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Sassafras officinale Nees ab Esenbeck

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Lavinia Andrei Jennings

HARP

(From The Paraguayan Harp)

Harp - cradle of the song - hand
rocking the infant tune - a fringed scarf
over the song for fear of sudden flight.

Contained in the sounds, the silence -
rainbow skin, mirror eyes - hidden
like sleep in a child's brow.

Inside the silence, a landscape -
encircled by horizons, torn
by knee and heel - fields of slowly-aging people,
in garments of clay beads and stained glass,
hands raised against the sun, irises engraved
with the sharpness of light.
They dwell in the silence
in the belly of the song.

At dusk they bow, yearning
for the fringed scarf to stir,
the harp to quiver, the rocking be still,
the hand tranquil - at the song's sudden flight.

Lavinia Andrei Jennings comes from Romania and has published poetry, poetic prose and reviews in The Bitter Oleander, New Millennium Writings, Pilgrimage, Cistercian Studies Quarterly, Clay Pot Review.

Jillian Benedict

Toes

Two birds, on wires,
finches, maybe. Plastic casing protects
their little scaly bird toes, prettier
than my toes.

“Take care of yourself now,” Mom says

“Your body will thank you when
you’re my age.”

A calloused reminder of my 22 years.

could be helpful, later when
the finches are gone, their feathers
stuck between a cat’s plaqued teeth and
my toes, forty, yellow, and hard.

Maybe I will have new feet, a podiatrist’s
experiment, a medical marvel.

Until then, I walk with alligator skin along my

tight-rope wires.

When I think of my Father

I see luscious leaves with dancing sun spots. Swatches of yellow- green above me, punctuating the sky and the valley around his cement porch. It was once so grand, now a mash potato valley filled with gravy. Coal, deep within Pennsylvania hills, drawn across state lines behind Norfolk Southern engines, the white stallion on the nose as dad clicks away on his bloated camera. I sit in the car pretending I'm interested for him. The shiny Charmaster gorged on chicken and sausage, flames burn lines into the sweating beef. Dad, flipping, Canadian beer in hand sharing, Suzie Jo's doughnuts sitting on the dishwasher in the corner of the kitchen. Time passing faster than cold sores. His hair, thinner than before he shaved four years ago. I would have let the fat needle plunge its tongue into my bones to lick out the marrow, if not for remission. Good, but un-trusted. When he goes, I will sit next to his grave with a cardboard Box O' Joe in his honor on the emerald grass budding from his dirt and I will think of my Joe.

Jillian Benedict is a senior English and creative writing major at Widener University and is the Editor-in-Chief of the undergraduate literary magazine The Blue Route.

Carol Deminski

She Took To Her Bed

She took to her bed

Waited out the wailing winds,

And reckless seas that tossed her,

In love's empty boat

Without a compass

She floated away from the land of lovers

The shoreline retreated in the darkness

She closed her eyes

And let it go

She took to her bed when the blood flowed

To mourn what never left,

What never arrived, what never grew,

What never died, what never blossomed

And never spoke with a voice inside her

She took to her bed to pass the days, adrift,

To lay on humid sheets,

Where she watched the shadows of trees crawl across the walls

Or heard the cooing of doves outside the window

And in the space around her there grew a calm.

One day a spot opened in the bed, it said,

I am here for you.

She nestled into that spot,

Curled as a lock of hair around a child's pinky

She escaped without apology

Accepted the solace of pillows to the cheek.

The bed remained steadfast

Restoring strength inside her

With the blanket of time tucked under her chin,

The years passed.

Later, they said of her,

She took to her bed.

Carol Deminski's work has appeared in Word Riot, PANK, Bartleby Snopes, Jersey Devil Press, Metazen and The Northville Review among other journals. She's on the web at <http://cdeminski.wordpress.com>. She lives and writes in Jersey City, NJ although not always in that order.

Howie Good

On the Eve of the Next War

Hear that? you ask. Hear what? I say. Both of us look, but only you see the fuzzy gray silhouette of a bombed building. Nothing matters and nothing connects. The torn gum wrappers are one small hint. Elderly tourists covered in cameras are another. You must have been thinking of a different country, somewhere where they cut the sugar cane by hand. It isn't until later, while I'm still shaking my head at your question, that the sky bangs shut. I used to love the dark or just after, when there's no longer a near and a far and what may really only be planets look like stars.

*Howie Good is a journalism professor at SUNY New Paltz. He is the author of the forthcoming poetry collection *The Middle of Nowhere* (Olivia Eden Publishing) and the forthcoming poetry chapbooks *The Complete Absence of Twilight* (Mad Hat Press), *Echo's Bones* and *Danger Falling Debris* (Red Bird Chapbooks), and *An Armed Man Lurks in Ambush* (unbound CONTENT). He co-edits White Knuckle Press with Dale Wisely.*

Peter Harris

La Haute Barre August 2012

That week made us gifts
of stone floors and butterflies,
mill stones marking boundaries,
a screen of fir trees,
and the soft tread of cows.

It gave us evenings of
wending hushed lanes
growing deep with the dark
and hearing the wind's prayer
in the hedgerow's cloister.

On the last night
there was time and space
to slide my arm's loose rope
around your waist,
feel your un-holstered hip,
and watch the sky's circuit board

from the bedroom window,

hear the rumble in the glass,

the rain's fire on the gravel.

Peter Harris is a school teacher in English. He has had a steady number of poems published in magazines over the last twenty years. He is studying towards a PhD in the history of the First World War.

Chelene Knight

If Teeth Could Talk

In this final hour
the gums numb.
Buttery tongues taste
the blood,
like flavour enhancers.

Sapphire eyes drift
to thoughts—slicing the throats
of bleeding evening skies
as cheeks grow round and ruby.
Please suction these rivers
of the microscopic.

Alveolar bone
surrounds the root,
anchors it in place.
Permission granted.
Slice the apex.

Raw on top of raw,
the heavens open—
Go ahead.
Bond my surface.

Chelene Knight is a student at SFU's The Writer's Studio in the Poetry Cohort. She has been writing poetry in secret since she was a kid and is now compiling a poetry manuscript. Her poetry is deeply rooted through learning and accepting her struggles being of mixed ethnicity and her experiences from childhood to adulthood. She stands strong in her chosen position as a young, hardworking single parent. Chelene writes from the ear—finding inspiration within every soulful lyric, sound, rhythm and beat.

Matea Kulic

Baba Vera

I join her in grass that is burning.

Her frock squares her shoulders

broad and brown, her face

smaller than mine and pulling.

Past fields and the rigid house,

we whip gold

in our calves, past

the meadow. Past open.

Sloven winds cure thighs

rough on last latch

rough on leather

eyes smoking lavender.

I dreamt her a lone aloe

palms extended. Heaved

base. Stripped spines,

peeled back saying

tongues don't heal inside.

Balm. Like green grass rain

I paste her face, deep lines

stretched back to earth.

And bottle up what remains.

Matea Kulic is a writer and literacy tutor living in Vancouver. She has been published in local literary magazines including RicePaper, The Liar and The Haro, the last one to which she also contributes as an editor. She keeps an online blog at: writingstrangers.wordpress.com. Between work and writing, she makes time for swimming.

Todor Oluic

Strand

Snakes and Parisians (contrary to popular belief) love spider webs,
but not the spiders themselves.

Nuns (who have need for eyes everywhere) love spiders but don't
care for the webs they weave.

The complications, the strange things people do before the dew has
yet to settle (loosing from the

moon's train) are foreign to me. But sometimes, when I'm walking
in the woods, I can feel (yet not

see) the lip of some strand stick to me and say: "look at what you're
missing", and I can't wipe it off.

(Off the poem "Spider Web" by Diana Hartog)

The Satin Bowerbird

How much blue does the female satin bowerbird need

in a man?

He displays flowers and pens and berries, dances

with the sky and ocean.

She'll build her nest around him,

the best dancer,

the overwhelming blue.

Todor Oluic was born and raised in Windsor, On, Canada and is currently attending university for English Literature and Creative Writing. His writing and music centers on the everyday life and seeks to show the trials, the successes, the joys and the sorrows of the average citizen.

Jake St John

Journeyman

the clouds attack

the sky

like a pack

of wild dogs

ripping and tearing

at the sun

as if it were

the last chunk

of meat

for miles around

tossing bits

and pieces

of sunshine

around the yard

that I'm laying in

on my back

knocked out

by a work week
that connected
to my chin
like a right hook
from the heavyweight
champ

Jake St. John writes out of New London CT. Since 2007 he has served as editor of Elephant as well as the co-editor of Flying Fish. His latest book 'I Talked To The Moon' (Wandering Head 2012) is a collection of poems detailing a summer long trip across America.

Alessandra Davy – Falconi

Pride

Somebody trained him to love without loving him back, and so one February night in a soft snow they slipped eight or so pounds of feline fur to the street and left. There was a church down the block which would hopefully wake up to its duty and take the ball of fur to its heart; or not, but it ought to, he was only eight pounds. Or so. They hadn't measured before letting him go.

She found him in the same snow at less than eight pounds definitely. Twelve days and the church had said *no room but life is precious here's food*. Twelve days and she said *I've got an apartment, will it do?*

His name was Baby. Her name was Yellow. She was *friend*, and he was the bundle who sometimes rested the full weight of his little head on her arm.

Alessandra Davy-Falconi is from Boston and Pittsburgh, and a student at Bryn Mawr College. She has been published in The Marble Collection: High School Magazine of the Arts, won the 2011-12 Helen Creeley Poetry Contest, and read her work at the 12th Annual Boston National Poetry Month Festival. She is always searching for stories to tell in whatever way she can.

Darrin McCloskey

The O'Doodles

In the mid 19th century, on the Eastern seaboard of North America the wave of immigrants was so great that many of the names of the people and the boats they arrived on were never recorded, which is why there is such an inconsistency in the spelling of names and where began the O'Doodle Clan, who, ironically, always fought with the O'Donnells and the Donnellys and everyone else who sprouted from the O'donngaile clan, claiming supremacy over any and all because they believed they were the beginning of, what they had hoped to be, a long line of O'Doodles.

"The Agitator!" That's the boat O'Doodles arrived on, someone said. "It had to have been The Agitator!"

There was Jim O'Doodle, Jim O'Doodle, Jim O'Doodle and then there was Michael, better known as Mick.

"Gay?!" shouted Jim O'Doodle, who everyone called Big Jim. "I toldya! See this is what happens when you break the link. We shouldn't have named him Mick! It's all your fault!"

"Oh Jim, you're overreacting?"

"Overreacting?! He's the last of the O'Doodles? Something needs to be done. And if the doctors refuse to work with me on this, then I have no choice but to take matters into my own hands. Mick! See here. Put these gloves on!"

"Like this?" Mick said, and executing his father's divine direction, he drove his fist up and caught him under the chin. Heritage experts would pinpoint this as the moment as representing the closet to being the end of the O'Doodle clan.

"The lad's caught some snap in 'em!" said one of the men, whose name Mick thought was Paul O'Bear, until he realized there were five others with the same name and realized the moniker was actually their duty.

And that's when it struck him; sittin' there next to his big dead dad with all those Paul O'Bears around him, when he realized a name is not a name, but a duty.

"I met someone?" he told his mother a number of years later.

"You met someone?"

"Yes, a girl."

"A girl?"

“Yes, it was just a faze.”

“A faze?”

“Yes, a faze.”

“You killed your father because of a faze?”

“No, during.”

“So there will be more O’Doodles?”

“Yes, there will be more O’Doodles.”

Born and raised in Prince Edward Island, Darrin M. McCloskey now lives in beautiful Vancouver, BC, where he works P/T at a used bookstore and runs his own small press, Black Ice Press. Darrin has self-published two novellas: Li'l Story: the true story of the rise and fall of the Great Canadian Novel, and Garden of da Gulf. See www.blackicepress.ca for more info.

Meghan Rose Allen

No One Is Going To Steal Your Refrigerator

I do not have to leave. I do not have to leave my house if I don't want to. It is all a plot to get me out of my house so that the drug addicts and the welfare people can have my house and take my refrigerator with the automatic ice dispenser.

"No one is going to steal your refrigerator Ma," Kostya sighs. "And speak English so Soo can understand."

I cannot believe that Kostya has brought the girl with him again. She is awkward and skinny and dwarfed by my beautiful son. She wouldn't even let me bring the korovai to the wedding or have the dancers.

"Ma, if you start with all the Ukrainian traditions, then Soo's mom will want to do all the Korean ones." Kostya had told me before his marriage. "We're not doing any of it."

"Maybe your mother would like to bring something with her?" the tiny girl whispers. Kostya's wife should be loud and buoyant, not timid like a church mouse. Why is she even here?

"Okay Ma, pick something so we can go."

Is this the way a son speaks to his mother who raised him by herself and gave up her entire life for him? He speaks to her the way he speaks to a mongrel dog? Ordering his mother around? I thought I had a good and dutiful son.

"I'm here, aren't I? I came all the way from Edmonton."

Edmonton is not that far. A good and dutiful son who insists I leave my house and who orders me to take something would know what I wanted to take.

Kostya rolls his eyes. "Here." He thrusts an disgusting, useless piece of clay at me.

This is what my son thinks I should take with me? I will throw it on the ground where it will shatter and startle them all. It hits the ground and rolls away intact. A shame.

"Mrs Koshowski?" The girl holds something out to me: a paper I put in the drawer with the spoons and the forks so I can see it every time I cook, every time I eat, translucent as a dried leaf. Maybe the girl is not as expendable and as stupid as I first thought.

"Come." I give the girl her first smile, tripping over my English words, "I will go now."

Meghan Rose Allen has a PhD in Mathematics and, until recently, was a cog in the military-industrial complex. She now lives in New Brunswick where she focuses on fiction and parenting full-time. She is always available at her website: www.reluctantm.com.

Wanda Clevenger

The Sin of Willful Thinking

Eighteen remains an aching awareness. I won't use the word *stupid* just yet as I find it harsh and bandied about too freely. Out of respect for my former self and the times, such as they were, I'll polish the skeletons in my closet to a high gloss by labeling myself misguided. Devout and overtaxed in the responsibility of single parenting, my mother brought me up exposed to a rather narrow slice of the big, bad world. She knew of this world, the portion she had experienced, and much was left undecipherable.

You don't do anything before you marry, so you don't need to know anything before you marry," Mom said. And my personal favorite: "Men are only after one thing." The no-nonsense look on her face when exposing this nemesis made clear she wasn't just whistling dixie. There was clear and present danger to be avoided at all costs. And I don't wish to persecute her convictions at this late date, only seek to reassure myself she was some mistaken.

While other girls my age looked forward to college plans with wide-eyed anticipation, I vainly searched for an indiscernible path, blankly stumbling toward nothingness. Free will previously stifled, no sure steps were reasonably taken. And reason was quickly scorned in lieu of everything deemed wantonly wrong. Possessing no map except for that which the doctrine advocated "the way" suffocated every unrehearsed decision with guilt. I was running hard and fast from everything to everything else, a devil hound nipping at my heels.

I worked routine after-school jobs, landing in one of the diners our small town had to offer. The dinky dive had been around awhile; my oldest sister worked there six years earlier while in high school. The torch was gratefully passed to me and "waitress" officially became my tour-of-duty. The new management renamed the restaurant The Hub. I thought it a jerky name befitting a diddly joint stuck in a dinky town. And I genuinely feared it was my future.

A quarter tip per person, per table, was standard and I didn't know different from dirt. Though, I did know if I wore my long hair in braids I'd get a slightly larger tip from a handsome regular. It began just like that too. One day I didn't know squat and the next I knew too much.

The day I wore my hair in a ponytail instead of the usual braids, he asked me point-blank where my braids were. No other words had passed between us except for his food order, the "can I get you anything else" question, followed by an obligatory thank you. But I was slowly catching on. I found if my apron was cinched extra tight it pulled the uniform up shorter by another inch. More legs—along with the braids—would catch me a few more quarters per male customer. Yeah, I was starting to get the picture. When you please a man, even if it's for a waitress tip in a greasy spoon, it puts you in the game. My eyes were opening. There was no turning back.

A first real paycheck came soon enough after earning my embossed high school diploma—a position with the Secretary of State attached to an hour's commute. I flubbed an interview at a local law firm on purpose, upset my mother pushed me into it. Whether aware or not, like all loving mothers she choreographed: what to do, when to do it, how to do it, what to wear while doing it. And to a degree, what to think. She had it in mind to decide the future for me, and I was having none of it.

I told the suit I'd absolutely leave his employment if an opportunity in the commercial art field presented itself. What a farce. An opportunity in the commercial art field in small Carlinville was as ludicrous a notion as Hugh Hefner setting up shop adjacent the Baptist Church. An art teacher had praised my talent senior year and I still held tight to the notion I might be an artist, given half an opportunity. To this day I can't believe my own audacity. But I accomplished what I set out to do, I blew that interview sky high. The course of my adult life was set by pure defiance. This counts as first in a long line of mistakes self-inflicted out of rash disregard, desperation, and reckless stupidity.

Destiny was set in motion. Life came roaring up the tracks full-steam—slammed right into me—and I was derailed more times than I care to admit. The government jobs held were one mind-numbing drudge after another, proceeded by countless carpools brimming with the most dreaded of humanity: the State Worker. I landed in the middle of a freak-fest. The forfeited desk in that long gone law office looked awfully darn good.

I rose at five o'clock every weekday to primp, coif, and catch my ride so I could pretend to sleep through the commute, so I didn't have to talk to the freaks, so I could get to jobs that could only be described as torture. The agony was further aggravated by loneliness, disappointment, and acute horniness. If anything at all could turn the tide, I thought it had to be sex. It was past time I became acquainted with my mother's nemesis. Early fall meant the local college was in full session; the most logical place to start, plenty of centrally located potential partying. I lied to my mother—what was one more sin atop another—said I was meeting a friend at her job and catching a ride home. The biggest solo decision of my life thus far, bad career choice aside, breathed life because I was unhappy and horny.

Set on getting laid, although hoping for someone in particular, I enlisted fate to provide a partner. I'd waited too long and had come too far to be picky. Someone surely wanted me, just for me. An unfulfilled need beyond physical propelled me into the night, alone and on foot, to the college road. But even that paled in comparison to the pounding in my chest. The act itself didn't scare me. Nor the night. Nor the sin. My biggest fear was that of omission. If rejected while willing to give up all I believed I had to offer, it would finish me. The leap I was taking was far more than just losing my virginity. I had to know once and for all if I was part of the equation.

The first car to come up from behind in the dusk carried a familiar face, a guy who pumped gas at the Texaco on North Broad. We had met briefly one Saturday afternoon. I was with an older sister who stopped to flirt with him. Polite but uninterested in her, he seemed friendly and was easy to look at. Afternoon sun melted into his strawberry-blond hair as he smiled in my general vicinity. He was smiling then as he recognized me, asked what I was doing, and without waiting for a response said to get in. It was that easy. It didn't matter that I was winging it, only that I was winging it. The whole flippin' universe fell into my lap and I grabbed for what the scandalous moment offered. Free choice.

The college was a few blocks away. We must have talked to each other, but I don't remember a single word. After drinking from a six-pack inside his car, we went to his dorm room. Some guys in another room yelled something, laughed, as the door closed. I hadn't drank before, was a little off-balance, and couldn't make out what they said. We unceremoniously fell onto his small bed and onto each other. I swear I'd give up details if I could remember any. My best description is a hit and run, except that it was no accident. I wanted it. He wanted it. Hell, every person on that campus wanted it.

I woke the next day safe and sound in my own bed, enormously changed. There was absolutely no shame in what we did. I didn't turn into a pillar of salt and Hell didn't open up and swallow me. The devil hound no longer nipped at my heels. My first time happened. I had sex. Dorm-room sex, no less. And be it by part or the sum total of hormones, loneliness, and determination, I made it happen.

When I wander back into the unhappy years that surrounded this time, I can push most of the muck aside just by thinking the name Blackburn College. By remembering how I found my own way.

The Sin of Willful Thinking was first published in *The Right Eyed Deer*, Issue 6, 2011.

Wanda Morrow Clevenger is the author of the collection This Same Small Town in Each of Us (2011). She has been widely published, and have added up 222 publishing credits in 86 print and electronic literary journals and anthologies. Amazon reviews can be found here:
<https://www.amazon.com/author/wandaclevenger>

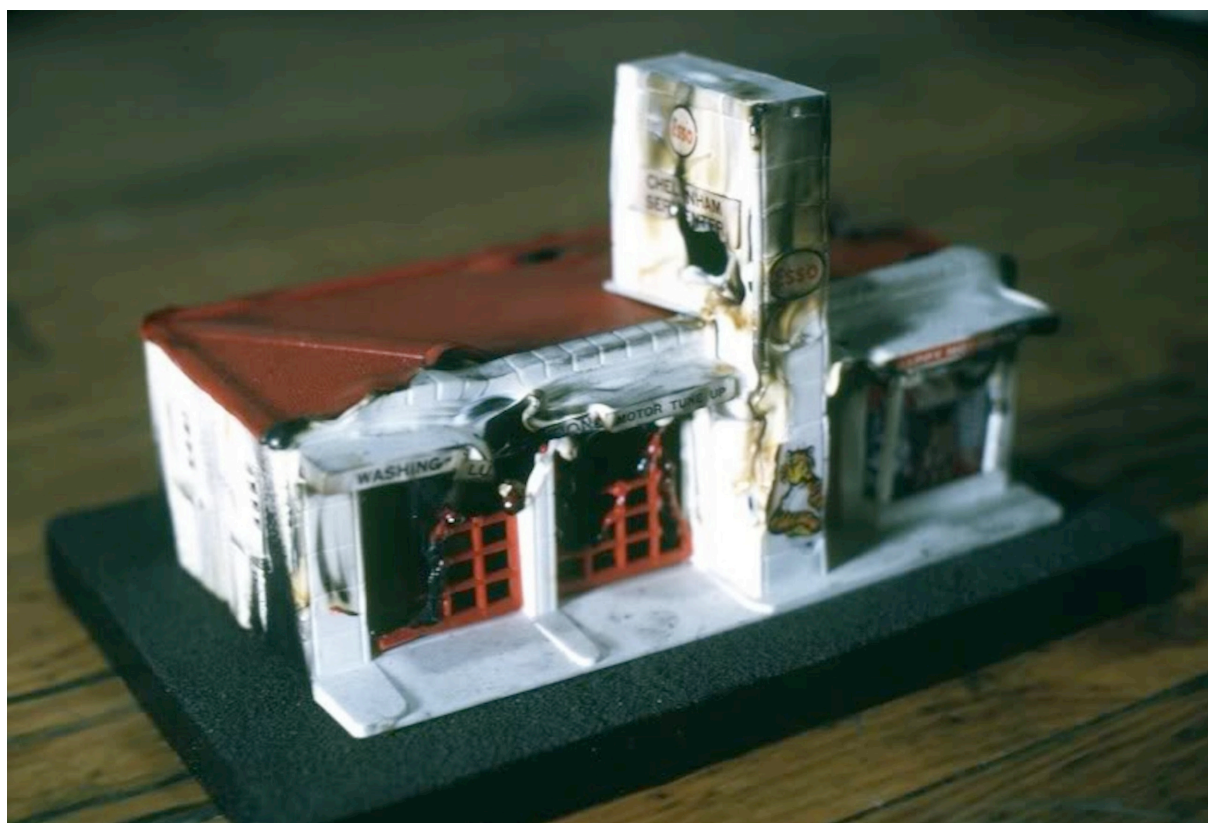
Jamie Feldman

Souvenirs from Our Anniversary Trip to Paris

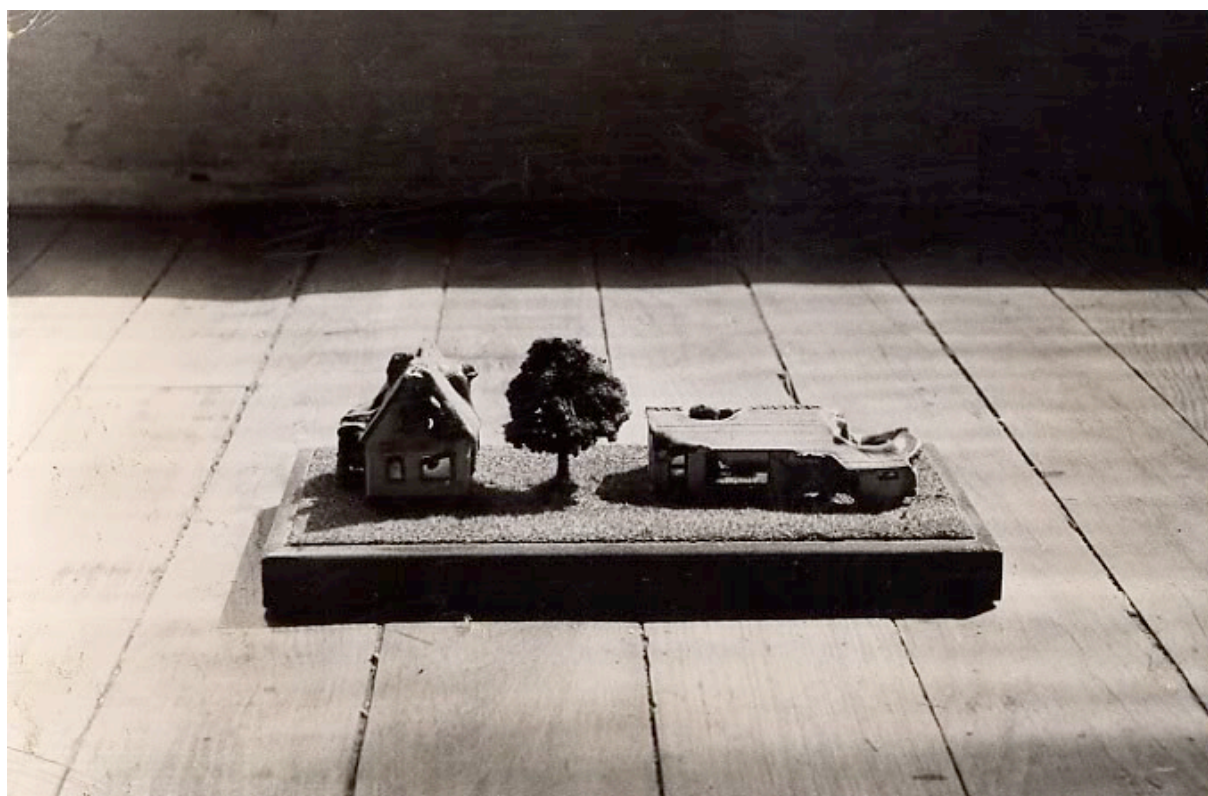
- Two ticket stubs from our overnight flight to Charles de Gaulle International Airport
- One extra packet of mini pretzels courtesy of Sheri, our flight attendant
- A map of Paris from our hotel lobby
- A key chain of the Eiffel Tower
- That caricature drawing Jennie made us sit for somewhere in Montmartre
- The cork from our celebratory bottle of Champaign
- The cork from our celebratory bottle of Merlot
- A napkin with directions back to our hotel written in blue ink
- The hotel keycard I thought I lost
- My new wallet to replace the one that was stolen on the metro
- A postcard of the Moulin Rouge
- A pink lipstick kiss on the collar of my white shirt
- A few wayward petals from the bouquet of sunflowers that Jennie threw at me that morning
- Another map of Paris from the hotel lobby
- A crushed macaroon
- Half a dozen stale croissants
- The box from a pair of diamond earrings for Jennie
- My copy of the Louvre's visitor's guide
- The cork from our celebratory bottle of Shiraz
- A pair of black panties
- The unreturned keycard from my new hotel room
- A hotel notepad with an unknown phone number written in red ink
- Two unused train tickets to Versailles
- Three unused metro passes
- A bottle of absinth
- Half of a candy bar with French writing on the label
- Six euros
- One return ticket home

Jamie Feldman is a writer/playwright from Halifax, Nova Scotia. Her writing has appeared on stage in places such as The Atlantic Fringe and Sydney AU's Short+Sweet Fest, and in print in places like Scissors & Spackle, Every Day Fiction, The Higgs Weldon, and The Green Bike Anthology.

Ira Joel Haber



Red and White Gas Station Floor Piece 1969
11" x 7 3/8" x 6 5/16" mixed. collection The Whitney Museum Of American Art. NYC



Two Small Houses and One Tree Floor Piece. 1969
9 1/2" x 5" x 4 1/2" mixed



Road House Restaurant Floor Piece
9 9/16" x 4 7/8" x 5 1/2" mixed. 1970

Ira Joel Haber is a sculptor, painter, book dealer, photographer and teacher living in Brooklyn. His work has been seen in numerous group shows in USA and Europe and he has had nine one man shows including several retrospectives of his sculpture. His work is in the collections of The Whitney Museum Of American Art, New York University, The Guggenheim Museum, The Hirshhorn Museum & The Albright-Knox Art Gallery. His paintings, drawings, photographs and collages have been published in over 100 online and print magazines. He has received three National Endowment for the Arts Fellowships, two Pollock-Krasner grants, the Adolph Gottlieb Foundation grant, and in 2010 he received a grant from Artists' Fellowship Inc.

“WRESTLING IS A WEIRD DRUG”

Toronto's perennial heel wants to turn babyface* and is taking whatever measures necessary to do so. On the cusp of the release of *Savage 1986-2011*, Moore's kitchen sink domestic family drama, the author and semi-retired video artist Nathaniel G. Moore discusses his influences, obstacles, the publishing world, love and the family dysfunction that has made him rich, in small press publishing terms. You will be witness.

by Ray McClaghlan Jr. Drawings by Andrea Bennett.

Savage 1986-2011 (Anvil Press, 2013) starts out with an innocuous fresh-from-the-public-pool early teen bike ride in North Leaside, a semi-affluent community in central Toronto. It's 1986. The novel ends some 75,000 words later on the Monday after wrestler "Macho Man" Randy Savage dies from heart complications one Florida morning in May of 2011. In between all of this, author Nathaniel G. Moore discovers the missing link between Simon & Garfunkel's jingle-jangle and 1990s grunge.

In contrast to his last book, 2009's *Wrong Bar*, which was teen pathological, insistent, manic and maudlin, his latest book, twenty-five years in the making, plays loud all the way. Ensnared with a more straight-forward and raw subtext he has used in his previous work, Moore orders up chaos unremitting; his characters respond with layers of grizzle and intrigue, affection and concern, each taking a turn screaming like one of De Kooning's Woman paintings, caught in the tantalizing web of the author's own much appreciated sense of personal dysfunction and martyrdom.

Fortunately, this creates a story with passion rather than monotony. Only one chapter, in which the protagonist, bored at his sports media office job, creates a fictional interview with [Randy Savage](#), does the book sag momentarily into artful vagueness. The novel is at its most accessible thanks in part to a pair of likable supporting roles in Holly (sister) and the bully / best friend (Andrew Beverley) and the infinitely dense Mom (Diane) and Dad (David) characters who are represented beyond their own human forms by everything from Darth Vader to Hitler to Jesus Christ to WWF's superstar The Undertaker. By the end of the [1980s it seems the family](#) has gotten too familiar with itself, poised for change - a slow burn.

(*perennial heel is 'rule-breaker', babyface is 'good guy' in wrestling speak.)

No levity as we hit the mid-1990s with disparate stride; this isn't going to be pretty. Coming of rage in the age of Cobain's suicide and Phoenix's overdose, there is a fatalistic sense that Nate, our protagonist feels he escaped a much darker fate than the dead boys he grew up admiring. By why was he spared?

Nate, our skinny hero uses the pop tools he absorbed as a child to decipher wrong from right one fateful afternoon in a real life battle with his father. The chain reaction sticks, setting him on a collision course to depression, poverty, solitude and too much introspection. As he hits his adult life in and out of realities, hospitals and universities, his diet is cynicism, fear and looming violence: Somewhere lost between Kevin McCallister (*Home Alone*) and Alex DeLarge (*A Clockwork Orange*). It's only after seven wilderness years does he reunite with Holly, who is now married and has a young daughter.

The closing moments of [Savage 1986-2011](#) recaptures this dense howl-round of mental turmoil quite effectively, except that its Sisyphean story of a lonely boy going home to mom may seem rather small-scale and narrow in the context of the consuming rage of decades of menacing videotape footage ("it's squinting red eye burning these incidents onto its magnetic tongue — not unlike "Big Brother is Watching", I thought, yeah, watch this, welcome to hell...")

While the family watches Nate, he watches them — and himself on VHS replay. It's only when Nate realizes he can walk out of the frame for good that we have a sense that things don't have to be quite so gloomy for this box bedroom rebel hall of fame candidate.

Despite his gifts and craftsmanship as a writer, Nathaniel's particular universe is one that remains a taste unacquainted by multitudes and *Savage 1986-2011* may shape up as the kind of severe honest work that accrues more honor than love.

What made you decide to use a wrestler's trajectory as constructional scaffolding for your latest novel?

NGM: Perhaps the talented Toronto poet David Seymour said it best or more recently in an interview with *The Toronto Quarterly* in regard to influence and writing, and his attribution to the works of poets Don McKay and Jan Zwicky. He said that poetry was a tramway (paraphrasing) to "philosophical attention." He went on to say that these writers "off-the-scale intellectual playfulness also taught me absolutely anything can become an object, or the subject, of that attention." Enter Randy Savage, the best wrestler of all time who was simply an incredible performer. I didn't like him at first and was an adamant Tito Santana and Ricky Steamboat fan.

But Randy's athleticism and antagonistic personality grew on me. By 1987 and into 1988, he was as big if not bigger than Hulk Hogan as a fan favorite. I was 13. The rest is Canadian literary history.

How did your recent art show Savage: Cult of Personality, Pure Media + The Art of Macho Madness infuse the book? Or did it?

To a large degree it did, it was a cathartic experience that art show in that I wanted to honour Randy, but also have him removed from me personally and let other's toil in his subject matter. I didn't have a piece in the show but of course was the culprit who made it happen. RM Vaughan summed it up best I think in the *Globe & Mail* when he wrote "While the whole town busies itself with Marshall McLuhan tributes, writer-curator Nathaniel G. Moore assembles a tribute to the late pro wrestler Randy "Macho Man" Savage. Surely, McLuhan would approve of this hybrid literary, music, video and illustrative multi-platform event. Somebody break a chair!"

Wrestling is a weird drug.

Compared to your other books, how do you place Savage amongst your greatest hits?

As singularly the greatest, but also the most difficult to finish. I wrote *Wrong Bar* in less than a year, *Let's Pretend We Never Met* took a decade and others were two or three years in the making. *Savage* quite honestly, seemed to begin in 1993 when I was still in high school. I was writing stories about my childhood even then, and they drastically fair well against the early and late drafts of *Savage*. I know that sounds far-fetched but perhaps it was always that way. At some point in 2000 or so, I fancied writing a Orwellian type novel prematurely called *1988*. And so, to a degree, I did just that.

You have assigned Charles Street Video with the task of creating a 15 minute short film to go along with the ebook version of Savage. What went into the filmmaking process, how involved were you in it and why did you choose this medium to accompany the electronic version?

It contains cruel 1990 era VHS and other domestic matter. A must-see for anyone human. Daniel Johnston would be proud.

Savage has illustrations by Vicki Nerino and Andrea Bennett throughout. Why did you choose these artists for the book?

Well, I always wanted to have illustrations in the book, going back five or six years. I discovered Andrea's work when I was with *Broken Pencil Magazine*, the must-read magazine of all things under the radar in Canada and the world when it comes to weirdo arts and crafts and literature.

I asked her if she'd draw a few pieces and it turned into something like twenty-five pieces, and so here we are.

Vicki Nerino is another artist I admire and I wanted her to recreate the iconic movie poster for *Empire Strikes Back* which was based on the original movie poster for *Gone With The Wind*. In it, mom is Darth Vader, Dad is Han Solo, I'm Princess Leia and Andrew is Luke Skywalker. I believe my Uncle Carl is in there as well, and my late cat Sadie and fictional older sister, the incredibly and always cool Holly.

The book appears to be a direct extraction from your own nuclear family. Care to comment?

It's an imagined chronicling, with a few special effects. The meals were unbelievably long so a lot of editing went into that, cutting right to the plate-scraping and dishwasher loading phase. A lot of middle class meat was consumed, and as a vegetarian now, I feel great shame.

The book [Savage 1986-2011](#) launches this October in Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver, published by [Anvil Press](#) Illustrations by Andrea Bennett: <http://andreabennett.ca/>

Ray McClaghlan Jr. is an Etobicoke, Ontario poet and artist, currently working on his first collection of poetry. His work has appeared in The Puritan, Ditch and Jade Magazine.



Illustration: Andrea Bennett (c) 2013



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