

The Shangri-La Shack Literary Arts Journal

Volume 1. Issue 1



The Shangri-La Shack™

Literary Arts Journal

Volume 1, Issue 1



Get Back Better, Eleanor Leonne Bennett

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God for granting all of these talented artists their unique gifts of
expression.

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Welcome to the inaugural edition of *The Shangri-La Shack Literary Arts Journal*.

Our mission is to provide a stage for raw expression that evokes appreciation for the gifts of the world in which we live. We've compiled creative writing, paintings and photography from an eclectic group of artists that reflect on the real value of our everyday world; bringing attention to the beauty of the wilderness, the oddities of suburbia, the mystifying darkness of a city, and everything in between.

We'd like to deeply thank everyone who submitted their creative works to this journal. It was such a powerful experience to hear the voices of so many sincere artists. Following is a collection of the pieces that we thought most genuinely expressed the values of The Shangri-la Shack. We look forward to continuing to lift up the voices of the community in future editions.

Come hang out in The Shack and express, celebrate, reflect, and indulge in the spectacular quirks, gifts, and challenges of our world.



Field Poppies, Elena Malec

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She is Brave, Eleanor Leonne Bennett

Sea Glass

By Mary Wallach

Fragments come back on the tide,
stories, worn down by the telling

to irregular perfection,
not what they were,

but what they've become,
more precious than reality,

more beautiful than truth.



I Got the Blues, Elena Malec



African Masks, Elena Malec

The Cave Painter's Deposition

By Michael Shorb

Should I say a river
met the wide blue sea
beneath a giant arch
of water-sculpted granite,
to say we settled this valley
by destiny or design
is falsehood, we were
dancing the fire and
skinned game end
of the day dance
we needed to stay alive,
we held our breath,
struck the earth
with a seed of future cities
in this place and not another,
and just to keep things straight,
I once ran with the hunters
before shattering this leg
I drag now, down
the dry black throat
of this cave, burdened
with a hide bag of charcoal
implements and chunks of raw
color coaxed from loam,
searching for just such a
sudden grotto canvas in
rock walls unseen by man.

You'd know the place right away,
the hushed air, a falcon of
updraft bearing away smoke,
at first I barely knew
what to do, scratched lines
became solitary elk on
river cliffs, a grazing herd of horses
came alive with umber manes
and wild blue eyes, bears
lumbered into the shadows,
looking back in alarm.

I had to talk fast
back at the campfire that night,
describing the paintings below
became the first song,
my agitated tapping on
stone the first music,
some wanted to kill me off
as an extra mouth to feed,
most wanted me around
for potential good luck
whatever they voted
to call me,
I might have been the first artist,
or the first priest,
or the first insurance agent,
yet became the first showman,
leading guided tours
of the hidden animal galleries
of my own creation.

Jesus Wore a Rolex

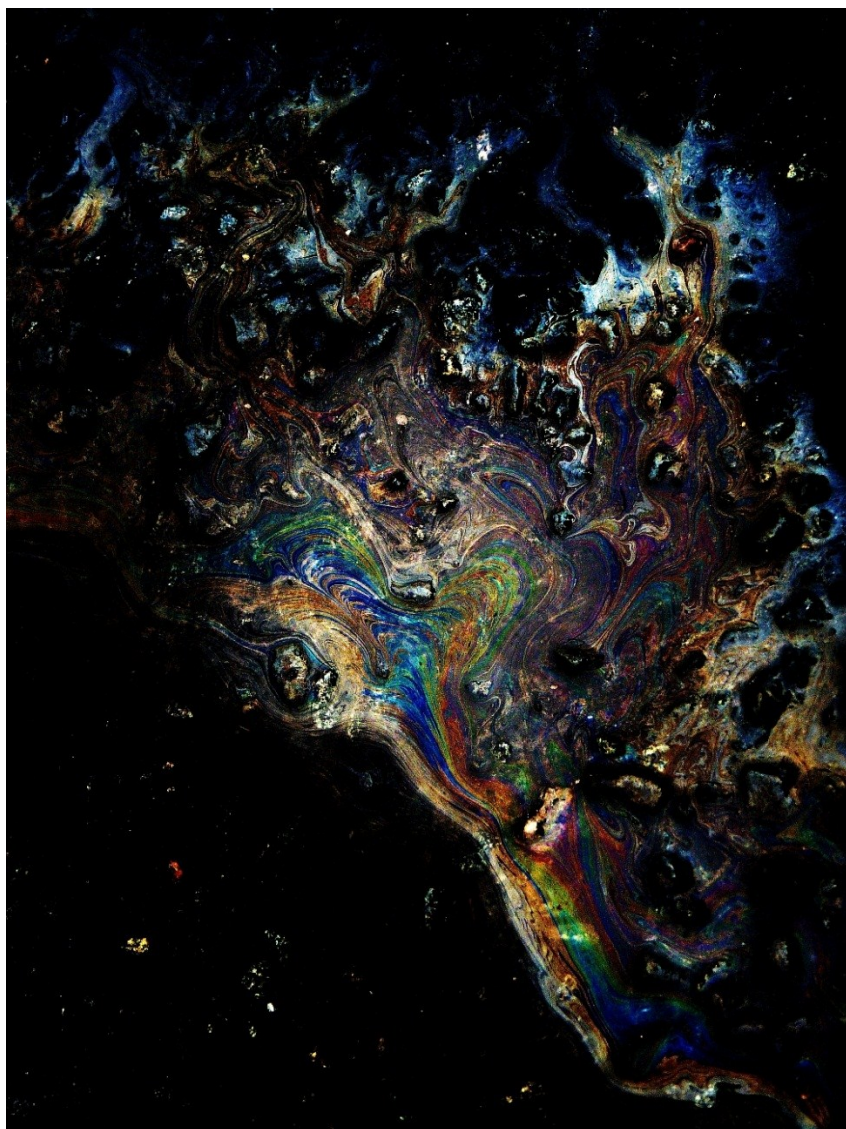
By Michael Shorb

That night on the sea,
when molecules of weathered wood
groaned from the dark
will of water and we trembled,
near perishment, and lightning
abated, and the waves gentled,
and fish danced in our nets,
blue glow from the Rolex he wore,
the numinous, punctured hands
glowing across the digitized
face of power.

Or at the trial, how onlookers
sweated away their chance
of redemption, and Pilate,
the Wall Street functionary,
glared at Him and demanded,

“Why do you have a better watch
than the power of Rome?”

Years later, after the hostile takeover
was rebuffed and order
was restored, the Powers that Be
hocked the Rolex
to build a cathedral
in the heart of the city,
to clothe and feed
the elite of His followers,
and provide them with limousine
service to and from
Golgotha, where dollar signs
denoted the Kingdom,
and the masses pushed forward,
eager to see their share
of the latest sacrifice for freedom.



Rain Over Oil, Eleanor Leonne Bennett

After A 'Pearl Harbor' In Cyberspace

By Michael Shorb

First I wake up
in someone else's skin,
I'm a Chinese or Brazilian
consumer today, my stock
portfolio's erased, I'm reduced
to relying on gold bars
and parking meter change,
an armed guard at
my front door demands
who I am and why
I wear the stolen winged
shoes of Mercury
lifted from the excavation site,
where the discovery of
broken bones and shards
of pottery exceeds all expectations,
still searching for my birth
certificate and dna analysis,
I'm sternly informed
if I don't understand the language
pouring from my television,
I am to report immediately
to a terminal beyond
the oil fields, where the last days
are canceled
until further envelopment,
and the contents of my mind
hereby both digitized
and privatized for my own protection,
leaving me only the mineral rights
to my own memories,
which I will quickly
barter away.

Late Summer Garden

By Craig Robert Charboneau

The garden gone unwatered in summer
Had thinned, shed dust and shrank against the heat.
Flowers turned black and purple dipped their heads
To seek out ground where others might shade them
And hung rigid and cracking in hot breeze.
So I neglected them, and so found them
And was full of guilt, because in the Spring
I enjoyed them without effort and took
For granted rain and how rain colored them.
If they looked at me now it was with
Averted gaze like an old love might turn
Away, ashamed and self-conscious that I
Had left them, it mattered not for what.
I cleared brush from the hose and unwound it
And turned the spigot where spiders had made webs
And began watering the dry garden,
The rose bushes and vines along the wall.
There were clouds then, and a soft wind blowing
So that when I finished there was the sound
Of water drops hitting between broad leaves,
And wind that picked up mist as it went by.
I found a chair and sat there awhile
To give the attention I had owed,
Though neither of us would look directly
At the other, we were both embarrassed.
And a single bee, come from nowhere
Appeared and made his way from bud to bud
As if to see what help the water gave,
If there was something left to salvage,
The last bee when the others had moved on
Who waited for my watering to come
And who, like myself, wondered if flowers
Regrow without having to be reborn.

Or Else Expecting Rain

By Craig Robert Charboneau

Well the worms are squeezing through the dirt
And breaking soil to fall upon the earth,
And the dandelions are perfuming,
And the bees are gorging on swollen
Marigolds, although not forgetting
To hurry back to their honeycombs.
They have all barely fit inside its shell.

The pond has smoothed its ripples and gone still,
A sheet of looking glass held to the sky.
And the ducks wade by the shallow end
With their young, their heads tucked beneath the reeds.
And the chartreuse apples on the trees
Have turned a livelier green, as if
The air had colored them bright today.
And everything is wincing from the sun,
Or else expecting rain to come.



Eleanor Leonne Bennett

Tattoos on Organs

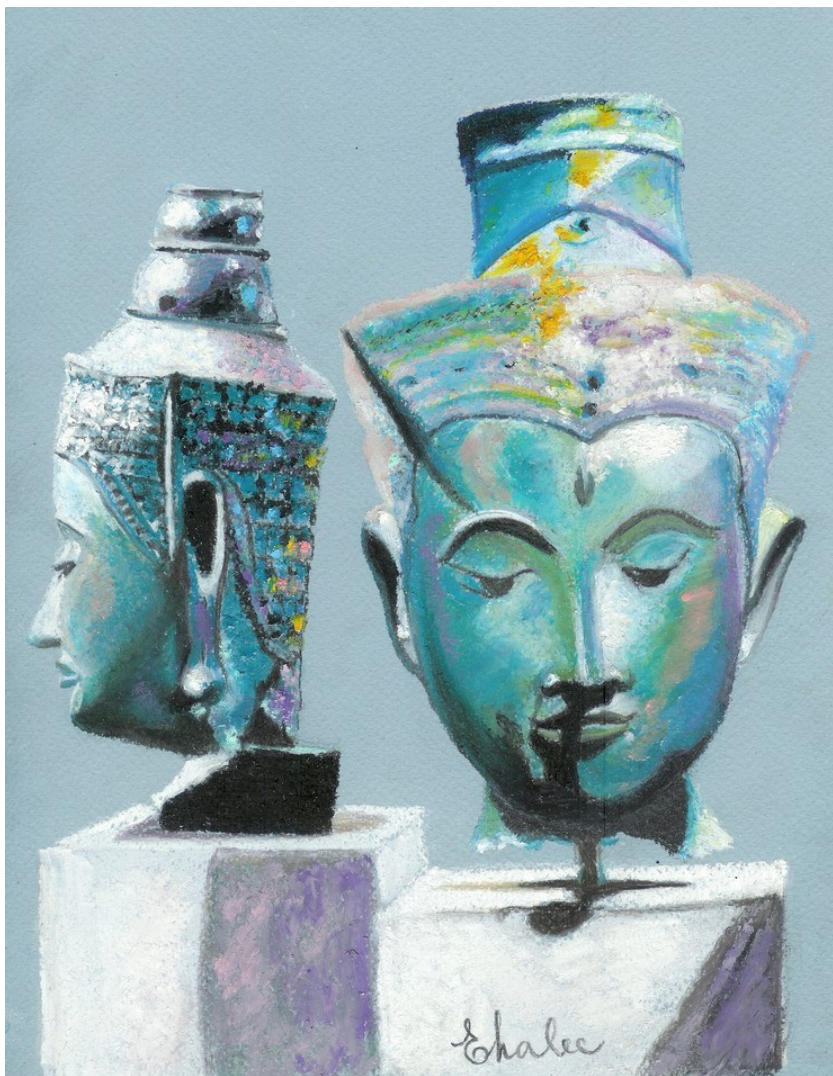
By Yayoi Joy Kitawaki

Some people do not draw anything
 on the surface of their bodies,
 but there are invisible pictures inside them.
On their organs, these tattoos pump every day.
They become alive.
Every time they move,
 people breathe.
They move without stopping.
It is better to keep the pictures inside.
Invisible things are often stronger than visible things.

The Yellow Carpet and The White Curtains

By Yayoi Joy Kitawaki

Dandelions bloom everywhere,
 cover the ground.
White cherry blossoms bloom everywhere.
 They are in the air.
When I stand in front of the flowers,
 I feel like I am in a fresh room.
I am outside,
 the yellow and white colors decorate
 a perfect design for spring.
I can stay in the fresh room
 as long as I want
 nobody will complain.



Fauvist Bodhisattvas, Elena Malec

The Gift

By Yvonne Tomek

The river glides in silence—

Mississippi near us that you have
Yet to see. It is time that runs
Alongside us

And lands of wilderness where you were
Born and we now share. Not because you
Are my own I love you,

But that a power of grace forms us in union
Like a wooden top I bring you from my journey I
Hope will light your childhood days—

Little top, bright red and solid, engraved by
Craftsmen to enrapture children, as I delight
In pleasing you in love that embarks
Non-ending.

Will you still love me

As we grow older, in centrifugal
Forces of river and toy through
Motions of galaxies

Spinning with stars?



Love and Protect, Elena Malec

Communication While You Are Here

By Michele Holmes

When you arrive on the Unit a staff member will go through your belongings and do a thorough but non-invasive search of your clothing and pockets. Bring a limited amount of clothing appropriate for the weather. A sweater or jacket may be needed even during the summer months. Please be sure to bring your own shaving equipment. Electric razors are permitted, blades are not.

Our rooms are set up for two-person occupancy. Regarding your last roommate you should know that we know you are to blame. Throwing yourself nude into such high thread count reeks of sentiment. Our advice: quit piping in the subtext.

A Personal History will be taken from you by one of our trained Social Workers. Please have a loved one present for the duration of this interview. Try to be forthcoming. Try, for all our sakes, to think the thing through to its logical end.

Say you should get what you want. Say one night, after a few drinks, she offers to drive you home. And say suddenly it begins to rain and you both get just a little wet dashing to the truck. You may want to have a small amount of money with you (quarters or \$1 bills) for the soda and candy machines.

Perhaps you'll laugh about this and as you dry off in the front seat you lock eyes and your object of desire raises one eyebrow ever so slightly to signal that the way you feel has not been entirely lost, all these years, has actually registered on more than one occasion, which you thought it did (a jolt over sushi) and as you realize the thought has become the thing you lean in for a kiss.

For visiting family: if you are bringing items to a patient please **DO NOT GIVE ITEMS DIRECTLY TO PATIENT.**

Please be sure to have your Patient ID Number with you at all times. Please be sure to provide a copy of this number to your family and friends; they will need this number should they wish to visit you or contact you by phone.

Try to remember what you desire reinforces the idea for your own feeble mind that you can somehow merge through bodies when we all know that bodies do not exist. We will be keeping your shoelaces until further notice.

Philosophy of Fish

By Derek Via

I can't help but admire
his faith as he ascends
at the appearance of my hovering hand—

his persistent hope that
I might drop a bit
of dried worm parts.

His faith may be greater
than mine.
He is King of his world with glass walls—

King of fluorescent gravel
and plastic-coated greenery.
But has he ambitions of deeper domain?

Does he thirst for the vast
green-tossed sea
as I long for unrefined forests and

perfectly wild trees?
I think I shall never
set him free.

Splendor

By Ben Nash

You have a touch of pink
eye
this morning,
light in the sky.

Put in your eye drops,
at first bleary,
clearing
blue.

Don't blink,
ink
in your colors,
open wide.

All day,
stay
with us,
don't close your eyes.

Romanies

By Gregory Gunn

One evening we canoed deep
into the inlet where boreal
and austral breakers converge,
the ocean so temperate
the sea bass spawn *en masse*.
Such safe remedial measure
from the earth's advancing
and withdrawing. Whenever
we drew shoreward you pulled
out the camping cookware.
I searched for kindling. It was
evident why I selected you.
I witnessed a nomadic quality
in you. Not just the Bohemian
nature everyone's capable of
that. It's being aware wherever
we venture, we have everything
the two of us necessitate.

When the Lights Go Out

By Jonathan Devin

The lights went out again
some time ago.
Not in the blue and white flashes
of sharp, blue October nights.
But in the soft staccato
of Time kept by the clock
down the hall.
For an instant, they danced
in a final transcendence
of surge and power.

As if, somewhere, towering smoke stacks—
the impetus of progress—stop up
and bow their trunks in conviction.
No longer blowing empty symphonies
in fummy quintets
into darkling sky.

But now, this holy darkness sounds
in ghost note whispers,
in staccato clacks
down the hall: inescapable.
Not light, but rhythm
illuminating the night.
Scratching, pulling
back to the sound. Away
from the blue and white memory
of those sharp October nights
when there was no need of light for company.
No bitter consciousness of
Time.

I, Too, Think Cheaply

By Jonathan Devin

I, too, think cheaply—
in the summer.

And assign my hands not to the books, the pens, or the cigarettes of the
past year.

But, instead, a stationary buzzing.

And I, too, as if statuary, sit poised and at attention
ready to carry out a quest like Odysseus;

however,

these sirens are not the same.

This quest: not as noble. It is

conveyed as passive—mundane—through a static screen
that stands propped and centered like a monument

(one to another unknown god).

The denouement of human attention diffused in a crude, oblong box.

Here, definition is the sole pejorative.

And is diluted, thinned, and dispersed
into a melting ether of flashing duplicity.

In sweet acquiescence, all thoughts let go. They

depart with no bang, no whimper. Only

buzzing. Only thoughtless,

cheap,

buzzing.

I'd Like To Tell You Before Leaving

By Walter William Safar

Shadows are floating around me, the well-known charwomen
in death's lounge,
and death is waiting in the corner,
cloaked in the turquoise attire of the moon.

I have read many a poem
and heard many stories of death,
and I thought I knew what it looks like,
black, dark and impatient,
but now I can safely say I was wrong,
for it is not black at all, and even less dark and impatient.

I have never seen such a beautiful cloak
like the one glittering on it now.

If I could speak, my darling,

I would scream out loud:

“Don't cry!...Death is not that horrible

if you wait for it like a friend,

and if you leave your soul behind...

Yes, do not cry!...There are even sadder people,

like I love You!”

It is quiet, so painfully quiet that I can clearly hear

her pearly tear travel her face,

silvering all the darkness around it.

I am lying on my deathbed, waiting

for the heavenly bell to toll,

because I have long since quit waiting for the church bell.

Everything around me is imprisoned in darkness and silence,

only her tear glitters, leaving behind a painful trace

of her oh so sensitive feelings.

Oh, Lord, if I could speak out once more before I go,

yes, Lord, I would tell her what I never did in my life:

“Don't cry!... My love is so loud

that you will be able to hear it from up high,

and when you hear the song of the freedom birds,

the crickets in blue nights,

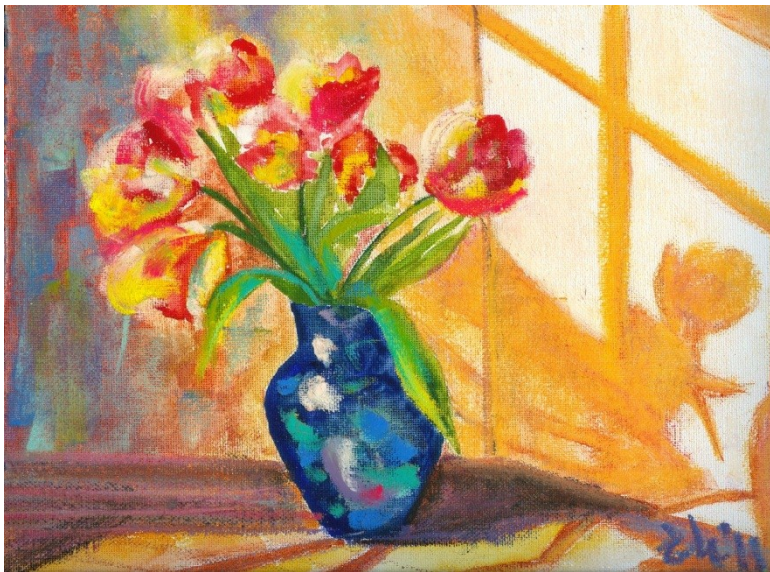
and the crow on the old oak's forefinger,

bidding the souls of lovers farewell into eternity,

know it, yes, you have to know it...

that these wonderful heavenly creatures
are carrying my love into your embrace...
so do not worry, my dear, I am leaving,
but my life will eternally stay with you!..."

My eyes are closing,
and that tear is becoming bigger and louder... and closer still,
as if it wants to accompany me on the road of no return.
I am not leaving in sadness,
because my eyes said what I think,
yes, I know that, and thank you, my Lord,
for leaving me time enough.



Parrot Tulips, Elena Malec

Without Hope

By Walter William Safar

I never meant to call for hunger,
but it calls for me,
endlessly faithful and accursedly honest,
it leads me,
like any given day,
into the soup kitchen of the darkest street in the world.
Everything around me is so unreal,
the smiling faces of those who pass by,
the full restaurants spreading the scent of food,
and the rustle of money bills, so unknown to me.
To many people, this is the brightest street in the world,
but it is so painfully cold and dark to me.
I feel like a wingless fly in the silky home
of the biggest spider of the world when I walk it.
Outside, the sun is gilding the leaden faces of those who pass by,
those who heedlessly chase after their own bright dreams,
and it is so dark inside,
yes, Lord, how could a soup kitchen be bright,
when its most frequent visitor is poverty.
The breath of hopelessness spreads around me,
and of horrible apathy,
as if I entered a coffin
that even death does not want to enter,
but I am not afraid that their hopelessness might kill my hope,
because it died long ago.
It's all the same in this coffin of human hopes,
the same poverty, the same food, the same nuns,
the same thick opaque glass
that keeps gazes from mixing,
there's only less homeless people,
because the long cold nights do not forgive poverty,
and while I drag my heavy leaden legs
towards the altar of my shame,
I can hear an unusually lively young voice,
a straying child singing a lullaby to its teddy bear.
Oh, Lord, can poverty be so hungry
as to even take away dignity from such a young being?
I am looking into these big, bright turquoise eyes of a child,

so dignifiedly spreading hope around him.
Nothing about him or within him
reveals that he is a victim of recession,
that he has lost his father and mother early.
Even though a big pearly tear
slid into his empty plate, spreading the echo of endless pain,
he is still patiently waiting for his piece of bread
hard as flint stone.
I am hiding from his gaze,
fearing that my apathy and hopelessness
might kill his hope.
You know, Lord, that I would give everything
to help this dear little being,
but how can a hopeless man help him?
If my help is the escape
and the hiding of my own inability and hopelessness,
I agree to remain hungry,
because there is no desire left in me to fight dilemmas,
because I have long since been without hope,
and so it is time for me to return
to my little home without light and hope,
into my little cardboard home
at the bottom of the old 134th street cemetery.



Do You Feel White Frost, Eleanor Leonne Bennett

The Airport

By Betsy Gansborg

We were at my father's lake house playing in the "airport," which was a gigantic cardboard box that a refrigerator had arrived in. For a full week we neglected our video games to do stuff with the box. We rolled down the driveway in the box. We pretended it was a time machine. We ate in it and pretended it was Kentucky Fried Chicken. Even when it had become misshapen and its edges were tattered, we continued to play in and to fight over it. When my father got sick of hearing us argue, he started to rip the box apart. But my brother and I howled until he took the piece he had ripped off and stuck it in the middle as a partition. That way my brother had his side and I had mine.

I don't know who had the idea of calling it an airport, but it was a brilliant one, since we had all these toy fighter planes made of Styrofoam, which we had bought from Kroger. We used marker to draw lots of buttons to push. We cut a little window in the partition so we could see each other and fight about whether the in-flight meal should consist of ravioli or cheese burgers. Different areas of the room represented different destinations, such as Hawaii, Disney World, and Costco. I explained to my brother that planes don't fly to Costco, but he insisted that Costco was bigger than Disney World. To quiet our argument, my father declared that Costco would be a destination. Then he banished the airport to our small bedroom and then shut the door.

On this particular day, my F-14 Tomcat was coming in for a landing at Disney World when the doorbell rang.

"Maybe it's Mommy!" he said.

"She said she was never going to come here again." I heard my father opening the door. Then I heard someone say his name in a shrill voice and laugh.

"Anthony! Rebecca!" he called out. My brother and I peeked out of the bedroom door. We could see down the hall into the living room. My father was hugging a strange lady who had on very short cut-off shorts that showed too much of her long, white legs.

Our parents had only gotten divorced three months ago. Before that, our mother used to come to the lake house with us. We got inside the box.

"Come on guys," my father said coming down the hall. "She won't bite you!" The strange woman tittered behind him. "Now come out of that stupid box and meet Sabrina." My brother and I were on the side of the box that faced the wall. We had our legs drawn up and we

were hugging ourselves.

“Awwww!” the strange woman cooed. “That is so cuuuute!” She came around and peered in at us. “Are y’all playing airport right now?”

“The airport is closed,” I said. The strange lady, or Sabrina as my father called her, had hair that was red like tomato sauce. I noticed that she had freckles. I had freckles too, but that was not enough to ingratiate her with me.

“Yep, this is their airport,” my father told her. “See all the little airplanes?”

“Don’t touch those!” my brother said, swatting my father’s hand away from his planes. My father took him by the arm and dragged him out of the box.

“Stop being a moron,” he said angrily, “and say hello to my friend.”

“He looks just like you, Robert!” Sabrina cooed. Then she gave my brother a smooch that left sticky pink lipstick on his cheek. My brother used both hands to wipe it off before crying out, “I want Mommeeeeee!”

He got back in the box and buried his face in his arms. Sabrina and my father looked at each other with concern. Served them right, I thought.

“Alright, alright,” my father said. “If you guys are gonna be grouchy, we’ll leave you alone. Dinner is in an hour.” When Sabrina’s pasty white face turned red, I smiled. When they had left the room, I put my arm around my brother while he cried.

“Come on,” I said. “Let’s play airport.”

“Let’s make a new place to fly the planes,” he said. We drew a picture of our mother’s house and taped it to the wall. My brother flew every single one of his planes there.

Book Mark

By John McCaffrey

After his wife left him, Byron tried to blunt his loneliness with obsession. The first was automated banking machine receipts, which he would compulsively scoop up off the floor or out of wastebaskets at 24-hour banking centers, bringing them home and laying them out on his kitchen table, as if he was readying a deck of cards for a game of concentration. Then he would pour out a first glass of wine and begin the deliberate process of scrutinizing each slip – imagining the people who owned the accounts, if they were a man or a woman, what they looked like, what was their job, how they spent their money, if they were married or not – fantasizing, speculating and dreaming late into the night, until the bottle was drained and so was he, ensuring that falling asleep – a difficult endeavor since the breakup – would come easy.

One day, he discovered a new obsession. It was bound to happen. The receipts, after a time, began to lose their ability to excite him, to transport him out of his own reality. Eventually, the scenarios he concocted grew dull, even depressing, until he was no longer wondering what people were doing or not doing with their money, but why they needed money at all. He began to creep into a bitter melancholy thinking about the uselessness of it all, about working and saving and buying things, about the terrible differences in wealth, how the entire society was drowning in thoughts of money, in bits of paper spit out of mundane machines that measured their value and defined them.

And so Byron flirted with the idea of becoming a Communist, or at least immersing himself in Communist doctrine. His idea was to buy some books on the subject, and in the spirit of the endeavor, and because money was tight, he snubbed the monolithic chain bookstore in town and instead headed to a used book bazaar in the basement of a Protestant church. His intention was to purchase anything written by Marx or Trotsky, even Mao; something red and dusty and revolutionary. The best he could find was a short story collection of Gorky's, a hardcover that smelled of moth balls. As Byron flipped through the pages, he was surprised to find, wedged between pages in the middle of the book, a postcard. On the front was a photo of a scantily clad woman, her arms wrapped suggestively around a street lamp, her face hidden behind a Venetian mask, her voluptuous breasts sequestered in a white T-Shirt with the words "Bourbon Street" emblazoned in hot pink letters. He flipped over the card, read what was hand-written in a purple pen:

*Arnold,
You are not missed. Nor will you ever be.
Sabina*

Byron returned the postcard to the pages, went to the cashier, paid two bucks for the book, and went home. This time he laid in bed as he examined the postcard, studying the photo, sniffing the paper, psychoanalyzing the handwriting, visualizing Arnold and Sabina, pondering their relationship, deciding them warring siblings, not lovers, his mind drifting easily to question and answer, until his eyes closed and his body, both excited and sated, found sleep.



Space Between Books, Eleanor Leonne Bennett

Byron began to haunt the bazaar on Saturdays, the only day it was open, spending hours pulling books from the shelves and out of cardboard boxes, rifling fast through the pages, shaking them by the spine, sifting through them like a miner panning a stream, looking not for gold but leave-behinds, intentional or accidental bookmarks, business cards and restaurant menus, grocery lists and faded photos, folded dollar bills and recipes, debris from a past reader's life, evidence that someone else had been there before him, fuel to transport him out of his existence and into another's.

One afternoon Byron was walking home from the bazaar with a new purchase, a hardcover copy of *The Sun Also Rises*, which, perhaps because it was missing the cover, he found in the fifty-cent bin. His desire to own it, however, was near the end of the book, between pages 184 and 185 to be exact, amidst the passage when Brett leaves Jake, Robert Cohn and the rest of her party of ex-pats in Pamplona to pursue an affair with a young and dashing bullfighter. There, tucked tight to the spine, was a square white envelope, the kind used to respond to wedding invitations. It was yellowed with age at the corners and sealed with red wax shaped into a tiny heart. The envelope was not addressed.

Like the ATM receipts, Byron's usual method was to wait until he got home to study his bookmarks, but his excitement about what may be inside the envelope got the best of him, and as it was a pleasant late summer afternoon, sunny, but not too hot, he decided it preferable to head to a local park and open it there. He chose a bench shaded by a towering elm, old enough that its trunk was wider than the bench was long, and bald in spots where the bark had been ripped off and replaced with graffiti markings speaking of unrequited love and individual existence. He sat down with his back to the sun and opened the book, flipping through the pages until he reached the envelope. He was about to pull it out when a tall, lithe woman passed by, stopped, and then walked swiftly over to the bench.

"Hi Wendell," she said smiling.

"Excuse me?"

Her face, long and plain without makeup, congealed with confusion.

"Aren't you Wendell?"

"No," Byron said, startled by the abruptness of her approach and question.

"I'm sorry. You look like someone named Wendell I met once."

"It happens," Byron said, recovering his senses.

"You mean other people have called you Wendell?"

Byron blinked. He was not sure if she was joking or not.

"You're the first."

"I imagine people mistake you more for a Robert," she said nodding, her face falling back into a flat line. "Or perhaps Leonard. But not Lee," she continued. "A two syllable name would suit you."

"How come?"

"Just the energy you give off," she said without pondering the question. "You seem calm. People with two syllable names are always calm. At least that's what I've learned."

“Thanks.”

“So am I right?”

“Sort of – my name’s Byron.”

“After the poet?”

“Actually, my father.”

“Was he a writer?”

“No, a welder.”

The woman squinted, as if sizing him up.

“What are you reading?”

Byron had forgotten the book, the envelope, his reason for sitting down on the bench.

“Oh, this.” His mind drew a blank on the title. He looked down, but without the cover, the only thing facing him was a blank page. He turned it over to the back where a description was posted. “*The Sun Also Rises*. Hemmingway. I just bought it.” He turned it back over, pointed to the blank page. “Used.”

“That’s good. No need to buy something new when you can get it old.”

She hesitated. “Mind if I sit down?”

Byron blushed. Since the split with his wife he had not been close to another woman, emotionally, intellectually, or physically – navigating around them with caution, as if they were underground landmines.

“It’s just, I’ve been walking all day,” she continued.

Byron slid over so that his right hip pressed tight against the bench’s arm.

“Certainly,” he said. “There’s room.”

The woman sat down. Byron had not noticed she was carrying a backpack, actually a black mesh satchel with matching braided straps that looped over the shoulders of her brown t-shirt. She removed the satchel and set it on her lap, so that the material spread over her khaki shorts, nearly to her knees. Byron blushed deeper, thinking the dark mesh sexy against her long, shapely legs. He also liked her feet, which were slender and exposed in open toed brown sandals.

“Would you like some water?” she asked rummaging inside the bag and pulling out a plaid-colored thermos.”

“No thanks.”

She removed the lid and took a sip. Waited, and then took another.

“Perfect,” she said, screwing the top back on. She returned the thermos to the bag. “I put cucumber slices and mint leaves in my water.

They have natural cooling properties, you know. I drink that all summer, and I'm never hot."

Byron purposely lifted his eyes from her legs, focused on her face, which he realized now was not so plain. Her eyes, in particular, were peculiar in shape and color – perfectly round and inky black, with sparks of white peeking out at the edges. It reminded him of pictures he had seen of solar eclipses.

"I might try that sometime," he said. "I sweat quite a bit."

He regretted the statement immediately. It was not attractive to sweat, he thought, certainly not to talk about it.

"Well, you can also soak in the mixture," she said. "Just add Epsom salts with the cucumber and mint. That's what I do – sit back with a glass of wine and lay for hours in the bath before bed."

Byron felt as if his ears were going to burst, he was blushing so hard. He turned away and coughed into his hand.

"Are you okay?"

"Just something in my throat."

"Are you sure you don't want water?"

"No thanks."

They were silent a moment. Byron found the break in conversation uncomfortable, and scoured his brain for a suitable topic to keep it going.

"Do you live nearby?" he asked.

She nodded. "I let a room in a house next to the church across town."

Byron held up the book. "That's where I bought this."

"That's right," she said. "They sell books in the basement. Do you go there often?"

Byron saw an opening to share his obsession, the sealed envelope inside the book, but pulled back.

"Yes. At least, lately."

"You must be an avid reader."

Byron hesitated. He realized he did not want to lie to this woman.

"More I just like books; what's inside of them."

"That's cool. You can learn a lot about yourself from reading."

Byron took in a deep breath. His wife always critiqued him for being too passive, accusing him of being a counter-puncher in life, someone who reacted rather than initiated. He remembered their first date, when he asked if he could kiss her, and she had surprised him with

an angry response, explaining that a man never asked to kiss a woman, he just did it.

He blew out a stream of air.

“Maybe we could meet there sometime?” he asked, trying to sound nonchalant. “It’s open Saturdays. We could look over the books and take a walk after – come back and sit here if you like, or go get a coffee.”

She hesitated.

“Do you mind if I ask if you’re single?”

“No. I mean, yes. I’m separated.”

“Children?”

“No.”

“Are you trying to get back with your wife?”

Byron hesitated.

“I’m not judging you if you are,” she continued. “It’s just that I have this thing where I’m attracted to solitude. It’s like an obsession. I’m drawn to men who are comfortable being alone. I found that there are two kinds: one type is alone because they like to be alone; it’s part of their nature; the other is forced into solitude by loss. I’ve failed in relationships with both kinds – the men who like to be alone want to be alone – meaning they didn’t mind being with me now and again, but they couldn’t make any meaningful commitment to a relationship, as that goes against their loner DNA. And the men I’ve been with who are isolated because of loss, once the pain of that goes away, once they get back on their feet, lose their need for solitude. They want to be part of the world again; they need to be social, making them, at least in my eyes, unattractive. So I break up with them, causing them a similar pain that they just got over.”

She nodded her head as if reinforcing a painful truth.

“So you see the problem. I don’t want to get hurt or do the hurting.”

Byron smiled. Her revealing made him feel more confident.

“So you’re single?”

“Yes,” she said with a laugh. “I am.”

“And your name?”

She laughed again. “Didn’t I tell you?”

“No.”

“It’s Emily. Three syllables.”

“Do people with three syllable first names have a general personality trait as well?”

Her face grew serious.

“I think we’re unfinished,” she said. “We need one more beat to become an even four – to become complete.”

“You sound like a numerologist.”

“More like obsessive compulsive. But I’m working on it.”

“So, want to meet next Saturday?”

Emily stood. She looped the satchel over her shoulders and smiled.

“How about noon?” Byron pressed.

“Two is better.”

“Okay. Two.”

Emily waved goodbye and walked away, her stride easy and controlled, the satchel bouncing lightly against the small of her back as she moved.

Byron lingered on the bench. He could not believe he had just asked a woman he barely knew on a date, and more that she had accepted. After some time, he returned his attention to the book in his hand, to where the envelope was quartered. He pulled it out and fingered the wax seal, the tiny red heart. He was about to break it open when his eyes caught on a sentence on the page:

“Together we walked down the gravel path in the park in the dark, under the trees and then out from under the trees and past the gate into the street that led into town.”

Byron finished the rest of the passage. He suddenly had a desire to become immersed in the words, to get lost in the action, in the lives of the characters, to be drawn into the fantasy, not create it. He slipped the envelope back into the fold and flipped to the front of the book. There was still plenty of light to read by. He began with the first sentence.



Swan, Elena Malec

Contributing Writers

Craig Robert Charboneau was born in Charleston, SC, and moved to Reno, NV in 2000. He is a student at the University of Nevada, Reno, studying English literature and Philosophy. He also moonlights as a comic strip artist with his strip "Joyce and all". Some of his literary influences are Frost, Housman, Edward Thomas, Stevens, and Lawrence.

Jonathan M. Devin is a writer, musician, and student, currently studying English at Liberty University. His poetry has consecutively earned him publication in LAMP magazine. In his poetry, he attempts to articulate the small, and seemingly inconsequential, occurrences of life and convey them in a way that captures their beauty and significance. He enjoys independent films, contemporary poetry, dark coffee, and New England Patriots football. While he currently lives in Lynchburg, Virginia, his heart will always reside in the foothills of western Massachusetts. After graduation, he plans on writing and teaching literature.

Betsy Gansborg was born in Atlanta, Georgia, but fancies herself an intrepid world traveler. She attended Sarah Lawrence College in Bronxville, New York and traveled abroad to Senegal and France during her junior year. Upon graduating, she taught in a New York City preschool for nine years. She holds a Master's degree from Hunter College in early childhood education. Betsy currently resides in Atlanta near her childhood home and hopes to devote herself more fully to her writing career, with several stories, essays, and a novel underway. She especially enjoys drawing on murky childhood memories for her subject matter.

Michele Holmes lives in San Diego, California, with her husband and two children. She is a freelance writer and editor working on a memoir entitled *Off the Block*, a book that thinks about her son's recovery from autism and the restrictions we place on language. She can be reached at msdholmes@hotmail.com.

Yayoi "Joy" Kitawaki is from Japan and studied Social Work as an undergraduate student in Japan from April 2004 to March 2008. Upon coming to the USA, Joy majored in Early Childhood Education at the Master's program of Cleveland State University. Her hobbies are writing poems and stories, drawing, painting pictures, and taking photos. She

enjoys sharing poetry and stories with children through her work in child care.

John McCaffrey received a graduate degree in Creative Writing from the City College of New York. He is a former New York Times Writing Fellow and Pushcart Prize Nominee. He teaches creative writing, helps direct a nonprofit organization in New York City, and is the Interviews Editor for KGB Bar Lit Magazine. His stories, essays and reviews have been published widely and also anthologized, including in *Flash Fiction Forward* (Norton & Co.), containing stories by J. Edgar Wideman, Rick Moody, Joyce Carol Oates, and other notable authors.

Benjamin Nash is a new poet. After years of studying political science, he has spent the last few years reading and writing poetry.

WALTER WILLIAM SAFAR is the author of a significant number of prose works and novels, including "Leaden fog", "Chastity on sale", "In the flames of passion", "The price of life", "Above the clouds", "The infernal circle", "The scream", "The negotiator", "Queen Elizabeth II", as well as a book of poems, titled "The angel and the demon".

Michael Shorb is a poet based in San Francisco. His poetry reflects an abiding interest in environmental issues, history, and the lyrical form. His poems have appeared in more than 100 magazines and anthologies, including *The Nation*, *The Sun*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *Queen's Quarterly*, *Poetry Salzburg Review*, *Commonweal*, *Rattle*, *Urthona*, *Underground Voices*, *The Great American Poetry Show* and *European Judaism*. His collection, *WHALE WALKERS MORNING*, will appear in Winter 2013 from Shabda Press.

Yvonne Tomek currently lives with her husband, James, in Cleveland, Mississippi, where she teaches English and French literature at Delta State University. She has published her personal poems in such journals as *MISSISSIPPI TODAY*, *POMPA*, *MISSISSIPPI VALLEY VOICES*, *THE BIRMINGHAM REVIEW*, and *DEAD OR ALIVE POETS SOCIETY*. Her recent book, *A SECOND SEASON: POEMS IN TWO LANGUAGES*, was published by Northwoods Press in 2008.

Derek Via is a writer with a passion for nature and a love for mountains. As a native West Virginian, he grew up hiking, biking, whitewater rafting, exploring the mountains, and learning to respect the natural landscape.

Derek is a recent graduate of Liberty University, where he studied Music and English. He now works as an Academic Evaluator for the University and hopes to complete his master's degree in English soon. Derek has a strong love for the culture of West Virginia and aims to one day publish books about the historical and cultural nuances of life in the mountains.

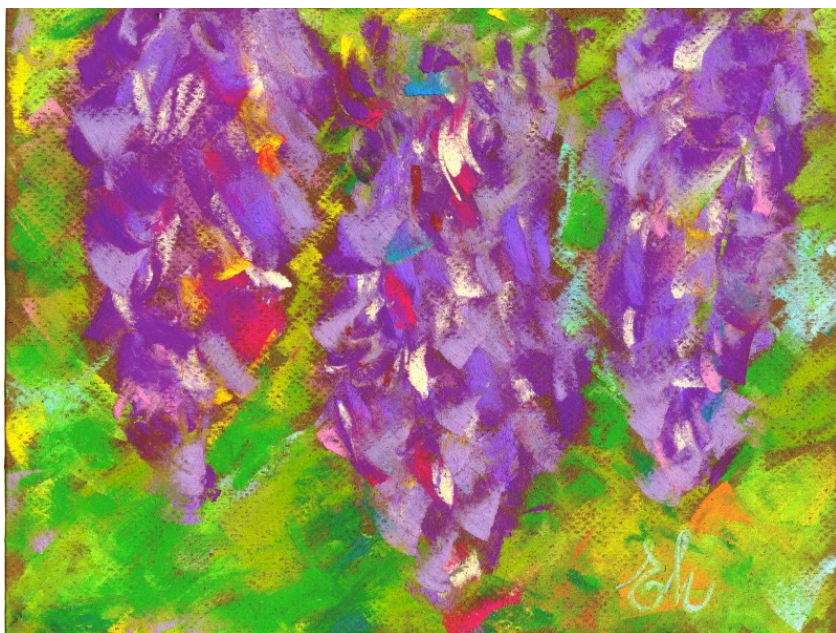
Mary Wallach's is a poet whose work has appeared in the *Cider Press Review*, *The Mississippi Review*, *Triplopia* and other publications. One of her poems was nominated for a Pushcart Prize and another poem has been featured on Garrison Keillor's *Writer's Almanac*. She is a psychotherapist in private practice in New York City, specializing in working with individuals in the arts, and has published articles on poetry and psychoanalysis in the *Journal of the American Academy of Psychoanalysis and Dynamic Psychiatry*.

Contributing Artists

Eleanor Leonne Bennett is a 15-year-old photographer and artist who has won contests with National Geographic, The Woodland Trust, The World Photography Organisation, Winstons Wish, Papworth Trust, Mencap, Big Issue, Wrexham science, Fennel and Fern, and Nature's Best Photography. She has had her photographs published in exhibitions and magazines across the world including the Guardian, RSPB Birds, RSPB Bird Life, Dot Dot Dash, Alabama Coast, Alabama Seaport and NG Kids Magazine (the most popular kids magazine in the world). She was also the only person from the UK to have her work displayed in the National Geographic and Airbus run See The Bigger Picture global exhibition tour with the United Nations International Year Of Biodiversity 2010. She is the only visual artist published in the Taj Mahal Review June 2011, and the youngest artist to be displayed in Charnwood Art's Vision 09 Exhibition and New Mill's Artlounge Dark Colours Exhibition.

ELENA MALEC, born in Bucharest, Romania in 1954, started drawing at an early age in graphite, colored pencils, watercolor and ink. A graduate from the University of Bucharest with a MA in modern languages, Elena pursued a career in education and research. Without a formal training in art she eventually followed her passion for drawing, sketching, doing watercolor at different ages. Art is for Elena an expression of her freedom of creating from imagination but also inspired by daily subjects, still life, her travels photographs, the beauty of nature, the human and animal features in portraiture. Elena believes art is a realm

of beauty and harmony and art's mission is to inspire meditation, bliss, positive energy, peace. Her work has been featured in the Tiferet Journal, Nature Art Exhibition – June 2011 on Light Space & Time Online Art Gallery, Art Network News Quarterly, The Artist's Eye and OFCA's Nature morte, Drawn Together exhibition at Siena Art Institute, Siena, Italy, and the Peace project – group exhibition California, New York, London.



***Wisteria*, Elena Malec**

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