Two Cities Review is an online review featuring quality fiction, nonfiction, and poetry. Our editors are:

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Letter from the Editors

Dear readers,

Summer is upon us once again, with its long light and brilliant sun. For many, summer is a time for renewal and, here at Two Cities, that's what we are up to as well. We're making some changes in our issue and podcast schedule that we think will improve the quality and reliability of the product we share with you. Stay tuned on our website for more information on those changes.

Meanwhile, our writers this issue are exploring love, nature, and the passage of time in many different ways. We've chosen many prose poems and short short stories this issue, which offer glimpses into different worlds and points of view. Summer is fleeting and so are many of the works in this issue, but we hope they will leave their mark on you as they have on us. We are also thrilled with the series of genre-defying works scattered throughout this issue - make sure you read between the lines!

Happy reading!

Blair Hurley & Olivia Tandon
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Dusk

John Hicks

Nearly dark when I got home from work. On the deck, a young raccoon was draining the hummingbird feeder, his hind paws on the rail, the long fingers tilting it so the sugar water ran down the side to his tongue. Seeing me, he ran along the rail, front legs hurrying to stay ahead of hind ones. Quick leap onto the tree, he scrambled head-first to the ground, black claws scratching his departure. He disappeared downslope into the darkening trees of the watershed. Further down, two Barred Owls called back and forth. They always sound muffled--like a mystic figure invoking spirits through a cloak-draped forearm. A hummingbird buzzed me as I lifted the feeder from its hook; impossible to see it against the shadows. A doe watched from the wildflowers where they edge out from the trees. I went to the kitchen for an apple, but when I returned, she was moving off, parting the fireflies in the undergrowth. So, I ate it and watched the sun dip beyond the far ridge, backlighting the trees like teeth in a comb. As it withdrew, the cicadas went silent. Then the birds. Even the breeze in the pines. It was like the momentary space an audience gives when the curtain goes up.

And I’m in a rowboat on San Diego Bay. I’m sunburned and thirsty, have an oar in each blistered hand, and my butt’s sore from the board seat. It’s late. I’m sixteen, and don’t want to head in, to surrender this independence, oblivious to my family’s concern. By
myself for a day, I find rowing mindless enough that the day slips from my shoulders. I’m enjoying not being responsible; no thought about where I’m going; safe within the bay. The sun is setting over Point Loma, shadow pouring over the near shore. I rest the oars, water from their tips drops into ripples that flatten as they slip away. This is the first time I hear it: No gulls shrieking, no bus engines or car horns. Not even children playing on the sand. For a short time, the world holds its breath. I think no one has ever noticed this before. I lean forward, waiting for something significant to happen. But the city exhales: mothers call their children, buses pull away from curbs, a light changes and traffic starts. Darkness moves across the Bay, across the city, and all I know is there are things invisible in my everyday.

I left the apple core for the raccoon to find. Went in.
At Breakfast

Joseph D. Milosch

After working six days a week for four months, Leo was half way through the highway project on the California and Nevada State line. It was 10 am when he arrived home. Turning off the ignition, he recalled that as a young man, he drove home nightly. Nearing retirement, he found that he could no longer stay awake on the daily drive home. Therefore, he alternated the days he stayed in a motel with the days he drove home.

He didn’t like staying in a motel for two or three nights during the week, nor did he like the effect that working far away had on his 30-year marriage. This was on his mind as he drove and fought sleep. When he had pulled over for a nap, his worries about his home-life prevented him from sleeping.

He rubbed to eyes to remove the dryness caused by his fatigue before he lifted his night bag out of the rear bed of his sky-blue pickup. Walking towards his house, he heard a Mexican crooner singing Mi Prieta Linda and smiled because it was his wife’s cooking song.

Pausing at the side door, he listened to his wife singing and smelled her cooking. Entering the house through the laundry room door, he set his bag on the washer and turned left to walk into the kitchen’s doorway. His wife, Alma, stood in front of the oven, grilling serrano chilies.

Besides the comal was a frying pan full of chorizo, papas, and cebolla. “Deme un besso,” he said, and she tilted her head and
offered her cheek. Kissing her, he smelled her hair, which had
cloaked itself in the odors of breakfast. He touched her long brown
hair, which was so dark it looked black under the kitchen light.

She had tied it back in a ponytail, and below the long silver
feathers dangling from her ears, a few gray hairs curled on her neck.
Her shoulders were exposed by the wide collar of her dress with its
lime leaf pattern.

Pouring coffee into his black cup with a chipped handle, he sat
at the kitchen table. Tacked on the wall, the church calendar
marked the days he’d been gone. “It doesn’t get any better than
this,” he said to his wife, who was loading their plates. Sitting down,
Alma held his hand, and he said grace.

“Do you like seeing me only on Saturday?” she said.
“No,” Leo answered, shaking his head. He felt too tired to argue
and hoped that his silence would disperse her anger.

“What am I to you?” Alma asked.

“Everything.”

“Don’t lie to me.”

“Coming home to you makes me the luckiest man I know.”

“Don’t lie to me!”

“Why don’t you believe me?”

“Because I know you.”

“I’m not lying,” he said.

“Do you think we’ll be together in the next life?”

“I don’t know,” he answered, trying to avoid the things he had
said in previous arguments.

“Am I ugly?” she asked.
Wondering how she balanced her uncertainty about his love with the vastness of her love for him, he said, “You’re the prettiest woman west of the Mississippi.”

“Be serious. You spend so little time with me now. Do you think you’ll spend more time with me when I’m dead?”

Stirring the salsa into his chorizo con papas, he thought because she’s been fighting cancer for 15 years, she had the upper hand.

“All I’m asking is for you to be with me while I’m still alive. I want to spend time with you now.”

She wouldn’t let him take her hand and rub her knuckles. He stared at his food, ashamed to look her in the eyes because he knew in 30 hours he would leave for work and not see her for another week.

He would come home, of course, but she would be asleep when he arrived. When he left at dawn, she would be asleep. Then, there were the nights he slept in a motel.

“You don’t know me anymore,” she said, “Do you know my favorite color?”

That was her trick question. The answer had multiple choices. When they first married, her favorite color was yellow. The color of the morning flower on a cactus.

Her first cancer diagnosis changed her favorite color to the blue found on the Madonna’s cloak in their church. When her cancer reappeared, her favorite color became the shade of the tree leaves above her father’s grave.

Sipping his coffee, he looked at the calendar’s picture of a California Mission. Below the Spanish word for Sunday, Domingo,
was written 1030 mass and Leo leaves at 530. She angered him when she insinuated that he wanted to work out of town.

That anger supplemented his anger with the California traffic that he fought to come home. Also, he was angry at always working far away. He was tired and angry and wanted to say, “Just let me eat in peace.”

He considered saying that they both wished to be together; unfortunately, work kept getting in the way, but that was a dead-end comment. Placing his cup on the table, he looked at her and said. “You’re right. I don’t know your favorite color, but my favorite color is brown, the shade that matches your skin.”

Alma looked at him and drew the edge of her hand across her eyes as she quoted his Irish cousin, “You’ve got the blarney clear up to here.” They ate in silence for a while. Rolling her tortilla in the palm of her hand, she said, “Hurry up and eat so you can shower and sleep. When you get up you can buy some beer. I’m going to make tacos.”

“Okay,” he said and reached for her hand. When she allowed him to hold it and to kiss the back of it, he knew he wasn’t quite out of the cold, but the ice between them was beginning to melt.
When I Try to Meditation on a Plane & Instead Imagine...

*Mimi Plevin-Foust*

someone pulling open the emergency exit, sucking me out as I grab onto the door frame— then whip away, perhaps still buckled to my seat with other hapless fliers hurtling through sheer freezing blue toward the cloud cover’s endless Arctic below....

Would I unbuckle from my seat and stretch out like a hawk or sky diver spread-eagled in happy freefall like all my dreams of flying, controlling my descent like a glider, phone-keys-ID’s dropping away as I pray to every angel and archangel for my perfect rescue, preferably plunging right into a band of handsome paratroopers who grab me into their star formation, then break apart to hold me close as their chutes explode open overhead, allowing me to enjoy sailing
through the heavens in the arms of a devilishly good-looking airman to land in an open field of soft alfalfa with hardly a scratch?

Or, do I stay buckled in to ride that airplane seat down to a breathtaking water landing, my seat skiing across some large unfrozen lake, my legs pointed straight ahead to avoid drag, until, soaking wet but unharmed, I gently glide to a bobbing halt near two curious swans, the whole skid live-streamed by amazed joggers on shore?

Of course, I’ve left out the logical end to my story when I slam into whatever I happen to hit—ground, trees, power lines—ripping my soul free from its shattered body—wiser—in that I at last know what a person thinks about when hurtling to their certain death and whether that moment comes before or exactly when she meets the ground.
Last night, I ate wild boar for the first time at the home of my friends Pierre and Christine. We sat on their terrace overlooking a hillside of vineyards lush green at the end of June. As the sun set, we had to put our sunglasses back on and hide behind a pillar. Five minutes, Pierre said, and the sun will disappear. No clouds willing to filter out the sun against all that blue surround. The colors here—the old painters loved them. It may have been five minutes in French time.

Pierre had showered and was ready to eat for a change. Usually, he shakes my thin hand with his thick one, or if he is too dirty, he offers his forearm for me to grab, then runs in for a shower. He works hard in the vines. He is a man of the earth who can tell where and when it's going to rain, contradicting all available signs to us watching dark clouds hover, listening to the low thunder rumble. Knows where the wind is coming from and why and all things visibly invisible.

Where did you get the wild boar? I asked.

Christine said it's a long story, then told us that story: a man in a nearby village has healing powers in his hands—particularly his thumbs. Nothing to do with Jesus. Once, he saw a cow moving awkwardly, favoring one shoulder. The man ran his thumbs down into the flesh of the cow until it moved normally again. The news spread through the village, and neighbors soon began dropping in, saying touch me the way you touched the cow. He did. He relieves
pain, stiffness, pressure. People wait quietly on a bench outside his tiny house.

The man refuses payment. He has no training in chiropractory. The word spread to other villages. Since he refuses money, the lame and aching bring gifts. The countryside has been overrun with wild boar, and the farmers all hunt them. The man cannot refuse all the meat. He redistributes it to those who visit him. He gave a chunk to Christine. They were waiting for a special occasion. They are old friends of twenty years. For our visit, Pierre pulled the meat out of his giant freezer, where he keeps such things.

Restaurants can't serve wild boar. The government inspectors won't allow it. The idea of sharing the meat, a ritual here in these small villages. The howling of hunting dogs thickens the air in season after the grape harvest. The braying of hounds carries miles through this clear blue sky.

Roasted with gravy, accompanied by fresh vegetables. We sighed on the terrace as the sun dropped below the village on the hill. Juice of wild boar around our mouths, wiped with tissues Pierre handed around, in lieu of napkins. The soft waft as the tissues pulled out of the box after the cicadas kicked back for the night. I was skeptical at first, Christine said. Then she pointed to her back and lifted her thumbs to mime the man's actions. She told us the name of the nearby village, but I'm not telling you. The man is 89 but the signs point to clear skies ahead, a steady tailwind.

When Pierre offers you his forearm, it's a gift. He expects nothing in return. Happiness is the sun setting on a good meal and
good story. The massive, shaggy beast reduced to stew, overshadowed by an old man with magic thumbs.

You might be skeptical, as I was. Christine was speaking French, of course, so I might have missed something in translation or time travel. But I don't think so.
She Came Over on the Mayflower

Jim Daniels

My grandmother moved in with us when I was seven. Broke, she'd come back to Detroit from Arizona on a train. A Mayflower moving truck arrived the next week with a yellow box twice my size that contained her life like one of the Reader's Digest condensed books she read. She pulled out some clothes for her dresser in the room she'd share with my sister, then the box sat for years like an upright double-wide coffin in the corner of the basement. My father put it on bricks to save from the occasional flooding. We used to climb in the box that smelled old like my grandmother, to hide in or to dream of going somewhere far. We never went anywhere that was not in the palm of Michigan's hand. All we knew of Arizona was the petrified wood she handed us in tiny beds of cotton as gifts when she arrived. We saw cactuses only in cartoons. She never talked about what happened out there housekeeping in a convent. My grandfather died before I was born. She'd gone out west with a lady friend, then came back alone and lived the rest of her life in my sister's room in a space curtained off that was as big as that box laid flat. She died when I was twenty-one years old, and I got drunk in that basement at her wake. When my mother had had my dog put down one day while I was at school, I barely shrugged, then headed off to my job at the party store, then after work to dry-hump my girlfriend in a way that was remarkably similar to my dog humping my leg during his glory years. My sister cried as hard as she cried when Elvis died, which was remarkably hard. I wonder now about
my grandmother's friend Hilda and what broke down out in the desert. If grandma kept any pictures, they weren't in that box. She collected rosaries and kept a heating pad on her back every night and sat on her bad watching a tiny portable TV with an ear jack so she could crank up the volume without disturbing my sister—the last of the five kids, the only girl. We called her Little Grandma as she got littler, her brittle bones hunching her into nothing. To have a long life reduced to one Mayflower Moving box. Whenever I see one of their trucks, I fold into myself in shame for leaving her in that lonely box all those years, making fun of her farts, just like the dog's. Old, and I'm one of them now. Put down. Put to sleep. Take me home, she said, and we didn't know where to take her. You know the rest. How one day the water rose too high and ruined everything.
The Mojave River

John Brantingham

Out here the gods play
their games with lost wanderers,
the river appearing now

out of a muddy hole like bruised faith
and disappearing again
in a mile.

It threads its way in and out
of the surface
during the long dry months,

and hiking these desert paths, I wonder
how many people walked
over the Mojave River

just ten feet above the water
that would have saved them.
I wonder

if any of them just gave up here,
sat down and died
not truly understanding

how cruelly twisted
the gods they worshipped
could be.
Contributors

John Brantingham is Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Park’s first poet laureate. His work has been featured in hundreds of magazines and The Best Small Fictions 2016. He has ten books of poetry and fiction including A Sublime and Tragic Dance. He teaches at Mt. San Antonio College.

Jim Daniels' recent books include Rowing Inland and Street Calligraphy. His forthcoming books include his next collection of short fiction, The Perp Walk, and his coedited anthology, R E S P E C T: The Poetry of Detroit Music, both to be published in 2019 by Michigan State University Press.

Chris Gavaler is an associate professor of English at W&L University, where he serves as comics editor of Shenandoah. He has published two novels: School for Tricksters (SMU 2011) and Pretend I’m Not Here (HarperCollins 2002); and three books on comics: On the Origin of Superheroes (Iowa 2015), Superhero Comics (Bloomsbury 2017), and Superhero Thought Experiments (with Nathaniel Goldberg, Iowa 2019). His sequential art appears in Redivider, Split Lip, The Ilanot Review, Aquifer, Hair Trigger 2.0, Sonder Review, and Sequentials.
**John Hicks** is a narrative poet whose work has been published or accepted for publication by: Valparaiso Poetry Review, I-70 Review, Ekphrastic Review, Glint Literary Journal, Midnight Circus, Panorama, Mojave River Review, and others. He writes among the wild horse bands of northern New Mexico.

**Joe Milosch** graduated from San Diego State University. His poetry has appeared in various magazines. He has multiple nominations for the Pushcart and received the Hackney Award for Literature. His books are The Lost Pilgrimage Poems and Landscape of a Hummingbird.

Over her career, **Mimi Plevin-Foust** has been a poet, glass artist, screenwriter and filmmaker. Her poems and articles have been published by Carve Magazine, LearnVest/Forbes.com, POZ Magazine, Willow Review, and more. She lives in Cleveland, Ohio and recently won the Gordon Square Review Poetry Contest. Learn more at mimiplevinfoust.com.

**Edward Michael Supranowicz** has a graduate background in painting and printmaking. He is also a published poet. He grew up on a small farm in Appalachia.