

Black Market Re-View



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Editor

Luke Thurogood

Editorial Assistant

Jessica Tillings

Poetry

Sarah Billington

Fiction

Laura Tickle

Artwork & Photography

Bill Bulloch

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Contents

[5]	Peter Branson	<i>White Hobo-o'-night Tyto alba: The Barn Owl</i>
[6]	Carl Boon	<i>The Mini Buses of Istanbul</i>
[7]	Dennis Thompson	<i>Initiation</i>
[8]	Yuan Changming	<i>Fallen Leaf</i>
[9]	Steven J Fowler	<i>The Betrayal of Hugh the Iron</i>
[10]	Ege Al'Bege	<i>Protests at New Waterloo</i>
[11]	Stephen C. Middleton	<i>Undercurrents</i>
[12]	Marc Swan	<i>Married with Chitlins</i>
[13]	Allen Forest	<i>Clown Ink</i>
[14]	Stephen C. Burca	<i>Papers</i>
[16]	Stephen C. Burca	<i>In School I Learned About Electricity</i>
[17]	CLS Ferguson	<i>The Ricky Incident</i>
[18]	Michael Garrett	<i>Ghost Auto</i>
[19]	Bill Crawford	<i>I Hear You Lima Charlie</i>
[25]	Lana Bella	<i>Notes on Water</i>
[26]	Lana Bella	<i>162 Heartbeats per Minute</i>
[27]	Lucas Shepherd	<i>Cat Year Crisis</i>
[28]	Dah Helmer	<i>The Lake</i>
[30]	Adam Kluger	<i>Night Owl</i>
[31]	Michael Onofrey	<i>The Community Room</i>
[42]	Daniel Roy Connelly	<i>If you live on the 83rd floor...</i>
[44]	Francis H Powell	<i>All dream Utopia</i>
[45]	Neil Slevin	<i>Sewing the Sea</i>
[46]	Contributors	

In the archive on the website along with this issue:

Daniele Pantano: *Ballerinas*

Interview: Robert Hampson on *Seaport*

Peter Branson

White Hob-o'-night
Tyto alba: The Barn Owl

Another barn conversion overdrawn,
a local farm deep down the lane:
their wildflower meadows have been sacrificed,
turned over - garden, shrub and lawn;
hay pasture round close-mown for silage in
the spring, crops dowsed with pesticide;
so you were forced to flit this site, no niche
nearby for moles and shrews to hide.
Our forebears felled wildwood to strive; world-wise,
you suss advantage, follow, thrive.
Though you've long gone, they've placed a nest box here,
for your return, should you survive.

Reprise you quartering high fallows, me,
in wonderment, a kid: you surf
the dusty shadows, pallid gypsy moth;
now yo-yo, spinning motionless
on syncopating string, silence intense;
your claws unsheath, locked on, plunge deep.
I marvel later, feeding post, your spruce
tweed overcoat by candlelight,
like sallow flecks of lichen on gold leaf.
This night, sad witness to that stern
church toll, beguiled, beneath all hallowed yews,
the witching hour, I sense your ghost.

Carl Boon

The Mini Buses of İstanbul

are painted blue, humid inside
in the morning with men

who recall their villages: schoolgirls
picking berries, women
at the bazaar tipping cantaloupes

with henna-stained fingers.
These men have narrow dreams: long

breakfasts in Kayseri, long,
strolls to buy Ramadan bread.
They—in button-down shirts—

play Hearts on their phones
with strangers and get bad hands.

Their breaths are sighs
for lost worlds, lost loves ripping cellophane
from packs of Turkish coffee

for their husbands. They are husbands, too,
but their briefcases are full of paper
instead of strawberry jam.

Dennis E. Thompson

Initiation

‘Gaylord, get out of bed and help us catch chickens.’

Two families gather around the kitchen table, knives laid out. Louise stands at the kitchen sink, beehive hair, a cigarette hanging from her lip. ‘Hope this don’t ruin my nails,’ she says. Everyone laughs. Three hayracks have been pulled in to form a circle around a fire. A big black pot of boiling water. The old man Kenny says, ‘his rack is the plucking rack; the next one is the gutting rack, and the third one is for cutting and wrapping.’

Kenny Jr. pulls a tree stump over to an open area by the racks, his Farmall M sputtering away. Louise says, ‘Kenny John, can’t you get it closer to the plucking rack?’ He glares cold whiskey stares at her. The old stump has seen this game before— blood spattered, small white feathers buried deep in the crevices of its blackened tabletop. Nobody can read its rings, to know its age, not with that much blood spilled over it. Huddled chickens stand squinting into the bright morning sunlight—innocent, unaware, not moving. The youngest children run around them, laughing.

‘Sharpen the knives, boys,’ Louise says ‘he old man ate so many beans and bacon last night; I couldn’t sleep with the smell.’ Everyone laughs.

‘Let little Gaylord kill the first one’ his older brother Donnie shouts, cold-hearted, quiet and mean behind his smile. ‘Grab the corn knife, Gaylord.’ Kenny Jr. hands him the chicken, its yellow legs twisting, eyes squinting up at Gaylord— thrashing around, unable to get away from the young boy. The young boy raises the corn knife high, his eyes on the innocent, unknowing blinks before death. Voices blur behind him. *Thwack* crushed, severed beak, pieces of comb attached. No blood. Gaylord drops the bird and the knife. The maimed chicken flops and dances over to the others, still alive. Jesus Christ, Gaylord’ Donnie yells, ‘what’d you do, close your eyes?’ Everyone laughs. The older brother picks up the corn knife, grabs the half-faced chicken and twists its legs until it stretches its neck onto the stump. *Thump* one sudden shock. White feathers turn crimson. The bird dances on the ground. Everyone cheers brave Donnie, who starts the long day of work. The process begins—chickens are grabbed, heads fly, blood spatters; still bodies are plucked and gutted. One head stares up from the ground, beakless, no longer in pain, its eye fixed on Gaylord.

Yuan Changming

Fallen Leaf

Shaking off all the dust

You have accumulated over the season

Flapping your wings against twilight

At the border of night

Like a butterfly coming down to

Kiss the land

As if to listen to

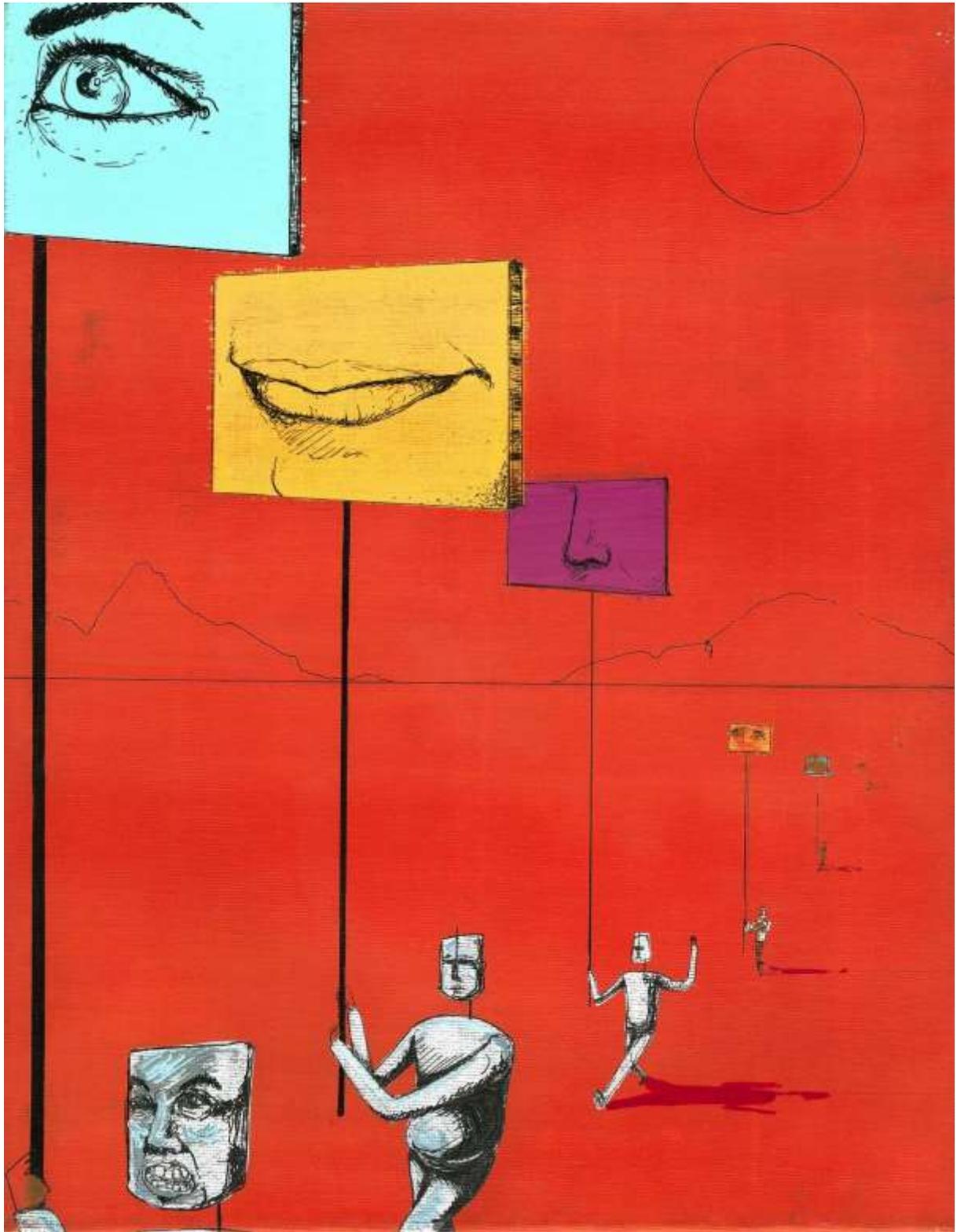
The heartbeat of the earth

Only once in a lifetime

Steven J Fowler

The Betrayal of Hugh the Iron

Making a sign in air above your head
I scalped a bea, a bird less beaked on your plain
and dreaming after you,
you wrote to me that a ledge on a mountain
climbed is empty in the winter
I hope you will use the dripping
letters you've sent me
a world war is a film so full of calm
I would've been more scared had it been
intentional and there was this Spanish woman
loudly talking as I slept & I gently placed my finger to my lips
hating only alcohol more than sleep, though aboard
I haven't drunk in 9 years
I want to be better like shrimp
anyone who is drink but maybe to take advantage
of you sleeping so
The devil's root more beautiful than a telegraphed picture,
to have eaten of one's mother's heart
and so to understand the language of birds
more beautiful than an animal study of the expressive values in bird song.
We have gained in terms of reality and lost in terms of the dream.
Yours sincerely
A Body



Protests at New Waterloo – Ege Al'Bege

Stephen C. Middleton

Undercurrents

Weeping Madonnas & mission creep

Spell the grim cedilla

That undercuts winsome fiesta

& a life of summer leisure

The knife under the nails

Of old men waving on street corners

Strange honour

Strange pride & innate weakness (perhaps)

In the end we cannot hide

The bleak vista

With a kiss

Or a ring.

Marc Swan

Married with Chitlins

Dusk is doing a two-step
on rolling waves of Casco Bay
as a duo with a bluegrass twang
and a couple from New Zealand
who met five days ago
jam like lifelong friends
in a noisy bar with well-heeled
tourists two-fisting vodka
drinks—voices mingling
with the scraping of chairs.
When Liz grabs the reins
for a melodic trot
thru “Six White Horses,”
Kate from down under
slips off her accordion
and picks up a flute.
Her husband Bob on dobro nods.
He has that impenetrable
I’ve been there, done that look—
sixty something,
a once white shirt,
torn jeans and keds;
the lead singer in fishnet,
black bodice-hugging top
thumb slaps a tambourine.
Chris on acoustic guitar
flicks back his long white hair
sluicing the harmony
through missing front teeth.
It goes on for three sets
unplugged in a place that
needs a mic, Klipsch speakers,
and a clientele that can zip
their lips and pay attention
to something that may just
add a little spice to their lives.



Clown Ink – Allen Forest

Stephen De Burca

Papers

I never had the chance to live
in a time of papers;
The heartily vague term of what
permitted travel.

Mimicking the rustling of Heart's *sceitimíní*
– a balance of nerves and excitement –
Papers enclosed a travelled photo of your face
in a renaissance of greys.
The steel-toed sounding *passport*
is today's replacement,
Officialised by a 35x50mm snapshot
of your deviated septum.

A humming case follows me through
the clinic-bright airport,
Wheeled for convenience, easing
the reasons to stay at home.
Those creamy brown papers
of another time
Rest with my wish
to travel lightly.

I never had the chance
to live in a time
Where declarations of Life were
on, in, or with paper;
Where every message wasn't time-stamped
in place of a real stamp;

Where you could live
in the time of greys,
the intoxication of imagination and ambiguity;

Where colour of a memory
never outshone the greys of smiles or tears;

Where grey came

from the pencil;

Where grey was the part of the brain
that held the soul.

A grey collects overhead while I pack
in a hurry

To avoid uncoloured drops that blotch my skin
as if it were paper.

Stephen De Burca

In School I Learned About Electricity

In school I learned about electricity,
The conduction of energy from A to B.

I learned to go to class early and listen
For your voice, or your laugh, outside
That shuffled me to make space
And act like a man with a 17 year-old moustache.

I learned to pass time by looking out the window,
Waiting for the hour-long lunch break to come,
So we could traipse around town
Sheltering in park pockets that could be ours.

I learned that there were many ways to hold hands.
Loosely with our baby fingers on those balmy September evenings,
Or a five-fingered squeeze in harsh Novembers
Trading warmth and comfort through our palms.

Everyday I learned how your smile flushed and fluffed
Your cheeks beneath eyes of melted dark chocolate,
How that charged image still pins me
Like pillows on my limbs.

You taught me about Billy Elliot
And how it was okay to be without words
In the same moments
You taught me about electricity.

CLS Ferguson

The Ricky Incident

My mother was out running errands when Ricky showed up in his cherry red Chrysler LeBarron. This was the first time a boy had driven to my mother's house to take me out. As it was, it had taken several days to convince my mother to let me go with him. She'd only acquiesced because it was during the day, we were only going to a public beach, and we would return before sunset.

Upon arrival, Ricky changed into his red swim trunks in our powder room; a room so tiny, one had to practically stand on top of the toilet to close the door.

When we returned to my place later that afternoon, my mother was rather curt, explaining that Ricky should leave rather than come in. After he left, I asked my mom what was wrong.

'What do you think is wrong?' She asked, holding up a pair of boys' boxer shorts.

'What are those?' My ignorance was genuine. In a huff, my mother explained that she had found Ricky's underwear in the powder room. As much as I tried to explain that nothing had happened between us, that he'd only forgotten the briefs whilst changing in the bathroom, by himself. My mother didn't completely believe me.

That is why when Souplantation Robert later asked me out on a date, mom insisted on being home when he picked me up. She invited him in, gave him the kind of talk that fathers usually do, and reminded him that she knew what time the movie ended.



Ghost Auto – Michael Garrett

Bill Crawford

*“I Hear You Lima Charlie—How Me?”:
A Radio Transmission From The Jungle War*

The electric crescendo overhead went strangely silent as the thunder and lightning gave way to the drumbeat of rain on the rusty tin roof. The Hawk feverishly spun the dials on his old field radio trying to escape the crackling static. This storm was seriously interrupting his obsessive nightly ritual.

‘Break!—Break!—Break! Any aircraft this net! I have air warning data. Out of Lima Zulu West on a direction of 240 degrees, max ord 3600, impacting grid 926324. How’s your copy?’

The Hawk was a forward artillery observer in August, 1969. The whole fucking North Vietnamese Army Second Division had secretly bunkered into the Que Son and Hiep Duc Valleys south of Danang. It was an unholy 120 degrees and the stench of death was everywhere. US infantry units were getting chewed up by disciplined communist forces which had gone undetected for months. The ferocious combat and relentless heat combined to produce hell.

The Hawk was desperately trying to save Bravo Company from being overrun. The dinks had them caught in a blistering crossfire near the Old French Hooch. Air strikes were on the way, but he had to drop some arty in there ASAP, to buy time until the jet jockeys could drop their shit. Bravo already had 6 KIA’s and 9 more badly wounded. What he did in the next three minutes would decide how many grunts would be left alive after the F-4’s unloaded their ordinance.

He was feverishly puffing on a Winston as sweat boiled under his jungle fatigues. AK-47 rounds buzzed around the makeshift Company CP. 82 mm mortar rounds were chopping up the earth as the NVA walked their fire into the perimeter. An RPG crashed into the already badly pocked wall of the Old French Hooch. Bravo was about to be overwhelmed by well-trained NVA regulars who were now chattering just inside their sagging company perimeter.

The Hawk's voice was shaky as he called in the co-ordinates, 'Red Leg 3-0, this is Red Leg 1-0. I have an urgent fire mission. Unit in heavy contact about to be overrun,' he bellowed into the handset, "grid 926324. Fire for effect.'

That done, he tried to think of things he might have overlooked. Moments later four white phosphorous artillery rounds pounded into the valley floor near the Old French Hooch.

The problem was, without a defined perimeter for Bravo Company, the rounds found an unintended mark—the chaotic Bravo Company CP. Molten chemicals spewed over the Hawk and the other GI's. Several grunts ran screaming in agony toward the advancing enemy as their sweat-soaked fatigues melted along with their flesh. The Hawk was knocked senseless by the blast. He was spared a deadly chemical bath by the shelter of a large pile of old bricks left from the dilapidated Hooch. Cries of flaming human anguish blended in with the cacophonous sounds of the fire fight.

The Hawk never recovered from that ghastly incident which defined his tour in the Nam. He was exonerated for the misfire by his Company Commander and the Battalion CO. Battery C shot white phosphorous rounds reflexively because they were already locked and loaded.

Back in the world, the Hawk—a previously free spirit from California—became a heavy smoker, drinker, and drug user. He drifted from job to job, never quite fully taking hold, before eventually settling in the ancient Uwharrie Mountains of central North Carolina. There he lived in solitude on an isolated 22 acre farm, surrounded by the National Forest. A three-mile, pot-holed, dirt road kept visitors to a minimum. The Hawk thrived on isolation.

He lived on VA payments. He was 30 percent disabled due to earlier exposure to Agent Orange and his near death at the French Hooch. Heart and lung problems sapped some of his strength, but nightmares from the errant Willie Pete rounds consumed him. He eventually journeyed east to enrol in the gunsmithing program at a tiny community college.

As much as the Hawk was haunted by the Jungle War, he was surprisingly fascinated by its artifacts. He hoarded combat memorabilia—helmets, dud grenades, jungle boots, c-rations—anything the grunts used in the jungle. His old farmhouse was clogged with stacks of US Army surplus equipment. Sprinkled amid this clutter were scores of empty beer cans and ashtrays overflowing with piles of rancid cigarette butts.

In an odd way, this chaos provided a psychological crutch for the emotionally shaky Hawk, who was always just a thin thread away from unravelling.

During the burning summer of 2014 he was ferreting out surplus gear in one of his favorite local haunts—the Uwharrie General Store. Nestled hard by NC 109 in the National Forest, the store was crammed with hunting and fishing gear, groceries, and beer.

The proprietor was retired First Sergeant, Hoss Gonzalez, who relocated his family from Texas so he too could enrol in the gunsmithing program. Hoss sold refurbished fire arms in a back corner of the store, and he was the Hawk's only real friend. Gonzalez was plump and jovial. He served in the same battalion in the Nam but at a different time. When things got especially rough with the Hawk, Gonzalez periodically performed impromptu suicide interventions.

Hoss was a procurement genius! He plied the internet locating and buying old combat gear from the Nam—most of which he sold to his friend for a song. That helped to keep the Hawk fixated on something other than the grim events of 1969. This summer Hoss performed a coup de grace. He located an old PRC-25 field radio. It even had two barely functioning batteries which still held a modest charge.

The Hawk was elated. He placed the relic radio smack in the center of his living room, clearing out piles of musty jungle fatigues in the process. He used an old pickup truck battery with frayed red wires to recharge the radio cells. It was a jack-legged setup. Sometimes sparks flew and acrid smoke hung in the humid air. Damned if that sketchy old radio didn't work after all.

He spent countless hours clutching the battered handset, and he was mesmerized and maybe a bit haunted by the hissing sound produced by the empty radio freq. One late drunken night, amid much static, some military chatter crackled out of the speaker. The Hawk instantly surmised that the transmission was coming from Ft. Bragg troops on maneuvers in the National Forest. They came every summer, and he had just seen GI's in desert fatigues in the General Store loading up on beer and cigs.

The Hawk became an enthralled, silent participant in their radio transmissions. He hung on every word as he spent hours keeping the PRC-25 charged. This August produced searing heat, often reaching 100 degrees. The ancient Uwharries were not totally unlike the

Central Highlands surrounding the Que Son and Hiep Duc Valleys. No lush rice paddies in the vals, but steep enough to be a bitch for GI's to hump up carrying a full rucksack.

The intense summer heat was suddenly punctuated by daily afternoon thunderstorms with intense electrical ferocity. At the Hawk's isolated farmhouse, his favorite nocturnal pastime of fondling and listening to the 45 year-old PRC-25 was disrupted by explosive lightning bolts, which in turn produced unbearable static.

The Hawk tried to compensate for these interruptions by chain smoking more Winstons, drinking extra beer, and puffing a fat joint here and there for diversion. He proudly rolled his own reefers with Uwharrie Gold, the local cash crop. The federal land surrounding his old farmhouse was sprinkled with marijuana patches carefully tended by gun-toting local entrepreneurs riding powerful ATV's. Forest Rangers burned some of the tall green stashes, but there were too many to eradicate completely. The local grapevine also hinted that there were protective payoffs to the underpaid Feds.

As August wound down the Hawk spiraled into one of his periodic depressions. The anniversary of his Bravo Company disaster loomed, and it took a sinister grip on his psyche. One night a near tornado ripped through the Uwharries. Torrential rains and soaring winds threatened to rip the rusty tin roof off the old farmhouse.

The Hawk sprawled on his living room couch drunkenly clutching his cherished handset. The empty push crackled with static from the electrical barrage overhead. The Hawk should have been terrified by this meteorological maelstrom, but he was numb with eternal, overpowering guilt.

A lightning bolt found his old brick chimney. Loose bricks and mortar clattered down on the tin roof. Suddenly there was a lull in the tempest, not unlike the coming of a hurricane's eye. Then the Hawk heard the unimaginable. The raggedy speaker of his PRC-25 crackled to faint but unmistakable life.

'Red Leg 1-0, this is Parker Pen 1-0, over.' Hawk's long dormant call sign once again echoed out over a military freq.

'Red Leg 1-0, this is Parker Pen 1-0, unit in contact! Gooks in our perimeter. Emergency fire mission!'

The Hawk's body went rigid. His bloodshot blue eyes popped out of his head like laser darts. The old handset snapped up to his mouth as he barked, 'Parker Pen 1-0, this is Red Leg 1-0. I have you Lima Charlie, how me, over?'

The bedraggled jungle vet trembled with fear as the pace of the radio chatter escalated to a frantic tempo. 'Red Leg 1-0, request an urgent fire mission, saturation on grid 926324. No markers! Fire for effect now. The gooks are so close I can hear them whispering to each other and their safeties are clicking off right in my ear!'

Nearly fifty years of torment ebbed in the Hawk's mind. He sat up tall on his patchwork sofa and instantly tuned back into the Jungle War. Decades of PTSD and guilt gave way to a soldier's duty and training.

'Red Leg 3-0, this is Red Leg 1-0. I have a fire mission. Unit over run at grid 926324. Fire for effect! In another minute they will be wiped out!' The Hawk was operating on pure adrenaline as he relayed a repeat fire mission to LZ West and the 155 mm howitzers of Battery C. The big guns boomed. Their incoming rounds sounded like a fast arriving train on the Chicago El.

It seemed like an eternity before Hawk heard Capt. Gayler's sharp Texas twang spit out from his old speaker. 'Red-Leg 1-0, Parker Pen 1-0. Your shit came in on the dime! The gooks are pulling back. You got some GI's out here that want to hug your neck when we get back up on the hill. Tell the boys at Red Leg 3-0, good shooting!'

Dawn seeped into the Uwharries like a foggy stream of cold mercury. The day promised more summer heat. The Hawk struggled out of his front door into the weed-choked yard. The PRC-25 now stood stone cold silent in his living room, the battery long since exhausted. George Hawkins was completely spent, but for the first time in forty-five years he felt no responsibility. His long neglected body and mind felt strangely cleansed. Had it been a drunken dream? Or had a long lost radio transmission from the Nam finally arrived bringing redemption?

Late September found the Hawk pedaling west up the eastern slope of the Blue Ridge. He was riding a shiny Schwinn Paramount outfitted with bulging pannier bags. He was bicycling home to California, where he would join an old buddy to open an arcade on the funky Santa Cruz Pier. On weekends they planned to enjoy a 1950 Packard Super 88

Victoria. His buddy got it for a cool 38 grand on eBay. Strangers along his homeward route often asked about the medal with a multicolored ribbon carefully pinned to his pannier. It was the Bronze Star, an honor secured for him by a grateful infantry captain, William Gayler, from Mineral Wells, Texas. They would speak often by telephone over the years ahead.

He often lay awake in his sleeping bag gazing up at the comforting stars. Sometimes sleep would finally creep in like a blackened gook sapper. Then he would suddenly snap awake to the sound of his own strained but calm voice: ‘This is Red Leg 1-0, I hear you Lima Charlie. How me?’ Tears would be streaming down his weathered cheeks.

Lana Bella

Notes on Water

sea-larks perch
the sky with their brown wings,
dolphins swim into
the harbor, trailing the flayed skin of the shore,

few things about the sea
disenchant the dark-haired woman on the water
urging the blue-stenciled kayak
away from the sand,
slipping into the strain
of her back
then the sag with her knees,
she sits in as the thin vessel drifts out toward surf,
without fail,
she feels those familiar pricks of an old injury
traversing down from
shoulders to fingers gripping
the paddle blades,

today, her pale skin
is effused in the smell of salt and curled morning
steam, lending her snaggletoothed
smile a veneer of structure
if not preoccupied calm,
the air in front and the sea throughout
are her trusted partners,
she is after all, only a system
of breaths and marrows,
where muscles memorize which rocks to steer
and which waves
to catch the sea's momentum--

Lana Bella

162 Heartbeats Per Minute

In the infinity pool
looking down the lanai,
a woman tears through the open
heart of the butterfly stroke
while the sun sinks over sea-stained
mountains,
purl of palm fronds,
her gold torsos.

At the rate of 162 heartbeats
per minute,
from conflict to belonging,
she swims,
whether under pale gray dawn circling
overhead or deep and inward
yesterday's empties.

She is alone now with
the cool strokes of fluid glass, none of
which she can raise to the banner of sky
to bring back the resilience
behind the muscles,
but she confesses to a moment
of suspension,
for out of this travail comes a thought:
blessed is the body that finds
home in the water.

Lucas Shepherd

Cat Year Crisis

On Tuesday afternoon Eustace threw up wet cotton balls on the kitchen floor. At first I thought the rascal had slipped into Mom's medicine cabinet, but upon further inspection the yak clearly originated from something much more sinister.

'Eustace is sick,' my dad declared, holding the dustpan and eyeing our family cat, who sat curled at the foot of the couch. Eustace could no longer bound up top and rest between the cushions. Dad tsk-tsked and shook his head and said, 'really, really sick.'

I frowned. 'So make him better.'

'I'm not sure I can, sweetie. Eustace is an old cat. We got him as kitten long before you were even born. He came from the shelter in Cedar Rapids. Um...he turned twelve last year, I think.'

'And he's going to die soon?'

My dad cleared his throat. This is really more your mother's area of expertise.'

'Is twelve really old?'

'Yes, Corinna. Twelve is pretty old. Heck, ten is doing pretty good, I think. He's living on borrowed time as it is.'

He patted my head and walked upstairs to his painting room. The middle three steps creaked under his weight. Eustace yowled, so I crawled over to him and scratched his under-chin the way he liked. He blinked, eyes open barely a sliver.

'Twelve is old?' I said. That doesn't make any sense. I know Dad and Mom are older than me, but I always thought they were *lots* older, like tons of years. But here I am, barely five years old, and I've lived nearly half my life without realizing it was almost over. Twelve years is all we get, if we're lucky.'

Eustace sneezed.

'Sorry, Eustace,' I said. 'Sorry for making this all about me. Here I am moping about my life being half over, and Dad says you're going to die soon.'

His brown tabby fur shimmered in the late afternoon light. His swollen belly rose, deflated, rose again, like a half-filled balloon you squish in your hands. Eustace wasn't my closest friend or anything—I thought it was stupid to have pet best friends—but we often spent winter mornings together watching cartoons on my beanbag, and over my life's first half I'd grown quite fond of him.

Slowly he drifted off. At first I thought he was dead, but then he began snoring. What did Eustace dream about? Catnip? A toy mouse on a spring? A thousand trips to the litter box? That one time he climbed the oak tree out front and forgot how to get back down? I wanted to go up and get him, but my mom and dad said, 'No way, Jose' even though my name is Corinna. They said, 'you're too young.'

I left Eustace be and stepped outside. It was a warm summer day. So what if I'd lived half my life already? No time to sit around and mope.

From the top of the oak tree, you can see all the way to where my mom works.

Dah Helmer

The Lake

Dawn, asleep at this hour.

Chilled air is a gift

in the grip of summer.

Nighttime collapses.

Landscape's fresh silence.

Moon, half blind.

In motion, breeze

is a caravan.

The water calls:

'Come, naked and shivering.

Dig through the mud for that

which is Truth. The moon

inters her light, bullfrogs

bark in circles.'

The lake: lover, formless womb,

ovulated by sunrise.

I set the canoe in motion.

Orange dragonflies, murmuring duckbills,

fist-sized tadpoles, radiant finch,

gesticulate above and beneath the lake.

Green reeds are warm light tendrils.

Sky's blue inks a mallard's back.

A raven's croak is more alive

than most people.

Mist drops while rising.

The canoe glides.

Water laps, gasps.

The poised presence of an osprey,
circling.

Everything silences, stills,
except for the canoe
over the Lake's belly.

The sun, pinned to the tip
of a redwood,
reflects like an eye in chrome.

I lie back and float,
like a water blossom's thirst.

*Night
Owl –*
Adam
Kluger



Michael Onofrey

The Community Room

‘I’m going to the pool,’ Rachel says.

‘The pool?’ questions Bud.

‘Yes. I like sitting next to the pool.’

‘The pool’s gone.’

‘Gone? What do you mean—gone?’

‘They drained the pool and jackhammered it, and jackhammered the concrete deck surrounding the pool, and hauled the pieces away in a couple of big trucks. Then they filled in the hole. This was about two years ago.’

‘I was out there this morning, Bud, sitting next to the pool.’

‘Sitting next to the pool, Rachel? In *Saturday Meadows*, here, in the mobile home park?’

‘Yes.’

‘But the pool’s gone.’

Rachel, small and thin, gives Bud an incredulous look—another incredulous look. Her blue eyes, wet and sharp, are behind wire-rimmed glasses, complexion wrinkled and very white. On her thin, creased lips there’s red lipstick, that was applied with an unsteady hand. The same could be said for the Bud’s hand. Unsteady, paper cup shaking as he brings it up to his plump, purplish lips, cup half-full, which is fortunate, and perhaps purposeful, for if the cup were full there’d be spillage. Bud’s not small and thin. He’s big and beefy, but “beefy” is slack beefy, flesh like pink bunting on his face. Interrupting the pink, are nests of broken capillaries—a bruised effect in certain areas. His jaw, chin and neck mingle in a wattle. He too is wearing glasses, but not wire-rimmed. Black plastic encases the lenses of Bud’s glasses, which are divided horizontally along upper and lower prescriptions. Bifocals, the inexpensive variety.

‘Rachel, I stood right there and watched them with the jackhammers, and now there’s a smoke tree and some agaves where the pool used to be. How long have you been here? Maybe you missed that.’

‘Been here? You mean in *Saturday Meadows*? I’ve been here since I retired—four, five . . . six years ago, maybe.’

‘Well then, you must have been here for the disappearance. It was quite an event. Everyone went out there to watch it. It was in the late fall. The weather was nice.’

‘Bud. I go out to the pool frequently. I was out there this morning.’

Bud raises his half-full cup of coffee and sips. Rachel watches this. On Bud’s thick forearm there’s a faded tattoo, and on his round head there’s a buzz cut that’s thinning.

‘This ongoing drought and all, and with no one using the pool, they got rid of it to save on water, evaporation significant, which also meant saving money. And to compensate the residents here, vis-à-vis money saved. They put two coffee urns in the community room here—free coffee—at least as far as two urns go that are filled twice a day, once in the morning and once in the afternoon. This was in lieu of knocking a little something off our trailer space rents. No swimming pool, and no reduction in rent. But we get some free coffee, which, if you think about, isn’t really free because we’re paying for it.’

Rachel’s looking up at Bud. Bud sips his coffee. The community room has an average, early afternoon crowd, about thirty-five people, some sitting on chairs, others standing. Bud and Rachel are standing. Aluminum canes of the three- or four-prong-footed sort are common. Some people make use of a walker, a couple of others straddle mobility scooters. One gentleman has cruised in on a golf cart. Some people have brought their own cups, handcrafted ceramics or mass-produced mugs with bold messages, such as: *I (heart) Las Vegas*. At one end of the room there is a dormant fireplace, folding chairs around its flagstone hearth.

‘We need a third opinion,’ Bud asserts, ‘a third voice to settle the issue.’ He motions with his non-coffee-cup hand and calls out, ‘Jim! Could you step on over here, please? We have a question that needs an answered.’

And so Jim, a skinny fellow with a four-prong-footed aluminum cane, starts over, one hand on the cane’s horizontal handle, the other with a ceramic mug that has coffee in it, a

practiced balancing act, for keeping the coffee in the cup is a challenge. On top of Jim's thin skull there's a faded red cap, the bill of which is down around Jim's errant eyebrows. An enthusiastic smile is on Jim's clean-shaven face. Maybe this is because he now has something to do, for prior to Bud's beckoning, Jim was studying the linoleum floor directly in front of his blue, Nike sport shoes. The enthusiastic smile, though, is crooked, right side of his face with expression, left side flaccid.

When Jim arrives to stand before Rachel and Bud, both of whom have watched Jim sally forth, he leaves his cane standing next to him like a faithful dog. Jim's cane-hand goes to the visor of his cap, which is where his fingers tweak the visor to lift it from his eyebrows, thus giving Jim a better view of Bud and Rachel. Jim, like Bud, is a bifocal-man, but in Jim's case there's a gaunt nose that his glasses rest on. Liver spots are on Jim's face and hands.

'Hello there, Bud, and hello there, Rachel.' Jim renews his aslant smile.

'We have a question, Jim, and we're hoping you can answer it for us.'

'Okay. What's the question?'

'Rachel says that there's a swimming pool here, you know, in the mobile home park, and I say there isn't. So the question is: is there a pool in the mobile home park or not?'

Jim starts nodding, a pensive expression, but then there's too much nodding, which cancels out pensive. When the nodding stops, Jim sips his coffee. This prompts Bud to sip his coffee. Rachel doesn't have a cup of coffee. Instead, she has a look of impatience that her blue eyes accentuate, wire-rimmed glasses helping out in this regard.

'Let me get this straight,' Jim begins. 'Rachel says there's a pool, and Bud says there's no pool.'

'That is correct,' Rachel intones, voice thin, yet with an electric charge, a hot wire effect. In response to this, Jim's countenance crumbles into a look of fright, which is also a bent expression.

'Well,' ventures Jim, 'I certainly can't contradict Rachel, and I certainly can't go against Bud. Can I?'

'What are you saying?' Rachel demands.

'I think I'm saying that there might be a pool, but there also might not be a pool.'

‘So you don’t know.’

‘Well . . . I know, but I don’t know, which means I can’t say one way or the other. Can I?’ Jim smiles hesitatingly, face tangled, bifocals reflecting two varieties of light, upper and lower prescriptions at work beneath a red visor. On the room’s ceiling there are florescent lights, long tubes housed in white tin, fogged plastic on the downward side of the fixtures, buffeting the light and dispersing it.

‘Let’s get someone else over here,’ Rachel says.

‘Okay,’ replies Bud, ‘you pick someone.’

‘We need a woman’s voice,’ Rachel claims, and walks over to a clutch of three women who are wearing muumuus. Rachel returns with a big-boned woman whose muumuu has yellow hibiscus, centers of the flowers dashed with red. This floridity is on a lavender background.

‘Leslie’s going to help us out with this,’ Rachel says, which causes Bud to nod in a jelly-like gesticulation. Leslie is about Bud’s size, and like Bud she has a paper cup in her hand, but unlike Bud Leslie’s hands are steady. Also, Leslie’s eyesight must be okay because she isn’t wearing any glasses, and there is no wattle, but there is substantial neck-girth. Leslie’s square face has attracted Jim’s interest. Jim’s head with its red cap and low visor are at an upward tilt, bifocals glinting various shades of white from the overhead lighting.

Turning to Leslie, Rachel says, ‘there a pool in *Saturday Meadows*, here, Leslie?’

‘You mean a pool with water?’

‘What other kind of pool is there?’

‘Now don’t get uppity with me, Rachel.’

Leslie’s voice is thick in a phlegmy way, like she was maybe a Chesterfields smoker for most of her life, and maybe still is. The hue of her complexion hinting at the same assumption, yellowish light brown. Her lips though are the same color as Bud’s, purple, but it’s a reddish purple due to a coating of day-old lipstick. Along with Chesterfields, bourbon might have been part of Leslie’s intake too, and then again, maybe it still is.

Leslie now deems to sip her coffee, air of a minor prima donna insinuated, and with this Jim leans forward for a closer look, skinny hand gripping the horizontal handle of his

sturdy cane for support, other hand/arm held out to the side, ceramic mug of coffee hovering. After Leslie swallows, she looks at Jim with her grey eyes, and in response to this Jim moistens his chapped lips with a pink tongue.

‘What are you looking at?’ Leslie wants to know, raspy resonance vibrating, the thrust of this query directed at Jim’s face, which causes Jim to sway back onto his heels, a splash of coffee lapping over the rim of his cup, linoleum flooring near his blue Nike’s accepting this without complaint.

‘Yeah, a pool with water. Is there a pool with water on the premises?’ Rachel asks.

Leslie, having rid herself of Jim, raises a bulky shoulder as if to shrug off the question. ‘Who cares?’ She says, ‘I have no interest in a pool, unless it’s a pool table.’

This sets off a gap in the exchange, which Bud, Leslie and Jim fill with identical motions, cups coming to their respective lips, coffee sipped, cups lowered.

‘Maybe you could bring over those other two gals, Linda and Kelly,’ Bud suggests, Rachel the recipient of this suggestion.

Thus Linda and Kelly are escorted over, and as their muumuus imply, they are like Leslie Impressive women along the lines of bulk, latent muscle of yesteryears part of their stature. Linda’s skin tone is dark, Afro-American ethnicity. Kelly’s is darkish too, Hispanic ethnicity.

Responding to the question of the pool, Linda sides with Bud, Kelly with Rachel, and each woman assumes a physical presence near Bud or Rachel respectively, for these are women who naturally, when called on to take a side, respond physically along with mentally.

Rachel, noting the configuration, says to Bud, ‘maybe we ought to take a vote on the issue.’ Bud smiles, an expansive expression, teeth gapped. ‘Absolutely,’ Bud says.

Raising his voice well above the room’s conversational din, Bud bellows, ‘Listen up, everyone!’ And so everyone turns to look at Bud. ‘We need you to participate in a democratic process. Step over here, please!’ This produces a slow migration, which in the end, assembles around Bud like cripples jockeying for a miracle—canes, walkers, mobility scooters, and even the golf cart. Obviously something big is in the works.

‘The issue,’ Bud begins, ‘is quite simple. Rachel says that there is a swimming pool right now in *Saturday Meadows*. I say there is no pool. I’m going to step over here, and

Rachel is going to step over there, and all those who agree with me, gather around me, and all those who agree with Rachel gather around her. After that we'll count heads.'

Everyone nods to signify understanding, or maybe to copy what their neighbor is doing. Rachel and Bud part and the crowd begins to divide itself. Naturally there are remarks and comments:

'Do we get to go swimming after this?'

'Do you remember when that woman drowned?'

'Are we voting to build a pool?'

When things settle down there turns out to be three groups—Rachel's group, Bud's group, and a small, three-person contingent in between, which is made up of Jim and Leslie and Danny, the man in the golf cart. Both Bud and Rachel count heads, which results in a joint statement, 'fifteen people, including myself, are in my group,' Bud says.

'And fifteen people are in my group,' Rachel says. Heads start bobbing as if to accept this, but before the bobbing finishes Leslie thunders, 'and there are three in my group! The independents! The "I-don't-know and I-don't-give-a-damn" group!' Responding to this proclamation, one man in Bud's group chirps, 'I didn't know we could do that. I want to change my vote.' He's a lanky fellow with a walker, which he now uses to shuffle over to join Leslie's group, and upon his arrival Leslie shakes his hand.

'Anyone else?' Leslie roars.

'Well, yes. I don't care if there's a pool or not. I think I belong in Leslie's group, too.' She's a square, squat woman with a Richard Nixon haircut, no walker, no cane, no mobility scooter. She doesn't even have a cup of coffee. She steps out of Rachel's group and enters the middle group.

'Okay,' Bud says, 'let's not get carried away.'

Rachel's wiry voice begins like a breath of frozen air, everyone's attention snagged. 'This calls for Mortimer,' Rachel says, and points to the far end of the room where a man sits hunched forward on the hard seat of a folding chair in front of the fireplace, direction of his gaze the blackened, empty firebox.

‘Righto,’ Bud concurs, and calls out, ‘Hi-ho, Mortimer!’ The man at the fireplace shifts his weight. His head turns left and then right. On top of his small head there’s splayed, white hair.

‘Mort! Down this a-way!’ Bud hollers.

Mort turns stiffly on his chair, neck ridged, and when his view finds the group, Bud calls in a bold voice, ‘e need your assistance, Mortimer!’ The room seems to have an echo, and Mort seems to be listening to it. When the echo and the listening cease, Mort raises a skeletal hand above his head and moves it back and forth, palm facing down and parallel with his frantic hairdo.

‘Stay right there, Mort! I’m sending Danny down to pick you up!’

Mortimer acknowledges this by turning his hand over, the hand that’s above his head, after which he lowers the hand.

‘Go get him,’ Bud says to Danny, who’s perched on the padded seat of his golf cart. And so, the electric whir of Danny’s golf cart begins, vehicle moving down the length of the room. Mortimer gets to his feet and waits. When Danny nears Mortimer’s vicinity Mortimer raises a hand as if flagging a taxi. Mort is wearing red suspenders, a white long-sleeved shirt, and a pair of dark slacks. There’s no tie and no wingtips and no jacket or sport coat, but somehow there’s a Wall Street image, and maybe Ivy League, too, is part of the billing, albeit a skewed one, for on Mortimer’s feet a pair of red, high-top Converse reside. Of eyewear, sleek, mod glasses, rectangular and narrow, a transparent plastic, grace Mort’s shrunken face. Mort’s clean-shaven, or perhaps he no longer has facial hair to deal with. A soft, wrinkled complexion is Mort’s, and a body that looks like a huge teardrop is also Mort’s, hips the widest point of that configuration. His shoulders seem pinched, and his forehead further pinched. But then there’s the wafting white hair, as if something has exploded from the top of the teardrop. As for legs, they hardly count. They’re too short. But then there’s the red Converse, which might be an attempt to color-coordinate, for there are indeed red suspenders, which are flagrantly set off by a white shirt, collar of the shirt open and looking stiff. It’s when Mort leaves the half-ring of vacant folding chairs that surround the flagstone hearth of the fireplace that a distinct waddle, like that of a duck, is portrayed.

It’s Leslie who comments, ‘and to think that *he* has more money than God.’

Everyone watches as Mort climbs aboard, then the golf cart turns and comes down the room in its approach, but then it veers at the instruction of Mortimer. The machine glides over to stop in front of the coffee-urn table, which is where Mort disembarks, whereupon he dismisses Danny with a wave of the hand. Surprisingly there is no tip. Mort draws himself a cup of coffee. And so Mort, with a paper cup in hand, sways over to the group, and when he arrives Bud welcomes him with a handshake, right hands employed, left hands, Bud and Mort's respectively, with paper cups. Bud's hand envelops Mort's hand like a blanket, and if this weren't enough there's Leslie who steps forward to shake Mort's diminutive hand as well, Mort's hand swallowed in Leslie's firm grip. After this head-of-state welcome, Mortimer brings his paper cup up and sips, lips thin and grey. Everyone watches this, and then they watch as Mort swallows.

'How may I be of assistance to you?' Mortimer intones, voice starchy.

'Well, it's like this, Mort. Over here we have Rachel who says that there is a swimming pool on the grounds of the mobile home park here, and those people surrounding her support that view. And then there's me, who says that there is no pool, and the people around me support my view.'

Mortimer looks at Rachel's group and then looks at Bud's group. After this he looks at the people in between, which is where Danny has parked his golf cart. Turning to Bud, Mortimer says, 'Okay. I understand your group, and I understand Rachel's group, but what about the people around Danny's golf-mobile?'

'Danny and those people don't know if there is a swimming pool or not, or don't give a fig.'

Mortimer nods slowly and says, 'I see', with a distinct clarity of voice, he then says, 'and what is it that you request of me?'

'Well,' says Rachel, 'the people in my group, and the people in Bud's group represent a voting process, a democratic process, and since the number of people in Bud's group and my group amount to the same number, the same number of votes, we have a tie. So, we want you to break the deadlock by telling us if there is a swimming pool on the grounds here or not.'

Mortimer surveys the situation by looking around with a couple of steady eyes that are nestled behind very cool glasses. When he finishes with that, he sips his coffee, a neat sip,

trim ashen lips without a glint of moisture. He begins a half-smile that creates enough of a gap to exhibit short upper teeth that look like they've been filed off straight, for there's no difference in length. Also, there is no difference in their size, one tooth up against the next and all of them small, like kernels of white corn.

'So,' pronounces Mortimer, 'you want me to tell you if there is a swimming pool on the grounds of *Saturday Meadows*.'

'That is correct,' Rachel says. Again, Mortimer performs a slow nod, and again his eyes scan the crowd. Mortimer has stage presence. 'This,' says Mortimer, 'is a question of existence.' With this pronouncement Mort purposely pauses to let the enormity of his statement sink in. But then something remarkable happens, for "remarkable" is often a part of coincidence, and in the spectrum of coincidence a woman boldly walks through the wide, automatic door of the community room as if summoned, which causes everyone to turn and look at her, for it seems providential that she should enter the room at this critical moment.

She's wearing a lime-green mini skirt, and very recent sunshine has put a red glow on her withered legs. Rhinestone mules on her dusty feet, and above the rhinestone glitter varicose veins trellis her ankles like seaweed. Her toenails are red and the red is chipped. The same can be said for her fingernails, chipped nail polish, nail biting factoring in. A cream-colored blouse hangs from her thin shoulders. Her forearms, neck and face with that same sunshine-red glow that shimmers from her rickety legs. As if invited, she walks over to the gathering and stands before the unanimous eyes of that group as if modeling, for she seems to have struck a pose.

'Is this the community room?' she inquires.

'It most certainly is,' answers Mortimer, and then adds, 'and who might you be, if I may ask?'

'I am Darlene.'

This seems to be important, so everyone nods to acknowledge.

'And I've been roaming the grounds of the mobile home park because I'm thinking of purchasing a doublewide, a resale, that's already spotted and ready for occupancy.'

Silence ensues. Mortimer sips his coffee.

Darlene is not wearing glasses and she has no walking implements. She is freestanding, but nevertheless she is obviously of the senior citizen ilk. On her thin, sunburnt face there is an array of cosmetics that reflect pink and red and purple and black. When she blinks her eyes there are tiny sparkles that flicker.

‘And I must say,’ Darlene picks up, ‘that I am totally impressed with what I’ve seen. The tennis courts that are next to the swimming pool have all but swung my decision in favor of moving in as soon as possible, because I used to play tennis and I’d like to get back into it.’

‘Tennis courts?’ questions Rachel.

‘Yes. They look like they’ve been recently resurfaced, and there are *lights*, so playing at night during hot or warm weather will be a pleasure, won’t it?’”

The room responds to this question, be it rhetorical or otherwise, with a peculiar hush.

‘Would you care for a cup of coffee, Darlene?’ Jim offers. ‘It’s free.’ Evidently Darlene has caught Jim’s fancy, for he seems to be emerging from his shy, hesitant shell.

‘Free coffee?’

‘Yes. When they took the golf course out, a nine-hole, pitch-and-putt affair, they compensated us for the loss of that amenity by putting coffee urns in the community room, here.’ Jim gestures toward the coffee-urn table.

‘Why’d they take the golf course out?’

‘They took it out in the interest of ecology and economy,’ Jim explains. ‘It was drinking up too much water. So now, where the golf course was, there’s a new residential section, more trailer spaces, more spaces to rent. The new section is called Section E. It’s way out yonder.’ Jim’s bony hand indicates a far off place. Darlene’s little eyes follow the hand to where it stops. A beat or two of nothing follows.

Returning to issues at hand, Darlene says, ‘Yes, I’m a bit parched. I’ll take you up on that cup of free coffee.’

‘How do you take your coffee?’ Jim asks, delivery nimble.

‘Caffeine, lots of caffeine.’

‘Righto,’ Jim asserts, and starts over to the coffee-urn table, but once he gets there and draws a cup of black coffee he discovers that he can’t manage his four-prong-footed cane and two cups of coffee at the same time, for he still has his own cup to deal with.

‘Leslie,’ chirps Jim, ‘could you give me a hand with this?’ Thus Leslie strides over, and so it is Leslie who delivers a steaming paper cup to Darlene, which creates a Bambi-Godzilla snapshot, for Leslie appears huge next to Darlene.

After sipping her coffee, Darlene says, ‘you know, I think the doublewide I’m going to purchase is over in that E section. It’s kind of a vacant area, isn’t it?’

“‘certainly is,’ responds Rachel, ‘lots of vacancies over in that section. That must be Craig’s doublewide that you’re interested in.’

‘Craig?’

‘Yes,’ says Rachel. ‘Craig died two months ago. Ken Yamamoto found Craig’s body on the bridle path, a toasty June afternoon. Craig’s cause of death was either heatstroke or a heart attack, or maybe both. His son, who lives down in Bullhead City, wants to sell the trailer in a hurry because he doesn’t like paying rent for the space.’

‘Bridle path? Are there equestrian facilities here?’

Again a gaping silence, which prompts everyone to sip from their cups of free coffee. In the wake of this, Mortimer clears his throat as if to address Darlene’s question.

‘Darlene, we got everything here. Absolutely everything.’

Daniel Roy Connelly

*If you live on the 83rd floor of a hi-rise that lances the desert skies
and they haven't completed your balcony yet, don't try this at home.*

He squats
in a dhoti,
can see all
Abu Dhabi
from the
83rd floor
he's taking
a break
from
building.
No rails
in place.
If he loses
balance
he'll fly
for 30
seconds
at a guess.
Pakistan
spinning
to victory,
England
positioned
precarious
-ly below.
Still as
a gull on
the wire
he nods
when
another
wicket
falls,
rises
like a
yogi to
his full
height on
the edge,
dhoti
tumbling
round his
pencil frame,
raises his

arms to
stretch out
a yawn
before
turning on
his bare
heels back
to work
the next
floor up,
full of
holes and
misplaced
masonry.

Francis H Powell

All dream Utopia

One day it rains,
Another day I ride with a legion of kings
Some people say we die
Others say that we rise again
But the sky will always remain above our heads
and birds will always migrate
And we can ride to the rhythm of the ocean
and marvel at sunsets
or look in awe, as rivers
weave their spell
as we recognize the wind
find a condition for peace
unfold our limbs
all dream Utopia

Neil Slevin

Sewing the Sea

Fishing for water,
sewing the sea,
you sit on your wood
by water swept and beaten quay,
passing no heed
to ticking time nor tide,
nor in the distance, me.

And shimmering
on the water
is your joy;
the sunlight's speckle
bobbing your face,
settling like stardust
in your golden hair's embrace.

All happening
in this moment –
not that you seem to notice,
and not that you seem to care;
for you are at labour,
lost within your working world,
just another day's *laissez-faire*:

your legs swaying
to the freedom
of the water's flow and flair,
its splashes freckling
the day's outlook,
your life (at least right now)
all moderate to fair.

Because for now
you are free to stitch
your own ties,
ones that will exert
their own force,
but – not now –
later, in due course.

And so,
not having moved,
you return to your post,
sewing the sea,
fishing for water almost.

Contributors

Peter Branson, a native of mid Staffordshire, has lived in a village in Cheshire for the last twenty-five years. A former teacher and lecturer in English Literature, and a Creative Writing and Poetry tutor, he is now a full time poet, songwriter and traditional-style singer. His poetry has been published by journals in Britain, the USA, Canada, Ireland, Australasia and South Africa; including: *Acumen*, *Agenda*, *Ambit*, *Anon*, *Envoi*, *London Magazine*, *North*, *Prole*, *Warwick Review*, *Iota*, *The Frogmore Papers*, *Interpreter's House*, *SOUTH*, *Crannog*, *THE SHOp*, *The Columbia Review*, *The Huston Poetry Review* and *Other Poetry*. He has won prizes and been placed in a number of poetry competitions, over recent years, including a 'highly commended' in the *Petra Kenny International*, first prizes in the *Grace Dieu* and the *Envoi International*, plus a special commendation in the Wigtown. His latest book, *Red Hill, Selected Poems, 2000-2012*, came out in May 2013. His latest collection, *Hawk Rising*, is due later this year.

Carl Boon lives and works in Istanbul, Turkey. Recent poems appear in *Posit*, *The Tulane Review*, *Blast Furnace*, *JuxtaProse*, *The Blue Bonnet Review*, and many other magazines.

Dennis Thompson teaches Writing and Film at Des Moines Area Community College. His work has appeared in *Mississippi Review*, *Colere Literary Review*, *Out of Line: Writings on Peace and Social Justice*, and *Literary Orphans*. His fiction *Jesus in the Eighth Race*, was nominated for a Pushcart Prize.

Yuan Changming, eight-time Pushcart nominee and author of five chapbooks, grew up in rural China, began to learn English at 19, and published monographs on translation before moving to Canada. With a PhD in English, Yuan currently edits *Poetry Pacific* with Allen Yuan in Vancouver, and has poetry appearing in *Best Canadian Poetry*, *BestNewPoemsOnline*, *Threepenny Review* and 1106 others across 37 countries.

SJ Fowler is a poet, artist, martial artist & vanguardist. He works in the modernist and avant garde traditions, across poetry, fiction, sonic art, visual art, installation and performance. He

has published six collections of poetry and been commissioned by the Tate, Highlight Arts, Mercy, Penned in the Margins and the London Sinfonietta. He has been translated into 13 languages and performed at venues across the world, from Mexico city to Erbil, Iraq. He is the poetry editor of *3am magazine* and is the curator of the Enemies project.

Ege Al'Bege (24-year old) has been producing art with a vengeance for as long as he can remember. Growing up in Miami Beach after immigrating from Colombia at the age of 3, Al'Bege's work is deeply inspired by the strangeness and singularity of Miami, the “Magic City”, and draws on the beauty and the grotesqueries of the human species. The mixture of revulsion and fascination with the modern world is a central driving force in his growth and motivation as an artist.

Stephen C. Middleton is a writer working in London, England. He has had five books published, including *A Brave Light* (Stride) and *Worlds of Pain / Shades of Grace* (Poetry Salzburg). He has been in several anthologies, among them *Paging Doctor Jazz* (Shoestring), *From Hepworth's Garden Out* (Shearsman, 2010), and *Yesterday's Music Today* (The Knives Forks And Spoons Press, 2015). For many years he was editor of *Ostinato*, a magazine of jazz and jazz inspired poetry, and *The Tenormen Press*. He has been in many magazines worldwide, including *Ambit* (UK), *Gargoyle* (US), *Otoliths* (Aus), *Acumen* (UK), *Sierra Nevada Review* (US), *Orbis* (UK), *Indefinite Space* (US) etc., Current projects (prose, poetry, and performance) relate to jazz, blues, politics, outsider (folk) art, mountain environments, and long-term illness.

Marc Swan lives in Portland Maine. Poems out this year appear in *Poet Lore*, *Mudfish*, *Gargoyle*, *PoetryNZ*, and *Westerly*; among others. His third collection, *Simple Distraction*, was published by Tall-Lighthouse, London, England in 2009.

Allen Forrest (Born in Canada and bred in the U.S.,) has worked in many mediums: computer graphics, theater, digital music, film, video, drawing and painting. Allen studied acting in the Columbia Pictures Talent Program in Los Angeles and digital media in art and design at Bellevue College (receiving degrees in Web Multimedia Authoring and Digital

Video Production.) He currently works in Vancouver, Canada, as a graphic artist and painter. He is the winner of the Leslie Jacoby Honor for Art at San Jose State University's Reed Magazine and his *Bel Red* painting series is part of the Bellevue College Foundation's permanent art collection. Forrest's expressive drawing and painting style is a mix of avant-garde expressionism and post-impressionist elements reminiscent of Van Gogh, creating emotion on canvas.

Stephen De Burca is a 24 year old writer from Galway City, Ireland. His writing was displayed in Iceland's *Out in the Open* art exhibition, hosted by Listhus Arthouse, in June 2015; where he spent two months completing an artist-in-residence programme for poetry. At the end of his stay, Stephen performed a solo poetry reading at the Icelandic Poetry Centre (Ljóðasetur Íslands) in Siglufjörður as a featured performer in the town's annual Herring Festival (Síldarævintýri 2015). Currently a Philosophy and English student at the National University of Ireland, Galway, he has had pieces published in NUIG Writers' Society's publications as well as the student newspaper *Sin*. Stephen was recently shortlisted for the *Over The Edge New Writer of the Year 2015* and will be a featured reader at *Over The Edge's* January 2016 event in Galway City Library.

Dr CLS Ferguson, is a communication professor at Mt. San Antonio College and California State University, Northridge and a Mary Kay Sales Director. She paints, sings, acts, models, produces independent films, and has published many academic articles and two academic books. Her portrayal of 'The Black Rose' in *Silence*, which she also co-wrote and produced, earned her a best actress award and a best film award at the LA Neo Noir Festival. Her music video, *Secrets & Lies* is currently earning accolades on the indie film circuit. CLS has published poetry in *Shangri-La Shack*, *Still Points Quarterly*, *PQLeer*, and other places. Her poetry collection, *God Bless Paul* is out on Rosedog Books. She has a dog, Sadie, with her husband, Rich Ferguson. <http://clsferguson.wix.com/clsferguson>

Michael Garrett used a 35mm camera with 1600 speed, B&W film stock and used only available light to take this image.

Bill Crawford lives in Winston Salem, NC. He is a social worker, writer, and photographer. He was an army Photojournalist in Vietnam. He can be reached at bcraw144@gmail.com

Lana Bella, a Pushcart nominee, has a diverse work of poetry and fiction published and forthcoming with over 160 journals; including a chapbook with Crisis Chronicles Press (Winter 2016), *Abyss & Apex*, *Chiron Review*, *Coe Review*, *Columbia Journal*, *Foundling Review*, *Fourth & Sycamore*, *Galway Review*, *Harbinger Asylum*, *Literary Orphans*, *Poetry Salzburg Review*, *Poetry Quarterly*, *William Jessup University*, and elsewhere, among others. She divides her time between the US and the coastal town of Nha Trang, Vietnam, where she is the wife of a talking-wonder novelist and a mom of two far-too-clever-frolicsome imps. <https://www.facebook.com/niaallanpoe>

Lucas Shepherd is an MFA student at the University of New Mexico. His creative work has appeared and is forthcoming in *The Atlantic*, *Aldous Huxley Annual*, *Colere*, *Rockhurst Review*, *Buck Off Magazine*, *Little Village Magazine*, *Daily Palette*, *Cedar Valley Divide*, and *Sliver of Stone*. He was the 2015 fiction judge for *Scribendi's* Western Regional Honors Council Awards.

Dah Helmer's most recent book is *The Translator* from Transcendent Zero Press. His first three books are from Stillpoint Books. Dah's poetry has been published by editors from the U.S., the U.K., Ireland, Canada, China, Philippines, and India. His poems recently appeared in *Lost Coast Review*, *Recusant*, *The Cape Rock*, *River & South Review*, *Acumen Journal*, *Sandy River Review*, *Stone Voices Magazine*, *The Linnet's Wings*, and *Diverse Voices Quarterly*. Dah has been nominated for The Pushcart Prize by the editors of *Transcendent Zero Press*. He lives in Berkeley, California, where he is working on the manuscripts for his fifth and sixth books.

Adam Kluger is a NYC artist and writer.

Michael Onofrey grew up in Los Angeles. Currently he lives in Japan. His stories have appeared in *Cottonwood*, *The Evansville Review*, *Natural Bridge*, *Road to Nowhere* and *Other New Stories from the Southwest* (anthology, University of New Mexico Press, 2013), *Terrain.org*, and *Weber - The Contemporary West*, as well as in other literary journals and anthologies.

Daniel Roy Connelly, a former British diplomat, has worked around the globe. He holds a first-class honours degree from Columbia University and a PhD in Shakespeare's *Othello* from The University of Saint Andrews. He has acted in and directed theatre in America, the UK, Italy and China, where his 2009 production of David Henry Hwang's *M Butterfly* was forced to close by the Chinese secret police. His poetry is widely published online and in print. He was the winner of the 2014 Fermoy International Poetry Festival Prize, a finalist in the 2015 *Aesthetica Magazine* Creative Writing Prize and winner of the 2015 *Cuirt* New Writing Prize for poetry. His recent work has been published by *The North*, *The Transnational* (in German), *Ink*, *Sweat and Tears* and is forthcoming in *Critical Survey*. He is a professor of Creative Writing, English and theatre at John Cabot University and The American University of Rome.

Francis H Powell. Born in a commuter belt city called Reading, like many a middle or upper class child of such times, she was shunted off to an all-male boarding school aged eight, away from her parents for up to twelve weeks at a time, until I was 17. Whilst at my first Art college, she met a writer called Rupert Thomson, who was in the process of writing his first book *Dreams of leaving*. His personality and wit resonated, long losing contact with him. Later she lived in Austria, in 1999 she moved to Paris. During her time in Paris she met Alan Clark, who had a literary magazine called *Rat Mort* (dead rat). She began contributing and got hooked on writing short stories. book *Flight of Destiny* is a result of this obsession. She also writes poetry.

Neil Slevin is a 26 year-old writer from Co. Leitrim, Ireland. A former English teacher in the U.K., Having graduated with a B.Sc. in Physical Education with English from the University of Limerick in 2011, he has now returned to University to complete an M.A. in Writing at

N.U.I. Galway and to pursue a writing-based career. Neil writes for *The Sin* (N.U.I. Galway's student newspaper), editing its entertainment section, and is an events reporter for I.L.A.S. (a campus centre providing community-based initiatives for the local area). Neil was *sixwordmemoirs.com*'s [Memoirist of the Month for October 2015](#), and was shortlisted for *creativewriting.ie*'s [monthly writing competition for October 2015](#). He is also a winner of *culturedvultures.com*'s [Poem of the Week competition](#).