

TORRID LITERATURE JOURNAL

2nd Annual Romancing the Craft of Poetry & Fiction Contest Winners Announced!



Special Interview:

Jacob Erin-Cilberto

Featured Poets:

Philip Jackey

Leighton Meyers

And Many More!

Must Read Fiction:

"The Model"

By Anthony Ward

Revolution

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Torrid Literature Journal

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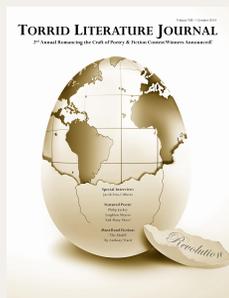
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FROM THE EDITORS

2013 In Review

After reading hundreds of poems and short stories over the past nine months, I must confess that I have a newfound love and appreciation for the written word and art in general. I love artists. I have said it before and I will say it again. I don't think I will ever get tired of the way an artist can steal my breath. I am still amazed to this day the way painters, sketch artists, sculptors, photographers, graphic artists, and the like can take a mental image and use their talent and skill to create a work of art that perfectly captures what they saw with their third eye. I mean singers and musicians can play sweet melodies that tell us about stories, memories, and experiences in such a powerful and engrossing way that they pull us into their world, their heart and mindset so we feel what they feel and experience what they want us to experience. Moreover, let us not forget the writers, the masters of the spoken and written word. They hold the key. Whether the poems and stories are complex in form and style or simple and straightforward, writers have the unfathomable ability to expose the beauty in every situation, every confession, every fear, and every rant.

Furthermore, with seven issues already released, we are excited to close out the 2013 year with the release of the *Torrid Literature Journal – Volume VIII Revolution*. Writers can put a moment of time on the universal platform that is art. This is why we love what we do. Art, the display and presentation of it is like watching television. Different channels and programs exist for all levels of interests and tastes. Diversity is beautiful and with this concept in mind, we work towards ensuring that our literary journal has something for every interest. Just as multiple colors make up one image this is how we structure our journal. With that said, as you go through this issue, we guarantee that you will fall in love with the power of the written word. With poems such as *The Diplomat's Last Dance*, *The Season's Portraits*, *Inside Out*, and many others, you will discover that within the pages of our last issue of 2013 exists the voices of writers who unveil material that covers a variety of topics that will engage your attention from the first to the last line.

In addition to the poems and stories that fill up the majority of this issue, our eighth installment includes several special features, one in particular being an insightful interview with Jacob Erin-Cilberto where you, our readers, will get an in-depth view into the heart and mind of a phenomenal poet. If you have read any of his poems that have appeared in our journal or if you have read one of his books then you understand why we had to interview him. Inside this interview, he discusses his early literary work, his career and upcoming titles, and he reveals the source of his motivation and inspiration. Erin-Cilberto's interview makes for the third one of this year. Be on the lookout next year as we continue to bring you additional interviews through our journal and blog.

Another exciting highlight of this issue is the announcement of the 2nd Annual Romancing the Craft of Poetry & Fiction contest winners. Much to my amazement, we received over twice the number of submissions then when we initially launched the contest in 2012. Therefore, we humbly want to thank everyone who submitted work towards this contest. Literature is such a powerful and universal art form and contests provide us with the humbling opportunity to give recognition to emerging and established writers where it's due.

There is always something exciting going on the world of literature. Therefore, we can't let you go without reminding you that next month is National Novel Writing Month (www.NaNoWriMo.org) where writers all over the world are challenged to write a 50,000 word novel in 30 days or less. This event encourages completion over craft and skill. Therefore, you don't have to be an award winning novelist with several books under your belt to participate. If you have ever been interested in writing a novel, now is the perfect chance. There is plenty of time to learn more about this opportunity and prepare your outline and novel notes. This is great for those of us who have never written a novel for fear of it falling short of reaching a certain skill level. Overcome your fears by participating. You will be glad you did, as you never know where a path will take you until you try. If you will be participating this year, be sure to connect with us on Facebook and Twitter and share your experience with us.

So, what can be said about 2013? I for one can humbly admit I have left behind a trail of tears, laughter, happiness and bittersweet memories. I can also say that our experiences, and how we respond to them, reveal the true nature of our character. I can go one step further and say how we end one chapter determines how we open the next one. Therefore, I leave with you this: end 2013 on a positive note. Be revolutionary, step outside of the box and create your own style in life that is all you. As I have said before, you are the only you that there will ever be. You can never be duplicated. You are an original so you owe it to yourself to be the best you that you can be. Dig deep within yourself and go through the rest of the year giving life at a minimum, 100% of you and 100% of your faith, love, happiness, and effort. Then continue this trend well into 2014 and beyond.

Be you. Be blessed. Be torrid.

Sincerely,

Alice Saunders

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

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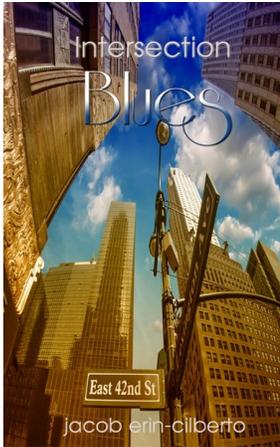
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1 ON 1: JACOB ERIN-CILBERTO

By Alice Saunders



Alice: Please tell us about yourself.

Jacob: I was born in Bronx, NY and lived there till I was nine. Then I moved to Lockport, Illinois. I have lived in Southern Illinois since 1968. I teach English composition and literature at two community colleges in the area: John A. Logan and Shawnee Community college. My friends call me “Fog” which is a nickname I got when I was in college.

Alice: When did you first consider yourself a writer?

Jacob: I don’t know if I consider myself a writer even now. I wrote short stories in grade school, mostly mystery stories. But when it comes to my poetry, I feel more like a conduit. The words come through me when the inspiration hits and often I am not sure that it is really I who is writing them down. But I know I am supposed to be doing this. And I feel lucky to be able to do it.

Alice: Can you please share with us your background in poetry and literature?

Jacob: My B.A. and M.A. are in modern American Lit. I have always loved reading poetry, started writing it in 1970, influenced by my friend Jane C. who was a wonderful poet, and Simon and Garfunkel’s music and Simon’s lyrics.

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

Jacob: I don’t know if there is ever an actual realization. It had always been there, lying dormant waiting to come out...and suddenly it started to do that.

Alice: Do you teach workshops?

Jacob: I have taught poetry workshops since 1998---for Heartland Writers Guild, Southern Illinois Writers Guild and Union County Writers Guild.

Alice: What can attendees expect to learn at your workshops?

Jacob: All types and styles of poetry are acceptable and in vogue right now. We should write what we feel comfortable writing as far as style, whatever suits us. They learn that poetry belongs to the readers once we let it go. To make every word count and that less is more.

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

Jacob: My first book is called “Last Leaf” and was published in Southern Illinois back in 1979. It is poetry, and the subjects vary...as in all my books of poetry.

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

Jacob: Not at all. This book is a collection of work from 1970 up to and including 1979 and it was what I was writing during that time. All part of the process and the growing, even the bad poems.

Alice: What has been your biggest motivation? Where does your inspiration come from?

Jacob: I write because I am supposed to...at least that is what I feel. I also write because I must, the need has been there for many years and at times poetry has been my lifeline. My inspiration comes from every-

where and everybody. Most often I get inspired by reading other poets...especially the beats, Ferlinghetti, Ginsberg, Plath, Sexton, O’hara and many others...Love Robert Creeley. But I also spend time at Writerscafe.org, a poetry site in which I have found a home. Have been on many, but this one seems most inspiring. So many good poets, and there is little meanness there, helpful reactions to the pieces, not destructive criticism. And, many poets there inspire me greatly.

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

Jacob: I don’t have a regimen. I write whenever the muse comes and that is quite often. I write within the crevasses of teaching and just life in general...most often late at night.

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

Jacob: No matter how many years I have been writing, and even though I know that the muse will eventually return, I still get nervous when there are no words coming. But I think the best approach to writers block is to write poems about it.

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

Jacob: My latest book is at the publishers. It will be published by Water Forest Press, and published by Victoria Valentine who is a wonderful publisher/editor/novelist and poet herself. This will be the third book of mine she has done, and my 13th overall. It is called “Intersection Blues” and will probably be coming out in the next couple months.

Alice: Can you describe one of your favorite poems that you wrote? Why does this poem stand out more so than the others?

Jacob: That is something I would have great trouble doing. I write them and then move

on. Much like Frank O'Hara, the beat poet...they come in bunches...and then often I forget them... I might read a poem I wrote last year and say to myself "Did I write that?" I keep writing, hoping someday to write a memorable, lasting piece, something that might stand up to the test of time...and have some value years down the road. I think most of us strive for that.

Alice: Is there a specific message or a reoccurring theme you communicate through your art?

Jacob: My themes vary...but I often write about poetry. I also write about the sixties and what was going on then, since those were my college years and there was much movement, revolution and change.

I liked those years, and my work seems often to be destined to go in that direction. I also write about relationships...and I have tried and failed at enough of those to give me much ammunition with which to shoot my poetic gun.

Alice: In addition to writing books of poetry, you have also reviewed books by other writers. Which book has been the most memorable to you?

Jacob: They have all been memorable in different ways...I have been lucky enough to review several good authors...I have reviewed several books by BZ Niditch...I consider him one of the best poets of our time and one of the nicest. He is very supportive of other poets. But several other poets have been fun to review: Barry Wallenstein, Marcus Rome and others.

Alice: What has been the toughest criticism given to you as a poet? What has been the best compliment?

Jacob: Years ago when I started sending out for publication, I received a rejection that was very helpful even though it hurt. The crux of it was that my imagery and metaphors were good, and I had a lively style but that I had too many loose ends. I had lines that didn't connect and didn't carry my metaphors throughout a poem...left lots of lines hanging. I learned from that...and worked on tightness and cohesiveness from then on, Very helpful.

I received one rejection that still makes me smile now, although at the time it was rather crushing. It was one word written on a page sent back with my po-

ems: "Nope"---that was it. Pretty flippant and hurtful but I survived.

My best compliment? That is a tough one. Pretty much any time a reader has some kind of reaction to something I write. When a reader can relate to one of my poems, I feel a piece is successful, even if it is only one person who relates.

One especially good compliment was from my father. Although an engineer and not really into poetry at all (he used to ask me what I was going to do with it), he once gave some of my work to an author who taught at the same college where he taught and who is a published poet, in order to get his opinion. That poet liked my work and my dad wrote me a letter to tell me that and started out the letter "Dear Poet"---that felt really good.

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

Jacob: My other love, teaching. And when not doing either of those, playing or teaching tennis.

Alice: If you couldn't be a writer, what would your ideal career be?

Jacob: I think writing itself is not so much a career for most. I think we all have other jobs in order to make enough money to live on (especially poets) and write around those jobs. For instance, many of us who are poets, are teachers. We write within the nooks and crannies of that life.

If I weren't a teacher, I would be a dairy farmer. I have always loved cows since my childhood when I spent my summers in Ryegate, Vermont.

Alice: What advice do you have for aspiring writers?

Jacob: Just keep doing it...I would also say that the poetry starts to get better the more we play with the words. At the onset, we tend to write more as a release of feelings, straight from the heart and for me that meant the feelings flowed from the end of my pen. I feel the improvement for me came as I was able to separate myself more from the feelings of which I was writing. Time allowed me to be more objective and to use more metaphor, to take the real life situations and portray them by telling another story. So I would tell aspiring writers, write in a style that you feel comfortable using. Experiment with different ones until you find your niche. And just let the

words come. I also would say "Don't force the content into form---let the form be natural, whether it is rhyme or free verse or haiku or senryu or acrostic poetry or whatever. Just let it happen...the more we force the words the less natural they will sound and the poetry will be stiff.

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

Jacob: Right now, there is only the new book on the horizon.

I also perform with a clarinetist who teaches at Southern Illinois University, Eric Mandat. We do a blues poetry duet. Lots of fun and we have performed since 1995 at several different venues and did a stint on Studio A Cafe, a local PBS television series. This was back in late 1990 and early 2000---we did a half hour special for them in their last season...that show is still aired today. We hope to perform again soon.

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

Jacob: My motto is treat others as you want to be treated yourself. Care about other people and your actions will speak louder than any words can. I also try to live my life so that I can rest my head on the pillow at night and sleep with a clear conscience, one that says I have done the best in whatever endeavor I have undertaken during that day.

Alice: 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?

Jacob: Write On! and be generous to your fellow writers. We are sometimes thought of as a strange group. Often we are misunderstood by family and friends, and all we have is each other. So be good to each other.

Open Mic Night

Price: Free!

All artists are invited to sign up and perform.

Special Guest Host
R.J. Kerker

When: Saturday, October 12, 2013
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: Tiffani Barner | tbarner@torridliterature.com

www.torridliterature.com
<http://www.facebook.com/dlopenmic>

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>

In addition, our feature for the evening will be the spoken word artist Tal Zentmeyer a.k.a The ZSpeaker. Please visit his artist pages to learn more about his latest spoken word album and upcoming work:

<http://facebook.com/TheZsepaker>
<http://reverbnation.com/thezspeaker>
<http://twitter.com/talzentmeyer>

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. Sign up starts at 7:30 PM.

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

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

ODE TO LITERATURE

"...Next Autumn, dressed amber and orange
Shakes hands with Summer..."
The Season's Portraits

"...doctors try to connect the dots,
kind of like I chase the stars..."
The Addicts

THE DIPLOMAT'S LAST DANCE

By Erin Rodini

He leads her; she lets herself be led,
the tango, the foxtrot, his hand
at her waist, her back arched.

Later, her throat scarred shut
from radiation, he vows never
to dance again. A vow he keeps

until Alzheimer's dismantles him
from within, and he forgets
who he is. The band plays a waltz

at the wedding. He sees a lovely girl
swaying in her chair, the girlfriend
of his grandson, though he doesn't know

he has a grandson. And now here he is
on shaky legs, shy, but confident
his grace will win her over, with a slight bow,

a formal May I?, offering his hand.

"...mildew and mold have claimed even the
past residents' shadows..."
Among the Ruins of a Former Mansion

"...If I see you again...I think I
will hand you this poem..."
After That, I Miss You

"...In a collection, possessed by emotion,
waits a lingering heart..."
Hidden Heart

"...The trees are erudite grandmothers
educated by the seasons..."
Golden

"...I watch as I fall, slowly
down I go, into a place of no
return..."
Gone

"...Let me tell you, my dear, this is
the cursed place nobody wants you to
see..."
The Placed Called Love

"...Now, the paths are hidden, waiting to
again be sought by wandering feet..."
Awaiting Persephone's Return

Erin Rodini's work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Colorado Review*, *Antiphon*, *Kindred*, *Serving House Journal*, *Mah Mag World Literature*, and multiple issues of *San Diego Poetry Annual*. Rodini is a winner of AW P's Intro Journals Project 2013. She was also recently nominated for this year's edition of Best New Poets by Ilya Kaminski. Rodini lives in San Diego with her husband and one year old daughter.

"...I keep things too long you, these, old
beliefs, other griefs..."
You, These, Old Beliefs, Other Griefs

"...I gaze upon the past and to you and me, and
wonder why you walked away..."
Beside the Shore

POETRY



LITERATURE THAT TAKES
YOU TO NEW HEIGHTS OF INSPIRATION

Raquel Laureano sees herself as an extremely creative person in need of producing various forms of artistic expressions. When she's not playing tag with her dog or working as a caregiver to the elderly, Raquel devotes her spare time to blogging, writing poetry and experimenting with her art. She resides with her children in the Windy City.

INVASIONS

By Raquel Laureano

a cold and determined
arrival shatters
emotions once composed;
strangling dreams,

ruling proudly
over a guilt-crippling
existence.

darkened mirrors
reflecting an
arduous
state of mind.
existing within,
living without.

Lindsay Pikovsky holds a B.A. in English language and Literature, a B.A. in Government and Politics, and a Juris Doctor. She enjoys reading, cooking, being outdoors and spending time with her family.

AWAITING PERSEPHONE'S RETURN

By Lindsay Pikovsky

The creek is dry and roughly lined by trees;
The skeletal remains stand there devoid
Of thick and full layers of foliage.
It rests on the ground when the summer ends
And waits for pale frost to dust it lightly
With cold powder. Water ran over rocks
In warmer days; now flat and round they squat
By sharp slopes that imply a waterfall
But where no water falls; there is a drought.
On warm, bright days, we walked through here often.
Now, the paths are hidden, waiting to again
Be sought by wandering feet.
The creek is dry and tall trees stand naked.
Their branches reach out in all directions –
A comforting aura of protection.
They will be covered in leaves soon enough;
The creek will run with cool water again,
And the paths will be trampled into shape.
As one, they wait for warmth, for life, for spring.
Patiently, they await rejuvenation.

Leighton Meyers is a novice writer with a passion for writing and taking in stray cats. She has intentions of going to college for creative writing, where she will use her degree to teach and inspire the next generation in the art of the written word.

THE PLACE CALLED LOVE

By Leighton Meyers

In the little nooks of the heart,
There is something that lies.
A knife that is tearing apart
A life until it dies.
There is something on fire,
Bitter sadness and hatred.
The scent of a liar
Pent up till it's wasted.

There's a twisted melody,
Blackened and bloody,
Enchanted by pain and fear,
Let me tell you, my dear,
This is the cursed place
Nobody wants you to see.

This is the place called love.

Dahlya Katz is a 17 year old high school student. She has written poetry ever since she was little. Katz aspires to go to FSU and become a surgeon one day.

GONE

By Dahlya Katz

I watch as I fall,
Slowly down I go,
Into a place of no return.
No longer the same person,
That I used to be.
Once I was always happy,
A smile on my face,
Now I watch from afar,
As the world goes on without me.
The train has left,
But I am still here.
I have taken a long journey,
But got lost on the way,
And nobody can be found,
To help me back home.
The memories of yesterday,
Are forever gone,
And I am left,
With no one.

Patrick Stafford (The Copywriting Poet!) is a resident of Northridge, California, and works full-time as a journalist, copywriter, editor and poet. Patrick has written for *AccessLife.com*, *Computer Edge Magazine*, *Wheelin' Sportsman*, *Pure Inspiration*, *Amateur Chef Magazine*, *Healthcare Traveler* and *Northern Virginia Magazine*, and has sold poems, articles and editorial pieces to both online and print publications over the past 30 years. He recently had books of poetry published online at *Writer's Closet* and *SynergEbooks*, another poetic tome regarding the life and death of Princess Diana published in print in 2002, as well as a short story that appeared in *Chicken Soap For The Soul* in late 2012.

BESIDE THE SHORE

By Patrick Stafford

You were walking beside
the ocean shore
and I gazed
there unto you
seeing us together
as two
yesterday before.

Before the ocean sea
did not so wildly, fiercely agree
with your endless longing
to be forever free.
And before the ocean sea
did not hopelessly lie
between you and I.

How your tide-swept eyes
were full of life and surprise!
They rendered to me
all the smiles and sighs
your heart now keeps from me
and now forever denies.

And though I offered
the freedom of the sea
and the beauty
of yesterday,
I gaze upon the past
and to you and me,
and wonder why you walked away.

Sarah Brown Weitzman, a Pushcart nominee in 2012, has had work in numerous journals and anthologies including *The North American Review*, *American Writing*, *Potomac Review*, *Art Times*, *The Bellingham Review*, *M.I.T.Rune*, *Rattle*, and *Slant*, etc. Her second chapbook, *The Forbidden* was published by Pudding House in 2004 followed in 2005 by *Never Far From Flesh*, a full-length volume of poetry (Pure Heart/Main Street Rag). She received a National Endowment for the Arts fellowship in 1984. Main Street Rag published her latest book, *Herman and the Ice Witch* a children's novel, in 2011. A former New York academic, Sarah Brown Weitzman is retired and lives in Florida.

YOU, THESE, OLD BELIEFS, OTHER GRIEFS

By Sarah Brown Weitzman

Not really black
but a deep gleaming porter,
your hair, and your eyes
that primary blue
straight from a tube -
you, in the first months
we had together
uncomfortable
in front of the camera.

A year later
your mind posed again
on your face
the same look in these
two photographs
animals have in cages
though when you wanted to go
you went, you went.

I keep things too long
you, these, old beliefs, other griefs,
holding on
to what cannot stay
what letting go might keep.

Jonathan Holland is a former jock, convicted felon, college dropout, recovering addict, college graduate, writer, tutor, and volunteer. He currently spends his time trying to spread hope through the concept of creative expression.

I SHOULD

By Jonathan Holland

“I should really quit smoking,” he thinks
before grabbing a butt from the sidewalk.

At the flick of a match, sweet sulfur
is drawn into the stagnant remainder
of someone else’s vice and into the
man’s chest. A few finite moments of
relief before he thinks

“I should have never started smoking,”
and he’s on to the next one.

“I should pick a new career,” he thinks
as heat from the grill warms his hand.

Chatter bangyellingclanklaugh—
sounds blur epiphanies.

He stares at the burger. Fresh red meat
shrivels and darkens before it burns.

He smashes, flips, lifts, with the spatula.

“I should have picked a different major” he thinks,
and he’s on to the next one.

“I should study more,” he thinks
as he clicks his laptop shut. On the strip,
neon purples and fluorescent yellows mix like
Jaeger and Red bull. Trumpeting beats
and booming trebles lift his feet in
monotonous slurred rhythms.

The top of a shot glass looks like a 0 in a
grade book, but its liquor gleams shimmering
light from above. He throws it back and
warmth crawls down the inside of his chest.

“I should have been born smarter,” he thinks,
and it’s on to the next one.

“I should ask her to marry me,” he thinks.

Her voice dulled by her emerald
eyes playing a montage
of wedding bells and kids laughing.

He nods his head agreeing with
whatever she wants. Her gentle gaze
touches him like the warm grip of white gold
on his empty ring finger.

He clasps the lonely finger
and warms it with his right hand.

When he looks up, she is gone.

“I should have asked her on a date,” he thinks,
and moves on to the next one.

“I should be happy,” he thinks
his face illuminated by HD 1080 p vibrant reds
and life like blues.

Wrapped in surround sound, he sits on his patent leather cloud
on marble floors under cathedral ceilings,
but ‘should’ brings him happiness,
like money buys love.

INSIDE OUT

By Jonathan Holland

He’d long since forgotten the click of the latch—that
meddling echo that reminded him he was trapped.
He’d forgotten that musty, dust clouded air that clogged
his sinuses.

Tears would drop to
the tip of his nose then
Plop Plop Plop
interrupting pencil etchings
and staining the paper.

Those same tears would streak down the cold
window in the visiting room when he pressed his face
through the glass trying to smell his wife’s lavender
vanilla lotion

Aside from the visits, the calls, the letters,
life was so simple on the inside.
sleep, eat, cards, eat, workout, eat, sleep.
He called it ‘Bit’in

Freedom brought piercing cries and
Nag Nag Nag.

“Would you like to make that a combo” and
Beep Beep Beep
bills, bills, and bill collectors
Ring Ring Ring

“How he could do drugs again with so much to lose?”

But his kids grew the same whether he was inside or out.
And tacos still flew out the drive thru window.
And bills stamped important still stacked on his kitchen table.
And his wife’s face still wrinkled and cracked and glistened.

Sure he was missed, but
Time moved the same
inside or out.

Brittany Gilbert is an English undergrad at Southeast Missouri State University and recently became interested in poetry during her creative writing class. She mostly enjoys writing about nature or mentioning the beauty nature has to offer, though she recently started to broaden her perspective by expanding on other topics and subjects.

HIDDEN HEART

By Brittany Gilbert

Receding shadows reveal
rows of books
left open
in the marketplace
of the dreamer.

Silhouettes capture the essence
imprisoned within the bindings.
The curse
left by the visionary.

Doing their best to leave behind
a notable impression
as ink trails across pages.

Like hieroglyphics on ancient tombs,
the search continues for answers
that twist and turn

becoming a labyrinth,
changing according to circumstance
and the surveyor.

In a collection,
Possessed by emotion,
waits a lingering heart.

LOST AND FOUND

By Brittany Gilbert

I met you a long, long
time ago,
in the meadow of our memories
under the shadow of a tree.

Where the birds made their nests
and sang of tranquility,
hand in hand,
we watched the sunset.

Yesterday, today, and tomorrow
are the same without you here, so
allow us to meet once more
in a shared dream,

because

in the sea of existence
no matter where you are
I'll find you again and again.

Therefore,

Let's sit on the beach
and wait for dawn.

Tulibona Namulemo is currently a high school senior trying out some techniques she learned in her Creative Writing class.

AFTER THAT, I MISS YOU

By Tulibona Namulemo

Sometimes, when I'm bored,
when I am tired of working,
when I am under the weather,
or when I just feel like it,
I lean back in my chair and think about you.

The first time I saw you at the picnic,
You caught me staring and smiled.
When your eyes caught mine,
I immediately looked at the ground.
You came over, and I talked to you.

We talked a lot after that.

The second time I saw you,
you were wearing roller skates.
I was sitting outside the rink,
watching you, laughing.
You caught me staring and smiled.
When your eyes caught mine,
I immediately looked at the ground.
You talked me into skating.
I wobbled across the floor,
screaming and grabbing the walls.
I fell down and you laughed.

We talked a lot after that.

I poured my heart out to you.
You poured yours out to me.

We did not talk too much after that.

I saw you again.
It was just me and you.
It was very awkward.

We did not talk too much after that.

I saw you again.
We had Panera Bread.
We walked and talked.

We talked a lot after that.

The seventh time I saw you,
you were dancing.
I watched you dance and couldn't stop giggling.
You asked me to dance. I refused.

I hugged you and told you I was leaving.
You asked me why, but my vision was marred.
I tried to smile, but it was hard.
I said goodbye.

The last time I saw you,
you were reaching for me.
You were calling my name.
You asked me if I realized this was the last time we would be seeing each other.
I turned away
and did not look back.
I did not want you to see me cry.

My heart skips a beat when I think about you.
Does yours?
Are there sparks and butterflies?

If I see you again,
I don't know what I would say to you.
I think I will hand you this poem.

Emily Strauss has an M.A. in English, but is self-taught in poetry. Around 100 of her poems appear in dozens of online venues and in anthologies. The natural world is generally her framework; she often focuses on the tension between nature and humanity, using concrete images to illuminate the loss of meaning between them.

AMONG THE RUINS OF A FORMER MANSION

By Emily Strauss

Only the facade is left--
held up by steel beams
the decaying middle walls
nearly gone, with sparrows
nesting in holes in the bricks
where massive pine beams
once supported dark ceilings.

In the center, the former sitting
rooms are bounded by tall
weeds among the rubble,
half a drawer lies rotting,
bottles and styrofoam lunch
boxes mingle with the broken
masonry plainly visible from
a burned-out door leading
nowhere, windows just spaces
under the noon sky.

Wild birds chatter their answers
to the caged parrots down the alley
and the hot breeze from the river
pushes the weed heads down,
mildew and mold have claimed
even the past residents' shadows.

FLOWING TO THE SEA

By Emily Strauss

The earth squeaks and rumbles
like a great metal gate rolling shut
on a rusted track, the downpour sags
every awning, pounding as shoppers
stand arrested, watching the gray water
sheet the air, even the dogs are quiet
momentarily, covering at flashes
of lightening, the welders stop
their work high up the bamboo
scaffolding, a scooter cleaves a wall
through the puddles, a pensioner
in a stained singlet fans himself
in an open doorway
the soccer pitch is a three-inch lake.
How can water ebb when the sea
is level with the road?

Jody McKinnon is a small town girl coaxed in the winding roads and changing seasons of Maine. She is a proud mother of four fine lads and a lover of all things spacial. She is also a wonderer of the stars and wanderer of life's roads. All things inspire her from the sound of a cricket to the blowing of the wind. McKinnon's work was published in *Light Workers World* and in a *Long Story Short*. She is in the process of completing a manuscript containing poetry, a short story and quotes. She is also gathering literature for a second manuscript. She may be reached at jody_reachforit@hotmail.com.

GOLDEN PASTURES

By Jody McKinnon

A wrinkle in time.
A pasture unfolds,
Into the great divine,
Of stories untold,
A whisper of light,
A trickle of truth,
An old souls delight,
To dance within their youth,
A romantic essence,
A delightful yearn,
To just be the presence,
To leave, to return.

Casmir Hodge is from Petersburg Virginia and a sophomore high-school student at Appomattox Regional Governor's school for the arts and technology with a major in the literary arts. Hodge recently won first place in the Poetry Society of Virginia 's statewide poetry contest.

IN THE LOOKING GLASS

By Casmir Hodge

Her eyes are hollow pools
Through which you think you can see the bottom.
What you think are the glittering
Smooth pebbles on the grainy bottom are really
Just the backs of the horrible monsters that swim
On the surface of her tattered soul.
Just. The surface.
Farther down, past those horridly
Beautiful creatures, in the darker,
Colder waters even more things swim.
Blind to everything, but the destruction
Of the few drifting remnants of
Her true self.
And even further down are the
Bones of her lovers,
Her family,
Her friends...
The people she never wanted to be
Dragged down,
Drowned. Along with the emotions
She never should have had.
They sink, slowly, in the silt of her consciousness.
Some with grim-bone grins and silent screams,
Others with spindle fingers reaching
for a surface they'll never see again.

BALLET OF THE SEASONS

By Casmir Hodge

Phantom footsteps
thrusting bodies into the lithely changing
lights of winter.
A melody of pastelled green,
leaping past the first Spring
into the swirling colors
of neon petals blooming.
When the acrylic shades of night
set, the Summer's nightingale sings
the lullaby of amber afternoons and the decay
of Autumn leaves resting on the ground.

Jolene Munch Cardoza is a native Floridian who currently lives in Washington, D.C. where she has covered professional theatre for the past ten years. Jolene attended the University of South Florida in Tampa and is a graduate of the Eugene O'Neill National Critics Institute. She is a member of the American Theatre Critics Association and has written for a variety of publications. Her byline regularly appears in the Washington edition of The Examiner newspaper, where she has reviewed regional theatre since 2007.

Golden

By Jolene Munch Cardoza

The late summer sun
a crowd in the park
the circle that goes 'round and 'round
a baby in a stroller
Dogs with fan tails
bright yellow flowers
a fountain in the middle
no water swimming down
The trees are erudite grandmothers
educated by the seasons
heavy with the dark leaves of August
waiting to kiss them goodbye
So many lives pass below
their aching, tired branches
chirping into tiny telephones
making plans for dinner
I look up to a
blue blue canvas of blue
as wide and as open
as my heart is to you.

Jaimie Miller is married with two beautiful children. Miller is also a Graduate of Troy University and working on her Masters degree at the University of West Alabama.

CANCER

By Jaimie Miller

"She fell to her knees and asked God why,
Why this pain had to enter her life.
The tears fell like fire down her cheek,
Like etched in stone, they carved too deep.

Her smiled vanished and her eyes sunk in;
The green swirls were lost again.
Her hair soon fell and her hands they shook.
Her feet trembled with each step she took.

Her scream was tiny whispers as she tossed and turned.
Each time she moved the pain still burned.
Deep within her heart she held on strong,
Even though the doctors said all had gone wrong.

Days would soon end and the light was fading out,
But prayers full of love overshadowed all the doubt.
Faith, hope, and love that got everyone through
Poured in like strength and her courage grew.

Living each day to fullest and best,
Still full of worries hidden behind stress.
The smile is back and the eyes once again shine,
But looking closely you'll still see the sign.

A constant struggle she'll always face;
A fight that can't be healed with a kiss or simple embrace.
But she never gives up, my hero she'll always be.
So God please answer my prayers as I cry here on my knees."

Bethany Pauls is an eighteen-year-old Canadian student with an interest in writing in general and poetry in particular.

THE SEASONS' PORTRAITS

By Bethany R. Pauls

In the shadow of the Rockies
Reside lakes that gleam like sapphires
And forests of regal pines
That have watched Winter march in
For decades
And stroke his white paintbrush over
every branch
every stone
and every droplet of water,
making all pale and frozen and soft and sleeping
as it waves it's hand.
These pines alone remain vigilant,
Ever-emerald and watching, waiting
For an energetic general to awaken their world.
And always he comes, faithful Spring
Gently smiling, trooping in with a band of green
And the soft songs of sparrows,
To make a light and careful sketch
Upon the revived waters,
Upon the stoic face of the mountain.
His dominion lasts a beautiful moment
Full of life and sweetness,
Before Summer appears once more
to make his home amongst the peaks
to leave his own carefree depiction
from the strokes of a crimson Indian paintbrush
dipped deep in a pail of sunlight.
Next Autumn, dressed amber and orange
Shakes hands with Summer,
And creates a short-lived portrait of
Falling leaves
and flying geese, singing their farewells.
Then Winter, camped on snowy peaks,
Descends swiftly to reclaim his throne.
The pines survey in silence,
Bowing their heads and
waiting for their blanket of snow.
They smile to themselves,
Knowing what the painters forgot—
That each season's portrait
Will be lifted from its place, in time,
And displayed once more
upon the mountain.

Daniel James Sundahl is a Professor in English and American Studies at Hillsdale College where he has taught for thirty years.

FUNERARY

By Daniel James Sundahl

Tennessee, the moon full before
The stealthy seep of daylight,
The murmur of the motor as the boat
Moves against the prevailing current.

We are here with a friend's ashes,
Urned for keeping at his request.
We are coursing northeast, up the
Cumberland, Hendersonville, LaGaurdo,

A little further then we'll stop,
Unseal his urn, the little bronze crypt,
Within his dust, final gray particulars
We'll slowly pour on the river's slick.

His widow is in the front, weighted
With a heavy woolen coat, her thoughts
Spilling out with all the sifting still
Unnumbered remembered days and nights.

She moves to hand me the urn, surprisingly
Heavy and warm to my ungloved hands.
I whisper to her that I'm sorry that
I'm at a loss for words and prayers.

The ashes smudge the water's shining,
Spreading everywhere like sifting smoke
Drifting away along the southwest current.
They move as if in rhythmical consonance

Just as morning light passes through
The trees along the river, the water
Golden now, better now, unencrypted now,
Bound to places of devotion by the sea.

Meg Eden's work has been published in various magazines, been nominated for a Pushcart Prize, and received the 2012 Henrietta Spiegel Creative Writing Award. She was a reader for the *Delmarva Review*. Her collections include *Your Son* (The Florence Kahn Memorial Award) and *Rotary Phones and Facebook* (Dancing Girl Press). Check out her work at: <http://artemisagain.wordpress.com>

UNTITLED PSALM

By Meg Eden

stars fill this
night,
illuminating all that
is—
even trees rise
from their shelter,
shadows
once dwelt in
are left
for greater places:
only
now do we realize
that morning means
waiting
for the dark to get tired
of standing in the sky.

A.J. Huffman is a poet and freelance writer in Daytona Beach, Florida. She has published six collections of poetry, available on Amazon.com. She has published her work in numerous national and international literary journals. She is currently the editor for Kind of a Hurricane Press literary journals (www.kindofahurricane.com).

SLIPPING THROUGH THE PANE

By A.J. Huffman

A forgotten window, gaping,
grants access to a baby dragon
fly. It wanders from room to room, working
against the false wind of the ceiling
fans. Struggling to decipher an exit
strategy on incomplete
ly developed wings. It attempts to retrace
its trek across unnatural roomscape. Hours
pass, altitudes lower, hope
falters until finally a draft brings a hint of
home. It hovers just inside
the opening, relishing a prideful pause,
an adventure survived, before diving
back into preferential sun.

Kate LaDew is a graduate from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro with a BA in Studio Art.

FROM THE DAY WE MET, PROBABLY

By Kate LaDew

the memory of that ache, love gone taut like a good exhaustion,
unravels backward,
so it might as well have been for always
I knew you deep to the rawness of your bones
and my mother said when she listened close,
she could all but hear the love coming off us,
electric and golden like a street lamp humming after midnight
after you left for good you still talked to me, still friends somehow,
told about new happiness, new sadness
eyes wide, hands shaking, a smudged look about you,
like ink left in a brief soft rain
and whatever it was that bound us,
whatever grabbed so tight and held so long,
left bruises on my heart you can see through the skin
those nights you remember my number,
I let you mold callused fingertips into them
leave deeper marks, grooves like climbing holds
and when your voice fades out I put my hand over my chest
heart hiccupping over those ridges, stopping for just a moment
but I'm still alive,
as long as you are, I'll be

NORTHERN DOWNPOUR

By Amanda Musso

think of me
in a heavy downpour
as you lean
against your back screen door,

remember me
when the sun goes down
and drowns itself
in the tides of tomorrow,

don't forget
to count your breaths
when your heart speaks out
against your head.

before the sky
turns night to day,
and the horizon
is full of light,

think of me.

please.

before I cease to be,
and my heart dissolves
from the weight of
what we never grew to be.

remember me, for i am restless.
i am crumbling.
i am fading.
i am everything you wanted,
but nothing that you kept.

remember me.

GUIDES THAT LEAD US NOWHERE

By Amanda Musso

We built walls to hide
the cracks inside,
and seal all doors with our unkempt hearts.

We plague our hearts with insecurity,
and hope the weight of our faults
will not sink it.

The tides of our blood will push and pull
and crash at the walls within,
but the tides only wash away what it can touch,
and not what is hidden inside.

So we sit, and we drown
in the pain we have brought
upon ourselves,
yet we cry out for forgiveness.

Feet stuck,
we are sinking under the heaviness of our decisions.
Self destruction is such a pretty little thing.

Anne Mikusinski has been writing stories and poems since she was seven years old, and making them up for as long as she can remember. Some of the writers that influence her are EE Cummings, Robert Frost, and Dylan Thomas. She hopes that one day, something she writes can inspire someone the way these writers have inspired her.

INTERLUDE

By Anne Mikusinski

And once again, I stop,
Somewhere
But not on Fifth this time
In fact, I'm not exactly sure
But still, you are the cause.

Lost not only in my head
But in my heart
Not sure of anything
Beside the thoughts of what was said
And what I know
And what I saw.

It's late.
I need to go
(I want to stay)
I can't decide
Everyone around me hurries past,
Their inner GPS shows them the way;
Mine's on the blink.

The lure of your soft voice
Cements me here
And I could live on that for days,
But not for life.

Resigned, I move again
Towards what, I am not sure,
But I'll remember where I was
And I'll come back
When we meet again
Somewhere.

EULOGY FROM A LATE ARRIVAL

By Anne Mikusinski

It must have been some party
The afternoon you left
And I, tardy as always,
Caught up in ephemera,
I came too late to say goodbye.

I wanted to be there
To see you off
And wish you a safe journey
As you left for parts unknown.

Being late is not fashionable
When goodbyes are involved
The loose ends that are left
Dangle like shoestrings
And lie in wait to trip me up.

The unsaid words hang in the air
Unspoken thoughts haunt me in late hours.
Nothing to do but remember
And hope I run into you again.

FICTION



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FICTION

THE MODEL

By Anthony Ward

Anthony Ward has been writing in his spare time for a number of years. He has been published in a number of literary magazines including *Enhance*, *Word Gumbo*, *Drunk Monkeys*, *Speech Therapy*, *Thousand Shades of Grey*, *Ginger Piglet*, *Torrid Literature Journal* and *The Rusty Nail*, amongst others.

I see them looking at me through the window as they walk on by, while I stand here wearing these contentious clothes they make me wear, day in day out, unable to go anywhere, unable to follow them, like their eyes that follow me as they move on down the street.

I would like to go down the street with them. Take a look around. Look in all the other store windows—especially when the weather's as encouraging as it is today.

There's times I cannot stand to be here. But I have no choice. I have to stand it. I have to stand their inquiring eyes giving me the once over, the twice shy glance, the brazen gawp. Some stand laboriously looking me up and down. Some take a furtive peek as they walk on by. While some just stand shamelessly ogling me, undressing me with their eyes, following the contours of my body as if a cam acting upon their linear thoughts—clearly yearning to take my clothes from me. There was one who tried once, but she (yes she) was immediately caught by security and subsequently arrested.

You'd think I was a model the way they go on. But I'm not. This isn't in the least bit glamorous, standing here such long hours that feel as if they go on for eternity.

I can't blame them for thinking I'm a model. My build certainly fits the criteria: tall, slim, irrevocably attractive; tanned from head to foot so that at times my clothes practically sail from me. Especially when the colours are so vibrant, catching the attention of them all floating by in a sea of motion, ebbing back and forth in waves, their faces washing up on the shore of memories before disappearing forever into a vast ocean of people.

There are many I see again and again. Some everyday, others every now and then, while some come and visit me—even acknowledge me with a slight nod as they walk on by.

I watch them go about their lives, going in and out of the bars and restaurants, wishing I could go with them—join them for a drink; be one of them; have a laugh and relax. But I can't. I'm stuck here bored rigid, all day, every day, being constantly molested and mauled by their sedimentary eyes.

I often find them quite unnerving. They almost dislocate my face just by looking at me. Their emotionless faces carved out of stone, like living sculptures. Except they appear dead inside.

What do they want from me? They watch me with their eyes swaying from side to side, surveying the street, yet targeted like projectiles in my direction.

I try to ignore them, but it's difficult when you're being ambushed by indiscretion, pointing directly at me without regard for my feelings—as if I didn't harbour any.

There was one day this rather impertinent young lady stood looking right at me for what seemed like a good ten minutes. She put her hand to her chin and looked me over and over until, eventually, she turned away and I saw her enter the store. The next thing I knew the dress I was wearing had been stripped from me, which left me completely in the all together, exposed for all to see. Not only that, but I was left that way for the rest of the day.

At first I felt completely humiliated and ashamed. But then my shame turned to defiance. Rather than feeling indignant I began to feel completely confident. I stood as proud as a Grecian sculpture for all to admire to show them I couldn't be marred. After all, why should I be disgraced by their inhumanity?

That's not to say they're all bad. I've gotten to know quite a few people while I've been here. Some I even think of as friends (despite the fact they never talk to me). Yet there are some that do, the ones that work with me on a night, that size me up in all these dresses while they compliment me with gestures and flattering remarks.

Though I must admit, I'm always disappointed that they never ask me to go out with them. They probably think me too boring. Someone whose never been born—that's never lived.

If only they knew that beneath this silent exterior there's a personality screaming to get out.

ONE THING LED TO ANOTHER...

By Lon Richardson

Lon Richardson's short story "Two Tickets" was recently published in *From The Depths* magazine. He has been writing non-fiction and fiction for the past 20 years, including a novel (yet to be published).

Well, it was like this: I'd just dropped out of high school with no plans, no career, not even a job. Then a couple of my friends came over and we talked about our situations and how we didn't have jobs or any money to speak of, and, well, one thing led to another I guess and we ended up running out of a liquor store with a measly \$97 and trying to drive away with a car that didn't go as fast as it should have, and, well, one thing led to another I guess and I ended up in front of a judge who must've felt sorry for me, not having a education and all and not having hurt anyone, and I wasn't even carrying the money anyway, so he talked for a while and, well, one thing led to another I guess, and I ended up doing community service working in a library. Which wasn't bad, since I met this cute librarian and we got to talking in the break room one day and, well, one thing led to another I guess, and we ended up on her couch in her apartment having tea and cookies and whatnot, talking for an hour or two and, well, one thing led to another I guess, and she ended up pregnant. That was bad enough, of course, but then she went and told her mom, who couldn't keep a secret worth a damn and went and told the girl's dad and, well, one thing led to another I guess, and we ended up married, which was actually a good thing, since it made me get a job and start being more responsible. But you know how marriage is, you get into a routine after a while and, well, one thing led to another, I guess, and we ended up with a couple of kids, which, I suppose was more responsibility, or more stress, more like it, since it must've affected my work because my boss called me into his office one day and gave me a good talking to, but then I started talking back and we got into this shouting match and, well, one thing led to another I guess, and I ended up without a job. This, of course was real bad. So when my friends came over – the same ones as before – and we started talking about what a mess I was in and the messes they were in and they came up with a whole new plan – this time with a faster car, a couple of guns and a different liquor store. But you know how it is, the best-laid plans and all, and, well, one thing led to another I guess, and we got arrested for attempted robbery and manslaughter – I swear it wasn't my fault, the gun went off accidentally – and this time the judge lectured me good and hard and even though the gun had gone off accidentally I got sent to prison anyway and before I knew it, there was this preacher who come in and talked to me and, well, one thing led to another I guess, and I got strapped to this table with my arms all stretched out like I'm on a cross and a microphone in front of me and there's these guys standing around and one of them draws the curtains and I see a few people outside the room with pens and pads of paper and well, one thing led to another I guess and I got this needle sticking ... into ... my ...

... arm.

Co-Co's Toy Box

By Grant Feters

Grant Feters is a writer living in Madisonville, Tennessee. His work has appeared in *Backpacker Magazine*, *Newspapers in Michigan*, *Professional Photographer Magazine*, *Knoxville News*. His published works include: *Horace the Hopper*, *War Dream*, *False Prophets*, *Night Walkers*, *What would Grant do?*. Feters holds memberships in the following: Knoxville Writers Guild (KWG), Children's Fiction Writers...With – KWG, Etowah Writers Group, and Chattanooga Writers Guild (CWG).

Yawn ... stretch ... sneeze. "OK. I think I'll go out to the kitchen and see if there's anything to eat ... Nope, not much! The same old thing? Oh, not chicken again! I am so tired of chicken, I could just puke. Sure would enjoy a big cup of milk, and a little something to dunk. Well - that's not going to happen, so I guess I'll go do something else."

"At least the sun is up. I could go over there and take a nap. I am so tired. It has been a horrific day so far. I had to go out last night. I had to be out all night long. Just before sunrise, I came home so I could eat breakfast and take a nap. I am so tired. I am completely worn out. The guy I live with just does not understand me. I am out all night, working the neighborhood. It's not as if I am just out prowling around, I work hard all night. I make a very big effort when I am out. But when I finally drag back in, all I want to do is go to sleep. I am going to bed."

Stumble, Squeak, Chirp, Buzzzz. "Get out of my way you stupid bird thing. I think you are a bird, although you never fly, you just sit there and chirp. You could be that store mouse, but I don't think so. I can't remember which one of you squeaks. Oh bother, I think I will just sleep on it and decide later what I am going to do with you."

Yawn ... stretch ... snoozzzzzzz. "What was that? I know that I heard something. What - was - that?" Snoozzzzzzz. Oooohhh ... stretch. "Oh, great, this is Kevitday, that's the day I agreed to clean up my stuff. I'm supposed to go through my things and sort out which of them I'm going to ignore and which of them I'm really going to ignore. If it were truly up to me, I would just ignore them all. What do I care if they are strung all over the house?"

Chirp, chirp! “Yes, yes, I think I will keep you. I like you. A matter of fact, I think I’ll just smack you around the house for a while. Smack . . . Noooo! Not under the refrigerator again! I hate it when you hide under there. It is so difficult to reach under there and snag you by the tail, then pull you out here where I can get a good hold of you. Darn it. I guess I need to hunt down that Store Mouse. Where did I leave him? He must be around here somewhere. I was just sleep’, no, I mean I was just walking through the bedroom and didn’t see that mouse anywhere. I’ll just take another look . . . There you are, hiding under the bed. You can run, but you can’t hide. I’ll find you no matter where you hide.”

“I wonder where that dog is. I haven’t seen him all day. He can be a real pain. I think he has been messing with my stuff again. Well, that does it for me. I’m going to swing by the food bowl once again for a little munch and crunch, then back to bed for a nap.”

“The other day I was looking for that Store Mouse. He was not where I left him. I think the guy I live with keeps picking up my stuff. He has a real hang-up about leaving my things where I want to leave them. Most of the time, I can find my things in a box near my bed. Yesterday I pounced on that Store Mouse. He had the strangest smell. It had a fake outdoor smell to him, all flowery and foul. He was also clean and soft. I tried to lick all the bad smell off. But I could still smell that April freshness.”

“Occasionally, Bruce, (well I think it’s Bruce.) The big-guy, who comes and goes all the time. He brings something home for me to examine. As a favor, I will go over to check it out, - but that’s so lame. I just turn my nose up at it and walk away. I don’t know why he keeps bringing all his junk home. It just keeps piling up in the box. I try to hide the stuff all over the house but he keeps bringing them back to the box and putting that new junk in with all of my good things. I wonder how he would like it if I brought home some wild things that I’ve killed outside. I could leave them in the middle of the floor for him to examine.”

“Is it dinner time yet? I’ll just slink out to the kitchen area to check on the food situation. Sometimes the really good brown food is there for me, but not always. Sometimes it’s that really nasty smelling stuff. It taste pretty good but it smells like butt.”

“Every day Bruce leaves the house. For the longest time, I think that he forgets I am here all alone. It feels like he is gone for days and days. The only thing I can do is climb up in my Tree, where I can look outside. I can also survey the whole room from that perch. There’s not much to do other than sleep. Sometimes, there is movement outside. I will check it out, but only as a last resort. The tree also keeps the dog out of my fur, so it’s a good place to hang out.”

“I am so mad at Bruce. When he finally does drag back home, I’ll just ignore him. I’ll keep an eye out for him but, I’ll not be so excited to see him. Although the dog is, and he’s always so loud and hyper. I think he is on drugs. Rex jumps on everything and he runs back and forth across the front window to the door and back. He barks constantly and that hurts my ears. I wish Bruce would put a muzzle on that flea bag.”

“So . . . Bruce, you finally decide to come home.”

“Hey, Rex ol boy. Did you miss me today? Easy, - easy boy, don’t jump, don’t jump. Come on, let me take you outside.”

“Good, take that barking fool outside! Take him out in the front yard. That way he can go play in the street.”

“Hello, CoCo. You big fat cat. I know you missed me while I was at work.”

“No, I did not!”

“Did you have a good nap today?”

“Purrrrrr.”

“Oh, so you still like it when I rub behind your ears.”

“Yes I do, don’t stop.”

“Come on over here and sit with me while I watch the evening news before.”

“Ok, I will sit here and dig into your leg with my claws while I go back to sleep.”

“Purrrrrrrrrrrrrr.”

“I got a new toy for you today. Look at it! Feel how soft and fuzzy it is.”

“Get that thing out of my face!”

“Come on CoCo, don’t you like your new toy?”

“Just toss it on the floor and I’ll go and ignore it later.”

“Well come on, let’s go see what’s for dinner, see if there’s any Cat food in the cupboard for you.”

“God, I hope it’s not that nasty chicken platter again.”

“Oh, look CoCo, it’s your favorite, - looks like it’s chicken again.”

“That’s it. I’m going back to my perch. Wake me when it’s tomorrow.”

BRIEF MUSINGS ON A PERSISTENT APATHY AND THE UNCERTAINTY IT ENGENDERED

By Jocelyn Crawley

Jocelyn Crawley is a 28-year-old college student currently pursuing a Masters of Divinity degree in preparation to become a pastor. While her writing interests are diverse, topics of intrigue include politics, history, literature, and religion. She holds B.A. degrees in English and Religious Studies. Her work has appeared in *Jerry Jazz Musician*, *Nailpolish Stories*, *Visceral Uterus*, *Dead Beats*, *The Idiom*, *Thrice Fiction*, *Four and Twenty*, *Kalyani Magazine* and *Haggard and Halloo*. Other stories are forthcoming in *Faces of Feminism* and *Calliope*.

During my senior year in college, my life became marked by random acts of selfishness and vapidness. Although originally unable to discern the source of my burgeoning apathy—and the narcissistic mindset which gave it life and substance—I eventually concluded that my depraved actions and attitudes resulted from uncertainty about my future. While I'd recently completed an internship where my supervisor hinted that I'd be offered a job following graduation, this concept didn't enthrall me at all. For although the process of attaining a degree in English had thus far been a challenging and therefore enjoyable endeavor, the thought of editing manuscripts for the rest of my life engendered a deep and unsettling anxiety which I interpreted as a sign that I shouldn't pursue the enterprise.

And that thought generated a deep void within me. An absence that eventually evolved into an abscess, the sense that nothing really mattered seemed to grow and swell as my uncertainty regarding what I wanted to do persisted. An invisible insistent force that stitched itself through everything I said and did, my stubborn torpor—whose essence was a plaguing nothingness that left me both exhausted and annoyed—breathed through my bones, blood.

My father caught on quickly. A writer himself, the time he'd spent perfecting his craft had generated an intense awareness regarding how to recognize and create the types of details that revealed the highly specific and individualistic nature of human existence. Noting the melancholy and indifference that had begun to occupy my eyes, he brought up my apathy over the breakfast table just three weeks before I was scheduled to graduate.

"You seem lost and lifeless," he said simply. Smiling now—familiar with his proclivity for letting lines from his literature leak into his speech—I ingested this little alliteration before responding.

"I don't know what I'm going to do with my life," I said. Dry and factual, the words sat on the stage of the scene unfolding before us with an unnerving authority that made me feel they were playing God.

"Why not?" he asked. Replete with curiosity and concern, his tone was entirely parental now.

"Well," I said, then faltered for several seconds. "I don't want to be an editor."

"Oh," he said. Surprised and thoughtful simultaneously, his shift in tone revealed that this wasn't at all what he'd expected. Apparently respecting my uncertainty—perhaps suspecting that it indicated some evolution in my thought life—he waited for me to elaborate.

"I didn't enjoy my internship," I said. Smiling to myself—aware of the episodic tone I'd taken—I realized that I was comprehending my own existence as an ever-unfolding drama.

"Why not?" he asked. Eyes penetrating mine now, his decision to meet my gaze seemed predicated on the notion that he could find the truth in my orbs.

"It was mechanical," I said. "A bit robotic."

Nodding slowly, he took a long sip from his coffee cup before responding.

"So what changes do you need to make in order to achieve the personal satisfaction that makes life worth living?"

Although temporarily amused by the trite and psychoanalytic feel of the question, the response that began formulating in my mind quickly sobered me.

"I don't know," I said finally.

A meaningful silence—one I could sense but not define—settled in between us then.

"I'm aware that you've had some adverse life experiences," he said. Momentarily in love with the calm tone he'd adopted here, I decided it somehow made me feel secure, safe. Indeed, the tranquil cadence of his words seemed to suggest that he knew exactly how to solve the problem we were currently considering.

"But," he went on, "I don't want you to become bitter."

"I'm not bitter," I said meaningfully. "I'm a rational reasoner." This fact I knew with certainty. Indeed, I had always used logic to draw conclusions about unpleasant realities and the significance they could have on my individual existence. And this practice did not include giving way to fits of hostility engendered by the power they might have over me.

"I'm not bitter," I repeated, somehow tranquil and insistent simultaneously. "Bitterness is an emotion and cognitive state individuals experience when they allow negative circumstances to torment them until their entire personality is distorted, ugly. That's not the state I dwell in. At all."

Apparently impressed with this self-summation, my father offered me an approving nod.

Slow but sure, time passed with the steady certainty of a shifting season. The Saturday before the last week of school, I spent half the day wandering aimlessly through the mall. Bored and bothered with myself, the idea of remaining in my room—the realm where troublesome thoughts burgeoned with a resilient buoyancy that couldn't be thwarted—left me unsettled, anxious.

Although the mall was crowded, I felt as if I was the only person moving through its corridors. Irritated that my thoughts had followed me to the shopping center, I tried to ignore them as I stepped into a small boutique whose name was announced with hot pink italic

letters that reminded me of speed and sound. Once inside the store, however, the idea that had been swelling inside me popped with a prompt persistence. Having about it a simple authority lying somewhere between the spheres of assertion and aggression, one question took shape in my mind.

Who are you?

Unable to answer, I felt that same unsettling uncertainty begin to swell again. Sighing softly, I exited the store and began moving to the food court in the center of the mall. Although I had no appetite, I intended to use food as a distracting force. Once I sat down with my meal, however, I realized that my plan had been entirely ineffective. Still haunted and hounded by the question that had pervaded my mental atmosphere, I briefly contemplated several significant events that had transpired in my life. While many crossed my mind, the one that remained most salient in my psyche was the day when I broke my arm. Twelve years old at the time, the mishap had occurred just one month before I was scheduled to compete in a cheerleading competition. Irritated and angry simultaneously, I fought the reality that began looming before me with a rugged insistence comparable to a hungry child pestering its parent for food. With the type of sympathetic sensitivity one uses upon informing someone that their family member has just died, my doctor told me I wouldn't be able to participate in the competition.

"But I have to participate in it," I said. Presenting the sentence as an unquestionable fact to which all other realities had to conform, I waited for him to respond.

"Why?" he asked carefully. Surprised by this question—I'd expected him to simply reiterate his original position—I thought about it for several seconds.

"Because I've been preparing for months," I said finally. Content with my comment, I considered the significance of how I'd assessed the situation. In categorizing my will and activity thus, I was essentially stating that I demanded some type of reward or payment for all my hard work. Although I wasn't suggesting that I felt any sort of entitlement to the competition's prize, I was insisting that I be granted the opportunity to compete for it. This—while but a brief examination of the self—engendered a brief yet very real passion and sense of personal identity. Having formerly considered myself to be a fairly normal person, I'd noted my proclivity for adopting a generic and somewhat robotic mode of existence with mixed feelings. While it was safe—indeed, conformance to accepted cultural standards was the key to my social security—modelling my life after rules and regulations I didn't fully understand or agree with left me feeling perpetually uncomfortable.

But now. In this present situation pertaining to my arm and the upcoming cheerleading competition. In this case, my attitude and course of action was not determined by another individual or collective society. Rather, I was the one who had developed and maintained a fascination with—and dedication to—the intricate world of cheerleading. Having chosen to pursue the sport after personally witnessing the mental agility and physical strength it all required, I'd worked hard to make my school's squad and contribute to our success. This era—rife with personal challenges and doubt—was marked by the most profound sense of independence and individuality I'd ever known.

At some point however, it left me. Having departed with a slow surreptitious certainty one expects of a careful quiet cat in pursuit of his prey, the passion and persistence with which I'd formerly approached my life was displaced with a wavering intrigue that eventually evolved into unalloyed indifference. Although I'd won the battle regarding my arm—somehow I'd coaxed it into a speedy recovery that enabled me to compete—I ultimately lost the war. A mental conflict concerning my intense desire to thrive in the face of obstacles and challenges that sought to rob me of energy and livelihood, the extra work it had taken to maintain my hope and competence as my arm healed had left me burdened, bothered. While I resented people and the situation at the beginning, my umbrage was slowly redirected towards some vague invisible force which couldn't really be defined, identified. At a loss for who to blame or where to direct my negative energy, my formerly amicable disposition evolved into an adamant passivity that began to dominate my demeanor.

Of course, that wasn't the only negative thing that happened. There were other situations that generated a sustained sense of hopelessness, lassitude. During my freshman year, my parents decided to divorce. Always under the impression that they were imperfect but happy people who found each other's company fulfilling, I was shocked and dismayed to learn that they had eventually grown tired of one another's flaws, foibles. After leaving the decision of who I would live with up to me, I chose my father and packed my suitcases in a mild stupor rooted in my inability to believe that any of it was actually happening.

There were other things. Right before my eldest sister's college graduation, our grandmother died. Everything—all preparations for Juana's big day—were put on hold as we all began arranging for the funeral. There was also a brief but influential stint we had with poverty during a national recession in which my father was laid off for six months. And yet—despite all these events—it was my broken arm that had always stood out in my mind the most. Perhaps personal and powerful because it occurred inside my body, the memory of everything that transpired during that time was like a tragic film that my psyche played continually.

Back in the present now, I remembered the impact everything pertaining to my arm had had upon me. While the issue was the type of event that promised to define my future even as it unfolded in the present, I could only recognize its immediate significance at the time that it happened. Sore and irritated on a daily basis, I had constantly fought down fury and frustration in the hopes that maintaining a rational mind would somehow contribute to a healing process that would enable me to compete. And though our squad ended up winning the competition, the brief periods in which the situation made me feel brittle and bitter had somehow stained me into the stolid solemn soul that I was today.

In analyzing all of it, my best friend—Jan Potter—defined what had happened in terms of allegory. Rife with what my father called an impeccable and inimicable emotional intelligence, she was the one I usually went to when anything went awry.

"The broken arm has become a metaphor for your entire existence," she said factually. "The events surrounding it—all of the agony that thwarted your livelihood and made you painfully aware of the inevitably frail and perpetually fractured human condition—has somehow woven itself through the fabric of everything else you've done, become. And—in the aftermath of the victory which yet engendered tragedy—you are left feeling weary and fatigued."

Indeed, the event had been enervating. Persistently, and with permanence in mind. Or so it seemed to me.

During one season—a period surely marked by the apex of my apathy—its existence became glaringly evident, obvious. Having chosen to date my next door neighbor based on our mutual attraction and perpetual proximity, I found myself eating dinner at his house at least twice a week during the six months that we dated. Amicable and involved in our conversations throughout the meals, I periodically caught his parents giving one another—and their son—nods of approval regarding our relationship.

Despite the inner indifference towards everything that was always abiding within me, things progressed between us. Eventually, I began sharing more personal information about myself to him without experiencing the type of guarded anxiety that normally precluded me from revealing anything meaningful. And yet—as paradoxical as it might have seemed to someone not accustomed to the dualities that marked my existence—my budding openness didn't matter. Even though I felt something substantive for Ryan, I ultimately didn't care about the nature or direction of our relationship.

This fact—the reality of my perpetual passivity—seemed to become plain on our six month anniversary. After taking me out to my favorite restaurant—one known for its diverse cuisine and clever waitstaff—he informed me that he'd purchased a hotel room for us.

"Why?" I asked. Toneless—without any assumptive or aggressive element—the question invaded the air with an authority suggesting that it deserved an honest answer.

"For privacy," he said almost immediately. "If I take you back to my house, my parents won't leave us alone."

Believing this, I nodded my assent.

When we entered the room, I felt something stoic invade my disposition, features. Although not afraid or uncomfortable, the detached neutrality that always abided with me seemed to well up with new strength, authority.

We hung out for several hours. Curious throughout our evolving conversation, I silently wondered if this was really all that he had brought me there for. Although not opposed to sex or sexuality, my persistent nonchalance towards life in general had always spilled over into every facet of my mind, existence. Entirely aware of this, I felt a sharp pang of apprehension shoot through me when he got up from the small table where we'd eaten a dessert of cheesecake topped with raspberries.

He tried. Irritated—he hadn't made this intent plain when I'd asked him about his intent earlier—I pulled away.

"Rebecca," he said, protesting.

"No," I returned. Flat and still, the word sat between us like a still born baby.

After it all—once he had driven me back home—I called Jan to talk about it.

"I wouldn't worry about any of this," she said once I'd finished explaining everything. Relieved slightly, I released a small sigh and felt my breathing pattern approach normalcy.

"You're sure?"

"Yes," she said, tone marked by gentle certitude. "You have a proclivity for adopting a stolid attitude towards everything and everyone. Sometimes. But I don't necessarily think that means nothing matters to you. You—it takes a lot to get you going. Passionate. About anything. And of course that applies to your sex life, too. Or lack of one. And there's nothing wrong with that."

Satisfied with her assessment, I said thank you before clicking the OFF button of my cell phone.

Over coffee the night before graduation, my father invited me to discuss my evolving views regarding graduation and whatever steps would follow.

"Well," I said noncommittally. "I don't know."

"You don't have to become an editor," he said gently now. "Not if you don't think it's going to make you happy."

"I'm beginning to believe that attaining happiness might be an impossible endeavor," I said. Staid and solemn, the sentence laid itself out on the table and beckoned us to deconstruct it.

"What is happiness?" he asked me then. Sighing now—for I knew he was one of those unusually intelligent and perceptive people who believed deep thinking was the cure for all that ailed humanity—I considered his question carefully.

"Happiness," I said finally, "is being and doing exactly what you want to be and do."

Nodding now—in agreement with this definition—he took a quick sip from his coffee cup before pushing the conversation forward.

"So if pursuing happiness isn't integral to your approach to life, what meaning does it have?"

I understood the import of the question almost immediately. Irritated and anxious suddenly, I sought to avoid it with a new and seemingly omnipotent tenacity. Strong and persistent, I moved my minds towards anything I could think of. Yet—with a similarly demanding force—something else drew me back towards the inquiry with an inimicable insistence which—if one had to contemplate it in context of something else—might be likened to a gravitational pull.

I thought about my existence then, considered the perpetuity of pain and discontent that seemed to knit itself through every facet of my life, thoughts. Although not always utterly miserable, an immovable melancholy had somehow rendered my world a whirlwind of lassitude and apathy that clouded my memories of moments marked by joy, purpose. Fulfillment. In recognizing the reality of this appraisal—deeming it an accurate assessment of the world I embodied—I considered my father's question carefully.

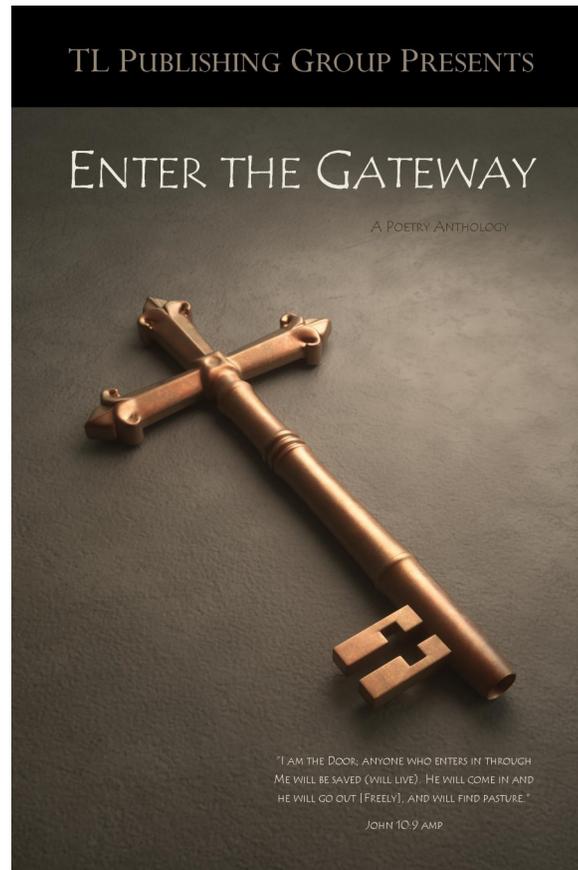
"Maybe life doesn't have a meaning," I said finally.

Smiling—apparently accepting the ambiguity and uncertainty stitched through my words—my father placed his empty coffee cup inside the small white saucer that sat atop the table.

"You could be right," he said slowly.

Both unable and unwilling to avoid the logic of his conclusion, I offered him a reluctant nod.

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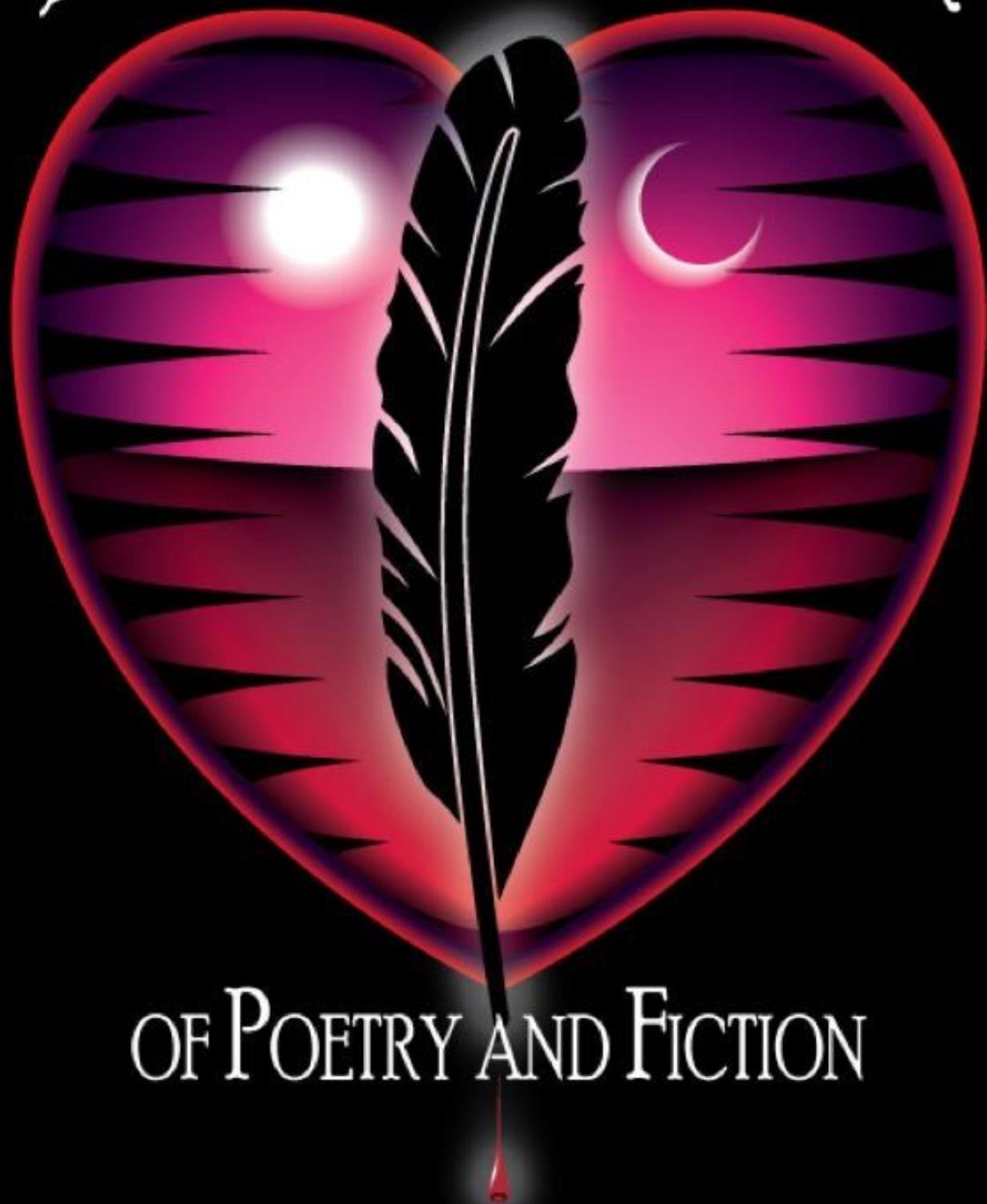
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Amy Pacini is a freelance creative writer and the Poetry Editor for Long Story Short ezine. She was previously a volunteer reader and editor for Short Poem ezine. Pacini is also the founder of Pasco Poets, and has held memberships in Poets Live, Brandon Poets & Artists Guild, the International Women's Writing Guild, and The Write Time. Her work has been published in *Mistletoe Madness Anthology*, *All Things Girl*, *Making Waves Poetry Anthology*, *Magnapoets*, *Hope Whispers*, *Hanging Moss Journal*, *Sand Literary Journal*, and many other publications. 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.

VENTURESOME VISIONARY

By Amy Pacini

There's a venturesome visionary
Passionately pulsating through me
Raging to be released
From the perfectionist persona
I decorously display
Through the world's wanton window.

Longing to awaken
From this mocking masquerade
Of scrutinizing slayers
Nasty naysayers
And poisonous players.

Ready to reveal
A radiant ruby
From a veiled veneer
One that sparkles
Without anxiety or fear.

A magical maestro
Of musical strings
Freely flying
On alpine wings
Excitedly energized
To be authentically alive
Rather than self shrinking
To popularly jive
And universally survive.

If others could only see
The luminous layers
Inside of me

Instead of savagely squinting
Through the
Limited lens of superficiality.

The world would be
A much better place
If society could alter
Their gloomy grimace
Into a felicitous face.

But even when
Those around me
Are depressingly discontent
I will follow my soul's scent
And courageously charter
On a visionary venture
Of fearless freedom
And infinite imagination.

THE LAST LEAF

By Chris Farrell

I.

Has not decided
to stay or go;
it stays, but this is not its choice,
rather its state,
and this state is finite -
temporary -
until it chooses to make it otherwise.
For now it dances,
threatening with every encouraging gust
to leave,
to let go.

II.

Holds because it knows
it wants to stay,
to remain where it has lived
from bud to green to red
and it doesn't care the rest have left,
have made a change
to be swept up in the breeze.
Doesn't care the branch sways and shakes
and urges the last to join the rest
because it has never felt the need to do
as others do
when others do
but this is only evident when it's alone.
It does care.
How could it not?

III.

Misses the rest,
and the desires of the branch,
which grasps the leaf and won't
let go, are secondary to the leaf.
For the branch will once again be full
in a short season's time -
This is why the branch holds
so tight to the leaf that would rather leap -
as though to say "Wait. Hold on.
Things will be better again."
But the leaf disbelieves, or
knows that things will not be better,
but rather will be as they were
and as they were is not enough for the last leaf.

IV.

Dances with fury
in the wind, clinging,
like a child.
But not tight like one frightened
and driven to its mother's embrace,
rather one desperate to explore the world
and holding just to mother's fingers
to keep from being lost.

V.

Misjudges the wind,
for how hard the leaf looks to fight
to cling to the branch
(or branch to the leaf)
and so the faith in that powerful gust
must be so great
that the temptation to soar
overwhelms.
Because it would rather have that faith -
take that leap -
for the chance to float on,
endless,
than stay, trembling,
in the place it knows too well.
Perhaps it does not misjudge
at all.

How far might a leaf blow in the breeze
and how far would be far enough
to call the journey worth it?
The last leaf knows
any journey is worth it.

VI.

Is just a leaf,
and it is just a branch,
and it is just the wind,
and this is just the way
of things.

WRINKLED SHEETS

By Mollie Markowitz

We were mosaic molds of sand. My fingers pulling out deeply buried shells, and I wanted to stay there. I still want to be there. We tumbled down the hill, rolling and laughing and spilling our wine. By the sea, we fell in love. We had it all, but more importantly, he had it all. We went for dinner at a nearby café, a dingy old shack. We wanted to escape extravagance for a few hours because we were only human. Happily married humans, who were hungry for an average life. Never mind the fact that he had more than enough money to fill an empty casket, buried deep beneath the sandy grass. We wanted simplicity.

I took his pruned hand underneath the water and let it rest on my cheek. He needed to know that I was his alone.

Back in the room, we were calm, assure of our future ahead of us, wanting to begin filling out our journals with stories of new houses and furniture and the miracles we would create. We were ready.

Each time the darkness on my side of the bed changed to a lighter shade and his side of the room remained black, I would walk outside to see the sun rise. Before marriage, I had never seen the sun rise at dawn, so with my morning routine, I felt lucky. While I awoke before the pelicans began their hunt, my husband dreamed of me. Or so he said. He would rise at a quarter past eleven every single day, giving me enough time to myself. I appreciated my mornings.

“Come fishing with me, Darling?” It was no question.

“Not now Dear. I’m going to the pool.” I watched my words, and he remained still. My intentions were pure, and he knew so.

“Then when you return?” Again, it was no question. And there was only one answer.

He was overbearing, but endearing. I loved him more than I can remember at this moment, and I know it was sincere. He would always pull the blanket to his side of the bed, leaving a large crease on the section of the sheets between us. But there was a way about him that made my insides burn and my mind forget all memories and knowledge of anything. Looking right into his black stone eyes, I would forget my own existence.

It was only occasionally that the fire upon my cheeks would extinguish and melt into a troubled sweat. These occasions often emerged after his afternoon run or scuba diving on the western side of the island, when he would return with an exasperated expression, wheezing, and cursing to god knows what. I would hand him the usual glass of lemonade with exactly five iced cubes. This was his preference, and he was always thirsty.

He would snap and fake a smile and squeeze my fingers just a bit too tightly, but I would not complain. I loved those things.

By the time the middle of our bed sheets had creased seven times, I wanted to live in that place. I wanted to wake up earlier than my husband for the rest of my life, wake up to a quiet, peaceful life carried out through the breaking dawn’s rays.

That was the beginning. Soon, the sheets were crumpled. Soon, the morning sun was not golden like a syrupy pancake, but instead an ominous symbol of what the day would bring forth. Soon, the skin on my face was not stroked lightly under the ocean’s cool escape, but rather abused and squeezed until I, myself, could no longer touch my cheeks. Soon, the nights held fear and manipulation.

But I was his.

Then we danced. On the cabanas by the water, with an afternoon glow to both our bodies as they drew in a crowd, hooking them like fish. We were known and loved, and more importantly of course, he was loved. He needed to be loved. But I needed no extra love from anyone else; he alone gave me more and more and more.

I was his.

But the nights were brutal and some days were not worthy of writing down inside my journal. I was confused and prayed for answers to my endless questions, sometimes wanting him to love me less. But I immediately erased those thoughts.

And, I no longer had my mornings. He woke at seven to smooth the wrinkled sheets.

We would take evening boat rides around the island, and he knew I was petrified of boat riding. He wanted to change me, make me fearless. He also loved to see me squirm. I remember how he joked, and I laughed. And then I laughed again when his joke had long ended. Laughing kept me sane. I never understood those jokes and I never appreciated his sense of humor. But I learned to adjust. I discovered that my laugh would grow louder as his compassion would deteriorate.

“I’m tired. Let’s go to sleep,” he would say. It was only seven-thirty but he was tired. So I was tired too.

I laughed and laughed and laughed.

In another three weeks the trip would end, but he was now my husband. “Till death do us apart,” he whispered to stroke me, to remind me.

But I did not truly worry about the future until one threatening night, just a week before our departure. He could sense my distance, my timid behavior, so he needed assurance that I would forever stay. Forever be his.

I was pregnant the next morning, and he claimed it was an accident. But I know what he wanted and what he did to me. I began to fear him, and not for my sake. I did everything he asked of me for the sake of my baby's safety. I worried how he would care for our child, and I hoped it would be more kindly than the way he cared for me. But I could not be too hopeful. Truthfully, I knew how my child's life would be, but I forced myself to sweep aside realism. I pretended and laughed until it hurt.

Each following day, I sat by the water for hours. Each day, the salty breeze and scorching sun drew me into the cold, caressing waves. They loved me genuinely and made the baby kick, keeping my child full of life. My husband's voice, unlike that of the sea, caused the baby to retreat within me, helpless and apprehensive.

I had but a few options for our future. Mine and my baby's. We could stay with him, go home with him, maintain a useless idealistic view of him. Or we could run. But running would do nothing for us, as he would follow. He would forever follow until he would track us down like deer in hunting season. As the end of our trip drew closer, decisions and the feeling of being contained inside a sealed jar consumed me when I ate, when I dreamed, and when I watched the waves. The salty sea became more and more appealing; it saved me from dysfunction, bringing me my only bit of happiness. Soon, my laughing became uncontrollable.

The final daybreak arrived. My baby kicked to hear the ocean's song one last time. I left my husband breakfast before I went, of course. I could not expect him to wait for me to return before eating. I walked on the pavement, watching my step. The grass and rocks were too steep and rough below my aching body. I needed the pillowy sand for assurance and support.

I knew it was time to leave with my husband, but I couldn't shake the pain inside my mind, the pain that pushed me into the sea, yelling, "Look what he did to you! Look how he squeezed, how he twisted, and how he mocked your bruising! Just look at yourself!" I sat in the water, terrified of what would come. I remembered his fingers, his eyes, his smile. How they destroyed me. How they would kill my child.

Sinking beneath the water, I vowed and decided and laughed.

I began floating on my back, letting my fingers curl up around the thick pieces of sand on the bottom. The water began to rise up into my eyes and nose and mouth, but it was cleansing. I took a sip of the sea, and it burned my throat, forcing tears from my already overly drained eyes. But the baby loved the taste. So I took another sip. My baby kicked and kicked for more.

I gave in to my child's demands, aware of where they would take us. Soon, I no longer held my float. I relaxed and felt safe. The baby was safe and sleeping by the sounds of sea gulls and rolling waves. I lived for the first time since marriage and wanted nothing but salt water for the rest of my life. Salt water would heal me. That evening, under the setting sun, my heart beat and I did not worry about the crease in his sheets any longer. There would be no more creases at all. In the water, under the clouds, above the sand at the bottom of the sea, my baby and I slept deeply. For we were safe at last.

READY? SET..VOTE!!!



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

In 2013, we published work written by over 80 phenomenal writers and from this number eight writers will be inducted into our Hall of Fame. Who are these eight writers? That depends on our reader's votes. Which poem stood out the most? Which short story really captured your attention?

Here is how it works. All writers who were published in the Torrid Literature Journal in 2013 are official candidates for the Hall of Fame. The candidates are divided into four different voting categories based on the volume their work appeared in (i.e. Volume V, VI, and so on.). Readers may cast their vote by visiting our website. Two writers (one poet and one fiction writer) will be chosen from each section based on the number of votes received. Voting starts October 1, 2013 and continues until February 1, 2014. The chosen candidates will be announced as official Hall of Fame inductees in Volume X of the Torrid Literature Journal. The inductees will receive a certificate recognizing their induction. In addition, the new Hall of Fame members will be listed on our website, bio included.

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

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

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

TL Publishing Group is always looking for submissions. We publish an issue during the first month of each quarter and each one is published 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 and structure. We accept a variety of submissions including: poetry, fiction, artwork, and articles.

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,

2013 has been a year for change, growth, and development, not just in literary skill, but also in life. We hope you found the articles, interviews, poems, and short stories that have appeared in our journals to be inspiring and encouraging. We also want to thank you for continuing to support TL Publishing Group. Between the journals, contests, literary events, and hundreds of submissions, we are continuing to grow in a positive direction and as we grow, we're being better positioned to help nurture the culture of literature. This is because of people like you. People like you, our readers, who support our writers who eagerly want to share their voice with you and the world.

However, now that the year is ending, where do we go from here? Forward. We move forward because standing neutral is just as bad as moving backward. We move forward and jump into a new year filled with new expectations, experiences, hopes, and dreams. A new year means more journals, books, contests, open mic events, etc.

Then again, are you ready for 2014? I realize this is somewhat an inane question seeing as how we can't stop time. Time is the one thing in this life we can count on to remain constant and with that, change is constant too. If we don't properly evolve with the times and adapt to our ever changing environment, it becomes hard for us to keep up. As long as we live and breathe, we should be growing and changing parallel to our environment.

However, in our effort to keep up with time, it is easy to lose ourselves. In 2014, we will embark on a journey to discover what was lost. With that said, we hope you will join us as we continue to present you with literary material that contributes to the development of the landscape of literature and art. See you in Volume IX.

- Editorial Staff



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