



# The Nabu Review

A Journal of Creative Fiction



The Nabu Review

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Editor - in - Chief

Sara Stevenson

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# Sinking by Kim Venkataraman

Sitting in a car with a bottle of vodka I know I can't open is part torture and part delicious anticipation. But what keeps running through my mind is how tired I am. Every part of me is weary. It's such a weird word, but my mother used to say it, and it's exactly how I feel, weary. My skin aches with the need to close my eyes, and I'm not sure I can bear the heaviness of the exhaustion that has soaked through every layer of my life. There's the store—which still isn't making money but takes nearly all of my time, the weekend catering jobs, the kids, and on top of it all, trying to help Jay finish work on the house. They're all things I've wanted and worked for, but is it supposed to feel like this?

Maybe if I just sit here and stare at the water and let myself have a few minutes of peace, I can pull my shit together. I told Jay I would pick up a loaf of bread, then meet him and the kids at his mother's for dinner. But instead of going to the market, I went to Bud's and got a fifth of vodka, and now I'm parked behind the abandoned cannery. So what if I sit here and stare out at the bait float and maybe close my eyes for a few minutes? Just because I bought the vodka doesn't mean I'm going to drink it.

God, I loved working on the bait float—I think it might be the best job I've ever had. Maybe because it was my first job, but honestly I think it's because the fishermen swore nonstop and didn't apologize. It made me feel like a grown-up, not like a thirteen-year-old kid who'd been shipped to a random aunt in Maine after her mother went AWOL.

I open my eyes and wonder if I might have fallen asleep for a moment. Fuck, I'm not even going to look at the clock. I just need a few more minutes. The bottle has slid into the space between the front seats, and I pick it up and put it in my lap. Would having a few sips be the end of the world? For six years I've lived with a line in my life that can't be crossed. Stay on this side and I'm good, but stray slightly—to a place where the rest of the world is able to roam—and I will have failed and ruined everything. But is that true? Does the past, when A led to B and then C and D—and lots of things I'd like to forget—mean that a slight bending of the line means it's all going to happen again? Twisting the paper around the neck of the bottle, I can feel myself getting closer to convincing myself that it doesn't.

The float looks tiny from here. Moored just off the shore, it's where the lobster boats off-load their catch and get bait fish. The summer I worked on it, all day the lobster boats in the Chapman co-op would deliver their catch, which I'd weigh and dump in the live wells hanging below the float. Twice a day the *Addy May* would come to deliver bait fish from Rockland, and a couple of times a week, the entire catch would be taken to Portland.

The bait stunk, and so did the boats, and even the wooden planks on the float had absorbed the fishy, rotting stink. I would be tired after each six-hour shift, but I loved it. I loved rowing out by myself in the morning, wearing the shed padlock key on a string on my neck, and when no one was there—which was a lot of the time—sitting in a worn-out beach chair and reading. It was pretty near perfect. The bait float, my aunt and uncle's house that used to overlook it, and even the rundown cannery next door felt like home, more than any place I'd ever lived.

I startle when my head slips to the side. Shit, I sit up straight and take a deep breath. I need to go, I will go, in just a minute. Maybe all I need is a sip, one warming, fortifying drink to get me past this moment. Out of this moment and into the next, whatever it might be. I take a deep breath and slide the paper bag off the bottle. The glass feels cool and I rest it in my lap as I close my eyes and crumple the paper bag tighter and tighter, into the tiniest ball possible.

I like coming down to this parking lot when I can steal a few minutes. If I pull down close to the water, I'm only a few hundred feet away from what used to be my aunt and uncle's yard. Their garden and house are gone, and in their place is an enormous shingled building that looks more like a hotel than a house. Even their dock was replaced with a bigger, newer one. But sitting down at the edge of the ocean, I can look across the water at the same view I had from my bedroom that summer. I never went out to the bait at night, but I imagined doing it. That long-ago summer, sometimes when I couldn't fall asleep, I'd imagine rowing out with a blanket and a pillow. pictured myself lying on the wood planks, the ocean gently rocking me, stars crowding the sky above me.

I'd never met my aunt Beth or her husband Rick before I came to live with them. Beth was my mother's sister, and she worked in the high school cafeteria during the school year, and before the bridge to the island was built, she worked in the ferry office during the summer. Uncle Rick was a supervisor at a metal forging company an hour inland, but in the summer he did handyman jobs on nights and weekends and checked on people's homes when they were away.

High above the water I spot an osprey, or maybe even an eagle it's so massive. It glides and swoops, rising and falling on the invisible air currents, its shadow giving chase on the water below. It's probably hunting, but watching the bird gently glide and turn, I wonder if maybe it is just enjoying the quiet and its freedom. As if the bird knows what I was thinking, it climbs higher and higher, then slowly circles down toward the car before disappearing. Maybe this is the message I've been waiting for, a sign to allow myself the smallest of breaks. Holding tightly to the bottle, I imagine the sound of the seal breaking and the burning warmth of my first sip.

I have loved the island since the first time I came here, but I've come to realize it's a different place to different people. For summer families like Jay's, Chapman is an idyllic summer interlude filled with boating, lobster bakes, and rounds of golf with their summer friends. Their real lives happen somewhere else—in faraway cities, at boarding schools and fancy colleges, until they have a family of their own to bring back for the Fourth of July party at the Club. But for the people who live on Chapman year-round, people like Beth and Rick, it's a place where the locals mostly live in small houses in the middle of the island. And for those who work for summer people—and almost everyone does directly or indirectly—summer is a rush to mow the lawns and tend the gardens and build gazebos and docks.

The year I lived with Beth and Rick, I learned everything changes after the second weekend in September. The sun still holds some of the promise of summer, and it's considered the best time of year for fishing and lobstering, but the biggest change is that the summer people are gone. The work of closing up their houses and hauling their boats is still to come, but those are things that can be done at a more leisurely pace. The feeling among everyone who remains is that they've finally got their island back, and once again they can have the peace and quiet of the place that belongs to them. I sometimes feel like I have a foot in both of those worlds, without belonging in either.

I twist the cap of the bottle, and the snap of the plastic seal is as loud and satisfying as I'd imagined. The bottle is fully to the very top, so I carefully lift it to my mouth, wondering if the first sip of alcohol in six years will feel like a homecoming or a let-down. Slowly I swallow, and find I don't taste anything at all. I take another sip and let it sit in my mouth, waiting for the slow burn, but finally give up. It tastes like nothing, like drinking a glass of lukewarm water.

Strangely, I find it reassuring. If the vodka doesn't affect me, then maybe its hold over me is gone. It's kind of nice, just relaxing and sipping, with no drama and no expectation of transformation. But what the hell, I look up and realize with surprise that it's already dark. The moon is nearly full and hovering brightly high above the bait, but as I watch I can see it moving lower, sinking and sinking. I hold the bottle to my lips and let the liquid run into my mouth, wiping a drip on my chin with my sleeve.

Shortly before my mother came to get me and I left the island, I remember my aunt saying when she was working in her garden that come fall her garden would make her feel as giddy as if she had thousands in the bank. Knowing that dirt and sun could give you more than you could ever need was one of the best things in life, she said. I take a long drink. Someday I'll have a garden like hers, with neat rows fertilized with seaweed and walkways lined with cardboard to keep the weeds from coming up.

"Ha!" I snort out loud. I barely have time to water two window boxes of geraniums. What makes me think I can manage a big garden? No, that will have to wait until things settle down. Another someday thing. How do you become a person who's thrilled with your garden? A person who's willing to work two—or even three—jobs to get by? And I don't mean it in a belittling way. I honestly want to feel whole in the way that I imagine Beth did. And maybe I did imagine it—what did I know when I was thirteen? I was caught up in the drama of my life and trying to fit in at a new school. But to me she seemed happy, and I guess that's what I want.

I wish I'd known when she died. I would have come back. Beth was more of a mother to me in the ten months I lived with her than my real mother was in every minute of her thirty-six years. But I never told her that, and somehow during the blur of high school and life, they both were gone. Not that everything was perfect

that summer. I didn't know many people, and most of the time my body was buzzing with a low-level anxiety, wondering when—or if—my mother would reappear. Sometimes I let myself imagine what it would be like to stay on Chapman Island and go to high school there. But that was the summer of the fire too. That night, and the weeks after when Roger Gentry was recovering and everyone was wondering what had really happened, was actually a horrible time.

Thinking about it reminds me of how my stomach ached sometimes with the stress of secrets kept and those worried about. It's still strange to think that the whole thing happened just across there...what the hell? A bright light has spread across the night sky, centering in the middle of Springettes Island, just like it did that night. As I watch, fire races up a huge spruce tree, turning it into an enormous sparkler. Next to it, the house seems to be glowing from inside. It looks exactly like it did that night across the water from Beth and Rick's house, which was why the fire chief came to the house to figure out which island the fire was on.

"Yeah, it's Springettes," he'd said into his radio. He looked oversized, standing in the living room in his bulky fireman jacket and boots. I'd woken up when I heard his truck pull in, and I watched from the bottom of the stairs. I remember he asked my uncle a few questions, and that's when my stomach started to ache.

"Well, I appreciate that, Rick, but you can clearly see his boat's on the dock, and so we have to assume he's out there." He turned to leave and said into the radio, "Send the boat out with whoever's on the wharf, and I'll meet you there." He nodded at my aunt and uncle and left.

The frame of the whole house is on fire, exactly as it was that night and as it's been in my dreams ever since, but that doesn't make any sense. There hasn't been a house out there in more than fifteen years. But, shit, there's a fire there now. Why have I been sitting here doing nothing? What if no one else has seen it? I look at my phone, but there's no signal. I reach for the key in the ignition, and my arm knocks the vodka bottle. God, it's more than half empty. My eyes feel so heavy, I know I shouldn't drive, but I have to. I put the bottle in the cup holder and quickly reverse. It takes all of my strength to push down on the brake. Everything looks blurry and dark, and I feel like I can barely see.

It's okay, I tell myself as I drive across the dirt parking lot. I'll drive slowly and concentrate. It's not far to the fire station, and once I get a signal, I can even pull over and call. The car rocks abruptly side to side. Fuck, what did I drive over? I look in the rearview mirror and all I can see is blackness. Just keep going, I whisper. Finally, I reach the road and I make myself look both ways, several times. There are no cars in sight and I pull out. Almost as soon as I pull onto the road, though, a rhythmic tapping starts. Tap, tap...tap, tap... Jesus, I must have a flat tire. Probably from whatever I ran over. Fuck, fuck, fuck! I grip the steering wheel tightly. It doesn't matter. I have to tell someone about the fire. I have to make sure no one gets hurt this time. But the sound gets louder and louder, bang, bang...bang, bang.

I startle and open my eyes. Somehow I'm back in the cannery parking lot, and the harshness of the light reflecting off the water makes me blink. There's a tapping on my window, and I startle when I see a policeman standing there. "Ma'am?"

I try to lower the window, but the car is off, and as I reach to turn it on, I remember the vodka. It's not in the cup holder; it's not in my lap. I glance around but can't see it.

"Ma'am?"

I start the car and put the window down. Nervously, I say, "Yes?"

"Just checking you're all right."

I remember the fire and look toward the island. "I'm fine but there's a..."

I let the sentence trail off as I look at the trees filling the island. The island looks exactly as it has for years, where nature eagerly filled in the gap left by the fire.

"What's that?" he asks, his face concerned as he leans closer.

"Oh, nothing..." I try not to breathe so he won't smell the vodka on my breath.

"Good. This is technically private property, so you really can't park down here."

"Right, right." I nod vigorously, trying not to exhale in his direction. I can see the crumpled paper bag on the floor, but where is the bottle? I force myself to smile and nod again. "I know that. I just needed a few minutes to..." I can't seem to think of what I needed, or what I should say.

"I understand." He pats the side of the car before walking away.



I start the car, but I really want to find the vodka before I pull out. I take my time putting on my seat belt and checking the mirror, killing enough time that he pulls out before me. Frantically I lean over to look under the passenger seat. Then I feel something behind my foot and reach down. I pick up the bottle. It's heavier than I expect, and as I pull it out, I'm shocked to see it's unopened. I rest my head back and exhale. In the rearview mirror, I can see that the police car has stopped near the top of the parking lot. He's waiting for me to leave.

I wipe the tears that have suddenly filled my eyes, and put the bottle in the glove compartment. As I reverse and head back toward the road, the police car starts moving again and pulls out of the parking lot. I put my window down, and when I reach the road, I turn in the other direction.

# Overrated by Bill Wilkinson

Mrs. Paulson clicked off the television set and turned the last lamp off. She could see Mr. Paulson's profile bathed in the wavering greenish-blue light of his ancient Gateway desktop. He spends most nights huddled in his den since connecting the computer to the web.

'Off to bed, hon,' Mrs. Paulson whispered. He offered only the slightest of grunts, not bothering to peel his eyes from the screen or slow the clacking of his fingers across the keyboard. She noticed the spacebar was sticking this time, frustrating his flow.

Used to be, after dinner and the dishes, Mr. and Mrs. Paulson would sit, hips touching, on the sofa in the living room of the modest home they'd inhabited these past thirty-two years. While Mrs. Paulson played along with Wheel, Mr. Paulson would jot plans for the following day's classes in his notebook. Then he would focus on the television once Jeopardy! began, calling out questions before Trebek completed the clues, while his wife cross-stitched or read a paperback.

He'd then turn on the ballgame or the hockey, watching until his eyelids shuttered, some part of his always touching some part of hers. At ten, Mrs. Paulson would rouse Mr. Paulson so they could negotiate the stairs to bed together.

It all changed when Mr. Paulson arrived home one afternoon, his balding head red, ranting about the younger man who entered his fifth period English class, uninvited, to threaten Mr. Paulson's existence.

'So he just comes in,' Mr. Paulson cried, hands up to the heavens, gesticulating to his wife who sat below him at the kitchen table, a crossword abandoned, her soft face wrinkling. 'You should see him. Pin-stripe suit and a thick red tie! And this smirk on his boyish face. Oh! He knows all there is to know!'

'But honey. Calm, please. Who is this man? Tell me,' Mrs. Paulson said, deploying the syrupy voice she'd mastered all those years wrangling first-graders, aiming to pacify her husband, who prefers threadbare cardigans to natty suits.

'The new principal. Oh, he looks no older than some of the boys and girls he sat among! And his phone was out the entire time, his fingers pecking away. The bell rang, and he marched past the students, grasped my hand, said, "I just sent you an e-mail." An e-mail! Then he said, "I gave you 3 out of 5 stars today." And I said, "What? Stars?" Mr. Paulson's open hands sliced and jabbed the air. 'He said, "I reviewed your performance. There's room for two sentences in the comments." And he smiled the whole time, he squeezed my hand so tight, cuffed me on the shoulder, called me "Man" not once but twice! "I look forward to seeing you improve," he said!'

'Oh, my,' muttered Mrs. Paulson. She'd never seen Mr. Paulson so animated, acting out the scene and imitating his adversary's chummy voice.

That's how Mr. Paulson learned of the school's new rating process for all its teachers. He'd now be rated, not by test scores or administrators or school boards, but by his students. There was a website; real-time star-tracking; daily rankings, school-wide; two-sentence reviews, one per student per teacher per day.

'This is all to improve the services provided by our teachers to the clientele, the receiver of the product, in this case, the student,' read the e-mail sent to all teachers. 'We need to approach education as a business. The best businesses, the ones with high brand loyalty and the greatest value passed to shareholders, the ones that profit and thrive, are those most attentive to its customers. Your students are your customers! Remember, this stunning manifesto continued, 'feedback, positive or negative, is crucial to ensuring the finest customer experience. Think Amazon! Those tasked with facilitating learning can only know what works by listening to the end-users, who are our students. Embrace this move towards responsive education! This is what our Founders had in mind as the end result of that great political experiment launched in 1776! This is What Democracy Looks Like!'

'What an ignoramus!' Mr. Paulson bellowed in his kitchen.

'You'll get used to it,' Miss Freely told him in the teacher's lounge the next day. Most of the young teachers had shrugged the e-mail off. This didn't stoke their outrage, not like the viral videos they argued over.

'Everything's a star system, now,' Miss Freely said. 'You're not on social media? Don't you use Yelp ratings when you look for restaurants? Or read Amazon reviews before buying stuff? Or Rotten Tomatoes when you want to see a movie?' She swiped through apps on her phone to demonstrate. Dismay crinkled his face. But he

likes Miss Freely. He appreciates her detailed rubrics and syllabuses. He can converse with her about nineteenth-century American literature. 'And aren't you a professional rater already? What are grades, after all?' she asked, leaving him to ponder.

He ruminated. He considered grading to be separate from those impulsive reviews left by ordinary people, sometimes emotional or angry or unreasonably joyous people, reacting instantaneously. The tests Mr. Paulson gives have correct answers, and anything else is wrong. Essays and open-ended questions are to be pored over with a discriminating eye to determine if the query is answered. Specific benchmarks guide the grading of a paper. He is trained to be objective; to weigh arguments for merit.

'But aren't we experts?' he asked Miss Freely at the end of the day. 'Aren't we trained to evaluate our students? To determine appropriate grades?'

She shrugged. 'I guess. But that's not the world we live in. Everyone has a voice and a platform.'

So that's why Mr. Paulson called the cable company to set his old computer up with internet services. He needed to get up to speed. He read tweets, Facebook posts, learned what the hearts and thumbs-up meant. He learned that the little Italian joint he takes Mrs. Paulson to the first Friday of each month has a 2-star rating. The vulgarity of the comments, the allegations lodged by customers, concerned him. His favorite film earned a 78 critics score on Rotten Tomatoes, but only a 48 from the audience. *The Old Man and the Sea* scored only 3.8/5 on Goodreads, the equivalent of a C. The Pulitzer- and Nobel-prize winning masterpiece earned the identical score to a book Mr. Paulson would never consider reading, a collaboration between James Patterson and Bill Clinton.

Monday mornings, Mr. Paulson drives-thru at McDonald's, ordering the Egg McMuffin meal with a black coffee. When he got to school the next Monday and unwrapped his sandwich, he knew his abstinence from the universal rating system had allowed himself to be trampled upon by others. So he took out his notebook, un-sheathed his pen.

'As often happens, the paper used in wrapping the sandwich had been slapped between the cheese and the English muffin upon assemblage,' he wrote in his notebook. 'Besides being unsanitary and rather unappetizing, this creates a mess AND twenty percent of the cheese has been lost to the wrapper.' He paused his pen. 'Also, when the opening of the coffee lid is positioned over the cup's seam, as happens quite often at your establishment, a small bead of coffee forms which escapes the rim and drips down the cup. When sipping, this bead of coffee has the tendency to stain the customer's shirt. I give your restaurant 2 out of 5 stars.'

That evening, he took that note and posted it to the local franchise's Facebook. He tweeted the corporate account. He joined Yelp to post it there. It was cathartic; empowering. Mr. Paulson was reading a new short-story collection written by a rather trendy author. 'The writer's comma usage is confounding,' Mr. Paulson posted on the writer's website, Facebook, and anywhere else he could leave his thoughts to be read by anyone. 'It appears the author is uncertain when to use 'lay' and when 'laid' is appropriate. Furthermore, I do not like the stories. I do not enjoy them. One star.'

# Meeting Mrs. Dalloway by Natascha Graham

She beat the splintered end of a fence post further into the earth.

The ground - sodden from rain, gave way easily, but still she beat it, enjoying the jolt and the bounce-back.

Chickens pecked at the soles of her boots through wire hexagons.

They'd escaped again early that morning. The wind had blown three of the fence posts down and made little glinting metal hillocks of wire mesh across the garden.

When she had drawn the curtains first thing, she hadn't been sure of what she was seeing. Now, here they were. Seventeen of them; Araucanas, Bluebell's, Maran's, Orpington, and a few Goldline's rescued from slaughter.

She looked at them now, the Goldline's, pecking, clucking. Clawed feet curling, flexing, cocking their heads to one side, eye-balling the ground for worms or bugs.

*Raptors.*

They'd taken a while to feather up. Serena had wanted to knit them jumpers after finding a pattern online. And she would have done it too, in the space before death, if she could knit.

She wiped hair from her face with the back of her wrist.

The wind was getting up again, but the fence should hold.

She dipped her chin into her scarf that still smelled of Serena - Her perfume. Her laugh. Her life.

She looked out across the field. Nothing was left of the trees now, just swaying branches, skeletons the lot of them, branches rattling like bones in the wind and around the very edges of the field she could make out the golds reds yellows and browns of the leaves from the old great oaks.

A pair of pheasants running, necks outstretched. A hare standing perfectly still in the rolling shadow of the clouds.

The storm had left the air taugth and threatened, another storm waiting to follow and the wind had blown the grass flat.

She would be rebuilding the run again come morning.

She stubbed the toe of her boot into the ground. The soil bruised and squelched a belch of watery mud across her laces, hair wild and whipped against her cheeks, caught in her eyelashes and the wet of her lips.

She felt weak for the first time in years. Only moments before she had felt hot and heady and full of the thrill of life.

A fleeting feeling, like water through the fingers.

Now winter had arrived and she hadn't even noticed it's coming.

The garden was dead.

Rose petals had turned to brown pulp, the brilliant sweet -smelling purple Heliotrope she had bought Serena had turned grey and brittle, and the trees sung a wandering song of their own.

She turned to where Serena had always stood by the door. Watching her.

Serena, a shadow now, with her loose fitting coat, and the blue-green blanket from the back of her chair wrapped around her shoulders, both hands clasped about a mug of tea. She barely seemed to move beneath the flap-flapping of the blanket, and the gentle ruffle of her short dark hair.

But then she smiled, seemingly unable to help herself.

Serena was beautiful.

Serena was always beautiful. Graceful. Whereas she was standing in a fine mist of rain in her old boots, losing hair grips in the mud.

But that one smile was all it took to remind her of why she (and the chickens) remained.

Serena.

It had always been Serena.

# Unexpected Guest by Yuliia Vereta

“The builders of empires always justified their actions by their beliefs that they and their cultures were superior to the cultures of those they conquered... believed in their superiority and strength, and that their actions were instruments of the divine order.” —Adam Jamrozik

Berlin, October 1905

The autumn was getting fierce. Extremely early this year. Everything in the city was soaked and wet. The streets were pierced by the cold wind that was bothering the leaves turning red and falling down onto watery roads and occasional tram rails. People were hiding in homes and shops warmed by the fireplace. Theater posters were unsticking and hanging down from the post. Ladies in elegant dresses were scurrying from their coaches to the small street cafes, holding umbrellas and jumping over the puddles. Berlin was breathing the fresh smell of the recent evening rain that made most people stay at home, baking buns with their grandchildren or play music in the living room.

Robert Koch, who was never entertained by piano talent or cooking skills of his wife was exactly where he felt he had to be, in his study in the Imperial Health Bureau, the building consisting of four stories of the wisest minds of the German Empire. He was sitting in the room next to his laboratory, behind the thick wooden door saying ‘Professor of Hygiene, Director of the Institute of Hygiene, Doctor Robert Koch.’ Next to the door stood the coat hanger with Koch’s black coat and a bowler hat, resting while he was as always busy.

Having inclined over his desk he was diligently scratching the paper, leaving on it dozens of lines of his fine handwriting. The caption said ‘The importance of improvement of sanitary facilities in the public buildings’. From time to time Koch brought his writing to rest, lifted the paper from the table, closer to the white dome lamp and reread everything that was on paper. Sometimes he frowned or thoughtfully stroked his beard and added some words or crossed some out and rewrote, and after pushing the oval glasses back to its place, went on writing.

The room was absolutely silent but for those scratching sounds he made when writing. Koch’s new study was a piece of art, every inch of it was a scientific sanctuary, filled with the best ideas of the epoch, the genius of the time. In the middle stood the massive wooden table with stacks of paper and a pile of finest books in bacteriology, half of them were written by Koch himself. Famous people, including politicians and doctors were watching him from the paintings hanging on the walls. Koch was paying his best attention to what he was writing, just like always.

Totally dedicating himself to work, Robert did not notice the vast shadow that appeared on the glass of his door, behind the door there stood a person that Koch would prefer to never meet in his life. But having such a great success in developing sciences and human knowledge as he did one usually does not have a choice. The shadow knocked the door and came in without waiting for invitation. Koch got distracted from his writing and looked at his late guest. It was a middle-aged man wearing the black uniform that looked way more serious than the police one. Koch pushed back in his chair and said:

‘Please take a seat. What can I do for you?’

‘I believe we can omit the introduction as it is of no importance’, his voice was deep and calm. The face seemed to have no emotions at all.

‘Well, as you know, the Empire is proud about your discoveries in South Africa and India and your fascinating work on tuberculosis, rinderpest, malaria, plague and especially anthrax’, the man looked at all of those honors and medals resting on the walls around them and continued ‘and as soon as all of these were properly studied here, in German Empire, and are a very serious matters we feel the need to have the examples of those bacilli and tissues of infected animals as samples not only in the medical laboratories, but also... in the governmental ones. Especially the bacterium *Bacillus anthracis*.’

‘Aren’t the laboratories of the medical institute the governmental ones? Or do we understand the



word 'governmental' in a different way?', replied Koch.

'They are governmental,' the man's voice turned impatient 'I was trying to say we need all those samples in the military laboratories.'

'And what made you come here and not just take them from the institute?' Koch did not seem to be scared.

'We need more than just samples of the bacteria. We need to perform the synthesis of the resilient bacteria spores that are able to survive for very long periods of time and in many different environments. In your recent experiment you isolated and grew *Bacillus anthracis* in pure culture and injected animals with the bacteria, we need the samples of these isolated and grown bacteria as we need to study how easily this disease can be transmitted.'

'I am too old to believe in the tale that this is for scientific purposes only and for the good only,' Koch frowned.

'What is good for the German Empire is good for you too. Think of everything you were given. If you refuse to do it, there will be someone else willing to take this ... project and probably this room.'

Koch heavily sighed. In the deep of his heart he always knew that this day will come and he was always scared of it, but hoped that when it comes there will be others to lead the world in a brave new epoch.

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The first deliberate uses of anthrax as an act of aggression happened during World War I, seven years after Robert Koch's death. There is the evidence that the German army used anthrax to infect livestock and animal feed traded to the Allied Nations, using world's first biological weapon.

# Meet the Authors

Kim Venkataraman has work that has appeared or is forthcoming in Amarillo Bay, BoomerLitMag, Carbon Culture Review, Desert Voices, East Jasmine Review, Entropy Magazine, Evening Street Review, Forge, Halfway Down the Stairs, The MacGuffin, The Licking River Review, Midway Journal, Nassau Review, Penmen Review, Poydras Review, Redivider, Riverwind, Spout Magazine, Talking River, Valparaiso Fiction Review, Whistling Shade, and Willow Review. She lives in Boston, and spends time during the summer in Maine where she grew up.

Bill Wilkinson writes fiction from his home in northwestern Pennsylvania.

Natascha Graham is a lesbian writer, poet and artist from Suffolk, England, with work previously published in Acumen, Litro and Flash Fiction Magazine.

Yuliia Vereta is a young writer from Ukraine, traveling the world and getting inspiration from other cultures to write short stories, poetry, creative non-fiction and whatever else that can comfort the disturbed and disturb the comfortable. Their other works were published in print and online in 2019 in Litro Magazine (UK), Genre: urban arts (USA), Penultimate Peanut Magazine (USA), the Valley Voices (USA) and the McGuffin (USA). They received the 2018 City of Rockingham Short Story Award (Australia) and became the finalist in 2019 Poetry Matters Project (USA) as well as 2019 Hessler Poetry Contest (USA).