongue along the back of your teeth, you taste decay. Rot.
On the phone, he asked, “Get a cocktail?” You wanted to say no, but you didn’t. While you hesitated, he told you when he would pick you up.

You took a quick shower. Blew your hair dry. Found something to wear that you thought made you look good. Thin. Younger.

In a quaint, one room tavern, you sat at a small, round table. The tavern had stucco walls and a string of little white lights draped along the ceiling. A couple, both with long hair—his gray and tied in a ponytail, hers dyed a deep red—were sitting two tables away. A heavy, doughy looking man sat with them, talking, gesturing with both hands. The three of them were sharing a bottle of wine.

The man in the gray ponytail put his arm along the woman’s shoulders. She did not appear to notice. She was looking at the doughy man on the other side of the table. You could see lines around her eyes. She was older than you, but she was still beautiful.

You walk with your dog along the cement alley next to a vast lawn that used to be part of a farm. No rowhouses are built on this one track of bright green. It has several shady trees, some ancient. The dog stops at one, then another of the wooden posts that line the edge of the lawn. A wire has been threaded through the wooden posts, separating the grass from the concrete.

“C’mon,” you growl at the dog, yanking on her leash.

The hammering on the roof is like a loud insect, except an insect’s hum is soothing. You round the corner, turn back up your street. Every morning, you take this quick walk. It helps ground you, keeps you from
thinking about the end of life that you see at work. The boredom. The loneliness. You took the job because you needed one and you thought it would be easy. That the pay was decent.

A new patient, Ian, has Alzheimer’s that is so advanced he now has the mind of a two-year-old. You know he was an aeronautics engineer from his application. Now, he says only letters, B, D, G and sometimes numbers, wheeling himself around the common area, bumping into the cupboard with all the DVD’s and books and jigsaw puzzles. His wheels leave black marks on the cupboards’ white wooden doors. You had to wheel him away from another patient, Louise, who sits every day at one of the tables, crying for you not to leave her.

On your front path, you unclip the leash from your dog’s collar and she bounds up the steps of your porch. Your *New York Times* is in a blue plastic bag and you pick it up.

At the tavern last night, he stood to buy you a second beer and the woman with red hair watched him. You glanced at him, too. Good-looking, he wore khakis and a short sleeved polo shirt. No belly hung over his belt and you know that his chest is covered in fine, blonde hair.

You watched the red haired woman. When she turned her eyes on you, you smiled at her. She did not smile back.

Your second glass of beer was almost gone and he had finished his when he said, “I think of you every time I go outside by my patio.” You remember that he had invited you to his house when his wife and young daughter were at the beach.

The warmth covered you from his comment; from the alcohol. You fought it, “Don’t.”

“Every time,” he stroked your hand which was resting on the edge of the table. “I think of you, how you – you know – “ he continued. “It happens every time I go out there.”
“Huh.”

“I placed the grille where we had that lawn chair. I look down at the patio’s stones and think of your panties,” he whispered the word, panties.

You pulled your hand out from under his, sat up straight in the chair. Glancing around, you did not smile.

The long haired couple rose. The woman took two steps, standing next to your married man. “You look so familiar to me,” she said.

You did not look at her, you watched him. He did not speak, smile.

“Are you—” The name she mentioned was not his. You could tell he was relieved. He shook his head and he did not introduce himself.

“I’m Chloé,” she lifted a small, white hand. Several bangles jiggled as she offered it to him.

“Pleased to meet you, Chloé,” he took her hand and gently dropped it.

“My husband,” she murmured as the gray haired guy with the ponytail nodded from behind the doughy guy who faced you. They encircled your married man, who shrugged at you.

“I’m Mary,” you lied. “And this is Joe, my husband.”

He followed your gaze and turned, nodding at everyone.

“Nice to meet you,” Chloé said. “I could have sworn you were—”

“C’mon, Chloé. Leave these folks alone,” her husband covered Chloé’s shoulder again with his hand.

You watched the bartender saunter over to your table. “Last call,” he said, wiping his hands on the long, black apron tied around his waist.

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You can smell coffee brewing when you close the front door behind you and the dog. You move quickly, plucking the carton of light cream from the refrigerator, pouring it into a ceramic mug and adding the coffee. With the New York Times under your left arm, you open the back door, take a seat in a mesh chair. You pull another in front of you to
rest your legs. A large, canvass umbrella and a fringe tree filter the bright sky above you.

No one else in the houses on either side of you is up yet. The dog rests on her side on the boards of the deck. The roofers’ hammering is filtered by your house—behind you—and it is softer. You glance down at the dog who is snoring. The sound is comforting. You take a sip of coffee. Hot. Hazelnut. Satisfying. You open the paper. You know if you move your legs off the chair, your dog’s eyes will pop open, watching you.

You cannot think of anyone to whom you could give your dog. You are always stuck on this. Sometimes, the effort to think from one minute to the next is so tiring, you want to simply stop. Before you wind up in a place like the one in which you work, you think of turning the car on inside the garage with Bob Dylan’s “I Want You” playing, over and over.

The woman who sits and cries, Louise, has a paid companion. The companion takes the seat next to her; tries to talk to her. Feed her. Louise will mumble Betty between sobs and you know that is her daughter’s name. Louise’s face crumbles and her cheeks grow wet when she cries. The companion—at twenty dollars an hour—pats her shoulder. She is kind. She pretends to care.

Somewhere in the alley, you can hear a neighbor pulling a trash can. You are invisible. No one knows you are out here. You are insignificant.

You hear more neighbors. A child is whining and his father shouts: Tyler. You hold the newspaper in your fingers. Nothing catches your interest. The air has grown hot. Your t-shirt sticks to your skin.

A truck rumbles in the alley behind your house. You see it beyond the mulberry tree at the end of your yard. You cannot read the signage on the side of the truck. The leaves from your mulberry tree obscure it. It passes your garage and stops just beyond it. The driver gets out and opens the gate to the yard of the neighbor who shares your east wall. Ladders are hauled and propped four yards from where you sit with your coffee and New York Times. You get up. A tsk escapes as you gather the newspaper and replace the mesh chairs under the table.
Sitting next to your married man in his car felt both familiar and sickening. He had the top down. He drove a convertible. Though he had told you his wife and daughter were at the beach, again, he did not drive you to his house. Instead, he parked on a tree lined road in the neighborhood that surrounds a country club.

“I’ve gotta’ drop off my dues,” he said, reaching over you to the glove compartment and opening it. He retrieved an envelope and opened his car door, “Stay here.”

You listened to the crickets echo. You could see a large porch with four white pillars beyond the leaves of the trees next to you. Behind you was a tall stucco wall that shielded the country club’s driveway. On the other side of the street was a building with a brick archway.

When he returned, he folded his arms in the driver’s side window frame, “C’mon. I want to show you something.”

You opened your door and stepped onto cool, wet grass.

“This is like a place I saw in Europe once,” he told you. “You won’t believe you are in Baltimore.”

You followed him. Curious. Under the brick arch, you walked on a path of flagstone. He was in front of you. You watched the muscles in his back beneath the combed cotton of his shirt. They were firm. His shirt fit his shoulders well.

“Do you know someone who lives here?” you asked. “It looks like F. Scott Fitzgerald could have.”

“It dates back to that era,” he whispered, turning; one finger on his lips.

In front of you were elegant rows of French doors lined up; one over the other. Five stories tall. You stood in a courtyard with a lawn and three wrought iron tables. A fountain, which splashed next to you, was centered in the lawn near the wrought iron chairs and tables. The flag-
stone path circled the fountain. It ended at a high brick wall. A bench was placed at the end of the path, in front of the wall. It was framed in green leaves and you sat down.

The moon was bright and he pointed it out to you before he kissed you. His teeth bumped yours. You could taste the salt of his saliva. You held your breath. Your head ached.

You thought of the night when you lay beside him under his sheets. They did not feel fresh, but you could tell they were good quality. You had promised yourself you would not say anything. You knew he’d chosen another.

You remembered that you had seen his profile—the sharp, straight nose; the squint in his eyes when he sucked on his cigarette—standing at the bar. It was late. You were alone. You had gone for a beer, knowing it was the same place at which you had first met him. You hadn’t seen him since the Halloween party. He had not called. When you saw him at the bar, you thought it was a sign. Your heart thumped. Hard. You could feel it in your ears.

You knew he’d buy you a beer. And he did. He did not seem anxious to leave. You leaned on the bar, let the cool liquid fill your mouth and swallowed. Smiled. He sat down on a high stool next to you. Resting his head in his palm, he smiled at you, “Want to follow me home?”

Your stomach pinched and you took short, shallow breaths.

He drove his sporty little car with the top down. You played Dylan’s “I Want You” and sang along behind him in your Honda Civic.

By the fountain, you pulled back from his kiss. In the moon’s bright light, you could see his eyes were still closed.

“How did you sleep with me that night, before your wedding?”

“What?” he opened his eyes.

“How did you marry her instead of me?”

He shook his head. Stood up. You watched him walk away from you.
Inside, by your refrigerator, you can hear the hammering from across the street. It is steady, annoying. The gutter workers are talking—loudly. The smoke from their cigarettes filters through the screen door of your kitchen, sour in your throat.

You grab the car keys from a basket on the counter, let the dog out and ignore the gutter guys above you as you hop down the back steps to your garage. You think of the stringy pansies on your front porch and decide to replace them with begonias.

A planter of begonias was on the counter of the nurses’ station when you arrived at work yesterday. They were from the son of a cancer patient. The patient’s daughter comes with her dad every afternoon to visit her. Her mother is in a wheelchair, she is at risk of falling. But her husband tries to help her each time she wants to get up. The daughter will stop him, come out of her mother’s room and stand at the nurses’ station, waving her arms, “Please, my mother needs help.”

You will follow the daughter back into the room, slide the bathroom door shut behind her mother’s wheelchair and wrap your arms around her. She will drape hers around you so you can lift her from her wheelchair and help her onto the toilet. With the bathroom door closed, her husband and daughter do not witness her indignity.

You are getting used to shit, drool, vomit and adult diapers. The nurses and the nurses’ assistants to not move from their posts when someone’s light blinks above a door. They nod at you, the aide, to do it.

You open the car’s back door and let your dog leap onto the seat. When you swing your garage doors open, there is a large, flat, white strip of a gutter on the cement where you will run it over. You pick it up and the edge is so sharp, it slices your index finger. Blood splashes on your shirt. You shove your finger in your mouth and suck blood as you open the driver’s side door with your other hand and slide onto the seat. When the car starts, you glance at the digits on your dashboard, wondering if the nursery is open. It is not yet nine o’clock.
You know where the brick arched apartment building is and decide to drive by it, killing time until you can purchase the begonias. You think of how you should still be sleeping; oblivious. The ride home last night with him was silent. Miserable. He did not park at your curb; follow you up your front porch. He did not take you to his empty house, either.

The arched brick apartment building is ten minutes away. You find the street on which he parked and turn onto it.

You lift your foot off the gas and press the brake, recognizing his convertible. Your heart pounding, you pass it and park on the opposite side of the street. Your dog pants, her nose is next to your head and you stroke her ear; ignoring the pain in your stomach, your urge to use a toilet. You take deep breaths, looking at his car in your rearview mirror. Beside it is the beautiful brick apartment building. You turn to look at the arch again. Your dog licks the glass above the door on the back seat.

You think he must be playing golf and wonder if you should wait for him. Tell him you are sorry. You crave the rough bristles on his cheek. The way they burn when he kisses you, rubbing them on your cheeks, your lips. When his skin touches yours and your sweat mixes, you own him. He tells you that his mother dusted him with baby powder on hot nights when he was little. That the melanoma on his blonde shoulder was caught in time, but it still worries him. That he’s lost the passion for the mortgage company he started with his brother.

In the rear view mirror, you see the red haired woman from the tavern last night—Chloé—walking under the brick archway. You sit up, the dog panting behind you. You can feel her breath on your ear as you watch Chloé step carefully; lightly, turning her head from left to right before she crosses the street. You duck so she cannot see you. The dog whines, sniffing at the space between your two front seats.

When you hear an engine ignite and the crunch of tires, you lift your head and watch a dusty, black Volvo station wagon pull into the street. You look at the brick archway again. There stands your married man. He is watching the red haired woman drive away. Your dog barks. Loud.
Startling.

He turns from her car to yours. You can hear his car keys dangling in his hand.
For three long days he had been riding along the dunes where pale thistles flowered. Not one sail whitened the horizon: from dawn till dusk, there was the monotone expanse of a calm sea, an unruffled sea the color of slate beneath the dismal glare of a white sky. Sometimes his horse would suddenly skid to a halt and neigh at the sea; and in a silken startling of wings some gulls disturbed from a hole in the cliff would whirl high up in the air, then disappear, and the red sand would ripple with their shadow.

And the young man would not even lift his head. With his brow furrowed beneath the outstretched eagle wings on his helmet, he was making his way, deep in thought, along the foot of the cliff, a high wall of schist running for leagues beside the sad sea. Some dried grasses of a mauve hue hung like hair halfway up the side of the rock, dead hair, inhabited only by a few rare sea birds.

In the evenings the cliffs turned pink, even the dunes were set alight by the fire of the sunset, and the young man would dismount and leave
his horse to graze the blue thistles of the sands and seek to stave off his own thirst, his hunger too, by biting the salty flesh from a few shells. And then, beneath the rising moon, he would continue on his way.

In the cloister where he had been raised under the command of the queen, his mother, he had taken a vow to find, dead or alive, the fair haired knight to whom he owed his birth: Bertram was the fruit of a sin. The bastard child of the Queen of Aquitaine’s fornication had been nurtured and nourished by her, even as an adulterous princess, as the idea of vengeance: she had sworn that the son of her affair would be made to find the unfaithful lover who had abandoned her. The young prince had grown up in a convent of Barnabites; the queen had taken charge of his education, invisible, masked, unknown to this son whom she destined to a tragic end. The monks had raised the child harshly in the hatred of the love of women and of all that laughs and flowers under the sun. Fasting and prayer had hardened the soul of this son of a queen, who wore a hair shirt under his damascened armor and a triple cord of hemp tied round his waist. And then, one fine morning, bewitched by a magic potion, the palms of his hands and soles of his feet rubbed with the blood of a she-wolf, the young avenger was released into the countryside.

“You will recognize the man who made your childhood bleak and vexed by the triple emerald glowing in its setting on the crest of his helmet. Whether his hair be snow white or golden, strike and kill, and you will have avenged your humiliated life, your mother, your race and your God.”

The fateful words were pronounced in a dream voice, in the very chapel of the convent where he had spent the eve of this battle. A form concealed in the shadows had dictated the judgement, and the next day at dawn Bertram had gone into the country, gloved, breast plated, masked in nielloed silver from his helmet’s crest to the star of his spurs, and above his morion was the tawny gold double flash of an enormous eagle beating its wings.

Up in the convent’s bell tower, a woman had long been watching
him in the flush of the burgeoning day. When the silhouette of the young adventurer had vanished into the distant heather, the queen had gone and prostrated herself before the high altar where nightfall found her still muttering and praying.

And now as he was riding beneath moonlight that silvered the calm sea, the memory of strange encounters oppressed the young warrior.

At first it had been, on the third evening after his departure from the cloister, a vision of three young girls at the edge of the wood, the three daughters of the old lord as they had called themselves when greeting him familiarly by his name. Sitting at the entrance of the forest, they had stood up at the sight of him and tried to garland his palfrey’s bridle with flowers. They were inviting and cheerful with hoods of anemones over their swinging braids and they seemed naked under their new tunics of leaf patterned silk. Standing in the dew, the group had surrounded him like a circle of nimble dancers, and with their bearing, the caress of their eyes and voices, and their cool, supple arms, they had tried to keep him there. But he had brutally driven his horse onward at the risk of knocking them over—prairie elves have a habit of appearing to travelers like this in the evening—and he had gone full tilt beneath the boughs, wild and deliberately deaf to their appeal.

He had ridden for two nights and two days in the oak forest, and then the high shady treetops had given way to broad clearings, and the clearings to mournful plains traversed by screens of aspen. Ponds sparkled among the tall grasses, and mists drifted night and day, weaving what seemed to be shrouds around equivocal willow trunks. Then he had entered a region of peat bogs and pale marshes where blackish soil yielded underfoot; and one moonless night as he rode alongside one of these grim swamps, his palfrey suddenly reared up under him and Bertram looked up and saw, standing on the leaden water, a supernatural, livid, nude.

It was a woman’s body of an alarming pallor, but her eyes and her smile were filled with a strange ecstasy. She had emerged like a will o’ the
wisp above a clump of water lilies, smiling drunkenly, as though contorted in a spasm, her breasts rearing up, her mouth open, a small silver mirror in her hand.

A freak moon had sprung up in the same moment behind the willow plantation, and the woman, blessed in death and glinting like mother-of-pearl, blocked the young man’s passage, offering him both her bluish mouth and the mirror’s image. An old willow, its branches lopped, had suddenly reflected in the pond as the figure of a faun, and when the young warrior had pushed away the wanton corpse in horror, an enormous frog jumped from the grass and dived with a dull thud into the deathly pale water.

And Bertram, walking along the sands, thought about all these magic spells, all these traps and illusions. What did they want from him, these masks from the shadows, these wandering figures of the night, and what was the symbol of all these temptations?

And he became aware that a silent galley, of which he had perceived neither a rustling of sails nor a beating of oars, was bordering the shore at the same time as he. The tall masts, the rigging and yards were transparent against the darkness, and it looked like a dream ship, for it did not so much cleave through the waves as glide over the water, and everything on board seemed to be sleeping a deep sleep. Not one sailor on the bridge. Abandoned vessel, or ghost ship? The waves did not even lap about its sides, and the ashen galley proceeded mysteriously side by side with him, and Bertram would have believed he had been tricked by another vision if he had not discerned, leaning on the prow, a motionless old man, the pilot no doubt, his fingers tormenting a lyre, but an enchanted lyre, for the chords he touched made no sound.

And with daylight Bertram found himself in a region of undulations and small hills broken by quickset hedges and apple orchards: the ghost ship, the pink sandy shore and the high cliff had vanished, and the young adventurer, starting to think nothing could surprise him, spurred his horse on across the pastures and hawthorn hedges of this orchard
country. Here was the most profound solitude; he could sense the close-
ness of the sea by the hue of the sky swept free of clouds, and the apple 
trees twisted by the wind, and he had already been riding for five long 
hours on a type of sunken path when a beautiful woman appeared to 
him. She was wearing brocade wrought with aspen leaves, and slender 
and straight as a lily she was riding bareback on a unicorn, an elegant 
and fabulous dream beast, its hair gleaming like metal. The lady on the 
unicorn was wearing on her black hair a gold helmet surmounted by a 
small crown and, like a knight, she held a lance couched at the ready.

She blocked the young Sire’s passage, and while threatening him 
with her lance, she gave the lie to her evil intention with a smile, showing 
Bertram an enormous red rose bleeding at her waist. But he had nothing 
but murder on his mind. With the back of his sword he pushed aside the 
beautiful warrior’s fine steel lance and ignored her.

As he passed by, the beautiful lady whipped his face with the rose 
from her gorget, but it was a dry rose, its petals falling, and the young 
man, having turned round in surprise, saw nothing but an old woman 
galloping away on a donkey. ‘Yet another of the Devil’s traps!’ he thought 
to himself, and he continued along the road, a little sadder, a little more 
weary.

Finally he arrived at a sort of inn. A pine branch shaded the door and 
three beautiful girls were standing before the threshold. Their breasts free 
in short homespun gowns, bareheaded and barefoot, they were laughing 
heartily in the crepuscular heat: one was spinning at the distaff; another, 
leaning over a stone trough, was retting hemp; and the third, at sight of 
the young man, rushed back into the inn but emerged again with a jug 
of wine. She offered Bertram a drink and the other two urged him to dis-
mount.

They smelled of sweat, of bread and lavender, but Bertram pushed 
them away. With peals of laughter they went back inside, closed the door 
of the inn, and the young man remained alone on the high road.

Now, his mount had gone over to the trough to drink and, as the
palfrey was quenching its thirst, Bertram, who had leaned forward, cried out.

The royal adventurer had just appeared to himself, the depths of the trough had become a mirror, and it was the face of an old man that smiled at him, the face of an old warrior with a long gray beard, his gaze weary and sad, his smile forgiving, a wan face from the past girt by a golden helmet where three emeralds glistened like tears, and Bertram recognized the man whom he had to strike down. It was himself, then, whom he had to kill by striking his image, and, his heart heavy with the deepest sorrow, Bertram understood that he had grown old. This gray hair was his, and these lifeless eyes, alas, had become his eyes, and he understood, too late, that he had pursued an impossible adventure. Life should be lived without scorning love, lust, pleasure or even the passing opportunity, and he had let himself be deluded by a deceptive mirage, like the pilot of the silent ship … And now it was no use thinking of turning back … for every hour flees, and cannot be redeemed.
Jean Lorrain (1855-1906) was a French author and judgemental spectator of fin-de-siècle decadence. He was renowned for his flamboyant homosexuality and an addiction to ether. Though admired in his lifetime for his literary achievements, many loathed him for his sarcastic analyses of Belle Époque morals and feared him for his caustic humor and journalistic attacks on leading figures. Critics have often focused on his eccentricities at the expense of his works which portray his society and its obsessive fears.
Editors’ Note

Useless Virtue and the Cultural Commons

By Kyle Roush

When not editing this journal, I am often known to dabble in law. In that area, my training, experience and interest tend to run toward intellectual property law as it relates to arts—to copyright and to trademark. Within this area, one of the most significant if not sacred concepts is that of the public domain. From this vantage, I was so happy to receive this story for a number of reasons. Of course, there is the fundamental worth of the story itself, an interesting, polyvalent tale spun by Monsieur Lorrain, as beautifully translated by Patricia Worth. But beyond its intrinsic merit, “Useless Virtue”—what it is, what it represents—appealed to me as a wonderful example of the necessity of our cultural commons. With this note, I humbly wish to highlight the wonder embedded in the very being of this piece.

The public domain is crucial to the flow and progress of culture, for the enlightenment of individuals, and very fundamentally, for all of us to become our best selves. We build on what has come before, and touchstone works form our common language as much as any discrete words, giving shape and structure to the way we see the world, granting precision and clarity to those who wish to better understand the world, putting powerful tools in the hands of those who would create and expand beyond the world that is. Without those reference points, we lose some of our ability to understand and engage with who we are, and to create and shape who we want to be.

There are of course many worthy arguments behind the concept of copyright, and the debate over appropriate lines and measures is one
I will not enter here; I only wish to make my case for this work as an important exemplar of what’s at stake therein.

With this piece, a man in France reaches into the deep history of his native culture, to the stories, symbols, and modes through which ancients saw themselves, as curated and reimagined by his own present. He twists those materials to new meaning, adding layers of critique and concept that rely, intrinsically, on the possibility of conversation between and among past and present. And then, the work lies dormant for a century, until another artist, living quite literally across the globe, of a different language, of a different culture, decides to give it new life. Translation is collaboration, each participant bringing new meaning and new vision, and here that meeting of the minds takes place across vast oceans, not merely of salt brine, but of time itself. It is a conversation across time and across history, and as we read it, here and now, it becomes yet another building block, yet another entry in our own lexicon, as yet another lens to shape our own understanding.

I believe that at bottom, in all of us who value story and writing, there is in some fashion or other an ache for the experience of wonderment. That will often come from the achievement and aesthetics of a work itself. It may come, too, from valences of meaning beyond the words on a page. This wonderful story, as composed by Jean Lorrain and sculpted by Patricia Worth, affords us a superb chance to remember that.
Dusting the wooden edges and cardboard backs of all these hanging photographs, I can cite the dates and places where I took them, though only because I recognize the background waterfall, the beach hut, the ages of my children trapped in glass.

But I can’t recall the sun on my arms, the low tide’s sulphur bite, or the arrangement of desires and fears that formed the composition of those days.

If I could somehow burnish these brown fiber boards to a smooth translucence, I might look from their angle and see who these people smiled at years ago--a shadow enclosing moments in his lens, a silhouette unframed, fixed yet missing.
A Garage in Summer

by Kevin Casey

The shrill buzz of cicadas would send
my grandparents sheltering from the heat
to lawnchairs in the darkened doorway
of their garage. And from that cave they watched
us play hopscotch and jumprope on the tongue
of hot tar that lolled out to the road.

We had grown out of those games and toys
by the time our grandfather died, although
grandmother still whiled away her summer days
in the mouth of the garage, her form
dissolving into its cool shadows
as the afternoons settled to evening,
and the radiance of the cicadas’ call
dimmed to the crickets’ furtive glimmer.
I guess that I should’ve figured that it would still be on the menu. I mean, the menu looked the same as always, but I guess that I expected them to draw a line through the Bobby. That happened with a Chinese restaurant my family sometimes goes to. I think they used to have a different kind of egg roll, and they took it off the menu, but they didn’t want to print all new menus, so they just crossed it off every copy. But this is different. There’s “The Bobby”, right under “The Sarah”, as usual.

I think my dad sees it too. He asks, “What’s everybody getting today?” which he always does, but he doesn’t really look around at us. He keeps staring at the menu. I look to Mom, who’s also looking at the menu, not answering. They’ve both said that Bobby’s death was horrible, but I think it’s just something that they say. I don’t know if either of them could have said anything about who Bobby was. Not that I can either.

Even before Bobby killed himself a few weeks ago, the Bobby was never that popular of a sandwich, kind of like Bobby. I don’t think that Mr. Thompson called the sandwich the Bobby to be mean. He was trying
to name all of the sandwiches after his kids in ways that made sense, I think. The Bobby is bologna and American cheese, layered. It made sense for Bobby. Bobby was a little pudgy, and he was one of those kids who ate paste in grade school. I’m not saying it to be mean, he just did. Though I guess that me knowing that he was a paste eater is at least kind of mean. Or, everybody in school agreeing that we should know him as a paste eater is what was mean, and I didn’t do anything to stop it.

“I’m getting the Craig,” Mom says. Turkey, provolone, tomato and basil. It’s a pretty good sandwich, but I won’t eat it ever since Craig Thompson told Jennie Krotz that she was a total psycho and that he didn’t want to be seen around school with her. She is a little weird, but just about everybody is weird, and Craig was just mad that she wouldn’t have sex with him. What kind of asshole goes off on someone like that just for not putting out?

“The Craig is pretty good,” Dad says. “What about you, kids?”

Tony shrugs. Tony isn’t a picky eater so much as he is a complainy eater. “They should serve burgers here,” he says.

That’s exactly what I mean, and then Dad acts exactly like Dad. “Well,” he says, “that won’t happen any time soon. What are you getting today?”

I just stare at the menu. It’s hard to imagine poor Bobby. If there is an afterlife, then what does he think about his suicide? Does he regret it? I look at Tony. I’m not sure if he would really get what regret is. Tony’s not a bad guy, but he sits in his room and listens to crappy music, probably while beating off. That’s not a guy who thinks about whether or not a paste eater is going to kill himself.

Tony sets his menu down and doesn’t look at Dad. “I’ll have the Cindy.” Tony thinks that’s a high-protein meal, but it’s just expensive, and Cindy is stuck up, which I guess makes sense. Or maybe I just never got to know her. I’d feel bad if she killed herself, too. Though I guess that if you think about it, I’m not sure why I should. She never did anything for me, and she never really was nice to her own brother, from what I can
tell. Either way, Tony tries to be do things like eat high-protein meals sometimes, but mostly he’s just kind of pale and with just a little bit of pudge. I guess I’m not really there for my brother either, but I don’t think that he’ll kill himself.

Dad sets his menu down. Dad’s wearing that blue polo today. The one that Mom always tells him is faded and he tells her is comfortable. That’s a conversation that could make you want to die. If that’s what’s ahead of you, two teenage kids, a mediocre restaurant and arguments about faded polos, then why bother? But maybe I’m just feeling that way because of Bobby. Maybe I’d feel differently if Bobby was alive and invisible and I was having pizza at a friend’s house while Bobby suffers by himself. It makes you think.

“I’ll have the Cindy, too”, says Dad, which is a little weird, but not that much. Dad eats a variety of sandwiches. I think that he has a pattern or system for deciding what he’ll eat, but I haven’t figured it out yet. Not that I’ve given it all that much thought. It’s been awhile since he’s had a Cindy, so he might be due, but it seems more like he’s siding with Tony. Or maybe in the creepiness from Bobby being dead, he just wants to be with someone in his sandwich decision. I look to Mom, and she’s looking at me, a half smile on her face. It actually makes her look tired. “I’m going with the Bobby,” I say. I try not to flinch or move or anything. It’s hard. I keep my eyes on Mom, but I know that Dad looked up, too. Tony either didn’t catch what I said or he genuinely doesn’t care.

“Have you ever had that before?” Dad asks. That means that he doesn’t want me to order it, but he also doesn’t want to tell me not to order it. Not that knowing that helps me much. It’s like doing really well on an ungraded pretest in school.

“It’s important to try new things,” I say. I can’t tell if my voice sounds sarcastic. It’s hard to pay attention to a bunch of things all at the same time. Dad nods. There’s a little quiet, and we all sit there, being a family in good ways and crappy ways.

Mom says, “Do you like bologna?”
I don’t know if she’s trying to call my bluff, make me eat it if I order it, or if she’s actually curious. “I don’t feel like ham or turkey,” I say.
“There are other options on the menu,” Mom says.
“So I can’t get it?”
Mom shrugs.
Tony says, “I’ll eat it if she doesn’t.”
Dad pushes his menu to the middle of the table. “Trying new things is important, but then again, waste not, want not,” he says. I never really understood that saying. Plus, when Dad says it, I know for sure that he’s not being ironic, even if I’m not 100% sure what it means.
Tony says, “Did you have a thing for Bobby or something?”
My first reaction is to say, “Gross,” but that would be a little too mean, so I just say, “You’re really immature”. Mom and Dad do one of those exchanges of looks that mean that they can communicate without either Tony or me catching on. Like in school when the popular kids can be at their own table and talk to each other. Though that’s not totally fair. The popular kids are together because they got to be together for no good reason, but Mom and Dad are together because they love each other, I guess. Tony and I are together out of dumb luck, like a superhero who gets his powers by falling into some reactor or something.
“I feel bad for him,” I say.
They’re all quiet for a minute. Maybe they’re surprised that I thought about someone else. Or maybe they just didn’t want to talk about Bobby at all.
“That’s nice of you, Honey,” Mom says, “But eating the sandwich won’t help him at all.”
She’s right, but in a crappy way. The waitress comes up to the table. I kind of recognize her. I think she was a cheerleader or something, when she was in high school, but she must be eight or ten years older than me, so I wouldn’t be able to tell you her name or anything. I’m sure she has no idea who I am. “So,” she says, “do we know what we’ll be having, or do we need more time?”
It’s weird that she says “we”. It’s kind of funny, her pretending like she’s a part of our family, but mainly it’s just annoying. Like being with our family is this great thing. Dad looks at me. He thinks that I’m not ready, but he doesn’t really want to send her away, either. Dad is about efficiency. And he probably doesn’t want to open the door for a bigger argument between Mom and me.

Mom doesn’t look at me. She just says, “I think we’re ready.”

Tony goes first. “I’ll have the Cindy.” It’s like he’s already forgotten what I’m ordering.

“And to drink?” the waitress asks.

He looks back at the menu. “Coke.”

My parents give their orders without looking at either me or the waitress. It makes us seem like we’re a family of rich pricks. Like the kind of people who would need to hear the brand of iced tea the restaurant serves or whether or not it’s organic before deciding what they’d drink. The waitress turns to me. “And you?”

“I’ll have the Bobby.”

The waitress’s eyebrows raise, but she writes it down. “Something to drink?” she asks. Not the same thing that she asked Tony. “Coke.”

“I’ll be back with your drinks in just a bit.” She takes the menus and goes to the kitchen. We all sit at the table. Kind of like always, but not quite. I look to Tony. Maybe he knows what he’s doing, going through life sort of oblivious to everything that matters. He doesn’t look at me.

Mom says, “Did they change the tablecloths recently?”

She can’t think that they have, but I guess it’s better than just sitting there, like Dad.

Dad looks down at the table. “Could be. They seem a little less scratched than usual.”

Tony pushes his fingernail into the tablecloth. “Same crap as usual,” he says.

“Anthony,” Mom says. And maybe Mom is glad for Tony’s obliviousness, too. He gives us something to bicker about while we wait. Something other than Bobby to think about.
Tony quits picking at the table, and we go back to being quiet and waiting. I try to figure out the song on the radio. I’m pretty sure that it’s Katy Perry, but I can’t remember the name. Or maybe it’s not Katy Perry.

The waitress comes back with our drinks. “Sandwiches should be up soon,” she says. It seems like she could’ve brought them. They’re just sandwiches, they shouldn’t take that long to make. “Thanks,” Dad says.

And we’re back to sitting silently. And then it’s Miley Cyrus. “Wrecking Ball.” It’s sad that I know that, I guess. “Any tests coming up at school this week?” Mom asks.

Tony shrugs. “There’ll be a review session if there is.”

I wonder if Bobby Thompson ever sweated tests. Maybe that’s part of what pushed him over the edge, or maybe he had other stuff going on so that he never really cared about small stuff like tests. “We have that paper on The Odyssey,” I say. There’s the social studies test, too, but the paper seems more like something that’ll be easy to talk about. Mom and Dad will give advice, and I can just say, “Yeah” or “Thanks.”

Sure enough, Dad says, “The Odyssey. You should write about Penelope.”

“Yeah,” I say.

Mom takes a sip of her drink. “What’s the assignment?”

“We can write about the difference between fate and justice, about what we can learn about people returning from war or about gender and power.”

“A lot to choose from,” Mom says.

“You should write about how weird it is that all the Greek soldiers were queer,” Tony says.

“Tony,” Dad says, “let’s not have that kind of talk.”

“It’s what Mr. Harrold told us,” he says. “And that would be gender and power. Or returning from the war, maybe.”

Tony can only be funny when he’s being stupid. Before Mom and Dad can start harping on Tony too much, the waitress comes back with our sandwiches. “Cindy, Cindy, Craig, and Bobby.” Of course she gives
me mine last.

“Can I get you all anything else?”

My parents tell her no and thank her. I think she takes a quick look
at my sandwich, and the she smiles and leaves. Maybe it really is pretty
rare for someone to actually order the Bobby. I wonder if I’m the first
person to order it since he killed himself. I know that they had a visita-
tion or reception or something here in the restaurant after the funeral,
but I’m not sure if they served any Bobbys. They should have made peo-
ple eat some.

“Well,” Dad says, “let’s tuck in.”

I pick it up and look at the sandwich before taking a bite. It looks
plain. I’m tempted to open it, to pick out the bologna or to check to make
sure that they didn’t spit in it, in case the person who makes the sand-
wich was pissed off that someone ordered a Bobby. But I didn’t do it to
be mean or to make fun. I bring it up to my mouth, and I take a bite of it.
It really does kind of taste like a paste eater. I mean, it’s plain and kind of
sad. I chew it, and I don’t look at my family. It feels sticky as I chew, like
a glob of peanut butter, and I swallow mostly to get it out of my mouth.
It goes down a little hard, and I feel tears coming in my eyes, but just a
little. I’ll take a sip in a minute, but I’m taking a couple more bites first. I’ll
finish this, take some sips, eat my chips. But I have to get this down first.
I have to finish my Bobby.
Kelli Allen’s work has appeared in numerous journals in the US and internationally. She served as Managing Editor of Natural Bridge, is the Poetry Editor for The Lindenwood Review, and directs River Styx’s Hungry Young Poets Series. She is a Professor of Humanities/Creative Writing at Lindenwood University. Her chapbook Some Animals won the 2016 Etchings Press Prize. Her chapbook How We Disappear won the 2016 Damfino Press chapbook award. Her newest full-length arrives from C&R Press 2017. Her poetry collection Otherwise, Soft White Ash arrived from John Gosslee Books in 2012 and was nominated for the Pulitzer Prize. www.kelli-allen.com.

Charles Bane, Jr. is the American author of three collections of poetry including the recent The Ends Of The Earth: Collected Poems (Transcendent Zero Press, 2015 ), and The Ascent Of Feminist Poetry, as well as I Meet Geronimo And Other Stories ( Avignon Press, 2015) and Three Seasons: Writing Donald Hall (Collection of the Houghton Library, Harvard University). He created and contributes to The Meaning of Poetry Series for The Gutenberg Project.


**Kevin Casey’s** work has appeared recently in *Rust+Moth, Valparaiso Poetry Review, Gulf Stream, Chiron Review*, and other publications. His chapbooks are *The wind considers everything* (Flutter Press) and *For the Sake of the Sun* (Red Dashboard). The full-length collection *And Waking...* was published earlier this year by Bottom Dog Press.

**Caryn Coyle** has been writing fiction for a decade. She lives in Baltimore and her fiction has appeared in *The Huffington Post, Cobalt Review, Gargoyle, Three Quarter Review, The Journal* (Santa Fe), *JMWW, The Little Patuxent Review, Loch Raven Review*, and *Midway Journal*, among others. Her work has also been published in the anthologies *City Sages: Baltimore* (City Lit Press, 2010) and *On the Edge* (Missouri State Poetry Society, 2012). She won awards for her fiction from the Maryland Writers Association, the Delmarva Review, the Missouri Writer’s Guild, the New Millennium, and Hidden River Arts.

**Gayane Haroutyunyan** recently graduated from Sarah Lawrence College in New York with an MFA in creative writing.
Zeke Jarvis is an Associate Professor at Eureka College. His work has appeared in Thrice Fiction, Moon City Review, and Posit, among other places. His books include So Anyway... and In A Family Way. His blog can be found at https://zekedotjarvis.wordpress.com/.

Beth Sherman received an MFA in creative writing from Queens College, where she teaches in the English department. Her fiction has been published in The Portland Review, KYSO, Black Fox Literary Magazine, Sandy River Review, Blue Lyra Review, Panoplyzine and Gloom Cupboard and is forthcoming in Delmarva Review and Joyce Quarterly. Her poetry has been published in Hawaii Pacific Review, Hartskill Review, Lime Hawk, Synecdoche, Gyroscope and The Evansville Review, which nominated her poem, “Minor Planets” for a Pushcart Prize this year. She has also written five mystery novels.

Jean Lorrain (1855-1906) was a French author and judgemental spectator of fin-de-siècle decadence. He was renowned for his flamboyant homosexuality and an addiction to ether. Though admired in his lifetime for his literary achievements, many loathed him for his sarcastic analyses of Belle Époque morals and feared him for his caustic humor and journalistic attacks on leading figures. Critics have often focused on his eccentricities at the expense of his works which portray his society and its obsessive fears.

Patricia Worth has a Master of Translation Studies from the Australian National University. She has translated French literature since 2009, with short pieces published in Australian, New Caledonian and US literary journals, including four Jean Lorrain stories in The Brooklyn Rail, Eleven Eleven and Belmont Story Review. Her translation of George Sand’s novel, Spiridion, was published by SUNY Press in March 2015.
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