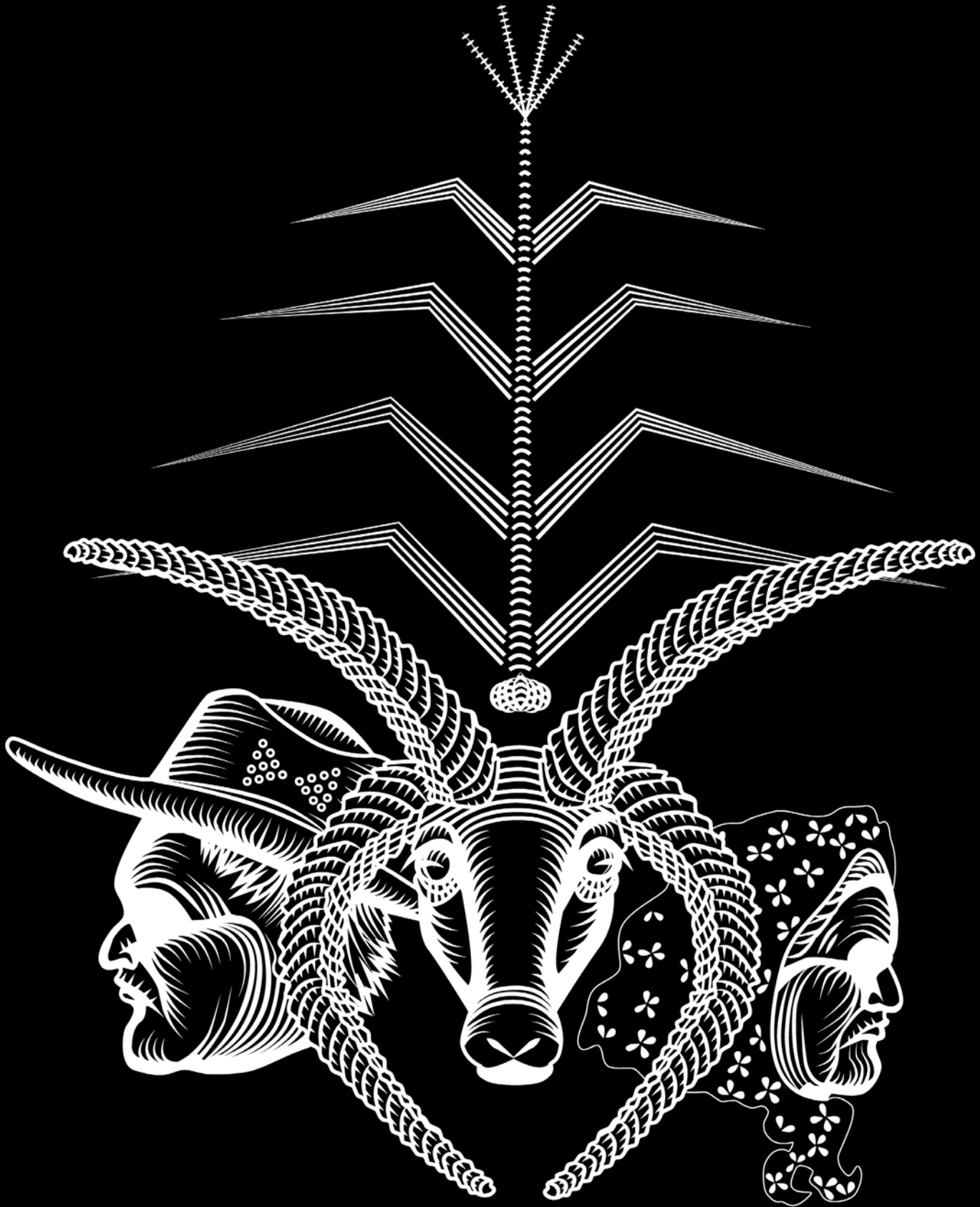


# Blue Mesa Review



Issue 40

# Blue Mesa Review

Albuquerque, NM

*Founded in 1989*

Issue 40

Fall 2019

*Blue Mesa Review is the literary magazine of the University of New Mexico MFA Program in Creative Writing. We seek to publish outstanding and innovative fiction, nonfiction, and poetry, along with compelling interviews.*

Cover Art

Elders by Marina Eskeets

# BLUE MESA REVIEW

Fall 2019 Issue 40

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# Issue 40



Hair Hero

*Vicky Charles*

# Letter from the Editor

Dear Reader,

Within our digital 40th anniversary issue, you will find our Summer Contest winners, our artists, our judges, and our founder—a group of writers and work as diverse as this place we call home, with as much rich detail, color, excellence, and emotion as an Albuquerque sunset. In 1989, Rudolfo Anaya went into the Dean’s Office and said, out of the clear blue sky, “Can you give me \$5000 and we’ll make a literary magazine everyone will be proud of. It’s a logical outgrowth of our creative writing program.” From that, Blue Mesa Review was born.

Since then, Blue Mesa Review has published 40 Issues with creative work from authors and artists all over the world. Our contributors have hailed from Shanghai, Brooklyn, Guatemala, Albuquerque, Afghanistan, and many, many other places. In our 40th issue, and in honor of our 30th anniversary, Blue Mesa Review returns to its roots as a Southwest magazine. Culturally, this place has everything—indigenous history and populations, multicultural border towns, immigrant populations from every corner of the world, families with Spanish, Jewish, German, Korean, Vietnamese, and Islamic roots, among others. Some of us can trace our ancestry back three hundred years. Some of us don’t need paper trails to know we’ve been here even longer. And some of us might have just showed up last week, but we are all part of the Southwest, part of the United States, part of the Americas, part of the globe. All of this is not to say that we are closed to ‘foreign’ narratives—rather, that we see the Southwest as representative of the world at large, showcasing diversity and internationality at its finest.

In this issue, you’ll find the visceral first-place poem from Natalie Wee, that peels open familiar relationships to bare the wounds within. You’ll see our tierra and our familia from the eyes of fellow Bordercanx, Toni Muñoz-Hunt, our first place nonfiction winner. You will also encounter the fiction of Alison Turner and Robin Rosanski and their two storytellers, who weave memories and fragments (and full-on hardware) together in attempts to make sense of their worlds. Through these and more writers you will find that these pieces are more than words and images—this incarnation of our magazine is part of a global community of readers, writers, and artists.

As part of that global community, we have a responsibility to share the art that preserves and cultivates the beauty of our earth and its language (all languages: written, spoken, visual and otherwise), and to figuratively unravel the systems that would destroy them. We have only to bring that powerful and important art to the world, and I am proud to be a part of a journal that does just that, year after year. We want to pass our microphone to those around us in order to amplify their voices and give them space to be



heard. This is the Southwest, our home and our world, and we want to share this place with you. (Check out some of the photography inside to see where BMR hails from—Albuquerque!)

In honor of our 30th anniversary, Issues 40 and 41 will showcase contemporary art of the Southwest by featuring two Southwest artists—on our cover and in our pages. Issue 40's cover is designed by Marina Eskeets, of the Diné Nation. Our Poetry and Nonfiction judges, Jake Skeets and Francisco Cantú, are from the Southwest as well, and brought their experience and expertise to bear on the pieces that were submitted. An enormous thanks is owed to each of them and to Lesley Arimah, our Fiction Judge, to our reading team and our editors, and to each of our submitters for making this issue possible and just so damned good. Thanks to Rudolfo Anaya, Marisa P. Clark, Julie Shigekuni, and every past editor who made 30 years of publishing fine art and writing possible. I would also like to thank you, reader, for taking this art in, understanding it as only you can, and reflecting it back into your world.

Enjoy.

Tori Cárdenas  
Editor-in-Chief



*Montaño Open Space Trail, Albuquerque, New Mexico – Tori Cárdenas*

**1st Place Fiction  
2019 Summer Contest**

*What is lost when one is forced to parent from afar? What, if anything, is gained? The author imagines a scenario given breath with deliberate, lovely prose. The characters are drawn to exacting detail, and over the course of an afternoon, the author delivers the expansiveness of a life lived.*

*Lesley Nneka Arimah*

# Home Depot

*Alison Turner*

---

Elsie sat on a bench in the middle of nowhere, nervous to meet her own son. She hadn't seen him in a month, and in that time, he'd turned into a teenager.

Women pushed strollers while jogging in spandex. Elsie's therapist had printed out directions for how to get there and had written 2pm at the top of the page. As if Elsie would get trashed and forget. She'd been solid sober all month and could tell when someone didn't trust her.

She pinched at a banana-nut muffin from Safeway and flicked a piece on the ground. Two squirrels fought over it. She had a blueberry muffin in another bag for her son, his favorite. At least it used to be.

In the last year, she'd seen Alec a dozen times in meetings surrounded by nosy do-gooder therapists, most of them chubby ladies who laughed at dumb jokes about their husbands eating all the cookies before they could take them to meetings. A month ago, near the end of her second – and last – residency in rehab, her case manager handed her an orange piece of paper. *I typed up your options*, she'd said. *It's orange because we ran out of regular paper.* Option 1: continue therapy/ rehab while Alec stays at the Boys Home, until the court deems you fit for custody; Option 2: enter the Foster-for-Family program/ you and Alec get your own therapists/ Alec lives with a host family for at least six months. She had stared at that orange paper so long that the burn she'd been feeling every day when she'd pick-up Alec from school now had an orange layer to it, like the tip of a cigarette when she inhaled.

A car pulled up with a woman and a boy. Elsie's boy. An Audi, and it parked next to her Corolla from the early 90s.

Alec got out and looked in the window of her car, then at the park. He wore a green collared thing that made him look like one of those preppy kids at Westwood Academy – Elsie had to stop for groups of those kids to cross the street on her way to work, all of them chatting and waving like mini-businessmen. Someone told her it cost 12,000 bucks a year to send your kid there. That would be most of Elsie's earnings most years, since something always prevented her from working twelve months at the same place.

Elsie stood up and said, "Alec."

"Mom!" He ran towards her, walking the last three steps. He was there, her son, and she wrapped her arms around him. He was taller than when she saw him last, in a courtroom one month ago, and skinnier, but he had the same hug.

The woman from the Audi opened her trunk and retrieved a backpack. "Hello, I'm Terry." Elsie had chosen Option 2, and the "family" Alec had been assigned to was one lady. Terry, who worked some government job, was tall. She wore khaki shorts to her knees, with a purse that looked like alligator, probably costing as much as Elsie's car. Terry held out her hand to shake – light, brief – then gave Alec's backpack to Elsie, which wasn't the Green Bay Packers one Elsie had gotten him for middle school.

Terry said, "Have fun, kiddo," and smiled like the ladies in the brochures for the treatment center that cost as much as Westwood Academy. "So nice to meet you, Elsie." Terry got in her car and drove

away.

“How’s living with that lady, Smarty?” Elsie asked. She gave him his muffin. She had called him Smarty since the beginning of first grade, when he asked what a Smart Alec was.

“It’s okay,” he said.

Elsie felt the words in her chest, an ache like craving a cigarette.

“Did you get the presents?” She’d sent him a package for his 13th birthday, a red shirt of *The Incredibles*, a movie they saw together, and a box of Thin Mints. The box was probably searched by Elsie’s therapist in the program, or maybe by Terry. Maybe both women pulled out the sleeves of cookies, just in case.

“I got it, thanks Mom,” he said, fidgeting like there wasn’t space in the seat.

“Did it fit?” She turned out of the park and scanned for a gas station.

He crossed his arms over his stomach, and she noticed, even without him wearing it, that the shirt should have been L not XL. “Damnit,” she said, hitting the steering wheel with her palm. “Shirt didn’t fit, did it? Mom fucked up again.”

If they’d let her see him more, she’d know how to buy the right damn size. She felt the pressure in her chest, making her say stupid things sometimes – that’s anger, her new therapist said. This one’s name was Mel, and their first meeting ended in Elsie listing out everything that made her angry: her ex-boyfriend, Tom, who called the cops on her son; the cops, who separated her from Alec like she was some crazy person, sending him to the Boys Home, and taking her to jail for domestic violence; Alec stealing candy, another charge on his record, all because they kept making him live with criminals; Payless Shoes closing without offering a transfer, right when she needed her job most; her second trip to rehab; orange pieces of paper with shitty ideas. She didn’t write all that, just

Tom  
cops  
Payless  
assholes

She knew what she meant.

“It fit,” he said. He broke the muffin in half and took a bite.

Maybe he liked that kind of dorky, collared shirt now. He looked different. His face was thinner and, Lord, small hair fuzzed over his upper lip. Maybe she looked different too. Better since she’d been sober. Or maybe she looked older.

“Pardon my French,” she said. She pulled over at a Conoco.

“That’s not really French.” He took another bite.

“You speak French now?”

He gave her that smile with the sideways look, the one he flashed whenever she accused him of cheating at Go-Fish. It was one of her favorite smiles.

“I got a new job,” she said.

“Where at?” He rolled some muffin between his fingers into a mushy ball that he popped into his mouth. He did that with hamburger buns too.

“Walgreens”

“That’s cool.”

She wanted to tell him how all morning they had her working in toys, the best section. She wanted to tell him about the Batman toy packs she’d hung on racks, the new Lego kits she’d stacked, how now they had a surfing set and a fishing one too. But he was too old for that now. She wanted to tell him she’d been nervous to see him, how in the break room, where the TV was on *Hoarders*, up too loud like always, her manager asked why she had taken the afternoon off. And how good it had felt to say, “I’m seeing my son.” But Alec was too young for that.

“You want to pump the gas?” she asked.

“Nah.”

“Suit yourself.”

He used to beg to pump the gas. She only had four hours with him, and she was already fucking it up. She pictured a barrel filling, like Therapist Mel told her to do when she felt pressure in her chest. She pictured pulling a plug at her belly button, angry water chugging out.

Elsie started the pump, lit a cigarette, then watched the back of Alec’s head. He didn’t stretch or look through the glove box, just sat still as stone. He was off the Prozac he’d been on since he was eight, too many side effects. Now he was on whatever was newest, and he seemed different somehow. Or maybe he was just growing up. The dial on the pump switched from 9.89, to 9.90, to 9.95. She pulled the handle up at 10.00 exactly. Alec used to think that was a pretty neat trick.

He got out the car, crumpling the muffin wrapper. “Thank you,” he said and threw it in the trash. He always had good manners. She made sure of that.

“Did you know you’re not supposed to smoke at a gas pump?” he asked.

“Who told you that?”

He shrugged.

“Why don’t you go pay,” she said, handing him a ten. He walked into the store, her boy, whose movements and sounds she would always know by heart. He moved slower, like he’d learned to take his time, growing upwards instead of out, even though doctors kept saying he was overweight. No one believed she knew her own son better than what studies show.

She smashed her cigarette on the ground and avoided the eyes of a man watching her from the other side of his truck. She had given up men with trucks, proving it by wearing less makeup and ditching small skirts. She’d never forget that asshole she dated her first time in rehab, when she was looking for an apartment and Alec had to start the second grade living in the Boys Home. That man offered to take Elsie out with Alec, his treat, anywhere they wanted to go. Alec chose CiCi’s Pizza, and it went okay until later that night, after they dropped Alec off, when the jerk said, *‘How’d a giant kid like that come out of a body so fine?’* Like he paid her a compliment, waiting for a reward. But instead, Elsie slapped him and told him to put his clothes on or just carry them with him out the door.

She should have stopped with men after Alec’s daddy. Men wouldn’t help her with her boy. She checked her face in the car door mirror. She felt clear and strong. She swore her eyes got greener every day she stayed sober.

When Alec was ten, Tom and his little girl, Lonnie, moved into their apartment. Elsie and Tom met at AA. Back then, they both had that serious look about them, neither of them rolling their eyes anymore.

Tom was tall, wore big boots and a Carhartt jacket, and made sure Alec stayed quiet around him. No whining, no complaining. He never said what made him so serious, but Elsie knew it had to do with the protection of his daughter. Lonnie was eight, and her mom had died giving birth to her, which made Tom more worried than most daddies. The four of them squeezed tight into two bedrooms, but it only lasted a week.

Alec got in and put on his seatbelt.

“What do you want to do today, Smarty?” she asked.

“Can we go home?”

A month of missing him was worth hearing him say that. He called her apartment home, even though he’d never seen it. She squeezed his hand and said, “Baby, I wish we could. They told you we can’t, right?” Mel had said, ‘*No Home Visits for the first two months of the program.*’

Alec shrugged, looking out the window.

First, they had to spend time in the open. The words Mel used were “in the community.” They probably worried there’d be a half-empty bottle of vodka on the counter at Elsie’s and she’d ask Alec to help her finish it.

“Ice cream?” she asked. Mel had given her a five-dollar gift certificate to Dairy Queen. “Then Home Depot?” On the weekends, Home Depot had a place for kids to build stuff out of scraps of wood and cardboard, and they used to wander the aisles making up designs for what they’d do when they were rich. Things like fish tanks for walls in the shower, or a room where you could paint on the walls whenever you wanted. Home Depot also had free coffee.

Someone honked. Elsie looked back: three cars waiting for the pump. “Shit,” she said. She started the car and pulled out. Cars came at them fast, but she gunned it. More honks. “Shit.” She should have waited to merge, but she didn’t know where she was going exactly. Who cared about a stupid barrel if you didn’t have time to pull the plug?

“Sounds good, Mom,” Alec said quickly.

She got over to the slow lane, breathed. Calmed down. He never said *sounds good* before. It used to be *whatever’s clever*, wherever he picked that up. They drove on Draft Road, wide-laned and walled in by fast food joints and drive-through liquor stores. The latter should be illegal, Elsie thought.

Those were the best years, when he was seven or eight and she hadn’t met Tom or the jerk before Tom, and they lived in the same apartment long enough to be recognized at the closest Home Depot. They never bought anything. But the manager gave Alec his own little table with caution tape around it that said “Do Not Touch, Work in Progress” so he could keep at it every Sunday. Once he’d trimmed a small, plastic tree leftover from Christmas, then glued popsicle sticks around the trunk like a spiral staircase.

“There’s one,” Alec said. He pointed at a Baskin Robbins.

“Let’s do Dairy Queen,” she said.

“Baskin Robbins is way better.” He turned his whole body to watch it go by, like he used to do when they passed a pack of bikers on Harleys.

“How do you know?” Elsie said. She pushed his shoulder, wanted to leave her hand there. “Huh?”

“Kristen, my therapist, took me. They have marshmallow and strawberry.”

“What the hell kind of ice cream is strawberry marshmallow? Aren’t you supposed to be doing therapy with her?” She pushed his shoulder again, again, again, until he smiled. “I don’t get ice cream in my therapy.”

“We do therapy,” he said. “She’s just really nice.” He looked away.

Jesus, he’s got a crush on his therapist. It was hard enough to keep all those ladies straight: Terry’s where he lives, Kristen’s his therapist, Mel’s Elsie’s therapist, and Sarah runs the show. Maybe they should trade therapists. Mel would be hard to crush on with those bushy eyebrows.

In her last session with Mel, Elsie wondered what Alec did in therapy. Mel said it was confidential, between Kristen and Alec. She wondered if he talked about all the moments she couldn’t. Did he remember when Tom called the cops and Elsie hit him with a doorstep? Did he remember his mother shivering naked in the bathtub, a bottle drowned by her side? She had wanted one drink with her grilled cheese, just one to celebrate her new apartment and being with Alec again.

“Bet cha Dairy Queen has all that crazy shit, if that’s what you call ice cream. What happened to vanilla and caramel?”

“I don’t know,” he said. “There’s one.” The red and white fish sign swam by. “Mom, you passed it.”

“We’ll get the next one.” They passed a bank with a marquee that flashed the time and the temperature: 2:28pm, 87 Degrees Fahrenheit. “That woman not feed you or something?”

Paths of sweat fell from Alec’s temples. “Can we do AC?”

“If you’re paying for it. Roll your window down, Smarty.”

Alec worked the crank, lines of sweat slitting across his belly.

“That’s what you get for wearing jeans, Goof. You gonna build today?”

“Build what?”

“At Home Depot.”

“Mom, that’s for little kids. I’m not even allowed.”

“Who told you that?”

The traffic light turned red, parking them next to a group of girls jogging in place and laughing on the sidewalk. An old Chinese man walking his dog stopped at the same light, surrounded by the girls.

“What a pervert,” Alec said to himself.

“A what?” Elsie asked. He kept facing the window. “I don’t like that word, okay?” She pushed him on the shoulder again. “Look at me. I don’t like that word.”

“Okay,” he said, slouching, picking a scab on his arm. He couldn’t use words like that, not with his record. Elsie didn’t know what happened that day, if he and Lonnie played doctor or if Alec saw something on TV; it all happened so fast. She was in the bathroom and heard Tom come home, the usual slamming of the door, then working the ice machine on the fridge. Then he started yelling like a cop and Elsie thought he was. Then she heard “You sick, fucked up kid!” and she rushed out the bathroom, and there was her boy, his little butt hanging out, Ninja Turtle boxers and jeans clinging to his calves, shoulders hunched like he was peeing. Lonnie sat on the floor in front of Alec, her brown eyes wide, her hair all over the place like usual. Tom had his arm up and Elsie ran in front of her boy, shielding her face. Tom looked at her like she was nuts. He said, *Fucked up perverted family*, then took the phone off the kitchen wall. It took Elsie too long to realize he was calling the cops on her ten-year-old son. But once



she understood, she panicked. The doorstep was the first thing she saw, an old brick that had been laying in the apartment hallway, used to prop the door open when carrying in Tom and Lonnie's things.

She realized now that if she had left the brick there, the cops might have laughed Tom away. Maybe. But instead they arrested her, adding a Domestic Violence charge to her trails of overdoses.

Elsie hoped Kristen and Sarah and Terry were teaching Alec he's not like other boys with that kind of charge. He couldn't say words like pervert. He would have to behave better than others. He had a record.

"Six eighty-nine."

"What was that?" Elsie asked.

The kid behind the counter handed Alec a mountain of ice cream, candy and syrup, in a waffle bowl. It was too big to hold with one hand, so he cupped it with both, the way some people drink coffee.

"Six eighty-nine."

"Jesus, hold on," she said. Alec hovered by her elbow, which he never used to do. "Find a table, Smarty, I'll be there in a sec." She picked coins from her purse and planted them on the counter until she had one eighty-nine. "Hold on, I got a certificate." A second employee held out her vanilla cone with caramel sauce. The voucher was bright red, and she had put it in her emergency pocket, next to a twenty-dollar bill.

"What the fuck?"

"Ma'am?"

The red voucher was there, but no twenty. She dropped her purse on the counter, raking through her wallet again. "Unbelievable," she said, "I can't fucking believe it." She left her purse on the counter and headed for Alec, who sat at a table of newspapers. She stretched her wallet open so he could see. "Hey, Smarty, something missing?"

He clamped his mouth over a spoon of pink bubble gum and cookie dough, giving her the dumb look he made when he was lying.

"Something missing?" She shoved the wallet in front of him. He'd stolen from a gas station once, at the Boy's Home, but how could he take money from his own mother? They both worked so damn hard with all this therapy and bullshit, and now he was blowing it.

"What?" he asked, his mouth so full, pink leaked out the side.

"What?" She mocked, imitating him. "Your own mother."

He coughed, splattering caramel syrup onto the table. Then he threw up, thick and dark like a sick animal. He had done this ever since he was little. Throwing up instead of growing up, she had called it. Maybe he wasn't even trying. Maybe he didn't want to live with her again. "Get in the car," she said. "I'm calling Sarah."

"I didn't take nothing," Alec said.

"Code barf" the kid at the counter called to the kitchen. "Ma'am?" he said, her vanilla and caramel dripping pools on top of the counter. "That's five dollars still."

"Six bucks for a fucking ice cream, Jesus," she said. She grabbed her purse and slapped down the red voucher. An employee came out pushing a mop bucket that overflowed and splashed bubbles on the floor.

In the car, Elsie's heart pounded, and it smelled like throw-up. Alec had his back turned to her, looking asleep. He wouldn't be speaking to her for a long time. They had been here before.

She rolled down the window but didn't start the car. She waited, and breathed, and waited, and breathed. Finally, she was calm, a different person than the one buying ice cream. This person was able to consider all the possibilities. A few months ago, she'd felt the same panic and dug through her wallet, forgetting she'd had to break her emergency twenty to pay for parking at the stupid courthouse. Maybe she'd spent it again and forgot. She had never been good with money.

"Smarty, I'm sorry."

Alec stayed quiet, like she knew he would.

"I got an idea," she said. "But we can't tell anyone, okay?"

He still didn't turn toward her, but he sat up.

"Let's go home. I have your old clothes. We'll clean that up, watch some TV."

Elsie waited.

Finally, Alec said, "She'll know it's a different shirt." But she started the car. She got her son back with the same focused energy she used before to get drunk. She'd get off work and head straight for the bar, knowing that whatever bad feelings she had would soon disappear. But now, it was her and her son, together, and they would make it through this crazy program their own way, even if they both fucked up a lot by breaking the rules. Alec and Elsie were the only ones who knew how to fix each other, and themselves.

Elsie gunned it on the first opening in traffic, not looking in the far lane. Sometimes you have to close your eyes and go.



*Rail Yards, Albuquerque, New Mexico – Mitch Marty*

## **1st Place Poetry 2019 Summer Contest**

*A poem for me is a field; it is an experience of language through image and sound. "Coping Mechanisms" feels like it was written to 'carve a doorway.' I felt like even I 'tried to hold without creasing / the light inside of it.' The poem is able to create a new emotion energized by striking imagery and close attention to sound. For me, this poem is a field, it's an experience, a sky-split-by-hot-yolk wonder.*

*Jake Skeets*

# Coping Mechanisms

*Natalie Wee*

---

I am young & want to leave:

so I touch myself all day,  
broth salt from bone & water.

It's a fact orgasm is closest  
to death without dying. I blood

my nails & cannibal my body  
feet first, carve a doorway

to walk through & name it  
a bruise of family albums.

A man turns into a rusted gate:

his wife gardens her blood,  
ribbons velvet tree rings for years.

Her ankles bloom two birds,  
instruments of wind & song

to hunt what lies out of reach  
like a field of stars in a photograph

I once tried to hold without creasing  
the light inside it.

Name a woman & a daughter:

will answer. The mother  
of my mother lived by bent knee

& bleach, foretold my father's hands  
& the bedrooms his mistress touched

into museums of yellowed light.  
A moon split the sky with hot yolk

when I was born, prophesized  
a season of waste, the mother

swollen with weeping & years.  
I know. I know my mother

could not leave because I arrived





Abiquiu Courtyard  
*Patricia Joyner*

## **1st Place Nonfiction 2019 Summer Contest**

*From its first line, Border Sisters shimmers with astonishing lyricism. In it, we follow two sisters as they careen through life along the Rio Grande, where the air they breathe and the blood that courses through their veins is simultaneously defined by oneness and division. Muñoz-Hunt masterfully evokes the beauty and complexity of rural life in the Southwestern borderlands, and captures—with deep, rooted wisdom—the intractable bonds of landscape and family.*

*Francisco Cantú*



# Border Sisters

*Toni Muñoz-Hunt*

---

The transition from summer to fall in New Mexico is the most miraculous time of year, with miles of unharvested produce as far and wide as the mirroring skies. Giant corn mazes rise from the earth and consume curious children for hours and, at night, when the desert sun hides behind the moon, sounds of laughter fill the air. Majestic mesquite trees smell like rain, mingling in the aroma of freshly picked corn and chili churning in large metal roasters. These are daily occurrences along the Rio Grande, rituals of the Bordercanos who inhabit unofficial towns with dirt roads, adobe homes, and farm animals meandering from yard to yard.

In La Union, the town where my grandparents live and where their grandparents lived, their ancestral home still shelters them. The bones of this home are erected from *la tierra*, the same *tierra* stained with the blood of my family and our fallen ancestors, the same *tierra* that continues to breathe life into the food we eat. Somewhere in this lastingness, a nether space exists, tucked between those carefree summers and the weeks leading up to another school year.

It was during this time on the cusp of childhood *la tierra* had stained my hands and the border had embedded itself beneath my fingernails. *La tierra* had a way of resurrecting, year after year, in endless rows of harvest-ready crops. I had become one and the same with them and with the men and women wearing sombreros and enduring looks on their faces. The closer I came to one side of our border, the further I grew away from the other. In Padrino's fields, our earthworm hands worked in and out of the soil—to the crops, from the crops to the bags—faster, stronger, and browner. We moved in unison, casting dancing shadows on the earth beneath the relentless New Mexico sun. The heat made those days last forever, suspending us in a brume of wonder and amazement. Tejano music throbbed in the background.

At the end of each workday, Padrino's pickup squealed along like a whistle, letting us know that the day was over. His truck bounced down the dirt roads and kicked up swirls of dust around him. We wandered together in a single file line, waiting as if for Padre's communion. Our starched sleeves and proud collars had finally succumbed to the endless streams of toiled sweat, working their way down, down and clinging to the brown skin and bones underneath. Lined in silence, one hand cupped inside the other, we waited for tokens and for the backs of every dingy white shirt in front of us to drift off one by one.

The assembly of white shirts wafting, like hanging sheets in the warm desert breeze. Ghosts heading toward the abandoned field nearby. Nobody said a word when the rows of makeshift, migrant houses appeared. It just was, and it had all existed before me. Within days, spray-painted visions of the Virgin arose on the facades of those shelters—mirages in the desert—candy-colored mausoleums. The earth smoked like ashes after a blaze until it was all gone.

I never stayed in the fields long enough to see the departure of those wandering Bordercanos. Like the endless rows of crops, the white-shirted ghosts disappeared one day. Harvest ticked along, dithering

to an end, and school wound around again just like clockwork. It was the first day of school, and I had recess to occupy my mind.

Playing La Llorona never grew old. We took turns being the crying fabled woman who drowned her children in the Rio Grande, chasing each other around and moaning and hollering until the next unfortunate soul was tagged “it.” I was never La Llorona for more than a few seconds, leaving the slower boys in angry tears and mumbling something about me not having any boobs to slow me down, unlike my sister. She was in high school with their siblings, and I was nine years old and the fastest girl in elementary school.

“Trust me, you don’t want them boobs anyway,” she’d say. That was easy coming from the girl who had already gone through puberty at my age.

After school, on the walk to catechism, the slower boys scurried behind me, singing some stupid song they made up, “Boney Toni *con chones color rojo...*” I don’t remember much of that song, only that it ended with me running and jumping up and down in red panties, and, because I was built like a pole, the panties wouldn’t stay on. Eventually, the boys fell to the floor, after jumping up and down and grabbing at their pants. Their exaggerated laughs turned to fits of giggles, with them rolling around like Children of the Earth insects—flailing their arms and legs in chaos.

“Don’t worry yourself, *Mija*. Girls with the *chichis* find themselves pregnant,” Grandma said, as all of us kids arrived at her catechism class at Our Lady of Refuge. I wanted to collapse inside of my koala bear backpack.

“*Buenas tardes*, Miss Maria,” the boys greeted my grandmother. Maria Refugio Enriquez Muñoz was a force and wrangler of whispers and insignificant stories. Those whispers traveled in hushed waves of wildfire, and we never knew which direction they traveled from.

We took our seats, and the boys fingered their Bibles, trying to find the right passage to fend off her glare. This was a woman who slaughtered chickens and goats with her bare hands, then turned around to clean, cook, and serve them for dinner. She always bundled leftovers for Padre and the poor parishioners at Our Lady of Refuge.

I sat there still wondering how girls with boobs found themselves pregnant. The Virgin must’ve had big boobs, I thought, and bigger than my sister’s, since she hadn’t found herself pregnant yet, or at least I didn’t think so. The worst those boobs had done was slow her down a bit. Although, I’m sure the hundred-dollar bill they’d occasionally win her at the Chihuahua Charlie’s Wet T-shirt Contest came in handy—or so the stories went—she never actually got around to telling me.

Grandma had big boobs, too, and never found herself in such a way. Instead she found *Jesus Cristo* and wanted us to find him, too. That’s why she taught us the Bible. Or her interpretation of it, Mom said. Grandma always found creative ways to bring its lessons closer to home, and if we listened hard enough, we’d know just whose home they belonged to. Mom called it gossip. Grandma called it the “word of the Lord.”

That day, during Matthew 5:31-5:32, “It has been said, ‘Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.’ But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, expect for sexual immorality, makes her the victim of adultery, and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.” We all knew this lesson came at the expense of the schoolteacher who lived across the street from the church.

Padre gave her an annulment from her husband, because things like divorce and raising children out of wedlock weren't acceptable, though nobody said a word about it.

I hated that Bordercanos never ran out of insignificant shit to joke and gossip about. If words were lost in English, we'd just find them in Spanish, or if they were lost in Spanish, we'd find them in English. When it came time to discuss the things that really needed to be talked about—some girl's uncle forcing his penis inside of her in the middle of the night, or the teacher who comforted her on his lap after school a little too long, or those defiant bruises protruding from places that were meant to remain concealed, or how everything later in life made her want to eat, purge, and self-medicate her problems away—we never seemed to find the words. Or if we did, it was too late to erase those stains, *como la tierra*.

"An annulment makes it not count, Grandma?" I asked.

"Si, *Mijita*. God wipes it clean, *como este* chalkboard," she said, wiping the chalkboard free from its scribbled words.

"But what about the wedding?" I wondered how anyone could forget when there was photographic evidence.

"*Como asi*, it never existed." She washed her smooth hands without water like a magic trick in front of the class. "*Porque*, no woman should pay the price of *divorcio*, if her husband sins with another man." The boys looked away in horror, scooting their chairs away from each other.

Mom said the truth couldn't be wiped away that easily. Grandma said Mormons didn't know much about marriage. "*Y que mas*, they aren't even allowed to eat the flesh and drink the blood of *Jesus Cristo*," she'd say.

My sister and Mom were Mormons, and for that reason they never attended mass on Sundays. I told my sister that Holy Communion tasted like grape juice and hard, tiny tortillas.

Picking me up from catechism was Dad's excuse to drive his car. It became his ritual. I could imagine him, as he walked toward the lone olive tree at the very end of our backyard. Its twisted roots gnarled above the surface and a swath of bushy leaves loomed overhead, but only on our side of the fence. The branches on the other side had somehow lost their lushness, and those bare boney limbs stretched out as if reaching for something. That tree didn't belong in the desert terrain, but the border was a place of encounters, and the old tree sort of made sense where it was, with Dad's bronzed beauty beneath it—a 1968 Corvette with a 427 engine. He'd carefully remove each cinder block from atop the brittle, blue tarp protecting her, and then take a lap around it.

Mom said before I was born it was Canary Yellow, and one day after I came to be, he drove up to the house and it was bronze. Nobody said a word about it. Mom only remarked that brown had a way of following him, even if it was bronze.

I can still hear the way those heavy fiberglass doors opened. In high school, they called him *El Animal*, and he had his pick of colleges to go to and play ball.

"Not like they were passing out scholarships to kids in this shithole border town," Dad said.

After catechism class, Dad came inside to kiss Grandma on the cheek. She pinched his in return, gushing the usual baby-talk greeting, "*¿Como-Estas-Mi-Bebe-Mi-Chiple-Mijo?*" In his khakis and fitted polo shirt, he reminded me of the boys on school picture day, dressed in clothes they normally didn't wear. After class, the boys lingered around to talk to *El Animal* about football.

According to the boys, a Chicano really made it in life when he got a *gringa* to be his wife. What I never found out was whether they knew the truth or if they chose to believe whatever they wanted. Like our border language—picking and choosing between English and Spanish—Bordercanos picked and chose their truths. I'd like to think that the real truth existed somewhere in-between.

*El Animal* received a one-year scholarship, sat on the bench during football season, couldn't keep his grades up, married a non-Catholic woman with secrets who happened to be white, lost his business, dug ditches for his impromptu family, and had a bronze jalopy that wouldn't make it past La Union.

Dad always left a little melancholy when all the praise and fanfare was over. The boys watched from the doorway at Our Lady of Refuge, as he went from side to side, unlocking the T-tops and storing them away, behind the leather bucket seats. They waved at us with admiration and envy. When they were no longer visible in our side view mirrors, it was just the two of us again inside Dad's bronze-colored confessional.

One day that car would be my sister's, if she managed to stay out of trouble. As it was, she already had a permit and was only a year away from getting her license, but the feat seemed almost impossible. Everyday feuds ended with her slamming the bedroom door and Dad shouting, "My house. My rules."

When the arguing turned into name-calling, before blackout rage struck and lines were forever crossed—and sometimes they were—Dad would take out the screwdriver and the bedroom doors came down. That's when I'd find her in the driver's seat out by the old olive tree, the tarp pulled back halfway, and her eyes were somewhere far beyond the border. Crouching inside the chicken coop nearby to watch her, I imagined myself jumping in the passenger seat and asking her why she did the things she did, but I never got around to it. I realized then that some people lived without in-betweens—only highs and lows—jumping from side to side and never settling on either.

Beyond this parched landscaped were thirsty truths needing mouths to drink them in and spit them out to whomever would listen, to whomever would do something to change these circumstances, but I guess this was the way things were, or had to be. I didn't know why, only that this way of life had existed before me.

"God baked you, Boney," Dad said. "Different ingredients." Whatever that was supposed to mean. I'm sure Grandma had talked to him about the boys teasing me.

"Boney." I hated that nickname, maybe because I was. And, maybe because that damn name rhymed too well with Toni. Dad pressed a little harder on the gas, accelerating around the turns. Had he been alone, he would've closed his eyes and searched those meandering curves like he had so many times before.

"Ever wonder why she don't look like you?" he asked. I found the edges of my thighs pressed hard against the tufted bucket seats, my fingers picking at the buttons below. I loved the sound of the engine, and yet its vibration scared me of its full power.

"Who?" I asked, never taking my eyes off the winding road ahead. Dad's paw rested on the gearshift, readying for its next move.

"Erica," he said. He was the maestro behind the wood and steel steering wheel. It was true. My sister had red hair, green eyes, and the type of skin that burns magenta in the sun.

"Because she looks more like Mom?" I asked, more of a question than an answer. My small frame

swayed left, then right, and left again. Dad's nostrils flared, and I could see the mestizo in him when he was thinking. He turned and gave me an awkward smile, despite his Fu Manchu.

"Your mom been talking to anyone?" He searched my eyes.

"When you drive to the city." My voice cracked under the low rumble of the engine. He jingled loose change around from inside the center console. It was filled with shiny, new quarters, and he handed me four as a deposit. I cupped the quarters in my warm palms.

"Who?"

"Who?" My voice cracked under the low rumble of the engine, as I cupped the quarters in my warm palms. Then, Dad's paw swiped at the gearshift, and the sound of the engine grew. Each swipe made my palms moist and his deep-set eyes shifted further and further away.

"Men?" He stared off in the distance. The engine roared and the wheels squealed wildly toward the embankment, and with another giant swipe, the desert sand sprayed high into the air and back on the embankment again—thrilling him to laughter.

"Well..." He growled.

I kicked my legs back and forth underneath the glove compartment, and my heart inched its way up my throat. I wondered how much he'd give me if I actually gave him a name.

"Regular people?" I guessed, half a question and half an answer, as I shoved the quarters in my pocket. His menacing smile made me feel guilty, made me want to give him a name, though I had none.

One last swipe brought the Vette to a low rumble and the pink part of his wide hand made its way to my knee. I remembered when that hand was softer, but digging ditches had taken its toll like the earthworm hands that belonged to the white-shirted ghosts from the fields.

Dad's proud jaw slung forward, as he searched for words. I watched his coarse black hair blowing in the desert breeze. I could taste my heart inside of my mouth.

He said, "She ain't your real sister."

#

An unseen line was drawn in the sorrel tierra that day after catechism class when I found out she wasn't really mine. I was nine years old. I spent the next seventeen years trying to make up for it—giving her loans, going to therapists with her, taking her to the doctor—diseases, medications, poor judgment in men. When I chose to accept that she was only half, and not fully, my responsibility, I walked away. We spent years after high school trying to free ourselves from the border, but it kept calling us back. Maybe that place where the Rio Grande separates two facing truths—Aztlán—was never supposed to be divided, or maybe that Catholic guilt and centuries of domination had convinced us Bordercanos that we're not worthy of real ear-to-ear grinning happiness. That happiness was reserved for those far beyond the border. It had been four years since I last saw or spoke with my sister.

Then on a Friday afternoon, I received a call from a friend of mine who worked for CPS. Erica had overdosed. My six-year-old nephew had called 911. The paramedics were able to save her, but my nephew was in foster care. She didn't want the authorities to call her family because she was afraid we'd take her son away, but that following Monday, his foster parents would be filing for permanent custody. If we wanted to do anything about this, we needed to be at the courthouse in Dimmit, Texas on Monday morning.

Last minute airline tickets to Podunk one and a half hours from Dimmitt, were way too much money. My mom, my brother, and I decided to drive. My friend said that Erica was nowhere to be found and she would not be attending the court hearing. We could handle things with her after we figured out how to take care of everything with my nephew.

Mom went into the courthouse first, while my brother and I found parking and called Dad to let him know that we had made it safely. We would call him later to let him know whatever we found out. Brett and I walked in, and an older woman smiled at us as we made our way to the back of the line at the metal detector. I put my items in the small container and placed it on the conveyor belt. People were always nice in Texas. It's funny how each border state has its own personality. Only one state over, New Mexico Bordercanos were not so trusting. I noticed the woman still smiling at us. The man with her was not. I gave her a half smile and acknowledged him. Normally, I would've walked by them and not thought too much about it, but something about them piqued my interest.

They had on their best clothing, which consisted of jeans and a button-down shirt for him and jeans and a tired holiday sweater for her. The clothes didn't fit, and I was quite sure the clothes didn't belong to them either.

"Doesn't that lady kinda look like an old version of Erica?" Brett asked, standing behind me.

"What?" I responded. "Sorta, but this woman's an addict." I guess this woman could have resembled Erica. But our Erica had long, lustrous hair and supple alabaster skin with freckles—the type of hair and skin that keep a woman ageless. This woman had short, dry, thinning hair and skin that had weathered from being out on the streets. The makeup powder she applied was as thick as pancake mix and only brought more attention to her sullen eyes and pitted skin. Her sad eyes were dark and colorless, unlike Erica's vibrant green ones.

"Look at the way that dude's holding her arm," I smacked my lips and shook my head. They stood on the other side of the metal detector now. I wasn't sure how they made it past security.

"How do you think we keep our women in line?" My brother joked. I shot him a disapproving look like I had so many times before, especially on those long road trips when we were kids. I no longer found that machismo humor funny. He continued, "That's right, you're a Latinx now!"

The guard at the end of the conveyor belt motioned us to hurry along.

"Come on. We're at the courthouse," I shushed him. "Besides, I'm not a fucking millennial like you. I don't use that word." We walked past the pair.

"You're too good now. You use the word 'fuck' instead." We both laughed.

"Toni! Brett!" the woman said. She was smiling and clearly happy to see us. Brett and I glanced at each other and back at the woman. My body started heaving, and I bent over in an effort to control the vomit as it made its way to my mouth. I swallowed hard. No. This woman couldn't be our Erica.

"I miss you." She hugged me as I hugged my knees. I could feel every bone in her frail body. By the time I stood up, Brett was almost out the door.

"You need to get your shit together, Erica!" I said and pulled myself away from her, wiping the wrinkles from my dress and heading in the direction of my brother. How could she do this to us? How could she do this to her son? I turned one last time to see her sobbing in the arms of that man, still staring at me. Another man who was going to save her.

#

Maybe it's not Erica, I tell myself, as Mom and I walk into the small white room lightly dimmed. Right in front of us, a table draped in a crisp white sheet is pushed against the wall with a single light shining down on her. Another white sheet is pulled up to her chest. I don't remember walking toward the table, only looking down and tracing the dark lines underneath where the coroner had made his incisions. It would be a few months before we had the autopsy report. She wasn't much of a priority. They had ideas on how she passed, but they were only theories. "Sorry, ma'am." They said they had seen these types of deaths happen to these types of women before.

The air seems thicker than usual. Mom and I breathe in deeply. Though we never admitted it, we had been waiting for this moment—that phone call or knock at the door—hoping it wouldn't happen, but knowing it would. A couple of months after seeing Erica at the little courthouse in Texas, the police came knocking.

I watch Mom comb Erica's hair, and talk to her, smoothing out the imperfections and fixing her just right like she used to when we were kids getting ready for school.

"Erica," she says her name in a way I'd never heard it said before. She is as radiant in death as we choose to remember her in life—before the rape, self-medication, abortion, self-medication, failed marriages, self-medication, CPS intervention, self-medication, battered women's shelter, self-medication-overdose.

"Why?" Mom cries. We know the answer, but it had evaded us.

The detective had a box of her belongings, and if we called the number on the card, we could collect her things. It wasn't much. They had found my sister's deceased body on the cold floor of some extended-stay motel in Amarillo, and for a small fee, they could help us make arrangements to ship her body back to the border where she belongs.

I wait for those big green eyes to flutter open. Maybe I can will them to open. I stare until my vision blurs over. Erica's eyes could light up a room and that laugh—that insatiable laugh. The kind of laugh that makes everyone around laugh, and sometimes it was too loud and I would try to quiet her down. I would do anything to hear it now. Please. "Why didn't I hug you when I had the chance?" "Why didn't I say, you're coming with me?" Why couldn't I find my words when I needed them? I want to hug her now but it seems empty. I feel her more in the air surrounding us rather than on the table in front of us.

"Momma loves you, sweet girl." Mom closes her eyes and places her cheek next to Erica's. My eyes well up, preserving that final moment like a sad snow globe, a distorted memory only to be shook up and repeated again and again.

I can't go back to that day when I found out she wasn't all mine, or to any of those days when she needed me—a real sister—not just half of one. I think of Dad's Corvette, those lost green eyes, that chicken coop, and how maybe things could be different like those early New Mexico mornings in the fields before sunrise. Before the pink shadow crept along the parched horizon, before steam from exposed rows of earth permeated, before proud dispositions hunched in humility, our talking silhouettes would break into laughter and our senses pulsed in slow, deliberate beats. We were as we should've always been—together—on the same side of the Rio Grande before it divided us.

Bordercanos have a saying, "it's *en el agua*"—the Rio Grande. Its muted reflection of the past has

a way of keeping us border people treading the waters in between. For some reason or another, each one wants to be on the other side, but never fully belongs to either one. I always wanted to remain on Erica's side but I never could quite find my words or way there, after that one ride home from catechism, I understood why. We were always destined to navigate the middle, with something or someone separating us. We were two halves, fragments looking for something to make us whole again, never knowing that we were and always will be border sisters.





*Rio Grande Gorge Bridge, Taos, New Mexico – Mitch Marty*

**2nd Place Fiction  
2019 Summer Contest**

*Readers are placed in the mind of a narrator who cannot remember and the result is a story of a life, eked out in bursts and fragments, held together with the momentum of the present. It is a challenging construct that would have failed in the hands of a lesser writer, but the author crafts a beautiful narrative with just the right amount of give and take.*

*Lesley Nneka Arimah*

# Arrangements

*Robin Rozanski*

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It's strange: I don't forget that I will forget. Notes clutter my rooms, full of mnemonics, little tricks, pictures, signs. But especially lists. "Write it down. Write it, write, write, write," you said, pointing at my palm-sized leather notebook. "Don't let my chamber float away." This, the first instruction regarding your funeral, unsettled me, so I fell back on habit; I uncapped the pen kept on a silver chain around my neck, and began that list the same way I'd begun so many others. The way you taught me when I was eight, barely able to stay on the lines: date on top, subject beneath that, deadline when applicable. You'd been my coach, picking up where the doctors left off, teaching me to live with an injured brain, a faulty memory. And, twenty-two years later, I was helping you cope with your own affliction.

"I want things done my way, Sweetie," you reminded me.

"You're fine, Mom," I said. "The treatments, maybe another round..."

"My way," you repeated, stubborn. "It's my time. My turn."

We spoke of death in this way, not of fears or meaning, but of flowers and hymns. You said 'chamber' with a long, unnatural drawl, attempting to sound like a southern lady, but we were not a family of refined southern tradition. We were pure "New" Florida. No tidewater manners or piedmont heritage for us. We suffered mosquitoes and humidity without the languorous façade of white linen and hand fans, we burned and itched like tourists, but that never stopped you from daydreaming of cotillions and mint juleps.

"Details matter," you said. "People notice the little things. You'll do fine."

What if I don't get it right? My voice, my worries, stuck in my throat. It - death as a thing- there is no pronoun for what death really is: A formless deity, a concept beyond comprehension, because the moment we reach it, we lose our ability to reason. It was not about mortality for you, but a milestone with rites. Tasteful and tangible steps closer to Dad and Carol. Carol, a child angel. Dad, a forgiven devil. You assigned such sacrosanct arrangements to me, your remaining daughter - the saved but broken twin - knowing exactly how much you asked of me. I would inevitably make mistakes, and you trusted me anyway. You had a faith I lacked.

## Deathbed

Hospitals were once for the impoverished and abandoned. Asylums. Sanatoriums. Residency in such an institution was to be avoided. Now, walls lined with art, hospitals exude a middle-class sophistication that allows patients the privilege of forgetting. Forget your fears, the sculptures and stained glass say, for this is a place of healing. Only the unfortunate die at home, blinds twisted shut against the sunlight, waiting for a neighbor's complaint and a landlord's key in the lock. That, you'd say, was no way for a lady to pass.

Dying in the hospital seemed safest. I watched your interactions with the staff until I understood- safe meant certain. Fate, not misfortune. At home, death would go unchallenged, or worse, be a half-done thing: choking, fading, helpless and unhelped. Whereas, among these persistent nurses, even a cardiac arrest could be reversed with adrenaline and electricity. You'd know they'd give every effort. And there

would be a man of God nearby. Any god, any man. You preferred men in critical situations and always felt secure with a man nearby, even if he'd caused your anxiety. When the end came, you were calm, and I did my best to mirror your poise.

It played out just as you'd thought, as you'd seen on TV dramas: orders, actions, extreme measures. The nurses' movements were practiced, like the pit crews I saw when Dad took me to Daytona the year before he passed. It was my 15th birthday and I knew you wouldn't come with; you hated cars. Neither of us shared his attraction to the sport, but I hid my nerves and followed his lead. I adored him the same way you did, drawn to his cold, controlling charisma, willing to accept that the accident wasn't his fault.

As the mechanic-like nurses worked on you, I stood in the doorway. I took sharp inhaled breaths through my nose and felt the wail of loss settle like a resting dragon. Your eyes closed, but you must have felt the hands and heard the voices. I know you appreciated their professionalism. They gave you a chance, a chance Carol never had in our wreck of metal. I don't remember that night, but it inhabits me, sadness so heavy it dampens my emotions like rain pulling down dust.

### Transfer

You'd said, "I'd like to know you're taken care of, that's all." Not really your last words, but the last ones I recall clearly. Those words came back to me, echoed, because I knew I still had to take care of you. From the moment they declared the time of death, I was meddlesome and calm, explaining your wishes, refusing to be ushered away. I stayed to observe the transfer. Your requests dealt with ritual and appearance, but to get to those I had to attend the messier aspects of your posthumous state.

The transfer team assessed everything *of importance*. This meant your weight (125 pounds, no additional team member needed), your disease (not infectious, no additional gear needed), and your state of decomposition (early, no additional gear needed). They documented your clothing and valuables. I told them you'd crocheted the headscarf yourself, but this was not of importance, and therefore went unnoted. You'd taught me how to crochet at least five times, and I still couldn't cast off. Or maybe that's knitting? The transfer crew didn't know either. They attached the ID tag. *Colette*. One L, two Ts. I made sure.

I followed the van to the funeral home, chewing my thumbnail during the long, nerve-wracking drive. They moved you onto a stretcher under a plush, navy blue cover. You disliked that color, but you would've liked the fabric, the coziness, the weight of the blanket, heavy like the ones you tucked up to our chins at bedtime. Both your girls, side-by-side, till there was just one. Did you realize that each night after the accident you smoothed my hair twice, and placed two kisses on my forehead? I wished I could make myself be Carol for the second kiss but was never quick enough. Nine years old, too old for magic, but my mind, so damaged, needed it.

At the funeral home, they placed you on a body tray, elevated your head on a concave block. The transfer supervisor explained in a quiet voice that this would prevent purging. I thanked them, even though I knew they didn't do it for you, but for themselves, to make their day easier. Cleaner. The undertaker arrived, a stack of dark towels in hand. Perhaps he did not trust the block to protect him from blood and bile. He said I should leave, so I left.

## Shroud

You joked about the clothing so much that I handed you the pen. “You write it the way you want it,” I said. I didn’t have your sense of humor. You gave the pen right back. “No need for shoes!” You laughed until you coughed, but I was still skeptical because you’d always preached complete, head-to-toe matched outfits, insisted. So, there it is in your perfect, unhurried cursive:

*Dark purple silk shirt (button it up, put the pearls over the collar).*

*Black slacks, the ones with the cuffs.*

*No shoes, hon!*

“Wasn’t that a hoot!” you said. I agreed, but you shook your head in a way that let me know I was forgetting something. “Thanksgiving, remember?” I didn’t, so you told me about the year we went to the mall after Thanksgiving dinner, part of a massive throng, hoping to get leather ankle boots at half price. But the frazzled clerk shooed us out, repeating those words over and over to each customer: “No shoes, hon. No shoes, hon.”

The mortuary was equipped with a state-of-the-art lifting machine, for dressing. The undertaker let me help him roll you instead. More respectful. He asked if I would like to help with the undergarment. For a moment I was at a loss; underwear wasn’t on the list. The assistant, a college intern with her hair in loose pigtailed, held out something that looked like a diaper. “Oh,” I said. “No.” Despite all my research, there were a few things I didn’t expect. I turned away until I heard the zip of the slacks. Under whispered guidance from the undertaker, the assistant managed the socks. When the undertaker asked her for the eye caps, I turned away again.

I gave them your cosmetics bag, each item inside unused. “Like this,” I said, handing over two pictures I’d taken of you a week earlier. The first one you posed for, the second one I took furtively, when you were not smiling, in case that would be more helpful. Natural. Expressionless. At rest. The lipstick, the shade you loved, made me think of half-healed bruises. The assistant took the bag but said, kindly, they had a very good restorative artist on staff. My resolve weakened, and I could go no further. I knew they would suture your mouth shut. I knew enough about plugs and fluids. I knew that the color palette of the so-called “restorative artist” was not one of springs and summers. I looked instead at the instruction: *Lipstick = Chanel, la raffinée, the new tube. Make sure to apply two coats.*

I am sorry, Mom. I tried to bear the unbearable as well as you did. Fix the unfixable.

I wonder if this is how Dad felt, coming home every day, refusing to let us abandon the house he’d selected for us so carefully - a home near the water, in the sun - waiting for forgiveness that can comfort but never cure.

## Prayer Cards

“The Lamb of God—not a serious one. Something cute,” you said. I wrote it as you dictated. *Don’t make the lamb too serious.* Not the stained-glass motif or the medieval tableau. A photorealistic scene of two little snow-white lambs on a sun-drenched emerald hillside. ‘Safely Home’ on the reverse side: I am home in heaven, dear ones, so happy and so bright.

The sunshine of my childhood, I can remember—so many days of it, enough for you, me, and Carol. The Three-Cs we called ourselves. Dad, an inelegant ‘Terry,’ wasn’t one of us. We-Three-Cs, out in

the sun, under the endless, elevated cloud-skimmed sky, skipped across brown pine needles and sharp fronds discarded by low palms, our feet burned by hot sand. We-Three-Cs, out to the shaded porch, where our rescued cats with newborn kittens mewed and cuddled. Carol insisted we care for every momma cat until the kittens were old enough to sell, at least eight weeks. We Three Cs Cat Care. Even after the accident, you and I kept at it.

I'd cry when I couldn't recall the names of a new litter, so you made up a game. Counting fingers, start with the thumb. Thumbelina. Index finger? Indiana Jones. Middle finger? Middleman. Ring Around Rosie. Pink Panther. Tom Thumb. Indigo. And so on. Sometimes we kept the kittens ten weeks. I called those extra days Carol Days.

"I didn't know what to do, at those times you thought you were her," you said, voice light but words thick from the morphine.

"What do you mean?"

"The first day home from the brain trauma rehab place. You looked in the mirror and thought you were Carol. You were so happy. 'Mommy, I found her!' you said. I had to tell you again, and again that she was gone. How many times I broke your heart telling you. The doctors said it would resolve itself."

I held your hand, Mom. You slept. One hundred questions collapsed inside me.

#### Interim

Everything was scheduled and paid for. Dad had always been organized and planned ahead for everything. His pension and the accumulation of insurance payouts were generous. Other than volunteering at the Humane Society, making your arrangements was the closest thing. I'd had to a real job. I waited, alone at home, for four days, working a jigsaw puzzle to pass time. *Service and funeral in one day*. Simple. You'd hoped for an overcast day, like a movie set in New England. I'd written it down, but scratched it out later, so that only two items remained on that list:

*Service and funeral in one day:*

~~*Cloudy, overcast.*~~

*Stay home.*

"What do you mean, stay home?" I'd asked.

"Stay home. Relax. Do something else." You patted the narrow space on the edge of the bed and I sat. "I don't want you to be so sad."

"Mom, I should be there."

"Oh, no 'shoulds.' Good enough to know you'll be beside me someday. With all of us."

You said something else, something I didn't write down, maybe what you wanted for dinner or something that seemed irrelevant. In these half-memories I feel forewarned, as if communicating with a ghost. I shouldn't have stopped with what you wanted, but also asked why. I can guess. Perhaps you thought I'd embarrass myself, become moody and flustered; the emotions would cause time to blur more than usual. That I might think the service was Dad's, relive the confusion I experienced at his wake, slam the lid down on you too. But it wasn't how you thought: I didn't blame him for anything. Reconciliation had taken years. To reconstruct our bond, he'd take me to the dock every Sunday morning— to watch the fisherman head out—until finally it became a routine I could predict and recall. And then he had the heart-

attack. I was angry, not at him but at my love for him. For it forming too late.

“Do something nice,” you said. “For yourself. Take care of yourself now.”

### Casket

210 pounds, 18-gauge steel, high gloss exterior, adjustable mattress, satin pillow and cashmere throw blanket. A warranty and a guarantee not to leak. You picked out the casket from a brochure, but if you noticed the guarantees, you didn't let on. I don't know if the manufacturers intended to protect against leaking in or out, but I know the leaking out would've concerned you most. You skirted the tangible horror of death. You must have worked hard to push it out of mind after Carol's and Dad's.

“Your father hated to even hear me pee, even after twenty years,” you said. “Imagine what he'd think of all that nasty rot right next to him?” You paused, maybe catching an unsavory thought before it formed. “Bad enough your nails keep on growing—did you know that? They grow. Hair and nails, or so they say. Check my fingernails. Manicure. Add that to the list.”

### Viewing

Stuffed armadillos hung on the wall, peanut shells covered the floor. In the sandy yard behind the bar, a lethargic alligator pushed his snout against the chain-link fence, more neglected pet than attraction. I didn't want a beer, but I ordered one anyway, because I couldn't sit for free. I sat there defiant and contrite-hearted because I had not stayed home, as you instructed. I couldn't stay away from your service, and this was the best view of the funeral parlor. A few cars arrived, some shiny and dripping condensation from the tailpipes, others rusted, with windows rolled down to catch the humid breeze. As the mourners made their way past the drooping begonias and blooming shrimp plants, a man with a smooth and practiced manner shook each hand. His dark suit looked out of place next to the chipped stucco portico and stubby sago palms, but he was appropriately somber. Exactly what you'd want. I pushed the beer away. I couldn't stand the smell.

A red-haired woman, wrists laden with beaded bracelets, sat next to me and looked me over, evaluating my black dress and bunned hair. With barely a pause, she began to speak to me as if I'd been expecting her. She told me about a funeral she saw in India. “All colors and banners,” she said.

“Sounds more like a parade,” I said. She nodded, then told me another story. Something about Thailand and an Italian boy, and a dare. She tapped the edge of my notebook to get my attention. “Why aren't you over there?” She pointed at the funeral parlor.

“I'm not even supposed to be *this* close,” I said. We snacked on peanuts and I told her more than I thought I could, even about the ban from the burial. “Maybe she thought I couldn't handle it,” I said. “There could be other reasons. Trying to remember is like staring into shadows.”

The woman placed two shots of tequila in front of us. “Yeah, you can handle it,” she said. “But you shouldn't have to.” As the mourners returned to their cars, she grabbed my hand. “Let's go.”

### Guest Book

“Don't make a fuss,” you said through a mouthful of ice chips. “Don't roll those eyes!” It was too late; my eyes had already rolled. I'd never heard of invitations for a funeral. You explained it as more of a request card. You didn't like the idea of an obituary or other public announcement. Dad's had brought in

a crowd. Too many handshakes.

The people you wanted to be there:

*Jack* (Your favorite nephew. A mischievous kid I never liked.)

*Harold* (Your next-door neighbor. After his wife died, he visited to do crosswords with you; two old friends measuring the moments of life, one obscure riddle at a time.)

*Nancy & family* (Your best friend and coworker of thirty years. Her kids call you Auntie Colette. She visited you in the hospital as much as I did.)

I waited for more names, but you were done. You didn't want to bother too many people. Who would be bothered? The cousins who surf at Cocoa Beach and deep-sea fish in the Keys? Your black sheep nieces, who tour artsy northern cities as a fire eater and a fortune teller?

"What about them?" I asked you.

"Incense is tacky," you said, moving on without answering. "Roses would be nice."

### Gravesite

"Don't let my chamber float away. Write that down."

I told you that even here, a mere fifty feet above sea level, coffins weren't popping up and spilling zombies into the canals. "Don't be crass," you scolded, with a little slap to my knee. "Anyway, I don't aim to be the first. Put me in the garden, so I *stay put*."

County regulations require the "garden" to have 12 inches of soil above the "burial container," so I arranged for 18. The extra room above could be arranged, but side by side had to be tight. You are next to Dad and Carol. Plots are expected to fill up within twenty years, and waiting lists become complicated. Dad bought the family plots so long ago, for all of us, but the rules could change. Will I make it in time? They call it overcrowding, as if imposing on the dead. Neighbors closing in, shoulder-to-shoulder, claustrophobic. Memory can be that way—congested, jumbled histories and faces.

Tipsy and dizzy from the tequila, I stepped onto the gravel entranceway of Ocean Side Cemetery, from the car of a red-headed stranger. She waved her beaded arms, urging me forward. Forward I went. I hugged, I cried, I hugged everyone again. I picked an armful of roses from the memorial display, stumbled over the carpet that incongruously covered the disrupted sod. I sat on Carol's gravestone, cradling the flowers like a baby. The clergyman spoke his words for you, the poems I'd given him on your behalf. I stayed there, silent and still, watching your plans unravel.

### Headstone

You romanticized headstones, thought of them as garden ornaments rather than death markers, so you easily rattled off the specifics for your own. Yours would be a portal stone: Salisbury pink granite, laser-etched gates of heaven, angels calling you up, a beam of holy light. Another facet of your beautiful denial - your chamber was not a coffin, but an elevator to God's penthouse. I wished I could've seen it the same way, but maybe I was too cynical. I learned of corporeal death too early, too fully, so that it became normalized, or least unspiritual.

One story you told often. I was nine, a year after the accident, and the exterminator came for the annual check for mice, possum, and whatever other critters might nest near our vine-covered home. He



asked if you'd smelled anything unusual. You hadn't, but I, eager to help, piped-up that I had smelled something terrible. Having always wanted to explore beneath the weathered planks of the screened-in porch, I volunteered to find the source. In that stifling crawl space, I slid into three dead catfish, dragged from the river and ripped by raccoons, eyes and gills and scales rotting down to worms. I had nightmares for weeks: A little girl's bones, displaced fish turned inside out, short-furred kits shivering in the night.

### Footstone

I admire anything with a concrete history, even the archaic fact that in England, footstones mark the graves of felons and murderers. I didn't tell you those sort of facts, that was the agreement. You picked what sounded nice, and I let it stay that way for you. Nice. "Stone or bronze?" I asked.

"Stone! Stone! They've got to match," you said. "All of them. Match!" You lost your patience that day. The nurse told me to let you rest for an hour. When we resumed, my handwriting was particularly neat. I tried to concentrate and keep with the escalating details.

*Granite (match headstone—Salisbury pink)*

*Flat marker (extra permit?)*

*Smooth. Polished border. Roses. (laser)*

*'Devoted Wife and Mother'*

*'Beloved Daughter and Sister'*

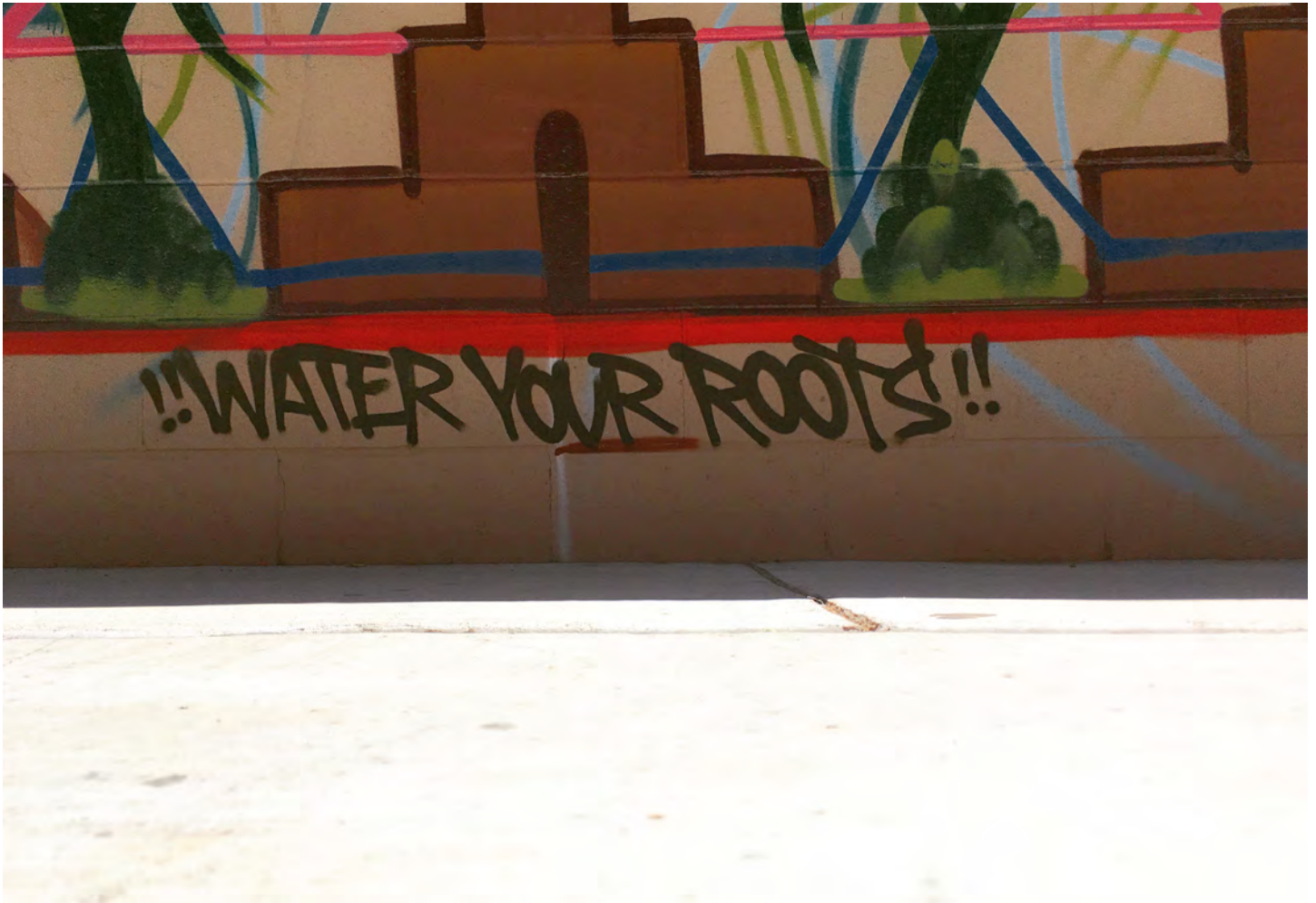
*Get one for Dad's grave.*

What was Dad's supposed to say? What polite lie did you ask of me? I can't remember, even as I revisit the list, each preceding item with a tidy checkmark next to it. I'm sure you told me, repeated it, waited, watched me write. Did I fake it? Doodle? Retrace a parenthesis instead of taking down your wishes, knowing that if I didn't spell out your love for an unkind man it would not be memorialized? Anything I erase would fall away. *My* misplaced love, *your* dependence, *our* blindness could evaporate. We would remain, and your name could go on, independent and strong.

### Eulogy

I knew the treatments weren't working because the doctors told me. Did you know that you were dying without being told? Could you feel it? I tried to protect you from the bleak updates and morbid plans, but I couldn't guard you from what was occurring within your own body. Surely you felt changes, like the aura before migraine, a seizing of the abdomen before monthly blood, an ache before fever. So many intuitions you taught me, but not this one. Not the final one. Grief reduces people to simpler senses, to indecision and timidity. Yet, in my own way, I am devoted to the truth. I never forget that I will forget. Notes and lists order my life. I remember you trusted me.

I made a calendar, until the habit becomes memory, and I visit the cemetery twice a week. *Colette, devoted Mother. Carol, beloved Sister. Terrence, our Rock.* Death is not a failure, not a weakness. We are all here, together.



*Villa Hispana in Expo New Mexico, Albuquerque, New Mexico – Tori Cárdenas*

## **2nd Place Poetry 2019 Summer Contest**

*As poets, we often try to push language out of the confines of margin and form. Some poems succeed and others still cling to the cliffside. Then, there are some poems that behead themselves and write from that beheading. This poem does just that with language but elegant and serrated. This poem stayed with me for days after reading it and I had no choice but to return to it for several mornings.*

*Jake Skeets*





II from *Brio*  
*Veronica Scharf Garcia*

# Blue Mesa Review's 30th Anniversary

## Interview with Founder Rudolfo Anaya

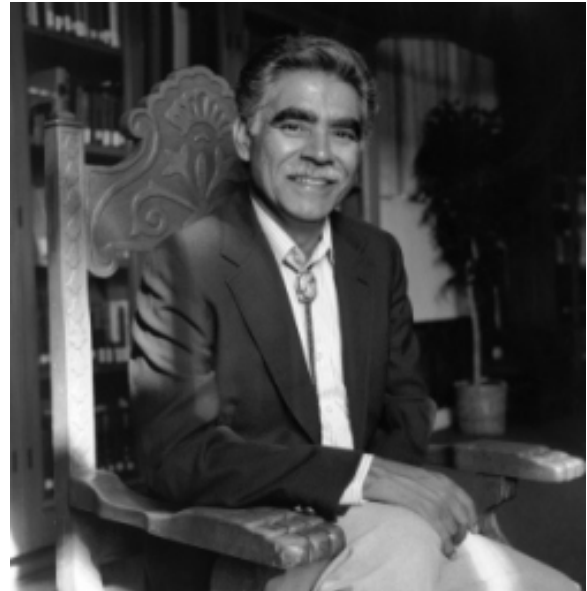
by Tori Cárdenas

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*Summer 2019 marked our 30th anniversary as a magazine! To celebrate our 40th issue, Blue Mesa Editor in Chief, Tori Cárdenas, spoke with our founder, Rudolfo Anaya, author of Bless Me, Ultima and Alburquerque, about what it was like to start the magazine, and how he's watched it grow.*

### **How did you decide to start Blue Mesa Review?**

In 1974 I was invited by the English Department at UNM to teach creative writing. My first novel, BLESS ME, ULTIMA, published in 1972, was attracting national attention. I met a wonderful group of teachers who were teaching creative writing classes, mostly prose and poetry. The group included, Gene Frumkin, David Johnson, Patricia Smith, Tom Meyer. At our regular meetings Gene, David, Pat and I often discussed the idea of starting a literary magazine for the program. At that time, I was on the national board of the Coordinating Council of Literary Magazines (CCLM), and I was learning about the importance of literary magazines in the literary and social life of the country. Where to get the money to start our own magazine was the big question. We spent meetings discussing possibilities for start-up cash. I made an appointment with the Dean of Arts and Sciences and explained our situation. He gave us \$5,000.00 for our first issue. You can imagine our surprise.



### **Did you begin with a mission or goal for the magazine? What did you hope it would accomplish?**

Starting BMR was exciting, we were in tune with what was happening all over the country, the birth of hundreds of literary magazines. Our goal was to make a home for SW authors.

### **What was that like for you—starting a new magazine?**

A word about the title, Blue Mesa Review. My wife Patricia and I spent many weekends in Jemez Springs. Driving home, we enjoyed the spectacular New Mexico landscape. We passed through Jemez Pueblo and turned east. To the left is Zia Pueblo. Rising along the Jemez River north of the pueblo is a long mesa, a flat table created on the land by volcanic eruptions from

an earlier age. At a certain time of day, the light reflects a bluish color on to the mesa.

“Blue Mesa Review,” I said to my wife.

“Yes,” she responded.

Starting the magazine required coming up with an appropriate name. We had been thinking of a name for the magazine. There it was. I took the name to my fellow editors and all agreed: Blue Mesa Review it was.

**How did the department support that vision? What support did you have from readers, the faculty and students?**

The department was very supportive. Literary magazines have often found a home in university departments. The faculty and students were excited. Students volunteered to help.

**How long were you EIC? Who helped you to organize the magazine? Read/select contributions? Publish the first few issues?**

I was EIC for about ten years, then Gene Frumkin and David Johnson took turns at being editors. All of us read contributions. Gene, David and Pat were excellent poetry editors.

**What did you request from contributors for the first few issues? What kinds of submissions did you receive?**

We sent letters, at first to friends. Once the word got out, we had a wonderful variety of submissions.

**What was the process of publication like for those issues?**

We read submissions, selected those we wanted to publish and turned them over to a student who organized them. Robert Masterson was our

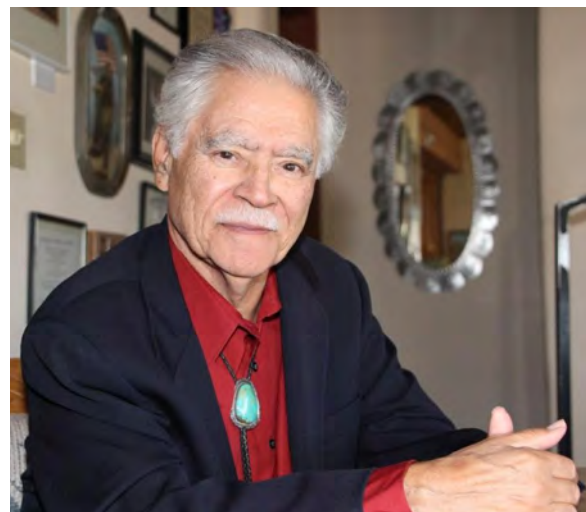
Managing Editor. He did excellent work.

**What did you think of following issues of BMR? How have you seen the original goals met?**

That issue # 40 will soon be published is a testament to the quality of BMR. There are so many talented authors out there who have a home for their work.

**What do you hope for BMR’s future?**

In 1983 I had a fellowship from the Kellogg Foundation. A group of my fellows planned a trip to China to study the society. In the evenings my wife and I went out to explore life in the cities we visited. One early evening in Shanghai we came upon an artist doing finger paintings. We bought one of a horse and that became the cover for the first issue in 1989 of BMR. Looking back on the first issue I feel extremely proud. It is a beautiful book. The Table of Contents glows with the names of all the fine authors we published. All of this was accomplished by the efforts of the group. The editors and students worked as a team. I hope the same collaboration continues as issue #40 is published, and beyond.





*El Prado, New Mexico – Tori Cárdenas*



## **2nd Place Nonfiction 2019 Summer Contest**

*“Welcome to Iowa: Letters to Carp and Other Immigrants” assembles epistolary musings and memories, reflections and poems, about what it means to be placed against the swift-flowing waters of America’s dominant culture. Even as the narrator is sexualized, exorcized, and othered, she finds solace in the natural world, coming to regard the animals that surround her as companions, teachers, and above all, fellow immigrants. Through her willingness to take formal risks, Budhwar offers us new ways of thinking about identity, legacy, and myth.*

*Francisco Cantú*

# Welcome to Iowa: *Letters to Carp and Other Immigrants*

*Kartika Budhwar*

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### To the Redwing Blackbird

You appear suddenly. After you, come  
lilac and coral maple blooms. Then grass  
crests where we should have cleaned the  
beds better. Wings to sear the sky, the  
sky  
your fishbowl but you must settle  
for sticky shrubs at swamp's edge.

The ornithologist puts grapes  
in his garden for orioles, colorless  
sugarwater for hummingbirds. But no  
sunflower seeds for you. *I don't want it  
here*, he says, *I don't like the sound  
it makes: Gonhorrheaaa Gonhorrhhea.*

## To Carp Dreaming of Dragonhood

I am sixteen years old when I first meet you.

My mouth is cluttered; my teeth don't sit comfortably against each other and my tongue is heavy and dry. I can't stop drumming my fingers against the study table, can't stop snaking them into the dirt when I force myself to lie in the grass. I have to remind myself how to breathe: deep and often. I want so badly to pluck my hair out of my scalp, something I haven't done since I was a small child. I itch instead, fingers and eyes begging for hair or a piece of paper. I deny myself endlessly because writing doesn't end much better than plucking hair does. No stories complete themselves, and my poems rhyme, which I have recently learned is undesirable. None of the wild has spilled out of me yet. It will soon. My parents don't know they only have one more year of my obsequiousness, or even my presence, so they take my passivity for granted.

I am always sweaty, slick, furious at myself. The environment is a mirror. Strange things start to happen. Landslides, the stones spilling loose, when I'm sitting on a cliff with my best friend, or driving to Bombay with my aunt. Two electrical fires in my room. I sleep through one and bathe through the other. My mother catches them both, shocked that I was subterranean through them. I am almost damaged every day. It's the year of men, too. Camera phones have just hit India, and despite my acne, clumsy knees, fat thighs, and jagged braces, men take pictures of me in the street. I can't decide if they will laugh or masturbate when they look at the pictures later. Either way, I start to hate men, and they haven't even gotten started on me yet.

Worst of all, I am stupid<sup>1</sup>. Very little remains from my scattershot education. I have a big dream and we have no money. My big dream involves a test called the SAT that I have never heard of until this month. I get stuck at the lowest level of math problems, the ones at the start of the easier book. This test is expensive and my father says he'll hire a math tutor. I can only take this test once. This dream requires the top 97th percentile on the test so I can get a specific scholarship, but I nearly failed my 11th grade exams. I can't enjoy the monsoon like I usually do; the clotted sky and sludgy ground remind me of my own mind.

*What books should I read for the English section of the SAT?* I ask on a forum online.

*Besides textbooks? Read American books. The Great Gatsby.* I read the book in an hour, enraptured by the long, perfect sentences, and slightly repulsed by the America in it. I couldn't tell you a single thing that happened in it, plot-wise.

My mother chants a strange mantra these days. Sometimes, she chants it for a whole hour. This is because she is a Buddhist now, she tells my father and I. She meets other Buddhists at their houses, chants with them, and they study together. She is trying to open a window in my life. She is trying to get me to chant as well, to read what she does. In secret, because I don't want to give her the satisfaction, I do

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<sup>1</sup> A few years later, the doctors will name The Stupidity: ADHD-Nonverbal Learning Disability-PTSD-Generalized Anxiety Disorder. Even later, I will decide this name is too long and I will drop the PTSD. I will keep the others because those names come with their own beauties and gifts. Also because those names become angry if I don't honour them and provide for them. This is a story that you, Carp, don't care about, so I'll tell it another time, to someone else.

both. I test the words, Nam Myoho Renge Kyo, and find that if I mutter them enough, my tongue softens, fits better in my mouth. If I say them for longer than I find easy, the knot at my neck smoothens and my fingers still themselves a little.

I open a two-thousand-page book—the Buddhist sect’s equivalent of the Bible/Geeta/Quran. Inside it, a Japanese monk called Nichiren rages at an authoritarian regime, and sends his tough love to his disciples. He is writing letters to them (and unknowingly to me) from the thirteenth century, feudal Japan. Some of his disciples are Samurai. His language is dramatic, and not all of it has aged well. But some of it has. In one of his letters, he is writing about you, Carp.

*A WATERFALL called the Dragon Gate exists in China. Its waters plunge a hundred feet, swifter than an arrow shot by a strong warrior. It is said that a great many carp gather in the basin below, hoping to climb the falls, and that any that succeeds will turn into a dragon. Not a single carp, however, out of a hundred, a thousand, or even ten thousand, can climb the falls, not even after ten or twenty years. Some are swept away by the strong currents, some fall prey to eagles, hawks, kites, and owls, and others are netted, scooped up, or even shot with arrows by fishermen who line both banks of the falls ten chō long. Such is the difficulty a carp faces in becoming a dragon.<sup>2</sup>*

I cry into my hands, and I’m not sure why. Then I sit with that first section of the ‘easy’ Math problems that have mystified me for weeks, and I break through and past them into even worse math problems.

Every night I repeat this. I chant, I read, I cry, I work through another page. You’ve guessed how this ends. I make the near-impossible percentile. I get the scholarship. I enter the dream. My life throws itself open. To keep the scholarship I’ll have to keep a certain GPA. You are still heaving up the water too, aren’t you, Carp?

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<sup>2</sup>Nichiren Daishonin, “Dragon Gate,” *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin I/II*, November 6, 1279.

### **To the Female Sparrow who is Nesting**

You've been here so long. You must have forgotten.  
I should tell you. You never wanted an America  
anyway, you did not want to eat the canker worms, you  
did not want to be cold, your ancestor died twice in  
New York without breeding. They just kept bringing  
more of you.<sup>3</sup>

I should tell you. The ornithologist won't shoot you yet  
but he will shoot your man. I thought there was some kindness  
in the yet, but no. Your man will just bring a new female  
to the same nest if you die. But you will abandon  
your nest if your man dies. So the ornithologist  
will shoot him first to save time.

Abandon the nest; there's nothing left. Last night  
while you were out the ornithologist pierced your eggs  
with a needle. He scrambled what was growing inside. He did  
it quietly, invisibly. He knows you will blame your neighbors,  
the Purple Martins, if you can see that all is lost. He knows you  
will take revenge, destroy their nests. He doesn't want that.  
He likes them better, for now.

If you remember a better home, if it still exists, go back.

---

<sup>3</sup>E.A Zimmerman, "House Sparrow History," Sialis.com, March 24, 2016, accessed February 14, 2019, <http://www.sialis.org/hosphistory.htm>.

## To Carp, Almost

My first year in California is mostly painless.

The ADHD makes it difficult to write papers, but sometimes manifests in what my Freshman Composition teacher calls “bursts of surprising freshness.”

In a Walmart, a fluffy white lady stalks me from behind toilet paper and pasta sauce, screams *go back where you came from* when I’m at the cash register, and then runs away. There is comfort in the fact that the African American cashier rolls her eyes and says *god help these honkeys* in front of all the nice suburban white folk averting their eyes.

Once they hear I am a lesbian and a virgin (this is true and untrue, depending on how you interpret these terms), white boys and brown boys decide they should remedy my conditions. I gain some satisfaction from not sleeping with any boys at all.

Friends have me say *Welcome to Tech Support* for fun, but, eventually, I can do a better Valley Girl than whatever resemblance my actual accent has to the Simpsons’ Appu. Their request changes.

Then, a mundane horror that sits at the intersection of race, sex, power and violence is visited upon me.<sup>4</sup> Maybe it’s a coincidence, or maybe it’s because of the horror, but this becomes the year of near-failing college, danger of losing scholarship, attempts at losing something my friends call ‘penis-virginity’ voluntarily, homesickness like bile, dry heat, intending to chant for three hundred days in a row without success, pack-a-day of Kool Menthols, lip piercing from a shady corner in West Hollywood, eating meat for the first time in six years because *like the nihilists say, what difference can one person’s choices make anyway*, and other such assimilations. A professor who is fond of me says one day, “I’m not worried about you like the others. Your rebellions are quite age and stage appropriate.”

I’m waiting for my friends in the liquor store parking lot. I do not have a fake I.D. so they have left me outside. A man slows his car, asks me for a cigarette. We start talking.

“I’ve never been anywhere in California except Orange County and L.A.,” I say. I strike a match with a flourish, and touch its flame to the tip of an aforementioned Kool Menthol. I inhale wetly and then exhale smoke at the burning match, extinguishing it. I think this move is terribly cool because I learned it from Lauren Bacall in *To Have or to Have Not*.

This man doesn’t look like Humphrey Bogart but he does look like a man. I decide he could be the one to help me discard said penis-virginity. As if I’ve transmitted this information telepathically, he tells me his name, Benjy, and invites me on a long drive somewhere beautiful. A place called *Whispering Water*, he says.

“Sure,” I tell him, shocking myself. “What’s your number,” he asks.

I have to inform him that I don’t have a cell phone. Everyone I know lives in the dorms like I do and I can just call their extensions.

He mumbles that I could have just said no instead of making things up. I bristle at being called a liar and suggest we *go right now*.

---

<sup>4</sup>Carp, I could say more about this, but there is no need to. This story isn’t new for anyone. It isn’t pleasant for me. And you already know all about men who like to stalk and maim their prey, men who call this ‘relaxation’ and ‘sport’.

He gestures at the passenger seat. I climb into his car. He stares at me. He looks the way I feel: horrified.

My friends are coming out of the liquor store as I buckle my seatbelt. “Bye,” I tell them, “I’m going to *Whispering Waters* with Benjy here.” They gawk and then Paolo says, “Girl, what in fuck’s name.”

Leslie says, “Poor sod is driving a Chrysler LeBaron, bet you’re sorry for him.”

As we back out of the parking lot, Sonam says, “Kay, you can do better than this chutiya!”

On the road, Benjy and I find we have nothing to talk about and perhaps no attraction. It also appears there isn’t much in the way of scenery outside of L.A.

I make notes of everything interesting.

1. An hour into the drive: A strange palm tree, smooth at the bottom, criss-crossed in the center, tapering into nothing. It has no leaves, no nuts, nothing. It’s practically a pole, poor thing.
2. Ten minutes later: A tent under a bridge.
3. The Camel-backed hills begin.
4. Forty-seven minutes later: a basket of fruit, perhaps fake, on the sidewalk. I remember that I have a banana in my backpack but I’m too embarrassed to eat a banana in front of Benjy.
5. Thirty-three minutes later: A yellow sign with red numbers: 28934709. No context.
6. Three minutes later: A bright yellow plastic octopus abandoned on a hill.

Eventually, I calm down enough to speak. “What’s in *Whispering Water*?” I ask.

Benjy says, “It’s real quiet and pretty. Do you like fishing? ‘Cause it’s got carp the size of this car.”

“Oh,” I say. “I’m a vegetarian.” I might make it true again, I decide. “Oh,” says Benjy.

“In fact, let’s not go to this *Whispering Water* place,” I say to him. “Let’s just pull over at the next rest stop, make out a little, and then you could just take me back?”

Benjy nods. His nose twitches.

“I mean, no sex,” I say. “You okay with that?”

Benjy lifts his shoulders to his ears and sighs. He does as asked.

Back on campus that evening, still a penis-virgin, I lie down in the spongy grass that was recently installed, rolled onto the ground like a carpet. I chant into the sky. My hands are the first to become distracted, reaching for the leaves littered around me. I crumple one and when the leaf breaks, it floods the air with a scent like sunlight. The palm trees crackle amicably. A tiny slug slinks across my notebook, towards the word *adversaries*. A crow feeds another crow.

Bouganvilla husks flutter down. I take my notebook and scribble the start of a story, writing around the slug. Though it would have been nice to meet you in person, Carp, I’m glad I didn’t. I’m glad Benjy didn’t hurt us that day. I’m glad he did the opposite of damage to me.



## To the Settler

You could have  
treated this land less  
like a scab to scour.  
The prairie was alive and busy  
underneath. It cleaned what you could not,  
drank, fed, healed but you bloodied,  
you set it on fire, you celebrated the  
pelican eggs already cooked and everything gone. Water like blood  
wastes against your body now, endless shatter of itself,  
retreat, return. Your language grows more passive, the hoarser  
your violence. *The move was made but not without*  
*violence.*<sup>5</sup> Why do call yourself such pretty words--  
*Settler, Pioneer--* whiteboy?

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<sup>5</sup>Dorothy Shwieder, "History of Iowa," *Iowa Official Register*, Accessed February 18, 2019, <http://publications.iowa.gov/135/1/history/7-1.html>.

## To Carp: Alone and Impossible

It's eleven years later when I see you again.

I live in Iowa: American heartland, home to the broken prairie, to muskrats, and poison ivy. Home to you, as well, Carp. I don't know it yet but they call you invasive, and encourage the good farmers to take spears and thread to your gleaming, supple bodies.

I am in my second graduate program for creative writing. During the school year, I get to write whatever I want to and I teach young people how to write what they don't want to. I accept my diagnoses. I accept pharmaceutical help when absolutely necessary for me to be *normal, organized, fully present*. I don't when I am free to be spontaneous/a shitshow. I recite the Lotus Sutra and chant half an hour, the first thing every morning, which helps me decide which way to go each day.

My first year in Iowa, a snap circulates the internet: two young men in front of the Black Engineering building, the text on top saying *[slur redacted] only*.<sup>6</sup>

I walk past Catt Hall every afternoon. It was the first building to be named after a woman. The woman is the suffragist Carrie Chapman Catt, who was a documented advocate of white supremacy.<sup>7</sup> There was some contention to her being honored, and in response, the university decided to keep the name, but butchered and slapped an Alice Walker quote next to Catt Hall—“... *it is the awareness of having faults, I think, and the knowledge that this links us to everyone on Earth, that opens us to courage and compassion.*” This, the way the quote is hacked and exploited, makes it almost worse.

A student, a young man, demands my credentials at least once a month, sits too close, asks me about my tattoo. He audibly sucks at the air when I walk past him and repeats my name under his breath, over and over again. The other students become protective of me, and the women bristle at him when he leers. The women of color in the classroom also become protective of Carrie Chapman Catt when we talk about her sentiments towards people of color. We eat what we are given, we learn to like it, and I would have too, ten years ago.

As I begin my second year, a WiFi network advocating the lynching of African Americans—*hang the [slur redacted]*—shows up on phones close to campus. A young woman visiting from LA reports it to the police.

“Unfortunately, it's not illegal to be a giant asshole,” Ames Police Cmdr. Geoff says to local news-people.<sup>8</sup>

My first summer takes me three hours away from the college town I live in, three hours away from the person I have fallen in love with. I decide not to miss him. I have been gifted time, beauty, freedom, knowledge: a writing residency at the Iowa Lakeside Lab in Okoboji.

I consume a book on Iowa history. I follow and interrogate the brilliant scientists and students who collect algae, study fish, and trap the waking croaks of life at dawn on the lake, the not-sounds at dusk in the Badlands. I watch mushrooms come into town, I learn about inoculating them, I look for morels.

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<sup>6</sup> [http://www.iowastatedaily.com/news/community-responds-to-racial-slur-posted-on-social-media-at/article\\_33df1174-822e-11e7-8dfd-773971215283.html](http://www.iowastatedaily.com/news/community-responds-to-racial-slur-posted-on-social-media-at/article_33df1174-822e-11e7-8dfd-773971215283.html)

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/1996/05/05/us/suffragette-s-racial-remark-haunts-college.html>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.desmoinesregister.com/story/news/investigations/readers-watchdog/2018/08/06/iowa-state-university-racism-ames-police-racist-wifi-address/897148002/>

I sleep. I chant quietly in my cabin. The walls are thin. I plot a novel outside in the dark. I worry about arcs and tension. My mind is blown open every day that I am surrounded by clear water, iridescent green, the patient voices of people who have devoted their lives to the natural world. I am shocked at my luck. All those years ago, I was told to drop science in 8th grade because I couldn't grasp the basic principles hiding within the teachers words, in the stilted language of textbooks. Here I am, learning what I was once shut out of, with my hands, with my ears, with my wonder.

At a Fourth of July fair, the largest in Okoboji, we come across Nazi paraphernalia and naked Mammy figurines, all gleaming under the sun. The Mammy figurine is chipped and one breast is missing. The local men ogle and laugh at it. Another Walmart, another slur, this one muttered. I am grateful for the oasis that is the Lakeside Lab.

One day at lunch at the Iowa Lakeside Lab, everything changes. There are seven of us, all women, at the table. We've finished pizza and moved on to a magical vegan Dr. Pepper cake. We are scientists, artists, educators, students, photographers, writers and we have all accomplished wonders this morning. Charla has captured, tagged, and freed glossy Purple Martins. Julia has been bombed by their poop sacs. I have braved the bouncy fens and bogs, and left the quivering fawn behind, untouched. Jenie has cleaved ink and wood, etched the land to life. Jenn has cured the cat-tails, dyed the hummingbird nests, and crafted paper. Gosia has helped diatoms reveal history. Ellen has sculpted the likeness of their microscopic majesty to human scale.

Christine has recorded a podcast about waste, death, dust, and taken two riveting photographs:

Photo 1: A bed of water curdled with hundreds of what she says are fish. A waterfall pours down, making a right angle against the horizontal water bed. Bodies of blurred fish heave upwards, failing.

Photo 2: A closer shot, focused at the top, where the water has only just started falling; a fish, unmistakable, scaling it. A carp, alone and impossible, has made it to the very top.

## To the First Shiitake Mushroom Shipment in Town

Someone from your hometown is famous. In Virginia, she goes by L.E. 46,<sup>9</sup> and your girl still fruits easy. Her spawn runs fast and damn, that yield *good*. They say she can take a shock. There's talk about her dark cap, that luscious white ornamentation. She misses the shii but she still spreads herself for sweetgum, sawdust. She's a moneymaker and if you're like her, you're worth it.

You arrive in summer, sleeping in pinprick plugs from China, Japan, Wisconsin. Welcome. In your new home, Iowa, come fall, indigo spores the grass neon under pines, and clitocype spells anise. In winter, buttons panic, thrust far, commune a quiet fury in the dark, spit white rope through compost, past peaty moss and numage. In Spring, Mycenae bleeds ragged latex. Stalked Puffball mouths a smooth edge, any season it likes. You keep sleeping; sleep while you can.

When you wake, I should warn you. Nobody has seen anything like you before, not here. This isn't Virginia and you might be nothing like your kin, LE. 46. Don't fight or share, don't rise among others, no matter how fragile and new their gills, how tender the cellular cuticle or viscid the stalk. Don't claim what scampers with life or spread your own,

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<sup>9</sup> "Buy Shiitake LE 46 (Grain Spawn)," Fungially.com, accessed February 05, 2019 <https://fungially.com/17999-2/>.

unaided. The ornithologist hopes that you won't  
run wild so far from your home, that you will still  
only cleave with your own kind. You are  
his retirement plan.

He tests sound, money and lyric in your flesh  
*Dark Forest, Golden Oak*. For now it's just  
sales, like the time I went by Kay on resumes  
and dating sites, just marketing for now.  
But this new earth and bark to birth and rest  
in, new sky and sun could spin something  
else eventually. You might morph, become  
the first of your kind. You might  
need that new American name.

## To the Twin Diatoms in my Microscope

*“Diatoms account for a quarter of all the photosynthesis on Earth; without their waste oxygen bubbling into the atmosphere for millions of years, we would all be left gasping for air.”<sup>10</sup>*

*“Glass-walled Single-celled algae known as diatoms, long thought to reproduce asexually, were recently found to be friskier than expected.”<sup>11</sup>*

They found you by bubbles of brown  
slime where deer trailed through  
Nebraska

wetland. Now you swell for a diamond  
tip, a raised stage. Meridian circles,  
sisters

on a stalk, amber from chlorophyll. Jealous  
of your phosphorescence, I turn away. You reveal

my alienness. I didn't arrive like you,  
known for beauty and purpose. Look at  
me

too close, and I wither instead  
of blooming gold. You can't find me

everywhere. Through the night,  
diatomaceous earth teems dizzy behind my  
eyelids. I root

for common ground. Like  
yours, my life would compress if  
I made

more of myself. Despite that fear, I too evade  
oblivion through sex. My body is my only  
home;

my home is only glass. My back is a rigid

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2003/feb/06/research.science>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.livescience.com/59772-diatoms-have-sex-after-all.html>

margin too: Inflexible. As daylight  
climbs the sky, I come back to talk to you  
but we are alike, after all. One of you sickened  
overnight, your amber shrunk  
to near-nothing. An amoeba engulfed  
the other and ate you. American  
sweethearts, you can die too. Thank  
you  
for storing your energy as oil, for every  
fourth breath. We owe you, even in death,  
for the fryer at Daddy McD's, for Spring  
Break swimming pool filters, for grease.

## To the Emerald Ash Borer

As summer gathers in Okoboji, I abandon structure and stories. Narrative comes unglued, the words titling away from each other. I want fragments, maybes.

The sun sets in the prairie and the moon rises by the water. The young people around me trample dandelions, gather wood for the fire, or drag beanbags to snuggle on. I feel younger too, buoyant, suspended, and terrified. I marry the person I love four times an hour but I leave him a couple of times a day too.

On the phone, he tells me about the floods back in Ames, the drain behind his house swollen with sludgy water and catfish. He checks on my house, my landlady, her dogs. They miss me, he says, but they are fine otherwise.

I'm sitting at the top of the steps, the lake below me. I watch goslings dawdle until their mama becomes impatient. She snakes her neck long, and jabs at them. Her beak becomes an edge to be obeyed. They scurry after her and trickle into the water.

I tell him I found a garden today. It has man-made gourds for Purple Martins and Wood Ducks. He says he could make gourd-houses for me and that hypothetically, we could have a garden.

I watch dragonflies skim the air above my notebook, blue-tipped and blue-faced. Something skitters next to my hip: bright green and gold, gleaming like a diatom or clouded glass or an emerald ring that lives in India. I can't be sure, but I think it's you, little Emerald Ash Borer.

In Beijing, your ancestors and Ash trees grew up together, so you learned not to damage each other irrevocably. But you and the Iowa Ash trees are strangers. They weaken as you grow and feed: Ash after Ash after Ash ruined.<sup>12</sup>

There is a ring a ring waiting, yes. It will have to cross space, time, and distance to come back to me. It's green like you, Emerald Ash Borer, and my grandmother liked me to try it on.

I don't kill you even though you sicken the gentle Ash where Monarch butterflies gather. I'm tempted to lift you up, set you by my ring finger, see how green and gold lie against my skin. I don't do it.

The last time I tried my grandmother's ring on, I was nineteen. I flew back home from California just in time for her to die. That first week back in India, she already started dying. We settled in to take an afternoon nap. She wriggled one ring off, and then another, and another, handing each to me. Eventually, I was holding her empty fingers and wearing all six rings. She was wearing a yellow cotton salwar kameez. She had a leg flung over me, which I loved, because only someone who loves you does that.

"Your hands are still like mine," she said.

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<sup>12</sup> "Emerald Ash Borer," Iowa Department of Natural Resources, accessed February 19, 2019. <https://www.iowadnr.gov/Conservation/Forestry/Forest-Health/Emerald-Ash-Borer>.



I looked down. My skin was smooth and dark brown; hers was knotted and fair. My pinky finger stuck out awkwardly like hers, and my knuckles were pudgy like hers. All our fingertips lined up. “I’ll leave all the rings to you,” she said.

“But Naani, I only want the green one,” I told her. “And I won’t feel grown up enough to wear it for like, twenty more years, so, like, take care of it ‘til then.”

Maybe she laughed.<sup>13</sup> Maybe she was asleep by then. It fit on my left ring finger perfectly. I decided that afternoon it would be the only ring for me.

Now, I say to my love on the phone, “There was an Emerald Ash Borer here, next to me. It’s gone, but it was so, so beautiful.”

The ring might be a little loose for me now. But that’s still true, my Naani’s ring will be the only ring for me.

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<sup>13</sup>More parent than parent, and I don’t remember what her laugh sounded like. This is an inconsolable loss. Memory can go fuck itself.

### **To Those who Miss the Ocean**

To green against the grain  
or rust this saline sky  
at day's mouth is to grieve  
by a freshwater lake  
or salt the soft heartwater  
so the sting sings at crooks,  
creeks and cuts. Don't.

## To Carp, who will not Settle

Orleans, Iowa: Spillway.

I was told to come here if I wanted to find you. Next to the sand, next to the ice-cream shop, there is supposed to be a barrier meant to keep you out.

A pregnant teenager scrubs sunscreen into her pale arms. Her boyfriend is still not showing stubble. They are both very literally kicking rocks. Toddlers cling to rubber tubes shaped like giraffes (who have silently fallen closer to extinction this month). I can't find you. I'm looking for you in a bed of water. A pressurized stream gushes down and through the bed violently but all I see is black noth—oh. I'm looking right at you.

You *are* the black nothing. There are hundreds of you thrashing towards and against the barrier that pushes you away. The water at my feet is boiling with you, Carp. The black bed is flecked yellow and green where the light can breathe: thread-thin momentary spaces where your bodies don't clump together.

What have you ransomed to tame the sky and swallow the the rain?<sup>14</sup> What have I? I switch perspectives between watching you all as one, and tracing a single blue-bodied finned life: its climb, crest and fall.

The wind, the cotton seeds, and the water blow one way; you would flow the same way but you swim against the man-made pour. You want to give birth, you want to go home.

Sometimes, a few of you make it up the slope of pressure but crash and fall, sweep back, past my sight, to start again.

If the air didn't drown you, you might. If you were bigger, you might. You might be dragons. *You might be live carrion*, the gulls smile as they swoop lazily and correct me, quick and bloody, beak and talon.

I want to beg you to give up. Will you do this all your life? When you die, do you fall back against others? I suppose you eat your dead.

*No snagging, wading, swimming, spearing, fishing, bow-shooting, arrow-shooting, littering*, says a sign. This must be purgatory.

Your scaled broken flight. I think of *The Great Gatsby*, those sad lovely sentences at the end. I write in my notebook: *We are dragons, or we were. We had the weather, we took the clouds. We are carps now. Our flesh flaying, an endless thrash upwards, pointless.* I scratch everything out. Carp, I am not American, and neither are you. Screw Fitzgerald.

One of you makes it over the barrier, a long and terrifying flight, and lands on the other side, in the blessed, calm, transparent water. This you is tiny and you hide under a dappled, half-submerged rock close to the shore. A child with a duckie around her square hips wiggles her toe next to this you. You tremble.

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<sup>14</sup> "Not only are [dragons] believed to bring rain, but also they are said to have supernatural powers and the ability to bring about miraculous phenomena," <https://www.nichirenlibrary.org/en/wnd-1/Content/113>.

## To the Mothers of the Super Generation<sup>15</sup> of Monarch Butterflies

You rest in unlikely places. Ash trees, spindlier than most. Abandoned homesteads. You will die before you go home but you birth the ones who make it back. The Sierra Madre waits for them, her volcano keening gold.

They love you in Iowa. They are learning to love you better. Though it chokes the cucumbers, they are letting the Milkweed live. Only Milkweed will do for your babies. You lay an egg on each leaf, careful, quiet, pale.

Your babies hatch and eat what was world. After they scarf their own eggs, they consume Milkweed poison. They become noxious and beautiful. They are plusher, stronger, slower to love and leave this land than you.

Your young know what you and your mothers knew: how to find kin, summon them from air or nothing, thousands of you, a cloud of flame. They will rest on the same Cedar, Fir and Ash as you did. So many of you at night that the dark drips warmth and the branches whimper and crack with weight of love.

Teach me too, mothers, grandmothers.

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<sup>15</sup> “Monarchs Embark,” Iowa Department of Natural Resources, <https://www.iowadnr.gov/About-DNR/DNR-News-Releases/ArticleID/62/Monarchs-Embark-on-Nature>.

## **To the Emerald Ring that Lived in India**

My mother is visiting America soon. On the phone, I tell her what has happened, what I hope will happen, and I ask her to bring you with her.

I want to settle. I want to settle down. I want to settle down with the person I love. We could settle down here. I want us, him and I, to change what every single one of those words means.

My mother cries, she says “Yes, yes” and hangs up.

My mother calls me back, she cries, she says, “She would be so happy. Your Naani would be so happy.”

Welcome to Iowa, Naani’s Emerald Ring.



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# Authors

## *Alison Turner*

Alison Turner grew up in the mountains of Colorado, where she learned to endure large amounts of time in inclement weather waiting for buses. She is a PhD candidate in Literary Studies at the University of Denver interested in community literacy, historical fiction of the American Old West, community-engaged scholarship and archives. She is the co-host and co-creator of the *When you are homeless* podcast miniseries, and her creative work appears in *Wordrunner eChapbooks*, *Little Patuxent Review*, *Meridian*, and *Bacopa Literary Review*, among others.

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## *Natalie Wee*

Natalie Wee is a queer Peranakan community-builder. She has received nominations for the Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net Anthology. Born in Singapore to Malaysian parents, she is currently a settler in Tkaronto (Toronto).



## *Toni Muñoz-Hunt*

Toni Muñoz-Hunt is a PhD student in Literature at the University of Texas at Dallas. This self-proclaimed Bordercana remains passionate about the geopolitical and geographical location from where she grew up, and has published works on the Border that have appeared in publications, like *Columbia Journal*. She has presented at conferences concerned with local and international border issues, from Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas to The University Culture Centre at the University of Bialystok in Poland. Muñoz-Hunt currently serves on the board of directors for Texas Women's Foundation and is the chair of Grants Policy and Programs.





# Authors

## ***Robin Rozanski***

Robin Rozanski's writing has appeared/is forthcoming in *A cappella Zoo*, *The Austin Review*, *Thrice Fiction Magazine*, *Iron Horse Review*, and elsewhere. She has an MA in creative writing from the University of Central Florida and is a teaching artist at The Loft Literary Center in Minneapolis. Her work explores damaged mind-body connections and has been supported by fellowships and residencies from InterMedia Arts, Tofte Lake Center, New York Mills Cultural Center, and Kimmel Harding Nelson Center for the Arts. Find her on Twitter @RobinRozanski.

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## ***William Harris***

After studying at University of Tennessee-Knoxville and DePaul University, William Harris has spent the past three years as an Adjunct Professor in Memphis, Tennessee with his girlfriend, child, and their five cats. He has previously been published in *Canyon Voices* and *Poetry Salzburg Review*. He often fantasize about being a centaur, especially in traffic.



## ***Kartika Budhwar***

Kartika Budhwar writes about porous borderlands where myth meets history, where the colonizer and colonized come together, where languages spar and fuse, where gender and sexuality collapse upon themselves, where the supernatural and the organic have equal claim.

She has an MFA from North Carolina State University. She is an MFA candidate in the Creative Writing and Environment program at Iowa State University. She was awarded the Hogrefe Grant and the CWE Fellowship. She was the Runner-up for the *Indiana Review Fiction Prize*, the *Arts and Letters Fiction Award* and a Finalist for the *Frank McCourt Memoir Prize*.



# Artists

## *Marina Eskeets*

Marina Eskeets is a Diné (Navajo) conceptual artist from Naná'áztiiin, New Mexico (The Big Curve, NM, Navajo Reservation). Eskeets received a Bachelors in Fine Arts, with a major in Studio Arts at Santa Fe University of Art and design. Her work is stimulated from her childhood herding her grandmothers' sheep, in a region directly affected by a uranium disaster. Unrestricted to any medium, she allows her ideas to be presented in the most appropriate technique. She has created a performance that interacts with her community, projected video onto a stretched loom, carved patterns onto a mountain side, constructed three-dimensional cardboard masks, and recently sketched illustrations onto deer skin using thread. Currently Eskeets' work is centered on energy extraction within Dinétah and identity through the unadorned of the everyday.

## *Vicky Charles*

Vicky Charles, based in New York, has a BFA in Photography from SUNY New Paltz. Her work consists of self-portraits that deal with issues about black identity, the body, and relationships with oneself. Vicky achieves her visual effects in camera with such procedures as staged studio work and double exposures. Her photography expresses itself without words, but by showing.

## *Patricia Joynes*

Patricia Joynes is primarily a nature photographer but deviates from landscapes when she observes interesting patterns and colors such as this courtyard and sky at the Georgia O'Keeffe studio in Abiquiu. Her photos are on book covers, in annual Blue Ridge Parkway calendars, a National Geographic Online story, and in literary journals. To see more of her work, visit her blog at [www.patriciajoynes.wordpress.com](http://www.patriciajoynes.wordpress.com).

## *Veronica Scharf Garcia*

Born in Chile, Veronica Scharf Garcia grew up oversea in South America, Africa, and the Middle East. Now living out of a suitcase for the last two years, she continues her itinerant life in Europe. California was her last home base. Scharf Garcia studied art at Colorado College and with Cristina Galvez in Lima, Peru. She has exhibited her art extensively & been selected as Studio Artist at Bakehouse Art Complex, Deering Estate, Art Center/South in Florida. Schaf Garcia was selected to four residencies as Associate Artist, one sponsored by the Andy Warhol Foundation. You can contact her at [verogoart@gmail.com](mailto:verogoart@gmail.com).