

Volume XI~ July 2014

TORRID LITERATURE JOURNAL



THE BUTTERFLY EFFECT

Featured Interview:

A. J. Huffman

Featured Poets:

Brandon Berman | Erren Geraud Kelly | And Many More!

Must Read Fiction:

"Rocks" | By Stacy Stepanovich

TL Publishing Group LLC

PO BOX 151073
TAMPA, FL 33684

ALICE SAUNDERS

EDITOR
asaunders@torridliterature.com

AISHA MCFADDEN

EDITOR
amcfadden@torridliterature.com

REBECCA WRIGHT

EDITOR
becky@agirlwholives.com

ANNE MARIE BISE

POETRY EDITOR
ambise@torridliterature.com

HEDWIKA COX

FICTION EDITOR
hcox@torridliterature.com

TIFFANI BARNER

MARKETING & NETWORKING SPECIALIST
tbarner@torridliterature.com

Official Website: <http://www.torridliterature.com>

Facebook Pages:

<http://www.facebook.com/torridliteraturejournal>
<http://www.facebook.com/tlpublishing>
<http://www.facebook.com/tlopenmic>
<http://www.facebook.com/gatewayliterature>

Twitter: <http://www.twitter.com/torridlit>

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

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

Torrid Literature Journal - Volume XI The Butterfly Effect

Copyright © 2014 by TL Publishing Group LLC
All rights belong to the respective authors listed herein.
All rights reserved.

ISBN-13: 978-0692244951
ISBN-10: 0692244956

Customer Service Information: The Torrid Literature Journal is a literary publication published quarterly by TL Publishing Group LLC. To have copies of the Torrid Literature Journal placed in your store or library, please contact Alice Saunders.

Advertising Space: To purchase advertising space in the Torrid Literature Journal, please contact Tiffani Barner at tbarner@torridliterature.com. A list of advertising rates is available upon request.

Disclaimer: Any views or opinions presented or expressed in the Torrid Literature Journal are solely those of the author and do not represent those of TL Publishing Group LLC, its owners, directors, or editors. Rates and prices are subject to change without notice. For current subscription rates, please send an email to tjournal@torridliterature.com.

Letters & Comments: tjournal@torridliterature.com.



Purchasing Information:

Torrid Literature Journal - Volume XI The Butterfly Effect

Print | \$11.00

Online | \$3.00

1 Year Print Subscription | \$35.00

1 Year Online Subscription | \$6.00

This issue is available in paperback and on Kindle at Amazon.com.

CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

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

All positions can be fulfilled remotely unless otherwise noted.

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

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

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

FROM THE EDITORS

The Power of Art

Since our last release of the *Torrid Literature Journal*, many memorable events have taken place. One of the most profound events to occur in the literary world is the passing of Dr. Maya Angelou. She was an author, poet, historian, songwriter, playwright, dancer, stage and screen producer, director, performer, singer, and civil rights activist. Personally, I don't view her passing as a lost. She finished her race and gracefully crossed the finish line where God called her home.

The legacy that Angelou created is immortal. Her voice will never be silenced. She will live on through the completed works she left behind. There are no boundaries strong enough to subdue the voice of literature. That is why we love art. Literature, along with every other sub-genre of art, has the unfathomable ability to transcend time. How often do we hear the statement that an artist is before his/her time? This is due to the fact that artists create works of art that escape the boundaries of the past, present, and future. Once art is created, it doesn't fall away, never to be heard of again. It becomes a seed that develops into something bigger. It multiplies and leaves a harvest capable of nurturing people and society.

With that said, we're humbled to present you with Volume XI of the *Torrid Literature Journal*. In this current issue, we're thrilled to announce our interview feature, A.J. Huffman, a full-time freelance writer and editor of *Kind of a Hurricane Press*. We are grateful for the humble opportunity to share with you Huffman's words of wisdom and insight for writers.

In addition to the new interview, we have over 35 poems and short stories that cover a wide range of topics and interests. Our writers have a message on their heart. A message they are eager to share with readers who are just as eager to check out what is being said. It's an affinity of sorts, a special bond because writers create works of art that in some way tends to resemble the lives of readers at one point in time. Writers create pieces of literature that vividly mimic what readers see in their head, no matter how farfetched the dream or fantasy may seem. We're thankful for our writers and readers who engage in this one on one relationship.

Our work to connect writers with readers doesn't end with this journal. We've got several other projects underway. As such, the need has arisen to expand our core team. We are excited to introduce you to our newest editors: Anne Bise and Hedwika Cox. Anne is our Poetry Editor from Powhatan, Virginia. Hedwika is our Fiction Editor from Houston, Texas. We are excited to have them join our growing family. We still have positions available as we are looking for bloggers and promoters to join our team. We're looking for bloggers who can commit to making at least 1 post a quarter for our blog. We're also looking for promoters who can help us promote our events. If you're interested in learning more, please visit our website for a more detailed job description. Having a strong core is a necessary component to ensure we're properly executing our mission which is to support and strengthen the culture of art.

Speaking of support, we want to take this time out to thank everyone who came out to our open mic event back in May. It was a night to remember. We understand that many of you, our readers, are located around the world, so we invite you to visit our website and check out some of the photos and videos of the performances. A diverse mixture of singers, musicians, poets, storytellers, comedians, and spoken word artists graced our stage. We are eagerly looking forward to our next show in

August. Even if you don't live in the Tampa Bay area, we still encourage you to attend an open mic event or poetry reading in your community. Something special happens when you go up to the stage and leave it all at the mic.

If open mic events aren't your style, don't fret. There many ways you can grow as an artist and connect with your audience. We went into further detail with this topic inside of Volume X. We released this issue during National Poetry Month and as such, we listed several ways writers can promote themselves and poetry in general. The possibilities are endless. Writers can utilize online avenues such as blog tours and virtual interviews. Writers can also have book signings at their local libraries or attend a workshop. Regardless of the methods you choose, we hope you will continue on your journey. April may be over but that doesn't mean you have to stop the celebration. We encourage you to continue spreading the good news of poetry. Familiarize people with its beauty and power. Generate support and raise awareness. As we covered in our last issue, there are many ways to support the culture of poetry.

Stepping over into the fiction side of the literary world, we would be remiss if we didn't mention that NaPoWriMo wasn't the only literary event to take place during April. There was also Camp NaWriMo. If you missed it, don't worry. July marks the start of the second Camp NaNoWriMo session where writers have the opportunity to participate in a smaller version of the full scale NaNoWriMo that occurs in November. Visit campnanowrimo.org to learn more.

This issue marks our midway point. We are halfway through the year and as we pause to look back at the projects that are behind us, we are left with feelings of excitement as our future is filled with more journals, literary events, contests, and the like.

As a final point, I want to reiterate the importance of art, the power of expression. Society needs what artists provide. If you need evidence of this, study Maya Angelou's life and the impact it had on others inside and outside of the literary world. Writers, there is a story inside of you, a poem inside of you, waiting for freedom. Speak and you will be heard, even when you feel like no one is listening. Someone is always watching you. When you create art you are planting seeds that others get to reap a harvest from. When you walk in your purpose and create art, you are generating an impact that will change the past, present, and future. You are important. Whether the goal of your art is to make people laugh and smile, pause and think, or jump into action, you are a necessary component to the bigger picture. Never forget your worth.

Be you. Be blessed. Be torrid.

Sincerely,

Alice Saunders

Follow me on Twitter:
[@lyricaltempest](https://twitter.com/lyricaltempest)

CONTENTS

EDITORIAL CORNER

1...1 *On 1: A.J. Huffman* | Alice Saunders

POETRY

- 5...*In the Audience Forevermore* | Brandon Berman
6...*Fish* | Changming Yuan
6...*Tattered* | Jedidaiah Joy Herrera
7...*Writer's Lust* | Gwendlyn Martin
8...*Priceless* | Marcelo Muianga
9...*What's Heavy and What's Not* | *Wildwood Days (for Patty)* | Richard O'Brien
10...*Ex. (Heart of Darkness)* | Kay Gosack
11...*Luck Be A Lady* | Levi Archer
12...*The Rose* | Joanna Kurowska
13...*An Inkling* | Joanna Kurowska
14...*Those Three Words* | Mariel Arriola
15...*Bernard Berenson Groping for Limits* | James Sutton
15...*Shrinking* | Kayla Pumphrey
16...*As If Our 24 Hours Were Flexible* | Tanya Dickinson
17...*Overcoming Strife* | Michelle Bayha
18...*Faith in the Fire* | *Freedoms Road* | Gerald Bergeron
19...*The Bluejay in the Storm* | Rebecca Stapley
20...*We Is* | Rachael Stanford
21...*Christine* | Erren Geraud Kelly
21...*Phantom's Last Act* | Thomas Piekarski
22...*Violets* | Alexandra Cannon
23...*He is Risen* | Michael Wakefield
24...*The Dream* | *I Will Never Have* | Psycho Kanev
25...*The Rain Comes on Cue* | Brandon Berman
25...*Abandon at Your Convenience* | Brittany Gilbert
26...*Footprints of Freedom* | Amy S. Pacini
27...*Serenity's Soliloquy* | Amy S. Pacini
28...*Date Night* | Anne Marie Bise
29...*Presence* | Lauren McCall

FICTION

- 30...*Adjustments* | Jules A. Riley
31...*Slaying Dragons* | Barbara Brockway
33...*Prom Date* | G.L. Snodgrass
35...*Children of the Tides* | Frank Scozzari
37...*For the Sanctity of Life* | Frank Scozzari
40...*Rocks* | Stacy Stepanovich

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- 41...Upcoming Open Mic Event
42...Ad Space Available
43...Call for Submissions

1 ON 1: A.J. HUFFMAN

By Alice Saunders

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

"What you need to know to survive in this industry is that what one editor loves, the next will hate, and what one editor hates, the next might just nominate for the Pushcart Prize."

Would you please tell us about yourself and your work?

I am a full-time freelance writer, and founding editor of Kind of a Hurricane Press. I have been writing poetry, flash fiction and short stories for the last 20-some-odd years.

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

I wrote my very first short story in grade school, so writing has been with me for a long time. However, it wasn't until college that I decided this was what I wanted to do as a vocation.

When did you first consider yourself a writer?

I'm pretty sure I've always considered myself a writer. It's one of those things that has just always been a part of me. I guess I started calling myself a writer out loud to others after I'd been publishing for about a year. So since my mid-twenties.

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

As a female poet, I think it would be safe to say that Sylvia Plath had a profound influence on me and my work. I'm also a huge fan of

Charles Bukowski. His unfiltered portrayal of reality is something that has always appealed to me.

As a fiction writer, I'd be remiss if I didn't say that J.K. Rowling and her unprecedented success with the Harry Potter series had an amazing effect on my work. Not only do I prefer to write in the 'tween fantasy genre, and hope that my work can someday reach a fraction of her impactful success, but also the simple fact that her work has opened up so many opportunities for other writers like myself is something I could never imagine, let alone give appropriate credit for.

When and where do you write? Do you set writing goals?

I write every day. All day. Whenever I am struck by inspiration. I keep journals and pens all over the house and office (yes, I still write manually), as well as in my purse and car. I do set goals, and am very hard on myself when I do not surpass them. I try to write at least 100 poems a month (though it took me a long time to work up to that lofty goal). I try to submit at least 100 submissions a month. I don't have specific fiction goals, though I have been trying to add pages to my first attempt at a novel each month as well. I keep a daily calendar that I track all of these goals on. It has really helped my productivity and success over the years.

How do you deal with writer's block? What is your advice on how to overcome it?

I can honestly say I don't deal with writer's block very well at all. I complain to my best friend, and fellow writer, April Salzano, constantly about it. But when it happens it happens. I keep a notebook of partial pieces, ideas, inspiring thoughts that I go to and try to work through it, but you can only force so hard. Sometimes you just have to ride it out. Brownies can help in that area.

What is your first book of poetry called? When and where was it published? What is it about?

These are two separate questions for me. My first book of poetry is called *Degeneration*. I am currently still seeking publication for it. I wrote it in college, and it's about pain and frustration, all the normal collegian emotions. It is still my favorite of all the books I've written. It's also the most personal for me.

My first published collection is called *The Difference Between Shadows and Stars*. It's a self-published work which I am a firm supporter of, and advocate for, as poetry seems to be a dying art and we, as writers need to do whatever we can to not only get our work out there, but to encourage the continued reading and writing of our genre. It is about emotional and mental darkness, actually, darknesses of all kinds. It was published in April of 2011, and is available on amazon.com. I have also been very lucky over my career to have seven solo chapbooks published by various small presses. And number eight will be coming very soon, as the winner of the Two Wolvz Chapbook Contest. That chapbook is my first successful ekphrastic set.

How did you come up with the title?

Titles, oh titles, the bane of any writer's

"I hope they enjoy my book(s) because my goal with any collection is to take the reader on a journey.

If they enjoy it, it means

I took them someplace they wanted to go."

existence. For both my collections and my individual pieces, be they fiction or poetry, I try to come up with something that is both powerful and sonorous. For *Degeneration*, I chose the title as a one-word descriptive of what I saw the speaker going through, the emotional decline that was prevalent through the collection. But I'm not going to lie, as I get older, and write more and more, titles continue to plague me. And I fully admit to quite frequently taking the easy way out and doing what are called Title lead-ins, which basically means taking the first line of poem and using it as a title.

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

I don't believe in regrets. And I don't re-write old work. I believe whatever I wrote at that time should stand as I wrote it. *Degeneration*, captures exactly what I was feeling and wished to express at that time. If I were to re-write it, my emotional growth as well as my skill advancement would make it a completely different collection. That's something that I should, and am, writing now, not something I would have written then. I do edit myself, have my friend and fellow writer, April Salzano, review and edit my work, and I do re-writes on current pieces all the time. But, and this is a big but in my opinion, if I re-write old work, I will have no measure by which to gage my progression. And that is something that is important to me.

Can you tell us about your challenges in getting this book completed and published?

I can honestly tell you, I don't have issues in completing books. By forcing myself to write as much as I do, full-length collections get completed quickly. Publication is a completely different matter. I am my own biggest obstacle in getting my work published. I absolutely despise ordering collections. It takes me days, days that I focus only on the ordering of the collection and therefore neglect the rest of my work. The second biggest challenge in getting a poetry book published is lack of opportunities. There are so many of us out there, and so few small presses – competition is fierce. That is why I decided to go the self-publishing route for *The Difference Between Shadows and Stars*. After several attempts with small presses that all said the collection was worthy of publication, but still rejected

Journals by Kind of a Hurricane Press:

Barometric Pressures: Author Series | Pyrokinecton | Jellyfish Whispers |

Napalm and Novocain | The Mind[less] Muse | High Coupe | Pound of Flash

it for whatever reason, I investigated the idea of getting it out there myself. I not only found it much easier than I thought, but the process was an invigorating learning experience for me, and was what eventually lead me to open my own press, and, in turn, offer new opportunities to other authors.

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

Do it, do it, do it. You have nothing to lose, and everything to gain. I'm not saying every book is going to get published, or that every poet is going to be an overnight success, but you lose nothing from the experience itself. It can only help you grow as a writer.

What is the hardest part of writing for you?

The number of hours in any given day. There just aren't enough. No matter how many goals I set for myself, there are days when writing just falls to the wayside of every other aspect of my life. And that is both upsetting and unpreventable.

What's the best thing about being a writer?

It keeps me sane. Whatever I am feeling at any given moment of time goes into my writing. If I'm angry, I get it out. If I'm sad, I get it out. And once whatever it is out, I can move on with my life. Seeing your thoughts and emotions in print helps focus things, at least it does for me.

Please tell us about your latest book of poetry. What is it called? What is it about?

I never work on just once collection of poetry at a time. I'm a multi-tasker to my very core. At this moment, I am working on no less than ten full-length collections, four joint-collections with my friend and fellow writer, April Salzano, and four chapbooks. And that's without factoring in my first novel, which I am also currently working on. For me, working on multiple projects keeps things fresh. In the past, when I've worked on only one project at a time, the pieces begin to feel stale and forced. I don't like my work to read that way. Jumping from project to project depending on what hits me, helps to keep that from happening. And, surprisingly, I seem to finish collections faster this way.

Can you describe one of your favorite poems that you wrote? Why does this

poem stand out more so than the others?

My favorite poem I wrote is a piece called "Counting Alligators in the Moonlight". The reason this piece is so special to me is that it was my first truly successful attempt at experimental poetry. It was published in *Labletter* a little while ago, and that gave me confidence in my ability to reinvent my poetic voice. It's success makes me want to try new things now. And there's no downside to that.

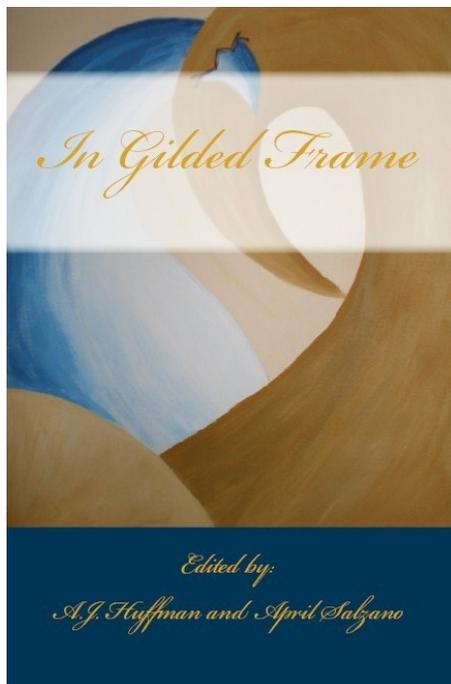
Why do you think your readers are going to enjoy your book?

I hope they enjoy my book(s) because my goal with any collection is to take the reader on a journey. If they enjoy it, it means I took them someplace they wanted to go.

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

I know it's a cliché, but I've had a lot of success by promoting my work(s) on the social media networks. Facebook, Twitter, and Linked In specifically.

Can you please tell us about Kind of a Hurricane Press, including your posi-



In Gilded Frame

By A.J. Huffman

Paperback: \$7.65

Link: <http://amzn.com/1493536575>

Synopsis:

For our fifth anthology of 2013, we asked our writers to draw inspiration from the arts. Never disappointing, some our authors borrowed from the great painters of the past, some from the up-and-coming painters of the future, while some looked to their own art work for inspiration. Others shunned convention, and turned to architectural inspiration, sculptural inspiration, installation art pieces, even movies and the written word for inspiration. All of these various authors and artworks conspired to create what we feel is our best anthology yet. We have no doubt you will feel every intellectual and emotional level of these pieces pulling you deeper into their world as you turn each divulging page.

tion there and the type of work they publish?

Kind of a Hurricane Press is my baby. I am the founding editor. We are a two-woman press. I am assisted by my co-editor, April Salzano. Currently we have six online journals, each with a different focus. *Pyrokinecton* focuses on literary quality poetry. *Jellyfish Whispers* focuses on nature-themed poetry. *Napalm and Novocain* is our end-of-a-relationship themed poetry journal. *The Mind [less] Muse* is our experimental poetry journal. *High Coupe* focuses on traditional 5-7-5 and 3-5-3 haiku. And *Pound of Flash* is our flash fiction site. Additionally, we have *Barometric Pressures*, which is our echapbook site. All the poetry chapbooks there are available for free download. Last year we added our first contest, The Editor's Choice Prize. Barbara Bald's poem, "My Mother's Tongue", was the winner of our \$200 first place prize.

The press also does several themed print anthologies that showcase poetry and short fiction. This year we are doing six. Our latest, *Something's Brewing*, a coffee-themed anthology is available now on amazon.com.

Where can people go to learn more about Kind of a Hurricane Press?

Our main site is <http://www.kindofahurricane.com/> From the main site there are links (under the side panel sister publications) that will take you to each of our other journals. The anthology guideline information is linked in the control panel at the top, as is the link to the editor's choice contest information. We also have a bookstore link in the control panel. The bookstore lists all of our current and past anthologies as well as links for purchase and downloading.

What has influenced your development as a writer?

Everything. I believe inspiration can be found everywhere, in everything you see and do. There's nothing that shouldn't impact your

writing, or even impact you as a writer. Experience is the key to growth.

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

Writers have to have tough skins. You will get the most horrible criticisms from some editors; you will get the most flattering complements from others. The key is to not let any of it get to you. The good and the bad can both negatively impact an author. What you need to know to survive in this industry is that what one editor loves, the next will hate, and what one editor hates, the next might just nominate for the Pushcart Prize. It's all a matter of perspective. And after 20+ years of doing this, I just remember, I like the piece in question, it is what I want to say and how I want to say it. The rest I just ignore.

Do you have any favorite poets or favorite books?

My favorite poet is Charles Bukowski. My favorite book is anything by Laurell K. Hamilton. I'm infatuated with all of her serial novels.

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

Adventures in Insanity. That sounds like my life on a daily basis. The things that I juggle . . . well, even I sit back sometimes and wonder how the hell it's all going to get done before they come for me with the straight jacket.

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

The beach. Despite the fact that I grew up in Western Pennsylvania, the moment I moved to Florida and saw the water, I knew I was home. It's just so peaceful and relaxing.

Are there any noncreative avenues you would like to explore?

I can honestly say no. I tried the office thing for awhile. I was a paralegal. I found it very disheartening. I often felt like I was suffocating. I can't imagine doing that again.

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

Treat other's as you want to be treated. I work very hard at trying to be a good person, to not let my anger/frustration/emotion turmoil taint my feelings about and actions towards others. Sometimes I fail, I let my temper get the best of me, but on the whole I'm doing okay.

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

Yes, I want them all to check out our journals and our upcoming anthologies. We are always looking for new work from talented authors!!!

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

Well, I already listed the websites for the press above, I can be found at all of those. They can find me on Facebook at Amy Huffman and on Twitter @poetess222.

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

I only hope that something I've said here has sparked something in at least one reader, and that that reader is now going to start a new project, submit to their first journal, publish their own book. I have been so blessed in my career as a writer, that I want to encourage others to follow that path, even if it is only part-time. It's worth it.

Jump on over to www.kindofahurricane.com. Their latest book, *Storm Cycle 2013 Anthology*, is now available for purchase. This latest anthology is an editor's choice edition that contains select literary pieces from their 2013 print anthologies.

ODE TO LITERATURE

IN THE AUDIENCE FOREVERMORE

By Brandon Berman

I want to be up on a stage
For all the world to see
And be free of this shy cage
That keeps me from being me

But when I think of those eyes
All centered in on me
I cringe and quietly tell the lie
That down here is where I'd rather be

I want to get up and loudly sing
For all the world to hear
And be free of this constricting ring
That fills my heart with fear

But when I think of all those ears
Listening solely to my voice
I shake with quiet, inner tears
And tell them singing is not my choice

There's nothing more that I wish
Than to become an extrovert
But until the day God serves me that dish
To the audience I must revert

Brandon Berman is a student at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York, the scenery of which is the inspiration for much of his poetry. He has been writing poetry since the age of 13 and has been published twice in the literary journal *Poetica Victorian*.

Changming Yuan, 5-time Pushcart nominee and author of *Chansons of a Chinaman* (2009) and *Landscaping* (2013), holds a PhD in English and tutors in Vancouver, where he co-publishes *Poetry Pacific* with Allen Qing Yuan (Submissions welcome at editors.pp@gmail.com). Recently interviewed by *PANK*, Yuan has poetry appearing in 719 journals/anthologies across 27 countries, including *Asia Literary Review*, *Barrow Street*, *Best Canadian Poetry*, *BestNewPoemsOnline*, *London Magazine* and *Threepenny Review*.

FISH

By Changming Yuan

If you could, would you become a fish
That can swim, freely in the water, but without
Being able to touch the horizon? --*I don't know*

If you could, would you become a whale
The king of the ocean, the ocean of words
For instance, the most powerful? --*How powerful?*

You wait for all other words to feed you
Like planktons, or swallow other fishes like similes
Metaphors, because you are big. --*Yes, very big*

If you could, would you become a blue whale
Whose calls and songs can reach afar, far
Beyond a civilization? --*Who can hear me then?*

Jedidaiah Joy Herrera is a BS Development Communication student at the University of the Philippines, Los Banos, and a freelance writer and blogger. She has written numerous poems that were featured and published online at *Writerscafe*, *Figment*, *FilipinoWriters* and her poem "Remembering Daddy" was published in *Torrid Literature Journal* Vol. 3.

TATTERED

By Jedidaiah Joy Herrera

Unwanted, abandoned, alone
My heart is a rag doll, tattered and torn.
Left on a shelf in the ashen dust
Still waiting for someone to pick me up.

Hold me, hug me, catch me.
Erase the scars left on my skin.
Pick up the pieces of my heart,
Save me before I disappear in the dark.

Gwendlyn Martin is a freshman in community college pursuing a degree in English and Creative Writing. Martin currently lives in a small Illinois town but hopes to soon move to Seattle. She is fascinated by the tiniest bits and pieces of life, and loves to learn. Between schoolwork and being with her loved ones, Martin studies Kitchen Witchery and other interesting aspects of the Wiccan religion.

WRITER'S LUST

By Gwendlyn Martin

I am seduced by the way words roll off my tongue, curl down my chin, and flow through my pen.
The way glittering oceans from far, far away and brilliant hues are mapped on the backs of my eyelids;
Names like Glass, Rhys, Baelia familiar and held close to my lips.
Never much of a fan of the outside world, but I know every character I've ever dreamed up by heart.
Never observant of reality, but I have their every scar, eye color, and every background memorized.
And I become mesmerized with the works of other writers:
Dipping my toes into the pool of Poe,
Hiding from Lovecraft's witchcraft and attics;
I am a snake charmer with these syllables,
Like Dostoevsky enchants the world through Raskolnikov's vision.
To imagine is to write and to write is to right the permanent wrongs of this earth through my rhetoric and the girth of my words.
To write is not to fantasize about a perfect utopia while sitting in some lame Starbucks drinking coffee.
To write is to utilize every single breath and movement to create another dimension in which perfection doesn't exist and doesn't pretend
to-
What immense importance would Snow White hold in the fairytale world if she hadn't tasted her step-mother's venomous apple?
Where would the vitality lie if Ellen Hopkins had written it so that Bree never emerged and became entangled with Crystal Meth?
To write is to imagine and to write is to right the permanent wrongs of this earth through my metaphors and cacophonies.
I am in love with the way the letters slide onto the page.

Marcelo Muianga is a poet residing in Elsburg, South Africa. His work has appeared in past editions of the Torrid Literature Journal. His poetry is a dialogue with the self about his experiences in life. It is inside poetry that he believes he is free to be whomever he wants to be, not bound by any morals, nor ethnic codes. He mostly tells stories of occasions he has seen, heard, and touched physically, yet sometimes just mentally. His stories include people that are currently part of his life, although they became simple memories of people he once knew.

PRICELESS

By Marcelo Muianga

I look at her and assure her that she is pretty.
She is shy and innocent, her past is written in her eyes but
I really don't know what she does behind closed doors.

I am an artist,
Who knows what fantasies I architect
Within the depths of my creativity?
I play with dexterity and
I seek to understand her complexity.

I look her in the eyes and reach my hand to her cheek.
She lays her head on my palm and closes her eyes.
The warmth that emits is all she needs.
I say to her words she has heard before, like
How being near her makes my heart rush,
That what we have is not lust, and I only hope it can last
Beyond the whips of time.
But her heart has been an abode to hurt.
She would not place her trust in my words.

Flip this she hates me.
I turn around she misses me.
I leave she calls.
I shut up she wants to talk.
We are souls in a course of opposites, which is
Perhaps the reason we still coexist.

I love the way she pushes away only to retract.
I love the way she plays with my feelings.
It shows confidence in her essence.

She probably fears the moment I might leave
And journey the heart of another.
Regardless she stands unshaken.
I tell her I will be here until the end of time.

She chuckles for an instant and falls back to reality
That the next second is an opportunity to uncertainty
She smiles, and then weeps
She loves me, and I love her too
We forgot of yesterday
And clearly we have no plans for tomorrow.
We love now and that is priceless.

Richard O'Brien is a writer who was born in New Jersey. He currently lives in Pennsylvania. He served in the army before the Berlin Wall came down, and later attended Rutgers University where he received a B.A. in English. Last year O'Brien completed his MFA in Creative Writing from Fairleigh Dickinson University. His poems have appeared in *Falling Star Magazine*, *Loch Raven Review*, *The Houston Literary Review*, *New Plains Review*, *Citron Review*, *Stray Branch Literary Magazine*, *The Penwood Review*, and *1/25 Journal*.

WHAT'S HEAVY AND WHAT'S NOT

By Richard O'Brien

Some days
it's not the big things
that do it to me—

war and terrorism,

the usual
slaughter of the innocents.

It's not my father
showing through on

my son's face
when he tells a joke
that makes me sad.

It's not
the look in my love's
eye when she tells

me some story about
a boy she knew
years ago.

Some days
it's the little things
like how I walked
down the hall

in my apartment
to the room where
I would write this poem

and the early evening
light coming

through the windows
turned all the colors gray.

WILDWOOD DAYS (FOR PATTY)

By Richard O'Brien

We gazed at stars over the parkway,
tilting our heads
back to look out the rear window.

Dark pines
bordered the road, swaying
to the harmony of rubber,
asphalt and engines.

Our father drove southward,
and we fought
sleep, enamored with the starlight,
until dreams came over us.

Our father is gone now and I
wonder if the stars

look the same from a Ford
Galaxy rear window,

if we could stay awake
through the night,

or if we could recall
the conversation he and mother
whispered in the front seat—

the quiet incantation
that called down sleep.

Kay Gosack is a poet and writing has always been the easiest way for her to articulate her thoughts and emotions. She uses her life experiences to create poetry that conveys her interpretation of the situations at hand. Gosack only hopes that one day her words can influence and inspire other individuals as previous writers have done for her.

EX. (HEART OF DARKNESS)

By Kay Gosack

these languishing memories bring me to my knees
and I'm gripped with a sense of suffocation and panic,
overwrought with the sweet severity of satanic pain,
distraught with these violent and contending emotions
because I can't let go of the ghosts of yesterday.
the agitation of intense and tragic experience
is more than I can bear
as I was unprepared for the impassioned sensuality of emotion
and your callous sense of what our love meant.
I never thought you would become just another
transient and evanescent memory that fades into my dreams,
you, my love, my world,
vanishing before me like the scattered impulses of fleeting desire,
leaving me in a mournful state of stillness and senseless misapprehension.
my somberness inundates my resolve to carry on
and I am impotent in my struggle to see the light over the horizon.
I thought myself bewitched but really I was blind
to the brooding and deathlike indifference you had to my happiness.
my love was abject to your love of your liquor,
those commingling of absurdities were destined to fail
from your inscrutable intentions and imprudent performances
and now I'm left strangled,
choking on excessive indignation and cravings for our better times.
I waited with ominous patience,
already accepting the end with a reluctantly eager fatalism
that fairytales are never true.
yet I miss you.
your past words of love will forever echo in my heart
and I try to forget the devastating nights of harrowing animosity,
the woeful atrocity of our failed marriage.
my love, my love,
always you, yet never was.

Levi Archer lives in the midwest with a small zoo of pets and a husband crazy enough to manage the chaos. She possesses a natural infatuation with storytelling and writing, as such she has begun publishing her work to the public. Her work is not limited to poetry, it encompasses short stories, novellas and novels. For Archer it is imperative that a legacy of words are left behind, from generation to generation.

LUCK BE A LADY

By Levi Archer

Luck is a dangerous mistress.
She is flippant and careless.
Caressing you with adoration,
Stoking the fires of passion
Then batting you around like a catnip filled toy,
Chewing on you until the flavor is gone
Discarding you then, in a litter box of despair

Luck is cruel.
She loves you fully
Then loves you not

She builds up your confidence.
Makes you think that you've reached the Holy Land
Only to then leave you naked and bare, with nothing
but your broken heart to cover your sins.
All the while she is cackling her sweet laugh at you

She can be your concubine, for an eternity or an instant.
Her power lies in how much damage she can do in either time
In a few moments she can raise you up to greatness and then crush you in the next beat.
She has no remorse
She lives only for *her* pleasure
and Oh! how she *loves* to watch you dance
and scream.

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

THE ROSE

By Joanna Kurowska

A baby girl was born
next to a rose;
They faced each other.
The child was blind.

When she grew older,
she opened her eyes
and began to think;
the rose was there.

One day the girl
heard the word "rose"
and asked the speaker,
"What is a rose?"

That person said,
"I'll draw it for you."
And so he did—
stem, petals, and all.

"It looks familiar,"
the girl said, puzzled.
"Where is this rose?
Is it a déjà vu?"

For a long time
she studied the drawing.
"I must think about it,"
she finally said.

She wrote about
the rose in the picture
and asked her lover
to read the script

"This is not," he said,
"what roses are like.
they have fewer leaves,
and more petals."

The girl looked again
at the picture of rose.
Then she read books
about roses.

She observed that
the rose in the drawing
and the roses in books
were very different.

"What is a rose?
she cried, perplexed.
"Is there anyone
who could tell me?"

When the girl died
her quest died with her
We will never know
what she had learned.

A new baby-girl
is born, next to a rose.
They face each other.
The child is blind.

AN INKLING

By Joanna Kurowska

A western autumn in Eastern Europe;
the sky's deep blue, white knit-clouds;
a narrow street—maybe a back alley;
some grass, concrete, a garbage tank

The wind carries an ochre-colored leaf;
it whirls between the walls that separate
our compartments filled with dust.

The air is a mask. I have to stop.

A homeless dog, its tail between its legs
seems to know more than I do as it sneaks
between the illusive walls; the wind twists
this afternoon into a complex script

If I turn its pages, I will know the one
who looks through my eyes, beyond words
I will plunge my hands through the walls
to yank the wings of the children they hold.

Mariel Arriola resides in Minnesota where she is a senior in high school. She hopes to become a successful writer one day.

THOSE THREE WORDS

By Mariel Arriola

I want you to say, "I miss you."
Just one more time.

One more time so I can reply with
All the things I've never said to you
How when I told you I liked you
And you rejected me,
I was lying.
I loved you.

How I might still love you,
Even though we hardly talk anymore
And that makes me immature and childish
But that's just how things are.

Or how it would be best if
You stopped saying those three words
Because you don't seem to understand
The effect they have on me.

You spit them out with that stupid grin
On your face like they're nothing.
But to me,
They're everything.

Deep down,
I know you will never return my feelings
And yet,
I can't think clearly when
You so easily disillusion me.

Are you so dense you cannot realize
I will never be able to move on,
Never be able to stop loving you,
If you continue to say
Those three words?

Since I cannot have your love
All I ask of you is that you say
Those three words
Just one last time.

Then I'll tell you
Everything I've ever wanted to say
But couldn't,
Wouldn't.

And maybe, just maybe –
After being bound to you
For all these years...

I can
finally
be free.

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

BERNARD BERENSON GROPING FOR LIMITS

By James Sutton

“My life’s the poem I would have writ,
but I could not both live and utter it.” - Thoreau

When those who follow wonder how it felt
to live in times as turbulent as these,
forgetting that each time has ice that melts
& fire that heats beyond where things should be,
they’ll seek out poets of that time to say
what fluttered in the feeling heart back when,
and what they hear will vibrate in their day
in sympathy to what was suffered then.
A picture’s worth a thousand words, and one
is known to truncate starkly in a scream;
but in the main, when pain & grief are done,
it’s poets who declare where hearts have been.
 So poetry has purpose, after all,
 provided poets answer to its call.

Kayla Pumphrey is an Education major, philanthropist, and poet who uses poetry to explore the world.

SHRINKING

By Kayla Pumphrey

Wet salt and
 dry heart.
Deep breath
 can’t exhale
 Hail the broken.
Strong mind
 strong value.
Weak needs
 weak wishes
 wishes the broken.
Growing – up
 falling – down.
Rising – now
 sinking then
 sinking when broken –

GROWING

BECAUSE, FIRST I SHRANK

Tanya Dickinson was raised in Missoula, Montana and attended the University of Montana. Her poetry focuses on issues ranging from family and community to nature, politics and philosophy. She currently resides in Portland, Oregon with her husband and daughter.

AS IF OUR 24 HOURS WERE FLEXIBLE

By Tanya Dickinson

I live in compulsions

How far can I advance in the shortest amount of time?

How much can I lose in the fastest?

Repeat and improve

As if our 24 hours were flexible

As if the world would stop

If I made my case.

I am not on life's "path"

I am on curved chutes that drive me mad.

What if I *want* to see what awaits?

There is a hustle in my skin.

What would a child do,

Raised with no clocks or calendars,

No sense of time?

A life of patience and dreams

Or panic, always feeling the end?

The clocks always tick

Setting time and dimension

That belong to no one.

Michelle Bayha resides in New Jersey. In the fall, she will begin her junior year at Montclair State University. Topics that she writes about include: friendships, relationships, mental disorders, war, individuals battling stereotypes, and the perseverance to remain strong during one's deepest struggles. Her poems have appeared in: *What If?* (Canada), *Congruent Spaces* (online), *UK Poetry Library* (online), *Torrid Literature Journal* (US), and *Forward Poetry: The World at War: Poems from the Battlefield* (UK). Empathy and compassion must be shown towards those who struggle in order for there to be a change in society. At the end of the day, one must realize one is not truly alone because there will always be someone that truly cares about one's well being.

OVERCOMING STRIFE

By Michelle Bayha

From a bond almost broken,
The couple must make the decision:
Stay together or separate?
Each has a treasure to hold on to,
Never letting each other go.

From a bond almost broken,
They say hurtful words to each other
Knowing that it would scar the heart.
Overwhelming stress occurs,
Trampling any chance of sleep tonight.

From a bond almost broken,
The couple reminisces back and forth
Of fond times they had together,
Wondering if it's worth it to sever
A relationship that means the world to them.

From a bond almost broken,
A couple withstanding problems
Slowly rises from the murky bottom
To the surface of a crystal clear ocean.
Their souls are refreshed by their newly revived love.

It must have been worth it for them to stay together
Because they mean the world to each other.

Gerald Bergeron is the author of five books and a bible study journal. Bereron has studied the bible for over thirty years, and the prophetic prophecies. He has also been writing poetry for the same time, and has accumulated over 500 poems. They are mostly about things related to scripture or that glorifies Christ.

FAITH IN THE FIRE

By Gerald Bergeron

"I am going to give you one more chance, to deny this one you call Lord." These were the words of an evil tyrant, who threatened them with his sword.

They kept the faith and trusted God, even knowing that they would die. One by one, they would lay down their lives, never stopping to ask, God why.

Some were thrown to the lions, while others were ran thru with the spear. Yet in their darkest moments, they believed that God was near.

They were burned at the stake while their children watched all the horrors they would have to see. They were told to reject the Son of God, if they wanted to go free.

Yet nothing would break their solid faith, nothing could make them fold. They were given a sure foundation, which was far richer than silver or gold.

Their sights were set on a heavenly city, the place they have longed to be. Where God would always watch over them, and Jesus they would see.

No whippings, rods, or crucifixions could make them lose their way. They knew in death they would live again, to be with Jesus that very day.

It angered those who did not believe, even kings who were born to rule. They said; *"what is the matter with these stubborn people, what makes them act like a fool."*

Yet as they came to their moment of truth, they would gladly accept their fate. Even as they were tormented and beaten, their enemy they refused to hate.

While the flames encircled their bodies, their eyes would close at last. Then all their pain and torment would be forever in their past.

There awaiting these precious saints, was Jesus to welcome each one. Tears of joy began flowing in heaven, as they heard Him say, *"Well done."*

FREEDOMS ROAD

By Gerald Bergeron

One day I came to the end of the road and in sin, I felt so lost. I had nowhere left to turn and run I stood facing a rugged cross.

I knew this life had still a lot to offer, yet the emptiness I felt inside; now drew me to that rugged cross, where now I could not hide.

With this entire world laid out before me, the time now came to choose. Would I now accept this sacrifice or decide again to lose?

While thinking about my destiny, I wondered about that light. Would I ever come to this cross again, or would it finally fade from sight?

All these things were going through my mind, but I knew it from the start. Now I had to make the choice, He was knocking at my heart.

I looked back at the fun I had, and as a child these ways seemed right. Yet as I faced that rugged cross, His truth came shining bright.

Tears began to fill my eyes, and I knew what had to be done. I knelt before the rugged cross, and accepted God's dear Son.

All of a sudden, I felt inside, as though my life was clean. It was like all the darkness leaving; His truth could now be seen.

Right then I knew that I had found life, and hell had suffered loss. For there I received eternal life, at the foot of the rugged cross.

The blood of Jesus washed me clean, and His joy it filled my soul. I knew I made the right choice, for God showed me where to go.

So many times, He called my name but I was too blind to see, until He brought me to the cross where Jesus set me free.

Rebecca Stapley went to Benjamin Franklin Charter School in Gilbert for elementary school. Near the end of second grade, she wrote a poem, "Peace in Our Hearts". Her teacher noticed Stapley's natural talent for writing poetry, so she was given a few small poetry booklets for to read in hopes of developing that talent. Stapley enjoyed these books and went on to continue writing poetry. In high school, she began a writing club at Heritage Academy. As President, she enjoyed organizing activities and giving assignments, but she especially loved reading the poetry of her peers. Her teacher encouraged her to continue to write and enter contests.

THE BLUEJAY IN THE STORM

By Rebecca Stapley

"Onward men!" the captain called.
The sailors exchanged terrified glances
As they advanced on the thundering storm.
"Tis death!" one cried. "A wall of death!"
Gulping, few sailors agreed.
"Courage, men! We're too far
to turn back now!" their leader cried.
They passed through the barrier of clouds
Into treacherous waters.
Some stared back at the closing sky,
Wondering if ever they would return.
Either the trust in his men
or his own stupidity
Thrust the captain into action.
"Starboard!" he screamed
as they approached a rising wave.
His courageous first mate yanked the wheel to the side
and *The Bluejay* turned against the furious wind,
Hitting the wave full-on.
The dark, foamy spray spread over the deck,
and a blinding mist filled the seamen's eyes.
"Port! Turn port!"
The first mate strained against the wheel
And dragged the boat to the other side.
The waves arose from different angles
as the captain tried to stay on course.
The Ocean crashed against *The Bluejay*,
Pounding with iron fists
As lightning struck the water—
Perilously close—
and flashed a light upon the boat.
The clap of thunder echoed through the storm,
and drowned out the captain's commands.
The chaos continued as darkness ensued
and the storm raged on,
Seeming never-ending.
The hump of a black wave climbed as it stood,
Bending over the boat
and crashing mercilessly on the deck.
Men were swept carelessly off,
Exclaiming as they fell in thrashing waters.
They swirled and somersaulted
through bubbles and icy black,
Inhaling only the salty sea,
and drowning in its darkness.
The first mate slammed into the railing,
and fell into unconsciousness.
The wheel spun freely,

And the boat careened perilously.
The troubled mast creaked, cracked, and fell.
Red mixed with deadly blue as water swept up blood.
The captain was trapped—
His leg crushed beneath the crow's nest—
And he couldn't save his boat
as the Ocean collided fully into her side.
She smashed to pieces, the words of her name
Splintered.
The Bluejay collapsed into herself,
And sank into the darkness
of the angry sea.

Rachael Stanford is a poet/playwright/essayist located in central Illinois. Her poetry has appeared in the following journals: *Euphemism*, *BlazeVox*, and *Adroit*. Her poetry was selected by Sandbox Theatre for a creative dance piece in 2012. She has also been a featured poet of the Peoria Poetry club on several occasions. In addition, Stanford has won awards from the Fulton County Council for their Spoon River creative writing contest. Her essays have appeared in the journal *Euphemism*. Additionally, she has work in a forthcoming anthology, *Chica Peeps*. In 2010, Stanford won the Heartland Ten-Minute Play contest and was a semi-finalist in 2012. Her ten minutes plays were produced in 2012 and 2013 by Cornstock Theatre. Also, Katie Rasumean Theatre and the Delavan Theatre Company have produced her plays.

WE IS

By Rachael Stanford

We

is

laughing at linguistics who
could never comprehend

though the space between our

fingertips

is wider than the Grand Canyon
the barren plains punctuating

I forge, unashamedly naked
as bitter November winds
lick my flesh

We is.

enveloped in blurred realities of
your memories, warmed by the lingering
touch of your flesh, a permanent tattoo

I run, unwavering by demons of doubts,
a happy toddler, each step in you

a cosmos

we.

Erren Geraud Kelly is a poet based in Burlington, Vermont. Kelly has been writing for 25 years and has over 100 publications in print and online in such publications as *Hiram Poetry Review*, *Mudfish*, *Poetry Magazine* (online), *Ceremony*, *Cactus Heart*, *Similar Peaks*, *Gloom Cupboard*, *Poetry Salzburg* and other publications. Kelly's most recent publication was in *In Our Own Words*, a Generation X poetry anthology; He was also published in other anthologies such as *Fertile Ground*, *Beyond The Frontier* in addition to others. His work can also be seen on *Youtube* under the "Gallery Cabaret," links. Kelly is also the author of the chapbook, *Disturbing The Peace*, on Night Ballet Press. Kelly received a B.A. in English-Creative Writing from Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge. He also loves to read and he loves to travel, having visited 45 states and Canada and Europe.

CHRISTINE

By Erren Geraud Kelly

who carries the music
on her back
like it's no burden
at all
her cello will imitate
someone's voice later
and i tell her chamber music
is one of my favorite things
not that i'm a savage beast
but because i respect
music's beauty
maybe i'll see her at
carnegie hall
with her chamber group
or hear her on a c.d.
a lone voice
singing

Thomas Piekarski is a former editor of the California State Poetry Quarterly. His theater and restaurant reviews have been published in various newspapers, with poetry and interviews appearing in numerous national journals, among them *Portland Review*, *Main Street Rag*, *Kestrel*, *Scarlet Literary Magazine*, *Cream City Review*, *Nimrod*, *Penny Ante Feud*, *New Plains Review*, *Poetry Quarterly*, *The Muse-an International Journal of Poetry*, and *Clockhouse Review*. He has published a travel guide, *Best Choices In Northern California*, and *Time Lines*, a book of poems. He lives in Marina, California.

PHANTOM'S LAST ACT

By Thomas Piekarski

It was in the next act that Phantom
Exited the stage
To the demise of the trombone
And resurrection of tympani.
Normally we would have been concerned
But weren't because
We expected him at least
To show before curtain call.

And yet

When he didn't appear to rescue
The ingenue on cue as was his role
We fidgeted, itchy, until the last words
Fell into the theater's filled abyss,
And we turned to one another
Asking telepathically
"What just happened?"

Alexandra Cannon is originally from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and holds a BA in English with a creative writing concentration from Albertus Magnus College, New Haven. She earned her MA in Creative Writing from Royal Holloway, University of London. Her work has previously appeared in *Speck Literary Journal*, *Autumn Sky Poetry*, *The Shine Journal*, Albertus Magnus College's *Breakwater*, and the *Bedford Square: 7 anthology* (Wood Ward Publishing, London, UK). Her website is Alexandra-LeighCannon.com.

VIOLETS

By Alexandra Cannon

after the fall
you watched the patchwork red
for the longest time form a winding
line that forked and branched
like a river toward the drain.

i stood iced over in the doorway
and when you looked at me you
did not look away and so we
might be staring even now,
fixed as these leaden wills.

we did watch the hand mend itself
over the weeks that followed like
some quiet, slow-moving magic
within you; a rock snaking its way
across the desert.

i don't know what this is if not
love of some variation, the kind
that wilts beneath the eclipsing
hand of gentleness, that needs
force to be expressed,
because if there is only one
truth worth reckoning, love,
it is this:
when you were hurt
and when i was hurt
—it didn't hurt.

Michael Wakefield is 41 years of age and was born in Dallas Texas on July 12, 1972. He married the love of his life, Dana Wakefield on May 25, 2005 and has one great son, Simon Silva. Michael has been a school bus driver for the past ten years and his interests include writing and singing. Michael says: "Much of my inspiration comes when I just let the Lord put the words in my heart to use."

HE IS RISEN

By Michael Wakefield

There's a cross on the hillside
That's stained with blood and tears.

The people would not listen
Their hearts were filled with fear.

It was our Lord and Savior
That died upon that cross
If it wasn't for his sacrifice
All our souls would be lost.

They buried him in a tomb
Rolled a stone in its way
Our Lord Jesus said
He will rise in just three days
Mary went down to the tomb
Where Jesus laid
There was an angel standing there
And the stone was rolled away.

The angel told Mary
That Jesus was not here
So go and tell the people
And wipe away all the tears
Mary told the disciples
What the angel said
That our Lord Jesus Christ
Has risen from the dead.

He has risen to the father
To prepare a place up there
There'll be a street of gold to walk on
Not a doubt or a care
They'll be angels standing around
Singing those holy hymns
So if you want to go to heaven
You need to trust in him.

Psycho Kanev is the author of 4 poetry collections and two chapbooks. He has won several European awards for his poetry and he's nominated for the Pushcart Award and Best of the Net. Translations of his books will be published soon in Italy, Poland and Russia. His poems have appeared in more than 900 literary magazines, such as: *Poetry Quarterly*, *Evergreen Review*, *Columbia College Literary Review*, *Hawaii Review*, *Cordite Poetry Review*, *Sheepshead Review*, *Off the Coast*, *The Adirondack Review*, *The Coachella Review*, *Two Thirds North*, *Sierra Nevada Review*, *The Cleveland Review* and many others.

THE DREAM

By Psycho Kanev

The window is thin as a spider
scream. Beyond, the darkness
tells the eternal story. Streetlamps,
these nocturnal crocuses, blink
in front of the coming dawn.

Deserted streets. In the gutters
dogs and cats dream that they love
each other. No change. All is the same
like it was in the beginning.

On the other side of the window
is the room with the bed.
The sleeping man wakes up
just to become someone else.

I WILL NEVER HAVE

By Psycho Kanev

she is like
a masterpiece from a painter
dead centuries
ago

she is still in the
attic

covered with old newspapers
and spider webs.

Brandon Berman is a student at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York, the scenery of which is the inspiration for much of his poetry. He has been writing poetry since the age of 13 and has been published twice in the literary journal Poetica Victorian.

THE RAIN COMES ON CUE

By Brandon Berman

Some think that it's the devil's curse
For water to come falling from the sky
As though the drops will put them in a hearse
They run from it to hide and cry

Some hate the rain, they do
Like a horror to the eye
They'd rather see skies of blue
And remain cozy, warm, and dry

I think those people are insane
I love nothing more than the rain
It's the perfect time to curl up in a nook
By a window with a long forgotten book

And sometimes when it rains I'll go out
To jump in puddles made by the spout
And feel cool drops upon my head
And hear thunder loud enough to wake the dead

I love the rain, I truly do
Skies of gray I do not rue
For when I'm feeling down and blue
The rain comes as though on a cue

Brittany Gilbert is currently attending Southeast Missouri State University. She is currently an intern at the university press. She became interested in writing poetry during a creative writing class.

ABANDON AT YOUR CONVENIENCE

By Brittany Gilbert

The stone path leads its way into a slumbering garden,
slinking off in various directions
with a singular purpose, to view
the meticulously placed flora.

Past the season of color
and into the desolate tundra,
there is an absence of footprints,
an absence of laughter.

Beauty has become lost in darkness, while
all that is left are scattered memories
blending into one.

The squirrels still jump and play
and the birds sing their melancholic songs, yet
the casual observer gives a fleeting glance, because
as the roses fade, so does their love for you.

Amy S. Pacini is a freelance writer from Land O Lakes, Florida. She is the Poetry Editor for Long Story Short ezine. She has held memberships in Pasco Poets, Poets Live, Brandon Poets & Artists Guild, the International Women's Writing Guild, and The Write Time. Her work has been published in *Torrid Literature Journal*, *Lost Tower Publications*, *Kind Of A Hurricane Press*, *Page & Spine*, *Cyclamens And Swords*, *Making Waves Poetry Anthology*, *All Things Girl*, *Magnapoets*, *Hope Whispers*, *Hanging Moss Journal*, and many other publications. She is the First Prize Recipient of the 2013 2nd Annual Romancing The Craft of Poetry & Fiction Contest sponsored by the TL Publishing Group. Pacini writes poetry, short stories, personal essays, and motivational quotes. She is the owner and operator of A.S.P. INK and its site www.amyspacini.com.

FOOTPRINTS OF FREEDOM

By Amy S. Pacini

You will take a giant leap of faith
By valiantly venturing out on your own
Into uncharted territory separated by thousands of unexplored miles
From the creature comforts of home
The loving support of family and friends
And the financial safety net of job security.

Over the hopeful horizon of transitional time
You will learn valuable lessons and gain immeasurable experience
Which will allow you to untie the apron strings of familiarity
And boldly embark on a life journey
Towards boundless freedom and unfettered independence.

For only by staking your sole claim in this volatile world
Of unexpected challenges and extreme adversity
Will you completely fulfill the true desires of your heart
And passionately paint your distinctive destiny.

When you fearlessly march in the footsteps of freedom
You will travel risky roads and adventurous trails
Of unparalleled possibilities and hidden fortunes
Ready and waiting for you to amazingly discover.

There will be dim days filled with setbacks and stumbling blocks
And numberless nights of loneliness and despair
But during this panoramic passage
You will resolutely rise up one beautiful morning
And purposefully seize the moment
By taking a single step that will promisingly lead to a successful leap.

In that miraculous moment you will clearly see your farsighted focus
And come to realize why you were called
On this venturesome voyage of self awareness and discovery
As you complete the courageous circle of idealized individuality
That was specifically designed for you alone.

When you reflectively remember your life
You will never forget how each personal pathway
Significantly touched, inspired, and transformed you
Into the independent woman you were born to be.

SERENITY'S SOLILOQUY

By Amy S. Pacini

Chaotic combustion
Raging inside my hurricane head
Hustle bustle
Of this noisy nation
No peaceful place
To creatively collect
My once tranquil thoughts.

Where can I reside
That does not constantly chug
With lightning speed
Technological transformation
Deluging duties and overflowing in bins?

Surrendering secular desires
Non-competitive career pursuits
Forfeiting friendship popularity contests
Putting on false facades
For critical public eyes
And snooty societal standards.

I long for a life of simplicity and solitude
To fearlessly sail the high seas
Of unrestrained sovereignty and jubilant bliss.

I want to throw reality's rough rocks
Into the river of reform
And rediscover the soft smooth stones
Of bountiful beauty and soulful serenity
Where loving grace and peace flow freely.

If life mirrored heaven
Goodness would eradicate evil
Turning hatred into love
Adversity into harmony
Melancholy into happiness
Despair into hope
Poverty into wealth
Tragedy into triumph
Doubt into belief.

When life and heaven do finally meet
It will be a splendid day
For the Lord we will finally greet
And step into his kingdom's palace for an everlasting stay.

Anne Marie Bise is an English teacher from Powhatan, Virginia. She has always had a passion for writing and poetry, ever since she read one of her first books of poetry, *Where The Sidewalk Ends* by Shel Silverstein. She enjoys writing humorous poetry because she strongly believes that laughter is the best medicine. Currently, she is working on compiling a short book of humorous poetry for publication.

DATE NIGHT

By Anne Marie Bise

When he told me he wanted to go out on a date,
I was pretty excited.
So excited, in fact, that it took me
Four hours to get ready.
I put on my best dress and heels
And when the doorbell rang,
I was filled with anticipation.
But when he told me we were going to dinner and a movie,
I didn't expect he meant fifty cent hot dogs from the gas station.
Or the romantic scenery of eating in a cramped car.
I didn't expect to spill the mustard of the fifty cent hot dog
On my fifty dollar dress.
And when he said we were going to a movie,
You better believe there was no way I would have guessed
That we would be driving through the car wash (in my very best dress).
I could not even suggest a better thing to do
So, I saved myself the trouble of another date with that cheapskate
I walked right out of the car, in the middle of the car wash
And when he asked me out on another date,
You better believe I said "Get real!"
And that fifty dollar dress is now a souvenir
Encrusted in mustard stains and crumbs
As you can imagine, I was totally bummed
That it did not turn out as well as I had planned
But, I still keep the dress, just in case
I get asked out on a date by another cheapskate.

Lauren McCall is a writer and a musician currently living in Georgia. She has written poems ever since high school. McCall went to the University of Georgia and studied music receiving her masters in 2010. The poems she's written have heavily been influenced through life experiences including her love of nature, the various types of relationships McCall has seen, and an enjoyment of mystery. As a poet, individuals including Robert Frost, Nikki Giovanni, and Jelaluddin Rumi have inspired her. The movement and rhythm of music have also inspired her poetry. Her poetry was also published in the *Wordsmith Journal*.

PRESENCE

By Lauren McCall

It is like...
Stepping into a river
As waves ripple from my feet.

In evolving swells, sounds collide
Into each other, until
They dissipate into silence.

In the chapel
The spirits come out to sing.
Swimming up to the rafters
With throats made of bells.
Diving into the depths
Singing like sirens
Strumming harps.

The sound bubbles up to the surface,
And I hear harmonies,
Notes melting into notes.

Are they in my head or actually
Ringing in the air?
I can never tell
In the chapel.

Silence's presence
Echoes as confidently as Sound's
When I play
In the chapel.

Like children
Skipping and giggling through pews
No one would ever know

No one would ever know
This is a solo.

FICTION

ADJUSTMENTS

By Jules A. Riley

Jules A. Riley, (b.1943) is an Anglo-Belgian writer residing in Scotland. His short stories have been published in several literary magazines in the USA, as well as England, Mexico & India.

Father's railway inspector's uniform always smelt of soot, not that Father had always worn such a uniform. I remember the first time a uniform was brought home and Father balanced on a chair, whilst Mother pinned alterations.

"Stand still. This is a very thick cloth."

"Melton."

"What?"

"Melton. That's what they call the cloth it's made from. Melton. Very hard wearing."

"Whatever it's called— it's very difficult to get pins in."

"Ouch woman, that was me."

"Well, that one went in."

The sewing machine was pulled out of its recess so Mother could complete the alterations before Father's first shift. A process repeated each time Father arrived home with another uniform and that much grander, as he attained promotion from porter to full station inspector.

"Looks nicer than the last one."

"Better quality."

"Silver braid. Very nice."

The sight of Father in such uniforms became part of a gradual change to our family circumstances. I realised that there were also sudden adjustments occurring to their lives. Breakfast had always been a family affair, held at the same time each morning, hurried but congenial. That was fractured, as Father began to leave for work whilst we slept. I would hear whispering, the groan of floor boards and Mother clattering about in the kitchen. Then the creak of the side gate and the squeak of Father's bike. Sometimes, creeping downstairs I'd find Mother wrapped in her dressing gown watching Father struggle with the gate and his bicycle.

"Why does Daddy go away?"

"He has to help to keep the trains running."

"Why?"

"It's the way it is."

During the school holidays I waited at the local railway station for Father's return. Father had obtained a post at one of the capital city's main railway stations. I'd sit on a platform bench watching steam trains come and go, the station chaotic for a few minutes as passengers clambered on and off and other people air-kissed and waved goodbye. Occasionally someone cried after a train had departed. Porters wheeled rumbling trolleys piled with luggage and goods. I tried to understand the station announcements to no avail and wondered if anybody else understood them, convinced after a while that they were spoken in a foreign language. Each time a train halted I'd walk the length of it to stare at the locomotive, gaze into the cab to see the flames licking at the boiler's door and marvel at the sight of the driver and stoker with blackened faces. On Father's arrival and after he'd collected his bicycle from the rear of the ticket office, we cycled home along streets void of traffic.

I had then as now vivid memories of when life had been different and Father owned a barber's shop and wore a starched white jacket over his smart clothes. Foreign holidays were an annual occurrence and well before the attraction of package holidays. Then Father was unapproachable and spending hours pondering over sheaths of papers scattered across the dining room table. At night I heard raised voices and doors slamming. Bit by bit the equipment from the barber's shop appeared in the house and was stored under the stairs.

During the period between the collapse of the barber's business and Father being employed by the railway company, my father appeared each morning dressed in old clothes. A horn blowing truck arrived in the street each morning and Father clambered into the back of the truck, not returning until late in the evening covered in dust, his back stooped and his feet dragging. Even in the heat of summer a fire would be laid in the living room grate so that the water in the back boiler could be heated to enable Father to bathe his aching body before sitting in solitary to eat a meal. Each Friday Father laid money on the kitchen table which Mother counted into small piles.

"When will the work finish at the oil refinery?" Mother ask.

"I don't know. It's killing me."

"Something else will come up, you see."

The appearance of Father with that first railway uniform changed the atmosphere in the house; Mother smiled again and there were no voices raised. The family settled back to a comfortable existence. Once more there was a better variety of food on the table and Mother bought me a new school uniform rather than making me wear the hand-me-downs from the boy next door. The house was redecorated and floors laid with new linoleum. Father built a shed to house a collection of tools that gathered cobwebs and the boy received a bicycle for his birthday. The Co-operative store delivered a TV encased in a polished cabinet to be placed in a corner of the living room after much kaffuffle over the men fixing the aerial to the chimney. A phone was installed in the hallway on a half-moon table bought specially; the phone only used for emergencies.

The equipment from the barber's shop stayed under the stairs to gather dust and Mother never had to count money again and place it in piles every Friday.

SLAYING DRAGONS

By Barbara Brockway

Barbara Brockway's work has been published in the *Intown Atlanta Paper* and *Quest For Kindness* blog. She has won two short story awards in the past year from the 700-member Atlanta Writers Club, including one for this short story. She is currently working on her second novel.

My wife tends to worry about abstracts. She worries about the kids choking on a grape or being snatched by a stranger. She worries about Hannah starting school this fall.

“What if she’s not challenged academically?” she asks, her brow furrowed.

“It’s kindergarten, honey. They’ll teach her not to eat paste,” I tease her.

I love how she worries about these unlikely things, how protective she is of her little chicks. My joking doesn’t help; her fears just linger under the surface, ready to bob up again.

Myself, I worry about realities. I worry about having enough money to retire. I worry about my aging parents and if I will have to make quality of life decisions based on dwindling bank accounts rather than their wishes. I worry about whose quality of life I’ll be concerned about—theirs or mine. I worry about gaining tenure at the university, which is a very real and looming possibility; unless I publish a paper on deadline by September, my position will not go up for review, and I won’t be considered this year. Those are real worries, not some vague thoughts about a boogeyman.

Which is why we are spending the summer in Florida. Not the boogeyman but the deadline. I have been on sabbatical this semester and feel the breath of my dying career on my neck. I have done all the research; I lugged a large suitcase full of it down here, but have not yet put a single word on paper.

I feel torn about being away from my parents, but as Marie and I discussed, this deadline is crucial to my career and besides, the two zombies shuffling around in the nursing home won’t miss my visits.

My grandfather built this cabin near a town called Niceville. How could anyone have any worries in a place called Niceville? For many years, all the aunts and uncles and cousins used the cabin at various times, apart and together, kids running everywhere, kitchen counters covered in peanut butter and jelly jars and mini-cereal boxes, sleeping bags littering the floors.

When we’re at the cabin Marie tends to relax about the kids; this place has a way of doing that to you. My cousins never come. I fear my children will be the last of the McTaggart line to enjoy the joys of the family cabin, and I am determined that they will get that chance. While we still have the chance. You see, the cabin may be one of the decisions I will have to make concerning my parents’ failing health and wrapping up their affairs. I may be forced to sell the cabin to afford to keep them in a facility that will extend their life, which may or may not be what they want. I may trade this place that houses generations of happy childhood memories for another year of strangers feeding my parents and helping them get to bathroom.

The cove is pretty quiet. There are ten cabins off to the left, all dotting the edge of the water. About half of them are occupied all year, half are summer places. All the residents are old people; most have owned their places for decades. You don’t see much activity here, our bay is not nearly as desirable as the Gulf of Mexico, less than an hour away, that’s where all the families go these days.

Our cabin is the last in line; to the right there is a large marsh about a hundred feet away from our property that runs into the shoreline of the cove. There is a meadow of reeds that ripples with the breeze and offers a hiding place for all sorts of nature. Sometimes we see large birds, like osprey and egrets, flapping their huge wings and swinging their spindly legs forward as they brace for a water landing.

Which is how we discovered the alligator. The first sunset after we arrived at the cabin, Marie and I were dangling our feet off the dock, drinking a beer and watching Hannah and Max splash around with an inner tube.

“Look, kids,” Marie said softly, pointing toward the reeds. “Duckies.”

The kids stopped their splashing as we all watched a mama duck with four obedient miniatures trailing behind her. Being at the cabin for half a day had already succeeded in softening the knots in my shoulders.

There was a big splash and a large dark form lunging low through the reeds. The shadow snapped its jaws around the last baby duck, amid wings flapping and a chorus of quacking,

Hannah screamed. Max stood still, ankle deep in the water, staring at the spectacle. Marie stood up quickly, knocking over her beer.

“Get out of the water! Oh my god, kids, get out of the water!” She ran the few steps off the dock to the shore.

The kids quickly complied, running onto the beach, shrieking and running into her legs.

The big animal was perfectly still, holding its dinner in its jaws for a minute, then turned away and disappeared into the reeds.

“Calm down everyone,” I said, holding up my hands. “It’s just an alligator.”

“Just an alligator!” Marie screamed at me. “Just an alligator! You never told me there were alligators here!”

Marie,” I said, “It’s not going to bother us. A bird is its natural prey.”

I didn’t *think* they went after humans.

“Ted, we can’t swim here if there is an alligator,” Marie said. Her voice had retreated from a scream, but was still loud and agitated.

“We saw them all the time when we were growing up.” That wasn’t quite true, we saw them sometimes.

“We still swam here,” I finished weakly.

Marie stared at me. Her mouth was open slightly and she was breathing heavily, as though she had just been running. I wanted to fold her up in my arms, kiss the top of her head and reassure her, tell her no harm would come to us here in Niceville, but I wasn’t entirely convinced myself.

“Alright kids, time to head in for bed anyway,” she said.

“Aww,” they chimed.

“C’mon now, I’ll feed you a snack before your bath,” she said.

“I’ll be in to help in a minute,” I said. I swung my legs back and forth a little off the edge of the dock and looked toward the reeds. The light was now fading. Marie stood on the beach for another moment, and then turned to walk away. I sat there until it was too dark to see, hoping to catch

another glimpse of the alligator.

The next day I sleep in, something I haven't done in months. The fresh air and woodland noises all spread a relaxation through my muscles that allows me to rest for what feels like the first time in a long time. I wake to the voice of our ancient neighbor, Mr. Buckle, drifting in through the window.

"I've only seen the one there. He's been around since last fall. We figured the hurricane blew him in from somewhere. Poor feller's all alone."

"Now, don't you worry none about your babies, Marie. That gator won't bother you if you don't bother it. You stick to swimming during the day and you won't have any problems." I try to remember the last time I saw Mr. Buckle in the water.

We go into town to have coffee and use the internet. While the kids share a smoothie with two straws, Marie and I google alligators. We show Max and Hannah photos and read aloud facts about habitats and feeding. We find a research paper showing Florida to be the hands down winner in alligator attacks.

"It's just that we used to see them all the time when we were kids, they never bothered us."

"Were they that close by?" Marie asks. "Wasn't your mom freaked out?"

"When my cousins and I were exploring, we'd see them sunning themselves on a log, farther away," I admit.

"None of our parents thought anything about it," I say, but I can't really remember if that was true. I can't remember if we told our parents, or if they heard what we were saying in the chaos of all that activity.

"Hmm, I wonder what this means, 'nuisance complaints and alligators removed'? Marie says. "Ted, maybe we could have it relocated?"

Max flashes a big grin. "Maybe they'll move it to where it will be happier, with other gators."

"Maybe it will find a gator girlfriend," Hannah says cheerily, giggling a little.

I'm quiet, picturing Hannah and Max splashing in the water being watched by the sinister eyes of the gator.

There is a little crinkle in Marie's forehead as she waits for my reply.

That night, we see the alligator again, this time from the safety of the dock. Again, we are enjoying the sunset when I spot a swirl in the water near the edge of the reeds about a hundred feet away from our perch. I've brought the binoculars in order to get a better look. I spot the small bump of its snout and the larger bump of the top of its head. Its eyes unblinkingly stare back at me.

I let the kids look through the binocs, helping get them pointed in the right direction.

Hannah gives a little breathless "Wow!" when it is her turn.

Max is more excited. "It looks like a dinosaur!" he exclaims.

I pass the binoculars to Marie, who stares silently through them a long time.

The next morning I call the Nuisance Alligator Hotline, which even has a catchy number: 866-FW-GATOR.

"I want to report a nuisance alligator," I state.

"OK," the woman's voice replies. "Let me just get a file started." I hear her typing on a keyboard.

"How long is the animal?"

"I'd say about 7 feet long." My response is typed into the computer.

"How long has the animal been sighted?"

"Since last fall after the hurricane."

"What time of day did you see the animal?"

"Both times we saw it was at sunset."

"Probably hunting," the woman says as she clacks my answer into her computer.

Hunting my children, I think. Hunting me.

"Sir, I can schedule the termination for tomorrow."

"Termination?" My voice comes out cracked, high-pitched. "I thought you would just relocate it somewhere else."

"No, a full grown animal is not a good candidate for relocation. We recommend that you be away from the premises during the day of the termination. If the area is quiet, it makes it easier for the officer to find the target."

Animal. Termination. Target. Could she be any more officious? She was scheduling a man to shoot an alligator with a gun. A creature that had been blown to our cove by a ferocious act of nature would now be blown away by a man in a khaki uniform.

That night I go out to the dock alone and find myself staring toward the reeds. After a while I see the dark form of the gator's head. I stare at it, feeling guilty, and it stares back, until it gets so dark we can no longer see each other. Even then I continue to stare, wondering if it is looking back at me in the darkness. I imagine it swimming soundlessly through the water, gliding gracefully back and forth under the dock. I draw my legs up under my chin.

The next day Marie takes the kids to spend the day with some friends who are staying on the gulf. She gives me a quick kiss, then hugs me for a long time, never catching my eye as she pulls away.

I stay at the cabin and open my laptop. I get out all my research, thinking it will help take my mind off the alligator to get started on my paper. I shuffle pages, dig around my briefcase for a highlighter, try to organize my thoughts. At around ten o'clock I hear a truck pull up outside, but there is

no knock at the door, so I try to focus on reading my notes. I can't concentrate; instead I keep glancing out the window, but all I see is the calm stretch of water that was there this morning. I switch chairs so my back will be to the window.

Eventually I hear a lone gunshot. The sound seems to ring out for a long while, as if it is postponing the silence behind it.

I slide the laptop over in front of me and start typing. My fingers build up speed; soon they are flying over the keys. Words spill out onto the screen as fast as I can think of them. I'm flipping through my research, marking things off my checklist, I churn out page after page. I grow hungry and thirsty, but I keep working. I am lost in the act of writing when the sound of a birdcall enters my consciousness. I stretch out my aching back, massage my cramped fingers. The shadows have grown long and there is a faint pink light outside.

I walk slowly down to the dock and sit down, dangling my legs. My gaze is drawn toward the reeds, even though I know the alligator is no longer there.

PROM DATE

By G.L. Snodgrass

G.L. Snodgrass is a born romantic. He has traveled the world twice over before settling down with his soul mate. He is a retired grandfather who likes to look at the world through young eyes.

My life was officially over. I wanted to crawl into a hole and pull the earth over me like a blanket. The only thing that stopped me from slitting my wrists was the thought of strangling Danny O'Brian with my bare hands. Who cancels a prom date an hour before the big night?

My mind flew a thousand miles a minutes to all the terrible things I could do to him. This was supposed to be my big moment. Walking in on Danny O'Brian's arm would have cancelled out some pretty crummy high school years.

"Why me!" I yelled as I cried into my pillow. The tears flowed like wine at a wedding. Something else I would probably never get to experience. Why do things like this always happen to me?

Freshman year I'd been too shy to even think about going. In sophomore year, no one had asked. Flat-chested bean poles like me weren't asked to fancy things like the prom. In junior year a bunch of us wallflowers were going to go together but I broke my ankle playing volleyball, and I wouldn't be caught dead at prom walking around on crutches. Only my friend Mary Hopkins even knew I wasn't there.

Senior year had been different. I'd come into my own. Blossomed as mom liked to say. Things had gotten all curvy like they were supposed to. They must have started working because I seemed to have caught the eye of the star quarterback and school hunk Danny O'Brian.

You could have rolled me up and mailed me to Wisconsin when he asked me to the prom. My mouth dropped open and my heart stopped beating. Danny O'Brian was asking me to the prom.

I'd squeaked out a yes before running all the way home to tell my mom. Then flew over to Mary's house to tell her. Being the bestest of best friends she had squealed and jumped up and down with me as we totally lost it.

Life was perfect. Chrissy Thompson, the school bitch and my personal nemesis, would see me walk in with Danny. I know she'd see us because she'd be monitoring everybody. Categorizing what they wore, judging and commenting to her pal gals about what a terrible color this girl wore. Or how sad it was that so-and-so couldn't find a date. All the time secretly squealing with glee at other people's misery.

Of course I told everyone that Danny and I would be going to the prom together. There had been quite a few shocked expressions and weak congratulations. I had filed every one of those looks away in my memory box and marked the folder "Pure Glee."

You know the feeling of being on top of the world? Of being in that place that everyone else wishes they could be? That was my life for the last month.

Mom, Mary, and I had spent hours shopping for just the right dress. I couldn't stop giggling and laughing as we went from store to store. Mom had been patient. Standing to the side, never criticizing but somehow letting me know what worked and what didn't work.

I finally found the perfect sky blue dress that matched my eyes. Low cut back and spaghetti straps. It fit me perfectly. They wouldn't even have to alter it. I looked like I was ready to step onto the red carpet at the Oscars. I couldn't wait to watch Danny's eyes when he saw me in that dress. I couldn't wait for Chrissy Jensen to see me. No way was there anything wrong with that dress.

Instead, no one would ever see it.

I started to ball my eyes out again when mom knocked gently coming into my room. "I'm so sorry honey," she said as she gently rubbed my back.

"Why Mom? Why always me?" I mumbled through a snotty nose.

"Oh honey," she said, rubbing a little harder as if she could push aside my pain and humiliation. "Someday, this won't seem so important."

"Oh mom," I yelled before throwing myself back onto my pillow.

She stopped rubbing for a second then said, "Can't you go by yourself? You can borrow the car."

"Mom, you don't get it," I cried again into the pillow.

"What about Mary, could you go with her?"

"Mom," I said, my voice getting exasperated. "Mary is going with Troy. No way am I tagging along as a third wheel. It's her special night too."

My phone ringing on the bedside table saved her from driving the spike in any deeper. She got up and left me. Looking back with a face narrowed in concern. I know her heart was breaking for me. My mom's pretty cool like that. You know she cares. I also know that she can be a bit of a lioness at times. Danny O'Brian had better not cross her path or he was going to find himself missing a couple of key assets from between his legs.

I picked up my phone.

"I just heard, Oh my god. What a douche." Mary said before I could even say hello.

"How is that possible, I only found out a few minutes ago?" I said between sniffles.

"Danny told John who told his girlfriend Marla. She called Sandy who called me."

Great, everyone now knew about my humiliation. I wasn't even allowed time to wallow in my misery before everyone wanted to stand around and watch.

"Did he say why?" Mary asked.

"No in so many words," I said. "I'm pretty sure it's because I told him I wouldn't go to the hotel with him after the dance."

"What, he wanted you to go to a hotel?"

"Yeah, a week ago he told me to make sure and tell my parents that I would be out all night and not to expect me back till the next morning."

"What'd you say," Mary asked.

"I told him I wasn't comfortable doing that. We hadn't known each other long enough. You know the normal excuses. No way was my first time going to be in the Ramada Inn after prom. I mean how cliché can you get?"

"Why didn't you tell me," she said.

"I don't know. He didn't press the matter and I figured it was all over with. The first hint I got that he wasn't happy about it was the phone call a few minutes ago."

"Wow, what a douche."

I laughed. Mary is such a good friend. We had known each other since before kindergarten. Her family lived two doors down and our mothers were best friends. We were closer than sisters. We never fought. Well almost never, and when we did it was almost always my fault.

"What are you going to do?" She said before pausing a moment. "Do you want to come with Troy and me?"

I almost accepted. I so desperately wanted to go that I almost ruined my best friend's prom night. Troy was a nice guy and he'd have tried to make it work. But no way was I doing that to Mary.

"No that's okay. Thanks anyway. I'll just curl up on the couch with a gallon of Haagen-Dazs and think evil thoughts about Danny O'Brian and what I'm going to do to him in the next life. I won't have an opportunity in this life if my mom ever gets a hold of him."

She laughed. That's the thing about Mary; she'll laugh like you're making a joke even when you're dead serious.

"Oh my god, I've got it," she yelled into the phone. "Oh this is perfect. My brother can take you. He's even got something to wear."

My stomach dropped. Mary's little brother Jimmy was barely sixteen and a pimply-faced sophomore. He was a nice kid but I didn't know about going to the prom with him. The only thing worse would be showing up alone.

"I don't know Mary ... I, uh."

"No, this is perfect, he's always liked you and he owes me big time."

Great, now I was a mercy date for a sophomore. How bad could it get?

Mary must have sensed my hesitation because she pulled out the big guns. "I need you there Jenny. No way am I facing Chrissy Thompson alone."

"Well, uh I."

"Great, I'll have him there in forty-five minutes. We can meet up at the dance and will have a great time. You'll see. Thanks Jenny, you won't regret it," she said before quickly hanging up so that I couldn't change my mind.

"MOM," I yelled down the stairs. "Mary's little brother's taking me, I need to get ready." I had forty minutes to get dressed and somehow cover up these blotchy eyes. I looked like a raccoon on crack.

Mom pulled her normal motherly miracle and got me to look halfway decent. She did something with alternating warm and cold towels to my face and then just the right amount of makeup that even I couldn't tell I'd spent the afternoon crying enough to fill Lake Ontario.

I slipped on my dress then the absolutely gorgeous heels and closely examined myself in the mirror. Not bad, I thought. Granted, everyone was going to know that Danny O'Brian had dumped me hours before the dance but at least they'd know it wasn't because of my looks.

Smiling to myself for the first time that night. My stomach dropped when I thought about Jimmy Hopkins. Oh well, beggars can't be choosy, I thought.

I was transferring a few things to my clutch purse when mom walked in and said, "I thought you might want to borrow these?" A pair of one carat diamond earrings rested in the palm of her hand. Dad had given them to her on their twenties anniversary. "They are only a loan; if you lose them you will go ahead of Danny O'Brian on my crap list. Get it?"

"Oh Mom, their beautiful," I said fastening the posts. "Are you sure? They are so perfect."

"Yes they are," she said with a huge smile. "Now finish up. Jimmy should be here in a moment."

My stomach dropped again. Every time I thought about walking into the room with Jimmy Hopkins, I got a sad feeling. There was nothing wrong with Jimmy, except that he was a two years younger and an inch shorter than me. That and the fact that he had to be forced by his sister to take me. When you added that to the fact of how I had bragged about going with Danny. I felt like such a fool.

Forcing a smile onto my face I went downstairs to wait. Butterflies kept erupting. I knew there would be some snickering behind hands and probably the occasional rude comment. But I could put up with it for a night. After all, someday this wasn't going to matter. Yeah keep telling yourself that Jenny, I thought. It might help you make it through the night.

Jimmy was late of course. Mary had probably had to hit him over the head to get him to go. How did the kid even have a tux? I know for a fact that Mary had told me last week that he wasn't going. Jesus, please don't let him show up in a suite. Or worse, his dad's suit? Would Mary do that to me?

My palms began to sweat. What if he didn't come? Great, a minute ago I was terrified of walking in with Jimmy Hopkins, and now I was frightened that I was going to get stood up.

The doorbell rang. Mom rushed to get it while I stood there waiting. She opened the door and my mouth hit the floor.

Jack Hopkins, Mary's OLDER brother stood there in a heart stopping full dress Marine uniform. A black tunic and snow white belt. Sky blue pants with a red stripe down the sides. White gloves and three shiny medals on his chest perfected the look. He reminded me of a movie poster of what a manly Marine was supposed to look like. Wide shoulders that tapered down to a narrow waist. My god, he was gorgeous.

"Jack," I exclaimed, "I didn't know you were back!" He was on his second tour in Afghanistan and wasn't due back for another month.

"I got back a couple of days ago," he said stepping into the house. His pristine white hat carried under his arm. He was as straight as an ironing board as his eyes traveled over me and lit up as if he liked what he saw.

"I asked my family to keep it quiet. I needed a few days to adjust. Mary only agreed if I owed her a huge favor."

"Oh my god. You're taking me to the prom." I said not even believing my own words.

"Ms. Carter, will you please allow me to escort you to the prom," he said with a little bow.

My heart skipped and all of the butterflies fell from the sky in a dead faint. Mary Hopkins, I am going to owe you for the rest of my life.

"Yes Jack, I would love to go with you to the prom," I said slipping my arm into his.

.o0o.

Some things in life are better than you expect. Needless to say my prom night was great before I even left the house. But walking in on Corporal Hopkins arm has to be one of the highlights of all time. The only thing better was the look on Chrissy Thompson's face.

CHILDREN OF THE TIDES

By Frank Scozzari

Frank Scozzari's fiction has previously appeared in various literary magazines, including *The Kenyon Review*, *The Berkeley Fiction Review*, *Two Thirds North*, *South Dakota Review*, *Folio*, *The Nassau Review*, *Roanoke Review*, *Pacific Review*, *Reed Magazine*, *Ellipsis Magazine*, *Barely South*, *The MacGuffin*, and many others. Writing awards include Winner of the National Writer's Association Short Story Contest and three publisher nominations for the Pushcart Prize of Short Stories.

The current had been steady for an hour now, taking Luke further in a direction he did not know. He looked off into the horizon, far out to where the sky met the ocean but could see only blue. The vastness of it, how the ocean blended from one shade of blue to another until it eventually turned to sky, made him realize just how lost he was. Having ventured too far out into a lazy Hawaiian sea, lulled in by a warm breeze and a tropical sun, he had been caught up in the Molokai Express—a vicious current between the islands of Oahu and Molokai known for its sweeping undertow. Luke was pretty sure nobody had seen him back at the beach or missed him at the hotel. He had neglected to inform the concierge of his daily plans, which had been the routine until that day. Now nearly three days had passed, and he remained adrift without food or water. His only life support was a two-foot by three-foot piece of compressed styrofoam. The sun, which had shined blissfully upon him, burnt through the remnants of his sunscreen, scorching his raw skin.

He lay there flat on the bodyboard with his arms wrapped loosely beneath it and his face pressed against it. The swells lifted him slowly and methodically. With an apathetic eye he looked out across the surface of the ocean.

I am alone as a man could be, he thought. I am a man without an island. And if I cannot find land soon, I will die. That much he knew.

All morning, there had been nothing, not even a fish.

Then he felt a rush in the water beneath him, and when he lifted his head he saw a dark flash beneath the surface. It was something large and fast. It darted from one side of the bodyboard to the other. Then it disappeared deep into the blue beneath him. A few seconds passed, and he saw it again, breaking the surface not more than ten yards from him. Emerging like a periscope was the head of a giant sea turtle, its large cranium and eagle beak turned sideways so that its eye was squarely upon him.

"Hello," Luke said cheerfully, happy to once again see another living being.

The turtle looked on curiously.

"Can you tell me which way is land?"

The turtle remained bobbing in the water, curiously watching him.

"I need your help, my friend. I cannot find land and will die soon if I cannot find it."

The turtle remained quietly buoyant. Then it suddenly dipped its head into the water, paddled swiftly forward for twenty yards, and lifted back up.

Luke looked around but saw no land. Grasping his hands along the edge of the board, he lifted himself higher but still saw nothing. He was surrounded by blue and only blue.

"Where? Which direction is it?" he called out to the turtle.

The turtle did not answer, and Luke dropped back down against the board and paddled forward toward the turtle, gently thrusting the water behind him.

When he got close, the turtle dipped its head beneath the surface again and darted away, forward for another twenty yards.

"You must know where land is," Luke yelled out. "You are a sea turtle. You need land to survive!"

Luke followed, this time keeping a distance.

"Come on. Show me. I need your help. I need you to help me to find the land."

The turtle gazed at Luke for a full thirty seconds, then turned its head and dipped below the surface again.

"Come back here!"

Luke watched and waited. Nearly a minute passed before the turtle resurfaced. This time he was at least forty yards away.

"Hey! Come back here!"

Luke paddled ahead with more determination, struggling now as the distance was much further and his arms were beginning to tire. When he had gained about half the distance to the turtle, he lifted himself up on the board again. He strained his eyes, scouring the horizon, but saw no land. The turtle disappeared again, and Luke paddled forward and waited. After a few minutes the turtle reappeared; this time he was a mere black dot on the horizon, nearly seventy yards off, beyond which there was nothing but blue sea and sky.

Luke looked up into the sky. The path was true, he thought. The turtle was moving a straight line.

Paddling harder now, thrusting the water behind him in spurts, Luke pursued. Each time he got close, the turtle would disappear again, and as before, he would reappear further out, lengthening the distance between them.

Luke struggled to keep up. For half an hour, he followed the turtle's path, which seemed to be straight and purposeful. After another twenty minutes, the black dot vanished on the blue horizon, and Luke did not see it anymore.

He is gone, he thought.

Dark clouds filled the horizon. Within minutes the clouds were upon him, and large raindrops came down from the Hawaiian sky. He rolled onto his back and opened his mouth, taking in what water he could, wiping it from his cheeks with his hands into his mouth. It felt soothing and quenching against his parched lips and down the narrow of his throat.

As quickly as the storm came, it broke, and now Luke looked up and saw a wonderful rainbow, arching from one side of the horizon to the other. Within ten minutes, the sky was clear, and he was back to the doldrums—no ships, no land, only blue. He was alone again. The turtle had been a godsend, Luke thought, but he was no better off than he was the day before.

He thought of his cheerful life back at the Wailea Hotel, lounging beneath the ceiling fans in the grand lanai, sampling the fresh pineapple and mango brought down by the bellboys each morning. It was all a distant memory.

All of his life, Luke had lived in peace with nature. He had created good karma with it. And when he first saw the turtle, he was hoping he would be able to cash in on it. Instead, he found himself lost and alone once again, drifting on an unforgiving sea.

Many minutes passed, or perhaps it was hours when he heard a splash. He turned and looked around and saw nothing at first. Then it came back, and like before, he saw another dark flash beneath the surface. But this one was different. It was sleeker and faster and not so wide like the turtle. When it finally broke the surface, cresting completely in a big beautiful arch, Luke saw it at last—a large bottlenose dolphin with perfect lines, a dark dorsal fin, and grey, silk-like skin that flashed beneath the sunlight.

As gracefully as it left the water, it reentered it, hardly leaving a splash.

Luke's weary mind was awakened by the spectacle. Having suffered three days of sensory deprivation, he was exhilarated to see the power and grace and the speed the dolphin exhibited. He searched for the animal down in the water, trying to see where it had gone but could not find it anywhere. Then it came up right in front of him, stealthily, like it had been there all along. Its head bobbed completely out of the water. It seemed unafraid. It was so close to Luke that he thought he could reach out and touch it.

A fellow mammal, Luke thought, an air-breather like me. And suddenly, with that realization, Luke did not feel so all alone.

"Hello!" Luke said.

The dolphin looked back, jovial and jolly-eyed.

"It is Nai'a," Luke said or "the leaping fish" which referred to an ancient Hawaiian proverb, said of one who jumps to conclusions.

The dolphin flipped over and shot down into the deep blue. In a few seconds, it reemerged in another flying leap, not more than twenty feet away. Luke watched as it splashed back under. Then moving quickly just beneath the surface, it broke again, cresting higher in the air.

He's performing for me, Luke thought.

The dolphin returned and resumed a position just a few feet away.

"That was tremendous," Luke said. "Really fantastic!"

The dolphin's eyes gleamed. His head bobbed up and down in the water.

"I need to find land," Luke said suddenly. "An island or something. Some place where I can stand. Can you help me?"

The dolphin's eye remained steady on Luke, looking upon him as one looks upon an old friend. It was an intelligent eye, Luke thought, as intelligent as any human eye, with perhaps a greater sensory perception. And it seemed the dolphin understood his plight.

"I must find land soon or I will die. Can you help me?"

With a playful cackle, the dolphin broke and swam quickly away. Stopping thirty yards off, it lifted its head and looked back at Luke.

"Land is there?" Luke asked, yelling out across the water. "It is in that direction?"

The dolphin made a cackling noise and held its position, as if waiting for Luke to follow.

Luke looked up, squinting into the sun. The sun was high in the sky, and he could not tell which way was north or south, or east or west, especially at this latitude without a hemispheric tilt. There were no points of reference out on the horizon, so he could not gauge his position in that manner. But it seemed to Luke, it was the same direction—the same direction in which the turtle had gone. His instincts told him it was so.

"Okay!" Luke said.

The dolphin seemed to be egging him on. It made a shrilling noise and swam backwards quickly, propelling itself in the same direct line away from Luke. Then it dove beneath the surface, and when it broke in another tremendous arch further away, it seemed to be following the same directional path.

He is leading me!

Luke paddled hard and fast, trying to keep up. The board glided swiftly over the swells, but as he continued, mustering what strength he had left, he could feel his muscles weakening. His arms began to ache, and felt like dead weights. Ahead the dolphin was waiting.

When he pulled up within ten feet of the dolphin, the dolphin repeated the process, making a shrilling noise, swimming backwards quickly, diving beneath the surface and breaking in a tremendous arch further away, following the same imaginary line.

And Luke followed.

More than eighty yards through the water, Luke pushed on, finally reaching a point where he was close to the dolphin again. Though he continued to paddle, he did so sporadically, with less vigor, coasting now and then, giving his weakened arms a chance to rest.

But now he was utterly exhausted. And he could feel it. Three days at sea had taken its toll. The lack of food and water, the lack of sleep, and a bad sunburn, weighed in on him. His body had run out of glycogen. Each time he paddled, the distance was shorter and the rest was longer. His arms had become dead things, dangling uselessly in the water. It was a matter of dehydration, and hopelessness. Eventually, he could go no more and he just lay there on the board, drifting in the water.

When night fell, Luke found himself surrounded by a big, arching Hawaiian sky, filled with stars that came all the way down to the horizon.

Though the dolphin remained nearby, there were times when the dolphin was not visually present. But always, Luke knew he was not far away.

We are one, Luke thought, brothers from the same earth, who breathe the same air.

Luke felt a primordial kinship with the dolphin; one that reached back to prehistoric ties. It is the ancestral oneness of the earth which binds all living things. From the oceans of the ancient world sprung the first life, and from the tide pools crawled the first mammals. All that which rose up from the yeast share a common beginning, Luke thought. And through the millenniums, though they had evolved differently, the bond remained. And there was no such bond as the one between man and dolphin, Luke thought. We are like animals, intelligent and fun-loving, but also susceptible to earthly dangers and the predatory nature of things.

In the morning, the water was calm. The ocean was flat as a lake; the sun, surreal in its rising; the earth, unusually quiet; and the sky, filled with morning colors, as one could only see in the Hawaiian Islands.

Luke looked around and did not see the dolphin at first. Then the bottlenose rose above the waterline.

“Good morning, Nai’a,” Luke said, though it hurt him to speak now. His throat was dry and coarse, and it was a bit of an effort just to lift his head. He stared at the dolphin, realizing he was as foreign being, as he was also familiar.

The dolphin made a playful, cackling sound. He was ready to get on with business. He immediately turned, dipped his long nose beneath the surface, swam swiftly away for twenty yards, and resurfaced.

Luke extended his arms into the water and tried to paddle, but realized he could hardly move. Beside him, the surface of the water moved in a sideways motion, and he understood now; he was merely petting the water without moving through it. The fatigue, dehydration, and electrolyte depletion he had experienced the previous day had continued its degenerative progression. Now his joints had all but frozen up.

He heard a noise and looked up and saw that the dolphin had returned close to him.

The dolphin made the cackling noise again.

“I cannot,” Luke said.

The dolphin motioned with its head, bobbing directionally, up and down.

“I cannot my friend. I thank you, for what you have done, I thank you for being here, I thank you for trying...” and babbling now, Luke’s voice slowly faded to silent.

Tired and exhausted, Luke closed his eyes. And he went out, for how long he did not know. When he awoke, the sun was high, and he felt himself moving, propelled forward by some unknown device. He could see small wakes trailing along the side of the bodyboard and realized he was being pushed. When he turned he saw the nose of the dolphin flat against the board, pushing it in a forward motion.

Luke tried to raise his head and look ahead. But he could barely move now, let alone lift his head. What he could see was only blue. Forever blue. It was his favorite color, and it pleased him to know that it would be the color he would see lastly.

Yes, he thought, he had lived all his life at peace with nature. He had created good karma with it, and if that good karma could not return now, then let him stay in the arms of nature, as a child would stay in the arms of its mother, and let the color blue be the one that engulfs him lastly.

More time passed—an hour, and then two, and then three. And in the fog of his mind, he heard the dolphin cackling, in the distant. He forced himself awake and looked up. Not far away was a storm cloud. And beneath it was a rainbow. And beneath the rainbow was a green strip raising above the blue.

The dolphin cackled more.

Luke rose higher, squinting with his eyes. What is it? He was not entirely convinced of it. His mind fought off the vision, believing it to be delusional. He laid his head back down against the board and felt himself moving again. The dolphin resumed its work. The wakes along the side of bodyboard took up again, trailing back from the small vessel. Luke laid there with his cheek pressed against the board, wondering what form of dream it was. Then he lifted his head and looked a second time, and he saw it again, and the green had grown longer and taller.

“You are my brother,” he spoke to the dolphin. “You are my brother from the tides.”

The dolphin cackled and continued to push like a tugboat pushing a disabled freightliner. The small bodyboard, with Luke on it, thrust slowly forward. The green object of land grew closer and larger, and the clouds above the land broke open in a distant rainfall. Luke could see the sheets of rain falling diagonally, and the sunlight crashing through the clouds, and the magnificent, massive rise of green mountains.

The rain came down, across the surf and onto the shoreline of the distant island, filling the tide pools there.

FOR THE SANCTITY OF LIFE

By Frank Scozzari

The boat heaved upward, its bow crashing against another large swell, and the icy water from it splashed over the railing dousing Benjamin’s bare hand and the side of his pant leg. He looked up at the pilothouse. Inside was the shadow of the skipper, Dan Smith, a bearded young man wearing a baseball cap.

“Can you see them yet?” Benjamin shouted out.

The young skipper shook his head.

From the elevation of the poop deck, Smith could see the ice field ahead, stretching horizontally in both directions as far as eyes could see, and he could see the opening in it, where the ice-breaker had entered. A deep, black rift etched its way landward through blocks of snow and ice, toward the islands of the Magdalen, a small archipelago in the Gulf of Saint Lawrence where men came to hunt young harp seals.

Benjamin glanced down at the rifle in his hand. He could feel the wood stock snugly against his palm and the cold steel of the trigger against his finger.

It was fate, he thought. His father had fought on the side of environmentalism, as did his grandfather before him – both men were committed

to the preservation of land and sea, and to the animals and creatures living there. His grandfather had worked for the *Reno Gazette-Journal* and wrote editorials in an effort to stop the eradication of the Nevada mustang. But in the 1950s, a man's work was more important than the conservation of a misfit animal, and his articles were eventually banned from publication, as was he. And his father, a mill worker for the Georgia-Pacific Corporation, took up the fight against the dumping of lethal by-products into the many streams and rivers of northern Oregon. He gathered signatures and petitioned national leaders and was eventually fired for it. And he spent many long years unemployed in an occupation that was, at the time, the only one for a middle-aged mill worker in the Pacific Northwest. Two generations of men before him had taken up the pen for the cause of environmentalism. It was why, Benjamin knew, he now stood on the deck of a ship with a gun in his hand.

As they approached the ice field, Smith eased back on the throttle and brought the engines to a complete idle. He waited for the swells to subside and then throttled ahead into the channel at a slow speed. The mouth of this man-made waterway was more than thirty meters across, evidence of how many times it had been used to access the permanent snowfields beyond. Either side of the channel was lined by four-foot walls of ice, out from which stretched large, diagonal cracks.

Benjamin kept his eyes keenly ahead as the ship inched its way upstream. As the channel narrowed, it became littered with chunks of floating ice, and he could hear them thunking off the bow. He glanced up at Smith frequently, checking for a sign, but Smith offered no signal yet. Beyond the channel, Smith could only see the sprawling white ice floes stretching out to the grey horizon.

Across the ice, perched at the top of his 55-foot, steel-hulled *crabber* was the old man Kalic, a burly fifty-something Canadian who had run a sealing company for twenty-five years now. From his high point, he watched his men perform their handiwork, that which they had performed in the same brutal, archaic manner for more than two decades straight.

The whiteness of the ice, which stretched out below him, was stained red now with blood. And the redness formed the image of a tangled web, where many blood-lines led to a central hub, a heap of dead or dying seals — their carcasses dumped there after their pelts had been taken. The young seals were shot or bludgeoned to death with *hakapiks*, or metal-hook-tipped clubs. Then they were dragged back to the ship, sometimes still conscious. It was a scene of butchery, only to be imagined in a dark dream or witnessed in a horror film.

But for Kalic and his boys, it was work, no different than a butcher in a meat shop or a lineman in a packing shed. It was the work of their fathers and fore-fathers before them. And the animals, though charming in appearance, were nothing but dollar signs, and mortgage payments, and food on the plates of their children.

"There!" he shouted, pointing a strong arm to a young seal scrambling away from the carnage. He looked down at a young man who was working the pelts with a knife below. "Cratton!" he shouted. "There! He is getting away!"

The young man grabbed his *hakapik*, dashed after the young seal, and gaffed it repeatedly in the head until it stopped moving. Then he hooked it with the spike at the end of the *hakapik* and dragged it back to the ship, leaving another blood line in the snow. The seal lay there on the ice floe with blood running from its nose. It was still conscious and gasped for air. Not far away, the Sealer sharpened his knife blade, and as he began slicing its fur from its torso, the young seal began thrashing violently, and he thumped it in the head again with the *hakapik* until it stopped.

In the distance over the rise of an ice berm, there were three other pups getting away. Kalic shouted to his men, directing them with the long point of his arm. One of the hunters scrambled up to the top of the berm with a rifle and cracked out three shots.

"That's some fine shooting there, Johnston!" Kalic shouted.

In between directing traffic, Kalic eyed the channel east. They had been pestered in recent weeks by a small group of rebel activists who coined themselves *The Abalone Alliance*, predominantly because they had come from the West, the Pacific coast, where they had rallied to protect the abalone from the intrusive discharge of a nuclear power plant.

He did not see the ship at first, but heard the familiar sound of a ship's diesel engine whispering across the ice floes. Then he saw the crown of its crow's nest moving above the ice toward them. He entered the wheelhouse, and when he emerged, he had a shotgun in one hand, and several rock-salt filled shells in the other. He had grown tired of these young activists, and of their harassing tactics. They had plastered the local towns with anti-sealing posters, callously displaying the carnage and portraying them as butchers. They had posted videos on YouTube, and painted the words '*Baby Killers*' in bright red on the side of his ship. And they had blocked the channel by dragging huge chunks of ice upstream and jamming them in the narrows, although Kalic's double-hulled *crabber* made quick work of it. More recently they resorted to more irritating measures, using a loud speaker to insult their families and threaten to ram their ship against the steel-hull *crabber*.

For Kalic, the activists were more of a nuisance than a threat. But their activities interrupted work, and some of his men were bothered by it, and by the escalation of it. Each time, it seemed, the activists were ratcheting up their methods, becoming more hostile and more desperate. And Kalic was determined to put an end to it.

He looked down at the rock-salt filled shells in his hand. He grunted out a deep-throated laugh as he loaded them into the shotgun. *This will teach them!*

It was their right, nevertheless, Kalic thought. It was the law of the land. It was Canadian law!

The annual seal hunt was a tradition that dated back several centuries. From before the time of Columbus, on through the advent of commercial shipping, young harp seals were taken for their fur, meat and oil. Since the industry's boom in the mid-fifties, new generations of Sealers lined up each year, ready to take the catch. For some in isolated communities, it was the only livelihood — the only means of financial survival. The hunt was even sanctioned by the Department of Fisheries and supported by the government, although Kalic would be first to admit they did not always comply with Canada's animal welfare standards. But if not for him, there would be others, he knew. It was tradition, and commercially successful, and no greenhorn young activists from California were going to change that.

Benjamin's mind was still on the rifle held in his hand as he looked forward into the narrowing channel.

"It is a menace," he recalled his father saying. "Only to be used by men without reason."

His father detested weapons of all types. They were the takers of life. That which was the greatest treasure of nature—*Life*—the most coveted of all things on earth was to be respected and preserved above all costs. And yet the very weapon that his father detested was in fact the instrument that could sustain the sanctity of life here in the ice fields of the Saint Lawrence Gulf, Benjamin thought.

Benjamin imagined the horror he had seen, coming upon the ice where the *Sealers* had done their work, the bloodied carcasses of hundreds of young harp seals; the pitiful cries of the pups; the repeated thuds of clubs raining down on soft skulls; the Sealers' laughter echoing across the ice floes. Perhaps a weapon was a menace of irrational men, but it was the only tangible thing the hunters could understand.

"You must speak their language," he said quietly, looking down at the rifle. If you are fighting irrational men of violence, then a menacing weapon is what one must use.

Nevertheless, Benjamin thought to himself, he did not intend to use the rifle to kill, only to fire warning shots over their heads. Of this, he was certain. The weapon he held in his hands would not be used to kill, but to squash the will in others to kill.

The ship's engines backed off. Benjamin looked up at Smith, who nodded his head and motioned with his hand to get down. Benjamin did so, promptly, taking a position behind the solid steel lip of the bow. As the ship rounded one last bend, Benjamin could see the 55-foot *crabber* ahead. Up on the master deck, coming around the rail to his side of the ship, was Kalic with an object in his hand. It appeared to be a *hakapik*.

As they drifted closer, Smith reversed the engines, ceasing their forward momentum. The propellers went quiet and the two ships were finally positioned, a mere thirty yards apart.

From the master deck of the crabber, Kalic shouted out, "Get the hell out of here! Go back home to California!" All the seal hunters, who were still busy working their pelts on the far side of the ship, stopped and turned their heads. "Go home!" Kalic's yelled again. His deep voice echoed across the ice floes.

Benjamin leveled his rifle, taking aim at a place in the sky just above one of the men's head.

"You suck off," he yelled back.

"Go away before I have to do something serious!"

You want something serious? Benjamin thought.

"We don't want any trouble," the man said. "We just want to get along with our work."

In his mind, Benjamin saw the dead seals again, strewn across the white ice, the bodies of helpless youth slain without mercy. And sighting down the barrel, there at a place in the open sky just above the ship, he pulled the trigger.

The bullet zinged harmlessly over the man's head.

Smith looked on nervously from the poop deck.

"Bastards," Kalic growled. Turning back, he looked in the direction where the bullet whizzed past. Then he took two deliberate steps forward, fully against the rail, brought the stock of the shotgun securely against his shoulder, and pulled the trigger.

The shotgun bucked and the salt pellets shattered the glass in the pilothouse just in front of the man they called Smith's face. Smith ducked down and to the side, behind the metal frame of the windshield.

Kalic grinned. Though he knew the rock salt would not cause serious injury, it would cause immense pain, and with this stinging message, he hoped to turn these young activists away.

He quickly aimed and pulled the trigger again. The second shot sent salt pellets scattering around the pilothouse, some of which hit Smith in his leg, tearing into his skin.

Smith dropped to the floor with a yelp, grasping his leg.

From below, Benjamin heard all the action.

"You okay?" he yelled out. But there was no answer, only groaning, and when he looked up at the pilothouse, he could not see Smith, only the shattered glass of the pilot's windshield.

Benjamin immediately lifted his rifle back over the bow's bridge and took aim again, a more sincere aim this time with the barrel pointing directly at Kalic's large frame. At the same time, Kalic swung his shotgun around toward the bow of their ship to where Benjamin had fired the original shot. Benjamin pulled the trigger first. Though the shot narrowly missed, it caused Kalic to readjust, and Benjamin pulled the trigger again. This time, the large, burly Kalic crumbled to the deck, grasping his chest in his hand.

Kalic's shotgun discharged skyward. He fell backward and dropped harmlessly to the deck. Two hunters close to the ship leaped aboard and scrambled up the iron ladder. They found Kalic flat on his back halfway out the doorway of the wheelhouse. There was blood on his chest and his eyes were lifeless.

"You've killed him, you bastards!" one of the hunters yelled out.

The other picked up the shotgun and emptied the three remaining shells in the direction of their ship.

Benjamin lay flat in the bow, cuddled against the cold steel. He heard the three shotgun blasts ricocheting on the upper deck. Then another rifle rang out, a different sound, and a ping of a bullet careened off the metal near him.

"You Bastards! You killed him!"

Another shot rang out and another bullet dug deep into the metal hull of their ship. Then there were multiple shots, from both land and sea, pummeling the ship from all angles.

Up in the pilothouse, Smith pulled himself to his feet, limped over to the wheel, and dropped the gear-shift into reverse. Keeping his head low, he throttled it down. As the boat picked up momentum, jettisoning in reverse, the stern slamming against the ice-walls of the channel. He could not swing the boat around without risking a further barrage of bullets. Nor did he have the advantage of sight. Using the bottom of the wheel, with head down, he had to steer it, the best that he could, trying to find open water.

At twenty yards, and forty yards, and sixty, the bullets whizzed past. At last, at a distance of one hundred yards where the channel widened sufficiently, Smith swung the bow around. He pointed the ship straight out the channel and throttled it all the way down. A few more shots rang out from the Sealers, but eventually they were out of range and out of sight.

Benjamin remained flat on the foredeck, prone with the rifle beneath him. It was still clinched in his hands. He could feel himself breathing hard and shaking. The adrenaline rush from the whole thing was still peaking through his veins.

“Wow! That was something!” he heard Smith yell down from the bridge.

Benjamin turned and looked up at Smith. Behind the broken glass of the pilothouse, beneath the ball-cap, he could see his face smiling.

“I think you killed that old bastard,” Smith shouted.

Benjamin stood up, still holding the rifle in his hand. He looked down at it and realized his hand was trembling.

“Are you okay?” Smith asked.

“Yes,” Benjamin replied, not sure of it.

“I think he was shooting salt rock,” Smith said, looking down at the blood on his leg. “Did you hear what I said? I think you killed that old goat.”

Benjamin stared up at the pilothouse without answering. In all his life, he could not imagine himself killing someone. It was sacrilegious, contrary to the teachings of his father and grandfather. It was a betrayal of one’s beliefs; an outcome not part of the plan. He looked down at the rifle – the menacing instrument used by men without reason. The barrel and chamber casing was still warm from its discharge, and although his grasp had unconsciously loosened, it felt awkwardly comfortable in his hand. A chill passed over his body.

What have you done? he thought. *How could you have fired that shot?*

“Yeah, I really think you got him,” Smith shouted down gleefully from the pilothouse. “I think you got him in the chest!”

Benjamin looked up, his restless brain quiet for a moment. It was a betrayal, all right – a betrayal of all that his father stood for.

As the ship made its way out the main channel into the open waters of the Gulf, Benjamin remained on the foredeck, feeling the rhythmic thumps of the swells against the bow. They thumped loudly, as did his heart. *I have killed a man*, he thought. He looked out across the Gulf to the southwest. The dim northern lights faded. He bowed his head and watched the dark water rushing toward the bow. *It was fate*, he thought, *the fate of his fathers*.

ROCKS

By Stacy Stepanovich

Stacy Stepanovich is an activist and a writer who lives in Florida. She has a MFA in Creative Writing from Goddard College and a BA in English from the University of Pittsburgh. Her fiction has appeared recently in *The Molotov Cocktail*, *Coffee House Press* and *Long Story Short*.

At the Opportunity Complex on the edge of the city, the prisoners bury their dead just outside the outer wall under mounds of rocks. There is a large, densely wooded area in the back where the earth is always too dry or frozen to dig a single grave. The mounds on the far side of the lot are difficult to build because the ground slopes dramatically towards the flats where the row houses sit empty.

The rocks come from the riverbed near the mill. They are palm-sized and smooth. Most are plain and grey like the Northeastern sky, but some are the color of rust and have flecks of gold in them that glitter in the light from the security tower.

Each body is marked with a handmade tombstone: crosses fashioned from smuggled scrap metal, melted plastic and any other items salvaged from the Complex or mill. The monuments never lasts long. Guards are fond of destroying them and occasionally a scrap is stolen from a grave with the hopes of fashioning a tool used for escape or suicide. Either method brings freedom. Then, the only monuments that are left are the mound of rocks and the smell of death.

The men carry the rocks in long slings, across the railroad tracks, over the iron footbridge and up the stairs to the Complex. They carry the rocks in the same slings that are used to carry the dead. The rocks are brought out first. Four men carry the twisted length of burlap. Several trips must be made in order to completely cover the body. This is important, if the birds are to be kept at bay. When the proper amount is gathered to ensure a secure burial, the body is retrieved from the morgue. The dead always feel lighter than the sling filled with stones. Few words are spoken.

Then the men return to their barracks, carrying with them a secret envy of the dead.



Open Mic Night

Tampa's family friendly open mic
With Special Guest Host: R.J. Kerker
Price: Free!

When: Saturday, August 30, 2014

Time: 8:00 PM - 11:00 PM

Where: The Bunker (f.k.a. Tre Amici)

1907 N 19th St. | Tampa, FL 33605 | P (813) 247-6964

Contact: Alice Saunders | asaunders@torridliterature.com

www.torridliterature.com

Join TL Publishing Group and the Tampa community as we celebrate poetry and the arts with our open mic event. Our open mic events are always family friendly and provide an open platform that welcomes all types of artists. In the past, numerous singers, musicians, bands, comedians, poets, spoken word artists, and storytellers have blessed our stage, leaving the microphone in flames.

At our upcoming event, we have R.J. Kerker as our special host for the evening. R.J. is a member of the American Song Box band and a long time supporter of the arts community in Tampa, Florida. He also co-hosted open mic night at Café Kili for several years before retiring to focus on other musical projects. Visit his band page to learn more:

<http://facebook.com/american-song-box>

<http://reverbNation.com/amersongbox>

Visit us during open mic night to learn more about the performers for the evening. There is no charge to attend this event. All performers, emerging and experienced artists, are encouraged to come out and participate.

Please visit our website and like our fan page on Facebook to receive important updates regarding this upcoming event:

<http://www.facebook.com/tlopenmic>

http://www.torridliterature.com/Open_Mic.html

If you are interested in being a featured poet at one of our events, please contact Tiffani Barner at tbarner@torridliterature.com.

AD SPACE AVAILABLE

Advertising space is available
within the Torrid Literature Journal.

Visit our website today for rates and deadlines.

Placing your advertisement in the Torrid Literature Journal will ensure your advertisement gets the attention it deserves within our growing community of writers and artists. Regardless of what you need to advertise, you want your advertisement to work for you. You want readers to be drawn to the information offered. You want your advertisement to propel your audience into action. The right advertisement in the right publication will make your audience come to you, look around, and listen to what you're saying.

When you purchase ad space from TL Publishing Group, you are not only supporting your business but you are also supporting the Torrid Literature Journal and our mission to promote the culture of literature and art. That is why we award all Advertisers with a free copy of the publication their ad appears in. Advertisers also receive a free one-year online subscription to our publication.

Our ad space is limited and it is available on a first come/pay, first served basis. To ensure you have the full advantage of our services, please note our publication deadlines listed herein. If you wish to have your ad appear in a specific volume(s), please contact us at ads@torridliterature.com.

2014-2015 Ad Deadlines:

September 1, 2014: October Issue – Vol. XII

December 1, 2015: January Issue – Vol. XIII

March 1, 2015: April Issue – Vol. XIV

June 1, 2015: July Issue – Vol. XV

September 1, 2015: October Issue - XVI

Current Ad Rates for Businesses and Individuals (freelance artists, authors, writers, editors, graphic designers, etc.):

Full Page: \$170.00

Half Page: \$55.00

Quarter Page: \$25.00

Please visit our site for ad size specifications. If you have any questions, please send an email to ads@torridliterature.com.

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

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

All submissions may be uploaded by visiting:

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

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

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



Dear Reader,

There are greeting cards for every type of occasion. These cards are often small but the messages in them are profound. In fact, they are so profound they move the reader. They move the reader into feelings of happiness, joy, gratitude, and comfort, just to name a few. This is the power of art. Simple words can sink deep into the heart of a person and provide them with what they need. All it takes is one line, one verse, one poem, one story.

Art is the instrument that when played correctly it creates an aesthetic melody that forces people to stop and listen. Art will cause people to view a situation differently just as easy as it can cause people to stop and think before they act in regards to a certain issue. Literature is not about words grouped together in a crafty manner. Literature is about what has been said, what hasn't been said, and what needs to be said. Furthermore, there are no limits when it comes to expression. There are countless ways to let someone know how you feel. There are countless ways to explain an idea, thought, or dream. The poems and stories in this volume are evidence of this.

With this said, we encourage writers to write often, read habitually, and submit often. There is a publication for every type of voice and style. There is a reader for every writer and a writer for every reader and in between this there is a publisher waiting to connect the two. Find your voice, your passion and own it.

We look forward to our next journey together in Volume XII where we continue to bring you literary material created by phenomenal artists from around the world. In addition, this special issue will announce the official winners of our literary contest. This issue also marks the start of our Hall of Fame voting. Until that time, we hope you will subscribe to our eNewsletter and keep up with these and other literary happenings that are underway.

- Editorial Staff



TL Publishing Group kicks off the second half of their year with the release of the Torrid Literature Journal – Volume XI The Butterfly Effect. This volume highlights the timeless power of art as voices from around the world come together in this single issue. The literature inside of Volume XI is as relevant today as it will be in the future. If you're curious as to how writers can capture and memorialize a moment of time then this issue is a must read. Artists have the ability to hold people's emotions and their psyche captive to their imagination and will as they create works of art that seem impossible until it's been done.

One of the significant features worth mentioning is the new interview with A.J. Huffman, owner of Kind of a Hurricane Press. As someone who has experience as both a writer and an editor, Huffman has some great words of wisdom to impart upon anyone looking to step into the literary field.

True to its nature, TL Publishing Group doesn't fall short of its goal to provide readers with literary content that will leave them inspired and motivated. Their poetry and fiction section, which makes up the bulk of the issue, is filled with over 30 poems and short stories that cover a multitude of topics from love and loss to dreams, identity, and faith.

Overall, these writers will astonish readers with their phenomenal and unique writing style. It's not just what they say but how they say what needs to be said. Whether they're making a repeat appearance or it's their first time gracing the pages, readers will quickly become attached the literary content that can only be found within the pages of the Torrid Literature Journal.

What's more, TL Publishing Group always announces their latest literary project and/or event. You don't want to miss out on the exciting events and publications they have in store for the literary community.

Contributors: Brandon Berman; Changming Yuan ; Jedidaiah Joy Herrera; Gwendlyn Martin; Marcelo Muianga; Richard O'Brien; Kay Gosack; Levi Archer; Joanna Kurowska; Mariel Arriola; James Sutton; Kayla Pumphrey; Tanya Dickinson; Michelle Bayha; Gerald Bergeron; Rebecca Stapley; Rachael Stanford; Erren Geraud Kelly; Thomas Piekarski; Alexandra Cannon; Michael Wakefield; Psycho Kanev; Brittany Gilbert; Amy S. Pacini; Anne Marie Bise; Lauren McCall; Jules A. Riley; Barbara Brockway; G.L. Snodgrass; Frank Scozzari; Stacy Stepanovich

Storm Cycle 2013: The Best of Kind of a Hurricane Press

Storm Cycle 2013: The Best of Kind of a Hurricane Press is a compilation of the editors' favorite pieces from the six 2013 online journals as well as our seven 2013 print anthologies.

Download the book for free at their website or purchase the paperback for only \$18.50 at Amazon.

www.kindofahurricane.com

<http://amzn.com/1497508576>

