

# ◇ Defenestration ◇

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# **Teratology 101: A Handbook for New Mothers in the Monster Age**

by  
**Christina Dalcher**

## *Alcohol*

*Mom-friendly rating: \*\*\*\*\**

*Monster rating: \*\**

*To ensure a head of disproportionate smallness, it is recommended the mother be an alcoholic. While moderate drinking may effect inadequate head size and facial defects, the desired malformation of ears, nose, and digits cannot be guaranteed without regular and heavy consumption of alcoholic beverages, particularly during the first trimester. Spirits are preferred to grape-based products.*

"What do you think of a small head, honey?" Clara asked her husband.

"Eh. Not very interesting. Is that all?"

"It might have odd-looking ears. Maybe a missing thumb."

Tony went back to his newspaper while Clara poured another two fingers—toes, really—of vodka, eyed the tumbler, and decided on an additional splash.

\*\*\*

## *Dilantin (and related chemicals)*

*Mom-friendly rating: \*\*\*\**

*Monster rating: \*\*\*\**

*Cleft palate, particularly if accompanied by cleft lip, is a felicitous outcome of anti-epilepsy drugs, specifically Dilantin. One out of three fetuses exposed to such treatments will be born with an orofacial cleft and other abnormalities. Note it is not necessary the mother be prone to seizures, as regular and early administration of this drug will ensure the desired outcome. Post-natal surgery is strongly discouraged and customized feeding bottles are indicated.*

"This one's good, Tony. Cleft lip, maybe even on both sides. It would have a nice, nasal voice, too. Like yours."

"Cleft lip is good," Tony whined.

"And I might get some mouth sores."

"Even better."

Clara reached for the vial on the kitchen counter, shook the solution a few times with her left foot, and dumped the contents into her drink. "Bottoms up!"

\*\*\*

*Varicella*

*Mom-friendly rating: \*\*\**

*Monster rating: \*\*\**

*Maternal exposure to Varicella, commonly known as chickenpox, during the first twenty weeks of pregnancy may result in limb paralysis and blindness. Though both are popular qualities in a newborn, the rate of success is an unfortunately low two-percent. Side effects on the mother include attractive rashes and blisters, although it must be noted these are concomitant with unwanted itchiness. Furthermore, one-third of infected fetuses will not live beyond two months.*

"I don't think I like the sound of this one," Clara said, sipping her drink through a straw. "What's the point if it won't be able to see itself?"

Tony agreed without looking up.

"Wouldn't it be nice if it had your lobster claws?" Clara stroked his left hand with her toe. "I wonder what I have to do to make sure it has a claw."

"It's genetic, dear. You don't have to do anything."

Clara beamed, and drew a large, red X through the chickenpox entry.

\*\*\*

*Thalidomide*

*Mom-friendly rating: \*\*\*\*\* (but see below in cases of maternal leprosy)*

*Monster rating: \*\*\*\*\**

*Thalidomide is an excellent choice for parents desiring severe limb deformity, including underdeveloped arms and legs. Note, however, that the extent and location of physical defects correlate with the timing of exposure; therefore, to guarantee long limb damage, take Thalidomide between days 22 and 28 of gestation (see chart on facing page). Mothers with leprosy should consider that exposure to this drug will result in temporary healing of skin lesions.*

Clara examined the chart, scratched at a sore on her neck with her big toe, and made a quick calculation. "If we time it right, we can still get some arm damage. Maybe even a stump."

"Thalidomide?" Tony set his newspaper aside and looked up at her adoringly. "What about your leprosy?"

"Could you live without it for a few weeks if I promised not to go outside? That's what Mother did, and look how I turned out."

Tony admired his wife's armless torso and nodded. "I'll live."

Clara bookmarked the page.

\*\*\*

*Accutane*

*Mom-friendly rating: \*\*\*\*\**

*Monster rating: \*\*\*\*\**

*A perfect drug for expectant mothers who prefer numerous facial and cranial defects, including, but not limited to, receding chin, underformed or missing ears, squinty eyes, and unusually small head size. In many cases, infants will be born with conical heads. A success rate of well over 25% has been attained with regular dosages before and during pregnancy. Highly recommended, although Accutane has been known to cure acne.*

Lovely, Clara thought. She didn't have acne anyway, although she would have liked to. She made a note to visit her doctor tomorrow morning for the prescription. "Look at this sweet profile, Tony. Doesn't it remind you of Alfred Hitchcock?"

Tony glanced at the page. "Very nice."

"Tony?" Clara asked, swirling her glass between the soles of her feet. "What if it doesn't come out the way we want?"

He shrugged again. "I suppose we'll have to move out to one of those colonies where the outcasts live."

Clara shivered at the thought, poured herself a third vodka, and called her doctor's after-hours number.

**Two Poems**  
by  
**Matt Dennison**

**Onion**

Never buy a single onion if you live alone.  
For unless you are greatly skilled  
in the art of onion management,  
at some point you will end up  
with less than half an onion  
on a little plate  
on the middle shelf  
of a nearly-empty fridge,  
it's pitiful, withered, stem  
looking like the sliced-off  
top of a monkey skull  
salvaged from the garbage  
of a monkey-brain-eating restaurant  
and no one should have to see that,  
alone, at 3 a.m.

**Epic**

After years  
of considering  
every other  
possibility,  
the only  
answer  
I can think of  
to explain  
his surly  
behavior,  
foul aroma,  
absolute  
refusal or  
honest inability  
to pay attention,  
cooperate or  
do right in any  
regard is that  
the boy sitting  
next to me on that  
curious first day  
of kindergarten  
was *severely*  
hung-over.

**Pitch Meeting: Election 2020: Running Mates**  
by  
**Kathryn Paulsen**

"See, it's Barack and Hilary all over again, only she's a Latina firebrand married to an ex-priest and he's a rabbi married to a feminist scholar who's a dean at Harvard."

"Hey, what if he's a rabbi and dean of the religious department at Harvard, and she's the prosecutor who cleaned up Houston?"

"Works for me."

"So they hate each other's guts, but it's not because of the religious and ethnic differences."

"Though that's gotta be a factor, right?"

"Sure, but it's mostly their platforms and personalities. She's a founder of the so-called Happiness wing of the Democratic Party. Their goal is to put the party back in the party the way our Founding Fathers intended when they made all that noise about the pursuit of happiness.

"In her stump speeches, she says happiness will be greatly enhanced when we start providing health care, education, a living wage, and retirement security for all, and when we withdraw from those armed conflicts so destructive to happiness both here and abroad.

"But her main programs are all about dancing: dancing lessons in school, free public dances, paid-to-dance holidays, dance therapy on demand. She says it's a well-known fact that more dancing equals fewer prisons—enough dancing, and we won't need prisons.

"She points out that in the days of our Founders, dancing was an essential political skill, and she thinks it should be so again. She wants dancing to become part of the legislative process—no bill should be passed until its proponents and opponents have given it a twirl on the dance floor. Instead of filibusters, they should have dance marathons, with free tickets offered to the public by lottery.

"Needless to say, he calls her a total flake. Whereas he's the serious one, the only one who can do the job that needs doing. His program's all about education and immigration reform. We're falling way behind on education and he wants to turn that around. Plus, it's a known fact that illegal immigrants are the main engine of our economy, and they're all going to Europe, Asia, Australia—anywhere but here. We need to replace obstacles to immigration with incentives, and we have to get them to go to our schools and colleges, so we can improve our educational performance enough to meet UN minimum standards."

"Wow, heavy."

"I know it's just the beginning, but what do you think so far?"

"You've got some great stuff there, only too much politics is gonna put the audience to sleep. We need to sex it up."

"I know, get rid of the spouses. She's a wild woman and party girl, the love 'em and leave 'em kind. She's had affairs with the hottest heads of state, and some athletes and artists and generals—"

"And the head of a major studio."

"Great, that'll feed certain people's egos."

"Whereas he's divorced. His wife left him for a woman, so feminists love him. He has models and rock stars and reality show hostesses falling all over each other to take her place, show him what a real woman is like."

"Only he's playing it cool, nursing his heartbreak, waiting for the real Ms. Right—"

"Great challenge for a writer—have him calling her a slut and her insulting his manhood, but with humor and dignity."

"Dignity—always dignity."

"Let's cut to the chase. How soon do we get them to bed?"

"Good question."

"Okay, they're having these debates, and the angrier our candidates get, the hornier they get."

"And she always has her stud of the week waiting to relieve her tension, whereas he's still chasing the broads away."

"But they both start fantasizing about each other."

"They have to be on the ticket together and still hating each other before they have sex, otherwise we lose the tension."

"Who's number one and who's number two?"

"Hey, what if she's a hunter and a crack shot and a big hit with the second amendment crowd even if they don't really buy that dancing stuff?"

"We've gotta have a wedding in the White House."

"Baby in the White House—"

"Two babies in the White House!"

"Twins in the White House!"

"Fertility drugs in the White House!"

"Quints in the White House!"

"Sextuplets in the White House!"

"Sextuplets—wow, what a concept!"

"Works for me."

"That's it, guys. We've cracked it."



## **Yours in undead desperation (a zombie soliloquy)**

**by  
Anna Della Zazzera**

I've started to keep a Food and Feelings Journal,  
but it just ends up sounding like the lamest brand of forced narrative.  
Like *Chicken Soup for the Mystically Reanimated Soul*,  
or that recurring dream I have where I'm the host of  
a low-budget, zombie-themed daytime talk show,  
wearing a coral pantsuit and discussing all the relevant issues  
for someone with an undead affliction.

"Have you been resurrected by extraordinary means?

Are you trying to eat away your unhappiness?

Plus, 3 brain recipes you won't believe are low fat!"

Just before I wake up, someone from the audience

asks me about coming to terms with being evil.

I never considered I might be evil.

It's been hard enough coming to terms with being dead.

But if I were evil, then I imagine

I'd be merrily killing and looting and defiling farmers' wives or something,

instead of documenting my every murderous whim

in a goddamned Food and Feelings Journal.

**Pinning**  
by  
**Lindsay A. Chudzik**

I played tennis with Madeline Morling each Monday. Everly Trickett and I did tea on Tuesdays. Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays I lunched with other ladies who lunched. I spent weekends shuffling my children to play dates with the Morling, Trickett, and Kipling children, and shuffling my husband, Andy, and me to dinner dates with their parents sans the Kiplings. Andy didn't approve of Russ Kipling, our newest neighbor, because he had secured their home through what my husband called "a tacky foreclosure." Also, his wife worked in the non-profit sector while Russ cared for their twins. Andy often said, "Never trust a man with unscuffed shoes, Corrine." He insisted this pointed to laziness and an unwillingness to provide for his family.

Despite Andy's barely scuffed Spectator Wingtips, I agreed with him about Russ, and I reassured him I was proud of what he did every day for our family at Bank of America. If he didn't oversee those who were collecting people's outstanding debts, who would? I understood there were two types of people in this world: workers and the individuals those workers kept in check.

My mother had been the latter, but I knew since my sophomore year of high school I wanted more. I suppose my mother had wanted more, too, as most conversations with her boyfriends she started with, "You have to treat me better, asshole." But she never encountered the Cliff Note's to *Pride & Prejudice* and, despite our living in Pennsylvania instead of England, while reading I understood the easiest path to attaining that more I desired—marrying up. My childhood best friend, Shelley, agreed, but Shelley had acne and back fat, and even someone like Andy—red-faced, gray-toothed Andy—wouldn't notice her once presented with options.

A cold snap arrived in early October, causing autumn leaves to accumulate like snowdrifts on our lawn and my loyalties to my husband to get buried along with my social life. It grew too chilly to play tennis or lunch on fancy patios, so in a moment of boredom I accepted Russ' request to follow me on Pinterest and I followed him back. I imagined his account was no different than mine or Madeline's or Everly's: a space to curate other, more talented people's ideas, then make lists of similar items to scavenge for at craft festivals. As Halloween approached, however, Russ' pins started flooding my feed.

"Look at these costumes I made for Vicky and Ricky—a spider and its web!" he wrote. Both had more glitter than a Mariah Carey album, and Everly exclaimed both were shoo-ins for Lower Gwyneth Elementary's annual contest. My daughter's cowgirl costume and my son's plastic Batman mask, recycled items from previous years because they dearly loved them, paled in comparison. Could I honestly blame myself if Emiline and Ethan cared for their belongings, though? Isn't assigning sentimental meaning to objects a positive trait, despite it shoving them off of the judges' radar? Hadn't Madeline and Everly bemoaned those children who only won in years past because their mothers had tried too hard, ordering expensive costumes in an attempt to fit in with the wealthier families, a misstep I too made before Madeline took me under her wing? She'd told me she was bored at the Bank of America events her husband made her attend. "I need an ally, someone to have fun with," she'd said. "The other wives are too old or too nouveau." She tacitly acknowledged I fit into

the latter category when dispensing her first piece of advice: "Always remember, money screams, but wealth whispers."

But then came Russ' jack-o-lanterns. "Here's some pumpkins I decorated between Vicky's piano lesson and Ricky's soccer game!" he wrote. This was followed by photographic evidence of his carving excellence: Ziggy Stardust, the Eiffel Tower, and the shower scene from *Psycho*. They taunted me online. Later, they taunted me while I walked my pug, the tangled swirl of Greek Revivals and English Tudors falling away in my mind like an uninteresting landscape might as his pumpkins took center stage. Madeline repinned Ziggy Stardust, likely as a way to remind herself she once was edgier and had listened to more than just *Kidz Bop*. In case it wasn't a vanity repinning, though, I stressed that Russ' carvings were ill conceived. I reminded Madeline of her own ideas, pointing to the likely possibility of delinquent children in neighboring developments just waiting to muck up our ordinarily pristine roundabouts. I suggested they would seize this opportunity to smash his pumpkins to assert further their delinquency, Russ' décor serving as mere bait to entice these adolescents to act like savages.

But Russ was relentless. Later that evening he wrote, "Check out these cupcakes fashioned after witches! I whipped them up while my children played in their tree house!" I imagined the chocolate mousse from the pointy iced hats ringing Vicky and Ricky's heart-shaped mouths. I also imagined their blood sugar skyrocketing. My children's apples and peanut butter might not have been as photogenic, but I was preparing them to become more photogenic adults, the type who didn't need root canals and didn't have diabetes. This dedication made me feel like a martyr. Still, when I picked up my children from a play date the following afternoon, Emiline exclaimed, "Mrs. Morling made Mr. Kipling's cupcakes! I had two!" As she pushed her unopened lunch pail towards me, she added, "They were dee-lish-us! Yummers!"

"Use your words," I said, even though Emiline had used words. "Use prettier words. Grammatically correct words."

"You can't always push vegetables on us, ma," Ethan whined. "Mrs. Morling agrees."

"Don't sass me, especially in front of your younger sister," I said. I considered asking if Mrs. Morling planned on taking him to the dentist, but I knew it was ridiculous to attempt to have a rational conversation with a seven-year-old. How could ordinarily rational adults whom I considered friends begin paying more attention to Russ than me, though, not noticing the damage his pins caused? Poor eating habits which put children in nutritional jeopardy. Backtalk. Russ was a monster, a monster that was destroying my community and my children.

Like most monsters, Russ was ruthless. The next morning he wrote, "Look at this wreath I assembled using the berries and foliage I collected while walking the twins to school! Before their dismissal, I'm going to repaint our front door to better match it!" This pin soon was followed by images of their new aubergine door. I had been begging Andy to hire a painter to touch up ours for months, but when I showed him Russ' pin, he insisted it looked ostentatious. "You should appreciate our shabby chic look, Corrine," he said, a catchphrase I was certain he'd simply come across while perusing one of my *Southern Livings* on the toilet.

"I don't appreciate our shabby chic look," I said. "It's trendy." I hoped to appeal to his classic sensibilities or, more so, his desire to avoid spending money on styles that quickly

fell out of vogue. As I aged, I saw a definite need for an appendix to the Cliff's Notes for *Pride & Prejudice*, one that illustrated how most rich people get and stay rich by being stingy. I sometimes missed my mother's insistence on new school wardrobes each fall, filling my closet with cheap, unsturdy garments I easily could replace the following September. There was something exhilarating in knowing I didn't have to commit, a certain excitement an inexpensive asymmetrical blouse lent that a costly yet sensible wrap dress never could. I'd shopped enough with Madeline and Everly to train myself to spot classics on the racks and, by measures, begin to love them. Still, when my mother who had moved to Florida occasionally sent clothing for my birthday or Christmas, it sometimes proved difficult to add those presents to the donation pile.

"I'm sorry you feel that way," Andy said, giving Russ' pin another look. I should have been pleased that at least one person hadn't joined the cult of Russ, but this made me angrier. Andy's allegiance to Russ' ideas would have benefitted me or, at least in the immediate sense, my door.

I tried to ignore Russ' Pinterest by watching reality shows about housewives like myself and, while I still felt as glamorous as these women, I knew my life wasn't as interesting. Emiline and Ethan should have been enough, but they'd become ghosts of me, really. When couples consider children in the abstract, they often are drawn to the promise of unconditional love and dressing their offspring in perfect outfits. Perhaps the love part remains, but the fact that these children will want to assign stupid names to household pets and select their own garish attire is rarely considered. I was unable to orchestrate the ways they represented themselves and, by extension, me. Emiline recently wore pink carnation spandex to a roller skating party. Ethan gave the Fed-Ex guy the finger for no other reason besides being able. Our dog's name was Cowboy, a name I was forced to repeat in dog parks and whenever he tried to greet houseguests with unwanted jumps and barking.

Knowing I couldn't craft like Russ, I grew desperate to draw attention to myself in other ways. I considered engaging in catfights with my friends like the women on Bravo, but this seemed unlikely. Madeline was anorexic and, as a result, too frail to fight. Everly was Quaker. Russ was a man and, since it wasn't acceptable for us to hit each other, I found it inappropriate for Madeline and Everly to even consider him part of our inner circle. Perhaps I didn't need a catfight if I could just prove to my friends that I was a domestic goddess who loved her children more than Russ loved his, a trait I never imagined Madeline and Everly cared about until now.

Despite having plans to dine at the club with the Morlings, I took on some of the au pair's duties for a change, dumping water into a pot on the stove, preparing it for whole wheat pasta. I combed the market's weekly circular while I waited for the water to boil, listing items the au pair could purchase that I wouldn't ordinarily approve of, items the children loved like animal crackers and Pop Tarts. I justified my choices by clinging to the "high in calcium" labels I knew these items bore to lure in oblivious mothers. My children needed to smile more, and I was willing to loosen the reins if these small concessions made that possible.

Then, Russ pinned a photograph of the homemade bread and beef stew he concocted so his family could share a hearty meal together to kick off the weekend. Suddenly, my whole wheat pasta looked uninviting from its box, the jarred sauce beside it even more so. I tossed the not-yet-bubbling water into the sink. I phoned Madeline to tell her Andy was feeling unwell so we were unable to keep our plans. She likely only had room for one project in her life, one person who didn't fit automatically. I had to do something to stay in

her good graces before next seeing her, something that would prove I was more worthy of her attention than Russ.

"What's wrong with Andy," she asked.

"Could be bronchitis. Maybe bird flu," I said. While she rambled about a Korean shop downtown that sold designer medical masks should we need them, I pillaged Google for images of stews that went beyond Russ' pedestrian meat and potatoes. Disconnecting with Madeline, I settled on Boeuf Bourguignon. I pinned the photo and its recipe, claiming both as my own. I wrote, "Just a little French cooking for my children and sick husband on this chilly autumn night." Madeline immediately inquired about the brand of Cognac I'd used and if it was safe to allow minors to consume liquor-laced stew. Everly overlooked this discrepancy and repinned the recipe without follow-up questions. Russ wrote, "Peux-tu cuisine!?" Trying also to sound fluent, I responded, "bon appetite!" When he wrote, "merveilleux!" I was stumped, unable to come up with a single French word on my own. I Googled "obscure French phrases," but felt so anxious I simply bid adieu to Russ and the rest of our cul-de-sac rather than giving myself away. I knew I should have paid more attention to Mademoiselle Duncan in high school. I knew I should've insisted on a European au pair, instead of one from South America. Still, I was already in better spirits about the responses to my stew and, after ordering a pizza, I settled into an episode of *The Real Housewives of New York* while waiting for the au pair to return from picking up my children from ballet and karate.

\*\*\*

The questions about my stew persisted the following morning as I tried to field them, hunched over my laptop in bed. *Are you French? Is this a family recipe? Have you always had such culinary prowess?* I told all of those who asked that my inclination to make the dish came to me like a magic trick, that my inspiration was akin to any great artiste and that, once one discovered his or her gift for sculpture or music or food preparation, denying that calling was impossible.

But my followers demanded more recipes once they tested my first. I considered comparing my stew to a masterpiece, pointing out how it would have been better for many celebrities to sink into obscurity once they reached their pinnacles. Paul McCartney with the last Beatles' album, *Let It Be*, the title itself practically nudging him to disappear. Ice-T with NWA. The interest people had in my pins prevented me from stopping, though, drunk on their attention. Russ pinned an afghan he completed for his daughter's bed and I knew I quickly would lose the ground I'd gained if I didn't counter his creativity.

"Why did Madeline ask if I recently traveled outside of the country?" Andy asked as he entered our bedroom to adjust his tie in the full-length mirror. He leaned in to kiss me, but instead pulled away, likely noting my morning breath. "And why haven't you showered? You've been on that computer all morning."

"I told her you might have bird flu, or something like it. Just tell her work sent you to Egypt."

"Bank of America wouldn't do that," he said. "Besides, I work with her husband."

"Well make up something. I hate going out with the *Borlings* sometimes. Madeline always pushes her food around her plate to make it look like she's eating and it makes me feel like a pig."

"Then you better get out of bed and hit the gym before dinner tonight," Andy said. "I rescheduled." I didn't give him my usual affirmative speech before he headed to work on a Saturday morning, but he didn't seem to notice. Andy couldn't see with his ears the way I imagined a significant other should, detecting those smaller things that either were hinted at or left unsaid. He only saw with his eyes, thus he was disappointed not by my lying, but by my looking unkempt first thing in the morning.

My children begged me to let them play at the Kiplings, but instead I told them they could have free range of the television and eat unhealthy snacks all day. I also promised they could let Cowboy on the couch. If I was going to convince Russ and the rest of the neighborhood women that I was more talented, securing friendships for my children and me, Emiline and Ethan had to be implicated. While the au pair served them Eggo Waffles, peanut butter & jelly sandwiches, and Planters peanuts straight from the jar, I pinned photos of crème brulee French toast, peanut butter & jelly crepes, and bourbon pecan chicken. As they shoveled in these snacks, I coached them on what to tell everyone else. "If you want to go back to celery sticks and carrots, you can," I warned. "I would hate to have to do that to the two of you, though. You deserve to be spoiled."

After seeing my pins, Madeline called to see if we were still on for the club. "Andy never told me he rescheduled," I said. "I've already slaved over dinner for my family. I can't possibly skip out."

"We don't mind coming to you," she said. "I do love anything with bourbon!"

"Andy's probably contagious," I said. "Even though he went to work, he was up all night coughing."

"I can bring some of those designer medical masks we discussed," she said.

"Trust me. You'll want to stay far away for at least a couple of days."

When I texted Andy to explain we weren't going to the club again tonight, he said he would go to the club's bar alone. "I can't stand another night in," he wrote. I'm not sure what time it was when he came home because I was busy pinning images of meals and snacks I never made, meals and snacks that were being re-pinned at far greater rates than Russ' contributions. When Andy finally came to bed, I didn't bother asking about his night at the club because nights at the club were always the same. He quickly fell asleep while I continued to pin, the glow from my computer screen flickering in the reading glasses he forgot to remove. Despite his snoring, I also eventually slept well knowing there were people out there who wished their lives were more like mine.

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Over the next few weeks, I broadened my interests on Pinterest, moving from culinary creations to crafts and home décor. I pinned broaches, earrings, and necklaces. I pinned children's barrettes and headbands. I pinned greeting cards, doorstops, and paperweights. I pinned a chandelier.

I started knowing Andy by the gobs of toothpaste stuck to his side of our double-sink, a half-eaten English muffin left on a plate on the counter, dress shirts placed in a bag for our au pair to take to the cleaners. We rarely conversed when together, me bent over my laptop while he stared intently at the television, even during commercials.

I stopped allowing the Morling, Trickett, or Kipling children in our house, as their parents would have to drop them off and pick them up and, in doing so, they would notice I didn't have any of my crafts on display. I also stopped meeting Madeline and Everly for lunch, aware I had none of the handcrafted accessories they would expect to see paired with my outfits. Most days, I didn't change out of my sweats. I noticed Madeline and Everly had stopped repinning my creations, but their cold shoulders didn't bother me as much as they ordinarily would because women as far as Tuscaloosa, Boise and Tempe were repinning me.

Eventually, Everly cornered me in Target, our au pair unable to shop for me because she was traveling for her birthday, a trip she'd worked into her contract. "Did I do something to offend you?" she asked. "If so, I want to make amends." Her pacifist nature prevented her from ignoring the signs of a deteriorating friendship like a normal person might.

"I've been so busy with the children and Andy's pneumonia," I said. "It takes weeks to recover from an illness like that."

"Madeline thought Andy had bird flu."

"Heavens no," I said. "He would have to be quarantined were that the case."

"I thought I saw him at the club a few nights last week," she said. "Well, at least I thought I saw his car when I drove by."

"You know Andy. He's always go, go, go. I'm proud he's such a hard worker, but I do wish he'd listen to his doctor. He would've recovered much sooner!"

"Well, I'm not going to set foot outside of this store until you agree to have me to dinner," she said. "Your constant culinary pins have made me so hungry!" Aware the housewives on the shows I watched prided themselves on their abilities to throw memorable dinner parties and proud that Everly had just admitted out loud she was still paying close attention to my activity on Pinterest, I extended an invitation to her for the following night. I told her to invite Madeline as well. "We'll be there."

When I reached my car, I asked Siri to locate a caterer. "Fast, Siri," I added. "Fast." She recommended Mitch's Kitchen and, although it had five stars on Yelp, I'd seen the establishment a few times on the restaurant report for improperly storing meats and cheeses. Besides, I didn't trust Yelp users. Even Arby's had five stars, people utilizing phrases like "the perfect lunch spot" and "simply mouth-watering". Siri recommended the club, but Madeline and Everly would recognize any dish prepared there. Andy and I had a decent caterer for our wedding, but he was no longer in business.

Then, I remembered Shelley's brother, Louie, whom I heard had opened his own restaurant. During my second semester of college, my mother's boyfriend had cleared out her scarce savings, momentarily forcing me to leave behind school to help her. Shelley found me a full-time job managing a coffee shop where she worked as a barista and suddenly, rather than studying art history from learned professors in lecture halls, I spent most afternoons in the café staring at the images of Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera imprinted on the women's and

men's bathroom doors respectively. I stayed up late drinking cheap liquor and playing cards with Shelley to distract myself from my life. Louie had been attending culinary school and he often whipped up midnight snacks, saving us from pilgrimages to the all-night salad bar at Lancer's.

Soon, I'd met Andy, a business major studying at Wharton who frequented the café. Shelley adored him, despite his always coming with his girlfriend in tow. But Andy showed up solo one morning and specifically asked for Shelley, wanting her to prepare his dry cappuccino and dispense advice about his unexpected break-up. She was taking an exam at the community college, so I stepped up, sensing an opportunity to get out of that hellhole. I was far more attractive than Shelley, plus Andy was depressed, the perfect combination. "I was going to ask out Shelley today, but I never thought to pursue you," Andy had said. I never told Shelley about the conversation. By the end of that summer, Andy I were living together and I had no need to return to college or talk to Shelley or Louie again.

"Siri," I said. "Find Chef Louie Taylor." She pointed me to a location just seven miles west but, despite its proximity, I was certain Madeline and Everly had never ventured there. Louie Louie's Creole Catering had excellent reviews and, unlike Arby's, its pictures actually looked mouth-watering. The food also looked far more sophisticated than his quesadillas and pizza rolls that had once impressed me. I called right away.

"Corri!" he said. "I thought you were dead!"

"It's Corrine now," I said. As I placed my order, he insisted he needed to prep the food onsite due to a recent grease fire. Still, I was determined to make it work and I figured he could use the money.

"I'll pick you up. You're right next to the Pizza Hut on Main, right?" I asked, aware I couldn't risk someone spotting a catering truck in my driveway.

"That Pizza Hut's a daycare center now. Drop-a-Tot."

"Then I'll pick you up in front of Drop-a-Tot," I said. "You have to be out of my house before three, so what time should I get you?"

"Eleven." As we negotiated price, I thought of all the times Shelley and I walked to that Pizza Hut, playing Joan Jett or Journey on the jukebox and trying to capture the attention of the pimple-faced high school boys who worked there. It had been the highlight of our adolescence.

When Andy returned from work, I told him he instead would need to attend the children's Halloween parade the following afternoon at one. "But they'll be devastated that you're not there," he protested. "What if they win?"

"They won't win," I said. "Besides, I have a mammogram scheduled for the morning. I found a disturbing lump, like a pea." I felt ashamed for saying so, but I'd just been watching *The Real Housewives of New Jersey*, so Amber's story was what came out.

"Why didn't you start with that?" he asked. "I have an important meeting in the morning, but I can go to the parade."

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As I pulled up to Drop-a-Tot, I waved Louie to my car. "You look great," I said. He'd aged, probably because he wasn't using the right skin products. "Throw your stuff in my trunk, then get in the back seat."

"The back seat? I should charge you extra for being difficult, especially after not hearing from you in almost ten years," he said. "You seem—different. Still painting?"

"I don't have time for stuff like that," I said. "Shit!" I read a text from Andy: "Can't make parade. Had to reschedule meeting to afternoon."

"Excuse me?" Louie asked.

"Oh, nothing. Just lay across the back seat. Please."

"Well, this *is* going to cost you extra," he said, though he did as I'd requested.

"Whatever," I said. "As long as no one sees you. I can't let anyone know I had help making this meal and my neighbors notice everything."

"Damn, Corri," he said. "Sounds messed up." Though he seemed to accept my explanation, I grew more and more nervous he'd pop up at any moment as the Dollar Trees and boarded up houses began to be replaced by yoga studios and homes with sprinkler systems. Madeline, Everly, and Russ shouldn't be on the road—they'd already dropped off their kids at school and it wasn't yet time for lunch. Rush hour had passed and their husbands and wife already were settled into work. As we drove by the club, however, I almost was certain I spotted Andy's car in its parking lot. I was angry at the thought of him skipping out on the parade, yet having enough time for breakfast. I also was angry at the thought of who he might be having breakfast with, but I knew I couldn't stop with Louie in my backseat. I didn't let him out of the car until I'd safely pulled into the garage and closed its door behind me.

While he prepared blackened catfish, fried okra, and red beans and rice, I snapped photographs with my phone of his process, carefully cropping out Louie before pinning a few. He was working faster than I'd expected and there was a good chance I could still make it to the children's parade. Also, the images I shared had been quickly repinned. I felt a surge of excitement each time my work was shared, like anything was possible, like my name was on the tips of so many people's tongues. "Don't you ever put down your phone?" Louie asked. "You're not as talkative as you used to be."

"I have work-related stuff to tend to," I explained. His messiness made me nervous. My house needed to look pristine for the dinner party, so I cleaned around him while he worked. I thought of how I used to take comfort in his sister's messiness during my unexpected return from college, as it was something stable, something that seemed like it would never change. "How's Shelley?"

"Nearly finished her PhD," he said. "Took her a bit longer to get started, but hey, that's often the case with most of the interesting people I know." Then, he added, "Maybe there's still hope for you?" Even though he was always a jokester, I couldn't help feeling like this was a jab.

Rather than asking what Shelley had studied or where, I headed towards the dining room to set the table with placemats I'd ordered on Etsy, careful there were no tags or signatures that would give away their true origin. I pinned photos of the settings once I'd completed my inspection, then re-inspected and pinned other items in my living room and foyer that I also had purchased through Etsy and planned to pass off as my own. Like the food, these images were quickly repinned. I noticed Russ hadn't pinned anything in days. Perhaps he felt overwhelmed by my output. Perhaps he realized he needed to step aside and let someone with true talent shine.

Louie called from the other room to tell me the meal was complete but, before I could reach the kitchen, he shrieked. When I reached him, Andy was waving a spatula over his head.

"I knew you were cheating," Andy screamed at me. "Why else would you let yourself go so much? You barely change out of your pajamas when you're around me and you're up until all hours chatting online with this—?"

"I don't care if I knew you way back, you people are strange" Louie said, rushing towards the closest door. "I'll be sure to mail you the bill." With that, he let himself out. I was relieved he was gone and even more relieved none of my neighbors would spot him, as the parade was about to start.

"Everly and Madeline must know all about the two of you, too. No wonder you've been keeping them from me," Andy said, now waving the spatula at me. "How was the doctor? I decided to meet you there, but the secretary said you never had an appointment."

"I don't have cancer," I said. "But I'm also not cheating on you. Can you say the same? Weren't you at the club this morning?"

"Yeah, the club right across from your doctor's office," he said.

I wanted to tell him I'd hired the chef, a dear childhood friend, to teach me how to cook Creole for him, but I was distracted by a notification on my phone. Russ had repinned me for the first time, sharing the catfish I'd spent the past two days stressing over. I knew I'd arrived. He was the real deal and in that moment I fully understood what I'd been up against, as well as the weight of Russ' admitting publically that I'd done something noteworthy he first hadn't considered. Andy tried to swipe my phone, but I ducked.

"I'm going to stay with my brother for a while," Andy yelled. I knew he'd be back by morning. His brother had married a Baptist who didn't drink and they didn't belong to a club. I'd deal with my husband tomorrow, but first I had to execute without him the most repinnable dinner party possible, a glimpse into an exclusive world where I did the picking and choosing, where I decided what was elegant and what was tacky, where I was what others aspired to be.

**Food Policy**  
**by**  
**Bob Schildgen**

The cigar is chewed to nothing,  
there's earwigs on the brie,  
but the dumpster's flowin' over  
and there's plenty here for free.

O dumpster so abundant,  
O emperor of ice cream,  
O mine of cans and bottles,  
O source of all, supreme:

Aluminum from Jamaica,  
crab from Afghanistan,  
salmon from Nebraska,  
caviar from Iran.

Let the moon shine down upon us  
in our state of utmost glee.  
Look! Cabbages and donuts  
and knobs of broccoli,

and burgers barely bitten—  
whole sausages intact  
on chow mein noodles nesting  
in mushrooms from Iraq.

Aluminum from Jamaica,  
veal cutlets from Tangiers,  
and from the heart of Chile,  
six asparagus spears.

**The Day That Went Hobnaciously**  
**(somewhere in the region of Nittle Wibbet)**  
**by**  
**Han Adcock**

It was Thursday. Thursdays are good for wandoodling your time, but it's better to put any Time you don't need into one of those big, green plastic thingies and leave it out for the Midnight Collector. He always refuses to take it but hey ho.

Who invented Thursdays anyway? I stood on the decrepit corner between Pointless Walk and Eville Avenue and I demanded to know the answer. The bins outside number twenty-four were so sparkly but still, they only answered with a silent reflection. Silent reflection is a good practice to keep in public, but like so many other people, I—

A cavernous, dark hole opened itself in the space before my nose. It splotched itself into a giant eye.

"We meet again," it told me.

"No, I'm sorry... Who are you?"

"It is I, the rightful heir of—"

"Yes, I can see you're an eye, but you've no hair to speak of. Or arms. Or legs, for that matter. In fact, why don't I just drop dead from fright now and save us both the bother?"

"Will you let me finish? I am Hexon, the Lord of Time and Ruler of Wasted Hell. We meet again."

"We do?"

"Yes."

Pause for thought. I did not remember studying for my A levels in the same room as a Ruler of Wasted Hell. Nor did I recollect meeting one at a party, bonking one or even accepting an Amazon delivery from one.

"You've lost me," I said.

A vague body attached itself to the bottom of the eye, though sadly with no other facial features. It held my gaze very steadily.

"Are you not Morton Windlas Binnock, the Third Erlking of Thodroe Wood?"

I turned around and checked the label on the waistband of my trousers.

"Nope."

"But you must be. I calculosed the co-ordinates to the nearest dinimal, I confudged the century to within the closest day... this is unfortunate. Do you know the Third Erlking of

Thodroe? Are you meeting him at this junction, perhaps?"

"No," I said, feeling my patience skiffle away.

"Oh. Well, what are you doing?"

"Nothing."

"*Nothing?*"

"Yes!" I bulleted. "Can't an innocent stander-by be doing nothing on a Thursday afternoon?"

"No," said the Ruler of Wasted Hell. I was really starting to dislike the man. Eye. Whatever.

"If yo must know, I was walking."

"May I join you?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"I'm busy."

"You said you were doing nothing!"

"Yes, but I'm busy."

"Doing what?"

"Nothing!"

"I demand that you bring me to the Third Erlking of Thodroe. Now."

"Or what?"

"Or I will subject you to cruel and inhumane torture."

"What, like, making me read my gas bills?"

"Worse."

"Fixing my boiler?"

"I'm not stupid. You know where the Erlking is. You're a ploy sent by him to skonk me from my task. March. Now."

"Actually, it's August."

"Move it!"

We moved. Though the corner of Eville Avenue and Pointless Walk is a skanky, rusty cesspit

—er, I mean, a scenic, rustic spot—somebody must have mistaken it for acne and burst it. Everything there was burst. Windows, garbage sacks, doors. Nobody lived there any more, yet someone had been polishing the bins. Bit late now that the people had bolturated.

I led Mr. Eye down the street, across the pedestrian crossing, past the cinema and the corner shop.

"This is very strange ground we're treading on. What's it made of?" the Ruler of Wasted Hell asked.

"Pedestrians."

"Not pelicans?"

"No, we ran out of pelicans."

"Why?"

"Because we ran out of grit."

"Why?"

"Because the town froze like a geriatric polar bear back in 2019. I don't know why. Maybe it just felt like it."

I led him down a flagstone path flanked on both sides by ridiculous garden ornaments. We stopped on a hedgehoggish doormat reading "When life gives you half a box of Turkish Delight, don't forget to put it in the fridge next to the lemons." It was a very wide doormat. In front of it was a door. It being the custom, I knocked on it.

Mrs. Ringwurm—that was her name—opened the door, cat in one hand, watering-can in the other. How did she pull on the door-handle? Perhaps the cat did it for her. Her hair was as white as Dover chalk. Her smile was limitless. Her jamjar head looked very sweet right then.

Hexon, Lord of Time and Ruler of Wasted Hell, fixed a burning iris on me (the only one he had) and spoke in low, ombly tones.

"I ask you to take me to Morton, the Third Erlking of Thodroe and Grand High King of All Space, and you show me... *this*?"

I was really starting to lose my findle with the guy. "Listen, Pus-Pupil," I said, while he spluttered and became bloodshot, "this woman is Morton Windlas because you asked me to take you to him. So treat her with respect."

"But Morton is not a human. Neither is he a woman!"

"Good morning," Mrs. Ringwurm said. Neither of us had the heart to correct her. She invited us in, told us she wouldn't be a moment and finished watering the cat.

"I wish you wouldn't do that," it said.

"Now then," Arabella Ringwurm said, and plopped the cat up on a washing-line which

stretched across her lounge. She hung it by the scruple of its neck next to a long line of other cats. "What is the problem?"

"Are you Morton Windlas?" Hexon checked.

"No... but I can be who you like, for a small fee." She winked.

"Madam," Hexon said. "What are you suggesting?"

"I'm an amateur actor-performer," was the answer. "What did you *think* I was suggesting?"

Hexon's pupil had dilated even further than I had thought normal, and a faint pink tinge crept around its edges. "I must apologise."

"Listen to me, my good fellow," the cat said, dripping and swonging. "Never, ever apologise. Life's not long enough for apologies."

"It is when you're immortal."

"Oh? Sorry."

"Doo be doo." Mrs. Ringwurm left the room and came back with a machete. Seating herself on the antique sofa, she removed her fellufous slipper and began to cut her toenails. Boomerangs of dead kerratin flew from her blurring hands, squadrons of them, and buried themselves in the furniture.

Hexon was weeping. "Madam. You have seven toes on your left foot." A small piece of nail dislodged from his cornea and twinkled down to the ground.

"Seven toes on each."

"Just what I was afraid of."

When she had done the other pedalo-sized foot, the antique rose from the antique sofa and adjusted her glasses.

"What business do you have with Morton Windlas of Thodroe?"

"You know him?" I said, but she ignored me.

"Not much." Hexon shuffled about. "Just a fight to the death, really."

She showed us around the house. In the kitchen was a vat bibbling with something of a hue between yellow and purple. Around the sink sprawled an intelligent fungoid life-form. Crystals grew from the fractured remains of the cupboards, and once they touched the floor they segued into a forest of tall, crazed glass structures, green and blue and pink, tubular, swollen in places, most higher than our heads. Nothing you wouldn't struggle to drink out of.

"Some of that was once my wedding glasses," Mrs. Ringwurm said, while Hexon gazed at it all and softly mumbicked:

"The catacombs of Kendrigror..."

I had no idea what was going on. As we climbed the tortuous staircase which both zigzagged and spiralled around, Mrs. Ringwurm said, "This is the waiting area."

"Sorry," I said. "But your stairs are a waiting area?"

"Not the stairs, the whole house, silly."

"For who? Waiting for what?"

"It depends."

The landing was a hillock of skin, still warm and in need of a wash. As we trod the pores I detected a faint heartbeat, and a pair of lips up ahead opened. I supposed they were lips. The teeth were like standing stones in a prehistoric monument.

"All right?" the landing-mouth said. "What'll it be?"

"The usual, Wroth."

"Right-ho."

I struggled to keep my footing during this exchange. The mouth closed, the skin beneath us sludgerated and we found ourselves walking into an intrepid nostril. If you've never seen an intrepid nostril before, believe me, this was one.

"And this is the bathroom..."

The bathroom was not a sinus, but an en suite. Burning orbs drifted. Something unearthly sang to itself behind the shower curtain. The cold tap dripped blood. I was expecting some kind of explanation, but received none.

"Oh," the Ruler of Wasted Hell breathed. "The Singing Soul-Curtain of Morganis."

"One moment," Arabella said. "I have to take this call."

She snapped and pinged as she grew an extra inch in stature. Her hair darkened. The hair on her arms grew thicker and blacker, and she glared down at me.

"Don't be late home," she grunneled. "Dinner's in the oven."

"Uncle Max?" I gasped, and then the changes reversed themselves.

"Sorry about that," Mrs. Ringwurm said, a tad out of breath. She showed us the spare room, which was stacked full of garbage (whose isn't?) cloths and polish, and...

"You're the secret bin-polisher?" I said. "Why?"

"Ah," Hexon sighed. "Just like Morton."

"Excuse me?" I said. "Hello?"



"By the way, your Uncle Maximal asked me to reverse the charges," Mrs. Ringwurm told me, though her gaze was reflected in Hexon's eye. She waved a hand nebbily. "I hope that's all right?"

"Fine." I was impatient. "What's going on? How did you do that? Do you two know each other?"

"It's like this." The soggy cat squinked up the stairs to see me out. A sliver of toenail protruded from its ribcage. By rights, the animal should have been dead. "The house is a waiting area, a point of contact between the dimensions, my dear. Our Arabella is the host, the clairvoyant, the... loudspeaker, if you will."

"I see," I said. "That makes sense, seeing as we lost Uncle Max down the back of the sofa when I was ten. Yes. So...?"

"For now, she will be Morton Windlas Binnock, Third Erlking of Thodroe Wood, until she grows tired of the present company." The cat looked at me coolly out of crossed eyes.

"Then what?"

"Then she will feed him to the fungus. Of course."

"Of course."

"We call him Bill."

"Bill the Fungus. Of course. Speaking of bills, I'm meant to pay the charges for Uncle Max's call, aren't I?"

"Yes you do. Don't worry, it's all arranged."

The moggy opened the door and melted. The Midnight Collector was on the other side.

## **This Is Probably Not The Right Time To Tell My Wife About My Awesome Movie Idea**

**by  
Doug Cornett**

From above, probably on a helicopter, we see an island in pandemonium. In the center of the island there's a volcano that is just spitting magma all over the place, smoke pouring upward, the whole place is rumbling. But what is that we see? Down at the base of the volcano, somehow not engulfed in lava? We zoom in. It's a hero, and he's, like, meditating up on one leg. He's got his shirt off and he's ripped. Then... his eyes snap open!

This is how I would start the pitch to my wife, but based on the way her lips are pursed and how red her face is and the curse word she just muttered, I'm guessing this is probably not the right time to tell her about my awesome movie idea.

My wife always says I need a creative outlet, and honestly, I can't think of anything more creative than this: *The Island of Misfit Kickboxers*. I know what she'd say: it's been done, but hold on, listen to this—they're not *trained* kickboxers. They're just, like, normal dudes and maybe a woman, too, who suddenly discover that they can kickbox. And they're *amazing* at it. And they're marooned on an island with an active volcano.

If she weren't wondering out loud in that high-pitched voice about what I've been doing all day, my wife would probably say that it sounds like just another mindless action flick. But get this: they're also all having existential crises. Like, one guy is an accountant or something and deep down he's thinking, *accounting? Really? All those numbers?* Bammo: now you're bringing in the art-house crowd.

My wife seems pretty pissed at me for this whole "you forgot to pick up our daughter from summer camp." But, call me crazy, "camp" makes me think of an overnight stay. Not just until 4pm. If we're talking camp, in my opinion, we should be talking sleeping over in a cabin. But this gets me thinking: maybe the island of the misfit kickboxers is really, like, a *summer camp* for misfit kickboxers. They kickbox all day and maybe water-ski and then there's a campfire on the beach with songs, s'mores, the works. They sneak out of their bunks at night and make out on the beach. There's a rival camp of expert Jiu Jitsu people on another island and they're always ready for an attack. Those people are a bunch of goons with ponytails. Just spitballing here.

And now my wife is yelling. Yep, she just opened the letter from the IRS and found out that I never filed our taxes even though I said I definitely did. I've never seen her eye do that before; kind of bulging but also twitching. She's not in a good place right now for constructive feedback on this project. This isn't really a nuanced headspace that's she's in. And I get that. I do.

They're misfits because nobody understands them. Heck, they don't even understand themselves. But that's because they've all got the heart of kickboxers and they've never realized it. They've got the feet and fists, too.

If my wife weren't throwing all of my possessions onto the front lawn right now, I'd tell her about the tribe of Amazon lady-warriors who, it turns out, also live on the island. They're

basically like Vikings but female and very sexy. But tasteful. They could either be friend or foe; when my wife's heart rate goes down, maybe I'll get her thoughts.

*It doesn't add up*, is what the accountant thinks about his life, and I just made that up. He has that thought while he roundhouses a ponytailed goon's head off.

Man, this could really be good. Like, *important* good. When my wife gets back from wherever she's speeding off to, we'll workshop this thing.

**Debating the Draft**  
by  
**Maria Bonsanti**

I have this need  
to sometimes rhyme  
my words, my phrases  
give them time

to forge an image  
more concrete,  
'cause more recalled  
dressed in a beat;

with strum of lyrics  
in the lines,  
'cause if unmetred  
lose some shine.

Diversify  
or versify ...  
an endless battle  
waged on high

with thoughts of muses  
clashing sound,  
'cause when at odds  
they slam to ground

– the thoughts, not muses –  
pen-impaled,  
'cause if a rhyme wins  
print derailed.

## **Former African Despot Mobutu Sese Seko is a Subway Conductor on the 6 Train**

**By  
Emily Buckler**

Spring Street. Stand clear of the closing doors. This train will skip Bleecker—I do not care for it. Transfers to the 4, B, D, F, and M trains must use my brother Rodney's special car service.

This is Astor Place, transfer to Rodney. Rodney accepts cash, traveler's checks, money order, VISA, MasterCard, attractive women, and this bubbly pink champagne I like. Fourteenth Street is next.

Attention, passengers. We are experiencing a momentary delay. We will begin moving shortly once we receive signal clearance... and a passenger provides an appropriate gift.

This is Fourteenth. Transfer to the L, N, Q, 4, 5, and 6 trains, unless you are that beautiful woman in the first car wearing the leopard print coat. You shall transfer to me.

Stand clear of the closing doors. The next person to hold the doors will be publicly executed. Twenty-third Street is next.

Twenty-third Street. This is a Parkchester-bound 6 train, making all local stops until Fifty-third Street. At Fifty-third Street, this train will experience significant delays while I hand over conducting duties to my first-born son.

Twenty-eighth Street. Man holding the doors: Come to the conductor's window, please.

## Contributor Biographies



**Christina Dalcher** is a linguist and novelist who prefers gin to small children. Find her short work in *Zetetic*, *Maudlin House*, *Pidgeonholes*, and other child-free corners of the literary ether. [www.christinadalcher.com](http://www.christinadalcher.com)



After a rather extended and varied second childhood in New Orleans (street musician, psych-tech, riverboat something-or-other, door-to-door poetry peddler, etc.), **Matt Dennison's** work has appeared in *Rattle*, *Bayou Magazine*, *Redivider*, *Natural Bridge*, *The Spoon River Poetry Review*, and *Cider Press Review*, among others. He has also made [videos](#) with poetry videographers Michael Dickes, Swoon, and Marie Craven.



**Kathryn Paulsen's** prose and poetry have been published in *New Letters*, *West Branch*, the *New York Times*, et al. She also writes for stage and screen and earned an MFA in film at Columbia University. For fiction and playwriting she's been awarded residence grants at Yaddo, the MacDowell Colony, Ledig House, and other retreats. She currently lives in New York City, but grew up all over the country (as part of an Air Force family) and has roots in many places. Her novels are represented by Sam Hiyate of The Rights Factory. She occasionally blogs at [ramblesandrevs.blogspot.com](http://ramblesandrevs.blogspot.com).



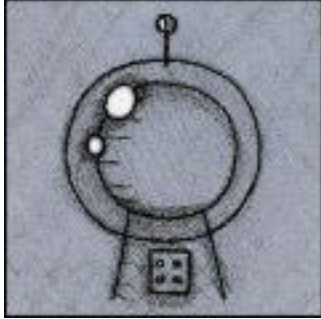
**Anna Della Zazzera** spends her free time writing about ghouly ghastly things and drawing tastefully half-naked ladies. She lives in Ottawa, Canada, where she works as a makeup artist. Follow her here: @litwitharuby.



**Lindsay A. Chudzik** received her MFA in Creative Writing from Virginia Commonwealth University. Her one-act plays have appeared in a number of festivals and Lindsay's short stories have appeared or are forthcoming in *Dogwood: A Journal of Poetry & Prose*, *Ghost Town*, *Haunted Waters Press*, and *Map Literary*, among others. Her creative nonfiction has been anthologized and her short story, "Check Yes If You Like Us," was a finalist for the 2015 Dogwood Prize. Currently, she is an Assistant Professor of Writing at Virginia Commonwealth University and facilitates creative writing workshops for ex-offenders at OAR in Richmond, Virginia.



Biographically speaking, **Bob Schildgen** (aka "Mr. Green") was managing editor of *Sierra*, the national magazine of the Sierra Club, for 8 years, and since 2005 he has been writing a [popular column and blogs](#) for them. A collection of these columns, *Hey Mr. Green*, was published in 2008. Woody Harrelson's blurb on the book claimed that "Mr. Green's cranky humor makes environmental living fun." His poetry has appeared in *The Atlanta Review*; *Occupoetry*; *Peace or Perish: A Crisis Anthology*, and elsewhere. He was brought up on a farm on the west coast of Wisconsin, and migrated to Berkeley, California, some time ago.



**Han Adcock** is a writer of short stories, short long stories, and poetry, ranging from the humorous to the bizarre. He lurks in a strange corner of Lincolnshire, England, where it always rains. You can find him at [www.facebook.com/wyrdstories](http://www.facebook.com/wyrdstories), or on Twitter as @Erringrey, or on Wordpress at [inspirationandlaughs.wordpress.com](http://inspirationandlaughs.wordpress.com) when he isn't knee-deep in a puddle with a duck on his head. Sadly, the duck has no blog.



**Doug Cornett** is a writer and high school teacher living in Portland, Oregon. He was awarded the Denise Marcil Prize for fiction at Skidmore College, as well as first prize in the 2015/16 William Van Dyke Short Story Contest from *Ruminate Magazine*. His fiction has been nominated for multiple Pushcart Prizes. His work has previously appeared or is forthcoming in *McSweeney's Internet Tendency*, *Lime Hawk*, *Fiction Southeast*, *Permafrost Magazine*, and elsewhere. He is a monthly blogger for *Ploughshares*.



**Maria Bonsanti** is a lover (and writer) of haiku and other short-form poetry. Probably because she's 4'10".





**Emily Buckler** is an editor and writer in New York. Her work has appeared in *The Southampton Review* and *Open Palm Print*. An MFA candidate in creative writing and literature at Stony Brook University, she lives in Brooklyn.