

# TORRID LITERATURE JOURNAL

THE BARE NAKED TRUTH

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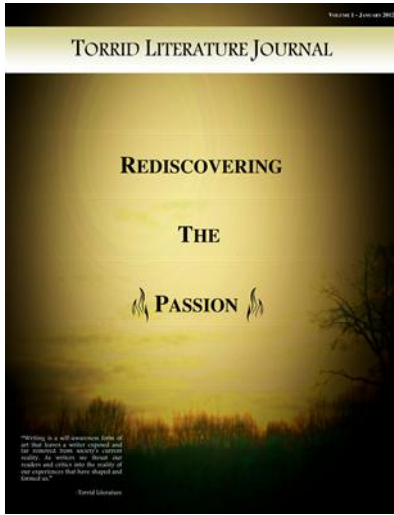
AT THE END OF THE WORLD"

BY T. FOX DUNHAM

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# FROM THE EDITORS

Welcome to the second issue of the Torrid Literature Journal. It is by faith and the grace of God that this journal was able to come back with a strong second edition that pays proper homage to its predecessor. TL Publishing, Inc. humbly thanks everyone who contributed to the creation of this volume. If it weren't for the artists displayed throughout this edition, this journal would be nothing but pieces of paper. It's the writers who hold the power to bring these pages to life and give this journal meaningful substance. This journal was carefully put together like artwork in a museum. The artists in this second volume have perfectly sculpted our dreams, fears, experiences, and passions. Come take a tour through our "torrid museum" as we unveil some of the finest artwork around. We promise you won't be disappointed.

Another reason for the excitement on our behalf comes from the guest columnists who were generous enough to grace our pages and bless TL Publishing, Inc. and it's readers with wonderful insight on literary topics affecting the writing industry today. We are proud to announce our featured and contributing columnists: Valerie Douglas and Oneal Walters. Both come from very different and diverse backgrounds in the literary industry. However, together they bring a wealth of knowledge and experience to the table. Entertainment aside, TL Publishing, Inc. aims to inform and educate as well. We want to make sure our audience remains informed on need to know information. We look forward to paring with many literary professionals in future editions of this journal.

We subtitled this second volume "The Bare Naked Truth" for several reasons. First, when you write, whether its fact, fiction, or opinion, you are opening and baring a part of yourself. You're sharing a dream, feeling, need, want, fear, etc. The list goes on. Our second reason has to do with our featured columnists who share with us their feelings and the truth as they see it regarding specific literary issues. So go ahead and start reading this journal with expectations. Then be prepared to have them exceeded.

We can never close this letter without a special thanks to all of our family and friends who continue to support us throughout this entire process. At the end of the day, readers only see the end product. It's our family and friends who anchor down with us behind the scenes from start to finish. As we mentioned in Volume I, creating, compiling, editing, and managing a publication and the business overall is no easy feat. However, it can, has, and will be done.

Thank you, everyone, for helping us to leave a literary mark on the canvas of world literature.

TL Publishing, Inc. Editorial Staff

*Alice Saunders*

*Aisha McFadden*

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"I write because I can. I believe as humans it is our right to express ourselves through whatever language and style we choose, should it be fiction and poetry, painting, or music. With my strength in poetry, I find it the most accessible way to not only express myself and my thoughts, but to provide others with an opportunity to question their existence and surroundings. I believe that by trying to bring up important aesthetic issues of the time, we can provide the current and future society with something to think about and learn from, perhaps building a better future for them."

Bryan Asdel

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"I could say I have no choice, but of course I do. I write to better understand myself and the world around me. It's sort of like brainstorming; I lay out the various pieces—some from my own life, some borrowed from elsewhere, most completely made up—and try to see if the resulting mess makes any sense. Sometimes, on good days at least, it does."

Daniel Davis

---

"I engage in this brutal word-wrestling called writing because once the beast is charmed and subdued, what beautiful creatures arise!"

B.E. Scully

## THIRD EYE APPEAL

BY ALICE SAUNDERS



As artists we have a third eye where we see the world in a color not found on the spectrum. Every event, laugh, tear, rant, memory, is a poem waiting to be written and spoken. Your third eye can be characterized as your muse – the controller of your ingenious domain.

Being an artist means many things. If you open a dictionary and search for “artist”, you will find the generic response: 1) somebody who creates art and/or 2) somebody who does something proficiently and creatively. Now before we go any further, let’s break down the meaning of art and creativity. Art can eas-

ily be defined as the ability of someone to create something in a unique way. To this point, to be creative simply means to use your imagination and available resources to make (i.e. craft, construct, compose, etc) something.

Keeping all of this in context, I believe it is fairly safe to assume that these definitions can be translated and summed up into a simple statement: Artists are extraordinary people who have to not only create, but live outside of the status quo to achieve the impossible. What am I saying? I’m saying that to create something profound and unique, your structure must be in tune with the incredible world of art. Embrace the uniqueness that is you and allow yourself to become attached and separated from it all at the same time.

I say this for several reasons. For starters, we must remain connected so we gain and cultivate our ability to recognize true art for what it is. As artists we are far from normal. We see what the world sees yet we also see the possibilities many refuse to consider. Our third eye is what makes us beautifully abstract. We dream without limits and stay focused on the ‘what if’ factor. We speak through our

creations, which in itself translates and decodes what our ‘third eye’ sees.

However, we must separate ourselves (although not completely) from our art so we never lose focus of the big picture. As artists we carry a diverse range of responsibilities. We are consultants for the covert emotions, veil piercers for the immoral, celebrators of the neglected, and comforters for the ailing; just to name a few.

The point is, we act solely for the benefit of someone else – to evoke emotions opposite of what a person is currently feeling, to affirm an idea, belief, or situation, and simply put: to motivate and inspire people. If you take nothing else away from this article grasp this: never forget that you have a purpose and with that purpose comes responsibility. If we are to achieve great things as a society in whole, we must first start with ourselves. We need to create, act, and live life in a manner where the base level of results carries a significant weight of accomplishment. Once that occurs, we can only go upwards from there. Then again, this is just what my third eye sees. What is your third eye telling you?

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## THE BARE NAKED TRUTH

BY ALICE SAUNDERS

It’s time to strip and I don’t mean literally. We need to remove the layers of conditioning that was done at the hands of a society where vocal freedom appears to be granted to only a handpicked group of individuals.

We can not allow society or circumstances to fool us into thinking we have no power or voice. Art is a form of communication. With that said, it is important that we make sure we as artists speak loud and clear. We need to present the truth in its clearest and purest form.

Artists, this is a declaration. No longer will we hold back our thoughts and emotions derived from dreams and experiences out of fear of being rejected, dismissed, or misunderstood. If we must

be abstract, let us be beautifully and perfectly so. Is the concept of being perfectly abstract not the main reason the literary greats are still being studied and honored today, centuries after their physical departure?

The concept sticks more when we speak (create) in a manner that compels readers, listeners, and onlookers to revisit our work. For example, people travel from all over the world to see the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel that was painted by Michelangelo in the early 1500s. That is the level we as artists need to arrive at or at least aim for. We want our work to be more than a lonely book on a shelf or a dusty CD in the car. We want to get to the stage where people are quoting our work, the point where cause and effect takes place: because our work has become so deeply rooted in the minds of society it effectuates a timeless influ-

ence.

With that said, no literary tra- chea has been performed on us, nor has our muse abandoned us. If we’re going to create, let it not be work crafted at fifty or seventy percent. Let our work be flooded with an onslaught of creativity that jerks this society awake from its slumber. A transformation of realization is underway.

We are artists and as with every other creative generation before us, we are ahead of our time, using our “third eye” as a lighthouse, a magnifying glass even, to present the truth, whatever it may be, in its purest form without shame or gloss. This is what it all comes down to: through our art and abilities, will have the ability to positively renew minds and change negative ways of thinking. Which side will you stand on? Will you stay quiet or will you speak loud and clear?

## TRADITIONAL PUBLISHING VS. SELF PUBLISHING

BY VALERIE DOUGLAS

There's a lot of talk about traditional publishing and self-publishing these days and a lot of it is confusing, some is down-right belligerent and some is scary. As a writer with a foot in both camps – deliberately – I know all the arguments. And I did it before it was fashionable and not because my publisher had decided to dump my backlist.

I had tried the traditional route for many of my stories – reading and polishing, researching agents and publishers, learning to write query letters and sending them out. The old days when you could write a short story for a magazine were gone and now the query/submission route was the only way. Like so many others, I piled up rejections. A few times I came this || close. One time I had an agent call me at home – on a Saturday – and we talked for an hour about how much they loved my voice, loved the story. Then a week or so later, a letter. 'I'm sorry, we've chosen not to accept you as a client, etc., etc.' Tears. Twice, on two different stories, publishers asked for a 'full' – a complete copy of the manuscript. Bounding excitement. I waited for over a year in each case. (Many publishing houses say it could be six months before you hear an answer but I was taking no chances.) Most also ask you not to submit to anyone else. Nothing. My manuscripts had set on the shelf for over a year. I didn't stop writing, but those stories didn't move. I polished them again, and sent them out, along with new ones.

So I tried a new tack, writing a different kind of story for a small press publisher. I stumbled over them, enjoyed reading the stories and thought I could do something different with them. Success!!! Hurray. I sold two stories – and then I learned the reality of traditional publishing. It's not easy.

First, there's the contract. Many lock your novel into a given number of years with that publisher – and perhaps your next one as well. That's a clause called the Right of First Refusal.

Then there's the editing, something not for the faint of heart. If you ever entertained the fantasy of an editor/publisher nurturing your precious manuscript to print, get over it. These days with the fast pace of many small presses, that novel had better be polished to a shine and they will still take the red pencil to it – and there's nothing metaphorical about that thing. That first edit will be awash in notes. Then there's the marketing. Don't let anyone tell you there's no marketing involved, that your publishing house will take care of it.

Book tours? Only if you're an A-list writer.

Writers are still responsible for almost ninety percent of the marketing of their books. Many publishers

'suggest' you have and maintain a blog and a webpage, as well as connect to internet groups and social networking.

Unfortunately, although my books were getting good reviews and ratings, success at a small publisher didn't automatically translate to success with a bigger publisher.

One manuscript was rejected because 'no one was buying epic fantasy'. That's since changed, I hear, so I might resubmit. Or not.

Another editor rejected a story because she thought I needed to decide whether I was writing women's fiction or a mystery, it couldn't be both. Then there were all the people who told me I couldn't write in multiple genres. Which was going to be difficult, since I already had a dozen novels written in genres from fantasy to thrillers to that mystery. Most were intended as part of a series. Uh oh.

So, it seemed I was down to a choice of multiple pen names or giving up some of those novels.

**“Don't let anyone tell you there's no marketing involved, that your publishing house will take care of it...writers are still responsible for almost ninety percent of the marketing of their books.”**

I'd already tried self-publishing once via a print version called a POD (print on demand) company. It was easy to do and fairly economical since I designed the cover myself. It's a pretty good-looking book but the cost of the print version for a reader made it unlikely they'd buy it. Not with all those well-known writers

out there.

But it felt really good to have a book of my own in my hands. It's an option, but it wasn't a good one. Although my own publisher only released in e-books, the market was huge, but it wasn't until a gentleman by the name of Mark Coker created a site called Smashwords that it really took off. Suddenly anyone who wanted to write a book could, and they could distribute it.

I was leery, I'll admit it. People said that if you self-published people would think it was vanity, no publishing house of any kind would take you. Agents would shun you. You'd never get a contract. You might as well kiss your writing career goodbye.

Yes, I was scared.

Of course, none of that has proven true, there have been a number of self-published writers who have made the transition to traditional publishing, in numbers not that much different from those who followed the traditional route.

Still, it was a risk I was willing to take, but gingerly. So I took the same book I'd already self-published as POD and posted it as an e-book. What did I have to lose? I'd already self-published it. If no one was going to buy it anyway, at least that way it would be out there where people could read it. It was too good a story to just let die.

# GUEST COLUMNIST

The first month I made ten dollars.

Part of the reason for that was because I had mislabeled it and partly because I had no idea how to market it on my own, other than what I'd been doing. (Some of which was now barred to me.)

One step led to another though and I got better at it. I posted a couple of fantasy novellas, both part of a series I couldn't find a place to sell. I priced one low and the other free. The free one 'sold' 500 copies in two and a half weeks. I was thrilled!

By then I'd learned more about marketing, found a few Facebook sites, got a few good reviews – and I was making some money. I had a decision to make and a difficult one.

All this time, I'd been doing research on agents and writing better query letters, searching out publishers that might give me a chance and collecting rejection letter after rejection letter. So, did I take my epic fantasy and possibly ruin any chance of having it traditionally published by self-publishing? Then I started hearing about some of the contracts offered by traditional publishers to self-publishers.

Suddenly it wasn't a do or die situation.

Is it harder or easier to sell books as a self-publisher?

The advantage with my traditional publisher was and is their name value and their built-in fan base. On initial release, there's an instant rush of sales as the fans get the newest books but then it trickles off. With self-publishing it's the reverse, a slower build and a steadier flow. The amount of energy in marketing is about the same.

Am I making money? Yes, about equivalent to what I earn from my traditional publisher and sometimes more, but I have fewer books with them, as opposed to fourteen self-published.

But that's changing.

To my amusement I actually saw a bounce in my sales with my traditional publisher when I released one of my self-published books.

One thing is certain, whether you're traditionally published or self-published – it is important to have a constant flow of books coming out. Each successive book helps introduce new people to the last one. The most successful writers at my traditional publisher have books coming out regularly, sometimes as often as every six weeks. One has such a successful career that she's earning what most people would consider a very respectable salary. Enough not to have a day job. The same is true of a few self-published authors, and that number is growing.

So, will I stop trying to publish traditionally? Probably not. At least not until more bestseller lists include independent/self-published writers. There's still a cachet to publishing traditionally. Will I continue to self-publish? Absolutely. In this new world of publishing, the writer has a degree of control they've never had before. It is the best time to be a writer, since you now have choices you never had before.

You absolutely can have your cake and eat it, too.

**Valerie Douglas** is a prolific writer and genre-crosser, much to the delight of her fans. A fan of authors from almost every genre from Isaac Asimov to Chelsea Quinn Yarbro, she writes classic fantasy, romance, suspense, and as V.J. Devereaux, erotic romance. She's the author of the epic fantasy series *The Coming Storm*, *Epic Ariana* Cover award winner, *Song of the Fairy Queen*. Her most recent releases are *Heart of the Gods*, the sequel to *Servant of the Gods* in January, and the romantic thriller *Lucky Charm*, in February. Who knows what will pop up down the road!

Happily married, she's companion to two dogs, four cats and an African clawed frog named Hopper.

You can find more information about Valerie at [www.valeriedouglasbooks.com](http://www.valeriedouglasbooks.com).

## ARE YOU THE KEY?



Interested in article writing?

TL Publishing, Inc. is seeking literary professionals who are interested in appearing as guest columnists in the *Torrid Literature Journal*. Articles should be based on topics that affect writers in the industry today. For more information, please visit our website or contact one of our editors.

## THE SACRED TOUCH

BY ONEAL WALTERS

Writers have paved a path for us, even before we began to contribute to the community of poets. We are involved in an active, strong and surviving community. We are all ages, races, genders and backgrounds. We are relevant because authority flows through words!

And poetry was brought forth upon the land and it was good.

There are two lights, the greater light is called inspiration and the lesser light is called recognition. Therefore, let each poet take their pencil and notepad and then either choose to create inspiration or to seek acknowledgement. Many poets, but not all, have died before their worth was discovered. This is the suffering of a poet. If we seek recognition then we are doomed to be compulsory poets. Compulsory poets write what is popular. They write what they have not mastered. They write without sincerity. It is the opposite for us, we are to write voluntarily (this refers to the writing process itself, not the business side of poetry). We are to establish a devotion to mastering our craft. We are to write even when there is no request to be published. The joy must flow from the creation and not the publication. The publication is the proof that your poem can find an audience.

We are to empower others!

Not all of us will be called to face the challenge of walking up Mount Sinai in order to receive a writing style or passion that will change the world. However, if I seek the attention of a reader and this causes a change within the reader, then I am successful. This is my return from the peak of Mount Sinai., It takes about 3 hours to climb the 7,498-foot peak following the Path of Moses, a stairway of nearly 4,000 steps<sup>1</sup>. If my sole desire is to exchange my poem for the praises of a reader, then I have accomplished very little as a poet.

Perfection is not a first draft.

Poets please master your craft through voluntary devotion. Become a regular visitor inside your thoughts to cause friction that can then be recorded for the world to see. This friction is not a single draft attempt. As an example, I was working on a verse for a wedding invitation last night with a talented poet. We went through a first, second, third and fourth draft before we discovered the final rough draft. Starting the fifth draft, we completely reexamined each stanza to ensure that it met our requirements. The necessity of mastering our craft also necessitates meeting our established writing standards. We are to preserve our community.

Oneal Walters is a Toronto born poet and author. Walters has been featured on the cover of Futureale Magazine and his poetry is published bi-weekly in the Call and Post Newspaper. Visit his website at [www.onealwalters.com](http://www.onealwalters.com).

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## LYRICAL EXPRESSIONS

TL Publishing, Inc. will be hosting its second open mic Saturday, April 14, 2012 from 7 PM—10 PM. If you will be in the Tampa area please make plans to stop by and attend. Sign up starts at 6:30 PM. We encourage all artists to sign up to perform. There will be food, prizes, and most importantly, amazing entertainment.



Open mic is a great opportunity as it gives artists a chance to support one another while making important connections.

This is a free public event that everyone is invited to attend. We look forward to seeing everyone there as we celebrate the arts and the release of Volume II of the Torrid Literature Journal. Please visit our website closer to the date for more information on the venue location.

Also, visit our website for a video recap of our last open mic. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Tiffani Barner, our Marketing & Networking Specialist, at [tbarner@torridliterature.com](mailto:tbarner@torridliterature.com).



# NATIONAL POETRY MONTH

## BECOME A PART OF SOMETHING GREAT

BY ALICE SAUNDERS

Started in 1996 by the Academy of American Poets, National Poetry Month is held every April. During this period various organizations, businesses, associations, libraries, and literary groups host and sponsor special events in support of poetry. TL Publishing, Inc. encourages everyone to support National Poetry Month by participating in programs and/or events held in your local community that contribute to the overall mission of ensuring poetry remains an integral part of the American legacy while serving as an avenue to a better future.

There are several ways you can support National Poetry Month. Attend a poetry reading in your local community. If there aren't any readily available, organize one of your own. There are many venues such as libraries, bookstores, colleges, and cafes, that will allow you to hold a reading for little to no cost. Another supportive action is to subscribe to a literary journal or magazine. There are hundreds to choose from with variable subscription rates and content. In addition, your money goes a long way in contributing to the success of the publication and ultimately other poets. You can even give a gift subscription to a friend or loved one.

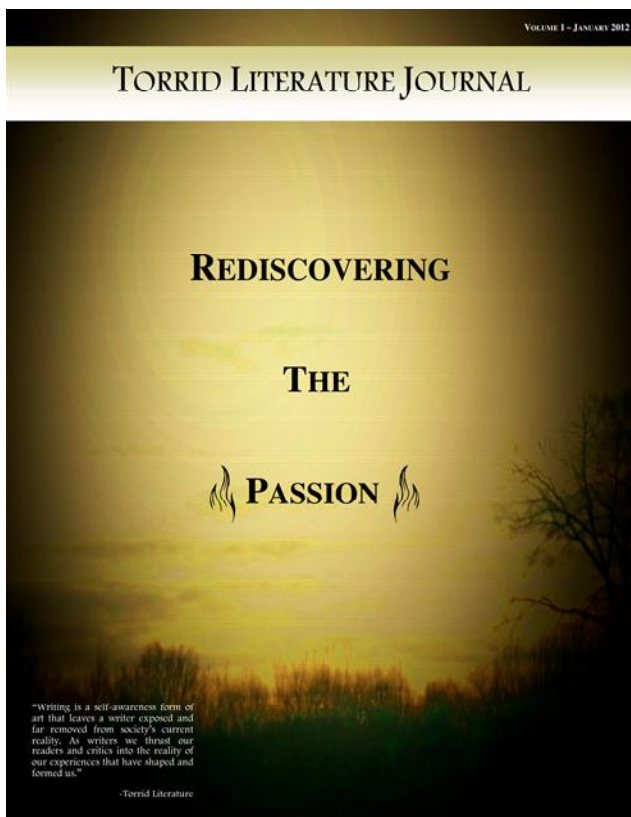
Another creative idea is to attend a poetry workshop. It's never too late to increase your knowledge and strengthen your skill. The scope of poetry is always changing. These workshops will keep you abreast of the latest industry styles and trends. Check with your local library or university for a list of programs offered. We also recommend attending a writing conference. These conferences provide a wealth of networking capabilities. A large part of success, in any business is marketing, which is all about creating and maintaining the right relationships.

Also, do you have friends who are published poets? Assist them in setting up a book signing at your local bookstore or help them create a virtual blog tour. Conduct research on how you can help promote your fellow poets.

Whichever step you choose to make in support of National Poetry Month, just know it is not in vain. We are the poets of today whose actions will be historically remembered tomorrow. Please keep this in mind as you go out and become apart of something great. Make sure you sign our guestbook on our website or stop by our fan page on Facebook. We want to hear how you celebrated this beautifully diverse yet vital art.

## DECIDE FOR YOURSELF!

Find out what people are saying about Volume I of the Torrid Literature Journal! We've received emails, messages on our guestbook, and comments on our fan page. Rediscover the passion by purchasing Volume I, the issue that started this beautiful literary journey. Visit our website to download Volume I for free. You can also purchase this edition in print for only \$8.50. You don't want to miss out on this inspiration!



"It is wonderful to hear of others with the same passion for well-rendered fiction. I am inspired."

Chris Stiebens

"What I find so interesting is you could never find this anywhere else."

Tilly

"I would just like to tell you how much I enjoyed reading Issue 1 of Torrid. 'You' by Catherine Kizer, and 'A Stillborn Contribution' by Ben Nardolilli, I liked especially."

Anthony Ward

"I've just received my copy of the first volume of Torrid Literature in the mail...it is a very handsome publication. I am proud to be a part of it, and I hope for all the best in your and its future."

Chris Heinrich

"As a whole I liked everything about this journal. I actually could not put it down and finished it in 2hrs. It was a real page turner."

Will Christmas

# ODE TO LITERATURE

"...I'm forbidden, yet I edge  
closer to the realm..."  
Void

"...I keep moving to find bits  
and pieces of me in different  
places..."  
Amelia

"...the only one of the Lonely  
Ones knows that diamonds are  
red..."  
Only One (Diamonds Area Red)

"...here she is, presented on  
the penultimate page..."  
Butterfly, Loch Avon

## PRIMA DONNA

By Cyndi Gacosta

The Prima Donna is the show.

When she sings I try to catch  
the voice but this magic shoots through my ungloved hand  
and kills another spectator through the heart.

Inside the dying man is the bullet,  
melting all his icy organs.

At the last note she holds  
the audience to her naked bosom  
and turns our pale faces of anticipation to a ghostly blue.

In the end when we empty the theater  
our lives renew.

"...the lies I painted in my head  
made you a hero just to rest my  
heart..."  
Spider Down The Drain

"...doppelganger...promises  
to save me then annihilates  
me..."  
Fox and His Friends

**Cyndi Gacosta** was born and raised in San Diego, California. She spent a few years of her early childhood in Sorsogon, Philippines. She studied literature at UC Santa Cruz. Her work has appeared in other literary journals such as *The Walrus*, *Monongahela Review*, *The Toucan*, and *Vanilla*.

"...A false impression of failure  
Decimated scores of originals  
What remained  
Were the same blind men..."  
Be The One You Dream

"...I know time betrays such songs  
with the same blunders each year  
turns me into a puppet but I'm not  
dumb..."  
My January

"...It is winter here in this coordinate of space. I shall wait by  
the pond reading Emerson until the sun rolls around to me  
and I bask in its glow..."  
I Am the Pebble, Slung By Youth

"...Stop looking for the reasons why  
destruction like this exists..."  
True Cause

"...Asphalt like a frozen wave cold and  
quiet as a grave...vultures line the  
balconies starving for mortality..."  
Holy Tiny Lonely: Movement 2

"...inhaling propaganda  
and blowing smoke into idealistic circles..."  
Anthem For The 90's From A Singer Who  
Lost His Voice



MaryAnn McCarra-Fitzpatrick is a wife and mother living in Mount Vernon, New York. Her work has been published in *OBSOLETE! Magazine*, *MoonLit*, *Contemporary Literary Horizon*, and is forthcoming in *Clapboard House*. She's worked in the publishing industry and currently holds a BA in English & World Literature from Manhattan College in Riverdale, New York.

### BUTTERFLY, LOCH AVON

By MaryAnn McCarra-Fitzpatrick

in four-color plates, this  
special featurette of our  
magazine:

ten steps to a new  
you:  
curving script to detail  
this cunning  
Stunt  
to be pulled off (in a  
most determined fashion)  
between the marshaled  
efforts of: dressmaker,  
manicurist, and  
the like, not  
forgetting, of course,  
some themes of self-  
improvement (so dear to  
our editorial hearts) whether  
whisking eggs or  
curling our eyelashes

and here she is, presented on  
the penultimate page, our paragon,  
our gold and ivory baby, our butterfly, her  
teeth tearing into peach flesh,  
ready, finally, for her close-up

Erica Marchant, a writer of both poetry and fiction, has been writing her entire life but has recently started submitting her work to publishers. In two years, Marchant plans to publish a fiction and non-fiction novel.

### VOID

By Erica Marchant

Grey and dull, floating high above the empty sphere.  
Nothing in my wake. It's heavy, lonely, quiet.  
Void of all life, emotion or serenity.  
Like death or an ancient disease.  
It harbors resentment, hatred, instability.  
Or maybe it's fear.

I'm forbidden, yet I edge closer to the realm.  
A glimpse of what's hidden beyond the void.  
I reach, but pull away.  
Trembling hands, aching despair burning my soul.  
Denying the moment when it all began.  
The expectations so clear, so vivid.  
They pull my heart; saturate me in solitude.  
Surround me in fear.

Erren Geraud Kelly is based in New York City with a B.A. in English-Creative Writing from Louisiana State University. Kelly's work has appeared in such publications as *Hiram Poetry Review*, *Mudfish*, *Poetry Magazine* (online) and many others. Kelly's work has also been published in several anthologies, most notably: *In Our Own Words*, *a Generation X poetry anthology* and *Beyond The Frontier*.

### AMELIA

By Erren Geraud Kelly

Turned me down sweetly  
Both times I hit on her  
But it was cool  
I found her poem  
I wrote for her in college  
Among the keepsakes  
In my mother's shed  
She went to New York City  
But like a true southern girl  
She couldn't stay away  
I went to the art gallery  
Where I once read poetry  
And found out she was the director  
I told Amelia I outgrew this town  
That I keep moving to find  
Bits and pieces of me  
In different places  
I'm sure in the future  
I'll walk in the art galleries  
Of the world  
And see bits and pieces of her

Z.M. Weiss lives in Houston, Texas as a bank teller and full time student in the process of obtaining his Bachelor's in Business Communications and Master's of Business Administration. His poems have appeared in *Great Poems of the Western World*, *A Celebration of Poets*, *Youth Erotic Press*, and *Theater in Asylum Magazine*.

### ONLY ONE (DIAMONDS ARE RED)

By Z.M. Weiss

Through the fiery chasm and the  
Graveyard that is dead,  
the only one of the Lonely Ones  
Knows that diamonds are red.

How can one small boy  
defend the entire human race?  
He's known it since his birth  
that he must keep his war face.

Under water and  
Staring lion eyes,  
Legacy carried by his daughter...  
Try to find the rest of the family ties.

Drew Pissarra writes plays as well as fiction. She toured her monologues "Singularly Grotesque," "The Gospel According to Saint Genet," "Fickle," and "Queer Notions" to such spaces as Highways in L.A., PICA in Portland, and On the Boards and Bumbershoot in Seattle. Her theater works have been seen at such NYC spaces as P.S. 122, Judson Church, Dixon Place, HERE Arts Center, Manhattan Theater Source and the Vineyard. Pissarra has also collaborated with several theater artists.

### FOX AND HIS FRIENDS

By Drew Pissarra

If I had the power (and I guess I do)  
To shoot a movie in which I got to play  
Some hysterically tragic version of myself,  
I'd be sure to have two major drunk scenes --

One where I got slapped in the face,  
And another with full frontal nudity.

I'd also deliver a couple  
Of long, introspective monologues  
Just to show you how really deep I am.

Hell, I think I'd push it even further:  
Make the movie triple-X with  
A neo-realist rape that uncovers  
Some great truth about me and society.

As for my climactic suicide,  
Because you knew that was coming,  
I'd show that in stunning detail,  
Have the camera zoom in  
On one watery green eye  
All vulnerable, all-knowing.  
Man, I can see the awards!

The storyline is simple but sci-fi.  
The time: A near future,  
Two weeks from today.  
The plot? Pretty basic.  
I'm a lottery-winner  
Who seeks comfort in plastic surgery  
And psychotropic meds.

I'd also play an uncredited minor part:  
A doctor who's also my doppelganger,  
And promises to save me  
Then annihilates me.  
But I'm really destroying myself.

Jacob Erin-Cilberto currently resides in Carbondale, Illinois. A teacher, Erin-Cilberto, has been writing and publishing poetry since 1970. His work has appeared in numerous small magazines and journals including: *Café Review*, *Skyline Magazine*, and *Hudson View*. Erin-Cilberto also writes reviews of poetry books for *Chiron Review*, *Skyline Review* and others. His 11<sup>th</sup> and newest book of poetry, "An Abstract Waltz," is now available through Water Forest Press, Stormville, NY. He has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize in Poetry in 2006-2008 and again in 2010. He also teaches poetry workshops for Heartland Writers Guild, Southern Illinois Writers Guild and Union County Writers Guild.

### ANTHEM FOR THE 90'S FROM A SINGER WHO LOST HIS VOICE

Jacob Erin-Cilberto

i bell bottomed out in the 70's  
smoked weed in a swamp of demarcation  
crossing lines, inhaling propaganda  
and blowing smoke into idealistic circles

loved a girl a lot like me  
until she became establishment's step daughter  
in furs and other pompous adornment  
not meant for me---

and i stepped down  
from a podium of delusion

and saw life as it was  
after the marches seceded from the causes  
and the posters left out in the rain of apathy

soaked to the skin of dejection  
i slipped out of the jeans  
slipped into the dockers  
where freedom's boat failed to launch

and got sucked into the movement  
that was no longer thirsty  
for what mattered  
just for what would get us to the 80's

in one piece  
rather than one peace.

### I AM BLIND

By Amit Parmessur

I could not look into  
the twisted eyes of that blind woman.

I muttered  
good evening to her sleeve.

Looking away with wet eyes  
I thought guiltily  
of the woman who would  
come into my room every minute.

I felt the flaccid hand holding  
mine as if reading Braille secrets.

What will you drink  
I asked her serum bottle.

I was told she  
could not drink or eat.

Goodnight goodnight I said  
to her white blanket.

As I left in a hurry  
it was dark, so dark outside.

It is all my fault  
I could not recognize her.

### MY JANUARY

By Amit Parmessur

Nothing's moving, not even the tiniest icicle  
And you know, it's not something I love  
Really, there's nothing moving on that icy tree  
Why? First day of the year always tells me that  
Joy will be like footsteps, to and fro in January snow  
Janus always sings promise and tells me to forget  
Dead years. I know time  
betrays such songs with the same blunders  
Each year turns me into a puppet  
but I'm not dumb.

A blinding blizzard's biting blast,  
January's urban rain falls long and hard over me,  
and my heart's hearth is wrapped in wet blankets  
The gusts steal the joy from my hands while I  
muse by the window, pale and numb  
with no freedom and no possibility of freedom  
Why my gardens always don coats  
of cruel January gloom?

I know, something's wrong in my life  
January's sinister snow keeps falling thick and  
fast in my life and no force can thaw it for me  
When will January open the door to the  
Year of Love, away from the red room of lust?

Dear Joy I'm not uninhabitable  
So, when I wince next year, you'll have to listen  
And flap your wings to me  
And carry me to a blissful, warm village.

Bryan Asdel was born and raised in Victorville, CA and is now attending Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff, AZ where he is seeking a B.A. degree in English with a minor in Philosophy. Besides writing poetry, Bryan is heavily involved in Kappa Kappa Psi and the National Honorary Band Fraternity, where he serves as Service Chair of his organization.

### GUILTY BEFORE PROVEN INNOCENT

By Bryan Asdel

Evidence at the scene of the crime--  
not just fingerprints, but hand prints  
are mine and yours proving  
us all guilty red-handed. I  
wash my hands in glass that scissors  
and slices its way through the jungle  
like a cheetah hunting the prey  
of the invisible man that runs from all  
the things that he has done. Axis and Allies  
and a world burning like forgotten bread  
crumbs in the recesses of the dark cave  
we call an oven. Behind the Pepsi logo  
lies a man and a knife. Stabbing, viciously  
vivaciously stabbing. Like a sweaty-toothed  
crazed man depicted as a mural on a brick wall  
that was glued together with Elmer's. It won't  
stay, this wall between you and I. It will fall,  
like Berlin and all that is. Days on the beach,  
walks in the park, chitter-chatter small-talk  
with friends, and the burrito shop you forgot  
the name of down the street.

### I AM THE PEBBLE, SLUNG BY YOUTH

By Bryan Asdel

First flight into the future, I am the projectile  
of a slingshot you once made with a Y-Shaped  
piece of wood and a red rubber band when  
you were young. Soared over mountains so high  
that the green, lush trees, to me appear  
pixilated like some video game we played  
before I took wing. For the first time,  
I am not afraid of feeling pockets of air  
creep beneath my feet-- but of the other rocks  
interrupting what is sure to be a smooth  
flight. The business men walking on the flat  
cement sidewalk, the cars rolling upon the rough  
pavement, and the trains brushing the steel rails--  
making a noise of unpleasant nature. I stop these  
thoughts, and instead glide into what is sure to be  
a blooming summer.

I find I have traveled  
too fast, and traversed this world with far greater  
haste than Maureen McCormick being thrust in front  
of a camera. It is winter here in this coordinate  
of space. I shall wait by the pond reading Emerson  
until the sun rolls around to me and I bask in its glow  
again, and with it bathe in the breeze.

Michael Bath is an animator and musician who has been writing prose and poetry on an amateur (and unpublished) level for over 2 decades. He currently resides in St. Petersburg, Florida. Bath also responsible for the cover design of Volume II.

## HOLY TINY LONELY ON THE WEB:

### MOVEMENT 2

By Michael Bath

Put her bible in her pack  
-strapped it closed, and to her back  
Hoodie on, tied her shoes  
-flashlight and her laptop too  
Things out there she didn't like  
-thought it best to take her bike  
Into the night a lonesome ride  
-Saint Jerome was by her side  
Playing leaves from waving trees  
-chase each other on the breeze  
The wind was crisp, the moon was low  
-it's pale and hazy orange glow  
Asphalt like a frozen wave  
-cold and quiet as a grave  
Rows of homes with vacant rooms  
-like headstones of domestic tombs  
Iron hedgehogs in the yards  
-scattered like a deck of cards  
Left there as the last defense  
-to plug the drain of residents  
Cluttered as a battle-zone  
-blocks of long forgotten homes  
No hum of engine/fall of feet  
-no sound all down her silent street  
Roofs of wreckage. siding in shambles  
-spiky grass all thick with brambles  
The hovels left to nature's way  
-suburbs in a slow decay  
Stinking trash from cans askew  
-fermenting in the nightly dew  
Clumpy milk in plastic jugs  
-dirty diapers crawl with bugs  
Broken toys out on the lawn  
-it made her sad to see it gone  
Eduprison, damp and dark  
-wild dogs patrol the park  
Churning chain and meshing gear  
-a steady sound that filled the ear  
She stopped a minute to take a drink  
-of bottled water from the sink  
Laptop keyboard fingers tap  
-thought it best to check the map  
Just beyond a mile ahead  
-that's where she'll reach the riverbed  
Another mile and then a smidge  
-and then she'll have to cross the  
bridge  
Down the road she pedaled on  
-all through the night to find her  
mom  
Alas the bridge, the city's gate  
-sagging under broken weight  
It's metal in fatigue and stress  
-give way to gravity's duress  
Falling arches, failing girders  
-occupied by huddled birds  
Rebar poked through concrete cracks  
-fractured like a dragons back  
Forgotten by their families  
-left in their calamity  
Orphans in their daily dredge  
-threw themselves off from the edge  
They couldn't stand to be alone  
-Saint Hedwig saw them drop like  
stones  
A sloppy splash drowned out their moans  
-as radiation ate their bones  
Down below, the choking flow  
-the slimy sludge that made it slow  
Thick with crud and slick as mud  
-the reek of rotting fish and blood  
Rising river cresting closely  
-hit the bridge but only mostly  
The roaches wouldn't drink from it  
-taxicabs won't sink in it  
She peddled by the lurking creeps  
-who dare not brave the murky deep  
Shipyard smashed with super-tankers  
-held in place with giant anchors  
Barnacles like piles of skulls  
-Cemented to the ruptured hulls  
Catatonic cargo cranes  
-their slumped and skeletal remains  
Shaky, Slanted, saggy slouch  
-bending like a worn out couch  
Echoes of the hollow screams  
-from things that dwell beneath the  
beams  
She crossed the bridge with time to spare  
-no time for things a-lurking there  
Twinkle twinkle little town  
-like a diamond on the ground  
Bustling with your busy sounds  
-echoing for miles around  
Spreading out, consuming all  
-swallowed up by urban sprawl  
The city used to be so bright  
-it had a halo in the night  
Lit up with a billion lights  
-from home it was a brilliant sight  
A zillion trillion megawatts  
-that left the naked eye with spots  
Now broken windows, looted shops  
-and multilevel parking lots  
Half completed skyward scrapers  
-drifting clouds of old newspapers  
Carbon streaks from burned out fires  
-Transit lines with busted tires  
Vultures line the balconies  
-starving for mortality  
Dilapidated shopping malls  
-graffiti painted on the walls  
Big artistic hieroglyphics  
-apocalyptic and monolithic  
Relics of the Urban Saints  
-who put their prophecies in paint  
Warnings of the great advance  
-of man with sand and dead that  
dance  
City dump, lumped up in clumps  
-the wafting funk, it surely stunk  
Stacked up high with garbage spilling  
-Oil derricks stopped from drilling  
Lightning lifted shadow's veil  
-rain came spilling down in pales  
Thunder spoke a voice of fury  
-the pounding water made a slurry  
Soggy socks and boggy breeches  
-overflowing drainage ditches  
A stroke of luck to not get stuck  
-while navigating through the muck  
She cycled along, the wheeling waif  
-with St. Louise to keep her safe  
In vast stone lawns of industrial rust  
-In broken glass and settled dust  
Work has stopped, it's been a month  
-the whistle hasn't blown, not once  
Welding arcs no longer burning  
-gigantic turbines stopped their turn-  
ing  
The workmen used to march like ants  
-single file to power plants  
But boiler rooms no longer boil  
-Patina grows on copper coils  
The laborer spoiled, he no longer toils  
-and the farmer does not turn the soil  
Massive cogs in stacks a-tipping  
-caustic stuff from tanks a-dripping  
Arrayed in ranks from too small to tall  
-the warehouse corrugated walls  
Corroded giants in the sky  
-the smokestacks seemed a mile high  
Trains sat idle on the rails  
-no more to venture down their trails  
Darkened lamps devoid of power  
-water rots the cooling towers  
Rodents seek a meager meal  
-perchance a crust of bread to steal  
Swarms of rats brought feral cats  
-the lofty roofs made home for bats  
Factories abandoned there  
-shambles moaning in the air  
The towers rocked in the autumn wind  
-while heavy droplets banged on tin  
Through rubble and stone, piles and craters  
-through tunnels, alone, up grain  
elevators  
Through blacktop rainbows on oily tar  
-through beams, bulldozers, bolts  
and bars  
Through mazes of razors and desert of spikes  
-through all of it – ALL OF IT- all on  
her bike

Jennifer Dean is a writer currently working and learning at the University of Nebraska in Lincoln. Her work has been accepted in *The Battered Suitcase*.

### SHE SAID

By Jennifer Dean

Realizing you need the Morning After pill  
is like looking for the Red Box Rental you misplaced,  
the one you watched once and realized

wasn't really for you—appealing, as it does,  
to thirteen year old girls coming

of age and learning about finding  
sisterhood and common ground among

black-eyed Emos, wire-rimmed Geeks and full  
bodied vixens. You panic when you realize

that if you can't find it, you'll be stuck  
with it forever. Paying for a movie you only watched once,

a movie that doesn't even mean that much to you  
with a message you outgrew years before.

That's the trouble with low-stakes rentals,  
nickel ante poker and the shot-gun approach

of sampling a wide mass and grabbing  
what looks even mildly interesting. Sometimes, you get stuck

explaining why you own St. Trinians'; a bad  
British knock-off of the American version.

You're not a moron. You just made a mistake, okay?  
Yet, somehow it slipped into the last place you imagined

it would end up, only to be found weeks later. You keep it  
because, after all, you had to pay for it and there is no defense

for its presence except one lonely night, leaving  
Walgreens with your Haagen-Dazs, you thought

you'd slum it and watch something light  
since it was laundry night and nothing else was happening anyway.

It was one of several, but by a quirk  
of fate, is now your possession by default.

So you tear through your house—flip the cushions  
on your couch, wondering how things got this messy

and promising never to let your lifestyle get out of hand  
or lower your standards again. Vowing

only Merchant/Ivory films and Academy Award winners from now on  
when you find the movie in your coat pocket and rush

straight to Walgreens and the Red Box still wearing last night's pajamas  
and the Uggs you had kicked off by the door the night before.

M. A. Schaffner has poetry recently published or forthcoming in *Poetry Ireland Review*, *Magma* (UK), *Stand* (UK), *Poetry Salzburg*, and *Frostwriting* (Sweden). Other work includes the collection, *The Good Opinion of Squirrels*, and the novel *War Boys*.

### HISTORICAL SURVEY

By M.A. Schaffner

In the interstices of Interstates  
villages survive unharmed unless we count  
the absence of woodlands and fields between  
one cluster of houses against the next  
with a noise-barrier-hugging bike trail or  
thin parks around un-culverted streams where  
raccoons pass by like tourists at old farms  
where docents tell us how we used to live  
and the nimble-fingered beasts try to fish  
as in the old days before the crayfish  
left or took on unusual colors.

Generations of birds and squirrels have learned  
the use of power lines, just as we've learned  
the worth of shrubs in simulating cover  
around these precarious remnants of what  
ancestors left for steady employment.

### APOCRYPHA

By M.A. Schaffner

Everything starts with "not," at which point God  
cycles into consciousness with red string,  
rulers, and Dixie cups. The universe  
applauds and sets sales quotas while we all  
wander door to door through strange neighborhoods  
that solidify into miniatures  
of cosmic perfection. The choice remains  
to surrender or arrogantly take  
indifference as a sign of worship,  
with or without processed cheese or sprinkles.  
Once flesh seemed equal to any challenge,  
but now it's just too much and oozes over  
even elastic waistbands. Where we go  
depends on signposts that melt each summer  
into pools you can swim in but don't dare drink,  
and divinity is just another's expense  
eating anticipated legacies  
we shouldn't have expected after all.



Anthony Ward is from the North of England and has been writing in his spare time for a number of years. Anthony derives most of his inspiration from listening to mainly Classical Music and Jazz, since it is often the mood which invokes him to set his thoughts to rest. He has been published in a number of literary magazines including *South*, *Neon Highway*, *Borderlines*, *Essence*, and *Blinking Cursor* amongst others.

### NORMALITY

By Anthony Ward

There's those of us  
Who deteriorate into ambassadors of our own mind  
Thinking we know what it is to be ourselves  
As if nobody else knew who we were

Who attempt to perpetrate our anonymity through testimonial transgression  
By becoming so residually absorbed in our perpetuating sentiment  
That we cease to exist  
And have to be brought back to normality.

### MANIFESTATION

By Anthony Ward

There are things happening about us  
We can neither see nor hear  
Nor even feel  
That occupy our prevalent space  
They touch us  
Travelling through our flesh  
As if we were not there  
Being merely translated by our presence  
While existing beside us  
In an elevated state  
Beyond our mental capacity  
Where we cannot sense the signals  
Trying to communicate with us  
Leaving them stirring constantly  
In suspended animation  
Before manifesting before us  
In electrical simulacrum  
That glimmer in semblance  
To a likeness we understand.

### TONGUE TIED

By Anthony Ward

It's as if I've got a personality impediment  
Stammering with sociability  
With my sense of self so pent up inside  
That I find myself lashing out at others  
Ready to tear their heads off and replace them with mine

When I talk  
It's like hearing an instrument  
Played out of tune  
No matter whether the words are in the right order  
Never sounding as I expect

With my thoughts becoming entangled  
The more I attempt to unravel them  
Before I end up tripping over myself  
Falling head over heel.





Segun Oyeniya is of the famous Eleesade royal dynasty of Ogbomosho Land, Oyo State, Nigeria. Oyeniya is a linguist, social activist and disciple of Christopher Okigbo and Patrice Emery Lumumba.

### AFRICAN BABY SOLDIERS

By Segun Oyeniya

Beautiful guns of wars  
Tender like new days  
As life finds not its own voice  
They labor for peace, theirs fading into the void  
And lullaby of salty salines mine from their lacrimal abode  
Caressed them into quiet mode  
To end their terrible days  
And be weaned from immature wars.

### REJOICE

By Marcelo Muianga

Rejoice African brothers and sisters  
Rejoice your step on the cradle of life  
Mothers and fathers of all nations rejoice  
They portray discoveries with the likes of you;  
Rejoice; they sailed away from their shores  
Rode on horses that gallop above the waters  
To trick you and use up your riches  
You welcomed them like gods  
Unaware you bowed before their celestial sighting  
Amazed at the fabrics covering their silk  
And fire spitting bastions  
Your own reflections played wonders in your minds  
Accommodated their turf like your own  
Only to have your feeding hand bitten;  
Rejoice enslaved African brothers and sisters  
Your bloodlines stream the whole earth for that  
You became architects to world wonders  
From your hands lives were borne  
Your breasts oozed nutrition to countless pale faces  
Hands of steel, you laid countrywide rails  
Faster than the wind could blow across it  
Many became casualties to the journey  
Yet your seed have prevailed, to see it finished  
To look back, seek, and find;  
Reasons to rejoice on that stack of burdens;  
Rejoice African brothers and sisters of these troubled times  
For your walk in freedom has been prepared beforehand  
The fields of hope have been laboured  
By blood and tears irrigated, from heroes you only see within ink  
And all not mentioned therein, just in tales from lips of those left behind  
Fortunate to see wrinkles dig their skins  
To pass on what they lived and witnessed  
Keep alive the fiery need to rejoice;  
Rejoice African brothers and sisters, do not disdain  
Nurture forgiveness in your hearts, for all that left did it not in vain  
Rejoice African brothers and sisters rejoice, rejoice...rejoice.

Marcelo Muianga grew up in the small town of Maputo, Mozambique until he relocated to South Africa at the age of 16. Muianga, apart of the Torridian family, is a frequent contributor to the poetry that appears on our Facebook page.



**Sonnet Mondal** is the author of six books of poetry including a poetry bestseller and is the pioneer of the 21 line fusion sonnet form of poetry. His works have been published in several International literary magazines and have been translated into Macedonian, Italian, Arabic, Hindi, Telugu and Bengali. He was awarded Poet Laureate from Bombadil Publishing in 2009, Doctor of Literature from United Writers' Association in 2010, Azsacra International Poetry award in 2011 and was inducted in the prestigious Significant Achievements Plaque in the museum of Bengal Engineering and Science University, Shibpur. At present he is the managing editor of The Enchanting Verses journal of poetry.

### MY CHAINED FAITH

By Sonnet Mondal

The far-flung whistle of the *colliery*  
and of the *Calcutta-mail*  
calls me every day after dinner.

The train's shrill echo and  
rhythmic melody of wheels  
form a sublime image of  
the girl out of my dreams,  
waving and smiling;  
screaming and crying;  
standing and waiting  
just for me amidst gasses,  
trees and hedges that wave  
in solitude and hope.

The curvature of the lopsided land  
plays hide and seek along with  
the clouds and moon blurring realism.

My belief is incurable and so is  
the facade of pleasure that I show  
while I follow compellingly,  
the whistle of the colliery.

My faith lies in the train,  
in the wilderness and  
the vaporous figure of my love  
while my whims are chained  
with famine and society  
that may identify me as a mad  
once I leave my job and run  
into the hazy backwoods.

### THE LAMENTING SOLDIER

By Sonnet Mondal

He sits in a bombed bunker  
with his gun and bullets feeding his mission.  
The heavy suit burdens him with  
"Why is he here!"

Once the boiling blood craved  
for blood and heads;  
for a fountain of red fluids  
raping the land of refugees  
and now the chance has been utilized  
and with it his life too.

His foe and his partners look alike  
after death with same bullets  
responsible for their fall.

He knows, when he crosses  
the border and walks to the land  
his army have captured the soils  
will too look alike.

"So was this fight to pass some time  
in practicing revolt against God?"

He is now a sinner, no martyr  
in the court of the almighty.

### THE SOLITARY BENCH

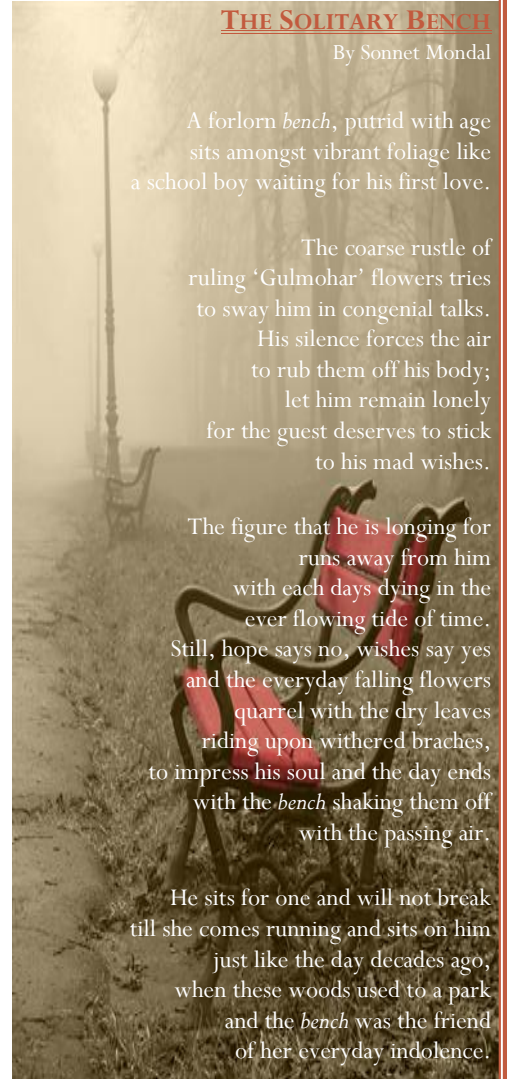
By Sonnet Mondal

A forlorn *bench*, putrid with age  
sits amongst vibrant foliage like  
a school boy waiting for his first love.

The coarse rustle of  
ruling 'Gulmohar' flowers tries  
to sway him in congenial talks.  
His silence forces the air  
to rub them off his body;  
let him remain lonely  
for the guest deserves to stick  
to his mad wishes.

The figure that he is longing for  
runs away from him  
with each days dying in the  
ever flowing tide of time.  
Still, hope says no, wishes say yes  
and the everyday falling flowers  
quarrel with the dry leaves  
riding upon withered braches,  
to impress his soul and the day ends  
with the *bench* shaking them off  
with the passing air.

He sits for one and will not break  
till she comes running and sits on him  
just like the day decades ago,  
when these woods used to a park  
and the *bench* was the friend  
of her everyday indolence.



### STEEPER SEE-SAW: ANOTHER PARALLEL POEM

By Changming Yuan

The higher the income, the lower the morals  
The taller the building, the shorter the attention span  
The bigger the house, the smaller the family

The more wealth, the less joy  
The more conveniences, the less leisure  
The more knowledge, the less judgment

The more medicine, the less health  
The more protection, the less security  
The faster the transportation, the slower the communication

The closer the network, the looser the relationships  
The cleaner the environment, the dirtier the mind  
The wider the highway, the narrower the perspective

Changming Yuan, whose poem "Me and Sand" appeared in Volume I, reappears in our second volume. Yuan is the author of *Chansons of a Chinaman* and is a three-time Pushcart nominee. He grew up in rural China and published several monographs before moving to Canada. Currently teaching in Vancouver, Yuan's poetry has appeared in *Best Canadian Poetry*, *Exquisite Corpse*, *London Magazine* and nearly 380 others worldwide.

Jaf Mahlangu currently resides in Vanderbijlpark, Gauteng. He's has been writing poetry as a hobby since high school. Another member of the Torridian family, he's a frequent contributor to the poetry that appears on our Facebook page.

### MY GOD OF DETAIL

By Jaf Mahlangu

should I give You praise for creating the earth  
and placing the stars and heavens in the sky

should I give You praise for creating the ocean  
and the vast land we see  
for decorating the earth with all the hills, rivers and  
vegetation  
that makes it so beautiful

NO

I will go further than that...  
I will give You glory honor and exalted praise  
for the detail in your greatness  
because

where I see my body  
You see every diminutive cell that forms my being  
and hence you heal me from my smallest detail  
You know every hair follicle in my head  
And count them as they fall  
where I see grass  
You see every blade that makes a landscape  
and You nurture each and everyone to its completeness  
where I see sand

You see every grain that forms a beach  
or a sand dune in the desert  
and You use each accordingly

you see to the well being  
of the tiniest insect crawling in the cracks of a wall  
You gave flight to birds and secure them in the sky  
Yet you still feed them on the ground

You know every leaf that falls from a tree in winter  
and you replace it in summer  
You gave life to every flower by the roots  
though they may burn, whither or be blown away  
they still rise to every drop of rain You pour on them

You gave instinct to the beasts in the wilderness  
for they can read the times  
they know when to hunt, eat and reproduce

in all Your magnificently enormous splendor  
there is great detail  
and for this I will praise You  
for You are my God of detail

### SPIDER DOWN THE DRAIN

By Jaf Mahlangu

a weird observation of an insignificant event  
as the spider went down the drain  
it reminded me of a relationship we never had  
your passing never meant anything  
how can I grieve for a stranger

as young as I was I tried to reach out to you  
but came back with a wounded hand  
the short time we spent together  
still lingers in my mind  
a memory I would rather forget  
as it gives pain more than relief

the lies I painted in my head  
made you a hero just to rest my heart  
maybe venting out this anger will help  
cross a bridge I've been avoiding for years  
maybe even write you out of my history book  
then you will truly resemble a spider going down a drain

through you He gave life to me  
for a purpose I uncover each day  
sadly you were never a father to me  
but a man who donated his manhood for my conception  
to make me another black statistic – a fatherless child

farewell then spider  
disappear in that dark drain to be seen no more  
thank you for the lesson  
my children will know their father  
and I will know them

Laura Funk is from Hagerstown Maryland. Funk is a non-traditional student at Hagerstown Community College currently expanding her talents in the Literary Arts.

### TRUE CAUSE

By Laura Funk

The earth shook and trembled  
The vast waves came crashing in,  
Thousands of innocent people died,  
They paid for mankind's sin.

We better take a hard look around,  
How can mankind act so remissed?  
Mother Nature is fighting back  
And she sure as hell is pissed.

The sky darkened with ominous clouds,  
The mighty wind began to gust.  
Twisting and turning with furious force,  
Swiped the land clean with one thrust.

We better take a hard look around,  
She is shaking her mighty fists,  
Mother Nature is fighting back  
And she sure as hell is pissed.

Fire shot from the mountain top,  
Darken ash filling the air  
Fiery lava flowed down with rage  
Leaving the land burned and bare

We better take a hard look around,  
We are on the top of her list.  
Mother Nature is fighting back,  
And she sure as hell is pissed.

Massive rain began falling down,  
Muddy flood water it became.  
Washing away everything in its path,  
Who really is to blame?

We better take a hard look around,  
See the answers we have missed,  
Mother Nature is fighting back  
And she sure as hell is pissed.

Stop looking for the reasons why,  
Destruction like this exists,  
Mother Nature is fighting back,  
True Cause: she is pissed.

Rochelle Germond currently lives in Tampa, Florida. Her work currently appears in *The Battered Suitcase*.

### And What Exactly Do You Want To Do With That Degree?

By Rochelle Germond

I want to leave this town. Flatter than  
unwashed hair matted to my skull, its  
geography hangs over me, obstructing  
my eyes. I want to get in my  
four-door-sport-edition compact  
and drive  
twelve hours north  
where there are hills  
and sloping streets and coffee shops featuring  
espresso drinks named after monkeys and  
local art on wood-paneled walls,  
local musicians in the room upstairs  
after 8pm on Friday and Saturday nights.  
I want to be sitting on the bench of a booth,  
varnished wood slats slapped  
against my thighs.  
I want to sip and sit and write  
undisturbed by anything other than the  
finesse of the threadbare thrift store find  
Persian rug that my shoeless toes can't  
stop feeling. I want to use that trite  
state pick up line  
because I can, because it would be appropriate  
in this new place. I want it to work.  
I want to call my mother  
from a different time zone  
and hear what the future will be like  
an hour from now.

Preeti Sharma is currently pursuing her bachelor's degree in English Literature from Delhi University (INDIA). Her all time favorite authors include Paolo Coelho and Stephen King. In prose, her writing bends more on the philosophical than on the adventurous side. In poetry, though, she feels she has touched upon many different emotions through her work, ranging from impulsive to detached and sometimes, humorous.

### LAW AND JUSTICE

By Preeti Sharma

A grey sea of muddled thoughts  
Orbs of burning conscience  
Conflicts that seek an answer  
But find none  
A bottomless pit where the crimes are dumped  
Over and over again  
Never to be filled to the brink  
The bright sunshine never reaches this deep  
Lost in the humungous array of clouds  
Floating matter of grey  
You see the light  
You notice the dark  
But the difference never so stark  
I am that tiny spark of life  
Being the one to carry the burden  
Of the illusory idea of justice  
Thinking if I have ever been just myself  
Weaving through the light and dark patches of life  
Never completely white  
Never totally black  
Treading on the path in-between  
Letting go of rich murderers  
Convicting the lost souls  
Suffocating the life out of their innocence  
They are damned to follow the path  
They preferred to relinquish  
Have I been just enough  
The deceptive power of a puppet  
Held responsible for countless crimes  
Of ignorance  
Of cowardice  
Of the doom it imposed on many  
Buying the peace and freedom for one  
Come forth, to the court of law  
Where justice is served  
Spiced and sauced according to your fees  
It's the law, not truth, that prevails  
For justice is but a mistaken entity  
It is not for you or for me  
It is, but a deceptive dream  
Prepare for the ultimate justice  
When life deserts your body  
For, in this world  
We have the law.

### BE THE ONE YOU DREAM

By Preeti Sharma

Who are we, but subservient fools  
Guided by rusted cliché's  
Following an obscure vision  
Of a future handed down  
By those who walked the same path before  
The death of inspiration  
Its cries are still resonant  
Resurfacing with every clink of the chain  
Forged by our own hands  
Upon our minds and souls  
Darkened and dismayed  
Curbing the voracious wants  
Will the destiny be ever attained  
  
A false impression of failure  
Decimated scores of originals  
What remained  
Were the same blind men  
With different faces  
But the same emptiness  
Clutching their existence  
Propelling them on the same circular path  
Feeding their greed of a ravishing reward  
At the end of their journey  
A deeply imprinted impression  
Of something that was never to be  
With borrowed thoughts  
Trudging along the same worn road  
Unaware of an impending time  
Of eclipsed humanity  
Of shared identity  
Of no originality  
  
Dare to dream  
Dream of walking down an unknown path  
Think of the possibilities cradled in future's arms  
Strive for singularity  
Create an independent self  
Be someone who has never been before  
Be the one you dream to be



## **ARE YOU READY...**

The pages are scorched because the gripping stories that follow are intense. You'll laugh, cry, and scream as the writers cause you to experience what the characters feel. Only in the *Torrid Literature Journal* will you find gifted writers who have the innate ability to craft worlds where reality and fiction blend together into what can be called a "Torridian Story".

THE CONSEQUENCES OF DENTAL VISITS

THE MAN OF HER DREAMS

WEST TEXAS TEARS

DANCING AT ALBIE'S PUB AT THE END OF THE WORLD

RUDE BOY

## **...TO SEE THEIR WORLD?**

# FICTION

## THE CONSEQUENCES OF DENTAL VISITS

By B.E. Scully

“There’s not much you can do about it now,” says the cheerful white coat with the clean, cool hands floating out of his sleeves like fluttering specters. “The roots are already atrophying; you see, the tooth only hangs in there because it doesn’t know it should be dead.”

I imagine the tooth nestled in my mouth like a crotchety senior citizen refusing to leave home.

“Once a tooth is too badly traumatized,” white coat continues, “there’s no way to heal it, really.”

*Traumatized*...I roll the word around on my tongue all the way home, liking the feel of it next to the dying tooth. I decide to store it away for future use: “You don’t know what it’s like to be *traumatized*.” Or maybe: “You weren’t there for me during my moment of *trauma*,” though the noun does lose a bit of the adjective’s flavor. I tuck the word far back among the steadily decaying roots, ready to pull loose when the tooth decides it.

B.E. Scully lives in the woods of West Virginia with an assortment of human and animal companions.

\* \* \*

The anger has gone far this time. I pace back and forth around the room while you throw things into a bag: the usual clothes and socks, the less obvious set of ankle weights. Are you planning on getting into shape, once you leave--physical separation as physical motivation?

“Where are you going? Where are you going?” I repeat like the cawing, circling bird of prey that I am. And then, even more absurd, “What should I tell your parents?”

When you eventually sit down on the bed, I know I’ve won. You say the usual things about not making me happy, about hurting me and not wanting to go on hurting me, etc., etc. I cry, which makes you cry, and then it’s my turn to convince you why I want you to stay.

\* \* \*

We lie in bed, you on the left side, the half-filled suitcase abandoned on the floor. The tooth sends out a sudden throb, like a low bass note punctuating the treble clef and then going quiet. Or maybe it was just my imagination. The white coat said that the tooth had a fifty-fifty chance: “It might fall out, it might hang in there. There’s no way to tell for sure. Teeth are funny like that.”

No way to predict it either way. I guess that’s just the nature of a traumatized tooth.

## THE MAN OF HER DREAMS

By Judith Miller

Rosa Felipe stepped from the brightness of the Illinois afternoon into the darkness of the motel room. She paused to let the shadows of scents and sights envelope her. Her senses, well-practiced from thirty years of cleaning such rooms, honed by necessity, told her that a man and a woman had made love in this simple, unadorned place just a short time before. Passionate, uninhibited love. Beautiful, gentle love.

As Rosa moved about the room, the essence of that love surrounded her; told her about the lovers. The woman, it had to be the woman, was very tidy, concealing all earthly details of the heavenly encounter in a plastic Walgreen’s bag, neatly sealed with a knot, carefully placed into the bathroom wastebasket.

The woman was also a considerate person. The towels were neatly hung; the bed made. The curtains had been opened to let Rosa know that the room, marked with a privacy card until almost 3:30, was now available for cleaning.

Even fully undraped, the window let in little light, the second floor walkway shielding it from the sun.

Rosa did not touch the wall switch. The natural light was enough for her. She did not wish the harshness of electric brightness to sharpen the dream-like softness.

Butterflies of fanciful hues hovered above delicate flowers of imaginary forms on a silken scarf that had been folded with care upon an elegant black and gold gift box. From beside the low, brown-veneered dresser upon which the scarf had been placed, Rosa lifted a dark metal wastebasket and watched wistfully as two pieces of wrapping paper crackled and tumbled from the upside-down can into her large black trash bag.

Even in the subdued light, one of the pieces sparkled with multicolored holographic designs. On the other, brilliant yellow suns peeked over pastel clouds floating in a sky of powder blue. Rosa liked that one better, but liked, even more, that the wrappings spoke of gifts given, of tokens of beautiful, shared love.

She would have to think about what the woman would have given the man, for his gift was gone, along with the large black suitcase she’d seen him wheeling when they had arrived the day before on the motel’s airport shuttle.

Judith Miller is a molecular biologist as well as a writer who currently lives in St. Louis, Missouri. Her work has been published in *Beyond Centauri*, the *Cave Hollow Press* anthology “Murder, Mystery, Madness, Magic, and Mayhem”, *Bibliophiles*, *52nd City* and many others.



A newspaper, neatly folded into another wastebasket, encouraged her already-kindled exotic thoughts about the man. She had seen the couple leave the complementary breakfast room that morning; had felt their electricity as they had passed her, breaking their mutual absorption only long enough to smile and nod good mornings to her. She had followed them with her eyes as they had strolled to this room, noticed they did not touch each other; knew they were as one without the need for physical contact.

Rosa had wondered at his appearance then—his thick blond hair contrasted with slightly almond-shaped eyes. The newspaper, in English, from Hong Kong, seemed answer to her curiosity. She had read about such people, offspring of the meeting of East and West who had chosen to remain in Hong Kong after the British Crown Colony was severed from its century-long keeper; rejoined to its Motherland.

The woman was not exotic. She looked like someone Rosa could feel easy with. An average-looking woman with wavy auburn hair that just touched her shoulders. Comfortable shoes.

And now the man was gone. He had stopped at nearby O'Hare on his world travels. Perhaps he had business in England. He had been reunited with the woman he loved so dearly. She had flown in from Louisville. That was the city neatly printed on the tag of the small black-wheeled suitcase Rosa dusted carefully. The woman should come back to a clean place after she had savored the last moments with him on the airport shuttle; after she had waved good-bye as he disappeared into the Jetway. The shuttle ride back would be empty for the woman. She would be physically lonely tonight, even though the warmth of his love would be with her. She would dream of him and remember their too brief, but oh so wonderful, time together.

But before she dreamed, the woman dined, fulfilling one hunger, when she could not fulfill the other.

Rosa had not needed her imagination for this scenario. Late that evening, while the nice, auburn-haired woman lay sleeping a lonely sleep, Rosa learned more details from Elena.

"Anything interesting at the restaurant tonight, Elena?"

Rosa's younger, mirror image smiled, brushed her long black hair from her face, then whispered conspiratorially, "Well, Mama, there was a woman who seemed very thoughtful, like she was thinking of someone she loved very much. And I think she must have been meeting him secretly because she asked to sit in the corner, far from any of the other diners, and when I seated two young men near her she was startled a bit when one of them spoke, as if she recognized his voice. Then she tried to look over her shoulder at them without being noticed."

"You think they knew her, Elena?"

"I think she was afraid they did, but when she finally caught a glance of their faces she relaxed. Almost sighed out loud with relief."

"And how old was she. And what was she wearing?"

"She was about your age, Mama." Elena was not surprised to see her mother smile at this bit of information. "And she wore a pair of dark blue slacks and a lovely white Mexican blouse with little red roses around the neck, like the one you bought me last Christmas."

At these specifics, Rosa nodded, then prodded a little more. "And how did she seem?"

"Well, like I said, she looked like she was thinking about someone. Now and then she would smile to herself. But she also looked a bit sad, like she was lonely. I think that's why she ordered that really fattening apple caramel delight I once told you about. Though, at first, she ordered simple sherbet. But we didn't have any. I couldn't help but bring her a scoop of ice cream with the cake. She smiled then and left me a very nice tip."

"That was surely the woman from the room, Elena. I knew she had to be nice. Oh, it must have been so lovely today."

"Just like you and my father?"

"Yes. Just like me and your handsome, gentle father. My Miguel." Elena smiled, remembering the many times her mother had answered her questions about Miguel, the father Elena had never known. Remembered how good it had felt to know that her life had been created from the joy of love shared. In return, she wished to make her mama happy. She told Rosa of anything she saw that would speak to the beauty of love shared between a man and a woman. Sometimes she embellished a bit. And sometimes, like today, she could add details to a story her mother was already constructing about the people she herself had encountered.

Elena had always thought her mother's pleasure at hearing and seeing evidence of such devoted love arose from the memories stirred—memories of Rosa's beloved husband, Miguel. She didn't understand why her mother was not bothered by descriptions of some things. Surely, clandestine meetings between people whose wedding bands did not match went against the teachings of the church. Rosa seemed to ignore such details. Only the romance of the tales appeared of importance. Elena thought that very modern of her mother.

"Well, my Elena, I shall go home so you can make yourself pretty before my dear son-in-law gets home from his night school. But I must say good-bye to my Mariacita first."

"Maria, come say goodnight to your grandma."

Rosa smiled as a door off the living room opened and a pig-tailed girl of about seven bounced out, carrying a large white paper in one hand.

"Look, Grandma. See how pretty I have made the picture we started. There are trees and flowers and my mama and daddy are sitting under the tree holding hands." Maria giggled as she pointed to the figures beneath the trees.

"You shall be a wonderful artist, my Maria."

Rosa kissed the child on the head, then walked from the second-floor apartment to the little green Chevy parked directly in front of the building's door. She turned and waved to her daughter and grandchild as they stood, framed by delicate blue curtains in the window.

A short drive took her to her building, where she climbed the steep stairs to her third-floor apartment, flipped on the light switch, and began to prepare for her evening. Walking through her simple living room, she paused a moment to gaze at the room's only luxuries, Monet prints. She would go, when she had a little time and money to spare, to the Art Institute, to stand and stare at the works of the Impressionists, with their view of the world through the blur of a waterfall. Long ago she had saved enough to buy a few prints. They were necessary.

She walked to her small kitchen, then returned to the living room to place a bottle of wine and a delicate glass upon the table by her comfortable, overstuffed chair of pastel flowered print. Sitting down with a pleasant sigh, she placed tired feet onto the matching Ottoman and leaned back to let the chair envelope her.

This evening she would not make the same mistake. She would not let her guard down; would not let the demons take control of her dreams.

Last night had been her first slip in a long time.

She had not been prepared for that long evening. Elena had only learned of the need to work the extra hours after Rosa and Maria had already walked from the girl's after-school program to the apartment of Elena and Ricardo; after Ricardo had given his daughter a hug and hastily changed from his mechanic's uniform into the slacks and shirt he wore to his night school.

She had enjoyed the extra time with her granddaughter; had answered, as many times before, the questions that were so much like Elena's when she had been this age.

"Tell me again, Grandma, about my grandpa who is with the angels. I like that story. And be sure to tell me about what a hero my grandpa was and how handsome he looked in his uniform."

Rosa, as always, as she had done for Elena, obliged with the tales of Miguel, her handsome husband who had been drafted just a month after their marriage. Who had been a hero to the men in his platoon in the jungles of Viet Nam. He had given his life to save his comrades so that they might return to their loving wives and children—something the wonderful Miguel was not able to do. But he had at least left a part of himself in the form of the beautiful Elena.

"My momma," the child interrupted, as she always did, as if on cue.

"Yes, your beautiful mother. The beauty of our love made your momma and the beauty was so pure that it was next given to you."

And Rosa tickled the tummy of her granddaughter, as she always did, as if on cue.

Yes, the time with Maria was good, but last night it had come on top of an especially tiresome day at the motel and by the time Rosa arrived at her own apartment after the extra long time with Maria, she was too exhausted to prepare.

Last night she had not had the strength to place the bottle of wine and the glass by the chair; to sit in her comfortable chair and weave in her mind the lovely tapestries intertwined with threads from lives of people she didn't really know; had not woven dreams from material she could not know.

Almost every night of her life she had carefully quilted together the emotions, the touches, the smiles she saw pass between two people in love. In this way she had been able to give to Elena that which she, Rosa Felipe, had never had.

She had given Elena the beauty of being able to love a man. All else in Elena's life had come from that. She had gone out into the world with an open heart and mind and with a confident step. She had met Ricardo and loved him, a man so gentle and kind, who encouraged Elena in all she did; who looked forward to Elena's enrolling in the community college next fall so she could get a certificate in restaurant management and move up in the world. A man who shared so joyfully in the care of Maria, a child conceived from the love Elena knew paralleled the love with which Rosa and Miguel had conceived her.

But last night the protective aura of love that Rosa worked so hard to exude to those around her and to herself had dissolved. Unprepared, exhaustion had drained her of her shield and lowered all back-up guards.

\* \* \* \* \*

At first the images fooled her dream self, who seemed not to remember that this was how it always began—a balmy day, a young woman breathing the fresh air as she made the invigorating long walk to the lighthouse overlooking the city of San Diego and its bay—a bay filled with Navy ships about to embark for the other side of the globe to help save the world from a game of dominos.

She felt again the pleasant admiration for the group of sailors walking towards her from the lighthouse—brave young men of all sizes, shapes, and hues, all granted the gift of handsomeness by their uniforms. In her dream she would smile the smile of innocence, forgetting where that smile had led those thirty years ago in another life.

Then the truth the dream had been hiding would strike, along with the grabbing and pushing of those once-handsome young men. Thankfully, the dream world would hide from her many of the graphic details of her ordeal, but the all-encompassing terror of being completely helpless, of having not a mote of control over her fate, were emotions that would be remembered always as they seized her once more in the dream.

Some things her senses did recall. Her eyes remembered the pain of an intense brightness, and its source. The last rays of the sun caught, for a breath in time, a sacred cross swinging from the neck of one of the devils, and were reflected into her eyes.

Her cheek remembered the pressure of curved metal. For a moment it crossed the path of her eye, now far enough from her not to touch, close enough to be seen. It was a gold band—a wedding ring on the hand of another of the beasts.

Her ears remembered the names of men being called in animal triumph by their fellows in crime. Many names. Different names. There were no Miguels amongst them.

At last they had walked away, taking her innocence with them, leaving her crumpled, violated form on the once-beautiful hillside beneath the lighthouse, overlooking the bay and the city.

But they had never left her. They came to her in the horror of her dreams, dreams that would forever remind her that she had lost the innocence that had dreamed of love and gentle embraces. They had taken it forever. Barred her from knowing it.

Along with her innocence, they had taken from her the beauty that had been within her. But she had learned to find beauty elsewhere. In this there was great irony, the irony of the wonder that was Elena. They had given her Elena.

Elena was beauty itself. Everything about Elena was beautiful. Everything that spoke of Elena must be beautiful and full of grace. Her beginning must be beautiful, too.

Rosa had built her armor from the beauty she found in her child Elena; in her child's child, Maria; in the love between Elena and Ricardo; in the lives of total strangers.

With the help of her armor, Rosa had learned how to hide the terror always lurking in the crevices of her mind so that Elena would have that which Rosa could not have

Last night, thankfully in the privacy of her own apartment, hidden from Elena's eyes, Rosa had let the armor slip away.

This night, she would practice, once more, keeping the armor solidly in place.

This night, she became the nice woman with auburn hair and comfortable shoes and held out her arms to welcome the exotically handsome man who was always gentle.

This night, Rosa Felipe had beautiful dreams.

## WEST TEXAS TEARS

By Daniel Davis

The little girl sat next to the well in front of the house, clothes torn, no pants. She had to be about four or five, a chubby little thing. She didn't seem to notice when Wilcox and I tied up our horses and walked over to her. Her eyes were closed, and if it weren't for the cries coming from her, I would've sworn she was dead. Just sat there, rock still, crying. Screaming.

Wilcox looked her over, then turned his attention to the house. The front door was open. Bullet holes in the walls. It was clear what'd happened.

"Told 'em," Wilcox said. "Can't piss off the Injuns and not expect pay-back."

A vulture took off from out behind the house. I watched as it flapped clumsily to a nearby tree, roosting in the dead branches. West Texas is a hell of a place to make a living. Almost as bad a place to die.

Wilcox walked in front of the girl. As his shadow passed over her, her cries faltered; but her eyes didn't open, and when he moved past, she resumed at her previous pitch. Low, but steady. No idea how long she'd been crying before we got there. I knelt down in front of her, running through the children's names. I'd seen them on a piece of paper, two days before.

"Amanda. Roxanne. Chloe."

At the last name, she shifted a little towards me. "Chloe," I said again. I hadn't spoken with a child so young since the war; I tried lowering my voice, but I could still hear the dust in it, the heat and the miles. I tried smiling, but that only made it worse; out here, you don't smile, you grimace.

"Pretty name," I told her, though I wasn't sure if that was true. Presumably her parents had thought so.

"They're in here," Wilcox yelled. He was in the cabin, looking out through one of the busted windows. "Didn't even bother to scalp 'em."

"They don't do that 'round here," I said, but quietly so he couldn't hear. It wouldn't have made any difference to him anyways.

I thought about touching the girl on the shoulder, trying to get a reaction, but I kept my hand at my side and just stared at her. I think she knew I was still watching; her voice lowered, but her tears still came and she didn't stop making that sound. I wondered how she could breathe. I wondered how many tears a little child has in them.

"Can you shut her up, Horace?"

I didn't bother to answer him. Just stood up and walked away from the girl. Her cries followed me—louder, up to a point, then they just plateaued and stayed there. As if she didn't know anything other than how to cry, and spent all day practicing it, and wanted my opinion on how it was going.

It was light inside the house, what with all the additional holes in the walls. The man had clearly died from multiple gunshots; I assumed he'd taken them when the Indians came up and fired a volley through the walls. The woman and the two older girls may have been shot, or may not have been, but they'd clearly died long afterwards, after the raiders took out their anger and frustration. Their clothes were torn, their blood drying puddles across the floor and walls. Wilcox was eyeing the women's bodies, probably trying to determine what'd happened to them; I looked away, at the man, then glanced back out towards the well. I couldn't see the little girl from there, but I could hear her.

Wilcox shifted his weight onto his Winchester rifle, leaning forward, down over the body of one of the girls. She had to've been about twelve. Amanda or Roxanne. I didn't like the way he was looking at her. Not hungrily, not like he would've had she been alive. But like he'd seen it before, knew who did it and how and why. Almost like he was waiting for me to ask his opinion. And part of me wanted to; I told myself it was for justice, so I could track them down and kill them in kind. I don't remember much about the Bible, haven't had a need for it since the first time I got shot, but I remember something about an "eye for an eye." Always stuck with me. You take the useful parts from things, leave the rest behind, scattered across the floor like dropped marbles waiting to be tripped over.

We spent a few moments just staring at the bodies, or Wilcox staring at them and me looking away. The girl cried outside. I heard vultures making a fuss out back, so I roused myself and went out there. The dogs had been skinned and left in the sun. It'd been a couple hours at least, and the flesh swarmed with flies and crows and buzzards. I tried to spit the taste out of my mouth, couldn't, and went back inside, where at the least the smell wasn't so bad yet. Wilcox had moved to one of the front windows again; he was looking towards

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the well.

"They're probably long gone by now," I said. "We were too late, that's all. Should've started out here the day we got the summons. Scared 'em off."

Wilcox grunted.

"I 'spose you were right." I kept myself from looking at the bodies, though I could feel them behind me. "They should've known better than to take land that wasn't theirs. Shame, though. No land-stealing warrants this kind of retribution."

Wilcox said, "One of 'em didn't get far."

"Scuse me?"

He nodded out the window.

I went to the doorway and looked. A horse was shuffling towards the house, from the west. It was an Indian horse, no doubt, covered in paint and blankets and whatnot. It was also covered in blood, and limped like mad. The way its head was swinging, I knew it wouldn't be standing much longer.

Wilcox and I went out to it. He stroked its muzzle while I examined the wounds. "Lot of cuts," I said.

He nodded.

"Doesn't mean the rider's injured."

"No it don't."

I sighed. "But it probably does." I checked my revolver and went over to my horse. I glanced at the girl as I walked past; she sensed me again, and her cries softened. As I started to ride off, they intensified.

It took me several minutes to find him, because I'm not as good a tracker as Wilcox was, but I have a lower tolerance for gore, so there'd been no way I could've remained near that house. I found the Indian caught in a barbed wire fence that had been strung up, and stretched in either direction for as far as I could see. I almost fell into it myself; barbed wire was still new to the area, which is probably why the Indian hadn't thought to look for it. I only saw it because I was riding carefully, my eyes on the ground.

The Indian—a kid, no more than sixteen or seventeen, as best I can judge Indian age—was still alive. He must've heard me coming, because he didn't look surprised as I rounded the big rock between him and me. He was dressed in usual Indian getup, except his leg was twisted at an odd angle from where his horse had fallen on him, and his arms and other leg were tangled in a mess of wire. Had some across his throat and face, too. He couldn't move much; just watched me from the corner of his eyes, shifting carefully as I dismounted and walked towards him.

I reached for my Colt instinctively, but didn't draw. He had a gun, but it was about a foot from his hand, and there was no way in hell he could reach it. His face was covered in some kind of paint that had mixed with the blood; there was some of it on his teeth, and when he snarled at me, his mouth looked like a red cavity.

Past the fence was open pasture. He'd been heading towards someone else's property, which meant that there was probably another butchered family just a couple miles away.

The Indian spoke first. I couldn't tell what tongue; I haven't had a whole bunch of experience with Indians, all I know is that they're people just like me, which means I don't trust them. Someone had told me what tribe was hostile in the area—hostile only because whites had come and taken over the land, a fact that none of the whites seemed anxious to acknowledge—but I'd forgotten it, because it didn't matter. If they're trying to kill you, you don't ask who they are, and you don't ask why. You shoot back, and hope you're quicker and more accurate than they are.

I let him have his say, whatever it was. Then, leaning on the big rock, I said, "You got yourself into a fine mess there, son."

He swallowed—which I'm sure hurt plenty—but said nothing. He couldn't understand me any better than I could him, which meant we understood each other perfectly enough.

"I guess you had reason to be mad. But you didn't have no reason to slaughter children."

He said something. His voice was raspy and faint. I didn't detect any remorse in his eyes. Just anger.

I shook my head, signaling him to shut up. He did, and I said, "You missed one, anyways. Little girl. Chloe. I guess it's a pretty name. She'd be a pretty girl, she wasn't so fat and scared."

I unholstered the Colt and raised it, sighting down the barrel at his face. He spoke again, his voice hardened, the syllables short and to the point. He looked at the revolver, then back at me. Nothing had changed in his eyes.

"I'm within my right," I said. "It'd be just, and it'd be fair. Maybe nothing's fair in all this, but we can make it fair, and I can do it by shooting you down right now."

He closed his eyes, but his mouth was set.

I fired. The bullet hit a few feet from his broken leg. He jerked, then gasped as the wire tore deeper into his flesh.

I holstered the revolver. The Indian began muttering to himself, his face contorted in pain. The reverence in his voice could only mean one thing—prayer. To a god, or to fate, or to his own damnation, I didn't know. In such moments, it doesn't matter what you believe, or even who you pray to. The words themselves are all that matter, whether someone's listening or not. For most of us, no one is—I've seen too much to believe otherwise. But the Indian had an audience, however unwilling. I let his voice drift over me, noted the anguish in it that went beyond the wire constricting tighter around his throat, the kind of pain it takes a whole people, an entire nation, to feel. For a moment, I wavered. There was nothing I could do, but there was something I could *feel*, and I started to reach towards it. But then the images in the cabin hit me, and the girl's cries filled my ears, and I let go of whatever the Indian wanted me to hold. I spat on the ground at his feet and took a step away.

"It ain't my place to make it fair," I said. "This is one big mess we're in, and let's just leave it that way." I nodded toward the hori-

zon. "Darkness is coming, and the coyotes with it. Let them make it fair."

He ignored me; since I wasn't going to kill him, I'd ceased to matter. I mounted my horse and rode off, not bothering to look back. When I reached the house again, I saw the Indian's horse laid out near the door, still breathing but absently so. I dismounted my horse and tied it near Wilcox's. It wasn't until I was walking past the well that I realized I didn't hear the girl crying anymore.

She wasn't near the well. I glanced around, but couldn't see her. I strained my ears. I could see Wilcox moving in one of the windows; he looked out at me, then away. Something in his glance caused me to lower my hand to the Colt again. Numbness ran through me. I glanced at the well, into it; it went down far and deep. Stank, too, the way wells do. I couldn't see anything.

I closed my eyes, my fist clenching around the Colt's grip. I remembered a whore in a town called La Piedra. Her face had been rearranged; her body had been battered, her spirit inflamed but dying. Wilcox's indifference afterwards—the same way he felt after any act of violence. A cool detachment, as though what he'd done had been preordained, outside of his control.

But surely a man had his limits. Even a wolf, if you turn your back on it, won't attack unprovoked, or unless it's hungry, or it's eased. And while Wilcox was surely sick, it was an illness that had been brewing since I'd known him, and probably long before that too. I'd tolerated it enough because I owed him my life and more, and it had never come back to haunt me, except in my sleep. I'd dreaded a moment like this, but I hadn't thought it possible.

I could do it, though. I could. I'd had occasion to before and hadn't, but I could do it now, I was faster than him; he was better but I was faster. The Colt was smaller than the Winchester, I could have it up and aimed before he even knew what I was doing. Two shots to the chest. One-two.

Then I heard movement behind me. I spun, almost drawing. She was standing near my horse, petting its leg. She looked over at me; her eyes were green.

I slowly lowered my hand from the gun, clenching my fingers, feeling the knuckles pop from the strain. "Chloe," I said.

She nodded, then returned her attention to my horse.

I heard Wilcox's heavy footsteps coming towards me. I turned. He saw my face, read me instantly. He may have smiled, behind that ragged beard of his. As it was, he said, "She was hungry, I reckon."

"Hungry," I echoed, as he stood beside me, watching her. She glanced over at us every now and then. Her tears had dried in the dirt and sweat on her face, leaving behind small sticky spots like enlarged freckles. She wiped absently at them as flies tickled her, as the horse shifted its weight beneath her touch.

"We'd best get moving on," Wilcox said. He mounted his horse. "What about her?"

The girl was oblivious. I reached for her, touched her shoulder. She flinched away, walked over to the well and sat down. She pulled her knees up to her chest and looked at me.

"We send someone out for her," I said. "Someone who knows her. I doubt she'll ride with us."

Wilcox didn't say anything, just started riding away. I mounted and followed him. I expected the girl to start crying again, but I all I heard behind us was the silence of the approaching night.

## DANCING AT ALBIE'S PUB AT THE END OF THE WORLD

By T. Fox Dunham

Lucy liked to watch angels flying in the clouds of soot and smoke bleeding from burning row houses. She longed to join their dance—divas born of fire devouring homes, burning life possessions, baking bodies to ash from rain of the Blitz.

Never could I see them.

I watch for Lucy now in smoke above London.

The wail of air raid sirens called me like siren song, my lullaby. They compelled most to scurry to their shelters, makeshift ones in the backyard, cellars, public shelters in the London Underground. I strolled into the night to seek a German bomb, to meet it at median, to transform my flesh into vapor.

I walked the train line to the Battersea power plant, to the Thames. My feet felt vibrations from the explosions. The city glowed orange from the fires. Search lights ripped the sky. Bombs shattered the docks along the Thames, missing me. For seven days since a stray bomb hit our building, I'd gone looking for angels. I tired of waiting for a bomb to find me. Water would kiss me to sleep.

"Here you! Stop."

An air raid warden stood sentry outside a cellar entrance at the foot of a mangled corpse of concrete and steel bones. I always thought their helmets looked silly, like when a kid would wear a pot over his head. It hung loose, a white W painted above the rim.

"Do you think those are fireworks over your head 'cause it's Guy Fawkes Day?"

"I took a wrong turn."

"You don't have your gas mask," he said. "Want to cough up bits of your lung if Jerry drops mustard gas on us? I saw it with me own eyes in the last war."

He studied my face with cat eyes, seeing in the dark.

"Lose someone dear to you? Off to jump from the railroad bridge?"

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“Not any of your business.”

“They all come this way, aiming for the bridge to jump into the Thames. We’ve got a prime location, best for business.”

He wrestled with the cellar hatch. The hinge moaned like a suffering child.

“Down the stairs and to the right.”

Horns and drums and a blues piano spun a maelstrom at the top of the concrete stairs, drawing my body down into the underworld as the promised semblance of life draws the dead—echoes of dancing and holding and loving, fleeting sensations of life so near like a dissipating dream. Glenn Miller diverted me from my course to the river.

Lanterns fashioned from blue and green and golden bottles dangled from the low ceiling, obfuscating faces so you never knew with whom you were drinking, dancing, shagging. Albie served moonshine from a saw table he’d converted into a bar—a quid a cup. If you drank enough from the chipped teacups, eventually the odor of grease and mildew got pleasant, like an old attic you used for snogging.

A record player damaged with age warped music into sickly song, the tone hollow, the beat a fraction slow. Albie had found it in the rubble of a collapsed house, figured no one was using it. Patrons donated records, mostly Jazz, Glenn Miller, Big Band, and took to a rubber mat to have a knees up after emptying a few tea cups.

“Why get this going?” I asked him after two teacups.

He worked on a chair, kneeling on his good leg. He’d lost the other leg when the factory had been hit. They found him under the rubble two days later.

“It’s dear to m’heart. Always wanted a little spot to play some tunes and have a drink with mates. Elbows up. M’patriotic duty.”

“That’s a nasty cough you got.”

“I’ll be dead soon like you lot,” he said. “Bits of the factory, bits of that bomb in me. Blood poisoning.”

“Keep bugging,” I recited the pub motto, modified from Churchill’s KBO.

“If he’s got a nice bum.”

And we soldier on.

\* \* \*

“Tell me your name,” I said. “Something French? Claudette maybe?”

She ground her fag into bar then pressed the dead cigarette to my lips. Ash brushed my mouth. I tasted bitter soot, my mouth salivating. I swallowed it.

“You already have a name for me,” she said, rosy lipstick spread thin on her lips. “One belonging to someone dead, someone rotting in the earth.”

Her hair oozed to her shoulders like spilled oil, reminding me of Lucy’s.

“Are you an angel?”

“Buy me a drink,” she said.

Albie already had teacup in hand. He waved off the currency I offered him.

“A chill in here tonight,” I said.

“My body burns when it snows,” she said. “I go out into the street without a stitch. I love the way my nipples get hard.”

“It’s snowing ash,” I said.

She took my hand, leading me to the rubber mat. We slow danced, first ones on the floor that night. None of the other lot looked up from their tables, from the wells of their chipped teacups.

Albie kept playing *Run Rabbit Run*. The song would end, and he’d reset the needle.

“Isn’t this one a corker!” he said, guffawing through three yellow teeth.

She danced on torn, black-strapped heels she’d sutured with wire, and the line she’d drawn up her legs to fake nylons had smudged. Her white dress clung to her hips—an old dress she’d must have pulled out of her wardrobe. She’d probably worn it as a young woman, giggling as she smashed the hearts of those new to manhood, teaching them a life lesson, strangling their ability to love.

“I feel her weighing down your shoulders when we dance,” she said to me. “I know you’re just dying to tell me about it. You’re so in love with your sickness.”

“You’re mistaken.”

She sharpened her eyes like a cat’s at play, just before chewing the jugular.

“You don’t need to say a word,” she said, taking my hand and sliding it down her thigh. She caressed my wedding band between her thumb and forefinger.

“You went mad for an angel. Fell deep in it. You drowned like two cats in a sack chucked into the Channel. Tiny flat, poor and happy. Underground to work in the morning. She’d lay on your chest at night and block out the war with your heartbeat.”

I pulled from her hand, but she locked her grip. She fettered me with maelstrom gaze, draining my strength. I surrendered my arm.

“You weren’t a part of *their* war. You didn’t go to the shelters during the air raids. You shagged while the bombs fell, turned the city to dust, shredding flesh.”

She rubbed her leg along my thigh to the beat of the song. Sweat soaked my trousers, clinging to my legs, chaffing my skin.

“You don’t know a goddamn thing.”

“Then go,” she said.

“So be it,” I said. I slipped my arm around her back, joined her body in motion to the watery music. I’d found my bomb.

“One night you walked home. Your building smashed to rubble, bricks popping in the fire. The war found your wife, spared you.”

I drove my nails into her waist, slicing the dress fabric. She moaned.

“She burned to ash. You inhaled her into lungs. Choked. Dust and ash.”

I expelled a draft of air till it thinned into string.

“The bombs keep missing me,” I said.

“You’re going to be a laugh,” she said, then pressed her mouth to my neck. “Come.”

She led me out of the pub, down one of the old bowels of the factory, deeper into the corpse. The foundation trembled, struggling against collapse. A shockwave from a close bomb would collapse the concrete, entombing us. My shoes soaked through from puddles of drainage water, but I didn’t feel a chill.

“Is it a knife in your chest? Do you cry walking the streets at night?”

She dragged me down into a pool of drainage water and oozed on top of me. She tugged at my trousers, ripping off the button. I pushed up her soaked dress.

I lost my body in hers.

“Cry for her and push into me.”

\* \* \*

“If you fall in love, this ends.”

“Do you love me?” I asked.

“I feel nothing.”

We played strangers each night. She’d ask me if I wanted a drink, maybe a dance. I’d ask her name. She’d put a doused fag to my lips. We’d dance, wrapping hips, then off to one of the cloisters to lie in waters among rats and dirt.

“Say her name,” she’d cry out just before climax.

“Lucy. My Lucy.”

Her body arched like a bombed bridge then collapsed.

“Don’t hide your tears,” she said. “They make me randy.”

While I entered her one night, she spoke:

“My fiancé lives at the bottom of the channel, still inside his spitfire.”

“When?”

“The night before I met you.”

“I’m sorry,” I said.

“Don’t bother. I don’t care. His Group Captain came to see me, making the rounds. I buried my face in my hands. Pretended to cry. Ever just feel like a clockwork soldier? Courtship. Marriage. Children. Wind-up bird. That’s me.”

When we shagged, I felt an echo of emotion, alive for those seconds—hurt, pleasurable pain. I watched suffering in her face, pinching the corners of her mouth. Then it dissipated, returning her vapid visage.

“I can almost feel her,” she said. “Think if I licked your tears, they’ll move up through me, leak from my eyes?”

I released into her, weeping on her chest. Then I tore from her body. I pulled up my trousers, soaked from spill water.

“I can’t see you anymore,” I said.

“See you tomorrow, lover.”

I nodded.

\* \* \*

Tonight would be the last night I decided.

We didn’t play perfunctory games, didn’t dance. I took her hand, and she led me to our love spot in the corridors. I didn’t feel the cold ache of spill waters this time, didn’t feel grease smearing my face.

Bombs fell close. The Luftwaffe targeted factories and the Battersea power plant. Explosions pummeled the earth, vibrating the concrete even this deep, shocking my chest. My heart skipped.

I entered her. She’d been bleeding. She pulled at my naked hips, pushing me in deeper. The climax built, pulsing through my groin, through my frail joke of a body—poor hands that couldn’t mend bits of ash and bone together into my wife,

She moaned, raising her hips.

The halls trembled from another bomb strike. The walls around us cracked, spraying chalk dust down my nose, turning to mud from sweat on my lips. I choked. Another explosion sucked the air from the halls through the above door. Pressure burst back. The ceiling collapsed, dropping chunks into the corridors. A rat parade scurried passed, crawling and clawing over us.

“Don’t stop,” she said.

She grabbed a snapped piece of steel from debris on the floor, pressed the sheared end to my ribs, threatening to stab my heart if I stopped.

“I’m Lucy,” she said. “I’m all the dead. A veil of ash hides my face.”

We shared climax, my grief and her emptiness mixing, pleasure real and reaching, stabbing through the groin. She clawed my arm, screeching like the twisting metal of the collapsing factory we heard nearby.

The walls quaked, bombs hitting the structure above us, mangling the skeleton of steel frames and stone. The giant’s corpse col-

lapsed into the foundation. Concrete walls squeezed and popped. Debris plummeted down on us.

I pushed myself off of her, feeling ahead in the dark.

"Just hold me," she said, slurring her words. "Let the world collapse on us."

I kissed her forehead, tasting metal, blood. Debris had struck her head. I ripped free my sleeve and bound her wound.

I longed to obey, to find comfort in her body like sinking into a cool bath in a burning house. I nearly surrendered, to hold her till we suffocated, entombed together, but I wanted more time with her, more nights.

"I can't do this again," I said.

I reached into darkness. I dug at piles of concrete shards, gnawing my fingers down to bloody stumps. The roof shifted, but luck blessed me. I broke free to the other side, light beaming through. I dug a rabbit hole big enough to crawl through.

I lifted her body under her shoulders. She clawed at my back, then she fainted from the injury, going limp like a cat with a snapped spine.

I carried her, pushing through the gap,

"Don't love me," she whispered, spitting blood from her mouth.

"Almost there."

I shifted an iron support, pulled her below it.

"I can't love you," she said.

"But you do."

"What next? Be a good wife? It wouldn't be any different. Men are fools."

I carried her up the stairs, to damp, river air. The vapor soothed my lungs, and I coughed, expelling the dust.

"Try for me," I said.

She nodded.

A member of the fire brigade waited at the top of the stairs and helped me get her outside. The moon reflected on his glass eye.

"Didn't think anyone could survive that," he said. "What are you lot playing at? Dancing during an air raid, having your own little pub down there while London is burning? Playing your fiddle like Nero?"

"Everyone's dead down there?"

He nodded.

They fought the blaze with hoses drawing water from the river.

I laid her down on the tracks. I took off my shirt and wet it from a leak in one of the hoses. I cleaned her wound. My body collapsed next to her, and we watched the fire, searching for heavenly hosts in the smoke.

"We should get you to hospital," I said.

She shook her head. I no longer had strength to fight her.

"Did you mean what you said?" she said.

"I didn't say anything."

She leaned her head and kissed my ear.

"I'm not promising anything," she said. "We'll see. Meet me here tomorrow when the air raid siren sings, just once more for old time's sake."

"I should at least walk you home."

"It's not far. I feel fine now."

I kissed her hand, and she parted.

I'd take that position overseas working for the foreign office in Australia where the war had no teeth. She'd fatten up with a baby in her belly, then another, and we'd have a little garden to grow our own vegetables and laugh at the idiot world for blowing itself to pieces.

The next night I plucked a purple nettle from the track to trade for her name.

Spitfires, Messerschmitt bombers shredded the London night among swaying spotlights, pulsing bleeds of tracer fire from anti-aircraft guns. Explosions illuminated the Battersea rail bridge, and viscous smoke flowed over the river from burning London. Away I turned my eyes.

George, the previous air raid warden who had accosted me that first night, stood at attention, guarding his post.

"The pub is shut, bombed out," he said. "They all got their wish I suppose. Guess you were lucky or unlucky."

"We'll see," I said.

"Come back to join them did you?"

"Did you see a girl?" I said. "She's suppose to meet me here."

"She went by just before you came 'round. I told her the establishment was shut, and she grinned like Cheshire cat and handed me some ration cards. I didn't mind taking them. She wouldn't have any more use for them after concluding her blasphemy."

"Please don't say anymore."

I fell to my knees. I witnessed angels dancing in river smoke, dancing as the world ended.

"I promised I'd deliver her message exactly," he said. "And you've got to keep your promises."

He told me:

*"Just didn't have another dance in me, but for awhile I wanted it. See you lover. It's been a laugh."*



**RUDE BOY**  
By Spencer Black

Standing in front of the professor's office, I thought about how I got here. Three flights of stairs and I could already feel my heart pounding against my rib cage. I had clammy hands and sweat beading down my back. I wondered what the professor wanted. I thought about how I covered my tracks pretty well, and if I was caught I was pretty sure it would be the University dealing with me rather than just a professor. No way have I been caught though, I thought. Next to me was a large window to the outside and I could see the University police taking notes, asking questions, investigating. The professor emailed me last night to see him in his office as soon as possible and I could only think about my last words before I was executed. I could picture the professor behind the door, asking me why I did it. I thought about how I would try not to be distracted by his large, black cloth covering his head with eye holes cut out. I imagined how I would tell him all the details from the beginning.

Walking on campus, I sipped my morning coffee and tried not to fall on the colorful sidewalk and sleep. The sidewalk was littered with colored chalk drawings and shout-outs to friends. Happy sorority girls expressing their love for their sorority sisters in the most obnoxious ways possible including, but not limited to: "We love you, Laura B.!" "Have a great day, Emily G.!" "Happy birthday Kristin T.!" and I thought about how Hallmark cards were more creative.

Walking up to the glass doors of Miller Hall, I could see my reflection: a young, scruffy-faced sophomore. Unable to decide what to do in life, I went to college as an undetermined major and took all Kinesiology courses. Tennis, bowling, basketball, you name it – I've done most of it. I retook them each semester as I still thought about what to do with my life. Meeting with my course advisor last fall, he suggested I take a real course – something that involved actual studying, thinking, and exams. Get the real experience and actually learn something, he said.

I said, "Okay, what do you suggest I take?"

Of course, the bad thing about taking an actual class was I actually had to think and the one course I decided to take was so early in the morning. It was eight a.m. and I took another sip of my decreasingly hot coffee – only I missed my mouth and dribbled some on my hooded jacket. Looking down at myself, I noticed the pavement. I read the colorful, bubbly words, "Gina is awesome!" I guess I should add 'people' to that list of reasons why this course blew.

Sitting in class, doodling while the professor lectured about something in the late 1800's, I was at the end of a row of seats. The girl sitting next to me, a tall blonde, long legs and sunglasses you'd think were modeled after an alien's face, she was sitting there texting. I saw her notebook was as empty as when she bought it except for her name at the top right hand corner: Gina Ria. Everything she thought about while in this class was... I leaned over to read a part of the conversation, "Last night was amaze..." and she pulled away. I carefully looked up to see her scrunch her face in disgust. I pretended not to notice and I looked back at my notebook.

Sun down, street lights on, sidewalk empty. My girlfriend was telling me all about her day while we both sipped hot lattes at the coffee shop on campus. Usually the place was packed, but it was a Friday. Friday everyone either went home or partied downtown. At least that's true for this town.

"Are you listening to me?" my girlfriend asked. I noticed I had been staring at the design in my latte.

I said, "Yeah, you were saying something about your math test."

My girlfriend leaned back and crossed her arms, giving me That Look. I think every boy knows what I mean when I say That Look, or at least I'm pretty well acquainted with it myself.

I gave the best innocent face as possible and asked, "What?" I shrugged my shoulders, raised my hands, palms out, confused look. I was trying to say that I really was paying attention. I was trying to say that I really cared about her.

That Look then turned into The Look, and I found myself walking back to my dorm alone. She said she had had it. She was through with me not caring. She wanted to see other people. She explained to me how she had been upset for quite some time now. I would always be with her, but I was never actually there with her. She was the one saying this, not me. I look back and maybe she was right. I don't know.

Tears as my foot tracks, I walked back to my lonely shared mansion, passing by Faucet Hall, Olivia Hall, Roger Hall and then Miller Hall. Walking by, I stared at the ground thinking about how much of a loser I was for being so distant. I was thinking about how I don't know how good of a thing I have with someone until it's taken from me. I was thinking how god awful of a person I was and how I could see a part of the sidewalk kind of glow in the corner of my eye. I looked and saw it was more chalk shout-outs. There were lamps scattered around, but it was still plenty dark and this chalk still glowed. It said, "Gina is awesome!" It was the same one from that morning. I looked at it with disgust and sniffed. I couldn't tell you why I exactly did it right then. I guess I hated the idea of people being happy when I wasn't. I looked around in the dark for a rock. And I decided to edit the message, click, click, clicking the rock against the concrete.

The next day, the seat next to me was occupied by a sobbing Gina. She was still texting as usual, but sniffing and shaking and looking overall depressed. I read in her texts, "They wrote that I was a slut!" "They all hate me!" "What did I do to deserve this?" and I sat back in wonder. A warm feeling came over me and I started to feel a little bit better about myself.

That night, I wrote more: "Gina R. can fall off a cliff." Just a few click, click, click's and I never saw her again. I assume she dropped the class, but that didn't matter. She was just a memory now. Of course others saw the empty seat and took her spot. A sweet, studious looking girl was now in Gina's seat and she politely said hello to me the first time we met. And all I could think about was if I held the same power over her as I did with Gina.

Click, click, click, the same affect and the replacement was replaced. I bought myself a box of colorful, bubbly chalk. The next

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replacement replaced. And the next and the next. Eventually, I decided to go broad. I click, click, clicked slanders using “you” rather than specific names. It affected people in a different way. While the class was affected as a whole, it wasn’t just their attitudes but their grades. The professor seemed to be wondering if he was doing something wrong as I sat in the back of the class as the only one with any real confidence thanks to my late night escapades. Why I did it all was for this amazing power.

Now I was outside the professor’s door, waiting to be disemboweled. I told myself that it was now or never and opened the door, shaking.

“Ah, just who we need!” the professor greeted me. Sitting behind his desk, he motioned over towards a seat and I noticed a girl sitting next to it. She was tense, arms and legs crossed and looking severely pissed off.

The professor said, “Thanks for coming in such short notice, but I’m in need of some help.” I sat next to the girl and took a sigh of relief. “This is Emma, Emma this is your new tutor.” Surprised, I looked at the professor and at Emma and then back at the professor.

Emma said, “That’s not what I need.”

I shrugged at the professor and he laughed and looked at me, “You’re the only one who can help this class. You’re the only one getting good grades. Everyone else is failing. And then someone like Emma here comes up to me and says it’s not their fault and won’t leave me alone.”

Emma with her hair in short pigtails, black tank top and torn jeans, she sat up in her chair and said, “Look, I study and pay attention in class. I never get low grades. Since those damn chalk messages started appearing, I’ve been failing!”

The professor shook his head, “Well there isn’t much I can do about those chalk messages, but I’m offering you help about those grades.” And he leaned back in his chair, arms behind his head, “This gentleman right here appears to know his way around the course. I’m sure he can help you.”

I’m not really sure why I agreed to help tutor. The professor said he would help give me priority scheduling for the rest of my college career here if I’d do this favor for him, but I’m the last person that would actually need that. He was recruiting tutors for all these kids as best he could. Anything to get them out of his hair. He wasn’t a normal professor – at least that’s what I gathered after the meeting with him and Emma. Maybe it was because I felt a pang of guilt that I decided to go along with his plan.

Emma and I met in the Library late Friday night. Sitting on the second floor, it was a ghost town. It could have just been us in there for all we knew. We sat a table across from each other. While she was on her laptop, I flipped through the pages of our text book.

I said, “What are you looking at?”

“Photography.”

I noticed the camera hanging from her neck, “You carry that camera everywhere you go?”

“Yeah,” she replied.

It was obvious she didn’t want my help in the course, but I continued, “Well, shall we get started?” And I opened up to the chapter we were currently studying.

Emma slowly looked up at me and gave a mean look, “I don’t know what the issue is. But it’s not studying. I don’t know what it is, but it’s definitely not studying.” Emphasis could be heard on the last few words.

I slammed the book shut, making a slight echo in the empty floor. I said, “Okay. What do we do then?” And Emma starts packing her things.

I said, “What are you doing? We have to study. I need to help you get through this class.”

She paused for a moment and looked at me, “Why do you care so much about helping me?”

I felt myself wanting to tell her the truth for some reason. I felt the guilt flow through me. Was I falling for this girl? Why did I want to tell her everything? All of these thoughts translated into a mere shrug. And Emma just laughed and gave me the finger as she headed toward the stairs.

Panicking, I asked, “Where are you going?”

“To take pictures,” she replied and slammed her way through the stairwell door. I ran through the door and looked down the stairwell and watched her circle down.

“You’re just quitting like that?” and she yelled yeah. “You’re not going to try anymore?” and she yelled yeah. “You’re not going to give me a chance?” And I saw a flash of her middle finger before she disappeared.

Like someone had set off a chalk bomb outside of the University library, Faucet Hall, Olivia Hall, there was chalk everywhere. After Emma’s explosion, I exploded. Like a chain reaction: click, click, click, boom and chalk littered the sidewalks.

Click, click, click. You are a loser. Click, click, click. You are a slut. Click, click, click. You cannot succeed in life. Click, click, click. Kill yourself. Click, click, click.

Even after I’m done chalking the sidewalk, I still heard the click, click, click of my chalk. I looked at my hands, dusty with blues, pinks and yellows. Still, the click, click, click went on. Sometimes this happened to people who go crazy. I dusted off my hands and with each wipe sounded off a click. Crazy people don’t know they’re crazy, but I knew I was. Click, click, click. I thought about how I needed water for my dusty hands. Click, click, click. The chalk wasn’t coming off. Click. I turned around and I saw Emma staring back at me through her large, fancy camera. One eye closed, one eye a giant lens and she kind of smirked. Suddenly, I felt as small as a speck of sand. The feeling of power and awesomeness reduced to humility and a possible expulsion.

Emma still behind the camera, still click, click, clicking, she said, “Say cheese.”

## DONATIONS

TL Publishing, Inc. would like to take this time to thank our supporters who have humbled us through their monetary donations. Thanks to people like Holly Wright, Sujata Narayan, and many others, we're able to increase the quality of the products and services that we currently provide.

The goal of a publisher is to act as an intermediary for writers and their intended audience. Therefore, we strive to ensure we present the work of writers in the manner it deserves. However, to achieve this requires several components, one of those being proper funding.

Your contributions are greatly appreciated as it allows us to better position ourselves within our community and our intended niche of publishing. Donating to TL Publishing, Inc. is much like adding water to a puddle looking to become something bigger. No drop is too small because it all combines and given enough consistency and time, that same puddle will become a much larger force that beckons recognition.

If you're interested in donating to TL Publishing, Inc. please visit our website today or contact Tiffani Barner at [tbarner@torridliterature.com](mailto:tbarner@torridliterature.com).

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## VISIT US ON THE WEB!!!

Stop by our website or one of our social networking sites and let us know what your thoughts are concerning our literary journal! We'd love to hear from you! In addition, these sites are a great way to stay connected and current concerning the latest events and news that affect the Torrid Literature Journal, writers, and readers everywhere.

**Official Website:** <http://ww.torridliterature.com>

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**Facebook Page:** <http://ww.facebook.com/tlpublishinginc>

**Facebook Group:** <http://ww.facebook.com/groups/torridlit>

**WordPress Blog:** <http://torridliterature.wordpress.com>

You can also find our calls for submissions listed on:

**Duotrope:** [http://ww.duotrope.com/market\\_5531.aspx](http://ww.duotrope.com/market_5531.aspx)

**Newpages:** <http://ww.newpages.com/literary/submissions.htm>

# 1<sup>st</sup> ANNUAL ROMANCING THE CRAFT OF POETRY & FICTION CONTEST

TL Publishing, Inc. is proud to present its First Annual Romancing the Craft of Poetry and Fiction Contest.

### **Guidelines:**

The contest will be held from March 1, 2012 through June 30, 2012. There are no fees associated with entries for this contest. All submissions should be sent to [submissions@torridliterature.com](mailto:submissions@torridliterature.com). Entries should either be included in the body of the email or attached as an easily readable file such as .doc, .txt, or .rtf format, with either "Contest – Poetry Entry" or "Contest – Fiction Entry" in the subject line. All contest submissions will be considered for the quarterly Torrid Literature Journal. You may also upload your contest entry through our submission manager: <http://torridliterature.submishmash.com/submit>.

**Poetry:** Send up to three poems in any genre.

**Fiction:** Send up to two stories with a maximum word count of 2,000 words or less.

### **Winners & Prizes:**

There will be three winners selected during a blind judging. Winners and their written piece will be announced in Volume IV of the Torrid Literature Journal which will be released in October 2012. The prizes are as follows:

**Third Place:** One free print edition of the Torrid Literature Journal.

**Second Place:** Free one year subscription to the electronic edition.

**First Place:** Free one year subscription to the print edition of the Torrid Literature Journal.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact one of our editors. Please visit our website for complete rules and guidelines.

### **Editorial Staff:**

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# A NIGHT TO REMEMBER



## Torridian Artists:

Mark Paycer

Jim Gaus

Rebecca Wright

David J.

Mike Bath a.k.a Mr. B

Artist Block

Papos

Anna B.

Josh Paul

Doc B.

Edgar Santiago

Poet Fuego

Makeba Jackson

Natasha Born

Lehua Lin

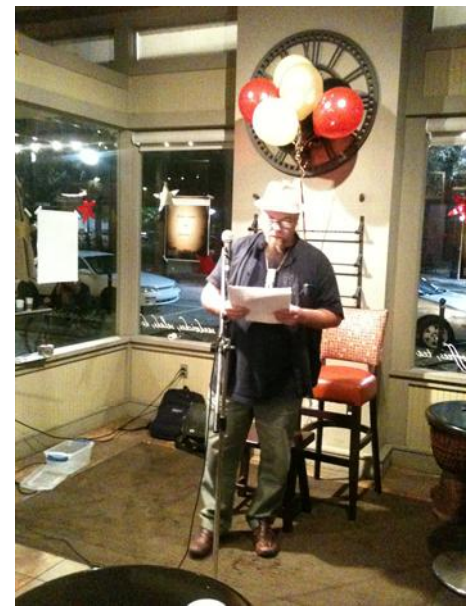
Kandake

On January 14, 2012, TL Publishing, Inc. hosted its first official open mic in Tampa, Florida at The Bunker (f.k.a. Tre Amici). Poets, writers, and musicians left the microphone in flames Saturday night as the above listed performers took the stage and made us fall in love with the arts. The night was a groundbreaking success, not just for TL Publishing, Inc. and the Torrid Literature Journal, but for artists in general. That night served as an important reminder that the arts community is not dead but alive and thriving. People came and left with an abundance of inspiration and motivation that exceeded any and all starting expectations.

Furthermore, seeds were sowed that night. We were able to connect with artists on a personal level and build valuable relationships that will benefit others in our local community. On the corresponding page, you'll see special photos of a few artists who performed that night in addition to audience feedback.

We'd like to specially thank the owner and entire staff of The Bunker for allowing TL Publishing, Inc. to host the event at such an amazing venue. In addition, we humbly thank our family and friends for supporting and guiding us along the way. Visit our website for a special video recap of that night. The entire team at TL Publishing, Inc. looks forward to meeting everyone again at our next open mic that will take place on Saturday, April 14, 2012.

Whether you live in Florida or somewhere else in the world even, we highly encourage you to attend an open mic, talent show, or poetry reading. Not only will you make valuable connections, but your skill level will increase as you acquire important feedback and support. If there isn't one in or near your area, consider starting an open mic of your own. Contact other artists, and venues such as coffee houses, libraries, and the like.



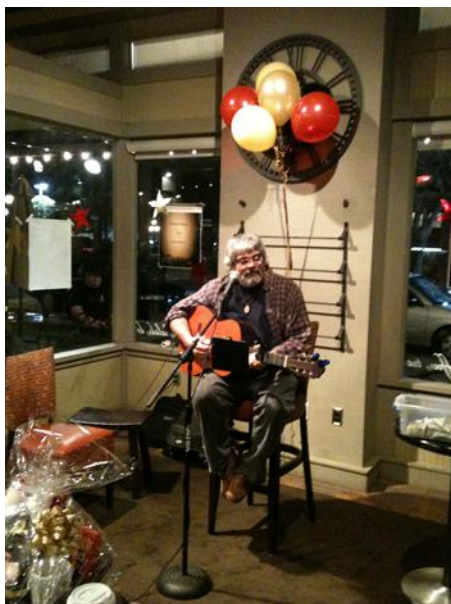
“...I’m still blown away by the phenomenal turn out at the first TL Open Mic @ Tre Amici!!!! I appreciated every poets, artists, group, etc. sharing their incredible talents with us all! I already have the second Open Mic on my schedule (4/14)! TL is a great success; and I can only hope for more success and prosperity in its near future and beyond...”

Frederick Saunders



“My inspiration was replenished after last night's meet up. The wealth of raw and powerful talent in this area is humbling. A lot of really good people got on the mic and put their minds, souls and heart in front of the people and we were all MOVED. I felt a sense of community I'd not felt in quite a while. The host and hostesses were gracious and encouraging and the crowd was as well. Everybody was so nice! Thank you all for a WONDERFUL experience and I hope to see you during future events. Thank you!!!!”

Mike Bath



# THE BUNKER

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With comfortable seating, free wifi connection, excellent entertainment, and an incredible menu, it's impossible to not feel at home.

Visit <http://yborbunker.com> for more information on the latest events and menu specials.

# CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

TL Publishing, Inc. is now accepting submissions for the Torrid Literature Journal. We look for work with strong literary content. That being said, send us your best. We're all about diversity and communication through the arts.

We don't look for a particular theme. We look at the poem, its message, and its structure. We consider poems in multiple genres as well as different forms and techniques which means we will also look at experimental work.

Writers may submit up to 3 poems or one fiction story with 3,000 words or less. To submit:

- Email your work to [submissions@torridliterature.com](mailto:submissions@torridliterature.com); or
- Visit <http://torridliterature.submishmash.com/submit>

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

Please keep in mind we are now accepting poetry submissions for our Christian Anthology as well. Visit our website for detailed submission guidelines.

If you have any questions or concerns please contact one of our editors listed on the Masthead section. We look forward to the reading experience.



Dear Reader,

Journey with us as we rediscover the passion and revel in the bare naked truth that only art can bring. The writers inside of this journal are as diverse as the colors of the rainbow. From theme, topic, and tone to the style and elements used, there is no way you'll be left bored or uninspired. We have many goals, but one of our more important ones is to make sure you close the last page filled with positive energy. Energy that motivates you beyond a 'feel-good' moment. We want to leave you bouncing to the point of activity. The need to get up and do something not for yourself but for the benefit of others. Therefore, thank you for taking this second literary journey with us as we discovered and reveled in the bare naked truth. Please visit our website and stay in touch with us on Facebook and Twitter. We humbly invite you to become a part of our family. Become a Torridian. Submit, support, share, exchange, and grow with us. We look forward to our third encounter together where we continue to bring you ground breaking material crafted by gifted artists all over the world.

- Editorial Staff



TL PUBLISHING, INC. PRESENTS

# ENTER THE GATEWAY

A POETRY ANTHOLOGY



TL Publishing, Inc. is proud to announce its first anthology of poetry called "Enter The Gateway". This anthology will contain a collection of poetry meant to inspire and uplift people from a Christian perspective. Please visit our website for detailed submission guidelines.

"I AM THE DOOR; ANYONE WHO ENTERS IN  
THROUGH ME WILL BE SAVED (WILL LIVE).  
HE WILL COME IN AND HE WILL GO OUT [FREE],