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Phenomenal Literature
A Global Journal devoted to

Language and Literature

A Refereed & Double Blind Peer-Reviewed Print Journal

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Chief Editor:

Dr. VIVEKANAND JHA

Associate Editor:

Dr. RAJNISH MISHRA

Review Editor:

Dr. CHANDRA SHEKHAR DUBEY



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EDITORIAL

We are pleased to release the Vol. 3, Issue 2 of the Phenomenal Literature. The current issue features 23 pieces of English Literature comprising 10 poems, 05 short stories, 01 novel excerpt, 03 memoirs, 02 essays and 02 book reviews.

The contributors who found places in this issue are Fabrice Poussin, JW Burns, Holly Day, Sandip Saha, Roger Singer, Avdhesh S. Jha, Edward Lee, Dhiman Saha, Rajiv Khandelwal, Phillip Frey, Chaganti Nagaraja Rao, Nidhi Singh, James Mulhern, Patty Somlo, Bruce Louis Dodson, G David Schwartz, Abigail Stewart, Pete Able, John Lee Scott, Scott Morris, David Feela and Heera Nawaz.

Comments of the readers and the contributors are important to us. Hence it is requested to make use of 'Feedback' menu of the journal's website to drop a few lines of feedback.

We are open to submissions round the year. You can submit your creative and academic works whenever you want. The submission guidelines can be found at the following link:

<http://phenomenalliterature.com/submission.php>

Wish you creative and academic New Year 2019.

Wonderful reading!

Editors

CONTENTS

EDITORIAL	3
POETRY	
1. Becoming Again FABRICE POUSSIN	7
2. Custom Made FABRICE POUSSIN	8
3. Visitors to the Great Southwest JW BURNS	9
4. The Snowman HOLLY DAY	10
5. Cradle Tales of Love SANDIP SAHA	11
6. Underwater ROGER SINGER	12
7. What is Love? AVDHESH S. JHA	13
8. The Burden of Pain EDWARD LEE	15
9. Golden Feathers DHIMAN SAHA	16
10. Etched in Memory RAJIV KHANDELWAL	17
SHORT STORY	
1. The Red Goddess PHILLIP FREY	19
2. Air to Earth CHAGANTI NAGARAJA RAO	25

- | | | |
|----|---|----|
| 3. | The Lord of Joggers Park
NIDHI SINGH | 31 |
| 4. | Smoke Rings
JAMES MULHERN | 36 |
| 5. | In the Afternoon Mail
PATTY SOMLO | 44 |

NOVEL EXCERPT

- | | | |
|----|---|----|
| 1. | George & Me (Chapter 1, From Lost In Seattle)
BRUCE LOUIS DODSON | 51 |
|----|---|----|

ESSAY

- | | | |
|----|--|----|
| 1. | Parallelsim
G DAVID SCHWARTZ | 61 |
| 2. | The Truth of Strength
ABIGAIL STEWART | 64 |

MEMOIR

- | | | |
|----|---|----|
| 1. | Missing Japan
PETE ABLE | 71 |
| 2. | How I Got Educated On Death Row
JOHN LEE SCOTT | 77 |
| 3. | Medical Dive
SCOTT MORRIS | 85 |

BOOK REVIEW

- | | | |
|----|--|----|
| 1. | Review of David Lee's Book <i>Bluebonnets, Fire Wheels, and Brown-Eyed Susans</i> or <i>Poems New and Used From the Bandera Rag and Bone Shop</i>
DAVID FEELA | 91 |
| 2. | Review of Vivekanand Jha's Poetry Book, <i>Falter & Fall</i>
HEERA NAWAZ | 94 |

- | | | |
|---------------------|--|----|
| CONTRIBUTORS | | 98 |
|---------------------|--|----|

POETRY

1

Becoming Again

FABRICE POUSSIN

There exists a distance of time and space
across a marble stone like steel and diamond,
echoes of syllables in gazes and flashing pearls.

She leans to a side absent to the event so close
staring away stealing a moment, her soul floats
seeking the hunter who will know the art of the catch.

Her chest ventures a breath between two worlds
she dreams of slashing a slice of this instant
hoping for a wave to offer its arms to a little journey.

He stands, mirror to her thoughts and wishes
accomplice to a dream yet to find a dawn
when the two can awaken under a same dew.

Later to share a stare into the meadow at dusk
parting once more with a longing to the morrow
lacking the sounds to seal for now their future.



2

Custom Made

FABRICE POUSSIN

Consider now that all of this was made for you
pores breathing life so the embrace continues
blood flows from rocks to rivers to oceans
and islands explode like so many supernovas.

Ponder upon the tower of skeletal structures
finding your way through the labyrinth of bones
a home built from dust to a glory yet to come
heaven in an uncertain valley of rugged storms.

Rest for a moment in the warmth of the flesh
fibers vibrate with the rhythm of the infinite song
pulses to the monument of memories to be
this refuge gapes it gates from the killing fields.

What indeed, if all of this was made just for you
a mass unrecognisable from the distance of loneliness
a size too large or too small in a moving present
freeze the instant, for this was made only for you.



3

Visitors to the great southwest

JW BURNS

yearn for lunch climbing Earth's bare exoskeleton
as if the sun could feed and clothe every empty basket
that once slipped from squirmy cobwebbed tentacles.
Left with only tattle-tail instincts and resilient concessions
their legs chase rock faces, the bricks of their hometowns
going soft when wind turns burials inside out.

Abyssal clay walls peeling songs, bone tunes
giving nothing away, vanished streams
filled with panther prints; the visitors lucky
to flutter among sitcom Kachinas, sip lineal spinoff,
find their lizard knees, soak their tongues in ash,
plant maize beside the lost sea. Farm the faint emissions.



4

The Snowman

HOLLY DAY

We drive our stakes and shovels through the heart
of the beast and pray for an end to
winter. We stomp on its head, kick its black coal eyes
far across the yard and take back our
old clothes from its body. No more snow,
we pray. No more cold.

The snowman lies where we kicked it down
arms outstretched in supplication, begging
for mercy against the onslaught of our
thick winter boots, lit torches
paper packets of early-sow seeds
held close to our chests in anticipation of spring.



5

Cradle tales of love

SANDIP SAHA

I like to keep you deep in my heart
lest you go out of my sight,
not knowing what is happening to you
I cannot live even for a while.

I am so eager to see you smiling,
never marooned or in grief,
your every cry comes as thud to me,
I rather prefer to swallow all your sorrow.

I like your every touch,
it thrills me top to bottom,
your soft sweet face melts me down
I hardly can get up to look at any other thing.

I am addicted to your well being
avoid all the time any hardship,
your pleasure is paramount in my mind
I do not bother about my own comfort.

I have little worry about anything
if I can hear a few pleasant words from you,
I can topple the mountain
the moment I feel you love me.

6

Underwater

ROGER SINGER

I am a prisoner of dreams.
My thoughts, stripped from time,
drift me into shadowed corners.
The gray and white melt from
day, opening at night
where eyes are teased by desert
spirits. The rocks of memories
are filled with ancient colours.
Rivers pull at me, oceans lick
my ankles. My voice is
underwater, agonising for
nothing. I rise to the surface,
floating without effort.
Night fills the void of what day
Fails to fulfill.



7

What is Love?

AVDHESH S. JHA

Hard as a rock and soft as butter;
love is caring about elfs;
an emotional learning;
of behaving and encouraging ourself.

Tough as iron and great as everest;
love is helping others and be helped
delivering the best;
and living at ease and rest.

Warm as the winter sun and cool as moonlight;
love is the selfless action;
an act of generosity,
and height of prosperity.

Sign of togetherness and way for oneness
innocence is the attribute of love and race;
a tribute it is that lifts one high
it is a grace.

Truth and honesty, courage and consciousness
a science of simplicity; love is thee;
an action without expectation,
that deals with satisfaction.

To console and sacrifice is the soul of love;
the eternal peace, the divinity;
a feeling to feel, an art;
beyond the infinity.



8

The Burden of Pain

EDWARD LEE

It was after the priest gave you last rites
for the third time
that you decided to let go
and shed all that you were.

On strange mornings,
when I am slow to rise,
I sometimes think
that maybe
it wasn't the pain, the illness
that stole you,
but the embarrassment across that young priest's face
as he repeated words
we all knew
by heart.



9

Golden Feathers

DHIMAN SAHA

On a bright sunny morning
with her shiny golden feathers
and flapping wings
she moved towards the northern plains
where monsoon has draped its carpet
over the green valleys and young forests
she flew higher and higher
far away from the known
carried by her golden feathers
into the mystic lands of the unknown
she flew over the white mountains
to the vast oceans full of blue
as the sun settled down behind the tiring sky
she rested her golden feathers
in waiting for a new dawn.



10

Etched in Memory

RAJIV KHANDELWAL

It was a crisp winter
On with mercury falling

Folks could be forgiven for being indoors
For outdoors was flush with thick, low lying fog
Only a few defiant buildings remained in sight

No sign of street life
Except a pack of street dogs asleep on a traffic island

Not a picture perfect phenomenal moment
And it did not happen exactly the expected way

Like a scene in a naughty movie
Where the thick fog of lust
That without warning
Suddenly creeps on you
Like-wise
Your unanticipated kiss
Was spontaneous
Unexpected

And the magic of that surprise touch

That engulfing erotic fog

Is still

Etched on the canvas



SHORT STORY

1

The Red Goddess

PHILLIP FREY

The pass lay in the northern California Mountains at an elevation of 3,112 feet. This is where she was born on a hot August morning, in the brush at the bottom of the pass. Her newborn voice crackled softly as she absorbed the morning heat. Hunger soon set in. She spread her red-blushed arms and grasped the surrounding shrubbery. Devouring it, her strength increased.

A hot gust of wind blew her arms against the hill that rose before her. Her body widened as she crept upward, struggling desperately to gain more ground. Then the most natural and wonderful idea came to her. She stretched an arm out and shot a hot ember over the brush. It landed 6 yards away and quickly went aflame.

The Red Goddess crawled to it, embraced it, and knew now that this was the way to grow. She roared with delight and cracked the air with her energy. More, she must grow more. She reached her arms out and shot embers in every direction. She joined them, and soon covered the entire hillside.

An icy pain – a portion of her body – destroyed!

Above her, figures sailed high in the sky. They again dropped something cold. More of her body, destroyed. She

spread herself around in such a way that her smoke billowed heavily. The Red Goddess roared fiercely as the sky turned black.

They were gone. She felt no more of their coldness.

Reaching the hillside's crest, she saw what she did not understand. She could not possibly know what a four-lane highway was, vehicles racing in two different directions. She studied the treetops on the far side of the highway. To reach them she knew what she had to do.

The Red Goddess shot embers onto the highway's pavement. Others struck vehicles, some bursting into flame. She gathered all the strength she could muster and pulled herself up to the highway, grasped an ignited vehicle and consumed it. Keep going, she told herself. Yes, stretch and leap to the next vehicle, confident now that she would spread herself to the trees.

Ghostly figures appeared in the smoky haze. The Red Goddess felt a freezing pain as she lost one of her arms. Drivers with extinguishers continued their attack. She had met her enemies; she knew them now. With renewed energy she wrapped herself around the biggest thing she could find. She knew not what it was, did not know it was an 18-wheeler carrying hazardous material. It exploded and her enemies fled from her wrath.

The Red Goddess was now well over a 1,000 degrees Fahrenheit and felt the power of her existence. Pushing forward to the far side of the highway, she consumed the treetops and drove her way downward into the valley, spreading herself wider, temperature increasing. Her arms flailed to a height of nearly 90 feet.

Before long, the entire valley was aflame, and the dense smoke continued to rise against the enemy. Leaving the

valley, she climbed the mountain she faced. She did not know that she now covered 10 square miles. Upon reaching the mountaintop, her enemies scurried about their structures, while vehicles sprayed her with their coldness. She had not yet won, and refused to give up.

From her arms she flung hundreds of embers. The homes soon ignited, and the vehicles retreated. At 2,000 degrees she blanketed the mountaintop with her orange-red body, and she pushed on.

A town lay a long way down the other side of the mountain. She knew it belonged to her enemies, knowing now what their structures looked like. Her body spread wider and grew to over 20 square miles.

Once at the edge of town the Red Goddess halted and gathered her strength. She then took her outermost arms and wrapped the sides of the town. When encircled, she drove forward and set everything aflame.

The evacuation of the town had already begun. Business owners fled their burning shops. Bankers fled as their money sailed as ash on the fiery winds. While the religious devout cried out to the heavens as if it were judgment day.

Above the Red Goddess, the planes were again attacking her with their freezing pain. Her body swelled and her arms exploded to a height of 150 feet. The pilots, taken by surprise, found themselves a hellish end.

Leaving the town burning in her wake, she reached a temperature of 2,300 degrees, and now covered 100 square miles.

At dusk, hot winds blew strong, as if the Furies had come to the aid of the Red Goddess. By dawn of the next day she covered nearly 700 square miles. It was then she saw a

city in the distance. Knowing nothing of bricks and concrete, the city appeared barren of what she needed to survive.

A plan came to her. She threw embers before her and created three small patches of fire. Leaving them on their own, they burst into parallel lines of low flame. During the day and throughout the night, the Red Goddess stayed behind as her three creations pawed their way toward the city, burning a path through the brush like commandoes on their bellies.

The sun rose on the horizon, too early in the day for anyone to see the three slip beneath the doors of a corporate office building. Once inside, the three joined and became one.

The building burst into flame. The Red Goddess knew now there was sustenance to be had. Pushing forward, her flames swallowed the city. Explosions rocked the streets. Within the havoc her enemies jammed their escape routes, fought with one another in their attempt to flee. Finally, most were consumed.

The Red Goddess continued southward, leaving the entire city ablaze. The land ahead was flat. She knew not what an oil refinery was, but she was too large now to avoid it. As she spread over it, the many explosions filled her with a strength she had never thought possible.

The Red Goddess had now grown to 70,000 square miles and moving eastward. She heard the cries of pain that came from her enemies. She heard the prayers to their gods. Gods that meant nothing to her. Enthralled with her own power, she now believed herself to be the one and only god of the earth, and she pressed on.

A ground crew of over 30,000 had gathered from all over the country. They despaired over the strong winds that pushed the Red Goddess into the Angeles National Forest.

Where she roared and raged against the firefighters and caused acres of trees to explode. Missiles of fiery branches attacked the ground crew with a vengeance. She ignited their escape routes, ate up as many enemies as she could, then left the survivors to run for their lives. None of them aware of her strategic abilities, none ever imagining The Red Goddess had deliberately spared the oldest and tallest of the trees.

Above her, an attack force of Air tankers, Heli-tankers and Supertankers spilled their retardants on her outer reaches. The Red Goddess sacrificed a number of her arms, permitting the tankers to extinguish them. The air attack then moved in toward her full body.

The time to implement her strategy had come sooner than expected. She threw embers back to where they had first attacked. The embers ignited the trees she had spared. But not all, leaving some to continue her game of wits. She forced the tankers back and forth until nightfall. The tankers fled finally, unable to operate within the smoky darkness.

She drove southward on the night wind and engulfed Southern California, to then blaze her way back up through Arizona and Nevada; up through Idaho, into Oregon and Washington, and into western Canada.

Newsflashes were no longer coming from the west. Their media facilities no longer existed. From the Rockies to the Atlantic Ocean, everyone was horrified. News broadcasters all said the same: Since the beginning of this tragedy, how is it possible that there has been no rain, and that the winds have continually favored the fire.

The Canadian winds shifted westward and carried the embers of the Red Goddess over the Bering Strait into Russia, where they ignited the forests. The winds then shifted her flames farther northward, where the snow of the mountains

melted into evaporating rivers. The winds again shifted, this time eastward, sending embers over the Amundsen Gulf to the northern islands, and then to ride the wind into Greenland.

The winds of the western United States carried a storm of embers eastward to the Atlantic, southward through Mexico, then down into Central and South America. By nightfall the skies of the world had filled with embers. By morning the planet was ablaze. The only survivors were the creatures of the sea, people and animals aboard ships, and those few who populated the Poles.

The Red Goddess never knew she had been a child of Nature – the one and only god of the earth. It was she who had given the Red Goddess thought, perception and purpose. It was she who had driven the Red Goddess on the wind. It was she who had needed to cleanse the earth and begin anew.



2

Air to Earth

CHAGANTI NAGARAJA RAO

The flight took off from the San Francisco airport. Raghu threw a look at the city as he was leaving it reluctantly. Raghu was in a pensive mood as he just left his near and dear in San Francisco. As he inadvertently switched on the calling bell instead of switching on the television screen, the airhostess approached him.

“Can I help you, please?” said the airhostess.

“Yes, I am suffering from light fever. Please keep a watch on my condition,” said Raghu after a minute of thinking.

“Yes,” she said and went away to attend to her duties.

‘How pleasant and thrilling is the job of an airhostess! They always fly in the air with the top brass of the society of every country, eating costly and tasty food, chitchatting among themselves during leisure hours, visiting several countries, interacting with people speaking different languages and possessing varied faiths, always leading a life without knowing what is suffering, pain or dejection and always smiling!’ Raghu felt as he observed the group of airhostesses in the big flight carrying about five hundred commuters.

She approached Raghu after half an hour and advised him to keep medicines in his shirt pocket.

Raghu called her a few minutes later. There was no response from her. Raghu thought she was careless to duties and irresponsible to commuters. But later he came to know that she went to take a ten month old child from the hands of her mother and lull it till she went into sleep. She laid the child in the cradle opposite its mother's seat. Then only he came to know that when he called her she went into the toilet to clean her hands, wet with the child's urine. He regretted for his hasty earlier conclusion about her.

"Yes?" said the airhostess approaching him.

"I will also put you to trouble like the child if I take cold water. Please serve me only normal or hot water throughout the journey," said Raghu.

"Yes. Please keep the air sickness bag ready for any urgency before I reached your seat," she advised Raghu taking the bag from under the seat and putting it before him in the inner jacket.

"You have done exceptionally good service. You deserve an elevation," said Raghu in an appreciative tone.

"Then please mention all these points in the feedback form so that I will get elevation in my present career with a higher wage. My name is Sandhya," said the airhostess smilingly.

"Somehow I am reluctant to lavish praise on you if this is going to continue in the airlines," said Raghu, putting her to confusion.

"What!" she went on with a little surprise and the usual smile of an airhostess, "Don't you like me to continue to serve in these airlines? Then what about my livelihood? And how to look after my aged sick mother in Delhi?"

Saying so, she left Raghu without hearing his answer. She then started serving the commuters with food and drinks.

After half an hour the airhostess was going round the seats to collect airsickness bags filled with vomited waste of some commuters and the food plates along with left over eatable items.

'My God! What a horrible duty! My earlier opinion was quite wrong,' felt Raghu, as he observed her collecting the bags patiently without feeling any contempt, and serving the commuters in several ways and in different roles.

The time for service was over. Almost all the commuters aboard the flight went into sound sleep. Raghu was not getting sleep as his mind was filled with tension about disposing of the heavy workload after a fortnight's absence from his office. There were a few seats vacant in the flight. Sandhya, the airhostess serving the wing came and slept in the seat next to Raghu, watching him throughout the journey.

After a long lapse Raghu went into sleep, quite unaware of happenings around him because of fever, except when Sandhya woke him up now and then for food or to remind him of taking medicines timely.

As Raghu slowly opened his eyes after a long sleep he was perplexed with the surroundings. He found himself not aboard the flight but in some unknown place. As he raised his head a little and looked around, Sandhya slowly approached me.

"Where am I?" Raghu asked in a feeble voice.

"Don't worry. We are in a hospital near Dubai airport. Last night you suffered from high blood pressure and experienced severe pang and you were out of sense. Sensing some unexpected trouble I admitted you here after taking precautions. Fortunately it was not heart stroke as I suspected but only gastric problem," said Sandhya to his utter dismay.

'Oh, my God!' Raghu heaved a sigh of relief, 'How fortunate I am that such a nice airhostess attended on me throughout my journey!'

As Raghu was about to rise from the bed she admonished him not to strain as the doctor advised rest for a day. A few minutes later Sandhya came with a tray with light food.

"When can I reach Delhi?" Raghu said with a little worry visible in his facial expression.

"Please take food. I will come within a few minutes after refreshing myself. We will go by evening flight to Delhi if the doctor gives clearance. I will accompany you and ensure that you will safely land in Delhi," said Sandhya.

"What! It is already 10 o' clock in the day. Didn't you fresh up still?" said Raghu in surprise.

"Our passengers' safety is more important for us than our personal matters," said Sandhya and left.

Raghu had taken food. He got complete relief. He was ready to take flight and could even travel alone. But Sandhya accompanied him up to Delhi.

They alighted from the flight in Delhi airport. Sandhya herself booked a cab. She accompanied Raghu up to his residence in Chanakyapuri. As she was about to proceed to her house Raghu stopped her for a moment.

"Today is inauspicious day. That is why, owing to certain sentiments I am not inviting you in to my house to have a cup of tea. I shall let you know the reasons later. But one piece of advice. You have served for sufficient time as airhostess. Bid goodbye to a life that denied to you privacy, security, health and happiness. The rest you read in my email," said Raghu and took her cellphone number and email

address and remained standing there, looking at the cab speeding to her residence.

Sandhya eagerly awaited the message for three days. It was on the fourth and auspicious day she received the message from Raghu: "I have seen you both as a server and cleaner in a hotel, a stewardess in a bar, a nurse in a nursing home, a midwife in a maternity hospital, and an ayah in a crèche! There were occasions when you handled dead passengers, when you helped a pregnant woman deliver a child aboard the flying flight, patiently tolerated the roués, cads and boozers and their sexual advances or signs, received humiliating proposals from affluent business magnate passengers of upper classes, cleaned toilets when needed and what not! All put together you are a noble woman! Why need you play so many roles? Just play one role for yourself and for the sake of your aged mother. Please resign your job. I will give a permanent job."

A week later:

A taxi stopped in the portico of Raghu's bungalow. Sandhya and her mother got down and entered his house. Raghu welcomed them with a smile. Sandhya remained silent without speaking anything. Her mother was keen to know what prospects were there for her daughter.

"You sent an email to my daughter promising a permanent job. If the perks you offer are acceptable, I will ask my daughter to resign her present job and join your office," said her aged mother.

"Yes, mam! The job is vacant for a long time as a suitable candidate could not be found to fill it. I found Sandhya the fittest person to fill it. If she accepts the job, I will look after you both on the earth as carefully as she looked after me

throughout my journey in the air,” said Raghu, looking at her for a positive reply.

“Yes, my daughter will accept the job. Please give details of the job,” said Sandhya’s mother with a slightly quivering voice.

“She will get a monthly salary of one lakh fifty thousand, plus an apartment in Delhi. She will get jewellery worth two crore rupees. If she continues in her present job she will get one step elevation in the air with the commuters’ lively feedback. But if she joins the job I offer her, she will jump over several steps on earth. The only condition is that she should confine herself to the four walls of the house without undergoing any stress or strain,” said Raghu.

Sandhya’s aged mother looked at Sandhya unable to understand anything. It was rather confusing to both Sandhya and her mother as to what the job was.

“My daughter has no objection to do the job. More than all these perks she is worried about the duties she has to perform. Please tell the designation of the job and the duties she has to perform,” said Sandhya’s mother.

“The designation is housewife of this bachelor’s house. Her only duty is to make it a home,” said Raghu.

Sandhya’s mother looked at Sandhya with a question mark in her face as if to ask her for her consent. A shy laden Sandhya, standing beside her mother gave her consent by slowly moving to the side of her prospective hubby to touch the feet of her mother to take her blessings along with him. Her face beamed with joy as she permanently came from air to earth.



3

The Lord of Joggers Park

NIDHI SINGH

The dappled Lord raised his nose and inhaled deeply of the bracing air. He surveyed his realm and all of god's wondrous creatures within it with approval.

The cooking fires hadn't started yet, the traffic was still a trickle, the dawn's quiet remained unbroken by the awakening of life; and beneath his feet the grass was still moist with the dewdrops trembling on its blades. Peace reigned, business went on as usual, and the sun shoveled through the haze with resolve.

The lonely old man with the mask, usually the first to arrive, called out to everyone including the tea-boy: "Good morning! Have a cup of tea with me. No? Okay, have a nice day then."

The stern school principal and her gaggle of friends had gathered around the holy basil tree for worship; the sweet scents of incense and ghee lamps mingled with basil leaves that grew in purple rosettes on the central stem purified the air and subdued baser tendencies in all creatures. Sweepers and guards sat on doorsteps and read fresh newspapers that had been dropped, before the sun rose, before the doors opened and they went about their work.

The slouching man with the overflowing beard and turban was behaving mysteriously again: clapping his hands, and laughing out loud in a shaded corner. It was supposed to

be good for you – but when people did it by themselves, it disturbed the Lord. The woman in oversized breasts had made her entry, chopping the ground with her heels – some people were just not meant for the business of running. The man in oversized boots – his toes caught up each time his feet curled – with his small plastic bag of goodies shuffled about, chased by eager clients waiting for him to tire and seek out a bench where he could dispense his wares.

The Lord sat smack in the middle of the track, close to the park entrance: proud, calm, and still. He was tall and strong and felt taller and stronger. He was skinny and lonely and felt full and complete. So far, all was well: the sun had risen on the right side, the old man swinging his golf club hadn't struck anybody yet, and the ground felt firm under his feet as he arched back, ready to spring at trouble. The Lord was known to be quick to settle an argument, with a guttural roar, or with a drawing of blood that made the other party see sense soon enough.

People often failed to appreciate the tough job he had of keeping order, though. Some waved at him, others evaded him: everyone kept a respectful distance. Before long, beauties, permed and pruned, their spindly legs sticking out of skirts wide as umbrellas flared in the rain would be strutting around, casting their aromas in the morning air, sending strong signals to suitors that they needed sinning with. And then his work would start.

“Do not present your butt in that manner to me, for then I must need smack it!” He would often call out to them to behave, but the preening coquettes, they heeded him not. And it was hard to keep off the slobbering playmates in fur coats, who knew what to say to get into a girl's panties for a bit of quick early morning bum sex. The king himself was a one-woman guy, though – his ladylove, Tiara, must still be

curled up on a sofa waiting for the house to rise. He planned to start a family soon enough with her – soon as he got some quality time alone with her, for she was always surrounded by proprietors to her virginity.

Suddenly, what he'd feared most happened. The peace was disturbed, the calm broken, the mind frizzled. Men stood still, women ran, children screamed and smoke belched out of earthen stoves like little gray balloons. Loud yelps, blood curdling cries, a chorus of pain rent the morning air. The café-au-lait tease in purple bows had strayed too far in the bush, and the amorous tykes, hot and heavy, had pounced upon her tender person. Soon, other freeloaders of the park, sensing an opportunity for a quick roll in the hay with the flushed buttercup, joined in the fray. Her ardor swiftly diminished by so many heaving and panting supplicants, she beat a hasty retreat, only to be rolled over and dogged by a square-headed, short legged brute who would have made quick work of her had not the Lord arrived on the scene in the nick of time and attached himself without formality to the windpipe of the attacker.

Meanwhile, people had rushed to the rescue of the distressed damsel with sticks, slights, and slurs, convincing the villain and his rascally associates to flee the slugfest. Their screaming, raging dash through the pristine environs at the ambrosial hour, however, upset many visitors and a brouhaha ensued with everyone snapping and sundering, writhing and worrying, grieving and growling, raging and raving, howling and heating, and turning and twisting, around and around, with endless rebound.

The afore-mentioned snub-nosed squat villain appeared to be the mastermind of the uncalled for early morning donnybrook, and were he not to be brought down, the Lord predicted events would come to a dreadful pass. His brow

narrowed and quickly he estimated the dizzying path the raging rascal was drawing through the greens, sending everything helter-skelter in his way. The Lord saw an opening between two still bystanders, who were eyeing him rather keenly, and made a dash for it.

Just as he passed between the two men, they stepped nimbly aside, and out of nowhere appeared a circle attached to the end of a stick. He felt a sharp tug as the noose tightened around his throat: had he not skidded to a halt on instinct, his head would have snapped off his body. He felt an explosion behind him, as the other man landed a crippling blow on his butt with his stick. Dangling at the end of a stick, hurt and humiliated, the Lord was dragged through his estate to a waiting, caged van where already many of his friends, their proud heads bowed in submission and shame, were immured.

“Look at him – eyes red like burning coals,” somebody shouted after him, as he looked upon his beloved park through the iron grille. Tiara, his dear Tiara was out there too, her sad eyes watching him through the wild mop on her forehead. “I’ll be back,” he growled, “and we’ll have a family of our own.”

“A menace!” remarked the turbaned man.

“This park belongs to us – these strays have taken it over!” The school principal admonished the animal catchers, waving a basil branch at them.

“Where are you taking them? Will you kill them?” Tiara’s owner, restraining his strangely agitated pet by a violent tug of the leash, asked the dog squad man.

“No,” said the man, “we’ll merely spay them – that takes away the aggression. And then we’ll bring them back.”

“But we don’t want them!”

“Then don’t feed them,” he replied, eyeing the man with the plastic bag full of biscuits. “They’ll wander away, or starve.”



4

Smoke Rings

JAMES MULHERN

Just as we were about to step onto the ice, Nonna nudged my arm away and opened the bank door. She slipped; her wig flew into a mound of snow. "My back! My back!"

I yelled, "Help!" Tony, a kid from school, ran from the Citgo station. A crowd of about ten people surrounded us, mostly women. Tony tried to help Nonna get up, but she screeched, "My God. You're hurting me. Someone call an ambulance. I think I broke something. Don't anybody touch me. I want a professional." Her coat was open. She had managed to create a rip in the leg of her pantsuit; there was even blood. Tears streamed down her cheeks.

The bank manager came outside. "Let me help you."

Nonna hollered, "Don't touch me! I slipped on your ice. Your maintenance person must be a *bombast*. He should be fired." She moaned, mascara a dirty mess on her teary cheeks.

"I've got your wig," a hunched-back elderly woman said. "Do you want me to put it back on?"

"Are you crazy?! What's a wig gonna do for me? What I need is an ambulance."

"Ma'am, I can assure you that an ambulance is on the way," the manager said. He reminded me of Cary Grant in his dark suit, white shirt, and tie. He had dark wavy hair parted on the side.

"I was only trying to help," the elderly woman said, handing the wig to a twenty-something lady with bright red lips and oversized tortoiseshell sunglasses. She looked disgusted and passed the wig to a gray-haired short man who twisted it with his hands.

"Hey, ya gonna ruin that thing, Mr. It was expensive."

"I'm sorry." He gave it to a fat prim woman in a green dress. A game of Hot Potato, I thought.

"It's okay. It's okay," Nonna wiped away tears. Her hands were stained with mascara. "My poor granddaughter." She pointed at me. "What a trauma to see her Nonna almost die. I'm sure she's gonna have emotional damage from this whole experience."

"Ma'am. She'll be fine. It was just a fall. It's not like you're dead," the manager said.

The prim lady blurted, "That was very insensitive." She looked to the others for approval.

"Thank you, lady. Don't forget he said that. You're my witness." Nonna whimpered.

"Of course not, dear." The woman smiled and stood tall.

"Oh my God! I really coulda died. Smashed my head open. And that would have been poor Molly's last memory of me. My brain all over this ice." She crossed herself.

The lady with red lips and glasses sized me up, then glanced at Nonna. She smirked.

"Jesus! My leg is bleeding," Nonna inspected her torn pants. "I must be covered in bruises." She began to breathe deeply. "Oh, oh! I'm having agita!"

The gray-haired man said, "What should we do? What should we do?!"

“Take some deep breaths, ma’am.” The manager kneeled and tried to hold one of her hands. Nonna pulled it away.

“So you think you’re a doctor now?”

“I was trying to calm you.” He wiped his mascara-stained hands on his pants.

“Keep your paws off me.”

The ambulance arrived as if on cue. The crowd opened to make way for two burly men who checked Nonna’s vital signs and lifted her onto a stretcher. They were very sympathetic, and Nonna kept saying, “What nice boys.” Once she was secured in the ambulance I entered. As we drove away, the siren sounded. Nonna covered her mouth to suppress laughter, smiling at me. I turned away because I knew I would laugh, too. “This is just awful. Just awful,” she said to the young man on the other side of her stretcher.

“You’ll be okay. We are going to take good care of you.”

“Thank you, dear.”

Through the window of the ambulance, I watched the crowd disperse. The woman with the red lips remained, staring as we drove away. She glared at me. I stuck my tongue out and smashed my face against the window.

When we arrived at the Emergency Ward of the Massachusetts General Hospital, the paramedics lifted Nonna’s stretcher from the back of the ambulance and pushed through automatic sliding doors. I followed them. We were greeted by a tall thin nurse with a white cap atop an immaculate blond bun. She asked the paramedics what happened. Nonna interrupted, saying she had a terrible fall on an area that should have been cleared of ice. “That bank is negligent!”

Soon, we were brought to an area in the back of the Emergency Ward, a large room full of stretchers partitioned by curtains. Nonna stared at the ceiling. She patted my hand on the railing of her stretcher. "You did good."

After a while, a handsome doctor in blue scrubs came to the stretcher. He asked me to step away so he could examine Nonna behind the closed curtain. She told the story of her fall again, this time embellishing details, complaining about the "inconsiderate" and "cold" bank manager. "I have witnesses."

He listened patiently. Then he said that she was pretty bruised up with a small laceration on her thigh. She would probably feel worse a few days from now, after the adrenaline rush had subsided. He didn't think she had broken anything, and the laceration did not need stitches; it simply needed to be cleaned up to prevent infection. He would order X-rays just in case. Before he left, he asked if there was anyone he should call.

"There's no reason to bother anyone else in my family. Once I have the X-rays, and you give me the okay to go, my beautiful granddaughter will ride home with me in a cab."

"Sounds good, Mrs. Janssen."

"Don't call me that. Call me Agnella. Janssen is my married name. My husband died a long time ago. He was a pain in the ass."

He laughed. "Okay, Agnella. Your granddaughter looks like a responsible young lady. I'm sure you will be taken care of." He opened the curtain and smiled at me. He said I should stay with Nonna and pull the cord for the nurse if Nonna suddenly seemed drowsy or confused.

A timid nurse cleaned out the laceration. We waited for the X-rays, and eventually Nonna was cleared to go. Our family probably assumed we were shopping and had stopped for lunch. The cab dropped us at Nonna's. We climbed the stairs to her apartment.

She moved slowly, stopping every now and then to rest. "That whole affair really knocked the wind out of me."

We sat quietly in her living room. After a few minutes, when she seemed like she was going to nod off, she sat bolt upright, very alert. "Ouch!" She placed a hand against her side. "I wish I hadn't fallen so hard." Then she said, "Molly, we gotta take pictures. We need evidence for the lawsuit. Let's go into my bedroom and check out the damages."

Nonna stripped, throwing the blue velvet pantsuit and her undergarments onto the bed. "Those clothes are going in the trash." She stared at herself in the mirror. For a moment it seemed she forgot I was there as she traced the bruises on her saggy body and looked over her shoulder so she inspect her back in the mirror. She said, "Grab the Polaroid from the left bottom drawer of my dresser."

I did, and then she said, "These pictures are gonna be the icing on the cake." She laughed. "That's funny, 'icing.' Don't you think, Molly? I mean considering how it happened." She put her hands on my shoulders and stared into my eyes. I could smell her sweat, her oldness. "I know what you're thinking."

"What?"

"You're thinking your grandmother has sagging breasts, a sagging ass, and flabby arms." She flapped the skin underneath her biceps with her hand. "You don't want to get old. But that's life. I had beautiful firm skin and was pretty like you, but aging is a terrible thing. You lose your looks,

and then sometimes your mind. Maybe you get a horrible disease. There's nothing you can do about it. You just gotta carry on and get as much as you can out of every moment you are alive." She smiled and kissed my forehead. "Now pretend you're a photographer for *Vogue* and snap some pictures."

It amazed me that she knew what I was thinking. Seeing her old body made me nauseous, afraid of the future.

"This bruise looks like a cow." She pointed to her right shoulder. "And this one on my ass looks like a barn. What do you think?"

"I can see the cow, but I can't see the barn."

"Well maybe not a barn. Some sort of building though. I think it's the Vatican. I got the pope's house on my ass."

"I don't know what the Vatican looks like, Nonna."

She eased herself onto the bed and patted the area beside her. I sat down.

"It's a fancy palace where the pope lives." She moved my chin with her hand so that I was staring into her rheumy brown eyes. "Listen to what I tell you. What we did today, some people would consider wrong. Certainly the pope." She laughed. "Grab the cigarettes from the bedside table, will you?" I reached over. "And the ashtray... Oh, and the lighter." I handed them to her. She placed the ashtray beside her, lit a cigarette, inhaled deeply, and blew smoke rings. "See those puffs of smoke." I watched them float in front of her face.

"Yes, Nonna."

"Look at that one in the corner." She pointed. "It's disappearing already. Here one minute, gone the next."

I watched the empty air. "So what?"

She slapped my face. My skin burnt and my eyes teared up. When I tried to move my hand to my cheek, she pushed it down and held it against my thigh.

“Why did you do that?”

“Because you gotta be tough. You don’t get anything in this world the easy way. What we did isn’t going to hurt anybody. That bank is gonna settle once we threaten a lawsuit.”

I turned my head, feeling a pit in my stomach.

“Don’t you look away!” She grabbed my face. As she spoke, I felt spittle on my nose. “And don’t you dare utter a word to anyone about our plan today. You understand?”

“Yes,” I mumbled.

“Say it louder.”

“Yes! I won’t say a word.”

“Your poor Nonna and you were walking to the bank. I slipped on ice and had a bad fall.” She laughed. “And I got bruises to prove it. She stood and pointed to the Vatican. “As God is our witness.”

“How much money do you think we’ll make?”

She gazed at her body in the mirror, as if making an appraisal. “I’d say about ten grand. Those hotshots at the bank won’t want bad press about an old lady falling on ice.” She moved the ashtray to the top of her dresser, then tamped out her cigarette. “Now you go downstairs and make us some coffee while I wash up and get dressed.”

When I was in the kitchen, I heard her fall down the stairs. “Oh shit!” was the last thing she said. I found her body on the mahogany landing. There was a pool of blood around her head, and her right arm and left leg were contorted, like

the Gumby doll of an angry child. I stepped over her body, walked up the stairs, and into her bedroom, where I sat down and lit a cigarette. I coughed, but as I watched the smoke rings dissipate, I realised Nonna was right.

“Here one minute, gone the next,” I said, and walked to the phone on her bedside table. I dialed 911. “My grandmother,” I screamed. “She fell down the stairs and I think she’s dead.”



5

In the Afternoon Mail

PATTY SOMLO

My mother says I am a bad son and she should disown me. She has written these words in a letter I have just set down on the counter of my shop. The paper is a pale blue colour and so thin I can see through it, if I hold the sheet up to the light. My mother wastes her time writing these words, filling up nearly the entire first sheet with them. I tell myself the next time she writes I won't bother to read the letter. But then when the letter arrives, I can't help myself. I open it and read the words I'm expecting and say next time I won't do this again.

In my mother's eyes, I am a bad son because I refuse to return to my country. I was expected to go back, the minute my studies were completed and I had my degree in hand. At first, I told my mother I needed to go on, study a few more years and get an advanced degree. By the time my graduate program was completed, the economy back in Egypt had collapsed, even further than the terrible situation that existed when I left.

"There are no jobs," I wrote my mother. I would have preferred to call but my mother refuses to own a phone.

What I didn't tell my mother at the time was that I would probably never go back home. She couldn't possibly understand, so I didn't even try. I had fallen in love, you see, and the woman was an American. New York born and bred, as she liked to say.

Even worse than falling in love with an American woman who worked every day and on warm days wore a tank top and shorts, I'd gone ahead and married her. We didn't bother with a wedding. No. One Tuesday morning, we drove down to City Hall and stood before a short woman with dyed bright red hair and a harsh Russian accent, who twenty minutes later pronounced us husband and wife.

My mother would not have understood any of this. In fact, if I'd written even one of the details of my life in a letter, I'm certain this would have broken my mother's heart. She had sent me, her only son Ali, to America because she believed America was the means to a good life. And while we were poor and struggling, my mother nevertheless has continued to define *good life* as living in the place and in the same way she has always known. If I wrote to her about what my life has become, this would have had my mother tearing her hair out by the fistful.

As if marrying an American wasn't bad enough, we had a child together, a son. By the time David was born, I had opened the store. My wife, Catherine, didn't approve. Here I was a trained engineer and I had decided to purchase a corner convenience store.

Maybe Catherine was right, that I didn't want to stay home. That's one of the accusations she threw at me near the end of our marriage, claiming I'd given up my job at the engineering firm downtown to own a store in a not-so-great neighborhood, at the corner of Seventeenth Street and Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard, because I wanted to be alone. Or at least I wanted to stay away from her and David.

So now you see there's an even worse part of my life I couldn't possibly let on to my mother. My American wife and I are divorced. As if this wouldn't have my mother screaming

and pounding my chest with her fists, I do not even have custody of my son. His mother does. I see him rarely, since I'm working nearly all the time at the store. In fact, so much time passes between his visits to my apartment that I barely recognise him when he comes.

I couldn't let my mother know that the boy has begged my ex-wife not to have to visit me. And what could I do? Yes, I have agreed. I send money, of course, but I've quit buying him presents. Since I never see my son anymore, I don't even know what he likes.

In her last three letters, my mother has changed her tune somewhat. She now claims she wants to visit me here in America. I tell her I am too busy, that I leave the house before the sun comes up and don't come back until after midnight. My mother says she doesn't care. If she can only see my face and hold my hand for a moment or two, that will be enough.

Of course, she kept the real reason for wanting to visit me hidden until this most recent correspondence. This time she told me the truth. She is dying. The cancer my mother never revealed to me before has spread, she says. According to her doctor, my mother has only six more months to live.

She does not want to die without seeing her only son again. And so I am faced with a dilemma. You see, as hard as I tried to make the store a success, it is, after all, located in a tough, poor neighborhood. I bought the store at a very low price, thinking I was smart enough to make something of the place. What I didn't realise was that all the previous owners had once believed the same thing.

The store is up for sale but so far I haven't received a single offer. I am losing more and more money every day. Each evening, I calculate what I've sold, hoping to have made enough to cover my expenses running the place.

What I can't bear to tell my mother is that America has worn me down. I have made mistakes, yes. Not understanding the freedom I was given here has certainly exacted a price. My mother cannot understand this, having her life go along on its preplanned path. She would not believe all the choices and opportunities available to a person in America and how easily one can take the wrong steps.

I came up with the idea at the end of a day in which I wrestled with the problem of my mother and her dying wish. This was the best plan I could manage, no matter how many times I went over and over my limited options in my mind. It was obvious that I couldn't leave the country, as long as my store was up for sale. Given that there had been only a handful of calls, I knew a buyer was not about to arrive. I couldn't bring my mother here. Even if I had the courage to reveal how my life in America had turned out, which I didn't, what would happen if my mother's health suddenly took a bad turn during her visit and I needed to take her to the hospital? I had no medical insurance, even to cover myself, let alone my mother. One hospital visit would ruin me, dropping me into a hole from which I would never get out.

To carry out my plan, I dressed in the only suit I owned, which I hadn't put on since my marriage. The waistband of the pants was a bit snug. So after pulling the zipper up as far as it would go and holding my breath in the process, I left the top button undone. The jacket too was tight. Best left open, I realised.

Luckily, I had purchased the two white dress shirts I owned a little large. There was enough material to pull out a bit of cotton to cover my gut. That allowed me to leave the jacket unbuttoned. Studying my reflection in the full-length mirror on the back of the bathroom door, I thought I didn't look half bad.

I almost couldn't remember how to fasten the tie. As I tossed one end over the other, I remembered that Catherine had done this for me the day we got married. That's when I realised how long it had been since I'd let myself think about that time. I scolded myself now to forget all that, but as I worked on getting the knot straight and close to my throat, my vision blurred. Tears had flooded my eyes.

Then of all the crazy things, I started letting the memories come of my mother when I was just a boy. How beautiful she was, I thought, recalling her brushing that shiny black hair which spilled down her back. I could see her now serving my father dinner first and me next, my sisters getting whatever little was left.

It took me several minutes and a few false starts to remember how to set the self-timer on my old digital camera. As soon as I got it set right, balancing the body on top of a short narrow bookcase, I hurried across the living room and sat down on the couch. Since my mother was dying, it didn't seem right to smile. I tried to arrange my face to look neither happy nor sad, as I waited for the camera to go off.

I printed the series of photographs I'd taken and sat down to write. Starting out, I thanked my mother for everything she had done, beginning with bringing me into this world. I couldn't have asked for a better mother, I told her, writing all the kind words my mind told me any mother would have liked to hear from her only son.

When I finished the letter, I carefully folded the thin writing paper around the photographs. As I slid the letter into the envelope, a dark thought entered my mind. I would never again see my mother alive.

For some reason, I kept my suit and tie on for the walk to the post office. As I made my way up Martin Luther King,

Jr. Boulevard, I noticed one of my regular customers on the street.

“Mr. Ali,” said old Mrs. Jackson. She was sliding her walker forward, then ever so slowly catching up with her feet. “You all dressed up today.”

“Oh, yes,” I told her, not wanting to have to explain the reason for my unusual dress

“You look like you goin’ to a funeral,” Mrs. Jackson said next.

“Oh, no, no,” I said. “Just some business I need to attend to. That’s all.”

The letter from my sister came in the afternoon mail, moments before I planned to leave my apartment and return to the shop.

“Our dear mother has gone,” my sister wrote. “We are burying her today.”

I put the letter down on the coffee table before leaving the apartment. As soon as I got to the store, I hung the sign I had just made on the front door.

CLOSED UNTIL TOMORROW 7:00 A.M.

The sky was as blue as I’d ever seen it here in Oregon, this being a place more often rainy and dark. I walked up MLK Boulevard, still wearing my suit and tie, though I’d slid my feet into a pair of comfortable white Nikes. Though I had spent nearly all my waking hours since coming to America either working or studying, I knew that from now on I was going to place myself more often outdoors.

I walked all the way to the bridge, something I’d never done before. Then I climbed up to it. The sidewalk on the bridge, I was surprised to find, was very wide.

Sunlight sparkled on the river. Two long white boats filled with rowers sailed by. Trees alongside the river's opposite bank were covered in pale pink blossoms. The air smelled sweet and I realised that spring had arrived.

I stared at the tall buildings downtown on the river's other side. The city where I'd lived going on, was it twenty-five years now? I had hardly seen it before. The river was beautiful, as were the boats, the sunlight and people peddling across the bridge on bikes.

I turned around and headed back toward my apartment. My life in America, I understood, was just now getting ready to start.



NOVEL EXCERPT

1

George & Me (Chapter 1, From Lost In Seattle)

BRUCE LOUIS DODSON

It's almost 4 am. Three hours of clean-up left to go. Lunch time's about to end, but I can't eat. I'm totally exhausted, covered with white flour dust and stink of lard that we've been wiping off the ovens, ductwork, and conveyors. It was a mistake to take this temp job – an act of desperation, but who knew? It's hard to find a decent job at my age. I turned fifty-three last April and regaining my once middle-class existence won't be easy, but I will. I've got to. I slug down another cup of weak machine-made coffee.

Roger pokes his head into the bleak, white-latex lunchroom flooded with fluorescent light. "Yo! George Hampton, *Mister* Brenner! Time for blow-down. Fun, fun, fun!" Roger's the senior baker here at Grannies' Cookies. Grannies' is a part of the much larger Endorf Corporation. I once held some Endorf stock. Life is ironic.

I suspect Roger isn't happy that I'm so much older than the other temporary workers. Probably worried I won't work as hard or fast as they. He's probably right. I've got a masters – engineering. Roger might have graduated high school... might have.

Now the temp I've been paired with, George, is struggling to his feet. We get along okay. He's an old hand at this – a big dude, taller than my own six-feet, an African American, well-muscled, and quite possibly on drugs. He won't stop talking. I suspect he's using uppers of some kind. Working with him's like having a transistor radio beside me. There's no way to turn George off, but I don't mind. We follow Roger to another section of the building, passing by a white board listing lost-time accident reports: one fractured arm, a broken toe. George sees me looking.

"Got to watch your ass in here," he warns. "Shit happens."

There's a stretcher fastened to the wall beside the board. My empty stomach feels a little queasy – should have eaten something.

We step through a metal door that opens to a flour storage bin some thirty feet across, about three times as high – a topless cylinder of stainless steel. It's empty now. We stand in drifts of flat-white flour dust below a spider web of catwalks, pipes, and duct-work also covered with a layer of the fine, white powder. I begin to sneeze and wipe my nose onto a lard-stained sleeve. It's warm and humid with an overpowering smell of flour, lard, and something I cannot identify.

Octavio shows up with yellow plastic raincoats. "Put these on," he says. Octavio is one of five Hispanic "sanitarians." That's what they call the permanent employees working here as janitors. The sanitarians wear dark green coveralls with name tags sewn on. Now, another of them brings us matching hoods with plastic windows to look through. Air-filter cartridges have been attached, one on each side. I put mine on and find the inside has been wiped down

with disinfectant that has killed the greasy odor of the cookie hell outside, replacing it with its own antiseptic scent. The hood and raincoat feel uncomfortable and claustrophobic.

I'm already sweating as we're given shiny, flat-blade shovels. There's a pile of large black plastic garbage bags for us to fill.

"Take us about an hour," George tells me.

Squinting through my scuffed-up face-plate, I watch sanitarians climb ladders to a maze of narrow metal-grating platforms high above. They look like figures in an Escher drawing.

"Ready?" one of them calls down.

"We ready!" George calls back. "But you be –"

George's voice is drowned out by the hiss of compressed air hoses that start the blow-down, and a blizzard of white powder swirls around us. We begin to shovel and the inside of my mask steams up. Sweat burns my eyes, but I can only blink. No way to get my hands inside this hood. Eight bucks an hour, *for this*.

I can see George, a blurry image in his yellow raincoat, shoveling hard and fast. It's difficult to breathe inside this hood. No way I'm going to do another night of this. I've *got* to find a steady job.

Some twenty-five or thirty minutes pass before I hear a muted shout from high above us, seconds later a metallic crash that's followed by a shriek of pain. A spray of red splatters the window of my hood. George screams a stream of muffled words from underneath his hood. I drop my shovel and run toward him, stumbling on a sheet of metal partly hidden by the flour dust floating down. Swaths of George's

blood begin to darken as they soak into the whiteness that envelops us.

I yank off my hood and yell into the chalky haze above us, "Stop the air!" Dust quickly clogs my nostrils. Shit! I doubt the Mexicans above can hear or even see me. Christ! It's hard to breathe. George's left arm is spewing blood from where his hand should be. I'm frozen for a moment, stunned by this surrealistic horror.

"George!" I grab him by the shoulders, lose my grip, then grab again. He's big and heavy, slippery with blood and on his knees now, the grotesque appendage flailing, slinging plasma as I try to drag him to the exit.

"No!" he protests – wants to go the other way. His bloody stump beats on my legs.

"My hand!" he screams.

With strength I didn't know I had I haul him back outside the bin, then stick my head inside again and shout to those above us.

"We need help! Goddammit... HELP!"

Blood spurts from George's arm. I tear his hood off. Jesus, God... what can I do? His mouth's wide open with a gold tooth gleaming as he howls and writhes on the now blood-slicked concrete floor.

"Hold still!" I rip the raincoat from his body, then remove my own. "We've got to stop the bleeding!"

Someone dressed in white comes running as George moans. "Ohhhh, God!"

A pool of blood expands around us.

"What happened?" asks a baker who stays back a yard or two from where we are – afraid of AIDS, I guess.

“He’s lost his hand! Call 911!”

The baker takes a cell-phone from his pocket and a moment later red lights spin and flash above us; now a siren wails. The air compressor shuts down, leaving us in eerie silence as a crowd of voyeurs gather; most are dressed in baker’s uniforms. I drag George to a concrete column and then lean him up against it.

“Shit!” I don’t know what to do. Nobody’s offering to help. I look at George. His face has turned an ashen gray as tears clean narrow trails through flour dust on his face.

“My hand,” he moans. “You got to find my hand! Go find my hand!”

“Lay him down flat!” one of the female bakers shouts. “I’ve had first-aid,” she says. “Make him lie down.”

“Okay.” I make a pillow for him with our raincoats.

“Find my hand,” George moans as I take off my belt and make a noose around his injured forearm.

“Hold this tight.” I shove the end into his right hand. “You’ve got to stop the bleeding!”

“Yeah. I got it, man. Go find my fuckin’ hand.”

I run back into the bin. The dust has settled – ankle-deep... blood spattered everywhere. I find a soft depression where we struggled, and a broken shovel handle. I squat down and rake through the accumulated flour with my hands – no luck. A nightmare. I begin to work my way out in concentric circles. Here! The hand is cool and clammy, lifeless meat. I stand and start to leave but trip on something. Damn! The shovel I was using. I get back onto my feet and run outside to George.

“Get us some ice!” I’m yelling at a group of bakers who have gathered, gawking at us. “And a plastic bag!”

I kneel at George's side to show his severed hand. I don't know what to do with it.

"Good man," George says. "You okay, Willie."

"They can put you back together, George." His right hand's shaking but still holds the belt tight as two guys in green come with a stretcher. Octavio hands me a plastic sandwich bag filled with crushed ice, but George's flour-encrusted hand won't fit. His fingers are protruding from the bag. Two more Mexicans get George onto the stretcher and I put the hand between his knees as they take off with him. I'm shaking, dizzy, nauseated.

"Better get yourself cleaned up," one of the bakers tells me. "You okay?"

"Yeah, I'm okay."



But I don't look okay inside the restroom as I stand before a full-length mirror. I look like something from a horror film. Soap and warm water wash blood from my face and hands without much trouble, but my pants and shirt are caked with lard-soaked flour dust and dark, red stains.

I leave the restroom, heading for the cafeteria and find George laid out on a table. There's a pair of medics with him. They've brought first-aid cases and a gurney. One puts George's severed hand into a Styrofoam container as the other sticks an IV in his arm and then another in his right hand's index finger. Something's draining into him from two clear plastic bags. My belt has been replaced with a white cloth they've tightened near his elbow. The two medics hoist him up and plop him on the gurney. One asks questions. "What's your name?"

“George Ham... pphhh...”

“Hampton,” Roger tells them.

“What’s your name?” the medic asks again. I guess he’s trying to see if George is conscious, or to keep him that way as the other medic turns to Roger. “Is this guy on any kind of medication?”

“I don’t know. He’s just a temp.”

I wonder if I ought to tell them I suspect that George is on amphetamines... might be important. I decide against it.

“All of you, go back to work,” says Roger to the vultures who have come to watch. Myself, the medics and Octavio remain.

“What’s your address?” the medic asks George.

“Ummmm... Seattuuul... uh....”

“Wake up! What’s your address?”

There is no response. The medic looks to Roger for an answer.

“I don’t know.” He shrugs his shoulders.

“You should call Max,” Octavio suggests.

“Already have,” says Roger. “Max is on his way.”

A paramedic turns George on his side and rifles through a billfold found in one of his hip pockets. “2215, South Yesler.”

“Good enough.” The other medic writes it down, then makes a cell phone call. “Give me the trauma doctor,” he commands. “Yes... Dr. Harwood? This is EM-405. We’re on our way in with a severed hand. Our ETA is fifteen minutes... right.” He puts the phone back in his pocket. “We are good to go,” he tells us. “Taking him to Harborview.”

They wheel George out and as they leave, a man I haven't seen before appears in street clothes: clean, white shirt and tie. He's got a clipboard in one hand.

"I'm Maxwell Evens, nightshift manager." He peers at me, but doesn't get too close. "Who saw the accident?" he asks.

Octavio just shrugs.

I tell Max, "I was with him when it happened."

"And your name is...?"

"Brenner. William Brenner."

He writes down my name and address.

"Brenner's temping here," says Roger. "His first night."

"Okay then. Roger, you can go. I only need the people who were on the scene." He turns to me. "What happened?"

"We were inside a bin, shoveling flour dust into bags."

"Es blow-down," says Octavio.

"Then something fell," I tell him. "And a sheet of metal tore through his left forearm – broke the shovel he was using."

"Did you have protective gear on?"

"Yes. We both did."

"Umm." He thinks about it for a moment. "Guess you really couldn't see too well then, could you? So much dust, the mask and all?"

"I could see George in his yellow raincoat. And I saw the silver flash of something coming down," I lie. I'm pretty sure George Hampton's going to need a witness... if he lives through this. I tell Max how I got George out and found the hand.

“Were any others there?” he asks.

“The bakers came, but they just stood around. The sanitarians brought us a stretcher and a plastic bag of ice to put the hand in.”

“Right.” He jots down the information.

Octavio steps forward. “I should go back now?”

“No, not yet. I need to get your statement. Mr. Brenner, you can leave. Go home and get yourself cleaned up. We’ll be in touch. You’ll need to sign an accident report.”



Five minutes later I step out into the cool, pre-dawn fresh air of this October morning – almost 6 am. My pants are falling off. Forgot to get my belt, but I’m not going back. I need a drink, but only have three dollars with me and I can’t go anywhere dressed in these blood-and grease-stained clothes. I climb into my van and start the engine, roll the window down and breathe in deeply, savouring a breeze that sweeps away the sickeningly sweet smell of Grannies’ baking chambers. I’m completely wired and wide awake. What now?

I cross my arms on top the steering wheel and rest my head on them a moment before trying to find a station on the radio. Nothing but early morning news and silly wake-up broadcasts. Might as well go home, clean up, and try to get some sleep. I’m missing Laurie, my ex-wife, and having someone I could tell what happened to. What’s my daughter, Mary, up to now, I wonder. I assume she’s still ensconced inside that Buddhist monastery up in Nova Scotia or I would have heard... I think. God, how the time flies. She’ll turn twenty-three in June. She doesn’t write or call.

Lonely as God, an army buddy once remarked. We were in basic training, his first time away from home. I didn't understand the comment then, but I do now.



ESSAY

1

Parallelsim

G DAVID SCHWARTZ

Parallelism serves to have the “reader” think of the fullness of a given. The “fullness” – a potent religious item – is always truer regeneration of a given elsewhere. So oral Torah (the rabbinic discussions and writings) is “implicit” in concern.

Parallelism, like any aspect of biblical (and possibly even secular) literature does not deserve to remain mere rhetoric but to become an aid unfolding, an individuals, a communities, a worlds – life.

It is interesting to note where parallelism does not occur. Parallelism does not occur in the histories not the ritual pronouncements. Parallelism does not occur, in other words, in those pronouncements concerning what was done in the past, or what ought to be accomplished in the present.

Parallelism is most frequently an accept of biblical poetry and (is the distinction is accepted) theology. Like the poetry of the Torah even the poetry of the history given over to paralleled thought, prophesies are theologies of impounding events. Parallelism is a poetic/prophetic stance insofar as theology – the poetizing of prophecy of the possibility – typical asserts an ambiguity which could be the paralytic response to the “will be” which is God is the humanity could be.

I do not mean this “could be” as a skeptical detraction from the (utterance of the “will be.” It is not as if God says “[as I will be]” and human beings answer skeptically “could be” implying “could be otherwise]. Rather, God says, without parentheses, as it were, “I – will – be” No don’t! But also no pre-programming discussion of what they “will be” will be.

Hence, human being always have a choose to act on their perceptions of the “is” to generate, as it were, the term (of more) of the will be.

Parallelism, in other words, ids its prophetic-literary structure is the choice of alternative truths which to structure thee “appearance (the perception” of the “will be.”

In less abstract terms, parallelism, in its prophetic stance does not simply restate two alternative ways of saying, parallelism strands two trajectories of a single statement – not a narrowing down if a truth to a single (non-paralytic) observation (re: Micah 6:8) which has a myriad of important implications but an extending of possibilities along the trajectories of the already acceptable.

Parallelism is a stretching forth, a longing for a new insight, the finding of an opportunity to see more than the simple facts of history or rituals or obligation. Parallelism, then, is imposed/ exposed opportunity to go beyond the accepted to the acceptable – poetically encompassing the literary possible inherent in the otherwise given. But these “literary possibilities” are, under specific regulations the very resale tending toward God.

What are the regulations? Precisely the historical spiral and the political obligations which are otherwise unpoetic, i.e. clear and to the point.

Further, the insight derived, if true to the “summered and clearly encapsulated (re: again, Micah 6:8, with all its

implications) at one and the same time, confirm the clear instructions (as self-discipline, as coherent practices to effect identity of a people, etc.) while utterly expanding our openness to, and with others.

Simply put, we live in the Parallelism (physical/Midrashic) of particular and extensively, unique (not exclusive a seclusion) and concerning. It is to live practice, but also to live quest. It is to like wisdom (especially in relation with people who like/ not like ourselves, to life the very best of outré heritage of intelligence accommodating the other... where Jew, Gentile, Caucasian – African-American, Oriental, male, females, intelligent, creative, wise or the not (yet).

Parallelism, in this sender, is to stand boldly at the edge of utterances verging into the “wilderness” of thought, computing / combusting / combining into new thought. Parallelism like some of the very best accepts of a life (humor, friendship, sexual activity, the Super Bowl and on) are the “same,” which is not the one, false unity of the typical “love”) but the one of extensively, of becoming different, yet remaining one, unified, together – beyond tension, even I achieved through tension.

Parallelism is the tension heading beyond, tension, to the higher unity of ultimate inclusivity which, as ultimate, requires the most extensive lack of shivery.

2

The Truth of Strength

ABIGAIL STEWART

Listening to my sister talk about giving her life to Christ I began to wonder why she would even want to. I don't remember much about those days, don't even remember how old I was, but I do remember my curiosity. Our parents allowed me to sit in on their conversations and learn the importance of making that life changing decision. We began having a Bible study after dinner every night based on giving one's life to Christ. I remember there were times that my sister would become confused but still firm in what she wanted. There was an answer in the Bible for all her questions which surprised me, though it didn't even phase her whatsoever.

We did these studies for weeks, every one of us enjoying these times together in the Word. Then one day after the study my sister and our parents left my younger siblings and I, going into another room to talk. When they came back both my mother and sister were crying, which scared me at first until I realised that they were happy tears. I don't remember my dad's exact words but I do remember him telling us that, "Your sister has chosen to give her life to Christ and she will be getting baptized." I remember that this caused me to wonder even more about Christ and my sister's decision. Could this be something I wanted for myself?

I remember sitting in the auditorium of the Church and watching as our congregation filled the wooden pews. "Here to celebrate my sister's new birth." My mother told me. Even

though I was young I knew what a significant event today would be for my sister. Even God knew, after all He is God, and he showed His glory by the weather. It had been a little gloomy and my mom thought it would rain, but the weather changed. Suddenly the clouds cleared and the sun filled the large room with a beautiful glow. We could even hear the birds chirping outside. The inside of the Church was cool, the air filled with the anticipation of what was to happen that afternoon.

I remember how the room quieted as my father and sister entered the baptismal, all eyes in the building turned to them. She had requested that our father baptize her, so our father got the privilege of baptizing her. I remember my father asking, "Do you believe in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit? Do you believe that Christ died for you and your sins?" To which my sister responded yes for the whole congregation to hear and my father plugged her nose and she vanished from sight as a splash filled in the quiet. My dad held her under for three seconds to signify her becoming one with Christ, His death and burial for three days before He rose again. I swear that the room brightened as she went under and became even more so as she came back up again. It was as though a bright light was suddenly turned on it was so brilliant. I knew, even in my young heart that this was the glory of God and that he had joined us in that auditorium, that the Holy Spirit had come to my sister as the scriptures proclaimed he would.

I remember that for months those moments stayed with me, always present, and that a change had come into my heart. I had seen the glory of God and He had shown to me that he is real and that he is alive and well today. I remember that the impact was so great that once in my pajamas I went into my parent's room and had a long conversation with

them about the events that had transpired that day. Even though my father told me that he could see that I myself was ready to make the same commitment I waited a few more years, though I don't remember exactly how many. But after watching the baptism of my best friend I was even more firm in my conviction. I wanted Christ in my life. So, I began to meet with Paul, our minister at the time, once a week throughout the summer of 2003 and we talked about the Disciples and why it was important to be a disciple myself. Sitting in his small Church office, the furniture in old wooden furniture with black office chairs, a small calendar on one of the plain wooden walls, I knew I was ready to pick up my cross and follow Christ.

I remember that when I told Paul this that he agreed with me but had one more thing he needed to clarify with me first, that I knew that because of my choice to follow Christ that my friends that didn't know Christ for themselves would see me differently and even not respect me anymore. I would become an outcast in many ways, and the thoughts that went through my head made my heart pound and I began to doubt for a moment. It only lasted a moment, that doubt, and then I heard the voice of God in my head telling me that it would be ok because He would always be with me. I told Paul that I didn't care and that following Christ was what I wanted more than anything.

I chose to be baptized on Christmas eve 2003, wanting my life to be my gift to Christ and even to myself. We didn't think many would come, that it would only be my family and the minister's family, but the whole congregation filled the pews. Though some of them doubted I was making the right choice, one of which was my uncle, and if I was even the right age to know what I wanted. Could I really live for Christ? My answer to them all was yes, I did and I could, even if I did fall

at times. This was one topic Paul and I had talked on greatly, one thing being that I could find my way back again if I did fall. Even Paul knew that I was ready and that I knew what dedication I would be declaring through my baptism.

I remember how anxious I was to get to the Church and let that water set me free. It wasn't long after we arrived at the Church that I was in that warm water, my father holding my hand as the water seeped through my clothes. He asked me the same question as he had my sister that day years before, and after I replied yes, splash. The water came all around me, even into my nose as my father had forgotten to plug it for me, which caused a little bit of pain. It didn't matter though as new feelings inside of me drove away the pain in my nostrils. As I came out of the water I could see a brightness had taken over the room once again, just as it had the day of my sister's baptism, only for me it was dark outside already. I knew by that brilliant light that the Holy Spirit was here and I could feel Him inside of me. A feeling that I already knew, but it had grown so much stronger like a warm embrace. I had made a choice; the best choice of my life and God has never left my side. Though the Lord knows there has been many times I have walked away from my faith, and many people that have given me a reason to doubt myself and my worth.

Over the years I have been faced with many trials that tested my faith. Carol was one of those that caused me to doubt myself worth. I was a care giver to her husband and as time went on, as I had been with him for three years, he needed me less so I would simply clean his home and sometimes grocery shop for him. I knew I would soon no longer be needed and my paying job at a small store in Evergreen was no longer enough, so I began to look for another job before I was no longer needed. One day as I was

sweeping Carol came to visit her husband. On her way out, she stopped to talk to me.

“How’s the job search coming?” She asked me as I leaned on the broom. Needing the break, I was grateful to converse.

“Nothing yet, I’m still waiting to hear back from the applications I’ve put out.”

“Well, you could always start your own business and clean houses in Evergreen. It’s really the only the only thing you’re good at and you don’t have a degree.” I remember the spite in her voice, like she saw me as beneath her.

I wanted to remind her that I wasn’t being paid to be there for her husband and that I was doing it out of the goodness of my heart. Yet, I was too hurt to even think clearly. I found a new job shortly after that and never went back. I felt freedom from a bully and yet her words always stayed with me. I felt that worthlessness as I went from one job to the next over the next year and a half. I didn’t even know who I was anymore. I had even learned that I had Endometriosis and it caused me such severe pain that I ended up having surgery and had to quit my new job because I wasn’t healing properly and couldn’t perform the tasks anymore. Luckily, I had a friend in my old boss and went back to work part time for her while I healed. After that I went on to Wal-Mart full time, and even started school at Red Rock Community College. I guess you could say that I owed Carol for giving me the push to get back into school. I felt the need to prove to her and everyone else who had hurt me wrong and that I was worth more than they claimed. Yet, within three months I quit Wal-Mart because I was being harassed by one of my direct supervisors. After I had reported a sexual comment he made to me he retaliated and

caused my life there to become hell. Once again, I slipped into a deep depression because of it. I hadn't been that depressed since I had learned about the Endometriosis two years prior to working there.

I started seeing this guy during that time, mostly because being with him helped me to ignore the depression and the thoughts it invoked. I was with him for a year, even was planning a life with him, but it wasn't long after I gave him what he really wanted and we were no longer together. I can see now that he used my depression against me in more ways than one. I felt like a fool. I had even walked away from God during my time with him, even though I still believed in God. After I broke up with him I sunk even deeper into the depression I was trying so hard to ignore. Suicide was more than a welcome thought. Yet, God had other plans for me. You see, even though I had walked away from him, he hadn't walked out on me and was still guiding my life. A good friend, the wife of minister, became my mentor and through her prayers and our study of God's forgiveness I found my way back to my Heavenly Father.

The path still hasn't been easy to follow and once again, a year later, I am back to facing not only my depression, but my Endometriosis has grown back just enough to cause me pain, plus I have learned from blood work that my estrogen and my testosterone is extremely low. My doctor even told me that in all her years she had never seen a woman of 27 with the blood work of a 90-year-old woman. Both being strong contributors to my depression and I can't even sleep at night. I feel alone and abandoned, even by my closet friend. I'm driving myself insane with the depression. The only distraction I have is working on my homework for Red Rocks. I only have three more semesters left and I will have graduated from there and yet I find no excitement in that. I'm

even headed for London at the end of May with my class this semester and I can't find anticipation for that. It'll be the first time I've ever been out of the country, and I should be excited to go. I know I just must let the medication take its course and soon I will be happy and excited once again. I also know one thing to be true, God is still beside me feeling my pain with me and is my comfort during this time, as with every other time. The only difference being that this time I won't allow anyone or anything to stand between me and my Savior ever again. He is all I need and he makes me happy, yes happy, even now as tears course down my cheeks.

I've come a long way from my baptism fifteen-years ago. No, I'm not perfect, but no one ever will be. Yet, I am strong and I am worth not only my weight in gold, but worth the blood of my Lord and Savior and he is always there beside me. Now, when people ask me what my religion is I tell them I don't have a religion, because God is not a religion. God is my best friend, my Father and my Savior, as he is for many. Religion can walk away from you, I know because it walked away from me when I walked away from God. I never found my way back to religion and I never want to, but I did find my way back to Christ and I'll never walk away from him again. I am strong not only because of who I am and where I have been, I am strong because he carries me so that I don't have to bear the weight of this world alone. I am weak but through him I am strong. "I can do all this through him who gives me strength." (Philippians 4:13 The Jesus Bible NIV)

MEMOIR

1

Missing Japan

PETE ABLE

My globetrotting brother and a friend of his were in agreement when one said that you fall in love with the first place you live abroad. For my brother it was the laid back attitudes of Central America. For me it was the somewhat exotic Land of the Rising Sun.

I jumped at the opportunity to teach English on the other side of the planet. It easily trumped any idea of entering the American workforce with a degree in English literature.

When I landed in Tokyo I felt I had entered an alternate reality. There was a swine flu epidemic and nearly everyone in the airport was wearing a surgical mask. I didn't know what to think.

From there began the bowing, the taking shoes off indoors and the not saying anything after someone sneezes and other weirdness. When asked about my experiences I always just say it was "stranger than fiction," and pretty much leave it at that.

Everything was completely bizarre to me but I fell in love all the same. Some of it I liked right away, like all the stocking legged girls wearing miniskirts in the middle of winter, and some I grew to love over time, like the mild, wholesome hot barley tea.

After some initial skepticism I grew to love the technologically advanced toilet seats replete with bidet and seat warming mechanism.

Once I tackled my stage fright I found a passion for singing my heart out of key in hazy karaoke boxes with friends and an all-you-can-drink hourly rate.

I developed a preference for the Eastern ascetic. Meticulously painted geisha and meticulously manicured gardens nearly brought tears to my eyes.

I was fascinated by all the little gizmos, doohickeys and thingamabobs of Japan. There was a gadget on sale for every unspoken desire. I couldn't resist buying the small neon-green plastic frog that held bars of soap in the shower while smartly draining the water from slits underneath, or the collapsible pink flamingo shoe horn that stood on its own attentively by the door. At times I was overwhelmed by their ingenuity.

In the town where I lived there were loud speakers spread throughout town that sometimes made announcements in the mornings and played a tranquil song at sundown. I loved to hear that tune because it meant I was free from obligation until the following morning when I was due back at school.

I also loved to hear the tune of Auld Lang Syne played in supermarkets at closing time and at school graduation ceremonies. The words were changed – there was something about fireflies in their version – but it still gave me that beautiful, melancholic feeling I always get after the ball drops in Times Square.

Festivals were always good fun. It was lovely to see the girls and children dolled up in kimonos and light cotton *yukata*. The look was from another time, even another world,

and it seemed I was transported to both. To see them gathered by the thousands was a merry, dreamlike spectacle.

Like the tea, some of the food took some getting used to, but in the end I grew to love most of it. Raw fish, sticky white rice, miso soup – it was tasty and healthy. It's no wonder Japan has one of the highest life-expectancies in the world. And it's also not surprising to note that the majority of people aren't pear shaped.

To be a consumer in Japan with a ten thousand yen note (about a hundred bucks) in your pocket was a wonderful thing, and the one hundred yen shops in Japan make our dollar stores look like they're being run by total amateurs.

Not even the sketchiest neighborhoods in Tokyo made me feel all that nervous. Japan has something like the third lowest crime rate in the world. If you leave your wallet on a bench you can return three days later and still find it there.

If all this weren't enough, the people made me feel special, as if I were more interesting and better looking than I am. This may have been less true if I lived in Tokyo, where foreigners were more common, but I lived in the least populated prefecture in the country, where I was still a rare, wondrous thing to behold.

There was so much to like, but after three years I still found life in Japan difficult. I could only carry the most basic of conversations and was more or less illiterate. I still depended on Japanese coworkers for anything that went beyond my basic day-to-day operations, and I often felt as helpless as a child. For better or for worse, in a period of discouragement, I quit my job and booked a flight home.

It was strange coming home. Landing in New York was almost as surreal as landing in Tokyo had been three years before. The strangest part was that I could understand

everything everyone was saying. Not only that – I could read! Words and their meanings flooded my brain! I didn't know what to do with all this bonus information.

I had missed being able to read, and I of course missed pizza, cheesesteaks, and buffalo wings (I'm American after all), but I found I wasn't all that happy to be home. After a few months of reverse culture shock I found myself fantasizing about getting back to Japan. It's been several years now and I still look back on my time in Japan with rose-colored glasses.

I miss speaking the few words I did know, and I can't stand thinking I will never have the chance to say "*itadakimasu*," or "*konomiyaki*," ever again.

I miss the pachinko parlors, pagodas and pedestrians obeying the traffic signs.

I miss not tipping for anything, anywhere, ever.

I miss the casual acceptance of the massage girls and prostitutes lining the streets that marked the seedy part of town.

I miss the professionalism that takes a lazy chain like McDonalds and has its employees assemble the perfect Big Mac that looks like it does in the commercials every time.

Feeling sad and down on the States I reached out to a friend I met in Japan. Dana was from Pittsburg and, like me, lived in Japan for several years teaching English. He sent a long email detailing several negative aspects of the country, which helped to boost my morale some, but he also had some positive things to say.

Towards the end of his email he said he had nostalgia for "the smell of the sea when the wind blows inland or the sound of thunder rolling and echoing over the water." When

I read that a sushi-sized hole opened up in my heart all over again.

If I had it my way I'd be back living there now. And this time I'd squeeze every last drop of experience out of it. I'd move into a monastery and sit in a rock garden watching wannabe samurai practicing kendo. I'd pay Ken Watanabeto act out scenes from Haruki Murakami novels in a legit kabuki theater. I'd reread *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion* while sitting in the park in Kyoto near the Golden Temple itself. There'd be back-to-back screenings of Studio Ghibli movies interspersed with screenings of *Lupin*, *Akira* and *Battle Royale*. I'd hold a solemn ceremony to officially thank the sacred spirits, or whoever is responsible, for the cherry blossoms, the brevity of the haiku and the high school girl student uniforms. I'd gorge myself on beef bowls, bento boxes and Kobe beef in Kobe, Japan. I'd do it all and I'd soak it all up like a sponge. I might even get around to making the popular, six-hour climb up Mount Fuji.

Sometimes I'm beside myself with missing Japan and the only thing I can do is to take a train into Philadelphia and walk over to Chinatown. I'll grab some sushi or ramen and pretend I'm somewhere out East. I'll imagine all of the people speaking different languages are talking about me because they aren't used to seeing foreigners in their neighborhood. For a while I'm able to trick myself and I'm content, but I can't stay within the boundaries of those seven city blocks forever.

I always feel down when it's time to leave. And on my way out, stepping under the large, ornate Chinese-style gate at 10th and Arch, I can't help but feel as though I'm leaving home rather than returning to it.

I like to think Japan is a mindset and that I can go back there anytime I want, but it's not so easy. In reality, my imagination isn't so good, and last time I checked Japan was six thousand miles away, which makes for a long, pricey flight.

It seems there's little I can do but go on missing Japan. It's just a fact of my life. Even if I got back there someday I'm sure I'd go on missing it. I'd miss the Japan I knew when I was in my twenties. That Japan is lost to me forever. I guess I should kneel down at an altar and light a stick of incense or something. Maybe that would help. I think I'll try someday.

Special thanks to Dana Brem for his insight and generosity.

2

How I Got Educated On Death Row

JOHN LEE SCOTT

The one good thing about going to Death Row if you are innocent is you get automatic lawyers to file appeals so your case gets thoroughly looked at by the courts. If they give your life, and you don't have a lot of money for a lawyer, you are screwed. So in a way I was lucky to go to Death Row. But my lawyers weren't doing me any good. They kept filing appeals and getting them rejected, always for the same reason, because they couldn't get the affidavits to prove that one of the jurors was first cousin to a guy called Kelly, one of the guys the detectives used to set me up. When you got the relative of a guy that set you up for murder on your jury, you are deep in trouble. And no one in Kelly's family would give the affidavits the courts kept asking for to prove Kelly and the juror guy were close relatives, so my appeals kept getting turned down on account of that.

One day in 1994, I asked this young intern lady who was working on my case at the time, I said, "What they saying about my case over there at the Death Penalty Resource Center? Are they going to do anything for me?"

She said, "Oh, you'll be dead by 1998." Just like that. Straight out her mouth.

That's when I knew those people weren't going to do nothing for me, just let me die. So I started writing them, cussed those people out. I guess they thought I did that because I was bad, but I wasn't bad, I was afraid, I was pissed

off, I was fighting for my life, and nobody would listen. They just kept sending little girls in little short skirts to ask me all these questions. Come sit on that stool with their bare legs all up in my face.

“What your mother like?”

“What your family like?”

What’s that got to do with anything?

So we had a bad relationship and they don’t try to help guys like that. It’s just to hell with him. They like the guys who tell everything they know about the other people on Death Row. They come and see you. Do you know Greg? Or Henry? Or Ahmed? What’s he like? Is he a good guy? They try to get all the bad stuff about him so they know if they’re going to bother with helping him or not.

When the intern told me that, I knew I could not carry my burden alone anymore, so I got my courage up. I asked her, I said, “Can you get me a penpal, some kind of man to talk to?” Because I’d always wanted a father and she might find me somebody with sense to talk to.

That was how I met my father Gorman Gilbert. He was a white man, but that didn’t bother me on account I never had been racist seeing I was half white anyway. Gorman, he was a professor at NC State University. He was in the Civil Engineering Department and he could easily walk to the prison from there. When I first met him, me and him, we just became honest, we just opened up.

He told me, “When it comes to somebody like you, most white males in a position of power, don’t you expect nothing from them because they have not been brought up that way.” He said, “They were brought up in a different sort of household. They were brought up to rule over people like

you. They might not admit it, but deep in their subconscious they've been conditioned to do that."

I just looked at him. I'm like, Whoa!

He said, "You keep studying that black history. You keep looking for answers. Never stop that, *never* stop that."

He blew my mind with a lot of his honesty. He opened my eyes up to a lot of things. I hadn't thought about it until I met him that all my life it had been white men who'd thrown me away. My father. The polices. The judges. The lawyers. Everyone.

I still have mad love for Gorman. We had a bond. He was the first white man who ever really *did* anything for me. He taught me like a father. He sent me books about Islam, and discussed Islam with me. I understood he didn't have any particular interest in this, but he was willing to listen and reason with me. He always was buying me other books as well, books that were hard to read, he forced me to *think*.

I would read these books and I would write him, copying out the books so that over the years this copying got in my head and educated me about how to express myself, because when I was young I did not know how to do that, so I wouldn't say anything, I wouldn't talk, I didn't know how to take the ideas in my head and put them into words. It was by writing out of books and then having Gorman come back to me on it that I started learning how to put my thoughts in words. It taught me how to think as well, because while I was writing it out, I was thinking through what the writer was saying. It was like a whole new world opened up. I was able to see things a lot differently and more clearly. I hope you understand this, how it felt when I first began to think. Free!

I'm still learning about thinking and I'm getting better at it all the time. That's why I like to talk to educated people. It

makes me think in different ways and I get to understand more about the world and why people do the things they do. Gorman was the main one did that for me. He wanted me to be the best person in the prison. Anything I wanted he would give me and I didn't even have to ask. Once I asked for a little thing, a little piece of jewelry, and Gorman said, "No, no, no, that's not enough. I need to spend more money than that." And so he always sent me the best. Nike sneakers, jewelry and rings, canteen money. This was in the early nineties before they took everything away and made us buy stuff in the canteen, cheap sneakers that hurt your feet.

And I think he came to see I truly did love him. Once people can get behind the race thing and the color thing, you can actually sit there and discuss things like that knowing it's not going to effect the person you love and are talking to, even though that person may be of another race. It's very, very seldom you run across those types of relationships and friendships in my world.

When I look back on it, it wasn't only his love, but him being in a position financially to help me out in the environment I was living in. I didn't have to worry about where my next cheese sandwich was going to come from, so I had the time to indulge in positive things. It's just amazing how money can take a person from my background and really educate that person.

The prisoners change toward you when you have someone supporting you like that. It's like in the ghetto. In the ghetto everybody's poor and they're struggling, so if a guy goes out there and sells drugs, or he comes across a lot of money, the neighborhood is not going to cause negative things for him. They're actually going to start protecting him because they're going to look at him like here's the guy who can give them ten cents, a quarter, if they need it. And it's the

same way in the prison environment. You'll still get that negative person out in the ghetto who'll want to destroy you out of envy and jealousy, you still have to be on the lookout for that type of person, even in the prison system you have to be on the lookout because you'll always get the guy who envies you.

The person in the ghetto who's got money, he can take a vacation, he can travel, see the world, but he'll still come back to the ghetto and live. And that's the way it was with me. That's why I was able to occupy my time with reading and learning, but the other guys couldn't. That's why I could advance on certain levels that they couldn't. You might have eighteen guys at the poker table trying to make a living, trying to make a dime so they can go get themselves a soda, and while they're at that table it causes all sorts of other negative problems. Next thing you know they get to fighting, they're cussing. So having someone out there in the world who can uplift you a little bit with funds and books and stuff, it makes a big difference... yeah, it's a big *BIG* difference, you just don't know. And the reason I know is because I've been there, I've been out there doing all that stupid stuff, trying to make a dollar out of fifteen cents.

I'm not trying to tell you I suddenly turned into a saint. It took a long time and a lot of hard work to change my attitudes, but first I had to comprehend that I *had* those attitudes. One thing I've come to understand is that not everybody has the gift to comprehend in the same way. Everybody's blessed in different degrees, not everybody is on the same level. Some people have the potential and some do not. It's like dunking a basketball. You can have a guy who's six foot six and based on just natural talent he can dunk the basketball, and then you can have another guy who's six foot six who does not have the natural talent but has potential,

and you can bring out some of that potential in him so that one day he may be able to dunk that basketball. And then you have the third guy who's six foot six who has no natural talent and no potential, so he'll never be able to dunk the basketball.

When it comes to knowledge, wisdom and understanding, I see myself as the second guy who had the potential, but no one ever reached in there to bring it out until Gorman came and made life comfortable enough for me to be able to sit back and think, to really *think*.

I used to talk about Gorman with my white friend there on Death Row, and he said to me one day, "Man, you've got a white man on your side. You hang onto him because most white men aren't going to be like that."

And then damned if Gorman didn't get Parkinson's. He had to quit NC State and go back to Oklahoma. Man, Gorman... even after he got ill and went away from me he still wrote me regularly, and he would get on a plane and fly to Raleigh and rent a car and come visit me. I could see him deteriorating right in front of my eyes. I'd tell him something and five minutes later he would have forgotten, and it got worse and worse.

I told him, "You mustn't be doing this. You mustn't be getting on a plane. You mustn't be driving a car."

"But I want to see you. I want to see you."

I told him, "No, don't do this. You're putting yourself in harm's way. I don't want you putting yourself in harm's way just because you love me."

He'd be talking about, "I've got to do something about this. I've got to do something about this. I've got to get you off Death Row. I've got to figure out how to do this."

He would have too, but fate threw him a real curve ball. If I'd had him, the white male, with influence, with friends, with friends with influence... oh man, if Gorman hadn't gotten ill who knows what could have happened. He made up for the father I never had and it hurt me that I couldn't be there to help him. A son is supposed to take care of his father when he's old and sick.

With Gorman gone out of my life I had no one to love me or cherish me. I have always had a loving heart, but in my predicament it was hard to find someone to accept it. I believe I'm at my best when I'm loved and wanted and I'm not too good when I'm not. That's my kryptonite, when I'm not loved and wanted. So I started writing to the churches around North Carolina for penpals. The Friday newspaper always had a list of churches in it, and I wrote the good people who sent Christmas cards every year to Death Row prisoners. I wrote hundreds of letters to hundreds of addresses. Every time I could get welfare stamps I just sat there and wrote. Lots of people answered, but it was mostly out of curiosity. Some lasted two weeks, two months, two years, but guess how many of them stuck with me? One. That special, loving person was my dear Sister Ann.

Sister Ann was a sweet lady who never had a worldly life. She'd been a nun since she was a little girl of fifteen. Her mother wanted one of her daughters to be a nun and when she died Ann was the one who did that for her mother. She was only young and didn't know what she was doing. It was okay while she was younger. She was a Dominican nun and those people are teachers. She used to teach poor kids in the slums of Los Angeles. That's why she could relate so well to me, she knew what it was like for poor black kids. She loved them. And when she retired to this nun's home in Michigan and had nobody to love and help anymore, she did that for

me. There was a lot she had missed out on in life and I tried to bring the world to her through my letters, love, and friendship. I loved her a lot. Without her help I may have done something crazy in that hellhole. She was a very helpful friend.

But she was doing all this for me secretly, not letting the administration at the retirement home know anything about it because she knew they wouldn't approve of her writing a prisoner. She had her own bank account and sent me funds without them knowing, sent me books without them knowing, wrote me back and forth almost every day without them knowing. So she was like a prisoner herself, she kept her hustle secret. Hell, one day she wrote and told me she was going to run away and get on a bus and come visit me in North Carolina. I said, "No, no, don't do that, you'll get in trouble, don't do that." Because I thought if she did something like that they'd throw her out the nuns' home and she had nowhere else to go.

Then one day she had to move rooms at the retirement place and they were helping her move her stuff and they found these letters I'd written her. She shouldn't have kept those letters, but she kept them so she could think about how to answer me and figure out what books she should send to me to read. The next thing you know, her sister, and her brother too, they get letters from the Mother Superior saying she wasn't allowed to write me anymore. They took over her bank account so she couldn't send me any funds or any more books. She tried to get her sister to send on letters from me, but they started opening her mail. She was a very old lady by then. I wish I could have gone to Michigan so I could hug her and kiss her and say thank you for all she did for me before she died.

3

Medical Dive

SCOTT MORRIS

It was not the announcement you wanted to hear when you're on a cross-country flight to LAX to meet a cruise ship bound for the Pacific coast of Mexico for a Big Family Trip – “We have a medical emergency, so if there are any doctors on board, please come to the back galley”. My mother, father, brother, and future sister-in-law were waiting at LAX for us and this trip had so occupied our family's group text, since the last Big Family Trip, and now it was getting derailed. Tension was high.

Anna and I were in the third-to-last row, so we were close to the action but witness only to all the other passengers peering back over their seats, rubbernecking. Subsequent overhead announcements called for a glucometer, sphygmomanometer, and another general plea for help, featuring a clearly-flustered flight attendant thanking everyone for their patience and informing them that there would be no snack-and-cola service because their patient's body was lying in the galley in front of the cart. A flight attendant jogged to the forward galley to get the Automated External Defibrillator and I clutched the armrest as the plane rocked into Albuquerque for an unplanned medical dive.

Speculation was thick at the airport bar. The woman had seemed conscious when the 14 muscled paramedics boarded the flight to get her; one carried her off in his arms, the woman assuming a strange seated position, like a folded-over

sack of produce at the discount grocery store. It was oddly intimate – her skin clammy, gathering in folds, and this man wrapping his tattooed arms around her, all the passengers looking on expectantly, praising him, damning her, praying aloud. Anna overheard some valuable Intel in the women's bathroom, as she tends to when we travel – twenty of the passengers on board were part of a film crew's makeup and hair division, including the patient. They had been in Atlanta for a few weeks working on a film, and were headed home. My source reports that people familiar with the situation say that she was out all night partying, despite her Type 1 Diabetes. Two of the woman's colleagues were at the bar, chugging beer, and they seemed downright gleeful. Perhaps they were getting paid overtime. A few people had shouted "We'll pray for you!", but I suspected that was a minority opinion among the Hair and Makeup Division, and that no one would be waiting behind to see to her when our flight resumed its service to LAX. Anna and I opined briefly on the impact one person's recklessness can have on others, as I sipped water slowly with a bowed head, nursing my own hangover-induced migraine. I'm a sucker for Black Box wine and barbecue on the night before vacation.

I tried to keep up with my family's group text. My Dad had booked the cruise and surprised my Mom at Christmas with the Big Family Trip, so there was a lot of anxiety flitting between iPhones. My brother and his fiancé had arrived at the Baggage-Claim-stationed-Cruise-Rep, the parents' flight had been delayed, and now Anna and I were here, grounded in Albuquerque, unsure if we'd make embarkation in Los Angeles. When they landed the plane, it was just going to be a quick stop to get the woman off, then the story was that we'd deplane and get back on in a minute, then it was an hour delay. Then the crew timed out, they'd need to fly a new

one in from Dallas, and as soon as they took off it would be four hours. We would miss the boat, but the airline's Customer Service team set out a small box of sandwiches and provided us with a \$24 food voucher we spent entirely on two huge ice cream cones.

My parents had raised us in a frugal household, but by the time my older brother and I were young professionals, the annual Big Family Trip was a centerpiece of our familial relations. My Dad would poll my brother and his fiancée and I in the summer for vacation suggestions, and then in the fall he would take all our ideas to a travel agent and ask them to decide for him. The further I got as a young professional in the Adventure Travel industry, the more I pushed for my ideas, but I was also growing into the understanding that their idea of a successful vacation was different than mine, and that was okay. My father and I had sailed through my angsty-teenaged-years with some conflict, had come to the unspoken conclusion that we were just very different people, and settled into the stasis of a distant, but respectful, coexistence.

He made a theatrical presentation to my mother at Christmas of a pictograph puzzle whose answer was the vacation destination for the following Spring Break. She would give a flushed smile of mock surprise, and then we'd eat quiche and I'd pull out the world map shower curtain and make sure everyone knew where we were going. I thought it was odd that my father didn't want her to give input on how she'd be spending her spring break, but this was intimacy; she was the kind of person who would rather someone else decided. This was high stakes stuff, doubly so this year because the Mexican Pacific had been my idea, and it was also the first time that I'd be bringing a girlfriend on the Big Family Trip. Anna and I had been dating for about a year,

and she was the first girl that I'd introduced them to in my adult life.

Ten hours later, after a considerable amount of time spent waiting on hold with the travel insurance people, arguing with the American Airlines Rep, and waiting on line to argue with the next person, we were safely installed in the LAX branch of a large chain hotel with flight reservations on the morning's first flight to Puerto Vallarta, the first port of call for this "Mexican Riviera" cruise.

"Now you're going to have to add this to the story you probably already wrote about this trip!" Anna chides, a fellow writer and the one person familiar with the oddity of my obviously-odd habit of trying to create a trip by writing a story about how I want it to all go, all before we leave home.

"No! This doesn't serve the themes of 'Cruising Past the Wall!' And I haven't written a story in advance, I've just outlined my themes and subtext. Rude."

"Okay." She flipped the television from one major news station to another.

"I'll just find a way to turn this interruption into a way of navigating my story's four layers – the effect of Trump on Mexico, the tourism industry, the traveling experience and our reputation abroad, and my own self-worth as an American."

"Okay, baby." She filled the bath tub with warm water.

"I'll also need to blend in a post-Wallace critique of the American Consumer Culture, like a real polemic against a lack of cultural competency or self-awareness, and an inability to recognise privilege, etc."

"That sounds really good. Can't wait to read it." She shook her traveling clothes loose and stepped into the tub. I

sat on the sink and kept talking. My hangover was gone, thanks mostly to time and Anna's indulgence. I was briefly struck by the thought that I hoped the Diabetic woman from the plane was awake by then. For her, tomorrow would be a day of dim prospects, trying to battle out of the hospital and back to LA.

"I also need to bring in personal elements, like my family and my relationship with my father. It'll sell well if I created a paradigm where I subtly suggest that my biggest complaints about America et al are really just complaints about myself and my childhood, etc. Maybe I will use the group text material from today to enter that. But I was going to use that to talk about Millennial Identity and all the contradictions, paradoxes, pitfalls, laurels, and critiques that surround that. Shit. I'll figure it out. I just need to work on my outline. Do you think millennials travel differently than our parents, and if so, how? I just want to work really hard on this one. Do you think we travel differently because we have access to a hell of a lot more information and we don't have the same social rigidity, or, I guess, like, structure as they did when they were young? I'm just going to do a bit of work on this and then journal and then we can go to bed."

We flew down to Puerto Vallarta the next day, to an all-inclusive resort that Anna had arranged when I was going on about an essay that's about what happens in the wake of unforeseen circumstances. The ship would make its first stop here and we would wait the two days until it did and get on. But I didn't open my computer or notebook for a minute of our two night stay – I had begun traveling, the ad hoc improvisation of what actually happens in the wake of unforeseen circumstances, breaking the central conceit of trying to order my events into a neatly planned progression of control. Actually, there was some planning – I took the

map of the resort and wrote a time next to each restaurant, in an effort to eat and drink everything in our short stay there. It wasn't a bad detour after all.

We boarded the ship when it docked in Puerto Vallarta – we were standing at the pier, ready, but some miscommunication and inefficiency with the pier security kept us off until the family had left on the day's pre-booked excursion. We were sure that my mother would think we were definitely dead, but we couldn't let that stop us from enjoying the pre-arranged beverage package.

When we heard them get back to the adjoining stateroom in the afternoon, I rapped on their door and my mother ran out with tears in her eyes. She closed the door, wiped her eyes, and then re-opened the door and invited us in.

Trump, thankfully, stayed off the boat. My father is a Trump voter, and our military had just fired 59 Tomahawk Cruise Missiles at a sovereign nation, and I was so thankful that my essay had derailed so I didn't have to ask him what he thought about it, maybe at one of the themed dinners, while taking furtive notes casually under the table. We sailed north, stopping in Mazatlán and Cabo San Lucas, where we went on a pleasant hike to a lighthouse and sat on a beach, respectively. We steamed north and ate and drank, and the trip was uneventful and pleasant. On our last night we toasted to a successful journey and I was glad. But I still need to figure out how to write the story.



BOOK REVIEW

1

Review of David Lee's Book *Bluebonnets, Fire Wheels, and Brown-Eyed Susans or Poems New and Used From the Bandera Rag and Bone Shop*

David Lee, Wings Press (San Antonio, TX) 2017, Paperback, 978-0-9962170-9-5, \$16.95 / Poetry

DAVID FEELA

Combine the sensibilities of a religious fundamentalist with a free-thinker and what you'll likely get is an oxymoron, but burnish that hybrid with a poet and you get David Lee, a writer who has been publishing memorable volumes since his 1974 classic, *The Porcine Legacy*.

In his most recent release, *Bluebonnets, Fire Wheels, and Brown-Eyed Susans* (Wings Press, 2017), readers are handed a bouquet of freshly picked and perennial poems rooted in the soil of Lee's childhood remembrances, though simple nostalgia is not the tenor of these hard-hitting portrayals of rural Texas life. You will laugh out loud and then, perhaps, lower your eyes, having glimpsed not what is right but what is true about human nature.

David Lee is both poet and storyteller. His new book reads like an anthology of the craziest incidents ever compiled, inspired tales of "women from small town West

Texas, 1948-1962." It's a tribute to those strong women who shaped Lee's adolescent brain into a genuine and brilliant custodian of the word.

Much of the pleasure in reading Lee's poetry comes from his scrupulous attention to crafting each page for the ear, saturating his characters in broad washes of rural dialect and dialogue, which he electrifies with humorous pronunciations and innuendo. Witness, for instance, the dilemma of a terrified deputy and his "cuddin" Leroy trying to decide how to get a six-foot snake down from the top on "Mizrez" Birchwood's drapes:

Could be a giant coppermouf
 I dunno
 it's one damn big snaik...
 mebbe one them amaconda
 crawl up through the sewerpipe
 bite wormens on the butt

It's impossible not to snicker at the two men, the deputy with his pistol drawn shaking in his boots, ready to shoot the "snick" while Susan Butterfield calmly but clearly repeats, "Don't you shoot that gun in here" at least seven times throughout the 12 page poem, her edict the most lethal force in the room.

The hypocrisy embedded in social norms and religious conventions becomes a lightning rod for Lee, and he strikes with subtle but deadly force. The characters populating these pages are all from the same small town, the preachers, the police, farmers and housewives, children and grandparents. They're family, all of them. They embody what we've seen in the world too, as Lee magnifies their antics and illuminates (like a child with a hand lens) their souls.

Biblical allusions and illusions: the fulcrum upon which Lee's paradise is supported and his poetic license is regained.

A product of his upbringing, experience as a seminary student, or lucky leftover from his pursuit of a Ph.D with a John Milton emphasis – who cares? – the stories delivered from this pulpy mount continually surprise us with little literary miracles.

Threaded through the entire collection are shorter poems “from the sidebar minutes of the monthly Town Board Meetings” that resemble, very loosely, haiku. But in Lee’s hands we might as well refer to them as Hicku – glimpses of the collective unsophisticated rural wisdom, as in this sidebar titled, *Another Reason Why You Didn’t Want Kristine Thornton To Talk During Town Board Meetings*:

I saw that girl of yours
wearing short shorts downtown yesterday
Deacon Hill
she’s so skinny I told my husband
I couldn’t tell if them were her legs
or if she was riding a chicken

Humor, satire, and awkward social proclivities aside, the book also contains deeper pools, quiet places like verbal ponds that reflect perfect imagery, as in this description of a woman, slowly dying:

...above where she lay in the body length embrace
of death, wash hung stretched out and starched
on the clothesline like a flock of angels
nesting in rows under a fading daylight moon
the cheatgrass whitewashed with hard rime

David Lee knows how to pick ‘em – the words, I mean. *Bluebonnets, Fire wheels, and Brown-Eyes Susans* is a paper posy waiting to be passed on to you.

2

Review of Vivekanand Jha's Poetry Book, *Falter & Fall*

(*Falter and Fall*, Poetry. Vivekanand Jha, Authorspress, New Delhi, 2017, Paperback, pp. 87, ISBN: 978-93-5207-517-1, Rs. 250/-)

HEERA NAWAZ

Dr. Vivekanand Jha is an erudite poet who has recently penned his poetry anthology entitled, 'Poems Falter & Fall' – he having published the book by the Authorpress. When he requested me to review this book, I was very enthusiastic, one, because of the title which leaves much speculation in the reader, and two, because the poet has high qualifications and the fact that he turned to writing after a promising career in the air force which he could have further pursued. Not resting on his laurels, Dr. Jha has also edited the poetry anthology, 'The Dance of the Peacock' and edits and selects poems for international poetry anthologies.

In this book, 'Falter & Fall', Dr. Jha has penned an extensive collection of 51 poems, all unique, different and unplagiarized. He covers a wide span of topics, ranging from the Bhagavad Gita to one's motherland, and from global warming (a disastrous consequence of environmental changes) to the benefits of yoga. There are very few topics he has not directly or indirectly touched upon. Obviously, Dr. Jha is a voracious reader whose thoughts flow freely and are expressed vividly in this poetry anthology. Only when the poet has read extensively and thought and analysed introspectively and deeply will he be able to come up with

new facets of thinking on old topics, more like old wine in new bottles. Readers will definitely be put off with hackneyed, stale or worn-out topics or ways of expressing them.

Dr. Jha's poems are written with a fresh and vivid style where there is no ambiguity in meaning nor rambling style of writing. He adopts a straightforward, direct, crisp and interesting style, which is essential while penning free verse. Yet, he is simple and unobtrusive, with an incisive, evocative edge. Although he is not overly forceful or emotional, he does make an effort to be clear-cut and most of all, communicative in his thoughts without vagueness or ambiguity. This is a tall order for a poet of today and this makes him a poet that stands out among the rubble.

Dr. Jha's poems show the readers that he has a vast storehouse of erudite knowledge and information that he draws from and from which he derives facts and figures. He takes a subjective, yet perfectly balanced and rational viewpoint on his various topics, many of which are present in our everyday life so that several readers can relate to them and possibly even empathise with him. For instance, his poem on widows points to a life of discrimination and injustice which shows how widows are discriminated against for no fault of theirs. He draws inference from the various topics he writes. Thus, in his poem 'Rainbow', he not only touches all upon the beauty of rainbows, but he infers that all living things are analogous to rainbows since both are derived from the same source of water droplets.

Dr. Jha's style of writing varies in his rhyming schemes. Though by he uses free verse (or verse where the concluding words of the line do not rhyme), there are poems where the last words of the line do rhyme. For example, the poem entitled 'An Elegy to the Poem', where he describes the fate

of the poem in the hands of publishers, he is able to bring about rhyme and rhythm in the poem, even though this choice of a 'rhyming word' restricts his choice of words (i.e., in the eventuality of him writing a non-rhyming poem). Thus, the lines, 'We don't accept unsolicited submission, So before sending works, must seek permission', makes us exult, as 'submission' rhymes with 'permission'. Thus not only is the rhyming scheme intact, but the meaning also comes across succinctly. Dr. Jha, not only uses rhyming words appropriately, but even in his free verse poems, there is a certain amount of charm and beauty in his being a clever wordsmith with his play of colourful and meaningful words. For instance, in his poem, 'Hanuman', after enlisting the reasons why this God is considered a very lovable monkey God, Dr. Jha concludes by writing, 'You're in every heart and home', thus indicating the indispensable nature of this God divine.

Yet, Dr. Jha is not at all the grim and serious scholar, and through poems like 'You'll Be My Valentine!' shows a sprinkling of light heartedness, as a detour from serious topics. In the lighter poems, he adopts a frothy, inconsequential style of frivolity, so that one doesn't have to break one's head regarding meaning and metaphors. In this way, the book is a mix of light and heavy topics, an example of the latter being a poem by him on transcendental meditation and the fear of death. In this book, I noticed that not much value judgments have been made except for ones that are inevitable, like the cruelty to animals which should necessarily be eschewed or the cutting down of trees, which causes a plethora of environmental woes.

On the whole, Dr. Jha's book, 'Falter & Fall' is a well-written book of poems which I would recommend to any student and professional who reads poetry for ameliorating

their thought process or for pleasure. I loved reading this book and in order to review it and get the raw essence of it, I read it twice – with absolutely no regrets! I wish Dr. Jha all the very best.

CONTRIBUTORS

1. **Fabrice Poussin** teaches French and English at Shorter University. Author of novels and poetry, his work has appeared in *Kestrel*, *Symposium*, *The Chimes*, and dozens of other magazines. His photography has been published in *The Front Porch Review*, the *San Pedro River Review* as well as other publications.
2. **JW Burns** lives in Florida, enjoys walking, fishing and other activities appropriate to a person of advanced years. Having once worked as a Journalist and also in the Marketing realm, he takes delight in writing short prose pieces.
3. **Holly Day's** poetry has recently appeared in *The Cape Rock*, *New Ohio Review*, and *Gargoyle*. Her newest poetry collections are *A Perfect Day for Semaphore* (Finishing Line Press), *In This Place, She Is Her Own* (Vegetarian Alcoholic Press), *A Wall to Protect Your Eyes* (Pski's Porch Publishing), *I'm in a Place Where Reason Went Missing* (Main Street Rag Publishing Co.), and *The Yellow Dot of a Daisy* (Alien Buddha Press).
4. **Sandip Saha** is a chemical engineer and PhD in metallurgical engineering. He has published one book of collection of poems, *Quest for freedom*, available at amazon.com. His poems were published in *Better Than Starbucks Poetry* magazines, *The society of classical poets*, *Oddball*, *Snapdragon*, *felan*, *The Ghazal Page* all in USA and in *Taj Mahal*, *Verbal Art* in India besides *The Cape Rock: Poetry*, USA has accepted his poem for

publication in the upcoming issue. He is a life member of The Poetry Society (India). His scientific research work can be seen at https://www.researchgate.net/profile/S_Saha4

5. **Roger Singer** is a prolific and accomplished contributing poet who we have proudly published for many years. Singer has had almost 800 poems published in magazines, periodicals and online journals – 400 of which are jazz poems – and has recently self-published a Kindle edition of his book of jazz poetry called Poetic Jazz.
6. **Avdhesh S. Jha** is a critic, poet, editor and a teacher. He a doctorate in Education and a Post Graduate in Mathematics & Education with 13 years of teaching experience at graduation and post-graduation level is a Faculty at EDI of India, Gandhinagar. Having command over six languages and interested in Methodology teaching, Philosophy, Psychology, Research Methodology and Statistics the author accredits to himself to prepare, design and introduce several new subjects in the curriculum of various faculties of various universities.
7. **Edward Lee's** poetry, short stories, non-fiction and photography have been published in magazines in Ireland, England and America, including The Stinging Fly, Skylight 47, Acumen and Smiths Knoll. His debut poetry collection "Playing Poohsticks on Ha'Penny Bridge" was published in 2010. He is currently working towards a second collection. He also makes musical noise under the names Ayahuasca Collective, Lewis Milne, Orson Carroll, Blinded Architect, Lego Figures Fighting, and Pale Blond Boy. His Facebook page can be found at www.facebook.com/edwardleewriter

8. **Dhiman Saha** is from West Bengal, India. He has been writing poems since he was 15 and his poems have been published in different anthologies and magazines like "Sometimes Anyway" "International Poetry Digest" and "The Chaundry". He is at present pursuing MA in English literature.
9. **Rajiv Khandelwal** obtained his bachelors's degree in Electrical Engineering from Birla Institute of Technology and Sciences (BITS), Mesra, Ranchi. Co-produced a documentary film titled "Visit India, Discover Agra" in 1986. Have published three volumes of Poetry – "Conch Shells and Cowries" – published in 1998, "Love is a Lot of Work" and "A Monument to Pigeons" both published in 2013. Was invited by the Sikkim Akademi on the occasion of the 7th World Poetry Day on 21st March 2006 to read one of his poems.
10. **Phillip Frey's** history includes professional actor, produced screenwriter and writer/director of three short films, one of which showed at the New York Film Festival. He is now devoted only to writing prose. The books "Dangerous Times" and "Hym and Hur" were his first published works of fiction. Phillip Frey has also had the privilege of having short stories published in various literary journals.
11. **Chaganti Nagaraja Rao** (born Oct 31, 1952), presently Senior Faculty, Centre for Urban Development Studies, Dr MCR HRD Institute, Hyderabad, hails from Rajamahendravaram. Earlier he served as Municipal Commissioner in Government of A.P since 1979 and retired as Additional Director on 31-10-2010. He has five books to his credit – four in English and one in Telugu, a collection of published short stories. Besides these, his work comprising about 10 short stories and 45 articles in

English and 42 short stories in Telugu has been published in various leading various newspapers /magazines.

12. **Nidhi Singh** lives with her husband in the idyllic Yol Cantonment, an erstwhile POW Camp for German and Italian soldiers during the two World Wars. Her short work has appeared internationally. She has also authored several novels and translations of Sikh Holy Scriptures.
13. **James Mulhern** has published fiction in many literary journals and has received accolades. Three stories were selected for different anthologies of best short fiction. In 2013, he was chosen as a finalist for the Tuscany Prize in Catholic Fiction. In 2015, Mr. Mulhern was awarded a fully paid writing fellowship to Oxford University in the United Kingdom. That same year, a story was longlisted for the Fish Short Story Prize. In 2017, he was nominated for a Pushcart Prize. He has received other awards as well. His writing (novel and short story collection) earned favorable critiques from *Kirkus Reviews*.
14. **Patty Somlo's** most recent book is *Hairway to Heaven Stories* (Cherry Castle Publishing). Her previous books include *The First to Disappear* (Spuyten Duyvil), Finalist in the International Book Awards, Best Book Awards, and National Indie Excellence Awards; and *Even When Trapped Behind Clouds: A Memoir of Quiet Grace* (WiDo Publishing), Honorable Mention in the Reader Views Literary Awards. She received Honorable Mention in the Women's National Book Association Contest, was a Finalist in the Adelaide Voices Literary Award for Short Story, has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize, Best of the Net and the story South Million Writers Award; and

had an essay selected as Notable for Best American Essays 2014. Find her at www.pattysomlo.com.

15. **Bruce Louis Dodson** is an expat living in Borlänge, Sweden where he writes fiction and poetry. His recent work has appeared in: *Foreign & Far Away – Writers Abroad Anthology*, *Sleeping Cat Books – Trip of a Lifetime Anthology*, *Pirene’s Fountain*, *Tic Toc and Storm Cycle Anthologies*, *Vine Leaves*, *Cordite Poetry Review*, *Buffalo Almanac*, *Popshot*, *Door Is Ajar*, and *Maintenant*.
16. **G David Schwartz** is the former president of Seed house, the online interfaith committee. Schwartz is the author of *A Jewish Appraisal of Dialogue* (1994) and *Midrash and Working Out Of The Book* (2004). Currently he is a volunteer at The Cincinnati J, Meals on Wheels. His newest book, *Shards and Verse* (2011) is now in stores or can be order on line.
17. **Abigail Stewart** is currently a student at Red Rocks Community College working on an Associate of the Arts degree.
18. **Pete Able’s** work has been published in *Forge Journal*, *Lost Coast Review*, *Wilderness House Literary Review*, *Prime Number Magazine*, *Philadelphia Stories* and *Foliate Oak Literary Magazine*, among others. Pete graduated from Rutgers University with a degree in English Literature in 2007 then went on to teach English in Japan for three years. He is 35 and lives in southern New Jersey.
19. **John Lee Scott’s** short memoir “Break-Out” was published in *J Journal: New Writing About Justice* in 2009, and “How I went to Adult Prison as a Child” in 2014. He is co-author with Joanna Catherine Scott of *An Innocent in the House of the Dead*, winner of the Brockman-Campbell

Book Award for the best poetry collection published in North Carolina in 2012.

20. **Scott Morris** is an outdoor educator and mountain guide across the American West. He recently completed his MFA in narrative nonfiction at Goddard College.
21. **David Feela** is a poet, free-lance writer, writing instructor, and book collector. His poetry chapbook, *Thought Experiments* (Maverick Press), won the Southwest Poet Series. His collection of essays, *How Delicate These Arches: Footnotes from the Four Corners* was selected as a finalist for the Colorado Book Award in the category of Creative Nonfiction.
22. **Heera Nawaz** is a hardworking person. She started working after her post-graduate degrees and has never looked back. Although she opted for the BPO field, she always wanted to pursue her educational goals, and hence started working in the training department of the BPO sector where she helped several trainees. She worked in both medical transcription companies and call centres and helped the trainees in the fields of proper English communication. She also helped in proofreading and editing medical documents besides helping employees in keeping up their credits in research. Though she loves teaching adults, teaching children has also been close to her heart. Therefore, she opted for teaching in international schools since she has a B.Ed. degree and she loves making difficult concepts easy to understand for her students.



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