



Mildred Haun Review

A Celebration of Appalachian Literature, Culture and Scholarship

2024

Table of Contents

Wildfires • <i>Hannah Houser</i>	4
To the woman holding up the grocery line • <i>Hannah Houser</i>	5
Pool Shoes Recommended • <i>Kay T. Fields</i>	6
Blood Will Tell • <i>Kay T. Fields</i>	8
The Collar • <i>Kay T. Fields</i>	9
Chase • <i>Kay T. Fields</i>	11
Meditation • <i>KB Ballentine</i>	12
Should Seasons Darken • <i>Jennifer Smith</i>	13
Call of Cataloochee • <i>Jennifer Smith</i>	14
Frost Crystals • <i>John C. Mannone</i>	16
After the rain • <i>John C. Mannone</i>	17
Promise • <i>John C. Mannone</i>	19
The Passage • <i>John C. Mannone</i>	20
Appalachian Herbs and Wild Plants • <i>John C. Mannone</i>	23
Appalachian Psalm • <i>Laura Miller</i>	24
Hold Still a Little Longer • <i>Laura Miller</i>	25
FOREST PRIMEVAL • <i>Kevin Collins</i>	26
HENLEY STREET • <i>Kevin Collins</i>	27
STILL LIFE FROM A RED ROSE • <i>Kevin Collins</i>	30
DANCE • <i>Kevin Collins</i>	31
Turn of the Wheel • <i>Ray Zimmerman</i>	32
Rebirth • <i>Ray Zimmerman</i>	33
Coyotes' Howl • <i>Ray Zimmerman</i>	34
Ode to the Craft of Poetry • <i>Natalie Kimbell</i>	35
Stolen • <i>Natalie Kimbell</i>	36
To be Twelve and Innocent in the 1970's • <i>Natalie Kimbell</i>	38

Table of Contents

Trying to Explain How to Survive a Broken Heart • <i>Natalie Kimbell</i>	39
Tennessee Spring • <i>Sharon Shadrick</i>	41
Romance Novels • <i>Sharon Shadrick</i>	42
On the Banks of River Affric • <i>Sharon Shadrick</i>	43
Babylon • <i>Kelsey Solomon</i>	44
Atropa Belladonna • <i>Kelsey Solomon</i>	45
Fourth of July • <i>Kelsey Solomon</i>	46
After Church • <i>Kelsey Solomon</i>	47
Bios	48

Wildfires

Hannah Houser

“It’s starting to cool down”

I told you as we
watched the Tennessee sky darken before
the Autumn equinox,
filled with gratitude for
chilly evenings and the absence of
blaring sun.

The forecast called for
no rain but the air was thick gray.
We sat outside sipping Dark and Stormies
and toasting to a break from indoor isolation.
Then someone on Twitter said the haze
was the clouds from the
California wildfires,
having crept across the breadth
of the country.

And my cheeks flamed over my brief respite,
knowing it was someone else’s torture,
worlds away.

To the woman holding up the grocery line

Hannah Houser

Your cart held only a few things,
and I expected a speedy thoroughfare,
prepared with payment already in hand.

When you mentioned your dead husband to the bagger,
I had to loosen the grip on my handlebar,
keeping myself from pushing you forward
long after the cashier'd passed over your receipt.

He went and got hisself killed on a motorcycle 40 years ago
you said, and I thought about the need to tell that story,
to remember that it's true and it happened and
his recklessness wrecked your life.

After that I followed my son here, and now I have a grandson,
The second time I'd heard you say that,
first to the woman in the adjacent line.
And he does great in school. So I'm staying.

Before you walked ahead you turned back and
smiled at me with wrinkles that said
Look at all the life I've lived.
I smiled too.

Pool Shoes Recommended

Kay T. Fields

Just as I finished my last lap,
a woman fell by the pool steps.

Not a familiar figure, or regular swimmer,
but a kindred spirit as she slipped

on that rubber mat, a slow-motion tumble
as she fell on her left hip and side.

No young, slender, water nymph, but a substantial
woman past her prime sprawled like some beached

turtle. Immediately, she looked around
to see who glimpsed her ungainly mishap.

Concerned, an attentive, young lifeguard hurried
towards her. She waved him off, maneuvered

onto all fours, then hoisted herself limb by
limb upright with hand rails on the pool steps.

With a tentative walk and a bemused expression,
she approached a chair, gingerly sat down, began

to check for evidence of her tumble. No immediate
damage appeared, and my empathy was instant,

as a comrade-in arms from accidents in aging
balance. I imagined how her thoughts were racing,

confusion was primary, how had this fall occurred?
An unwelcome feeling of vulnerability grasped her,

shaking her usual self-confidence. I could approach
her later, confide while skinny-dipping at midnight

has run its' course, no matter, come on
in, the waters still fine. Silence prevailed

as an urge to offer advice was thwarted,
I didn't say, "Always wear water shoes."

Blood Will Tell

Kay T. Fields

For: Mary Stephens Thompson

It was revelation not pleasant,
as I pulled wadded tissues from my purse.
I have become my mother, I thought.

My purse was leather, unlike her colorful
collection of vinyl bags adorned with faux
gold chains that matched her chosen outfit.

My bag wasn't filled with miscellaneous paper
scraps with no obvious purpose. My wallet wasn't
covered with zippered compartments and hidey-holes
where items disappeared forever. Coins weren't loose
at the bottom of my bag mixed with tobacco grains.

No cigarette case or box of matches lurk in the dark
recesses of my purse. No box of *Luden's* cough drops
is open that spills its random contents into the bottom mix.
My keys aren't attached to a large, puffy pink ball. I don't
have at my fingertips a plastic tip chart to calculate
a restaurant tip, down to the exact cent, for example \$1.82.
I do carry lipstick, but not Revlon's *Love That Red*.

We were so very different, but fundamentally in blood,
bones, and heart, the same. I now carry *Kleenexes* she did,
a white flag of surrender to that inevitability of maternal love.

The Collar

Kay T. Fields

That small, worn leather collar in front of me seemed forlorn. Those bold metal spikes that implied, “bad boy” were lost without his neck literally bristling with tiny, fierce swagger.

It first encircled the Yorkies neck in 2006 when he was just an appealing puppy. The ID tags that remained were burnished to a metallic red and blue. They clicked against his water bowl with musical notes in times before the collar came off forever.

That collar endured brutal Texas summers when it was too hot for the Yorkie to chase ducks in frantic, but futile pursuit. The leather grew supple in snow when the small dog plunged down mountain trails in his Utah days.

The collar moved with the old dog to the green, green hills of Tennessee. That boy who loved him with such devotion asked only one thing of his grandmother. “Always keep his collar, please.”

That old dog and the boy’s grandmother found themselves to be a perfect match. Days passed in joyous abandon. Nights were for the old dog to burrow deep against his beloved person.

The collar came off on October 10, 2021 for a last time. Seventeen years of faithful service across many acres of land, and down highways, trails, through forests, snow, mud, and brittle fall leaves that so enticed the little Yorkie.

That collar went into the mail today to the young man who so loved that small dog who had such a huge heart, and indomitable spirit.

Chase

Kay T. Fields

He has been gone a few weeks now. Grief has yielded ground to grateful memories of that old Yorkie. My favorite image is when my husband asked him, “You want a biscuit?”

Our seventeen-year-old boy vibrated like a plucked guitar string as he followed his old man into our kitchen. A biscuit was presented, and politely the old Yorkie accepted his treat.

The treat hung awkwardly from both sides of his mouth, and with his canine grin, he challenged his person to try to steal his biscuit. The chase was on.

They circled the couch at a brisk gallop, careened off a side table, ran into the hall, and back again. Both seemed oblivious to age, infirmities, or dignity.

I sat and laughed helplessly at their antics. When the biscuit softened sufficiently, the old Yorkie chewed his prize. The old man flopped onto the couch.

Meditation

KB Ballentine

Sunflowers smiling
through summer drought
swallow my sighs –
dust a lighter weight
than my worries.
Never mind.
The barred owl still
summons twilight's purple.
Horizon full
with light of the rising
moon guiding my eyes
to those wide centers –
yellow petals bright
even after darkness falls.

Should Seasons Darken

Jennifer Smith

When autumn flecks scarlet with somber shades,
I accompany the creek on its cursive route,
among hickories' gold leaf ambience.

Memories echo through canyon's arena;
sunset narrates in crimson voice.

While winter strays aimless amid bare trees,
I scout white draped mountain's silhouette
for portraits sketched in snow.

Sterling cascades stream February's song,
verses tumbling in lyrical waterfalls.

If thorns pierce spring's most delicate balance,
I wait under a canopy of old growth forest,
urging sun to sweep the ancient floor.

White trillium and spring beauties whisper rebirth;
Virginia bluebells hush my loneliness.

When June scripts summer in mournful tones,
I capture assurance from cornflower sky,
and finger-paint the clouds.

A flame azalea choir summons me to their brilliance.
My soul retraces seasons, then rests upon the bald.

Call of Cataloochee

Jennifer Smith

I remember Cataloochee in September,
summer night, soft bed in a Maggie Valley motel,
small-town slumber before two nights in backcountry;
but first, rearranging essentials in voluminous backpack,
trying to trim my thirty-pound load.

Smoky Mountain mist ushered hikers
into remote land where Cherokee hunted,
Cataloochee Valley, a pastoral place;
trees erect in rows along ridges,
mountain waves rising through morning fog.

I imagined a black bear
rambling his dwelling at dawn,
roaming meadows and scrambling
rocks and roots of his ancestral home.

Friends traversed the Caldwell Fork Trail,
comradery easing weighted shoulders;
soul cleansing water sounds spoke our names,
guiding us to the footbridge
over Cataloochee Creek.

Colors of the forest greeted us in goldenrod,
ironweed's purple and jack in the pulpit's maroon,
We paused in the peace of Palmer Chapel,
its steeple pointing to the Appalachian sky
that we slept under in a hardwood grove.

My backpack, a daypack now,
is lighter as I have aged,
yet I recall the paths of Cataloochee;
ankles deep in mud on paths walked by horses,
spirits soaked in solitude on the Boogerman Trail.

I remember the face of a lone black bear,
bidding us farewell as we walked to our car,
his arms hugging a poplar tree,
before scurrying amid sourwoods
under late summer's sun.

Frost Crystals

John C. Mannone

Throughout the night, ice
laces the windshield—
from a distance, a textured
amorphous mass, but close up,
a crystalized layer translucent
to the morning sun. Soon
heated air tempers the glass
ice interface. Loosens their
grip and interlocks. Exposes
dendritic branches and their
branches within branches—
a fractal universe or better
said a micro universe. Each
facet catching myriads of glints
producing a thousand suns
of their own. A galaxy of
icy stars, each with its own
worlds. And for just a moment
I am on one of their moons
longing for you.

After the rain

John C. Mannone

there's something holy
in the petrichor air
of April, the flowering
dogwood, blooms
palmate in the sun
piercing through clouds,
white petal-bracts tinged
scarlet, at its heart
a regal cluster crowns
the true flower, blood
red seeds—the fruit
of fall.

There's something holy
about the cardinal's
"loud, clear down-slurs
or two-parted whistles
ending in a slow trill"
singing *cheer, cheer, cheer*
while perched on rough
outstretched branches
in tiers. Joyous. Just
because the echoes
of an ancient chant
that jeered the ears
are now muffled by swish
and sway of refreshing

wind moist with promises
of spring.

There's something holy
beyond the chorus
of nature's hymns
threading time,
especially on Friday
remembrances, so good
to know that the cold
indifferent winter—with
its sepulcher-white snow—
has given way to new life
after the rain
 when all the sins
 of sadness
have been washed away.

Quoted text is from The Cornell Lab, All About Birds

Promise

John C. Mannone

The thick branch of a black willow
arcs across the pond, framing water,
rippled by morning rain. Below,
the drizzled surface etches silver
linings on the waves advancing toward
the shore to be caught in a thicket
of zigzag twig patterns on mirrored
surface, while sky sifts through the net,
hope's blue wedges parting clouds
emptied of their rain. Soon the sun
and harbingers of spring sing loud
through February's shroud:
a flaming red cardinal, undone,
mourns for his mate. And I too
burn with passion for release
from winter's grip of loneliness.

The Passage

John C. Mannone

It's one of the most beautiful places to take a walk
—Tripadvisor, Chattanooga, Tennessee

I stare in awe at the nine-foot bronze structures, each weighing two thousand pounds, elevated another four feet on granite and concrete bases. The Russian artist, Daud Akhriev, sculpted four wax molds before casting the metal statues using an ancient technique. These ladies representing the four seasons, stand near the Market Street Bridge.

Every artist is inspired before his or her creation is wrought. I ponder what the sculptor thought about. Before he cast “The Four Seasons” in bronze. Perhaps he edged his tools to the same liveliness

that Antonio Vivaldi orchestrated with his *Le Quattro Stagioni*. Who in turn had prayed to God for inspiration. He was a Venetian

priest who penned four Petrarchan sonnets; translated them into four violin concertos of allegro music.

“The Four Seasons” manifested by young women, goddesses in ancient Rome, as portrayed by Horae: holding hands, dancing in a garden, bringing gifts of the season. Spring bears flowers in a basket, Summer wears a crown of corn, Autumn shares a cluster of grapes, Winter covers her naked body with a warm cloak.

These women standing on the south end of the Market Street Bridge are grimaced, perhaps for their indirect witness. They feel the ground beneath, the heaviness there, sense the density of injustice. Seeing the trail, they cry tarnishing their eyes at Ross Landing.

I wonder if the fall harvest of grapes is not for a wine of celebration because there are reservations and eulogies, and winter’s coat won’t stay the chilling deaths. And their spring flowers? For the burial. And summer’s crown of corn, one of the few native American foods to be thankful for, is reminiscent of the crown of thorns.

The atmosphere is palpable with Vivaldi’s harmonic contrasts and innovative melodies. But do they cover the wails, the screams,

of the Cherokee, their forcible
expulsion to The Passage west?

It is said that this path from
the Market Street Bridge
—originally named after the great
Cherokee Chief, John Ross—
to the ferry at Moccasin Bend
is beautiful.

But beauty is in the eye
of the beholder. The Cherokee's
tears have blurred any beauty there
as had those from the "Four Seasons"
—theirs, gushing toward the river.

Photograph of one of the bronze structures at Ross landing on the Tennessee River:

<https://s3.amazonaws.com/gs-waymarking-images/d5056aab-0670-4885-a762-f151c06d5df6.jpg>

Appalachian Herbs and Wild Plants

John C. Mannone

I remember

dandelion and sassafras teas releasing
the blood from toxins and winter's dietary
deficits from lack of fresh greens. An elixir
to help liver, kidneys, the urinary tract; and
blood sugar. Goldenrod checks cholesterol.
Relax with chamomile and lavender.
Unknot your stomach from stress or flu
with ginger, alehoof, creeping charlie,
or mint. No more pain with henbit or nettle
nor inflammation and high blood pressure.

When I was a toddler,

only four and feeling down, my Nonna
brewed rosemary tea for my upset stomach.
She said, in a mix of broken Spanish
and Sicilian in simpler terms because

I didn't have a clear mind

to understand these words: that rosemary
is an antispasmodic, mild analgesic;
cures intercostal neuralgia, headaches,
migraine, insomnia, emotional upset,
and depression.

And now, I still don't have

the understanding of all that jargon but
I like to collect clear vials of herbs and wild
plants, especially rosemary in May. Because
May is designated special awareness month for
good mental health.

Appalachian Psalm

Laura Miller

I will lift my eyes to the hills
and give praise to the Lord our maker.
I will lift my gaze through forest lace,
a leafy view through sweetgum and maple.

Compared to his words of holiness,
mine are hollow rumbles like rolling glass
marbles in warped washtubs or breezeless
August through wind cymbals.

His words are rubies of truth, a knife
dividing good from shadows of evil
exposing each man's heart, yet
they are far sweeter than honeysuckle.

He is water to a panting spirit,
a poultice to my pummeled soul.

Hold Still a Little Longer

Laura Miller

The sound of chalk is hollow
on the sidewalk capturing
unbound creations with you
dusting your hands as if
you're a bee visiting flowers
summers ago, skipping
across hopscotch, walking
on homemade stilts, or planting
marigolds and tall cannas
with grandma who once asked you
to stand still
as she marked a level chalk line
for stitching an even hem
around your floral dress.
You, a brief princess,
reigned before seasons
fashioned bleary ghosts.

FOREST PRIMEVAL

Kevin Collins

I step where forest feet have trod in time
The fleeting deer and ambling 'possum sure
And bright'ning day illumines forest prime

I, wending 'mongst the rooted feet, adjure
The acts of humankind which may protect
The fleeting deer and ambling 'possum sure

For many passageways, I recollect,
Have disappeared as we forget to do
The acts of humankind which may protect.

The leaves which rustled underfoot, they knew
Their destinies through cycles ever spun
Have disappeared as we forget to do

We fail to understand what we have done
As barren trees can ne'er make life fulfill
Their destinies through cycles ever spun

Where human footprint crushes nature's will
I step where forest feet have trod in time
As barren trees can ne'er make life fulfill
And bright'ning day illumines forest prime.

HENLEY STREET

Kevin Collins

When I cross this bridge, I see your face,
Your long blonde hair swept back
Your wistful smile, modest, teeth turned sideways.

When I cross this bridge, I know your parents
Meant well,
Gave you everything, youngest
Always beyond my reach,
Poor, shy.

When I cross this bridge, I remember
The last time I saw you,
Married young, seventeen, different culture
Rich beyond measure
Gifts and promises
To you,
Naïve beyond belief
Goodly people, Godly places
Man and woman created.
She to him subjunct

When I cross this bridge, I recall
The last look I saw on your face.
“I need help. I need a friend.”
Sitting in the crowd, noisy, boisterous
Amidst and alone
Darling and desolate
Lost.

In your eyes a plea
To me.

When I cross this bridge, I acknowledge
My weakness, peer-bound, tongue-tied,
Pretty young lady.
Lovely.
How to breach the married bans,
The feminine pedestal of bearing, grace, and privilege.

When I cross this bridge, I realize
That I looked down.
The moment passed
Intervention impossible
Youth being young for the future.

When I cross this bridge, I know
In two months
She sailed
From this bridge
Gracing the space
Long hair floating, angelic
The long fall.
Cross-cultural victim
In-bred naivete.
I was away.

When I cross this bridge, I hear again
The radio report
When I heard. No details.
Your name.
Your act.
Your desperation.

When I cross this bridge, I remember
You.

So that you may live your life
More.

When I cross this bridge, I falter
Feeling your self as you
Stepped from this bridge
Onto that bridge, choosing,
Precipitate,
The bridge I too must cross.

STILL LIFE FROM A RED ROSE

Kevin Collins

As the vigor fades with tear
Crispy leaves and petals sere
Red from brilliant turns to rust
As the matter turns to dust.

Velvet smooth and tissued web,
Perfumed scent in time to ebb,
Roses crumble not to die,
Transforming life, a breathless sigh.

DANCE

Kevin Collins

When tingling feet scratch grooves into the floor
Anticipating rhythm, movement, too
Scant opportunity to voice their say.

For moving feet are bound, constrained, a-moor
To customs, practice, place, and time, to rue
Their instinct, bouncing, prancing, play away

Frustrated by the bonds of social bore
When movement means to only tread the few
Slow walks, predictable and typic way.

Why pace when skipping steps express much more
Delight in daily ventures ever new
When life calls, "live" the most of ev'ry day

So dance the morn, and dance the noon, your feet
Can dance the night along, new dawn to meet.

Turn of the Wheel

Ray Zimmerman

The years roll back like
the turn of a wagon wheel
and I am home again.

The rocker on the porch
returns me to the smell
of woodsmoke and barbeque,

the sound of a tractor,
and my dad on horseback
at my uncle's farm.

Uncles and aunts, parents
and grandparents long gone
step up to the porch.

Even the cousin that passed
last week says hello. He was
a disagreeable old cuss.

Still, he was family and
I tried to be kind until
he ran me off for good.

Rebirth

Ray Zimmerman

Like Jonah from the belly of the whale,
the bear emerged from her winter den.
Three cubs were her message of salvation.
Despite frost and snow, life continued.

Jonah was grouchy, having spent
three days dead. Not yet the symbol
of the risen Christ, he wanted God
to smite the Assyrians.

The bear was grouchy too,
having given birth in the frozen ground
and nursed cubs with stored reserves.
No berries waited to restore her strength.

On the way to the river, her cubs saw leaves
shivering in the breeze and stopped to play
as all young things do. She swatted one cub
on the backside and proceeded to fish.

Coyotes' Howl

Ray Zimmerman

They awakened us one morning.
Safe in the cabin we listened.
Without fear, we searched
for the new moon.

No highway noise disturbed
our peaceful scene, although the roads
would take us home on Sunday.

When morning came, I made grits
and eggs but saved the chili peppers
for another dish. The coffee awakened
our nostrils and taste buds.

I thought blackberries might be good
if pancakes were in the picture, but
hiking shoes and the ridgeline beckoned.

Ode to the Craft of Poetry

Natalie Kimbell

Gather thoughts like random flower bulbs,
scatter them on lined paper under an expectant hand.
Some sprouts root and blossom, others shrivel.
Growth as a writer comes when least expected.

Scatter words on lined paper under an expectant hand.
Poetry buds with toil and persistence.
Some lines root and blossom, others shrivel;
many seedlings require more weeding than others.

Poetry buds with toil and persistence.
Some plants are culled for strong development.
Many seedlings require more weeding than others.
When flowers bloom, satisfaction abounds.

Some lines are culled for strong development.
Gather thoughts like next year's flower bulbs.
When poems bloom, satisfaction abounds.
Growth as a poet comes when least expected.

Stolen

Natalie Kimbell

Wichita, Kansas, January 25, 2024

A life is not important except in the impact it has on other lives.

Jackie Robinson

A bronze body
on home plate, poised
to add to his 313 batting
average, 972 runs scored,
1,563 hits and 200 stolen bases.

Formed to remind us
the man who bore
hard curved
“good ole boy”
Go back to the cotton field
hatred on the open diamond.
and never broke.

then like an echo
of heinous racism
his statue cut down
on a kid's ball field
by those who hide
in the night

sliced at the ankles
and stolen away
dismantled

and burned
like garbage.

Now hands of all colors
replace this tribute
remember the legacy
of the man who wore 42.

To be Twelve and Innocent in the 1970's

Natalie Kimbell

Even young elm saplings double dare
Keep Out signs, and thread their branches
through construction fences.

We, elementary school trespassers, mimic the saplings,
and wiggle past wires after men's work hours.
We gather welts scraping passed barbs and briers
and create elaborate tales of the day's battle scars.

We crawl belly- down on enemy terrain
like we had seen in movies and news flashes
between skeleton- framed subdivision houses,
and deep mud- filled craters. In this realm,

drill bits and bent nails are spent shrapnel.
Loose boards become bridges in rice patties,
standing cement mixers our aircraft artillery,
outlined houses, our imagined destruction.

We yell, *Boom!* Someone drops and moans
taking his turn being a dead soldier or mourning wife,
knowing nothing of the sights and smells of battle,
too young to be grateful for our ignorance.

Trying to Explain How to Survive a Broken Heart

Natalie Kimbell

After *Purple Rain* by Prince

It's like steering your car on a narrow switchback
two lane road on an unfamiliar mountain through a storm
when you know you have never seen rain like this.

A gale that topples trees,
floods tributaries of the soul.

Torrential rain spiders splat then scurry
grab new positions on the windshield—
distort what lies ahead.

Moving is like traveling on ice through banks of fog.
You creep, crawl, inch forward
and the instant you praise yourself for moving,

his voice becomes the radio.
I never meant to cause you any sorrow.

Your flashers on, your eyes aimed low,
straining to keep on the right side of life's white line,
center lines blurred by advancing highway halos—

his voice croons, *I never meant to cause you any pain.*

You clutch the wheel staring through the windshield

wind whipped— pelted with hail
that wipers can't appease.

And all you can, and must do, is drive.

Tennessee Spring

Sharon Shadrick

Cold, damp air- full of winter
Ambushed by daffodils
Poking their fragile, yellow heads
Through a chilly russet earth.

A Tennessee spring is a sneaky thing
Sending its first flowers on a reconnaissance mission.

Winter reclaims its God-given rights
No quarter given
While the daffodils playfully retreat
A game of peek-a-boo cut short.

Romance Novels

Sharon Shadrick

We burned trash in the backyard
On Fredonia Road in 1964
Relatives close, times hard-
And Daddy made the times harder.

“Why did you treat Mama like that?”
Gifting me a sorry blueprint for relationships and life.
Your mistakes provided nails
For others to keep me in my place.

So I risked nothing, playing it safe
Reading my happily-ever-afters.

On the Banks of River Affric

Sharon Shadrick

Water rushes over rock, crashing like cymbals
at the foot of the falls.

Loch liquid saturated with peat
churns to a tea-colored brew
with enough force to knock a man down
Licking the river bank in the aftermath.

Wild ferns and marsh marigolds grow up
together like old friends.

A spray of water teases the chill breeze
gray rocks tinged green with lichen
slippy as a freshly waxed floor.
Soft inlets of calm water puddle
on stepping stones of flat, fickle rocks.

Babylon

Kelsey Solomon

The hotel burnt so long ago.
Mud, walnuts, and buckeyes
buried the tales of healing
waters, where tourists hankered after
the clay-persimmon elixir
to wash away the ache.
Neighbors counted up in years,
down in cars that skidded
along the gravel driveway,
fortified by sycamores.
Every July, fruit cracked
as they hit ground,
the well sunk still.
They figured God withheld
their cure as sacrifice,
but she knew.
Whispers, giggles, splashes
from behind her farm
brushed through the sweet gums
to a grocery bag crinkling
from her finger's crook.
She packed stone after stick after seed
as heavy as plastic meshes
and stacked each piece for
when the rain comes.

Atropa Belladonna

Kelsey Solomon

For Abbagail

I cup our namesake in my palms and
sing about the lore of our birth: a berry,

as wide as our pupils should be on the night
we offer our lace to a split-level floor, poor
for prayer. We are not the amaryllis here. We rise

closed and fall on the next little girl's lips,
where she will whisper giddy secrets

through white teeth as strong as the tremors
of a man whose legs can now frame
repentance. I told her that it's our way,

but we feign poison. We know the dosage
and harmonize with the steady hum of bubbles

floating to the top of champagne glasses
we hold to keep company at a distance.
We save the fruit for the end. The jam is sweet.

Gods order it so. They eat, spread like dandelions
across tables and books and cities, too rooted

to pluck, and we are born to be too much
of a lady, so we fake our intent, erase memory
cupping new berries, but we're ripe, they say.

Fourth of July

Kelsey Solomon

The collision caused his eyes to burst.
Equine tears mucked mahogany
atop his nose ridge and rippled
along summer tar, a canvas:
the firefighter tried to hose it away
for the sake of approaching patriots

while fireworks waltzed above.
Headlights curtail his broken neck, twisted
upward, mouth hung open like a hurried robbery.
And he slept. Sleep—to put him down.
His caretaker raised her cup
to our banner, stripes, strikes,

as she left the stable cracked to watch
history in the sky, propane blue to red fuse,
flashing sharp white before the boom,
and as I drove, the blacktop drank up
seal brown's blood, sweet as cherry wine.

After Church

Kelsey Solomon

I plant a dogwood tree
where deacons align

in rocking chairs outside
a country kitchen, their

faces like Shar-Pei pups
posing for a picture.

A camarilla of strong
secrets, they wave

shyly to some gallant
women in chambray.

It makes them feel
young again.

Bios

HANNAH HOUSER (she/her) is a lifelong East Tennessean, writer, and manager of internationally renowned musicians. She has been a part of the music industry for over a decade and specializes in artist relations and management, community building, and creative content management. She holds undergraduate degrees in English and Art from Carson-Newman University, where she was named the Outstanding Graduate of 2012 in both departments. She has been previously published in *The Red Branch Review* and *The Pigeon Parade Quarterly*. She resides with her husband and black cat in Knoxville, TN.

KAY T. FIELDS resides in Dandridge, Tennessee. She published a memoir in 2019 titled, *Godsmacked: A Memoir of Mania, Mayhem and Mischief*. She is a poet and a transplant from Texas who moved with her spouse to Dandridge in 2010. Her work has been published in several literary magazines, including the 2023 *Mildred Haun Review*. She and her spouse enjoy life with their Yorkie, Victoria.

KB BALLENTINE'S eighth collection, *Spirit of Wild*, launched in March with Blue Light Press. Her earlier books can be found with Iris Press, Blue Light Press, Middle Creek Publishing, and Celtic Cat Publishing. Published in *North Dakota Quarterly*, *Atlanta Review* and *Haight-Ashbury Literary Journal*, and others, her work also appears in anthologies including *I Heard a Cardinal Sing* (2022), *The Strategic Poet* (2021), *Pandemic Evolution* (2021), and *Carrying the Branch: Poets in Search of Peace* (2017). Learn more at www.kbballentine.com.

JENNIFER SUSAN SMITH, a retired elementary school speech-language pathologist, resides in Rock Spring, Georgia. She has work published and forthcoming in WELLREAD Magazine, *The Bluebird Word*, *San Antonio Review*, *First Literary Review East*, *Grub Street's Our Planet*, *Our Stories*, and more. Her grief writing sample will appear in Diane Zinna's *Letting Grief Speak*, with Columbia University Press. Jennifer is a member of Chattanooga Writer's Guild. She serves as chairman of Alpha Delta Kappa International Pages and Pearls Book Club, and is a member of the Gamma Beta chapter.

JOHN C. MANNONE has poems in *Anthology of Appalachian Writers XV* [Barbara Kingsolver] and *XVI*

[Ann Pancake], *Windhover*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *Poetry South*, *Baltimore Review*, and others. He won the Impressions of Appalachia Creative Arts Contest in poetry (2020), the Carol Oen Memorial Fiction Prize (2020), and the Joy Margrave Award (2015, 2017) for creative nonfiction. He was awarded a Jean Ritchie Fellowship (2017) in Appalachian literature and served as the celebrity judge for the National Federation of State Poetry Societies (2018). His full-length collections are *Disabled Monsters* (Linnet's Wings Press, 2015), *Flux Lines: The Intersection of Science, Love, and Poetry* (Linnet's Wings Press, 2022), *Sacred Flute* (Iris Press, 2023), and *Song of the Mountains* (Middle Creek Publishing, 2023; nominated for the Weatherford Award). He edits poetry for *Abyss & Apex* and *Silver Blade*. He's a physics professor teaching mathematics and creative writing at an East Tennessee magnet high school.

LAURA GUNNELLS MILLER is a writer from southern Appalachia where she has been a longtime teacher and community volunteer. Her recent poetry appears in *Salvation South*, *Artemis*, *Pine Mountain Sand & Gravel*, *Abyss & Apex*, *American Diversity Report*, *Silver Blade*, and elsewhere.

KEVIN D COLLINS PHD: performer, writer, musician, artist, activist. He's worked in hunger and disaster relief, prison reform, houselessness, racial, environmental, and immigration justice, and nuclear weapons abolition. He loves Shakespeare, arts-based research, megapuppetry, Hannah Arendt, and quantum physics. He plays music with the Emancipators folk band and is the founder and creator of the Catalystica Players megapuppets.

RAY ZIMMERMAN is a former president of the Chattanooga Writer's Guild. He has published poems in numerous journals, including *The Mildred Haun Review*, *The Avocet*, *Number One* (Volunteer State Community College), and *The Southern Poetry Anthology: Tennessee, Volume 6* (Texas Review Press). He has also published a series of broadsides featuring his poetry and photography and is currently publishing on Substack. His feature articles have appeared in *The Chattanooga Pulse*, *Photo Traveler* (Los Angeles), *The Journal of Interpretation* (Fort Collins, Colorado), *Appalachian Voices* (Boone, North Carolina), and *The Hellbender Press* (Knoxville).

NATALIE KIMBELL, a longtime resident of Sequatchie County, Tennessee is a parent, grandparent and public school teacher. Her first chapbook, *On Phillips Creek* is on sale with Finishing Line Press. Her work is available in several anthologies and online collections including the *Mildred Haun Review*, *Tennessee Voices*, *Pine Mountain Sand and Gravel*, *The Anthology of Appalachian Writers*, and *Women Speak*.

SHARON SHADRICK is a retired teacher and aspiring writer. She recently had two poems selected for publication in the *Women of Appalachia: Women Speak Anthology*. She lives in Dunlap, Tennessee with her husband, two grandchildren, and three rescue dogs.

Born and raised in Hamblen County, Tennessee, **KELSEY A. SOLOMON** teaches composition and literature for Walters State Community College, where she serves as the Faculty Senate President and spent four years as the chair of the Mildred Haun Conference Planning Committee. She holds a Master of Arts in English from East Tennessee State University and a Bachelor of Arts in English (Creative Writing) and Philosophy from Carson-Newman University, where her irrevocable union with poetry truly began. Her poems have appeared in *Still*, *Black Moon Magazine*, *Anthology of Appalachian Writers*, and *Pine Mountain Sand & Gravel*, most which she's written in someone else's kitchen or in the Notes app on her phone when the muses demand.



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