

The Mocking Owl Roost

December 2025

A Walk Through the Museum



FICTION
Western Suits



POETRY
Premonition

Featuring

POETRY
Sing to Me, My Dugong Friend

FICTION
The Pendant



POETRY
The Chaos of
Nyx

Masthead

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DYNAMITE DETONATOR

Chloride General Store Museum, Chloride, New Mexico

Bob Armstrong

Stovepipe Turner didn't know a lot of things, but he knew blasting. Like most everything else he knew, he learned it by doing — sometimes following some shouted instructions from a boss and sometimes by figuring it out on his lonesome. The fact he still had all his hands and fingers showed he'd been a right good pupil, at least in this.

Long before he'd gotten his nickname, young Silas had walked away from his last classroom back in Nacogdoches County at just nine years old, as his family pulled up stakes after the war. Cotton prices had hit bottom and the bank owned more of their land than his father did, so his old man had figured on homesteading some free land out on the Edwards Plateau in San Saba County. That didn't pan out, but at least Stovepipe, his parents, and his brothers and sisters had kept their hair, which was more than could be said for some other homesteaders during the Comanche Wars.

So his Pa and his older brother Nate got work as muleskinners, and drove Army supply trains during the campaigns against Quanah Parker and his people. Since that paid better than farming ever had, they continued working for the Army during the later campaigns against the Apaches in the New Mexico and Arizona Territories. Eventually, young Silas joined them, once he was big enough.

In Arizona, one by one, the Turner men answered the call of silver. By the time Stovepipe had reached 17, he had a pick in his sturdy hands and a confident stride in his step.

Now, some men have a feel for rock — they can sense which way a vein is going to run, and can judge which ones will pinch out and which will lead to mountains of high-grade ore. Stovepipe wasn't one of those men. He'd learned to identify a silver sulfide from a silver chloride, and he could tell if a copper-iron sulfide or lead-rich galena might also carry a healthy amount of silver. But he didn't have the bloodhound nose others did for sniffing out buried riches.

Still, he showed his know-how when it came to loosening the stuff from the ribs of the mountains. He always placed just the right amount of charge in each hole to break up the rock without making a mess of it. He learned to time a series of charges so that the first explosions would loosen the rock and a fraction of a second later the others would push the shattered ore into a neat pile. That saved a lot of time and sweat when the workers filled carts to bring the paydirt to the surface. They'd pat him on the back and give their liberal thanks.

Ordinarily, a man with his skills could command a good wage at one of the big mines in Bisbee or Globe, or even up north in Jerome, but Stovepipe had picked up a few habits during his time as a muleskinner. The drinking and fighting hadn't been a problem when he confined them to saloons at night, and he'd earned his nickname — and a certain degree of respect — when he'd knocked out an opponent by slamming his head repeatedly against a stovepipe in a cheap hash house. You had to admire a fellow with that kind of sand, so long as you weren't the one getting a gully bashed into your forehead.

But when he showed up drunk for work too many times in Tombstone, and when he punched a foreman in Bisbee, the mine owners decided he was one more hazard in an industry that was already a risky investment.

Seeking a place where his reputation hadn't preceded him, Stovepipe turned east. He tried the various mining camps of New Mexico and eventually he drifted into Chloride, at the entrance to a canyon a day's ride from the Army fort at Ojo Caliente. These dusty mountains held no shortage of silver, but just as he arrived, the U.S. treasury switched to the gold standard.

The plummeting price of silver didn't stop Stovepipe. Long after most of the other miners had abandoned Chloride, he kept searching for a vein so pure it would pay enough to be worth digging out. Every week, he dug just enough to buy food and whiskey and dynamite. He was sure that somewhere nearby lay enough silver to live off of for the rest of his days.

But blasting is dangerous work, even for an expert — especially if you're working alone. And it's definitely not to be undertaken after an afternoon pick-me-up of Skull Cracker.

Stovepipe's end came in an abandoned shaft he'd been poking around in for a few weeks. He drilled a series of holes and placed his charges in them per his usual, making sure he had enough to break up the rock, but not so much that he might shatter the ore into tiny pebbles. He adjusted the fuses to time the explosions for maximum efficiency, just as he'd learned to do as a blaster's helper. Then he placed his detonator a safe distance away, around a bend in the mine shaft, and ran his wires up to the charges.

But when he went to connect the wires, they wouldn't quite reach. Impatient to get on with his work, and with his head pounding from the hangover, he tugged on the wire. From beyond the bend where his detonator sat, he heard the sound of something falling. Stovepipe's fists clenched. This job was already taking too long and he'd be damned if he'd stop and walk over there to see what had fallen. So he pulled again, got the slack he needed, and touched the wire to his charge — and that was the last thing Stovepipe Turner ever did.

After nobody saw Stovepipe for the better part of a week, a pair of miners went out to investigate his diggings. A few hundred yards into a mine shaft, they came to a detonator that they recognized as Stovepipe's. It lay on its side on the floor of the mineshaft, with the handle depressed against a rock obstruction as if it had been pulled into it. The men followed the wires around the bend to a fresh pile of rock — a decidedly neat pile, and a final testimony to Stovepipe's skills. If the price of silver had been higher, they might have dug out the rocks and found the shattered body underneath. Instead, they only took the detonator, and reported Stovepipe as properly buried.



Chloride, New Mexico



Lotus Pocus

Faris Ridzuan



I'm a self-made glass lotus
 Hear me ye, my lotus pocus
 Street smart to sell me, is my locus
 For all of you to be fond — is my focus

Glisten do I on a moonlit night
 Made to glow in the dark or light
 Street smart fond lotus, indeed, am I
 People take me home, it's me, they buy

Me, I don't glow like pretty glass lotus
 My coming and going bloom, the original pocus
 I float adrift on the still pond at each busy street
 Though I might sometimes vanish, wow am I sweet

Open and close, start and end
 Each petal as delicate as baby's hand
 At the start of the streets, my forever home, the pond –
 I laugh at fake objects – no need to buy me, of me all are fond

Scoff scoff, you might be real, but I am strong and self-made
 I'm naturally alive yea, and you, you're just the fake dead!


Both street smart fond lotus
 And street start pond lotus
 Didn't see that within both and each lotus'
 lotus pocus
 Are laughter, dance and play, fake and real — funny focus



Western Suits

04



Rex Allen Arizona Cowboy
Museum, Willcox, Arizona
Bob Armstrong  Fiction

*Listen, Rex. It's not me. It's not Republic or any other studio. And it's not the drinking, though a bit of moderation wouldn't kill you. It's the goddam television. That goddam box is killing serials. It's killing newsreels. And it's killing the singing cowboy. For Christ's sake, Rex. Look at Roy. He saw the writing on the wall in '51 and moved to the small screen. Why? Because it's perfect for a small, reassuring, family-friendly kind of story, like the kind you and Roy and Gene tell. People going to the pictures now want a big movie. A big spectacle. A trip to Broadway. 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea! Seven Brides for Seven Brothers! And if they're eggheads from the east coast, they want something with a lot of sweaty people yelling at each other. On the Waterfront! A Streetcar Named Desire!

*I'll level with you, Rex. I've had to call in favors with distributors to get your pictures out there. You should hear them whine: 'Singing cowboy pictures were perfect first reels, but the theaters don't want first reels. They only want to show features.' Unless they're catering to the kids, that is. I get distributors asking me for vampires, little green men, giant lizards; whatever they can play in a double or triple bill for horny teenagers in their old man's Buick. Now look, Rex, you know and I know that there's an audience out there for your kind of entertainment. Good, upstanding people. Hard-working folks in small cities and towns who just want to feel good and listen to a handsome all-American fella who looks good in a hat and has a strong, soulful baritone. So how do you reach them, Rex?

*No, I'm not talking television. Roy's got that sewn up tight. You need to get out on the road as a full-time musical act. They'll all know you from your pictures, and they'll jump over each other to get tickets to your shows. I could keep you playing every night of the week from May to October: State fair, county fair, rodeo season. They'll pack that grandstand to see you and the Arizona Wranglers put on a show. And you know what you need to do Rex? You give 'em a show. They've seen you in black-and-white up on the screen. Now they'll see you in full color. So give them some color. Go down to Nudie Cohn's western wear shop. You know — Vineland and Victory in North Hollywood. Tell him you want some cowboy suits so bright you'll blind the entire front row. I'm talking flowers and butterflies. Embroidered roses and violets studded with rhinestones. And that's not all. You know what's big now? Hawaii. Ever since the war. And especially since Burt Lancaster and Deborah Kerr made like rabbits in the sand in From Here to Eternity. You got tiki bars popping up from El Paso to Fairbanks. And country music fans love that Hawaiian guitar sound. So you write yourself a novelty song with a Hawaii angle. You're the artist, Rex. You figure it out. And we get you a Nudie suit made of some kind of shiny material and covered with everything Hawaii. Palm trees! Pineapples! One of those Hawaiian flower necklaces embroidered into the material. And you hit the road with your band and your wardrobe and you'll have a whole new career.

*With Hank Williams gone, you'll be the king of country music. And not just country. Now that Sinatra's busy being a movie star, the sky's the limit for you, Rex. Get the suits, Rex, and become the biggest singing star in America!

Just take it easy with the booze.

PREMONITION

Peace in Union, Thomas Nast, U.S.
Grant Museum, Galena, Illinois



DONNA KATHRYN KELLY

Palm Sunday

Here, in this parlor,
 I wear the blue uniform,
 at the side of my once-handsome,
 now weary-faced friend,
 and when he introduces me
 to the enemy general,
 the well-dressed man in gray
 looks surprised,
 says I'm the "one real American"
 in the room.

But I correct him:
 "We are all Americans."

And it is, I suppose,
 in fulfillment of my mother's dream,
 from when I was in the womb,
 that I should pen
 the instrument of peace
 in this war between men
 whose language
 is unlike my own.

With stylus and manifold book,
 I write the terms of surrender
 at direction
 of my most-revered
 General Grant,
 a man of dusty boots,
 and equine spirit,
 who has selected me
 from a room full of his men,
 and charged me with
 this most solemn duty,
 though I am the non-citizen
 among them.



Good Friday

The President talks Macbeth,
 seems preoccupied by guilty ghosts,
 prefers theatre
 to war,
 lines about fate,
 lines on the palm of an actor's hand,
 ponders the predictive
 power of dreams,
 leans in to eye
 Red Jacket's medal
 on my chest,
 as if it were a door

to a contested waterway,
 eastbound and sacred,
 a low passage at the base of a ridge,
 peacefully crossed by the Iroquois
 for countless years
 but then ravaged
 by the battles
 of an American war
 that has only recently ended.

I am, perhaps,
 the last person to meet
 with him privately;
 and there is a gloom about him,
 an ominous pitch,
 when he asks me
 what I think of time:
 Where does it begin,
 Where does it end?



Poet's note: Nast's painting depicts Confederate General Robert E. Lee's surrender to Union General Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox Court House on April 9, 1865. Brevet Brigadier General Ely S. Parker, Grand Sachem of the Six Nations of the Iroquois (Seneca), served as Grant's military secretary during the Civil War, and Parker penned the terms of surrender at Appomattox on Palm Sunday, 1865. Parker met privately with President Abraham Lincoln several days later on Good Friday, mere hours before Lincoln was assassinated.

Premonition is the poet's imaginary account of the potential musings of Parker during and after each of those important historical events. Instrumental to the poet's acquired knowledge of the relevant background of Parker's life, including the source of the quotes of Lee and Parker upon being introduced by Grant, is the book, *Warrior in Two Camps, Ely S. Parker: Union General and Seneca Chief*, by William H. Armstrong, Syracuse University Press, 1978, (Chapter 10, pages 110-113).



“There is a steel truss bridge over the Rock River that makes her shiver every time she come to this town.”



**Opening line of THE DESCENT: A Halloween Novel
@donnakathrynkelly.com**

In THE DESCENT: A Halloween Novel, the Black Hawk statue in Lowden State Park gives public defender Galena Kane a silent, but physical, warning to leave. Galena, however, ignores that sign—among others—and chooses to remain in Oregon, Illinois for Halloween weekend. Will Galena regret her decision to stay in the small town along the Rock River for her 30th birthday celebration?

Find out by reading THE DESCENT: A Halloween Novel !

**Order your copy of the novel today at
www.amazon.com/dp/B0CGL3S534.**

Broken Bugle

Bob
Armstrong

Arial

He was a baby when his father brought the bugle home from the war, both the instrument and its player broken during the nightmare bombardment at Sedan — the Prussians' big Krupp guns had turned the soil of the Ardennes to dust.

He was a young man when, in 1892, he carried it by train to Le Havre, by ship to Montreal, and by a long series of more trains to the dry, flat land in the west. As he broke the soil and grew his herd of dairy cattle, he missed the green Jura hills of childhood. But he did not miss the threat of the empire that had seized Alsace, Lorraine, and his father's hopes.

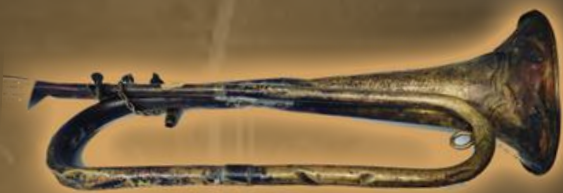
Aside from his father's bugle, he brought little else from his home country other than the language in which he worked and sang and worshipped. He never repaired the bugle's mouthpiece; there'd be no need of it in this land, where his Mennonite neighbours shared nothing but a language with their militaristic Prussian cousins.

He was a father himself when the newspaper told him of the murder of the Archduke. He feared the worst, but a surprising longing for the vengeance he'd never brought for his father welled up in him. His son became one of sixty in the village who answered the call, two-thirds of them choosing to wear the blue of France rather than the khaki of the British Empire. And his son also became one of the twelve who remained in the soil of eastern France.

He cut his hay, milked his cows, and gazed at the broken bugle that hung on a wall for twenty years after his son's death at Verdun — until a stroke felled him as he separated cream from milk.

He was an old man when, three years later, a whistle roused him from the fog of memory. His grandson and two dozen others departed for Winnipeg, where they would train to fight a new generation of German invaders. This time, all the young men of the village wore insignias bearing the image of a maple leaf.

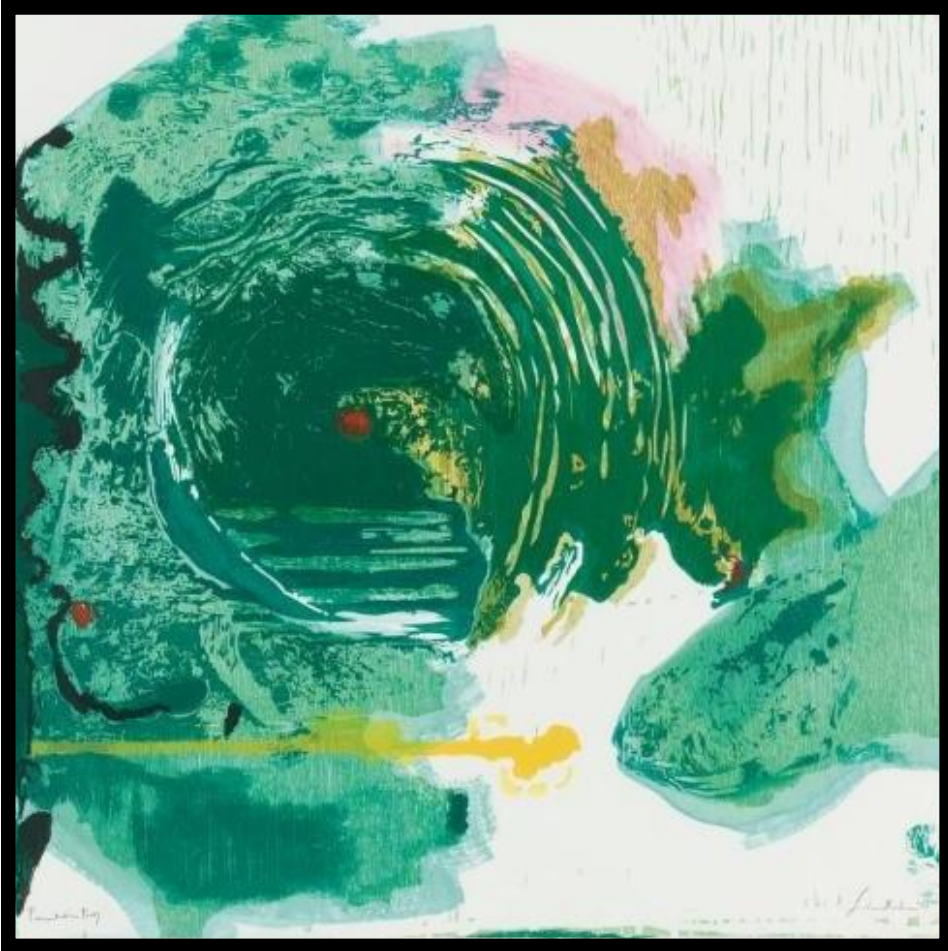
He clutched the broken bugle to him, and waited for news.



Manitoba Dairy Museum,
St. Claude, Manitoba

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RADIUS



LAUREL BRETT

PROSE

We stand before Frankenthaler's *Radius* — stormy green, a pink accented verdancy lit by traces of yellow and salmon. The jade center — the chaos of a hurricane or the flat disc of the Milky Way. An insistent maroon dot reminds me of the persistence of consciousness in a speeding universe dilating into space.

Even here we are part of the cosmic turbulence. We humans coil and stretch. We hunker into shells of the past, spiral into future nebulae. We struggle to find languages to portray being trapped in energy. Only rarely do we find them.

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Swiss Guard, Papal Mummies, and Indigenous Lands

12

Rita Mock-Pike

Papal Mummies in the Catacombs, Stato della Città del Vaticano



*Trigger warnings:
systemic oppression of
Indigenous peoples, death,
mummies, religious
abuse**

I'd never really thought about it,
This sick fascination with the
Display of death and the dead,
And how we've foisted these
Curio closet ideals on those
Who never asked us to curate
Their death, their dead, their toys,
Their clothes, their baskets, their homes.

But I remember our displays of death,
The papal mummies under the Swiss Guard,
The Vatican mentality of Europeans to
Display the dead, the revered, the "holy".
Cringe waves swept through my body
As we walked past the recently dead pope,
His form still decaying, his "preserved" body
On full display for all to witness the adulteration
Of body when soul leaves behind.

I thought it grotesque then, still do now. Maybe more so.
A little bile coughs up the tubes when I think of it.

When we came to this land, this "new world"
We took their bodies and treated them like ours —
Against their will, no consent, no permission, no requests.
And to this day, many remain on display as though
They wished to embrace this sick, unsacred macabre
Fascination with death that these cults have embraced and passed on
As if it were normal, healthy, and humane with good intent.

We robbed them of the land — not something they even called their own —
And today still we plow through their sacred grounds, stealing,
Displaying, and dancing over the graves, not merely of those long forgotten,
But those still, today, suffering at the hands of the invaders.
We curate their history — their lives and their ways — as if we had some right.
This sickness of mentality, to conquer, to dominate, to control.

I cannot convince museums to give up the dead,
Those thousands (hundreds of thousands!) stolen, archived,
Forgotten and despised like boxes of moldy shoes not fit for exhibition.
I cannot change the minds of those who think it's "right" to
Dominate and control the people of kinder, empathetic spirits.
But I can speak. And speak I will.

Give them back their dead.
Give them back their dignity.

Give them back their dead.
Give them back their equity.

Give them back their dead.
Give them back their dust.

POETRY

*Red Tasbeeh
on
Red Lips*

FARIS
RIDZUAN



Kiss

Red Lips
 Muah! — On
 Red Tasbih

Miss

Hands flailed
 Legs slippedy-slipped
 Body fallen deepedy-dipped
 Swirlingly-swirled into don't-disturb-my

Bliss

Woven ruby hearted
 ~~~ Quiverings ~~~  
 Dad's tears bound to string  
 Serenading glow-tears humming  
 Watch..... out!

**Hiss**

Red tasbih  
 Crimson snake  
 Thumbs attar over musk  
 Laughing bloody altered dusk  
 Math formula — “must add”  
 $Ninety9 = 33 + 33 + 3three$

**Cis1**

Don't . Disturb!  
 Balloon fiddling — then  
 Burst! from fun playing —  
 Holy Red Telephone Line!  
 Been severedy-severed



—Beep—  
crimson smoky faced

Sss

2 Balloons

1 breath

Outtedy-out

In Boom!

One Bliss

Sighed

In Gloom!

bliss chains

RELEASE

# *The Pendant*

*The Peabody Essex  
Museum, Salem,  
Massachusetts*



*Fiction*

*E J Moran*

Salem, Massachusetts, a coastal city on the northeastern shore of the state, lies fifteen miles northeast of Boston. This “City of Peace” has become more infamously known as “The Witch City,” instead, and it is, perhaps the ghoulishly seductive allure of its past that keeps the tourists coming. However, the witch trials are just a small part of Salem’s illustrious history.

Modern day Salem does nothing to hide its misdeeds or secrets of the past. Yet, every once in a while, a dark secret slips by unnoticed like a warm summer breeze, impossible to grasp. One such secret lay within the Ropes Mansion on Essex Street. The mansion, now owned by the Peabody Essex Museum, includes the immaculately kept grounds. Both are open to the public. Many visitors make it a point to see the mansion and the regal gardens that grace the back of the home, especially after it famously became known as “Allison’s House” from the movie, *Hocus Pocus*.

It was a majestic two story home built circa 1725 in the classic Georgian style, with wood clapboards on a large piece of prime property. Additions have since been made to both the front and the back, and it now stands white with black shutters, a white picket fence surrounding the grounds and fluted columns in the front entrance, giving it more of a Georgian Colonial look.

It also has a reputation for housing generations of the Ropes family, one of whom does not seem inclined to leave, these almost 200 years later.

### The Ropes Family, 1700s–1800s

The Ropes family was both esteemed and influential, loved to entertain, and hosted frequent elaborate parties among Salem’s elite. Their pedigree was impressive; aside from their wealth, Abigail’s grandfather, Nathaniel Ropes II, had been a Harvard graduate, and was subsequently appointed a Superior Court judge. Though revered by many, he was also fiercely disliked by the common folk for his blind loyalty to the Crown during a tumultuous time for the Colonies with the Revolutionary War on the horizon.

Judge Ropes also demonstrated a total disdain for the lower class, and ruled on matters that came before his courtroom accordingly. It was not unusual for the judge to send a gentleman to prison for non-payment of taxes to the Crown. In most cases, families of the incarcerated suffered financially and became poverty stricken. They were often reduced to performing menial jobs for pitifully low wages, living paycheck to paycheck.

Judge Ropes died in 1744, at age 47. At that time, the dreaded smallpox disease, sometimes referred to as the “speckled monster”, raged throughout Salem, and the variolation was only available to the wealthiest of citizens. As the epidemic grew, the townspeople began to blame the inoculation itself for the spread of the disease throughout town, and riots began in the streets of Salem. One evening, a frenzied mob turned their rage-filled behavior on the Ropes mansion, throwing stones at the windows and threatening the judge. Due to his affliction with the disease, and perhaps coupled with the stress of being set upon by the angry mob, the judge died the next day. To some, dying of smallpox after being inoculated against it, was considered poetic justice for Justice Ropes.

Subsequently, after the Revolutionary War ended, Judge Ropes’ son Nathaniel III, a wealthy merchant, inherited the mansion and moved in with his wife Sarah, and their three children, Nathaniel IV, Sarah (who went by Sally), and Abigail.

Abigail Pickman Ropes, born 1796, was the youngest child of Nathaniel and Sarah. She grew into a beautiful woman, with thick chestnut hair that fell in waves about her shoulders, and deep blue eyes that seemed to captivate those who gazed into them. She was quite charming, and was considered one of Salem’s most eligible single women in her time.

In the summer of 1824, Abigail met Edward Wilkes at a charity function being held at the mansion. She was mesmerized by his dashing good looks; he was of average height, but regal bearing, and she was enchanted by his intense brown eyes that seemed to focus on her alone. But mostly, perhaps, it was his maturity and sophistication that Abigail found so alluring. Although Edward held the respectable position of a pharmacist, Abigail’s family did not approve of him as a potential suitor. He was considered to be of lower status than Abigail’s family, and thus, not as deeply entrenched in Salem’s high society as they.

The family's position and involvement in Salem Town led them to host many social functions with a constant flow of guests at the family mansion. This afforded Abigail and Edward opportunities to repair to the gardens unnoticed, and meet at the gazebo on the back lawn. They then had the luxury of enjoying each other's company over a glass of wine, while making plans for their future. Abigail came to love the scent of freshly sawn cedar that emanated from the newly built structure, as on some evenings, she and Edward would spend long hours there, after all the lamps in the mansion had been extinguished and the family had retired for the night.

After losing her parents at an early age, Abigail found much comfort in the arms of Edward, who had more world experience and maturity than the younger men she'd known. She was enamored of, and some might even say bewitched by, the handsome man who seemed to be so enthralled with her. They spent many stolen moments together whenever the opportunity presented itself.

Abigail was able to come and go undetected by using the back entrance to the mansion, typically used by the house staff. She transported the wine in her flask, a relatively new novelty of the time, and one that a friend of the family had especially designed for her. It was made of blown glass, with little intricate flowers and her initials etched onto its surface.

If Abigail was ever caught coming or going into the house during such late evening hours, she planned to say she had trouble sleeping and merely stepped out for some fresh air. Fortunately, she hadn't needed that excuse, as no one, apparently, had ever suspected what she and Edward were up to. How she longed for the day, and dreamed of a time that she and Edward could be together, without the judgment of society! However, she remained content for the moment, believing that better days lay just ahead.

Edward came late one evening with a small hammer and chisel, and enlarged the hollow of a tree that stood in the back of the yard, just behind the gazebo. He then fashioned a little latched door, nearly indiscernible in the bark of the tree, where their wine glasses could be deposited after their rendezvous, away from the possibility of prying eyes discovering their hidden stash.

There is where they secreted not only their wine glasses, but a delicate heart pendant made of silver that Edward gifted to Abigail, which had their initials inscribed on the front, as well as locks of their hair, visible when the pendant was opened. It was encased in a small delicate silver box with a cloth. It cost Edward almost one half of his weekly wage, but he felt it was important to have Abigail believe in him and his intentions. After all, she came from wealth, and he struggled to maintain an image that was at least respectable in her eyes. Since she could not wear the pendant, she kept it safely in the tree's hollow, and fastened it to a silver chain that she could wear when she and Edward met during their clandestine evenings together.

### Frankie Dalton — 2025

Lainey and her two children, Katharine and Frankie, were looking forward to spending an entire week exploring the many historic and touristy sites of Salem, Massachusetts. They had been planning this vacation for several months, and arrived mid-day with a packed car, filled with excited anticipation.

After unpacking at the hotel, they were ready for a good meal and a relaxing night of making plans for their holiday week.

"The great thing about this area is that even if we hit bad weather, there's plenty of indoor places to visit," Lainey pointed out. "The Hawthorne House, the Witch Museum..."

"I hope we're gonna see more history than witchery," Frankie sighed. He just wasn't enamored of the way the entire town seemed steeped in witchcraft. To him, it made light of such a profoundly regrettable episode of history.

"Okay," Lainey said. "I'm dying to try the Lobster Shanty. I've heard it's a must see on our list of restaurants. Good food, casual dining; exactly what I need after that drive. Let's get an early dinner, then tomorrow we can head to the Ropes Mansion."

“Yay!” cried Katharine. “I can’t wait to see the inside of Allison’s house!”

“Oh no,” Frankie said, giving an exaggerated moan. “Not that place from Hocus Pocus!”

“Actually,” Lainey explained, “it is, but it’s also got a very interesting history, and I’d love to see that beautiful garden, so there’s something for each of us.”

“A trifecta!” said Katharine. She skipped alongside them as they left the hotel.

\*\*\*

The next morning, while Katharine and their mother were exploring the inside of the Ropes mansion, Frankie wandered around the grounds, admiring both the architecture of the building and the different species of flowers that graced the landscape. He spotted a tree in the back that looked much older than the rest of the garden. It was bent, as if it were so world-weary that it could no longer stand erect. As he got closer, he noticed what appeared to be a human-made imperfection in the bark. Curiosity won over, he took out his Boy Scout Woodcraft pocket knife and began tracing the bark outline with the tip of it. The more he dug in, the more intrigued he became — the knife went through the bark more easily than if it had been solid.

Digging further, Frankie saw a glint of glass, and his curiosity got the best of him. He reached in, and gently pulled two wine glasses out, one by one. He noticed how old and discolored they look, and one seemed to have some residue that has crystallized at the bottom. He reached further down in the hollow, and found a small, tarnished box with some sort of pendant inside on a thin chain. Not knowing what to make of it, he returned the wine glasses, but slipped the silver box and pendant in his pocket for further investigation in the privacy of his hotel room.

The family retired early that evening, as it had been a busy day for all of them. Frankie left the box on his bedside table for further inspection in the morning. That night, he had a dream; one so vivid that it seemed to unfold like a silent movie. Years rolled by of a tryst between a beautiful young woman, dressed in the Victorian style, and a handsome young, dark haired man who appeared to be her male suitor. Based on what materialized before him, the woman was clearly in love, yet the man seemed distant, reserved, almost as if he were acting a part in a play.

Frankie awoke with a start and, lying silently in the dark, tried his best to shake off the dream. To distract himself, he reached inside the silver box for the pendant. He was surprised to find that it was hot to the touch, as if it was burning. It left a mark in the palm of his right hand.

The next two nights brought no relief from the visions. Evening after evening, the two met under cover of darkness, at the same gazebo that stood just in front of the tree with the hollow; the tree where Frankie had found the silver box and pendant. He had no choice but to watch with fascination as the scenes played out before him. The morning light found him exhausted, with his bedclothes twisted in a bunch as if he’d been running in his sleep.

Lainey noticed her son had seemed distracted over the last several days. He seemed to keep his eyes as narrowed slits, as if he was afraid of seeing too much, and she noticed dark smudges underneath.

At breakfast, she asked, “So, what about the Hawthorne House today? We’re expecting a thunderstorm in the late morning, but the skies should clear up by early afternoon. I think it might be the best day to go.”

Frankie seemed not to hear her; his face remained blank as he looked off in the distance. Lainey asked him once again, then cleared her throat loudly to get his attention. He shook his head slightly, as if he’d just noticed where they were. Finally, he broke down. “Okay, I think this is going to sound crazy, because it sounds that way to me.”

Lainey and Katharine put down their forks and waited. Lainey looked concerned, and gave him her full attention.

“It’s about this pendant. Well, it’s not so much the pendant, but the dreams I’ve been having since I found it. I mean, they’re not even dreams; they’re like these visions I’ve had every night. It’s as if I’m watching a movie and I keep seeing the same two characters, over and over, but I have no idea who they are.”

Katharine was wide-eyed with amazement, and uncharacteristically speechless. Lainey, however, looked troubled as she took in her son’s apprehension.

“Well, last night, I saw the man put something in the woman’s drink when her back was turned. She had no idea; he put poison in the wine glass while the woman poured his wine and corked her flask.”

After a moment’s pause, Lainey asked, “Is the haunted reputation of Salem getting to you?”

“Mom! Are you kidding me or what? I mean, are you serious right now? I’m going to make this kind of thing up?”

His indignation flushed scarlet as it crept up his neck and toward his face.

She knew her son could be quirky, but was not given to over-imaginative fantasies. In fact, he always eschewed stories of the paranormal, and excelled in the sciences, things that could be proven — tangible things you could hold in your hands, study, and draw logical conclusions about.

“According to what we’ve seen, the mansion is owned by the Peabody Essex Museum. It wouldn’t hurt to read up on the Ropes’ history. Maybe you could ask someone at the Peabody if they have any interest in taking a look at what you found. I mean, it could lead to some interesting history.”

Frankie eagerly agreed and opted to spend his hours researching the Ropes archives. Specifically, he focused on the family who lived here when the mansion caught fire in 1839, and whether there was ever an investigation.

“Mom! C’mere, you gotta come take a look at this!” Frankie could barely contain his excitement. His hands shook as he handed his mother the laptop.

Lainey read the account with interest, of Abigail’s untimely death due to a fire in the mansion in 1839. There was no mention of an investigation, and it was long believed that Abigail’s petticoats caught fire after she got too close to a fireplace in her bedroom.

“I think you’ve stumbled onto something here,” Lainey said, “but let’s try to gather more data. I think it will take more than this to get the attention of anyone — much less the Peabody — to take a real interest in the relics you’ve discovered.”

Frankie continued his research and found more fascinating facts and theories. Lainey thoughtfully said of one particular find, “That would explain why, despite her beauty and social standing, she never married. According to all the history here, she lived her entire adult life in the mansion. I mean, it’s really just conjecture, but if you could convince the Peabody to at least take a look at the pendant and glasses, maybe they’d consider testing them?”

“They should, if they get to know you at all. The biggest septic I’ve ever met!” Katharine said.

“Um, I think you mean skeptic? And let’s stay focused here. It couldn’t hurt to give the Peabody a call, or better yet, let’s stop by on the way to the Salem Trolley.”

“Okay, but please, let’s not spend too much time there,” Katharine pleaded. “We still need to see the Witch Museum later.”

Frankie rolled his eyes as he gathered the relics for presentation, and the family headed to the Peabody.

Although it took quite a bit of prodding, the Peabody Essex Museum finally agreed to look into Frankie's claims. What they neglected to admit at the time, was the fact that a diary believed to be Abigail's survived the fire of 1839. It was found inside a built-in alcove in her room, and in it, she identified the dashing young man who had stolen her heart as Edward Wilkes.

Upon testing the crystals at the bottom of the wine glass, traces of the drug Laudanum — commonly used in the 1800s as a catch-all remedy and, occasionally as to drug individuals — were discovered. Encouraged by their findings, the Peabody next tested the silver contained in the pendant and confirmed that it did, indeed, date back to the 1830s. Suddenly, the visions as described by Frankie seemed not just possible, but probable. They now felt they had more research to do themselves, and conducted a more in-depth analysis of the Ropes history.

## Edward Wilkes — 1800s

Some years before Abigail was born, her grandfather, Judge Ropes, convicted a gentleman, Adam Wilkes, and sentenced him to ten years in debtors' prison. Mr. Wilkes had been a fairly wealthy and well respected merchant in town. The charge? Allegedly, non-payment of taxes to the crown. Mr. Wilkes insisted that he had paid in full, but was unable to provide the proof on his day in court, as his ledger had mysteriously gone missing. The Wilkes family believed this to have been an act of duplicity by a fellow merchant known to the loyalist party. That same merchant soon took ownership of the family business at a highly reduced price. This left the family unable to pay back taxes and court fees, and kept Adam Wilkes to serve out his full term in prison.

The incarceration and sale of the Wilkes' business ruined the family financially, and they quickly transitioned from a comfortable upper middle class lifestyle to one of poverty. They lost their home, the family wages and subsequently, their way of life.

Some time after Mr. Wilkes' release from prison ten years later, his son Edward was born. He learned of the tragic consequences and the fate that had befallen his family due to the injustice bestowed on them by Judge Ropes. Edward vowed to seek revenge on the man who ruined his family's prospects for a happy, stable future. Judge Ropes, however, was no longer alive for Edward to retaliate against, leaving him to avenge this wrong through the Ropes family.

In the summer of 1824, years of meticulous planning led Edward to introduce himself to Abigail at a social gathering at the Ropes mansion. Although he had a respectable job as a pharmacist, Abigail knew her family did not approve of his lower social status, and thus, he was to become Abigail's secret suitor. Edward was not only outraged about the impact Abigail's grandfather had on his family, he deeply resented being looked down upon by her.

As a pharmacist, Edward spent his years quietly studying which drugs would be suitable to achieve his lethal intent. His research led him to choose Laudanum, a very strong drug which included a mixture of opium and ethanol. Because it was known to cause drowsiness, he knew this drug would keep Abigail off balance. She should then find it difficult, he calculated, to navigate her way out of the mansion after the fire started.

One late evening, when Abigail turned to pour his wine, Edward hastily slipped the drug into Abigail's glass and watched it dissolve. He anticipated the coming events of the night. This was it; there was no turning back now. Years of planning would come to fruition tonight.

After consuming her wine, Abigail began to feel extraordinarily tired. Soon after, Abigail had to bid Edward good-night and slowly headed for her room. Edward knew which bedroom was hers, and waited under cover of darkness for her lamp to extinguish. Adrenaline surged through him; his heartbeat pounded in his ears as he waited to put his plan into motion. Finally, revenge would be his, and he could find some peace in his life.

With only the stars and a quarter moon to light the way, Edward found his way behind the gazebo. He deposited the wine glasses into the hollow of the tree where the pendant lay and proceeded to the back of the mansion where Abigail's room was located to start the fire. In his excitement, he neglected to realize that the pendant could possibly incriminate him. When the thought occurred to him, he planned to return to the garden, grab the pendant, and bury it somewhere far from here. However, after setting the home alight, he found it impossible to make his way to the backyard. The flames soared out of control so quickly that he needed to make a hasty exit. He could only pray the secret hollow would never be discovered.

His prayers remained answered for nearly 200 years.

## Epilogue

In keeping with the Ropes family habit of maintaining a written account of their history, the Peabody Essex Museum took it upon themselves to have the newly discovered details of Abigail's death, and the murderous treachery of Edward Wilkes, written into the record of the Ropes archives as the probable cause of her death. It was done as much for history's sake as for the benefit of Abigail's memory.

The Museum hired a conservator-restorer to evaluate and protect the pendant from further tarnish and damage. The wine glass was re-investigated using a multi-analytical approach, and indeed, traces of laudanum and its components were found in the crystalized residue of what was logically concluded to be Abigail's glass.

While the silver box lies at the Peabody Essex Museum, the now infamous silver heart pendant has been encased in an intricate frame made of cedar, and hangs securely in the bedroom that Abigail occupied for most of her life. The pictures inside have faded, but the memories have not.

Despite the circumstances surrounding her untimely departure from the world, Abigail seems reluctant to leave the mansion where she spent most of her adult life. According to the accounts of numerous visitors, her soul lingers there like a wispy shadow. She sometimes appears as a hazy figure moving about from room to room, or is seen gazing out of the second floor window as if she's awaiting someone she long ago left behind.

Legend has it that on a "good" day, Abigail orchestrates playful tricks on visitors to the museum, such as whipping past someone so quickly that they feel a cold breeze, or randomly moving an artifact or heirloom from one room to another. At times the window curtains may flutter, absent of any outside breeze, or one may feel the touch of an unseen hand as they enter the mansion. Abigail seems content to live out her spectral years in the home she so loved.

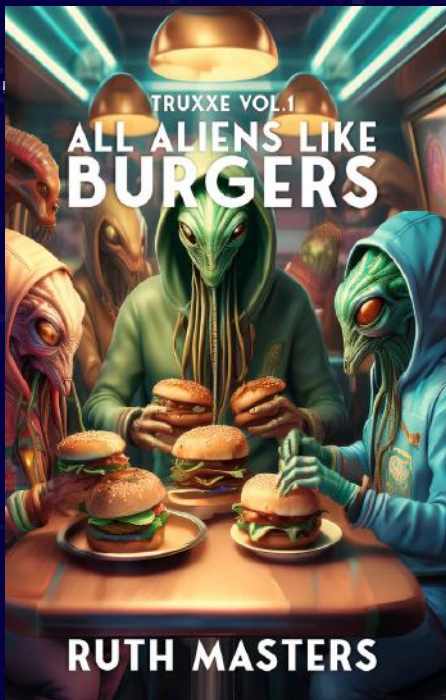
The family ledger has now been rectified and the book is properly closed.



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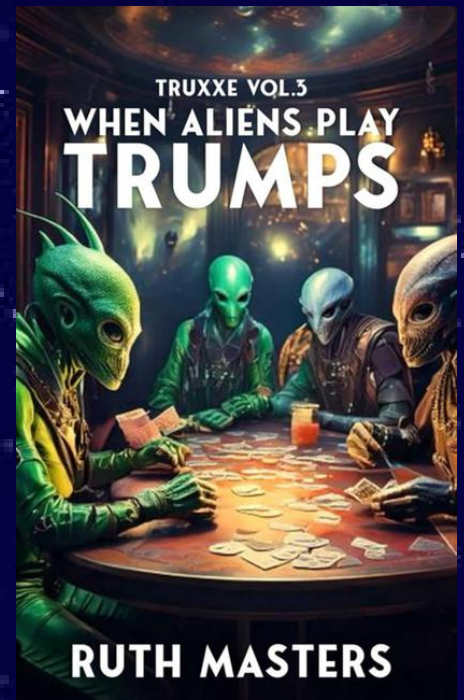
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# MUSKETBALL

John Muro

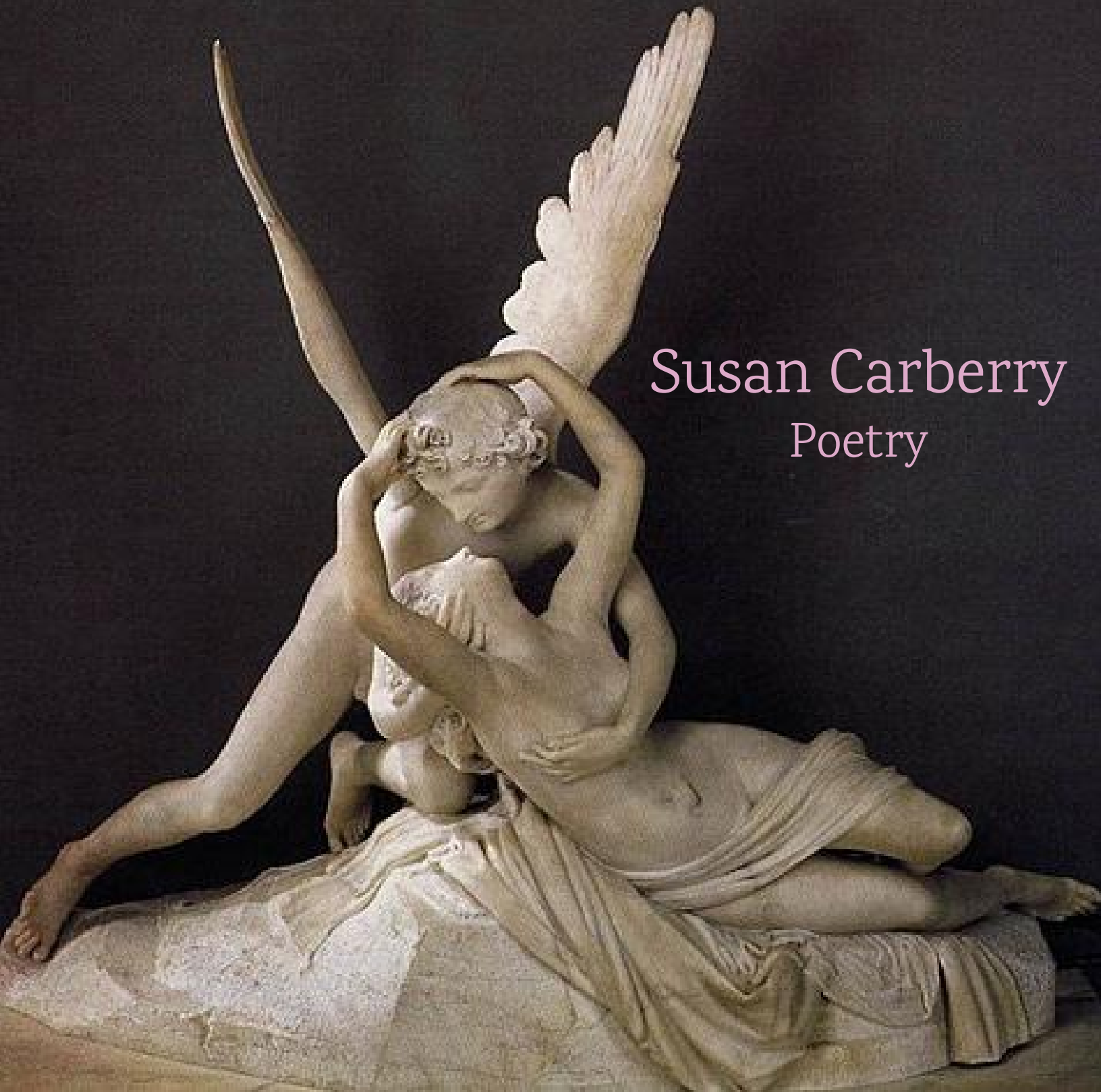


In the museum's half-light, tucked beneath dusty panels of glass, one might be forgiven for thinking it was an alien sphere that fell from a cruel orbit and settled within this vitrine of primitive calm. Centuries old, it had been hastily poured, hand-warmed and then set aside where it cooled and took on the hue of still-water before it was ram-rod stuffed in dark defect and then, to the sound of brute thunder-clap, danced as the courier of blight through the dark and narrow barrel and tumbled in small caliber past plumes of oil-smear and kestrel-blue smoke mere moments before it violently dispatched whatever living thing it had pursued and then blindly entered.

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# Cupid and Psyche

Psyche Revived by Cupid's Kiss, Antonio  
Canova, the Louvre



Susan Carberry  
Poetry



Prologue

27

I cast my dreams into silent parentheses  
as I sleep the sleep of a thousand years.

Part 1

He comes to me on lunar beams.  
Passionate, probing kisses,  
urge me to stir from Venus'  
vile hex, vengeful curse.  
I emerge from my twilit world,  
safe in his all-enfolding arms.  
His mother's jealous spell  
broken in his warm embrace.

Part 2

Selene's moon wanes  
as Helios' star rises,  
illuminating Cupid as he flies  
into Eos of the dawn.  
Fast-fading night, sprinkles  
sleep-dust in my eyes. I yield  
once more to timeless slumber.  
Our love, eternal, forever apart.

Epilogue

I sleep the sleep of a thousand years,  
casting my dreams into silent parentheses.

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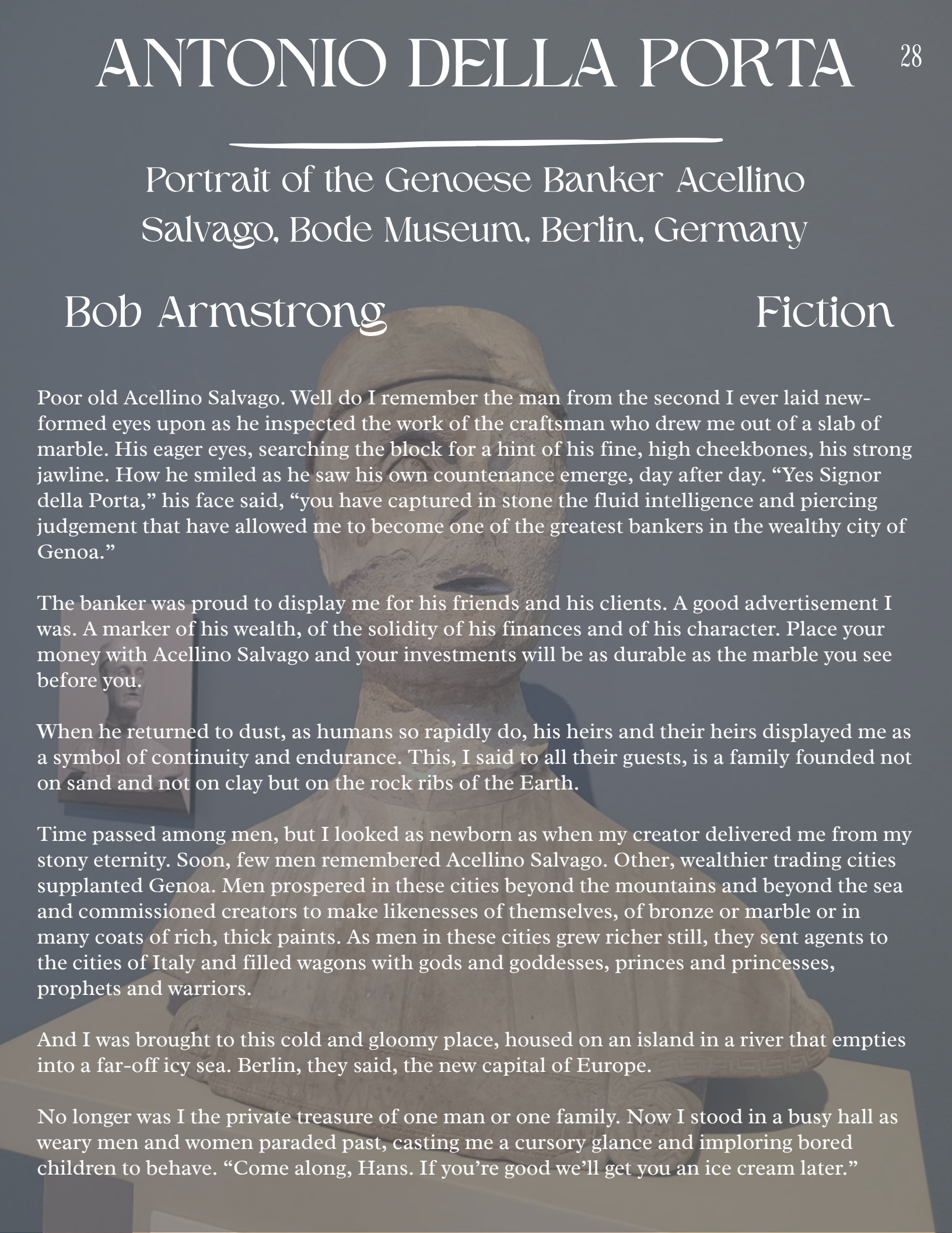


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## Portrait of the Genoese Banker Acellino Salvago, Bode Museum, Berlin, Germany

Bob Armstrong

Fiction



Poor old Acellino Salvago. Well do I remember the man from the second I ever laid new-formed eyes upon as he inspected the work of the craftsman who drew me out of a slab of marble. His eager eyes, searching the block for a hint of his fine, high cheekbones, his strong jawline. How he smiled as he saw his own countenance emerge, day after day. “Yes Signor della Porta,” his face said, “you have captured in stone the fluid intelligence and piercing judgement that have allowed me to become one of the greatest bankers in the wealthy city of Genoa.”

The banker was proud to display me for his friends and his clients. A good advertisement I was. A marker of his wealth, of the solidity of his finances and of his character. Place your money with Acellino Salvago and your investments will be as durable as the marble you see before you.

When he returned to dust, as humans so rapidly do, his heirs and their heirs displayed me as a symbol of continuity and endurance. This, I said to all their guests, is a family founded not on sand and not on clay but on the rock ribs of the Earth.

Time passed among men, but I looked as newborn as when my creator delivered me from my stony eternity. Soon, few men remembered Acellino Salvago. Other, wealthier trading cities supplanted Genoa. Men prospered in these cities beyond the mountains and beyond the sea and commissioned creators to make likenesses of themselves, of bronze or marble or in many coats of rich, thick paints. As men in these cities grew richer still, they sent agents to the cities of Italy and filled wagons with gods and goddesses, princes and princesses, prophets and warriors.

And I was brought to this cold and gloomy place, housed on an island in a river that empties into a far-off icy sea. Berlin, they said, the new capital of Europe.

No longer was I the private treasure of one man or one family. Now I stood in a busy hall as weary men and women paraded past, casting me a cursory glance and imploring bored children to behave. “Come along, Hans. If you’re good we’ll get you an ice cream later.”

Years there were when few men and women came to see me and years there were when the Sunday crowds swelled through the rooms around me. I looked into faces glowing and fat with prosperity, haggard with fear and hardship, sharpened with cunning and hatred.

One day, men in workers' overalls brought a wooden crate into my room. I had seen the likes of that before. Was I to move to another city? Was there a new capital of Europe? They placed me in a box and carried me to a cart that jostled through noisy streets until I felt myself descending staircase after staircase. I came to rest, still in my crate, in a kind of double darkness in a vast, echoing cellar. And through the wood of my tiny portable cell I felt the presence of others such as I.

Periodically, I felt the ground shake. When the shaking was powerful, I might hear one of my neighbours tumble to the floor. But I feared not, for I am the stuff of Earth itself, forged in a furnace hotter than that of Vulcan, and I felt safe in my straw-cushioned crate.

Once I heard strange voices echo through my subterranean prison. They were distant and I could not understand their words, nor whether they spoke the language of Berlin or that of some other land. And immediately after these voices, I heard the crackle of burning wood and felt the heat and smoke of a fire in a mighty oven. How many wooden crates were down here? How much flammable paint?

You cannot kill me as easily as you can the gawkers who paraded past me. But the heat, the heat. It cannot burn one such as I, but it can reduce marble to powder. Proud Acellino Salvago lost one of the eyes that gave him his vaunted foresight. He lost the long nose down which he would glare at a debtor. The mouth that might in life have uttered strong commands was now a lipless cavern.

And now I am returned to my pedestal, still in Berlin, more visited than ever before. I am no longer the masterwork of a great craftsman. I am hideous. I am a monster. And a monster is not simply a thing ugly to behold. A monster is a portent, a warning.

Poor old Acellino Salvago. He thought I would forever bear the message of his prosperity, wisdom and acumen, but it is a darker one altogether that I carry.



# Sing to Me,

## Rita My Dugong Mock-Pike Friend

Waaram [Dugong], National Gallery of Australia,  
Canberra, Australia

Spotted beast of ocean deep,  
A cousin of my friend from childhood.  
Were you, too, mistaken for mermaid,  
Oh friend in these waters blue?  
I hope you were.  
And I hope you sent sailors  
into fits of delight, and consternation, even rage,  
when you proved by manatee-like cousin  
on the other side of the world.



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# Indelible Dachau

**Dachau Concentration Camp Memorial Site,  
Dachau Germany**



*\*\*Trigger warning:  
Holocaust, death, death  
camp, Nazis\*\**

**Nonfiction**  
**Anonymous**

“Unfortunately, we can’t go in.” The concert director announced a few minutes after we pulled up to the gates of the most important site we wouldn’t see on tour.

A bus load of teens, with a few scattered twenty-somethings in the mix, mostly shrugged their shoulders. There were no Jewish folks among us — that we knew of anyway — and so though Dachau, the German prison camp from WWII was important, most people seemed rather unimpressed. I don’t think there were any Holocaust-deniers among us, at least, but most teenagers aren’t that attuned to world history that happened before they were thought of.

Something within me couldn’t handle being there. My vivid imagination, perhaps, drew up the history of the site — a camp I’d never heard of before that day in my twentieth year on this Earth — and my body began a subtle quivering. I’d read *The Diary of Anne Frank* as a homeschooled middle-schooler who lived in the library. But this wasn’t someplace she mentioned. And at the age of twenty, I didn’t really understand any of it. The idea of Nazis and death camps was beyond my ken.

Yet, the longer the bus sat there outside the gates, the more my body responded to this moment. I began smelling the burnt flesh of the people who’d died there more than sixty years earlier. “Can’t you smell that?”

My tour mates shook their heads. No one else smelled a thing.

I hadn’t seen the incinerator, but I knew, instinctively, where it was. And that’s from where the smell emitted. Today, twenty-five years later, I still smell that horrible stench of death, ashes, and destroyed human lives when I think of that moment. They say smell is the strongest memory sense. Usually, it’s meant that a smell evokes a memory, but in this case, the memory evokes an indelible odor I can never be rid of.

The tears that flowed forth were unstoppable. The tour director asked what was wrong. I couldn’t understand myself, so I made the excuse of stories from people I knew who’d survived. I didn’t know what else to say that would make sense. I had already been accused of being a drama queen on that tour thanks to an undiagnosed medical condition, and I didn’t want to add more of that burden in that moment.

Now, after years in seminary and theological study, delving into the impressions that generations past have made on our DNA — that whole generational curse thing from the Bible would explain this! — I look back on that moment and I know. I know why I couldn’t control the wailing I felt deep in my bones. As it turns out, I have Jewish heritage.

I believe that this moment remains etched on my soul because it was collectively etched into the DNA of my people. If you’ve ever read Jung, you’ll understand this as the collective unconscious. If you haven’t perhaps you’ve heard of genetic memory. Either fit — both agree.

Roughly one hundred years ago, the rise of Nazis began. Today, we see them rising once more, taking on different faces, different names, different celebrations. And this is why we can never forget our history. For when we do, we are primed to repeat it. Over and over and over again.

That moment in my personal history was only an awakening. I pray it continues to linger for as long as I live. May I never forget — Jewish or not — that they came for people who weren’t deemed “suitable” for society. Those with disabilities. Those of the LGBTQIA+ community. Those who dared defy them. And now, as many of see what feels like the world burning down around us once more, may we remember the indelible deeds that the genetics of the Jewish people will never forget.

# The Chaos of Nyx

She pads softly through the darkness  
 Primordial and sleek  
 Black as midnight, striking fear in the heart of Zeus

Mother of Thanatos  
     Ket  
     the Fates  
 Her brood is large and dangerous

Nyx, the mighty,  
 Giver of Night and Dreams,  
 Creator of the Void nighttime creates

Her chariot streaks like a comet through the night sky.  
 A cloak to swallow stars.  
 The moon bows to her passing

Is she the comet that will stop the world from turning?  
 Perhaps...

One never knows in the night.

Nyx, Hillview Museum,  
 Washington, D.C.

Sue Cook

## **BOB ARMSTRONG - WINNIPEG, MANITOBA, CANADA**

Bob Armstrong is a novelist, playwright, and freelance writer from Winnipeg. His second novel, *Prodigies* (Five Star/Gale), won the Margaret Laurence Prize for Fiction in the 2022 Manitoba Book Awards and will be re-published, with a sequel, by Roan & Weatherford. His writing has appeared in the U.S. in *Red Earth Review*, *Kudzu House*, *Roi Fainéant*, and *Saddlebag Dispatches*, and in Canada in *The Literary Review of Canada*, *Prairie Fire*, *Exile*, *The Fiddlehead*, *FreeFall*, and various anthologies.

## **LAUREL BRETT – LONG ISLAND, NEW YORK, USA**

Laurel Brett is a novelist, poet, essayist, memoirist, and mother. Her thesis on Thomas Pynchon's early novels won a national award. She has devoted herself to social justice issues since she was a teenager. Her novel, *THE SCRÖDINGER GIRL* (Akashic, 2020) was called a page turner in *The New York Times*. Her work has appeared in *ONE ART*, *SECOND COMING*, *EKPHRASTIC REVIEW*, *THE NEW YORK TIMES*, *THE NASSAU REVIEW*, and *LILITH* among other venues. She lives with her beloved bichon-poos overlooking a harbor. Nature, art, and true human connection inspire her.

## **DONNA KATHRYN KELLY – ILLINOIS, USA**

Donna Kathryn Kelly practiced law for many years in the Illinois criminal justice system. After spending the first decade of her legal career as a criminal defense attorney, Kelly worked as a felony prosecutor in McHenry County, Illinois. Kelly is the author of the crime novel, *Cop Eyes*, a murder mystery concerning a northwest suburban Chicagoland area public defender, Cheney Manning, whose police officer husband is shot and killed in the line of duty.

## **EJ MORAN – NEW JERSEY, USA**

EJ Moran began writing short stories several years ago. While she favors the stories of O'Henry and J.D. Salinger, she has interests in varied genres, including contemporary literature and non-fiction. She is currently working on two other short stories which will be completed shortly, and in her spare time, enjoys writing alphabet poems for her daughter's Kindergarten class. She lives and works in the Northern New Jersey, USA area.

### **IMAGE CREDITS THIS ISSUE:**

FREEPIK – Starline,

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UNSPLASH – Alex Lion, Zhaoli JIN, Ryan Stefan, Sai Balaji Varma Gadhiraaju, Alberico Bartoccini, and Khamkéo

## SUSAN CARBERRY – REGULAR CONTRIBUTOR

Susan lives in NW London. Her poems are an eclectic mix of social commentary, the natural world, the human condition, humour, and her deep faith in God, and they appear in several anthologies. She recently published her own poetry booklet, *Eternal Ephemera*. Susan is a Poet in Residence to the gardeners of Roundwood Park. She reads her work for events at the City Literature Institute, and has begun writing flash fiction and short stories. She's a familiar figure in her local cafes and restaurants, where she sits with a coffee and writes, gaining inspiration from the world around her.

## SUE COOK – COMMISSIONING EDITOR, STAFF POET, WRITER & PERFORMING ARTIST

Sue Cook (she/her) lives in Illinois with her husband Randy and dogs. Her passions include assistance dogs, rescue dogs, music, acting, theater, poetry, and Doctor Who. She's been in both film and theater and is a regular cast member of the podcast [Doctor Who's Line is it....Anyway?](#) Sue is an advocate for the use of Service Dogs to assist their disabled handlers to maintain their independence. [Quigley's Quest](#), her first children's book, addresses how a dog becomes a Service Dog.

## UFAN-ABASI FRANCIS – WEBSTER

Ufan-Abasi Francis is based in Nigeria and is part of the SEO/Web/Social team. She's interested in digital media, especially how content and design work together online. Outside of work, she enjoys journaling, exploring visual aesthetics, and curating content ideas. A fun fact: she's always on the hunt for the perfect playlist to boost her focus.

## TANDY MALINAK – HEAD COPY EDITOR

Tandy Malinak was engrossed in visual art, stage performance, and storytelling before she knew what the words meant. A second-generation homeschooler with a BA in Elementary Ed, she also knows kids and homelife; set her down with a cup of tea, and she'll go until you stop her. She loves fantasy, sci-fi, Nintendo, board games, studying the Word, the smell of a campfire, the sound of ocean waves, and all things feline—to name a few! Originally from Seattle, Tandy now lives in Chicago's northside with her husband, 2 dragon-loving kids, and 5 cats.

## OUAHID MERABET –MSY TECH DESIGNERS – DESIGNER

Ouahid is a software engineer by training, with over 25 years of professional experience in visual design. Throughout his career, he's mastered the complete print-design process, from initial concept creation and layout to large-format printing and installation. Currently, his focus is digital design, including social media visuals, educational and historical animations, video editing, and basic web development. Ouahid founded MSY Tech Designers, an online company providing innovative graphic and IT solutions. He deeply believes that a picture is worth a thousand words — and a video, even is worth even more. Exploring documentaries, sports, philosophy, history, and science enriches his perspective, fueling his creativity and inspiration.

## NANCY MOCK – CREATIVE TEAM & PROOFREADER

Nancy (she/her) was born in Montana, raised in Ohio, and moved to Florida almost 30 years ago. Mother of Rita Mock-Pike and her two siblings. Nancy learned to make computers “dance” in the early 1970s, with her husband's encouragement, before most people had computers in their homes. She's had a lot of experience formatting magazines, flyers, etc. throughout her life. As a retiree, her favorite hobbies are still crafting (mostly sewing) and reading.

## RITA MOCK-PIKE – CO-FOUNDING EDITOR-IN-CHIEF & EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR/PRODUCER FOR MOCKINGOWL STUDIOS

Rita Mock-Pike (she/her) is the granddaughter of aviatrix, Jerrie Mock, first woman to pilot an airplane solo around the world. Rita has taken inspiration from her grandmother's life and flight and pursued many of her own dreams in theatre, podcasting, novel writing, and cooking up delicious food from around the world. She now writes on food, travel, pets, faith, and the arts. She's happily married to Matt, and faithfully serves the very fluffy kitten queen, Lady Stardust.

## **MAE MONTERO – DESIGNER & WEBSTER**

Mae Montero is a New Orleans-based graphic designer with a B.A. in Graphic Design from Loyola University New Orleans and a background in photography. She's passionate about visual storytelling and enjoys creating thoughtful, minimalist work. Her inspiration comes from time spent in nature, natural textures, and everyday light. Outside of her creative practice, Mae enjoys being active outdoors and hanging out with her favorite cat, Mr. Leo.

## **JOHN MURO - REGULAR CONTRIBUTOR**

A resident of Connecticut and a lover of all things chocolate, John Muro has authored two volumes of poems – In the Lilac Hour and Pastoral Suite – in 2020 and 2022, respectively. He is a three-time nominee for the Pushcart Prize, a nominee for the Best of the Net Award and, more recently, he received a 2023 Grantchester Award. John's work has appeared in numerous literary journals and anthologies, including Acumen, Barnstorm, Delmarva, Moria, River Heron, Sky Island and the Valparaiso Review.

## **FARIS RIDZUAN - COMMISSIONING EDITOR & STAFF WRITER**

Faris is a multilingual musician, artist, and writer. He has played roles such as education and youth policy officer, tech product policy manager, branding and curriculum lead, strategy lead, manpower lead, and social science and interdisciplinary researcher. He is due to graduate soon with a Master's in Malay Studies from the National University of Singapore (NUS), where he tutored Asian and Malay Studies, winning teaching awards. Faris graduated from NUS with a First Class Honours in Sociology, minoring in European Studies. He has been leading national, regional & global initiatives such as Youth Panel Member for AMP 4th National Convention, Global Project Advisor for Connecting Climate Minds, and Co-Lead for Asia, Global Indigenous Youth Summit on Climate Change. Faris was awarded the prestigious NUS Outstanding Young Alumni Award in 2023.

## **RACHEL ROBINSON – DESIGNER & VOICE ACTOR**

Rachel attends the University of Wisconsin – Madison where she is obtaining a degree in graphic design. Some of her hobbies includes track and field, F1, WWE, taking walks with friends, BTS, Law and Order SVU, and more. She has recently gotten into ceramics and has an interest in voice acting. A fun fact about Rachel is that she binge-watched the show 9-1-1 in about 5 months and it's her new obsession.

## **AMANDA WOLF – DESIGNER**

Amanda is a storyteller fueled by a love for history, art, and a touch of magic. With degrees in Art History and Anthropology and certifications in Museum Studies and marketing, she's spent 15 years bringing exhibits to life in museums of all sizes. Whether curating, teaching, or traveling the world in search of ancient ruins and local legends, she's passionate about connecting people to the past. She thrives where history meets imagination — think Victorian time travelers, ancient aliens, and fireworks over Disney castles included. A devoted cat lover, she shares her home and lap space with three curious and cuddly cats.

## **JANET WRIGHT – PROOFREADER**

An avid reader since childhood, Janet loves nothing better than to curl up on the sofa and lose herself within the tactile pages of a physical book. She's open to any genre, though her favourites are historical crime, time travel, and Gothic horror. Her passions are C17th embroidery, teddy bears, and visiting Venice. She's Mum to two grown sons, and Grandma to two young grandsons who already know far more about information technology than she does. Janet writes under the pseudonym Rosetta Yorke. Her short stories, poetry, and micro fiction have been published in a variety of anthologies and magazines.

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