

ISSUE ELEVEN

---

# LUNARIS REVIEW

A JOURNAL OF ART AND THE LITERARY



# LUNARIS REVIEW

*A JOURNAL OF ART AND THE LITERARY*

## ISSUE 11

Published in January, 2020 by **LUNARIS**

Email: [contact@lunaris.com.ng](mailto:contact@lunaris.com.ng)

Website: [www.lunaris.com.ng](http://www.lunaris.com.ng)

Copyright © Individual Contributors, 2020

All rights reserved.

Cover Art and Artworks by Gilbert Omoniyi Gabriel

Cover Design by Tolulope Oke

Book Layout and Design by Tolulope Oke

Without limiting the rights under All works are copyright protected by *Lunaris Review* and the individual contributor(s), no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise), without the written permission of both the copyright owner(s) (contributors).



**EDITORIAL TEAM**

**ART EDITOR**

Hezekiah K. Oluwadele

**MEDIA MANAGER**

Eniola Cole

**POETRY EDITORS**

Abeiku Arhin Tsiwah

Ojo Taiye

**ASSOCIATE PUBLISHING EDITOR**

Dhee Sylvester

**MANAGING EDITOR**

Damilare Bello

**PUBLISHER**

Tolulope Oke

# CONTENTS

---

Foreword	1
Concubine – <i>Rudy Ravindra</i>	2
Demons – <i>Michael Ace</i>	14
One if by Sea – <i>Lana Bella</i>	16
The One I Love... – <i>Michael Akuchie</i>	17
Back from Furlough – <i>Shmavon Azaiyan</i>	18
Walkin' with You – <i>E. Martin Pedersen</i>	38
Zephyr – <i>Robert Beveridge</i>	39
Mother's Epitaph – <i>Mosobalaje M. Abimbola</i>	40
Hummingbird – <i>Steve Carr</i>	21
Time and Mirage – <i>Olabisi Abiodun Akinwale</i>	51
Salvation Hymn – <i>Henneh Kyereh Kwaku</i>	54
About the Contributors	



## Foreword

The year 2020 promises a lot of exciting things, and we are delighted. If 2019 is any indication, there is a lot *Lunaris Review* has to offer. The hiatus has been long, but it has not been without a substantial reason. A lot of changes have happened in the course of the break in publication. While it seemed the hiatus over-stayed its welcome, we are grateful for the changes that have happened over the course of the ‘holidays’.

In 2015, when the plan to start LUNARIS was hatched, with *Lunaris Review* being its kickoff project, we knew it would open doors for other plans to be accommodated under the LUNARIS initiative, many we couldn’t answer at that point. 2019 came with proposals and several brain-storming sessions, and one of the plans fell in place. In 2020, LUNARIS would be organizing its first prize in honour of the distinguished historian Professor Toyin Falola. This development coincides with LUNARIS’ plan to generate ideas and facilitate initiatives that would contribute to the sustenance and promotion of Literature in Africa and beyond. It has always been the defining creed in which LUNARIS is anchored. This is why when *Lunaris Review* opened its submission windows, it was to creatives within and beyond the shores of the continent, a gap that needed to be filled at that point, even till now.

Apart from a new website, additional team members whose energy and creativity match the vision of *Lunaris Review*, and a new submissions window structure, much still remains the same with regard to commitment and art offerings. *Lunaris Review*’s mission remains the same. The Issue 11 supports this. We have collected a select number of fine poetry and prose to usher you into the New Year, just as we have always done. Much still remains to be seen from LUNARIS, but for now, enjoy this new issue.

Happy New Year!

**Damilare Bello,**  
Managing Editor, *Lunaris Review*

## Concubine

*Rudy Ravindra*

WHEN HIS FATHER HAD a stroke, Deepak air-dashed to Vizag. Siri, his father's concubine, said that Mr. Narasimham returned from his usual walk on the beach, had a shower, and sat down for *pūja*, facing the morning sun and chanting *slokas* with *rudraksha mala* in his hands. At the conclusion of the prayers, she would bring him a cup of coffee. However, when the familiar chants ceased abruptly, she came out to the veranda to find him sprawled on the floor, unconscious.

Few years back, after his wife's demise, Mr. Narasimham brought Siri, a low-caste lass from the village where he owned paddy fields and fruit orchards and other cash crops. His daughters, on their periodic visits to check on the old man, would wrinkle their noses at the sight of this pariah—young enough to be the patriarch's granddaughter. Still, out of love and respect for their father, they tolerated her. Ignoring the chorus of quiet condemnation, haughty looks, and hostile glares, the comely concubine with her come-hither looks and sensuous gait serenely supervised the cook and the maids and the gardener. Deepak felt it was not his place to censure, but secretly saluted his father's taste, who surely knew how to pick them.

On Deepak's visits to Vizag, the meticulous Siri made sure that his room was ready—clean sheets, banked towels, fresh soap, and shampoo—and that the cook prepared his favorite dishes. Frankly, he was looked after much better than his own house in Bangalore, where his busy wife, Vani, had very little time to bother about the household.

\*\*\*

MR. NARASIMHAM WENT INTO a deep coma and since his recovery seemed extremely remote; the doctors detached all those futile tubes and sent him home to pass on in his own bed, surrounded by his children.

Deepak, the only son, performed the last rites. His two sisters and brothers-in-law helped with the arrangements and received relatives and friends who came to express condolences. Deepak was embarrassed when Vani, a lowly academic with plenty of vacation days, was unable (unwilling, more likely) to attend the funeral, while his wealthy and busy brothers-in-law, who rubbed shoulders with magnates and ministers, came all the way from Bombay and Delhi.

To escape the constant cacophony of continual callers, Deepak strolled to the park right across the house. Children screamed on swings, squealed on seesaws, and slid speedily down the smooth slides. Adults, while keeping a watchful eye on the boisterous boys and girls, sat on weathered wooden benches and listened to the evening news on All India Radio, blaring from screechy speakers. Prime Minister Modi congratulated President-elect Trump. Mr. Modi met with visiting Iranian dignitaries in



New Delhi. Pakistan-sponsored terrorists infiltrated into Indian Territory to murder innocent civilians. And the local weather, a depression in Bay of Bengal and torrential rains.

Away from the hullabaloo, in a far corner of the park, Deepak slumped on a bench. He would miss his father and his wise counsel, who navigated him through the rough seas of life. Relatives and friends looked up to the old man who helped many poor relatives with money and food, and in some cases even performed their daughters' wedding at his big house.

Averse to sullyng his father's good name, Deepak disagreed with his sisters, who were determined to unceremoniously pack off the penniless paramour. He thought, without hurting Siri's feelings, I should send her back to the village with sufficient money to survive until she finds a job. This big town, with its pimps and prostitutes and other assorted crooks, is no place for this simple girl. No longer the de-facto mistress of the household, a cowed Siri ceased to flit around like a hummingbird to order the help. He felt that, at another time, at another place, if only her intrinsic birth did not prove to be an albatross, Siri might have had access to education, paving the way for a proper job and better life.

Hearing someone cough, he looked up. Siri, her head bowed, asked, "May I speak to you, sir?"

Deepak patted his side, but she hesitated. He smiled. "If you continue to stand and admire the grass, we can't talk, can we? Please sit."

She smiled shyly and sat at the edge of the bench. “Sir, I’m sorry to disturb you. B-b-b-but, I just couldn’t get you alone in the house. Sir, I can’t go back to my village.”

A puzzled Deepak said gently, “You know the house is gonna be locked up. We’ll not need any help. So...” He hated to be curt and left what he had in mind unsaid.

“C-c-c-can you take me to Bangalore? I can cook and clean.”

“That’s a great idea, ah, you are reliable and efficient, yes, yes, lemme think about your case carefully.”

“Sir, if you send me back to the village, my husband will torture me.”

Deepak was surprised. “I-I-I didn’t know you are married. So, he lives in the village?”

Her face was clouded for a brief moment and she sighed deeply. “Yes, sir. My father married me off to that asshole. I was only fourteen. See, not many girls in our community. Father got good money for me. But at that time I didn’t know that the husband will share me with his two brothers. They were like animals, ah, um, I got scared, um, ran back to my parents, ah, um, my father beat me and returned me. So, every night those three men, um, they, they...” She became teary-eyed. “If that was not bad enough, my husband used to get drunk and beat me up. He’d do very bad things, um, ah, burned my body with cigarettes, and, and, other beastly stuff.” She choked up at the painful memory of the brutality. She blew her nose. “I got fed up and

chopped off his hand.” She said it calmly as if that rascal’s hand was no better than a chicken head.

Although aware of the paucity of a pool of marriageable-age girls due to abortion of female fetuses and cruel killing of newborn girls in many parts of the country, this was the first time he came face to face with its consequences. Still, he just couldn’t believe this modest maiden’s bold act. In his view that blackguard got off rather easily.

“Siri, how did you actually do it?”

“Sir, very simple. That scoundrel passed out after too much toddy. I went outside, got an axe and thwack, that’s it. Hand on the floor, blood everywhere, he screamed blue murder and tried to chase me. I ran very fast all the way to Big Sir’s, ah, I mean your father, house, um, before the bad guys got their hands on me and gagged me, and, and, ah, um, I worked in Big Sir’s fields, he’s the big zamindar, very kind man, sir. He saved me sir, he really did.” She rubbed her thumb and first two fingers to indicate the role of money. “Sir, I became Big Sir’s property. As long as he was around no one dared to touch me. But, now…” she shivered, “They will use me mercilessly; they will hurt me every day. Death is much better. But they won’t kill me, see they need my snatch.” She sobbed silently. She wiped off the tears with her *pallu*, “Sir, you are the son; now, all Big Sir’s property is yours. So, you own me. You can do anything with me. If you don’t help me I’ll kill myself.”

He was saddened at her vulnerable position. “Don’t worry, I’ll make sure, ah, no one will hurt you. You have my word, okay?” He patted her.

\*\*\*

AS PER THE AGE-OLD Hindu traditions, Deepak, the scion, inherited all the property, movable as well as immovable. Mr. Narasimham bequeathed his wife’s jewelry—considerable amount of gold, silver, pearls and diamonds—to his daughters and ten lakh rupees to Siri.

\*\*\*

THE HOUSE WAS, AT LONG LAST, quiet and peaceful. The relatives left; his snotty sisters returned to their big cities. Now, no longer harassed with conflicting commands of the two ladies, the cook’s demeanor improved and delectable dishes again appeared on the dining table. Once again, Siri took charge of the household.

Sipping a cold beer, Deepak reviewed the situation. Overseeing the estate would be an onerous job, though not a full time one. His father went to the village almost every week, for a couple of days, to keep an eye on the manager and workers. And during harvest time, he camped out in the village to safeguard the produce. But Deepak lived too far off to make such weekly trips. In his absence, the manager might be tempted to cheat him. As his father was fond of saying, he who holds the honey is bound to lick his fingers. The alternative, sell the farms and the orchards, would be a pity as that land had been in his family for several generations. And if he were to sell it

off, his father would definitely frown from his celestial abode up above. Deepak told himself: It is imperative I return home for good.

Now, he had the unenviable task of convincing Vani to move back to Vizag. Actually, his parents were deeply disappointed at his decision to move to Bangalore. Deepak enjoyed his work at the shipyard and had a good social life. And then his arranged marriage turned out to be troublesome.

In the beginning, he was happy with Vani who, at that time, was a junior faculty member at the university. But when Vani landed an academic position at the prestigious Gandhi University in Bangalore, things got complicated. His parents didn't endorse the move. In fact, his father, a much-respected Dean at the local university, scoffed the idea, saying that Vani would be a small fish in a sea of sharks. But Vani brushed it off.

A well-trained engineer, Deepak had no problem finding a job at a multinational company in Bangalore. But, he was unhappy in that big, bustling city and missed his home town, his parents, and his childhood friends, now in important positions at Vizag. Also, he missed the beach and the sapphire waters of Bay of Bengal. Vani, on the other hand, happily hurled herself into work.

To clear his head, he stepped out of the house and walked aimlessly on the beach and gazed at the white sailboats in the blue waters of the bay. He thought, they better sail back to the marina before the storm hits. Munching on freshly roasted peanuts, he enjoyed the sound of waves—swish, swish, swish—the intermittent foam

caressing his feet, and the squish of the soft, wet sand between his toes. He threw a peanut up above and caught it with his mouth. Seagulls squawked, a foghorn sounded at a distance and with the gradual setting of the sun and the concomitant twilight, beacon of the light house began to appear brighter by the minute. As the tide rose, he bent down to fold his pants up to his knees.

Suddenly a big wave hit the shore and children playing in the water shrieked back to their guardians. Wet up to his thighs, he continued his sedate stroll. And yet another violent wave surged and he lost balance and was flat on his back, staring at the blue twilight. He shivered at the cool breeze, and to get warm he jogged back home.

He got rid of his clothes and showered in the outdoor shower stall. At the roar of thunder and flashes of lightning, he wrapped a towel around, and ran into the house. And then it started to pour, torrential rains hit the roof and the window panes and the winds howled and the tree branches shook.

When he went into the dining room for a beer, Siri said, “Sir, dinner’s ready,” and motioned him to the head of the table. While she carefully poured the ice-cold liquid into a frosted mug, he was amazed at her transformation, from conservative to contemporary. In a snug-fitting hipster sari, revealing slim midriff, and a sleeveless blouse baring slim arms, she looked stunning. Swinging her shapely hips, she sashayed into the kitchen, and in a few minutes rolled out bowls of steaming white rice, sautéed eggplant slices, stir-fried colocasia rounds, and lamb cubes in a red sauce. She placed a mound of rice at the center of his plate and small portions of other items around it.

Aware that he liked to read while eating, she brought his iPad and went back to the kitchen.

He thought, I'm getting used to all this pampering; it will be hard now to eat the tasteless food of that cranky cook in Bangalore. One more reason to return home for good. But, he questioned whether Vani would be willing to swallow her pride and give up her futile struggle to soar with the stars of science—disciples of Nobel Laureates and products of Ivy League schools.

The lashing rain continued to pelt the windows and thunder boomed and lightning flashed. The sound of fierce surf hitting the shore reached the house. At this rate the big waves would definitely pound the high embankments, and the low-lying areas might be flooded.

In the cozy living room with a book in his hand and small whiskey by his side, he was glad to be indoors. And then the lights blinked a few times and went off, as if giving up the fight with Mother Nature. Enveloped by pitch darkness, he stumbled his way to the mantel for a flash light.

Getting ready for bed, he heard a gentle knock. He got hold of the flashlight and opened the door. In the dim light, he saw Siri in a translucent nightie. “Sir, I’m scared, thunder and lightning, ah, very, very dark” she shivered, “c-c-c-can I sleep in your room?”

Without waiting for an answer she simply unrolled a coir mat.

“You shouldn’t sleep on the hard floor. Don’t we have a camp cot in the store room? Come, let’s get it.”

They went to the other end of the house and opened the storeroom. A rat scurried past and Siri screamed and clung to him. They dusted off the cot and carried it out. Then they brought a mattress from the guest room. They both laid down on their beds, wide awake.

She said, “Sir, sorry, I spoiled your sleep.”

“No worries, with all this loud thunder and bright lightning, how can anybody sleep?”

“Sir, did you think about my case?”

“I’m still thinking.”

“Lemme help you think faster.” She simply came to his bed and started to go down on him.

Holding her sinewy shoulders, he gently pulled her up. “No, no, no, we can’t, ah, um, you and my father...”

She laughed merrily and doubled over. “I fooled everybody, even your sharp sisters, ha, ha, ha.” Still laughing loudly, she wiped her eyes. “Sir, a single woman is a fair game to most men. If I didn’t pretend that I’m Big Sir’s woman, the driver, the gardener, the handyman, ah, even that lousy milkman with his front teeth missing, they all, um, you know what I mean...” She sighed and snuggled up to him. “I know you want me, the way you looked at me from the very beginning, ah, when I came to this



house, ha, ha, ha, you can't fool Siri." She slid out of her nightie and playfully squeezed his hardness.

Tired after their amorous encounter, they drifted off to sleep. And the raging storm continued to cause havoc.

In the morning, when he opened his eyes, he was all alone in his bed. He recollected her lush body, her musky smell, and her earthy and eager exploits. Warm and vocal, she gave herself fully and freely. Yet, another very important reason to return home for good.

Siri knocked and walked in with a steaming cup of coffee. She drew the curtains and sunlight poured in. "Thank goodness, the storm has gone out to the sea."

He sat up against the headboard and sipped his brew. "Siri, thank you for everything."

"No need for that, sir. I'm now completely yours."

She dropped her nightie and stood completely in the buff. Nutmeg nipples stood on brown globes; black bush between fleshy thighs beckoned. When she put her hair up, he found her hairy axilla strangely titillating and held out his arms. She kissed him on his lips and slid her hand down. "Did you think about my case, sir?"

He cupped her perky breasts and gently rolled the nipples between his fingertips. "You didn't give me much time to think." He chuckled.

She laughed vivaciously, "Maybe I leave you in peace, and then you can think of my case, right?"

He caressed her firm buttocks and suckled her erect, pebble-hard nipples. “I’m joking, yeah, yeah, I’m gonna stay back, try to get a job in town and manage the land. So, you don’t have to go anywhere, okay, now your case is closed.”

She giggled, “Case closed, base open. My base will always be open for you, only you.” She guided him into her.

Glowing with the intensity of the moment their bodies entwined in a state of bliss. Her head rested on his broad chest, she listened to his rapid heartbeats, and wiped the glistening sweat beads on his forehead. “Sir, can I use the money Big Sir gave me, ah, um, to go to college?”

“But did you finish high school?”

“Yes, sir, I mean I passed matriculation, equal to high school. Big Sir sent me to tutors to learn English, Telugu, Science and Math and History and Geography. Big Sir was gonna enroll me in college, but...I’ll miss him, he was very good to me,” her lips trembled and she began to sob, tear drops fell on her cheeks like pearls.

He wiped the tears and stroked her head. “Siri, the money is yours to use as you like. I’ll help you with college application. What do you wanna major in?”

“Computers, there are lots of jobs.”

## **Demons**

*Michael Ace*

Blank sky is unusual  
It is ritual; prevalence of  
Spirits over everything human.

I see the larger parts  
Of me in the  
Clouds...

Holding themselves  
Together in a  
Dark, heavy  
& weary  
Form...

& sometimes when  
They lose hold  
Of themselves  
& it begins  
To rain...

I run inside, hiding  
From my own  
Demons.

Demons were there  
Among the boys  
Fighting at the  
Park last  
Night...

They were among  
The onlookers,  
& the elders  
Sprinkling  
More blues to  
The flame.

Demons are everywhere  
Our hands can reach  
& even beyond.

## **One if by Sea**

*Lana Bella*

Dearest here, I am sundered in  
the dawning grey, fluting air  
after the Shearwaters' flights.  
Making ceremony of the dark,  
I rock me through the rough  
and tumbled floor, where tales  
of sunken ships pitch up from  
hinterland of the wider world.  
One if by sea, I air-bruise into  
waves with lungful of sand on  
some faraway beach, foam-agog  
with 68.65 mph wind worth of  
chills. Off the margin and into  
vast, I hunger more for the black  
walled in glass, rise and fall as  
confits of the seer and peppery  
seen casting off from the sunrise  
on the ford, as I myself go reef  
to ochre fowls, pearl-button shirt  
nerves wet to the salt-set down.

## **The One I Love in this World is a Dying Person...**

*"What to say to those whom you love in this world"*

*—Karen An-Hwei Lee*

*Michael Akuchie*

To those who reach for the small of my hand  
& quicken the outbreak of want.  
To those I have filled with tenderness  
like an ocean sunk into a shallow abdomen.  
To those whose names swirl along  
in the undercurrents of a casual thought.  
To those whose hands disclose the distribution of scars.  
To those who belittle the scourge of loss  
& conjure up a universe colored by sunrises.  
To those whose names are preserved in poems.  
The one I love in this world is a dying person  
that doesn't acknowledge prayer as a lifeline.  
Let the Lord swallow the earth to churn out repentance.  
All I do is to never deprive the body of direction.

## Back from Furlough

*Shmavon Azatyan*

A CLOUDLESS AZURE HUNG over the highway. The intermittent traffic, the changing scenery – hamlets, then plains, then mountains, then orchards – lulled Hyko into a light doze. The red Niva cavorted its way through the ditches and potholes, the engine whirring loudly.

Styop snorted and spat. It startled Hyko. He was getting a ride from Styop, a nineteen-year-old conscript driver who was serving in the Army Headquarters as Hyko. Hyko had fought him two months ago. He hated Styop's marabou stature, his grey eyes, his convulsive shrugging shoulders and filthy words. He had to bear it all on the way back to duty.

Styop was sprawled on his seat, driving in the spirit of *I have you in my clutches*. Two months back, in the same spirit he beat up Hyko's friend, Max, because he had sworn back to an old timer. Hyko didn't agree that Max was wrong; arguing that recourse to physical force was unjustified. But that was the order of things. The old timers had each other's backs. They didn't care about a justification. They surrounded Max and poured a barrage of kicks and punches into him. Hyko

and the other rookies didn't stand by each other. That started the wreck. The death of justification.

“Do you usually get there in four hours?” Hyko asked, thinking that talking might help, even with a scum.

But Styop shot daggers. “Hyko, you're not stupid, are you?” he said and then, hurrying to smooth out this *slip-of-the-lip*, “don't you know Styop drives fast? Styop can beat anybody on the road.”

Hyko balled his fists. It would feel great to land a jab on the sucker's face. This is his chance... If it weren't for the old timers, he would have beaten the hell out of Styop. Yeah, serves him right, he could have declined taking this fucking ride with Styop. He wanted to save money. But the old timers were going to demand an explanation why he didn't want to get a ride with Styop anyway because both were coming the same day and time. Well, maybe it was his chance to beat up Styop. He'll wait for his moment. He's gotta do it.

Hyko couldn't help thinking about that day when Styop and the old timers roughed up Max. In the morning, Max was messing around on the local computer network. A swear word popped up on his screen. Max replied to the anonymous message, swearing back. One of the old timers rushed into the room and said to Max: “You'll answer for it tonight.” Later, in the evening, a few old timers and Styop whipped Max. When Hyko demanded an explanation, Styop told him to go to hell. He threw a jab at Styop. They fought for almost an hour. But because Hyko



had stood up for his friend, Styop didn't mind him much afterwards. He was a "plucky guy."

And now four hours' drive with that jerk, Hyko thought. The four hours was nothing compared to twelve months he had yet to do with Styop in his service. He turned back to check on his guitar – his mother's gift to him on his birthday long time ago. It was his hope. He and Max would extract all the beauty in the world from the instrument to drive away the shit they had to face every day during their service. He was going to play it in the evenings after work, and that would help him forget the day's problems. Forget Styop, at least for a while. He promised himself he won't ask Styop for any favours, or have to do with him after they got back.

\*\*\*

THE NIVA SPED. Hyko was wedged between the bags in the back seat. Ghevor from the Check Point Unit, whom they had picked up on the way, had claimed the front seat. Styop and Ghevor prattled about how many women they had fucked while on furlough. Styop pushed down on the accelerator. The speedometer jumped to 100. The road back to duty, however, was seemingly endless.

Styop checked Hyko in the rear-view mirror and then turned to Ghevor.

"Hyko's a good guy. He's got his friend's back. So we didn't whip his ass."

Hyko rubbed his cigarette on his palm, distracting himself with the burning pain.

Ghevor drew from his own cigarette. “What did his friend do?”

“Swore at Sagho.”

“For what?”

“Thinks he’s cool. Dumbass!”

Hyko crushed the cigarette in his fist. Styop pushed a cassette into the player, *No Mercy* came on: “Where do you go, my lovely? Where do you go? I wanna know, oh oh e-oh!!” Hyko pushed the crushed cigarette through the slit of Ghevor’s window.

Styop crossed over into the oncoming lane. Hyko glared ahead. A new black Volga bore down on them from the other direction. At the last second, it swerved, its horn barking furiously. They got clear of it safely, but the near-hit sent shivers down Hyko’s spine. Ghevor offered his box of Camels to Hyko, as if nothing had happened. He declined.

“You could kill us, Styop.” Hyko tried to sound as amicable and as discreet as possible.

“Shut up!” Styop replied.

“Scared?” asked Ghevor, turning to Hyko.

“You work with computers,” said Styop irritated, “what the fuck do you know about driving?”

Would it ever come to an end – that lonesome stretch of road with the hissing traffic outside and the loud clamour of the engine? Hyko was sickened to

think that he was riding with the jerk who had worked over his friend. They all knew Max was clean. That jerk had been picking on him for days just trying to find a fault with him. He had to find an excuse to get even with Max, just because one evening Max had been bold enough to shake his status. Just two weeks after they had started service, the old timers gathered them together in one of their houses. They were pissed off that the rookies didn't follow their instructions and orders. It was the order in the army that if a private declared his non-allegiance to any of the groups or individual fellow-privates, then he had no right to seek help or advice from or rely on anybody, and he had to deal with all his problems on his own.

Something almost impossible for a rookie if he wanted to stay out of trouble. But even if anyone wanted to be on their own, the old timers wouldn't like it. Styop and old timers meant to keep the rookies under their thumb, to make them do their duties with their own. They were the aces, and the rookies their cat's paws. When the old timers' reprimanding reached a peak, a silence fell on the room. Then Styop asked: "Who among you all is fucking confident that he can worry along on his own?" And Max said "me." That meant Max *got it all*, that he stole the whip hand Styop held over the rookies. And even after he'd whipped Max, Styop wouldn't leave the "young" alone. It had become a habit for him to come to Hyko and Max's house, intoxicated, stinking, crying for money, cachinnating at his own gibberish. He'd then grab a soap or a razor and leave. Just because they were rookies.

Hyko looked at the guitar next to him, thrust between Ghevor's seat back and his seat. He knew he could use his hands to put beauty in his head. He was going to play as soon as they arrived.

They passed through a busy country stretch. Styop tailgated a ten-wheeler truck. He shifted to fourth, the differential gear rumbled, and the car lurched to the left of the truck. He was quick enough to react to the oncoming traffic by sliding back into his original position in the wake of the truck.

“Fucking truck!” cried Styop.

“Try again,” Ghevor said, looking at the meadows on the right.

The highway widened, and Styop tried to overtake the ten-wheeler. An oncoming pick-up truck steadily approached. Styop hit on the accelerator, and the Niva roared ahead. The pick-up driver sounded his horn, but Styop continued his course and slammed his horn in reply. The pick-up drew closer. Hyko's heart raced, the sweat dripping from his forehead. The Niva nearly sideswiped both the truck and the pick-up.

Hyko stared at the nape of Styop's shaved swarthy neck sporting a neat hair fringe, below which the spinal vertebrae looked like walnuts stuck under his skin. How innocently exposed was that son of a bitch!

\*\*\*

THE NIVA RUSHED HEADLONG on the cleared highway. Hyko's mind shifted through the treeless waste, the dull stretch of the highway, the zipping cars, as he

squeezed himself among the bags on the back seat to try to nap. Styop and Ghevor kept chatting. Styop turned up the music whenever he checked and saw Hyko's eyes were shutting.

Far off, the pale bluish mountains had furlfurlows and broken shoulders, which now Hyko could see from a different angle. As they reached the outskirts of a village, Styop slowed down. At the curb of the highway, some people were settling into a violet sedan 07. Two of them were young women in shorts, and the other two - children; one was a young man, and an elderly lady. As they got nearer, Styop hooted the horn.

"Sweet chicks," Styop cried, moaning lustfully.

"Oh man, I'd spare a day for them," said Ghevor.

Ghevor cranked the window and put his head out. "One has super legs. Did you see it?"

"The red one?" asked Styop, excited. "I like the other one. What a pussy!"

A horn blew. Hyko looked through the rear screen. The 07 was requesting to overtake. Ghevor leaned across Hyko to look into the 07 through the rear screen. The ruddy young woman in the front seat was talking to the driver. Hyko could see her bosom framed by the windscreen. He thought she was attractive.

"She's dazzled me, boy!" Ghevor cried.

The 07 signalled for overtake, moving sideways to the left. Styop sped up, and the oncoming traffic forced the 07 to retreat. Hyko turned around to look

through the rear windscreen. There was a tussle inside the car. The faces of the women in the back came forward to take a look at the red Niva. The young woman was beautiful. Hyko turned around, nervous.

“You’d bang her the whole day, wouldn’t you?” Styop asked, grinning.

“Try and stop me!” said Ghevor again leaning across Hyko for a view of the women in the 07.

Styop slowed to 40 km/h. Hyko checked the 07 again. The young man at the wheel gesticulated threateningly. He turned on the blinker again, hoping to overtake them. The young woman beside him was staring at the Niva, perplexed. One of the children had a small shovel in his hand, ready to thrust into the earth the moment they arrived. Hyko pictured to himself how the women would lay a blanket on the grass, cut some bread and put the food and plates on the blanket, the man would make the barbecue, while the kids played. But the devil was gnawing at their day. And he was a part of that devil.

“Styop, they’re going for a picnic,” said Hyko. “Let them pass.”

“Hell!” Styop shouted.

“We can lick the guy, and then fuck the girls,” Ghevor said.

“I can’t wait!” cried Styop.

The driver of the 07 flung up his hands, furious. He attempted to overtake on a long curving turn with the high shoulder of rock on the left. Reacting to the 07’s easing left, Styop steered the car to the right. The 07 cut between the Niva and

the rock. Styop jabbed at the wheel and pressed hard on the accelerator. A roar let forth, and the 07 tried to go faster to complete the overtaking. There was a hullabaloo of horns, bawling of engines and whiz of tyres. The young man kept on punching the horn. Styop replied in kind. The women were glaring at the Niva, aghast. It was good the screens were tinted, Hyko thought. They couldn't see he was in the car with the suckers! Jumping for joy like two monkeys! Hyko stared at Styop's nape. His hand crept inside his pocket and felt the pen knife. He could hit him hard right in the nape with his knuckles. It would force him off the road and give 07 a chance. But it would involve all sorts of risks.

Styop pressed on the 07. An oncoming truck appeared around the curve. The 07 sank from view.

"The clonk thought he could get ahead of me," said Styop.

"You fucked with him all right!" cried Ghevor.

They lit cigarettes, yipping curses. Somewhere the road forked, and the 07 turned off their route.

The highway, as if scratched out between giant shoulders of rocks and mountains, stretched ahead empty. After a while the car edged along gulches with spree autumn leaves and chuckling rivulets. Later Hyko wouldn't be able to tell what he had seen on his way. He was disappointed in the old timers. When five months ago he, Max and a dozen other young recruits arrived at the Army Headquarters, Sagho and Lyov, were the aces. As rookies, they had to follow these

old timers' instructions. Hyko thought he knew what he was and was not supposed to do. They all thought they knew. But they made mistakes one after the other. And the whole squad got punished, but then the culprit had to get his second punishment this time by the old timers who were furious, because the rookies didn't follow their instructions. After a couple of time the whole squad was sent on fatigues, the old timers gathered the rookies after hours. In a small room, they jumped on the rookies for their "whatever attitude." Hyko accepted that hierarchy, that bossing around – it was man's world. But he could never understand why Styop, who was just nineteen, unschooled, stupid and violent, had to sit on one side of Sagho, a university graduate, and talk about what the "young guys," who were a few years older than he, could or could not do. Why?

\*\*\*

WHEN THEY REACHED a halfway point, Styop and Ghevor decided to stop for food. Hyko had no appetite, besides he would never eat with the jerks. Ghevor said that he was very thirsty and would drink tun. Styop decided they could ask at a nearby village.

"Guys, we're gonna lose a lot of time," said Hyko.

"Come on, man!" cried Ghevor, "You want to stay off duty as long as you can."

"Maybe the ride gave him indigestion," Styop said and laughed.



Styop parked at the outskirts of a village, in a gulch with a river. The village was on the other side of the river. After crossing the river, they started uphill. Suddenly, Ghevor raised his arm. They saw something flash behind the bushes. It seemed to be a light blue jacket. Styop jumped forward into the bushes. In a couple of seconds, Hyko saw a teenager girl with a basket of laundry on her hands, tripping downhill. She was probably in her last year at school or something, with a beautiful tan, chestnut hair, smallish, but with muscular legs and hands.

“Ooh, she’s hot,” said Ghevor in a low voice.

Styop crashed through the bushes and walked towards the girl, motioning them to come on up.

As Ghevor and Hyko got nearer, Hyko heard Styop asking “You live in the village?”

She was not shy, but ignored the strangers by pretending to be very busy. She glanced at them and went on emptying the basket and putting the wrinkled clothes on the edge of the water.

“Say, we’d like to buy some tun from you.”

“We don’t have tun to sell,” she replied.

“You could give us some to drink, eh?” asked Styop, grinning.

She took her time to answer. “My brother’s coming soon. You can ask him.”

“I’ll help you to carry the basket,” said Styop.

“We’re taking it to my aunt in his car.”

“What’s your bro’s car?” asked Ghevor, spitting into the river.

“A truck.”

Styop nodded. He and Ghevor walked away. Hyko couldn’t hear their conversation, but it was obvious they made a plan - Ghevor had to go up the road and try to get rid of the brother. Hyko regretted he had got out of the car; he couldn’t be part of that. She might agree to go with Styop, but Hyko knew that Ghevor was going to have her, too, and she didn’t look like a whore. These fuckers only care about fucking women! What if he tried to talk them into passing this young woman? When Hyko walked up, Ghevor asked Styop:

“You got a thing with you?”

“Don’t care,” said Styop.

“You’re crazy!”

“Look here,” said Hyko. “Don’t do it. She’s a virgin.”

“Have you checked?” said Ghevor, grinning.

“I won’t hurt her, don’t worry!” said Styop.

“Well, maybe she doesn’t want to have sex with you- ,” Hyko stammered.

“You- She doesn’t know you.”

“Come on, man, she’s a delicious chunk,” said Ghevor, upset at Hyko’s opposing their plan.

“So what’s the plan?” Hyko said, gritting his teeth, sick at his own question.

“You both are going to... ?”

“Listen, man,” said Styop, “if you don’t want to fuck her, go get some sleep in the car.”

“Would you like it, if somebody did the same to your sister?” cried Hyko.

“What?” came from Styop’s mouth. His face turned red and his grey eyes into big white balls. He stepped forward, but Ghevor pulled him back. “I’m gonna smash your jaw, if you say that again.”

“Of course, your sister must marry as a virgin...”

Styop became furious. He tried to get to Hyko, but Ghevor blocked his way.

Ghevor stared into Hyko’s eyes menacingly: “You’re going to answer for what you’ve just said about Styop’s sister.”

“Look,” said Hyko caught off guard, “I just want to say that you two aren’t fair, because you would kill the guy or the guys who did the same thing to your sisters.”

“You think you’re somebody that can tell me what to do?” Styop yelled. “Don’t you dare tell me what to do, OK? Got it?”

Ghevor walked Styop away, whispering in his ear. Styop strolled downhill towards the girl, and Ghevor climbed up back to Hyko. He gestured to Hyko:

“Let’s go, man.”

They walked up the road to the car.

“We’re gonna try it, if she hooks up easily, then it’s not our fault,” said Ghevor, panting.

“You’ll ruin her life,” said Hyko.

“Girls are meant for fucking. Didn’t you see it? She’s got the itch real bad.”

“I didn’t see anything like that. She’s an innocent girl, and she doesn’t want to fuck you.”

Ghevor stopped walking. He put both hands at his waist sides. As he took some time to think Hyko was a bit relieved that Ghevor might back off.

“Look, Mr. Judge,” said Ghevor, “you may be right, but you’re not authority to boss around here, OK?”

“Fuck you!” cried Hyko.

Ghevor flung his clenched hand at Hyko. Hyko grabbed his hand with one hand and socked his jaw with the other. Ghevor cried from pain and grabbed Hyko. They fell down to the unpaved road.

“We’re gonna beat the hell out of you,” Ghevor screamed at the top of his voice. “Just wait till we get there.”

Hyko let him go, and the first thought seeing Ghevor’s bloody lip and the scratches on his face was the painful anticipation of a scandal around him once they arrived at the headquarters. He turned away and went uphill. He got into the car and lay in the back seat. In a minute, Ghevor came up holding a handkerchief over his mouth. He took a pack of condoms out from the dash board flap and disappeared down the hill. Hyko shut his eyes and tried thinking about his guitar and the pieces he liked playing.

He was almost dozing, when he heard a car approaching. He snapped his eyes open – it was a truck. Ghevor turned up suddenly and walked up to the truck. A young man with a heavy tan on his face and arms, rattled hair and the expression of one of those naïve village kids Hyko had seen in the country leaped down from the cabin. Ghevor started to talk incessantly, blocking the young man’s way to the river. The young man listened to Ghevor, his hands at his waist. He looked in the direction Ghevor pointed out with a finger. The latter was speaking alarmingly, impatiently gesticulating. Eventually, the young man returned to his truck and got in. He waved to Ghevor and drove away.

Hyko considered going out and telling the guy about the bastards’ plan. But did he have to? If she didn’t want to have sex, she would scream for help. They were close. The village was close, too. He would then go... He’d pick up a rock and crush Styop’s head. But could he? Once they got to the headquarters, the word would be out that he assumed responsibility for something that he wasn’t entitled to. You can’t be a rookie and boss an old timer about. He would get a good lick. That wasn’t all – during the remaining period of the time he had to serve, Hyko would be on the spot. He would have hard times with the old timers and with his fellow-privates.

Hyko got out of the car and opened the trunk. In the midst of their bags he saw a huge monkey wrench and a car jack. He took the jack out. It was heavy. Just one hit and that jerk would be wounded. He deserved it. As he approached the

bushes, it was all quiet. Where is Ghevor? Next he thought he looked ridiculous, standing in the gulch with the car jack, looking around foolishly. He went back to the car, put the jack in the trunk, got inside and closed his eyes. Hyko held his head in both hands and pressed it on the soft seat not to hear anything, not to see anything, and, if possible, not to feel anything. Why did he agree to be given a ride? He hugged his guitar. He wished he could play a sonata or Pink Floyd. That would help him get rid of all the spleen that had built up like a snowball rolling on snow under his heart.

\*\*\*

THE SOUND OF THE CAR door opening woke Hyko.

It was Ghevor. He glanced at Hyko with a calm expression, underneath which his fury was tempesting.

Hyko looked at his watch. They had lost an hour and half.

“I barely made her agree,” cried Styop.

“She was pretending,” said Ghevor. “She was gonna let the first guy have her.”

“We beat everybody.”

Styop was completely ignoring Hyko.

“Her brother was so stupid,” Ghevor sniggered.

“What did you tell him?”

“That a military training’s going on. The military took your sis to your aunt’s.”

It startled Styop into laughing.

They settled into their seats. Styop and Hyko’s eyes met briefly in the rear view mirror. Hyko thought he saw a mischievous lustre that glows in the eyes of one who knows a secret. So they had planned to ignore him for the rest of the trip, but Hyko was going to get a good beating once they were back. Styop played *No Mercy* again.

Now this is the time, Hyko said to himself. He was acutely aware of the knife in his pocket. He was going to stop the sucker and cut his music. As his hand slipped into his pocket, his chest was consumed with a chill, like mint. The engine barked; the car moved uphill. The chill spread out through his limbs, his palms becoming clammy. His hands disengaged from his brain. The energy swooned across his system, like dessert sucks streams. In that barren scorched mind of his there was no soil for rationalization. The car sped up; he thumped back into the seat.

\*\*\*

IT WAS LATE AFTERNOON when they arrived. Styop dropped Hyko at his house. Ghevor was waiting for Hyko to get his stuff out of the car. Then climbing back into the car Ghevor said without looking at Hyko: “I will send somebody to tell you where to come meet us up tomorrow evening.”

Max was home. Hyko lied down a while in his room. Max played the guitar. Hyko told him the story on the way back.

“Let’s get some vodka,” Max said.

“No.”

Max lingered in the doorway.

“Not anymore.” Hyko nodded to the guitar.

Max tapped on his shoulder and walked out. Hyko could hear him using the toilet. He thought he had napped before Max stepped in his room again.

“Let’s go play cards,” said Max. “Karo and Aren are waiting – two teams.”

Hyko didn’t want to do anything. They went out to the backyard. After a few cigarettes, Max left.

The evening wasn’t moving. The sweet autumn aroma tranquilized him. But he yearned for the feel of the summer twilights. Then he didn’t have his guitar, or he would play it beneath the starry nights.

It was almost dark. The birds weren’t chirping. The crisp chill bit his limbs.

He walked inside the house. He slouched on the couch in the living room. The bookshelves laden with fiction were mounted to the wall above the fireplace. Two rocking chairs were on either side of it. There were fancy curtains and a heavy wooden dinner table. He thought his eyes shut for a while.

He got up.



In his room, he unpacked his suitcase. When changing into his tracksuit, he felt the pen knife in his pocket. The day with Styop began to encroach on him – the two junkies, the road rage, the harassing spree... He had to stop.

Hyko's eyes fell on the guitar in the corner. He picked it up. He took his time to read his mother's wishes engraved on the back of the fingerboard. Then he started scratching the body surfaces with the pen knife and chipped the edge. The dogged determination to see the guitar busted up pulsed through his arteries. His senses came back. He stabbed the instrument, once, twice, and then again and again. The body gave in. He slid the knife under one string and pulled it up as hard as he could. It was too tough. But he broke it at the third attempt. And then the next string. And the stabbing again, stronger now. In half an hour, the guitar body was a wreck, the strings groping about, the bridge and the fingerboard still stuck together, the headstock with capstans lying at his feet.

Hyko remembered something. In the garage, the landlord had all sorts of junk. He headed to the garage. In the piles of bolts, nuts, screwdrivers, and wrenches he found a rusty car jack. He carried it to the backyard, and then walked back inside the house and brought out the guitar junk. Carefully aiming, he lifted the heavy jack and hit the headstock. It leapt, undamaged. He tried again. It took a painful quarter of an hour to crush it. Then, gasping, he clenched his hands and using his knuckles broke whatever had remained of the guitar body into still smaller chips.

\*\*\*

IT WAS PAST MIDNIGHT, when Max woke him up. He held the disfigured fingerboard in his hands. The white of his eyes were rolling in the darkness.

“Why?” said Max softly.

Hyko wiped his eyes.

“They recognize us as friends and won’t bother us,” said Max.

His voice was calm, but from years of friendship Hyko recognized the timbre of irritation.

“Right,” said Hyko. “Not *us*.”

Max walked out. Hyko heard him sweeping the wreckage and throwing it into the garbage bin. He laid back down back to sleep.

## **Walkin' with You**

*E. Martin Pedersen*

I live on the canal between two small peculiar lakes  
almost every day I walk around the big one, a lovely walk, long and warm  
the water is so peaceful, the birds at rest, the palm trees  
singing of home in San Francisco Bay  
the other lake is beautiful too, I never go there though  
the other lake doesn't interest me  
it's used for growing mussels  
it's the long one I like, I could go there forever and never tire  
never tire  
I would never tire  
I hope you get it.

## **Zephyr**

*Robert Beveridge*

Lazy, loose wind, you calm me,  
alto whistle tempering my ears  
under those cold stars, as,  
round and round, I sail  
all seven seas, time and again.

Live in those unities, wind:  
enter my soul, wrapped around the rudder,  
enter my small bunk.

Zephyr, lazy wind, my  
every companion, you calm me.  
Remember your breath, all I  
need to steer my little craft.  
Stay with me, young wind.

## Mother's Epitaph

*Mosobalaje M. Abimbola*

In papa's house,  
coziness developed wings and  
it flew into the nostrils of mother,  
it crawled into her eyes from there, sometimes.  
It itched her. Always.

She grew into a mountain of waterfalls  
too tall for me to surmount.  
But at her feet, I would collect enough of her flows, to bath me.

I was washed into a stranger,  
with a swollen left foot too huge to cover papa's thong.

There was a huge gulf in the center of our home,  
only papa was fierce enough to cross  
- the almightiness of the African man you can say.

And each time he did, in ways unknown to me,  
mama becomes a garment, torn, soiled, burnt.  
Then she would fall and flow again.  
Those times, I would sit by the side pillar of what was left of the wife of Lot.

But mother would say I was her balm, and my life -her healing.  
She told me there are dark places a man should not be found,  
like the temple of salt.  
She would call me out with dry eyes and a fresh skin  
worn over her darkness.

The day I found my leg a shoe, outside,  
I realized I was a line full of adulterated enjambments.

I found a man who called his woman a temple,  
her body, a shrine,  
her ego, his prime,  
he worshipped her like a priest sold out on a course for his god.  
Yet the clouds held still.

Then, I realized the crack in papa's rugged home  
didn't have to always be.  
Mama could also be a peacock, with rainbows of feathers  
glistening, under the lordship of the sun.

I understood the tattoos beneath her skin.

I came home to drag her towards the west, she shrank.  
I sang her a lure, of a castle in my hut,  
she pulled back, like a wave from the shores.

She sang me a melody too bitter to be a song.  
It tasted like a dirge, falling from the beak of a lonely bird,  
on the weak branch of a tree with a drought of leaves.  
She said, 'The women in this part of the world are moons  
never meant to skirt beyond the laps of nights.'

I asked with a with a roasted throat,  
'Doesn't the moon bless the dawn, sometimes? Even in her prime?'  
She replied with a loud teardrop in her palm.

On her epitaph, I had it inscribed -  
'A moon, whose light never skirted beyond the laps of nights'.

## HUMMINGBIRD

*Steve Carr*

**A**T THE KITCHEN SINK, Julia felt the warm, moist spring breeze blowing in through the open window brush her cheeks. She ran her tongue across her lips; certain she could taste the honeysuckle that perfumed the air. Her hands were in a dishpan of lemon scented sudsy water. She wiggled her fingers, sending ripples across the water's surface, creating more suds. Using a sponge she wiped a plate that was in the pan and then rinsed it off and placed it in the dish drainer with the other plate. They were the last plates of a set given to her by her mother when she got married. The rim of the plate was decorated with miniature bouquets of lilacs tied together with bright red ribbons. Next she washed a frying pan that turned the water greasy. As she lifted it out of the pan, she glanced up at the window. A hummingbird with bright red, purple and blue feathers on its neck was stationary in mid-air, its tiny wings a blur as they flapped. It was looking straight at her with one eye.

“Henry, there's the first hummingbird of the season,” she said. “It's so small it could fit in the palm of my hand.”

Seated at the kitchen table, Henry flipped the page of a magazine and without looking up, said, “What did you say?”

The hummingbird turned its body and stared at her with the other eye.

“A hummingbird is right outside the window,” she said. “It’s looking at me in a very strange way.”

Henry turned the page and gazed longingly at an advertisement for a set of gulf clubs. “A hummingbird is staring at you? Are you crazy? Why would it do that?”

Julia turned from the window, and said, “I’m not crazy. I have no idea why it’s looking at me. See for yourself.”

Henry looked up at the window. The hummingbird was gone.

“I don’t see a hummingbird,” he said.

Julia turned back to the window. “It flew away. Hummingbirds are incredibly fast. But it was looking directly at me, watching me.”

Henry flipped a page and stared at a picture of a beautiful girl in a bikini lying on the bow of a yacht. “Sure, it was.”

\*\* \*

JULIA SAT IN THE WINDOW seat in her bedroom sewing a button onto one of Henry’s shirts. The breeze flowing in through the open window tousled her bobbed, gray-streaked brown hair. She enjoyed watching how nimbly her long, slender fingers pulled the needle and thread through the button holes; Henry had once said



her fingers were beautiful, but that was many years ago. She could hear him down in the living room shouting at the television while watching a football game. Finished with the button, she snipped the thread and laid the shirt in her lap. She looked out the window. Streaks of pink and purple were fanned out across the twilight sky. The cry of a loon from the nearby lake reverberated across the pine woods.

The same hummingbird as before suddenly appeared outside the window. It was close enough that Julia could hear the humming of its wings. It stared at her.

Startled, Julia jumped up and took several steps back from the window while clutching Henry's shirt to her breast. "What do you want?" she said to the bird.

The hummingbird remained stationary for a moment and then flew into the room. It eyed the yellow roses printed on the wallpaper and then flew up to one. It tapped the flower several times with its pencil-like beak and then flew to within inches of Julia's face where it hovered, looking at her.

Feeling on her face the breeze created by the bird's rapidly moving wings, Julia dropped the shirt onto the floor and put her fingertips to her cheek. She felt as if she were being kissed ever-so-gently.

"What are you doing?" Henry said, standing in the bedroom doorway. He was grasping a lottery ticket in his calloused, meaty hand.

Julia turned. "The hummingbird."

“What hummingbird?”

Julia turned and saw that the bird was gone. She ran to the window and looked out. The sky was a smokey gray. Dusk had begun to blanket the woods. A hawk's screech sounded from the nearby trees.

“The hummingbird I saw after dinner was here, in this room, just a few minutes ago,” she said.

Henry looked down at his shirt. “Why is my shirt on the floor?”

“I . . . the hummingbird . . . I'm sorry,” she said, and then rushed over and picked it up.

Henry entered the room and sat down on the edge of the bed. The springs beneath the mattress squeaked under his weight.

“I almost won a million dollars,” he said, holding up the ticket. “I was only two numbers off.”

Putting the shirt on a hanger, Julia said, “There really was a hummingbird in here.”

“Imagine what we could do with a million bucks,” he said as he opened the drawer in the bedside stand and tossed the ticket in with a pile of other tickets. He closed the drawer and then bent down and took off his boots. He threw them into a corner, causing the caked-on mud to crumble off.

Julia put the shirt in the closet. “There's something strange about that hummingbird,” she said as she returned to the window seat and sat down. She

looked out the window and inhaled the aromas of pine and cedar. Pin pricks of sparkling stars dotted the black sky. A glowing, white crescent moon cast its light across the landscape.

“Just once I wish I could bet on the winning team in a game,” Henry said as he began to unbutton his shirt. The third button down popped off and landed near his shoes.

\*\*\*

RAYS OF MOONLIGHT FILLED Julia's bedroom. Hearing the hum of the hummingbird she awoke with a start. The bird was inches from her face. She looked over at Henry. He was on his back, sound asleep, snoring loudly and exhaling stale breath. The bird tapped her nose with its beak.

“What do you want?” she said to it in a whisper.

The bird went to the open window and hung in the air, staring at her.

She threw aside her covers and quietly climbed out of bed. Bare footed and in her pale blue nightgown she crossed the bedroom and stepped up onto the window seat, and then climbed onto the bird's back, straddling it. She clutched the feathers on the sides of its neck.

The bird turned and carried Julia away. It descended to the garden where it darted from flower to flower, sucking the nectar from white crocus's, yellow daffodils, pink tulips and honeysuckle. It then flew into the woods, dodging the tree branches loaded with pine needles. Coming out of the woods, it then crossed over

the lake, passing dragonflies, clouds of gnats and flew over croaking toads on lily pads and turtles riding atop floating tree branches. On the far shore the hummingbird entered a small, moonlit meadow where deer feasted on the fresh sprouts of grass and butterflies flitted from one wildflower to the next. It stopped amidst a patch of purple larkspur where Julia climbed off the bird's back.

“I can't stay here for very long,” she said. “If Henry wakes up he'll wonder where I've gone.”

The bird gazed at her with one eye, and then with the other eye. It then flew to a cluster of light blue forget-me-nots and began to drink the nectar.

Julia wandered around the meadow, examining the petals of the flowers and letting butterflies alight on her outstretched fingers. As the first rays of dawn sunlight appeared above the treetops, and feeling drowsy, Julia laid down in a bed of clover. With her face illuminated by the moonlight, she closed her eyes and breathed in the aromas of the meadow.

“Are you going to sleep all day?” It was Henry.

Julia opened her eyes.

He was standing next to the bed and was tightly grasping her arm. A splotch of shaving cream was in his left nostril. As always he had on too much aftershave and its pungent odor wafted from him like slow moving fog. “Are you going to fix my breakfast, or what?” he said.

She sat up, and excitedly said, “Henry, I had the most incredible experience during the night. I rode on the back of the hummingbird to a meadow on the other side of the lake. It was so beautiful.”

He walked to the doorway and before going out, said, “I don't have time to listen to your wacky dreams. Are you going to fix my breakfast or not?”

Julia sat on the edge of the bed and wiped bits of clover from her feet, and then got up and dressed. She glanced at the window several times in hopes of seeing the hummingbird. Before leaving the bedroom she knelt on the window seat and scanned the yard in search of the bird.

In the kitchen Henry was seated at the table. His fishing pole and tackle box were on the floor next to his chair. He was tying a hook onto the end of the fishing line. “I should have left earlier, but I thought I'd go down to the lake and see if I can finally catch that monster catfish. There's a hundred dollars being given by Karl's barber shop to anyone who does.”

Julia put the coffee on the stove. At the sink, she opened the window and waited several minutes before she took the two plates from the dish drainer along with forks and knives to the table. She placed one setting in front of Henry and was about to sit the other plate where she sat but noticed for the first time that several of the lilac bouquets were faded, almost to the point of being invisible.

“I didn't dream it,” she said, sitting the plate down hard on the table.

Henry looked up. “Didn't dream what?”

“About riding on the hummingbird's back to the meadow,” she said.

“No one could ride on the back of a hummingbird. It's too small.”

She put the utensils next to her plate, got the frying pan, spatula, eggs and bacon and went to the stove and made breakfast.

\*\*\*

“THAT CATFISH NIBBLED ON my bait. I'm sure of it,” Henry said. Next time I'm sure to get him.” He sat on the edge of the bed and took off his boots and tossed them in the corner. “I did catch six smaller ones. I filled the sink with water and put them in it. You can clean them in the morning. Some catfish, biscuits and eggs would be great for breakfast.”

Sitting on the window seat, Julia leaned on the window sill and stared up at the glowing moon. A chorus of crickets and the hooting of an owl rose out of the darkness of the woods.

“What did you do today?” he said as he took off his shirt.

“Puttered around in the garden,” she said watching a moth fly near the window and then flit away. She sighed.

With his shirt in his lap, he said, “There's a football pool going on at work. I need to decide tomorrow what I'm going to choose.” He pulled on a loose button, detaching it from the shirt. He tossed the button in the corner with his shoes and then waded up the shirt and tossed it on top of his boots.

Julia left the window and went to her vanity dresser. She looked at her reflection in the mirror and ran her fingertips over the crows feet around the corners of her eyes.

“I’m getting old,” she said.

She turned and saw that Henry was in bed. She shut off the light, kicked off her slippers and got into bed. Henry smelled like sweat and fish. His eyes were closed. She rolled on her side and stared at the window until Henry began to snore, and then she rolled onto her back and closed her eyes.

The tapping on her nose woke her. The hummingbird was in front of her face. It looked into her left eye and then her right eye. It then flew to the window and remained there, its wings humming.

Julia tossed the covers aside and got out of bed. At the vanity dresser, she took off her wedding ring and placed it on top of her black lacquered jewellery box. She removed her pink nightgown and laid it across the vanity dresser bench. Before stepping up onto the window seat she blew a kiss to Henry. From the window seat she crawled onto the hummingbird's back and flew away.

## Time and Mirage

*Olabisi Abiodun Akinwale*

'Life has a way of sneaking into a man's eyes  
To hold his vision between two worlds; real and imaginary'

I read this somewhere in a book  
In the throat of a boy, filled with the ashes of his mother's shadow  
On his tongue is the real taste of smoke  
Rising from bodies, slain with the images of death

It's a fact that there's a part of time  
Where memories are forged on blank sheets  
Breaking the poems in every being  
Into verses of grief and dirges

In my vein is a boy  
Who thought of flowers  
And hide(s) behind every thorns of death

Under my skin is a girl, whose eyes is a castle of things  
Threatening to break her body  
At the sight of- the 'moon', 'beaches' and 'water'

In my father's house are two portraits  
That wrecks my body with silence  
-a portrait of me and my sisters  
-and another; of me and my mother

I'm a boy at the roadside of time



Sipping his days in dark quantities, because;

I do not know when my soul shall become a silent city  
Crawling into the heavens with broken walls

At the end  
The soil would mock my body with elegies

Everything my hand touches  
Have the tricks of sneaking into the pages of broken history

Life is all about running after mirages  
And things emptied of existence

My body is an enclosure of glasses  
Too fragile to hold tomorrow

I'm human  
An embodiment of mortality.

## Reflection

Two things happen whenever I stand before a mirror;  
-I see the reflection of a boy whose skin is an incarnation of withered memories  
-and of another boy whose body is a castle of silence.  
I grew up in places fighting for space  
In the eyes of women dinning with the night- naked  
Women mourning their bodies in dark rooms- with moans,  
Places where men trail the echoes of their voices by diving into songs  
Songs plaited over the earth with roses.  
These places reflects the images of boys  
Learning how to trail the wind  
And those things that thrust their hearts with wild beats,  
Boys on the street of survival  
Whose stories are lame testaments of nights when the moon mock their boyhoods  
And the stars, the radiance on their skin.  
I've tried finding those places on maps  
They said they live only in the dark corners of our hearts  
Where we wrestle with our demons  
And with those things that blend our shadows with dusty tales.  
We're reflections of lost and won battles  
Reflections of times we choke on soft dreams  
For names named after gods.  
'Nothing unclad the image of God in a man  
Than what he [the man] sees when he stand before the mirror'  
Said a man whose body is a reflection of thoughts  
Running in God's mind, when he created man  
And make his environment- his ghost.

## Salvation Hymn

*Henneh Kyereh Kwaku*

do not pull my mouth  
into sin. else i swallow  
you whole. like a pelican  
& you fall through me  
for i am hollow. i barely  
can—hold on to this  
moon lightning my  
belly. so i take a bath  
in the mouth of  
salvation's river. & the  
sins swim off  
like broke crabs & drunk  
lobsters. & into the  
mouth of waiting pelicans.  
i baptize again. i wash my  
sins anew—with salvation.

## CONTRIBUTORS

**E. Martin Pedersen**, originally from San Francisco, has lived for over 35 years in eastern Sicily where he teaches English at the local university. His poetry has appeared in *The James Dickey Review*, *Ink in Thirds*, *Mused*, *Oddville*, *Former People*, *The Bitchin' Kitsch* and others. Martin is alum of the Squaw Valley Community of Writers. He blogs at: [emartinpedersenwriter.blogspot.it](http://emartinpedersenwriter.blogspot.it)

**Henneh Kyereh Kwaku** has poems, micro-prose and essays published or forthcoming in *New South Journal*, *Three Drops Press*, *Ghana Writes*, *Lunaris Review*, *Kalahari Review*, *Praxis Magazine*, *Agbowó* and elsewhere. His chapbook *Revolution of the Scavengers* is coming out next year in the boxset *New-Generation African Poets: SABA*, published by the African Poetry Book Fund and Akashic Books. He holds a Bachelor of Public Health in Disease Control from the University of Health and Allied Sciences. He is from Gonasua in the Bono Region of Ghana.

**Lana Bella**, A Pushcart nominee, is an author of two chapbooks, *Under My Dark* (Crisis Chronicles Press, 2016) and *Adagio* (Finishing Line Press, forthcoming), has had poetry and fiction featured with over 270 journals, *2River*, *California Quarterly*, *Chiron Review*, *Columbia Journal*, *Poetry Salzburg Review*, *San Pedro River Review*, *The Hamilton Stone Review*, *The Ilanot Review*, *The Writing Disorder*, *Third Wednesday*, *Tipton Poetry Journal*, *Yes Poetry*, and elsewhere. She resides in the US and the coastal town of Nha Trang, Vietnam, where she is a mom of two far-too-clever, frolicsome imps.

**Michael Ace** is a poet currently living in Abuja, FCT Nigeria. His works have appeared on *Praxis Magazine*, *Kalahari Review*, *AFAS Review*, *African Writer*, *Agbowo*, *Jacar Press* & elsewhere. He has curated several contests and anthologies, all for the betterment of literature. He was selected and published in the 2018 Best New African Poets Anthology, the same year he became a finalist of *Lagos International Poetry Festival*. In 2017, one of his poems was selected as best from around the world by *Wildsound Review*. He manages submissions and publications on *ACEworld Magazine* and *EroGospel*. This he does with coding, blogging, graphics and web, book publishing.

**Michael Akuchie** is an Igbo-Esan poet currently studying English and Literature at the University of Benin, Nigeria. An *Orison Anthology* nominee, his poems have previously appeared on *collective Unrest*, *Impossible Task*, *Anomaly*, *TERSE* and elsewhere. He is on Twitter as @Micheal\_Akuchie. He is the author of the micro-chap, *Calling out Grief*, recently published by Ghost City Press.

**Mosobalaje M. Abimbola** is a graduate of Industrial Chemistry. He is a lover of art literature, and is actively engaged in writing of several genres of literature such as poetry, prose, plays, reviews and translations. He lives and writes from Akure, Ondo State, Nigeria.

**Olabisi Abiodun Akinwale** is a Nigerian poet and writer, an explorer of darkness, silence and beauty. Winner of the *Luna Art Poetry Contest 2018*, *SRAF Award*, Federal University Lafia Best Student Poet of the year 2017 amongst others. His works have been published in *Tuck Magazine*, *ExpressIt*, *DWARTS*, *Festival of Poetry* etc. he lives and writes from Jos, a city on the Plateau, somewhere in the North.

**Robert Beveridge** makes noise (xterminal.bandcamp.com) and writes poetry just outside Cleveland, OH. Recent/upcoming appearances in *Wildflower Muse*, *Noble/Gas Qtrly*, and *The Ibis Head Review*, among others

**Rudy Ravindra** attended a summer writing workshop at Iowa and trained under ZZ Packer. His prose has appeared in *Ginosko*, *Chicago Literati*, *Saturday Evening Post online*, and others. He lives in Wilmington, NC More at: <http://rudyravindra.wix.com/rudy>

**Shmavon Azatyan** writes fiction and screenplay, as well as poetry. He holds a PhD in Humanities and Social Sciences from La Trobe University. Shmavon's short stories, essays and poems appear in many countries. Shmavon's research interest resides in narrative, fiction and film, and in the narrativity of space. Shmavon's fiction output appears in *New London Writers*, (a short story 'Let's Talk' 2012), in *Masque&Spectacle*, (a short story 'Death Episodes' 2017), Fiction and Non-Fiction anthology 1999-2018, Van Aryan, 2018.

**Steve Carr**, who lives in Richmond, Virginia, has had over 340 short stories published internationally in print and online magazines, literary journals and anthologies since June, 2016. Five collections of his short stories, *Sand*, *Rain*, *Heat*, *The Tales of Talker Knock* and *50 Short Stories: The Very Best of Steve Carr*, have been published. His plays have been produced in several states in the U.S. He has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize twice. His Twitter is @carrsteven960. His website is <https://www.stevencarr960.com/> He is on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/steven.carr.35977>

## CALL FOR SUBMISSION

Art is sudden, almost forceful in creation; its offerings are subtle, but never transient.

- Dami Lare

*Lunaris Review: a journal of Art and the Literary* is open for submissions for its Twelfth Issue. It seeks unpublished works of fiction, non-fiction, poetry and visual art. Kindly visit our submissions page at <http://review.lunaris.com.ng/submission-guidelines/> for guidelines and our Facebook page *Lunaris Review* for further details. All submissions should be sent to [submit@lunaris.com.ng](mailto:submit@lunaris.com.ng)

Either write something worth reading or do something worth writing. - Benjamin Franklin