

NORTH

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Thirty Below by Olivia Sykes

The universe sleeps while dawn hovers
below the ivory hill five miles over.
All is quiet, but for the gentle crunch
of boots on diamonds- On the path, they trudge.

Restless, the wild, whirling, northern wind
sets fire to bare, alabaster skin.
Puffed coat, woolen mittens- insufficient!
Old man winter: omnipotent and efficient.

Warm, wispy smoke curls like a shapeless ghost
from the mouth of its rosy, coarse lipped host.
Purples, peaches illuminate the sky.
The beginning of a new day is nigh.

Heat envelops and a happy bell sings.
Good friends meet to welcome a bright morning.

Le Spectacle* by Charlene Kwiatkowski

After a plaque on Hôtel Suisse: “L’écrivain irlandais James Joyce (1882-1941) séjourna dans cet hôtel en octobre 1922. Il y commença son roman *Finnegans Wake*”[1]

James Joyce is arriving in Nice today.
Not just arriving, but sojourning at Hôtel Suisse:
seaside views along the Promenade with door-sized windows
suitable for defenestration. The worse the draft,
the better the chance of catching crumpled wings
landing in la Baie des Anges. “First we feel.
Then we fall,” will read one. The window of fame opens
with unpredictable grace.

Rarely does the weather fail to cooperate
but this morning’s clouds smilesmirk with threat of rain.
No difference to the swimmers who come
like faithful dogs to immerse in salt water
while a crowd of the avant-garde tarries on the beach
holding umbershoots just in case. Five false sightings.

At 3 o’clock Joyce arrives by boat, ripripples of energy
recharging the weary crowd he waves to
with Scribbledehobble and a marked copy
of the *Irish Times* in hand, particles of quotidian
making way for *Finnegans Wake*.
The writer weaves through the swarm
to the cherry building below la Colline du Château.
Last seen are an eye patch pulled from a coat pocket
and hunched shoulders slipping in and out of shadows
like a work in progress.

The swimmers will later find his jettisoned pages
but let the tide carry away his thick stream of words
after calling it inarticulate debris.
Bababadalgharaghtakamminarronnkonnbronntonnerronntuonnthunnt-
rovarrhounawnskawntoohoohoordenenthurnuk!

The clouds make up their minds.

Enough cooperation; they release a sudden shower
of praise, let's say, apropos to the guest—fashionably late.
A string of umbershoots open along the shore,
explosions of colour driving the spectacle home.

**Originally published in Charlene Kwiatkowski's chapbook* 'Let Us Go Then' *(The Alfred Gustav Press, 2021).*

[1] "The Irish writer James Joyce stayed in this hotel in October 1922. It was here he began his novel *Finnegans Wake*." The poem includes a number of Joyce references. "First we feel. Then we fall" is from *Finnegans Wake* while "Scribbledehobble" was what he named one of his notebooks where he jotted down ideas. *Work in Progress* was the early title for the book. "Smilesmirk," ripripple," "umbershoot," and "Bababadal…thurnuk!" are words he invented. The latter represents the sound of a thunderclap.

ISOLATION by Josh Beer

When the Covid-19 pandemic first broke out, I was very touched that several of my former students offered to get food and other essentials for my partner, Cathy, and me, should we need anything in our isolation. At first, before the full effects of the virus were known, we tried to take a walk every day so as not to feel cut off. But as things became worse and our movements more restricted, I was reminded of a very sad occasion, when I was about 11 or 12 years of age and confronted by the extreme effect of loneliness and isolation in old age. What happened has remained indelibly in my memory.

According to my birth certificate, I was born the son of a pastry cook, early in World War II. My father had been enlisted to serve in the Royal Navy, but his work was declared a protected occupation, and so he was sent to work as a night-cum-day baker at a small shop at the far end of Streatham High Road, close to where Norbury began. Later dad was asked if he would like to work at a larger bakery some miles away. Having settled with his family in a flat not far from where he worked, he declined to move. The other bakery was bombed with few survivors. What my life would have been like if dad had died, I shudder to think, that's even if I had been born.

Norrington's where dad worked had originally opened in the late Victorian era and was still owned by the same family. It was certainly not a prepossessing building or location, but had some typical 19th century features such as a Dickensian arch beside the shop that led into a cobblestone yard with a stable at the back that had stalls for three horses, although only one horse was still regularly used to deliver bread in a covered wagon.

Towards the end of the war Norrington's bakery was put up for sale. Dad's sister had married a publican who by our standards was rich. They lent dad and mum enough money to buy the bakery, and so we became part of Adam Smith's nation of shopkeepers.

The horses were high maintenance; they had to be groomed regularly; their stalls had to be cleaned daily and the manure removed; periodically a farrier was required to tend to their hooves and replace the horseshoes; harness and reins, etc. had to be kept in usable condition and had to be fitted before and taken off after each delivery, not to mention the horses' feedbags. Also hay had to be fetched from the Rookery on Streatham Common in a covered, two-wheeled barrow which the groom pulled along by two poles in the manner of a rickshaw. One Sunday the groom took me for a ride in the covered wheelbarrow and I was put on top of the hay for the ride back. It began to rain and Dave, the groom, closed the doors, not knowing that my fingers were on the back of the door holding the frame. Needless to say it was the first mighty scream I remember making.

Dad soon decided to dispense with horse-and-cart deliveries by buying a three-wheeled van. Thus he saved the expense of hiring a groom to look after the horses and was able to rent out the stable as a work place for a small factory. Apparently I cried when I heard the horses had been sent to a knacker's yard, but I don't remember.

Whether delivered or not, the price of bread was government-controlled, and no extra charge could be made for delivery. Every so often a Government Weights and Measures Inspector would appear, unannounced, in the shop and weigh every loaf to ensure the population was not being ripped off by some unscrupulous merchant. To prepare enough bread for delivery it was necessary to hire a night baker who worked from midnight to 8 am. Two batches of bread were needed: one for delivery and one for the shop. A Roundsman was also required for the deliveries. In addition to dad himself who worked in the bakehouse from 5 am to 6 pm he hired a full-time pastry cook and two shop assistants.

It was a hard life, profits were marginal and, even though he was not unfeeling, dad could not afford to be sentimental. It was always somewhat of a gamble how much bread would be sold each day. An unexpected hot day in spring might mean that much less bread got sold than usual, and, if not sold at a reduced price at the end of the day, had to be thrown in the pigs' swill. At about 5.30 pm dad would take off his apron and change out of his baking clothes before going into the shop and counting the day's takings in the till which were then deposited in the safe in the small office of the shop.

The particular day in question was a Saturday. The Roundsman, who was near retirement age, was taken ill that week, so dad had to deliver the bread as well as work in the bakehouse before and after the delivery round. Dad himself was also suffering from lumbago at the time, and mum would literally have to lift him out of bed at 4.30 am. I was told that I would have to help deliver the bread that Saturday, but before we did so, dad made a practical but momentous decision. He would give up bread deliveries after that week. He would thus save paying the wages for a night baker and a Roundsman and the cost of running the van.

Once we started the rounds, dad would tell me what to put in the large wicker breadbasket to take to certain houses. Since customers were expected to pay for the week's delivery on Saturdays, dad looked in the logbook and told me how much was to be paid. I was also to inform the occupants that Norrington's would no longer be making deliveries after the following Saturday. At about 2 pm, in Norbury, we turned off the London Road into a side road. On the right-hand side there was a group of Victorian terraced houses, four stories high.

Looking in the logbook, dad told me what to put in the basket, and then said: "There is an old lady living on the top floor, she usually only takes a small loaf. I duly climbed the thirty to forty stairs before knocking on her flat door. There was a few seconds' delay.

Slowly the door half-opened before the old lady, short and grey-haired, put her head out. I offered her her loaf, collected the shilling or so she owed before telling her there would be no more deliveries after the following week. She immediately broke down into tears and said: “Norrington’s has been delivering me bread since the 1890s; I’m too old to get out. What am I going to do?” I had no words to say except to mutter something trite before leaving. The loneliness and isolation of old age are things we may all have to face, but in a time of crisis, whether we are young or old, we should forget our differences and remember our common humanity.

Fall by Rosemary Lazier

should I be ashamed to say,
sometimes this life, as it lands, is not enough—
I want it all,
the call of geese
gathering
in my throat,
I want the leaves to turn, burning
I want them
surrendering
entirely
detaching
from tree
falling
into my hands
as helpless birds
I want the transformation
to give itself over

and I want the palm of stillness
held silver as a lake.

I want it human
you know the way

to have

is to carry the carbon,
the fray of
longing, tongue
parching letters, imprinting, press
into gauze of insect wings, shatter
with the crumpling
ashen scatter
in ditch,
breathe the fast-fading twilight,

so
let me, let me,
while I can take, while I can hold
let me flash headlong, headlong
unthinking into wonder into color
as long as I am alive,
I will I will
be changed.

you know the way.

A Peaceful Morning in al-Haram al-Sharif Series by Alex King



All photos by Alex King from a series in Jerusalem of the Al Aqsa compound, the home of the third holiest site in Islam.

Professor White by Charlene Kwiatkowski

your picture came in the mail
freckled hands on the Book of Common Prayer
sitting in a cathedral, special feature
in the alumni magazine

your hair is greyer but your smile hasn't changed—
a slit envelope inviting a question,
reflection, or different point of view

you wanted to believe your students
had something profound to say on Elizabethan literature—
heaven bless you

I read the article on your research
the forgotten prayer of Katherine Parr,
sixth wife of Henry VIII, that found its way
into the book of Common Prayer

This is an example of the influence women had on history, and you know
more discoveries are bound to be made
not just in the reformation, but beyond

I notice the plain band on your left hand
still there after seven years, out of place
amid stained glass and flying buttresses

the ring unfurls and I am back
in class, reading a sixteenth-century novel
I can't remember the name of

Kyle asked if the protagonist settled by marrying Mr. X-
you said we all settle
in one way or another

you might as well have said
we should drop out of school
we were twenty-two what did we know
of love what did we know—

I turn the page of the magazine,
my silver ring next to yours
and I smile, remembering what it's like to be green.

To the man who chose to be my father by Olivia Sykes

Love is a pair of canvas ballet slippers,
overpriced and already well-worn,
paid for by a handful of copper pennies
earned through eternal hours spent bent over
greasy assembly lines and half-broken parts,
sweaty, weary, and emotionally sapped.

Love is a father who is devoted to a little girl
and wants to prove to naysayers in the world
that family is more than blood in veins
or microscopic strands of DNA.

Love is a powerful bond, twisted and tight,
forged by courageous choices made
during a sparkling, sunny, spring day
at a 90s park, metal not yet decayed.

I was 3, he was just past 28.
Actions are the loudest declarations of love.

Dandelion Delight by Tessandra Wendzich



To my firstborn, turning three by Amy Bloom

Your bony little body,
squirming,
digs into my fleshy one

Exhausted, I draw deeper

I can't believe I made you out of seemingly nothing

Then you sing,
and I hear myself;
Tell a joke,
I hear your father—

And when you hurt,
I feel it
Viscerally.

You are yourself,
your own person,
as you should be;

While I may never be just myself again.
I think that
is how it should be, too.

Exhausted, I draw deeper

I am a time traveller
A mother of teens
Grateful for one more chance to hold her babies
Unbothered by their crying
Soaking it in
Comforted by comforting you

You lay your head on my soft belly
"Mommy," you sigh, as I stroke your curls.
I did not know I needed healing,
But I am healed.

Two comets by Kira Locken

Two comets, racing across the sky,
Seemingly parallel to each other.
Watch them bounce off planets and solar systems, breaking and bending
Collecting molecules and star dust.
Hurtling, hurried they soar, pulled into gravities oh so absentmindedly
Unaware they are moving closer, feeling an impact of realization suddenly.
And there it is, it cannot be undone, redone or done better.
It is thought that the Earth was made by broken debris huddling together
Holding on tightly as creation swirled around them
All that we are- from broken things made whole again.

Spear-Woman Comes Home by Joel Balkovec

Joel Balkovec graduated from the College of the Humanities in 2013. This scene is set in the world of his Spear-Woman sword and sorcery stories.

When Bayan crossed the nine-span bridge of Asi and put her father's city to her back, she never intended to return. And yet Fate has sent her on a long, strange road with many strange twists and turns – not least of all the ones that bear her back again and again, it seems, to the city she swore was behind her forever. The sun is at her back as she crosses the nine-span bridge in the opposite direction as all those long years ago.

Her first stop is the great fountain in the city's central square, to wash the grime and dust of the road from her face.

"Spare some alms, lad?" the blind beggar by the fountain asks.

"*Lass*," she corrects. "I am a woman."

"Ah," the beggar answers, apologetically bowing his head. "I heard the clattering of your armour. A woman clad for war is a strange thing. But in times such as these…"

"No stranger than the fact I cannot seem to escape this place," she mutters.

She glances down at the old man.

"I was born here. I left, and swore I'd never return."

The old man shrugs. "Well, *lass*, we can try to outpace the history that made us. But I've only ever known it to bring us back right to the very places we tried to flee."

"Hmm," Bayan replies. "I suppose."

She sets a few coins in the old man's hand and passes into the city.

For Her by Kira Locken

There are people like you who make me glad to be alive,
Who make me smile, make me blush, make it safe enough to cry.
People who don't exist in books and movies or even childhood fantasies,
Because you are just exactly, precisely, you.
People who make me better, smarter, kinder, and more beautiful.
I would be happy forever to live inside your mind,
So I could gather up all your fears, doubts, insecurities and pains.
Not to take them away, but to make them more tame.
Because this is not a story, love isn't finding someone and fixing everything wrong—
Our broken pieces are sharp and loud and lasting.
But loving you is finding a comrade in battle, a bed at the end of a long night,
Arms that let you collapse
And whisper "It's ok I won't tell anyone"
Yes, problems are still here, from before and from now. But I am loved by you.
And I actually believe I can survive them.

Morning by Alex King



The Calling of Saint Matthew* by Charlene Kwiatkowski

After Caravaggio's painting in the church of San Luigi dei Francesi, Rome

How many times we made to leave, thinking we had seen it all then circled back, you and I, too cheap to throw a few euros in the illumination box (tourists come for the Caravaggios, someone else will pay). How blinding the light—out of nowhere a thick river flooding the room, hand moving with it from shadows, all attention pooling around Matthew: bearded one, alone in meeting Jesus' gaze. How uncomfortable he looks—one hand clutching coins, other hand pointing at his chest. You want me? Other men hunch, refusing eye contact. Such foppish clothes: plumed hats, embroidered vests. Jesus' bare feet pointing towards the door—come, follow me. Wooden window beams crossing from background to foreground, centering everything. Two lines once noticed, impossible to unsee even after the coins buy a minute of light and we are left waiting in the dark again for someone else's generosity.

**Originally published in Charlene Kwiatkowski's chapbook* 'Let Us Go Then' *(The Alfred Gustav Press, 2021).*

The Vision of Ozymandias by Rosemary Lazier

There was a time when the echoes of my
chiseled limbs- unmoving conductors—
sang in the reaches of the desert; when
eddies of sudden sandstorms
throbbed for me as arteries.
My sculptors enacted a mirror
of autocratic justice in my gaze
mocking the philosophers who haunted the
courtyard, haunted my sleep.

I floundered as the slow pulley of years
piled great stones for my cenotaph.

Within the prowess of my kingdom—
its zenith evidenced by artifact—
there was always the imperceptible specter:
a friction of molecules
hissing in my fevered dreams
interminable wind over sandstone.
What was it that drove my madness—
the hum of nonexistence flicking
its sizzling serpent tongue
white-hot or
the shadow puppet dance of divine
judgment snaking the walls?

Gust of grain
upon grain eroded my sneer.
The afterlife disclosed itself, a grinning
mirage as I crumbled,
heatwaves blistered portals, seared rivers,
elaborating and vanishing in
the air above me.

This was the time I was terminal—

my lymphatics ossified,
and that which was most human- my heart-
the prideful, thumping relic,
was silenced by the slow assault
of fossilization:
thrashing the final protest of a reptile
palmed for embalming,
stilled by layers of sludge.

Yet, see,
In spite of
my leveling:
the buried epochs,
the severe and pitiless lip line
of horizon-

the scarabs crawl forth a cure
from catacombs
roll out their little suns
of dung, this cycle softening
the fields,
my mouth, my stones of organs,
my heart (*almost repenting*
its impulse, its longing for glory),
move
(*reanimated by maggots, by sand fleas*)...

then, at times, in this sheen of heatsong
and dust, the forgotten
monoliths of my mind, of my
kingdom, levitate—
hover like somber birds
bent on resurrection;

into cloudform
they rise, they rise.

Morning by Alex King



Contributor Bios

Joel Balkovec graduated from the College of the Humanities in 2013. After Carleton, he pursued a Master's of Classics at the University of Ottawa and a Professional Writing degree from Algonquin College. In 2024, he started his freelance writing and editing business, Emona Literary Services. He has published sci-fi and fantasy fiction on various platforms.

Josh Beer taught at Carleton for 50 years. He founded the Ottawa Society for the Arts and Sciences to ward off sinking into a lethargic senility. The vote is still out on that one. He writes annually for the magazine *Argo*, most recently arguing that Euripides' tragedies, set against the mythic background of the Trojan War, are anti-Spartan plays with whom Athens was fighting at the time. Some think that this is evidence of his madness, if not senility.

Amy Bloom (B.Hum. 2013) is a writer and public servant from Ottawa, ON, where she lives with her husband and two children.

Alex King is a HUMS alumnus who is currently pursuing a career in archaeology. She specialized in Phoenician studies and Levantine archaeology for her M.A. She currently works as the senior researcher for Dr. Dolansky's *Women of the Ancient World Project*.

Charlene Kwiatkowski (B.Hum. 2010) works in communications and writes poetry. Her debut chapbook *'Let Us Go Then'* was published in 2021 with the Alfred Gustav Press. Her poems have appeared in *Arc Poetry Magazine, PRISM international*, *Vallum*, and in the anthology *On Occasion: Poems for the People* (Coach House Books, 2026). Charlene lives in Port Coquitlam, BC with her husband, daughter, and twin sons. textingthecity.wordpress.com

Rosemary Lazier (B.Hum 2012) is an Ottawa-based high school teacher of English, and Biology, and Special Education. She holds an M.A. in English Literature from Carleton University. Outside the classroom, she is the proud mother of a curious, imaginative young daughter.

Kira Locken graduated from Carleton with a Bachelor's degree in Journalism and Humanities in 2019. She currently lives in Ottawa with her fiancée and works for the Government of Canada with a focus on Indigenous policy as well as gender and 2SLGBTQA+ equality.

Olivia Sykes is a voracious reader, occasional writer, and dedicated teacher from Brantford, Ontario. When her nose is not pressed between the pages of a novel or her notebook, she enjoys running, travelling, and drinking maple lattes.

Tessandra Wendzich graduated from Carleton University's Humanities program in 2008. She later earned a PhD in Education from the University of Ottawa and now continues her love of teaching as an Academic Consultant for BeMo Academic Consulting. Tess enjoys educating post-secondary students, as well as her two young boys—who keep her very busy. She often combines her love of teaching with her passion for healthy living since "healthy bodies create healthy minds.