

Brilliant Quarterly

Flash Fiction

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Edited by Kristen Bailey

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Brilliant! Quarterly prints in March, June,
September, and December.

Submissions:

Brilliant is open to submissions year round.
Accepted stories under 350 are posted online.

The books accepts stories under 1500.
All stories under 200 are considered for the
back cover contest that runs for each issue.

Submit by emailing story to
brilliant@kristen-bailey.com

Brilliant

Thirty-Four Stories from Twenty-seven
Authors
From Five Different Countries

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Back Cover Contest Winner:

“Hypocrite!” by Sophie Bachard

(Also on page 71)

Chosen for its lively characters and writer’s
voice

(The word limit was extended for
this issue’s contest.

I might do that occasionally. After all, why
make up my own rules if I can’t break them?)

The Story Behind Brilliant:

Writer turned editor (but still a writer)

I'm very proud to present the first issue of Brilliant, and very thankful to all the wonderful writers who submitted stories.

So why did I pick up the editor hat and launch this magazine? I write flash fiction but had trouble finding a place to publish it. Some print magazines publish flash along with their other stories, but few specialize in flash. Instead of seeing this as a hardship to my writing, I saw the opportunity and opening to start my own magazine. This seems to be a common story in the world of publishing, but this one is mine.

These stories are all here to entertain. This very short form is perfect for today's world, where people wait at the bus, the store, the doctor's, and in many other lines. If you have a few minutes, here's a story for you.

This issue contains the material printed online, additional longer stories, and two articles on writing flash fiction in "Writer's End" on page 105.

Old Storms

By John J. Wilson

Another bolt followed by a crackling, tearing boom. Even at his age, a bad storm still bothers him, and this one has him sitting straight up in bed. It's crazy this fear he has, he knows that. It had never completely left him though. Tense and breathing hard, he waits. Inevitably, Kate will come, as she always had.

They had grown up very modestly in a small little row house with peeling tan paint, bad gutters and a postage stamp yard. It was down on the end of Bellamy Street, a dead end road with a short metal guardrail half covered in long weeds. The sidewalk was narrow as sidewalks were back then, only about 2 foot wide. He remembered that for some reason. It was cracked and weedy too. That sidewalk had always bothered him, it led nowhere.

They were not poor. Their mother had told them that repeatedly.

“You tell that Jeffrey Bellencourt that we are *not* poor” she would say with desperate eyes, flipping the always stray lock of brown hair behind her ear again.

She would walk away, but an hour later, as if the conversation had never ended, she would lean down to him with a tightly wound smile and say, “You tell him that.”

The truth was they had little, but never really wanted for anything, except for a father of course. His sister Kate, four years his senior, actually remembered their father before he had left. She said that he was usually sad and quiet, but had often brought them candy from his job at the drugstore. Kate told him that he went to work one spring day and never came home.

“Your dad turned right instead of left on his way home,” his grandpa had once explained to him with his normal deadpanned expression. An oversimplified explanation yes, but you never know, his father’s decision might have been made that quick, that close to being a flip of the coin. Who knows, maybe he had just said to himself that day, “Heads I stay, tails I leave.”

Their mother, Patricia, had never been the same afterward. Losing her husband and their father, coupled with her monotonous job at the factory and the never-ending work waiting at home, took its toll. It eventually stole everything she had, drained her of all the energy and life she had to offer. Kate helped as much as she could at such a young age, becoming a little mother to him as they trudged their way through those childhood years.

Patricia had finally snapped one rainy fall day, broken both in spirit and hope. He was six years old. The rain was coming down hard as she stood in the kitchen making meat loaf. It was his favorite and he sat head in hands, contentedly watching her. She smiled down at him sadly while she kneaded the ingredients together in a large mixing bowl, then turned to reach for something and when she looked back at him she was crying. He didn't know what to do. When she screamed and stabbed the knife deep into their old scarred cutting board, he had started crying too.

Timed perfectly with her scream, deep thunder rolled towards them in the distance. A long rumbling which ultimately reached their tiny kitchen and clinked the glasses together in the drainer. His mother stood looking down at the floor for a very long time, her arms gripping the counter so hard he could see the veins in her arms. He tearfully slid off the kitchen chair and slowly made his way out of the room.

The storm worsened that afternoon with lightening and wind that blew the trees sideways. Alone with his mother until Kate would get home from school, he had gone to his bedroom window, pleading and praying for her get home quick. Finally her yellow bus came and up to the house she had come, walking up that thin weedy sidewalk.

As time wore on, Patricia began talking to herself and pacing around the small house continually. She drank more and more, late into the night. She suffered terrible headaches that would contort her face into someone they didn't know, someone who would scream and throw things around the small cramped house. Someone who would chase them into a corner, or the narrow hallway leading only to their small, closet size bedrooms.

Then they would simply wait as she approached, at times it was a slow death march but at others, it was a teeth bared dash down the hall toward them. There was no escape of course, no negotiating, only a tense standoff could be hoped for.

Kate was a human shield – facing the raging inferno that was Patricia. He watched from behind, sometimes attempting to brave the rage with his sister, looking out at his mother from under her sister's arm. There were times though when he simply couldn't face it. He would study the pattern on the back of his sister's shirt or stare at the floor looking for something imaginary he had dropped. He would even chant something to himself over and over, a song or a poem, anything to distract himself from the terror he felt. All the while, praying for it to just end.

He always wondered what Kate had looked like from the front during these confrontations. Had her face reflected the terror she must have felt

or did she somehow mask it with a look of indifference or even strength?

How scared she must have been.

Storms, that's what Kate had called those terrifying episodes. It was her way of dealing with it, and her way of somehow explaining it to a confused and scared little brother. The thunder would rumble and the lightening would crack, but through it all Kate had been there for her little brother. How he loved her for that.

His memories blinking off, Tyler realizes that tonight's storm had finally moved on. But the last crack of lightening, always cruel in its deceiving pause and long pregnant delay, crashes and scatters his thoughts with vengeance. He jumps again wide-eyed, and for a flashbulb second, he sees a narrow dim hallway from 20 odd years ago.

Then, as she always had, Kate whispers into his ear, but now from nearly a thousand miles away, "It's alright...there...see? Mama just doesn't feel good, she doesn't mean it. It's over now, Ty. All over. Okay now, its okay...just a noisy old storm and it's gone."

Her soft young voice always had a shaky little quiver to it, but it was brave, resolute and full of goodness all at the same time.

His wife rolls over restlessly, mumbling something in her sleep. His eyes are still wide, but his heart and mind are much calmer now. He swears he can feel the comforting hug from those slender strong arms, so long ago.

As he gets a light phantom kiss on the forehead, sleep comes grudgingly back to him.

In another bedroom, on the west coast, with her sleeping husband beside her, a woman stares at the ceiling. The sheer drapes on the window are gently blowing from side to side. It is a peaceful warm night with a slight breeze blowing in from the ocean. A perfect night for sleeping.

Finally, she rolls onto her side, closing her eyes slowly while her heart continues to even out and her breathing becomes much steadier. She can sleep now, she knows Ty is o.k. and that he's finally gone back to sleep. Her last thought is that she's glad it isn't stormy here tonight. Storms had always bothered Kate terribly.

End

Bio Following Next Story

Look At Me

by John J. Wilson

She is drawn to the window and parts the drapes, looking down into the spotlighted backyard.

He stands looking up at her. He's tall and far too thin. His unnatural smile, a grotesque grin, reaches ear to ear. A large black dog sits alertly next to him, looking up at her and smiling as well.

His hands rhythmically clench and unclench. She starts backing away from the window, moaning, slowly shaking her head.

“Look at me”, he thinks and she hears.

With round eyes, she looks out and down.

He casually takes two steps back, then moves forward, gliding straight up to the window with blurring speed. Their faces now an inch away. His grinning, gaping mouth smears and fogs the window.

Tripping backwards, knocking over a small table and lamp. She tries to scream but finds no voice.

In the shadowed, slanted light of the fallen lamp, he has an odd mechanical look to him. A

certain manufactured symmetry. His eyes are rolled up like a shark in mid bite. He stays there, kissing the glass and spread eaged to the four corners of the window.

Heart hammering, she strains for the surface, clawing for the surface but she can hold her breath no longer. Finally gasping for air, she wakes, screaming into the dark quiet of her bedroom.

Rising early, she feels drugged and sluggish. Seeing her bed stand and lamp undisturbed, her tension fades somewhat. Unconvinced, she goes to the sunny window while tying her robe. Deliberately and quick, she parts the drapes in a flurry, taking an unconscious step back. The morning sun slants in through clean un-smearred glass.

Troubled still, she scans the backyard. Only chairs, the birdbath and Little Tyke toys. Letting the drapes fall back, she grins and shakes her head, walking to the bathroom.

In the shower, she has already forgotten most of it.

But through the frosted doors she catches low movement out of the corner of her eye. Big, dark and lumbering it strolls by waist high and out of sight.

Then, "Look at me," he thinks and she hears.

End

Bio – John J. Wilson is a central Illinois native. He has written over 50 short stories; including mainstream, suspense, westerns and historical fictions. His work has been accepted by Crime and Suspense, Flashshot, Flashing in the Gutters, and Fictional Mushings. He's also been involved in two Anthology projects: the upcoming, *My Little Book of the Dead* -Edited by Deana Hoover and the currently available *By the Chimney With Care* - Edited by Tony Burton. He is now working on his first novel.

Billy's Quest

by Michael A. Kechula

When a state inspector visited the orphanage, all the children were lined up for examination. As the inspector passed each child, he asked, "What do you want to be someday?"

"A nurse," said a girl.

"Very commendable," said the inspector. "We never have enough of them."

The next kid said, "A policeman."

"Wonderful. Crime is increasing every year. We'll always need brave police officers to protect us."

The inspector approached Billy. "And what do you want to be when you grow up?"

"A pizza."

"Why a pizza?" asked the startled inspector.

"Nobody loves me. But everybody loves pizza."

"He's a lunatic!" the inspector yelled. "There's no sense squandering taxpayer money on the likes of him. Abandon him in the forest."

The director of the orphanage tore off Billy's T-shirt that said, ORPHAN. He gave Billy a new one that with much larger letters that read, LUNATIC.

Billy was immediately placed on a helicopter and taken to a dense forest.

When the helicopter descended and was a few feet from the ground, the director threw Billy out. Landing on his head, the boy was unconscious for three days.

* * *

Billy awoke when a fluffy tail tickled his face.

"What's a lunatic?" asked a chipmunk, pointing to Billy's T-shirt.

"I think it's somebody who wastes tax payers' money."

"What else are you, besides a lunatic?"

"A boy. But I wanna be a pizza."

"Why?"

"I wanna be loved."

"What kinda pizza do you wanna be?"

"Pepperoni."

"Well, you came to the right place," the chipmunk said. "Stand over there under that magic tree."

The moment Billy was under the tree, the chipmunk mumbled strange words. Within seconds, Billy transformed into a pepperoni pizza.

The chipmunk whistled. Fifty relatives raced toward him.

"Look what I got."

"Wow!" yelled the chipmunk's relatives.
"Pepperoni Pizza! Our favorite!"

Between burps, each chipmunk loudly affirmed its undying love for pizza.

I'm finally loved, Billy mused, as a cute girl-chipmunk sank her razor-sharp teeth into the last morsel.

End

Bio after last story

Brotherhood of the Spider

by Michael A. Kechula

“Doctor, something terrible is happening. I think I’m turning into a bug.”

“That may not be such a bad thing.”

“Whadda ya mean?”

“Being a bug has certain advantages.”

“Am I hearing right?” Harry asked. “Aren’t you gonna say I’m delusional and try to convince me it really isn’t happening? Aren’t you gonna prescribe extensive psychotherapy and drugs to help me overcome this?”

“If you wish. But that’s very expensive, and if you’re turning into a bug, how would you pay for long-term therapy?”

“Hmm. That’s true. I wouldn’t have a penny. Bugs don’t have financial transactions. Never saw a beetle carrying a wallet.”

“That’s exactly my point about the advantages of becoming a bug. Your life will be far less stressful. You won’t have to pay taxes or rent, or even for food and drink.”

“Which has often caused me lots of distress,” Harry said, “especially when I got laid off and didn’t know where my next dollar was coming from.”

“I think you’ll be fine. Just relax and let it happen.”

“You seem to think it’s normal.”

“As normal as apple pie,” the doctor said.

“Then I’m not mentally ill?”

“Not if you think you’re turning into a bug.”

“Then there’s no reason for me to be here.”

“That’s true.”

“And no reason to return ever again,” Harry said.

“Correct. Unless you want me to give you a shot to hasten the process.”

“You can do that?”

“Sure. It’s quite ordinary. We learned how to do that in the first week of medical school. You’ll feel a little pinch, and you’ll be on your way much faster. By the way, do you know what kind of bug you’re turning into?”

“No. Is there a way to find out?”

“Yes.”

“Really? I never could have guessed.”

“Of course not. You never went through medical school. If you had, you would’ve learned about that in the second week.”

“Good grief,” Harry said. “I wonder what they teach in the third week?”

“They used the third week to review what we learned in the first two. Then there was a big exam.”

“I woulda thought they’d use the time talking about how blood circulates, or how muscles work.”

“They used to do that. Before we took over.”

“Who’s ‘we?’”

“The Brotherhood of the Spider.”

The doctor grabbed his ears and lifted. His head slid off to reveal his true identify.

Harry screamed. “You’re a—”

“Spider. A bug-eating spider to be exact. Too bad you haven’t changed into a bug yet. I could go for a nice snack.”

Panicked, Harry ran for the door.

Halfway down the block he ran into a policeman.

“Officer. Please help me. My doctor’s a spider. He just pulled his head off, and I saw what he really is.”

Fortunately for Harry, the cop had dealt with countless loons during his long career.

“There, there, now,” said Officer O’Leary. “Don’t fret. Come with me around the corner to the Urgent Care Center. Let’s get something to calm you.”

“I’m not crazy,” Harry said.

“Of course not. But you sound very nervous. The good doctor will give you something for your nerves. You’ll love this doctor. She’s a knockout.”

When the cop ushered Harry into the doctor’s office, he told her how nervous Harry was. Harry took one look and fell in love.

“Officer O’Leary, would you mind waiting in the next room?” the doctor asked. “I’ll let you know when I’m finished treating this poor, unfortunate man. Then perhaps you can see that he gets home safely.”

“Sure thing, Doctor,” O’Leary replied. “I’m always glad to help a citizen.”

“I’m going to give you something to calm you,” the doctor told Harry. “Which arm should I use?”

“My left,” he said, intoxicated by her nearness and the attention she was giving him.

“Ouch! That pinches.”

“Sorry. Didn’t mean to hurt you. Aren’t you glad this is the last time you’ll ever have to get a shot?”

“Yeah. Wait a second. What about this year’s flu shot?”

“You won’t need it.”

“Why?”

“It’s quite complicated,” she said. “You’d have to attend medical school to understand. Now, lie down and let it take effect.”

She pulled up a chair and held his hand.

She must like me, Harry thought. No doctor ever held my hand before.

Harry started to feel nice inside. He tried to tell her, but his voice didn’t work.

“Oh my,” she giggled, “you’re the handsomest June Bug I’ve ever seen. If I were a spider, I’d gobble you up.”

Before Harry could fly away, she put him into a glass jar.

“Officer O’Leary,” she called. “You can come in now.”

The moment the policeman saw the cute bug, he removed his hat, pulled his ears, and lifted his head off.

End

Bio following last story

Squiggles

by Michael A. Kechula

Billy vomited green gunk.

"What's wrong, Billy?"

"I got morning sickness, Mom."

"That's silly. Boys don't get that."

"Yes they do."

"Says who?"

"The little purple ladies from the flying saucer."

"Dammit! You're making up weird stories again. You're grounded for lying!"

"I ain't lying. They shot little squiggles into my stomach with a ray gun."

She worried that her eight year old might be schizophrenic. Suddenly, an inner voice said, "He's not schizophrenic. Rejoice! Your son will soon become mother of a new and glorious species."

She didn't understand why the words Loch Ness Monster came to mind.

"I'm too young to be a grandma," she muttered when Billy vomited again.

End

Bio – Michael A. Kechula is a retired technical writer. Switching to fiction in 2003, his flash fiction works have won first prize in six contests and honorable mention in three others. His stories have appeared in fifty-eight online and print magazines and anthologies in Australia, Canada, England, and the US. He's authored seven books of flash fiction stories and a self-study book that teaches beginners how to write flash fiction. He's owner of Flash Tales Magazine, an online magazine specializing in speculative fiction in the micro and flash fiction formats, found at www.flash-tales.com.

Dream Girl

by Jack Swenson

He was late. She hated being late herself, and she didn't like to wait for somebody else. It made her nervous. There was never anything to do. She couldn't smoke in the restaurant; she never remembered to bring the crossword puzzle. Maybe she should take up knitting. That would keep her from fidgeting. It would keep her from folding and refolding her napkin, repositioning the silverware. She reached for her purse and removed her compact. She peered wide eyed into the tiny mirror and used the powdered pad to repair imaginary flaws.

And then she saw him. He stood there in the doorway, waiting until his eyes adjusted to the dim light. He scanned the room, but he didn't see her. The restaurant was crowded, and she had taken a table in the corner. She was about to stand up and wave her hand, but something held her back. There was something wrong with this picture. Was he the man she had slept with last night? He seemed different, and somehow, well, disappointing. She thought he was tall, and he wasn't; he was average height at best. He had a bit of a paunch. His nose was bigger than she remembered. His skin was pale. And she didn't remember that he wore glasses. Big, ugly glasses with thick black plastic rims. Of course there were a lot of

things she didn't remember about the previous night.

Such as how they got back to her apartment. She remembered going to bed with him, though. It had seemed like a good idea at the time.

Last night it had also seemed like a good idea to meet him for lunch the next day, but that morning she had misgivings. And now, in her dim corner, she wanted very much for him to go away. Maybe he would think that she stood him up. He stood there for a moment more, looking about. He frowned and looked at his watch. Then he turned and walked out.

She waited a few minutes and then gathered her things and exited the restaurant. Blinded by the sunlight, she ran right into him. "Oh!" she said.

"There you are," he said. "How's the girl of my dreams?"

End

Bio Following Next Story

The Old Man

by Jack Swenson

Every wrinkle is but a notch in the calendar of a well-spent life. (Dickens)

Elmore had the kind of sense of humor that not everyone appreciated. He knew that. He also knew that not everyone thought he was a swell fellow. That was okay with him. He had no time for fools. If they didn't like what he said or did, they could lump it. He was going to live life as he saw fit. They could sit in their rocking chairs and tsk-tsk; he was going to be out and about, kicking up his heels. Causing trouble, others might say, but he liked to think of it as having fun. Elmore was eighty-three.

One fine day Elmore emerged from a Target store. In the sack that he carried were his purchases: a pair of spectacles with rose-tinted lenses that he got for his wife for a buck at the dollar rack, a pair of boxer shorts emblazoned with a red devil and the words "Hot Stuff," and a bottle of diet Coca-Cola. When he reached the parking lot, there was a policeman writing out a parking ticket. Elmore walked up to the officer and said, "Hey, buddy, how about giving a senior citizen a break?" The cop ignored him and continued writing the ticket.

"Hey, dummy," Elmore said. "Did you hear me?" The cop glared at the old man and started

writing another ticket, this one for having worn tires.

Elmore called him something even worse, and the policeman finished the second ticket and put it on the windshield with the first. Then he started writing a third ticket.

This went on for about twenty minutes. The more the old man abused him, the more tickets the policeman wrote.

Finally Elmore shrugged and walked away. He rounded the corner of the building, walked diagonally through the parking lot until he found his car, unlocked the door, got in, and drove away.

End

Bio - Jack Swenson teaches writing to a bunch of lively and talented senior citizens, and in his spare time, he scribbles away on his own. His stories have appeared in many online and print journals, most recently in the Taj Mahal Journal, Pindeldyboz, ken*again, Diddledog, and The Smoking Poet. His second book of short fiction Menage a Trois may now be purchased from iuniverse.com.

Hapless

by Franco Marcel

She glanced in my direction as I walked to the art section of the bookstore. I didn't think much of it at first. I looked back while skimming an H.R.Giger book; she stole another glance. Cute. Librarian glasses, brown frames. A faded horizontal striped polo shirt, green and white. Short, dirty-blond hair cut just below her ear lobes. She had found her way to the poetry shelves in the next row over. I walked past her, going for a Nabakov book. I looked back, we locked eyes, we smiled, we turned away from each other. In my head, I imagined walking up to her and saying the right thing and her handing me a phone number. We'd go hang out in a coffee shop a few days later, talk about foreign films, Sonic Youth, Langston Hughes, Salvador Dali. We'd go to locals shows of decent bands, playfully argue over whether Nietzsche was worth a damn and talk about taking a trip somewhere romantic, like Paris. Or Jersey. We'd do all the boring, pretentious things jerks like us did, her and I.

I stood there and daydreamed while she paid for a book and left the store.

End

Bio – Franco Marcel began his career as a senior staff correspondent for the *Reading*

Eagle newspaper. He is currently a freelance writer and his work has been in various publications, both online and in print, including *GetgoMagazine*, *The Centrifugal Eye*, *Deathtrip Dogs*, *Zygote In My Coffee* and *AlightedE-Zine*. When not wandering North America, he can be found sleeping comfortably somewhere in or around Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Show, Don't Tell

by Sheryl Hamilton Chaney

I should like to take a little critter, a wee little bunny, fill him full of chuckles, draw him long with personality and call him Character.

Now, Character had little fuzzies under his chin that wiggled and tickled when he scratched behind his ear, and of course, one ear hung kinda skee-whompus. His round little tail wiggled in time to his nose, or so it seemed, and his thumpity-thump had a way of tripping him, always at the wrong moment and he would go end over end.

His favorite spot was under the berry briars next to the pond. There was just enough sunlight coming through in the early morning to warm him and lift his senses to meet the adventures of a new day. This early in the morning, the dew clung to the leaves of the berry briars and created thousands of prisms dancing in the breeze.

Our little Character loved this spot until Possum came along. There was something about Possum that scared Character right fierce. The way his whiskers moved and quivered when he sniffed gave Character the chills, and his beady eyes--- well, that did it! Thumpity- thump, away he scampered, like a tumbleweed in the wind.

He watched Mr. and Mrs. Duck and their family sunning themselves in a near-by mud puddle. A dispute broke out and mud flew as wings flapped amidst angry squawks.

If I had wings like a duck, I could have mud puddle anger too, and get Possum back for all the spine-shivering dirty looks he gives me.

As the day wore on, the season's temperature soared and all the animals of the pond found someplace to hide from the heat. It would be that way until evening when the mirrored water in the pond would again be vibrant with life.

End

Bio – Sheryl Hamilton Chaney has been published in the *Mainstream*, UCC's newspaper, *In Other Words*, An American Anthology, and Northwest Christian College's Literary Journal, *The Mustard Seed*. As a returning student after many years of raising a family, she delights in playing with words, shaping, twisting, and tossing. Someday, she'll paint a tear drop with words.

The Unloved

by Juleigh Howard-Hobson

If you could see this churchyard with unhuman eyes, eyes that see the invisible past as well as the invisible present, you would see that there were many graves here upon which old house-faeries cried.

They cried as though their hearts would break. They cried for the one and only thing in their existence that had finally made existence bearable for them, but now was dead. Dead and cold and would never rise again.

They wept. And it was terrible. It was a terrible thing to hear.

You would see, in a shadowed corner, that there was one who sank down more deeply than any other, sank deeply upon the thick lid of a stone tomb. One whose agony chilled and split the night and stabbed the hearts of those who heard. Those who could hear.

Sobs of unendurable sorrow.

And you would know that when it was asked, when it was asked by the others, for whom--for whom in this whole world that it so loved and could not bear to consign to the dank blackness of the mortal tomb--its sobs became

more loud and its weeping more heart-breaking.

And you would know that it answered them:

"I weep so loud and so bitterly because, no one...", it cried, "...no one lies here at all."

End

Bio - Writing of Juleigh Howard-Hobson has appeared in *The Hyper Texts*, *The Raintown Review*, The 2002 Edinburgh Festival of the Arts: *Writers Quarter*, *Bewildering Stories*, *Dead Letters: Zine of the Zombie Apocalypse*, *Aesthetica Magazine*, *The Australian Reader*, *R-KV-RY Journal*, *Flipside*, *On The Wing*, *The Australian Reader*, *Seven Cups of Coffee*, *Macquarie University Arena*, *Odin's Gift*, *Focus*, *Idunna*, *The Raintown Review*, *The Arabesques Print Review*, *The Non-Euclidean Cafe*, and *Shatter Colors Literary Review*, among other places.

Along with other awards, She's won the prestigious Australian Returned Serviceman's League's ANZAC DAY Award for poetry. She holds a gold medal for poetry and a silver for short story from the MacArthur Arts Festival (Australia). As well, She is the co-editor of the Arets Vakreste Boker 2004 award winning Norwegian-press literary collection UNDERTOW.

To The Caretakers

by Wayne Scheer

Alice sits on the edge of her husband's hospital bed massaging his cold, swollen fingers. "It's all right, Jimmy," she whispers. "You can let go."

"It won't be long now," the doctor says after listening to his heart. Alice feels the doctor's hand on her shoulder. She doesn't know how to react.

She tried caring for her husband at home until he collapsed in the bathroom. She tries not remembering the sound when he fell off the commode. Or the mess.

He wanted to die in his own bed. He opens his eyes, confused, tries to focus on Alice. She smiles and kisses his colorless forehead. She's forbidden herself to pray because she doesn't know if she'd ask for life or death. Instead, she sits on the edge of his bed, stroking his hand, wondering what life will be like when she finally lets go.

End

Bio – After teaching writing and literature in college for twenty-five years, Wayne Scheer

retired to follow his own advice and write. He's been nominated for a Pushcart Prize and a Best of the Net. His work have appeared in *The Christian Science Monitor*, *The Pedestal*, *Smokelong Quarterly*, *Pindeldyboz*, *The Potomac*, *Art and Understanding*, *Monday Magazine*, *Flashquake*, *Stone Table Review*, *Triplopia* and *Free Verse News*. Wayne lives with his wife in Atlanta and can be contacted at wvscheer@aol.com.

Special Delivery

by Patricia A. Boutilier

Eightyfive degrees, sunshine, December
twentyfourth, Bah, Humbug!

Then, outside, from the noisy United Parcel
Service truck, she descends, her shirt stretched
tight against plump, round full beasts, shorts
barely grazing past dumpling clefts of flesh.

Red-and-green patterned socks are squashed
into tightly-laced hiking boots covering trim
ankles. So, this is Christmas in Florida! Who
needs snow?

Ding-dong, doorbell rings!

A jaunty elves hat perched atop brunette curls,
beneath, bright smiling parted pink lips saying
"Happy Holidays, want your package? I've got
forty seconds. What can Brown do for you?"

Thanks, Santa. God bless us all, everyone!

End

Bio – Patricia Boutilier is a magical grandma
living in beautiful Naples, Florida. By day she
is a nurse and massage therapist, but writing

is her passion. Poetry is her typical genre but she has begun dipping my toes into flash fiction and short stories. She has been published in *Goblinfruit*, *Astropoetica*, and *Waterways: Poetry in the Mainstream*.

Man Gone Wild

by Judy Cabito

Verna, in double-knit, hot pants she should have tossed thirty years ago, burst through the door of Phil's Barbershop.

"Where is he?" she demanded

"Who?" Ernie asked, mid-cut of the man's hair he'd been working on.

"That slim-bucket, no good, hair-trimming, drug-pushing freak owner."

"You mean, Phil?"

"Sure, if he's got a name...Phil."

"Is there anything I can do for you, miss?" Ernie asked.

"You want to do something for me?" She moved toward him, one foot, then the other as she spoke each word clearly. "You want to get that sonofabitch and bring him here – to me?"

Ernie stepped behind his chair so that the other man separated Ernie from Verna.

"Listen miss..." Ernie started.

"Don't you patronize me. I want to talk to that sonofabitch. He go give my Henry some of that Viiii-aaa-gra, and he's been running around naked for three day. I can't take it no more. That sonofabitch, Phil, should pay."

Erie pulled out a bill from the cash register.
"This do?"

"You think money will stop him?"

"Listen," Ernie said sympathetically. "I'll talk it up with Phil. You're right, ain't nothing worse than a man gone wild. He shouldn't have left you in the lurch."

Verna backed up. "You'll do that?"

"Sure enough, sweetheart."

"I'm counting on you."

Ernie led her out the front door, shut it behind him and flipped the sign: 'Closed.'

He turned around, faced the other man. "Boy, what are you going to do, Phil?"

"There's nothing I can do," Phil said pulling out his little black book. "Give a man a little something to turn his love life around and they think one pill is good, two better and three a sure thing. I can't be accountable. That's why they only get three pills at a time. The only thing I can do now is mark down 'one for

Henry' – that sonofabitch – can't be trusted no more."

End

Bio – Judy Cabito lives in Long Beach, California. She is the Vice President of the California Writer's Club, Long Beach Division and participates with the American Zoetrope. Her writing has appeared in numerous publications including Gator Springs Gazette, The Writer's eZine, IceFlow, Flashquake, Alighted and Book by Authors (published by the Long Beach Library.) She grew up steps from the Puget Sound and calls herself a Westcoaster, if there is such a thing.

Dahlia's Dream

by Wayne H.W. Wolfson

A hostile wind, the sharp pieces of city grit, the bite, water to my eyes. She wanted to tell me about her dream. The neon lights of the street blend into one another. One big blot whose outline expanded and was rapidly becoming less distinct.

I did not want to.

She was trying to infect me, shed her images, no matter how personal, for a future good nights sleep.

I did not want to. I tried to put her off with a look, avoiding eye contact. It was no good, she was winding up. As far as she was concerned, it would come, she would be free, then it would be my problem.

No.

I had my own problems. I started running down the street. The night was winding down, she was running out of options. We both knew what we were doing, trying to look casual, she gave chase.

The clock was ticking. She just started shouting it out from her pursuit a few feet

behind me. The wind took some of her words, chopping up the narrative, a symbolist poem on the run. Was the dog in there somewhere?

Some people turned as we passed. Did the wind only give them the disregarded words? Which were more important? Where was the dog now?

I was getting winded. I prayed for an acquaintance to happen upon her, that few feet between us, a wavering room in which they could easily enter. Or maybe a stranger needing to know the time.

I kept running. I know she was there, but began worrying less, how much night could possibly be left.

End

Bio – Wayne is a California based author. More information on his works, including his new CD can be found at his site [Terrible Beauty](#) .

Body Image

by Maria Pollack

As the anesthetic began to take effect, she thought about how after the operation, her thighs would be smooth and creamy like those of the models in the fashion magazines. She knew it would make all the difference. When she went to the beach she would no longer have to pull on a pair of shorts the moment she got out of the water to hide the cellulite that dimpled the tops of her legs. At the gym, she would no longer have to use an extra-large towel as she made her way to the shower to hide her shame. She just knew she would and grace, perhaps, even like a dancer. When she woke, a young man was bending over her and smiling.

“The operation,” he announced, “was a success.”

She tried to smile in reply, but she wasn't quite sure she managed it. She felt wobbly. Her head was pounding and a wave of nausea seemed to be rising in her stomach.

“In no time at all, we'll have you fitted for a prosthetic and you'll be up and walking again.”

She stared at the man. “Excuse me?”

“The infection hadn’t traveled as far as we thought it had.” He pulled back the sheet covering her legs and pointed to the empty space below her left knee. “We were able to save most of your leg.”

But she didn’t really hear him because she was staring at her thighs and the cottage-cheese like fat that still clung to them.

End

Bio – Maria Pollack has had short fiction published in *The Detroit Jewish News*, *The Little Magazine*, *The Loyalhanna Review*, *Wings*, *Quantum Tao*, *Art Times*, *Urban Desires*, *Lily*, *The Angler*, *The Green Silk Journal*, *The Picolata Review*, *Word Riot*, *EMG-Zine*, *Blue Print Review*, *Chick Flicks*, and *The Ghost in the Gazebo: An Anthology of New England Ghost Stories*. Recently, she also had published a creative nonfiction piece in *The Oregon Literary Review*.

Saturday Night

by Jens Rushing

“Let’s do it,” Xygraphon said. A muscle in one of his many handsome pseudopods twitched, sending a nerve-bolt through the controls. Brilliant light flooded the teleportation deck of the Krazzar ship. The light receded, leaving a bemused and naked man. The man patted at his body, perhaps wondering where his clothes went, perhaps wondering why he stood before two tremendous creatures seemingly constructed of phlegm and wires.

“YOU ARE LEONARD SMITH,” Kalgar said. Xygraphon snickered; Kalgar had the volume all the way up, and when his squammous voice boomed through the chamber, Smith shuddered like he’d been electrocuted. “YOU ARE HERE TO ANSWER FOR THE CHARGE OF BEING A GRAVELY INFERIOR RACE.”

“Me, personally?” Leonard said. “I think I’d do better if I had my clothes on.”

“NO, NOT YOU PERSONALLY,” Xygraphon said. “YOU ANSWER FOR THE WHOLE OF HUMANITY.”

“Well,” Leonard said. He seemed confounded. He chewed his lower lip for perhaps forty seconds.

Xygraphon grew impatient. “WELL?”

“Well, what?”

“WELL, EXPLAIN YOURSELF.”

“See, it’s like this. I’m just a bus driver. I drive a bus. I don’t know as I can explain for all of humanity.”

“MAKE THE ATTEMPT, FLESH-CREATURE, OR YOUR PLANET IS ANNIHILATED.” Xygraphon held a tentacle over his orifice to stifle his bubbly laughter.

“Stop it,” he hissed at Kalgar. “Stop making faces, jerk! I’m trying to do this!”

“AND YOUR, UH, ORGANS WILL SHRIVEL,” Kalgar added. He clicked the microphone off just in time to prevent Leonard from hearing a flood of laughter.

“Well, gosh.” Leonard scratched his head. “We’ve got, uh, lots of flowers and dogs and things.”

“YES. PLEA. TELL US OF YOUR CULTURAL ACHIEVEMENTS. WHY SHOULD WE NOT DESTROY YOUR PLANET?”

“We got lots of books. Books like *Hunt for Red October*. And, uh, *Da Vinci Code*.”

“CLANCY IS A HACK,” Kalgar said.
“RESEARCH IS NO SUBSTITUTE FOR THE
MOST BASIC PROSE SKILLS.”

“We got movies, too. Movies like... *Hunt for Red
October*, and, uh *Da Vinci Code*.”

Silence reigned on the teleportation deck for a
little while. “This guy...” Kalgar said.

“Don’t look at me!” Xygraphon replied. “I didn’t
pick him!”

“I’m sorry, all right?”

“No,” Xygraphon said. “Let’s get him out of
here. My dad wants the ship back by ten.”

“Your dad can kiss my orifice.”

“Shuddup!”

Feedback squealed as Xygraphon clicked the
mic. “YOU HAVE BEEN FOUND GUILTY.”

“Mmmokay.” Leonard shuffled his feet.

“THE EARTH WILL BE DESTROYED.”

“Well,” Leonard said. “I guess that’s not my first
choice.”

“UNLESS...”

Kalgar grabbed the mic. “UNLESS YOU SHAVE YOUR HEAD AND EAT ONLY MUSTARD FOR A WEEK.”

Xygraphon roared with laughter, which Leonard heard only as a sound like chickens clucking. He grabbed the mic back.

“YES, YES, AND YOU MUST INTRODUCE YOURSELF AS ‘CRAPFACE’ FOR A YEAR!”

“A whole year?” Leonard said.

“OKAY, SIX MONTHS?”

“Six whole months?”

“OKAY, TWO MONTHS. UH, PLUS ONE MONTH.”

“I reckon I can manage that.”

“OFF YOU GO!” Xygraphon manipulated the teleporter controls, and the brilliant light bore Leonard away. “Do another?” he asked Kalgar.

“Yeah! But let’s get a Canadian this time. They’re just so funny!”

End

Bio Following Next Story

Membrane

by Jens Rushing

The pericardial membrane is a fraction of a fraction of an inch thick. It has the tensile strength of overcooked spaghetti. You can scratch it with a fingernail, and that scratch is death.

That's shoddy workmanship, is what that is. I can hardly be blamed for it. But no one hesitated to, not one moment. Her husband, for example. I brought that brat into the world with my own hands, and hatred flashed over his face just as quickly as if he had never known me. When he had pneumonia at eight years old, I tended him for three days and nights, never sleeping, never complaining. But ingratitude is the lot of the ministers of grace. I was never taught to expect anything more.

More shoddy workmanship: my seat cushion here at the train station. It squelched unpleasantly when I sat, and when I poked at it idly, the cloth just peeled away. Every ball in the universe has been dropped. And the puzzle is this: the chair is one of a long conjoined row under the awning. The awning isn't portable. Yet the decay of the chair indicates that it endured many thunderstorms. A true mystery.

Another train comes. I hear it before I see it, rumbling far down the track, a famished

leviathan in search of prey. The immensity comes; the rumbling grows louder and louder until no one can think of anything else. Everyone freezes, waiting for the train to arrive, watching, waiting, and then the train is *here*, hissing to a stop on the tracks. It disgorges its human freight, and life resumes.

The train goes. Another comes. Interchangeable parts. My buttocks grow numb, I shift my weight, the cushion disintegrates a little more. I watch a woman buy a bottle of juice at the vending machine. I want a bottle of juice very badly. Suddenly *he* is there, the dead woman's husband, sitting beside me.

"Running away?" he says.

"Three days now."

He moves like he's going to take my hand, but doesn't. His hand falls just short of mine and lays on the rotten seat. "Come home, Dad," he says. "It's all right. She's... buried now."

I don't say anything, and I hear, like a waxing thunderstorm, another train in the distance. It wells out of the unknown, bigger, faster, bringing an entire new world with it. This train is different. This is *my* train, and this time *I* will diminish and draw into the unknown with it.

"Come home," he says, like I didn't hear him the first time. "I forgive you. Just come home."

There is a membrane between us, only paper-thin, yet the division between life and death. It needs only to be scratched. I look at our hands, laying parallel on the cushion. His thumb twitches but the hand doesn't move. I wait. I give him a chance, I really do. Then I shoulder my bag and get on the train. The train and I diminish and life resumes.

End

Bio – Jens Rushing lives and writes in north Texas. Look for his stories in *Out West magazine*, *Aphelion magazine*, *Amalgamae magazine*, *Gold Dust magazine*, *Rage Machine magazine*, and the *Sails & Sorcery anthology* from Fantasist Enterprises.

Arrival

by M. Blake

I remember how my grandmother opened the door for us, and there she'd be with that growing smile and the little laugh - just waiting for us, though it was late - and I could never keep from smiling myself, no matter how tired I was from the ride. I'd go right for those raised arms and the big hug. Everybody else got the same, of course. She always seemed thrilled to see us, and never let us down with any other reception. I can remember smiling when my dad pulled the car into the driveway, anticipating the warm greeting to come.

Behind my grandmother's outward show of emotion, there stood my grandfather, quietly, hands clasped behind his back, always dignified yet smiling warmly, maybe even chuckling to himself. A hug when we were small, and then a handshake when my brother and I got older.

After the greetings it was in to the kitchen for something to eat before bed. In the kitchen there was a table-booth for everyday and informal meals (the dining room was only used for special occasions). Everybody would squeeze in to the small booth, with my grandmother using a stool at the end. In this way, she could easily get up for something from

the fridge or a cupboard (she always seemed to be bustling around the kitchen for something).

The whole family loved my grandmother's fresh cold cuts, which she always bought that very day, knowing we were coming. Boiled ham, liverwurst, thin-sliced bologna, with Swiss cheese and cheddar, sliced tomato and onion, pickles and relish, and big soft rolls to put it on. We were always a sandwich eating family anyway, so we couldn't think of better fare after the three hour ride, and six hours since our last meal. The whole family would be thinking about that food spread for the last hour of the ride, and I don't remember sandwiches ever tasting so good.

With the food to revive us, the talk would usually continue on into the early morning, though we kids usually retired first. There would be plenty to talk about because we usually hadn't seen my grandparents in half a year or so, and my grandmother would be firing questions at us about how school was going, or what we had been doing in our free time. My mother and father would hold off talking about adult subjects until my brother, sister and I went to bed. And then, from the basement, where we slept on cots, we could hear the adults laughing and gabbing sometimes to two or three in the morning.

We kids were always excited just to be at my grandparents' house, especially on the first night, after the three hour ride that seemed like

six. Usually, the three of us talked as late as the adults, discussing any plans we had for the coming days. Normally, it was just a three day stay - a long weekend - but if it was summertime, we might stay close to a week. If we stayed a week, we were usually bored by the time we left, having run out of games to play around the house (hide and seek, darts, bean bags), and tired of monster movies and each other. We wanted to get back home to our friends. But on that first night, the whole visit was ahead of us, and we never knew what my grandparents had planned for us. It was like the first day of summer vacation, or the week long Christmas holiday. Though excited by the possibilities, we'd try and get some sleep that night, putting off the decision of where to start until the next morning.

End

Bio – M. currently resides in RI and is working on a novel length project this winter. Still, he always has time for short pieces. He has writing online at: *3711 Atlantic; Stick Your Neck Out; Madswirl; Fiction on the Web; Hackwriters; Zygote In My Coffee; Exposed; Cerebral Catalyst; Sidewalk's End; Eloquent Stories.*

Homework

by the name is dalton

I read once that Thomas Wolfe wrote in a white heat, filling up page after page till they tumbled toward the floor and produced great piles of words and symbols.

He felt compelled and driven to reach inside and pull every last ounce of experience, documenting and presenting to history his side of the story.

He died.

End

Bio – The Name Is Dalton is a punk rock bass player. His work has appeared in *Culture Freak*, *Socket Shocker*, *Fall of Autumn*, *The 2nd Hand*, *Flash Flooding* and other awesome outlets.

Identity Crisis

by Virginia Marion

"What shall we do today?" I asked myself, and Myself asked the same of Me. Me said she was tired of the same old thing and suggested we do something Daring and Adventurous. This led to strident objections from myself, who preferred the tried and true and would really rather never have any type of adventure whatsoever. Myself brought up the incident with the cherry picker. I laughed at the memory and couldn't resist reminding myself that it could have been a disastrous situation if it hadn't been for me, whose boldness and daring had saved the day.

I wanted to go to the bookstore and myself agreed. But me said she didn't feel "literary." Myself and I shared a sigh . . . me was in a mood.

I offered a jaunt to the coffee house for a bit of people watching. Me looked interested, but myself refused; mentioning the time Me had seen that attractive man and spilled her coffee on him deliberately just so we could get his phone number. "And didn't he turn out to be flat? Only one of him in there." I had liked the man, but couldn't leave me and myself out in the cold, so we never called him back.

Me said, "Let's go horseback riding!" I shuddered remembering the time the horse I was riding got spooked and ran off across the wilderness with me hanging willy-nilly to the saddle horn begging myself to hold on and not let us fall to our deaths beneath the thundering hoofs. Nope, horseback riding is a thing of the past.

And so we sat, me, myself and I, and argued the day away trying to decide what we should do. I finally looked up from the argument and commented on the beautiful sunset painting the western horizon in streaks of color.

"Well girls, I guess it's time to go in for supper."

Me and myself agreed. Thus, the battle over what to cook began.

End

Bio – Virginia Marion lives in Texas. She has had flash published in The Melic Review, Long Story Short, and The Writer's Post Journal.

Dressed For Success

by Pamela Tyree Griffin

I drank the last of my cocktail and made my way to the bathroom. Once there I stood in front of the mirror. I wore my grey pinstripe suit. My pink, silk cuffed shirt was in stunning contrast to my ebony skin. My grey pumps were divine – as well they should have been with their two hundred dollar price tag. I looked damned good if I do say so myself. The mirror was good to me but then again it had something real good to work with.

I checked my makeup and my hair. My French tipped nails were perfection. I wore the epitome of the corporate uniform – hell, I dressed better than my boss most days anyway.

Seated in a stall, I reflected on the evening. I was invited to the partners' dinner - this was a big deal. My work was paying off – finally. The investment in clothing, hair, etiquette classes and a Master's degree was working.

My boss came in, mumbling something with that deep voice of hers. She was with her assistant who I recognized by her squirty little giggle. My boss sounded like she was more than a bit tipsy.

“Her? Yeah, I invited her. Sure she has all kinds of credentials but that’s not why I invited

her. Having her will look good in the paper. Besides she's the best dressed one of them at the firm."

"One of them?" asked the assistant.

"You know – African Americans or whatever they want to be called these days."

Their laughter accompanied them as they exited.

A statue, I froze on the toilet. I didn't get up for a while. And when I did, it was to walk out the door and to my car. I wasn't sure how I would feel the next day.

I was glad that when I woke up it would be Saturday.

End

Bio – Pamela Tyree Griffin has been writing since she was five years old. A married mom, she works as a corporate trainer and motivational speaker with a fondness for incorporating storytelling in almost every presentation. Her fiction and articles have appeared in: *Papyrus*, *Salome Magazine*, *Suite 101.com*, *The Philosophical Mother*, *Long Story Short*, *Poor Mojo's Almanac(k)*, *Chick Flicks*, *The Writer's Voice*, *Flash Flooding* and others. Her book of flash fiction called *He says He Has Cats and Other Short Tales* is available from

Amazon.com. She sees a story in everything and everyone and draws upon her vast life experiences to create her characters, situations and settings. She offers them up for your enjoyment and thanks you for allowing her to do so. Pamela is the publisher of "SHINE! An Online Journal Of Flash."

Bad Luck

by Christine Lucas

“Haven’t you sent the message? They’re killing us!”

Captain Adan of the Southern Alliance ducked behind a barricade just in time to avoid an enemy arrow. Lieutenant Seltin crouched beside him.

“We have, sir!” Seltin’s voice was barely audible over the fireblasts of the enemy battlemages. “Grond sent his fastest pigeon to the Lord Chancellor at the palace, informing him of our surrender. It should be there by now.”

“Unless the new king has decided to eliminate all opposition,” said Adan.

Seltin did not reply. He couldn’t — not with an arrow through his throat.

* * *

Somewhere at the North, under a pine tree in the royal gardens, the chancellor’s black tomcat lay purring on the grass. With his amber eyes half-closed, he licked the blood from his whiskers.

Messenger pigeons had never tasted better.

End

Bio – Christine Lucas has been reading and writing fantasy and horror stories for two decades now. She likes to explore overlooked parts of fantasy worlds, especially the lives of the animals that dwell in them. Her work has been published in Nocturnal Ooze and Writers Post Journal.

First Kiss

by Christopher Allan Death

Some people say that your first kiss is perhaps the most memorable moment in your life. Some people say that your first kiss will reveal a world you only dreamed could exist. For a high school sophomore named Andy Greene, both became frightfully true.

Her name was Angela Sophie Baker ... or so she told him after school one fine spring day. She said that her parents moved into town after her father relocated for business purposes. Apparently her mother left shortly after giving birth, because she “didn’t want to be tied down.”

Andy paid close attention during her life story. He even acted semi-interested. But then again, who wouldn’t listen to a beautiful girl with long blond hair, green eyes and slender figure? She was any guy’s dream come true.

Eventually the two began going out, and before long Andy felt himself falling in love. Angela was so easy to talk with. He had never met anyone so fun-loving and amazing. Then the romantic conversations started to flow.

“Andy, do you think I’m good looking?”

“Of course – you’re the most beautiful girl I’ve ever seen!”

“Have you ever loved anyone else?”

“No, you’re the first.” That was a blatant lie.

“Am I your best friend?”

“Without a doubt.”

“Have you kissed anyone before?”

“Not in my entire life.” Now *that* was the truth.

“Who is your favorite person in the entire world?”

“You are, Angela.”

Finally one night Andy asked her out to dinner. The moment they sat down at the corner diner, he knew this was the night. Tonight he was going to kiss Angela Baker. And nothing could change that fact. Even heaven itself could not stop him.

When the night finally rolled to its end, he could feel the sweat dripping down his neck. His palms felt sticky and the entire world seemed slightly out of focus. That was when she leaned forward and kissed him. She planted it square on his lips and would not let go. Suddenly Andy began to choke.

Something long and slippery snaked down his throat, probing through his esophagus until finding real estate somewhere in his stomach. Andy choked and tried to vomit. Whatever had extended from Angela's mouth now released something deep inside his body. He could feel movement around his liver.

Moments later Andy came to a shocking realization. Angela was not a normal human being. In fact she was not human at all. She said she had come from far away, outside the Milky Way Galaxy. She was sent by the alien home world to investigate Andy's species on earth.

Shortly after that shocking revelation, Andy learned he was pregnant. Unlike other humans, Angela's species reproduced by introducing a fetus into the male body until birth. Apparently maturation period was two years.

Andy thought about going to an abortion clinic, but after a brief chat with his friends he decided that wasn't a good idea. Either the nurses would laugh him out of the office or the US government would lock him up for testing. Either way his reputation was ruined.

Now with his life thoroughly crushed by his intergalactic girlfriend, Andy subjected himself to loneliness. The alien spawn grew larger everyday, and he could not shed the consequences of that first fateful kiss.

Even after the baby was born and adopted into its alien home world, Alan waited several years before he began dating again. And he waited a full forty-eight months before another kiss. He didn't want to risk becoming impregnated by another alien female again. Once was enough.

While some people still hold the first kiss close to their hearts, Andy learned that some dreams aren't meant to be fulfilled. Every time he locked lips with another girl, the memory of his first fateful tongue-tango became fresh in his mind. And he was scarred by that first kiss for the rest of his life.

End

Bio – Christopher Death currently resides in the concrete jungle of Northern Colorado. The author splits his time between writing short stories and spending the day with his eccentric close friends.

The Marbled Sweet

by Sophie Bachard

I remember an incident from my childhood. My sister's birthday, pass-the-parcel over, cake slices gobbled, presents distributed and wrappers shredded, and mother announced her surprise, her infamous homemade boiled sweets. My blood ran cold when mother flounced back into the room carrying the jar brimful of those dazzling multicoloured fruit-flavours, the same jar she kept high up on the kitchen shelf away from what she called my light fingers. Forever I had my eye on one particular sweet in that jar, a kaleidoscopically marbled one that held every secret sweet pleasure in the world. In bed, I schemed late into the night, taxing my tired little mind for ways to scale the cupboard and reach it.

*Thirty preteens screeching, pleading like
starving hordes, begging hands.*

All except me, frozen in disbelief, mesmerized by the jar, by the marble sweet I could see pressed against the glass.

Mother instructed everyone to line up dutifully but I refused to budge from under my aunt's crooked wing. I squirmed, agonized, as little clammy hands dived into the jar, greedily snapping. As each kid's wriggling fingers veered

close to my precious marble, I almost burst. I think I turned blue in the face because my aunt nudged me out of my hypnotic state and said "what's wrong boy, you sick?"

I couldn't speak, nor barely breathe, when I saw grubby-handed Daniel, a bully I'd crossed, fingering for that marbled sweet, the malicious smirk as he popped it into his mouth infuriating me ... *he knew he knew I'd talked about it and he knew ...* instantly I hated my mother for what she'd done. When simpering mother brought the jar to me, I swiped it from her, shattering it to pieces against the fireplace. "I hate you," I cried, running from the room in tears.

End

Bio Following Last Story

Hypocrite!

by Sophie Bachard

In the hall, Amy kicked off the vacuum in a practiced motion then bent close to the mahogany door, her ear pressed to the keyhole, pretending to fix the suction pipe while she eavesdropped.

In the bedroom they were at it again. After a bout of love-making (*God their desperate effort to make a baby was pathetic!*) that rich bitch was giving her other half hell again, blaming his impotence for her inability to become pregnant. *Stuck up frigid bitch*, Amy thought, sniggering. *God how I hate having to clean their mansion. So degrading, like wiping their bums because they're too rich and lazy to do it themselves. People like that think money buys everything. Whoever said the rich were the scum of the earth was dead right!*

The door swung open and Amy straightened up.

“Miss Amy please come inside.” Mr. Rich, in regal dressing gown, ushered her in politely.

A blush blooming on her cheeks, she self-consciously straightened her pinafore and

entered.

“I was just gonna knock,” Amy lied. “To ask if I could get off early today. My little boy’s starring in his school’s play this afternoon.”

The rich cow lounging on the bed like an aging Cleopatra had the cheek to pout like a spoilt brat! *God these people never grow up.* Amy swelled; proud of her motherhood. *Not so better than me are you, eh?*

“You’re lucky,” Mrs. Rich said, “What I wouldn’t give for a daughter.” The couple exchanged glances.

Should pay to get your tubes fixed, love!

"Sean suggests a surrogate. The going rate is a \$100,000."

Amy dropped her attitude like a hot coal. Smiling a syrupy sweetness, she said, “Awww you poor people. I feel for you, I really do. Of course, I’d love to help.”

White Noise Sacrifice

by Sophie Bachard

The snowstorm raged faster, reducing visibility.

We could see nothing beyond the corona of weak yellow light from Kelly's storm-lamp.

We struggled on, wrapped head to toe, only our eyes exposed to the raw icy needles. Squinting, I could barely lift my eyelids. My quadriceps burned from piston-lifting my knees through snowdrifts

"We should turn back," Kelly shouted from behind her scarf-covered mouth, "To get help." Her voice barely broke the snowstorm's constant white-noise, but her intention was clear enough. She stopped, pointed back the way we'd come, then sagged, reluctant to go on.

"Not giving up," I shouted.

After a moment, she nodded and we helped each other stagger on, huddling close.

The blizzard obliterated any possible trail but our perseverance paid off. Ahead, the faint yellow squares glowed. I felt Kelly stiffen beside me with hope, clutching my arm.

"Look. Church."

I nodded.

"God I hope she's safe there."

I dared not hope.

Bits of spooky graveyard came into view gradually, dark-etched on the snow-blurred space. Kelly stumbled in her haste and fell down.

As I crouched to help I spotted something by the headstones: a mound amid flatness. I yanked Kelly up, mindless of being brutal, pointed, and we staggered over.

Here on disturbed cemetery ground we scrabbled about. Then Kelly gave a shout, gesticulating like mad. She held up a snow-encrusted satchel.

"Joanna's! She must be around here."

We dropped to our knees as if praying at the grave, dug with our gloved hands ham-fistedly, frozen fingers imparting no feeling. I wouldn't have known what I touched.

Kelly found her. She went berserk, using both hands like shovels, scooping. Her gloves ripped to shreds, blood mixing stark red in the snow. She dug Joanna out and cradled her. "She's warm. Oh God how?"

"Don't cry or your eyes will ice up."

She rocked her, glancing back at the church with gratitude.

Minutes later I found the real reason she was warm when I uncovered Joanna's pet Labrador, frozen solid - all her body heat surrendered. I dug around the dog's fur to show Kelly true sacrifice.

End

Bio – Sophie Bachard was born and bred in South London, UK, where she was raised as a feral child by stray dogs on a council housing estate. After losing the entire manuscript of her ten million word epic autobiography at sea, she now sticks to writing short fiction to stay sane.

The Last Color Game

by Gale Martin

First Published in *The Giggle Water Review*

"What color would you say, Aggie?" Martha asked. She wiped some sweat from her chin with the back of her hand. From her purchase she could see clear to the inlet, blue as the lapis on her finger.

"Can't say. Never seen anything like it."
"Nor me. But if you had to go out on a limb—,"

"Out on a limb? You're a stitch."

"No wiggling out of this. Pretend you're a game show contestant."

"Speak up, dear," Aggie said.

Aggie floated in a shimmer of sunlight. Or was it her imagination? "You're on a game show. For \$5,000, what color is it?"

"Scarlet," Aggie said.

"I'm not saying, 'Good answer,' like they do on television. When I think of scarlet," Martha explained, "I think of the tanagers around our woodlands. I've seen them at the feeder. Scarlet has some orange in it."

"Not scarlet, then." Aggie sighed. Her head bobbed toward her chest.

"You're not trying," Martha scolded.

"I am. The thread of purple in that rivulet there? How about cerise? That might be a match."

"Are we talking about rivulet or cerise?"

Aggie smiled. "Cerise, dear."

"Of course. Besides it's damn near a freshet anyway."

"Your facility with language becomes you. Always has."

"All right. We've a healthy sample now."

"Healthy, Martha?"

"All right. A good sample, if you've no objections to good."

Aggie shook her head.

"It's not scarlet, and it's not cerise."

"How about cardinal?"

"Too red."

"Burgundy?"

"Too purple. Think, Aggie."

Aggie examined the stream, drying in places. "Look there." She pointed to a crevice halfway between them. "Tell me that's not terra cotta."

"There's a hint," Martha conceded. The midday sun washed everything on the ledge in amber. "But not enough to call it terra cotta."

"It's coming to me," Aggie said. She winced and closed her eyes. Her head relaxed into a rocky rise behind her.

Martha observed some movement in Aggie's chest. Her breath had grown shallower in the last hour. "We never should have hiked the old mine road. It's my fault entirely."

"Quiet, damn you. I...have it," Aggie whispered. "Crimson. That's it. Isn't crimson the perfect color?"

Martha watched the blood flowing from her sister's thigh where the limb had impaled it. "Crimson. Spot on, my dear."

* * *

"Tragedy struck in Kuanalahu State Park yesterday," the television announcer said, "when two elderly sisters fell more than 30 feet from the Mine Hill Cliffs trail. According to the

fire chief, the women landed on a small rock ledge, which saved them from falling another 40-plus feet. By the time rescuers rappelled down the cliffs to get to them, one of women had bled to death. The other was airlifted to Kuanalahu County Hospital with multiple injuries including a broken leg and a dislocated shoulder but is expected to live."

End

Bio – Gail Martin is a former English teacher who began writing creatively two years ago. Besides Giggle Water, he has published his short stories and flash fiction in *Duck & Herring Company's Pocket Field Guide*, *Sirens Magazine*, *Alighted*, *Wet Ink Press*, and *Flash-Flooding*, winning two flash contests and two short story contests. Besides unrepentant blogging, he is also hard at work editing his second novel, one he cranked out for NaNoWriMo.

The Silent Inmate

by Liam Brennan

The young guard towered over the blood-drenched body in shock. Officers gathered round to witness the horrific sight that lay on their cold, cement floor in Kingsway Penitentiary. "He went for my gun. I was lettin' em out to the yard and he jumped me. I didn't know what else to do boss," he uttered as beads of cold sweat met with tears. I wavered at a distance as they carried the body away; hanging their heads. The dead man had been a favorite among the inmates and guards because of his solemn presence. "He used to smile two miles wide when that weekly letter came," said one of the guards. They patted each other on the back, trying to maintain a hierarchical power over the nearby inmates.

The young guard, the newest in the Illinois State Penal System, stepped into the dead man's cell. I moved closer, peering over his shoulder as he stooped down to pick up a yellow note that had fallen from the open envelope on the bed. I sensed his anxiety as he unfolded the paper and scanned its contents: Young Max has lost his arduous battle that consumed him these past four years. He is in a better place. Placing the note in his breast pocket, the guard collected himself; he couldn't let the other inmates see through his cool exterior. He brushed against me inside the confined chamber, his flesh going cold as he

passed. When he had gone, I sat down on the silent inmate's bed and flipped through an old comic serial, "The Last Stand of James T. Tall" that accompanied the note. The main character lived in the woods, a lumberjack by trade, and each week he warded off the menacing creatures that came his way. It was a straightforward existence, something that the inmate and I had discussed many times.

"That boy wrote him every week." I turned to see two older guards, their faces frail and ravaged by time, standing at the door. They looked around the empty cell with great compassion and sorrow in their voices as they traded stories about times the inmate had confided in them. "Talked about that kid like it was his own" said the elder guard. "Used to sit there day and night readin' those damn books. Said he identified with him, the main character. I'm sure he meant that bald little cancer boy though." The other guard chased away tears as they flooded his eyes, "Must have been some bad news this mornin'." The elder guard blessed himself and they departed.

I decided it was time to move on as well, stepping past the icy, brick walls and chain linked fences, walking toward the dense forest that isolated this place from the reality of the outside world. The trees towered over me as I knelt to gather wood. I'd never started a fire before but the pictures in the serials were self-explanatory. With the smack of two stones, a spark shot up and I lay back with a sense of

pride, although it appeared too effortless to be true. At that moment I heard it, the thumping sound of an axe blasting through tree stumps with the greatest of ease. I turned and there he was, having already arrived in our new world. The bullet holes were gone and he looked as I'd always pictured him, just as James Tall looked when he conquered another scoundrel. I stood and brushed the hair out of my eyes as he chomped through the final piece. He wiped the sweat from his face and moved slowly towards me, with that comforting smile creeping across his face. "Max?" he said, as I nodded my head and returned the favor. This was the life we had been dreaming of, in a world without restrictions.

End

Bio - Liam Brennan resides in Winnipeg, Manitoba. He has written numerous short stories and his work has been featured in Boston Literary Journal, Long Story Short, Alighted, and Yellow Mama. He also writes for the University of Winnipeg student newspaper, The Uniter and is currently working on a screenplay and a novellette entitled Seven Minutes To Midnight.

Working Class Hero

by Randal Pretzer

“How many times have I told you to keep that door closed?” The store manager shut the doors to the dock and stormed off. I laughed at the whole thing after he left, then pushed open one of the doors and propped a stool in front of it to hold it open. I sat down and picked up *Hunger* by Knut Hamsun, my second all-time favorite book, and I realized I forgot to put my bookmark back in. I was about to search for the page when I heard one of the doors bang up against the wall. I looked up and I saw the store manager standing a few feet away.

“Yes, sir.” I said, putting down the book and walking to him.

“Are you hard of hearing? I told you I want these damn stores shut.”

I just looked at him.

“And since you are obviously not doing anything, why don’t you help the men’s department fold clothes?”

“Sure.”

“Now, follow me.” The store manager led me out to the men’s department and showed me which

clothes to fold. The other employees laughed a little. I waited for the store manager to leave while I attempted to fold one of the shirts.

“45 to linens for customer pick up....45 to linens for customer pick up.”

I had barely started on one shirt, and I get called for a pick up. I hate pick ups but this time I didn't mind. I hate folding clothes and I like the linens department. The workers there are some of the best. I was about to head to linens when the store manager came up to me.

“Hey, I thought I told you to help in the men's department!”

“I got called for a pick up.”

“Well, after you get that pick up, you come back down here and fold these clothes you hear me?”

“Sure.” I love placating him. I had no plans to go back to folding those clothes. It was not my job.

I came out of the dock landing and I saw the store manager again in the china department. The china manager and some of her other employees were putting up some dishes up on display. I was about to head over to linens when someone from china called out to me.

“Hey excuse me, sir, you are in the dock?” she asked.

“Yes, but I'm heading to the linens for a pick up...”

“Oh, the pick up is here.”

“Oh, sorry.”

“It's okay...it's over here.”

She led me to it. It was nearby where the store manager and the china manager were talking. I overheard them as I picked up the package.

“Excuse me, I need you to clean out your stockroom. It's a mess,” he told her.

“I am sorry sir, but I have a lot of other important things to do. Christmas is coming up....and....” the linens manager said.

“I don't give a damn what else you have to do! I am telling you now to clean out that damn stock room! Do you hear me?” the store manager said right in front of the other employees.

“I'm sorry, sir...we have to get this other stuff done or...”

“I said I don't give a damn about the other stuff! You do what I tell you now. The other stuff can wait.” the store manager said. “I don't

know what I have to do with you managers to get you to listen and do what I ask! Do you tolerate this from your own employees? Or what?” He was yelling at her now. She started to cry. Her employees stood silently with sad looks on their faces. I wanted to step in but I need this job. However, was my job worth her going through all that? No. I decided not.

“Excuse me, sir,” I said.

“What the hell do you want? Did I not tell you to go fold those clothes?” he yelled at me.

“I don’t think it is appropriate for you to talk to her that way. You don’t talk to anyone like that....what right do you have to do that?” I said.

“I am the store manager, and it is perfectly within my rights to discipline my employees when they don’t do what I ask!” he yelled again.

“You are the store manager, yes, but you're suppose to be professional and calm...stern but courteous. This is unprofessional and brutish behavior. Do you have to embarrass and undermine her authority?” I asked.

“I have had enough of this! You're fired!” he yelled and walked off.

“I don’t give a damn....this damn job can kiss my behind.” I yelled at him.

The manager and her employees were about to say something to me when the operator paged me. “45 to furniture....45 to furniture.”

I apologized to the department manager and her employees for having to leave and headed to the furniture department. I assumed I was not fired yet so I continued as if nothing had happened.

“45 to executive office....45 to executive office.”

Okay....now I was fired. I laughed out loud and walked to the office. Fuck face was there, I'm sure.

“As I said you are fired! You can pick up your last paycheck this week. I don't want you on these premises again...do you understand me?” he said.

“Forget you. I hope you have a bad day, and take lots of wooden nickels.” I walked out, not even bothering to catch a reaction. Why did I care? Forget him.

I said goodbye to all my friends I knew in the different departments. I left through the wrong door, one of the entrances instead of the back way we were suppose to go through. As I headed to my car, I realized I forgot my check and so I went right back to that place they call Will's, but what I call hell in a very small place. I got the check, and on my way out, I looked at the register nearest to the door. All the phones have intercom where the whole store can hear

you. You just had to hold down the five button. I checked to see if there were any managers around before I walked over to the register, picked up the phone, and held down the five button.

“Hello everyone! Welcome to the best quotes of our local store manager here for this store I call hell.” I said in one of those stereotypical white guy voices, like what Richard Pryor did on his stint at Saturday Night Live. “I will start out with some of his famous quotes: 'I don't give a damn what you have to do.' Let's say it again, 'I don't give a damn....I don't give a damn...I don't give a dam.'....It is like a song isn't? Now for a commercial break.” I laughed out loud right over the intercom. I couldn't continue because I was too nervous and forgot all the other quotes. I looked around once again to see if there were any managers. I saw some employees on the floor laughing and holding their stomachs. I saw some customers with faces of disgust. I hated to cut it short but I couldn't remember anymore of his quotes, and I was expecting security any minute. I was surprised I made it this far. I got back to the intercom. “We are back, and I hate to cut it short, but all good things must come to end. It's been fun. Glad I'm getting out of this hellhole. And I hope the store manager takes a lot of wooden nickels and somebody slashes his tires.” I hung up the phone, checked again for any manager or security. I saw none and ran like hell out the entrance.

I luckily had time to find another job before my bills were due again. Not a bad time to become a working class hero.

End

Bio – Randall Pretzer was born in Nurenburg, Germany in January, 1976 and has been writing short stories off and on since he was in 4th grade. He has had three short stories and a couple pieces of poetry published. His biggest influences for his writing have been his father, Randy Pretzer, his brother, Dan Pretzer and the famous authors Knut Hamsun, John Fante, Charles Bukowski, Henry Miller and Kurt Vonnegut. His father is ranked 1, his brother 2, Knut Hamsun 3, John Fante 4, Charles Bukowski 5, Henry Millier 6 and Kurt Vonnegut 7. Knut Hamsun set the stage claims Randall.

Sands of Fear

by Christopher Schmitz

Jessica clung to Calvin, apprehensive of the meandering bodies around her. A mass of people bustled around them.

She could feel it coming on. She knew what was about to happen; she was doomed.

Horror seized her body like a jolt of electricity stiffening her muscles, as if rigor mortis set in. She watched with dread as the doors and windows imploded under the weight of the fine, silica sand. Her ears could only hear the sounds of her own screams; they crescendoed above the bass rumble of the gushing sand. It shot forth like a geyser, drowning everything in its path. There was nothing but sand, everywhere sand!

Where is Calvin? Help! Somebody save me!
CALVIN!

In a matter of seconds Jessica's feet were firmly entrenched in a foot of sand. She was a frozen siren, her high pitched screech waning into a breathless groan as her lungs emptied, squeezing every molecule of oxygen out in her last, mortal wail.

Sand rushed over Jessica, entombing her in concretion. Her clenched lungs were

constricted and breathless, and another wave of ecru particles washed over her body. She was trapped, like some strangled fetus in a cadaverous womb.

Frozen solid, her vision blacked out before the final tide enveloped her. No breath could enter her lungs. Oxygen was a faint memory; her next gulp would fill her shriveled lungs with asphyxiating granules.

She was being mummified alive. The terror amplified exponentially, shrieking inside her brain, paralyzing her.

This is it...again! Why does this keep happening to me?

Under several cubic tons of loess, Jessica felt subtle shifting and settling. The roar of the sands had stopped. Her consciousness faded as she hung tightly to her last dying breath, her oxygen having since expired. She would not breathe in, unwilling to let in the final dusty breath that would desiccate her from the inside out.

The audible buzz inside her mind quieted. She blacked out, her body still trying to scream.

* * *

Seconds later, a blast of cold burst through her. Jessica wheezed and cried, doubling over in the fetal position. Her mouth was dry and

her lungs ached as if the sand had finally conquered her.

Her eyes opened to a blurry scene and the grit of the asphalt under her aggravated her skin. A haze in her head made her feel drunk. A large crowd of people stared at her, mumbling about what they had just seen.

Self-conscious and embarrassed, Jessica leaned into Calvin, her rescuer. Her breath still came in ragged gasps and he laced his gentle fingers through her hair, helping to calm her.

He was her knight and savior, always dragging her from danger. This was not the first time a claustrophobic attack had struck in a busy shopping center. It would likely not be the last.

Calvin stood and waved his arms, pushing the crowd back. “Come on, people. Give her some room!”

End

Bio – Christopher Schmitz is the author of The Kakos Realm fantasy novel series. His short fiction works include pieces of sci-fi, horror, fantasy, literary fiction, and satire. You can check out more of his writings at www.TheKakosRealm.com.

Speck

by Rowena Southard

One day a small speck of sand made its way into the sock of a happy businessman. Although the speck was just that, a speck, it had an effect on the much larger man. The speck worked its way from the city sidewalk up the back of the man's oxford and over the side, into the black sock that was held up by a garter around the man's leg. It moved as though it had tiny muscles and intention, although that was impossible because it was only a speck of sand and sand cannot have muscles or intention. It worked its way through the tiny weave of the nylon sock as the man walked and finally came to rest in one of the fleshy creases at the back of the man's heel. The speck, although very small, caused his shoe to rub in the back, in the place where new shoes usually rub, not old shoes, and the otherwise happy man grew irritable without knowing why. The man yelled at his secretary and found fault with his assistant's reports. The speck remained in the crease of the man's heel, and the man grew progressively more impatient with his secretary and his assistant. The secretary made excuses to the assistant for the businessman's poor behavior. The assistant lectured the secretary about being oppressed by the ruling class.

Days went by and the speck of sand stayed put. In fact, the speck almost seemed to grow comfortable lodged there in the crease of the businessman's heel, although that was impossible because a speck of sand cannot become comfortable. The man grew more and more unhappy without knowing why and thought about calling a doctor of some sort, for perhaps he needed a pill or a new type of therapy, something that would reshape his brain or help him to understand his childhood. In a fit of bad temper, he fired his secretary and his assistant, and they both complained to their unemployment counselor about being oppressed by the ruling class. The businessman took a leave of absence from his job and talked to a psychiatrist every third day about how unhappy he was. The doctor listened carefully and wrote notes on little notepads. They talked about the possibility of the businessman taking a pill or having an adjustment to his spine.

Then one day, when the man was sitting in a lounge chair wearing only swim trunks, he rubbed his ankles together and he suddenly felt a real sense of relief. The speck of sand fell from his heel and lodged in the lounge chair pillow, waiting for another fleshy crease to attach to, although that was impossible because the speck wasn't waiting for anything and had no sense of time. The man was suddenly happy again and called the doctor to tell him how much the treatment had helped. He went back to work the next day and rehired

his secretary and his assistant. They agreed to come back to work for him because they hadn't found new jobs, but when he wasn't around, they spoke about how they were oppressed by the ruling class. No one ever knew about the speck. It sat unseen in the wrinkle of the lounge chair, a cause, a tiny source with no intention at all.

End

Bio – Rowena Southard has spent most of her life in Texas and California. She studied writing and biology in college, and she now works as a part-time college English teacher in Northern California. She has written many short stories, including a collection of stories set in a carnival. In addition to writing, she enjoys painting and mycology. Rowena is a long-time member of the B Street Writers in San Rafael, California, and her most recent story will appear in the upcoming issue of *Sybil's Garage*. She is married to her biggest fan, Dave.

Pittsburgh Snow

by Guy Hogan

Outside, the sunlight was harsh and the first snow of the year dusted backyards and roof tops. From the fifth floor of the apartment building, looking out his living room window, the man could remember when he was a very young boy and the first snow always arrived in November. This first snow had fallen last night, in January. The man was in slippers, pajamas and bathrobe.

The man was forty years old. He sipped cocoa from a porcelain cup and thought about being forty. He heard the woman come up behind him and she put her arms around him from behind. It was their first weekend off together since she had agreed to give up her apartment and move into his. She was thirty-five.

In a sleepy voice she said, "What should we do today?"

"Anything you like."

"We always see the same people."

"Let's see new people."

She said, "People can be so disagreeable."

"Let's rent some movies."

"Romantic movies?" she asked hopefully.

He was looking at the snow. He thought about the engagement ring he had hidden that she knew nothing about.

"Yes," he said. "Romantic movies."

End

Bio – Guy Hogan lives in Pittsburgh, PA. He is a Vietnam War veteran. A K. LeRoy Irvis Fellowship allowed him to complete an MFA in fiction at the University of Pittsburgh in 2006. His homepage is <http://www.authorsden.com/guyhogan>

Pookie Has Two Daddies

by April Grey

“Hey Pookie, Daddy’s going away on another business trip, and I’m leaving you with Mommy down the hall.”

Pookie, a black and white, long-haired Chihuahua, wagged his tail frantically and whined at the door. As soon as Jeff opened it, he raced down the hallway of their small apartment complex.

“Why Pookie? You’re ready to stay with us?” Giving Jeff a friendly wave as he walked down the stairs with his luggage, Alice closed the door. She scooped up Pookie in her ample arms and Pookie licked her face. “Look who’s with us, Albert!”

Albert looked up from his newspaper and grunted. “Tell him to leave some dog food for the mutt next time. How long?”

“Just a few days.”

Pookie was in seventh Heaven because his Mommy let him sit on her lap all day, stroking and grooming him. And she always cooked him fresh chicken breast and gave him leftovers. But he missed Jeff something awful. If only Mommy and Daddy would live together!

But Mommy lived with Not-The-Daddy Albert,
and Daddy lived alone.

If only...

“Albert, Pookie needs his walkies, but
if I leave the fish on the stove it will burn.”

“Okay. Okay.” Albert grabbed the leash
off the doorknob. “Don’t want to have to clean
up any messes.”

Inwardly, Pookie smiled.

“Oh, Jeff, how nice of you to come.”

“Not at all, I feel terrible about this happening.
I’m glad I was home in time for the funeral.
What was it I heard--that he fell while taking
Pookie for a walk?”

“Yes, on the stairwell. You know
Albert’s eyesight hadn’t been too good of late.”

“I feel responsible.”

“Not at all, and Pookie has been such a
comfort in the past few days. Oh, and who is
this?”

A lovesick grin plastered itself on Jeff’s face as
he patted the arm of the man beside him.

“This is George. We met in San Francisco on my last business trip. He’s moving in with me.”

End

Bio – April Grey lives in NYC with her husband, son, Chihuahua, two cats and four tropical fish. Last year two of my short stories were published, "Super Villains" in *Walking Bones Magazine* and "Problems of Communication" in *Amalgamae Magazine*.

A Little Crazy is OK

By Kristen Bailey

(A story from my collection:
A Place to Stay and Other Short Stories)

My schizophrenic brother had several invisible friends, but they didn't frighten me. I didn't think of David as sick, and only mentioned his affliction to explain the unique friends. For some reason, though, the ghosts he saw on the living room couch terrified me. They reportedly died in the house fire some twenty years before my family bought the house that I grew up in. I never understood why the ghosts stuck around, sitting silently on the couch, and never asking for anything. David's friends were polite and he shared with me what they said. I got them. I didn't get the ghosts.

It's been a few years since I let that white, dead, couple bother me. All of those unexplained childhood moments are crashing back into my conscience now as I plan my brother's funeral.

I sit in his living room, in the small house he shared with his caretaker, trying to visualize him sitting on the love seat across from me. Would I be afraid of a ghost if it were my brother? I don't want to let him go. I almost wish I could see ghosts.

I offered to live here with him, and take care of him, but he sternly said no. Mother explained he didn't want to lose me, and that he thought he would if I saw him at his worse. Other people were scared of him when he heard too many voices and couldn't sit still. I saw him differently. I knew he loved me. It's not that hard to love a "faulted" person when he loves me so much.

"Lisa?"

I startle so bad, I jump right up to my feet. "Yes?" It had sounded so much like David . . . it had been David's voice there for a second. "Sorry, I was thinking."

"I'm heading out for a little while. Are you okay?" He looks concerned, and I know he's used to caring for people. He's not just a nurse, he helps people keep stable.

"I'm just remembering David. Is it alright if I stay?"

He nods, smiles, and leaves, slipping into his jacket as he goes out the door. He's completely unaware I'm trying to see my brother's ghost.

Well, maybe I'm not going that far. Maybe this is what mourning is like. I wouldn't know because this is the first time I've lost someone close to me. I wouldn't mind if I could hear voices, if I could take David with me, and feel him around sometimes. That kind of crazy

should be okay for everyone.

I remember I have a lot to do today, so I rise and pull in a deep, bracing breath before walking to the front door.

The smell is so familiar I don't realize right away . . . but it's there. I can smell David's distinct mix of cologne and dry skin lotion. I can smell him for a second before I walk out the door.

End

Brilliant Book Press Catalog

The River People Flourished by Kristen Bailey

Before fur traders or missionaries touched the Pacific Northwest . . . The River People flourished.

River Song lives in a valley of meandering streams that give them salmon to eat each spring. Oak trees abound in the valley. A forest of cedar and fir surround them, making a canopy and giving them planks for their longhouses, canoes, and totem poles. River Song's father, Chief Sits and Thinks, is growing old and sick. He trusts in her to lead their people. She must use her gift of words, especially when a wandering band of braves seeks a new home with them. Can this young girl hold her tribe together?

"A nicely told tale that discusses American Indians from a different perspective. It combines history with romance, with a hint of early women's liberation and a larger dose of Indian culture." *The Herald and News*

A Rocky Redemption by Kristen Bailey

A story about balancing friendship and romance
She hid an abusive marriage and divorce from her friend,
but Savanna Thompson must return home as a single
mother. She tries to reconcile with her best friend, Cassie,
who just lost her husband. The problem is that Cassie
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The Enemy's Son by Kristen Bailey

A romantic suspense novel with a lot of action and
adventure.

He's the only one who can help her save her father, but
can Cora trust the enemy's son?

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An emotional romantic suspense

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Writer's End

The place to talk about Flash Fiction
(and other writing issues)

Following are two articles by Guy Hogan, a flash fiction author from this issue. He has stories and more articles on his website at www.authorsden.com/guyhogan.

Have an article to submit? Send it to brilliant@kristen-bailey.com, and write "article" in the subject line.

Flash fiction Rocks!

by Guy Hogan

Let's talk about form. While I was working on my Master's I taught as a Teaching Assistant two terms of Composition and one term of Creative Writing and one term of Fiction Writing. For the Fiction Writing class I tried to explain in simple, logical language several elements of the short story that I had found out about through constant experimentation. Experimentation can be a very slow process. So, here are a few insights about the form of the short story.

As far as I can tell, and I may be wrong, but the basic form of all short stories is: the setup, the buildup and the payoff no matter what length the story is. That's it. Don't believe me? Go to any stories of your favorite, successful authors and re-read them; you will find this form. Some writers are more skilled at hiding the form, but it's there all right and I would guess that this form has not changed for successful story writing since our ancestors painted stories on the wall of caves.

For a piece of flash fiction (around 1,000 words) the setup might be two, three, maybe

four paragraphs. The setup will probably give the location of the story, maybe introduce the main character(s) — best to keep the number of characters small like two or three — and plunge the reader into the action.

The buildup will usually be the body of the story and will contain most of the action, conflict or tension.

The payoff will contain the resolution.

That's all there is to it. Nothing here is meant to be a hard, fast rule; but it will give anyone who wants to write flash fiction a rope to hang on to as he or she enters the swirling waters of the very short story.

Editor's Commentary: I thought this article explains my suggestion: make something happen. Following the basic form Hogan's lays out will ensure your story moves. Other writers have called this the Three Act Structure, started in Greek times. It applies to plays and helps writers give form to their stories. I just read a great article in the latest issue of *Writer's Digest* called "Getting Your Act(s) Together" by Ridley Pearson. In flash fiction, I've seen some great stories that use one line for the set up. For an easy study of plot, check out "Billy's Quest" on page 15.

Flash Fiction and The Internet

by Guy Hogan

Let the good times roll.

Some pundits blame MTV for the short attention span of viewers. Everywhere we go we are bombarded by information. Multi-tasking is a buzz word for the zip-zip world we live in. There is never enough time. We want and need our information now. Through the Internet we can connect almost immediately to nearly anyone anywhere in the world. If flash fiction did not already exist it would have to be invented.

There's something mystical about an entire story with a setup, a buildup and a payoff all being contained within, oh, 300 to 1,200 words. The computer screen was made for flash fiction and flash fiction was made for the computer screen.

What should be the ultimate goal of flash fiction writers? To produce work that revitalizes the language; to produce work read by the many and studied in our halls of higher learning; to ultimately have the very short story take its rightful place alongside the poem, short story and novel as one of the great artistic forms of literature.

Here are some ezines that publish first class flash fiction. They are looking for submissions. I've been published in Chickflicks Ezine and Word Riot.

SmokeLong Quarterly (www.smokelong.com)

Chickflicks Ezine (www.chickflicksezine.com)

Word Riot (www.wordriot.com)

Hobartpulp (www.hobartpulp.com)

Pindeldyboz (www.pindeldyboz.com)

Editor's Commentary: I'd like to add Brilliant to this list! Also, check out Skive Magazine online and Duotrope's Digest's Market.

I love how this article lifts flash fiction up. Some argue it's an easier form because it's shorter, but I say it's like poetry. Shorter can be stronger. I see literature as a rainstorm outside, and flash fiction is a tiny drop. These short pieces can be deep and meaningful or just entertaining. The short form forces words to mean more and express new meanings.

Comments on this issue of Brilliant, the magazine's layout, or the stories? Email your thoughts to brilliant@kristen-bailey.com.