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All of My Younger Selves Live Inside Me,

EILEEN CLEARY

The children do commune with one another.
Most ghost some backwoods
where they would have built a stick house
had they dwelled within their own bodies.
Do not ask them to hold one another. They are shy
as trillium bowing their faces to the earth.
Somewhere within a green echo and ash morning,
seeds of me breed a baggy cloak of dusk
which extinguishes me the way
the North East wind snuffs match light.

There is No Illumination

MARY CROW

I stagger when I go out into the brilliance
of a Nicaraguan day, waves of heat that explode
into a white that blinds rather than illuminates,
hands reaching for something to brace against.
I've lost so many days, and now a stranger writes
to ask about letters I wrote to his father, crumbs
a girl once followed into what turned out to be
danger—when no creature came along to swallow
them one by one, pacing behind her in silence—

Where is that self who wrote those letters
from a cold country, far away, that self
who was gathering glances off fresh snow
(bits of glitter reflecting from a mirror in her palm),
a girl I barely know and a man who was this stranger's
mysterious father—such crumbs that whiten
the trail she concentrated on. Her pain
has led her to a doorstep without asking herself
what escapes might lead out of the dim forest.

Moon Shadows

JIM FINLEY

To the Old Intelligentsia

Sitting a chair in the backyard
on the end of a blustery day,
I suddenly glance up and spy
a clutch of old men.
Half-a-dozen, perhaps more.

Frail, fragile, pale as ghosts,
their leaf-like, unfettered bodies
drifting, swirling, wafting aloft
as though frolicking
in the late evening shades.

Recognizing old friends,
I wanted to call them out,
talk awhile, catch up,
at least evoke a nod, a wave,
but time had encrusted their names.

Left alone, feeling abandoned,
I watched as the fickle winds
swept one leaf, then another
into the darkness
below a splintered moon.

The Nestor Effect

LOIS MARIE HARROD

> *When Telemachus set out to find his father Odysseus, Nestor received Telemachus kindly and entertained him lavishly but was unable to furnish any information about his father's fate.*

Telemachus walked the dodgy streets
treating people like dogs, turning
his eyes, avoiding straight, *whatchalookingat?*
can't stare the rabid down,
even children know whom the hoods
notice, they destroy, so give the goods
the right-of-way, say with the torso
I am no threat, wipe spit with your elbow,
toss the nickel, your last quarter in the clink
like a savvy New Yorker, do not expect
more than the curse you got in Florence
before your eyes adjusted from light
to dark, stumbling as you did over an old gypsy
blocking the vestibule with her trap
of skirts, pockets for everything
and you had no bone to throw.

But here in Amherst, Virginia, a man is looking
for a loaf of bread and though you don't know him
from Rover, he says "Good morning,
and how are you today?" as if he means it,
and when you answer, he smiles and shakes
as if he'd like you to pat his head,
an old man, a Nestor, with a twinkle and genial hair
roughed up in the back by his baseball hat,
and suddenly you understand
that you do not know how to act in this place
where everyone exhibits dogged friendliness,
looks you in the eye, compassionately,

would lick your hand if you let them,
and is still not able to tell you
what it is you want to know.

Lendings

MAXIMILIAN HEINEGG

"Off, off you lendings" - Lear

Fools as well, for all this wanting
to feel the sea-wind crack
its cat o' nine tails, for daring
let me have it, instead of waiting it
out, for howling, gone with the breath
needed to companion the hours,
welcome as fire's ceremonial pace,
limbs that shouldered winter ash
in this backwards alchemy, life's
beauty strange as silk,
from which we weave but will
not keep our minds, glad in truth
for any hand-me-down to bear
this storm, or the one to follow.

The Subroutine That Called Itself

HEIKKI HUOTARI

Permission to speak freely, says the tree and I say, *Fools are made by poems, like me*, and apple pies are thought by whirling dervishes to be in retrograde but I give credit to the Lazy Susan not the Urban Planner (by whose grace each major intersection is arrayed the same) so when you enter *my* implied icosahedron you'll be resurrecting every which way *and* have handsome antlers.

Sibling Rivalry

EMMA JOHNSON-RIVARD

I am trying to write about mice.
I am always writing about my sister, who
is not really my sister.

Unfortunate. She is a poet, too.

Decades later I
killed mice with a bottle.
This is our
great divide.

She raised field mice in a tank,
fed each by hand. They
dreamt of her.

After August

LAURIE KOLP

a trapdoor unlatched and someone
smashed tomatoes on the floor

captured dismembered chunks
landing in hands of the hungry, detached

hitchhiker thumbs pasted red pocketed
limbs threading cracked ground, dolls

with memories staining the heart
with stranger things

Ars Illustrated

LEN KRISAK

Who would have thought it possible—a wheezer
So hoary that it sounds like pure Villon?
But there he was, a snowy-bearded geezer
Trying to make some wedge of space his own.
The white cane like a Geiger counter needle
Succeeded brilliantly in posting him
Behind a pillar down the platform, where
I couldn't see how he would ever wheedle
A bill from passersby. Wait—that's not fair;
No blind man begs these days. The light was dim,
So maybe that explains what happened next—
A peek (I looked as if I hadn't seen),
And then . . . he glanced down at his watch. My text?
Who says that poems shouldn't be, but mean?

Learning to Fly

V.P. LOGGINS

It's six thirty in the morning
and you've just dropped your wife
at the train station where she

picks up the train across the city
commuting to work, while you
drive eastward down the highway,

the sun rising in your eyes, cars
passing you on the right and left,
when suddenly the traffic slows,

lanes on either side of you beginning
to back up, congested, you discover,
by the cop on the shoulder pointing

the cold nose of a radar gun
out the window. Jerk, you think,
as you pass through a thicket of snails

on either side, sun tearing your eyes,
when you catch sight of a sign beside
the road announcing the regional airport's

flight school. *Learn To Fly* it says,
in serpentine letters, and you think
it would be great to fly as you drive

down Route 50, fifty or fifty-five yourself,
knowing that nothing lasts forever,
while you remember your wife

napping from station to dark station

on her underground way to work
traveling in the opposite direction.

Now That I No Longer Fish

AL MAGINNES

water has retreated into
its older mystery. I have
no need to clarify
the length and shape
of shadows cruising
below the brackened faces
of ponds. But the three quarters
of my body made from
water draws me to scan
the dark barriers, their echoes
of a time when what came
to land was neither fish
nor mammal, but half-creatures
seeking the element
that fit best. Only later
would that choice disappear.
The borders of land and water
made themselves, and once made,
dissolve only in dreams
without beginning or end,
only the mirage of shadows
underwater, small deceptions
reminding us how all
that entices can also kill.

Driving Past the Empty Prison

MARY MAKOFSKE

Dispersed, men who were caged here, lifted weights
and did their time, were trucked out in crews
to build picnic tables where families, not theirs,
spread lunches and sipped beer. The brick buildings
look like a college for crime. It had been,
before that, a "boys' school" Mrs. Roosevelt visited,
one FDR hoped would train "delinquent" boys
for useful work. Years before, a home for alcoholics.
One after another, each exercise in rehabilitation,
isolation, or punishment abandoned, going out
of style or out of money. What can we make of it?
What would open the boarded windows,
let in light, set whirring lathes in the machine
shop, fill the kitchen with bubbling soup?
The fields have forgotten furrows, the last harvest
long ago consumed, and we have no vision
of what future we could house here, who might live
or work in this abandoned place. What dreams
might rise from beds where now no one sleeps.

New and Improved Detergent

JULIO MARZÁN

Blood was never a sacred thing.
Read old books; believe the screen.
Red stains now only lightly cling.

One guy covets another's ring.
Bullets riddle one soft spleen.
Blood was never a sacred thing.

Bump a shoulder, insult a king.
He stabs you to impress his queen.
Red stains now only lightly cling.

Quiet that baby, break its wing.
Fat hard pillow dumped unseen.
Blood was never a sacred thing.

My land once one genetic string,
Bombs return how it had been!
Red stains now only lightly cling.

“Thou shalt not” is a bygone thing.
Modernity suds up, leaves us clean.
Blood was never a sacred thing.
Red stains now only lightly cling.

Inspiration / Expiration

RICH MURPHY

Poetry parents produce for door steps:
a practical joke in the neighborhood.

Wrapped in paper, a cry for help
written in bold print surprises,
and moms and dads pass
around the nursery rhyme time.

The pigpen playpen ends
after the clock pacifies,
and the thumb pinches with patience
at crayons, pencils, pens.

Elephant eared and needle-nosed,
the street-dwelling punch lines
steal from prose pros and blacken eyes.

In the street, a hand meets, shakes
due to itchy feet and insight
not commercial anxiety.

The awful orphan picks at solitude
caked on the sidewalks for future refugees.

With no room in a wallet for marriage
the lollygagger learns to straight-arm
the enthrall and cuddles at arm-length.

(Beneath mantles parading photos,
unwritten books burn in hearths
as soon as a match rubs for commitment.)

Only in old age does the social slouch

sleeping under a book tent wake to
affection afforded on the horizon,

a long night caressing the scalp,
the shoulders, the inner sigh.

Crickets

MATTHEW MURREY

Bedtime, August, what does a man tell himself,
hearing the crickets? Before turning off the light,
does he run his fingers across the shirts
in his closet, then shake his head? I empty
my pockets on the counter—keys, phone, wallet—
and shrug. My brother clicks on talk radio (*blah, blah, blah*)
rolls over in bed and dreams dreams he will never
remember. The crickets—those all-night singers,
black as dirt and thick as fingers—will be dead come November.

My Daughter's Goldfish

JANUARY PEARSON

We look into the small
bowl of pink pebbles,
see the fish floating
upside-down.

Rust-colored scales
circle eyes darkened,
fins bent and still.

I take the green net
to lift the fish
from my daughter's sight.

She asks if we
can keep her
one more day.
The fish loved her,
she tells me.

Its golden skin
shimmers, cradled
between glass and water,
opal belly a crescent moon.

Why do you want
to keep her? I ask.
She twists her blonde braid.
Because I want to look at her,
she says.

Lunch at the Center

MICHAEL ROGNER

They called to one another like forest birds,
always maintaining contact, her in the garden
or cooking, or reading in the root cellar,
he with his tools, fixing found furniture
to donate to the discovery shops.
On weekends they would go to the Center
where he'd stand at the entrance with a pocket
heavy with quarters, rattling them into the change box
for the unimaginable many who couldn't afford lunch.
She worked in the kitchen, flipping eggs and bacon
for a hundred old steelworkers and their families,
sneaking home the unwashed jelly jars
so at night she should prowl through the alleys
here in Western Pennsylvania, with every other home
for sale or on the way to being boarded,
and hide the jars in landscaping,
because the ants needed something to eat.

Overcast

G.B. RYAN

Snow lay a few inches deep across miles
of level farmland in Ontario.

Whatever it was they raised did not
need to be fenced in – an expanse of snow,
the farmhouses here and there without a tree
or bush, houses that might have been charming
a hundred years ago before huge sheds
were erected next to them to hold
giant machines for agribusiness
and big drums for diesel or pesticides.

Without snow tires or chains, I followed
a single pair of tracks on the lonely road.

I caught up with the truck making these tracks
and doing about thirty miles an hour.
I followed since there was nothing else to do.
He stopped at a farmhouse and walked back to me.
I live here, he said and glanced at
my New York plates. You've followed me across
my fields. Please leave. I retraced our tire tracks.
He watched until I was off his land.

At the Gates

HEATHER SAGER

The cornstalks part
as the wind's breath

tugs open my jacket
and tosses twigs

from the gravel path
up toward the blue

there low white clouds drift
they cast shadows over

distant forest
the oaks beyond

leaving bright the corn,
the path, myself

in my ascending path
a large green praying mantis

sits amid the gravel
as if to welcome me

into the gates
of this cloud world

Moving from El Paso

ROBIN SCOFIELD

for Lindsay Parker Tall

Lindsay, I wish I could tell you
the new owners cut down the tall
yellow flowers outside your old house
and left the hulking pine and sparse ocotillo.

Five years ago, you packed up your new
husband and his dogs, your daughters
and their horses, for life in Mission, Texas,
down the dusty valley, and you brought

your songbird laugh, your blue porcelain
eyes, your knack for brilliant friends.
You would, my friend, shrug off
the flowers in favor of moving on

just as you left Milky Way, sure
your old cat was safe with me.
Katrina and Emily you raised
as desert people: tough, springing

back drought after drought. But
first their father's death, now this?
How much is too much too young?
Your father said you were happy

before your husband fumbled
his career in the Border Patrol
for guns or money or drugs.
Then, on a warm day in January

on the Rio Grande plain near
the Gulf, he shot you in the head.

At least he called emergency
and didn't try to conceal the crime,

confessed, and pled out of trial.
It seems like honor, but that is the
wrong word, for you are still dead
at 45 by his gun. The wrong word.

Because your daughters are still teen-agers.
Because your parents are still alive.
Because the dog you rescued sniffs for you,
trying to find the rest of your life.

More or Less

PATRICK SWANEY

For a moment the branches on the two
trees in the front yard look like they are
dotted with small blossoms, like they are
living and on the edge of becoming more
alive, like it is spring. It is not spring.

It is November and the branches
have only nubs where leaves, dead now,
once clung, living. The dead leaves
fallen to the yard have already been
mowed over or raked to the edge
of the street where a machine
making a grid of the neighborhood
vacuumed up almost every last one
and then continued efficiently on.
It must have been the morning fog,
strange and southern seeming, that made
the scene appear for a moment not as it was,
or some trick of the mind as it searched
for significance, some hope flickered
and suppressed. What remains are details
that in their description need not mean more
than they do. What remains is what
happened and then more after that
and after that happens, more still.

Summer Leaves

GARY J. WHITEHEAD

Headlights snaked
through hemlocks
and black pines,

not in any hurry,
though not without
a sense of seeking,

one lamp tilted up
toward the trees,
where something

seemed to hide,
the other staring
straight ahead

and now into the green,
shining disks
of a mule deer's eyes,

which, when the beam passed,
blinked a few times
and saw, perhaps,

the fatigued faces
at the station wagon's windows
and then the dusty trailer

behind. Maybe the deer
watched as the car
creaked to a stop

and the people stepped out,
hungry and a little stiff,
the father backing the camper

into a level spot,
the mother lighting a lantern,
her children huddling

in its yellow glow.
Maybe the deer was a doe,
and, in the safety of the dark,

she nudged her spotted fawns
and went on chewing
the sweet summer leaves.

Suffocation

BRITTNY MEREDITH

On the weekends, my stepdad and I would dig under couch cushions and look underneath furniture for spare change. We would go to Taco Bell, buy whatever dollar menu items we could afford, and eat while sitting in the bed of his '86 Nissan, sweating under Missouri's August sun. This particular memory is clear: a small, red-headed stepchild sitting on the side of her stepdad's truck, the metal hot against her thighs as she tucked her knees together while balancing an enchirito on her lap. The other memories appear to me like images in a kaleidoscope – colored pieces coming together and separating again.

My stepdad was born with an inadequate oxygen flow to his brain. This story was told every time he made a mistake, so every bit of it was memorized and could be regurgitated back mockingly. The doctor wanted to go on vacation, so he induced grandma's labor. Something went wrong, and the baby almost died. Except he didn't, and sometimes I wonder how much differently my life would have been had he never existed.

Once, he filled the bathtub with nearly boiling hot water. Steam rose and created chills on my skin. At the bottom of the tub, like disheveled sand at the bottom of the riverbank, a mix of chemicals dissolved into the water. I remember this clearly: he ordered me to remove each piece of clothing from my body. I stepped into the bathtub, the water burning my skin. My skin felt frail on me, hung like a bag, disconnected from my entire body. I tried to sit down and, when I did, I felt the coolness of the tub touch my genitals.

"No," my stepdad chided. "All the way in." I cried and screamed. I couldn't tell if it was the chemicals or the water that was causing my skin to feel on fire. What I do not remember clearly is the aftermath. I do not remember how I got out of the tub or how my mom found out. I do not remember who consoled me, if anyone. When my mom asked my stepdad why he did it,

he told her it was because my feet smelled bad. I do remember that.

"Your stepdad was born without oxygen to his brain," I was told. "He thinks slower than some people."

I lived my young adult life feeling like an infraction to the world – a bothersome wart that couldn't be removed. Sometimes I think my stepdad tried to surgically remove me, the bath incident being one he could rationalize.

Everything I did angered my stepdad. If I woke him up, if I spoke too loudly, or if I questioned something he said. My entire life was spent on the tips of my toes, avoiding any hazard that might come my way. I learned that the ground was made of shattered glass.

I cannot recall every time I was choked against a wall, spit flailing from his mouth as he yelled at me. I did not tally the amount of names I was called as a child. I do remember that, between punches to my arm or my head being slammed against the wall, he would tell me how ungrateful I was for all he did for me.

My stepdad is not a villain.

Every Halloween we sat on the couch and watched horror movies until we could no longer keep our eyes open and the sun could no longer resist rising. He did not resemble the monsters on the TV. He never missed a band concert or a play, even if my role was minor and irrelevant. As I would leave the stage, his eyes would brighten, and he would reveal a set of teeth that resembled piano keys.

When I turned twenty-two, I found myself in my first teaching job at a school full of trauma. That same year, I found myself in the waiting room of a psychiatric hospital.

"I've been sick," I told my mom. I was cramped in my small Malibu, my knees hugging themselves against the steering wheel. From the other end of the phone, she asked what kind of sick. "I

have PTSD." Silence, when interrupted, chills and pierces you. I go through the WebMD entry: the definition and diagnosis. I began to cry. My head came to my thighs. My weight seemed heavier than at the beginning of the conversation, as though my body was a victim of too much gravity. She asked about the cause, her voice becoming as cold as the silence that had since dissipated. I tell her everything. I tell her about the bath. I tell her about the punches. I tell her about the bruises on my throat. I tell her about growing up in constant fear, the fear that still resides in my bones, makes them shake; I tell her all in one breath at the same time. I could feel the connection between my mother and I corrode; the silence was acid.

"You know," she began. "Your stepdad was born with not enough oxygen to his brain…"

Lot's Wife

KAEL MOFFAT

After four millennia, she woke up. When she reached Jerusalem after days of walking north along the Jordan River, through heat and dust that clung to her like ash, through Cretaceous sand and limestone the color of dead flesh and basalt folds dark as her hair and older than the Patriarchs, through scrub and flowers with new names like *desert figwort* that crouched amid irrigated crops like orphans, through languages that sounded familiar but that were nevertheless strange, she found a city of housing blocks jutting from the hillsides like broken teeth, sandaled children kicking dusty soccer balls, and drably uniformed soldiers. She had never heard the word *machine gun*, but threat and fear are languages the body cannot forget. In the evening when the bomb went off at the checkpoint, the jolt knocked her to the ground and the ball of flame shocked her like a serpent in the garden. When she rose to her feet again, the warped metal, burning rubber, scattered gems of glass, torn-open torsos, women's wails, screams of children, shouts of men, soldiers' barked orders, warm tears on her own cheeks and lips made her long for the solitary comfort of her prison of salt on Sodom's torrid plain.

The Terms of Archaeology

DENISE TOLAN

Chronology

In the spotlight of memory, we are in the foyer of my friend's apartment. Both of us are late, so we quietly share the shedding of coats and keys. In the living room, opening remarks rise and fall like a minor sea.

"I can't tell," you lean in to whisper in my ear. "Have they introduced the artist yet?"

"Poet," I say, wondering if your tongue really touched my ear.

"Poet. Yes, of course. Poet."

"I couldn't hear," I say.

"No. Me either."

I head for the kitchen to find wine and an opportunity to check my ear.

"I came here tonight with a woman I met in Lisbon," you say, from across the kitchen island. Your hair is wild from when you removed your cap making you look like a young lion just finishing a playful romp with his pride. "I can't tell you how much I wanted her. But now – she left me in the hall so she wouldn't miss the introductions."

"My husband is parking the car," I say. "I rushed in because my friend is hosting the poet. I grew up Catholic. This is a holy-day-of-obligation event for me."

You look at me like I am a ruin you stumbled upon.

"I'm not sure why I said all that," I say. I hook my hair behind my ear and feel moisture.

In a split-second we are on the back porch, my back flat against the brick.

"What are you?" you say, into my neck. "I've been looking for you forever."

"I'm not sure who you found," I say. "This person is not me. I don't do things like this while my husband is parking the car."

The sound of applause floats onto the balcony.

Ruining everything.

Assemblage

Before we meet for coffee, I google you.

"I approach ruins," you say in an interview, "with respect for all that has been discovered and excitement for all that is left to find."

Walking toward you in my ruby sweater, I imagine my eyes as green as ancient ivy. You see me, spread your arms, and begin to advance, like an eagle or an explorer might. But before I feel a sinew or a muscle touch my walls, there is a woman's laugh. Then another.

I am surrounded by women more beautiful than me. I falter.

Your fingers thread through my hair exposing my neck to the air. My pulse is fast and with a long lick you trace the throbbing line.

The laughter has gone silent.

I close my eyes and wonder why ruins become covered in ivy.

Our perfectly planned night is ruined.

"The tornado isn't anywhere near the airport," you say on the phone.

"The flight is cancelled anyway."

"Then drive here."

"It's a nine hour drive," I say. "And it's eight o'clock at night. I can't do it."

"Can't or won't."

"Who is this?" I ask.

"Just a frustrated guy," you answer, sounding like one.

The next morning, my flight arrives one hour before yours departs. We sit across from each other until you must line up to go.

Before today, there has only been talk of the night that has turned into day and is now nothing more than a ruined plan. I think about something new to say, longing, even, to hear a beautiful woman's laugh.

"I don't think you'll be back," I say.

"Of course I will," you laugh, but you are looking around the terminal and it sounds a lot like *maybe*.

You turn to walk through security. There is a layer of dust on your back. The chair you sat in was dirty. I think to brush you off but imagine how my hand would then be dusty and when I hug you goodbye the dust from my hand will go back on your shirt and so I stand there, hands to my side, wondering how to break the circle.

"I guess we will love through our dreams," you say, waving and walking backward.

I wonder if the dust on the chair was from a tornado after all.

Debitage

You text me a picture from your new room in your new country where your new life has begun. Outside the window I see a village sitting atop a perfectly round hill; the houses like ants clinging to the side of a bowler hat.

I feel too old for this kind of regret.

Beautiful here, you text. *Tomorrow I visit the ruins on the hill.*

On the corner of your bed, I spy my face. You have accidentally included my picture in the picture, but then again, I wonder if you mean for me to see it.

Is this your holy act of obligation?

Material Remains

Nothing is going right, you text. *I am stuck. I am broke. I want to get back. Back to you.*

Because you are stuck and broke, I wonder?

That night you text a picture from inside your new hotel. It is dark, so whatever is outside the window remains a mystery to me.

I use my fingers to widen the picture you send. There is a small package at the foot of your bed. It looks like a little treat hotels leave for their guests. My name is on the wrapper and I know it is a coincidence, but it feels important.

Will you find ruins outside this village? I ask.

Yes. I found some earlier today. Your eyes were on every wall. So green. I held my arms out as if I could hug them.

And did you? Did you hug them?

I block your number before you can respond.

Any answer would ruin this moment.

Melody Dreams

HARRY YOUTT

"Anyway, my dreams have all been coming in music," the old man told me, last time I went in to see him. He said communication wasn't worth the words it took after all.

How long? I asked, as if what he said made any sense.

"The past week or so," he said, not even looking up.

"When it began, my first thought was: So this is what it is to be a right whale!"

He'd never spoken of whales before, let alone, *Right Whales.* Said he heard about them on the Discovery Channel. Said it wasn't anything like talking. It was music you didn't think about at all; it just came to you, and with a message that didn't have to be pieced out to be understood. You simply knew from hearing the music.

And when you wanted to be understood, you simply sent a melody out that got your point across. "No – not your point," he said, there was no such thing as a point. When you sent your melody out it was you, in the air, going out somehow, so that what the other heard in the melody was you, at your depths, you at your essence, you entering the other person so that everything was the same, and nothing of meaning was ever lost in translation.

"Talk about love!" he said, and I couldn't believe it was the same guy I knew, talking.

I asked him what exactly it was that he dreamed. He said he didn't remember and anyway it would be impossible to put into words.

Who else was in the dream? I asked him.

He said he didn't remember that either. And besides it wasn't important. Might have been a multitude.

I told him I'd never heard him talk like that.

"And you never will again," he said.

"That's just about all I have to say."


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The Shape of a Heart

LIZ BERTSCH

It was nothing short of miraculous when my infant remained asleep when I began reading Ian McEwan's celebrated novel, Atonement. Amidst the gurgle and breath of my daughter, McEwan's omniscient narrator unfolded a breezy story of a young woman from a wealthy English family entangled in the business of writing and producing a play for her family. The play is a love story of sorts in which a young and reckless young woman falls for a questionable man and lands herself in trouble. When brought sufficiently to her knees, she is saved by a well-meaning doctor in whose relationship she is restored and uplifted. My quiet hour of reading ended when I realized the disaster brewing in the margins of the story that would befall Robbie Turner, the gardener's son, a young man attempting to improve his station in life through an education bankrolled by the woman's father. I had no intention of suffering alongside Robbie, and so I closed the book and settled into a warm nap next to my baby in my quiet bedroom awash in the golden light of a cool autumn morning.

Life was too good in those early days of motherhood to spend what little free time I had on a sad story. But then one arrived encoded into my daughter's DNA that I couldn't avoid and whose telling occurred in a doctor's office. The doctor explained to us that neurofibromatosis, NF, affects the development of neural cell tissues and could potentially cause tumor growth on nerves on and around our daughter's spine and brain, as well as cause bone and skin abnormalities. He spoke of the disease's continuum, ranging from harmless to life-threatening and at present, there was no way to predict how it would manifest. He inquired about a family history of the disease, and when hearing that there was none, he responded with the words, "spontaneous genetic mutation." He assured us that a diagnosis did not mean that our daughter would develop any of the issues related to the disease, and he advised us to make

an appointment with her pediatrician to order tests to determine if tumor growth in her brain and spine had occurred. We walked out of the office and on the verge of exploding, and yet we summoned patience and smiles for our toddler as she waved goodbye to all of the children in the waiting room with her plump hands, and big toothy grin.

My husband spent hours on the computer and at a university library reading medical studies about NF and put me on a need to know basis given my propensity for anxiety. Later that week we saw Bridie's pediatrician and were once again assured that having the diagnosis did not mean that our daughter would suffer a life of tumors or malformed bones, and weeks later we looked at images of her brain and spine and discovered that our baby was tumor free. We were to live in hopeful anticipation that the NF poised to express itself through our baby's body, remain forever dormant; and at the same time, we were on the look-out for signs of the disease, an unpredictable disease that irrevocably changed the way we thought about our daughter's future.

It took time, but we learned to strike a balance between living a normal life while on the lookout for bumps in Bridie's skin, problems with her ears and eyes, and bones that didn't look right. We were like other parents when we clapped and hooted for our daughter while she danced around the shoe store when trying on her first pair of sneakers, but we also lived with the nightly ritual of performing body checks while drying her off after her evening bath. Bridie's nightly bubble baths often threw me into a swirl of anxiety because there was always the possibility that we could find something wrong. My body vibrated with fear because of what was lurking in the margins of daily life.

The joy that I experienced while watching my baby develop into a spunky and hilarious toddler was at odds with my anxiety, and I learned to cope through stuffing my worries into drawers of various shapes and size. There was one for tumors, and the one over there was for bones, and that one – that really big one

– was reserved for cancer. Jerry, too, learned the art of compartmentalizing, seeking respite in the books that he loves. When the drawers flew open in the middle of the night, we turned on the television or opened books preferring insomnia over having to deal with open drawers in the middle of the day now that our baby spoke in full sentences and desired our active participation in her dramatic play.

What I could not compartmentalize however was the anger that emerged when socializing with moms who had no idea how it felt to receive a terrifying medical diagnosis for your child. A shameful and unwieldy case of motherhood envy emerged whenever I was in the company of mothers who had more time than I did inside the lovely delicate baby bubble. I could barely contain my anger whenever a conversation made its way over to the expense of organic produce because the price of organic broccoli was the furthest thing from my mind. I grew furious and took to ignoring mothers and their babies down the grocery aisle and at the park, who were looking for a face-to-face connection with me because I wanted what they had, and I couldn't have it.

One of the few places that I experienced relief from my angry and sad self was my classroom. As a teacher, it's pretty easy to give yourself and your worries over to the hustle and bustle of a group of kids who don't have a minute to waste to get all the fun there is to be had in a day. In the middle of the post-diagnosis intensity, I chose to read Kate DiCamillo's popular new book, The Tail of Despereaux, to my kids. From the first pages, the kids and I were thrust into the plight of a rat, a very angry rat, who had fallen in love with light and was relegated to the darkness of a dungeon.

We discovered that the rat followed a shaft of sunlight up from the dungeon to the castle proper and stumbled upon the royal family dining. So taken by the spectacle and majesty of the royal family in the light of day, he forgot to hide, and the princess saw him hanging from a chandelier. Chaos ensued; the queen drowned in her soup; he learned that rats are despised and scurried back down into the dungeon with a broken heart. The

narrator took great pains to inform us that the rat's broken heart healed crookedly and was the reason for his malicious and cruel behavior towards the very sympathetic and ever so cute mouse, Despereaux. Everything about the rat became crooked including the spoon that he wore on his head, which he believed was his own shiny, royal crown.

Although my students learned why this character was such a creep, they did not find him at all sympathetic. I could say nothing to the kids to engender a lick of sympathy for this broken character; they simply were not having it. "He's mean," they cried out in unison and repeatedly shot down my attempts to explain what was underneath the rat's behavior. They insisted that the rat was just that, a rat because they believed that one's actions and behavior define a person. In no way would they allow the omniscient narrator to elicit sympathy for the rat whose actions spoke louder than words. Life was a first-person enterprise for these kids, and I had to agree with them as we neared the conclusion of the book, and yet I felt such sorrow for this rat with a crooked heart, yearning for the light he couldn't have. I began to worry about the shape of my own heart.

Encoded into our daughter's DNA, is a partial version of a story, and we are learning to remain hopeful that in the telling of what is to come, our daughter will not experience extreme hardship and suffering. With the help a rat and the kindness of the children in the face of sadness and loss, the shape of my story shifted along with my heart. Yes – our daughter's neurological disease required visits to the doctor, and yes, we worried often, and at the same time our daughter continued to charm and delight us. It was because of all of the children in my life that I learned to look back at the mothers at the park and the grocery store and smile, letting them know, "Yes – I see your child, and you see mine – aren't they beautiful? Yes, yes, we are mothers."

A Slow Thawing

AIDA ZILELIAN

1.

I stood in the middle of my living room with a baby Bjorn strapped to my waist while my two-month daughter lay in her bassinet screaming mightily. Champ's doughy jowls spread across the wooden floor. He cocked an eyebrow with canine worry.

I started negotiating the straps for our third outing of the day. "I'm coming Sophia," I said, trying not to yell, not to become completely unhinged because Champ could easily lose control of his bladder and piss everywhere.

After two attempts at lifting her into the carrier I was able to snap shut the thick clasp that was supposed to fit snuggly on the nape of my neck.

"Okay buddy," I said, jiggling his leash.

Champ glanced up at me briefly and then closed his eyes.

"Please Champ," I said. "You'll have an accident. I'll give you a treat when we get back, okay? I'll give you meatballs." I would never have given him meatballs, but it didn't matter anymore.

Finally he lifted his head and hobbled to the front door. There was blood on the floor where he had been resting his head. The size of a quarter. I walked back to the kitchen and wiped it off with a damp paper towel.

When I opened the door a gust of hot air swept over us immediately. I knew we would make it as far as the end of the block and turn back. Sophia shifted restlessly against my chest. Small beads of perspiration had already gathered at her temples. Without lifting his leg Champ finally peed in a patch of grass and we turned back to the house.

I could hear my phone ringing as I unclipped his leash. "I'm coming, I'm coming," I yelled, as if someone was knocking at the front door.

I walked over breathlessly and began replaying the messages. There were four missed calls.

"*Hi Aida. It's Mom. Call me…*" Her voice faded as if she had called me in mid-sleep, her words inaudible.

"*It's Mom. Please call me back.*"

"*I keep calling. You don't answer. Please call me back.*" I had told her to call one of my sisters if I couldn't get to the phone, although they lived in another state.

She didn't leave a fourth message.

I looked up at the clock. There was no time.

After carefully unstrapping myself without the baby falling out, changing her diaper and preparing a bottle of formula, I wedged three pills into three meatballs and put them in Champ's bowl. Sophia began to wail impatiently. These synchronized feeding times were a coincidence and a necessity. As I sat in Brian's armchair feeding her, I could hear Champ slobbering as he gulped down his food and drank water. I had a paper towel ready in my hand to catch all the drool before he shook his head.

I had noticed the small bump under his lip a month ago. It was mouth cancer. The pills would prolong his life, but not by much. Brian had gone back to work. I was taking care of a newborn and a dying dog.

2.

I stood in the first pew with my family as our relatives and friends waited on the long line that curved to the back of the church to give us their condolences. My mother gripped the banister as if she were hanging on to the edge of a cliff. After the service she would collapse to her knees as they wheeled the casket to the hearse.

"He's gone. He's left me alone," she sobbed.

Her eldest brother, my Uncle Hagop, came to her side. "He is still here with you," he said. "He hasn't gone anywhere."

As we walked behind the pallbearers I could feel Sophia kicking, kicking like someone locked behind a door. *Nothing here you want to see. Trust me on this one.*

My stepfather would have held Sophia if he had lasted three more weeks.

This was the beginning of the unraveling of my life. Like a play when the lead forgets her lines and improvises badly. The audience is awe-struck. It is unthinkable. Like the death my stepfather, who I had known and loved for most of life.

3.

"Sophia, what are you doing in here?"

She is four years old and sitting in my stepfather's study pulling open his desk drawers and examining items with immense interest.

I smell the mustiness of ancient books given to him by his father, a survivor of the Armenian Genocide. I smell the world in which he lived, a monastery of books piled from floor to ceiling in custom-made bookshelves. The oversized amber ashtray is empty and still stained with the residue of crushed unfiltered cigarettes.

"I'm just looking," she says impatiently, clutching his magnifying glass and squinting through the lens. An enlarged brown eye glares at me. "He's not here anymore so I have to touch his things. *Okay?*"

No one believes me when I relay these exchanges. They think I am embellishing. This time I am stunned into silence. I avoid his study as if the walls are caked with asbestos. I ignore the portrait my husband took of him, which hangs outside of his study in the long narrow hallway. His affectionate smile and large

green eyes greet me warmly when I visit my mother's apartment. I look away. I pretend he has gone on a long trip. My daughter is investigating as if she has been assigned a life-long mission.

"Brian, Sophia's in the study. Please get her."

But no one thinks it's a big deal. Not even my mother.

4.

I was lying awake, my pronounced belly facing the ceiling. I could hear the faint chirping of birds through our open bedroom window Brian forgot to close. The slightest noise would stir me from sleep: Champ shaking his head in the middle of the night, Brian's light snoring, someone on the street bleeping their car to unlock it.

I wondered how different he would look from all the other Saturdays we had visited. With each passing week my stepfather's rosy pallor faded to a pasty yellow, his collarbone was more visible, his clothes hung on his frame more shabbily. I couldn't bear to visit him. I couldn't bear not to.

I ran the shower to ease my body into a waking state. I remembered the last time I visited and how my mother was helping him into the bath, trying to steady him for the brief seconds she was able to scrub his back before he almost fell off the edge of the tub. My hair slippery with conditioner, I tried not to cry. Surely the baby could feel my grief. Surely she would be infected with my sadness. I would be my bipolar mother passing on her illness, another link creating a chain of disease. I cried anyway, but the moment had passed, like laughing when you've outgrown an old joke.

As the life inside my body grew the days of his life unraveled, the spool almost bare from thread.

5.

This year I decided to visit his grave on Father's Day. It was my first time; after her outburst in church, my mother had refused to go to the burial and we had driven her home. I read through my sister's text of directions and made the last turn, pulled to the right as her message had instructed.

The brightness of the sun shone through the tall maple trees, and the expanse of the silent cemetery belied the irony of its beauty. I clutched the roses and plastic cone I had filled with water and began pacing around, as if I was hunting for a treasure.

"Where are you, Sevag?" I found myself asking out loud. "Where are you? Where?" I tried to remember the description my sister had given.

"I'm here to say hi. I don't know if you can hear me. Can you hear me?" My impulsive jabbering did not feel foolish. The driver of a passing car glanced at me casually and then his face flickered with alarm.

Finally I saw the large, maroon-colored marble tombstone. I stopped and stared. I read the inscription once, twice, three times, four, until the blur of my tears stung my eyes.

"Hi," I said, kneeling down. I pushed the cone gently into the dirt and placed the roses inside. "I came to say hi. See how you're doing."

It's what I would have said had I visited him at the hospital.

From the distance one would have thought I was visiting a freshly buried grave. I could not cry quietly.

6.

When I closed the door behind me and entered his office the smell of sulfur tinged the enclosed space. He rested his head in his hand and held a cigarette between his fingers, closed the computer screen after hours of translating a memoir he had been

working on. I could hear the fierceness of the pattering rain against the windowpanes.

"Sevag?"

He looked up and smiled, took a drag off his cigarette and exhaled intensely.

"I need to borrow the van to move the rest of my things," I said.

Three months prior, I had announced my plans of moving out and finding my own apartment. My mother, a traditional Armenian woman, was galled that as the eldest of her three daughters, I had dared to tear the family apart, to collapse the family structure. She began by ignoring me, as if I was a trespasser she had to tolerate temporarily. It had been a long, tireless battle, which she tried to upend by disowning me for the rest of her life. On this particular evening, she was at a social function.

"You mean to tell me that a steamer trunk and a bed frame won't fit into your two-door Nissan?" he asked, still smiling.

Whether or not he acknowledged my mother's horridness, even inwardly, is something I will never know. But we both knew her indefatigable capacity for eliciting drama and her visceral hatefulness towards anyone who crossed her. (On several occasions, she had stormed into his study with a long-nosed lighter and threatened to burn his father's books because he wasn't spending time with her on a weekend afternoon.)

"Go ahead," he said. I waited for the caveat – 'make sure to get back before your mother comes home' or 'let's keep this between us,' but that was all he said.

I raced to the foyer and grabbed the keys to the van.

When I returned home later than I had intended there were two slices of pizza wrapped in aluminum foil on the kitchen counter. He knew all too well that my mother wouldn't have bothered saving food for me.

7.

"How is your mother doing?" people still ask me. It has been five years since his passing.

"She has good days and off days," I answer.

Within myself, with each passing month a thin layer of ice has frosted over. It has now reached glacial proportions.

I am waiting breathlessly, for a moment, a thought, a word – a fissure of unthinkable magnitudes to crack open the landscape of my grief.

Author Profiles

Liz Bertsch is a graduate of Bank Street College of Education in New York, and lives and teaches on the East End of Long Island. Most recently, her essays were profiled in *EndPain* and *West Texas Literary Review*.

Eileen Cleary is a graduate of both the Lesley University and the Solstice MFA programs. She co-founded the Lilly Poetry Salon of Needham, Massachusetts and is a recent Pushcart nominee. Her work is published or forthcoming in *Naugatuck River Review*, *J Journal*, *The American Journal of Poetry* and *Main Street Rag*.

William C. Crawford is a photographer based in Winston-Salem, NC. He invented Forensic Foraging, a throwback, minimalist technique for modern digital photographers. See William C. Crawford On Pinterest.

Mary Crow's poems have been published in literary magazines including *American Poetry Review*, *New Dawn*, *A Public Space*, *Interim*, *Poet Lore*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Illuminations*, *Cimarron Review*, *Indianola Review*, *Wisconsin Review*, and *Tulane Review*. She has published three chapbooks of poetry and three full-length books plus five volumes of poetry translation. Her awards include poetry fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Colorado Council on the Arts as well as three Fulbrights. She served as Poet Laureate of Colorado for 14 years and is retired from the faculty of Colorado State University's creative writing faculty.

Jim Finley writes mostly fiction grounded in the place and spirit of his youth; in the shadows of Kiowa Peak, across the Brazos Salt Fork, near 4-Sixes Ranch, somewhere south of sorrow and north of nothingness. Youth for him was the 1950s, but even today, this single slice of Texas and the people it marks remain sacred.

Debbie Hall is a psychologist, writer and photographer whose poetry has appeared in the *San Diego Poetry Annual*, *A Year in Ink*, *Serving House Journal*, *Sixfold*, *Tuck Magazine*, *Poetry24*, *Bird's Thumb*, *Poetry Super Highway* and other journals. She has work upcoming in an AROHO anthology. Her essays have appeared

on NPR (This I Believe series), in *USD Magazine*, and the *San Diego Union Tribune*. She received an honorable mention in the 2016 Steve Kowit Poetry Prize and completed her MFA at Pacific University in Forest Grove, Oregon. Debbie is the author of the poetry collection, *What Light I Have* (2018, Main Street Rag Books). She is equally passionate about the creative opportunities offered by both photography and poetry.

Lois Marie Harrod's 16th and most recent collection *Nightmares of the Minor Poet* appeared in June 2016 from Five Oaks. Her chapbook *And She Took the Heart* appeared in January 2016. *Fragments from the Biography of Nemesis* (Cherry Grove Press) and the chapbook *How Marlene Mae Longs for Truth* (Dancing Girl Press) appeared in 2013. *The Only Is* won the 2012 Tennessee Chapbook Contest (Poems & Plays), and *Brief Term*, a collection of poems about teachers and teaching was published by Black Buzzard Press, 2011. *Cosmogony* won the 2010 Hazel Lipa Chapbook (Iowa State). Links to her online work at www.loismarieharrod.org.

Maximilian Heinegg's poems have appeared in *The Cortland Review*, *Columbia Poetry Review*, *Tar River Poetry*, *December Magazine*, *Free State Review*, *Gravel*, and *Crab Creek Review*, among others. He is also a singer-songwriter and recording artist whose records can be heard at www.maxheinegg.com. He lives and teaches English in the public schools of Medford, MA.

In a past century, **Heikki Huotari** attended a one-room school and spent summers on a forest-fire lookout tower. Heikki is now a retired math professor and has published three chapbooks, one of which won the Gambling the Aisle prize, and one collection, *Fractal Idyll* (A...P Press). Another collection is in press.

Emma Johnson-Rivard is a Masters student at Hamline University. She currently lives in Minnesota with her dogs and far too many books. Her work has appeared in *Mistake House*, *Nixes Mate Review*, and *Moon City Review*.

Laurie Kolp is the author of *Upon the Blue Couch* (Winter Goose Publishing, 2014) and *Hello, It's Your Mother* (Finishing Line Press, 2015). Her publications include *Southern Poetry Anthology*

VIII: *Texas, Stirring, Rust + Moth*, *Whale Road Review*, *Front Porch Journal*, and more. Laurie lives in Southeast Texas with her husband, three children and two dogs.

Len Krisak has work printed (or forthcoming) in *The Antioch Review*, *The Sewanee Review*, *The Hudson Review*, *Raritan*, *The Southwest Review*, and *The Oxford Book of Poems on Classical Mythology*. He is the author of several books, including *Rilke: New Poems* (Boydell & Brewer, 2015) and *Prudentius: Crown of Martyrs* (Routledge, 2019). He is a recipient of the Richard Wilbur Prize in 2000 for his book, *Even as We Speak* (University of Evansville Press), as well as the Robert Frost Prize, the Robert Penn Warren Prize and a four-time champion of Jeopardy!

V.P. Loggins is the author of *The Green Cup* (2017), winner of the Cider Press Review Editors' Prize, as well as *The Fourth Paradise* (Editor's Select Poetry Series, Main Street Rag 2010) and *Heaven Changes* (Pudding House Chapbook Series 2007). He has also published one critical book on Shakespeare, *The Life of Our Design*, and is coauthor of another, *Shakespeare's Deliberate Art*. His poems and articles have appeared in *The Baltimore Review*, *Crannog* (Ireland), *The Dalhousie Review* (Canada), *English Journal*, *The Formalist*, *The Healing Muse*, *Memoir*, *Modern Age*, *Poet Lore*, *Poetry East*, *Poetry Ireland Review*, *Slipstream*, *The Southern Review* and *Tampa Review*, among other journals. He has taught at several institutions, most recently the United States Naval Academy.

Al Maginnes was born in Quincy, Massachusetts in 1957 and grew up in a number of states, mostly in the southeast. He has worked as a mail clerk, a landscaper, an electrician, a carpenter's helper, a hammock weaver, surveyor, and, since 1990, as a teacher. His full length collections are *Taking Up Our Daily Tools* (St. Andrews College Press, 1997), *The Light in Our Houses* (Pleaides Press, 2000), *Film History* (WordTech Editions, 2005) and *Ghost Alphabet* (White Pine Press, 2008). He has also published four chapbooks, most recently *Between States* (Main Street Rag Press, 2010) and *Greatest Hits 1987-2010* (Pudding House Publications, 2010). His poems and reviews have appeared in journals and anthologies including *Poetry*, *Georgia Review*, *Shenandoah*, *Tar River Poetry* and many others. He lives in Raleigh, North Carolina with his wife and daughter and teaches

composition, literature and creative writing at Wake Technical Community College.

Mary Makofske's latest book is *World Enough, and Time* (Kelsay, 2017). Her poems have appeared in the *American Journal of Poetry*, *Poetry East*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *Orbis*, *Spillway*, and other journals and in eighteen anthologies. In 2017, she received The Atlanta Review International Poetry Prize and the New Millennium Poetry Prize.

Julio Marzán has poems published in *New Letters, New York Review*, *Parnassus*, *Ploughshares*, *Tin House*, *3 Quarks Daily*, and *Harper's Magazine*, among others. From 2004-2007 he was Poet Laureate of Queens, N.Y. A profile of Julio was published in the fall 2009 issue of *Columbia Magazine*.

Cameron Maynard has been photographing west of the Davis Mountains for several years and his images from Hurricane Harvey were recently published in *Glass Mountain*. His writing has been featured in *Roads and Kingdoms*, *Atlas Obscura*, and *Found Polaroids*. He is the nonfiction editor for *Carve* magazine and lives in Dallas.

Brittny Meredith was voted "most opinionated" in high school and has since considered it a challenge to remain the loudest, most obnoxious woman in the room. She co-hosts the podcast, Mansplaining, where she analyzes hyper-masculine culture within action films. Her work has been published in *The Dead Mule School of Southern Literature*, *805*, *Burningword Literary Journal*, and *Graceless*.

Kael Moffat lives in Olympia, WA with his family and works as a librarian at Saint Martin's University. It is his ambition to overdose on kayaking or hiking someday. Previous work has been accepted by or appeared in the *American Journal of Poetry*, *Literature and Belief*, *Dark Matter*, *Flint Hills Review*, and other journals.

Rich Murphy's fifth book-length collection of poems *Asylum Seeker* was published in 2018 by Poetry Press at Press Americana. The book is the third in a trilogy: *Americana* that won the 2013

Press Americana Prize; *Body Politic* that was published by Prolific Press in January 2017; and now *Asylum Seeker*. His poetry has won two national book awards: Gival Press Poetry Prize 2008 for *Voyeur* and in 2013. *The Apple in the Monkey Tree* was published by Codhill Press in 2007. Chapbooks include *Paideia* (Aldrich Press), *Family Secret* (Finishing Line Press), *Hunting and Pecking* (Ahadada Books), *Phoems for Mobile Vices* (BlazeVox), and *Great Grandfather* (Pudding House Publications).

Matthew Murrey's poems have appeared in journals such as *Prairie Schooner*, *Poetry East*, and *Rattle*. He received an NEA Fellowship in Poetry a number of years ago, and his first book manuscript, *Bulletproof*, will be published by Jacar Press after being selected by Marilyn Nelson as the winner of Jacar's 2018 Full-Length Book Contest. Matthew is a high school librarian in Urbana, Illinois where he lives with his partner. Their two sons live in the Pacific Northwest. His website can be found at https://www.matthewmurrey.net.

January Pearson lives in Southern California with her husband and two daughters. She teaches in the English department at Kaplan University. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Gargoyle Magazine*, *Atlanta Review*, *Pittsburgh Poetry Review*, *Watershed Review*, *Summerset Review*, *American Journal of Poetry*, *Four Chambers Press*, *Timberline Review*, *The Chiron*, *The Mockingheart Review*, and *Modern Haiku*.

Michael Rogner is a restoration ecologist in Northern California and lives with his wife.

G.B. Ryan was born in Ireland and graduated from University College Dublin. He is a ghostwriter in New York City. Elkhound published his *Who You Need to Start a Riot* in May 2017. His poems are nearly all about incidents that involve real people in real places and use little heightened language

Heather Sager lives in Illinois where she writes short fiction and poetry. She has work forthcoming in *Painted Bride Quarterly* and has contributed to *Heavy Feather Review*, *Mojave River Review*, *Bear Review*, and *Literary Orphans*, among other journals.

Robin Scofield, author of *Flow* (Street of Trees Projects) and *Sunflower Cantos* (Mouthfeel Press), has poems appearing or forthcoming in *The Meadow* and *Cimarron Review*. She writes with the Tumblewords Project in El Paso, where she lives with her husband and her Belgian Shepherd dog.

Patrick Swaney received a PhD in creative writing from Ohio University. He teaches creative writing and literature at Catawba College, a small liberal arts college in North Carolina. His writing has appeared in the *Asheville Poetry Review*, *Conduit*, *NANO Fiction*, and elsewhere.

Denise Tolan's stories and essays have appeared in *Lunch Ticket*, *Hobart*, *Apple Valley Review*, *The Tishman Review*, and others. Her work is forthcoming in 2018's Best Small Fictions, was named in Wigleaf's Top 50, and included in *The Best Short Stories* from The Saturday Evening Post Fiction Contest 2017. Denise is a graduate of the Red Earth MFA in Creative Writing Program at Oklahoma City University. She is shopping a collection of short fiction, *Weighting*, and is currently completing a novel, *Tales the Fat Chick Told*. You can find more information about Denise and her obsession with Moby-Dick at:
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Kennen White, professor of clarinet at Central Michigan University, is also a photographer; his work can be found at Art Reach in Mount Pleasant, Michigan. He has photographs published in *The Grey Sparrow Journal*, *Open Palm Print*, *Flute View*, *Minerva Rising Literary Journal*, *Temenos*, *Walloon Writers Review*, and others.

Gary J. Whitehead's poems are forthcoming in *The New Yorker*, *North American Review*, *Parnassus*, and *Crazy Horse*. Recent work appears in *Ploughshares*, *Epoch*, and *The Massachusetts Review*. His third book of poetry, *A Glossary of Chickens*, was chosen by Paul Muldoon for the Princeton Series of Contemporary Poets and published in 2013 by Princeton University Press. His work has been featured on Garrison Keillor's NPR program The Writer's Almanac, the BBC's Words and Music, and on Poetry Daily, Verse Daily, and *The Guardian*'s Poem of the Week. Whitehead has been the recipient of the Anne Halley Poetry Prize (*The*

Massachusetts Review), a New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowship in Poetry, and the Princeton University Distinguished Secondary School Teaching Award. A featured poet at the Geraldine R. Dodge Poetry Festival and the Princeton Poetry Festival, he teaches English at Tenafly High School in New Jersey and lives in the Hudson valley of New York.

Harry Youtt's fiction and poetry are frequently published in literary journals and have garnered several Pushcart Prize nominations. Harry has conducted fiction and poetry workshops and readings in various locations in the United States, as well as in Ireland, England, and Wales. And for a very long time, he has been an instructor in the UCLA Extension Writers' Program.

Jonathan Yungkans is a Los Angeles-based writer, poet and photographer and, currently, an MFA Poetry candidate at California State University, Long Beach. His work has appeared in *Lime Hawk*, *Twisted Vine Literary Journal*, *West Texas Literary Review* and other publications. His poetry chapbook, *Colors the Thorns Draw*, was released by Desert Willow Press in August 2018.

Aida Zilelian is a New York City writer and a high school English teacher. Her novel *The Legacy of Lost Things* was the recipient of the 2014 Tololyan Literary Prize and, most recently, her short story collection *These Hills Were Meant for You* was shortlisted for the 2018 Katherine Anne Porter Prize in Short Fiction.