



Portrait of New England
A Literary Magazine

Volume 2

AXEL GALDEN

VOLUME 2

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The editor and advisory board would like to dedicate this issue to the writers who chose to submit to the *Portrait of New England* as we return from our hiatus of several years.

We are thankful to you.

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COVER ART BY AKSELI GALLEN-KALLELA,
“WINTER LANDSCAPE”

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***given the subject matter of “A Common Wealth of Tragedy,” which discusses traumatic content and violence, we at The Portrait of New England acknowledge a content warning for our final short story.**

Editor's Note:

This issue marks the official return of, *Portrait of New England*, after being on hiatus over the past several years.

From the time I reached out to the original editors about revitalizing *PONE* at the end of 2021 through the publication date on December 22, 2022, Brett, Jon, and Smrithi have been instrumental in supporting this project. I counted on each of them for help and their perspective as I carefully outlined the magazine's return over the past year.

The effort of returning to active status could have been an overwhelming endeavor. And though it was a task with many moving parts and responsibilities, the reassurance, levity, and backing of Brett, Jon, and Smrithi provided a faith that let me know that this issue would go well. No person is an island, and they are a testament to the importance of community.

And in the same vein, I must also celebrate and thank all of the contributors in this current issue. I had been told it is not often that literary magazines return after a years-long hiatus, so when the submission calls were announced, I was terribly uncertain if there would be any writers who would answer. And yet, we received a substantial number of submissions, despite the hiatus situation and the regional qualification for *PONE*. I may have mentioned this to the submitters throughout the acceptance and editing process, but it was a pleasure reading so many beautiful pieces.

And I must thank you, reader, for choosing to read this magazine. By reading, you advocate for the many unique and powerful voices within this issue. For your support of the writers, missions, and goals of *PONE*, you have my deepest thank you.

Thank you,

Matthew

The History of Architecture

Eric D. Lehman

This is a town in need of architecture, I thought, as I pulled back the curtain and looked out the hotel window across the parking lot to a collection of mild suburban streets. Standing to one side and moving the curtain, I could see the small downtown, with its 1950s Town Hall and dingy storefronts. The small town of Possack, Connecticut was not much, but it was my hometown, this town in need of architecture. And, I thought grandly, I was here to provide it.

I had some successes, both individually and with my firm. I had two dozen houses in Connecticut on my own, and another three dozen which I had partially designed. The firm had a small, interesting skyscraper in the Midwest and a hockey rink in Canada. We had sold dozens more after those, but so far, only one was in the process of being made. And now, I had been replaced in the firm. A forced retirement. Who could blame them, though? I was seventy-four years old now, beyond retirement age, and they needed new ideas.

When I had started, my ideas were certainly new, and remained cutting edge, at least as far as the public was concerned. The suburbs were always several decades behind, and sometimes never caught up. The most popular house style was still neo-colonial, after over a century. I grimaced, and sat down at the small desk-like piece of furniture that graced chain hotel rooms. I picked up a sharp, three-sided pencil and drew a quick sketch on the clean white paper. Then I spent longer with it, using lightly gridded, nearly see-through paper in order to map out my ideas more fully. Sipping the hot coffee, now gone cold, I moved with inevitable reluctance to the computer. The pencil remained in my hand for a minute, and then, betrayed, slipped back into a wire and wood holder.

These sketches were just extra perspectives for the community center design I had completed last month. It was a request by the first selectman, and the hearings about it were tonight. At first, I had felt a sense of honor and gratitude that my small fame had occasioned this request, and then an excitement I had not felt for years. I had accepted the commission and pretended that I was doing them a favor.

A knock at the door and I glanced at my watch. The representative of the local historical society was here. Although my papers were destined for a university archive or held by the firm I once worked for, a few had made their way here already, held by the high school I attended, one medal in a glass case with the Possack Possum statue, and one of my old drafting

tables in the art rooms. I had more to give the historical society today, now that I was here again.

I shuffled over, checking my wrinkled face in the mirror, back aching from the two hours in an unfamiliar chair.

“Hello!” I opened the ugly, painted door.

“Hello.” A young woman, maybe thirty, thirty-five, cat’s eye glasses and straight brown hair, shook my hand. “I’m Sasha.”

I ushered her into the room, noting her pleasantly rounded calves, with a mere aesthetic eye. The time had long passed for me to feel anything but a disinterested appreciation for beauty of any sort. I had heard that other men in their old age felt more, but I did not. It may have been my heart medication, or my back pain, or maybe I had simply had enough of all that. I thought of my wife Janet and smiled. Well, almost enough.

The woman sat down at the small table, glancing at my computer and the sketches. Her face was set in a half-frown, and I felt a little surprised. Until now, everyone I had met or talked to from the historical society – indeed, the entire town – had been completely happy to see me.

In response to this, I grinned wryly, adjusting my always-slipping glasses. “It’s nice to meet you. Please call me Bill.”

She nodded, glancing around, then looked up at me closely, studying my face as if looking for something hidden there. “You have a lot of angles,” she finally said.

“Thanks,” I said dryly, before realizing that she meant my work.

She turned to the table, gesturing at the sketches. “Are these the designs for the center?”

“Just some last-minute ideas to add.”

“Hmm,” she said. “Have you been to the site?”

“Yes.”

“So, you know about the house?” her voice rose.

“House?”

“The Hellman House,” she said impatiently.

I sat down, confused. “The house...the old house there?”

“Yes, of course.”

“It is terribly run down.”

“But it is a historic home. I mean, a Civil War general lived there.”

“Not a good one,” I chuckled, trying to calm her down.

“Well, it is not Ulysses S. Grant if that’s what you mean. But this town reveres him.”

I didn't remember any mention of him ever in school or out of it, and shifted in the chair uneasily. "It should have been taken care of fifty years ago. It's beyond repair."

"I disagree."

"Well..." I said, looking at the designs on the table. "I guess we can agree to disagree about that house. That is the site the town gave me, after all. I didn't choose it."

"Well, the town made a mistake."

"I appreciate that you feel that way," I said, as a way to finish the topic.

But she wasn't done, and stood up as if to emphasize something. "I'm afraid that the historical society will be protesting this building tomorrow night at the hearing. I thought it only fair to warn you."

"Well..." I said slowly, mind churning at this information. "I spoke to Dr. James a few weeks ago and he seemed enthusiastic about the project."

"He has been voted out as president of the society."

"Really?" I tried to sound like this news was somehow a shock. Old age flattened out the drama of life, and I often found myself trying to remember the mountains. "That's too bad."

"Yes, well," she said, face reddening. "It was over the Hellman House, if you must know. I think that you'll find that people around here care a lot about their history."

"I see. Well, I am sorry so many feel that way."

She paused, looking at the designs and then at my craggy face again. "The society would like to invite you to visit the house this afternoon."

I sighed. I had been planning on going to the high school to see my old drafting table. Well, perhaps I could still work it in before dinner with the first selectman. "I'll be happy to come by. It will be good to see the site again..." I trailed off. I had been about to say "after the designs were completed," but held my tongue. No use mentioning them with her.

"Thank you," she said stiffly. And then, holding out a hand formally, as if agreeing to a pact, she shook my old paw, which crumbled in her firm grip. "I will see you at 2 p.m. at the corner of Main and School Streets." Then she marched out the door. The box of my things, my own relics, remained in the corner. I sighed. It was a heavy box to carry back to the car.

The house, I decided not to call it the Hellman House, was not on the National Register. It was on the historical society's website, though, with a large banner "SAVE THE HELLMAN," and a button to click to donate money. I had planned to eat lunch at Curly's Diner, one town over, one of the last of those old boxcar diners, with their clean, metallic lines and neon

lights. But I ate lunch in my hotel room instead, munching desultorily on a dry roast beef sandwich while I researched. I called Janet and told her of this development, and she gave me her usual good advice.

“Just do the work,” she said. “It will be all right.”

“I really don’t want to go to the house this afternoon. Maybe it’s a mistake to go.”

“Don’t give them an excuse to hate you. Be nice to them, even if they are rude, and present the best case. That’s all you can do.”

She was very wise. But it was always difficult to live up to. At 1:45 p.m., I took the elevator down to the lobby, walked out the sliding doors, and started my car. The site was only a half mile away on the same road, but I wanted to be able to get out of there fast if necessary. I drove slowly, not wanting to be early, but arrived with five minutes to go, turning onto School Street and parking under a shady maple. The 1845 Greek Revival home stood on the green lawn at a slight angle to the modern road. Despite my failing eyesight, I noticed immediately that its shingles were falling off. At the same time, a woman stepped out of the front door. I squinted to see who it was. Ah, of course, my nemesis, Sasha. I realized I didn’t know her last name...should I ask? No.

With the eyes of a young eagle, she spotted me in the car and strode over. I struggled out of my seat belt and opened the door by the time she reached me. I unfolded myself from the leather seat, smiling broadly. We exchanged guarded pleasantries, and walked across the too-green lawn. I scuffed fertilizer pellets off my shoes. Someone wanted this site to look nice – the first selectman or the historical society? Taking out a key slowly and deliberately as if she were performing a sacred act, Sasha opened the door and waved me inside. The floors were dangerously beyond code in the living room and almost everything inside had been redone poorly in the early 20th century. The staircase had a nice turn, though, and the railing was a marvel. I ran my hand along it, picking up dust. “Can we go upstairs?”

“No.” She sounded embarrassed. “I’m told it’s not safe.”

I shrugged, trying not to start critiquing, or praising in the case of the railing.

She began to shake a little, and I saw that she was actually crying.

“Please, don’t...” I said, uncomfortably.

“No, it’s just that I love all this so much,” she said, facing away from me. “History, I mean.”

I nodded, trying to think of something to say about it, but failing. “Thank you for sharing this with me,” I said instead.

“You see now, why it needs to stay,” she said, the fervent note of the believer creeping back.

I made a noncommittal grunt, moving towards the door. Outside, I was surprised to see that First Selectman, Belinda Chase, was waiting.

“Ah, Mr. Laurens.”

“Belinda, good to see you.” I tried to be informal to lighten the mood. I had met her only once, six months earlier, but had spoken on the phone several times since then. She was as young as Sasha, and wore a similar pair of cat’s eye glasses. I briefly wondered if this was a coincidence.

While we shook hands, Sasha looked darkly at the tall, well-dressed woman. “I was showing Mr. Laurens why we needed to keep the Hellman House intact.”

“We’ve discussed this, Ms. Janssen,” Chase said with the self-assured voice of a practiced politician. “The town doesn’t have any other available land.”

“What about the Estherwood parcel?”

“No, that is not available yet. Maybe not for five years.”

“Well, then, wait.”

“That is absurd.”

“You mean you don’t want to wait.”

“That’s right. I am the first selectman now. And who knows if *he* will be available five years from now? Not to mention a thousand other variables that you know nothing about.”

I turned away, biting my lip. Was that what this was really about? For them and for me? One last chance to make something worthwhile? I had avoided thinking about this, but she was right. This might be my last chance. I stared at the high traprock ridge to the north, where I had played as a boy. I couldn’t even make it to the top of that hill today. Shivering a little, I brought my attention back to what I could control. I looked carefully at the grass, the dirt, the concrete. In my mind, the community center rose, brick by brick, glass window by glass window, filling the site, making it whole again, becoming a node of happiness and activity for the town. I saw the empty sidewalks between this spot and the town hall filled with young mothers and their strollers, with old couples heading for a game of bingo.

Their voices were in harsh whispers now, two snakes on the grass of the wide lawn.

“I can’t believe you are here harassing this man. He is a treasure...”

“I know what’s right...”

I walked out of earshot, surveying the properties nearby, thinking about my design and how it would fit here. The high cement pylons for the

sweeping roof would be difficult but worth it when the curved sweep of the roofline appeared above the suburban street. It could be seen from three directions, and from the nearby hills, if I was right about the line of sight. It was a statement piece in a town that had none, the only building of its kind for twenty miles in any direction. It would be a focal point for the community, but also for art students, building nerds, and other assorted architecture fans. The roof alone would make them swoon, and the concrete and bare wood interior would give residents a sense of comfort and drama at the same time.

“I have to visit an old friend,” I said to Belinda, forcing myself to also turn and smile at Sasha.

“I’m so sorry about this, Mr. Laurens...”

“Sorry!” Sasha’s voice rose to a shout. “You should be sorry for your legacy!” She saw the look on my face. “Not you, her, I mean.”

“I will see you for dinner at...” I continued, then paused, not knowing who should know what anymore. “At the place we discussed earlier.”

She nodded apologetically. “See you soon. You have my number?”

“Of course.” I walked back to my car. One of the advantages of age was the ability to leave sticky situations without seeming rude. I considered going to the high school, but instead drove out of town to Curly’s Diner for a cup of coffee. Sitting at the Formica counter watching the cook flip burgers on the ancient grill, I thought about the dilapidated Hellman House, about the long-ago person who designed it, about the person who crafted the fantastic railing.

“Art is always first,” Janet told me when I called her about it.

“Maybe,” I said. “Isn’t the old house art, too?”

“Is it?” she asked.

“No. But that’s just my opinion. And I am hardly a disinterested party.”

Driving back into town, I realized that I needed to change my clothes. I stopped at the hotel and put on my three-piece suit, the tie choking me a bit, the pants tight and uncomfortable around my thin hips. I met First Selectman Chase at her home, a well-built Georgian revival on a quiet street.

“It’s good you didn’t say you’d be here,” she said wryly, waving at the suburban cul-de-sac. “They have protested at my house before.”

“Really? At your house!”

“Indeed,” she said. “They would have never done that in your day, I suppose. A more civilized time.”

“It’s still my day,” I said, chuckling. “I’m not dead yet.”

“Oh, I didn’t mean to imply that!”

I waved it away with another chuckle. This woman had enough problems without my touchiness. We stepped into her formal dining room, where her husband was setting out plates for a meal of cheese ravioli and salad. I refused the glass of wine offered. “I want to be sharp for the meeting.”

“Yes,” she said, waving her husband’s offer away. “I’m only having one. It will be a more difficult conversation than you anticipated, perhaps.”

“I had only talked with the previous president a few weeks ago. I thought everything was fine.”

“Well, things changed. You know how quickly things happen when someone gets a bee in her bonnet.”

I shrugged. “Are my drawings going to be there?”

“Yes, I’ve arranged for them to be set up on easels in front of the assembly.” She paused. “What are you going to say?”

“The speech I had prepared seems out of step now.” I shook my head, wondering.

We finished dinner and drove separately to the town hall in the fading light. She ushered me through a back door, down a hallway, and into an old music room, now a council chamber. It was half-full, and people streamed in from the main entrance. With a pat on the shoulder, Chase left me to sit with the other political figures in the front left row. I looked around, confused, then saw my drawings. I walked over and checked them out. Only then did I remember the other drawings I had done that morning. Forgot to give them to the first selectman. Ah, well, there will be time for that, I thought, or not, if things don’t go well tonight.

The five Historical Commission committee members sat up front behind a long desk, looking like judges. They were elected members of the council who served on that committee. Were they also in the Historical Society? Were they members of Belinda Chase’s political party? Were they allies or foes? I realized I didn’t know anything about the politics behind all this. There may be people here in favor of a community center, or it may be that the first selectman was alone in her quest. I might be in for a tough ride; someone could start throwing eggs.

There were no eggs, but certainly a lot of murmurs and glances in my direction. I sat at the end of row on the right by my drawings, facing the committee and trying to keep my brain right. I didn’t want to get distracted. An old woman sat next to me in a day perm and deep purple dress, holding a large purse on her lap. She grimaced at me when I glanced at her. I could see Belinda at the other end of the row, and a secretary taking furious

notes. After preliminary remarks by Belinda, the murmur of voices finally died down to a few coughs and whispers.

One of the five committee members stood up. “This is a special session of the Historical Commission on the new community center planned for the corner of Main and School Street.”

“On top of the Hellman House!” a voice crackled out from the back of the room. That set the room going again.

The head of the committee waited patiently until the voices died down. “We will first hear from Sasha Janssen, President of the Historical Society.”

Sasha stood up, her dress an uncompromising red, her hair swept up in a hairdo from a previous century. She looked young and strong and confident. “We watch history on our televisions and think that history is something fake, something created for our amusement. But I am here to tell you today that the past is very real. At the Possack Historical Society...” She turned around and the rows behind her, maybe fifty people in all, stood up as if to be counted, then sat down. “At the Possack Historical Society we preserve history, not because we love it for itself, but because it informs every aspect of our lives now. We can walk down Main Street and see the horse troughs from horse and buggy days, we can share a bowl of corn pudding at the Old Stone House, we can walk the trails along the ridges of Possum Hill set down by our ancestors. And a restored Hellman House will be part of that history.”

More than half the assembled crowd gave a rough cheer. Sasha let them go and then waved them down, in command of her audience. She talked a little about the history of the house, and then came back to her argument. “The past is full of complexity and beauty beyond the capabilities of the most well-funded film budget. That past is right here in Possack, Connecticut, for all of us, if only we can keep it.” She paused, turning to address the people instead of the committee. “What is a community but its history?”

There were more cheers, and I could feel a wave of discontent wash over my back. My tie choked me a bit and I felt my pocket for a small bottle. In the other pocket was my cell phone, and I badly wanted to call my wife. If only she could be there with me instead of trapped in her bed at home. The purple-dressed woman next to me had slid over to another chair. Had she done that before or after that speech? I could feel a rising panic making my knees weak and my hands shake.

“Mr. Laurens, please stand up and address the committee.”

I stood up, trying to hide my trembling fingers. The chamber muttered and murmured with the noises of gathered humanity. I saw one woman scowling disapprovingly across the semi-circle of chairs. Sasha was somewhere to my left, and so was Belinda. I looked at the ceiling instead, sighing, and then at the five committee members of the Historical Commission, each looking at me with curious eyes.

“Thank you for inviting me to speak. As I hope everyone here knows, I was invited by the First Selectman to design a new community center for the town. My town. This is where I grew up, where I went to school. Down the road at Grapeleaf Hollow is where I had my first kiss.”

Titters and snorts from the assembly and I could hear a man in the back scoff loudly. I ignored it, trying to focus on the hastily scribbled outline I had made at the diner that afternoon. “When I was asked to do this, I was unaware that a house remained on the property. I was only told the dimensions of the land. On the easel to the left of the committee you can see the results. I am happy with the design, and I hope you are, too.”

I paused, but there were no shouts of even murmurs of approval. I went on quickly, staring now at some of the people in the audience, one by one, forcing my eyes to meet theirs.

“I wish I could say it doesn’t matter to me, but it does. I heard someone say that I could take my design and give it to some other place, or wait until more land is offered by someone as a replacement, two, three, five years from now. I want to give this back to my home, and I want to give it now.” I paused, rubbing my bald head. “I am an old man. Those of you here who are my age know what it is like. It matters. A lot.”

This wasn’t the right track. But I wanted to get it all out, all the reasons, all the emotions. “After all, we’re not just knocking this house down because it’s an eyesore. We’re not arguing about restoring it.” I tried not to wince; I shouldn’t let Sasha’s argument creep into my own. “There is always a war between the past and the future, you see. That house is the past, my design is the future. And sometimes, maybe even this time, the past beats the future. Its needs are sometimes greater.” And now you’ve acknowledged their point, make the turn, I told myself. I took a deep breath and began. “But here, we also have the present to consider. This is not some millionaire’s private home I’ve designed. It is for all of you, especially for the most needful residents, in fact.”

I spoke for a few minutes about my design, using the drawings to illustrate the points, keeping the focus on the people who would be using the cafeteria, the bingo hall, the billiards room. And then, sensing I was in danger of going on too long, I finished. “In the future, when someone

speaks of the history of our town, what will they speak of? What will the future Possack Possums build from?" I paused, looking around at the assembly, then at each of the committee members in turn. "What is history? The one we have left, or the one we make together here today?"

I sat down. The committee forestalled any other speeches with a procedural motion, and took a quick vote, 4 to 1. The room erupted in a din of voices, some happy, some unhappy. The first selectman came up to me and with tears in her eyes, shook my hand. "We'll meet for breakfast tomorrow at eight?" she asked rhetorically, before walking briskly to the committee members and speaking with them in her smooth politician voice, clear and crisp above the hullabaloo.

The old woman who had been scowling at me appeared and held out a wrinkled, five-ringed hand for me to shake. "I thought I recognized you. We were in the same class together forty-seven years ago at Possack High. You were very handsome."

"I was," I said. "Not anymore." I tried to remember her name, but failed. "I have to go now, but here is my card. Drop me a message and we'll reconnect."

She smiled and nodded happily. "Thank you."

I walked briskly to the side door, trying to avoid any more encounters, staying far from the knot of angry people gathered near the main entrance. Slipping outside, I loosened the tie, gasping for breath. When it returned, I pulled out my phone and called Janet.

"We won. They are going to build it."

"Thank goodness!" she cried happily. "You must be so pleased."

"No," I said. "I feel like I killed someone."

She talked me down somewhat as I started the rental car and drove two miles to the hotel. But as I sipped coffee in the bland, poorly designed lobby the next morning, I still felt that way. Had I ever been satisfied with the way they show in the movies when some creator is successful? No, never. It is always a kind of death. But who exactly was it I had killed?

At precisely 8 am, Belinda Chase appeared in the lobby in a sky-blue suit, smiling at me. "Well, we have conquered."

"So it would seem," I said, standing up slowly, an ache in my hip. "Was it a foregone conclusion?"

"Oh, no," she said. "I think you changed some minds."

"I meant on the committee."

"Yes, confidentially, and please don't repeat it, but I was only sure of two of them."

I nodded. At least I had accomplished something with the effort of the previous evening. So often that overshadowed the actual effort. Remembering, I picked up a folder off the small table. "I have some additional drawings here. The computer drawings are already sent to your account."

"Wonderful," she said. "You can explain them to me at breakfast. Some people are waiting for us at the Old Stone House, a properly historic restaurant."

"Sounds good," I returned, trying to remember the place. "I suppose you can't be seen going to the Curly Diner across the border."

"Not today." She looked around the lobby as if searching for spies, then laughed. "Not today." She took the folder from me and flipped through my drawings, shaking her head in apparent admiration. "Come," she waved me toward the sliding glass doors. "Let me introduce you to some of the people your community center is going to serve."

I followed her out to her car. She already had what she wanted, a concrete success to cap her years in office. But, to her credit, she still wanted me to feel good. What she didn't know was that the argument last night had nothing to do with my feelings. As I reached into my jacket to touch the bottle of pills, I remembered that on the drive home in the afternoon, I had to pick up medicine for my wife, and drop a key off at my former firm. I sighed. Hopefully, I would have enough time to do it all.

Mount Washington, Late November
Ann Taylor

An unplanned stroll up the paved road
for the view we never get to see.
Freezing fog turning everything
rimey, prickle-white,
the stiffening of tree-limbs,
low greenery, logs flat out, us,
crystal spikes crackling
the only sound around,
except for the fast skid and slide
of the wrong footwear descending.

Visions of Nemo
Alexander B. Joy

Winter Storm Nemo
7–18 February 2013

The creek pushed further into memory
Beneath the steady weight of flake on flake.
A picket fence's moonlit shadow shrinks
Like grasses in reverse; all contours
Simplify their shapes. A distant snowplow's
Low rusalka groan heightens to a roar
Then, buried, fades. A salted asphalt patch
Closes like a wound; the arthritic creak
Of trees dissolves in sounds of snow on snow.
The dents on an abandoned car round out
And overflow. An elephantine mound
Hibernates in every driveway. And rows
Of unlit houses, a Schrödinger state
In each: Who sleeps in one another's arms,
Who turns a shoulder at a lover's reach?
The shingled rooftops smooth to unworked clay –
From such dimensions everything begins.
Perhaps tomorrow we can start again.

Winnepesaukee
Ed Ahern

The lake was frozen hard, the ice a foot
in depth, the wind an unrelenting howl.
The warmer coat I could have worn was home.
I knew within two hundred skitter steps
that I would suffer pain till numb and dumb.
We started out in early morning light,
the coldest, rawest time of day by far.
My host, a business friend, was set to fish
until the sun had sunk below the ice.
I drank his offered brandy, cheap and raw.
My face and feet were first to go away,
my senseless fingers curled into my palms.
The cans of beer would stick against my lips
and food was quickly frozen stiff and hard,
but still we stood beside the augered holes.
We stayed until the booze had all run out
and words and urine pained us to produce,
then penguin shuffled off the ice to shore.
As I recall we caught no fish that day
but talked of how we'd fish again, and did.

Mother in New Haven, 1963
Charlotte Friedman

Gray undersky, slush-muck
of winter—young men chewing
on facts, digesting theories, spitting out
hypotheses and me? *How am I here?* My mind circles
around diapers, bottles boiling. I am *boiling*,
my own juices flowing
from these tiny tits. Land of motherhood,
your geography has swallowed me.
Gifted buggy too big, a drag
up the building stairs. *Leave it at the bottom.*
Maybe someone will steal it. I steel
myself for life with a baby and a man-
child, hyperventilating hypochondriac.
Such words from one newly wed,
a whispering sea of incantations
from these frosted lips.
No Daddy's girl, Southern belle
ringing for men, still soft
as little boy-urchins.
What was it I promised six months ago?
to have and to hold? A baby-girl
under these mountains of tulle.
And my man-
child, slender and wiry, spring-
loaded. But not for this life. *Make it work,*
husband, dear fragile man. I know
it's too much, too soon.
We will crumble under
the weight.

Beating the Dark

Emily Fabbriotti

Part 1: Alone

Tucked into a soft, hand-me-down sofa, among a large faded flower print and set-in coffee stains, Emily was reading a paperback she had read several times before and listening to the dull howl of a misty winter storm outside. She looked up into the window over her and saw that the night sky was tucking the sun away for safekeeping until tomorrow.

She sprung from under her blanket and made the rounds in her one-bedroom home, beating the dark—this was what she called the quick chore of illuminating every corner of the house before nightfall. Her house had originally been a summer cottage in a seaside vacation community. It was stationed in one of those towns in the South Shore that even lifelong residents of Massachusetts had never heard of; one with lots of economic starts and stops, so that business plazas were always half operational, and neighborhoods were dotted with new construction next to ramshackle cottages.

The cottage was, as of this year, a century old. This meant crooked walls, sedimentary layers of linoleum under the kitchen floor, and no light switches by the doorways like younger, newer homes meant for people to live in all year long.

There was beating the dark and losing to the dark. She often lost to the dark when she got deep into a good book or some utter nonsense on her phone, or when going out past dark and forgetting to turn all the lights on when she left in the afternoon. All losing really meant was momentary terrors of scurrying into silent, darkened rooms to grope around for a light switch. But it was a big loss because Emily was a jumpy person, and her whole evening after losing felt like an exercise of turning around quickly to see who had walked out of the shadows to follow her around.

Once the little home was glowing, Emily thought about the big spotlight on the docks at the yacht club up the road. It was for spotting boat robbers, but if she had one on her porch, she could shine it on the ocean outside right now to watch the wind push its open palms across the water's surface. Her mind drifted to how it would feel to fall off a tall ship, break both legs on the way down, and land in that cold salty chaos on a night like this.

She checked her phone for texts from her husband, who was halfway around the world again, and she calculated he was long asleep by the command of a foreign clock and foreign workday hours. If she were living back in her hometown, she would have gone for a drive right now to stave off boredom, checking on the houses where her high school friends' parents lived, peering in on the construction of new neighborhoods, shoveling hot French fries with mustard in her mouth at familiar stop lights. But this town wasn't hers like that. They had only moved here a year before, so she was still getting turned around on basic errands. She would just get lost driving around in the dark, trespassing on other people's memories, their high school friends' homes, their broken fields, their French fries.

After spying a stubby leftover joint in the old ashtray on the coffee table that read, "*Let's make like hippies and blow this joint,*" Emily spent the next half hour laying back on the couch and watching the ceiling fan pull her smoke plumes apart and spread their limbs about the room.

A low empty growl from her stomach made Emily sit up, close her eyes tight to fight dizziness for a moment, and then pad her slippered feet into a brightly lit kitchen to put on a pot of water for rice. She could hear a massive bird, like a crow or a raven, nearby making a fuss, and wondered if one of the many cats in the neighborhood had made a score of it. Who would even win in that battle? What was she just doing?

Oh, right. Rice. How much goes in? A whole cup? Now, is that how much she makes when it's her and her husband, or is that the right amount for one?

More muffled commotion outside. She didn't think crows were out and about after sunset. And seriously, would a cat go for one of those things? In this neighborhood, the crows were huge and hung around in droves like old gangsters at a deli shop.

So, one cup of rice, and optional butter. She'd go with butter. Wait, should she half the recipe or is that the right amount for one?

Is that even an animal outside? Well, if there's leftover rice it can be lunch tomorrow.

Good god, that noise!

Pulling long, sand-colored drapes away from the front windows, Emily peered past her porch and postage-stamp-sized yard to a cottage two lots down that was so badly out of order, she had always assumed it was empty.

Emily homed in on the cause of the noise. Laying on her side in a seated walker was an elderly woman in a pink knitted cap and puffy old coat calling, “Help! *Heeelp.*”

Part 2: With Each Other

The business of getting the woman upright and back into her home was long and confusing, especially for a stoned young woman who was terrified from CPR training years ago that told her moving an injured person could kill them in several distinct ways. The woman had insisted that she wasn't hurt, and just needed to be put up right, her breath smelling so strongly of cigarettes that Emily wondered whether the woman had swallowed one whole during the fall. The old neighbor's icy white hand with green and blue veins like exposed wires clutched Emily's down jacket as they pushed open the front door of the elderly woman's shack.

Emily noted that the woman had not beaten the dark that night. “Just a minute darlin’,” the wheezing and out-of-breath woman assured as she disappeared into the blank black room. If it weren't for the shuffle of small pieces of furniture being moved aside and the brisk clanking of cans on the floor, Emily would have thought that the woman had left her standing at the doorway of a warm abyss, smelling of dust and old, still water.

An LED light bulb attached to a bare sconce cracked alive and Emily was assaulted with the scene of an entire living space in one room. Like the first floor of her own cottage, it was one continuous living space, with the kitchen counter and appliances fitted into the wall opposing the entrance. Lining the walls were dusty cardboard boxes, some crushed, some with kitchen wares and indiscernibles thrusting through, some with magazines and unopened letters piled on top until they were reaching the cracked and stained ceiling tiles. In the center of the living space was a deeply indented green plaid couch with a yellowing bed pillow and crocheted blankets pressed into the cushions, the whole of which was glazed with a web of long white cat hairs. Two orange kittens were snuggled and sleeping at the unpillowed end, a chunky 8” television sat on a TV tray across from the bed pillow spot. Cat food cans and coupon books littered the peeling linoleum floor and the tiny kitchenette where the woman stood.

“Soda!?” the woman asked, startling Emily and the sleeping kittens, who untucked their warm little heads from each other's arms.

The woman stood behind the opened door of a heavy antique refrigerator to showcase the beverage options. Each of the three dark shelves was stocked

with little brown cream soda cans, perfectly aligned like soldiers in a parade. Emily dribbled out, “sure,” while she questioned how much that refrigerator was now worth, and how it would look in her own kitchen.

The young woman seated herself at the absolute edge of the sofa and felt a dramatic slope in the floor as she settled. The entire structure was being pulled down toward a giant cast iron stove that crouched heavily in the corner of the little shack.

A matted gray cat with one eye permanently winking surveilled Emily from the bathroom sink behind her, which caused her to note there was no door on the bathroom. The old woman released all her weight into a seat in the middle of the sofa, fitting perfectly into the indent like a bone in a socket.

“So sorry ‘bout all that. I knew I shouldn’t be out there. Just love the water on stormy nights like this, all angry and mad.”

“I know. I wish we could put a spotlight on it,” Emily mentioned, noticing another cat, a dark little calico sleeping close to the raging heat of the stove. How many were hiding in this room?

The old woman prepared herself a cigarette, a motion she’d gone through thousands of times—tapping an end of the cancer stick on her left palm thirteen times. Her thin white hair tossed about on top with every hit, abandoned of its hat.

“In the ‘80s, I was a teacher for the town then, and I used to take my whole classroom down to the water here and have my husband show them how to make fishing lures,” she added, her cigarette flashing a quick glow like an orange period at the end of her sentence. “Teach ‘em somethin’ useful.” Emily nodded and sipped her soda; it was cold and crisp and she was feeling very warm.

Trying to be friendly, Emily shared the memory of the time her seventh-grade teacher took the class on a field trip to an IMAX theater and they watched a sped-up video of starfish on the ocean floor. The speed of the video revealed to the children that starfish were very much on the move but seemed still to the human eye because the moves were so tiny and slow. “It was like this slow-motion rush hour with starfish tumbling over each other and all the rocks. Blew my little mind.”

The woman appeared as though she were not listening at all, the metronome-like “lick lick lick” of some cat somewhere in the room and the constant growl of the stove were the only sounds to be heard.

After a tense moment in which Emily seriously considered just standing up and walking out the front door, the woman abruptly shared, “You remind me of a student I had in the ‘90s.” She was still staring forward and not at her guest. “Same build even. A tall drink’a water. Caught her smokin’ marijuana behind my classroom. Told her I wouldn’t tell if she put what was left of it on my car tire in the faculty lot.” She looked quickly at the younger woman, raised her right eyebrow, and coughed up that old smoker’s laugh that sounds like gravel being shaken up in a paper bag. Emily let out a girlish gasp of faked shock.

“HUNDreds of students in my lifetime. I still remember the name of every one of my kids.” That phrase, “my kids,” had quite a bit of wear on it, like Emily’s paperback at home. The old woman tipped her head like she was giving a nod to hundreds of invisible, youthful spirits who joined them in the room for a moment.

“And any kids of your own?” a question Emily asked out of concern for the living conditions she was a guest in.

“Uh-no. Well, yes. I had a boy. Sunny,” her words stretched far into the past. “But there was an accident.” The young woman’s heart broke in half and floated to the bottom of her stomach as the old woman closed her eyes and shrugged.

The conversation moved to the town they lived in, information each was lacking passed between them—a bit about what it was like in the past from the old woman since Emily was a transplant, and a bit about what it was currently like from Emily since the old woman didn’t leave her home and didn’t know the goings-on anymore.

After a long, ragged sigh, the last of the older woman’s cigarette dropped into an empty cat food tin between her bare purplish feet. Emily jumped up and politely asked herself to leave, pulling on a loose end of a cardboard box top to write down her phone number. The second yank pulled the whole box down, like a Jenga bar in the middle of its tower, instantly pulling down the boxes on top of it and under it in one loud and dusty calamity. Hundreds of yellow closed and half-opened envelopes splattered onto the floor, in addition to some dead bugs of several genuses, petrified by time and dry paper.

The girl was mortified and blushed deeply. The woman didn’t even turn to look. She just cleared her throat and scratched her head, suddenly noticing

the absence of a hat and looking this way and that for where it might have landed.

Emily scribbled her phone number on the shred of cardboard box left in her hand and implored that the woman call if she “ever needed anything.” She dropped the number on the kitchen table and saw it was on top of a 1999 *Time* magazine. That scrap of cardboard would surely stay right there until the end of time.

The wind had stopped, but it was snowing fast and heavy now—the kind of snow that acts like a school teacher who walks into earth’s noisy classroom and puts her finger to her lips. It was a quiet walk back home through the snow, save for the pattern of feet crunching into the proud white mass.

Part 3: Together

Emily’s house slippers were a soggy wad by the time she made it up her porch stairs and through the front door, a burning smell snapping her out of what was left of her high.

“Shit! Shit! Shiiiiiiit.” Emily rushed over to turn off her stove burner. The water intended for her rice had evacuated the pot by way of air, and the burner left deep black rings on the base of it. She rolled her eyes at herself and turned to head for a long-held bathroom break, but then felt every nerve in her body stand on end when she spotted a gray cat winking at her from her bathroom sink.

She shrieked and scrambled to slam the door on the intruder. After steeling herself, she slowly reopened the door to find an empty bathroom.

She chopped the shower curtain with her hand. Nothing.

Looked around the kitchen and under the couch. Nothing.

Her phone glowed on the counter and she responded to a text from her neighbor, who asked if she were alright, as they had heard a woman scream.

Part 4: Apart

The next morning, Emily tied her hiking boots tight and wore extra layers for her morning walk. She crunched through the low layer of stiff snow up to her neighborhood coffee shop where the sleepy teenage girls made her coffee without fanfare. She wandered her usual walking loop under the glowing gray sky and through the blinding white landscape. The classroom was still quiet.

It started to snow again as she rounded her street. Big, slow, fluffy flakes. She stopped in front of her front door, turned around, and found herself boldly and hurriedly walking to the old woman's walkway. She paused at the front door, steam streaming from her breath and coffee cup. She pressed her ear to the door and tried to register whether she was hearing an old television hissing with static or nothing at all.

When Chickens Come Home to Roost

Cortney Davis

No matter where they are, at dusk chickens come home to roost. They file through the wire fence opened by the woman who gathers their eggs in the morning, or by the woman's children, who have also learned to gather eggs, to wash and dry them tenderly.

The chickens come home singing a night sound in their throats as all creatures do: horses nickering as they nuzzle their hay ricks, doves settling in the tree limbs, humans calling sweet dreams from room to room.

The chickens are in Bridgewater, Connecticut or they are in Middlefield, Connecticut, coming home according to their own time, returning through their own dusk. Sometimes a lost hen survives—not through its own cunning but because of the laziness of the fox, the distraction of the hawk.

This chicken, waiting outside, safe, in the morning, could be joy—the way joy can linger, patiently, until the gate of the heart opens.

Make Way
Kathryn Sadakierski

It's like one of those childhood jokes
About various fowl crossing various roads
When the cars stop to let the family of ducks pass
In a parade of honks and feathers,
Safely on their way
From the perils of traffic back to the grass.
A light-caressed line of colored cloth squares
Is suspended between the trees, between
Which the late afternoon sun shines,
Slanting onto the creek in the woods,
Sifting through cloud reflections like a sieve,
The water dappled with white and gold daubs,
Waiting for the ducks to cross.
Once they've reached their destination,
The cars continue on, everyone off to somewhere
Only they know, or are trying to find,
Gauging their path by the compass of light
Pointing to a place they can pin their hopes on,
To be refreshed, baptism via a byway,
Songs on the radio a sheltering solace,
The lyrics like pillows you can rest your spirit on,
Leaning into the words you've always felt in your bones
Like the furrows of a hammock,
Head back, drinking in the sky,
Navigating the depths of the imagination.
What you've dreamed
Is vivid and improbable as the duck procession
Reverenced like a royal caravan,
But therein lies the beauty
As you search to make it happen
In this wild world you live in.

State Line
Joanne Corey

The sign was placed precisely,
the perpendicular reading STATE LINE,
jutting out toward the road
to orient the occasional stranger
to this juncture of Massachusetts
and Vermont, the metal painted white
with black capital letters.

Over decades, the metal rusted,
the paint flaked away,
the adhesive letters that someone
had helpfully applied also succumbing,
so the sign now reads S LIN,
the town names on the parallel member
missing so many whole and partial letters
that only those who already know where
they are can surmise
WHITINGHAM and MONROE.

Only someone on foot can read
the intact VT and MA
in small letters,
straddle the line,
heal the divide
of American geography.

Fifth Season Finality?
Melissa D. Burrage

There's beauty in the end of things
the way the landscape changes hue in Autumn
how the oak matures, turns red then brown
how we seek it out, before its leaves fall
There's beauty in the end of things
how switchgrass turns purple
summer cornflower blackens in fall
like chocolate bon-bon's swaying in the breeze
There's beauty in the end of things
how fierce ferns fight until the end to stay green
how dahlias still dazzle
how pink asters defiantly refuse their decline
There's beauty in the end of things
how seed heads and pods rise above beach grass
offering hope that new life, next season, will appear

The Season

Andrew Yim

Popham Beach

The year is 1991 and it's Labor Day weekend on the southern Maine coast. I'm running on Popham Beach with a ragged pack of about two dozen teammates. We trot on the hard sand just beyond the ocean's break, darting up the beach to avoid waves and tidal pools. Terns dive into the surf and gulls hover over the beach as children run quickly in and out of the cold surf.

We have runner's tans, dark from hand to elbow, then pale and freckled at trunk and back. The pace is easy as is the conversation. Both wax and wane like the soft sea breeze and shifts of sand from dune to water's edge. Bill notices I'm wearing the same running shorts I wore the previous year. It's a recurring joke on the team now, how long will the shorts last. With the help of a few safety pins, they'll last forever, I reply.

We run to where the beach hits the fresh waters of the Morse River, and then back to the entrance. I take my shirt off at the end of the run, sit on the sand, and watch waves crest and crash. Coach pulls a football out of the van and we run routes into the surf. We cram into the vans for the ride back to Brunswick and the bustle of the new semester.

Wolfs Neck Forest State Park

It's ten days since the run on Popham Beach and I'm back in the routine of classes, running, study, and long dinners. Summer is over and It's time for "flow miles," which start at moderate then flow into race pace. It sounds like a zen experience, but we know no zen waits for us at Wolf's Neck Forest State Park.

We start the run where asphalt meets the sandy, dirt road of the park, which doubles as an organic farm. Between the Harraseeket River and Casco Bay, cows graze on thick grass just beyond the water's edge. Loons and cormorants drift then dive into the harbor, where the occasional seal pops up. An osprey cruises above the bay and then towards stands of balsam fir and red maple. The smell of pine mixed with salt and cow pie distracts me before the nose adjusts.

The conversation dims in anticipation of hard effort. The cows lift their heads as we pass and Dave picks up the pace. He trained hard this summer and is making a point. I feel the sting of the first surge, lungs pressing as muscles begin to respond and release. With each mile, the pace is, by design, faster. We run around the edge of the park, between field and shore, before crossing a small bridge over an inlet that reaches farther inland, through marsh and pasture.

The pack thins as we move through the fourth and fifth miles, looping back through empty campgrounds towards the bridge and cows. Coach drives by in the van, kicking up dust and pebbles, and yells out encouragement. Body and mind ride waves of pain and effort. We hit the sixth mile, disturbing the cows again. Sam, with his smooth, silky stride, leaves us literally in the dust. The small pack breaks into an uneven line. At the finish, I look up and notice purple pastels that streak across the sky, first notice of the sunset. We give each other high fives and jog back to the main road.

First Meet

An early frost glazes the well-tended grass of the college fields the morning of our first meet. A crisp September sun breaks the slight morning chill. Dressed in uniform, we warm up along the dirt trail, through the white pines that border the fields. I am quiet, caught in pre-race anxiety, while Bill, our captain, jokes around, trying to keep it loose before the race. It is a beautiful morning, but all I think about is the impending pain.

At the crack of the gun, we sprint across the full width of the grounds that surround the field house, jockeying for position against a few other colleges from southern Maine. Morning walkers stop to watch and cheer as soccer and field hockey players prepare for their games. The pack thins as we funnel off the field onto the path. Two or three abreast, we run again through the white pines before spilling out onto a sidewalk that takes us through campus. A few classmates clap and yell as we split the quad, between chapel spire and red brick dorms.

On the last loop around the fields, Bill breaks from the final pack of five. He's running strong today. But while he drives to the finish, my legs and mind rebel. It's all tight for me this morning. I finish and then gasp for air as I bend over, hands to knees, and feel the wave of lactic acid slowly

drain from my legs. I wander around and then join the post-race huddle as the last runners stagger across the finish. We warm down, commiserating and congratulating, measuring our performances and condition.

Mere Point

We jog in light rain through the fields, then forest, towards Mere Point. I nurse a sore hip and fall slightly behind the pack. We banter, joke, philosophize, and gossip as we turn onto the road that splits the spine of the peninsula. Looking left and then right, I glimpse ocean, just beyond summer estates and pastures. We discuss favorite MASH episodes, the merits of Bud Lite versus Milwaukee's Best, and then the recent outbreak of political graffiti, chalked on the sidewalks of the campus quad.

We run by a weathered cape with lobster traps stacked next to the garage, tangled in net and buoy. The black lab that roams free on the property gives us a cursory bark as it trots across the lawn in warning. A man appears from behind the traps and whistles to bring the lab to heel. He wears his yellow lobsterman bib at half mast, with shoulder straps hanging below his waist.

At four miles, half way down the peninsula, we come to a small landing, where rocks and asphalt mix with crushed shells and dried seaweed. The small bay is quiet, protected from the thunderous ocean waves by miles of inlet and rocky coast. Sam throws a thin, smooth rock side-arm into the water, where it skips six times before falling to the depths. In the distance, a fishing boat cuts the waters of Maquoit Bay as we turn to run back to campus. The rain begins to clear as we gain pace. The smell of rain on asphalt gives way to a mixture of brine and earth of fallow field.

Hero Hill

During class that morning, I'm distracted, on edge, already thinking about the workout. I hate this workout, I hate coach for posting it yesterday, I hate the feeling I have right now, knowing all the pain that awaits at that hill.

We call it Hero Hill, but really it's just a too-steep access road that runs a half mile down into a sand pit. There's nothing scenic or heroic to it in my

mind. Nothing to distract from its main purpose. Sand for some, pain for me. Some build walls, others run up hills.

Pain has its own palette, degrees and shades of discomfort and then up the scale to agony. The first fifty meters up the hill, passing by the wall of glacial sand, is only a discomfort. Despite all experience, my mind thinks that this perhaps is as bad as it will get. But, the incline steepens and by 200 meters, darker tones of discomfort, moving into real pain, make me question my effort. It would be so easy to simply stop, give up the fight, and walk away from this hill and idiotic sport.

Then it's over. We finish the sixth ascent with a final sprint. I curse in relief and then Bill, Dave, and Sam curse in solidarity. Jesus those were hard. Jesus did we really need to push that last one at the end? We laugh and then exchange hard high fives that sting the skin. It's over, I think to myself, these hills are over, for today at least.

State Meet

Foliage is near peak as we head north on I-95 to Waterville, Maine, for the State of Maine Championships. As I settle into my seat, the anticipation of pain begins to build. While some joke to release the stress, I withdraw deep into myself. I'm not easy to be around on race day. But the others know and leave me to my thoughts.

The trees lining the course, just off campus from Colby College, are in the fire of peak foliage. A light morning rain, just beyond a mist, pastes new fallen leaves to the trail. The morning chill fades as we warm up over the first two miles of the course. It is a brutal course, at first flat, and then up a hill for over a mile. The trail up the hill features occasional knots of root and rock, obscured by leaves and needles.

The rain picks up at the start of the race, and within a half mile, we are deep into puddles and muddy turf. I am straining by the time we reach the hill. The front pack pulls away and I see only the back of the runner, five meters ahead. I try to hold the distance between us and find a rhythm. I search for mantras, "Don't give up," "smooth and strong," but my legs aren't buying it. Bill and Sam are already in full stride running down as I plod towards the crest.

I'm angry as I cross the finish, almost a minute behind Bill and Sam. We are speckled and smeared by mud, our uniforms glued tight to skin by rain. Mist rises from our bodies, as warm, quick blood meets the cold damp air. Crows gather on the trees at the far end of the field and begin to caw. The rain, then the clouds begin to break. Morning gray giving way to shadow and light. We head to the gym for warm showers and dry clothes.

Topsham

Halloween pumpkins on stoop and porch have begun to shrink and dry as we head northwest to Topsham for a recovery run. The cold, dry wind prompts me to put on a second layer. We run away from the coast, through campus and then town green. At the old Fort Andross Mill, where the power of the Androscoggin River once turned slave cotton into cloth, we take a quick left, towards a footbridge with wood slats that spans the Androscoggin.

One by one, we begin to cross the bridge. With each additional runner, the bridge's sway gains depth and speed. A dozen feet slap and strike the wooden planks in staggered syncopation. We cross and the bridge slowly comes to rest.

We make our way through streets of colonial-era houses with stern, puritan facades. Then we run uphill, further inland along a road with larger lots containing half-scavenged cars on blocks, piles of furniture, machine parts, and lumber. A pickup truck with a rifle rack and then an 18-wheeler with a full load of timber cruise by, pushing the air into our chests as we jump off the road into the low brush.

We loop back to the railroad bridge, a half mile north of the dam and mill. My stride is measured and careful as I cross the bridge, just above the dark, moody waters of the Androscoggin. A train passes once a week or so, good enough odds for us. We cross in a single file, like soldiers on patrol, making sure to avoid steel rail and nail, then scamper down the embankment. We reach the fieldhouse just as long shadows turn to night.

New England Championship

The squad heads south on I-95 early Saturday morning to Boston and the New England Championships. We cross the Maine-New Hampshire border

at Piscataqua River Bridge, and then stop to pee and stretch at the New Hampshire Liquor Store. In an hour, we're deep in Boston, between Roxbury and Dorchester, cruising the perimeter of Franklin Park in search of a parking space. The gray morning has turned into a cold, rainy mess.

Even in the park, I feel the city buzz. The sound of cars and trucks filters through bare trees and bald fields. The last, hardy duffers of the season play a round on the municipal golf course as joggers circle the park. As we start our warm up, one of the elite squads, a group of Irish nationals from Providence College, cruises by. They run with quick, strong strides that seem effortless.

Three dozen squads with seven runners each line up at the far end of the field and wait for the gun. The starter stands 50 meters away, facing the middle of the line. He yells ready, fires the gun, and then sprints out of the way. Two runners from the University of Vermont move into our path and Bill responds with a stiff elbow. We run into the oak forest, "The Wilderness", and then loop back to Bear Cage Hill, where bears once lived in the Franklin Park Zoo. At two miles I realize that my effort is contained, almost pedestrian. I'm having a good day.

Everyone is running well and we move as a pack through the field. The pace quickens as we pass runners from Division III rivals, and then Division I schools. Suddenly, Dave slips in the mud and goes down head first, but he recovers quickly. I focus on the next runner and then the runner after that. I'm in that rare space, in smooth rhythm between effort and exhaustion. It happens once or twice a season.

I loop over Bear Cage Hill again and then sprint past the starting line to the finish at the other end of the field. A wave of endorphins and euphoria carries me through the finish line. In a few minutes, the damp chill moves into muscle and lungs. We gather at the edge of the field, receive coach's congratulations, and then head back to the van. We run mostly in silence along the paved trail and then sidewalk. Boston grinds its gears into the Saturday afternoon as we pile into the van and change into dry clothes.

We stop at Prince Pizzeria, a half hour north of Boston on Route 1, and admire the "Leaning Tower of Pizza" before heading in for lunch. We wolf down a half dozen pies and just as many pitchers of soda. Back in the van, I stare at the small herd of life-size plastic cows that graze in front of the

Hilltop Steakhouse. We merge back on to Route 1 and my eyes grow heavy as I observe the car dealerships, budget motels, drive throughs, and strip malls.

I wake up just south of Portland, Maine. In forty minutes, we arrive at the fieldhouse, make plans for the evening, and then disperse. I walk alone on the path back to campus, thinking of Bear Cage Hill, the winding trail through the oak forest, and then the sound of two hundred-some runners in hard effort across the muddy field.

In The Forest at Nightfall

John Grey

A platterful of chickadees almost in my hand,
the last butterfly fluttering between the blooms,
the usual rabbit offering to a cagey fox.
That is death I can absolve with a hand wave.
I am anticipating something,
How long will it be before these leaves
take it upon themselves to fall?
I can only drop my jaw and stare
as warblers climb up through air,
hot with summer, cooled by breeze.
Everyone is on tenterhooks, as before a storm -
everywhere, yet also some instrument is strangely played
as if strung with yellow oxide and the mulch of the dead.
Day is floating, drunk in the fading sun,
welcomes the unimagined chance.
Here, in this old place, newness is everything.
How else can you imagine song plays so sweet in here.
I can't tell you. I exist apart. But these trees now -
they've lived here for years, immobile but so driven.
By a shallow pool where pale reflection suggest
it's time to go, hazy late summer, burnished with lemon light,
defying the creep of shade, a garden of past
and future paradise. And this music, always.
It may never stop. This is a cathedral. It's communion.
Then night falls. The melody ends.
If not for wind, there's nothing to be heard,
Odors of the town come wafting up from below.
I see lights where there are fences.
Some part of it is even my own.
It's pleasant enough to live there. And convenient.
Even as the diner and the bar stay open,
offer shimmering life to echo that of the forest.
But I am not eager for my return.
My anxious self does better here.
The air is thick and still. Stars blink on.
I'm not ready to join the bored, the lost, the foolish,
the jerk and hum of conversation,

drink and more drink until the evening ends with me.
as just one more human water-spout.
August 1989 can wait. Why waste epiphany on humanity.

Red Leaf
Patricia Peterson

Some morning, or more likely late afternoon
walk along the s-curved gravel road that passes by the barn
near the copse, before the beaver pond.
You stroll, with this moment of full feeling
a kind of meandering expansion
of earth tones and fragrances.
Then you catch
out of the corner of your being
a patch of red.
And suddenly, all you see is
fixed on that shiny blousy color
so bold and crass to call out like that
there's hardly an excuse.
Don't look, don't linger on it But you do
You look long and longingly, you hold it
in your mind, a bruise to press,
and see it flash among those softer tones
and know this world will give over to the bare bone one.
But right now hold on tight to all of it.

Midday Walk
Katherine Gotthardt

It's long overdue, this reflecting,
turning the outside in,
examining what everything means.
Take a moment with a magnifier,
see the season's leaves in a different light:
not green, not olive, but emerald,
brash in the heat of high noon.
Had you not stopped, you might have missed it,
their absolute insistence on survival.
Had you not stopped, they might have missed it,
your once-in-a-lifetime complete attention.
It is these seconds that matter,
these halts in the day's eagerness to end too quickly.
You know what it's saying innately.
You see how the flies of time
flash their wings in the sun,
fine displays of speed and uncaring.
Watch out now.
One's buzzing around your hairline.

Sounding
Katherine Gotthardt

Those sounds you can't identify,
staccato croak of the hungry froglet,
or the cricket's stridulation.
Or maybe it's a baby squirrel,
grey mouth puckered in need.
How they squeak fragility.
The featherlight cry to survive.

The Tree in Sunderland, Massachusetts

Gayle Lauradunn

The sycamore still stands on the edge of the roadway where it stood in grace before the road bowed around it. Heart-shaped leaves send their light green rays and paler, hairy underside out with messages to those who pass by. Perhaps a path the Mohegans trod crossed near. It appeared before the Puritans arrived to “subdue the wilderness” as some version of the bible admonished them to perform. Prickly buttonball fruits fall on heads of those who wander under its rich canopy. The “wilderness” included all manner of wild forests and “wild” Algonquians, but somehow the sycamore is there, its elegance not to be denied. After King Philip of the Nipmucs died at an assassin’s hand, the small cluster of log cabins grew into a village, and a road for carriages then automobiles, curved out away from the tree’s root base. Today visitors come to stand across the way and wonder at the speckled light that shines through broad leaves, and branches that sway high above the grassy swath below. The sycamore stands, still, in majesty.

Authors' Ridge
Frank William Finney

At Emerson's grave,
I let go of the reins,
while you trotted off
towards Thoreau's
remains.

We met once again
for a romp
at the Inn
then galloped our grins
towards Walden.

Fighting for the Forest

Emily Ehrhart

The summer Jeremy was expected to return home from prison was abnormally hot. Wildfires devoured lands from Southern California all the way up the western states to British Columbia. The brutality of climate change was intense, fueling Jeremy's demand that we pick up where we left off, continuing a fight that had separated us for over fifteen years.

The letters he wrote leading up to his release were focused on plans for protests and attention-seeking demonstrations. He sent maps that highlighted development routes for oil pipelines and mountaintops in danger of decapitation for mining. He talked incessantly about planning our *next steps*.

"I want to do something big," he said one evening across the prison's crackling phone line. I had to strain to hear his words, but I could feel the force of his ideas. "We can do this better than last time, Shannon. We can open the world's eyes to what's happening here."

I mumbled some lackluster words of encouragement, hoping that he did not sense the anxiety that was pulsating through my body.

After the call, sitting on my screened-in porch and watching the northern California fog creep through the night sky, I thought about how different he would find me when he came home. I was a changed woman, no longer the activist he had fallen in love with. Not to mention, I was ten pounds heavier with graying temples and creases around my eyes. Would he still find me beautiful?

Before Jeremy was sent away, we were leading a movement hell-bent on rescuing old-growth forests along the West Coast. These lands were being consumed by careless logging corporations, and we believed it our mission to stop them and educate the world on the risks of deforestation.

It all started when we met at a protest nearly two decades ago, each of us carrying signs with bold messages as our voices unified in shouts that demanded change. That was the version of me that wore Birkenstocks and hemp-made jewelry. My livelihood came from a job at a natural foods market, and my home was an RV that I parked on a friend's acreage. It was a far cry from the woman who would later get a law degree and wear three-piece suits.

Back then, Jeremy lived on a commune, and spent much of his time writing diatribes against the conformity of our overtly-corporate society. He eschewed excess, and proclaimed his devotion to a radical form of

environmentalism that proudly put conservation above all else. He was young and energized for a fight that he desperately wanted.

I realized I loved him when he chained himself to a massive bulldozer that was about to clear paths towards a cedar forest slated for demolition. Men in hardhats demanded he move, but he stood his ground, willing to risk his life to save those trees. I wasn't quite so brave, but I stood on the sidelines, holding my sign, giving voice to the lands that nobody seemed to care about anymore. Several times, Jeremy and I locked eyes, urging each other to stay strong.

One year later, we got married. My best friend, Jessica officiated our mountain-side ceremony as clouds moved in, creating a veil of spring mist. In my sundress, my bare feet sank into cold, moist grass that sent chills all the way up my body, causing shivers and goosebumps. Jeremy held me tight, rubbing his hands across my bare arms, trying to warm me up.

We spent the following months more involved with the movement - protests and tree inhabitations. I developed quite the reputation for climbing towering redwoods, setting up a plywood perch, and refusing to come down for days, halting tear-downs and irking impatient loggers. Jeremy had other skills. He could pick locks in the dark and disable the engines of parked trucks with only a screwdriver and a flashlight.

The day that changed our lives came when a logging company was scheduled to take out nearly 100 acres in northern California before the government could declare it protected land. Many people showed up that day – loggers who called us worthless hippies and accused us of trying to take away their livelihood, Indigenous peoples who stood with linked hands and demanded respect for their land, and our group – angry and ready to fight for the exploited environment.

It didn't take long for things to get out of hand. One of the loggers threw a rock, and within mere seconds, there was a burst of energy that resulted in shoving, clenched fists, and men with puffed-out chests who spat threats at one another. Police showed up with batons and pepper spray; they started herding us away from the loggers, using their bodies as blockades so that we were separated and weakened by their force.

Suddenly, there was a blast that shook the entire forest. It should have been Jeremy's classic calling card -a truck that simply wouldn't start, an anonymous statement that deforestation had to end. But this time, he had gone further, creating a boom that felt seismic in that moment. Even though none of his previous efforts had been violent, I knew this was his work. He had told me the night before that he felt like he needed to take the resistance to the next level. We had always agreed that we would never fight

ecological destruction with violence, but somewhere in him that promise had been invalidated.

When the explosion went off, all of us – loggers, police, and protesters – fell, our mouths gaping open in screams of terror, as we struggled through a temporary deafness from the fury of the blast. Jeremy would later tell the police he wasn't there when the truck blew, but the last thing I saw that day before the boom knocked me down was his face, stern with determination as his lanky frame pushed through a crowd of people. When I came to, the older woman with a long gray braid that fell down her back, who had been standing next to me moments earlier, was crawling across dirt peppered with broken glass and debris. Her arms were scraped and bleeding, and her face was splattered with mud as a trickle of blood seeped from her hairline.

Somewhere in all the mess of that day, a 21-year-old kid, recently hired by the logging company, had crawled into the passenger seat of the truck – maybe looking for something or hiding from the chaos. They said he was dead as soon as the explosion went off.

Jeremy's years in prison dragged on, and with each passing month, he grew quieter, more distant from me. He never said the words, but I suspected he resented me for not carrying on the fight. When he found out about me going to law school, he made it clear that he thought an overpriced education and my decision to become part of a legal system that he believed failed him, was an ineffective, hypocritical expression of activism. When I took my first job with a leading eco-protection organization, he said they weren't doing enough. Fearing more judgment, I started to hide the other changes that took place in my life, in me.

Over the years, I've tried to forgive Jeremy for what he did that day. Maybe he always suspected this compassion was a struggle for me. The truth is, I never believed blowing up that truck was right for our movement - it did nothing but set us back and reinforce harmful stereotypes that the world too often assigns environmental activists. Jeremy didn't rig that truck out of anger for the forests. That action came from a rage someplace deep within him, and belonged to hurts he carried from long ago. Forgiving him would be easier if he could see this truth.

As his release neared, he started to open up more and reached out to me almost every day. He had a habit of never really talking to me, but just at me, all about the movement and the change he trusted would come. I wondered if he still expected me to climb trees and stand in front of logging trucks as they sped down gravel roads. What would he think of my quiet life that no longer centered around protests? Would he despise my avoidance of

conflict? Was Jeremy the man I wanted, was I still the right partner for him
- or had that explosion forever destroyed us?

Twentieth Century Sappho

Angela Acosta

Lost again in the theater building, I muse about purple staircases. Reflections of past productions line the walls, winding me through the twentieth century. Acting is the truest form of being oneself when authenticity must reckon with acceptability. Such is the fate of the women who loved each other and the craft they honed together. Sappho assumes her twentieth-century garb, that of a determined, self-righteous woman who acts what she herself cannot live. Embodied in Spanish artists, she takes to the stage in their radiant costumes, an homage to Bauhaus costume parties and all the ruckus and grandeur of the twenties. Her jovial, mobile theater is peopled with educators alphabetizing through movement, farmers sonically sowing, and sweet Señoritas reclaiming the front stage after growing up in the chorus. Across New England Sappho wears long cloaks and scarves to escape the cold, warming up in the dormitories of historically women's colleges, erupting into fits of giggles as a new student throws stockings on her head. Every little palpitation and glimmer of a half-seen sapphic world bears her name, a calling card for those who dare to take the stage, whether in a creaky dormitory in America, the great theaters for all of queer Madrid, or in the long years of exile in Argentina, always moving towards Sappho's promised future.

Italian Knot Cookies
Natalie Schriefer

My mother preheats the oven
while I mix the dough by hand.
Every Easter we twist these knots,
spin spirals on the cookie board,
fingers coated with flour.
We've lost other traditions—
egg hunts, church, and now,
as the years pass, family—
but baking stays. Mom pinches
a taste of dough and I sip icing
from a spoon, the milk and sugar
so sweet my tongue aches,
the metal of the spoon tart,
a bittersweet tingling
that lingers after the cookies
are frosted, sprinkled, gone.

A Good Rest

Donna Mitchell

I still held the hypodermic needle in my hand as I dialed my daughter's veterinarian. "I might have a little problem here with my daughter's cat," I said. "I'm calling just to be on the safe side." I'm put on hold and I looked past the needle to the little cat at my feet. "We were doing so well and then this happens," I told him.

"What seems to be the problem?" the vet tech said, her voice gravelly and weary.

"I gave Demon's insulin shot to Monster instead."

"Well, that would be a problem if Monster doesn't require insulin. Does he?"

"Uh, no. He doesn't. I'm just wondering if I should be concerned." She put me on hold again and finally the vet came on the line.

"You're going to have to force-feed your cat canned food every hour for the next 12 hours to counteract the insulin."

"But Monster isn't my cat! I'm just house-sitting. And he hides from me."

"Well then, he may very well die in the night."

"He'll die? But it's my daughter's cat. He can't die!" I tried to get my brain into gear, but it wasn't processing what I was hearing.

"If you can get here by one, we can give him an IV and he can stay the night. We're closing early because of the storm."

"He'll live? There's a storm?"

"Just get him here by one." The line went dead.

The weekend had started out on such a positive note. I had been so looking forward to some downtime. Four days and nights in my daughter's quiet Vermont village, caring for her three cats while she and her husband sailed on a mini cruise. The drive to visit Jane and Jeremy had always been relaxing for me. I gladly left the congestion of Albany for Vermont roads. My routine was a stop halfway at the bookstore in Manchester to treat myself. I bought Thomas Perry's thrillers there. I had them all. His plots were always about escape and hiding from the bad guys. Candy for me. Then I continued on through the National Forest and up and over Bromley Mountain. It felt like I was backpedaling in time to the 60s when traffic was scarce and slow. The views of the winter wonderland were spectacular as I made my way east. The snow was deep and the boughs on the trees were heavy with it, but I found their driveway nicely cleared for my arrival. Turning the key in the door produced a reverberation of pounding paws as three cats gathered in anticipation and then scattered in dismay when they

realized it was just me. It always took time for them to warm up to me on these visits.

Typically, Jane left elaborate instructions for me about her beloved pets. I found the note on the kitchen counter. “Welcome Mom! Please remember to separate the cats at feeding time. Everything is labeled. Tim eats upstairs on the window shelf— the enriched cat food; Monster eats in the den—the reduced calorie; and Demon eats the prescription food on the half bath counter. It will be easy to give him his shot there.”

Demon and I had a history. I’d been dreading his part of the deal ever since Jane asked me to house-sit. I’ve always been afraid of Demon, but I have admitted this to no one. He was a “rascal” as a kitten and his name was apt. I found him to be dominating and disquieting. I avoided looking him in the eye. Over time, he developed diabetes and required a shot of insulin each morning. He had to be sedated to make his periodic vet visits. I wasn’t the only one who was wary.

I have three children, all grown. Jane has been the easy one, the one who has a level head and has launched herself successfully. My other two have required much more of me and have kept my life spiraling up and down. There have been no middle-of-the-night phone calls from Jane. No emergencies. This was my chance to do something for her. I was determined to show Jane that she could rely on my competence whenever she needed me.

Each day of my sojourn, I relaxed with my thriller in the living room overlooking the quiet valley. I arranged myself on the sofa before the picture window with a quilt over my legs. Occasionally, I peered out at the panoramic scene below. I was content to be warm and sedentary and admire the snow that remained outside.

I was responsible to no one except the cats, and I had quickly mastered the feeding protocol. Each morning, I loaded up their bowls and prepared a syringe with insulin from the fridge. The cats gathered in the kitchen to watch. I didn’t vary my course. First, I ran up the stairs with Tim, the wiry, orange cat, and placed his food high on the shelf. Next, I scurried back down to the two remaining who were waiting in their assigned places—the den for Monster, the gray and black one, and the half bath counter for Demon, who is gray, black and white. They all chomped eagerly. Demon would stop momentarily to stare at my hand as I pulled the cover off the syringe, but I quickly grasped a fold of his neck and plunged the needle in when he turned back to the food. Finally, I would make my way back to the kitchen to boil water and steep my tea. I grew smug with my success. The cats and I were in harmony. I had conquered my fear.

On day three, I once again followed my precise routine. Demon's injection went especially well. I emerged from the bathroom feeling confident until I noticed that Demon was sitting in the hallway before me. I opened the bathroom door and found Monster eating on the counter. Confusion turned to dread as I realized the cats had switched places and Monster had just received his first shot of insulin ever.

After speaking to the vet, I walked to the window and, indeed, the snow was coming down hard. My car looked like a pillow hidden under a bed sheet. A search of the kitchen for a can of cat food or any food that might entice a cat produced nothing. I bundled up for a long walk and ventured forth into the storm.

When I arrived at Jake's Quick Stop at the bottom of the hill, I was coated with white powdery snow. The shop was empty of customers and the teenage clerk behind the counter stared at me as I stomped my feet. "You walk here?" he said.

"The road's not plowed," I said as I scanned the shelves for tuna. "Do you have any idea when the plow will go up the hill?"

"Hard to tell. Say, what do you need?"

"Tuna, I need tuna to catch a cat. And then I have to stuff the cat in a box and drive it through the storm to the vet."

"I'd reschedule if it was me. I mean, it's nasty out there."

"Can't. I just hope the tuna works. But then what. How do I get a cat into a box?"

"You have to grab him while he's eating. We have a cat, and he hates going into the carrier. My Mom sets it on its end with the door open and then drops him in. Gravity. But you're not trying to catch Demon, are you?"

Oh, God. Everybody knows everybody in Vermont! How can they stand it? "You know Demon?"

"Jane said her mother was coming over. We've all heard the Demon stories."

I purchased a can and followed my footprints back up the hill with the tuna. I pictured my warm, snug home back on the "flatland," with no cats to worry over. The idyllic weekend had taken a turn.

Back at the house, I could hear the plow starting on the hill as I prepared to trap Monster. First, I hid the cat carrier behind the kitchen tablecloth. Next, I scrounged for a can opener and succeeded in opening the can of tuna and doling out three servings. All of the cats recognized the sound of metal hitting metal and came running. I whipped out the carrier as Monster began to eat. It was easy to grab him, but as I held him over the carrier, I heard an ominous sound. Demon was growling. Cats growl? I

dropped Monster into the box and slammed the lid shut as I watched Demon slink closer and closer. His eyes had narrowed, and they were focused on my face. He wasn't planning on Monster going anywhere. I didn't want to experience what Demon had in mind for me, so I turned and ran into the den. He was right behind me, but I pivoted and leaped back into the hall and pulled the door shut. Time was running out for the vet run and there was a blizzard raging outside. Meanwhile, Tim had three bowls of tuna to finish. He was oblivious to the drama around him as he savored the treat.

Corralling Monster and back on the road, the storm produced a total whiteout. I followed the taillights of a milkman's truck down into the valley and on to Main Street. Monster howled in the carrier as I struggled through the slush to the vet's door. The lab tech turned out to be the same woman I had spoken with earlier. I recognized the tired timbre of a long-time smoker. She was buxom and middle-aged with a square frame under a droopy, hand-knit cardigan. She silently motioned me into the exam room.

"Well I made it!" I said. No response as she opened the carrier and tenderly scooped Monster out by the scruff of his neck.

"I got some good advice from a kid at the store and caught this little guy with some tuna!" I expected some recognition of my accomplishment. But still no response as she stroked Monster's neck and took his temperature.

"What a time I've had with that insulin shot. Cats who look like twins and then the snowstorm!" Nothing.

"Such a sweet cat too!" I just babbled on.

Finally, she hugged Monster to her breast and looked over at me, "You actually think Monster and Demon look anything alike?"

Busted. Of course she knew these animals. We were in Vermont! "Well, you needed to have been there," I said. "You must see this sort of thing all the time, wrong animal getting a shot?"

"Nope, I can't say that I have because I haven't. You can go now. Call in the morning to see if little Monster makes it through the night."

Her judgment weighed heavily on me. Some people can parry criticism just like Wonder Woman, swishing and blocking with her defensive wristbands. Judges very much want you to feel guilt. I cooperate fully. With my Catholic upbringing, guilt is a given in most of my interactions with living things. Find an empty water bowl, the remorse for leaving an animal without water for half an hour is oppressive. Pick up a kid a couple of minutes late from school, and I feel the censure of both the class aide and my kid twisting my gut.

To give myself succor, I often turn judgment right back at my accusers. As I slowly drove back to the house through the storm, I envisioned the tech as a stereotypical Vermont hillbilly. One who lives high up on an isolated dirt road and doesn't ever read a newspaper. But the irony that my own daughter resided high on a Vermont hill at the end of a dirt road and didn't subscribe to a newspaper did not escape me. I especially missed that newspaper each day as I sipped my morning tea.

After a restless night of regret and worry, I awoke to a brilliant sun and my car buried in two feet of snow. To my relief, the vet called with good news. I shoveled the car out, waited for the snowplow to again clear a path down to the valley, turned over my credit card, and brought Monster home. He looked well-rested. The three cats lined up at the door as I packed my bag for my exit. I could sense their relief. I studied the resemblance between Monster and Demon as I stood over them and felt justified. I gave the house a quick look over. Everything was back in place for the vacationers' imminent return. The empty tuna tin was in my duffel. I decided not to mention my little hiccup to my daughter. She'd hear about it soon enough.

***given the subject matter of “A Common Wealth of Tragedy,” which discusses traumatic content and violence, we at The Portrait of New England acknowledge a content warning for this story.**

A Common Wealth of Tragedy

Benjamin Thomas

I started going to the hospital chapel, if only for a few minutes at the end of each twelve-hour shift, following the shooting near Boston Common. Everyone working that evening, either in the emergency department or the operating room, had been approached by senior leadership to attend a debriefing. I quietly declined and said I needed to pray. It was the only thing I could say where I knew they wouldn't—couldn't—argue. The fact was, aside from a particularly awful flight a few years ago, I hadn't prayed to a god of any kind since I was probably ten. Despite this, I, like the anti-vaxers my nursing colleagues and I scoffed at, claimed religious exemption from something meant to help.

The room was small and held only four pews. At the front was a wooden podium and a table lined with electric candles (real ones banned by the Joint Commission and its list of safety standards). There was a stained-glass window that didn't depict anything overtly religious, as not to favor one belief over the rest. The desk near the door had a prayer ledger where families and friends could write the name of someone who needed thoughts and condolences in order to pull through the malady that ailed them. There were brochures scattered near the ledger, and a row of thirteen religious texts.

Only two of them were not the King James Bible.

Sitting there that first night, I read news reports on the shooting until the battery on my phone died. It was mostly stuff; I already knew: five people were killed on scene at the commuter rail stop, one on the way to the hospital, and then a final one after they arrived, leaving the death toll at seven. Nine others were injured before an off-duty cop killed the shooter. Several articles deduced that because of track maintenance and route closures, the platform wasn't as populated as it should have been. They labeled it luck. I wondered if the families of those that died thought the same.

Later that night, sitting on her apartment's fire escape, my friend Bree handed me a cigarette and shook her head. “Don't try to justify it, Nate. There is no reason.”

I shrugged. “We have to do something.”

“We’ll never prevent this kind of shit. That’s why when people say it’s the media or video games and all this exposure to violence—*please*. Is that why they staked Christ to a couple pieces of wood and shoved a spear in his side? Because they played Mortal Kombat on a stone tablet?”

“I know but still.”

She raised her hands. Shiny silver bangles slid down one wrist. “Look, all I’m saying is that people have been awful since the dawn of time. It’s who we are. Just be aware of your surroundings, you know? Who has a bag. Where the exits are.”

I laughed at the irony of her outwardly stating the need to know where your exit was while we were sitting on a fire escape, as Boston traffic bustled below.

#

The visit to the chapel had been meant as a one-off. A way for me to avoid sitting in a training room, chairs arranged in a circle, telling my fellow nurses and the doctors and technicians that were working that night, how the shooting affected me personally. The truth was: it didn’t. Yes, I was working. And yes, I took care of two patients who were at the station. One was a twenty-one-year-old woman who had been out with two friends celebrating her newly reached legal drinking status. A bullet had grazed her shoulder, tore off a good inch of skin and muscle, and then buried itself into a wall. Later, that bullet would become part of a forensic analysis by the Boston Police Department and the FBI.

But that person (as well as the other victims) *had* been directly affected by the shooting. I had not. And to sit in a room and say that I had, and how I was feeling about that, seemed disrespectful to the dead. More so to those who were close to them and still alive. They had known these people for years, lifetimes maybe. I had been exposed to them for a few short hours and had only been doing my job while I was with them.

Bree and I were at a bar a few nights later and I made a sarcastic comment about the debriefing. She leaned over a pool table and said, “Yeah, but you had to take care of them, right? That must have affected you. I mean one of them died for fuck’s sake.”

“Bree, I have patients die all the time. Some, believe it or not, because they were shot.”

“Remind me what hospital you work at so I never, ever go there.”

I mockingly laughed and went to order two more drinks. While I was standing at the bar, the back door slammed open and my heart jumped. I hurried around the bar in an effort to put *it* between myself and the person banging their way inside, only to realize with embarrassment that it was

just a barback lugging in a keg. My face burned. I don't think anyone paid my momentary panic any mind, but it sure as hell felt like everyone was staring at me; their conversations paused.

I handed Bree her drink and she raised an eyebrow. "You okay?"
"Yeah," I said and glanced toward the back door. "I'm good."

#

The shooting, if anything, only exacerbated my inability to sleep. I lay there with my phone and thought of texting my ex, Melissa. We had barely spoken since the split, and even though it was only a few weeks ago, I wasn't convinced this was an appropriate moment to reach out. A mutual friend recently told me she had started seeing someone. I gave up trying to sleep and opened my laptop.

Boston Police had officially released the names of the victims as well as the alleged shooter (though the *Globe* and several other news outlets had that information publicized hours after it happened). The youngest victim was seventeen and the oldest was sixty-three. I clicked through their pictures. When I reached the end of the slides, I started over.

According to the Gun Violence Archive, the *T-Stop Tragedy*, as social media had so aptly named the shooting, took place on the 217th day of the year and was the 214th mass shooting in America. Despite their commonality, 214 in one year sounded like an absurd statistic. I clicked into the definition of what a mass shooting was. Per the GVA, it was *an incident in which at least four people were shot, excluding the shooter*.

Huh.

I tried to figure out the logic behind which incidents made national headlines and which didn't. I couldn't come up with anything. A new witness had come forward, claiming they heard the shooter shout something in Arabic before opening fire. Conservative news outlets ran that interview for two days. Allowed a roundtable of white men and women and a single black man to pick it apart and discuss the barbarity of 'other' faiths. I glared at the talking heads and thought, *don't you think talking about people like they're animals has something to do with it?*

#

"Did you go to church as a kid?" Bree asked across a table of Thai food.

The restaurant was small and decorated in bright colors. It was one of our spots, and had been since we graduated college, me as a registered nurse and her as a communications major. While she went on to graduate school, I opted to remain with a four-year degree, as the thought of more student loans was too daunting to pursue a masters. We never tried dating.

Just wasn't on our radar, I guess. There was a drunken night after a club which was the afterparty to a different party on campus, that led to a near hook-up, but we both passed out before we could take our shirts off and took that as a sign. It was nice to wake up with relief and not regret. Those two things lived so close to one another.

At this point, she was happily taken. Had been for almost a year.

"Kinda?" I answered.

"How do you *kinda* go to church?"

"I don't know. We only said grace when my grandparents were over."

Bree laughed and a noodle slid out of the corner of her mouth which only made her laugh harder. "Sorry—okay so you were only religious when it counted. Like: 'Hey, I don't really believe in you, but please don't let me die in a bus crash'."

"I guess. It was never really a thing, just kinda like, *here's some of your options; go make up your own mind.*"

"That's pretty cool though," Bree said.

I wasn't sure. "Is it? I'm faking faith to get out of support groups. If I was brought up with the slightest religious intent, then maybe I wouldn't be faking it, or I would have just attended the stupid sit-down."

"No, you wouldn't have. Do you remember two years ago? The baby?"

I did when. Though, truth was, I remembered it more often than that.

"They tried to offer you counseling after that one too and you faked having a sudden onset of the flu or some shit until they forgot about it and stopped asking."

"What's your point?" I asked.

"My point, Nate, is that you won't ever take the help, so don't blame your parents or your lack of religion for it. The only thing that's going to settle all of this for you?" She waved them in little circles. "Is for you to acknowledge what you've seen and deal with it."

I didn't say anything for the rest of dinner and Bree didn't pry. We were good like that. A long-running joke between our circle of friends was that we never would have worked as a couple because we were *too* good together. It wouldn't be fair to everyone who had to work at it.

We left the restaurant, but I paused at the street corner across from the T stop. Bree began crossing with a group of people, her Charlie card already in hand and ready to board the train.

I called after her, "Think we could just walk? It's nice out and I could use some air."

She hesitated and, in a moment of selflessness like all her moments of selflessness, Bree nodded with a small smile. "Yeah, of course."

#

I worked the next three days. 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. Each night, I found myself in the chapel. It took till the third night for me to open a copy of the King James. I read the first few pages. Read of Eve and Adam and the serpent. Digested words written in the same narrative style as classic science fiction or fantasy stories.

I couldn't differentiate between them.

When I was ready to leave, I stuck a scrap of paper between the pages I ended on, careful to ensure it didn't stick out.

My next shift wasn't until four days later (a perk of working three twelves in a row). When I left, I stopped outside the chapel, pretending to check my phone until a security guard and two nurses from the floor walked past. When they were gone, I slid inside, careful the doors made no noise when they shut. The makeshift bookmark was right where I left it.

Later that night, I lay in bed, head still fuzzy from the lingering taste of vodka on my tongue, and pulled up Melissa's number. *Randomly thought of you. Hope all is well. Always.*

When I woke up the next morning, after only an hour-or-so of solid sleep, I regretted the *always*. Her lack of response amplified that regret, causing it to spread over me like wildfire.

#

Google's top news headline was the president's response to the recent re-ignited push for gun control. I read opinions from both sides of the aisle and remained furious at the lot of them. *We understand and sympathize with what you're going through; our thoughts and prayers are with you.*

"Fuck your thoughts and prayers." I shut the screen.

Halfway through my next shift, between being yelled at by a drunk and pulling a non-compliant patient out of a diabetic coma from low blood sugar, my phone vibrated with a text: *Hey, sorry I never replied. Crazy like always. Things are good. Was meaning to text you after I read about what happened, hope you weren't working.*

I thought of responding right then, telling her that I was in fact at the hospital that night. That I had watched one of the victims die—done CPR on them actually—but I didn't. I couldn't bring myself to say much of anything. So, I slid my phone back into my pocket and went to pull meds from the pyxis.

I read more from the book that night. It was approaching a month since the shooting and only a few new names had been added to the chapel ledger. My bookmark, aside from when I periodically moved it forward a few pages, remained untouched.

#

Labor Day passed, and it wasn't one of my holidays to work so I wound up with five off in a row. Bree and I got together with a few friends and talked about taking a trip to Salem, something to get in the Halloween spirit. I tried to muster some excitement, and it was there, a little bit anyway. I told them I'd check the hospital schedule and let them know.

After my next shift, I reached the part in the story where the angel of the Lord appeared through a burning bush; I shut the book. I looked back over at the table and wondered if, in the singular Quran or the singular Torah the hospital had put in this supposedly non-discriminatory room, the stories were quite so... out there. Rather than check, I kept reading the one in my hand, oddly ashamed to think that I was meant to. For some reason, because of who I was and what country I was in and what subset of society I belonged to, the King James was the one I *had* to read.

That night, rather than sleep, I Googled each of the three books. I tried to pick apart the similarities and the differences. There were many. Aside from the shooter pleading insanity, and the waning calls for gun control, news organizations had lost interest in what happened. Their focus had shifted back to the outlandish things coming from the current administration, tumultuous relationships with foreign countries, and a few articles on climate change. The Amazon was burning at an unprecedented rate, but because the devastation was only affecting animals and the planet itself, not people directly, no one seemed to care. Maybe they were hoping to see God in the fire.

Bree texted me just after 2:30 a.m. *I know you're awake. How'd the group thing go?*

I stared at her message trying to articulate that I *had* in fact made a meeting with an EAP counselor... I just stopped short of entering their office. But rather than answer her, I scrolled through the conversations on my phone until I reached my ex Melissa and started to type.

Actually, was on when it happened. Crazy shit you have no idea.

That's what I could have—should have—sent to her, but I didn't. My thumbs touched the keys and spelled out a different set of words: *Can I ask you something?*

My phone vibrated less than a minute later.

Of course.

Is it a good time?

Yeah, I'm at home, have an early morning tomorrow. What's wrong?

Early morning? It's almost three a.m.

I know—did you want to ask me something?

Why'd we split?

I didn't think she would answer. I even turned my phone on silent and put it face down with the alarm off. But in the absence of sleep, curiosity plagued me, and I looked.

:/ you know. things just didn't work out. We were in different places.

Real reason, Lis

I pressed the standby button and stared at the blank rectangular screen until my eyes became blurry. Then it glowed: *Incoming call*. Fuck.

"Hey." My chest froze.

Her voice was soft, barely more than a whisper. "Hey."

We laid in silence for a few minutes. The sound of her breathing is rhythmic and soothing.

"Nate, what's wrong?"

"Lis." I said it as sternly as I could. "Please."

There was muffling on the other end of the phone. She was sitting up; I could see it in my head. Back against the headboard, knees like cloth-covered towers beneath the sheets. There came a soft click; she was biting her nails.

"You needed help, and no matter what I did, you wouldn't get it."

I could have silently mouthed the words along with her, but hearing her say them was, as it had been the first time, sobering. *You're a fucking shit*. That's what I wanted to say to myself. It's what I said to myself a dozen times over after we had that initial conversation.

"I'm sorry I couldn't talk to you about it. I should have, I just, I couldn't suck you into it. You'd have thought I was crazy."

"It didn't have to be me. It could have been anyone, I just wanted you to talk to *someone*. Find some kind of outlet. I wouldn't have cared if it was me, a professional, or even Bree. But you wouldn't even talk to her about it."

I opened my mouth only to close it.

"Were you working the night of the shooting?" She asked; I didn't answer. "Jesus, Nate. Why didn't you call me sooner? Are you okay?"

My eyes lost focus and I could feel the words in my head. I could see them like they were clouds floating in front of my eyes. I took a deep breath, but I couldn't get them out. They just hung there like captured animals on Noah's ark. I closed my eyes and gave up trying to let them out.

"Yeah, I'm alright."

We talked for a few more minutes. But something had shifted in her tone. The realization that there wasn't going to be a breakthrough. I was

tempted to ask about the guy she was dating but didn't. Instead, I thanked her. Not only for staying on the phone, but for actually calling.

"No one really does that anymore," I said.

"Sometimes it's nice to hear a voice."

"Yeah, sometimes it is."

The next morning, I sat down in the EAP office at the hospital and held my hands together to keep them from shaking. While the person behind the desk asked me how I was doing, a different person, in another part of the country, brought an assault rifle into a bar. The incident made national headlines. It was America's 219th mass shooting of the year.

####

In Conversation with Poetry Contributor, Joanne Corey

MJ: Can you tell us a little bit about your process of writing, “State Line”? What did that look like? What would you like for your audience to take away after reading your poem?

JC: I wrote “State Line” during a private writing retreat in North Adams, MA in May, 2021. I had gone back to the area for a few days on my own to write and make decisions on which poems to include in my collection *Small Constellation*, which centers around the North Adams area, its evolving history, and my family’s relationship with it. I wrote “State Line” because I wanted to include a few more poems about the small towns that surround North Adams and what it was like to live there.

My childhood home in Monroe, MA was about a half mile from the state line and I passed the state line sign that is the subject of this poem thousands of times, on foot, by bike, by car, by school bus when I was in high school in North Adams. In some ways, it felt superfluous, as the small towns were each other’s neighbors, regardless of state. For example, most of the people in Monroe, MA belonged to churches in Readsboro, VT because Monroe was too small to have any churches of its own. My father worked for New England Power Company, which had dams and power stations along the Deerfield River in both Massachusetts and Vermont.

As with many other rural areas in New England, the closure of mills along the rivers caused population decline and a certain amount of decay, represented by the rusted state line sign. The people on the ground, however, can still see themselves as members of connected communities regardless of a line on a map. They can still enjoy the unifying force of the river and hills, aside from the geographic names they have been given.

MJ: Who are you reading right now?

JC: I’ve most recently finished Tara Betts’s collection, *Refuse to Disappear* (The Word Works) and am about to dive into Jessica Dubey’s most recent chapbook, *All Those Years Underwater* (Kelsay Books).

*MJ: When you submitted your poem, you talked about how it was a part of your unpublished collection, *Small Constellation*, which you say centers around the North Adams, MA area. Would you mind elaborating a little on how that area (and even region) has influenced your writing?*

JC: Growing up in Monroe, then a town of about 200, I went to North Adams frequently to visit our grandparents, to shop, and to attend high school, so it feels like my second hometown. As I was entering adulthood, North Adams and the surrounding towns entered a period of economic decline that halved the population and led to most of the young people leaving the area. After I graduated from Smith College in 1982, I moved to Broome County, NY to join my spouse who was a native of Stamford, VT, which is also close to North Adams.

We continued to visit frequently, as we still had relatives and friends there. When I returned to my childhood love of writing poetry in my fifties, it was natural to me to write about my family and our New England roots. I also felt drawn to explore the sweeping changes that have occurred in the North Adams area over time. I have a unique perspective as both an insider and an outsider that I thought might be elucidating and that I explore in *Small Constellation*.

The collection contains poems dealing with the Hoosic and Deerfield Rivers and their place in the lives and livelihoods of people living in the region; the Hoosac Tunnel and railroads; personal stories of my family's immigrant roots; and the astonishing transformation of the mill complex that started as Arnold Print Works, became Sprague Electric, and is now the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art.

There are also a number of ekphrastic poems based on artworks from MASS MoCA, some of which also tie to the landscape or North Adams' history.

MJ: You mention in your biography that you have been an (almost) annual resident at the Boiler House Poets Collective at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art in North Adams. Can you talk a little bit about that fellowship and how the work you've done there has impacted you?

JC: In November, 2015, I attended one of the first workshops-in-residence weeks at The Studios at MASS MoCA, a collaboration between The Studios and Jeffrey Levine, founder, publisher, and artistic director of Tupelo Press. As someone who had just recently begun to publish my poems, I only had the courage to apply because it was taking place on my “home turf.”

Although I was in over my head as a beginner among much more accomplished poets, we poet-attendees bonded so strongly that we wanted to continue our relationship. As the Boiler House Poets Collective, we have met for a week-long reunion residency at MASS MoCA every fall, other than the pandemic closure of 2020.

The Boiler House poets have been foundational in the development of *Small Constellation*, including workshopping individual poems and an earlier version of the manuscript. I learned a great deal about ekphrastic poetry from their example and from group projects we have undertaken during residency weeks.

I’ve also enjoyed the opportunity to read with them in North Adams several times.

MJ: Is there a specific poem about New England that has really inspired you and your work?

I have memories of “learning by heart” Longfellow’s “Paul Revere’s Ride” as a young student in grammar school in Monroe, MA. I think I internalized that sense of place, because, when I started to write poems myself as I got a bit older, I naturally gravitated to writing about my own New England surroundings.

When I returned to writing poetry in my fifties, I again felt drawn to poetry of place, and particularly to my place of origin, the MA/VT border area.

MJ: Outside of Small Constellation, are you working on any projects or publications right now?

I am working on final manuscript preparation for my chapbook, *Hearts*, which will be published by Kelsay Books in late summer, 2023. *Hearts* deals with my relationship with my parents, concentrating on my mother’s final years, as she battled heart disease.

I'm also working on a new chapbook manuscript of ekphrastic poems based on artworks of MASS MoCA.

MJ: Where else, in terms of magazines and publications, can readers view some more of your work?

JC: Wilderness House Literary Review, Volume 17, Number 1:
<https://www.whlreview.com/no-17.1/poetry/JoanneCorey.pdf>

Rat's Ass Review, Fall/Winter 2022:
http://ratsassreview.net/?page_id=4093

The online anthologies of The Binghamton Poetry Project:
<https://thebinghamtonpoetryproject.wordpress.com/anthology/>

While my blog Top of JC's Mind is an eclectic mix of writing, I always link to new publications as they become available. You can also find links to older publications, as well as a few self-published pieces:
<https://topofjcsmind.wordpress.com/>

Contributor Biographies

Angela Acosta (she/her) is a bilingual Latina poet and Ph.D. Candidate in Iberian Studies at The Ohio State University. She is a graduate of Smith College and recipient of the 2015 Rhina P. Espailat Award from West Chester University. Her work has appeared in *Rainy Day Literary Magazine*, *Flying Island Journal*, *Panochazine*, and *Toyon: Multilingual Literary Magazine*. Social Media: Instagram @aaperiquito

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Ed Ahern resumed writing after forty-odd years in foreign intelligence and international sales. He's had four hundred stories and poems published so far, and six books. Ed works on the other side of writing at *Bewildering Stories*, where he sits on the review board and manages a posse of nine review editors. He's also lead editor at *The Scribes Micro Fiction* magazine.

<https://www.twitter.com/bottomstripper> ;

<https://www.facebook.com/EdAhern73/?ref=bookmarks> ;

<https://www.instagram.com/edwardahern1860/>

Melissa D. Burrage is a historian and author of *The Karl Muck Scandal: Classical Music and Xenophobia in World War 1 America* (melissadburrage.com). She began writing poetry in earnest after her twenty-two-year-old son died in a tragic motorcycle accident in his final semester of college. Her work can be found in *Persimmon Tree*, *Libretto Magazine*, *Paterson Literary Review*, *Duality*, *Poetica Review*, *Foyer Magazine*, *Syncopation Literary Journal*, *Sweetycat Press*, *Dashboard Horus*, *Smoky Quartz Tenth Anniversary Literary Anthology*, *Southern Arizona Press: The Poppy: A Symbol of Remembrance Anthology* and *Cephalopress: Border and Belonging Anthology*.

Joanne Corey is a native of the Massachusetts/Vermont border area and a graduate of Smith College; she currently lives in Vestal, New York, where she participates with the Binghamton Poetry Project, Broome County Arts Council, Tioga Arts Council, and Grapevine Poets. She returns to New England often to visit family and friends. With the Boiler House Poets Collective, she has completed an (almost) annual residency week at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art in North Adams since 2015.

Her first chapbook, *Hearts*, is forthcoming from Kelsay Books in 2023. She invites you to visit her eclectic blog: topofjcsmind.wordpress.com.

Cortney Davis is the author of five poetry collections, most recently *Daughter* and *I Hear Their Voices Singing: Poems New & Selected*. She is also the author of three memoirs and co-editor of three anthologies of creative writing by nurses. Her honors include an NEA Poetry Fellowship, three CT Commission on the Arts Poetry Grants, the Prairie Schooner Poetry Prize, the Wheelbarrow Poetry Prize, a Tillie Olsen Creative Writing Award, and two CT Center for the Book Awards. Cortney served as poet laureate of Bethel, CT from January 2019 to December 2022. <http://www.cortneydavis.com>

Emily Ehrhart writes creative nonfiction and literary fiction. She has been published in *Voice Catcher Literary Magazine* and *Honeyguide Literary Magazine*, as well as the online edition of *Vegan Life Magazine*, an international publication. Currently, Emily is an MFA in Creative Writing Candidate at Vermont College of Fine Arts. She also holds an M.A. in Counseling from Webster University and a B.A. in English and Political Science from Saint Louis University. Emily lives in Edmonton, Alberta with her husband and two dogs. She enjoys traveling to the Pacific Northwest, her former home, and Vermont, where her graduate school program is based.

Emily Fabbriotti lives happily in the South Shore with her handsome husband, Ethan, and silly little puppy, Tugboat. She was previously published in *Thoreau's Rooster* (2011) and *Portrait of New England* (2019). When she isn't enjoying the beauty of nature in Massachusetts by hiking, boating, and eating local, Emily works on a collection of poems she promises herself she will finally complete in 2023.

Frank William Finney is the author of *The Folding of the Wings* (Finishing Line Press). His poems can be found in *Constellations*, *Green Mountains Review*, *Portrait of New England*, and elsewhere. Born and raised in Massachusetts, he taught at Thammasat University in Thailand from 1995 until 2020.

Charlotte Friedman is a poet, teacher, and steadfast believer in the potency of imagination. Charlotte received her MFA from Vermont College of Fine

Arts and M.S. in Narrative Medicine from Columbia University, where she taught in the English Department for ten years. Her book, *The Girl Pages*, was published by Hyperion, and her poetry in journals such as *Connecticut River Review*, *Intima* and *Waterwheel Review*, which nominated “Alams for Cleaning Out the Painter’s House” for a Pushcart Prize. Poetry translations (with Carol Rose Little) of Juana Peñate Montejo’s Ch’ol poetry have been published in *World Literature Today*, *North Dakota Quarterly* and elsewhere.

Katherine Gotthardt, M.Ed. is an award-winning poet and author who spent the first 27 years of her life in northern Massachusetts. As a child, she swam in Walden Pond and to this day, though she currently resides in Virginia, she has an etching of Henry David Thoreau on her living room wall. A graduate of Middlesex Community College, University of Massachusetts Lowell and Cambridge College, she has 11 books to her name and dozens of publications online and in journals. She spends her days writing full-time, loving her family and spoiling rescue dogs. Learn more at: www.KatherineGotthardt.com and follow her on Facebook at: @KatherinesCoffeehouse.

John Grey is an Australian poet, US resident, recently published in *Sheepshead Review*, *Stand*, *Poetry Salzburg Review* and *Ellipsis*. Latest books, *Covert*, *Memory Outside The Head*, and *Guest Of Myself* are available through Amazon. Work upcoming in *Washington Square Review* and *Red Weather*.

Alexander B. Joy hails from New Hampshire, where he used to spend the long winters reading the world’s classics and composing haiku. He is currently being held against his will in North Carolina. When not working on fiction or poetry, he typically writes about literature, film, philosophy, and games. Follow him on Twitter (@aeneas_nin) for semi-regular photos of his dog and see more of his work at linktr.ee/alexander_b_joy.

Gayle Lauradunn’s *Reaching For Air* received Finalist for Best First Book of Poetry (Texas Institute of Letters). *All The Wild and Holy: A Life of Eunice Williams, 1696-1785*, a book-length persona poem, received Honorable Mention for the May Sarton Poetry Prize. Her third collection *The Geography of Absence*, was published in October 2022. She was the co-organizer of the First National Women’s Multicultural Poetry Festival, held for a week of readings and workshops at the University of Massachusetts,

Amherst, where she also received her doctorate. She is on Facebook and Youtube.

Eric D. Lehman is the author of 22 books, including *New England at 400*, *Quotable New Englander*, *A History of Connecticut Food*, *New England Nature*, and *Afoot in Connecticut*. His biography *Becoming Tom Thumb* won the Henry Russell Hitchcock Award and was chosen as one of the outstanding university press books of the year by the ALA. *Shadows of Paris* won Novella of the Year from the Next Gen Indie Book Awards, a Silver Medal from the Foreword Review Indie Book Awards, and was a finalist for the Connecticut Book Award. Find him at www.ericdlehman.org or Instagram @afootinconnecticut.

Donna Mitchell lives in Upstate New York. She has strong family ties to Vermont and can often be found hiking or haunting the bookstores there. She is a lifetime writer and likes to try her hand at new genres. She can be reached at: djmitch@nycap.rr.com.

Patricia Peterson was born in a suburb of Chicago, educated in the West, and employed in editorial and writing on the East Coast. She has a very small owner-built cabin in Vermont, has hiked the White Mountains and fished sweet rivers such as the Lamoille. Now back in Chicago, she has published some poems but has been, on the whole, undiscovered until now.

Kathryn Sadakierski is a writer from western Massachusetts whose writing has appeared in publications around the world, including *Critical Read*, *Literature Today*, *New Jersey English Journal*, *NewPages Blog*, *Northern New England Review*, *Origami Poems Project*, *Silkworm*, *Snapdragon: A Journal of Art and Healing*, *Yellow Arrow Journal*, and elsewhere. In 2020, she was awarded the C. Warren Hollister Non-Fiction Prize. Inspired by nature, Kathryn loves exploring the beautiful landscape of New England, growing flowers (especially zinnias), and writing in the sunshine (much like the flowers, she is powered by the sun!). She holds a B.A. and M.S. from Bay Path University.

Natalie Schriefer often writes about nature and coming of age. Her work has appeared in the *Journal of Compressed Creative Arts*, *Room*, and *MTV*, among others. She received her MFA from Southern Connecticut State University. Say hi at www.natalieschriefer.com or on Twitter @schriefern1

Ann Taylor, for many years a Professor of English at Salem State University in Salem, Mass., has written two books on college composition, academic and freelance essays, and a collection of personal essays, *Watching Birds: Reflections on the Wing*. Her first poetry book, *The River Within*, won first prize in the 2011 Cathlamet Poetry competition at Ravenna Press. A chapbook, *Bound Each to Each*, was published in 2013. *Héloïse and Abélard: the Exquisite Truth*, was published in 2018, and her most recent collection, *Sortings*, was published 2020. She is currently at work on a new collection of poems, *Taking Care*.

Benjamin Thomas writes from New England where he unequally balances time between hiking, writing, and quoting seemingly random movies. Get in touch at benjiswandering.com

Andrew Yim is a writer, and, during the weekdays and occasional Saturday morning, primary care nurse practitioner. His essays have appeared in various print and online publications, including *The New York Times*, *The New Haven Review*, *Trail Runner Magazine*, *Biostories*, and *Farsickness: Literary Travel*.

About The Portrait of New England

Portrait of New England is a regional-based literary magazine, accepting poetry, fiction, and creative non-fiction submissions from writers with ties to New England (for example: former resident, current resident, attended school in the region).

After being on hiatus for several years, the magazine relaunched in December of 2022 and published its first issue since 2019.

Submissions open back up between March 1, 2023-May 31, 2023.

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