





Lit + Art

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"805" is the Dewey Decimal number for literary journals.

805 was founded in 2015 from the library's commitment to promote the vast creativity of our community and beyond. The library's mission is to nurture imagination, promote lifelong learning, and enrich the community.

The editors seek short fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and art that is unexpected, striking, and moving. *805* accepts submissions from residents of Manatee County as well as the rest of the universe.

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Lit + Art

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From the Editor

At this time of year, the veil between this world and the next falls away. Spirits and mortals pass back and forth between realms to commune in mystery. Art, if you will, whether written or visual, is where mortal and spirit tryst in the mind's field of imagination.

In this edition of *805*, mortals and spirits play hide and seek. They intimidate. They chase. They dance.

We are excited to publish first-time author Megan Huxley. Her essay "The Bad Word Death" explores a fear to which we can all relate.

And another first—Brenda Mann Hammack, creator of our haunting cover, and Scott Petty are the first to contribute to *805* selected art and poetry, and selected art and fiction, respectively.

Enjoy.

Jyna Johnson
Editor

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Bios

An Opening to October

Stacy Kidd



Atropos
Brenda Mann Hammack

You were saying something about owls & far from
any neighborhood, how certain

folks talk talk about birds and sundry
Sundays, an et cetera—

that doesn't sit quite right with you
& to tell the truth, there are the neighbors

you care not one bit for, not one lonely bit.

*

The screech owl, atop the brick house,
in near-broadish daylight—

its exacting and open silence. It's something

you might wish for—

the more gray than white of it,
and surprise of it, a simple light

by which to sit with friends

for a good, long while and occasionally whisper.

Equinox

Richard Herring

“This is a good time.” I could hear Ingrid discussing my last day, “the Autumnal equinox. A good time for the soul.” It always was. When winds from the north suggested the coming chill, it was a time to rejoice and celebrate. It made working day shifts at the chemical plant less oppressive and meant Oktoberfest would soon be upon us. This one, we will not have together, but share a wealth of memories, of so many fine times.

It was usually about this time of year when the carnival camps sprouted on the edge of our town like forest mushrooms after a persistent rain. They came in odd assortments of trucks and trailers selling goods and performing services for a week or so before moving on to the next town or country on their annual circuit. Villagers warned young people about tricks and treachery, but we would find subtle ways to make our way out there to see for ourselves.

The first time I took Ingrid to the camps, we were celebrating her seventeenth birthday. From saddle bags, actually on a donkey, I bought her a necklace made of shells from Greece. From the back of an American station wagon, with panels designed to look like wood on the sides, we took home an exercise hoop designed as practice for hula dancing. A Volkswagen van, painted with images from tarot cards and neon peace signs, was mounted with a large replica of a fortune teller’s crystal ball on top. Up two wooden steps, through the open back doors, the silhouette of an old woman beckoned our presence.

Elaborate decorations inside the van created an eerie mix of dread and excitement. Candles on a covered wooden crate separated us from the costumed witch whose touch, as she gestured over our open palms, was cold, dank, and dusty. Before the session reached its end, she foretold that our lives were destined to weave together and then apart but, in the end, would be served by the love we shared between us. We spilled out and down those steps, loudly teasing each other with newly learned bits of future foretold. A tall man in an extravagant weave of colored sashes was stationed to impart some order among the unruly. He bent in our direction with a long finger to his lips, suggesting we preserve the mystery of the moment. We laughed and pulled each other by the hand, away from the gypsy camp, kicking through the beautiful carpet of autumn leaves that night and all the memorable times that followed.

“This is indeed a good time,” Ingrid was saying in German to

someone next to her, “for the transcendent soul. A change of season; light to dark to light again. Joy to suffering and back to joy.” I chose to believe that the Flemish nurse, Ada was her name, understood those words but either way, it made little difference. Ingrid’s care and assistance had been miraculous in getting me to Belgium and the hospital transfer here to Liege. She studied as laws were codified and stayed current with the unfolding legalities that allowed us to come here. Without her help, I may still be in Aachen, beyond the searing, writhing pain of the early stages, through the anguish of knowing the disease would continue, eating through organs and tissue unabated, for as long as tissue is still alive.

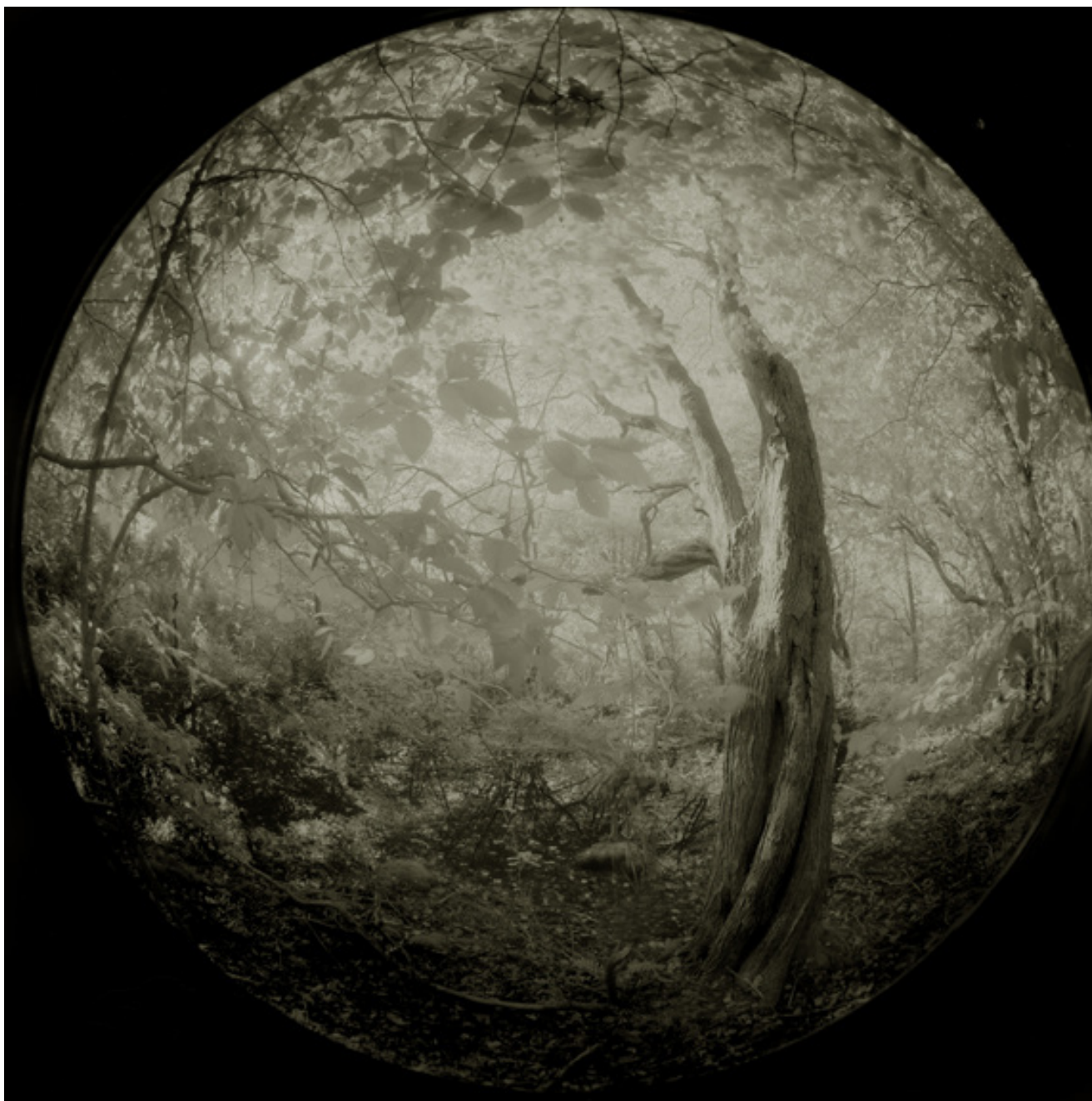
I have no sense of how long my eyelids have been too heavy to open. I heard an unfamiliar voice, with a phrase perhaps obscured by accent or language, announce what I understood to mean the medication was now injected into the drip. There are other words afloat in the room, but the spaces in their sequence stretch farther apart. I was aware of no localized pain, and the sensation of Ingrid’s fingertips brushing across the back of my inert fingers turned into a different kind of feeling altogether. It became a light sea breeze caressing the back of my hand and rippling the hairs on my arms like a gentle, incoming tide.

We were at Juist that August with our feet in the sand as the North Sea softly washed around them. We were in our thirties then and I leaned toward her to kiss salt water residue from the corners of her eyes. This was her first trip from the city after divorce from the clerk she chose to wed as a result of my steadfast refusal. Foolish and resolute in my youth, I insisted that the premise of marriage was an artificial social construct and a false institution.

We turned to run from the rushing tide and found asylum down a different, narrow path beneath a majestic canopy. With the tastes of local wine and picnic and each other on our lips, we whispered we could lay there forever, on the deep, soft-matted floor of the Black Forest that June. We lamented that we couldn’t. It was a long drive north, back to my shift at the plant the next day. An unexpected rain waited for us to emerge from our resplendent hideout, forced now to manage uncertain footing down the precipitous path.

Now, we are tripping down the steps behind that Volkswagen van. Our light, nervous laughter tries to obscure the shivering uncertainty bestowed on us by the old witch inside. The tall old man waits in a dark and hooded costume this time, and bends forward as I approach. The long, twisted finger pointed at me curls in on itself and, as it does, pulls me in the same direction. We turn and, in the flickering light of the campfire, I see the stunted maple trees and the gnarled passages between them.





Britta's Tree
Gary Bartoloni



Choices Again
Fabrice Poussin

The Bad Word Death

Megan Huxley

Four Stupid Cupids was the book that ignited my fear of the word *death*. That book may not have implanted the very first thought or fear of death. The first idea was probably formed somewhere in the back of my mind while I was listening to the radio or watching advertisements for the always horrifying 11 o'clock news. But, in my mind, it marks the beginning of a vivid phase in childhood.

My ban started when I was seven years old. I sat on the rough, gray carpet in front of my glossy bookcase balancing *Four Stupid Cupids* between my knees. Twenty pages in, and the book seemed great. The content was borderline inappropriate. The book was the weight of an adult novel when I held it in my small hands. Twenty-one pages in, and I slammed the book shut. I shoved it between two Harry Potter books and didn't touch it again for twelve years. The problem? The word death was written on the page. There was a scene of a woman dying. She was run over by a parade float. It was meant to be funny, but to me, nothing could ever be funny if it involved that word. My ban on the word "death" lasted for four more years.

I'd read the book a few months before 9/11. My mom was a flight attendant. She still is. She was supposed to fly to New York City later that day, but she didn't fly again anywhere for a month. I don't remember despairing over the loss of thousands of lives. I remember grieving for what could have happened to my mom. Grieving because I started to understand what dying meant.

I hadn't grasped the concept of death two years before when my cousin and I sat on the yellowed, linoleum floor watching the ambulance load in my great-grandmother. I soaked in the anxious nerves of the family, but it was the same worry a dog exhibits when its owner is shaking and crying. My cousin gloated because she knew what was happening, but I was too young to tell. I was told later that day. We played basketball during the funeral reception a week later.

That ignorance was wiped away when I found out my single mom could go to work and never come home. That meant never seeing her again and no one else left but my grandmother to indulge my wants and wishes. I dreamt vividly of what the end of her meant. I dreamt of her wearing her sheer pantyhose and wrinkled high heels in the airport. I saw her heels

break, along with her ankles. In my dream, that was her end. Nonsensical and gruesome. I woke up abruptly, staring at the ceiling, until my mom got home at 7 a.m. the next morning.

Dreams and daydreams of all the things that could happen to my mom occupied my thoughts. The bad word was constantly on my mind, but the ban was still on. It could not be heard, read, or spoken.

The song “Last Kiss” came on the radio. “Oh where oh where can my baby me? The Lord took her away from me.” My mom sang and drummed her long fingernails on the steering wheel, occasionally looking over and down, smiling at me. I sat uneasily listening to the lyrics about the woman who died in a car accident on a rainy night. I woke up at 5:30 a.m. a few mornings later, waiting to hear my mom’s 4Runner pull into the driveway after a night of flying.

Courage the Cowardly dog was on Cartoon Network. I watched the little pink dog run into Muriel’s arms and away from monsters as I worked on multiplication for homework. A monster was defeated by Courage and buried in the backyard. A white flower grew immediately from the dirt grave. I turned the channel and didn’t watch the show again for a while.

The number of tainted songs and books increased dramatically. I mentally put the offending media in a file labeled “don’t look at” or “don’t listen to” I couldn’t let the thought that had been dominating my mind leak into my favorite forms of escapism.

Sometimes I wonder if the sudden realization and subsequent obsession with death was the beginning of my questioning the Southern Baptist beliefs I was raised to adhere to. Why should I have been so scared and obsessed with something happening to my mother if I believed she would be picked up by angels and sat on a fluffy cloud ready to watch me until I could meet her again? That was my childhood idea of heaven. I still prayed every night at that point. I recited “Now I lay me down to sleep. I pray the Lord my soul to keep.” I still addressed every deceased family member individually.

“Hi Nana, did you see me get to the swings first today?”

“Hi Jerry, grandma showed me a picture of the afro you had in the 1970s. I loved it. Those striped pants were ugly, though. I wish I could have met you.”

I continued to talk to them for a few more years, but it started to feel certain they couldn’t hear me at all. I always asked them to reveal themselves to me, in any way or form, but they never did. That silence was the beginning of my questioning, and the questioning was the paired with the beginning of my ban.

As I write this, I sit across the room from my grandma, hooked up to machines in the ICU. A heart attack and stroke have left her in a dreamy, childish state that is now scary and far from cute. I was reading *The Benefactor* by Susan Sontag, but I had to put it down. “You will not taste death—you will be tasted by death” was printed on the page. My obsessive

fear ended around ten years old. It was replaced with an almost morbid fascination with something I’d never seen up close. Now that the thought has become up close and personal again, there will be a temporary ban until there is distance between me and the bad word *death*.





Every Battlefield and Patriot Grave
Jacob Welch



Mrs. Danvers
Brenda Mann Hammack

In Which the Countess Bathory Feels Her Age

Brenda Mann Hammack

Elizabeth Bathory, gaunter now, five centuries on, has been confined to a tower that has kept her from sun, but not from using Instagram. #agelessbeauty #bloodbath #fairestofthemall

Most fashion ads discourage with their barely fleshed throng. She'd always liked her peasant girls with meat on their bones. #proteinis4lovers #whatvampiresreallywant

She doesn't trust a mirror to keep her informed any more than she trusts hydroxy acids to keep her ever young. #scamsthattargetseniors #dermabrasiangonewrong

Charles Manson murdered 11, Ted Bundy 14 more. She killed 650, but doesn't rate a score in Murderpedia. #equalrightsformurderesses #girlsgowildforgore

She's not getting any younger, but cannot die of boredom. At least, she's got a following in social media forums. #followmeback #vladwho #sendseruminsteadofmoney

Wake Up Dead

Nick Gregorio

Taylor has a port, a pump, a box of syringes, and sore fingers. We—my husband Dan and I—have got an app that can give us accurate blood sugar readings on a line graph as long as Taylor's iPod is connected to a Wi-Fi signal. And me, I've got a ceiling fan and my cell phone in the dark.

Stare long enough at a fan on high and the blades will melt into a blurred circle, a single piece of wood running its circuit in slow motion. There but not there. Like a ghost. It's hypnotic, the effect. I'll stare and close my eyes and stare and close them longer. By the time I'm drifting off, Dan already asleep, I'll sit up in the bed sweating, panting, checking my phone for any changes in Taylor's levels.

But of course everything will be fine.

It always is.

And if it's not we'll fix it.

Tonight, like every night, we did every single thing we could before putting Taylor to bed. Gave him a snack—one that'll release sugars overnight to level out the dip he had and the shot we gave him. Waited until he was asleep-asleep before even thinking about getting underneath our own covers. Before I took my contacts out, even.

And when I wake up, Dan'll be so nice. He always is. He'll wake up and ask me what I need.

I'll tell him, no, nothing, everything's fine, that it's okay to go back to sleep. But I'll need to stare at that fan again to get back to sleep hoping Taylor won't pass without me knowing it. Hoping he won't phase through the bedroom wall all pale and see-through trying to tell me it wasn't my fault.

Taylor, my little ghost-boy, he'll be so sweet. He'll say, "Mommy, it was my bad pancreas. It wasn't you."

I'll sit up and cry, tell him that it couldn't have been. That I must've dosed him wrong before bedtime.

"No," he'll say. "Maybe the app didn't pick it up in time, but it definitely wasn't you, I promise. I just couldn't stay in my body anymore." He'll reach his hand out, white-blue and glowing in the muted television behind him. Like headlights through fog.

But my hand'll pass through his. All cold and clammy from the ectoplasm holding him together. And that'll just make it all that much worse. I'll never be able to touch him again. And it wouldn't matter how long he decides to haunt the house, he won't really be there. Not really.

No matter how many vases, or pizza boxes, or empty bottles he floats across the room just to get a reaction out of us.

No matter how much he spooks the dog into barking at the walls so he can giggle that giggle that makes me laugh.

No matter how many years in a row we win Best Haunted House in the Neighborhood Association Newsletter.

He'll have woken up dead.

Same for me. Every day.

A flesh and blood phantom talking to a specter of a little boy who died because of me.

"It was my blood," my little ghost-boy will say. "Not you. You did everything you could."

He'll tell me about how I left binders full of log sheets for his daycare staff to fill out throughout the day.

He'll tell me about my mother, Gam-Gam, and how she whispers to herself that she can do it, she can do it, she can do it, when she gives him the shots I can't give him in the middle of the day.

He'll tell me about the day-long doctor appointments that I can't stand but smile through. The thousands and thousands of dollars spent on cutting-edge tech that insurance doesn't cover yet. The tears I don't let go of until Dan gets home and I'm in the tub with wine.

"I see everything now," Taylor will say. "I've seen everything you've done for me and I know, now that I'm dead, that none of this was ever your fault."

I'll change the subject, make a joke about his vocabulary, say, "It's impressive for a two-year-old."

"I'm infinite, Mommy," he'll say.

Then I'll cry harder.

Little boys aren't meant to be infinite. They're supposed to grow up, play sports, write poems for girls or boys they've fallen in love with. They're supposed to get in trouble, get caught smoking cigarettes, get questioned about the box of condoms stashed under their beds. They're supposed to go to college, pick absurd majors, work in bars to pay for their real degrees. Get married, get a dog, have a kid or two.

But Taylor, my sweet little ghost-boy, he'll be stuck like this. A blurry little body in the dark. Like the fan spinning overhead. An optical illusion. Real and not real at once.

And this time when I check my phone for any changes in Taylor's numbers, Dan doesn't wake up. I shouldn't expect him to. Not every time.

Sitting up soaked, the fan dries the sweaty ectoplasmic sheen off my skin. And when I catch a chill I check my phone again, the corners of the room.

No alert.

No ghost-boy.

Just me. Shivering, scared to go back to sleep.

I tip-toe across the floor, avoid the noisy spots. But they whine from under my feet no matter what I do.

The door creaks, but it's soft, low.

I catch my shadow in the hall, the nightlight stretching my body twice my height, half my width. And when I reach for the doorknob into Taylor's room, my hand is a claw in the black.

But then it's the sound of little boy breath. Taylor dreaming in his crib.

My palm on his back, I feel his breath go in and out.

In and out.

In and out.

He's warm. Not sick warm. Alive warm.

The way he's supposed to be.

His soul still tethered to meat and blood and bone. No powers.

No wisdom passed down through the infinite.

Just a boy.

Just like last night.

And the night before that.

I breathe deep, close my eyes, let it go.

Like last night I say, "Stay here."

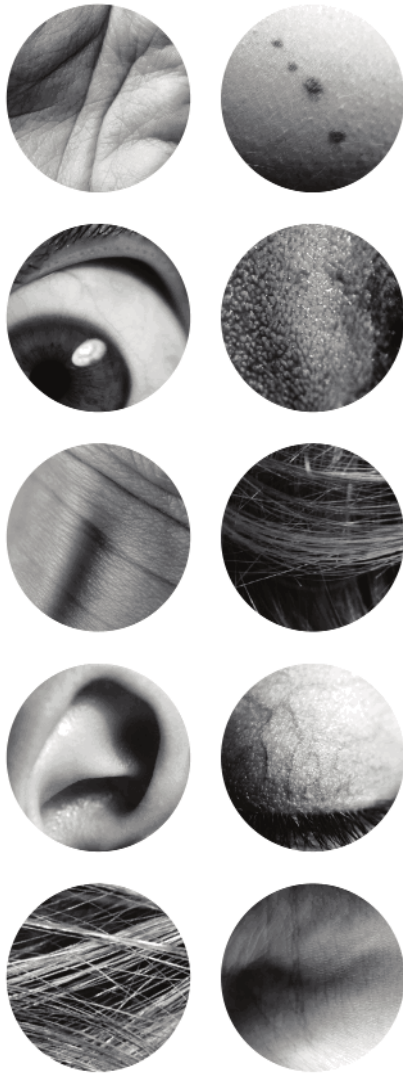
And like the night before that I say, "Stay here."

And like I'll say it tomorrow night I say, "Stay here."





Desert Home
Haylee Massaro



Human Specimen
Nina Gregg

The Hunter

Brontë Pearson

I fell in love, once,
and this is how it felt:

I am a doe, freshly shot
in the woods somewhere,
my void gushing,
and my eyes stagnant.
I lie still
as the sun puts on
its many faces
until the insects
begin to nibble at my flesh
and strip away the mask
I wore from day to day
to reveal the striations
of my soul,
and I let them.
I let them nest in the marrow
of my sorry bones,
and I let them sing
through the hollow caves
in my veins,
and I let them drink from
the wells that irrigated
my once warm vessel
until we are nothing more.
They leave me.
I am scraped clean
with nothing else to give,
and I have either revived
the light within these
vivacious creatures,
or I am still dead
with nothing else to lose,
and all anyone could ever say is,
“I’m sorry. I understand.”



Backdoor
Scott Petty

The Reign of Guilt

Lisa Verdekal

Caught up in her days of playing, the little girl initially took no notice of the diminishing water supply. Adult grumblings and furrowed brows hazed by above her head as she skipped and ran. But as drought continued the severity penetrated her awareness, she too began looking up at the sky each morning in search of heavy clouds. Now the relentless drought dominated her every thought. The ravaged lake had revealed her guilt.

Yet no one in the village noticed.

Occasionally, they glanced into the dusty pit that had once been a thriving, rippling, sparkling lake, their mouths made drier at the sight. Mostly they tried to avoid looking, it was too disheartening. They had already been rationing water for months, lugging it back to the village from miles away. At first, rotting fish and other interesting odds and ends lined the bottom, now only fissured earth. It was a forlorn sight. The local animals had eaten the fish bones and the interesting items had been removed by the villagers. Fabricated scenarios about how these things came to be at the bottom of that lake provided initial entertainment, but that time had long passed. Now only thirst mattered.

Most of the villagers took part in the lugging, but some of the men sat around looking glum, claiming to be coming up with a better solution. They should be down on their knees begging the elements for mercy, the women thought as they trudged by. Complacent men—taking the water for granted, continued the women shaking their heads, they forgot in their arrogance that there was something bigger than them. Yet the women couldn't agree on what that something was.

The men watched the women huddled together whispering, snickering, and amongst themselves expressed the view that the women might be the cause of this drought, didn't many myths say women were the bringers of evil, not to be trusted?

Families had private conversations about individuals or other families, blaming them for what was now referred to as the curse.

It was likely them that caused it, their greedy ways brought this on us.

It's that couple over there, they drink during the day.

Still not married at her age and inviting men over.

That family has too many children.
Those parents are lazy.

He's a bit odd, such a loner.

I was over at their house one evening; you should have seen the

strange food they were eating.

We never should have let that family move here.

As drought continued and dust prevailed, everyone started to look the same. Lank hair, skin and clothes coated with grime. They all had the same listless gait and longing in their eyes. Fear and desperation skulked behind everyone. Whatever status someone had held before the drought didn't matter now. They were all in the same grounded boat.

The closest village won't give us water anymore, said some people returning breathless, dirt streaked across their calves, arms, and faces. We will have to go farther next time.

The following morning, the little girl joined her mother for the daily trek to another village, as always, having to pass the lake on the way out. The water bearers filed by heads down and no one turned to the little girl accusingly. She felt her guilt though. She felt it all day long and also when she closed her eyes to sleep, and when she slept, it made its way into her dreams.

In the new village, the people treated them badly, made them wait in the hot sun for the water. They said their supply was getting too low now, they told them not to come back, this was a one-time deal. One woman stayed behind offering herself to a man who appeared to be in charge and had access to more water. She fell to her knees and put her forehead to his filthy feet. He sneered at her and jerked his feet out from under her head then indicated with a wave of his hand that she should stand behind him. Three other women were there already and they jostled her to the back. The little girl had a vague memory of this man sometimes coming into their village to fix things, he had always seemed pleasant. Things were different now.

Passing the lake on the way home, exhausted and parched, with only the prospect of a small glass of water to soften their sandpaper tongues, no one looked into its barrenness. It was too depressing, too pointless and they simply didn't have the energy. But the little girl looked and in its emptiness saw her full guilt, saw it clearly. This awareness jolted her each time she passed, soon they would figure it out.

She thought countless times about sneaking out into the night when everyone was asleep and never coming back, but she knew the dogs would start barking and growling and the thought of passing them scared her more than the wrath of the villagers. Were these really the cared for dogs that she used to pet and play with? Like the man from the other village they had once seemed so pleasant.

But the dogs were thirsty, too. They hung around the lake at night listlessly panting until someone came along. And then they growled low, long growls that said, stay away, this is our lake, we didn't cause the drought, you did. Other animals also came out of the forest at night to find relief

from their thirst. They ventured as far out of the forest as they could until the dogs' threatening growls sent them back. In the days of flowing water, the dogs were subordinate to the villagers; now they had shifted their station. Some of the village men still persisted in believing they were in control of the situation, yet the truth was, they had lost their hold on things months ago. The dogs and the others saw them for what they were, fools who thought nature bended to their will.

Months earlier, at the point when mud still lined the bottom of the lake, when it still contained a hint of moisture, a woman wild with thirst had run out to the lake at night, so determined, the dogs raised their limp muzzles when she had already past. She climbed over the side and slid down until her feet squelched into the mud. She knelt into the thickness and scooped up some of the viscous liquid. She brought the teeming scoop to her mouth and began licking it, sucking on it, mud running down her arms and tiny creatures wriggling between her fingers. The whole village gathered on the shore watching her, glad it wasn't themselves who had succumbed to such pitiful behaviour. As they silently derided her madness, they also somehow hoped she was getting some liquid satisfaction. Their toes poised just at the edge of the drop. If she was satisfying this thirst, they all felt they would jump, slide, push and hit, to get to that mud. Standing with the others, the little girl wasn't thinking solely about mud and liquid. Overriding this terrible thirst was her guilt that she had caused this spectacle down there, the tormented woman licking mud, moaning. Yet still no one noticed.

In time, the villagers began to lie on the shore in family groups along with the dogs. It would never rain again, they knew it now, and they resigned themselves to their fate, too enervated to do otherwise. The people had upset the Gods, or whoever did the deciding on the matters of nature, no one could dispute it. One of the men feebly pushed himself up to suggest that possibly a sacrifice might be the answer: killing a dog and throwing him in the pit, or all the dogs, and the cats too, whatever it took. Although the idea appealed to everyone, the question was whose dog? No one could easily condone subjecting their own dog to that fate, despite the fact the dogs seemed not to belong to them anymore. Someone else suggested an animal from the forest, there was nodding all around, but who would catch it, who had the energy? Someone quietly said in a joking kind of way, what about a virgin? Everyone chuckled, but their eyes darted furtively around the group, locating their young children to ensure they were near.

One night, the little girl mustered up her strength and courage and crawled to the edge of the lake and climbed in. She called out hoarsely, everyone come, everyone, then louder as an energy rose within her. Slowly they all sat up and tried to focus, then gathered on the edge watching, thinking, what will she do down there, there is only dust? But they were still ridiculously hopeful that out of this arid earth she would squeeze liquid. Would there be a miracle? Could this little girl turn dust into water?

Listen, she said, raising her small arms, you have all missed it. I am the guilty one, I have caused this drought. Everyone stared uncomprehending. I stole something and lied about it, I blamed it on my sister and she got into a lot of trouble. The sky cracked thunder.

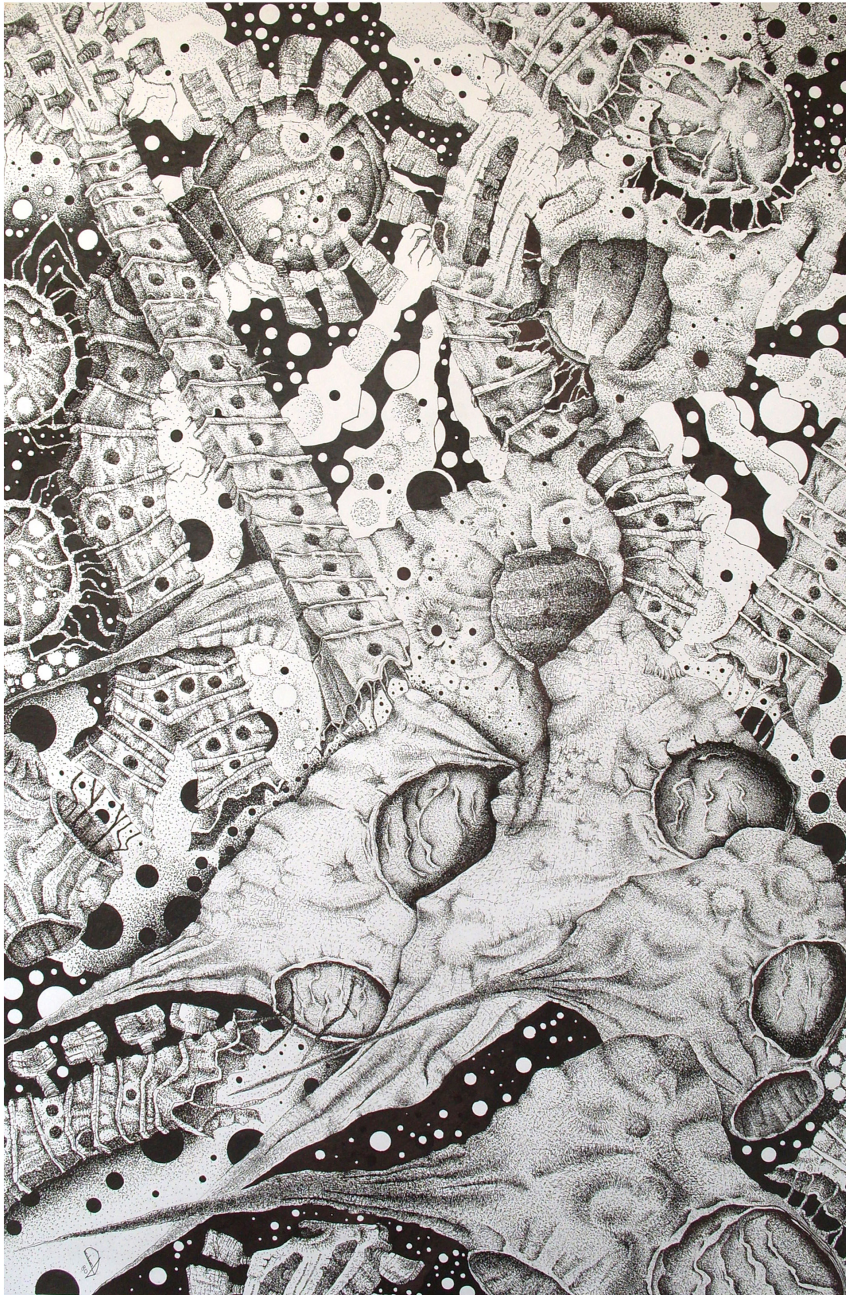
Then a man nodding with understanding slid down and raised his arms high. No, this girl is an innocent child, it was me—I have been hiding dreadful secrets. Wind swept heavy, dark clouds over the starry sky. Two more men and three women slipped in, lifting their arms. No, I am guilty, me too, listen to what I have done. A drop of rain hit the bed of the lake. And another. Steadily each villager slid into the pit, each proclaiming their guilt and revealing their secrets, lamenting their nasty thoughts. The man apologised for suggesting a sacrifice.

People smiled and said to some, that's not so bad, you are only human. And others sighed, laying hands on shoulders, its ok, we will forgive you. Fat drops plopped on top of everyone. Arguments began and several fist fights ensued. Some claimed they would never forgive. Some displayed empathy—I can understand why you did it. And others, genuine friendship—the goodness in you outshines that one bad act. The drops continued falling harder and faster. People cried and hugged, scowled and raged, tears and blood flowed. People prostrated themselves in humble thanks.

And in unison, everyone drank in the water as it gushed from the sky, washing away the grime into the yielding earth.



Dalí
Jorge Luis Mendoza



Guitarras Para Fantasmas
Jorge Luis Mendoza

Eye Island

Scott Petty

I find a human eye floating in my tomato soup. I am certain I ordered tomato soup. The restaurant is crowded. I look around for anyone else eating soup. Everyone is looking at their phones. The restaurant is crowded but silent. I google the health benefits of eating eyes. The results are sites about dishes including fish and sheep eyes. I touch both my eyes to make sure neither fell out. I push my eyes in with my fingers to keep them from falling out. My phone beeps. It is a text from my mother. She has forwarded a link to a video. She says it is funny and insists that I stop whatever I am doing to watch the video. It is a video of a dog and cat dancing, then they fight, then the dog chews the cat in half. Perhaps it is a fake, but it looks real. "How is your soup?" asks the waiter. I do not formulate an answer in my mind. I mumble nonsense in reply. I watch the video again. My mother tries to call, but I decline the call. I watch the video again. I hear laughter in the room. I watch the video again. I hear a siren, far away. "Is it another bomb?" someone says. I watch the video again. The eye in my soup turns over, backside up. It looks like a little white island in an archipelago of fleshy bits. I am certain I ordered tomato soup. The siren gets louder. Trouble is getting closer. People check their phones to see what is happening. People start texting. Trouble is getting closer. I push the eye to the side with my spoon. I eat all the fleshy bits. I save the eye until the end. It turns over and looks up at me. The siren gets louder. I can feel the earth trembling. People are texting. The trembling stops. There is an explosion. The siren stops, then starts up louder than before, then stops again. I look forward to reading about what happened later. I will google it. I keep thinking of the video of the dog and cat. I believe it is real, but it might be fake. I believe the eye is fake, but I eat it anyway.



Death

Laurette Folk

Blood retreats to the four corners.
The mind says to the heart: you're
Fired. Get your shit and get out.
The heart telephones the soul
Listen, there's a train leaving
In an hour. The soul,
That quicksilver flash—

In the late summer
When the flowers turn to seed
And the birds fall from the sky to
Rampage the stalks,
Death counts his money. His skin
Is draped over his bones like an
Oiled hide, his limbs felled.

The grass parts and a throng arrives
In black hats and bonnets. They unravel bills
From their fists and Death pours
A round for everyone.
Through the fields they go,
Young again.

Above them, wings.

I recall now, how it was—
The six-legged angels
Tapping at the windows.
The stone rolled away from our
Front door.

The sheets cast aside.

In this cleared space
He speaks a word
Well below my audible range.

It is something in the air, rarefied.
I collect it in the cells of my lungs,
Push it

through the ventricles
of my
Heart.



Portland, Oregon

Scott Petty

Francesca

Andrew Pryor

Francesca hated the air she breathed.

She regarded air the same way she regarded people who chose invisibility over flight as their hypothetical superpower when prompted. *What do you need to hide from everyone?* she'd think. *What would you be planning that you'd need to sneak past everyone?* Air was like millions of invisible people that could also fly, which was ten thousand times worse.

She had no drapes or curtains in her house, only blinds. They hung heavier than fabric, but she had to be more careful to close the doors and windows, otherwise the wind could get in through a crack and sweep throughout the house and lift the blinds away from the window frame before letting them fall back with a clatter that could wake anyone, even if she wasn't the only one in the house tonight.

Francesca shuffled across the hardwood floor in her nightgown, turning lights on as she made her way to the living room. Her silhouette wound and elongated against the living room wall like the hands of a Dalí clock. She was thin, and short, and wiry like a mousetrap.

The blinds clattered again, and she half-jumped, half-pivoted in the direction of the noise. It was coming from the kitchen.

She strode in through the kitchen doorway face-first, ready to flail and claw at any unwanted guest, but the kitchen was empty. The pale Venetian blinds swung back and forth against the window over the sink, rain dotting the askew wooden slats from the half-opened window behind them.

As soon as she closed the window and adjusted the blinds, Francesca sank into the wooden kitchen chair next to the stove. The clock on the microwave said 5:25 AM. "No use going back to sleep now," she said, whispering to someone that wasn't there. When it was nighttime, she spoke to herself in a loud voice. It was only in the dawning hours that she felt comfortable enough to lower the volume on what she said, even though she was the only one that could hear it.

She opened the tea cupboard and reached into the box of Bigelow, and her fingers closed on something unfamiliar.

It was a stone. A small stone, something speckled green and brown, the size of a black olive and the shape of a cicada.

Francesca smiled.

She liked to put stones throughout the house in places where she knew she'd forget them. Small stones, from the size of a peppercorn to the size of a golf ball, scattered in all sorts of hiding places throughout the

house, places where you could just happen upon something you weren't expecting. It brought a sort of vitality to her daily life, a reminder that she could still be surprised. She had no guests in her home, no one to disturb or turn over things but herself. The stones could stay untouched for days, weeks, months, ever. She liked that about them. They stayed constant, and remained constant. No worrying about disappearance, change, metamorphosis.

The stone smelled like mint and licorice. She placed it back among the tea bags and poured herself a mug of hot water. She dipped the tea bag into the mug, and watched as plumes of oaken brown spread through the steaming water, swirling so tight, she could curl up in their liquid arcs. She breathed in the warmth.

Francesca was sitting in the darkness, cross-legged, her head resting on a pillow of fresh herbs, the smell of polished glass surrounding her. She was eighteen, and she thought she knew everything she needed to know, even though she was trapped in her own omnipresent darkness. It was just a part of life. It was the strongest part of life.

To pass the time, she recited poetry silently, the iambs and trochees rocking back and forth against her skull like ripples in a fishbowl. *Because I could not stop for Death/He kindly stopped for me...* What would Death feel like? Would it be anything like this? Intermittent bursts of light, and then nothing? Was life just a long preparation for what came after? What about love? Was that just the pain that a muscle went through before growing stronger?

She didn't know if she would ever love anybody, because she had never met anybody that felt the way she did. She never met anybody as afraid as her. That was what love could be: a canceling out of two reservoirs of fear. They flowed into each other and rushed up against each other and then became still, became deeper and warmer than any ocean.

She could taste the sharpness of mint in the back of her throat. She breathed deeply.

Francesca was sitting on the polished wood floor, in a corner of her living room, watching a spider weave a web over her head. For some reason, the spider reminded her of Ben. She couldn't exactly say why—it wasn't a spider with his face, like some sort of forgotten Greek mythical creature—it was just a normal spider with its eight legs and pinpoint eyes, pivoting and pacing back and forth over fine tightropes, scurrying and weaving as though it had anywhere to be, anyone at all to come home to.

She supposed Ben had a bit of that in him—some sort of directed, manic energy. He had a habit of pacing back and forth when he was absorbed in thought, and he had this look on his face like he couldn't decide between the two ends of the room he was caught between—but whenever she asked him, he always had a detailed thought to share. A handyman project, maybe, or a book-balancing act, or a coyly-shared surprise for her

birthday or their anniversary.

Ben was the first one to tell her that marriage was not always fun, that it was a project for everyone whether they wanted to admit it or not.

"Good marriages are like houses," he'd said to her. "They take work in order to be kept up properly. They take love and care and effort."

She'd listened to him, but it was a while before she'd heard properly.

Looking up at the descending and ascending spider, she thought of how much work went into something so fine and delicate. So subject to the whims of nature, or the cruelty of fortune.

She took a deep breath, feeling the unswept dust enter her lungs.

Francesca was lying under the radiator, enjoying the heat of a dark Grecian night. This was a good decision. How could it not have been a good decision?

They'd spent the first few days just "getting lost" as Ben had put it. Losing themselves. Absence of self makes the ego grow fonder.

Cucumber and tzatziki and spiced lamb coated her tongue as she looked down the ridges of stone and sand towards the sizzling beaches, the white sun reflecting off of the glittering shore. Their world was a mosaic, the sharp edges and wrinkles filed off as they looked into each other's faces for the first time again. Later, they would have to return to painfully-defined photo-realism, the different textures and tones reminding them just how long they had been together—but for now they could pretend. That was what vacations were for, pretending. Pretending your life was centered somewhere else.

Here, even a kiss felt like a renewal of vows.

The salt air wound its way through her nostrils, made her excited to take every breath.

Francesca could see a dim sliver of light poking through the space between the tops of the thick reference books and the shelf above. She was pinned to the varnished back wall by crisp pages, smelling paper and gathering dust.

She hid within her book collection now, ever since winter had ended. As March began, the air inside the house grew silent enough to read comfortably, and that was what she did, read through older, once-neglected works like Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and H.G. Wells' *Journey To The Center of The Earth* and Flaubert's *Sentimental Education*—even when her eyes slid off the page because she was so tired, she would pretend to scan anyway, move her eyes back and forth over the page out of habit. Trying to fill up her head with words in order to drown out her and her husband's shared silence.

Dust bunnies and cobwebs collected everywhere she looked, and she made no attempt to disturb them. Sometimes she'd even attempt to breathe the dust in and make her self sneeze, just for movement's sake, just in order to break something that couldn't be easily broken. She closed

herself off in a dark corner of her mind, looking at that bright sliver of light, that hopeful line connecting her and her husband still, thinking that she knew what she could do, but it would be better to let time take care of itself. Time inhaled the sawdust that nature shaved off of everyone and everything.

Francesca laid on her side at the back of her sock drawer, the cotton and lint piles surrounding her, pressing down on her, gagging her, muffling everything she wanted to say, to shout, to scream.

She thought she could cry, could send trails of tears streaking down her face, could exhaust herself until she could start again. But the tears never came, only the blood as she bit down on her tongue. Trails of blood flowed over her bottom lip and formed overlapping pools, dripped out of the sides of the sock drawer while she made no sound, no sound at all.

Francesca sat in the middle of the glass coffee table, pretending that she was floating in mid-air as she held her eyelids open at just the right angle.

All around her were stone monuments, oversized reminders—a dark blue globe, a red marble drink coaster, a pen the size of an Egyptian monolith, sticking straight up, accusing the air. The glass was cold and unforgiving to sit on, but she would bear the pain for however long it took.

Her face was stone, but not hard or unforgiving, just flat, calm, a death mask for the living. Specks of dust the size of stalks of hay settled around her, dotted her shoulders, rested in her lap. She didn't move. She couldn't breathe, and she had never been more at peace.

"The storm's really picking up out there, isn't it," said Francesca, a little too loudly for her liking. She sipped her tea and listened to the low rumbling of the wind and rain outside, the shutters vibrating in their frames. It was growing lighter outside, but there was no sun, just a soft wash of gray over the morning sky.

Maybe she would go out and visit a neighbor. See if they needed any help with the storm. You could always be helpful, even if you couldn't always be friendly.

Francesca thought for a second, then went over to the telephone. She struggled to think of the next-door neighbor's number. She punched in a familiar chain of numbers, held the phone up to her ear.

A mechanical voice rang out through the headset: "Sorry, the number you have dialed is no longer in serv—"

She set the phone back in the receiver, the sharp *click* reverberating, clearing away just enough cobwebs and dust.



Grizzly
Greg Lowman



Authors & Artist Bios

Gary Bartoloni began his photographic life around the age of nine when his Dad allowed him to use his Kodak Tourister. He has had many individual showings of his work, along with participating as a member in various photo and art groups in and between New York and Florida. His work has been chosen most recently for the internationally juried exhibit Camera 2015 held at the Von Liebling Center, The Sarasota Center for the Arts, and The Southampton Art Center. He has participated in OK Harris and Soho Photo exhibits, and has presented a portfolio for a Guggenheim Grant regarding the visual recognition of endangered world forests through infrared portrayals.

Laurette Folk's fiction, essays, and poems have been published in *upstreet*, *Literary Mama*, *Boston Globe Magazine*, *Talking Writing*, *Narrative Northeast*, *So to Speak*, and others. Her novel, *A Portal to Vibrancy*, was published by Big Table. Ms. Folk is a graduate of the Vermont College MFA in Writing program and editor of *The Compassion Anthology*. www.laurettefolk.com

Nina Gregg, born and raised in South Florida, was exposed to art at an early age, as she grew up in a creative family. Gregg's artistic interests include figure drawing, sculpture, oil painting, jewelry design, printmaking, photography, and fashion design. Her art involves concepts of human communication, presence, evolution, and brain development. She has attended programs in fashion design & illustration at Central Saint Martins in London, Otis College of Art and Design in Los Angeles, and the School of the Art Institute in Chicago. Gregg is a faculty instructor at the Coral Springs Museum of Art, where she teaches fashion design & illustration to children ages 8-16. Her work has received awards in juried student exhibitions in South Florida. She is a 2015 National YoungArts Foundation Merit winner in Visual Arts and 2015 Congressional Art Competition winner and award recipient in the 2014 Scholastic Arts Competition. She also volunteers, teaching monthly sewing classes for young teens at S.O.S. Children's Village in Coconut Creek, Florida. Gregg is attending The Rhode Island School of Design in fall of 2016.

Nick Gregorio lives, writes, and teaches just outside of Philadelphia, PA. His fiction has appeared in *Crack the Spine*, *Hypertrophic Literary*, *Maudlin House* and more. He is a contributing writer and assistant editor for the arts and culture blog, *Spectrum Culture*, and currently serves as fiction editor for Driftwood Press. He earned his MFA from Arcadia University in May 2015 and has fiction forthcoming in *Zeit|Haus*, *Corvus Review*, and *Third Point Press*.

Brenda Mann Hammack teaches creative writing at Fayetteville State University, Poetry Barn, and the Eckleburg Workshops. Her first book, *Humbug: A Neo-Victorian Fantasy in Verse*, appeared in 2013. Her poetry

and fiction can be found in *Mudlark*, *Gargoyle Magazine*, *Menacing Hedge*, *Papercuts Magazine*, *Elsewhere Lit*, and *Rhino*. A new story based on the Pendle witchcraft trials of 1612, is forthcoming in *Anthropoid: the Collective*. Hammack is managing editor and web designer for *Glint Literary Journal* (www.glintjournal.wordpress.com).

Richard Herring grew up in the suburbs of Washington, D.C. He explored a decade of blue collar jobs in southern states before changing course to a 35-year career in education and a Ph.D. from Texas A&M University. He now lives and writes full time on the Florida Gulf Coast. His works appear in *Louisiana Literature Journal*, *Nebo: A Literary Journal*, *Green Hills Literary Lantern*, *Sixfold*, *Talking River*, *KYSO Flash Fiction*, *Jerryjazzmusician.com*, and have been accepted for publication in *The MacGuffin* and *Nerve Cowboy*.

Megan Huxley is a graduate of the Savannah College of Art and Design with a BFA in writing. She is an Atlanta native, but now lives in Lyon, France where she spends her days writing and searching for English sections in bookstores. This is her first piece to be published.

Stacy Kidd's work has appeared in *Boston Review*, *Colorado Review*, *Columbia*, *Eleven Eleven*, *Gulf Coast*, *The Iowa Review*, *The Journal*, *Phoebe and Witness*, among others. She's the author of two chapbooks: *A man in a boat in the summer* (Beard of Bees Press, 2011) and *About Birds* (Dancing Girl Press, 2011) as well as the forthcoming book of poetry *Red House Over Yonder* (The National Poetry Review Press).

Florida native **Greg Lowman's** artwork features marine life, the outdoors, and wildlife in various media. Find him at www.GregLowmanArt.com and on Instagram @greglowman.

Haylee Massaro is an English teacher currently living and working in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. She attended the University of Pittsburgh earning a B.A. in English Literature. She went on to study English education at Duquesne University where she earned her M.S.Ed. She enjoys reading, writing, playing music, and traveling any chance she gets. While she has not had any traditional training, she has taken up an interest in photography as an art medium. Her photography has appeared in *Ink In Thirds*, a literary magazine.

Jorge Luis Mendoza is a self-taught artist and illustrator born in Santa Clara, Cuba and based in Bradenton, Florida. He graduated with a degree in Architecture from the Central University Marta Abreu de Las Villas. He works with various Cuban publishing houses as a book illustrator and specializes in youth and children's short stories, poetry books, magazines covers, and more. His first creations reflected a geometric and abstract

composition. Later, passing through several stages, his work reached a point where it touches his own personal worlds: islands, birds, journeys, nostalgia, and love. He has also ventured into the world of animation and the creation of experimental audiovisual. He has participated in various group exhibitions and six solo exhibitions.

Brontë Pearson is a senior at the University of Arkansas at Monticello, where she studies creative writing, biology, and professional writing. She is a fourth year consultant in the university's Center for Writing and Communication and serves as the student editor for the scholarly journal *The Philological Review*. Brontë has previous and upcoming publications in journals including *Black Mirror Magazine*, *River and South Review*, and *Linden Avenue Literary Journal*.

Scott Petty's photography has appeared in *Trendesign Magazine*. He has published poetry, prose, and music reviews in *Three Elements Review*, *Space City Rock*, *Noize Makes Enemies*, *The Palm's Leaf* and *War Writers' Campaign*. He is a two-time finalist in the *Texas Bar Journal* Short Story Contest. He is a veteran of the War in Afghanistan and lives in Houston.

Fabrice Poussin teaches French and English at Shorter University, Rome, Georgia. Author of novels and poetry, his work has appeared in *Kestrel*, *Symposium*, *The Chimes*, and more than a dozen other magazines. His photography has been published in *The Front Porch Review*, *the San Pedro River* magazine, and more than sixty other publications.

Andrew Pryor lives in Essex Fells, NJ with his family. He is a graduate of the Rutgers-Newark MFA program, and his work has previously been published in *apt*, *Knee-Jerk*, and *Foliage Oak*.

Lisa Verdekai left her childhood home on the sunny west coast of LA, California to live on the wet and windy west coast of Mayo, Ireland and that suits her perfectly. Before she settled down in the countryside, she lived in London for four years and then spent another four years in Berlin. She has a certificate in Child Care, an Honours degree in Irish Heritage and a Masters in Advanced Language Skills German. She has been published in *Pink Girl Ink*, *Connacht Telegraph*, *Scarlet Leaf Review*.

Jacob Michael Peter Welch is an amateur writer local to the Sarasota, Florida. In the class of Sarasota's Riverview High School, 2006, he held the titles of Editor-in-Chief of the *Riverview Ram Page*, President of the *Riverview Quill* and Scroll Journalistic Honor Society, and wrote opinion columns for both the *Riverview Ram Page* and the *Sarasota Herald-Tribune*. Jacob was diagnosed at the age of 12 with the neurological condition Spinal Muscular Atrophy type 3. This disorder led to the eventual abandonment of

postsecondary academic study, in favor of an appropriate and comfortable living situation with family. He is currently confined to a wheelchair in activities outside of the home, and as such, spends his time writing prose, and poetry, and immersed in the study of history and etymology. This is his first piece of graphic art to be published.



Lit + Art

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