The Paumanok Review

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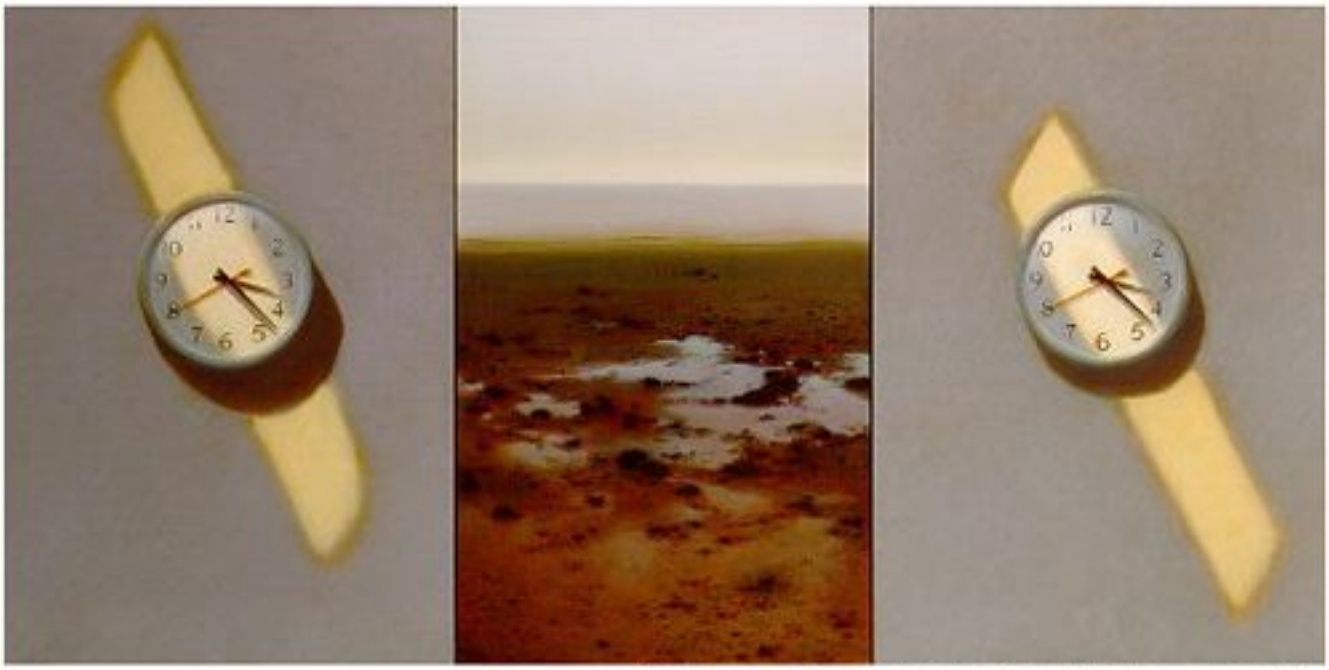

Peter Malone *Time and Again* 29" x 59" oil on canvas, 1995

The river at Autumn wanes
as a love affair drifting
towards conclusion might feel
to him who loves and loses
with all he's been given

She stands on the riverbank
searching for her reflection
seeing more than before
now the leaves fall so gently
to soft hands on the piano

FEATURING:

Elisha Porat
Maryanne Stahl
J.P. Maney
Scott Whitaker
Kathryn Rantala

Bass notes like undercurrents
pull beneath a sad melody
offbeat, one bar at a time
to beguile a shoal of fish
shimmering to the cymbals

In this brief moment all is
distilled as they look into
the water together once
more, the touch of her hand
slowly uncoiling from his

From "Spring Leaves" by Mike Plumbley

The Paumanok Review

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About The Paumanok Review

The Paumanok Review is a quarterly online magazine dedicated to publishing and promoting the best in world art and literature. TPR is an English language publication that welcomes international and translated submissions. TPR accepts short stories, short shorts, essays, serials, poems, memoirs, novel excerpts, original music and spoken word recordings, and art for publication. Since "going live" on January 15, 2000, TPR has established a readership in 43 countries.

The Paumanok Review was created to bridge the gap between overly scholarly online publications and genre-oriented zines. Prime among TPR's objectives is putting authors who have not previously been published online at ease with the process and the results.

Hosted by the generous people at the Etext Archives, TPR is always available free of charge at: http://www.etext.org/Fiction/Paumanok

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The Paumanok Review welcomes quality contributions from authors and artists with an understanding of the magazine. Simultaneous and reprint submissions are encouraged. Full guidelines, news, publishing information, and the archive are available on-site. Your comments, questions, and suggestions are always welcome and may be directed to the editor at paumanok@etext.org.

'When the guns are fire, the muses are silent'

THE LIFE AND WORK OF ELISHA PORAT

He was.

So, one day, Elisha Porat's biography will begin. The simple opening will serve because elaborate phrases and clever analyses cannot better explain Porat's individuality and patriotism, his quiet genius that transcends political and ideological boundaries. He must be read. Suffice to say, Porat, the man, is a veteran of three of Israel's wars for independence: Six Day War in 1967, the Yom Kippur War in 1973, and the War of South Lebanon in 1982. He is a farmer, the keeper of an orchard on Ein Hahoresh kibbutz, which his parents founded. Like Hemingway, he is a soldier; like Frost, he is a tender of the land. But Porat is exquisitely, inexplicably, *more*.

As a writer, he is perhaps best defined in the moment when, reading quietly, one recognizes the author as a master, long neglected by the English-speaking world. Porat's stories are unassuming pieces dedicated to the study of a single moment and epic trips into maelstroms of war. His poetry, never prosaic or trite, is humble but encompassing, and displays a prowess for Donne-esque conceit and self-observation. Porat notes that the antipathetic occupations of his life are weighty factors in his work. "'Until I smelled the fragrance / of the cut grass, I didn't believe / I was home again,' said the young soldier, " Porat writes in "The Fragrance of Mignonette."

> And I, who was stricken after him, fifteen years
> after him, did not believe I had risen
> from my bed: drunk as then climbing
> the clay hilltop, flattening myself
> on its grass.

But his dissentient work, like the way he has lived his life, treks toward one end: the betterment of Israel.

Porat's writing is understandably laced with sadness. An IDF volunteer, horrified by his recent actions, finds himself unable—or unwilling—to communicate with an attractive young woman on the kibbutz. People wander the streets of Porat's Israel seeing in strangers the faces

of friends dead for decades. Sex is a consensual escape, an act not without consequence but often without deep emotion. Life is real, and the majority of his work is conspicuously lacking in fantastical deus ex machina and quaint palaver. Things are. People are, or they are not. The concrete, even tone of his often reporter-staccato fiction renders a clearer picture of Porat's soul than could any wispy Romantic prose.

Porat makes himself clear to those who have not lived his life, or any semblance of it, and that could prove to be among his most useful gifts. His recent publication in *The Boston Review* and his willingness to embrace electronic publishing as a legitimate and important medium are harbingers of the continuing expansion of his world-wide readership. At home in Israel, where he has published 17 books of poetry and prose since 1973, he was honored with the 1996 Prime Minister's Prize for Literature. In the U.S., he has achieved what few foreign-language writers can ever hope to experience—the translation and publication of his work in book form (*The Messiah of LaGuardia,* Mosaic Press). It is unfortunate that something is inevitably lost in translation. But something is inevitably gained. In Porat's case, that could mean a votary for life.

Now, Elisha Porat—who must be read—explains something of his home in the creative essay, "Projecting a United Will."[1]

Projecting a United Will

In my youth, the old-timers told me that people who sought solitude in the woods near the kibbutz were unique. Too highly educated to take part in the exhausting work, too sensitive for the daily hustle and bustle, too snobbish to participate in the daily affairs of the settlement, they set out for the tall Eucalyptus trees on the outskirts of the kibbutz to hide in the shade of their thick branches and build a tree house that could only be reached by a makeshift ladder.

And that is why people would tell all kinds of controversial tales about them; fascinating tales about a life of freedom up here, in the shaded domes, completely isolated from the warm, pulsating life beneath them. These men raised their hot heads upward, toward a different sky, one that could not be observed by the pedestrians on the soft sandy path down below. Some were dropped from the collective kibbutz memory soon after having arrived. Others lived to a bright old age and eventually joined their comrades down below. They merely blush a little on being jokingly reminded of their former escapades in the tree tops. Several of them have actually become mythical. But the tales serve to remind them of their first days in the country, their first steps on kibbutz—most of all, they recall the unique smells.

As a lad, I chose to ignore the decaying tree houses in which crows nested. I tried to disregard the large rusty nails that were forever stuck in the large trunks and served as an

[1] For more on Elisha Porat, or to order *The Messiah of LaGuardia,* visit his website at: http://www.artvilla.com/porat/

annoying reminder. In my wandering, I merely intend to discover some concrete evidence of legendary existence.

And then, on one of my walks at twilight, as my power of judgment seemed to be somewhat impaired, I came across that legendary figure from the old-timer's tales. He looked just like one of us, in his dark blue clothing and heavy rubber boots. "Come on up!" he called, encouraging me to climb those precariously loose steps. "From up here the entire world looks different".

Overcoming fears that had been nurtured throughout sleepless nights, I followed him up the tree.

"This way! This way!" He pulled me into his lofty outpost, which overlooked tower tops and power lines. "Sit down! Why are you breathing so hard, why are you so pale? They must have scared you with their stories down below! After all, this is merely a simple tree house, not a dragon's nest.

"Do you remember Rabbi Haim Vital's stories? Do you recall one about the Holy Ari and his failure?" Instantly he had removed all barriers. I was not longer a young dreamer, but his spiritual equal. I was no longer a moonstruck lad, seeking temptation and sin in the woods, but a pupil sitting in front of his teacher. I was extremely flattered to have been chosen from among my buddies who had remained behind, down there in the teeming kibbutz yard.

Translated from the Hebrew by Hanna Lesh

A Short Farewell Letter

poetry by Elisha Porat

To my Hebrew, my own sundered, grated
Hebrew:
There, in my forgotten, distant childhood
You were placed inside my ear, imprinted
In my finger, poured upon my neck.
Now, goodbye: I am sinking, forgotten
You go on, not turning your head.
Fare you well, my bell-wether.
Now lock on, my distant one, to
The neck of a tender boy, weigh heavily
On the neck of my successor.

Translated from the Hebrew by Asher Harris

Western Exposures

fiction by J.P. Maney

I.

When Joe Devlin arrived at the Hotel Mirado, he felt on the verge of a nervous breakdown. *Oh God,* he'd prayed on the plane, *give me a shot at something new*. The magazine he worked for, a digest of threatened landmarks, featured architecturally distinctive buildings in terrible shape. Joe was sick of gutted shells and empty rooms.

An odor of decay greeted Joe at the front desk. The clerk, a bald, buzzard-like man with white hair sprouting from his ears, took Joe's credit card and grinned. "You're from Boston," he said. "Me too, once. Make yourself at home."

There was a big brown stain on the clerk's shirt, Joe noticed.

At the elevator, he put down his bag and camera boxes. Looking up he felt his heart plunge. Suspended in the gloom were faded drapes and bent chandeliers. The dry, dusty odor was everywhere. A cross of tape covered the elevator button.

"—Third floor, to the left," the clerk crooned.

Joe turned and took the stairs.

This would be the last job, he told himself. He would work through it—finish it—then quit. He would go back to Boston and begin a new life, the life that was always meant for him, not this: breathing dust on a landing so dimly lit he had to watch each step. He would return home to make the pictures he had always dreamed of, images like memories of summer, like when he was a child and the world made itself new and took shape before his eyes. He would not do it for money; he was thirty-six years old and money was not his problem. He had always worked hard for others. He had never done anything for himself.

This would be the last job, he promised. And then he entered the dark, stale hallway that led to his room.

II.

It wasn't what he was used to.

The buildings he photographed were usually empty, boarded up; inside they had a

bluish, underwater quality, like sunken wrecks. But here the morning light—a desert light—clipped corners, sharpened edges, and warmed the faded carpets.

The old clerk was staring at him. It made Joe uneasy. When Joe spread the tripod legs for the big 8 X 10 Deardorff, the clerk waved. "Name's Price," he said. "I'm a factotum, here in case you need me."

Fat chance, Joe thought.

Yellowed prints of the Grand Canyon hung on the lobby walls; beneath them hunched tumorous sofas and lamps with parchment shades. Magazines like dry leaves lay curled on chairs. Joe flipped the camera hood over his head. He focused on a vase filled with roses.

Upside down on the ground glass, the flowers appeared heavy and full. He knew it would appeal to the editors of the magazine. Arranged in a chipped vase, they looked as if they understood experience, but hadn't been bruised by it. Joe pressed the shutter and lifted the hood.

"Everything's the same," said a high, fruity voice. "The same as always."

A skinny old woman with watery blue eyes looked up at him. She was four feet tall, the size of an ancient child.

The clerk rushed over to her, called her Miss Arthur, and took her bag. Joe watched as the old man leaned close: he thought they would kiss. Price whispered something and put the barrel of his finger to his head.

The woman stared. "But where will I go?"

Price pursed his lips. He said nothing. The woman's gaze and her question came to rest on Joe.

Then he saw: the roses were wax.

III.

The next day Price told Joe the hotel had been sold to someone in Kansas City, a man who had never seen the place.

"Maybe," the clerk said, showing more gums than teeth, "you could send him some pictures."

Joe frowned. All day the old man had been watching him, following him around. "I am not a maker of postcards," Joe said.

"But if he knew what this place really looked like," Price said, "then maybe—"

"I doubt it," Joe interrupted.

"—he'd keep it just the way it is."

Joe looked at him. He was a bony old man with tufts of hair in his ears, a clown wearing baggy shirts that were never clean, but he was serious. Couldn't he see the cracked walls, the fallen ceiling in the dining room, the worn carpets and sagging stairs? "Pictures wouldn't help," Joe said.

"They might," Price said.

"Mine wouldn't."

"Now you listen," Price said, forcing Joe back against a wall with a sharp finger pressed to his chest. "For thirty-eight years I've worked here behind that desk. This used to be the best.

We had the first air-conditioning in Arizona. Anyone who was anybody stayed here—and ate here too before the dining room closed. Senators, winter people, folks who came down for the air." He tapped Joe's breastbone like a telegrapher sending code. "This is an historical site."

"Right," Joe said, slipping aside. "That's why I'm here."

Price walked to the middle of the lobby and snatched up a cigarette butt. He held it in his veiny hand and shook it at Joe. "This may be no surprise to you," he said stiffly, "but the family, they sold it and didn't even tell me."

"It happens," Joe said. He felt embarrassed, even a bit sorry for the old man, but there was nothing he could do. "Maybe you ought to be realistic."

Price's fist tightened. He put the butt into his shirt pocket and walked away.

IV.

The next morning, as Joe prepared to work outside, the clerk called to him. His eyes looked tired, as if he had been up all night.

"Have you been to the Collection Agency?"

"The what?" Joe said, replacing the lens cap on his camera.

"The Collection Agency. It's a place that sells antiques."

"No," Joe said. "Should I?"

Price's eyes glinted. "Wilder—the fellow that owns it—he's a lot like you."

Joe wondered if the old man was crazy. "What does that mean?"

"He's even got some hotel items," Price said. "You'd like it there."

How would you know? thought Joe.

V.

When Joe walked into the Collection Agency, he saw a man in a green silk shirt sitting behind a glass counter. He looked slick but tired, like an aging mannikin. The top of his head was bald. He glanced up at Joe with a slightly bored expression.

"How much money you got?" he called.

"What?"

"Money. In your pocket."

Joe's hand moved instinctively to his wallet.

The dealer stood up behind a case filled with pistols, coins, and arrowheads. Above were shelves piled high with Indian baskets. "Cash-ectomies are free today," he said. "I take it you're here for one."

Joe looked at him. The man's face was square and serious-looking, with dark eyes that seemed to pin him to the bone. The man slowly grinned. *Of course*, thought Joe. *A joke.*

"Sorry," Joe said. "No cash-ectomy today."

The man kept grinning. "Looking for anything else, or am I supposed to have ESP?"

"I guess you'll have to guess."

Wilder laughed. "All right. This is hard now—don't tell me. Wait. You're the guy at the Hotel Mirado taking pictures, right?"

Joe stared. He felt his face blush.

"Hold on," Wilder said, turning around to a desk behind him. "I think I got something for you."

He flipped through a pile of old *Life* magazines, then stopped suddenly to uncover a large, mounted photograph. He handed it to Joe.

The print, slightly faded, showed two men standing side by side. The words "Wells Fargo" floated like a halo above the head of one—a deputy perhaps, judging from the badge, or a sheriff. He stared straight ahead, holding a rope which trailed up and looped around the neck of an Indian considerably taller than him. The Indian's face was blurred, but the manacles on his hands and feet were in focus. The depth of field and long exposure made everything but his face perfectly clear.

Scrawled across the bottom were the words: Crow Flies East. Commercial Hotel, June 3rd, l883.

Joe stared at the captive Indian with a sense of wonder and appreciation. It was a superb photograph, beautifully composed.

Wilder tapped it with his finger. "Damn good," he said. "Rare. The hotel was new here, under its first name."

"Hotel?" Joe said.

"Sure, don't you see it? Behind them. That's the Hotel Mirado."

It was true. The windows were different now—smaller—and the brick had been partly stuccoed since then, but the section of door that showed was still the same. "Do you have a price?" Joe asked.

Wilder winked. "Sure, I got a price—don't you? This is the real thing, early, a piece of the Old West. But sometimes you got to whore things up a bit. Know what I mean?"

Joe gave him a puzzled look.

The dealer chuckled. "For two years, this sat in the case. And for two years I had folks ogling it, hemming and hawing. But nobody bought it. They picked it apart, said it had too high a price. But the more I looked at it, the more I thought what a piece of history it was—so I figured it wasn't high enough. Once I upped it from seventy-five to seven-hundred fifty, I got some serious offers."

"But you never sold it."

Wilder laughed and gave Joe a good-natured slap on the shoulder. "That's right. Don't you see? That's the beauty. This way, they really want it."

VI.

As Joe worked through the hotel, he became frustrated by the disappearance of things. First was the long pendulum clock behind the front desk, an absence making a bare spot the shape of a giant keyhole. Next was the mission-style sofa on the landing leading to the second floor. There in the afternoon, Joe noticed it was gone that night when he came back from dinner.

He asked Price about it. He complained that his work was being ruined.

Price stood next to the roses. He seemed to be watching the sun sink into the new buildings farther down the street. The light from the evening sky gave him a detached,

otherworldly look. “Nothing we can do,” he said quietly. “They’ve settled, and now they’ll have to deal with it.”

“Deal with what?” Joe said.

“Consequences.” Price jerked his thumb in the direction of three high-rises down the street. “I been watching them creep up from year to year. That’s what they have in mind for here.”

In the lobby, perhaps in the entire hotel, their voices were the only sound. With its dark, Victorian woodwork, long marble counter, tall ceilings and dusty drapes, the lobby reminded Joe of a tomb.

“June first, Sattady,” Price said. “That’s the last day. So if you want to stop things from disappearing, you’ll just have to cram them into your camera.”

Saturday, Joe thought—it was the day after he planned to leave.

Later, outside, as he prepared the Hasselblad, the eyes of passersby went from Joe to his camera and then to the hotel, as if asking: “Why bother?” To them the hotel was not just beginning to fade.

It was already gone.

VII.

“Didn’t I tell you?” Wilder said, wearing a shirt the color of blue ink. “Soon as it’s not for sale, everybody wants it.”

Joe frowned. The old photograph had begun to haunt him. For some reason he had a hard time remembering the faces in it. “I just want to look,” he said.

“That’s a fine way for me to get rich,” Wilder said, rising abruptly from his chair. “But before you do, I want you to check out something else I got. Roy!” he shouted. Turning to Joe he said, “Like you to meet my good friend Roy.”

A scuffling came from somewhere in the stacks of boxes and spindly furniture behind them. A short, sweaty man crawled around the corner of a large trunk. When he stood up Joe saw that he had a red, sun-burned face and a week’s worth of black stubble that looked like dirt. Roy flicked his eyes at Joe and brushed himself off.

Wilder caught Joe’s eye and made a circling motion at the side of his head. Then he called to Roy. “This here’s the photographer staying at the Hotel Mirado. He look like an Indian to you?”

Roy grunted, giving Joe a poisonous stare.

Nice, Joe thought.

“Show us what you got from that storage unit,” Wilder said, pulling Roy over to a glass case.

“You already seen it.”

“He hasn’t,” Wilder said, smiling at Joe. “Come on, he’ll get a kick out of it.”

Roy pulled a long necklace out of his pants pocket. Shards of black ice hung between the beads.

“Bear claw necklace,” Wilder said reverently as Roy held it in Joe’s face. Joe stared at the long, dark claws.

"That and a whole bunch of other stuff is from a storage unit Roy bought at auction," Wilder explained. "Hopi, Zuni, and some Navajo stuff, too. Now all he's gotta do is sell it to me."

"The hell I do," Roy said and shook the hair from his face. Wilder grabbed the necklace but Roy pulled back.

Joe watched, horrified. The necklace held.

Wilder let go. "Why don't you show us what you got in the box?"

Roy glanced at Joe and seemed to consider. He went over to a big hat box on the floor and kicked the lid off. Inside Joe saw a big crushed bird.

"Eagle feathers," Wilder declared.

"Headdress," Roy said softly.

"Museum quality," Wilder said, leaning back and resting his elbows on a cabinet behind him. "He's got a ceremonial outfit that goes with it, too. Ol' Roy's a lucky fuck, only he's too dumb to know it."

Roy turned to Joe. "They'll kill me," he said. "They got a lawyer after me who says I got to return everything on account of it's illegal for a white man to own."

"Then give it back," Joe said.

Roy made a rude sound and shoved the bear claw necklace into his pocket. He looked straight at Joe, who stared back, amazed at how bloodshot Roy's eyes were, a pair of pink nets with a dark pupil caught in the center of each.

"That's right, give it all back," Wilder said. "But they didn't give it to you, did they? Hell no. Stuff like that goes higher than giraffes' nuts and you paid over two hundred for that unit. They didn't pay their rent and so now it's yours. It's that simple. Now consider," Wilder went on reasonably, "you owe me, you gotta pay. You sell this stuff, you double your money."

"Four-hundred!" Roy gasped. "Yesterday you said six!"

"That was yesterday. You wait longer, I'll make it three. I got risks."

"They're after me, not you," Roy said.

"Relax," Wilder said. "What are they gonna do, phone the Great Spirit?"

"I heard rocks last night. Little rocks. They threw them at the trailer."

"They don't know where you live," Wilder scowled. "Rocks."

Suddenly the shop door rattled. Roy spun around and stepped on the headdress.

"Get that covered!" Wilder barked, and Joe's heart leaped as he threw the lid on the box. Roy pitched to his hiding place behind the trunk.

The door opened slowly. A short Indian wearing a Yale T-shirt walked in. He was someone Joe had seen once or twice at the hotel. His arms were hard-looking; he held a brown shopping bag.

"Got some doorknobs," he said. He shook the bag.

Wilder waved to Roy. "I'll handle this." Then he winked.

Joe moved to the door.

"Hold it," Wilder called. "You haven't seen the picture."

"I've seen enough," Joe said.

VIII.

Out on the street, Joe walked quickly. His heart wouldn't calm down. His arms and legs seemed uncoordinated, as if they belonged to a variety of other people. He had intended to look at the photograph and now he felt mixed up in something weird and confusing.

He wondered if he should call the police. But what would he say? What would he tell them? Was Wilder ripping Roy off, or was Roy the thief? And which was illegal, the headdress or the necklace?

Why should I care? he asked himself. The sun was making him hot and miserable.

He walked down Central Avenue. It was a street full of bright stores in glass and steel, chain hotels and restaurants. When he finally came to the Hotel Mirado, Joe stood outside and looked at it for the first time without a camera between them. His eyes followed the shelter of its wide, old-world arches and cast-iron balconies, its tall windows grouped in twos and threes. He felt calmed by its symmetry, its order.

Leaving the bright sun, it took a minute for Joe's eyes to adjust to the lobby. Then he saw someone else, not Price, behind the marble counter. A pimply kid in a polo shirt.

"You on the list?" the kid asked. He showed Joe a piece of paper with mostly crossed-out names. Joe found his and asked where Price was.

"Chest pains," the young man explained. "He's in the hospital having tests."

Joe thought back to the morning. Price's face was clay-colored, yellow.

"I'm a temp," the clerk said and smiled.

Joe went to his room and closed the door. The room was stifling. He switched on the overhead fan and went to change his shirt. As he opened the closet, the doorknob came off in his hand. On the other side, the knob and plate were gone.

He took off his clothes and lay naked on the bed. Directly above moved the slow blades of the ceiling fan. When his eyes closed, Joe thought about the same things he often thought about. He believed that at some point in his life he had completely lost control. Somehow he had become cut off from life itself, isolated, stuck on the outskirts of his and everyone else's experience. *It was always the same,* he thought. He opened his eyes and watched the fan blades circle overhead, each like a snapshot, a glimpse of the same thing over and over again. He thought about the pictures he'd taken of the hotel, the hallways, floors and ceilings, the wallpaper flecked with tiny thistles, the windows showing the mountains and the moon rising like a radiant nickel, the beds and dressers reflected in mirrors, the dusty bulbs, the cracked plaster, the empty hangers in closets, the chandeliers tangled like dead spiders. They were the same wherever he'd gone.

He heard a sharp noise. A knock. He listened: the sound became indistinct, like the scratching of an animal. He slid off the bed, grabbed his pants, and crept to the door. Opening it soundlessly, he saw a man across the hall crouched with a screwdriver. The man stared blankly at Joe and went back to work.

It was the Indian from Wilder's shop.

Joe closed the door and dialed the front desk. "Look, this is Joe Devlin, upstairs," he said, heart pounding. "I found him—the guy unscrewing doorknobs."

A burst of static went through the line. "Who?" said the clerk.

"How do I know?" Joe said. "He looks like an Indian."

"Oh, that's Ralph."

Joe blushed and held the phone away from his ear. "Don't you care?"

"Hell no," the kid laughed. "You didn't scare him, did you?"

From the hallway came a thud on the floor and then a rolling sound. "I guess not."

"Good," said the voice on the phone. "Now don't worry, nobody's going to take your things. Ralph's working for Mr. Price."

Joe's eyes widened. "But he's ripping you off."

The clerk laughed. "Everybody's ripping this place off, man."

IX.

The last morning was noisier than usual. As Joe slipped into his clothes, he heard footsteps in the hallway and doors slamming. Someone was making a last sweep. He went to the windows and raised a shade. In the street below a paper bag blew into the traffic. As Joe watched, the bag reared and seemed to dodge each passing car. The way it moved it almost had a personality. Then a truck flattened it.

He thought about Price. He imagined Price exacting a secret revenge—even if it came down to filched doorknobs.

In the lobby everyone was packing up. Joe had never seen most of them. A few he'd caught peeking around corners or watching from cracked doors as he worked. Half a dozen were gathered in the sunny end of the lobby. The chairs were gone now and the old men sat on their suitcases.

"They know they're supposed to be out of here," the new clerk said.

Joe carried his bags to the door. As he passed by, one of the old men raised his hand and said something. Joe stopped and leaned closer.

"You with the wreckers?" the man asked. Though quite pale otherwise, his hands were knotted, cherry-red. On his lap lay an empty dog collar and leash.

Joe shook his head.

"We thought you were a wrecker," the man said. Behind him Joe could see the others with their dry, accusing faces.

Joe moved quickly to the door.

"Well, well—if it isn't the Grim Reaper!"

Joe whirled. Wilder stood on the sidewalk outside the hotel. He held a trash bag.

"Cheer up, partner. I'll give you a good price for that camera gear."

Joe shuddered. "What are you doing here?" he said.

"Supervising. There's work to be done." Wilder put a finger to his lips. "By the way," he added, "there was a little development after you left the other day. Roy made a deal with the Indians. They were real pleased—paid him and thanked him and everything."

"No," said Joe.

"Don't believe me? Roy kept the best of it—they didn't even know what they had in there. You ought to come on down and see what I bought off him. Why, you and me could work together—you take the pictures, and I'll send 'em to Sotheby's." Wilder chuckled as he

reached into the trash bag. “Look what they gave Roy. Those Indians sure do have a sense of humor.”

He pulled out a toy Indian with a red rubber head and a drum between its knees. Joe groaned. *How low could he go?*

“Watch this,” Wilder said, winding the key on its back. He set the toy on the ground. The head dipped and the arms flapped up and down, rapping the drum.

What saved Joe was how the spectacle seemed to simplify things. He couldn’t walk away. Opening one of his camera boxes, he felt a rush of adrenalin. In the top section was a trigger-rigged Leica M3.

“Hey friend, don’t shoot!” Wilder said, trying to keep a straight face. He raised his hands.

Joe raised the camera to his eye. Within the frame was Wilder, the toy Indian, the entrance of the hotel. As Wilder bent down to wind the toy, the old men from the lobby straggled out to watch. They looked like an assemblage of scarecrows. Joe pulled back to let them in.

Wilder crouched on his hams and guided the toy Indian. He looked attentively at Joe, like a prize fighter sizing him up. Wilder grinned, as if between them was a developing recognition.

“Who’s it for, hot shot? The *National Enquirer*?”

“It’s for me,” Joe said, and pulled the trigger.[2]

[1] This story first appeared in *Western Humanities Review*.

Returns

poetry by Mark Halperin

When a friend asks why I keep returning to Russia, I talk about people in the back of a "march-route" taxi passing fare-money to a passenger in the front, back to back with the driver. She hands it over her shoulder, the driver makes change, and the process reverses, money passing down the line. I like the odd community. I say, it's become a place I can enter, full of connecting alleys and friends. Don't I know which central market has the lowest prices, and to ask who's last, when I join a line? Where else could I use that? Those I love and have loved are people I was irresistibly drawn to, pursued, and at the same time, those who let me pursue them—one place, one time. Isn't that a life, mine, and like a poem, shouldn't it appear inevitable and freely elected, the contradiction joined in who I am? Suppose that woman had had blue eyes or I had lost this man's address or no one answered the phone. We see alternatives, choices, when we could be no more than the means by which our genes express themselves. And if there are choices, couldn't we be the result of how the one's others made completed themselves, or prey to inexplicable forces, bound by love's returns?

To My Best Friend

poetry by Steve Brazzell

I scatter jewels on every shore
and hide their omnipresent
glitter, dreams alive and well
but shielded from the twist of
vaguely underestimated calls to
other idols.

I neither box nor store the gems
of gold and rubies shining brilliant,
bright and sapphire night and days
of tender incubation, storms
of incandescent, wondrous,
trembling, everlasting height.

I neither share nor horde the
thought of you and me entwined
in beams of thought triumphant,
minds emblazoned, torn between
the love for quality and right and
mighty swords bewitching all we
ever thought was true and tender.

I may not show it, may not live it,
but the constant gleam of sun and stars
and all the other brilliant lights
that blind and stun us do not move
me, do not tell me all your smile can
say in just a moment, just a twinkling
burst of sudden friend

A Small Victory

fiction by Terry DeHart

A small boy walked along a dirt road in a poor neighborhood of Portland, Oregon. Old lawnmowers sputtered and bogged in the yards and airplanes droned in the morning sky. The boy walked alone and inhaled the warm smell of cut grass. The breeze carried puffs of heat from the east and the sky appeared happy to be free of the overcast of the rainy season, but the boy didn't expect the summer to continue. He knew the true weather of this place was rain, and so sunlight was like a lie. But he walked and the muddy streets were baked by the sun and they were beginning to take on the new, hard shapes of summer.

The boy didn't stop to look for bugs in the vacant lots, as he usually did, and soon he was five blocks from home. It was the farthest he'd ever dared to venture alone. He walked with his hands stuffed into the pockets of his stained, hand-me-down trousers. He held his head high and took deep, lung-straining breaths of the summer air. He was stripped to the waist and the sun's warmth felt like a pair of adult hands held close to the skin of his shoulders. He watched a jet airliner chalk a white line across the sky and he chewed a stick of Juicyfruit gum he'd taken from his mother's purse. He staggered carelessly up the ridges and down into the valleys of the rutted road. He craned his neck up at the airliner and at the fresh blue sky and then he puckered up his seven-year-old lips to practice his new, tuneless whistle, but the chewing gum kept plugging up his works and no sound came out.

A dog barked. A car backfired. The boy began to sing an old hymn he'd heard during the rainy months. *When morning gilds the skies, My heart awaking cries.* He wasn't sure what all the words meant, but he liked the heavy feel of them in his mouth. He smelled the fresh-baked smell of hardening mud and he heard the happy, twinkling sound of a cheap transistor radio. He decided to walk all the way to the railroad tracks.

But as he walked, he wasn't watching where he was going and he fell into a deep pothole. One moment his foot was poised to step to earth, and then he was falling through the air and sucking in his breath at the suddenness of it. He landed hard, and his knees hit rocks, and he felt a sharp pain. He realized, curiously, that he couldn't breathe—that the chewing gum had lodged itself in his throat and he couldn't exhale the air in his lungs or draw another breath.

Tears came to his eyes and he bore down hard against the blockage in his windpipe. The panic built higher and higher and there seemed to be no end to it. For a long, real time he tried

with all his strength to cry out, to tell his mother and father what was happening to him, but no sound escaped his bluing lips. A darkness spread beneath the skin of his face. He heard the wet sloshing of his heart. He curled into a ball. The sunlight beat against his closed eyelids, the color red.

He was on the verge of surrender, but then he fought against the blockage one last time and the gum moved a tiny fraction of an inch. He found the strength to push again and finally it slipped free and fell from his mouth. He exhaled his stale last-breath and then he gulped in a fresh new one, and then another and another. He coughed until he was certain his throat was clear. He rose to his feet carefully, with a bright adrenaline clarity. His knees bled through the holes in his trousers. His throat burned, his nose was dripping, fat tears streamed from his eyes—but he couldn't help but laugh. He walked and bled, and all the while he laughed in a high, pure voice. There wasn't a cloud in the sky and he could hear the bumblebees chugging and buzzing through the sweet air.

When he arrived home, he refused to tell his parents what had happened to him. They looked frightened when they saw his torn clothes and bloody knees, and then they were angry and threatening—but he only told them that he'd fallen. He didn't have the words to fully describe what happened, and he didn't think he ever would.

And then just as suddenly and surely as it had left, the rainy season returned. During the first night, the wind hissed and the monster-trees scratched at his window. The rain pounded hard against the thin roof but the boy resisted the urge to run to the safety of his parents' bed. Instead he rose and put on his Superman pajamas. He opened the curtains and stood at the window and watched until the water rose in the unpaved streets and made the world smooth again.

Tobacco Tax:

THE DRYING SHED

poetry by Scott Whitaker

Like a chain, one could travel down
the smoke rising through the barn window
to the pipe, and through the pipe to
the lungs, which tell the true story.

Comb the rats out the corn. Comb
the rats out the barn. Comb them out
into tangled wheat grass
across the yard and down the creek.

In the barn loft among the hay the purpose
of a nipple is no simpler than a rough kiss.

Below, the tobacco shed is packed with leaves.
The leaves are like drying dreams
in the barn. The more one banks in the drying shed,
the more the drying shed knows.

**

Five-hundred pounds of tobacco bought one man
from another in 1665. Five-hundred pounds
of what would be nothing
unraveling out of a gentleman's pipe

For the better part
of a decade John Whitaker banked away
five-hundred pounds of tobacco to remove his X
from Maryland.

Shut the forest down behind you. Shut the woods
out. Close the forest forever.

**

From the high perch on top
of the hay, tobacco's sweet teeth bites through
the tang of after-touch, the tang of one person's sex
on another. The wind carries in it
and the nose carries it away.

Six on Sunday. Two tomorrow. The tobacco
shed is dry. The Tobacco
shed is feverish. Rats rake
the eaves. Across their backs
fleas doze and infect
the leaves. The leaves
dry like dreams in the drying house. At the end
of the day the leaves are a little less
than what they were in the morning.

When it goes up in smoke there's something familiar
about the blue Qs and curls somersaulting
and circling. The familiar way the butt
rests between the fingers like a pen or gun.

Comb the rats out the corn. Comb the rats out
the barn. Comb the rats into the wheat grass.
Tangle up a long girl in the hay. She won't come
until the rats have gone.
From the hay-mounds
the drying shed peals off a sharp wind.
The barn is next to the tobacco shed
When you sweat in the barn's high lofts
it smells like yellow leaf.

**

In the back of 1665
John Whitaker, Johnny Welsh Back, Johnny Rye
and Johnny Smoke. Smoke curling out his pipe

as he carves a new pipe on the timber porch stoop.

Inside, his wife Mary sweeps dust out the back

Collect and tie. Tie and bale. Untie and re-tie.
Hang in small bunches. The leathery wings curl
outward as the shed opens and closes. Leaf flaps
and flutters, awakened by high-pitched
wind and sun.
Collect and tie. Tie and bale.
Untie and re-tie. Hang in the shed. 500
pounds of tobacco stashed in the bank.

John Whitaker imagines rats in the dry shed,
imagines rats smoking his crop. Rats with little hands,
little pipes. Finds curious pipe curled twigs
on the floor of the shed. They are blackened at the ends.

**

500 pounds. Five-hundred
pounds. Mary could only count to twenty.
500 stretched to the ends of the world.

Thousands of spread palms stuck together.
500 pounds of what would be nothing
unraveling out of a gentleman's pipe.

John Whitaker learned to add. John Whitaker
looked in the tobacco shed at the end
of the day and swore his shadow leapt
from the tied bunches, the thousand hands.

In the end Mary had walked off the timber porch
and up the wagon's perch. Pennsylvania, a bounce
up the trail and a week of weak coffee and diarrhea.
Behind them the shack sank into the field.
The shack sank under Maryland
and the wagon moved over the great arc of the sky.

Close the forest down. Leave it behind.

John Whitaker's chain of smoke reached back
behind them. Reached all the way back to Maryland.
Back to the coast and beyond the coast,
across the Atlantic, back to Wales,
smoke chained them home.

**

Nearly four hundred years later Uncle Pete
reconstructed the barn from old sketches
and planted seed from the same stock Aunt Ruth claimed
pulled the family out of Maryland. Once under
glass there's truth to it. Aunt Ruth's photos,
and photocopies of documents, yellowed
leaves in Bibles. She sketched the family back
to Wales, the tobacco bales, the family pipe.

The barn has long grown under like a bad toenail
and now lies under the callused wraps of kudzu
and vine-wood. The high open window mouths an O.
The dry shed is a shadow in the wheat grass
where fire touched it one low afternoon in October.
Gentle tapping against the door. An old friend
leaning through the flapping screen to find the old
woman asleep. The old woman's dreams tied above her.

The Leapfrogging Pool

an essay by Lad Moore

The cool mist of the waterfall surrounded me with its shroud of blue-green fog. My friend was gone—-as if swallowed into a demon's salivating mouth. For the first time, I had not been by his side when he reached for my hand. Now everything between us seemed to have been lost, without words spoken.

Jimmy Roundtree and I had two things in common when we met. Our fathers worked for the same airline and we both suffered under the same tutelage—the always-sweating Russian Prince—self proclaimed as he was.

Our fathers flew transports over *The Hump*, and made their fame as some of the most accomplished—if not the most daring of wartime flyers. When the strife was over, several of the best of Chenault's Flying Tigers and Chinese National Air pilots got together and rode their fame into private enterprise. So it was with our dads.

The demand for American knowledge and technology took us to Burma, India, and Indonesia, where their skills were in demand as flight instructors. Each of the postwar countries desperately wanted to establish air power, and the fame that followed the Americans' air exploits was highly marketable. The last of these assignments, flying for the Indonesian *Angkatan Udara,* was tame in comparison to the risks and dangers of the war years. Crossing *the Hump* had tested the upper limits of flying skill. I recall my father's tales about stretching the airplane capabilities while dodging the ground fire—and of protecting the strategically vital *Burma Road.* I studied his flight logs—the "remarks" column read like an adventure book:

"Lost sister C-47—ground fire."

"Dinjan, Assam India to Kunming China—three-ball alert over the Hump at 18,000 feet."

"Artillery fire, Tenchung—Jap air raid in progress on letdown."

"Dog fight during rice drop—Paoshan—lost right engine over Yyi River."

"Mountain crossing via Pao and Teng—RAF co-pilot—-Blacky went down—Search for Blacky—no wreckage."

My father's friend, Captain Roundtree, was always with him. They flew together at Jones Field in Texas to earn their wings, and early on, they began building their legends. It wasn't enough to fly under the Red River Bridge in Louisiana wing tip to wing tip, but they did it upside-down. The two renegade pilots were of high interest in three states by authorities looking for those twin P-40's.

They flew hard and celebrated late. These traits followed them to Indonesia, where they linked up with a dozen more men like them. I was only twelve years old, but I often marveled that somehow, despite long nights of marinating in Chinese beer, the pilots always made flight line muster with fresh-found energy.

IT WAS 1951. Angkatan Udara had built a large base in the mountains at Bandung, north of Jakarta, and the Americans moved into a cluster of houses close to the airfield. As we often did, Jimmy and I flew with our dads in the C-47 cargo plane when the trip was a routine one. This particular day should have been uneventful, as we were on a short hop to a field north of Padang to ferry a load of metal runway strips. Many of the jungle airfield surfaces were nothing more than narrow ribbons of perforated steel—snapped together like today's Lego toys.

Three hours out of Jakarta, we encountered bad weather. It was monsoon season, so storms and high cloud tops were just flights-de-jour. This day was different. It was not one of the ordinary rain swells that quietly came and went in the afternoon. This was a rough one. The plane was lurching and buffeting, and the sky was filled with electrical displays. We turned east to head for calmer air. Suddenly, with a loud boom and jagged incision, lightening severed a sizable piece of the left wing. The plane was shuddering and creaking, and the drone of the engines rose up and down in waves. My father shouted back at us from the cockpit to strap ourselves in tight. I grabbed one of the nylon loops that hung from the ceiling and buckled it to my lap belt, harness-style. The seats in the C-47 were single rows of bench-like metal, extending down each side of the fuselage, and freight was secured in the center. Jimmy moved over to the port side of the plane to look out the window at the damaged wing, and I stayed on the right side. We couldn't see each other through the stacks of freight.

Jimmy shouted, "hang on tight, kid"—almost gleefully. His words had a tone of authority yet were non-threatening—as if barking fun at someone in the next bucket on a rocking Ferris wheel. The plane was wobbling and listing hard to the left—turning in a wide spiraling circle. We were headed down.

I could see the green of a rice paddy, distorted by the sheeting rain and looking odd, like liquefied grass against the portside windows. In the cabin, I saw Roundtree and my father grasping the throttle levers together, and one of them was calling out a mayday message, breaking up the sameness of the crackling radio.

I braced hard against the metal bench, pushing against its back rail. The green of the earth was all around us now, and we had lost all sky. The last seconds of the fall were long and languishing, but the impact surprised me. It was like riding a skipping rock across a pond—and surprisingly gentle. The plane made contact, and lifted up again. Then it collapsed like the stopping of an elevator too fast—leaving my stomach behind.

The airplane settled. The engine noise was gone, and I could hear the drumming of the

rain against the metal fuselage. My father called out, and Jimmy and I answered simultaneously—the same two words, as if rehearsed: "I'm okay."

In minutes we were surrounded by rice farmers who chattered like magpies. It seemed they came from nowhere, and when Roundtree opened the door, I think they were shocked to see him standing. They pointed at him, like he was supernatural.

We got out and walked around the plane in the knee-deep mud—it was partly inspection, and partly awe. My father said it was worse than he thought. The wing was shredded and several sections were missing, including the left engine cowling. The plane was lying like a beached whale in the field, its propellers folded like a parasol. The tail section was bent awkwardly, distorted as if heated plastic. I heard my father bragging about the crumpled C-47. He was muttering something poetic. He said, "It handled like a freed kite settling gracefully into a tree—feathery and proud." And Roundtree confirmed less poetically, "Goddamn fine airplane."

JIMMY AND I HAD MUCH TO TELL the tutor the next day. His name was Peterenenko Rosilov, but we called him Mr. Rossy. It was our Americanized nickname, because we couldn't pronounce his whole name and get anything else done. He added the title of "Prince" to it all, but Jimmy and I never acknowledged his royalty. Rossy liked to talk about himself, and how he and his extended family had been ousted from power in Russia. I think Jimmy and I learned more about the Revolution and the Czars than we did the three R's.

School was conducted in the garage, which had been converted into a study and office. The curriculum was a mixture of lecture and writing. It was all correspondence work, with completed lessons and test papers forwarded to the Calvert School in Maryland. Test grades and certificates for accreditation were returned to us by mail. Rossy was particularly strong in teaching math and science, so we performed interesting experiments in chemistry and biology. To supplement his teachings of the arts, we took weekly field trips. He was an enlightened tour guide who explained important historical and cultural sites from my father's Jeep. We visited Jakarta's shrines and gilded temples. We toured art galleries and museums, where we learned of Indonesia's dominance by, and recent freedom from, Dutch rule. Rossy taught us much about Indonesian religion and culture, and Jimmy and I were eager learners. Our youthful energy far surpassed his, and Rossy often became tired on the field trips. Jimmy and I exchanged hushed giggles at his behavior, because it was so predictable. First he would slice his hand across his throat, the time-out signal for his breaks. Then he would find a shady spot, open his folding cricket stool with a snap, and sag into its seat like a beanbag. He always popped his handkerchief once, wiped his brow, and then emitted a loud wheeze like the releasing of steam from a locomotive.

Jimmy and I made the best of the rest stops. We hunted four-leaf clovers or scoured the area for insects—candidates for tomorrow's biology session. We sharpened sticks with our pocketknives to throw at the ever-present lizards, giant spiny creatures that made the trees their home.

We grew into inseparable friends. Our closeness was partly circumstance and partly convenience, as we were two Americans of the same age and social level. But we also had complementing talents. We quickly gelled. Jimmy was good in math and science, and I excelled

in English and the arts. We helped each other through our homework and grilled one another for upcoming tests. In our free time, we were adventurers exploring the dense rain forests that surrounded our compound. We bragged that we hunted tigers, often finding their giant paw prints on the jungle paths. We secretly knew that success was not encountering one.

Indonesian boys were avid kite-fighting enthusiasts. Jimmy and I worked long hours trying to make a perfect cutting string to compete in the aerial combats. The first thirty feet of kite string was coated with glue, mixed with shards of powder-fine glass. With a skillful crossing maneuver, the tangled lines would saw at each other until one kite was severed. In the end, we were almost always outmatched.

We often climbed onto the garage roof. It was flat, with a three-foot high facade, and was the perfect fort and observation post. We delighted in watching the natives defecate, an immodest cultural lesson we should have skipped. Behind our neighborhood, originating in the native compounds, were endless sewer troughs—a spider web of two-foot wide canals that diverted water from rivers and streams. They were the natives' toilets. Adults, lifting their loose sarongs, and small children rarely clothed, used the troughs not three feet apart. Cleanup was a makeshift bidet. They splashed their posteriors with water fanned up from the trough. We snickered as we watched, but it was a clumsy kind of fun. For two Americans raised with shiny white porcelain, the real fascination was the experiencing of cultural differences. It graphically reinforced what Rossy taught us about poverty, ignorance and the links to disease.

Jimmy and I admired how Indonesians could climb. They had no cinch belt and no climbing spikes, but their ease in scaling an eighty-foot palm might humble the best of telephone-pole linemen. They just straddled the trunk, with legs at 45-degree angles, and ascended to the top like an inchworm. With one hand free, they harvested coconuts and emptied rubber-tree bowls. Their descent was smooth and graceful, like cliff repelling.

Jimmy's house was just next door, in what was an upper class compound, surrounded by concrete walls. It was a neighborhood of American pilots, Indonesian government officials, and high-ranking military officers. Security guards roamed the perimeter. They were there to protect us against communist sympathizers, not the humble natives. Our lifestyle and housing was princely by comparison, so we attracted crowds of the curious. The natives congregated in front of the main gate, or would peer over the walls, standing on makeshift bamboo stilts. They didn't intrude, they just watched. If we approached them, they would retreat into the jungle, only to reemerge the minute we moved away. Often we would find raw fruit and dried fish wrapped in banana leaves on the top of the wall like an offering.

IT WAS A LIFE OF SPLENDOR. Every home had servants, usually a cook, a gardener, and a house-man. The servants were like family, and we came to love them.

EDDIE WAS THE NAME we gave to our house-man. I don't think I ever heard his real name. He was fluent in English, having been educated in the Methodist Church School as a young man. Eddie lived alone in the small apartment over our garage, and I often wondered about his life apart from our family. Even though we were good friends, he never invited me in. Sometimes in the late evenings I could hear the soft sounds of a stringed instrument and smell the sweet odor of the peanut sate he grilled on the balcony. Other nights he stepped outside to

smoke his water pipe, and I could see his figure against the moonlit sky. He kept a lone candle in his window, a quiet reassurance that lit my pathway to sleep.

In his free time on Saturdays, Eddie taught Jimmy and me the art and rules of three-man soccer. We played for hours, while my dad was at the airfield. It was a far more disciplined game than I first thought, and one that mirrored the skills of a herding dog. Eddie could do things with his feet that I couldn't do with hands. Playing as a one-man team, he could best Jimmy and I playing as partners.

At the end of the game, Eddie always went into the house and prepared his trademark cask of limeade. It was freshly squeezed, with a wild orchid or gardenia floating on its surface. We ate natural cocoa cookies and talked about his scoring plays in our soccer game.

One such day, we were recounting the details of a hard-fought match, sitting on the steps leading up to the veranda. Jimmy had his back to the handrail. Suddenly Eddie told us to sit very still—not to move a muscle. We froze in place, noting the intense look on Eddie's face. I scanned the area and saw nothing out of the ordinary. As Eddie inched his way on his haunches toward Jimmy, I saw the cobra. Its fanned hood hovered just beneath Jimmy's arm, which he had rested on top of the hand rail. Eddie moved closer, his eyes staring wide and not blinking. Suddenly, in a lightening-quick grab, he had the snake in his fist. It coiled around his arm, attempting to spit its venom into his eyes. Eddie disappeared around the side of the house, and returned a few minutes later with the carcass. Jimmy and I were still shaking from the near miss. He told us a story to calm us down.

"You saw my wide eyes and my menacing look. I never took my eyes away from those of the snake. Even as I slid closer, I was meeting his stare. I did not blink because he cannot do so." For effect, he showed us that look again.

"My piercing eyes and my cautious approach hypnotized him. I mimicked the stare and the character of the mongoose—the archenemy of the cobra," he said.

"My eyes caused a trance—-such as can be brought forth from the melody of a flute—-the snake will not strike."

"Usually," he added, his broad grin revealing the crimson of betel nut-stained teeth.

It was the most incredible thing Jimmy or I had ever witnessed. When I told my father about it that night, he seemed skeptical that it could have happened that way, despite seeing the remains of the snake. I kept that snake to support my story until its blackness stank up the garage.

Jimmy and I talked about practicing that feat. We never gathered the courage— even on the harmless giant lizards that were so easy to get close to, when baited with bean curd.

THE *ANGKATAN UDARA* PILOTS and staff spent many of their Saturdays at a resort in the mountains at Lembang. There was picnicking, games, horseback riding, and some of the best barbecue I ever had. It was kabob *sate*—cubed ox, speared on a skewer with exotic fruits and vegetables, roasted slowly over a wood fire, and basted with Eddie's peanut sauce. Captain Roundtree liked to say, "best damn barbecue anyplace. Makes you want to slap your grandma."

The pilots washed the sate and fried rice down with ample amounts of Chinese beer and wine. Even in this vacation setting, Jimmy and I were still served our daily dose of goat's milk.

I figured goat's milk was some sort of penance for having lusted for Dolapan—a hot mixture of the juices of seven exotic fruits and a host of spices. Dolapan was a highlight of the visits to Lembang, and the recipe was the bartender's best-kept secret. The pilots didn't care what was in it. They just added Spanish rum and renamed it *"Tiger Oil."*

Lembang was a thousand acres of rain forest and volcanic mountain terrain. Jimmy and I explored the nearby caverns to watch the hordes of bats, or prowled the thickets looking for mango trees. The highlight though, was the majestic waterfall. Its origin was almost 600 feet high, framed in a rainbow mist. It careened over a rock ledge into space, sheeting its way to earth and forming a deep blue pool at its bottom. Its name, "derisemablan suiapulu," translated in English to something like "Windpipe of the God," so called for its narrow chute at the top, and the ribbon of water that remained virtually intact as it fell.

THE POOL WAS usually filled with swimmers, spellbound by the cool shower that tamed the summer sun. I hadn't seen Jimmy for maybe an hour, but I was not conscious of time as I drifted aimlessly in the crystal pool like a water-soaked log. Suddenly there were screams, and people were pointing up to the top of the falls. I got out of the pool and cupped my hand to my forehead to shade my eyes. It was Jimmy, at the top of the falls. I recognized the yellow shirt with the red star on it—a souvenir Eddie had given us from an Indonesian soccer team. He was standing on the rock edge of the chute. Everyone was signaling and motioning him back. He seemed oblivious to the crowd below and leaned out to watch the river release itself over the edge. Across from him there was a second ledge, the two almost touching. The river squeezed its way between them, then spewed out with foam and fury from its constraint.

Somehow I knew what he was thinking as he edged toward the opposite side. He was going to step across the ledge, one foot on each rock, with the river hurtling beneath. I spoke out loud for God's intervening hands. *Jimmy, I prayed, don't do it.*

In an instant, he disappeared. He was not on either side. All eyes turned to the rocky pool below, where several swimmers were still standing in neck-deep water. He did not surface. Roundtree and my father jumped into the pool fully clothed. They probed the waters with six other men, diving and groping for the body that was surely there.

Suddenly, onlookers began waving their arms and pointing up again. They seemed to be focused on a lower part of the waterfall. Then I saw it—-the yellow and red colors, waving in and out of the waterfall thirty or forty feet from the top. The soccer shirt would appear, then disappear, as if a flashing signal. It was Jimmy, draped across a rock like it was a towel-bar. The fury of the wind and water caused his shirt to billow, inflate and deflate like a balloon.

Several men started up the side of the cliff toward the top carrying armloads of ropes cut from the rows of playground swings. My father and Roundtree joined them in the climb. They inched their way up the cliff just west of the waterfall. Their ascent seemed painfully slow. I closed my tear-filled eyes for long minutes then opened them to see little progress. I prayed that Jimmy would not lose his grip after being in the force of the current so very long.

Once at the summit, the men began connecting the ropes together. They tied the rope to their waists, three our four of them acting as an anchor. I could see Roundtree at the edge, waving the rope across the rock where Jimmy lay. No hand came out to grab it. Time and time again it passed over the spot, dancing wildly as if being tossed and retrieved like a tease.

The men brought back the rope and Roundtree tied himself on. Slowly they lowered him down. He was trying to steady himself against the back of the cliff, but the water would jerk and flip him about, like a Howdy puppet. Roundtree began to swing himself in a wide arc, side to side across the falls. When he passed Jimmy's location, he made a poke at the shirt. It must have been a signal, because on the next pass he bought Jimmy out with him, holding him around the waist like a limp sack of feed. Slowly the men began to retrieve them.

I could hear voices behind me. "Would the rope hold?" It had been battered about the rocks time after time, and now it had the weight of two. Foot by foot they rose, often turning pirouettes in the current. They reached the top to cries of victory, and Roundtree turned around, clutching Jimmy in one arm and holding up his other hand in a familiar gesture. It was the aviator all's-well sign: *thumbs up.*

They returned back down through the jungle, winding their way carefully along the steep trails. I met them halfway down. Roundtree said Jimmy was okay, except for chills and scrapes and bruises. The men wouldn't let me close to him, waving me away. I could hear his teeth chattering over the echo of the falls. Once he looked at me. His face was blue and his eyes were hollow. I couldn't explain it, but I felt strangely distanced from him. It was the first time we had not been hand in hand through a crisis. It was as if I had let him down, had not been there when he needed me. I felt an uncomfortable guilt, yet I knew that I had been helpless through it all.

THE UNEASINESS WAS STILL PRESENT when he returned to school after a day of extra rest. I sensed that something was different. He looked past me when we talked, and his dialogue was abrupt and choppy. He was changed—not in appearance, but in persona. I became concerned that something in our friendship might be lost forever.

I talked to Eddie about the strangeness I sensed. As he oftenliked to do in my times of fear, he told a story that he translated as "The Wings of Japoto." It was about a young boy who cherished his imaginary friend, and how when he outgrew it, he cast the friend aside. But sometimes the boy felt a lingering guilt, a feeling of betrayal. He told his father of his discomfort.

"Japoto's father recited what all men eventually know," Eddie said. "Growing is a journey to the doorway of manhood. For the travelers, it is a distance marched with a varied pace. Some will be first in the line. Others will come along in time. The road will often seem harsh, and will be littered with the once-proud treasures of a fleeting youth. But all will pass through its door much stronger than before."

Eddie linked that story to what happened to Jimmy, but added that Jimmy's experience was an even stronger kind of maturing—one that is born of near-tragedy.

In his best Methodist-School English, he offered a promise: "Your little friend has leapfrogged you in his travels to becoming a man. Soon though, your quick steps will reunite with his, and you will walk the rest of the way together."

I decided I could be patient. I figured Eddie was right—like about the mongoose and the cobra.[3]

[3] "The Leapfrogging Pool" has appeared in *The Copperfield Review* and *Manx Fiction, U.K.*

Mothers and poets

poetry by Moshe Benarroch

it is interesting that mothers insist
that their sons be
musicians
maestros
even composers
but
find me a mother who encourages
her son
to be a poet
or even
a writer
send him to take privates lessons
with famous writers
with poets
so they will learn
who takes a loan
so the son can write.

we have a reputation
of youth spoilers
revolution
starters.
not like musicians.

Reflection on a Hard Shell

fiction by Vanitha Sankaran

Marge caressed the edge of her canvas. With the rough sketch blocked in and the underpainting applied, she could glimpse what her composition might become. Ocean on one side, sand on the other, herself straddling in between. Not bad for a rusty amateur. She still remembered the scene like she'd been there yesterday, standing under the awning of a juice stand near Pompano Beach, listening to the summer rainstorm pound into the fabric. In the humid aftermath, she'd propped her easel in the wet sand, fingers aching to hold a brush. Marge sighed. The woman she'd been was untouchable now, just a reflection in a steamy mirror.

How was she supposed to find herself again?

She picked up her dappled palette and selected a round brush, then dipped it in a puddle of color.

Naples Yellow Deep. The taste of saliva that rose under her tongue every time she thought of her marriage. Where the hell had it all gone wrong? When had Ernie's needs eclipsed hers? Why in God's name had she let them? Marge slashed a gash of yellow for an expanse of beach, then stippled in the sand and the broken fragments of seashells. She picked up another color.

Cerulean Blue. Like her nightly glass of Bombay Sapphire, quaffed in secret while Ernie watched the news. Damn him for never noticing. Damn her for needing him to. God, blue was supposed to be soothing and sincere. When had it taken on despair? She rent an ocean into the canvas, poured her truth into the murky water. Her catharsis swirled in eddies under the surface. Now it was time for the sky.

Alizarin Crimson, she chose the color without thought.

So many pictures she'd painted with this, a bluish red, it was almost impure. Like the blood roses wilting on the table behind her, the kind Ernie had given her on their first date. And on every anniversary since. It wasn't his fault she hated him.

She hated herself too, for the weak wispy nothing she'd let herself become. She smeared some paint onto her palette and bled her regret into a dying sun that stretched across the heavens.

Marge stopped to moisten her canvas, then started brushing in the details, wet paint on wet paint. The hatred of red seeped into the grit of yellow, and was halted by the fear of blue.

She worked without pause, sketching here, thwacking there, then stroking through and through. It was finally taking shape. She took a step back and stared. She'd painted herself on an island, glaring at her reflection on the carapace of a Florida Blue Crab. A hemorrhaging sun set behind her as she grasped the cracked shell. The stark outline of her body leapt out of the hazy background, mirroring the colors of the crab. Edged in yellow, tipped in red, and tinted in a greenish blue.

The only thing that separated the woman from her reflection was the force of her own anger.

Spring Leaves

poetry by Mike Plumbley

(after an album by the Bill Evans trio)

The river at Autumn wanes
as a love affair drifting
towards conclusion might feel
to him who loves and loses
with all he's been given

She stands on the riverbank
searching for her reflection
seeing more than before
now the leaves fall so gently
to soft hands on the piano

Bass notes like undercurrents
pull beneath a sad melody
offbeat, one bar at a time
to beguile a shoal of fish
shimmering to the cymbals

In this brief moment all is
distilled as they look into
the water together once
more, the touch of her hand
slowly uncoiling from his

LaFaro dampens his note
Motian's hi-hat silenced
Evan's cascading fingers
tailing away to the end
one last sombre chord fading

A Question

poetry by David Ritchie

If I were to spin around quickly, unexpectedly,
would your face be the same as if you knew
I would be looking at you
Would I then see all your faces
the one looking at the back of my head
the one looking in your past perhaps
your childhood
possibly the face of your ancestors
looking for you in the landscape
because they can't see within your backdrop
Would these faces be hoping to see something different
perhaps the day break
perhaps witness the universe detain the sun
to flex it's muscle when it thinks you are not looking

If I turn away just as quickly
will you offer lies
to explain the different faces
And would you try to convince me that the universe
does not really detain the sun
that it is just a trick of the eye
my eye
that saw all this?

The Resurrected

fiction by Elisha Porat

I.

Once, while I was waiting at the central bus station in Jerusalem, a woman of about 60 came up, said hello and wished me well. I returned the greeting but wondered how she knew me. She drew closer and said that for all the years that had passed, she remembered me as if we had parted only yesterday. “When was that?” I asked her. “Just who are you, and how do we know one another?”

She clapped me on the back and said that I had not changed a bit. The gray in my hair merely added to my charm and vitality. How was it that I did not remember her, Sarah, the brave Yemenite woman from the Jerusalem ETZEL battalion? After all, it was I who had crouched below her while she scaled the wall to set the explosive charges. Had I forgotten that as well? Did I not remember the mad, panicked flight from the wall when so many had been wounded? And the damned cease action order, the cause of all that grief, had I no memory of that either?

I was stunned. More than once, people had mistaken me for someone else and hailed me to say hello. Out of politeness, I had returned the salutation. Later, I would crack my head half the day trying to recall, who was that, when did we meet, where did I know him from? Of course, I cannot speak of their forgotten names and discarded *noms deguerre*. But a sapper in the Jerusalem ETZEL battalion? Nothing in the world could be easier to disprove, for I had never served in the Palmach or in the Hagana. I had been but a boy then, and called into the Israel Defense Forces only in the 1950’s when I reached the age of induction set by the Defense Service Act of 1949. While in the army, I had served in a rear echelon unit of which I prefer not to say very much. To this day, I am somewhat ashamed of what I did in that unit while the cream of our youth spent their days in trenches on the border.

Here was another case of mistaken identity. Besides, she had aged me by a full decade. I forgave her for that. Many people wrongly think me older than I am. But where did she come up with these bizarre recollections? Breaching the walls of the old city—I? A bitter rear guard action and bloody pull-back—who me? The fallen comrades, the damned order—was I in all that? The slim volume of our history surely included the whole story. But what had I to do with any of this?

As often happens to me, my thoughts came too late. I wanted to answer her, but she had already vanished into the crowd of travelers waiting in the station. I edged out of the jam-packed line. Although I knew I was wasting my time and delaying my trip to the coastal region, I had to lean against the station wall. I had to survey the passengers' faces and gradually tame the turmoil that Sarah the courageous Yemenite had visited on my peace of mind.

I remembered a similar incident that had occurred some years earlier. I was walking on a street in Tel Aviv on some petty shopping errand when a man my own age suddenly accosted me and insisted that I was a long-lost friend. For all my protests that I was neither his friend nor the friend's cousin, indeed, I had never heard of them, the fellow beseeched me with a desperate loss of faith that I found deeply touching. "It's not possible, it just isn't possible," he repeated. "The same thinning hair, the same stubble, the same two-day growth never touched by a razor." When I tried to convince him that similar faces can be misleading, especially if you hadn't seen them for many years, he burst out, "It isn't just the face or the body. You speak just like him. The same hissing diction, the very same hoarse voice. The same twitch on your face and exactly the same twist to your curling lips."

I felt very uncomfortable then. With difficulty, I separated from my misguided admirer. Had we not entered a shop where I was known and one of my old friends worked, I would not have managed to shake him off. He was so dependent on me, he begged so for me to recognize him and share with him the distant years of our friendship, that it felt awful to break away and tell him again and again, "I don't know you. We've never met. I don't know what you want from me." I was truly sorry for his pain when I saw on his face how he gradually bowed to the truth and began to admit to me and to himself that a sad mistake may have been made. In the end, we became such good friends that we exchanged addresses and telephone numbers. Smiles, slaps on the back, some words of encouragement. "It's nothing, these things happen. No one these days is immune to mistakes. This was a sad, little mistake. There are much more painful errors."

But the words of Sarah the Yemenite went straight to my heart, kindling a storm that could not quickly be calmed. A man finishes a grueling week of studies in Jerusalem, then rushes to the bus station for the trip to his house on the coastal plain to make Shabbat with his wife and his children and the oaks in the yard; how is it possible that while he is hurrying home, and his mind is already somewhere between the lawns and the red tiled roofs, a plain Jerusalem woman stops him, cloaks him in an imaginary past and wrongly takes him for an ETZEL lad who crouched below the wall to the old city and boosted to his shoulder the brave sapper who would toss an explosive charge above the barricaded gate? Why didn't I hasten to answer her, "Sarah, you are mistaken. I am not the boy you knew back in '48. I'm not even from Jerusalem. I'm from the plain, from a village near Hadera. I'm finishing my required subjects, that's all. Don't turn my world upside down. Let me go in peace to my little house among the orchards." It seemed to me that I saw the shadowy image of the Jerusalem woman slipping away like a furtive gust of wind through the bustling station's teeming platforms.

II.

One night, I was invited to a party at the home of a well-known Jerusalem editor. She greeted

me warmly and served exotic dishes she had learned to prepare during her years abroad. While we enjoyed the food and drink, she introduced a young woman, no beauty yet quite bewitching, whom she praised as the best rewriter on her editorial staff, and one interested in more than just the pages she recast. Like the editor, she had kind words for a story of mine the paper was going to publish. Why, she had fallen in love with entire passages in it and was eager to discuss its innovative structure with me face to face. In this way, our hostess politely but firmly maneuvered us together, cheek to jowl at the little table in the corner of her cramped salon where we might whisper oblivious to the buzz and hum of the guests around us.

The rewriter asked my name and inquired into my age and line of work. She was amazed that a man like me would forsake an established life in the plain to dart between Jerusalem's yeshivas and seminaries in search of balm for the wounds festering in my soul. Still, the story I had submitted was very fine and she believed I ought to continue writing despite the demands yeshiva society made on my time. She found in my story something protean yet powerful. "Now that we meet in person," she said, "I see in you the same contrasting qualities of putty and steel. Your appearance bears an astonishing resemblance to the language of the story." For my part, I was more than a little surprised by the familiar tone she adopted. Dumb with confusion, I sat across from her and felt the first twinges of a powerful and mutual attraction.

After a long conversation battered by the surrounding din, we left for the bus stop below the house. She was going to her home on the edge of Jerusalem while I had to return to my little dormitory room. The volume I was studying lay open on my desk, beside it the notebook in which I scribbled thoughts my reading provoked and observations drawn from outside the confines of the volume's densely printed pages. We boarded the late-night bus and sat side by side. As if by chance, her shoulder brushed me, then she half swung her body to me and her thighs pressed hard against my own. I don't know where I found the courage, but I took the plunge and wrapped my arms around her shoulders. It was clear at once that we were headed to her small apartment on the city's outskirts. The volume open on my desk and the notebook at its side would await my return, perhaps that night, perhaps at dawn, perhaps not until the following day if things went well between us.

We got off at the last stop and, locked in passionate embrace, made our way to her door. How astounded I was by her request to make love in deathly silence. How I marveled at the efforts she made to choke back her moans. How sweet were the fingers she placed on my lips so I, too, would not cry out when the final ecstasy possessed me. Afterwards, we rose and dressed and returned to the building doorway, where the hot-blooded copy editor showed me a little hutch of white rabbits the tenants permitted her to keep. She drew me behind the building, to the small inner yard where some flower beds she tended gave the Jerusalem night a sharp scent, and a few vegetables, mangled by the neighborhood children, eventually fed to the rabbits.

I asked her to explain the silence on which she insisted in bed. She had a roommate, she said, a fine young woman studying social work at the university who was about to marry her sweetheart and leave for a job in one of the development towns in the south. Out of a deep sense of pity, she would not sully for this splendid young woman whatever life in the big city had not yet spoiled. For some reason, I remarked that I understood all the nonsense if that was

the case. Her explanation justified the strange precautions she had taken to assure our silence, even if we had been forced to make love like mice. But I never imagined that she would ask me to slink out of the building without a sound. Nor did I know that she would beg me to postpone the shower I craved till a later hour or, better yet, until returning to my cubby-hole in the dorms.

Her final words enraged me, just as her efforts to preserve the hush of her bed had roused in me a secret fury. I rose from the bed, dressed hastily and told her, very loudly, that one could hear the same thing in the other tiny apartments in that crowded building. I was no longer a boy; it was years since I had indulged in one-night stands. I had long since wearied of ridiculous affairs like these. Her behavior reminded me of an incident buried in my youth.

Rising to her feet, the copy editor seized me and implored me to lower my voice. But I was drunken with anger. you might say. and loose with my words. “Listen,” I persisted like a stubborn child, “I once went for a walk with my girlfriend in the hills of Jerusalem. As darkness fell, we arrived at a small, forgotten kibbutz called `Ma’aleh HaHamisha.’ It was almost off the map, so it seemed to me. The houses gripped a cliff to avoid sliding down the steep slope. Encountering the kibbutz chairman, we requested a room for the night. `By all means,’ he replied, `we have a guest cabin. Here is the key, here the water pitcher, there the kerosene lamp in case the electricity is off.’ He led us to the cabin and opened the door to the middle room. Then he wished us good night and went on his way. The two of us, hungering for love the same as you and I, did not even wait for the echoes of his footsteps to die on the pavement. We fell on each other at once, sank to the ratty mattress spread on the floor beneath us and rolled around to the sound of our cries of passion. We utterly forgot where in the world we were.”

The rewrite editor watched me with darkening eyes. Had I not been so big and strong, she would simply have taken hold of me and sent me flying through the window. I already heard the voice of the pure social worker calling, “Who’s there? What’s all that noise? Ilana, is that you? Do you need help?”

“Just a moment,” I shouted across the door to the unseen mob that no doubt had gathered outside to hear my tale. “One moment, let me go on with the story: Suspicious rustlings stirred on the other side of the cabin’s walls. My beloved thought we should peek outside, perhaps mice were nibbling on the thin wooden slats. But I was brave lad in those days and said, `Give me the lamp, I’m going outside to look.’ I grabbed the lamp and flung open the doors to the rooms on either side of us. None of you will believe what my eyes beheld.”

“Ilana, is that you? Ilana, has something happened? Do you need anything?” the roommate called to us. The copy editor answered, “No, no, everything’s OK. You can go back to your room.”

I raised my voice like a street corner preacher, turned to the window, opened it wide and shouted, “You won’t believe what my eyes beheld. The two other rooms were full of drunken kibbutz workers sprawled naked and sweating, all of them squinting through cracks and holes in the splintered partition. They were panting with desire to glimpse my girlfriend lying nude on the tattered mattress. `You damn perverts, what stinking corpses you are,’ I waved the lamp at them. `You dirty Peeping Toms, you vermin, you filthy swine.’ I choked on the fury lodged in my throat. I kicked their sweating bodies and threatened the surprised workmen, in a voice

not my own, `I'll burn this cabin down on you!'"

Suddenly, I was baffled by my boisterous behavior. I burst half-dressed out of Ilana the rewrite editor's apartment. To her stunned look, I streaked past the fine young roommate and down the stairs. The chilly air outside lashed at my chest. I stopped in my tracks, sniffing the scents of a wadi and the resin aroma of a copse of pines close by. The block was pitch black, swathed in wisps of mist and low, sodden clouds, and the night breeze carried distant sounds. I completely lost my way. I didn't know how to get out, which direction led to the city and which to the road. Cursing the absurdity of my situation, I began to walk briskly along an unfinished street until a gap suddenly yawned beneath my feet. I saw that the road and the street had come to an end, with the city nowhere in sight. I craned my head heavenward in search of help, but the low wisps of cloud obscured the stars. I was forlorn. I had no idea where in the world I was.

Then I saw lights in a window nearby. I gave up, knocked and asked for help. The door opened and Miss Sarah, the courageous Yemenite, appeared at the threshold in some sort of night gown. She recognized me at once and said, "A Palmachnik like you lost in the night? What about those scouting courses you took years ago? What about those those long nights you spent on orientation hikes? We didn't go astray like this back in '48."

I told her my strange account. "It's nothing, Palmachnik," she laughed. "Everything will be just fine." She took me back to the street and directed me in the clipped manner of those early years. "Turn right here, left here, then go straight and you're back on the main road into town. You can get a taxi there." I thanked here and vowed, "Miss Sarah, we will meet again. Meanwhile, many thanks. But I was not with you there, in the Jerusalem ETZEL battalion. It was not I who kneeled down so you could throw the explosive packs." She laughed again. "It's nothing. Each of us must hide from someone. And each of us must mold his past anew with his own hands. I wish you good night." Then she vanished into the blanket of fog.

III.

Our final encounter was the most surprising. Taking a break from important matters, I was plodding through the stalls of Hadera's little market. As I walked, I glanced at the heaps of fruit and flopping fish already beginning to stink. Suddenly, I saw two women, their faces aglow with delight, flapping their arms at me. Very properly dressed and made-up they were, and carrying handsome purses. Just as I was, in rough sandals and shorts, I came closer and greeted them, wondering all the while who they were.

"Hello, Palmachnik," one of them approached me, "have you already forgotten? I'm Sarah, from Jerusalem." I rushed to her in joy. "Hello, Miss Sarah," I said, "what brings you down from the lofty mountains of Jerusalem to the low plains of Hadera?" Sarah explained that she and her sister were attending a family wedding in the Nahali'el quarter of town.

In all her years in Israel, however, she had never been to our hamlet and was especially glad to run into me as they had just lost their way in the streets. From many kind people, they had learned how far the Nahali'el section was and feared, much to their sorrow and shame, that the moment of the ceremony had nearly passed.

I gave them a hand, slowly leading them through Hadera's narrow streets north to the

Nahali'el quarter. "You and your sister have nothing to worry about," I told Sarah. "Heaven was smiling on you when you found me. It is my pleasure to guide you on my free hour right to the hupa." The two overdressed Yemenite ladies from Jerusalem trailed behind me like a pair of infants toddling to the playground. Sarah extolled the virtues of Jerusalem in disparagement of the villages of the plain, which were not only a journey of many hours from home but also as alike as twins. From Nahariya to Kiryat Gat, the same avenues, the same shops, the same bus stations. Suppose you close your eyes, surrender yourself to the swaying of the bus and catch a short nap; if you wake up and find yourself riding on the main street of town, you simply cannot tell whether you are in Gadera or Hadera.

I laughed in agreement, then I reminded her of old memories, of that night when I had wandered bewildered and lost in her neighborhood floating within an oasis of clouds.

She nudged her sister and asked, "Do you remember? Do you remember how I told you about the strange young man I met one night?"

"Is that him?" asked the sister. "The one you said seemed risen from the grave to bring back to life the days of the siege and the battle for the city?"

"What's this, Miss Sarah?" I jumped in. "Are you so quick to kill off your acquaintances?"

Sarah went pale and stopped. Some things were not to be repeated before strangers, she instructed, just as there were matters better left unsaid even between sisters.

Her sister, humiliated by the indiscretion that had slipped through her lips, tried to make up for her blunder. Unmoved, Sarah begged my pardon. Anyway, what was my name?

Here we had chatted politely all this time and they had yet to hear my name. Soon we would arrive at the wedding and she still would not know who I was before I disappeared again.

"Abshalom," I said. "My friends call me Avsha for short."

The two sisters gasped in surprise. Clinging to one another, they stared at me in fear. "Abshalom? Are you sure? How can this be, Abshalom?" Sarah demanded. "Tell the truth, what do you know? Tell me the truth," she suddenly raised her voice, "enough of this strange game you're playing with us. Who are you really? Were you or were you not in ETZEL's Jerusalem battalion? Did you or did you not stand below me the night we broke into the old city? Is that you, Avsha, from the battalion's sapper platoon? Tell the truth, are you Abshalom who was killed later in that battle on the hill near Bet Shemesh? Are you Abshalom the living or Avsha the dead playing tricks on us?"

"But Miss Sarah," I squeezed her hand hard, "I am Abshalom, but most certainly not the one you and your sister believe I am. I've already told you I was a boy during the War of Independence. I was drafted into the army only after the Sinai campaign in 1956. I can show you photos and documents. What is it with you two ladies? Have you stuffed your heads with superstitions? Whoever heard of the dead rising from their graves to stroll at liberty through the Hadera market? Look at me, ladies, come a little closer; do I really have the face of the resurrected? Now let's go a bit faster, or you'll miss the wedding in Nahali'el."

They huddled still more closely, clasped one another by the hand, lowered their gaze and followed me like docile sheep. From time to time, they threw me a suspicious glance, evading my face but studying me from my balding head to my sagging belly. I could not

restrain myself and asked myself aloud, “How is it possible to make such a mistake? How can someone, right in the middle of the street, suddenly take another for a young fellow who died so many years before? Had he aged exactly like me? Tell me your opinion, ladies, did his hair turn white like mine? Was he losing his hair like me? Were his muscles going slack like mine? Look, he was a fearless sapper in the first wave of attackers, not a goldbrick like me wasting his time in the army behind stands of waffles and soft drinks. Had anyone ever heard such a crazy story? And the similarity of our names?—there are a thousand ways to account for that, and another thousand to explain the resemblance of our nicknames. So what if every Abshalom in the country is called Avsha by his buddies?”

We passed between the little houses of Hadera and soon heard sounds of rejoicing rising from a yard in Nahali’el. I directed the wayward sisters to the garden gate but refused their invitation to enter and join in their relatives’ celebration. “This is it for me,” I said. All in all, it was I who should feel indebted to Miss Sarah, for rescuing me from a tough spot that night. Sarah pressed my hand and said, “Enough, Abshalom. Don’t mention Jerusalem, say nothing of that night. Every word you speak only makes me more confused. And my sister is of no help in clearing up the mystery. You see before you a foolish woman. On those nights when the ETZEL battalion went into action, she clung to our parents’ legs, may they rest in peace. Every shell exploding in the city scared her out of her wits.”

I bade them farewell. I saw how Sarah urged her sister to hurry along so they could inform the celebrants of their arrival. But her sister, not to be rushed, halted at the latch to the gate. Then she glanced back at me to see if I was still striding to the sidewalk or would suddenly spread secret, dormant wings and soar to the foot of Jerusalem’s walls, beneath the old city’s barricaded gate.

Translated from the Hebrew by Alan Sacks

The Cheap Urn

poetry by Steve Brazzell

They gave me a plastic urn with your last remains
one of those mass-produced, stamped-out pieces
of Made in Taiwan tokens none of us look at twice
at yardsales. I couldn't afford the Memories of Brass
alternative they tried to sell me between hasty visits of
tissue from lap to eye. This box held you like none
of us ever could and had an airtight lid. It girdled
every flake of ash you left of the bones where they
hitched your meat. I poured you into grandma's old
blue Moet vase she bought in Champagne the one
I used to love back when I still loved things that
didn't look back and smile. I couldn't shake out all
the dust from that plastic box and stared at it until my
mind was made between rinsing and tossing and
finally tossed that little piece of you into the trash.

Even to this day I feel as if a part of you is missing
as, I guess, so is a part of me.

Proud Heartworm

poetry by Elisha Porat

Hush now, proud
heartworm, stop your gnawing,
leave off chomping. I've suffered enough
because of you. Down girl,
down. Stick to the bottom
of the pit; and quiet there, you arrogant thing.
Maybe if you shut up in time,
it will hurry, pass over us
too, like it did then, and again
nab, grab and take down with it
those who aren't careful

Translated from the Hebrew by Vivian Eden

Twilight

fiction by Maryanne Stahl

Adapted from the Novel *Forgive the Moon*

When Keith and I decided to go ahead with the pregnancy that surprised us during senior year of college, our friends thought we had lost our minds. “You two must be crazy,” my former roommate Diane kept repeating, using the word loosely, the way everyone did. Few of them knew it was my mother who actually was crazy—schizophrenic, to be exact—herself the most persuasive argument against my having children.

But once the test came back positive and I got over the shock of it and Keith grew accustomed to the idea, I wanted nothing so much as to have this child.

I knew what I was in for. A baby would enable me to recreate my experience of family, recreate myself. I would be the kind of mother I had always longed for: attentive, safe, normal, a mother who would protect her child against chaos.

I dreamed in color about her. She had a tiny, hairless animal body and a serious face. “Who are you?” the dream-baby asked as she appeared before me in a dimly lit, blue room. I looked at her and knew. “I’m your mother.”

“Well, then,” the dream-baby said with a logic that seemed to give her small body weight, “you will have to love me.” I woke up frightened I would lose the chance.

Keith coached me through my labor, strong and tireless and deeply frightened. The obstetrics night nurse was a throwback who disapproved of fathers—or any non-medical male presence—in the delivery room. Stoically, Keith ignored her mumbles and glances and guided me through the heights of the worst pain I had ever experienced. And Keith got to see what I never did, the first look at our child’s perfect face framed in the oval aperture of my flesh, that split second before she slid into the world.

“So this is who you are,” I said to my daughter as I held her, and, with a prodigious effort, she opened her eyes for us to greet each other. She was the most distinct person I’d ever seen. I stared at her for hours, cradling her in the crook of my left arm even as I ate my hospital dinner.

On Wednesday, we brought her home to our apartment on the ground floor of an old but fairly harmless house in our college town. Keith photographed Isabella in the wicker laundry basket we’d made up as her first bed. He photographed her in the green plastic infant

seat he'd picked out of someone's trash and washed with Lysol, artfully backlit by a narrow window. He photographed her in bed with me, and I photographed her in bed with him. For two days we did little but adore her and wonder how we'd ever lived without her. We also wondered how we'd ever have a life again.

My mother came to visit us on Friday. She took the train up from Long Island because my father didn't want her to drive alone the four and a half hours to the college campus where we lived. But though her mental state was, my sister Lizzie had informed me, border line—a change of seasons or an important occasion would invariably set her off, and both had occurred—my father never objected to her making the trip. "A mother should be with her daughter at these times," he had said, as though my mother were like all other mothers.

She arrived carrying a squat, deeply lined pumpkin, and wearing such bright make-up and clothes, I thought at first she was dressed in costume.

"Hel-lo," she said, her voice so deep in her throat that it sounded almost a growl.

I looked up from the sagging, thrift-store couch where I lay smelling Isabella's head after nursing her. The sight of my mother's face jolted me like a sudden pinch. Mascara had smudged in two grey half moons beneath her eyes, and her passionflower pink lips twitched to one side every few seconds (a side effect of her medication). I wanted my mother to go away; and I wanted my mother.

"Hello, Grandma," Keith greeted her as he took her coat and purse and suitcase and looked around the apartment for a place to put them. My mother held on to the pumpkin. He decided, finally, to stow the purse and suitcase against the wall and drape the coat over a chair as though its owner wouldn't be staying long.

My mother's mouth stretched into a clown smile. "I'm Grandma," she agreed, handing Keith the pumpkin.

"Wow, a large, orange gourd," he said, then added at her frown, "A really great pumpkin." He set it on a table by the door, on top of a week-old stack of mail.

I kissed Isabella's head, avoiding the soft, downy spot that pulsed with her heartbeat. "Isn't she perfect?" I said as I levered myself into a sitting position. My mother stepped toward us, her hands outstretched but her arms close to her body. A child might think she was a monster.

"Let me hold her," she said and then lifted my sleeping daughter from my embrace. "Please."

I clung to the baby. "Wash your hands."

My mother gazed at her fingers as though they were smeared with grime.

"You've been travelling," I reminded her.

Her eyes seemed to turn inward then, and I recognized the look of her listening to a voice from within. Her lips moved soundlessly, and I had to look away. I felt an old pang, double-edged with anger and remorse.

She turned toward her purse. "I'll have a cigarette first."

My mouth dropped open, wordless; Isabella stirred.

"Out," my mother said as though directing herself, walking to the door without her coat. "On the porch."

Keith looked at me as the door closed behind her and the pumpkin wobbled on its

perch. “Oh boy,” he said, shaking his head. “Three days?”

MY MOTHER DECIDED to cook us dinner in the wok, though she had never used one. “This is an interesting pan,” she’d said. Keith had gone out to a class-he was a graduate teaching assistant and had already missed four days-and Isabella lay in her basket on a white cotton pillow my mother had embroidered for her with flowers and rabbits. From my bed, I could hear her tiny sucking movements, and wondered if she was dreaming of my breast.

I lay under the chenille quilt that had been Keith’s grandmother’s, trying to nap. “You should sleep when the baby sleeps,” my mother had instructed as she chopped onions on the kitchen counter, the only parental advice she’d offered so far. It was a good though impractical suggestion. I needed to sleep, but I couldn’t sleep. I hadn’t really slept, it felt, since Isabella’s birth. The closest I’d got was a kind of semi-alert twilight, a drifting state of exhaustion that offered rest but not restoration.

Twilight. That’s what glimmered outside the window, a silvery October dusk that made the world seem small. And twilight seemed to describe the darkening descent of my mother’s condition, a state where it was difficult to see the real shape of things. Her mind was still, for the most part, with us, but as though slightly obscured, in lengthening shadows.

I lay there, wishing for sleep, but also wishing to be drinking tea at the cast-off patio furniture that served as our kitchen table, my mother—a normal mother—across from me, passing on her wisdom and experience, telling me the stories of my own infancy. Instead, I lay alone in my room as she fixed another of her silent meals. It was her way, I knew, of caring for us, for me. The very way, I thought bitterly, that consoled me least. “I’d rather order in Chinese,” I’d told Keith, “or deli sandwiches, than have a mother who cooks good food while listening to voices.”

He had shrugged, half listening to the lament he’d heard from me so many times. “I like your mother’s cooking,” he had said as he leaned to kiss me goodbye. “Isabella will get her first taste of it, what, about four hours after you do.”

I’d smiled. Another first. “I’ll have to pick out the onions.”

Now I propped up on an elbow and listened: my mother was humming in the kitchen. A good sign. I decided to make myself some tea and talk to her. I grabbed a pillow and shuffled out of the bedroom, pausing first to bend over Isabella and listen to her breathe. I bent closer until I thought I could feel the tiniest brush of her breath on my cheek.

In the hall, the smell of frying garlic and onions grew strong, a familiar smell, an appetite-whetting smell, but one that now raised my ire. Had my mother given any thought to the fact that I was nursing and should be eating bland foods? Did she know—or remember—anything about caring for infants? I stopped halfway down the hallway, partly because my stitches ached and my insides felt as though they were about to fall out, partly to compose my emotions. Once again I was close to tears. Hormones, I told myself. I didn’t want to be annoyed with her, though almost everything she did annoyed me. I wanted—what was the phrase the books used—to feel our bond. She was after all my mother and I had just borne her first grandchild. She began to hum a melody I recognized, *Once I had a secret love*. She couldn’t be hearing voices and humming that tune, the song that had always meant she was happy.

She was happy. A warm excitement tingled in me, as though I had been given an unexpected gift. All I wanted at this moment was to be somebody's child and to talk about my own.

My mother hadn't turned on the light in the kitchen, and it was nearly dark, but my eyes were adjusted to the dimness. She didn't turn as I entered the kitchen. She stood at the stove, lowering chunks of breaded chicken into sizzling olive oil, still humming. The oil in the wok was three inches deep.

"What are you doing?" I cried out, startling her. She turned toward me abruptly and dropped the plate of chicken into the wok. Boiling oil spattered up across her left hand.

I screamed.

My mother didn't, but she held out her reddening hand and began to bite her bottom lip.

I rushed to the sink and turned on the cold water. "Quick!" I ordered her. "Get your hand under the water while I get ice."

"Sssh," my mother warned as her face contorted in pain. "You'll wake the baby."

ISABELLA SLEPT AND SLEPT. "Is this normal?" I asked my mother, willing to believe whatever she told me. We were sitting on the porch with the door ajar so we could hear Isabella's cries, but though I sometimes had to strain my ears to be sure, she remained silent. She had been sleeping for four hours.

My mother drew on the cigarette in her right hand; her left hand lay wrapped in ointment and gauze in her lap. "Babies sleep," she answered me. "Be thankful she's a good sleeper." She tilted her chin as she smoked.

"But she's not," I said as I watched a set of headlights turn the corner, hoping they were Keith's. Isabella had been waking up every couple of hours, all night long, since we'd brought her home. Admittedly, that had only been two days ago. The headlights belonged to a giant-tired car with ridiculously high suspension: some townie's.

"This is my last cigarette," my mother said. "Then she'll wake up."

I looked at her, huddled in a creaking lawn chair under the yellow porch light, a miniature moon beneath the half-hidden hunter's moon in the sky. The index finger of her burned hand was tapping out some pattern on her lap.

"How do you know?" I asked, hoping for maternal wisdom—infants under four weeks of age rarely sleep more than four hours at a time—rather than superstition—if I finish this cigarette in three puffs, the baby will wake—or worse.

"Ssh!" my mother lifted a finger to her lips, and I thought she had heard the baby. I leaned my ears toward the door.

"I hear whispers," my mother told me, whispering.

My muscles coiled tight, ready to spring toward the door and my slumbering baby. The baby I knew so little about beyond the fact of the raw, protective love I felt for her. Who was there? I listened but heard nothing beneath the ordinary night sounds of engines and electricity. Fear leapt in me as though pulled by the moon.

"I hear whispering," my mother repeated, rocking in her chair. "And I know who it is."

Like the gas flames on the stove I had rushed to lower earlier, the high, quick heat of my

fear immediately reduced, simmering rather than boiling that familiar stew of anger and incomprehension.

"What?" I asked, clenching my back teeth. "Who?"

My mother crushed out her cigarette against the metal arm of her chair. "If I only smoke when they tell me," she explained, "Isabella will stay safe."

This was the first time she'd said my daughter's name; until now she'd referred to her as "the baby." Another first. I winced. My breasts throbbed tenderly; my milk was coming in.

Keith's car pulled up in front of the house and at that moment I heard Isabella cry. I jumped up, knocking my pillow cushion to the floor, wanting to rush to him, wanting to rush to her. For a second I swayed on my feet, confused.

"I'll get the baby," my mother said, pushing herself up.

"No!" I snapped and rushed past her through the house.

In the dark bedroom, I lifted my daughter to my shoulder, careful to support her heavy, wobbly head. She continued to cry, an insistent, angry sound that I thought was from hunger. I had never heard her wail this way, and part of me was glad, for my breasts burned full. It wasn't until I got to the sofa in the living room, and sat with her beneath the lamplight that I saw the bright red line across her cheek.

Keith followed my mother into the room. "I smell something good," he said. He cupped my shoulder and bent over Isabella. "And I don't mean you, Stinky." He kissed her forehead.

I glared at him. I didn't like this nickname for her he'd begun using. "Look," I said, turning her cheek toward him. "She's scratched herself." I hadn't yet mustered the courage to cut her papery fingernails.

Keith examined Isabella's face as I opened my shirt. I could hear my mother in the kitchen now, opening and closing cupboards. We had agreed to wait until Keith got home to eat her deep-fried wok chicken and vegetables.

Keith frowned, his eyelids lengthening. "She's bleeding," he said. He lifted Isabella's tiny, curled fist. "Her nails are not that sharp."

He was right. My eyes met his, panicking, as Isabella's rose petal mouth latched on to my nipple. Something—or someone?—had hurt her. "But how?" I asked, my stomach rolling into a tight fist. She sucked like an animal.

Keith straightened. "Something in her basket," he said and strode to the bedroom.

Isabella's sucking was painful, a punishment. I knew before Keith returned with it in his hand that it had to be the pillow. He came back carrying it, shaking his head.

"What?" I asked, so tired the blood seemed to have slowed in my veins.

"Look at this," he said, holding up a sewing needle under the lamp, a thin, pale thread dangling from its eye. "Someone left a needle in this pillow. It could have stabbed her eye." His voice trembled with fury.

Someone. My crazy mother. I guess you didn't smoke your cigarettes in the right order, I wanted to say to her. But I looked up and saw her standing in the doorway, her hands clasping a tattered dish cloth to her chest, her eyes so large and liquid they reflected light. And I knew that there would never be a trick to keeping children safe.

Fall 1999

poetry by Elisha Porat

Now in the fall the curlews assemble
In the orchards, and the grey conies
Are already changing their colours, while I
Too rub on my heart the cream
That protects from summer heart, to keep it
Safe on wintry days as well.
And in my room which darkens in the cloudy light
I go up to the wall: I tear off papers,
Pictures and reminders of the last two thousand years.
I stand in front of the empty rack
And once more take a pledge:
No bungling now, you treacherous body,
You have to bear me still
All of me, into the next thousand.

Translated form the Hebrew by Asher Harris

The Train to Montevideo

fiction by Paul Alan Fahey

Uruguay
1985
6:35 a.m.

Eduard heard the shouting in the street. He sat at the breakfast table and studied the objects cluttering the window sill. Two ceramic pots, a red and yellow basket he bought for Maria in that little shop by the Rio de la Plata on a recent trip to town. A framed photograph taken in Mexico of his smiling grandson, a skeleton mask dangling from his hand, the Day of the Dead celebration.

He felt Maria's touch as she bent forward and put her cheek next to his. Maria's fingers lightly caressing Eduard's hair then pulling him close to her, resting her head against his as she stood behind him, whispering all would be well when they both knew it would not be.

With her hair up, she looked as she had the first time he'd noticed her, a school girl of sixteen crossing the Avenida de Julio on an errand for her mother.

Maria poured Eduard's coffee then sat down next to him, her husband of thirty-five years.

"What will you do, *cara mia*?" he asked. "You are much too young. There will be others."

"Wait for you," she said. "What else?"

"But it may be very long. I might not return."

"I will wait."

"Remember when . . . "

Outside the apartment building, they heard a jeep brake to a stop.

Eduard had lived the greater part of his life in this haven. He had been given a second chance, had eluded his enemies and made passage from Vichy to this obscure little town in the mountains of South America. He'd often wondered if there was a forgiving God, but, in his case he did not think so. Only Maria. She had understood and forgiven him, had seen something deep within his soul that others would not.

Voices in the hallway. The sharp military commands more distinct now. Eduard had a vision from the past, a different hallway and different voices, an officer addressing him in an almost forgotten language. "Herr Sturmbannfuhrer," the words keeping pace with the footsteps pursuing their quarry.

Eduard was Commandant then, drafted at a young age into the SS. He had never killed anyone. No, not directly. His job was to contain, keep the status quo. But who would care about these details now? After all this time, after all this terrible history.

Eduard opened the door. He wanted to tell his story to the men in uniform. "I was young then," he could tell them. "How could I disobey my superiors? I did not want to do those things. I am not responsible." But he knew they would not listen.

Maria, framed in the doorway, her hand to her mouth, a hushed scream, the final image before they led him to the car with the engine running.

Eduard was thankful Maria had urged him to wear his heavy coat. It was unusually cold for early September. And these men? Eduard did not blame them. It wasn't their fault. They were only doing their job, following orders as he had once done. And if they didn't hurry, they would be late.

The train to Montevideo was always on time.

Dying Slowly Inside this Dwelling of Weeping Wallpaper

poetry by Aaron LaFlora

As your eyes permeated the lucid secrets that a room dares to disclose,
Did it rekindle cruelly confrontation inside your writer's soul?
And for just a few moments,
While the breath was being suffocated from an abyss within your stomache,
Did a weepy aching body struggle to hunt for an open space—
Any space other than within the confines of these walls?
Even though the barricades before you be of my very own,
Your acuity reminisced the intensity inlaying restrictions of such do give as
The walls—
The barriers that vow
"Till death us do part" have adorned my prison with feigned smiling photographs,
And no one ever dares nor really cares to inquire or even presume what occurs
To "the couple" subsisting within them.
But you—
You,

Whom I have carelessly allowed access,
Must never divulge what secret cruelties linger within my walls.
And I—
I
Will once again cower inaudibly to a silent world of screaming pain,
My body numbed from the lack of tears and
My soul wracked from the smiles within the photographs of a disparate time,
When life was calmer,
And spouses responses more benign,
And my body seemed prettier enough to be told so.
I must expend the tears I have conserved
To re-paper the ominous walls once again,
So never
To anyone
Will they give up their secrets.

The Finnish Forest

fiction by Kathryn Rantala

It had blue eyes. That was all she could say about him. She thought him a tree, his arms the branches of it, his beard the leaves. She did not see his private parts because of the leaves, the beard, which layered down to the ground, trailing off to where the squirrels had curled and gone to sleep in it, their tails over their faces. She did not notice he was a man. She thought him a tree, a tree with blue eyes, rooted there, with squirrels.

She built her home next to the tree, built it herself with timbers shaved by herself and notched by herself, timbers resting against each other. She packed the open areas with mud and whatever she found, made a fire inside above which to cook, in front of which to warm, beside which to coax her fears and penitence to lie down. Her husband was gone, a Russian. There had never been a house, not their own, had never been a moment when she did not think but would not say, "you are a Russian."

It was a long time ago when she moved there, when he was gone, when she built the little house by herself. The trees were thick in that section, a section with not too little water, not too much; a section sufficient in itself. The bible had gone for fire in winter, the icons, the old chair, everything but the wool sweater, the braided rug.

She said that the trees were thick in that section. Even when the season was not dark, it was dark. She said there was hardly any sky to be seen. She built next to the tree with the flowing leaves and the squirrels because of the blue in it like sky, because it had blue eyes, she said.

EVERYWHERE A LAKE, that's what they said about that place. They said that everywhere you went there was a lake. There was a census for lakes, a census for trees. They wanted to know the deep of the country provided by lakes, the tall of it provided by trees. Everywhere a lake, they said, a lake and trees. They liked knowing how many there were, how many were in that place.

THE WOMAN UNDERSTOOD THINGS, took pride in order, in logic, so was at a loss to explain when her sister was found in the lake, under an overhang, sound asleep underwater with no shoes. She saw the feet first and brought her out as she would any person found under water, and was astonished that this person was her sister, whom she knew to be dead already, and

cremated.

When she brought her out of the water her sister stayed sitting at a slant, her ankles crossed, her arms slack in her lap, leaning, as if against something. After a few minutes, her sister opened her eyes, slowly, looking around, water beading in her lashes, on her skin. She saw the woman, looked at her a moment as she might a tax official, a census taker, her eyes dull, disinterested, and said, twisting on her ring finger, "take this away."

The woman thought then and again later, every time she thought of it, which was often, that her sister came back without beauty or wit, with dull, disinterested eyes. Why would she do that, why would she ask for trouble? Later, no matter how much later, every time, she would not understand why she came back at all, if just to be this: less.

"Okay," she said about the ring and took it. The obligation of the ring, the homelessness of it, burdened without inspiration. It made her feel that neither of them, from then on, could grow very much, just for having had the burden of it.

SHE BUILT NEXT TO ME, next to my branches and layered, flowing leaves, next to the parts of me she did not see, because of the blue in my eyes, because I have blue eyes, she said.

Once I was a Russian, and then for a time I wasn't and then for a time I was, and then, for a longer time, I wasn't. I went into the forest one day when I was not anything in particular but everything I am. I walked in it and around it and through it and across it, on every inch of it, among every green and most green and some green and every brown and most brown and some brown, and finally stopped in this small space I have been in before, this place where for no reason in particular I stopped. There was room enough for me, the branches of me, my leaves, the small forest animals, a small house, if someone were to build one. I stood in this place for a long time until I no longer noticed I was a man.

She said she thought my arms were the branches of a tree, my beard the leaves, she said. She built next to me. She did not see my private parts because of the leaves, the beard, which layered down to the ground, trailing off to where the squirrels had curled and gone to sleep in it, their tails over their faces. I could not turn to see her eyes, her parts, the smoke I smelled from the cooking, warming, calming fire. I could not turn and see her home in the woods. But after a while, after a long while, under the spread of me, lower, under the place where I stopped, lower than the layered leaves, the curled and sleeping forest animals, I felt the sightless tendrils of her weave the earth aside; felt the finest spaces forming out for roots, felt the spread of her among, the brush of her along, my roots; deep down felt the forest of her, the reach she made within me in this place to find the waters and the things we need.

Beans with tabasco for breakfast

poetry by Moshe Benarroch

I sat to drink an espresso
a morning of hamssim desert winds
and near me sat a known poet
less famous than me, though
and he was speaking with an intellectual
or a man from the T.V. or the radio
they were speaking about ars poetica
about ethos pathos and epos
and science and education and
the mixing of cultures and the integration of cultures
in a very ashkenazi language
and I asked myself
what the hell do these people eat for breakfast
red beans with tabasco?
and I consoled myself that I don't have such kind of friends.
anyway
they completely spoilt the taste
of the coffee.

My First Story

fiction by Elisha Porat

I

That summer, a few days after I was demobbed, I had a very strange experience. One afternoon I had a sudden urge to take an old school exercise book and a large yellow pencil out of one of the boxes in which I kept my few belongings. I didn't yet have a permanent room in the kibbutz, and I was constantly moved from one old hut to another. Once I was condemned to a room that was narrow and dirty, and once I found myself in a room where the floor tiles were sparkling but the walls were cracked and there were no windows. Another time I awoke in a strange room filled with a stinking pile of mattresses among the decaying huts of the Nachal unit.

I used to get up for work in the sheepfold while it was still night. The sand paths were still damp, and the snail tracks clearly marked. I would spend the day working hard in the humid heat, burrowing away in the manure and absorbing deep into my skin the sharp smell of sheep which never wore off. In the afternoon I would wake up from a steaming sleep, soaked in sweat, lying between the sheets and thinking of my young life. Between one duty and the next, between one awakening and the next, there is always a time when the soul flutters here and there, searching for its future. But I was so eager to know what my life held in store and at the same time so caught up in the pressing details of the present that I never even managed to plan one step ahead. Everything that happened took me by surprise and nothing was done out of choice, and yet everything was so expected and so natural that I couldn't even imagine that beyond the steaming horizon there might be a different life, close enough to touch.

After stretching out this sweet interlude as long as I could, slowly waking up out of a fantasy dream full of memories of my recent army service and full of strange visions of the future, I got up and left the hut. Beyond the hut encampment, just behind the walls, there was an abandoned plantation of subtropical fruit trees, guavas that had ceased to bear fruit, worm-ridden pomegranates and a few loquat trees whose leaves had withered. I spent many hours in that forsaken garden when I felt weak and drained, examining the veins of the leaves and the peeling trunks, looking at the clusters of white snails packed together in the upper branches. In the silence that reigned after the overpowering bleating of the sheep, I imagined hearing voices

calling me and directing me to my new path. My whole body was taut. I strained my ears to their utmost. I climbed up to the tops of the trees to shorten the distance to those uppermost regions. But I heard nothing, and I had to come down and beat a path through the dry thorns out of the plantation and search for what I so needed somewhere else.

There was nobody waiting for me in the whole, wide world. I had done my duty. I had completed my stint and felt free to wander half the night. On the other side of the hill the kibbutz hummed with life. Mothers called their children with long-drawn-out cries whose echoes could be heard all over the green fields. Those days I had already begun to ask myself those questions that trouble me still today: Does my young life have any meaning? Why do I drift aimlessly from hut to hut? Who is it that directs my life in such a way that I wake up to the stinking breath of sheep? Is this a test that I have to go through? And what comes after, after I have passed through each of its difficult stages?

This habit of asking myself questions about my life while I wander along the paths and by the hedges hasn't left me. And eventually, as usual, I find myself in the small, leaf-covered plot of the cemetery. I have already written elsewhere that our cemetery is outside reality. It is outside space, for its surroundings are neither dwellings nor garage, but a beaten down piece of ground that preserves the place as it used to be years ago. I have also written elsewhere that our cemetery is outside time, for what meaning can there be here to the passage of the hours? What does it matter if it is now late afternoon? And what if the wind that rustles through the branches soon dies and gives way to the waves of croaking that rise from the swamp, from the thousands of frogs that will soon come out to hunt mosquitoes?

I sat down on a mound of sand. The cool sand penetrated my clothes and touched my skin. If there is one memory that I cherish, it is the touch of sand on my bare skin. When I move my leg about in the tunnels of the ant-eating insects, the grains of sand slide out of the holes and along my muscles, get caught for a moment between the hairs and continue to slide as far as the delicate folds. I was beginning to consider letting myself fall a prey to that kind of self-pity I enjoyed so much. I would fix my eyes on the sun sinking into the not-so-distant sea and abandon myself wholly to daydreams, an almost unchanging series of yearnings, each one leading to another. A parade of longings would arrange itself in my head and step out on its tireless march.

But all at once something slipped. A figure stole into the shadows of the cemetery trees. I heard footsteps and then the farm sounds of water rushing through pipes and the short tap-tap of the prongs of a rake on gravel. And suddenly time stood still and it was as if my whole being burst out of the sand and out of the earth itself like some shining balloon. I began to hover between the slowly darkening sky and the lengthening shadows on earth. Everything came to a halt. The yearnings disappeared and I had the strange feeling that I might be vouchsafed a rare glimpse into my future life. Deep inside me I felt a thrill of excitement. It was as if someone had promised me that a small window would now be thrown open, and through it my life would run as if on a screen. In my ears there were voices which I imagined were telling me the longed-for story of my life. It was as if someone were measuring out the years of my labour, distinguishing between one job and another, permitting and forbidding and offering advice. All I had to do was give myself over to the sweet sounds and not allow myself to think that I agreed to it all.

Nor in fact was I terribly surprised since I had long hoped for some such illumination. When I was still walking along the thorny path between the withered guava trees, I guessed that I was approaching a joyous revelation such as this. I was already on my feet, shaking the sand from my trousers, and hurrying barefoot towards my suffocating hut, to the old exercise book and the thick pencil. I remember:

On the unmade bed, in the cloud of sour stench, dripping sweat onto the exercise book and dampening its pages, I began to write with the stupid feeling that I had to record for posterity the wonderful vision I had just seen. I was in such a hurry not to forget anything and not to mix up the details that the pencil tore the pages, but I took no notice. I turned the pages without stopping, panting with passion as I wrote down everything about the strange incident that had happened to me, the figure that had stolen into the cemetery, the hands that had carried out the holy task, watering the plants and raking the leaves and cleaning up around the tombstone. And there was a kind of insubstantiality about the whole incident, as if the figure had no name and as if I did not know her, and as if I didn't exactly know who she was or what she was doing here now at this disconnected moment.

I threw myself into writing until darkness filled the room and I had to stop. When I got up to put on the light, it seemed as if I had written all there was to write.

I felt I was slowly being drained of the extreme tension that had held me. Afterwards I took the exercise book in my hands and wondered at how I could have written so fast and what actually was lying there between the pages. I was sweating terribly and went outside to get some fresh air. One of my friends was already getting ready to go to the dining-room for supper. While I was writing I had been so detached from time that I did not realize how late it was getting. Whistles and shouts began to echo between the rotting huts, while a wonderful feeling of liberation came over me, a great lightness of my whole body. I threw the exercise book on to the bed and flung the pencil at the wall. I joined my friends and, hopping on one leg, I went with them to the dining-room.

II

In the same way I sent the story to the editor of the literary quarterly. I found the quarterly, which was then a new publication, in the magazine reading room on the top storey of the Cultural Centre of the kibbutz. After the exhausting night milkings, I used to go into the empty room, turn on the lights, sit by the window and lose myself completely in reading the magazine. Fellows of my age, who had just been released from military service, used to publish poems and marvellous maiden stories.

Their way was already laid out before them. Somebody pushed them and somebody else pulled them, and they wouldn't have to wait like me until they couldn't deny their writing. They wouldn't spend ten years in silence, eating themselves up, maddeningly distancing themselves from what they really had to do.

I don't remember any more whether I copied out the story once or twice. Be that as it may, it was that same old exercise book and clumsy engraving pencil that I used. I gave the pages to our post office clerk and together we arranged the rebellious leaves in a brown envelope.

Are you sure this is the correct address? she asked me. Are you sure there is an address like this in Tel Aviv?

Yes, yes, I answered hastily. I turned pale and began to sweat and my pulse raced. The whole business was not very pleasant. It didn't suit people whose destiny was to work until they dropped. What a strange occupation, out of the ordinary! And just you wait, I said to myself, wait until it gets around in the kibbutz. I quickly forgot the whole thing and put my writing out of my mind. I immersed myself in hard work and in the details of the daily routine.

With whom could I share my distress? My co-workers with the flock were occupied with the sheep, and on their free evenings they would roast lambs meat, drink beer and make pigs of themselves. The other youngsters in the kibbutz were immersed in their jobs, their girl-friends and the modern machinery. I, on the other hand, felt wonderful music around me and wonders that were about to take place, while the world looked new from moment to moment. I sensed from afar that there was a different world which was destined for me as I was destined for it, but in the meantime I was a prisoner in the rat race. As a matter of fact, I wasn't unhappy with the situation. Somebody would have to appear from nowhere and drag me by my coattails until I realized that my time was getting short. If it didn't happen soon, I would never be able to join the chorus whose fresh voices I heard as I excitedly leafed through the pages of the literary quarterly.

Only our experienced librarian seemed to suspect me of something. Although he was always grumbling and complaining, he had a particular soft spot for me. After I had overcome the hurdles he used to place in the way of the readers, I could feel a kind of unspoken invitation. “Not everyone can be a reader, a genuine reader,” as if he was trying to hint, “You have to exert yourself in order to ascend the ladder of reading.” He used to hum old tunes to himself while bent over his files and shoot annoying questions at the tormented readers. “Why do you need to read, anyway? Isn't the newspaper enough? Anyway, who said that there was such an author whose books you insist on reading? In any case, it's much more interesting outside. They're building the kibbutz, fighting wars. Why do you have to squeeze yourself into this miserable library where you can't even find a decent catalogue?”

But I couldn't suddenly open up, blushing with sudden shyness, and tell him of my attempts at writing. He would have asked me, “Why do you have to write yourself? Have you read everything that others have written? Who told you that what you have written hasn't already been written by better writers than you? And anyway, there's more than just a little bit of audacity in what you're doing. Who are you altogether? Here are all the works of Y. H. Brenner, have you read them? Have you seen the stories of A. N. Gnossin? Have you spared a glance at the volume of new poems by Avraham Shlonsky yet?”

But I knew that there was no way I could reveal my deepest thoughts to him. For even if he knew more than others, and even though he loved books to distraction, he would not be able to understand my little melody.

In this way three weeks went by. Actually, I didn't even expect an answer. The sudden fit of writing passed and I returned almost to routine. What I had experienced at the time of writing had already quieted down, and if annoying afterthoughts arose, I silenced them. I didn't go by the cemetery again, and I tried not to remember that unique picture of the small figure stealing in to look after the tombstone. I also made an effort not to resurrect the moment of

illumination that had compelled me a with a power that was completely new to me. I had learned my lesson and taken the hint. But I had no power to change the rest. I didn't even dare to imagine that there might be groups of budding poets in the big city, and that I, if I only wanted, might be able to join them, and that everywhere, young men, beginning writers, were pressed against bookshelves. The post office clerk met me in the burning hot dining-room at midday, between one milking and the next.

"You've got an answer from Tel Aviv," she said, and since it was a big envelope, I was invited to the post office to collect it myself. Puzzled, I followed her. What was the meaning of the large envelope? Anyway, who had expected an answer from the editor of the quarterly? In fact, what did I have to do with all that remote and forgotten business?

We went into the post office and she handed me the envelope. After she closed the door behind her, she asked, "Have you told your father yet?"

"What about?" I asked her. "What do I have to tell him about?"

"About this envelope," the post office clerk said. "And about your first stories." Without waiting for an answer, she turned and went off. I looked for a hidden corner where I could be alone with the editor's answer. I ran down the hill to my little, isolated hut, closed the door firmly behind me and opened the envelope.

Pages of my old exercise book fluttered out of it. I recognized my hasty handwriting immediately and my wild pressure on the pencil. Then, when I shook the envelope, a piece of office paper with the name of the quarterly printed on it fell out as well. My young heart began to beat and I sat down on my pallet and began to read.

It wasn't the editor himself who had answered but his assistant, the secretary of the editorial board. "Since the editor is busy and cannot read all the material that arrives …" and then, "It is obvious that this is your first story. There is a great deal of your soul's outpouring and many important sentences. I am sorry to say, however, that this is not enough. You have much to say but you do not yet have your own poetic language, etc. etc." After that she continued, "Why don't we wait a bit, we, the editors, and you at your table, say another year or two, until you produce a more satisfactory piece of literature? What do you think?" And finally, "You should know that we have done you a personal favour by taking the trouble to read your jumbled handwriting, and in pencil, too! Something we haven't come across in our literary tower for years! In the future, if you want anybody to take the trouble to look at your manuscript, please be so good as to type it out on a typewriter as they all do! Now we are sending you your manuscript back even though you didn't enclose a stamped, addressed envelope as required. Yours faithfully, Signature, Secretary to the Editorial Board."

Stunned, I began to search around me, in the boxes and the crates, for a box of matches. I threw things aside and dropped all kinds of articles on the floor but I couldn't find any matches. I grabbed the packet of papers and ran to the guava thicket. There, above the main sewage pump of the kibbutz, I bent down over the wire grating and tore the pages into little pieces and furiously threw them, together with the letter from the assistant editor, into the powerful, swirling current of the sewage water. I stayed there, bent over the grating, till the very last piece of paper disappeared, and then I sat down panting on the concrete wall, so upset that I didn't even notice the horrible stench.

III

When I went to my parents' room in the evening, my father was sitting at his large desk, as was his practice these last few years. The desk was piled high with dictionaries and lexicons, and other books, which he was translating, lying open. He was leafing through a Russian booklet and said, "Sit down and make yourself a cup of tea. Mom isn't back yet but I'll gladly join you."

While I was busy at the sink making the tea, Dad said from his desk, "So you've started to write, eh? Why all the secrecy? Why the mystery? The post office clerk told me something. What did you write, a poem or a story?"

"Something not fully worked out," I said casually, not wanting to continue the conversation which had suddenly become too revealing. Sometimes, when my father opened up because he was excited, he used to tell me about new words he had found in the course of his translation work. He would marvel at an excellent story he had come across by chance in a foreign language journal. He would praise a young author nobody had yet heard about.

"Writing is a serious business," Dad said, "and it can't be done just like that, at the drop of a hat, between the night milking and taking the sheep out to pasture."

The post office clerk really annoyed me. Who asked her to report on every letter that went out? What's it got to do with her if this was my first attempt? And anyway, who gave her permission to report to my father and scrutinize everything I did? I poured out the tea, set the cups on saucers and didn't answer.

"Where shall I put your tea?" I asked, coming to the desk. There was a thick volume of Mishpat Haurim lying there and I spilt a few drops of boiling tea on Isaiah Steinberg.

"Never mind," Dad said, "You have to know how to pour out tea, as well. And for some reason or other I thought you, too, wanted to be a volleyball player."

My brother played volleyball on the kibbutz team. He was an outstanding player, and when Dad could get away from his desk, he took a lot of pride in his son.

"If not a player then in charge of the sheep, or work rota organizer, or even farm manager. Why not? These are also important things for a lad of your age."

We sat and drank tea. Dad put down the Russian booklet, took off his glasses and gave me a strange look, as if we had were meeting again after a long absence.

"Have you brought the manuscript with you? Give it to me and we'll have a look."

"No," I said. "It was a ridiculous effort and its not worth talking about. Anyway, I got rid of it myself."

"You threw it away?" Dad cried out in amazement. "Didn't you leave yourself a single copy?"

"No," I said. "I don't need a copy."

"But maybe I need a copy," Dad burst out. "Don't get into bad habits. It's about time you began to cultivate correct working habits."

I looked at the Midrashim that were always to be found on Dad's desk and the books of commentaries with papers stuck in between the pages and his dog-eared black Bible. Even though I had made one small, abortive effort, that doesn't make me a writer, and even though I had caught a glimpse of distant places, the night milking still waited. And even though the time would come for me to choose between different worlds, that time was still a long way off,

hidden away in the folds of the long years that were still to come. Why should I bother with it now? The time that waited for me in the pastures, or chained to the little milking stool or in the dust of the feed that rose from the milking stalls seemed long, infinite, immeasurable.

Dad tried to approach me in a different, gentle way. He might succeed by placating me instead of rubbing me up the wrong way by being too straightforward.

“Why don't you try to write out the story again? You must surely remember most of it. Words are not so easily forgotten. Do it for me. I only want to glance at it. In any case, it's better to make a number of versions. There's always room for further polishing.”

I thought I might have left the first draft in the hut. I had impetuously torn the pages out of the exercise book so maybe they were still there if they hadn't been blown away by the afternoon breeze that swept up between the rotten floorboards. Suddenly we were closer, almost against my will. The cup of tea, his gentle manner, my surprising story. All right, not all the sons of immigrants will be volleyball players. They may be stronger and taller than their parents but, who knows, some of them may be drawn to the world of books.

“Have you read Chekhov's *The Woman with the Puppy*?” Dad asked.

When I was a boy I used to devour well-known authors according to the rows of their books in the library. How many volumes did Dostoievsky write? I took them all in one lot and read them one after the other. How many of Thomas Mann's books had been translated? I swallowed them all. And so on, according to time and place and the recommendations of my girlfriends who were great readers.

“Yes,” I said. “I've read a bit of Chekhov.”

“Excellent,” said Dad. “In that case you will understand what I want to say. Do you remember the frivolous officer and the bored lady? Do you remember the amusing game they played as if it were just to pass the time and enjoy a chance meeting? Then suddenly, in a flash, almost without them realizing it, everything turned upside down. She fell deeply in love with him and he knew he couldn't live without her. You see, that's the genuine Chekhov. He leads you, as it were, up the garden path. He tells you a slight tale about a small platform at a station in a summer resort, a most enjoyable cruise on a river boat during a southern summer, and suddenly you know, almost at the same time as the characters themselves, that the lives of both of them have become dependent on that small adventure. I call that, Chekhov's point of reversal, and you can follow it in every single tale that that wonderful story-teller wrote.”

I listened to my Dad. It was a long time since we had had such an intimate conversation. But inside I thought, “What have I got to do with Chekhov? What are his be-hatted ladies to me? What have I got to do with his painful point of reversal?” All I wanted to recall was one moment of illumination in the cemetery wood after a fantasy dream, and to respond to a secret invitation that was sent to me. I didn't want to waste time but to write everything I had felt inside and everything I had seen outside. What kind of literature would sprout from that? I had certainly exaggerated in my description of the trees, the leaves, the ground. I had gone overboard in picturing the rake, the hosepipe, the hand that was stretched out to tidy up. But they had been no less important to me at that moment than the nameless but familiar figure that in total concentration and disregard had been so absorbed in some kind of ritual that riveted my attention.

Meanwhile, Dad continued on his own track, “And here, in this excellent Russian

booklet, some scholar has published a wonderful article on Chekhov. Never mind the point of reversal, that's an old discovery. Just listen to this original idea," and he began to translate straight from the text:

"Chekhov the story-teller has a wonderful quality, the quality of surprise. You never know where his sentence is gong to lead. You never know how his characters will behave. Will they sink into despair, will they quickly board the showboat, will they disappear in the accelerating railway carriage?"

Dad put the booklet down. He could have gone on reading to me for a long time, but he noticed that inside I was moving further and further away. "This world," he said, "the world of writing is full and mighty, and if you want to enter, at least know what you are letting yourself in for."

My visiting hour was nearly over. I stood up and began to get ready to go. I gathered the cups and saucers and put the spoons in the sink.

"I would very much like to read the story," Dad said before I left.

"Okay. I'll check in the hut and see if maybe some of the pages are left."

When I left my parents' room, the old questions tortured me. Is this really what my life is going to be like? Piles of books and bits of paper stuck in the pages to mark the place? Booklets thrown about in every cranny with tea stains printed on them? Translated paper chases after Chekhov's surprised characters? What kind of a paralysed life is this? It's a barren life. Where are all the promises of the colourful lives of writers? Where is all the pleasure, the power, the wisdom? Is this really what my life will be like if I join the vibrant chorus of the journals?

On the way to my bed in the rotting hut, at the edge of the abandoned guava plantation, I heard a host of voices out of the night. A whole world of living creatures was noisily active under cover of the darkness, and from afar, out of the jumble of sounds, I could also make out the bleating of the sheep waiting for milking time.

IV

Today, sitting at my desk, which is covered with open books with bits of paper between the pages marking the place, I am trying to remember without getting things wrong. Many years have passed since those distant days, and when I fall into the act of remembering, it is difficult to guess where it will lead me.

Did I respond to Dad's request and bring him the rough copy of my confused story? Did I, in fact, find the pages of my first draft?

"With an ordinary pencil, just like that, straight on to the paper?" Dad exclaimed. "It's a long time since I saw such a primitive job."

It's hard to remember. A hurried visit to my parents' room. As I come in, Dad puts his glasses up on his high forehead. "Well, did you find it? Give it to me. We'll read it."

I hastily drop the handful of papers on his desk, cutting the affair as short as possible, hardening my heart, trying to make the whole thing seem completely trivial.

"Oh, really. It's not important. I'm in a terrible hurry. You can put the pages in order yourself, and if one or two are missing, it doesn't really matter. You can make it up. The most

important thing is that I'm in an awful hurry. Tomorrow we're taking the sheep to the beach for their annual wash. I'm sure I won't sleep at night and we'll come back all burnt. See you!"

Did my Dad hear these last few sentences that I threw him, or was he already immersed in reading, bent over the pages, holding them to the light and gripping them as if they were some tool? Did he answer me, or was it his usual humming, telling me that he was already far away? For even if he had heard my question, and even if he had had more than one answer, he was already well on his way to another place. Did he say "Bye, bye!" and add a mild threat, "Wait a minute till I finish reading and then well talk" Or perhaps he asked whether it was true that they had returned my manuscript, and wasn't that just like them. Was it so immature that it set the teeth on edge, or had the editors just been too idle to read the untidy pages, scratched with a hard pencil and permeated with the smell of sour milk and yard manure?

That Saturday, at the table for the afternoon snack, when all the family was gathered on the veranda of my parents' room, Dad took the pages out of an envelope, put them in front of him and said:

"Your awful Hebrew, and where did you dredge up such incorrect sentences, and why were you so hasty in your descriptions? Where are you running, man?"

With that he turned the family meal into a whole lesson on the study of writing. As he turned over the pages, I was shocked. The whole lot was completely covered with his corrections in red ink, literally poured into the indentations of my pencil.

"I read everything," Dad said, "and not like the editors of the quarterly read it in Tel Aviv. Then, when I finished reading it, I read it again, and a third time. Wow, what a lot you still have to learn!"

And I sat in front of the pages and didn't recognize what I had written. Where had all the crossings out sprouted from? Where had all the commas and question marks appeared from to stain the pages?

All I had tried to do was bring back to life an elusive sight, a shadow that stole away, a breath of wind. I had no intentions of creating literature. The only reason I had rushed and pushed to send it away to the journal was because I also wanted to be among the intrepid of my generation, who had only just taken off their uniforms and were already the neophyte poets, those whose poems were recited at night by young girls, their blouses dripping with slim volumes of poetry.

"Once," Dad said, "Faustovsky went to visit the famous writer, Maxim Gorky. He placed his first few stories in front of Gorky who read them and gave his opinion. Go away, young man, and live among people for ten years, and after that, write. Then and only then, come back to me and bring what you have written."

Was it because of Dads' words on the veranda that evening towards the end of summer, when my story, slaughtered and bleeding, lay on the family table, that I was silent for ten years? Was he too severe in his criticism of me? Today, from the distance of years, I ask myself whether a childish desire for revenge wasn't born on that occasion. Was that the reason I turned away from my notebooks for so many years? Was it because of the memory of that conversation and those pages that I buried myself in the dusty fleeces, the hooves of the sweating sheep and the smelly piles of animal feed?

After Dad died, Mom asked me to go through the carton of papers he had left. I pulled a

bundle of papers from among the cardboard files and when I began to read I was amazed . It was a short note of his in memory of his mother. Corrections in red ink, obviously added in a fit of fury, criss-crossed the typewritten lines. Not a word was spared, not a line had escaped unmarked. The margins were full of endless alternatives and suggestions. I put down the papers and distant scenes suddenly flooded over me. On the table, between the cups of coffee and slices of toast, lay my first story, scarred with the red lines of Dad's pen.

"You know how hard he was on himself," Mom said, as if she had read my thoughts.

"Yes," I said. "He was hard on me, as well."

"Not really," Mom said. "I remember how pleased he was when your first stories began to appear in the newspaper."

"True. But what did he really think? He was never completely satisfied."

"Silly boy," Mom said. "You have no idea with what love he followed your career. He felt that you were writing during all those years when you hid everything from us. He guessed that you were going through a new stage even when you denied everything. You were so closed up it was impossible to get a word out of you."

"That's not quite true," I said. "You don't remember any more. Have you forgotten how much he wanted me to be a volleyball player?"

"Ha! Don't I just remember!" Mom said. "And I will never forget how afraid he was that you might fail. How he worried that someone would turn you off and he wouldn't be there by your side to encourage you."

Dad died about a year before the war, and after the war broke out I couldn't contain the writing inside myself. In the end I let the stories burst out. A few years later some editor or other suggested that I prepare a collection of stories.

"You already have some good bricks with which to start the building," he wrote.

At first I didn't want to listen. A book? Who needs a book? Aren't the stories good enough on their own? Still, I listened to a voice inside me, sat down and chose the stories for the book. Dad never saw my first book, but his photograph, which always stands on my desk, went with me while I worked. Was he with me during all those difficult hours of organizing? Did he raise his finger to warn me of the haste that mars, of faulty language, of feeble characters? Did he tell me about Chekhov's points of reversal and his surprises, which are the soul of short stories?

Did he ask me how I had spent my ten years of silence?

"Silly boy!" I can still hear Mom's words echoing in my ears. "You have no idea what a stubborn mule you were, or how much he tried to get close to you in his last few years. What a shame that he never lived to see your book."

Now, when I remember that crazy moment on the sandhill at the edge of the cemetery, and how the editor's secretary made a fool of me, and how I crouched down over the grating of the sewage pump, and how my story lay in front of me, pierced and reddened by Dad's strict pen, I begin to realize how close I was to stumbling that summer when I wrote my first story.

Translated from the Hebrew by Asher Harris

Contributors

Moshe Benarroch ("Mothers and poets" and "Beans with tabasco for breakfast") has published two collections of poetry in English: *Horses and other doubts* and *You walk on the land until one day the land walks on you*, both available from Amazon, Borders, and Barnes and Noble. He was born in Morocco and lives in Israel. He writes in three languages, Hebrew, Spanish, and English, and his poetry has been published in hundreds of magazines worldwide. He was the featured poet in the international Austin poetry festival, 1999 and in poetrymagazine.com (July 2000) and has read his poetry in Israel, Spain, and the US.

Steve Brazzell ("The Cheap Urn" and "To My Best Friend") is an independent software developer who lives in Buford, Georgia with his wife Daffney and their five daughters. While primarily viewing his writing as "personal therapy", he has had poems published in *Writer Online* and the combination Internet and print magazine *The Wicked*.

Terry DeHart ("A Small Victory") lives in the San Francisco Bay area with his wife and two daughters. He works as a technical writer at NASA Ames Research Center. His stories have been published in *bananafish* and *Vestal Review*, and are forthcoming in *In Posse Review* and *Blue Murder*. Mr. DeHart has won or placed in a variety of writing contests, and was nominated for a Pushcart Prize in 1998. He is currently working on his first novel.

Paul Alan Fahey ("The Train to Montevideo") is a learning disabilities specialist at Allan Hancock College in Santa Maria, California. In addition, he edits the new annual college literary journal of short fiction and memoir, *Mindprints*. A prizewinning short story writer, Mr. Fahey's work has appeared in *Potpourri*, *My Legacy*, *Artisan*, and, most recently, *Furious Pen* and *Vestal Review*.

Mark Halperin ("Returns") teaches in the English Department at Central Washington University and has taught in Japan and a number of times in Russia, where he has been a Fulbright lecturer and an exchange professor in Moscow and St. Petersburg. He is the author or three volumes of poetry including *The Measure of Islands* from Wesleyan University Press. A new book of his poetry, *Time as Distance*, is due out from New Issues Press (Western Michigan University). In addition to his poetry and prose, he has published translations of Soviet period and Russian authors.

Aaron LaFlora ("Dying Slowly") has had poems featured at various poetry webzines including *The Rainbow News*, *Poet's Corner*, *Poetry By Definition*, and *Cafe Poetry*, where she was awarded the Silver Quill Poet of the Day award. She is currently seeking a publisher for *The Manila Envelope*, a collection of poetry. Ms. LaFlora, a literary liaison, lives with many "animal children" and enjoys playing the saxophone, guitar, piano and, when

the weather is kind, riding her bicycle as much as possible.

Peter Malone ("Time and Again"), a native of New York City and an exhibiting artist since 1982, has been included in group shows at Grace Borgenicht Gallery, Gallery Henoch, the National Academy of Design, the Hudson River Museum, the Laguna-Gloria Art Museum, and will be featured in his second solo exhibition at the Southern Vermont Arts Center, Manchester, Vermont this August. He is currently serving as Gallery Director at Kingsborough Community College in the City University of New York.

J.P. Maney ("Western Exposures") has published in *Troika, Confrontation, Green Mountains Review, American Fiction, Quarterly West, Apalachee Review, The Bridge,* and many other magazines. He has co-edited four anthologies of fiction, including *Best of the West* and *A Celestial Omnibus: Short Fiction on Faith,* now in its third edition. Mr. Maney is a graduate of the Iowa Writers' Workshop and holds a Ph.D. in English. He is currently working on *The Other Country,* a novel about the kidnapping of freedmen in New York State, their sale in slavery and subsequent rescue.

Lad Moore ("The Leapfrogging Pool") is a former printing executive who operates a small farm in East Texas. He enjoys more than a hundred publishing credits and is currently completing his memoir, *Firefly Rides*. A second work in progress, *Offspring of the Tiger*, chronicles his distanced relationship with his father, one of the storied Flying Tigers of WWII.

Mike Plumbley ("Vapour Trails"), a native of Newport, Isle of Wight is the co-author of *Isle of Wight Rock – A music anthology* (1995), self-produced with friends Vic King and Pete Turner. The book sold out its 1,000 print run and the trio released a companion CD, *Vaguely Sunny*, in May of 2000. This is his third appearance in TPR.

Elisha Porat (Featured Contributor) is a veteran of three of Israel's wars for independence and of the publishing gauntlet, having published 17 books of poetry and prose in Hebrew since 1973. In 1996, he was awarded the Levi Eshkol Prime Minister Prize for Literature. His book *The Messiah of LaGuardia,* translated by Alan Sacks, is available in English from Mosaic Press.

Kathryn Rantala ("The Finnish Forest") has published poetry and prose in *The Oregon Review, 3rd Bed, The Melic Review, Elimae, Painted Bride Quarterly, Connecticut River Review,* and others. A collection of prose and poetry, *Missing Pieces*, was published by Ocean View Press in 1999, following, by some years, a poetry chapbook, *The Dark Man*, from Longhouse Press, Seattle. She is a Seattle native and the founder and current co-editor of the semi-annual print journal of poetry and short prose, *Snow Monkey*.

David Ritchie ("A Question") has published in many on-line and print journals including: *The Animist* (Australia), *Niederngasse* (Switzerland), *still* (UK), *Serpentine*, *Parnassus Literary Journal, Piedmont Literary Review*, *Short Stories Magazine*, and was the blue ribbon winner for poetry with the Southern Poets Association. He has been an active proponent of poetry through teaching and public performances for many years in the Seattle area. He is the editor of *The Blue Water Journal* and past poetry editor of two online magazines. He resides in the San Juan Islands with his wife and his one-eyed cat, Mister.

Vanitha Sankaran ("Reflection on a Hard Shell") is a scientist by day and a writer by evenings, nights, and

other moments snatched at whim. Her current work can be seen in recent issues of *Prose Ax* and *The Independent Mind*. "Reflection on a Hard Shell" is part of a collection of linked short pieces she is currently writing.

Maryanne Stahl ("Twilight") is a writer and folk artist who lives on a lake in metro Atlanta with her husband, son, dog, cats, ducks and other wild creatures. She has recently published stories in *Sunscripts, Snow Monkey, Mindkites, Vestal Review, Gargoyle,* and *Salon*. Her first novel, *Forgive the Moon,* will be published by New American Library (Penguin-Putnam) next year.

Scott Whitaker ("Tobacco Tax") received his master's degree at Boston University. Currently, he teaches high school and college English in rural Virginia. His poems have appeared in a variety of magazines including *Fresh Ground, PIF Magazine, The Wayne Literary Review* and the *Neiderngasse Review*, among others.

Endnotes

Mark Halperin (Current Issue) is looking forward to the spring publication of a new book of poetry, *Time as Distance,* from New Issues' "Green Rose" series, a product of Western Michigan University.

Mike Plumbley (Current Issue) and the dedicated artists and programmers at iowrock.net announce the launch of *Vapour Trails*, a sub-site dedicated to advancing worldwide appreciation of Isle of Wight musicians. You can visit the site at http://www.iowrock.net/vapourtrails/ and read more about the Diamond Isle in Mr. Plumbley's article, "Vapour Trails," available in the TPR archive.

Elizabeth Routen (1.3, "A Far Distant Place") announces the impending publication of the short story collection *Voices on the Stair* and the coincident launch of her new website, available at: http://thestair.cjb.net/

Gaither Stewart (2.1, "The Death of Masaccio") is pleased to announce the publication of the novel *Labyrinth* from Southern Cross Review E-books. "The story takes place against a background of the political terrorism that has plagued Italy and other countries in the aftermath of the social explosions of 1968," Stewart says. "Two terrorisms emerged in Italy, Germany and France: the left-wing terrorism of disillusioned young people who demand a real revolution to obtain 'everything here and now'; the right-wing terrorism of the sons of European Fascism-Nazism who dream of the past. In most cases the terrorist organizations were eventually infiltrated and manipulated by secret services or became criminal associations. The events here are imaginary although former terrorists, romantic nostalgics like Sergio [the main character], and their heirs, regularly raise their heads and dream of old glories."

Shameless Self-promotion

Issue 6 of *Critique*, the consummate review of books, magazines, media, and the like, is now online with a feature on Margaret Fuller and more insightful, in-depth reviews of contemporary and classic literature including *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle, Light Action in the Caribbean*, and *In the Heart of the Sea*. *Critique* is available in HTML and PDF (subscriber only) formats and may be accessed free of charge at: http://www.etext.org/Zines/Critique