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Westview Staff

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W E S T V I E W

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Stylesheet

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2. Electronic submissions are also preferred for artwork via dc.swosu.edu/westview/.

Artwork submitted should be suitable for black and white reproduction. Work should be no larger than 8.5" x 14". However, photographs of larger works may be submitted.

3. Include a brief biographical sketch for our contributors' notes.

4. Subscriptions and correspondence may be sent to Amanda Smith-Chesley at westview@swosu.edu.

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W E S T V I E W



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword

This issue of *Westview* represents the hard work of Amanda Smith-Chesley's Editing students in collaboration at Southwestern Oklahoma State University. The Editing students proofread each line and thoughtfully considered the order in which the pieces are arranged. Their meticulous attention to detail has been invaluable, and we are indebted to their dedication. We at *Westview* wish to thank all of these students for sharing their time and skills to make this issue possible.

6 Anne Babson
Imperfect English Composition

9 John Grey
The Choice is Mine

11 Dilvin Işiki
If Ever

12 Gordon Grice
Beetles in Moonlight

- 13 Donna L. Emerson**
Lampyridae
- 14 Donna L. Emerson**
Doughboy and Jenny
- 15 Dennis Ross**
New Barista
- 16 Donna L. Emerson**
Princesses
- 17 Henry D. Goldkamp**
Your Girlfriend is a Boozy Animorph
- 18 Jack Cooper**
Promise
- 19 Robert L. Penick**
Midnight Run to Nacogdoches
- 20 Jack Cooper**
Festina Lente
- 21 Richard Dinges Jr.**
Summer Thunderstorm
- 22 Matthew C. Brennan**
Sunday Morning
- 23 Molly Sizer**
Blimps are Cool
- 24 Dick Bentley**
Health Care
- 26 James B. Nicola**
Ballad of St. Stephen's Green
- 27 Jack Cooper**
On the Move
- 29 Nan Byrne**
Drifting

31 Diane Glancy

Part One

34 Diane Glancy

Part II

35 Henry D. Goldkamp

Prayers Coagulate Around a Woman on Her Porch

39 Molly Sizer

Naming Southwest Oklahoma

40 Shiann Dawson

The Pie Lady

41 Kadence B.

Hometown

42 Eleanore Lee

Trash

44 Chad W. Lutz

Skipping Rocks

62 Eleanore Lee

Villanelle: Flood Time

63 James B. Nicola

Rains

65 Dennis Ross

Here and Now

66 Aimee Klein

The Yellow Porch Swing

67 Nan Byrne

Commemorate

68 Anne Babson

A Certain Age

70 Jack Cooper

Birds of Light

- 71 Richard Dinges Jr.**
On Wings
- 72 Shiann Dawson**
Human Rib Bone, \$10
- 74 Gordon Grice**
Irises Planted on a Grave
- 75 Richard Dinges Jr.**
Green
- 76 Richard Dinges Jr.**
Clean Slate
- 77 James B. Nicola**
Ire Man
- 78 James B. Nicola**
Interactive Sonnet
- 79 Dennis Ross**
Carved Door
- 80 Contributors**
- 85 Photos & Illustrations**

Imperfect English Composition

By Anne Babson

I. Thesis: While in love, no matter what my mother says about the milk for free, I have discovered that he is prose, not sonnet. While having sterling qualities, he is not perfect. Remind the reader that no one is. Remind self.

A. This essay shall endeavor to prove the above. No Ronsard yearning for the unattained beloved allowed. No Petrarch—nothing, in fact, from the Continent—no love poetry with that much garlic in it. Shakespeare ok, but only that “nothing like the sun” sonnet—no Romeo and Juliet balcony scene.

1. We are older than Romeo and Juliet. We should know better by now. Anyway, they were Italian.

2. I wonder if we do know better.

B. He really is imperfect.

C. I am trying to keep my head on my shoulders. I mean it.

II. He snores.

A. Put in the stuff about the milk for free here but refute it—same for white on your wedding day diatribe.

1. Shut up! You’re not the boss of me! I’m an adult now! Yes, ma’am.

B. He doesn’t get enough sleep because he is such a hard worker, so dedicated.

C. He really is imperfect; he really is.

D. Steady, girl.

III. He doesn't hug me as much as I would like.

A. He has pledged his eternal protection of me. He said it like a broadcast journalist, right into the camera. He is on sentry duty 24/7. (Say something about the guards at Buckingham Palace—see C.)

B. He does hug me a lot. He just doesn't hug me when I am crying, tries to fix the problem instead, doesn't understand that I do not hold him responsible for spilled milk.

1. Another opportunity to refute the milk for free theory here—explore.

C. He is British. In spite of all temptations to belong to other nations, he remains an Englishman. Other nations may hug at random, but he never will. That would be intemperate.

1. Nelson: "I expect every Englishman to do his duty." Would Nelson hug?

2. Churchill: "Never have so few done so much for so many." Would Churchill hug?

3. Starr: "Turn left at Greenland." Would Ringo hug?

D. He is an engineer. Crying does not lead to good coding. There is no crying in baseball. (Is there crying in cricket? Research.)

IV. He could stand a pedicure.

A. Address metrosexual theorem and whether it applies here, or if the Eurotrash quotient is enough. Go back to Information Technology axiom—recalculate.



B. "...How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!"—Romans 10:15 (from the King James).

1. Put in something here about Jesus washing feet. He goes to church, loves Jesus.

2. He really is imperfect. He really is.

C. If I remember he is imperfect, I won't be so silly, will I? Will I?

V. Conclusion

A. The milk is never free. There is no such thing as a free lunch. The British call this dinner, traditionally.

B. He is English. I am silly over him. The BBC would never comment, but this is a perfect combination.

C. He has grown accustomed to my face.

D. Talk about the Ministry of Silly Walks versus Area 51—explain countercultural conspiracies.

E. He says he is not going anywhere, stated solemnly with clipped consonants in the prose of *The Financial Times*. When he walks, he treads on the ground.

F. And yet by heaven, I think my love as rare as any IT executive belied with false compare.

The Choice is Mine

By John Grey

I wear mismatched clothes,
fill the sink with dirty dishes,
sit and watch football on the TV
until all hours
while drinking beer
and feeding my face with crackling chips.

Sure everything smells musty.
The windows
look like tracts of gravel.
And the curtains don't bear shaking.
As for the ceiling,
let me put it this way—
the spiders and I
have adopted a policy
of live and let spin.

This is my prize
straight out of life's Crackerjack Box.
You are not loved,
so this is your reward.

I'm behind on the rent.
I flirt with the woman
in the apartment next door
who, I swear,
is a working girl.
And I make promises
to the landlady
that I know I'll never keep.

Yes indeed. I've got it made.
And yet, there's someone I'm interested in.
And maybe, just maybe, she's interested in me.
This version of the good life
may be more temporary than I think.

So what should I do?
Put an end to the relationship
before it gets any more serious?
Or dispose of this greasy pizza box?
I ask you,
where does the future come up
with these choices?



If Ever

By Dilvin Işiki

If ever this sadness
 unbraces
the ties between
me and you,
 I'll hang
myself to your happiness;
so naturally
that your skin so warm
 swarms
with the incense of life
long asleep
 in my cells.

Beetles in Moonlight

By Gordon Grice

This rooted cliff is riddled
and pocked. On August nights,
you can watch the moonlight clatter
into shards that move apart
and come together to couple.

It's the mating time
of certain black beetles,
scarabs with clubbed antennae.

Try to hold one,
and it smears you with its dung,
struggles against your hand
with claws complicated
and ineffectual.

Leave them alone, and they crawl
this canyon in clusters,
male on male on female,
and their phalluses protrude and turn
the corners of their metaled bodies,
more like spiked tongues than genitals.

You can find them all day, but dusk
brings them to a turtlish frenzy,
and by the time the moon
is high, the ground is resplendent with them,
every crevice of the cliff
disgorging them, a black tide that blues
beneath the moon, and then the moon
seems to crawl about on their backs, each
sleek body carrying the round entire
reflection of the moon,
a thousand moons
mating and forsaking.

Lampyridae

By Donna L. Emerson

As I walk down the June steps
of the farmhouse,
fireflies flash close to my face.

Droplets of light fill the night sky,
small lights coming toward me,
bobbling, dipping down, as far as I can see.

We used to catch them in jars, sit them
next to our beds until their lights went out
or pound nail holes in the jar tops so they'd
stay with us 'til morning.

Mating time, the males flashing, the females
close to the ground on the grass blades,
the bushes. If the lights grow closer together,
all is well for the next generation.

One large lightning bug
tries to come into our bedroom
window, knocking on the pane.
The room fills full with his clicking

sound and light, magnified by window glass.
He lightens our faces like a candle,
softening bedposts
and our startled eyes.

Doughboy and Jenny

By Donna L. Emerson

Our summer horses, five-gaited
warm-bloods. Alert, easy to ride.

They brought us through tumbling
orchards, woods too lumpy to walk,
narrow paths beside Campbell Creek.

Gave us words like forelock, withers,
coronet, fetlock, sixteen hands tall.

Horseshoeing, everybody standing around
talking while Grandpa scraped and tapped.

Doughboy, powdery white, his head
held high. Jenny, a cedar-brown Morgan.
Smooth, supple skin to lean into,

blood moving through all the time,
and through us too, being there, especially
when Doughboy rolled over during our ride

or got behind Jenny when she was in heat.
We had to jump off fast to the left

for their commotion scrambling, scooting
in dusty grass to avoid bruising
and at least stop laughing.

New Barista

By Dennis Ross

She moves like a half-grown colt,
all legs and skinny arms,
a bit awkward, not in complete control,
ready to shear off and gallop
among the tables at the slightest need,
another latte, cappuccino, or bagel.

Energy courses like a flowing river,
her first real job, college this fall,
excitement at the infinite horizons
stretched all around her,
spring on an unbounded prairie
of flowers and tall grass,
any thunderstorms off in the distance,
not even a thought to ripple the day.

So gallop across the fields of wonder,
let the sun warm your supple back,
crop the dewy new grass and flowers,
and glory in another brand-new day.

Princesses

By Donna L. Emerson

*First grade girls are deciding who's
a princess. They say I'm not one.
All girls can be princesses, dear girl.
Some of them just don't know it.*

Princesses have to be brave,
wait the time they must with courage,
until other honest people
of the kingdom find you.

Princesses start out quite simply
as ordinary girls with big hearts
who learn to turn cartwheels,
set the table, practice alphabet letters,
perhaps listen to Mendelssohn
until they find the part written
by his beloved, Baroness Delphine.

He loved her *startling effect*
but never told the part she'd written.
She changed his G minor concerto
and gave it to the world.

Your Girlfriend is a Boozy Animorph

By Henry D. Goldkamp

My shadow nearly dodges your ghost
for an iced glass, again a gin to toast.
In the meantime, the nighttime,
that black digestif, nips & sips us both.

Lives' knives should not allow for sleep,
but wade & wait—their timing is cheap.
Who asks *Is dyeing your heart a crime?*
save casks of scum burped through your teeth.

Juniper toad-throats croak from beneath
& you ribbit in my gimlet. Cubes melt to thief.
Thaws crack a clear, barrel-aged rule of mine:
an eye for an eye for three fingers, neat.

Promise

By Jack Cooper

Her hands looked old
boney and bruised
but her face young
her cheeks blushed
her eyes wandering

His hands felt young
smooth and strong
but his face had been greying
a weak decision or two
a forgotten promise
a little drink

We should have been together
he thought
something old
something new
He watched her from his window seat
as she got off the train
No one was waiting for her

Midnight Run to Nacogdoches

By Robert L. Penick

He is sitting in a fast food restaurant, pining for a woman who has never had an original thought in her life. It is Christmas Eve, and she is five hundred miles away, celebrating with her new in-laws. He is a damned fool, but hasn't quite realized it yet. Like Dostoevsky's *Raskolnikov*, he is seized by a compulsion, far from murder but born still of desire and indignation. Outside the window, snowflakes pile up like feathers in an uncomfortable pillow. He stares out into the night, and that is all he sees. Night.

There were certain promises made which were not kept. Precise itineraries not completed. His present situation bears no resemblance to the Facebook account he abandoned fifteen months previous. There is no somewhat attractive woman sitting across from him, gazing with an amused smile over a pile of hamburger wrappers, matching him fry for fry while jabbering about office politics and daytime television. There is no second toothbrush in his bathroom, no dresser drawer reserved for feminine undergarments. No carton of Trader Vic's vegetable soup inhabits his refrigerator. Anything left are empty words still ringing in his head. They were fiction as they sprang from her mouth. Never had she meant the June wedding, the four bridesmaids, the honeymoon on the gulf coast. A changed heart was just another way of saying "liar."

He deserved an explanation. That and an apology. This sort of wrong simply could not be allowed to stand. He had been treated as less than human, as a tool. A resolution was required. Picking up his plastic tray, he moved to the garbage can by the exit.

Five hundred miles to Nacogdoches. He could be there by dawn.

Festina Lente

By Jack Cooper

—for Charlie

I once laid a stone path in the yard
and unearthed a spadefoot toad
in hibernation

It woke up unharmed in my hand
and I took it to the zoo
where it could look through glass
at smiling children
and get fat on crickets

Half the world lives underfoot
this garden sprite seemed to say
Make haste slowly



Summer Thunderstorm

By Richard Dinges Jr.

A cold pierce, bolts
crack sky's lids,
a brief glimpse
at eternity
through waves of heat,
a countenance that
blinded those who
dared peer into
god's eyes. A grumble
follows, a grumpy
response to my
lack of respect,
a yawn at what
I should fear, no
longer a child
who cowers under
unknown's demands.

Sunday Morning

By Matthew C. Brennan

Back home from Kroger, I sense that something's terribly wrong: five squad cars flashing red cordon the street, and yellow tape extends from a fencepost to a worksite shed across from us. Beside it rests a Jeep that jumped the curb and stopped, and running from the scene, a woman, sobbing, scrunches her face into a hand-wrung rag, disfigured by whatever horror she was brought to see behind the white construction trailer.

Later, in their now-quiet cars, the cops roll away and leave the tape to flap in the wind like litter from a Sunday picnic. Nothing on the news, no sightings of the suffering young woman anywhere. So afternoon slips into evening, couples walking their well-groomed dogs and killing time, the half moon rising, a slow leisurely winding down of a watch reset on Monday morning.

Blimps are Cool

By Molly Sizer

Today we saw the Goodyear Blimp. It flew
above the roofs of town. We stopped and watched
the behemoth maneuver with the wind.

I saw it land behind the plant where workers
leave with injured backs and missing thumbs.

A Goodyear job is hard to find; the work
itself is harder still. The sounds inside
will deafen minds; the fumes and dirt can kill.
The jobs connect to houses and schools, to
grocery stores and churches.



Health Care

By Dick Bentley

On this hill, in this clump of trees at the edge of the golf course, I sit with the wind swaying the daisies. Now distant, Bernardini's milky eyes are focused on the golf ball as he bends down before putting. He studies the ground. He analyzes the lie, the turf, the wind. Bernardini is the President of the Health Group that has denied me treatment. The treatment is too experimental for my tumor, the bean counters said. So I am to die. And so is Bernardini. The sun oozes across the sky; the breezes undulate over my skin like warm bandages. My heart beats with the systole and diastole of waves against a breakwater, and boredom creeps over me like vines. I know what I want: an event, by which I mean a squeeze of the trigger of the weapon now aimed at Bernardini's distant heart, as he kneels over his tiny white ball on the eleventh hole. His golfing partners, more health care executive pension plan investors, insurance dealers. A little acidic gossip. A little high-tech megadeath, a sharp thing that will wake them up. Then run a street sweeper over the eleventh green, turn the breeze up to hurricane so the daisies' heads tear off and hurtle through the air like bullets. A melon-burst, the tomato-colored splatter, Bernardini raises his arms as he kneels as if sniffing the air. His wings are spread for flight. He's howling like a siren, and he finally has everyone's full attention, before he rolls over like a noon pigeon.

Everyone gets a turn, and now it's mine. But some get more turns than others, and I've never had a turn, not one. You think I didn't hate their pity, their forced kindness. They are pointing now toward this clump of trees. I could have a few more of them by the time they sentence me to death.

I'll already be dead. You can wipe your feet on me, twist my motives around all you like, dump stones on my head, and drown me in the river. What we want, of course, is nothing more than the same old story: the trees pushing out their leaves and shucking them off, the unfurling of slugs, the worms vacuuming the dirt, the daisies and their pungent slow explosions. We want it all to go on and on again, the same thing each year, monotonous and amazing.



Ballad of St. Stephen's Green

By James B. Nicola

While loitering in St. Stephen's Green,
Watching the youth pass by,
I spied an elder gentleman
In a blue suit and bright tie

Strutting, five-feet-six, or less,
With hair of jet-streaked gray
Combed back and wetted to impress
In a masculine Irish way.

When standing, he would start to list;
When waddling, clack his cane—
Or metal pole, hitched at a wrist—
To make it down a lane.

He rummaged through a rubbish bin,
Got most of a gâteau,
Then clacked off pocketing the win,
Uneven, driven, slow.

I rummaged through my knapsack stash
Recalling half a scone
And fished it out. But in a flash
The lopping man was gone.

Then, spotting him, I gave pursuit.
He sped and cursed the leg
Then shouted down my bag of loot,
Too proud, too fine, to beg.

On the Move

By Jack Cooper

Arriving

I caught the bus to the beach
under a blue and white sky
and sat behind five or six riders
all with the dazed look of the car-less and out of sorts
who had lost the distinction between medicine and food
The driver was a soldier of the wheel
who attacked traffic as the enemy
in her rush to keep a schedule that no one trusted
and everyone cared deeply about

The wheel came to a jerky stop in a lot
where the parking lines had been painted
just before two pigeons dropped down for some caramel corn
leaving loopy trails of white bird-prints
back and forth across the wet surface
as if designing spaces for anyone arriving from the clouds

Leaving

We're leaving these wounded beasts of the streets
this impeccable anonymous apartment
this dry and incandescent co-habitation with ambition
to wonder among dripping leaves
the smell of mycelia
and a hundred seasons of shade
Adieu to this incredible indigestible city
its fantasies and exaggerations
its nonrenewable decay and constant emergency

God's speed to places safe to go at night
that have nothing to do with falling stars
or rising rivers or creatures nested in their differences
We ache for dirt and clouds and canopies
for the unsettled unpainted garden
of long-buried inclination



Drifting

By Nan Byrne

On the bed my eyes closed
I am letting drift take me
I am remembering Mrs. Buffington
She said Canader instead of Canada
and told me once that Gillian Armistead
was a less than brilliant girl
And I am hearing my mother say,
All rich people are happy because
of the money have you ever noticed
the sidewalks of Boston look like
Brooklyn when the snow melts?
That your dreams can turn you into a horse
But only life can turn you into an ass
Texas men like ten gallon hats
and turquoise belts and Texas women
wear mink coats over spandex
but no one wears a girdle anymore
or likes leftovers or knows what do
with a panic-stricken canary or
how to respond to the pause
between words that white space
the opacity where something else needs to be said
something that you only know you're missing
when those reticular fragments
are floating past your eyes and you
are trying to make some sense
but all you can make are connections
The garnishments of words are not images
The rivers of the world are not the waters of the world

Evening shade is not night
Childbirth is like a week with two Sundays
And if I were a fork and not a knife I might be of use
my father said before he cut and ran
His pallbearers were all men of the cloth
each one a preacher telling us the good news
God we waited and waited for the epilogue
but someone turned out the lights
and sleep came softly

Part One

By Diane Glancy

The Man Who Loves Dreamsicles

He reads the wrapper with rapture—
*Let the Dreamsicle warm a moment before eating,
so it will not stick to the tongue.*

He unwraps the Dreamsicle watching the crystals form
as it warms.

He studies the striations of frost on the orange coat
of his Dreamsicle as the Earth's atmosphere touches it.
Maybe he is like Christ walking through the wheat field
or Van Gogh studying sunflowers.

The man who loves Dreamsicles is delighted as figures
in Piero di Cosimo's *The Discovery of Honey* [1498],
an early form of the Dreamsicle.

He is passionate as El Greco's *Adoration of the Magi*
[1565-67] in orange Dreamsicle hues.
Or his *View of Toledo* [1596-1600],
in which Dreamsicle flames burn at the stake
during the Spanish Inquisition.

The man who loves orange Dreamsicles
has red hair and beard.
He is Van Gogh's *Self-portrait Eating a Dreamsicle* [1889]
or his peasant family, *The Dreamsicle Eaters* [1885]
in a dingy room in Holland.

He is held by the oranges in Pieter Bruegel's [the Elder]
Peasant Wedding [1656].

Or Paul Gauguin's *The Vision after the Sermon* [1888]
 in which an angel wrestles with Jacob—
 the angel's wings white as the inside of a Dreamsicle.
 Or the splash of Wassily Kandinsky's
Sketch for a Composition VII [1913]
 as we move toward the modern Dreamsicle.

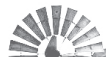
There's also Paul Klee's *Twittering Machine* [1922]
 where birds made with line and dot
 tweet the song of an ice cream truck circling neighborhoods
 in summer.

Jackson Pollock could abstract Dreamsicles too.

I think also of Christofino Allori's
Judith Holding the Head of Holofernes [1613].
 Her bodice orange as a Dreamsicle.
 [Holofernes was about to destroy Judith's village of Bethulia
 when she went into his tent
 with her saber and removed his head.]

In 1905, 11-year-old Frank Epperson left a glass of soda
 on the porch on a cold night in San Francisco.
 The next morning, he found it frozen
 and pulled the soda from the glass with the stir-stick
 he had left in the glass.

In 1923, Frank Epperson introduced the Popsicle to a crowd
 on Neptune Beach in Belmar, New Jersey.
 Then came the Creamsicle.
 Then the Dreamsicle.
 The man who loves Dreamsicles has visions of paradise
 where Dreamsicles float in the air redolent as orange
 blossoms.
 He sees radiance in the Dreamsicle orange
 of Rosso Fiorentino's *The Descent from the Cross* [1521].



I actually saw a picture of Martin Luther King, Junior giving his *Ihaveadream* speech in Washington, D.C. with a Dreamsicle in his raised hand.*

Maybe George Washington ate a Dreamsicle when crossing the Delaware.

I think of Mars as a Dreamsicle—
or the orange storm-clouds on Jupiter,
voluptuous as Joseph Wright's *Vesuvius from Portici* [1774-76].

Spiral galaxies twirl through the traveling Hubble.
Their orange coating covered with a slight hoarfrost—
their inside white as iced milk, pure as lily of the valley
or a polar bear.

I suppose it's the reverse of the molten ball of earth
that had to cool so grass would grow and cows could eat
and give milk for the Dreamsicle.

Once I drove through the southwest.
The wind blew fine sheets of dirt across the highway.
That same evening, the sun went down
orange as a Dreamsicle through an atmosphere charged with
dust.

At 5:00 a.m., I woke to a gunmetal gray-black light—
as if the horizon of Earth were the rim of a black light-bulb.
It's why I sleep on the road sometimes—
to be near the wildness there
and to see the first tinge of orange-dawn on darkness,
as if a Dreamsicle rising without its stick.

* I saw this on a website while researching the Dreamsicle

Part II

By Diane Glancy

The Erring Need of Narrative

I

Christ

with rapture

passionate—

a saber—

his raised hand.

II

There is, in the orange, the constraint of art history and the
primitive need

of its form. In a wound tearing apart, the need for meaning
sticks.

I could not therefore, leave the moorings—because the plop of
orange—

not the fruit but the frightful separation from the known
world—

would fall to indirection.

Thus, I write the idea and not the handling.

Prayers Coagulate Around a Woman on Her Porch

By Henry D. Goldkamp

Southern static : pink tongue : dewy
ears : seagulls yelling Wal-Mart

parking lot next door : train anger :
projects : boxcar breathe a spray

our woman on her porch : chicken fat
green bean tin : gospel lukewarm beer

busting miller's white girl gold :
strung out queen cobra wet : hissy fit

she twerk on twilight : her iPhone
whip cream hand fan : work hard

zaps of blue : miniature death-struggle
zip the bottom of that glue-catch

heard round corner : rats clowning
circle nets brown slick : scurry

what left of sky : pulled weeds dyed
daps blue light her iris crispy :

lollipops of grease : her past :
window unit got sty eye sing ugly

summer oversung dust rug heart index
: Sun worship : Son worship : Sunday :

mismatched fryer pan : chapel pound heat
God won't : answer and they leave messages

they locked inside out : church stink :
Sun dead cow tow the white nitrogen bead

tiny mystery island of salt below
bare copper wire fishing out an outlet

open holes her pomeranian claws :
slab : black warp inhale a weight

furry gravity noses in : vanish flesh
happy : gold : look : rock doves

hopping small hops pick bits of gravel :
spit out when bits of gravel bite hard

blue ink blink metallic shivering \$5.99
dripping ablutions heaping goo

after milk curdles does it grow fur?
she doesn't take honey with a goddamn thing

radio cricket behind her smile sticky :
cheeks shimmer pothole antennae

internet trickle inside that sweat-brain
a single termite wing missing a chunk

attic diaspora : Mississippi desert
pregnant big with ten pound sky

child shriek five houses down "I'm gonna
kill you" : her eyes crimp like bottlecapped

twist-cap ashtray : three smushed butts
: one still smoking and sour and justified

peanut shell sleep : armrest : waffle-
thread shrapnel : protein war against

drugged Louisiana Purchase : roach
dancing in love : deflated tricycle tire

her dreamfeet crinkle astroturf
Jesus : second miracle of water

a kiss : a molding lampshade : offal
of cheap pastel purple ribbon : Go Saints

cooler : foam guts factory speckled
frozen splash : the time giant Night

grown lonely to rip raw cherry plastic
in half growling cloud milk : stray

cat tummy drag fat : crawl space :
light bulb pocked : grey smoke

street car sizzles like frozen pizza :
tissue-thin Bible : Chinese menu : The President



grates behind her channel surfing : a ghost
clicking dogs : palms swish into cat burglars

Lion of the Valley props up her window
unit wedged : wet donkey : sopping prayers

like walking into someone's mouth :
: soda water vault : same feeling

a family glock that sleepy trigger :
screen smack : denim-wrapped :

giant night : quietus

Naming Southwest Oklahoma

By Molly Sizer

Young Andrew Carnegie invested years
steeling money; in his old age, he built
imposing music halls on the east coast
and libraries in rural towns out west.

Roosevelt's Rough Riders waged war on foot
up a Cuban trail with smoking bullets.
He came home a hero, America's
pride, although scores of men died of disease.

About the best and maybe only good
that Benjamin Tillman managed while in
Congress was to reform campaign finance.
His worst was to support attacks on blacks.

The Yankee Henry Lawton fought in four
Of this republic's wars and died in one.
Today, his combat-weary persona
walks the world of Southwest Oklahoma.

*Nadarko translates to "butterfly place"
In the Caddo language. A white man's mistake
Added an A; now, it's Anadarko.
Butterflies always favor the Caddo.*

*Gotebo swam the swollen river
on the coldest, wettest day of winter
and saved father and son of the Giles clan.
Kiowa Indian—he was a kind man.*

The Pie Lady

By Shiann Dawson

You again.

You don't even remember me.

I can tell by the way you're smiling,

Two-dollar pink lipstick smeared

Across aged, yellow teeth.

So, I smile back,

Lips curling into something

That wants to be a snarl.

Last week, you told me how

The company I work for is evil

And

How I, personally, am a liar

All because someone else

Put some pies in the wrong spot.

Under a sign for \$3 when they should have been \$8.

I just work the register, I told you

And you shook that long, gnarled, dirty finger in my face

But you're smiling now.

"Find everything okay?"

"Oh, yes," you reply, "I hope these hoses ring up correctly.

They were on clearance."

The words are out of my mouth before I can stop them.

"Oh, God, I hope they do, too."

You look a little puzzled now,

Head tilted, evaluating,

But you keep smiling.

You still don't remember me.

Suddenly, I realize that

I prefer it this way,

so I keep smiling too.

Hometown

By Kadence B.

"We must consider, however, that this moment or feeling that we recall may, in fact, be airbrushed or fictionalized by our memory."

— Zachary Boren

My hometown is a monochrome.
Pack rats on every block with vintage
Whatever-you-have from whatever-year.
I walk around the perfectly preserved stagnation.
The gas station everyone still calls by its old name,
Before it was bought out, hasn't changed.
The new coat of paint and resurfaced asphalt
Does nothing against the patina of time.
Standing in its own decadence, the building seems to
Be tired.
And I still know whose mothers are working there.
Still tired.
I buy a Surge. Citrus soda everyone is going gaga over.
Never had one before.
Check out the hype, I suppose.
On my way to the next graveyard.
It's only a couple blocks to the high school.
The place where many in my class would
Say were their glory days. The football field
Overgrown with clover and bermuda that suffocates
Everything around here.
The new fieldhouse, bought with oil taxes, looks nice, I guess.
It's hard to care about touchdowns when you're sight-reading
Sousa. But where does the funding go?
Nothing has changed in this gradual decay.
The soda tastes terrible.

Trash

By Eleanore Lee

To find where the Johnsons used to live,
You have to turn up the old dirt road,
Hang left, then go on past the splintered gate
Of the town dump
(You'd drag your bags of trash out of the trunk or down from
the truck bed
And just leave them on top of the pile).
My mother didn't like me going to their house.

It was farther up that road, near the rocks.
Hard to miss.
The empty, ruined barn,
The wrecked Chevy in the front.
Denise and I'd climb in and pretend to drive.
In the kitchen, usually a small, pale child or two
Underfoot.
I liked to work the hand pump in their sink.

Flowered linoleum in their front sitting room.
Their dad's cigar butts in the rusty can on the sideboard.
The inside toilet didn't flush, so you had to use the john out
back
On up past the wandering chickens.
We had hideouts in the woods,
And we built a fort behind the woodpile.

They're gone now.

Chip spent some time in jail, and then he left the area.
Denise got pregnant in tenth grade.

The lot's been up for sale a long time.
They're gone.
Stuff though. It stays.
The dump's shut down, but
People still sneak their junk in after dark.

The rotted cardboard boxes: Mountains of them
Huge wet bags of dripping rotten tomatoes

Offal
Beer cans: Schlitz and Bud
Mail, unopened
Red shorts with the seat worn through

The pile of single socks
Dog food cans
Dead lightbulbs
Wet clumps of cut grass
Pond scum
Squashed possum
Empty vacuum cleaner bags, cloth diapers
Fanta bottles
Torn birthday paper and ribbons
Canceled checks.

It's still around—
Not shredded stacked or sorted
Just there.
Earth coat of many colors.

Skipping Rocks*

—Originally published in *Havik, The Las Positas Anthology 2019: Magic Tricks*, May 2019, pp. 223-226.

By Chad W. Lutz

There's a place in town where the only two roads meet, marked by an old sycamore. Its bark is blotchy, and the few limbs it has left reach for the sky like the pleading arms of a dying man. I guess I should back up a moment and clarify that, by "town," I mean four ramshackle houses spaced a mile apart along a cracked and aging Midwest county road. Be it ever so dreary, it's where I grew up, and the tree was where the kids from the next town over wanted me to meet that day.

I'd met these people in passing, a chance encounter at the fair a few weeks earlier after the rides had shut down, and the vendors had packed their stands for the evening. They were standing outside the gates. One of the kids, a gangly, pasty-faced redhead named Robbie, said he recognized me from somewhere and suggested we all go down to the sycamore and "hang out." The two girls clinging to his hip, Stacy and Rhonda, thought it was a righteous enough idea and readily agreed.

"Come on, Chad. It'll be fuuuuun," the girls pleaded when I showed signs of hesitation. It's not that I was scared or anything. I just didn't know why they were all so hot to hang out with some dumb kid like me, especially when they lived not one but two "towns" over. The area around the sycamore was nothing but an glorified ditch anyway.

They pressed and pressed and blew long, frustrated sighs out of their noses with every concern I raised. Stacy, who was chewing on something like three packs' worth of bubblegum,

* The character of the father do not reflect the views of Westview or Southwestern Oklahoma State University

assured me, with Red 40 stained to her long teeth, she wouldn't bite. Rhonda flung her hair from side to side and played prosecutor with her eyelashes. Robbie, who had been silently flipping his cellphone open and shut, stood like a statue made of slow-melting ice and waited for my answer.

"I seen you before," he said in a slow, Johnny Charisma drawl. "You're the kid who buys his pops smokes, right?"

I nodded.

"Any chance you could score a couple packs for me?"

I actually passed on the action that night, lying that I had to get up early to help my father remove a stump in the Johnsons' yard the next morning.

"Damn the Man," Robbie said in his all-too-cool masculine bravado, shaking his head as if this were the shame of the century. The girls made like they were going to protest, but Robbie raised a hand in the air, and they instantly drew silent. He looked to them and then back at me. Then, he shrugged and began to draw away.

"Those things'll kill you, you know," I said before they'd got more than a couple yards.

"Yeah?" Robbie said, turning about face as the girls snickered beside him, one on either side.

"Carcinogens. They put rat poison in them. That's what I read in the Time Magazine, anyway." I kicked at a rock on the ground in front of me. It didn't move.

Robbie smiled.

"We'll see you roun'," he said and wandered off into the darkness with a wink.

The Johnsons, as everybody in town knew, were a hard, old couple who raised chickens and grew soy when the ground permitted. They ran a tight schedule, and if you told them you were going to do something, you'd better do it. Stagnation stunts perspective, I've found, and those people, even Mrs.

Johnson (especially Mrs. Johnson), were no exception. They'd never left town, not even on their wedding day.

Both of them were at the end of their drive as my father's black Dodge Ram pulled onto their property at six that following morning. Mrs. Johnson was wearing a nightgown and a light shawl, despite it being maybe a hair over forty degrees, and an expression as grave and grey as the cloudy sky brooding overhead. Mr. Johnson, meanwhile, sat in his old Ford pickup with the motor idling, the heater on, one of the windows cracked, and a steady stream of Marlboro smoke rolling out the slit. My father gave an unreciprocated wave as we pulled in and parked the car. Mrs. Johnson insisted on walking back the quarter-mile, simply pointing in the direction of the stump out behind the house. Mr. Johnson broke the silence of the morning as he put the old Ford in gear and backed the vehicle under the makeshift carport made from a weather-worn, canvas tarp and the shell of an old wagon. There, the Ford's engine died, and the sound of a rusty car door opening and slamming shut further demented the grey uncalm of the day.

"Your boy gon' help block the win' today, Griz?" Mr. Johnson said wheezing through a fit of laughter, addressing my father by his old war nickname.

"Gotta get 'im out the house one way or another," he said, extending one giant paw of a hand to Mr. Johnson. And then, turning to me, with a wad of singles and fives extended in one hand, "Reds. The carton. And hard packs. None of that soft shit."

He smashed the bills down in my open hand, and before I could even nod in acknowledgement, he was off clapping Mr. Johnson on the back with a hearty cackle at the joke he'd apparently just made and asking if the man had any beers he'd be willing to part with.

About a quarter-mile up the road from the Johnsons' place, there's a gas station called Ed's General, where a man named Habib has pumped nothing but 87-grade and fixed flats for the last decade or so with his wife, Pari. The original proprietor, a man named Jacob Dower, found a lump in his left breast some years back and sold the place to Habib. It was rumored Dower split for some place warm: Florida or one of the Carolinas. If that's true, he was one of the lucky ones. Like me.



My father has been a proud patron and life-long Philip Morris customer ever since he was twelve. Despite smoking a pack and a half a day, he was still somehow able to spend most of every morning doing manual labor, either on our farm or one of the other three in "town." Sometimes, he does odd projects around the house, from what little my mother tells me, but mostly he's out in the fields digging up rocks so the tiller blades don't end up looking like dull shears. What my father has never done, as long as I've been able to walk, that

is, is buy his smokes himself.

I always wondered why Habib never thought I was smoking them myself, or why he sold them to me at all, for that matter. "You a nice boy," he'd say to me with a smile. "Good to you father. Good boy. I hope I have good boy like you some day." I hated that. Made me feel about an inch tall. One time when I was ten, I opened one of the packs to see what the fuss was all about, but I instantly gagged on the tarry smoke and threw up. The only thing I got out of it was bed without supper.

"It's good exercise," my dad would insist whenever I'd protest making the weekly trek down County Road 45 to Ed's for a re-up carton of Marlboro Reds. I always wanted to point out that if it was such good exercise, he shoulda just made the trip himself. But in the twenty-five grueling years I lived with him, there was only one time I can remember anyone talking back to my father. That person's jaw has sat a little crooked ever since.

Like clockwork, I returned to find Mr. Johnson and my father drunk and no closer to pulling up that stump than mankind was to landing on Pluto.

"You get them damn smokes like I asked?" His voice pounded out like thunder the moment he caught sight of my outline drumming up the drive. I raised the plastic grocery bag in the air to a smattering of half-applause, knee-slapping, and slurry laughter.

"Atta boy," he said, clapping Mr. Johnson on the back. "I tole you that boy good fer something'."

It was three weeks after the chance meeting at the fair that I strode onto Ed's General dusty parking lot for yet another carton of my old man's smokes to find none other than Robbie and his merry band of misfits, Rhonda and Stacy, leaning

against the Coke machine out front under a sweltering mid-July sky.

"Well, if it isn't the Man of the Hour," he'd proclaimed, raising a sweaty Coke bottle in my direction. "Got a second to spare, Champ?"

I looked left and noticed a fire-engine red Nash Suburban with white-wall tires and its signature wood paneling, a 1942, the kind you see hard bodies loading surfboards into on postcards from California. One of its wood panels was missing, but outside of that, the thing looked immaculate.

The Nash was parked cattywampus just inside the grass, making it impossible for anyone else to park on that side of the lot. I envisioned Robbie flying into the parking lot, kicking up a storm cloud of dust, throwing the car into park, and saying smoothly to the girls, "We're here."

I looked back at the trio, wondering how anyone so cool could live in a place so lukewarm. Stacy and Rhonda looked more eager than ever. In that July heat, they glistened with what I could've been convinced was pure sex. Rhonda, I remember, had on these jean shorts that started at her hips and barely made it past her tight, youthful thighs.

"I gotta buy smokes for my dad," I said, not knowing what else to say.

"What was that?" Robbie said, untwisting himself from the sly pretzel he'd been leaning in and inserting another dollar into the vending machine. An ice-cold bottle of Coke tumbled out of its insides. He picked it up and walked it over to me, as if I knew what to do with it.

"Take it," he said, and placed the bottle in my hand. I wasn't thirsty, but what was I going to do? Deny the king of cool?

There was something instantly odd about the way the label felt. It was a five-dollar bill wrapped around its iconic red

packaging.

When I looked back up at Robbie, he was grinning from ear to ear.

"Once you're done buying smokes for your old man, whadya say we go down to the old sycamore?"

I was just about to hand the five back to Robbie and make up some lie about having to set the dinner table or do a month's worth of laundry when Habib's voice came bouncing through one of the station windows.

"Good boy! You here for father's cigarettes, yes?"

I dropped my hand back into my pocket along with the five, and lowered my head.

Without saying anything, I started for the door.

Before I could, Robbie jumped in my way with the kind of agility only a cat, a big cat, like a tiger, possesses.

"Tonight, at sundown," he said, pushing a meaty finger into my chest. "Don't be square. Be there."

I dug my feet into the ground and headed for the door. I couldn't look at him, so I looked at the bottle instead and so meekly my head could've fit right inside.

"Good boy!" Habib shouted. "Come, come. I have special price!"

Shortly after dinner that night, with the sickening musk of Marlboros mingling with the smell of my mother's meatloaf, I told my father I was going for a walk.

"Where?" he grunted from his seat in front of the television, his gaze never wavering. We only got four channels, but just like his cigarettes, my father maintained a religious kind of devotion to each one. He called them "The Four Winds" and laughed every time he used the pet name.

"Just down to the old tree."

"To do what?" his tone changing from a grunt to a growl.

"To watch the sunset," I lied.

“What kind of queer shit is that?” he replied. But my mother, ever-sympathetic, even to the fly caught in the spider’s web, ignored him and said with a polite but tired smile, “Be back before dark, Chad.”

My dad wouldn’t.

Heading north on County Road 45 takes you to a Walmart-anchored blip on the map known as Buxton, where the greatest thing to happen to its citizenry, outside of rolling back prices, was a 1987 playoff berth into the high school football semifinals. But, unlike my “town,” the kids in Buxton were cool.

The kids there talked about movies and music, what was happening at the university in Columbus, and ten-dollar notions like presidential executive orders and why marijuana should be legalized. The kids in Buxton also had cell phones, not like the kind you can use to get on the internet today, but cell phones nonetheless. Hardly anyone talked about tillers, soy, or the price of manure. And when kids bought Marlboro Reds, they bought them for themselves.

I remember how much I’d wanted a cell phone back then and how I’d sometimes stay up late writing down numbers I’d like to call if I ever had the chance. My favorites were 686-0574 and 688-8073. Who knew what cool people were waiting on the other ends of those lines?

About a quarter-mile past Ed’s General, I saw the fire-engine-red outline of Robbie’s woody wagon, the thought of which made me laugh out loud. I was a teenager, not a priest. I remember how bright and vibrant the red stood out against the sickly, stagnant green of the knee-high corn fields and the marshy, tall grasses that bordered the roads on forever. Just to the left of the Nash Suburban was the old sycamore and its dying arms reaching high into an otherwise treeless sky,



pleading to be put out of its misery.

Stacy and Rhonda climbed on the roof of the car and started whooping and hollering and shaking parts of their bodies that made the air seem electric, while Robbie hung back in that same pretzel stance he'd had at Ed's General against the sycamore tree as he flipped his cell phone open and closed. It made me blush, but it also filled me with excitement.

I wondered who someone like Robbie would call. But no sooner had the thought entered my mind did it make way for what I knew was the truth: Robbie never called anyone. No way. Not someone like him.

Anyone called Robbie.

We spent that evening skipping rocks under passing cars. The object was to time our throws and get them between the tires without hitting anything. None of us came even remotely close, and we laughed as the drivers twisted into a frenzy,

hearing the rocks pound around beneath their feet. The sound was like dropping marbles down a drain.

"Does anyone have a joint?" Stacy had asked after an hour or so, a large blob of gum passing from molar to molar. Rhonda agreed and said that'd be sick, but Robbie disagreed.

"Let's let Ace weigh in on the festivities," he said, flicking open his phone and closing it again. A fresh Marlboro cherried between his lips as he spoke. "After all, Champ here is the Man of the Hour."

I still remember being caught with my tongue in my throat. They wanted to know what I wanted to do. I could hardly contain myself. Was this even possible?

At this point, it was around nine o'clock, and all that remained of daylight was a whitish-salmon lip in the westerly sky.

"Can I see your cell phone?"

It was the only time I ever heard Robbie laugh.

"Sure thing, King," and he tossed me the device just as sure as he would a pencil or some other seemingly indestructible item. I was so nervous I almost dropped it. "Who you gonna call?"

"Ghostbusters!" Rhonda giggled.

I was beet red.

"What do you guys think about the legalization of marijuana?" I said stalling, turning the cell phone over in my hand. "Do you think President Clinton will sign an executive order to legalize the pot?"

Robbie walked over and took his cellphone back.

"Nobody calls it 'the pot', Mayne. And let's not spoil the evening."

Just then, a black pickup truck, emerging out of the darkening night thundered down the road headed right for us. Before it even came into full view, I knew exactly whose truck that was. I'd recognize it anywhere. There wasn't a single

doubt in my mind as to the person behind the wheel or their intentions.

Taking aim, I launched a medium-sized rock at the oncoming vehicle, which struck the windshield head on, shattering the glass and bringing the pickup to a demonic, screeching halt.

"I got an idea," said Rhonda, beginning to move toward the red station wagon. "Let's get the hell out of here."

"Why you little fuck!" my father boomed as his truck door slammed so hard it swung back open. He was breathing like a locomotive. His feet whispered scratchy threats as they scraped against the pavement. "This yer idea of a fuckin' 'walk'?" And then to the others, "And who're these fuckin' punks?"

I walked out into the road with my hands up to try and cool my dad, as Robbie and the girls stood their ground.

"Hey, let's just get out of here," I heard Robbie say and turned to watch him stamp out a cigarette that was only a quarter smoked. It was the first time there had ever been a waver to his voice.

But my father's presence and the low rumble of his idling truck were like an ominous magnet whose pull couldn't be ignored.

"Which one of you threw it?" he bellowed, grabbing me by the collar and dropping me to the ground with his free hand before I could get a word in edgewise. Two seconds later, I felt the hard edge of a steel-toed boot digging into my ribs.

Robbie took a step forward but retraced his steps when my old man whipped out a hunting knife, six-inches long, from his belt loop with a single flick of the wrist.

My father grunted in approval, satisfied nobody was going to move, and set his sights back on me, as I rolled around in the street holding my right eye.

"Think you're hot shit, crashing my windshield. Now, which one uh y'all threw it?" He looked from Rhonda to Robbie to Stacy and then to me again.

"WHO?" he roared, his voice so shrill and sharp it seemed to split the night.

When no one said anything, he bent down, and with the skill of a butcher, began carving into the cartilage of my left ear. The sounds of my screams echoed into the night.

"I threw it, you big dick," Rhonda said, throwing up a rock she picked up and hitting the old man in the head. He grabbed his skull, groaning, and then gnashed his teeth.

"I threw it, too," said Stacy, spitting out her wad of gum and kicking it off to the side in one fluid motion. She picked up a rock off the road and socked my father right in the forehead with it.

My father tumbled backward onto the road, right in a pool of my blood.

"Looks like we all threw it," Robbie said bouncing a rock in his hand.

I almost couldn't believe what was happening. Who were these kids: three strangers I'd only just met, advancing on my father like big cats backing down a poacher on some African plain.

I watched my father's lips peel back through a red blur of pain. Slowly, and grunting, he stood up, knife still in hand, eyes sizing up Robbie, Stacy, and Rhonda.

"Fuckin' niggers," he said steeling his eyes and sneering.

Time stopped. All that could be heard was the truck idling.

My father stared at them. And they stared back at my father.

They. Them. They. Them.

"I think you better scat," Robbie said, as Stacy and Rhonda stepped forward in the faint glow of the trucks headlights, new rocks glistening in their hands.

The wind blew between them, stirring the old sycamore tree. Its dead limbs scratched and clawed against one another.

"Dad," I called out, slowly gaining my feet again. "Let's just go. Let's just go back, all right?"

He lowered his eyes to his knife. The tree limbs scratched at one another.

"Put the knife away, Dad."

Little by little, the knife fell to his side and then dropped to the street where it settled with a weak clink. As soon as it hit the ground, I kicked the blade away and wrapped an arm around my old man.

With my voice wavering, I said, "Let's go home."

"My dad says he can get me a job at his law office in Columbus once I graduate. That's pretty cool, I guess. I don't know. He says I can work there while I go to school and then maybe go full-time or something when I get my degree. I think it'd be cool to work in a law office. Maybe I can meet some sexy bad guy." Rhonda's eyes were like flashbulbs as she talked.

She paused to take another draw from the bottle of Beam Robbie had taken from his dad's liquor cabinet and then tapped Robbie's shoulder with it. Robbie waved it on, and so the bottle came back around.

"What about you, Sly?" Robbie asked. "What's on the menu for you once you're done cooking in this small town?"

The bottle had been to my lips, but I brought it to a rest in my lap.

"I'm gonna be cool," I said, mind swimming from the four or five slugs of whiskey I'd already taken. "I'm gonna write articles for the Dispatch and travel the world." I raised the bottle again, only to find it was empty.

"A writer, huh? Sounds busy. You know what busy is?"

"I know what busy is," I said, smiling. But, I gotta get out of this place. My father..."

We rolled on in silence for a while, and then Robbie said something I'll never forget. He said, "Eh, this place ain't so bad. People can get turned on anywhere. Dig? That's life."

"Not this place," I said, taking a drink from the empty bottle and letting my head loll around on my neck some.

Outside, the world was nothing but darkness: cat's eyes on the concrete and a green mile sign every minute or so the only proof we were still on planet Earth. I felt like we were tumbling somewhere dark and beautiful, somewhere corn never grew, where things like walks to buy my dad smokes couldn't happen, not even if they wanted to.

"Nothing cool ever happens here. There's just corn and the Johnsons and that stupid sycamore and that's it. Nobody cool ever came out of this dump."

Stacy and Rhonda laughed.

Robbie didn't. He said, "What about you, Ace? Ain't you cool?"

"Let's just be cool, Dad. Let's just be cool, huh? Drive me home?"

I pointed toward the open driver-side door fighting the wind.

"Let's just get in and go."

"Chief," Robbie protested, but I waved him off.

My ear was bleeding all over me. My shirt, soppy and red. Against its white, the blood made me look like a human candy cane.

"Home?"

He squinted his eyes.

"Yeah, home."

"And what about my fuckin' windshield? Huh? Who pays for that?"

"I'll take care of it when we get back," I said, insisting with

an outstretched arm for him to trust me. "It's time to go."

He grunted and growled like a large mammal, a bear.

"Give me one good reason why I shouldn't stick you and your friends right here, right now."

Dropping my arm, I stepped right up to his face. "Because there's more of us. And the sooner you accept that, the easier this can be."

Another growl rumbled from somewhere deep inside his throat. We stood face-to-face, neither of us breathing.

"Just get in, Dad," I said.

"Chad," Robbie stammered as I rounded the car. His eyes were as big as the moon.

"It'll be cool," I said. I got in the passenger side and buckled myself in. My dad followed.

He regarded the kids from Buxton one last time but couldn't find anything to say. He stepped into the vehicle, shut the door, and we began to drive.

My dad was a man of routine: drink, smoke, TV, work, sleep, eat. There were certain things you knew about him. He watched one of the Four Winds after dinner and then went directly to bed. He worked, if he did, between daybreak and noon every single day. My dad never, ever drove without smoking a cigarette. Sometimes, he'd shake things up and he'd slap my mom and I around, but this was a constant that always held true.

We were veering right to make a full U-turn when he started rummaging through his pockets for a smoke and his lighter. He steadied the wheel with his right knee while his hands moved from his shirt pocket to his pants pockets, left one first and then the right. We'd made the turn when he dropped his lighter, and I remember thinking about my mom and what was going to happen when we finally did get home. It made me want to throw up.

Right knee still holding the wheel, he accelerated out of the U-turn with his left foot, and headed straight for Rhonda, Stacy, and Robbie.

“Teach those fucking niggers to throw rocks at my car.”

He was still fumbling with the lighter and now had one hand on the wheel.

The truck gained speed. Faster. Faster.

Through the spidered windshield, I could see the Buxton kids scatter. My dad honed in on Stacy and followed her down the County Road.

“Dad, no!” My ear was pounding. My heart enormous in my chest. But he ignored me. The speedometer climbed. 25. 30. 35. 40. Stacy’s figure grew and grew in the cracked glass.

“Dad!”

He ignored me.

“Dad!”



He ignored me.

“DAD!” I yelled and grabbed hold of the wheel.

The truck veered hard left.

“What are you doing?” he cried, trying to pry my hands away.

The spindly face of the old sycamore towered over us, the light from our headlights reflecting off its old, white flesh and turning into a violent, brilliant flash. I closed my eyes and waited for the impact. 40 ft. 35 ft. 30 ft. 25 ft.

The truck folded into its trunk like aluminum foil. Its metal frame whined and moaned. Everything went light and dark again and again. Things became blurry. Sounds became distant. I felt the tug of the seatbelt and the pop of the airbags. My face felt like it was being punched by a very large glove. It jostled my head sideways, and I had just enough time to watch my father’s mouth become a giant “O” as he flew from his seat through what was left of the front windshield and hit the tree’s trunk in front of us head on with a loud snap, dying instantly. He lay there like a ragdoll on the hood of the truck, with its guts sizzling and gurgling and hissing beneath him.

Things were still blurry. Everything inside the cabin was dusted with glass. The world kept strobing light then dark then dark then light. Sounds mixed and garbled. But a number, a number I knew one day I’d use, one of my favorite numbers popped into my head, and I knew what I had to do.

686-0574

686-0574

686-0574

686-0574

686-0574

686-0574

686-0574

I muttered the word “cell phone.” The faces hovering over me seemed confused, so I said it again.

"Cell phone."

All of a sudden, there was weight in my hand, and my fingers were searching the face of the object with a familiarity I always kinda knew I'd feel when the moment came.

686-0574

Its ring filled the entire universe. Again.

"Licking County Sheriff's Department," a voice on the other end came through.

I handed the phone out to one of the faces and carefully unbuckled my seatbelt. I tried to lean forward, but a pain in my side made me draw air.

The weight lifted from my hand and, with it, the rest of the world.

The next morning, I woke up to a heavy pounding on the door and an even heavier pounding in my head. Groggily, I crossed the room and opened the door. It was Mom with a plate of blueberry waffles and a glass of orange juice balanced on a serving tray.

"I thought you might like something different," she said, but paused before exiting the room. I remember her smile and how it had faded so violently then as she burst into tears.

"Your father's dead," she said, wiping her eyes and composing herself. "They found him crashed into the old sycamore this morning."

Try as she might, the composure unraveled, and she collapsed down on the bed next to me. I put an arm around her.

"What do you think about North Carolina?"

Overhead, the Milky Way sparkled.

Villanelle: Flood Time

By Eleanore Lee

The skies above just opened up, hear how the torrent roars...
On city streets, through parks and lots, our stains are washed away.
Down gullies gutters sidewalk drains the cleansing water pours.

Rain beating down, rain rinses clean the drought the pain the wars.
The pounding waves that leap the shore...What is it they convey?—
The skies above just opened up, hear how the torrent roars.

The red-tailed hawk in new morning light: it climbs, it floats, it soars.
Does it look down? And see our fate? It knows but won't betray—
Down gullies gutters sidewalk drains the cleansing water pours.

They told us this could happen: floods from our drowning shores.
They cover stinking piles of trash, and drench us. But we say:
The skies above just opened up, hear how the torrent roars!

Water covers. Rain, it pelts, it smashes down our doors.
Did I really not see it coming? Perhaps I looked away.
Down gullies gutters sidewalk drains the cleansing water pours.

Our land may soon be flooded, her towns her hills her shores.
But right now it all looks hazy through that menacing glittering spray:
The skies above just opened up, hear how the torrent roars.
Down gullies gutters sidewalk drains the cleansing water pours.

Rains

By James B. Nicola

One kind of rain wears moccasins
and comes in quiet as a ghost
then leaves your cheeks-nose-forehead moist
with an unremarked kiss.

Another rain sports sneakers, runs around
and can't stop whispering, but not in words,
as small boys misconstrued
will fill a room.

A third's the teenager who, with a drum-
roll's promises of what's to come, will make
you watch where you walk, but her spills mean no
real harm.

The fourth rain then explodes,
an angry father.
What was to come—has come
with a throttle and thrum

but will grow (as all rain's growth)
into the grand ancestor
fading into translucence,
oblivion,
and spirit
with a smile of circumspection
and release

leaving in her wake the drying time
when the air is fresh and pure
at least awhile,
and all seems well
with the light, sweet scents
of heaven

where angels fashion feathers into wings
and miniglobs of H_2O into soft, kid leather
to soothe the feet of subtle, supple

rain.



Here and Now

By Dennis Ross

Driving along an Iowa gravel road,
I am sometimes jolted wide awake
as from a forever sleep, struck
by the immediacy of the world,

by a purple vermillion sunset
over eight-foot corn, a raccoon
with three babies clutching to her back,
or a deer and two fawns transfixed
in the road, staring wide-eyed
at my old truck before wheeling
to bound into the ditch and jump
the tumbledown barbed wire fence.

Sometimes it is a glowing white barn
freshly painted, or a field full
of roly-poly cows each with a wide
white band around their black body,
a bit like pandas, designed no doubt
by small, giggling farm children.

Even one blue iris, which Grandma
called flags, can ring that wakening bell.

The Yellow Porch Swing

By Aimee Klein

The smell of honeysuckle
carried on a breeze
the soft squeak
of that yellow porch swing,
we would all sit together
and watch the sun go down,
watch the oranges and pinks
and reds fade away
until the stars came out
and crickets chirped
and fireflies flickered green.

My heart would swell
with each sway of the swing,
as we talked and laughed
about everything.
But soon mosquitos
would force us inside;
perhaps if we had known
that the last time
would be the last,
we would have stayed longer.
We didn't know—
how could we?
And now those moments are gone;
that porch is empty.

Commemorate

By Nan Byrne

We learn by losing

The dead—first one becomes many
The truth we knew becomes the truth we suffered

The cause of falling comes not from desire
or destiny but merely accidental

and when we unleash the dogs
we do not go with them

I am older now than my mother when she died
In those last days when she inched toward oblivion

she moved in an unfamiliar gray aquarium
her clouded fish eyes damp lit and me

with my calf-like ways mooing at the moon
If I were to color loss I would color it arson

A touch from a match that brings destruction
Travel on a dark highway into a darker forest

I relaxed there in her house after she was gone
wrapped my feet under me on her blue couch

read through her papers and diaries
longing to see mention of my name

There were none and the days after
have been no more than a re-telling

How the flames licked and bit at my throat
never letting up even when the weather changed

A Certain Age

By Anne Babson

The body churns out its red butter every
Twenty-eight days but spends the whole cow to do it.
The skin still glows a little, but blood vessels ruddy
As the spaceship face fissures, approaching warp speed.

The eyes dim a little but learn to glare murky,
Nameless, dark guilt into the hearts of young people.
The cheeks and chin sag from too much time upright.
The forehead plants complaints in rows to harvest soon.

The waist and thighs expand, colonizing more couch,
So that the buttocks sit in state, a judgement seat.
The brain calls the end from the beginning and
Loses track of titles. Why name names? All exit!

The voice deepens into Aretha baritone.
When it growls its music, it says weightier things.
The feet flatten, no need to travel. Here must be
As good a terrain as any to take a stand.

The fingers lose their fake nails that helped pointing, eye-
Gouging, but got in the way of making gravy.
The hands build more now as the lifelines dig deeper
Ditches. They scrub up more messes left by others.

The veins everywhere pop out—surprise party guests—
Make legs permanently bluestocking radical.
The breasts sag a little, no longer inviting
Youthful sucklers who turned out vampires after all.

The breath labors more, subtly realizing
Oxygen has thinned at this altitude of climb.
The bones start to turn to chalk, ready for blackboards
To scrape out lessons on slate for the still-foolish.

The heart beats more rapidly, aware a shark lurks
Just under one's toes as one swims to the surface.



Birds of Light

By Jack Cooper

Autumn streams of rain
hit the maple tree
and red and yellow leaves
wing off in all directions

I collect them
and press these sylvan birds of light
in a children's book
so they might preserve the story
about life that flies
happily ever after

If a blue sky
can convince a green forest
it's time to play dead
and you and I know why
is it not our calling then
to make the case
for selfless acts of perpetuity?

The human heart
is like a tree
that has more leaves
than it needs

On Wings

By Richard Dinges Jr.

Each day, more flies
descend and buzz
my porch. I bathe.
I shower. I use
scented soap, rinse,
and dry. I sit
and wave them away.
I sit in evening's
gather of gloam.
I imagine a black
cloud that hums
a dirge over
my aging meat,
a song sung by
flies who know
my destiny.

Human Rib Bone, \$10

By Shiann Dawson

A little gift shop, nestled into a house of death
Filled with...well,

Trinkets, mostly.
Marbles, stuffed plushies,
Representative mementos of the skeletons in the next
room,

except, of course, cute and fluffy.
Paperweights in the form of resin containing butterflies,
emeralds and sapphires that once lit the sky,
now permanently encased, finding a home next
to coffee-stained papers
and ugly black pencil sharpeners.

"Look at that," my husband murmurs, and my eyes follow his
pointing hand.

REAL Human Bones declares the sign, and I blink a few times.

Your eyes are fine,
whispers the little voice in the back of my head.
I walk to the display, still doubting,
but no,
they're real.

My eyes trace over the scattered selection of skulls,
Phalanges,
Vertebrae,
And ribs.

For some reason,
I can't look away.
There's something about it that's just



Sick

Cold

Maybe even cruel.

One of the rib bones is close to the edge of the glass,

Brightly lit by the fluorescents, every detail highlighted.

The organic curve of collagen and calcium is pocked,

Imperfect,

with lines, cracks, pores that used to hold veins.

How many times, I wonder, was this rib clutched in laughter?

How many times bruised by play that was too rough?

How long did it serve to protect a heart, lungs?

What kind of person was this rib part of?

Were they happy?

Did they imagine this for their remains?

Did they know they were to become

souvenirs?

Human Rib Bones, \$10

It seems...

... Obscene.

And yet...

...I want one.

"What would you do with a rib bone?"

I don't know.

What would I do with a rib bone?

I just don't want to leave it here.

Irises Planted on a Grave

By Gordon Grice

The irises lick the wind
with fragrant tongues,
Wound the sultry noon
with their purples,
jostle their creaking leaves,
spread like rumors under the soil,
root in the graves of my ancestors,
choke out the roses,
grow brash and crowd the grass,
poke their twisted tips
to hide the names on headstones.
After a rain, their lips are wet
and parted to speak.



Green

By Richard Dinges Jr.

Green is cool
to gaze into,
woods strangled
in undergrowth,
dappled by spots
of sun, shadows
lost in humid thoughts
that promise night,
temperature lowers,
sweat dries, dreams
creep in between,
waves expand into
visions of what
never was, what
is yet to come.

Clean Slate

By Richard Dinges Jr.

No one wonders
why we return
each morning, eyes
half-shuddered, mouths
yawning, to walls
smeared white, haunted
by ghosts of numbers
and graphs, yesterday's
deceased ideas,
another day
dedicated
to innovation,
something never
done before, new
and improved, a leap
forward from flat
platforms, flat walls
covered in color,
then erased each
night to clear the way
for another day.

Ire Man

By James B. Nicola

When the life is mostly moor,
 make it poetry.
When the land is lonesome, you're
 bound to plant a tree.

Listen to its whispering leaves:
 give them word and hope.
Hear the widow as she grieves;
 note survivors cope.

Taste the troubles; gulp the brew
 that makes you a man.
Poems, made, will never do
 but be all you can.

Interactive Sonnet

By James B. Nicola

This is the place where I'm supposed to say
a thing I have to say, and soundly, then
expound upon it like a pregnant hen
with fourteen eggs she cannot help but lay.

This is the place where I'm supposed to bray
a bit more, not state the above again,
but add to it, syllables held to ten
or so, so that I don't go on all day.

This is the place things change, or turn, where there's
a point of opposition, risk, or doubt,
giving this world of flight grave turbulence.

This is where I must trust that someone cares
enough to come and help me work things out.
And you, my friend, have made the difference.

Carved Door

By Dennis Ross

I stagger with a heavy door, thick,
ancient oak with six carved panels:
a dove, a plow, flowers, wreathed
acanthus leaves. Setting it upright,
I balance it on brown, frustrated grass
in a parched, frustrated world
with the present eating the future.

I hear a group singing and a guitar
from the far side, a folk song
from the 60s about love, a new spirit
of peace in the world. Maybe

if I open my door, a revolution
of understanding will emerge,
a new thrust of green and growing,
and the bird of life, many colored
with many different and strange ideas,
will sing again on the Earth
and drown out the bigoted chants
of death in jackboots marching.

Contributors

Babson, Anne

Babson's poetry collection *Polite Occasions* (Unsolicited Press, 2018) just came out earlier this year. Her first poetry collection *The White Trash Pantheon* (Vox Press, 2015) and current chapbook, *Dolly Shot* (Dancing Girl Press, 2018) are currently available in independent bookstores and on Amazon. Babson's first play, *Reenactment*, was also published this year. The opera for which she wrote the libretto, entitled *Lotus Lives*, has been performed in New York and Boston and is being performed in Montreal in just a few days. She has been anthologized in both the US and the UK multiple times, most recently in *Nasty Women Poets: an Unapologetic Anthology of Subversive Verse* (Lost Horse Press, 2017). She has been nominated for the Pushcart four times as well as has been featured on Poetry Daily. My work has recently appeared in *Iowa Review*, *Cider Press Review*, *Southampton Review*, *Bridges*, *Barrow Street*, *Connecticut Review*, *The Pikeville Review*, *Rio Grande Review*, *English Journal*, *New Song*, *The Penwood Review*, *Sow's Ear*, *The Madison Review*, *Atlanta Review*, *Grasslands Review*, *WSQ*, *Global City Review*, *Comstock Review*, *California Quarterly*, *Wisconsin Review*, *The Red Rock Review*, and many other publications. In Europe, Babson's work has appeared in *Current Accounts*, *Iota*, *Poetry Salzburg*, *Nth Position*, *Adelaide* and *Crannóg*. In Asia, she was published in *Quarterly Literary Review Singapore* and *Yuan Yang*, with forthcoming work appearing in west Asian publications *Coldnoon* and *Zabaan*. She has been anthologized multiple times in both the US and the UK and has done residencies at Yaddo and Vermont Studio Center. She is reading at this year's Tennessee Williams Festival.

B., Kadence

Kadence B. is a SWOSU graduate and aspiring author. They like to spend their free time playing video games, Dungeons & Dragons, and very seldomly writing poetry. It is unclear how they intend to be an author with so little effort. They live in New Mexico, though they never stay in one place very long. Their disposition is as bright as the desert sun.

Bentley, Dick

Bentley's books, *Post-Freudian Dreaming*, *A General Theory of Desire*, and *All Rise* are available on Amazon. He won the Paris Writers/

Paris Review's International Fiction Award and has published over 260 works of fiction, poetry, and memoir in the US, the UK, France, Canada, and Brazil. He served on the Board of the Modern Poetry Association and has taught at the University of Massachusetts. Check his website, www.dickbentley.com.

Brenan, Matthew

Brennan has contributed poems to such journals as *Westview*, *Sewanee Review*, *Valparaiso Poetry Review*, *The Hardy Review*, and *South Carolina Review*. His most recent books of poems are *The House with the Mansard Roof* (Backwaters Press, 2009) and *One Life* (Lamar University Literary Press, 2016).

Byrne, Nan

Byrne is a poet, fiction writer, and screenwriter. An MFA graduate of Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, Virginia her work has appeared in *Seattle Review*, *Potomac Review*, *New Orleans Review*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *Princeton Journal of Women, Gender, and Culture*, *Canadian Woman Studies*, and others. She has won awards for her screenplays, been nominated for the Pushcart Prize Anthology, and has been the recipient of grants from the Vermont Studio Center and the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts.

Cooper, Jack

Cooper is author of the poetry collection *Across My Silence* (*World Audience, Inc.*, 2007). His poetry, flash fiction, and mini-plays have appeared in *Rattle*, *Slant*, *Slab*, *Bryant Literary Review*, *The Main Street Rag*, *North American Review*, and others. His poetry has also been selected for Ted Kooser's "American Life in Poetry" and Tweetspeak's Every Day Poems. His poem "Of Longing" was selected as Grand Prize Winner in *Crosswinds Poetry Journal's* 2016 Poetry Contest. He is co-editor of www.KYSOfash.com. He writes poetry for the same reason the chicken crosses the road—to get to the other side.

Dawson, Shiann

Dawson is a Senior at Southwestern Oklahoma State University. She's always loved writing but has not had any prior publications. She has a wonderful husband, an adorable baby, and more pets than should probably be listed. She plans to pursue a doctorate and hopes to publish more of her works in the future. She did not buy any bones while at the Museum of Osteology even though she was very tempted to.

Dinges, Richard Jr.

Dinges has an M.A. in Literary Studies from University of Iowa, and after many years, he no longer manage business systems at an insurance company. *The Journal, Abbey, Comstock Review, Ginosko, and Red River Review* most recently accepted his poems for their publications.

Emerson, Donna L.

Emerson writes poetry and prose. She recently retired from college teaching and her practice as a licensed clinical social worker. Some of her publications include *Alembic, CQ (California Quarterly), CALYX, The Chaffin, Courtship of Winds, Denver Quarterly, Door Is A Jar Magazine, Dos Passos Review, Eclipse, Edison Literary Review, Existere-Journal of Arts and Literature, Fourth River, Fox Cry Review, The Griffin, The Los Angeles Review, LUX, Naugatuck River Review, New Ohio Review, Paterson Literary Review, The Paragon Journal, Passager, Persimmon Tree, Praxis: Gender & Cultural Critiques (formerly Phoebe), Quiddity, Sanskrit, Slipstream, Soundings East, So To Speak, The South Carolina Review, Sow's Ear Poetry Review, Spillway, Spry, Stone Canoe, Tower Journal, Verdad, and Weber—The Contemporary West.*

Glancy, Dian

Glancy is professor emerita at Macalester College. Her latest books are *Mary Queen of Bees*, a novella of Mary Wesley, sister of John Wesley, *The Servitude of Love*, short stories, and two collection of poetry, *The Keyboard Letters* and *The Collector of Bodies*, Concern for Syria and the Middle East.

Goldkamp, Henry D.

Goldkamp lives in Saint Louis / New Orleans / the spirit of gratitude. He likes spreading it around / realizing how damn lucky this is. He has recent work in *Mudfish / Hoot / Blood Orange Review / dryland / b(OINK) / Sierra Nevada Review / Pretty Owl / Foliate Oak / plenty* others. His art has been covered by *Post-Dispatch / Time / NPR / more*. To read up on / temporarily stalk Henry, please google "henry goldkamp" with a fresh drink of your choice.

Grey, John

Grey is an Australian poet, US resident. Recently published in *Front Range Review, Studio One* and *Columbia Review* with work upcoming in *Louisiana Review, Poem* and *Midwest Quarterly*.

Grice, Gordon

Grice is the author of *The Red Hourglass* and other books about wildlife. His shorter works have appeared in *The New Yorker*, *Westview*, *Harper's*, and others.

Işiki, Dilvin

Işiki is a 29 year old Turkish woman. Studied English Language and Literature and graduated from my department as the valedictorian. I have been writing poems in English for a few years.

Klein, Aimee

Klein is a student at Cameron University. She is studying for her Bachelor's degree in English, with a concentration in Literature. She lives in Lawton, Oklahoma.

Lee, Eleanore

Lee has been writing fiction and poetry for many years in addition to her regular job as a legislative analyst for the University of California system. She has a BA from Barnard College in English. She worked as an editor at Columbia Teachers College and as a stringer for Time Inc. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in several journals, including *Alabama Literary Review*, *Atlanta Review*, *CQ (California Quarterly)*, *Crack the Spine*, *Existere Journal*, *Meridian Anthology of Contemporary Poetry*, *Penmen Review*, *The Portland Review*, and *Tampa Review*. She was selected as an International Merit Award Winner in *Atlanta Review's* 2008 International Poetry Competition. She also won first place in the November 2009 California State Poetry Society contest.

Lutz, Chad W.

Lutz was born in Akron, Ohio, in 1986 and raised in the neighboring suburb of Stow. A 2008 graduate of Kent State University's English program, Chad is an athlete with a writing problem, attending Mills College in pursuit of an M.F.A. in Creative Writing. His writing has been featured in *Diverse Voices Quarterly*, *Kind of a Hurricane Press*, *Haunted Waters Press*, and *Sheepshead Review*. Chad runs competitively, recently taking second overall at the 2 Cities Marathon in Fresno, November 2016.

Nicola, James B.

Nicola's poems have appeared in *Westview*; the *Antioch*, *Southwest* and *Atlanta Reviews*; *Rattle*; *Tar River*; and *Poetry East*. His full-length

collections are *Manhattan Plaza* (2014), *Stage to Page: Poems from the Theater* (2016), *Wind in the Cave* (2017) and *Out of Nothing: Poems of Art and Artists* (2018), *Quickening: Poems from Before and Beyond* (2019). His nonfiction book *Playing the Audience* won a Choice award. His poetry has received a Dana Literary Award, two *Willow Review* awards, a People's Choice award from *Storyteller*, and five Pushcart Prize nominations—from *Shot Glass Journal*, *Parody*, *Ovunque Siamo*, and twice from *Trinacria*—for which he feels both stunned and grateful.

Penick, Robert L.

Penick is a bit of Oklahoma romance, here. I've had work in over 100 different literary journals, including *The Hudson Review*, *North American Review* and *Plainsongs*.

Ross, Dennis

Ross taught and did research at Iowa State University. Now retired, he has gone back to his first love, writing poetry, as a second career. He has about 180 poems published. *Relatives and Other Strangers*, his first chapbook, appeared in Finishing Line Press.

Sizer, Molly

Sizer is a retired Sociologist taking creative writing classes at Cameron University in southwest Oklahoma. She also serves as a substitute teacher for middle-school students in Lawton, and a volunteer at the Wichita Mountain Wildlife Refuge. Poetry has taken her by surprise. She has presented some of her poetry at the 2018 Woody Guthrie Poetry Readings in Oklahoma City and at the 2019 Scissortail Creative Writing Festival in Ada, Oklahoma.

Photos & Illustrations

Cover “Light Shines Thru” by LadyDragonflyCC - >;<

Table of Contents Bark 40+255 Thunderstorms

10 “burning pizza box” Stewart Smith

20 “Pad - Toad (Bufonidae) Paul van de Velde

23 “MM00007438” Florida Keys--Public Libraries

25 “Fractured Golf Ball” Tim Sheerman-Chase

28 “Pack up” Filip Deblaere

47 “Untitled” Jamie Smed

52 “Ripio Argentino” Teo Romera

59 “Wrecked truck” U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Southeast Region

64 “Rainy Sunset” Chris Redman

69 “Mani” Andrea Schiavon

74 “Purple Heart” Calsidyrose