

euphony

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# EUPHONY

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*Euphony* is a nonprofit literary journal produced biannually at the University of Chicago. We are dedicated to publishing the finest work by writers and artists both accomplished and aspiring. We publish a variety of works including poetry, fiction, essays, and criticism. Visit our website, **[www.euphonyjournal.org](http://www.euphonyjournal.org)**, for more information.

Founded Spring 2000 by  
Stephen Barbara and Matthew Deming

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# MANAGING EDITOR'S LETTER

Dear Reader,

I will admit that it was difficult to decide where to start this letter. *Euphony* was founded in the spring of 2000, making the issue you hold in your hands the culmination of a quarter-century of literary magazine publication at the University of Chicago.

In some ways the magazine has changed over those twenty-five years (for one, our online presence only dates back to 2008), but, if you take a look at the oldest issues archived on our website, you will find that much has stayed the same as well. Our “nonfiction” and “fiction” sections may have been combined into “prose,” but, from our commitment to publishing pieces in widely varying styles to our perpetual use of Minion Pro on the cover, *Euphony* remains today the continuation of a decades-long history.

The most notable aspect of *Euphony*, though, the one I emphasize when asked what *exactly* the publication does, is our commitment to publishing the highest-possible quality work with the lowest-possible barriers for submission or participation. We charge no submission fees, we read and accept pieces from authors in all stages of life and from all corners of the world, and there is no application process to join our staff—joining our deliberation process is as simple for UChicago students as showing up to a meeting and chiming in. I believe this principle of lowering barriers to be of paramount importance for a student publication, but, more importantly, I believe it to be a valuable commitment in the context of the wider publishing field. In an industry that too often has immense obstacles to entry, *Euphony* is proud to offer a space where the only requirements for submission are an email address and a piece you’ve written. It is a legacy worth being proud of, and one which I hope continues for another twenty-five years.

Thank you, as always, to the staff and board members of *Euphony*, without whom this issue could not have been produced. Whether you attended every meeting or simply voted in final considerations, whether you are a board member or just started coming to meetings this quarter, this issue was profoundly influenced for the better by your voice. And thank you to Stephen Barbara, one of our founders, for agreeing to write a letter to go in this issue.

I am excited to introduce the Spring 2025 issue of *Euphony*, which has been twenty-five years in the making.

Happy reading,  
Mazie Witter  
Managing Editor

# FOUNDER'S LETTER

Dear Reader,

Twenty-five years ago, Matthew Deming and I cofounded *Euphony*. The year was 2000, and a literary magazine was still a tangible thing: perhaps not big enough to be used as a doorstop, but something you could swat a fly with. I was then a sophomore at the University of Chicago and, truth be told, I had needed the magazine—both in the tangible sense I mention above, and also for all it implied in analogue: the community, the people, the connection.

I had struggled in my first year at the University of Chicago. Having spent much of my childhood being socialized in all-boys Catholic schools, my freshman year in Hyde Park came as something of a shock to the system. The diversity, fierce intelligence, and intense ambition of my new classmates was intimidating. I spent a lot of time wondering if I belonged.

What I did have was an all-consuming passion for literature and a certain eye for seeing, and getting to know, talented writers. In this way, I found my people in Chicago: the book-crazy, likeminded literary set on campus. From that group of people, and with a determination to make a name for ourselves, *Euphony* was born.

Looking back, our first big break came when the late Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Mark Strand agreed to serve as our Faculty Advisor. We met him at a local diner and, over a bowl of Special K, convinced him to open his address book to us. After dashing off letters to his many contacts, we were able to publish great work from the likes of Charles Simic, Adam Zagajewski, and Craig Arnold. We complimented those high-profile pieces with excellent work from students on campus. As it happened, you could find many precociously gifted young writers if you knew where to look.

Once we had good submissions flowing in, it was only a matter of getting the word out. And here Matthew Deming proved a crackerjack member of the team, designing hilariously outré posters advertising *Euphony* in the most attention-getting fashion possible. We plastered the campus with flyers, set up lively weekly staff meetings, hosted parties. Too many smart, capable people to name here aided us greatly in finding good fiction and poetry and making our printer deadlines. But it was surely a collective effort to get the magazine off the ground.

It's thrilling to think that, 25 years on, *Euphony* is still running and can now lay claim to being the University's oldest literary magazine. So why *Euphony*, still? These years later, I hope it remains what it was in its conception—a reflection of the best writing from the restless, relentlessly curious, brilliant creative minds at the University of Chicago.

Stephen Barbara  
Class of 2002  
New York City, May 2025

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# *POEMS*

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# POETRY EDITORS' LETTER

Dear Reader,

Welcome to the twenty-fifth anniversary issue of *Euphony*. Last issue, in the thick of winter, we remarked, “We have a long way to go.” Spring has taken the spotlight since then, but winter’s lengthy gown trails in the margins. It was chilly today, and a few weeks ago sleet spat from the sky. Perhaps we still have a way to go, even if it isn’t long.

But where are we going? What will we find in the new season?

We know that we’ll find challenges and comforts, cymbal-crash thunderstorms and skies so blue you just want to lie on your back and witness it. We’ll find the thick, sweet smell of hyacinths, clinging humidity, dirt, woodchips, and shades of green we’d long forgotten about. We will find all this. But, like the best poetry, spring is generative by way of reduction. We thin out the fridge and the closet—no more stews, no more heavy sweaters. Shake off the excess. Spring is about widening the spaces between things, letting the air and light sweep away what is burdening you.

This issue contains four poems. “Chum” satires unattentive personalities. “Who is calling?” takes us on a winding backroad narrative, vibrating like a struck tuning fork all the while. “A Fragment Lost” lets us exist in that liminal space between sleep and wakefulness, night and morning, language and its aching absence. “Close,” thrumming with the heat of memory, concludes the section.

It’s spring, and *Euphony* is turning twenty-five, and we are filled with gratitude for our contributors, readers, and everyone on the *Euphony* team past and present. Read some poems. Wear some linen and get your hair cut short. Don’t forget to leave it all behind.

Sincerely,  
Mohammed Lone and Shiloh Miller  
Poetry Editors

# Who is calling?

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*Johnny Elder*

One night, a cold night, he drove through the dark, investigating the convenience of a plain of no rocks or cavities, of the mildest undulations, the gentlest of seas, for this was an oceanic style of travel, where he made the road up as he went along. In the middle of a grass-bearded swell he collided with a musical sigh, hairingly out of tune. The car fainted. The ghost of the dashboard drifted out the window and was carried off by an owl. Mister Catchit, quantum mechanic, minister of roads, vaguely in search of his wife, possibly his daughter, stepped out among the sweet grasses and invited the unlovely melody to hit him in the face. Hit him *hawwd*. It wasn't so bad. A less experienced man would run off in panic to find a telephone: his unstable reckonings amounting to what? Hayseed mayors hanging up their chainsaws. Blue-lit cows come barking from the shed, in search of a pond. No baby raising a peep lest she be set to perish in a tree. Careful Mister Catchit had seen every hat, every mystery a weed-bed of possibilities. What, then was this dissonant keening on the plain? The creaking of frozen waters? Knives and forks squawking? He recognised the scraping together of horsehair and horseshoe, the murder of an adagio, the winter eisteddfod. A turn-around sign, he'd been called for, he was wanted, so many broken arpeggios sticking to his ribcage.

# A Fragment Lost

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*James R. Hannah*

Night relaxes its eastern hand  
Dawn inches forth, Quiet a vigil keeps.  
The house about me now is still.  
I sort through words while my lady yet sleeps.

A thought half-formed, that thief of peace,  
Has left me wrestling with its residue.  
The fragment of a dream dim-glimpsed,  
I seek the means to mend it whole anew.

The fragment fades and Dawn bears it away.  
No wisp remains. There's nothing left to say.

# Chum

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*Susan Shea*

He puts himself  
at the head  
of the long table

in front of the  
killer whale-sized  
window

so that

we have to keep  
squinting to see him  
talking at every turn

he has no idea  
the bright light  
all around him is

swallowing him up  
whole-heartedly

# Close

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## *Tor Strand*

Since we looked at each other and couldn't  
make much of anything.

How are we ever supposed to  
with hands unable to hold more than

our given fields—mine fence-staked,  
yours of too many beautiful, fallow shades.

We're in the motel lobby because  
I refuse to sleep in the snow-covered

campground. Do you remember  
that afternoon we hardboiled

eggs over a twig fire, laid in the dust  
by the road, asleep as fast

as a freeze. Do you remember when  
we looked at the trees and one looked

back with a face like a wolf—god we laughed  
when we built too big a fire, had to throw

the river on it, ran into the river death-lean  
and drinking dark liquor because we'd been told

to by too many. What I remember now is how  
jumpy you get around snakes. Do you remember

that kid who rung one right  
out of the spring by its neck—

held it up like a child—his sad  
strength tense in his temple—or when

that truckdriver asked if I could fix  
the tangled wires in his dash and I did,

jumped right in the cab like someone who  
had never been hit and you told me later

your knife wasn't in your pocket  
that all you had on you was one of those

hard boiled eggs, that if he tried anything  
you'd've hocked it right into his eye. We stand

there in the motel lobby and I just can't quite  
forget the gravel in the road on those spring

evenings, ordinary evenings, when my hands  
went dust-black from playing ball in the street

as you tried to forget who you were,  
what you loved. We are in the motel

lobby, and it's gotten late as I look across  
the street at the white glare of the Subway

dining room like some eternal flame of this  
estranged now—and behind the motel counter

the woman says a price we can't pay, and after  
a pause, says again, *How about the trucker rate. Half off.*

And that night we sleep okay.

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# *PROSE*

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# PROSE EDITORS' LETTER

Dear Reader,

As the season turns once more, we are so happy to introduce our lovely readers to the latest issue of prose!

These stories will invite you all to linger inside a memory, chase after a glimmer of ambition, and brush your fingers against the fragile contours of loss. Some of the pieces unfold with a playful spark. Others wander, searching, or move so quietly they're almost a breath against the page. And, together, they drift across time to trace the small fractures in quotidian life and bear witness to a silent resilience that somehow survives change. We hope that somewhere in these pages, you'll find a moment that stays—maybe a flicker or perhaps a hush you can't quite name that unsettles you and settles in you.

First, we have “Death Cannot Part Them”, the winner of *Euphony's* annual prose contest, which this year featured a theme of “Endings.” This dark, emotionally gruesome tale will inevitably hold the reader's attention fast until the very end. After that, we have our prose contest runner-up, “Weltpolitik,” which tells the story of a transatlantic relationship through the lens of the narrator's adventures through philosophy as he spends a semester in Paris. Third, we have “Plastic Memories” which transports readers across the globe to Japan, where an eager student finds himself transported into his teacher's childhood in the Japanese countryside. And finally, “The End of Craftsmanship” is a wondrous display of prose depicting the complex and melancholic relationship between an elderly woodworker and his nephew. Together, these pieces transport readers across the world, each providing an exquisitely unique glimpse of characters, thoughts, and moments which will inevitably plant themselves within your hearts.

Best,  
Katherine Chen and Maya Mustata  
Prose Editors



# Death Cannot Part Them

*Maiah Jezak*

## Winner of the 2025 Prose Contest

Ellis shook herself from her tangled bed sheets and rushed to snatch the shrill telephone from its hook. It had been ringing nonstop all morning; savagely disrupting the precious few hours of sleep she'd managed. The only people who phoned her were usually selling under-read newspapers and suspicious car warranty extensions, but no salesman on Earth could possibly be this persistent. Her left eye twitched with nerves as she restlessly twisted the glossy cord around her fingertips—pinching them until they turned a dull red. She briefly considered taking her fist and smashing the receiver into tranquil oblivion before she answered on the eighth ring.

“Hello?”

“Good morning Miss Evans. This is Connie from Rosewood Cemetery. So sorry to disturb you this early, but I'm afraid I have some bad news. Your sister's grave was vandalized last night. The police have been called and are on their way.”

Ellis's voice caught in her throat “What do you mean it was vandalized?”

“Well, it appears to have been robbed. Do happen to know if your sister was buried with any valuables?”

“None at all. How could this have happened?”

“That's exactly what we're trying to figure out, ma'am. If possible we'd like for you to come down here and talk to the police sometime today.”

Fragmented recollections of the night before hit Ellis like a speeding train, shaking her from her sleepy haze. Two drained bottles of Jim Beam. A late-night trip to Rosewood. The bulging garbage bag carefully propped on the pillow next to her. Ellis leaned down and peered closer at her cotton pajamas. The usual powder blue and white stripes at her ankles and knees were caked with flaking mud.

“Ms. Evans, are you there?”

She spun around to get a distant glimpse of herself in the bathroom mirror. She was smeared with clay from head to toe. Streaks of dried blood mixed with the sludge on her forearms, coating them like sleeves.

“Ms. Evans, can you hear me?”

Ellis couldn't speak over the lump forming in her throat. Her head was swimming. All she could think was *Alex*.

*6 hours earlier*

She peered down at the tombstone. The plain slate plaque read “ALEXANDRA MAGNOLIA EVANS 1988-2009”. Ellis hadn’t been able to sleep, so she decided to head over to the cemetery. She visited her sister most nights. Her days were filled with petroleum pumps and large diet slushies. Regulars were her highlights. A smile or a comment on the weather were the extent of her friendships, just enough to keep her going.

Alex was twenty-one when she died. Ellis’s ever responsible big sister had gotten an E. coli infection from diving into the local power plant’s cooling pond on a drunken dare. Her heart stopped in a stark white hospital room ten days later. She’d been in perfect health before the stunt. Alex’s passing had completed Ellis’s long history of utter abandonment. Their mother bled out during Ellis’s birth and their father had been given a lethal injection in an Iowa state prison before she could walk, leaving four-year old Alex and an infant Ellis to fend for themselves. Neither of them ever minded much; at least they had each other. The sisters were begrudgingly housed by their great aunt, who promptly moved to Panama City Beach the minute Ellis turned 17. She was left to bury her sister alone six months later. Despite Alex’s popularity in life, Ellis had been the only person to ever visit her grave. She had handpicked the stone’s epitaph herself:

“Death cannot part them.”

The grief had cast an unshakable shadow over Ellis’s life. She dropped out of high school with one month left to go and took a cashier job at the gas station. Whiskey became her new best friend. Depravity sank into her mind with every sunset, like a damsel shifting into a beast. On nights where a fifth of liquor and a fresh joint couldn’t pacify her desperation, she’d grab her keys and begin the mile-walk from her apartment to Alex. She knew the night route like the back of her hand by now. Alex’s plot sat in between two extravagant monuments dedicated to beloved grandmothers “*gone too soon*”. The towering marble perfectly concealed Ellis’s monstrous sorrow. It had become a second home, a second bed.

These visits usually satiated her desperation for connection. Alex had been her only real family. Her best friend. Ellis hadn’t received any gregarious genes—they’d all gone straight to Alex. She started getting invited to fraternity parties in the eighth grade. She’d bring Ellis along to slumber parties every weekend so she could eat the rich kids’ pizza and waste their nail polish. It was also at these parties where Alex would inevitably start retching cheap tequila in the bushes before sunrise. Ellis

was always ready with a glass of water and a breath mint. When Jamie Finch shoved Ellis's head in a toilet in the sixth grade, Alex yanked him from fourth period and punched his two front teeth out. There was never a need to develop her own social skills or make her own friends. Alex was Ellis's Charon through childhood, and her quick departure had left her drowning in the Styx for eight years.

Tonight, the full summer grass glimmered with dew under the streetlight. She gently ran her hand over the soft blades. She felt untethered. The idea stalked her day and night. Stepping in front of the morning bus instead of boarding. Letting the steak knife slip inwards. Swallowing ten pills instead of one. Alex had been the only thing chaining her to the ground. To life. In the eight years she'd been gone, Ellis felt she'd been constantly walking the line between heaven and Earth. If the urge ever burned enough she'd be off in a moment.

Tonight's visit had done nothing to ease her torment. She couldn't feel Alex anywhere. She reached further into the grass and pressed her knuckles into the ground. It dimpled beneath her touch. Rainfall that afternoon had softened the earth into mire. It was strange to think that Alex was somewhere underneath it all.

Ellis stared at the ground, hard. Alex was right there. Her breathing became shallow. Years of scattered thoughts were piecing themselves together. Either she had drank more than she remembered that night, or she was having a breakthrough. Her sister wasn't in heaven or hell. She wasn't in the leaves or passing butterflies. She had always been right here. All of this hideous misery had been simple ignorance. Alex wasn't gone, just concealed. Ellis just needed to get closer, somehow.

Her hooked fingers pushed further into the soil. She just needed to get through. She began clawing at the ground. Piles of dirt gathered at her hips. The loam melted under her touch like butter in a sizzling skillet. Adrenaline rushed through her blood. Her movements became more frantic as the minutes ticked by, her elbows catching on discarded shards of stone. She could feel streams of balmy blood dripping down her forearms. It didn't hurt.

\* \* \*

At least an hour had passed. The muscles and joints in her arms were growing weary and stiff from the exertion. Her mind willed her arms to keep moving, to keep digging, but they grew wearier with each stroke. She had slowed to a glacial pace. Desperation screamed from every molecule in her body to continue. Running out of options, she reluctantly tipped her head downward. Her teeth pierced the earth, her mouth filling and throat choking. She spat it in her lap and repeated. A lump caught in her windpipe on the fifth mouthful. Bile and vomit

rushed up her throat and dripped on the mound of dirt below her. Tears of shame prickled in her eyes. All of her efforts had only managed to clear two or three feet. She couldn't keep doing it purely by hand, she was too weak. If she was going to find Alex, she'd need help.

She rose unsteadily from her new pit, her bones aching as she trudged towards the directory building a few hundred yards south. Over the past eight years she'd managed to memorize the layout of the entire cemetery. The careless facility typically left their rusted shovels propped against the back doors.. The pain from her wounds washed over her as she walked. The adrenaline from earlier had dissipated completely, leaving her weary and aching.

Ellis sighed with relief when she eventually spotted a shiny handle glinting against the building wall. It had seen better days, the blade caked in mud and the shaft's paint flaking from the summer heat. Next to it lay an open box of generic black garbage bags. It would have to do. Gathering the rest of her strength, she stuffed a bag into her back pocket and hoisted the heavy shovel over her aching shoulder. She had to get back.

\* \* \*

This was much easier. The blade sliced through the dirt and grass with ease. She worked through the burning in her muscles and the white-hot sores on her palms. She didn't know how deep under Alex was, but she knew she had to be close. She had been digging feverishly for at least three hours. The bleeding on her forearms had ceased, but the blisters on her hands had burst into a new river of agony. She'd been considering stopping to get rest and trying again in the morning when the tip of the shovel hit something solid. Cautiously, she thrust it down again. The same dull *thud* met her ears. It was Alex. Clearing away the remaining soil dusting the casket's lid, Ellis began to tremble with excitement. She had found her.

\* \* \*

### *Present*

"Ms. Evans, are you there? Can you hear me?" the woman continued, her voice alarmed.

Ellis took a shaky breath to steady herself.

"Yes, I'm here. We'll be over as soon as we can."

Gingerly returning the handset to its cradle, she stumbled to the bathroom in a daze. The cool tile bit her bare feet. She stuffed the rubber plug into the bathtub drain and twisted the faucet to a boiling tem-

perature before tiptoeing back to her bedroom for a change of clothes. The morning sun shone through her curtains over her rumpled bed. She ran her hands across the quilt and smiled softly. Amidst the weeks of dirty laundry coating her mattress, the black waste bag was still neatly propped up on her pillow. She grabbed the heavy bag with her left hand and yesterday's t-shirt with her right and headed back to the steaming bath.

Some of Ellis's first memories were of bath time. Their cheapskate aunt had the sisters sharing a tub until they couldn't squeeze in without their noses touching. Alex would make bubble hats on her head while Ellis squeezed lukewarm water from the bottom of her rubber duck. Their aunt would leave the girls to splash around until the water got cold. After the bubbles had gone flat and their fingers grew wrinkled, they'd always press their foreheads together to keep warm and murmur secrets out of earshot.

These recollections usually left her hyperventilating and scrambling for the liquor cabinet, but this morning Ellis smiled instead. Alex was back. All was well. Ripples of steam rose from the full tub as Ellis carefully emptied the bag's contents into the water. She stripped from her muddied pajamas and climbed in after them, moaning in pain as the hot water washed over the fresh scabs on her palms and elbows. Reaching for the used cloth hanging over the tub, Ellis gingerly started to scrub at her raw skin. The water grew murky as she washed the previous night's heist away. With it, she scrubbed away her years of grief and despair.

She gently fished her hand through the cooling water until it caught on something firm and globular. Cupping the object in both palms, she slowly lifted the object until it was level with her face. Alex's skull stared back at her. Years underground had erased her once flawless skin; only a few remaining strips clung to her hollow eye sockets like peeling paint. Her crooked grin was the same, only now without her signature cherry-stained lips and Marlboro Lights. Ellis pressed her forehead against Alex's and sighed. It was close enough.

## Runner-up of the 2025 Prose Contest

Sophomore year was relieved by a few brief trips to her in DC or me in Chicago. But generally, I drifted into a naive possessiveness as our relationship, conceived in long-distance, continued to be long-distance. Our fights made no sense, I couldn't understand her problems, and, worse yet, I offered my help to fix them. When we shared an apartment for a month mid-summer, I was somnambulant. We both had appropriate summer internships, and apart from those working hours, we hardly left each other's sight. Ironically, I grew dependent on our shared sleep—there were no expectations on either of us if we weren't awake. In August, she went back home upstate to be with her family. Then, in September, our problems briefly mended themselves when she and I met again.

Before her own school year started, she flew to Paris to visit me while I took a study abroad course on the French Revolution with Prof. Myorar. He was a political and legal scholar, numb about America's future, and, in his own words, considered "teaching the least important part" of his job. He was my favorite professor. Most classes, he would steer our department-mandated discussions on topics like Versailles or the Sans-Culottes closer to his true interests: authoritarianism and Hannah Arendt. In Myorar's class, whoever found a way to work in a point about Arendt during discussion would be regaled with stories: a classmate discovered this phenomenon after mentioning Arendt's name and receiving a twenty-minute response. That this was a class on the French Revolution was just a cover and we all came to know it. One day, I texted my dad about the class discussions, and he returned with an elaborate thread (which I quickly heart-reacted on iMessage) about Arendt and her curious love affair with the Nazi jurist, Martin Heidegger. I was impressed that my dad had this niche anecdote prepared. He reminded me that in college he had been, of course, an economics major—but also a *philosophy* minor. That would explain the presence of the uncreased Schmidt and Speer on the living room bookshelf at home.

Class would go by quickly. I would have the rest of the day to myself. But for the week she was with me in Paris, I was happy. Sure, she would stare past me and let tears well up after we ate pho in the 13th Arr.. And sure, the photos I took of her at Montmartre with the little skyline in the distance all came out lifeless. Sometimes I got the feel-

ing that things were turning horribly wrong; other times, I paid it no attention at all. Either way, by the time we fell asleep on the tiny cot in my temporary dorm at Cité Universitaire, I promised myself there was nothing to be afraid of. As if I were lying down on a hospital bed in a state of terminal lucidity, I forgot all my anxieties, eliminated one-by-one the hundred doubts in my mind, and shut my eyes.

She left Paris to return to her own college after that week and quickly resumed a regimen of limited communication. “There’s just not much to say,” she would say. In seminar, I asked Prof. Myorar about the Arendt and Heidegger affair, and he straightened up, leaning in with uncharacteristic attentiveness. I remember only bits of what he said since the question possessed him to speak in postdoc-level catechisms, but I gathered that their bond was found in the synthesis between Heidegger’s “being toward death” and Arendt’s “being toward life.” What did that mean for me? I understood neither Heidegger’s death impulse nor Arendt’s free and active life—and Myorar wanted me to grasp their synthesis? I was sleepwalking through Paris, my relationship with her, and Myorar’s classroom diatribes. In this way, I did feel between life and death.

I became mercurial under the sparse, depressed conditions of our relationship. Without her in Paris, where was my “being toward?” At Gare du Nord, I wanted to declare myself hers, pin her to me, and die with her. At the Musée d’Orsay, I wanted my freedom and a return to the levity of the past. On warm nights in the dorm, lying alone on my still-too-small cot and submitting to the unfettered smells of chlorine and dew drafting in through the window, I did the noble thing and did nothing about how she was drifting away. The classroom was blurring together with my post-class walks along the Seine. I would carry with me, for hours at a time, thoughts stemming from my under-understanding of the philosophical nature of Arendt’s and Heidegger’s relationship. Was there a synthesis between their embraces of life and death? What did Prof. Myorar mean by “dialect of negation”? And was he going to stop pretending that this class was about the French Revolution? It’s funny how both my dad and Myorar approached my questions about the Germans with so much enthusiasm. I found here that nobody wanted to talk about French history. There was a heavy air here and I was sick of it.

On my penultimate day in Paris, I was walking through Gare du Nord to evacuate to neutral Belgium. (I wanted to buy chocolates for my family and for her) Right as I was getting on the Eurostar train, five undercover police officers wearing a mix of baseball caps, sneakers, and hoodies approached me requesting to search my bag and examine my ID. I quickly registered them as petty criminals and any legitimate police credentials they may have had were lost on me. I said—in horrific

French—"You are not really the police," brushed them off, and started again for the train. I made it about four steps before they grabbed me, handcuffed me, and beat me up. Something atavistic gripped me and I started fighting back. You never know what sort of response you're going to have in instantaneous situations like this. Whether you fight, run, or freeze up is something neither you nor society can program in advance. With my arms cuffed behind my back, being dragged across the station platform, I berated myself about why I didn't just give them what they wanted. After all, even if they weren't the police and just wanted to rob me, resisting wouldn't be worth it. Deep down I knew I wanted to fight; to die and be vindicated.

I felt an unfamiliar mix of penitence, fury, and adrenaline as I sat cuffed to the foldable chair inside the offsite customs office. There were three pieces of furniture here, all banal—a table, a chair, and a white ceiling light. The officers were strategically positioned around me in case I made any sudden moves.

"I will remove the handcuffs if you don't fight again. Will you fight us again?" One Yankee-capped officer asked me in magnificent English.

"No. You have a gun." I replied.

And so I watched them fish for my passport in my backpack until one officer found it, held it up like the Statue of Liberty, and it became apparent that I was American and would have to be let go. The collective groans of "putain" and "merde" filled the room. I have never been so grateful to be from the United States of America.

I made it on the next train to Belgium, but I wanted to leave this whole continent and go back home. Didn't the Allied powers win the war in the end? I didn't care to ask Dad or Myorar about their thoughts on the matter. Oh, and she never got those Belgian chocolates.



# Plastic Memories

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*Daniel Clausen*

Dave Sutton had been in Nagasaki a little over two months when his Japanese teacher finally invited him over for dinner. Dave had been getting ten to twenty minutes of extra conversation practice during lunch time with him after his morning classes every school day. Slowly they had built a rapport.

Dave was in Nagasaki for an intensive course in Japanese with the hope of getting his language skills good enough to do graduate research on Japanese literature. He had vague notions of reading Endo Shusaku's *Silence*...or reading *hibakusha* literature from Nagasaki...or, just doing anything to stay away from the cold of Chicago and avoiding his ex-girlfriend. So now, what had once seemed like a dream was a reality. And the teacher who was volunteering little parts of his day to make Dave's dream come true had invited him to his home.

"Don't expect too much," Nikaido Sensei said in English.

Nikaido Sensei was an old Mitsubishi man, someone well-traveled, who had picked up a lot of English over the years working with foreign engineers and occasionally traveling abroad. His classes were famous for his bright personality and his tendency to indulge in "*kankeinai hanashi*," long tangents that took the class away from the textbook.

When Dave arrived at Nikaido Sensei's house on the hills of Nagasaki overlooking the bay, there was a note on the door written in English: *Come In*. Dave entered the house, took off his shoes, and said, "*Ojyamashimasu*." To that, Nikaido Sensei simply replied, "Come in, come in," in English. His Japanese teacher was in the living room hard at work on what looked like a massive art project.

"There is food in the kitchen."

And so there was. There was a plate with a ham and cheese sandwich, some rice, and a cup of black coffee. Now, Dave understood why Nikaido Sensei had told him not to expect too much. Still, Dave was hungry, so he ate it without complaint, all while Nikaido Sensei continued to work on his art project—a model of some kind, massive in scale, that looked like an island village.

"Here, paint these," Nikaido Sensei said, handing him little toy cars. He saw that Nikaido Sensei had already set up small brushes and paints.

Dave started painting. He didn't ask any questions; instead, he examined the model in silence. The model seemed to be of an island city. There was a massive wind turbine at one end. Scattered here and there were large generic block apartment buildings.

"This seems very detailed."

"Mmm...yes, the details are important. But mostly I just work on this model out of habit. Old men like me need hobbies. You know, after I retired from Mitsubishi, I spent a week doing nothing at all. I studied some English, had lunch with old friends, read the newspaper. Many of these friends had been retired for a long time. After one week, I thought I would go insane. After two weeks, I had a long think about how all these Mitsubishi retirees were doing...to my eyes, they were half-dead already...it was like a zombie movie. That's when I decided I would go back to school and get my certification to be a Japanese teacher. So, I did that and started teaching at our Japanese language school...and for a while that was enough. But then I decided I needed more to fill up my time. That's when I started working on this model."

"It's...big..."

"It didn't start that way. It's Takashima, my old hometown. It's an island close to Nagasaki City. It's about fifty minutes away by ferry from Ohato Port. You probably know Gunkanjima, Battleship Island. It's quite the tourist attraction now. Well, Takashima is the island before that one. You should go there sometime. There is not much to see now, but in its day, it was a busy place. See, this is my old high school."

Nikaido Sensei pointed to a building on a hill...or was it a mountain? Then he pointed to a field near the high school. "That is where my brother and I always used to play baseball."

"I'm guessing this is the port building."

"That's right."

"You sure have put a lot of work into this."

"At one point, they were thinking of using this as a decoration in the port building. 'They' meaning one of the nonprofits that work on the island. By the way, the island looks totally different now. This is the way it used to be before..."

"Before?"

"Well, a lot has changed."

Dave finished painting his miniature car.

The night passed quickly as they worked. Eventually, they stopped working on the model and went into the kitchen to share glasses of *shochu* and talk in Japanese.

\* \* \*

A week later, Dave visited Nikaido Sensei again. This time when he arrived at his teacher's house on the hill there was pizza waiting for him.

"I got takeout pizza for us," he said from the living room where he was working on his model. Dave hadn't eaten since earlier that day, so he took a moment to eat a few slices before proceeding to the living

room. The model had grown since the last time he was there. Little by little, it was filling in with details.

"Today, we'll be working on the old high school."

They worked mostly in silence, painting little plastic trees and the sides of buildings. Finally, Dave broke the silence, practicing his Japanese. "You used to be a student at that high school?"

"Yes, a long time ago. My brother was two years older than me. We both played baseball. But he was the talented one on the team. Do you like baseball?"

Dave shook his head.

"That's right, I forgot. Dave-san likes *literature*. You will write wonderful scholarly works on Japanese literature."

"In Japanese, I hope."

"Whatever Dave-san does will be wonderful." Nikaido Sensei continued painting the school with his miniature brush. "I'm glad I am sharing this with you. I feel like I need someone to look at this. The way the island is now, if I put this in the port terminal like that non-profit wants...well, it too will turn to dust and rot."

"Do you go back often?"

Nikaido Sensei shrugged. "It's all just rotting buildings now. There is very little on the island besides government buildings, a little museum about coal, and the beach. I'm already a sad old man. Why would I go there just to be sadder?"

That struck Dave as odd. He didn't consider Nikaido Sensei to be a sad old man. He was one of the most engaged and active people he knew, regardless of age.

"Do you know why I became a Japanese teacher, Dave-san?"

"You said you needed a way to be unretired."

"So, so...to be retired is to be dead. This job puts me in the realm of the living. Young people, new life. You are all coming to Japan to learn Japanese, to breathe new life into dying Japan, into people like me. You will do wonderful things, Dave-san. So will the other students. They will fill necessary jobs, start families, and build little communities here...I should be doing lesson planning, but somehow, night after night I end up back here working on this model. Why?"

"Because remembering is important...maybe?"

Nikaido Sensei nodded his head. "Perhaps. But there is a time to let go of the past too."

Dave thought about his own past. He remembered breaking up with his girlfriend, the tearful goodbyes with his mother before he left.

"But not tonight," Dave said. "Tonight, we will paint and remember."

Later that night, Nikaido Sensei brought out his best *shochu*. They shared glass after glass. Dave practiced his Japanese. He talked about

Chicago and all the things he did not miss, such as the cold and the high cost of living. Perhaps Nikaido Sensei said something important about Takashima, but all that Dave could remember later was working on the details of that model.

\* \* \*

A few weeks later, Dave and some of his friends took a boat trip out to Hashima, also known as Gunkanjima (Battleship Island). Like Takashima, Hashima had once been a coal-mining island, and like Takashima, when the mine had closed, the island had been abandoned. But unlike Takashima, it was entirely abandoned. A ghost island. The island had been registered as a UNESCO World Heritage Site to draw in tourists. They took the boat to the abandoned island and saw the empty, rotting buildings. Dave had to admit, it was a romantic setting—the perfect setting for a ghost story.

And perhaps there was a literary project to be done...he was sure he could find stories, perhaps even some with literary merit, about Hashima.

But then he imagined the big model in Nikaido Sensei's house. He knew he had to go to Takashima someday soon. He had to see it for himself.

Dave told some of his friends in the class—Chinese and Vietnamese students, as Dave was the only American—that he was planning to go to Takashima sometime soon. There was some interest at first...but as the days went by and studying became more intense, the interest died down. Dave, for his part, was starting to think toward the future, toward his studies in Japanese literature. He began to read Japanese novels in small chunks. As his reading became smoother, his time reading became more enjoyable. He was making his way slowly through the works of Haruki Murakami and Natsume Soseki. Speaking was another challenge altogether, but he practiced diligently with Nikaido Sensei.

He had written down a book Nikaido Sensei had recommended—*Remembering Takashima*. A book of photos and captions detailing life on the island before the closure of the coal mine. He thought about looking for it in the local library, but then, remembering that Nikaido Sensei had said the book was in the port building, he decided that he would wait until he was on the island to read it.

"How is the model coming along?" Dave asked Nikaido Sensei during one of their daily Japanese chat sessions.

"It will always be a work in progress. If I were ever to finish, Dave-san, I am afraid my home would die a second time," Nikaido Sensei replied. Nikaido Sensei touched the middle of his own forehead. "Once it lived up here. Now, I must work on it with my hands or else I will forget."

After his midterm tests, Dave found himself with an abundance of free time. The idea had been growing slowly in his head ever since his nights working on the model with Nikaido Sensei—he would go to Takashima by himself; he would camp on the island.

He went to the local discount store and found a cheap sleeping bag, a flashlight, and other camping equipment. On Takashima there was still one active hotel—a surprisingly cheap one, even for a student. But the idea of camping on the island under the stars excited him.

He took the boat early in the morning. It was a short trip—only fifty minutes. They stopped at Iojima first, the resort island. From there, many fishermen got on the boat. As the ship approached Takashima, he noticed the modestness of the port building. He disembarked from the boat and entered the small building. There was not much there. In the back was a section that had closed down but looked like it had once been a restaurant. There was one shop that was looked after by the same young lady who seemed to also oversee the tourism desk and ticket counter for the boat. At the port building, Dave took a moment to reorganize his belongings and plan his day. He decided he would leave his camping gear in a locker and rent a bike from the local staff at the port building. But before Dave could even lock up his belongings, he noticed the book at the tourist counter.

*Remembering Takashima.*

He sat down at one of the chairs and began to flip through it.

Through simple black-and-white images with captions, the book's early pages captured the time before the coal mines were shut down. They showed happy coal miners, their faces covered with coal dust and grime, going about their daily lives. The photos and captions depicted a community of blue-collar workers living together, creating families and lives. They also showed thriving schools on the islands, with the students competing in festivals. Then the story turned dark. There was news that the mine might be shutting down. The union organized to prevent the closure of the mine. There were protests, sit-ins, but finally the inevitable happened. Then, Dave saw a name: Nikaido. His sensei's brother was one of the organizers. He read on. Near the very end of the book, Dave learned the horrible truth. Nikaido Toru, the brother of his beloved sensei, had committed suicide after the closure of the mine.

Dave was alone in the port building now. Dave took a moment to process what the book had shown him.

After a few minutes, Dave recovered. He approached the female receptionist at the port building, the building's one worker, who was the storekeeper, the ship ticketing agent, and the local tourism expert. He asked how he should rent a bike. The young woman smiled at him and

called someone on her cellphone. Soon there was a bike delivered to the port building.

"How long will it take to bike around the whole island?" Dave asked in Japanese.

"You're so young," the young lady said and smiled. "I think you can do it in three hours."

And so, Dave started on his trip. Just as he left the port building, he saw the empty husks of the old Mitsubishi tower apartments. In the foreground were little plots for growing sweet tomatoes—a new venture on the island—though Dave didn't quite understand it. The center of town was nearly empty. All there was to see were boarded-up buildings, artifacts of a more prosperous time. Soon Dave made his way past the one remaining hotel. Then, the large city hall, which also seemed strangely vacant. He soon found himself at the beach. It was the one place on the island that had some activity. The area around the beach had been converted into a beach village for tourists. But next to the beach were more condemned apartment complexes. Dave knew these buildings well from Nikaido Sensei's model, though he wasn't sure if Nikaido Sensei had grown up in one of them.

Dave found himself lingering by the beach. It was just a little after the beach-going season, so he was the only one there. He had never really been a swimmer, but now that he was starting his new life in Nagasaki, he thought he might soon become a beach bum. The thought brought a smile to his face. The weather was warm and beautiful. His bike ride so far had been pleasant. But despite the cheer he felt, there was a melancholy shadow. Nikaido Sensei's brother had committed suicide...because he couldn't save his hometown. Now, many years later, Dave was there to wander through the monuments of a once vibrant community.

Soon Dave continued his bike ride around the island. He stopped at the tourist sites that referred to Takashima's role in the Meiji Revolution. He went to the site where the residence of Thomas Blake Glover had once stood, the Scottish merchant who had helped Japan and Nagasaki evolve into modernity. He continued along the road. It seemed that some of the houses were still being lived in, but many of the others were dead husks. One of the houses had been converted into a shared residence for tourists like Dave. It wasn't long before Dave had made his way around the island. As he approached the port from the other side, he saw the remains of Takashima's old mining industry. He also saw that there were some newer tower apartments where residents lived.

He was at the port building again. It hadn't seemed like that long since he had left. But three hours had passed. Dave wondered what to do with the rest of his time. Somehow, he made it through the day. He found his way to the top of Mount Gongen and enjoyed the view. He lin-

gered at the beach a bit more. But at the end of the day, though he had nothing left to do, he still felt like he should stay on the island.

He returned his bike, paid the fee, and got his luggage from the port locker room.

He could have inquired about the shared residence...or he could have stayed at the very reasonably priced hotel...but instead, Dave found his way to the abandoned apartment block near the beach. He had no way of knowing whether this particular block was the one Nikaido Sensei's family had lived in. Likely he had lived in one of the houses further up the hill.

He entered the building...surprisingly, it was unlocked. He walked down the hall to one of the first-floor apartments and tried all the doors until he found one that was unlocked. He stepped into the dark, stale room.

There he unfurled his sleeping bag and laid down. He thought about how much his life had changed since Chicago, since breaking up with his girlfriend and quitting his job. He had studied Japanese at university and had searched for a way to make his studies relevant, but now that he was here, preparing for a graduate degree in Japanese literature, his whole life seemed surreal. However, it was the confidence that Nikaido Sensei had shown in him that made Dave certain he was on the right track.

The night was quiet, and there was no light in the room other than his flashlight. He wondered to himself if he had made a mistake. Maybe bugs would crawl into his sleeping bag as he slept. He wondered whether he should just sleep outside or go to the hotel and get a room...

But, in the dark of the room, somehow, Dave was relaxed. The night air was quiet, and soon he was asleep.

\* \* \*

When Dave opened his eyes, he felt sunshine on his skin. He was in a different place. He was walking up the hill...to school. There were two young boys walking with him. They were each carrying a baseball glove, and the boy to his left had a baseball with him. Intuitively Dave understood that these were the Nikaido brothers; one was his teacher, and the other was his teacher's older brother. They were walking to school. As they walked, Dave looked down at a bustling port area. It was alive with people and activity.

"Oy, Mariko was checking you out in class yesterday." It was Nikaido's brother. And he was talking to Dave. But Dave wasn't Dave. Dave was someone else.

"She does that to every new guy that comes to class. That's just her way," Dave responded in Japanese, intuitively. As Dave spoke these

words, he understood that he was not himself.

The day wore on...as (his dream-self understood) it usually did. Dave, but not Dave, found himself in a classroom where a teacher droned on and on. It was only the younger Nikaido brother, Dave's future teacher, who seemed focused. The rest of the class was restless, almost disrespectful. After class, the younger Nikaido brother explained his attentiveness in class: "We can't live on this island forever. There is a great big world out there. If I study hard, perhaps I can find a good job outside this island."

The older Nikaido brother disagreed. "I want to stay here, mine coal, and hang out with my friends every day...if I can't become a professional baseball player, then what's wrong with staying with your family and friends?"

"Don't worry, you will be a professional for sure!" Dave but not Dave assured him. The younger Nikaido brother, however, didn't seem so sure.

Later that day they were on the baseball field. They were attending team practice. They were all on the baseball team together. They were being watched by the cute girls in the stand, including Mariko, as they caught fly balls and grounders for practice.

Dave but not Dave knew he was no good at baseball. Somehow, as he gripped the baseball bat, the wood seemed not wood but plastic. Magically, when the ball came his way, he knew what to do. He hit one, two, three deep into the outfield.

"*Sugoi!* You're getting better!"

When the sun started setting, the three of them began their walk home from the baseball field. As they left, the girls in the stand waved to them, including Mariko.

They walked, laughed, and talked together. The sun was beginning to set, and as it did, Dave could sense someone watching them. There were two big moons becoming visible in the sky like eyes, and he began to perceive things. Giant fingers were placing trees on the hillside. However, only Dave but not Dave seemed to see those fingers. The two Nikaido brothers walked on, oblivious.

As the sun set, however, these two eyes started to shape into a face—the face of his teacher. Nikaido Sensei was watching them. As they walked, Dave but not Dave realized that they would never reach home. They were meant to stay that way—forever, three young boys on an island, together, after baseball practice, walking to a home that only existed in a moment in time.

\* \* \*

Dave woke up. He was still in his sleeping bag. It was early morn-



ing. Instinctively he sat up, unzipped his sleeping bag, and began to rub his body to make sure no bugs had snuck into his sleeping bag. Happily, his body and sleeping bag were bug-free. He did the same thing with his backpack and other baggage.

He made his way out into the early morning Takashima sunshine. Dave's mouth was dry. He found a vending machine and bought himself some cold sparkling water. Dave checked his phone and realized that it was still early in the morning. It would be another hour before the first ferry made its way back to the mainland. It was a Sunday, so there was no reason to rush back, yet Dave felt something strange in the pit of his stomach.

It was an uneasy feeling. He knew he had woken up and that this was the real world, but something felt off. Something made him want to call Nikaido Sensei. Yet, he stopped himself. He wasn't on that kind of terms with Nikaido Sensei yet.

Dave walked back to the port building. There were a few people there, mostly hobby fishermen who were waiting for the boat back to the mainland. Dave looked at the book again, *Remembering Takashima*. He found the page with the picture of Nikaido Sensei's brother—he read the Japanese again. There was the word in print—"suicide." He remembered the vision from last night, the young boy who wanted to grow up to become a professional baseball player.

Slowly, however, he found himself making his way back to the front of the book, toward the page devoted to everyday life in Takashima. He thought of Nikaido Sensei's model in a new light as he looked over the pictures. Each picture evoked a story. There was something to remember about this island beyond the fact that it was a coal-mining island. There had been lives here, memories...and now the island was something different. An artifact.

The boat came to take him back to the mainland. From his seat, Dave could see the island growing smaller. He said goodbye to the island. Soon he was back on shore. Nagasaki was quiet. Early Sunday morning was a time of rest. Dave thought about going back to his tiny apartment, but there was something nagging him in the back of his mind—an idea that Nikaido Sensei might not be alright.

He made a decision. He called his teacher. He would apologize for calling him so early, and then he would tell him about his trip. There was no answer. It was 9:30. Perhaps he was still sleeping. But something told Dave that his teacher, ever the active Mitsubishi man, should be awake. He tried again. There was no answer again. Dave thought once again about going back to his apartment...but it wouldn't take him long to walk to Nikaido's apartment from the port building. He just had this feeling...he had to make sure that Nikaido Sensei was okay.

Dave made his way up the hill to Nikaido Sensei's apartment. As

he climbed, the uneasiness in his stomach grew. He felt that something was wrong. As he walked, the dream from the night before became more vivid. He could see those two eyes in the night sky. He could remember what it felt like as the world slowly turned to plastic.

He reached Nikaido's house. He rang the doorbell. There was no answer. Then Dave noticed that the door was slightly open. Dave pushed it open ever so slowly. He stepped in. At the doorway he took off his shoes. "*Ojyamashimasu*," Dave said out of politeness.

There was no response. He noticed that the house was unreasonably tidy. Nothing suggested that a single elderly person lived there. Dave's uneasiness grew. He now felt a cold terror overtake him. As he walked through the house, he half-expected to see Nikaido Sensei's dead body somewhere with a tidy suicide note. As he continued to walk through the house, he saw no one. There was just the sense that everything in the apartment had been put into its proper order as if for the last time.

Dave looked around, hoping to spot a healthy Nikaido Sensei sitting down, drinking green tea. Instead, his eyes found the plastic model of Takashima. It was in the living room. But now it looked filled out. Painted. Detailed. Complete.

Dave smiled. He approached the model. It was beautiful.

The terror subsided.

He examined the model. Nikaido Sensei had managed to fill the island with little plastic people. Dave looked closer. These plastic people were not just generic figurines either. Each seemed different from the other, and as he looked even closer, he saw a plastic figure that reminded him of Nikaido Sensei. And next to him was another figure who somehow Dave knew as his sensei's brother.

And as he looked even closer at the little plastic figure that reminded him of his teacher, no bigger than half a fingernail, it seemed to turn its tiny head and look up at Dave.

And then Dave saw the most amazing thing. The plastic figure looked, smiled at him, and winked.

# The End of Craftsmanship

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*Arjun Mandal*

He has been living on the edge of the desert for nearly fourteen years. There is very little to distract him. A truck stop and a gas station, about a mile down the road. A small strip of shops a further mile in the same direction. North of there, nothing for a good four hundred miles. In the evenings the wind is calm and sounds like loneliness, but isn't.

He has a small workshop, full of shavings, coffee cups, piles of dust, tins of paint. Behind it a larger, less sturdy warehouse, stacked full of the same object, over and over again.

It takes him anywhere between a morning and a full day to finish a piece. The size, which used to vary, is now a constant, as is the shape. A small, flat disc, raised in the middle to perfect proportions, smooth as polished stone. Every day he makes one or two.

In the beginning—years ago—he produced so many, a dozen a day at least, rough-surfaced, lopsided, sometimes too fat in the middle, almost always disproportionate, badly painted, asymmetrical. They lie stacked on top of one another at the very start of the warehouse. Sometimes, often at the end of a week, he goes to see them, as a reminder of who he was, how far he has come.

To think he used to do one in an hour! The thought shames him.

He is not an immodest man, but he is convinced of his gift, and feels assured of his future celebrity, which will be activated (he has told himself) by the expiration of his beating heart. One day they will come, from all around, to see the treasure he has built up. Sometimes, as he takes a break and drinks a coffee, he imagines the fights that will take place once he is gone, the memorial schemes people will propose, the small galleries and museum sections that will bid for his legacy. He thinks of the people who will claim to have known him. He thinks of all of this as he sips his coffee.

The confidence comes from his pursuit of perfection. The early attempts, piled in unsightly heaps at the front of the warehouse, he sometimes considers destroying. Their misshapeness, their disjointedness, irritates, even depresses him. But every time he thinks of their annihilation, he thinks of the place they have in his history—the path they show to what he has become.

From his window he can see people come from afar. They never stop. The car appears as a dot, then a buzzing shape in the distance, then a growing, growling rectangle of life, until it whooshes past and fades into the huge lake of nothingness on the other side.

There is only a nephew who drives out to see him, once a month.

Someone he has explained all of his theories to: why the discs are exactly this wide, this thick, curved in this precise way. The meanings behind the measurements, why it is so important to repeat this, relentlessly. The nephew is the only one who doesn't laugh. Each time he takes one or two home, wrapping them carefully in a beach towel and placing them on the back seat.

His sister says the nephew makes jokes about him at home after every trip, mocks his obsession, but the craftsman knows better. People don't drive five hours, once a month, for no reason. The nephew says things like this give life shape and meaning, but he is never quite sure whose life he is referring to when he says this. Last year he visited them for Christmas, and was silently surprised to find only two of his pieces in the house. He did not have the courage to raise the subject, but spent the entire drive home wondering where they had gone.

That winter, the craftsman feels terrible pain in his left side, just above his groin and into his midriff. A sharp streak of pain, the sharpest, most acute pain he has ever felt. He drives a two-hour drive to the nearest city to learn he has a gall-stone in his bladder. The pharmacy has the medicine he needs—while he waits for them to find it, he wanders into a gun store across the road. At the back of the shop, in a section entitled "Trapshooting", he finds a whole stack of his creations, piled together clumsily against the wall under a sign that says, with no apparent irony, "Targits". Each piece costs a dollar.

The craftsman continues for a week, then stops one morning. He goes outside, smokes a cigarette. A series of rippled clouds stretch out over him in the sky like the steps to an enormous, floating palace. He considers destroying every piece he has, but the thought is too big for him, too much for him right now. He tells no one what he saw in the gun shop, but when the nephew comes again at the end of the month, he pretends to be out. Through the lace of a window he spies him walk around the front of the house, puzzled. On the ground lie a dozen of his most recently-finished pieces. He watches his nephew pick one up, run his hands with pleasure over the smooth, contoured curve of its rim,

## CONTRIBUTORS

**Daniel Clausen** has published stories and articles in such magazines as *Slipstream*, *Black Petals*, *Ken\*Again*, *Aphelion*, *Spindrift*, *Zygote in my Coffee*, and *Leading Edge Science Fiction* (among many others). His recent novel, *Statues in the Cloud*, is available on Amazon.

**Johnny Elder**, of Melbourne, Australia, abandoned full-time journalism after thirty-five years to write what he wanted to write. He is collecting stories about profound childhood encounters with birds. He persists with dance lessons.

**James R. Hannah** is a retired scientist living with his wife in a quirky old house on Staten Island. His background includes writing, editing and proofreading prose. He recently decided to devote his remaining years to reading and writing poetry. Now ninety, he has begun submitting his most recent poems for publication.

**Maiah Jezak** a third-grade teacher and writer from Midland, Michigan. When Maiah isn't dazzling her students or writing her next story, she enjoys napping in cars, tuxedo cats, and exploring far away places with the people she loves. She has completed (and is hoping to publish) a middle-grade fiction book about a young girl's journey encountering zombies, her father's addiction, and how the two intertwine.

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**Arthur Mandal** is a writer based in Eugene, Oregon (but grew up in the UK). He has published over 30 stories in *The Barcelona Review*, *december*, *3:AM*, *The Forge*, *Southeast Review*, *Los Angeles Review*, *The Stand*, *The Summerset Review*, *Bending Genres*, and others. He also has a chapbook with the acclaimed Nightjar Press. [www.arthurmandal.com](http://www.arthurmandal.com)

**Susan Shea** is a retired school psychologist turned poet. She was born in Brooklyn, New York, and now lives in a forest in Milford, Pennsylvania. Her poems have been published in, or are now forthcoming in *Chiron Review*, *ONE ART*, *Folio Literary Journal*, *Green Silk Journal*, *The Write Launch*, *RavensPerch*, *Ekstasis*, and others. Recently, she was nominated for Best of the Net by *Cosmic Daffodil* and for a Pushcart Prize for three poems by *The Umbrella Factory Magazine*.

**Tor Strand** is a Fishtrap Fellow and recipient of the Mari Sandoz Emerging Writer award. He was also selected as the 2023 Margery Davis Boyden Wilderness Writing Resident. Tor's poetry and essays have been published in the *Colorado Review*, *Salt Hill Journal*, *Fugue*, and elsewhere. He is currently an M.F.A. candidate in poetry at Oregon State University. Find more work at [torstrand.org](http://torstrand.org)

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