

SILVER APPLES MAGAZINE

Creativity Worth Consuming



Issue 9 - May - 2017



74
PEOPLE WE HAVE LEFT BEHIND



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People We Have Left Behind

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Origami Handcrafted Gifts & Wedding Craft



George Dempsey Flanagan of Mojo Creations also known as 'The Maker of Magic' is a trained Graphic Designer and Artist based in Birr Co. Offaly.

George studied Graphic Design in Limerick School of Art & Design - specialising in design for print. He prides himself in being able to connect with the client turning any vision into a reality.

George's other area of expertise lies in his passion for creating and teaching Origami - 'the Art of Japanese Paper Folding'



"As a child, before I ever knew what Origami was, I taught myself how to transform paper airplanes into birds. some years later, I learned it was an art and Mojo Creations was born!"

As well as teaching workshops, George has developed a range Origami Handcrafted products that include framed artwork and Miniature Origami Art Vessels Origami Pet's in jam jars known as Whimsy's, as well as creating bespoke pieces for weddings, these include everything from bouquets & boutonnières for the entire bridal party, to table decorations & centre pieces for the venue.



Custom orders and personalising requests are all part of the service. If you are interested in working with George to create your own bespoke wedding ideas or Origami Crafted Gift for a someone special you can follow the magic on facebook & email: g-dempc@hotmail.com

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Letter from the Editors:

In which we don't look back in anger
Gráinne O'Brien, Alex Dunne & Una Hussey

When we were thinking about this issue - People We Have Left Behind (in case you somehow missed that) - we knew we would get some interesting interpretations of the theme. After all, we've all had people enter and exit our lives; whether it was a fleeting interaction, a friendship outgrown, or a broken love; whether they left by their choice or ours, it doesn't matter. They linger. They leave their mark on us and change us in ways we might not even realize.

Themes like this always gain the most submissions, and it's little wonder. Memories of the past awaken something in us. They haunt us. And it when we are haunted, that's we create our best art.

The theme for this issue was intended to be a memorial for those who entered our lives and then left. It was not intended to be dark or depressing, and we're delighted that, by and large, it's not. The submissions came in thick and fast, and they were full of reflection. There was melancholy yes, but they were also thoughtful and even hopeful.

We hope this issue sparks in you memories of people long forgotten, the love and laughter of your past, the fights and tears, and possibly, inspires you to reach out to someone you have left behind. Unless they don't appreciate your taste in trashy TV and cheap wine, in which case, you're probably better off without them.

Thank you for continually supporting us, supporting our artists, and remembering that creativity is always worth consuming.

UA 25

Eoin Devereux

The passengers around me,
In Economy Rows 34 to 38
Were strangely quiet
When the captain announced
That an emergency landing was necessary
Some five miles out from Rineanna,
The meeting place of the birds

I had always imagined
That in situations like this
There would be screaming, prayers and tears

We gently flew off and banked seawards
Following the jagged contours of the Wild Atlantic Way
Dumping aviation fuel
Slowly killing time
While the fire crews readied themselves
Back at the edge of the poured concrete runway

Heads bowed forward,
As instructed by the immaculate manicured Air Stewards,
We dutifully rehearsed our crash landing
Noting the strip lighting and the nearest Emergency Exit Door

It was in this silence
That I thought about never seeing you,
Our sons or ancient preening cat again

It was in this silence
That I thought about the importance of what is not said
Of how words and talk sometimes fail to express
That which is deeply felt

*Eoin Devereux is a Professor by day. He has published short stories, flash fiction and poems in a range of journals and books. He DJs at 'Manchester Night' and plays guitar with the indie band **Section 17**. He tweets daily as @profdevereux*

Why we chose it:

I think we can all agree that flying is terrible and the sooner Star Trek-style Transporters are invented the better. Eoin's poem captures a feeling of unreality, a sense that events are unfolding in slow motion, and reminds us that in times of crisis, our thoughts so often turn to our loved ones.

Sand

Ilyana Kuhling

Ilyana Kuhling is an Irish-Canadian poet based in Limerick. She has previously worked with and been published by the Art Bar Poetry Series, in Toronto, Canada, and Stanzas, a monthly event for emerging writers in Limerick. Ilyana is currently pursuing an undergraduate degree in Psychology and Sociology.

Why we chose it: Ilyana was sweet enough to send us both a censored and uncensored version of her poem "Sand". Being foul-mouthed cretins of the highest order, we immediately skipped the uncensored version. This poem perfectly captures those relationships that leave an indelible mark

And we left the city, to find ourselves at midnight
stumbling through a golf course in the dark
your phone screen illuminates the cosmos
so we can see the trees
and stars surround us, shroud us like a blanket

We lie in the sand dune, drunk, laughing.
This. This is what it feels like to be in love,
platonically

The next day I find sand in my hair and shoes
fragments of truth
hazy memory cannot recollect
but the sand does not lie

I still find grains of you
Wherever I go. In people, in places, in music

And maybe you find grains of me too
When you send me a message and we haven't
spoken
In half a fucking year
And you say
"I heard this song and thought of you".
Now, I'm crying on the subway.
You piece of shit.

I still find grains of you.

Back to Mandir

Kerry E.B. Black

There's something wrong with staring down a bull on an abandoned street in urban USA. Yet here I am behind a burger joint, counting the enraged puffs from flaring bovine nostrils. I can't outrun the thing; it is huge, but fast. I can't hide.

It paws the asphalt and grunts. Its huge brown eyes show no herbivore kindness.

"Dude, I'm sorry. I know I'm not supposed to eat beef," I plead, my hands fluttering in front of me like flags of surrender. My Hindi relations would shake their heads in solidarity with the bull. "I'm an American now, though. My whole family is."

The thing's massive sides heave.

I back away, my legs agonizing over the slow movements. "Look, I promise we'll go to the temple and make offerings."

The thing's grunt became higher in pitch. Chills race up my spine and set my hair on end.

"Mandir. We'll go to the Mandir and make offerings. I promise. Really."

With one step, it moves close enough for me to notice the odd, elongated pupils in its bulbous eyes. Its manure-rich smell overpowers the garbage pouring from the dumpster.

With a swipe of my hand, I knock the paper cap from my head and cover my staff name tag. "You know, even my Dad ate a hamburger and a cheeseburger."

The yellowed, blinking light reflected off the dark-tipped horns.

"I mean, it was a mistake. It doesn't say

Kerry E.B. Black lives and writes in a butter-coloured cottage along a foggy river outside of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA. Feel free to follow the author at www.facebook.com/authorKerryE.B.Black or Twitter @BlackKerryblick

Why we chose it:

A great reminder that sometimes the things you thought you left behind - tradition, religion, culture - can hunt you down in the strangest places. This little piece made us laugh, think, and want a burger. Kerry does it all in a flash 400 words.

beef. I mean, ham is pig, right, and cheese is made from milk?"

I bumped into the cold, greasy garbage bin and whimpered.

"See, it's different here."

I felt its hay-laced breath coat my face.

"I'm quitting today. No more beef. I'll get another job. We'll visit Mandir. I'll make my whole family go, okay?"

It opened its mouth. Teeth like antique ivory grazed my cheek, leaving a trail of bubbly slime as I cowered.

"There it is! Found it!"

Two men in cowboy get-ups, complete with Stetsons and lassos, sauntered over. They pulled my tormentor away, whipping its head around using its horns. They prodded it into a trailer. Metal scraped against itself as they contained the creature.

"Thanks for distracting Old Boss, kid!" one of the cowboys yelled over his shoulder.

I wiped slime from my cheek and struggled to hold down my dinner as the truck pulled away into the darkened streets, taking with it my surreal encounter with the Divine.

Haiku

Denny E. Marshall

the man on the moon
wishing mission astronauts
had not forgot him

*Denny E. Marshall has had art, poetry, and fiction published. Recent credits include poetry in **Quantum Fairy Tales** #18 Winter 2017 and artwork in **Third Wednesday** Fall 2016. See more at www.dennymarshall.com*

Why we chose it:

It's funny to comment on haikus because the comment is often far longer than the poem itself! That's the beauty of an effective haiku though, they manage to convey so much in such a constrained format. Denny's haiku is no exception; it paints a heartbreaking image of loneliness in three short lines.

Holes in Our Tickets

Nalini Priyadarshni

Between guzzling absinthe and walking
in circles on frozen ground
we dream of unborn summer and sigh
and watch it freeze the moment it escapes our mouths
Still hot from kisses we write to each other

We draw mandala with blue tips to check
if there is still a chance to catch the train
I was late and you didn't wait

Carpe diem
you shouted at nobody in particular
before you hitched the ride
and lived by your words
gathering shadows until they were all you had

Carpe diem
I repeated and made peace with the crowd
I lost myself, subsequently

Carpe diem
we now whisper to each other and
keel over to be sucked into the vortex of drunkenness

Maybe at the other side of the portal, in a parallel universe
we would no longer be held hostage by the holes in our tickets
and visions beyond the end of tracks.

*Nalini Priyadarshni is the author of **Doppelganger in My House** and co author of **Lines Across Oceans**. Her poems have appeared in numerous literary journals, podcasts and international anthologies including **In-flight Magazine, Poetry Breakfast, Yellow Chair Review**. Her forthcoming publications include **Sacred Women in the Anti-violence movement: Anthology**.*

Why we chose it:

Nalini has a beautiful way of using language to put you into an almost dreamlike state. Reading her words transports you to a place out of time, while reminding us to seize the day while we still can

Ira's Fantastical Night Ride up New York 9

Les Epstein

Ira's Fantastical Night Ride up New York 9

Characters

Ira, an educated and retired professional and lover of everything Mozart has slipped into later stages of dementia. He remembers pieces of stories, enough to bridge together yet another trip to his favorite place in the Adirondack Mountains.

Holly, married to Ira for over fifty years, she struggles to maintain a quality of living for him at her own expense. She is an extremely bright woman but her sense of irony is starting to harden.

In darkness the overture to Mozart's Don Giovanni starts out. Lights reveal an older man, Ira, seemingly lost in the music. On a small slab that is his porch, he sits on a wooden chair, next to a small table on which a CD Player rests. Every so often he attempts to conduct the music by waving his arms but he has difficulty following or maintaining any sense of tempo. He walks over and stops the music. He pulls out the CD and stares at it for a moment. Then he gently places the CD in the player and presses play. He sits in his chair and becomes lost in the music. Though the Commendatore's famous entrance music happens much later in the opera, Ira calls out "Don Giovanni!" He walks over to the player and stops the music and though he intends to start the music over but he forgets to press play. He prepares to conduct, with arms wildly in the air. Realizing there is no music he rises and hits play. The overture starts again. He sits frozen with arms in the air. Slowly he nods off to sleep. His wife, Holly, enters; she carries a scale. She stands on the scale and looks put off by how it reads.

HOLLY

Down two more pounds. I'm eating. (*Looks at Ira*) I am certainly cooking. I even ate three spoonful of ice cream last night and still I'm down two more pounds. (*Hearing him snore a little.*) Well, that means you're still breathing. (*Looks down at the scale.*) I am wasting away. I haven't been at this weight since I was in my high school sorority. Maybe not even then. (*Seeing Ira wake up.*) You're playing that so loud the neighbors will hear. What are you doing?

IRA

(*Staggers for words, huff and puffing a little and then settling*) I don't know.

HOLLY

You look like you are conducting.

IRA

I guess I am. How did I do?

HOLLY

Brilliantly. Turn that down. (*He does so.*) What are you conducting?

IRA

(*Listens for a moment.*) Sounds like Don Giovanni. I've always wanted to conduct that opera. Are you going back to the Bronx now or are you planning to stay longer.

HOLLY

I think I will stay.

IRA

Good.

(*He stands and walks over her still standing on the scale.*)

IRA

You seem taller.

HOLLY

Life with you has stretched me to new heights.

IRA

Hmm. It's almost time to start packing. I think I will head to AAA and get one of those maps.

HOLLY

You've driven that router a hundred times why would you need a

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map.

IRA

It seems to be the thing to do. I seem to need that map more and more. I thought I heard one of those screech owls last night, howling from across the lake.

HOLLY

(Agitated at what she knows is an illusion.) What lake?

IRA

Schroon Lake. It was if was saying Ira, where are you?

HOLLY

(Sensing the irony.) Where are you?

IRA

I think I said to that owl I am on my way. I am ready to hit the road and wind through Manhattan, up through Sleepy Hollow and Hyde Park. Remember Hyde Park? That's where the Roosevelts lived. I think they may still be there. Then there are the Catskills all the way up New York 9 until you have a perfect view of the Perseids falling all through August. The best time is to go at night and there they are, lighting the night time Adirondack sky. A flash there... another flash there.

HOLLY

Do you make a wish?

IRA

A wish?

HOLLY

A wish upon a shooting star.

IRA

No. *(Pause.)* What were we talking about?

HOLLY

Dinner! We were talking about dinner. Would you like some dinner... chicken? Why don't you come on inside. And don't leave the CD player on the porch. It might rain tonight. Come and eat. *(He doesn't move and so she embraces him from behind.)* How about a nice chicken leg?

IRA

(Warm and even flirtatious) Yeah! *(Pause.)* When should we start packing?

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HOLLY

Packing? Oh...uh...

IRA

For Schroon Lake. It's about time to go.

HOLLY

Oh... I don't think we'll be going to the country this summer, Ira. We have all those appointments. You have an appointment tomorrow with the Dr. what's his name. The Cardiologist. *(He gives a pained look.)* I know you hate to go.

IRA

We've been there before. He doesn't know shit from shinola!

HOLLY

Well, let's have dinner and not worry about it right now. It's getting dark. The days are getting short and shorter.

IRA

(Singing like the Commendatore in the finale of the opera) DON GIOVANNI! DON GIOVANNI! The man enters the don's house but he's a stone! He's statue. DON GIOVANNI! DON GIOVANNI! I must have my revenge! *(He places another CD in the player and manages to find the Commendatore entrance on the recording.)* Here's the stone guest coming to take Don Giovanni into hell.

HOLLY

I am already there.

IRA

They pull him into the... what'd you call it?

HOLLY

Abyss!

IRA

Yeah! I know what he feels. I think I am being pulled in the abyss too.

HOLLY

I am dissolving, Ira. I barely weigh anything. I can't eat; I can't think I don't know what to do.

IRA

We should be heading the Adirondacks soon. Schroon Lake. Remember? That little Barn where we head Don Giovan-

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ni. We had to take that little road off New York 9 and go straight up hill, past old farm equipment and what seemed like hundreds of birch trees shedding their bark. Bark! We should think about getting dog. I wouldn't mind a dog

HOLLY

We have a dog.

IRA

And it's really not working out. I think we should get rid of that dog.

HOLLY

And what? Get another dog.

IRA

I don't know. I'm just telling you... My mother... She bought a roast beef for tonight. They put a limit on how much meat you can buy because of the war. But it was frozen so we left it on the counter to defrost. Did you see it there? We went to the movies and when we came back the roast beef was gone and the dog was lying on the kitchen floor, moaning.

HOLLY

That was in 1944.

IRA

You must have gone back to the Bronx then and we traveled up New York 9 to Schroon Lake. I don't know when we plan to go up this summer but August will be here soon.

HOLLY

It's September.

IRA

Well, let's pack up and go before it's too late.

HOLLY

Ira, we can't go. It's just not possible..

IRA

(Stepping away from the porch.) Why do you teat me like I am a baby? We always go the Lake.

HOLLY

Well, come inside and we'll talk about it.

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IRA

NO!

HOLLY

Why not?

IRA

Because I don't wish to go inside. I am waiting for here.

HOLLY

What?

IRA

I must have... I had a job there once... at the golf course. My job was to fetch the balls hit into the water.

HOLLY

I though you collected those balls and sold them...

IRA

(Continuing) But they didn't tell us about the snakes. They didn't tell us about the snakes.

HOLLY

I know...

IRA

THEY DIDN'T TELL US ABOUT THE SNAKES! THERE WERE SNAKES EVERYWHERE.

HOLLY

All right. It's OK. The snakes are gone now. I'll get you a glass of water. *(She leaves for the water.)*

IRA

In the pit with the golf balls and snakes, the devils pull in Don Giovanni and he disappears into the abyss. My cousin from Bronx is here. I don't how long she expects to stay. *(He sits up straight and hums the Don Giovanni/Zerlina duet—"Là ci darem la mano"—in which the Don attempts to seduce the young bride-to-be during a wedding celebration Don Giovanni hosted. He holds his hands up as if he were ready to conduct but then appears to be driving.)*

(She returns with some water.)

HOLLY

Driving somewhere?

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IRA

I'm not sure. The traffic is probably one big mess. Well... I'm... (*clears throat*) I'm sorry. Did we argue about something? Whatever it was I am sorry.

HOLLY

No need to apologize. Heading up New York 9?

IRA

Well, just to let you know we'll be heading towards Schroon Lake in August. Leaving the city in that old black Ford.

HOLLY

It's September, Ira.

IRA

Oh... then we should leave very soon.

HOLLY

(*Sitting Beside him and speaking with a soothing tone.*) I believe that old Ford is heading out of Manhattan... Right up Broadway towards the Bronx!

IRA

There! If you look at the whole street... then... well, I am not sure how to put it. It's like how its been said if you know what I mean.

HOLLY

Let's take that old Ford through the Bronx...

IRA

Should we drop you off?

HOLLY

No. I think I will go along for this ride. We'll sit together and glide through Westchester and all the fancy homes where we once said we would live, and now once out of the city glare we can shoot a picture of the moon... Then we can wave to the Hudson River and pass along old Dobbs Ferry and then say hello to Washington Irving

IRA

Hello Washington Irving!

HOLLY

Then there is the town Croton. We'll ride side by side through the Town of Croton and there we can see the sailboats on the Hudson and hope the breeze is not too strong for them. Then

it's off to Peekskill and Fishkill...

IRA

Time for lunch!

HOLLY

Tomorrow! It's night now. There, Ira! There is the home of Martin van Buren, right off New York 9.

IRA

Political hack!

HOLLY

We'll take that old black past Albany and on past the racetrack and the Saratoga baths. We'll jet up past old Lake George and then the village of Duck. And before we even know it, we've arrived. We are here at the Schroon. Remember Natty Bumppo was herewith Chingachook and the Munro sisters.

IRA

Who?

HOLLY

Alice and Cora.

IRA

Say again?

HOLLY

Last of the Mohicans. It used to be one of your favorite stories.

IRA

Henry Fonda?

HOLLY

No! I don't think it was Henry Fonda. I don't know... maybe... I'm not sure. But there they are, standing after a hard fought battle in this lovely lake. We're here in the shadow of Mount Severance. Now we're parked and ready to cross New York 9 to the other side. There we can stand in the Schroon and watch for shooting stars. Are you ready to cross?

IRA

Ready!

HOLLY

Let's look both ways. *(Their heads turn left then*

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right.) Take my hand (*He whistles the Don Giovanni duet again as they step forward.*) Good! We're across now. We're at the lake. Should we take our shoes off? Let's take our shoes off. (*They do so.*) Now step into the water. (*They take small steps.*) Do you hear the breeze whisper through the pines on the shore?

IRA

That might have been me.

HOLLY

Little gas?

IRA

It's what I've got left in the tank.

HOLLY

No! I think it's just that Adirondack breeze, hot, full of gossip and sweet. It knows all the history of everyone who dared to stand in this lake. Your history, Ira, is on this breeze. Now look up. The Perseids are on their way. OH! There's one! There's another! There are a hundred million of them.

IRA

I keep hearing Don Giovanni. Do you know him?

HOLLY

Not personally.

IRA

Neither do I.

HOLLY

Drink!

IRA

(*Taking the water*) Are you married?

HOLLY

I am married to you.

IRA

Well, how about that. Are you sure? But if we were not married would consider marrying me.

HOLLY

Yes, Ira! I would do that. I would do just that.

IRA

Good! I think I just saw what'd you call it?

HOLLY

... A shooting star?

IRA

A flash then out like an old light bulb...

(Lights fade, as they look skyward)

*In addition to appearing in such periodicals as **Eyedrum Periodically**, **Rizal Journal**, **Sweater Weather**, and **Saudade**, Les Epstein's plays, "Ira's Fantastical Ride up New York 9," premiered at the Greenbrier Valley Theater (West Virginia), and "This Slud Zarilla" at Virginia's Page to Stage. Les teaches in Roanoke, VA.*

Why we chose it:

Les's play takes Ira on one last trip with his beloved wife and allows us to come along for the ride. Beautiful and sad, this play proves that sometimes there are people you never leave behind, even if it can feel as though they have left you.

Lost

Lynn White

Lynn White lives in north Wales. Her work is influenced by issues of social justice and events, places and people she has known or imagined. She is especially interested in exploring the boundaries of dream, fantasy and reality. Her poems have been widely published online and in print publications.

Why we chose it:
We hate to say it, but Lynn kind of led us on here. We thought this poem would FINALLY solve the mystery of all those lost socks, but alas! We must continue to ponder in vain.

All those lost souls wandering sadly
in the space of their imaginations.
Where are they?
I can't find them,
can't help them.
All those lost socks swallowed.
by the washing machine.
Eaten up
Digested.
Where are they?
Odd,
but I can't find them.
All those lost words tumbling
through the dictionary.
Sometimes I find a few
and catch them
hold them,
write them down.
Then, sometimes
a few more find me
and I grab them too
and rearrange them all.
Sometimes they are worth reading
and picked up, no longer lost.

Leaving Home

Sarah Evans

Russell paused in the doorway to the kitchen, which was filled with steam. Pots and bowls piled over every surface, while Sabrina whisked up something over the stove.

“What’s all this?” he asked. It was rare that Sabrina cooked a meal from scratch.

She smiled tightly. “You do remember? About tonight?”

He didn’t. If he admitted that, she’d accuse him of never listening. Not implausible. He waited.

“Ryan’s coming to dinner,” she explained, using her overly-patient tone.

“Ryan?”

“You know. Cailin’s boyfriend.”

“Oh,” he said. “Yes.” He’d heard the name being bandied around, but he was certain he’d not been informed so precisely of his status.

“Perhaps you could sort out the fold-up bed.”

“The fold-up?”

“Yes. I told you. He’s coming for dinner and staying over.” Sabrina’s voice betrayed no more emotion than if she’d said “and we’re having pasta.”

“Sleeping here?” Please tell him he was reading this wrong.

“Uh-huh.” Sabrina wiped down the granite surface that looked perfectly clean.

“So if you could set up the spare bed in Cailin’s room.” She admired her manicured nails.

“Cailin’s room?” He sounded like a

*Sarah Evans has had over a hundred stories published in anthologies, magazines and online. Prizes have been awarded by, amongst others: Words and Women, Winston Fletcher, Stratford Literary Festival, Glass Woman and Rubery. Other publishing outlets include: the **Bridport Prize, Unthank Books, Riptide, Shooter and Best New Writing.***

Why we chose it: Sarah has taken our theme and run with it in this story - a daughter who's growing up and growing away from her father, a husband and wife whose bond has become tenuous, and a man who's left his old hopeful self behind.

flaming parrot.

“Well where else?” Sabrina’s smile was condescending, almost victorious he thought.

“For Christ’s sake. Don’t you think we should discuss this?”

“What’s there to discuss?” Her eyes met his and he was aware that despite her apparent offhandedness, she was observing him closely.

No bloody way. The words were forming, pressing to be said. Except they would probably have no impact and he’d be left looking ridiculous. His daughter’s behaviour was beyond his control and probably always had been.

“And is it... I mean have they?” The question felt unbearably prurient, but didn’t he have the right to know?

“Well of course they have,” Sabrina said. “I thought you knew. You don’t have a problem do you?”

“She’s sixteen.” Surely it was not unreasonable that he object to some pimply boy being physically intimate with his barely pubescent daughter.

“He remembered earlier times, simpler ones, and the way Cailin hurled her small, warm body onto his lap to whisper her childish secrets”

“Exactly. We should think ourselves lucky that she’s only now starting to have sex and with a perfectly nice boy her own age. And that she’s sensible enough to confide in her mother and take proper precautions.”

Her mother. The words were pointed and pierced as per their design. Not that he wanted – heaven forbid – to have that kind of

discussion with his daughter.

“Much better that it’s all in the open,” Sabrina added.

Her expression was smug. She was claiming victory in their battle, he thought, the battle which had slowly and subtly played out over the years: to be favoured by Cailin over and above the other. He remembered earlier times, simpler ones, and the way Cailin hurled her small, warm body onto his lap to whisper her childish secrets. Her preference felt so undeserved. He remembered the surge of joy, even though (or was it, a little, because) he knew that her devotion to him hurt Sabrina.

“It just seems young,” he said, sticking to his point, yet no longer certain of it.

“You’ve forgotten what it’s like to be sixteen. Perfectly old enough.”

He hadn’t forgotten what it was like to be sixteen. That, he thought, was very much the problem. He knew all too exactly how the minds and bodies of sixteen-year-old boys worked.

Perfectly nice?

He doubted it.

Russell stood under the shower, hoping the cascade of water would refresh him into a better state of mind. He thought of his first time and then of the first time with a girl who had mattered. He thought of his first time with Sabrina. She had been twenty-five, almost a decade older than Cailin. Even that seemed impossibly young. He thought of firm flesh and supple limbs and joints that didn’t ache.

He thought of sex, of all its deep and varied pleasures, and how it was perverse not to want that for his daughter.

Just not yet.

He thought how ignorant he had been at sixteen, how urgent and clumsy his advances on girls; how his focus had been purely on getting what he wanted. Was that type of testosterone-charged selfishness just him? Unlikely. Had times changed? Would this Ryan be more knowing in the ways to please? Or Cailin more assertive in demanding what she wanted? The details were the last thing he wanted to dwell on.

He dried himself and chose a semi-smart shirt. He sprawled on the king-sized bed that allowed him and Sabrina to sleep together in comfortable separateness, yet come together when they chose to. Out of need. Passion. Love, he supposed.

The doorbell rang and he heard Sabrina’s exclamations of, “How nice to see you.” At some point he would have to descend the stairs and feign politeness to this little prick who was fucking his daughter.

The thoughts punched, hard and furious.

But he needed to snap out of it, ought to go down. His longing for pre-dinner alcohol was outweighed by his feeling of utter dread and instead he waited until he heard Sabrina’s summons: “Russell! Dinner!”

He was hungry. Thirsty. He owed this to Cailin.

He half-jogged down the stairs in an attempt at vigour and the momentum carried him forward into the kitchen.

“Hello, love,” he greeted Cailin, taking in how the top she was wearing was black, close-fitting, with buttons open one too low. Her once familiar body had become alien, just as her thoughts were obscured. “And you must be Ryan!” His voice was super-duper-ly-hearty, his smile stretched thin. He held out his hand, then thought that a handshake was ridiculously formal. He wondered why the hell he was the one feeling uncomfortable.

The boy was exactly as Russell had pictured him, in all the details he couldn't have known. His hair was unnaturally black, dyed perhaps. What sort of teenage boy dyed his hair? He did indeed have spots and while it was grossly unfair to dislike him for his smear of teenage acne, it added to Russell's sense of lack of cleanliness. Taking proper precautions. He hoped it wasn't just pregnancy Cailin was guarding against. The thought of condoms in connection with his daughter made him feel sick.

Sabrina placed a steaming pile of lasagne in front of him. Orange grease was filtering its way out to form a film at the edges of his plate. Cailin passed him the garlic bread which oozed butter. His insides were carrying out strange contortions, yet all the while he could see himself pouring wine and hear his voice keeping up a stream of questions. What subjects was Ryan taking for 'A' level and had he thought yet which universities he would be applying for? Was he into football?

Sabrina smiled, her polished hostess smile. “Let him eat,” she said, then proceeded to bring up some film she'd seen with a friend, the sort of slick comedy he himself avoided. But Ryan and Cailin had seen it and discussion of the best moments of laugh-out-loud comedy provided fuel for lively discussion. He felt himself being removed from the field and told to wait on the sidelines. He felt his role as father - which surely involved fighting off inappropriate sexual advances on his daughter - being snatched away with all this talk of being sensible and openness.

The boy managed to drip a little of the lasagne down his chin and a drop of orange grease snagged on one of his white-topped spots.

Russell slugged back a mouthful of cold, crisp wine, trying to quell the threatened eruption of his stomach.

Dinner concluded, the four of them retreated to the lounge and to a DVD of Sabrina's choosing. Usually Russell would have absented himself, tucking himself away in the box-room turned study and adopting an heroic character in his online game. Tonight, he didn't want Ryan to judge that he was an deficient father.

All through the film - romantic capers between glamorous pretending-to-be-dowdy stars - he was aware of Ryan and Cailin sitting thigh to thigh, and of the progression of Ryan's hand from interweaving with Cailin's fingers, to groping her knee.

The closing credits blared, accompanied by Sabrina's told you sos as the scrolling names revealed her success in identifying the actors.

"Do either of you want anything?" he asked the teenagers. "Another drink?" Except surely they'd drunk quite enough. "Coffee? Hot chocolate?"

Ryan muttered he was fine.

"I think we'll probably..." Cailin said.

"I wonder what's on TV," he said, reaching for the guide and reeling off the names of programmes. If only he could postpone this moment. But Cailin and Ryan were already standing.

"We're going up," Cailin said.

"Hope you'll be comfortable," Sabrina said, with a coy smile.

He listened to the thump of their footsteps on the stairs, the squeak of the landing, the click shut of Cailin's bedroom door. He heard the beat of music through the ceiling and tried not to picture what might happen to its rhythm.

"Well," Sabrina said. "You could get me a drink." She looked unbearably pleased with herself. "That seemed to go well."

She was needling him and almost certainly doing so deliberately. She knew him well enough to know that he had hated every minute of the evening.

"Yes," he said.

"Maybe we should invite him along on our summer holiday."

Russell felt his blood turn lava hot. "I can't see why we'd need to do that." The music from upstairs seemed to have been turned up

"He heard the beat of music through the ceiling and tried not to picture what might happen to its rhythm"

louder.

“I didn’t say *need*. But it might be nice.”

He thought of Ryan tagging along, the sight of his greasy spots over breakfast and his thin arm dangling permanently over Cailin’s shoulders.

“It would be nicer to have her to ourselves. It might not happen that many more times.” All too soon, she would be leaving home, leaving them behind.

“It might not happen at all, if we don’t invite Ryan.”

“Did she say that?”

“She doesn’t have to.”

“Since when have you been such a great mind reader then?” His voice rose, just a little.

“Shhh,” Sabrina said in an exaggerated way. “We don’t want them to hear us argue.”

“We’re not arguing.”

She raised her eyebrows. “Keep your voice down.”

“It is down,” he said, raising it. “But I don’t see why the hell I should have to pretend that Cailin having barely legal sex is what every parent should positively wish for their daughter.”

He felt the release of giving in, allowing the slide towards the point of pure hatred, finally expressing exactly what he felt about Sabrina and her chummy attitude towards Cailin’s molester.

Sabrina’s laugh was low and mocking.

“So that’s what it’s all about. Daddy refusing to let go. Not seeing her for what she is. An adult or as good as. Still thinking of her as Daddy’s precious little girl.”

“At least she doesn’t still call me that.”

“Don’t bring my father into this.”

“Well perhaps if he hadn’t always been so stupidly overindulgent, you’d have exerted a bit more control over Cailin.”

“You can talk. You were the one always spoiling her.”

“I did not.” She had seemed so sweetly unspoilable. “You were always egging her on. All that buying make-up when she was no age and stupid heeled shoes and tight glittery tops.”

The arguments were well worn, but there was always a new way to express them, and they still had power to bite.

She’d never let Cailin properly be a child, always wanting her to act older than her years. He’d been an absent father, always working

late. She hadn't taught their daughter the principle of restraint; he'd not been around enough to teach her anything.

Both of them were stretching the truth. The important thing wasn't accuracy, rather to maintain the heat.

"I'd been out working all day. Working to keep the two of you."

"With just a little help from my father."

She knew how to land the blow.

"Fuck you," he said. "Fuck you!" He stood up and started walking towards the door.

"Well that's very grown up. Just storm out, why don't you."

He continued, fists clenched, into the kitchen. He drank a glass of water, then paused. He had nowhere to go. This was his house, give or take a large deposit from his oh so generous and I won't ever let you forget it father-in-law; he felt trapped within its tasteful furnishings. Unable to go back to the living room. Unwilling to head upstairs and draw closer to that thumping music.

But he couldn't just stand here. He drank a second glass of water then walked past the living room where canned laughter issued from the TV. He continued upstairs. The guest room, its cool anonymity and distance from Cailin's room felt inviting. But in sixteen years of marriage and much bitterer rows than this one, he and Sabrina had always managed to abide each other's company enough to lie on opposite sides of their wide bed.

He lay down and the heat of the quarrel dissipated. The music was switched abruptly off. He thought of the pink-wallpapered room and two slender bodies lying entwined in its single bed. Nostalgia stabbed, for Cailin's childhood and his own youth. Innocence was generally overrated, he'd always thought. Now he felt its loss.

He woke at two minutes to seven. Five days of every week, he craved stolen moments to remain within the bliss of sleep. Now it was Saturday, with the opportunity for indulgence, he felt restless.

Might as well get up. His first impulse was to deliberately create a commotion, just as Sabrina had done when she came to bed last night. His second thought was that the pleasure in irritating her was less than the annoyance of her being awake. He crept across the bedroom and opened the door quietly.

In the kitchen, his mood lifted at the thought of strong coffee. Sun glinted through the window, lighting up the daffodil-yellow walls.

He started humming then stopped, holding his breath at the sound of footsteps on the stairs. They were too light to be Sabrina's. Please would it not be Ryan.

He turned. The answer to his unuttered prayer yawned deeply and pushed back her hair.

"Hey, baby girl." It was a while since he'd called Cailin that and he wondered if it was a mistake. But she smiled easily.

"Hey."

"D'you want coffee?"

"The way you make it?" She grimaced.

"I can heat up some milk."

"OK." She yawned.

He poured milk into a jug and put it in the microwave.

"Can I?" she asked and indicated the cafetiere.

"Sure."

Carefully, she pushed the plunger down. "Don't know why that's so satisfying," she said.

"You always liked doing it, ever since you were little."

"Yeah." She looked down at her bare toes. "Thanks, Dad."

"For letting you do the coffee?"

"For yesterday." Her eyes remained fixated with the floor. "For being cool about Ryan. I mean, I know not all parents would be, and I appreciate it."

He felt suffused with guilty, undeserved pleasure. He caught the pleat of anxiety between Cailin's eyes, the dark eyes which matched his own. She looked young and vulnerable and he saw how she wanted his approval. He felt, as he had done so many times, the overwhelming fierceness of his love, and how its depth and magnitude did not help him to understand, nor to offer guidance or protection.

"It's OK."

"Is it? We did hear... I mean you and Mum last night."

"That wasn't anything to do with you."

"Really?"

"Really. Oh shit!" He lurched over towards the microwave to rescue the erupting milk.

She laughed. "At least it's frothy."

"Yeah."

He busied himself with cleaning the spillage, then pouring coffee and topping it up with milk, a dribble for him and half a cup for

her.

“Thanks,” she said.

“Look, maybe I find it a bit hard,” he said. “I mean you and Ryan. I know you probably think I can’t remember being your age. It isn’t that. It’s just...” He sipped his coffee and looked directly at her. A pink dressing gown embroidered with rabbits hugged round her body and she looked younger even than her years. “I know it’s not always easy to figure out what it is you want. Just don’t ever let anyone pressure you into things that you don’t want to do.” It felt a feeble attempt to express all he wanted to say.

She looked down, smiling above her coffee. “I won’t.”

“Promise!”

“Promise.”

It was the best that he could hope for.

“You can tell me,” she said. “You and Mum.”

“There isn’t really... We just have our differences.”

“Serious differences?”

She sounded oddly grown up and he felt their roles being reversed, her trying to tease confessions from him.

“No. Actually, they might be.”

She gave no indication of disquiet.

“Maybe you should take your own advice,” she said. “About doing what you want. After all...” He had a sense of words chosen very deliberately. “It’s what Mum does.”

He was aware of her staring unflinchingly at him as he absorbed the implication of what she’d said. He found he was neither surprised, nor unduly dismayed.

They both turned to look at the doorway.

“Coffee!” Sabrina said. “Is there any left?”

Her face was soft with the blur of sleep, and amidst the sags of middle age, he glimpsed the girl he’d known and remembered the two of them setting out together, a shotgun wedding because Sabrina was already pregnant, but nonetheless so full of hope and dreams, promising to love one another fully: mind, body and soul.

The wave of tenderness was unexpected in that he had not felt it for so long. It came and went in a heartbeat. And in the instant that followed he understood that he was leaving. Not yet, but soon.

He no longer knew or cared who finally had won. But he was weary of the battles; he was leaving Sabrina, leaving home.

Match

Robert Beveridge

Robert Beveridge makes
noise
(xterminal.bandcamp.com)
and writes poetry just
outside Cleveland, OH.
Recent/upcoming appear-
ances in **CircleShow**, **The**
Literateur, and **Vanilla**
Sex, among others.

Why we chose it:
To us, Robert's poem reads
like a 'cheers' to all those
relationships that end not
with a bang, but with a
whimper

It ended
not with broken glass
or shattered picture frames

not with blood
or the stench
of rotten food

it ended
without trumpets' blare
or nausea

it ended
like a match left
on its own

that sputters
then goes out

Occasional Poem

Joanna Grant

(Berlin, Museum Island, May 2016)

A late spring sun sinks over the Tiergarten, the famous trees of Unter den Linden sway in the brisk breeze as if they had always been here, always will be. The little beige taxicabs whizz and dart through the construction zones erected all over Museum Island, the canals in their mossy green depths a moat around the Neues Museum where they keep the Pergamon Altar (closed for restoration) and the famous head of Nefertiti in a strange dark room next to a hallway with peeling paint and pits in the masonry. Scars from the war. They retained parts of the old structure when they rebuilt. When we helped. When these bustling streets were heaped with debris. Rubble. Small mountains of smashed, burnt bricks.

Oh yes, I remember, he says, my taxi driver. Everything ruined. Not one stone on stone. We kids, we played king of the mountain on the heaps. We played tag, we chased each other in and out of the bombed-out cellars, the burned-out tram cars, and everywhere the smell of shit and rotting bodies under the bricks. And Americans.

We both get a laugh out of that. But to be serious, he says. I do remember. How you helped us all rebuild. We wanted

Joanna Grant teaches for a program run by the University of Maryland that offers college classes to American service members in deployed locations. Her poems are about her and the soldiers' experiences living and fighting as the American empire enters its tyrannical decadence. They leave their loved ones behind as they go where they're sent, and they get left behind, too, in all kinds of ways.

Why we chose it:

Joanna's poem reminds us that we are living in a difficult time in history and occasionally it can feel as though we're leaving so much behind - civil liberties, the rights of minorities, and even our humanity. But it is important for us to remember that those times like these, the best art can prevail. Also, we wholeheartedly encourage you to use your art to resist! The world needs your voice!

to remake the world, I say,
we wanted to make sure it would never happen again, all that hate
and death.

Things are good for now, he says. We build and build. You see. Per-
haps too much.

We Berliners, we like our countryside. Our green. There are many pro-
tests now.

You will see. If that Trump wins your election, you might see more.
There, and here.

That Trump, he entertains. But he frightens, too. Well, you know his
family comes

from here, I tease. The family Drumpf. We laugh. Oh, I hope it won't
come to that,

I say. If it does, well, maybe you Berliners can come teach us. How to
protest.

Or perhaps just how to survive. In difficult times. And so we agree, so
we both hope

That it won't come to that, as the silky black crows wheel down in
their slow arcs.

As the sun sets on the treasures of Museum Island, the steel ribs of
the rebuilt Bundestag,

all the pockmarked columns, all the inscribed memorials. To living
on. Amongst the ruin.

Pickles

Michael Chin

I met Pickles outside my apartment building when he rubbed his side against my calf and purred and was adorable. No collar, what could I do but take him in?

He liked to eat pickles, so I called him Pickles. We ate dill spears at my kitchen table. I bit from one end to the other, as if they were hot dogs. He gnawed from the moist fleshy inside, out to the skin as if it were watermelon. I tried it his way, but pickle juice dribbled down my chin and onto my shirt and I thought it was a foolish way to eat a pickle.

I thought it might be funnier to name him Tater Tot, so I made some tater tots, but he only smelled at them, only licked one, and was on his way, so I didn't force it. He cuddled up beside me, folding his body in a C-shape, so he could rest both his head and his back paws on my lap while I watched reruns of *Frasier* and ate the rest of the tots.

We went to bed together. He lay close enough I could smell his breath so I slid his body down so I could just feel his breath on my chest, and he didn't fight it. He was a good cat.

In the morning, there were little drops of blood on the sheets. It's the first I noticed the hole just above Pickles's ear and all of the white, wiggling little worms in there, glistening like hot ramen noodles.

He blinked slowly. Groggy. Maybe dying.

*Michael Chin was born and raised in Utica, New York and is a recent alum of Oregon State's MFA Program. He won **Bayou Magazine's** Jim Knudsen Editor's Prize for fiction and has work published or forthcoming in journals including **The Normal School, Passages North, Iron Horse, Front Porch, and Bellevue Literary Review**. He works as a contributing editor for **Moss** and blogs about professional wrestling and a cappella music on the side. Find him online at miketchin.com or follow him on Twitter @miketchin.*

*Why we chose it:
Oh man, this is really sad,
and gross, but mostly sad.*

I put a shower cap on his head, around his ears. He didn't seem to like that so he pawed at it and flicked his ear until the cap tilted to his right side, where the worms were anyway.

The vet said there wasn't much she could do for him—that he was a goner and she could put him down.

I told her he wasn't mine.

She asked whose he was.

I told her I found him outside.

"No collar." I wasn't sure if it were a question or an observation, because clearly he didn't have one. "If he's a stray, the kindest thing is to put him down here."

I looked Pickles in the eyes for any sign of what he wanted to do. His eyes shifted, his head turned. He stretched a paw to the edge of the tissue paper on the exam table and dug his claws in.

I don't think he knew.

I took his face in my hands for a moment, careful to hold him low, away from the worms. "I'm sorry. I love you."

I haven't been able to bring myself to eat pickles since. I think I might adopt a cat someday.

A Matter of Habit

Sergio A. Ortiz

“...you must say words, as long as there are any, until they find me, until they say me, strange pain, strange sin, you must go on, perhaps it's done already, perhaps they have said me already, perhaps they have carried me to the threshold of my story, before the door that opens on my story, that would surprise me, if it opens, it will be I, it will be the silence, where I am, I don't know, I'll never know, in the silence you don't know, you must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on”

— Samuel Beckett, *The Unnamable*

You learned to make those stone-cold
don't-fuck-with-me faces in fifth grade
while I excelled at English, math, and history.
I knew words, numbers, and dates
would never betray me.

In high school, we drifted away
as you sought the approval of boys. You sacrificed
half your humanity to fit in. I circled the edge
of the pool and dove in. For me, “outside” became a habit.

You stopped riding wooden horses
to the school cafeteria. I spoke “love” in codes to boys
like wetting my lips while staring at their legs
flying above the pommel horse.

Years later, I learned to laugh at the pile of rejected poems,
the overdrawn checking account, the rushed anniversary gifts.
In fact, I managed to get over my *The Crying Game* moment.
I'd like to imagine you did the same, that after all the men
you're happy dating girls, playing tackle football,
and pissing in the urinals.

Sergio A. Ortiz is a gay Puerto Rican poet and the founding editor of **Undertow Tanka Review**. He is a two-time Pushcart nominee, a four-time Best of the Web nominee, and 2016 Best of the Net nominee. 2nd place in the 2016 Ramón Ataz annual poetry competition, sponsored by Alaire Publishing House. He is currently working on his first full-length collection of poems, **Elephant Graveyard**.

Why we chose it:

Sergio's poem reflects on those formative friendships, those might-have-been-loves, the people we've left behind but still think about on occasion. There's fondness there, but its tinged with bitterness. It makes us think that maybe we should let go of some past grudges and wish all of the people we've left behind well.

Thank you for reading Issue Nine:
'People We Have Left Behind'

Submissions for Issue Ten (we're hitting
double digits people!!) will reopen later in
the year

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***Confessions from the back page:
I got nothing' people!***