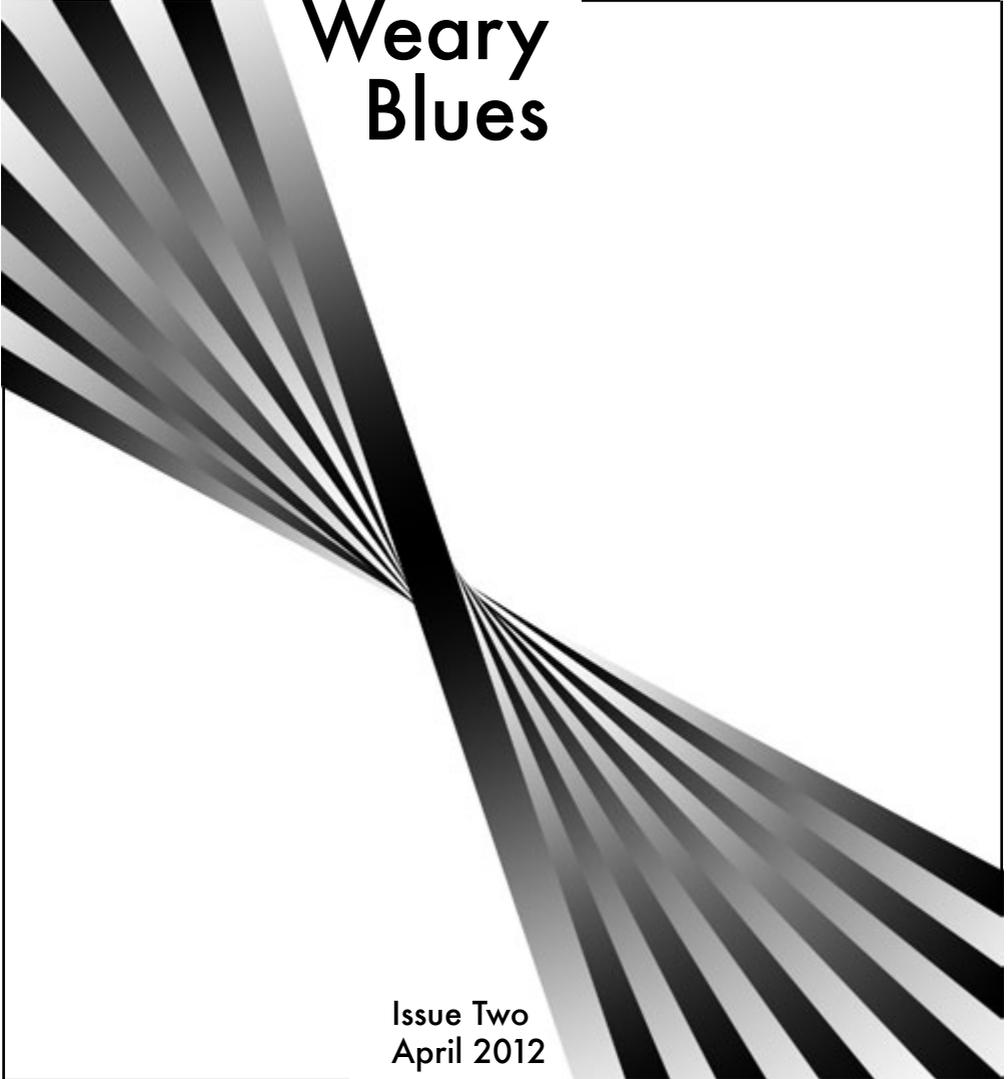


# The Weary Blues

Issue Two  
April 2012



## ABOUT THE JOURNAL

**T**HE WEARY BLUES was started for one purpose, and one purpose alone - the free dissemination of literary and artistic culture. Cultural commodification has built barriers to publication, particularly when it comes to those disciplines represented in this journal. New and established authors and artists are finding it increasingly difficult to spread their work to an international and multicultural audience. It is hoped that *The Weary Blues* will contribute to the alleviation of this pressing issue.

**SUBMISSIONS ARE WELCOME AT  
[THEWEARYBLUES.ORG/SUBMIT.HTML](http://THEWEARYBLUES.ORG/SUBMIT.HTML)**

# EDITORIAL

James O'Sullivan founded *The Weary Blues* in September 2011. He is a PhD candidate at University College Cork, studying Digital Arts and Humanities, while also a graduate of Cork Institute of Technology.

His first collection of poetry, entitled *Kneeling on the Redwood Floor*, was published by Belfast-based Lapwing Publications in August 2011. Outside of his work as a postgraduate researcher, James writes poetry and short fiction, some which has appeared in numerous periodicals and anthologies. Further information on James' work

can be found at <http://josullivan.org>

**JAMES O'SULLIVAN**  
**EDITOR**



**KATIE AHERN**  
**EDITOR, SHORT FICTION**

Katie Ahern is a PhD candidate in the School of English, UCC. She holds an MA in 20th Century American Literature and Film, as well as a BA in English and Irish.





Lenora is currently completing an MA in Texts and Contexts: Medieval to Renaissance, in UCC. She also holds a HDip in English and a BSc (Hons) in Chemistry

**LENORA MURPHY**  
COPY-EDITOR AND PROOF-READER

with Forensic Science.



**NORA DUGGAN**  
EDITOR, VISUAL ART & PHOTOGRAPHY

Perceptions of time and place inform the predominantly

site specific nature of Nora Duggan's art practice. Using digital still and moving images, she frequently makes reference to the 19th century development of their analogue equivalents, and the potential they promised as quintessential agents for the representation of place and time. Her work can be described as digital interventions, seeking to infiltrate the narrative structure of a photograph or film, particularly in relation to the construction of memory. Nora is currently a PhD student at The Huston School of Film and Digital Media, NUI Galway. She holds an MA in Fine Art (Art in the Digital World) NCAD, Dublin (2011), and a BA in Fine Art, DIT (2009).



**ANDREW HEALY**  
GUEST GRAPHIC DESIGNER

A graduate of Edinburgh College of Art and National

College of Art and Design, Dublin, Andrew Healy is currently working as a freelance designer and artist. Examples of his multi-disciplinary practice can be found at [www.andrewhealy.com](http://www.andrewhealy.com).

**BAIRBRE FLOOD  
GUEST POETRY EDITOR**



Bairbre Flood's second book of poetry *On The Click* was published last year and is available from: [www.irishbooksdirect.ie](http://www.irishbooksdirect.ie) . There are samples from the book on her website at [www.ontheclick.yolasite.com](http://www.ontheclick.yolasite.com) RTE Radio 1's *Arena* interviewed her recently and featured her work - the podcast can be heard at: [www.rte.ie/radio1/arena/archive1/2011/1116/arena.html](http://www.rte.ie/radio1/arena/archive1/2011/1116/arena.html) She is currently studying music in Cork, writing songs and performing with her band.

# POETRY

## Bells, Stars, Puddles, Muddles by Bairbre Flood

Bells in the washingmachine, stars in the puddles,  
I get myself into such a muddle.

What I'd give for one clear line, something

I could believe I could climb,

something uncrooked, something smooth,

I see your face the way it looked just before you left

and I wanted to touch your hands, the blister

burning, burns me hard.

They never leave, my friend told me, she's been there and bought  
the hair-shirt, she should know alright, I should listen alright,

Driving tears, the motorway never veers, keeps its path,  
its past

holding it, leans around

the mountain and down towards the city lights,

but I see your face and there's bells in the tyres passing,

stars in the headlights.

I said last time I wouldn't come here again,  
so why am I stretched on the ropes?  
Spitting in a bucket, hoping against hopes -  
bells between rounds, stars in my head.

My masterplan has disappeared, my guards are running for the gates,  
I'm stripping off this uniform, bodies floating in the lake.  
Everytime I try to handle things, things roll their fists at me,  
I'm taking off the glasses before I fool myself I can see.  
Let it be, let it be, let it be, let it be,  
I'm stripping off this badge before it becomes a part of me.

Maybe you'd let me be honest, maybe you could be that true,  
maybe we could let lies bloom.  
What do you really want from you?

Everyone's acting like they've only one part,  
that that's all they could hope for,  
all they deserve.  
Don't try and tell me you buy into all that,  
that the lines in your head aren't  
the ones that I heard  
cause there's bells in the watchtower, stars in the searchlights  
spinning through the darkness,  
crooked, smooth,  
we're spinning through the darkness, crooked, smooth.

WILLIAM FORD

## Hardbop Grandpop: Horace Silver

“I Want You”

Slicked hair wild  
as Cab Calloway's, body hunched,  
face a dark light,  
he plays a note- for-note, chord- for-chord hammering  
again and again  
of a melody  
that won't ever,  
ever get old until  
the crowd swings madly with, yes,  
I want you, baby,  
no matter how many kids or grandkids you got or  
don't  
so long as you  
keep lovin' me.

## Night after Night

All dates since play mutes  
to our lost paradise of slow, delicate entries  
and one cigarette for two.

Without you, love, I blow  
the heart's leftover, irregular stutter  
into an EKG of blues.

## Jobless

Rent two months behind;  
phone, three weeks; car  
unlicensed by the state  
because of money due  
his runaway love and son--  
he sits before the computer  
listening to an endlessly  
cycling Miles Davis blues  
while scanning the best bets  
for vodka, smokes, and porn.

A carpenter with bad hands  
and knees, he tames no birds  
in this cell but has the mice  
on the edge of his sight  
skittering over the floor,  
their sound like the brush  
on drums he once played  
in a few local gigs with friends,  
tempo rising to irregular time  
in the smoky air of local fame.

WILLIAM FORD has published two books of poems, *The Graveyard Picnic* (Mid-America Press, 2002) and *Past Present Imperfect* (Turning Point, 2006) and, in 2010, two chapbooks from *Putty House*, *Allen & Ellen* and *Descending with Miles*.

His poems have appeared in *Brilliant Corners*, *The Iowa Review*, *New Letters*, *The North American Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Poetry*, *Southern Humanities Review*, and elsewhere.

A winner of the 2001 Writing Award from Mid-America Press and of two Des Moines National Poetry 'Iowa Poet' awards (2003, 2004), Ford has also received three Pushcart nominations (1994, 2002, 2008). He lives in Iowa City, Iowa.



## **Beyond Outrage** by John Saunders

the stasis of bewilderment,  
the inability of movement  
after the shock. Flowers  
wilted, dying one by one.

When I listened to you  
I could not hear my future  
or find a safe road  
to contented peace,

instead the currents of pity  
pulled me out of my depth,  
where danger played easily  
and chance ruled my life.

I should have known better.

**MÁIRE MORRISSEY-CUMMINS**

## **Love surfs the waves**

Wrapped in the warmth of a June night  
under the light of scintillating stars,  
you point to the Milky Way,  
my gaze follows yours  
as I catch the moon in your eyes.

We walk hand in hand on the beach,  
our whispers sprinkle the dim light.  
Your smooth embrace tickles my face,

tumbles my hair,  
tingles my toes  
beneath an ebony sky.

The candy-sweet scent of Valerian \*  
weaves with the salty sea breeze.  
It entangles our love,  
unravels it  
in the pulse of the waves  
and binds us forever  
in the surging surf.

## **Hair washed in Beer**

She was gentle  
as she washed my hair in beer,  
rolled it in curlers  
for Sunday best.

It was summer,  
she sat on the windowsill.  
arms crossed, chatting with neighbours.  
She wore her pink lipstick smile,  
her grey dress with red polka dots.  
And me, a matching dress  
made from the remnants.  
We were twins,  
mother and daughter,  
all things beautiful.

I can't recall when her smile faded,  
her face nettled with anger,  
gnarled by drink,  
her chain smoking,  
the bag of pills.

In a drunken stupor,  
our dinner splattered the lino,  
She lunged with the ladle,  
slipped and fell,  
sliding in the thick slimy mess.  
Writhing with anger,  
hatred burned from her eyes  
as she trashed all around her.  
I ran, with nowhere to go,  
hid for hours behind the Beech tree,  
rocking my sister for warmth.

An old woman now,  
she remembers her life  
solely with regret.  
I remember  
her pink lipstick smile.

## **Another year my child**

Hawthorn blossoms  
pearled the hedgerows  
as birds rejoiced,  
chiming the air  
with heartbeat rhythms,  
a cotton crisp spring  
as baby buds peeped in.

I carried you,  
felt you  
but never got to hold you.

Another year has passed  
and I am lost  
lonely in the black cold of winter,  
remembering the day

remembering the day  
you left me.

It has been so long  
and we never said goodbye.

My tears  
are frozen in time.  
Echoes of songs  
that never were,  
of dreams  
that can never be.

Fog blankets the fields.  
The sky expresses what I cannot.  
I hear the parting clouds,  
I speak to the sunrise  
of my love for you,  
your movement, your sound.  
I would speak of anything  
to bring you back,  
but there is only frost  
and winter dwells in my heart.

I see the spring,  
but know  
I will never feel your warmth.

Máire is Irish. She is living in Greystones, Co. Wicklow at present. She has spent many years working abroad in Holland and in Germany. She is married with two adult children. She is writing one year and loves to paint. She has had many poems published in journals, anthologies and e-zines in 2011. She is a member of the Irish Haiku Society and Haiku Ireland and loves this new found creative life.



## FEATURED POET: GRAHAM ALLEN

Graham Allen is Professor at University College Cork, Ireland. His books include *Harold Bloom: Towards a Poetics of Conflict* (1994); *Intertextuality* (2000 and 2011); *Roland Barthes* (2003); *The Salt Companion to Harold Bloom*, co-editor with Roy Sellars (2007); *Mary*

*Shelley* (2008) and *The Reader's Guide to 'Frankenstein'* (2008). His work has been translated into Japanese, Korean, and Persian. His poems have previously been published in *Southword*; *Other Poetry*; *The Stinging Fly*; *The Rialto*; *Poetry Ireland Review*; *Revival*; *La Questione Romantica*; *The Shop*; *Theory and Event*; *Cultural Politics*; *Transmission Annual*; *Cyphers*. His texts for stage have been performed by Gatekrash Theatre Company at The Stack Theatre, Cork School of Music, at the Comedy Club, Cork, and at the Cork Midsummer Festival in 2008. He was the winner of the Listowel Single Poem Prize in 2010.

### Miss Universe

Nobody can teach you anything.  
Your self-deprecation is a lie.  
Always the first to highlight your own weakness,  
you hold the patent for every mirror.  
Your murderous form of self-defence  
is an out-dated early warning system  
plugged into cemented underground bunkers,  
beyond all hope of renovation.  
You are in this way the United States  
at the logical end of its paranoia,  
annihilating everything you touch  
in your mission to ensure perpetual peace.  
I will call you my own killing machine  
and lay my body in front of your wheels.

## I wouldn't start from here

I'd start from there, or there,  
or over there, or anywhere,  
really, but here. You see,  
here is nowhere until  
it's someone's somewhere  
and it will never be that  
until someone, you perhaps,  
is somewhere else.

I was once somewhere else,  
so I know what I'm about  
and could not speak true,  
as I do on this topic,  
if I had not travelled  
far out into the misty murk  
of there, and over there,  
many, many receding roads,  
every circular one of which,  
homewards, led me here.

These are my hill-top lights,  
this is my moon,  
my urban scream, my night-time dogs,  
my comfortable, familiar rain.

Those who ask for directions  
are clearly not at home  
and, quite clearly then, logically,  
should not start from here.

## On Thomas Butt's *A View of Cork*

If I had the skill of the painter  
I would swivel the geography of Cork,  
so that we did not separate each evening,  
but walked home together, peaceful-like,  
you to the south, me to the north.

## Patrick Street

Your new millennial tiles are cool  
beneath the feet of flood-lit winter shoppers.  
Have you forgotten so quickly  
how everything within you burned?

## Transverse Myelitis

A fuse has blown in the refrigerator  
of your spinal cord, Frida Kahloesque,  
and slowly the meat and the butter are bleeding  
onto the Roquefort, melon and water-cress.

## Military Hill

What do you want?  
What would you have wanted?

I see you sometimes in the street,  
I did not mean to keep you unborn.

You are playing football.  
You have brown eyes and a hurt nose.

You are running for your life.  
I cannot help you.

From this distance you have no name.  
You burn in the palm of my hand.

You stand, unseen, outside of every window.  
We did not hear you calling,

or you yourself were deaf.  
But we need you now,

Cork boy with matted hair,  
a toy gun and torn trousers,

kicking cans down Military Hill,  
madly excited about tomorrow.

## Call Centre

The building breathes people.  
They wilt and pale in the pcs' glare  
as fibre optic capillaries suck on human material.

From the dull throb of the dial tone  
to the scratch of complaint against the ear  
unceasing labour is done upon us.

Fingers gallop keypad fences,  
words are herded through telemouths,  
a babble of voices gather, swell and break.

Sense is malled in thrall to time;  
dissected, sectioned and represented  
in spreadsheets stacked in c:, d: and e:.

The day is stretched in clicks and digits  
until there comes a break  
for the silent equilibrium of night.

Each new morn the centre is dragged  
into being from cold, uséd material:  
silicon, electrons, concrete and flesh.

## A Prayer For The M50

Dead cars lurk like beached whales beneath flyovers.  
Each sliproad junction's a station of the cross.  
The seasaw chatter of the radio fills the ear  
drowning out the hum that spreads  
as you indicate and pull across  
this speedsick country.

The petrol station is an outpost  
manned by Poles in Dublin accents.  
“Dobre den, dobre did, dobre don't”,  
the coffee machine gurgles, it spits and it stammers.  
The newspaper's sectional, sectoral headlines  
speak to its own and its own only.

The tank is full and it's time to drive.

The morning's grey and it's light outside.

The holy man of the M50 lies beside junction 3.

He says:

‘Each car is every car and every car is me.’

## Cork- Sunday Morning- Coming Down

A smash of hair hangs from a letterbox,  
a droop of shoes cluster in the door,  
floating plastic deckchairs are plastic broken swans:  
all is abuzz with throw away cascades of the city's secret song.

Our secret seers are time callers and last chancers,  
muddled and puddled in notes at the bar where  
bed sit boy's dilapidated eyes stroke lovers' back-turned backs  
and the city kicks its heels against the algebra of the world.

Its song is a mutter of diesel, a prow parting water,  
the midnight choreography of red-green lights.

Michael Dineen is a writer from Cork currently stationed in Dublin. He has studied English and Philosophy and works in eCommerce. He is not averse to a pint of stout and enjoys running, swimming and travel.

# Winter

by Mick Corrigan

Winter ate the light  
cold stealing  
love and passion  
huddled  
we moved  
warily  
hunched  
against  
the bite

Trust  
we kept  
clenched  
in hand  
pushed in pocket  
eyes distant  
hope  
banked dimly  
glowing  
below the damp  
of experience  
bitter  
muttered snatches  
words  
misting  
in air  
Arctic  
it looked  
like forever  
felt  
like forever  
and then  
and then  
and then  
the trees  
came  
In to bud

## Church in the Pines

The weight of the hour presses heavy on my heathen bones. 7:45?  
Jesus. But you asked me.

Tupperware and beatific smiles. Their children, sleek and spit-shined little anachronisms. At least there's coffee. We make our way through the split pine pews, hard and damp with dew. You introduce me to people I feel certain you do not know. Emphasizing that I am from California. California. Like that means anything.

Settling into the rock hard seat of my seeming eternal damnation, I fail to follow the sermon or pinpoint a narrative through line. I smash an ant on my jeans. The congregation stands, singing "Amazing Grace" - and not the first and third, like the Methodists.

The lake shimmers beyond. Crushed glass.

Somewhere between that sweet, sweet sound and the failing of the flesh, you fold your thick fingers into my delicate ones. I imagine your death and know that I love you.

# My Green Sofa

The left side of my sofa  
is for boys

Perched like dappled cockatiels  
Sipping a dry chardonnay

chirp.

There, they display their professorial preenings  
Their Fortune Teller flattery

(I paid my dollar, I must want to hear)

Beads on an abacus, the space between us-  
Sliding  
Measuring  
Together  
or apart  
Depending.

And my Green Sofa, a silent witness  
To sweet, staccato trills and  
Clinching Silences-  
Dead  
unbridled  
When there is nothing left to say

If you beat the over-stuffed pillows,  
Words,  
like dust,  
will scatter.  
My sofa collects them.

And beneath the rough textured cushions:

Almonds

Hairpins

An earring

Bird shit.

## A Pin for the Butterfly

She tried it on like a little girl balancing in her daddy's work boots. Too big, too improper, too ill-suited to resist.

No longer the measured girl, addressing kisses like valentines, weighing out the meaning and the verse. She moves through the city collecting lovers like butterflies, exotic and rare. Each one more beautiful than the last. No more West Coast vanilla for her, she's done with that. Evenings, she slips under their dark skin with ease, with conviction, without remorse.

She too was a butterfly once- collected, pinned. "I wanted to know you," the boy whispered by way of explanation. And straining in her death throws, she spread her pleasing wings once more, still hoping he found her beautiful.

Now, transformed, she strolls the streets in her daddy's boots; she likes the way they make her legs look.

Paige Ryan is a writer, producer, yoga teacher and lucid dreamer living in Los Angeles. Her writing has appeared in *Grace and Grace Notes*, *Birmingham Magazine*, *Inspire Me Magazine* and *Quad Literary Arts Journal*. She is currently inspired by songwriting, yin principals, excessive verbosity and nail polish.



# VISUAL ART

## CATHERINE BOYLE

A native of Boston, Massachusetts (USA), Catherine Boyle has lived in Europe since 2003. Her educational background is in political science (specifically, Sovietology), documentary filmmaking and non-profit management.

As one of the three founders of White Tara Productions, [whitetara.org](http://whitetara.org), from 2002 until 2009 Catherine worked as a volunteer producer, director and editor on documentary films shot in Bangladesh, Honduras, Afghanistan, Nigeria, Ghana, Thailand, Bulgaria, Italy and the U.S. The focus of White Tara Productions was consistently on humanitarian and social issues that do not receive adequate coverage in the mainstream media. Since 2009 Catherine has been based in the west of Ireland, and her most recent film projects may be found at [catherinefilms.net](http://catherinefilms.net)

## Tribal Resilience

A Lisu woman from northern Thailand displays her tribal finery on the occasion of a local holiday. At the same time, however, the sadness in her eyes hints at the ongoing struggle for survival on the part of Thailand's hill tribes, many of whom are stateless persons. (next page).





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## **GARY KENNEDY SPOOKY**

Gary Kennedy is a photographer based in the UK. His interests include pictures, music, sounds and vehicles, and not necessarily in that order.

(next two pages)

## **STEPHEN TOOMEY HEAP OF PHILOSOPHY (LOCKE) HISTORY OF ART**

Stephen Toomey is a contemporary visual artist based in Dublin. He has studied Philosophy in Trinity College, Dublin, and Fine Art in the Dublin Institute of Technology. He was awarded the Cill Rialaig Artist's Residency Award 2011.





## VIEJO

by Frank Scozzari

Don Nicolas labored painfully up the steep grade. He was old now, terribly old, and his legs showed the withered gait that comes with oldness. The pack dug deeply into his shoulders and caused him to slump forward and stop frequently for breath. His dark, weathered face, drawn and tired, had seen the sun rise over the grade forty days now, yet he had gone unrewarded for his labor.

He stopped at the top of the rise and studied the rugged canyons to the north. He counted aloud, three canyons to the west. The sweat was standing on his forehead though the sun had just completed its climb over a craggy outcrop of volcanic boulders east of him. He took his hat off and wiped his pale forehead with a handkerchief. Then, wincing in pain, he plodded on methodically across the rock-strewn terrain down into the third canyon, steadily weaving between yucca *valida* and *cholla* cactus.

*Life endured is life won*, he thought. It would be his someday. Then see if the villagers laugh! He grunted sharply, his intense hazel-gray eyes sparkled, and a smile burned over his face giving it the determined expression of a man willing to endure great hardship. It was a pleasing thought and it helped strengthen his legs and give him the will to push on.

His daily pilgrimage brought him to a mountain that looked like a turtle. Where two gullies met he took up a goat trail that climbed above a long slope of talus rock. There a narrow

ledge led him alongside the mountain to the familiar site of his labor; a thin crevice in the rock wall hidden behind two elephant trees, whose fat trunks and numerous tapering branches completely covered the crevice from the rocks below. He dropped his pack, examined the fresh rock exposed from his prior day's work, and then, without further delay, took up the pickax and began to slowly hammer the inner wall, chipping off small chunks of rock and exposing more of the clean fragments beneath.

His mind was swirling with thoughts as he worked; thoughts of his boyhood, thoughts of all the years he had spent in the mines of Durango; the endless years of toiling in bottomless pits. And each time the pick struck, he could feel the pain of all those years go through him. His hands were calloused and blistered. His old skin split open easily. He was sore in every bone and muscle. But he was a stubborn old man with a stubborn dream and a belief that something of value lay hidden behind the wall. So he hammered away at it all day, like all the days before, and his body suffered.

The shadows of late afternoon drew on and Don Nicolas was sad that he could not continue. Another slam of the pick might bring out his treasure. But he had thought that yesterday and the day before, and always there was nothing. He checked the rock wall, a shallow indentation, empty of any sparkling minerals. It was right, he knew. A strong vein of quartz showed plainly above him, running the width of the crevice. The broken rock fragments below were heavy and flaked with mica. All the signs were there. But the wall would not vindicate this to him. Not even one gram of yellow metal had emerged from the wall in forty day's time.

Once again defeated, he set his pick aside and smiled defiantly, creasing his wrinkled eyes.

*"Mañana,"* he said aloud.

Then, with swollen ankles and blistered hands, he gathered up his things and slowly made his way back over the grade, down the long hill to his little village.

El Zape was a small town in the mountains north of Durango. Everyone in El Zape knew Don Nicolas, and everyone knew he had purchased the old San Pablo claim, a worthless stake of three hundred acres which had once been mined for opals and silver. The town knew mining well. Its young men had gone off to work in the mines since the Spanish colonial days. So they knew Don Nicolas to be a foolish old man. For a man of his age and condition to be mining, and mining the old San Pablo claim, a claim everyone knew was dug out, was almost comical. Each morning when he left up the mountain they would look at him and laugh and each day when he returned with nothing they pitied his ignorance.

“Hey old man! *Viejo!* Are you rich yet?” asked the young men on the corner as he stumbled into town. They laughed at him as he passed, and though the old man’s hearing had long since faded, his sight was still good and he knew that they mocked him.

He stumbled on past a row of dirty, pastel-colored buildings to his small adobe. He dropped the heavy pack off his sore shoulders and then made his way across the narrow street to the cantina. He took up his favorite table in the corner beneath a hanging lamp. He had spent many nights there considering his progress, planning his next day’s work, and examining small fragments of rock he had broken from the wall. It was his place of refuge, his one place of rest where he came, wrecked and tired, after a long day at his mine, to drink beer and eat a hot meal.

“*Guiso,*” he said in his hoarse voice to the proprietor.

Roberto Diaz stood behind the counter. He looked over at him with a disgusted expression on his face.

“And one beer, *Pacifico.*” the old one added.

“And money? Do you have money to pay for it?” the proprietor asked.

Nicolas reached into his pocket and brought out one small centavo piece. His battered, trembling hand, with nails blunt and broken, set it on the table.

“If you could put it on my tab again, like you have done

before, that I would appreciate.”

The proprietor shook his head firmly.

“No Nicolas. Your tab is overdrawn. You are not good for the money and I cannot afford to go broke feeding old men who do not pay for their meals.”

“But I’ll have the money....Soon,” protested Nicolas.

“Then I’ll pay you twice what I owe.”

“And how will you have this money, with that worthless claim of yours? You should have never wasted your time, *Viejo*. It is not worth the effort. Go down to Durango where your children can care for you.”

A stranger sitting at the bar who had been listening to the conversation turned and looked over his shoulder at the old man. He took a long drag off his cigarette.

“You have a claim?”

“Yes.” said the old man. “I’ll be rich soon.”

“Don’t pay him any mind,” the proprietor warned. “His head is full of sediments, and he wants a free meal.”

“And where is your claim?” asked the stranger.

“*En las montañas.*”

The stranger nodded his head.

“It is the old San Pablo claim,” the proprietor intruded. “Nothing left up there but cactus and scorpions. All dug out years ago.”

“Oh.” replied the stranger.

Nicolas went silent. Then he mumbled something, almost to himself.

“What?” the stranger asked.

“And the gold.” Nicolas said louder.

The stranger stared at him curiously. “Oro? How do you know there’s gold?”

“*Senor,*” the proprietor intruded again. “He wants a meal. He thinks he can convince you that he’ll be rich tomorrow so you’ll buy him a meal.”

The stranger took another drag off his cigarette and stared thoughtfully at Don Nicolas. He had seen old men full

of false dreams before and was familiar with the workings of beggars. He nodded his head and turned his back to him, drawing long off his cigarette again.

“I know my business,” Don Nicolas said loudly. “And there is gold.”

“Shut up old one,” the proprietor said. “*No echandas mentiras!* Don’t be telling lies.”

Don Nicolas’ eyes grew grimly shallow. His stomach was turning with hunger pains. But he said nothing more and sat quietly in his corner. His mind drifted back to his youth, a time when his body was not so frail and his mind sharp enough to outwit the likes of Roberto Diaz and the stranger. He remembered as a proud young man going off to work in the mines of Durango, as all young men of his village did. The dark endless tunnels of earth etched like honeycombs through the mountains, full of soot and unbreathable air. There were the sounds of the rail carts running the tracks and the endless shoveling of men in dark holes lit by kerosene lamps. The conditions were not fit for mules, yet men, men of considerable substance, toiled under them.

He was strong then, and youthful, and blinded by the ignorance of youth; and it was a job that paid better than anything else available. So he hammered away at the walls, sifted through tons of rock, and made the mine owners very rich. It was not until a good ten years had passed before he became disillusioned. That is when the mines took his good friend Juan Alonzo, crushed beneath a load of rock and sand. And later, Jesus DeLeon and Santiago went, not by the weight of rock, but by the slow infectious disease of the lungs that withered them away from within. They had passed away slowly, like shriveling orchids. The mining company did not care. It was the fate bestowed to all who labored in the mines. But Nicolas took it grudgingly, and his mind burned venomously even now as he thought of it.

He harked back deeper into the past, of his father going off to the same mines, coming home dark and dirty, wheezing,

his lungs full of sediments. He recalled his mother singing and cooking *tortillas* on a flat stove, serving mole and beans in healthy portions. She could not comprehend his father's weight loss. She was ignorant, as were all, of the hidden poison that filled the air in the mines. It was the law of the laborers, Nicholas knew, to serve a life of youth only to be withered away in one's prime. He had seen his father's generation come and go through the mines, and he had seen his own generation come and go. The young men who gathered each Saturday evening at the *bailes* were next to go.

So it was that Nicholas had vowed in his youth to buy his own mine someday. He reasoned this to be his only salvation. Should he die of the cancerous lung disease or beneath a load of rock, at least it will have been for himself. Life endured is life won his father had told him, and he was willing to endure all that life offered so long as he could taste a small piece of the sweet life the company mine owners had known.

But the years passed quickly, like clouds in a summer sky, and the money gathered slowly. His body had withered with age before he had saved enough to purchase the old mine. Now he sat in the cantina, the lonesome survivor, with a wall of quartz unwilling to give and without the pesos to buy a meal.

The cantina proprietor shook his shoulder.

"Wake up *Viejo*. You must leave. I am closing."

Don Nicolas looked up at him, his eyes glazed-over and distant. His mind was still stirring with thoughts of the past. It took a moment but he gathered himself and shook off the proprietor's hand. He pulled himself slowly to his feet, feeling the arthritic pangs of his joints, and made his way across the narrow dirt street to his small adobe where he spent the remainder of the night in restless sleep.

The following morning Don Nicolas awoke to the sound of a rooster crowing. Hunger pains were gnawing at his stomach so he made breakfast of a pile of dried *tortillas* and water. He scratched another mark on the wall where he had been counting the days he had spent mining in the mountains. Then

he assembled his pack, loading in two large canisters of water, a second stack of dried tortillas, and a pouch of pinole.

The proprietor was in front of the cantina sweeping the porch when Nicolas came from his adobe.

“Hey *Viejo*. You are not going up the mountain today? Can’t you see a storm is coming.”

Don Nicolas looked up into the sky and saw, through the pale twilight, large white clouds forming overhead. He shrugged his shoulders and began his painful march up the street.

“*Viejo loco*,” the proprietor cried. “Crazy old man.”

Nicolas ignored him and continued his slow march.

The climb up the grade was more difficult than before. There was little nourishment in *tortillas* so he was weak and famished-feeling. His legs had the weight of three. He bumped against sharp rocks and cactus needles. His ankles swelled with pain. He had to do everything he could to keep one foot moving out in front of the other. But he bore the pain, as he bore the pain of an entire lifetime. His courage was stronger today for his pride had been touched and his knowledge challenged. He could accept shame before the world, but never could he accept shame from his own village, or from Roberto Diaz, a man who was still clinging to his mother’s breast when Nicolas first lifted a pick. So he plodded on, heavy-footed, the burden of his pack weighing heavily upon his shoulders.

The sky grew dark around him. When he crested the grade there was no sun to shine in his face. He gazed about, taking in the small circle of the world around him. To the north was a rumbling mass of black clouds. They had gathered high in the sky and tumbled toward him like a great wave that wished to crush him. He could see lightning flashes far off, shooting down through the clouds like the tongues of many snakes. The wind had also picked up and blew strongly out of the northeast. He could feel it pushing coldly against his face. He turned and looked back at El Zape, far below. The pastel-colored dwellings were vague to him. He could make out the Calle Fronte that formed the center of town and the river that wound gently past,

but nothing more. Then he turned back, leaned forward into the wind, and began descending into the third canyon.

It stormed for three days. The *vados* and *arroyos* swelled with water. The mountainsides were drenched and the Calle Fronte had become so muddy that it was like soup. The downpour was incessant.

There had been no sign of Nicolas for all of the three days. The villagers believed his craziness had finally caused his death - drowned in a wash or frozen beneath a rock overhang they thought.

“The crazy old one is dead,” they announced frankly. “*El Viejo loco esta muerto.*”

But the fourth day brought clear skies and a lone figure stumbled down from the mountain. The figure fell frequently, crawling at times on all fours. It was water-soaked and croaked out a malignant cough. A plug of mucus had filled its lungs and made it breathe heavily and gag for every breath.

No one was there to help the figure when it reached the Calle Fronte so it lay in the mud for half an hour before it gathered up the strength to continue. It dragged itself along to the cantina where it lay at the door unseen. Then, scarcely managing to stand, the figure entered the cantina and staggered the short distance to the bar.

Everyone in the cantina went quiet. They looked on with ghastly expressions.

“I have come to pay my debt,” the figure announced.

Roberto Diaz, the proprietor, looked at him. It was the *Viejo*, old and withered, caked with mud. He had the gray stubble of beard protruding from his chin and his eyes were on fire. Otherwise he looked like walking death. He was swaying from side to side barely able to stand. He had to use the counter as a brace to keep from tumbling to the floor.

Slowly he took a sock from his pocket and emptied it on the counter. Out rolled several large stones that glistened beneath the light. Roberto Diaz lifted one of the stones and examined it. The soft yellow metal was familiar to him. He knew it for what it

was. The heaviness was unmistakable.

“It’s gold,” he said in disbelief.

The old man’s head was spinning like a battered boxer. He could hear the faint mumblings of the people around him, the excitement in their voices, the news of his discovery spreading from chair to chair. But he was feeling extremely faint and disoriented.

“Nicolas!” the proprietor exclaimed. “You must have a seat. Let me get you a beer. I will cook you some *quiso*.”

Nicolas fell to the floor before anyone could reach him. He awoke hours later, chilled and sick. Most of the townspeople were gathered around him. They had moved his bed into the cantina where it was warm and he could be watched over. A pig was being slaughtered in his honor to commemorate his discovery. Roberto Diaz had cooked *quiso* for him and had it sitting beside his bed. Most everyone in the village was there, caring for him and waiting for him to speak.

“The vein is large,” Nicolas finally wheezed out. “Larger than any I’ve seen.”

Then he slipped back into unconsciousness.

The villagers were overjoyed. They brought him more food and drink. Roberto Diaz offered him a permanent place in his home. The young men who stood on the corner wanted to be his employees and work in his mine. The old women lit a candle to the Virgin in thanks and prayed for his recovery. And Maria Hernandez, the old widow, offered him her hand in marriage and hovered over him greedily.

But Nicolas, awakening now and again, was feeling no hunger. He had no thoughts of marriage or working his find. His chest weighed heavily upon him. His breathing was labored and the mucus that filled his lungs caused him to cough frequently. Sometimes he shivered uncontrollably; his entire body trembling.

Two days past and his condition degenerated. The townspeople brought him *caldo*, teas, and ointments. The ancient women prayed for him and performed healing rituals at his side. More candles were lit to the Virgin. A dozen rosaries were

were chanted. But Nicholas lay pale and wheezing. He did not eat nor did he drink the teas.

“He’s going to die,” Roberto Diaz concluded. “He will not live to see another day.” Then, looking around at the people who filled the room: “We must get him to tell us where the mine is.”

But Nicolas said nothing. No matter who asked, no matter what was offered, he said nothing. It was not that he was too weak to speak, but that he chose not to speak.

“Tell us where your mine is *Viejo*,” the people demanded. “It will be of no use to you now. You are dying old fool. Let your friends live well.”

He heard others vow to follow his tracks into the mountains and ransack his adobe in hopes of finding a map. But Nicolas did not care. He knew that life was being drawn from him and he knew he kept no such maps. Within hours his breath became faint. The voices of those around him, harsh and angered, grew distant. The light in his eyes faded, and he smiled, thinking of the rain that washed away his tracks and of the two elephant trees, whose fat trunks and numerous tapering branches hide the crevice from the rocks below. Then he drowsed off into what seemed to him the most comfortable and satisfying sleep he had ever known.



Frank Scozzari lives in Nipomo, California, a small town on the central coast. He is an avid traveller and once climbed Mt. Kilimanjaro, the highest point in Africa. His short stories have previously appeared in various literary journals including *The Kenyan Review*, *The South Dakota Review*, *Pacific Review*, *Roanoke Review*, *Reed Magazine*, and many others. He has been twice nominated for the *Pushcart Prize*, and has received various literary awards including winner of the National Writers Association Short Story Contest.

# SUBMISSIONS

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Name this file using the following convention: [Poetry/Short Fiction] - [Author] - [Title, Title]

Example:

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