Note from the Editors

It’s not so much that we wanted to expose the underbelly of Tuscany, rather, we know there’s more to it—and more to write about it—than poetic descriptions of undulating fields with olive groves. *Explore the flip side of the Tuscan cliché,* we proposed in our submission call, and, well, we got it, along with other non-idealized writing.

Four poets deliver diverse perspectives through flashes of memory, quotidian experiences and vivid imagery: James Bird and Will Cox, editors of the successful Belleville Park Pages, award-winning poet Alex Josephy, and writer Kevin Harper who does double duty this issue in poetry and cultural commentary. Jeff Shapiro, as a recent divorcé in his story *The Night,* learns how a single word can lead to a comic series of events.

We are introducing video this issue, with inventor-artist Luca Baroni. His imaginative creation of musical instruments and other objects using recycled materials surprised and delighted us—it’s nothing you’ve seen before. Be sure to check out the bonus video we’ve added to our Facebook page.

What’s something cliché but that you’ve always wanted to do anyway? You’ll see our contributors’ answers to this question, together with their bios, at the end of the journal.

The next journal will be published in June 2015, when you’ll be able to read one of the winning short stories from the writing contest we’re launching today! The contest is co-hosted by *The Florentine* and open to writers of all ages. There will be two winners, one published in each magazine, and a guest judge, writer Kamin Mohammadi. Please visit our Homepage for full contest details and information about the contest reading in May 2015. You can now also find the latest news from The Sigh Press on Facebook.

Lyall Harris & Mundy Walsh
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L’OSPEDALE

ALEX JOSEPHY

The doctor on duty has abandoned
his black bag, open on a marble table,

while he gets mid-morning coffee
with the ambulance crew.

He won’t be long, the bag’s jowl
promises; you retreat to the quad,

the white travertine bench
round-edged with use.

Your bleeding finger seeps, darkens
a dishcloth, while you watch geraniums

endure the blazing sun. He’ll be with you,
when he’s enjoyed his *basso*. And you?

You have the scarlet geraniums,
their antiseptic dogs-pee scent,

finch-song, the black bag’s grimace.
What more would you want?
We’re all out tonight
Ghouls under yellow street lamps
Petri-Dishes of chemical expectation
X-rayed fiends with deep pupils that swallow visions in one gulp.
Malleable entities.

You are wholesome
Whereas I stand cracked
With a polluted yolk that
Drips through a brittle shell
And so I move on.

I’m selling on the Black Market of Memorabilia
On the Black Market of Memory itself
A Dry Salter with a Medicine Dub dub dub chest as
We jump through moulded loopholes edged by bracelets

“I’m a jeweller”
She spits at me in molten lumps of silver
As she crawls a decorated finger towards my sticky mouth
Where the guts of my sentiment fester.
The lungs of my mouth chatter
As the thick, cold ring wrapped around your long index
Slips from my tongue
To the bone fossils of innocence
Hanging out in my gums.

You weld more words into my ears and chant
“Bite down” and so I do, I do what she says and the ring hurts my teeth
and your eyes widen and my jaw slackens and you drag the wet finger
and ring along my teeth and out of me and you giggle you fucking giggle
as I try to remember what my mouth feels like without your skin and
bone and metal inside it. I am dripping in your ore.

As i sit, cold
You laugh and snort at the girls wearing fur
and feathers
Whilst your heavy pendants sway from every limb.

You flip a heavy coin
That lands on my head
And walk out of the front door
Leaving me smelted
Imprinted
Legless around your anvil
Wrought by your iron.

It’s a forged memory stolen from your own Black Market,
and as the door closes
I cough up the silver ring I stole from your finger,
stuck at the top of my throat.
ACOUSTIC-ELECTRIC GUITAR

LUCA BARONI

VIDEO: ACOUSTIC-ELECTRIC GUITAR
Mancificatrice Mano

Tip-Generator Hand

Luca Baroni

* 

Video: The Hand
My visit to the bordello happened by mistake. Seriously.

This was back in 1991—which suddenly sounds long ago. Back when every bar and tobacconist in Italy had pay phones that clicked loudly as the seconds passed, and you paid 200 lira per click. Back when the centers of Tuscan towns hadn’t yet become pedestrian zones, so streets were lined with cars squeezed into impossible spaces and you could even park in Siena’s Cathedral Square. Not exactly for free, but then again you couldn’t be sure. There was no saying whether the old man with the parking-attendant hat honestly worked for some official organization or had simply appropriated the piazza as his personal kingdom.

It was the 31st of December. End of a rough year, the year my first marriage withered and died. In May my wife and I, with the help of Irish friends, had moved together to a rented farmhouse near San Giovanni d’Asso, about fifty minutes southeast of Siena. We had hoped Italy might work the trick of restoring joy, but our unhappiness, we soon discovered, was not a question of geography. Somehow we had turned destructive to each other beyond repair—too skilled had we grown in reciprocally inflicting sadness despite our good intentions. Time to do the unthinkable and face life alone. End of summer, our Irish friends Ruth and Stefania, mavens in local real estate, found another property to rent—this time for me only. The upper floor of a house in Chiusure, centuries old. Resident population of the town: ninety-two souls. Ninety-three when I moved in.
The months of that autumn, I thought I’d go nuts. No one in Chiusure spoke English; I had yet to study Italian. When making purchases at either of the town’s two bottega-bar-general-stores, I got by with embarrassed smiles and utterances in the language I struggled to create by Italianizing my remnants of high-school French. “Je desidero un pane, per favore,” I stuttered to the merciful, patient shopkeepers. “E un petit poco di formaggio aussi.”

In my rooms upstairs, I drank too much red wine nightly, desperate to sleep. Meal times I cooked, then ate alone at the table meant to seat four. After washing the dinner plates, I’d take my wineglass over to the armchair picked up from a second-hand outdoor market stall in Florence. Sitting in front of the fire, I occasionally tried to decipher the mystifying Italian TV shows that flickered on the six-inch screen. Television wore me out; I ended up reading a lot.

An epiphany came to me in the bathroom once. I realized after peeing that, if I so chose, I now could leave the toilet seat up. My parents, from the moment I was old enough to handle peeing on my own, had taught me to lower the seat afterwards in gentlemanly deference to the needs of my sister. But Suze wasn’t here in the simple apartment. No girlfriend either. And no wife. First time ever, I was free—at least in lavatorial terms—to consider no one but myself.

So I gave it a shot. I peed, flushed, got settled back inside my pants, then boldly returned to the bulky but comfortable armchair by the fireplace.

Less than two minutes later, in the bathroom once again, I put the seat down. Fear had seized me: a sickly terror of slipping into selfishness. Someday, I imagined despite all present evidence, a woman might spend a little time in my apartment, and I wouldn’t want my bathroom to make her suspect I had forgotten my more civilized habits.

Hard, those autumn months. No glimmering of new possibilities, only bleak mourning for everything lost.

And now it was December 31st. L’ultimo dell’anno, I had heard Italians say. The Last of the Year. Goodbye, sad year, goodbye. No room tonight for moping. I promised myself I’d celebrate.

Late afternoon, errands still to run before dinner, I hopped in my car. Not the gorgeous apple-red Mercedes a friend in London had sold us for a song.
That gem stayed with my wife. Instead I, in separating, had bought myself an old, drab-green Fiat Ritmo, paying little more than the price of scrap metal because the car was half a blown gasket-head away from the junkyard. Never had I loved a car more. Rocinante I dubbed her, after Don Quixote’s hapless, heartful mount. Broken-backed companion in unforeseeable adventure.

Final dusk of the year, I pulled out of Chiusure, past the sorry scrawny lopsided Christmas tree in the little square, and rolled ten kilometers downhill to the bigger town of Buonconvento, wiping the windshield with my gloves frequently because Rocinante’s defrost system was defunct.

Christmas lights sparkled around the central parking lot in Buonconvento and along the main street. I stocked up on fruit and vegetables from the fruttivendolo, then collected my best shirts from the lavanderia. (Ordinary laundry I handwashed in my kitchen sink and hung to dry on the clothesline outside my bedroom window; ironing a shirt, however, was and remains an unmastered art.)

“Buon anno,” said the fruit vendor.

“And to you,” I said.

“Anno nuovo, vita nuova,” said the woman who handed me my starchly ironed shirts.


Filling up at one of the town’s two gas stations, I put a question to the man at the pump. “Maybe a little music tonight?” I said, unsure how to formulate the grammar of the interrogative.

“Musica?” said the gas-station man.

“A place to hear music maybe? A cleb?” Ruth and Stefania, expert consultants not only in real estate but in linguistic matters too, had mentioned once that Italians pronounced club as cleb, God alone knew why. So I made sure to mispronounce it properly.

“Sì, un cleb.” The man warmed to the subject. “Probably the sort of cleb you’re looking for. A night is what it is. Is that what you want?”

“Night!” I said, seizing upon the single word I was relatively sure I had understood. “A night. A nightcleb, true?”
“A night,” his nod confirmed, both of us oblivious to the crucial incomprehension underway. “A night. A night.” He pointed toward the blackening hills beyond the edge of town. “Lots of beauty up there. Tanta bellezza.”

“And the music is viva?” I checked, thinking a moody club with a grooving jazz combo might be just what I needed.

My question stymied him until he discerned my mistake. “You don’t mean viva. You mean dal vivo,” he corrected, explaining with many words that music should be live, not alive. And somehow lexical considerations absorbed us so completely that we never got around to ascertaining whether the music at the cleb was live, but the man took care to point out the road. “Not the one you take up to Chiusure but the other one parallel, and you’ll see it. Old farmhouse on top of the hill. Lights will be on there tonight, you can count on that.” He promised me I’d enjoy a memorable evening. He’d been many times. The place, he said again, was packed with beauty. “Tanta bellezza,” he repeated, shaking his head dreamily. “Tanta bellezza davvero.”

Driving up the twisty road back to Chiusure, I could not decide. Life experience for me had never, so far, included a New Year’s Eve excursion to any official place for partying. I’d always been the stay-at-home sort. But this End-of-Year in my solitary apartment might be too wretchedly lonesome, even for my tastes.

See how you feel in a few hours, I counseled myself, because it was only 7:30 and the evening was still young.

And the gas-station man’s mention of all the beauty to be found at the nightcleb must have planted a green sapling in my little brain because fresh energy took root as soon as I turned the loud, lonely key of my apartment and walked in the door. I got to work giving the place its weekly clean, top to bottom. Not that it needed it, but what if it were to welcome a hypothetical guest later in the evening? I put on some Mozart, dusted the bookshelves, swept and mopped the floor, showered, made myself a ravioli soup recipe of my own invention, ate, drank enough wine to relax but not so much as to preclude driving in safety, changed into the red underwear my advisors Ruth and Stefania
had coached me to buy in keeping with some sort of propitiatory Italian new-
year’s custom, splashed on aftershave even though no razor had touched my
miserable beard-hidden face for ages, and dolled myself up in my version of
party clothes: the somber layers of corduroy and tweed acquired during
marriage when my English ex-wife had endeavored to transform this middle-
class American Jew into an image of genteel Britannic understatement.

Past ten o’clock now. I was all set, though I still could not admit to
having decided my plan. I imagined the nightcleb. Dim lights, easy on the eyes.
Good live music. And all that bellezza.

No harm poking my nose into the place, I told myself as I grabbed my
coat from the rack beside the front door. If I don’t like it, I can always leave.

Aboard Rocinante once more, out past the lopsided Christmas tree,
downhill to Buonconvento, left then left again as per the gas-station man’s
instructions, until a small sign advertised the entrance to the crunchy gravel
drive.

The large parking lot outside the well-lit farmhouse surprised me. It was
empty, save for two or three frost-covered cars. I checked my watch: quarter to
eleven. Maybe people would arrive closer to midnight, I told myself. So I parked
near the exit, ensuring an unobstructed getaway later, once the throngs showed
up.

The front door opened into a small, windowless, neon-illuminated
anteroom which smelled cloyingly of bleach. No one there. Atop an otherwise
empty desk sat a hotel-style bell. I rang.

A moment later a man emerged from a closed door behind the
cumbersome desk. “Desidera?” he said, his face devoid of smile.

“You are open?” I asked, feeling my eyebrows lift and the corners of my
mouth rise by reflexive habit to shape the mask of the polite and friendly
foreigner.

“Of course.”

“And you have music?”

“Music. Yes. Music.” He looked past me, as if I had already wasted too
much of his time. And before I managed to remember the proper way to inquire
whether the music in question might be live, he said, “Twenty-five thousand to come in.”

“Twenty-five thousand lira?” The price, back in 1991, of a full tank of gas for my car. Steeper than I had expected as an entrance fee. I tried to peer into the main room, but he had closed the door behind him. “Can I take a look at the, you know, atmosphere?”

“You pay first. Then you look.”

“Twenty-five thousand’s a lot.”

“Holiday tonight.” He stared flatly, his patience about to run out. Sensing, perhaps, that my indecision had all but congealed into a definitive no, he added, “First drink’s included in the cover.”


The money went from my pocket into his without the stopover formality of a cash register. His ushering arm urged me around the desk as he opened the door to the nightclub. “Sit where you want. Barman will serve you at your table.”

The interior, blatantly designed with little care for esthetics, was not what I had expected. The lighting was industrially bright and blanched in the middle, dangerously dark where the outermost tables lurked in the shadows skirting the big room. The central glowing eyesore was the dance floor, above which hung
a motionless mirrored ball. A wide ring of high-backed padded benches separated the dance floor from the tables, the turquoise leather of the upholstery intensifying the venue’s aura of outdated disco sleeze.

There was music, too. Not live, but canned. Piped in loud through unsubtle speakers dangling from the ceiling. Bass-line abuzz, treble tinny and thin. “Mi piaci,” sang the Tuca Tuca song resurrected from the early 1970s. “Ah-ha!”

People dancing as well. Two pairs, similar in composition. In each, a short old man wrapped his arms around the waist of a tall beautiful girl. Disarmingly beautiful. Ploddingly the men led the lithe girls in a slow-stepping shuffle-grope. And I thought: There’s no figuring the glue that keeps some couples stuck together.

Apart from the dancers beneath the lighting’s cruel glare, the rest of the room sprawled gloomy. Deserted.

I wanted to leave, but could not imagine asking the bouncer for reimbursement. Plus I had credit for a drink, so what the hell?

Choosing a twilit, middle-ground table not too deep into the abysmal peripheral darkness, I sat. A moment later, a barman appeared tableside to take my order. “First drink is free?” I double-checked.

“Included in the cover,” he assured.

“A whiskey, then,” I said. “Per favore.”

“Excellent. We have the finest, naturally.” And he mentioned a Glen I’d never heard of.

Half a minute, and he was back with my glass. I sipped. I had tasted finer in my life. Many times.

Alone once more, I watched the dancing couples and decided I’d better make the drink last. Midnight seemed a long way off.

My solitude proved brief, however, because a young woman of astonishing beauty materialized out of nowhere, resting lovely fingertips on my table and asking whether she might sit down.

Couldn’t have been my aftershave to have drawn her close, I decided. Must have been the secret magnetism of corduroy and tweed. “Sit, of course,
sit!” I rose from my chair—the gentlemanly thing to do, my parents had taught, when a woman took her seat.

Despite my delight, I was stumped by the girl’s evident eagerness for my company. I had, since separation, moved among people as invisible as a ghost. Suddenly this dream female wanted to spend time with me. Why?

Conversation came easy. Miraculously so. She spoke no English. French? She shook her head. “I’m a stranger here, like you,” she said in Italian much better than my own. Really, I don’t know how we managed to communicate. But comprehension between us worked, I swear. And I remember everything we said.

Her name was Maria. She told me she came from Romania.

“I’ve been there!” I blurted, glad for the common ground. With my university chorus, I explained. Traveled around and sang concerts in Sibiu, Constanța, Bucharest, in 1979 when Ceaușescu was still in power, and life looked very, very difficult for the people living there, but a beautiful, beautiful place all the same—

“You know Bucharest?” she said.

“Not in the sense of know it well, but I saw it. Beautiful, beautiful. Even though some parts of the city were still mountains of fallen buildings after the big, you know, what’s the word in Italian when the earth shakes? They hadn’t rebuilt. Have they rebuilt now?”

“Not enough.” She blinked. “Home,” she said. “I remember the earthquake of ’77. Bucharest is my city.” She looked at the two couples shuffle-groping on the dance floor. “Different from here.” She turned back to me and smiled quickly. “Want to dance?”

“I dance bad,” I said.

“Oh, come on.” She reached across the table and touched my hand.

“Dai.”

“No, I never know how to move. Anyway—” I pointed to the speakers through which recycled discottrash rattled and squeaked “—this isn’t my kind of stuff. I only do slow dances. Or a waltz.”
And I was about to ask what had brought her to this particular nightspot on this particular night when the barman emerged from the darkness. He did not look to Maria for her order, though. He spoke to me and suggested I buy the lady a drink.

“Um. Yes,” I said. “Sure.”

She thanked me, then told the barman she wanted chamomile tea.

“Excellent,” he said, disappearing, only to return with his tray before we’d had time to reweave the strands of our conversation. He set the cup, saucer, and steaming single-serving teapot before her. On the table in front of me he placed a handwritten bar-tab. “Twenty-five thousand,” he said.

“Twenty-five thousand?” The price of another tank of gas.

“For the lady’s tea.”

“Twenty-five thousand lira for a cup of tea?” I said, trying hard not to sound unchivalrous. But the prices at this nightclub were insanely out of line.

“It’s good tea,” said the barman.

“Should be,” I said.

He waited until I coughed up the cash. Once the money lay safely on his tray, he laughed. “And you’re not just paying for the tea.”

“No? What am I paying for?”

Something in this interchange had put a smile on his face. “For the conversation with the lady.”

“What? I mean, it’s good conversation, but I thought conversation was free.”

He chuckled, tickled by my words. “This one here has no idea,” he said to Maria. “Doesn’t understand a thing, does he?”

“I don’t think so,” she answered.

“Wait. You two know each other?”

Maria grinned. “We know each other.”

“Should I explain?” asked the barman.

“No, no. You go. I’ll tell him,” she said. And they exchanged sentences in a language I did not recognize. Romanian, maybe.

The barman nodded. “Refill on the whiskey?” he offered before leaving.
“At these prices, I think I’ll say no.”

Laughing to himself, he walked away.

“Want to dance?” Maria invited again.

“No, thank you,” I said. “What is it that you’re going to tell me?”

“Let’s dance.” She touched my hand again. “We can talk later.”

“Please, no. Tell me what you have to tell me.”

She smiled. Sighed. Set to fixing her chamomile tea. “You don’t know?”

“Know what?”

“Do you know where you are?” she began.

“Yes, of course. In a nightclub. See, the man where I bought the gas for my car told me—”

“Not a nightclub,” she said, pronouncing it right. “You’re in a night. A night.”

“Yes, but that’s the Italian way of saying—”

“You truly have no idea,” she cut me off.

“Explain, please.”

So she explained. Men came here to spend a few hours with women, and they paid for the time. Otherwise, why would girls as pretty as the two on the dance floor possibly be snuggling up with old men—like those two?

I’d been wondering, I confessed. “So men pay to dance with women?” I watched her test her tea.

Not just to dance, said Maria. They pay for conversation, too.

“How much?”

Twenty-five thousand lira for every fifteen minutes.

“Times four makes a hundred-thousand lira per hour?” I checked my watch. “I’d better leave.” Twenty past eleven now. Where did that put me on the clicking minute-meter? Already in the hole for two tanks’ worth of gas, I’d soon be out of a month on my apartment’s rent.

The barman approached, tray in hand. He placed a fresh glass of whiskey in front me, this one generous, almost a double. “No, listen. I didn’t order this.” I started to stand.
“Sit.” His heavy hand on my shoulder pushed me down into my chair. “Te lo offre la casa.”

“La casa?” Had I understood correctly?

“Yes, it’s on the house. Courtesy of the barman.” His grin had somehow softened to friendly. “You come to this place with no idea, you deserve a drink. And the next fifteen minutes of conversation with Maria, you get that for free too.”

Maria read my surprise. “He’s a good boy in a bad place,” she said once the barman had left us alone. “And I’m a good girl.” Demurely she sipped chamomile.

Right, I said. Let’s do this. If we can talk for the next fifteen minutes without emptying my already suffering wallet, then let’s talk. But talk the truth. “Will you talk to me, and tell me what I want to know?”

“You’re not with Customs and Immigration? People like that?”

“Writer. Hoping for publication in fiction.”

“Well, that’s okay. I think.” She spread her slender arms, a sign of openness. “Ask.”

I asked.

Yes, she answered, this club was her place of work. Her boss? No, not the barman, but the angry-faced bouncer who had let me in. Her actual work? Dancer. Not only dancing with the customers. Dancing on her own, too. Which was better. You know, a show. “You should stay until later and watch. At one-thirty, maybe two o’clock tonight, I’ll do my show. You will like it. My dance is—” she smiled “—molto bella. Molto artistica. Molto sensuale.”

Stay? I looked at my watch again. Twelve more minutes of conversation left. How, I asked, did you get to be here?

Because of dance, she said. Real dance. She was a real ballerina and had worked in the corps de ballet at the National Company in Bucharest. Barman as well. Yes, our barman, right here, right now. He worked there, too. Not as a dancer. Choreographer he was. Choreographer still. “The choreography for my show is his. Very beautiful. You should stay and see. Only a couple of hours from now.”
“And you and he came here because?”

A scout from Italy. Recruiter. “Recruited us from Bucharest. Promised us good performances, good money in Italy. Me doing dance. Him choreography.” Ballets in the good theaters in Rome, the recruiter had said. Milan, even. La Scala.

I looked around the bleach-smelly club, watched the leggy girls for hire working the floor.

“Been more than a year already,” she went on. Stuck. A simple trap: she and the barman couldn’t return home until they earned back the money the recruiter had laid out to finance their trip here.

“Do the police know about this place?”

They come as customers, she said. Off-duty, of course.

I took a big swallow of Glen Something. Family back in Romania?

A nod.

“And does your mother know what you do?”

Write to her all the time, said Maria, looking away. Long letters full of everything I know she’d love to hear. Wrote to her last week. Told her I had just danced *The Nutcracker*. Naples. Teatro San Carlo.

And, um, the men here. Is it really just conversation and dance? Are you all asked to do more?
Her eyes became direct.

The management doesn’t exactly force. But, you know, when a customer has paid for your company the whole evening, and you wouldn’t believe how much money they spend here in a single night, then when it’s time to go to bed, you don’t have to, have to, have to say yes, but you can’t really say no either. You understand?

Is it, I mean if you want to tell me, what’s it like—with the men?

*Look at them!* she said. We’re not in Milan with bankers and actors. Here they’re all farmers and shepherds. They think you’re a whore. And their bodies... The smell...

“Come,” she said, changing the subject. “Let’s dance.” She stood up, pulling on my hand.

“I dance bad. I told you, I—”

“You told me a waltz. So I told the barman to put on a waltz and here it is. Up! Come on!”

I listened. The music lilted in slow waltz time. One two three, one two three. “Our fifteen minutes are finished.”

“One waltz. You promised!”

So I rose from the chair, and we walked to the dance floor beneath the bright inertia of the frozen mirrored ball. Hand held hand, and my arm reached for the small of her back as her hand rested on my shoulder. I stood straight as I could, trying to deserve the perfect poise of her neck and head. Then we waltzed. Never before had I moved to music with a genuine ballerina in my arms. Me, clumsy me. But she: her body had no weight. Only a gorgeous swirl of movement and grace. Absolute beauty.

We stopped when the piece ended. “Thank you,” I said. “I’m leaving.”

“*Esprimi un desidero.*”

“Express a desire?” The dancing had lulled my brain far past its limited ability to perform translation.

“For the New Year. What’s your desire?”

“Oh. My desire. No, yours first. You make your wish.”
“I wish—” but she stopped, pondering which request to put to the universe, not wanting to waste an opportunity for magic. “I wish, this time next year, not to be here anymore.”

I looked at her, shimmering on the edge of the over-bright dance floor. Daughter in her mother’s eyes. Piece of business in those of the bouncer. Whore for her customers. Maria for me. A woman stuck, at this precise moment of her life’s longer flow, in an ugly present tense.

“Good,” I said. “I wish your wish will come true.”

Outside, I found Rocinante where I had left her: nose facing roadward from the chronically empty parking lot. I switched on the engine, turned up the heat, my gloved hand struggling to free the windshield of frost. I drove up the curvy road to Chiusure, and thought about my botched attempt to be an ordinary, unmarried member of grown-up society celebrating a happy occasion like New Year’s Eve. I wondered whether I’d have the nerve to tell my Irish friends Ruth and Stefania. Ever tell the story to anyone.

I remember pulling in beside the sorry, slouching Christmas tree when I reached Chiusure, my new and lonely, lovely home. I, the ninety-third soul to compose the town’s little population. Maybe I will never understand the quirk of recollection, the paradoxical mechanism by dint of which the most miserable memories somehow become the most precious sacred treasures.

I parked, switched off Rocinante and stepped out, the night air giving a cold lick to the skin of my neck inside my scarf. The clock in the church’s bell tower chimed just then. Twelve strokes.

Old life done with. Time for the new.
THE WAY BACK
KEVIN HARPER

You found resurrection not so simple
As you thought
The grave dirt impossible to clean
From your clothes
The pennies over your eyes
Still blinding them

Ashes turn into light
Light turns into motion

Voices in a hall of mirrors
Do not lose your way
Into this beating heart
LOOKING AT PHONE PICTURES FROM ITALY, PARIS AND AMERICA
Will Cox

it could be a good thing that you are crippingly infatuated with things untwisting

on the one hand is sanity fat of her lower abdomen, a lombardian upbrung from two south dubliners her stomach tangent to your fullflattening palm. the hole halo of her naval is ascending you are pressing down pounds per square inch. in pressing down her chin and knees are spinning disagreed directions reminding you of an erector set. you are taking pictures. what. my country doesn’t really grow pubic hair. why. i don’t know. i guess maybe we are just too young a country.

on the other is a motherless hair tie curled in fear on your curved palm. you are poke rolling the tie alife, plucking hairs as evidence you are alive. it was under the bed you rented on the internet when you sold yourself as clean and respectful. your landlord is watching. you are taking pictures. yours. no. hmm. whose is it. i don’t know. i’m not sure. we said no guests. she at least endorses your claim at being clean as she takes and sorts your money.
in the other, stuck dropping over a waist basket is a forgotten yoyo tied to your palm ceiling. being an adult returned home in winter, you are spring cleaning, you are taking pictures. the line is wound and spinning. the spun is unwinding it. the toy reminds you of a child with palms uplifted. you flick your wrist stretching a hair tie but not enticing the yoyo. in the other hand you are mindlessly swiping into naked pictures. your mother enters. where was. whose was. who is. i don’t. i’m not. who’s who.
DOUBLE PLET GUITAR
LUCA BARONI

VIDEO: DOUBLE PLET GUITAR
The night before last, I was driving home on the small winding road between Costalpino and Costafabbri, where I live. Traffic had backed up, dozens of cars, on the last curve before home. I sighed and proceeded slowly and patiently, waiting like everyone else to see what the problem was. Soon I saw a roe deer lying on the road in the oncoming direction. Its front legs were tucked beneath it and its moist eyes looked at the cars passing by.

A woman in a blue dress had stopped all the traffic from the other direction. As I passed slowly, I could see the deer had been shot in the leg. I pulled over.

The woman was upset. She asked me if I was a hunter, then said, “Sir, will you put it out of its misery? Can you shoot it?”

“Well, that wouldn’t be very sporting and I don’t have a gun.”

“What should I do…what can we do? I called the police. You know they will never arrive!”

“Let me see if I can move him off the road.”

I walked up to the deer from behind, but I could see pretty quickly it would be cruel to touch him. Someone in the lengthening line-up honked their horn. The deer flattened his ears for a moment.

The woman was now hunched over her cell phone, talking rapidly and gesticulating, framed against the approaching darkness.

I walked back towards my car. I looked at the deer lying on the road. There was a set of oncoming headlights reflected in his eyes.
Remember your childhood assertion?

*This is what I want to be when I grow up.*
**TO OUR CONTRIBUTORS:** Tell The Sigh Press about something cliché but that you’ve always wanted to do anyway.

*

**LUCA BARONI,** 31 years old: an inventor in Florence for the past year. Two things distinguish human beings from animals: the use of tools and storytelling. With recycled materials, I am in pursuit of the dream to make machines that work for humanity.

HTTPS://WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/PAGES/DUMP/1514653165422494
WWW.RISORSERIA.COM - WE DISCOVERED LUCA AT RISORSERIA, VIA SAN GALLO, 69/R

IN MY HOMETOWN, I was bored and I wanted to know what it was like to be a vagabond.

,**

**ALEX JOSEPHY:** I live half the year in Montalcino and half in London. For me, Italy is both a retreat and a home. My poems have been published widely in UK magazines and anthologies, and have won awards such as the MacLellan Prize 2014. Cinnamon Press, based in Wales, will be publishing my first poetry pamphlet early next year.

WWW.ALEXJOSEPHY.EU

WELL, FOR A LONG TIME I’ve wanted to be able to dream in Italian. Like dream-flying, one foot rising from the floor, then the other, it would be quite effortless, thrilling but also completely familiar. Even *il congiuntivo!* I’d realise that there had never been a time when I couldn’t do it.
JAMES BIRD: I don’t like talking about myself in the third person very much. I live in Hackney, London and print and publish other peoples’ words in a publication called the Belleville Park Pages. I’ve had my own words published in both print magazines, like Paris Lit Up, and online magazines, like NewWaveVomit.

WWW.BELLEVILLEPARKPAGES.COM

THE CLICHÉ that I would most like to fulfill is to go and find myself, and everybody else, in India.

[ ]

JEFF SHAPIRO was born and raised in Massachusetts. He has worked as columnist for the British edition of Cosmopolitan and has had non-fiction articles published in New Society and International magazine. His first novel, Renato’s Luck (HarperCollins, New York & Sydney) has been translated into German, French, and Dutch, with movie rights optioned to Mango Productions, Inc. Secrets of Sant’Angelo, his second novel, was published by Berkley Publishing Group (Penguin USA). As well as teaching Creative Writing at Siena School for Liberal Arts and the Siena Art Institute, Jeff teaches English at the Università Popolare Senese and has worked on the editorial staff of Verso magazine. A resident of Italy since 1991, Jeff and his wife, Italian singer Valeria Indice, live outside Siena. He is currently at work on his third novel.

WWW.SIENASCHOOL.COM
WWW.SIENAAART.ORG
WWW.UPSENESE.IT

YOU ASKED, so here’s what I’ve always wanted to do: sit on my pillow and fly, magic-carpet style, the way I used to in my dreams as a kid.
KEVIN HARPER is a Canadian ex-pat currently living near Siena. He still has trouble conjugating the verb dare after having been in Italy 18 months.

DESPITE IT BEING SLIGHTLY TOURISTY, I always wanted to take Italian cooking classes. A couple of weeks ago I did. It seemed to work out well. When I got home and tried pasta preparation myself, I had “issues” with manipulation of flour for the mix. The result—my kitchen looked like another cliché-Canada in Winter...

WILL COX: I was born in Portland, Oregon and went to university in Boston where I studied business administration. For the last two years I have been living between Paris and London while running a literary startup called the Belleville Park Pages.

WWW.BELLEVILLEPARKPAGES.COM

I’M AN AMERICAN who moved to Paris to write and get involved with art. I am a cliché, walking. My unfulfilled cliché is to ask the girl to Prom in a really creative way, but I am already uncomfortably old for that now.
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