Rathalla Review

Rosemont College | Fall 2017

Art

As a self-taught artist, **Jacqueline Meyerson** has been blessed to have been voted one of the top 100 Pastel artists in the world by the *Pastel Journal*. She has garnered many coveted national and international awards and gold medals including a designation as Master Pastelist. Jacqueline is a member of many art societies, including the International Association of Pastel Artists, The Pastel Society of America, Allied Artists of America, and the American Artists Professional League. Currently, she teaches a pastel workshop at the Baum School of Art in Allentown, PA.

Nathan Nielsen graduated from University of California, Santa Cruz in 2009. His prints have been exhibited at both the Warehouse and Gallery Central in Fresno, California, and The Big Top in New Orleans. In addition, he has been published in *Agave Magazine*, *The Stone Boat*, and *Driftwood Press*.

Cover

Fish Cocks and the Band

Nathan Nielsen

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Contributors

Poetry

Susannah Jordan earned an MFA in Creative Nonfiction from Queens University of Charlotte. Her flash fiction and poetry have appeared in *Cold Coffee Stand*, *Daphne Magazine*, *Twisted Sister*, *50-Word Stories*, and *The Story Shack*.

Rita Feinstein is a graduate of Oregon State University's MFA program. Her work has appeared in *The Cossack Review*, *Menacing Hedge*, *Queen Mob's Tea House*, and *Permafrost*, among other publications.

Darrell Dela Cruz has published work in *The Stillwater Review*, *The Tau*, *Studio One*, and *Ignatian Literary Magazine*. He analyzes poems on his blog retailmfa.blogspot.com. He graduated with an MFA in Poetry from San Jose State University.

Flash Fiction

Brandon Hansen is a graduate of Northern Michigan University, where he served as an editorial intern for the school's literary magazine, *Passages North*. His writing may be found in *Puerto Del Sol*, *The Dunes Review*, and *Vine Leaves Press*.

Sal Difalco lives in Toronto. His work has appeared online and in print.

Creative Non-Fiction

Ayesha Hamid is a Philadelphia-based poet and writer of creative nonfiction. Her poetry has appeared in Blue Bonnet Review and Philly Flash Inferno. She holds a M.F.A. in Creative Writing and an M.A. in Publishing from Rosemont College. Recently, she completed a full-length memoir called *The Borderland between Worlds* and is the Editor in Chief at *The City Key*, www.citykey.wordpress.com.

Fiction

Blake Kilgore lives in Burlington, New Jersey, with his wife and four sons. People there treat him with kindness, and he is at ease living among the old and tall forests of the Garden State. His lingering accent, however, verifies that his heart is still Texan and Okie. Blake's writing has appeared in *Lunch Ticket*, *The Stonecoast Review*, *Midway Journal*, *Forge*, *Thrice Fiction* and other fine journals. To learn more, please visit blakekilgore.com.

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THE WAVERING BALANCE OF FORCES
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Co-Signer

Darrell Dela Cruz

The correct decision is to sign
and forget your dead bedroom
infatuation. I have a seller's

tongue: I can make your payments
low enough to ignore
the fine print and the careful

labels, I can reduce your burden
like a secret addiction, and, after
our interaction is done, I don't leave

a paper trail. No accounts linked
back to you—just a transaction
where both parties are, eventually, liable.

Pebbles

Brandon Hansen

Mom,

I have 1026 pebbles in a jar. But don't tell anybody, like definitely do not, nowayJose, because I am making, and I mean this, a living for myself now, and here's how I do it: Picture me, outside. I am small, I am in a dress. I have a desk – the pebbles are on the desk. I am sitting behind the desk in a wicker chair. I have a sign that says, "Take a guess/$1! Win/$100!" and people, I mean, they really do their best, but, Mom, they are not even close.

When the sun dips away I take the pebbles, and, oh, I have this old wooden box of yours I use for the dollar bills, and on a good day I'll have to push down with my whole arm to close the thing, and I think, honestly I'll be set for a while, I mean people really are wrong, number-wise, so I think everyone is sort of hive-minding the wrong way – I dunno, it's kind of funny, I guess, because, well, I just said that they aren't even close, but really, they are pretty close to each other.

But anyway, Mom, I'm writing you now because it's early and there's a pounding at the door, because someone big is saying, "Let us in," and, I mean, I don't know what to do but write to you, because, Mom, I never counted the pebbles, but I just know how many are in there, some things you just know, you told me that a couple of years ago, and in that same way I know about the pebbles I just know what'll happen in a few minutes, and it'll be like this:

All slow motion, I'll throw the jar of pebbles, it'll burst over the bridge of the officer's nose, pebbles will spray in black and white and grey blurs everywhere, like TV static, they'll hit the other furniture with tinks and thuds and the officer will fall to his knees, blood will seep through the cracks in his fingers as he cups them to his face, the other officer will spring across the room, just in one jump, he'll grab me, I'll spin around, try to crawl away, but he'll have me by the foot, he'll drag me, and the pebbles and glass will streak and cut the floor beneath me, will mess my belly up, and I'll see you, in your sundress, black and white, floral patterned, your hair auburn and a mess, your head buried in dad's chest, and he'll be in his checkered shirt, sleeves rolled up, long legs hanging over the edge of the couch, mouth hanging open, his arms laying over your pale back, both of your feet, white, just brushing the floor.

You'll think I'm special when you read this, Mom.

Which.

I dunno.

Sincerely.

The Search For Calm Among the Chaos

Ayesha Hamid

My maternal grandfather and grandmother were born in times of great change and widespread global crisis. Lives were unpredictable and children were propelled into adulthood before their bodies could catch up. World War I came and passed, and then fascism gained ground among people who had once believed in the primacy of reason, a people once touched by the Enlightenment. World War II gripped the globe during my grandparents' formative years while British Colonial Rule, entrenched in the Indian Subcontinent for centuries, swayed and then collapsed completely. Pakistan was created in 1947, two years after the end of World War II, and though the creation of a border between India and Pakistan involved the simple act of using a pen to make lines on a map, the blood-letting that followed had incalculable consequences.

My mother's parents were Mohajirs, or migrants who relocated from India to Pakistan during the partition; they settled in Karachi, one of Pakistan's now largest cities. No matter the spreading squalor within Karachi's new shanty towns, my grandparents built a secure home, located in Defense Housing Authority, one of the city's safest locations. The property's cement walls protected the family from the city's crime. Floors of cold stone absorbed burning light and strong concrete beams flowed upwards, seemingly touching the sky. Regardless of the security of this home, the instability of their times never allowed my mother's family complete relief. My grandfather warned my mother and aunt about good times saying, "Don't become attached to good times because bad times are coming right after them."

For him, everything had always been tenuous. Rigorous responsibility was thrust onto my grandfather, Nazir Khan, or Baba as everyone called him, at twelve years of age, when his father succumbed to an unknown illness and became a recluse. After this point, my great-grandfather rarely interacted with his family to offer any support or guidance.

Instantly, Baba became the head of the household since his mother, like all other women of that society, was limited in what she could do. Females couldn't fathom thriving without a viable link to a man, and without this visible connection, a woman was considered suspect. Women needed the "guidance" of a male relative, even if that relative was a child. So Baba was given much authority, at a young age, and would continue to be the guardian of his mother and sisters for the rest of his life. In speaking of his mother, my grandfather said, "I've been a parent to my mother longer than she was ever a parent to me."

As a child, I saw them, my grandfather and great grandmother, speaking to each other a handful of times; she'd always look on lovingly while he stood with a more serious stance. When he left her company, she'd feel comfortable enough to pull out a small, multicolored, tin box containing her favorite games and start playing solitaire. If her son happened to return after remembering one last point, she'd quickly hide everything back in the box.

Everyone called my great grandmother Nani Ma, meaning simply, grandma. All I know about her is that her ancestors may have migrated to South Asia from some other part of the world, like Turkey, because her fair complexion and thin, long limbs were indicative of foreign blood. My grandfather shared the same complexion and stature.

Nani Ma was married off at fourteen, to a husband twice her age. Before her marriage, she'd usually spend the day sitting under the shade of tropical trees or running around, but after her marriage, she started dealing with the responsibilities of motherhood. From this point on, she became a servant of sorts because her husband held strong opinions regarding how children should be raised. He yelled at Nani Ma saying things like, "Feed him this way!" or "Don't put her clothes on like that!"

Nani Ma's marriage continued this way until her husband's death. From then on, she never wore anything besides a white sari, as was expected of

the widows of that day. In the limited memories I have of her, she's always wearing the same type of sari.

I had the opportunity to spend time with her before my family left for the United States. We'd both sit on the sofa, in the living room, with the smooth green carpet under our feet. She'd complain about her aches, pains, and especially her wrinkles. I told her that when I grew up, I'd become a doctor and find a way to fix her physical problems. I held her face between my hands and lifted her cheeks up saying, "You see, your wrinkles are gone. When I'm a doctor, I'll figure out how to fix your wrinkles for good."

Impressed that a five-year-old child could think in such terms, she told my mother that one day I'd "do something amazing like become a great doctor who would heal the world."

My grandfather, on the other hand, wasn't someone who gave compliments as easily as Nani Ma did. In order to deal with his responsibilities and the uncertainties of life, he became singularly focused, becoming obsessed with his studies and then work. He finished his education and worked at a bank for the rest of his life. His life resembled that of an ascetic because indulging in pleasure wasn't part of his repertoire. Life wasn't meant for pleasure anyway, it was meant for self-sacrifice. Instead of splurging on food or drink, he'd eat just a samosa during the workday and, in this way, accumulated more money for his family. Due to his meager diet, he remained extremely thin throughout adulthood.

In his thirties, he lost all his hair. Bearing the weight of the world on his shoulders, he was constantly irritable. He'd often snap at his wife or children.

"Shut up, you fools!" he'd yell at his daughters.

He lectured my mother and aunt about the centrality of work in an honorable life. "There's no other honor in life than an honest day's work. You girls like to waste your time. Forget about your foolish fantasies. This makeup, this fashion, this jewelry is all rubbish. I want you to become well-educated and to stand on your own feet in this world, or else it will take everything from you. Bear the gravity of this world with the shield of education; people are fickle, but you can trust knowledge," he said.

As his daughters grew older, he found more nuanced ways to criticize what he thought of as questionable decisions. Writing a letter to my mother after we'd been living in the U.S. for a few years, my grandfather implored her to move back to Pakistan.

"Your children are not meeting their potential because of the poverty that immigration has brought. Their education suffers every day you stay in America. Top quality schools are waiting for them in Karachi, so bring them back and salvage their education. In America, the best that they can hope for is to become waiters."

Regardless of all the self-control, my grandfather had a life-long vice – he smoked cigarettes. Breathing problems related to cigarettes caused his death in 1988, but he probably passed away, without guilt, knowing that his whole life had been spent taking care of his

mother, sisters, wife, and daughters. Though he died a number of years after his wife, he was outlived by his mother.

My grandmother Azeema, or Begum as most called her, was a softer soul than my grandfather. She was not one to yell or lecture, but was a kind and loving parent. In her pictures, she always had her hair back in a bun and wore formal saris. She seemed to be assessing the world, looking on it through her thick, eye glasses. Begum had been greatly molded, at seven years of age, by the loss of her mother. For her deceased mother, she had an abundance of affection. Perhaps it was this child's desperation for the presence of her mother that made her memories so real, or maybe it was her memories that made her so desperate. Whatever the case may have been, her memories were something that she couldn't or wouldn't lose. Her mother would never be replaced.

Others didn't feel the same intensity as Begum; her father remarried quickly after the death of his first wife. My grandmother would later recall her stepmother and say that "that woman could never compare to my real mother." If any child could disown her parent, Begum did so with her father. Choosing to live on the second floor of her aunt's home, located right next to a graveyard, instead of living with her father, Begum created a distance and declared her continuing loyalty to her mother.

During her life, Begum put on many masks that disguised her desperation for love; one of her faces was that of a humanitarian in the guise of a physician. In her day, the purpose of a woman's higher education, even in the west, was to secure a good marriage, but Begum's educational pursuits were not so singularly driven. She was also focused on work, like her husband, but her obsession went deeper than supporting her family. She'd craved the power to heal long before she went to medical school, and in becoming a doctor she gained some control over her chaotic surroundings. It would be the control she didn't have when she'd wanted to stop her mother's death. To harbor this control, she linked herself to universal suffering and became a balm to Karachi's suffering masses. In so doing, she joined the city's deluge of pain and perdition and became entangled in an endless circle of life, death, and disease.

Later in life, Begum switched roles and took on the face of a cancer patient, recovering and then relapsing. Finally, the cancer metastasized. Debilitated, she must have had time to think even though she was in great pain. She must have considered whether she had done everything she could have, to help those who needed healing. Would her daughters, women without the protection of brothers, be able to deal with the trials of life? Luckily, she'd had the time to arrange my mother's marriage to a good man. He had kind eyes, and among the thousands of faces that she'd seen in her lifetime, she felt that his was one she could trust.

Perhaps, as she lay dying, she thought again about her own mother's death. Would her mother finally come back for her, now that death approached her, or would she meet her mother on the other side of the curtain between life and death? My

grandparents' home had become quiet except for Begum's painful breathing. The sounds of what seemed to be a subdued drum thumped through the house as her lungs attempted inhalations and then collapsed.

"Inna Lillahi Wa Inna Ilayhi Raji Un," my grandfather said. The utterance of these words, "surely we belong to God and to him we shall return," customarily uttered after someone's death, confirmed to everyone that Begum had left the world. It's been forty years since she died, but just like her mother, she is not easy to forget.

Flamboyance

Susannah Jordan

Drunk girl sleeps in her flamingo
sundress, pink birds wrinkling
as she dreams.

Three boys. A wall.
And sixty flamingos.
They climb over.

Forget two for one stone.
Pinkies expire too slow.
So they kick 'em instead.

A feathered heap too crumpled
for Alice to fashion
a croquet mallet.

Drunk girl sleeps in her flamingo
sundress, pink birds dying
as she dreams.

No Recollection of the Theft

Blake Kilgore

Granules of soil mingled with spittle to produce a slimy coating on his lips and chin. Blades of grass tickled his lashes each time he opened his eyes, but they seemed heavy, and he felt a profound desire to keep them closed. Every sound was distant, cavernous. His brainwaves were in slow-motion, reduced so that he could not even formulate basic cognition. Somewhere inside was a caution or concern, but it couldn't break through the blanket of his semi-conscious stupor.

It was the stiffness in his limbs and dull throbbing in his brain that woke him. He ached from marrow to skin, from crown to heel, and it was a lingering ache that made all movement sluggish. He brought his palms under his chest, which pounded in a rhythm both panicked and irregular. The blood was trying to purge, but he had been unconscious. Suddenly he felt the rush in his bladder, and he savored a small victory, realized his pants were dry.

They would not remain so if he did not rise and find release. With colossal effort he pushed himself to his knees and opened his eyes. Packed dirt and crushed blades of grass testified to a long sleep of forgetfulness, but he slowly recalled, smelled and saw the dried river of vomit crusted on the roots of a familiar oak. It was baking in the morning sun and the sloshing contents of his riddled stomach were convulsing for another go. He crumpled against the trunk and retched. It was mostly dry and some swallowed back, a chemical fire in his throat.

Cato slumped and rolled over to behold the morning. The full sun burst like a rod of flaming steel inside his brain, clamoring through his skull, ear to ear, base to brow, swelling his eyeballs, and hammering down his shoulders into his back and chest. Instinctively his hand rose to cover his eyes, and more scorching vomit slithered around his gums and over his tongue. His eyes moistened with pain, and with regret.

There was a rattling, hissing noise from his left. Cato shielded his eyes and saw the old blue pickup, its grill crumpled around a wrought iron lamppost, which was leaning toward the earth at a forty-five degree angle, its bulb mostly dark. At random and sparse intervals, it clicked and buzzed, the light barely flickering before retreating again to silence. The wheels of the truck had churned the earth, had carved a serpentine groove from street to post.

Cato's eyes adjusted as his brain slowly revived, and he realized that he was at home, lying in his own front yard. He could fathom little else.

Retreating night bugs, morning song birds, the hush of the breeze and accompanying swaying of branches suddenly intruded, and a flicker of peace penetrated the looming despair. Cato closed his eyes, and two streams pushed from beneath eyelids as his body began to shudder. A plea for mercy whispered over his chapped and grimy lips.

But the symphony of nature was ruined, interrupted by the harsh throttle of gears, the squealing of tires and sliding of doors. A long white van jerked to a halt at the curb, blocking out the sun, and several men shot from open doors, covered in black from head to toe. Cato counted six men, and they were spreading out over his front lawn as they advanced on his position at a trot. He stumbled unsteadily to his feet and toward his front door.

It was locked, and the knob twisted in his hand with futility. His eyes streamed now with panic and he

hoarsely called for his wife and children. He banged fists on wood and rang the bell, too, but the house was silent, empty. Cato turned and ran to his truck. There were tools in the bed. But he was too late and the marauders tackled him, securing hands and feet. Cato thrashed wildly until one of the men waved a moist cotton ball under his nose.

There was a burning agony and then darkness and silence.

———

Cato woke to a rhythm, steady drops along a hollow pipe, and then the gurgling sound of ripples spilling on the floor. He was blindfolded, and the pressure of the binding was excessive. There was also coarse cloth inside his mouth, pulling at the corners of his cracked lips. He could barely breathe and his thirst was unbearable. His pants were no longer clean; he smelled both urine and diarrhea.

Inside, it felt like his brains were being pressed outward, against the harsh lining of his skull. He wanted to scratch beneath his scalp, wished he could detach his crown and thrust fingers into the matter to knead away the arcing pain. He longed to plunge his head beneath a waterfall, to let it seep into his ears and eyes and mouth and through his pores to rehydrate the cracking flesh inside his head. It felt like he was dying.

Cato's hands and feet were bound to a chair, and his back was stiff. Sciatic pain was jolting from his lower spine, shooting up to his shoulders and down to his knees. He tried to struggle against the ropes, but they were too tight, and every effort proved both useless and painful. Soon his wrists and ankles were raw with burns.

"You killed my daughter!"

The voice was robotic in tone, but its cadence was human, angry. Cato placed the voice to his right, and soon he felt hands removing his blindfold. Then the pain in his head was jarring, for he was placed beneath a row of spotlights which beamed down on his face. Cato closed his eyes, but the hot lamps burned through his lids and the throbbing was unrelenting. Just when he believed he could take no more, the lights shut off with a loud click, and a sound of power winding down. The pulsing in his brain subsided slowly, and two of the masked men approached and lifted his chair, then carried it into a long hallway with many doors, but only one exit.

"The police are looking for you. But they will not find you. They will not find any of you."

The altered voice echoed through the silence of the place. Cato was somewhere forgotten, out of the way. But, why the phrase – 'any of you'? Fear clawed from his belly into his heart, which began to race. He mumbled frantically against the gag, but no one responded. Soon he heard a scream, and its tone was familiar. Then one of the doors down the hall opened with a whine. A moment later a bound

and gagged young woman appeared, shadowed by two of the masked men, each securing an arm. She was a pretty college girl, with blond hair and beautiful blue eyes. Cato pulled against the ropes, but soon the masked men were holding him down, and the robotic voice was speaking.

"You killed my daughter! Now, I will kill yours!"

Alyssa, Cato's eldest daughter, broke free for a moment and charged forward, falling before him and weeping on his knees. Blinded by tears, he mumbled incoherent apologies. If only he could get free.

But then the men were dragging her away, and she was screaming, and when she was at the end of the hall, they took her into one of the rooms. Cato was praying as he never had, begging God to forgive him for his crime, and to spare his family.

Boom!

The gunshot echoed, a bass sound that caused the tin walls to rattle and sway. Cato wept uncontrollably, but through the fog of tears he saw two black clad men drag the body of his precious daughter through the exit, into the sunlight.

"She is gone now, and it is your fault. Drunks hurt everybody, but especially those they love the most."

An eerie sound of robotic weeping accompanied masked men loosening the gag enough to slide a tube into his mouth, and then they began pumping in water. When he swallowed, he felt a jolt of healing in his limbs. He started to talk, but the men replaced the gag, then the blindfold, and he was left alone with his guilt.

Lonely hours filled with mourning followed, as Cato recalled his decline, the enslavement of addiction.

He binged a few times in college, but he had been a serious student. He'd been proud not to live to booze like many of his fellow classmates. After he graduated, he hardly drank. He was busy with his career and with starting a family. But then his sister Jade died, unexpectedly, and he bought a case of beer for solace. It was gone two days later, and he had been drinking alone. It frightened him and he stayed dry for several months, but the sorrow of Jade's passing lingered. Later, he started bringing home a case a week, drinking two each weeknight and the rest on the weekends. He'd put on the ballgame and check out, and the sorrow would subside until the next night, when it was time to turn up again.

When Alyssa was three, and Cato's wife Sarah was pregnant with their second child Johnny, she started to express reservations about the empty cases of beer and the weekly trips to the liquor store. Cato laughed it off, said he had a high tolerance. It was no big deal. But something ill was growing inside, a desire to drink that was unquenchable, and he knew it, though he lied to himself too.

When Johnny was born, Cato snuck a flask of scotch into the hospital, and went to sleep each night buzzed. He became adept at keeping the buzz on,

level, so he could get up in the morning without too much headache, and with enough mental energy to function. But his stomach was beginning to testify, and there was often blood in his stool.

And he still got rowdy when he went out for a special occasion. In the beginning, his best friend Jeremiah and the rest of his boys found it hilarious, because the normally quiet Cato would loom large, taking on a charismatic persona that brought smiles all around. But then they started to see the fallout after the big nights. Sometimes Cato slept in the alley behind their favorite tavern. He even got robbed once, but had no recollection of the theft.

There were two DUI's on his record now.

One night Sarah and the children tried to intervene. Jeremiah was there too. They spoke in turns, saying how much they loved Cato, and how they all needed him, and that he had to figure a way out of this maze. They would help him in any way, but he had to admit he was helpless.

Cato knew he was out of control, but he would never admit it. He just decided to make purchases in cash, keep the booze out of sight. He could control this, had been doing so for many years. Never took a sick day for a hangover, never missed an important event. So he blacked out a few times. No big deal, right? But the lingering fear was always there, the barely conscious realization that he could not manage this, that it would chase him down, and he would not escape the consequences.

And now he had killed someone's poor child, and his precious Alyssa was murdered in revenge. Did they have Sarah and Johnny too? He knew they did, and tried to figure a way out of the mess, but his bindings were secure and he could hear the constant footsteps of the masked men on the other side of the wall. And his brain was still mottled by drink. He was so angry at himself, but all he could do was cry.

———

The lights were on again, burning into his skin, and then the blindfold and Cato's gag were off and he was blinking, trying unsuccessfully to see. While two of the men came to pump more water into his mouth, the leader was speaking in his digital voice.

"We do not even need to kill you, fool, for you will kill yourself, soon. But what of the others, like my daughter? Should we let you live, when your recklessness will take more lives?"

Cato was weeping, begging for his family's life.

"You have had your revenge....my sweet Alyssa...I am sorry..."

"Stop talking, drunk, you did not kill only my daughter. My son was taken as well. My daughter, she died suddenly, as soon as you hit the car. But my son died slower. So will yours."

Johnny was wearing his letter jacket. He was only seventeen, a high school junior. He was strong for a kid, but no match for the three masked me who led him down the hall toward Cato. He was forced through one of the doors and then Cato heard screaming and the

grinding of machinery and soon blood was pooling from beneath the closed door. Cato cried out for his son, but Johnny only shrieked. The sounds of his anguish eventually ceased, but the machinery and the blood continued for another two hours.

Cato watched as the men carried out bulky bags of flesh and blood, as they brought in the mops and bleach and cleaned the space so that no one would know what they had done. Cato was sober now, enraged. He was dead already, so he might as well kill. He focused and his eyes dried. He called out to the leader.

"Who are you to judge? What gives you the right to torture and punish my children? I am to blame for the deaths of your children, not they. Come and face me, coward! Take off your mask!"

Cato heard footsteps and then he saw his wife. She was bound and gagged, and they brought her close, forcing her to sit a few feet away, facing Cato. The leader walked over and stood between them, and then took off his mask. But beneath the first disguise was another - a caricature of Cato's own face stared back into his weary eyes.

"I am Cato the drunk. And only I can make it stop."

Cato bowed his head in humility.

"I confess - I am an addict! I will do whatever you ask. Please, set us free."

The masked men untied Cato and loaded him back into their van. As it raced away, he looked out the window and saw three shapes, the three drawn faces reluctant, but still looking with hope at a new future and a resurrected life.

He collapsed then, like a mountain crumbling from peak to cavern. His body rolled and swayed, the tears poured. Bewildered, gasping desperately for air, he eventually cramped from the lamentation. Riding away from his kin, for his kin, Cato knew the old man would have to die. He wondered who he might become next. And he wondered if he could forgive. Of course they were right and he was wrong. It was a just tribulation, but he still felt a brooding anger.

He signed his own name at the bottom of the paperwork, checked himself in. The masked men waited in the van, made sure he was committed. Once inside, he called Sarah, and they mourned together for all that was lost, and they prayed for what they hoped might return.

Two months later they were all waiting for him, and though he had been angry, he was calm now. He hugged Jeremiah before he got into the car with his family.

"I understand why you did it, and I am grateful. Now I want to go home, and start again."

Sarah drove and Cato looked out the window. He could feel the nervous gaze of his two beloved children. He wanted to live, for all of them. But you can never kill the demon. You can only chase him into the shadows. So when Cato and his family passed through the green light at Broad and Strait, Cato looked

down Broad. Three blocks away he saw the golden sign that hung above Esau's Liquor, one of his old haunts. He closed his eyes, shook his head.

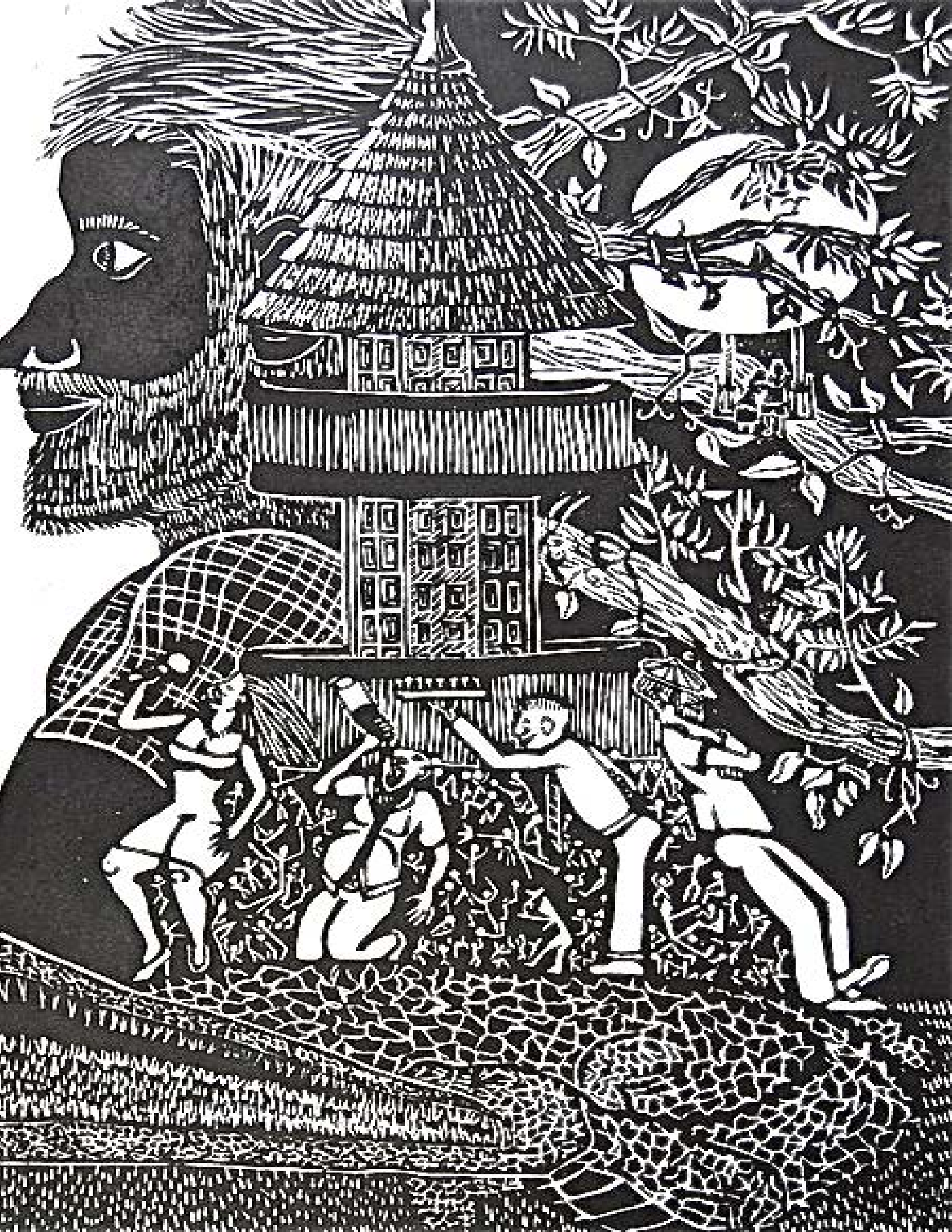
But then he got to wondering.


Cafe
Gilly's
Tavern
GOLDEN
PAGODA
Meyerson Music
ZACH'S
SAFETY
KiKos
MEXICAN FOOD
DRAW ME!
SEE INSIDE
LOUNGE
BOWLIN
LANES
JOKER
SAFETY MATCHES
MADE IN
USA
Tips
ON WILSHI

Valentine

Rita Feinstein

did you ever read that story
or others like it
about the couple whose car
broke down in a snowstorm
and when they tried walking
to the nearest farmhouse
or gas station
the cold stopped their hearts
and when the spring thaw
uncloaked their bodies
their spooning skeletons
seemed peacefully asleep
and if you ever read that story
did you feel the warmth
suffusing your eyelids
and did you feel
my bones in yours

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The Proposal

Sal Difalco

Nino the goat had brought the village great prosperity with his predictions of the outcomes of Serie A soccer games—communicated by way of pasteboard and hoof placement. The villagers had pooled their resources and made a killing with city bookies. A new fountain had been installed in the piazza, and a statue of St. Rocco, the village's patron saint, was being chiseled at that moment by a renowned regional sculptor, Martino Bracchi, who promised a masterwork—but Father Carmine, the village priest, was dubious. All this ill-gotten money had made the village more bearable, true, but there was always a downside. Furthermore, and this is where perhaps he failed as a villager but succeeded as a man of the cloth, Father Carmine didn't trust Nino. Goats were connected to Satan, it was inescapable. Moreover, who names a goat? It was unnatural. One morning, Father Carmine approached a destitute man known as Lupo by the villagers. Dark, hirsute, with menacing red eyes, Lupo would do anything for a few lira. After Father Carmine made his proposal, Lupo looked at him sideways. "You want me to off the goat?" he said. "Yes," Father Carmine said, "he's evil." Lupo burst out laughing. "Evil?" he said. "But he predicted that Palermo would beat Juventus! You call that evil? Please." When Lupo, also known as the village gossip, told everyone about the proposal, no less than seven attempts were made on the priest's life. Nino correctly predicted that the eighth attempt would be the last.

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