

# imagine all the people

tilton library literary & art journal ~ summer 2020



Editor: Erika Higgins Ross, writer & therapist (left)  
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Tilton Library director & artist (right)

Cover art: *Golden Rule*, Julia Hioe

# Letter from the Curators

In the midst of this challenging time, when so many of us would love to be back in our wonderful library, browsing the stacks and chatting with neighbors about our favorite books and movies, we are instead pushed to find new ways to connect creatively. In the service of building community and celebrating creativity, Tilton offers this debut issue of the literary and art journal *Imagine All the People*.

*Imagine All the People* is a cornerstone of “Imagine Your Story,” this year’s Summer Reading Program, which includes no in-person programming this year out of respect for health, safety, and social distancing. This old-school printed format also offers an alternative to screen-based programs with which we all feel saturated.

Please enjoy this eclectic mix of genres, including poetry, short fiction, drawing, painting, and photography, all by brave local writers and artists. The Tilton Library wishes to thank these contributors for sharing their work. And we thank you, dear reader, for joining us in creativity and community support. Connection and openness is essential, now more than ever.

Sincerely,

Erika Higgins Ross and Candace Bradbury-Carlin



*Coffee Stain Creatures*, Rebecca Lang

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*Sunset at First Landing*, Karen Guy

# DISTANT SHORES

**By Pat Ryan**

*I saw the world  
dissolve in waves*

—Maureen N. McLane, “Mesh”

The woman gazed out her window at the gray-green waves endlessly slapping the rockbound Maine coastline. She reread her letter from the girl in Togo (neat handwriting, the French carelessly translated by an aid worker). The girl had thanked her for the photograph, adding, “Your huge house near the ocean frightens me.”

The woman lifted her binoculars to the horizon—southeast, toward the Gulf of Guinea. Togo, she had learned, rises from its palmy beaches to farmland and mountains. “We are now in the rainy season,” the girl had written.

## 2 imagine all the people

There will be stormy weather everywhere, the woman thought. Take care, children: tempests are coming.

In the background, a radio voice reported on a new study. *Summer thunderstorms in North America will likely be larger, wetter, and more frequent in a warmer world, dumping 80 percent more rain in some areas and worsening flooding. Future storms will also be wilder.*

The woman turned down the volume and finished reading her mail. Among the newspapers and magazines was a science journal with an article titled “Our Changing Coastlines.” She opened to the page and read about a future where vast portions of the United States would be inundated by the rising oceans, submerging present coastlines under thirty fathoms of water.

Looking heavenward, the woman said, “You might be pleased to know, my darling, that your grave will be washed away with the tides and fishes.” Her husband had been noted for his fluid poems about water in all its forms and shapes. She had also been a poet but was no longer able to compose, for when she sat down at her desk, she felt it bucking against her. More alarming, when she walked outside her house, the ground pitched, falling and rising under her feet. She told no one, but if visitors arrived, she stepped slowly and carefully out to greet them, hoping they would think it was because she was frail instead of crazy.

When her husband was alive, they had not been afraid of the elements. They had bought and renovated this fisherman’s cottage sheltered by spruces on a rocky headland hanging over a cove. In the early mornings, they would walk along the windy Atlantic beaches, collecting shells and hoping to encounter Rachel Carson, who lived nearby on her own “granite rim of shore.”

Though they never met her, they overcame their disappointment by drinking hot rum and reading aloud in the evenings from *The Edge of the Sea*. Her husband, poet of the water world, was excited by Carson's passion for the magical zone where land and water merge.

"Listen to this," he would say back then, reading some passage to her. She had been jealous of that other writer.

Over the years, the couple had explored many shores around the world. On their fiftieth anniversary, they flew to Chile and visited the three houses of the poet Pablo Neruda. The homes were reflections of Neruda's love of the sea, spiraling upward for the best views of the Pacific and overflowing with nautical artifacts and his collection of seashells—more than nine thousand shells, mollusks, and conch. One of his houses, built on a rocky promontory overlooking the ocean at Isla Negra, was filled with marine treasures and had a huge anchor set into the garden sand outside.

In Valparaíso, after visiting another Neruda house, the woman and her husband had sipped pisco sours and quoted the lines they could remember from his "Ode to the Sea."

"So much sea," she said. "It cannot stay still."

He recited, "Now, behave yourself, don't shake your mane, don't threaten anyone, don't smash against the sky."

She countered with, "My name is sea, it repeats, while slamming against rocks."

Together, they said, "*Me llamo mar.*"

When they returned to Maine, they showed their friends the panoramic photographs of sea and sky on Isla Negra and shared their surprise

on learning that Pablo Neruda had been afraid of the ocean. He had declared himself a sailor on land only.

Unafraid, they had located the perfect sailboat, bought it, and named it *The Indigo*. Sailing soon became the woman's favorite sport.

Now, many years later, with the letter from Togo on the desk and rain pelting the roof of the cottage, the woman searched for a book from her past, seeking relevance in literature as she had done with her husband.

"Where is that Rachel Carson one?" she mumbled. "That bit about time and the sea."

She couldn't find the book, but a phrase came back to her: "The differences I sense in this particular instant of time that is mine are but the differences of a moment.

"A moment," she repeated. For the earth, it is but a moment. And this moment—my particular instant of time—is determined by my place "in the stream of time and in the long rhythms of the sea."

Her husband had said that the edge of the sea was alive to Rachel Carson because it presented "an elusive and indefinable boundary." Remembering this, the woman began to tremble. What if there is no longer any boundary, nothing stopping the relentless sea from smashing against the sky? She began to toss Neruda's poetry books from the shelf until she found the poem she wanted. She read:

*. . . a vibration starts up, vague and insistent,  
a long rumble of thunder adds itself  
to the weight of the planet and the foam,  
the groaning rivers of the ocean rise,  
the star vibrates quickly in its corona  
and the sea beats, dies, and goes on beating.*

The woman looked out her window again. A mere hour had passed, but the waters had meshed: the rain with the ocean. The horizon was lost in a gray seascape. It is gray inside my house too, the woman thought. She examined her hands. “Even my body is gray,” she said.

The window panes shuddered in the wind. A gust from an open window blew the girl’s letter onto the floor. The woman picked it up and studied the ending. “After the rains stop, the harmattan will come,” the girl had written. Harmattan, according to her dictionary, was “a dust-laden wind on the Atlantic coast of Africa.”

Undiscoverable pieces of the house quivered and rattled. The radio voice suddenly became louder, announcing: *As the ice melts in Antarctica and Greenland, the shape of Earth will change.*

The woman was perspiring and thirsty. Turning on the tap in the kitchen sink, she gulped handfuls of water and doused her face. The action made her feel cooler and more stable but couldn’t stop her runaway emotions. The shape of Earth is going to change, she thought. The planet’s rotation will be disrupted. Gravity will be weakened. Eternity will be closer.

“We must sail away,” the woman said then, turning her mind to that calming memory. How she missed the joy of sailing. One bright morning last week, when the sun highlighted the ocean waves, she had felt the old longing, the urge to push out and away in their boat, *The Indigo*.

“Imagine, darling, if I sailed *The Indigo* all the way down to Togo,” she said out loud. “I could surprise my letter girl.” The girl always ends with *à bientôt*. Maybe she would like to see me soon, the woman thought. She envisioned their meeting on the beach, followed by a walk to some cozy

shelter, then friendly conversation—polite at first, becoming more familiar as they watched the sun set.

As if their meeting were possible, as if it were reality, the woman considered her obligation to the girl. What would I tell her about the rain and the oceans and the rotation of Earth? Should I warn her? No, better not to predict disaster. I will write a poem about the sea—in French—as a gift. “I will write soothing, fearless words,” she said, seating herself at her desk and taking up her pen. “I will lie.”

“*La mer est notre mère,*” she began, then faltered. The pen dropped from her fingers. She felt the desk rolling like flotsam in the waves. A petrel drifted past the window, rising and dipping on invisible winds.



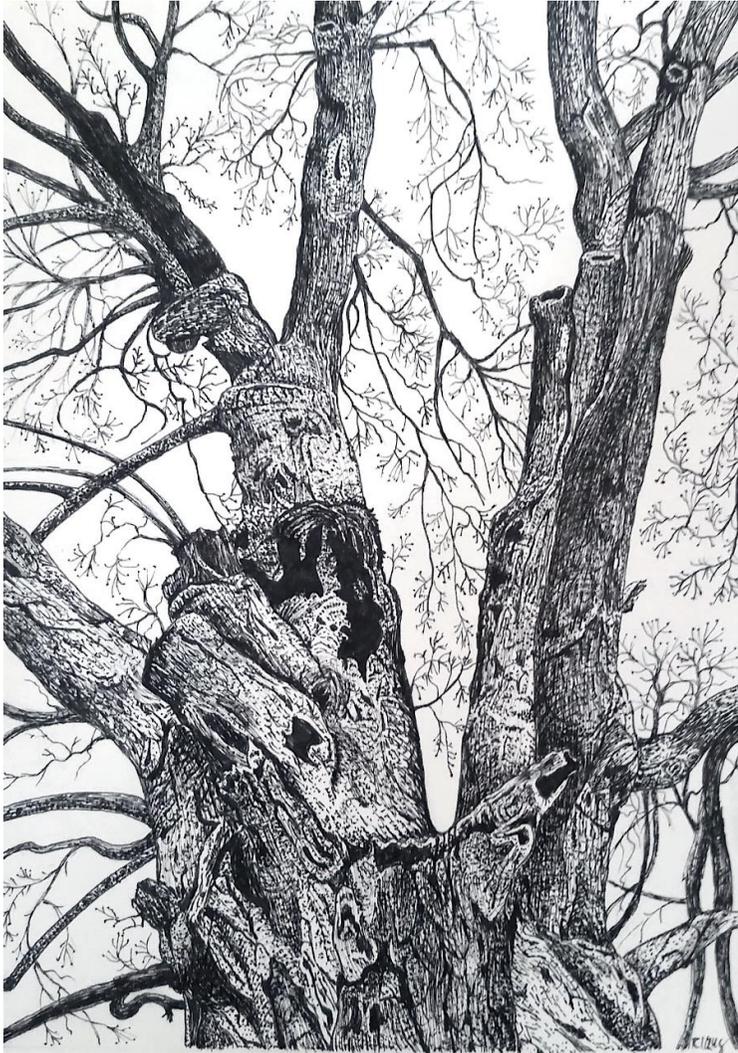
*Window Clouds*, Tim Hilchey



*Asparagus Still Life III*, Tim Hilchey



*Jars, Tim Hilchey*



*Sugar Maple*, Rebecca Lang

# GREEN DAY

**By Beatrice Brynda**

You show me your suburbia.  
Your cut-and-pasted world,  
with smooth pavement and  
unchanging cream-colored homes.  
I think I'll lose you if I wander too far.

In the middle of the night,  
when we lay on your bed,  
we can hear the curfew-breakers  
getting locked out by their parents  
would your mom be mad if she knew?  
The land disappears behind your house,  
drops off to red dirt  
and construction for more linoleum, carbon copies,  
of the same place.

We're out of place.  
You with your short curls and me with  
my black shoes.

One day, I'll show you my wild.  
The cobwebs and trail blazes and broken glass  
pressed into the dirt.

And the cold spring,  
filled with algae.  
It supplied water to an old hotel  
on the hilltop.  
It burned down years ago,  
but we can sit on the manicured lawn where it was  
and talk about your sister and how trapped we are.

You'll say how you'd never tell your mom  
and me, my dad.

Our secret is in the spring,  
far overgrown with aqueous plants  
and pipes rusted shut  
buried somewhere beneath the concrete  
so the world can ignore it.





# SO MUCH BLUE

**By Erika Higgins Ross**

By the third day of hard rain, everything is green. Almost too green. It hits a point where Jess feels oppressed by the lushness. Invasive knotweed nudges the window screen. Wild grape vines threaten wires. Bittersweet tendrils choke the trees. Jess gazes out the window at the wild New England summer, and if she blurs her vision just right, she could be in Costa Rica. It's as if she never emerged from the four-hour hike she took into a cloud forest, never left the deserted ranger's cabin with a simple wood stove and pile of damp wood, metal bunk beds, moldy plastic-covered mattresses. And crawling across the floor, an iridescent, electric-blue beetle. Thirty years later Jess remembers it as being an inch long, but that may not be right.

When Jess looks up, it's as if she summoned the blue. Two indigo buntings perch together on the wire outside her bedroom (which is now also her office) window. She has seen the frosted steel of blue jays in Massachusetts, but not this kind of blue. Almost turquoise, surprisingly blue.

A multitude of birds descends on her homestead this spring (which still feels like winter, cold and wet and eternal)—orioles, cardinals, finches,

nuthatches, so many juncos, all the woodpeckers. Jess wonders if the pandemic has left them more room or if they have been here every spring and Jess finally has slowed down enough to notice the birds, who are unconcerned with her recent interest or previous disinterest. They're not here for her.

Friends post pictures of birds online, compare sightings, download apps. She jokes with a friend in New Jersey who is recovering from COVID, who is finally breathing easy again and wondering how long his antibodies will last: "We're like retired people, nothing to talk about but the birds and the bread." Jess is still working, her job both essential and remote. Her friends are furloughed and laid off, just as their kids are heading to college. Everyone is trying to breathe and survive. And taking pictures of birds.

The indigo buntings stay only for a day or two, socially distant from the other birds. Jess takes a picture with her iPhone, but between the filmy hand cream she accidentally smears on the lens (her teenage daughter shakes her head—"clean your phone, Mom!"), the reflection off the pane of glass, and the fuzzy filter of the window screen, all she captures is a vague idea of blue birds on a wire.

When Jess lived in Costa Rica, her host sister once said (in Spanish, which Jess learned fast and furiously), "I don't understand why you Americans come study here, why you would want to be so far away from your families." Jess was 19 at the time, and there was no amount of distance from her parents that felt too far, though she also missed them with a deep heartache that she numbed with cigarettes. She smoked back then and took more extreme risks—hitchhiked rides in the back of pickup trucks, swam in riptides, trekked four hours into rain forests to see iridescent blue beetles. She signed her name in the guest book as she left the main ranger station and headed into the forest. No cell phone. No tracking device. If she'd disappeared in that forest, she'd have been gone for good.

Jess wonders how her mother managed the terror of having her teenage child in another country. After Costa Rica there were months in Nicaragua with a family that didn't have a landline. Or hot water, a refrigerator. A cholera outbreak in the neighborhood where Jess lived. Two bombs set off in the center of the city. Jess watched as police came through the neighborhood collecting machine guns from private residents; she was stopped by police late at night while heading to an underground drag show with a group of Sandinista-leaning lesbians; she boiled her water but ate food from the streets; and this is to say nothing of her sex life while traveling. Of course her mother doesn't know these stories. Better not to know.

Jess is not alone feeling deep unease in the age of COVID and increasing police violence, white supremacists, angry men waving guns. She is not alone in becoming aware of the lifelong false sense of safety she's carried with her (white skin and middle-class money) along with the vulnerability (a woman who dares travel alone). America is a powder keg being shaken by a narcissistic sociopath. She tries to lean in. She protests. She supports her family. She masks up before walking with her aging parents. She watches the birds.

Jess is relieved (and guilty) that for now her daughter can only roam so far in this infected, crumbling, rage-fueled world. She wants to fling her out to have adventures—to discover a drag show in a neighborhood far from home; to hike distant trails, unencumbered by phones and social media; to fall madly in love with kind strangers in youth hostels. But now it's masks and hand sanitizer and socially distanced runs on country roads. And indigo buntings. She hopes one day her daughter will see a beetle in the middle of a cloud forest that blows her mind. For now they have to live with just this much blue.



*Untitled*, Janna Essig

# TRIUMVIRATE NEUROSES

(Three poems on mental illness in  
my everyday life)

**By Kieran Dowd**

## **i. panic pills**

plunge your hands into my chest and pull  
out my still-beating heart  
twist the blade with your silver  
tongue and fabricate my veins into something  
else, something vile and  
spidery: my memories are delicate cobwebs of  
ashes and dust, ashes that once  
ran red and blue and burned with the  
fire of a thousand suns  
bright lights are the  
knife between my ribs  
emptying out the vacuum chamber in my lungs  
set me free with surgical blades made of ink  
loosen the knotted darkness in my  
chest and slice my rapid-firing

nerves of something that is not  
steel like my throat, melting into a mass of  
silence and static  
crowd each atom together until they all  
explode from the stress, now  
multiply that by the number of stars in the universe  
and quantify the chaos in my brain

**ii. summer dusk**

from the lilac bush, a lone sparrow sings  
calling in the dusk with a voice too big for her body  
*close your eyes, she says, you can rest now.*  
*this day has been long, and you have earned it.*  
you are drawn to her voice like moth to a flame  
because you are the dusk, long shadows and  
shining planets drawn along your collarbones  
beckoning a murder of crows to sit along your  
outstretched arms and speak to the stars  
they are your eyes and ears, your hands and mouth  
a crow perches above the sparrow  
they do not chase her back towards the day  
because she is simply doing her job, and doing it well  
they bid her farewell with a turn, a glint of sharp beak  
and they are gone into the dusk  
you fall over her, bringing the world to night  
and darkness, in the form of a crow, takes your hand  
*rest, he says, this day has been long, and you have earned it*

**iii. sharp things**

he has a needle between his teeth

you ask him to tell you that you are something you are not

he bites the needle; it twists, it turns, it slides between crowns, it

pierces his tongue, it shatters in two and he swallows the pieces. you

watch his adam's apple bob and you think about the fact that the only floating bone in the body is right there.

he opens his mouth to speak and his canines are steel-sharp and there is a lump in your throat stomach esophagus you don't know where.

you feel like all the floating bones in the world have left their owners' throats and coagulated inside your digestive tract.

everything is connected, he says. you tie together things that share one similarity, which is that they all pass through the same eye.

he inserts two slender fingers into his mouth, tongue out. mandibles, maw. there is a thread. he pulls it from his throat, and you feel it come up like a rogue piece of spaghetti, or maybe a catheter, because spaghetti is not the most elegant metaphor.

you can't remember the difference between a metaphor and a simile.

you can't remember the name of the one floating bone in the human body.

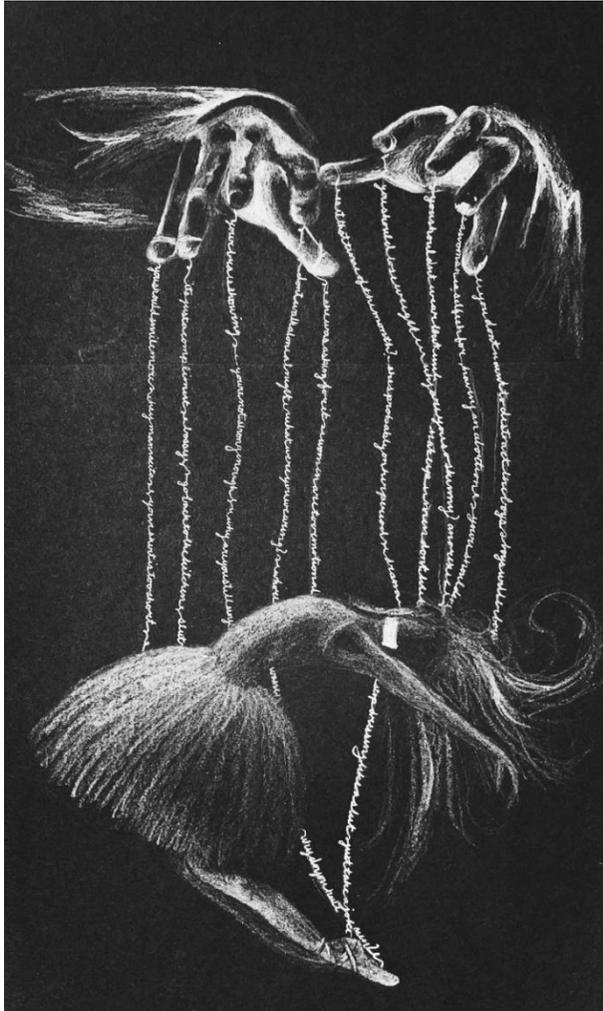
he is carefully stitching his lips closed, together.



*Untitled*, Janna Essig



*Untitled*, Janna Essig



*Puppet Master*, Julia Hioe

# PROFESSOR TINDERBROOKS' HAUNTINGLY HORRIFIC EXTRAVAGANZA

**By Russell Bradbury-Carlin**

Professor 'Tinderbrooks' Hauntingly Horrific Extravaganza (featuring Mordecai the Ghost) begins each night when the stage lights dim bit by bit. On this particular evening, the heightened murmurings of the audience dim alongside the lights. The sounds of amiable chatter and restrained bouts of laughter are followed by the creaks of chairs along with the clatter of canes and umbrellas being set down at people's feet.

Eventually, and only for a moment, the entire theater is plunged into complete darkness. Some in the audience gasp. Some titter. Then Professor Tinderbrooks enters from curtain left with two large candles in his hands. The large flames flicker and dance. They create eerie shadows across the professor's craggy and creviced face. Two stagehands bring more

candles from curtain left and curtain right. They place them on tables arranged around the stage. The collection of flames provides the only illumination.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” the professor announces with a voice that is both sweet sounding and filled with authority. “Tonight, prepare to be astonished. Prepare to be amazed. This will be an evening you will not soon forget. For on this very day, on this very stage, I will produce for your education and entertainment an actual spirit. A once living and breathing person. Now, long dead.”

Quiet exclamations ripple amongst the crowd.

Professor Tinderbrooks rests his hands in the pockets of his brown tweed jacket. He stares out at the audience through his wire-rimmed glasses. “You see, ladies and gentlemen, I am a scholar in the world of the paranormal. The world of long-gone souls and ghouls. The ephemeral and the hidden. I study the things that are all around us but that we cannot see. Spirits are real, ladies and gentlemen! Trust me, they are quite actual. This evening, you will bear witness to the manifestation of a very authentic and astoundingly articulate spirit. We will be visited by Mordecai. Mordecai the Ghost.”

The audience claps appreciatively.

Mordecai is a seven-year-old ghost.

This does not mean he has been a ghost for seven years. He actually does not remember how long he’s been dead. But when Mordecai passed away, he had been a seven-year-old boy.

Now he lives in a jar. A jar that once held blackberry preserves. From inside his home, he can see the ring of old moldy jelly that still clings to its lip. Professor Tinderbrooks keeps Mordecai in the jar all the time. That is,

until he needs to produce the ghost for the stage show. The jar is small and cramped. Though, in reality, a ghost could easily fit inside a thimble, if needed. To Mordecai, however, it is still confining.

But all of this confining and all of this time gives Mordecai the space to think.

Many ghosts don't think. Some ponder.

Most just tend to repeat the same thing over and over, such as re-creating the manner of their death again and again.

Mordecai does not do this.

Mordecai is also a bit different from other ghosts because he has memories of his life before his death.

Very, very few memories.

On this typical night, this is how Professor 'Tinderbrooks' Hauntingly Horrific Extravaganza (featuring Mordecai the Ghost) continues: The professor saunters slowly amongst the candles and talks about his travels around the world to hunt for signs of the paranormal. As he does this the flames of the candles waver and wiggle from the current of air that trails behind him. This makes shadows leap and loom all over the stage.

The professor's voice dims to a whispered hush when he describes sneaking into cold, haunted castles or into dusty underground mausoleums. Then his voice booms, menacingly, when he announces his encounters with the denizens of the afterlife.

Once he has completed his tales, the stagehands come out and extinguish all the flames except for the two large candles the professor began with.

"And now, ladies and gentlemen, it is time for you to meet our special guest," he announces.

This is the signal for the stagehand on the left to open the preserves jar that sits on a stool just behind the curtains.

The professor closes his eyes and takes a deep inhalation. His chest expands like a barrel. Then he releases his breath in one long, slow hiss. The audience stares in fascination. Then he turns and looks at what seems to be the empty space between the dancing flames of the candles.

“Why hello, Mordecai,” he says amiably.

The audience starts to whisper. Then they began to murmur. Some even guffaw. Why there is no ghost there. “The professor is insane,” someone declares aloud.

The professor glances out over the audience with a smirk on his lips. This is all part of his act. He leans forward to the empty space where the ghost is supposed to be. He brings his broad hand up to his mouth and appears to whisper something into thin air.

Once the audience noise reaches a certain decibel, the professor raises his hand and speaks with a bellow of deep authority.

“You protest because you cannot see,” he announces. “But what of gravity? You cannot see it, and yet you believe.”

The audience’s sounds begin to die down.

“You protest because you believe me to be mad, perhaps.” He waves his hand through the space between the candles. “And did they not label Galileo insane for declaring that the Earth traveled around the Sun, when it appears that the Sun, in fact, circles the Earth?”

The audience is now listening again.

“Well, ladies and gentlemen, I tonight will prove to you that Mordecai the Ghost does, in fact, exist. I, or should I say we, will make him visible for all of us to view.”

Now the audience is in the professor's grasp again. His showman's noose all the tighter.

"One fact about ghosts that many do not know is that they need human interaction in order to become visible to us. What I need from you—each and every one of you—is your concentration. I need you to focus your attention on the space just above these two candles. And, if we are able to concentrate enough, Mordecai will, I assure you, materialize before our very eyes."

"Are you ready, Mordecai?" the professor asks the seemingly empty air.

Then he turns back to the audience. "Yes, he is ready."

"Now concentrate!" the professor bellows.

The audience leans forward collectively. All eyes stare, unblinking, at the stage. Some people's faces turn red as they strain to focus. Some grunt audibly.

Then the air shimmers a bit for a moment. There are a few gasps. Then the shimmer fades.

"More!" declares the professor.

Then an outline, a kind of wispy wet fog, appears. It is in the shape of a person. A small person hovering over the stage.

Then the shape wavers. It fades in and out of view.

"More!" the professor bellows again.

There is nothing for a few moments. Just enough moments (the professor and Mordecai know well) that lie between the audience's interest and their giving up.

"Everyone! More!"

And then he appears. Mordecai the Ghost is fully present.

"It's a child!" someone in the audience declares. Others gasp.

This, of course, has all gone to plan. The professor works the audience like they are a roomful of puppets.

“Good evening, Mordecai. We are so pleased that you have paid us a visit tonight.” The professor bows a bit to the ghost.

And it appears that Mordecai bows in response.

The professor then describes a story of how he found the boy ghost in an abandoned village in a wild valley in Romania. And that it took weeks of coaxing and careful science to capture him.

The entire time that the professor is telling this tale, Mordecai hovers in space. He scans the audience. They stare back at him with slack jaws and wide-open eyes.

These are the few memories that Mordecai has of his life before he died: He remembers rolling down a grassy hill. The momentum builds to the point where he can no longer stop himself.

He remembers swinging a thick crooked stick and hitting a tattered leather ball. Then the sound of other children yelling, “Run! Run!”

Then there is one where he dangles his feet in a cold stream while he sits on a wooden footbridge.

These are most of the memories that he replays again and again while he hovers in the preserves jar.

His last memory, though, is when he met Professor Tinderbrooks for the very first time. He was still alive then. And this memory is the most vivid and complete.

He met the professor on the street as he went to buy a loaf of bread for his parents. The professor sat on a bench on the edge of the park. He introduced himself as a famous explorer. He told young Mordecai tales of

climbing Mt. Kilimanjaro and of exploring ancient abandoned castles in Scotland. Many of these tales are similar to the ones he tells during his stage show.

Then the professor offered him a bottle of sweet syrup to sip. It was the kind of syrup that all children like.

Mordecai took a sip.

His stomach began to cramp. Then his vision dimmed. And finally, seven-year-old Mordecai fell dead onto the ground. For the sweet syrup was laced with arsenic.

And the professor, who had really never traveled very far and did not really have the desire to, sought the fastest and easiest way to make a ghost.

On this average night, this is how Professor 'Tinderbrooks' Hauntingly Horrific Extravaganza (featuring Mordecai the Ghost) ends:

The professor finishes the story of coaxing and capturing Mordecai in Romania. Then he says to the audience, "Let us see if we can get Mordecai to talk to us tonight. I warn you, he rarely speaks aloud. But on occasion, he will answer one question and one question only."

The professor draws his hand out over the audience. "What would you like to ask this ghost on this evening?"

It is always the same question. Every night. It never varies.

"How did this young boy die?" someone asks.

"An interesting question," the professor announces. He places his hand on his chin and strokes it thoughtfully. "You know, no audience has ever thought to ask this question before. Excellent!"

He turns to the ghost. The ghost turns to the professor. “Mordecai, the audience would like to know how it is that you came to such an untimely end. In what manner did you die?”

Every night the answer is different. Every night, the professor whispers one or two words into the ghost’s ear while the audience is questioning his sincerity. And every night, the words are meant to plant an image in the audience’s mind. Not to completely answer the question. But to give just enough information that they can fill in the gaps with whatever grisly and sad story they want. Sometimes the word is *suffocation*. Sometimes it is *diphtheria*. Other times it is *impaled*, or *rabid bat*, or *decapitation*. It is, however, never *poisoned*. Nor is it ever *arsenic*.

Tonight, the words are *burned alive*.

The audience gasps once again. Some of the ladies erupt into tears. Some men place their hands over their open mouths.

Then Mordecai droops his head slightly. He takes one more mournful look up at the audience. Then he fades. He returns to his jar.

The professor bows.

“Thank you. And good night,” he says, exiting the stage.

The house lights come up.

The show is over.

The last thing the professor does each night when he leaves the theater after one of his performances is to put the jar that formerly contained preserves, but now contains Mordecai, into a velvet bag that he places in his leather suitcase.

And before he closes the suitcase, he glances at the jar and says, “Good night, Mordecai. Sleep well.”

Mordecai does not respond.

Even if he did, the sound of his voice would not penetrate the glass of the preserves jar.

But if he did respond, he might say, “Good night, Professor. I hope you sleep well, too.” For that is the polite thing to say.

He also might inform the professor that ghosts don’t actually sleep. They don’t have much use for it. He might add that the nights in the jar, in the velvet pouch, in the leather suitcase are, however, a good time to think.

This night, however, is not so typical. On this particular night, something is different. The evening does not end in its usual manner.

The show has ended. And the professor pauses as he begins to put away his props. He is distracted by an attractive young woman who comes back-stage to lavish praise on him. The professor, of course, enjoys this. He spends a long time elaborating more of his marvelous tales—all to her delight.

Then the professor realizes that it is late. The train that is taking him to the next city for his next show leaves in fifteen minutes.

He bids the young woman farewell and immediately packs his things together. He tosses candles into bags instead of placing them carefully.

He shoves the jacket he wears onstage into his valise without folding it properly.

Finally, he rakes the velvet pouch and the preserves jar containing Mordecai into the briefcase instead of first carefully placing the jar inside the pouch. The professor runs to the train station and, out of breath and sweating profusely, catches his train just in time.

The next evening does not begin like an average night for Professor Tinderbrooks’ Hauntingly Horrific Extravaganza.

As the professor sets up the stage, he finds that the left entrance is packed with large painted backdrops for an opera that will be performed the next weekend. He decides, rather unwillingly, to place the stool that will hold the preserves jar on the right side of the stage instead of the left.

And when the professor opens the bag that contains the candles, he finds that nearly half of them have broken in half. He sends one of the stage-hands out to purchase as many candles as he can.

Mordecai, in the meantime, spent the evening rolling back and forth inside the jar, inside the briefcase as the train weaved back and forth on its tracks.

The rolling disrupted Mordecai's thinking. He tried to recall the few memories he had before his death. But each was disrupted by the jar banging up against the side of the briefcase.

Rolling down the grassy hill—bang!

Hitting the leather ball—bang!

Dangling his foot in the stream—bang!

Only his memory of meeting Professor Tinderbrooks for the first time is allowed to play out longer. And much to his surprise, other thoughts entered his mind. Thoughts that had not occurred to him before.

On this specific but atypical night, here is how Professor Tinderbrooks' Hauntingly Horrific Extravaganza (featuring Mordecai the Ghost) unfolds:

The professor introduces himself in his usual manner. He tells his stories as he does at every show. And he calls forth Mordecai as he would on any typical evening.

But throughout his performance, the professor feels off. His voice does not boom as loudly as it usually does. The flicker of the few candles

makes his shadows smaller and less looming. And it takes the professor a few extra moments to recall the next parts of his presentation.

This becomes the most apparent when the professor calls forth Mordecai.

The audience responds, as it usually does, with disbelief when the ghost is not visible. Only this time, a group of men stands up.

“Fraud! You are a fraud!” they seem to cry in unison. One of them even begins to approach the stage in anger.

The professor feels a ripple of fear run up his spine. And when he leans in to whisper the word to Mordecai—the word that describes the supposed manner of his death—he can’t think of anything. His mind draws a blank.

“Make something up,” he whispers, standing forward to rebuke the audience’s skepticism.

Now Mordecai feels off too. “Make something up?”

He hovers in space, still unseen by the audience, and he thinks about the professor’s request.

The professor encourages the audience to join him in bringing Mordecai into view.

Many thoughts run through the seven-year-old ghost’s mind.

Finally, Mordecai comes into view. The audience gasps. Many express surprise and tears as they realize he is only a child.

And then the moment comes for the ghost to declare the manner of his death.

Mordecai pauses.

He pauses for a moment longer than he normally would.

And in that pause Mordecai realizes something.

Why, he could introduce a new word. A word that had never been allowed to be uttered in the Hauntingly Horrific Extravaganza. He could, in fact, tell the truth—reveal an actual part of his story to the audience.

He also realizes that he could go further than this. He could, perhaps, tell a whole story, just as the professor does each night. Mordecai could share with the audience the clearest and most recalled of his memories.

In that brief pause, Mordecai considers all of this.

And he concludes that this is already an atypical evening for the Hauntingly Horrific Extravaganza.

So he opens his mouth, utters the word “poisoned,” and begins to tell a story.





*Out from Under*, Candace Bradbury-Carlin

# IT'S NOT FAIR

**By Leo Franceschi**

It's not fair,  
those dead bodies  
lying in the ground.

Walked the same ground  
in the same state as they are now  
being "trapped"

Trapped in a bubble of hate and loathing  
Coming from others  
Who never have experienced the pain  
of being hated just for walking on earth

It's not fair.  
That a medal has already been awarded to me,  
even before I ran the race.

I was born into this world  
With a shiny gold number one

Hanging down around my neck  
and those others were born  
with a predetermined neck ornament as well

This time not as appealing  
The knee of the “gold wearer”  
Or the rope of his brother

Who created inferiority?

It's not fair,  
that those resting in the ground  
fought and never lived to receive their prize  
nor did their nieces, nephews, children, or grandchildren  
I didn't have to fight  
and I still *won*

And the loser's punishment  
for losing  
is stares.

The loser becomes an eye magnet for the winner  
An object for him to judge or fear

It's not fair  
That for four hundred and one years  
That same loser and their family were forced to mine

the gold for the  
self proclaimed “winner”

And then he would flaunt it,  
right out front

It's not fair

Now I question myself,  
When will it be fair?

After the gold flaunters are gone?  
Their statues torn down,  
Their hateful symbols erased

But that still leaves the number one  
One as in first  
That is the first step to possible liberation  
All I'm asking for is life  
—The second step  
That really should be the first one

Life for all

No one deserves for their breath  
to be extinguished

42 imagine all the people

It is fair

A fair demand that all people should be granted the right to live  
and breathe

It is fair





*Deserted Beach on Cape Cod, Karen Guy*

# ISOLATION

**By Dorothy Milne**

In a time of cancelation  
How do we find consolation?  
From the state of isolation  
And from the feeling of desolation?  
Are we in a place of desperation?  
We have to look for signs of elation  
Free ourselves from hibernation  
Get back to socialization  
By finding some sort of correlation  
Between being alone and in relation  
Really feel the sense of anticipation  
To a point of true celebration.



*Rainbow*, Dan Harper

# THE POSTMAN'S DRAGON

By Winston Galt

Clouds swept by, like hills of alabast. The noonday light cast gray between their folds.

*Perfect conditions.*

A black wing arched overhead.

It rose up from the side of the rising saddle, sable scales glimmering in the sunlight. *We're close.*

The postman swayed upwards and downwards with each beat.

With a pulse of the reins, the downward tug of gravity intensified, sending rider and beast diagonally beneath the wet of white clouds.

Beads of clear water settled on the gray goggles of their flight mask. The dragon's neck stretched out before their vision, undulating in the passing mist. Flickers of embers spun from his mouth, curling crimson through the cloud.

They counted the length of the descent in steady breaths, one by one. *A single circle should do.*

They peered at their watch. Landing too fast would cause a fuss.

A pull from their reins. Gentle but firm. He couldn't feel through his scales, but he understood the pressure in the soft spots behind his horns.

Wings like dark sails unfurled, and as the clouds gave way, they stabilized in the glow. It was cloudier below. *Humid.*

Shafts of light punctured the seaborne doldrums. They passed through them like waterfalls, the light flickering off them. *Slow and steady.*

The sound of the wind was deafening. A scope chained to their knuckle helped spot what couldn't be.

A tug from the reins. A wing raised in response, and the postman was suspended sideways from the saddle. Gravity dug its claws into their shoulders, but they simply peered through the lens, suspended above the abyss to the dark sea below.

*There.*

A tiny house. On a tiny island. Rimmed in white beach. Gray smoke coiled from the toy chimney.

A kick from the postman's foot and the lizard declined. Ducking forward, tendrils of wind licked past their shoulders in careful descent.

The black wings opened like curtains, casting shadows across the sand.

A woman in red waited at the edge of the palm trees.

The postman's boots landed toes deep in the film of the retreating waves. Boiling slobber dripped from the dragon's teeth, eager for rest. The postman ran their fingers along his clamshell scales as they walked up the quay.

“It’s incredible,” the woman mouthed, eyes locked on the dragon’s crimson eyes.

The postman unfastened the parcel on their hip, checking the number. They did a quick count of the ounces freed up. How much water they had. The trip to the mainland.

“—you never. You can’t even—a! Oh! Thank you, sir.” The parcel was suspended in front of her. She took it with a wrinkled hand.

She looked at the parcel as though she had forgotten what was inside. “I’m so sorry,” she said through a smile, eyes back on the drake. “I’m all out of sorts I suppose. You never—oh! Sorry, I’ll sign. How silly of me.”

She took the postman’s pen with her other hand and traced a pretty line on the clipboard. The postman looked anywhere but at her. Her house was red too. Flecking pink shards were about the seastone masonry. Like shed skin. Wood chimes chirped dumb percussion in the hot breeze. She was looking back at the postman. Her gray eyebrows jumped as she realized.

“Oh! I’m sorry, miss. I hadn’t, I mean—with your mask I couldn’t tell—”

“It’s fine, no sweat,” the postman responded. *Stop apologizing.*

The woman dropped it, pushing her gray hairs behind her ear. A sea-glass earring flashed green beneath the blue sky.

“So . . . how is it? Flying with it, I mean.”

The postman shrugged. She didn’t need to look to hear him play in the surf. She didn’t need to change her answer.

“Scary for a minute, boring for a year. He can’t fly in the cold for very long.” *Always the same question.*

“He?”

“He,” the postman said, pulling the flight mask off. *No use in this for a while.*

The old woman wiped her palm on her jeans and offered it like a lucky penny.

“Amanda. Locals call me Annie.”

The postman looked at it like a brandished knife before gripping the blade as cautiously as one could. She had a lot of tacky rings. One was plastic.

“Annie and Amanda don’t match.”

It was Amanda’s turn to shrug.

“Ammie’s not my name though,” she said through perfect teeth.

“Coffee?”

The postman’s head shook.

“Why would my name be—”

“No! I mean, are you thirsty? Er. Down? I suppose you don’t drink it for thirst,” Annie chirped.

The postman looked away, separating from the old woman’s hand.  
*Why do they always wanna talk?*

“I have to. I have more—”

“No’s not an answer,” Annie said, thumbing over her shoulder.  
“C’mon. You came all the way out here, lemme pay you something.”

“That won’t be—” she began, stopped by Annie’s arms akimbo. *So annoying.*

“Fine,” the postman said, eyes in the sand.

The postman yelped as Annie took her by the glove up the path of painted stones. “Hey! All right, I—” she protested as the old woman stopped.

“Will it—er, *be*—be okay out here for a few?” She nodded at the dragon, a whorl of gray hair.

The dragon paced in the rocking surf, out shoulder deep in the crystal water. His black crown trailed thin waterfalls with every resurfacing. Even in the sun his eyes shone red, like pits of fresh coals.

“He’s just cooling off. Doesn’t really like attention anyway, so—”

“So he’s just like his mom, then?” Her smile was stifling. The postman stared at the grass as they walked. “It’s all right; long flights take a lot out of us.”

“What’s his name?” Annie asked from behind her back, twisting twin teacups under the faucet.

“Name?” Her house was somehow bigger on the inside, despite the clutter. Hotter too. The salt breeze was stronger on the ground; notes crooned through it from the sitting room. It caught her ear.

“Yeah. The thing you didn’t give—sit please. Chill out. And take off that jacket; you’ll catch the opposite of a cold.”

The zipper on the flight jacket started at her waist.

“Never gave him one.” She shed it like armor. Her tank top was soaked through. *I probably reek.* If it bothered her, Annie didn’t show. She looked too annoyed.

“What?! How could you not?” She slid a cup across the driftwood table toward the postman.

She shrugged pale shoulders, tying the jacket around her waist.

“Never seemed necessary. Not like he knows mine.” The music was quiet, blended with the afternoon like whiskey around ice cubes. She glanced. A turntable. Retro. *Red.*

“*Not necessary.* Honestly.” A dollop of brown liquid poured from elbow height. It spun in the cup, trailing nutty steam. “There’s nothing more important than a name.”

“Maybe. But we have a working relationship.” It tasted sharp. Annie plunked in too many sugars. *Sweet but sad.*

The old woman settled in a worn chair, gray head balanced on her palm. *Her bracelets are plastic.* For the first time in the hour, she didn’t say

anything. The postman just sipped, eyes on the window. Outside, the worm played in the waves, his forklift-ended tail slashing at imagined fish.

“You look like a girl who works first,” she said across the teacup. If it was a stab, it drew blood.

“Do I?” *A girl.*

Amanda nodded, diagnosis dire.

“You do.”

The postman sat her cup on a stray newspaper.

“I like my job.”

“I believe you.”

“I do.”

“You said that.”

“It’s important.”

“It is.”

“It’s good work.”

“I imagine.”

“I like doing it.”

“Again, you said that.”

“It’s true.”

The two women sat, ankle deep in ugly silence.

The absence of speech illuminated the music, like invisible ink in front of a lamp.

Annie got up. She walked to the sitting room, too fast to hide her urgency.

Suddenly it was cut off, a third through its second half.

She returned slower. There was a weight to her steps. *Embarrassed.*

“Sorry. I just—” She refilled the postman’s cup. “I didn’t plan on bringing someone in today. Silly of me.” Her face was red. She smiled with her mouth. *She forgot. But she’s lying.*

“It’s okay,” the postman started. “I’m sorry for being rude.”

Annie frowned. “No, no, pea. I’m sorry I’ve—I’ve been the rude one. Just, you . . .”

She searched for the words, swirling her hand in the air. “You just. You have such an incredible job. But you . . . you seem . . .” She didn’t finish. The postman watched the steam coil off the rim of the mug. *Lost.*

The quiet returned, settling in the room like dust.

The dragon swept out its black wings and passed across the tiny island. The beat of its wings rattled the tin of the roof, quaking china in the cupboards and dislodging a book from the table. The postman listened to him land on the beach opposite; shattered shells jingled as they fell from his talons.

“If—” Annie began. She drummed her fingertips on the table. The postman watched her curiously. “If you, umm, wouldn’t mind . . .” The old woman continued. The postman finished her coffee, getting ready to leave. *Why do they always wanna talk? They just end up bating—*“I’d like you to deliver something for me.”

The courier stopped, settling back in her chair. *What?*

“A . . . delivery? To where?”

Amanda folded gray hair over her other ear. A blue shell dangled from it.

“Not far”—*her hands are shaking—*“just to Kingsbridge, south off the coast.” She mumbled, eyes on a drawer. The courier blinked. *That’s three damn days.*

“You could just . . . order by telegram; I’m sure someone would—ma’am, please.”

“It’s around here somewhere, just a minute, sorry,” Annie said, rooting around in the sitting room drawer. The postman just stood, peeking around the corner, trying to figure out how to say no. It felt wrong to enter the little room. *Like I’m intruding.*

The old woman returned with a thin letter in her hand; her fingers bit it like a lifeline. It was sealed in wax. *Red.*

“Here . . . I was going to—here.” She extended it, winded from her torrid search. Despite the grip, she leveled it at her like a gun, gesturing for her to take it.

“Ma’am, I—”

“Annie.”

“Amanda, I ca—I can’t take this. It’d cost way too much for something this small, and Kingsbridge is—”

“Please.”

“I—”

Amanda put her fingers around the courier’s glove and pulled away the leather. *Her hands are cold.*

Gently, she pried apart her fingers and slid the letter between them.

“Please miss . . . I—” Annie’s hands shook, still wrapped around hers. “It’s—it’s been too long, I’ve waited for . . . too long. I—” She bowed her head. “Please.”

The dragon crashed between the hissing waves.

“Why don’t you . . . send a boat? Or a telegram. I don’t want to steal from you . . . Ma’a—Amanda, you could—” She tried to unfurl her fingers but they wouldn’t listen.

“I don’t think . . . I don’t think I could. On my own. Out here,” she said to the ground.

“Ma’am, the price would be too much: I don’t want to put that on you.”

The old woman gripped tightly.

“I’ll pay. I’ll pay. Don’t worry. Please. It’s—” Water stained the paper. A drop. “It’s for someone who I hurt . . . a long, *long* time ago.”

*She’s . . . crying.*

The courier felt her eyes drift back to the letter. It didn’t feel right to leave yet. Just saying yes and ditching it . . . wouldn’t be . . .

“Why me?”

Another tear. She sniffed, wiping the snot on her sleeve. Her makeup ran. She exhaled, looking away somewhat, returning with a smile under wet eyes.

“You like music”—*sniff*—“don’t you?”

The courier turned red. *What does that have to—*

“No more than anybody else,” she lied.

Annie laughed.

“Liar. Well.” She took a step back, remembering herself. “The person that’s addressed to is quite the *moldy peach*. I think you’d get along. For starters.”

“But.”

“No’s not an answer.” She chirped between a sniff. “Besides . . . I think you really do like flying . . . but I think you’re scared to pick a direction.”

The dragon’s shadow passed over the house. His red eye peering inside. She looked back at it. Annie didn’t.

“I can’t—”

“I know what it feels like. And I know where it ends. I . . . I’ve been waiting . . . for myself to choose . . . to be brave for . . . *decades now*. I can’t die without mending what I broke. I can’t.”

The courier stared at the letter.

*A direction.*

“A musician?”

“A saxophonist, so sort of,” Annie said through a sweet smile. “At least in the stone age. It’s been a long time, and I doubt he’ll want to hear from me, but . . .”

“I understand.”

“No, pea. I’m sorry, but you don’t.” She shook her head and crossed her arms, wiping away another stray. “You don’t until you do. That’s why.”

The postman turned the letter over. Annie’s pretty line was stifled, tighter. The ink had faded but read clean.

*“Sorry I’m late.”*

“All right,” she said.

“Are you sure you don’t want anything? I’m really putting you out. I’m sorry—again.”

“It’s fine,” the courier said from behind her flight mask. She heaved with both arms. Pulling the dragon’s belts tight. He clicked his jaw. It made the cooper’s pop of a very heavy lid being shut very quickly. The ambient temperature spiked somehow higher. The postman kicked his haunch with her spiked boots. *No fussing.*

Climbing up into the saddle, she uncovered the barometer for a fifteenth check. Triple-fastened her belt to the three carabiner locks on its horn, harness, and stud. With leather fingers, she flicked the reflector over her goggles, basting the sunlit world in charcoal gray.

Annie stood a safe forty feet back from the fiery beast, who couldn't be bothered to acknowledge the old woman, much more preoccupied with the reins hooked to his crown. *Always whining.*

"Thank you!" she called up. The dragon eyed her sidelong, showing his full wingspan, casting the white beach in black shadow.

"It's nothing!" she shouted back. "And stand back!" *Nothing at all.*

Getting him off the ground required some force. Lifting herself off the seat, she lashed him with the thick leather tendrils. The dragon gave a hollow hiss, like a crocodile, before strutting forth on his saurian legs. She could feel the dip into the soft sand with each footfall, rising and falling twenty feet with each lunge. *Scared to pick a direction . . .*

The jerks were sharp, but experience kept her head level. She guided him along the beach, beads of warm water spitting up to her ears with each titanic splash. Angling her arms, he gained speed, waiting for her signal. Twisting the reins in her fists, the courier pulled them over her shoulder, then slashed them back, the wave of leather snapping against his temples. *Annie was right*, she found herself thinking.

Sparks flew from his maw as he lurched upward, barking in animal excitement. The first wingbeat was the hardest. Wings like mountains thrust downward, pressing his rider low. The blast parted the water, briefly unearthing pink corals and skittering crabs. The postman grunted, struggling against gravity and gale, mustering the dragon's head into position northward. She smiled, despite herself. The letter against her heart.

The world gave way as the rider spun her dragon into the wind. Banking left, she peered over the edge of his wings at the table of ocean miles below and at the tiny red speck on the white beach.

Madness struck like lightning. Looking forward, she watched her hands tighten to fists around the reins.

Whipping them to the right, she pulled hard under a cloud, her dragon plummeting in a doom dive.

She hiked her feet into the stirrups, locking forward like a jockey, as the ocean careered toward them both. Embers spun and danced over his crown and off her goggles as the blue world sped toward them over the screaming air. She screamed too, teeth tight, as it grew closer. *Pick a direction.*

*And closer. She was right.*

Before it opened like the mouth of a great blue giant, ready to swallow them both.

*She was right.*

In a harsh trio of commands, she banked, kicked, and pulled.

Her wings opened and then pulled tight as the world spun on its axis. The sea became a ceiling as they flew inverted over the surface of the ocean. Seawater parted overhead, forming rainbow vaults. She saw her eyes reflect back at her in the spaces between moments and eternity, before plummeting forward, lashing her dragon into full flight again, realigning them and separating from the water.

He gnashed and snapped his jaws, but she just laughed. And laughed.

*I do like to fly.*





*Horse in Barn Window*, Candace Bradbury-Carlin

# CANTERBURY AND OTHER TALES

**By Ken Weiss**

*The references are to the classics: Chaucer's Canterbury Tales; Boccaccio's Decameron, about friends taking turns telling stories while escaping the medieval plague in Florence, Italy; and to other epic tales*

Chaucer's troupe were on the trail  
To pay homage to a holy site  
Boccaccio's friends recount their tales  
While shunning plague on a posh estate

In each a set of friends regale  
Their tales, some bawdy, some laced straight  
Amusing are they, without fail  
As each one tells of others' fates

Turns are taken in each case  
As dreamy stories they relate

Of love and lust, and motives base  
And earned comeuppance's ill fate

And then there's Tasso to read through  
Don Quixote's valiant quest  
Ariosto's noble heroes, too  
King Arthur's knights and all the rest

These all are sets of tales long told  
With what seem lessons then well learned  
Yet morals known in times of old  
Seem now forgotten or even spurned

.





*Still Life with Empty Chair*, Anne Buchanan

# LOVE ON THE LINE

**By Steve Bernstein**

Happy birthday, sweetheart! It's Mom. I hope you have the best birthday ever, my most wonderful girl. Looking forward to celebrating this weekend. Oh, and a question: chocolate or vanilla? I forget which one you like.

Hi honey. I can't find that little metal watering can, the one from Aunt Sandy. Where did we put it after we dug out the tomato bed by the driveway? Love you, Mom.

Hi sweetheart, I know you're busy at work but I wanted to tell you . . . oh yes, yes, here it is. I was just looking at some old photos from when we went to Cape May. You were four and Michael was eight. Remember that photo of Sniffer digging a hole under Dad's beach chair until the hole caved in and Dad's chair collapsed? She did that every summer

and it was always Dad's chair. The good old days, right, sweetheart? Dad has been gone thirty-five years. Or is it thirty-six? Or maybe forty? He was way too young. He would be so proud of you and Michael. I miss him so much.

Hi honey! I guess you'll have to do the driving from now on. I just heard from the doctor. She called Motor Vehicles to take my license away. She says the accident caused my brain injury and the surgery will only go so far. She reminded me that it was lucky that nobody else got hurt. I'll stop fighting. I'm tired. Even the house feels like it's too much. Do you want my car?

Hi sweetheart. Louise wanted to join us for dinner. She has the apartment across the hall and stopped in to introduce herself when we were moving in the piano. I told her all about you. Louise asked if you are free for dinner Thursday night, that's vegetarian night. 6:00. I hope you can come! You'll like Louise. She moved here from Philly, too. Love you, Mom.

Hi sweetheart. It's so nice living closer to you. Apple picking was fun this morning. I hope you're going to make your famous apple pie with yours. Save me a piece!

The quilt is coming along nicely. Glad we changed the border color. I'm having a hard time lining up the squares. Maybe it's my glasses. It used to be so easy to line up the squares. Can't wait to see how it looks on your bed.

Sweetheart, did you see my sewing scissors, you know, the good ones? Hope you get out on your bike. Beautiful day! I think it just might be spring. No more snow for us!

Sorry to bother you, sweetheart, but I can't find my scissors for sewing. Do you have them?

Do you have my scissors? Call me.

Hi sweetheart. I waited for you in the dining hall. Weren't we supposed to have dinner tonight? Or was it Wednesday? Oh, well. We'll pick a new date. Miss you!

Thanks for the postcard with the two puppies sleeping together. Such cute little faces. I forgot you are away for, for, for work or something. Give Dad a big hug for me.

Hi sweetheart. I was waiting for you downstairs in the dining hall. I hope you're okay.

Hi sweetheart. I hope you're having a great day. I miss you. There's something I wanted to tell you . . . um, uh . . . I guess I forgot. Bye.

Sweetheart, did I miss my girl's birthday? It's this week, right?

I can't find Michael's phone number. Do you have it? Call me as soon as you can.

Hi honey. Do you think you can pick up Michael and come visit me soon? I haven't seen you in so long.

Sweetheart, I forgot Michael lives in Paris, doesn't he? Or is it Greece? Can't keep track anymore. Bye, sweetheart. I love you.

They are taking us for a little walk today. Wish you could come with us, sweetheart, but I know you're working. I can't find my sneakers; do you have them? Call me as soon as you can.

Louise is here and she really enjoyed having dinner with you. I didn't know you two knew each other. She thinks you're the greatest. And I do too!

Hi sweetheart, oh . . . hold on . . . hold on, someone's at the door. People are always coming to the door and asking questions. I don't know what they want.

I'm ready for our walk. When are you coming? Where is my jacket?  
Do you have my sneakers?

Hello? Hello? Who's calling, please? Who's calling? Who's there?  
Who is it?

Hi sweetheart . . . Oh, never mind.

Hi Brenda, this is Annabelle from Arbor Manor Assisted Living. I'm your mother's weekend CNA. We met last weekend at the Sunday

concert. Anyway, I noticed your mother trying to call you so I dialed the number for her. I'll put her on. Just a sec. Mrs. Gomez, your daughter's not home, but you can leave her a message . . . Oh, thank you, thank you, uh, uh, Andrea, thank you . . . Hi sweetheart. Are you there? How are you? There's nothing to do here. It's boring. I miss you. Come see me. This is Mom.

Hi Brenda, Maureen here, your mother's night nurse at Country Life Hospice. She's especially agitated tonight. She packed her suitcase and is waiting for your father to pick her up. She's looking for her passport and her license. She says it's time. I think it would be a good idea for you to come over.

Hello Brenda, this is Stephanie from Country Life Hospice. We met when we did the paperwork for your mother's room. Can you call me as soon as you get this message? It's important. I know it's late, but please call me as soon as you get this message, no matter what time. It's about your mother.



*Muster Field Farm*, Lorraine Hart



*Waiting for the Tide*, Karen Guy



*Untitled, Allison Kostiuk*

# A SMELL SAVORED

**By Phoebe Hynes**

I don't change my sheets for days  
after you visit.

My squished hands guide a lazy version of my body to  
the bed that invites me to crawl on top of your dry sweat.  
My torso sprawls into the dream of lovemaking transpired.  
I like the nest that we created, lounging  
against a mattress I pushed in the corner.  
T-shirts slouched into the crevices against the wall,  
And my five pillows circling  
our old tangled limbs.

Lust is a shield,  
A disguise of telling your eyes where to look.  
Eyelashes against eyelashes.  
Your iris seized a blanket  
And buried a dilated pupil underneath.  
This is the facade of being naked.  
You're still wearing skin.  
A bed will not preserve sensuality,  
But my quilt will hold my body together.  
Until I find the pants I threw across the carpet.

# RECOILING THE AUDIBLE AND TANGIBLE

**By Phoebe Hynes**

When the words left your mouth  
They were smooth like curved poems.  
There was texture in your sounds,  
A bend and a loop deflecting the tone.  
They waited to find the space and make an escape  
from the crevice under your tongue.  
Patience allowed for the lyrics to unfold,  
Sometimes giggling in between the *ums* and the *ahs*.  
Your laugh was round.  
Often I'd find it in my coat pocket,  
bunched up,  
after the warm fabric had been pressed in the clementine chair.  
You know the one,  
relaxed in your living room until last May.  
I'd hold it in my hand like the earrings I clutched  
after forgetting them time after time on your nightstand.  
I'd fidget with it in palms, crumpled-receipt style.  
Hidden crunches swooning in my hand  
And a muffled *baba* coming from a fist.

# APRIL

**By Phoebe Hynes**

Have your feet touched the mud lately?

It wasn't a choice of mine, but it crept into my shoes the  
weekend it wouldn't stop raining.

My boots were immersed in quicksand.

I've tried picking it off, and they're still dusted in clay.

My feet made a good mold.

It's almost time for them to touch grass.

I want my toes taken by new growth of thick green strands,  
Until I am pulled into the dirt.

And so,

I can listen to the wisdom of silt and loam.

# MY FEET TOUCHED DUST TODAY

**By Phoebe Hynes**

My feet touched dust today  
Toes dug into the panels of wood in my new room,  
While dancing to Ifé and learning about the capabilities of my legs.  
They unravel and grapple with the strokes of dirt lingering on the  
floorboards.  
UMBO projects through a speaker.  
Listening and moving,  
A body understands truth.  
It makes its way to the ground and asks the splinters why they need  
to reach the surface.  
They whisper “come down”  
I inch closer,  
And listen to them shout  
“Bring it back round.”  
So I turn.  
So I twist.  
And I listen for the lyric “drop it to the sound”  
And I do.

# TODAY THE SUN WILL RAIN

**By Phoebe Hynes**

Swooning red drops,  
Reigning from where you could be.  
What is it like to sit on a hot star?  
Is it nice?  
I imagine it's like the core of the Earth.  
Which I've been to of course.  
Hiked back and forth through a force.  
Many times.  
Thinking of you.  
We haven't met yet.  
But I think it will be warm.  
A pool of orange from below



*Buzzing*, Candace Bradbury-Carlin

# THE FIRST TIME SHE CAME OVER

by Adam Giordano

A train horn sounded in the distance.

*That has to be two or three miles away. And how have I not noticed it before?  
How is that possible?*

He stood to go to the refrigerator but immediately sat back down.

*How come I can't hear her making any noise in there? Because she's sitting  
down to pee, that's why, dummy.*

The horn sounded again. He looked at the clock on the microwave.

*Holy shit, that might be Trevor and Pete's train. But don't they usually take  
the 5:17? Or is it the 4:17? Shit, shit, shit, I have to get her out of here. If they walk*

*in and I'm sitting here at the kitchen table with Alison Greinke, trying to act all suave-like? There's no way. I gotta fix that fucking clock. That blinking is driving me nuts.*

His cereal bowl from the previous night was still sitting beside the sink. A fat black fly landed on the rim and began rubbing its front legs together.

*Look at this place. This is no good. This is so not good.*

At the sound of the toilet flushing, he became very still.

The bathroom was cleaner than she expected it to be. She peeked inside the medicine cabinet. Nothing surprising. A mangled tube of toothpaste. Some hydrogen peroxide. A three-pack of contact lens solution.

Also, a bottle of prescription pills. She wondered whose they were and what they were for. She began to reach for them.

*Oh my god, what am I doing?*

She carefully closed the cabinet door. The mirror was slightly speckled with toothpaste.

*"You have beautiful eyes." Fuck that. This is so stupid. I'm gonna tell him I have to go. Who cares?*

She walked over to the toilet and gently lowered the seat and lid at the same time. She sat down, counted to thirty, and flushed.

As she walked into the kitchen, he looked up at her and smiled.

"Can I get you anything?" he asked. "Something to drink?"

"Billy, do you really think I have beautiful eyes or do you just want to fuck me?"

"Whoa. Jesus. Um . . . that's a crazy drink order."

"I'm sorry, I have to go." She started for the door.

"No, no, Alison. Please stay. Please."

She stopped.

“Please don’t go. Honestly. I really want to talk to you.”

He could hear her breathing. And the fly buzzing around the kitchen.

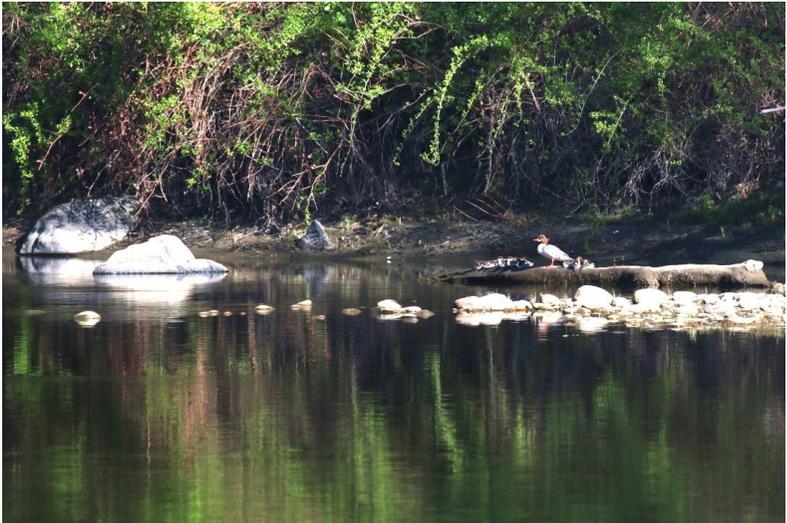
“I’ve been in love with you since seventh grade.”

She turned around slowly with a look that said, I will kill you.

He thought to himself, *I will always remember this moment.*



*Green River Dam, Russ Higgins*



*Common Megansers*, Cheryl Patterson

# CONTRIBUTORS



Most writers don't have a master plumber's license and a master's degree. **Steve Bernstein** has both. Steve is a humane educator, special education teacher, animal-rights activist, and mentor to at-risk teens. In 2017 he self-published his memoir, *Stories from the Stoop*. [www.stevebernsteinauthor.com](http://www.stevebernsteinauthor.com)

It is crucial for **Candace Bradbury-Carlin** to use materials that might normally be discarded in her art. The overlooked, the orphaned, the flung bits — these are her materials. What humbly crosses her path. She tries not to work with the new but what is around her, used but unsung. Candace is also a library director and thinks libraries can save the world. She lives in South Deerfield with her husband and son



**Russell Bradbury-Carlin** is a resident of South Deerfield along with his wife and son. He is the executive director of Youth Services in Brattleboro, VT. He writes and takes photographs part time.

**Beatrice Brynda** is an eighteen-year-old from Deerfield, Massachusetts, and a recent graduate of Stoneleigh Burnham School. This is her first time being published outside of school, and she is excited to continue writing in college



**Anne Buchanan** grew up in Greenfield but moved away from the area after graduating from UMass. She worked in genetics and epidemiology at Penn State for many years and started to draw and paint after she retired. Buchanan and her husband moved to South Deerfield in February, just before everything shut down. They had just gotten their library cards and look forward to getting back to the library when



**Kieran Dowd** (FRS '21) is an aspiring astrobiologist who lives in Greenfield with their parents and cats. When they're not in school or keeping an eye on said cats, they enjoy taking hikes, playing the violin, writing, and drawing. They can usually be found getting way too attached to various fictional characters or rambling about their latest science-related readings.

In late March, **Janna Essig** set about taking daily walks with her daughter and eight-month-old granddaughter as a source of handling the dramatic changes in the world and in her life. She began to see the intensity of nature and how the image of this wildness gave her a space in her mind of limitless freedom. Essig has her fine arts degree and master's in education with a focus on creativity. For many years she has belonged to a great group of Amherst artists.



**Leo Franceschi** is 16 years old and an upcoming junior at Frontier Regional High School. He occasionally writes poetry in his free time, which he has very little of because he's involved in activism, theater, and playing trumpet in the school band.

**Winston Galt** is an artist from Conway, Massachusetts. He is an avid writer of poetry and fiction, with an interest in the connections formed between people. A biologist by education, he places as much of his own interest in the living world into his work as he can, moved by a desire to share his curiosity with others. A student of history and quiet moments, he draws from nature and designs board games in his free time.

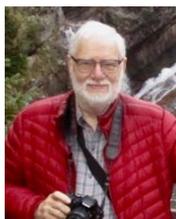


**Adam Giordano** lives mainly in Brooklyn, NY, though he is a frequent visitor to and likely future resident of Deerfield. He is a graduate of the Middlebury Bread Loaf School of English.



**Miss K** is a name given to Karen Guy by a dear friend who passed away, and it is much more than a name. It has become a symbol with which she signs all of her work, and it reminds her to live and cherish every moment. In that spirit she tries to capture the world around her in whatever way possible. Sometimes that means she is doing some quick sketches at a café or it may mean she is painting a plein air on a mountain. Each day Miss K looks for new ways to capture the world around her.

**Lorraine Hart**, retired partner of Hart & Patterson Financial Group in Amherst, has recently moved to South Deerfield from Conway. She enjoys plein air painting around New England and beyond.



**Russ Higgins** is a retired English teacher and local photographer. He specializes in taking pictures of Franklin County towns.

**Tim Hilchey** came to Franklin County in 1981 as a college intern reporter. He worked in Greenfield and Worcester before joining the *New York Times* in 1990. He and his wife moved to Deerfield when he retired in 2015.



**Julia Hioe** is 16 years old and attends Deerfield Academy. She is a soccer and softball player as well as a swimmer. Recently she's been passing the time by experimenting with different art media and techniques at home but can't wait to get back to the studio!



**Phoebe Hynes** is an artist based in Western MA. Look for their work in Amherst's *Jabberwocky* English journal and Z Publishing house's 2019 Emerging Poet Series: Massachusetts. They have spent time dabbling in various facets of education, where they work as an environmental educator for the state parks and a paraprofessional in public schools. They are a person who cannot seem to find comfort in the pursuit of only one passion.

**Allison Kostiuk** is a 13-year-old girl from Deerfield. She has taken interest in the arts from a young age. She loves all forms of art and hopes to begin getting her own artwork out in the public. This summer she is working on improving her techniques and also trying new forms of art to really expand her horizons.



**Rebecca Lang** writes that due to the lockdown, she recently got back into drawing. It started with listening to Tony Silva's Spanish Guitar Live at Five on Facebook. She picked up a pen and began meditative doodling. This was a way to be present in the moment and tune out the news. Lang holds a BFA in painting from UMass, but she's an illustrator at heart.

**Dorothy Milne** taught English at Bement School for many years and always loved encouraging her students in their poetry writing. She was also a camp director and coach for decades. In her retirement she enjoys reading, swimming, knitting, and cooking.



**Cheryl A. Patterson** has recently moved back to her hometown of South Deerfield. She spends her early morning hours out with her camera capturing wildlife and nature scenes. Patterson is a retired partner of Hart & Patterson Financial Group of Amherst.



**Erika Higgins Ross** is a licensed marriage and family therapist, activist, and writer who has lived in Deerfield for the past seven years after long stints in New York City and Los Angeles. Tilton Library is one of her favorite places to sit and think and write.

**Pat Ryan**, formerly an editor and feature writer in the Culture Department of the *New York Times*, is now retired and firmly rooted in Deerfield, where she has discovered inspiration for stories that mingle nature's caprices with community character.



**Ken Weiss** recently retired as a professor of anthropology and genetics at Penn State University and moved to this area, where his wife, Anne, grew up. Writing verse is an interest he now has time for—more expressive than lab research and far more enjoyable than grading exams!



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