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TORRID LITERATURE JOURNAL

TENSION

Featured Interview:

Joanna Kurowska

Featured Poets:

Alicia Cook | James Tyler | And Many More!

Must Read Fiction:

"Local History" | By Rachel Vogel Quinn

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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.

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I love this point. Don't be mistaken, I love every aspect of the editing and publishing process, but I especially love moments such as these where I sit down to write this letter. When I get to this stage, it means several vital steps have taken place. It means we've wrapped up another issue of the *Torrid Literature Journal* and we're ready to unveil the work our phenomenal writers have created. It means we have another opportunity to show our readers what movable literature looks like. It means we have another chance to spotlight writers from around the world, of all ages and skill level. With this issue specifically, it means we have wrapped up another successful year. Therefore, we are humbled to present you with the *Torrid Literature Journal – Volume XII Tension*. This is our last volume of 2014 and it serves as a turning point as we begin to prepare for an exciting year ahead.

Furthermore, Volume XII starts off with an explosion of rich poetry that is filled with a high level of resonance that I guarantee will have you overflowing with inspiration and good energy. Each poem is as unique as the writer who created it. A good poem starts long before it is written. It starts with a feeling or thought, a memory or experience. Furthermore, readers want the words to work for them. They don't want to end a poem the same way they started it. They expect something to happen, even if they don't know what that something is. This is the duty of a writer – to make the reader feel the power behind the words. The same concept applies to fiction. We all love a good story and the ones selected for this volume will pull you into the writer's handcrafted world filled with tears, laughter, and the unsettling truth about human nature. Taken together, there is a good deal of literary material for our readers to taste and experience. Reading through our publication is similar to touring a new area, only with each poem and story you're traveling through different areas of the past, present, and future as writers share their memories, explore their current situations, and openly dream about tomorrow.

Another noteworthy feature in this issue is the announcement of our winners for our Annual Romancing the Craft of Poetry & Fiction Contest. We're very excited about this contest because it gives us another opportunity to recognize writers and award them with prizes in honor of their phenomenal talent and skill. If you're as much a fan of literature as we are then you will fall in love with this year's winning literary pieces as they capture the beautiful diversity and power of expression.

While we have a great deal of stimulating activity happening inside of this volume, we have just as much happening outside of our publication if not more. Our last issue of the year marks the start of a new Hall of Fame voting season as we prepare to make room for new inductees. Our Hall of Fame gives us the opportunity to recognize writers based on our reader's votes. In 2014 alone, quite a few writers have had their work appear in the *Torrid Literature Journal*. Which poem was your favorite? What story impacted you the most? We are asking you to tell us by casting your vote.

As we have covered in previous issues of our publication, literature has many purposes. One of the more beautiful purposes of literature is the way it provides inspiration, strength, and relief. This is the core reason we created Gateway Literature, a Christian imprint of TL Publishing Group. If you enjoyed our first Christian book, *Enter the Gateway*, then you will fall in love with our upcoming second title, *The Effects of Grace*, which will be released in August 2015. If you're interested in submitting your original unpublished work for consideration, please visit our website for specific submission guidelines. We're looking for thought provoking Christian poetry that delivers inspiration and encouragement.

If you want to witness this exchange live then you will want to attend an open mic show or poetry reading. Back in August, we hosted an open mic show of our own at The Bunker for our local community. The

show was phenomenal as people came out to join us in celebrating the arts. A variety of artists representing different genres graced our stage and blessed our audience with a diverse selection of poems, stories, songs, and other presentations. It takes a certain level boldness and humility to stand up and perform in front of an audience because it leaves the performer naked with no way to hide. Be sure to visit our website for photos and videos that capture the essence of that night.

As we prepare to close this chapter and start a new one, we want to thank you for your continued love, support, and prayers. This year has been nothing short of a powerful learning experience that has renewed our passion for literature. Each closing year we're more than ready to do it all over again. Moreover, I want to point out that I know what it feels like to follow a dream. I also know what it feels like to fall and stumble along the path to achieving victory. However, the goal is not to quit. You won't fail if you don't quit. I apply this truth to all areas of my life and I encourage you to do the same. I challenge you to live life to the fullest. Love harder, stress less, and laugh more than you have before. Follow the desires of your heart and don't let a few mishaps cause you to quit. There will be challenges, seen and unforeseen. In the end, it's all worth it, but don't be mistaken. In this life tension is a given. It can't be avoided. However, don't confuse the good with the bad. The word *tension* has many definitions. One interpretation defines tension simply as stress. Another source defines it as the act or action of stretching or the condition or degree of being stretched to stiffness¹. Bad tension can arise due to stress from certain circumstances or situations that are beyond our control. Good tension comes hand in hand with faith. It comes from trying something new that is outside of your comfort zone. Good tension comes with practice and hard work as you strive to achieve your dreams and goals. It's not supposed to be easy. You can't get to the next level or season without experiencing some form of opposition or difficulty. You must flex your faith muscle. The act of conditioning means to train. It means to become stronger and fit for a particular purpose. Whatever you are trying to achieve know that it will always remain in your reach so long as you believe in yourself and the gift within you.

Therefore, bend but don't break. Situations and circumstances don't define you and neither do your mistakes so don't let them break you. Stretch and work your faith. Athletes and performers may be gifted but like any other skill or trade, it takes time and practice in order for them to perform at their peak. Take ballerinas for example. They don't transform overnight into the performers you see on stage. It's takes time, patience, consistency, and dedication, among other factors. So don't be afraid to grow. Take risks and leaps of faith. I have said this before and I will say it again. Nothing remains the same or at least nothing should. Anything with life should always be evolving. The goal is to end a season different from the way you started it because life is a journey and yours is not over. Your story remains unwritten. What will the pages of your life say about you?

Be you. Be blessed. Be torrid.

Sincerely,

Alice Saunders

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

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1 ON 1: JOANNA KUROWSKA

By Alice Saunders

Joanna Kurowska's poems and fiction stories have appeared in *Ancient Paths*, *Apple Valley Review*, *Atticus*, *Bateau*, *Christianity and Literature*, *Illuminations*, *International Poetry Review*, *Off The Coast*, *Room*, *Solo Novo*, *Tipton*, *Vineyards*, and elsewhere. She is the author of five books of poetry, most recently *The Wall & Beyond* (eLectio Publishing 2013), *Inclusions* (Cervena Barva Press 2014) and *The Butterfly's Choice* (forthcoming 2015 from Broadstone Media). Kurowska's critical works have appeared in *The Conradian* (UK), *Slavic and East European Journal*, *Religion And The Arts*, *Southern Quarterly*, and elsewhere.

"I like to think of myself as the wind.
Especially when I feel scared or overwhelmed,
this idea of being "the wind"
triggers my will to act,
to make things happen."

Can you tell us a little bit about yourself?

Born and raised in Poland, I have lived in the US since December 1988. This means I am bi-cultural and bi-lingual, which of course becomes reflected in my writing. While I have written poetry since I was very young, throughout most of my professional life I have taught Polish as a foreign language, at the college level. With regards to research, I have written a doctoral thesis on Joseph Conrad's European identity, and published essays and reviews on literature, religion, and education. As a creative writer—now full time—I have written seven volumes of poetry, five of which have been published as books, the other two awaiting publishers' decisions. A num-

ber of my poems have appeared in periodicals in print and/or online, including—I am proud to say—*Torrid Literature Journal*.

At what point did you realize this was something you wanted to do?

My desire to write started to crystallize during my early adolescence but, due especially to my emigrating from Poland and the ensuing language transition, only recently was I able to determine that writing is—or, better, has always been—my foremost pursuit. It became clear to me some several years ago, when English being my second language no longer felt as an insurmountable obstacle with regards to creative writing.

When did you first consider yourself a writer?

Being a writer and considering oneself a writer are two different things. Some define themselves as writers early in life, for example Tennessee Williams, who—after working briefly in a shoe company, then doing odd jobs in order to survive—started to write full time. Others go into writing later in life, as was the case with Joseph Conrad, who first pursued the career of a sailor (in which he achieved the rank of captain). After working for the British navy for sixteen years—during which time he learned English—Conrad switched to writing fiction in the language (English in fact was his third language, Polish being his native, and French acquired in early

"This polarity—life's demands against the
necessity of seclusion to be able to write,
have been always a source of great tension to me."

boyhood). So both life circumstances and the change of language determined Conrad's development as a writer.

As for me, notwithstanding various big changes occurring in my life, I have been writing since youth; but again, only recently did I start to define myself a "writer"—which entails a significant switch in perspective, in that whatever I may be doing for living, I do it in order to write.

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

There are many books, so it is difficult to pick a particular one, but I would like to mention Jan Parandowski's *Mitologia* (Mythology). Beautifully illustrated (mostly with BW photographs of the ancient Greek art), the book was in my parents' library. I read it often, feeling absolutely fascinated by the adventures of Jason, Hercules's struggles, the intrigues among the Olympian gods, and so on. I should also mention *The Odyssey* in Jan Parandowski's translation—a book that made me particularly aware of there being a way of looking at the world different from the reductive empiricism following the Enlightenment and (equally reductive) nineteenth-century rationalism. Later, Bulgakov's *Master and Margarita* had a similar effect had on me—the realization that there is more to "reality" than the physical eye or—to paraphrase the Polish romanticist poet Adam Mickiewicz—the lens of a scholar can grasp.

Other significant books that I read in my early years include Hermann Hesse's *Steppenwolf*, Thomas Mann's *The Holy Sinner*, Alejo Carpentier's *The Lost Steps*, Andrejev's *Judas Iscariot*; on the Polish side, Karol H. Rostworowski's *Judas z Kariotu* (Judas Iscariot) and the poetry by Bolesław Leśmian. Later, the works by

Joseph Conrad, especially his *Under Western Eyes* and *Heart of Darkness*. More recently, Carl G. Jung's *Undiscovered Self* and *The Red Book*.

What's a typical working day like for you? When and where do you write? Do you set a daily writing goal?

I have always had to do many things other than writing, but kept writing nevertheless. Not teaching full time during the last four years, I have been able to devote more time to writing. I have recently prepared five poetry collections and worked on several other projects, some nearing completion, others already published. On average, I spend about six to eight hours every day working on some writing project; but I can work only on one thing at a time. In fact, I believe multi-tasking is the enemy of good writing. So if I decide to clean my closets, for the duration of that activity (which may last a day or a week), I am unable to focus on writing. On the other hand, while writing I am likely not to notice that the closets are a mess or the bed not made. If I don't write for more than three days, it feels like time is wasted, even if I have been doing other work (of which there is always a full plate). Gradually, I become restless, until I have made some progress writing-wise. This polarity—life's demands against the necessity of seclusion to be able to write, have been always a source of great tension to me.

I should add, I am not a "typical" writer in one aspect, namely that I currently write in a language I did not even speak in my early 30s. Back then I was working on some literary and/or research projects (while doing other things for a living). Then I engaged myself in a doctoral research—a blessing, since it has taught me English but also an obstacle, as it forced me to postpone my other projects. During the last few years I have had the time to return to

those projects, some of them being in English, others in Polish. This means I need to work incrementally on several major projects; something I would not recommend under normal circumstances. The bright side of this situation is that I can't complain on the lack of ideas, for the next ten years or so!

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

The best advice I can think of is the one given by Laura Oliver in her book *The Story Within*, "Even bad writing is better than no writing." I find novel writing to be the most difficult, simply because the one I work on is my first. It entails broad research and a good deal of learning about writing itself. I have benefited from reading books about writing, some of which I find particularly helpful, like Oliver's. With regards to poetry, my best learning experience and advice is to read and "digest" a lot of poetry.

With some caution, alternating one's primary pursuit with one or two minor projects can help to overcome a writer's block. Joseph Conrad, for whom writing was torture, did exactly that. At times, when working on a novel, he would "escape" into something less daunting—a short story or novella, finish it, and then go back to the novel.

I often feel not satisfied at all with what I see on the page. Due to its brevity, a poem can be relatively quickly polished into the final "gem," but with regards to the longer narratives, I have the tendency to edit them endlessly. However, it's better to leave editing for the end. "Perfection is the enemy of completion," my academic advisor once told me. Accordingly, my advice is to just keep on writing, no matter how slow and imperfect.

"I always try to respond constructively to life's turns. It may take me a long while to "digest" the meaning of a given experience, but eventually it becomes "digested" in a creative way."

You have participated in quite a few poetry readings and workshops. Were you ever hesitant when it came to writing or sharing a specific poem? Why?

Occasionally, poems can be strongly contextual. For example, a series of my poems tackle religious paradoxes and the nature of spiritual knowledge. Those poems are questions-probes rather than "answers" but, taken out of context, they may appear more definitely "religious" or "anti-religious" than I would want them to be, so I try to provide my listeners with some larger context or read them together with other poems. After all, in a poetry book, every poem is a part of a larger fabric, and taking it out can limit or alter its overall significance.

You wrote a book titled *Inclusions*. What is this book about?

I'd say *Inclusions* depict my attempts to understand the world as I find it—absurd, lovely, incomprehensible, full of promise but also of decay. At the "mystical" level, I feel much "included" in this amazing world. It's hard not to notice, however, that in nature "everything eats everything," while humanity professes exclusions based on prejudice and stupidity. While "understandable," greed is stupid, violence is stupid. Sadly, entire institutions and discourses "sanctify," with all seriousness, various forms of stupidity. For example, over the last ten years or so, we have undergone an ever-increasing bureaucratization of our social life. Institutions traditionally use bureaucracy as the means of social control, but I cannot help thinking that, in long term, it is just stupid (stupidity being our most serious threat). What worries me is that small social units—even individuals!—follow that unfortunate pattern, while in reality they *do not have to*. But they do choose to multiply papers, forms,

circulars, directives... Anyway, *Inclusions* is my poetic attempt to look—and marvel—at this paradoxical world of ours.

How did you come up with the title?

One of the poems in the book is titled "Inclusion." The poem itself is about the yearning and will to be included; to overcome the artificial barriers we create. Again, it's a strong theme for me. I must emphasize, however, that the credit for suggesting the title goes to my husband, John Brownell, who has been inexhaustible support and help in my creative endeavors. It was his idea to put the word *inclusion* in plural and use it for the entire collection. I loved the suggestion and gladly followed.

What was your favorite poem to write and why?

I consider the poem "Nothing" to be my favorite because it addresses exactly my greatest moral/epistemological concern, that we tend to "lock" reality (or what we imagine to be "truth") within our cognitive prejudices—be they scientific, religious, or personal. We have every right to think a tomato is red—but please, do not force that idea onto others! (who are very likely to come to a similar conclusion, anyway. But please, let them do it on their own!) We often take enormous, abstract ideas—such as God, Universe, Life, Origin—and build or adopt some ready-made systems, around them. Then we feel insecure and often turn into aggression, when others choose not to conform. So my poem "Nothing" is a survey of such "systems," with my ultimate choice of depicting the "truth" as Nothing. This draws from Master Eckhardt's idea that "God is Nothing"—because the moment we name God as "something," what we have named is

no longer God. In other words, what I think God is, is merely something I think, nothing more. One would have to be God, to be able to cross that epistemological barrier!

What's different about this book?

The greatest difference is that it is my first collection of originally English-language poems. Otherwise, it continues to probe the matters that have always intrigued me: the mystical aspects of the world; the symbolic significance of the "ordinary"; the absurdity of hierarchies in human society; the mystery of existence. Also, some readers told me that *Inclusions* reads more mellow than my previous collections.

What advice would you give to writers who are contemplating writing their first book?

Read, read, read. Besides enjoying a story or poem, try to learn from it, spy how the others did it! Talk to other writers, meet with them. Listen to their advice. Watch the world, avoid judging anything, forever wonder!

How do you market your work? What avenues have you found to work best for your genre?

I am eternally in the process of learning about "marketing". I use social platforms on the Internet, such as LinkedIn, Facebook, WordPress, Twitter. While selling books is important (obviously), the whole process is about relationships. For example, a number of people bought my books simply because I had engaged in some conversation with them (including people I have never met in person but simply exchanged a few lines with them on Twitter or Facebook). It is an incredible

joy to me to read or hear my readers' comments. I value them very much and always respond. In the end, however, I find face-to-face meetings with readers to be most enjoyable, rewarding experiences—and I think they work best for poetry.

What has influenced your development as a writer?

I always try to respond constructively to life's turns. It may take me a long while to "digest" the meaning of a given experience, but eventually it becomes "digested" in a creative way. Simply put, I write about life, as I experience it. Writing is an attempt to understand life. I should add that my *rendez-vous* with "transcendence" or the never-ending evolutions of my faith, have been a core factor.

What is the hardest part of writing for you?

The number and variety of projects I have been working on, for years now, against the pressures of life. It is really an impossible task to prioritize among several projects that are very different from one another but equally important: from a number of poetry collections still to be written, to the editing of the memoirs left by my deceased father, to a language manual, to Conrad research, to the novel, to a collection of short stories, etc. The hardest part is having to choose between all those equally important projects, against the limits of time and, frankly, resources. Yet choose I must; and sometimes—or should I say, always? the very life helps. Sooner or later something happens, that suggests "follow this path, not another." While waiting, I always try to work on one of my projects.

What's the best thing about being an author?

Freedom.

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

I have recently finished a semi-biographical poetry collection titled *Stained Glass* and including poems drafted in Polish during the 1990s, then fully developed in English. Since that collection deals conspicuously with my life story, I would use its title, *Stained Glass*, for my biographical book. Taken apart, pieces

of stained glass seem pointless. Put together, they can be arranged into a coherent, possibly beautiful composition. I feel it is up to me to arrange the scattered pieces of life into a sensible whole.

Have you written a book you love that you have not been able to get published?

Well, my language book has been extremely enthusiastically considered by a publishing house in the US; then the same house fell completely silent, leaving all my e-mail/snail-mail queries unanswered. This is really the only example that comes to my mind. Other than this, I have currently two poetry manuscripts submitted to publishers, for whose decisions I have been waiting. I hope they will get published, eventually. So, the language book apart, it's too early to talk about a book I haven't been able to get published. I have had some rejections of course, that's normal, but so far my poetry manuscripts have been accepted for publication faster than I had anticipated.

What book are you currently reading?

Charles Bukowski's *The Roominghouse Madrigals*, *Habry* by Helen Degen Cohen, and *The Gnostic Jung* by Stephan Hoeller.

If you couldn't be an author, what would your ideal career be?

I would love to be a ranger or a naturalist. But I would still try to write!

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

I would like to quote Joseph Conrad's novella "Youth": Do or Die. I always feel action is the only sensible response to life's challenges. I once wrote a poem titled "the wind," which depicts the wind as blowing regardless of whether a feather, a pebble, or a wall stands in its way. Even a wall cannot stop the wind. I like to think of myself as the wind. Especially when I feel scared or overwhelmed, this idea of being "the wind" triggers my will to act, to make things happen. If the wall is large, the wind may need to change its direction, but eventually, it will either turn the wall down or go around it, usque ad finem—to the very end (another quotation from Conrad).

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

As I said, there are several projects. Poetry-wise, I'd like to mention a collection that deals with the Nazi/Soviet occupation of Poland during the second world war. This project is based on papers and the memoirs left by my father, who passed away five years ago. While focusing on the experiences of individuals—citizens of Poland during the wartime (deprived of their property, they were in hundreds of thousands forcefully deported, as a compulsory labor-force eventually to be destroyed, to the Soviet Union or to Nazi Germany), this collection aims at exposing political violence and manipulation as parts of human experience.

Can you tell us where people can find you? Website, social media, blog, etc.

Anyone interested is welcome to visit me on my website <http://joanna-kurowska.com> for information about my recent publications, readings, interviews, or to order a signed copy of any one of my books. I also have two parallel Facebook pages:

in English: <http://www.facebook.com/JoannaKurowskapoetry>

in Polish: <http://www.facebook.com/PoezjaJoannyKurowskiej>

My Twitter name is [@JoannaEKurowska](#)

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?

I would like to express my gratitude to *Torrid Literature Journal* for publishing my poems in one of your past issues, as well as for inviting me to this interview. Thank you very much!

And to my fellow writers: HAPPY WRITING!

ODE TO LITERATURE

JESS COOK

By Alicia Cook

I have to be honest,
death kills more than just the person and
things I thought I would always recall
are starting to fade.

The sound of your voice, your laugh.
They are no longer ingrained.
Watching old home videos just to remember.

So much has happened,
since everything happened.
So much has changed,
since everything changed.

Born 11 months apart,
but nearly 10 years older than you now.

I stand in the doorway of the home office.
Trying to remember when it was your room.
Trying to remember who I was before I became
a gnawing reminder of what could-have-been for you.

Trying to remember who we were before we weren't.

Alicia Cook is a resident of New Jersey and she holds a BA in English Literature as well as an MBA. Cook has been writing for as long as she could remember and within the last year or so she has been posting some of her writing to her Instagram page (@thealiciacook). Cook enjoys writing both long and short fiction as well as poetry. She also dabbles in blackout poetry. She has been published in both media and print.

Antonio G. Fernandez was born in San Francisco and raised in Wyoming. He received a B.A. in English from San Diego State and his M.A. in Creative Writing from San Francisco State. His poetry can be found in *Redlitmag*, *14 Hills* Vol. 13.2, *Merge*, *Matrices* and online at *Pemmican Press*, *The Smoking Poet*, and *Wordriot*. He dedicates all his work to his son Felipe. He lives in Sherman Oaks, California where he is constantly wrangling his next poem. His blog is at www.antoniofernandez.com.

**WHEN YOU TAKE ME SERIOUSLY YOU MIGHT BELIEVE I SPEND TIME WALKING AROUND INSIDE OF YOU WHEN YOU
AREN'T LOOKING**

By Antonio Fernandez

You laugh
when I tell you how
I feel.

It's not the same
as other boys—
men.

They don't think
in aspects of
the unknown
too busy
using words like—
heart, lips
eyes
maybe even
bleeding or black.

I cannot speak so
silly,
loose
uninformed
disposable
empty—
got it!—
imaginable.

My mind doesn't
comprehend the obvious—
count of hairs
in your left eyebrow
exact shape of your
different colored eyes—
though
round might
be a good sound
to describe them.

I only understand
details—
how skin cells weep
when they
leave your arm
forever dead
never to be with
you again—
lost in the carpet
with dog hair

and other sad things
no one can see.

I can imagine
the finger ruts
my hands make
on the inside
of your hips
if I were a microscopic
sub dermal man
looking up
from underneath—
pretty sure
I'm already
there somewhere
below
your skin.

From where I stand
hand to forehead
invisible pioneer
eyes skinward
the pressure
a mad creature
alive
trying to get in
tugging and pulling.

You don't understand
do you?
It's okay for now,
someday you might.

Right now,
I want to let you know
that you're much more
than the shape light makes
when it touches my eyes
a reality only I can see.

A perfect mirror image
of the miracle
I am picturing in my mind
as I sit here at my desk—
bored
wishing I was walking
through your soul.

Jolene Munch Cardoza is a native Floridian who has worked in the Washington, D.C. theatre community for the past 13 years. She is a member of the American Theatre Critics Association and has reviewed theatre for a variety of publications and media outlets, including *The Washington Examiner*, *Metro Weekly*, *Washington Theater Review*, and *Theatre Spotlight*, among others. She attended the University of South Florida in Tampa and is a graduate of the Eugene O'Neill National Critics Institute. She currently resides in New England.

OBITUARY

By Jolene Munch Cardoza

Words words words
What we did, what we contributed
Never about
 how we feel
who we loved
who loves us.

Loves – continuing love
even beyond a grave
 beyond the words
 engraved upon stone
erected above our heads.

Just names
 listed in black and white,
the newspaper print
 objectifying relatives and kin.
No friend names,
 no dog names,
 no cat names,
 no favorite hat,
milkshake, the way you take your coffee
 or tea.

Words words words
 never enough
to show the world
 who we are.

Matthew J. Spireng's book, *What Focus Is*, was published in 2011 by Word Press. His book *Out of Body*, won the 2004 Bluestem Poetry Award and was published in 2006 by Bluestem Press at Emporia State University. His chapbooks are: *Clear Cut*, a signed and numbered limited edition of his poems and photographs by Austin Stracke on which the poems are based; *Young Farmer*; *Encounters*; *Inspiration Point*, winner of the 2000 Bright Hill Press Poetry Chapbook Competition; and *Just This*. Since 1990, his poems have appeared in publications across the United States including *North American Review*, *Tar River Poetry*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *Louisiana Literature*, *English Journal* and *Connecticut Review*.

LADYBUG, MARCH

By Matthew J. Spireng

Scared the hell out of me as I sat
at the kitchen table reading the
Sunday comics when it appeared out
of nowhere and landed on the page.

Now it is walking from comic to
comic as if it's a character
itself, only there's no balloon to
tell me what ladybug is thinking.

Yongyu Chen is a writer from Farragut High School in Knoxville Tennessee.

AUTUMN BEACH

By Yongyu Chen

stand by at sunset,
to see the drifting sand sift,
and swallow the sea

AUTUMN SAYS GOODBYE

By Yongyu Chen

when I go I want,
the world to see, all the good,
it has done for me

Ivan de Monbrison is a french contemporary poet, writer and artist born in Paris in 1969. He currently lives in both Paris and Marseille, five poetry booklets of his works have been published: *L'ombre déchirée*, *Journal*, *La corde à nu*, *Ossuaire* and *Sur-Faces*. His poems or short stories have also appeared in several literary magazines in France and in the US such as: *Jointure*, *Arpa*, *Friches*, *Phréatiques*, *Les Hommes sans Epaules*, *Harfang*, *The Boston Poetry Magazine*, *Penny Ante Feud*, *The Coe Review*, *The Germ*, *The Fox cry review*, *The Walrus*, *Cardinal Sins*, *The Columbia Review*, *The Minetta Review*. His visual works have been shown in a few galleries in both Europe and the US, and also printed in a several art and literary magazines and can be seen on his website: <http://artmajeur.com/blackowl>.

THE MASK

By Ivan de Monbrison

Le mur d'une pensée. Une corde faite de peau.
Des épingles de chair dans mon corps
de papier. La nuit bruisse, on entend des noeuds
de cordes qui se serrent. L'obscurité me recouvre
tout entier. Le rêve ouvre la porte et entre dans
la pièce. L'écho tombe plus lourd. Je n'arrête pas
de penser. Le sommeil n'est pas loin. L'horizon
est imaginé, le paysage aussi. Les fenêtres se
ferment et je suis enfermé, et par une petite fente
dans le mur je vois ce qu'il y a de l'autre côté.
Un homme allongé, je l'observe, il remue à
peine. Enfin il se retourne. Il n'a plus de visage,
plus de mains, il est comme effacé. Alors je vois
un masque, posé à ses côté, c'est mon propre
visage qu'il vient de retirer.

The wall of a thought. A rope made of skin. Pins of
flesh in my body of paper. The night rustles,
we hear knots of ropes tightening up. The dark
covers me up totally. The dream opens the door and
walks in the room. The echo falls heavier. I did not
stop to think. Sleep is not far away. The horizon is
figured out, the landscape too. Windows are closed
and I'm locked in, and through a small slit in the wall
I can see what there is on the other side. A man lying
down, he barely stirs as I am still watching him.
Finally he has turned over towards me. He has
neither face nor hands anymore, is just as if they
had been erased. Then I see a mask, placed on his
side, it is my own face that he has just removed.

A.J. Huffman has published seven solo chapbooks and one joint chapbook through various small presses. Her eighth solo chapbook, *Drippings from a Painted Mind*, won the 2013 Two Wolves Chapbook Contest. She is a Pushcart Prize nominee, and her poetry, fiction, and haiku have appeared in hundreds of national and international journals, including *Labletter*, *The James Dickey Review*, *Bone Orchard*, *EgoPHobia*, *Kriya*, and *Offerta Speciale*, in which her work appeared in both English and Italian translation. She is also the founding editor of *Kind of a Hurricane Press* (www.kindofahurricanepress.com).

MY BRAIN IS TIRED

By A.J. Huffman

of processing the banalities of daily
life. Time tables, schedules, to-do lists
and torturous discussions of absolute
irrelevancy. It needs some zzz's, a few
sheep to count. So I force it into feeted pajamas,
tuck it under comforter with teddy bears,
hoping to calm its calamitous patter.
Together we hold vigil under the moon,
praying for silence to descend
before we and the night burn out.

I AM EMPTINESS

By A.J. Huffman

a gaping, vacuous (w)hole. I am
conqueror, romanticized (at best)
to conquistador. I am taking,
claiming you as my own. Soon
you will be surrounded by a sea
of me's. Waving, screaming,
drowning, the world will see nothing
but the black encompassing flag
of consumption that is me.

April Scott is currently a high school senior in Monson Massachusetts. She became interested in poetry after a creative writing class and hopes people enjoy reading her work as much as she's enjoyed writing it.

DO THEY SEE

By April Scott

I see the smiles on their faces,
Do they see mine?
It slowly fades, deteriorating each second.
Nothing left, but a face of hurt.
Nothing left, but eyes that see agony.
Nothing left, but ears that hear screams.
I'm lost with no escape route,
My mind consumes my thoughts like they don't matter.

I see the color in their eyes,
Do they see mine?
It slowly fades, blackness takes hold of me.
A bright blue, now turns gray,
Like dark clouds taking over a clear sky.
Life becomes duller, eyelids become closer.
I'm lost with no escape route,
My mind consumes my thoughts like they don't matter.

I see the love in their hearts,
Do they see mine?
It slowly fades, permanently frozen.
A healthy beating heart now beats for no one.
The soft light pink gradually goes black.
My heart now sits as a cold, empty shell.
I'm lost with no escape route,
I'm dying from the inside out.

Clemencio Bascar is former Professor and Vice President for Corporate Affairs at Western Mindanao State University in Zamboanga City. Bascar is a multi-awarded poet, songwriter, and playwright who writes columns, articles, and books. He is first place winner of the National Poetry Contest jointly sponsored by the PRAMA Foundation, Inc. and the United Nations Information Centre (Philippines) in 2001. He is married to Melinda C. Dela Cruz and has three kids, namely, Jane, Lynnette, and Timothy James.

TOO LATE FOR ANOTHER DREAM

By Clemencio Bascar

Frantically, I gather
Embers on the verge of death
In hopes of adding luster beyond their last sparkles; it's hopeless
Not a beam carries even for a moment on my palm.

Eagerly, I take
A sneak glimpse of realms in my twisted mind; regrettably only to witness columns
Tumbling like spiked rocks in the dark where designs of dawn and twilight
Collide; unraveling tattered images of the past.

By the sidelines, sketches of the
Future spread against the uncharted void; un-trodden meadows sigh in anguish; unconquered peaks
From afar taunt every daring spirit; then come the premature gleams of dawn; it's too late for another
Dream.

Rick Hartwell is a retired middle school (remember the hormonally-challenged?) English teacher living in Moreno Valley, California. He believes in the succinct, that the small becomes large; and, like the Transcendentalists and William Blake, that the instant contains eternity. Given his “druthers,” if he’s not writing, Rick would rather be still tailing plywood in a mill in Oregon. He can be reached at rdhartwell@gmail.com.

RELIEF

By Richard Hartwell

Ashes to ashes, dust to dust,
thus, laid to rest is her uncle,
brother to her bereft father.

No tears, no smile, virtually
emotionless so that to others
she may seem to be in shock,
so blank is her face, pale her
countenance. Only she knows
what ill courses through her
memory built of nightmares.

She seems rooted to the spot
during service staring at his
shell, the body without soul.

She knows what statistics
say, one in three molested
as a child, usually by a family
member; one in five raped
before full adulthood. But,
what do figures tell of fear,
hatred, betrayal in the rawest?

What do graphs tell of greeting
your molester face-to-face,
holidays spent with family?

Wherein does forgiveness
reside? Is forgiveness real
when restrained for years?
After granting forgiveness,
what is left? The internal
rot of hatred, disgust, self-
loathing can be left to fester.

Dirt hits the wood coffin,
hollow reverberations sob,
not tears, but final relief.

Leonore Wilson is on the MFA advisory board at St. Mary's College. She has taught extensively throughout the Bay Area. Work has been in such magazines as *Quarterly West*, *Third Coast*, *Pif*, *Laurel Review*, *TRIVIA: Voices of Feminism*, etc. Her new poetry book, *Tremendum Augustum*, by Kelsay Books is coming out in February.

O VALERIE (1958-1993)

By Leonore Wilson

You are every female scared as hell
With a single voice and a beer bottle hand
Madder than a stoplight.

What solitary closet-sized room
I wade in that you left; o motherless girl
In your sleeveless jersey, big sister

Burning your cigarette deep,
Herded in your kitchen to be murdered
With your son's little league bat.

Remember mass, Miss Valerie, the mumble
Of nuns, the uniforms and the advice
To marry well but then the light

Hurts your eyes and you're left
In a neighborhood big as a battleship
Gripped with babies and inattention.

So you run in your peeping tom
Dress and splashy eyelashes, wild
Like you're nineteen again.

Hundred pound animal, gooney, gorgeous
To throw your nervous skin back
Desiccatting the cornfields, vineyards.

With your motor turned up
Tires spinning and sliding, wanting
An exist because your whole life depended on it.

Athar C. Pavis grew up in New York City, attended Mount Holyoke College and studied literature in France. She lives both in Maine and in France where she teaches at the University of Paris. She has published her poetry in magazines in the UK (*New Poetry, Candelabrum*) and in the United States in *Explorations, Measure, The Eclectic Muse, The Comstock Review, the Avatar Review, Oberon, and Trinacria*. She is currently working on a collection of poetry to be entitled *The Power to Revoke*.

QUINIDINE I KNOW YOUR NAME

By Athar Pavis

Quinidine, I know your name
Who took my father by surprise
One Sunday night, and overcame
The heart it meant to tranquilize.

Quinidine, I know where you
Are hiding, and will track you down,
Murderer, who did undo
The very heartbeat it has bound

Forever. In the autopsy
They hide the criminal you became.
“A hammer used to kill a fly,”
Said one doctor, before the crime.

Another called it usual,
“To fibrillate might cause a stroke.”
“You cannot die from atrial,”
Replied the first. My father broke

The impasse. It was a choice.
“I do not want my mind impaired,”
He said, I said, in one voice.
“No blood clots to the brain.” He cared

How he lived. I hear him now,
High stakes gambler explain, in sport,
He'd weighed the pros and cons somehow,
But the toxicology report

Rings up the curtain on the truth.
Quinidine, I see your name
In liver, blood, and underneath
The signature of when you came

Strangling my father on the couch.
The fifty glasses wait in rows
For wine. He trusted you too much
And even now my father knows

The fifty glasses he dragged home
From Zabars, were an act of faith
In Quinidine, who would become
Arrhythmia, the wings of Death.

Quinidine, I know your name
Your promises to pull him through
The fête my father wanted came,
A funeral for all but you,

Traitor, who batted on his health,
Robber, who left his face awry,
Who took my father and myself,
You're going to die!

James Tyler received his BA in English from Austin Peay State University. Journals that have published his work include *Country Entertainment USA*, *First Class*, and *Mobius*. Tyler writes fiction and poetry, and currently write at Barnes and Noble cafes.

POEM FOR THE RED GOODBYE

By James Tyler

Tonight my cat stares at my glass of vodka
with the envy of a closet drunk.
Tonight I read the poetry of Anne Sexton
with the envy of a wannabe poet.
“Wanting To Die,” I say out loud.
She looks unamused. The neighbor’s dog
barks,
and she looks interested.
I tell her about Plath and all those women I
love.
I tell her about suicide and how I want to
cut my wrist,
how the television and voice tells me to do so.
It happened in Baltimore and it’s happening now.
Oh, the scar on my right arm,
the need for blood,
the cry for help, perhaps, with a new, light scar,
or something even deeper. Perhaps a howl.
No, I will not gas myself as some have done.
I will feel the life pour from me, the red goodbye.
And you, cat, will look on unamused,
as the blood flows from forearm to hand,
trickles from the fingers
onto the final poem.

Helen Companion's work has most recently been published in *Hedera Helix*, *Wingspan*, and *Cadence*. She is the winner of the Sigma Kappa Delta national writing competition in both poetry and fiction. She likes cats, snakes, rats, and other animals that consume each other, oxford commas, and ridiculous parodies of excellent poetry.

VICARIOUS

By Helen Companion

The yellow light at the intersection
blinks, drowsy as the sun creeping
over the horizon. A sign,
taller than I am, points to the left, announcing
the race track. Nearby is the Short
Track, where the children of men who wished
they were Dale Earnhardt deck their sons
in racing gear, complete with numbers
and pretend endorsements.
The men hunch over the oversized go-karts
making last minute adjustments
to increase torque
or handling
and remind their sons to accelerate
into the curve for higher speeds.
The boys, who are too young to drive a car
grip the wheel,
jam their foot against the gas pedal,
and remember to keep their eyes open
through the constant curves.
The ground spits mud from the tracks
and their fathers cheer from the sidelines,
the air filled with the smell of Bud light
and sunflower seeds as they imagine
themselves spinning
around the big track.

Recently nominated for two Pushcart awards, **April Salzano** teaches college writing in Pennsylvania where she lives with her husband and two sons. She is currently working on a memoir on raising a child with autism and several collections of poetry. Her work has appeared in journals such as *Convergence*, *Ascent Aspirations*, *The Camel Saloon*, *Centrifugal Eye*, *Deadsnakes*, *Visceral Uterus*, *Salome*, *Poetry Quarterly*, *Writing Tomorrow* and *Rattle*. The author also serves as co-editor at *Kind of a Hurricane Press* (www.kindofahurricanepress.com).

PLAYING IN TRAFFIC

By April Salzano

We took my mom's offhanded directive
literally, three adolescent girls
in short shorts, legs shaved to the knee,
spitting in the wind over a bridge.
Unable to summon the kind of spit
that travels, we took to chewing
Skoal bandits between stolen cigarettes.
Pouches tucked in bottom lips, we dared
someone to say something, try to
call us a name we hadn't heard yet.
Rebellion was a misnomer for conformity.
We find ourselves suspended there
some days, leaning over to watch
semis and sunroofs pass under our feet,
planted on an interstate overpass,
waiting for life to get just a little better.

Beau Boudreaux teaches English in Continuing Studies at Tulane University in New Orleans. His first book collection of poetry, *Running Red, Running Redder*, was published in the spring of 2012 by Cherry Grove Collections. He has published poetry in journals including *Antioch Review* and *Cream City Review*, also in anthologies along with *The Southern Poetry Anthology*.

YOU ARE NOT HERE YET

By Beau Boudreaux

Showing early for the concert
sold out— a minor failure

but now the house is quiet,
oiled ceiling fans spin

and the beagle sleeps on his back
upstairs in your nook—

books in stacks inhabit
the desk, green bank lights

lure the Formosa termites—
there's a load in the washer

motorcycle needs a spin
feels like May, sundresses...

this sweltering summer
your decision to move

a new job—I try to put my arms
around the virtual you in my head.

TOO BIG
A Found Poem

By John Repp

When it gets too big inside, you cut.
Too noisy. Cut. Too dark. Cut.

I want to cut bad right now.
Those thin red lines. How good

you sleep afterward. I know it's bad.
My arm hurts. It might be infected.

I love my box. G has a knit bag.
A has her father's old shaving kit.

I always have a fresh razor in there
& a bleached napkin, a travel bottle

of alcohol & a tube of ointment.
I love looking inside & seeing it all

clean & ready.

Lee Busby is graduate of Vermont College of Fine Arts. He recently taught in the Creative Writing program at Missouri State University, and is a co-founder of the River Pretty Writers Retreat. He has previously published poems in *The Ginkgo Tree Review*, *Connotation Press*, *The Moon City Review*, *Elder Mountain*, *Numero Cinq*, *Fullosia Press* and *Poet's Ink Review*, among others, and has a chapbook, *Wild Strawberries*, published by Finishing Line Press. He currently lives in Kansas City, MO.

GREEN PARROT BAR, KEY WEST, FEBRUARY 2012

By Lee Busby

Who wants my pickled green bean?
Excuse me, my "Caribe Bean"?

9AM. Monday. Or is it Tuesday?
It's a Bloody Mary. And I'm in love,

I think. No one that lives in Key West
needs a tan, at least not at 9AM.

I can't keep drinking this.
Dawn works from ten till six,

and when she's working, I drink
even if I don't care to drink.

Now that the contents of this poem
are settled, we can move on:

It's one part vodka, two parts heart,
but you can't taste the heart

without tasting the vodka first,
the black pepper, the tomato juice,

remember that green bean?
Remember how I was in love

at the beginning of this poem?
Can you see what I'm tasting now?

They only have two bathrooms here -
one for each of us. The clearer

the glass, the more vodka she poured
in it this time. There's only so much

heart to go around, so it never mixes
50/50. I wonder if my heart

is red like this vodka, this taste
of pepper, like Dawn's skin, my red

foot that hurts when I walk?
I walked here from Hemingway's

house. He had heart enough
for five women, never had to pour

his own drink. He put a urinal
in his backyard. Now this is my idea

of Key West! Who knows who I am
here, how much more vodka or heart

I have or have had? A sign behind
the bar reads, "It's only love,

give it away." That doesn't work
with vodka, sometimes love is easier

to get than vodka. This bar opened
in 1890, and they've never given

me a free vodka. Hemingway never
once stepped on the toe

of a six-toed cat, no matter
how much vodka. I just found out

it's still too early for happy hour
(and I've never loved anyone

the way that I love you). Do you
understand what that means? Do I?

I need more tomato juice, vodka,
pepper, more Dawn, more

Hemingway, more you. And top
it off with a little heart, maybe

a little love that floats on top
like this pickled green bean.

And you say you'll walk me home,
but only after I use the bathroom

again. I say goodbye to Dawn,
to Hemingway, to my empty bar

stool, to this doorway. I say
goodbye and goodbye to the sidewalk

with each step as you gradually lead
me, in love, back to my imaginary

home in Missouri, where I have no bartender,
no cats, no tomato juice and definitely no vodka.

Andrew Bohn is an artist living in Fort Collins, Colorado. He primarily works with wood, metal, and glass; however, recently his powder blue Smith-Corona typewriter has become a favored tool.

PATTERN OF LIVING

By Andrew Bohn

Just so you know this all comes
straight from my fingertips to you,
I don't sit and torture poems in the
back rooms of my mind,
until they give up these perfect
little turns
of
phrase,
for some reason that just doesn't
work for me,
I feel like you would know,
and I would never be able
to conceal my own disgust
as I led the simpering thing
out into the light, paper thin
blanched white from too
much time indoors, wan
little thing held in my
hand with an obvious
d disdain, the kind of
loathing that one can
only have for oneself would
read on my face, and so
instead I offer these,
and they are all I have
to give just now
and all I ever seem to
find...
little intrinsic asides
with the typewriter
tapping at keys,
like laying down a
length of string
as I enter the maze
of my days,
seeing that surely
others have some this way,
I see their threads,
many hued,
and I know that I am
one,
the Warp, the Weft,
the Shuttle, a simple Pick,
I am still weaving
my part of the pattern,
looming days,
and weaving together

phrases in the simple
effort to tell you that
If you can see this,
you are the Fell,
and this poem is the past
and inextricable part
of the pattern of living

REPTON

By Craig Cochran

The clip-on tie pinches my throat
As I draw machine guns
On the back of the church program,
Dust mixing with lilac perfume
Blasting though the open windows,
Going home for Sunday dinner.
This hot ribbon of asphalt
The only thing fresh here,
Thrown like a rope over the rolling pastures of
Uncut hay and rusting farm rakes.
Clapboard houses are so close
You could touch the sagging porches,
Staring back with sullen indifference.
There were always old men in rocking chairs
Nodding at cars as they passed,
But little by little the men disappeared
And the rocking chairs were sold or stolen.
Repton High now has trees
Growing through the windows,
Its roof caved in,
The entire gymnasium full of rotting text books
And an old mattress.
At the Save-a-Lot, Mrs. Jenkins
Hugs me and says I was the smartest
Boy in Sunday School.
They are excited about the new Wal-Mart
That will crush the last
Memory of life from this place.
You should come back here to live,
Mrs. Jenkins puts her papery hand on my face,
We need young people to start families.
I lean down to kiss her cheek,
Smelling her scent of dust and lilacs, and
I know the next time I return
Will be for her funeral.

Justin Rose is a twenty year old Wisconsin native in his junior year of college pursuing a Professional Writing degree. Growing up, reading was always one of his passions. He immersed himself from an early age in classic literature, and his love for reading never faded. As he read, he developed the desire to write, to create for others the same wonders that reading created for him. Since the age of twelve, he has taught himself to write. Additionally, in high school writing classes and his time in college, Rose has striven to hone the raw skills he gathered in his own pursuits.

WHISPER

By Justin Rose

Whisper, whisper in my ear, ever near, stay right here.
Long I sought you, just to feel you, just so I could hear.
Just to know you're ever near. Stay right here.
Hear my weeping, whisper softly, "Still I'm here, ever near."
Sorrows flood my sorry soul. Still you whisper in my ear,
Softly, sweetly, you still whisper, "I am here, ever near."
Long across the country wild, I chased whispers far and near.
Never knowing you were ever, only ever still right here.
So now searching for your whispers, I would hear you here.
Clear away the doubt and sorrow, chase away the fear.
Let me whisper softly, sweetly, you are here. You are here.
Let me voice what words have fallen, fallen on my waiting ear.
"Wandering child, hear my whispers, here you need not fear."

Bobby Teevans is currently attending Wheaton Academy, which is a Christian high school, located in the Northwest suburbs of Chicago. He is currently in a creative writing class at Wheaton Academy.

CHRISTMAS SONNET

By Bobby Teevans

The chilly air from the north has drawn near
while leaves decompose into the dry earth
it is a time of stress and instills fear
but we'll soon celebrate our savior's birth

The days get short as Christmas rolls around
decorations inside and out go up
the world turns white as snow falls to the ground
we eat and drink with friends from plastic cups

Schools and businesses all come to a close
the neighbors yards are filled with christmas gnomes
while everything but the fire has froze
there is no place you'd rather be than home

Outside is a barren lifeless wasteland
because of Him life is found from His hand

Jeston Dulin is a graduate of Northwest Missouri State University's M.A. English program, and currently teaching composition at that same school. Dulin has worked as an intern with *The Laurel Review*, and been published in NWMSU's student-run literary magazine, *Medium Weight Forks*. His flash fiction piece, "Prodigal Son" was published in the May 2014 issue of the literary magazine *Apocrypha and Abstractions*. Dulin's writing revolves around themes including nostalgia, the Midwest, and a questioning of reality.

UNDER OBSERVATION

By Jeston Dulin

I got a telescope for Christmas, but I can't wear my glasses
when I look through it. The wine she bought
has a duck on the wrapper. The bottle is now empty.

A twilight blanket illuminates her lonely picnic.
There are stars, and I can't help but wonder:
Are they forever?
Are we?

At the other end of the Milky Way Galaxy,
a small, gray man stares back at me. He wonders
if we exist. Do we have life?
We have water, and oxygen.
The primordial ooze that birthed us
can be bred just as easily on his world,
on others.

There is no center to anything
I feel us both thinking:
where are we, really?

Desirée Jung's background is in journalism, film, creative writing and comparative literature. She has published translations, fiction and poetry in *Exile*, *The Dirty Goat*, *Modern Poetry in Translation*, *The Antigoniish Review*, *The Haro*, and others. Jung has also participated in several artist residencies including the Banff Centre, in Canada, and Valparaiso, in Spain. She has worked with the Canadian poet George McWhirter in her M.F.A in creative writing at the University of British Columbia. Moreover, her research and Ph.D. thesis in Comparative Literature was based on the works of Canadian poet P. K. Page, which she defended at the same university. She is also a Canadian-Brazilian writer, and her work aims to stress the boundaries and differences between languages and cultures. Her website is www.desireejung.com.

JABOTICABAS

By Desirée Jung

In the farm's laundry, she scrubs her feet well, massaging
between the toes and feeling tightness in her heart
when she squeezes the bones and their structure vibrate,
modifying as the purple stains, vestiges of the fruits,
begin to disappear, slowly.

Later she remains with the sweetness in her saliva, the residues
of the jaboticabas on the branches, the black skin clinging
to her nails and veins, which levitate, as though elevated.
She walks into the old house as someone entering former times,
the earthen tiles, a shrill through her spine, a current of air
that lets her believe that last century's ghosts
whisper in between bedrooms.

The shape of her husband passes through the hallway
and he continues walking as though speaking
with walls, his words weighting in the air. Sitting in his bed,
her son, hands covered with mud, face all red, a tiredness which
he ferociously defends, fighting to obtain the rights
to drive a tractor through the fields. "Still there?" She asks,
looking at him through the mirror.

When she climbed the jaboticaba tree, she thought deeply about the boy's freedom.
He had her genes, or perhaps it was mere coincidence that he also wanted to fight for
it like her, loose in the tree branches, the fruits attached to her feet. Entries to life,
stains of time. He gets tired of waiting for his father's answer and
leaves the room, head down.

Erren Geruad Kelly is a pushcart nominated poet based in Salisbury, North Carolina. Kelly 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. Kelly's 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. Kelly is also the author of the chapbook, *Disturbing The Peace*, on Night Ballet Press. He received a B.A. in English-Creative Writing from Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge. He also loves to read and he loves to travel, having visited 45 states and Canada and Europe.

AUBADE

By Erren Geruad Kelly

day breaks, like a rose opening and the city
opens up with its urban symphony, you tune into yourself
never allowing the ivy of doubt, to possess your heart
now, god breathes his love into you, it is an
aura, like a halo around your head, like
beethoven, taking reverie and distilling it into black notes
rarely, do you allow sadness to own your soul
instead an elixir of grace, sweet as honey, timeless as memory
tells you that the day must be daisies that a
tender soul as yours, always leaves joy behind as diamonds,

as a child, strolling

FICTION

LOCAL HISTORY

By Rachel Vogel Quinn

Rachel Vogel Quinn is a young writer based in Des Moines, Iowa. Her fiction focuses on themes of family, ancestry, memory and environment. She is currently working on a novel about a murder committed by her great-great-grandmother, a German immigrant in the late 19th century.

It's blue," Louise said, pointing toward the bird flitting over their heads. "Mom, it's blue."

"Black," responded her mother, without glancing up a second time. The bird had disappeared, the branch where it had briefly perched flicking sweetly in the late spring breeze.

Louise started to speak, but her mother interrupted, her aging lips somehow faster off the block than her daughter's.

"I tell you, Louise, that bird was black," she said again, eyes on the checklist the senior center had provided. "A raven. Trust me. I know these things."

Louise rolled her eyes—a spot-on impression of her own teenage daughter's. The bird had been a blue jay, and even with failing vision, there was no way her mother could have mistaken it for a raven. It was her mother's way of taking control of the day, Louise knew.

The two of them were participating in an afternoon scavenger hunt in Black Hawk Park, organized by the senior center in town. The hunt had been Louise's idea, spotted in the paper last week. A good way to get her mother out of the house, she had thought. Although Sandy wasn't yet frail, she had retreated into her home in the past year, engulfed by the sycamores that outlined the yard like hulking fence posts. She had never been the kind of woman to let age catch up to her, and she still kept her hair neatly coiffed and her makeup precise. So Louise was at a loss to explain her mother's recent surrender to the isolation of the elderly.

Her mother continued down the paved trail, nearly falling as she stepped on a small rock, her eyes still glued to that damn checklist. Louise ran to catch her mother's hand, but she was already upright and steady—and she waved Louise away dismissively. Her face was locked in a tight knot of concentration, wrinkled like bread dough only half-kneaded.

"See anything else?" Louise attempted, breaking herself against the jagged ice of her mother's continued silence. Growing up, Louise had believed her mother never stopped talking, that she continued chattering to the walls after the rest of the family had gone to sleep. Now, while raising her own talkative daughter, Louise had trouble getting her mother to share anything about her retired life. It sometimes seemed that Louise's voice echoed off her mother's elbows and shoulders, bouncing away into the trees without reaching its intended target.

"Hmm ..." was her mother's only response to Louise's question. Louise resigned herself to the silence. At least her mother was walking outside, breathing the sweet spring air. It didn't have to be a bonding experience, Louise told herself. Her feet fell into rhythm with her mother's, and the swaying of the branches about them seemed to synchronize with their own swinging limbs.

A few minutes later, a little farther down the path, they came upon a huge locust tree in the midst of death—its delicate leaves spinning slowly to the ground. The leaves seemed to take whole minutes to complete their free fall, lingering in the last moments of their lives. Louise stopped and stood mesmerized—lost in the movement, tumbling herself end over end with the green shards of the tree's spent life. She cut herself free from her mother panting beside her and, for a few seconds, let one tiny, twirling leaf become her whole world.

Inches from the ground, the leaf was snatched up by a leathery hand, swift and brutal. "Got it," her mother cried in triumph. "A locust leaf."

Her mother deftly checked the leaf off the list. "You know," she said, oblivious to Louise's long look, "this would be a lot easier if we just pretended to find these things. Why waste another two hours playing hide and seek with the park?"

"You want to cheat?" Louise asked, failing to control the note of disapproval in her voice. She sighed, losing motivation with each expelled molecule. "Why don't we just go home? Todd is grilling hamburgers tonight. You can play with the kids."

"No," her mother said with sudden vehemence. "We signed up, and we'll finish. Don't you want to win?"

"It's only a Blu-ray player," Louise said weakly. "You don't even watch movies."

"I don't care about that." The wrinkles around her eyes contracted as she squinted at her daughter. "I want to win!"

Her mother's competitive streak was nothing new to Louise, but she had never thought the older woman would stoop to cheating a bunch of seniors out of a unwanted prize. Her mother was younger than the other participants by a few years and still refused to see them as her peers, referring to them as "those geezers," a term she had picked up from her grandson.

Louise's mother still looked late middle age, her nose small and her lips wide, just like her daughter's, her eyes twin hollows of deep blue. Leaning close to catch a glimpse of the list, she sniffed her mother's scrubbed skin, smelling like baby powder spilled on antique lace. Underneath, she detected the scent of her mother's house, green apples and daisies and something like a rotten tomato. It almost made her wrinkle her nose. An old person's smell, Louise recognized now. When had her mother started smelling that way?

"All right," Louise said with a shrug. "We'll keep going. But no cheating."

* * *

Sandy hadn't stepped outside in several days. Although she had a pretty garden and a neat yard her grandson kept mowed, she didn't like

to sit on the deck. The pollen made her sneeze, and the breeze ruffled her hair. It took her long enough to get it set each morning.

But Louise had called with her silly suggestion, and Sandy had actually found herself looking forward to an afternoon in the park. It made her think of the old days with Sam. They used to stroll through Black Hawk Park before they were married, counting the geese and the wildflowers. She had been a different woman then, and the memories of those times continued to fade, losing their color and outline until, sometimes, she had trouble even recalling the name of the park. But she could still picture Sam's face—his light brown eyes nearly gold in the sunset—as the geese began to descend, dropping out of the sky as if felled by bullets, then pulling up at the last second for a tidy splash in the river. The birds were so thick back then that they had nearly blotted out the sun hanging like a blood orange in the sky.

When Louise had arrived that morning to pick her up, Sandy found herself still in bed, confused as to why her grown daughter was tugging at the covers.

"Just leave me be," she had growled, turning onto her side. "Just leave me be."

"Mom," the tugging continued, "we have lunch plans and then the scavenger hunt, don't you remember?" She could hear the concern creeping into her daughter's voice. Sandy sat up abruptly.

"I remember," she snapped. "You don't have to maul me like a piece of meat."

As she slipped out of bed and into her robe, she watched her daughter's face melt, a look half-shame, half-stubbornness. The look of a victim, Sandy realized, but one beginning to take the power back.

"You said you would pick me up at eleven," Sandy had rushed on. "It's only ten."

"No, Mom, I said ten."

"I think I would know what my own daughter told me. You must have forgotten. Don't you ever use that silly day book of yours?"

Louise stepped back, lowering her shoulders and her gaze. "You get dressed. I'll go put on a pot of tea."

Sandy quickly curled her hair and stepped into a pair of silk slacks and a matching peach jacket, slightly wrinkled and bunching at her waist. The best she could do today, she thought, slipping on a gold necklace as she left the bedroom.

As she hurried down the hallway, Sandy scolded herself, as she often did these days: You shouldn't have slept so late. You must stop forgetting things.

* * *

"Mom, can I see the list?" Louise asked, after another half hour of wandering. Her mother had yet to spot anything else, and her frustration was showing in her brisk strides, the way she rolled her wrists as she scanned the ground.

Sandy handed the paper over without a word, and Louise quickly skimmed the sheet. "I saw a patch of lilies back up the trail. Yellow. Only I didn't know they were on the list."

"I saw those," her mother responded. "Asiatic lilies, not Calla."

"It doesn't specify."

"But you know they meant Calla lilies."

Louise caught herself rolling her eyes again and handed back the list. It was so like her mother to assume the species of lily the organizers had intended. She always thought she knew what was about to come out of people's mouths. And if she was wrong, she insisted the others were lying, or that they didn't know their own minds. Sandy Hudson was a confident mind reader in a failed circus.

Louise remembered one day in the fourth grade, bringing a note home to her mother about a field trip the following week. They were to visit the history museum and then take a walk along the riverfront. The note mentioned casual attire. Her mother had been sure the teacher had meant formal.

"You are going out in public," she had said, "to a museum. You must look your best."

"But, Mom, it says . . ." Louise had pleaded, already defeated before her sentence began.

"I know what it says. I can read, can't I? But your teacher must have gotten it wrong. No child of mine will go to a museum in shorts. You'll see when you arrive."

And so Louise had gone to school that day with a blue velvet dress down to her knees, a stiff white collar, black shoes and knobby tights. The dress smelled of her mother, of musk and mothballs. Predictably, her classmates all wore shorts or jeans. As they trekked along the river, her thighs chafed and her heels blistered. The dull brown whitecaps of the Mississippi matched her dirty collar, loose from tugging with grimy hands. The breeze ruffling the trees had sounded like television static, like disappointment as the picture faded into fuzzy stripes.

Even on that day, Louise had never questioned that her mother had been right. Mrs. Greene must have made a mistake. But the other mothers hadn't been as insightful, and Mrs. Greene was too polite to embarrass them all with a correction.

In Back Hawk Park, Louise watched her mother saunter farther down the path, passing other pedestrians—other senior scavengers—without a glance. On a roll now, she stopped every few minutes and checked the list, sometimes pulling out the stubby pencil to make a mark.

Just as Louise was about to catch up, her mother carefully knelt and picked a small dandelion well past its prime, its ethereal white petals barely clinging to the stem. Her mother carefully crossed something off her list and then—astonishingly—broke into a grin, like a child receiving a grand gift they never knew existed. She blew on the flower, scattering the wish-granting petals to the four winds. Her mother watched them fly away, her eyes wet and her face frozen as they fell.

Sandy had never been superstitious, had always scoffed at salt thrown over the shoulder, fingers crossed, birthday candles blown out with fanfare. But as she gazed at that delicate dandelion, near the end of its earthly existence, she was seized by a desire to make a wish. Only she didn't know where to begin.

In keeping with her upbringing, Sandy was a religious woman, taking her children to Mass every Sunday while Sam slept. She taught the children their Hail Mary's and Our Father's and Glory Be's. She always clasped her hands and bowed her head during Grace Before Meals. But prayer—the spontaneous, tell-all kind—had never been her style.

When Louise was six years old, she had come down with a bad case of pneumonia. Her daughter's sweaty hair lay twisted on her forehead like tassels. Her face was slick and gray, her hands small and warm, like the rocks Sandy's own mother used to slip in at the foot of her cold winter bed. The room smelled of sickness—of bodies unwashed and shelves undusted.

That had been the last time Sandy had prayed open-heartedly and desperately, outside the constraints of well-worn words on the back of hymnals. Even then, the words had not come easily, and Sandy had found it distasteful to plead and bargain with God. But plead she did—begging for her daughter's life, promising to be more loving, more involved, a mother like Holy Mary. Sandy had thumbed through her old Confirmation Bible and made promises with every page.

Louise recovered, and promises were broken, as they always are. But from that day on, she took care to hold her daughter's hand, smooth her hair, mingle advice with compliments. That part of the contract she had at least fulfilled.

Holding the dandelion, however, it wasn't God she was reasoning with. It was herself. The seedlings floated away like a hundred tiny angels, off to see the world on a pleasure cruise. Would they remember her wish as they flew over lakes and rivers, were awed by mountains and died in deserts? Could their lives be anyone's but their own?

Sandy reached down within herself for a familiar strength, increasingly absent these days. It hadn't been a wish she had made but a threat: "I will remember, I will. Or my life as I know it is over." The dandelion's certainly was.

As her mother struggled to her feet, Louise ran over to offer a hand. This time her mother didn't wave her away but grasped her wrist as she stood with a faint groan. She smiled sadly at Louise—her dry lips slightly upturned, her eyes wide and blue and open. "One more down," she said. "I think we might have a chance after all."

Louise glanced at the list in her mother's hand, trembling slightly in the breeze. More than half the items had neat checkmarks beside them. Louise was surprised to see that all of them were things they had found—leaves and birds and flowers and eggs half-glimpsed in nests. No cheating, after all. She wondered suddenly if her mother had even been serious about that, or if she was just having some fun at her daughter's expense. Louise laughed now and turned away.

On the bluff to the left, the pine trees were moving gently, dancing to their own quiet song. Louise could almost hear the notes, a string quartet just loud enough for two lovers to hear. The sun above lit the trees like dancers in a puddle of moonlight. She was reminded suddenly of a winter evening, right before Christmas, when she had caught her parents dancing slowly before the tree. Their swaying was barely noticeable, and her mother sang softly in her father's ear.

With one last glance at the pines, Louise continued up the path, her mother already cresting the small hill above.

As the sun lingered west—tiptoeing across the sky's expanse without leaving a single print—Sandy strode faster, the cement path turning into a dirt trail beneath her. She stepped over the detritus of the forest—dead tree limbs, patches of clover, Black-eyed Susans—clogging the way as if placed there by dam-building beavers to slow the flow of human traffic. Her daughter chattered endlessly beside her, drowning out the queer birdcalls darting through the air. Tweets fast and slow, together then alone, wind chimes making a pattern you could never quite catch.

Sandy had never been able to identify birdsongs, not even the cardinals who lived in her backyard. The trees here momentarily thinned, prairie grasses opening on either side of her like cresting waves frozen before they could break against the shore. In this sudden space, more birds hovered—over yellow, purple, pink flowers, partakers of a pastel buffet. Without the trees as shield, the wind rushed at Sandy, carrying the scent of wildflowers, wet dirt, and long grasses. She breathed deep, taking in a part of the park she had always considered her own.

Whoop-whoop-weep-weep-weep-weep. Birdsong sounded above—two notes loud, then four fast and frantic, like a lover calling its mate, a baby calling for a mother out wandering.

"I think it might become a Trader Joe's," Sandy heard her daughter say as she tuned back in to the tuneless chirp beside her. "That would be nice for Todd and me; the other location is so far away."

"What are you talking about?" Sandy responded, perhaps a bit too brusquely. She calmed her voice. "Who is Joe and what is he trading?"

Louise turned toward her, as bewildered as Sandy was. "The construction site on the corner of Forest and Sixth, Mom. We drove by it this morning, and I pointed it out."

"Oh yes, I remember now." Sandy nodded quickly, forcing her lips into a crooked smile.

"I've taken you to Trader Joe's several times," Louise continued, a note of nag in her voice. "You bought wheat flour, remember? You called the place hoity-toity."

"Hoity-toity. Yes it was," Sandy trailed off.

Louise continued up the trail, and this time Sandy stayed back, watching her daughter and squinting into the light peeking through the treetops. The sun was unrepentant for a May afternoon. Sweat dripped down her powdered cheeks, smelling sour. Sandy wasn't entirely sure it was from the heat.

After a sharp turn in the trail, Louise suddenly recognized where they were, now that they had left the main path. She turned back to her mother with a grin.

"This is one of the locations where Black Hawk clashed with the Illinois militia," she explained, words rushing with delight. "Lincoln fought in that battle, when he was young. Chief Black Hawk and his warriors fled over that ridge in retreat, and the soldiers lost them in the forest the Indians knew so well."

Louise had learned all this from her mother. Although the park was named after the heroic Indian chief, most of the town's citizens knew little or nothing of its history. Not so her mother. Mrs. Sandy Hudson knew every detail about the history of the area—what the founder liked to eat, who the first priest was in love with, when the store on Second Street was built, burnt down and renovated. She even knew the natural course of the river before the dams, how the shore stone weathered over time.

For her mother, Louise knew, this was more than just a love for the home where she had lived all her life, more than a connection to a specific place. She frolicked in details, in the minutiae of the past, the way some women dove into knitting or gardening. Louise and her brother had never received hand-woven sweaters from their mother, but they did get an education in where they came from, what went on before. Their roots, Sandy called it, though her family had emigrated here from Scotland long after the town was founded. Once a place was hers, it was hers for all time.

Louise recalled long days tromping through these woods as a child, hearing about the Black Hawk War and the Indians who had lived here for centuries. Then they'd take a tour of downtown, bricks crumbling and people bustling as their mother slowly—and with much drama—recounted the doings of the people who had once lived, owned, shopped or slept in each building.

She was a master of gossip, only 100 years too late. Louise never remembered her mother sharing a tidbit about a neighbor, the parish priest, the shop owner down the street. The living were off limits, the dead seemingly fair game—nosiness disguised as history. Her mother spent hours of her free time in the public library and the state historical society, rifling through journals and gossip columns and personal letters from those buried a few blocks away. Her mother called it investigating; Louise secretly termed it snooping.

Farther from the park entrance now, Louise noticed that the birds' calls were louder, as if aware they were no longer trespassing on human grounds but frolicking in their own kingdom. Here, in the middle of town, was a natural place, and Louise could almost imagine herself in the old-growth forest of yore, never quite knowing when the trees would end, when the wild would withdraw.

During those long-ago treks through the park, her mother would stop every 100 yards to recall a tidbit or ramble on about someone long dead. On those hikes, Louise had felt connected to a single place in a way she hadn't since, plugged in to all the subtle turnings of history, the parallels, the coincidences, the absurd and the sorrowful. She felt the trees breathe out their stories, and she sucked them in, trading carbon dioxide for oxygen and isolation for communion—accompanied, of course, by her mother's authoritative voice. The woods were a classroom and a church, a playground and a home, both familiar and mysterious at the same time.

Louise had taken walks in the park many times since then, but it was her mother's voice that brought it all back—laying the spell across the forest floor.

Now, stopped in her tracks, her mother was looking at Louise strangely. "Black Hawk," she echoed softly and took a step forward. She tripped over a root and went down like a birch—fast and loud.

"Mom, are you all right?" Louise gasped, springing toward her mother after a frozen moment spent watching her flimsy limbs tumble like bones from a blanket.

"I'm fine, I'm fine," her mother said irritably, reaching for Louise's hand and slowly getting to her feet a second time. "Damn root."

Louise thought her mother's eyes looked shiny, wet, but she chalked it up to the sun. Her mother wasn't hurt, after all.

The pair spent a few more quiet moments on the trail, the paper floating listlessly from her mother's loose fist. Then Louise came upon another familiar landmark—a crumbling bridge holding itself up across the creek. Half of it had collapsed; the boards gone but the iron underpinings rusty in the water below. An offshoot of the path made a quick jaunt into oblivion—its existence nearly extinguished by moss and weeds and short purple flowers. It was a bridge no one could cross, a promise broken just when you thought it would hold, and Louise longed for the other side. It looked forlorn, forgotten by its builders, its pedestrians, even the boys who used to fence with sticks, back and forth, back and forth, across the water below.

"Tell me again the story of the bridge," Louise asked her mother, a smile already tugging at her lips.

Her mother waited a beat, then launched into the tale, her voice weaker than it had been but still resonant with the grandeur infusing all her history.

"The year was 1889," she began, "and the creek had flooded for the sixth summer in a row. Back then, the crossing was used to ferry goods from farms out west to the markets downtown. Both the farmers and the merchants complained—and with much reluctance—the mayor agreed to finance an iron bridge, large enough for two wagons to pass abreast.

"But the mayor was an untrustworthy man, and when taxes were raised to pay for construction, he embezzled most of the money and put it toward a big house on top of the bluff. In the bridge's place, he built a narrow wooden version, which he constructed himself, being a fair carpenter.

"When the people saw it, they ran the mayor out of town and tore down his house in a fit, using the lumber to enlarge the bridge and build a wooden road to it. Some logs inevitably ended up in people's houses and barns, too. But the town never had the money for an iron bridge, and a flood-of-the-century washed half the bridge away six years later. Since a gravel road was being built further to the south, the bridge was never repaired."

With a flourish of her long fingers, her mother ended the tale and began walking away from the bridge, her back turned on its rich history.

Louise stared after her mother, her mouth open wide. She took off in long strides to catch up; her mother was faster than she looked.

That was not the story. Not at all.

Years ago, Louise's mother had told her and Eddy that the bridge was a relic of the Black Hawk War, built by the militia to cross a flooded stream and then destroyed days later when the Sauk and Fox attacked, isolating them on the other side.

Was her mother lying now, or had she been lying then? Had any of the stories been true?

Climbing the next rise, Sandy kept her back to her daughter, her heart thrumming like the Indian drums that had once echoed in these woods. The trees still felt the reverberations in their sap; Sandy felt them in the pounding of her blood.

Increasingly, Sandy found herself in situations like this, put on the spot, and she wasn't able to handle herself with her normal aplomb. She felt disoriented, lost in space and time, sitting an exam for a class she had never taken.

Her daughter only made it worse, always asking questions, putting forth little niggling reminders. Acting half a schoolmarm and half an

eager child. Sandy had never leaned on other people, especially her daughter. Louise needed her mother, always would, and it was not time to trade places, not now. She would never become an infant in her daughter's dutiful hands.

Slowing down now, Sandy flashed back to her last doctor's appointment. Had it been two months ago now? The details were fuzzy, but she remembered the doctor's handsome hazel eyes, and the way her head swam when he spoke the words, the room growing fuzzy at the edges. That was a word the doctor had used to describe her, "fuzzy," a thoughtful under-exaggeration, a hammer wrapped in cellophane, a gun with a silencer.

Even before that appointment, Sandy had begun sorting through photos and old school papers, tossing them into boxes marked for Louise and Ed, a few for scattered nieces and nephews. She had meant to do this for years, since her husband had died more than a decade ago. The moments they contained no longer belonged to her, had left her long ago for greener forests.

Now, though, feeling the wooden frame of her mind slowly begin to lean, Sandy was determined to stop the softening, to cage her brain in steel and silence. No one would ever need to know about the doctor's murmured words, his pitying, patronizing smile. And if the edges did fray, watered like eggs sunny side up, seeped like sauce from spaghetti, there was always a fall down the stairs, or better yet, down the half-rotten steps of Black Hawk Park.

Sandy paused on one such step, her right heel unsteady. She had spotted it.

Louise was dozens of yards behind her mother when she crested the hill and spotted an old woman on the steps below. She rushed forward, toward the bowed white head, scalp showing through, as pale as the hair growing above. Had one of the other scavengers taken a tumble down the stairs? The steps were rotting and yielding under her feet, straining to return to the earth. They were accidents waiting to happen, and the park staff should have replaced them years ago.

Louise was only a few feet away when she recognized her mother. A starling feather cradled in her steady palm, she looked up at Louise in joy. Her smile seemed to bounce off the trees around them.

"Do you think we won?"

Louise smiled back, stunned by the beautiful blue-black feather speckled with tiny white stars, glossy in the sunlight streaming through the canopy above. It seemed to have fallen from nowhere, part of a magical realm where fairies flew and birds sparkled with gems. She took a breath. "Let's go back to the park entrance and see."

They returned the way they had come, walking side by side now, Louise stepping carefully in the soft, short grass next to the trail, submerging her sneakers in a stream of green pulling her on to another forest, a bigger river, an ocean she had never seen. Weedy and patchy in patterns, the grass spoke of long ages past and summers just begun.

Louise felt the breeze caress her face and turned to find her mother smoothing her hair, her eyes soft like blueberry pie.

"This might have been a good idea after all."

"Might?" Louise replied.

"Might," her mother affirmed. "You never can tell."

Overhead, a blue jay flitted from a branch, singing its fading song as it winged farther and farther away.

OBSSESSION

By Lorin Cary

Lorin Cary taught history at an Ohio university and then decided to create his own cause and effect relationships. The resulting humorous historical novel, set in the present, is *The Custer Conspiracy*. Two stories appeared recently in *Cigale Literary Magazine* and *decomp Literary Magazine*. Several others appeared in *Nantucket Writings* and *Cafe Solo*, both of which are defunct through no fault of his.

Over the years Ridley's hair thinned, strand by strand. Each morning he bent and scooped up the wiry wet mass that clung to the screen over the shower drain. He studied the clot and recalled what he'd once looked like. He marveled at how this malady had crept up on him, a sinister slow destruction of his once proud mane. It must have taken years and then, it seemed on a single day, there he was, nearly bald.

Ridley spent hours in the bathroom. He anointed himself with creams, jellies and herbal concoctions to induce growth. After these ministrations he placed the long strings of his remaining hair across his dome, patted them down and applied hair spray to hold them in place.

The comb-over-spray-down technique worked, Ridley thought, although Dede complained about the smell of the aerosol and how long he took in the bathroom. She appeared impatient with what she called his "fixation." "You are deluding yourself," she said.

Ridley wondered whether maybe that wasn't the case when a high wind lifted his hair on one side and Dede's friend Alice laughed so hard she crossed her legs. "It's hinged," she managed to say. Ridley felt horrible. He looked in the mirror and had to admit that what hair persisted did not provide even an illusion of cover. When Dede suggested a toupee, he decided to explore the idea.

With some misgivings, Ridley checked the yellow pages and selected The House of Hair because it promised "discreet and personal attention to your every need." A salesman assured him "We got just what you need." After an assessment of color, texture and facial dimensions, Ridley faced the task of selection. He lingered over the Wayne Newton, but dismissed it after the salesman suggested it was "too tall for a man of your stature."

The salesman praised the hair piece he finally selected, the Burt Reynolds, said it fit, looked good, and would change his life. "It sits beautiful, looks fantastic," the man said. "Knocks off maybe twenty years."

Ridley studied himself in a mirror; he did look different.

Problems with the toupee emerged over the course of several months. Ridley thought he now had a full head of hair, yet gradually perceived that people knew it was not his own.

He'd walked into the library once and a lady turned away, her hand over her mouth. A man glanced at him with a smile and whispered something to the woman he was with. Then the woman peeked, and grinned. Worse, when he and Dede were in a restaurant he heard the dreaded word "rug" uttered and shortly thereafter "stupid" and "poorly done."

Such comments upset Ridley and each night when he removed the toupee, set it on its stand and combed it, he grimaced and his shoulders slumped. Ridley did not remain despondent for long. He came to believe that the problem was not with the toupee itself, but with how it sat on his head. It had a tendency to slip forward, leaving an embarrassing gap of scalp at the back. Sometimes it shifted to one side, in which case his hair appeared lumpy and uneven. On hot humid days his scalp itched and if he scratched it the toupee moved. Ridley stopped using the

adhesive designed to hold the thing in place because it melted if he blushed or the temperature rose above 95 and a waxy yellow fluid dribbled down his cheeks.

Humiliating experiences such as these led Ridley to the notion of permanently affixing the toupee. The idea had its drawbacks, he knew. But he was so tired of being ashamed, so spent with the effort of ensuring that the toupee sat properly, that he ignored them. He went to the local drugstore and bought the best epoxy glue he could find and went home and mixed the solutions from the two tubes as the directions suggested. Just as he set the glued toupee onto his head the phone rang. Startled, he turned and the toupee slipped out of position. In his heart Ridley knew this, even before he looked in the mirror. And when he did that he gasped. There it sat, like some flat furry creature that had leapt at him from on high and ended up sprawled sideways across his head. The part ran from one ear toward the other.

He looked ridiculous. Ridley allowed himself a brief chuckle. As the phone stopped ringing, he reread the directions. The epoxy set in 15 seconds. At that point Dede found him. "My god," she said, "what happened?" Ridley explained and Dede, never one to waste motion, grabbed the toupee and yanked it upward. It did not move and the yank caused him significant pain. Too much time had passed.

Tearing from the agony, Ridley sat down on the edge of the tub.

"Ridley, honey, I love you," Dede said in a choked voice.

Ridley wondered whether she was stifling a laugh.

Dede insisted that they go to the Emergency Room and Ridley agreed because he couldn't think of anything else to do. A grin creased the doctor's mouth, but her professionalism won out and in short order, she removed the toupee, along with a portion of Ridley's scalp which for some reason did not yield to the chemicals applied.

Ridley vowed that, once his scalp healed, he would get a hair transplant. Dede, who seemed exasperated, showed him a photo of a bad transplant job. "See," she said. "The guy looks like a drunken farmer tried to plant rows of corn in his scalp."

Ridley admitted she was right. But he inquired into the procedure none the less. "What you do is grow a mustache before you get the plugs," a technician at Hair Today advised. "Then when you get the transplant you shave it off. People look at you, they say 'something's different, oh, I got it, your moustache's gone.' And you say, 'Right.' Get it?"

Ridley stared at the neat, symmetrical rows on the man's head. They reminded him of young rice shoots. He decided to pass on the transplants. Instead, he took to wearing hats and caps, and acquired a large collection of both. These worked when he was outside, yet proved no solution for the indoor times. He clung to the quaint Victorian belief that it was rude to wear a hat inside.

In time Dede's frustration boiled over. One day she put her hands on her hips and glared at him as he stood in front of the bedroom mirror. "Honey," she said, "I got to say, and I told you this again and again, I love you the way you are. But, and I got to say this, too, you are driving me nuts and you have got to stop this preoccupation . . . this obsession. I have had it." She stomped one foot. "Do you understand? I have had it."

Ridley pursed his lips and sighed. "I guess you're right. I got kind of carried away, didn't I?" Dede nodded and Ridley turned back to the mirror. He squinted at his profile. "You notice how that guy looked at me last night when I ordered the pizza?" he said, his hands on his belly. "Dede, you think I'm too fat?"

BURNING DOWN THE DOLL HOUSE

By Gloria Keeley

Gloria Keeley is a graduate of San Francisco State University with a BA and an MA in Creative Writing. She is currently a volunteer at the grammar school she attended, teaching poetry writing to two 3rd grade classes. Her main writing focus is poetry. This is her first short story.

In my neighborhood, when I was little, there were many more boys than girls. I always played with the boys, mainly because my older brother had to take me along when he went to play with his friends. We'd play tag, basketball, and mostly baseball. I loved playing baseball. I didn't like softball. I liked to pitch overhand. I also preferred the smaller baseball to the larger softball.

When I was in the first grade, I always played with the boys in the schoolyard. We'd run around playing tag, marbles, and we'd shoot baseball cards to knock down the cards we placed against a wall. I was really good at both, but especially marbles. My mother used to laugh as I'd walk to the car after school with my huge sack of marbles.

One afternoon, after lunch, I was playing baseball with the boys. The girls were playing jacks and jump rope. Now, I didn't hate jacks or

jump rope, I just would have rather been playing baseball. Just as I was about to get my turn at bat, my teacher, Mrs. Rollins, came up to me. She told me that I couldn't play with the boys. She said she noticed I played with them every day and it had to stop. She made me go and play jacks with the girls. When the bell rang, Mrs. Rollins told me to sit on the bench alone out in the schoolyard. Then she and all the kids went back into the classroom.

When my mother came to pick me up after school, I told her what had happened. She was furious. She got out of the car and stormed into my classroom. She went right up to Mrs. Rollins, who was at her desk putting students' papers into her briefcase.

"What do you mean by leaving my daughter Gloria out in the schoolyard alone?" my mother began. "Anything could have happened to her!"

Mrs. Rollins started to explain that I was being punished for always playing with the boys.

"What?" My mother answered, incredulous. "Why can't she play with the boys? Boys are all she has to play with in our neighborhood. She's allowed to play with boys. Don't stop her from doing that. She has my permission to play with whoever she wants. And don't you EVER leave her out in the schoolyard alone again. I'm going to the principal right now to tell her what happened."

With that, my mother took off for the principal's office. Mrs. Rollins never stopped me again from playing with the boys.

My life and the way I looked at it changed one day when I was in the first grade. I was 5 1/2 years old. Mrs. Rollins was reading us a story. We all sat at our tables listening. Each table had two students. The girls were paired with the girls, and the boys were paired with the boys. I don't even remember who my desk partner was. What I do remember is that directly behind me was Bobby. His was the last table in the middle row. This particular day, as I was listening to the story, I decided to take my little chair and sit with Bobby and his desk partner. Bobby moved over to make space for me and said to the other boy, "Make room, we have company."

I thought that was so nice of him to welcome me that way. I was in love with Bobby. He was the cutest and nicest boy I'd ever known.

Mrs. Rollins was reading to us the entire time. I was moving my chair to sit with Bobby, and when she looked up, her face turned red, and she marched over to me.

"What are you doing?" she half yelled. "Who said you could move your chair back here? ... Well?"

I didn't answer because nobody told me that I couldn't do this, I just did it. I didn't think I'd done anything wrong.

"Come with me, young lady!"

I didn't like being called young lady, but I followed her anyway. She led me back to the cloak room which was a small alcove in the back of the classroom.

"You stand back here until I tell you that you can return."

At this point in my young life, I really didn't understand that I was being punished. When I was old enough to finally understand that standing in the corner was not a good thing, I had gotten to the point where I spent a lot of time standing in the corner. I've had to stand in so many corners that I can putty and spackle a crack in the wall and paint it so you wouldn't even know it was there.

After Mrs. Rollins left me there alone, I looked around at all of the coats, practiced tying my shoes and glanced out the small window which looked out onto the schoolyard. The schoolyard was empty. Having nothing better to do, I reached up over the coats to get my brown lunch bag. I opened it and looked inside. I always got a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, an orange, a banana and cookies. I went for the cookies. I was eating the second cookie when Mrs. Rollins came back, I guess to tell me that I could come back into the classroom. However, when she saw me eating the cookie, her face got redder than ever. The rush of blood looked like an elevator going up.

"This isn't lunch time!" she yelled. She grabbed my lunch bag and threw it back up on the shelf.

"You just stay back here a little longer."

She left me there, still red in the face.

Having nothing better to do, I peered out of the small window in the cloakroom. I saw a man walking toward our classroom. He was carrying something but I couldn't make out what it was. Very soon I heard some pops and lots of screaming. Not fun, excited screaming but horrible screaming. I tiptoed to the end of the row of coats and peeked into the classroom just in time to see the back of the man's head and the back of my teacher. All of a sudden my teacher's head looked like a watermelon blowing up in all directions. I couldn't comprehend what was happening. The popping just kept going, and soon all of my classmates had fallen down. The man's eyes darted around, and I realized I was in danger, so I snuck to the back of the cloakroom and hid behind bookshelves. I shook like a leaf as I saw the man's shoes entering the cloakroom. He stopped; I couldn't see his face. I crouched perfectly still. He left quickly, and I heard the classroom door slam.

I laid still for I don't know how long. After awhile, I heard sirens and lots of screaming. I later learned that the screaming was from parents who had gathered in front of the school. They were told by the Chief of Police that it appeared that all of the children were dead.

I got up slowly and peeked out of the small window. One of the policemen spotted my movement and shouted, "There's someone inside! I just saw someone move!" I scrambled back to my hiding place. I then saw feet at the entrance to the cloakroom. I began whimpering. I soon saw several sets of feet coming in slowly. I looked up and saw that their guns were drawn. I started to really bawl now. They must have spotted my tiny feet and they put their guns away.

"It's ok, honey, come out. It's safe, we're policemen. What's your name?"

I peeked again to make sure. They all had uniforms on. I slowly came out, still crying.

"Gloria," I said very softly.

One of the officers came up to me and tried to lead me out by my shoulder. "Don't touch me, please don't touch me!" I said.

The officer said, "OK, just follow us. Keep your eyes closed. We'll lead you out." I didn't close my eyes. It was important for me to look for Bobby.

I repeated, "Don't touch me."

I didn't want them to lead me away yet. I looked around and saw all these little bodies on the floor. I saw Mrs. Rollins, and I saw a lot of blood. My eyes darted all over until I rested on the place where Bobby's desk was. I saw him, and I knew it was him by his clothes. I ran up to him, knelt down and cradled him.

"Bobby! Bobby!" That was all I could think of to say. I looked at him and shook. His face wasn't really there. I cried uncontrollably, still yelling, "Bobby!"

One of the officers finally picked me up and brought me outside. I heard one of them say, "She has blood all over her, but it's not hers. She's OK, she's fine."

I saw that he was talking to the parents. The officer said, "This is Gloria. Is her mother or father here?"

My mother let out a shriek and ran up to me. She hugged and hugged me, crying fitfully. My brother, who had been in the third grade classroom, was there too. He hugged me and kept his arm around me.

When we got home we were not allowed to discuss what happened and no newspapers were brought into the house. At family gatherings nothing was ever mentioned about the incident.

My mom let me go to Bobby's wake. It was, of course, closed casket. My mother had told Bobby's mother that we would be coming. I shyly went up to Bobby's mother and she hugged me. She gave me his Roy Rogers bedspread. Bobby and I had talked about it when he got it the week before. His mother said that Bobby told her about our conversation and how much we both loved Roy Rogers. I had asked Bobby if Pat Brady, Bullet and Nellie Belle were on the bedspread. When Bobby's mother gave me the bedspread, all she could manage to say was, "Thank you for holding Bobby. I know he heard you. It comforts me that you did that." I wondered how she knew about that. Later I realized she must have read it in the newspaper.

I often think of my fallen classmates. I don't really even remember what many of them looked like, although I can still see Bobby vividly. I think of all of them as I go through each rite of passage in my life's journey: My first Holy Communion, Confirmation, first school dance, proms, and graduation. I stop and say a prayer for them all, all who never experienced the ups and downs of growing up, to be cut down so young. And in a weird twist of fate, it could have been me too, as I will always wonder why I was spared to my own dying day.

EXHAUSTED

By Danny Judge

Danny Judge is an emerging writer who is working on his first novel. His short story, "Last Night," will appear later this year in *The Quotable*. A former Marine, he lives in the Midwest with his wife and two-year-old son.

The aisles of the brightly illuminated shopping market seemed longer than usual; the Thursday afternoon shoppers—normally listless and robotic—were suddenly all potential threats. She attempted to calm her nerves by envisioning a pie cooling on a window ledge, but this failed to assuage the nagging that she certainly would be caught—exposed at last—and they would all shake their heads in lambent condemnation: yet they wouldn't be surprised, they wouldn't be shocked.

I knew it all along, I did, they'd say as they watched her led from the store, hands behind her back. Ever since she lost her young ones, she hasn't been the same—who could blame her, of course? But this ... I wonder what the girls at the salon'll say—Marcy's her cousin, you know. Then these faceless members of the crowd would skitter off, as if they'd all just remembered an important obligation—their scandalous accounts would spread through the town like wildfire, and by the next day the number of people who claimed to have been shopping at the market when it'd happened would double or perhaps triple the number that had actually witnessed it.

She recognized Ms. Cabernathy putting along languidly—she was very old and moved slowly, but she would gossip just as eagerly as her younger counterparts when the time came. They all talked about her anyway; they noticed how after the young ones had gone she'd changed, how she took to the bottle a little too often, even considering her tragic losses (*poor thing, they all said*). *But ...* There was always a "but"—there was a threshold, an invisible line that you were afforded after a stroke of horrible luck: how was it determined? No one knew, but they *all* seemed to know when it was crossed. So they talked.

She watched as Ms. Cabernathy finally settled on the same loaf of bread she'd been settling on for decades; the old woman made her way around the corner and on to the next aisle. The produce selection was puny—it was arranged on a small refrigerated section near the back of the store. After the elderly woman was out of sight, she moved quickly, plucking a grape—

(someone whistling)

quickly popping it in her mouth—

(someone coming, their cart rounding the corner)

not chewing but spitting it right back into her waiting palm—

(their hands coming into view she was CAUGHT, SHE WAS CAUGHT!!)

moving as fast as she could, putting it back in the bag—

(it's Mr. Duncan and he'd seen her and she was CAUGHT she'd been a fool and he'd seen her do it and he'd tell and then they would TALK)

and backing up casually (*she hoped beyond hope*), studying the cucumbers as though she'd doubts over their ripeness and—

She was not caught. Mr. Duncan hadn't noticed her yet, and when he did, he flashed her a warm smile—almost imperceptibly sympa-

thetic, but she felt it. She always saw the empathy in the eyes of the townspeople, no matter *how* pleasant their smiles. She was relieved.

She forced herself to say hello to Tom behind the meat counter—she was flushed with adrenaline and couldn't focus enough to read the daily specials. Tom gave her the same smile as Mr. Duncan, which was far more welcome than the look of wary suspicion that she'd braced herself for. She turned down aisle two: canned goods, condiments, pastas, spices, etc.

She attempted to focus long enough to place several items in her cart; she'd wonder later how she'd ended up with lasagna noodles and Alfredo sauce. She paused in front of the spices—another puny selection staged upon a two-foot section of shelving.

She'd passed Ms. Cabernathy two aisles away, considering a small box of dry cat food. She thought she had time to do it—she wasn't typically brazen enough, but the adrenaline rush she'd ridden after the grape had given her a sense of invincibility. She did it, acting as quickly as she could, her hands trembling—nervousness or excitement, it didn't matter.

She plied the top off of a small plastic tube of cayenne pepper—it was a small store and still carried the brand without a safety seal, so if she was careful she could replace the top without risking discovery. She nearly let it slip through her nervous fingers as she set it back on the shelf and selected a taller tube of cinnamon, plying the top off in the same considerate manner. She stopped herself and made sure she was still alone. Then, as fast as she could, she sifted two tablespoons of the hot cayenne pepper into the cinnamon shaker and replaced both of the lids securely, restoring them on the shelf with care.

Mr. Frindy (she'd always thought he'd a funny name) started down the aisle then, and she breathed a sigh of relief. She had done it.

She passed him, their carts nearly brushing each other, and he smiled the same smile that they all smiled. He put his hand gently on her cart.

"I saw what you did with the spices you wily bitch," he said, still smiling.

"*What?*" she gasped, gripping her cart defensively.

"I said how have you been, dear?" he repeated, his eyes suddenly wide and concerned.

She put her hand on her brow and sighed, talking herself back down.

"I'm sorry Mr. Frindy, I don't know what I thought . . . I've had a heck of a time finding sleep this week, that's all," she offered meekly.

He responded with his own deep sigh and a sympathetic wince. He said something undoubtedly supportive, but she didn't hear him—she was inside of her own head, reeling. She was aware on a cursory level that she smiled and thanked him and wished him a good afternoon. She approached the cashier's stand as though she were clogging through the thick, muddied air of a bad dream that couldn't end soon enough. She heard herself offer more robotic—yet apparently sociable enough—banter and had a moment of spiked panic as the teenage girl scanned her items, sure the little brat would ask her if she'd *meant* to select baking soda and vinegar and orange juice concentrate: *gosh, this is a weird assortment, Mrs. Gruise*, she'd say. Then they would all talk; then they'd pick out *her* as the one who'd sabotaged the spice aisle, and all because she hadn't been focused enough to—

"That'll be fifteen dollars and eighty-two cents, ma'am," the girl said—no trace of scorn or even curiosity on her young face.

She began to feel better as she walked to her car; no one had chased her out of the store or asked her any accusing questions on her way out. She even giggled a bit, chastising herself for being prone to such fancy and uncharacteristic paranoia.

Mr. Brendle, the town sheriff and a man of typically gentle countenance, approached her as she stocked her groceries in the cramped trunk of her car. He advanced from the sidewalk and glanced at her backseat as he neared her to say hello—he stopped suddenly, eyes wide, right hand dropping to the revolver attached to his hip.

"How *could* you?" he asked, revolted and angry. "They're only *kids* for Christ's sake, how could you *kill* them you monster?" He drew his revolver and aimed and she had a moment of terrible, sick understanding as he squeezed the trigger—

"Mrs. Gruise, are you alright?" he asked, his amicable smile faltering a little.

"I'm sorry?" she asked, shaking her head and blinking twice.

"I was wondering what your trick is," he said, his smile returning—reluctantly, though.

She gaped, then realized he was gesturing at the car's back seat.

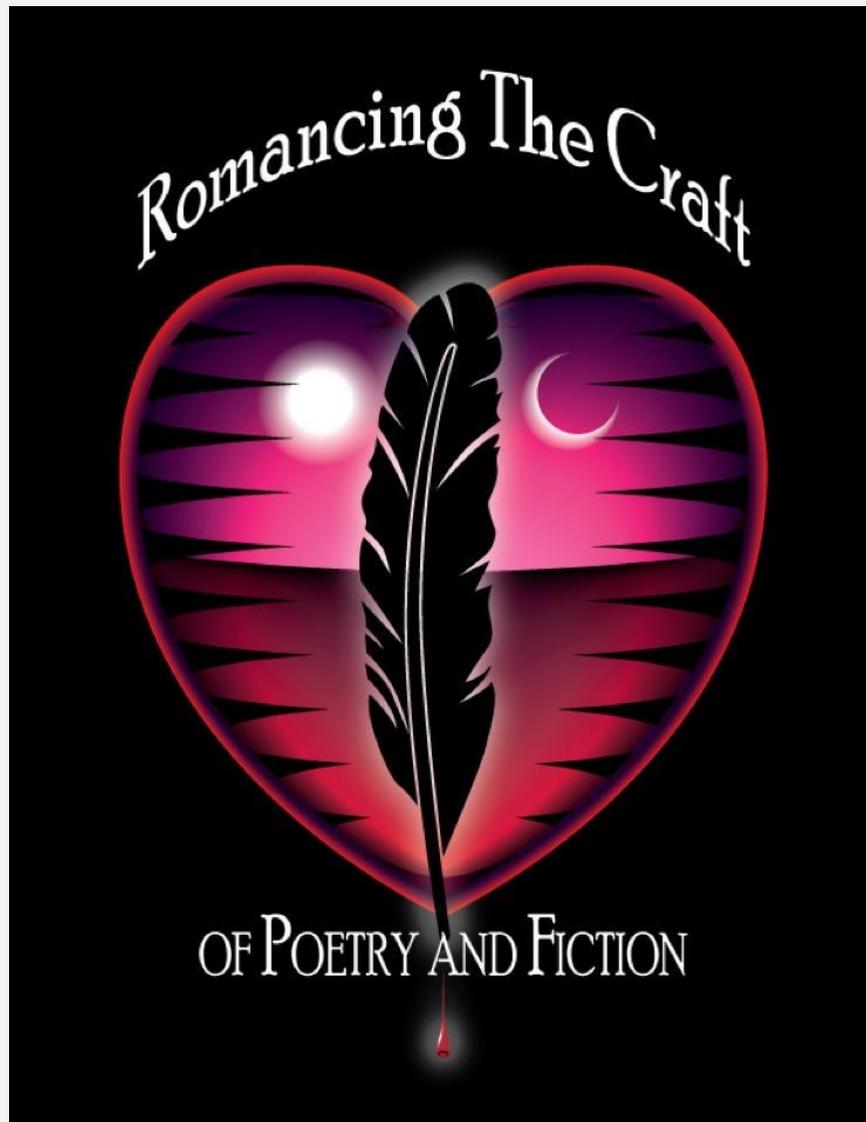
"Laney and I would give anything to be able to tire the kids out like that," he said. "And to have them *all* napping at the same time?" He shook his head good-naturedly and patted her on the shoulder as he continued on his way into the supermarket. "You're a miracle worker, Mrs. Gruise," he said, chuckling.

She was trembling as she sat down behind the wheel of her small Oldsmobile. She straightened her mirror and saw Anna, Becca and Mikey—eight, five and two, respectively—sleeping in the backseat, little Mikey in his car seat, loosely clutching his teddy bear between his big sisters. She smiled, again admonishing herself for allowing her imagination to run away with her.

She decided to go home and wake up the children after-all—they'd looked so peaceful as they'd fallen asleep in the garage that morning, and she'd hadn't the heart to disturb them yet. Little Mikey had rumbled and roared, mimicking the idling engine as she'd closed the garage door—she'd laughed appreciatively and kissed him on the forehead before going in the house to brew a pitcher of sun tea.

She smiled as her thoughts turned to her tea—it would be ready after a couple more hours, and she thought perhaps a dash of vodka in her iced tea was *just* the thing to cure her strange mood. She'd have to fuel up before that, though. She was low on gas and maybe a little hungry—a slice of cheesecake along with a tall, perspiring glass of cold tea would do the trick, and maybe later she would read the children a story. They'd behaved all day, after all, and she was in a good enough mood to spoil them a little, it seemed.

INTRODUCING
THE 2014 WINNERS



1ST

Amy S. Pacini is a freelance writer and poet from Land O Lakes, Florida. She is the Poetry Editor for Long Story Short ezine. Her work has been widely published in online ezines, literary journals, and anthologies including Torrid Literature Journal, Kind Of A Hurricane Press, Lost Tower Publications, Page & Spine, Cyclamens And Swords, Making Waves Poetry Anthology, All Things Girl, Magnapoets, Hope Whispers, and Hanging Moss Journal. Pacini is a two-time 1st place winner of the Annual Romancing the Craft of Poetry and Fiction Contest for 2013-2014 sponsored by the TL Publishing Group. She writes poetry, short stories, personal essays, and motivational quotes, and is the owner and operator of A.S.P. INK and its site www.amypacini.com.

WRITING ALWAYS FINDS ME

By Amy S. Pacini

Writing always finds me...

In the clustered cells of my restlessly racing mind
In the lonely longings and aching apprehensions of my heart
Weaving a whirling web of whimsical words and a wishful well of wisdom.

Fancily floating like a carefree cardinal red feather in the blissful breezes
On a spring Sunday afternoon looking up at the cloudless robin's egg blue sky
Pondering the purpose and meaning of life and how I fit in to the universal master plan.

Through streaming sensations, trickled thoughts, and cascading cares
Of woodland creeks, mountain lakes, and rainforest waterfalls
It percolates the perceptions, ignites burning passions, and unleashes my chambered creativity.

Writing always finds me...

In the radiant rays of sultry summer days and the witching hour of harvest moonlit nights
It never lets me down and is always there for me no matter the day or hour
It doesn't have to check its daily planner book for an opening or need to pencil me in.

It silently waits for me to open my artistic arms
To euphorically embrace its literary lines with artistic agility
When I am mentally blocked or drained, it journalistically jolts my linguistic lightning.

It allows me to completely and wholeheartedly be myself
And clearly sees the transparent totality of my intricate individuality
With its strongest sensibilities and weakest witherings.

Writing always finds me...

It speaks to me through the daily interactions of the people I meet and greet
While taking a relaxing drive through the country or exploring a new city
On cemetery epitaphs of those who are remembered for their final inspirational inscriptions.
While reading breaking news articles and controversially edgy editorials
Reading romantic love stories, suspense thriller novels, and farcical comic strips
Through biblical scripture, devotional divinity, and prayerful penitence.

It does not mock or snicker at the silly, stupid or strange things I say
It does not unjustly judge or bluntly criticize my opinions, actions, mistakes, and failures
But alternatively offers me a safe sanctuary of solitude and serenity.

Writing always finds me...

In the chaotic chasms, majestic moments, and sacred spaces of each morning sunrise
In the surreal subconsciousness of castle cloud dreams
And monster chasing nightmares of every nightfall's repose.

WRITING ALWAYS FINDS ME

By Amy S. Pacini

Between the sidewalk cracks, cobwebbed corners, masquerading mirrors and open doorways
Down familiarly traveled roads, unforeseeable twists and turns, and uncharted territories
Through rivuleted rumination, meadowed meanderings, and oceanic odysseys.

Recurrently roaming like an apparitional abstraction
In the echoing halls of home and the unoccupied rooms of chimerical childhood
Yearning for love and acceptance, understanding and respect.

Writing always finds me...

It quietly whispers in the silhouetted shadows of my melancholic moods
And patiently listens to me unveil my deepest and darkest desires, shameful and sinful secrets
On the unfilled pages of personal pain, anguish, and sorrow.

In trying times of dire desperation when I feel hopelessly hollow and forlornly fractured
It brings me to a much better place than where I originally came from
It uplifts my sinking soul and transcendently transforms my being into a liberated literate.

Like a lost dog fervently finding his way back home again because that is what writing feels like
A pleasant place to call home and that is where I always retreat when I want to find
Calming peace, cozy comfort, Hallmark happiness, lively laughter and lavishing love.

Writing always finds me...

2ND

Jennifer Palmer is twenty-one years old and lives in Spartanburg, South Carolina. Palmer has been writing since eighth grade, and she is currently trying to find an agent for the fantasy book she's written.

CLAY

By Jennifer Palmer

The letter she holds
holds no surprises,
but its thorn pricks nonetheless.

"Nothing," she says,
"Not even honorary mention."

I may be all moor and cliffs,
but she is forest and pond –
denser than a wolf's winter coat
darker than the shadows encasing it.

"Next time," I reply,
"You'll show them next time."
But her head is turned and set.

For there are depths in her
my wings can't possibly reach,
dens and havens hidden behind barricaded eyes,

I touch her hand,
cool as a shaded stone,
and wonder at this internal frost.

"Again and again," she says,
disgust clouding her speech,
"And always the same result!"

How can a moth comprehend a panther,
or a sparrow understand a deer?

"It's pointless," she continues,
"I'll never be good enough."

How can I tell her
the ingredients she holds, the earth and water,
make clay, ripe for the forming,
when all she sees is mud?

SUICIDE ON THE CORNER OF CALIFORNIA & MAIN (UNTITLED)

By Moneta Goldsmith

I saw a woman jump off a cliff last night
into the ocean. This was on the corner of
California & Main. Or not on the corner
exactly—but rather hidden off to the side
 behind some shrubs
 where I'd been sitting.

& so I saw the woman's face before
she jumped—although I wouldn't know
 how to begin to describe it to you now.

They say to write a poem you should be proficient
in things like metaphor / imagery / descriptive
 language.

But all I can say is that I saw her face
 her eyes

a moment before she jumped—
& that a large crowd gathered afterwards
huddled up over the bars
 that fenced in the pier—

trying to determine where the woman landed
 or even whether she might still be
 alive.

(There was speculation the woman might have landed on
the tops of the trees below & managed to hold on—something
 I doubt given how far
 of a drop this was.)

When the police arrived & began to ask questions
searching for details to get to the bottom of what happened
 it was at this point that I decided
 to go home

to try to make sense of what I had seen.
 To write about things
 I guess.

(It's possible I was afraid. It's possible that
if the police had asked me the color of the woman's skin
 or even how old she was
 I would not have remembered
 anything at all.)

It might be true what some have said
that the art of storytelling has declined
in our society ever since
death has become more or less
 invisible.

Gone behind closed doors.

But it's also true the range of a man's emotion
when he looks inside himself
is vast beyond comprehension
 (possibly infinite)

& although I left
to search for some image or
 detail or metaphor
to make sense of what I had seen
in a way that might be useful
to someone else some day
 the truth is
that when I got home
 I found nothing at all.

Crickets sang pointlessly on the patio.
The typewriter sat on its desk unobserved
 inside.

It's possible I was afraid.
It's possible I cried—
 but what does that matter
 if I'm unable to tell you why?

READY? SET..VOTE!!!



Our Hall of Fame serves as a platform to preserve, honor and promote the growth and culture of literature. Earlier this year we inducted 8 writers into our Hall of Fame. These writers are from all over the world and they all have a unique style that draws attention to their literary craft. Now the time has come to vote for our next season of Hall of Fame members as the release of the Volume XII Tension means we have successfully closed out another literary year.

In 2014, quite a few writers have had their work appear in the Torrid Literature Journal. From this group 8 writers will be inducted into our Hall of Fame next year. Who are these 8 writers? That depends on our reader's votes. Which poem stood out the most? Which short story really captured your attention?

Here is how it works. All writers who were published in the Torrid Literature Journal in 2014 are official candidates for the Hall of Fame. The candidates are divided into 4 different voting categories based on the volume their work appeared in. Readers may cast their vote by visiting our website. Two writers (one poet and one fiction writer) will be chosen from each section based on the number of votes received. Voting starts October 1, 2014 and continues until February 1, 2015. The chosen candidates will be announced as official Hall of Fame inductees in Volume XV of the Torrid Literature Journal. The inductees will receive a certificate recognizing their induction and a lifetime digital subscription to the Torrid Literature Journal. In addition, the new Hall of Fame members will be listed on our website, bio included.

Additionally, please visit our website to learn more about our 2013 and 2014 Torridian Hall of Fame members, including their writing history and other places where you can get read their work.

To learn more, visit http://www.torridliterature.com/Hall_of_Fame.html

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

TL Publishing Group is always looking for submissions. We publish 4 issues a year and our journals are available online and in print. When it comes to reviewing a submission, we don't look for a particular theme. We look at the work itself, specifically its message, delivery, and structure. We accept a variety of submissions including: poetry, fiction, and articles. We also accept requests for interviews and book reviews.

All submissions may be uploaded by visiting:

<http://torridliterature.submittable.com/submit>

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,

If you're reading this right now then it means you've reached the end of our current trip. However, this doesn't have to be your last run through. Literature is timeless. You can pick this publication up and read it again at any time, not to mention literature this good warrants a reread anyway.

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Furthermore, our publication is a shell, a skeleton so to speak. Our writers give this publication its meat and substance. As you read this, know that we're already hard at work on our 2015 issues of the Torrid Literature Journal as we strive to continue to provide you with the literature you know and love.

We look forward to our next journey together in Volume XIII where we will celebrate our 4 year anniversary and our continued tradition supporting the culture of literature. Until that time, we hope you will subscribe to our eNewsletter and keep up with what's happening at TL Publishing Group.

- Editorial Staff



“...I was walking through your soul...” - Antonio Fernandez

“...I gather embers on the verge of death...” - Clemencio Bascar

“...I don't sit and torture poems...” - Andrew Bohn

TL Publishing Group wraps up their 2014 year with the *Torrid Literature Journal* – Volume XII *Tension*. The work in this volume flawlessly captures the attractiveness of literature as it presents readers with a fine collection of literary material that will put their senses and imagination to work.

The Volume XII writers shed necessary light on the fact that writing is not a means to an end. It is a start to a new beginning. Writing allows people to clear their heart and mind of the clutter and other matter that tends to build up overtime. In the middle of this clean up, people find hidden treasures and other keepsakes as they linger on a forgotten memory or a favorite dream. Other times, they stumble upon a painful experience they're fighting to escape or a situation they're struggling to figure out. In any event, writers understand the importance of release and the risks of implosion.

Other highlights from this issue include a new interview with Joanna Kurowska, a writer, teacher, and editor from Evanston, Illinois. To finish, TL Publishing Group announces the 2014 winners of the *Romancing the Craft of Poetry & Fiction Contest*.

Lovers of the written word do not want to miss what the Volume XII writers have to say as they step up to the proverbial platform to share their memories, dreams, and experiences. Rest assured that each piece of literature carries its own weight worth every moment of the reader's attention.

Contributors: Joanna Kurowska ; Alicia Cook; Antonio Fernandez; W. S. “Eel” Bericuda; Jolene Munch Cardoza; Courtney Leigh Jameson; Matthew J. Spireng; Yongyu Chen; Ivan de Monbrison; A.J. Huffman; April Scott; Clemencio Bascar; Richard Hartwell; Leonore Wilson; Athar Pavis; James Tyler; Helen Companion; April Salzano; Beau Boudreaux; John Repp; Lee Busby; Andrew Bohn; Craig Cochran; Justin Rose; Bobby Teevans; Jeston Dulin; Desirée Jung; Erren Geraud Kelly; Rachel Vogel Quinn; Lorin Cary; Gloria Keeley; Danny Judge; Amy S. Pacini; Jennifer Palmer, Moneta Goldsmith



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