

# Front Porch Review

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Volume 14, October 2023

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Splash Time  
- Flo Hayes



A Dream Please  
- Antoni Ooto

I never dream of mother...  
even after all those cups of coffee, sugared by her stories of the South and  
that smile signaling all was right. We were a pair once, growing up together.

Thinking back after twenty years, I remember a spring day, the hum of mowers  
and the air greening. All of us lounging on the patio with lemonade,  
and a long unplanned afternoon ahead. Such a lazy beginning of a summer to come.

In this welcome pause, mother told us, (her children,) she would not repeat the chemo.  
There, sitting in the sun, head down, smoking her last pack of cigarettes,  
she twisted her ring...twisting that ring around and around, polishing a life.

And without reading our faces, rose stiffly and went inside.

*for Aley Neoma Finley DeCrocce, mother*

First published in *MindFul*, 2022

A River to Swim Across  
- Judy DeCroce

And then I realized even in the telling,  
towards the truth, but not so surely —  
the dark water calling, the far shore along way across,  
till my someday arrived.

Swimming, swimming past the rope's marker,  
deeper and beyond. Father ahead, father beside,  
father's words a buoy, finally finding that boulder  
— a landing, found for me.

Hard breaths, heart pumping — I did it — we did it,  
made a memory...a good one at last.

*for Dad*

First published in *Halfway Down the Stairs*, December, 2019



Storm Cloud Over Lago Vista  
- Devane Clarke



An Actor's Life  
- Mary Ann Dimand

I see the actor, staged. Her glowing  
skin, her shining hair, her body  
so utterly inhabited, joyously  
used. I hear her strong elastic voice, watch  
her face give grammar  
to her movements. I see them  
put her in a box. Large enough for a grand piano,  
but not larger. She acts well there too, you know.  
There's just not much to do  
between those boards. Still,  
what part she's granted, she gives  
life—even though it's corpse, or ghost,  
or some ancillary damage. The crate  
is shrunk, her moments smaller. Until  
she gets too battered,  
too splintered in that cage.  
A few years later, I hear them say  
she's so limited. And then the box —  
they still have not released her —  
looks old-fashioned. It's got to go.  
And she goes with it.

Thinking About Tomorrow  
- Joseph Glaser





Awakened Marble  
- Douglas J. Lanzo

marbled mountain slopes  
band white in sun-brushed tones  
as pure as snow  
from which ancient sculptors  
awakened frozen figures

Baileys Spiked Coffee  
- Terry Allen

The old gentleman sits by himself  
in the dimmed light  
at his favorite corner table in the jazz club,  
keeping warm on a bitter cold winter night,  
and listening to the trio play,  
*All the Things You Are*,  
a sensuous and tenderhearted song.

And that's just fine by him.  
It's a piece he liked to play on the piano  
when his arthritic hands didn't betray his efforts  
to bring to life Jerome Kern's lovely melody.

It's this piece that reminds him of his wife  
who passed away two or three years ago.  
Although, now, he's not entirely certain.  
Often, he can't recall how long he's been alone  
and that's when, he feels her presence,  
and he thinks she may not have left at all.  
It's in these fleeting moments  
that he hears her voice so clearly  
that he finds himself speaking out loud to her.

And now, in the last year or so, he sees her  
for just a moment. Usually it's late at night,  
sometimes she's sitting in a chair,  
looking at him from across the room,  
or she's passing by the bedroom door.

*I should talk to someone about this*,  
he finds himself saying aloud  
as the trio takes the lush, intricate music  
for an improvised walk around the room.

*I'll make an appointment next week  
and talk to the doctor*, he thinks  
as he sips the last of his drink  
and sits back and is carried away to a time  
when the air was warm and his wife was near,  
just as she is now, sitting close to him,  
listening to the music, and keeping time  
with her translucent hand on the table near his.

Buckeye  
- Len Kazmer



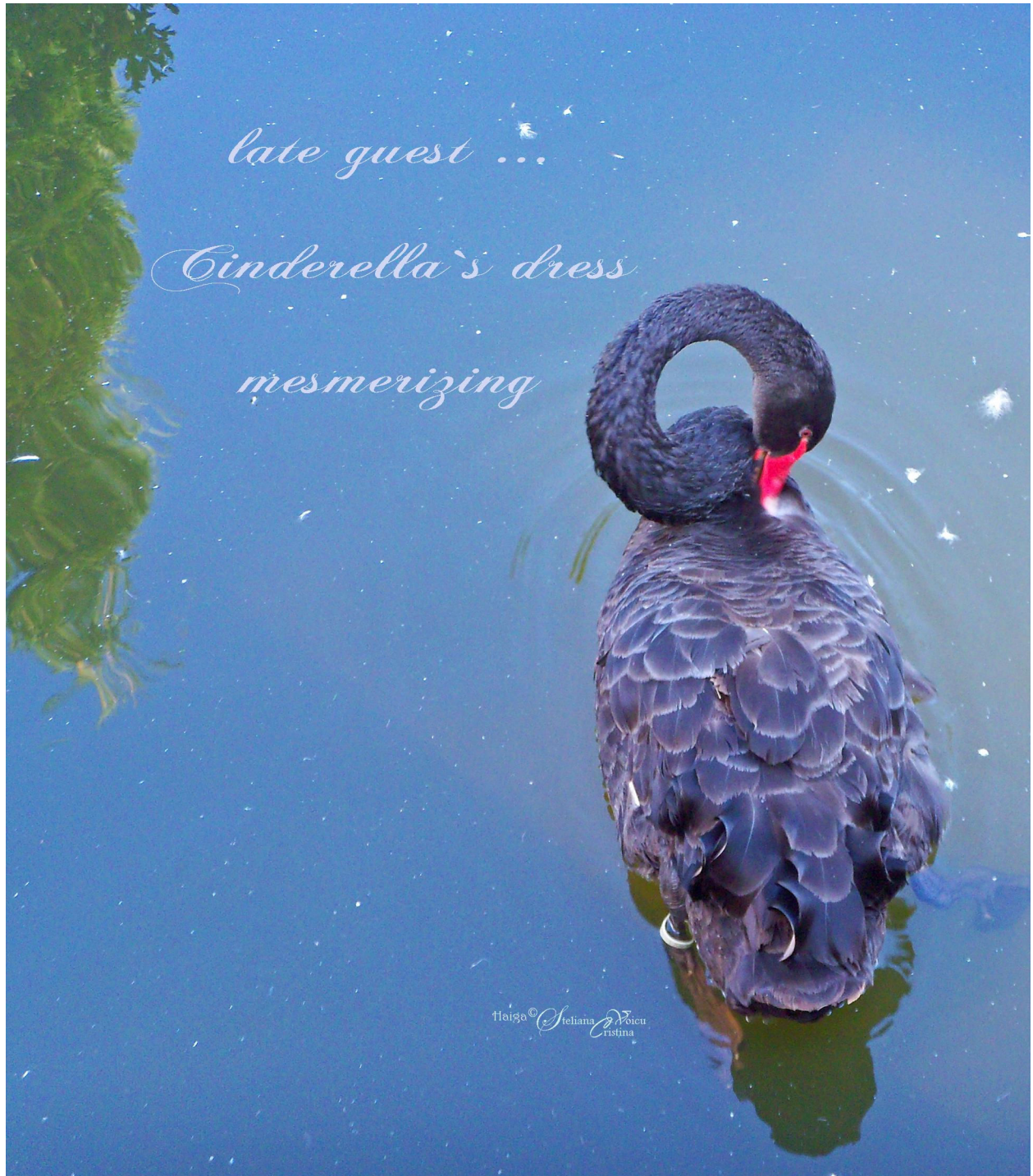


Capitulation  
- John Muro

Shoreline is shrinking and the shuttered cottages are ghosted by mists drifting upward from channels of mud-softened marsh like tawdry shrouds that appear more pallid smudge than luminous pearl and the frayed tassels of common reeds, that once rustled high in pale blue air, are now arched in supplication like martyrs leaning closer to earth as all the world's submerged in a kind of deadfall between seasons without the gift of sound or movement, minding the air's prolonged undulations and the deepening stillness of the water, until the sudden sprawl of a heron laboring to lift its bright weight in stony silence and, once air borne, watching its avian form shape-shift back into the abandoned light of the back-water and I find myself somewhere between awe and surrender, asking for that moment back, yet knowing it, too, like a life, will be erased and given up to ether.

First published in *New Square* (Official Publication of the Sancho Panza Literary Society), Volume 5, Issue 2 Spring 2023

Late Guest  
- Steliana Cristina Voicu



Grasping at Straws  
- Ian Woollen

Kenny's general anesthesia took longer to wear off than expected. Nothing to worry about, the nurses assured his wife, Gail. They brought her a Coke and allowed her to wait on a chair in the corner of the recovery room.

The patient lay motionless on a high bed. Lights and numbers blinked on the monitor beside him. An undulating wave of blue. Fluorescent tubes flickered overhead. A nurse popped in to fiddle with something. Ten, fifteen, twenty minutes passed, maybe more. From previous experience, Gail knew that time turns murky inside medical facilities.

Kenny stirred, groaned, tried to bite at his lower lip. "Where am I?"

"In the hospital," Gail said.

"You finally had me committed?"

"For your hip surgery," Gail said.

"Oh, so I'm a hipster now," Kenny said.

The nurse smiled. "Is he usually such a card?"

"It comes and goes," Gail said.

How to describe Kenny? Squat, muscular, balding at the crown, pie-faced. Plain vanilla, in the best sense. What you see is what you get, and what you don't see... well, more on that later. Kenny worked at a lumber yard six days a week for twenty years. He liked the smell of the wood. He wore coveralls and drove a forklift back and forth between warehouses and the loading dock until an April tornado destroyed the entire complex. Tornadoes don't get names like hurricanes but they should. This one was ruthless. A couple of his crew members didn't make it. Kenny survived with a disabling hip injury, which required several surgeries.

"For better, for worse, but not for lunch," Gail said. "You need to find something else to do." She was sweeping the kitchen, or attempting to, while Kenny read the newspaper. A smiling embodiment of always pleased and never satisfied, Gail wiped her hands on her apron and waited for her husband's response. It often took a minute for Kenny to put his thoughts together.

"Yeah, I don't know," Kenny said. "My grandfather claimed you need three things to stay active in retirement."

"Except the poor guy never got the chance," Gail said.

Kenny nodded ruefully. "One of his things was fishing. He was going to take me bass fishing every weekend."

"So, why don't you dust off your tackle box?"

"I need to make some money. Our savings took a big hit from all the medical expenses recently, and, besides, fishing isn't the same without Arthur."

Kenny's grandfather had been a popular taxi driver, working for the Red Diamond Cab Company. He liked to do the airport run, chatting it up with his fares. "How was your trip, mister? What was the best thing that you saw?" Sadly, Arthur's career came to a tragic end one afternoon in the winter of 1998 when he pulled up at a gated, north side address and honked. Out from the house hurried a ponytailed musician with a guitar case on his back. He ran down the porch steps, dragging a couple of bags on rollers. As Arthur loaded the luggage into the trunk, the musician's irate girlfriend ran out screaming and waving a pistol. She fired at the musician, but missed, hitting Arthur instead.

"Hey, here's an idea," Gail said, "become a taxi driver, like your grandfather. You keep



your vehicle nice and clean, and you know your way around the city.”

Kenny blinked and scratched his head. The suggestion floated back and forth between them, like a bluegill under the surface, while Kenny formulated his response. He shivered through a feeling that bordered on giddy. “I could be a taxi driver like my grandfather?”

“Sure, why not?”

He paused and said, “I don’t think taxis exist anymore.”

“Yes and no,” Gail said, “people use their own car and subcontract out to Uber or Lyft.”

“But there’s probably a phone app gizmo. I would never be able to figure out how to use it,” Kenny said.

“We can get one of the neighbor kids to teach us. I’m sure it’s easy. Otherwise, they wouldn’t be in business.”

“A good suggestion,” Kenny said. “You always have good suggestions. There is one problem.”

“You’d have to talk to your passengers. You’d have to have conversations.”

“Yeah, it’s just not me.”

A zealous problem solver, Gail recruited a neighbor kid to set up Kenny’s Uber account and presented it to him as a done deal. Not wanting to disappoint her, Kenny sucked it up and reminded himself that she often knew what was right for him. Then he wrote out a list of all-purpose phrases to use in response to his passengers’ backseat comments. Among them, “If you don’t like the weather, just wait five minutes,” and, “It’s not whether you win or lose, it’s how you play the game,” and, “I’ve seen better, and I’ve seen worse.”

Fortunately, on Kenny’s first day as a cabbie, the interactions, the routes, and the app technology all went smoothly. Nine fares and nobody said much of anything, other than to tell him their destination. Kenny drove a very pregnant woman to the hospital. That was kind of cool. And he drove a guy in a clown suit to a birthday party. In some ways, the job was like operating the forklift, just moving stuff around. Kenny made a point of holding the steering wheel tightly at ten and two o’clock, so his passengers would feel safe.

“How did it go?” Gail asked, at the dinner table. She’d made his favorite meal, liver with onions.

“I’m tired, more than I expected,” Kenny said, “maybe just from nerves.”

“Does your hip hurt?”

“My hip is fine.”

“That’s great.”

“And, surprise, I could sort of feel Arthur riding along beside me.”

“Did *he* say anything to you?”

“No, but here’s the thing,” Kenny said. “I realized that my grandfather has always been there, riding along beside me, cheering me on in spirit.”

Gail wiped her hands on her apron. “Did you stop at the tavern on the way home?”

“No, why?”

“You sound drunk.”

Kenny laughed, thought she was kidding. They finished supper, washed the dishes, and walked around the park. The playgrounds were crowded. Frisbees flew in the dusk. A strolling guitarist strummed random chords. They stopped to chat with an elderly neighbor, Dolores, on her usual bench. Back in the day, Dolores had worked as a dispatcher for Red Diamond and was tickled to hear that Kenny was driving. “Arthur would approve,” she said.

“I hope so,” Kenny said.

“Get yourself a gray chauffeur’s cap. Arthur liked wearing one.”

“Kenny doesn’t go in much for hats,” Gail said.

They returned home to watch their TV show and to eat a bowl of ice cream. Afterwards, so as not to fall asleep on the couch, they went to bed. Kenny wanted to be fresh in the morning. Unfortunately, his sleep was fitful, disturbed by a dream of a taxi driver getting attacked and robbed. He saw Arthur, in his prime, expiring from a gunshot wound, slumped over the steering wheel. In the dream, Kenny spoke to his grandfather. “It’s not whether you win or lose, it’s how you play the game.”

At breakfast, Kenny considered buying a pistol and a shoulder holster. Gail was against it. “It’s asking for trouble,” she said.

“Do you want me out there driving around unprotected?”

“No, I want you to be comfortable,” she said, “but now I regret suggesting this job in the first place.”

Kenny poured them both more coffee. He reached over and patted her knee and said, “Look, I’ll do the job unarmed for a couple more weeks and see how it feels. Ever since Arthur was killed, I not as trusting as I once was.”

Gail glanced at the clock on the stove. “It’s eight thirty in the morning. Did you put something in your cereal?”

“What do you mean?”

“This doesn’t sound like my husband.”

“Still waters run deep.”

He decided to try the airport run, on the hunch that arriving passengers just off an airplane, just getting back from a trip, were probably not going to attack their taxi driver. It was a tradeoff, as far as income. Some days he had to wait in the cell phone lot over an hour. He dozed, read the newspaper, and watched people being greeted by family and friends.

“Gail, how come we never take trips?” They were sitting on the back porch after Sunday lunch. Gail was filling her birdfeeders.

“Weekends in the fall, we go see the leaves at Turkey Creek,” she said.

“I mean on an airplane or a train.”

“Because long ago you and I both decided that traveling was a pain in the ass,” Gail said. “Have you changed your mind?”

“Yesterday I had a fare returning from an annual trip to Yellowstone, a tiny lady in big hiking boots.”

“You want to go to Wyoming?”

“I don’t know,” Kenny said, “it’s a possibility.” He had heard some vivid stories from his airport fares. It didn’t take much to get them going. Inspired by his grandfather, Kenny discovered that being a good listener was as important as talking, if not more so. All he had to do was grunt and grin and say, “Welcome home.”

There was a volunteer firefighter who had been in the thick of a raging wildfire in Colorado. He had a lot to share about the feel of the wind and smoke. Then there was a choir director from Florida flying in for a conference on something called ‘choral-ography’. Her hair was wrapped inside a bright, blue turban. “Say again. A conference on what?” Kenny asked. He honked at the stalled truck in front of him. Traffic from the bypass was backing up off the ramp.

“It’s movement, simple and easy,” the director explained. “It’s essentially teaching choir

members how to dance and sing together at the same time.”

“My wife used to sing in our church choir,” Kenny said.

“What happened? Why did she stop?”

“No clue, frankly,” Kenny said, “I’ll have to ask her.”

The director said, “By the way, do you have any recommendations for restaurants near my hotel downtown?”

“Sorry, you’ve stumped me on that one, too. It’s been a long time since I went out to dinner.”

On Saturday, spur of the moment, Kenny invited Gail to dine at a nearby cafeteria. It had been around since forever, same location, right across from the baseball stadium. Both sets of parents had taken them there as a reward for sitting through a double-header. Kenny assumed Gail would be happy not to cook for a change. Wrong. It took some convincing.

“It’ll be too expensive,” Gail said.

“We can keep it simple, mac and cheese. It’s a cafeteria. Jello for dessert and coffee. Can’t be more than a few bucks.”

“Says old Mister Tightwad.”

“I’m feeling flush today, thanks to a couple of big tips.”

“What if we can’t get a booth and have to sit at the counter with somebody else?”

“I don’t understand,” Kenny said. “Why is that a problem?”

She wiped her hands on her apron and shrugged. “It shouldn’t be. Okay, let’s go.”

Gail’s reclusiveness had sneaked up on her in the past few years. After two miscarriages and a joint decision not to try again, she focused all her attention on housekeeping and her birdfeeders. Gail often joked about becoming a homebody. Kenny thought this was her version of his mother’s frequent ‘the world is passing me by’ complaint. But he was starting to wonder if it was more than that.

Gail spoke daily with the neighbors and waved to the mail carrier. Kenny and she took their walks, and she still went to church, but less often. Kenny wondered if quitting the choir was part of the homebody syndrome. To prepare for broaching this topic, he brought Gail a second helping of dessert. “Honey, I want to ask you something personal,” he said.

“Oh my God, I’ve created a monster,” Gail said.

“Next thing you know, I’ll be buying a monster truck.”

“What is it, Kenny?”

“Why did you quit singing in the church choir?”

Gail gulped her iced tea. “You want the truth?”

“Yes, please.”

“You promise not to get upset.”

“I promise.”

“There was a guy in the tenor section who was hitting on me,” Gail said.

Kenny forced a laugh. “My goodness, well, at least he knew how to spot a winner.”

“And I was afraid that if you found out, you would hurt him,” Gail added.

Kenny winced and gulped his coffee. He nodded. “There might have been a time when that could have happened but I think that time has passed.”

The next few weeks felt different between Kenny and Gail. The atmosphere grew warmer. It was as if one of them had turned up the thermostat without telling the other, and that was acceptable. Gail read their horoscopes aloud from the newspaper at the breakfast table.

Kenny brought home a deluxe 40 lb. bag of birdseed from the farm co-op. He regularly worked eight hours, driving all over town and out into the county. Unarmed, and with little to no pain in his hip, He felt more comfortable with the taxi gig, but he missed being with his wife through the day. That had never occurred at the lumber yard.

Kenny and Gail held hands together on their walks. It felt good, not too sweaty, not too loose, or tight. And then one morning, Kenny woke up and found himself curled against Gail's back, with his arms and legs wrapped around her. It was sort of embarrassing, especially when she said, "You are hogging the bed."

"Sorry," Kenny mumbled. "What day is it?"

"Laundry day."

With all the subtlety he could muster, Kenny said, "Would you like to come out with me in the cab?"

"What do you mean?"

"Ride shotgun, be my straight man. Arthur and May used to do it, and everyone thought it was cute."

"Like an old couple going for a Sunday drive," Gail said.

Kenny said, "And it would get you out of the house."

"Oh, is that your strategy? No, thanks. I've got things to do."

"Think about it."

"Go make some coffee," Gail said, "and, just for the record, if we were out riding around together, *you* would be *my* straight man."

Kenny sensed that a seed had been planted, especially when Gail went to the bank to deposit his disability check and came home with an Alaska cruise brochure from the 50+ Travel Club. She didn't say a word about it, just left the brochure out on the kitchen counter. She also stopped accusing him of hogging the bed. They went out to dinner at the cafeteria again. Cleaning out his car after work, Kenny found a pamphlet about foster parenting that had been left in the backseat by a D.C.F.S. social worker, to whom Kenny had offhandedly mentioned their childless status.

Gail grabbed it out of his hands. "No, are you serious?"

Kenny chewed on his lower lip. "Maybe if we put our minds to it."

"Hell, it still feels like a dirty trick," Gail said. She dropped the pamphlet and suddenly began to sob. It was like a storm blowing in, or out, something long pent-up inside her. Kenny leaned in closer. He held her tightly and remembered clutching a steel support girder in the warehouse as the tornado roared through.

"Forget about it," Kenny said. "Forget I ever said anything."

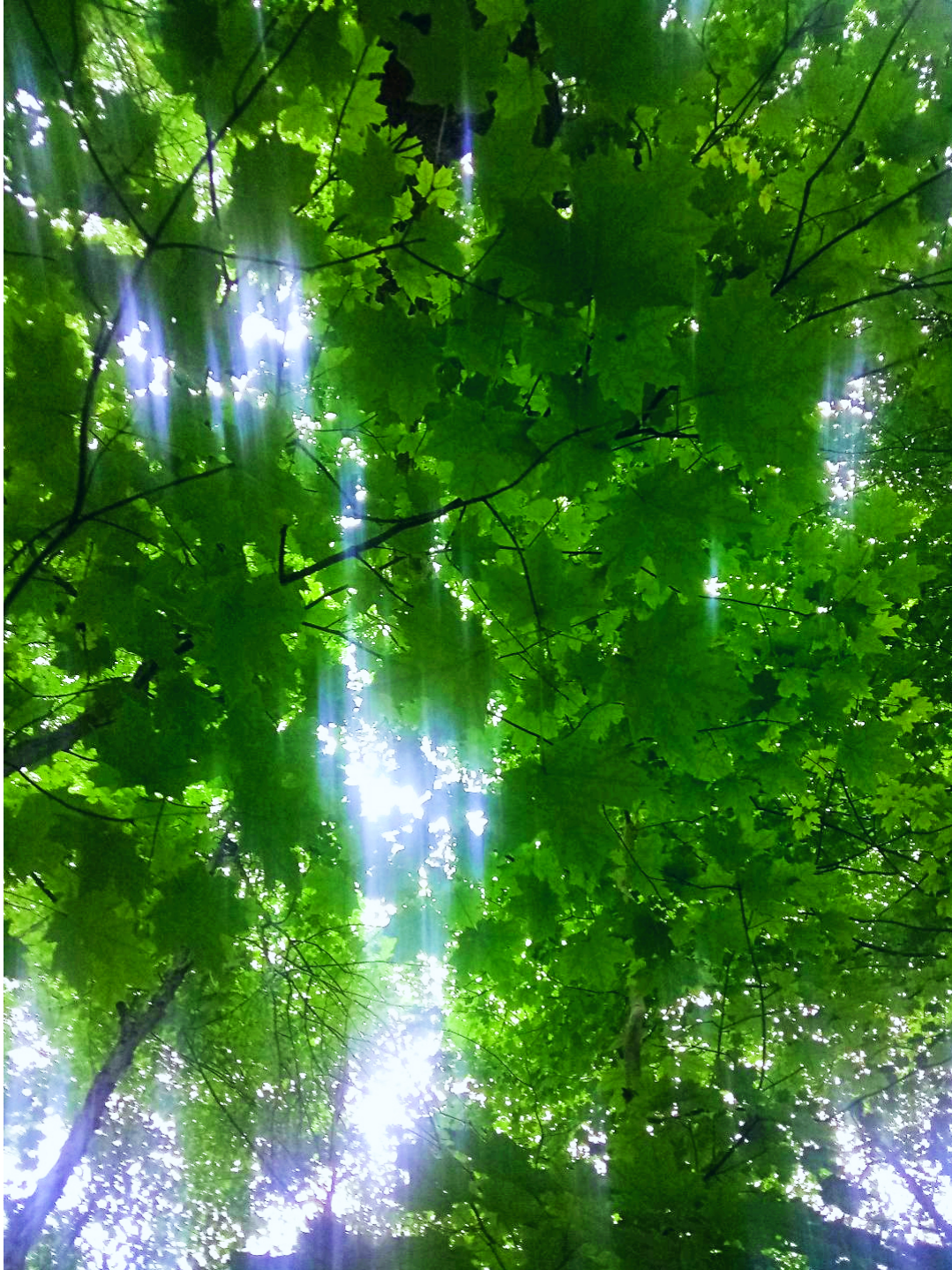
"Oh, for chrissakes," Gail moaned. "What is the matter with us, Kenny?"

"We're just getting older and grasping at straws," he said.

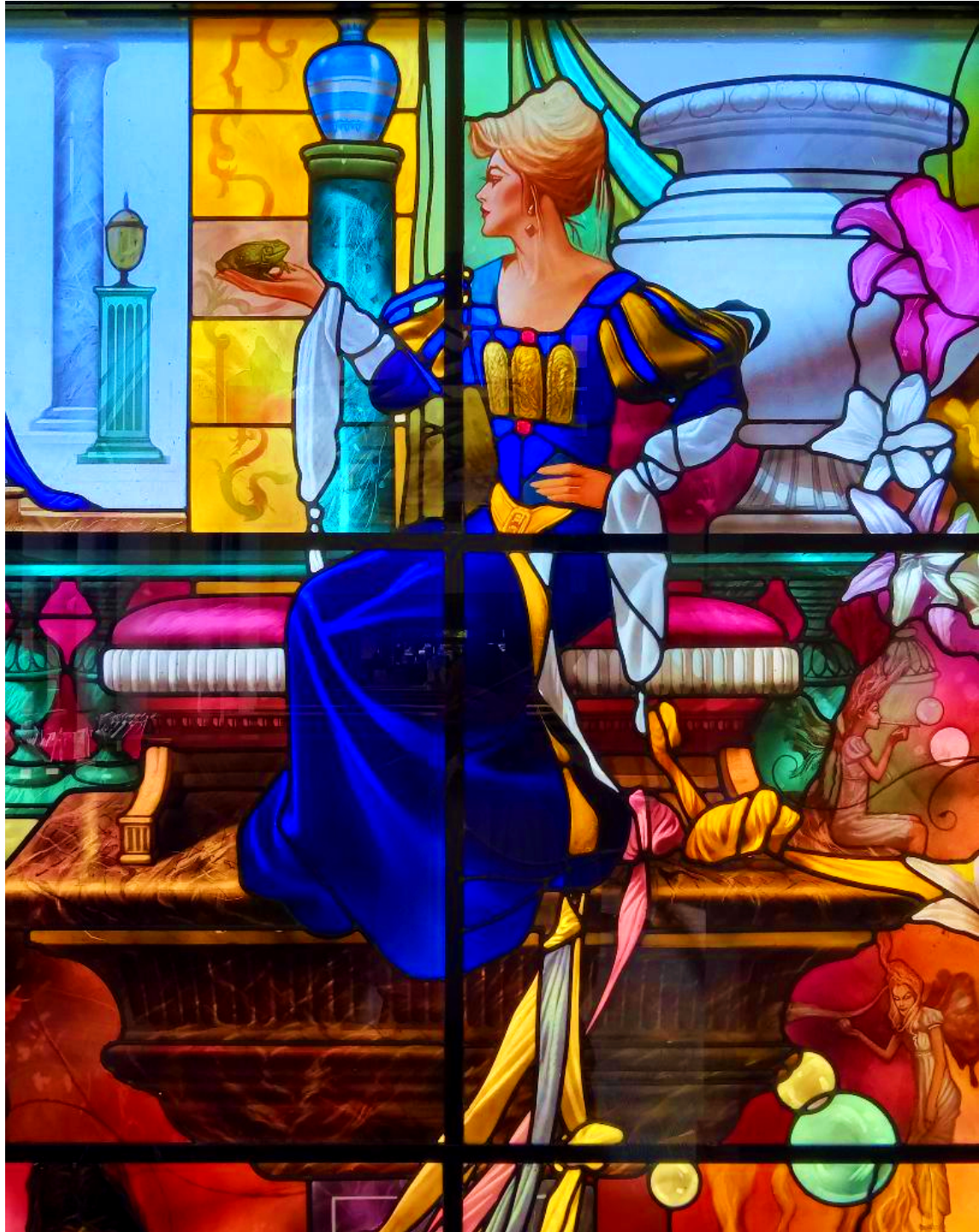
Gail slowed her breathing and swallowed. "Tell you what... I will ride with you. It's not a solution, but it will help. I can make sandwiches. We'll find a nice place to stop."

With Gail onboard, the customer rankings for their Uber service increased. Kenny claimed not to care about the rankings and reviews, but he started reading them daily. He and Gail consistently received five stars. One particular review had an impact on him. It came from Dolores, who they'd driven to the audiologist to have her hearing aids fixed. "Your grandfather would be proud of you," she posted, "Arthur never could have handled all this online crap." Kenny resolved to buy a gray chauffeur's hat.

Let Light Shine Upon Thee  
- Michael Shoemaker







Birthday Bowl  
- Daniel Thomas

Is there any sound quite like the cacophony  
of a bowling alley? ...the din of bowling balls  
smashing pins that crash together and tumble  
on a polished wood floor? ...or the sad sound  
when a ball slips into the gutter, then thunks  
into the gulley at the end of the lane?  
The continuous clamor, punctuated by shouting  
and laughter, is so deafening that one tiny  
six-week old, hidden behind a blanket  
in his stroller, sleeping, perhaps dreaming  
beneath the delicate blue veins of his closed  
eyelids, one new person named "Eddie,"  
sighs himself out of a deep sleep.  
He must be shocked to wake to this wall of sound  
unmuffled by the gauzy waters of the womb.  
His face frowns, lower lip sagging,  
before the first cry comes out, but when  
it does it's a shriek filled with dismay  
that even the new mother and father cannot  
dissuade. They take turns passing him back  
and forth as they continue their game – this special  
afternoon a story to be told to him  
some day – the father's birthday, the older children,  
a family with a new member, the beer and cheese  
curds, the lonely fellow, whose only comfort  
in this crazy place is the warm, full breast  
of his mother, and she, wearing her two-tone  
bowling shoes and gliding towards the line,  
just needs a good roll to pick up a spare.

The Eyes of Uganda Are Upon You  
- Michael DeRosa



Malachite Kingfisher





Red Colubus



Shoebill



No Traditional Song Necessary  
- Lois Greene Stone

Psst! I think there's a new job for males. Really new. Be a substitute groom. Don't exactly know how social media will label the opportunity to catch the attention of men, but age shouldn't matter much as he'll only be playing a role. No license needed as it isn't going to be a marriage, it's just a wedding.

My computer's dictionary says: **wedding**> n. a marriage ceremony, especially one including the associated celebrations. See? Nothing about a union... a ceremony and celebrations.

The *Wall Street Journal*'s front page of Business and Finance, August 10, 2023, ran a long article on the four dresses brides buy so those on the Internet can see their fashion show and expenses. Envy? Absolutely looked for. Cost for hair and nails will be ho-hum, and whether filet mignon and sea bass are served also just not important. It's the dress....no, the dresses. There was an absence of a groom mentioned, or even a woman-to-woman nuptial. Doesn't matter. That paper noted that during 2023, a groom was ill, possibly with Covid, and that his bride ordered a cardboard cut-out to replace him as she paraded down an aisle.

I'd heard that as more women fill medical school vacancies, few male students select Ob-Gyn as a specialty. Even politically, society seems to say 'not the most qualified but female and preferably minority' when looking at a slate of candidates. More men are taking on a division of labor in homelife, which is positive if it's division and not a different math concept. Women can use sperm donors to bear children, and a husband is no longer needed as we've accepted 'single mother' with ease. Further, sperm donors are no longer anonymous. *The Wall Street Journal*, August 28, 2023, notes a donor is now trying to visit all the offspring he's the biological father of, and that was once private.

So, let's get back to the potential job. Ladies, want to wear your four wedding dresses and have your social media showing be totally magnificent? Of course, you must fake a ceremony. Help wanted: Male who can provide a tuxedo, or whatever the bride feels will be background for her important day. Only needed for a short while as the reception doesn't require a male escort since the bride will be changing her outfit so many times. Pay is negotiable. Since it's a ceremony and not a legal happening, no divorce lawyers must bother setting up prenup or planning how soon the divorce might take place. Everyone is happy. The bachelorette party can still take place since there's no reason to 'x' that out as it's all women!

Oh, my! The August 30, 2023 *The Wall Street Journal* HAS a solution. Seems the characters who are mascots for colleges are now important wedding guests. "I was more excited to see Benny than I was to do a first look with my husband." And the woman gave her name for this piece. Benny Beaver is the Oregon State University's mascot. The costumed character was paid for the performance. So why not hire the person inside the 'suit' to be groom first, and then don the mascot outfit? One of two inductees in the 2023 Mascot Hall of Fame is the Syracuse University Orange, a big fruit wearing a blue hat. So, possibly, an alum might have to pay a bit more for the job, but if the transition from pretend groom to pretend piece of fruit can easily be made, it'll accomplish everything the bride might want to show off 'her' importance.

Marriage. It's different from a wedding. Men: we've created a 2024 job for you!

Private Garden  
- KJ Hannah Greenberg



Sliver of Serenity  
- Claire Scott

A suspended moment  
when my computer works  
my car works, my phone works  
my washing machine works  
my electric can opener works  
and my neurons are sparking  
like the fourth of July  
remembering my neighbor's name  
and the current number of planets

Stop and savor I say  
pause and pray to the god  
of your choice, pick one, any one  
maybe the one chain chewing Chiclets  
after joining AA, hiding emergency  
bottles of scotch in cirrus clouds  
or the one whose message machine  
says it is no longer taking messages  
in English, French or Mandarin

Or perhaps a prayer to a pastel angel  
with wispy wings and a wonky halo  
in desperate need of silver polish  
or to the scraps of a saint, figments  
of cloth and a few finger bones  
resting in an ancient reliquary  
your choice  
just let me float a little longer  
on this once-in-a-lifetime sliver of serenity

Ignoring knife's long shadow on the wall  
ignoring sirens and scabbling termites  
nibbling at the edges of my life  
let me tuck this moment into my pocket  
like a piece of caramel candy  
for the days rats invade the cellar  
or a tornado rips off the roof  
or the ice cream store runs out  
of Shangri-la Raspberry Sorbet

The Last Train

- Roberta Senechal de la Roche

Two days before the Sabbath  
we saw you had lost your shadow.  
Now angels flap plucked wings and curse  
on street corners and subways  
and a white horse with iron hooves  
walks the howling city, slow  
unbound, inarticulate, eye on the cosmos  
searching for a rider to take up its reins.

If you ever touch the wind  
that takes the last of leaves in fall,  
you might conclude  
that night is your best friend  
that steel rails might  
be your salvation after all broke  
under weights of cold  
or lights turned up too fast, too bright.

*Your breath is fire  
I am ash, you are  
the elements that suffuse  
ice and blood  
the deer, the swallows, stars  
that you let us see,  
just when we need them  
just before the last train leaves.*



Sunshine on the Water Makes Me Happy  
- Susan Myrick





Till The Jack-In-The-Boxes Pop All Around Us  
- David Henson

Sometimes she wanders away  
from the facility.  
This time she makes it  
to a department store  
where I find her with red  
streaks down her wrinkled cheeks  
and around her mouth,  
sobbing for her mother.

A man who must  
be the manager barges past me  
to the makeup counter, takes her hand,  
pries loose the lipstick,  
and asks if she belongs to anyone.

Sweet child, let me  
lead you the long way through the store.

We'll loop to the candy and squander ourselves  
on taffy kisses and licorice whips.  
We'll hunch behind hedgerows of hanging coats  
as mannequins in blue, vested suits  
cry for help in squeaky voices,  
and startled shoppers drop their bags.

Hand-in-hand we'll skip  
past dressing mirrors,  
our images flickering  
like an old-time movie.

We'll hide with the toys  
in the dimmest, quiet aisle  
till the jack-in-the-boxes pop all around us  
and the giant, stuffed bear cradles you in it arms.

First published in *Pikestaff Forum*, #7, Spring, 1986



Vigilance  
- Michael Moreth





## Guidelines

We publish thoughtful, provocative fiction, poetry, essays and visual arts.

Submissions are accepted year-round.

- If accepted, submissions may appear in any quarterly issue.
- Biographical information will be requested for accepted submissions.
- If your submission was previously published, please cite the reference.
- Simultaneous submissions should be accompanied by a statement stating so.
- If your work is accepted elsewhere prior to our evaluation, please notify us.
- All work must be original and in English.

We do not publish novel excerpts, memoirs, genre material, flash fiction (less than 1000 words), book reviews, erotica or works which rely upon explicit language or gratuitous violence.

Fiction can be up to 5000 words. It should be relevant to a general audience, compelling and thought provoking. Finally, it should contain a protagonist with a positive, articulated, universal goal (e.g., freedom from oppression) who actively struggles to achieve that goal, overcoming emotional obstacles in the process. We expect the protagonist's values and beliefs to be reflected in his or her behavior, which behavior initiates conflict with other characters. Ideally, the protagonist is motivated by a past wound which he or she attempts to heal. By story's end the protagonist learns something significant about human behavior.

Essays can be up to 5000 words. We do not publish essays which are life stories. We do publish essays which express perspectives about topics of general, timeless interest. That is, we are not interested in essays about current events but are interested in essays about the vagaries of human behavior. An example of an ideal essay is Mark Twain's *Corn-Pone Opinions*.

We are interested in poems which contain vivid images, resonating voice, rich language, discernible rhythm and thoughtful messaging. An example of these attributes is Mary Oliver's *Wild Geese*.

Visual arts which elicit the comment, "How interesting!" are desired. Submit visual arts as **.jpg** files; do not send **.tif** or **.bmp** files. Accepted visuals may be reduced to fit the available space.

Mac users, please be sure that your files are readable by Windows 10.

This magazine does not currently pay upon publication.

Accepted material will be edited. If changes are deemed significant, the contributor will be notified and given an opportunity to accept the changes or request that the piece be withdrawn from publication.

Send submissions to [gphillips938@comcast.net](mailto:gphillips938@comcast.net) Send 1 prose piece, 1-5 poems, or 1-4 photos at a time. For prose or poetry, type or paste your submission into the body of the email message.

We will not open any unsolicited print attachments. Photos, however, should be sent as attachments. Include your name and e-mail address.

Please expect to wait up to one month for a reply. Occasionally, with email, there are technical difficulties. We cannot be responsible for delay or loss of submissions. To check on the status of your submission after one month has passed, please send a message to [gphillips938@comcast.net](mailto:gphillips938@comcast.net).

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