Michigan State University Libraries Short Édition

Recovery

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Recovery

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Beverly Fishman: Recovery, installation view at the Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum at Michigan State University, 2022. Photo: Evan F. Christopherson/MSU Broad Art Museum. Used with permission.

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NATHAN CURTIS ROBERTS

The Startler

My hands still tremor. I am chopping vegetables for dinner, and I struggle to keep the knife steady. I am deaf in one ear—and the other ear is on its way—so I am easily stalked, exposed prey. My mother is a barefooted assassin, slinking behind me to jab a finger in my ribs. She makes a shout like a child's imitation of a movie martial artist. "Haiyah!" she says, laughing to see me jump.

"One of these days, I'm going to turn around with a knife in my hand and accidentally stab you," I say.

Old age has cooked her brain down to its essence. She had a human personality, a whole complicated stew of it, once, a long time ago. But it boiled away. All that's left of her is this empty intrigue of small ambushes. Her body still clings to her, desiccated and shrinking. She jabs my ribs again, frowning when I make no reaction.

I am irritable. Not in general—irritability is not what will be left of me when my mind has boiled away—but at the moment I am agitated and sweaty, because I have not had a drink in three days. A week ago, all the blood in my veins, which was thinned with vodka, suddenly transmogrified into foamy yellow bile. This is what happens when you drink too much for too long, blood becomes bile, ask anyone, try it yourself. I am no longer a being with a beating heart at its core; now my flesh centers on a gooey liver that struggles onward. When I love, it does not bloom from my bosom, it teeters instead from that other organ, down and off to the side. I was living somewhere else. Not living so much as sleeping. Then I woke up to find myself so filled with foamy yellow bile that it burbled from my mouth and anus. I have come to Utah to dry out, because—because why not, it's a privilege. Every drunk should come to Utah to get sober, stay with my Mormon mother, have the toxins startled out of them. Do it if you get the chance.

The mountains here do not look real. They are real, I know they are, I've seen many of them up close. Great big slabs of rock, rising toward God. But from a distance they look like a lie, a rumor, a bit of gossip whispered to the land by one of the angels. And the land rises up to listen more closely.

When she tells me church gossip about people I will not meet, she speaks loudly and with precision. When she talks about estate planning or dying relatives her voice is mumbled and soft. I lean in close to hear her, and I get another jab to the ribs.

I am the victim of a bully who can barely stand upright in the wind. "What?" I say. "What?" "I can't year you, what?"

"Stop being dramatic," she replies.

Dramatic is what she says when she knows she won't be allowed to say faggot. Stop being dramatic: I've been hearing it since puberty. Stop being a faggot: it's beyond my control. My hands still tremor. Just a little. "When you fall in the shower," I say, "and you're screaming for help, then you'll understand that I'm going deaf."

"Stop being dramatic."

She doesn't fall in the shower, she falls in the kitchen. A geriatric tumble that paints her leg with a port-wine bruise, ankle to hip. In Utah, the doctor's offices are filled with pairs like us: middle-aged child, elderly parent. All the parents have been reduced to their essence. One, in his dotage, turns out to be kindly, a blessing to his people. Another is nothing but nastiness, which is expected, who can blame her. A third is funny—he can't tell a joke, can't get through it, can't remember how it goes, but everything is hilarious to him anyway. He has sores on his face, and he laughs and laughs. My mother sits in her chair in the waiting room with her arms folded. She is unable to sneak up on anyone. The fluorescent lights are glaring and the nurses are keeping an eye out.

Most nights I cook dinner. I prepare the foods she used to make. Meatloaf and mashed potatoes, chicken and rice. She stalks me like a barefooted assassin, and sticks a finger in my ribs. "Haiya!"

“One of these days, I’m going to turn around with a knife in my hand and accidentally stab you,” I say.

“Stop being dramatic.”

I will stab her. You’ll see that I will. It will not be an accident. I will push the kitchen knife into her gut and release the hot steam from inside it. Then I will release the bile from inside mine. Her steam will rise as my bilious foam dribbles to the floor.

“Haiyah,” she says.

“One of these days,” I reply.

I will not stab her. I will only fantasize doing it. Eventually the tremors in my hands will cease. And I will be sober. And no one will notice, because everyone I know here is a Mormon and does not drink.

And I will look out the window, past the garden, past the birds beating wings against thin air. Toward the mountains, which are real but look like whispers.

KATHLEEN MCGOOKEY

Epilogue, Late October

The oak holds its flickering leaves for one more morning. The light no longer trembles when I take a breath, even though a car rattles toward me down the long dirt road. Is it over? What harder part is still to come? A deer pauses but the frayed cornstalks can't hide the sheen of its body. In the field beyond the trees, a sandhill crane ripples a wing. I only see a little motion, dissolving, a little pale flash: I will never have enough eyes.

KATHLEEN MCGOOKEY

February Morning, Self Portrait

as frost on the shingles

as lost school form, crumpled under the table

as smudge on my glasses

as clouds like cotton balls, as the bit of blue peeking through

as nail in the spare tire

as dream in which I write a check to cover the damages

as grocery list, as $100 bill, as broken pencil with no eraser

as wet laundry, forgotten in the washer

as surgeon's scalpel, incision blooming behind me

not as hawk gliding through the dawn

no, not as dawn, indigo softening to gray

not as dead deer, head twisted in the gravel at the side of the road

but maybe as steam rising from sun-warmed shingles, roof dappled
with shadow

maybe as white jet drawing a line across the sky, stitching clouds
together

ALLYSON DAVIDSON

Padre Island Daybreak Meditation

Gulf waves
rumble in
hush - crash
trickle - slide
out to sea

gulls, white dots
between island
and ocean —
twig legs tuck
up and back

wings unfold
— lift —
— hover —
— glide —
back to the line

shells in flotillas
arrive on a swell
hues, fawn to pearl
soft on the glisten
depart on a roll

water surrounds ankles
toes melt into sand
layers shred
tatters peel away
on a breeze

Gulf waves
rumble in
hush - crash
trickle - slide
out to sea

MICHAEL HAMMERLE

Hotel Florida

When I got my first CD I was almost eight and my mother was twenty-four. I knew she was my mom but spending time with her was more like hanging out with Wendy Peppercorn. Somehow her absence, that distance, made her seem cool and fun and out of reach. My brother and I weren't going to drown ourselves for her attention, or affection, but the thought crossed my mind.

She would swoop in some Saturday nights with Slim Jims and treats and watch wrestling with us and we would act out the wrestling we were seeing. I echoed my older brother like two TVs playing the same channel in different rooms. Over the next six-or-so years we learned the frequencies of her Saturday-night visits like this were random. The in-between time was so easily forgiven because when we were little kids my mom liked to get us gifts.

That night, our gift was our first CD, the Eagles' Hotel California. The next day she took us shopping. We put the CD in the car that morning and drove with the windows down and played Hotel California all the way to the Regency Square Mall in Jacksonville, Florida: white Cadillac, with Dayton wire wheels (my step-dad's ride). My mom smoked Marlboro lights, had a couple tattoos, and always kept a picture of her strong female bulldog on the panel cluster. My mom was built, born tan, and darkened easily, which made her freckles come out, auburn curly hair, light jean shorts and white shirt, with clean, white shoes.

At the mall she bought us two pairs of shoes each (name-brand shoes). I got a pair of white Nikes with a blue and orange swoosh and some black and white Sketchers. I don't even remember if I picked them out. That was my first memory where I spent all day out with my mother. The Eagles, "Hotel California," the single, on repeat everywhere we went in the car after the mall. We had got back from the mall at night. She put us to bed, kissed us, and told us she loved us. Had we not been in the beds we've always had, and at our

grandparent's house, we could have pretended it was the first night we lived with our mom.

We had a boom box in our room and she put Hotel California in and set the CD's case on the dresser. My mom was the only person who said I love you to us, and was certainly the only one to kiss us, affection like in the movies. "Hotel California," the single, especially reminds me of the time she watched wrestling with us and stayed the night and went shopping the next day and she stayed the night again.

"Breakfast," Pop bellowed and woke my brother and I.

I saw the case to Hotel California on the dresser. We ran out of our bedroom and through the living room to the kitchen searching. Things were returned to the way they had always been: our mother was gone, we had a few gifts to let us know she had been there, and Gram and Pop were raising us—Pop made sausage biscuits and covered them with a clean white hand towel.

We believed that we would never live with her. But eight years later, about a year after Pop died, we did go to live with her in the house she visited until we both graduated from highschool. We'd been living in Orlando with my grandma and her sister.

Anytime our mother returned she brought with her the kind of affection that used words, kisses, and hugs. Gram worked the 11 to 7 at the hotel (could be second or third shift) and she didn't have the time. Pop's military training injury progressed him to a wheel chair. He still took us fishing on the dock at Alligator Lake, or to get the balls lost in the tall grass behind the batter's box at the baseball field, and showed us the trophies in the dumpsters. He did a lot for us: always let us know we could talk to him. But we never had anything deep to say because we were happy living with our grandparents.

Living with out mother meant affection was only a room away. Her love didn't replace the knowledge that she could leave anytime, or that she was looking for love, how different that was from our solid Gram and Pop. And for all their solidarity and content, childhood had this parental confusion and lonesomeness too. My brother and I, our reality after Pop died, we knew where the buck stopped.

My childhood, no matter how it feels, like everyone else's was just a few years. It is hard not to believe most, or this large portion, of my life occurred in the past when I had no say, no control, and way to live how I see fit. I learned dwelling in the past, beyond the information, can dictate my future if I let it. Losing the man who raised us, and knowing our biological father didn't want to know us, we could be whatever we want. We chose to work, to get an education, and to sit in front of any board who'd see us for a better job.

When I hear the Eagles, I think of those Saturdays and the Regency Square Mall, Cadillacs, Wire Wheels, Custody, Guardians, and youth, not just my brother and I, but our mother; how different a day was with her. Given the choice, I wouldn't change a thing. I'd wake and find her gone all those times because tackle boxes, knife collections, rare coins, history lessons, non-caffeine, low-sodium soda, a loyal dog, tool boxes, falling asleep in forts made of TV-dinner tray tables and blankets, saying I'm scared and my Pop turning on his side so I had room to sleep in his back, Gram working out deals with my teachers for summer school so I can stay on track, her working with me after coming home late so I'd get my homework turned in, the beach, sitting too close to the waves and a rogue comes in and puts us all on our backs, pizza after hospital visits, pickle chips, and beef jerky to get us through dialysis, the quiet strength of pushing Pop up a concrete hill, his open hand in the air, the hospital bed, no words, my hand in his hand, and eyes like Iolite calling me son.

MARTHA CLARKSON

On the Way to the Store that Sold Cigarettes to Minors, 1975

She could've been ten
or eighteen
it was impossible to tell
from across the street
"the retard" we called her
involuntarily flinging her arms
from the low porch steps
of the green bungalow

and us inseparable pack of four girls
we could've been ten
or eighteen
passing our permit tests
and other times blowing
bubbles in our milk glasses
we involuntarily flung ourselves
at the universe

passing her house was part fear
as if she'd rise up and give chase
and part fascination
that someone not like us
but so like us
dared display her affliction in public
and what was her affliction after all
we had no idea, we called anyone different
a "retard," even just plain dumb boys
of which there were plenty

sometimes my stomach
felt like nails being pounded
I pitied so many things I ran across

the cat having its tail pulled
the girl who bled onto white shorts
in class and had to go home
the girl on the porch

of course I didn't say this
it was too soft a feeling
when we claimed to own the world
strutting the sidewalks in our platforms
big comb handles sticking out
of our back pockets

owning the world meant smoking
in the Winchell's parking lot
cupping your cig when it rained
it meant not telling
when the science teacher asked you
to stay after alone in the portable
it meant not trying
for things you couldn't win
so you'd never be a loser

maybe our fear of the girl on the porch
for she was, in fact, a girl, with bangs
and a bowl cut and an ironed yellow dress
was because we thought of how it could've been us
just as easily how fortunate we were

but no it was just us gawking
like we knew a secret
which always made us feel superior
our cig packs hidden in our knee socks
under our bellbottoms
walking tough and swallowing
our future shames

MARIANNE PEEL

Viable

My father banned books in the house
when I turned fourteen. Thought my face
squandered too much time entombed in books.
Novels peddling peculiar doctrines.
Dubbed me Four Eyes, my cat-eye glasses
sagging off my nose. Grabbed my chin with his fist,
slammed shut my mouth. Told me flies would
swoop in there, between my teeth. Would deposit
maggots on my tongue. He plucked
rotten potatoes from behind my ears, potatoes
pocked with grey eyes, grey cross-eyed pupils
enshrouded in slumping skin.

At night I buried the back of my head
beneath the pillow, the embroidered case starched
and pressed stiff with my mother's flatiron. I shined
a flashlight on the contraband book I'd smuggled home:
Let the Hurricane Roar. I wondered if strangulation
was possible between chapters. Wondered if the pillow
would asphyxiate my airway in the cave of the night.
Wondered if I would drown there
between the pages. Interred
without a bell to wrench.

Satisfied, I resuscitated
with every proud cockcrow

CRAIG LOOMIS

Rowing Time

Almost none of us could understand why such a smart young man like John would think that rowing a boat back and forth across Gibson's lake was such a good way to spend his time. And so, every now and again we couldn't help but… "Nothing personal, of course, and it's none of my business, just curious, know what I mean, just curious but why would such a smart…"

John would smile, maybe even rub his chin and look down at his feet, saying, "That's a good question. A real good question."

John is like that: big, quiet, a college graduate with one, maybe two degrees. He lives all alone in the old Nefferson house that really isn't much of a house anymore—more like a grand shack, I'd say, weeds and small brush covering the once-lawn, broken roof, shingles cracked, one of the walls split jagged, like some kind of unfinished surgery. That's the way it was when John moved in, and that's the way it's stayed. Of course, there's nothing like rent to pay.

It all started when he returned from Afghanistan, in fact, that very same day. Still uniformed, army haircut and boots, he went straight up to Marcus Jaspers, and after talking the small talk of how good it was to be home, John held up his hand as if to say enough and asked him right off for the job. Marcus, not used to being stopped in mid-sentence, looked a little confused, then angry, then confused again before answering, "Why sure, of course, but are you sure? I mean, you just got back, and maybe… I don't know, but maybe you'd want to relax a little bit, get Afghanistan out of your system and spend some time doing nothing for a while."

But John had already made up his mind, saying, "Yes, well, excuse me, Mr. Jaspers, but I'm sure—real sure." Grinning to show Mr. Jaspers just how sure he was.

It was then that Marcus reached down and stroked that old yellow cat of his that's always following him around, petting that old cat like

it was more important than John's asking for a job. Finally, when that cat had had enough and slipped away, Marcus looked back at John, who hadn't moved, standing tall and army-like, and said, "Alright."

John reached out and shook his hand, maybe a little too hard, saying, "Thank you," and then walked away, aiming straight for the old Nefferson house that really wasn't anybody's idea of a house anymore.

It took Marcus Jaspers the longest time to get over the fact that they never once talked about wages—not once.

Except for weekends and the summertime, John doesn't do much rowing. On Saturdays there'll be a pack or two of Boy Scouts, maybe a church group, and on Sundays you've got your picnickers and the old folks, the occasional lovers. John rows them all to Harper's Island, or sometimes all the way across to the north shore. Four dollars and fifty cents roundtrip.

So there it is: a quiet, ex-army, college graduate, John, who returned from the war and decided to live in the pines, along the cliffs and row a boat for a living, which wasn't much of a living at all. It just didn't figure, see what I mean? A young man wasting his time like that.

But then there was that day about six months after John's return when some of us were sitting on Martin's porch, doing nothing special, some drinking and watching one of those purply spring storms slide across the valley; finally, one thing led to another and before we knew it we were talking about the war and all that went along with it. It was right after Curtis said the whole thing was a good idea because we were fighting the Taliban and Al Qaeda and probably even a handful of communists and saving all those Afghans from going wrong that John suddenly became somebody else. Just like that, he threw a beer bottle and then another, there was a dish on the table and he threw that too; he pitched back his chair, stalked into Martin's house like he lived there, yanked the clock off the wall, brought it outside and threw it as far and high as he could.

We were all on our feet by then. "What? Wait. Hey. What's the matter?" But you could see that John wasn't listening, wasn't hearing, just throwing things, and now kicking one of the patio chairs into

the rose bushes, and now pulling open his shirt—buttons flying—as if he needed air.

It took John the better part of three days, walking from house to house, to find everybody and apologize, saying, "Sorry. I'm real sorry." Shaking everybody's hand once, sometimes twice. We all said that's alright, we understand. But he didn't like that answer and said, "No, it's not alright, can't be, and, excuse me, but you don't understand." He asked Martin how much he owed him for the clock. "How much for the clock?"

Of course, Martin said, "Never mind. It was one of those old, good-fornothing Sears clocks. Never mind." But John wasn't like that and he pushed a ten-dollar bill into his hand, saying sorry one last time, grabbing his hand to shake it, before walking away.

When he came to me, I have to admit I was a little spooked, but after I saw how it was all a big mistake, I relaxed, even put my hand on his shoulder father-like, asking, "John, why did you do that?"

Running his hand through his not so-army haircut now, moving his feet like there was something all wrong with keeping them still, he answered, "I don't know."

Bluejays arguing in the trees, the sun a high springtime bright.

"Or maybe I do know but can't explain it. What a time," he said, rubbing his chin. "What a waste of time."

Don't see much of John these days, none of us do. Last time I saw him he was thinner, with moustache. It was a gentle Tuesday afternoon and although he was all alone, he was frantically rowing across the lake, arching his body to pull on those oars—tiny white explosions where oar meets water—with something like a grimace on his face, but pulling as hard as he could.

AMY MARQUES

We Haven't Any Home

If she'd been asleep, she might have thought it was a nightmare. But Lyra was halfway through her morning tea when her chair slammed against the wall. She stood, legs shaking, and held onto the doorway as the floorboards swayed and her world crashed down.

China broke, books pounded to the floor, windows shattered, and the screams of the neighboring babies' cries filled the air. Lyra's stomach lurched along with the rumbling building, and she wished she could close her eyes. It felt like hours, although she later learned that the worst of the earthquake had lasted less than a minute.

Her legs buckled and the urge to curl up into a ball and cry threatened to overwhelm her. She needed to get out of this house. But, absurdly, she wanted to never leave.

She picked up her coat and packed salve, linen for bandages, and writing supplies. In the kitchen, she added bread, cheese slices, and two apples before heading out.

Life had taught her to expect the worst.

Nothing could have prepared her for this.

San Francisco was awake and scrambling. Aftershocks rumbled in waves and at every tremor, buildings shed more plaster. As their homes succumbed to the earthquake and fires that followed, families flocked to Golden Gate Park in their nightclothes. Older children and men dashed past Lyra to retrieve what they could from cracked buildings, and an encampment of makeshift tents soon took over the park. All around her were baby carriages and carts piled high with linen, sewing machines, crayons, dishes, and old clocks. One man in a fine suit screwed roller wheels to a large trunk and toted food and heirlooms. Entire bedframes and mattresses became makeshift stretchers to carry the wounded. She had lived through shocks before, but nothing like this.

For four days, fire raged uncontrolled, water dwindled, and people swarmed. Lyra walked from tent to tent, helping where she could. When she ran out of bandages, she recruited a boy to fetch more from the emergency dispensary. Lyra cleaned wounds, bandaged burns, and tended to broken limbs and one amputated finger. She heard the calm in her voice and watched her own steady hands as if from a distance. The hardest work was writing letters dictated by those who desperately sought to reunite with loved ones.

One old man reminded her of John. He had the same fine hair with a lock that fell over his forehead. And a kind face. She struggled to meet his hopeful gaze with dry eyes.

In the last earthquake, in 1896, her John had been on his way home. She had been making dinner. Or trying to. She had been useless then. Her world rattled and she hadn't saved anything that mattered. Not dinner. Not John. Not even the child who slipped out too early from her womb.

She had nothing to lose now. Nobody to worry about. Nobody to worry about her.

"I hope you find your son," Lyra whispered. She pocketed her pencil stub and turned to go back to work. She swayed and his hand closed on her upper arm.

"Have you slept?" He kept hold of her.

"I'm fine," Lyra said.

"Sleep," his wife said. "You are of no use to anyone if you faint dead away in exhaustion."

She wanted to bristle, but their gentleness gave her pause. They were right. She had said much the same to others. She nodded a thanks, set her bag down for a pillow, wrapped herself in her coat, and closed her eyes.

#

Lyra awoke, but the nightmare continued. The air was thick with smoke and ashes and her throat was dry, but the line for a dipper of

rationed water was hours long and she didn't have time to spare. She ate the last half of an apple she had in her satchel, making an effort to chew slowly, drawing out the moisture to sooth her thirst.

"I want to go home," a child whimpered nearby.

"We haven't any home, dearest. We…" The mother's voice faltered, and Lyra heard pain in her intake of breath. Mother and child sat wrapped in a blanket, a handful of belongings in a cloth bag at their feet.

"I'm Nurse Lyra." Lyra cleared her throat, but it didn't help. Her voice was barely more than a rasp. "Maybe I can help?"

"I'm waiting for my husband." When the toddler shifted on the woman's lap, Lyra saw that her belly was big with child and her skirt soaked. The woman closed her eyes and clenched her jaw as a contraction shuddered through her, but she kept her hold on the toddler.

Hollow panic threatened to fill Lyra, so she bit her lip. This was not like before.

"You can do this," she told herself as much as the woman before her.

It didn't take long. It took a lifetime. With a final, groaning push the baby slid out into the world. Gray and ashen and listless.

Lyra felt all the breath rush out of her as she rubbed the baby's damp cool skin and blew into its mouth. Droplets of rain began to fall, washing away ash and tears. Breathe. Come on, breathe. She blinked back tears and kept working on the tiny limp chest. Cries reverberated through the camp Rain! It's over! The fire is over!

The infant whimpered, then wailed, and Lyra let out a ragged breath of relief. She watched, wordless, as the mother wrapped her baby in a shawl and pulled newborn and toddler to bosom, crooning to both.

Lyra tilted her face up and breathed.

MARY CHRISTINE KANE

The Top

Today I am on top of the world, I said
then looked down
already feeling the drop
in my belly.

I wanted
finally
the middle
ground:
air neither thin nor suffocating
rocks not sharp or grand.
Just my hair falling down
the center of my back
wind twirling it
whenever it wants.

I walked and walked
letting my toes rub the sides of my sandals
until red and bothered
and still said *hello* in a most ordinary way
to every person.

I did not want the things
I have chased: secret tunnels,
frozen peaks, permission.

ANN E. WALLACE

Training Ground

Each decade, or sooner,
I've been granted a fresh chance
to master the art of illness.

I cut the teeth of adulthood
with a tumor and my ovary
dissected in the lab, a bare head,
and a fridge full of chemo.
My doctor called me kid,
and she was not wrong.

The fragile pact of my survivor
story dissolved in my thirties,
my body dizzy, trembling,
a new disease scratching
at frayed nerves within
my head. Chaos called for focus
upon the art of living, even
as my world spun
fast and faster.

When a third disease took
root, the humility of losing
another organ gave way
to the painful art of healing.

But I was ready for the latest
blow, had braced myself
when the heat and weight
of the virus descended,
shuttered my home
first among my neighbors,
bringing fear that each labored
breath might be my last.

As this long tail storms, a trail
of wreckage left within me,
I pick up my pen
and stop waiting
for my long recovery.

ANN E. WALLACE

The Alchemy of Survival

The science was there,
in the chemo cocktail that dripped
into me for 5 days each month,
a regimen my body bucked
and fought until the drugs won.

I grew strong, learned to see the world
anew in the light refracted
off the shards of my weary soul.

And I fell sick again. And again.
Each time, I tinkered, trying to spark
an ember from basest of metals, dark
and lifeless, until the smallest flare
of hope caught fire and I bent over,
cupped my hands around the flame
and blew gently until it danced.

ELIZABETH KERLIKOWSKE

The Yearling

hobbles to the salt lick,
licks, back hoof off the ground.
Gash infected or healing over
on his hip. I can't tell.
Another car/deer crash.
That can't explain his ears,
sprouting inner white hair
but tips gone. Spring frostbite?
Lumpy swells where antlers will
break through further garnish him.
He was a twin. His brother gone
one afternoon, another car/deer crash.
His mother still trains him though
he is maimed. He loves eating
sage and likes to sprawl in oregano.
He may not make it through
the winter, but in this late
December sun with a fresh
apple and his mother close,
he does not suffer.

JOAN MAZZA

One Year Followup

In gusting wind, I walk from the parking lot
to the waiting room filled with people on crutches,
in wheelchairs, one missing a foot. I hear
someone say it's been two weeks since her surgery.
A year and two weeks for me.

I've brought handmade cards for everyone
who attends to me today, including the clerks
who check me in, x-ray techs, and nurses.
The surgeon says everything looks good, zooms

the screen to show me the space on the first images
of my crushed tibial plateau. We were very concerned.
The space was two inches and now it's healed,
the hardware where it should be. He apologizes
for screws hurting when he presses.
They had to be long enough to hold,

and hold they have, so that I walk without a cane,
only a little hitch in my step that increases
as I tire. I show him my pedometer, say
I can climb stairs, feed the wood stove.

You don't have to see me again unless
you need to. Don't hesitate to call.
You don't need more therapy. Just walk.

I walk, better after these words, to the next
building looking for Annette, Joe, Ian in rehab
where I spent two weeks. They don't recognize
me standing, not in a wheelchair, my face
not so gray or thin. But when I say my name

and they hear my voice, they hug me. Look at you!
Oh, yes, look at me! They see progress.
I see how far I have to go to be where
I was before the fall and still hope to get closer

to hauling wood inside, hiking in the woods,
maybe a trek across an airport on the way
to Guadeloupe next winter. No ice.
In dreams, I'm dancing.

LACY ARNETT MAYBERRY

Heart in the Bushes

My sister is in prison. In October, she writes, I'll get to see the sky. She anticipates freedom, but thinking of it too much undoes her; she tries to stay in the moment, to cling to her daily routine of reading and yoga and sleep. Her one solid plan upon release: To eat a milkshake mixed with candy bars.

Last year, when she was in holding at the county jail they had video calls—a costly kind of prison Skype—and we synced her image with the television on Christmas morning. We stared at her in widescreen and she looked away, suddenly embarrassed. Rather than too many of us talking at once, the room was silent. We pointed our end of the camera at our Grandma, who didn't have a computer and so never got to see her, but this, she said later when she called on the landline, made her feel deeply ashamed.

To pass time, my sister spends long hours drawing coloring pages for her children: bunnies for Easter, turkeys for Thanksgiving. She makes them elaborate hidden pages, too—colored sea floors or forests complete with a finder's key. They discover a turtle camouflaged in tree leaves, dog bones in the trunk folds, a heart in the bushes. My children hunted for these treasures with their cousins once. My daughter wanted to write her aunt a letter back. They don't allow you to write in marker, her cousin warned. In case someone puts drugs in the ink. In my young niece's imaginings, inmates huff the bright markings on letters from home.

I write to her twice a week, printing out poetry and magazine articles. I wire money to her commissary account so she can buy phone cards or soda. She's been devouring books from the library cart: Moby Dick, Number the Stars, A Visit from the Goon Squad, Northanger Abbey. We have surprisingly similar tastes, something I was unaware of. I didn't know she liked to read. I don't think she knew, either. She used some of her money to buy a small radio off her former cellmate. "Have you read A People's History of the United States?" she writes. "I heard of it on NPR."

It's the closest we've been in our lives. I spent our childhood ditching her to play with the neighbors. I didn't want anything to do with her then and later, when we were more grown up, she got hooked on heroin and didn't want anything to do with me. What we have now is a circumstantial kind of closeness. When she gets out, I worry that I won't know how to stay close without the letters, without her desperation for my friendship.

"Your support has made a world of difference in my little prison world here and will be something to take with me to the world outside of it," she writes.

Unlike my sister, I allow myself to project wildly into the future, thinking of her coloring at the table with her children, of next Christmas together, her first yoga class, that milkshake.

RILEY WINCHESTER

Aperitif

He orders a vodka soda and I can feel the sweat build up on my forehead, just under my hairline, and my legs start to shake. That was my drink. I've made that same order hundreds of times—thousands of times, I realize, now that I do a quick inventory. It's not that he's drinking around me, I've been around drinkers plenty of times since I called it quits, but it's the context of the moment. For weeks my manager, Jessica, has been hyping up this dinner. It's not every day that someone in my position is asked to have dinner with the president of the company. He's been impressed with my work lately, she tells me. My numbers have been great the last two quarters. They don't know that, too, is how long my sobriety has been.

The server returns with waters for Jessica and me, and a vodka soda for Roger. It's in a short glass. He'll be ordering another soon.

"Tell me, Sam," he says, "you've been with us, what, three years now?"

"A little over two and a half years," I say. I take a sip of water and put my free hand down on my legs to stop the shaking.

Roger takes the first sip of his vodka soda and winces. I used to love that wince—hell, I still do; I miss it now. That wince after the first sip of a strong drink, that first promising sip that tells you everything you're feeling now will soon change so long as you keep sipping and sipping. The wince lessens with each sip, and by the third or fourth drink there's no wince at all. The vodka becomes flavorless, and you forget why you ever so stupidly thought it burned before. It's good, it's smooth, you feel good. The sips turn to gulps.

"Sam is one of our best analysts," Jessica chimes in.

"That's what I hear," Roger says. He stirs his drink with his pinky and then sucks off the vodka soda residue left on the tip of his finger. "And you know, ever since Adam left, we've needed to fill his role."

I stare at his glass. Ice slowly melts and falls into position, crashing deeper into the glass. I think of my first drink. Prom afterparty junior year. I was scared to drink. I was a shy kid, never took chances or rode on the wild side. But I was pressured into going to the party by my date. At first, I abstained. Then, after a couple hours, I caved and drank a Bud Light. A vodka and Sprite. A shot of Fireball. A hard cider. My face started to feel funny. I drank more vodka. I felt myself becoming more social. I was talking to peers I'd never spoken to before like I'd known them my whole life. I felt good and uninhibited. I took another shot and went to the bathroom. After I washed my hands, I looked in the mirror, and I'd never seen myself happier. I thought I had found the solution to everything that had once disturbed me. I had never felt so much life.

"Yes," I say, "It's been busy since he left, but I've been holding my head above water." Truth is, I've been slammed since Adam left, and work has been hell. I've been doing the work of two people, working sixty-hour weeks. It's been a true test of my sobriety, but I've stayed strong.

"He's been exceptional." Jessica smiles at Roger, then me.

I take another sip of water.

"Good, good." Roger leans back in his chair and picks up his drink. He holds it for a second, almost like it's an offering, and thinks. "Every day I'm grateful for people like you in this company." He takes another drink. It must go down the wrong pipe or something, because he lets out a little cough.

The drinking really kicked in during undergrad. Weekend warrior who binge drank on Fridays and Saturdays, to drinking Thursday through Sunday, to drinking every night, to showing up to class after a few drinks, to showing up to class with a half-vodka, half-water in my water bottle. The only times I spent sober were mornings, when I rose, drank my coffee, brushed my teeth, then fixed my first drink. It was normalized then, a joke, a thing college kids did. We didn't have a problem; we were in the time of our lives. When college

ended and we all became adults, most of us stopped. But I ramped it up.

"You a sports fan, Sam?" Roger asks me.

"I am. Football mostly, but I follow some baseball."

"Who's your team?"

"The Lions." I nod my head. "Through and through."

"Good man," he says, and he leans in closer to me, setting his drink down.

Jessica turns to me and gives me a 'keep it up' smile. She clears her throat. "You went to a game earlier this year, didn't you?" she asks me. I'm surprised she remembers this.

"You did?" Roger says, his interest piqued.

"Went down to Soldier Field and watched them play the Bears." I adjust myself in my chair and try to covertly wipe the sweat from my forehead.

"You know, I'm a season ticket holder," he tells me.

Of course I know this. I did my due diligence.

"Is that so?" I say.

"Have been for eighteen years."

Roger takes another drink and with it he takes a few ice cubes. He chews on the ice.

One of the best parts of drinking is chewing on the ice cubes toward the end of a drink. It feels good, the crunch of the ice cubes, the tensing of the jaw muscles, but most of all it feels good to know another drink is coming. There's always another drink coming if you want it.

"They win that game you go to?" Roger smiles.

I finish a sip of water. “No, uh, they lost 24-14.”

“Of course they did.” Roger smiles to Jessica. “I was kidding when I asked.”

Jessica lets out a fake laugh. I follow suit.

Roger shakes around the dregs of his vodka soda. I carefully watch the remnants swirl around the bottom of the glass. The little bubbles of carbonation spin and disappear. He sets the glass down and the drink settles.

I don’t know who said it, but I lived by it. If something good happens, we drink to celebrate. If something bad happens, we drink to forget. If nothing happens, we drink to make something happen. Nailed an interview: drink. Bombed an interview: drink. Received a raise: drink. Shit day at work: drink. Boring Saturday night: drink and hit the town. This resulted in failed relationships, uncomfortable conversations with family, a wrecked car, bruises and broken bones, nights spent in ditches, blackouts and blackouts and blackouts, endless shame and guilt, morning shakiness, perpetual brain fog, extreme anxiety. Vodka in my morning coffee. Sneaking off to my car to nip vodka and suck down beers at lunch. Becoming a regular at happy hours. Living to drink, drinking to live.

Roger picks up his glass and pours the rest of his vodka soda down his throat. He studies the menu. “What are you guys thinking?”

“It all sounds so good,” Jessica says, “It’s hard to decide.”

“I’m thinking the lobster roll,” Roger says.

The server returns. “Can I get you guys more drinks?” she asks us.

Roger orders another vodka soda. Jessica says she’s OK. I put in an order. The server walks away. Roger smiles at me.

“I’ll probably do the shrimp tacos,” I say.

“Ooh, those sound good,” Jessica says.

“That they do,” Roger agrees, not looking up from the menu.

When the server returns, she sets the vodka soda in front of Roger and turns to me. “And you said soda, not tonic?”

“That’s right,” I say.

“OK, great,” she lets out a sigh of relief as she sets down the drink.

She asks us if we’re ready to order food, and I take a big gulp of soda water.

LINDA NEMEC FOSTER

The Tourists Get Their Rental Car Stuck in Cannero

Such an embarrassment in northern Italy: the Lake District filled with large tourists in tiny cars. Or in this case, small tourists in a big car. No matter the details, they can't find their hotel—a small boutique number on the shores of Lake Maggiore. Not as crowded as Como, but they still drive past the front door and the bewildered locals who can't imagine where they could be going with that car. Creeping down the pedestrian lane, ignoring the universal road signs (an outline of a car with a stark red line slashed across it), they take a left turn onto an even smaller road. Narrower than an alley, a footpath, a bicycle lane. The car gets stuck between a bar and a pizzeria. They can't move an inch until a kind waitress rushes out, gently frees the side mirrors, and directs them to drive in reverse down the steep path they just came from. They disappear with their car, the buildings streaked with black, black scars.

JENNIFER A. SWALLOW

The Other Side

The early birds had come and gone, as had the later risers and the Sunday morning drivers. It was lunchtime now and no bargain hunters had stopped by in the last twenty minutes. The sun shone, scorching the plastic knickknacks and costume jewelry on the card tables. Sandra sat in the shade of her open garage fanning herself with a decade-old flyer for the high school chorus' spring concert.

She scanned the racks of clothing. Dozens of t-shirts and sweats emblazoned with the letters for Alpha Xi Delta. Lacrosse jerseys with the number eight on the back. Prom and homecoming dresses carefully wrapped in plastic with tissue paper between the layers to preserve them for the day when Kelsey had her own daughters. Now Sandra could only hope to relive Kelsey's excitement about those dresses in the eyes of an unfamiliar teen girl. But she did hope.

A flash of wind pierced the stillness, rattling the great oak tree in the yard.

Except it wasn't wind. It was a pair of black, military-style boots, and a split second later, jeans and a shirt, then a whole human being, crashing down along the branches, ejected out toward the driveway, skidding along the tables, and flying into the clothing rack.

The prom dresses scattered, colors floating through the air, brightly cascading in slow motion, somehow having escaped their plastic casings.

Except it wasn't dresses. Huge, heavy swaths of blue and red and yellow draped the folding tables and blanketed the dark pavement. Sandra crouched down and picked up an edge. She gathered it to her as she walked toward a groaning.

A man lay on the blacktop, legs and arms tangled in hangers and metal.

She dropped the fabric and dug him out of the wreckage. He rose slowly, first to hands and knees, then upright, favoring his left side.

Sandra said nothing.

He patted his clothing up and down as if looking for a lost wallet or eyeglasses. He shifted some cords from one side of his chest over his head to the other. Then the man said, "They told me this would happen. Take up parachuting at my age and you're going to get hurt. They think it's a crisis from Beverly leaving me, but they don't know what they're talking about."

Sandra still said nothing.

"Well," he smiled slightly and gestured to the tables, "thank goodness for your clutter or I would have ended up flat as a pancake on your driveway."

Pancake. Sandra cringed. That staple of small-town diner breakfasts all across America. A breakfast that she and her now-vanished family had once enjoyed on road trips. Now a disgusting, vile word.

Sandra remembered the suppressed snickering. The comments of "idiot!" and "Darwinism at its best" online. The confusion and even annoyance when Sandra refused to tell people what happened and the subsequent whispers and smirks after they had Googled it.

Alpha Xi Delta had held a fundraiser for the McDowd family. The father, William, had been shot by police in his own home while his arms were raised. The police claimed he was threatening them. The subsequent investigation revealed he had not been, and the responsible cop pled guilty to manslaughter. The sorority wanted to help. Each member went around the community and got pledges. Kelsey raised eight-hundred dollars.

None of that part of the story mattered. What mattered to people was that Sandra's twenty-year-old daughter had choked to death in a pancake eating competition. That was apparently "fucking hysterical."

Kelsey died two months after William McDowd. One year and nine months before his daughters were awarded three million dollars in

a civil suit against the county. Seven years before Sandra was emotionally prepared to let go of her daughter's belongings and a strange man came crashing into the therapeutic purge, almost pancaking himself amid the faux fur throw pillows and pastel desk accessories.

But there was one thing Sandra hadn't put out for the garage sale.

"Ma'am? Are you alright? I'm sorry I startled you. I'm still new to this whole skydiving thing and I—"

Sandra turned away from him. She headed through the garage toward the interior door. The man called something to her, but she couldn't make out the words. She went into the basement of this house she had moved to a year after the incident in an effort to escape the ghost of her daughter.

On a shelf in the basement was a box containing baby shoes, tiny teeth, handmade Christmas ornaments, yearbooks, and a small object the Alpha Xi Delta sisters had given her all those years ago. At first, this object had horrified Sandra. She'd wondered how her daughter's former friends could be so crass and cruel, why they too would mock her this way. Years of counseling had helped her see a different point of view, that maybe they'd given her this object to honor their friend. Maybe they felt she deserved it since Kelsey had quite literally given her life for the cause.

When Sandra walked back outside, she saw the man seated back on the ground. He had removed his helmet and was holding his head in his hands.

"Ma'am, I'm awfully sorry, but do you have an aspirin?"

"Here, this is for you." Sandra held out the object, a trophy.

He held it up and read the quote on the pedestal out loud, "No matter how flat you make your pancake, it still has two sides."

Now it was his turn to stare.

"Because of what you said. About pancakes and people not understanding you and all."

"Oh. Yeah." He turned the trophy around in his hands. Then he swiped one finger across the brass pad of butter that sat atop the brass stack of pancakes. He touched the finger to the tip of his tongue. He laughed.

And after a few seconds, Sandra laughed too.

MARIANNE PEEL

In the Driveway with Dad

I need you to know that what your mom just told you, about making dinner last night, just isn't true. She hasn't made dinner in almost a year. Can't even put a bologna sandwich together, let alone a good meatloaf smeared with ketchup. Has forgotten how to make out checks. I'm worried. Worried that I will pass before she does. She just can't take care of herself anymore. We're not eating much anymore. I can do poached eggs. Grilled cheese. But it's usually burnt. I can do tomato soup. I miss her stuffed cabbage. I don't let her anywhere near a knife. Afraid she'll cut herself up good. Coring a cabbage is just too hard. I been looking into nursing homes. You know, the kind that's an apartment with a pull cord. Just in case. Thought we could live there, like that, until she gets so bad I just can't take care of her no more. It's hard to wash her hair. I try to make sure she's clean and presentable. But sometimes she just wants to sleep. And changing her clothes, getting those shirts over her head or those pants over her legs is just too hard. I know she'd like her fingernails painted. And I tried it once. Smeared that Sweetheart Red all over the tips of her fingers. Had to scrub it off with nail polish remover. My hands just shake too much. Most of the time your mother just sits. Falls asleep a lot during the day. Mixes up her days and nights. Wants to go out for pancakes at seven in the evening One time she even took off all her clothes in the living room. Then she said she was ready to go out to eat. Took me forever to get her clothes back on her. She's better when I just give her the pain medicine when she asks for it. Sometimes, I try to slip her a half pill. But I know she's hurting and end up giving her the whole damn thing. And that cookbook you brought me, the one you're holding in your hands. Just take that on home with you. You know damn well I won't use it. You know I don't read nothing but the newspaper. And these days I even fall asleep doing that. Thanks for the gift certificate to Red Lobster. She likes their stuffed flounder and those cheddar biscuits. She always orders a Manhattan or two when we go to Red Lobster. Says they soothe her nerves. Make her less jittery. And thanks for making her

meatloaf recipe while you were here. I'll be enjoying cold meatloaf sandwiches with lots of ketchup. For the next couple nights. That's some good eating.

RODNEY TORRESON

Mother, with the Gray Hair of Assisted Living

though nearly blind, could yet play piano,
ply the blurry pearl of the keys. Her ears would lead,
her arching hands with lithe fingers follow.

Years earlier, she gave up going places
and having to park her purse. Once Covid closed in,
the dining room shut down. Her walker no longer

lurched through the halls. Old chords of conversation
dried up. If the stars outside her window came
screeching to a halt, though, she didn't notice.

Instead, she'd imply over the phone
that the shadows weren't willful, even after
the event coordinator said that due to the virus

she could not play the baby Grand in the lobby.
Like her, the other residents were folded up
in their rooms. No more

"I Left My Heart in San Francisco"
and other tunes that showed how deep was yesterday.
The only folks she saw, covered in shadows,

brought her meals and meds. Seldom
did patterns of light in the vague outlines
of Minnesota Twins thrum from the TV.

However, this spring, the lawn of the manor
once more lopes along. She, who over two years ago,
said that she'd reached the end of her keys,

with all their sharps and flats, returned at 93,
to the bench. Again, in her hands a balm of melody,
and in a way those she's touched are washed

by her blindness, with some adding their voices
in song, their hearts bridging verses to the chorus.
They restore a living covenant with others,

through clapping and, afterward,
maybe a hand on her shoulder that resumes
a sanctuary in the territory of touch.

RODNEY TORRESON

What Folks Starved to Leave the House Will Do

like a herky-jerky old man
at Mr. Burger: cherub faced,
a few hairs hurled across his scalp,
eyes too open, as if in them
abides the whole blue sky,
who can't walk
but with the tiniest steps has learned
that once he's scooted through the door
(provided another person opens it),
and his windup feet keep circling,
as if peddling, perhaps, a small unicycle,
he can cut through the morning
coffee crowd, his fingers stretching out
like wheel spokes, his bony form
bobbing at a calamitous clip.

Soon he's given to the rhythm
of his hips, the dance
of his silver buckle.
If he slows, he'll lose balance
and drop, as he did a month ago.
but he won't be helped.
This morning, he lunges headlong,
catching himself with his fingertips
on the metal counter,
places his order, and patters
to a booth (not the closest one, mind you),
just missing two grandmothers
sharing photos in the middle aisle,
then stiff-legged at his booth
and with a flip of hips,
folds himself in before
the body knows it's been tricked.

ANITA SKEEN

It began with a quaking Aspen

or, wait, maybe before that
with Octopus Tree, our neighborhood
refuge, taken down by Mr. Daughtery
so he could put up a house none of us kids
wanted in the neighborhood, or even before that
when my daddy's big station wagon slid off
the ice-slick vertical driveway and took out
the pink dogwood at the bottom.
The trees have been coming down
for as long as I can remember and each one
gone was a singular loss, a singular grief
still mourned if only by me. Grief is
like that, a seed fallen on the heart, perhaps
left unattended for years, until you open
the door one day and there it is, blooming
and fragrant, and you say, Oh, yes….
Most recently it was the huge white pine
drilled through by beetles, and then the red maple,
home to chickadees and nuthatches, woodpeckers
and goldfinch, that the septic tank pumpers said
had to go because its roots covered the lid. Oh no…
I said, not that tree, it's not coming down. It didn't.
But I could not save the cedars from the chainsaws
of Consumers Power, men who left vodka bottles
in place of the limbs. The limbs of the apple tree
snap from too much weight, too much unpicked sweetness
this year. A hundred apples lay on the ground among
twigs and leaves. Two days later, the deer have eaten
them all. They have taken the pears from the lower
branches of that tree, leaving the earth scattered with
fruit missing one bite. Oh, and that quaking aspen: a start
from its roots keeps rising, leaves whispering yes, yes, yes.

SIVAKAMI VELLIANGIRI

Vivek Wrote About one Mr. S

The political parties have polished the pillars
the walking pavements have been glossed
stone has become mosaic.

Swaminathan *Iyer*, ex IIT, has a Sunday group
they are a restoration club holidaying to culture sites
they have perspectives on the glory of the past.

Impossible to rework on embossed marble
even the shadows of the *Devanagiri* script
cannot be reached by rubbing sand-paper.

But sometimes, there is a small piece of rough stone
bulging, protruding, as if eggs hatched inside :
the script is dented and you can feel if it is Telugu or Tamil.

Or in the courtyard huge pillars might lie like dead trees
abandoned, and this is where the recovery happens;
the bird brained politicians would have saved the cost

of transporting a 1010 year old piece of architecture.

MAGGIE NERZ IRIBARNE

With Affectionate Best Wishes

Papers

After I received the news, I trudged upstairs to retrieve the yellow folder sitting on the shelf in my attic office. I held it in my two hands, recognized its solid weight. Labelled *Correspondence with Leo Dolenski,* the folder held approximately two hundred pieces of uniform loose-leaf covered line-by-line in cursive black ink, a no-frills penmanship as controlled and consistent as the man who wrote it. I flipped through the pages: *Dear Maggie, Dear Maggie, Dear Maggie.* So many letters, so many years.

The ink on the imperfectly preserved pages—the earliest letter written in 1997—was beginning to fade.

Leo would not have approved.

The Archivist

In 1993 I was 24 years old when I stepped into my first real job as assistant for public services at the main library at Bryn Mawr College. The library was teetering on the brink of change. The card catalogue had just gone digital, but the many tricks and charms of the internet remained a mystery.

Leo, the college archivist, a stalwart of the old guard, worked up on the second floor in a caged-off area, his small desk covered in books and papers. At age 61, tall and rugged with an often-tanned, chiseled face, he wore plain button-up dress shirts, open-collared with a tee shirt underneath, dress pants, and heavy shoes with dark socks.

Despite his desire to be hidden away with his old papers, Leo was tasked with covering the reference desk on Wednesday nights. He hated being out on the main floor, exposed to so many people, so much conversation, but had he not had that assignment we would have never become friends.

Back then, I stayed after my 9-5 hours most nights to work on my long-stagnated master's thesis in English, which just happened to be about Bryn Mawr alumna (class of 1909) and modernist poet, Marianne Moore. Around 6 PM on one of those Wednesday evenings, Leo and I found ourselves together in the staff room for our dinners. He sat in an old comfortable chair with a simple sandwich on whole wheat. I sat across from him, eating some leftover from a stained Tupperware container. I told him about my struggling paper. He said, "You know, we have a lot of Marianne Moore items here, right? We even have one of her capes and tri-cornered hats." Oddly, I didn't know that. At that point, I hadn't even been up to the archives at all for work, let alone for research. That would change.

In Leo's archives, I enjoyed gazing up at the many lanterns hanging from the ceiling. To this day, on Bryn Mawr's annual fall Lantern Night, first year undergraduates receive their own lantern from upperclasswomen, a symbol of passing the light of knowledge on to the next year. Leo worked under these once light-filled representations of so many life stories. He told me some of them, like his star-struck meeting with actress Katharine Hepburn, class of '28, when she once visited the library. Another story recounted his trip to Maine to collect donated papers from E.B. White, whose wife, Katharine Sergeant White, was also a Bryn Mawr alumna ('14). The author walked Leo around his property, showing off the barn where he first envisioned the spider Charlotte spinning her web in Charlotte's Web. As a lover of writers and books, this casual memory caused my jaw to drop.

When Leo retired, the college had a big sit-down lunch in an old room with dark paneled walls decorated with dusty oil paintings. He enjoyed kind speeches and gifts, a send-off worthy of his humble greatness. At the end, I approached him and said, "Can we write each other letters?"

He replied, "If you write me, I'll write you back."

He kept his promise.

Correspondence

There was a formula to Leo's letters: He would reference my letter and comment: "I liked the way you summarize your days of work, study, the books you are reading, your bike, your plans for the summer: 'So overall, I am well.' Given that you're juggling many balls at the same time, there's something to be said for your statement." Then he might deliver wisdom or a piece of advice: "Since you find teaching (even teenagers!) a soul-satisfying experience, you have found your vocation. This is no little thing." Next, he would open up on a larger commentary on life, faith: "Belief though, is really the pearl of great price for it has the power to transform lives, and gives life itself great meaning." He often referenced a poem or essay that matched the content of my letter. His letters contained quotes from Richard Wilbur, Gerard Manley Hopkins, and Mother Teresa, among many others. Sometimes he would share a little bit of his own emotions: "I miss my annual trip to Maine and the waters of the Penobscot. At least I had my chance." At the end he would return to something I said or a general feeling conveyed in my letter and give me a practical assessment: "I am pleased you're happy in your work, since you spend so much time at it."

Hope and Love

In his very first letter to me, written in June 1997, Leo said something that rings more true to me now than it ever could have then, and sets a theme for life, my life, all of life: "To live though is to learn that very few realities are permanent. There are beginnings and endings and more beginnings." Ending with that mention of beginnings was Leo's relentless style. No matter what dark event or concept he covered in his letters, he always returned to hope. Later, he said, "Christian hope tells us we have a future, a goal whose particulars we do not know. We believe that our lives do not end in a void, in emptiness, that justice will prevail and the tears will be wiped away." In the last letter Leo wrote me, dated December 2020, in response to my Christmas card, his handwriting shaky, he lamented the state of the pandemic, but conveyed hope for the future. He commented on the harrowing political scene of 2020 and while stating the bleak reality of a divided

country, again offered hope. At the end, he wished my husband, son, and me a better 2021, ending with, "We need to breathe freely again."

Months later, my heart beat faster as soon as I saw the letter in my box, in a different handwriting, with a different name, but from Leo's address. I had written him just a few weeks before. A friend at his retirement community received it and wrote to tell me Leo died in March. Knowing this would be the last letter for my yellow folder, I cried that day and felt the now familiar weight of grief, but I liked the idea of Leo breathing freely in some new reality, some new beginning.

Tangibles

Leo and I could have corresponded by email, but when I first asked him if he would write to me, it was silently understood between us that I meant real letters. Paper letters. All these years I have wondered why I made sure I saved them, in order, in their physical state, rather than scanning them and dragging them into a folder on my computer's desktop. I feel proud of my collection, even though I am unsure of its significance. Will I ever read them again? Will I someday show or give them to someone? Will I throw them away? What is the purpose of saving anything? Maybe that is the central question of an archivist.

My husband, who incidentally has a Ph.D. in paper science, tells me of the merits of paper: It can be taken everywhere and anywhere, does not need an outside energy source to be used, is cheap to make, and has a much better resolution than a digital screen—it's easy on the eyes.

I will preserve Leo's letters properly, treasure them, continue to open my folder. I want to hear his unique voice speaking, echoing through the time of our shared history, my present and future. I will enjoy the comfort of his so-familiar handwriting. The ink may fade, but his presence, so real on these crisp pages, does not.

My letters from my friend confirm my faith in paper. I know that Leo would agree.

I wish I had written to him about this.

SCOTT T. STARBUCK

Koda

Walking my American Shepherd
I imagine him saying, "Your work
saving the world from climate catastrophe
through poetry is about as likely
as me reaching a squirrel."

"I need a raven to listen to right now,
so I can look up to find.
I need other dogs to smell,
deer to startle, banana slug to explore,
East Fork Lewis River to drink from.

"Like the salmon, we run, spawn, die.
Our time on Earth is so short.
Walk with me."

KATHLEEN MCGOOKEY

Absence in Any Weather (Spring)

My field ripples green and silver

unpredictable

That thing with feathers, with beak and talons

hovers coasts

I blink away the sting—

Out of darkness, more what?

it's just— it's just—

That quick light voice again? Singing?

RUSSELL THORBURN

Dead Poets Who Visit Jim Harrison

After his stew of suckling pig, slow cooked
in a red-wine sauce, his one eye of an Inuit hunter
observes through his window of deceit
the dead poet Lorca coming back.
Seventy-some-years old, Jim Harrison,
not wearing a shirt and underwear,
with his cock unfettered, downs
one more vodka, his beloved Stolichnaya.
He watches Federico stop at his door,
as if looking for those loves he won't ever meet again.
Tapping on the double-glazed window
to get the poet's attention, he lifts his vodka
bottle up for all dead poets to drink.
His blood's gorged on cheese, desserts,
beluga spooned from a half-pound jar.
He didn't live alone in Patagonia but more
than anybody he understood how to die.
A dead bird falls from the roof. One more
casualty of the heat. And the articulate desert
wind plays on its five-stringed guitar.
Letters from his editor balled up on the floor,
a cluttered desk of greasy plates and cheese
wheels that have rolled on inside his gut:
Pacifico beer bottles empty like late October.
Back in Montana he wrote on a yellow page
it's zero and 80 mph winds. Now he's pouring Lorca
his first drink from a coffee cup with coffee
still in it, and talking about hot southern sands
yearning for white camellias. A rattlesnake
that bit his favorite dog he had to shoot.
Come on in, Jim says, knowing Yesenin
somewhere in the yard waits with his rope.

RUSSELL THORBURN

The Edmund Fitzgerald Is Out There

No sun today, the rolling choppers bent on their tempest,
and that great graveyard of water never
gives up its dead. A man beholds the suffering
in a flooding hatch, sees his fate suddenly sealed,
like Fortunato who recognizes the others,
the water an avalanche of cold that will suck out
your breath like the last minutes on a clock.
A ghostly bubbling echo of your remaining life,
hands struggling to remain above the waterline.
That's me in my tennis shoes, headed to the Coast Guard
Station, with its rescue vessel moored to the breakwall.
On the other side, wild water, and I always stop
like a sentinel to scan the heaving horizon
for a floundering swimmer, someone washed away.
It's this poem then with its slackening lines
that I'd throw to the drowning hopeless,
like those others falling into death's edge,
who happen to be reading my poetry,
deciding my syntax or subject, misplaced
commas: my name hardly mattering at all.

ANITA SKEEN

How a Quilt Becomes a Story

For Chris Worland

Begin with a story, one you have
perhaps heard told several times,
one that has become a touchstone
from the teller's past. Remember
the story involved a double wedding
ring, that these served as pastel roads
where the child ran her toy cars
when she was confined to bed with
illness. Recall that the teller's favorite
color is blue, the deep funnels of morning
glories, the New Mexico sky. Think how
she loves maps, the curvy lines that wind
through places called Big Chimney, Kentuck,
Abiquiu, and Rugby. And animals: the rabbit,
the cat, the hedgehog, a parrot named Mango.
Let Route 119 be the road that takes you to
the heart of the story, the grandmother
who quilted those wedding rings, the mother
who threw them away because bindings
were frayed, seams were unsewn. You
know what a loss that was, though you were
not there. You know how history shows
itself in cloth, how one slip of fabric recalls
The War, another the Sunday dress, one
the baby who never came. Sew
your own story with the teller's story,
the squares, the prints you choose,
the double ring, one yours, one hers.
This quilt you make makes a new story,
a palimpsest, the old story showing through
here, and there, and over there. When you tie

off the final thread, tie your years together,
those past, those to come. When you give
this gift, you stitch up the old wound.

ANITA SKEEN

On the first warm day in March

after a trudge on the icy path
through the sun-splashed woods,
we sit on the front stoop,
hatless and gloveless, drinking
glasses of cinnamon tea.
As we walked, we talked
how we both were blindsided
this past week by colleagues
with agendas obvious and
secretive at the same time,
that we are part of a puzzle
with missing pieces tucked in
a pocket or slipped to the dog,
but not by us, leaving the jay
with no wings, the cottage
roofless on one side.
Snow melts on the driveway.
A chipmunk dashes in front of us,
startled, forgetting that humans
come out in the sun. Friends
who see each other mostly
on Zoom, we are vaccinated,
boosted, and finally, maskless.
We can feel our new lives,
not just the restored old ones,
taking shape as we tell how
we will go forward now, aware
of the terrors in Ukraine, the loss
that is always possible, perhaps
just days away. But today, here
we are, together, making a plan.

CONTRIBUTORS' BIOGRAPHIES

Martha Clarkson's writing and photography can be found in *F-Stop, Seattle Review, Portland Review, Black Box Gallery, Tulane Review, Hawaii Pacific Review, Feminine Rising, Nimrod, Tipton Poetry Journal, Rattle,* and many more. "Her Voices, Her Room" won the short story prize from Open City/Anderbo. She has two notable short stories in *Best American Short Stories*. Martha attended University of Oregon's Creative Writing Program and was a past poetry editor for Word Riot. www.marthaclarkson.com

Allyson Davidson lives in Austin, Texas. She began writing in the Ghost Ranch Fall Writing Festival and has been part of the Ghost Ranch writing community for the last fifteen years through festivals, summer seminars and most recently, Zoom workshops. The support, collaboration and encouragement from this community has been vital to her ongoing development and evolution as a writer attempting to make sense of the world and our places in it.

Linda Nemec Foster has published twelve collections of poetry including *Amber Necklace from Gdansk*, *Talking Diamonds,* and *The Lake Michigan Mermaid* (2019 Michigan Notable Book) which was created with co-author Anne-Marie Oomen and artist Meridith Ridl. Her work appears in magazines and journals such as *The Georgia Review, Nimrod, New American Writing, North American Review, Verse Daily,* and the *2022 Best Small Fictions Anthology*. She has received nominations for the Pushcart Prize and awards from Arts Foundation of Michigan, National Writer's Voice, Dyer-Ives Foundation, The Poetry Center (NJ), *Fish Anthology* (Ireland), and the Academy of American Poets. In 2021 her poetry book, *The Blue Divide*, was published by New Issues Press. A new collection of flash fiction, *Bone Country,* is forthcoming in 2023. The first Poet Laureate of Grand Rapids, Michigan (2003-2005), Foster is the founder of the Contemporary Writers Series at Aquinas College.

Michael Hammerle holds an MFA from the University of Arkansas, Monticello, and a BA in English from the University of Florida. He is the founder of *Middle House Review.* His work has been published

in *The Best Small Fictions, Split Lip Magazine, New World Writing, Louisiana Literature, Hobart After Dark, Maudlin House,* and elsewhere. His writing has been a finalist for awards from American Short Fiction, Hayden's Ferry Review, and Prime Number Magazine. He lives and writes in Gainesville, Florida. www.middlehousereviews.com/michael-hammerle

Maggie Nerz Iribarne is 52, living her writing dream in a yellow house in Syracuse, New York. She writes about teenagers, witches, the very old, bats, cats, priests/nuns, cleaning ladies, runaways, struggling teachers, and neighborhood ghosts, among many other things. She keeps a portfolio of her published work at www.maggienerziribarne.com.

Mary Christine Kane lives in Minneapolis, Minnesota where she works in marketing and is a volunteer for the arts, parks and animal rescue. She earned an MFA from Hamline University in Saint Paul, Minnesota. Her poetry has appeared in numerous journals and anthologies including *Bluestem; The Buffalo Anthology, Right Here, Right Now; Ponder Review* and others. Her poetry chapbook, *Between the stars where you are lost,* was published in 2019 by Finishing Line Press. Mary can be found online at marychristinekane.com.

Elizabeth Kerlikowske's new chapbook, *The Vaudeville Horse*, will be published this spring by Etchings Press.

Craig Loomis has been teaching English at the American University of Kuwait in Kuwait City for the last eighteen years. Over the years, he has had his short fiction published in such literary journals as *The Iowa Review, The Colorado Review, The Prague Revue, Sukoon Magazine, The Maryland Review, The Louisville Review, Bazaar, The Rambler, The Los Angeles Review of Los Angeles The Prairie Schooner, Yalobusha Review, The Critical Pass Review, The Owen Wister Review, Juxtaprose Literary Magazine, Cumberland River Review, REVUE, Consequence Magazine, Fiction International* and others. In 1995 Craig's short story collection, *A Softer Violence: Tales of Orient*, London: Minerva Press, was published; and, in 2013 Syracuse University Press published another collection of Craig's short stories

entitled *The Salmiya Collection: Stories of the Life and Times of Modern Day Kuwait.* Craig's novel *This is a Chair: A Lyrical Tale of Love, Death and Other Curriculum Challenges* was published by Sixty Degrees Publishing in October 2021. Crais has a new collection of short stories coming out this summer entitled *Where the Clouds Begin: Tales of the California Foothills,* Sixty Degrees Press.

Amy Marques grew up between languages and cultures and learned, from an early age, the multiplicity of narratives. She penned three children's books, barely read medical papers, and numerous letters before turning to short fiction. Her work has been published or is forthcoming in anthologies and journals including *Star82 Review, Jellyfish Review, Flying South,* and *Streetcake: Experimental Writing Magazine.* You can find her at @amybookwhisper1 or read more of her words at https://amybookwhisperer.wordpress.com.

Lacy Arnett Mayberry lives and teaches in Tucson, AZ. Her work has appeared in *Washington Square Review, The Pinch Journal, and Literary Mama,* among other publications. She writes at lacymayberry.substack.com

Joan Mazza worked as a microbiologist, psychotherapist, and taught workshops nationally on understanding dreams and nightmares. She is the author of six self-help psychology books, including *Dreaming Your Real Self.* Her work has appeared in *Crab Orchard Review, Potomac Review, Rattle, Poet Lore, Slant, Prairie Schooner,* and *The Nation.* She lives in rural central Virginia.

Kathleen McGookey's most recent books are *Instructions for My Imposter* (Press 53, 2019) and *Nineteen Letters* (BatCat Press, 2019). Her work has recently appeared in *Copper Nickel, Crazyhorse, December, Field, Glassworks, Miramar, Quiddity,* and *Sweet.* She lives in Middleville, Michigan, with her family.

Marianne Peel is now nurturing her own creative spirit after having taught middle and high school English for 32 years. She has spent three summers in Guizhou Province, teaching best practices to teachers in China. She received Fulbright-Hays Awards to Nepal

(2003) and Turkey (2009). Marianne participated in Marge Piercy's Juried Intensive Poetry Workshop (2016). Marianne's poetry appears in *Muddy River Poetry Review, Belle Reve Literary Journal, Jelly Bucket Journal, Gyroscope Review,* among others. Marianne was a finalist for the Naugatuck River Review Narrative Poetry Contest (2020), and she was longlisted for the Alpine Fellowship Writing Prize (2021). She has a collection of poetry, *No Distance Between Us,* published in 2021 by Shadelandhouse Modern Press. Marianne is a graduate of Michigan State University.

Nathan Curtis Roberts was born and raised in the San Francisco Bay Area. His stories and essays have appeared in *The Atlantic Monthly, Alaska Quarterly Review, River Teeth, The Threepenny Review*, and several others. He currently lives in Utah.

Anita Skeen is currently Professor Emerita in the Residential College in the Arts and Humanities at Michigan State University where she was the Founding Director of The RCAH Center for Poetry at MSU and is the Series Editor for Wheelbarrow Books. She has been the Coordinator of the Creative Arts Program at Ghost Ranch for 41 years, and the Fall Writing Festival for 23 years. Anita is the author of six volumes of poetry: *Each Hand A Map* (1986); *Portraits* (1990); *Outside the Fold, Outside the Frame* (1999); *The Resurrection of the Animals* (2002); *Never the Whole Story* (2011); *When We Say Shelter* (2007), with Oklahoma poet Jane Taylor; and *The Unauthorized Audubon* (2014), a collection of poems about imaginary birds accompanied by the linocuts of anthropologist/visual artist Laura B. DeLind. With Taylor, she co-edited the literary anthology *Once Upon A Place: Writings from Ghost Ranch* (2008). Her poetry, short fiction, and essays have appeared in numerous literary magazines and anthologies. Collaboration is an important aspect of her work and she currently involved in writing projects with poets Jane Taylor and Cindy Hunter Morgan, and visual artist Laura DeLind.

Scott T. Starbuck taught ecopoetry workshops the past three years at Scripps Institution of Oceanography in UC San Diego Masters of Advanced Studies Program in Climate Science and Policy. His book of climate poems *Hawk on Wire* was a July 2017 "Editor's

Pick" at Newpages.com, and selected from over 1,500 books as a 2018 Montaigne Medal Finalist at Eric Hoffer Awards for "the most thought-provoking books." *My Bridge at the End of the World, New and Selected Poems,* was a 2020 Finalist for the Blue Light Press Book Award. *Between River & Street* (MoonPath Press, 2021) documents vanishing Pacific Northwest salmon culture before it may be gone. Starbuck's Trees, Fish, and Dreams Climateblog at riverseek.blogspot.com has over 100,000 views from readers in 110 countries.

Jennifer A. Swallow is known more for writing about cybersecurity than imaginary lives, but that doesn't stop her from filling notebook after notebook with ideas. She lives the life of a digital nomad and usually finds inspiration everywhere she goes. When inspiration is lacking, she disappears into the wilderness until it comes back.

Russell Thorburn is a recipient of a National Endowment Fellowship and the first poet laureate of the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. He lives in Marquette, where he sometimes performs with his sextet Radio On. His one-act play of a retro-alternate reality, *Gimme Shelter,* was set for a premiere at the Black Box Theatre but was cancelled by the pandemic.

Rodney Torreson, the former poet laureate of Grand Rapids, Michigan, won the *Seattle Review*'s Bentley Prize, and Storyline Press named him runner-up for the national Roerich Prize for first books. In 2015, the Dyer-Ives Foundation honored him "for his longstanding commitment as a poet, teacher, patron, and advocate for poetry in West Michigan. His third full-length collection of poetry, *The Jukebox Was the Jury of Their Love,* was issued by Finishing Line Press in 2019. His other full-length books of poems are *A Breathable Light* (New Issues Press. 2002) and *The Ripening of Pinstripes: Called Shots on the New York Yankees* (Story Line Press, 1998).

Sivakami Velliangiri is a poet, born in Madras and brought up at Trivandrum, and now living in Chennai. When Sivakami Velliangiri was Sivakami Ramanathan she published her poems in *Youth Times*, and in various other literary journals. Professor Srinivasa Iyengar included her among the women poets in his *History of Indian Writing*

in English (1980). She is Founder Member and Co-curator of *The Quarantine Train,* an online Poetry Workshop. Her online chapbook *In My Midriff* (https://tinyurl.com/nzk7db78) was published by Lily Literary Review. *How We Measured Time (*https://tinyurl.com/h38tpfz5) is her debut poetry book. Her poems appear in *The Penguin Book of Indian Poets,* edited by Jeet Thayil, April 2022.

Ann E. Wallace, a poet and essayist from Jersey City, New Jersey, is author of the poetry collection *Counting by Sevens* (Main Street Rag). She has published work in *Huffington Post, Wordgathering, Halfway Down the Stairs, Snapdragon*, as well as *Juniper* and many other journals. Follow her on Twitter @annwlace409 and Instagram @AnnWallace409, or read her work at AnnWallacePhD.com.

Riley Winchester is from Michigan. He's been nominated for several Pushcarts awards, and he has been shortlisted in several contests.

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

(ANNOUNCED JANUARY 2022)

Exploring the theme of Recovery

Michigan State University Libraries Short Édition, an innovative publishing platform affiliated with the international publisher Short Édition, seeks short work (8,000 character max, about 1,000 words) exploring the theme of Recovery. Submissions accepted through May 15, 2022. Selected work will appear online and in MSU Short Édition machines, and will be considered for publication internationally. The theme is in conjunction with the MSU Broad Art Museum's exhibit of Beverly Fishman's art, also called Recovery.

Accepted submissions will be included in a print issue distributed to all authors and added to MSU Libraries collections. Work will also be compiled in a themed issue available on the MSUL Short Édition site.

Please limit submissions to one story, one short essay, or up to five poems. Poems must be submitted separately. For example, if you are submitting five poems, each poem must be uploaded individually. Each submission should include a short biography directly beneath the work.

Please do not submit previously published work for themed issues.

MSU Libraries Short Édition, a platform that provides free on-demand printing of flash prose and poetry, is now accepting submissions. Submissions are open to new, emerging, and established writers. Accepted work will be included in all four MSU Libraries Short Édition machines and considered for national and international publication through Short Édition machines located throughout the world. All work should be less than 8,000 characters (about 1,500 words). Full guidelines are posted at: lib.msu.edu/shortedition/submit/.

The machines are currently located at the MSU Library (Main), the Broad Art Lab, the East Lansing Public Library, and the Capital Region International Airport. Writers do not need to be affiliated with MSU to submit work.

A collection of short works exploring the theme of Recovery.

Martha Clarkson

Allyson Davidson

Linda Nemec Foster

Michael Hammerle

Maggie Nerz Iribarne

Mary Christine Kane

Elizabeth Kerlikowske

Craig Loomis

Amy Marques

Lacy Arnett Mayberry

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