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The Paragon Journal

Journal of Creative Arts

inside: grab that light / interview with jill palmer / parting in winter

The Paragon Journal

Journal of Creative Arts

The Paragon Journal: Journal of Creative Arts – Summer 2017 Part 1

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The Paragon Journal

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on the cover

The Wall by Wayne Russell

He is a creative writer born and raised in central Florida, he has lived in Scotland and New Zealand, he now resides in Columbus, Ohio with his small family. In March 2016, Wayne launched his very own online creative writing zine, Degenerate Literature.

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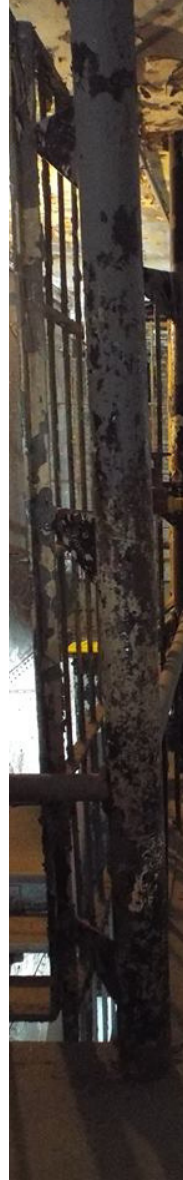
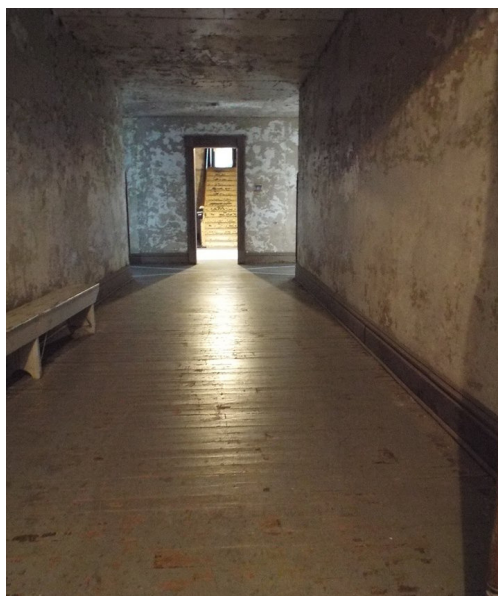
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EDITOR'S LETTER

We are pleased to present you with the eight issue of The Paragon Journal. We have worked hard to bring you the best emerging writers, as well as showcasing some of the greats.

Besides producing this issue, we have ventured off into publishing other types of print media. We are releasing a poetry anthology this fall that features the work of 70 poets. This is the beginning of a long career in publishing.

We are almost to our two year mark, and could not be any happier. Thank you for believing in us when you are searching for a home for your work.

Without further ado, please enjoy our eighth issue.

Best,



Austin Shay

11/08/16

Gillian Sommerville

The person that I want to be
Is sitting across from me
At this table full of boys.
He's content, he can sit in this room
Consumed only with the knowledge he
Is right.
While I am choking.
Joking, they laugh
And suddenly my next four years is reduced to the punchline
Of the dumbest joke I've ever heard
I am choking.
Not of laughter.
I am choking because my words have been swallowed
Silence is easier than opposition
Hate easier than love.
I am positioned between a rock and a hard place
It's hard to face what is going on here, I get it
But please.
Acknowledge me, because I am scared.
I am scared my opinion will become too big to accommodate yours
So I will begin to pour myself into the cracks of the floor,
Become a girl who is easy to walk on,
A girl who is easy to agree with.
The girls who are easy to agree with are talking about their hair
They stare at me and ask "Are you okay?"
Are you okay? Every footstep we have taken will regress into
Our rib cages
Because our throats will be too full of opinions.
I am told that
"Women aren't supposed to think"
And he winks at me and laughs.
I am so happy my silence
Has provided your comfort.

when the dead talk about sex

Sergio Ortiz

trees resurrect from their flesh.
They're storytellers of clandestine love,
barbs of rivers that penetrate,
and those delivered to the sea.
They meander desires, pantheons smell of cum.
They evaporate kisses in the
humidity of coffee plantations,
in canyons, and banana fields.
The dead talk about sex
and invent new caresses
on the altars of the dead,
offer flower collars in memoriam
of the pleasures of the phallus.

At Lúpulo's Tavern

Sergio Ortiz

Soft jazz, hugs, kisses,
promises and fingers intertwined.
Me, a young man afraid of the dark.
You, a man rattled by light. You dragged me
to the back between twilight and twilight.
A waiter arrives, I ask for a hot chocolate,
you order red wine, take off your coat,
put it on the armchair. I lay my hand
on trembling places. Lights lower.
Roof rises. Chair collapses.
Coat falls, the chocolate, the wine.
Outside, the rain. Tourists. Suitcases.
The smell of Burger King.
A poster advertising Cialis.

Confessions of a Protestant
Wayne Russell

The phone rings
neon purple / black ravens
are frightened
away
they cower into the confines
of blunting skyline
Like me they shy away from
humanity
Humans are the most dangerous
animal of all
As if we didn't already know
my wife slams the door
in disgust
Tomb stones sway laughing
in gallant Springtime
the phone rings once again
and rattles my bones
The bones of my ancestors
clang a wind chime tune
and soon I join them
another voice silenced by the shrill
cloak of death
St. Michael please deliver me
from my debauchery
Though I am
protestant
I still need thee

JILL PALMER

2016-2017 STATE PENNSYLVANIA FFA REPORTER



The Pennsylvania FFA State Officers team consists of seven high school graduates who have elected to defer their education for one year to serve Pennsylvania FFA as youth ambassadors. During their year of service, which begins and ends at the annual State Convention, these officers will travel the state presenting 6 conferences and 2 statewide conventions, as well as speaking to over 13,000 FFA members, supporters and individuals involved in leadership and agriculture.

Jill Palmer has spent 365 days trying to influence her generation of agriculturists as a State FFA Officer. She is from a small town in Fulton County, Pennsylvania, and went to an even smaller high school.

Our editor-in-chief, Austin Shay, had the wonderful opportunity to meet Jill in 2013 when he served as the 2013-2014 State FFA Sentinel, and since then he has watched her grow into a smart and charismatic woman. And her it is her wisdom and passion for agriculture that brought us to have this discussion about women in agriculture.

Austin Shay (AS): As a FFA (Future Farmers of America) member, what was your Supervised Agricultural Experience? What were some of your favorite Career Development Events?

Jill Palmer (JP): My SAE project was a dairy exploratory project in which I leased, for free, one or multiple dairy animals of my choosing and trained them to walk by a halter in time for the local fair. Some of my favorite CDE's were Public Speaking and Job Interview. I think they really brought me out of my shell and made realize that I could have the confidence to take on an important and powerful leadership role one day if I wanted to.

AS: We have known each other for a few years now. How would you explain the impact that FFA and agriculture has had on you?

JP: To explain the impact FFA and agriculture as a whole has had on me is so difficult. My life has literally been altered because of this industry and organization. Simply, I'm absolutely not who I used to be. I was able to find my safe zone in life, which still found it's ways to push me out of that zone and find a way to make it happen. I learned to not be so self conscious of who I am and to love myself. All in all, agriculture and FFA saved me from thinking that I could never do great things with my life.

AS: Do you plan on continuing on a path in agriculture in the future?

JP: I do plan on continuing in the agriculture field. I will be attending Penn State Mont Alto with a major in agricultural extension and education and a minor in agribusiness.

AS: The realm of agriculture is predominantly male, how do you believe that you will make a difference in the future of agriculture being a woman?

JP: I believe that I can make a difference in agriculture as a woman because I know who I am, and I know that I have such a passion in life for what I do. I know that no matter the challenges I may face, I will always fight to overcome them. Having a passion is where it starts in being successful, no matter what the given situation is. When you have a deep passion for what you do, you're going to work hard and overcome whatever you face.

AS: Being a State FFA Officer you are faced with educating your own generation of agriculturists, do you see your female peers stepping up and becoming leaders in their fields?

JP: As a state officer I see so many females each day stepping up into important leadership roles within agriculture. It makes me proud to see their passions and efforts being put into something that for so long has been considered “a man’s way of life.” Women are making a change to the way we look at things, especially in the agricultural world, and to see young, spirited women taking on the challenge let’s me know that agriculture is in great hands and will see even more diversity in the future.

AS: The number of women in FFA has skyrocketed since 1969 (the year that women were allowed in the FFA), as well the number of women in agriculture, but as an industry women are still struggling. Do you have any insight on the reason(s) for this struggle?

JP: I think there will always be this stigmatism about being a woman in agriculture. Women are often held to the standard of too emotional, and not strong enough to handle tough situations, but so many women out there are facing adversities in agriculture with great strides. Women are stepping up to the plate to make the tough decisions like where to plant their crops for the best yields, and making sure they have solid animals on their farm to produce only the best of their commodities. They’re taking over after the loss of a family member, and wanting to continue a legacy that they found to be their way of life as well. Not every woman is held to a standard of such, but those who are, are making sure they not only work hard to prove others wrong, but still love every second of whatever they do.

AS: What words would you have for a future generation of women agriculturists?

JP: If I could say anything to the future generation of women in agriculture, I would tell them to simply be confident in who they are. When you love yourself and are confident in who you are, you’re going to do great things. Confidence is key to overcoming obstacles and breaking the walls of stigmatism down. Nobody in this life can love you more than you can love yourself, so take care of yourself and make great things happen.

AS: Do you believe that as the future generations of agriculturists come into power in the industry we will see more women holding higher roles in agriculture?

JP: I do believe as the agriculture industry gets larger we will see a rise in the amount of women who are involved. As I travel all over the state, I see so many women holding leadership roles within the jobs they carry. Whether they teach agriculture, sell crop insurance or milk cows three times a day, women are stepping up to the plate and they are doing a great job at it. Whether they come from a farming background or not, the agriculture industry has a place for everyone and I firmly believe that women are answering that call.

Grab That Light

Valerie Frigerio

Its dark. Cold, gaping in its void. I can't see or feel anything in front of me. I stumble along in my blindness, my hands stretched forward, grasping for something. My knees, shaking and weak, my feet tripping over nothing. My heart is beating a slow but loud staccato into my ribs. I try to keep my breathing calm, but I can hear myself start to panic, a wheeze creeping into my labored pants.

Ah, there's a light. It's small, flickering like it's fighting against a wind. A pinprick in the distance, but by God it is blinding. Like staring into a star. I start to creep towards it. My footsteps slow, cautious. It's beautiful actually; hues of golden yellow and orange and vibrant red. As I come closer it grows bigger, its light turns into flames, and emits a brilliant heat. It swirls and dances, against a wind I cannot feel. The heat flares on my cold face, and my hands feel like they're burning.

But with the next few steps the light does not come closer. I quicken my pace, but now it seems to sink away, sputtering and losing its strength. It grows colder, weaker. I'm running now, trying to reach it before it is gone. Suddenly I'm struck from above, a force from the sky slamming onto my back, crushing my legs, pinning my shoulders to the ground. It hurts. It burns. I reach my hand out as my sight blacks out, trying to grab that light.

~~

With a gasp, I jolt up, sitting upright. I'm pretty sure I'm a step away from hyperventilating, the familiar wheeze in my chest starting to build. I grip onto the bedframe to gain some sort of grasp on reality. As my breathing returns to normal, I shift my gaze to the rest of the room to regain my bearings. I see white walls, small scuffs near the floor and the dented door frame, I feel sheets under me, an ancient scratchy blanket slipping down to rest at my waist. Bed, I'm in my bed. I'm in my bed at the station. I let out a shaky groan as I rub my eyes, trying to scrub away at the shitty feeling. I look to my left to look at Dunbrogh, whose fiery red hair spills onto his pillow, conked out in his bunk, snoring quietly. On the top bunk above him lies Pharah, skinny bastard that he is, his wirey leg hanging off the edge. Oh Lord, it was just a dream. I close my eyes and cover them with my hands, willing my heart to calm down again. I try to focus on the sound of honking taxis and the airbrakes of buses, and the quiet roar of the ovens in the bakery across the street. New York is never really quiet, even at four in the morning.

I flop back down onto the bed, my head making a dent in the pillow as I take a deep breath. That was one hell of a fucking dream. I allow myself to tremble in fear of what I had seen. I can't really remember it. There's no way in hell I'm going back to sleep after this, I decide. I reluctantly

I drag the blankets off, the chill from the A/C making me shiver a little. I grab an old shirt from the dresser at the foot of my bunk, slip it on, and grab some long socks as I make my way to the door, skirting round the pole that leads down into the engine bay.

The station is quiet. Somehow it feels bigger, despite the fact it is wedged between a Chinese restaurant and a laundromat. Yet it stands, 125 years and still taking care of Canal St. My bare feet squeak on the recently cleaned floors as I made my way through the hallway, past the bathroom, lockers and radio room.

I finish pulling on my socks as I stumble to the kitchen, hell bent on making some very strong coffee. As I finally straighten myself up I see the light illuminating a lone figure. Chief Mierra is sitting at the table, a stack of reports on his right, an ancient laptop in the middle, and a pack of cigs and coffee on his left. He's getting older, I notice. His hair has just a bit more pepper amongst the pitch black, more lines on his tan face. But his grey eyes are still sharp, still alert after all these years. He motions for me to help myself to the pot he's made as he peers through his reading glasses and plunks the keyboard with his index and middle fingers.

I nod in thanks, and reach up into the cabinet to grab my favorite mug, a Harley Davidson one that belonged to my dad. I fill it to the brim, sans cream or sugar. I nearly moan in pleasure as the hot coffee makes its way down my throat. Granted, it tastes like shit, but it's hot and that's all that matters. I hear Mierra chuckle quietly behind me. I make a mental note to request better coffee at the next meeting.

We sit at the kitchen table for a good while, no exchange of sounds except the slow but methodical clacking of keys. We drain the first pot, and I make the next one. Only until the sun started rising through the gaps of the skyscrapers that are outside our windows did I excuse myself to go piss the waterfall of coffee I had consumed. Chief tells me to wake everyone else when I was done.

I briskly trot to the bathroom, my bladder quickly riling itself up to start screaming at me. I make it in time. I'm ashamed to say there was an audible sigh of relief when the floodgates burst open. I might as well hop into the shower while I'm there.

As I toweled myself off, I catch myself in the mirror and pause. I can't really remember last time I looked at myself, honestly. I'm not bad looking, I think, as I move towards the mirror, looking at my reflection. My curly black hair is kept short but long enough to tie back, with the sides shaved. Dark eyes, almond shaped like my mother's but no monolid like her mother. High Chinese cheekbones but a big islander nose, courtesy of my father. I'm big all over; solid muscle, a not-quite set of abs, all covered with deeply tanned skin stretched taut. My tattoo, a gift from my father

and a tribute to his Samoan heritage, stretches around my left shoulder-blade to my chest, angular lines and delicate patterns, a hawk on my bicep and a sun resting over my heart. I flex for my own amusement. They don't train you to carry around 200 pounds of gear and tools for nothing.

~~

“OH OH OH OH – IF LOVE COULD CHOOSE SIDES! OH OH OH OH IT’S TAKEN MINE!”

I plant my foot on the bunkroom door and kick it open while caterwauling to Eden’s Crush, scaring the room’s occupants so badly that Rychen topples out of his top bunk and Coleman just basically screams “FUCK” as he shoots out of bed clutching his pillow to his hirsute chest. I laugh.

“C’mon, up and at ‘em,” I say as I dance around, jostling sleepy shoulders and kicking bedframes, “or I’m gonna drop this towel.” I threaten, my finger’s loosening on the ends of the admittedly thin towel. After a few exclamations of ‘keep it on, keep it on!’ and one ‘drop it you pussy!’ from the back of the bunkroom, they grumble and curse but drag their asses out of their beds and move to the latrine as a herd, to the heat of the steam still lingering in the air. Freeser is still clinging to some semblance of sleep, leaning on Pharah as they trudge to the commune.

By the time everyone is out of the shower and preening in front of the mirror, I start on more coffee and some food. A few loaves of fresh bread from across the street, a big plate of scrambled eggs and a whole pig of bacon. It’s amazing to watch fourteen men inhale such a large amount of food and coffee in less than 10 minutes, as I watch from the counter, chugging some more joe. Everyone is talking excitedly. Snatches of ‘how’s the wife?’, ‘man, Chief is gonna kick my ass’, ‘fuck you that’s my bacon’ are heard from around the table. I contently hold my coffee cup in my hands and listen to Burman recall a heroic rescue of a hot blonde, whom Burman delightfully recalled was only wearing a silky negligee, from a fully involved structure fire. He caterwauls on about how he swooped her from her room, and how he carried her out with flames above his head and no mask on. He cheekily adds that she gave him a kiss after. I roll my eyes, and looked out the window at the clear blue sky. I check my watch. Its 0846.

~~

Battalion 1 to Manhattan

“We just had a plane crash into upper floors of the World Trade Center. Transmit a second alarm and start relocating companies into the area.”

Engine 6 to Manhattan

“The World Trade Center tower No. 1 is on fire, the whole outside of the building. There was just a huge explosion.”

Engine 1-0 to Manhattan

“Engine 1-0, World Trade Center 10-60. Send every available ambulance, everything you’ve got to the World Trade Center now.”

~~

“Engine 6 responding with 6.”

“Ladder 9 responding with 8.”

“Copy, Engine 6 with 6 and Ladder 9 with 8. Second alarm assignment World Trade Center, Engine 6 report to Fulton at the Warren Building, Ladder 9, Delta side of North Tower.”

There’s a dull roar echoing around every corner, every arch. It weaves its way around massive buildings, through the culminating dust and ash, increasing in volume and intensity. It’s the sound of anguish, the echoes of a fallen monolith, and the impending fear that will ensue. Yet amongst the din is us. Making our own noise.

We’ve got our sirens blazing, pulling the horn to clear stray taxis and screaming civilians. I find myself relatively calm as I methodically check my gear. Novec hood is tucked into the collar of my jacket, helmet strap is tight, everything’s fastened and covered. I have to slouch down in the seat to get my air pack on. I sometimes wish rigs were tall people friendly. I pull the waist straps tight as I look around, checking my buddies to see if they’re done, and to watch their actions, their expressions. Machin, while smoothing his blonde curls into his hood, has his head down, his lips moving in a silent prayer. Yang, one of our youngest members fresh out of the academy at 19, has fear in his eyes, and his hands are shaking. He can’t seem to get the buckle on his chest to fasten. I reach over and grab his wrists. He sucks in a breath between clenched teeth and looks me in the eyes. I can only give him a small smile of what I hope is reassurance. I fasten the buckle, pull his straps tighter around his tiny body to make sure everything is secure. I pat his cheek, hard enough to sting but it seems to focus him. He nods in thanks, and turns to stare out the window in awe as I turn to Pharah. He’s fine, all of his gear perfectly in place and a possessive hand on the pike pole nearest to him. Thorne, is grumbling in the officer’s seat, as he viciously pulls his gear on. He’s ex-Army, he’s rightfully pissed. Meanwhile our driver Hensley is driving like a madman down Fulton St., cursing all the way at the audacity of these fucking taxis, get out of the way!

I look out the window and am vaguely shocked to see a city bus filled with firemen. I assume they’re the 3rd or 4th dispatch at this point, or the second wave from their company. I can see their chief, a 33 patch on his white helmet, talking on his radio which subsequently travels to our engine.

“Company 33 to Engine 6, we’ll follow you in.”

“Copy, Company 33 with Engine 6 and Ladder 9. Proceed to Command post on Greenwich St.”

As we make a slightly speedy turn round the curve, Hensley cursing as we nearly take out a street sign, we finally see the building. Oh God, the top of North Tower is gone. There's just ash and smoke. Fire is licking its way out of the shattered windows.

"Do we have any report on a fire condition yet from on-scene personnel?"

"Division 1 reports numerous floors on fire, K."

Hensley parks us on Albany, and we hop out and start to gather our tools. Machin and Yang grab some of the longer pike poles from the sides of the truck. I favor the set of irons, a combination of a flathead axe and a halligan bar. Everyone else grabs bags or hose or rope, anything that we think we might need.

Ladder 9 pulls up next to us, Chief Mierra hanging out of the driver's side window, his brow pinched with trepidation. In the jump seats, Dunbrogh and Freeser stick their heads out too. Past them, Rychen, Coleman, Burman, Johnson and Padilla are jostling around, trying to see the building.

"Ladder 9 is going to proceed up to the North tower." He said, pointing at the burning wreckage. "Report to command, they're in the lobby of the South Tower. Wait for your assignments." He said, looking at each of us.

"Gentlemen, good luck. Every comes home, yeah?" His eyes are steel.

"Yes sir." I murmur, quiet and gravely. With a nod, he drives away, towards the North Tower, dodging debris and civilians.

We start walking. Over our portable radios we hear increasingly stressed chatter.

"Whatever it was hit the north side of the building. Fire is venting from at least one floor, heavy smoke's all over the front and top of the building, approximately 90-something floor, K."

"Division 1, receiving reports floor No. 106, numerous people trapped, floor No. 106."

"Guys, it was a plane that struck the building."

"Be advised we have jumpers, K, jumpers."

"HEY WATCH OUT WATCH OUT" Yang screams. He pushes me and Thorne out of the way, off of the curb.

Boom. Or maybe more appropriately splat.

Any sort of identifying factors of the body were erased in a bloody mash of liquefied innards and congealed blood and bits of brain scattered in a ten-foot radius. Pharah got a bit of blonde hair and skull on his helmet. I neglect to tell him. Hensley is quiet for once, just staring at the shoe that had bounced off and onto the curb. Machin forcibly turns Yang so he doesn't keep looking.

We quicken our pace. There are a few stragglers from the building, covered in ash and coughing. Some are running away, some are just staring in awe, crying. One man, his formerly white button up shirt now saturated black, still had his briefcase clutched to his chest. I approach him, grabbing him by the shoulder. He flinches violently, but when he catches sight of me under my mask, his arms weaken and he lets his briefcase drop. I tell him to run. He takes off sprinting, following other civilians towards Fulton St. I'm glad to see that he stops to grab some of the more shell-shocked civvies as he runs towards safety.

With Thorne at the lead, we enter South Tower.

~~

It is fucking chaos. Thirty or so chiefs are standing together, trying to discuss plans and attempting to reach their companies through the radio. There's debris falling, and civilians running out the shattered glass doors as more firefighters come flooding in. Coming down the stairs are more people, and rescue teams that had went up earlier, assisting the injured and elderly. There is an old man being helped down the stairs, a piece of shrapnel imbedded in his leg. Blood is sluggishly dripping onto the floor, but he looks determined, and was able to make his own way to the doors.

We find Mierra among the horde of chiefs, and he pulls away and beckons for us and the ladder company to gather. He pulls us all over into a huddle, calling out assignments. Dunbrogh and I stand by his side as his lieutenants. As we each hand him our accountability tags, He relays to us with a fairly steady voice.

“Alright, Ladder 9: Dunbrogh, Freeser, Johnson, Burman, Rychen, Padilla and Coleman. Dunbrogh you're in command, make your way up to Division 104, reports of 25 to 30 people trapped.” Dunbrogh nods, his mouth set into a grimace under his mustache. He grips his axe just a little tighter.

Mierra turns to me. “Engine 6, take whatever hose you can up to the 78th floor, confirmed fire on east side and north side. Machin, Hensley, Pharah, Yang, Thorne, you're with Aumavae.” He says. An echo of 'yes sir' is passed around.

Gripping my shoulder and gesturing to the rest of our company, he tells us good luck, God willing we will come back down alive. We take a knee to put our respirators on. Machin rests a hand on Yang's small shoulders and speaks a quiet prayer, the Latin undistinguishable but still comforting in its message.

Dunbrogh leads his crew past the throng of commanders towards the elevator, loaded with a stokes basket and all the rescue tools they can carry. Hensley, Thorne, Yang and I each shoulder a 100ft line of 1 ¾ inch hose and throw it over our air-packs like a horseshoe to leave our hands free, and proceed to make our way up into the stairway. I give Dunbrogh a solemn salute as we head into the chaos. It's 0903.

~~

Marine 6 to Manhattan

"You have a second plane into the other tower of the Trade Center, major fire."

Car 4 David to Manhattan

"Be advised, report of a second plane that crashes into the second tower."

Manhattan to Division 1, Command post in South Tower

"Division 1 be advised, 3 Adam reports that you have a second plane that crashed into the second tower about two-thirds of the way up. He would recommend that you transmit a fifth alarm for that tower as well."

~~

It's actually very quiet in the stairway. Just the labored breaths of us climbing stairs, the echoes of our boots on the steps bouncing off the walls. I try to keep myself focused on Machin's gauge on his air pack. It's still at 4500 psi. Frankly I'm just trying not to groan about the burning in my thighs. I mean yes they force you to do a lot of running and lifting and going upstairs in the academy but not 104 of them!! I let myself whine a little, hoping no one hears. Thorne chuckles behind me. Dammit.

We hit the 19th floor, where there's gotta be at least 100 other firefighters there. That's where the smell of fire really hits you. Firefighters tend to joke about it, when you can still smell fire on your gear after a working job. But not it's cloying and thick, and you feel it burn into your nose and chest. I fear it will never leave me.

They're standing in the dimly lit stairway, spilling out into the floor, cluttered with cubicles and paper flying everywhere. Some are slouched against the wall, trying to catch their breaths. Their gear is almost completely covered in soot and ash and dust. Many are throwing up, whether from exhaustion, dehydration or fear of what they saw, I wouldn't know. Some are assisting some

injured civilians. One civvie with severe burns across his back is being ushered passed us into the stairway. I hear whispers that he was rumored to have made it down from the 80th floor. Others are in groups, murmuring about what may have happened, what would have caused this, when we feel a rumbling under our feet. Not only under, but around, above, everywhere. Like a monolith rising from hell, the building is groaning and creaking, growling and screaming. Over some radios, a few faintly hear a MAYDAY, that another plane has hit the building. Most of us didn't hear it.

A young guy, a probie from 43 is wildly panicking , yelling "Yo, we need to evacuate!!" He's waving his arms, trying to get an officer's attention, anyone's attention. His call seemed to fall short, as others continued their rests, and more began to head back up the stairs, all in their own little worlds.

The probie sees me and my crew start to head upstairs and implores "Hey, hey, wait!" He grabs Yang's arm, who just about jumps a foot into the air. "They just called a MAYDAY, we gotta get out of here!" He turns to me, fear in his eyes.

"We got a job to do." I say, my voice rough and strained. I've got no patience for a scared shitless probie. But I look at the state of him. He's exhausted. He isn't sweating anymore. His gear is beginning to fall apart, clearly a used set and it is an ill fit on him. His hand on Yang's shoulder is shaking so badly that his accountability tags are starting to jingle around.

"Kid, go find your crew." I say, Yang shakily taking his hand off of his shoulder, patting the probie on the back. "Head back down to Command." He looks at us in disbelief, utterly lost. I wonder where his unit is. Maybe they never came back down with him.

I turn around to face him. I look him straight in the eyes. I say "You did good." I feel his gaze on me as we turn to proceed up the stairs.

~~

34th

"Hose Unit to Chief 6, 3 civilians found. Sending them down now."

47th

59th

"Hose Unit to Chief 6, reports of collapse, we will continue until told to evacuate."

63rd

76th

"Hose Unit to Command 6, do you copy?"

0958

We just hit the 79th floor. At this point, none of us can really feel our legs anymore. It's just lift one leg in front of the other. Radio has gone suspiciously quiet as well. We try to reach Chief Mierra, occasionally getting one or two stray words from him, but otherwise static. We were able to hear "Resc-" and "95th" and "John Wayne time". We chuckle at that last one. Backdraft was a great movie.

We stop on floors 60 through 70, looking for people still trapped or injured. All ten floors are evacuated, and people safely down the stairs. They thank us profusely, and we just nod them on down the stairs. There was this real big guy, gotta be around 400 pounds at least. I tell some of the other people to help him down, and they all nod yes, yes and grab him to hustle him down the stairs. I hope he gets out alright. On the 75th floor, we had to pause in fear as the stairwell started to visibly sway. We cling to the railings and to each other, just waiting it out. It stops soon enough. Everyone breathes a sigh of relief. We proceed on.

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~~

Manhattan to Field Command

"Manhattan calling Field Comm., K. Manhattan calling Field Comm. Manhattan calling Field Comm"

"...to Manhattan, urgent."

"Go ahead, K."

"One of the buidings, the entire building has collapsed..."

"...urgent, identify."

"...major collapse in one of the towers."

"Which tower, K?"

"Tower 2, Tower 2. The entire tower, major collapse."

~~

I see a light. Its yellow and red, swirling and dancing and growing so beautifully. It's so small. I can only see out of my left eye. Can I even blink my right eye? I can't feel my right side. Everything is so hot. Like its burning into me. My left-hand hurts. I try to look. I see a piece of metal sticking out of it. I try to move it. Its pinned to something. It's Yang. Yang's back. There's a

beam protruding out of Yang's back. Fuck. He's not moving. I need to move. I can't stay here. I have to go. I have to go back. Mom. Dad. My brothers and sisters. My crew. Oh, GOD my crew. C'mon goddammit I gotta go I gotta get out of here GODDAMMIT. GOD GET ME OUT OF THIS. DON'T LET ME DIE LIKE THIS.

FUCK.

Is it sweat or tears streaking down my face? It stings.

I can't see the light anymore.



Drew Gasparini

MUSICAL THEATRE COMPOSER, SONGWRITER, COMEDIAN AND TEACHER

Drew Gasparini is a thrilling young musician equally committed to forging a new sound in the intersection between theatre and pop, to nurturing the next generation of artists, and to throwing one hell of a party. Drew is an award-winning musical theatre composer and lyricist, a musician and songwriter, a comedian, and a teacher.

As a musical theatre composer:

Named one of Playbill.com's "Contemporary Musical Theatre Songwriters You Should Know," Drew is currently developing a number of new stage musicals including a commission for Warner Bros. Theatre Ventures, an adaptation of the film *It's Kind of a Funny Story* for Universal Stage Productions (music & lyrics, book by Alex Brightman), an adaptation of the Newberry Award-winning children's book *The Whipping Boy* (also with Brightman), and *#UntitledPopMusical*, a wholly-original piece that shines a spotlight on our celebrity obsession (music & lyrics, book by Michael Kimmel). *Everything in its Place: The Life and Slimes of Marc Summers*, a one-man-show starring Marc Summers written by Brightman with music by Drew, premiered at Bloomington Playwrights Project in April 2016. Other full-length musicals include *Crazy, Just Like Me* (book, music & lyrics; 2011 New York Musical Theatre Festival "Best of Fest" winner and runner-up for "Best Book"), *Make Me Bad* (also with Brightman; world premiere April 2015 at Bloomington Playwrights Project),

and Turn of the Screw (also with Kimmel; commissioned by Fordham University, 2012 workshop at Lincoln Center). Drew was a contributing composer for the fictional musical Hit List on the NBC television series "SMASH", for Oxygen's "The Next Big Thing" (on which he could also be seen and heard), for the children's cooking program "Monica's Mixing Bowl", and for the popular one-woman off-Broadway show Hot Mess in Manhattan ("The Text Message Song"). "The Music & Lyrics of Drew Gasparini" was presented at Lincoln Center in 2015 and at the Kennedy Center in 2012, and Drew's unique brand of musical theatre concerts are performed regularly to sold-out houses around the world. Drew is an alum of the BMI Lehman Engel Musical Theatre workshop and his sheet music is available for purchase at www.NewMusicalTheatre.com, where he is a top-10 best selling artist.

As a musician and songwriter:

Drew grew up in a house filled with music and has been performing with his sisters Kasie and Chloe since they were all in diapers. In October 2015 the three siblings decided to make things official, launching the band SAINT ADELINE with musician Justin Goldner. Their unique brand of folk-pop has quickly won over hearts, landing them gigs from NY to Nashville to London. And Saint Adeline's first EP, which is produced by Goldner, will be released in Fall 2016. When he isn't writing and recording with his siblings, Drew can often be found sharing the stage with his friend and collaborator Louis Sacco, performing re-interpretations of jazz standards under the banner LOUIS & DREW. And Drew began his career as a solo singer/songwriter playing all over the country and sharing the stage with artists such as Jason Mraz, Third Eye Blind, and the Plain White T's. Winner of the 2006 John Lennon Songwriter's Award, he has released four albums over the past decade: "Small Thoughts (EP)", released in 2005; "Overboard (EP)", released in 2008; "Drew Gasparini Band", released independently in 2012 (a compilation of songs written while under development with Sony Records); and "I Could Use A Drink: The Songs of Drew Gasparini", released by Broadway Records in 2013, showcasing Drew's unique hybrid of pop and musical theatre and featuring vocals from some of Broadway's hottest young stars. "I Could Use A Drink" spent 5 weeks on the top 100 iTunes charts. The Houston Press has described Drew's music as "deftly captivating with lyrics that pulse with vibrant poignancy and appealing wit." Drew is signed with Razor & Tie Music Publishing, and is currently working on his next album.

As a comedian:

The (M)orons are Alex Brightman (School of Rock, Matilda), F. Michael Haynie (Peter Pan Live! on NBC, Wicked), Andrew Kober (She Loves Me, Les Miserables), and Drew Gasparini. Four talented friends who write and perform together as a comedy collective. Their brand of humor is ridiculous, grotesque, irreverent, debaucherous, and laden with fart jokes. THE (M)ORONS HAPPY HOUR, a variety show best described as The Rat Pack meets "Jackass" (with music), debuted in December 2014 at the Slipper Room, a burlesque club on Manhattan's Lower East Side. The gents are developing a TV pilot and beginning to plot their next live show. www.WeAreTheMorons.com @WeAreTheMorons

As a teacher:

Drew is as committed to nurturing the next generation of performers as he is to showcasing his own work. He has been invited to lead master classes at schools across the country, including Boston Conservatory, The Growing Studio, PACE University, Cap21, and A.C.T. in San Francisco. His class format is designed to offer a safe environment for students to learn from Drew and from one another, and focuses on topics from song selection and interpretation to conquering fears and building a career.

Austin Shay (AS): Growing up in a musical family, did you always know that you wanted to continue the tradition?

Drew Gasparini (DG): My parents never forced us to be musical or to play or write music. But it was really easily accessible for us. The house was full of musical instruments of all kinds and when there was down time in the house, I would always start fiddling around on one of the guitars or the drums or pianos. We love music. I don't know that being a musician was considered a tradition in our household, but the option was always there.

AS: Did you have a lot of chances to express your musical talents growing up North of San Francisco?

DG: The Bay Area is ripe with culture. It was easy to find kids who loved to sing and dance and act and play in a band - and because of the amount of accessible opportunities there were, it was hard to not find a place to sing or perform.

AS: How did you end up in New York City?

DG: By accident kind of. When I was 19 years old and living in LA, I wrote a musical. I had been writing songs since I was 12 but this was my first full length musical. I submitted it to the New York Musical Theatre Festival. My show didn't make it to the festival, but they wrote me a hand written letter back saying that they think I have what it takes to make it as a composer in NYC. So I moved to New York weeks after that and here I am, almost 10 years later, writing Broadway musicals for a living. Pretty cool. Glad I took their advice.

AS: How did you feel when you first heard one of your songs performed by someone other than your siblings?

DG: The feeling was so big in my head. It was so explosive and reward-ing when I heard someone other than me or my sisters sing my music. To this day it's still an overwhelming feeling of "I can't believe someone is singing something I wrote!" I pinch myself everyday. It never gets old.

AS: Having your songs performed at 54 Below must be an exciting experience. Do you ever just need the reminder that you are successful? I don't want to make it sound like you aren't humble, but sometimes we all need a reminder.

DG: I don't really let my own ego ever get in the way. 54 Below is a venue in NYC that, for whatever reason, has allowed me to bring my brand of live music to life. They are so welcoming there. It's nice to be a part of what is currently a big staple in the NYC world and in the theatre world. I'm very lucky to have the support of the people at 54 Below, the singers who join me for these shows, and more importantly, the audience. Theatre crowds love laugh and cry and at 54 Below at my shows, these crowds shake the joint dancing with us. It's a great time. What a lucky turd I am!

AS: What is it like to work with your sisters in your band?

DG: It's the most "no duh" idea we've ever had. We'd been singing our whole lives and we'd begun writing, and my sisters are both AMAZING writers, so with our forces combined we always feel like we are bringing our childhood to the stage. It's really fun sharing my family with the world!

AS: I am assuming your family is very supportive. Do your sisters help you with whatever you need?

DG: I have the most supportive family ever. My brother and sister-in-law and my parents all support everything we all do from CA, and the sisters are here with me in NYC and it makes it easy to just be there for one another. But even from across the country, the rest of the family is the most amazing ever. It's a gift to have the support I do coming from my family.

AS: Many of our authors and artists are afraid of rejection or failure, what could you tell them about rejection or failure?

DG: It's a good thing. Failure is a good thing. You can't learn if you don't fail. It's impossible not to fail. The music business and the theatre business are always so rapidly moving and evolving that it is near impossible for anyone to be an expert in them. If you fail, you'll know right away if you are able to get up and try again or if it's going to be too much. If you think you still have some fight left, then take your time to learn, grow, and get better and smarter, then show the world what you got. ALWAYS make sure that whatever you do, it's YOU. "Your" style is what makes it interesting, not that you are trying to be what you think anyone else wants you to be. Be you. Be you, loudly and proudly.

AS: Did you ever think of giving up? If so, when?

DG: Never giving it up. This is my passion. I do this for free most of the time. So no. I would never give up writing or performing or feeling the need to let people know how important art is. Never stop once you get go-ing. Retirement isn't the same in this world. You're an artist. The world needs you more than you realize.

AS: Writing music and plays is a challenging thing to do, but how do you stay so positive in continuing your work?

DG: I stay so positive because I'm actually doing it. It's easy to smile everyday when you get up for work and your work is sitting in a room and having an idea that's never been had before everyday. Sure, it's a lot of pressure to think of something new everyday, but the thrill of seeing it come to life is so rewarding that I smile at the long game.

AS: Do you feel any pressure to continue producing such epic scores with the success of your previously released material?

DG: The only pressure I feel comes from me. I always want to not just be better, but to always find something new about what I do to incorporate into what's next. Theatre, and writing... evolutionary art forms. It's exhilarating trying to keep up with it!

Parting in Winter
Robert Garner McBrearty

You say it's time to go.
Outside your window,
It looks like snow and snow and snow,
I've seen more partings than you'll know.
In here the fire burns bright,
Out there the winter chill runs deep,
The tender quaking of so few leaves
Remaining on the branches.
There are wars on every channel,
Let's pray for peace.
From here the path heads south,
I doubt I'll pass this way again.
I've crossed these rivers before,
But I was younger then.

On Losing Vision
Robert Garner McBrearty

I don't mind so much
When you take the wheel.
The truth is
I always liked it
When you drove,
First in those
Days when I was
Liquored up,
And later when I
Was stoned only
On sweet coffee
And regaled you
With my tall tales
While you steered steady
Down the road.
I'm not ready
To give it up completely,
I'll drive
To the store and back,
To the post office, the lake,
The routes I know as well
As your profile
When I glance left,
Your hands still set
For the curves ahead.

1945

Kelleigh Stevenson

The tenth petal bloomed on
a flower of a different kind, a flower of a different color,
one that keeps different time.

To compare it to others would do no good-
for no dainty rose, pure lily, or graceful willow could compare
Just a thicket of time worn thorns, memories sewn inside the jagged points and gentle curves
alike

Rain gives life from a different source,
a different height,
and mends the tears left behind
Nestled in a garden enclosed in silence and peace, the flower is safe

Peaceful

Quiet

Buried in minds for generations to come.

My Rich Uncle

Steve Slavin

1

I remember my parents referring to Uncle Bill as “a confirmed bachelor.” Now, a bachelor was an unmarried man. But what, exactly, was a confirmed bachelor?

I heard my parents and some of my aunts and uncles, call old women – usually in their forties or fifties -- “spinsters.” So, I thought there’s got to be some connection between the confirmed bachelors and the spinsters.

I pretty much figured it out by the time of my own confirmation. My mother bought me a beautiful dress, and the whole family went to church where Father James presided over the ceremony. So, I concluded that when unmarried men reached the age of forty – or maybe it was fifty – they bought a nice suit and went to church to be confirmed.

But what about the spinsters? Was there a confirmation ceremony for them too? I discussed this with my friend, Rosemary. She told me that if a woman was not married by her fortieth birthday, she had to become a nun.

I thought about this, but quickly realized that Rosemary must have been given the wrong information. There were plenty of spinsters walking around, and some of them were clearly not nuns. Rosemary and I concluded that the ones who did not become nuns must have had secret confirmation ceremonies. Which, of course, made them “confirmed spinsters.”

2

Uncle Bill was twenty-five years older than my mother. One day I asked her if he was really her brother.

“That’s an excellent question, Eileen. Bill is actually my half-brother. Do you know what a half-brother is?”

“Mom, I don’t have a clue.”

“Bill and I have the same father, but different mothers.”

“How come?”

“Well, Bill’s mother died. Her name was Mary.”

“When did she die?”

“She died when Bill was about twelve.”

“Then what happened?”

“A few years later, Bill’s father married Grandma Helen.”

“And then you were born!”

“Yes. And that makes Bill my half-brother.”

“So then, he’s my half-uncle.”

“Correct.”

“So why does he say he’s my uncle if he’s only my half-uncle?”

“That’s because he loves you very much.”

3

When I was about four, Uncle Bill would play Chutes and Ladders and Uno with me. As I remember, he was pretty good for a confirmed bachelor, and was even able beat me a few times. But he often admitted that I was a far better player than he was.

One day, he asked me what I wanted to be.

“A lawyer!”

He seemed surprised.

“Why a lawyer?”

“I want to help poor people.”

“Eileen, that is truly admirable.”

“Uncle Bill, I know it kind of means ‘good,’ but what does admirable actually mean?”

“It means, honey, even better than good.

“Eileen, I know you are already eight years old, but don’t you think that’s a little young to decide on your life’s work? And how do lawyers help poor people?”

“There was a very poor family that lived just down the block from us. Their landlord threw all their stuff out on the street. They had to go to a homeless shelter.”

“How awful!”

“Well, Uncle Bill, if I was a lawyer, I would have gone to court and stopped that landlord from doing that. And the mother had just had another baby.”

“You know something, honey? If you want to be a lawyer – and to help poor people – then I’m sure that you will someday be a really fine lawyer.”

4

A few years later, Uncle Bill came over for dinner. My mom had made his favorite dish, corned beef and cabbage. He always used to kid that you had to be careful not to eat too much of the cabbage – or not enough corned beef.

He was wearing a jacket I had seen many times before. My dad often teased him about how old it was. Finally, Uncle Bill seemed to take offense.

“I’ll have you know that this jacket was custom made!”

“I’m sure it was,” said my mom. “But for whom?”

My parents roared with laughter. Then, a few seconds later, I finally got it and started laughing too. The laughter was contagious, and even Uncle Bill couldn’t stop himself.

5

My parents and my other aunts and uncles were divided on this question: Was Uncle Bill rich – or was he poor?

Aunt Rose made the best case that he was rich:

“First of all, he has worked in the Post Office for over forty years, and he’s still going strong. True, the pay is not great, but everyone knows what a tightwad he is. He lives in a small rent-stabilized apartment, and we all know how much he spends on clothes. I’ll bet he’s got hundreds of thousands squirreled away.”

Then, Uncle Paddy argued the opposite:

“We all know about Bill’s devotion to the Catholic Workers’ organization. Now I’ve got nothing against them – they do very good work for the poor – but they also make all their members take a vow of poverty. I happen to know personally that he hands over almost his entire paycheck every week.”

“That shows how much you know, Paddy” piped up my dad. The Post Office pays their employees every two weeks.”

“Fine,” said Uncle Paddy. “So then he gets to give ‘em twice as much!”

I sat there listening, and even though I had heard Uncle Bill talk occasionally about the Catholic Worker, all I knew about them was that they helped the poor.

The next time Uncle Bill came over, I asked him to tell me what this group actually did to help the poor.

“Uncle Bill, do you work for The Catholic Worker?”

“Sort of. I do volunteer work for them. Not for them, but for the organization itself. They have a couple of buildings near the Bowery, which is a street in the City. But my regular job is in the Post Office sorting mail.”

“Tell me about the Catholic Worker.”

“It’s a kind of community, a community where everyone shares. If someone is hungry, that person is fed. If someone has no clothes, that person is given clothes. And the homeless are given a place to sleep.”

“Isn’t that like a homeless shelter?”

“In a way it is. But we give out of love. In our “houses of hospitality,” we are all the same. In a sense, we’re all poor. But you could also say we are all rich. That’s because we are a sharing community.”

“Can I come to see it?”

“Of course! But I think it would be best if you came with your parents.”

I went to Uncle Bill's community many times, usually helping to serve meals, and often just sitting around talking with whoever was there. Going there strengthened my resolve to become a lawyer. I really got to know poverty almost firsthand.

Before going to law school, I still needed to attend college. Even if I had wanted to go to an out-of-town school, my parents would not have been able to afford to send me. And law school would be still another financial burden.

But Uncle Bill remained very encouraging. He often said that if I really wanted to be a lawyer, then I could become one.

I remember the family dispute about whether Uncle Bill was rich or poor. I knew that he certainly did contribute a lot to the Catholic Worker community – in time and money.

When I was ready to apply to law schools, Uncle Bill was even more direct: "If you really want to go, you can do it. I may be just half an uncle, but I have full faith in my niece. "

Was there a hidden message? Was there a hint that if I fully committed to going, he would help pay the tuition? That is, if he actually had the money.

The only way I managed to get through the first year was to live at home and take out huge student loans. I still came to the "house of hospitality" whenever I could. Uncle Bill had finally retired from the Post Office, but only because his health was failing.

Whenever he saw me, he would address me as Esquire Eileen. And whenever I mentioned my financial woes, he observed, "You made it this far; I know you'll make it all the way."

By the beginning of the third and final year, I doubted that I would ever be able to pay off my loans – especially since I would never earn very much representing the poor. But I had to admit that Uncle Bill had been right after all. I certainly could make it through law school, and even do it on my own.

A few months later, Uncle Bill passed away. When we visited the funeral home, I tried to hold back my tears. But when I looked in the coffin, I completely lost it. My parents put their arms around me. Then they led me away.

"Did you see what he was wearing?"

Of course they did. It was his custom-made jacket.

A week later, Uncle Bill's lawyer asked us to come to her office. Surprisingly, none of the other family members was there. It turned out that Uncle Paddy had been right. Uncle Bill had given most of his paycheck to the Catholic Worker Movement.

Then his lawyer addressed me. "You must know how proud you made your uncle. You were the only family member who visited the 'house of hospitality.' You went almost every week since you were in middle school."

She stopped talking. We waited. Was that it?

Then she smiled, cleared her throat, and continued.

"A few years ago, your uncle changed his will. He made arrangements to pay off all your student loans."

7

Most people use money as a proxy for success and even happiness. By that standard, Uncle Bill was not a rich man.

Since I was a little girl, he recognized a kindred spirit, and he shared with me the joy of giving to others. And for that, I will be forever grateful. He was indeed my rich uncle.

Weaponary

Aditi Uniyal

All of a sudden, I taste war on my lips.

The flowers growing from the lines
of my palms have started smelling
like carnage, and I have to take care
not too slip over on the blood that
floods the marble floors I walk on,
my steel chest rattles when I breathe in
gunpowder, my fingers morph into
gun barrels and my bones forge
themselves into metal, my heart
holds more iron than a human
can bear and my throat has become
a duct for bullets, my footsteps
have a disciplined rhythm but each one
is clunkier and heavier than the last,
my stomach is bulletproof and my thighs
are strong as concrete

(maybe concrete is all they know how to be like now)-

my body is turning into an arsenal,
or a weapon, or maybe I do not know
on what level do I lie on the hierarchy
of war instruments,
but what I do know, is that it isn't one
I wish to unleash, because
I am supposed to wage a war
where I do not know who the enemy is.

Where the Sidewalk Ended
for T. S. Eliot
Robert Wooten

I fell through a crack in the sidewalk, once.
Down, for a long time, I fell.
Through myself and past all sounds:
the engines;
the eager hairy bipeds that walk the streets—
“Which of the monkeys is it?”;
the unctuous waiters?

And, still, the journey continues
through the soil,
the darkness,
the woman in the sheets,
the house and morning breath.
I miss breakfast
and am still falling.

Now, the mist of the city is gone, the cat,
and now, that stench of the yellow fog of midnight,
gone.

Then, here I am at last,
lying by a crack in China,
that sidewalk in China, in the grass.
And I am as a newborn man and glad to be back,
though no one speaks my language,
the pilgrim without a city,
the lover without a love.

And the people walk the same.
The mist is still there.

And the air, there, is cold . . .
and now, I just roll back toward the crack and my hole.

And, when they found me in hell,
I couldn't remember my name.

And no one spoke my language.
I still hadn't had breakfast.

And now, here I am again.
And I don't even have to travel.

Music Lesson Francine Witte

She looks at the piano. The keys. The bench. Then endless sheets of music.
Her mother wants a child who can play and make them forget they are all growing older.

The little girl is 10. And the last thing she cares about is music. Or how to make it. Or getting older.

She cares about why her father is never around anymore. Why her mother keeps saying that things will make sense some day.

The little girl watches her mother each night by the window peering through the venetian blinds looking for the father. And the father not there. The father not there.

That's when she sits herself down at the piano and strikes a hard middle C.

The Apocalypse Eric Johnson

In primeval corners of the world, microbes are brewing that could kill millions of people. Politicians will stand at podiums like windbags as experts scramble to discover a cure if possible.

People will fall over dead in their tracks. Then the wildlife will reign, and we will all become a grand feast or banquet. Vultures will swoop down and peck eyes out of their sockets, while wolves, bears, and wild cats will devour the remaining flesh. Those left behind will battle against the nausea-inducing stench and gruesome sight of contamination. Our bodies will return to the primordial matter.

WAYNE RUSSELL INTERVIEW

BY AUSTIN SHAY
PHOTOS BY WAYNE RUSSELL

In every issue of The Paragon Journal we like to include an interview with the featured photographer. This issue we are proud to introduce Wayne Russell as our featured photographer. We are featuring five of his photographs including our cover.

Wayne Russell is a creative writer born and raised in central Florida, he has lived in Scotland and New Zealand, he now resides in Columbus, Ohio with his small family. In March 2016, Wayne launched his very own online creative writing zine, Degenerate Literature.

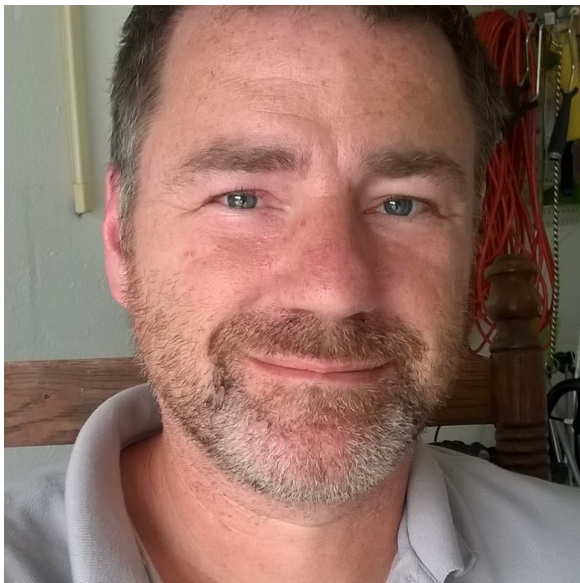
Austin Shay (AS): When did you start on this literary adventure?

Wayne Russell (WR): Far back as I can remember, I have always loved playing around with the creative arts, drawing, photography, and writing little stories since the age of four or five.

I was first published back in the Spring of 1990 with two poems in a print anthology, from there on out I was hooked on submitting my poetry, but it wasn't until the dawning of social media era that I really took my writing to the next level.

AS: Do you remember where your first piece was published?

WR: Yes it was in a print anthology by Quill Books back in the Spring of 1990.





AS: How are some of your literary heroes?

WR: I would really have to say I started off in my late teens, early 20's, idolizing the romantics such as Shelly, Keats, and Robert Burns.

As life unfolded and my eyes were truly opened to the sometimes very harsh world in which we live, my taste drastically changed to Poe, Sexton, Plath, W.D. Snodgrass, and John Berryman.

AS: Do you have an all-time favorite book or poetry collection?

WR: Yes, The Birthday Letters by Ted Hughes, Chicago Poems by Carl Sandburg, Ariel by Sylvia Plath, The Complete Poems: Anne Sexton, The Dream Songs by John Berryman.

AS: After a brief internet search, we can see that your first photographs are published in this issue. What made you want to start taking photographs?

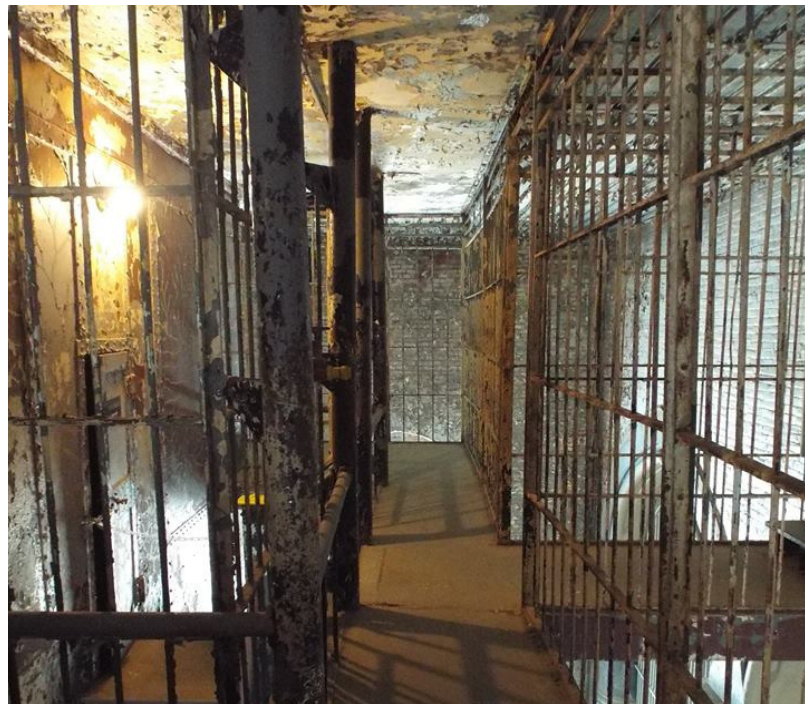
WR: Photography has always been a big part of my life, it just took me owning a decent camera to start submitting my photos along with my writings.

AS: Besides photography, you have been quite successful as a poet being published in Indiana Voices Journal and Dead Snakes. What would you say is the topic that you write about the most?

WR: Social issues, I like to raise the awareness level of the hardships others face not only in the US, but in the world at large.

AS: You have been fortunate enough to travel to the four corners of the earth. Do you ever draw inspiration for your poetry from these travels?

WR: Absolutely, I drawn on my experience's and my travels especially in my fiction writing.



AS: “Confession of a Protestant” is being published alongside several of your photographs in this upcoming issue. What is the inspiration behind this poem?

WR: It’s what I like to call a patch work poem, it’s based on a dream that I had about how someone would drink themselves into oblivion to hide from the pain of life, that self-medication mask.

It’s about facing your own mortality, and saying your final goodbyes to a much-loved parent. “Confession of a Protestant” is about many things.

AS: What advice would you give to the disenfranchised writer?

WR: 1. Never give up on the art that you love.

2. Chase your dreams, don’t ever let anyone tell you that you are not good enough.

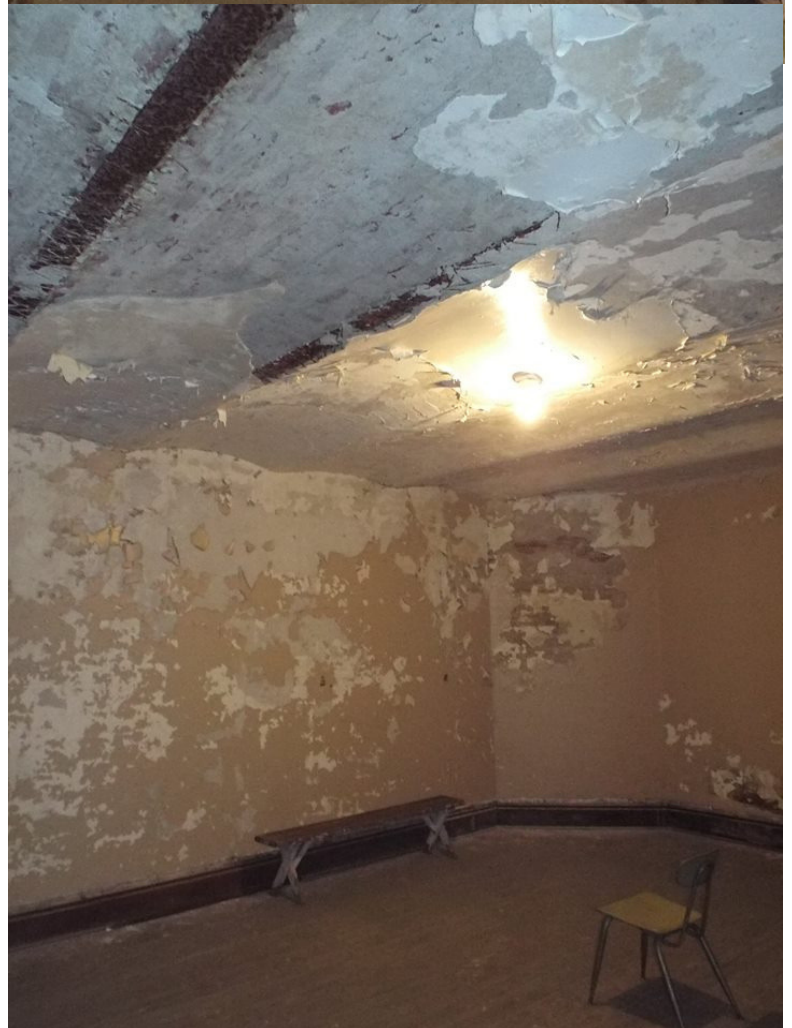
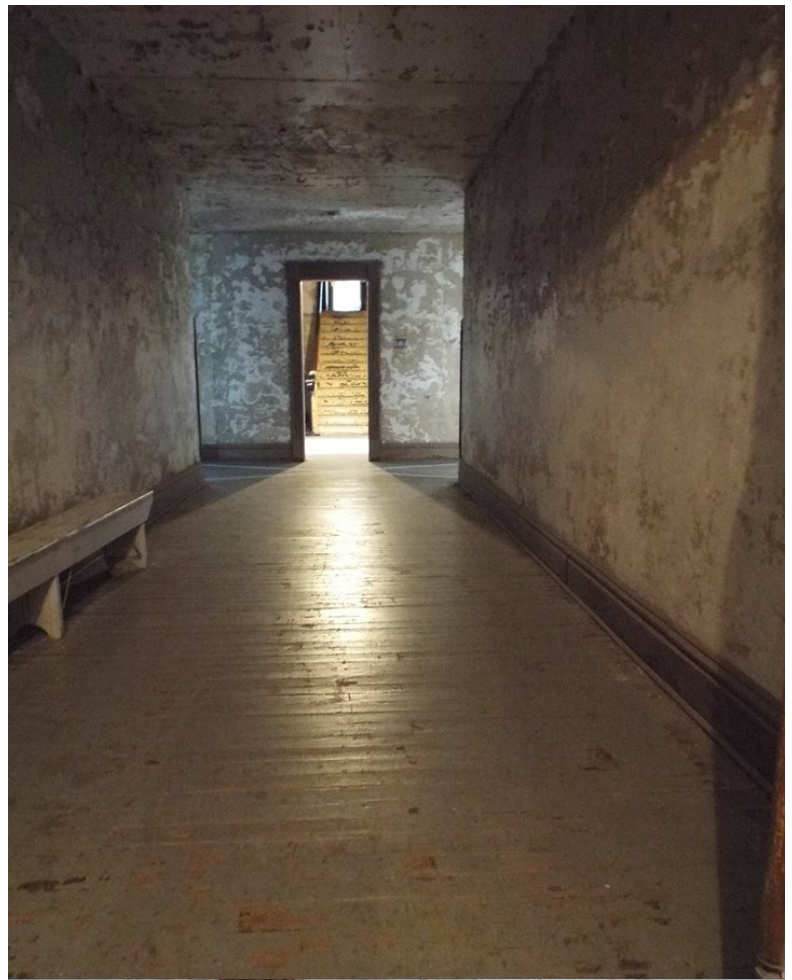
3. don’t write for fortune and fame, because most writers are public servants to the starving arts, write because it is part of you.

4. carpe diem cease the day!

AS:It appears that you are also the editor of an online magazine titled Degenerate Literature, what has lead you to start this magazine?

WR: It has been a dream of mine for the past ten years to launch an online magazine of and for all the disenfranchised writers out there, so finally in 2016 I made the dream a reality.

Degenerate Literature is truly a labor of love, it’s been a real blessing to have come across so many talented writers from so many diverse backgrounds and countries.



AS: According to the website for Degenerate Literature, it states that you are trained as a graphic designer. Do you think that your background as a graphic designer benefits you as a poet and photographer?

WR: 100 percent yes! Degenerate Literature would not be possible without my knowledge of website design, “complementary colors” colors that don’t clash, but look good together. Photography and fonts that complement each other, their placements, formats JPEG, TIFF, etc.

Even without the hassles of old school coding there’s still so much work to running an online or print magazine.

AS: What can you tell me of the “status quo of a waste land of poetic snobbery and highbrow ego, so he lowered the bar into the gutter where every day misfits and vagabonds dwell”?

WR: LOL! Oh yes that, I said and meant that on the DL website.

That being said, we aim to publish those authors, artist, and photographers, that are absolute beginners to the seasoned veteran’s just please “Leave your ego at the door.”

Stay humble, at DL we greatly dislike bios that are epic life stories. It’s the arts merit that matters, not the pedigree of the artist.

AS: How do you handle the rejection of your work as well as sending the rejections to aspiring writers that submit to your website?

WR: We all hate rejection, rejection stinks. I have developed a thick skin over the years over my massive piles of rejection letters, emails, etc. but it still hurts.

I have definitely learned to research the magazines content, if at all possible; before I submit my work.

Sending rejection letters is an event that I have always detested, because I know some of the submitters are new to the creative arts scene, some of the newer artist let rejection stand in their way, sadly; some never submit their work anywhere else again.

With issue thirteen of Degenerate Literature I welcomed aboard a new assistant editor, so delivering the acceptance and or rejection letters now falls upon her shoulders.

I like to lurk in the shadows and construct the newest issues, while she corresponds with DL’s growing mob of talented creative types.

Ode #20
Sergio Ortiz

Rousseau Leaves the
Enlightenment for Hollywood
Ryan Flanagan

the rugs all started to fend for themselves
and soon
there was not a single floorboard
you could trust

the social contract
broken down

I stepped
gingerly.

I am not poking fun
at you Don Pablo, it's respect
disguised as laughter, but I cannot
stand it. I do not allow such forms
of humiliation, such an offense:
to write verses to an onion
and all the while, do it right.

On the other hand, I, so new
at this trade, I cannot thread together
more than three beautiful lines
to the man I love using qualifiers
you so skillfully wasted
on elephants, artichokes, dogs,
salt-roses and onions.

Damn you, Neruda,
for using those expressions.
You leave them useless.

Echoes From The Floor
Michael Verderber

CHARACTER BREAKDOWN

MECHANIC – 40s, male, father of Boy/Dion; abusive; an older Liam
BOY – 8-12, male, son to Mechanic
DION – 18-20s, male, college student
MISTI HICKLEY – 20s-30s, female, victim of spousal abuse at the hands of Dion
LUELLA TROPY – 40s, female, helps run a Women's Center
GAIL – female, victim of spousal abuse
HAMMOND – 30s-40s, bank manager
LIAM HICKLEY – 30s, male, is a younger version of Mechanic, father of Dion

*Ages of Liam, Misti, Luella, Gail, and Hammond can be adjusted to assist with casting.

SETTING

Several different time periods over the course of roughly 30 years. It happens in the present, the recent past, and somewhere in between.

SCENE ONE

(Lights up on MECHANIC, about 40, messing with an engine, which is raised up enough to where he can get underneath to work on it. He gets up and crosses to a table and searches for a monkey wrench. He picks it up and saunters back to the engine. He gets on his knee and examines a facet of the engine. He sighs with frustration and begins to crawl under the engine. He begins to turn a knob on the engine. He hits it with the monkey wrench in frustration.)

MECHANIC

God dammit!

(He continues to work on the engine, lacing his work with sighs of frustration. A young BOY slowly creeps in with a basketball in hand. He is wearing a basketball jersey.)

BOY

D-dad? *(Long pause of silence)* Dad? *(No answer)* Dad!

MECHANIC

What, goddammit?! *(Continually working)*

BOY

I need a ride to the game.

MECHANIC

What!?

BOY

I need a ride to my basketball game. *(Long pause)* It's the championship...do you want to come? *(Long pause)* So, can you take me? *(Long pause)* Dad!

MECHANIC

What!?

BOY

Can you give me a ride or not?

MECHANIC

(Gets out from under the engine and confronts BOY) Look, goddammit. I have to fix this and two other engines by Friday. If I don't, we don't eat. You got that? We don't eat. Now leave me the hell alone.

BOY

I just needed a ride.

MECHANIC

Get one of your goddamn friends to take you.

BOY

They already left. I've been waiting on you.

MECHANIC

(Crossing face-to-face with BOY) I told you to get another ride!

BOY

(Beginning to cry) Why can't you take me?!

(MECHANIC raises hands to slap BOY but lights fade out. The sound of thunder erupts on the impact of the slap. They remain frozen. Scene ends.)

SCENE TWO

(Lights come up elsewhere on stage, a dorm, where DION enters with a backpack. The dorm is comprised of a desk, chair, a wastebasket, and a mini-fridge upstage of the desk. He puts the back pack down by the desk and sits down. He sighs tiredly and stares at his desk. He eventually reaches into his bag and takes out a ravaged folder full of papers. He pulls out a syllabus from the folder and a notebook from his bag. He reads over the syllabus and puts it on the floor. He opens his notebook and finds an empty page. He takes a pen from the cup on his desk and begins to write. He writes for about 30-40 seconds and stops to read his work. He sighs, stretches, gets up, and crosses to the mini-fridge. He takes out a drink and returns to his

desk. He picks up his pen, drums with it a little and continues to write. Lights slowly fade as he remains frozen. Scene ends.)

SCENE THREE

(Lights up on three women sitting in a half circle at a Woman's Shelter. MISTI HICKLEY is sitting in the center with her arms crossed, wearing a dark blue long sleeve shirt, her purse at her feet. LUELLA TROPPIY is sitting to MISTI'S right, dressed in a suit. GAIL is sitting to MISTI'S left and is dressed similarly to MISTI. They are all wearing sticker name tags with their names hand written on: MISTI H., LUELLA T., GAIL B., respectively)

LUELLA

Misti Hickley? It's your turn.

MISTI

Thank you, Dr. Troppy.

LUELLA

Please, Misti. Call me Luella. I am your friend, we are all your friends and we should address each other on a more personal level. Generally speaking, we like to work on an individual basis, but I wanted to try something different with this group. Throw out the books, if you will. If that is alright with you?

MISTI

Sure. *(Apprehensively)* My name is Misti Patton and I live over in Westsprings and um...where do I start?

LUELLA

At the beginning.

MISTI

I'm not sure what you mean.

GAIL

Luella, may I?

LUELLA

Yes, Gail.

GAIL

How about the first time things happened?

MISTI

Like the first time I got hit?

GAIL

When you first started noticing a problem.

LUELLA

Now remember, Misti, you don't have to say anything you feel uncomfortable with. Many of us have been through some of the same things you have. (*GAIL nods in agreement*) But just say whatever you are comfortable with us knowing.

MISTI

Oh, okay. (*Takes her time*) My husband is usually a good man, but he has these, these rage spurts. He'll come home from work and be so angry. I'll ask him if he wants something to eat or drink or whatever and he'll snap at me. The first time I really noticed a problem was several months ago. I, uh, went into the garage where he was doing something and I asked him to come in and have dinner with me. He just started yelling and he threw a...I guess it was a monkey wrench across the garage. He was like an animal. So feral and wild. (*GAIL nods in agreement while LUELLA listens intently, jotting down a few notes.*) I didn't know what to think, I was in shock that he went so crazy.

GAIL

Girl, I know what you mean!

LUELLA

(*softly*) Please, Gail, let her continue.

GAIL

Sorry, Misti.

MISTI

Oh, it's ok. It's good to know that I'm not alone in this shit. (*brief pause*) He came to dinner and I remember that he, he kind of barged in and opened the fridge violently and slammed the door. I remember that a lot of the magnets and pictures and things fell off. He didn't, like, pick them up or anything. He sat down, grabbed his fork and started shoveling food in his mouth, like he was starved. He was like a dog or something.

LUELLA

How did that make you feel?

MISTI

Well, I guess I didn't know what to think. I was shocked. I think I just stared at him for a few moments and then snapped out of it. I started eating...I think...no! Wait, I asked him what was the matter and he ignored me. Well, he kind of grunted. Then I started eating very slowly. I kept my eye on him because I didn't know what he was going to do.

GAIL

Were you scared, honey?

MISTI

No. I was really just worried. I had never seen him blow up or anything like this before. I mean he gets fired up when he plays football or whatever with his friends. It scared me, I suppose, in the sense that I didn't know what was going on and what had happened. (*voice begins to crackle*) I know he gets stressed out about work, I mean, being an engineer can be stressful, but he wouldn't tell me.

LUELLA

So you tried to approach him.

MISTI

Of course. That night, but he stayed bottled-up.

LUELLA

How long have these (*eyes her notes*) "rage spurts," as you call them, lasted?

MISTI

I guess that, I mean, what I was telling you about was in October. So, yeah. It has been several months. (*Long pause*) He stayed very temperamental from pretty much then on.

GAIL

Can I ask you somethin'?

MISTI

Sure.

GAIL

Did he find a friend in the bottle? (*MISTI looks perplexed*) Did he get into drinking?

MISTI

No, no never. He can't drink. His doctor won't allow it.

GAIL

Why is that?

LUELLA

Let's try to stay focused. Tell us a little bit about your husband.

MISTI

He is an engineer over in Westsprings. We have been married since he graduated with his Bachelor's from BU about three years ago. Things have always been fine between us. (*With dread*) Until rather recently.

LUELLA

Misti, when did he first hit you? (*MISTI does not reply*) You don't have to answer, Misti.

MISTI

No, no it's ok. (*pause*) After all, I came here to get help.

(*Lights fade. Scene ends.*)

SCENE FOUR

(*Lights up on HAMMOND, bedecked in a full suit, sitting behind an office desk working*)

on something. His desk is cluttered with papers filling the "OUT" and "IN" boxes. LIAM HICKLEY, about 26, dressed in a white collar shirt and tie (no jacket), enters office.)

HAMMOND

Ah, Liam, come in please. *(gestures to chair in front of his desk)* Liam, do you know why I called you in?

LIAM

No, not really. I mean, I think.

HAMMOND

I needed to ask you a few questions about your, um, performance lately. Liam, do you take pride in your job?

LIAM

Of course.

HAMMOND

(Disbelievingly) Really? I talked to Yoel over in accounting and he has reported to me that you have been slacking off quite a bit. *(acknowledges a picture on his desk)* You know, I have been in the banking business for 26 years, back when my father sold it to me. Ever since that day I have worked as hard as I can to keep up with the fast pace of banking.

LIAM

Wait, what did Yoel say exactly?

HAMMOND

Look, Liam, I don't want to beat around the bush too much. Your performance has not been up to our expectations.

LIAM

What do you mean "expectations"?

HAMMOND

Liam, things just aren't working out and-

LIAM

(Scared yet stern) What are you saying?

HAMMOND

Yoel has informed me that this is your third strike and *(slight pause)* we're letting you go.

LIAM

That's bullshit! I need this job! I won't be able to make the payment on my house. I'll get kicked out!

HAMMOND

You should have thought about that before you were late. You have been late to work three days in a row. You come in smelling like alcohol. Liam, no one wants to do banking with a drunk.

LIAM

I have not come in drunk, you son of a bitch!

HAMMOND

Well, people have been complaining. It's company policy that you finish out today and clear out your desk.

LIAM

(Venomously) You son of a bitch!

HAMMOND

Watch it, Liam.

LIAM

You son of a bitch!

HAMMOND

You clear out your desk right now and give your assignments over to Leyendecker, so she can take care of them.

LIAM

You son of a-

HAMMOND

Get out, Liam, or *(picks up phone)* I'm calling security to throw your ass out.

(LIAM exits hastily and angrily. Lights out and scene ends.)

SCENE FIVE

(Lights up on DION still at his desk writing. He gets up, stretches and paces, keeping his eyes mostly on the paper. He grabs the drink can, crumbles it up and throws it in a wastebasket basketball shot style. He looks into his fridge, stares a few moments and closes it. He sits down at desk, picks up pencil, writes for about three seconds and gets up. He crosses to the fridge and gets another drink out. He also grabs the bag of chips on top of the fridge and begins to eat. He sits down to write some more as lights fade. He freezes and scene ends.)

SCENE SIX

(Lights up on MISTI, GAIL, and LUELLA. They are in the same position and the scene continues where it left off.)

MISTI

No, no it's ok. After all, I came here to get help. Where shall I begin? *(pause)* Um, about a week ago I came home late and he was sitting at the dinner table waiting for dinner. He looked troubled and before I could ask him what was the matter he started cursing at me because I hadn't made him dinner.

GAIL

I hate that chauvinistic pig shit! They think we're born to cook!

LUELLA

Gail. Please.

GAIL

Sorry. *(Under her breath)* It just pisses me off!

LUELLA

(More sternly) Gail.

MISTI

It's okay, Luella. *(assuring herself)* This is, after all, a group session. Let her vent.

LUELLA

Gail, do you have anything else to say?

GAIL

Just that I hate cooking. *(Beat)* Go on, Misti.

MISTI

Where was I? Oh, yeah, um, so he started yelling and he smashed a dinner plate on the ground. At that point I just got scared and started crying. It didn't even phase him. He just kept yelling and yelling. And then I made the mistake of yelling back at him and calling him names.

LUELLA

Let me just interrupt for a second, Misti. You need to understand that you did not make a "mistake" by fighting back. If he thinks he can throw tantrums, so can you. If he thinks that he can throw dinner plates on the ground, sweetie, so can you. But, be aware of your actions.

MISTI

(unsure) Well, it really feels like a mistake. *(struggling)* When he hit me it was like getting struck by lightning or thunder or something. And he left me bruised.

GAIL

Say what? He left you bruised. Hell no, you don't take that!

LUELLA

Sweetie, where did he bruise you?

(Lights fade as they freeze in black. End scene)

SCENE SEVEN

(Lights up on LIAM, holding a box of his belongings; stapler, fake plant, etc. There is a long pause before he does anything. In anger he lets the box drop. If items fall out, all the better. He begins to breath heavily. Suddenly, in a burst of rage, he angrily attacks the box flailing about and screaming for about 10-15 seconds. Lights fade. He freezes as scene ends.)

SCENE EIGHT

(Lights up on MECHANIC and BOY. They are frozen in the same positions as before. They say the same lines in the same manner as said before, as if it was rewound and replayed.)

BOY

I just needed a ride.

MECHANIC

Get one of your goddamn friends to take you.

BOY

They already left. I've been waiting on you.

MECHANIC

(Crossing face-to-face with BOY) I told you to get another ride!

BOY

(Beginning to cry) Why can't you take me?!

(MECHANIC raises hands to slap BOY but lights fade out. The sound of thunder erupts on the impact of the slap. They remain frozen. Scene ends.)

SCENE NINE

(Lights up on DION, who is pacing more incessantly. He angrily grabs the paper he has been writing and crumples it up. He throws it in his wastebasket and preps himself to write again. He pauses and stares up at the ceiling. He reaches into the wastebasket and takes out the paper. He starts to write on the crumpled paper when the phone rings.)

DION

Hello? *(pause)* No, this is Dion. Steven isn't here right now. *(pause)* I think he gets out of class at 4:50. *(pause)* Ok, I tell him you called. Bye.

(He settles in to write as the lights fade. Scene ends.)

SCENE TEN

(Lights up on LIAM, who is laying on the floor amidst the office items with a gun in his left hand. He lays very still and begins to murmur to himself. He sits up very slowly, rubs the gun with his fingers and puts the gun to his head. Long pause. He sighs and puts the gun back down.)

LIAM

God dammit.

(LIAM puts the gun away in the box and begins to pack the office supplies back into his bag. Lights fade as scene ends.)

SCENE ELEVEN

(Lights up on MECHANIC and BOY. They are frozen in the same positions as before. They say the same lines in the same manner as said before, as if it was rewound and replayed.)

BOY

I just needed a ride.

MECHANIC

Get one of your goddamn friends to take you.

BOY

They already left. I've been waiting on you.

MECHANIC

(Crossing face-to-face with BOY) I told you to get another ride!

BOY

(Beginning to cry) Why can't you take me?!

(MECHANIC raises hands to slap BOY but lights fade out. The sound of thunder erupts on the impact of the slap. They remain frozen. Scene ends.)

SCENE TWELVE

(Lights up on MISTI, GAIL and LUELLA. They are in the same position and the scene continues where it left off.)

LUELLA

Sweetie, where did he bruise you?

MISTI

Chin. But that went away. Also, on my arms. *(She pulls up her sleeves to reveal very purple and blue arms from mid-forearm up into the sleeves.)*

GAIL

(Angrily) Oh my God!

LUELLA

Misti, have you reported this to the authorities? Please tell me you have.

MISTI

N-no. Not exactly.

GAIL

What do you mean "not exactly?"

MISTI

I haven't. Okay!?

LUELLA

Gail, do not berate her. *(Softly, yet sternly)* Misti, why haven't you reported this to the police?

MISTI

I don't know. *(Long pause)* I was scared.

LUELLA

Misti, you know you should have reported this. This *(pointing to MISTI's arm)* is domestic violence. The cops would make sure he never hits you again. Why don't you say

something?

MISTI

Because I love him. (*GAIL and LUELLA look at each other as GAIL sighs.*)

LUELLA

You need to tell someone.

MISTI

I came here, didn't I? I thought your policy was to be discrete. I don't want the whole world to know (*struggles*) that I married the wrong man!

LUELLA

It is important for people to know what he has done to you. Do you want this happening to other women or children as well?

MISTI

No...

GAIL

You got to stand up for yourself, girl!

LUELLA

Will you please report this? I beg you, for your own good--

GAIL

And the good of others.

(*Lights fade, the freeze and scene ends.*)

SCENE THIRTEEN

(*Lights up on DION wearing a different shirt sitting at the edge of the stage as if he was in class.*)

DION

Oh, is it my turn? Ok. (*He gets up and stands at the edge of the stage*) Um, my name is Dion Hickley and I'm a sophomore Mechanical Engineering major. The essay topic I chose was um, a specific turning point in my life. I chose a turning point in my life when I was much younger. Um, ok. (*Begins to read*) When I was younger, I was late for a junior high basketball game and I asked my father, Liam Hickley, to give me a ride. He was, at the time, working on an engine of some kind and was stressed out. He ignored me at first but I was really persistent because I was going to be starting in the game. He got really mad and hit me across the face. I was scared of my father pretty much from then on. I became jaded about asking my father for rides or anything at all. This got me thinking about what I did to cause him to hit me. It became my fault that I was hit. As I grew older, I realized that it was not my fault after all. I have had frequent conversations with my mother about why my dad is the way he is. She said that when he was younger, (*lights up on LIAM slowly putting the things back into the box. He slowly*

examines each and every object.) he lost his job as a bank teller because he was frequently tardy. From what she said he sort of snapped and grew reclusive. He started to work on lawnmower engines because he could not find another teller job. Even with the mechanic job, he could not afford the house payments. I never lived in the old house, but my mother says it was nicer than the one I live in now. The turning point in my life was the realization that my father was a darker man than one would presume. *(Lights on LIAM fade out).* Despite the problems he had in his life, I promise to never hit my kids no matter what and under no circumstances. *(Lights fade out on DION as scene ends.)*

SCENE FOURTEEN

(Lights up on MISTI, GAIL and LUELLA. They are in the same position and the scene continues where it left off.)

LUELLA

Will you please report this? I beg you, for your own good--

GAIL

And the good of others.

MISTI

Ok. Okay, I will.

GAIL

(Looking in her purse). I didn't bring my phone.

LUELLA

It's ok, I got mine *(she begins to dial).* Misti, what is your husband's name?

MISTI

(apprehensively) Dion. Dion Hickley.

[F I N]

Recipe For An Appetizer
Caleb Coy

To produce the effect of
Key, spark, grille. Or perhaps
 needle, vinyl, skillet
For sampling of souls in a crowded room
For a suitable arousal of curiosity

Pairs well with *quintina*, *cherita*, or a tall *vignette*
Enhancing the flavor, the
 overall experience

Ingredients:

1 egg yolk, self-containing
1 or more readers, be they fat
 or lean
1 beast, preferably posthumous

Preparation:

Translate the heart
Be mindful of aesthetics

Smoke. Glaze. With varied herbs

Soak in a bath. Adjust
Temperature according to taste

While baking:

Give serious thought to devouring in one sitting

(Note: Even mollusks, however bitter, must be knifed with care)

Let all drip from the counter
And do not rinse your hands, they
 betray your labor

Ready to serve:

So stir the bowels, the seat of emotion
Grab the attention of everyone
 loosen their tongues
Remove your coat. Fold your paper napkin
Say Grace. Participate.

An Affluent Affair

Christa McDaniel

Crystals dripped like melting ice from the grand chandeliers hanging from the ceilings that seemed to extend skyward into oblivion over the crowd. The glimmering ice of the fixtures radiated with the chill that always seemed present when the herd of high society gathered. Even the dull light of the gas lamps that lined the spacious theater seemed unable to cast more than shadows on the empty faces of the throng. Adelaide had always found empty to be a surprisingly appropriate description for the opulence that trickled from every seat in the house. Even though pearls clung to every breast, flowered aromas dancing sickly sweet amongst a sea of bodies draped in the finest clothes, and money threatened to bulge from every coin purse, something remained stoic about the group.

The only real life amongst the molded citizens around her came from the white pages of the script that danced in the minds of the actors positioned on the wooden stage illuminated before the mass of seats. Not the actors themselves, for their cake painted faces dripped with sweat and discomfort, their buttons nearly bursting with the desire to be thinner because everyone knew the stage never flattered. Overdramatic voices and facades assaulted Adelaide's ears with every new shrill hopeful who took center stage, reeling off the newest dreadful romance with words no man would ever grace a woman. No, the only life adhered to the written word, black ink pressed onto smooth paper.

Many a days would her mother call for lunch with some ill-willed suitor, pulling her from the company of wordsmiths brimming with real life, spilling hearts and secrets onto books, pulling at her breathe while real men could only pull at her patience. Was it not even tonight that she sat in the stuffy theater with this assault of shrill voices to please the rich young man a few isles down who had been admiring her ever since the last play, who like so many others stayed glued to the bursting bodice of the woman now taking center stage?

The lights dimmed with ambiance as the woman recited her lines, words spilling from the corners of her cherry lips like waves from the sea, crashing into the audience to pull them with the tide of her performance. The dim gas light illuminated only her powdered face, shifting every eye to the gleam in her own. The actress seemed to drink in the audience just as much as they consumed her. Even Adelaide in all of her boredom stole a glance at this woman.

"Have you seen any of her performances before? A right siren of the trade, my dear," a voice Adelaide had yet to register chimed in with the soft murmur of the crowd. She registered a man she had yet to notice take the seat beside her, a dark man a few years her elder with a clean face and neat suit. She smiled politely as trained, bowing her chin ever so slightly in recognition, her golden blonde curls spilling over her shoulder as she did so.

"Why yes, I guess I frequent the theater, one could say. She is one of its saving graces, I could say," Adelaide retorted. The man seemed amused, stealing a sideways glance at her as he clapped in unison with the crowd as the act ended.

"One could say, however, I'd fancy knowing what you do say," he inquired.

Adelaide leaned towards the man only a bit, if only for the appearance of hiding her critic in soft tones.

“I do say that I’ve always found the art types overdramatic. Although, one could say that was what they were paid to be. However, I say much like our fair lady on the stage, they drink and eat the drama. Much as you say, like sirens. The pennies we toss for the tickets may go to the wardrobes and the settings, but what they really trade in is our adoration.”

The man gave a soft chuckle, adjusting in his seat to whisper back to Adelaide.

“Don’t we all trade in adoration, my dear? They say the currency of the rich is attention.”

“The currency of the powerful is favors, and we gain favors through our renown, which we gain through attention. Which begs the question of why we ever bother to act as if opulence is our trade when actors pack themselves in troupes and live on the edges of society and gain that same attention,” Adelaide rebutted.

The man let his gaze leave the changing scene of the play and fall on Adelaide. His eyes reflected the melting ice of the chandeliers, but none of the coolness.

“Is it, though? Is it not better to be famous than infamous? Should we not strive for reputation above all else?”

“Attention is attention. Have we not spend just as many dinners in discussion of the thieves than we have in discussion of the storeowner? Do we not ponder upon the wretched just as much as the good? Do writers spend their days inking tales for the heroes just as much as the atrocities of the villains?”

Adelaide found her interest in the siren upon the stage dwindling as she shifted to better hear her companion. The murmuring of the crowd had begun to be just as bothersome as the shrillness of the actors. Noticing her body language, the man motioned to the door.

“Care for a cigarette, my dear?” he offered with an outstretched hand.

Adelaide gave no second thoughts to the matter, thankful for an opportunity for fresh air, as one knew a woman was not to venture into the night unaccompanied lest it tarnish her reputation. She rose from her seat, smoothing down the layers of her velveteen dress, adjusting the deep mauve jacket to be straight upon her delicate shoulders. She followed the man towards the pair of intricately designed wooden doors that offered escape from the stale theater, her eyes trained on the back of his deep mahogany hair. Something of the way this man carried himself as he strolled reminded her of the western heroes in her tales, cocky men with funny accents, if only this man had not held every grace in his voice that men of high class adhered to.

When they reached the grandly lit entrance, lights flooding the signs directing people to the show, jolting compared to the dim, smokiness of the inside, the man turned to Adelaide, leaning comfortably against the brick wall of the theater. He pulled a metal tin of hand rolled cigarettes from his pocket, extending a slender hand to offer her one. Adelaide accepted without hesitation, waiting for him to strike his match and light the end. She drew a deep drag, inhaling the bitter smoke, and then let it slip between her lips to join the gentle haze of the night air.

“Would you rather be written as a name on a roaster at a party of rich men, or the man who came into the party with a gun?”

Adelaide couldn’t help but let out a laugh at the queerness of this question. Such an interesting man she had stumbled upon. She thought for a moment of an answer, enjoying her smoke.

“I’d rather be the man he shot, because alcohol will forget the party, and the next criminal will shadow the shooter, but a dead man in high society is a scandal, and scandals are eternal in the lives of people like us,” Adelaide recited, taking another drag from her cigarette.

“May I inquire the name of the man so interested in a ladies opinion?” Adelaide added.

The man smirked, replacing the cigarette he had never lit within his tin. He straightened himself, stepping away from the wall. Adelaide could not help but notice the air seemed to have filled with her cigarette smoke. The crowd that had gathered outside of the theater finally dispersed, leaving nothing but the gray haze in the air. She felt a certain tightness in her chest as a shortness of breath overcame her.

“A name is of little importance when history never remembers the shooter.”

The shrill sounds of the siren of the stage reciting her lines filled the empty air as the night turned upon itself and Adelaide’s vision failed. The slow decent to the sidewalk felt like an eternity as the stars in the sky dripped like melting ice down on the grandeur of the theater.

Dance of the Sanderlings

Ann Christine Tabaka

Little sanderlings
Playing tag
With the incoming tide
Feet ablur
While racing the waves
For tasty morsels
Buried in the wet sand
Bully gulls invade
Scattering the smaller birds
Circling around
They land once more
To continue their eternal waltz
With the ocean

Underworld

Ann Christine Tabaka

Deep within the crumbling catacombs
the sulfurous odor of burning torches
rags drenched in thick oil
light the way
Footsteps kick up a gray pall of ancient dust
carrying with it the stench of rotted flesh
Narrow passageways open up to dank chambers
Where lost souls gather
observing rituals as old as man himself
Subterranean cites and burial sites existing
side by side shrouding their dark secrets
Vermin scurrying through sewer openings
squeal as they rush by
A pervading sense of the macabre greets all
who dare to pass through the gates of hell

The Morning After in Orlando
CLS Ferguson

50 mamas lost their babies
50 papas, too
53 more are wondering how long they'll hold on

The politicians on the right say, *see*, we need to defeat ISIS
The politicians on the left say, *see*, we need gun control
But if everyone in the night club had a gun they could have taken out the shooter
But if there wasn't so much homophobia, the shooter would have never shot
We need more armed police
It's the Republicans' fault for taking bribes from the NRA
We need to be more *prolife*
If you're prolife, it must include *all* lives

We cannot allow them to divide us
We must unite

As the investigators try to identify the bodies,
a symphony of cell phones hauntingly serenade their efforts

Things Lost To Yesterday

CLS Ferguson

1. Her long-held, deep conviction that her children were the most important thing in the world to her.
2. The life behind her eyes and smile.
3. Dependability in things she said and did.
4. The names she called me: Sugar Dumpling, Darling, Sweetheart.
5. Time together. We could pack a day or do nothing at all, loving each other's company.
6. Memories. Hers memory became so faulty that it makes me question my own.
7. The Christmas tree, ornaments, and Christmas village she collected for three decades.
8. The grilled cheese sandwich and warm tomato soup awaiting me after a long drive to her house.
9. Her handwritten notes. I inherited from her the compulsion to clean out. Once I accumulated 20 of her lovingly worded letters, I recycled them. I knew that there would be more notes in the mail to me any moment. Now she may never write one of those to me again.
10. Faith that she will always be there. There are now cracks in the foundation of my world.

CONTRIBUTORS

Caleb Coy has a an MA in English from Virginia Tech. He is a freelance writer living in Christiansburg, VA with his wife and two sons. He has previously been published in Connotation Press, Liminoid, and The Common.

CLS Ferguson, PhD speaks, signs, acts, publishes, sings, performs, writes, paints, professes, and rarely relaxes. Her portrayal of *The Black Rose in Silence*, which she also co-wrote and produced, earned her a best actress award and a best film award. Her music video, *Secrets & Lies* earned accolades on the indie film circuit. She is published in numerous academic and literary journals. Her poetry collection, *God Bless Paul* is out on Rosedog Books. She and her husband, Rich are raising their daughter, Evelyn and their Bernese Mountain Border Collie Mutt, Sadie in Alhambra, CA.. <http://clsferguson.wix.com/clsferguson>

Ryan Quinn Flanagan is a Canadian-born author residing in Elliot Lake, Ontario, Canada with his wife and many bears that rifle through his garbage. His work can be found both in print and online in such places as: *Evergreen Review*, *The New York Quarterly*, *Word Riot*, *Setu*, *In Between Hangovers*, *Red Fez*, and *The Oklahoma Review*.

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Robert Garner McBrearty's poetry has been included in *Pilgrimage*, *Pooled Ink*, and elsewhere. He has just recently started submitting his poetry for publication. His short stories have been published in the *Pushcart Prize*, *Missouri Review*, *New England Review*, *North American Review*, and in other literary journals.

Christa McDaniel is a Creative Writing major in a very uneventful town in Arkansas, so here we must invent our own little curiosities. I do that with my writing

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Steve Slavin is a recovering economics professor. He earns a living writing math and economic books. His short story collection, "To the City, with Love," was recently published.

Gillian Sommerville is a senior in high school. She has only been writing for a short amount of time, but in that time she has discovered so much about myself. Overall, writing has proved to be a comfort for her. While she may never write professionally, she hopes to continue to write well into her future, for herself.

Kelleigh Stevenson is a seventeen-year-old West Perry High School student soon finishing her Junior year. She is the editor-in-chief and current president of her school newspaper and frequently writes. As of recently, she has had a short epistolary published in a college creative project.

Ann Christine Tabaka was born and lives in Delaware. She is a published poet, an artist, a chemist, and a personal trainer. She loves gardening, cooking, and the ocean. Chris lives with her husband and two cats. Her poems have been published in numerous national and international poetry journals, reviews, and anthologies.

Aditi Uniyal is a high school student and poet from Mumbai, India. Her work has been published by The Bombay Literary Magazine, Moledro Magazine, Indian Ruminations and is upcoming in a poetry anthology about conflict in India. She is passionate about poetry, history and cinema. She believes that close observation almost always results in good poetry.

Michael Verderber

Francine Witte is the author of the poetry chapbooks *Only, Not Only* (Finishing Line Press, 2012) and *First Rain* (Pecan Grove Press, 2009), winner of the Pecan Grove Press competition, and the flash fiction chapbooks *Cold June* (Ropewalk Press), selected by Robert Olen Butler as the winner of the 2010 Thomas A. Wilhelmus Award, and *The Wind Twirls Everything* (MuscleHead Press). Her latest poetry chapbook, *Not All Fires Burn the Same* has just won the Slipstream chapbook contest. Her poem "My Dead Florida Mother Meets Gandhi" is the first prize winner of the 2015 Slippery Elm poetry award. She has been nominated seven times for a pushcart prize in poetry and once for fiction. She is an avid iPhoneographer. A former English teacher, Francine lives in New York.

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