

N N E R

Northern New England Review

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Northern New England Review

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Northern New England Review is published as a creative voice for the Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine region. *NNER* publishes writers and artists who live in, are from, or have connections to Vermont, New Hampshire, or Maine. If you live here, were once from here, lost or found your heart here, we welcome your words and experiences.

Northern New England Review is edited and designed by students and faculty at Franklin Pierce University in Rindge, New Hampshire. Questions can be sent to Rebecca Peacock Dragon, teaching editor, NNER@franklinpierce.edu

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SLEEPLESS

EDITORS' NOTE

When many folks think about Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont, the most common images tend towards the natural and pastoral, the beautiful and idyllic. However, for the 44th volume of Northern New England Review, our editorial team wanted to explore the complexities and contradictions of our region more deeply. In our call for submissions, we presented our vision, “to feature artists and writers who uncover the lesser-seen and explored aspects of New England. It isn’t all just birch trees, maple syrup, and fall foliage!”

Our contributors did not disappoint. In this volume we are reminded that the lowing cattle in the field are used for food and visit an absurd scene: a naked lady confronted by a spider. The reader sees a picturesque New England landscape through the lens of a social media post.

We also get a deeper look into the dark and despairing, particularly in three pieces about a contributor’s mentally ill father, who was homeless on the streets of Burlington, VT during the coldest winter on record. One piece tells a tale about siblings going to visit their father on death row, inspired by the last person remaining on death row in NH. In one pair of poems, we hear the judgmental voices from people living on opposite “sides of the track.” And yes, this volume is also filled with the beauty that emerges from both human relationships and our stunning natural environment.

We hope that you not only enjoy these works of poetry, prose, and fiction, but that they help to give you a clearer and more holistic view of our region. It has been our honor to bring these pieces to publication.

~Rebecca Peacock Dragon

**NORTHERN
NEW ENGLAND
REVIEW**

William Doeski

CATTLE IN WINTER RAIN

Composed of bundled chestnut strops,
the cattle brave the winter rain
with undiminished appetites warming
their succulent pink musculature.
My neighbor raises these creatures
to serve in his pricey restaurant,
their dismemberment an honor.
The cold rain embraces them
with colorless affection that
they will appreciate only
the moment before the stun gun
dismisses their tiny intellects.

Mona Anderson

WHAT KIND OF PERSON

smushes a nickel-sized spider with a white tissue
as it rests against a white wall next to a white towel

thinking about its escape from the crazed naked
lady about to step into the shower, the crazed naked lady

who swiftly crushes it and mumbles “sorry spider”
then tosses its murdered remains into the white wastebasket.

Later I imagine spiders smother me, shroud my face
and arms, attack my eyes, crawl up my legs. I let them

invade because what kind of person kills a spider
in Spring when tulips and daffodils gasp for breath,

bluebirds lay eggs, bears yawn awake, frogs unthaw,
buds on the maple glisten blood red.

What will I kill next? Stomp ants nesting in the walkway? Shoot the
skunk in the shed? How many trapped mice?

I could have found an empty yogurt container,
captured that damn spider, tossed it outdoors. I was too lazy

and in a hurry. And naked. There is that. Still, how easy
it is to whitewash myself in the world.

Mona Anderson

AS WE HEAD TO THE DUMP

A snow-burdened limb threatens to pull down
the power line to our country house, plunge us into
darkness for the second time this week.

Does its leaning mother tree yearn to lie
on the forest floor, become a refuge for squirrels,
feed the bugs and fungi, recycle into the earth?

I'm suddenly embarrassed with all this garbage
we'll soon proudly sort, glass shattered into one pile,
plastics tossed there, cardboard in one bin, cans

in another while we pretend someone somewhere
will remake it into something useful -- more plastic
bottles? Likely something to bring again to the dump.

We'll heave the rest into the giant compactor
that takes it somewhere, I don't know where. I want
to make excuses. I'm old. I do my part. What else can I do?

The limb shakes in the wind. We'll lose our power again
for sure. This time you promise to buy me coffee first,
and a quill pen to write poetry by candlelight.

Malik Selle

UNIVERSITY ROMANCE

Cold though undead moments of the day
We prefer the future not the past.
At right angles we began to lay
In that dry Bates natatorium.

Reading American compendiums,
My tortoiseshell glasses by your feet.
Even child romance would not last
Holding hands on your college street.

Sure enough I watched with wet eyes
This strange Colosseum – empty pool –
Heard white-tile rejoicing cries
Not sober crowds intent on booing.

Characters onto ourselves screwing
Could not say just where the heat begins.
Gin and grain whet our theatrics school
Though it would not fix my broken lens.

Robbie Gamble

SUMMIT SCONE

When you posted a photo on social media
of your left hand holding a wedge of blackberry-lemon scone you
baked earlier, now hovering above your extended hiking boots
resting on a granite slab slanting to cliff's edge,
and far beyond a perfect Vermont summer panorama:
distant folds of mountains against a bluebird sky
laced with cloud puffs, and what you didn't
record or post was the moment several minutes later
when you stood up and ungraciously slipped, rolling over
and whacking your temple, breaking your sunglasses,
leaving a small gash over one eye that you were able to stanch after
a few minutes with several gauzes fumbled from your bag, pressed
in place then held by the band of your watchcap—
no big deal really, but why would you want to share
with the big wide digital universe that you were an oaf,
or a martyr, or perhaps a diligent boy scout type prepared
for just about any scenario when you would rather linger
on the moment just prior, when your world was warm
and soft and piney-green, falling away at your feet,
and a morse of tangy-buttery sweet goodness
was about to land on your tongue to nourish your soul
and charge your body to muscle up to the summit and back down
again—
that's how you'd prefer to frame this adventure, this day, your life:
the bright pleasurable apex at the center of it,
not the dark, sticky, stained blotches around the margins
you hope you'll be able to scrub out of the sleeve
of your favorite windshirt and the hem of your watchcap
later on after you stumble back home.

DECAY

They often did this and they were here again: falling on to the remnants of some long-forgotten road that led into dark and dense woods. As always, they didn't know how they got there and they weren't sure how they would get back. She imagined how lush and alive it was during the summer but it was the end of fall and the trees were bare and the road seemed like a tunnel cutting through the woods, channeling them from their known world into one unknown.

The day had started out for them in sunshine and high spirits but now they were quiet, absorbed in their own thoughts. They continued to walk as the road dwindled to ghosts of tire ruts through the dense undergrowth. "Look," she said, and pointed to the top of one of the two ridges that flanked the road, "A roof."

The two-room house had a kitchen and another area that seemed to have been used for everything else. The house, which was in that rare, suspended state of decay—some place between what was once someone's home and that being reclaimed by the woods. It would not be like that for much longer. The grey, afternoon light showed through the plank walls. There were vines and ferns pushing their way through the broken window pane, twining around loose boards and rusted nails. Through the glass-less windows, the red, orange, and yellow of the autumn leaves seemed unusually bright and clear against the grey boards in the dull light. It would not be long before the house would be completely reclaimed by the woods and one day, no one would even know that it had been there. Like a skeleton, it still showed evidence of its existence with most of its flesh stripped away. The strewn possessions left behind were faded and shrunken. She looked around for a long time without saying a word but he knew what she was thinking.

“This is amazing,” she said under her breath and turned to him, “don’t you feel it? It’s as if something is in the air—” “Probably Hanta virus,” he interrupted absently, “don’t touch anything.” But she thought that he sensed it too, as he cautiously toed aside a rusted Chock Full ‘O’ Nuts coffee can and leaned over the sink to touch one finger to a calendar picturing a faded tractor.

The lives lived in that house were a mystery. The physical atmosphere was like a sentence started and abruptly stopped, never finishing and hanging in the air. All that once might have happened in those two, small rooms would likely remain a secret. All that was known now was the present—and the present was a small, still-full can of cinnamon, a ancient box of turnip seeds with a corner chewed off; its contents spilled, a small naked doll without a head, and, remarkably, shreds of curtains wafting in the breezy windows.

She thought that their own lives together were also a mystery but now their future was dark and uncertain. At first, they had been happy. They were compatible in what had once seemed like every way. It was different now but both of them pretended that it wasn’t. The truth was, they weren’t sure what had happened or when. There had been joyous weekends spent hiking and canoeing and traveling, and other, odder things like mining rocks and finding old, abandoned houses in the woods. Many times they had said how lucky there were to share an appreciation for these esoteric pursuits. Now they were torn apart, they had lost each other and what they had left was like the shreds of curtains hanging in the windows and the faint ruts in the nearly-obscured road behind them. They had been suspended for months, standing in this place that was between their once happy past and the uncertain future.

Did it start out the same for the people of this house? Was life once sunny and bright in their small home on the hill? What could make people suddenly leave their

home in such haste that they left their dishes and books and even a tube of toothpaste by the sink? They both had seen many of these forgotten houses in the woods and had tried to imagine the reasons for such flights. It had been inconceivable that anyone could leave like that but lately it seemed clearer. It can become so complicated and so sad. Their lives had grown convoluted, hopelessly tangled like fishing line from a series of bad casts, so bad that she could no longer imagine untangling it. Maybe it would be better to just cut bait, to leave everything behind and start over somewhere else. But when they wordlessly left, she secretly took the can of cinnamon with her and he pocketed the doll before they retraced their steps back along the overgrown road.

Michele L. Tremblay

TRAILER

Look at the them.
Old and decrepit and
taking up space.
Eyesore: tumbling down, cluttered, tacky.
How can they live like that?

They're supposed to be mobile
but they stay in one space —
lights vestigial and sitting on blocks.

Don't they have any self-respect?
I wonder what it's like inside.
Smells, like decay and spoiled foods.

They are fragile and
not made to last with
built-in obsolescence.
The smallest insult opens the hole that can never be closed.
The first chink in the armour is the beginning of an end.

They cluster together.
There is comfort in the sameness and seeing that
no one is better than anyone.
Comparison is fear.

One day, they'll be gone.
The sooner the better.
Something better might come.
But probably not.

Michele L. Tremblay

TRASH

Look at them.
Old and decrepit and just
taking up space.
Ugly, heavy, dishevelled.
How can they live like that?

They barely move and
look at them totter; limping along —depending
on wheels and sticks.

Don't they have any self-respect?
I wonder what it feels like to be them.
The smells. The rot of disease.

They are fragile and
not made to last with built in obsolescence. The
smallest insult is injury that will never heal. The
first chink in the armor is
the beginning of the end.

They stay together.
There is comfort in not seeing anyone who is
younger...healthier.
Comparison is fear.

One day they'll be gone.
The sooner the better.
Something better will come.
Just not for them.

Michele L. Tremblay

BRIGHT RED BLOOD IN THE FRESH WHITE SNOW

bright red blood in the fresh white snow.
bright red blood on the snow white feet.
the coppery, red squirrel lies inert.
it was living only moments ago.
our animal is back.
it has killed again.

Eric Braude

TETHERED

To their favored clamber rocks—
four hundred child-miles.
We camp below New Hampshire's

Old Man of the Mountain—
jut-jawed, gazing
from his granite cliff,

beard fragmenting,
but anchored fast by nets.
We take the kids up peaks,

the old rock face
cabled tight.
They traverse

summits, we fall
behind, cables
bound to snap.

WITHIN A CIRCLE OF HANDS

The Meeting School, Rindge NH

Before High School Graduation I wake
to the comfort I've found within
a circle of homes and people
I do not want to leave, cannot leave.
I am in a place where trees around the field's
edge are a fence of rough lace and sky's
ceiling is no longer the length of loss.
My cry for one year more is not to be.
Barefoot I strike out on Thomas Road's
spring-cold dirt, alone, the forest's familiar
rustle draws me along. This land, the family
of people, kept the dark I've carried
from swallowing me. What I've gathered here
may I keep like a tree's annual rings. This
is my winter's store, my strength for
what's next. I turn now, move on.

E.C. Gannon

NOVEMBER, MERRIMACK VALLEY

Here we are, occupying the suburban night,
driving around and looking for a place to get high.

At our elementary school, we listen to the joints
of the metal swing set as we go

up and

down and

up and

down,

our gazes oscillating between the starless
winter sky and the frosted grass. They say
it's supposed to snow tonight, the first time
this season. We sit facing each other
on the slide so the clouds of our breaths
meet before they disappear under
the streetlights. Behind us, a dog barks.

I say that if we start driving today,
we could make it halfway cross-country
before anyone realizes we're gone.

You agree and then bop across the hardened
mulch to attempt the monkey bars where
Lisa Adams broke her leg in first grade.

O O B

On the boardwalk Ferris wheel,
I worry about the wind coming
off the waves and the integrity
of the structure, and Maggie drips
soft serve all over her thighs.
She licks the runoff from the length
of her forearm, laughing, and all
I can do is hope she won't try
to put her arm around me.
She uses the palm of her hand
to wipe the ice cream from her legs
or, rather, rub it into them so all
the stray blond hairs begin to stick
together, and then says that once
we get back down to sea level,
she'll cleanse herself in the water.
I don't know how clean she'll get;
I can see stray diapers and plastic
bags bobbing with the riptide from here.

E.C. Gannon

SOUTHERN MAINE, JULY

In the pools of water left on the sand by the morning's high tide, two young girls in tankinis play dead, their crisped backs exposed to the midday sun. Families wade through the pools, temporary ponds contaminated by pee and empty chip bags, to get to the open water, cold enough to take their breath away, and no one looks at the girls. Lifeguards blow whistles at anyone deeper than their torso; the flags on their stands warn of strong riptide. The girls come up for air, laugh at each other, and lie face down in the puddle again. I can't tell how old they are, but I can't imagine it will be long before they'll stop playing dead, before death becomes something too tangible to discuss, never mind make fun of. An ice cream cone wrapper floats past the girls, and an older woman gets up from her lounge chair to fish it out of the water and throw it away.

REROUTING

I take the off ramp and make a left at the light. The GPS app on my cell phone begins rerouting. We're driving down route 23 and there's nothing but white pines on either side of us. I clench my tongue ring between my front teeth. I hate when people play with their tongue rings, but I get why they do it now. It's an impulse; it's something foreign that's become a part of you; something you can't get rid of. It reminds you it's there every time you go to speak or take a breath.

We are on our way to see Dad. He's on death row. He's been on death row for eight years now and according to Jackie his time is almost up. No one wants to see him. No one except Jackie. I don't know what he did to be on death row, and I don't ask in case someone tells me. I don't want to know. Whatever it was must have been bad. Mom never accepted his calls from jail and the kids at school still look at me funny and lower their voices when I walk past them. It could be because of Dad, or it could be because my hair color changes every other week. I'm glad I only have two months to go to graduate.

We are at the halfway point of a six-hour road trip from Jersey to New Hampshire and the GPS app has rerouted twice since we stopped to pee at a gas station in Yonkers tacking on another hour and fifteen minutes to the drive. I'm behind the wheel and Jackie, my little brother, is asleep on the passenger side with his hands in his pockets – the heater in my car doesn't work. I exhale and can see my breath in front of me. Up until now we've been listening to Ariana and Eminem - Ariana was his choice. It's only ten in the morning and the temperature is already at its high

for the day – 23 degrees. I told Jackie to wear a coat and double pants like I did, but he wanted to wear Dad’s old suit. He even put on his tie. He said he didn’t want it to wrinkle in his bag, but now he’s shivering.

I can see Jackie stirring out of the corner of my eye. He sits up and reaches for the radio dial. I know immediately what he is going to do, turn down the music so we can talk. Jackie’s conversations always start benignly enough, then they turn sharply, out of nowhere, like a knife coming out of a dark alley right into the liver.

“If you could have any superpower, what would it be?” Jackie says.

I think about this for a moment then say, “Can it be anything? Like can I turn myself into a cake?”

“Why would anyone want to turn themselves into a cake? No, it’s gotta be something useful like invisibility, or flying, or time travel, or walking through walls.”

“Invisibility.”

“Why invisibility?”

“Why not? You could walk around, and no one would see you. You could hear people talk about you and know what they really think.”

“I wouldn’t want to be invisible. Plus, if you want to know what people think about you just have mind reading powers?” Jackie says.

“But invisibility is more fun. You could fuck with people if you’re invisible. Move their shit around, pull their hair.”

He shakes his head and I reach over and ruffle his red hair, which he immediately smooths back down. I don’t know where he got his red hair from. Everyone else in our family has dirty blonde hair. Perhaps it’s from

some long lost relative on Dad's side. We don't know much about that side of the family.

"Mine would be time travel. I want to travel back in time."

I suddenly feel bad for Jackie because I know what he wants and I'm not going to give it to him. I'm not going to ask him what time he'd travel to because I know what he's going to say, and I don't want to start a conversation about what I remember about Dad to help him fill the gaps in his mind when I'm trying to create gaps of my own. So, I do what I always do when the conversation goes south for me, I turn up the volume on the radio.

"What's up with the GPS?" Jackie says turning the volume back down. "Didn't we have only an hour left to go?"

He has a look of despair. "What do you mean?"

"The arrival time is now 2:47. It was 1:30 before. Visiting hours end at three."

"Don't worry, Jackie. We'll make it on time."

"No we won't. It's too close. Even if we do get there at 2:47, which we won't, we won't have much time with him."

I don't say anything. I just look straight out onto the road.

He's right, we're not going to make it on time. I've never been this far from home. We never had enough money to go anywhere. I got my driver's license a week ago when I turned eighteen and straight away, I bought this car – a rust covered Jetta with a little bit of black. The floor is half gone. It was only five hundred dollars. I paid for it with my life savings from the waitress job at the diner two blocks from home. Jackie insisted on pitching it the fifty dollars he

made mowing the neighbor's lawn. I didn't want to get my driver's license and I didn't want to get a car, but Jackie reminded me of a promise I'd made him when he was eight. I was ten then when eight years in the future seemed like an eternity. But a promise is a promise, especially one you make to your little brother.

"It's so fucking cold in here," Jackie says. He's frantically looking around the car. "Is there a blanket or something I can use to cover myself with?"

"I told you to wear sweats and a coat."

"Is there any water?" He bends down to look under his car seat.

I focus on the road ahead. I see what looks like patches of ice. It's so cold it's hard to keep my teeth from chattering.

"We'll stop soon and get something from a gas station," I say. "Maybe one of those throw blankets."

Jackie nods and tilts his head back closing his eyes. His face and neck are flushed; his cheeks are red. He loosens his tie but doesn't take it off. I look at the GPS and then at Jackie and then make a left turn onto the next country road I come across. The GPS begins rerouting. The temperature gauge on the dash reads 22 now. I still have half a tank of gas, so I keep going.

"Remember when Dad would come home after work late at night and take us out driving around town?" Jackie says. His eyes still closed. "What did he call it? Cruising? Wasn't that fun of him? He was always doing spontaneous stuff like that."

I reach over and put my hand on Jackie's shoulder to give it a squeeze. I can't believe how cold his jacket is. "What's this thing made of. Here you want my sweater?"

He pulls away from me, "I'm fine."

I search the car for water or something to give Jackie but

all I find is a half-empty plastic bottle of soda in the pocket on the side of my door. I touch it and the bottle is tight and hot and feels like it's ready to explode. Besides, I see a cigarette bud floating in the dark liquid.

"We should stop and get some water," I say.
"Maybe some hot chocolate."

I pull over to the side of the road and search for a gas station on the GPS. I follow the directions diligently. Up to that point all the turns I had made kept us near the highway. Now the GPS has taken us down a two-lane road that narrows down to a gravel path that hasn't been plowed. The path stops one hundred feet from an abandoned gas station. We are miles away from the main highway.

"Is this the gas station? It looks like it's out of business." Jackie says.

I get out and walk to the front of the car. It feels good to stretch my legs. I look around. There is a gas station sign mounted on a rusted steel pole. There are four large holes in the ground where the gas pumps must have been located a long time ago. The place looks like its last customer rolled by around in nineteen-sixty. There are cracks in the concrete. In a hundred years, grass and trees could easily overtake this place, and no one would even know it had ever been here.

"You'd think they'd update the GPS," I say.

I get back in the car and leave the door open, one leg stretched outside. I pull my cell phone off its cradle which is mounted on the dashboard vent. I type in gas station and wait. The little pin wheel turns and turns. I get out of the car and hold my cell phone up

high over my head. Nothing. My worst nightmare: I have no signal.

“Is there another station nearby?”

“I don’t know,” I say. “I don’t have a signal.”

“This is insane. Let me try. I’m taller.”

“Well?” I say following him around the parking lot.

Jackie shakes his head.

“Let’s get back to the main highway,” I say. “We had good signal there. And I don’t like being out here.”

I get in the car. The gas gauge says I’m down to one quarter. That should be enough to make it back to the main road. I drive back on the gravel road the way we came, tires spinning over the snow, but the road never opens up to the paved one and it never widens into two lanes. I could’ve sworn this was the way back to the main highway, but now I’m not so sure. All the snow and pines look exactly the same.

“Do we have signal yet?” I say.

“Maybe if I shut it down and restart it.”

I look up at the sky. A few gray clouds float above us. The dash temperature gauge reads 19. It’s going to snow again.

“This really sucks, Becky. I swear, I’m starting to get a headache.”

“We’re just wasting gas.”

I pull the car to the side. Jackie holds the cell phone up high outside the window. I get out of the car and look around. Nothing for miles. Everything out here is dead. The snow is pure white, not one tire track. No one’s been this way. I don’t recognize anything around me, and I don’t remember where I made the wrong turn. It looked like

such a simple route. I'm starting to get hungry and I'm freezing, and Jackie is turning redder by the minute. This sucks. I want to be back home. If I could choose any superpower to have now, it would be teleportation.

I get back in the car. "Anything," I say.

"No," Jackie hands me my cell phone.

"Feeling alright? You don't look so good."

Jackie leans his seat all the way back and covers his eyes with his arms. "It's just so cold. Is there really nothing to cover myself with? Not even in the trunk?"

"Let's go a little further down this road and see if we can get back to the highway or maybe we'll see someone that can help us."

"We haven't seen anyone in miles, Becky."

The gas gauge is getting low, almost touching the E. Jackie's jaw quivers. Jackie closes his eyes. Seeing him like this reminds me of the times when he would come to my room after Dad had been taken by the police. I hadn't been there to see it happen. I had been at school, but Jackie had been home sick that day and had seen the whole thing play out from behind the curtain of the living room window. The resisting arrest, the handcuffs, the shoving into the back of the police car, mom collapsing on the floor screaming.

The road ahead of me is long and narrow. There is literally nothing out here. The pines we saw along the highway are long gone, replaced by birch trees. It's too cold for even the bird to fly. The temperature is now 17. How much lower can it get? The low fuel lamp lights up on the dashboard and I feel desperation in me rising. Will we ever make it back on the road? It's crazy to think just this

morning we were in civilization. It feels like Jackie and I are the only people left on Earth.

All this just to see Dad one last time. I try not to think of him too much. When I was eight years old Dad brought home a stray dog that showed up in his garage without a collar one day. Dad helped Jackie and me wash him up and tuck him into a bed we made out of an old box we had from when we moved into the house. We were always moving back then. Dad let me name the dog because I was the oldest. I named the dog Bear because he was brown, and his fur was thick and frizzy. Jackie and I loved that dog. We would wake up early, even on the weekends, to feed and play with him and we would fight over who's room he'd sleep in at night. Regardless of who's room Bear would end up in all three of us would scrunch up in a twin-size bed together.

One day walking home from school I saw Bear on the road lying on his side, blood coming out of his ear. I ran home yelling at the top of my lungs for help. Bear had gotten out of the yard somehow. Someone had left the gate open, and he was hit by a car. Jackie and I sat with Bear in the back seat of the station wagon as Dad drove us all to the vet's office. When we got there, Dad went to pull him out, but Bear had stopped breathing. His eyes never closed. Jackie begged dad to get another dog a couple of weeks later, but I didn't want another one.

The car begins to stall. I tighten my grip on the steering wheel. "Please, no," I beg. All the warning lamps on the dashboard light up – they are all red. The gas gauge is on E. The car slogs to a stop no matter how

I press on the gas pedal. I get out of the car and pop the hood. According to my driver's ed teacher this is what you're supposed to do if you get stranded somewhere so someone can see and help. I don't expect anyone to come by anytime soon. I look at what's under the hood. I don't know what I'm looking at. There's a bunch of black cables everywhere and it smells like burnt oil.

Jackie mumbles something I don't understand. I walk to the passenger side.

"How are you doing?" I say.

"What's going on?"

"We ran out of gas."

"We ran out of gas?" he says. "Now what?"

"Someone's gotta drive by eventually," I say. "I mean someone built a road out in this goddamn place for a reason. Right?"

"No one's going to come, Becky," he says. "Look around you. It's a wasteland out here. And it's getting dark. There's no one. No one." He sits up and hangs his head between his legs. "This is all my fault. I made us come out here."

"Come on," I say. "We may want to start walking. Try to find some help. We can't just sit here." I pull my cell phone from its cradle and look to see if there's a cell signal. Nothing.

"My hands and feet are so cold I can barely feel them," he says. "And I have a horrible headache."

"Come on. Let's just go."

I turn back to look at the Jetta. I wonder if it wouldn't be best to just stay by the car, but Jackie's face and neck are getting bluer by the minute and he's having a hard time breathing because he is shaking so hard. I need to find some help. I can't believe there is not one single soul to be found out here.

Jackie is dragging his feet, like his muscles aren't working. I want to tell him this is all my fault. That it was me who made the GPS add time to our route because I changed the address in Yonkers when we stopped to pee and kept making turns when he wasn't paying attention. I want to tell him it's my fault we are out here stranded because I didn't want to go see Dad and I didn't have the guts to tell him that.

"I need to sit down," Jackie says.

I look around and see a tree in the distance. The tree has no leaves, just branches that reach toward the sun, bare and dead.

"Come on, Jackie," I say. "Let's get to that tree. We'll rest there for a bit."

I put his arm over my shoulder, and we make our way toward the tree slowly. When we reach it, we both fall to the ground. Jackie leans against the tree.

"Here let's huddle together and keep each other warm," I say pulling myself close to him.

"Thanks for taking me to see Dad. You're the best big sister ever. I hope you know that?"

I don't know what to say to that. I don't feel like I've been a good big sister to Jackie. I don't play with him video games when he asks me to, I barely acknowledge him at school when I see him around. My days are spent absorbed in my own shit. Even this trip, that was supposed to be for him, I didn't do right.

I lean back against the tree and take Jackie's

hand in mine. “Tell me about your superhero power. What time period would you want to travel back to if you could?”

He doesn’t respond.

“Jackie?” I say a little louder now. “Wake up. Tell me about your superhero power. Talk to me, Jackie. Ask me anything you want. I’ll answer anything.”

I rest my head on Jackie’s shoulder. My cell phone has no signal, and the battery is low. It’s 3:45 pm. “Let me tell you about dad, Jackie,” I say. “Let me tell you what I remember.”

Jeff McRae

RAW MILK

Mother sends an email: The Farm is Up For Sale Again. Inside, a blue link to the listing I don't want to click. I click. I'd heard the house was gone but never made the pilgrim's trip to see the empty space formerly filled with our stairwell, bookshelf, piano; the mirror in which we primed and posed for dates after chores, where we waged wars with solitude and work. The faint odor of manure on my coat, kitchen floor slippery with chaff. It's all more than a memory can house—where we argued, listened, read aloud after dinner, heard, saw, slept and woke up. Out back, the old walnut held me with one arm above the hedge like a gentle god holds a boy who lives in a world of animals and long grass—all of it bulldozed out of our lives except the spring house, its constant cascade into a well-spring that feeds all living things on the now former dairy with two barns and scenic views. Thank god the grandparents dead and not alive to see this vulgar snowbird nest, potential Airbnb investment property. Trees grow in the field for Christ sake. Their cabin, built up the road redone, done up, gentrified. Who knew how strong the limb that held me there. One point seven million for it all. The final filaments of ownership are imaginary. And true, it's been too long to see we were there—not in the meadow edge, fields we cleared, tree line we cut. Not in the cement we poured, the “Welcome Home” painted on the barn bay door when father was gone

for weekend gigs. I've mourned, held it proudly.
I'm worn thin with the whole thing. What do I betray
by putting it down, the memory—that farm, our
childhoods, the story of who I've been convinced
we were? I'm never going back. I shut my eyes
and walk the road into the dooryard. There is
the old house, front door askew in its jamb.
The dining table set with mother's plates and
we're all there, the dog on my foot, my glass
full of raw milk.

Jeff McRae

ROOTED

I call mother on Sunday afternoon.
Hellooooo, how are you?! I ask
with cartoonish curiosity, afraid
she is lonely on her new floors,
with her H-Vac set for summer
sixty-five. It looks like rain,
make sure to bring your laundry in,
she says. I am two hundred
miles away and there are no clouds
in the sky above my house, mom.
Just an airplane. Why not just go?
I say, resuming our argument
that she visit the ocean. What
are you waiting for? I stay in
my lane and do not welcome
change but, all the same, I root
for her to go to Maine, to York,
Portland, or points further north,
place names we know from
a children's book she read
to me when we were young.
I hear thunder over the phone.
It's starting to rain, she says. It's so
beautiful sliding down the window.

Denise Drapeau

YOU, YELLOW BIRCH

We planted you, a tiny sprig,
a speck in the mind's eye,
a vision for the future.
You sprouted up overnight,
like a beanstalk to the sky,
branching out, proud and tall,
stretching wide in all directions,
reaching well beyond your roots,
making rings around each passing year.
We captured you in photoshoots,
preserving memories,
first days of school and prom nights,
basking in your beauty,
in awe
as you changed with the seasons,
growing your own way,
unwavering in the wind,
casting shade against the heat,
standing strong in your golden light.

RECKONING

Rain siles. I hope the tree roots hold,
that saturated soil brings a harvest of worms
for robins gliding in to rustle the grass
now greening.

(How quickly my desire glides into spring.)

I wonder how worms know time,
know when it's time. Robins, too.

What sense compels their flying north or south?

What is now except this branch to grip in storm-swept
trees?

I envy them their now. I brood on ruination.

Will robins know when fewer broods survive?

How do whales in the nearby sea sense a dwindling tribe?

Do worms, robins, whales remember forebears, teeming?

The great leviathans must grieve lost calves, cousins
beached.

Conscious, and, yes, with knowledge—
robins in a dell that holds the shape of home—
symphysis of feel, scent, and sight
for this ground, leaf-bedded, wet, spongy.

What systems let the birches know their neighbors' needs,
even, perhaps, my need of them?

What store of sonar maps do right whales carry,
though migraine-dizzy from roaring ships?

When patterns fracture, what then?

Grief I cannot reckon has settled in,
yet hope keeps showing up, greening.

Glenn Reed

LATE AUGUST MORNING

The morning light soothed
along with a soft blanket of silence
and sip of herbal tea
Until the realization came that it was, in fact
a new quiet, with open windows channeling only
occasional squawks of wary jays or
whir of cars passing through late summer
Voices speaking a different language and
A void where the backyard cardinal
had been, just days before, baring his heart
with cheery calls, the songs that pulled
reluctant feet from under covers
before first cups of caffeine
Aging brings more appreciation, yes
savoring the moment, noticing the detail,
Bending to smell a June burst of dame's rocket
or pausing to see the blinking of stars
in dark woods after early summer's dusk
But still, a sadness always accompanying
such change, that emptiness, longing
for vanished songs, the inescapable need
to stare into it, to embrace the loss
Then to hear what is now being said, to catch
that peripheral flash of red
Reminding as to
what still remains

Fiona Peterson

PEONIES

A friend gifted me with a bouquet of peonies today,
sweetly fragrant,
in shades of pink from pale to deepest blush.
They remind me of oh so slightly blowsy showgirls,
who know that the show will not, can not, go on forever,
that the curtain must come down,
but for now, just for now,
are giving it their all.

Paul O. Jenkins

CATHEDRAL OF THE PINES

Bereft today and chilled,
I ponder restoration,
For I have lost one who was all to me.
In this cathedral of pines,
Designed to honor sacrifice,
I model some mantle of faith
Woven to shroud us from
That certain, coming chill.
Today I reappraise mistrust,
That threadbare wrap
I've so long longed to lay aside.
And so I try.
I walk the gravel paths,
Regard the rocky altar,
Invite unheard summons,
And hear only familiar whispers
That bend branches of Swiss stone pines
And penetrate my shabby costume.
Bereft today and chilled,
I relinquish restoration
And leave, clothed simply as I came.
I've heard no call but merely echoes
In calm reminder of biotic fact:
We cannot sacrifice dubiety
On hallowed altars built by others.

Richard Fleck

LOBSTERMEN TALK

Voices come from two
lobstermen bringing their
boat back in with the tide
and a fair harvest of keepers.
They talk of how seaweed
got tangled up in their
boat's propeller, but how
easily it would be to simply
untangle its long tan strands.
They mentioned how fine
and wonderful a day it was,
not at all like a day ago when
a frightening thunderstorm hit
scarring the sea gulls away
all across a vast Casco Bay—
it brought to mind my own
memory of a horribly loud and
dark thunderstorm which hit just
above our up-coast cottage
that scarred the wits out of
me as a young boy years ago,
but now the lobstermen laughed
merrily at a wet, shaggy old
dog on a long wooden wharf
who greeted them with his very
loud bark and wagging tail,
wagging me back to the present
moment with laughing sea gulls
so gently flapping overhead.

HOMESICK

The rain has slowed to a soft drizzle by the time my sister and I make it outside, crouching in the driveway in rubber rain boots. My knees are covered in the perpetual scrapes and bruises of a childhood spent outdoors, climbing trees in the neighbor's yard or scrambling the boulders on the property line. McKenna follows my lead, hair curling close to her head in the humidity, as we creep down the driveway, bent close to the ground.

What follows is a rainy-day ritual so deeply ingrained in us that I can't recall who started it—we locate the earthworms stranded on the asphalt and scoop them in dirt-smudged hands to the grassy safety of the front yard. McKenna inevitably gives them names, things like Squirmy and Jeremy and Wormy and Steve, and once we've done a few passes up and down the hill to make sure we didn't miss any stragglers—or, worse, they attempt to wiggle back onto the driveway—we consider our work for the day done and head inside to wash our hands.

It's not something we've done in years, but recently I walked across the Boston College campus to get to my office, rain falling gently on the grass and my shoulders. I'd lost the rainboots of my youth and the soles of my sneakers had seen better days, rainwater already threatening to ruin my socks from the ten-minute walk from the train station. The sidewalks were devoid of people, but when I looked down I noticed them—earthworms, all over the pavement. The longer I looked, the more of them I saw.

The urge to stop my walk completely and start picking them up, moving them to the grass like I'd done as a kid, was so strong I forgot where I was going, that I had a meeting in mere

minutes, that I was essentially an adult on paper with things to do that didn't involve dirtying the knees of my jeans to make sure a few worms didn't get stepped on.

I guess the truth is that I am nothing if not a product of my hometown—generations of roots so deep that sometimes I feel like I'll never get the dirt out from under my fingernails—and the fear that comes with the awareness of where I've come from feels just as tangible. The place where I grew up is somewhere people are always trying to get out of; I've always known this. The main issue that comes with being from a town made for leaving is the unshakeable fear that maybe you are meant for that fate too.

I left home in 2018 and traded a graduating class of 54 for a liberal arts college in Fenway that I assumed would have the answers to everything I thought I was missing. In truth, I got nothing out of those next four years except a handful of life-changing friendships, the closest thing to an ADHD diagnosis without a medical professional, and the realization that it was the multiple concert venues within walking distance that had really kept me in love with the city. It was the miles of lamplit streets that I stumbled down with my best friend that made me feel grounded. In a place where I always had something to do and people nearby to drag along on my adventures, I convinced myself that I'd found home, or something close to it—that I'd made it out and really kept it that way.

But that part I've never admitted to anyone except maybe my notes app in the middle of the night is that there's a part of myself that I neglect on purpose, a

part of me that comes alive on dirt roads and among the oak trees. It's not a life I can truly envision for myself, moving back out into the woods I grew up in, but every so often the vision rises to the surface: late night drives on lanes I know through muscle memory, bonfire nights with the neighbors, a little cottage to make every inch my own. Hardwood floors and an afghan blanket on the couch, creaky front steps to French doors. Falling asleep to the sound of wind whistling through the quaking aspens and the crickets that cling to the porch lights, and watching the stars at night from the back deck.

I have to force myself to really admit it: that after all that work, all that escaping...I'm homesick. The places where we grow up are an indelible part of ourselves. I can no more escape my past than I could scrub the tattoos off my arms. I'm no different or better than anyone I grew up with, except for the fact that it took me longer than them to realize that maybe liking where you're from isn't a bad thing or a fucking weakness.

So now sometimes I envision what it would be like to move home, or somewhere similar. Even now it seems unrealistic to me; I'm too dependent on the city and the lights and the ability to fill up a small space with big ideas. I am too enamored with the hustle and crowded sidewalks, the way I can always try something new. I know myself enough to know I crave constant motion, nothing stagnant, and that this little life I'm picturing, an existence with the volume turned down, would quickly suck me dry. I hope someday I'll be able to quiet the sea inside me enough to enjoy floating atop the waves, but until then, I'll continue to battle it out with the breakers.

Until then, I'll just think about it—leaving it all. A clean break. Somewhere I can stop to pick up the worms.

Nathaniel Lachenmeyer

CHURCH STREET, BURLINGTON, VERMONT

These three pieces by Nathaniel Lachenmeyer reflect on his father's struggles with schizophrenia in New Hampshire and Vermont during the 1980s and 1990s, and on the year his father spent homeless on Church Street in Burlington, Vermont, prior to his death in 1995.

Because I visited once many years ago when I was young and spoke to every stranger I could find who had met the colorful transient on the park bench who wrote constantly in a notebook and spoke back to voices only he could hear, because I learned he had had to stay outside 24/7 during the coldest winter on record after the shelter kicked him out for good because he was infested with lice and refused to shower, because he nearly died on that bench that January but instead was arrested by the police for eating a meal he couldn't pay for at the Oasis Diner to keep from starving, because when they sent him to Waterbury and the psychiatrist asked him, "Do you think you have a mental illness?", he replied, "Yes, my mental illness is love of life and humanity," because after they released him he rented an

apartment two blocks down from that bench and again started sending out his vita to universities, because he never gave up hope that he might one day be able to return to his old life as a sociologist and professor, because he died alone two weeks later in that apartment from a heart attack brought on by the lingering effects of the previous winter—Church Street, I cannot forget you.

Nathaniel Lachenmeyer

FIFTY-TWO

I would give almost anything to sit beside my father on some porch somewhere, anywhere. Just him and me sitting side by side and looking out at, for instance, the setting sun. That old porch in Pelham I loved when I was young and there were worlds, so many worlds to explore, before that first one exploded, taking all other worlds with it, especially the one called The Future, the brightest planet there was, lost, blown to bits in the derailing of his gifted mind. That is the one I think of first, but Pelham belongs to someone else now. Any porch would do. We would talk and laugh and reminisce and watch the sun setting, the bright light going, going, and then, what's better than dusk, I ask you? Answer: nothing is, not if you are sitting with your father who is so old now but content because he has lived the best life he could and you have been there with and for him through it all. If now is too much to ask, then take me to Vermont State Hospital's smoking porch, the fall of '94, ten months after his arrest for theft of services. He was back on meds then and apparently doing better, but I wouldn't care at all if it would have been conspiracies and delusions all day long and voices he pretended not to hear. I don't care. I would take that over you or anyone else, alive or dead. Especially today. Any day, but especially this very long today. You see, I've

done the math. I am now older than my father ever was. The sun has set; it's dark now, here in Marietta. I should go inside. My son is home for my birthday and my wife is calling me. The cake is ready and the candles are now lit. But some ghosts will only come if you're alone.

Nathaniel Lachenmeyer

MURAL, NEW HAMPSHIRE STATE HOSPITAL, 1996

The one I remember best
is of a gray cat sitting on a windowsill

looking not at the painted panorama
of rolling hills and sunlight beyond,

but back over its gray shoulder
at the cold dark hallway in disarray,

the strips of paint hanging from the ceiling,
the broken windows, the refuse

and leaves collecting in corners,
and the ghosts of patients long gone,

including the one who painted it,
and me, who was there searching

for my father, who must have looked
at that painting, too, when he was a patient

on that ward a dozen years earlier,
struggling to make sense

of what was left of his world,
what the illness, which he could not see

or believe in, had done to it,
only then it must have appeared

very different, bright and flat,
cartoonish in the fluorescent glow,

before the paint had been exposed to
the elements for years, had

cracked in a dozen places and started
peeling back from the wall,

with some of the pieces barely
hanging on, but with enough left

for the cat and the encasing window
to still remain clear, present,

which made it seem intentional,
a calculated effect by the artist

to symbolize something about
the nature of memory, what we keep

and what we lose of those who were
lost long ago but have not

been forgotten—not by the ones
who loved them; at times, my recollections

bring to mind a peeling painting
of a gray cat sitting on a windowsill

looking not at the painted panorama
of rolling hills and sunlight beyond,

but back over its gray shoulder
at me, the one it has never left behind.

S.R. GRAHAM

SLEEPLESS

Maine is filled with your absence, as am I—
an island in the sea of it: fire-dusted,
parched, every midnight rimed with salt and lye,
but pine-pitched in midday fever, lusted
as the stars burning in their summer sky.
I chart the swelling dark where you are not.
Days break like so much flotsam on the tide,
sand dollars shattered, scattered as my thoughts'
serenity. None of this should matter;
coves came before the fine grain of your skin,
lip, and breath stole stillness from my center.
Surely such waters will grow calm again.
Beyond storms' horizons the sun glows gold,
rises too large for sea or shore to hold.

CONTRIBUTOR NOTES

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GLENN REED lives in Wilder, Vermont and works at a local non-profit. He writes in his spare time and enjoys hand-feeding chickadees and chipmunks while hiking local trails. His publications include a collection of his poetry entitled *Coffee Grounds in the Worm Bin* and *Searching for the Wild Asparagus*--a collection of essays and original photographs.

MALIK SELLE is an emerging writer and visual artist. He graduated from Emerson College in Boston and has since published short stories and poetry in America and abroad, including the publications: *Stoneboat Literary Journal*, *The West Trade Review*, *Beyond Words Magazine*, and others. He's also exhibited and sold his postmodern collages and prints, publicly as well as privately, in Palo Alto and San Francisco.

MICHELE L. TREMBLAY is a fourth generation New Hampshire native. She spends as much time as she can with her husband and cat, Frances Quispamsis, on a little pond at the end of a dead end road in New Hampshire. She is a marine and freshwater environmental consultant with clients throughout the US and Canada. She writes when she can.

CONNEMARA WADSWORTH's chapbook, *The Possibility of Scorpions* won the White Eagle Coffee Store Press 2009 Chapbook Contest. She's been published in *Prairie Schooner*, *Bellevue Literary Review*, *Valparaiso*, and elsewhere. "Mediation on a Photo" was a winner of The Griffin Museum's *Once Upon a Time: Photos That Inspire Tall Tales*.

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