

Signs



Paddler Press Volume 16

IT'S ALL SO BEAUTIFUL

Paddler Press

Volume 16 - Signs



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Paddler Press
Peterborough/Nogojwanong, Ontario
paddler@canoeideas.ca paddlerpress.ca @paddlerpress
paddlerpress.bsky.social

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Foreword

I've always loved funny signs: the ones outside of stores designed to draw attention and business; church signs that do much the same thing; bumper stickers that make driving that much better; and even graffiti that is more than just initials, a name, or tag. Here in Canada, we're all looking for signs of spring after a long winter; something that tells us that the cold is losing its grip and warmer days are ahead.

In life, we are always looking for signs, big or small; whether they be literal directions when travelling, or figurative signs that direct us in life. Some may read daily horoscopes or put faith in cards to tell them what to do. Sometimes, it's a word in passing, or a gut feeling that we should, or shouldn't, be doing something. Is it someone from our past reaching out or is it that still small voice inside directing us?

A few years back, I ended up in the hospital with what turned out to be a pretty big gall bladder attack. Once diagnosed, I realised that I had been having them for ages, but I missed those smaller signs. Maybe if I hadn't, I could have prevented this more painful and scary major episode. How many times do we say to ourselves once we're aware of something that we totally missed the signs along the way? Maybe we just need to slow down and pay more attention to the signs we're given.

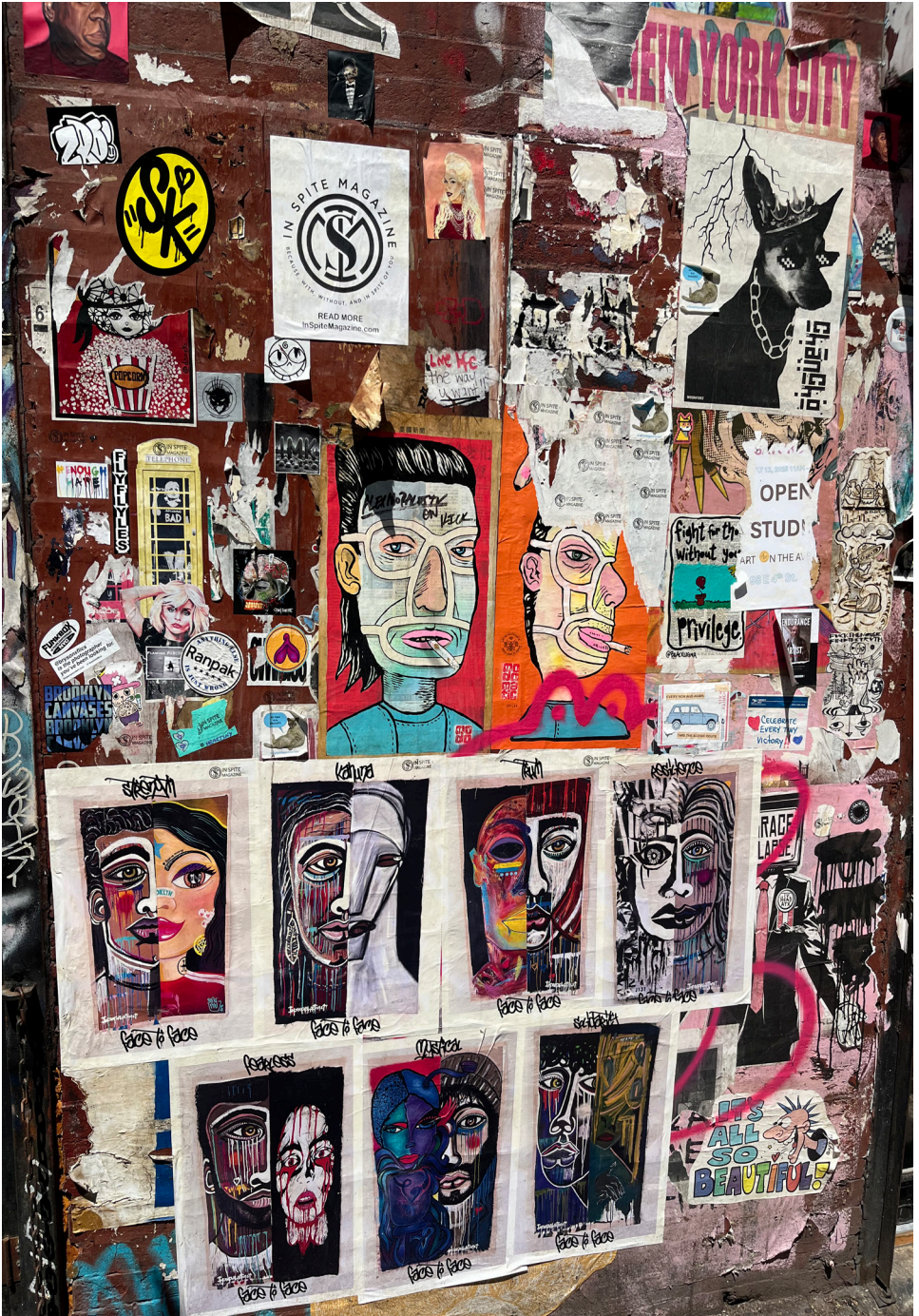
In this issue, our 16th, is work from 23 creatives that seeks to address the subject of Signs with humour, melancholy, family, strangers, nature, city, and memories. Thank you, once again, for trusting Paddler Press with your work.

Happy Paddling,

Deryck N. Robertson
EIC, Paddler Press

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NoHo by François Bereaud

Small Things

Angela Arnold

Stuff that's as expected – since you
signed up for it, added your name –
stuff as round, as minute as
the dots on dice, marks on a ruler, cat hairs
where cat hairs always cluster, new skirt spoilers:
things as below the radar of finger tips,
as eye-skewingly straight,
as fuzzy as that.

The wrong length of sigh.

Scarf all bobbed.

A mislaid number.

The simply dropped.

Complications.

Implications. Tiny

life bristles in urgent need of a shave.

To prevent the divorce.

Stop the car in time, having forgotten.

Not go, round the corner, where disaster is already

crouched, as glaringly obvious as a pea

in a cake loaded with raisins,

ready to shoot.

Beware of the specks, the hanging frazzles,

the tiny twitches. They mean.

The Dump Years From Now

John Grey

This mound is actually full of newspapers
from the sixties, seventies.
Future archaeologists digging
in the phony hills where
Cherry Lane ends and tall steel gates begin
may find amid the rusty cans,
the plastic keeping to its promise of eternity,
bits and pieces of our civilization's
ephemeral papyrus.
The bugs, the minerals in the soil,
are no judge of what belongs in history books,
what's old news the minute it succumbs to print.
Moon landing stones may be nibbled to dust
but a classified of a young man hungry for love
may survive, though no clue if the ad worked,
if, new woman in hand, he declared it all
a giant leap for Mankind.
Nixon, Kennedy, Johnson and their
escapades in Vietnam may not make it
but a yellowed picture of a young girl
in a sun-dress sprayed by water from a fire-plug
could survive as an example of one
who did not come home in a body bag.
If I had my way, no reference to
the Partridge family, Timothy Leary or Spiro T Agnew
would last beyond the length of a worm's gullet
but the article about the sign in an English field
that read nothing more than "Don't remove this sign"
gets my wish's vote.
Won't that capture perfectly the modus operandi
of future academic hands digging in our dirt...
the past is irretrievable...it must be here somewhere.

Nature Day

John Grey

A half mile walk around a lake and that's nature.

A mallard skirts across the surface. Same conclusion, I figure.

A couple of kids are fishing.

“Catch anything?”

“Nah.”

Their mother dips her toes in the water.

Their father scans the tiny beach

with a metal detector.

Two more “nah”s.

Parked cars.

Barbecue pit.

The usual signs:

Don't feed the waterfowl.

Swim at your own risk.

Don't remove any flora or fauna.

Please leave this preserve as you found it.

Leave it like you found it?

The ducks don't care.

The kids don't care.

And, to be honest,
the signs don't care either.

Parakeets in the Park

Leanne McClements

Mama and I take an evening walk through the park. The familiar song of blackbirds turns to *chook chook chook chook* alarm calls as we pass, not unlike the blackbirds at home. Don't be scared of us, I tell them in my own language. The trees are familiar, too. It is peaceful. I miss Tatko – and Didus and Baba, but there isn't much to say about that.

We sit on a bench near a clump of late-leaving ash trees, still bare while the nearby horse chestnuts lining the avenue have already burst into green. A sudden, loud screech breaks the silence. Mama and I look up, momentarily afraid. Another follows, and another, and a flock of unfamiliar green birds gathers in the denuded trees

like sudden new leaves. The raucous birds have much to say with their red beaks, chatting in shrill whistles and chirrups. 'Papuhy, Halyno,' Mama says. I wonder if they are new here, like us. Do they like their new home? I want to tell Mama the parakeets are lovelier than emeralds, but we just sit, listening, until the rose-ringed sky fades.

Our street

Marie-Andrée Auclair

The street shouts printed messages
stapled on trees, 'follow the signs'
'come to the party'
'play and win'
'don't get played'

morse code of black dots
on sidewalk
from gum-spitters

a desiccated micro garden
penned behind wrought-iron
fence of hearts and flames
ambiguous safety

anti-graffiti brick walls
still virgin
after twenty years

a derelict house, no windows
just 4 by 8 plywood sheets
nailed to the facade
stories erased

autumn in July, a twig
with three saffron-y leaves
matching the yellow fire hydrant
winter's coming

subway station, St-George
in the glass pane
a person I may know
about my height
with my taste in clothes.
I was there.



Street, Venice by AV Rasmussen

Initials

Marie-Andrée Auclair

We ride acronyms like comfortable toboggans
to glide over sharp meanings
and sail through ionic bombardments.

The resonant poetry of MRI placates the fire
of radiation. We may befriend a CAT-scan, pet on our lap,
not a computerized axial tomography.

Other initials, we love for quick efficiency
unhampered by treasures their abbreviated bodies
embed. We unfurl components of contracted forms

and own our story: Anno Domini carries centuries
of christianity, TNT explodes louder than trinitrotoluene.
We pull up roots from truncated words

meet ancestors, companions who shared bread
and treat each other with consideration,
the same gaze they, and we, give the stars.



Sign on Charlotte Street, Peterborough, ON.

The Fire Inside

Ira Schaeffer

Just before sunset,
I'm hiking along a coastal path,
looking for the trailhead
to Beach Mountain,
picturing its fire tower
and the pastels of twilight
over a few lonely islands.

Leaning into the wind,
I reach the sign:
*Beach Mountain—
elevation 957 feet—*
carved on the face
of the wooden post
like a scarified totem.

I read how Abenaki climbed
this mountain to commune
with their Creator
and through the language of fire,
its plumes of sage and oak
shaped themselves into words
of praise and appeal,
that reached through clouds
and sky to a starlit cave
where God held the moon.

Yellow is fading,
there is purple in the sky.
I've begun too late
to reach the mountaintop
but not the sea.

I sit on a flat rock
under the cold fire
of the moon.
Breathing with the surf
I'm drifting off
inside a mist
that fills my body.

Shadow and rock,
the face of the moon,
the names of things,
everything is burning—
and I am rising like smoke.

—except him —except me

Alison P. Birch

we were everything
good
sad and real
from every
Love story
that was untold
we were everything
but what saved us— and didn't
—we would learn
everyone has a tell

—except him —except me



Sign of Spring, Edwards Gardens, Toronto.

Ode to Brevity

Michael Lee Johnson

I live in this room alone,
old news, old technology,
at the bottom
of my spiral
stairway—
there's a note.
Western Union telegram.
Dictum: "Your dad has died."
July 29th, 1982.
Old news.
Letter & stanza
come to an end here—
no period
(STOP).
An era ends (STOP).
Grief paid for by the word.



*Footnote: After 10 years in exile, Edmonton, Alberta Canada, Vietnam War era, I started the journey home. I found a telemarketing job selling coupon books in Minneapolis, Minnesota. I managed to save enough for a room, I got a landline phone, then got this message.

Johnny Got His Flags

Michael A. Russo

I'm passing by Johnny's house on my daily walk.
Johnny's got his sprawling flags flying on poles that could cover football fields,
Johnny's got his flags blowing in the breeze nailed to his wooden porch,
Johnny's got his flags planted all over his perfectly manicured lawn.

Seeing Johnny's flags-
even more assured than death and taxes
-lets you know how Johnny feels about everything.
That way, it's just about impossible to forget Johnny's views on:

Guns	Government laws	Politicians
Police officers	Education	Immigration
Women's rights	Science	Religion

I admit, the colors blowing in the wind are certainly a beautiful sight.
And I fully support Johnny letting all of his beliefs freely fly,
'cause after all,
he still has that constitutional right.
And hey, nobody should be restricted from having something to say.
I just wish that when it comes to openly expressing my views,
Johnny would fight for me in the exact same way.

The Problem with Places

Raquel Fletcher

they're hard to pin down – places
never stay in one spot
That coffee shop we loved when I first moved
here, the one with the good quiche
keeps sprouting up new franchises
all over town – and that eyesore
of a karaoke bar we used as a signpost
never said a word before it peeled out of town
a sole suitcase in the backseat
The problem with places
is they leave traces
and reputations, that outlive them

The problem with places
is they're unreliable narrators
Ask a place to describe the house
where we first made love, on the bed
beneath the hole in the wall
you made coming back drunk from some party,
and it would talk about smooth drywall
and fresh paint
The problem with places
is they take up spaces
that tell a million different stories

The problem with places
is they mask their age
The jazz bar speakeasy that closed its hatch
to tourists – only the locals knew the password
was old enough to be my grandfather's
watering hole, but its clientele
was all our age

We spent every Thursday night there
free drinks for the ladies!
Felt like it was my Sugar Daddy,
now the lover that got away,
no one answers when I knock at the peephole
The problem with places
is time out-paces
all the memories we wanted to make

Sometimes I walk by your old apartment
with the rooftop terrace, and still hear you
spitting out rosé between fits of laughter
complaining you've put on weight
since we'd taken up happy hour
as a serious hobby
I still feel the sunset lighting a halo
behind your curly hair, but all I see
is an empty terrace

The problem with places
is they don't remember the faces
of the friends who no longer call this place home



Venice (2) by AV Rasmussen

The Ride

Molly O'Dell

When we finally leave the trail and reach a gas station in Marlinton, West Virginia, the day's full-on blue, crisp and clear. I'm hopeful we can catch a ride back to our car. Having been so enthusiastic to walk this trail, I focused on getting us to the trailhead and my husband was to handle return logistics. Back in Virginia, we live in an Appalachian Trail community where everyone catches rides to and from trailheads throughout the county.

It was a thrill to find bobcat tracks along the path and then spot a lynx on a sharp crag, several hundred feet above the trail. We viewed broad wing and redtail hawks soaring above us. Leaves on the oaks and maples waved orange, red and yellow pennants as we walked beside the Greenbriar River on the old railbed of the Chesapeake and Ohio railroad. But now the dogs are thirsty and so am I. We fill our water bottles and their collapsible bowls. My husband asks a slender guy with a mop of black hair if they are headed in our direction but they're going a different way. I even ask an elderly man who pet the dogs but he just shakes his head. Plenty of people are coming and going but no one's willing to give us a ride back to our car with two dogs, especially since Heath's a one hundred pound chocolate lab. I'm tired after ten miles of walking and refuse to walk eleven miles back to Watoga. Hubby's really surprised we can't find a ride; he'd been adamant we would.

Finally, after forty minutes, a pleasant gray-haired man and his round and giggly wife come over to us and the man says, "we live near where your car is parked, happy to give you a lift." He lifts his cap from his bald head and replaces it. "But you'll have to ride in the bed of our pickup, on top of the pile of firewood."

"That doesn't bother me," I say.

"Me neither," says husband.

“Are you sure?” his wife asks and raises her eyebrows.

We say, “let’s go” and walk over to their truck. I look up to where we are to sit. The truck is a fairly new, black Ford with good paint and no obvious defects. The wood is stacked tight and high.

Carrington, our apricot bichon, takes the challenge best. She scampers atop the load of splintered firewood. I shove Heath, hesitant to say the least, while my husband pulls him to the top of the wood pile. I climb aboard and the driver asks if we’re ready and says ‘hang on’ as he slips into his seat. We can see him and his wife through the back truck window and she keeps an eye on us as we pull onto the two-lane highway. The wood smells like fresh cut oak.

The first curve of the two-lane disturbs my sense of adventure. There is nothing to hang on to because we’re several feet higher than the top of the sides of the truck and what feels like a minor swerve inside a vehicle is greatly exaggerated on top of a load of wood. It feels like one of those nauseating carnival rides, predictably unpredictable. Husband holds Carrington and hunkers down. On his side of the road is a high mountain and on my side, a sheer drop. After the fourth curve I wonder how we’ll make it twenty miles. I never liked the roller coaster.

After a dozen curves one after the other, Heath becomes antsy and starts whining. I’m sure my face registers panic to the woman inside the truck and she gives me an encouraging look and turns up music on the radio. That causes Heath’s whine turn to a full-fledged yowl. I try to make him sit but once I get him settled, he stands and looks for a way to get off the logs shifting beneath him. He wants to jump. At one curve, I peek over the edge of the truck and look down a long cliff straight into the Greenbriar River. When I sit up, my back’s soaked. Heath slobbers all over me.

Anxiety. His. Mine. Ours.

I think that’s about when I scream. The driver’s not going over

20 mph; I can see the speedometer. At one point he turns into a pull-over and asks if I'm ok. I say, "no but we have to keep going." I apologize and try to find something stable to hold but there's only the top of the truck and sticks of wood.

The precipitous drops on my side balanced by the mountainous slopes on the other side of the road offer no comfort. My husband's still hunkered and never utters a sound, offers to help with Heath or comfort. I can't imagine what the kind people inside the truck are thinking when I throw some of their carefully cut and stacked pieces of wood off the truck to see if I can create a more stable platform. No such luck.

At some point "Jeeeeeesus" escapes from my mouth. I am not really a Jesus person. I never thought I would need Jesus to connect with God but I petition Jesus loud and clear. In my mind I laugh at myself and know my screeching's of no benefit.

But, as I ride on top of that shaky pile of stacked wood, I truly believe I'm about to be slung to my death and cannot calm myself. Wailing the word, loud, with emphasis on the Jeeeeese, momentarily quells waves of uncontrollable terror.

After twenty miles in hell, we arrive, safe at our car. The couple emerges from their truck. Both show concern but have twinkling eyes and flushed cheeks like they've been laughing. I immediately start to laugh and cry. The woman says, "we've not seen such a good show in years. We know you were terrified. We knew you were safe and we just couldn't help enjoying the situation. You were hilarious. Thank you!"

They refuse to take the money we'd promised to pay for the ride and leave, still chuckling. When I look over at my husband, he's fiddling with the car keys, oblivious to my angst, as if nothing out of the ordinary has happened. The moment we settle inside our car, I realize I've experienced a steep learning curve and should never count on my husband for anything. Ever.

Regrets, I've Had a Few

Steve Denehan

Scientists have announced
the successful erasion
of specific memories
from the minds
of rats

how this was determined
I am not sure, but
human trials
are expected
in five or six years

there are thoughts I cannot shake
memories tattooed, branded
inside me, and so
I thought
where do I sign?

before realising
that without the memory
there is no doubt
I will make the same mistake
all over again

older people sometimes say
with the end in sight
that they have no regrets
that they would do it all again
just the same

a kindness, possibly
reassurance for family members
then again

maybe they have lived a sunny life
a life without regrets, and so

they have missed out
on death-wish butterflies
snap judgments, bad decisions
the coin toss fury
of impossible choices

the adrenaline rush of choosing
not so wisely
could it be
that a life without regrets
may be the greatest regret of all

Bord Na Mona Peat Plant, Lullymore, County Kildare

Steve Denehan

We set out on our bicycles
to no particular place
the canal came along with us
loaded with perch and bream
ducks and ducklings

we arrived at the old Bord Na Mona Peat Plant
derelict now
half-eaten by the elements

we entered the canteen
windows smashed, no door
she looked up at me
as broken glass broke further
under her feet
'Is this okay, Dad?'
'It's okay.'

we explored, stood at the old counter
imagined ourselves
serving soot-faced workmen
we read graffiti
some old, some fresh
most, laden with expletives
'A lot of people seem angry, Dad.'
'A lot of people are.'

we found a small rooming house
boarded up but we scabbled through a window
to land, and go half through
the rotten floor
we trapezed across beams
peered into shadowed corridors

mildewed rooms
'If Bloody Mary was real, would she live here, Dad?'
'Absolutely.'

we climbed wrought iron stairs
rusted through in parts
swayed together, two stories up
I leaned over the railings
'Watch.'
the spittle glided down
moving gently from side to side in the air
she leaned over, did the same
'Why are we doing this, Dad?'
'I don't know really.'
we kept on anyhow

Tuesday Morning in Santorini

Steve Denehan

Just a glance is all it takes, and
within minutes
I know him

the openness of holidaymakers
their lives pouring from them
to nodding strangers
as blood or wine
on white carpet

Swedish, coming here thirty years
first, in his late teens
island-hopping with friends
then with his wife
who smiles and waves behind him

I learn about his parents
his college years
his jobs along the way
I learn about his sister
wild once
another person now

he implores us to visit Stockholm
to take a boat to the archipelago
to go back in time, to a simpler time
to another Scandinavia

a tattoo on the inside of his bicep
Oscar, and a date
he sees me looking

‘Oscar, my son.’

‘The day he was born?’

‘The day he died.’

there is nothing much to say
after that

Margin Notes and Verses Inside the Covers But No Name

Jannett Highfill

You find a Bible in the road.
You take it home, wrap it against the damp,
hunt up the porch of the nearest church

or tuck it safely out of the way in your backseat
until you see a “Lost Bible” sign
(one each side of the road) with a phone number.

And if the book falls open to a page

*Pipe me to the pastures still and be the music that I care to hear:
When it comes the landscape listens.*

where every word except “shadow”
feels ancestral, marginal,
then you’ll leave

the handwriting undeciphered, let the eavesdropping go.

Half a Loaf Is Better Than One

Barbara Saunier

When the mat says Welcome, it means
we're here to receive from your shoes
the soil of our disparate
lives and travels, and so ease our way
into this one life here
at this table, for this time being.

Time was, before a woman brought food to guests
she brought a clay bowl filled with cool water.
She took off your sandals and knelt
to wash your feet. Now she may just

wave you over the threshold from the kitchen
but much else remains the same:

Greet, enter, sit, eat.

As ever, it's by the laying on of hands
that food becomes a meal. And when we
break the bread and ladle up the soup
—drizzle raspberry vinaigrette
over spinach leaves on a plate—
we are share holders here.

No matter you may come to test
your mettle, plan a party, shear the sheep,
or read aloud our poems
one by one and each by each:

what has been other among us wanes
when we mingle the dirt of our soles at the open door.
Cross the sill and let this common meal
nourish — even beyond departure.

Seamstresses

Pamela Ambrozy

Certainly there is a prairie environment which shapes one's life. No matter how far we may wander, recollections of our life in Gray will always remain with us. From time to time one is reminded that the strangest coincidences really do happen.
- my grandmother, Doreen Youngs, 1984'

My grandma talks to me
through the tin can telephone
made from all the threads she's left behind.

She leaves me messages all the time.

The night she died she visited me in a dream.
She took her needle and pierced the outline of her town onto my body,
a place so small it disappears from maps.
It had marked her and so it marks me,
and the grain elevator of Gray, Saskatchewan sits on my wrist in ink.

Her mother was a needlepointer too,
Gray's town seamstress.
Stitching together burst brows at the town rink,
reattaching severed thumbs,
binding flesh with the thread I hold in my hand now,
the one that turns my grandmothers to time travelers.

I tug on that thread,
and whisper through to my grandma that I got her message.

I taught that girl one day, whose grandpa was from Gray,
whose thumb it was all those years ago.
She saw herself too, in my grandmother's map,
two points in time pulled together.

And when her grandparents came to see me,
clutching a photo of that same Gray grain elevator in their hands,
I knew it was really my grandmother
handing me another string.

I keep those threads as phone lines and listen for the ring,
and I do not fear Atropos' shears, they only cut one string.



A Willing Forest is Always Beautiful

Penny Nolte

A gauge out on the lakeside of the lodge shows fifteen feet of rain fall annually. It's late spring in Hoh Rainforest, where my husband and I are taping a family wedding. We should move on. There is still room on the video and his cousin would be surprised to have some of the reception filmed.

But instead, we walk slowly back from the beach, admiring the sun setting brilliantly through tall trees. Much taller and lusher than I'm used to back in the equally beautiful but ice broken Adirondacks.

We notice a sign, "Exit Before Sunset," and a path. Feel like taking a walk? Sure, there's still time before the speeches start. As we stroll, we marvel at the way the sun casts long shadows through tree trunks, so tall we can't see their tops and as thick as our VW Bug.

The sun continues to set as we stumble through mossy mud-covered roots that mock my dressy shoes. It grows darker, and we can't see the path ahead. It occurs to us that we are lost, that we need to run. Run away from the setting sun, "Faster!" because its light is almost gone.

Breathless and disheveled, we burst out of the woods to look wide-eyed at each other while gasping for air. And we understand, perfectly, what the sign meant.



At the Stoplight on U.S. Rt. 17, South

Molly O'Dell

I'm both appalled and jealous of the gal on the iridescent blue motorcycle, matching metallic helmet flashing in sunlight. Delicate wings tattoo each side of her back and flap with every movement of her scapulas. These feathers perfectly framed by the red bandana top tied at her neck and around her waist. Embellishing her cutoffs rows of rhinestones glisten and a pack of Marlboros jut from her hip pocket. No socks, white Keds and a sparkly ankle bracelet rest on huge pedals. While waiting for green, she takes out a cigarette and lights up. Smoke rings float over to my car as I watch her speed between vehicles and out of sight, a Valkyrie escorting her warriors home.

Lightening bugs glitter
Acceptance of mortal risk
Fuses prevent fire

Kissy Legs, it's been a while

Beth Sherman

When I read Marc Z's obituary in our college alumni magazine it made me incredibly sad. Respected gerontologist dies unexpectedly. I started to cry. Not because he was dead. I'd wanted to kill him myself many times. No, I was upset because now we'd never have the chance to meet by accident so he could see for himself how well I'm doing – husband, two children, teaching job, PhD. Plus, I look so much younger than everyone we graduated with. I felt bad for his wife and kids. They must have loved him, must have seen a different Marc than the one who kept shredding my heart to a pulp.

We met in English class Junior Year. Dickens and Austen. Bronte and Eliot. His eyes were the rich, warm shade of chocolates I couldn't wait to devour. His lips made me want to run my fingertips across them to see if they were as soft as they looked. He had curly hair on his head and legs. Kissy legs, I called them. We used to sit on the Quad at U Penn and make up names for the constellations: Decatur, Drizzleberry, Calliope. He was on the track team, had dozens of friends. They were always laughing, flinging their arms around other people's shoulders. I felt like I was in a Pepsi commercial.

Once, he invited me to a party at a fraternity house. I bought a new sweater for the occasion. When I went outside my dorm where he was waiting, I saw eight other girls. Turns out he'd invited them too.

Another time, he broke up with me over the phone, while his roommates were listening on speaker. He broke up with me a lot, but we always got back together, the way a puzzle piece finds the right edge.

We used to go dancing every Friday night at a dive bar in South Philly. The place was crowded, hot, loud. At midnight, no matter

what song the DJ was playing we bear hugged, making slow circles as neon lights flashed and he whispered, we're together in my ear.

We had a pact. Every time we heard the song "You Can't Hurry Love," we had to stop and do 25 push-ups. He took me to the track, slowed his pace to match mine. Told me, you can run as far as you want.

There's a picture of the two of us at our Senior Prom. I'm wearing a gauzy white dress and uncomfortable shoes. My hair dips below my shoulder, parted in the middle. He has on a blue suit. I can still smell the soap he used – clean and piney. We're fresh faced, hopeful, impossibly young. It's one of those pictures people post on Facebook on their anniversary. Us – 40 years ago. Next to Us – now. Later that evening, he slept with a sophomore on the volleyball team.

I devoted several journals to him. How much I loved him, how he always did me dirty. When I read them it makes me cringe. I wrote: I want him back. I wrote: all the good memories make me so sad. Even my writing suffered. I wrote every cliché you can think of about love gone wrong. I want to tell that girl, honey, you're better off without him, but she'd never believe me.

We broke up after graduation. Got back together, broke up, reunited. A merry-go-round I couldn't stop riding. Until he broke it off for good. And I started dating other guys – Jeff, David, Stuart, Steve – who didn't treat me any better. Pearls before swine, my therapist said. I thought it was a line from a Shakespeare play. But when I looked it up, the speaker was Jesus.

I got over Marc when I learned to like myself better. It took years. But I never let go of the fantasy that someday we'd meet again. He'd take one look at me and all the old feelings would come rushing back. They keep you young, those feelings. Butterflies. Twisties. Flutters. Whatever name you call it – a breathless jagged hum. I wanted him to want me again, to experience regret.

Every once in a while, I hear “You Can’t Hurry Love” and I remember us pulling over on the Schuylkill Expressway, getting out and doing push-ups, our hands pressed against pebbly concrete while the radio blared and other cars honked, collapsing into each other when we couldn’t manage one more, joyful and breathless, laughing at the stars.

Signs

For Dad

Elise Chadwick

I feel you hovering the day after you died,
surveying the flurry of activity meant to still
my grief. I hear you tsk tsking my tears,
your deathbed whisper, warm in my heart,
Let's have none of that.

The radio dj resurrects some of your
favorite songs this morning. Janis offers
a piece of her heart. John Fogerty, blue
about the rain. BB King and Lucille
mourn the thrill is gone.

I wish you were here this afternoon,
sitting at the kitchen table with me when
I struggle with the daily crossword. You
would know, without counting squares,
that *half of a 1960's folk quartet*
is *Mamas or Papas*.

If you had stayed one more day, we could have
watched an episode of *Pawn Stars*. You in the
hospital bed, lights dim, night nurse off to the side.
I would have liked to see you delight in the
Whiskey Rebellion letter, signed by your favorite
president. Even in not-so-great condition,
it is invaluable.

Ground-Breaking

Susan Mason Scott

Her grave lies below a Pin Oak thick with an apron
of acorns capped, the unmistakable seeds we can't

find where the sun sets. We rotate 90°, ford a brook,
trace rye grasses coiffed in a crew cut

he forsook. Among 300,000 stones has he lost her?
A city doe forages, keeps a tentative eye for fear

rarely suffers softness. Alone with my father,
an altitudinous oak, he murmurs *Mother*—

an illusion. My Catholic grandmother I never knew
his eyes to color stone or corners to pool then cave

to gravity. My mind mines—who is he?
Fingers skinny as jade leaves can't mask his face

sallow and seeping, he anoints her.
Seeds of such tenderness, I have not witnessed.

Five Dollars

Erin Jamieson

I walk past the dollar store
aroma of cheap plastic
& stale hot pretzels
I only have \$5 but spend it
on lemonade, sold by boy
with a constellation of freckles-
there's something I recognize
in those wide, hopeful eyes
like miracles might happen
that any of us might escape
pothole roads, overcrowded schools
any of us might live a life bigger
than struggling to pay bills

And the Fruit Yet to Come

Sharon Hoffmann

That basket on my daughter's dinner table
– the large one with the loquats and papayas –
that was meant to hold peaches.
My grandmother made that herself in 1923
when she and my grandfather owned Peachland.
Her own mother grew blackheart cherries.
When I was little, I was astonished
you could get fruit without paying
a single dime. And when I stayed
with cousins, I discovered that
wild blackberries were also free,
although you paid for those in scratches.
Peaches, though – peaches you had to pay for.
Not us, of course – we were family – but other folks
drove out to the orchard to buy Elbertas.
My aunt and uncle had the place next door where
they grew strawberries and Pride of Summer apples.
On my father's side, my great-grandfather raised
raspberries and yellow Spanish cherries.
In a newspaper dated 1889, I read that
an unexpected frost injured his orchard.
I can't grow cherries here at my own place,
but I do have citrus. The orange blooms
on the left side, a Meyers lemon on the right.
Every year, their fragrance is the sign
that spring is blessing us again.
I wish that I could sleep all night
in between the trees, intoxicated
by their perfume, breathing in their promise
and exhaling my praise to the dark earth
for her flowers, the fruit now on the table
in my grandmother's basket,
and all the fruit that is yet to come.

Do You Follow Jesus This Close?

Emma-Jane Peterson

asks the bumper sticker on the car
in front. No, I follow Him like the yo-yo
drops and rises, like the rock-pool fills
and drains, like the wind lifts a leaf
in giddy dance and lets it float away.

Wise, that He doesn't follow me; He rests,
a flowered paperweight inside my heart,
a constant cast of sun and moonlight
on my hair. A gold deposit lodged within
my spirit's vault, one day, to be redeemed.

Contributor Biographies

Pamela Ambrozy is a teacher and writer based in Treaty 7 territory. Her English MA capstone project reimagined pedagogical approaches to Shakespeare by merging the physical and participatory nature of early modern theatre-going with the modern-day classroom. Pamela published a chapbook with *JackPine Press* in 2024 and is featured in *Paddler Press* Vol. 14. www.pamelaambrozy.com.

Angela Arnold is a writer, poet and artist. Her poems have appeared widely in print magazines, anthologies and online, both in the UK and elsewhere. Collection: *In Between*, ‘inner landscapes’ and relationships (*Stairwell Books*, 2023). A second collection is forthcoming. She lives in Wales. Twitter/X @AngelaArnold777; angelaarnold777.bsky.social

Marie-Andrée Auclair is a Canadian poet whose poems have appeared in online and print publications, for instance in *Bywords.ca.*, Canada; *The Frogmore Papers*, UK; *Tokyo Poetry Journal*. More poems are forthcoming at *Queen’s Quarterly* and *The New Quarterly*. She enjoys traveling, photography, and dancing.

François Bereaud is a husband, dad, full time math professor, mentor in the San Diego Congolese refugee community, and mediocre hockey player. He is the author of *San Diego Stories* published by *Cowboy Jamboree Press* and the novel, *A Question of Family* published by *Stanchion Press*. He’s the fiction editor at *The Twin Bill*.

Alison P. Birch is currently a faculty lecturer in the field of Education, Literacy and Linguistics. She enjoys writing poems, music, hiking, camping, movies, friends, family, and cooking. Alison loves spending time with her daughter. She has had poems published in *Paddler Press*, *Texas Poetry*, and *Wax Poetry and Art*.

Elise Chadwick taught English at Horace Greeley High School for 30 years. She lives in New York City but spends most weekends in her home in upstate NY, coexisting with the deer, groundhog, fox, bats and rabbit who got there first. Her poems have been published in *The New York Times*, *Healing Muse*, *The English Journal*, and others. Her chapbook *Poems on the Precipice* was published by *Kelsay Press* in 2025.

Steve Denehan lives in Kildare, Ireland with his wife Eimear and daughter Robin. He is the award-winning author of two chapbooks and seven poetry collections.

John Grey is an Australian poet, US resident, recently published in *Shift, River And South* and *Flights*. Latest books, *Bittersweet*, *Subject Matters* and *Between Two Fires* are available through Amazon. Work upcoming in *Levitate*, *Writer's Block* and *Trampoline*.

Raquel Fletcher is a published author, journalist and former TV reporter. Born in Regina, Saskatchewan, she worked as a political correspondent in Quebec City for almost a decade for both Global News and Bell Media before returning to the Canadian prairies. She is the recipient of the 2025 Saskatchewan Writers Guild Prize in Poetry. Her poems have been published in anthologies and literary magazines.

Jannett Highfill is a Great Plains poet living in Kansas. Her poems have appeared in *Rhino*, *Common Ground Review*, *The Iowa Review*, and elsewhere. She has three chapbooks, *Light Blessings Drifting Together*, *A Constitution of Silence*, and *Brown Restless Green*. Jannett coauthored *A Tempered and Humane Economy: Markets, Families, and Behavioral Economics* from *Lexington Books*.

Sharon Hoffmann is a writer based in Atlantic Beach, Florida. Publications include *The Hooghly Review*, *New York Quarterly*, *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *Alice Walker: Critical Perspectives* (*Harvard University Press*), *Paddler Press*, and other magazines. Awards include fellowships from Atlantic Center for the Arts and Florida's Division of Cultural Affairs, three Pushcart nominations and a nomination for Best Spiritual Literature.

Erin Jamieson's (She/Her) writing has been published in over 100 literary magazines and nominated twice for both the Pushcart Prize and Best of Net. She is the author of four poetry chapbooks, including *Fairytales* (*Bottle Cap Press*) and a historical novel, *Sky of Ashes, Land of Dreams* (*Type Eighteen Books*). x/Twitter: @erin_simmer, YouTube: @SimmerErin, Facebook: erin.jamieson.52, Blue Sky: simmererin.bsky.social, Instagram: @jamieson5335/

Michael Lee Johnson lived in Canada for ten years during the Vietnam era. Today, he is a poet in the greater Chicago-land area, IL. Johnson is a widely published poet, a song lyricist, has published several poetry books and chapbooks, and is a nominee for 8 Pushcart Prize awards and 7 Best of the Net nominations. He received the International Award of Excellence 'Citta' Del Galateo-Antonio De Ferrariis XI Edition 2024 Milan, Italy-Poetry for *If I Were Young Again*.

Leanne McClements is a poet based in Oxford, UK, where she runs children's services and immersive classes using songs, shadow puppets, and stories. Her poems have been published in magazines and online, and she is currently working towards a debut collection. She can be found at leannemcclements.carrd.co.

Penny Nolte creates gentle narratives of family and place. After a long pause from storytelling her new work can be found in *Beach Chair Press Magazine*, *Floating Acorn Review*, and *Four Tulips*, among others. Originally from upstate New York, with a fortifying decade in Colorado, she now calls the Green Mountains of Vermont home.

Molly O'Dell is a family physician and loves being outdoors, her primary influencer. She also loves writing and received an MFA from University of Nebraska in 2009, published a chapbook, *Off the Chart* and a multi-genre collection, *Care is A Four Letter Verb*. Unsolicited *96 Saws and Quips in the Wake of the Pandemic* was published for her public health colleagues in 2021. She currently serves as poetry editor for the *Journal of Medical Humanities*.

Emma-Jane Peterson lives in the UK. Her poems have been published in *BoomerLitMag*, *The Ekphrastic Review*, and *The Clayjar Review*, among others.

AV Rasmussen is an avid teacher, writer, backpacker and photographer. Their photography has previously appeared in *Lifting the Sky: Southwestern Haiku and Haiga*, *Unearthed*, and *Analogies and Allegories Literary Magazine*, among others. They were the featured photographer for the Winter 2022 issue of *Susurrus*, where their work was nominated for Best of the Web. Their poetry has appeared in many journals and anthologies, including: *Veils*, *Halos*, and *Shackles*, and *Impossible Archetype*.

Michael A. Russo is a veteran Long Island public school teacher of 25 years. He is married to his beloved wife and has two remarkable children. His eclectic poetry is inspired by the gritty and realistic works of the 1970s. It also reflects the many joys, absurdities, and tragedies of the human condition. He also takes pride in speaking for the silent, silenced, and forgotten. Work has been published in *Exquisite Death*, *The Anomaly Poetry Series Anthology*, and the *Long Island Quarterly*. He is also the author of seven independently published poetry books.

Susan Mason Scott, a retired math instructor, resides in Madison, Indiana, but has lived stateside and internationally, including in Sierra Leone as a Peace Corps Volunteer. She was awarded first place in the Nebraska Poetry Society Poetry Contest and was a finalist in the 2025 Sweet Poetry Contest. Her work appears in several publications and on her website: susanmasonscott.com.

Barbara Saunier has published in numerous journals and reviews, including *Poet Lore*, *Cream City*, *Spoon River*, and *Nimrod International*. Her work also placed first in The MacGuffin 16th National Poet Hunt. She is retired from teaching at Grand Rapids (MI) Community College, retired from the farm, and retired from riding dressage. But she still drives a stick shift and does not color her hair.

Ira Schaeffer, long-time poet and resident of Rhode Island, has been widely published in various print and e-publications. A former CCRI English Prof., Ira continues to share his love of the written word by leading creative writing workshops in local libraries and centers for lifelong learning.

Beth Sherman has had more than 200 stories published in literary journals, including *Ghost Parachute*, *Fictive Dream*, *Bending Genres* and *Smokelong Quarterly*. Her work is featured in Best Microfiction 2024 and Best Small Fictions 2025. She's also a multiple Pushcart and Best of the Net nominee. She can be reached on social media @bsherm36.

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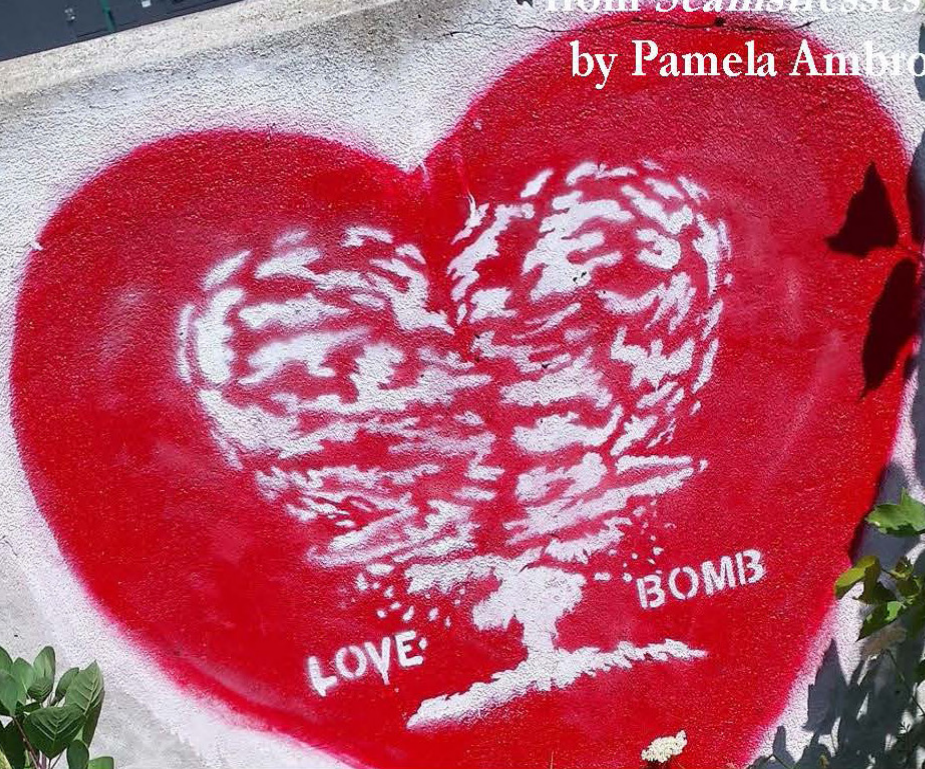


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*I tug on that thread,
and whisper through to my grandma
that I got her message.*

from *Seamstresses*
by Pamela Ambrozy



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