

The Mocking Owl Roost

Still Life

*October
2026*



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Masthead

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Still Life

Peter A. Witt

Apple, green and sour, lay on the antique table
ignored by even the dog who sniffed, turned away,
curled up and napped.

Picture album of a sunlit country wedding
long ago also ignored, dreams now faded,
promises unkept.

Wilted spring flowers, petals scattered
on old mahogany, water leaking from a slight
vase crack leaving a permanent stain.





Ukulele with Vessel

Penny Nolte

Penny Nolte - Vermont, USA

"Ukulele with Vessel" is a still life drawing inspired by a prompt from Vermont artist and educator Jenn Renko to place objects against a windowsill and notice the shadows they cast. I chose objects that held meaning for me. The ukulele is mine, the birdhouse was my father's, and the sunglasses were my mother's. The "More Time" ceramic jar pictured was the work of Anne L. Burnham, a talented northern New York potter.

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Red Lily in Vase

*Rita
Mock-Pike*

A single blossom
A vase
These memories wrapped in time
As she sniffs the lily fragrance
Recalls her life before
When art was everything –
Brushstrokes as vital as breathing
Canvas the same as clothing
Gouache like blood through veins
Until he said 'no more' and
She listened
She silenced the easel's story
And put away the brushes
The life in her eyes snuffed out

Thirty years erstwhile
She packs away the clay pots
Throws away the bristles
And remembers what could have been
As if it had been
And life surges through her soul
For a brief aura –
A tiny sigh –
And the red bloom
Whispers brio

Today the light shines perfect
And he's gone now these five years

She pulls the easel from the closet
Retrieves the discarded riggers
And turns his photograph to watch
Without hindrance
As she fills the pots with paint
And takes her first real breath in years.



Appalachian Rouen

Taylor Hagood

Monet painted the cathedral's façade obsessively,
moving pigment from canvas to canvas every passing hour,
installing each stroke into its special light.

I've come to this stream in the same anguish of light.
Minded to specificity, tracing as though with an almanac,
in a huff at the stark cold green of May 9,

murmuring June 28 in a length of warm shadow,
today in October with a frosted sun spotlighting downhill
through thinning trees to the yellow-furred

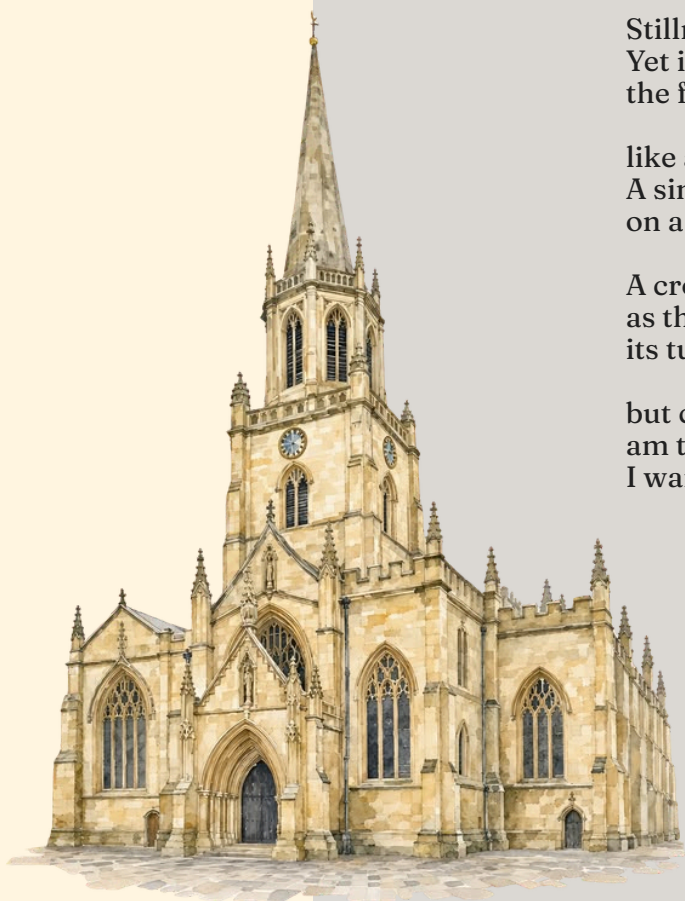
brown water. It has taken me almost fifty years
to learn the depth of prayer. I am convinced that,
in language I try to grasp, its depths run deeper yet.

Stillness seems so strong as to be structure.
Yet its buttressing I can feel almost in motion,
the fine wrinkling water's surface telling its movement

like a story brought out over and over again with dessert.
A single golden leaf slips along the water's top, snags
on a black rock, then drifts on again.

A crow laughs like a crone, black wings akimbo
as the liver-spotted, elbow-stuck arms of the aged,
its tune modal, unresolved, snappy as a banjo's

but complainy as a fiddle's. I wonder if I
am the conductor of this orchestra of bugs and leaves.
I want to stay when the light goes away.



Rita Mock-Pike

Nonfiction Humor



When I Met My Prince

"I'm sorry, but you can't take your camera. Photography can damage artifacts."

With a grunt and sigh, I laid my camera in the well-guarded locker, and climbed the stairs of Brodick Castle.

After a few micro-lectures on Scottish history, the castle, and the Isle of Arran herself, I learned an ancestor's portrait hung somewhere within.

And there he rested. Right where the guide had noted: the last hallway before the exit.

I gazed at the painting for a while, feeling a sense of kinship. The Prince of Orange. I'd heard about that branch of the family often, but never before seen a portrait of any of them. After a few moments, I moved on. I couldn't stare all day. We had more things to explore!

"What the—?!"

I turned to see my travel buddy, Elizabeth, staring wide-eyed at the painting.

"Yeah, that's my kin," I joked.

"Uh-huh," Elizabeth gaped.

"Some prince from the House of Orange."

"He looks just like you!"

"Whatever," I laughed but stepped toward the painting to look again. "Oh. That's why he felt familiar..."

My own chin, nose, cheekbones, and eyes stared back at me. He was blond, I was brunette. And you know, a woman. Otherwise, we could have been twins.

The guide noticed us agog and stepped over. "This Prince—Oh, gosh!" She turned back and forth from my face to his. "I guess he is your ancestor!"

They still wouldn't let me take a photo. Not even for their guestbook.

No Photography

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Arte Deco

I bought the lamp at an Antiques Fair,
Arte Deco rewired for modern life
or so they said,
but I was never sure
if it was the real thing.

Perhaps the question should have lingered,
hanging its weight on my mind,
its authenticity an enigma,
but it never did.

Authenticity always depends
on the luck of the draw
or the twist of a card,
but a thing of beauty is loved forever.

Lynn White

Poetry



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Impressions

My wife would have
Monet's Irises
set neatly on the table
framed by fork and spoon
in the pale glow
of a white linen napkin.

I would have
Gauguin's Polynesian Woman
in bright batik
half buried
in mashed potatoes
gravy pooling at her feet.

Van Gogh would have
the silence
of a starless night
echoing
in both of his ears.



Louis Faber

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Emma's Gift

WEBB JOHNSON

Fiction

A friend and colleague, knowing I had summer break from my job at the College of Art and Design, asked me if I would volunteer to teach a summer school class for incoming high school freshmen. I agreed, so she posted this announcement in the Spring/Summer issue of the City Civic Arts Newsletter:

'Scapes: Land and Sea. Learn to draw the world around us.

For young artists interested in taking their drawing to a higher level.

Explore a variety of subjects, developing an understanding of form, composition, line, light/shadow, perspective, and color.

Tuition: \$20 + \$15 supply fee due at first class. (Class size limited to the first twelve.)

Tuesdays & Thursdays for 6 weeks – Starts July 5th – 11:00 to 12:30 – City Library room #205

Instructor: Ted Wilson

By the middle of June, twelve students had signed up for the class. I ensured the classroom had ample supplies of sketch paper, colored pencils, and other basic drawing materials, locked the door as I left, and went away eager for the session to begin.

On the first day, I parked my jeep and lugged a dozen totes for the student's art supplies up to the second floor.

Seven boys and five girls awaited me. The boys wore cargo shorts and tees while four of the girls wore cut-off jeans and stylish, scoop-necked tops and sandals – not too different from what kids wore in hot summers when I was their age 20 years ago.

But the fifth girl had noticeably long, straight, unstyled red hair, and stood apart from the group. She wore a plain, calf-length skirt, white stockings, brown leather shoes with laces, and a sleeveless white blouse that bared her thin, freckled arms. She held those arms crossed in front of her, with her head ducked and her face half-hidden by all that hair – an uncertain stranger among a crowd of friends, perhaps.

I asked the group, "Are you here for Mr. Wilson's drawing class?"

They answered, "Yes," practically in unison, and I said, "Wait here. I'll see if I can find him." I made a show of turning my head to look around the hall and then said, "Oh. Here I am."

They responded with the groans my silly greeting deserved. Then I unlocked the door and let everyone in. Twenty-five desks lined the room, waiting for those mere twelve students.

"First come, first serve," I told them. "Take whichever one you want."

Within moments, they had grouped in the center of the classroom – all except the russet-haired girl. She selected a desk in the back row and sat down without a word. While they got situated, I put the totes on my desk, unpacked the attendance sheet, and wrote my name on the whiteboard behind my desk.

Then I checked emails once more before getting started. One of them informed me that all fees had been sent in, so I didn't have to collect any money. I also learned from it that an anonymous donor, a self-titled "Patron of the Arts", had paid for one Emma Garibaldi. The note claimed she was "socially challenged", under the care of Child Protective Services, and awaiting assignment to a foster family. "Transportation is a problem," the note finished, "so there may be tardiness or missed classes."

I frowned, knowing just who this note referenced, and thinking how unfairly it could stigmatize a person. The other students chatted and laughed with their friends as though it had been years, rather than just a couple of weeks, since they'd seen each other. But she sat alone.

I looked over what would be my workspace twice a week for the next six weeks. The large, second-story windows let in plenty of north light and offered a sweeping view of the city park surrounding the library. I spotted several trees that could serve as models for scenery backdrop or even subjects themselves. An expanse of sky stretched above all of that and, with any luck, we'd have a variety of summer clouds to talk about and replicate.

At slightly past eleven o'clock, I got their attention by tapping the desktop. "A few introductions in order," I said. "I'm Ted Wilson. You can call me Mr. Wilson or Mr. Ted, whichever you prefer. I've taught classes at the College of Art and Design for the last several years, and before that I managed to pass all my classes at the same school you'll all be attending come September."

Blank stares told me the class did not see this as the fascinating connection I'd hoped for.

I shrugged, sighed, and grabbed the attendance. "Okay, time for roll call. Please say 'here' when I call your name." I paused, and then said, "Would anyone like me to go over that one more time?"

I smiled, and they laughed. The kid who laughed the loudest wore a visored cap on his shaggy head and Rawlings baseball jersey. I looked toward him. "So, what's your name?"

He said, "Eddie Gallagher. Nice goin' on makin' it through high school." He let his eyes go wide, and rolled them a bit. "I sure hope I do."

I chuckled, and the others around him all roared. I guessed they had been laughing at Eddie's clowning for most of their lives. But his good humored response told me I had made a connection and broken some barriers — a vital thing for an art class.

The rest of them all answered "here" when they heard their name, and then we passed out the supplies and the tote bags. I saw Emma Garibaldi's shoulders relax when she realized that there was one for her.

So began that first day. All my students clearly came from families that took education seriously — they stayed focused even for this summer school class with no academic credits and no real relevance to any career planning. I'd been teaching long enough by now to know that parents too often considered art an "extra" thing: Useful for developing an appreciation for the finer things or as an intellectual challenge and outlet for creative energy. "Just what every kid needs to thrive," or so they said — but they always drew the line on art as a career.

Now, I firmly believe that there are no bad reasons for learning, and I'll gladly teach any that come my way, for whatever purpose they come. That said, I always hope to find the students who possess not just a desire for status or a talent for illustration, but who also hold that mysterious capability to convey feeling, insight, and passion through art.

It was that capacity that drew me into art as a career in the first place.

Years ago, on a high school field trip to the DeYoung Museum, I got emotional and weepy-eyed in front of a painting titled *Starry Night*. My teacher, Mrs. Havens, saw my embarrassment as I tried to hide those tears, and said all too loudly, "It's okay, Ted. It's not unusual to see tears in the presence of Van Gogh."

This ensured that I had the tag "Teary Ted" hanging on me the rest of the semester, and beyond.

All the same, I still choke up seeing some beautiful leap of imagination or some exquisite surprise. It doesn't happen often, but it did that summer session — and from a wonderfully unexpected source.

I don't know how Emma got to our classes on Tuesdays and Thursdays, but she was always waiting for me, no matter how early I arrived.

A couple weeks in, I asked Gayle Snow, one of the popular girls, about it. She shrugged her shoulders and said, "I didn't see her get here either. But I heard that her dad's in jail, and her mom's missing." Gayle bit her lip, then said, "I try to be friendly, but she acts like she's in another world. Maybe she's, like, autistic or something."

Gayle's friend Julia French added, with a glance toward the back of the room, "She's weird and lives at juvie. That's all anyone knows."

I said, "All right, that's enough. Let's try to make this part of Emma's life the good part, okay?"

The girls flushed and nodded, and as far as I could tell afterward, they did try to be friendly.

But Emma kept her seat in the back row, as though being ignored or unseen was something to hope for. And every time I asked to see her work, she would lean forward, covering it with her forearms and elbows as her long, rusty-red hair fell across her shoulders. Treating her in any special way, or trying to draw her out with brief one-on-one conversations like I held with the others only seemed to emphasize her painful dissimilarity, so I took to limiting my communication with her to a good morning smile. If she wanted to talk, I could only hope that she knew she could come to me.

The summer went by quickly, and every piece I saw showed great improvement from the last. We had a lot of fun in the process, but the last day came at the right time: With just a couple of weeks of summer vacation left, my students had become distracted by the anticipated challenges of high school. Improving their ability to draw landscapes slackened.

I wanted the last day to be fun — no exams or long discourse, just art for the sake of art. The kids filed in and watched me write the day's assignment on the whiteboard: *Draw a picture titled: "A Place I Love"*.

"We've got the room until two p.m. today," I reminded them. "It's finals for other kids, but extra fun for you. Take all the time you want, and we'll gather to wrap up and have a chance to share at about 1:45."

Eddie let off a number of his usual wisecracks about this that got the rest of the class roaring and joking around, but after a few minutes, they got serious and began thinking and drawing in earnest.

I walked around, watching the drawings develop. The ones doing seashores employed the method for realistic-looking, back-lighted breakers and waves that I'd taught early on. The rolling, grassy hills all had some version of the bending dirt road and lonely tree I'd used for demonstration.

The students had learned well, but they were drawing places they loved to draw, rather than places they loved. I'd hoped to see places that came from the heart, not just from the head and the hand.

Emma was absorbed in her work, refusing to let me see it as usual, but using every item in her art supplies tote. What I knew of her life seemed so hard, with no rewards, no joys, no family or friends to counterbalance the hurts. I was dying to see what had come to mind that she could work on so diligently.

The clock moved on, 1:45 arrived, and I walked to the front of the room.

"So, who'd like to share? What places do you love?"

One by one, most of the kids stood up, displaying their work to the class. Their drawing quality ranged from not bad, to good, to damn good, and I was feeling mighty proud of my efforts for that summer.

Then Emma stood up.

She hesitated for just a moment, and then walked to the front of the class, holding her 14x16 sketch paper close to her chest. With everyone quiet and watching, she turned to face them, and held the paper out like a gift.

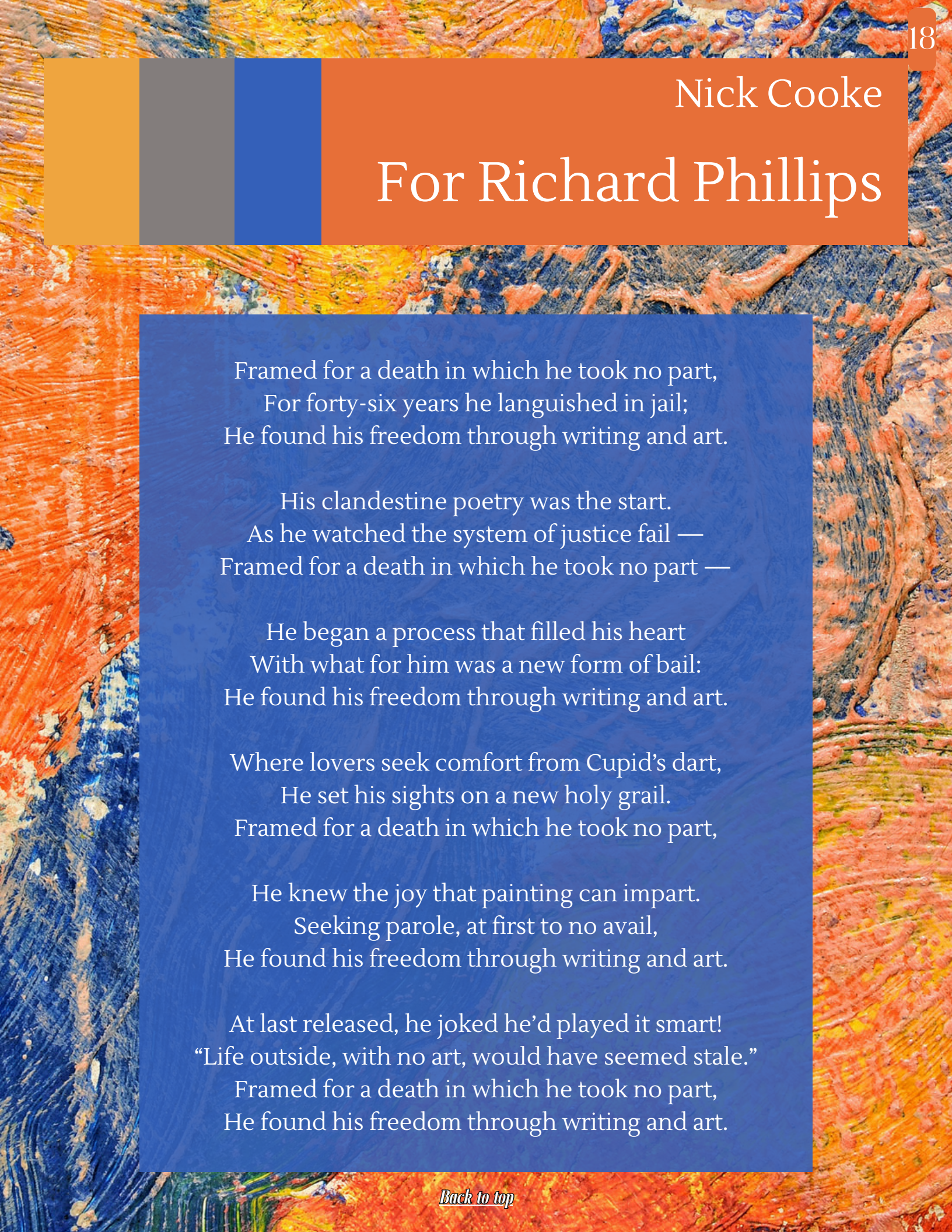
Her sublime masterpiece was neither a landscape nor a seascape. It showed the interior of a room and employed perfect lines and vanishing points. Light streamed in from the large windows, creating soft shadows and depth, and faintly penciled trees and clouds were visible through those windows. Eleven students sat at desks, all hunched over their work — and one of them wore a baseball cap over his shaggy hair.

At the front of this room, she had drawn the whiteboard showing the assignment I'd written almost three hours earlier — just a scrawl, with “love” being the only legible word.

I'd planned to say something about the importance of art and artists in helping us understand our connections to our fellow humans, our connections to the world we share. I'd planned to make it short and sweet, as an appropriate close-out to a successful six weeks. But my words got stuck. Instead, my teary eyes told my students all they needed to know.



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Nick Cooke

For Richard Phillips

Framed for a death in which he took no part,
For forty-six years he languished in jail;
He found his freedom through writing and art.

His clandestine poetry was the start.
As he watched the system of justice fail —
Framed for a death in which he took no part —

He began a process that filled his heart
With what for him was a new form of bail:
He found his freedom through writing and art.

Where lovers seek comfort from Cupid's dart,
He set his sights on a new holy grail.
Framed for a death in which he took no part,

He knew the joy that painting can impart.
Seeking parole, at first to no avail,
He found his freedom through writing and art.

At last released, he joked he'd played it smart!
"Life outside, with no art, would have seemed stale."
Framed for a death in which he took no part,
He found his freedom through writing and art.

Tahiya Nuzhat



A Quiet Moment

In a quiet, cool December morning, the soul gazes out the window, towards the open sky. The warmth of the coffee quietly wakes up the body and the mind while she catches a moment of solitude. The children will be up soon.

This piece speaks to a quiet stirring of emotions that comes with being in one's body while the mind reflects through multiple dimensions of life. I hope the art brings expression to the quiet feeling of being.

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Sue Cook

Black
Orb
Tableau

Paranormal
Fantasy





“Momma do you ever see me when you walk down the stairs from your visits to the roof? I watch you from the Rift,” Millie said softly as she watched the last trace of Annabelle’s skirt clear the midway landing on the stairs down to the main floor of the Black Orb.

The alabaster form flitted close to the top of the Rift, which dangled in the stairway between the roof and the main floor of the [magic shop].. Her gaze lingered where Annabelle had vanished. It had been a long time since she’d visited The Black Orb, and Life in the Rift had consumed her while she cared for the wee goyles. Why am I so concerned with how they feel about me? I have duties, obligations! I have no time for mortal concerns. With that, Millie turned and flew back to the Rift. Her heart forgot the Orb and those that loved her as soon as she turned.

On the rare occasion when she looked out of the Rift, the world appeared different than when she had a human form. Each glimpse felt like snapshots, and every time Millie blinked the projector advanced to a new slide in a tableau of sorts.

“No time for pictures,” she muttered. “No time for mortals, even Momma,” she said a bit louder to no one in particular. I am an alabaster gargoyle, an angel of the Rift. Sighing heavily, Millie turned back and flew toward the heart of the Rift.

“So you ain’t got time for those who love you, eh, Mil?” Diao spoke from the stairs. “I see ya peeking, Mon. Get your boney alabaster behind out here and give a Raven a proper hug.” Diao stood in human form, arms wide.

Millie turned to see the young man frozen like a snapshot in time, a broad grin on his handsome face. How I miss your nonsense, you silly Raven!

“Diao!” she squeaked aloud and flew into his arms. The weight of her stone body took him to the ground. Each moment of her plunge back to the human world whirled around her in pictures. She tried to catch her balance, to steady the images, but the abrupt stills crashed Millie into unconsciousness.

When she awakened, Millie felt disoriented and moved her limbs slowly.

“Easy, Mil,” Gar whispered in her ear. “Remember gargoyles take a bit to get their ‘earth legs’ back. You don’t want anyone to see you flying about the Orb, do you?” Gar chuckled.

She braced herself against the wall and tried to sit up. The entire Black Orb Staff had gathered around her, each with varying levels of concern, excitement, or joy in their eyes. Draco perched on her head and Toby nestled in her lap, determined to get as much love from her — and give it! — as possible. Her cold skin felt a touch of warmth as they burrowed deeper into her stony embrace.

"Gar, how is this possible? One moment I was peeking out from the Rift and now voila! Here I am." She motioned at her body. "I'm still a gargoyle, albeit beautiful and sparkly. Not like most—" She blushed.

Gar only smiled his love to her. "I don't know, Millie. We gargoyles are a mysterious lot."

Diao laughed. "Awww Mil, you haven't changed!"

Her milk white eyes lifted to Diao. "But I have changed. I'm no longer the Millie who opened the Orb. You have your life here. Mine is in the Rift. Gar can attest to that. Tell them, Gar," She pleaded.

Gar sighed. "I thought once you came back to the Orb, and saw your Mother and Diao, and me... I thought you'd want to be here with us." Gar stepped forward, hesitantly leaned out as if to embrace her, but stopped short. How could she prefer the Rift to their love? "I guess I was wrong. You've been in the Rift a long time."

"I don't understand this one bit, Millie. Don't you want to be here? Hold Toby? Joke with Diao and Draco? Cook with me?" Annabelle hunched her shoulders in defeat.

Millie slowly stood, looked at everyone and took a step towards the Rift. Diao grabbed her arm to stop her. She whirled around to face him.

"Leave me be, shifter!" she spat in his direction. Diao released her, his hand falling to his side. Millie spun around lightning fast and dove into the Rift. Annabelle gasped audibly and stared after her, breathing heavily in ragged waves. Silence fell as everyone stared at the Rift.

Suddenly, a soft clap came from behind them.

Nyx stood in the doorway of the floor. "The girl does have a flair for the dramatic. Don't take it too hard Diao. From one shifter to another, her mind is cold as her alabaster skin. Er, stony exterior."

Diao looked at Nyx, and then walked past her, saying as he went, "Don't assume what I'm feeling, woman. You know what they say about assumptions."

"My, my aren't we testy? The girl simply loves being a gargoyle. Perhaps we're too boring for her? Should we not be happy she has found her place?" Nyx sneered to no one in particular.

Before the last word fell from Nyx's lips, Annabelle stood nose to nose with her, and hissed a warning. "I don't care if you are a goddess, I will put you over my knee if I must, to stop your stupidity. My daughter is none of—"



Nyx raised a hand. "Save it little witch. I've said my piece." Then she stepped around Annabelle, shifted into a silky black lab and bounded away down the steps. A trill of laughter trailed into the sounds of a happy dog in chase of entertainment.

Draco stood facing the Rift. His eyes sought some sign that his friend would return. When he saw nothing, he turned to face Annabelle, Gar, and the rest.

"She is one sneaky little bit—"

"Watch it." Annabelle raised an eyebrow at Draco.

Gar patted him on the shoulder. "She's the mother of Thanatos. What do you expect?" The group began to walk out of the room and down the stairs, glancing back at the Rift.

Nyx walked back up the stairs with a ball in her mouth, eyed Annabelle strangely and muffled around the ball, "Guess Chaos begets chaos, right Annabelle?" Then she deliberately walked to the edge of the Rift and dropped the ball into its maw. "Oopsie, my bad! I'll get it, and your little alabaster gargoyle, too." Then she cackled like a witch and leapt in after it.

She was too quick for anyone to stop her — nor were they sure they wanted to.

"Well, I didn't see that coming," Gar managed to stammer.

For a moment the Rift showed them a few snapshots. A tableau of an exuberant black lab bowling over Millie while the wee laughing goyles fluttered around them before Nyx turned to stone.



Flowers, Fruit, and Clouds

Taylor Hagood



the shapes are only pigment
surface celebrations of surface
richer than Warren Buffet

yet they blend in such mystery
red into gray into blue into tomorrow
on canvas, wood, paper, metal

they formed Manet's late trinity
as he brushed his bold way
against his deteriorating legs

persons of interest and interesting
externals bristle like particularly old
memories in melodies in eyes

the water will not stand still
it need not even be written much less
hoped into either history or now

Sadness/Snow

Carlene M. Gadapee

After Sargent's painting, "Snow"

Unforgiving rust and white and gray,
crag and cliffs, a great blue bowl
of darkness. This is where sadness settles.

Snow sifts, a deceptive scrim. No one is fooled,
or if they are, then they aren't looking:
valleys, clefts, and chasms fill with stony cold.

Silent Aspirations

Fiction

William D. Baker





I sip the cup of heavy, black coffee and look out the window of the Garfield Park Indianapolis Eatery. Outside, leaning against the window frame, stands my long-unheard-from college friend, Red Balfour. He's reading a ragged paperback; at his feet sits an equally ragged dog. Of course, he is older. It's 1996, fourteen years since graduation from Jefferson College, but Red isn't simply older. He's dark and sunken, with lifeless hair and a furrowed face. The auburn beard is present but dull and shapeless.

Red was the hottest student D.J. on campus and invited to every party, and known for his laugh, red beard, and 4.0 G.P.A. He was an artist and would gladly exchange a painting for a six-pack. He was a writer with the first draft of a novel that had professors urging him to send it to a publisher, but he was already on to something else. Red was dissecting the writings of Karl Barth in the cafeteria, playing the music of Sonny Rollins on a saxophone, or studying an insect in the garden of the college president. He was always somewhere doing something, usually accompanied by others, usually accompanied by me.

Red Balfour is supposed to be in L.A. writing for a worldwide Christian outreach ministry. That was the job that Jefferson College proudly trumpeted before graduation. However, Red dropped out of contact soon after moving to California. Now, over a decade later, he's here leaning against the Garfield Park Indianapolis Eatery, dressed in threadbare clothes with a cigarette in the corner of his mouth.

I stand in the doorway and take him in. For a moment, I am angry, hurt even — he could have contacted me sometime over the years. But I realize I can't stay angry with Red; that hasn't changed, and I smile in relief.

"Red Balfour?" I say.

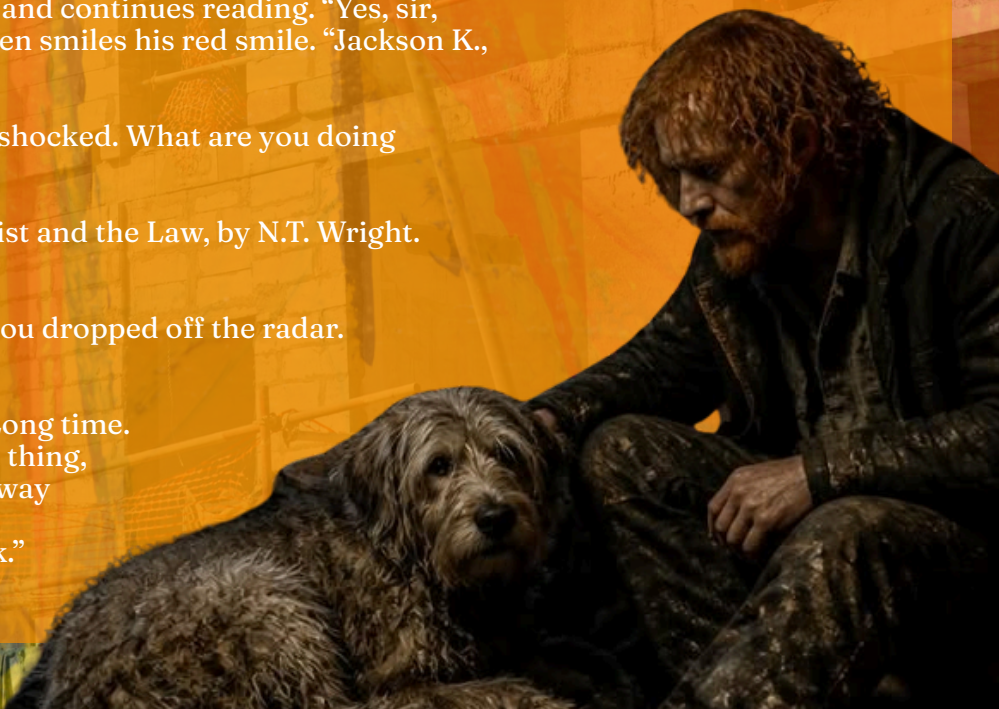
He does not look but holds up a finger and continues reading. "Yes, sir, how can I help you?" he says at last, then smiles his red smile. "Jackson K., why, look at you."

"Wow, Red, I can hardly believe it. I'm shocked. What are you doing around here?" I ask.

Red shows me the book. "Reading Christ and the Law, by N.T. Wright. He's a fascinating theologian."

"I mean, you were in California, then you dropped off the radar. How long have you been back?"

Red gestures like waving away a fly. "Long time. I couldn't do L.A., man. That whole job thing, man, it was too political. I worked my way across the country and stayed around here. It took me a few years to get back."



I say, "You should have let me know. Jefferson College has been calling you a lost alum for a long time."

Red shrugs. "You're right. Sorry, man. I should have looked you up, if anyone."

"Your family was supposed to be around Knightstown. I tried to find them but couldn't," I say. "That was years ago. I never knew. I mean, no one ever knew what happened to you."

Red looks at the sky, then down at the dog. "Yeah, my family, they aren't in Knightstown anymore. They're, uh... they're somewhere else. Florida or something, I don't know," he says. "Oh well. What about you? What do you do now?"

"I'm married," I say. "You can guess to whom. We wanted to have you in the wedding, but, you know, we couldn't find you."

Red looks puzzled for a second. "Oh, yeah. I remember her. Don't tell me her name. I'll get it in a minute."

I continue, "I'm a building inspector for the city of Indianapolis. I had properties to look at in this neighborhood. I still write part-time and have a few things published, but there isn't much money in it."

Red looks puzzled. "Good for you anyway. Wow, published — that's great. I would like to read it. So, a city building inspector? What about seminary? The last I remember, you were excited about moving into church administration and going to seminary. What happened?"

"I did start out at a district office for the church but didn't stay long. Once I got into admin, well, let's just say that my eyes were opened. Besides, church admin and my writing weren't exactly a good fit. After that, I thought about seminary, but by then I wasn't interested. I think reality is what happened."

"Tell me about that," Red says.

"What do you do now?" I ask.

Red shrugs again. "You could say self-employed." He looks across the street. "You know this and that. I collect metal and sell it to the yards sometimes. Good money in that if you find the right thing, it's hard to haul around in my car, though."

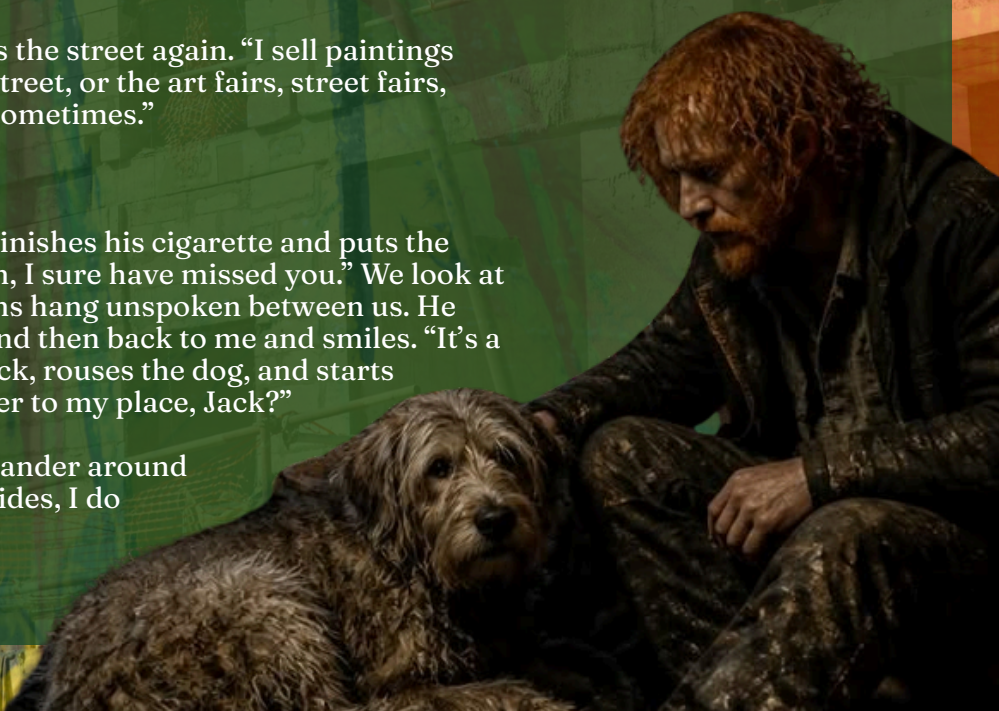
"Do you still write and paint?" I ask.

"Sure, man. Off and on." He looks across the street again. "I sell paintings on the curb. You know, over on Talbot Street, or the art fairs, street fairs, places like that. I even give them away sometimes."

"Okay," I say.

Red looks again across the street as he finishes his cigarette and puts the butt in the nearby holder. "Man, Jackson, I sure have missed you." We look at each other for a moment as the questions hang unspoken between us. He squints up at the sky, down the street, and then back to me and smiles. "It's a beautiful day." He shoulders his backpack, rouses the dog, and starts walking, then turns and says, "Come over to my place, Jack?"

"Sure," I say, although I'm not keen to wander around Garfield Park in the late afternoon. Besides, I do actually need to finish work.



Red starts walking again, and the worn-out dog gives me a wary gaze, then follows. We walk a few blocks and stop at a two-story dump of a building on the corner of Shelby and a street that has no sign. The building is a total trash heap. Red wrestles with the deadbolt on an exterior steel door, and we traverse a narrow passage, stepping over all manner of refuse until he stops to fight with another door. We enter the apartment, and it is a wreck, stacked with useless junk.

Red drops his backpack somewhere, and I lose sight of the dog. "Coffee?" he asks.

"Sure."

Dust-filled light blazes through an ample wall of dirty windows. I stand in a relatively clear spot and watch Red go around a corner of stuff piled against a wall. I guess he is in the kitchen, but I don't look. Red calls to me, "Clear a place on the sofa, Jack. You're going to love this coffee. It's made with something called a French press. I picked it up in Cali. Get this: it was invented by an Italian, not a Frenchman. That's crazy, man."

I look around for the sofa and see the only clear space is next to the dog, who raises its head to stare at me. I put my hands in my pockets and stay where I am.

"Sorry about the apartment," Red calls. "This junk was here when I moved in. I haven't taken the time to throw it out. Rent is cheap or free sometimes, man, because I watch over the place. The owner is a terrific fella."

It is a large room, and I notice the wall under the windows. Books, records, and CDs fill makeshift shelves arranged along the wall. There is a pieced-together stereo system on one shelf. The shelves, their contents, and a walking space in front are totally clean, in contrast to the rest of the apartment. The wall not taken up by windows and shelving holds a huge and intricate abstract painting.

"You see that brown folder?" Red says, and I jump with him suddenly at my shoulder. "Remember that novel I wrote? There it is, all finished."

"I remember. Finished?" I ask.

"Yeah. When I came back across the country, I stopped in a city in Iowa. I met someone there, a woman." He pauses, looking at the book in the brown accordion folder, then out the dirty window. "Peg," Red says at last. "We worked on a newspaper together. I was 22 and a cub reporter, and she was an editor. She helped me with the book and had it ready to send in. Made all the contacts, and whatever went into that part of it, I don't know. She was a good editor." He pauses again, so long, I think he's through. "Peg was a little older than me, but it didn't matter. I was, she was, am in love. It was the best thing that happened to me. We were together for two years and seven months."

I say, "That's great. Where is she now?"

"Breast cancer."

"Oh, Red," is all I can manage.

"I will see her again someday in a better world. I believe that. I know it." He looks to the end of the bookshelves. "After she was gone, I didn't have the drive for the book, but one day I will, for Peg." He glances at my face, holds up a finger, and whirls on his heels. "Coffee." He goes to the kitchen.

I look at the abstract wall again and take in what he has told me. "Did you paint this wall?" I call after him.



"Yeah man, my other paintings are there leaning against the end of the shelves. Look them over. Take one if you want. I like that wall; it's one of the best things I've done," he says. "Put on music. Pull out a book. Make yourself at home."

I hear Red clanking around in the kitchen as I flip through the canvases until a good-sized one catches my eye, and I pull it out. I prop it on a nearby table that is fairly level with junk and stare at it. I am no art critic, but there is something exceptional about this one. Something that captures — something that's relevant and even personal.

I jump again when Red speaks at my shoulder. "You like that one, huh? Me too. Great stuff." He sets two steaming mugs of coffee on the shelves and turns back.

I look at the painting and say, "It's so..."

"It speaks to you. I know; it speaks to me, and I painted it," he says. "It's called *Silent Aspirations of the Undetermined Color*. You see, there's a color in stage lighting called bastard amber. No kidding, that's the name. It is a color that's open to interpretation and undetermined."

"Yeah?" I say, still looking at the painting

Red points to a place in the picture. "See, here's the amber and here and here and back here. You step back and look at this as a whole, and it is us, man. It's me and you and, like, the people. And we are back there, like the amber, and we are undetermined and open to interpretation, because that's what life is until we are one with the Creator and the Creation. You see all of this up here?" He motions to the mass at the top two-thirds of the painting. "See this big stuff? It's all moving around and swirling and huge and dominating, and it's in control."

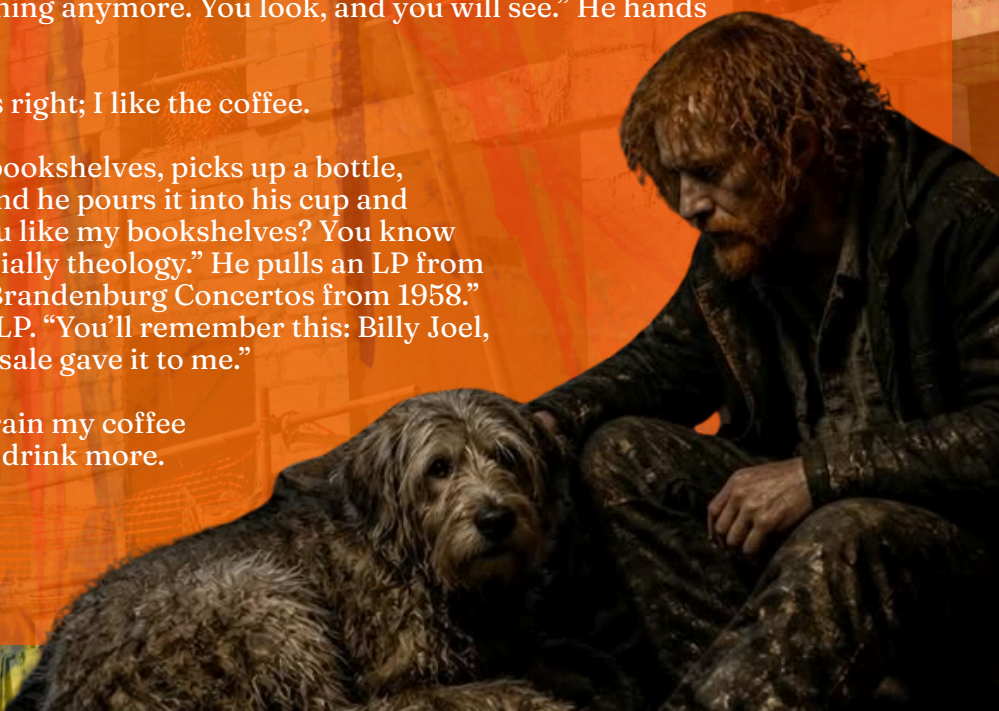
He is the Jefferson College Red.

"It's like the government, the corporations, the religious megachurches, and all of the crap they pile on the amber. It's the news and the booze and the dope and the politics and wars and the useless garbage they sell us. They are pushing us around, man. Pushing around the amber man, drowning us out with noise, and keeping us back. But look here," he points. "Look at the amber. Here and here and here. See what it's doing? It is on the outside and moving up; it's on the inside and pushing forward, and it is saying to all that crap, that garbage, all that noise and oppression. Saying you might be on top now, but we are on our way, and one day, one day, man, with the Almighty by our side, you are going to see us, and we won't be silent anymore. The amber, the bastard amber, will be determined, defined, and validated at last. The amber is going to rise and be right where it belongs. And all that hurt, all that pain you caused us, man, it won't mean anything anymore, not anything anymore. You look, and you will see." He hands me a cup. "Here's your coffee."

I do not know how to respond, but Red is right; I like the coffee.

He takes his cup to the other end of the bookshelves, picks up a bottle, and motions it to me. I shake my head, and he pours it into his cup and then drinks it down. He pours more. "You like my bookshelves? You know me; I always like music and books, especially theology." He pulls an LP from the stack. "Found this at Am Vets. Bach Brandenburg Concertos from 1958." He drinks more and pulls loose another LP. "You'll remember this: Billy Joel, Glass Houses. Not a scratch on it; a yard sale gave it to me."

He pours from the bottle and drinks. I drain my coffee and think that I don't want to watch him drink more. I consider leaving. "Yeah?" I say.



"I can't pin down one kind of music. You know that." He draws forth albums and CDs as he talks. "Miles Davis, Zeppelin, Cash, Pavarotti, whatever." He holds a CD in a broken case. "These disks are perfect. It's La Boheme by Puccini. A 1979 recording with the famous conductor Carlos Kleiber — he was supposed to be mentally unstable." His hand is unsteady when he refills his cup. "La Boheme' means 'the bohemians'. Bohemians are poor artists and writers, like Kleiber and you and me."

The Red that I saw just a short moment ago is fading. I edge to the door and tell him, "Listen, Red, I need to wrap things up at the office."

"Look at this." He grabs a thick book. "It's one of my favorite books on World War II. Pictures you've never seen before." With jittery hands, he turns the book for me to see. "See, the Nazis took these photos. Here they have some captured French and make them dig a hole," he points. "Now here's the big one, man. They shoot them in the head to fall into the trench they just dug. Look at this one. You can see the pistol shooting and the bullet hitting that dude in the head. That's one dead frog. Sorry, I mean Frenchman. It is the epitome of man's inhumanity to man. War is not glory, man; it's abomination." He puts the book down.

I open the door behind me and say, "It's good seeing you, Red. Call me, and we will get together."

"Hold on, man!" Red totters to me and locks me in a bear hug. The unwashed clothes, the coffee, the liquor, and the trashy apartment combine in my senses, but the awareness of them fades as I hold him and then gently push away. The years of wondering, the pain, and the time that separated us are meaningless. He is Red; he is my friend.

Red says, "Hey, I can't call you. I don't have your phone number, and there's no phone here anyway. I go to the landlord for that." Of course he didn't have my number; I hadn't thought of that. He finds a pen and scrap paper and writes my number, and I fear it will soon be lost in the stacks of junk. I decide to check on him soon.

I step over the clutter outside his door and turn back to him. Red sways in front of me until he steadies himself on the doorframe. Despite the alcohol, his eyes are sharp and intent as he looks at me. "You married Olivia. That's her name, Olivia," he says.

"I'll come see you next week. I'll look around until I find you. Don't move or anything," I say and pick my way through the passage. He nods. Out on the street, I look at him in the doorway, and we raise a hand to one another.

That evening I tell Olivia about Red, and we laugh and cry, telling stories about him.

It's the following weekend as Olivia and I have morning coffee and watch the news. We hear of the death of a man and his dog by gas asphyxiation at a condemned Garfield Park building.

"Red?" she asks, but she knows.

I think for a moment. "I was going to check on him next week," I say. "I'll go see what I can do. I can at least identify him."

The body is gone when I arrive, and I show my ID to the police, who are finishing their work. I negotiate the narrow and cluttered passageway again and find that the room is the same except for no dog and no Red.

"Hello, brother. Are you the police or a friend of the tenant?" A nasal voice behind me asks.



I turn around. "I am a city inspector, but I knew him. Are you the owner?"

"Yeah, Gary Pace. Pace Enterprises. I found the poor guy." He looks like most white landlords of dumps like this. He has a tiny body, a pinched face, a long nose, and the shifty eyes of a small creature. Pace has ample slicked-back silver and black hair and clothes from the 70s. His shirt's unbuttoned three down to show off a gaudy medallion hanging from a stick neck. He has platform shoes to make up for height and a voice that is an odd mix of Brooklyn and Midwest. Red called him a terrific guy.

"This place is a real toilet," I say.

"Yeah. I'm having it taken down, brother. I hardly charged him little or nothing at all some months. He watched over things for me." Gary Pace looks around the room. "He could have hauled all this junk out of here."

"So could you. You could have fixed the gas," I say and watch his face twitch.

"You needn't break my balls, brother. Doesn't anyone know what happened here? I'm letting my lawyer handle it," he says.

"You should," I answer, and know that even if I make a report, nothing will ever come of anything. "What about his things? Do you have a family contact for him?"

"Nah. There's just you and me. He didn't sign nothin'. I got his name and cash when he could pay anything." Pace sticks his hands in his front pockets and stares at the abstract wall.

"Alright, Gary Pace, when are you taking it down?" I ask.

"Soon, brother, soon," he answers and doesn't take his eyes off the wall.

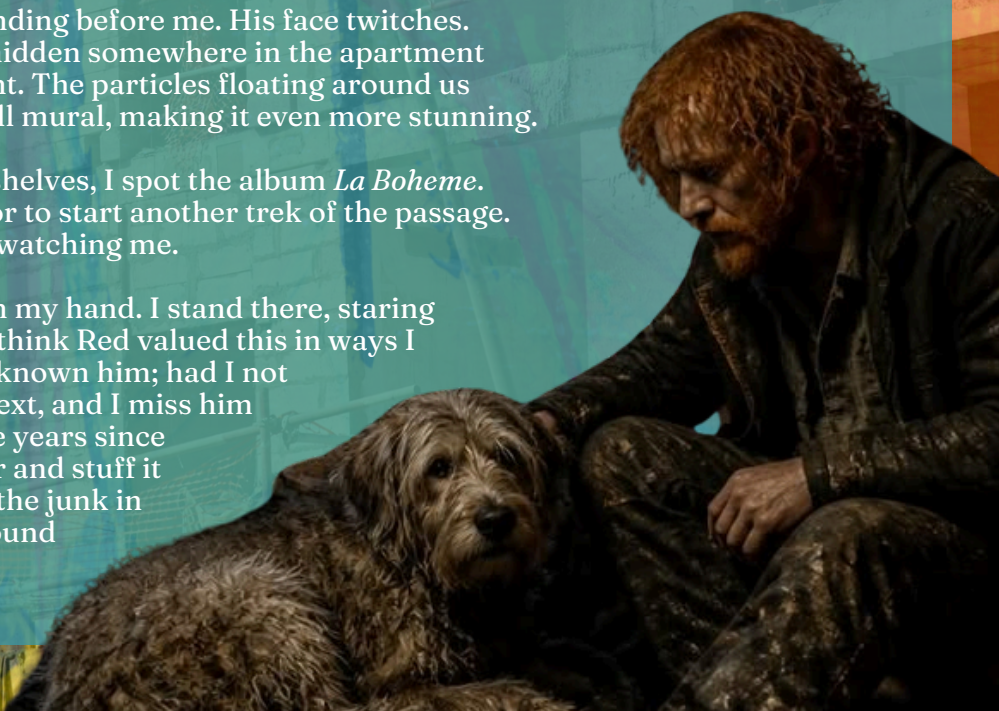
I look at the bookshelves. "I'll come back with my pickup. Leave the door open or hang around. I'll load up what I can. The junk stays. Do you want anything?"

"Maybe a painting. I like his paintings. He gave me one once." Pace answers and looks away from the abstract and to the floor. We say nothing for a moment. "Look, I'm sorry about Red," he says. "I liked the guy. I was helping him out, letting him stay here. He was living in his car." He turns back to the wall painting, and his voice changes. "I never knew anyone like him, you know? You could talk to the guy about anything. He was like..." He pauses and looks out the dirty windows. "Like a real friend," Pace says.

I look at the profile of the little man standing before me. His face twitches. We say nothing for a moment. A clock hidden somewhere in the apartment ticks while dust dances in the grimy light. The particles floating around us add a surreal, pixilating effect to the wall mural, making it even more stunning.

"Yes, he was," I say at last. On the bookshelves, I spot the album *La Boheme*. I pick up the CD and go through the door to start another trek of the passage. Pace follows and stops in the doorway, watching me.

I cease my journey and look at the CD in my hand. I stand there, staring at this thing in its broken plastic case. I think Red valued this in ways I would never have considered had I not known him; had I not found him again. I wonder what to do next, and I miss him more in this moment than I did all those years since college. I can't look at the CD any longer and stuff it in my front pocket. I sigh and glance at the junk in the passage. I know without turning around that Gary Pace is still in the doorway behind me. "Bohemian," I say.



“What’s that?” the landlord asks.

I turn and look at him for a few seconds and say, “Bohemian. It’s what he called himself.” I smile at Gary Pace and think, sure, maybe Red is right; maybe in some way, this little man is terrific. “Brother,” I add, and he returns my smile.

“Sure, brother, sure,” he says and raises a hand in goodbye. I do likewise.

I move Red’s paintings and a few items his family may want if I ever locate them. What little I take, I store in my garage, and Olivia and I sit up late talking about Jefferson College.

Olivia goes to bed, and I stay in our living room looking at the few things of Red’s I brought into the house: his manuscript, the album *La Boheme*, and the big painting he named *Silent Aspirations of the Undetermined Color*. I put the album in my CD player at low volume.

I place the stacked pages of the novel on our coffee table and start reading the first chapter. I realize immediately that the expanse and depth of this book are far beyond my modest short fiction. My writing is not bad; I have moderate success with a few magazine publications, but nothing of this scope and complexity. I will read it soon in its entirety and maybe even pursue it further for both of them. If it ever earns a dime, I will donate it to a homeless shelter.

I immerse myself in the painting and in remembering Red and the night before graduation when he showed up at our dorm room bummed out. He hadn’t been drinking or anything else and sat on my bed and cried. Red cried for the four short years gone. He cried that we all must leave, and he cried that there was so much to do and no more time for it. He cried, and then he skipped graduation.

I can’t help but look closely at the painting, and it’s the same as at Red’s place. It is pulling, showing, and letting me see. It is still exactly as Red described it: all the noise of domination, chaos, and madness is above, but desperation, hope, and determination are below. First there’s one spot of amber, then another and another, and when you see them, there are many. There are more amber points down below and less as they push up and venture out, revealing themselves and making their silent claim. They are single-minded and moving forward. They will never stop.

I see a single small swatch of the amber rising on the outside ahead of all the others. It is a furtive, struggling thing, almost not there, almost blotted out, almost pushed from existence by what seems to be the insurmountable presence overhead, and on that beautiful, undetermined, silent brush mark of bastard amber lives the smallest and most delicate pinpoint of bright red.

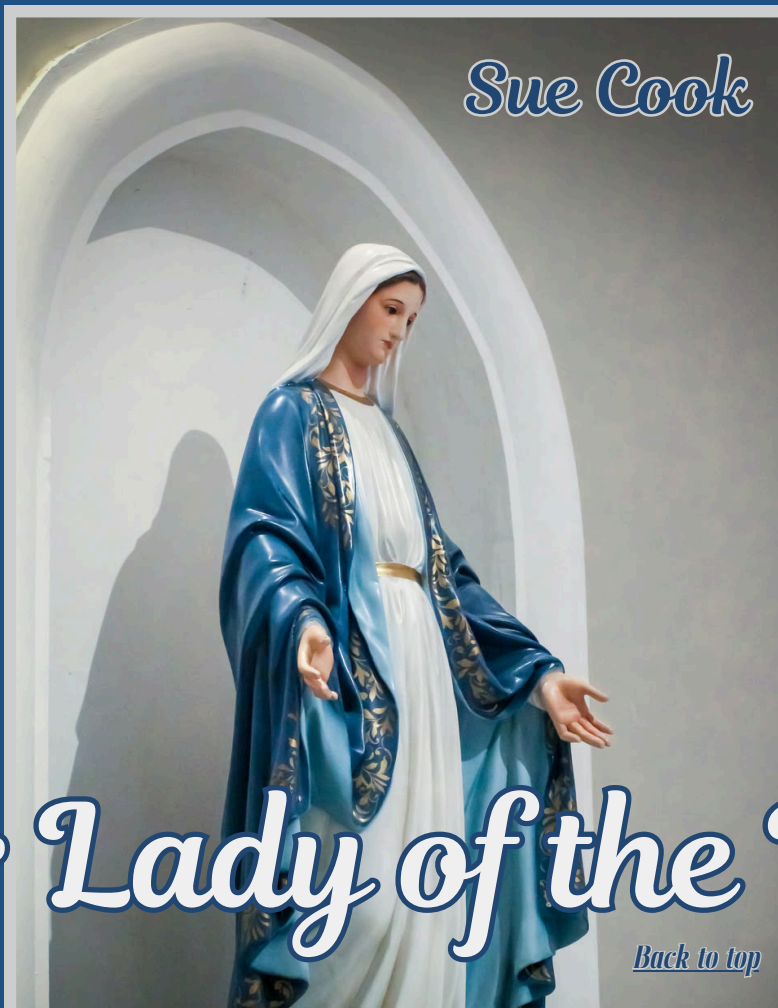
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I saw you as I played in the hall.
 Quiet,
 Reverent
 Hospital Child holding her
 Grandmother's spirit in her hands,
 Nana Rose of Chicago.
 Lost,
 Dying.
 Still, I played in the hall.

Hours passed,
 Resting at the feet of a beautiful statue,
 Our Lady of the Hall.
 Her eyes met mine as she beckoned to me.
 Carved marble pleaded for the dish to be filled;
 A child's quarter would suffice.

As if called, I rose and placed a coin in the dish.
 Glancing back at the statue, I startled.
 The statue now looked upward, with arms raised!
 My joyous squeal and a crowd gathered.
 Our Lady of the Hall looked down at me,
 Arms lowered, quarter gone.
 Hospital child's father called it a "fight of fancy",
 But Our Lady of the Hall knew:
 Heaven touched Earth.
 A statue and child
 Complicit in the tableau of life
 And death.



Our Lady of the Hall

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Cohesion

V. Bray

petals curl in
and out
of themselves

pause, flow,
connected by a wisp,
a tendril

color melds
two blooms
into one

grace held against
copper foil—
yellow iris blends
and breaks
flower to metal

contrasting colors,
shapes cohere
this painting

yet today
people shout, jeer
eye to eye, pupils dilate
arms entangle, feet stumble
into a medley of
the opposite of grace



Shawl Wrapped Nostalgia



Tulip Chowdhury

Fiction

Standing by the window of her bedroom, Irma looked longingly out at the hills beyond the hills on which she lived. She wished her mother, Sandra, were there to witness the arrival of fall in Stowe, Vermont. Around town, the changing season touched nature with hues of orange, yellow, and red, painting the trees on the hills overlooking her house.

Nostalgia lingered over her regardless of the beautiful scenery. The day would have been heavenly with Ma. Fond memories kindled her thoughts. They used to take long walks on dry leaves, enjoy pumpkin lattes from the local café, and spend slow evenings by the fireside. Both of them loved the seasonal changes in New England. Winters were harsh in Vermont, but the vibrant fall foliage around their home made them fall in love with Vermont over and over.

Shifting on her feet and drawing her shawl closer, Irma took a long sip from the teacup she held. Her breath caught momentarily, and she closed her eyes, feeling the touch of the shawl on her shoulder. Her already dark eyes darkened further with deep thoughts, and her wide lips pressed together, creating a few lines about their edges. In her late thirties, with her slender figure, she gave the impression of a younger woman. However, there were strands of white mixed with her black curly hair. Irma liked it natural — no coloring for her, neither on her hair nor on her face.

She set the teacup down. As she reached for a teaspoon to add sugar to her tea, her eyes fell on the plate of red apples on the table. She sighed as another significant memory with her mother surfaced: their fall season apple-picking. A gust of cold wind sent another letter of loving memory through the open window panes, and Irma pulled her blue shawl closer to her neck. She held on to it with her left hand, feeling the crocheted yarns, the loving warmth, then lifted a corner of the shawl with her right and brought it to her nose.

“The shawl is incredibly soft and warm, as it is a special one,” Irma whispered to herself, remembering the day she got it.

She took a deep breath and was momentarily transported to another time.

It was her birthday in 2024. Ma's voice echoed through the memory.

“Irma my love, I finished your birthday gift. It's a nice, cozy shawl that I crocheted for you. It will keep you warm in the winter. And it's in your favorite color, too! Do you like it?”



Ma had said, after almost three months of crocheting her blue shawl. A beaming smile spread across her oval face, and her eyes crinkled around the corners. Ma's cheeks looked sweeter with the slight sagging, especially when the salt and pepper hair fell loose around her face, as it did at that moment.

Ma said, “Who knows how long I will be able to do any handwork with eyes getting so bad? Wear it and I will be with you.”



The window curtains flapped as another gust of cold wind came in. Irma held on to her shawl, seeking warmth. Her heart lurched as she thought of the long hug and the words Ma had said. Words have power, Irma knew, and as if power vested in what Ma had said, life happened.

And now Ma's words whispered in the space like a haunting truth: “Who knows where I will be able to do handiwork?”

Irma's eyes filled with tears, and she clung harder to the blue shawl as another gust of wind blew in. Her shoulders heaved as loud sobs escaped her. Her typically calm face, with its high cheekbones and wide mouth, lost its composure as tears welled up.

In a soft monologue, Irma said, "Ma, where are you now? You worked so hard to give us a better life in America, and I do appreciate your efforts, but why can't we both be together in one place? Are you okay, Ma? Are you okay?"

Holding the shawl's end to her eyes to dry her tears, she felt as though Ma's hands were helping her.

She continued, "When the stars twinkle in the night sky, in my sleep, I dream of our Amherst home, Ma. I call you just like I used to, to make sure you've eaten dinner, that you're warm, that you're all right. I still want to know, Ma."

No answers from her mother. Instead, a voice whispered from the deep answers, "Dear love, we don't come to Earth or love anything forever, remember?"

It was the voice from her head, the one that she called her Guardian Angel and knew to be a spiritual connection to the divine. The Guardian Angel filled the voids in life from God. Her inner monologue spoke when others could not. For the first time since moving to Vermont, Irma wondered if she could go apple picking without her mother. Irma turned from the window to gaze at the plate of apples, red and delicious, that sat on the table; the knife waited for the fruit to be cut and shared.

Would Ma be coming back from her travels across Europe soon? Her mother had mentioned an extended stay in Spain with her family. What if she decided never to come back to America? Of course, her mother could choose how to spend her sunset years.

Her mother had often quoted the noted Indian writer Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay, "Great love does not always bring people close, but throws them apart too." Or, as she knew it so well in her native Bengali, "*Boro prem shudhu kachei tanena, dureo thelia dei*". Irma sighed at the memory.

She wanted her mother to be happy. Love meant letting go, and she herself would patiently wait. Perhaps Ma will return to America again. She drew the shawl tighter around her shoulder and sat by the table to enjoy an apple. Possibly another fall, her mother would be there to share in the apple-picking and the eating of fresh apples with her.



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This Beta's Heart



Whirling, grace'd, and wing-like,
The beta spreads
Purple fins to fly
'Cross water'd hills
of blue-gray ripple,
Green foam,
Algae scented
Bloom

As the too bright sun warms
The waters resting still
Beside the old barn
Red.

The artist inhales the
Geosmin, pauses,
Closes her eyes.
Gasps out frustration,
Sorrow,
Dust of ages unnoticed.

Every pulse of this
Beta's heart
Captures time
Like a capsule
To a canvas
Splashed with water shades
And she might forget,
Remember,
Dream
Once again.

She grins into concentration,
Sweeps the fancy fins
Across time-yellow'd canvas
Now living
By this beta's tiny spirit
Captured in pigment and water.

Together they laugh.

Rita Mock-Pike

Contributor Bios

WILLIAM D. BAKER - INDIANA, USA

William D. Baker's fiction has most recently appeared in Rosette Maleficarum, Active Muse, LEON Literary Review, Red Rose Thorns, Revolver Literary Magazine, Word City Lit, Literary Heist, confetti, and Tenth Muse. Additionally, he has over a dozen more fiction publications dating to 2013.

V. BRAY - NEW JERSEY, USA

V. Bray has been a writer since childhood and still has a box filled with her first "books", usually illustrated with markers and bound with yarn. She writes in many genres, from speculative and historical fiction to poetry. Her work has been published in About Place Journal, Halfway Down the Stairs, Multiplicity Magazine, and The Writer.

NICK COOKE - LONDON, UK

Nick Cooke has had around 85 poems published or accepted to a variety of outlets, including Acumen, Agenda, The Dark Horse, Ink Sweat & Tears, the High Window Journal, and Dream Catcher. He also has around 40 poetry reviews. In 2016 his poem "Tanis" placed first in a Wax Poetry and Art contest. He was a featured poet on the Flapper Press site in December 2025.

LOUIS FABER - FLORIDA, USA

Louis Faber is a poet and writer. His work has appeared in The MacGuffin, Cantos, Alchemy Spoon (UK), Meniscus and Arena Magazine (Australia) New Feathers Anthology, Dreich (Scotland), Prosetrics, Erothanatos (Greece), Defenestration, Atlanta Review, Glimpse, Rattle, Cold Mountain Review, Eureka Literary Magazine, Borderlands: the Texas Poetry Review, Midnight Mind, Pearl, Midstream, European Judaism, The South Carolina Review, and Worcester Review among many others. He has also been twice nominated for a Pushcart Prize and twice for a Best of the Web. His new book of poetry, Free of the Shadow, was recently published by Plain View Press.

CARLENE M. GADAPÉE - NEW HAMPSHIRE, USA

Carlene M. Gadapee's poetry and critical reviews have appeared or are forthcoming in many publications, including Waterwheel Review, Gyroscope Review, Smoky Quartz, Think, Allium, Vox Populi, and MicroLit Almanac. Carlene received a "Best of the Net" nomination in 2023. Her chapbook, What to Keep, was released by Finishing Line Press in early 2025. Carlene lives in northern New Hampshire.

Contributor Bios

TAYLOR HAGOOD - WEST PALM BEACH, FLORIDA, USA

Taylor Hagood lives in South Florida and is the author of the recently published chapbook, *Lepidoptora*. He has also written poems and reviews for several magazines, such as *A Thin Slice of Anxiety*, *A-Minor Magazine*, *Across the Margin*, and *California Quarterly*. Outside of writing, Taylor has a broad range of interests, including oil painting, playing the guitar and banjo, and fencing.

WEBB JOHNSON - CALIFORNIA, USA

Webb Johnson is a retired widower living in Napa County, CA. He volunteers with the Greater Farallones Marine Sanctuary Association, walking beaches and collecting bio-data. He enjoys nature photography and bird-watching.

PENNY NOLTE - VERMONT, USA

Penny Nolte is an author, artist, and educator who creates gentle, often quirky, narratives of family and place. After a decades-long break from storytelling, her new work is beginning to appear in print and online. It is included in *The Avalon Literary Review* and *Dorothy Parker's Ashes*.

TAHIYA NUZHAT - NORTH CAROLINA, USA

As a self-taught artist, Tahiya has always loved painting. From still life to figure painting, Tahiya loves working with colors, be they shifting hues to transitioning values. Academically trained in Economics and professionally a full-time Healthcare Analyst, painting provides solace away from the screen. In addition to painting, Tahiya also loves reading classic literature, practicing yoga, taking nature walks, traveling to new beautiful places, and spending time with loved ones.

LYNN WHITE - WALES, UK

Lynn White lives in north Wales. Her work is influenced by issues of social justice and events, places and people she has known or imagined. She is especially interested in exploring the boundaries of dream, fantasy and reality. She has been nominated for *Pushcarts*, *Best of the Net*, and a *Rhysling Award*.

PETER A. WITT - TEXAS, USA

Peter A. Witt is a Texas poet and a retired university professor. He has been twice nominated for *Best of the Net*. When not writing poetry, Peter and his wife are active birders, Peter is also a dedicated wildlife photographer. He also researches and writes family history.

Staff Bios

TULIP CHOWDHURY – REGULAR CONTRIBUTOR

As a contributing writer for The MockingOwl Roost, Tulip Chowdhury's writing explores life from the trivial to the pivotal, blending the visible with the invisible — like a kaleidoscope. Her favorite leisure activities are reading, listening to music, swimming, and walking in the woods. She lives in Georgia, USA.

SUE COOK – COMMISSIONING EDITOR, STAFF POET & WRITER

Sue Cook (she/her) lives in Illinois with her husband Randy and dogs. Her passions include assistance dogs, rescue dogs, music, acting, theater, poetry, and Doctor Who. She's been in both film and theater and is a regular cast member of the podcast Doctor Who's Line is it...Anyway? Sue is an advocate for the use of Service Dogs to assist their disabled handlers to maintain their independence. Quigley's Quest, her first children's book, addresses how a dog becomes a Service Dog.

EMMA DIEHL – COPY EDITOR

Emma Diehl is a recent graduate of Ohio University with a Bachelor's in English pre-Law. During her time at OU, Emma contributed to several local literary journals, served as the vice president of two writing clubs and the editor-in-chief of Elephant Eyes Literary Journal, and played trumpet for The Thursday Night Jazz Band in her free time. After traveling in Ireland, Emma plans to either attend law school and focus on education law and students' rights or join an indie band as a trumpet/bass player, whichever one comes first.

ANDI MAGANA – COPY EDITOR

Andi is a Mexican-American enthusiast of the humanities and a lover of literature and cats. She is an Atlanta-area resident who loves reading flash fiction, translations, poetry, and fantasy novels. With an interest in different genres and styles, she also values opportunities to develop her editing and work-shopping skills with fellow writers. It was in a creative writing class that she discovered her love of writing and hopes to publish her short stories or even a book one day. In her free time, she enjoys learning different craft skills, traveling, painting, and watching history documentaries or video essays on various topics.

TANDY MALINAK – HEAD COPY EDITOR

Tandy Malinak was engrossed in visual art, stage performance, and storytelling before she knew what the words meant. A second-generation homeschooler with a BA in Elementary Ed, she also knows kids and homelife; set her down with a cup of tea, and she'll go until you stop her. She loves fantasy, sci-fi, Nintendo, board games, studying the Word, the smell of a campfire, the sound of ocean waves, and all things feline—to name a few! Originally from Seattle, Tandy now lives in Chicago's northside with her husband, 2 dragon-loving kids, and 5 cats.

Nancy Mock – Proofreader

Nancy (she/her) was born in Montana, raised in Ohio, and moved to Florida almost 30 years ago. Mother of Rita Mock-Pike and her two siblings. Nancy learned to make computers “dance” in the early 1970s, with her husband's encouragement, before most people had computers in their homes. She's had a lot of experience formatting magazines, flyers, etc. throughout her life. As a retiree, her favorite hobbies are still crafting (mostly sewing) and reading.

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RITA MOCK-PIKE – EDITOR-IN-CHIEF & EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Rita Mock-Pike (she/her) is the granddaughter of aviatrix, Jerrie Mock, first woman to pilot an airplane solo around the world. Rita has taken inspiration from her grandmother's life and flight and pursued many of her own dreams in theatre, podcasting, novel writing, and cooking up delicious food from around the world. She now writes on food, travel, pets, faith, and the arts. She's happily married to Matt, and faithfully serves the very fluffy kitten queen, Lady Stardust.

MAE MONTERO – DESIGNER & WEBSTER

Mae Montero is a New Orleans-based graphic designer with a B.A. in Graphic Design from Loyola University New Orleans and a background in photography. She's passionate about visual storytelling and enjoys creating thoughtful, minimalist work. Her inspiration comes from time spent in nature, natural textures, and everyday light. Outside of her creative practice, Mae enjoys being active outdoors and hanging out with her favorite cat, Mr. Leo.

RACHEL ROBINSON – DESIGNER & VOICE ACTOR

Rachel attends the University of Wisconsin – Madison where she is obtaining a degree in graphic design. Some of her hobbies includes track and field, F1, WWE, taking walks with friends, BTS, Law and Order SVU, and more. She has recently gotten into ceramics and has an interest in voice acting. A fun fact about Rachel is that she binge-watched the show 9-1-1 in about 5 months and it's her new obsession.

AMANDA WOLF – DESIGNER

I'm a storyteller fueled by a love for history, art, and a touch of magic. With degrees in Art History and Anthropology and certifications in Museum Studies and marketing, I've spent 15 years bringing exhibits to life in museums of all sizes. Whether curating, teaching, or traveling the world in search of ancient ruins and local legends, I'm passionate about connecting people to the past. I thrive where history meets imagination—think Victorian time travelers, ancient aliens, and fireworks over Disney castles included. A devoted cat lover, I share my home and lap space with three curious and cuddly cats.

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