

FutureCycle

FLASH FICTION POETRY



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2012

FutureCycle
FLASH FICTION POETRY



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Table of Contents

POETRY

<i>Gilbert Allen</i>	7
<i>George Capaccio</i>	10
<i>Patricia Caspers</i>	14
<i>Drude Clark</i>	16
<i>Joan Colby</i>	18
<i>Dan Corjescu</i>	20
<i>Kate Cumiskey</i>	21
<i>Holly Day</i>	22
<i>Gary Fincke</i>	24
<i>William Greenway</i>	26
<i>Grey Held</i>	28
<i>Audrey Henderson</i>	29
<i>Daniel Lassell</i>	32
<i>David Lewitzky</i>	34
<i>Joanne Lowery</i>	35
<i>John Mahoney</i>	37
<i>John McKernan</i>	38
<i>Bruce McRae</i>	39
<i>Diana Pinckney</i>	40
<i>W. M. Rivera</i>	42
<i>Michael Rowe</i>	44
<i>Linda M. Smith</i>	45
<i>Mark Taksa</i>	46
<i>Yun Wang</i>	48

FLASH FICTION

<i>Erica Bauman</i>	53
<i>Carly Berg</i>	54
<i>Cathleen Calbert</i>	57
<i>Valerie Cumming</i>	60
<i>Adina Ferguson</i>	61
<i>Rebecca Fraser</i>	62
<i>Stephen Graham Jones</i>	65
<i>William Klein</i>	66
<i>Nathan Alling Long</i>	67
<i>Linda Lowe</i>	69
<i>Gavin Pate</i>	71
<i>Contributors</i>	73



Poetry





Gilbert Allen

Watch Our Congregation Grow!

A cemetery, or a parking lot?

The Everlasting Life Committee had to choose. Years later, no one will remember whose inspiration finally paved the road with good intentions, leading to a hell of a lot of concrete, dogwoods harrowing every second row—each member's space inlaid with burnished, oil-resistant bronze. Each car's baptismal air conditioner will sprinkle plaques on sweltering Wednesday nights.

Finally out of gas? They'll celebrate your spirit inside the sanctuary, wheel you out to your assigned, accustomed place, then break the concrete like a communion wafer, inter your body where your chassis stood.

And when a new rectangle finally cures above the last survivor of your surname—well then, you'll be declared a VISITOR, letting newcomers know you're holding up their prized Infiniti, their leaden feet.

Gilbert Allen

The Elephants of Zimbabwe

for Katy Payne

1. In Sengwa, tusked families lumbering
down riverbeds dry to the eye
but not to trudge and trunk—divining
elephant wells

found later by leopard, lioness
slaked by those first footnotes
the ones you carefully archived
with your other chosen family

before leaving for Ithaca, New York.

2. When you returned, you found the great beasts
culled, stripped of their ivory,
one small aircraft's scorched bones
(plain and plane

emptied, all families gone or grieving),
no river, no wells, all vanished—
till you climbed to see elsewhere
a new dry passage underscored

by water, the same river, a thousand new wells.

3. Wells like elephants, whose voices
lie always beneath the dry drums
of human hearing, silent thunder
of living and dead

crossing the Sengwa, crossing the page
to the end of one sentence
where everything changes.
Where a new one sets out

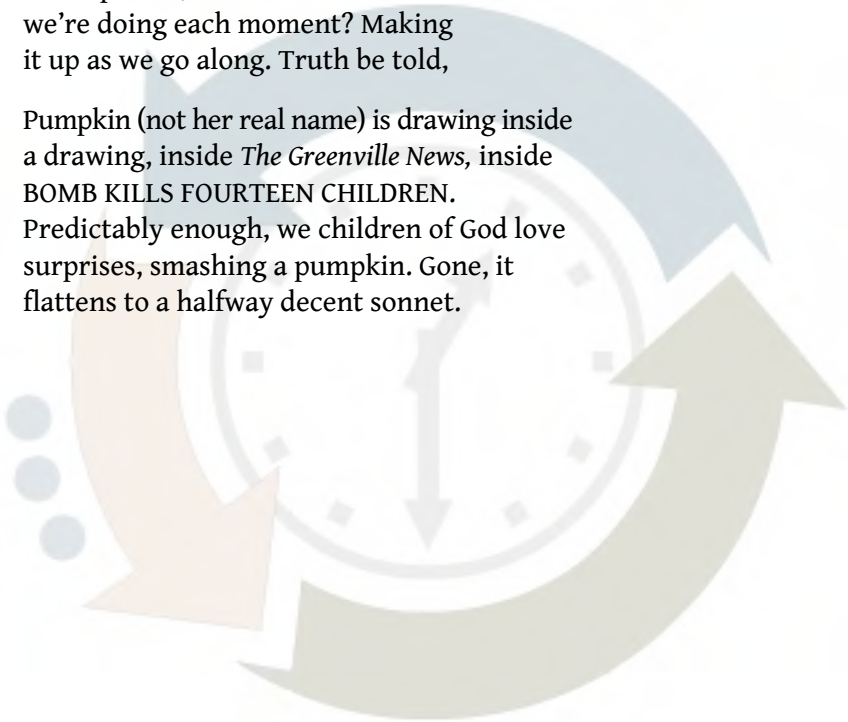
the sound ellipsis of four feet....

Gilbert Allen

Finished

"What are you drawing, Pumpkin?"
"I don't know—I'll decide
when I'm finished!" And the so-called
grownups giggle, because it's so
Godawful cute, which is to say, appropriately
incompetent, but isn't that what
we're doing each moment? Making
it up as we go along. Truth be told,

Pumpkin (not her real name) is drawing inside
a drawing, inside *The Greenville News*, inside
BOMB KILLS FOURTEEN CHILDREN.
Predictably enough, we children of God love
surprises, smashing a pumpkin. Gone, it
flattens to a halfway decent sonnet.



George Capaccio

Fog at Westport

1

An intimate fog has cast off the sea
and taken hold of house and yard.
Nothing dares disturb its spell.
It slowly entrances hemlocks and firs
and softens the thorns on a blackberry bush.

The grass stands deep and wet.
A breeze smelling of clover and salt
scatters the dew that beads my breath.
I freeze when a stray dog barks.

A wild rabbit, perfectly still,
reflects the will of the old stone bench.
I brush off a mosquito and pass like a ghost
through a ruin of weeds and rusted tools.

Blue spruces flanking the porch
trade silent looks across my face.
The moon's dissolved in a cloudy stew.
The sulphur of fireflies crackles in flight.

I turn down a flowered lane,
feeling emptiness rise from the dead,
and stop once more before going in.

To give the silence a deeper ring,
a foghorn adds a final hush.

2

A few lights loom on the second floor.
Couples are drifting upstairs.
The antique clock on the hutch by the sofa
stubs its heart against the hour.

I lower the shades and undress in the dark.
The woman I love is sleeping outside

drawn to the mystery of the fog's caress
and the sensuous crush of a summer night.

My bed quivers from the pair next door.
Like a bug caught in their passion's webbing,
I feel her cry and cry his name
till my ear bones snap.

While he moans in a manly way,
she comes and comes and comes again.
Her fingers almost rib my back.
Nobody's ever touched my name like that.



George Capaccio

Kennebunk

Steady rain
of oak logs burning
on a blustery day.

I pilot an easy chair
while watching the chimney
reel up the flames,

feeling the sea around me,
spying through every port
in the cabin,

feeling the wind as it
buoys the shingles that batten the roof
and washes over yards of tall beach grass.

Behind me
in rainbow glass,
branches of lilac with wealthy green leaves
are meeting their maker in a state of grace.

The platinum pendulum
of the clock on the wall
jibs toward eternity
through second-hand loops.

There's comfort in knowing
the time of my death
is fixed as the lighthouse
that looks over this bay

and my life, however mislaid,
can always be found
in the peace of a foghorn
plying its trade.

George Capaccio

Romance in French

The rain is carrying quite a burden tonight
possibly due to the convergence of so many dreams
for a world where compassion reigns supreme
and things like drones are consigned to the past.

Autumn calls to me with her cloak of colors
and her gorgeously enigmatic eyes.

I could easily picture her in a Paris bistro
charming the patrons with her savoir faire

while letting her lit Gauloise linger in the air
as she tosses back her smoky auburn hair
and squeezes the hand of her dappled lover,
Leopold something or other.

"No ideas but in things." (W. C. Williams)

The idea of angels and angel wings,
unflappable forms of mercy
closing around us when we are most unhappy
and alone.

Or there is nothing of the sort,
only long dark days and empty rooms,
and no angels, only the past
wrapping its arms around you.

Patricia Caspers

Hatsuhana Beneath the Waterfall

I was a wagyū bride, sold
like prized beef, and wedding eve,
my groom took me
as he would one of the herd.

Katsugoro had a black-fisted
vengeance, and each haru,
when the stream chirped with frogs,
he sought his foe and left me
to wash the feet
of his oyster-eyed mother.

He would not return until
hatsuyuki, when angels
fell from the sky, seeking fire.
We had none to offer.

When Katsugoro snapped his legs
like dry bamboo, I wove him a cart
and trucked him high through mountains
of windache to Tonozawa Falls.

Under the harsh wrath of water,
there was silence, and I prayed
for one hundred days.

Such a good wife, the villagers said.

Izanami-no-kami, I begged, you too
know a wife's grief. Please, wash this poison
from my breast.

On the hundredth day,
she scrubbed my body clean
and washed me into the next life.

Patricia Caspers

Since You've Been Away, the Garden

is drought stricken

and tongues of bean vine
strangle the corn in its husk.

Zucchini shade bests slender
stems of pepper stalks.

Summer squash curls
reptile-skinned
beneath a wilted green skirt
sequined in brandywines.

Katydid jeer
from sunflower heights.

Did you never receive my letter?
Evenings I fling
copper-barreled beetles from chewed leaves
into a bowl of soapy froth
until nightfall declares one of us
the victor.

Come home before the frost
and we'll bury the hyacinth bulbs.

Drude Clark

Hunger

Vintage plastic radio squats on a small table; old country tunes struggle through patchy reception and interruptions of airplanes overhead in a dusky sky.

Black and white tom cat jumps onto the table, squeezes past radio, past rickety fan that stirs thick air in a forlorn room, leaps from table to land silently on adjacent window sill.

Long black tail twitches at its tip, breaks the air with an intensity that belies cat's composure—front paws align with the horizontal of the sill; whiskers extend like optic fibers to catch signals from the ethers.

He stares. Gaunt woman locks his stare with fierce blue eyes framed by drooped lids. Her body fades into tattered damask upholstery. Quavering finger traces lid on the last can of pet food cradled in her wasted lap.

Drude Clark

Collage

I dream walk for miles in the warm sea-kiss of aqua waters
in Tahiti while the sun scribes a gilded arc high over
my head like the dome of Saint Peter's Basilica

and my eyes seek silent stories on skulls and yellowed bones
of an ossuary inside a stone chapel in a medieval Portuguese
village and I dream roll onward to where our tour bus has halted

long enough for me to gape at forests of TV antennas planted
across moss glazed tile roof tops laced with dangling loops
of electric wires teased loose by evening breezes

that stir while the earth segues into sunset and the hushed steps
of twilight usher us down humble cobblestones into Sean's
smokey pub in Dublin, serving thirsty patrons since 1600,

and I conjure ghosts of diverse colonists surging across a frigid
heaving Atlantic to inseminate the miraculous New England, come
America, while uncounted numbers of displaced peoples are ground

into the earth cycle upon cycle until from our stratosphere we can
see ourselves as a collage on a blue marble some call Gaia, with
memory of her own, as I gaze at the needle stuck into my arm

and it reminds me of a straw in a Maui pineapple rum cocktail
served at brunch on a hotel lanai. Soon...the afternoon's
monsoon clouds will gather to waste their warm tears.

Joan Colby

Swallow

Soaring at dusk, to feed on the wing,
Forked tail like a serpent's tongue,
Every year returning
To the steep loft, harbinger
Of a thousand summers

Where lounging with tall
Frosted glasses of iced
Sweetness, we swallowed,
Grateful for the company of friends

Or in a lonesome bar knocking back
Shots of Jack Daniels
Swallowing the hard words
Left unuttered.

That reflex, the last to fail,
You refused the tube while
You could still speak

Despite saliva, thick and sticky
Enough to glue wattled nests
To cobwebbed rafters
Of a dim unforsaken

Sanctuary where your last breath
Coalesced to a lump of sorrow
In our throats, unable to swallow this.

Joan Colby

Sandals

This side of the border, they discard
all that weighs them down:
empty water bottles,
a pastiche of plastic,
fake IDs, addresses
of cousins in LA or Chicago,
if they can get that far
on blisters and sweat.

When the sun at noon scorches earth,
or the desert night lays a cold
coverlet on shuddering flesh,
they squat in creosote bushes,
patrols shining lights to stun them
like animals.

Thousands have perished.
Some sitting as if alive
staring sightless in exhaustion
and despair. Others
baked sere. Just bones clad in rags
gnawed by javelina.

Four sandals
filthy with the dust
of pilgrimage.
His flanked by hers
as if they wound
their bodies together
before stepping out and
walking off to nowhere.

Dan Corjescu

Six Haiku

Spring touches your lip
a black crow with silver feet
announces young love

A Swan has black feet
Your love has no roots to give
Autumn has no red leaves

No life without you
A winter scarf weeps dread
Nightingale again

Upside down underneath grass
A fox buries sorrows
The view is supple, new

The Sun a white hat
Stretch to reach Antares
Warm milk near your thigh

Burn candles for me
A still crane in water's church
Clouds pray for us

Kate Cumiskey

Pretty is as pretty does

Across two bridges, through the swamp, mangroves
poke stiff fingers at the low gray belly of dawn;
ivory and ash limbs bare across limitless green,
a constant changing murmur like lovers—
gray velvet wings of cranes whisper,
mullet splash, gators hiss then slap rising water.

I lean out into November chill, my wet hair trailing
out the window all the way to school. Mother
said it was good for me, it built character which
I waited for, like the visit of some exotic relative
with tales of imagined things. I wanted
to be touched, to feel what other flesh
was like. To listen: patience even then
more a part of me than my own strange body.

Obedient I waited for character to settle in,
wild cold hair a welcome mat. Patience...
Mother knew what was coming with her heavy,
mindless tasks—reeking
of bleach, calluses on my knees from scrubbing
the terrazzo floor, my mind wandered—
with her talk of what pretty girls do.
Answer: my skin is soft with rough, rough use.

Holly Day

Supplemental Income

It didn't take long for me to discover
That the Tooth Fairy would leave
Just as much money for someone else's teeth
As she would for my own. Some years later

I found that leaving dead mice
Under my pillow also brought
Monetary compensation, and the cat
Things I found in the rain gutter on the way home
From school, and college, and work
All proved to be invaluable sources of income.

And wow, did I feel like a big sucker for the Man
When I found the equivalent to a week's pay
Shoved under the mattress in place
Of the nice boy next door, smothered
In his sleep—all those years of busting my hump

When all I had to do was
Find some more teeth.

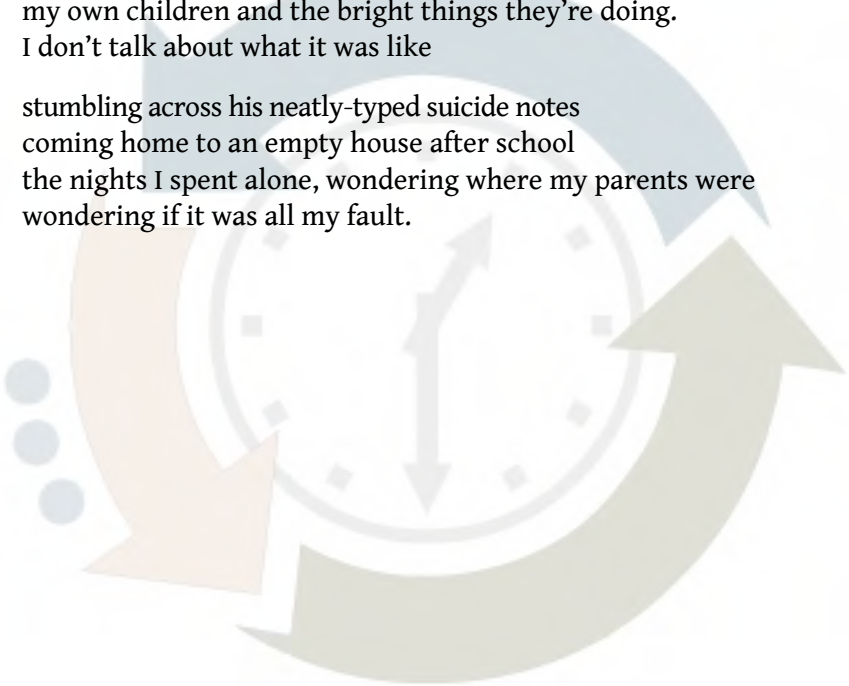
Holly Day

Conversations With My Father

there's a moment of silence and the questions
push their way into my head, was I loved as a child, was I
the mistake I always felt like, why did I
always feel so alone. it's a familiar plug

in the lull, and I rush to fill the gaping hole
with more talk about the weather, my job
my own children and the bright things they're doing.
I don't talk about what it was like

stumbling across his neatly-typed suicide notes
coming home to an empty house after school
the nights I spent alone, wondering where my parents were
wondering if it was all my fault.



Gary Fincke

Four Tractors

Once, in May, a tractor vanished
Beneath the earth, a farmer too early
Into the onion fields. We watched
The John Deere, large and green, rise
From the mud, heaved up by pulleys.
The farmer, as it sank, had stood,
Riding until his shoes had touched
The soil, becoming, he said,
A sad, temporary Jesus,
Walking until he'd reached the shore.

My student, thirteen, had one eye,
The other a socket stitched closed,
Her hair hung across scars like cloth.
Her father's black Harvester had
Flushed birds and turned over two nests
Of mice before he let her crouch
Behind him, hugging his neck ,
In shorts and t-shirt, like a model
For the joy of family farming,
Thin legs still white in early May.

From a red New Holland , that year,
A boy my son's age tumbled, too,
Under the harrow that followed.
A minister said, "Remember
The seven years of joy that child
Has brought," as if that boy were pet.
After the service, the one-eyed
Girl followed her father, who hunched
His shoulders as if dragging her.

All year, the girl with one eye was
In love with happy endings who

Were always unfaithful, and I
Had no revisions. A teacher,
I was a ghost who left the school
Before I entered my body
And walked to my children who had
Not been injured, their tragedies
Postponed. In May I passed tractors
Idling their breath of memory
In plowed fields Sometimes, the farmers
Crouched beside them, obedient.



William Greenway

Wanted

Aging widower seeks half-pint woman half his age for meaningful relationship. Must be beautiful (long, black curly hair preferred, olive skin, Mona Lisa lips), talented, hilarious. Must love: cooking cheesy, peppery rice, writing and reading poems, sex, running five miles a day on the treadmill, singing Aretha Franklin into the microphone of the TV remote control, dancing in the kitchen in XXX men's t-shirts.

No sadness or sickness need apply.

William Greenway

Perffect

I vote for just one hotel on holiday
so she'll cry only once. That
arrival at sunset, the room dark,
the view of the Alps or the Tiber
not there, flowers wilted
or the wrong kind, the guide books
having lied, no more perfect
than the white wedding. It's a word
women believe in all their lives, while
men settle for *okay, not bad, or
this'll do*. Which is why we marry them,
I guess, with their poor self-images and fear
of lines and cellulite in fluorescent
motel mirrors. What good is white
but for virgins and surgeons to blandish
what's missing: the stain, the flaw they
eventually have to face, like the brick
wall outside the window, the sagging
mattress, and the men they finally marry
who make them cry.

Grey Held

Soup Kitchen

I untie my volunteer apron,
sit down with Isabella,
who tells me her mind
is its own light source.

All the inherent goodness
in the Swedish ivy on the table
is bowing towards her.

Every day she wakes
to city moths that settle on her face
as a beard of wings.

She fled from San Salvador
to Boston, where she's studied
dumpsters.

Soon she'll get a shower.
She'll get a towel.
She'll get a bed for one night.

I'll go home to plug
my ears with wads of cotton,
not to hear the sirens
and backfires or the urgent
sermons of the crows.

Audrey Henderson

The Lichen Lovers

for Sylvia Duran Sharnoff
Co-Author, *Lichens of North America*

What we didn't mortgage or pawn
is hardly worth mentioning.
The wedding china paid for
a specialized lens and my guitar
collection bought a motor home.
Yes, we were broke. The tongue waggers
clucked and shook their heads,
three years' carpenters wages
gone, for what? Lichen.

We gave the little speech
sort of like moss, breaks down rock
the stuff of model railroad shrubs
and the manna that fell on God's
chosen people was a lichen actually

but we met with blank stares mostly
as we criss-crossed America
looking for clean air.

You corrected book text on your
sick bed as we reminisced
about tundra how I shot the lichen
through a cloud of mosquitoes
while you beat the air with a glove
and I know you loved the words,
you said it had all been worth it
to see "rock" and "tripe" juxtaposed.
Still, I wish you could tell me again
that we'd breathed in rarified air.
I wish you could tell me again
we'd eaten the bread of heaven.

Audrey Henderson

Airstream

I want a beehive
and a Winnebago.
No, an Airstream trailer
made of aluminum
pressed into art deco rays.
I imagine the kitchens
have nickel latches
and maple doors.
I will fry us eggs in Arizona.
You will read the newspaper
as usual, on a folding chair
greyer, not bald, and eminent.
The children will be older
Emma a scientist, Helen
something beautiful
and empathetic. We will pass
through several time zones
and see cactuses.
The trailer will shine
on the highway
like a bullet, pointed
and convex. When
we get home
I'll make us
candles
out of
yellow wax.

Audrey Henderson

A Late Encounter with the Professor of Islamic Art

For no reason, I walk into a bookshop
and find you've written
the definitive edition on your subject
for Thames and Hudson.

Miles and years away
I see you at a window
the sun making silly leg shadows
on your safari trousers

and now you're a grey eminence.
Were the jokes for my benefit?
I know how I reveled
in our shared dislike of epic.

Of course I overlooked the thumb fungus
and your indecisiveness—
separating glass from coffee granules.
There was a coat of arms on all your books.

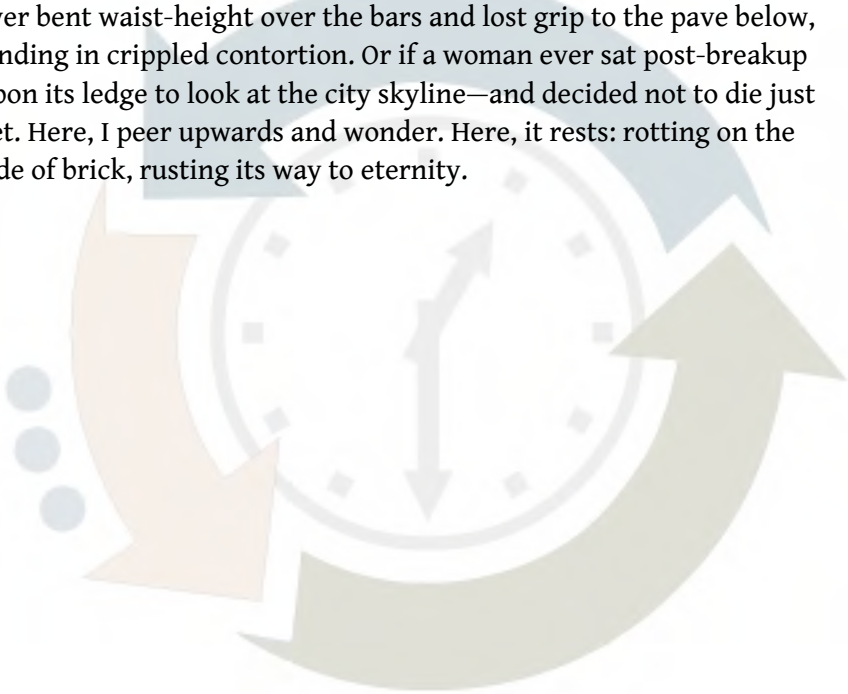
I stand before the shelf
and wonder whether I've been worthy
of that wink you gave me from the podium
in your red robe

and my heart curdles
even as I leave the shop with a bag
full of dawn over the mosque
and fondness rising like the doves of Cordoba.

Daniel Lassell

Fire Escape

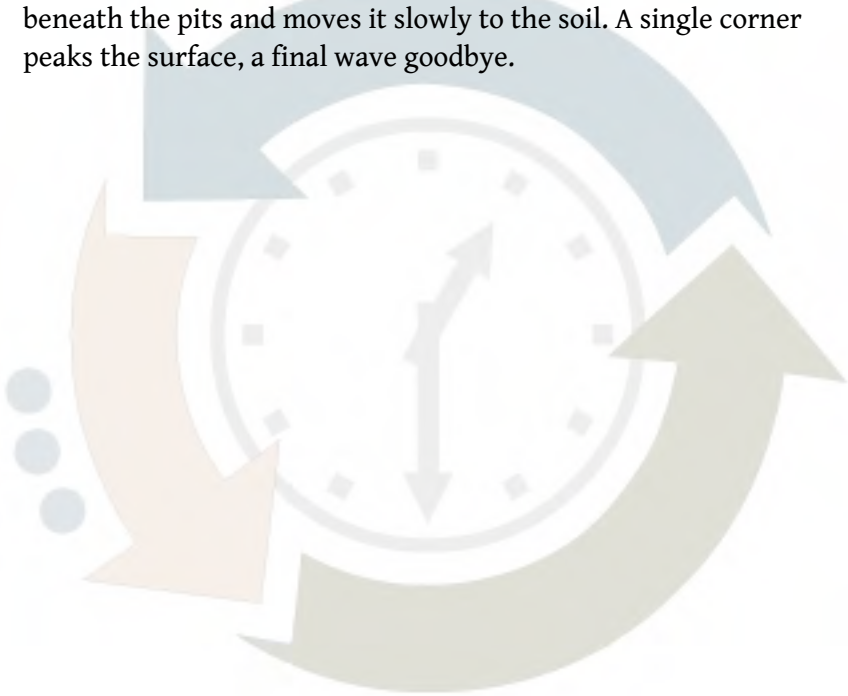
A trap to the heavens. Winding to and fro in knotted symphonic grace, diagonalized and crisscrossed upwards and downwards, ladders trapeze the top and base. An *emergency exit* they call it. But one could climb and fall just as easily. I wonder if it has been used in its hundred years. If a soul ever crawled out the window and descended to safety to leave billowing smoke behind. If a child ever bent waist-height over the bars and lost grip to the pave below, landing in crippled contortion. Or if a woman ever sat post-breakup upon its ledge to look at the city skyline—and decided not to die just yet. Here, I peer upwards and wonder. Here, it rests: rotting on the side of brick, rusting its way to eternity.



Daniell Lassell

The Gravestone on Meridian Street

Has no others to keep it company. It sleeps amidst the hustle and honk of city streets as people frequent, clacking stilettos and knocking boots. The body beneath it decayed decades ago, taking the form of worm shit. The gravestone decays now. Under exhaust plumes and cellphone waves, it crooks and levels to the earth. Its etchings rubbed bare. A patch of sward catches it beneath the pits and moves it slowly to the soil. A single corner peaks the surface, a final wave goodbye.



David Lewitzky

Belly Dancers

Oh housewives and mothers
with your scarves and shawls, your
veils, your turquoise and your amber;

belly dancers with your finger cymbals,
your bare midriffs, black eyes
on fire with kindness, generosity;

almas honored for your dance,
your swaying, rhythmic,
elegant maternity;

oh suburban sisters, strong shouldered
paradise dancers, with your
soft hips, your tambourines;

oh good women raising children
in safety and joy, leave awhile
your lawns of security,

dance for us,
bring peace to us and comfort us,
we troubled pilgrims at the inn,

and celebrate for us nice neighborhoods,
a middle class, a middle life,
a middle heaven.

Joanne Lowery

In History at My Job

The summons comes, the corridor,
the closed door. I have read about
the chair opposite the superior's desk
and wondered how it felt to sit
beneath Stalin's stare, to wait
worry-free, little me all innocent,
ears of disbelief as accusations
pierce me in the style of St. Sebastian.
Why would anyone nod to fantasies
that only days later in the cell
make a kind of paranoid sense?
And motives so secret even the motivator
never knew they were now revealed
and laid out in rows on the battered table
like a bad hand of cards. My hand
is steady as I lift the pen
to sign my performance review for 1937
thankful that the organization has ferreted
out an underling's malevolence and crimes.
Like those who were led away
never to be heard from again, I touch
the edge of the table, how much it feels like wood.

Joanne Lowery

Because of the Neurology Waiting Room

None of us are completely bald
like down the hall in oncology.
But a woman in a wheelchair
has her head thrown all the way back
as if inviting someone to slit her throat.
Her teeth clack softly and rhythmically
like the ticking of a clock.

Two men watch the t.v. hung high in the corner:
terrorist cells have been discovered,
and already I can feel mine exploding.

After the little hammer makes its rounds
to be sure I jerk in all the right places,
I learn some new long medical terminology.
And after that, out on the highway
seeking the calm of music, I'm not surprised
a passionate song with all the intensity of sex
is only a man singing about a bird.

John Mahoney

open land

the placement of the cyst,
within the spinal cord itself,

makes even micro-surgery
not worth the risk

still i remember that moment
and the seasons changed

until we come to this day
of what might have beens

and still
no one can tell me whether

the x-ray, like a Tarot card, in that
that manila envelope,

which i occasionally hold
up to the light of my bedroom window,

brought about this day
and outside this window

it is March in Minnesota
a grey and snow melting day

of low clouds, and wet winds
of waiting, and getting over

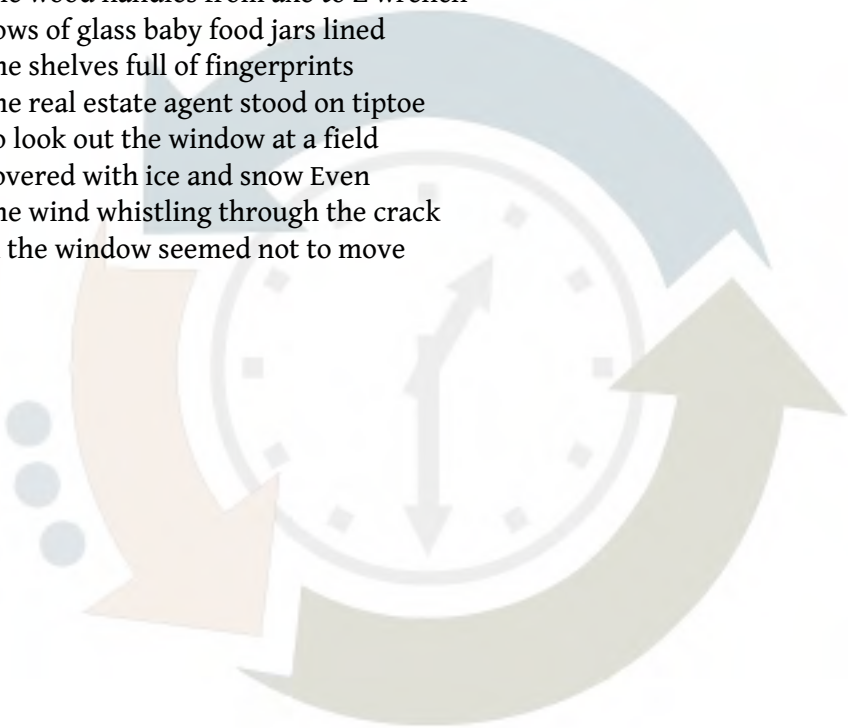
putting the envelope back, behind
the dresser, and walking down

the stairs, and back, into this,
this other life, this open land

John McKernan

Cloud Cover for Weeks

A man had turned into a sheet of dust
Lying on the work table in his garage
The silent hammers in their chrome
Hooks said nothing for many days
His fingerprints still hovered on
The wood handles from axe to Z wrench
Rows of glass baby food jars lined
The shelves full of fingerprints
The real estate agent stood on tiptoe
To look out the window at a field
Covered with ice and snow Even
The wind whistling through the crack
In the window seemed not to move



Bruce McRae

Small Words

January. Between two midnights.
Night a temple to darkness.
The dark tearing its veils.

I'm warming the stones in death's bed.
Dismantling love's scriptures.
Addressing godhead's absolute bone.
I'm lying here. Writing night a letter.

My words are small and centuries long.
Each story is a ghost's story.
Every sentence is a walk down to the sea.

I think of a rock
being constantly thrown at the wind.
Or I think of nothing.
Of time's snowmen. Of life's songs.

I'm in an ice-house,
hours passing at an incredible distance.
The moments parting.
I'm in a dream-house.
Alive to the possibilities.
At the centre of this raisin-world,
stringing popcorn-words together.
Making a breath chain.

Then nothing happens.
I am that cracked god,
all my creations beneath me.
The room is a boat
slipping out of its dim harbor.

I'm past the lighthouse now.

I am beyond salvation.

Diana Pinckney

Another Dream,

Mother, of us trapped in that room by the nurses' station, you swaying
on the bed's side, me buttoning the thousand buttons down your dress,
kneeling to wrestle your feet into shoes, struggling with sweater and coat
for winter's at the windows, ghosts grip the grounds, when suddenly we
dodge the green-coated doctors and race down halls through stinking
airless stairwells, you fast, sleek as a doe, me panting behind till lost
in a labyrinth of doors that open to the bright white of bandages,
crying, unable to catch my breath, to suck back what I said
and say the things I didn't know to say, years ago in Richland
Memorial that fall I insisted on surgery, your foot black from M.S.,
one operation leading to another, to losing your leg, your heart
with it and no words to release us from that place we return to when
my days
break, unless the earth you so loved, Mother, spins us into another
season where we'll walk, not wheel, through the tall glass doors into
hundreds
of iris in a sweep of dark purple, blue, gold, white and bold –blazing
the paths, bearded tongues whispering while you tell me
their names, all the beautiful names.

Diana Pinckney

The Magic Bed

after Stanley Kunitz

At times we're under the Sistine's
looming finger or beside the Graces that flowed
from Botticelli onto the folds of Mother's sheets.
Her high, spooled mahogany I climbed aboard,
nightgown tucked and pigtails
flying as we sailed the pages of her books
beyond that brick bungalow on Enoree.
Worlds opened like Faberge eggs. *Abracadabra*—
Glistening on the banks of the Neva,
the Hermitage danced Mother's ruined legs

and my bare feet through amber halls to city squares
where we breathed air steamed from the bronze
nostrils of horses. Like Alice we tumbled small
to large, to El Greco's bodies, ghostly,
deliciously chilling. The Nile streamed us to pyramids,
rivers of sand, a dusting from those gods of sky
and earth. *Fee fi foe fum*—the dreaded Tower groaned
with cells of iron bracelets and slits exposing scaffolds
on the Green. Colors bled through pages. Hesse spilled

from books stacked on eyelet linens. When Milton spoke
of blindness, Mother recited. When she was gloomy,
Voila, we pulled the fabrics of Matisse around
our shoulders and set off for Paris. She steered our fearless
ship to inescapable, separate destinations. When finally,
I steer her wheelchair down the halls of the National Gallery,
we greet Goya's rosy-cheeked Duke like a long-awaited
companion. Looking up, she says, *He winked*.
Did *she*? No doubt she did, and did and did.

W. M. Rivera

Water Wife

...marâtre Nature

I love nature's excesses
from a distance. This summer flood extends
beyond expectancies. It burbles over furniture
and my nerves. Nobody's drowning, but close.

One day it's top news: hot spots of fire
in flame the deserts where Bedouins used to
strip their enemies, leave them to broil—
and next this overwhelming water.

One week of downpour's proof
how water might become—and us,
fretful like the Sorcerer's Apprentice, frantic
with our double buckets, never fast enough.

The storm runs into night and rains
down spouts where spiders abandon nets
spun across the cellar door, and storage space
now floats haphazard prizes on the floor.

It doesn't matter what you see in this deluge,
it's what you don't,
the irony of loving the excess you want to flee
or stop the way it's going.

W. M. Rivera

No starting over

In memory of Gil Cuatrecasas, whose paintings were
destroyed by floods in Galveston and Houston, Texas.
(ref. *Texas Monthly*, August 1976)

From sketching stems, leaves, pistils, sleeves,
his father's exacting botany, he learned
how deep inside colors burn,
from dried up stems and petals, from clitoria and quamoclit
to the thick crackling fires that curled
into a paint-shaped world.

Then floods washed up.
High waters raged. "Desks bobbed like harbor buoys,"
as per the news. Paintings were rafts thudding against walls.
The loss complete, not critic's curse but worse,

as if from under water
spitting out an almost death, he quit the art of urgency,
the gasp for air to reach and climb those mountains masters
laid out centuries past, the challenge and the joy
to leap from everyday unconsciousness and then arrive
where vivid colors burst—and the brilliant light.

Reading books, long walks
through streets far off and back; he propped
his man-size canvases up against the walls
like ancient lovers mummified, not dead
just put to rest, behind him now
the urge to cut a figure on the cave.

Michael Rowe

Travelers

There was one road, Short Tract, paved and decent condition but too hot for bare feet the three days we walked it that went through an abandoned town, Angelica, torn up white Colonials next to knocked down shacks along Main Street and dead ended three miles north at the Baptist church in Prospect, crazed clapboard houses leaned over and a field of apple trees with ruined fruit, Short Tract before Angelica rolled up and down hills under gray clouds piled up like anvils past collapsed shacks and barns and wheat fields turned to mud puddles or burnt to stubble but for one straight rising stretch that showed us how many we were, a northbound flowing stream of humanity driving half dead cows, a pickup truck held together with baling wire carrying toddlers and elderly, gaunt horses drawing carts piled up with firewood, pots and pans, ten gallon plastic jugs of water and boxes of silver fish infested pasta with men, women and children on foot on either side carrying babies, blankets, tools, knives, rifles, axes and chickens live and skinned on their backs swatting flies under the iron sky and finally setting down at the side of the road refusing to go one step further, their faces, young and old, etched with woe but impassive too as though constant strain had carved itself into skin that hardened and leathered around it.

Linda M. Smith

Meditations at the Sink

As a young bride, I stood at the sink
in the kitchen with the red-flowered wallpaper,
looked out the window to the orange trees
in the backyard and had a fleeting feeling.
I yearned for something yet to come, though

we were cheerful, elated, even euphoric at times.
I learned to cook. Bert told me meals were good
even when they weren't. We worked and
laughed and loved through the years,
but when I stood at the sink, sometimes,

and looked out, I recalled a sense of something
I wanted, though I didn't know what, but I
was aware that the thing was getting closer.
Our houses, kitchens, yards and trees changed
over the years until we came to our mountain home.

He still brings me coffee in bed every morning
and bought me a Buick for my birthday.
We worked and took care of Dad and Mom.
Now, I stand at the sink in our gold-colored
kitchen, look out the window to the birds

feeding in the plum tree and remember
the orange trees and the red-flowered wallpaper
from long ago, and realize it has come.
The fleeting feeling, the sense of something,
turned to self-knowledge. I am on the right road.

Mark Taksa

Knife

Popping out of the bushes, an insurance seller
holds a knife to my throat. He will guarantee my life,
he shouts, if I do not shout while he lists risks
to my survival. While I water petunias,
he snarls, a tree could fall and crack my neck.
I could lose my job as an opera star.

He tells me that my quiet certifies the discipline
of a diva. A knife multiplies fantasy;
I remember an aria never out of my mouth,
agree I see my face under a headline.

He orders me to believe that a storm,
in my town where breeze does not lift a leaf,
will push down my prize winning redwood
and shove sun past my window.

I will be too hot to water flowers and grass.
They will die. Desert terrorists will settle
next door. The street will become a rifle range.
Garbage trucks will not collect. The price of my house
will dilapidate. The city will fine my garbage.

Into lip clipping position, the knife inches closer.
The seller's grin is cordial as that of a hungry person
with new soup in his gut. He shouts
he is in a hurry to sell anti-mugging insurance
to his next victim, shoves me papers
I sign without reading.

Mark Taksa

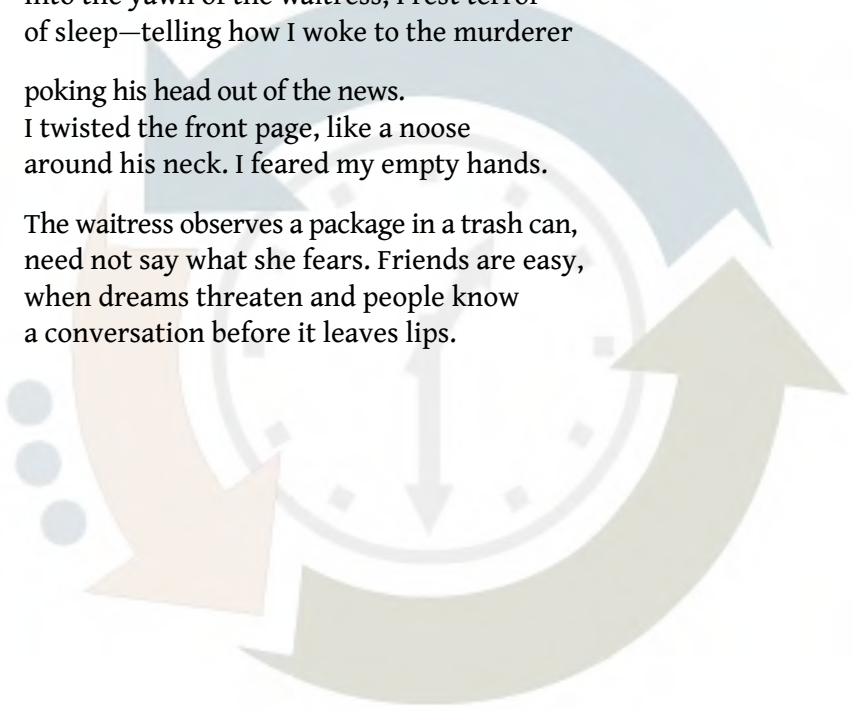
Intimacy Burn

Moon lights the smoke from pot holes
in front of this café where the waitress lifts
her purse from the chair I always take.

The cup clangs against the plate
with the bang of a bomb.
Into the yawn of the waitress, I rest terror
of sleep—telling how I woke to the murderer

poking his head out of the news.
I twisted the front page, like a noose
around his neck. I feared my empty hands.

The waitress observes a package in a trash can,
need not say what she fears. Friends are easy,
when dreams threaten and people know
a conversation before it leaves lips.



Yun Wang

Futurescape

Thunder of applause
followed by rain on the desert.
A single yellow flower
opens from a cactus palm.

A child sleeps.
Oars navigate an opal sea.

The Sun will die in five billion years.
Ten million spaceships will depart
from its white dwarf corpse.

A kiss sparks
beneath a canopy of cherry blossoms.
Electricity of one thousand faces
carved in breathing stone
rushes from Notre Dame.

Protons will decay.
The Universe will dissipate
back into a sea
of space-time foam.

Child, you are the guide
in my journey. I climb on
the boat of your laughter.

Yun Wang

Dreamscape

Mad men were counting down
to detonate the planet.
Dreams directed us to
Tunnel Number Two beneath the sea.

On the other side: a land of white
lotus.
We learned to live without eating.

We conversed in poetry.

The explosion carried our oxygen
iron, magnesium
into opaque
intergalactic clouds.

We grew translucent wings.





Flash Fiction





Erica Bauman

The Current From Here

As the sun swung high over the aboveground pool in the backyard, Harold's mirror asked him, "Where will the water go?"

His mirror was sitting in the worn armchair by the window, still in the flannel pajamas that made Harold itchy just looking at them. Harold was bent over the wardrobe, sniffing t-shirts to see which was the cleanest.

"I dunno," Harold said, popping his head out of a blue shirt. "Gutter probably."

His mirror leaned forward to prop his head onto his hands, knuckles that now seemed large in fingers like pipe cleaners pressed against his lips. Harold still had trouble hiding the way his stomach clenched at the way the pajamas pooled around his mirror's limbs.

"It's nice," his mirror said, watching the sunlight dance on the water's surface like a school of silverfish. "It all goes to the same place. Pool water, rainwater, sewage. Eventually it all washes out to sea."

His mirror smiled at him and Harold decided that his mirror seemed much happier now that August was coming to an end and it was getting colder for everyone else. His mirror was still thinking about all the pools on the block emptying out in a vast river that swept down the gutters to join a network underground, buried rivers that flowed for miles in the dark, stretching out for the light and the sea.

"It's nice," his mirror said later that afternoon as he watched the chemicals drip down the IV in his arm. "Everything flows together."

And three months later, when his mirror was lowered into the ground, Harold agreed.

Carly Berg

Soul Custody

When you have a connection with another person, the two of you create a “spiritual child” together. Sally knew this because she’d collected plenty of them through the years, some good and some bad. It was mostly the bad ones who showed up at her house in the flesh.

Now she tried to sleep, but the spiritual child created with her obnoxious brother, or Withbrother, as she thought of him, kicked her in the face in his sleep. Withmother woke up and took his side, as usual.

At least the sweet ones slept. Withgrandma slumbered solidly. Withjill, her best friend from grade school, cuddled up with her like a big soft doll.

Later, she awoke to banging in the kitchen. The bossy lady downstairs thumped on her ceiling with a broomstick.

Withrobert and Withleo, her spiritual brats from her two ex-fiances, were at it again. They were wrestling in a mess they’d dumped on the floor: milk, eggs, flour, and ketchup.

By the time she got the room and boys clean, the sun was up.

She set her alarm so as not to sleep through her psychiatrist appointment. She needed more of his lovely little pills. Then she downed four shots of vodka and surrendered to blissful oblivion. Like many misunderstood souls, she required mood-altering substances to keep from losing her damn mind.

Doctor: As I said, it’s quite an ingenious example of projection. Your mind has put your lingering feelings from these failed relationships into a personified form. In fact, I’d like to research your case further and write a paper on it.

Sally: About that prescription...

Doctor: No more medication. We need progress here, not merely symptom relief.

Sally: But, I can’t—

Doctor: Whoop! Time's up.

The spiritual children didn't come out much in the daytime. They waited until she was in bed for the night.

Withrobert opened her apartment door and left it that way, for starters, and she did not live in a good neighborhood.

She and Robert had fought and fucked like alleycats. Their breakup was so crazy the lady downstairs set her broomstick aside and called the police.

He got the new leather sofas. She got Withrobert. She couldn't stand the little bastard, but she had to take care of him, as does any other parent with troublesome kids.

Unless... *The doctor said he wants to do research.*

Sally googled the doctor's name and found his home address.

"Children," Sally said. "I have a surprise for some of you. The others will get something later, so no crying. Withrobert, Withleo, Withbrother, and Withmother, come on. We're going for a ride."

The bad spiritual children raced to the car. They behaved for once (sort of), not wanting to blow their chance at the mysterious treat.

She thought it best not to give the doctor a chance to say no. She sent the children to the door alone and drove off.

Sally's life was now so nice she went off disability and re-joined the workforce. She quit drinking, kept her hair combed, and made new friends. The children she kept were the ones who brought her comfort and joy.

She had the doctor to thank. After all, the others were dreadful spiritual children but they were her spiritual children. Sally could not, in good conscience, have abandoned them. They had to be given to someone she trusted.

The least she could do was thank him for accepting her problem children and ask how his research was coming along.

But he no longer worked at the clinic. Sally asked the receptionist to dial him at home.

Doctor (on the phone): You were right, they're real as hell and this is hell. They won't leave! I hope you're happy, bitch. *Click.*

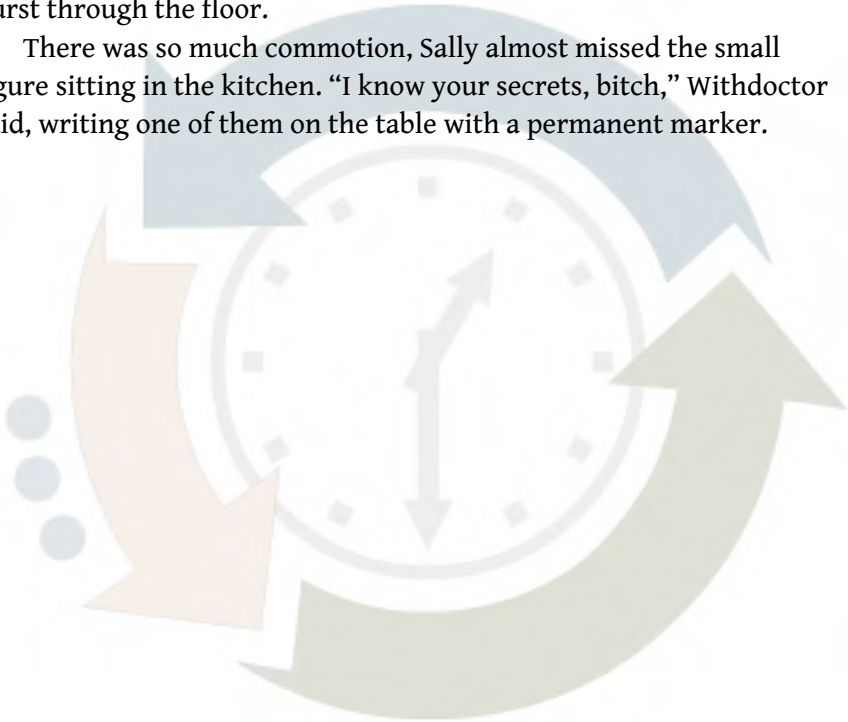
Sally was happy, too pleased with her shining new life to care.

That night, after dinner and a movie with a hot date, she curled up to sleep with the sweet spiritual children.

She awoke to banging and running water.

Her bathtub overflowed, as did her bathroom and kitchen sinks. The flooding must have caused a rainstorm downstairs. The lady downstairs beat on her ceiling so hard the broomstick threatened to burst through the floor.

There was so much commotion, Sally almost missed the small figure sitting in the kitchen. "I know your secrets, bitch," Withdoctor said, writing one of them on the table with a permanent marker.



Cathleen Calbert

The Milkman and the Vampire Lady

The milkman hates the dawn as the poet hates the pen and as the college applicant hates analytical thises-to-thats. Like the would-be freshman at a state university, the milkman sees no comparisons between things. Nothing is like anything else. The milk bottles don't glimmer like the moon. They don't chime like church bells signaling doom. They don't glisten like the back of a woman's thighs once she's through with you. The dawn is like the sunset but rather backwards: it means the beginning, not the end, of work for the milkman. So he works—glimmer, chime, glisten—and makes no comparisons. He leaves the usual half-pint for the lady at 13 Hester Place. He almost sees her, but doesn't. A brush of darkness against a curtain. Blur through glass. Click of high-heeled boots. He can't see her making comparisons: the milk bottle is to the milkman as the milkman is to...



Cathleen Calbert

Tiffany

The Lady Vampire is mad about original Tiffany lamps and justly prizes the three she owns. Few enough exist. They're illegal in France, as they should be: inside each of the overturned bowls dance a dozen fairies, captured in those believing days of green hills and milkmaids. Fairies love to dance, as you may know, and they glow, like Dutch diamonds or Victorian prisms, when they kick their shapely spider-legs or whip their moth-wings into frenzies, but no one truly enjoys being forced to dance in formation for the rest of one's days, so we may offer them some measure of pity. Ah, but what a delightful light! And you may not know this, yet it's as true as anything: they are spiteful creatures, fairies, prone to unfair gossip and malicious little lies.



Cathleen Calbert

Small Ghosts

While other Manhattanites battle bedbugs and dust bunnies, the Vampire Lady struggles with shadows the size of infants' t-shirts, which drift along the lower moldings, then float up to the ceiling, where they bob and blow like opaque gray balloons. Others, a bit heavier, circle around the burners on the stove until the flames sputter and go out, leaving an aroma of fresh gas and ancient fish sticks. In the refrigerator, one stretches itself out in a guilt-inducing portrayal of mold while several more solidify in the freezer as smoky popsicles. The Lady V. orders her maids to bleach the place, to sanitize it, to scour it clean. But she calls off Greta and Aubergine before they can disperse the spirits. Each one depresses the living daylights out of the Vampire Lady, yet each seems to her as well a gleaming ruby of remembrance. She sighs their names. *Bootsie, Kittens, Sappho, Mittens, Delilah, Tangerine Dream*. The small ghosts promise her they'll never leave.

Valerie Cumming

Clipper

She dreamed she was in labor and woke up covered in her own blood. She knew immediately what had happened. Her husband was still sleeping in the bed beside her, turned away to face the wall. He'd been home from Iraq for two months and rarely left this position. Shell-shocked, everyone called it. Before the war, he liked sailing and going for long jogs and eating green beans and making love slowly, like there was no place else in the world he'd ever want to be. He'd had a dog he loved, Clipper, but the dog had died while he was away, hit by a car one night when she accidentally left the screen door open. Many nights now she slept with her palms open against her husband's bare back, willing him to turn to face her, to tell her the things he had seen.

She rolled out of bed, careful not to shake the mattress, and left a trail of blood to the bathroom. It came out into the toilet, a dripping red tennis ball. She fished it out, wrapped it in toilet paper to dry it. For a long time she stood looking at it, this thing that had come from inside of her. She thought about using nail scissors to cut it open, see what was inside, but decided that she couldn't stomach it. Eventually, not knowing what else to do, she dropped it back into the toilet. She was worried it might not go down smoothly, but it did, and then it was gone, nothing left behind but a few, reddish strands swirling in the bowl.

The shape of it, the tennis ball shape, reminded her of Clipper, all the nights after her husband had left for the war when she and the dog sat together on the couch, his head in her lap like the only warm thing left in the world. When he died, she cried for eight days straight without stopping.

There was the mess to clean up. She got a bucket and some rags, crawled in her bloody nightgown along the cheap linoleum, wiping up every trace. She was careful not to wake him. He must not know about this, she thought. He must never know.

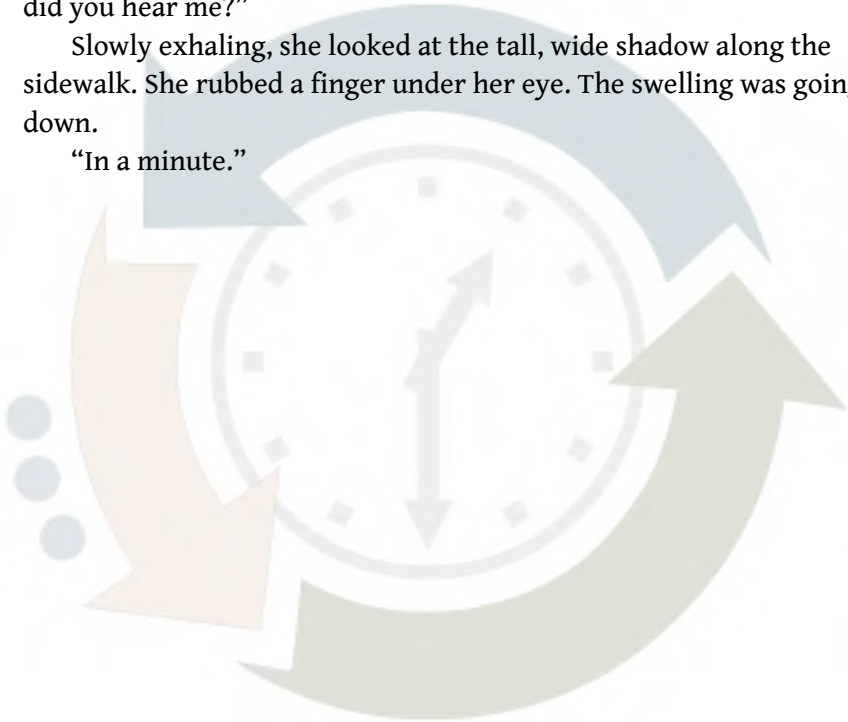
Adina Ferguson

Love's Ashes

She sat on the stoop with her legs wide open. The wind whispered along her thighs as she flicked ashes from the nose of her cigarette. Blowing smoke to the sky, she met the moon with closed eyes. The silence was ruined by heavy breathing. “Baby, come inside,” he pleaded standing in the doorway. She took another drag. “Woman, did you hear me?”

Slowly exhaling, she looked at the tall, wide shadow along the sidewalk. She rubbed a finger under her eye. The swelling was going down.

“In a minute.”



Rebecca Fraser

Don't Hate Me 'Cause I'm Beautiful

Mrs. Wattinger pretended to be engrossed in the latest issue of *Home Instyle*, but her eyes scanned the article on page fifty-six without seeing it. Her full attention was on Rita.

Rita's full attention was on Mrs. Wattinger's kitchen. She glided across the Italian marble flooring with the grace of a figure skater, spray bottle in one hand, dust cloth in the other. Every now and then she would give a dainty little squirt and pause to wipe at the granite bench top in an efficient circular motion. Rita hummed as she went about her work. Mrs. Wattinger recognized the tune as one of Dr. Wattinger's favorites. She ground her teeth as she sipped at the tea Rita had made for her.

"He likes me better than you."

Mrs. Wattinger jolted so forcefully that her tea spilled from the bone china and burned her hand. "What? What did you just say?"

Rita turned surprised eyes in her direction. "Why, nothing Mrs. Wattinger. Oh, you've spilled your tea. Let me clear that up for you." She hurried around the bench and dabbed at the brown liquid with her cloth.

As she did so, her cascade of strawberry blonde hair brushed Mrs. Wattinger's shoulder. 'Fuck me' hair, that's what it was. Of all the hairstyles Rita could have come with, Dr. Wattinger had selected the strumpet's mane. He'd even named her after his old-school crush, Rita Hayworth. Foolish old man.

"Oh no, you've hurt your hand." Rita's voice oozed concern. She reached for Mrs. Wattinger's hand to inspect the red bloom the hot tea had made. Mrs. Wattinger couldn't help but notice the contrast: Rita's hands were milky and unblemished whereas her skin was mottled with the faded beginnings of liver spots.

"Just leave it." Mrs. Wattinger snapped. She wrenched her hand free, shuddering at the grotesquely human feel of Rita's latex skin. "I'm going upstairs for a lie down." Mrs. Wattinger whirled from the

room. As she strode up the stairs she was sure she heard a sly titter from the kitchen below.

In the coolness of her bedroom, Mrs. Wattinger dabbed a blend of peppermint and lavender oil at her temples. She inspected her face for a long time in the mirror, then lay down on the crisp cotton and drew the netted curtain around the bed. She reflected on what she had heard (imagined) Rita say. It was her own silly fault, she supposed. She had nagged Dr. Wattinger for an iMaid for the better part of a month. Initially he had balked not only at the exorbitant price tag, but also at the sheer indulgence of the idea.

“Why must you always be so ostentatious?” he asked, shaking his head at the online catalogue as Mrs. Wattinger tapped petulantly at the monitor with a lacquered nail.

“It’s nothing of the kind,” she had huffed. “Besides, Violetta Strachan has one and...”

“Of course. One wouldn’t want to be outdone by the Strachans.”

Mrs. Wattinger had ramped it up a notch then. She sulked and raged and tearfully accused Dr. Wattinger of being a neglectful husband. When that didn’t work, she tried a week of silence peppered with icy stares. Finally, she resorted to the old adage of catching more flies with honey than vinegar. She rose early to cook breakfast. She greeted him with perfumed smiles and dutifully asked about his day. She even did that thing that he liked in bed. When she raised the subject of the iMaid again, she did it playfully and coquettishly, and even suggested he could design his own model. Dr. Wattinger had buckled and thirteen days later Rita had arrived.

Mrs. Wattinger had tired of her quickly. After all, their apartment was only small, and there was only so much housework to be done (as Dr. Wattinger had pointed out, Mrs. Wattinger reflected with a pang).

Dr. Wattinger, however, was delighted with Rita. The iMaid was always irritatingly cheerful. She encouraged his jokes with tinkling laughter that made her hair and latex bosom bounce. She fawned over him at dinner time and searched her programming for all his favorite meals. Mrs. Wattinger would often find them chatting

together animatedly at the breakfast table when she came downstairs. Sometimes their talk would dry up when she entered the room and Rita would jump up from her seat and busy herself with the breakfast plates. Dr. Wattinger would shake his newspaper and smile at Mrs. Wattinger sheepishly. When Mrs. Wattinger took her seat and poured her juice she could feel the ice-blue stare of the iMaid's synthetic eyes boring into her back.

Yes, Rita would have to go. Once Mrs. Wattinger had made her mind up she felt a little better. When she woke from her nap, she would dig out the warranty papers that accompanied the iMaid and see what she could do about getting her returned. With this thought on her mind she closed her eyes.

Rita brushed the net curtain aside and looked at Mrs. Wattinger for a long time. Finally she bent down and placed a hand over Mrs. Wattinger's mouth and pinched her nostrils together. Her automated face was expressionless as she applied the maximum force her programming afforded.

Mrs. Wattinger's eyes flew open in horror. Her hands formed claws that clutched and raked futilely at the iMaid's skin.

"Don't hate me 'cause I'm beautiful," Rita whispered. She watched as the life eventually drained from Mrs. Wattinger's face and her feet ceased beating their drum-like rhythm on the counterpane.

Rita then removed her apron and floral housedress. She opened Mrs. Wattinger's underwear drawer and rifled through the garments. After consideration, she selected a filmy baby blue negligee and slipped it over her head. It hugged her latex breasts and genitalia exquisitely.

Rita walked downstairs and positioned herself seductively in Dr. Wattinger's armchair. The clock on the kitchen wall ticked away the hours as she waited for him to arrive home.

Stephen Graham Jones

Nights Like These

I brought my orgy with me to the PTO meeting. We were second loudest. Next my orgy came to the grocery store with me, because I was out of milk or butter—something in the dairy department anyway. What I remember best is how cold the refrigerator bins were, at least until my orgy spilled into them. About three in the morning, after a much-needed nap, my orgy hit the sex toy store. Sales went up six-hundred percent. Dawn found my orgy at the early service of the church I used to go to. We gained three members. We tried on clothes at the mall—using my employee discount—and probably stole some stuff on accident, but we left some stuff as well. Then we drank a lot of Gatorade in the parking lot, and introduced ourselves to each other. Two of my orgy were named Stephanie, as it turned out. This was awkward for a bit, but then a van slowed by us very suggestively, and my orgy piled in—safety in numbers—and that van was rocking, creaking, and moaning. The windows were of course tinted, and, after my orgy, thoroughly steamed. One of the Stephanies traced a fingertip heart into that spent breath as we were leaving, and the other Stephanie kissed it in the middle, a little to the left, my brain taking a snapshot of that image—the empty space of her lips—and that’s what I remember best about my orgy.

William Klein

Mrs. Kemper's Popsicle Sticks

When God made Mrs. Kemper, he made her to be a breaker. Every morning at 10:15, while her third graders do independent math study, Mrs. Kemper pours a can of diet Pepsi into her ice-filled travel mug. When the can is empty she crumples it. At the beginning of the school year, Mrs. Kemper gives each of her students a popsicle. When the popsicles are gone, she writes the children's names on the sticks and puts them in a cup. When she needs to call on a student, she pulls a popsicle stick from the cup. When a student leaves her class for some reason she breaks their stick.

Julie Adams had been a beautiful little girl. Mrs. Kemper thought all her students were beautiful, but everyone else thought Julie was too. When she died in a car accident over winter break and Mrs. Kemper had to break the news, she cried with the class. Several months later, after her mother committed suicide, Julie's father burned everything Julie had ever touched, including their house.

Mrs. Kemper keeps the popsicle sticks in a red plastic cup. She rattles it at the class if no one answers her questions—a mock threat. The sticks have a chalky feel that Mrs. Kemper hates and the sound of them rubbing together sets her teeth on edge. They are stained halfway: red, orange, yellow, green, blue and purple. One May morning Mrs. Kemper's hand found Julie's stick. It was stained yellow; the ink that spelled her name had bled into a fuzzy outline. Mrs. Kemper broke it.

Nathan Alling Long

A Bear's Tale

Just this morning, me and the wife and our little one were sitting down to eat, when we heard a shot in the woods. I built this little house myself, which isn't easy, having giant paws and no opposable thumbs or power tools. The first instinct was to stay and fight. But these intruders—well, we've heard stories. A metal rock they throw that pierces the skin. Friends murdered for sport, or fur. Which is worse, really?

I told Mama and Mica to hustle. I considered the cellar, but my friend Bobo was shot in his den, while hibernating. He hadn't done nothing. So we scurry into the thicket and waited. After an hour, when the noises had stopped and the coast seemed clear, we headed back home.

"Porridge will be cold," Mica said.

"You're lucky you're alive," said Mama.

I had a bad feeling when I saw the door ajar. My clean wooden spoon now had porridge on it. I saw Mama's was the same. Mica's bowl was plain empty.

"The furless have been here," I said. "Have your claws out."

They followed me to the living room, my family. We stayed close and tried to look big. I found a strand of golden hair on my recliner and picked it up. "White folk," I said. "The worst."

Mama looked at her chair and saw another strand. She wouldn't even touch it.

Just then, Mica started balling, standing over what was once his chair.

"Upstairs," I growled. I was angry now. We all marched up. My and Mama's bedspreads were ruffled. Poor Mica screeched, seeing the thing in his bed.

"What the hell!" I said looking at it. "Even their cubs think they own world!"

She woke up screaming, as if we were the terrorists or something. Mama pressed her paw down on the furless one's head, like the button on an alarm clock, until the sound stopped. Still, she was squirming some under the blankets.

We mauled her fast and threw her body out the window. Then we changed the sheets and went down for breakfast. But really, we'd all lost our appetites by then.



Linda Lowe

But this is America

Imagine coming home to find that your key doesn't fit in the lock. As you stand on your front porch, wondering how this is possible, the door jerks open.

What you see first is the gun. A gun that's bigger than a rifle, but you don't know the name for such a weapon. The young man pointing it at you is dressed in camouflage and tall black boots. Even though it's not Halloween, even though he's standing on the wrong side of the door, you think it must be a joke.

You smile at him and say lightly, though you don't think it's funny, "How clever, very clever. You had me going there for a second."

He doesn't smile back. His accent is strange, his English broken, but there's no mistaking, "Not your house."

"But...this is America," you say, like a ten-year-old, as if once he realizes where he is, he will gladly leave.

He looks at you impassively, with eyes so dark they don't seem to have pupils, but when you ask if you can please, please come in, he steps aside.

He follows you like the Secret Service into the living room, where an old man in his underwear is napping in your husband's favorite chair. From the big screen TV, Diane Sawyer is delivering the news: "David, at the Pentagon, thank you..."

The kitchen is brimming with army types, toasting each other with champagne. One woman, clutching a TV dinner, is trying to figure out the microwave. A man is chopping the legs off the chicken you were going to fix for dinner.

You look out the kitchen window when you hear the thud of the diving board. Several people are swimming in your pool. Your dog is scratching at the back door. Scratching and whining to get in.

You stumble up the stairs with the wild thought that you're in the middle of one of those lucid dreams that's turned into a nightmare, and when you get to your bedroom you'll find yourself lying next to your husband, the alarm about to go off, and together you will start the day.

But no.



Gavin Pate

Sunday School

"I dreaded that first Robin, so"

—Emily Dickinson

They found the shallow grave, the one they dug a Sunday months before. The earth now pat and dry, the grass grown in patches, the stick a headstone broken but still there. Three of them, like last time—father and sons, one seven, one four—on their knees, pulling back the ground with hands. This Sunday morning, over eggs and toast, he told the boys it was time. The mother paced, pleaded it no lesson for a father to teach his sons. For months she'd said the family needed more. Faith, hope. He didn't ask what they had in common. I'll take them to see it, he said, then they'll understand. The boys sloped eggs into their mouths and the sun crested their neighbor's pines. Why call them? she'd asked on that other Sunday. You could have disposed of it yourself, saved them your grim fascinations. Boys like dark things, he said. They help explain the world. There will be darker. They'd have no trouble finding it again, what they buried, what remained, the older boy sprinting off the porch, the screen thumping into the younger who wouldn't flinch but clumsily fall and rise and pursue his brother towards the thing. Because they'd buried it themselves, digging the first time with little blue shovels. After the hole, he asked who would do it. The seven year old prodded his brother with chicken and wimp. The four year old looked to his dad—and the dad nodded, said to go ahead—so with puffy hands blind to disease he touched the thing. The older's cowardice was broken by the younger's act, so he held out his hands as well, both surprised at the lightness of the thing. This is what they'll know, he thought. The first of it. Dropping it in, excited but silent, they kicked at the earth and covered it well and used the stick to help remember, even now knowing how man might spot his ground. When first he found it, he had caught the soft red in the grass, almost mowing it over, and had cut the engine, yelled for the boys to come. He had propped against

the mower, admired it in the grass, wished then for tobacco. He no longer smoked, yet the idea of tobacco, black and sweet, seemed right for then. Something about a Sunday and what a father had to do. He had said for them to look. The seven year old, already knowing, had asked if they would bury it, but the four year old saw past and asked the cosmic question. He had not answered, just said for them to dig, and eagerly, they plowed the ground. He had thought this respectable enough, the best there was for Sunday. Later he knew they had not finished. They found the broken stick and he said they wouldn't bother with the shovels. It would be done with hands. Dirt in their nails, the sun behind, they stooped together and found the wisp of bones already clean. This is what they'll know, the other part. The birds above let loose their cries. The mother would say No, not in the house, so on the grill he boiled the water cut with bleach. They brought him string and glue and he showed them how to do it, pay reverence to the world. The seven year old pulled the wings apart, stacked the bones beside, and when finished they snuck it in their room, strung some purple yarn to the ceiling fan and hung it there, a little skeleton of a crucifix. He should have told grand stories, promised magic, suggested they might fly, but instead they sucked at the dirt under their nails, and unaware, he taught them how to pray.

Contributors

Gilbert Allen is the Bennette E. Geer Professor of Literature at Furman University. His fourth collection of poems, *Driving to Distraction*, was featured on The Writer's Almanac and Verse Daily. Some of his newest poems and stories may be found in *Measure*, *Pembroke Magazine*, *Sewanee Theological Review*, *Shenandoah*, *The Southern Review*, and *Tampa Review*. In 2014 he will be inducted into the South Carolina Academy of Authors.

Erica Bauman is a graduate of the Writing Seminars program at Johns Hopkins University. She enjoys reading, writing, and following other people's recipes in the kitchen. Her short story, "The Road Stretches On And They Won't Wait For Me," was the runner up in *So To Speak Literary Magazine's* Fall 2012 Fiction Contest, and her flash fiction piece, "The 7:33 to Grand Central," was published in *Linden Avenue's* January 2013 edition.

Carly Berg is a giant couch cushion who doesn't want to be judged. Her stories appear in several dozen magazines and anthologies, including *PANK*, *Word Riot*, and *Bartleby Snopes*, and she's been nominated for a Pushcart Prize as well. She is working on a book of flash stories.

Cathleen Calbert's writing has appeared in many publications, including *Ms. Magazine*, *The New York Times*, and *The Paris Review*. She is the author of three books of poetry: *Lessons in Space* (University of Florida Press), *Bad Judgment* (Sarabande Books), and *Sleeping with a Famous Poet* (CW Books). She has been awarded The Nation Discovery Award, a Pushcart Prize, and the Mary Tucker Thorp Award from Rhode Island College, where she professes.

George Capaccio is particularly proud of winning first prize from the University of Arkansas for a collection of his poems entitled *While the Light Still Trembles*. Although writing poetry has been one of his lifelong pursuits, like most poets, he has had to look elsewhere to make a buck. So he has started writing fiction and nonfiction for educational publishers and also working as a professional storyteller in schools and other venues.

Patricia Caspers is an award-winning poet. Her work has appeared most recently in *Anderbo*, *Storyscape*, *Valparaiso*, *Ploughshares*, and *The Boiler*. Her work is forthcoming from *Generations*, *Main Street Rag*, *The Mom Egg*, and *Dirtcakes*. She wrote a weekly blog post for *Ploughshares* titled, "Hearing Voices: Women Versing Life." She has an MFA in poetry from Mills College, edits poetry for *Prick of the Spindle*, and lives in Massachusetts where she teaches writing at Worcester State University.

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Joan Colby has published widely in journals such as *Poetry*, *New York Quarterly*, *the new renaissance*, *Grand Street*, *Epoch*, *Mid-American Poetry Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Kansas Quarterly*, *The Hollins Critic*, *Western Humanities Review*, and *College English*. Awards include the Illinois Arts Council Literary Award, Stone County Award for Poetry, Rhino Poetry Award, the new renaissance Award for Poetry, and an Illinois Arts Council Fellowship in Literature. She was a finalist in the GSU Poetry Contest (2007), Margie Editor's Choice Contest (2009), Nimrod International Pablo Neruda Prize (2009, 2012), and received honorable mentions in the *North American Review's* James Hearst Poetry Contest (2008, 2010). For more than 25 years, she has edited *Illinois Racing News*, a monthly publication for the Illinois Thoroughbred Breeders and Owners Foundation. She and her husband live with assorted animals on a small horse farm in Northern Illinois. She has three grown children, six grandchildren, and has published seven other books: *The Atrocity Book*, *How The Sky Begins to Fall*, *The Boundary Waters*, *Blue Woman Dancing in the Nerve*, *Dream Tree*, *Beheading the Children*, and *Dead Horses*. *Joan Colby: Selected Poems* is due out from FutureCycle Press in 2013.

Dan Corjescu is a Romanian-Brazilian poet living in Sofia, Bulgaria, who writes verse in English as well as in other languages. Some of his poetry has been published or is forthcoming in *A Bad Penny Review*, *Burner Magazine*, *Quantum Poetry Review*, *Red River Review*, *Three Line Poetry*, *Spinozablue*, and *L'allure des Mots*. He was also published in Mario Fratti's anthology, *Thank you, Gorbachev!*

Kate Cumiskey teaches at UCF and is a graduate of the MFA program (poetry) at UNCW. She has published a nonfiction book, *Surfing in New Smyrna Beach*, now in its second run at Arcadia Press. Her work appears in *Crazyhorse*, *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *Paterson Literary Review*, *Blood Orange Review* and other literary magazines.

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Holly Day is a housewife and mother of two living in Minneapolis, MN, who teaches needlepoint classes in the Minneapolis school district. Her poetry has recently appeared in *Hawai'i Pacific Review*, *The Oxford American*, and *Slipstream*. Her book publications include *Music Composition for Dummies*, *Guitar-All-in-One for Dummies*, and *Music Theory for Dummies*, which has recently been translated into French, Dutch, Spanish, Russian, and Portuguese.

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Gary Fincke's latest collection of poetry, *The History of Permanence*, won the Stephen F. Austin Poetry Prize and was published in 2011. His next book will be a collection of stories, *The Proper Words for Sin*, from West Virginia University in April. An earlier collection, *Sorry I Worried You*, won the Flannery O'Connor Prize and was published by the University of Georgia Press. He is the Charles Degenstein Professor of Creative Writing at Susquehanna University.

Rebecca Fraser is an Australian writer with a love of speculative fiction. Her work has appeared in various genre anthologies and publications: *Short Sips—Coffee House Fiction*, *AntipodeanSF*, *New Myths Magazine*, and *Ripples Magazine*.

William Greenway's tenth collection, *Everywhere at Once*, won the Poetry Book of the Year Award from the Ohio Library Association, as did his eighth collection, *Ascending Order* (both from the University of Akron Press Poetry Series). His publications include *Poetry*, *American Poetry Review*, *Southern Review*, *Georgia Review*, *Missouri Review*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Poetry Northwest*, and *Shenandoah*. He has also won the Helen and Laura Krout Memorial Poetry Award, the Larry Levis Editors' Prize from *Missouri Review*, the Open Voice Poetry Award from *The Writer's Voice*, the State Street Press Chapbook Competition, an Ohio Arts Council Grant, an Academy of American Poets Prize, and been named Georgia Author of the Year. He is Distinguished Professor of English at Youngstown State University.

Grey Held is Director of Client Services at a research firm in Cambridge. He is a recipient of a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship in Creative Writing. His first book of poems, *Two-Star General*, was published by Brick Road Poetry Press in 2012. His second book of poems, *Spilled Milk*, will be published by Word Press in 2013. His poem, "Vending Machine," was set to music by Paul Carey and has been performed by a cappella groups all over the country. Through a prison outreach program, he has led poetry writing workshops for prisoners in the Northeastern Correctional Center in Concord, MA.

Audrey Henderson was a finalist in the 2008 Indiana Review 1/2 K Award and won second place in the 2008 *River Styx* International Poetry Contest. She was chosen as a Special Merit Poet in the 2009 Muriel Craft Bailey Memorial Award Contest and was a finalist for the 2012 Slapering Hol Chapbook Competition. She has work forthcoming in *Magma*, *The Midwest Quarterly*, and *Tar River Poetry*. A contributor to BBC Radio Scotland, she graduated from the University of Edinburgh.

Stephen Graham Jones is the author of eleven novels and three collections. Most recent are *The Last Final Girl* and *Growing Up Dead in Texas*. Stephen has some hundred and fifty stories published and has been an NEA fellow and a Bram Stoker Award finalist. More at demontheory.net.

William Klein's short fiction has appeared in *Eric's Love Hurts Anthology* and the *Poydras Review*. He attends school at Lewis-Clark State College for both Secondary Ed and Creative Writing. Many elementary school teachers use popsicle sticks in their class in the way described in this story.

Daniel Lassell has been featured (and is forthcoming) in several publications, which include literary journals such as *riverrun magazine*, *Pure Francis*, and *Haiku Journal*; and anthologies such as *Panik: Candid Stories of Life Altering Experiences Surrounding Pregnancy*, *A Celebration of Young Poets*, and *Overplay/Underdone*. He lives in Huntington, West Virginia, where he teaches at Marshall University.

David Lewitzky is a retired social worker/family therapist living out a sedentary life in Buffalo, NY. His work appears in *Nimrod*, *Red Wheelbarrow*, *Rabbit Catastrophe Review* and *Crosstimbers*, among others, with work forthcoming in *Passages North*, *Puckerbrush Review*, *Roanoke Review*, *Poetry Bus*, and others.

Nathan Alling Long's work has appeared in various literary journals—including *Tin House*, *Story Quarterly*, *Indiana Review*, *Crab Orchard Review*, and *The Sun*—as well as on NPR. He has been awarded a Pushcart nomination, a Breadloaf work scholarship, and a Virginia Commission of the Arts grant. He lives in Philadelphia, teaches at Richard Stockton College, and can be found at wp.stockton.edu.

Linda Lowe received her MFA in poetry from the University of California, Irvine. Her poetry chapbook, *Karmic Negotiations*, was published by Sarasota Theatre Press. Online, her stories have appeared in *The Pedestal Magazine*, *LITSNACK*, *Long Story Short*, *Right Hand Pointing*, and *The Linnet's Wings*.

Joanne Lowery's poems have appeared in many literary magazines, including *Birmingham Poetry Review*, *Rattle*, *Slant*, *Cottonwood*, and *Poetry East*. She lives in Michigan.

John Mahoney in the woods above Lake Minnetonka in Minnesota. He practiced law as a public defender for fifteen years and continues his legal research and writing, most recently an article in the *William Mitchell Law Review* (Vol. 31. No. 2, 2011). His work recently has appeared in the United States in *The Rose & Thorn* and *The Garbanzo Literary Journal*. In the UK, John's work has been published by *IMPpress*.

John McKernan—who grew up in Omaha, NE, in the middle of the United States—is now a retired comma herder after teaching 41 years at Marshall University. He lives—mostly—in West Virginia where he edits for ABZ Press. His most recent book is selected poems, *Resurrection of the Dust*. He has published poems in *The Atlantic Monthly*, *The Paris Review*, *The New Yorker*, *Virginia Quarterly Review*, *The Journal*, *Antioch Review*, *Guernica*, *Field* and many other magazines.

Originally from Niagara Falls, Canadian-born **Bruce McRae** is a musician who has spent much of his life in London and British Columbia. He has been published in hundreds of periodicals and anthologies. His first book, *The So-Called Sonnets*, is available from the Silenced Press website or via Amazon books. To hear his music and view more poems visit his website: www.bpmcrae.com.

Gavin Pate is the author of the novel *The Way To Get Here* (Bootstrap Press) and has been published in *The Collagist*, *The Southeast Review*, *Barrelhouse*, and *Rain Taxi*, among others. He currently lives in Virginia with his family where he is an assistant professor at Virginia Wesleyan College.

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Michael Rowe's poems have been published in *Commonweal*, *Medical Humanities*, and other journals. He is also the author or editor of four books, including *Crossing the Border: Encounters Between Homeless People and Outreach Workers* (University of California Press, 1999) and *The Book of Jesse: A Story of Youth, Illness, and Medicine* (The Francis Press, 2002).

Linda M. Smith moved to Hayesville, NC in 1989. It was there, surrounded by the lake and mountains, that she was inspired to write poetry. She joined the North Carolina Writers' Network West soon after, and her poetry and short essays appear in twelve anthologies. She won four awards from the Clay County, NC Arts Council.

Mark Taksa has published in many journals and anthologies. He has also published several collections, the most recent of which is *The Torah at the End of the Train*, which won first place in the 2009 *Poetica Magazine* chapbook contest.

Yun Wang's second poetry book, *The Book of Totality*, will be published by Salmon Poetry in 2014. Her first poetry book, *The Book of Jade*, won the Nicholas Roerich Poetry Prize from Story Line Press and was published in 2002. *The Carp*, a poetry chapbook, was published by Bull Thistle Press in 1994. Yun Wang has published poems in numerous literary journals, including the *Kenyon Review*, *Cimarron Review*, *Green Mountains Review*, *International Quarterly*, *Poet Lore*, *Boxcar Poetry Review*, and many others.

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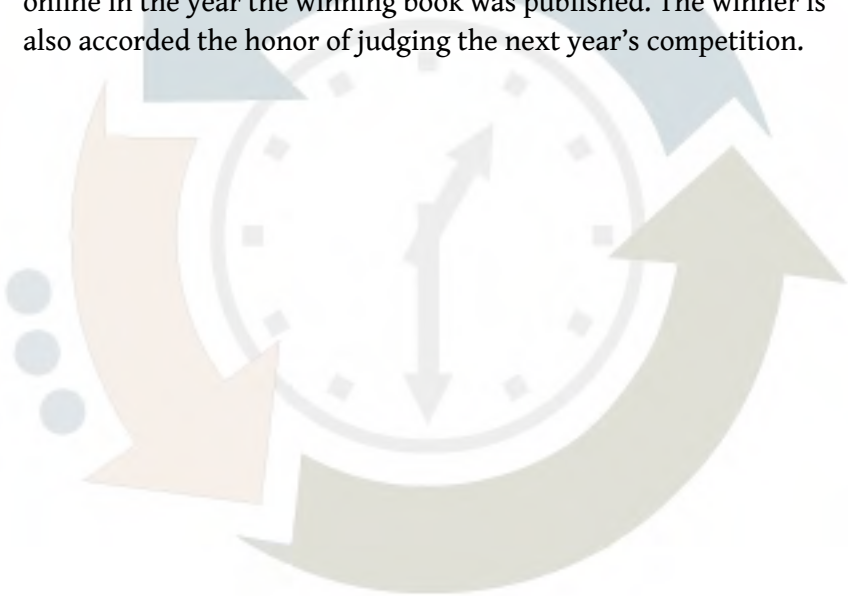
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The book ranked the best in judging is announced as the prize-winner in the subsequent year. There is no fixed monetary award; instead, the winning poet receives an honorarium of 20% of the total net royalties from all poetry books and chapbooks the press sold online in the year the winning book was published. The winner is also accorded the honor of judging the next year's competition.





IN THIS ISSUE

POETRY

Gilbert Allen
George Capaccio
Patricia Caspers
Drude Clark
Joan Colby
Dan Corjescu
Kate Cumiskey
Holly Day
Gary Fincke
William Greenway
Grey Held
Audrey Henderson
Daniel Lassell
David Lewitzky
Joanne Lowery
John Mahoney
John McKernan
Bruce McRae
Diana Pinckney
W. M. Rivera
Michael Rowe
Linda M. Smith
Mark Taksa
Yun Wang

FLASH FICTION

Erica Bauman
Carly Berg
Cathleen Calbert
Valerie Cumming
Adina Ferguson
Rebecca Fraser
Stephen Graham Jones
William Klein
Nathan Alling Long
Linda Lowe
Gavin Pate



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