

Flights



Issue One

Flights

Welcome to the first ever issue of *Flights*, our very own journal. We were overwhelmed with the quality and variety of work we had to choose from for this, our first issue. It's exciting to be able to feature work both from writers who have regularly attended our Spoken Word evenings, and writers new to us, and often from much further afield.

Thank you to all who submitted.

We'd like to say a really big thank you to, friend of the Dragonflies, Gaynor Kane for permission to use her beautiful painting of a dragonfly as our cover art.

If you are inspired by what you read here, we take submissions on a rolling basis so you are welcome to submit at any time, we hope to produce the next edition of *Flights* in September.

In the meantime, we hope you enjoy the wonderful poetry, prose and flash fiction we are so privileged to publish in this first edition.

All the best

Darren J Beaney & Barbara Mercer

Editors

June 2021

Flights

Poetry

Niki Strange	Edward Lee	Julie Stevens
Claire HM	Dee Allen	Thea Schiller
Ramesh Dohan	Kevin Ahern	Paweł Markiewicz
Matt Alton	Joseph a Farina	Ben Nardolilli
Colin James	Yash Seyedbagheri	Peter Miadinic
Margaret Royall	John Tustin	Bruce McRae
Robert Beveridge	Yuu Ikeda	S Reeson

Prose

Alfredo Salvatore Arcilesi	David Gold	Steve Slavin
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Flash

Gaynor Kane

Flights

Niki Strange

I CAN WRITE MYSELF

into an open top car,
careering on corniche roads
in the Cote d'Azur's brûlée noon.

No factor 50,
for the facts of my melanoma
are of little consequence.

All is shadow-less velocity.
I am heliotropic to the blazing sun,
lit up, let loose.

Letter by letter,
I am matter transported.
Written reckless.

I can write myself

sprung from a high board,
suspended in defiance
of Earth's pull,

my balance restored.
Lost nodes, radiated breast,
sleeved right arm

parts of this new entirety
that tucks, revolves
then plunges

as steel into the
quenching water.
Written stronger.

Flights

Edward Lee

CHEMOTHERAPY

He stops, the razor
halfway down
his foamed cheek,
and wonders why
he's bothering
with this submission to appearance.

He finds his answer silently,
and finishes his shave,
the razor continuing to his skull,
taking the hair
that remains there,
smiling to himself
at this small victory.

Flights

Edward Lee

THE BLOODLESS WOUNDS OF LOVE

In my dreams
we fight, pointed tooth
and curled claw.

We fight like we never fight
during waking hours,
timid and gentle
to each other
when we can look into
each other's eyes.

We fight in your dreams too.
your tight jaw
and clenched fists
betraying you
as you sleep.

Across the distance of slumber
we rage against
each other, our smiles
the next morning
fooling no one
but ourselves,
our years together slowly becoming more
than our years apart.

Flights

Edward Lee

NIGHTMARES BORN FROM A DAY OF DYING

In my dreams
I fight with shadows,
waking with bruises
the size of my fists
covering stretches of skin
that have not been touched
by another's hand
for years, the taste of blood
tight on my swollen tongue.

Flights

Julie Stevens

SEE A WISH

Bring me the sail of your breath
carry it to me and
put it in here.
I need the rumble of music
the first drop of rain
your morning words.

Bring me the edge of a wing
the back of a cloud
the top of a flake.
I need the sigh of a snail
the tremble of a fly
the drift of sand.

Bring me the sway of leaves
the pain of a splinter
the strength of a wave.
I need the call of an owl
the end of a tunnel
the jewel of water.

Bring me a silky tear
a lucky thought
a puff of smoke.
Bring me rays
bring me storms
bring me hush.

Carry them to me and
put them in here,
I can make anything happen.

Flights

Julie Stevens

ALL AROUND

Here I rest wondering where to find
the strength I need,
will it ever reach this broken soul?

The gift of waking knows where it moves
weaving into sleeping minds,
but how to hold?

The arm of wind makes the earth shudder
no fleeing leaf can halt its flight,
can I take that?

The sun delivers every morning
painting with its fine hand,
could I reel that in?

These eyes know it lives all around
shouting its name with a jubilant cry.

Flights

Julie Stevens

TO BE FREE

I don't know how it happens
I wake and I'm here,
balancing on air, my invite to leave.

If I hold this, I'm free
shove hurt from inside,
leave it to fester alone.

Feeling the rush, I'm taken
a door marking the way,
to a world where no one suffers,

I'm soaring over trees
racing through towns
and I won't ever stop.

I don't know how it happens
but I'll gladly go, be free
from the dark of day,

run with life as it carries me
always sail strong,
today will be kind.

Flights

Claire HM

HERON

He crashes into the canal path one night in
November and reclines in noodle wrappers and

broken bottles, one deck shoe peeks through the
browning cocksfoot as the idle consider

his snapped neck.
It points to a curved wing, the waning

blade of a beak, his body rotting beneath
dull feathers. Above his neck the questions form.

I stand with my blue skull
scarf fluttering, remembering hands as they crept

under my dress, creeping up, up and I stare
past this old carcass as the memory creeps

until my gold ring catches his beak
and two worlds start to glint, glint in the sun.

Flights

Claire HM

SONGS OF FLESH

- (i)
I smell tight and clean
the brackish tang of raindrops
damp prayer at dawn.
- (ii)
You are lions breath
blaze of sun beating muscle
hot wind rasping sand.
- (iii)
After the rasping
juice soaks through the leather fronds.
New mint. Petrichor.
- (iv)
Singed lashes flutter
hair feathers over belly
birdsong at sunset.
- (v)
Slurp of blistering tongues
our bodies gibber and cuff
chord of the full moon.

Flights

Claire HM

KAJAL STICK AND POWDER

- Unfaithful is not the moment
I lean in to kiss him
in a room thick with burning
- cigarettes and black sky,
in a room swirling with metal
guitar and red lights
- that turn the plump blonde
body, pink.
That was faithlessness. Lurching
- mouth leading,
bearing my teeth. No,
thats not unfaithful.
- Unfaithful starts on the
grey bus home,
my first hangover
- my rounded image
pale and red eyed
in the mirror of the unseen
- drivers periscope,
my trembling hand
in the make up bag,
- fumbling to project
the right image, easier
than facing my ugliness
- in someone else's eye.

Flights

Dee Allen

COMBATS

We've survived

Rain storms,
Long walks,
Climbing hills,
Thankless work

Together.

We've been to

Nightclubs,
Open mics,
Street protests,
Nature hikes

Together.

My friends
From England
Are more reliable
Than any person I'd known in the States.

Tough and black,
They look ready
For the battlefield
Than for Goth concerts.

Made for fighting
On foreign soil,
But with me, they walked
On a non-violent path.

Flights

Long ago, they'd travelled
On an aeroplane just to meet me.
Haven't betrayed me yet,
This fine, upstanding pair

Of fifteen
Eyelet, steel
Toed, veggie
Leather combat boots.

Flights

Dee Allen

FRAGMENT 2021

In one of his home-made
Newsletters to our loved ones,
My Uncle Poppy,
Childhood role model
And family theologian [these days],

Shared a memory
Of walking through
New York City
And finding someone's
Spray-painted revelation—

Words of caution, actually—
On the outer wall of a
Cathedral, possibly
Catholic, and
It said:

BEWARE OF DOGS

Which I assume
Might have meant:

BEWARE OF DOGS

Posing as sheep,
Running and attending
The warm holy sanctuary

From the cold truth—

[Inspired by the newsletter One Love – American Black History Month Edition, February 26, 2021.]

Flights

Thea Schiller

A PLEA, A PRAYER

Doing our best, in secret,
in whispering to the wind,
To carry, to cradle, to whisk us far away to lands of asking,
for completion, envelopment --
the way we needed to elope
inside a secured calm of love.
The wind's memory of childhood
Pushing our small frames ahead,
Our laughter, effortless eddies, circling above
the trusting atmosphere of family,
when what was known was without the fear
Of future endeavors and dread.

Oh wind,
the need to feel the spread upon our necks
Your gentle fingers moving away from weep to blossom.

The cherry trees,
inch up the vine of green,
transform the trance of white, to pink to sing.
For we, no longer alone, bereft,
will sink into your smoothest swoon of Spring,
Abide fierce messages you bring,
To stay robust and trust
the sojourn of your languor'd wind.

All chases of our supplications
Stop inside your wondrous solemn breeze.

Flights

Ramesh Dohan

NIGHT AT THE MUSEUM

Caravaggio
Did it first, making his paintings
Out of verses from the bible

In another, a nymph
The arms and legs splayed as if
possessed by a lustful god

The sumptuous reclining nudes
Always hopeful for something new

The heads and shoulders of gods
Cheer the crushing of a serpent

This is what poems do
They call out everything
By a name

Flights

Ramesh Dohan

STORYTELLER

My hand, the old style
Adept at poetry
How the palm and mouth
Rock back and forth
Talent has a look
And conducts herself accordingly
The face it takes
a minute to know, is yours
it heaves me out of a straight line
a story I was maybe narrating

Flights

Ramesh Dohan

A WINTER'S TALE

Beyond the thick curtains
The snowflakes are
Starting to fall
Each one determined
To bury something
I pay a visit
To an iron typewriter
That has not lifted
A key in years
Perhaps there is
A word in the dictionary
To describe this day

Flights

Kevin Ahern

TO BE OR NOT?

I had self doubts, late yesterday
A crisis existential
Am I for real or might I be
A dream, inconsequential?

Descartes said, "I think, therefore I am"
To prove his own existence
Because to be, there must be something
Making that insistence

Just like Descartes, I think a lot
So I had to be, wahoo!
But in view of that, I must confess
I'm not so sure of you

Flights

Kevin Ahern

TOO MUCH TIME

I got arrested the other day
Seems what I did was not OK

An officer told me that my crime
Was I had taken too much time

"But what," I said, "I didn't know"
"That it was time for me to go"

"Ignorance," he said, "is no excuse"
"You mess with time and you will lose"

Because of this, it seems that I'm
A person who'll be doing time

Flights

Paweł Markiewicz

UNENDINGLY PICTURESQUE

a pulchritudinous sonnet

according to
Paweł Markiewicz

I am through a superb window – looking.
An angel of feeling awakes in me.
The dreamy oak-trees stand alway leafless.
The native auspicious cue is just large.

My scenery - the enchanted verdure.
The moony old barn of Ted my nuncle.
I am looking at a proud throng of crows.
They belong to the whiff of every times.

The springtide looks so meek-beauteous-fair,
first and foremost Morningstar - at night.
I daydream springwards window-view withal
of a dreamy Ovidian summer gale.

Homelike herbage that seems to bewitch all.
My cats want to enchant the fantasy.
Dreamed subtle morn withal notably.

.....

gale - archaic: wind
alway - archaic: always
cue - archaic: mood
verdure - green
nuncle - archaic: uncle
throng - archaic: bevy

Flights

Matt Alton

THE HISTORY OF A NAME

on the playground
I told them
my grandad post-war naval service owned
Alton Towers that a select few
schoolmates would be equipped
with free tickets
and an arsenal of brags for next term
in the eternal present of who's it? perhaps
I craved some history
where nicknames stuck
like fat to a pan I sought the status
of a Somebody
or public sector desk job it could be
that now in the telling
I fabricate this memory
to lend my childhood
some depth
or nervous breakdown and early retirement
I saw
that a name is never far
from a constellation of twisted metal
looping back to the same point
with sweetness and sickness in the belly

Flights

Matt Alton

NOT THE STAIRCASE OF YOUR DREAMS

The phone cord spirals three steps up
and I cram my ear to the receiver.
Deep enough and his breath might
helter skelter me into that quiet room.
Hours, weeks, years go by. Hairstyles change,
follicles retire. My voice cracks
and kintsugis back together. I stretch
the wire to the next step up –
a game I play to keep things interesting.
Copper is scrapped and travel with
nothing to hold seems unlikely.
Gaps in conversation widen, miles multiply,
air pollutes despite my refusal
to fly. The helix that binds us is tugging
with no space to spring back.

Flights

Joseph A Farina

DIES IRAE, DIES ILLA

through the refurbished oaken doors the pews await your return. still scarred and
gum branded by us then,
they remember you in another time. faint organ music fills the vast hollow of the
church's nave. we assemble
as the ceremony begins. you rest silent, hands clasping beads intertwined with
stiff fingers, covered in
crosses and signs of faith, holy water stains your pall. we shiver at your entrance.
old eyes stare up and down
and close as they survey the gilded saints and stained glass tall windows casting
rainbows upon you and
remember the living days. anointed by cleansing incense, we leave, following
behind you. tonight we'll search
ourselves, speak of past springs and summer reunions, then like snow melts to
water, as you become
ancestral, return back to our charted lives.

Flights

Joseph A Farina

THRESHOLD

running home from school , breathless
to watch Annette and American Bandstand

my Italian angel and the devils music
in black and white and shades of grey

i dreamed of her in mousekatechnicolour
i acted out rebellion hosted by dick clark
in monophonic glory. ate my wonderbread
and aspired to truth, justice and the american way

through frightening days of 8th grade battles
for dominance and street wise knowledge
that Sister Mary Laura never taught

through sticky nights of hardening dreams
that left me quickened and awake
with memories of my angel
smiling through the moistness of new pleasures
i accepted but did not yet understand.

Flights

Ben Nardolilli

AMATEUR PALIMPSEST

The Greeks might forgive our opinions,
If we are willing to forgive theirs,
Believe me, they can do it,
Just not in texts that have survived for us,
Much reflecting is needed,
Beginning with the construction
Of new idols and new temples to put them in,
Then destroying them in due course
Because these will be ruins
Worthy of adoration and mourning,
Items we can fully appreciate
Now that we are the ones who put them up
And brought them back down,
Controlling the past and the present again.

Flights

Ben Nardolilli

STOICISM AND SKEPTICISM

The desired burials never come, all we know are fragments,
ambiguities, the lost worship, nothing disappears
for good, the established wisdom continues to be maintained
even though we know the foundations are lies,
all attempts at a new zeal lead nowhere, so long as edifices
refuse to crumble like good ruins, the sparks of change
are smothered by the shadows that they cast,
meanwhile, we rise and stand in moldy basilicas, huff incense,
and carry the trains of teachers we know are invalid,
all in the name of a sinking harmony that cannot be disturbed.

Flights

Colin James

IN SO FAR

A fabulous fear of heights
has you kneeling in front of me.
I'm looking out the window
at the traffic lights.
Patience is usually prophetic,
expectations are then forthcoming
knowing something has to happen.
Us, we are two quantified warriors
poignantly skinny, verifiably vested.

Flights

Yash Seyedbagheri

PACE

Pick up the pace, drink Diet Pepsi, more Diet Pepsi, run to your office, like
Chariots of Fire,
stretch your smile too wide. Try to dance to Tchaikovsky, get the body pumping,
that doesn't
work, crank up Taylor Swift. Finish grading papers two weeks ahead of time,
drink just enough
wine at the faculty party, laugh, cracked laughs, then have more caffeine, some
pills. Now, the
sheets feel too thin and sleep's so close, but your eyes won't close. You feel that
impulse,
pushing you to pick it up, pick it up, but you just want to sink into darkness.

Flights

Yash Seyedbagheri

BACKYARD

Backyard was once a verdant kingdom, a space to dance beneath the moon,
watch blossoms
blow, make love. We smoked indicas at midnight, watching smoke unfurling,
curtains opening
once-young minds.

Now, the grass has been crushed by gravel. It's a patio. A barbeque grill is
coated in rust
and blemishes. She called barbeques senseless, impractical. Even after I stream-
lined things,
because I thought streamlining meant salvaging.

I sit at the patio table. Credit card bills, utilities, alimony, and damages to
the drywall
demand dues, the byproduct of flying fists.

The moon murmurs and tugs. I can't look. Brightness always fades.

Flights

Peter Mladinic

HEART'S DESIRE

I marvel how such a beautiful song
came from such an ugly place.
I'm thinking of the Avalons who sang
and recorded this iconic R&B ballad
some call Doo-wop, and Newport News
where the Avalons came from.
I stayed there briefly. It was rows of
dark wood rooming houses, movie
houses with triple X marquees, a police
station. One late Saturday night, one
of two shore patrol, I saw a drunk white
guy tear up his fingerprints,
his bloody face and head after white
cops clubbed him. My Newport News
clashes with this song. You've
likely heard "soul on fire" in some song.
When the Avalons sing it in "Heart's Desire"
I feel it down to my toenails.

Flights

Peter Mladinic

LOVE AND MARRIAGE

Frank and Eileen's divorce was nasty, as many are, but I wasn't in court, hearing court, I imagined, had a film in my mind, though I didn't see lawyers. He wanted the divorce. Eileen had strayed with one man, but likely more than one. Men I never met. She told me last time I visited, their marriage falling apart. Then the divorce I heard about from her, from him. I was two thousand miles away from these two close friends. Gradually he silently accused me, not saying outright I wasn't there for him. What could I do, holding down a job at times overwhelming as jobs can be. I tried to be a good friend but wasn't good enough. He retreated into silence. But she and I stayed close enough for me to know that they in time fixed their problem. They didn't remarry but resumed the friend part of marriage. Both living in the town they lived in when they lived on Castlewood, with their son and daughter. Very recently the daughter Lori reached out to me. Frank was living in her house, with her family, and passed after a long illness. I texted Eileen, told her I connected with her daughter. That's cool was all she texted back. When Frank became ill she texted brief texts; like I got a report of his decline, but that's all. Once he was like a kid brother to me, and she a sister. We met in Mr. Gilmore's World History, which met a two, Monday and Wednesday. They were a couple.

Flights

He had a red Volvo wagon, the Frank Mobile, I sat in back while we rode long straight country roads buzzed on the joints we passed, some nights high on acid. Flash forward, best man at their wedding I raised a glass to a long happy marriage. When Frank was ill, I thought about him often, but what could I say, I'm sorry you're dying. I didn't ask if I could talk with him. There was the fact of his dying nothing could change. I feel I've lost her but what is a feeling compared to the fact dead is dead. At least Lori reached out. Their divorce she took hard being a kid but I guess she got past it, as Frank and Eileen got past it.

Flights

Margaret Royall

THE SWINGING SIXTIES

Argument over a maxi coat

My mum threw me that sideways glance,
said I looked absurd, that nobody wore
long coats nowadays.
Did I want to make an exhibition of myself?

I said everyone my age had them in London -
Trendy in Chelsea, uber-cool to wear one.
No one would turn and stare, unless with envy!

What's more, you'll not walk with me
to chapel in it. I forbid you, do you hear?"
She raced ahead, peeved, trying to disown me.

In London I aspired to be the epitome of cool,
a sex goddess, popping into Bus Stop or Biba
for a cheeky little Barbara Hulanicki number.

Back in my home town, not so.
Whispers, gossip, faces behind net curtains.
I rebelled, determined to shock prim neighbours
Look at me! I'm one of those weird hippy-chicks!

"I'm sure God doesn't care what I wear!" I said,
"Remember Mary Magdalen? She was a prostitute,
but Jesus loved her!"

Flights

Margaret Royall

WALKING THE BROOMWAY*

A silver-grey thread bathed in afternoon light,
meandering across the mudflats;
sly as a slippery serpent, sinister shape-shifter,
filling the cavernous jaws of the creak.

At first a scant trickle, barely discernible, then
flooding, flaunting its power, pushing ahead
to cut off tardy walkers, trap the unwary.

I watch the black-backed gulls wheeling,
diving down, foraging in the clear shallows.

Hardy walkers stride out with purpose now,
putting distance between themselves and the tide,
calling with urgency to their canine companions
chasing the eddies, stout sticks lodged between jaws.

A sudden rain shower pushes through;
I fumble to pull a cagoule from my rucksack.
My black wellies match my darkening mood.
False bravado? A little too foolhardy?
This walk in the sea is a well-kept local secret;
the thrill of outwitting the tide,
manna for adrenalin junkies...

But not for me, a novice minus requisite guide!
Reviewing the imminent danger I regroup,
reluctantly turning back for home again.

** The Broomway is a pathway traversing the sand and mudflats of Maplin Sands, a treacherous walk out to Foulness requiring the services of an experienced guide. The tide comes in more quickly than a man can outrun it. To date more than 100 people have died.*

Flights

John Tustin

BARENAKED

Your barenaked body
In the memories of my mind
Is more happy to see
Than these keys
Upon which I type
As quick as light

As slower than molasses
Sliding uphill

And how excellent our bodies together
Were
I remember also now
And think about
With my toes numb from the beer
And Dylan playing
As I think
About

Your barenaked body
Warm and soft
Up against
My last good rememberings
In this

The second half of life

My barenaked body cold now
And in need of clothes
And closure

Getting dressed in the dark
But still hoping

Flights

John Tustin

DRAGONFLY

There was a moment –
We heard a noise and saw the
Dragonfly
Bumping up against the fluorescent ceiling light
Higher than we could reach

He or she
Was the size of my index finger
And he or she kept bumping his or her prehistoric body
Up against the harmless light

We looked up and Anita,
Who admits an aversion to insects
Admitted this dragonfly
Was indeed beautiful

And I agreed

I told her something about prehistoric dragonflies,
Their oxygenated inflated size
And that sea scorpions were as big as we are today
And were among the first sea-dwellers to take to land

And then we moved on
To something work related
I guess

I don't even remember the conversation drifting

As for what the dragonfly then did....
I don't really know

Flights

Bruce McRae

THE DOG OF HIS THOUGHTS

I am divinity, said the lunatic.
I am an onyx column, a chronicle
of fantasy and reflection. I am
a treble-clef. A mule of consistence.

The wind blew this way and that way
and the lunatic declared himself
to be a wicker effigy, a mosaic trampled
by tourists, the sacking of Rome.

I am a beach during constant summer,
the-one-who-was-mad explained.
I am the death-warmed Ganges,
he muttered into his bandages.

Children threw stones in a field
while the madman paused in wonder,
his mind-monsters waiting patiently,
the wind persistent in its endeavours.

Flights

John Tustin

THE DEVIL MAY CARE

The devil rang while you were out.
He said he was sorry to have missed you,
that he'd been hoping to reconnect.
(his words, not mine)
He'd only just found your number,
he explained, in the pocket of a jacket.

The devil asked if you were well,
and I didn't know what to say.
It's best you tell him yourself.
We all have problems.
We all have teeth to grind
and bones to powder into meal.

Regardless, he said he'd call around some day,
catch up on old times,
if you weren't too busy.
I almost felt sorry for him.
I almost felt something.

Flights

John Tustin

TALENT SHOW AUDITIONS

Next is a comedian
who simply stands there sobbing.
A stagehand leads him away.

Then, a juggler of the invisible.
Either a con, or utter genius.

A singer only dogs can hear.

A magician, minus any magic.

The mute thespian,
his monologue of clicks and whistles.
We thank him for coming.

Lastly, after a trying day,
a woman who only glares at us,
her anger palpable,
our personal lives in disarray.
All kinds of trouble brewing.

Flights

Robert Beveridge

FLIRTATIOUS

The songs in the dell
may be sung by wood
nymphs, bullfrogs,
pitcher plants eager
for their next meal.
Before you walk the path,
a little beef demiglaçe
behind the ears, pink
Himalayan salt rubbed
into the wrists, a sprig
of rosemary between
your teeth. Thus girded,
a moonlight walk.

Flights

Robert Beveridge

KISSES, TAROT CARDS, AND OTHER THINGS THE FAIRIES STOLE

You added the mushrooms at the right time, but the pumpkin went in a couple minutes late and it hasn't quite achieved the stage where each piece bursts open, reveals the embryo of the New Messiah within. You taste the broth, swish it around your palate for a minute, add a pinch of salt, a drab of asafoetida, two tablespoons of ichor of Taranassa, Prince of Nightmares, Surveyor of the Kingdom of Leeches, and two grinds of pink peppercorn. The lid goes back on for another fifteen minutes as you continue your search for an August moon in October.

Flights

Yuu Ikeda

I WISH

I wish words that nobody hits on
dropped from the sky like snowflakes did,
and piled up on my umbrella

I wish I could pick up these words,
put them in a small bottle,
add colors, and
carry the bottle always

I wish I could gather
a lot of words
every day,
and make colorful collections of words

I wish these words spread
through someone's heart
in Spring that snowflakes start to thaw

Flights

S Reeson

RING

Again, orbits collide
fingers clasped, emphatic ride
disturbed by which
you never will remove
and that destroys
all sanctity we ever hold.
'I cannot leave', and yet
you stay, each time
apologetic as the last,
decaying moment's tryst, lust
fractured, bound as art.
What hangs us isn't gold;
unmake life's possibility
forever gone, potential she,
not I
beholds.

Flights

S Reeson

LONDON

Saturday night, remains
though ache's malaise
only created because
life, somehow expired
smoothly vacated, silver
strands across our sin.
Athena lied, persists
wisdom lost, derides
pointlessness of this
when I cannot
remove a lie from life;
faulted, contained
lies sleeping above he
incapable of trust.
This mettle cannot
move, remains as proof.

Flights

Alfredo Salvatore Arcilesi

ELECTRIC CANDLE

Heart pumping faster than her legs, she feared she might kill her mother, feared her father would catch up to her.

"Cora!"

Oh, no! Daddy's getting closer, she thought. He's s'posed to be sleeping.

Ignoring her father's pursuit, Cora ran past the quiet houses lining the quiet street on this otherwise quiet night. Past the bungalow, home to Mr. King, who had dressed as Santa Claus one Christmas "'cause he's too busy to do it himself," Mr. King had explained. Past Ms. Shelley's dark, leafy lawn, where she hosted Easter egg hunts "'cause the Easter Bunny's too busy to hide the eggs himself, so I help out," Ms. Shelley had assured. Past Dr. Deaver's home that doubled as his dental office, where he had presented five-year-old Cora with a dollar to commemorate her first lost tooth, because, well... "The Tooth Fairy's too busy." Past the houses that remained dark, for their inhabitants had yet to be awakened by-

"Cora!" A breath. "Stop!"

Blazing through a dead intersection, Cora spared a thought for the archetypes on whose behalf her neighbours claimed to work during their respective seasons. She wondered where they were: Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny, the Tooth Fairy. Wondered if they saw the X-ray, the way she had. She wondered if they saw the lie. Or-

Her heart stopped.

Her mother died.

Her father caught up to her.

Then a double crash against her small ribcage.

And another.

Another.

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Her heart stopped.

Her mother died.

Her father caught up to her.

Then a double crash against her small ribcage.

And another.

Another.

The doctor.

And when she thought she couldn't lose another beat:

What if mommy lied to me?

No.

Impossible.

Though it was looking that way.

Cora didn't want to think of her mother in that light.

All the more reason to run.

"Cora!"

Too close.

He was quick for someone who was not only old, but had been asleep. They had been watching television; he had allowed her to stay up as late as she wanted, a sort of gift—including all the junk food she could pack into her sugar-and-salt-coated belly—to celebrate her recovery.

Recovery.

The X-ray, she thought. The lie.

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The plan had formed during her time in the hospital, then solidified in her bedroom (after the doctor deemed it safe enough for her to return home) into something simple, doable. Her footsteps were light, quiet—the coughing fits had faded to wheezes—and her father had taken to marathon sleeping in the wake of the loss of their beloved matriarch. The cemetery was only seconds away, past Mr. King's, Ms. Shelley's, and Dr. Deaver's.

Of course, Cora had to be careful, for the last time she snuck out of the house she ended up in the hospital, where the lie had waited to be discovered. Within her.

Tonight, not seconds but minutes ago, Cora had eased away from her father, uncomfortably sleeping on the other end of the couch. She had tiptoed toward the front door, and after tense moments with the loud lock and creaky hinges, made her escape. The cold air had stabbed her body, trying to get to that special spot into which it had settled three weeks ago, trying to send her back to the hospital. She hadn't intended to run, though she knew she should hurry; there was no guarantee her father would remain asleep.

Down the front steps.

Down the driveway.

To the right, along the sidewalk that had lead her and her father from house to cemetery every day after their first, ceremonial visit.

"Cora!"

Daddy's awake! she had thought. *He's coming!*

Breaking into a sprint, the race for the cemetery had begun.

Now, finally, breathlessly turning into the cemetery, Cora kept an eye and ear out for zombies, though she couldn't be bothered with them at the moment. Or any moment.

Now was her only chance to learn the truth.

"Cora!"

She knew her mother's name, but not the letters of which it was comprised. She knew her mother's headstone, but not in the thick darkness. She recognized the tree against which the headstone seemingly rested, and- Yes! Made out its twisted silhouette, shaped by the streetlamp from beyond the cemetery.

The frozen grass ended. The mound of earth began, a heavy blanket over her mother (if she was there), tucked in by the small yellow excavator that had patiently waited for her, her father, and the few mourners to leave before it could discreetly perform its job.

Cora dove to her knees, and began digging her short fingers into the cold dirt, yanking out pitiful handfuls. The small craters her fists made quickly filled in with seemingly more black soil than there had been. Determined,

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she thrashed at the dirt.

"What're you..." Quick breaths. "...doing..." More quick breaths. "...Cora!?"

She continued the excavation as if her father hadn't finally caught up to her, as if he wasn't witnessing her apparent breakdown, too stunned to take the final steps to seize her, to stop her from spraying his pants with flung dirt. To stop her from disturbing the ground, his wife, her mother.

Cora dug harder, deeper, numbness creeping throughout her hands.

I gotta know! she told herself.

Ignoring her father, who knelt before her.

I gotta know!

Ignoring her father, who took a face full of dirt.

I GOTTA KNOW!

He didn't stop her.

'Cause he knows I know!' she thought.

Frozen razors cut hot tracks into her cheeks. She used both anesthetized hands to investigate the conflicting sensation, but succeeded only in lodging clumps of cold, hard dirt into her teary eyes.

Stupid!

She was angry to have shed even one tear in the presence of her father. She continued to dig, furiously, but the dirt stung her eyes. She tried to ignore the annoying pain, but gave in to wiping her eyes, depositing more dirt within them.

Again, she tried to dig...

Again, she wiped her eyes...

Tried to dig...

Wiped her eyes...

Dig...

Wipe...

With a scream of frustration, loud and fearsome enough to scare nearby zombies back into their graves, exhausted and defeated Cora collapsed onto her side, feeling nothing.

Except her heartbeat.

Many heartbeats—pounding her chest, neck, ears, pulsing throughout her tired legs, her unfeeling hands.

Another heartbeat joined her own. Slower. Calmer.

Too tired to reject him, too cold to admit her body needed his warmth, Cora wondered if her embracing father's own mother or father or someone he loved, someone he *trusted*, lived in *his* beating heart. Or if they had lied to him, too.

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Perhaps it was the cooing, coupled with the gentle rocking.

Perhaps it was the way her heart began to slow, calm, synchronize with her father's.

Perhaps it was the pathetic progress she—a mere girl, not a professional excavator—had made, and knew she would never learn the truth, see it for herself.

Perhaps it was the way her father whispered it was okay, all okay.

"It's *not* okay!" Cora blasted, elbowing his chest. His heart. She didn't need the ambient streetlamp to illuminate her father's stunned, hurt expression. "I wanna see Mommy!"

In the past couple of weeks, she had come to know what the beginning of her father's crying sounded like: a hitch in his voice, as if he was trying to prevent a sneeze. She heard it now. But instead of speaking in tears, he spoke in words. "I... I know you do. I want to see Mommy, too, but—"

"Where is she?"

Silence from his silhouette.

"Where. Is. She?" Three numb fists pounding against his chest.

Then it came: the not-quite sneeze, followed by the awkward sobbing. "I'm sorry, I..." He swallowed the rest.

"You lied to me, Daddy." Whatever tears she reserved, her father used.

"You and Mommy lied to me." Thinking about her mother as a liar had made her feel bad, guilty; *saying* it aloud made her feel outright criminal.

As she had in the hospital bed, then in her own bed, Cora replayed the lies in her exhausted, perplexed mind:

"No matter what happens, I'll always be in your heart."—her mother's final words, the night before the surgery.

"That's just Mommy giving you hugs and kisses."—her father, shortly after the funeral, clarifying what Cora took to be a ghost in her bedroom.

Mommy giving me hugs and kisses?

How could that be if she's s'posed to be in my heart?

Sneaking out of the house after what her father told her.

Standing in the windy backyard, receiving—and trying to return—her mother's hugs and kisses.

Her father discovering her weather-ravaged body the following morning.

The doctor showing her the X-ray of her chest, where her new-moan-yeah no longer threatened.

"But Mommy wasn't there, in the X-ray," Cora said now, the tears brewing again. "I looked and looked and I couldn't see her." A tear betrayed her.

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She didn't bother to catch it, not if her father hadn't seen it. "So if Mommy's not in my heart, and mommy's not the wind, giving me hugs and kisses," she pointed a dirt-encrusted digit at the pile of disturbed earth, "then she's gotta be in there. She's gotta."

What she took for yet another tear landing on her cheek was, in fact, one of her father's.

"I saw Mommy in the *coughing*, and I saw them put the coughing in the ground." She pointed at the spot where she was certain her mother was buried in her *coffin*.

If whimpers were speech, then Cora might have understood what her father was trying to say.

"Mommy is in there, right?"

She tried to push against her father's embrace, the only response he could muster.

"Right?" Cora managed, before giving in.

#

In spite of her father's snug work, Cora still felt the breeze that wasn't her mother's hugs and kisses penetrating the thick comforter. He kissed each bathed cheek—one from him, one "from" her mother; they both knew, but never brought up—and left. Tomorrow they would have a talk about mommy. "True talk," daddy had said.

The creaky hallway steps she had once thought belonged to a ghost disappeared into her parent's bedroom.

Or's it just daddy's bedroom now?

She didn't know.

Her parents'—*her father's*?—bed squealed, then silenced.

She hated to ruin her father's careful work, but she needed to know.

Kicking away the comforter, Cora, aware of where the creaks hid among her floor, tiptoed toward the mirror sitting atop the drawer. After minutes of careful study, she saw that her father had lied to her again, in the cemetery: she saw not a single trace of her mother within her features.

"True talk," daddy had said.

Tomorrow.

Navigating the creak-mines strewn about the floor, Cora returned to bed, turned on her side, and stared at the nightlight her mother had installed. In the shape of a candle, its flame perpetually ablaze, albeit with the help of

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electricity, the small beacon of comfort had defended Cora from an assortment of bumps in the night. No longer fearing those bumps, she reached for the night-light, but stopped.

A new fear.

A fear of her own making:

If I turn off the nightlight, how will mommy know where I am?

Flights

David Gold

RASCAL MY BOY

He was meant to be a border collie but it didn't turn out that way, not that we cared one jot. Purchased for a song, no doubt, by my mother, from some scruffy local farm, he arrived in our kitchen one evening, a fully alive cotton wool toy, complete with shiny black button eyes and nose. It was love at first sight; how could it not be?

Over the years that followed, we grew up together, Rascal and I, spending joyous stretched hours, lost to all others, exploring the soft and impossibly green woods and fields around our house, the slightly sweet smell of fresh, Scottish dampness almost always in the air. Our activities were many and varied. Games of hide (me) and seek (him) were a staple - Rascal was dispatched to fetch a stick launched towards distant, thick vegetation (hopefully delaying his retrieval), while I did my best to find the hiding places that even his dog super powers would not immediately discover. My best efforts (up in a tree was a frequent triumph) invariably gave rise to increasingly frantic yelping, conveying to me, an anthropomorphic mix of laughter, excitement and (for my best efforts) perhaps a little desperation, at my absence.

Sometimes, we'd just sit side by side in companionable silence on the top of our favourite ridge, with me stroking his shoulders, feeling the now sleek fur and impossibly rippling muscles seemingly acquired as some effortless birth right. With the sun warming our faces, we would survey our kingdom - the river below, flanked by lush grassy pastures clearly being enjoyed by a scattering of cows and sheep, whose contented conversations reached us every so often. Usually, a slow breeze was to be found, tracking the path of the river, and the soft edges of this would, intermittently, waft up the hillside towards us, causing Rascal to tilt his head back just slightly, and flare his leathered, damp black nostrils, to read the invisible (to me) words and stories carried in the air. I always wondered what they told him.

He's buried in a small, ancient wood, near our old house, and on my now infrequent visits to my old home town, I often pass that wood. I think of him every time. My dad, also gone now, called him 'Rascal my boy'. Man's best friend doesn't even begin to describe it.

Flights

Steve Slavin

TYPE CASTING

1

Before there were PCs and Microsoft Word, there were ways you could correct your typing errors by relatively crude versions of cutting and pasting. They varied somewhat in quality, and each was pretty time-consuming.

Early in my college freshman year, I developed perhaps the best cut-and-paste process of all time by following a simple multi-step process to correct dozens of typos I made in each of my term papers. This included retyping each corrected word, and using “invisible” tape to cover the typos. After photocopying the pages, I needed to apply White Out to hide the faint lines left by the “invisible” tape, let the pages dry and then make new “perfect” photocopies.

Had I had the money, instead of spending all this time making corrections, I probably would have just hired a typist to produce pristine term papers, while I spent the time that I saved on more worthy pursuits.

2

I had a friend who supported herself through college and law school by typing term papers for students at Brooklyn College. We had met during our sophomore year when I answered her ad in *the Kingsman*, the student newspaper.

I had a paper due in just three days, and there was no way I could get it in on time. It was twelve pages long, and my professor expected us to hand in “clean copies.” Even my elegant cut-and-paste technique would not pass muster.

For the then exorbitant fee of a dollar a page, Marla came through for me. A born procrastinator – not to mention a not-so-great typist -- I soon became typing dependent. Bottom line: Marla’s typing just looked a lot better than mine.

3

Two years later, when I began grad school and Marla enrolled in law school, she kidded that I could end up paying for her degree. “Yeah,” I replied. “at the cost of being able to afford my own tuition.”

Flights

For a while, my prophecy seemed quite unlikely to come true. My professors assigned much longer papers with at least relatively clean pages required. I found that – except in dire emergencies -- I could no longer afford Marla’s fees, which had now more than doubled.

I had become much less dependent on Marla’s help, but we continued to be close friends. Still, she warned me that I would surely need her services when I completed my Master’s thesis.

As luck would have it, my thesis was the last large typing job Marla would take on before devoting all her time to studying for the bar exam. I kiddingly asked if I would need to find another typist after she hung up her shingle.

“Steve,” she said with a big smile, “I’ll always be there for you.”

“What if I actually get through grad school and am finally ready to write my doctoral dissertation?”

“For you, Steve, I’d be honored. Of course, I’m going to have to charge you the same hourly fees I’ll be charging my legal clients.”

“I had better start saving now!”

4

A month before the results of the bar exam were announced, Marla had already gone on several interviews, but she didn’t get a single offer – or even a call-back. “You know, Steve, it looks as though the law is still a white boy’s preserve, if you get my drift.”

“Well hopefully, by the time you get your results, perhaps even one of the big white-shoe firms on Wall Street will recognize your talents.”

“Oh, they have! Three of them offered me jobs on the spot!” She paused. “They knew how I had worked my way through college and law school.”

“Lovely.”

“Wait Steve! It gets better! They each told me that if things worked out, in just a year or two, I could become one of the highest paid legal typists in the city.”

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“Well, if it gives you any satisfaction, you’d be making more than most untenured college professors.”

“If I can’t get a legitimate offer soon, I’m going to apply at Legal Aid. I hear they’re very fond of Black girls there. We relate so well to the clients.”

“Maybe you’ll like it.”

“Maybe I won’t!”

5

Marla received one of the top scores on the New York State bar exam. She was third in her class at Brooklyn Law School. And her first – and only – job offer was from Legal Aid.

After she had been on the job for a few months, I asked how it was going. I knew, of course, about the long hours, tough working conditions, and terrible pay. Still, I was surprised to hear her answer.

“My job is like a shit sandwich.”

“Would you care to elaborate?”

“Steve, yuh wanna know what’s wrong with a shit sandwich? Too much shit... and not enough bread!”

“Well, Marla, the next time we go out for lunch, I’ll know what not to order.”

6

Marla decided to give it one year to see if she could adjust to the workload and the poverty-level wages at Legal Aid. And after that, she reluctantly decided to continue. After all, none of the decent law firms were exactly busting down her door.

Amazingly, I was almost breezing through grad school, and had even chosen my dissertation topic. Perhaps “An Evaluation of the Economic Cost and Effectiveness of the Barbados Family Planning Association” was not the wisest choice” --especially since it would end up being 350 pages long.

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There was only one person to whom I could entrust it. Amazingly, Marla agreed. A week before, she had handed in her resignation to her supervisor at Legal Aid. And until she found a better way to make a living, she would reestablish her typing business.

“You know that I’ll earn more than I did at Legal Aid – not that they set the bar all that high.” The two of us then burst out laughing.

She confided that she still hadn’t given up on the law, but she had to support herself in the meanwhile. And she had certainly picked up valuable experience at Legal Aid. If not for the extremely long hours and the poverty-level wages, it really wasn’t such a bad job.

7

Soon Marla was regaling me with some of her own stories about her more eccentric customers. No longer confining herself to term papers and occasional doctoral dissertations, she took on people from all walks of life. And she even confirmed for me that the widespread belief that most lawyers could not write was completely true.

Her most memorable story was about what would be a self-published autobiography of an older woman who turned out to be prone to making numerous grammatical and spelling errors. Apparently barely literate, she still wanted to tell anybody willing to read it the story of her life.

Even when completely cleaned up, the manuscript would still be utterly unacceptable to any publisher, perhaps even among the bottom-feeders of the vanity press.

Marla realized that if she even took on this job, it would be very slow going. And as they say, “time is money.”

The woman gave her a small advance payment in crumpled one-dollar bills. After she left, Marla began work on the first page, making dozens of corrections, while trying not change the substance of what the woman wrote.

The next day, Marla called to tell her that she had completed just the first twenty-five pages. Could she stop by to see how they looked? They agreed on a time

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the next afternoon.

When the woman arrived, Marla handed her the pages and asked her to look through them to see if she was satisfied. Marla then went back to work on another typing assignment.

A half hour later, the woman knocked on Marla's office door. Marla invited her inside and asked her to please sit down. Then she confided, "I wasn't at all sure that you would be happy with the changes I made.

The woman didn't say anything for a while. Marla knew that as a very bad sign. If she had been happy with Marla's work, she would have said so immediately.

Finally, Marla asked if she was displeased. Still, the woman said nothing. And then, she very slowly shook her head from side to side.

"I gather that you didn't like the changes I made."

"No. No!"

"I'm sorry, but I felt they were needed."

"Maybe they were. I know I'm a terrible speller, and I know I make a lot of mistakes when I write things. But...."

Marla waited.

"But the pages that I gave you? Those were my words. What I wrote about was my life. But this? I don't write that way. I don't talk that way." She paused and seemed to be thinking about something. "You see, it's a book about me. And this?" she said holding up the pages Marla had typed. "This isn't about me. This isn't about my life."

There were tears in Marla's eyes. This was not a term paper. This was indeed a person's life!

What could Marla possibly say? Now she was shaking her head "no." Soon she was sobbing.

Flights

The woman stood up, and then slowly walked across the room and put her arms around Marla and hugged her.

Finally, Marla stood. "I'm going to type your story exactly the way you wrote it. I won't change a word."

8

A few weeks later, Marla got a call from one of her clients at the other end of the spectrum -- a lawyer, who, like many of his colleagues, could barely put together two coherent sentences. He thanked her again for all her help, and ruefully confessed that he had never realized just how bad his writing was before he saw all her edits.

But he was completely puzzled. When he sent her his brief to be professionally typed, he had no idea that she was a lawyer herself. Then he asked around and heard nothing but glowing reports. He even checked in with a couple of her colleagues at Legal Aid.

Marla was very impressed with his honesty, and perhaps even more so by his self-deprecation. When she told me about the call, I said he sounded like a complete mensch (Yiddish for a person of integrity and honor).

"Steve, he offered me a job! As a real lawyer! At three times what I was making at Legal Aid! Can you *believe* it?"

"Sure! And you'll be worth every penny!" Then we sit there for a while, while I absorbed what Marla had said.

"Steve, you don't seem very happy about it."

"Of *course*, I am!"

"Then why the subdued reaction?"

"Well, how am I ever going to find such a great typist?"

Flights

Grove Koger

THE OTHER SIDE

I took one of my favorite hikes late last season, up to Cramer Lakes in the Sawtooths. The lakes lie at an altitude of almost 8,400 feet, and Redfish Lake—that's where you start up—is a little over 6,500 feet, so it's what's called an "accessible" hike. There are much harder ones in the area, believe me, but it's a full day up and a day back, and I spend another day poking around and shooting some photos and maybe hooking a few fish, so it's a good three days in all.

I'd parked behind the lodge, eaten a big breakfast and talked for a few minutes on the dock with one of the other hikers, an older fellow, before setting out on the shuttle. He had a weathered look about him, along with decades-old clothes and jacket to match, and we made the kind of small talk you make when you're going to be in a stranger's company for a while. I mentioned where I was going, and he replied that he was headed to Madeline Lake. I nodded, hating to reveal my ignorance, since I've lived in the Stanley Basin for years, but the truth is I'd never heard of Madeline Lake. (On top of everything else, I'm guessing that's how it's spelled, since there's more than one way.)

It was a crisp morning—they're always crisp here when they aren't downright freezing—but I've never found the five-mile trip across the lake to the trailhead unpleasant. It's a restful prelude to the hike, and a good chance for me to clear my mind of the extraneous thoughts that are normally crowding it.

I'm going to call the old man "Joe," since I need a handle for him, and somehow, he looked like a Joe. In any case, our routes apparently lay together up the cleared trail through the valley floor for the first part of the climb, so I let him take the lead. Whatever concerns I might have had about his age, he didn't seem to have any trouble with the climb, but after about half an hour, he sat down on a boulder to retie his boots. As I joined him on a nearby boulder, he fumbled open the pocket of his flannel shirt to take something out. I assumed it would be a map, but when I glanced over, he was holding what looked like a snapshot.

"My wife," Joe explained. "She asked me to keep her picture with me."

I nodded, but all I had seen was a pale rectangle.

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"She says things are a little ... indistinct there," he continued.

He stared at the snapshot, and I had the impression that he would have kissed it if I hadn't been there. I turned away.

"Well, this is where I turn off," Joe finally said, putting the photo away and nodding toward a wooded ridge that rose alongside the trail ahead of us. "I'm headed for the other side."

I wished him luck and he raised his hand in farewell as he began working his way through the brush around a deadfall at the tip of the ridge. Could there be an unmarked trail there? I thought about checking, but I didn't want to lose my momentum, so I continued on my way.

#

Finishing a long hike is as satisfying as starting it, and I try to stretch out the pleasure for as long as possible. In this case, I visited the bar that runs along the side of the lodge, an unpretentious little place that can't have changed much since the lodge was built in 1929. I was looking forward to a quiet hour nursing a beer, resting my boots on the fender of the fireplace and thinking over the hike as the evening set in.

I'd set up my tent in a good spot between the upper and lower lakes and enjoyed a big meal of pan-fried trout the second night. And I'd gotten some good panoramic shots of the Stanley Basin that I would work up back home. But thinking about my photographs reminded me of Joe and his snapshot, if that's really what it had been. It wasn't important, but the incident puzzled me. Like I said, all I'd seen was a pale, empty rectangle. When I'd questioned the shuttle pilot on the way back an hour before, he didn't think that he'd seen Joe since that first morning, so maybe the man knew another way out. Or maybe he was still up there. His pack, which had looked about as old as he was, wasn't that big, so he'd have to be eating a lot of trout.

#

A few days later I had some business at the ranger station and thought I'd ask the ranger about Madeline Lake. He hadn't heard of it either, but that wasn't conclusive.

"I learn something every day," he explained. I knew from long experience that he tended to talk in clichés.

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"Let's see," he continued, taking one book and then another off the shelves behind his desk. I recognized all of them, but didn't say anything. Next, he pulled open a wide drawer and pulled out some topos. I'd tried those too, but it was reassuring to see someone else going through the same motions.

Finally the ranger turned to his computer and checked a USGS database of place names. I recognized its layout immediately.

"Huh!" He shook his head and finally turned back to me. "Maybe the fellow knows something we don't."

Thinking that I couldn't have put it better myself, I thanked the ranger and headed back to my pickup. The first storm of the season was on the way, and I wanted to get home before it hit.

#

My thanks to Jim Stark for describing the incident I've dramatized in this story and for providing me with detailed information about hiking in Idaho's Sawtooth Mountains.

Flights

Gaynor Kane

COMING OF AGE

Other girls went shopping for little white dresses and veils. She didn't want, or need, any of this.

Looking in the mirror, sun firing up her auburn hair, she felt foxier than ever. She pawed at her little pointed nose, breathed in the smell of freshly mown lawn, petrichor, the charcoal from a barbeque three streets away.

Yesterday, her mother had left a razor on the bathroom shelf for her. She knew that she wasn't going to use it. A swipe across her tablet, some clicks and several pairs of new trousers were on the way, next day delivery. She rubbed a hand down her leg, felt the smooth fur, warm and soft. A distant dog barked and she cocked her head.

Coming of age was natural.

Flights

Gaynor Kane

LOLA

The Brazilian sun sparked in the highest point of the sky, scorching skin and turning the sidewalk to lava. As Lola set off on her daily walk, her nostrils filled with pungent city smells. Passing the end of an alley, she heard a soft whining sound and took a detour to investigate. Pulling apart fruit store garbage revealed an infant, swaddled in a grimy rag, wrinkled skin and squirming. Lola gently lifted the bundle taking care not to hurt it. Their eyes met, the baby cooed.

There was a hospital only four blocks away. She often walked past it and knew people would be coming and going. Often the staff had flashed her warm smiles, she decided that was the best place. On arrival at the steps, Lola rested the baby in a shadowed corner. Out bounced a young male nurse. Lola noticed he smelt of antiseptic. The nurse looked down with a frown as he noticed the bundle. Just as Lola was turning to leave he bent down.

‘Good dog’ he patted ‘I’ll take care of the baby now’.

Lola first appeared in The Bangor Literary Journal issue 9

Flights

THANK YOU to all of our contributors

Dr Niki Strange is currently poet in residence at Macmillan Horizon Centre, which supports people affected by cancer in Sussex (thanks to Arts Council/National Lottery funding). Along with creating new work, she has been delivering poetry workshops for former and current patients, drawing on her own cancer experiences. She passionately believes in poetry as a source of solace and is committed to supporting peoples’ wellbeing through the wonder of words.

Edward Lee’s poetry, short stories, non-fiction and photography have been published in magazines in Ireland, England and America, including The Stinging Fly, Skylight 47, Acumen, The Blue Nib and Poetry Wales. His play ‘Wall’ was part of Druid Theatre’s Druid Debuts 2020. His debut poetry collection “Playing Poohsticks On Ha’Penny Bridge” was published in 2010. He is currently working towards a second collection. He also makes musical noise under the names Ayahuasca Collective, Orson Carroll, Lego Figures Fighting, and Pale Blond Boy. His blog/website can be found at www.edwardmlee.wordpress.com

Julie Stevens writes poems reflecting the impact MS has on her life, as well as other topics close to her heart. Her poems have recently been published in Dodging the Rain, The Honest Ulsterman, Nymphs, Impspired and The Lothlorien Poetry Journal. Her debut chapbook, Quicksand, was published by Dreich in September 2020. Website: www.jumpingjulespoetry.com, Twitter @julesjumping

Claire HM writes as an act of healing that is an invitation for others to create the stories they need to access healing too. In 2019 she had an essay published in the anthology, I Wrote it Anyway, about her experience of accessing university, and the long journey of finding the confidence to write as a woman from a working class background. How to Bring Him Back, her debut novella set in the seedier side of 90s Birmingham, is a story framed by a spell to let go of the past and will be published by Fly on the Wall press in October 2021. A short series of Brummie monologue poems giving voice to Classical female literary characters are upcoming in Tears in the Fence. She has most recently been published in Black Flowers Literary Journal, streetcake, Mooky Chick, CapeMagazine and Nymphs. (www.clairehm.com / IG and Twitter: @clairehmwriter)

Flights

Dee Allen is an African-Italian performance poet based in Oakland, California. Active on the creative writing & Spoken Word tips since the early 1990s. Author of 5 books [Boneyard, Unwritten Law, Stormwater and Skeletal Black, all from POOR Press, and from Conviction 2 Change Publishing, Elohi Unitsi] and 37 anthology appearances [including Your Golden Sun, Rise, Extreme, The Land Lives Forever, Civil Liberties United, Colossus: Home, Impact, 2020: The Year That Changed America, Geography Is Irrelevant and coming soon from Flower Song Press, in connection with the Rio Grande Valley International Poetry Festival, Boundless] under his figurative belt so far.

Thea Schiller, a New York poet and psychotherapist facilitates a poetry workshop at the Somers library in Somers, N.Y. and practices psychotherapy in CT. She holds a B.A. in creative writing from The City University of New York, and an MS in counseling from Western CT State University. Her poem, "Sarah" was the Orchard Poetry Prize winner in Furrow, University of Wisconsin. Recently, she has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize and her poems have appeared in The San Diego Annual Poetry Review 2017-2018, Edify Fiction, The Ravens Perch, 4th & Sycamore, Hevria, Lucent Dreaming and The Tenth Muse as well as many small literary journals in the past. When given the chance she follows her muse from Norway to Greece.

Ramesh Dohan hails from Toronto, Canada. His poetry often slips into quirky, tender, or profound observation on the everyday, reading and writing, and poetry itself. He was previously published in Boston Literary Magazine (2011), Bywords Journal (2012), Allegro Poetry Review (2015) & Bosphorous Review of Books (2021).

Kevin Ahern is a Professor Emeritus of biochemistry from Oregon State University who is enjoying the spare time he has gained in retirement to write verses, limericks, and other creative items.

Paweł Markiewicz was born 1983 in Siemiatycze in Poland. He is poet who lives in Bielsk Podlaski and writes tender poems, haiku as well as long poems. Paweł has published his poetries in many magazines. He writes in English and German.

Matt Alton is a Brighton based poet whose work has been published by Ink Sweat & Tears and played on BBC Radio Sussex. He has been commissioned by Poems by Post as their July 2021 poet. He was a student of the Creative Writing Programme 2020/21 and has accepted a place on the MA in Creative Writing and Education at Goldsmiths for September 2021.

Joseph A Farina is a retired lawyer in Sarnia, Ontario, Canada. His poems have appeared in Philedelphia Poets, Tower Poetry, The Windsor Review, and Tamaracks: Canadian Poetry for the 21st Century. He has two books of poetry published, The Cancer Chronicles and The Ghosts of Water Street.

Flights

Ben Nardolilli currently lives in New York City. His work has appeared in Perigee Magazine, Red Fez, Danse Macabre, The 22 Magazine, Quail Bell Magazine, Elimae, The Northampton Review, Local Train Magazine, The Minetta Review, and Yes Poetry. He blogs at mirrorsponge.blogspot.com and is trying to publish his novels.

Colin James has a couple of chapbooks of poetry published. Dreams Of The Really Annoying from Writing Knights Press and A Thoroughness Not Deprived of Absurdity from Piski's Porch Press and a book of poems, Resisting Probability, from Sagging Meniscus Press.

Yash Seyedbagheri is a graduate of Colorado State University's MFA program in fiction. His stories, "Soon," "How To Be A Good Episcopalian," and "Tales From A Communion Line," were nominated for Pushcarts. Yash's work has been published or is forthcoming in SmokeLong Quarterly, The Journal of Compressed Creative Arts, and Ariel Chart, among others.

Peter Mladinic's poems have recently appeared in Ariel Chart, Bluepepper, the BeZine, Detour Ahead and other online journals. He lives, with six dogs, in Hobbs, New Mexico.

Margaret Royall is a Laurel Prize nominated poet. She has been shortlisted for several poetry prizes and won the Hedgehog Press' collection competition 2020. She has two poetry collections: Fording The Stream and Where Flora Sings, a memoir in prose and verse, The Road To Cleethorpes Pier and a new pamphlet, Earth Magicke out April 2021. She has been widely published online and in print, most recently: Hedgehog Press, The Blue Nib, Impspired & forthcoming in Sarasvati and Dreich.

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Twitter: RoyallMargaret

Instagram : meggiepoet

Facebook Author Page: [Facebook.com/margaretbrowningroyall](https://www.facebook.com/margaretbrowningroyall)

John Tustin's poetry has appeared in many disparate literary journals since 2009. fritzware.com/johntustinpoetry contains links to his published poetry online.

Bruce McRae, a Canadian musician and multiple Pushcart nominee, has had work appear in hundreds of publications around the world. The winner of the 2020 Libretto Chapbook Prize (20 Sonnets), his books include 'The So-Called Sonnets'; 'An Unbecoming Fit Of Frenzy'; 'Like As If'; 'All Right Already' and 'Hearsay'.

Robert Beveridge (he/him) makes noise (xterminal.bandcamp.com) and writes poetry in Akron, OH. Recent/upcoming appearances in Page and Spine, The Pointed Circle, and Failed Haiku, among others.

Flights

Yuu Ikeda is a Japan based poet. She loves writing, reading mystery novels, and drinking sugary coffee. She writes poetry on her website. www.poetryandcoffeedays.wordpress.com/ Her published poems are "On the Bed" in <Nymphs>, "Love? or Death?" in <Sad Girl Review>, "Poetry Drops Like Raindrops Do" in <JMWV>, and more.

S Reeson [she/they] is 54, bisexual and married with two children: they has suffered anxiety for all of their life, and started telling stories as a ten-year-old in order to help them cope. They write and record poetry, short stories and episodic fiction, plus dissect their unique creative processes using both video and audio as the means to continue coping. A considerable lived experience of mental health issues, a passion for niche arts and media and an undimmed enthusiasm for environmentalism combine, to allow creativity to emerge, and new stories and projects to be created. They love to experiment, pushing creative boundaries and gain a huge amount of motivation and inspiration from talking about both the journey and their continued development as a creative. When S is not in her second home online, they enjoy lifting heavy weights, learning how to run properly and static cycling in the meat space.

Artisan baker by trade, **Alfredo Salvatore Arcilesi** has been published in over 60 literary journals worldwide. Winner of the Scribes Valley Short Story Writing Contest, he was also a finalist in the Blood Orange Review Literary Contest, and was awarded the Popular Vote in the Best of Rejected Manuscripts Competition. In addition to several short pieces, he is currently working on his debut novel.

David Gold was born and raised in the countryside just to the south of Glasgow in Scotland. He is a lyricist and singer songwriter who has only recently dipped his toe into the mysterious world of writing without music in mind. He is a passionate environmentalist and has also been known to work as a technology consultant. He now lives in London with his wife and son.

A recovering economics professor, **Steve Slavin** earns a living writing math and economics books. The third volume of his short stories, *To the City, with Love*, was recently published.

Grove Koger is the author of *When the Going Was Good: A Reader's Guide to the Best Narratives of Travel, Exploration, and Adventure* (Scarecrow Press, 2002), Assistant Editor of *Deus Loci: The Lawrence Durrell Journal*, and former Assistant Editor of *Art Patron* magazine. He blogs about travel and related matters at worldenoughblog.wordpress.com.

Gaynor Kane is from Belfast. She is published by the Hedgehog Poetry Press and her books include 'Memory Forest', 'Penned In' (co-written with Karen Mooney) and 'Venus in Pink Marble', which was Black Bough's 'Book of the Month' in November 2020. Follow her on Twitter @gaynorkane

Flights



Flights

Flights



Issue One

Flights

Welcome to the first ever issue of *Flights*, our very own journal. We were overwhelmed with the quality and variety of work we had to choose from for this, our first issue. It's exciting to be able to feature work both from writers who have regularly attended our Spoken Word evenings, and writers new to us, and often from much further afield.

Thank you to all who submitted.

We'd like to say a really big thank you to, friend of the Dragonflies, Gaynor Kane for permission to use her beautiful painting of a dragonfly as our cover art.

If you are inspired by what you read here, we take submissions on a rolling basis so you are welcome to submit at any time, we hope to produce the next edition of *Flights* in September.

In the meantime, we hope you enjoy the wonderful poetry, prose and flash fiction we are so privileged to publish in this first edition.

All the best

Darren J Beaney & Barbara Mercer

Editors

June 2021

Flights

Poetry

Niki Strange	Edward Lee	Julie Stevens
Claire HM	Dee Allen	Thea Schiller
Ramesh Dohan	Kevin Ahern	Paweł Markiewicz
Matt Alton	Joseph a Farina	Ben Nardolilli
Colin James	Yash Seyedbagheri	Peter Miadinic
Margaret Royall	John Tustin	Bruce McRae
Robert Beveridge	Yuu Ikeda	S Reeson

Prose

Alfredo Salvatore Arcilesi	David Gold	Steve Slavin
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Flash

Gaynor Kane

Flights

Niki Strange

I CAN WRITE MYSELF

into an open top car,
careering on corniche roads
in the Cote d’Azur’s brûlée noon.

No factor 50,
for the facts of my melanoma
are of little consequence.

All is shadow-less velocity.
I am heliotropic to the blazing sun,
lit up, let loose.

Letter by letter,
I am matter transported.
Written reckless.

I can write myself

sprung from a high board,
suspended in defiance
of Earth’s pull,

my balance restored.
Lost nodes, radiated breast,
sleeved right arm

parts of this new entirety
that tucks, revolves
then plunges

as steel into the
quenching water.
Written stronger.

Flights

Edward Lee

CHEMOTHERAPY

He stops, the razor
halfway down
his foamed cheek,
and wonders why
he’s bothering
with this submission to appearance.

He finds his answer silently,
and finishes his shave,
the razor continuing to his skull,
taking the hair
that remains there,
smiling to himself
at this small victory.

Flights

Edward Lee

THE BLOODLESS WOUNDS OF LOVE

In my dreams
we fight, pointed tooth
and curled claw.

We fight like we never fight
during waking hours,
timid and gentle
to each other
when we can look into
each other's eyes.

We fight in your dreams too.
your tight jaw
and clenched fists
betraying you
as you sleep.

Across the distance of slumber
we rage against
each other, our smiles
the next morning
fooling no one
but ourselves,
our years together slowly becoming more
than our years apart.

Flights

Edward Lee

NIGHTMARES BORN FROM A DAY OF DYING

In my dreams
I fight with shadows,
waking with bruises
the size of my fists
covering stretches of skin
that have not been touched
by another's hand
for years, the taste of blood
tight on my swollen tongue.

Flights

Julie Stevens

SEE A WISH

Bring me the sail of your breath
carry it to me and
put it in here.
I need the rumble of music
the first drop of rain
your morning words.

Bring me the edge of a wing
the back of a cloud
the top of a flake.
I need the sigh of a snail
the tremble of a fly
the drift of sand.

Bring me the sway of leaves
the pain of a splinter
the strength of a wave.
I need the call of an owl
the end of a tunnel
the jewel of water.

Bring me a silky tear
a lucky thought
a puff of smoke.
Bring me rays
bring me storms
bring me hush.

Carry them to me and
put them in here,
I can make anything happen.

Flights

Julie Stevens

ALL AROUND

Here I rest wondering where to find
the strength I need,
will it ever reach this broken soul?

The gift of waking knows where it moves
weaving into sleeping minds,
but how to hold?

The arm of wind makes the earth shudder
no fleeing leaf can halt its flight,
can I take that?

The sun delivers every morning
painting with its fine hand,
could I reel that in?

These eyes know it lives all around
shouting its name with a jubilant cry.

Flights

Julie Stevens

TO BE FREE

I don't know how it happens
I wake and I'm here,
balancing on air, my invite to leave.

If I hold this, I'm free
shove hurt from inside,
leave it to fester alone.

Feeling the rush, I'm taken
a door marking the way,
to a world where no one suffers,

I'm soaring over trees
racing through towns
and I won't ever stop.

I don't know how it happens
but I'll gladly go, be free
from the dark of day,

run with life as it carries me
always sail strong,
today will be kind.

Flights

Claire HM

HERON

He crashes into the canal path one night in
November and reclines in noodle wrappers and

broken bottles, one deck shoe peeks through the
browning cocksfoot as the idle consider

his snapped neck.
It points to a curved wing, the waning

blade of a beak, his body rotting beneath
dull feathers. Above his neck the questions form.

I stand with my blue skull
scarf fluttering, remembering hands as they crept

under my dress, creeping up, up and I stare
past this old carcass as the memory creeps

until my gold ring catches his beak
and two worlds start to glint, glint in the sun.

Flights

Claire HM

SONGS OF FLESH

(i)
I smell tight and clean
the brackish tang of raindrops
damp prayer at dawn.

(ii)

You are lions breath
blaze of sun beating muscle
hot wind rasping sand.

(iii)

After the rasping
juice soaks through the leather fronds.
New mint. Petrichor.

(iv)

Singed lashes flutter
hair feathers over belly
birdsong at sunset.

(v)

Slurp of blistering tongues
our bodies gibber and cuff
chord of the full moon.

Flights

Claire HM

KAJAL STICK AND POWDER

Unfaithful is not the moment
I lean in to kiss him
in a room thick with burning

cigarettes and black sky,
in a room swirling with metal
guitar and red lights

that turn the plump blonde
body, pink.
That was faithlessness. Lurching

mouth leading,
bearing my teeth. No,
thats not unfaithful.

Unfaithful starts on the
grey bus home,
my first hangover

my rounded image
pale and red eyed
in the mirror of the unseen

drivers periscope,
my trembling hand
in the make up bag,

fumbling to project
the right image, easier
than facing my ugliness

in someone else's eye.

Flights

Dee Allen

COMBATS

We've survived

Rain storms,
Long walks,
Climbing hills,
Thankless work

Together.

We've been to

Nightclubs,
Open mics,
Street protests,
Nature hikes

Together.

My friends
From England
Are more reliable
Than any person I'd known in the States.

Tough and black,
They look ready
For the battlefield
Than for Goth concerts.

Made for fighting
On foreign soil,
But with me, they walked
On a non-violent path.

Flights

Long ago, they'd travelled
On an aeroplane just to meet me.
Haven't betrayed me yet,
This fine, upstanding pair

Of fifteen
Eyelet, steel
Toed, veggie
Leather combat boots.

Flights

Dee Allen

FRAGMENT 2021

In one of his home-made
 Newsletters to our loved ones,
 My Uncle Poppy,
 Childhood role model
 And family theologian [these days],

Shared a memory
 Of walking through
 New York City
 And finding someone's
 Spray-painted revelation—

Words of caution, actually—
 On the outer wall of a
 Cathedral, possibly
 Catholic, and
 It said:

BEWARE OF DOGS

Which I assume
 Might have meant:

BEWARE OF DOGS

Posing as sheep,
 Running and attending
 The warm holy sanctuary

From the cold truth—

[Inspired by the newsletter One Love – American Black History Month Edition, February 26, 2021.]

Flights

Thea Schiller

A PLEA, A PRAYER

Doing our best, in secret,
 in whispering to the wind,
 To carry, to cradle, to whisk us far away to lands of asking,
 for completion, envelopment --
 the way we needed to elope
 inside a secured calm of love.
The wind's memory of childhood
Pushing our small frames ahead,
Our laughter, effortless eddies, circling above
the trusting atmosphere of family,
when what was known was without the fear
Of future endeavors and dread.

Oh wind,
 the need to feel the spread upon our necks
Your gentle fingers moving away from weep to blossom.

The cherry trees,
inch up the vine of green,
transform the trance of white, to pink to sing.
For we, no longer alone, bereft,
will sink into your smoothest swoon of Spring,
Abide fierce messages you bring,
To stay robust and trust
the sojourn of your languor'd wind.

All chases of our supplications
Stop inside your wondrous solemn breeze.

Flights

Ramesh Dohan

NIGHT AT THE MUSEUM

Caravaggio
Did it first, making his paintings
Out of verses from the bible

In another, a nymph
The arms and legs splayed as if
possessed by a lustful god

The sumptuous reclining nudes
Always hopeful for something new

The heads and shoulders of gods
Cheer the crushing of a serpent

This is what poems do
They call out everything
By a name

Flights

Ramesh Dohan

STORYTELLER

My hand, the old style
Adept at poetry
How the palm and mouth
Rock back and forth
Talent has a look
And conducts herself accordingly
The face it takes
a minute to know, is yours
it heaves me out of a straight line
a story I was maybe narrating

Flights

Ramesh Dohan

A WINTER'S TALE

Beyond the thick curtains
The snowflakes are
Starting to fall
Each one determined
To bury something
I pay a visit
To an iron typewriter
That has not lifted
A key in years
Perhaps there is
A word in the dictionary
To describe this day

Flights

Kevin Ahern

TO BE OR NOT?

I had self doubts, late yesterday
A crisis existential
Am I for real or might I be
A dream, inconsequential?

Descartes said, "I think, therefore I am"
To prove his own existence
Because to be, there must be something
Making that insistence

Just like Descartes, I think a lot
So I had to be, wahoo!
But in view of that, I must confess
I'm not so sure of you

Flights

Kevin Ahern

TOO MUCH TIME

I got arrested the other day
Seems what I did was not OK

An officer told me that my crime
Was I had taken too much time

“But what,” I said, “I didn’t know”
“That it was time for me to go”

“Ignorance,” he said, “is no excuse”
“You mess with time and you will lose”

Because of this, it seems that I’m
A person who’ll be doing time

Flights

Paweł Markiewicz

UNENDINGLY PICTURESQUE

a pulchritudinous sonnet

according to
Paweł Markiewicz

I am through a superb window – looking.
An angel of feeling awakes in me.
The dreamy oak-trees stand alway leafless.
The native auspicious cue is just large.

My scenery - the enchanted verdure.
The moony old barn of Ted my nuncle.
I am looking at a proud throng of crows.
They belong to the whiff of every times.

The springtide looks so meek-beauteous-fair,
first and foremost Morningstar - at night.
I daydream springwards window-view withal
of a dreamy Ovidian summer gale.

Homelike herbage that seems to bewitch all.
My cats want to enchant the fantasy.
Dreamed subtle morn withal notably.

.....

gale - archaic: wind
alway - archaic: always
cue - archaic: mood
verdure - green
nuncle - archaic: uncle
throng - archaic: bevy

Flights

Matt Alton

THE HISTORY OF A NAME

on the playground
I told them
my grandad post-war naval service owned
Alton Towers that a select few
schoolmates would be equipped
with free tickets
and an arsenal of brags for next term
in the eternal present of who's it? perhaps
I craved some history
where nicknames stuck
like fat to a pan I sought the status
of a Somebody
or public sector desk job it could be
that now in the telling
I fabricate this memory
to lend my childhood
some depth
or nervous breakdown and early retirement
I saw
that a name is never far
from a constellation of twisted metal
looping back to the same point
with sweetness and sickness in the belly

Flights

Matt Alton

NOT THE STAIRCASE OF YOUR DREAMS

The phone cord spirals three steps up
and I cram my ear to the receiver.
Deep enough and his breath might
helter skelter me into that quiet room.
Hours, weeks, years go by. Hairstyles change,
follicles retire. My voice cracks
and kintsugis back together. I stretch
the wire to the next step up –
a game I play to keep things interesting.
Copper is scrapped and travel with
nothing to hold seems unlikely.
Gaps in conversation widen, miles multiply,
air pollutes despite my refusal
to fly. The helix that binds us is tugging
with no space to spring back.

Flights

Joseph A Farina

DIES IRAE, DIES ILLA

through the refurbished oaken doors the pews await your return. still scarred and
gum branded by us then,
they remember you in another time. faint organ music fills the vast hollow of the
church's nave. we assemble
as the ceremony begins. you rest silent, hands clasping beads intertwined with
stiff fingers, covered in
crosses and signs of faith, holy water stains your pall. we shiver at your entrance.
old eyes stare up and down
and close as they survey the gilded saints and stained glass tall windows casting
rainbows upon you and
remember the living days. anointed by cleansing incense, we leave, following
behind you. tonight we'll search
ourselves, speak of past springs and summer reunions, then like snow melts to
water, as you become
ancestral, return back to our charted lives.

Flights

Joseph A Farina

THRESHOLD

running home from school , breathless
to watch Annette and American Bandstand

my Italian angel and the devils music
in black and white and shades of grey

i dreamed of her in mousekatechnicolour
i acted out rebellion hosted by dick clark
in monophonic glory. ate my wonderbread
and aspired to truth, justice and the american way

through frightening days of 8th grade battles
for dominance and street wise knowledge
that Sister Mary Laura never taught

through sticky nights of hardening dreams
that left me quickened and awake
with memories of my angel
smiling through the moistness of new pleasures
i accepted but did not yet understand.

Flights

Ben Nardolilli

AMATEUR PALIMPSEST

The Greeks might forgive our opinions,
If we are willing to forgive theirs,
Believe me, they can do it,
Just not in texts that have survived for us,
Much reflecting is needed,
Beginning with the construction
Of new idols and new temples to put them in,
Then destroying them in due course
Because these will be ruins
Worthy of adoration and mourning,
Items we can fully appreciate
Now that we are the ones who put them up
And brought them back down,
Controlling the past and the present again.

Flights

Ben Nardolilli

STOICISM AND SKEPTICISM

The desired burials never come, all we know are fragments,
ambiguities, the lost worship, nothing disappears
for good, the established wisdom continues to be maintained
even though we know the foundations are lies,
all attempts at a new zeal lead nowhere, so long as edifices
refuse to crumble like good ruins, the sparks of change
are smothered by the shadows that they cast,
meanwhile, we rise and stand in moldy basilicas, huff incense,
and carry the trains of teachers we know are invalid,
all in the name of a sinking harmony that cannot be disturbed.

Flights

Colin James

IN SO FAR

A fabulous fear of heights
has you kneeling in front of me.
I'm looking out the window
at the traffic lights.
Patience is usually prophetic,
expectations are then forthcoming
knowing something has to happen.
Us, we are two quantified warriors
poignantly skinny, verifiably vested.

Flights

Yash Seyedbagheri

PACE

Pick up the pace, drink Diet Pepsi, more Diet Pepsi, run to your office, like
Chariots of Fire,
stretch your smile too wide. Try to dance to Tchaikovsky, get the body pumping,
that doesn't
work, crank up Taylor Swift. Finish grading papers two weeks ahead of time,
drink just enough
wine at the faculty party, laugh, cracked laughs, then have more caffeine, some
pills. Now, the
sheets feel too thin and sleep's so close, but your eyes won't close. You feel that
impulse,
pushing you to pick it up, pick it up, but you just want to sink into darkness.

Flights

Yash Seyedbagheri

BACKYARD

Backyard was once a verdant kingdom, a space to dance beneath the moon,
watch blossoms
blow, make love. We smoked indicas at midnight, watching smoke unfurling,
curtains opening
once-young minds.

Now, the grass has been crushed by gravel. It's a patio. A barbeque grill is
coated in rust
and blemishes. She called barbeques senseless, impractical. Even after I stream-
lined things,
because I thought streamlining meant salvaging.

I sit at the patio table. Credit card bills, utilities, alimony, and damages to
the drywall
demand dues, the byproduct of flying fists.

The moon murmurs and tugs. I can't look. Brightness always fades.

Flights

Peter Mladinic

HEART'S DESIRE

I marvel how such a beautiful song
came from such an ugly place.
I'm thinking of the Avalons who sang
and recorded this iconic R&B ballad
some call Doo-wop, and Newport News
where the Avalons came from.
I stayed there briefly. It was rows of
dark wood rooming houses, movie
houses with triple X marquees, a police
station. One late Saturday night, one
of two shore patrol, I saw a drunk white
guy tear up his fingerprints,
his bloody face and head after white
cops clubbed him. My Newport News
clashes with this song. You've
likely heard "soul on fire" in some song.
When the Avalons sing it in "Heart's Desire"
I feel it down to my toenails.

Flights

Peter Mladinic

LOVE AND MARRIAGE

Frank and Eileen's divorce was nasty, as many are, but I wasn't in court, hearing court, I imagined, had a film in my mind, though I didn't see lawyers. He wanted the divorce. Eileen had strayed with one man, but likely more than one. Men I never met. She told me last time I visited, their marriage falling apart. Then the divorce I heard about from her, from him. I was two thousand miles away from these two close friends. Gradually he silently accused me, not saying outright I wasn't there for him. What could I do, holding down a job at times overwhelming as jobs can be. I tried to be a good friend but wasn't good enough. He retreated into silence. But she and I stayed close enough for me to know that they in time fixed their problem. They didn't remarry but resumed the friend part of marriage. Both living in the town they lived in when they lived on Castlewood, with their son and daughter. Very recently the daughter Lori reached out to me. Frank was living in her house, with her family, and passed after a long illness. I texted Eileen, told her I connected with her daughter. That's cool was all she texted back. When Frank became ill she texted brief texts; like I got a report of his decline, but that's all. Once he was like a kid brother to me, and she a sister. We met in Mr. Gilmore's World History, which met a two, Monday and Wednesday. They were a couple.

Flights

He had a red Volvo wagon, the Frank Mobile, I sat in back while we rode long straight country roads buzzed on the joints we passed, some nights high on acid. Flash forward, best man at their wedding I raised a glass to a long happy marriage. When Frank was ill, I thought about him often, but what could I say, I'm sorry you're dying. I didn't ask if I could talk with him. There was the fact of his dying nothing could change. I feel I've lost her but what is a feeling compared to the fact dead is dead. At least Lori reached out. Their divorce she took hard being a kid but I guess she got past it, as Frank and Eileen got past it.

Flights

Margaret Royall

THE SWINGING SIXTIES

Argument over a maxi coat

My mum threw me that sideways glance,
said I looked absurd, that nobody wore
long coats nowadays.
Did I want to make an exhibition of myself?

I said everyone my age had them in London -
Trendy in Chelsea, uber-cool to wear one.
No one would turn and stare, unless with envy!

What's more, you'll not walk with me
to chapel in it. I forbid you, do you hear?'
She raced ahead, peeved, trying to disown me.

In London I aspired to be the epitome of cool,
a sex goddess, popping into Bus Stop or Biba
for a cheeky little Barbara Hulanicki number.

Back in my home town, not so.
Whispers, gossip, faces behind net curtains.
I rebelled, determined to shock prim neighbours
Look at me! I'm one of those weird hippy-chicks!

"I'm sure God doesn't care what I wear!" I said,
"Remember Mary Magdalen? She was a prostitute,
but Jesus loved her!"

Flights

Margaret Royall

WALKING THE BROOMWAY*

A silver-grey thread bathed in afternoon light,
meandering across the mudflats;
sly as a slippery serpent, sinister shape-shifter,
filling the cavernous jaws of the creak.

At first a scant trickle, barely discernible, then
flooding, flaunting its power, pushing ahead
to cut off tardy walkers, trap the unwary.

I watch the black-backed gulls wheeling,
diving down, foraging in the clear shallows.

Hardy walkers stride out with purpose now,
putting distance between themselves and the tide,
calling with urgency to their canine companions
chasing the eddies, stout sticks lodged between jaws.

A sudden rain shower pushes through;
I fumble to pull a cagoule from my rucksack.
My black wellies match my darkening mood.
False bravado? A little too foolhardy?
This walk in the sea is a well-kept local secret;
the thrill of outwitting the tide,
manna for adrenalin junkies...

But not for me, a novice minus requisite guide!
Reviewing the imminent danger I regroup,
reluctantly turning back for home again.

* The Broomway is a pathway traversing the sand and mudflats of Maplin Sands, a treacherous walk out to Foulness requiring the services of an experienced guide. The tide comes in more quickly than a man can outrun it. To date more than 100 people have died.

Flights

John Tustin

BARENAKED

Your barenaked body
In the memories of my mind
Is more happy to see
Than these keys
Upon which I type
As quick as light

As slower than molasses
Sliding uphill

And how excellent our bodies together
Were
I remember also now
And think about
With my toes numb from the beer
And Dylan playing
As I think
About

Your barenaked body
Warm and soft
Up against
My last good rememberings
In this

The second half of life

My barenaked body cold now
And in need of clothes
And closure

Getting dressed in the dark
But still hoping

Flights

John Tustin

DRAGONFLY

There was a moment –
We heard a noise and saw the
Dragonfly
Bumping up against the fluorescent ceiling light
Higher than we could reach

He or she
Was the size of my index finger
And he or she kept bumping his or her prehistoric body
Up against the harmless light

We looked up and Anita,
Who admits an aversion to insects
Admitted this dragonfly
Was indeed beautiful

And I agreed

I told her something about prehistoric dragonflies,
Their oxygenated inflated size
And that sea scorpions were as big as we are today
And were among the first sea-dwellers to take to land

And then we moved on
To something work related
I guess

I don't even remember the conversation drifting

As for what the dragonfly then did....
I don't really know

Flights

Bruce McRae

THE DOG OF HIS THOUGHTS

I am divinity, said the lunatic.
I am an onyx column, a chronicle
of fantasy and reflection. I am
a treble-clef. A mule of consistence.

The wind blew this way and that way
and the lunatic declared himself
to be a wicker effigy, a mosaic trampled
by tourists, the sacking of Rome.

I am a beach during constant summer,
the-one-who-was-mad explained.
I am the death-warmed Ganges,
he muttered into his bandages.

Children threw stones in a field
while the madman paused in wonder,
his mind-monsters waiting patiently,
the wind persistent in its endeavours.

Flights

John Tustin

THE DEVIL MAY CARE

The devil rang while you were out.
He said he was sorry to have missed you,
that he'd been hoping to reconnect.
(his words, not mine)
He'd only just found your number,
he explained, in the pocket of a jacket.

The devil asked if you were well,
and I didn't know what to say.
It's best you tell him yourself.
We all have problems.
We all have teeth to grind
and bones to powder into meal.

Regardless, he said he'd call around some day,
catch up on old times,
if you weren't too busy.
I almost felt sorry for him.
I almost felt something.

Flights

John Tustin

TALENT SHOW AUDITIONS

Next is a comedian
who simply stands there sobbing.
A stagehand leads him away.

Then, a juggler of the invisible.
Either a con, or utter genius.

A singer only dogs can hear.

A magician, minus any magic.

The mute thespian,
his monologue of clicks and whistles.
We thank him for coming.

Lastly, after a trying day,
a woman who only glares at us,
her anger palpable,
our personal lives in disarray.
All kinds of trouble brewing.

Flights

Robert Beveridge

FLIRTATIOUS

The songs in the dell
may be sung by wood
nymphs, bullfrogs,
pitcher plants eager
for their next meal.
Before you walk the path,
a little beef demiglaçe
behind the ears, pink
Himalayan salt rubbed
into the wrists, a sprig
of rosemary between
your teeth. Thus girded,
a moonlight walk.

Flights

Robert Beveridge

KISSES, TAROT CARDS, AND OTHER THINGS THE FAIRIES STOLE

You added the mushrooms at the right time, but the pumpkin went in a couple minutes late and it hasn't quite achieved the stage where each piece bursts open, reveals the embryo of the New Messiah within. You taste the broth, swish it around your palate for a minute, add a pinch of salt, a drab of asafoetida, two tablespoons of ichor of Taranassa, Prince of Nightmares, Surveyor of the Kingdom of Leeches, and two grinds of pink peppercorn. The lid goes back on for another fifteen minutes as you continue your search for an August moon in October.

Flights

Yuu Ikeda

I WISH

I wish words that nobody hits on
dropped from the sky like snowflakes did,
and piled up on my umbrella

I wish I could pick up these words,
put them in a small bottle,
add colors, and
carry the bottle always

I wish I could gather
a lot of words
every day,
and make colorful collections of words

I wish these words spread
through someone's heart
in Spring that snowflakes start to thaw

Flights

S Reeson

RING

Again, orbits collide
fingers clasped, emphatic ride
disturbed by which
you never will remove
and that destroys
all sanctity we ever hold.
'I cannot leave', and yet
you stay, each time
apologetic as the last,
decaying moment's tryst, lust
fractured, bound as art.
What hangs us isn't gold;
unmake life's possibility
forever gone, potential she,
not I
beholds.

Flights

S Reeson

LONDON

Saturday night, remains
though ache's malaise
only created because
life, somehow expired
smoothly vacated, silver
strands across our sin.
Athena lied, persists
wisdom lost, derides
pointlessness of this
when I cannot
remove a lie from life;
faulted, contained
lies sleeping above he
incapable of trust.
This mettle cannot
move, remains as proof.

Flights

Alfredo Salvatore Arcilesi

ELECTRIC CANDLE

Heart pumping faster than her legs, she feared she might kill her mother, feared her father would catch up to her.

“Cora!”

Oh, no! Daddy’s getting closer, she thought. He’s s’posed to be sleeping.

Ignoring her father’s pursuit, Cora ran past the quiet houses lining the quiet street on this otherwise quiet night. Past the bungalow, home to Mr. King, who had dressed as Santa Claus one Christmas “‘cause he’s too busy to do it himself,” Mr. King had explained. Past Ms. Shelley’s dark, leafy lawn, where she hosted Easter egg hunts “‘cause the Easter Bunny’s too busy to hide the eggs himself, so I help out,” Ms. Shelley had assured. Past Dr. Deaver’s home that doubled as his dental office, where he had presented five-year-old Cora with a dollar to commemorate her first lost tooth, because, well... “The Tooth Fairy’s too busy.” Past the houses that remained dark, for their inhabitants had yet to be awakened by-

“Cora!” A breath. “Stop!”

Blazing through a dead intersection, Cora spared a thought for the archetypes on whose behalf her neighbours claimed to work during their respective seasons. She wondered where they were: Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny, the Tooth Fairy. Wondered if they saw the X-ray, the way she had. She wondered if they saw the lie. Or-

Her heart stopped.

Her mother died.

Her father caught up to her.

Then a double crash against her small ribcage.

And another.

Another.

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Her heart stopped.

Her mother died.

Her father caught up to her.

Then a double crash against her small ribcage.

And another.

Another.

The doctor.

And when she thought she couldn’t lose another beat:

What if mommy lied to me?

No.

Impossible.

Though it was looking that way.

Cora didn’t want to think of her mother in that light.

All the more reason to run.

“Cora!”

Too close.

He was quick for someone who was not only old, but had been asleep.

They had been watching television; he had allowed her to stay up as late as she wanted, a sort of gift—including all the junk food she could pack into her sugar-and-salt-coated belly—to celebrate her recovery.

Recovery.

The X-ray, she thought. The lie.

Flights

The plan had formed during her time in the hospital, then solidified in her bedroom (after the doctor deemed it safe enough for her to return home) into something simple, doable. Her footsteps were light, quiet—the coughing fits had faded to wheezes—and her father had taken to marathon sleeping in the wake of the loss of their beloved matriarch. The cemetery was only seconds away, past Mr. King’s, Ms. Shelley’s, and Dr. Deaver’s.

Of course, Cora had to be careful, for the last time she snuck out of the house she ended up in the hospital, where the lie had waited to be discovered. Within her.

Tonight, not seconds but minutes ago, Cora had eased away from her father, uncomfortably sleeping on the other end of the couch. She had tiptoed toward the front door, and after tense moments with the loud lock and creaky hinges, made her escape. The cold air had stabbed her body, trying to get to that special spot into which it had settled three weeks ago, trying to send her back to the hospital. She hadn’t intended to run, though she knew she should hurry; there was no guarantee her father would remain asleep.

Down the front steps.

Down the driveway.

To the right, along the sidewalk that had lead her and her father from house to cemetery every day after their first, ceremonial visit.

“Cora!”

Daddy’s awake! she had thought. *He’s coming!*

Breaking into a sprint, the race for the cemetery had begun.

Now, finally, breathlessly turning into the cemetery, Cora kept an eye and ear out for zombies, though she couldn’t be bothered with them at the moment. Or any moment.

Now was her only chance to learn the truth.

“Cora!”

She knew her mother’s name, but not the letters of which it was comprised. She knew her mother’s headstone, but not in the thick darkness. She recognized the tree against which the headstone seemingly rested, and- Yes! Made out its twisted silhouette, shaped by the streetlamp from beyond the cemetery.

The frozen grass ended. The mound of earth began, a heavy blanket over her mother (if she was there), tucked in by the small yellow excavator that had patiently waited for her, her father, and the few mourners to leave before it could discreetly perform its job.

Cora dove to her knees, and began digging her short fingers into the cold dirt, yanking out pitiful handfuls. The small craters her fists made quickly filled in with seemingly more black soil than there had been. Determined,

Flights

she thrashed at the dirt.

“What’re you...” Quick breaths. “...doing...” More quick breaths. “...Cora!?”

She continued the excavation as if her father hadn’t finally caught up to her, as if he wasn’t witnessing her apparent breakdown, too stunned to take the final steps to seize her, to stop her from spraying his pants with flung dirt. To stop her from disturbing the ground, his wife, her mother.

Cora dug harder, deeper, numbness creeping throughout her hands.

I gotta know! she told herself.

Ignoring her father, who knelt before her.

I gotta know!

Ignoring her father, who took a face full of dirt.

I GOTTA KNOW!

He didn’t stop her.

‘Cause he knows I know!’ she thought.

Frozen razors cut hot tracks into her cheeks. She used both anesthetized hands to investigate the conflicting sensation, but succeeded only in lodging clumps of cold, hard dirt into her teary eyes.

Stupid!

She was angry to had shed even one tear in the presence of her father.

She continued to dig, furiously, but the dirt stung her eyes. She tried to ignore the annoying pain, but gave in to wiping her eyes, depositing more dirt within them.

Again, she tried to dig...

Again, she wiped her eyes...

Tried to dig...

Wiped her eyes...

Dig...

Wipe...

With a scream of frustration, loud and fearsome enough to scare nearby zombies back into their graves, exhausted and defeated Cora collapsed onto her side, feeling nothing.

Except her heartbeat.

Many heartbeats—pounding her chest, neck, ears, pulsing throughout her tired legs, her unfeeling hands.

Another heartbeat joined her own. Slower. Calmer.

Too tired to reject him, too cold to admit her body needed his warmth, Cora wondered if her embracing father’s own mother or father or someone he loved, someone he *trusted*, lived in *his* beating heart. Or if they had lied to him, too.

Flights

Perhaps it was the cooing, coupled with the gentle rocking.

Perhaps it was the way her heart began to slow, calm, synchronize with her father's.

Perhaps it was the pathetic progress she—a mere girl, not a professional excavator—had made, and knew she would never learn the truth, see it for herself.

Perhaps it was the way her father whispered it was okay, all okay.

“It’s *not* okay!” Cora blasted, elbowing his chest. His heart. She didn’t need the ambient streetlamp to illuminate her father’s stunned, hurt expression. “I wanna see Mommy!”

In the past couple of weeks, she had come to know what the beginning of her father’s crying sounded like: a hitch in his voice, as if he was trying to prevent a sneeze. She heard it now. But instead of speaking in tears, he spoke in words. “I... I know you do. I want to see Mommy, too, but—”

“Where is she?”

Silence from his silhouette.

“Where. Is. She?” Three numb fists pounding against his chest.

Then it came: the not-quite sneeze, followed by the awkward sobbing. “I’m sorry, I...” He swallowed the rest.

“You lied to me, Daddy.” Whatever tears she reserved, her father used.

“You and Mommy lied to me.” Thinking about her mother as a liar had made her feel bad, guilty; *saying* it aloud made her feel outright criminal.

As she had in the hospital bed, then in her own bed, Cora replayed the lies in her exhausted, perplexed mind:

“No matter what happens, I’ll always be in your heart.”—her mother’s final words, the night before the surgery.

“That’s just Mommy giving you hugs and kisses.”—her father, shortly after the funeral, clarifying what Cora took to be a ghost in her bedroom.

Mommy giving me hugs and kisses?

How could that be if she’s s’posed to be in my heart?

Sneaking out of the house after what her father told her.

Standing in the windy backyard, receiving—and trying to return—her mother’s hugs and kisses.

Her father discovering her weather-ravaged body the following morning.

The doctor showing her the X-ray of her chest, where her new-moan-yearh no longer threatened.

“But Mommy wasn’t there, in the X-ray,” Cora said now, the tears brewing again. “I looked and looked and I couldn’t see her.” A tear betrayed her.

Flights

She didn’t bother to catch it, not if her father hadn’t seen it. “So if Mommy’s not in my heart, and mommy’s not the wind, giving me hugs and kisses,” she pointed a dirt-encrusted digit at the pile of disturbed earth, “then she’s gotta be in there. She’s gotta.”

What she took for yet another tear landing on her cheek was, in fact, one of her father’s.

“I saw Mommy in the *coughing*, and I saw them put the coughing in the ground.” She pointed at the spot where she was certain her mother was buried in her *coffin*.

If whimpers were speech, then Cora might have understood what her father was trying to say.

“Mommy is in there, right?”

She tried to push against her father’s embrace, the only response he could muster.

“Right?” Cora managed, before giving in.

#

In spite of her father’s snug work, Cora still felt the breeze that wasn’t her mother’s hugs and kisses penetrating the thick comforter. He kissed each bathed cheek—one from him, one “from” her mother; they both knew, but never brought up—and left. Tomorrow they would have a talk about mommy. “True talk,” daddy had said.

The creaky hallway steps she had once thought belonged to a ghost disappeared into her parent’s bedroom.

Or’s it just daddy’s bedroom now?

She didn’t know.

Her parents’—*her father’s?*—bed squealed, then silenced.

She hated to ruin her father’s careful work, but she needed to know.

Kicking away the comforter, Cora, aware of where the creaks hid among her floor, tiptoed toward the mirror sitting atop the drawer. After minutes of careful study, she saw that her father had lied to her again, in the cemetery: she saw not a single trace of her mother within her features.

“True talk,” daddy had said.

Tomorrow.

Navigating the creak-mines strewn about the floor, Cora returned to bed, turned on her side, and stared at the nightlight her mother had installed. In the shape of a candle, its flame perpetually ablaze, albeit with the help of

Flights

electricity, the small beacon of comfort had defended Cora from an assortment of bumps in the night. No longer fearing those bumps, she reached for the night-light, but stopped.

A new fear.

A fear of her own making:

If I turn off the nightlight, how will mommy know where I am?

Flights

David Gold

RASCAL MY BOY

He was meant to be a border collie but it didn't turn out that way, not that we cared one jot. Purchased for a song, no doubt, by my mother, from some scruffy local farm, he arrived in our kitchen one evening, a fully alive cotton wool toy, complete with shiny black button eyes and nose. It was love at first sight; how could it not be?

Over the years that followed, we grew up together, Rascal and I, spending joyous stretched hours, lost to all others, exploring the soft and impossibly green woods and fields around our house, the slightly sweet smell of fresh, Scottish dampness almost always in the air. Our activities were many and varied. Games of hide (me) and seek (him) were a staple - Rascal was dispatched to fetch a stick launched towards distant, thick vegetation (hopefully delaying his retrieval), while I did my best to find the hiding places that even his dog super powers would not immediately discover. My best efforts (up in a tree was a frequent triumph) invariably gave rise to increasingly frantic yelping, conveying to me, an anthropomorphic mix of laughter, excitement and (for my best efforts) perhaps a little desperation, at my absence.

Sometimes, we'd just sit side by side in companionable silence on the top of our favourite ridge, with me stroking his shoulders, feeling the now sleek fur and impossibly rippling muscles seemingly acquired as some effortless birth right. With the sun warming our faces, we would survey our kingdom - the river below, flanked by lush grassy pastures clearly being enjoyed by a scattering of cows and sheep, whose contented conversations reached us every so often. Usually, a slow breeze was to be found, tracking the path of the river, and the soft edges of this would, intermittently, waft up the hillside towards us, causing Rascal to tilt his head back just slightly, and flare his leathered, damp black nostrils, to read the invisible (to me) words and stories carried in the air. I always wondered what they told him.

He's buried in a small, ancient wood, near our old house, and on my now infrequent visits to my old home town, I often pass that wood. I think of him every time. My dad, also gone now, called him 'Rascal my boy'. Man's best friend doesn't even begin to describe it.

Flights

Steve Slavin

TYPE CASTING

1

Before there were PCs and Microsoft Word, there were ways you could correct your typing errors by relatively crude versions of cutting and pasting. They varied somewhat in quality, and each was pretty time-consuming.

Early in my college freshman year, I developed perhaps the best cut-and-paste process of all time by following a simple multi-step process to correct dozens of typos I made in each of my term papers. This included retyping each corrected word, and using “invisible” tape to cover the typos. After photocopying the pages, I needed to apply White Out to hide the faint lines left by the “invisible” tape, let the pages dry and then make new “perfect” photocopies.

Had I had the money, instead of spending all this time making corrections, I probably would have just hired a typist to produce pristine term papers, while I spent the time that I saved on more worthy pursuits.

2

I had a friend who supported herself through college and law school by typing term papers for students at Brooklyn College. We had met during our sophomore year when I answered her ad in *the Kingsman*, the student newspaper.

I had a paper due in just three days, and there was no way I could get it in on time. It was twelve pages long, and my professor expected us to hand in “clean copies.” Even my elegant cut-and-paste technique would not pass muster.

For the then exorbitant fee of a dollar a page, Marla came through for me. A born procrastinator – not to mention a not-so-great typist -- I soon became typing dependent. Bottom line: Marla’s typing just looked a lot better than mine.

3

Two years later, when I began grad school and Marla enrolled in law school, she kidded that I could end up paying for her degree. “Yeah,” I replied. “at the cost of being able to afford my own tuition.”

Flights

For a while, my prophecy seemed quite unlikely to come true. My professors assigned much longer papers with at least relatively clean pages required. I found that – except in dire emergencies -- I could no longer afford Marla’s fees, which had now more than doubled.

I had become much less dependent on Marla’s help, but we continued to be close friends. Still, she warned me that I would surely need her services when I completed my Master’s thesis.

As luck would have it, my thesis was the last large typing job Marla would take on before devoting all her time to studying for the bar exam. I kiddingly asked if I would need to find another typist after she hung up her shingle.

“Steve,” she said with a big smile, “I’ll always be there for you.”

“What if I actually get through grad school and am finally ready to write my doctoral dissertation?”

“For you, Steve, I’d be honored. Of course, I’m going to have to charge you the same hourly fees I’ll be charging my legal clients.”

“I had better start saving now!”

4

A month before the results of the bar exam were announced, Marla had already gone on several interviews, but she didn’t get a single offer – or even a call-back. “You know, Steve, it looks as though the law is still a white boy’s preserve, if you get my drift.”

“Well hopefully, by the time you get your results, perhaps even one of the big white-shoe firms on Wall Street will recognize your talents. “

“Oh, they have! Three of them offered me jobs on the spot!” She paused. “They knew how I had worked my way through college and law school.”

“Lovely.”

“Wait Steve! It gets better! They each told me that if things worked out, in just a year or two, I could become one of the highest paid legal typists in the city.”

Flights

“Well, if it gives you any satisfaction, you’d be making more than most untenured college professors.”

“If I can’t get a legitimate offer soon, I’m going to apply at Legal Aid. I hear they’re very fond of Black girls there. We relate so well to the clients.”

“Maybe you’ll like it.”

“Maybe I won’t!”

5

Marla received one of the top scores on the New York State bar exam. She was third in her class at Brooklyn Law School. And her first – and only – job offer was from Legal Aid.

After she had been on the job for a few months, I asked how it was going. I knew, of course, about the long hours, tough working conditions, and terrible pay. Still, I was surprised to hear her answer.

“My job is like a shit sandwich.”

“Would you care to elaborate?”

“Steve, yuh wanna know what’s wrong with a shit sandwich? Too much shit... and not enough bread!”

“Well, Marla, the next time we go out for lunch, I’ll know what not to order.”

6

Marla decided to give it one year to see if she could adjust to the workload and the poverty-level wages at Legal Aid. And after that, she reluctantly decided to continue. After all, none of the decent law firms were exactly busting down her door.

Amazingly, I was almost breezing through grad school, and had even chosen my dissertation topic. Perhaps “An Evaluation of the Economic Cost and Effectiveness of the Barbados Family Planning Association” was not the wisest choice” --especially since it would end up being 350 pages long.

Flights

There was only one person to whom I could entrust it. Amazingly, Marla agreed. A week before, she had handed in her resignation to her supervisor at Legal Aid. And until she found a better way to make a living, she would reestablish her typing business.

“You know that I’ll earn more than I did at Legal Aid – not that they set the bar all that high.” The two of us then burst out laughing.

She confided that she still hadn’t given up on the law, but she had to support herself in the meanwhile. And she had certainly picked up valuable experience at Legal Aid. If not for the extremely long hours and the poverty-level wages, it really wasn’t such a bad job.

7

Soon Marla was regaling me with some of her own stories about her more eccentric customers. No longer confining herself to term papers and occasional doctoral dissertations, she took on people from all walks of life. And she even confirmed for me that the widespread belief that most lawyers could not write was completely true.

Her most memorable story was about what would be a self-published autobiography of an older woman who turned out to be prone to making numerous grammatical and spelling errors. Apparently barely literate, she still wanted to tell anybody willing to read it the story of her life.

Even when completely cleaned up, the manuscript would still be utterly unacceptable to any publisher, perhaps even among the bottom-feeders of the vanity press.

Marla realized that if she even took on this job, it would be very slow going. And as they say, “time is money.”

The woman gave her a small advance payment in crumpled one-dollar bills. After she left, Marla began work on the first page, making dozens of corrections, while trying not change the substance of what the woman wrote.

The next day, Marla called to tell her that she had completed just the first twenty-five pages. Could she stop by to see how they looked? They agreed on a time

Flights

the next afternoon.

When the woman arrived, Marla handed her the pages and asked her to look through them to see if she was satisfied. Marla then went back to work on another typing assignment.

A half hour later, the woman knocked on Marla's office door. Marla invited her inside and asked her to please sit down. Then she confided, "I wasn't at all sure that you would be happy with the changes I made.

The woman didn't say anything for a while. Marla knew that as a very bad sign. If she had been happy with Marla's work, she would have said so immediately.

Finally, Marla asked if she was displeased. Still, the woman said nothing. And then, she very slowly shook her head from side to side.

"I gather that you didn't like the changes I made."

"No. No!"

"I'm sorry, but I felt they were needed."

"Maybe they were. I know I'm a terrible speller, and I know I make a lot of mistakes when I write things. But..."

Marla waited.

"But the pages that I gave you? Those were my words. What I wrote about was my life. But this? I don't write that way. I don't talk that way." She paused and seemed to be thinking about something. "You see, it's is a book about me. And this?" she said holding up the pages Marla had typed. "This isn't about me. This isn't about my life."

There were tears in Marla's eyes. This was not a term paper. This was indeed a person's life!

What could Marla possibly say? Now she was shaking her head "no." Soon she was sobbing.

Flights

The woman stood up, and then slowly walked across the room and put her arms around Marla and hugged her.

Finally, Marla stood. "I'm going to type your story exactly the way you wrote it. I won't change a word."

8

A few weeks later, Marla got a call from one of her clients at the other end of the spectrum -- a lawyer, who, like many of his colleagues, could barely put together two coherent sentences. He thanked her again for all her help, and ruefully confessed that he had never realized just how bad his writing was before he saw all her edits.

But he was completely puzzled. When he sent her his brief to be professionally typed, he had no idea that she was a lawyer herself. Then he asked around and heard nothing but glowing reports. He even checked in with a couple of her colleagues at Legal Aid.

Marla was very impressed with his honesty, and perhaps even more so by his self-depredation. When she told me about the call, I said he sounded like a complete mensch (Yiddish for a person of integrity and honor).

"Steve, he offered me a job! As a real lawyer! At three times what I was making at Legal Aid! Can you *believe* it?"

"Sure! And you'll be worth every penny!" Then we sit there for a while, while I absorbed what Marla had said.

"Steve, you don't seem very happy about it."

"Of *course*, I am!"

"Then why the subdued reaction?"

"Well, how am I ever going to find such a great typist?"

Flights

Grove Koger

THE OTHER SIDE

I took one of my favorite hikes late last season, up to Cramer Lakes in the Saw-tooths. The lakes lie at an altitude of almost 8,400 feet, and Redfish Lake—that’s where you start up—is a little over 6,500 feet, so it’s what’s called an “accessible” hike. There are much harder ones in the area, believe me, but it’s a full day up and a day back, and I spend another day poking around and shooting some photos and maybe hooking a few fish, so it’s a good three days in all.

I’d parked behind the lodge, eaten a big breakfast and talked for a few minutes on the dock with one of the other hikers, an older fellow, before setting out on the shuttle. He had a weathered look about him, along with decades-old clothes and jacket to match, and we made the kind of small talk you make when you’re going to be in a stranger’s company for a while. I mentioned where I was going, and he replied that he was headed to Madeline Lake. I nodded, hating to reveal my ignorance, since I’ve lived in the Stanley Basin for years, but the truth is I’d never heard of Madeline Lake. (On top of everything else, I’m guessing that’s how it’s spelled, since there’s more than one way.)

It was a crisp morning—they’re always crisp here when they aren’t downright freezing—but I’ve never found the five-mile trip across the lake to the trailhead unpleasant. It’s a restful prelude to the hike, and a good chance for me to clear my mind of the extraneous thoughts that are normally crowding it.

I’m going to call the old man “Joe,” since I need a handle for him, and somehow, he looked like a Joe. In any case, our routes apparently lay together up the cleared trail through the valley floor for the first part of the climb, so I let him take the lead. Whatever concerns I might have had about his age, he didn’t seem to have any trouble with the climb, but after about half an hour, he sat down on a boulder to retie his boots. As I joined him on a nearby boulder, he fumbled open the pocket of his flannel shirt to take something out. I assumed it would be a map, but when I glanced over, he was holding what looked like a snapshot.

“My wife,” Joe explained. “She asked me to keep her picture with me.”

I nodded, but all I had seen was a pale rectangle.

Flights

“She says things are a little ... indistinct there,” he continued.

He stared at the snapshot, and I had the impression that he would have kissed it if I hadn’t been there. I turned away.

“Well, this is where I turn off,” Joe finally said, putting the photo away and nodding toward a wooded ridge that rose alongside the trail ahead of us. “I’m headed for the other side.”

I wished him luck and he raised his hand in farewell as he began working his way through the brush around a deadfall at the tip of the ridge. Could there be an unmarked trail there? I thought about checking, but I didn’t want to lose my momentum, so I continued on my way.

#

Finishing a long hike is as satisfying as starting it, and I try to stretch out the pleasure for as long as possible. In this case, I visited the bar that runs along the side of the lodge, an unpretentious little place that can’t have changed much since the lodge was built in 1929. I was looking forward to a quiet hour nursing a beer, resting my boots on the fender of the fireplace and thinking over the hike as the evening set in.

I’d set up my tent in a good spot between the upper and lower lakes and enjoyed a big meal of pan-fried trout the second night. And I’d gotten some good panoramic shots of the Stanley Basin that I would work up back home. But thinking about my photographs reminded me of Joe and his snapshot, if that’s really what it had been. It wasn’t important, but the incident puzzled me. Like I said, all I’d seen was a pale, empty rectangle. When I’d questioned the shuttle pilot on the way back an hour before, he didn’t think that he’d seen Joe since that first morning, so maybe the man knew another way out. Or maybe he was still up there. His pack, which had looked about as old as he was, wasn’t that big, so he’d have to be eating a lot of trout.

#

A few days later I had some business at the ranger station and thought I’d ask the ranger about Madeline Lake. He hadn’t head of it either, but that wasn’t conclusive.

“I learn something every day,” he explained. I knew from long experience that he tended to talk in clichés.

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“Let’s see,” he continued, taking one book and then another off the shelves behind his desk. I recognized all of them, but didn’t say anything. Next, he pulled open a wide drawer and pulled out some topos. I’d tried those too, but it was reassuring to see someone else going through the same motions.

Finally the ranger turned to his computer and checked a USGS database of place names. I recognized its layout immediately.

“Huh!” He shook his head and finally turned back to me. “Maybe the fellow knows something we don’t.”

Thinking that I couldn’t have put it better myself, I thanked the ranger and headed back to my pickup. The first storm of the season was on the way, and I wanted to get home before it hit.

#

My thanks to Jim Stark for describing the incident I’ve dramatized in this story and for providing me with detailed information about hiking in Idaho’s Sawtooth Mountains.

Flights

Gaynor Kane

COMING OF AGE

Other girls went shopping for little white dresses and veils. She didn’t want, or need, any of this.

Looking in the mirror, sun firing up her auburn hair, she felt foxier than ever. She pawed at her little pointed nose, breathed in the smell of freshly mown lawn, petrichor, the charcoal from a barbeque three streets away.

Yesterday, her mother had left a razor on the bathroom shelf for her. She knew that she wasn’t going to use it. A swipe across her tablet, some clicks and several pairs of new trousers were on the way, next day delivery. She rubbed a hand down her leg, felt the smooth fur, warm and soft. A distant dog barked and she cocked her head.

Coming of age was natural.

Flights

Gaynor Kane

LOLA

The Brazilian sun sparked in the highest point of the sky, scorching skin and turning the sidewalk to lava. As Lola set off on her daily walk, her nostrils filled with pungent city smells. Passing the end of an alley, she heard a soft whining sound and took a detour to investigate. Pulling apart fruit store garbage revealed an infant, swaddled in a grimy rag, wrinkled skin and squirming. Lola gently lifted the bundle taking care not to hurt it. Their eyes met, the baby cooed.

There was a hospital only four blocks away. She often walked past it and knew people would be coming and going. Often the staff had flashed her warm smiles, she decided that was the best place. On arrival at the steps, Lola rested the baby in a shadowed corner. Out bounced a young male nurse. Lola noticed he smelt of antiseptic. The nurse looked down with a frown as he noticed the bundle. Just as Lola was turning to leave he bent down.

‘Good dog’ he patted ‘I’ll take care of the baby now’.

Lola first appeared in The Bangor Literary Journal issue 9

Flights

THANK YOU to all of our contributors

Dr Niki Strange is currently poet in residence at Macmillan Horizon Centre, which supports people affected by cancer in Sussex (thanks to Arts Council/National Lottery funding). Along with creating new work, she has been delivering poetry workshops for former and current patients, drawing on her own cancer experiences. She passionately believes in poetry as a source of solace and is committed to supporting peoples’ wellbeing through the wonder of words.

Edward Lee’s poetry, short stories, non-fiction and photography have been published in magazines in Ireland, England and America, including The Stinging Fly, Skylight 47, Acumen, The Blue Nib and Poetry Wales. His play ‘Wall’ was part of Druid Theatre’s Druid Debuts 2020. His debut poetry collection “Playing Poohsticks On Ha’Penny Bridge” was published in 2010. He is currently working towards a second collection. He also makes musical noise under the names Ayahuasca Collective, Orson Carroll, Lego Figures Fighting, and Pale Blond Boy. His blog/website can be found at www.edwardmlee.wordpress.com

Julie Stevens writes poems reflecting the impact MS has on her life, as well as other topics close to her heart. Her poems have recently been published in Dodging the Rain, The Honest Ulsterman, Nymphs, Impspired and The Lothlorien Poetry Journal. Her debut chapbook, Quicksand, was published by Dreich in September 2020. Website: www.jumpingjulespoetry.com, Twitter @julesjumping

Claire HM writes as an act of healing that is an invitation for others to create the stories they need to access healing too. In 2019 she had an essay published in the anthology, I Wrote it Anyway, about her experience of accessing university, and the long journey of finding the confidence to write as a woman from a working class background. How to Bring Him Back, her debut novella set in the seedier side of 90s Birmingham, is a story framed by a spell to let go of the past and will be published by Fly on the Wall press in October 2021. A short series of Brummie monologue poems giving voice to Classical female literary characters are upcoming in Tears in the Fence. She has most recently been published in Black Flowers Literary Journal, streetcake, Mooky Chick, CapeMagazine and Nymphs. (www.clairehm.com / IG and Twitter: @clairehmwriter)

Flights

Dee Allen is an African-Italian performance poet based in Oakland, California. Active on the creative writing & Spoken Word tips since the early 1990s. Author of 5 books [Boneyard, Unwritten Law, Stormwater and Skeletal Black, all from POOR Press, and from Conviction 2 Change Publishing, Elohi Unitsi] and 37 anthology appearances [including Your Golden Sun, Rise, Extreme, The Land Lives Forever, Civil Liberties United, Colossus: Home, Impact, 2020: The Year That Changed America, Geography Is Irrelevant and coming soon from Flower Song Press, in connection with the Rio Grande Valley International Poetry Festival, Boundless] under his figurative belt so far.

Thea Schiller, a New York poet and psychotherapist facilitates a poetry workshop at the Somers library in Somers, N.Y. and practices psychotherapy in CT. She holds a B.A. in creative writing from The City University of New York, and an MS in counseling from Western CT State University. Her poem, “Sarah” was the Orchard Poetry Prize winner in Furrow, University of Wisconsin. Recently, she has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize and her poems have appeared in The San Diego Annual Poetry Review 2017-2018, Edify Fiction, The Ravens Perch, 4th & Sycamore, Hevria, Lucent Dreaming and The Tenth Muse as well as many small literary journals in the past. When given the chance she follows her muse from Norway to Greece.

Ramesh Dohan hails from Toronto, Canada. His poetry often slips into quirky, tender, or profound observation on the everyday, reading and writing, and poetry itself. He was previously published in Boston Literary Magazine (2011), Bywords Journal (2012), Allegro Poetry Review (2015) & Bosphorous Review of Books (2021).

Kevin Ahern is a Professor Emeritus of biochemistry from Oregon State University who is enjoying the spare time he has gained in retirement to write verses, limericks, and other creative items.

Paweł Markiewicz was born 1983 in Siemiatycze in Poland. He is poet who lives in Bielsk Podlaski and writes tender poems, haiku as well as long poems. Paweł has published his poetries in many magazines. He writes in English and German.

Matt Alton is a Brighton based poet whose work has been published by Ink Sweat & Tears and played on BBC Radio Sussex. He has been commissioned by Poems by Post as their July 2021 poet. He was a student of the Creative Writing Programme 2020/21 and has accepted a place on the MA in Creative Writing and Education at Goldsmiths for September 2021.

Joseph A Farina is a retired lawyer in Sarnia, Ontario, Canada. His poems have appeared in Philadelphi Poets, Tower Poetry, The Windsor Review, and Tamaracks: Canadian Poetry for the 21st Century. He has two books of poetry published, The Cancer Chronicles and The Ghosts of Water Street.

Flights

Ben Nardolilli currently lives in New York City. His work has appeared in Perigee Magazine, Red Fez, Danse Macabre, The 22 Magazine, Quail Bell Magazine, Elimae, The Northampton Review, Local Train Magazine, The Minetta Review, and Yes Poetry. He blogs at mirrorsponge.blogspot.com and is trying to publish his novels.

Colin James has a couple of chapbooks of poetry published. Dreams Of The Really Annoying from Writing Knights Press and A Thoroughness Not Deprived of Absurdity from Piski’s Porch Press and a book of poems, Resisting Probability, from Sagging Meniscus Press.

Yash Seyedbagheri is a graduate of Colorado State University’s MFA program in fiction. His stories, “Soon,” “How To Be A Good Episcopalian,” and “Tales From A Communion Line,” were nominated for Pushcarts. Yash’s work has been published or is forthcoming in SmokeLong Quarterly, The Journal of Compressed Creative Arts, and Ariel Chart, among others.

Peter Mladinic’s poems have recently appeared in Ariel Chart, Bluepepper, the BeZine, Detour Ahead and other online journals. He lives, with six dogs, in Hobbs, New Mexico.

Margaret Royall is a Laurel Prize nominated poet. She has been shortlisted for several poetry prizes and won the Hedgehog Press’ collection competition 2020. She has two poetry collections: Fording The Stream and Where Flora Sings, a memoir in prose and verse, The Road To Cleethorpes Pier and a new pamphlet, Earth Magicke out April 2021. She has been widely published online and in print, most recently: Hedgehog Press, The Blue Nib, Impspired & forthcoming in Sarasvati and Dreich. Website: www.margaretroyall.com
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John Tustin’s poetry has appeared in many disparate literary journals since 2009. frit-zware.com/johntustinpoetry contains links to his published poetry online.

Bruce McRae, a Canadian musician and multiple Pushcart nominee, has had work appear in hundreds of publications around the world. The winner of the 2020 Libretto Chapbook Prize (20 Sonnets), his books include ‘The So-Called Sonnets’; ‘An Unbecoming Fit Of Frenzy’; ‘Like As If’; ‘All Right Already’ and ‘Hearsay’.

Robert Beveridge (he/him) makes noise (xterminal.bandcamp.com) and writes poetry in Akron, OH. Recent/upcoming appearances in Page and Spine, The Pointed Circle, and Failed Haiku, among others.

Flights

Yuu Ikeda is a Japan based poet. She loves writing, reading mystery novels, and drinking sugary coffee. She writes poetry on her website. www.poetryandcoffeedays.wordpress.com/ Her published poems are “On the Bed” in <Nymphs>, “Love? or Death?” in <Sad Girl Review>, “Poetry Drops Like Raindrops Do” in <JMW>, and more.

S Reeson [she/they] is 54, bisexual and married with two children: they has suffered anxiety for all of their life, and started telling stories as a ten-year-old in order to help them cope. They write and record poetry, short stories and episodic fiction, plus dissect their unique creative processes using both video and audio as the means to continue coping. A considerable lived experience of mental health issues, a passion for niche arts and media and an undimmed enthusiasm for environmentalism combine, to allow creativity to emerge, and new stories and projects to be created. They love to experiment, pushing creative boundaries and gain a huge amount of motivation and inspiration from talking about both the journey and their continued development as a creative. When S is not in her second home online, they enjoy lifting heavy weights, learning how to run properly and static cycling in the meat space.

Artisan baker by trade, **Alfredo Salvatore Arcilesi** has been published in over 60 literary journals worldwide. Winner of the Scribes Valley Short Story Writing Contest, he was also a finalist in the Blood Orange Review Literary Contest, and was awarded the Popular Vote in the Best of Rejected Manuscripts Competition. In addition to several short pieces, he is currently working on his debut novel.

David Gold was born and raised in the countryside just to the south of Glasgow in Scotland. He is a lyricist and singer songwriter who has only recently dipped his toe into the mysterious world of writing without music in mind. He is a passionate environmentalist and has also been known to work as a technology consultant. He now lives in London with his wife and son.

A recovering economics professor, **Steve Slavin** earns a living writing math and economics books. The third volume of his short stories, *To the City, with Love*, was recently published.

Grove Koger is the author of *When the Going Was Good: A Reader's Guide to the Best Narratives of Travel, Exploration, and Adventure* (Scarecrow Press, 2002), Assistant Editor of *Deus Loci: The Lawrence Durrell Journal*, and former Assistant Editor of *Art Patron* magazine. He blogs about travel and related matters at worldenoughblog.wordpress.com.

Gaynor Kane is from Belfast. She is published by the Hedgehog Poetry Press and her books include ‘Memory Forest’, ‘Penned In’ (co-written with Karen Mooney) and ‘Venus in Pink Marble’, which was Black Bough’s ‘Book of the Month’ in November 2020. Follow her on Twitter @gaynorkane

Flights



Flights