

Brilliant! Quarterly

Flash Fiction

Located online at
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Issue Two, June 2007

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 book 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

Issue two

Hello and welcome to the second issue of Brilliant Quarterly. You'll notice a story on the front cover, and that's because I received many great qualifying stories for the back cover contest. The cover picture is of South Umpqua Falls, a place I love here in the Umpqua Valley. Brilliant changed locations during this last quarter, and continues to be a source of inspiration and learning for me. While this issue is full of entertaining stories, I feel some are very deep and personal.

Thanks again to all the wonderful writers who submitted.

Issue one is still available, and downloads of all Brilliant Issues are free at lulu.com/brilliantbooks.

There's a new title at Brilliant Book Press. Read more about ***A New Kind of Music*** by Diane Payne in the catalog at the book's end. This young adult novel about change and growing up is a great example of what Brilliant Book Press is looking for.

Happy writing,

Kristen Bailey

Other magazines to support And submit work:

Skive Magazine

The Short Story Quarterly

Skive Short Story Prize 2007 Results

This year the 3rd annual Skive Short Story Prize attracted a record number of entries from all around the world including Australia, US, Canada, France, UK & Ireland. The First Prize of \$200 USD went to a very deserving writer, and there are also 4 writers whose stories have been commended. The March 2007 issue of Skive contains a selection of the finest stories.

Learn more at www.skivemagazine.com

Shalla Magazine

Great insider info from editors and agents

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PHOTOGRAPH OF A BOUNCING BALL

by Jens Rushing

Might as well have taken a picture. If the man had a picture, he could frame it and set it on the corner of his nightstand, so he'd have something to pick up – something tactile. The memory was real enough, sure, but he couldn't *touch* it, just – live in it. Just walk through it in slow-motion.

Right *here*, in the bottom left corner of the frame, the fender of his Jeep. And *here*, in the upper right, a bouncing blue and orange ball. The movement of the ball would just *leap* out of the photo; you would want to grab it and throw it against a wall or to your kid sister. And *there*, dead center, the kid, frozen in his step, reaching to catch the ball on its next bounce. Like a faun from Keats's Grecian urn. He'd never catch the ball. The ball would never have that next bounce. Frozen in time – in the photograph. Never growing old, never knowing the disappointment that comes with catching the thing (like in the Grecian urn), for then it can no longer be caught.

The light would be bright. You'd be able to tell that it was late summer, early evening, and that tall oaks and pecans shaded the street, and the golden sunlight dripped through their leaves. And that summer would last forever. No autumn, let alone winter, for the kid. How the man envied him. Winter

was all he knew. Winter going on five years now.

The man walked through the memory and admired it from all angles, like it was on a pedestal in a museum. He could sit against the wall like a college student and sketch it in his pad. He knew it that well. The kid's arm stretched like the branch of a willow tree. Thin (how thin these children are!), sinuous, but bursting with life, warm and glowing with it. The man crouched for a better angle. Beyond, the Jeep straining like an eager terrier to leap forward and shatter the immortal stillness. Nothing moves in photographs.

Not the two sparrows splashing in an oil-iridescent puddle; not the crystal jets of water from a lawn sprinkler. Not the mother, nor the father, nor the sister, nor the brother, nor Topeka, Kansas, nor China, nor Saturn. The rings of ice and rock, a million billion miles across, grinding to a halt in their celestial tread. The Great Red Spot roaring quiet and unchanging.

And the frame of the photograph? That which bound it? Nothing. The plainest, most unliving wood.

The man went back to sleep (same old dream). His doctor had worried at first because all the man wanted to do was sleep. Wasn't natural, the doctor said, and tried to give him medicine to help him deal. The man didn't need any help dealing. He dealt just fine, long as he could sleep. The dream was terrible, but in the dream it was always summer.

The ball waited to descend. It waited forever. So much depends on a blue and orange ball.

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.

ON THE KIND OF RAIN THAT MAKES HER WANT TO DANCE

by Natalie Pennington

She's just a girl who wants to stop time.

She wants to pause it at the right moment-
for the rest of her life she'll flirt with the idea of being
an adult- she'll stay blissfully unaware, content with
being daddy's little girl, calling home from college for
every flat tire she can't fix; every box she can't lift.

And here is where she finds herself: standing in the
rain, palms up, face tilted, greeting the shower like
an old friend long forgotten.

She can't remember the last time she saw a rain that
made her want to dance.

But there's something about today.

She was startled to see the clouds open up- and there
it was. Tumbling from the sky, eager to touch the
ground, drop after drop of rain. So frequent that they
shook the tree branches; soaked the leaves, each one
more enticing than the last.

It's the kind of rain that makes her want to curl up
under a warm blanket and watch *Winnie the Pooh*
and the Blustery Day.

But she doesn't own the movie anymore; hasn't seen it in years.

So she dances: she spins and watches the drops fall down, colliding with her skin, spraying around her as she digs her feet deeper down into the moist earth. She moves as the brown mud cakes her toes and almost methodically washes free again as the rain pours on.

But she doesn't have time anymore; hasn't danced in years.

College girls don't dance in the rain and watch old cartoons, they study to make A's to please their dads.

She remembers the feel of the peeling paint beneath her toes when she was a little girl: she'd perch at the end of the porch on rainy days, her small hands clasping the rail. Her sister would run ahead, darting from the door to the grass in a matter of seconds, arms thrown out, twirling so fast that it made the little girl left behind on the dry porch dizzy just from watching.

But more than the crudely painted porch and more than the spinning image of her sister imprinted in her memory, she remembers the shock of the first step away from the safety of the house: the sudden cold water pounding at her from all sides, soaking her in seconds, knowing there was no going back and not even caring.

It was the kind of rain that would go on forever, washing away all the things that didn't matter- a constant and comforting tap that would roll

seamlessly down her skin and to the muddy grass below.

She wishes desperately to be that little girl again; to not feel so alone in the world.

And now, without her sister to tempt her out into the shower; without her mother to offer her a warm towel to dry off with, she can't help but feel there's something missing.

Her sister is married with a baby on the way- her mother hasn't been there since she was old enough to divide numbers greater than ten.

When did things get so complicated?

She shivers as her feet delve deeper into the muddy ground that's become like a pond submerging the green grass around her.

The rain falls on.

"You'll catch cold."

She blinks, shoving wet locks of hair from her eyes. A boy stands awkwardly in front of her.

His hands are shoved in his pockets, his shoulders hunched, as if somehow that will keep the attacking rain from penetrating his shirt- it doesn't. He shivers; she laughs.

"Catching a cold would mean a chance to relax."

She feels uncomfortable standing still with the rain in

constant motion, and she raises her arms once more, gracefully spinning away from the boy, a smile on her face; an attempt to accent her desperate wish for a carefree mentality.

The smile he returns is far more genuine, his shoulders relaxing a little, welcoming the drops, inch by inch.

“There might be better ways to get rest.”

The grin fades from her face, and she stops her tango, turning slowly to face him again.

She doesn't know him- but she doesn't care. There's something about the way he cares about a complete stranger that puts her at ease, makes her willing to open up.

“What do you do when you can't stand still?”

She doesn't expect an answer, but hopes for one anyway.

Unsure of how to respond, the boy grabs her hand, moving with her as he watches the rain shoot like sparks off her skin.

“You dance.”

End

Bio – Natalie Pennington was born in Texas but raised

in Missouri. She is currently in her third year as an undergraduate at Missouri State University studying Communications and Creative Writing. Post undergraduate, she plans to continue her studies in interpersonal communication. She is a debater, writer, and avid reader of anything that has at least one true sentence. This is her first published work.

FINE AND MELLOW

By Wayne H.W Wolfson

I head home. Even if I had, had money, I was just too tired to sustain the illusion that something, something may happen. Most days the possibility sustained me, that and the music. There was no place to go anyways.

The rain made the sky waver. Off in the distance a plane, a dull gray bird no longer bothering to flap its wings.

In-between showers, the wet pavement gave up its distinct perfume. My cigarette no longer likes me, it lets out a hiss before trying to roll away.

I put on some music and open my notebook. I am of three minds, one of them exploded, black ink blood falling upon the page in pulse like spurts. All the words I should have said.

In a lonely act, she called me while under the influence of a setting sun.

I didn't want her here. Now I have grown too accustomed to my solitary confinement, living safely behind my pillars of books and records whose exact order I had memorized.

The influence of a setting sun, I was still willing to make the trip across town. No, no she wanted to come here. I wanted her, aspects of her, just not

here. It would make it harder to make that eventual complete break of which I can not seem to control, despite being a master.

I lost, for the first of several times tonight, she came.

I would have to watch her like a hawk. I knew her plays, to leave something behind as pretext to return.

Really, it did not matter how closely I watched. She had always been all slight of hands and misdirection no matter where we were. So I would settle for her just leaving my records alone.

I went through the motions of cleaning up, dusting around piles, soaking disregarded coffee cups, now found again.

Initially she had appealed to me, the lack of shame she made me feel surrounding my loneliness.

“We are all alone.”

She had said that, that first night. I found out later, she used that line on almost all her customers. We both sensed that there was something greater than ourselves hidden just under the surface of every day life. I went looking for it, as I always had, in music.

She was not sure, so dabbled in different things. After her miscarriage she became lazy, giving up, now settling for mere distractions.

At different times, I imagined various ways in which I fit into her life. I would like to think things both good and bad because it all suited me.

Her mother was moving to Arizona, prompted by a fit of ill timed guilt, she was invited along. I did not want her to go, although I could never say why.

The plan had too many holes in it, but this may have been from her habit of only telling me half the story, what she wanted me to know, safe guarding the rest for some future agenda.

We fought, she said I was jealous or some such thing. Those last ones, a few of our bigger fights and it felt good.

The day she left was dream-like. I had just gotten out of the hospital after three days of bad bronchitis. All our going away rituals had been left undone.

She is gone, but not her coat, like the ghost of her shadow hunched over a chair.

Her first month there, I got the drunken phone calls. I would try to synch a record up to the weather, my mood, to give a fuller picture. There was a time difference which I could never get straight. I did not know if she were just getting home or going out.

A few years ago, she said she would be home around Christmas. I have the perfect record for that.

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.

THE LITTLE THINGS

By Gayla Chaney

Angie Kibedeaux, called Sweet Pea by her grandmother, fears getting bedsores. She's young, yet she knows it can happen if she stays in bed too long. At twenty-seven years of age with over five hundred pounds of body weight, Angie adds bedsores to the list of bad things that could befall her. She lists them below heart attack and diabetes, but above stroke. Strokes seem reserved for those past thirty-five. That's a long time off. A lot could happen in eight years. She could lose enough weight to get out of her bedroom, the house might catch fire, she could be rescued by a tender-hearted fire fighter who would be so entranced by her gray eyes that he would hardly notice her size, there could be a nuclear disaster in which case, she might as well be indoors. These different scenarios are options that, when lined up and compared to one another, give Angie a lot to think about.

Not long ago, when Angie still clung to the dream of being discovered by Star Search, she practiced singing along with MTV. But when she sang a little too loudly after midnight, Grandpa stomped into her room and unplugged the set. "Night's for sleeping," he grumbled. Angie cried for an hour. The TV was the portal to all her best friends, and late at night was the only time she could enjoy their company without interruption. For two weeks following the midnight episode, Angie hated her grandfather. Then, he brought her a copy of People Magazine, and she loved

him all over again.

The ordeal prompted Angie to give up singing and take up art. Her Aunt Vee was delighted. "Let's face it, dear," Aunt Vee sighed as she deposited a stack of art books on Angie's night stand. "Until you are able to leave this room, you might as well put your time to good use." She patted the books. "Enjoy!" she said, leaving Angie alone with the Italian masters, the Dutch masters, the Dadaists, the Futurists, the Cubists, Op and Pop, and American Realism. All found their way, in time, to Angie's attentive gaze.

Frida Kahlo's surreal, autobiographical work fascinated Angie as did Marc Chagall's floating lovers, and Rene Magritte's bowler hats and smoking pipes. She noted there were plenty of large women in the paintings of the great masters. Peter Paul Rubens, for one, had a penchant for the well-endowed female. Angie couldn't find a single bed sore on one of them, and that alone gave her hope for her future.

It was just a small thought and yet, it lit up inside her like a glistening, golden key. Noting the large women in the paintings displayed in Janson's History of Art, Angie wondered if she might be able to inspire an entire new generation, one raised with affluence and yes, excess. Her body alone was a statement. She would, however, need the artists to come to her since mobility was now a problem.

When Aunt Vee visited the next day, Angie intended to bring up the subject of modeling. Her aunt arrived with a new book on Edward Hopper. Angie listened dutifully, waiting for the right moment to broach the subject of modeling with her aunt. Her grandparents

would be appalled, but Aunt Vee might be able to convince them that Angie needed a job or a hobby, something beyond her four walls. As her aunt was discussing Hopper, her grandmother arrived with lunch on a tray.

"Is my girl hungry?" Gram asked as Aunt Vee leaned over to inspect. The tray held a slice of meatloaf, mashed potatoes and gravy, green beans, cornbread, and a large brownie with a scoop of ice cream.

"Really, Winnie, do you think she needs the brownie and ice cream?" Aunt Vee inquired, her brow raised.

"Well, Sister, would you like to take over the kitchen duties?" There was contempt in Gram's voice, and Angie quickly tried to smooth things over.

"Everything looks delicious, Gram." Angie began to eat, pretending not to see the angry expressions that registered on both women's faces. As Aunt Vee collected her purse and jacket, Angie knew the discussion about modeling would need to be postponed.

"You're killing her, Winnie." Aunt Vee whispered a little too loudly outside Angie's room. Every Wednesday that Angie could remember, her grandmother had baked brownies for her, serving them warm with a glass of cold milk. Angie loved them, but she knew her aunt was theoretically correct.

Yet, her grandmother's response held some truth, too. "Life is short for all of us. Why shouldn't the poor thing have her brownies? They are one of the few joys

of her sad life. No mama, no daddy. Everybody ran off and deserted her to pursue their own selfish pleasures. All she has is us old folks, good food, and books. Such little things bring her so much pleasure. They make my Sweet Pea happy."

Angie agreed with that, too. She filled her mouth with a warm brownie, savoring its deep chocolate flavor. Tuesdays, Thursdays, and on weekends, popcorn was her afternoon snack. Mondays and Fridays, she had to make due with a can of cashews because Gram played bingo. But Wednesdays were reserved for brownies.

Diabetes could possibly rob her of this ultimate joy in the future. There were also bedsores, strokes, nuclear threats, and house fires. For a moment, Angie thought she might cry. It was terrifying to be a victim in waiting. But then she glimpsed some chocolate icing smudged against her finger. She licked it away and felt better. Angie hoped Aunt Vee could find her an artist. He didn't have to be famous yet. And if he liked brownies, he could come on Wednesdays.

End

Bio – Gayla Chaney's fiction has appeared in Potomac Review, Thema, Carve, Natural Bridge, Cicada, and other literary journals. She lives and writes in central Texas.

ON THE PONTE GARIBALDI

(or On the Garibaldi Bridge)

By Louisa Howerow

A shiny filament floats over the Tiber. The man notices it first. "An adolescent prank."

The woman watches the filament rise above the dark green water. An arc suspended, as if in pause. "The work of a young artist."

"What artist? It's ordinary magnetic tape." He searches for the filament's end, finds it attached to a stone baluster with a crisscross of yellow cautionary tape.

The woman claps her hands. "Imagine! A repository of voices!"

"You can't know that," he says. "It might be anything or nothing."

She can't believe what she's hearing. "No, it's something."

They stand on the stone bridge a long time. The filament – silver in the distance – ripples, dips, lifts. An imperceptible change in the warm air and it pushes out, a parabola heading to shore.

She makes up stories about the voices. He puts his arm through hers. Words fill the space between them.

End

Bio – Louisa Howerow's prose has appeared in small press magazines, journals and online. Her latest work can be found in Kaleidowhirl, Write Side Up and Poetry Midwest.

LANDING PAD

By Will Curl

He was on the phone ordering cement. I asked him what for. "You'll see," he said. I asked him how he was going to pay for it. "I've still got some money from last summer." He spent the rest of the day digging up the backyard.

I asked if I could help, and he said sure. I grabbed a shovel out of the garage and started turning the grass over. He watched me for a little while and then told me I wasn't doing it right.

"You always screw everything up," he said.

He'd been lying out there more and more lately, coming home from school and stretching out and staring up at the sky, sometimes for hours. Mom would call out to him and he'd ignore her. Finally he started sleeping out there.

He told Mom he was adding on to the patio. She said it seemed like an awfully big addition, "You'll like it," he said. "You'll see."

She finally called someone when he took a can of orange paint and sprayed "Aliens Welcome" in huge letters all over the back yard.

End

Bio – Will Curl is currently a Lecturer in English at the University of Wisconsin – Fox Valley, and his short fiction has appeared or is forthcoming in Hayden's Ferry Review, Karamu, juked, Ghoti and other publications. Other than that, he's not terribly exciting.

VICTORY

-for Dominic Dunne

By Damian Dressick

Once upon a time, an unsuccessful writer followed well-known editors everywhere. Elevators. Taxi cabs. Even to the bathroom. Finally, after weeks of careful planning, the unsuccessful writer cornered his quarry one afternoon in the stairwell of a parking garage on Lexington Avenue.

"What do you want from us?" the exasperated editor asked, eager to put an end to the unsuccessful writer's aggravating pursuit.

"I want to be successful," said the unsuccessful writer.

"That's easy," the editor replied. "Just tell everyone what they want to hear."

For many years, the writer did just this. Told the old it was not so bad to be old. Told the poor they were privy to raw pleasures the rich would never experience. Told the rich they bore no guilt for the reckless way they lived their lives and that they were hard lives, too, for all their entitlement and ease. "Hard. Hard. Hard," the writer wrote again and again. "The lives of the rich are hard."

This made the unsuccessful writer very successful. He bought a car that rode as if on rails. A cantilevered house a view of the Lake. Had women with eyes the color of seawater to accompany him wherever he went. And he only read books that told him how hard successful writers struggled, constantly working at the edge of their ability to figure out what people wanted to hear.

End

Bio – Damian Dressick lives and writes in Pittsburgh, PA. His fiction has appeared in *McSweeney's Internet Tendency*, *The Aroostook Review* and *Flashquake* and is scheduled to appear in *The Worcester Review* in Fall of 2007. He holds an M.F.A from the University of Pittsburgh and is currently shopping his first novel, a coming-of-age story set during Pennsylvania's 1922 coal strike.

FROZEN

By Krishan Coupland

I watch you skate.

I could watch you like this for hours, for days, because you're so beautiful. Like seeing you fly, all effortless glide, all turn and glitter. And you're smiling; christ, it's been too long since I last saw that smile.

The other children on the rink don't have half the quick, easy momentum you do. They're clumsy, Bambi-like, as though their legs are new and they're just finding out how to use them. You though, are perfect, and you don't even know it. If I tell you how good you are you'll smile and giggle and shrug as though it never really occurred to you before. Probably it never has.

You complete another flawless circuit, step off the ice, hobble forward on the turned-in blades of your skates. New skates, still wearing in, hard-shelled and white. You're smiling still as you seek me out in the stands.

I reach toward you—because for a second I've allowed myself to believe that you're real and whole and there again. I reach for you.

And my fingers meet with static charged glass. It's the cameraman, the me from seven years ago who holds you and takes you home and casually wastes away the seconds and hours and weeks he has left with you.

End

Bio – Krishan Coupland is a student living in Southampton. He likes writing stuff down and does it a lot. Sometimes he takes pictures. His work has been published in several literary journals including Dicey Brown, WildChild and Verbsap.

THE ULTIMATE ANSWER

by Edward A. Rodosek

"Why are you so gloomy?" Master asked me. "You hardly have any worries, you're still young, and in good health. Besides, you are among the ten wealthiest people on the globe."

I shrugged. "All that still doesn't help me to get a definitive answer to the single most important question on the whole world."

Master gazed at me wryly. "Which question?"

"Oh," I said, "it'd sound silly even to me if I said it out loud."

Master pulled a slip of paper out of his pocket. "Then write it down here," he said.

I did so, and handed him the paper. After he read the question, he raised his eyebrows.

"Do you realize now," I asked, "how impossible it would be to find a sage anywhere who'd be able to give me a definitive answer?"

"For heaven's sake," objected Master, "why do you need a sage? I've developed many computers with artificial intelligence, all of them are far wiser than any person anywhere."

I waved my hand in protest. "Well, I've traveled all over the world and asked the most advanced computers everywhere that same question. It was all in vain; none of them were complex enough."

Master became excited. "You mustn't give up! We could build a computer so large and complex that it would be able to answer that question - in fact, any answerable question. Don't you know that as complexity increases, many thresholds are exceeded that produce unpredictably greater and more novel results?"

I stared at him, still undecided.

"Give me enough money," he said, "and in a year, I'll build such a computer. I assure you, it will formulate the definitive answer on all possible questions."

"Including the ultimate question, the one I just wrote it down?"

"If I say 'all,'" Master replied firmly, "then I mean literally. All. You do, of course realize that such a grandiose project will cost a great deal of money?"

"I'll give you as much money as you need; even if I go broke."

Master stretched out his hand and I shook it firmly.

I wrote as many checks for Master as he needed. Then he invited the best software and hardware

experts from the entire world to join him on this project.

He explained, "When I told them how much I was going to pay them for their services, nearly all of them quit their jobs and joined our project."

"Excellent," I said. "Give them all the necessary instructions, but my decisive question must remain a secret."

"Don't worry about it, pal," Master said. "My lips are sealed."

Master engaged skilled workers from everywhere to build a huge building to house the computer and then he ordered his crew to install all the required equipment and neural networks inside it. Then they grappled with designs for a computer that would ultimately surpass all others. They took great pains with that for they honestly didn't know which ideas were really the best.

Often they argued and made many mistakes since there were no earlier prototypes on which to build.

The team worked frantically, day and night, even on Sundays and holidays because the one-year deadline was approaching quickly. They accomplished more and more work, driven themselves to exhaustion, sinking into restless sleep, and up to work some more.

Master worked more than any other, but he was still not satisfied with the results. He claimed they were good but not good enough.

Meanwhile, I wrote check after check.

Time passed, and the computer was already able to distinguish the possible from the impossible, good from evil, and the truth from a lie. Before long, the computer knew more than any single expert on the project. On its front side, there were many shining gauges and readout devices but some of them were not lit yet. Master knew the computer would be perfect only when all the indicators would light up simultaneously.

Only the Master himself was allowed to query the computer in the main hall. Everybody knew, of course, that Master asked the computer various questions, and gradually, more and more of the indicators lit up. The computer faithfully responded to every question that Master put to it. Or, nearly all of them.

As time passed, rumors spread about the Master's interrogations. Namely, that the computer simply refused to answer each time Master asked it a particular question. All but one of the indicators would light up.

The allotted of a year ran out and Master came to me with his report.

"I'm very sorry, but there is no sign that the computer will be ready to answer your question any time soon. What shall we do now?"

Initially, I was angered but then I replied, "We mustn't quit now. I'll issue more checks, but you

must bring the computer to perfection."

Some days Master was so tired he fell asleep in the main hall. During one of his naps he had a mysterious dream and after he awoke, he was truly inspired. Then he ordered the computer to upgrade itself recursively from that point forward. No more add-ons. That measure proved to be a good one, because shortly thereafter, the last indicator light turned on when it was queried.

Now Master knew the computer was finally capable of a definitive answer to its most perplexing question.

Master visited me, and when I saw his beaming face, I knew he had something important to tell me. "Our project is finished," he said solemnly. "Come with me to the Main Hall and boot up your magnificent computer. It now has no equal in the entire world."

"Excellent," I said. "Could I ask it-or better him-that question of mine?"

Master nodded. "Now you can. You'll be the first to ask him that question, and I promise you'll get the ultimate answer."

When I entered the main hall, I was amazed at the sight of the magnificent device. Compared to it I felt tiny and insignificant.

"I've ordered all of my staff to leave the hall," Master told me, "so nobody will disturb you." He stepped out for the way as well.

"Wait," I stopped him. "Stay with me, please. You've been managing the whole project and we both should hear the ultimate answer to my question. Oh, how excited I am!"

"And I feel just the same," Master admitted. "Well then-ask him."

I sensed my quickening pulse, my dry mouth, and wet palms. I swallowed hard and tried to contain myself so that my voice wouldn't tremble when I uttered my final question.

"Does God exist?" I asked. All the indicator lights flickered and then blinked on in unison.

"It does now," answered the computer.

End

Bio — Edward A. Rodosek is Construction Engineer, Doctor of Technical Science and Senior Professor in Faculty of Civil Engineering, Ljubljana, Slovenia, European Union. He is married to Rina and they have one daughter, Tejka. His pastimes are jazz music, chess and long walks with his golden retriever Simba.

Beside his professional work, he writes science fiction, mostly at night. He is the author of four novels and ten collections of short sci fi stories (see: <http://www.cobiss.izum.si/cobiss-eng.html>) in

Slovenia with good reviews.

So far more than two dozen of his short stories have been published in SF magazines in USA and UK. All of his texts have been edited twice by two professional North American agencies.

Most reviews of his stories emphasize strong, believable characterization, unexpected twists inside the story and surprise endings. Owing to the fact that he lives in another cultural environment, his stories often show a different standpoint than other stories published on the US sci-fi market. For his stories published so far are characteristic a broad variety of themes, plots, places and outcomes. Most of them could be placed in soft sci-fi, and the rest are hard sci-fi or experimental but with great stress on the inner conflict of the protagonist. For several stories the reviews stress their distinctive film adaptation potential.

MORTAL DANGER

By Frank Roger

Sunshine, a swimming pool, an exotic cocktail and a good book. Wasn't that all they needed right now?

Cindy cast a glance at Ted, her husband, stretched out next to her. He didn't even need a book and had already dozed off, mere minutes after their arrival at the pool. They were the only ones here at this early hour – no doubt the other hotel guests were still having breakfast or hadn't even risen from their sleep.

She sipped from her drink, closed her eyes for a few moments and enjoyed the sunlight caressing her skin. They had been looking forward to this holiday and were determined to savour every minute of it.

She opened her eyes again, took her book and started to read.

She had barely read half a page when she heard a loud and angry voice. A man was standing right in front of them. Where had he come from? She hadn't heard him arrive, and he didn't look like a hotel guest, nor like someone of the hotel staff.

"I'm in danger," the man hysterically shouted at her. "Mortal danger perhaps. They're after me, they can be here in a few seconds. I don't have much time, lady, so I can't go into the details, but it was foolish to go

back and forth like this, you have no idea what the risks involved are...”

Cindy stared at him, at a loss for words, without a clue as to what he was ranting about.

The man must have seen her expression as he said: “Look, I don’t have the time to explain everything, and I’m sorry for barging in here like this, but...” A beeping signal from his wristwatch made him break off his sentence. He cursed and continued: “Shit, this is worse than I thought, I have to get out of here fast, sorry about all this.”

After his final word the man disappeared, like an image on a TV that was switched off. Cindy looked at Ted, who appeared to be awake.

“What was all that?” he asked. “Where did that man go to? And what was he talking about? And where did he come from?”

“I have no idea,” Cindy replied. “No idea at all. He warned us about a danger.”

“I don’t want to hear about danger,” Ted said.

“We’re on holiday. I’m glad he’s gone.”

That seemed to end the discussion. Ted closed his eyes again, and she went back to her book.

Barely five minutes later a second man appeared out of nowhere, noticed them lying poolside and asked: “Excuse me, did you see a man here? Someone who popped up and disappeared again? Someone who gave the impression of being on the run?”

Cindy merely nodded.

“So he’s been here all right. Well, pay no attention to him. Forget everything he said, pretend that incident never happened. It doesn’t concern you. Don’t worry, okay? Thank you.”

The man shot her a smile and disappeared, just like the first guy had done.

“What the hell is going on here?” Ted asked, risen from his nap again. “Who are these people? Hotel staff?”

“I don’t think so,” Cindy answered. “I have no idea what all this is about.”

“They should leave us alone,” Ted complained. “We’re on holiday, remember? We pay hard-earned money to have a good time here.”

Cindy nodded. Her husband had a point. The quiet had now returned and she picked up her book again.

A few minutes later two men appeared at the same place where the other guys had materialised. These two wore uniforms, and were definitely neither hotel guests nor staff. Could they be policemen? Was this something serious?

“Excuse me,” one of them said. “We’re after a dangerous man, and we think he may have been through here. Did you by any chance spot him? Did you engage in conversation with him, was there an exchange of information?”

Cindy nodded. "There was a guy who popped up like you did and disappeared again."

"That must have been him. We urge you to stay out of this case. We're supposed to arrest this man. Please, be careful. Thank you for your help."

The two men winked out of existence.

"This nonsense has got to stop," Ted complained angrily. "You heard that idiot? *We urge you to stay out of this case.* They're the ones who come barging in here and spoil our holiday. To hell with them! I hope that's where they went off to."

Cindy had to admit her husband was right. The hotel management should not let this sort of thing happen. It was really irritating and spoiled the holiday atmosphere. She hoped it was over now and picked up her book again.

Five minutes later it became clear it wasn't quite over yet, as a woman appeared at their side.

"Excuse me," she said, her voice edged with concern. "I'm looking for my husband, and I hope to find him before the Time Police arrest him. He's in terrible danger."

"I think we've seen both your husband and those policemen," Cindy replied. "And there was another guy. What is all this about?"

The woman seemed on the verge of breaking into tears. "My God, they're closing in on him. Maybe I'll be too late, and I doubt his lawyer will be of much help. You see, time travelling is against the law. My husband was one of the first travellers, venturing

forth before the law was passed. The thing is, that law is retroactive, considering the nature of time travel, but my husband doesn't accept the validity of that legal provision. The police obviously don't share that opinion and are after him. My God, I hope I won't be too late. Thanks."

She disappeared, probably off to where all the others had gone to.

"Did you hear all that?" Cindy asked. "Do you believe what that woman told us?"

"I think I know what this is," Ted replied grumpily. "This is a kind of play, it's all part of the hotel's guest entertainment programme. I'll tell the reception to stop bothering us with it."

"Are you sure? How can hotel staff members pop up and disappear like that? That would be quite an act. And that first guy claimed he was in mortal danger, and then there were these cops and his wife's explanation..."

"I don't know. Anyway, I'm happy as long as we're not in mortal danger. We're on holiday, remember? We pay lots of money to have a good time. I'll go and talk to the guys at the reception desk later today. All this nonsense is unacceptable."

"I suppose you're right," Cindy said. She picked up her book again, hoping she would finally get to read it.

End

Bio – Frank Roger was born in 1957 in Ghent, Belgium. His first story appeared in 1975. Since then his stories appear in an increasing number of languages in all sorts of magazines, anthologies and other venues, and since 2000, story collections are published, also in various languages. Apart from fiction, he also produces collages and graphic work in a surrealist and satirical tradition. By now he has more than 500 short story publications (including a few short novels) to his credit in 22 languages.

WHITE GINGER WAVES

By Janis Benn

"It has to come back." Gloria sat on the sand dune watching the waves pounding the golden beach. The turquoise blue water that had played in the warm afternoon sun, tossing swimmers about in the surf, had become gray and moody under the twilight sky. She had not realized how cold it could get in Hawaii after the sun had set. Wearing only her shorts and tank top, she wrapped a beach towel around her shoulders to shield herself from the cool evening breeze. The fine powder-sugar sand that clung to her arms and shoulders stung her skin against the weight of the towel.

"Hey, lady, the beach is closed." A heavysset man wearing an olive green Grove Farms' security uniform startled Gloria making her jump as he stepped from between the dry scruffy sage bushes that lined the shore. As he fought to breath from the long climb over the dunes, he collapsed on a pile driftwood tossed on the beach a recent storm and stared annoyed at her. "I'm locking the gate, you can't stay."

"I'm with them." The middle-aged woman pointed to the large bonfire at the far end of the bay where a group of teenage boys, invoking their ancient Hawaiian fishing rights, set up camp on the rocky cliffs and drank beer.

"Stupid Hoale," she heard him mutter as he hoisted his large frame to his feet and started the long descent back towards the parking lot.

"What did he care if I sleep in my car tonight?" she wondered. "It has to come back." Her eyes returned to search the dark waves as the full moon danced on water. The scent of wild mesquite burning at the campfire filled the air.

Yesterday, the island tour guide had told her an old Hawaiian legend. "If you make a wish on a lei then throw it into the ocean," the wise Hawaiian Kane had told her. "Pele, the Goddess of Fire, upon hearing your prayer, will return the lei to the shore with your answered prayers."

After twenty-three years of marriage, Gloria still loved Norman with all her heart. One evening last spring as they sat at the dinner table eating their pot roast and homemade mashed potatoes chatting happily about the white and yellow crocuses that were just beginning to open in the garden, he announced he was leaving her. All she could feel was death, like a cancer, slowly growing inside her. She had spent weeks drifting around her home noticing the empty spaces in her life that he had left. The vacant closet, the bare bookshelves, the silent chair at the table and the hole on the mantle where her daughter's wedding photo had been were all constant reminders of her loss. It had been a girlfriend's idea to get away for a vacation in Hawaii.

Now, alone on the island, Gloria miss Norman even more. When she found the pure white ginger lei with

the sweet-spicy fragrance at the grocery store, she knew what she had to do.

"It has to come back." Out on the sea, Gloria spied something white and round bobbing on the tortured waves. "There it is." Kicking off her black rubber flip-flops, she raced towards the water's edge. She took a few steps into the sea foam. The cold ocean lapped at her feet. "Where is it?" The tide flooded around her calves unnoticed. Her eyes were fixed searching the roaring ocean ahead. As the water surged around her thighs, she braced herself against the strong the under tow that beckon her on. The crashing of the white surf rose and fell keeping its treasure hidden between swells.

"Is that it?" She held her arms above her shoulders as the sea soaked her shirt.

"Hey Aunty, you can't swim now." A voice from the warmth of the fire swam out to her. "Kimo, did you see, someone is swimming out there?"

"No man, you crazy, no one out there. Have another beer." The sound of laughter flared up on the shore then burned out as the boys returning to talk story around the fire.

Then white, all before her was white as waves crashed over her head and filled her sinuses with the sting of salt water. As she came up, the moon floated gracefully in front of her lighting the way. Brine lingered on her lips, reminding her of the baby's tears she had kissed away as a young mother. She reached her arms out long and began swimming toward where she thought the flowers had been. "Just a little further, I can almost reach it." Her arms ached as she

fought the currents. Cold, the water numbed her flesh, but she pressed on trying to reclaim her lost dreams. Another wave swept over her. Gloria looked through the water and spied the flowery halo floating above her. "There it is!" The sea had delivered its gift. She stretched her hands out towards her prize on the surface. Around her waist, she suddenly felt the warm, welcoming arms of Pele pulling her towards her answered prayers.

Shortly after sunrise, the security guard went about his usual duty. He unlocked the gate and drove his beat up old company truck down the dirt road to check on the locals who spent the night at the beach. Still parked in the dirt lot, the blue rental car sat covered with a thin layer of red dust.

Annoyed and panting, he stumbled up the dunes toward the shoreline. A large rusty rooster crowed at the trespasser and rattled the poor man's bones.

Expecting to find another tourist asleep on the beach, he found nothing except an old wilted lei that had washed ashore overnight.

He looked at the battered flowers. "What was the old legend?" He wondered. "That's right, if you toss a lei into the ocean and it comes back, you will have a safe return to Hawaii."

"Tourists will believe anything," he thought to himself as he kicked the once beautiful flowers that now lay crumpled and torn in the sand.

End

Bio – Janis Benn took a number of creative writing classes in college, but found she really didn't have any stories to tell. So, she set out to find adventure. Twenty years later, Janis has stories waiting to be written.

Two years ago, her husband's job transferred them from their home in Seattle to the tiny island of Kauai. For the most part her stories are an attempt to answer the eternal question, "So, what's it really like to live in Hawaii?"

PIES AND BROTHERS

By Shalla DeGuzman

In Nebraska, summers are fierce, the soil rock-hard, especially before rain, and growing up here toughens you, while at the same time softens you with the wildness of its sunsets, its open sky swallowing you with its orange, gold and blue.

My brother John and I used to ride our brown and white colts here. He used to tell me, “You get the carrots for Aries and Suzette, I won our last bet” or “You better go to the store for mama instead of me, otherwise, I’ll tell her you got in trouble at school today, you know I will.”

When I was learning how to bake, he visited the kitchen often and played pranks. One time, I was making an apple pie and he sat down at the table, all innocent like, and pretended to peel the apples for me, while telling me a joke about chickens crossing the street. “Urban myths,” I had laughed. “What are you up to?” I had asked him. Later, I caught him switching the sugar canister with the salt!

Over the years I’ve kicked him, pulled on his hair — he is three years younger, and for a while was shorter than me — learned how to bully him until he cried.

But now he’s being shipped to Iraq, he’s leaving tomorrow and all I can tell him is: Don’t forget our

summers and the wildness of our open skies.

End

Bio – Shalla DeGuzman’s short stories have appeared in the Mosaic Literary Journal, WordRiot, the [Mad Hatters Review](#), The Houston Literary Review etc.; her articles in The Scriptorium and L.A. Freepress; her skits at the Stella Adler Theatre.

Shalla, a former writer and producer of a health and fitness cable show, is currently writing a novel. She is President of *The ShallaDeGuzman Writers Group* where she interviews literary agents, publishers, editors, etc.

For more on Shalla: www.shalladeguzman.com

** Want to get inside publishing info from editors and agents? Read Shalla’s chats at:

<http://www.shallamagazine.com/chats.php>

This online magazine includes a interview with Brilliant’s Editor, Kristen Bailey.

A Moment In The Sun

By Fred Stewart

Work had chewed me up and spit me out, and I needed a quiet place to lie down.

“No book tonight Luke, I’m whipped. Hop into bed, and we’ll do two chapters tomorrow.”

“C’mon Dad. You don’t have to read, just tell me a story about when you were a kid.”

“Like from the days before they invented iPods and cars?”

“Yeah, maybe something with dinosaurs in it.” Luke answered with a toothy grin.

“Alright, if you promise to go straight to sleep, I’ll tell you about the time I saw a miracle.”

* * *

Crack! As soon as the ball left Donnie’s bat we knew the game was over. The swing was ferocious, and the ball would carry well in the balmy June air. With two outs, the runners on second and third were moving on contact, and would easily score the tying and winning runs.

Things couldn’t be worse. Not only were the Senators

going to win the championship, but that arrogant jerk, Donnie Dolan, was going to be the hero. I despised Donnie, but my concern was for my older brother Billy. Donnie had a history of humiliating my brother, and it was a safe bet that a game winning hit would fuel a new barrage of taunts.

Donnie had pasted the ball. It sailed high and deep towards the left-centerfield fence and the thick green briar beyond. Seven dejected Red Sox just turned and stared in awe at the towering shot. An eighth Red Sox, pitcher Ricky Teague, slammed his glove into the pitching rubber and kicked clumps of brown clay towards the Senator's dugout. Only my brother, the centerfielder, was intent on making a futile chase for the ball.

When I first noticed Billy, he was already in a dead sprint, with his back to home plate, and his head down. He had always been blessed with exceptional speed, but that day he seemed to glide atop the emerald grass of the vast outfield. I wondered what my brother was thinking as I watched his red and white uniform streak towards a ball he could never reach. If I had to guess now, it would be the rapidly approaching fence, the ball, and Lizzie Appleton.

* * *

“Who is Lizzie Appleton? And did Uncle William crash into the fence?” Luke asked, as he edged himself up in bed.

* * *

Lizzie was Billy's first love and they had been

inseparable for almost a year. As time passed and Lizzie matured physically, however, Donnie Dolan and several of his 10th grade friends took notice. Billy was not weak or cowardly, but he was small for the 9th grade, and on a regular basis Donnie would harass him. “Hey Billy, is it true that your dad croaked with no insurance, and now your mom cleans the school’s toilets?”

In the end, the embarrassment and peer pressure were too much for Lizzie. On an icy December morning, just before school, she called Billy and told him that her parents would no longer allow her to date. A few weeks later, she was wearing Donnie Dolan’s varsity baseball jacket at school. Now, just as the pain and embarrassment had begun to subside, those old wounds were going to be ripped open.

* * *

In the stands, a hundred frenzied Senator’s fans, Lizzie amongst them, were screaming and jumping, with arms raised towards the sky. An equal number of Red Sox fans sat silently, sharing the moribund look of inevitable defeat. But, while 230 fans, coaches, and players, had accepted the game’s outcome, Billy had not.

If the ball hadn’t been lifted so high, he would never have gotten close. Billy had measured the trajectory and direction of the ball upon contact, and rather than concede a split-second to look back, he trusted his judgment as to where it would fall. He had sprinted seventy feet towards the fence before most of the crowd even noticed him. Even then, no one gave him a chance to make a play.

When my brother got to within ten feet of the fence, he finally stole a glance back over his left shoulder. That's when I first sensed the possibility of something extraordinary. His eyes flashed against the bright midday sun, and he quickly located the plummeting white ball against the cloudless blue sky. Billy took one final stride, veering slightly to his left, and launched himself into the air towards the fence. I stared, transfixed, as he propelled himself onto a vertical plane four feet above the ground. Billy sailed through the air, facing downward, and then twisted his head back to relocate the rapidly descending ball--which now angled a few excruciating feet beyond his airborne body. He stretched out his left hand as far as it would reach, and then for further extension, used his fingertips to push the glove partially off his hand.

Abruptly, stunningly, the Championship was in doubt. Senators' fans, who seconds before had been in a clambering euphoria, fell silent. In that final moment, as Billy soared through the air, as the fence closed in, and as the ball hailed towards the earth, we stood hypnotized.

The baseball slammed into the outer-webbing of the glove, and spun forcefully towards daylight at the top of the mitt. The bright ball protruded from the worn leather, resembling the top of an unstable snow cone. Before colliding with the ground, Billy gently, quickly, brought the glove to his chest and cradled the precariously wedged ball with his right hand. While this technique yielded the greatest hope for securing the catch, it also left his body and face dangerously exposed. He smashed violently into the turf. At first

Billy bounced, then slid across the grass, and then slammed face first into the chain link outfield fence. The initial collision with the ground bruised his ribs and took his wind, and the impact with the rusty metal fence serrated his forehead just above the right eye.

There was an instant, cluttered with shock, wonder and concern, but Billy quickly rose to his feet and extended the ball into the air with his right hand. The stands erupted. While the Red Sox crowd was far more jubilant, many of the Senator's fans joined in a standing ovation. The entire Red Sox team, along with coaches, ran to the outfield. Although his forehead now bled and he was noticeably winded, Billy's teammates lifted him onto their shoulders and carried him past the bleachers.

As the celebrating Red Soxs passed near, my brother waved to me and blew Mom a kiss. We waved back, and after Billy had turned, mom wiped a tear. Then I saw my brother make eye contact with Lizzie Appleton. At first she gazed at him uncertainly, and then she smiled and gently clapped her hands. Billy, stared back at her for a few seconds, tipped his blood stained cap, and then slowly turned to his teammates. After they had set him down, Billy squinted towards the sky and grinned. Whether it was your grandpa, or God, or both, he was looking to, I can't say. But, at that moment, I saw a calm confidence in your uncle that he carries with him to this day.

* * *

"Is that really a true story Pop?" Luke asked in a voice both excited and reverent.

“It is, and it happens to be my personal favorite. It inspires me to believe anything is possible.”

“Thanks, tell mom I said goodnight.”

“Will do buddy, sleep tight.”

“Dad, one more question. Did Lizzie and Uncle William ever talk again after that day?”

“That, my little friend, is a story for another night. But, I’ll tell you what, Uncle William and his family are coming over for dinner on Sunday. Why don’t you ask Aunt Elizabeth your question?”

Somehow the fatigue of a grueling day had faded, and I left my son’s room with a smile.

End

Bio – Fred Stewart graduated from Notre Dame law school in 1990. He is the father of seven children, and lives in suburban Philadelphia. This is Fred's first story. He was inspired by his wife Diana, whom he describes as the world's greatest as of yet undiscovered fiction writer."

MY GEOGRAPHIC TONGUE

By Joachim Frank

This is what my dentist said: "Do you know you have a geographic tongue?"

"My God," I mumbled through the contraptions he had stuck in my mouth, "I love the sound of it."

I could hear it as a line from Lori Anderson: "You/With your/Geo-gra-phic/Tongue!" I concluded I was a chosen one; special somehow. But underneath the surface, I had to admit to myself, I was quite worried.

"It's a tongue not evenly covered by a carpet of *microvili*," my dentist said importantly, without explaining what exactly microvili were.

Apparently, some patches of these little things are missing; the flesh of the naked tongue is exposed, and what is more, the boundaries of the red patches are moving around, like the borders of countries during war.

As kids, we played war in Germany just after WWII had stopped; it started with a big circle drawn in the dirt, divided into countries like a pie. You had to run for a ball, but if you didn't get it, the kid next to you could annex the size of a footprint from your territory.

"Germany," the guy called out, holding the ball and

was about to throw it, "Declares war against . . ." and everybody fidgeted, one foot inside his territory, the other outside and ready to run for the ball, prepared to defend his own country, dreading to be the target of the next assault.

"People worry about these splotches of red flesh," the dentist continued, "so I got into the habit of putting it into my file, 'G.T.', as soon as I notice it. Because five years later they come back screaming: 'Doctor,' they say, 'there's something weird here. Looks like cancer.' And I tell them, 'Don't you worry,' I say, 'it's all in my files: you have a geographic tongue. You've had it all along.'"

Knowing I have a geographic tongue has changed my life. At night, for instance, I move my tongue around in my mouth, shifting entire continents. I feel I have finally grown up. It is a powerful way of falling asleep.

End

Bio – Joachim Frank, a German-born scientist and writer, has lived since 1975 in Albany, New York. He took writing classes with William Kennedy, Steven Millhauser, Eugene Garber, and Jayne Ann Philipps. He has published several short stories and prose poems in *Lost and Found Times*, *The Agent*, *Inkblot*,

Heidelberg Review, *Groundswell*, *Peer Glass*, and *Open Mic*, all in print. He wrote three novels, still unpublished. Some of his poems have appeared in the online journal *Offcourse*. Recently, several pieces of fiction were accepted for publication online, by *elimae*, *3711 Atlantic*, *Cezanneâ's Carrot*, and *The Noneuclidean Cafe*. He has also shown photography in regional exhibits. A portfolio of his photographs can be found at Pedro Meyer's international photogallery zonezero.com.

REGINALD

By Skadi Meic Beorh

At the age of five, Reginald decided that he would be God.

He ran into the kitchen.

"Mommy!" he announced, his face beaming like a slice of ripe watermelon. "I'm God now!"

"You are?" Mommy answered in a matronizing tone as she pulled a pudding pop from the icebox. "That's wonderful! Now go play while mama finishes supper."

Reginald, savoring the rich, yellow vanilla, ran back through the perfectly-kept living room, across the toy-cluttered den and out the back screen door onto the Tonka-truck porch.

"I'm God!" he declared. "Now I will make big, big worlds!"

And so he did.

His dad had a difficult time finding the carport that evening after work.

End

Bio – Skadi meic Beorh is a writer of speculative fiction residing in Morningside, a quaint Allegheny River community of cottages with white picket fences. His work as recently appeared in Ballista, Twisted Tongue, Black Petals, and Sinister Tales.

IN THE SHADOW OF THE CATHEDRAL OF LEARNING

by Guy Hogan

I was back from Vietnam and discharged from the army. I was young and in college. A light snow was falling. It was night and I could see that farther down Forbes Avenue the commercial district was all lit up. I was glad I had decided to stay in Pittsburgh to go to school. I wasn't so happy about joining the fraternity I had joined.

Well this time I wasn't going to take any more guff from Tony. It didn't matter that he had been drunk earlier. It didn't matter that he was my fraternity brother. When he was sober he was too big to mess with, but he was probably still drunk and getting drunker and I could take him. I was well into the commercial district when someone spoke to me. The person was past me and I stopped and turned to see who it was and it was Joyce Lynn Summerton.

She said, "And where are you on your way to in such a huff?"

"To kick some butt!" I didn't like the anger in my voice. I didn't like that Joyce could hear the anger, too.

Joyce Lynn Summerton was in my Monday, Wednesday and Friday ten o'clock. I looked at her

hair, eyes and mouth. Her complexion had a slight glow from the chill in the air. There was something in her shoulder bag. I shifted my books and notebook to my other hand.

More calmly I said, "You don't make it to any of our parties anymore."

"Not like I use to," she said. "Some of the fraternity brothers get too rowdy for me."

"Me too."

We stood in silence for a moment. Her gloved right hand came up and squeezed her coat together at her throat even though her muffler must have kept out the chilly air. She smiled at me and then looked away. A few students walked past. The lights of the moving motor traffic created a stream of red and white.

"I'm headed back to the dorms to sit in front of the boob tube," she said.

"On a Friday night. Do you believe it? I just made a run for some popcorn to pop."

I nodded and smiled.

"Well," she said, "have to slide."

"Joyce?"

She turned back to me.

I said, "Do you think I could come up and watch

some TV with you?"

"In my room?"

"I'll go whenever you want me to."

"Frank, I don't know."

"Are you seeing someone?"

"A boyfriend?" She laughed. "No, I don't have a boyfriend."

There was a display window near us. Several mannequins in swimsuits were posing on a sunny beach. Joyce was looking at the display window. She put her gloved hands in the pockets of her coat and then looked at me and said, "I'll have to sign you in."

We started walking for the dorms.

"So," she said, "how've you been?"

"Great."

End

Bio-Guy Hogan is a Vietnam War veteran. He got his MFA in fiction writing at the University of Pittsburgh in 2006. His work has been published in several online and print publications. His homepage is <http://www.authorsden.com/guyhogan>
Read Hogan's article in Writer's End.

HER EYES

By Jim Harrington

Carl remembers waking in the hospital with tubes growing out of his mouth and nose. The IV remains. His doctor had warned him about the consequences of high blood pressure and extra weight. They say he'll recover.

He glances at Helen as she sits guard. His eyes move from her ring to his. He peeks at his watch; it's time for her to pick up the kids.

She lays the book in her lap and hooks a strand of auburn hair behind one ear. He marvels at her slender body and wonders why he did it.

"How are you feeling?" she asks.

"Better. I was able to walk without the dizziness yesterday." He can't remember if he's told her this; he sees no hint on her face. "How are you doing?"

She steps to the bed and grasps his hand. "You scared me. I'm not ready to lose you," she says as she bends down to kiss his lips. "I have to go."

"I know." He tightens his grip, but relents. He needs to think. "Say hi to the kids for me."

"I will." He watches Helen gather her things. She

turns and blows him a kiss as she walks out the door.

How could I do this to us? To you, Helen. Carl stares out the window as a shadow creeps up the pale blanket. He thinks about Angela. The first time was lust. The second a mistake.

I have to see it in your eyes, Helen. Your eyes never lie.

He rolls his neck to ease the pain and massages his right arm. Her eyes will tell me. He wipes a tear from his cheek and sweat from his brow. But since the stroke, I can't see eyes, or mouths, or noses. He lowers the bed, his head isn't right.

“I can't see your face, Helen. How will I know?” He blinks his eyes to clear the blur. He settles back and takes a deep breath. The last thing he remembers as the shadow envelopes him is Helen's face--with her eyes closed.

End

Bio – Jim Harrington is a retired librarian who is embarking on a new career. His stories have appeared in Long Story Short and Laughter Loaf.

TWO PLACES

By Allen McGill

Detective Faraday opened the door to the interrogation room and shoved the young Hispanic punk inside. "Sit down, Beno," he ordered. Detective Cummings entered, closing the door behind him.

"The man you mugged may die," Cummings said, parking his rear on the table. "It's touch and go. You hit him real bad."

"I didn't mug nobody," the kid said with a sneer. His voice rose in pitch with each word. "I told you, I was with my man, Cato, in the park."

Faraday took off his jacket. "Right. Playing hopscotch."

"Playin' what?" Beno asked. He kept his tough-guy attitude, but his fingernails dug into his palms.

"How long were you with Cato?" Cummings asked. He lit a cigar, and blew smoke toward Beno.

"All day," Beno said. "Ask him."

"You're positive?"

"Yeah, I'm positive."

"Write that down," Faraday told him. He tossed a yellow legal pad and pen onto the table.

"Sure," Beno said, and began to write quickly. When he was finished, he pushed the pad away and asked, "Can I go now?"

Cummings smiled. "I Don't think so, Beno. You see, we just arrested Cato for killing an old lady...in the park."

End

Bio – Originally from NYC, Allen lives, writes, acts and directs theatre in Mexico. His published fiction, non-fiction, poetry, essays, plays, photos, etc., have won awards and appeared in: NY Times, The Writer, Newsday, Literary Potpourri, Poetry Midwest, QLRs, Herons Nest, Frogpond, Modern Haiku, World Haiku Review, many others. He is a former member of PEN. He was an invited guest at the First World Poetry Festival in Taiwan 2005, haibun editor for Simply Haiku, and two of his plays have been professionally produced in Sacramento and L.A. His first book -- SUNSEEKERS, a selection of haiku and haibun by Allen McGill -- has just been published by Golden Swamp Warbler Press.

WHAT IS FATE?

By Stephen L. Thompson

David picked up the phone, held it for a few seconds, then slammed it back in its cradle. "I can't do this." He paced around his room for several minutes. Stopping by his phone he said, "What the hell. My life's a joke anyway." He dug in his pocket and came out with a shiny North Carolina quarter. After a short flight through the air, it decided his fate. For several long seconds David stared at it on the back of his hand, then he turned it over.

Amanda picked up on the third ring.

Bio - Stephen L. Thompson grew up a short drive from the middle of nowhere in Northwestern Pennsylvania. Though he longs for the peace and quiet of the country, he now lives outside of Philadelphia for financial reasons. His work has appeared in *The Electric Mandolin*, *Sigla Magazine*, *A Flasher's Dozen*, *AlienSkin Magazine*, *AntipodeanSF*, *Written Word*, and *Brilliant!* For a complete listing of his publications, visit website:www.oneoveralpha.com.

CHAMELEON

By Peter Tennant

Armed soldiers with orders to shoot on sight guard the approaches to the Presidential suite. To get past them the alien telepath will need a disguise, and what better disguise than the appearance of the great man himself.

Ando reaches out and filches the image from the President's own mind. He advances confidently, projecting it before him.

The soldiers raise their guns and order him to stop, but Ando ignores the command. He smiles, that masculine, winning smile of the President's, and gestures the soldiers aside with a wave of the President's elegant, manicured hand.

Ando takes three more steps and the soldiers gun him down. His body resumes its normal shape as he falls. The President thinks of himself as a handsome and distinguished elder statesman. Unfortunately for Ando the great man's guards are not a party to this self-deception.

End

Bio - Peter Tennant is currently non-fiction editor for the Whispers of Wickedness website and print magazine (www.ookami.co.uk), proof reader for TTA

Press (www.ttapress.com) and book reviewer for Black Static (the new incarnation of the International Horror Guild Award winning magazine The Third Alternative, to be launched this September). In the past he has been on the editorial team at Interzone and Peeping Tom, and written columns for The Dream Zone and The Fix. Peter has had more than 150 short stories published and over 400 reviews.

THE POINTING OF FINGERS

By Garrett Socol

She spent the first six hours in a corner, quietly sobbing. The rock hard bed was as uncomfortable as the ice cold toilet seat, and there was little to look at beyond the steel bars which were the unsightly color of raw steak.

Kathleen Lawley vehemently maintained her innocence, but that didn't matter to the hideously dressed jury that convicted her of second degree murder. A Vassar graduate with honey blonde hair and the lithe, graceful body of a dancer, Kathleen had driven to Dot's 24-Hour Diner for a cup of cocoa where she sat at the counter and engaged in a friendly chat with Mara, the only waitress on duty. This took place minutes before midnight when Kathleen was lonely and most of Fergus Falls was fast asleep. First thing the following morning, the police pounded on Kathleen's front door and arrested her for the brutal murder of waitress Mara Drizzle.

During her second week behind bars, Kathleen unexpectedly bonded with her fellow inmates. These weren't the hardened, tattooed criminals she expected to find. Some had husbands and children, girlfriends and boyfriends, dogs and cats, and bad luck, fate, or being at the wrong place at the wrong time became their ticket to immolation. Several believed they'd been wrongly convicted and felt livid that the real criminals smugly roamed the street like

winner in a crap shoot. "Victims are quick to point fingers," Vonda Nunn (serving time for manslaughter) said, "And sometimes fingers point to the wrong person."

Kathleen clicked with the smoky-voiced, green-eyed Vonda; they giggled, chatted, gossiped, and shared intimate stories of their lives. Both sensed a profound friendship developing.

Almost five weeks after being incarcerated, Kathleen learned that DNA evidence collected at the scene matched that of a serial killer in the neighborhood. Kathleen Lawley was free.

Instead of feeling that five weeks of her life had been stolen, Kathleen cherished the time she spent getting to know a group of women she never would have met.

She spent her last six hours in a corner, quietly sobbing. Being released from the Fergus Falls Correctional Facility was the saddest experience of Kathleen Lawley's young life.

End

Bio - Garrett Socol began writing short fiction in 2007. This summer, his work will appear in Ghoti Magazine, Monkeybicycle, and McSweeney's Internet Tendency. Prior to 2007, Garrett wrote the play THE SHADOW OF GREATNESS (Berkshire Theatre Festival 2000, starring Richard Chamberlain) as well as BICOASTAL WOMAN (Pasadena Playhouse, 2003). He wrote non-fiction pieces for magazines including Cosmopolitan, Movieline and McCall's. He won the

Gracie Award and the Prism Award for his work in television.

AGAINST THE CURRENT

By William Falo

Molly heard the stream and the sound poured into her soul, it flowed deep into her heart and she saw Ryan struggling to breathe as his lungs filled up with the water of the icy Bering Sea. She slumped against the floor and held her face in her hands as a flood of tears came.

She remembered the day Ryan took her away from potato farm life and Ashton, Idaho with dreams of making a fortune as a crab fisherman in Alaska. He died when a rogue wave swept him overboard. She returned and he stayed behind in a grave in Dutch Harbor.

“Damn it,” Molly said as the door bell rang; she wanted to be alone in the empty home and its dusty memories. She peeked out and saw a man in a fancy suit. She opened the door and he greeted her with a smile, “Hi, I’m Paul Cummings from Ashton Real Estate. We would like to offer you a great deal on this house and land,” he said.

She remembered getting mail in Alaska from them but recycled it without opening it. “I’m definitely interested,” she said thinking of the sound of the stream out back. He left a card and said he would return later with some papers. Molly walked out back risking a panic attack. The potato fields her father toiled at stretched brown and open before her;

bordered by clumps of trees and deeper woods. The sun began to fall and darkness spread as a deer walked out into the field and fireflies blinked messages to each other.

The stream seemed to become louder even though she didn't move and Molly hurried inside with her hands covering her ears. She crumpled on the floor, sobbing and calling, "God, why do you hate me?" A glass of wine and a sleeping pill gave her some respite until the sun leaked into the bedroom and woke her up.

The realtor came the next morning, "Hi, Mrs. Ritchie."

"Miss," she corrected him. He wanted to show her papers and maps so she cleared away all her knitting on the table; a hobby she started in Alaska while Ryan was at sea and continued for therapy. Molly put on her glasses and saw the stream on the map. "I want to sell immediately."

"Great, we can start the paperwork today," he said. The money would enable her to move into an apartment without a pool and live in comfort. He showed her their plans which included building houses right down to the edge of the stream. Then he smiled, "Then we'll divert this stream and put in a strip mall." He smiled constantly and clapped his hands together while twirling his mustache.

"What's this?" Molly pointed at a small square on the map adjacent to the stream.

"Probably a large shed, don't forget to clean it out because we'll have to knock it down."

Then he packed up his things. "I'll return soon, Miss Ritchie," he said as they shook hands. Molly watched as he skipped down the driveway.

Her hands shook as she thought of walking toward the stream. She set out listening to music in her headphones to drown out the sound. The majestic Teton Mountain Range loomed on the horizon as she walked toward the shed and the stream. She thought of her father walking these fields growing potatoes and tilling the land.

The music helped but she noticed mist rising off the cool water and goose bumps crawled up her arms. The sun was up high and the temperature climbed as she reached the reddish-brown building.

The door creaked open and sunlight streamed in from the dirty windows. She glanced around and gasped. Pictures hung on the walls with cobwebs dangling off of them. An easel held a painting covered by dust. Molly looked around in awe. She wiped off the painting; it showed a wolf walking by a stream presumably Henrys Fork right near here. There are wolves here, she wondered. Her mother had signed it. She died when Molly was five years old.

Molly took off her glasses and wiped her eyes. The pictures showed wildlife from nearby; an antelope leaping through the fields, a lynx with glowing yellow eyes, and a mountain lion ready to strike. One was of her father fly fishing with someone. A fly fishing rod and two nets leaned against the wall with a jar beneath them. They were the ones used by her father and her to catch tadpoles.

With wet eyes she went outside. She saw the water and panicked causing her to stumble and roll down the bank until she splashed into the edge of the stream and then darkness filled her vision. She opened her eyes and saw a man standing over her. "Are you okay?" he said. The man held a fly fishing rod.

"I'm not sure," she said.

"I found you in the water. I thought you were dead." They were near the shed. He must have carried her here. She found her bent glasses and put them on. He said, "My name is Chad."

"My parents used to live here. I'm Molly."

"I used to fish with your father. I miss him. He did tell me about you." The man looked to be in his forties with clear blue eyes.

"What happened?"

"I have Aqua phobia ever since my husband died," she looked down.

"I'm sorry," he said. "Do you need help?"

"No, I'm okay." But when she tried to get up she stumbled. He walked her back as deer dotted the fields and an owl hooted nearby. A wolf howled from the direction of nearby Yellowstone.

Suddenly, near the house thousands of fireflies blinked rapidly in the trees; lighting up the woods. It was a magical moment. They both watched in amazement until it gradually dimmed. "Have you ever

seen anything like that before?” She asked Chad.

“Never, I wonder why they did that,” he said.

Molly shrugged her shoulders as she reached the house, “Thanks for helping me.”

“No problem. Have a good night, Molly.”

“Good night,” she said. She looked back and waved as he faded into the darkness.

She took out her knitting and thought of trying fly tying, until sleep claimed her. She dreamed of catching tadpoles with her father in the stream, then putting them in jars until they turned into frogs. She wasn't afraid of the water then. She had a fleeting thought that the shed is in a great location for a fly fishing store.

The realtor knocked early in the morning with a briefcase.

“What's all this?” She asked the giddy realtor. His hair was slicked back and he wore an even fancier suit.

“Pictures of the stream after were done with it.” Molly put on her bent glasses and looked at the picture. It showed a Starbucks and other stores where the stream was located.

“What about the fisherman who fish there.”

“They can go somewhere else?”

“I think I need some more time before I decide to sell.”

His smile disappeared. "It's too late. You can't go against the current, many others are selling." He quickly gathered up his papers.

"I'll fight it," she said. He left quickly and didn't skip this time.

She sat down and wondered what to do. She couldn't grow potatoes. She slowly walked toward the shed and dared to look at the stream. She saw Chad among other fisherman working a fly line on the far shore. She desired to talk to him. Remembering the fall, she gingerly stepped toward the shore. Her breathing sped up and she covered her glasses with her hands.

Chad saw her and yelled, "Wait, I'll come there." He waded across the foaming water and walked toward her. Eventually he reached her and held out his hand.

She took it and calmed down, "Molly, look there." In the water below her feet were tadpoles swimming against the current. From upstream two mallards swam toward them followed by a string of ducklings. An otter splashed from somewhere down stream playing with an unseen object. The water was full of life.

Molly formed her shaking hands into a cup and scooped up water from the stream then poured it over her head reminiscent of a baptism.

End

Bio - William Falo lives in Southern New Jersey with

his wife and two daughters. He writes short stories and is currently planning a novel. His fiction has appeared in the Northwoods Journal and Shine and is forthcoming in Bewildering Stories and Sage of Consciousness.

OF WHOM I AM PROUD

By Randy Barfield

There were twelve of them in the Olive Garden restaurant dinner party. Most were family members and were there to celebrate Phil Madden's graduation from the state of Georgia's higher ed flagship. Phil's dad rose from the table and held his wine glass high for the toast. "To my dear son Phil, of whom I am so proud," he sang out. The others applauded and cheered. Two of them made additional toasts before the glasses clinked. A polite Phil sat on one side of his dad while his mom sat on the other. Karen, Phil's brother Marty's fiancée, knew that Phil and his mom almost never sat next to each other. The red wine, appetizers and 'entrees' had been great as well as the jokes and teasing. After the main course dishes had been removed, Phil's mom signaled that she had something to say. "I suggest we each order a very special dessert to honor my newly-graduated son even further. Besides, he's now an 'educated' fool," she said. The sound of silence.

End

Bio - Randall Barfield is from Georgia but lives and teaches EFL in Colombia, South America. He has

been writing off and on for many years and has been published in Ploughshares, poetrylifeandtimes, and other publications.

IED (IMPROVISED EXPLOSIVE DEVICE)

By Dan Dittmar

We were still stateside, not even finished packing our gear when Patterson started with it.

Two days before we shoved off and I had just come from the range and was sitting under the shade of a eucalyptus with its high reaching canopy spread unevenly to the west, pulling my weapon apart and running patches through the oily barrel till they came out clean and dry. Nearby, Patterson, kid-looking with skinny arms hanging from a shirt too big on him and with sweat glistening on his head, was sitting Indian style on a stretch of hard, dry grass in the sun. The sun burned down on him. He wasn't looking at me. He wasn't looking at anything.

"I ain't coming back home, Rick," he said still staring at nothing. "I know it."

The smooth cleanness of the dark metal barrel felt like velvet in my hand and I was running my fingers over it again when I looked through the cool shade to

where he was sitting. I told him to just forget about such thoughts. He was balanced upright on his folded legs, teetering forward then back up again. I'm not so sure he heard a word I said.

Then, overseas for seven months, like a parrot with a shaved head, all I heard from him every morning going down the dirt path to stand in formation was: They're going to kill me; I know it. I'm going to die over here. There ain't no way I'm going home. Nope. No Siree, No way."

The temperature reached one-hundred-eight degrees the day we got orders to rotate back to the States. We were packing and Patterson was across from me shoving worn out cammies into his already overloaded sea-bag. He was still going on about how he was going to get it. I told him once and for all he was full of hogwash and to just shut-up about it now. On top of his bag was the red patterned *kaffiyeh*, still waiting to be packed; we had all bought one from the old Pakistani vendor who sold trinkets and crap on base in Bahrain. After everyone had paid the man, we assembled into a tight line next to him smiling proudly with his front teeth broken off into decaying stumps, and with our covers off and the *kaffiyehs* in place on our heads, took a picture which I still like to look at.

The day before we left we were sweating our asses off in a convoy on Highway One near Samarra when an IED hit the vehicle Patterson and Dugan were in. We all heard the sick sound. We all turned our heads when we heard the sound. Dugan said later it was a

miracle 'cause he wasn't even so much as scratched,
but it was different for Patterson.

That was how it happened

It's funny how he knew.

I was still a Corporal, then.

End – Bio Following Next Story

THE START OF SOMETHING

By Dan Dittmar

We were in Fallujah. The wind had changed direction and oily smoke began drifting westward from concrete houses that were now piles of rubble burning alongside car wrecks in the alley.

From my perch I could see mongrel dogs, orphaned when the civilians fled, scurrying back and forth on the street below. Bony and angry, they were searching but not finding; I never heard them bark. Across from us were walkup tenements – two, three stories – lining the street like a row of white dominos; except the black spots were windows instead of dots. The building before me was still, other than some curtains fluttering like eyelashes from broken and left open windows. The place looked toothless and crippled, but empty buildings always hold so many surprises. In my left hand the muzzle was raised and felt warm now on my palm and fingers; the tension felt just right on the trigger.

I prayed *oh Jesus give me strength*. This time the targets would not be made of paper. Unfamiliar sweat on my forehead gathered momentum, surprising me when it ran a cool line past the flat of my temple and then went jagged, crossing down my cheek.

The man, who would be the first, opened the door and then drew back in its shadow. Within seconds, my concentrating eye followed him charging into the

street, running in a crazy sort of pattern. Following him in my sight, again I prayed *oh Jesus give me strength*. The young bastard was put down with one shot and it wasn't so bad as I thought it would be.

Then the second one went raging from the door, like a bull stung on the ass. *Oh Jesus!* One round later and he went down near the first and I felt pretty okay about doffing that one, too. After the third SOB was added to the growing pile of street litter I nearly felt goddamn marvelous about the whole thing.

Dugan leaned in. "Hell, Rick," he said. "There's a damn fine reason why you got that Expert Badge, back on the range."

The last one came out wearing white tennis shoes, firing an assault rifle - missing everything there was but glass and concrete. He stopped cold and yelled some crap we didn't understand. I put him out, too.

Then everything went quiet and we smashed their weapons and patted them down for intel and found some good cigarettes, which we smoked.

The following day we were back at it. Despite the heat I did not sweat.

And I did not pray *oh Jesus*.

End

Bio - Dan Dittmar is a New Jersey native and a graduate from Rutgers University. He currently lives in Southern California. His work has appeared in Skive Magazine and Skive Quarterly.

WARSAW ANGEL

By Barra Bromley

The girl stood in the shaft of moonlight, looking for the world as if the light came from within. White hair, chalk white skin, an oversized petticoat in crumpled white, each outlined with luminescence.

Marta, wakened by this new presence in the now familiar room, peered over her blanket warily. "Are you an angel?" she asked the apparition.

"I think I must be," replied the visitor.

The Warsaw ghetto badly needed an angel and Marta felt blessed that the visitor had chosen this modest room so crowded with those remaining of the three families. If only her mother and Ernesta, her elder sister, were still with her. When the angry soldier had ordered them aboard his truck where had he taken them? Marta hoped that wherever it was, they had angels visit them too.

The angel stepped closer to the wooden pallet on which Marta spent much of her days and nights. Close enough for her to see that the angel's eyes had warming fire in them on this cold night.

"Why have you come?" asked Marta, looking around for something to offer. Her mother always said that a

stranger only remained a stranger if you withheld hospitality. Then she would offer poppy seeded cakes on plates circled with entwining roses. Wreaths of welcome that now lay in the distant past....

“I have seen you from afar and felt you needed comfort,” said the angel, shivering.

Marta had only one thing she could offer the angel. “Come,” she whispered, echoing her mother’s welcoming tone. “You may share my blanket.” Lying close to the angel, Marta fell into contentment. The other families in the room shared their bread but could no longer share anything of their spirit. That an angel came especially to her, and wished to share a little of her care, caused a smile to rest upon Marta’s lips.

In the morning, a draft drove icily through gaps in the wall. Winter was harvesting its cruel hold. The angel had gone, leaving Marta to wonder whether she had imagined it. As old Mr. Tusinska came in, bearing the jug of water he collected each morning, he brought with him a blast of melancholy air. “Now I’ve seen it all,” he said, putting down the jug with a sigh. “And just yards from our door.”

“Joseph, what are you talking about?” asked his wife, too inured by the continuing horrors of war to feel genuine interest.

“A girl, barely older than Marta here, is lying dead outside. And wrapped in nothing more than a wretched petticoat.”

“Sadly, she’ll not be the first,” said his wife already thinking of the water and the little bread they would have for breakfast.

“But she looked so strange,” said Mr. Tusinska. “Almost ethereal,” he went on. “Everything about her white. Skin, clothes, hair. With eyes open and irises red as berries on a snow covered branch. Clearly albino. To think she died so alone like that...”

“Poor angel,” said his wife shrugging. “Poor angel.”

End

Bio - Barra Bromley took her fiftieth birthday, two years ago, to finally release the writer within and since then, she hasn't stopped writing. At the beginning, she Worked on large scale pieces (there are two incomplete novels lurking at the back of her computer) but now she works mostly on short, short stories as she enjoys The different type of discipline they require from novel writing.

She loves writing about people and how they interact but she also enjoys exploring the surreal and the quirky. Currently, she is planning to take an MA in Creative Writing at Birkbeck, London and begin working on a book of short stories all with the same theme. In the near future she wishes to teach creative writing to beginner writers and pass on the pleasure of this satisfying craft.

LOST IN NECROPOLIS

By John Weagly

“Can someone please help me find my way home?”
Cassie said.

The cold silence of the surrounding tombstones was
the night's only response.

It wasn't good to be out after dark. And it really
wasn't good to be lost.

And it really, really wasn't good to be lost after dark
in a cemetery.

“Is anybody there?”

Cassie wandered past crypts and mausoleums. She
needed to remember the way she came. Finally, by
the light of the pregnant moon, she saw a tombstone
she recognized.

Cassandra Bigelow.

“Home at last.” Cassie laid down on her grave and
went back to sleep.

End

Bio - John Weagly's short story collection "The Undertow of Small Town Dreams" is currently available from Twilight Tales Publications. For more information about John, check out his website at www.johnweagly.com.

STOPPING BY

By Brett Moore

My granddad just stared at the television. I wasn't sure if he knew what he was watching. When I approached him, his eyes slowly lifted to mine.

"Hey, Granddad."

He waved with uncertain recognition. I'm sure he knew I was a relative of some sort. A couple of strokes would muddy up anyone's memory. I grabbed a nearby chair at one of the tables from the dining area of the nursing home and put it near his wheelchair. As I sat down, I caught a glimpse of the other residents looking at me like I was their relative. They wanted very painfully to express something to me. I avoided eye contact whenever possible.

"So, Granddad, how have you been?"

"Good, I guess," he said in a scratchy voice.

"What did you have for breakfast?"

"Oh," he said, with a strained look. "I don't know."

I twirled my thumbs and looked out the window.

“It’s pretty cold outside today,” I said.

“Yeah,” he replied.

Sometimes, I wondered if my words ever registered in his head. I wanted to connect with him. When I was younger I didn’t get much of a chance to see him. I tried to think of something else to ask him. How many times could I talk about the weather and food? Why was I asking him what he had for breakfast? The problem was he didn’t have anything to say and neither did I. We sat in silence.

I thought about what I had to do that day. Clean up the apartment. Get an oil change. Pay my credit card bill. Go to the office. Get some work done; life goes by quickly and I’m always worried about getting everything done in time. It’s one task after another until you die. I suppose it would be nice to get all my work done before I’m dead. I would hate to leave a messy room behind or leave some unfinished work at the office. And tomorrow I had a dental appointment. It would be terrible to have bad teeth as a corpse. Well, I can understand wanting to have good teeth.

I glanced over at my granddad. He was in peaceful slumber. I could see that the other old folks were closing in on me and trying to get my attention. I stood up and tapped my granddad on the shoulder to tell him I was leaving.

“I remember now,” he said. “I had eggs for breakfast.”

End

Bio – Brett Nicholas Moore has been writing short fiction for years and was published in the book *Original Sin: The Seven Deadlies Come Home To Roost* by Paper Journey Press in 2004. He is the author of *Tales of Brother Goose*, a satire of classic Mother Goose tales.

FULL BLOOM

By Suzanne Nielsen

The sun sets off in the distance, and the desert gets ready to pull its shades. Sunrise and sunset are two visions that can't be recreated, neither with tempera paints nor watercolors. Even movies can't recreate this divinely natural phenomenon. I threaten to look away, but my mind won't let go of its slow descent to the underground.

Twilight dangles not wanting to give in to the chloroform of dusk. Dusk settles like a dutiful blanket atop the sand, heavy full of the day's warmth. There standing atop the blanket is the cactus shadow illuminates and stands in the distance, arms stretched open, Christ like. Is it sacrificial or offering sacrament? I can't tell.

I look at the cactus, arms outstretched, maybe saying, "Come closer, come let me hold you." I know better. I've been drained of blood samples. Needles sting and then leave scars you never forget. But the cactus is beautiful, and its voice, an authority's voice, is low in tone but gentle and so convincing.

In the slipping sunlight, the cactus's needles look foreboding, like a stern reprimand from a nurse. I think of my father's unshaven face scratching against me when he would return after many hours of drinking and how it would leave my face blushed in the morning. "Come closer, let me hold you," he would say, with such authority, and the needles would start their draining.

I am there. I am his wife and the cactus is waiting for me. It has grown so tall as the moon rises. It reminds me of the telephone poles I wanted to climb when I was a child. On road trips, I would count them until my eyelids became heavy and slumber took over. Then I would see the poles following me, their arms free from bondage and ready to take hold. When I would awake, the poles were always standing at attention, trained soldiers ready to deliver a universal message that was not part of my dream.

The cactus does not bloom. It wants forgiveness and calls to me. It has a message to deliver, and I am its teetering receptor. I trust the needles won't harm me nor drain my bodily fluids, so I walk ever so slowly over into its arms and stand ready for its embrace.

Suddenly I come crashing into the whiteness of this sterile hospital room. A needle driven into my arm feeds me liquids, and I am fighting the state of fluidity. I see shadows. I have never been to the desert. I have never seen a cactus, but I have imagined it quite vividly from my midwestern hospital bed, and in so doing, the needles bring me comfort. The cactus juice is entering my body and I fall back into a slumber. I am going to the desert this afternoon to see the cactus in full bloom.

End

Bio - Suzanne Nielsen, a native of St. Paul, Minnesota, teaches writing at Metropolitan State University. Her poetry, fiction and essays appear in literary journals nationally and internationally; some

of these include *The Comstock Review*, *The Copperfield Review*, *Mid-America Poetry Review*, *Foliate Oak*, *Identity Theory*, *The Pedestal*, *Pindeldyboz*, *Rosebud*, *Rumble*, *Thunder Sandwich*, *Word Riot* and *580 Split*. Nielsen was recognized by storySouth's Million Writers Award in 2005 for her notable story, "Fists for Hands." So'ham Books released her collection of poetry titled "East of the River," in December 2005. So'ham will publish her collection of short fiction in May of 2007, titled "The Moon Behind the 8-Ball & Other Stories." Nielsen earned a BA in Writing from Metropolitan State University, an MA degree, with an emphasis in fiction writing, from Hamline University, and an EdD through Hamline University.

Writer's End

Aspiring Writers and Flash Fiction

By Guy Hogan

One of the secrets of publishing flash fiction is revision. Many aspiring writers think this means doing two or three drafts. They move around sentences or delete or add paragraphs; and then they hit the send button. This is not doing revision. This is tinkering.

Revision is going over a piece of flash fiction word by word and sentence by sentence while asking yourself, is this the right word in the right place? Is this the right spelling of the word? Is the sentence the word is in clear? Is this the right punctuation for this sentence? Is this sentence in the right place in the paragraph? Is this paragraph in the right place in the story?

This approach is revision. And the entire story should be put through this kind of revision several times during a period of at least *several days* if not weeks or even months. It is my contention that after talent and perseverance it is the art of revision that separates the aspiring flash fiction writer from the

published flash fiction writer.

Bio - Guy Hogan's flash fiction and articles on flash fiction have appeared in several online and print publications.

His homepage is www.authorsden.com/guyhogan.

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Sandprints A Collection of Poetry and Prose

by Sheryl Hamilton Chaney

From Sandprints: "Ashes and Mist"

*My words fall as ashes
No one hears
Such a small thing—
To make no shadow.*

*My tears become mist
As a vapor
Rising in despair—
And are no more.*

*My song becomes silent
Passed as a cloud
I look and I see—
And my heart follows my eyes.*

Brilliant Quarterly, Issue One

27 different authors 100 pages of fiction

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 blames Savanna's boyfriend for her husband's death.

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?

More Than Memories by Kristen Bailey

An emotional romantic suspense

Can Molly love him if she can't remember him? And what if her memory loss is due to some horrible act on her part?

A Place To Stay and Other Short Stories

by Kristen Bailey

A New Kind of Music

A Young adult novel about change

By Diane Payne

I listen to NPR and imagine how my life would be different if my mother hosted a show for them instead of our community radio station. I never know what she'll say on the air. She'll talk about her period, strange dates, weird people at bowling alleys, anything. Everyday I worry she'll talk about my acne or something personal about me. She'd be more careful about what she says if she worked for a respectable station. On school days, I set my radio alarm to NPR. The first time she heard the radio click on in the morning, she came to my room and said, "NPR! I knew you'd be rebellious one day, but NPR! You're fourteen and enjoy NPR. That is so weird." I could hear her saying "NPR" over and over until her coffee was finally ready. Then she calmed down. Somewhat. If only she knew who was really weird.

When I was three, Mom landed a job hosting an 80's all women punk show on Tuesday nights. She was perfect for the job. To her, the 80's punk musicians have produced the best music ever. The walls of our apartment are crammed with albums and CDs.

I can still remember sitting at the radio station while she did her show. She was so animated, so into it. She can't understand how I can remember something that happened when I was three, and I assure her I remember everything. "That's too bad," she says.

Most of my friends think my mom is cool. Others seem embarrassed for me. When she walks into our school, everyone looks at her. It's 2005, not 1984. She doesn't care. She dresses like a punker. Spiked hair. Spiked dog collar on her neck. Short ripped skirts. Combat boots. She's thirty-four but dresses like she did when she was fourteen. I won't be dressing just like this when I'm her age. I'll change. That's what people do. Change.

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