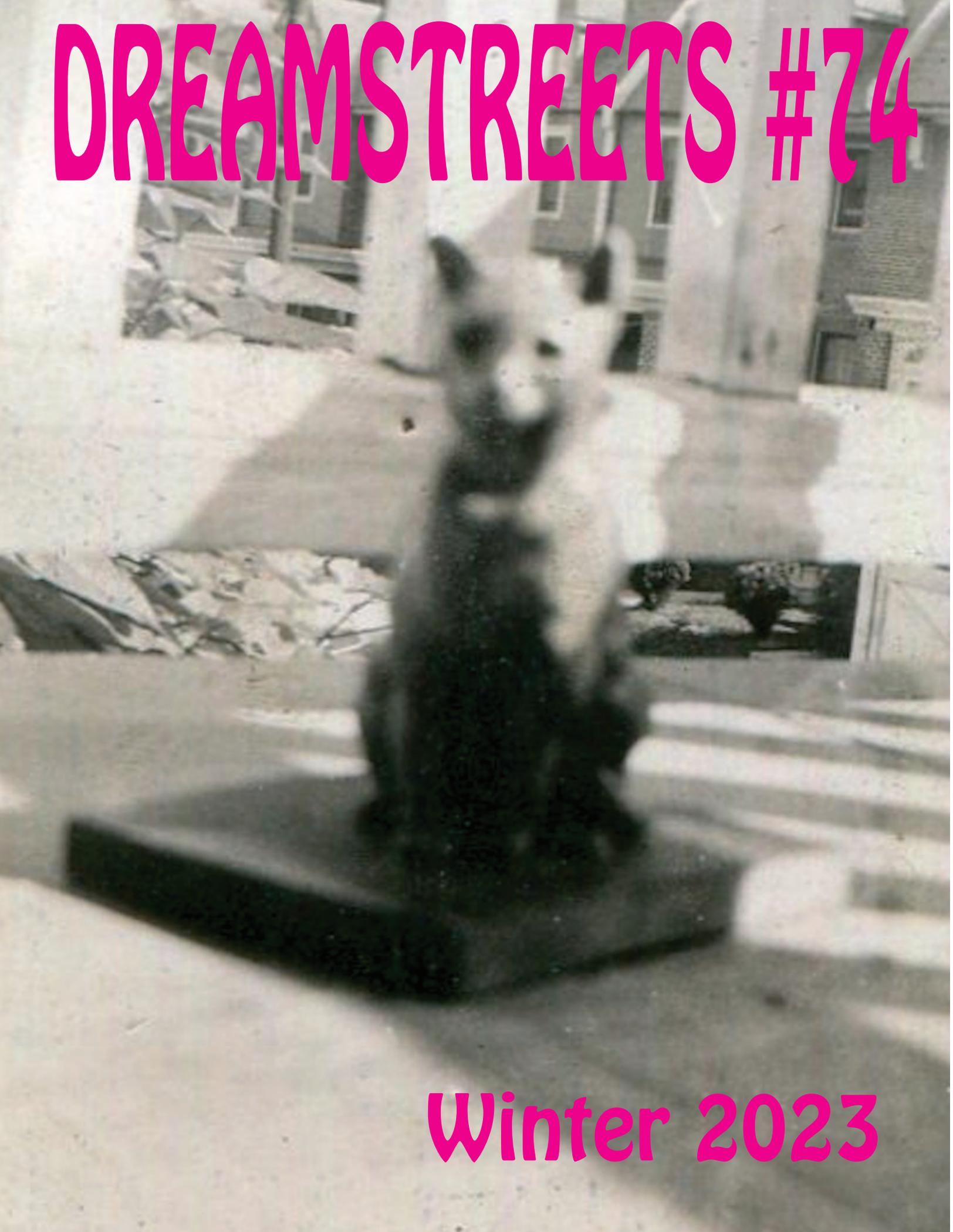


DREAMSTREETS #74



Winter 2023

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Steven Leech

Boysie's Horn

The History of Jazz in Wilmington
in the 20th Century
Steven Leech
with Afterword by Larry Williams

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*With afterword
by Wilmington
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BROKEN TURTLE BOOKS

Dreamstreets #74

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Incidental Art on p. 3 is by Jonathan Bragdon.
Redemption on p.21 is by Franetta McMillian.

The Cover & Contents

The cover, from a snapshot taken sometime in the late 1930s, is a photo of a cat that for years I thought was a household pet until my mother told me that it was a sculpture she made. For a short period she had been a student of Delaware artist Frank Schoonover, but no evidence of it survives. She and my father met while taking classes at the Delaware Art Museum, probably in the very early 1940s. They married in 1942 and I was born in 1943.

In past issues of *Dreamstreets* I have published a couple remnants of my father's writing. The photo on the cover is the only example of my mother's artwork I know of, except for a now lost sculpture of a bird she made while a patient at the State Hospital at Farnhurst. It was unrecognizable as a bird, a distortion caused by her schizophrenia, an affliction that lasted her entire adult life—the family curse.

One day during her final years while I was acting as her live-in caretaker, she suddenly blurted out a poem, which I thought was pretty good. I asked her who composed it and she answered that she had. Sometime later, armed with a small tape recorder, I asked her to repeat the poem so I could record it and perhaps publish it in *Dreamstreets*; arthritis would not allow her to write it down for me even if she was willing. As for my request to recite the poem again, she refused. She died and took that poem with her.

In this issue of *Dreamstreets* we offer a literary artifact somewhat connected to Delaware in the form of the only short story written by William Henry Leonard Poe, the older brother of Edgar Allan Poe.

Edgar Allan Poe and John Lofland, Delaware's earliest literary figure, undoubtedly knew each other and interacted on occasion. They probably found one item in common that may have bound them in friendship. Both experienced deep pangs of love with a woman, and in each case the pairs had pledged their love for each other. In Poe's case she was Elvira Royster and in Lofland's, Sallie Mitchell. The consequential similarity in both cases was, as was the archaic custom at a time when women were still considered property, both Sallie and Elmira were married off by edict of their parents—most likely their fathers—to more suitable suitors. As perhaps today, the life of a poet and author is not lucrative.

This tragic similarity between Poe and Lofland affected the nature of their literary art that followed, Sallie Mitchell and Elvira Royster acting as festering muses in the imagination of both Poe and Lofland.

While Lofland sequestered himself in a Milford, Delaware, garret (from which he was to be rescued, perhaps, by none other than Poe), Edgar had an older brother, W. H.

Leonard Poe, to take literary revenge in the story republish herein. Leonard Poe even named the protagonist “Edgar.”

We also offer a piece of prose fiction from Auset Marian Lee from her novel in progress *A Settling of Crows*. An earlier chapter from her novel was published in *Dreamstreets* #57.

More prose comes from Franetta McMillian, with her speculative novel in progress about the 2nd Civil War in the United States, *I Dream A Highway*.

Beside of’ reliable Ken Segal, new poetry in the current issue includes work from Jim Bourey, who is a veteran of the Coastal Writers Group in Rehoboth and Acorn Group in Dover. He has published *Silence, Interrupted* (Broadkill River Press, 2015) and *The Distance Between Us* (Cold River Press, 2020). New poetry comes from Nolan James Morris, a native of our White Clay Creek watershed who dreams of “a love-oriented means of existence.” In much the same way as Poe had been wont to pass many times through Delaware, Ray Greenblatt stretches his travel between the Eastern Shore and Philadelphia. His work has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize, and he earned the Anthony Byrne Prize for Poetry.

For my own contribution to this issue, I offer two pieces, one fiction and the other a chapter from my book *Valdemar’s Corpse*. Both pieces have a bearing upon one another and remain relevant to our times while depicting an earlier era. There is even a subtle, perhaps oblique, relationship to the current issue’s cover. The two prose pieces demonstrate how history can rhyme, with the help of literary art.

— *Steven Leech*

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES (Please have the courtesy to comply with these carefully. They are simple and make our job much easier.)

We accept literary submissions in any genre, including criticism, reporting, and commentary from and of concern to Delawareans and those in the Delaware Diaspora. We solicit our own visual art. Generally, we do not reprint previously published contemporary work although one previously published poem in a sequence of un-published poems might be permissible; just make sure we know, so we can give credit. Our reading periods are year-round. We sometimes publish a summer issue curated without submissions.

Send up to 5 poems of no more than 5 pages, not including your cover page. For prose, 15 pages is roughly the limit although more may be acceptable if the work is exceptional. For criticism and commentary, it’s wise to query first. Begin no more than one poem on each page and make your stanza breaks clear.

Please send your work to: dreamstreets(dot)press(at)gmail (dot) com AS A SINGLE ATTACHED DOCUMENT in Microsoft Word (.doc or .docx). PLEASE, DO NOT

MAKE US OPEN AND KEEP TRACK OF SEVERAL DOCUMENTS. Write "Submission" in the email subject heading. IN YOUR SINGLE DOCUMENT, include a cover page with name, address, phone number, email, and a short bio of 50 words or less, and indicate your connection to Delaware. Those who need to use snail mail may address a hard copy of their submission to Dreamstreets Press, P. O. Box 4593, Newark, DE 19715. Double space prose, single space poetry as your standard, use 12-pt Times New Roman font, and remove extra space between paragraphs. Align text left, except for special or unusual typography, in which case, we may have to work with you to render it faithfully. DON'T CAPITALIZE TITLES unless that is your intention.

Simultaneous submissions are fine, but please let us know in your cover letter if you are courting another and inform us immediately if your work becomes elsewhere engaged. We reserve first serial rights until publication, when all rights revert to the author. Our rights include electronic as well as print publication and magazine reprints. Please give Dreamstreets credit if you re-publish your work. Our editorial committee will review your work and get back to you before the next issue.



Jonathan Bragdon

We begin this issue of Dreamstreets by going back in time to the spring of 2001 and issue #40, and a poem by our friend Audrey Pittman. We believe it will enhance the content that follows and deliver not only a sense of meditation but also a message we may all appreciate.

Audrey Pittman

Sleep in the Garden (glowing green wino)

The oracle said, "Sleep in the garden,
and wisdom will be revealed to you."
So, I pulled the beat-to-hell antique
steamer deck chair out of the basement,
where it had been waiting its day.
I drilled and doweled,
glued and joined,
oiled and caned,
and at last, brought it out
to my downtown front-yard garden,
among the fragrant lilies and phlox,
with an enormous quilt,
on a sterling summer night.

At first the streetlights seemed too bright
to let me sleep —
but, almost as soon as noticed,
they began to dim.
And finally, drunk on the scent
of Bourbon roses and
heady, night-scented, sweet flowering tobacco,
I drifted off.

So, about three o'clock in the morning,
I was awakened by a wino
meandering up the sidewalk.
Slight, hoary, arthritic, and —
it seemed like -his clothes were glowing, a pale eerie green.
I rubbed my eyes and looked again:
Yep, he's glowing alright.
Will o' the wisp from his own gas?
maybe he was rooting through
leftovers in someone's garbage can,
and the phosphorescent pseudomonas bacteria
were clinging to his shirt?
Then I caught a whiff of him
on the predawn breeze . . .

I suddenly remembered how the Buddha
would sometimes manifest himself
as a wino,
lying in his own vomit,
covered with garbage,
smelling of rotten fish.
To pass him by in disgust
was to pass by untold opportunity for enlightenment . . .
maybe this was who I was here to learn from?

So I held still
and I waited,
as this glowing green wino
shambled up to me,
and I listened.
And he said one word:
"Change"

From A SETTLING OF CROWS

Auset Marian Lee

CHAPTER 4

Brookline

The colored section of Brookline was first named “The Milky Way” by Jonesey, a known philanderer, who got poetic one night and compared the colored women of Brookline to the stars in the Milky Way because they were so plentiful and such a delight to look upon. Who could refuse? They were in front of the carriage house rolling dice, Jonesy, Spivey, and Tree. It was a bitter cold Christmas in 1885.

“Ya see,” said Jonesey, “when you look up at that there sky, and all that milk is just a-flowin’ down right at you, pourin’ from the sky like the milkman just spilled his whole delivery right on your front porch. And it’s just sittin’ there lookin’ atcha. Awww, man, ya get drunk at the sight.”

“Yeah,” agreed Spivey. “Like one big tit in the sky.”

“Shut up, Spivey,” demanded Tree. “The last time you saw a tit was Leap Year and you ain’t no poet. Poets don’t use words like ‘tit,’ you moron.”

Tree turned to Jonesey and asked “Is that what you told Annie Mae last night? Yeah, I saw you sneaking off with her yesterday. No wonder you’re gettin’ laid,” he joked.

Spivey re-entered the conversation. “Where do you get that shit man,” he asked Jonesey. “I gotta give it to ya. You got some shit wit you.” Spivey slapped Jonesey on the back, took another pull of whiskey, and passed it to him. They were all cracking up when Gordon Webster, their factory boss and quasi-benefactor, pulled up in his carriage. They told him what Jonesey had said.

“What stars? I don’t see any stars,” Gordon said with a smile.

“Shut your mouth,” said Spivey. “You know it’s the truth. Look like you can’t stay away.”

Gordon Webster just laughed and drove away.

The next day at the factory, Gordon told Iris, “Are you one of those fine Milky Way stars down on the row, Iris? Thought maybe you’d be a flower,” he laughed.

“Wouldn’t you like to know. I don’t know nothin’ ‘bout no milk, but you know I was always a star,” she bragged, flashing her big-toothed grin at him.

After that the name caught on, but the myth was that it was Gordon Webster who had anointed the slender piece of dilapidated real estate that was his own back alley with the stellar name.

“The Milky Way” was named Hamden Corners in the 1950s in honor of the first Black man to get killed on one of the machines in the Webster factory. His name was Roosevelt Hamilton, and they found his body crushed and mangled one sparkling May Day in 1942. But in 1954 *Brown vs. Board of education* was on the tip of everyone’s tongue.

They paved Reed Street the next year, as though the *Brown* verdict desegregating schools finally gave Negroes a right to a real street. They had actually integrated their school a few years earlier. It was an integration that was barely noticed on the national scene because it caused little stir. Brookline and Hamden Corners knew how to get along.

Also in 1954, a liberal-minded Brookline historian decided to document the Hamilton tragedy in an op-ed piece in the local paper. This article caught fire with the coloreds. The newspaper, careless and downright mean, printed the man’s last name as Hamden and nobody ever corrected it. The story spread and somehow “Hamilton Corners” became “Hamden Corners.” No one knows quite how, but they figured after the streets were paved a new respect for Negroes must have been due in recognition of the *Brown* civil rights case. No one remembered that Jonesey had so poetically named the factory row, or why. They didn’t even remember the legend of Gordon Webster, which had been a choice morsel in the rumor mill for some time. People thought that white people simply wanted to honor Hamilton, or Hamden, as it were.

That honor was received by most of the colored people who knew the backstory, but there was one person who wasn’t buying what they were selling. That was Cotton DuBois.

CHAPTER 5

Cotton

Cotton lived on a dead-end, dusty road. She saw the world at her feet not at the end of that road. On her street were miserable houses that stooped like Daddy Hoppin’ John and sagged like sad, empty breasts. Cotton’s breasts were happy and full. Beauty was her companion.

Cotton DuBois lived in Hamden Corners when the crumbs of white people did little to whet her palette. It was 1964, and all around the country, Black people were waking up and demanding more; in Hamden Corners, however, the people were still complacent.

Cotton read the newspaper daily to keep up with current events, mourning the death of John F. Kennedy and praying for the passage of the Civil Rights Act. On “Bloody Sunday” she cried when two hundred state troopers in Selma, Alabama attacked 600 civil rights demonstrators with billy clubs and tear gas. Controversial Nation of Islam Muslim and civil rights champion, Malcolm X, was one of her heroes. She hung on to Dr. Martin Luther King’s every word. Nevertheless, people in Hamden Corners seemed oblivious to the world changing around them. As far as Cotton was concerned, too many people were afraid to rock the boat; they didn’t realize that Black folk did not share the same boat with white people. Negroes were relegated to a little canoe, and that canoe was hemorrhaging water.

CHAPTER 6

Maizie

Cotton's mother Maizie was a sensible woman who saw the world unedited, just as it was. She ruled her roost but knew that her influence stopped at the front door. As a young girl Maizie had known the summer dust of unpaved roads that could be tasted on round red lips and swept off wooden floors and out into the day, along with rusty children with molasses on their cheeks. In her day dust crept up sturdy legs full of fatback and biscuits; it muted cotton denims and bright country plaids. Sunday whites were bright and fresh off the clothesline but turned dingy by the end of the day. Mothers and old men sat in church pews and summoned God to help them dust the despair from their lives. Help them carry on another week or just until payday.

The dust in Gloucester County that was swatted, collected, and scrubbed by Sunday women, Saturday night men, and stickball children finally ascended into heaven just in time for church. White people lived differently, with their paved roads and well-tended secrets. While that was something that Maizie knew all too well, she aimed to forget it. Not forgetting could be the difference between life and death. It was almost a religion to her, but this Sunday Maizie could be found at Reverend J. McBride's Ezion Mt. Zion Church. Even Daddy Bill, whose real name was Luther, went this Sunday. In this matter, he didn't have a choice. He knew that this one concession in his marriage paid for a world of sins. It was a small price.

It was one morning in 1966, and all the streets were paved, though the past still kicked up dust. The sun was so bright that it made the devil hot. Maizie sat in her usual church pew with her husband, whom she called "Daddy Bill," for no particular reason. Luther William DuBois was a lot of name for a lot of man, according to Luther himself. Cotton sat with them.

Daddy Bill handed Maizie a fan to get ready for the service. This was the first time he had stepped into church in a long time. Friday night had made the difference. He was still thinking about it when he handed Maizie the fan. Reverend Calvin J. McBride, the minister at Ezion Mt. Zion, raised a holy furor that sent fans to fanning, women to moaning, and men to fidgeting in their seats. The congregation wailed and swayed for the love of a God that led them by the hand on dark and dusty roads. But one thing for sure, the streets of heaven were paved with gold.

"The wages of sin is death," exhorted Reverend Calvin J. McBride. And on the word "death" his fist slammed the pulpit and woke up Lonnie Anderson in the second-row pew. Lonnie sat up to listen to the preacher, oblivious that a bee was circling his head for a landing.

Lonnie came to church only to catch a glimpse of Cotton Dubois, who sat a row behind him, deliberately out of his eye. It was a challenge each Sunday for Cotton to stay away from the local hounds fast on her heels so that she could enjoy the service in peace.

She sat still with her Bible resting in the sleek, cool, beige folds of her lap. With a wide-brimmed straw hat framing those cat eyes, she appeared demure, soft, and devoted to the timbre and rhythm of the sermon. But just below the brim, the green eyes cut like emeralds through the rhetoric of a hypocrisy that was thick as the smoke that curled in the air in Big Irma's bar.

"I said sin, this mornin'. Sin ain't nothin' but the devil," preached McBride.

The congregation hummed in agreement. "MMMMMhmmmmmm."

"And the devil don't want but one thing from us this morning'. The devil don't KNOW but one thing 'bout life this mornin'," warned the preacher.

"MMMMhmmmm." repeated the congregation.

"And that's death: Say amen," ordered McBride.

"Amen."

Fans flapped faster. Feet got to stomping. Pocketbooks clicked and hand-laundered lace hankies came out.

Ain't that the truth, thought Maizie. Daddy Bill sat there with a smile on his lips. They were both thinking about Friday night.

It was late, too late for Daddy Bill to be getting home from working night shift. It had been happening lately. The children were out. Cotton was at Virginia's babysitting and spending the night, and Sissy and her younger sister, Ella, were at a slumber party. The last Maizie saw of Ella, she was complaining about being a "tag-along."

It was deep night when Daddy Bill came home to Maizie. This hard, black, deep purple sky-night daddy came home to his moonbottom woman in the deep late of night.

Dirt-crusted, deep blue denims wrinkled around Maizie's bed... late. Too late for this honey-oven woman, who knew that Ruby worked at the factory and who wasn't no fool. She knew Ruby wore skirts that stretched across all the reasons why Daddy Bill was late. Again.

He curled at her side, leg placed just so, and steady-easy pushed his manhood standing on alert against her. His manhood pushed against this moonbottom woman who could make the sun rise in the morning as sure as his hard love would rise to greet her each time she called his name.

"Daddy?! Come here," she'd call, heat rising in her throat rich with tongue words spilling over lips made to say his name. Made to make him rise to greet the call.

Ooooohweeee baby, thought Daddy Bill. What YOU want brown bottom moon woman? What YOU want big-legged, big-lipped, two big round honey brown sumptuous reasons why Daddy Bill always came home to Maizie. He had spent all night catting around with Ruby at the factory and she still wasn't putting out for him. But it was only a matter of time. So Daddy came home to Maizie all fired up and ready for some easy loving, just like he liked it, tried and true.

But moonbottom woman don't move, thought Daddy. And she ain't sleep. And she don't move. Daddy Bill's passion flame flickered and he wanted to light her up, if she would just move those big old legs 'round here like she was SUPPOSED to. He steady-easy pushed, steady-hard glide, slowly knee-pushed his manhood against brown moonbottom woman.

But she don't move. And she ain't sleep. And she don't move.

Well, ain't love free, and ain't love easy, thought Daddy. Ain't love free like yellow juice runnin' from morning eggs.

Ain't it. Free?

He'd go get a beer and come back. Then moonbottom woman would turn her moon straight up to the sun and call his name. He laughed hard because he knew that she wasn't sleep, and he pulled off his socks, stinking up the summer air.

In the kitchen, Daddy's beer exploded when he popped it, like he wished he could empty his passion—explode into forever-night into this woman who wouldn't move against his glide. This was HIS woman.

Daddy Bill fumbled through the deep night-shift-night as always, without turning on the light, grabbing for a chicken wing, or cold potato salad dish, just knowing that his baby had left him HIS plate. Maizie cooked in summer heat day, and heh, heh, night, he thought. Shit, she better.

But Daddy can't feel his plate in the cool of the refrigerator. Nothing so far. His fingers had memorized the position of the plate, like he had memorized her moans and favorite positions.

"Shit, don't LET me have to turn on the light..." He never turned on the light before, and he wasn't going to start because of no Ruby and a Payday Friday Goodtime or unpaid bills. He'd take care. They never had anything turned off, did they? Well, just that once. He stomped upstairs to the bedroom and wished he had kept his boots on.

He got to mumbling. Daddy Bill don't COME home to have to turn on no light to search for his food and have his manhood fall limp in front of the darkness. Shit, who the FUCK she think she—

Low curses melt-faded into the night air. Maizie heard them and finally moved. She met her man at the bedroom door and cooed.

"Daddy Bill, what you stumbling' 'round this darkness for? You ain't got no dinner yet?"

"No, I ain't got my mothafuckin' dinner. I ain't got my mothafuckin' nothin'. Here I am workin' my ass overtime and you ain't got my dinner where it s'pose to be. How you EVER expect to keep a man if you don't know what you s'pose to do?"

Maizie cooed. "Baby, you so drunk, you just ain't looked right. That's all. Go down there and turn on the light, baby. You can't see a damn thing in the dark 'cause you ain't no goddam cat. You a ol' fool that can't see."

Maizie sat in her church pew and thought about how the devil had been working on Friday night. Daddy Bill wasn't paying the devil any mind. He reached over and slipped his hand in hers.

"I said the DEVIL don't know 'bout nothin' but death," repeated McBride. "Because the wages of sin is death. And I'm here to tell you, brothers and sisters this mornin' that we just can't wait to collect our paychecks."

"My, my," said Minnie Brenner in the first row, feeding Charisse peppermints to keep her quiet. Brownie, and Sissy were beating each other with the fans.

"Can we?" asked McBride. "We just can't wait... I said we can't wait—can I get a witness—" thump, thump, two beats, "to collect our paychecks."

The ushers started passing out more fans. One sound hallelujah rose from the choir.

"Because if we're not working for the Lord...."

"Ye-e-e-s," said the deacon in a low, steady affirmative.

"I said, if we're not workin' for the Lord," puff, puff, pause, "then we must be workin' for..." And by this time, Rev. McBride's eyes were bugging out of his head and looking all around the congregation. He cupped his ear to hear the response.

The women clicked their teeth, cast evil eyes at some wayward husband, a few people clapped. The men dragged out their handkerchiefs and mopped up their sweaty brows.

"Who?" demanded the reverend. "Who are we workin' for night and day, day and night? Mr. Charlie with the red cape and the punch clock. Yes, we're workin' in time, on time, and overtime for WHO...?"

"Oooh, Lordy," Selma said, and through her teeth she hissed, "JEsusssss." The forlorn fact is acknowledged.

Daddy Bill barely heard a thing. He was thinking about Friday night and his Manhood Alert.

"Don't you start now, baby," he had told Maizie.

"I ain't startin', baby," she said, and to prove it she let her gown slip just so and move those big thighs to rustle the pink folds clinging around all she had—or so he thought.

Ooooohweeee! Manhood alert, he thought to himself. Daddy, you so sweet!

She woke now, ain't she woke. And a laugh burst from his chest. Women. Goddam women.

He stumbled back down the steps to the kitchen and forgot all about his ass-kickin' boots. He had his hard back. Didn't need no boots—no workin' all the goddam time night-shift boots.

He'd save them.

Because he was gonna kick Carl-at-the-factory's ass. Massa Charlie, white-eyes-buggin'-all-the-time-at-Ruby's-ass Carl. And Ruby just tossing and bumping it in front of Mr. Charlie's gold-toothed grin. As Black as Ruby was, she needed to be sticking to her own kind. Besides, Mr. Charlie couldn't do for her what Daddy could do.

He'd kick his goddam mothafuckin' ass and take his money, too.

(And probably lose his job. Because Carl's sister was married to the foreman so Carl could kick ass, screw, and be White All Day Long with a job for the rest of his natural life.)

But somehow when he got back to the kitchen, night felt close around Daddy's neck. Like four hundred years of southern rope or northern slick-assed, clean-killing silver noose slitting niggah's throats northern style. Business clean—let the show-time Bad Niggah-dos wipe up the blood in their token-assed windows.

Shit. He'd kick Carl's ass ANYWAY and give his money to Ruby... or big-legged upstairs woman. If she'd just ACT right.

"Where IS the mothafuckin' light!" yelled Daddy. Just then he heard a rustling, but it didn't sound like soft thighs coming to rescue him. It sounded like a rustle-creek and it felt, all of a sudden, warmer than hot spring night warm in that kitchen. Daddy Bill started sweating his beer.

"Maizie?!! That you, Maizie! You better come on over here and get my dinner, dammit. And turn on this light, shit. I ain't got all night..." He heard a definite creek. And then a bump.

Maizie sat on the edge of her bed, pulling up her stockings and humming. She liked to hum when she was nervous, or just plain pissed. Hmmmmmm hmhmhmhm Lawd Sweet Jesus, hmhmhm, Daddy Bill, hmhmhmhm. Her laugh pushed her back against the empty in Daddy Bill's bed, and she wondered about the noise she heard downstairs.

Yessir, she wasn't stupid. Big-assed, yes; jewel-lipped, uh huh, but stupid?... She hummed louder.

Rock of ages, hmhmhmhm (...come in late and expect her to be...) hmhmhmhm hmhmhm and no...she didn't hear nothin downstairs. Why should she since she had called Carl and used her White folk's voice to tell him that Daddy was trying to hump Ruby...hmhmhm hmhmhmhm. Her friend Blanche-at-the factory had so much as drawn a picture. She had known for some time

Stocking thighs glistened in the pale bedroom light that she knew how to turn on—and off—along with her thighs. Shit, this was her shit, Maizie thought. And she hummed...(comin' in the house all hours of the)...

Yes, she had called Carl and wondered how long it would take before he went after her husband. Before her gamble turned into a sure thing. She kept her Sunday gloves ready for ushering at Ezion Mt. Zion and ready for being a woman and doing what a woman had to do. Being a Black woman and being a do-right woman, doing right by the four hundred years of the graves of her mothers and their mothers' mothers working too hard for the money and too hard for the love.

Bump-crush-downstairs-ruckus couldn't possibly reach upstairs with all the humming she was doing. Singing and swinging low sweet chariot. Singing that she only did because it calmed her nerves that didn't care anymore if they turned to steel. She knew that love wasn't free and women weren't as easy as men thought.

Everything had a price.

Now where did she put her Sunday, fresh white gloves? hmhmhm hmhmhm. Everything has a price. She never had to start no loud begging foolishness about payday and unpaid bills and she wasn't going to start now. And it was only since this Ruby got him to itching this way that he came home late and wrong and got her to humming.

She worked. She loved. And she wanted her man the way she wanted him. No more, no less. Hmmmmmm. The song oozed from her throat strangely non-melodic and more jazz than Ezion Mt. Zion gospel.

She loved Daddy Bill, and he loved her more than he could ever curse his way out of. And all that bumping and scraping downstairs might wake him up to stop coming in the house all late and wrong and pushing up against her with his tired-ass self.

She found her Sunday gloves in the same drawer with Luther's .38 caliber loaded piece-o-hard-explosion-up-somebody's-ass-come-messin-round-his-house. And don't think that Daddy Bill didn't teach moonwoman how to use it.

Downstairs Daddy Bill listened in the darkness for his woman to come rescue him. "Maizie? That you, Maizie?"

"No Maizie here," came an easy voice reply, too at ease in Daddy Bill's house. The "no" hung in the stupid hot air with limp stupid penis and bare eyes bugging. When the light came on, Daddy was looking at a steel rod Smith and Wesson that was cowboy hard and White Boy crazy. Crazy the way Daddy could never be without getting fired. Forget fired, killed.

White boy Carl sat easy with a voice like ain't-it-easy-sex in this niggah's kitchen, pointing his hardness right at the limp in Daddy's manhood. Carl was ready to make this niggah a bitch. His bitch. Africa-black punk-assed mothafuckin' piece of asswipe bitch, thought Carl.

No words and loud laugh belted from Daddy Bill's gut because he was ready to upchuck his Too Many Beers Good-Time Friday Night all over Maizie's floor.

Maizie would be really mad, then, and he would never get laid. Of course, he'd be dead. Hello Smith. Good-bye Daddy.

"Looking for your dinner?" asked Carl, smacking his nasty, skinny lips stretched—easy—over the gold in his tooth. Like Ruby's skirt stretched so easy across all the reasons why Carl wasn't giving up his Friday goodtimes in her bed.

Not for no niggah.

The first click Daddy heard was when the light went on. The second click was Carl's Smith and Wesson, cocked hard. The third click was the sound of a .38 caliber pistol, cocked hard and ready. There stood Maizie wearing all of her Sunday-Go-To-Meetin' clothes. To accessorize the outfit, she held Daddy's .38 caliber pistol in her white-gloved hand.

"Carl, you mess up my kitchen?" asked Maizie. "Daddy, you pee on my floor?"

Hot damn! thought Daddy. My baby, don't she coo? Goddam crazy hummin' bitch. Ain't she just as sweet as Daddy wanted her to be? Church croonin', good lovin' woman made Ruby look like a used do-rag stinkin' with grease.

"I say, Carl, you mess up my kitchen?" repeated Maizie.

Aha! thought Daddy. Now Carl, you the stupid bitch. And he laughed so loud that he doubled over just in time to miss the bullet that would have parted his hair.

The bullet wasn't from this White Boy, either. It was a Hello .38 humming through the night air.

"Goddam baby, what the fuck you doin'? If you don't know how to shoot that thing..."

"I know how to shoot it," said Maizie. Never raised her voice. Never. No need.

No-words Carl thought twice about peeing on Maizie's sparkling kitchen floor like he wanted. Shit, niggahs were crazy. If she'd shoot her old man, think what she might do to him.

"Ma'am, I don't mean no harm," said Carl. "Just had some business to take care of, and it it's all right with you, I'll be on my way.

"Well, as long as you're finished," said Maizie, "and bein' on your way, why don't you just take out the trash as you go. Daddy? You know you didn't take out the trash this mornin'?"

"I know, baby, I was just going to..."

BLAM!

Thirty-eight caliber bullets talked louder than she would ever strain her voice to speak. This time it pierced the air between the two men.

"What you say, Daddy?" asked Maizie, somewhat in a trance.

"Nothin', baby, nothin. You know how I is, always talkin' 'bout —"and he had the good sense to shut up as it occurred to him that she wasn't in a talkative mood,

By this time, Carl was a memory. A white-ghost-streakin'-in-the-night memory. Soon as he heard the second shot, he was a trash-grabbin'-getting'-the-hell-in-the-wind mothafucka. He was gone.

Daddy almost laughed out loud in church at the thought, but then, in a flash, McBride whipped out a red cape, threw it over his black robe, and leaped from the pulpit.

"The DEVIL!" he yelled. Lonnie was so startled when he woke up, that he almost fell off the pew. But he awoke in time to see the reverend passing out black pieces of paper with white numbers etched on them, saying, "The wages of sin is death. Come collect your paychecks. The wages of sin is death. Devil got your number. You reap what you sow..." and so on.

After McBride passed out all the tickets to a shocked and confused congregation, he went back up to the pulpit with all the fire and thunder that he could muster after hopping around the church and risking cardiac arrest.

He finally raised his hands like Moses parting the Red Sea and looked across an ocean of faces staring up at him in amazement. Then he said, "But my GAWD," he paused, "is a great Gawd. He is a merciful Gawd. He is an A-a-a-ble Master. So when your number comes up, if you have served him right, you don't have to die."

Nettie Mae Brown was sitting in the third row and glad to hear that since the number on her little black paycheck was "1."

"But you can't serve two masters, today children. No, you can't. Just choose Jesus and set yourself free." The word Jesus whispered through the hushed silence as people looked at their black destinies etched on construction paper.

At that point in the service, the church deacons carried a table down the center aisle with a great, round bowl in the middle of it, and sat it in the front of the church. McBride came down from the pulpit and took off his red taffeta cape. Sister Alma Johnson, McBride's own personal devil, sat in the fifth row and smiled. She had made it out of an old red party dress that she cut up.

"Now, if ya choose Jesus, then come up here and give your paycheck to the devil in this burning bowl." And McBride lit the candles in the bowl. People shuffled. Coughed. Looked at one another. The sisters twisted their hankies in confusion. Daddy Bill stuffed his limp, grey handkerchief in his lapel pocket and squirmed in his seat. No one moved. Even though they felt uneasy holding these tickets, no one wanted to be the first to stand up and admit that they had earned the devil's wage.

"I said Jesus can save you this morning," trembled McBride. And he began singing "Amazing Grace" in a strained, guttural moan. Nora Ferguson, the church pianist, used the opportunity to accompany him. This would give her a good excuse to stay seated.

McBride didn't seem to care if anybody came up or not. Lost in his song, eyes closed, pacing the front of the church, he was oblivious to all else. And out of the hum of the congregation, in the midst of McBride's plaintive wail, came a voice that shook the church.

"THE DEVIL BE DAMNED!"

And so the Devil had been on that Friday night with Maizie holding a pistol at her husband who loved her more than he even knew.

Maizie cooed, holding the .38 hard, ready steel, pointing carelessly at this careless-with-her love Black man whom she loved too much.

"Daddy, you ready to go to bed?" she said in her honey, butter voice.

Oh, yes, he was ready to go to bed. Hell, go to church, go to anything she wanted him to go to except straight to hell, which is where he would most likely wind up.

"Well," she said, "I ain't ready." She said it steady like the steady press she had felt against her moonwomanhood. No, she wasn't ready, and she wasn't sure when she would be ready. It's just that the hard, steel rod felt so good...and hard...in her hand.

Maybe she would push it up against his ass...or maybe she wouldn't. Maybe she would just stand there and see if she could coo his little snake-limp-stupid-penis into a firmness that she could do something with once they got upstairs—never letting go of her steel .38 caliber manness...or maybe she wouldn't. Maybe she would ask him how good Ruby had been...hmmmmmmmmmm. No, she guessed how Ruby had been. Not half bad, but not half as good as she was. She tried to think of a church song that she knew all the words to...hmmmmmm.

Maybe she would just kill him and think about it later. That's a thought. And just think about the whole thing later. Just go on to bed and let him drip blood all over her sparkling kitchen floor, littered with white/Black men's bullshit, and go upstairs, and sing hymns, and never know what

happened. She never raised her voice and she was always in church on Sunday, so they couldn't send her to jail.

Except that she was Black. And strong and Black and justice didn't go together, even though nobody cared about her man. Nobody...but her.

Daddy Bill's voice was butter rum and he came singing low and slow across the air that kept him from loving this Sunday-Go-To-Meetin', calculated, white-gloved moonwoman who was real smart. Didn't wear those gloves for no reason, unless she aimed to shoot.

They'd never guess that she killed him, he figured, because as sweet as Daddy played, her sweetness was for real. Black-trouble woman. Don't take-no-shit-good-gloved woman—real sweet. Cold-blooded steel for nerves and love for brains. That's why Daddy knew that he could make it across the kitchen to ease his steel hardness from her hand, before she got too used to it.

That's why he knew he would keep his job, because he wouldn't be killing some white man over some hussy. No, not when he had a goodloving mama holding his gun just right. In her hand.

"Baby, I think it's time we sat and watched the sun come up like we ain't done in a long time, don't you?"

"You think it's time, Daddy?"

"Yeah, I think it's time," came the reply. "I think we need to get caught up on our stoop sittin' like we used to. And sometimes you let me put my hand right up your thigh..."

"Oh, now, go on," giggle.

"Yes ya did and ya know it. Right up your thigh, right when I came home and it was too dark for anybody to see."

Giggles and deep throat laughs jingled until dawn as they watched the sun come up on another day.

And that's how Daddy Bill got to church on that Sunday morning to hear the right Reverend McBride.

"THE DEVIL BE DAMNED!"

McBride's eyes flew open, and everyone turned to the back of the church where a tall, dark man, elegantly handsome, held his ticket high and glided down the aisle on smooth, buttered, Italian leather loafers. He fed his number to the flames. It was "2."

McBride narrowed his eyes and looked Wellington Rockwell Nash in the face. No one blinked. The church was still. Then McBride turned his back and lifted his hands in the air.

"Praise Gawd!" said McBride. The congregation echoed, **"Praise Gawd!"**

Then the women streamed into the aisles to make their offering, not sure if they offered the paper to the flame, or their passion to the dark man at the altar. The men followed, glad to be taken off the hook. Six women tried to discreetly write the phone numbers in their hankies to give to the stranger.

And before the last hymn was sung, just before the ushers took up the collection (the biggest take in the history of the church), Wellington Rockwell Nash and his Italian leather shoes glided out the back door as quietly as they had entered.

McBride's church attendance reached an all-time high after that service. Reverend Emmonds at Faith Pentecostal lost its ripest young women to Ezion Mt. Zion. Emmonds thought it was the thunderous preaching of McBride. He had no idea that the pews swelled with the bodacious thighs of women plotting the next home-cooked meal for Wellington Rockwell Nash to sink his clean, white teeth into.



Ken Segal

Time Flies

I find I'm staring at the clock,
It moves so quickly, what a shock!
The seconds seem to fly right by,
And minutes, too, I don't know why.
The hours are nothing to me,
The days are speedy, don't you see?
The weeks are weak, they do not stick,
Months disappear like a magic trick!
The years, I swear, scurry away,
Decades seem shorter, come what may.
My life, it seems, is just a minute.
And there are many moments in it.

An Excerpt from *I Dream A Highway*

Franetta McMillian

Kyla only had scattered memories of the Second Civil War, which began just before her fifth birthday and ended just after she turned seven. It was a raggedy little war, a patchwork quilt of bar fights and schoolyard brawls that began in the Midwest, then spread to the coasts. There was also a smattering of gallant generals, glorious battles, and brilliant military campaigns, but mostly, it was unfettered chaos. As one survivor put it, "Everyone just went plum crazy stupid for a couple of years."

How much war you got depended on where you lived. There wasn't much action in the mountains of Penn's Woods. The terrain was treacherous and there was no bounty in the area people wanted. Kyla vaguely recalled her father listening for news of nearby violence on the radio. She definitely remembered the Battle of Philadelphia and the night some fool fringe militia people tried to liberate the Liberty Bell and blew themselves up instead. Her father nearly fell out of his chair laughing.

The area that reincorporated into Carolina Region during Rehabilitation bore the brunt of it. Blood ran in the streets almost daily. During the height of the war there was the U.S. Army, National Guards from three states, several police forces, and as many as fourteen rogue militias, duking it out in the name of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

The most vicious and well-armed of the rogue militias were the Red Bloods, who despised damn near everyone who wasn't White, male, ostentatiously Protestant Christian, and rabidly capitalist. They were also the wealthiest and best trained. No one knew exactly where they got their money, but it was rumored they were funded by shadowy oligarchs both domestic and foreign.

R. L. Lee Merriweather had the old Red Blood insignia on his ring, but Kyla didn't know if he had been an actual foot soldier (he looked like he would have been a teenager during the war) or was merely a nostalgic sympathizer. She asked her phone: "Show me significant Second Civil War events, Scarlet Town, Carolina Region."

The search coughed up a ton of hits. It would take hours, if not days, to wade through them all. "Narrow search to significant Second Civil War events, Scarlet Town, Carolina Region, Merriweather Family." Boom! It was still plenty, but at least the hits fell into two major categories: Second Civil War conspiracy theories about the Merriweathers, and news articles about a car bombing in front of the Aaron L. Merriweather Theater on the Avenue of the Arts in downtown Scarlet Town.

The Merriweather conspiracy theories were typical. The Merriweathers had been scary rich for generations, as well as secretive, which was always a combination that sent the worst imaginations aflutter. Ernest Aaron Merriweather (R. L. and Levon's grandfather?) had single-handedly endowed the Levon School of Music. He named the school after his late wife, a victim of ovarian cancer, and an accomplished amateur violinist.

Unlike many of the super rich, the Merriweather family had managed to retain most of their fortune through the collapse. This was because they wisely invested in what Ernest called “real stuff” such as precious and rare metals, gems, utility companies, and manufacturing as opposed to “Wall Street hocus-pocus.” For the most part, the Merriweathers kept their political views to themselves, although one of R. L.’s and Levon’s uncles once caused a scandal for going on a drunken racist rant during a wedding reception that someone posted on social media. Conspiracists also believed the Merriweathers secretly funded many of Carolina Region’s rogue militias, including the notorious Red Bloods. However, a thorough post-war Rehabilitation audit of their finances never provided any tangible proof of this.

Kyla went on to read about the bombing. It occurred just after a Christmas Eve performance of the *Nutcracker*. A bomb detonated under a limo with R. L.’s and Levon’s mother, aunt, younger sister, a family friend, and their chauffeur inside. They were killed instantly, along with ten other VIP bystanders who were waiting near the curb for their vehicles. For some reason R. L. didn’t attend the performance.

Levon was just about to leave the theater when the bomb went off. The shockwave sent him flying backwards, slamming him against a wall. He lost consciousness, shattered several bones, and was buried in broken glass and debris when part of the lobby ceiling collapsed. He was 17 years old. He spent the next two years in and out of the hospital and rehab.

Holy shit! thought Kyla. No wonder Levon was still traumatized over the war.

It was easy to hate families like the Merriweathers. They seemed to have it all and never suffered as hard as everyone else. After all, they had the unmitigated gall to attend a ballet while the world was in flames and somehow they still got to celebrate Christmas. How could they be so goddamned oblivious and still be human? But Kyla couldn’t imagine waking up in a hospital bed with her body shattered and a good part of her family gone. *Damn, she thought, something I wrote gave him hope after this?*

She needed to hear *Mass* again. Even though the composition had become a New Union standard, Kyla hadn’t thought about it in years. It was something she’d composed a long time ago and she wasn’t in the habit of listening to her own stuff once the final rehearsals and premiere were over. She walked to the living room and addressed her smart speaker: “Play *Mass for the Fallen*.”

“Ms. Nightsone,” the speaker said, “you have five versions, the most recent of which was recorded in September 2045. Which one would you like to hear?”

“Play the premiere performance with that amazing countertenor,” Kyla replied. “It’s the only one I ever liked.”

* * *

“You know,” Kyla told Levon, “because of your little stunt, I listened to *Mass* for the first time in years.” They were sitting on the floor around the coffee table in her living room, eating Chinese takeout. That afternoon Levon made good on his threat to stop by and trim her hedges. He arrived in his workingman’s disguise, driving a rusting utility truck. After he

finished outside, Kyla invited him to stay for dinner. They decided on Chinese takeout and nearly came to blows arguing over who should pay. Levon eventually gave up and let Kyla win, and she was glad for the victory. It made her feel less kept.

"You mean to tell me you never listen to your own music?" Levon asked, somewhat surprised.

"You have to understand. By the time I write a piece of music, consult with musicians, conductors, and vocalists in rehearsals, and then attend the premiere, I feel like I've been listening to it for as many as three years straight. I'm sick of it and I never want to hear it again."

"I can't imagine ever tiring of your work," Levon said.

"Try listening to one section nearly every day for months. You'll want to turn it off real quick."

Levon just laughed.

Kyla finally asked the question she'd been meaning to ask since that first afternoon: "Tell me: just what is it about *Mass* you like so much?"

Levon countered with a question of his own: "Why did you write it?"

Though it was the music that put her name on the map, the piece wasn't one of Kyla's favorites. She finished it just before her twenty-first birthday when she was studying composition in Paris. Though she'd been living outside the States since she was 15, she suddenly found herself feeling homesick for her beleaguered homeland after sneaking into the ruins of Notre Dame Cathedral. She also missed her father. He was ill and she couldn't visit him because she didn't have the money. They had a weekly video chat, but that was hardly enough.

Though the Second War of the States only officially lasted two years, Rehabilitation didn't begin in earnest until almost four years after the war ended. The first transitional government talked big and pretty, and promised change, but moved too slowly, and accomplished little. After decades of government as spectacle, most lacked the skills, patience, and discipline to enact effective policy. *Let's just paint over the pain and sing happy songs*, they said. *Bury the rot. Every so often, like clockwork, America burns, but it will keep on rising like the Phoenix forever...*

Kyla hadn't wanted to leave the country at all, but her father insisted. The exiled musicologist and jazz musician had taught her everything he knew about music, and decided she needed to study abroad with better teachers if she was going to ever reach her full potential. He and the other exiled intellectuals in their tight-knit mountain community pooled together their meager resources, bought her an EU passport and a plane ticket, and sent her to France via Canada.

She recalled the night the ferrymen arrived to take her across the border. Her father was there, along with some of their friends, and he had tears in his eyes. *Do us proud, Little Queen*, he said. *Write the music that will bring us to the light.*

Well. That was one reason why Levon's boundless admiration made her squirm: people had been making her play savior for a long time. No one should believe in you that much.

After nearly 80 years, Notre Dame Cathedral remained little more than a stately ghost. Though the French government did enough maintenance on it to keep the edifice from collapsing, it was never fully rebuilt. You had to apply for a tour, and even then, you usually had to be high-ranking clergy or a top tier scholar for your application to be accepted. Kyla and her roommate Ja'Neen snuck in just before dawn after smoking some of the best hash Paris had to offer. Kyla remembered the sunlight piercing the dusty gray sanctuary through the holes in the roof, looking for all the world like golden rays of light from heaven. She saw hope in the decay, and dropped to her knees and wept, even though she didn't believe in God, and had never consciously prayed in her life.

She wrote the text and music to the last section of *Mass* first:

*Lazarus, come forth
Dry your eyes, my brother
Death holds you no more
Lazarus, come forth
Dry your eyes and taste the sun
Listen: a new day is dawning...*

When it came time to meet with her instructor, she brought in a section of the first movement of the piano concerto that had been her assignment, along with the section of the *Mass* she'd tentively titled, "Resurrection." They discussed the concert first, which he found competent, but unexciting. Consummate skill, but no fire, he tutted. That's what he said about many of her efforts. The she showed him "Resurrection."

What's this? he asked.

Something that came to me, she replied.

He read through the score, humming the melody line as he went. It was difficult to gauge his reaction. Occasionally, he would pause to ask a question or make a comment: *Who wrote the text?*

Kyla replied: *I did.*

It is quite moving.

Thank you.

The bells on this line, nice touch.

Thank you.

He turned to play a few chords from the conclusion on the piano. *I like this resolution,* he said. *Quite unexpected. Very nice.* He handed her her manuscript. *What brought this on?* he asked.

Inspired trespassing, she replied, smiling to herself. Then: *I miss my father. I miss the States.*

Now that, he said, pointing at the manuscript, *that has fire. Finish it.*

But what about the concerto? she asked.

Compared to that, the concerto's bullshit.

When Kyla read about the call for music to celebrate the end of the New Union's first phase of Rehabilitation, she decided, with her instructor's encouragement, to submit *Mass*. If her score was chosen, the Redemption Prize package included paid travel expenses to the last week of rehearsals, premiere performance, and reception in Philadelphia from anywhere in the world. All she needed to be eligible was proof of U. S. citizenship and she still had her original birth certificate, even though she had neglected to get a passport. Hopefully, her father would survive long enough to witness her triumphant homecoming and they could see each other one last time.

Kyla was incredulous when *Mass* won. She immediately called her father, whose health had, thankfully, begun to improve.

She didn't let the cat out of the bag right away. She figured she'd ease into it, tease him a little. *Daddy*, she asked, *do you think you might be well enough to travel to Philly, say, in March?*

Well, I don't know, baby. There'll be crowds then. All those folks at the celebration. Besides, don't you need that money for school?

Yeah, but I have the money now.

Where'd you get it?

I won it, Dad.

How? You been gambling? he teased.

Daddy, I've got a piece premiering at the Art Hall, top billing. I won that contest I entered. Little Queen is coming home.

Dang! Queen, if I'm still breathing, I'll be there. I'll bring everybody else too.

Kyla arrived in Philadelphia a week before the premiere for final rehearsals. It was the first time she'd ever heard her music realized entirely by other people. She'd had a few high profile premieres before, but she'd always been the primary performer. It was surreal to hear all these strangers who lived an ocean away breathing life into sounds which had so far lived mostly in her imagination, on her keyboard, and on her computer.

Kyla's father arrived in Philly on premiere morning, along with seemingly most of the residents of Penn's Woods. A bunch of them had chipped in and chartered a couple ancient yellow school buses. Her father had lost a ton of weight, and used a walker, but he was as sharp and funny as ever. The whole gang found a diner with enough space to hold them, and feasted on a big American breakfast of pancakes, eggs, sausage, and bacon. It was just like old times and Kyla realized she'd never been so happy or relaxed in years. These were her people. Though she had enjoyed her life abroad, made a few friends, and

learned plenty, there was no place like home. Kyla decided right then and there she'd finish her studies, then return to settle down in the New Union.

Premiere night was heady; the performance was perfection. Everything went off without a hitch. Folks were impressed too. Kyla was flooded with so many compliments at the reception, she felt like she was drowning. All these dignitaries, dressed in evening gowns and tuxes, came to her ugly crying and gushing about how her music gave them hope the struggling New Union might survive. That's when Kyla began her tradition of sneaking out of receptions early. She slipped out of a fire exit, sat on a concrete step by a dumpster facing an alley, and gasped for air.

"Yeah," Levon said. "And I was really pissed you'd vanished too. Nobody knew where you were and I'd been waiting in line for nearly an hour."



Redemption

Jim Bourey

Old Girlfriends

Forgetting

how I buried that old love is nearly as difficult
as when she shows up ~ at just the wrong moment.

Then I need to find a new shovel.
Of course, shovel is a metaphor,
as is burying.

I don't put bodies in the ground,
though I sometimes wish I had.
Life might have been easier.

Now I'm wearing silver hair, old
man's jeans and a weathered expression.

But I can become like a babbling teenager
caught with his hand under a sweet girl's shirt,
when that old love walks into view and smiles.

I imagine her remembering our moments
in the back seat of her daddy's '67 Lincoln.

In truth, she might just be thinking
how good her legs feel
in her new support-hose,
while I relish the return of ancient guilt.

Rendered

*"Did you ever hear a coffin sound?
Then you know a poor boy's in the ground."
from "One Small Favor" by Blind Lemon Jefferson*

That's the way he sang it,
but it changed. Things change,
just like the cost of a coffin;
simple pine box, sleek mahogany,
or steel lined copper vault. The dirt
will strike the box, the body
will be rendered to dust.

For a time, I worked next door
to a rendering plant. Dead horses
were trucked in (other animals too)
and cooked down to make tallow and lard,
bone meal, and other ingredients
used in glue and lipstick and dog food.
When the wind blew across that plant
I imagined being a citizen living near
Auschwitz on a day when the ovens
were fired up.

Burying is better. Dirt blankets bring decay
effectively, though commercial crematoriums
filter their chimneys, burn hot and fast. Neighbors
barely notice the death next door. I'm not quite
next door to the reaper or the renderer now.
Closer than I was a minute ago, but
who knows, right?

My funeral instructions opt for cremation,
a cheap little box or tin urn that will carry my fine
ashes and bony bits, to be raked into the earth
on a steep riverbank. Thus, they will be
rendered. I'm ordering a helping hand for Nature.
Some worms may go hungry. But they'll survive.

The Pirate

W.H. Leonard Poe

To the Editor of the North American.

On my last voyage to the West Indies, a friend whom I met after a long separation, related to me the following adventure, and as it appeared singular and romantic, I made a memorandum of it, and I now transcribe it from my "log book" for your use, which you are at liberty to do with as you may deem proper. Yours, W.H.P.

I went to the Havana in the summer of 182-, on business, and having settled it to my satisfaction, engaged my passage in a vessel bound to New York — We had been but a few hours on the voyage when I felt that weariness and pain which indicates the approach of the yellow fever. I continued to grow worse, and to add to my distress, the vessel began to roll violently and sea-sickness with all its horrors cause upon me — I would have sacrificed every thing for a quiet place in which to die, as I felt that this was all I could wish for. Overcome at length with weakness, and completely exhausted, I fell asleep, from which I was awakened by a confused noise. I at first believed it was merely imagination, but as it became louder, I felt convinced that what I heard was a reality. At length the cabin door opened, and several persons descended. Our captain approached my berth and told me the vessel had been captured by pirates, and that we were now standing in for the land. I heard the first part of his speech with an apathy which my illness only can account for; — but the very name of land seemed to operate like a charm upon me. A young man now approached and told me to be under no apprehension, as no personal injury was intended, and that every care should be bestowed upon me. He inquired the nature and state of my disease, and brought me a cordial, which considerably relieved me. In a short time we were at anchor, and I was told our vessel would be detained for a day or two, and after a few articles had been taken out, permitted to proceed on her voyage. The same person subsequently entered, and observed that I could be much better attended on shore, where I would be relieved from the bustle and confusion of the vessel. To this I cheerfully assented, and in the afternoon I was placed in a boat and carried to a hut near the beach; — here I was treated kindly, and every attention paid me. I had been three days on shore when the young man (whom I now discovered to be captain of the corsair) arrived, and told me our vessel would sail in an hour, and if I wished to proceed in her I was at liberty to do so, although he remarked, in my present state it would no doubt cost me my life: — and that if I would trust to him, and could bear the detention of a month or so, he would convey me to some part of Cuba, from whence I could easily procure a passage home. Believing a removal in my present state would be almost certain death, added to a strong desire to know more of a man who appeared so different from what I had heard of men engaged in the profession with which he was connected, made me assent to his proposal. In about a week I was decidedly

convalescent, and I felt really grateful for the kindness of the youthful outlaw. One evening on entering my room he expressed himself gratified to see me so much recovered, as he was to sail in the morning for the other side of the islands, and it was his wish that I should accompany him, as it was likely he would fall in with some vessel bound to the United States, and I could thus get home — the next morning we were underweigh.

It was near midnight when I was awakened by a deep groan in the cabin in which I slept — I raised my head and perceived the captain gazing on a small but beautiful dagger, which he was holding to the light as if to see more plainly — before him on the table, as well as I could judge, lay a miniature — he was in tears, and appeared much affected — In a few moments he placed them in his desk and went on deck. I mused some time on the singularity of this man, who seemed fitted for a situation better than that of a piratical captain: — he was rather small in his person, but well formed — had been handsome, I should think, but sorrow seemed to have set her seal upon his brow; his hair exhibited the marks of premature old age, although he could not be more than twenty-three.

The next night I determined to watch and see if he would again look at the dagger — he at length came down, and after sitting some time in a contemplative posture, opened the desk and again the dagger met my eye — Curiosity could bear it no longer — “What a singularity beautiful dirk,” I exclaimed — he started as if he had been shot, but suddenly recovering himself, said, with a look which seemed as if he would reach my very thoughts, “Why did you make that remark?” I felt abashed, but he immediately added, “Since you appear anxious to know my history, I will tell it you. Do you see that,” he exclaimed, as he moved the light nearer and placed the dagger before me — “’Tis blood,” I answered, sickening at the sight — “Ay, ’tis blood!—blood! to save one drop of which I would give all this miserable body contains—and yet,” added he, wildly, “’twas I that shed it!”—He buried his face in his hands and groaned deeply—in a few moments he became more composed, and began his story.

“The events of my boyhood I pass over — suffice it to say, I lost my parents at an early age, and was left to the care of a relation. I received a good education, and knew sorrow but by name until I had attained my eighteenth year. I then began a new existence — I was in love — Yes! if ever a man loved passionately — intensely, — I did. I was singular, romantic in my ideas, and Rosalie was equally so. I will pass over the few happy hours of our affection — they would be tedious, and I would not wish to bring them to me mind too forcibly — she promised me her hand, and declared none but myself should ever possess it — Oh! my friend, you are young — but beware how you entrust your heart and happiness into the keeping of a woman! — it is this that has brought me to what I am — a wretched outcast —a murderer! — a broken hearted desperate being!” — The perspiration stood in large drops on his forehead — after a pause he continued:

“I was too much restricted by poverty to marry — but I believe that I possessed talents which would place me beyond the reach of its effects — I accordingly embraced an offer from a friend to engage in a trading voyage to the West Indies, and as my health was delicate, my friends considered the climate would restore my frame to its usual vigor. I bade a farewell to home and Rosalie — that kiss! — that farewell kiss, was our last.

We were detained nearly a year trading to different ports, and altho' I had written home every opportunity, had never received an answer. It was with such feelings of rapturous joy which language is incapable of defining, that I saw our vessel fast approaching my native land — a thousand endearing recollections rushed to my mind — the thought that my Rosalie was false, had never entered my brain — I would have blushed if it had done so.

It was night when our boat landed me at the wharf, and I flew with a beating heart towards her dwelling.

I forgot to mention the dagger — I purchased it with some other trinkets on account of its beauty, and that day carelessly put it in my waistcoat pocket.

There were lights in the front of the house and I heard music — I wished to see her alone, and went to the garden gate — everything reminded me of the blissful hours I had passed — I walked towards the servants' houses, intending to get one of them to carry a message to Rose. The first one I met had often carried letters between us — but she did not recognize me, until I spoke, when she exclaimed, O Lord! Master Edgar is it you! — Miss Rose is to be married in half an hour!" and burst into tears. I have often since been surprised at my own firmness, for I listened calmly to her tale! — 'twas short — a wealthy suitor had been proposed and was accepted. I asked if she could not procure me an interview — that, she said was impossible, but if I would stand in the passage I might see her as she passed to the room. Thither I went, and as there was only a small lamp burning, I could not easily be discovered — I heard her laughing and talking gaily in her dressing room — strange feelings came over me — a thousand lights seemed to dance before my eyes — a difficulty of breathing, and a confused sensation of pain oppressed me — when I came to myself I was leaning against the wall, and my hand convulsively grasping the dagger.

The door opened, and Rosalie with several others, came into the passage — I waited until she was nearly opposite to me, when I let fall the cloak with which I had concealed my face, and exclaimed "do you not know me! — I am Edgar Leonard!" — She shrieked at the mention, and I buried my dagger in her bosom!" —

He paused — his countenance was livid, and he bit his lip till blood spouted on the table before him. — After a few moments he became more composed, and hastily swallowing a glass of wine, proceeded —

"I remember nothing afterwards until I found myself in the street — my hand felt stiff, and when I held it up in the moonlight, I discovered that it was blood — the truth flashed my bewildered mind — 'twas Rosalie's life-blood! the dagger, too looked dim — that too was stained with blood of her, for whom, but one short hour previous to the fatal disclosure of her inconstancy, every drop in my own veins should have freely flowed! — I knew not how I got there, but I was in the boat, and I remember telling the men to land me on the opposite shore. I wished to fly, if possible, from thought, and embarked under a feigned name in a vessel for Columbia, intending to join the Patriots. On our passage captured by this vessel, and as I was now an outcast from society, I gladly joined them, and at the death of their captain I was chosen the commander.

I am weary of life, yet, although a murderer, I cannot commit suicide. I have courted death, but it shuns me — so true it is, that

“Life’s strange principle will longest lie

Deepest in those who wish the most to die.”

You have now heard the history of my ill-fated life — but I have something more with you” — with this he opened a chest and drew thence a bag of gold — “Take this,” said he, — “it may benefit you — me it never can — and yet,” he bitterly added, that at one time, perhaps, would have made me the happiest of mortals in the possession of my” — He stopped short — and suddenly clasping his hands to his forehead, he reeled and sunk senseless on the floor, ere I could recover from the bewildering maze which had seized upon my faculties — He slowly recovered, and, when he seemed somewhat composed, I endeavored to persuade him to renounce his present mode of life, and again return to the bosom of civilized society — “Never!” exclaimed he, with a vehemence which made me shrink back with terror — “Never shall my outlawed foot pollute the soil of my much injured country — some speedy vengeance may here close my hated existence — but to bear in retirement those stings of remorse with which my guilt-stricken conscience is afflicted, would be worse than a thousand deaths on the ocean, where every nerve would be firmly strung in the conflict.” His firmness awed me into silence, and I felt no inclination to renew my endeavors to avert him from his purpose.

In a few days we fell in with a vessel bound for Charleston, in which I obtained a passage, and, after bidding an affectionate farewell to the youthful commander of the pirate, to whose attention and kindness I was mainly indebted for my restoration to health, we kept on our course homeward, and his little barque was soon beyond the reach of our observance. When the last glimpse was extinct, (And until then I stood motionless on the deck,) I retired to the cabin, where I found that not only my baggage had been safely and carefully delivered through his orders, but that the gold which I had intentionally left in the cabin of the corsair, was also placed in the hands of the captain, to be delivered to me.

After a pleasant run of five days we reach our destined port, and it being the sabbath day on which we landed, my first duty was fulfilled in repairing to the church and offering up my grateful acknowledgements for the original display of the finger of providence in my behalf, — and in which a prayer for the *unfortunate pirate* was not forgotten.”

Ray Greenblatt

PREHISTORIC WATERS

Rivers created Philadelphia,
pincers of Schuylkill and Delaware
squeezed the earth together
making dirt floor, brick wall,
growing a wooden heaven;
even today, some urban stone
is chinked with mollusk and seaweed
from underground oceans.

When mobs career up
South Street the bellows
of mastodons saturate the air;
when a solitary figure
wanders down Elfreth's Alley
prehistoric fog still prickles
at eyes, the stink still
catches at nostrils.

As cobbled lanes buckle,
as buildings start to lean
imperceptibly at first,
a stream not quite smothered
swarming in ancient cellar holes,
still works at life, at
nibbling all impediments
no matter how techno-new.

nolan james morris

opening

what was said to the rose
what made it open
rather than close

what was said to the rose
was said to me here
in my chest

what led me to the woods
and what allows me
to rest

sweet water swimming
around and around
what was said to the rose

in thy eyes is found
soft songs
in the dark

marries both dolphin
and shark
dog and cat, hawk

and meadowlark
yes, this is that word

oh, mysterious spark

Ken Segal

Scatter-brained

I may seem weird or scatter-brained,
My mind is not my own.
It's full of random images,
And all I've ever known.
I concentrate when on my job,
I seriously do!
Yet I am likely to produce
Confusion, chaos, too.
My memories are mysteries,
No telling what they'll be.
I can bewilder my best friends,
And they will humor me.
I think I can't be humanized,
I'm a feral kind of beast.
A soda-pop's communion
And a candy bar a feast.
I like to learn new factoids,
And to gain another skill,
Yet I have diagnoses
That say I am rather ill!
I wander like a stranger,
Never knowing where I'm at.
I will keep your precious secrets,
I'll keep them under my hat.
I like to pass for normal,
But it really isn't me.
My spirit wants to just burst forth,
Like a captive that's made free.

Silent Sirens

Steven Leech

There are stories hidden in the recesses of memory and clothed by the history of events, backstories like one from the betrothal of Ethel duPont and Franklin Roosevelt Jr., or of a woman who had fallen in love with both a father and many years later with his son. Needed only is a city, an address, and a place to begin.

Leila, or Lee to those who knew her, would take the #8 trolley daily, in the springtime in 1939 before the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was signed later in the same year, to downtown Wilmington. Only two years out of high school, she's got a job as a supply clerk in the office of Delaware's Writers' Project of the Works Progress Administration. Those writers, who had earned a nice salary, would stop by to get assignments or submit finished works and occasionally gather in the hallways to talk among themselves.

One of those who came into the office was Vernon Branch who was handsome in Leila's young eyes, with copper colored hair, a trim mustache, eyes that played tricks with the warm tone of his speech, and always well dressed with tweeds and the faint fragrance of Old Spice mingled with the rich tobacco from his pipe. Leila, with big eyes and a suppressed lisp in her speech, could barely respond with words when he spoke to her only necessities.

Since 1933, the year before Vernon graduated from high school and with the new Roosevelt administration, discussion centered around promising times coming out of the detritus and crisis of capitalism and in spite of its apparent need to wear a fascist cloak. The inspiration generated by the great socialist experiment in the Soviet Union and progressive movements reported in the pages of *The Nation* and the flowering of cultural voices from *New Masses* and *The Partisan Review* inspired discussion in all its variables. Agreements among interlocutors were negotiable without rancor.

At the Greenwood Bookstore or over coffee at Walt Portier's the latest words from Trotsky or old favorites John Reed or Harry Kemp swirled in the air with wisps cigarette smoke. Occasionally at Hardcastles, artists Bill White or Edward Grant, harboring secret jealousies of one another, or Richard Dolman from the Theatre Project, would find Vernon shopping for sharp pencils of fine lead. He, too, divided his time between the word and the image.

Two years before Ethel had married Franklin in a lavish wingding up in Centerville, attended of course by the President of the United States. The event had broken Vernon's heart.

Ethel, daughter of Francis duPont, not directly related to either Willie and Alfred or the Coleman and Pierre sides of the family, had been a more radical black sheep ingenue of

the family who slumped among the lefties downtown. She and Vernon had drawn close, attending events together and forming a rapport with complimentary notions over a wide range of sensibilities.

Whatever was the subterfuge that tempered Ethel's wild heart into the arms of Franklin Jr. not only mystified Vernon but spun him around into the pit of unresolved unrequited love, one that would haunt him for the rest of his life, and at least until the outbreak of World War II, a wayward muse.

Outside of Vernon's inner world of stoic acquiescence over the sudden end of a promising affair, sympathy was secretly harbored by his friends though no one outwardly commiserated with him. When Leila became aware of what had occurred between them, she was both sympathetic and hopeful that she might find a place in the vacuum of Vernon's life.

Life had taken Vernon elsewhere, taking his pencils of fine hard lead to classes at the Delaware Art Museum. Searching for an image that had seemed just out of reach in the wake of Ethel's sudden betrothal, he took classes in drawing the female human figure.

Her name was Sally and when she stepped onto the riser and dropped the robe from her nakedness, Vernon saw the shadows of what could have been and tried to capture it all with his pencils.

She had found him when he had looked down while guiding his pencil in the corner of the room. They traded notice of each other's features, his copper colored hair, the concentration in his eyes as he interpreted her body onto paper.

Afterward, both found themselves standing together near the steps leading to the entrance of the museum. She smiled at him and he knew he'd been smitten.

By the autumn of 1939 the world had changed. Molotov and Ribbentrop had signed the non aggression pact between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, and a simmering debate about it rang out among local fellow travelers, even among those writers and artists on the cultural fringes. Trotsky was on the lam, exiled by Stalin. Heroes like Rosa Luxemburg and Eugen Leviné were dead leaving a trickle of hopelessness slowly turning into rivulets of dread.



Vernon sought refuge in the company of Sally and another who would be his future wife, who was also a wild budding artist who swept him off along with the draft. Everything had changed when Vernon was drafted in early 1942, slamming of the door behind a different world. He was now a married man going off to war with a child on the way.

After Vernon was drafted the Artists' and Writers' Projects of the WPA got absorbed into the war effort. Leila took classes at Goldey's in typing, stenography and office management, which led to a job at Dupont. In the early 1950s she married a man who was an idealist but poor and could not hold a job for long. Leila had a daughter, but the two were too poor to buy a house as had many returning G.I.s who had married and started families in new suburban bedroom communities.

During the war Vernon found himself thinking about Ethel the day he found the only way he could get a flight to a new assignment was aboard a B-25 bomber that was short of a door gunner. In an attack by a flock of Japanese Zeros he found his thoughts about her almost inexplicably transforming into anger as he pressed the trigger of the 50 caliber, following the tracers as he and the turret gunner hit the Zero at the very same time.

Later, he wondered if he'd ever see Sally again on that October day in 1944 as he drove a LCVF landing craft full of combat ready men in the Leyte Gulf to a landing in the invasion of the Philippines. His father had also fought in the Philippines during the Spanish American War and pausing to think about him as he turned the LCVF around after disgorging the soldiers among the bombs bursting on shore and the chatter of small arms fire he thought about his own son, who he had not yet seen, and felt ashamed when he learned he was named after him.

During the war Sally had continued to make money modeling, especially for the new found popularity of photography. Richard Dolman, who had to find another income after the Theatre Project had evaporated had promoted his new advocacy and made some money from cheesecake.

War was a whirlwind of the unfinished and when Vernon returned after V-J Day it was as if he was living in two overlapping worlds.

That new world of the fading 1930s had become a world of chrome enameled apathy, of freshly sprouting Levittowns smothered by a smoldering fear of subversion safeguarded by social conformity, and the 1950s droned on. Vernon's marriage fell apart. Sally disappeared into an old memento, a per-



sonalized inscribed portrait photo Vernon had hidden in a cluttered drawer along with some nude 8X10s Richard Dolman had taken that Vernon hid in a black envelope behind a print in a frame.

On that day in May 1965 when Vernon learned of Ethel's suicide he was alone. His estranged wife was living with his mother-in-law and Vernon Jr. was away at college.

"He turned her into a drunk," Vernon had once told his son when he timidly asked about her. There was no one there to know whether he shed a tear, or at least became profoundly plaintive over her death. Did she think about him, he wondered, before she slipped into final unconsciousness?

About a year later, Vernon Jr was drafted when his student deferment lapse over a technicality. The draft led him on a path nearly in reverse from the one his father had traveled. The troop ship that carried him across the Pacific Ocean first docked in the Philippines, where both his father and grandfather had fought, then to Vietnam in Southeast Asia, in the vicinity of where his father had begun his service during World War II.

Ten years later, in 1975, after a "new left" echoed the world of the "old left" of the 1930s augmented by the kaleidoscopic promise of an Age of Aquarius and the liberation of Vietnam by Vietnamese, Vernon Jr joined the Communist Party under the watchful eye of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Leila, now nearly thirty years older than Vernon Jr. was also a member of same Party club and seeing Vernon Jr caused her to remember his father and to rekindle her love for him only in image and memory, but to be smitten by a son in secret as well as the remote hope that her life could realize some lopsided fulfillment.

With her daughter living a life with her husband in Wilkes Barre, Leila divorced the dead weight of her own husband and reclaimed her maiden name, left her panties to dry on a rack outside her bathroom, did favors for Vernon Jr. and hoped her panties would make him think of her in some sort of carnal manner. But when Vernon Jr. married the daughter of her best friend after Ronald Reagan was elected President, Leila's long lingering hope that she might grow old in a better world was dashed.



Where Evil is Stronger Than Love, The Wartime Novels of Two Delaware Authors

Steven Leech

Americans were captivated by apocalyptic literature during the turn of the 21st century, especially the variety promoted by neo-conservative evangelicals commonly referred to as the “left behind” series. While popular among large segments of America’s reading public, these novels did not resonate with the same enthusiasm among Europeans. This was largely because Europeans had already experienced their own real life 20th century apocalypse that was called World War II. During a span of years that actually began in 1936 with the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War to the end of hostilities in May 1945, Europeans experienced six million dead in Nazi concentration camps, more than twenty million killed on the eastern front of the war, thousands upon thousands of others killed in various other places, and whole cities like Dresden, Berlin, and Stalingrad utterly destroyed and turned into rubble. So bad was the aftermath that a mass mobilization called the Marshall Plan was implemented to help with the recovery. Europeans had had their apocalypse, while Americans suffered mere rationing and just under 300,000 combat personnel killed in both the European and Pacific theaters and none on American soil.

Four novels by two Delaware novelists, Jack D. Hunter’s *The Blood Order* (Times Books, 1979) and *The Tin Cravat* (Harper & Row, 1981), and Charles Wertenbaker’s *Write Sorrow on the Earth* (Henry Holt and Company, 1947) and *The Death of Kings* (Random House, 1954) were written about the vortex of that 20th century apocalypse.

Jack D. Hunter worked clandestinely in Germany as an officer in the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) during the final part of the war, and Charles Wertenbaker rode the coat tails of Allied Armies into France after the D-Day invasion as Chief Foreign Correspondent for *TIME* magazine. A report of much of Hunter’s role in the final days of the Third Reich can be found in *The Axmann Conspiracy* by Scott Andrew Selby, published in 2012 by Berkley Caliber, New York. Both Hunter and Wertenbaker knew of what they wrote.

In their four combined novels they pit their characters up against the great ideological struggle of the 20th century, between Communism and Fascism. It is interesting to note that both authors, in spite of the approximately thirty-year span between their respective novels, suggest similar conclusions regarding the nature and outcome of that ideological struggle.

The stories in both Wertenbaker’s *Write Sorrow on the Earth* and Hunter’s *The Tin Cravat* take place in Europe during the final weeks of the war in 1945. The difference is that Wertenbaker writes within the context of the French Resistance and Hunter relates a story of clandestine activity inside Nazi Germany. There are overpowering similarities, the greatest being the desperate and dangerous efforts by the Nazis to stave off what has

become increasingly obvious, imminent defeat of the Axis in Europe. The Nazi world is crumbling into panic. In the midst of this panic, avoiding capture by the protagonist Paul Boisseire in *Write Sorrow on the Earth* and Bruno Stachel in *The Tin Cravat* is tantamount to the success of their respective missions.

While Boisseire is a character we've never encountered before, Bruno Stachel is not. Hunter first created him as the protagonist and anti-hero for his acclaimed novel, *The Blue Max* (E.P. Dutton & Company, 1964). *The Tin Cravat*, referring to the Iron Cross that the Nazi's handed out almost gratuitously and thus cheapening its significance, is the third book in a trilogy. When the novel begins, we find Stachel cooling his heels on an obscure military installation near Hagerstown, Maryland. He had escaped Nazi Germany at the conclusion of the second novel in the trilogy, *The Blood Order*. The Americans cannot be sure he can be completely trusted because he had risen to the rank of Generalmajor in the Wehrmacht. However, Stachel is considered a valuable asset to his OSS handlers, represented by Polly Loomis whom Stachel had encountered originally in Berlin as a secretary in the United States' German embassy around the time Hitler came to power in 1933. Soon afterwards Stachel, along with two other escapees he had known from his exploits during his flying days of World War I, is recruited for a clandestine mission within Nazi Germany. Those two others are the pilot Ernst Randelmann and Elfi Heidemann, the widow of another pilot who had given up his life to save Stachel's and who is now a nurse. Both characters had been depicted in *The Blue Max*. The mission for whom the three are recruited is, ostensibly, to thwart the Nazis from going underground after the war is ended in an operation called "Werewolf." There is speculation that defeated Nazis may attempt to wage guerilla war from the Alps after Hitler's demise. Stachel, displaying a wily skepticism, which has become among his major traits throughout the trilogy, has his doubts. He smells a red herring but does not let anyone know.

After the three's recruitment, they are sent to the New Castle County air base near Wilmington, Delaware. This facility had actually been a minor stateside military installation during World War II. Stachel and Randelmann are sent there to learn to fly an American B-17 bomber, which will be part of their clandestine mission behind the lines. The three are also sent on a practice nocturnal clandestine mission in rural Delaware County,, during which they are given the objective of penetrating a factory in Chester, Pennsylvania. Not only does Stachel succeed in a mission that he is expected to fail, but he does so with some clever innovations, while simultaneously attempting to compromise Elfi Heidemann because he feels she is not suited to espionage. Elfi proves him wrong by demonstrating she's a tougher cookie than he expects. But Stachel has a deeper motivation, and that's because he's in love with her. Though he can't even admit these feelings to himself, he innately wants to protect her.

Romance is also incorporated into Wertebaker's *Write Sorrow on the Earth*. Boisseire's wife, Simone, lives in occupied Paris and is also a clandestine agent for the

Resistance. Paul and Simone are separated because Paul is operating in the mountainous countryside of southeastern France. However, a final fateful mission carries him to Paris, which leads to the conclusive episodes of Wertebaker's novel. Simone acquires the undercover name, "Madame Gregoire" for her own cover as a clerk in a Paris bookstore, as well as "Mademoiselle Duchêne" merely for the sake of confusion. Paul's best friend in the mountains, who goes by the name "Bob," is a Spaniard and a Jew who is a veteran of the Spanish Civil War. His native Spain, just across from the Basque region from which the French Resistance fighters operate, is under the firm control of the fascist dictator Francisco Franco. While Paul's background is as a member of the professional class, as a former history professor at the Lycée du Parc in Lyon, Bob is from the Spanish working class and is also a Communist.

Write Sorrow on the Earth contains many of the scenarios expected from the lives and activities of resistance fighters. They slow enemy maneuvers by staging guerilla raids, steal enemy weapons, pass information to allied contacts, and keep their heads down. Some surprising details are revealed, like the unlikely alliance with the French criminal underground, called "The Rabble." Another interesting subject has to do with capture by the Nazis, which is considered an automatic death sentence, and the manner under which information may be extracted under torture.

Early in *Write Sorrow on the Earth*, Bob is captured during a raid. He is interrogated, sometimes using torture. It is a process he seeks to control, even though the very nature of his predicament means that he has relinquished control. He must provide a prearranged time frame to his comrades so they can change their tactics and put space between the enemy and the partisans. Bob maintains control through a constant means for figuring out what time it is without his captors suspecting. Fortunately, Bob is able to escape. It is an escape that will prove eventful.

In Hunter's *The Tin Cravat*, Bruno Stachel and Elfi Heidemann remain steadfast as they discover each's love for one another in the crucible of their mission and the difficulties they face that threaten their survival. Randelmann had been captured and executed by his Nazi captors after a nearly botched airdrop by parachute at the onset of the mission. The changes incurred by Paul Boisseire, Simone, and Bob in Wertebaker's *Write Sorrow on the Earth* are not as steadfast. For the three, changes are more philosophically oriented, especially for Boisseire. The stress of their missions also affects them psychologically.

Jack D. Hunter's *The Blood Order* and Charles Wertebaker's *The Death of Kings*, his final novel published by Random House in 1954, run back-to-back in consecutive time frames. The time line in Hunter's novel begins on November 9, 1923, the day the Nazi attempted to overthrow the government in Munich, and concludes near the end of 1938, approximately where Wertebaker's *The Death of Kings* begins, ending in 1950 just after the onset of the Korean War.

On that fateful day in 1923, Bruno Stachel, who had been deprived of flying thanks largely to the Versailles Treaty that ended World War I, is married to a rich heiress of a German publishing company. As the famous flying ace, depicted in *The Blue Max*, he is her war trophy and he is a footloose drunkard. On that infamous day in 1923, Stachel has just awakened late in the Munich apartment of Anna-Marie Elsbet Karlotte, the Baroness von Klingelhof-und-Reimer. She is the mother of Rudi, an acquaintance of Bruno, who is also a secret member of the Sturmabteilung, or SA, the “Brownshirts,” the shock troop faction of the early Nazi Party led by Ernst Roehm. Stachel and the Baroness have had an all-night tryst, which Bruno cannot remember because of his excessive drinking. It is a situation that causes him to decide to stop drinking, which he does throughout the remainder of the trilogy.

More than anything else Stachel is trying to escape the commotion created by the “Beer Hall Putsch” occurring outside the Baroness’ apartment. In his effort to exit the situation, he notices that an old acquaintance from his flying days, Hermann Göring, who has become a participant in the insurrection, had been wounded by gunfire. Stachel, recognizing this old comrade—who had also made a showing in *The Blue Max*--runs to his aid and prevents him from being arrested by the police through some haphazard and unintended gestures. Nevertheless, Stachel’s hangover-addled assistance leads Göring to be grateful enough to place Stachel among the Nazi elite, meaning those who had participated in the founding insurrection of Nazi Party and worthy of membership in “The Blood Order.” Stachel would automatically become a member of the Nazi inner circle.

A newly sober Bruno Stachel wants to fly again, so he slowly begins to hitch his wagon to the brightening Nazi star. Throughout Hunter’s novel, Stachel grows in stature as the Nazis take power in Germany. His abstinence from alcohol is not the only sobering experience for him. Slowly he learns the treachery of which the Nazis are capable. He even commits these kinds of acts to survive incidents of subterfuge and internecine intrigues. It all becomes good practice for him for those days depicted in *The Tin Cravat* when he is performing his clandestine mission inside Germany.

As a member of Nazi inner circles, Stachel experiences those evil machinations of Nazi ideology. In an early dialogue with Stachel, Hitler expounds about Jesus Christ:

Christ’s followers, for all their tenacity for over the past nineteen hundred years are destined to fail—to wither away on some future vine. Why? Because if, as they claim, the Nazarene was indeed the Son of God, if Jesus Christ was actually God in the flesh, man will have to change—in attitudes, outlook, habits, everything. And man fears change. He’d rather hold fast to familiar evil than try to adapt to an unfamiliar good. It’s much easier, more comforting, to say, No, the man of Galilee was a faker, a ridiculous sentimentalist with an overblown ego, than to say, Yes, he was right—the cause of my discontent is in me, myself, and I must change my basic nature if I’m ever to be happy at all. Christianity—like communism—carries the seeds of its own failure. Men will

reject both because they ask men to change—to sublimate their own natural greed, covetousness, envy, their desire to acquire, own, control, profit, dominate their peers.

Hitler continues his comment by declaring that he won't ask men to change, but to agree with them and to point out the real external culprits.

Stachel maneuvers through the Nazi apparatus with one objective in mind, and that is the fly aircraft again. It is his only real love. He also must maneuver around those in the Nazi hierarchy who are suspicious of him and who plot against him, the chief of whom is Martin Bormann. The two dislike one another intensely, even though an arrangement Bormann is obliged to keep with Stachel costs the life of his wife Kaeti, murdered by one of Bormann's hit men during a compromising situation. Stachel later gets his revenge by killing the hit man and getting away with it, further angering Bormann.

A deeper evil develops on an ideological scale in both *The Blood Order* and later in Wertenbaker's *The Death of Kings*. It is an evil that is characterized in both novels in similar geopolitical terms relative to the political nature of the United States and, in economic terms, relative to the nature of Capitalism. Nazi ideology is inclined to lean toward the political nature of the United States because it is the most powerful Capitalist country. Fascism promotes, as its economic lynchpin, laissez faire capitalism. Fascism, and especially Nazism, is diametrically opposed politically and economically to the Bolshevik brand of Communism present in the Soviet Union, which Hitler vows to destroy. To garner political and economic power in Germany, Hitler must make deals with the captains of industry in Germany as well as with its wealthy class. In a scene that is almost comic, Stachel, using his influence with the Baroness von Klingelhof-und-Reimer, marshals financial support from a crucial number of wealthy class patrons. The Baroness herself is in the meeting because it occurs at a social gathering she is hosting. During the meeting, Hitler is hiding in a nearby closet and overhears the entire proceedings.

The evil represented by the ascendancy of the Nazis is not without its moral reactions in Germany, as well as its political consequences and its sympathizers in the United States. The first doubts in Stachel's mind are sown when he decides to visit the widow of a fellow flyer, Otto Heidemann, from his days as a flying ace during World War I. Her name is Elfi Heidemann. The visit does not go well, and Stachel is confused about why he would want to see her. Later, in her role as a nurse, she encounters a Jewish man who had been severely beaten by the police and cares for his wounds in her apartment, which gets her in trouble with her landlady. To keep out of trouble with the Gestapo, she has to turn the man in. Through pangs of remorse Elfi eventually joins in an effort to rescue Jews stranded in Germany, but not before she enlists Stachel's connections to free the Jew she'd been forced to turn in. Neither of them knows that the act will lead to a fateful conclusion.

In Wertenbaker's *The Death of Kings*, the consequences of Hitler's rise to power in

Germany are presented in the context of the waning Depression in the United States, where isolationist policies, Nazi sympathizers, and anti-Communism provide the tension for the novel's plot. The plot is represented by the interactions among the editorial staff of a fictional American news magazine called *Beacon*.

A little like Hunter's *The Blood Order*, having its genesis in the previous novel *The Blue Max*, Wertenbaker's *The Death of Kings* has its beginnings in an earlier novel, *The Barons* (1950, Random House). *The Barons* also provides the Delaware connection, though the connection has been purposely obfuscated by the author not only for his own protection but to also insert a device of fiction.

In Wertenbaker's earlier novel, *The Barons* are a wealthy family of manufacturers of explosives who are emerging from the 19th century in the midst of severe business problems. The company, which bears their name, is saved by three cousins. One cousin knows the nuts and bolts of the company, one has an extraordinary business sense, and the third is an expert finance speculator and has positioned himself on the ground floor of the new American finance capital paradigm about to explode into the twentieth century. If the three cousins sound like they could be Alfred I., Pierre Samuel, and T. Coleman duPont it wouldn't be accidental. Two relevant consequences emerge from *The Barons* that have a bearing for *The Death of Kings*. The main character of *The Barons*, Stuart Baron, who most resembles Alfred I. duPont, has fallen in love with his cousin Philippa and marries her after a difficult divorce from his first wife. The marriage causes a scandal and a serious rift in the family business just as their fortunes are about to grow exponentially. Through Stuart's best friend, a minister name Richard Berkeley, he slowly begins to apprehend the innately evil character of finance capitalism even though he is trapped by it. Stuart struggles to stay married to his cousin Philippa in the context of scandal and capital accumulation. Ultimately, Stuart's choice to stay married to Philippa leads to the subsequent disastrous end to their marriage, even though Philippa is the love of Stuart's life. The ugly end to Stuart's and Philippa's seemingly star-crossed affair leads the reader to conclude that for Stuart Baron the evil engendered by his cousins' avarice is stronger than his love for Philippa.

The device of fiction that Wertenbaker uses to connect *The Barons* with *The Death of Kings* is to make Louis Baron, the editor of *Beacon*, the son of Stuart Baron. Robert Berkeley, Baron's chief editorial assistant at *Beacon*, is the son of Richard Berkeley, Stuart Baron's minister friend. In this manner, Wertenbaker can suggest a continuation of many of the same themes from the earlier novel.

The twentieth century had been a century of the growth of two major ideologies, which in the simplest terms can be called the ideological struggle between Capitalism and Communism. The twentieth century's ideological history is the story of Capitalism and Communism's relationship with one another in the ebb and flow of events, characterized most apparently by the Great Depression. *The Death of Kings* begins by characterizing the state of Capitalism at the onset of World War II in the waning years of the Great

Depression. The history of this grand ideological struggle is about to fall into the vortex of evil under the name of Fascism and its racist big brother, Nazism. It is in *The Death of Kings* that the relationship of Capitalism and Communism bears witness to one another in the presence of Fascism and within the caldron called World War II. There is no better place to bear witness than in the pages and inner workings of those who work at *Beacon*.

The *Death of Kings* exhibits characteristics similar to *The Barons* because, as an author who lived in Delaware for twenty years, Wertebaker knew well the history of the duPont family and the Dupont Company. Wertebaker creates fiction from his own experiences. Though he disavows similarities in *The Death of Kings*, *Beacon* begins to resemble TIME magazine for which Wertebaker actually worked, and Louis Baron begins to resemble Henry Luce, TIME's actual editor. Others who buzz around and through the story in *The Death of Kings* are familiar, both in type or kind, and as actual historic figures. There are members of the American Communist Party who are torn when the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany sign a non-aggression treaty in 1939. There are the Nazi sympathizers like the sadistic Olga, who Wertebaker simply states has a Polish last name that's unpronounceable. There are the cynics and the faithful. And there are the truly evil, slimy characters like Angus Griswold, who has an uncanny resemblance to the real life Whittaker Chambers, who during the early years of the domestic Cold War had a heavy hand in destroying the work and lives of many who were suspected of being subversives and Communist sympathizers. Like Chambers, Griswold had originally been a member of the Communist Party, but quit ostensibly because of Stalin's persecutions. Afterward he turned against the party, believing in his convoluted way of thinking that to destroy the Communist Party was to preserve its original Marxist ideals. Griswold, who begins to gather dirty secrets from the personal lives of those with whom he's come in contact, begins his own campaign of intrigue, which aims to destroy the lives of those he suspects of harboring subversive thoughts or who engage in unorthodox activities. Griswold begins to act more like those Nazi Gestapo agents depicted in Hunter's novels and in Wertebaker's *Write Sorrow on the Earth*.

As suggested in both Hunter's and Wertebaker's novels, the aftermath of World War II brought about some very significant changes to America politically. By the end of *The Death of Kings*, after an irreconcilable rift between old friends Robert Berkeley and Louis Baron, the political climate had moved to the right from the left-leaning climate during the years of the Great Depression. Several reasons are suggested. The first is the perceived relative strength of the Soviet Union with regards to its influence in post-war Eastern Europe and the strengthened Communist parties in western European countries where resistance movements had been influenced by local Communists. Later, the Communist Revolution in China in 1949 sent many right leaning people into a lather laden hysteria. The domestic activities of a slightly younger generation of professional underlings who had not experienced the horror of the war and who had fallen under the

spell of those like Angus Griswold had also contributed to the change in domestic political climate.

By the end of Hunter's *The Tin Cravat*, Polly Loomis, who not only was Stachel's "handler" on his clandestine mission, and who had been secretly in love with him since their first encounter in Berlin in the early 1930s, admitted to a colleague that she had sent Stachel, Elfi, and Randelmann on what amounted to a suicide mission. Stachel had been correct in his suspicions. His real mission was to fly an escaping Martin Bormann out of Germany before the final defeat. Polly had made a deal with Bormann to allow him to carry a bomb bay filled with gold bullion out to North Africa in a Nazi-captured B-17 where an American submarine would ferry him to a new life in South America. In exchange for her collaboration with this most brutal of Nazi thugs, Bormann would make available the Nazi file on the Soviet Intelligence apparatus, a file that could trump the Allies capture of the biggest Nazi intelligence agent and make him look, to use Polly's own words, "like one of the Katzenjammer Kids." Polly had been willing to carry out her collaboration and treasonous act with Bormann for the opportunity to rise in the ranks of the about to be established Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). The file would have led to fame, status, power, and wealth. The temptation from Nazi evil was too great and Polly Loomis had conspired to make her deal with it. Things would not work out as she had planned.

Bruno Stachel had been correct in his suspicion that he'd been maneuvered into a position to ferry Bormann out of the country. He was also correct that he'd been set up for a suicide mission because Bormann will have to eliminate all the witnesses to the act.

Two factors coincide which interconnect to bring resolution. The first is that for the first time in Bruno Stachel's life, after the drinking from his younger days and the cynicism that made him appear as more of an anti-hero than hero throughout Hunter's trilogy, he had finally found love embodied in another, namely Elfi Heidemann. Concurring with his newly discovered capacity for love had been Stachel's love for his native Germany, which had been taken over by an incarnate evil that was potent enough to visit apocalypse upon an entire continent. Stachel had been maneuvered into preserving the life and nefarious ambitions of one of this evil's worst minions. In an act of self-sacrifice, he flies the escaping B-17 into harm's way by placing it in a position to be shot down by American fighter aircraft, killing himself, Elfi, Bormann, and Polly Loomis' ambitions.

The end is not so simple for Paul Boisseire, yet the effect of apocalypse is just as profound. He has undergone some drastic psychological changes. His friend Bob, while on a courier mission in Paris has had an affair with Simone, which had acted to transform Bob's personal aura of pessimism into a sense of hope. However, Paul is shaken. In the midst of the stresses Paul has shouldered and the struggle to cope with Nazi oppression, his philosophical outlook has changed. Before, as a member of the French professional class, he had embraced the Cartesian brand of philosophy that had been acceptable to the

French petit bourgeoisie. His growing sympathies with the struggles of the working poor and the peasantry had caused him to lean more toward the Marxist philosophy. The result had been similar to the same kind of transformation that Bruno Stachel had undergone. Boisseire's love for the people of his native France, as well as for the Resistance fighters who were his comrades, became almost too intense to bear.

In the end, Paul is captured by Nazis, even as the Allied armies had entered occupied France. Much as had happened to Bob earlier, he is subjected to what has today been termed, "enhanced interrogation techniques," but Paul will not reveal the whereabouts of an important comrade. Paul's captors decide to submit him to a slow strangulation by hanging him as a means to extract information. Instead, while hanging by his neck, he manages to kick his tormenter in the balls, which snaps his neck. Paul has sacrificed himself for the preservation of a single important individual and for the love of his country.

This profound expressions of love discovered by both Bruno Stachel and Paul Boisseire had died with them. Certainly, evil remains, though not as virulently as that summoned from hell by the Nazis. In Wertebaker's *The Death of Kings*, even after hostilities had ended in World War II in Europe, Robert Berkeley casts a wary and worried eye toward Spain where Fascism survives under the regime of the dictator Francisco Franco. The potential is still present, but it is a threat some are willing to tolerate or even mollify.

During Robert Berkeley's final break with Louis Baron in November 1950, during some of the darkest days of the Korean War, Louis declares, "There are no good things in the world anymore. There's only a choice of evils."

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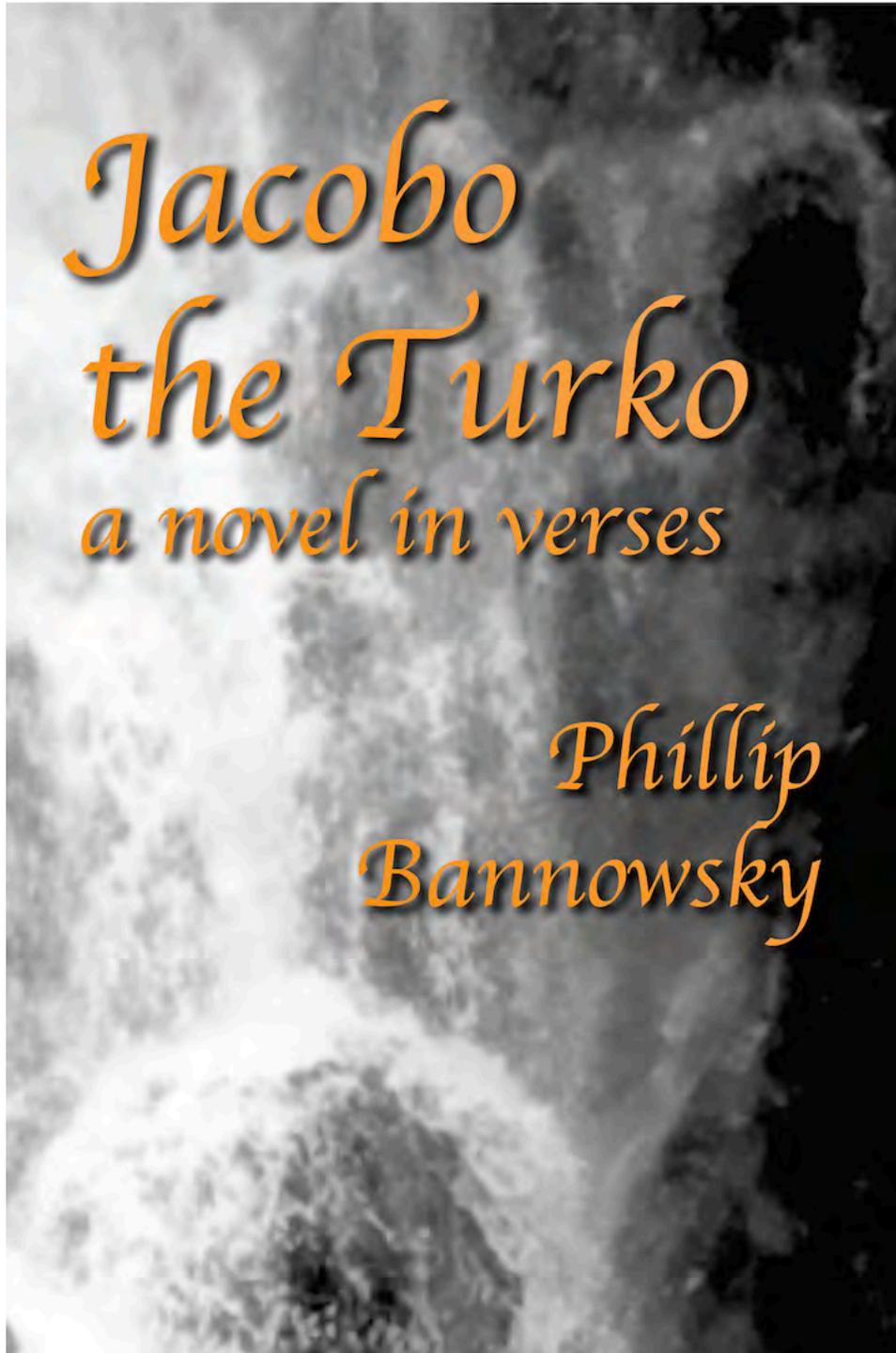
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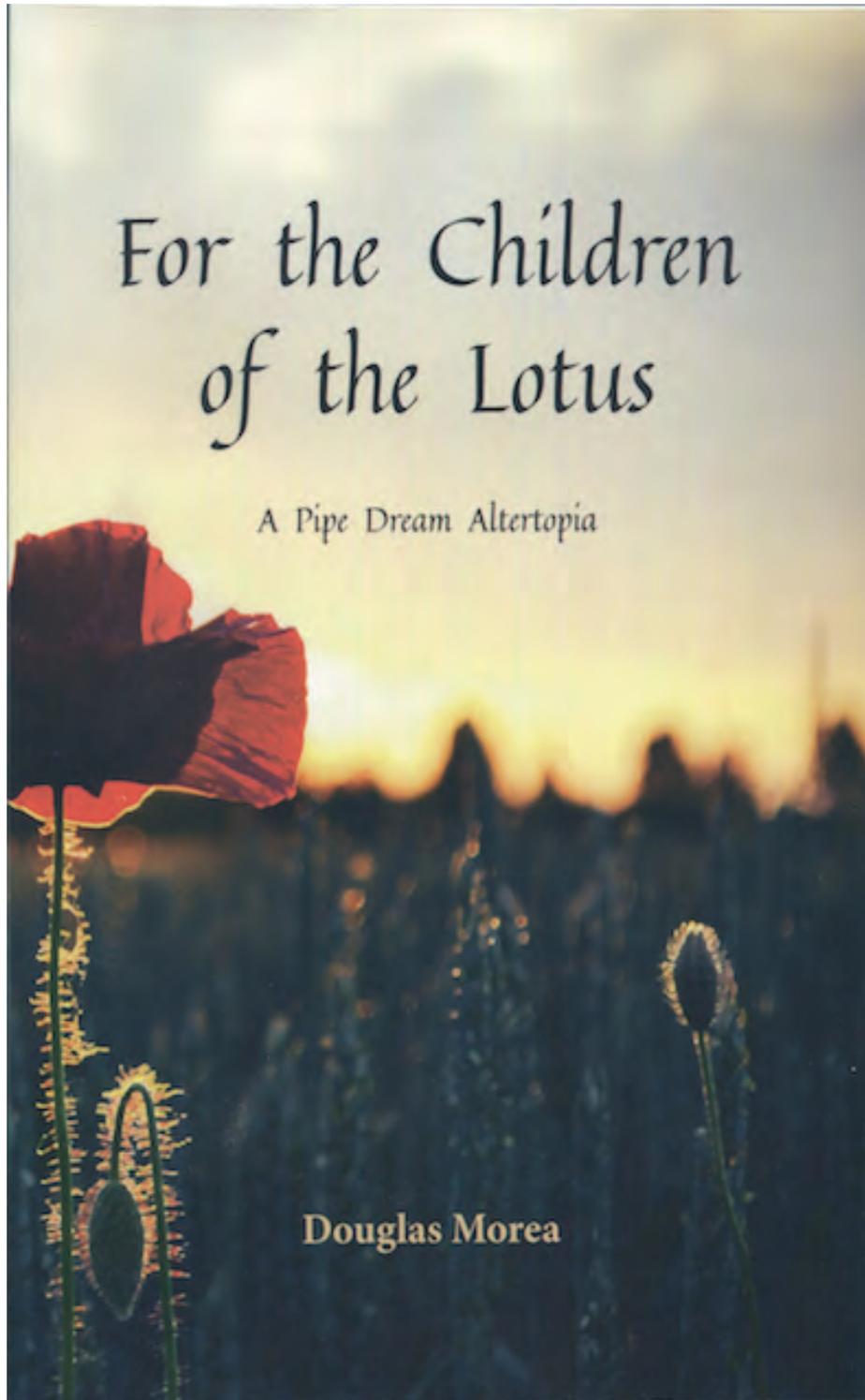
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