



2022 Writers Master Class with Barbara Kingsolver
Sept. 29, 2:00-3:30 p.m. EST, Byrd Center, Shepherd University

Below is the line-up of writers for the AHWIR Master Class with Barbara Kingsolver, Thursday September 29, 2:00-3:30 p.m., at the Robert C. Byrd CHE on King Street, Shepherd University, Shepherdstown, WV. There were a great number of superb submissions this year to selected from for the special focus of this September 29 Master Class, and we congratulate all the writers for their talent and temerity. The audience is invited to participate (both face-to-face and on zoom), as copies of Master Class participant submissions will be provided for all at the Kingsolver Events link at <https://www.shepherd.edu/ahwirweb/kingsolver/schedule>. We ask all to share their thoughts as we undertake a friendly and supportive conversation about good writing, both prose and poetry. After each writer is introduced, the writer will come to the podium to join Anthology Editor Sylvia Bailey Shurbutt and WV Common Read Author Barbara Kingsolver. **One submission only** (1-2 page poem, fiction, or creative nonfiction excerpt) **will be read. Writers will remain on the stage to answer questions and to respond to Kingsolver, Shurbutt, and the audience.** Readers for the Master Class are encouraged to revise and submit their submissions in full to the *Anthology of Appalachian Writers*, Barbara Kingsolver Volume 15. Writers whose works were not selected for the Master Class are also invited to submit to the Kingsolver anthology.

- 1) Tom Donlon, Shenandoah Junction, WV, tdonlon3@comcast.net reading "Thirty-Nine Cicada Wings" (poetry in person)
- 2) Bruce Waldron, Shepherdstown, WV, brwaldron69@yahoo.com reading "Genesis" (poetry in person)
- 3) E.J. Wade, Oak Park, IL, Nariny2009@gmail.com reading "Framed" (poetry zoomed)
- 4) Ginny Fite, Harpers Ferry, WV, gnnfite9@gmail.com reading "Songs My Mother Taught Me" (prose in person)
- 5) Kathleen Furbee, Independence, WV, kfurbee@yahoo.com reading "Stoop Musings at the End of Summer" (prose in person)
- 6) Randy Underwood, Martinsburg, WV, erundwd@yahoo.com reading "Lament for a Dying Town" (poetry in person)
- 7) Kari Gunter Seymour, Albany, OH, gunterseymour@gmail.com reading "Planting By the Signs" (poetry Zoomed)
- 8) D.W. Gregory, Shepherdstown, WV dwgregory2008@gmail.com reading "Mercy" (prose in person)
- 9) Noche Gauthier, Harpers Ferry, WV nochegauthier@yahoo.com reading "A Fox in Virginia" (Prose in person)
- 10) Lisa Taka Younis, Shepherdstown, WV taka2me@aol.com reading "Simply" (prose in person)

Name: Tom Donlon

Address: 80 Spur Court, Shenandoah Junction, WV 25442

Email: tdonlon3@comcast.net Will your attendance be face-to-face in Byrd (masks optional) or via Zoom? Face-to-face

Brief Biographical Blurb (not to exceed 100 words): Tom Donlon lives with his wife and children in Shenandoah Junction, WV. He earned an MFA in Creative Writing from the American University in Washington, DC before moving to West Virginia in 1986. He was awarded a chapbook, *Peregrine*, in November 2016 from a book contest sponsored by the Franciscan University in Steubenville, OH. Poems have appeared in many journals, newspapers, and anthologies. Recognition has included Pushcart Prize nominations and a fellowship from the WV Commission on the Arts.

✓ THIRTY-NINE CICADA WINGS

Lily, seven, collected them from our grass
where they'd spun down from the trees.

Orange membranes of the outer wings sweep
into a cathedral arch. Fifteen inner panes,

like cellophane, are framed by the same orange leading.
The panes, a mix of long ovals and zig-zag ends,

fill the outer edge like adjacent counties. She knows
the grown-ups live for only a week or two and says

it doesn't make sense to have babies, then die.
It's too soon to discuss the brief candle of our lives.

They're an odd mix of parts, not what you'd expect
after seventeen years underground sucking on tree roots:

blunt, wide heads; protruding red beads for eyes;
a stout, orange-black body tied to high church wings.

And the male with its famous singing thorax.
With only a week to court, procreate and sign off,

the thorax drumming must be enough for the ladies,
the shrill song. The wingless, scaly nymphs fall

from tree to ground and dig in to synch their clocks
for the day of resurrection, then the subsequent free fall.

DEATH ROW INTERVIEW

Leaves are falling. Our yard and driveway
display the art of oaks, hickories, maples,
sycamores, poplars, walnuts, and hackberries.
Again, we see the cycle of nature in this valley.

I heard an interview with a murderer. With a pistol,
and on his Harley, he shot the semi driver who'd
gotten too close. He then pulled into a gas station
and shot a trucker filling underground tanks.

The interviewer asked the guy about an afterlife.
He laughed and said, "We are bio mass, man.
We are like a leaf. It falls from a tree, and that's
the end." Surely he knows the complexity of leaves—

how they convert sunlight to chemical energy
for food. Surely he knows of chloroplasts, the terms
chlorophyll and photosynthesis. Does he know
that food and water flow through the veins of a leaf?

Leaves wave as they come down and swing to show
their many colors, their waxy cuticles, the epidermis
that protects from water loss, and inside, the busy work
that produces oxygen. Now, they decompose

to feed bacteria and critters underground. Yes,
it's hard to make sense of it—grow, flourish, die,
grow, flourish, die. I hear you, leaves. I'll see you
again in the spring.

RUGGED FACE OF APPALACHIA

Oh Lord, when will the traffic stop?
I've been listening to the twang of tires
for way too long, and the exhaust noise
as vehicles climb the hill and pass by me.

There was a time when my limestone face
enjoyed the rising sun, the flocks of turkeys
hustling by, eagles and crows. But now, I feel
my chin coming loose. I've seen it before

from colleagues who share this wide expanse
of hillside beside the highway. They've lost
body parts. Below, along the road, are remnants
of ancestors. I guess we must accept that life

changes; we come and go despite being the
rugged foundation of these hills. Who would
have thought that minor breaks, over time,
could send us down? I just heard a crack.

Name: Bruce Waldron

Address: 561 FernBank Drive Shepherdstown WV 25443

Email: brwaldron69@yahoo.com

Will your attendance be face-to-face in Byrd (masks optional) or via Zoom? Face to Face

Title and Genre of Poem, Fiction, or Creative Nonfiction: Poem is entitled Genesis

Genesis

Bruce R. Waldron

High in the green hills of the Blue Ridge
At a location that was certainly Eden
Fourteen crows sat quietly
Waiting for life to begin.
Two represented hope
Three stood for love
One was meant to record memories
And another devoted to reading dreams.
The rest remained uncommitted
Perched on the cusp of tomorrow
Waiting
Watching
As dawn washed over rolling hills and deep dales.
All waiting to see what impact mankind's birth
Would have on that lush and peaceful garden.

Name: E. J. Wade

Address: 264 S Marion Street – Apt. 2

Email: Nariny2009@gmail.com

Will your attendance be face-to-face in Byrd (masks optional) or via Zoom? Participate via Zoom

Title and Genre of Poem, Fiction, or Creative Nonfiction: Poetry

Literary excerpt (embedded here and not to exceed two pages, including this submission information):

FRAMED

There is no way to separate myself.
No way to unravel the ropes
that bind or the ties that intertwine,
generation upon generation,
of bodacious full bodied women
holding fast to their hair
 bent
 unfettered
 curled tight
as I am mirrored
in their high cheek boned reflections.

I know them very well
even though we have never met.
They line the walls of the room,
only the preacher is allowed
to sit and rest his weary feet.

Framed in chestnut and gold leaf
they sit staunch and perfectly still,
dressed in their Sunday best,
posing and embracing one another,
like well-beloved relatives always do.

I have no memory
 of the fair skinned Nanna
 or ebony chiseled Big Mama
staring back at me with radiant eyes,
 manicured nails painted
 seafoam green or tomato red
by the man with
the longhaired brush
for the cost of one dollar
on a warm summer Sunday afternoon.

Resting on the hips
of caramel colored witnesses
they carry with them the secrets,
of country ham, fried chicken,
slices of sweet potato pie
and homemade yeast rolls,

packed and bound in waxed
paper wrapping folded at the corners,
nestled snug in white paper boxes
tied with cotton twine
for the long train ride north.

IRON BIRD

Closing the door behind us
and placing the key beneath
the potted plant
we leave behind the security
of our quarantined
brownstone, trampoline, and easel

my collection of watercolor paints
seep through the zip lock bag
stuffed carefully in the corner
of the hand me down suitcase
between the lucky sweater
and the handmade jewelry box
adored with macaroni shells
and gold leaf spray paint

we travel by iron bird
forty thousand feet above the ground
hands linked in solidarity
we hold our breath
changing masks every four hours
like the bandage covering my freshly
skinned knee

my sister, my mother, and me
seated three across whisper
a prayer in unison

“Give us grace, O God
to dare to do the deed which
we know cries to be done”

gifted with the window seat
looking out I greet the clouds
leaving them behind like
those teary eyed relatives
I thought I would never miss

Submission to AHWIR Master Class with Barbara Kingsolver

Ginny Fite

Fri 8/19/2022 3:21 PM

To: Sylvia Shurbutt <sshurbut@shepherd.edu>

Submission for AHWIR Master Class with Barbara Kingsolver

Submit this form with your reading embedded, to Dr. S. Bailey Shurbutt at SShurbut@shepherd.edu

Name: Ginny Fite

Address: 615 Mara Rose Lane, Harpers Ferry, WV 25425

Email: gnnfite9@gmail.com

Attendance: Face to face

Title, genre: "Songs My Mother Taught Me," Fiction

Excerpt (embedded here and not to exceed two pages, including submission information):

Songs My Mother Taught Me

My mother leaps from her chair at the kitchen table, knees clamped together, clutching her yellow silk kimono with the dragon embroidered on the back, and races to the bathroom. Her legs scurry like a spider's. Splotches of bright red blood leave a trail behind her across the floor. From the bathroom door she shouts, "Clean that up!"

I wet half a dozen paper towels with water, wrap them around my hand so her blood won't touch me, and, shuddering, wipe sticky red spots off the floor. I turn my head away from the paper mess I throw in the trash and pretend not seeing it will protect me. I wash my hands five times.

This chore is as bad as carrying a dead mouse by its tail out to the incinerator and throwing it down the chute. It's not as bad, I learn later, as using a hanger to brain a mouse caught in the trap but not yet dead. Everything has its own degree of horror. Every act can be calibrated by its distance from revulsion.

I was five when I first saw my mother's sudden bloodletting and expected to find a blood-tipped knife at the foot of her chair. I made sure to sit as far away from her at meals as I could. Bleeding was a contagious condition for which there was no cure, a curse that might befall me any moment. I could die from it. My mother knew what I thought.

"You wait," she said, confirming my fear. "It'll happen to you."

I didn't yet know I'd bleed regardless of my own volition. I was still young enough to think I controlled how my body worked—hands, legs, fingers, mouth—that it would do what I wanted when I

wanted. I should have known better. I knew about threats; there were enough warnings. I should have taken her words to heart, but I was already dubious about everything she said. She was not to be believed.

I was still young enough to think what happened in our home happened everywhere, that we were normal and mothers were universally unreliable. All families have something odd about them—something they hide, something that shames them. Our shame sat on my shoulders and I was responsible for it, like cleaning up the blood, even if I didn't know what it was or understand it.

Six years later when I did bleed, my mother, for all her warnings, was unprepared. She wrapped me in old rags until husband number three could run to the store for sanitary pads. My knees weak with shock that this was happening to me, I sat on the edge of the tub and waited. My mother mopped up the blood on the floor.

"You're a woman now," her husband said when he returned with the box. He smiled as if we shared a secret.

I averted my eyes and hated him for speaking, hated the shape of his lips making the words, the sounds coming from him. I pictured his tongue and tonsils wagging in his throat, which was more revolting than blood. I didn't want to have any secrets with him. Humiliation and hate bonded with the pain throbbing in the center of my body stained by this new shame.

Thanks for considering my submission.

Ginny Fite

304-261-0164

Submission to the AHWIR Master Class with Barbara Kingsolver

kathleen furbee

Mon 9/12/2022 10:19 AM

To: Sylvia Shurbutt <sshurbut@shepherd.edu>

Name Kathleen Furbee

Address:586 Fairview Rd Independence WV 26374

Email:kfurbee@yahoo.com

Will your attendance be face-to-face in Byrd - face to face

Title and Genre: Stoop Musings at the End of Summer - Creative Non fiction (excerpt)

Stoop Musings at the End of Summer

It is the last day of August in the final stretch of summer. The air is warm but not miserable, and it vibrates with the hurry up rhythm of crickets and cicadas announcing the coming of the fall. It is a sad and frantic sound, this chorus, and it pulses like a heart about to break. *Life, life, life*, it says. *Gather ye roses while ye may* it says, *and be quick about it, for the end is nigh. Prepare ye for the coming of the frost.*

I sigh as I sit on my front stoop, enjoying the feel of a sunbeam. It has escaped a puffy white cloud, which drifts about with others in the sky, looking like contented lambs ambling in a meadow of blue. The blue is deep, azure and endless, another sign of impending autumn, I see, this clarity of light. The light brightens the green of the trees which grow about me like a hug, and join the earth to sky. The trees are still lush this year from abundant rains, still photosynthesizing, still transforming sunshine into sustenance.

I sit on my stoop amidst a rainbow of zinnias. There are dahlias too, and canna lilies, butterfly bush and black-eyed susies, asters and sunflowers and ironweed in the field. Red and orange and yellow and pink, purple and maroon and salmon and golden, these flowers bloom with their petals opened wide as if in ecstasy. Hummingbirds and bees and butterflies, like blossoms on wing flit and dip into their embrace, gathering sweetness, turning nectar into nourishment to fuel their flights, some traveling far and wide; they will be leaving very soon.

I used to be busy too, this time of year, like these birds and bees and bugs and trees. I used to harvest and gather and preserve, summer, storing it greedily in my jars and on my shelves and in my memories. I wanted to hold onto it, life, hold onto all of it, all of the sweetness, all of the stuff which fed me and mine. I fretted and worried and worked so hard. Was there enough? Did I need more? Was I enough? Should I do more, be more, can more, achieve more, love more, and how could I possibly make it all last?

As I sit on my stoop remembering my so many ends of summer, my kitchen fogged with steam and heat, my baskets full of tomatoes and beans, my children clamoring for affection, my employers demanding my attention, and school beginning, and cars breaking, and driving, rushing hurrying hurrying I wonder, did I miss, something? Did I miss, this? A sunbeam slipping from behind a cloud, a hummingbird sipping from a red flower, a butterfly floating in the blue sky? Yes, perhaps, for I was in motion too, doing what must be done. All these butterflies and bees, do they notice what they see? Or are they, too, merely surviving? Might there be a poet among them?

I shift about on my stoop. My bottom is bony and the stoop is hard. I am uncomfortable and old and arthritic. I forget, sometimes, not the aches and pains unfortunately but that I am old. It amazes me to see my hands, thin skinned and wrinkled. It amazes me to see my life, so long lived and closer to done, and still I ask myself that same question from my hurrying days- was it enough? Was I enough, should I have done more, been more, canned more, achieved more, loved more?

The term "biological imperative" comes into my head. I wonder if it could be a way to measure the worthiness of my time and life on this planet. Have I earned the right to the space I have occupied and the resources I have consumed during my many days of life? Have I at least fulfilled my biological imperative? What, exactly, is it? I look it up on my smart phone, a handy thing to supplement an aging mind. Everybody Wiki defines biological imperative as *The needs of living organisms required to perpetuate their existence and survival and to see it flourish*. Other sites list requirements like oxygen and water and food and shelter and reproduction and elimination and sleep and being in groups called conspecifics and I have done all that, have I not? I have slept, except when I haven't, and awakened and eliminated and cleaned my shelter (sometimes) and fed SO many meals to conspecific family and friends. I have reproduced and so have my children. My grandchildren are growing and thriving, dispersed like sweet squeaky seeds to various states in this nation. I have fulfilled my biological imperative, right? As much as these birds and butterflies and bees and trees? May I be excused now, is my duty done? May I simply sit here, guilt free in my sunbeam, waiting for winter to come?

Barbara Kingsolver Writers' Class Application

Name: E. Randolph Underwood

Address: 49 Brockton Lane, Martinsburg, WV, 25403

Email: erundwd@yahoo.com

Will your attendance be face-to-face in Byrd? Yes

Brief Biographical Blurb: E. Randolph Underwood is a retired civil-environmental engineer living in Martinsburg, West Virginia. His short stories have been published in two volumes of the *Anthology of Appalachian Writers* and he has self-published one non-fiction book, *Train Whistles and Other Distant Memories*, about growing up in a small West Virginia town, four fictional West Virginia-based mysteries, and a novella entitled, *A Road Once Travelled*.

Title and Genre of Poems: Lament for a Dying Town and Nights at Grandpa's Lake Cabin - Appalachian Life and Memories

Lament for a Dying Town

I take the lonely exit onto
The potholed two-lane road
That once ran from sea to sea,
But now between two exits
For a town I once called home
So many years ago.

I'm saddened at what I see
During the short drive into town.
Gone are the well-kept houses
That once lined nearly every street.
Now just some scattered remnants of
Prosperity the little town once had.

Gone is the thriving little downtown
With many local stores and and shops
Where one could find within a mile
Whatever was ever needed.
Now just a couple of stores remain,
But no place to eat or drink.

Long gone is the local high school,
The lifeblood of our town,
A place where most could walk to each morning,
Socialize along the shaded steps,
Greet everyone by their first names,
Then learn what we really needed.

Gone is the local soda shop
Where we met again after school,
Enjoyed a shake or a soda,
Competed for the highest pinball score
Before adjourning to someone's house
For a friendly hoop or two.

Gone are the festive Saturday evenings,
Streets and curbs filled with cars,
Kids standing outside the theater
For the early evening show,
Locals sitting on their porches
Enjoying a peaceful and restful time.

Politicians promised progress fifty years ago
With a four-lane highway around our town,
Bigger and better schools and
Shopping centers at every hub.
But who needs progress such as that if
There's nobody to turn off the lights.

Nights at Grandpa's Lake Cabin

 were like magic when I was a lad.
The sky was always dark,
 but lit by millions of tiny stars.
The air was always fresh,
 but filled the smell of pine and the evening's musty mist.
The place was always quiet,
 but filled with the sounds of bullfrogs, crickets, and far-off trains.
The evenings were always cool,
 even during the hottest summer months.
The surroundings were always familiar,
 but filled with as many mysteries as the fog upon the lake.
Most of all, Grandpa's cabin was always filled with love,
 A haven from all the cares outside the gate.

Name: Kari Gunter-Seymour

Address: 1837 Peterson Lane, Albany, OH 45710

Email: gunterseymour@gmail.com

Will your attendance be face-to-face in Byrd or via Zoom? I will be at an event in NC and so must Zoom

Title and Genre of Poem: Planting by the Signs

Literary excerpt:

Planting by the Signs

I communed with woodcock
and pine warblers today,
under a cornflower sky,
all the muted shades of early spring
striping the fields.

I can hear my grandmother's voice,
*You need to put your taters in the ground
'cause the signs is right.*

Though I always took her at her word,
I never truly understood her science
until long after she was gone, but lately
I have come to respect her study of the stars,
the astrological systems she relied upon.

Plow the soil under barren signs,
Aquarius, Gemini, Leo,
sow during the fertile,
Cancer, Scorpio, Pisces.
Plant crops that produce their fruits
above the ground at the moon's waxing,
root crops during its wane.

She not only planted and harvested
by the signs, but weaned her babies,
trimmed her hair, baked cakes and coaxed
many a child away from the edge of fever
when the signs were highest.

While campaigning for president,



Michael Bloomberg said:

“I could teach anybody to be a farmer.

You dig a hole, put a seed in,

put dirt on top, add water.”

Along America’s roadways, stunted corn stalks

tip their tasseled heads, exhausted,

saturated in GMO’s and fusty air.

Who knew the humiliation they would suffer?

I hear my grandmother’s voice, a divination,

Thick rolls the mist, that smokes and falls in dew.

Master Class application

D.W. Gregory <dwgregory2008@gmail.com>

Mon 9/5/2022 1:28 PM

To: Sylvia Shurbutt <sshurbut@shepherd.edu>

Name: D.W. Gregory

Address: PO Box 549, 209 West Washington St., Shepherdstown, WV 25443

Email: dwgregory2008@gmail.com

Will your attendance be face-to-face in Byrd (masks optional) or via Zoom? Face to Face

Title and Genre of Poem, Fiction, or Creative Nonfiction: Mercy - short story

Literary excerpt (embedded here and not to exceed two pages, including this submission information):

Mr. Henry fell in love the way most men of an advanced age do: without noise or smoke, just a letter to his daughter noting the unusually dry weather and his neighbor's admirable persistence in watering her tomatoes.

He observed that Mrs. Milburn was out there every morning with a hose, even gray days when he would not have bothered. And now look: Her beefsteaks hung heavy on the vine, fat red, and rude--insisting on attention. Something about the way she cradled the fruit struck him as emblematic of her entire character; she was obviously a young woman both tender and practical.

He said nothing of her character to Lucy, of course, but revealed his interest unwittingly, in disclosing that he had lent Mrs. Millburn his power drill to assemble some shelves. (He had, of course, offered to put the shelves together for her, but she would not be persuaded.) No one Lucy knew, man or woman, had ever talked her father out of any power tool at any time. But it was the postscript he added that most alarmed her: "Mrs. Milburn," he noted, "is certainly a sturdy woman."

Lucy canceled her plans for the weekend and headed immediately for the door.

Norma Milburn was only a few years older than Lucy, recently parted from her husband and not much sorry for it. The reasons would soon become clear to Mr. Henry, who made the mistake of thinking Mr. Milburn's abrupt departure an occasion for regret rather than celebration.

No one in his circle had ever been divorced, though Mr. Henry would concede that his circle was never large since his retirement, and in the two years following his wife's death, had shrunk even more. Before her illness, Mrs. Henry had been forever arranging things—shuffling them both to church on Sunday mornings, to card games and dinners with friends, concerts in the park, weekends with Lucy or their son Teddy, and of course, their annual budget vacation at Cape May. Since her death, his life had so

contracted that he could not remember the last card game he'd played, nor the last sermon he'd suffered through. Much as he resented having to get up early Sundays to put on a coat and tie, he now missed his wife's clucking attentions with the lint brush and especially, her exasperated sighs when he appeared at breakfast in his favorite shirt, comfortably worn out at the elbows. He could not imagine why anyone would part with a wife willingly, no matter how trying she might be at times.

These days, Mr. Henry's routine was disrupted only by the nagging medical needs of his aging and arthritic cat, Rupert, whose bowels were increasingly difficult for the poor creature to control. And Mr. Henry, with his fading eyesight and propensity for misplacing his glasses, did not always notice immediately, leaving it to Lucy to stumble upon something unpleasant on the carpet and come raging in search of paper towels.

"Do something about that damn cat!" was Lucy's usual sputter.

Mr. Henry routinely replied with a calm, "He's a fine old boy," and stroked Rupert's crooked back until the cat settled into his elbow and fell fast asleep.

"Not too fine to put down," was Lucy's frequent rejoinder – a suggestion that could not have been more vile had she proposed Mr. Henry himself for the needle.

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DW Gregory is the author of [MEMOIRS OF A FORGOTTEN MAN](#), [RADIUM GIRLS](#), and [SALVATION ROAD](#). Look for the Washington, D.C. premiere of *Memoirs of a Forgotten Man* at [Washington Stage Guild](#) May 5-29, 2021.

You can check out much of my work at [this link](#) on the National New Play Network's [New Play Exchange](#). *MEMOIRS OF A FORGOTTEN MAN* is available on the new play exchange and in an anthology from Methuen Publishing, 'Five Plays by Women from the Contemporary American Theatre Festival.' *RADIUM GIRLS* and *SALVATION ROAD* are available from Dramatic Publishing. Read more about me at my [website](#).

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Please do what you can to alleviate the horrific suffering of Syrian refugees and families separated at the U.S.-Mexican border. Consider a donation to [Doctors Without Borders](#) or to the [Refugee and Immigrant Center for Education and Legal Services](#) (RAICES).

Name: Noche Gauthier

Address: 740 Washington St, Harpers Ferry, WV 25425

Will your attendance be face-to-face (in Byrd) or via Zoom?: Face-to-face

Brief biographical blurb: Noche Gauthier is a young fiction writer and folk musician from West Virginia who intends to study Appalachian Studies. You can find her work in The Anthology of Appalachian Writers, or The West Virginia Fiction Competition.

Title and genre: "A Fox in Virginia" -fiction

A Fox in Virginia

For the first time since I was a little girl, I went back to the place you grew up.

There's a quiet in the car as we go down Highway-90. The kind of solemn quiet that comes up with unearthing old memories, churning them like fresh ground in your open palms. My mother talks of what she plans to make for dinner, how the sun seems brighter, how she can't wait to start her gardenias in the sunroom. My grandfather listens in supportive silence, nods along, and tugs at his pants to straighten them like he waits nervously at the altar for you all over again. I look for signs of you in the reflection in windows of passing cars, in pedestrians trotting crosswalks, and things as abstract as the brown and green of highway treelines.

This silence hangs heavy around us, we're not sure exactly why we planned this trip, and less sure even of how to commemorate you. This familiarity that follows us sits solids in the air. It reminds me that the last time we were here, you held my hand as you showed me where you used to ride a thoroughbred named Judge through the hills of Virginia.

As we get past your antique store in a quiet little town, I mention you. How'd you hate the fact that it now has a neon-green sign above the door, in a lousy, slanted font advertising, "Virginia's American Bistro!" You poured your heart and soul into that place, and mom reminds us that time changes everything that childhood promises permanent. I pull my knees to my chest in the back of the car and think of you, walking this same main street, with Mexican sunflowers tucked into the band of your strawhat.

Grandad mentions a painting of a red fox that you did, catching a glimpse of him as he dashed away from the hunt in the afternoon, "She'd sit awake and wonder about him. If that fox ever got home." Recalling the painting, I only remember how you had captured the wide eyes of a creature on the run, just then realizing how valuable its own life was.

We don't visit your home, or the creek, we just sit quiet at the end of the drive. Together we stare at a new last name on your fir-colored mailbox, "Thompson," with the silhouette of a deer head painted on the side. I ask to get out and walk, and I follow the road and wonder if my feet ever step into the same pavement cracks that yours once did.

The lane is wide, bright and sunny. Honeysuckle flows to me from the wind of passing cars. A runner nods to me, and I wish that my purpose for being here had such a light-hearted connotation. I wish that I hadn't been so young when I still had you here, so naive of my own fragility.

You once took me to pick wildflowers, you had gotten me a wooden pressing kit from the farmstore just down the road from our house. At eleven, I dragged my feet and cursed the hot air of August. My only thought at that time was my return home, as we cut away at the stems of Queen Anne's lace. Now, I wish I had relished in any moment of time spent with you. This road's hills unfurl like a path of my own history, as the routine of my shoes striking the road draws up memory. I remember mom taking down the clocks in the hospice room, piling them outside the door, swearing up and down that even in death you needed no reminder of your ceasement in time.

Now, I try and spot you everywhere. The cows on the other side of the fence along the road peek through the trees at me, their black and white bodies throwing splashes of newspaper color into the vibrancy of our setting. I think of praying, or talking to God as you would have. Today, I can not risk my heart for radio silence.

Instead, I watch the flora and fauna around me, and I set it to the watercolor palette you used for most of the paintings in my childhood home. I had stared for so long at each of them that now I can filter my vision in an effort to see the art that you made out of your everyday. There is no distinct plan to handle grief, no one right or wrong. In some backwards, painful way, this familiar piece of land is drawing me back to you. I half expect you to meet me walking down the road, with a coy smile on your face and a basket full of wildflowers. I wish for some glimpse of you in this place you loved enough to put on canvas over and over again.

Here, I can smell sunflowers, the dark, dry scent of your vegetable garden. The taste of okra and fried green tomatoes, things that even in death have kept me holding your hand, just as I did once as a little girl. As I cross over a small bridge to peer down at the same creek that passed by your house, I realize that I hold memories closer than the passage of time allows. Letting go of your hand is still this foreign, cold concept. The grass and english ivy along the stacked stone walls grows thicker the further I walk, and as the sun sparkles through the trees, I see a flash of red amongst the green.

A young fox trots across the road in front of me, her head sniffing at the pavement and then dashing across to the other side. She seems foreign in the different vibrant forest colors, and for just a moment, I swear her eyes meet mine. It's a small, yet entirely infinite thing that makes me pause on the side of the road. She is mixed back amongst the treeline before long, and standing on the side of a Virginia lane, I believe suddenly that you paint me things still.

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Will your attendance be face-to-face in Byrd (masks optional) or via Zoom? Face-to-face

Title and Genre of Poem, Fiction, or Creative Nonfiction: Simply

“You do realize I can send you to prison?”

Yet another woman held his future in her hands. Billy Deale was granted special permission to be present. He and his attorney, a quiet mouse of a man, sat at a long, polished wooden table in the conference room. Across from them stared Ms. Francine Thompson, the magistrate judge. A no-nonsense, unemotional person, she'd granted his presence mostly because of curiosity. Her jewel-green fountain pen remained capped on a yellow legal pad, and she waited for him to answer her question.

“Yes, ma'am. I do.”

“While the attorneys review this case, you'll sit quietly, until I ask you a question. I am the authority in this room, Mr. Deale. Everyone here understands that fact. Are we clear?” Judge Thompson paused.

“Yes, ma'am. We are.” Billy sat ramrod straight in the swivel seat. The room was frigid, but his armpits were damp. He didn't let it show, but Billy was pissed he was here. Of course, he shouldn't have fallen in love with the boss's wife, destroyed his boss's car, or the garage, or the parking lot. Why didn't everyone understand he and Delaine were in love and they should be together? Why was he stuck taking care of his ailing mother? This wouldn't have happened.

Billy constantly thought of Delaine. So what she was the boss's wife, and he was just the service manager. The boss, Big Jim, was a lucky idiot. He inherited a dealership from his dad, Big James. The father died from a massive heart attack and the gold mine of a car business went to his kid, who happened to be a huge stoner and high school fuck up. Now, fifteen years later, Big Jim owned three dealerships and married Delaine, a beautiful woman he met at a bar at the beach, who was now having an affair with Billy.

The first time Billy spoke to her was at the car dealership.

Big Jim introduced her. “This is my wife, Delaine.” He thumped Billy’s chest and gestured toward a massive and very dirty SUV parked in the bay. “Take good care of her. Fix whatever is making the turn signal stick. Get the boys to wash it, inside and out.”

Then holding Delaine’s face, he said, “Driving around in a dirty carriage is bad for business, Princess.” Winking at Billy, Big Jim patted her butt. She blushed a shade close to a tomato.

Billy knew embarrassment. He was a 36-year-old man who lived with his 70-year-old overweight, diabetic, mental-midget of a mother in his childhood house.

Every morning before work, he drank his coffee half-asleep and watched a game show where often a middle-aged, beer bellied man spun a wheel with a dopey grin on his face and solved a puzzle. From the kitchen, his mother addressed him in her gravely, southern croak, laboring for a breath. She suffered from emphysema caused from years of smoking.

Despite the urge to raise the volume to drown her out, he listened as she nagged.

“Billy, shouldn’t you be gettin’ ready to go to work? (gasp) If you’re late, your boss will be angry. Swallow your pride, (gasp) you need the job, (gasp) or we won’t be able to live here.”

Die already, die. You old bat.

His father left when Billy was thirteen and his sister, Hannah, was ten. After the divorce, his former homecoming queen of a mother faded away and her interest in caring for a family disappeared with her. She ate and smoked her way to an unhealthy bloated waste of a human. Hannah chose to live with their dad, Bill Sr., and in the end, Hannah lucked into a magical life with the a new mother and a new family in a new house in a new town.

Seething inside and sitting across Judge Thompson, he knew prison was an option, but for the last twenty-three years, Billy was already a prisoner.