



The Paragon Journal
Issue 18 - October 2019

The Paragon Journal

A Journal of Creative Arts

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The Paragon Journal: A Journal of Creative Arts -- October 2019
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The Paragon Journal

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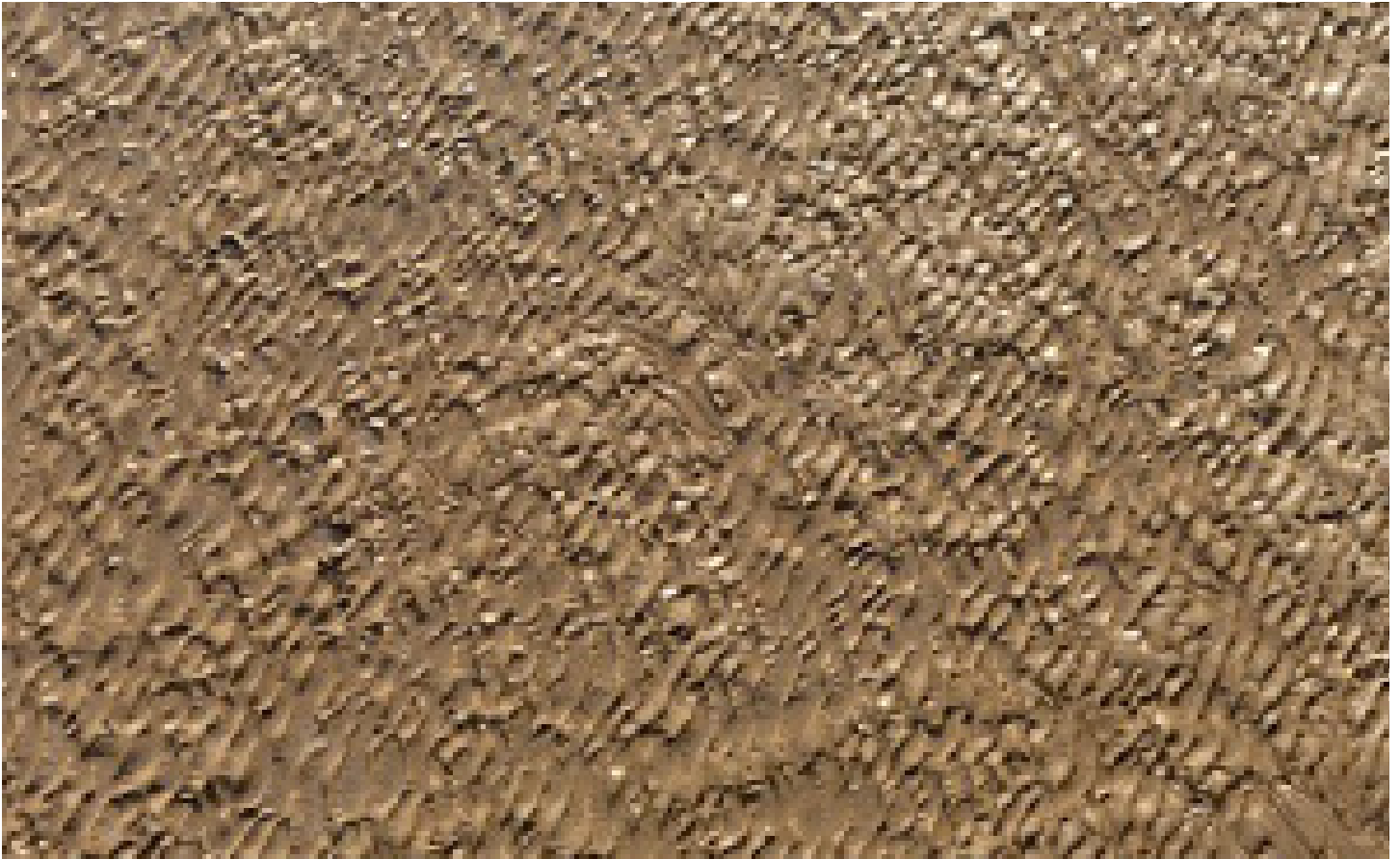
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Puddles in the Future

the snow, both white and dirty (not yet), falls
into the street
around me
surround me
with your cold warmth.

the snow, both dirty and white (not anymore), rests
on my sneakers
 soul
threatening to melt
 soak
and force me to confront my demons
 change my socks

Language Sickness

I knock on metal and plastic
like a statistic in the face
of death defying stunts.

I pound away at pounds
and ounces and fluid ounces
of silicon and wire
and water-logged mechanics,

hoping that words
nay, characters
spell for me what my mind
has decided is a math problem.

I slide gracefully like a ballerina
with three broken legs
and a concussed heart
as I swear I will never share again

yet still equations leak out
of the compressed barrel
between my ribs,

I want to conquer words,
to lord language

yet I retain a slave to syllables
and find myself alliterating
despite my best intentions

I become Temujin,
Khan of Khans,

yet I lose battles
and fall to ideas
that other people have injected in me
whether they knew they were holding the needle.

The words explode in milliseconds
but time slows down anyways
to let each letter burst
at its own tempo
with color and panache
while I try to resist
and still get covered in paint
in entropy's cruel dance.



Icarus in the Moment Before He Fell

I stare into the eyes
back into me

that stare
expectantly

and I just

crash.

I burn myself and the world
with the knowledge that my failures
are to be communally shared

that inheritances is a curse
not a blessing.

There is a war
tapestry that rests

an uneasy
on its own laurels

in my gut
the pit of my

stomach
soul

that sings
melodious? and sweet?
they rot the teeth
pathetic

cacophonies
too saccharine

little

shit

splash.

Halation

It goes like this,
if two arrows can intersect
& two ovals can overlap then a
man can have sex with a man &
a woman can have sex with a woman.
In case they will never hear,
we'll keep telling them
it's called sexuality not fundamentalism.
Ultimately, isn't a relationship a relationship?
A cannon where lovers are catapulted.
What's up with the specifications?
What's wrong with having alterations?
I wonder if the first to rock the boat
was a man wearing a queen's gown
or a woman sporting a king's crown or simply—
a romance that wore the rainbow cape.

Breast 2 Breast

Splotches of razor-like objects spray-painted
with orange zest, cinnamon roll spice,
and a jasmine odyssey,
this is the vision of this graffiti girl.

This girl who is the only work of art
in a neighborhood of misconceptions and preconceptions,
in a neighborhood of
wishy-washiers
and
adult toddlers.

This graffiti girl is the Amor
that cannot be bought in any store,
this girl is not a perverse lore
not a castoff from a pimp's war,
but she is the description of relationship
the verb to marriage
the meaning to an adopted child
in a baby carriage.

This graffiti girl who is around
yellow lines that make roads
and crosses that make avenues,
around boxes that make homes
and unrefined shapes that make
the backdrop the norm
she remains there,
the whistle.

The calming whistle
to her lover's 8 ounce organ that
is as sharp as a thistle.

Over Mary's Shoulder

Brian sat with his wife, Mary, on the worn kitschy love bench of their hotel-room balcony. Together they watched the evening melee unfold in the large square stretched out before them. Locals dashed from A to B; side-stepping the easy-go-here-and-there flip-flopping tourists. Traffic snarled and argued. Hawkers competed with the deluge of impatient engine revs, moped beeps and a continuous blare of up-beat Latin passion. This cacophonous riot of life and living was emblematic of the exotic land Brian had chosen to interrupt the drudgery of their everyday non-existence back home.

Brian had had to twist Mary's arm to come here. Her preference had been to go to the same place they always went to. When she began to recite the menu of her favourite restaurant and plan which evenings they would go there, Brian had balked at the idea. He managed to convince Mary to try this new place he had heard of. He promised her it'd be nice. It'd be different, sure, but not too different.

So there they were. A drink on the balcony, settling into the last night of their holiday.

Brian knew the inevitable chat about the homeward plan was almost upon them. It was in the air, circling; ready to land. He took a long swig from his beer bottle.

'When we arrive in tomorrow we should go straight to my Mam,' said Mary. 'She'd love to catch-up.'

Here we go. He tilted his head backwards and drained the bottle.

'Maybe it's best to go straight home?' he said, as calm as he could muster. 'The unpacking. You know?' A legitimate reason was essential.

'Why?' said Mary. She put down her wine glass. 'Do you not want to see her?'

Obviously not legitimate enough. He scolded himself for being so foolish. Should have known better.

'No, no it's fine. We should go see her. I'd like to,' he said, in vain. He knew what was coming next.

'I can't believe you don't want to see her,' said Mary, her eyes searching. 'She really likes you, you know that?'

Over Mary's shoulder, his gaze fell on the solitary figure loitering outside the Happy time bar. It was on one of the quieter side streets, off the main square. Each evening around this time she took her position and did her thing. And Brian watched.

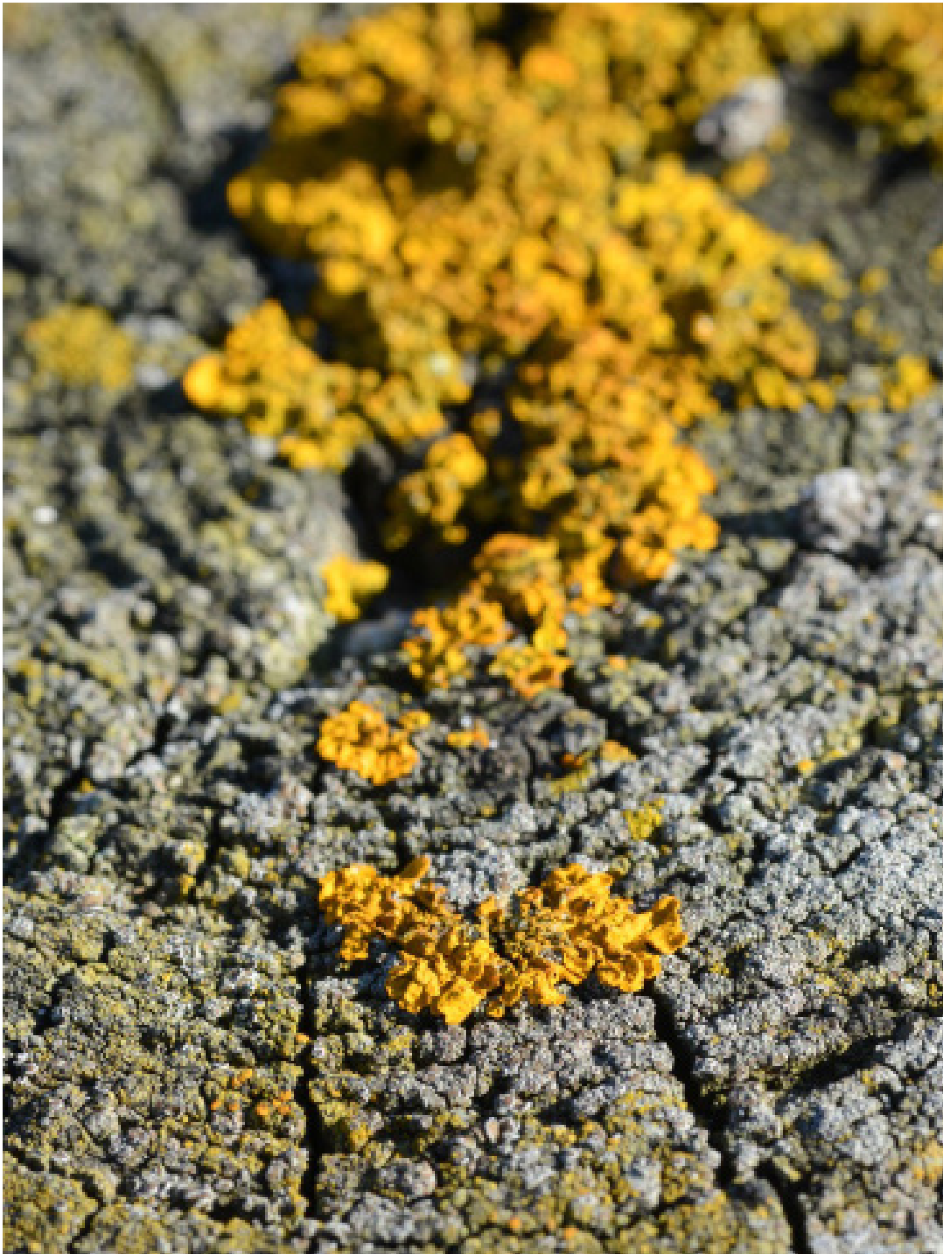
'I know,' is all he said. Better to end an argument before it began.

'She gets lonely, Brian. She needs us.'

He often thought about doing it. To go down there. He'd ensure his stroll was slow enough to make it obvious. They'd make eye contact and she'd say something like, "hi baby, do you want to come inside with me?" Something like that. Cheesy, sure. But playful, exciting and oh so tempting.

'You're right, Mary. I know she needs us.'

He'd let her lead him towards the back of the bar. They'd go hand-in-hand into an inconspicuous room. A bed being its centerpiece. She'd close the door behind them. What they did



together would be a private affair. Nobody else would know.

'Great so,' said Mary. 'We'll stop by for a chat when we arrive in tomorrow. She'll love to hear all about this weird place you choose for our holiday. While we're there you can assemble the book shelf she ordered. It's been lying around in its box for ages.'

The bed would be in the shape of a heart. The walls would be crimson. And there'd be a mirror on the ceiling. Before they went any further, she'd let him know about her special thing. Was that ok for him? He'd say he knew. He knew all about it.

Perfect, he'd say. It was perfect.

'Does she have an allen key?' said Brian. The view was unhindered, if she stayed exactly where she was.

'What's that?'

After some preliminary cuddles and kisses, she'd tell him to roll over onto his front. "Get on your hands and knees," is what she'd say. Firm. Dominant. He'd do it. It's what he wanted. There'd be a quiet moment while she got in position. He'd use it to relax himself. And to prepare.

'It's a long metal shaft,' he said. 'I need it to screw the thing together.'

He'd submit to her. Completely. It'd be a new experience for him. Something forbidden. Risky. She'd thrust away at him. Over and over again. Right to the end.

'I'll ask her.'

Afterwards, they'd settle down on the heart shaped bed together. The sheets dank with their sweat. That post coital whiff. She'd snuggle up beside him. Her tiger-stripe gaze satiated. Nostrils flared. Only then would he truly open up to her. He'd ask her what part of Africa did she come from. She'd reply with some exotic sounding place he'd never heard of. A distant land. Harsh and mysterious.

'Yeah, ask her.'

She'd run her claw down his chest and make circles on his belly. She'd be the beast toying with her prey.

'Great. Oh I can't wait to see her. It's going to be so much fun,' said Mary.

'Yeah. Fun,' said Brian, still looking over her shoulder. He'd tell her that it wasn't like Mary was a bad person or anything. It wasn't like he wanted to leave her. Not really anyway. It wasn't her. No, it was . . . it was him. He needed something different. Some excitement. His dark slayer of the humdrum would tell him not to worry. "It's ok, baby," she'd say. "I understand."

Her fingers would wander down past his navel. "It's okay," she'd say again. He didn't have to explain.

He closed his eyes.

The Surprise Party (Based on a true story)

Barbara knifes the butter into the bowl. Vanilla extract next. Then powdered sugar from the ceramic jar with the rooster on it. Satisfied, she picks up the egg beater and cranks away, adding milk from the jug as she goes.

“Is that frosting?” hollers Bobby, as he pitter-patters into the kitchen.

“Why, yes it is.” She hands him the beater for a taste. “Don’t spin the knob like last time.”

Bobby traces the bloom of metal with his tongue, ferreting out the good stuff, sapid and sweet. He turns to his sister, Diane, in her baby chair, and gives her a lick, too. Uh-oh. He drips some onto his corduroys and onto the floor.

“Okay, okay, we’ll save the rest for tonight.” Barbara recovers the kitchen tool and sets it in the sink.

“But Tarzan wants some,” Bobby pleads.

“Tarzan can wait if you can wait.”

“But, I can’t.”

At the sound of Tarzan’s name, or the smell of food, the mongrel pup ambles into the room and stands poised like a penguin, the coat on his chest to match.

“Come on, boy.” Bobby leads him out and up the stairs. They make a circuit of the small farmhouse while he performs Tarzan’s trademark yell, the dog barking right along with him.

Back to work, Barbara lifts the cake off the four-legged stove, and, nice and cool, sets it on the turntable. The spatula her brush, she paints the canvas with concentric rings, then hugs the sides, as the easel goes round in a circle. Now comes the coup de grâce; colored food dye. She measures two teaspoons into the bowl, mixes the batch, then pulls out the piping bag. Carefully, she slides the flower nail to the bottom, where it lands snug—and on the first try!

The bag spoon-loaded with frosting, she deftly adorns the cake with festoons, a pastry Picasso in her Blue Period. No one died to make her feel blue lately, but she did fight a case of Quinsy sore throat. Doctor Maggio came by with a shot of penicillin. It forced her into bed for a week, a real drag, especially during the holidays, so she’s glad to be up and moving around again. The only thing she laments is that she missed all the fun.

Suddenly Diane starts to cry, either from the ruckus or the sugar, but a Barbara determined keeps on squeezing, to finish another rose.

“Looks good,” a voice speaks into her ear.

Barbara jumps. The voice is Jim’s.

Her dress floats as she spins and whacks his bottom with the piping bag. Postcards fall from the big white safe that is the fridge. Diane laughs.

“I hate when people sneak up on me,” she says.

“It was too easy.” Jim snickers, and grabs her wrist.

He kisses her, and steps back, his arms built from throwing hay bales, hidden in a suit for selling life insurance.

She holds her heart, still fit from her swimming days. “No more surprises.”

Quickly, she changes the subject, as she doesn’t want to give away the great secret. He’s

turned 30 today, and she plans to make it count by throwing a huge party.

“I didn’t even hear the car pull in!” she squeals.

“Told you she purrs like a lamb.” He picks up a card from his nieces and tacks it to the fridge with a magnet strip: *Merry Christmas 1948!*

“Between that and the baby crying,” Barbara explains, lifting up Diane, “I couldn’t hear a thing.”

Tarzan scampers in to say hello.

Jim sets the briefcase on the table with his Prudential papers inside and casts off his hat.

“How was work?” Barbara moves the case to the counter. “Isn’t Murray taking you out for a couple drinks at the bowling hall?”

“Oh, that’s right.” He rubs his cheek. “5 p.m. Better not cancel. In three days, I’ll be taking him for drinks.”

“And me, in four,” she says.

“At least with you we have plenty to talk about.”

“You can talk about tractors.”

“Murray doesn’t know a tractor from trachea.”

“Maybe he does from the war. You never know.”

The doorbell rings, averting any interrogation.

“That’s him!” Barbara plunks the hat back on Jim’s head.

“So fast to get rid of me.”

She kisses him goodbye with Diane on her hip. “Don’t want to keep my brother-in-law waiting.”

Jim turns about, and there Murray is at the kitchen door, broad chin, cropped hair, wire frame glasses; can’t miss him. He greets Jim with a handshake and Tarzan with a scratch on the head. Tarzan greets Murray with slobber. Barbara, with a baby and a mess on her apron, allows Murray to settle for a side-hug. When the greetings end, the partings begin. Murray gives Barbara a knowing glance, pats Jim on the back, and guides him out to the driveway.

Sun glints off the snow. Words comingle on the back step and disband. Tarzan whimpers and, looking for more excitement, goes off to find Bobby, probably upstairs playing Lincoln Logs. While Tarzan goes up the stairs, Barbara walks past them, making the short trip to the living room in the front of the house to deposit Diane in her bassinet. Soon, through the windowpane, she sees Jim and Murray cruise by in...their Ford coupe? Jim must have insisted on taking the family car to show off the wheels. It’s okay. Instead of Murray driving in circles, she’ll have to rely on him talking in circles. She has till 8.

Progressing into her Rose Period, she returns to the cake and dollops on the flowers. Arms folded, she admires her work, then moves like her actions were a recipe. Toss bag in sink. Set oven to 350. Open drawer. Silverware on table. Unlock cabinet. Set fancy plates. Remove prepped ham from fridge. Place tray in oven. Turn on exhaust fan.

The dial on the clock reads 5:30. The doorbell chimes. The first guest arrives, her mother Blanche, to help steam vegetables. Blanche is Barbara’s middle name. She hates the name Blanche, but she likes her mother, even if she does get in the way sometimes.

Barbara, being one of seven children from the St. James clan, and Jim, one of five from the Bauman’s, expects a madhouse. Cars file in within the hour. They park behind the cow barn

next to the big, blue farmhouse across the street, owned by Jim's parents, and well out of sight from their little white house on this side. A 30th birthday only comes once in a lifetime, and she can't have anyone flubbing it up.

By 6:30, the house fills with the chatter of loved ones, the aroma of ham, and the songs of Al Jolson, relegated to background music until Count Basie comes on with "Richard, Open the Door," which everyone takes full advantage of in telling her brother, Richard, to open the door whenever a new guest rings or knocks.

7:30. Diane, asleep in Nana's arms, is placed upstairs in her crib, while Bobby plays Monopoly with his uncles in the living room, marching the lantern around the board. He treats it more like a race than a game of finance, so it's hard to say who's winning. Over in the kitchen, the table is laid with shrimp and crackers and Lorna Doones. A buzzer dings, and the oven, aglow, releases the ham, glazed bright in golden honey. Compliments go up from around the house accompanied by the clinking of beers. Barbara punctures the bronze skin with a meat thermometer shaped like a stop sign. The red rises to 150 degrees, right at the spot marked *Tender Ham*. What a relief!

Any residual stress evaporates from her body. But, in case she missed a spot, Barbara kicks off her shoes, pops a Viceroy in her mouth, and flicks flint. She exhales the blue smoke, hit by one of those strange moments where time grinds to a halt, a moment of self-awareness, seeing all of these faces, knowing they were brought together because she had gone on a blind double-date to a dance in the city, disliked her man, and asked her friend, Jane, if it wouldn't be too much trouble if they could switch. She smiles to herself, wondering what Jim has planned for her birthday in 4 days. She'll be 25, and it only happens once in a lifetime after all.

"Barbara, dear, it's a quarter to 8." Blanche rouses her from the daydream.

The phone chimes. Richard answers.

"Murray says they're heading back now," he informs with a click.

Barbara stubs the butt, and leaps from the chair. "Places everyone! Places! Kill lights! Crowd into the kitchen! Don't shout surprise until they're through the door!"

The waves in her hair flutter up and down as she runs.

Laughter dies to murmurs dies to silence. Packed in, the family forms a semi-circle in the kitchen, the door surrounded, blurred in darkness. Barbara takes position by the light switch, where she waits, and where patience grows to pain. The Bakelite radio ticks solitary above the stove. Ten minutes pass in quietude.

Finally, a car grumbles up the street. High-beams shine into the house, filling the kitchen with light and shadow. The images of her siblings flicker and wink out. Murray must be pulling in behind his Chrysler. Two metallic thuds rattles the windows from outside. Crunching then sounds from the snow on the footpath. Swiftly, a pair of shoes mount the back step, and a pair of hands tug on the storm door.

"Get ready," Barbara whispers.

Tarzan growls.

Bobby whispers, "Shhhh."

The brass knob slowly rotates.

Someone says, "Richard, open the door," which is scolded with another shush.

But open the door does.

The Mimes and Mummers Convention

As the lights come up, MIGUEL MICHELE, a mime in traditional whiteface make-up, gloves and black bodysuit stands center stage. He stands there and waits. Not being able to talk (he's a mime after all) he just stands there, a bit awkwardly, and waits. Finally, LANNY TOTTENBERG enters and crosses to a lectern at left. LANNY addresses the audience.

LANNY

I'm sorry I'm late. Have you all had a chance to get acquainted?

(Realizing the absurdity of the comment)

Anyway...

(Finding some composure)

Good evening and welcome to the Greater North-American Mimes and Mummers Convention and today's forum on the state of the art. With us is Miguel Michele, international mime artist, who will be presenting his essay, "An Appeal for Acceptance." I'm Lanny Tottenberg - I'll be translating.

(MIGUEL begins to act out his essay. As he does, LANNY translates his actions into words.)

"'An Appeal for Acceptance' by Miguel Michele, mime. Why is it when writers of movies and television shows need a quick, cheap, mindless laugh they often interject a mime? What's funny about a man in a box - trapped with seemingly no way to escape? Is that funny? Is claustrophobia funny? Or else they place the poor mime outside in a storm - trying desperately to make his way home while pitted against the elements of nature. Is that funny? Do you often find yourself laughing at people trapped out-doors in a hurricane?"

"Since our heyday of the silent film era during the 1920s, the mime has fallen from grace and now appears in the eyes of society little better than a circus clown. Even the word itself - mime - brings about titters of laughter from most every sector of the audience. Over the years it's taken on an almost derogatory connotation - 'You scrawny little mime!' 'What are you, some sort of mime?!' 'Mime this!' Some might even call it a slur. As a result, I suggest we no longer refer to ourselves as the lowly mime, but rather enjoy a re-christening and call ourselves 'mimics,' 'mirrors,' or even 'apers.'"

“I often ask myself, ‘Why must I always wear white-face? Why am I forced to hide behind this everyman exterior? Must I always be you – can I never be me?’ And as far as the body-suit goes, can’t it come in any other color? Cannot a mime walk proudly on stage in yellow or green? Are rainbow suspenders *déclassé*? Change is what will sustain our art form! Otherwise, our whole industry will go to the Easter Bunny.”

(LANNY has clearly misinterpreted. MIGUEL looks at him sternly then repeats the movement which has one hand representing devil horns and the other holding a basket.)

Oh, I’m sorry – “go to Hell in a hand basket.”

(MIGUEL continues)

“I have a reoccurring nightmare in which millions of mimes are wandering the streets aimlessly, so beaten-down by society, they’ve become too weak to gesture a single plea for help. I have awoken in a cold sweat time and time again as this nightmare has driven me to the brink of insanity.

“This is why I’m suggesting that today we come together and unite; birds of a feather must stick together. We must boycott these writers and their juvenile scripts until they agree to show mimes in a more positive light.

“It’s time we stand up for ourselves! Let us no longer be the butt of jokes but rather the joke-makers! Let us no longer languish at the bottom of the pecking order, but rather be the pecker! We must cease all miming until we get the respect we deserve!”

(Suddenly, from within the audience, MARCHELE MIZELLE, another mime in traditional mime-wear, stands up, outraged by what she’s been hearing. She mimes her anger and frustration emphatically. Her interpreter, LUCY THOREAU, caught off guard, works frantically to keep up with her.)

LUCY

“What the hell are you talking about!?”

(To the audience)

I’m sorry, folks. I’m simply interpreting. This is world-renown mime artist MarcheLe Mizelle. I’m Lucy Thoreau - I’ll be translating.

(As MARCHELE begins to mime, she makes her way up on stage. LUCY eventually follows)

LUCY

“You’re insane, Miguel Michele! Insane!”

(MIGUEL responds)

LANNY

“Don’t beat around the bush -- tell me how you really feel.”

(MARCHELE begins to respond. LANNY stops her)

Um... he meant that rhetorically.

(MARCHELE continues)

LUCY

“I say if a writer wants to use a mime for a laugh, let him! Are you trying to take away what little work we get nowadays? Would you rather we return to plying our trade on street-corners -- climbing ladders and walking in one place -- all for the handful of coins only sympathetic ex-mimes toss into your hat?

“Your call for a boycott will set our trade back hundreds of years. Be happy writers are using us at all. Or else there’d be nothing for us but self-imposed exile -- gathering in basements to mime for each other.

“No, Miguel, never will I see us retreat into the shadows as my parents once did just to share a few soundless moments. We mimes will rise again in the hearts of the public, but it will take time and perserverance -- not cowardly retreat. You can’t throw the baby out with the bathwater; we must continue to take what little work we’re offered. Don’t you see, once we’re no longer integrated into society -- even as the butt of jokes -- we’ll be forgotten. Out of sight, out of mime.”

“And it’s not just the mimes and mummers, Miguel, but all those who depend on our trade: the white makeup industry, the black spandex manufactures, the hearing aid salesman -- who follow us from theatre to theatre preting on the unexpected to believe they’ve suddenly gone deaf after seeing our shows. And what about the little mimes? How do we explain to them that their art form is passe and has no sustainable means for generating a living wage? We must take whateer work we get!

(MIGUEL’s blood begins to boil and he mimes his anger)

LANNY

“What prostitute of the mimic arts comes before me? Willing to mime for any old birthday party or bar mitzvah that comes along. Have you no pride? Are you willing to be confined to a box or

or lean on a shelf for a few bucks and a slice of cake?”

(MARCHELE responds)

LUCY

I too have experienced the bigotry of the anti-mime movement in this country, and believe you me they're a fierce and angry bunch.”

(MIGUEL mimes in response)

LANNY

(To MIGUEL)

I'm sorry, I missed that.

(MIGUEL repeats the series of movements)

Oh, I see. Yeah, I couldn't agree more.

(Realizing he hasn't interpreted for the audience)

Oh, I'm sorry. One more time, please, Miguel?

(MIGUEL repeats the series of movements; LANNY interprets)

“Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned.”

LUCY

“It's more than scorn, Miguel, it's personal; my brother, Manuel Mizelle, who, after miming for the local stagehand's union banquet, was stoned to death by a mob of angry sound technicians. Still, I refuse to be intimidated by those who seek to silence us – metaphorically speaking, of course.”

LANNY

“But we have few options. It's not like we can get work on the radio.”

LUCY

“But is a boycott the answer? Oh, Miguel, you're a lot like my father, Maurice Mizelle. He too organized a strike when I was... was...”

(Having trouble interpreting)

“... a midget...?”

(MARCHELE tries again)

Oh, a girl! “He too organized a strike when I was just a girl – ‘The Great Mime Walk-Out of 1982.’ Mimes took to the streets. Sounds could be heard everywhere. Our demands were never met. And in the interim, mimes were forced to take menial jobs – airplane guides, food tasters,

living mannequins – and my father was blacklisted. He died – silently, of course – of a broken heart. There were no parades in his honor – they didn’t dim the sound systems on Broadway for him – he died a forgotten man. And the mimes he had worked so hard to help came to despise him.”

LANNY

(Truly touched)

“That is so sad.”

LUCY

“That’s the fate I hope to save you from.”

LANNY

“I’m speechless.”

LUCY

“You see, Miguel, the time to mime is now. Together.”

(MARCHELE has created an invisible box around herself and invites MIGUEL to join her)

“Don’t stand on the outside alone. Please, Miguel, come share my box.”

(MIGUEL thinks about the invitation for a moment, and then climbs into the box with her. He mimes...)

LANNY

“I think I love you.”

*(They begin to kiss. Then kiss passionately. Then grope)
(To the audience)*

I think it’s self-explanatory.

(There is a pause from the interpreters and MIGUEL and MARCHELE continue to grope)

LUCY

Well, this is awkward.

LANNY

(To LUCY)

Any suggestions?

(There is a long pause as she thinks. Then finally...)

LUCY

Lock them in.

LANNY

Lock them in?

LUCY

Will the world really miss two more mimes?

(LANNY mimes putting an imaginary lock on the box. MIGUEL and MARCHELE react in horror. LANNY and LUCY laugh and exit together. The lights slowly fade, creating a box of light around the two mimes who frantically look for a way out. Resigned to their fate, they look to the audience, blank-faced, as the

LIGHTS FADE



Dance Before Devastation

Eternal silence had fallen over the small condo, one she'd still refused to accept. Sinking-back into the couch she crossed her arms, refusing to watch the muted television. Every station was covering the same crisis, anyway. Why keep reminding herself of things she could change?

The tense quiet was suddenly broken, the soft sounds of a piano resonating from behind her; a song she recognized all too well. The girl closed her eyes, a longing pain blossoming in her chest as a pair of footsteps approached.

A warm hand grasped her own and she allowed herself to be led up from the couch. The melody rang lavishly from the tiny speakers as he let his other hand creep gently around her waist. She grasped his shoulder, glancing up at his face.

"You recorded this?" she asked quietly. They swayed to the melody, feet touching the floor when the chords shifted from one to the next; E flat to G to A flat. They effortlessly mimicked the steps done shortly after they'd slipped twin rings onto each other's fingers. Even now they sparkled, still only a few days worn.

"Of course," he replied, smirking as she let him spin her in a slow circle. "Well, technically my dad did. I was a little busy doing something else."

She laughed, slipping both of her arms snugly around his waist, holding onto his life while she still could. He pressed her flush against him, pretending he couldn't feel a wet texture begin to seep through his shirt. He glanced out the window, bidding farewell to the pale sky.

The girl gasped, holding back a sob as the key effortlessly shifted into E major. The notes flowed eloquently, and she could almost picture a regal figure sitting at the grand piano, fingers floating over stark white keys.

"Your sister is really talented," he remarked as they listened, lovingly swaying side to side. The music slowly built into a crescendo, before quickly tumbling back down.

"She'd always said she'd be the one to play at my wedding," she sniffed. "That I would be thanking her for providing the dance music for my future husband one day."

The boy shook his head, an amused grin spreading his lips apart. "Looks like it came true after all."

She didn't reply, letting her cheek rest against his shoulder. The news anchor on the silenced TV was motioning frantically, capitalized words flashing across the screen; the same headlines that had been scrolling across the screens ever since the threats from Russia became something much more than just empty words. The recorded piano pressed on.

"I just wish we had more time," she said.

"We have now," he provided without confidence; both of them knew the song wasn't the only thing soon coming to an end.

He gasped. She turned. The newlyweds glanced at the distant horizon. A small, dark dot had appeared in the sky. As they continued to stare, it steadily increased in size. Someone outside their condo was screaming. Her sister played on through the recording, notes rising and falling in quick succession.

Dimly, she wondered if her sister knew she'd not only be playing at their wedding, but also the end of their lives. The girl quickly hid her gaze in her husband's shoulder, unable to

watch their impending doom approach.

He pressed his face into her soft hair, inhaling the sweet, flowery smell. He closed his eyes. "I love you."

A roaring began to rise; a low whoosh of air that began to slowly overtake the melodic tone from the boy's phone. The song crept towards its finish as the missile hurtled towards the earth, rhythm being drawn out in preparation for a dramatic finish.

"I love you too." she whispered back, breath shaky against his throat. She kept her face in his shoulder, letting the world stay dark as it ended.

The piano recording was cut off abruptly, mere seconds before the final chord could ring out. Eternal silence followed.



Artist Bios

Andrew Benton is an MA student at the University of Sussex in the UK, a keen photographer and an occasional writer.

Matthew Silken is currently an undergraduate student in New York City, majoring in English and minoring in sociology. He has taken courses in poetry, scriptwriting, and creative writing throughout his tenure in college.

Adam Que is a writer from New Jersey. He has competed as an amateur mixed martial artist. After he stopped competing and working to be a professional fighter, Adam started to share his writing. He is forthcoming in *Flumes Literary Journal*, as well as appearing in *The New Engagement*, *Here Comes Everyone*, *The Write Launch*, *Rigorous*, *Sheila-Na-Gig* and others.

Robert Madden is Irish, 39 and has been living in Zürich since July 2010. His first novel, 'Tick and Bash' is as of yet unpublished, but he is currently writing his second novel, 'Zero Hour.' In May 2018, his flash fiction story 'Thanks for calling' was published by *Cafe Aphra*, a Californian-based online literary journal. Robert has been shortlisted many times for his flash fiction stories with the Australian online writer's resource, *NeedleInTheHay*. In June 2018 he won their 'Athlete's footnote award.'

Lawrence Thelen is the author of the book *The Show Makers: Great Directors of the American Musical Theatre* (Routledge). His published works for the stage include the comedies *Eating Rhode Island* and *Higgins in Harlem* (both published by Dramatic Publishing), the one-man comic play *Ichabod Crane Tells All*, featured in the anthologies *Best American Short Plays 2011-2012* and *Best Monologues from the Best American Short Plays* (both published by Applause), and the one-acts *Beethoven's Last* (*Dramatics* magazine) and *The Guppy Ballet* (*Applause*). His comedy *Pie in the Sky*, which was a finalist for the Abingdon Theatre Company's Christopher Brian Wolk Award, premiered simultaneously at The Victory Theatre Center in Los Angeles and the ART Station Theatre in Atlanta. His comic opera, *Pyramus and Thisbe*, was produced in New York by the 92nd Street Y, and his musical *The Third Wave* received the Jackie White Memorial Playwriting Award. Thelen has contributed fiction and nonfiction to *Dramatics* magazine and *Show Music* magazine. For seven years, he was the producing associate and literary manager for *Goodspeed Musicals* in Connecticut.

Paul Bauman is a writer first and a bodybuilder second. He was raised on a farm in Western New York and loves and lives in the city of Rochester. He has a BA in Film from SUNY Oswego and is currently attending SUNY Brockport for an MA in English.



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