

◇ Defenestration ◇

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Table of Contents

TS Hendrik, "An Egg, an Ogg, and a Grog"	2
Thomas Cavazos, "To a Distant Lover"	5
Jennifer Pullen, "Once Upon a Bed Time Dreary"	6
Susan Chertkow, "My Fairy Garden"	8
Bryan Thao Worra, Two Poems	10
Darry Dinnell, "Inch-High Girlfriend"	11
Katherine Cowley, "The Last Bathroom"	13
Charles Edward Wright, "Salad Days"	19
KJ Hannah Greenberg, "Ott Toby"	20
Anton Rose, "A <i>Game of Thrones</i> Senryu"	22
John Domenichini, "Girt by Side Effects"	23
Grace Marshan, "encroachment"	27
Christina Dalcher, "Go Badgers!"	28
Contributor Biographies	32

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An Egg, an Ogg, and a Grog
by
TS Hendrik

Ogg and Grog strolled through the beautiful prehistoric environment. The sun was shining brightly, and the air warm, with just the slightest chance of Ice Age. All around the world seemed to be at peace.

"What a lovely day it is in 3000 B.C.," Ogg proclaimed.

"B.C.? What's that?" Grog asked.

"Before Christ. It's the other one I can never remember."

"I have no idea what you're talking about."

Ogg Frowned. "Me neither. Hey, what's that bird doing?"

The bird in question was hunkered down over a nest. Beads of sweat clung to its brow as it tried to squeeze something out. A few grunts later, and a white shelled offspring plopped out. The tired mother gazed upon it happily before falling into a well-earned sleep.

"I think that bird just pooped out a rock." Grog exclaimed.

"Egg-mazing!" Ogg added.

The two circled in for a closer look. Ogg lifted the bird so that Grog could recover the precious stone. Once in hand, Ogg replaced the sleeping bird back on its nest. The two took turns holding the gem, twisting it every which way. Neither had ever seen a bird dropping quite like that.

"It's a miracle," breathed Grog.

"We should throw it at Matog," said Ogg.

"Yes," Grog agreed enthusiastically. "Let us throw poop at our friend, that we may laugh."

And so the two set out on a great journey to visit their friend. Matog lived two hills over -A fair bit to walk. But that was alright. The day was perfect for walking. Along the way they managed to club no less than 20 animals. A good afternoon's hunt for the boys.

When at last they crested the second hilltop, they could make out their friend down below. Matog was washing his loin cloth in the stream that ran beside his cave. A fire cracked and snarled next to his naked body. The two men did their best to sneak up on Matog so as not to alert him to their prank.

As soon as they got close enough, Ogg and Grog hollered at him. When he turned around, Ogg pelted him in the face. The stone split into pieces upon impact, dripping a yellow goo down his face. Matog scowled and was about to yell at them when a bit of the yellow ran into his mouth. He licked at it, pondering the taste.

"He's eating the bird poop," Ogg laughed.

"Not poop," Matog responded. "Whatever it is though, it's delicious."

Ogg and Grog looked at each other, shrugged, then each dipped a finger in the yellow. As they tasted the goo off Matog's face, their eyes brightened with the new flavor.

"That is one magical bird," Grog stated.

"Egg-strodinary," Ogg agreed.

"What are you talking about?" Matog grunted.

After they told Matog about the bird, he insisted on seeing it for himself. The three trekked back to where the bird was no longer nesting, but instead pondering its empty nest. Grog picked the bird up and turned it upside down. He poked at the belly hoping it would squeeze out another delightful stone. Instead the bird squawked angrily. Grog put it back down disappointed.

"Maybe it's broken?" Ogg suggested,

Matog, clearly the scholar of the three suggested they wait till morning to see if it needed to recharge. They all agreed and left to their respective homes, intent on coming back in the morning. Each dreamed of tasting that stone again.

In the morning they found, just as Matog had theorized, a new stone, freshly pushed out by the sleeping bird. The three took it to Grog's home, careful not to drop it. As they walked, each had to have his own turn holding the magic stone. Back at Grog's they smashed it in a bowl. Ogg poked the yellow globe that came out. Amazingly, it popped. They each dipped their fingers in, enjoying the smooth, creamy, flavor.

"Amazing," said Grog.

"Life changing," nodded Matog.

"Egg-zistential," Ogg rounded out.

It became a new ritual for them. Each morning they would gather and relieve the bird of its stone and eat it. The bird eventually became wise to them and periodically changed locations. This would cause them go on a special stone hunt.

"I wonder," said Matog after collecting the stone one morning, "how it would taste if we put it over fire, like with meat?"

Carefully they set about using the stone bowl to cook it. After they tasted it, there was no going back. From then on it was always cooked. However they were beginning to run into a new problem. Ogg, Grog, and Matog were three large men. Splitting one magic stone was hardly satisfying.

They decided the solution would be to leave the bird alone for a while. Let it build up a stack of magic stones which they would then eat together one Sunday morning, as a special

occasion. Not for breakfast, and not for Lunch, but a special meal between the two.

When the three of them did return to the nest, they found something they never expected. Instead of the stockpile of stones they were expecting, they found the bird standing over just one. Astoundingly, the stone was cracking and something was coming out of the stone. Little by little a beak poked and nipped till after a last big burst, out toppled a tiny chick.

"The magic stone makes baby birds," Matog said in wonder.

"Did not see that coming," Grog added.

"My sentiments Egg-zactly," said Ogg.

The other two turned to Ogg.

"Why you keep doing that?" Grog asked.

"What?" Ogg queried back.

"Saying "Egg" all the time when pronouncing words," Matog replied.

"Have I? Egg? I didn't realize. Maybe it's the magic stone making me do it."

Grog nodded. "Makes sense. In that case, I suggest we call the stone an Egg."

They all agreed. They also decided to leave the chick be. They reasoned that if the egg would produce more birds, eventually there'd be lots of eggs with more chick-liquid to eat. On the walk back home, Matog was particularly vexed. As they neared Grog's cave, he decided to speak what was on his mind:

"Which came first?" he asked the other two.

"How do you mean?" Grog asked back.

"Well, if the bird comes from the egg and they egg from the bird, which one comes first?"

Neither had an answer for him. But that night, all three of them lay awake in their beds, unable to sleep.

To a Distant Lover
by
Thomas Cavazos

These winter nights know not your gentle touch,
Your fingers running wild against your skin.
My darling, this I ask (think it not much:)
To be your partner, privy to your sin.

Cruel, unkind nymph! Why do you tease me so?
Am I not faithful? Call; do I not come
On winged feet? Mercurial, or slow?
But thine gaze meets not mine, and I am numb.

Your kisses: only saved for other men!
Your smile, your laugh, your lips: meant not for me!
I see you, my love, every night. But then?
The deed is done, the light goes out, you flee.

But still, this thing I love more than the rest:
The heart beneath your pixelated breast

Once Upon a Bed Time Dreary

by
Jennifer Pullen

Once upon a time there was a child who had the misfortune to be born in a kingdom with some extremely socially sensitive fairies. *Shush, you asked for Sleeping Beauty, and so that's what I'm giving you. I know I'm not reading it, I'm telling it, that's what people used to do all the time, you know. When? Once upon a time, that's when. Anyway. So once upon a time.*

Once there was a king and queen who wanted a child so much, that when one was finally born they issued the invitations to the christening in a rush and forgot to invite all of the local fairies, which was a very bad thing to forget. They invited three good fairies and forgot the more morally gray one. They would have been much better off not inviting any fairies so that none of them could have felt picked on. *Trust me on this, sweetie, don't have parties and invite everyone who works at your office except one persons. It will go poorly, and invitations to fairies work exactly the same.*

So the day came for the party, and many people dressed in fine silks and velvets (in other words, generally overburdened with socially constructed symbols of wealth such as jewels and really big hair) attended to give the baby gifts. The king and queen watched the beautiful gifts pile up, and thought they should have a baby every year, because nobles never gave up so many valuables so willingly during taxation time. After all of the humans piled their costly presents on long tables, the fairies headed towards the royal cradle, floating on clouds of pixie dust with brilliant sorbet colored hair floating behind them. One blessed the baby with extreme beauty, another with a heavenly voice, and then, before the third could give her blessing, the fourth fairy (the morally gray one) burst into the throne room, trailing guards in her wake whom she'd hexed to think she was an expected guest. She floated just like the other faeries, and had hair that looked like bubble filled water, but her expression was stormy. She felt self-conscious about her watery hair, about how, if she shook it, everyone got wet, and she knew that people left her out because they didn't like her. They blamed all bad weather on her, she was certain of it. *Why did she think everyone hated her? You don't think fairies can be self-conscious? Just let me tell the story. Fairies are people, or almost people, and people have all kinds of irrational fears. Just like your father thinks Mark at work has the hots for me, even though Mark is gay.*

The self-conscious water-fairy scattered water droplets all over the marble floors, and the guards, coming out of her spell, hurried to get orange cones so that no one slipped. But dangerous water puddles weren't enough for her. She was determined that someone would pay for her humiliation. So she looked down at the cradle and cursed the baby to prick her finger on a spinning wheel on her 16th birthday and die. She had a rather loose concept of what death meant, being immortal herself, but she felt she had to say something severe, so she said death, assuming it was like a tree losing its leaves and then sleeping for a time before bursting into renewed life. *What is immortality? Well, it's like one of those stupid video games that your brother plays, where people fall off cliffs and then reappear at the top an infinite number of times. Yes, I know it doesn't work like that in real life, and I'm glad you know too.* So the fairy, being confused about death, floated off, scattering water, feeling a bit better about herself, at least until the next time she felt slighted, which would be soon.

The third sorbet-fairy changed the curse, which she said was the best that she could do, so that the girl would fall asleep for a hundred years, or until she was woken up by a suitably passionate kiss. *True love's kiss? That wouldn't make sense, sixteen years isn't enough time to make anyone fall truly in love with her, and sixteen year olds don't have cemented personalities anyway. Remember that. I changed the story a bit. Shush.* Of course, the third fairy could have undone the curse, but that would have made the water-fairy mad at her, and she wasn't going to bring that upon herself. So instead she changed the curse, figuring that a hundred years was more than enough time for her petulant fellow fairy to lose interest in a mortal princess.

The king and queen were quite rationally upset about the curse, so they had all of the spinning wheels and all of the spinners moved to a neighboring kingdom, which conveniently had very inexpensive wage rates. Interestingly, while trying to save their daughter, the king and queen invented out-sourcing. *Which is why you can have cheap shoes put together by starving children in Bangladesh. Hurray. No, not hurray, I was being sarcastic. Of course they didn't burn the spinning wheels, that's an asinine thing to do. Why? Because they couldn't possibly destroy the only technology available to them for making thread. After all they wouldn't have had time to invent a new way, and without thread to put on looms, they'd all have to go naked. A naked and very cold kingdom. That would be worse than the curse. Yes, yes, I'll finish the story.*

Inevitably they didn't manage to get all of the spinning wheels because people buried them in their back yards and hid them under floor boards, and so the poor little girl pricked her finger and fell asleep, along with the whole rest of the castle. The third sorbet-fairy had long since forgotten about the minor event of mortal christening party, and so didn't notice that she'd put a little too much oomph into her curse changing, which resulted in far too many people going to sleep. So after a little bit of time went by, but not a lot, looters showed up and started trashing the castle, and one of them, a teenage boy, found the beautiful passed-out princess and groped her a bit and then kissed her thoroughly on the lips. She woke up and socked him in the jaw. The end. *Goodnight sweetie, sleep well, don't worry, no one is going to grope you in your sleep, I'm sorry, I shouldn't have put that in. Don't worry. Just sleep. No, I don't want to read you that book. It's so dull. Please don't cry. Damn it. I mean, darn it. Shit. Okay, I'll read it.*

My Fairy Garden
by
Susan Chertkow

In late June, when my stone birdbath developed a deep crack, I recycled it into a fairy garden.

I filled it with dirt, a miniature ceramic cottage, small-scale plants, moss for grass, and tiny gravel for a stone path.

By July, the garden had two fairy occupants: Letitia and Etheline.

The roommates appeared to settle in well.

They added a trellis with climbing vines, a pink flower border along the stone path, and a welcome mat at the door.

But in early August, grievances and discord took root.

Letitia wanted the cottage pantry stocked with only organic food items.

Etheline preferred a vast assortment of snacks and munchies for her weekend party guests.

Letitia liked a traditional décor: chintzes, an heirloom rug, a rocking chair, and coordinated placemats.

Etheline preferred a contemporary setting: bright colors, modern art, and a lot of gold and silver accents.

When Letitia found empty bottles of mead, an ancient honey wine, she reminded Etheline that drinking was against the rules.

Etheline scoffed and cursed her in dirty fairy words.

Then a terrible rain storm struck the fairy garden causing widespread destruction.

Etheline found alternative lodging with an elf.

But Letitia stayed and opted to restore the little cottage and grounds.

She reinforced the dwelling, added tall shrubs, and a mini-herb vegetable garden.

In September, Etheline returned for a visit. She marveled at the reconstructed fairy garden and all the upgrades to

the property.

She pleaded for a return to their former living arrangement.

"I'm tired of flitting from elf to elf," she confided.

"I promise to control my drinking and to cut out the partying.

Give me another chance, please?"

Letitia briefly considered Etheline's request.

But then, she realized she liked her solitary, quiet life in the fairy garden.

She had proved she could handle whatever came her way.

She presented Etheline with a farewell basket of herbs, sweet peas, and baby carrots from her garden.

In exchange, Etheline gave her a bottle of mead, which she just happened to have with her.

Two Poems
by
Bryan Thao Worra

Arachne's Daughter

One morning
Walking into my backyard,
A thin strand of spider silk tangles my legs
With a quiet snap,

Its frustrated author glares
From a high corner nearby.

Shall I pity her folly or praise her ambition?

I return inside to my cup of coffee
And an unfinished love poem not worth mention.

The New Humenu, 2112

For long pork, until recently,
Our majority tasted like bland chicken,
Closer to an old American fast-food chain
Than something Southeast Asian free-range.

Things stayed tough even after the Great Drought
And the Emptied Ocean, despite our best advances.
Reflavored sewage solids and discount roachwurst
Barely satisfied the Survivors, let alone the Thrivers.

Thanks to a modest proposal,
Dr. Morrow's radical gene therapy
Sparked a new eatconomy.

With the mostly-consent of the desperate indifferent
We incentivized 99% humans, *Homo Edibilis*,
Injected with archived DNA from antique biobanks.

Who needed to get to Alpha Centauri, anyway?

Our new buffets feature a sumptuous repast:
Menison, Mangus Beef, Tuna Mish, even exotic Miraffe.
Eat heartily.

Next year, they promise novel advances like Melephangaroo!
Alas, fitting wines like a Humerlot remain in short supply.

Inch-High Girlfriend **by** **Darry Dinnell**

The first question people ask after your inch-high girlfriend has been carried off to the ladies' room by one of her girlfriends is some variation of "So what is your sex-life like?" Refreshingly absent in the asking is the usual leering grin that accompanies friendly inquiries into intimate affairs. Rather, the look is more often one of deep concern – severe, even. The question is a fair one, and I will answer it for you in due course; there are, however, other things you might be interested to know about dating a woman who is one inch tall.

Disappointed shall be the man who treats a woman as arm candy. I draw many a stare at restaurants, but not so much on account of the woman I'm with. The sight of a man tilted across a dimly lit dinner table sending soft whispers towards the seemingly empty place set opposite him commands more than enough attention. Double and triple dating becomes a necessity. It smooths the task of comfortably installing my inch-high girlfriend in the women's washroom.

Outdoorsy dates are most difficult. Leashed or not, pets are overly interested in my inch-high girlfriend, and so I clench her snugly in my fist. Windy days are especially harrowing, seeing your love swept up on a spring breeze, leaving you with no choice but to swat the air hysterically in hopes of reclaiming her.

We spend most of our quality time indoors. I lie motionless on the couch, she lies on my stomach facing me, her affectionate gaze rising to eye level and back down again with every breath I take. Eventually she seeks my face by way of a determined crawl, struggling onto my shoulder, adorably refusing assistance. Balanced on my intertragic notch, she hollers tenderly "I love you" into my ear canal. When I do make a move, it is never done too quickly.

But you are still wondering about matters sexual.

Imagine a woman has hopped the security barrier at Stonehenge and has thrown her arms around one of the monoliths, starting into a diligent shimmy upward. Returning the favor requires approximately the same fine motor-skill set involved in assembling a model ship in a glass bottle.

You said you wanted to know about our sex-life.

More pressing is the issue of reproduction. As with most couples of any solid duration, we have discussed whether or not we want children. Though we both agree we do, medical professionals seem less enthused by the idea. What if, they ask, the child was to have its father's size?

I tell her that I am not one of those people for whom children are a deal breaker. I tell her my love will endure no matter what. Her thin smile is barely visible, but in it I detect a dissembling.

We talk about artificial insemination. All we need is the right donor. I would do anything for our relationship, even if I must become the most banal kind of cuckold, bested by a test-tube. Every day I scour ostensibly empty benches, apparently unoccupied bathroom stalls, looking for a donor. Even fruitless searches comfort me, given the unsettling possibility that she should be the one out looking on her own.

And so I have little choice but to leave all you, the curious, with nothing better than the wistful truth. Loving an inch-high woman is a search for an adequate inch-high man.

The Last Bathroom
by
Katherine Cowley

The world was ending, yet instead of taking a last stand against the winged beastlings, Quintessence insisted on visiting every single women's restroom in the city.

As they dashed towards the mall, Quin funneled energy through a bead in her necklace. A translucent, 3D map of the building appeared before her. "Keep them off us!" she shouted.

Hoshi ran her trembling fingers through her blue hair, trying to maintain calm. Then she did as her master commanded. She drew energy through the ground, into her feet. She passed it lightly through her body and blasted streaks of blue light through the sky, destroying several pockets of the locusts. Yet the sky grew darker with their millions of bodies.

"Honey, try not to draw the attention of the entire swarm," Quin reprimanded. She stood tall, majestically even. Her flawless, chestnut-brown skin was impervious to both wrinkles and fear.

Hoshi inclined her head and took a deep breath. Mistakes like this explained why, after eight years, she was still an apprentice. She propelled power through the ground, away from them. Remembering the street grid, she sent the energy under the road. It spurted up through the nearby Walmart in a burst of flame. The sky lightened slightly over their heads as the locusts shifted their attention.

"Good," murmured Quin, pushing open the doors of the mall.

Hoshi ran inside with her master, feeling a slight glow at the praise. There were no people left in Walmart, so Hoshi had not risked harming anyone by redirecting the creatures' attention. When they had visited the remains of the megalithic store just ten minutes before, only the fragments (and stench) of corpses disturbed them as they made their way to the restrooms.

Now they ran through the mall, dodging slabs of ceiling that had fallen to the ground. People huddled in the shops, fearful for their lives. But the walls of the mall would not save them. Human structures did not stand a chance against the extraterrestrial insects. The creatures were the length of Hoshi's middle finger, part animal and part machine, with gorgeous, iridescent wings, only beautiful until you realized the bugs' mandibles were made of other-worldly metal strong enough to pierce a tank.

Quin vaporized the locusts that followed them inside. Her skill level was such that she did not even need to use her fingers to direct the energy. And while Hoshi had only managed to turn a few objects into tokens in order to channel energy into more complex spells, Quin had turned almost everything she owned into a token. And a number of things that did not belong to her as well.

Quin darted into the women's bathroom, desperately scrutinizing the space.

Hoshi examined the restroom with her, but, like the others they had visited, it looked completely normal. Stalls, toilets, sinks. At least today, unlike a normal day, none of the

women's bathrooms had any lines. In fact, they were all entirely abandoned, which surprised her—the end of the world did not eliminate certain bodily needs. Arguably, it might increase those needs, which would explain the terrible stink anytime they passed people.

"Damn," said Quin. "Automatic towel dispenser."

Perhaps Quin had become unhinged. Perhaps the otherworldly force that filled the sky had broken something inside her. But it was not Hoshi's place to question her. Their contract did not allow it. Even at the end of the world. And from the reports on Hoshi's phone, there might be only hours of life left for humanity. She would rather not spend her final day pursuing a deranged, toilet-centric quest. But she would bend her will this one last time.

"The mall has other bathrooms," Hoshi suggested.

Quin shook her head. "They will be the same as this one."

Hoshi touched her hand to the familiar, reassuring plastic. What could possibly be wrong with automatic towel dispensers? Before today, Quin had never shown any aversion to technology.

They ran out the nearest exit and found an abandoned red convertible, keys in the ignition. Hoshi breathed in deeply. Upon closer inspection, it was not actually a convertible. The vehicle had been built as a sedan, but locusts had devoured the entire section of the metal roof above the front two seats. And the car had not been intentionally abandoned. Small chunks of bone littered the seats. Quin waited patiently while Hoshi brushed the pieces into a pile, wrapped them in paper, and placed them in the glove compartment. She could not cremate the remains or chant a mantra, but she would not disrespect the dead by sitting on them.

Quin drove at a frantic pace. Hoshi stood, fighting off their attackers with green shafts of light. It was not as effective as blue, but didn't call the bugs as quickly.

The car swerved around a corner. Hoshi gripped the jagged edges of the metal roof. It cut into her left hand, drawing blood. She used her right hand to destroy a group of the enemy following them.

From the corner of her vision, she noted a small boy. He pointed at them. "They will save us!"

"No," thought Hoshi as she blasted the silver-streaked locusts heading towards the child. "We will find the perfect lavatory, and then relieve ourselves before we die."

Yet the boy was not the only one to think Hoshi and Quintessence had come as their saviors. They did look the part. Normally Hoshi dressed in plainclothes—jeans, a tank top, whatever made her look like a normal college student, so she could use her powers inconspicuously. But of course, the world began to end when she was at an anime convention, cosplaying as her favorite character. Her blue hair and costume definitely attracted attention, and Hoshi took a certain amount of pleasure from looking like a hero. And Quin drew eyes every day. She was an extremely muscular African American woman in her forties, with dark sunglasses and her signature weaves, which looked like they came straight off the cover of a fashion magazine.

But what could two people do against trillions of assailants? Yes, there were others like Quin and Hoshi scattered across the world, but all their forces combined would be like using teaspoons of water to put out a forest fire.

Quin muttered to herself as she drove. "Too new," she said to a restaurant, deprecating its bathrooms without even stopping to evaluate them. "Too small," she said to a corner shop. "You probably don't even have one," she said to another store. "There's not enough time," she wailed.

Tens of thousands of the insects pursued them, drawn by the scent of their flesh. Their bodies made a clicking sound, which built like an orchestra of knives into a deafening roar. Hoshi swirled magic around her. It was harder to draw energy when her feet weren't on the ground, but she could do it. Hoping Quin made no quick turns which could send her flying out of the car, she shot energy from both her hands. To her disappointment, the resulting green light looked rather cute, like something you might see on *My Little Pony*, rather than a deathly show of force as she had intended.

Dozens of the locusts made it past Hoshi's defenses. They landed on her arm and ripped at her flesh. She screamed, then incinerated them with pure red energy.

"Are you okay, honey?" Quin asked.

"I'll be fine," Hoshi managed. She trembled. Her eyes stung. She was missing a chunk of skin and muscle on her right arm. The remaining flesh looked like a pinkish-red, Hello Kitty bow, turned into a taffy pulp and seeping blood.

She pulled her arm into herself and used her opposite hand to apply pressure to the wound. She swallowed the bile rising in her throat. She would not go into shock. Not right now. Quin needed her and her ability to draw on large amounts of power. And on one of their missions, Hoshi had fought even after patching a bullet wound in her shoulder. She could survive now. It was just a flesh wound.

"Sit down," directed Quin.

Hoshi crumpled to the seat. She forced herself to examine her wound. It wasn't near any major arteries and wasn't bleeding very much, so she didn't need a tourniquet.

Quin removed her scarf and flung it at her. She funneled energy through one of her beads, creating a temporary shield, then drove like a maniac desperate for a latrine, shooting out small bursts of color even as she swerved around deserted cars.

Hoshi fingered the scarf. "I need your vodka."

Quin passed it to her. "Don't lose the flask," she directed as she took a hard right turn. "I turned it into a token to stream my favorite radio station."

Hoshi wondered why Quin needed a music-playing vodka flask, but decided she didn't want to know. Sometimes when she asked questions, she found out way too many personal details. She unstopped the cap. She really wanted to drink it, but then there might not be enough.

She poured a little of the vodka on her wound. She groaned as the clear liquid hit her flesh, creating an intense burning sensation. But she suspected it wasn't enough. The locusts had not created smooth lacerations as a knife would. She needed to disinfect the entire surface.

She poured vodka on the corner of the scarf—it was cleaner than anything else in this car. She pressed the wet scarf to the wound. She repeated the process again and again, using the vodka to clean the entire, bumpy remains of muscles and mangled skin. In one spot the insects had torn through the muscles all the way to her bone. She tipped the last few drops of vodka into her mouth.

Labeling the enemy as locusts was not particularly fair to the earth's own insects. Real locusts killed people, but not directly. They devoured miles and miles of crops and throughout history had caused massive famines, killing tens of thousands. But at least they did not eat human flesh.

Yet the extraterrestrial creatures who had entered through the earth's atmosphere did act similarly to earth's insects. Over the past weeks, there had been dozens of attacks. In the largest outbreaks, alien locusts consumed 60,000 people at a fútbol match in Brazil and 70,000 people at a rock concert in Spain. In both cases they left no survivors. Governments destroyed the insects and tried to figure out where they had come from, but encouraged people to go about their daily lives, to maintain a face of calm against the horror.

This morning, Hoshi had gone to her anime convention. By lunch, when Quin called her, the upsurges had descended through the atmosphere. In the time it had taken them to meet, the earth's major governments and militaries had fallen in focused attacks by the bugs. Now the otherworldly locusts had hit plague level. Hundreds of millions—perhaps billions—of people were dead. And each individual locust could eat its body weight in a single day.

Using her teeth and her good arm, Hoshi ripped off the now filthy section of the scarf. She used what remained of the fabric to carefully bandage her arm. Not that it really mattered, as soon all humans would be dead. But old habits did not banish themselves.

Quin's shield evaporated with a tiny popping sound. While more skilled at its use, Quin could not draw on energy for as long as Hoshi.

Despite the pain piercing her body, Hoshi rose to her feet again, leaning against the car. She used her left arm to fight, letting her master focus on driving.

Quin sped into the parking lot of a hardware store, then drove straight into its glass doors. Hoshi pushed energy through her ring and created a quick shield to protect them from the glass shards. The car barreled through the aisles, sending buckets of colorful paint through the air.

The car screeched to a halt in front of the familiar, female stick figure. Hoshi killed thousands of locusts with blue whips of light, not even bothering with the less powerful green. There were too many of them anyways, and with the pain from her injury, it was challenging to limit the amount of energy she used.

Without warning, Quin slung Hoshi over her shoulder and hauled her into the bathroom like a janitor with a sack of toilet paper. She set her down on the floor, next to the sinks.

"We found it," said Quintessence, looking at the towel dispenser. Hoshi thought she saw a tear slide down the down the older woman's cheek.

Hoshi forced herself to her feet, gritting her teeth against the pain. She looked at the towel dispenser. It was a standard, old, brownish-black one, with brown, scratchy paper towels. In white lettering, it read, "Pull With Two Hands Only." Now that was discriminatory against people who could only use one arm, a category which now included Hoshi.

She examined the side of the towel dispenser. It had one of those brown wheels you could spin when the paper towels inevitably jammed. Above the wheel was the label, "For Emergency Feed, Turn Here." This certainly was an emergency, but Hoshi could not imagine how paper towels would help them.

"I need you to channel as much energy as possible," said Quin, "And share it with me."

"But that will draw the eye of the swarm," protested Hoshi, forgetting her place as an apprentice.

"It doesn't matter. This is our last stand." Quin pulled Hoshi into a tight embrace. Her body was warm and strong, resilient in the face of everything.

"Thank you for teaching me," said Hoshi, inclining her head.

"It has been an honor," said Quin.

Hoshi breathed in deeply, then drew on all the energy she could find. Her skin tingled and glowed red. She had never allowed herself to handle so much power. She did not know if her body could take it. Yet still she drew more and more.

It was like a beacon to the locusts. The beasts ripped off the roof of the building, shredding the metal into flecks that floated to the ground like glimmering flakes of snow.

Still Hoshi drew more power. She opened herself to Quin, who channeled the power into the towel dispenser as she turned the emergency feed.

The locusts descended towards them. Their deaths would be painful, but at least they would be quick.

The paper towel dispenser split open with a clap of thunder and a brilliant burst of light. The walls of the hardware store disintegrated, as did the rows of products. Only the women's toilets remained.

The air shimmered. And then hundreds of individuals appeared around them, crystalizing into solid form. Most of them did not look remotely human, but Hoshi recognized their power and control. It felt the same as Quin's. The people—if you could call them that—blasted energy into the sky, destroying millions and millions of locusts, with colors Hoshi had never seen before. Neons and pastels of every shade mingled with an awful, urine yellow, which was surprisingly effective against their attackers.

"Who are they?" Hoshi yelled.

"Reinforcements," said Quin. "Masters from other worlds, come to save our earth from annihilation. I just had to call them."

Hoshi finally understood. Quintessence was much more powerful than she had ever supposed. She had set up a token to connect herself to the rest of the universe. Only a handful of masters could perform such a feat, and most would not consider the effort worthwhile, due to the slim chance of ever needing to use it.

With her own access to energy, Quin would only be able to call a few other masters. But with Hoshi channeling, Quin could draw a legion. She had used an ordinary object—a paper towel dispenser—something ubiquitous that could be found no matter where she traveled. But she must have set up the token years ago, never guessing that paper towel dispensers would change.

Hoshi drew more energy to herself. She did not have the same skill level as those around her, but she would fight with them. For the first time today, she believed they could win. And hopefully the battle would end sooner rather than later, because Hoshi really needed to pee.

Salad Days
by
Charles Edward Wright

These ribbons
of carrots?

In *my* day,
medallions.

Ott Toby
by
KJ Hannah Greenberg

Toby was an Ott. Ordinary in his coloring, he appeared all green with an array of filled orange circles. His nose, as was typical, was red (Itts, in contrast, he taught us, are pink with purple specks and gray proboscises.)

Our Ott arrived late one summer. Bernie didn't see him, and, when he consequently sat on Toby, he disappeared. Toby's ears, too, went missing, but Betsy claims that Toby's selective hearing predated that happenstance.

Shortly after Bernie vanished, Bermkie and I were directed to spruce up our new friend. For a while, we remained confused about the function of his tabs and slots. So, that first time, he wound up with a curly do when he had wanted a straight fly away. We forgave ourselves instantly; it's tough to stand close to a critter that smells like a locker room because he's habituated to living among fungi. That he ever got groomed remains a wonder.

Besides, initially, we didn't know that Otts enjoy their fermented ingesta and that they push themselves towards naps while ruminating among mushrooms. Regardless, our knowledge gap proved negligible since we became mesmerized by Toby's Kandi Kid coloring and by his interest in our butterfly picture collection. None of Bella and Billy Rated's children of had ever before interacted with such a creature.

Months passed. Initially, Toby accompanied us when we photographed the reds and yellows that sipped at buttercups or flew to mallows. Later, he tried to farm those nectar eaters, believing that he could nurture them with clouds and stars. When they died of starvation, he was happy, anyway since he ate them.

We were miffed. I admonished Toby to leave the butterflies alone. Bermkie pulled out great hassocks of grass and threw them at our odd Ott. Everyone else cried.

Time passed. All was swimmingly well with Toby until he asked us to bake a pizza for him on fire circle rocks. He had witnessed Bartha frying eggs accordingly and wanted to emulate her.

It was hard to deny Toby. He had constructed compost beds for us, had journeyed to the marketplace with us, and had helped us tap the sweet trees. Yet, after that culinary mishap, both Bartha and Toby wound up with yolky faces.

Bartha had necessarily been involved because she deemed Toby too short and too volatile to use matches. When Bermkie delivered Bartha's news, Toby had tried a mind meld on Bermkie.

Thereafter, Bermkie took more and longer naps. Toby also emptied Bermkie's closet, the contents of which he tossed onto the nearest road. Crows called out in delight as they carried away bits of Bermkie's clothing and harnesses.

Bermkie just shrugged. He got our folks to give him their credit card to replace his gear and fed Toby extra gumdrops in gratitude.

That appreciation evaporated, though, when Toby asked Cathy Callwell to the autumnal social. Cathy, who Bermkie thought was his girl, believed her standing on computer-mediated information exchange sites would improve if she were photographed with an Ott.

Initially, Bermkie took to sleepwalking and to making Meep-like sounds. Eventually, he thought to ask both Sally and Ally Jenkins to escort him. One comely girl on each arm, he entered the dance hall, where Cathy unequivocally ignored him. In no time, two nice-looking sisters were left stranded near the fruit punch.

In the end, Toby, who was sated with having his face spread all over YouTube, apologized. It took some time, however, for Bermkie to forgive Cathy's disloyalty.

During the weeks those two were figuring out their relationship, Toby's Twitter numbers dropped; he didn't know you had to keep after social media. Toby mewed and grayed. He remained miserable until I allowed him to dab his many limbs with my lone bottle of cologne. When I warned Toby that applying scent while living in woodlands would bring stinging, biting insects, he salivated, and then dumped the rest of my liquid all over himself.

To the Rated Family, bugs' multifaceted eyes and noses-slash-mouths-slash-tongues are of small consequence. Toby, though, found those unfurling, little tubes fun to eat. When he tasted all of the flyers drawn to his stink, he saved their orifices for last.

The more he ate, the more he needed to poo. Bartha's Perazzi persuaded me to be his outhouse chaperon. At least we had an extra Sears Catalog to read.

After using up my cologne, Toby claimed Breena's lighter fluid. He mixed that juice with Bermkie's indelible ink and flung the results at our walls.

Flutter byes with orange wings and brown spots, with grey wings and white dots and with wondrously large iridescent, green wings were attracted to that mess. Toby ate glutinously, while I applied a soapy mixture.

Outdoor temperatures dropped as did Toby. He got scatterbrained, increasingly forgetting to wipe his appendages before entering our home. Bermkie, who took pride in our hardwood floors, demonstrated a new style of anger. Had it not been for a well-timed call from Cathy, Toby might have gotten splattered alongside of the ink and lighter fluid mix I was still scrubbing.

As winter approached, Toby dozed more and chased winged lovelies less. Bermkie, too, was absent; he seemed to have been adopted by Cathy's family. That left Brent, Bartha, Breena, and me to clean up after our careless Ott.

When awake, Toby collected autumnal flowers, hoping to attract insects. Out home became strewn will leaves, twigs, creepy-crawlies' carcasses and bit of Ott fur. I don't know why Toby shed in the winter.

One night, Bermkie returned to announce that he and Cathy were going steady and that they planned to wed. Toby responded by curling up under the dining room table, wrapped in Mama Bella's best quilt. He lay immobile, not dead, but ready to hibernate. It had taken the last of his reserves to imagine, a loud, why a pretty miss might want to marry someone from a family that was B-Rated.

A Game of Thrones Senryu
By
Anton Rose

gritty grey morality
interrogate the human condition
tits and dragons

Girt by Side Effects
by
John Domenichini

It started three months ago. I was getting ready for work when I noticed my feet didn't feel right. I looked at my shoes and realized I had them on the wrong feet. It was kind of funny, but how does a sober adult put his shoes on the wrong feet?

I switched my shoes and went to work. I told my wife about it that night and we had a good laugh.

The next day as I was getting ready for work again, I inadvertently put my left shoe on my right foot. At least I caught it before I put the other shoe on the wrong foot, too, but it kind of worried me. What could cause one to suddenly put one's shoes on the wrong feet? More disturbing to me was the fact that throughout the day I had a strange urge to take my shoes off and put them on the wrong feet again.

I wondered what might be influencing my behavior in this way and the only thing I could come up with was the cholesterol-lowering medication I had started taking. When my doctor, Dr. Egal, had suggested that I take the medication, I didn't question it. I've rarely taken prescribed medication in my life, but I've always been pro-medication. If I had a headache, I popped an over-the-counter pill. Stomach ache? Pill. Allergies? Pill. Whatever. If there was medication for an ailment I was experiencing, I was willing to take that medication.

By the way, I never paid much attention to the media frenzy around the "miracle" inactive ingredient, Ingoglyoxine. I'd heard about it as it was being developed, but I didn't take prescribed medication often enough at that time to be interested. Of course, I couldn't help but hear some of the details, such as the fact that pharmaceutical companies were adding Ingoglyoxine to almost every prescribed medication known to mankind and that it successfully eliminated a whole bevy of serious drug side effects.

When Dr. Egal suggested that I take cholesterol-lowering medication, he went on and on about how safe it was because it had Ingoglyoxine in it. According to him, I had nothing to worry about. Actually, I hadn't been worried and I remained worry-free until I felt compelled to put my shoes on the wrong feet.

From work that morning, I called Dr. Egal's office. Three hours later, Dr. Egal returned my call.

"Does the drug you prescribed for me sometimes cause disorientation?" I asked.

"Not that I've heard of," he said. "What are you experiencing, exactly?"

"I put my shoes on the wrong feet two days in a row and all day I have a strong desire to put them back on the wrong feet," I said.

"Oh that. Yeah, that's a known side effect."

"What is?"

"The inclination to put your shoes on the wrong feet. It's something about how Ingoglyoxine interacts with the active ingredients in the drug."

"But that's a really specific side effect," I said.

"Yes, but it's not serious and it affects less than 1% of patients. I'll prescribe a different drug for you that also contains Ingoglyoxine. I have one in mind; you're very unlikely to experience a side effect again. That's been my observation, anyway."

"Okay," I said, "but what are the known side effects?"

"Well," he said, sounding somewhat excited, "surprisingly, some patients have found themselves inadvertently humming the Australian national anthem. That's the main side effect. Again, less than 1% of patients experience any kind of side effect at all, so chances are it won't affect you."

"I don't even know the Australian national anthem," I said.

He laughed. "That's the interesting part. Most patients who show the symptom don't know the song, but they find themselves humming it anyway, of course, they have no idea what they're humming."

Since Dr. Egal doubted that I would experience a side effect from the new drug, I decided to try it.

I took it that night before bed and went to sleep. My wife shook me awake in the middle of the night.

"What?" I asked as I sat up. Then I started moving my arms involuntarily. It took a great deal of effort to stop it. I felt the urge to move other parts of my body, too, but I controlled myself.

My wife gave me a confused look. "You were singing in your sleep," she said

"Singing? Or humming?" I asked.

"No, singing. And loud. Some song I've never heard. Strange lyrics. Something like 'Our home is girt by sea.' That's what it sounded like, anyway."

I pulled out my phone to look up that string of words and sure enough "Our home is girt by sea" are lyrics from the Australian national anthem.

For the rest of the night, my wife kept shaking me awake because every time I fell asleep, I started singing the Australian national anthem again. And every time I woke up I had that same strange desire to move my arms and other parts of my body.

Neither of us got much sleep. The good news is I learned that the word "girt" means surrounded, so at least I expanded my vocabulary.

In the morning, I went directly to Dr. Egal's office and demanded that he see me right away. He did. He even seemed interested. Not in me so much as in my reaction to the drug.

I gave him a summary of what had happened the night before.

He rubbed his chin and listened intently as I spoke. When I finished, he asked me to be more explicit about the involuntary movements I had experienced.

"Well," I said, "first, I put my right hand in."

Dr. Egal started taking notes by tapping a stylus on a tablet computer he held in his hand. "Then?"

"Well, then, I took my right hand out."

Dr. Egal nodded. "I see. Did you put your right hand in again?"

"Yes, I did," I said.

"Then did you shake it all about?"

"Yes," I said. "Why? Is it a known side effect?"

He shook his head. "No, it's the hokey pokey, though."

"Are you sure?"

"Oh, yeah," he said confidently. "That's what's it's all about."

I pondered this for a moment. I was sure I had never done the hokey pokey in my life, not even as a child. "Dr. Egal," I said, "the hokey pokey might be kind of fun done voluntarily, but feeling compelled to do it when I don't really want to is rather frightening."

"Oh, I understand," he said. "And singing the Australian national anthem in your sleep is an interesting, but perhaps, troubling twist, as well. Okay, let me prescribe something else for you that contains Ingoglyoxine."

"Hold on doc. Let's talk about the known side effects first."

"Well, the drug I have in mind this time, on very rare occasions, causes patients to sneeze in a higher pitch than usual."

"But doc," I said. "I can't be sneezing a lot. That might interfere with my job."

Dr. Egal smiled and assured me that very few patients experienced this side effect, and those who did didn't sneeze more often than usual. It was just that when they did sneeze, it was in a higher pitch than was normal for them. That was all.

I rarely sneeze, so I figured it would be all right.

I took the new medicine and didn't notice a thing for three days because I didn't sneeze once in that time.

I finally sneezed when my wife and I were out having dinner, and the pitch of my sneeze was higher than usual. Much higher. So much higher that it shattered four wine glasses: my wine glass, my wife's wine glass, and the two wine glasses of the couple sitting at the table next to us.

The two tables were girt by broken glass and spilled wine. Luckily, my wife and I had been drinking white wine. The other couple wasn't so lucky. It was a miracle that nobody was hurt; my wife and I thought that was quite a consolation. Unfortunately, nobody else saw it that way. We can't go back to that restaurant any time soon, I can tell that.

Monday morning I was back at Dr. Egal's office. I told him the whole story.

"Your reaction to Ingoglyoxine has been very educational for me," he said patting me on the shoulder. "Well, let me try prescribing yet another drug for you."

"No," I said. "Can't I try a low-cholesterol diet instead?"

"Well, I don't think things are that dire," he said.

"Doc, if this continues, I'm going to end up being charged with manslaughter."

An expression of concern spread over his face. "Okay, if you want to try something unorthodox, like restricting your diet, that's up to you. I won't try to stop you."

Well, I've been on a low-cholesterol diet ever since and it's working. My cholesterol level is way down. I don't enjoy being so careful about what I eat, but desperate times call for desperate measures.

encroachment
by
Grace Marshan

i once told a boy
that i searched for my own castle,
where the skies were sewn
from only the warmest of fabrics.

this boy asked what
this castle should look like,
were he the king
of it,

and i told him it would be
small and stout and not
at all what i wanted for my life.

and he, despite my description
of the kingdom i cared to lead,
the policies i'd enact as my own queen
of my own castle,
without the assistance
of him or others,

he, instead, showed to me
a picture of his tallest tower,

though i did *not* ask.

"oh haha"

Go Badgers!
by
Christina Dalcher

Dear Incoming Students of the Class of 2020!

Please join us for a performance of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* this evening in the outdoor amphitheatre. After the play, soft drinks and snacks will be served in the Jefferson Courtyard.

Go Badgers!

Sandra Holly
Student Liaison

Dear Students,

It has been brought to my attention that certain themes and elements of last night's play caused serious upset. Let me be the first to apologize for not having provided a list of potentially offensive/troubling/titillating subject matter, particularly the depictions of night-time stalking, suicide, and dangerous nocturnal balcony climbing. The Drama department has cancelled further performances of *Romeo and Juliet* and will be reprising last year's staging of *Little Mary Sunshine* in lieu of the discomfoting Shakespearean tragedy.

I would also like to mention that Roosevelt College does not, in fact, advocate "dangerous nocturnal balcony climbing," despite claims by PORNO (Pals Of Ralph Nader Organization).

Most sincerely,
Sandra Holly

P.S. Regarding the bowls of mixed nuts on the snack tables, I have sent a memo to catering suggesting they provide labels with the warning "This bowl contains nuts" next to bowls containing nuts at all future events.

Dear Concerned Residents of Lee Hall,

The building at the southeast corner of the quad was not named for the Confederate general, but for the American author of *To Kill a Mockingbird*. We see no need to rename the building.

Sincerely,
Sandra Holly

Dear Concerned Residents of Lee Hall,

Harper Lee's recently published novel is currently under review.
Thank you for bringing this to our attention.

Sincerely,
Sandra Holly

Dear Concerned Residents of Lee Hall,

We will be renaming your building.

Sandra

Dear Current Students,

Please do not send further email complaints about Thomas Jefferson. The Jefferson Courtyard is now the Rose Courtyard. Note that 'rose' refers to the flower, not to any individual, living, dead, or undead. Also note that all roses have been removed from the courtyard for safety reasons.

Sandra

Dear Current and Former Students,

In light of last week's hunger strike, Roosevelt College will adopt a new grading system. The grade of F (0.0 grade points) will be abolished because, in the words of Undergraduates for Positivity, "failure makes students sad." Also, as several alumni (and alumnae) have informed us that failing marks handicap their admission to graduate programs, this policy will apply retroactively.

Sandra

P.S. For those students still on hunger strike in protest of D grades, the catering office is currently processing your request for additional cases of Snapple and Red Bull.

Dear Members of The Disabled Student Association,

I apologize for my insensitive use of the term 'handicap' in this morning's email.

Sandra

Dear Hunger Strikers,

I do not know who sent the cases of Enfamil to your sit-in, but will look into the matter.

Sandra

Dear Students,

Please forgive the delay in responding and for any mailer daemon bouncebacks you may have received. My inbox has been over quota for days now, so I will be holding an open forum to discuss the Ban These Books Campaign at seven this evening in the Auditorium (formerly the Twain Auditorium).

Sandra

Students,

For those of you who could not attend the forum yesterday evening, here is an excerpt of the minutes.

The following written works will be removed from all reading lists and from the library's stacks effective immediately:

Huckleberry Finn

Ten Little Indians

All works by William Shakespeare

All editions of the Bible

All books in the *Idiot's Guide* and *X for Dummies* series

Students who own copies of these books should avoid reading them in public spaces or in shared dormitory rooms.

Please do not contact me via email with questions. I am still catching up.

Sandra

This is an automatically-generated email. Please do not reply

Sincere apologies for the inclusion of the terms 'Indian,' 'idiot,' 'dummies,' and 'Bible' in my previous message.

Sandra

This is an automatically-generated email. Please do not reply

The following course has been cancelled pending reworking of the syllabus:

BIOL 250 (Entomology)

Once Professor Roberts works out a way to teach this course without reference to insects, we will reinstate it into the curriculum. In the interim, all students disturbed by the current material should excuse themselves from class. Safe Room #43 is located on the ground floor of the Life Sciences building.

Which word in 'do not reply' did you not understand?

Safe Room #44 has been installed next door to Professor Roberts' Entomology lab.

Good Morning, Badgers!

I have taken over the role of Student Liaison from Sandra Holly. Please feel free to email me with any concerns you have. In the meantime, I hope you all enjoy Christmas break.

Looking forward to working with you all!

Mary O'Keefe

Goodbye, Badgers!

Effective Monday, January 4, immediately following Solstice Break, I will be joining Ms. Holly as her assistant at King Saud University in sunny Saudi Arabia.

Mary O'Keefe

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Contributor Biographies



TS Hendrik has been writing online for several years, mostly for his site [The Non-Review](#). He was born a week early, plans to die a week late, and in the meantime can be found on twitter [@NotNotTSHendrik](#) mostly tweeting bad jokes.



Thomas Cavazos is a writer living and working in the San Francisco Bay Area. In between binge drinking, binge watching Netflix, and binge playing video games, he writes fiction and poetry to alternately exorcise his inner demons and clamor for approval and validation.



Jennifer Pullen is a PhD candidate in Creative Writing from Ohio University. Her fiction has appeared or is upcoming in journals including: *Going Down Swinging* (AU), *Cleaver*, *Prick of the Spindle*, *Clockhouse*, *Phantom Drift Limited*, and *Blink-Ink*. She spends half her days as a cat with rainbow colored wings, cursed because of owning too many Lisa Frank coloring books as a child. Her weaknesses in cat form are many, including string and unattended bags of Skittles. As a human she spends her days digging out from under a pile of books and tea cups. She occasionally sends out stories from beneath the pile. If her laptop battery dies, this may be her last communication until she finishes excavating herself from the pile of books, probably sometime next year.



Susan Chertkow, a Chicagoan, is the author of the novel *The Gnome and Mrs. Meyers*, an urban fantasy on Kindle at Amazon.com. She is a fine artist and tournament Scrabble player.



Bryan Thao Worra is a mammal. Usually. His ink sticks to the paper consistently. You can visit him at: <http://thaoworra.blogspot.com>.



Darry Dinnell has lived in Montreal for nearly a decade but has never in that time been of Montreal. His work has appeared in *the Washington Square Review*.



Katherine Cowley has tripped on a pyramid, intentionally stepped in quicksand, and eaten an egg she cooked on the asphalt in Phoenix. In between doing stupid things, she writes stories and essays. Her work has appeared in *Steel and Bone*, *365 Tomorrows*, *Segullah*, *Meeting of the Myths*, and *Locutorium*, among others. She has also worked as a college writing professor, a radio show producer, and a documentary film producer.



Charles Edward Wright was raised on a narrow neck of land between a sluggish turn on the Potomac River and a muddy stretch of the Mattawoman Creek, in a town where the eggs were never poached but the venison very likely had been. More recently he has been working at the University of Maryland Libraries.



Playfully quaint **KJ Hannah Greenberg** gets high on adverbs, mixes more metaphors than a platypus has pockets, and attempts to matchmake words like "balderdash" and "xylophone." Her newest collection of short fiction is *Friends and Rabid Hedgehogs* (Bards & Sages Publishing, June, 2016).



Anton Rose lives in Durham, U.K., with his wife and their very fluffy dog. He writes fiction and poetry, and his work has appeared in a number of print and online journals. Find him at antonrose.com or @antonjrose.



John Domenichini has been known to exaggerate. In fact, he exaggerates all the time, even when he's sleeping. Reader beware.



Grace Marshan is not yet related to any U.S. president. She currently resides in California.



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