

Volume XV~ July 2015

Torrid Literature Journal

Untamed Creative Voices

Featured Interview:

Jim Landwehr

Featured Poets:

Roy Bentley | Barbara McGaw | And Many More!

Must Read Fiction:

"The Ultimate Good Samaritan" by Philip Goldberg

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Torrid Literature Journal - Volume XV Untamed Creative Voices

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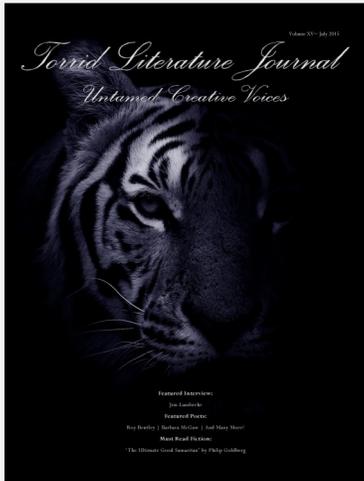
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CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

All members of our team will be listed on the Masthead section of our website. In addition, members of our team will gain valuable experience while making an impact on the literary community. If you plan to apply for a position, please keep in mind that your time commitment will vary depending on your position and the project you are working on. However, please plan to spend a minimum of 2 hours a week with a 6 month to 1 year commitment to the position. Everyone on our team will need to be familiar with the products and services we provide, as this is the best way for people to understand our mission for the culture of literature and art.

All positions can be fulfilled remotely unless otherwise noted.

We're currently accepting applications for several blogging positions until they are filled. We're looking for bloggers who will create literary content for our blog. Successful candidates will be expected to create at least one post per quarter, although more is encouraged.

Minimum length of participation is 12 months. Please take this into account before applying.

Questions? Please send an email to jobs@tlpublishing.org. Please visit http://torridliterature.com/Careers_Opportunities.html for more information.

FROM THE EDITOR

One of the interesting aspects of a literary journal is the way different voices collide to create a beautiful cohesive publication that speaks boldly and loudly. It's like a roar that can't be ignored because words have power. The writing process in general is empowering. It brings a writer into close contact with his primal voice that is raw and unfiltered.

If we continue to dig deeper we'll see that inside every artist's work is the truth that he's trying to express. This truth is the weight that an artist bears and it is heavy. An experience, dream, or desire has pushed him towards a specific realization and now he must communicate that message to others. Whether it's to share a laugh, tear, or some other special moment, writers are charged with taking their internal voice seriously because not creating art is like trying to cage an animal that wants freedom.

With the *Torrid Literature Journal – Volume XV Untamed Creative Voices*, our aim is the same as it was with the last fourteen volumes. We want to reveal the power and beauty of artistic expression among emerging and established writers of all ages. Even though our purpose remains the same, there is nothing ordinary about this publication.

Each writer is unique and built differently. Their writing style carries a distinctive signature embedded beneath the surface. It's why literary works by different authors are never the same. Even if they touch on the same topic, each literary piece will still affect readers in a different way. It's like baking or cooking. Let's take restaurant chefs for example. Two chefs at different restaurants may specialize in the same type of cuisine but each one has their own set of recipes though. If they both make a pound cake, more likely than not, each one will have a different taste. Each chef uses their own measure of ingredients. They've put a lot of time into gathering the right mixture of ingredients together because they want to give a unique taste to their creation.

The same tactic applies to writers. There's form, technique, style, tone, and voice to consider, among many other literary ingredients. As writers develop their skills and hone their voice, their resulting work will evolve as well. In addition, as writers grow, they're learning to embrace their natural gift. It's not a matter of which writer is great or which one isn't. It's a matter of taste and style. It's about serving up something that's desirable to readers because writers know that they can quench the reader's hunger.

With that being said, one question lingers. What do you desire? We thrive on diversity so think of the *Torrid Literature Journal* as a restaurant that serves up delectable menu options to suit your creative tastes. The poems and short stories in this issue focus on relatable topics that will give you confirmation, relief, and the simple enjoyment of knowing you're not alone with regards to the various highs and lows of life.

Speaking of life, it can truly feel like a wilderness. At times, it's easy to get lost or take a wrong turn. We hope the literary material within our pages will provide you with illumination for your own life and the situations you face. To start off this issue, we have an exciting interview with author Jim Landwehr from Waukesha, Wisconsin. The poems and short stories that follow reflect on various moments of time that will deepen your appreciation for life.

As always though, our journal isn't the only project that readers can turn to for inspiration. In between releases, we've been busy with other projects that have called for our attention. One of our most exciting projects has been our blog, which is seeing a jump in activity. We've shared contributor poems and thought provoking interviews with various figures in the literary industry. Make sure you follow our blog so you don't miss out on the exciting content that we share with our readers.

We're also in the middle of compiling poems for our second Christian Anthology, *The Effects of Grace*. This book will be available to the public later this year. We're very excited about this release. If you enjoyed, *Enter the Gateway*, then you will love our second Christian title to be published under our Gateway Literature imprint. Our desire is to share poems of hope, inspiration, and encouragement from a Christian perspective.

In addition to this, there was another Camp NaNoWriMo writing session during the month of April. I always find it exciting to partake in this challenge. It gives me a renewed sense of passion for writing. There are so many components to a well written story. I can humbly admit that I have a deep level of respect for authors who cross over the finish line and complete this goal. Another Camp NaNoWriMo writing session is taking place this month. If you're interested in writing a novel or if you're looking to add another one to your list, then I personally encourage you to participate in these writing sessions.

Lately, the days have been heavy. I believe that everyone has a story to tell. There's so much to write and speak about. As a writer, I can say that it hurts to keep it all inside. Not speaking creatively is akin to not breathing. As writers, we know that we catch what people often miss and we can speak in a way that many are unable to. We speak for those who can't. As such, it's a requirement that we maintain a specific mixture of humility and confidence. We must be confident in our ability and humble in the manner in which we speak. Whether your literary work speaks concerning topics that affect you directly or indirectly, I hope you find the strength and confidence necessary to speak your truth.

Your truth is your voice. It is not something that needs to be watered down. It is not something that should be taken lightly either. Whether you have been gifted with the ability to provide laughter in your stories, hope for romantics, or encouragement for sufferers, it doesn't matter. Embrace the beauty that is you because there will never be another replica or replacement. You are an original which makes your work all the more important. Let your raw, untamed voice shine through your work. Embrace the freedom of artistic creativity. We all need art.

Be you. Be blessed. Be torrid.

Sincerely,

Alice Saunders

Follow me on Twitter:
[@lyricaltempest](#)

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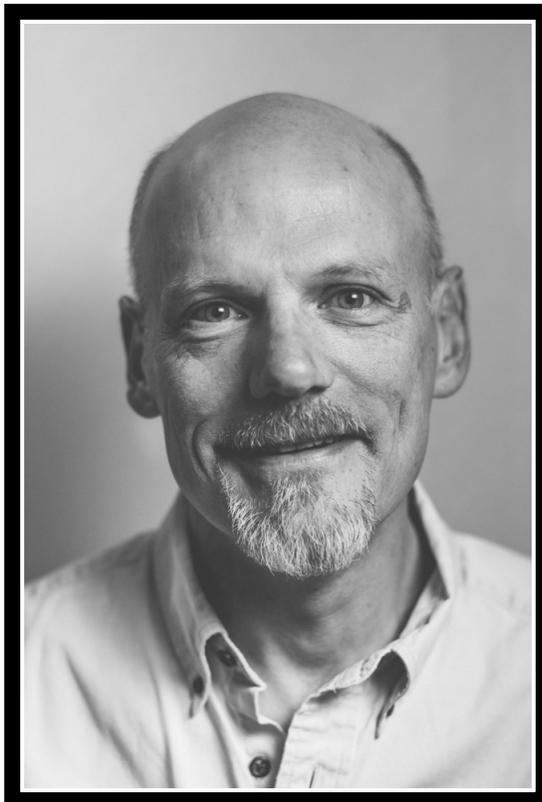
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1 ON 1: JIM LANDWEHR

By Alice Saunders



Would you please tell us about yourself and your work?

I have always loved writing, but about 6 years ago I joined a writing studio, AllWriters Workplace and Workshop, and began taking my writing seriously. I started with creative nonfiction and then branched into poetry. My memoir *Dirty Shirt: A Boundary Waters Memoir* was published in June of 2014, fulfilling a lifelong dream of mine. Then, on March 31st of 2015 my poetry collection, *Written Life*, was released by eLectio Publishing, fulfilling a second dream of mine. It's been a wild ride. Great fun.

When did you first discover your passion for writing?

When I was in fourth grade I created little short stories on ½ sheets of paper. All of my stories had a moral to them for some reason, but I determined then that it was something I really enjoyed doing.

What is your creative regimen? How often do you write?

I live by the concept of “anchor time.” This is the premise that every week I set aside 2+ hours on Saturday afternoon to write at the library or a coffee shop. This time is sacred and I make sure it happens regularly. Then, any time during the week over and above this that I get in is a bonus. I also blog twice a week, which insures that my writing is fresh. Don't get me wrong, sometimes blogging

can be a drag, but I always hit twice a week.

Do you have a day job as well?

I live and work in Waukesha, Wisconsin which is just outside of Milwaukee. My day job is as a Geographic Information Systems Analyst for Waukesha County. It is a bit like Google maps at the local level. It keeps the lights on and the creditors at bay.

Is there any particular author or book that influenced you in any way either growing up or as an adult?

There were several really. As a kid, I loved the humor of Patrick F. McManus and Erma Bombeck, which explains the humorous

“Usually by the time I’m ready to submit something, I hate it so bad it’s almost like someone else wrote it. I had to send *Dirty Shirt* to its room for 6 months because it had become my problem child.”

thread throughout *Dirty Shirt* and much of my poetry. Later, I was turned on to the beats, in particular Richard Brautigan, who I couldn’t get enough of. His work is so unconventional. And finally, Kurt Vonnegut has to be my all-time favorite. Dark humor with incredible wit and character development. He makes me want to take up smoking Pall Malls.

What themes or topics do you like to discuss through your art?

Written Life is comprised of ten different themes, including Home, Love, Religion, Pets, Death, etc. I think this particular collection will have broad appeal because it addresses many facets of our broken, beautiful lives. It takes a healthy happy look at life’s joy and a sober look at its sorrows. The pitch that sums up what’s in it best reads “Introspection and humor, joy and sorrow, murder and pyromania are all fair game in this life; this *Written Life*”

Where do you draw inspiration from to create your poems?

I walk through each day with my eyes wide open for inspiration. Sometimes I see it in a beautiful fall tree, other times in the innocence of my dog’s face, other times in my kids. It’s everywhere if you’re open to it. That’s what makes writers a bit different or even odd. Ha!

You’ve recently released your first poetry collection, *Written Life*. Was this book self-published or was it picked up by a publisher?

My publisher eLectio Publishing was kind enough to squeeze it into their schedule this year. They treat their authors as a family and wanted to back my collection in part because of the success of my first book. Now, to be fair, I’m not keen on self-publishing, only because I feel there’s no gatekeeper there. It’s a free for all and I think quality suffers. I’ll probably lose a few followers having said this, but it’s something I’ve become kind of passionate about.

How did you get connected with this publisher?

When I was ready to submit, I went online and sent my manuscript to 20 different small presses. Then, when I got a rejection, I submitted it to another, so I had 20 out there at all times. After 11 rejections, eLectio expressed an interest. They are a Christian publisher whose policy is not exclusively Christian books, but certainly “clean” books; books without a lot of gore, cursing, and sexual situations. *Dirty Shirt* fit the bill, as does *Written Life*.

What is this book about? Why should readers buy it?

The poems are about life; about all facets of

life, (including death, which is a part of life, Ha!). I’ve had people say to me, “I don’t usually like poetry, but I like your poetry.” What a great compliment! Part of my style is to make it readable and relatable. People should buy it because it will make you laugh and cry inside the same “theme.”

With *Written Life*, what message did you want to get across to readers?

That life, with all of its fears, downfalls, setbacks and hardships still has an overwhelming amount of love, joy, happiness and serenity in it if you look for it.

How long did it take to complete this poetry collection?

I’ve been writing these poems for six years. Many were previously published in other journals and magazines, including *Torrid Literature Journal*.

Can you tell us about your challenges in getting your first book published?

As I said, I got 11 rejections before my first acceptance. It was funny because the two presses I thought would be sure to love my book, were the first two to reject it. That hurt. But over time, you develop thick skin. Rejections fueled my efforts to submit elsewhere. It only took me about four months to get accepted. It takes some people years, so I was lucky.

What advice would you give to poets who are looking to publish their first poetry collection?

Rather than going for numbers, whittle it down to only quality poems. The original number of poems I intended for my collection was 100. After I weeded out the mediocre, I narrowed it down to sixty something. I thought, if I don't think this poem is really good, why would someone else? Good advice.

If you had to go back and do it all over, is there any aspect of your book that you would change?

Not really. I'm ecstatic about the whole thing. Like I said, it's a dream fulfilled.

How do you plan to market your work? What avenues do you believe will work best for your genre?

Dirty Shirt was an education in marketing for me. Promotion is a drag, but a vital part of any books success. I plan on hitting up libraries and bookstores primarily, but will try and get into the book festivals around the state too. I've got a couple of radio interviews set up too, which are always fun. Poetry is a bit of a different animal than a book-length memoir. I'm sure I'll learn some things along the way.

Can you describe one of your favorite poems in *Written Life*? Why does this poem stand out more than the others?

Probably my all-time favorite is "The start of a beautiful friendship." It tells the story of my courtship with my wife, built around the Bogie/Bacall relationship.

What inspired you to write this poem?

We were both from different states in a long-distance relationship and decided to meet in a neutral city one weekend. It was magical, but it was also...Cleveland.

What is the hardest part of writing for you?

Silencing the Inner Critic. Usually by the time I'm ready to submit something, I hate it so bad it's almost like someone else wrote it. I had to send *Dirty Shirt* to its room for 6 months because it had become my problem child. Ha!

What's the best thing about being a writer?

Having someone say "I LOVED your book," or "I love your blog." It validates that maybe I'm not so crummy after all. Take that, Inner Critic!

How do you deal with writer's block? What is your advice?

I don't struggle with block that much. I think part of what helps this is having the ability to switch to poetry if the nonfiction isn't coming, and vice versa.

What do you like to do when you're not writing?

I love fishing, biking, kayaking and pretty much anything outdoors. It is during this time that I can re-connect with my inner voice and quiet things down a bit. I love to read too, but don't have the time for it like I would like, in part because I'm writing/promoting so much. Ugh!

What books are you reading now?

Ten Swords, by Lynn Carol Austin a colleague in AllWriters. I just finished Michael Perry's Young Adult novel, *The Scavengers*.

What books would you recommend to readers?

I have a Books By the Bed column that outlines some good reads at:
<http://www.wantedtobewriters.com/2014/08/books-by-jim-landwehrs-bed/>

If you were writing a book about your life, what would the title be?

Between the Lines. Because I've lived my life between the lines for the most part. This is not always a good thing, but it's the path I've taken...mostly.

What has been the toughest criticism given to you as a writer? What has been the best compliment?

A guy once told me that my *Dirty Shirt* would never sell because there was no conflict. Well, two years later, I was published, while he self-pubbed. The best compliment was, "Your book made me laugh and cry, sometimes on the same page."

Can you share with us some of your goals for this year?

To continue to promote these two books, get a couple more anthology short stories accepted, and start shaping up my next book.

What motto, quote, or saying do you live by? Why?

My brother, who recently passed away from cancer at 47, always said "Live life to the fullest." His death crushed me, but his legacy was for me to learn to live everyday like it was my last. Live life to the fullest!

Do you have any upcoming projects, tours, events, or announcements that you would like to share with our readers?

One of my long-range projects is to take one of my Uncle Jack's books and re-write every other chapter and try and get it published. He's deceased, but when he was alive, he wrote two books but couldn't get them published. I thought it would be really cool to take one of them, re-write every other chapter, adding some action, and publish it as a co-authored novel, thereby fulfilling his dream posthumously. I'm really jazzed about it, but it's a ways off yet.

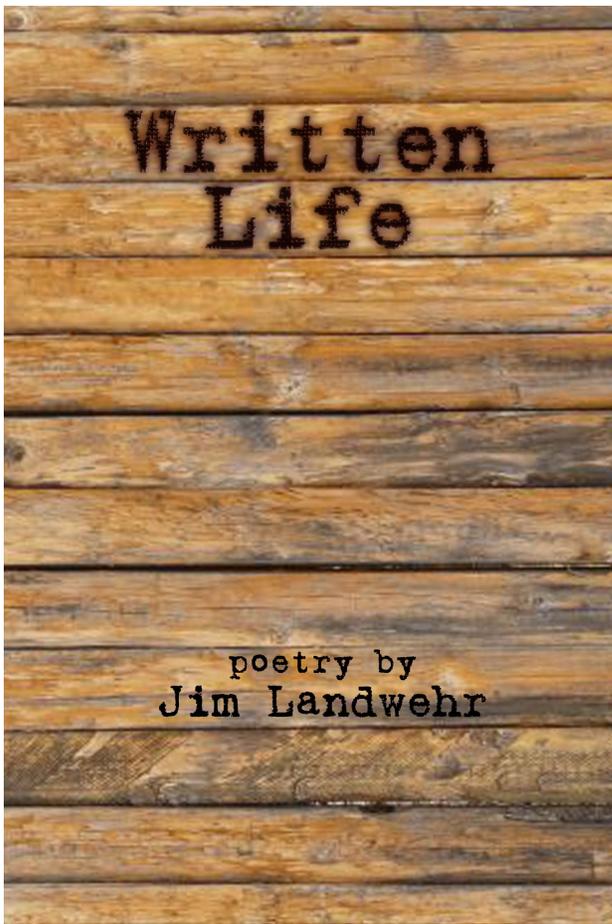
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Thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview. What final thought and/or message would you like to leave with our readers?

Thank you again for having me on your blog. I really love TLJ's content and the covers are always spectacular!

Parting thoughts: Poetry makes everyone a better writer. It makes the world a better, more understandable place. It heals. It is as important as all the other genres.



Written Life

Author: Jim Landwehr

Description:

Written Life takes a whimsical swing at poetic conventions as it delves into the intricacies of Midwestern life in the twenty-first century. It asks the hard questions, like, God, who are you? Death, when will you come? Dog, have you been let out lately? Introspection and humor, joy and sorrow, murder and pyromania are all fair game in this life; this *Written Life*.

Publisher: eLectio Publishing, Little Elm, TX

Purchase Link: <http://www.electiopublishing.com>

Price: Paperback - \$10.99, eBook \$4.99

ISBN: 978-1-63213-094-5

Dirty Shirt: A Boundary Waters Memoir

Author: Jim Landwehr

Description:

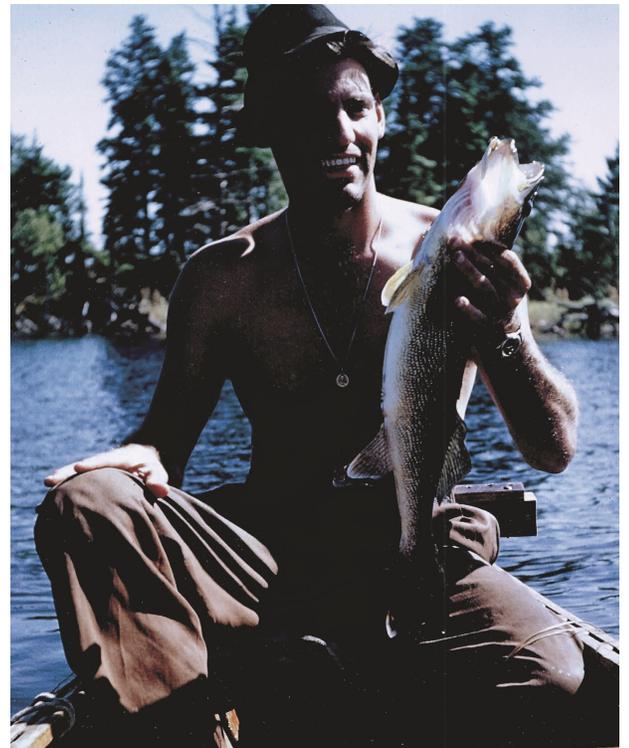
Jim Landwehr and his brothers pursue their love of the outdoors by tackling some of the country's most remote terrain, the Boundary Waters Canoe Area. While encountering crazed loons, widow-making portages, and temperamental automobiles, they also discover more about each other and their long deceased father. In recent years, with a desire to instill their love of the area into their own children, they include them in their voyages, and the legacy continues. Their exploits are woven throughout with humor, emotion, and warmth.

Publisher: eLectio Publishing, Little Elm, TX

Purchase Link: <http://www.electiopublishing.com> | <http://amzn.com/1632130289>

Price: Paperback - \$15.44, eBook \$4.99

ISBN: 978-1632130280



DIRTY SHIRT
a boundary waters memoir
JIM LANDWEHR

ODE TO LITERATURE

PERFECT LIE-F

By Nathaniel Osborne

the war is eternal and internal and physical
between who is and should be and wants to be;
from outside anyone can come and watch
the perfect life unfolding in its beauty;
flower unfolding with pretty little petals,
showing off its vibrant life and color,
while within it hides a molten soul rife with blemishes,
smoldering in anguish from a life found unfulfilling
while seeking salvation through pretentious perfection
doomed to fail though not by fault or lack of effort
doomed by the fall which shattered innocence.
wicked scars and damaged wares
for sale to the lowest bidder are all that remains
of what once was and still is yet the
pride and beauty of the Creator
from the outside He watches in anguish
and sends poetic whispers:
I love your scars.

Nathaniel Osborne is a freelance writer and an undergraduate student. He is currently majoring in Psychology while minoring in Creative Writing. Osborne is twenty years old at this time, and he writes and reads to both escape reality and learn more about it.

Barry Yeoman was educated at Bowling Green State Univ., The Univ. of Cincinnati, and The McGregor School of Antioch Univ., in creative writing, world classics, and the humanities. He is originally from Springfield, Ohio and currently lives in London, Ohio. His work has appeared, or is forthcoming in *Red Booth Review*, *Futures Trading*, *Danse Macabre*, *Harbinger Asylum*, *Red Fez*, *Vine Leaves*, *Crack the Spine* and other print and online journals.

SURREAL POEM

By Barry Yeoman

My myth is shortchanged
at every purchase, my dwelling
clogged with the fumes of things.
The molecules stand stagnant
and growing, closing me in,

contaminating the space
of my soul. Time for
inventory and philanthropy
time for disengaging the images
of experience into the unconscious

of art. My only wish ---
to take you with me
to the land without promises,
to the bone-laden cities of awe,
to the irrigation ditches of neurosis

where the moon, hazed-in
measures itself by degree
and brackish cyclical glow.
Together we may walk
four-legged through the aroma dream

of history, or befriended
by lecherous nomads, stretch
the skull, unkind and
sand-smoothed across an endless
flow of dunes.

Liza Marshtein a college graduate from Charleston, South Carolina. She has been writing since she was eight years old.

MINDFUL

By Liza Marshtein

These are the minds that lay awake at night;
As they lay in the dark, waiting for the morning light.
Replaying and replaying,
thoughts and memories that keep relaying.

Heartbreaks, missed chances, and regret;
More thoughts they can't forget.
No's that should have just been yes,
Thought after thought, these minds are a mess.

That boy on her mind she can't forget;
Maybe if they just hadn't met.
He lies awake all night, wondering,
Even though he should be slumbering.

The scars on their hearts are like their regrets;
Their missed whimsical opportunities are their Russian Roulettes.
Safe in this round, but the gun's been triggered,
These minds pray for a game that's been rigged.

Kristiane Weeks, is a Hoosier with a passion for the arts, something that Indiana is not famous for. She has dabbled in all writing forms, but poetry and creative non-fiction are her niches. Weeks is an MA student studying Creative Writing at Indiana University in South Bend with her BA from Flagler College in St. Augustine. This poem is, more or less, an autobiography encapsulating her experiences as a Hoosier and a four-year Floridian inspired by the great Frank O'Hara.

AUTOBIOGRAPHIA LITERARIA

By Kristiane Weeks

Carl Sagan calls it *starstuff*
I call it fingered impressions into skin-
I am a little bit of everything

not just my father, dark marble
unbreakable
unbreakable me
or my mother
we have the same
Polish nose, lips, laugh
Sorry mom, but I am the bay
at the bottom of your
magmatic steep (you're a little too
volcanic for me)

I crave blueberry doughnuts,
pools in thunderstorms
Who gave me these?
Was it you who made me
horrific, "desensitized"
for thirty-years-past,
mostly Italian, blood (Oh, Argento!)

the stars still keep
me sweet, keep a smile
you can pour over pancakes
just give it a try
try to imagine you
without your surroundings
without your setting:
St. Augustine
you've made me lax
I move
I think
like your lapping bay
like your heavy summer air

Setting: Michiana
I can take the girl
out of the cornfield
I can try,
rip cornstalks out of the girl,
unearth
roots from ribcages
you can replant them anywhere
but there's nothing that
can be done
with Midwestern charm

Don't thank me,
thank Lake Effect snow
gifted from Lake Michigan
itself, thank the flatland
consuming miles
that brown mass paired
tastefully with months
of gray skies
there's hundreds of farmers
killing themselves over these colors
every year
these colors are all mine

*

I am not a farmer
but some days I wonder
if this loam isn't meant for more
than seeds and scraping hands

plant my feet,
my scarred ankle and arms
every ribboned curl on my head
take my densest tears

I push them into soil, deep
refuse to nourish them,
how are they still sprouting
What fuels them
and what fuels me
what is my profession?
I am not an academic
I am more than a shaper of sentences
I am a preserver
give me your words
I can jar them, boil them, seal tight,
watch
as I turn mere letters into
burnt lime oceans,
I am a magician

and you are my gypsy man
juggling and predicting shades
of the graying sky
and you're saying
this is just the way it is
and you're saying
I can't tell you
you won't understand

AUTOBIOGRAPHIA LITERARIA

By Kristiane Weeks

but you can tell me
because who really knows
anything
about anything
anyways?

You can tell me stars
are marshmallow fluff
aliens built today’s technology
and I will not laugh
I’m not an encyclopedia
and maybe an encyclopedia
isn’t even an encyclopedia
but maybe you
are

why I keep coming back
to you
for answers,
coming back to soak up
every yellow and red particle
emitting from you.

I want to explore
pages inside your hands
and read knowledge formed
from the golden forest
in your eyes.

So tell me seagulls are bagels
I will listen, honestly,
because your guess is as good
or better
than mine and right now
I’m guessing
you and I are going to be
comfortable
sitting under blankets together
until we figure out just what
all this is all about
And even when we don’t
exactly
figure it out
at least I know you
will move the orange juice
to the front of the fridge
after you drink from the carton
and I know this

because there’s never a glass
in the sink and the dishwasher
is full (or clean)

and at least you will know
this doesn’t bother me,
observing your shiny spectres
shuffle around me when
you’re away,
the channel turned to HLN,
the shower curtain left open,
I need to feel these movements
undisturbed.

Paul Smith writes poetry and fiction. He lives in Skokie, Illinois with his wife Flavia. Sometimes he performs poetry at an open mic in Chicago. He believes that brevity is the soul of something he read about once, and whatever that something is or was, it should be cut in half immediately.

X MARKS THE SPOT

By Paul Smith

The tree had a red X
Spraypainted
And a shrine
Three potted plants
And some papers
Waterproofed
Plus a magic marker
With ink that
Doesn't run
Of all these trees
Just this one
Along the bike path
Yet further ahead
There are more
Marked
With that red X
No shrines
And that thunder
Is so far away
The trees just shrug

Tom Montag is most recently the author of *In This Place: Selected Poems 1982-2013*, as well as *Middle Ground*, *Curlew: Home*, *Kissing Poetry's Sister*, *The Idea of the Local*, and *The Big Book of Ben Zen*. Recent poems will be found in *Hummingbird*, *Stoneboat*, *Split Rock*, *Riding Light Review*, *The Chaffin Journal*, *Foliate Oak*, *Hamilton Stone Review*, and *Digital Papercut*. He blogs as *The Middlewesterner* and serves as the Managing Editor of the Lorine Niedecker Monograph Series, *What Region?*

GO ON, FRIEND

--for Chris Halla

By Tom Montag

Sometimes, friend, we know what
lies beyond this moment

and sometimes we don't. We
wake surprised every day

when we wake and then we
are surprised when we don't.

We wander then, pushing
the darkness, looking for

what comes next. What comes next?
Those who know have gone ahead

and now you've joined them.
Don't wait for us. Don't look back.

Go on, friend. Go on ahead.

Mark Antony Rossi's poetry, fiction, creative nonfiction and photography have been published by *The Antigonish Review*, *Black Heart Review*, *Cerebrus*, *Deep South Journal*, *Ethical Spectacle*, *Flash Fiction*, *Japanophile*, *On The Rusk*, *The Journal of Poetry Therapy*, *The Magill Review*, *Sentiment Journal*, *Death Throes*, *Vine Leaves Literary Journal* and a dozen other worthy publications. He currently writes a weekly science humor column "Atom and Eve" for the online publication "*The Magill Review*."

QUESTION THE QUIET

By Mark Antony Rossi

Question the quiet.

Like kids left alone in the playroom. That silence is not golden. It is nightmarish.

Question the quiet.

Like a lover two hours late for every dinner. That tardiness is not an accident. It is garish.

Question the quiet.

When you can't hear your grandfather snore throughout the night. Hold your forbearance.

Question the quiet.

If you lose your inner voice shout to the heavens to find your faith. Clouds will grant clearance.

Question the quiet

or you will be quieted by the questions.

Michael Jerry Tupa has been creating poetry and short stories for more than 40 years -- an elusive task, indeed. Some of his works have appeared *In The Wilderness House Literary Review*, *Calliope Writers*, the *Cowboy Poetry Press*, the *Poetry Super Highway*, and others.

TWO-WAY STOP

By Michael Jerry Tupa

Midnight winds moan through naked trees,
leafless branches silhouetted
like skeleton limbs
against the moon-lit sky,
rattling in the wind-racked night.

Spreading out from the bottom of the tree --
as far as I can see --
stones sprout
from the soil,
each one etched with a lonely finger
of humanity.

Each rock is mute with the secrets of a
lifetime --
a lifetime of glowing sunsets,
dew-soaked feet,
injuries, triumphs,
love, heartbreaks,
hopes. humiliations
and glories,
condensed into two simple truths:
When Born and When Died.

I stumble out of this place
knowing someday when I again visit
this lonely acre, my stiff feet
will not touch the ground.

But will I still see the squirrels,
frozen like mourners, on overhead branches?
Will I hear bright eulogies delivered
by hidden birds,
whose wings point my inside man to another realm,
while the rest of me
stays behind in gnawing decay?

THE PATH OF NATURE

By Jeanne M Kachnij

Follow the path of nature
And you shall never de-ter
From forested trails, densely filled
With pines, aged oaks and fir

And, through this path of nature
Cast heav'nly gaze up' to the trees
Blinding, sparkling shimmers of light
That stream be-tween dense canopies

Ever-changing course of nature
Leaves give way, released unbound
Flitter-flutter, . . . as conducting
Life's con'-cert, then rest aground

"Onward," beckoning path of nature
Verdant landscapes, grass a-sway
Dance to-n-fro' in response
To wind's soothing melody

Inhale deeply, scents of nature
A waft of pine blends earthy loam
Enhanced only by trailing steps
From your climb, . . . me'-andering roam

Listen! Oh... sweet sounds of nature
Wing-ed beat, birds sing song-n-chirp
Rustling leaves, crackle of branches
Babbling waters, . . . a distant brook

Within your u-nique path of nature
Spiritual quest, pri-vate' journey
Ev'ry sense, ful-ly aroused
As life unfolds its mystery

Oh, God-given path of nature
Coaxed along His splendid ways
Where endless means are revealed
To converse with Him, . . . to give praise!

Philip Kolin has published seven collection of poems, most recently *Reading God's Handwriting* (Kaufmann Publishing, 2012); *In the Custody of Words* (Franciscan Univ. Press, 2013), and *Departures: A Collection of Poems* (just last October with Negative Capability Press). His poems have appeared in *Christianity and Literature*, *Spiritus*, *The Windhover*, *The Cresset*, *America*, *Anglican Theological Review*, *The Other Journal*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, etc.

ORIGAMI

By Philip C. Kolin

A young man, about 25 or so,
in a fuchsia seersucker suit

reclines at a café, delicately
sampling morels and tofu.

The sky that day was stubborn
refusing to move away

from grey and bantam white
no matter how long it took

to implore it otherwise;
how does one change a cloud's

mind? He hoped that all
the folded invitations he sent

to her would at least
bring one play date.

The waiter refilled his decanter
and talked about origami.

Amber Allen works in pharmacy, a stressful job lacking in creativity. Writing is her passion, and it's how she expresses herself. The part of poetry Allen likes the most is the connectivity it brings between the writer and reader, no matter which role she plays.

HOME

By Amber Allen

"I want to go home,"
She moves through life,
never actually living
anywhere outside her head.
Her mind is fully consumed
by dreams of a true home
this
mythological
place
which she's heard of
but has yet to know.
A quarter century of life
crawls by
before she notices.
The search for her home
falls
by
the
wayside,
In its place, the struggle for
mere survival.
But every night,
lying alone in her bed
as she sleepily sighs
it crosses her mind,
Where is this "home" place
Houses are not homes,
she knows this too damn well.
A thunderstorm gathers
within her soul
finally, she crashes.
A symbolic breakaway and
a
home
is
found
suddenly,
quickly,
without so much as a warning sound.
It is not realized within any dwelling,
but a much simpler place:

she thinks
while lying in her bed.
a marionette,
the fit beneath a chin,
arms she's encircled within.
It takes on a higher meaning,
a more profound definition.
And there is simply
no way, no way
she could have known,
had any premonition of the
that would so easily grow
between their two souls
and make her, for once,
"Sir, I feel at home with you,"
she sighs.
"You are," he replies.
And she knows
pushed aside.
"I want to go home."
she wonders?
until
"I can't take this hell."

home
at last,
feel whole.
it's true.

Holly Wells holds an M.A. in English Literature from Mississippi College and teaches at Hinds Community College in Raymond, Mississippi. Like many in her profession, she reads voraciously. As a fledgling writer, Wells is also interested in exploring the Truth that lies within the many paradoxes of the Christian faith.

WORDS FOR A WOUNDED FRIEND

By Holly Wells

Grasping for something meaningful
to say to you,
I have crashed into the wall
at language's periphery.
Now I pray the Word into my words
so that you might understand.
When I raise my head,
my myopic vision clears,
and I, amazed, see that the great barrier
is, in truth, a gossamer veil.
I cannot go beyond it—
not yet, at least—
so I wrap it around myself,
becoming like a child ensconced
in her grandmother's silk curtains.
Here, I straddle the line between
the Light and the dim reflection,
the Song and the dull echo.

If I speak from this place,
perhaps I can help you see
the gap—no, the canyon—
between who think you are
and who you really are—
between your perception
and the truth.
You see your scars
as terrible lingering ghosts
of wounds still gushing blood,
draining all the strength
that once was yours.

Come into this veil with me.
Open your eyes.
See your seeming scars and tremble
at your long-hidden beauty now revealed.
From the deep slashes—
evidence of evil's invasion—
streams a light so intense
that it can come only from the other side
of a darkness long endured.
Your wounds have become—have always been—
like star-strewn holes in smothering night clouds,
like radiant rips in live Lazarus's graveclothes.

So let us remember
these infrequent glimpses of Reality

that show us that this shadow-world
is not quite true—
our glimpses that long to be gazes
at eternal things unseen.

Laura Bernstein-Machlay is an instructor of creative writing and literature at The College for Creative Studies in Detroit, Michigan. Her poems and essays have been published in numerous journals including *The Michigan Quarterly Review*, *The Alaska Quarterly Review*, *The Georgia Review*, etc. She has work forthcoming in *Visions International* and *San Pedro River Review*.

MIRROR

By Laura Bernstein-Machlay

I volunteered to be keeper of the unwanted
family photos. Sepia, black and white, hand-tinted rose
spilling like autumn from shoe boxes,

from shopping bags and milk crates—the unmarried
cousins and childless aunts, strangers
whose faces gaze from decades past, all of them removed

like yellowed tape to make room in the albums.
Uncle-clowns who grin at the sky, their dancing coins
just out of reach. Our matriarch as a bride clutching her

bundle of wild flowers to her chest, the roots intact,
dirt drawing small clouds at the hem of her skirts,
Some second cousin, gray to her bones, another

pinched-faced as a bat, staring down
the throat of the camera. Lately I've taken to hanging
these photos around my house—this teenage girl

holding secrets in the twist of her smile,
this soldier stroking the shiny lip
of his rifle, his gaze wandering towards ghosts

at the edges of the picture, this child with her
tight, tight braids gleaming like starlight.
These faces disappeared

from history—I have given them a home, made them matter
again behind new frames and uncracked glass. Still
I don't think they're grateful. Sometimes I'll glance

sideways, catch them as they watch me back—their eyes
squinted, or worse, their cheeks dimpling a little
as if I'm hilarious

as I turn every lock to the click, as I pull the curtains
like splayed hands across the faces of every window
and fold down the bed clothes

just so, as I rub cream into my skin and stare past
my own dreams into theirs in the reflection
of my grandmother's silver wedding mirror.

Sharon (TJ) Parks is a student at Pensacola Christian College, where she studies Professional Writing and Education. Parks wrote "She's Laughing in English" for her two adopted, Chinese sisters who have melted her heart and crossed all language barriers with their sweet love.

SHE'S LAUGHING IN ENGLISH

By Sharon (TJ) Parks

When she speaks, she babbles, though every word clear.
She whispers it all, her memories held dear.
Her words tell me nothing, still thoughts are made clear,
Cause she's laughing in English.

When she screams, she stumbles, I can't understand.
She shouts all her anger, I can't comprehend,
But still I can listen as I hold her hand,
Cause she's crying in English.

When she really needs me, I barely know why.
I laugh at her gibberish, as I walk on by,
But soon I stop walking, and once again try,
Cause she's sighing in English.

When she talks, she fumbles, through Mandarin unknown,
She'd have me hear more, cause she feels alone;
So I take her hand, my lap now her throne,
Cause she's hugging in English.

When she tells me stories, of moments she needs,
Her little hands waving, declaring decrees.
And I'm lost in language, I let her take lead,
Cause She's walking in English.

When her voice, so broken, returns to the wall,
Her words, barely spoken, still speak of a call,
If I listen closely, I hear her heart fall,
Cause she's longing in English.

When I hear her chatter, I sometimes might wish,
To hear all her words, I think that'd be bliss,
But I'm still in awe, how words can be kissed.
Cause I'm learning new English.

Ryan W. Murphy is tucked in the hills of Arkansas, where he spends most of his time trying to find a way to hide from the heat.

IF MY LOVE FOR YOU WERE AN ANIMAL

By Ryan Murphy

It would roar with the tremendous fury of a
small creek, enraged at the thawing of spring.
Its wings would flutter weakly in the sweet
sun of Indian winters.

If discovered, it would shock
the world like a coelcanth
but we'd be in the know.

We would take it for walks
but only on the highest hilltops we could find,
lower elevations aggravate its asthma.

At night it would find its way
into our bedroom and climb
up above the bed to watch us sleep.
Lurking, waiting for a meal.

Richard Spilman is the author of two collections: *In the Night Speaking* and *Suspension*. His work has appeared in many journals, including *Poetry*, *The Southern Review*, *Image*, *American Literary Review* and *Rattle*.

LOSING TOUCH

By Richard Spilman

There are days I do not think of her,
weeks when the standard prayer
for souls of the departed on Sunday
is the only thought I muster.
No need to blame age or memory.
Sooner or later we orphan ourselves—
the ego gives birth to this sad ruin,
parentless and childless,
clutching the present like a man
lost in dreams who hears familiar
voices calling, but cannot awaken.

James Stoner earned a Masters in Liberal Studies and a Masters in Creative Writing. He is a Senior Lecturer of English at the University of Wisconsin--Milwaukee. He was a featured poet in the *The Pacific Review* and has had published other poems in *Cultural Logic*, *The Awakenings Review*, *Education Studies*, and in the poetry anthology *Silent Voices*.

PONDER A THING WITH ASTUTE AWARENESS

By James Stoner

Only when we silently ponder
a daffodil dwarf or the honey bee
and life do we pass through the gates
of existence and come into being.

Even in winter flowers blossom,
offering themselves up to us.

In our silence, when we open ourselves
up, breathe refusal out, and openness in,
we begin to shape clay like a potter,
spinning the universe our wheels:

The thing becomes a poem—
a whirling planet within an
infinite universe not bound by laws,
not by gravity or space nor time, not even language.

In the amniotic deep it is possible to breathe.
There the stone grieves and the chickadee sings
its four notes about a fully lived existence.

The attenuated openness of a curious scientist
who finds doubt.

The ineffable, the inexplicable
where words have no place.

Ponder a thing with astute awareness
and life gushes forth out of the earth,
a kind of joy emanates from each thing—
The garden, the stone, the teapot boiling over,
the unexplainable black matter, the universe
become metaphors for poet and life.
Things speak.
Deaf ears hear.
Blind eyes see.
Minds enlarges.

Phillip Farris is a communication major that spends his free time reading and/or writing. He currently resides on the island of Guam, but is originally from Tampa, Florida.

REGRET

By Phillip Farris

I have lost what was now forgotten
Years of unmemorable memories disappeared
Succumbed by my tainted desires
And faded into a dull murky dream

I have squandered away what I hold dear
Wasted by this essence of lust
Enamored by the constant contradictions
And incapable of the purest intentions

And yet, this is my reality
Based solely on my acts of indiscretion
Torn between the decisions of right and wrong
And riddled with the pain that I have yet to feel

Masked in this echoing silence
My fallacies become real
Maturing these little white lies into facts
And cloaking my imperfections to the outside world

Am I lost without her?
I whisper in the shadow of the night
Only to find my unfaithful heart plunging forward
Into the tremors of this disdained world

And sure, I will always have my delusions of happiness
Sustained by a trance we both know does not exist
Because it isn't enough just to live
Aching for the next ripple to come along

So of course I will remain in my fantasy
Concocted by my irrational thinking
Subdued entirely of the pain I have caused
And forever living this lie I built.

Robin Peroldo is a proud Florida writer who enjoys writing about nature and history. Peroldo's work has appeared in the Orlando Weekly, The Scribe (Seminole State College's student newspaper), and Revelry Literary Magazine. She was also the 2007 prize winner of the Stephen Caldwell Wright Poetry Awards in Sanford, Florida.

THE MISSED STOP

For Ruben Thomas

By Robin Peroldo

We were never friends,
but your loss reminds me to hold
hands wide against petty wallows
and snide needles of triumph.
Prejudice weighed on our scale,
rising and falling in hostile
gains and frustrated retreats.
Always together, but condemned
to miss our common ground.
Like strangers on the night train
who slept through their stop.

Christina Mengis lives with her husband Chris Mengis and her step-son Chris Jr. She loves to write about the things she sees in the world in order to help make sense of them.

ODE TO WHAT I WANT

By Christina Mengis

Ode to what I want
I want to be rich
like the woman with the loyal husband,
with the two beautiful children,
and the fulfilling job.

What do I want?
I want to be smart
like the college student, on the honor roll,
taking the hardest classes,
and passing with flying colors.

I want to be special
like the rainbow that graces
the sky with its beauty
on a partially sunny day after a light refreshing rain.

I want to be loved
like the baby that everyone wants to hold,
loves to smell,
and think is cute even when it's crying.

But what I really want
what *I* really want,
most of all,
what I really want
is to

Want
to be ME.

BED #5

By Colleen Farrelly

Her arms as thin
as the pencil I use
to fill in her chart,
eyes fixed,
glazed,
staring
at a nonexistent mobile,
waiting for the book
on the shelf
to be read to her--
to explore worlds
she'll never know--
but there's no one
here to read,
no one to be
her anchor through the storm,
for her sole caretaker
has too many beds
that need to be fed,
given their meds,
and comforted
in their last moments.

James Sutton is a graduate of Iowa's Writers Workshop. Studied with John Berryman, George Starbuck & Marvin Bell. He has published 14 books of poetry, mostly sonnets. Sutton worked as organizer, lobbyist & senior policy analyst for Iowa teachers union. He lives in Des Moines with his true wife & cat.

131. ADVICE TO THE 'LORN

By James Sutton

Do not believe that love can last & last.
It has its season; then it turns to dust.
What seemed its promise soon becomes its past.
Even a rose succumbs to fatal rust.
So dare to feel its thorns; embrace the dew
that beckons on its latticed filigree;
explore its passages; be someone who
suspends the outcome of finality.
You, too, may choose to shape your fate to'rd love,
yes, even if you wander as you play.
The rose you pass unfeelingly above
may well be gone before the end of day.
 Love while you can—before you, too, are gone.
 If you love well, such loving can't be wrong.

Justin Rose grew up in northern Wisconsin where he developed an early love of literature. He loved the classics before he could read, studying the illustrations in children's abridgements of novels like *Moby Dick*, *The Three Musketeers*, and *The Invisible Man*. As soon as he could read, he devoured dozens of such abridgements, often reading them through in a single sitting. As he grew and neared high school, he began to seek out the real versions of the abridgements that had amused him as a child. This began his love affair with written words. Rose attempted his first novel in grade school and since then has never stopped writing. He later went on to study writing in high school and currently majors in Professional Writing at Pensacola Christian College.

UNVEILED HEARTS

By Justin Rose

Yesterdays of the future lie, to warm us with their hope
As we face the misty past with dread and trembling fear.
Who knows what violence there may lie, in those dull recesses?
Who knows what truths may come to light when one's heart confesses?
Love, let me softly lay my hand upon your shaking shoulders.
Let me wipe away the tears, that wend down your white cheeks.
The air is chill. The silence, still, patters on our ears,
As we prepare to plunge into the past of painful years,
Let me say, before we start, my love will stay the same.
Divulge your guilt, divest your grief. Let me see sin's traces,
The dark behind the light I love, the shadows of your graces.
No sorrow, no sin, no hidden shame could take tomorrow's love.
So clasp my hand. Hold it fast. Outpour all the pain.
Then, as I follow, fumbling—focus lost—to form the words
To fill the vacant void that follows, focus on the memories made
In our hope-filled past. As I say what I must say and all my sins display,
Know that I've not changed. My sin, my shame, I show them now,
The stains upon my soul. But yet, as you, now see my sin,
Can you—still see our past? Lean on love's memories, my Love.
Look not to the future—hollow—heralded by my past.
Hold to the fullness of our memory and the fullness it foreshadows.
You once said you saw my soul and found it beautiful;
I once heard your heart cry out and with it fell in love.
Now, in horror, holding fast to the love you have,
Behold as I bare my broken soul and brazen blasphemies.
Together broken, we now are one—a heap of shattered shards.
You've shown yourself. I love you yet, perhaps even more.
I treasure the halves of your heart that you hold forth to me.
Dare I suppose that still you care to gather the shards of mine?
Blessed mercy, blessed love, blessed loyalty.
Come here, forget—the past's declines.
Look, see—how the future shines!

Barbara McGaw lives with her family in Freeland, at the southern edge of Michigan's northern forest. She's always written poetry, but the poems sat untended, in drawers around the house. When she retired from teaching she had the time to look at them again, reworking them until she was satisfied. Several years ago, she began to send them to literary publications. Like poets everywhere, McGaw's had her share of rejections, but her poems have found their way to publications like *Blast Furnace*, *Dark Matter*, *Foliate Oak*, *Ginosko*, *Livid Squid*, *Pudding and Stone Highway*. In 2011, her poem "A Stone Heart," was the recipient of the Abbie Copps Prize for Poetry, sponsored by Olivet College.

HART ISLAND, NEW YORK

By Barbara McGaw

The rose tint of morning sky illuminates the heads of convicts
as they unload small coffins in the unpromising pink
of sunrise. Silhouetted men are thrown in sharp relief. They move
with an odd synchronomy. Their shovels ring against earth
hard with frost. Shallow holes appear among the dried grasses.
We won't know the faces, or hear the cries of the inconvenient dead,
these poor babes dug into dirt off Long Island Sound.

*Night's cold spreads through the unheated room where
a young woman sinks into the pocket of a sprung sofa.
Her soft mouth's caught in a question; the baby's eyes are too wide
in his face. Early morning laces the window with frost, but she lingers
by the glass; her warm finger remembers a name. As stars fill their spaces
around the slivered moon, the boy lies dead in a dumpster.*

An old man with a troubled face waits on a shovel. His chin is hidden
in the orange of his prison clothes. He speaks in tired mutters;
his gloved hands hold a chugging heart. Toes numb,
he stamps his boots in the broken soil, then resumes his work
as the last babe of the morning is put to rest. His short limbs
and unfinished bones are squeezed into a slatted box.
There is no one to name him. He's buried in the dirt of this potter's field.

Roy Bentley's poem is from *Sass*, an unpublished manuscript that was named a finalist for the Louise Bogan Award from Trio House Press. Poems from the collection have found their way into *Pleiades*, *North American Review*, *Shenandoah*, *Blackbird*, *Laurel Review*, *Sou'wester*, *Guernica* and elsewhere. A prose poem from the book appeared in *The Southern Review*, Winter 2014. Bentley has won fellowships from the NEA, the Florida Division of Cultural Affairs, and the Ohio Arts Council. He has published four books: *Boy in a Boat* was published by the University of Alabama Press, *Any One Man* by Bottom Dog Books in Huron, Ohio, *The Trouble with a Short Horse in Montana* won the White Pine Press poetry award and was published by White Pine, and *Starlight Taxi*, my fourth, received the 2012 Blue Lynx Prize in Poetry and was published by Lynx House.

PARENTING

By Roy Bentley

My father had these eyes—I mean, he could look at
and through you. One afternoon in summer, and without
waking me from my third-shift slumbers, he took Charlie,
the ancient family Beagle, to the vet. Had him put to sleep.
By then, the sad animal was falling over in the flowerbed.
Soiling himself. A mutt of a dog who lived to ride in cars.
Slept in the garage. Looked out through the glass patio door
at a world of hurt he was raja of. So when I saw my father
tamp down a mound of light-colored dirt by the phone pole,
I thought what you think at twenty-six about loss. Not much.
By then, he'd finished making the ground accept something
and he dropped the shovel. Wiped his face on a t-shirt sleeve
he'd tugged out to be of use. And I can recall my mother—
the two of us going where he was standing. She called him
by name—said *Roy*—like she somehow knew better than ask.
He picked up the shovel. Looked at the spot again. I knew
as he shouldered the old tool. Started walking away from us,
from the backyard, without words. On the way to the house,
I may have imagined Dad wrapping the dog body because,
leaving the garage, I saw that the quilt from Charlie's bed
was missing. Of course what he was doing was saving me—
from seeing the light leave my dog's eyes and a glaze come
over them like impenetrable fog swallowing a car's headlights.
Like the night he coughed blood, my father. Couldn't save me
a moment longer from the facts of suffering that stay with you
like the best story about someone. Someone who had lowered
the quilt-wrapped body of a dog into a hole, a makeshift but
serviceable grave he had dug without help. Reaching down,
he told us—tearing up again—as far as arms will extend
and manage their hold to drop the body into dark gently.

Jim Landwehr's first poetry collection, *Written Life*, was released by eLectio Publishing on March 31st, 2015. He is also the author of, *Dirty Shirt: A Boundary Waters Memoir*, also from eLectio Publishing. He has non-fiction stories published in *Main Street Rag's Creatures of Habitat Anthology*, *Forge Journal*, *Boundary Waters Journal*, and others. His poetry has been featured in *Verse Wisconsin*, *Torrid Literature Journal*, *Echoes Poetry Journal*, *Wisconsin People and Ideas Magazine*, the *Wisconsin Poets Calendar*, *Off the Coast Poetry Journal*, and many others. Landwehr lives and works in Waukesha, Wisconsin with his wife Donna, and their two children Sarah and Ben.

THE GUEST HOUSE

By Jim Landwehr

We get there early
From suburban hell
To urban shelter
Plug in the electric dinner

They linger, loiter, and laugh
Eighty six souls
Down on their luck
Grateful for today

Their stories are not mine
But I listen, raptly
Eye to eye
I listen with my eyes

Tales of women
Booze, bad choices
Miscues, broken families
Metropolitan gypsies

The line forms
Paper plate china
Plastic sterling silver
Styrofoam crystal cups

After dinner
The Thank yous
And God blesses
Are all that's leftover

I come to pour milk
To lend a hand
Listen to a story
And always leave better than I came

These are my brothers.

Erren Geraud Kelly is a pushcart nominated poet based in Portland, Oregon. He has been writing for 25 years and has over 100 publications in print and online in such publications as *Hiram Poetry Review*, *Mudfish*, *Poetry Magazine* (online), *Ceremony*, *Cactus Heart*, *Similar Peaks*, *Gloom Cupboard*, *Poetry Salzburg* and other publications. His most recent publication was in *In Our Own Words*, a Generation X poetry anthology; he was also published in other anthologies such as *Fertile Ground*, *Beyond The Frontier* and other anthologies. His work can also be seen on Youtube under the "Gallery Cabaret," links. He also the author of the chapbook, *Disturbing The Peace*, on Night Ballet Press. He received his B.A. in English-Creative Writing from Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge. He loves to read and travel, having visited 45 states and Canada and Europe. The themes in his writings vary, but he has always had a soft spot for subjects and people who are not in the mainstream.

LIKE A BIRD...

By Erren Geraud Kelly

Like a bird, you give yourself freely to all
Only heaven can claim your heart, you
Remove your shoes in your home and
Instantly, blessings come forth, i
 Would find eternal blessings in a kiss
 Treasure you as a

Jigsaw puzzle piece, completing me
And I know I can only love you from afar
Maybe it's enough, in dreams
I know you'll always matter as
A sleek cat, you lie with me
 In dreams, i
Smile, no matter is it's a dream

Or true

FOR KATELYN

By Erren Geraud Kelly

After the rain, it
All looked different
The snow was washed away
And the light danced, filtering
Through windows
Your hair hung low as
Your nightshirt danced across
The room
You turned around like a hand on a
Clock
The dog picked up on
The groove
That was like the sun coming in
You and tori amos and starman
I should've taken a picture
But why bother?
Some moments shouldn't be a prisoner
To time
I don't want you to be a
Prisoner to memory
I just want to watch you
Lying next to the window
Waiting for the rain to
Come again
Listening to tori amos
Sing about the starman

Allison Grayhurst is a full member of the League of Canadian Poets. She has over 400 poems published in more than 200 international journals and anthologies. Her book *Somewhere Falling* was published by Beach Holme Publishers in 1995. Since then she has published ten other books of poetry and four collections with Edge Unlimited Publishing. Prior to the publication of *Somewhere Falling* she had a poetry book published, *Common Dream*, and four chapbooks published by The Plowman. Her poetry chapbook *The River is Blind* was published by Ottawa publisher above/ground press December 2012. Her e-chapbook *Surrogate Dharma* is pending publication by Kind of a Hurricane Press, Barometric Pressures Author Series. She lives in Toronto with her family. She also sculpts, working with clay; www.allisongrayhurst.com. Some of places her work has appeared in include *Parabola* (summer 2012); *Literary Orphans*; *Blue Fifth Review*; *South Florida Arts Journal*; *Gris-Gris*; *New Binary Press Anthology*; *The Brooklyn Voice*; *Straylight Literary Magazine*; *The Milo Review*; *Foliage Oak Literary Magazine*; *The Antigonish Review*; *Dalhousie Review*; *The New Quarterly*; *Wascana Review*; *Poetry Nottingham International*; *The Cape Rock*; *Ayris*; *Journal of Contemporary Anglo-Scandinavian Poetry*; *The Toronto Quarterly*; *Fogged Clarity*, *Boston Poetry Magazine*; *Decanto*; *White Wall Review*.

PULLED FROM THE LIFELESS WATERS

By Allison Grayhurst

I see the eyes that blow the day
from the dark throat.
I feel the voice of unhindered love
wash over my skin like fresh butter.
I hear the world calling with its drug dull
blurbs and I fade like colour in the sun,
exposed at my roots to the drain of muted sorrow.
Then I wake to the good journey
and the ruthless tearing away of burdening stuff
to touch a purity that pains like a
small girl's smile or the death of someone near.
It is new again, has left me to stand on my own
again and take the challenge to my pores,
with forgiveness everlasting and the terror
of knowing so great, so generous a love.

DEEPER LAYER OF LOVE

By Allison Grayhurst

A bird dying in the tall grass, its wing, a bent leaf
that could not re-form. In the swamp yard, another bird
balanced on the stem of a tall weed, never noticing
the voice of death. The signature of each tree against an
unobtrusive sky. The frog placed by a well-intended child
in the middle of a road. The itch under the casted arm.
What mends the snow? In this land wedged between instinct and heaven
does anything mend or know a lasting happiness other than stillness?
Elements carved like karma into a snail's brain, into the whale on fire
with symphony, into a baby, stillborn, and into its mother,
whose substance is now reduced to a wafer, fossilised by impersonal failure.
There is so little love, so little to count on but the love
that continues loving despite the not-so-hidden deformities,
despite the limitations that bind us in these ambulance beds.
Only such love that carries the gruesome ghost of each finite tale
can open the way to a new perfection, to Gods' infinity of love that sees and heals
by its seeing, by its decided effort of
continuance.

FICTION

THE ULTIMATE GOOD SAMARITAN

By Philip Goldberg

After years of struggling as a screenwriter, **Philip Goldberg** turned to short fiction writing with success. Over 35 of his short stories have appeared in both literary and small press publications including *Straylight*, *Avalon Literary Review*, *Riding Light Review* and *Foliate Oak*.

Toxic words flicked off her self-loathing tongue, echoed off ceramic bathroom tiles, and boomeranged back into Maggie Rourke's ears. Followed by one long whistling breath; then and only then did she feel ready for the day. Part of her morning ritual: showering, brushing teeth, deodorizing armpits and shouting, "I hate my life. I hate my life. I hate my life." Somehow these words helped balance her world and got her up for almost anything life vomited on her (the reek of vomit still fouled her mouth from earlier this morning).

Standing barefoot in the bathroom—soles prickly from the cold floor tiles—she stared in the mirror at her skinny body; a body that stood as a road map of her life so far. Today she needed more balance than usual. Today she had a monthly lunch appointment with her dad.

This meeting (a ritual, perhaps?) had been occurring for nearly 16 years. Since she had been 14. Since her parents had divorced. Stopped only by her stint in rehab when she had turned 19. Rehab brought on by her bad reaction (drugs: smoked, ingested and injected and then a near fatal overdose) to the divorce and the death of her mother. A bad reaction propelled by anger and sadness and stirred into her problematic brew of screwed-up genes, which had always been vying to steer her in the wrong direction (despite it all she had somehow managed to make it through college—post rehab—with only minor bumps and bruises).

Focusing on her face in the mirror: two heterochromic eyes, one bluer, the other grayer—which gave her an exotic look (guys were attracted to them)—the pouty lips, the reddish freckle smack in the center of her right cheek, Maggie navigated through the many thought-up excuses (some good, some lame) she'd conjured to miss the lunch. In the end she'd always attended as if the magnetic force of family was too strong. Or the fear of disconnecting from him was too great.

But today, she knew, was different. Today she could not miss it. "I hate..." She cut herself off.

Michael Rourke stared down into his cup of coffee, black and unsweetened as usual, as if gazing into the abyss. He drank it this way, despite knowing how the acid played havoc with his stomach. Nearing 60, more than a decade since he'd been hailed as a marketing whiz at a Fortune 500, he now made his keep as a consultant—the Gandalf of marketing some had called him. He viewed it as a great way to ease into retirement for which he wasn't quite ready. Yet Margaret made easing into anything difficult. Of his three daughters, she tested his ulcer to the max. Frustrated him the most. As he spooned his coffee (a habit), he mulled over how such a thoughtful child, such a bright girl had grown into a drifting lifeboat lost among the waves. The same tragedies had befallen his other daughters, one older, one younger than Margaret, yet they had navigated their lives, in his opinion, with far more direction. At times, he chastised himself for Margaret's rudderless existence. What example had he set? With three marriages, two divorces and numerous affairs, his personal life appeared equally off course. That her mother had died of ovarian cancer when Margaret was 18 had only casted her further adrift. Unable to come up with any positive conclusion to his thoughts, he stopped spooning, lifted the coffee cup to his lips and sipped the tepid-growing brew as a lone starling chirped incessantly outside in the backyard.

Maggie stared empty-eyed at the bedroom closet. Assorted dresses, tops, shirts hung before her, while shoes, boots and sandals huddled below. Taking it all in, she wondered why selecting what to wear for lunch with her father always seemed like solving a Rubik's cube. Outfits for bar nights never overwhelmed her so. Seeing her siblings, Kelly and Sara, never caused her this level of stress. But somehow the world transformed into a choppy sea whenever she met him. And nothing further edged her nerves than selecting her outfit.

"Oh, come on, Mags," she grumbled, "this isn't a job interview." She groaned. "A damn dress won't make him see you any differently." Yet in her heart she shrugged off this hollow statement, knowing what she wore mattered. She believed her clothes influenced his view of her; hopefully made him see she was not the blighted branch in the family tree.

Closing her eyes, she sing-songed: "Eeny, meeny, miny, moe. Catch a tiger by the toe..." She extended her finger at the closet and continued the child's nursery rhyme until: "My mother said..." For a moment, her voice wavered. Even saying the word *mother* brought on a swell of anguish. Still caused her to crumble and feel alone. Gathering herself slowly, she regained her full voice and continued: "to pick this very one and on goes you." With eyes now open and the thought of her mother, Mary fading, she stared at a sleeveless orange dress hanging in the closet. Luckily the temperature would hit 80-degrees today so she pulled it off the hangar and prepared to slip into it.

Michael headed toward his garaged Lexus, noticing Lil, his latest wife, who was working in her small vegetable garden on the side of the house, where tomatoes and green peppers were growing. He walked toward her with a slight limp—the product of a car accident years ago—as she stood to greet him. A slender woman of 45, her coral blue eyes warmed her face and made her smile look more cheerful. If only, he wondered, she had been wife number one. Unfortunately, he understood, relationships and their time and place in one’s life were so random, so incomprehensible.

He saw her eyes narrow, most likely in reaction to his dour expression. He felt her warm, moist lips on his cheek and heard her soothing voice float through his ears: “You worry too much.”

“She makes me.” His voice tightened as a screw, recalling the coiling in his gut when not long after the death of her mother Margaret had run away from home; and how he’d searched for her for two days before a tip had led him to a girl named Adriana’s house; how wretched he’d felt upon finding Margaret curled fetus-like on a rug high on pills.

Lil’s eyes grew sympathetic. “She’s going through a tough patch.” Her encouraging hand patted his arm, dragging him back into the moment. “She’s come a long way since her really dark days.”

Her comment surprised him, made by someone who had only entered the picture a few years earlier. Gazing at her, he replied: “If only . . .” slipped from his mouth as a tired sigh.

Maggie finished applying eye shadow. Reviewing her reflection in the small mirror standing on her desk, she pondered aloud: “Is it enough?” Maybe. Studying herself further, she decided: “Oh, leave it.” The Long Stem Rose lipstick she applied looked right. Feeling stuck to her desk chair, she questioned why these lunches freaked her out. Her father didn’t lecture her; he wasn’t the lecturing type. He wasn’t argumentative; he hardly raised his voice. No, it was his quiet tone of all things. His tone of being in control, of being more settled, more fixed to the ground, whether he was or wasn’t, that unmoored her. And his silences cut deep. In those quiet moments, his eyes turned judgmental; at least she saw it as such, piling up her flaws and adding to his growing mental list of her insufficiencies. Much like she had felt in rehab seated across from Dr. Phillips, the scrawny, scraggly shrink who’d always struck her as a boy swimming in men’s clothing; he’d also said little and had judged her through his eyes. How, at the time, it had so creeped her out.

Maybe a light at the end of the tunnel existed somewhere in her father’s mind (as it might have in Dr Phillips’). To her, the hope of such a glow kept her attending lunch (as it had kept her attending Dr. Phillips’ sessions). Despite all this, seeing her father today was paramount. She needed money. Needed it bad.

Standing, she ran her hands over the summery dress, smoothing it as best she could. Stared at the matching flats on her feet and nodded approval. Grabbing her purse, her car keys, she walked out of the apartment.

Inside the plush interior of the dark blue Lexus, Michael felt as if he wasn’t driving. More like gliding. To him, the world outside, silenced by the soundproof windows, whispered past. This comforted him, created a sanctuary, a womb of sorts. Coltrane be-bopped off the Sirius radio and out through the Bose speakers, laying deconstructed rifts on the cool conditioned air. Drumming his fingers on the steering wheel, he knew Maggie needed money. Everything she’d said in their last phone conversation had underscored it. Her voice had dropped to conspiratorial levels where secrets were shared and serious issues were held just outside the forum of discussion. As Trane’s sax sent dissected musical notes in all directions, Michael cut away all her possible needs for the money and honed in on the one that made the most sense to him. He’d given her money for this before, two previous times in fact. Constantly he fought the urge to do so. Denying her would be good medicine, the proper lesson. Make her deal with her decisions. But he couldn’t. After all these years he still held the uncomfortable weight of abandoning her when he’d left her mother. He didn’t feel this way with his other daughters; those relationships seemed even-keeled. Only with Margaret did this sense of guilt float to the surface. He viewed her as the needy child. At times, he had questioned whether he needed a needy daughter in his life. Whether he could not function without one. This chewed inside him whenever he saw her. With this agonizing thought, he drove into the restaurant parking lot.

Queasiness spread across Maggie as she drove. The reasons for it stacked up: the meeting ahead, the money needed, the reason for the money. If she had been a gambler, she wasn’t confident of the certainty on which bet was the soundest. All played as possible winners. Shaking her head, she wondered how her life had become such a mess; the stuff of soap operas she’d watched as a young teen. How could she have strayed so far from what she’d expected of her life when she’d been a girl? Jessie—was their breakup her fault? Sometimes she questioned whether or not she’d been aping her father’s history of ill-fated intimate relationships. She couldn’t say. Nor could she comprehend her firing from the great job at the tech start-up she had nailed after graduation. Even graduate school had hit a dead end. Overwhelmed, she’d fled it as if a refugee fleeing a war-torn country. Like always, she considered that this was who she was. Imperfect to a fault, she lived as if life was a series of collisions—drugs, parental divorce, the consequences of unprotected sex, maternal death—each painful but never killing her.

She saw the restaurant’s neon sign ahead. A six-foot red fork moving up and down over an equally large cyan plate. The cheesy sign recalled the signage of Blue Moon (a woman’s bare red neon leg kicking away from a blue neon crescent moon), where she had earned cash

as a stripper and pole dancer. Her stomach tightened at images of her grinding body against fully clothed men, who'd slipped dollars in her garter or bikini panties. The catcalls, the sexual banter filled her ears and she lowered her eyes, overwhelmed with anger and embarrassment. She had been 18 and had needed drug money. It was easy cash: a lot of it too. Thankfully, no one in her family knew about this, nor did Doctor Phillips. It stayed hidden in the bottom of a closet like some unwanted pair of shoes.

Looking up, she caught sight of her father; he always arrived first. She steadied herself; flushed the dark memories down her mental toilet.

Parking, her lips slipped into a nervous smile. She knew he would give her the money without asking why. Hand her the check without a word. She would experience his disappointment in having done so. Little she could do. Deny the check, which she couldn't, and he'd force it on her. Turn around and drive away, and he'd get in his car and follow her. She wanted no scene. Nothing was to be gained by one. No, she knew that their relationship was fueled by guilt, and powered by anxiety. Over the years, it had developed a life of its own, whether she liked it or not.

Looking out the windshield, she saw him staring right at her. A smile? Or a grim grin? She couldn't say. To her, either appeared correct.

Uneasiness, like a few Martinis, slogged through her veins (she could sure use one right now). Gulping air into her lungs, and then purging it as she couldn't hold it any longer, she ground her teeth and exited the car.

An hour or so later, Michael stood alone on the parking lot pavement, watching her car peel into traffic and out of sight. He thought about how skinny she'd become: toothpick thin. Something he'd address next time. Then he recalled their parting conversation.

"Try," he'd whispered in her ear, embracing her.

Stepping back, her face had worn a puzzled look as she'd mumbled: "I do, dad." Her eyes widened. "I do."

Sizing her up, he'd doubted it. "Try harder," he pleaded. "Please." Familiar words, he had told himself them many times in his hard-driving days as the marketing miracle worker. Endless hours fueled by cocaine, speed, pot. Secret rehab stays masked as long business trips or solo vacations. Even when he had found her high at that girl's house, he'd felt conflicted. His duty as a dad battled his demons. It wrecked his gut, brought forth cold sweat to his pores and probably helped form his ulcer. To this day she knew none of it. She also didn't know what finally forced him to clean up his act: her. Seeing what she was doing to herself during her own dark days broke his heart and served as his catalyst of change.

More than the divorce, the death of her mother, even more than her neediness, this was why he did what he did for Margaret. The result: He had grown into the role of the benevolent bystander who'd always jumped into the wreckage, rescuing her, always cleaning her up and placing her back on the road again—the ultimate Good Samaritan.

To anyone else, this would have been the opportune time for tears. Not him. Steeling himself against this emotion as raw as sun burnt flesh, he stared up at the animated neon fork and plate, wondering when he'd come clean about all this to her. Another opportunity missed, it wasn't the first, nor would it be the last. He ran a hand through his thinning hair. A pained smile crept across his lips. Anyway, he'd given her the money. The act always made him feel good. And that counted for something. Didn't it?

With some clouds floating above, he headed to his car, spying two starlings flapping across the sky, chirping in unison.

Driving in her car, Maggie replayed their parting scene. It left a sour taste in her mouth. Their words were, if not the same, a rift on the same theme. More than that, the lunch had consisted of her talking, him listening and judging her with his eyes. Crap, she thought, she didn't even find the salmon tasty. Hardly ate it.

She glanced at her pocketbook on the passenger seat; in it was the check. More money than she'd needed. Always more. She let loose a long sigh, wondering whether playing the role of rescuer, redeemer was the role of a lifetime for him. Some masked, caped superhero that swept down at the last moment and saved the damsel in distress, namely her. Whether it was this image of her father or not, the toxicity had evaporated for the moment. A red light stopped her. Staring at the fiery orb, she wondered why her father had kept his secret life secret. Lil had confided it to her around a year ago (Lil was good that way). At first, she'd felt angry, betrayed. But once she had ridden out the initial pain (and it had hurt), she didn't feel so fucked up (although she still found herself chanting her morning mantra). She didn't get his silence. After all, wouldn't it be a relief to tell her? She shrugged her shoulders.

And then the light turned green.

With hours to go before her shift started at the bar, she faced the road ahead, not sure where she was heading once the light turned green.

THE BIG MOMENT

By Douglas Cole

Douglas Cole's work has appeared in *The Chicago Quarterly Review*, *Red Rock Review*, and *Midwest Quarterly*. More work is available online in *The Adirondack Review*, *Salt River Review*, and *Avatar Review*, as well as recorded stories in *Bound Off* and *The Baltimore Review*. He has published two collections of poetry, *Western Dream*, through Finishing Line Press, *Interstate*, through Night Ballet Press, as well as a novella, *Ghost*, through Blue Cubicle Press. He received the Leslie Hunt Memorial Prize in Poetry; the Best of Poetry Award from Clapboard House; and First Prize in the "Picture Worth 500 Words" from Tattoo Highway. He was recently the featured poet in Poetry Quarterly. He is currently on the faculty at Seattle Central College.

I cleaned up after work on Wednesday, shaved, and put on the only sport jacket I owned, which didn't quite fit right. It hung on me like a loose robe, like I was a kid wearing his dad's hand-me-downs. I had picked it up in a thrift shop, and it was the best I could find, but now I had this weird feeling and obsessive thought that the suit might have once belonged to the old wino who had lived and died in my apartment, as though he still inhabited the walls and by some gravitational influence I was tumbling into his old life-pattern, even to the point of going out and finding his old clothes.

I picked up a bottle of white wine, and red just in case, a little pint for later, and a loaf of fresh French bread, and I drove the old familiar road feeling more like a ghost than ever. The jumping nerves were firing in my stomach. I parked a little ways up the street and smoked a cigarette to calm down. I kept flipping through the radio stations, looking for the right song to propel me into the evening, but I couldn't find one so I shut it off. Then the thought occurred to me, I can go in, or I can leave. It is a simple choice. And the effect of that choice on all of our lives might be infinitesimal. Then again, who knows the different pathways small acts travel through the fabric of other people's lives, the choices not even considered yet made, the butterfly launching whole lifetimes of regret or even, perhaps, happiness? Now could be one of those moments. And I would never know. Not really. Or, the Big Moment might have occurred long ago, long before even this particular life, setting in motion things I just can't see or change. And crazy possibilities hover just ahead, the unseen door waiting to open, weird dreams we inflate and fly into. How can I know but to go through as I am, pushed by some invisible force or imagining it just the same? Enough.

I climbed out of the car and strode up to the house, the yard I had once worked, though it looked better now (not a good sign for my return), and I knocked on the back door, forgetting the front because I had never used it when I lived here.

Carol answered the door, and I couldn't say a word. "Hey, come in, come in," she said and embraced me, and I felt the urge of an old life I could never re-inhabit. There were tears in her eyes and I felt my own eyes begin to burn, and we looked at each other for a long moment across an unbridgeable gulf of time. She didn't look any older, though her red hair was cut short, just above the shoulders. She wore a light blue dress I had never seen before. She was beautiful. But I was acutely looking for something, evidence that she still knew my life, because she felt now like someone I had never seen before, which made me feel like I no longer existed.

"It's all right, it's all right," I said, and I smiled. I went in, and the kitchen was full of the rich smell of a meal that could save a man's life. I looked around at the pictures on the walls, the family, their family, and I straightened out the arms and the front of my uncomfortable jacket. The place was brighter, freshly painted, better again than I remembered. But I felt none of my old presence there.

"Come on," she said, and she took my arm and led me into the living room.

They were all there, the whole family, dressed I could tell for company. Up close now I could really see them, the faces of my two children, and I was overcome by a wave of vertigo. I could barely stay afoot. I was shot back within myself, and I had a hard time pulling out of a close focus on their faces and playing my role, or finding my role, and hearing them and knowing how to act. And I was introduced like a stranger: "Here's your father," standing there like a partially materialized ghost.

"Hello, Stephen," I said, shaking his hand like my own from a past I had yet to live. He was nervous with a terse smile and a narrow gaze, hanging back, trying to figure this stranger into his world. And I met my daughter, shaking hands with her. I was aware of the desire to hold her coming out of a self I thought long dead, but I knew I couldn't do that. I wanted so much, but I was too far away now.

I shook hands with Don. He seemed like a nice man, though he dressed like my grandfather, wearing a golf shirt and belted shorts, white socks and leather sandals. But I felt no animosity towards him, feeling so dispossessed of my past that I knew my claim on this life had run out. We all sat down, waded through some awkward silences. Carol brought me a beer.

"So what kind of work are you doing?" Don asked me, trying in his way to head up his family, present himself, and this was the only question he could think to ask.

"Well, Don, I work in a place that does some parts manufacturing for planes. We're out by the airport. It's a nice little operation. I help manage the painting division." I looked around the room at the unfamiliar furniture, a seascape painting with bad water, more photographs of the family at summer get-aways and birthday parties.

"Is this for commercial planes?"

"Excuse me?"

"The parts? Are they for commercial planes?"

"No, small planes. Private. Some military."

"Management, then."

"Sort of," I said. Stephen wouldn't return my glance but kept his gaze firmly toward the window. I caught Melissa's eyes a few times, and a brief little smile.

Another awkward silence. I drank half my beer, then stopped.

"Would you like to see some pictures?" Melissa said.

"Sure."

She got up and went out of the room.

"He doesn't want to see those," Stephen shouted after her. "All she draws are fish."

She came back in with a scatter of crayon drawings, all of fish. They were quite good. "These are wonderful," I said. "I love them. You like fish, don't you?"

"That's my guardian spirit," she said.

I looked through the pictures of green-sided salmon with white spots, all of them in motion, all of them drawn inside flowing blue lines of water.

"You can have one," she said.

"You know," I said. "My brother is an artist."

"He is?"

"Yes. He would love these."

"You can take one for him, too."

"Okay," I said, and I picked out two pictures, folded them carefully, and put them into my pocket.

"Say," Stephen said, "Didn't I see you the other day?"

"What was that?" I said.

"You were walking on the street. I was playing basketball. That was you, wasn't it?"

"Yeah, actually, it was," I said. I knew I couldn't lie, and if I started now who knows where it would end.

"So you've been by the house," Don said. What an expression of worry he had, and I saw him direct a cool look at Carol which was attached, I was sure, to a whole session of conversations they had had in which I figured prominently and not as the hero.

"You should have stopped," Stephen said.

"Yeah?"

"Sure. I would have introduced you to my friends."

Don laughed and so did Carol, a little, but it was a strange, nervous laughter. Then silence. Then Stephen said, "So what was prison like?"

"Stephen," Carol said, "Give him a break."

"No. No, that's all right," I said, and I could tell Don wasn't too happy about the way the conversation was going. "It's a good question." And I looked at Stephen directly. "I'll tell ya. It's a terrible, terrible place. You never want to go there."

"Believe me, I won't," Stephen said. And then, as if he couldn't help himself, as though he'd had this thought a long time and finally found a way to let it out, he said, "I definitely don't want to turn out like you."

"Stephen!" Carol said sharply.

"No, that's okay," I said, "You're right. You don't want to follow my lead. You're a smart kid. I can see that. And you know, Stephen, I made some bad choices, I admit that, and I know it hurt you guys—"

"It didn't hurt me." Stephen said. "Besides, it's a little late to start preaching, don't you think?"

"Woah," Don broke in, and I heard him say quietly to Carol, so that I wouldn't hear, though I did, "See."

"Stephen," Carol said, "What has gotten into you?"

"He's right. He's right," I said. "He's just being honest. And I respect that."

"Don't fucking try to defend me," Stephen shouted, "say you respect me!" Then all hell broke loose. Melissa went to the couch and sat down and started rocking back and forth.

"That's it, Stephen," Carol said, "I can't believe it."

"Well what the hell is he doing here? He can't come in and pretend to be our father."

"He *is* your father."

"He is not. He's an ex-con who stopped being anybody's father a long time ago."

"Come on, Stephen," Don put in. "He hasn't done anything." But I could tell he thought differently.

"I love the way you make my point for me, Don," Stephen said, shooting a hard glare at him.

Melissa was crying. She didn't make a sound, but I saw tears going down her cheeks as she sat on the couch across from me, her hands held tightly between her knees, her pictures next to her. And behind her, on the wall, was a family portrait of the four of them, looking every bit the perfect family. There were no signs at all that I ever existed except in the face of my son who now looked at me with the purest expression of hate.

I stood up. "Look, maybe I'd better go." Don stood up, ready to show me the door.

"No wait," Carol said, holding her hand up. Then she turned back to Stephen. "I want you in your room, now!"

"What?"

"You heard me."

"No way!"

"Now!"

And he stormed off. Carol turned back to me. "I'll be back in a minute. I'm going to have a quick talk with him." Then she left,

and Don and I stood there awkwardly silent. What was there to say, now? Don tried, though. He said, "You know, it's hard for him, a kid his age. He's already becoming very independent. He doesn't even want to listen to me. It's just all the time you've been away, all the emotion he's bottled up over the years. Would you like another beer?"

"Thanks, Don, but I really should go. I didn't mean to disrupt—"

"No. No. Wait till Carol comes back."

Melissa snuffled, and I looked down at her and said, "I'm really sorry, Melissa. I didn't mean to..." a whole host of wrongs jammed up in my mind.

"It's not your fault," she said. "He's an asshole. You didn't do anything." I knew she wasn't supposed to swear, but who would scold her now? "Please," she said, "Don't go."

"What about Stephen?" I said.

"He doesn't mean it," she said. "I know." She looked at me, and her face held some secret.

"You really want me to stay?"

"Yes," she said, and when I looked into her eyes I almost broke down, seeing there such a depth of sadness that all I had ever suffered or thought I had suffered seemed like fantasy and self-pity.

"All right," I said. "I'll stay."

I sat back down, and Don brought me another beer. I could barely drink it. Then Carol came back in. And I felt so bad because she looked so distressed, but Melissa had put a hold on me so deep, even sitting across the room, I couldn't move.

"Well," Carol said, "I think we should eat. The food's about ready."

"What about Stephen?" Don asked.

"He'll come out when he's ready."

And so we sat down to an enormous meal of baked chicken and fresh steamed broccoli and sautéed apples and wild rice. Don opened one of the bottles of wine I had brought and lit a dining candle, and then I recognized the linen tablecloth and napkins Carol had received from her parents for our wedding. I looked at her, and she smiled. I wondered if Don knew. The food was delicious, but I had to force myself to eat. My stomach was a rock-hard knot.

"So," Carol finally said, "How's your family? How's your brother, Joe, doing? You mentioned him, earlier. That got me wondering. I can't remember the last time I saw him. Way before the kids were born..."

I said, "Well, I haven't seen him for a while. He's living somewhere in the valley, but he doesn't have a phone and we haven't really stayed in contact much."

"Why doesn't he have a phone?" Melissa asked. "Everybody has a phone."

"Well," I said, taking a big drink of wine. My face felt hot. "My brother's a strange character. He has a hard time in cities and crowded places. He's a little...unusual, I guess you could say. He's always had a strange way of seeing things, but he's good at heart. Although, there was one time...do you want to hear? I'll tell you a story about him from when we were kids."

"Yeah, I do," she said.

So I went on, "I was a bit younger than you are now, and I suppose this is kind of a cautionary tale, too, now that I think about it. Anyway...and so we were playing up in the attic of our house, and Joe found my father's rifle and it was loaded...and he pointed it at me, right, and pulled the trigger. Click! But it didn't fire. It was in perfect working condition and it was loaded, but it didn't fire. Strangest thing. And he said he knew it wouldn't fire, that he just wanted to scare me. He said he kept it from firing because he was magic. What do you think about that?"

"Wow," said Melissa, "Weren't you scared?"

"It didn't even seem real at the time," I said. "Kind of like a dream."

Don didn't look too pleased with my story, and he and Carol looked at each other for a moment with a whole host of meanings and those previous conversations passing between them even though they didn't say anything, then Carol asked me, "And your father? How's he doing?"

"He's still up north," I said. "I don't hear much from him, either. Did he ever check in on you guys? I asked him to check in on you."

"No," Carol said, smiling a little. "No, he didn't."

We ate for a while in silence. I drank some more wine, and now I could eat a little more, but I had no appetite. I heard music coming from Stephen's room, and I found myself wondering what his room looked like since my memory of it was of a little boy's room full of stuffed animals and legos and cars and posters of dinosaurs.

Melissa just watched me, smiling at me. I asked her questions about her friends and her drawings. She gave me short, nervous answers. "What grade are you in?" I asked.

"Fifth."

"What's your teacher's name?"

"Mrs. Poston."

"Is she a good teacher?"

"I guess so."

Then she asked me, "What are the people at your work like?"

"Well," I said, "There's one fellow named Raphael, and he's seven feet tall and he sings arias."

"What're arias?"

Don cut in, "It's a kind of opera music."

"Right," I said. "Opera." I stopped. What could I really tell her about myself, about my life? I took another drink of wine. I nodded. "Seven feet tall, and he sings opera."

Stephen never came out, and I said my goodbyes and got out quick and drove west to the docks and parked and breathed and took out my pint bottle and had a guzzle and looked at the dimming sky and shook my head and laughed.

I sat in my car for a while, smoking, thinking. Going back had been a mistake. I took out Melissa's drawings and looked at them for a moment and then put them in the glove box. I watched the lights of the freighters as they moved in the distant black. Stars twitched overhead. I drank the last of the little pint I had bought and tossed it in the back seat. I couldn't see myself going back to work. I couldn't see myself going back to my apartment. I suddenly remembered that I had missed my check-in with the parole officer, which put the paranoia on me, stunning me into a new awareness of my surroundings as I scanned for police cruisers. I got up and collected the bottles from the back seat and carried them over to the trash can. They made quite a clatter as I dropped them in. I looked around. A few people were standing over by the food stand, but nobody seemed to notice me. Now it was night. A streetlamp nearby glowed with a little halo of light projected on the ground beneath it. I went over to it, stepping into the halo of light. I reached into my pocket and found Thane's card. I turned it over in my hand. Then, I called. He answered. I said, "Hello, Thane? Yeah, it's me, Tom. Yeah. I'm in."

CHEKHOV'S VEGETABLE GARDEN

By Brandon Madden

Brandon T. Madden has recently been published in various undergraduate, graduate, and professional journals including *The Red Cedar Review*, *S/tick*, the *River and South Review*, *Flyover Country Review*, *Sediments Literary Arts Journal*, *Gravel Literary Journal*, *Empty Sinks Publishing*, *Write Time and Write Place*, and the *Non-Binary Review*. In addition to fiction writing, he has also published academic and political theory papers in journals including *The Transnational*. In 2011, he published his first novel, *V.S.A.* He hopes to one day become a competent writer.

The hunting rifle felt awkward and foreign in my hands as I patrolled the neighborhood with Mike. The last time I held anything similar to it was when I was ten, and my cousin Derrick brought over his birthday present: a fresh out-of-the-box B.B. rifle. He brought it over for us to try out—my mother was opposed, but my father said it would be good for me—and at the time I was excited as Derrick unscrewed the top and carefully poured the metal pellets inside. They made a calming sound similar to beads in a rain stick, but it was ensconced in metal, which made me feel off-balanced. I remember watching him cock the gun and hoist it to his shoulder, nuzzling his cheek against its wooden end. With great precision, he fired a few rounds, hitting the assortment of metal-figgie animals my mother had placed in her garden. (At the time I was thankful she wasn't watching, but looking back now, I wish she had been there to put a stop to it.) My cousin then handed me the gun and told me to try to match his shots. I can still feel the slight trembling in my hands, partly from the weight of the gun, partly from a sudden burst of nervousness that shuddered through me as Derrick's eyes honed in on mine. But as I squeezed the trigger and fired off each shot, I felt more comfortable, empowered. After the fourth shot, a squirrel jumped onto the fence. Derrick grinned and leaned forward.

"Okay, this time aim for the squirrel," he whispered.

"But won't that hurt it?" I replied as I watched the squirrel chewing on some sort of nut or seed, oblivious to the fact that its life was being debated.

"Nah, it'll probably just scare it," he replied.

There was something strange about his voice, as if it belonged to a sinister serpent stalking its prey in the camouflage of tall brush. He guided the gun until he had placed the cross hairs on the unsuspecting squirrel. I don't remember if I pulled the trigger or if he did, all I remember is watching the squirrel fall off the fence and land on its back, twitching. I don't remember what Derrick said to me as he and I approached. He might have taken delight in his kill, or, who knows, maybe even felt something like guilt. Thick crimson goo coated the grass and began to harden, and something in my brain linked it with the broken shards of cinnamon candy that my mother used to make during Christmas. And as the squirrel appendages continued to kick, spreading the blood, I repeated to myself that Christmas was on its way.

I never held another gun again, until tonight, and that fact has made me something of an enigma in the town that prides itself as the state's best hunting grounds. (That, and I'm a vegetarian.) While the city treated the opening day of hunting season as a national holiday, I would sit outside and tend my garden. Occasionally, I would look up and watch the trucks roll past with their spoils, catching a glimpse of their glassy-eyed prey. It was as if their eyes were staring aimlessly past me, trying to figure out a way to get back to the woods.

Maybe Mike noticed that I was uncomfortable—or perhaps he himself felt uncomfortable walking in silence with the town's anomaly—and let out a deep breath, releasing a long tendril of white vapor.

"It's a good night for a stroll," he said. "Thanks again for volunteering."

I wanted to point out that I actually didn't volunteer, and that we were all more or less mandated to sign up at the town hall meeting. In fact, the whole experience was everything but voluntary. Although the meeting had ostensibly been called to discuss the growing wolf problem in our town—to which I had supplied plenty of literature from work regarding how to deal humanly with the wolf population—the group had clearly decided on their course of action before the first word was spoken. And like a domesticated dog trying to join a fraternity of wild wolves, the only thing I could contribute was to add my name to the patrol duty list.

"Yeah, no problem," I said to Mike. "But to be honest, I feel kind of useless with this gun. I have next to no skills in handling it."

"Well, hopefully for your sake you don't run into the wolf."

"Hopefully."

"If I get it, I could make some jerky," he laughed. "Or maybe even a rug."

The scent of lingering leaves caught itself in the wind as it wiped past us, causing Mike and me to tuck our chins into our jackets. It continued to blow as we neared the end of the dirt road, giving us an excuse to end any second attempt at conversation—and as if by instinct, when we finally did reach the end of the road, we gave each other a nod and went opposite ways to cover more ground.

I checked to make sure Mike was out of sight before I turned around and began heading back home through the shadowy backyards of my neighbors. With some luck, if I moved cautiously enough, I would not trigger any home security motion sensors and would be able to sneak back inside, unnoticed, within a few minutes.

Crack.

I paused mid step as if frozen by a spell. I held my breath to listen closer as my eyes scanned the yard's eerie darkness.

Crack.

Crack.

Maybe it was just a squirrel or a chipmunk, I told myself as my breathing shallowly resumed. I blinked my eyes a few times and squinted to see if I could spot the creature making the sounds. In the corner of the yard was a figure that appeared to be bobbing up and down in the grass. I heard something scratching against the ground, which gave me the slightest hope that it might just be someone's dog. But as I drew closer and my eyes adjusted better to the darkness, the beast's form elongated, becoming a longer legged and bigger pawed creature than a dog. Its narrow chest stretched up from a hole in the dirt and turned to face me, sensing my presence for the first time.

It too looked like it was trapped by some enchantment as we both stood observing each other from a short distance. But what surprised me was neither its shallow breathing nor its graceful stance; it was the way its eyes honed in on the rifle, recognizing it immediately. I clutched the gun closer to me, afraid that the wolf knew its life would be in danger and was ready to make its move, but it remained still. Its eyes did not have the instinct of a killer, but rather they grew glassy, reflecting something caught between fear and the knowledge of imminent death.

"It's okay," I said to the wolf. "I'm not going to shoot you."

The wolf took its eyes off the gun, retraining its focus on me. I felt as if it was trying to read my facial expressions to judge the sincerity of my words.

"Honestly," I repeated. "I wouldn't even know how to use this if I had to. No one is going to shoot you."

"Not according to Chekhov," said the wolf.

The wolf's words broke my paralysis as I felt myself jump. My sudden movement must have had a similar effect on the wolf, for it too sprung up from its burrow.

"Excuse me?" I said as I regained my composure.

"Chekhov once said that when a gun is introduced into a story, it must go off before the story ends," replied the wolf, its voice sounding like it too was trying to regain some calm.

"I can assure you this gun isn't going to go off," I said as I placed the rifle on the ground, keeping eye contact with the wolf. "I am not Chekhov, and this is not a story."

The wolf remained skeptical. I wanted to coax it into an easier state of mind—maybe with a conversation about literature, about which the wolf evidently knew a fair amount—but this was neither the time nor the place to talk literature. (Although I did half wonder how the wolf had come across Chekhov in the woods.)

"If I were you, I would get out of here as soon as possible," I said.

"Because people want to hurt me," said the wolf.

"Because people want to hurt you."

"But I have to dig up my vegetable garden first," replied the wolf, shaking its head. "I'm already late on the harvest season, and winter is coming soon."

The wolf's words felt misplaced, causing my head to tilt and my face to scrunch in confusion.

"You have a vegetable garden?" I asked, repeating the words out loud to make sure I had understood clearly.

"Yes," he replied matter-of-factly. "I'm a vegetarian."

"No kidding. Me too," I said.

"I had a feeling. It's like I could smell it on you."

"Really?" I asked. "I didn't think dietary preferences were something you could smell on somebody."

"Maybe not smell," the wolf said as it sat down, contemplating its words. "Maybe instinct. I don't know. I just had a feeling, you know?"

I nodded, squatting on my haunches to get a better look at what the wolf had already dug up.

"So are you the only vegetarian, or are there more?" I asked.

"Only me so far," the wolf replied. "I've been trying to get the others in the pack to join, but they just shake their heads at me and run off to hunt rabbits or other prey."

The wolf paused as if testing his words, picking out the best and ripest before they left his lips.

"I've tried to explain to them the health benefits, and how this could help mend our image as wolves, but they just won't listen. A lot of times I'm left alone to gather my own food."

"Your image?" I asked as the picture of a lone wolf roamed into my mind. I could see it as a gray solitary creature in a desolate woods, and I wondered what it would look like during the winter in the off-white snow when the trees and sky were also gray.

"I've read plenty of books where we are the killers and villains," the wolf said. "It made me distraught; I've never killed a thing in my life."

I nodded, feeling empathetic. The wolf looked back down and pawed at some of the root vegetables it had dug up.

"Well, I think you're off to a good start," I said. "What vegetables have you been growing?"

"I've grown some sweet potatoes, some radishes, and carrots."

"You have quite a green thumb there," I said. "Most of my stuff all died out because of the terrible summer we had."

"Oh, it was nothing," replied the wolf bashfully. "I was hoping that I'd have a bit more herbs to collect, but the basil had a bad season and my cilantro never really took root. Damn rabbits kept eating them."

"I usually keep them inside to grow," I replied. "You know, if you want, you can come back home with me and I'll give you some of my herbs."

"Really?" the wolf said.

"Sure, I have more than I can use," I said. "It will definitely give your food more flavor, and—hey, I don't know, it might convince your friends. I can even give you a couple of other spices and recipes, maybe some cinnamon for those sweet potatoes."

"That's very kind of you," said the wolf. "I really appreciate it."

"No problem," I said, looking around to make sure no one was watching. "Just stay put, maybe even hide in that hole so no one sees you. I'll be back soon."

The wolf nodded and lowered itself deep enough to the point where only its eyes and ears could be seen poking out of the ground. I almost wanted to find some branches to canopy and camouflage it, but decided against it; I would be quick. A strange feeling came over me as I passed through the backyard and neared my house. It was the feeling that watchful eyes were upon me, tracking my movements and waiting for the right moment to apprehend and extract information from me. Perhaps this is similar to what shelterers felt during WWII when they took in refugees from Germany. My heart thudded at the thought of the city's citizen militia breaking down my door and searching through my house until they found the wolf, or evidence of my involvement. As I entered my backyard and opened the sliding door, I could hear their voices labeling me as a "wolf lover" and "traitor" to my city as they arrested and escorted me away. But still I wanted to help the wolf.

Although the house was quiet and empty, I felt wary as I walked through the living room and entered the kitchen. I couldn't shake that feeling of the city's watchful eyes, as if they had already infiltrated my house. (Maybe the television had been rewired, like the ones in 1984.) I didn't dare turn on the lights as I opened the cabinets and felt my way through, identifying the herbs by touch and scent. Strapping on a cloth knapsack that had been lying on the counter, I placed the parsley, basil, cinnamon sticks, and other spices into the bag. With each item, I felt as if I was planting the seed of a new friendship that was soon to blossom. I smiled at the thought of next year inviting the wolf over to help expand my own vegetable garden. After all, it did seem to make much better insights and instincts to growing than I did, and if we were successful in rehabilitating the image of wolves, then maybe the city and the pack could combine efforts for a community garden. I gave out a slight laugh at the thought of newspapers getting the scoop and covering the story. It would probably be as shocking as Hitler and the Jewish population reconciling and rebuilding Germany together. For the time being, however, we would have to grow our friendship under the cloak of darkness.

As I made my voyage back to the wolf's spot, I ran through excuses to explain why I was carrying around the knapsack if anyone were to stop me. Could I convince Mike or another neighbor that the best way to lure out a wolf might be through herbs and spices? I did have the authority of an environmentalist, after all. In any case, such a diversion would surely allow me to pass without losing my supplies, or at least give me enough time to warn the wolf to run. (Maybe I should plan on making an emergency shelter near my house so the wolf would have a safer place to hide.)

The wolf must have seen me approach, because it gave out a small sound of excitement and began to climb out of its hiding spot.

"I had an idea," the wolf said as it stretched its legs and began walking towards me. "I was thinking maybe next year—"

Bang.

The gunshot ripped through the night and left behind a vacuum, as if it had transformed the wolf's hole into a void that slowly began shutting down my senses. I remembered the wolf making a yelp that, to me, seemed tinted with a hint of betrayal, and I turned around to watch Mike fire off another round as the wolf darted off towards the forest. I don't remember what Mike said to me as he approached. He might have yelled at me to pick up the gun, or maybe asked if I was all right. But my eyes honed in on the dug-up vegetables that seemed to have a crimson sheen over them. I remember walking towards the void and crouching down to pick up the fruits of the wolf's labor, now splattered with a thick, sticky goo. And as my fingers brushed their skin, I smelled something like cinnamon.

DEAD ASLEEP

By Victoria Griffin

Victoria Griffin is an East Tennessee native, currently studying English and playing softball at Campbell University. Her short fiction has appeared in *The Fringe Magazine*, *Fiction 365*, and *Calliope Nerve* and is set to appear in upcoming issues of *Apeiron Review* and *Down in the Dirt Magazine*.

I crept around the corner, clumsy with sleep, unable to tell whether I had been awakened by the nightmares or the voice drifting from the kitchen, coarse from years of smoking cigarettes and commanding her children. My living brothers were asleep in the next room, and my dead brother was asleep across the street, underneath layers of soil and time—comfortable in his wooden bed. As I stepped onto the kitchen tile, I put a hand over my mouth.

The kitchen was dark, the only light the new morning rays filtering through the window, but I could just make out my mother's form, bent over the sink. Her long gray hair fell about her shoulders, and I could hear the sound of her heaving as the sour smell of vomit rolled toward me. I started to her side but was frozen when her head flew upward, like a submerged buoy breaking the surface of the water. She spun on her heels until she faced me, but her eyes were buried under layers of sleep. My startled face did not exist—the scene around her was painted by memories, made real by her dream. Her hands were on her belly, and she stood with her hips jutting forward, as though she carried a great load. I'd been told to never wake a sleepwalker, so I listened in silence as she acted out her past on an empty stage.

"You can't do this anymore."

She dropped to her knees with a grunt, her arms wrapped around her belly, her eyes facing the floor. Her body convulsed, her back heaving up and down. Again, I started to her side, but before I landed the first step she threw back her head, strands of gray hair sticking to her sweaty face.

"I won't let you do this!" I watched her trembling fingers wrap more tightly about her abdomen. "I've stayed for two years! I stayed when you drove my family away. I stayed when you broke my arm. I stayed after feeling the child inside me die—because you weren't ready for it. I stayed because I love you." Her breaths were thick and heavy between her words. "But I don't love you this much."

She cried out again and fell to her side. I could almost hear the sound of a man's boots heavy against the tile, striking her ribs, and I could nearly smell the alcohol on his breath. My mother rose from the floor, using the edge of the counter to support herself. She wore a wild expression, like an injured creature, frenzied. And she pawed her way toward the door, past where her attacker must have stood.

"You can punch me and kick me until you're blue in the face! But you will *not* touch my children. I'm leaving." Then she stopped. My breath was still in my lungs as I watched her frame, cold and silent, and the fear shading her eyes. "Put that away, Max, really. You're not going to... Max?" Her face got hard, and her hands rolled into fists. "You better go ahead and shoot me. Because that's the only way you're gonna keep me here."

Her back straightened, and her eyes narrowed. One hand still rested on her belly, empty of life for years now, and her stare locked onto the empty space just in front of me—waiting for the bite of lead in her chest.

Even through her waking sleep, I could see the flames in her eyes. I had never seen brown eyes burn that way, so hot and bright that ashes accumulated at her feet. I had never seen that strength in her bones, driving her chest toward her attacker, showing him that she could not be broken. I had never seen her so brave.

The whole house shook as the back door was opened and then tossed back into its frame. My mother's eyes took on the sharp look of consciousness and the dull, passionless reflection of her life as she was ripped from her memory-ridden sleep, and I watched her shoulders slump and her familiar manner return. The sound of drunken footsteps accompanied slurred ranting, and my mother's hand was on my shoulder whispering, "Go on to bed. Don't let your father catch you up. Hurry." And she urged me toward the safety of my bedroom.

The door closed between my parents and me. I was inside my room, but my mother was the one trapped inside her cage of a life.

I cracked the door just enough to see the blow that knocked my mother to the floor and to watch my father grab his coat and set out once again—to somewhere I hope I never go. My mother pulled herself up onto a chair, and I watched as her tears struck the wooden table, her strength buried with my brother, her fear very much a part of her world and mine.

As I closed the door, I decided that I envied my dead brother, still in his coffin. I envied his restful sleep.

THE COAL BUCKET CRADLE

By Daniel Ruefman

Daniel Ruefman's works have most recently appeared in *Mother Always Writes*, *Red Earth Review*, *Barely South Review*, *Minetta Review*, *FLARE: the Flagler Review*, *Burning-word*, *DIALOGIST*, and many others. His chapbook, *Breathe Automatic* was released in 2014 by Finishing Line Press. He currently teaches writing at the University of Wisconsin—Stout.

As the death throes of winter descended upon the Appalachian foothills, a team of mules struggled to find their footing, dragging a Hoover wagon through the mud. Atop the wagon, where the windshield of the stripped Model-A once was, Stanislaw snapped and pulled the reins in a futile attempt to find the nearly impassable lane that, like the freshly plowed fields surrounding him, seemed erased by the late spring snowfall.

“*Cholera jasna!*” Stanislaw’s Polish curse ascended over the sloppy, suctioning sound of rubber parting the muck and snow scraping against the bottom of the truck’s frame. “Up! Up!”

With a lurch, the rig pulled onto a steep drive, shored up with field stones. It rocked, and finally came to a rest between a gray-shingled farmhouse and barn imbedded in an adjacent hillside. The driver leapt down from his place and opened the door. Without a word, Richter swept from cab of the old truck and entered through the back door of the house where he was greeted by an entryway piled with boots and stained clothes inundated with the aroma of aged manure. Old coats lined the walls, some on pegs, others knotted around one another. He stomped and scraped his boots, but did not remove them before pushing through the door and into the main house.

As he crossed the threshold, he was encountered the flitting fingers of 8 children huddled around the dinner table, busy with games and needlepoint. Many of the older children paused to watch as he removed his coat and cradled it in the crook of his elbow, before breezing by instinct through the bedroom door to his right.

The moth-eaten curtains were drawn and the wick of the kerosene lamp bedside held a blue flame that was all but swallowed by the dusk. Richter covered the room in three strides, found the lamp’s knob and raised the wick to push the shadows back from the bed, revealing a woman in her thirties. Her breathing was labored, but hushed. As the light washed over her pale face, she squinted up at him.

He bent over her, peeling back the quilt and covers leaving only the single, white sheet draped over her. There, between the twin peaks of her knees, a copious amount of blood soaked through the sheet. Lifting the final cover, the crimson stain grew wider, soaking into the feather mattress that cradled her distended hips.

Wide-eyed, he repressed a gasp and glanced up at the woman’s face. Eyes closed, her head had fallen limp against her pillow, but her chest continued to rise and fall intermittently. He grabbed for his bag, retrieved a small bottle of alcohol and moved to sterilize a blade over a ceramic basin on the dresser. Across her mouth and nose, Richter placed a rag laced with chloroform and cut the nightdress, exposing the woman’s bulbous belly. With a sigh he leaned in and slowly, irreversibly dragged the blade across her exposed skin.

On the other side of the closed door, the children huddled around the table listened to the pendulum of the wall clock pushing the seconds. No sound escaped the room. Joasia, the eldest daughter, busied herself with dinner, rolling the biscuit dough out on cookie sheets, pausing occasionally to feed the iron stove in the corner. Between tasks, she bent over her sisters’ needlework, raising her eyes cautiously in the direction of the bedroom where Richter was tending to her mother.

Without warning, Richter emerged from the darkened bedroom, clutching a bloody bundle of rags, his shirt drenched, his arms still glistening with coalescing human fluids. Without raising his eyes to the children, he proceeded to the side of the stove in the corner. There, wedged between the wall and iron belly was an empty galvanized bucket, its bottom glittering black with coal-dust. He paused to consider the bundle before kneeling in the corner and with an air of finality, deposited the bundle within the cold steel.

All eyes in the room watched, but Richter gave no acknowledgement that else was there. Raising a shoulder, he dabbed his eye and wiped his nose on the one clean spot on the shoulder of his shirt. With a half-grunt, half-sigh, he pressed his hands against his knees, stood slowly, and breathed as a soldier might before battle, before vanishing once more through the door of the bedroom.

The younger children returned to their tasks, while a few of the older ones remained in their chairs, trading glances with one another and eyeing the bucket with mingled curiosity and fear of whatever now lay within. Joasia tried to distract them, setting the table for dinner, placing a plate of hot biscuits its center. One-by-one, the children reached for the plate and quietly began nibbling—all except five-year-old Bertie. She placed her embroidery on the table, toddled across the room, and bent over the bucket to get a better look at the bundle that Richter had placed there.

Joasia, drew breath as if to scold, sweeping to her sister’s side, but paused at a flicker of movement. Something poked at the fabric. Joasia knelt next to her sister, and they considered the bucket together. Just as she had convinced herself it was a trick of the light cast by the kerosene lamps on the wall, the fabric offered up another twitch and emerging from a loose seam of folds, five tiny fingers flexed and stretched.

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We encourage everyone to become familiar with the Torrid Literature Journal first by reading previous editions. This will give writers a general idea of the type of content we look for. Our submission period for the Torrid Literature Journal is year round and our response time varies depending on the volume of submissions received.

If you have any questions or concerns please contact Alice Saunders at asaunders@torridliterature.com. We look forward to the reading experience.



Dear Reader,

It's almost hard to believe that we're on our 15th volume of the Torrid Literature Journal. Nevertheless, here we are. This journey started with our initial desire to inspire readers and help writers. Today, that mission hasn't changed. In fact, our mission continues to evolve and branch off into multiple projects as we work to support and strengthen the culture of literature.

Keep in mind that our mission is not a solo effort. In addition, the publishing process can be very strenuous. Our writers, readers, supporters, and editorial team members are all key participants involved in making this mission a success. Thus, we are very familiar with what makes a journal more than just pages with ink.

That being said, we hope you enjoyed our most recent end product. Our latest release, Volume XV Untamed Creative Voices, is a beautiful reflection of what happens when writers get in touch with their craft and embrace it in its truest form. The contributing writers spoke about the world as they see it through their eyes.

We hope this issue left you feeling encouraged and ready to discover your calling. If you know your purpose, we hope this issue has renewed your passion and given you the inspiration necessary to continue honing your craft. Everyone in this world is important and you are no exception. The heart can't function without the lung. Everyone has a vital role to play. Are you playing your part to the best of your ability?

We look forward to seeing you again in Volume XVI. Be sure to subscribe to our eNewsletter to receive important updates and breaking news about our publications and fellow writers.

- Editorial Staff



“Each rock is mute with the secrets of a lifetime...” - Michael Jerry Tupa

“You once said you saw my soul and found it beautiful...” - Justin Rose

“Love while you can—before you, too, are gone...” - James Sutton

TL Publishing Group starts off Volume XIV Untamed Creative Voices with a special interview that reveals the interior scope of a writer’s mind. Jim Landwehr, a writer from Waukesha, Wisconsin and author of *Written Life*, takes readers behind the scenes of his work as he discusses the sources of his inspiration, writing tips, and much more. This interview sets the atmosphere for the rest of the publication, which contains pages of vibrant and thought provoking literature written by writers from around the world.

Literature is about stylistic expression. The contributing writers in Volume XIV use their words to carefully construct beautiful images that tell unforgettable stories that imprint upon the senses. The readers will see, touch, and experience life through someone else’s eyes. Overall, Volume XIV will leave readers in awe of the artistic power that writers yield.

The *Torrid Literature Journal* also continues its creative regimen of providing readers with literary works that ponder, discuss, and refute interesting aspects of life. This publication has an aesthetic appeal that roars with artistic freedom. Lovers of literature and creative expression will come to appreciate the way this ongoing publication continues to find a place into the hearts and minds of its readers.

Contributors: Nathaniel Osborne; Barry Yeoman; Liza Marshtein; Kristiane Weeks; Paul Smith; Tom Montag; Mark Antony Rosi; Michael Jerry Tupa; Jeanne M Kachnij; Philip C. Kolin; Amber Allen; Holly Wells; Laura Berstein-Machlay; Sharon (TJ) Parks; Ryan Murphy; Richard Spilman; James Stoner; Phillip Farris; Robin Peroldo; Christina Mengis; Collen Farrelly; James Sutton; Justin Rose; Barbara McGaw; Roy Bentley; Jim Landwehr; Erren Geraud Kelly; Allison Grayhurst; Philip Goldberg; Douglas Cole; Brandon Madden; Victoria Griffin; Daniel Ruefman



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