

TORRID LITERATURE JOURNAL

REDISCOVERING

THE

PASSION

“Writing is a self-awareness form of art that leaves a writer exposed and far removed from society’s current reality. As writers we thrust our readers and critics into the reality of our experiences that have shaped and formed us.”

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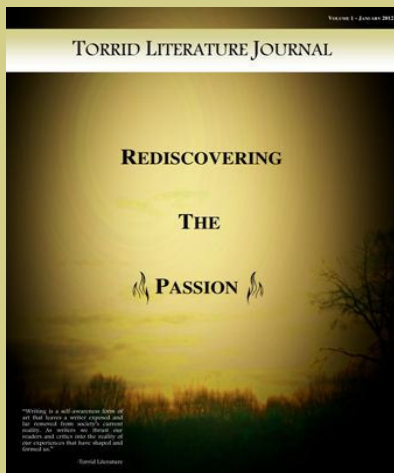
EDITOR

asaunders@torridliterature.com

AISHA MCFADDEN

EDITOR

amcfadden@torridliterature.com



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FROM THE EDITORS

Welcome to the inaugural issue of the **Torrid Literature Journal Volume I**. Torrid Literature wants to thank everyone who tirelessly contributed to making sure our first release was a powerful and memorable one. For those who aren't aware, a great deal of 'behind-the-scenes' research, effort, time, and sacrifice goes into the creation of a literary publication, whether it's an electronic or print version. It's far from being an overnight process. From the planning, compiling, accumulation, editing, and overseeing, each piece was put together as an artist would put paint on a canvas; many individual colors but one overall picture: an exponentially strong lyrical voice intent on seeking out the ears and eyes of those willing to listen. Sshhh, someone has a story to tell.

With only a vision in mind, we went out on faith and the blessings came in. We humbly placed our call for submissions and the responses received was overwhelming, but not in the sense of panic, but in the sense of the epiphany settling in. Voices wanted to be heard. Dreams needed explaining. Inspiration was looking for its conduit and finally found its instrument. Submissions were received from all over the country from emerging and established writers, each one looking for a chance to claim a spot on the literary canvas.

Torrid Literature started out as a small Facebook group page, which soon proved too constricting for the intensifying talent housed there. In an effort to expand our vision, a website was created, and now a journal is established.

Torrid Literature especially wants to thank the many family and friends who dynamically put up with us through endless revisions, drafts, reservations, and inquiries. We are forever grateful and blessed to be able to call you family and friends.

Whether you love to write poetry and fiction or just read it, this journal is established for the lover of words. This journal is for the person seeking the laugh and entertainment they haven't had in weeks. This journal is for the person who is still waiting to have a literary piece steal their breath and not release it till its time. This journal is for the person seeking relief and healing. This journal is for the person seeking writings on shared experiences, the knowledge that someone else in this world seems to be writing a story or poem based exclusively on them.

So again, we say thank you for all of your contributions and grand words of encouragement. Thank you for helping us to leave our literary mark on the canvas of world literature.

Torrid Literature Editorial Staff

Alice Saunders
Aisha McFadden

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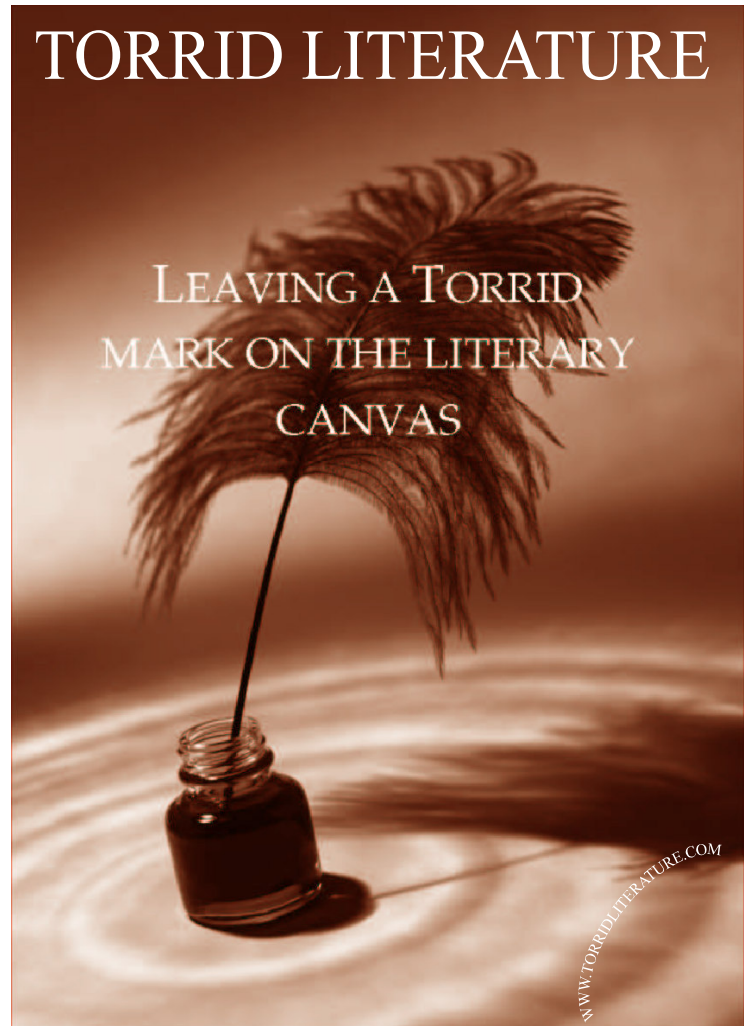
REDISCOVERING WHY WE EVEN STARTED

It happens. Sometimes we get so caught up in normal life we forget what made us fall in love with writing in general. We need to stay reminded of the memory, that moment in time where the epiphany hit, where we realized that not writing was the same as not breathing. Whether we write professionally to publish, locally just to share, or personally, just to keep, the rush is still the same. The rush comes like a heat wave at any time and takes no mercy on what we're doing at that current point. It's the reason why we write wherever we can, in class, on a napkin in a restaurant, on our Smartphone's or PDA's. We have to get it out less we implode.

The beginning session is a building climax, as we get to our personal space and let the waves over take us as we finally put pen to paper and fingers to keyboard to put down the first strokes of a literary piece. Then the peak tackles us, not the other way around, shaking us up and leaving us breathless midstride as we realize we're far from over. What seems as the end is only the beginning.

We've accumulated and assembled and must sashay down the mountain we've built enjoying the aftershocks that still rock our literary core as we ensure our end is as good as our beginning.

Even when our muse decides its time to rouse us again, we stay connected, never far removed from each piece we create. Association wears pleasantly over our literary features as we never tire of repeating this cycle, knowing we get stronger and stronger each time this literary mating occurs.



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REEVALUATING THE FLOW

As writers, we should be very conscious of our writing as it should always be progressing. At all stages of our craft, we should have some form of awareness that lets us know that an impact is ongoing, whether internally or publically. The more we do it, the more our skills expand. This is due largely in part to the fact that constant practice breeds beneficial results. That said, an evaluation of our work, throughout a period, should reveal development. As long as we are alive, we should be constantly evolving for the better. Our perception and outlook often changes because of the experiences that affect our surrounding environment. Thus, writing is a medium that conveys and confirms that sequence.

A reassessment of our literary work throughout the years should one way or another show growth and maturity, whether by the way an idea, emotion, or statement is conveyed or by the simple fact that through writing, revelation has been obtained more strongly than before. This reevaluation goes beyond the mere search for grammatical and structural improvement. Poetry, as with other arts, is a medium and outlet for the transfer of ideals, thoughts, dreams, and experiences. Whichever the purpose we're writing for, we need to make sure our intent matches with our effect. Writing has power because of what is and isn't being said. People, as readers, only pick up a book for several reasons: escape, affirmation, entertainment, and/or reprieve. As poets, we are on the other end of that spectrum, with the same needs but satisfying them differently. We seek to reveal ourselves and share our dreams and experiences with others. From a writing standpoint, living and existing are two separate concepts. As writers, we're missing out on the former if we're not writing. Our writing is the connection that lets us truly breathe.

Let's not forget one of the most noteworthy reasons we're driven to write in the first place: healing. It's an outlet, that allows us (as well as readers) to truly exhale on an emotional and mental level. This is especially the case when certain circumstances cause us to feel like we're forced to take in every negative effect and action without having anywhere to release it. Think on it. Should we allow the negative effects of our circumstances to swell up and take root within in us or do we pick up our pens (and keyboards) that work like an extended vein, and let it all bleed out? Do we turn to our writing, throwing everything into it, or do we hold it all in, afraid of what would come out? Do we allow walls to develop - stop points of panic or hesitation that make us erase, cross out, or press the Backspace key multiple times for fear of what critic's might say?

Experience and time are sibling concepts that go hand in hand, that together can breed beneficial boldness.

Every so often, we should ask ourselves a few questions: Why did you start writing in the first place? Do you feel you've grown as a writer/poet, exploring new places of development within yourself? Is your writing content curved to pamper the fancies of a particular audience type? Is your writing cautious or bold and daring, taking on the taboo and unspoken art of what's not being said? Has your writing gotten deeper and complex, questionable in nature or omniscient in a particular area or field?

I hope after reading this, you've discovered something interesting about yourself. With any luck, you've found any hidden areas that need to be polished and cultivated. We all have them. Everyone is on an individual racecourse in their life. As long as we are alive, our race is never finished. That being said, we should be constantly growing, learning, and maturing. Our literary past is like a snapshot portrait of the beginning foundation we laid. A foundation that helps raises us to achieve a stronger access point in the future whereby, greater emphasis and impact is received. Look at where you've been and where you've yet to go. We've only just begun to scratch the surface of rediscovering why we started writing in the first place. So pull up a seat and journey with us as we rediscover the passion.

Interested in article writing?

Torrid Literature is currently seeking experienced and professional writers interested in writing articles on literary topics including: publishing, agents, editing, form and technique, and much more. Submitted articles that are chosen will appear in the [Torrid Literature Journal](#).

Writers interested should visit www.torridliterature.com for more details and extensive guidelines.

Editorial Staff

THE MOMENT WE FORGOT TO BREATHE

How quickly we forget the essential elements that make us a writer. It's no surprise that many of us are losing our way. It's not the praiseworthy service we get from a piece deemed exceptional or groundbreaking by critics or readers. It's the writing itself. It starts with our love of it and how we cultivate and coddle our gift, ensuring that time doesn't inflate our gifts but that it takes root. We need to understand that we are not the protégé of the elite. We are the archetype, the prototype to be modeled after. We are setting the stage for others to follow. How are we doing so far?

If our passion for writing truly is the same as our necessity for breathing, then many of us are dead inside. Respiration fails to take place because slack sustains us instead. How often are we writing truly, and at a regular pace? Are we building a consistency to be profited at a later point in time? How many times have we abandoned our pen and let dust collect on our keyboard because life's circumstances dictated our actions? When we knew, still know, that deep inside that's when our muse was stimulating us the most. How many times have let this happen because of critic's opinions or rejections of our piece?

We write not for approval but for a cure for what ails us. We write to inspire and to ease one another's suffering. We write to cause, question, and discuss change. We write to evoke emotions that would otherwise remain dormant. We write to boldly declare through our art things that aren't being said and things worthy of a repeat, reprove, and rebuke.

The concept is half of a whole. Flip us over. How many of us are letting our literary muscles relax? How much longer can we ignore the forced stanzas and verses that we somehow ripped out? Poetry flows automatically. That's the only way it goes. That said, are we blurring the lines between natural and strained? Is there ever a need to?

Lyrical devolution takes place when we merely subsist, not seeking knowledge in how to hone our craft. Do we just sit and let our craft wilt like a flower devoid of nutrients for growth and water for saturation? How often do we take the time out to become skilled and trained? How many of us have floated down because we've yet to hit the realization that there is no roof when it comes to the knowledge of literature? As advent writers we should always be dreaming, seeking, learning, growing, and sharing.

As writers our end paths are unknown, yet the majority of us have a jagged walk to begin with, thus throwing us off the predestined course. We sidestep our route when our reasons for writing become something less. Passion for the craft itself takes a backseat as pride and fame lead the way. Who's controlling who?

As true artists in the field of literature, we should only be concerned with two main points: baring ourselves for all to see and ensuring that we leave our literary mark and claim in the process. Outside the general function of entertainment and relief, both are purposed to evoking historical, political, emotional, societal, spiritual, and mental movements. We can't however, get to the stage where we exhale and see the fruits of our labor if there was no point of conception, the initial inhale and pause. The moments where we

joyfully suffer burning the midnight oil per say. From the late hours to the early morning, we'd do it all over again if it meant we'd achieve the same rush, the point of contact where everything felt right in the world because we're floating on the euphoric high of being in our element.

So when was the last time we remembered to truly breathe?

"I forgot to inhale so it's no wonder the exhale
never came
I let the rush die out
Dry up
No foresight of ecstasy remains
The energetic elements that let me know a claim
was coming
Except who was claiming who
She ran through my mind
Her footsteps leaving imprints
Only like my mind was the sand
Inefficiency was the water that washed her steps
away

Remiss in realizing that passive understanding
took pieces of her away
It wasn't till she was completely gone that I tried
to bid her stay
No muscles exist to ascertain this inhale
Like faded paintings or jilted lovers
No longer do we function in the intended value
stream
I'm just a feign
To weak to confess that my lack of progress was
because my love turned lust
Lust not of her but of the followers who came
with
I should have kept her like a preservative
Strengthening her in the saccharine grace of my
passion
Maybe then she would have saw fit to bless me
with an exhale"

© Alice Saunders

"Oh, sweet poetry
Come talk to me..."

Ode to Poetry

"... Blood vessels hidden
behind a neglected goatee
explode like balloons and
snap like..."

Redblurred

"...scraping with her hands
untouched love into the trash
with tears falling..."

Swallow It Down

"...It's too cold to look
out at the flakes of
January's had life
confetti down the..."

Crimson

"...at this time of the year, the
spring, she's blind, but in
summer, fall and winter she
sees..."

Simple

"I coughed at the whiff of
blood and age thickening between
the vertebrae in a python's embrace."

Retrieving a Fork

ODE TO LITERATURE

LITTLE STORIES By Psycho Kanev

They say that if you want to understand the others you have to get out of your skin and try to fit in their shoes. But how can I do that? This fearsome timelessness doesn't allow me to be somebody else. Look at your belly-button, stick your finger in it and remember your parents. What was before will never be again. During the autumn of your hearts ask yourself how it all began and how it will end. Not with a bang but a whimper, say the old poets, but don't believe them. History always finds its own way into the slits of time. Be yourself, not someone else. Read the ancient Greek philosophers and after that just forget them. In this odious technocratic time, we have no other choice, but to love each other. Don't hate your fellow man and the lines you are reading now. Other eras will come. Our little time will be over soon and others no one will give us. Those who achieved immortality, today they sit on the shelves in the libraries- dusty and half-forgotten. And if I can fit in your shoes, first I will see how much money I got: and if I can afford it, I will buy this book, or I'll spend my last dollars on ice-cream or flowers. Nobody will be angry with me.

Psycho Kanev currently lives in Chicago. Kanev has been writing poetry for the past 10 years. His poems have appeared in more than 400 literature magazines, including *Poetry Quarterly*, *Chiron Review*, and *Burnt Bridge*. He is the author of several poetry and fiction collections including, "Walking Through Walls" and "American Notebooks".

"...TV looms overhead, but watching it
taxes you..."

A Self-Portrait Rather Than A Self

"I am
Already devouring my
Next moment
For
Experience should never grow tired from
repetition..."

On The Intellectual Highbrow

"...she draws all
flame's attention to
herself."

Whoosh

"...on the weekend ... a
guy is reading my heart
and spilling it
poetically..."

Nodes of Fantasy

"... Yet how I long to be...
solid... liquid... and
gaseous... like a true grain of
sand..."

Me & Sand

"This was the day I would
propose. I guess I'll chalk
it up to fate..."

My Day of Bliss

"...emotions become
liquid spread like ink in
the dust of the skies..."

Symmetry

"Rejected so quickly, I understand that you
May not have liked them,
But you gave me no time
To recede from the glow I got..."

A Stillborn Contribution



POETRY

PURE RAW INTELLECTUAL TALENT

+

LITERATURE

=

SMOLDERING EFFECTS

POWERFUL AND PROFOUND ART FROM EMERGING AND ESTABLISHED ARTISTS

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Ernest Williamson III has published poetry and visual art in over 300 national and international online and print journals. He is a self-taught pianist, singer, and painter. Williamson is also a three-time nominee for the Best of the Net. Visit his gallery at www.yessy.com/budicegenius.

NODES OF TRUE FANTASY

I DON'T LIKE YOU
NOR IS THE SUN A GOD WITH AN OPINION
UNLESS WE DENUDE OPINIONS AND DEEM
THEM
TRUTH
WELL,
WHAT I MEAN TO SAY
IS THAT I LIKE YOU
NOT LIKE ME
BUT I DO
SEEM TO FANCY YOU
NOT IN MY IMAGINATION
I MEAN...
I
REMEMBER
WATCHING YOU WRITE
IN YOUR PURPLE DIARY
ON THE STEPS OF YOUR BROWNSTONE
LAST SATURDAY NIGHT
YOU WERE LAPPING IMPATIENT
RAIN
DROPS
AND YOUR EYES WERE LIGHT
PURPLE
HAZEL
MIXED WITH
CONCERN...
... CONCERN FOR
WHAT
YOUR THOUGHTS
WERE
TELLING YOU
THINGS
LIKE
WHY AM I SITTING
OUTSIDE
IN THE RAIN
LAUGHING
MESSING UP MY HAIR
AGAIN
ON THE WEEKEND
KNOWING THAT A GUY
IS READING MY HEART
AND SPILLING IT POETICALLY
PITIFULLY
RIGHT
NOW

REDBLUERED

By Peter LaBerge

Red.

The anger in his face. Blood vessels hidden behind a neglected goatee explode like balloons and snap like brittle golf clubs. We inch our way to the door, but we know we're trapped on the oriental rug, restrained to the polyester fibers like nautical butterflies are plumed into water. Goner.

Blue.

Illustrations of lost pulses. The navy fibers stitched into our strands of hair. The door slams and we recognize the man must've left. But we don't dare look up to see. We lie on the floor. We're supposedly dead—"waiting to rot," he commanded from the hallway before the door slam— but I think Death must've rejected us.

Red.

Rivers of blood like spider silk. Pools of it create sticky porridge-like stains on the rug, which will be a nightmare for Mother when she comes home and finds us lying here.

Blue.

Pale shades of sky. Our elbows will be pale shades of sky and our

Red.

bloodshot eyes flecked with ocean water.

Peter LaBerge is a sixteen year old Connecticut high school student. As an aspiring writer and photographer, his work has recently appeared in several places, including *Leaf Garden* and *Burnt Bridge*.

CRIMSON

By Peter LaBerge

Lines of crimson (or are they finger-strokes of strawberry blood ambling through snowy fields) perfume the television.

&

It's too cold to look out at the flakes of January shed like confetti down the windowpanes to my left—how they smile at static snowflakes buzzing like frost-flecked bees fit as puzzle pieces into shades of grey.

&

The crimson multiplies, reaching its rosy claws further and further downcast towards the warm embrace of Zero, drab like a neglected hangnail at the very bottom of the televised graph, accompanied with a sigh from the Mad Money team until they disappear, dragging a disconnected power cord and the chipped crimson surface of sense with them.

Changming Yuan, author of *Chansons of a Chinaman* (2009) and *Politics and Poetics* (2009), grew up in a remote Chinese village. Yuan currently works in Vancouver. His poetry has appeared in over 300 literary publications worldwide, including *Barrow Street*, *Best Canadian Poetry*, and *London Magazine*.

ME & SAND

By Changming Yuan

On the beach of life
I am a grain of sand
Too light to build a castle
On my tiny senses
Too heavy to fly high
With the west wind
Too stubborn to flow afar
Along the currents

Yet how I long to be
Solid in body
Liquid in heart
And gaseous in spirit
Like a true grain of sand

John Grey has been published in the *Talking River*, *South Carolina Review*, and *Karamu* with work upcoming in the *Prism International* and *Evansville Review*.

WHOOSH

By John Grey

A brief impulsive waving - and already
a salute no longer just for me,
my crumbling gaze. The heat has found its nerve,
can't stamp it out, can't water it.
Audaciously, she draws all flame's attention to herself.
And then, as if my own fire's not enough,
all of a sudden earth is all ablaze,
as if the glance that sears the mountaintops
can't stop with love, with spellbound strangers.
As if her body's nothing but a sulfur match.

Hal O'Leary is an eighty-five year old veteran of WWII. As a Secular Humanist, and having spent his life in the theatre he believes that it is only through the arts, poetry in particular, that we are afforded an occasional glimpse into the otherwise incomprehensible. Hal has been inducted into the Wheeling Hall of Fame and is the recent recipient of an Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree from West Liberty University.

MY DAY OF BLISS

By Hal O'Leary

It seems I've lost my day of bliss,
Because of all this bloody rain.
There'll be no picnic with my miss,
It's in this house I must remain.

Because of all this bloody rain,
I'm here for now and to be sure,
It's in this house I must remain.
There's naught to do but let it pour.

I'm here for now and to be sure,
The picnic and my plans must wait.
There's naught to do but let it pour.
I guess I'll chalk it up to fate.

This picnic and my miss must wait.
This was the day I would propose.
I guess I'll chalk it up to fate,
But, sad to say, that's how it goes.

This was the day I would propose.
There'll be no picnic with my miss,
But, sad to say, that's how it goes.
It seems I've lost my day of Bliss.

Valentina Cano is a student of classical singing who spends her free time reading and/or writing. Her work has appeared in *Exercise Bowler*, *Blinking Cursor*, *Theory Train*, *Magnolia's Press*, *Precious Metals* and will appear in the upcoming editions of *A Handful of Dust*, *The Scarlet Sound*, *The Adroit Journal*, *Perceptions Literary Magazine*, and many others.

Retrieving a Fork

By Valentina Cano

Your spine twisted like a tree's moldy bark
as you bent under the table.
The skin crackled around it,
laughing, rusted.
I coughed at the whiff of
blood and age thickening between
the vertebrae in a python's embrace.
Each knot clicked in place
like late train tracks,
letting you move a bit
as you'd like, but keeping a
thick leash on your intentions.
You turned to me with a creak,
a cock of the head and
a half-gaping beak,
waiting for my eyes to warm your insides,
melt the congealing mess
that grooves between your spine
like taffy.

The Practice

By Valentina Cano

She gathered her fingers like flowers,
closed her hand in a drooping fist
and waited for the sun to rise.
For the egg yolk to crack
and spill all around her in sulfurous waves.
She tensed her tired muscles into one arch,
toes like pillars of calloused marble.
Each holding up a world.
She lifted one foot in a slight angle,
painful, tight,
like a bracelet or small sock,
the tension building until
it was fall or be thrown.
So.
She fell, the columns cracking,
toppling, crumbling,
until she was spread fully in the sun.
A stain in white.

Gary Beck has spent most of his life as a theater director and has worked in various other industries. His original plays and translations of *Moliere*, *Aristophanes*, and *Sophocles* have been produced Off Broadway and have toured colleges and outdoor performance venues. His fiction and poetry have appeared in hundreds of other literary magazines including *Cervena Barva Press*, *Calliope Nerve Media*, and *Silkworms Ink*. He currently lives in New York City.

NOTHING ABOLISHES CHANCE

By Gary Beck

The poor pray
for a better life
for their inadvertent
children of poverty.
The middle class hopes
for a better life
for their children
of unearned comforts.
The rich expect
a better life
for their children
of indulgence.
Some are more sheltered
from assaults of fate,
but all become kin
when fatally surprised
by sudden disaster.

Gale Acuff has taught university English in the US, China, and the Palestinian West Bank. His work has appeared in literary journals such as *Ascent*, *Florida Review*, *South Dakota Review*, and several other journals. He is also the author of three poetry books all published by BrickHouse: *Buffalo Nickel*, *The Weight of the World*, and *The Story of My Lives*.

LOVESICK

By Gale Acuff

I'm missing Sunday School today and Miss Hooker, our teacher. I'm in love with her
but I'm only 10 to her, say, 30,
so I'm too young and she's too old so why
is there a God at all? *You've got the flu*,
Mother says. I'd just fastened my clip-on
bow tie and was starting to comb my hair
(with Brylcreem--*a little dab'll do ya*
--that I borrowed from Father. Well, took. Well,
stole, but he'll never miss a little and
he always lets me use his Mum in my
armpits) when I threw up in the sink but
I managed to swing most of my vomit
(Alpha Bits and Tang) into the toilet.
Mother heard me and said *No church for you*
today, kid, and here I lie in my bed
and try not to puke again because it's
a long way down to our only bathroom
from the attic--fourteen steps but it feels
like a lot more when I'm sick. Miss Hooker
will miss me, I hope, but it's not
like school--I'm not missing any homework
but I was looking forward to David
and Goliath, and wondering if she'd
tell the tale, and I mean the whole thing, with
the best part of all, when David cuts off
Goliath's head and holds it high. I've seen
a photo of that. Well, not a photo
--people didn't have cameras back then
--but a picture; but the artist was good,
just as if he'd been right there and said to
David, *That's it, David, raise it real high,*
don't move 'til I tell you, and finally
he's got it. I'd like to be an artist
but I can't even draw a crooked line.
I stare at my ceiling like a panel
in a comic book, just waiting for life
or the next best thing, to fill it up. I
see Miss Hooker there, sitting in her chair.
She's awfully pretty, brown hair and green eyes
and something like freckles. And lipstick but
not too much. And her dress is just-right short,
no knee but you know she's got one. Or two,
I should say. And she shaves her legs. And she's
thin but not like a girl but a woman.
Father likes her, too. *She's a peach*, he says.
No, Mother says, *more like a tart*. That's like
a kind of éclair or cinnamon bun
but I don't get it though I'm sure she's sweet.

If this flu ever lets me sleep I'll dream
we're married--I mean Miss Hooker and I
--and walk home from church together and read
the Sunday comics together and eat
together and watch baseball and cartoons
together and we'll even have babies
together--I'm not sure how but she'll know
where to get them. I'll have a good job so
we'll have 12--that's a pretty good number.
Just thinking about it makes me want to
vomit again. Mother says that's okay,
to get the demons out of my system
so that must be what love is--being sick
and healing up, then getting sick again.
It's either that, she says, or I'm pregnant.

SIMPLE

By Gale Acuff

At Sunday School we sit in a circle
around Miss Hooker, or it's a semi-
so that, I suppose, she can see us all
and that no one of us deserves favor.
I love her so I try to sit in front,
which means at the highest point of the curve.
She's good at looking at everybody
but at least I get my share and maybe
it helps that the window is behind me
and it's natural to stare out of one
so sometimes she gazes over my head
into the east. When we're almost done with
God and Jesus and the Holy Ghost for
the morning, I feel the light on the back
of my neck. Or the heat, I should say. Then
it must be too bright for her because she
looks away. Even if she looks me in
the eyes, I see her squint. And then it's time
to go. But the sun doesn't always shine
in the same place everyday--days go by,
weeks and months, and it moves, or the earth moves,
or they both move (I'm not good at science),
so at this time of the year, the spring, she's
blind, but in summer, fall, and winter, she
sees. If it wasn't science it would be
a miracle. And every year's the same.
But next year I'll have a new Sunday School
teacher--I've lasted three with Miss Hooker

--and my new classroom will be down the hall,
for fourth and fifth graders. They have Miss Gooch,
who's old enough to be my grandmother.
Her classroom has a window facing west.

Still, I'll drop by to say hello to her
--Miss Hooker, I mean--and to say I miss her
even though I don't know if I will but
it's a good bet. And someday I might stop
coming to Sunday School, and even church,

for good. Father doesn't--he's home right now
reading the Sunday paper, every page
of every section. God is that way, too,
eyeing everything and missing nothing,
and if you ask for something from Him He'll
give you an answer--yes, no, or maybe
--but in His own time. Last month I asked for
ten cents more on my allowance each week.

*Well, let me think, Father said, and get back
to you.* He hasn't yet. But I have faith

that if the answer's no the sun will still
come up tomorrow, though it might shine
on someone else. That sounds pretty simple
but maybe someone has to believe it.

I will, and that will be like sacrifice,
and if that doesn't buy me Heaven then

I don't want to go and they can't make me.

GOOD BOY

By Gale Acuff

My dog follows me into Sunday School
class. *Two dumb animals*, my best friend says.
Everyone laughs. My dog looks embarrassed,
his tongue sticking out and his tail wagging.

Can he stay, I ask Miss Hooker. Can he?

Yes, she says, *if he can behave himself.* He
will, I promise. Sit, Caesar, I say. Sit.

He does. Good boy, I say. Lie down now. He
does. Good boy, I say. He lowers his head
onto his paws, then sighs. He raises it
as we say the Lord's Prayer. At the end
we all say *Amen* and he woofs. We laugh
but I tell him to knock it off. He does.

We move on to David and Goliath.

David killed Goliath with a slingshot
or something like. That bully fell and shook
the earth. *Dust everywhere, boy and girls*,
Miss Hooker says. *And when it settled, there*

lay Goliath, flat on his proud fat face.

I had a slingshot but Father took it
when I broke my bedroom window--I missed
the trashcan, and *crash.* *What happened up there*,
he hollers from the living room. He's been
watching football. Nothing, I lie. *Nothing*,
Hell, he yells, and stomps up to my attic
bedroom. I can't close the curtains in time
and he sees my window broken and shouts
Great John God, boy, this ain't no shootin' range.

No sir, I say, and give him my weapon
--I forgot to slip it behind my back.

He sticks it in his hip pocket. *Nut case*,
he growls--*you don't get no 'lowance next week
and you getting a spankin' right now.* He

sits on my bed and I lean across his thighs
and he swats me three times. Then I get up
and he looks me in the eyes and says *Don't
never do that no more.* He goes downstairs.

He's big as Goliath to me then but
he's got my slingshot, too. I want to grab it
from his pocket as he walks out my door
and I almost do but I'm too afraid
to load up again and shoot and besides

I might miss again, or really kill him,
then have to cut off his head with my knife
and hold it like a trophy up to God.

So I stand there stifling sobs. Then Caesar
trots in the room. Go 'way, you damned dog,

I say, and fall on the bed and cry. He
jumps up and sniffs and licks my face..
He laps at tears and dries them off, sort of.
He gives me slobber in place of them all.
If a dog was God this is how he'd heal.

After Sunday School I stay late to tell
Miss Hooker my story. *Oh*, she says. *Oh*
again. Caesar sniffs her. *He smells my cat*,
she says. He hates cats, I say. No offense,
I add. *None taken*, she says. She's smiling.
What a good boy, she says. I try, I say.

FEAST OF CONSUMPTION

By Leila A. Fortier

Bring me not
Words left lifeless on wire
Hangers~ Immobile in their empty
Closets~ Starched and stiff~ Cinched in
Asphyxiation~ Their messages leave no
Stain...No iron burn~ Sterile within
Their plastic covering~ Zipped
Immobile~ Deprived
Of spontaneity-
The very
Breath
Of
Life
-Here-
Expressions
Lay cold on the plate~
Lifeless on the tongue~ A steel
Knife scraping over dry toast verse~
Parched of wine for spirit~ Water for
Thirst~ A banquet left to waste by the
Weary~ Too afraid to touch...Too
Afraid to taste~ Lead me to
The empty page...
Still fresh
With
~Possibility~
Dream-state chasing
Forgotten words~ Swimming in the ink
Of immortality~ Abandon the pressed pages of stagnant
Formality~ Be broken by transgression and reborn within testimony~
For etched is the voice upon the weathered and stained~ Where magic
passages await

~The feast of their consumption~

In 2007, Fortier initiated the anthology *A World of Love: Voices for Carmen* as a benefit against domestic violence and in 2010, composed a photo book entitled *Pappankalan, India: Through the Eyes of Children* to benefit the education of impoverished Indian children. She is also the author of *Metanoia's Revelation* through *iUniverse*.

Leila A. Fortier is a writer, artist, poet, and photographer currently residing on the remote island of Okinawa, Japan. Many of her works have been translated into French, Italian, Spanish, Arabic, German, and Japanese in a movement to raise global unity and understanding through the cultural diversity of poetry and literature. Her work has been published in a vast array of literary magazines, journals, and reviews both in print and online. Visit www.leilafortier.com for her complete publishing history.

ON THE INTELLECTUAL Highbrow

By Leila A. Fortier

I
Do not
Pack my words
In suitcases of the places
I've been...Of last night's dinner-
Or yesterdays breakfast~ There is no
Poignant pondering at the closed door
No accounting to be found of my life's
Scars wrapped in the cellophane of
Perplexing intellect~ I already
Know where I have been
And gone~
Those stories hold
No more discovery or secret...Even in my
Own omissions~ I am unsatisfied without my alchemy...
Without reckless transformation~ Something amorphous beyond
Recognizable state~ The high of perpetual wonder~ And while the
World contemplates its naval and the sad irony of its self inflicted
Circumstance: I have already been there and gone~ I have
Already whispered and left~ I have already kissed
Your closed eyes and vanished~ I am
Already devouring my
Next moment
For

~Experience should never grow tired from repetition~

SYMMETRY

By Leila A. Fortier

S
I
L
E
N
T
Is
The
Chorus of
Bounty born
Within the covenant
Of sound~ Where dual breath
Dances in simultaneous symmetry
Where emotions become liquid spread like
Ink in the dust of the skies... And stars are merely
Particles of our humanness shattering~ Everything that
Is holy... Everything that is divine... Is singing
So sweetly... Nearly imperceptible... Yet
Place your ear ever close to my
Now ecstatic heart and
Hear me waking
As if from
Deep
S
L
E
E
P

William D. Hicks is a writer based out of Chicago, Illinois. His poetry has appeared in numerous literary journals including *Outburst Magazine*, *The Legendary*, *Horizon Magazine*, *Breadcrumb Sins*, *Inwood Indiana Literary Magazine*, *The Four Cornered Universe*, and many more. Hick's photo, "Daybreak Radiating Sun" is featured on the cover of Volume I of the *Torrid Literature Journal*.

WE ARE HUMAN

By William D. Hicks

we avoid the coffee and cream rituals of life
that flavor our past and scent our present
we pray our ideals remain unwrinkled in the future
and that we succeed at changing the world with little change to ourselves

William Doreski's work has appeared in various electronic and print journals and in several collections, most recently *Pygmy Forest Press*.

Ben Nardolilli currently resides in Montclair, New Jersey. His work has appeared in various publications including the *Houston Literary Review*, *Red Fez*, *Elimae*, and many more.

A SELF-PORTRAIT RATHER THAN A SELF

By William Doreski

Visiting hours until eight.
The flesh-pink corridors gloom
where unused rooms cast shadows
through their propped-open doorways.
Nurses clump at the station.
Their eyes flick over me and fade.
One old man tramping in to visit
one old woman gathers no light,

fails to catch their attention.
If I stayed all the night the nurse
who hourly checks your IV bag
wouldn't notice me. Frail and flat
on the bed, you're an etching,
a self-portrait rather than a self.
A cup of vanilla ice cream,
a drinking glass with a straw,

and a photo of Myra the cat
adorn your swiveling table,
everything psychically out of reach.
The flattish window-rectangle
exposes two feet of snow
layered on the adjoining el.
In the dark it suggests a shrug
of pale cosmic shoulders. TV

looms overhead, but watching it
taxes you, the slinky, cheerful
young woman advertising this
or that too bubbly to be human.
The bed on which you've etched yourself
boasts a powerful motor to raise
and lower immense bales of meat.
In its tiny electronic mind

you barely exist. I'll return
tomorrow, and if your image
has regained a few dimensions
maybe I can drive you home where
with the help of synthetic drugs
you'll persist long enough to cast
a shadow dense as those ghosting
from the unused patient rooms.

A STILLBORN CONTRIBUTION

By Ben Nardolilli

Rejected so quickly, I understand that you
May not have liked them,
But you gave me no time
To recede from the glow I got,
After I sent them out,
When I thought to myself how good they were,
Lines wonderful enough
To let another pair of eyes roll over.

But perhaps there were no other eyes,
Oh the submission
Was too efficient, done through a manager
That I could not see or grasp,
Through a nice machine online,
Maybe the editor was a machine too,
The response was so nicely cut
From a cloth I know others would see.

It was all too soon,
They are now orphaned, already
I have so many to find a home,
And now they come back from the west
To look for some journal
That might give them shelter
And what answer can I give them?
I'm too stunned to make excuses.

WE SEEK CONFIRMATION
By Ben Nardolilli

There is no harmony, a touch,
And sometimes an order followed,
But we amuse only one another
With these caged educations.

This specie's fundamental nature
Is to be alone, to pace the globe
For caves and emerge to build fences
In hopes of attracting neighbors.

Still, if we remain lonely and no
Neighbor settles down beside us,
We can escape our heights and natures'
Brightness in sleep, imitating the night.

Shane McConnell is an adjunct lecturer in Development Reading at Borough of Manhattan Community College.

THE BROKEY POKEY

By Shane McConnell

you put your savings in
you get nothing out
you put your paychecks in
and he makes it all work out
you do the brokey pokey
and he tears your fortune down
nobody had any doubts

it's a ponzi scheme. you get nothing back
it's a sureshot money maker. bernie's got the knack
he can give you ten percent every year with no mistakes
too bad the investment was fake
it was a mistletoe and it was made of cash
but bernie spun around and said "kiss my ass"
he was the way to go if you liked to make a buck
but the last ones in go bankrupt
you've grown to hate this man. we all understand
we feel bad for you and we're glad he's in the can
i've not been on top. at least you got to be
you'll have to play the lotto like me
he took some millionaires. he took some billionaires
he took a hot iron, stuck it up their derrieres
more and more the world is central bankers and peasants
on top of that we're facing a depression
you were the haves. now you're the have nots
wealthy people now are on a suicide watch
everybody wants to live above the fray and rich
it's hard to turn down a good pitch

you put your savings in
you get nothing out
you put your paychecks in
and he makes it all work out
you do the brokey pokey
and he tears your fortune down
nobody had any doubts

GIRL, YOU'RE SO LITERATE

By Shane McConnell

girl, you're so literate
girl, you're so literate
girl, you're so literate
... you're so literate
you know brave new world and 1984
you make good conversation and leave me wanting more
no cosmopolitan or mademoiselle
you don't let them prey on your concept of self
you took creative writing. your verse is exciting
your shelves are inviting and have fake ivy climbing
being literate is more than background information
it's ongoing active contextualization
the author of your pillow talk, I cuddle and care
baby, i'm your uptown sinclair
when I feel stressed you suggest herman hesse
or the games of kamala for a searching siddhartha
you get my opinion but we often disagree
and you call my attention to the side I don't see
you stake a position in romanticism
and existentialism and social anarchism
you lived in the belljar. you lurked in the rye
you think bartleby the scrivener's a pretty great guy
you make me want to be a better man like gatsby
you had me at boo radley

Cara Frame is a registered nurse, who loves to read and write in her spare time. Her poem the "Beat Goes On" has been published in the 2009 Issue of All Things Girl called "Journeys".

ODE TO POETRY

By Cara Frame

Oh, sweet poetry
You have not visited for a while
Your rhythms have not danced before my eyes
Your chants have not been heard
Perhaps it is my ethnocentrism
That makes you superior to all other genres
Or maybe it is the colors you paint
And the stories you tell
All like songs
Played by an orchestra
Oh, sweet poetry
Come talk to me
Sit for a short time
And paint me a picture of the world

Tracy Darling is a proud graduate of the University of Virginia. Her writing has appeared in several literary journals including *The Tower Journal*, *Global Graffiti Magazine*, *Red River Review*, and many more. Her poem, "Offering Up the Main Course," was chosen as the First Place Winner in *Rapid River Art Magazine's* 14th Annual Poetry Contest 2011.

SWALLOW IT DOWN

By Tracy Darling

He held her head in his stare
forcing her to swallow
down the back of her throat
choked by anger and defeat
in front of her children watching
over dinner plates with big eyes
scared like hers pleading for help
and strength to stop these forced feedings
by his mind tripping him
down
into the cellar, all darkness
no light to illuminate
jarred love shelved below
his needs reaching out into the smell of damp
earth, rusty tools not touched
in years, sweet juices waiting
for the turn of his wrist, fingers
breaking seals releasing
memories of early love letters
candles burning words melting
onto tongues not speaking in the
kitchen, scraping with her hands
untouched love into the trash
with tears falling
down
into dish water warming her resolve
to vomit the hurt, to take the jars
in her hands and throw against
built-up walls smashing glass
shards and love seeping
down
her hungry cheeks

UNTITLED, 1985**

By Tracy Darling

They took away her bench
and all the photographs she likes
are titled Untitled
what's left
is her blank stare
head detached, placed beside
her body bent over
pressed and molded
chiseled unnatural in natural stone
and maybe the separation is self-inflicted
her hands on hammer, on chisel, her arms
do not exist in the reality of the photo
of her life cold and permanent
unmoving, unflinching, unchanging
she does not recoil at his touch
as he wishes

** After "Untitled, 1985" by Jerry Uelsmann,
The San Diego Museum of Photographic Arts, San Diego,
California

DIGLOSSIA*

By Susan V. Meyers

There are so many ways of saying a word
it's a wonder we understand anything.

I could say *Mother*, and you would hear
tides pressing in. A glass boat, the rough edges of reef.

Darkness, I could say, or *Guilt*,
and the rain would find you: brass knobs

insistent on rooftops; some hurricane
from another life. *Shelter*, but you know already

these mad, expectant wolves.
Warning, I whisper.

Warning, Mother. But you're listening
to your own slow, hungry heart.

Susan V. Meyers has lived and taught in Chile, Costa Rica, and Mexico. She earned an MFA from the University of Minnesota and a PHD from the University of Arizona. Meyers currently teaches at Oregon State University. Her work has appeared in *CALYX*, *Dogwood*, *Terra Incognita*, and *The Minnesota Review*. Meyer's work has also received several awards, the most recent being the Fulbright Fellowship.

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THE BLUE PARROT

By Ron Koppelberge

She was dressed in her sheer camisole and her bedroom slippers. A parrot in ceramic glory hung on the faded pink wall of the bedroom. Simple and replete with the notion of winged freedom, winged in glory and azure tincture; an amber eyed thrill.

She stared at the round ceramic dish adorned with the blue parrot, “Polly wanna cracker?” she said out loud.

The bars on the window were closely stitched but they would allow for the bird in an easy breath. The windows were open and a warm gust of air blew between the steel bars. A blue parrot, a companion in hell. The locks remained steadfast and heavy on the bedroom door allowing for nothing and in chained, bolted distinctions of prison.

The blue parrot, she saw it clearly, cawing, cawing her name in provident foreshadowing faith, in fortune and wildfire freedom. She took the file she had secreted away from behind the blue parrot and began sawing a tiny groove in the steel bar. She smiled thinking of winged freedoms, open skies and the desires of a sweet deliverance from the confinement of her Husband’s design.

She would be free, she would be free.

Ron Koppelberge has written 100 books of poetry over the past several years and 17 novels. He has published 447 poems, 252 short stories and 82 pieces of art in over 122 periodicals, books and anthologies. His work has been accepted in England, Australia, Canada, Thailand and India. He is also member of The American Poet’s Society as well as The Isles Poetry Association.

You

By Catherine Kizer

I see you there, tantalizing and truculent. When I am using, our conversation is strained, no ebb and flow. Circling around me like a shark in love, the drugs take bites of me, ripping my flesh with hungering ferocity. Leaving less of me to live with, less of me to give to you.

And I want you so much, I might kill for you. I am killing myself. The void of love lost, rests upon the top of my head, seeping into my mind. I can think of nothing but you.

Anticipation. This is the best part. Knowing when I might get high, is better than the high itself, as once I know it’s going through I can do anything, be anything and do it all with a big smile. Oh, how deceiving this smile is. I wear it all the way to the pharmacy, where I obtain said drugs, and use them immediately, to quell the racing thoughts, to quiet my mind.

Things suddenly seem simpler. I am blown by a wind, loosey goosey, I sway around, bending from my waist, things fly by. I have no interest in anything, only the currency of the high and what I will spend it on. I plan events where I will do something, because it would be much more fun if I’m high.

You are sober; I am having trouble, but I’d do it for you, anything for you. If I do glimpse the other side, the side of abstinence, I see it and I don’t know what it is. I know I’ve been sober before, a long time ago. I don’t remember how it looks, feels, to be simply what others are.

You are very beautiful. I am ugly on the inside, I don’t let you in. Witnessing the tempest in me might drive you away – can’t have that. You will fill the caverns of my empty soul. Fill me up, please; I need you, to make me one within myself, because right now, I am two, one part woman, the other part addict. I don’t know how to reconcile, how I can be more woman, and less addict. If the woman absorbs the addict, the addict loses power, retreating to the very back of my mind, under lock and key.

Your lingering hand on my shoulder as you walk by. The way you look at me. I will have you, this much I know. Quiet, quiet. Must be stealth so as not to draw attention, must hide the thoughts, the actions of someone who is wasted. The wastedness blends with the mania, and I am very far-gone. Beyond my own reach – my legs don’t work, my hands rattle, my speech is slightly slurred. As long as I don’t stand up, speak, try to pick up my coffee, I’ll be okay.

I wanted you so badly, I did not see the future, one in which I see the real you. I must always be doing something, you do not. I must cook and clean, you do not. The “you do not’s” add up, and you do nothing very well. Now we are together. I did not know this when I wanted to obtain you. I fear that nothing will ever change; it will be like this forever,

Catherine Kizer has been published in *All Things Girl* and the *Carlow Literature Journal*.

that you will never stand up and claim your own life. Worry, worry. I don't know if I can stay like this, your inaction, your lack of being, your lack of there.

I love you; you're so good to me. Sex is like touching a supernova. You do things to me, bringing forth deepness between us. We load up with pieces of each other, until I am you and you are I. We move with slow desperation, needing each other to become whole.

You are angry when you expose me. The little pink pills, on the floor, in my car — I get sloppy, leaving evidence wherever I've just been. Working very hard, once again, I must hide whom I am, how I'm feeling. When I get caught, I go down, curling up under the rug, embarrassed, shameful, lower than dirt, I hang my head under your accusing eyes.

And I know those eyes, hurt and disappointment on your face. Lately, when you catch me, your face says it's okay. The next time, it won't be okay, you will say you're sick of this, you don't want to live this way. *What way?* I ask. You didn't know I was doing it until just now. So what's the difference between when I'm doing this and when I'm not? You cannot tell I'm taking the pills, only when I'm trapped. I don't understand, but your paranoia is obvious.

Take me away. Remove me from past, present, tomorrow. All I feel is regret, racing, and fear. I seem not to exist in consciousness at all, but rather in impulses and snap decisions. How can I manipulate the here and now? I don't see things for what they are, but rather, how I want them to be. I live in the land of the really reallys — I am really really sad, really really happy, really really manic, really really anxious, but never really really calm.

Your love for me runs deep, as does mine for you. But there are fleets of monkeys in our living room. They fly and jump around, obscuring our experience of each other, and, with all that screaming, we talk, but we don't really hear each other. It all stings deaf ears. I tell you I need more from you in this relationship. You tell me to stay sober; neither of us hearing the other, thus, making no effort to change. What will it take? Which one will lose their mind first?

COLLECTIONS

By Chris Castle

Mia had watched him for a long time that summer. She had wandered into the fields, running her hand along the tops of the barley. One balmy afternoon she had found the house, the day after, the man who owned it.

She had watched him every day, carrying the unmarked containers into the house. From time to time he peered into the crates, as if whispering into them; other times he gave them little more than a casual glance, almost bored. Mia watched it all unravel, the man almost hypnotic to her in the way he went about his business. There was nothing, she realized at the tender age of fourteen, as delicious as watching an adult carry around a secret.

Chris Castle currently works in Greece. His work has been published in several publications.

Mia found herself searching for the man in her sleep; the contents of the crates shifted from night to night, sometimes sweet dreams, other times the stuff of nightmares. She woke each morning with her fingers outstretched, still sifting through the straw of the stash; it didn't even worry her that the nightmares shuddered her awake with a broad grin on her face.

It was the day before the storm. Mia settled into her spot, as familiar and welcoming as the patch her brother chose for fishing, when the hand fell onto her shoulder, making her scream. She shucked away from the man, squirming underneath the deadweight of his large, flat palm, until she was pressed up against the old elm tree.

"You've been watching me," the man said and the voice was light. It matched up with the willowy fingers and the nails that grew too long on the tips. "Why have you been watching me?"

"I..." Mia began to say, fighting the dryness in her throat. She knew she had to speak and speak now. *Silence was not good enough for him*, a place in her mind screamed. "I want to know what's in those crates. You could call it curiosity." Mia kept her eyes on him, wondering where those last few words, the truth, had come from. His face shifted and a thin, slice of lemon-rind smile flickered over his lips.

"I appreciate your honesty, girl," he said and nodded. "Well, let me show you then," he went on and sprayed one hand out in front of him. Mia smiled weakly back at the awkward invitation and pushed herself off the tree. He stepped into the clearing and she followed him, aware her chance to run was fading away, until, soon enough, it was gone.

This was not how it was meant to be, she thought as she stepped over the short grass to the house; in all the scenarios she had imagined, the *quietness* of it all was not what she had expected. The man's voice, his gestures, the odd grace as he stooped down to collect the crate in front of them, all of it felt like she had stolen into somebody else's dream, or worse yet, somebody had tampered with one of her own. He looked round once as he reached the door and then walked inside. Mia, her body screaming, followed him in.

The house itself was clean and brisk; there was a faint smell of lemons and nothing else. The building itself was almost impossibly cool for a summer shack. He climbed the stairs without so much as another word. Mia watched as he set the crate down on the floor; there were two doors, both jammed shut. He faced her.

“These are where I keep my collections,” he said quietly. Even though he had carried the box, there was no sweat on his brow. *How is that possible?* She wondered, feeling her own hair matt slightly at her neck. “You choose,” he added, almost casually.

Mia was suddenly aware that the man had said ‘collections.’ For some reason, she understood it was important to make that distinction. She looked at each door, both utterly normal and unblemished. To her sudden, fierce horror, she noticed that beads of sweat had started to form on his brow.

“Left,” she said quietly and resisted the urge to point, knowing her fingers were trembling. The man nodded agreeably, as if that had been the intended choice all along. He knelt down and picked up the crate.

“This delivery is for the left,” he said and carefully turned the knob.

The room was full of butterflies.

Everywhere Mia looked, they danced in the air, clinging to the walls, unmoving on the ceiling. One settled on her wrist. Quietly, he opened the crate and two more slipped out.

“They’re beautiful,” she managed to say, oddly aware that she didn’t want to open her mouth too widely in-case one chased down her throat. The sudden image made her gag and the idea of it, being...stuffed full of twitching wings, made her shiver.

“Just one of my collections,” he said and pushed the empty crate out past her with his foot. Suddenly the room seemed to fill with them, their wings brushing and fluttering, taking up too much space. Mia backed out of the room, her hand covering her mouth. He followed her out slowly, closing the door with a tight snap.

“Just one,” he repeated and lightly tapped on the door to the right and grinned.

Please don’t tap back, she thought with a sudden, pure terror. For a second, neither of them moved; the droplets of sweat on his forehead had swollen. In a flash, he drew out his hand, repeating the same awkward courtesy. Mia nodded and edged onto the stairs, waiting for his palm, or even a thick droplet of sweat to fall on her at any moment.

Mia stepped out onto the grass. She raised a hand and he nodded, before slipping back inside, drawing the door to with a sharp snap. Mia turned and ran, the tears falling in clumsy waves. She didn’t look back though in her throat, wings fluttered and in her ear something tapped back against the other door.

An Entirely Ridiculous Idea

By Chris Heinrich

Eight differently colored paper pads were strewn across the table. The different colors were intended to organize Lee and Mitchell's thoughts, but that plan was becoming increasingly irrelevant. They had yet to even throw away a bad idea. Neither were there any marks on the whiteboard. None of the markers had been uncapped.

That, at least, would be something Lee thought. *Then we’d have something to show for our hours here.* He gouged his forehead with the tips of his fingers.

“This is pathetic,” he said. “We’re professionals. It’s not that hard to write a new TV show.”

Mitchell, sitting across from Lee and so deep in concentration that he had not moved in the slightest for the past twenty minutes, broke from his meditation.

“Because there are no more original ideas. It’s the end of history. The only thing left is to appropriate the past and hope no one remembers the original.”

“So, what? Maybe a radio drama? Some vaudeville?” Lee sneered.

“I’m thinking a reality show.”

Reality shows had been done to the death long ago, but Lee had lost all will to fight, much less disagree. He should have been home long ago. Should have had a proper meal instead of the heat-lamp take-out the producers had ordered before locking the door.

“Do you remember *The Wild Side*?” Mitchell asked.

“Sure.”

“No show in history ever had such an incredible reversal of fortune. After the third episode of its first season, it dominated its time slot on prime time, and every demographic watched, but the network dropped it before the fourth episode of the second season. No one else dared pick it up then.”

Chris Heinrich is a graduate of Gonzaga University. After spending the past year in Kenya and Indonesia working at orphanages and education centers, he now lives in Bozeman, Montana, with his wife.

“So you want to repeat a failure? Genius,” Lee said. “Besides, people would have to be total morons to not realize we were ripping it off. Its premise was unique, and too many people remember it. Unless you want to invert it and send some primitives into a modern city. Actually, that’s pretty good.”

Lee grabbed a pencil and the sky blue pad, but Mitchell pulled the paper away.

“Forget it. *The Wild Side’s* success relied on the viewers relating to those people sent to live with the Okuro and imagining themselves in the same position. Sending some bushmen into the city wouldn't work. People couldn't empathize.”

“Give me back the pad. It may be stupid, but it's more than you've got.”

Mitchell ignored him. “The reason the second season failed? The public had been fooled right along with the contestants. The show offered every primitive tribal stereotype possible, and the audience believed it right alongside the contestants. That probably made it worse actually. We expect reality show contestants to be the dregs of humanity, shallow and ignorant, but the viewers were fooled into believing that this tribe really ate rotten, maggotty cow hearts to scare death and danced on ant hills with honey-coated feet to prove their courage. That's a good lesson for you. Don't ever prove how stupid people are to their faces.”

“And sometimes people can't help but prove their idiocy by never shutting up,” Lee said.

“What you probably missed was *The Wild Side’s* second great success. The producers and writers and everyone who was in on the set-up from the beginning made a documentary of the whole thing. *A Second Look at The Wild Side*. They recorded interviews with the contestants who left early, talked to viewers and saved every major article published before the season finale and big reveal that the Okuro were only actors. The creators wanted absolute, undeniable proof that everyone believed the tribe was real. Sales have been astronomical.”

“I haven't heard of it.”

“Not surprising. Most of the sales have been overseas to people who never saw *The Wild Side* during the original run.”

Mitchell was speaking slower now, savoring every word like a fine *hors d'oeuvre*.

“And therein lies my idea. People may not want to be proven fools, but they love nothing more than knowing someone else is.”

Lee stared.

“I don't know. I feel pretty confident now that someone's a moron, but that's not making me happy or getting me out of here any sooner.”

Mitchell leaned forward. “We create something so ludicrous, something so bizarre, that no viewer could doubt it's fake. Then we convince someone it's real. That's our show. We create a controlled environment, like a small town or apartment building, and everyone in it is obsessed with this one ridiculous idea, and I mean obsessed in every way possible. They love it so much they're obsessed. They hate it so much they're obsessed. The problem is that it's essential. You can't live without it, and you can't avoid it. It's like eating or breathing.”

Lee leaned toward Mitchell.

“People could hate each other because of it,” Lee said. “They could argue about how it's right, when it's wrong, how often it's healthy. Some could reject it entirely, and others could never have enough of it.”

“Some could believe there's nothing holier, and others could treat it as a giant joke,” Mitchell said.

“Whole industries could be built around it.”

“Branches of the social sciences.”

“Advertising series.”

“Critical theories.”

“Sub-cultures.”

“Now imagine this, a town entirely obsessed with this ludicrous idea and some poor person moves in and is just trying to figure it out and fit in.”

Lee licked his lips. “I'm liking this.”

“The idea needs a name.”

“It should sound exotic and exciting, a little dangerous.”

“How about sex?” Mitchell said.

Lee gave it some thought.

“Sex.” He let it roll off his tongue.

“Sex.” He bit it short.

“Sex.” He drew it long. He breathed it deep. He pitched it high and pitched it low. He nodded.

“That works.”

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