

Stephen Dobyns
In a Row

The mailman handing me a letter,
he paid a little. My daughter's

third grade teacher, the electrician
putting a light over my back door:

they paid as well. The woman at the bank
who cashes my check. She paid a part of it.

The typist in my office, the janitor
sweeping the floor—they paid some too.

The movie star paid for it. The nurse,
the nun, the saint, they all paid for it—

a photograph from Central America,
six children lying neatly in a row.

One day I was teaching or I sold
a book review or I gave a lecture

and some of the money came to me
and some rolled off into the world,

but it was still my money, the result
of my labor, each coin still had my name

printed across it, and I went on living,
passing my days in a box with a tight lid.

But elsewhere, skulking through tall grass,
a dozen men approached a village. It was hot;

the men made no noise. See that one's cap,
see the button on that other man's shirt,

* * *

hear the click of the cartridge as it slides
into its chamber, see the handkerchief

which that man uses to wipe his brow—
I paid for that one, that one belongs to me.

Carrie Fountain
The Jungle

In motherhood I begin
to celebrate my own

smallest accomplishments,
as when I wake to find

I've slept through the night
and I feel a little healed

because sleeping is something
I didn't learn how to do until

I was an adult and had to read
a book about it because, I've

always liked to joke, I was
raised by wolves. I was raised

by wolves was, in fact, the very
joke I made in explaining

to a fellow mom as the children's
theater went dark that, like my own

young son, I was seeing *The Jungle*
Book for the first time. I don't

even know what it's about, I said.
I was sort of raised by wolves,

I said and laughed, and then
the curtain went up and I was

shocked, of course, to find
The Jungle Book is about a boy

who was raised by wolves,
and I am shocked again now,

having just googled it, to find
the number one query

associated with Rudyard
Kipling is: *Is the Jungle Book*

a real story? People are dumb
is what I was thinking, I admit,

when I read that, but then
I clicked and clicked and found

that—oh my god—*The Jungle
Book* is based on the story

of a feral boy found running
on all fours alongside a wolf

in the Indian jungle, which is
funny to me because *feral*

is the word that has always come
to mind when I think of the boys

I grew up with: those feral boys
who moved through the world

with the ease afforded to those
who didn't give two shits

about anything, who'd empty
beer cans in seconds, wrap cars

around poles, all the while joking
about fucking each other's

mothers. They were feral
in the desert shooting guns out

by the airport. They were feral
on their skateboards in the Whata-

burger parking lot. They were feral
because they were allowed

to be, and eventually we'd all
get in trouble for what they'd been

doing, even us girls who—what did

we do all that time while the boys
were fighting and spitting
and calling us whores? I don't
know. We were talking to each
other, I guess, which is how we
became human. But no—no.
Those boys weren't feral. Those boys
were typical. They'd been born
knowing the world would be theirs
long after they'd grown bored
of nihilism and turned their attention
to capital, became men, became man-
kind, the kind of men who'd ruin
something if it meant they got to
keep it, who'd kill something
if it meant they could see it up close,
maintain the illusion of having
owned it, having earned it, even,
who'd track a boy and a wolf
through the jungle for days until
finally they had them trapped
inside their own den. When those
men found they couldn't lure
the boy out with words, they forced
him out with smoke. And when
the boy finally stepped out into
the sunlight those men captured
him, bound him, and when the wolf
who was the boy's mother came
following close behind, the way,
at intermission, I followed my own

son, who is by now too old
to come with me into the women's

room, to the very threshold
of the men's room door—when she
came out behind him, they shot her.

Tommye Blount
Phonophobia

Body cam footage, the crackle and chirp of it anyway, I'm within earshot—I know what is about to happen

again; click the news site's window closed; open my window to geese barking a path across the man-made pond,

the pond plopped near a quiet suburban lane. One flops over, pops up with a spray of grass in its beak. It turns its bearded head away

to the road's new pitch—an ice cream truck blares the white noise of an old American song. The tune whips the air

in my mouth into vanilla soft serve. Once, back in Detroit, my brother sent me out to shout for the Mister Softee truck.

Two cones. "So I said: *Little Brother, where is the other cone? You should have two,*" he always starts and upon hearing the beat,

I chime in with, "So then I said: *I had two but yours went splat on the ground.* I just started slurping away on the other cone."

None of this ever truly rings a bell for me, I never remember yet want to remember, so I rattle off the learned script,

so that he can laugh, then I can laugh harder, which makes him laugh even harder until we both

bark and crack up with tears streaming down our faces, we are so happy then: the guffaws, the chuckles,

just one big snicker, we can't stop laughing, we laugh until we can't breathe, you'd think we are dying.

Naomi Shihab Nye
Gate A-4

Wandering around the Albuquerque Airport Terminal, after learning my flight had been delayed four hours, I heard an announcement: "If anyone in the vicinity of Gate A-4 understands any Arabic, please come to the gate immediately."

Well—one pauses these days. Gate A-4 was my own gate. I went there.

An older woman in full traditional Palestinian embroidered dress, just like my grandma wore, was crumpled to the floor, wailing. "Help," said the flight agent. "Talk to her. What is her problem? We told her the flight was going to be late and she did this."

I stooped to put my arm around the woman and spoke haltingly. "Shu-dow-a, Shu-bid-uck Habibti? Stani schway, Min fadlick, Shu-bit-se-wee?" The minute she heard any words she knew, however poorly used, she stopped crying. She thought the flight had been cancelled entirely. She needed to be in El Paso for major medical treatment the next day. I said, "No, we're fine, you'll get there, just later, who is picking you up? Let's call him."

We called her son, I spoke with him in English. I told him I would stay with his mother till we got on the plane and ride next to her. She talked to him. Then we called her other sons just for the fun of it. Then we called my dad and he and she spoke for a while in Arabic and found out of course they had ten shared friends. Then I thought just for the heck of it why not call some Palestinian poets I know and let them chat with her? This all took up two hours.

She was laughing a lot by then. Telling of her life, patting my knee, answering questions. She had pulled a sack of homemade *mamool* cookies—little powdered sugar crumbly mounds stuffed with dates and nuts—from her bag—and was offering them to all the women at the gate. To my amazement, not a single woman declined one. It was like a sacrament. The traveler from Argentina, the mom from California, the lovely woman from Laredo—we were all covered with the same powdered sugar. And smiling. There is no better cookie.

And then the airline broke out free apple juice from huge coolers and two little girls from our flight ran around serving it and they were covered with powdered sugar, too. And I noticed my new best friend—by now we were holding hands—had a potted plant poking out of her bag, some medicinal thing, with green furry leaves. Such an old country tradition. Always carry a plant. Always stay rooted to somewhere.

And I looked around that gate of late and weary ones and I thought, This is the world I want to live in. The shared world. Not a single person in that gate—once the crying of confusion stopped—seemed apprehensive about any other person. They took the cookies. I wanted to hug all those other women, too.

This can still happen anywhere. Not everything is lost.