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Raleigh Review Founded as Rig Poetry
Robert Ian Greene
February 21, 2010
EDITOR’S NOTE

I’m excited to announce in 2014 Raleigh Review is moving to biannual publication. As we make this shift, I would like to take a few lines to thank our founding board members—Joseph Millar and Professor Dorianne Laux. Four years ago, when the precursor to Raleigh Review was Rig Poetry, my “harebrained blog,” I approached Dorianne and Joseph to tell them my plans for the organization with the magazine serving as a precursor to a writers’ studio. Thanks to Joseph & Dorianne’s continued support, advice, training, and confidence, and thanks to Raleigh Review’s artists, poets and writers, our subscribers, our talented staff, and to United Arts Council of Raleigh & Wake County—the magazine is the foundation for our 501(c)(3) nonprofit literary arts organization. Poems, stories, and artwork from our first three issues have won Best of the Net, as well as a Summit International Award at the gold level.

We believe that great literature inspires empathy by allowing us to see the world through the eyes of our neighbors, whether across the street or across the globe. Our mission is to foster the creation and availability of accessible yet provocative contemporary literature. Raleigh Review speaks best through the works we publish. We believe fine art should challenge as well as entertain.

—Rob Greene, editor
# CONTENTS

**ART**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coffee Talk Series</th>
<th>Debra Wuliger</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Musician Pen &amp; Ink Series</td>
<td>Ruby Newman</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**CREATIVE NONFICTION**

| Scrimshaw | Pierce Tyler | 22 |

**FICTION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Room 44</th>
<th>Gregory Josselyn</th>
<th>12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Night With No Moon</td>
<td>Jacqueline Doyle</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What Remains</td>
<td>Dani Sandal</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flight Over Paris</td>
<td>Susan Frith</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danny Came Home</td>
<td>Alisha Karabinus</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courting the Fairest Lady</td>
<td>Mark Rosenblum</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**POETRY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Romance</th>
<th>Dorianne Laux</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Soliloquy of the Chicken...</td>
<td>Eric Paul Shaffer</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moving the Raleigh Review [from August on]</td>
<td>Joseph Millar</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Tiny Bird</td>
<td>John Balaban, Translator</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penelope</td>
<td>Karen Harryman</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cicadian</td>
<td>C. Wade Bentley</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Just Before Dawn</td>
<td>C. Wade Bentley</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wingbert</td>
<td>Susan McDonough-Hintz</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winter</td>
<td>Jill Coyle</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aubade</td>
<td>Andrea O’Rourke</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moon Shot</td>
<td>Buckley &amp; Ott</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kidnapping Mary</td>
<td>Marsha Mathews</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elegy, for the Immortal</td>
<td>Rick Rohdenburg</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Trial</td>
<td>Panagiota Doukas</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Lifting</td>
<td>Kristin Laurel</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play House</td>
<td>Debra Kaufman</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genesis of a Jet</td>
<td>Elizabeth Breen</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**CONTRIBUTORS**

| Debra Wuliger | 7 |
| Ruby Newman | 63 |
| Pierce Tyler | 22 |
| Gregory Josselyn | 12 |
| Jacqueline Doyle | 31 |
| Dani Sandal | 38 |
| Susan Frith | 45 |
| Alisha Karabinus | 54 |
| Mark Rosenblum | 60 |
| Dorianne Laux | 6 |
| Eric Paul Shaffer | 10 |
| Joseph Millar | 16 |
| Emily Wilson | 18 |
| John Balaban, Translator | 27 |
| Karen Harryman | 28 |
| C. Wade Bentley | 29 |
| C. Wade Bentley | 30 |
| Susan McDonough-Hintz | 36 |
| Jill Coyle | 37 |
| Andrea O’Rourke | 41 |
| Buckley & Ott | 42 |
| Marsha Mathews | 48 |
| Rick Rohdenburg | 52 |
| Panagiota Doukas | 53 |
| Kristin Laurel | 57 |
| Debra Kaufman | 59 |
| Elizabeth Breen | 62 |

*Raleigh Review | 5*
POEM | Dorianne Laux

Romance

I know we made it up, like god, but god
it hurts. Like phantom pain in a leg that’s been taken
what’s gone throbs, aches. Nothing there, and still
the pain makes a shape.
ARTWORK | Debra Wuliger

Coffee Talk Series

I Greet Woman
ARTWORK | Debra Wuliger

Coffee Talk Series

Friend Gives You Smile
Coffee Talk Series

When Peace Came I Showered Under Streaming Light
POEM | *Eric Paul Shaffer*

**Soliloquy of the Chicken Sexer**

Cocks crow. Hens lay. You want eggs, you gotta draw the line.
You know, gotta separate the sheep from the goats, the potatoes
from the tomatoes, the p’s from the q’s. Speaking of goats,
my high-school English teacher told us about Greeks and goats.

Not like *that*. You know, he said the Greeks called tragedies
“goat songs,” but he didn’t even know why. You believe that?

Dum ass. Anyway, the chicks roll down the conveyor belt.
I pick ‘em up, one by one. Flip ‘em over, squeeze the belly,
take a good look you-know-where. Anyone says
“If you seen one,
you seen ‘em all” ain’t seen nothing yet. There’s thirteen ways
of looking down there. This one’s a girl. Fine.
   Here’s
another girl. Back on the belt. Oh, here’s a boy.
   Yeah, a male

is another story. There’s a big plastic garbage can
   next to me.
I flip the boys in there. That can gets full, you seal
   up the bag

and drag it to the dumpster. And, oh, man, when
   you get back,
do not forget to put a liner in the can. That’s one
   unholy mess.
I made this decision after my brother e-mailed me an article about how museums are not taking chances on new painters. You have to be a name, they said, and artists were interviewed about showing their paintings in places you go to collect test results. Apparently university professors are reading their plays in pubs. An East End writer in a wheelchair started taping his poems to shop windows. I want to bring poetry to the people, he said. As if, poetry, for the entirety of its existence, was for my cat. The article spent a long time talking about how a pizza shop sued him for harassment after he wrote a poem with permanent marker on their bathroom mirror:

I found you under a bridge.
Hidden.
Like an old woman
in a house
of unanswered telephone rings.

But we must divorce quickly—
the pain of long distance
will not only end
but never finish.

Call Daniel at +44 020 7478 0100.
I have seen the same person pass out flyers in Soho and he was not wearing a shirt. This made
me uncomfortable. On the back of his wheelchair was a picture of his naked arms reaching towards the sun. It read Holistic Services. Let Light Heal. Sex Magick. Lots of Love to You.

My boyfriend plays piano. I like saying that. My boyfriend plays piano. I like telling people at parties that the man who kisses my hip bone and pulls my hair out of the drain charges complete strangers £110 to watch him slam his fingers on a bunch of keys. I do the usual things you would expect from a museum guard. I guard. I tell people to stop taking pictures and not to touch the paintings. This makes me nervous to use my own cell phone in public because I am afraid someone will kindly remind me to put that camera away, Sir! Absolutely no photographs! Pencils only. No pens or paintbrushes. Surely someone would accuse me of carrying a deadly weapon if I reached into the cave of my coat pocket. I imagine people at the Barclays cash machine are convinced I will steal their money so I stand as far away from them as possible. As if the gaps between each person are as large as an undiscovered solar system and we have forgotten how to say, You look great today, turn left at Bond Street, or, You make me happy. We even forgot the day we accidentally left our door unlocked and nothing happened.

What if, you trusted me?
Kept the window open.—
with the purse sitting on the table.

E-mail Daniel at iammariel3@figwig.net.
There is an amendment in the museum’s employee handbook that I cannot have a conversation with a patron for more than sixty seconds for fear that they are trying to distract me, while someone steals a painting. Once, a twelve-year-old had asked me, How does it feel to look at paintings all day? You must love art, he had said. I could not respond.

It was a benefit performance called “Pianos for Peace,” and the collective wealth of the audience in Room 44 could solve my and the universe’s debt crisis alone. I set up some lights I found in the assistant curator’s supply closet. This was the first time I actually took initiative at my job. My boyfriend needed light. I will do this, I thought. When my boyfriend started playing the piano, I swear it was like falling for a stranger on the Tube again, and my destiny from this moment forward would be endlessly wandering the internet, searching for a connection gone missing. His pointed auburn hair draping his dark brown eyes and flushed cheeks and curved swan neck were things no one else could kiss but me. It was as though his chapped nose and unmoved jaw re-awakened the Renaissance. The ancient nymphs and fairies escaped their canvases, people were taking pictures of everything with glorious flashes, people were taking pictures of people taking pictures, art critics were naked feeling the brushstrokes, dogs with berets ran through the corridors, the curators re-recorded audio guides with sounds of old people falling in love, and children painted
over masterpieces with interactive computers that let you see the insides of your body.

It was my job to hand my boyfriend roses that, in the next hour, would begin decomposing in our trash. I would take them out to the dumpster next Thursday. He’ll be in Croatia. And in that eight seconds, the audience, like a chorus of Degas’ ballerinas, turned in perfect unison and studied me, not the Seurat, the Renoir, the Pissarro, or my boyfriend who plays the piano, but the son of a toll booth attendant and an administrative assistant in a 2001 Dior suit and faded name tag, all while applauding, like I was a subliminal message hidden in a yogurt advertisement, impossible to decode. I was like a desirable but undetected scent overpowered by the portrait of the man they all paid to see.
POEM | *Joseph Millar*

**Moving the Raleigh Review**  
*for Rob Greene*

Once we shovel the trash from the switch room  
sweep the black widows hanging down  
from the vents and bitter leaves of insulation  
speckled with fiberglass and asbestos

once we clear out the warped ceiling tiles  
stained with squirrel urine  
and the desiccated raccoon carcass  
trapped in the dead furnace blower

once we pay first and last  
to the ancient diabetic landlord  
shuffling over in his aluminum walker,  
his blotched hands gripping  
the ribbed blue handles,  
his John Deere hat pulled over his eyes

we start to think we belong here  
cross from the veterinarian  
next to the abandoned market  
this gray day in March, my birthday—
though I will fall asleep later on
trying to meditate in the front seat
on the ruins of time,
on the sounds of the wind
making words in the oaks and pecan trees

words we would try to search out and fashion
next to the old woman's tailor shop,
at its door a potted camellia,
in its window a hand-sewn rose.
POEM | Emily Wilson

[from august on]

[august]
There is a knock on the back door. The darkness and I, we cannot tell who is there; if the night could see for itself what hid around the corners, it would not have to send the moths. In this story, the knock is my Aunt Angie, the one embezzling from the PTA. She tells my dad something in a whisper, and he cries. Strange, I think. I did not know sculptors chiseled tear ducts into their granite.

[the previous may]
Tire-travelling from school to home across West Virginia mountains. My dad and Uncle Warren in the front, the containers of transitions in the back: the cardboard boxes and my body. “Nah, bro, I’d be down for a mountain mama. All you need is gum and tongue for lovin’ someone,” Warren said. When we stopped at a hotel for the night, I heard the dusky lavender tongue of rock-borne weeds murmuring, Turn back. This is our country.
They scraped Warren’s left elbow off I-95. There are things we have yet to understand. I don’t know why our language has no words to differentiate going upstream and downstream, no word for when the current changes direction. My Granny Gail doesn't know if his blood alcohol content and the speed of his motorcycle imply intent.

My dad left for the bathroom, and Warren and I sat alone in the Bob Evans booth. My mother’s distrust of Warren, which had been tilled in me for seasons, ripened into a wordless fruit. The silence a hard stone to swallow, he excused himself, went outside to spit some hallelujah grit stuck in his throat. It arched with the speed of a rushed confession. He returned and I watched his construction worker fingers pick at sweet potato fries. Is familiarity a prerequisite for love?

Warren left behind an eight-year-old son named Joshua. Aunt Angie is now collecting for his college fund. At the funeral, Josh latched onto my brother. The text of his torn cuticles read: I have not been comfortable here. My brother asked Josh, a season too early, “What do you want
Santa to get you for Christmas?” Josh said, “I don’t trust no man who wants me to sit on his lap.”

[decades ago, probably summer]
When the leafy soldiers traded in their green uniforms and stopped standing at attention, the tobacco fields became the place where every Wilson teenager learned how to drive. Two paths. On the left: rusted bones whose motors no longer work. On the right: a ditch that is difficult to drive around.

[august]
My dad has never been a particularly disagreeable man. And then my Granny Gail’s fourth husband would not contribute to the cost of a casket. What I thought of for an engraving: Fear is not the mouth of a cave; it is not easier getting out than going in. Warren’s left elbow was fire-tickled in the end, sprinkled into Kerr Lake, so it did not matter anyway.

[a day my mother will not disclose, roughly 19 years ago]
My mother, a young mother. Wishing to have her own home until she discovered Warren had stolen my dad’s credit cards. The thief of the kitchen cabinet had acquired thousands of
dollars in debt. She gave my father a choice: half his DNA or half his DNA.

[from august on]
The left path of the tobacco field grows fainter and fainter with every thirteenth birthday. The recently added motorcycle frame, though it now bears the same uselessness as its four-wheeled predecessors, is still unfamiliar with oxidization. My brother handles the ditch like a pro.

[august]
My mother harvested forgiveness like a late crop after Warren died. My dad blamed himself. His brother and abusive father now both lost to the bottle. This is what my dad has learned of love: *it is like owning the riverbed, but not the flow of the water.*
CREATIVE NONFICTION | Pierce Tyler

Scrimshaw

The moment I jumped off the M/V Uncatena ferry as it steamed away from Nantucket and out to sea, I had an inkling something might go wrong. Jeff had jumped first, right when he was supposed to. But Matt, who was next, didn’t go for some reason. And as I flew through the air that warm July morning—with dark waters down below and the steel hull of the ferry vibrating just behind me—I sensed Matt’s not jumping could pose a problem for us, though I didn’t know how yet, or what, if anything, I could do.

I’d met Matt that summer at the Whale, a seafood restaurant on the edge of town where we both had jobs in the kitchen. I can’t say we had a whole lot in common, but we were both nineteen and became friends the way people you work with sometimes do. He was a short little guy—not much over five feet. And his hair, which was blond, was unusually long and looked like he never combed it. I suppose he was cultivating a surfer dude look, though I don’t think he actually surfed. Jeff, on the other hand, was a friend from New Haven. Someone I’d known growing up. So when he went over the side of the ferry, there was no question I was going, too.

The waves in the ferry’s wake were enormous. I had to fight against huge, green walls of water to keep from going under. Eventually things flattened out. And when they
did, I spotted Jeff and swam over toward him. We scanned the horizon for any sign of Matt. But there was nothing between us and the mighty Uncatena, which continued to plow onward like a tinned ham toward the sea.

No sooner had we started swimming in toward shore than a small sailboat glided onto the scene, manned by a well-heeled vacationer in his forties. It must have seemed a bit incongruous to him: two youths in the water waving him down like that. But he tacked over anyway and offered us a lift. We told him the whole story. How we’d boarded the ferry wearing only our bathing suits. How we’d jumped near the beach club, but Matt had not—which meant he was headed straight to Woods Hole with no money for a ticket back.

It was funny to think of Matt’s predicament. But the mood quickly turned serious when a Coast Guard cutter came flying around Brant Point, its sirens blaring like a swarm of angry bees. It seemed like it might have something to do with us. But what? We’d gotten away cleanly. We hid ourselves until the cutter passed but soon saw the cause of the commotion. Off in the distance, about a half mile away, the M/V Uncatena was stopped dead in its tracks. It had turned completely sideways, blocking the channel. And there was black smoke belching from its smokestacks. Something was clearly wrong. We figured we better not stick around. So we thanked our skipper and slipped back in the
water, swimming the remaining distance into shore.

Walking back into town, we noticed something strange was going on. People everywhere were clustering in small groups. On the sidewalks. In the street. Everyone talking and listening. Leaning in close, so as not to miss a single word.

“How many were there?”
“Two, I heard.”
“Propellers got ‘em—and that was that.”
“Can you imagine?”
“Their poor parents.”
“Stupid kids.”

All across town, the chatter was the same. Everywhere the word was we were dead, and the news was spreading like wildfire.

Now, I’d read Mark Twain so I knew these things were possible. But this was actually happening. And I’d be lying if I didn’t say it creeped us out. Still, I couldn’t help but see an opportunity. It was as if a gap in time had suddenly opened up. All we had to do was step into it—and disappear. As if by magic. And who knew what might happen next.

This was heady stuff and we needed some time to think it over. So we hitched a ride out to Siasconset Beach, but found everyone there already knew. The news was traveling faster than we were. If we wanted to stay anonymous, we had to get off-island soon. Apparently, though, Jeff had ideas of his own. Because as I was hatching our exit strategy, he wandered off
to a phone booth in the parking lot and dialed us in to the police. Five minutes later a squad car pulled up and we were soon being whisked back into town.

The officers at the Coast Guard station were in a bad mood. They’d burned a lot of fuel and man hours trying to find us—including the cost of a helicopter called in to assist with the search. It puzzled me, though, how they could know so much about us. Matt had to be involved, but I couldn’t explain how. We got our answer soon enough when a side door opened and in walked Matt, escorted by two officers. He seemed to be having some trouble walking, and a gray woolen blanket was draped around his shoulders, as if he might be cold. His hair was bedraggled. There were cuts on his face and feet. He looked like something the cat dragged in. He sure lit up when he saw us, though. Like everyone, he’d thought we were dead. I can’t say the feeling was mutual. After all, it was his fault we were in this mess.

As he told us his side of the story, the bottom line was he’d been scared. That was why he’d backed away and why he hadn’t jumped with us. He realized immediately the mistake he’d made. But what could he do about it? The end of the coastline was approaching fast. Frantic, he raced upstairs to the observation deck, where dozens of passengers were enjoying the view. He bounced this way and that. Careening like a pinball. Then finally. Deciding. Right there in front of everyone. He climbed up onto the
starboard rail and over he went. It was three stories down to the water.

Now, I wasn’t there, but when I imagine that moment, I see Matt performing a perfect swan dive. His arms spread out wide. Chest extended. The long locks of his golden hair trailing off behind him. Because if you’re going to do something stupid like that you might as well go all the way. He swam for the jetty as fast as he could. His “plan” was to hide there until the ferry passed. But everyone on the boat saw exactly what was happening, could track his little body as it crawled toward the rocks. This explained why the ferry stopped and the black smoke coming from the smokestacks. When he reached the jetty, he wedged in between some boulders there. But the barnacles were tenacious—and the wave action made it worse. So when the voice on the megaphone ordered him out, he was more than happy to surrender.

In the end, we paid the Coast Guard for all the trouble we’d caused. And just like that, my summer savings were gone. As if that weren’t enough, the judge sentenced us to twenty-four hours in the Nantucket jail, where they never turn the lights off and cheeseburgers are served for every meal. To this day I’m still not sure exactly why we did it. My stepfather, the Freudian analyst, thinks he might be partly to blame. But I don’t think so. It had more to do with simple wanderlust and the desire to gather stories. Which makes this here a form of scrimshaw, etched on an ivory page.
A Tiny Bird

A tiny bird with red feathers,
a tiny bird with black beak
drinks up the lotus pond day by day.
Perhaps I must leave you.
POEM | Karen Harryman

Penelope

My freshman girls don’t understand Penelope’s faithfulness.
Twenty years waiting it out, fending off Ithaca’s finest—
They don’t account for the difference in values.
When we get to Calypso’s Island, they’re pissed. Why does Odysseus get to cheat? they ask.
Other times, other mores, I tell them, and not one of them is satisfied.

Back home I knew a woman who slept under the porch nights when her husband would beat her.
In the morning she’d crawl out and make his breakfast. Sometimes strength is a weakness, I say.
Sometimes we say faithful when we mean fucked.
Cicadian

Infinite nymphs sucking sweet xylem sap, grubbed in mud, waiting these seventeen years for the siren song to draw them upwards at last into mad, full-throated orgy, the brief bacchanal before only molted husks remain, lining every tree like abandoned burkas, like withered penitents awaiting the Rapture. And then silence—the sharp and harrowing nothing left when life has gone to ground.
POEM | C. Wade Bentley

Just Before Dawn

Out the door in the dark and early and through the wire fence at the back of the yard feeling my way along the path at the bottom of Maxwell's fields crossing the canal on two wooden planks and then I am among them sensing the cows before I see them hearing them breathe and finally there they are like icebergs in a dark sea and I call come on girls let's go as they slowly rise and lumber along behind leaving me to pick my way between electric fences or feel the hot stripe across my thighs and curse my Mormon boy curses until I make the milking shed at last switching on the yellow light stamping my boots on the cement floor to keep warm until six steaming cows come to fill the space with slobber and shit as I kneel between their bowed and heaving sides their teats dripping milk bringing barn cats to dance around their hooves and soon a certain syncopation that we all of us boy and cats and cows know and wait for settle into and quietly ride like the low and steady line of an upright bass stepping us into sunrise.
A Night with No Moon

I don’t give a rat’s ass whether you believe me or not. I don’t know you and you don’t know me. I might not like you if we got to know each other on the outside. I’m just telling a story here, passing the time. I got nothing but time these days. So take it or leave it, I don’t care.

There were five of us hanging at Danny’s Bar that night. Connor had a new squeeze and took off early, so that left four: me, Big John, Len, and Scobie. We’d had a few beers and played some pool, and someone, I think Len, said he knew about a sure thing. Maybe it was Scobie. Scobie and Len both knew, but hadn’t done nothing about it, since they figured it would take more than two. One outside man, two or three inside. You gotta be fast, on a job like that. In. Out. With a burglar alarm, it’s eight minutes tops.

Somebody knew someone whose sister-in-law cleaned for this rich family that’d be in Hawaii all week. Week was almost up. High walls, big yard, lots of trees, dog at the kennel, neighbors nowhere near. House had an alarm, but cops are busy Saturday nights in Oaktown. We’d have eight minutes for sure, maybe more, but we weren’t taking no chances. Like I said, it was a sure thing.

We picked up duffel bags and tools and flashlights at Len’s. There was no moon and by the time we got up there, the Hills were dark as a
motherfucker. The driveway was long and curvy. We eased the car in under some trees real quiet, pulled the bulb on the overhead light in the car before we opened the doors, and left them part open. Len stayed at the wheel.

Scobie found a cellar window that wasn’t even wired and Big John, who’s a skinny son of a bitch, not much more than five foot tall, wiggled in, ran up the stairs, unlatched the kitchen door, then let us in the back. Alarm started the minute he opened the door but we knew it was gonna happen so we just hopped to it. Scobie ran for the den to look for cash and computers, Big John ran for the dining room silver and shit, and I ran upstairs to look for jewelry and cash in the master bedroom. We done it before and were pretty damn good at it.

The staircase was long and winding, and the whole way up there was pictures of this perfect family on the wall. Two blond parents, three blond kids, on boats, on beaches, in front of the Eiffel Tower, the White House—older the higher up on the stairs you got. Probably there’d be a new one, at some luau in Hawaii, after they got back. I’m thinking, damn, there’s not a single picture like that of my family. Never had no vacations, never had no Dad most of the time. Mom always drunk off her ass. Maybe I would’ve had a family of my own by now if Joleen hadn’t got that abortion. I told her it was wrong, but she didn’t care, never listened to me nohow. Boy would’ve been almost two by now. Or maybe it was a girl. Don’t know where Joleen’s got to.
The bedroom was big, with a view of the Bay from a row of tall windows. The Oakland I know, just little specks of light, far away. Jammed the whole jewelry box in the duffel bag, hoping all the good stuff wasn’t in some safe, and started rifling the drawers. People are stupid, think if you hide a stack of bills under your underwear nobody’ll find it. Found a shoebox with more cash in a pile of boxes in the walk-in closet. And a gun and some ammo in the night table, so I took that too. Would have ripped the TV off the wall but it was too damn big.

I figured I had time so I tried the next bedroom, still hauling ass. Hot pink carpet like fake fur, green and pink polka dots on the walls. I’d finished the drawers in the closet when I found it on an upper shelf. I tell you, my hair stood up. I can still feel the prickling on my neck, taste the beer rising up in the back of my throat.

It was inside of a plastic bag in a hatbox, black cardboard with silver writing on the side. A plastic Ziploc bag like for sandwiches except much bigger. I couldn’t believe my eyes.

I dropped the box like it was on fire, got the fuck out of there fast as I could. Didn’t even let on to Len and Scobie and Big John until we were on the road. We’d pulled the doors tight without slamming them. The three of us done all the running were breathing hard, and I was sweating, fucking scared I tell you. We was coasting down the hill, lights still off, when I told them.
“You won’t believe what I seen in there. In a box in one of the bedroom closets.”
“What, man?” Len said.
“Yeah, what? Diamonds or something?” Big John was always looking for the big score.
“I seen the skeleton of a dead baby, curled up like it was inside its momma.”
“Jesus God. Are you sure?” Scobie said. He crossed himself.
“You think I’d make something like that up?”
Big John said it was none of our business and I guess it wasn’t. Scobie thought we should ditch everything, in case we was messing with some bad juju. He’d seen stuff in the South would make your hair turn gray overnight. Len wondered if they was Satan worshippers, something like that.
But Big John fenced it all and we got our cuts. Never got caught. I’m in on a bank job, stupid shit that we should’ve planned better. Out in four with good behavior. Which I aim on keeping up.
Wonder if I should’ve called the cops, though, for that godforsaken, unburied child. I still see it, curled up in its plastic shroud, glowing like a crescent moon. Wonder was it dead yet when it got sealed up in plastic, how long it took before it was nothing but bones. Whether it was too late to baptize it. I keep feeling like there was something I was supposed to do, and I never done it. Maybe God was calling me and I didn’t hear. God knows I had a run of bad luck after that night, and plenty of time to think it over since.
They say the unburied will haunt you. I don’t know if it’s that baby or Joleen’s, but I can hear it
crying sometimes in my sleep. I wake up in a sweat, my heart pounding. What could I have done? Never saw nothing in the paper, but you can bet they hid that baby before they called the cops.

Believe this or not. It’s nothing to me.
Wingbert

I named my first
car, that rusty
sweet heap,
swapped for a bushel
of Jersey blue crabs.
Four wheels I fled on,
front seat I slept on,
torn back seat
where my tongue
spelled l-o-v-e
on a bare breast.
I was eighteen
grazing nineteen,
becoming someone
who names
what changes her.
POEM | *Jill Coyle*

**Winter**

At the wintertime it was a lotta snow and ice. It’d get to where you coun’t go the road an’ the fields were all cover’d with snow blowed into big ol’ drifts. Us kids would go romp around in’t. I ‘member back in nineteen and thirty-eight hit was the awfulest snowstorm ever I seen. Hit was so cold we coun’t git warm everhow we tried. Mama boilt water and filled a stout warshbasin and us kids set in’t. It certain was warm in the warshbasin! After the snow melt, we seen the fence beside of the pasture was sigogglin on account of the heavy snow had blowed up agin’ it. Papa blessed out that snow right loud when he seen the fence needs fixed.
FICTION | *Dani Sandal*

**What Remains**

*Ah, the knowledge of impermanence
that haunts our days
is their very fragrance.*
— Rilke

The Word slips from my lips and I am promptly led home from Sunday service by Grandmother Lucile for a lesson.

While removing the Cajun Shrimp polish from her nails, she says, “If you’re gonna to say it, baby, say it quietly and quickly like this.” Then she demonstrates the correct way to use the expression. The woman knows. She’s got credentials. Thirty-two years schooling English in Hattiesburg, she is not to be second-guessed.

So on this Sunday afternoon in the heart of summer, I heed her advice. Eyes still teeming and ten-year-old ego scorched wicked from the light whip of a switch atop two layers of pants and one pillow. Ass intact and point taken, I blow her nails dry so she can peel me a fig.

“That way,” she continues, “people can’t quite hear it and when they ask, ‘What did you say?’ You tell them duck or puck or luck or stuck or whatever—and laugh. Always laugh. They shouldn’t expect it coming from a cute little thing like you. You should be playing a harp, you’re so precious. Just don’t say it in church again. And so loud. Or, if you must, wait till the choir starts up. I say it all the time these days at the hospital when
they ask those exasperating questions. ‘Mrs. Clement, what is this picture of?’ As if I’ve lost my mind completely. It is a whisk. I do not give one iota. They expect me to say, ‘Butcher knife?’ But I say, ‘Fuck.’ Very quietly. It throws them off. I am losing my memory, baby, not my mind. Fuck is a word whose meaning has never changed. Years and years could not mutate it. Check the OED. I have respect for its longevity. And, Lord, don’t overuse it, or it loses its kick. You may as well be saying, ‘Excuse me?’ So say it only when you mean it. Remember, ‘fuck’ has gusto. But don’t, I repeat, do not, use the word ‘suck.’ I don’t approve of the way youth use it today. ‘This sucks, that sucks, you suck.’ I know that you will be tempted, however, you must refrain. Got that?”

Other things Lucile wants me to remember this summer: she sits, three years old, naked upon a patch of crabgrass at dawn with her cotton clad mother, cracking dewed watermelon, its sweat pink meat on her tongue...girl days: barefoot, braiding tobacco on a back porch or collecting potatoes from fields in her flour sack apron and keeping a few under her pillow to pretend they are dolls donning the same tweed dress...catching a rainbow, belly full of eggs...the sound those amber gems make when they break mirrored waters (plunk) and how their own rise to swallow them like Christ...marrying the preacher’s son at fifteen then giving birth to a baby boy, still and blue as a winter moon...receiving a stone throw to the skull while she
rallies for integration...the sound it makes (like an egg to a spoon)...how she goes stockingless to church at noon to feel fine linen against her skin, a red-headed, foul-mouthed granddaughter in hand...after service she suns her full white thighs in plain sight at the reservoir while we suck on peppermints and watch the reverend baptize the wretched, washing their sins away...

§

A December evening, room 103, artificial light spreads wide on a woman whose tongue—that lovely tongue—now lolls dumb in its tomb of forgetting. I slouch in a straight back chair at her side, feeling duped and benignly homicidal because there’s nothing I can collar and throw down. And because I am sixteen now and she had been a prophet, I say, “Well, Lucile, this absolutely sucks.” To which she stares, slack-jawed and slumped, eyes large on the window where snow beats against the pane and a lone pine bends in prayer. Taking her hand, cracked and flaked white as talc, I finger her nails, now yellowed, like ten blisters pressed in curled willow switch. Leaning in close, my lips to the crook of her ear, I whisper The Word so slow and soft that it must echo in that pillaged space where the past has been plucked by a thief like some celestial fig...fuck, fuck, fuck...and for a split, benevolent second, she turns back to me, bright-eyed and quick as a girl who’s seen the flip of a coin down a long dark alley.
Aubade

Forget the morning of the dead mouse in the sink, the rust that the pipe coughed. Swim off the dock. Pass the empty gangplank and the mossed legs of anchors, paddle through that water, sick for air, and forget your lover’s feet in your lap, the half-light’s illicit trace on the mandolin.

His drab couch. Forget your red handprint patches stitched to the curves of his black long johns. Coming off, the prints deflating like soured fruit. Forget the uneven legs of the three-drawer bureau that held you. The muffled hablar of men laying a roof in the alley behind the drawn blinds, the way the shower water lashed as he said, *We’ll always be this beautiful*, then eddied as if devilled by this casual sway—and look ahead past the lake, at the backdrop, those wallpapered woods where, you think, he took off, as wolves do.
POEM | John F. Buckley and Martin Ott

Moon Shot

Everyone watches General Jim, hero to trillions and even some girls.
His Joint Lunar Defense Command shines full on our screens each Mega-Moonday, right before bedtime. I make the three-finger vow

To fight all enemies, lunar and extra-lunar, but few are worthy.
I gather the neighborhood lunar league, using the attic for home base, with a window to watch invaders and mind-controlled moms.

Spacemen must hold their breaths, hence the stinky trunk challenge.
A leak in the roof has rotted the leather lid and the granny panties inside. Membership has its privileges; membership has its costs.

Three kids fell, unable to seal their lungs from the mildewosphere inside their temporary tomb. We receive our orders from the Ouija
board and open far too much airplane glue to create the wormhole.

I am on the losing side of the catastrophic vote to allow “lunas” into our boy haven, and not even the fiberglass hazing can halt Stephanie and Christy’s ascent through the ranks, their earning construction-paper badges for hand-to-hand combat, for moon-walking across the roof, for correctly identifying JLDC arch-enemies: the Nazi Tigers of Titan, the Sharkbats of Neptune B, the Ice Cave Ghosts of Mars that spooked Skylab into a falling star. I tie a walkie-talkie to a balloon, and the satellite beams the husky voice of General Jim to us, though the girls argue it’s the UPS man. And there he is, the notorious imposter, mud-brown uniform a travesty of paramilitarism.

Through the window,
tracking his truck, we wriggle into the crabapple
tree, fitting

fruitbombs into slingshot rayguns with popsicle
crosshair sights.
I aim and aim to impress, and even as I am
distracted by giggles,
I slip toward the earth and launch supersour
missiles, the freed

world whirling, tractor beam pulling me toward
General Jim,
toward the elite squad on the moon itself, into a
darkness filled
with the shouts of vanquished foes and heroic
escape velocity.
FICTION | Susan Frith

Flight Over Paris

There goes Madame Blanchard in white ruffles. Sophie to some. A nervous one, they say. *See her jerk at the sound of a trumpet blast?* Beneath her ostrich-plumed hat, the balloonist is small and angular. She climbs into her balloon’s gondola and waves to the people, bobbing her head so she never quite meets their eyes.

Night has settled over the Tivoli Gardens, where children chase each other around a kettle of *chocolat*, lovers squeeze hands, and a traveling doctor peddles phials of green medicine.

“All disease comes from a worm,” says the doctor. A touch of catarrh crusts his voice, but he keeps talking. “There is even a worm of love.”

The lovers roll their eyes. A stonemason from the provinces spits at the doctor’s feet, calling him a fake, before wandering off to steal dinner.

Madame Blanchard rises above them all. Tonight there are fireworks, which the people have come to expect from her shows. Bengal lights bathe her gondola in a blue that’s the shade of their better dreams. Next, something gold flickers inside the vessel. What else will little Sophie drop down to them? Another parachuting dog? More royal birth announcements or at least some bright paper fans? The people crave her souvenirs, each of which flutters down with its own piece of sky.
“Bravo!” the crowd calls out. “Viva Madame Blanchard.”

A girl with chocolate smeared across her cheeks jumps on the spot where the balloon has left the earth.

§

At first only Madame herself knows the balloon has caught fire. The hydrogen that should lift her is burning. As she tries to swat out the flames, her first thought is that the citizens of Paris will miss her latest stunt. She’d hidden a torch and a pouch that should have opened to toss more stars to the sky. The people would have loved it, just as the farther away she gets, the more Sophie loves them. She’s dealt with hailstorms and marsh landings. She spent one night in a faint, floating higher and higher. Can she not handle this?

For years, her husband was the one they came to see. Then Sophie began to crave Jean’s weightlessness for herself, so she went up with him. She discovered the proper distance from things. Down below, the rattle of carriages and the noise of crowds had always unnerved her. Jean’s debts used to pinch her awake. And now there’s his absence, which is like a dark armoire pressing down on her, pushing out her breath. Up here, though, she suspects she is fearless.

Sophie tosses out ballast. With each stone she buys another moment to look around. She thinks of her Jean. What did he notice on his last descent? For a time she has envied him this secret. She passes over a church steeple, sees a
flower stall shut for the night, and wonders why an old woman is crying alone on her balcony. Things move faster now. Sophie crouches and crosses herself.

§

Several blocks from the Tivoli Gardens, the ditch diggers on Rue de la Provence finish their work by lantern light. One of the men reaches for a roll he has saved since breakfast. It is so hard it cuts his gums. He tongues the spot, tasting metal. He looks up and for a moment believes that Madame Blanchard has come to pay them a visit. But she is going too fast for that.

When Madame’s balloon thumps to a nearby rooftop, it seems like a miracle. She is made for this, the digger thinks. She can survive what they cannot. The man holds this thought as the bread starts to soften in his mouth. Then the basket tips. In a flutter of white, Madame strikes the cobblestones below.

A ribbon tied tightly under Madame’s chin has kept her hat on. Her feathers tremble under the men’s breath. They try not to stare directly at her still, startled eyes. In the distance, the people of Paris shout for Sophie, but the workmen have reached her first. Now that she is down here, so close to them, they will build her a nest.
Kidnapping Mary  
*Eunice*

We didn’t know how to do it, without getting caught. Been there nine years now, her sigh-reen face rising out of the shrubs. She looks good—she’s white. She’s righteous. Her nose’s broke a bit, but those eyes. They look straight to the far side of heaven, her hands wide open like she’s about to catch a pass.

That’s Mary, Mama of Jesus, all right.

None of us had spine enough to take shut of her at a proper church meeting. Lawdy no!

Tell Pastor Janet about Mz. Mink? Nary one of us eighty-year old gals would do that.

We ain’t got no meanness in us. We just wanted Mary gone.

Young foreign feller about thirty stopped in one Sunday, then left. He come in thinking
we’d be good Catholics ‘cause of Mary waiting at the door. But I reckon we Methodists
was just too much singing and shouting and hugging for that forlorn little feller.

Proved what we knewed all along—Mary had to go, dad gum it. Mary had to go.

How to get shut of her without Mz. Mink catching wind?
We needed a plan. I didn’t want no part

of such conniving myself, but being Treasurer, they said I was the very one to get away with it.

Come October, we pulled on our men’s hunting clothes,
backed Big Angie’s pickup to the wheelchair ramp. Yahoo!

we jumped like Marines. We netted Mary in a trash bag,
hefted her in the back, climbed in. Angie squealed off

leaving nothing but a hole in the hedge. Kidnapping done,
we dropped Mary real respectful-like
at the Catholic church where she belongs. We got tickled
to think of them bedraggled long-faced Catholics

showing up for mass the next day. There’d she be. A sign from heaven. Rumors would fly—

**MARY MOTHER OF GOD TRANSFIGGERED**
**STATUE WEEPS REAL TEARS**

whole town flocking to see. Sure enough, what they couldn’t see, they made up—

tears, slick on alabaster white. Somebody spied Mz. Mink’s creek-colored Lincoln Continental high-tailing it. Let me tell you, my belly was shooting sparks.

I made a bee-line for Big Angie’s. From the porch, I heard her surround-sound TV,

& who’d have believed it — Mz. Mink’s rattly voice on the six o’clock news. Big Angie and me,

we looked on, hollow & stiff as uncooked macaroni. Then Mz. Mink did something I ne’er seen her do
at the Methodist church. She kneeled down. Same time, she pulled the microphone smack plum
to her bobby-pin lips. Going on and on about how she’d been first to find Mary,
somebody’s garage sale special and saved her, the Mother of God. She brung her to the Methodist church
where she stood all alone for years, tearing up ‘cause she never felt quite welcome. Now me and Angie, we squirmed
like bait in a fisherman’s tub. She’s a real piece of work that Mz. Mink. Next day, she started catechism.

Maybe not such a poor do, longs she happy. As for that hole in the hedge out front of our church,
some claim they still see Mary there, arms stretched wide, stuck on welcome.
Elegy, for the Immortal

You’re drunk, Li Po, and
one thin arm upraised,
you teeter to the water and your fate,
the moon a water lily,
night a cloak of black and stars.

Li Po, you old sot. Li Po!
But you gather up
the midnight
and dive in—

Li Po!
POEM | Panagiota Doukas

Second Trial
for my father

The nurses come to bring you water
like Romans bearing vinegar to a bed-pinned
Christ—

they dab lips, paint water like sacred images:
    buffalo,
red deer, hawks around the dark mouth

cave—they probe, you bite, and suck the sponge-
stick
    hard, to relearn water like you once learned to
swallow

warm chugs of breast milk dry: and what they call a
    miracle
is just the body remembering:
    those essential motions, its habits.
Danny Came Home

So many grunts came back broken, jagged with rage from those thirteen slogging months, but not Danny. Danny brought home two tattoos and a delta of scar tissue that spread over his right thigh, but he was whole: feet, ankles, knees, and skin that had been raw with days of standing stagnant in water that stank of war. For thirteen months, he kept two steady hands and one vision of home. Danny could close his eyes and see Marguerite, blue skirt flaring over legs smooth and white, so goddamned gorgeous his teeth hurt with it.

Now he is back, living it, but nothing is like he imagined when he was carrying a dream through the jungle. She is standing at the stove, her hands careless of the frying pan, the sizzling grease.

“I didn’t think you would come back,” she says again. “I thought you were dead for sure. You were with Lucy’s no-good man.”

“I know.”

“She’s better off.”

Danny lies; he tells her, “He was a good soldier,” when really, Leonard was about as useful as shit on a shingle, even before they were in country.

Marguerite says, “Barbie’s husband, he didn’t come home neither, or Cathy’s.”

“No, they didn’t.”
“I didn’t know what to think. I kept waiting—” Her voice freezes and she looks down, remembering, maybe, that she’s at the stove. That things are on fire. “They made an awful racket with crying. Everyone brought food. Barbie didn’t have to cook for days. Her mama moved in. She does all the housework now while Barbie just sits.”

“The bacon’s gonna burn, baby. Turn it off.”

She just stands there, staring at Danny, or beyond him; her hair falls dead to her shoulders, frizzy and unbrushed. She used to wrap it every night with cotton rags, and mornings, the curls bounced as she poured pancake batter and squeezed oranges. Come nights, she’d smear lipstick around the hungry darkness of her mouth and they’d go dancing. Now the folds of her cheeks droop around lips that have bled out.

“I didn’t know what to think,” she says again, softly now.

He nudges past her. Turns off the stove. Gently pries her fingers from the pan’s crusted handle. Danny guides her back to the counter, back to the simple reality of breakfast, of a morning that should be like all other mornings.

“Come on, let’s mix up these eggs now.”

His hand settles at the base of her spine and Marguerite stiffens. For a moment, he thinks she’s gonna flare up, tell him there was some college boy longhair motherfucker warming his bed and shitting in his toilet while Danny crouched in the rain. Then her shoulders sink again and she touches the waiting eggs like she’s
never seen them before. One by one, she cracks them, slowly, on the rim of the bowl and Danny takes the empty shells from her, crushing the halves together in his hands.
POEM | Kristin Laurel

The Lifting
...to fall, patiently to trust our heaviness.
Even a bird has to do that before he can fly.
— Rilke

Dylan, your room’s still a mess,
there’s Monster energy cans on the floor,
your back-pack’s un-zipped, books and papers
lie on your unmade bed. And on your
   nightstand—
the dust is piling up, thick.
Grandma wants to go in and clean it all
up. Your mom has closed the door,
she cannot bear to look inside
and not find you. But isn’t that just like you?
You have the entire family
afraid to go in your room, except to clean it up.

Dylan, your mom believes you sent her blue jays
one lonely morning; she saw twenty or thirty
jays fly in and land on the apple tree by her
   kitchen window.
She says it was a gift; to see all those blue jays
next to a bright morning sky.
Native Americans describe that blue on blue
as a “double vision”—a clarity, a purity of the
   soul.
Grandma thinks blue jays are pests;
She says they squawk and carry on, steal other birds’ nests—
She thinks your mom has magical thinking.

After a year like this, I’ll believe in anything.
And I’ve taken to wanderings, any old kind, to the simplest places.
Just yesterday at the Park Reserve, I saw a rescued Barred owl who had been hit by a car. He’ll never fly again; when I noticed he was missing an eye—
I looked away.
I don’t want to know what a one-eyed owl knows.

Instead, I watched a black hairy caterpillar-kick up dust.
I watched them fly: A Gypsy moth, A Mourning cloak, and many Monarchs. I sat on top of composting leaves, and
I watched as a small brown seed drifted toward the blue sky, carried by the white silky hairs from the milkweed.
POEM | Debra Kaufman

Play House

Glory Jean had everything—
a smooth blonde mom,
winking dad,
her own little house
with ruffled yellow curtains.

The day we sipped beer
from tiny cups she said,
*Touch me here.*
I felt a quiver I knew was wicked.
*Let’s be French.* She licked my lips.

There was swooning, then the looming
rest of it: my mother (how did she know?)
marching me home, clouds
threatening snow, wind bending
daffodils in bloom too soon.
Courting the Fairest Lady

Everything about you is perfect. — Gary Cooper to Audrey Hepburn in Love in the Afternoon

At first, she appears as Holly Golightly from Breakfast at Tiffany’s. Window shopping elevated to timeless elegance. Oversized sunglasses, elbow-length gloves and a pearl choker co-star with Givenchy’s Little Black Dress in the classic introduction to our leading lady.

She glances over her shoulder, removes a long, thin cigarette holder from her dainty mouth and smiles at me. I glance away, shy, unable to look upon her for a time. Am I worthy of her radiance?

Next, Princess Ann from Roman Holiday. She zooms past me on a Vespa. I am tempted to yell—attract her attention—but I am reticent once again. Spellbound, hypnotized by her joie de vivre and the striped scarf fluttering against the most elegant neckline in the world.

When I see her again, she is Sabrina Fairchild from Sabrina. She strolls across a tennis court in a flowing, strapless gown—a black and white muse to beauty. She beckons me to follow. She exits the tennis court and makes her way down a flight of stairs leading to an underground jazz club.

We are in Paris now. She is Jo Stockton from Funny Face. A slinky seductress in black skinny pants and a black turtleneck dancing uninhibited
to beatnik jive. I rally the nerve to speak to her. From across a smoke-filled room, while organizing words in my mind, she vanishes.

Suddenly I am alone, staring at a blank television screen. A frantic call to the cable company brings only an apology for a city utility crew cutting the wrong line. No ETA as to when service would resume. No Charade or Two for the Road. The Audrey Hepburn marathon continues, but I am no longer to be part of The Nun’s Story or The Children’s Hour.

Finally, in late afternoon, the screen glows back to life and My Fair Lady appears. She is wearing the iconic black and white Ascot hat with its abundance of flowers, ribbons, and feathers. The hours without her have made me realize I must not let opportunity pass. When evening comes, I invite Eliza Doolittle to the Embassy Ball and she accepts my invitation.

At the appointed hour, she appears in a shimmering white gown and long white gloves. When I tell her she looks divine, she curtsies with the grace of an angel. I take her hand and lead her to the ballroom. She tells me that her heart takes flight when I begin to dance with her and we could have danced, danced, danced...all night.
POEM | Elizabeth Breen

Genesis of a Jet

Evolution is like a tornado sweeping through a junkyard and leaving behind a Boeing 747.
—The Creation Museum, Kentucky

It begins, as so many things do, with screwing—a gulf breeze prompts that first bolt to pump a knot of copper dizzy—junk mounting junk in iron-rich dirt. Groundwater swells aluminum until it’s tender as muscle; old bicycles boozed up on rain are seized by the white capillaries of lightning. The yard in the heat of conception: tin cans are silk worms now, spitting metal into sheets alloying an old jungle gym and headlights into steel. Wind splays copper apart, throbs like squid tongue, thrusting wire, melted glass to fill what’s empty: as through a funnel, a helix, a galactic washing machine pulsing scrap begets salvage, salvage begets salvation—an silver jet stands. The world, as always, birthing itself new again, urged from an abandoned womb, ready for the sky.
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