

ExPatLit.com

*A Literary Review
for Writers Abroad*



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Letter from the Editor

Dear readers,

American novelist Henry Miller once observed that “one’s destination is never a place, but a new way of seeing things.” As we launch our maiden issue of ExPatLit.com, we are inspired and compelled by Miller’s perspective.

We expatriates are fortunate in many respects: we see and hear, taste and smell and touch the wonders of the world. The stuff of *National Geographic* and *Discovery Channel*: we’re part of it. But what we tend to sacrifice in the interest of our immersive experience is a defining sense of *place*. Friends, family, facility; these become transient, and we never know quite where we’ll be in three months, six months, a year.

This lack of definition can be frustrating at times, but it’s also liberating. When we travel, we’re not really looking to *belong* somewhere; we’re not looking to arrive. What we want is to challenge our perceptions, maybe even turn them inside-out, and to see the world a little differently. Makes for good conversation, good scrapbooking, and – occasionally – for good writing. The following ten compositions, we humbly submit, are the definition of good writing, and they capture the expat spirit. We are grateful for the privilege to share them with you.

Enjoy.

Joe Dugan

Managing Editor

Shushufindi

Lark Beltran

Seeing an odd name for the first time,
in this case, printed on a sign
at a quiet Ecuadorian crossroads,
one smiles at the quirky syllables
spoken in the area as nonchalantly
as we say Cleveland.

Delightful such words are,
each one a history, often coined
in the flowering of a now-dead language.

Conjuring up the remote and alien,
foreign place names tickle the fancy,
slide or stick on the tongue,
honey-caramel textured like Lostwithiel
or harsh as dragon scales: Irkutsk.

Whatever changes rack the world
and remodel its cultures, may it never
run short of Shushufindis.

My “Half” Family

Wendy Jones Nakanishi

I have three sons who refer to themselves as “halves.”

In Japan, any man, woman or child of mixed-race parentage is known as a “half.” I first heard the term over twenty years ago. An American, I had arrived in Japan in 1984 to take up a position at a small private university in the south. Initially, I was the only *gaijin*, or foreigner, on the staff. But after three years, a Canadian man, his Irish wife, and an English woman were hired. The English woman had been born and raised in Britain, and her father was from London, but her mother was Singapore Chinese: a wartime romance. I was idly chatting with one of our students one day when the young Japanese leaned forward and whispered earnestly, “That English teacher is a ‘half,’ isn't she?”

I was shocked by the inherent racism I sensed in her comment. I remember blushing and feeling hurt and confused on my friend's behalf.

Those feelings are, naturally, intensified in the case of my own boys, now ages nineteen, seventeen and twelve, when I hear them so described, either by themselves or by others. My husband is Japanese, a “pure-blood.” I can't help feeling that the term “half” implies that our progeny are mongrels.

The Japanese are profoundly, if often unconsciously, racist. I know that as a blonde, white-skinned, blue-eyed westerner I am routinely accorded better treatment than those “gaijin” residents here who come from another Asian country or from Africa.

One of the first English words I heard here was the term *homogeneous*. Japanese are proud of their single-race culture. Foreigners still represent only a tiny portion of the

population, but that is changing, partly due to the boom in international marriages such as my own.

Western men have a great attraction for Japanese women, who have seen American television shows and films depicting husbands cooking meals and changing diapers. They have heard of the western injunction “Ladies first.” They compare these idealized Hollywood images with the reality of a country in which men expect to go first in any situation, in which men never venture into the kitchen, in which men are the pampered wage-earners who are absent from dawn till midnight every weekday, and who spend the weekend resting and watching television.

I was thirty-one when I met the Japanese man who would become my husband. He was thirty-four. I had been asked to give a special lecture on British poetry at a cultural center in the medium-sized town of Takamatsu, on the island of Shikoku. There was the usual assortment of earnest middle-aged housewives and retired businessmen. They were all eager, their smiling faces turned upturned towards me as I spoke, as though expecting words of wisdom that might transform their lives.

There was one exception: a disheveled young man who sprawled at the communal table, his face cradled in his arms. When he was nudged to attention by a neighboring student, he raised his head and smiled sleepily, informing me that he was a farmer and had been up until the early hours sorting oranges to be taken to the local agricultural cooperative.

I disliked him on sight. I didn't like his lack of contrition regarding his apparent rudeness. I was upset that he had disrupted my well-mannered class. I was suspicious when, after the class, he asked me if I would like to see the greenhouses where he grew flowers.

As they say in novels, “Dear reader, I married him.”

From the start, our relationship proved an education of sorts—a lesson in self-knowledge, however unwillingly undertaken. I had suspected that the abrupt young farmer had designs for me; I soon learned, to my chagrin, that he actually wanted an opportunity to practice his English. Takehito had once lived in Kenya for three years, working as an agricultural specialist in the Japanese equivalent of the Peace Corps. One humiliation followed another. My young farmer had no romantic interest in me; he was actually engaged to a young Thai woman who worked in Bangkok as a civil engineer. Takehito's parents opposed the match, ostensibly because she would be unable to find similarly high-paying work in Japan, but her darker skin undoubtedly played a part in their disapproval.

Given our advancing years, our longing for children, and the adamant nature of his parents' opposition to a Thai daughter-in-law, Takehito and I married after a short engagement. Because we were both past the first bloom of youth and had been involved in a number of other relationships, some of which ended disastrously, we embarked on our life together with “realistic,” or some might describe them as “low,” expectations, and that fact possibly accounts for the longevity of our marriage. Defying popular odds for such matches, we have just celebrated our twenty-first wedding anniversary, and we are probably more favorably disposed to each other now than we have ever been. I also attribute our happiness to the fact that Takehito has actually lived outside Japan and is not as insular as many of his compatriots. He is frequently described as an “unusual” Japanese. He has always been a doting father and a helpful husband. He helps the children with their homework every night and washes the dishes.

But marital bliss hasn't always characterized our relationship. We started off badly;

I began to contemplate divorce weeks after the ceremony that united us. I found Takehito's friends and family intrusive, and I lamented the loss of privacy. A neighbor invaded our bedroom on the morning after the marital night with a message from my husband's mother; we hadn't managed to get a phone connected yet in the rental property we'd moved into. It soon became clear to me that I had not simply married a man called Takehito. Rather, I had formed an alliance with the immediate and extended family of a Japanese farmer.

It was difficult to take in at first. I was the product of the typical American dysfunctional family. My father left home when I was seven. Two years later, when my parents' divorce was finalized on St. Valentine's Day, no less, he married a woman several years older than my elder brother.

My father moved to a town seventy miles away with his new bride; my mother, sunk in deep depression, retreated to her bedroom, where she lay on her bed and read magazines and ate chocolates. We four children were left to fend for ourselves. As adults, we agree that we each developed toughness of character as a tactic for survival. We also have mixed feelings now about our upbringing. On the one hand, there were privations—it was as though we were orphans, although our parents were alive. From necessity, we had to learn basic household skills. On the other hand, we learned to relish our freedom and independence. We marveled at hearing about the restrictions our friends' parents placed upon their activities. We felt we could do anything we wanted, when we wanted, and we did.

My marriage transplanted a loner, a rebel at heart, into the confines of a conformist, settled family unit. Our lives were inextricably intertwined. We lived near my in-laws by necessity. My husband worked with his parents every day, growing oranges and

greenhouse flowers for the local agricultural market. I quickly grew accustomed to phone calls morning and night from my mother-in-law, or *Okaasan*, as I was to call her, and my father-in-law, *Otoosan*. Arrangements had to be made for each day's work, or future plans devised. Too, we were expected to attend frequent memorial services for departed ancestors, held in front of the elaborate Buddhist altar in *Okaasan's* house, and to turn up on Japanese holidays.

The birth of my own boys drew us even more closely into the family net. Naturally, Takehito's parents were anxious to see their grandsons and, equally, they were anxious that the usual formalities should be observed. Japan is a country of networks and groups and associations. A Japanese woman's marriage signifies her joining her husband's family, rather than, as in the west, forming an alliance with one man. Likewise, the birth of a child, at least in our area, is an event that involves the extended family and the neighborhood.

When my first son was several months old, my mother-in-law held an elaborate lunch party for all those relatives and neighbors. It was an occasion characterized by the usual division of the sexes. The men sat on cushions on the floor, each with a portable table set with a large bento meal placed before him. The women, clad in aprons, scurried to and fro between the dining area and the kitchen, bearing trays with bowls of miso soup and flasks of warmed sake and bottles of beer. After the men had eaten and drunk their fill and were lying back, flushed, on their cushions, smoking and chatting, the women apologetically settled before their own portable tables, placed in a drafty corridor near the kitchen, to have their own meal.

I was required to wear a kimono and to kneel before the men, offering sake or trying to replenish their glasses of beer. There was a celebratory toast of sake, and I was

requested to moisten my baby's lips with the warm liquid, raising a general laugh when the boy seemed eager to have more.

I had worried that my sons might be bullied at school because their mother was an American. This, fortunately, has not proved to be the case. Undoubtedly, the boys have profited from the fact that their father belongs to one of those long-established farming families of the area and that they are related to many of the people here. Too, I may have assisted in the general acceptance of their mixed-race ancestry by offering to teach some English lessons at their primary school and by volunteering to participate in neighborhood activities.

For me, the greatest problem is, and always has been, that my sons and I speak different languages.

When I mention this concern to American friends resident in the States, they grin and shake their heads knowledgeably: "Two teenagers and one adolescent boy? Of course you don't speak the same language! Who knows what they're talking about? That is, if you can get them to talk at all." But western friends residing in Japan and similarly circumstanced understand completely. If they live in such a rural area as I do, they may find that they are the only English speakers with whom their children are in constant contact. Raising a bilingual child in such circumstances is very difficult, particularly if the English-speaking parent works full-time and is unable to spend much time at home. My husband is a taciturn individual, even in Japanese, so, despite his fluency in English, our boys have missed out on lively English discussions at the supper table.

My children speak to me in simple Japanese and I reply in simple English. Misunderstandings are common. We sometimes resort to drawing pictures to explain our intentions; other times, we consult dictionaries. My sons have a good comprehension of

spoken English, but they are unable to speak it themselves. In this they are like most Japanese, who are taught English at school from the age of twelve, but whose lessons lack emphasis on conversation and listening.

I was granted a year's sabbatical by my university a little over eleven years ago and took my three sons to England, where I had done postgraduate work before my marriage. My sons were then ages seven, five and one. It was unreasonable to expect that they might master English in that short time, especially as it transpired that my two elder sons befriended two Japanese boys whose father was earning a degree at a university near our town. My in-laws sent monthly boxes of Japanese food and videos and children's magazines and books. We might as well have stayed in Japan, as far as my boys were concerned.

In spite of the linguistic divide between myself and my sons, it may be that our particular challenges are the very things that bring life and color to our relationship. When my parents, embroiled in the emotional drama of their break-up, defected from their duties, my siblings and I gained strength from our freedom. Similarly, although it has been a huge source of pain for me that I can't chat with my boys in the way most parents take for granted, we enjoy, paradoxically, an unusually close relationship. Perhaps it is because we are deprived of a common language that we are far more physically affectionate than is common in Japan, where demonstrations of intimacy, even between a mother and child, are scarcely seen. My boys and I are playful; we make jokes. If actions speak louder than words, we know each other profoundly but at an intangible level.

Still, it is a less than perfect situation. I blame myself. I should have made a much greater effort to learn Japanese years ago. My excuses for not having done so are many. I've had a full-time job since coming to Japan. I'm not gifted at learning languages. I've

felt overwhelmed by work and household duties. But it's never too late. I am currently enrolled in a Japanese study program.

But I feel that I have imparted a sense of the larger world to my children and that they have imbibed western values that I cherish but that they might not have encountered or found acceptable in a purely Asian environment. They like privacy and independence; they respect women; they can envisage a life outside of Japan. They are “international” citizens, familiar with the States and England and all the other countries I have dragged them to. In a world that is, to adopt the cliché, increasingly “globalized,” perhaps the type of family to which I belong—with my own relatives thousands of miles away, and my children citizens of a land not my own—will become the standard rather than the exception.

Now, when people call my children “halves,” or when my boys refer to themselves by that term, I say, “not half, but both.”

On the Almost-Red Bricks

Michael Shirzadian

On the almost-red bricks of the fireplace hearth

Rests the small iron rod used to poke

Half-seasoned logs,

Black at its tip.

There Mr. Safaraz

(please call him Mehrdad)

Spoons sugarcoat-fruit and blesses the food:

Aush-e reshte with a touch of gheimeh and

Basmati with saffron of course.

These remind of Shiraz or Tehran

Or those humming-hot nights when he'd sleep on a roof

By the Caspian.

Mumbai

Gabriella Natal

Down on my elbows on the floor. I strip open the white pack of instant soup. It has red letters on the outside. Ingredients. The carpet scrapes them. My elbows. Should the lamp be on or off? Why does CNN have so much damn advertising. Should I turn it off? The drapes are closed but bullets don't care one way or the other, do they?

The 21st century version of a mother's adage about clean underwear. Always pack decent pyjamas and a bevy of instant soup. Hotel fires aren't unheard of. Neither are coups d'état. Why don't you put a gun to my head and shoot me right here, I told my boss when he wouldn't cancel my trip to San Salvador during a rebel siege of the Sheraton. One young guy, just joined the foreign service, guerrillas in his upstairs bedroom. Great lookout point, they said. Put him in the closet downstairs, just in case, they said. Why do I always travel alone? The boy quit. Hadn't even finished a year. Reports from the CIA? Read like someone had written them from inside a letter box, peeping out the slot.

On TV, we saw dust scatter from the twin towers. We saw tourists homeless in Phuket, the ones Tsunami didn't sweep up. Never know when your flight number will come up in the Jihad lotto. My daughter fourteen says don't go. Don't worry, I've got plenty of life insurance, I say. I like my work. I meet people. She rolls her eyes. Grins a downward sloping squinty grin.

Trouble with decent hotels. The people. Over trained. Obsequious. Definitely surplus labour in Mumbai. A room cleaner, a bed turner-downer, a mini-bar refiller boy,

too friendly, room service boy, curious. Why are they always boys? I'd rather girls did the comings and goings. It's more seemly when you're a woman in a hotel room, alone. Oh, and watchmen on each floor. Not to mention bellhops, desk clerks, concierges to fetch aspirin for you, of course. Where are they now? CNN doesn't say. It only shows dark forms running. People scattering. Dark forms with automatic rifles. Machine guns, too, I think. Grenades? Never bothered to figure these things out. We were anti-war in my day. My male friends might know the makes. Or say they did.

The soup's open. Where's the water. Still some bottled water in the bathroom. One bottle. How long does soup stick in the belly? No sense in going for the whiskey in the mini-bar. What if I need to do something? What? Where did I put the hot pot? Drank the tea already. There were four bags Darjeeling and English Breakfast in the little white ceramic box for sugar packets and whatnot. The hot pot's under the desk. What did I do that for? Right, the plug over there is low on the wall. Don't have to walk by the window. Crawl over to the hot pot and dump the soup powder in over the heating element. Carpet's rough. Put the envelope in the dust bin under the desk. No cause to be messy. How long will I be here?

Life's funny. Australian guy just arrived in Boston - sabbatical leave. Looked the wrong way and stepped out. Smashed like a bug. Well I'll be darned my dad said coming home from campus. The driver moaned. Clutched his ribs.

Am I nauseous?

Night time's worse. Voices, explosions. Gunshots. Where is everyone? Let me get that water. Soup's no good without water. Why do I always travel alone? CNN says people are being killed. Which floor? Office security manual said don't take a room on the first floor. Might get robbed. Kidnapped, at worst. Said never take a room above the

sixth floor. Fire ladders can't reach. Who the heck ever heard someone tell the front desk, I'd like a room between the second and sixth floors please. Idiot, I think. How about terrorists? Which floors can they reach? I know where the fire escape is. It's on the back of the door. Studied the diagram for ten minutes.

Put a wet towel on the crack under the door. Smoke in the halls, but no fire alarm so don't go. A different kind of smoke. We did that in college. Wet towels to keep the dope smoke in, not the bombs out. Bombs in Yemen, the week after I left. A hotel. Airport closed in Bangkok. Day after I left. Demonstrators. Inching closer to fate. The Beatles thought we'd have a revolution. Thought it would be fun. This is sort of not fun. Not real. Let me get that water. The bottle's in the bathroom. Last bottle.

I crawl to the bathroom. What am I doing? Smoke rises; always crawl, they say. Yes, but do bullets rise? Don't know anything about these things. The manual says don't tell a boy soldier he looks darling and snap a photo. These are not boys. The dark forms on CNN look like more than men. Like trained assassins. Like Rambo. Good Rambo wasn't real, was he? Sylvester Stallone, yes. Where are these guys when you need them? No, they are not real.

I think it's daylight now. Or nearly so. If I part the curtain I can see who's in the square. On CNN, they look worried. Scared, actually. Someone was killed.

Carpet's thick. Why are these decent hotels so luxurious. Slept on the floor. Sheets are a mess. Room cleaner's gone. Gone home, I hope. Now for the cup. Cup-o-soup. Imagine! Cup-o-soup at the Taj Mahal Hotel. Got one granola bar at the bottom of my suitcase, I think. Saving the chocolate in the mini-bar for tomorrow. Burst of energy to get me outta here. Sugar boost, tomorrow. Well, thinking positive. Good. Why don't I panic? Later. I'm hungry. Where is everyone? If I traveled with dozens of colleagues,

would we all be under my desk together? Could pass the cup around for sips of soup. Maybe one of them would panic. Cry. Moan about his kids. Better I travel alone. What's CNN saying? I've got jeans on. I could bolt. Let's get the tourist map from the caddy on the desk and try to connect the dots with CNN visuals. Why does the hotel on CNN look like it's in another country? Antarctica. But with people. Why does it look black-and-white, and dark green? Night cameras, maybe.

Why do I like to get room service. I might not even have been here. The room service cart's in the corner, chicken bones dried. Tandoori smell. Have to go out to dinner more often, next trip.

Footsteps in the hallway. Bumping sounds. Good bumps or bad bumps? Maybe under the bed is best. Theory. Bed's too low. Behind. Behind the bed. Toward the window with the bullets. Well, potential bullets. None yet. Not this window. What floor were people killed on?

Knock on the door. Soft knock. CNN says the evil Rambos are knocking on doors. Rounding people up. Rambos knock hard, don't they? Hell, Rambos blast down doors. Don't answer. Clicking noises. Static. Who has radios? Good guys or bad guys? A French guy, an ambassador. Got scared during the invasion of Panama. Took a radio from the soldiers. The good guys. Bad guys. Let him have it to feel better. Wouldn't give it back. They called headquarters. Why don't normal people have radios. They had radios in Jamaica. After the hurricane. Everyone had radios instead of phones. Never saw ones that worked before. The ones that came in wrapping under Christmas trees never worked. How do you hide behind a bed? Is it like a kid hiding behind a skinny tree?

Phone's ringing. Can't shoot through a phone. Bomb either. Answer it. Yes, answer it.

Phone's ringing.

Okay. Hello? Yes, this is Mrs. Johnston. My door? Yes, my door. There's someone.
It's okay. It's you? It's hotel people. Police? I hang up.

Jeans. Yes, I'm dressed.

Passport. Wallet. Where are my shoes?

The towel. Pull it. The latch. It's noisy. Why are hotel doors so heavy.

The hall's dark. Light from my bathroom by the door glows their faces. An armed man. A uniform. Torchlight. Lots of ammunition in a belt. The mini-bar boy, pointing at me. No, beckoning me with a hand. Nodding to the man with the ammunition. Finger on his lips. Yes, I'm quiet. Following. Too friendly. He didn't go home. He was downstairs, somewhere. With the others. How do you thank someone for rescuing you? Maybe I can panic now that he's here. The hall's dark. Stairwell, too. Debris. A body. I have one granola bar in my left hand. Got to go out to eat more often on my next business trip.

Comedian Tragedian

Paul Handley

Once in the land of Formosa, where Yossarian and Napoleon frolicked on the sand,

Yossarian had Samosas flown in by Milo.

Napoleon was presented a canteen of mimosas served in his command post tent.

Yossarian feigned illness and reprieve was the hospital to pinch Nurse Rosa.

Napoleon committed atrocities even beyond the imagination of Mario Vargas Llosa.

At Waterloo, Napoleon cried Remember Alamosa, Colorado, which stymied his troops,

except for his supplicant adjunct, who also served as Josephine's lover.

Yo-Yo could have helped Napoleon if he were the bombardier, not artillery.

Who is the larger figure? If judged by Cardozo, it would be tossed out of court for lack of jurisdiction.

Napoleon was made emperor while Yossarian received a naked medal.

Napoleon is revered yet he needs lifts to attain that crazy Assyrian's heights, albeit he had the advantage of being a figment.

In the ponderosa pine forests of Corsica the Costa Nostra recruited Napoleon.

Napoleon wanted France to know about his power base, but was silenced by omerta code.

Hikaru

Doug Stuber

One cherry blossom detaches, falls, a single unit
allowing fruit its space, starting its new journey: island
to reflecting pond, orchard to cottage yard, daughter to
lover, enhanced by the wind, if even for only six seconds.
Transformed to long-boned genius, long-yearning adult,
considerate friend, purple-green plaid from soft pink,
tan suede boots from four-petalled bloom. Hikaru, as they
say in Japan, hits the town running, arms crossed, cradling
herself like the war-torn victims of Vietnam, but not
worn or torn, she flings enthusiastic youth toward
outstretched limbs. She captures her beginning and future
simultaneously, shedding one form, embracing another,
sweating humid Spring, still awkward in this skin.
Descending unannounced, she moves among mere mortals
Spreading joy, quietly demanding obedience, offering all
in exchange for all. Most cannot accept, choose an
easier, less complicated path; but those blessed metamorphosed
beings who join Miss Cherry soon realize for one day,
week, or lifetime, their lives will never be the same.

The Gift

L.K. Clark

“I have to say I’m...well, no offense, but I’m surprised,” Dr. Alan Murphy said to Ali. His name was actually Ali bin Murr bin Omar Al-Chanaah in full, but Alan quickly decided to follow the Saudi Arabian tradition and call him simply “Ali.”

Doctor Ali looked up from the patient chart he was updating. He looked at Alan, then followed the doctor’s gaze to the group of women coming out of one of the hospital conference rooms. Quickly, he turned away. “Alan,” he whispered harshly, “it’s not our custom to ogle females. Turn your eyes from them.”

“I’m so sorry, Ali.” The man quickly complied, his face reddening. “I totally forgot.”

“Don’t let it happen again. This may be 2030, but there are certain constants in our society; this is one of them.”

“I...I won’t. I was just, like I said, surprised, that’s all.”

“Surprised, surprised,” Ali answered impatiently. He had spent many hours during the past week orienting the British doctor to the hospital as well as to life in Saudi Arabia. The visiting surgeon had tried poor Ali’s patience more than once. It was an honor to have him here to share his skills, but the man had a lot to learn about adjusting to Islamic culture. “What’s so surprising about a group of female doctors and nurses?”

“Oh, dear. I’m afraid that if my looking at the women disturbed you, you really won’t like what I was planning to say.”

Ali forced a smile. “Relax, my friend. If you need to be censured, rest assured, I’ll

gladly take the responsibility upon myself.”

A sickly half-smile crossed Alan’s face, accompanied by an insincere chuckle. He was not accustomed to, nor did he enjoy, having another doctor rebuke him. “Never, uh, mind. It’s...Well, the workers here are very content and happy. That’s all. That’s very good.”

Ali gazed at Alan quizzically, then back to the space the women had occupied only moments before. A look of understanding crossed his features and a genuine smile now appeared. “They were all smiling, weren’t they?”

“Yes. Indeed. How did you know?”

“Oh, I’ve seen it myself. I just didn’t stare,” he said in mock scolding.

Alan smiled warily.

“Every three months,” Ali continued, “our female obstetricians meet with our female nurses—along with their counterparts from the rest of the country—to update them on any new procedures and make sure there are no problems. They’re always smiling when they exit. No men attend the meetings, nor are there male obstetricians or attending nurses. It would be... unseemly.”

“But why are they so happy when they leave?”

“Who knows?” Ali said with an exaggerated shrug of his shoulders. “Who understands women anyway?”

Some things were the same, even cross-culturally.

Fadwa twirled around, giggling, before throwing her arms up. She then hugged herself and dropped onto her bed with a smile and a sigh.

“It’s amazing, isn’t it?” she asked her three visiting friends.

“I’m sure Ishaq’ll think so,” Bahiya, Fadwa’s neighbor, responded with a crooked smile.

“So where’d you get that negligee, anyway?” Asma asked. “It’s absolutely sinful!”

Fadwa gasped. “Asma! Don’t say that! There aren’t any taboos in a couple’s relationship as long as they’re both comfortable.”

The young woman broke into peals of laughter. “Yes, Fadwa,” Asma answered with the feigned tone of an obedient schoolchild, “so you’ve said. Now answer my question. Where’d you get that?”

My mother got it for me.”

Laughter again. Who knew that anticipating a wedding could unbind such formerly forbidden topics? Lingerie! For the past six years of her life, Fadwa had been disguising the fact that she had the body of a woman. What a relief to finally wear something that revealed her femininity.

“I wish it was me getting married,” Lulu lamented.

“Lu, don’t be like that,” Fadwa answered her little sister. “You’ll have your turn. You’re only fourteen!”

“It’s true, Lulu” Rana, another friend, answered. “I didn’t think boys would ever be interested in me, but my mother told me last week that seven—can you believe it, seven—women have approached her, asking for me as a match for their sons. My mother said that she never had seven prospective matches. In fact, she told me that my father might never have even asked to marry her if it hadn’t been for his accident.”

“Why?” Lulu asked. “Your mother isn’t that ugly.”

“My mother isn’t ugly at all! How dare you say such a thing!”

“Sor-ry.”

Rana sniffed and turned from the girl, waiting several seconds before responding. “It wasn’t because my mother wasn’t pretty. In those days, families were more concerned with the character of a person than they were with their looks when it came to finding husbands or wives for their kids. Sometimes boys back then didn’t even see their brides’ faces until the wedding day. Outside the home, lots of women wore veils and black abayas all the time.”

“Ugh,” Asma responded. Then, with wide eyes, she slapped her hands over her mouth. Looking from face to face, she explained, “I’m just glad we’re allowed a little more freedom nowadays. I can’t imagine having to always cover up in black.”

“Me, either,” Fadwa said.

“Let me finish,” Rana said, raising her voice slightly. “The only reason that my mother didn’t have other mothers knocking at her door to ask for her hand was that so many able-bodied boys had signed up for military training. It was a crazy time. My father said our country was in some kind of jihad rage. My mother said it seemed like a fever had infected the boys and all they could think of was defending Islam. The only ones left behind were either sick or disabled. My father was in a wheelchair even back then, so he couldn’t go. But at least he got my mother!”

“Well,” Asma said, “let’s just be happy there are plenty of boys around now. Fadwa has a handsome and very physically fit young man waiting for her.”

The others gasped. With a light slap to her friend’s arm, Fadwa scolded, “Asma! Can’t you be a little more subtle?”

“So why don’t the young men want to fight the jihad nowadays?” Lulu asked.

Rana huffed. “I don’t know, Lu.” She paused for a moment before adding, “I know that my dad and uncle and their friends wonder the same thing. I’ve overheard

them talking about it.”

“Let’s talk about something else,” Asma said in her most dramatic tone. After a pause, she said, “So Fadwa, will you dance for Ishaq in your new negligee or will you dance naked on your wedding night?”

“Asma!” the rest of them groaned.

“No, Mom. Not ‘iffy genetics.’ I said epigenetics. It means ‘on’ genes. Scientists study how they can modify genes without changing the sequence of DNA within a specimen. Adding molecules to the DNA structure makes a difference in the way genes are expressed.”

“What?”

Mariam sighed. “It doesn’t matter anyway, Mom. I’m moving on to obstetrics in the fall.”

“Oh!” her mother answered. “So you’ll be a baby doctor, right?”

“You got it,” she answered. “Hey Mom, would you please put Leena on the phone?”

“Hey, big sister,” Leena said a moment later. “What’s this about you becoming a baby doctor?”

Leena, now applying for grad school in England, kept abreast of current events better than her mother. “I thought you were still working on that experiment with the mice.”

“We finished it, and it was more exciting than we imagined. Remember I told you that, depending on what the female mice consumed during their pregnancies, certain genes could be ‘silenced’ in their offspring?”

“Yeah, yeah. Some were born brown and some yellow.”

“Yes, but that wasn’t the most startling thing we discovered. When the mice grew, the brown ones had significantly lower occurrences of diabetes, obesity, and cancer than their yellow counterparts. When we gave the mothers supplements that contained a simple methyl group, one specific gene was silenced. But the mice aren’t the exciting part. We can identify large portions of the human genome that respond similarly.”

“Mariam, you mean—”

“—We don’t know what it means yet. My colleagues will keep me in the loop. Who knows? Maybe someday I can help Kingdom mothers and babies with the concepts I’ve learned.”

Youssef sucked in deeply, closing his eyes to savor the sweet apple-flavored tobacco. He’d been looking forward to this time with five of his closest associates. Actually, with five of his closest friends. After ten minutes, the shisha was casting its soft blanket of lightheaded fuzziness on him. He listened to the hubble-bubble of the water as the smoke passed through it to enter the long, velvet-covered tube that carried the soothing tobacco essence to his mouth. His taut muscles began to relax. He allowed the sensual sweetness of the smoke to linger on his tongue before exhaling.

He smiled as he opened his chestnut eyes just a crack to check on his comrades. Yes. They, too, were enjoying the hookah.

“Ah, my friends. It’s good to enjoy some moments of relaxation together, isn’t it?”

Gabr’s gaze floated to Youssef. He smiled. Four of the man’s front teeth had rotted out of his mouth many years earlier, and the rest were the dull color of sand. Still, his lazy grin was a pleasant sight to Youssef.

These men, these faithful five, had sacrificed much: their youth, at times their health, and all of the personal aspirations they had once possessed. They were of the committed few.

Now clouds of fruity smoke surrounded and relaxed them all.

“Naji. I see that you’re enjoying yourself.”

“Yes. I feel the water pipe draining away the stress of recent days. Still, I can’t completely forget the difficulties.”

“No. Nor should you,” Youssouf answered in a calming tone. “Our struggle to win victory for Allah will, I’m afraid, always be with us.”

Ismet’s gaze moved from the shiny brass base of his water pipe to the leathery face of his leader. “Youssouf. You disappoint me.”

The others jerked their necks to look at Ismet. No one dared speak this way to the Prophet’s (peace be upon him) servant.

“Oh, my friends,” Ismet hastened to add, seeing the ire he had raised. “I mean no disrespect. Many pardons,” he said, bowing his head toward Youssouf.

The leader’s eyes narrowed, all signs of tranquility erased from them. “I suppose you would like to explain yourself,” he answered in a low, dangerous tone.

Ismet dropped his pipe and stiffened his back. Folding his hands at waist level, he assumed the position of humble beseeching. “Of course you don’t disappoint me,” he said. “I only mean that I’ve prayed for a final, overarching victory for so long. I’ve pinned my hopes on it.”

Ismet squirmed slightly under Youssouf’s concentrated gaze before he finally released the man with a sad smile.

“I understand, Ismet,” Youssouf said. “It’s hard to wait. Still, we don’t know when

victory will come, or whether it will even come in our lifetimes.”

“It would be easier, come quicker, if we could recruit some young blood to our cause. Some young Kingdom blood,” fifty-two year old Sha interjected. More than the others, Sha suffered from a number of physical maladies as a result of years spent in abnegation and deprivation. Nevertheless, though his years slowed his body, he was as dedicated to their cause as the day he pledged himself to it at age seventeen.

Youssef returned a sad smile. “Ah, yes. Don’t we all wish for the old days, when young men without number were willing to sacrifice whatever was necessary for the cause of Allah.”

The others nodded, but no one spoke.

The remaining time in the hookah café was quiet. Though the comrades enjoyed the indulgence, they were unable to fully clear their minds.

As Mariam exited the conference room with the gathered female doctors and nurses, Sabira, a visiting gynecologist from Iran, touched her sleeve. Sabira’s long dark hair was striking as it lay on her white uniform.

Mariam stopped to turn and look at her, her eyebrows asking what Sabira wanted.

The Iranian leaned forward and, with her mouth close to Mariam’s ear, said, “I have only one question for you. How did you do this?”

Pulling away so she could look at the woman’s eyes, Mariam answered, “Come. Join me in my office.”

The visiting physician knew of genetic manipulation in principle, though she’d never worked in the field. Mariam’s explanation fascinated her.

“When pregnant women go to their obstetricians for prenatal visits, the doctors

give each a supply of vitamins. Only Saudi Arabian obstetricians and their nurses—all women—know that the supplements contain a specific methyl group molecule. And the invisible, ludicrously simple molecule turns off the aggression gene in every boy born in our country.

“After I graduated from The Johns Hopkins School of Medicine—”

“—At the top of your class, I see,” Sabira said, pointing toward the certificate on Mariam’s wall.

“For that achievement, I won the coveted chair position of Chief of Obstetrics in the most prestigious hospital in all of Saudi Arabia. I couldn’t believe it. There were others with years of experience who were more qualified.

“From this position, I was determined to carry out the plan that a brilliant group of my colleagues from Duke and I had devised. Winning over other female obstetricians and their nurses was easier than I anticipated. They all had brothers and sons they didn’t want to see die in some unholy holy war.

“I always contended that, if mothers ran the world, there would be far fewer wars. This is my way of giving Kingdom women a chance to run their world.”

Sabira shook her head in wonder. “I’ve heard a lot of rumbling from Iranian men about how the Saudis can’t be depended on anymore to carry on holy jihad. I had no idea that the reason was a female obstetrician with guts.”

Mariam gaze was on the floor, but a definite smile marked her expression.

Many men gathered to socialize in dewaniahs that evening after nightfall prayer, each cordially and respectfully welcomed to the special rooms. As custom had dictated for centuries, the men sat in circles, none more important than the others. Never did they

turn the soles of their feet toward another, for that would show great disrespect. In some dewaniahs, the guests sat on couches. In the traditional ones, they sat directly on floors covered with richly patterned Persian carpets. Hosts offered handle-less cups of cardamom-flavored coffee, half-filled, to their guests. No one needed milk or sugar. Rather, sweet dates balanced the flavor of the strong drink.

The hospitable mood worked to relax the men so they could talk. “How are you?” “And your family?” They discussed, questioned, and considered other topics as well. Conversation in which a man learned nothing was a waste of time.

Although it was deemed discourteous to introduce unpleasant matters in conversation, it had been difficult—very difficult—to avoid one topic recently.

“Another business associate challenged me today,” an international businessman said in one dewaniahs.

“The same thing happened to me,” another chimed in.

“My clients: the Syrians, the Iraqis, the Kuwaitis, the Libyans,” the first man continued, “they constantly badger me. ‘Where are the young men of the Kingdom who are willing to pay the ultimate price for jihad, for Allah, most gracious and merciful?’ they ask.

“I have no answer. Young men would rather study. Or start their own businesses. Or get married and start families. They’re more like girls than men. What’s happened to them? I don’t know how much longer I’ll be able to bear the shame. Perhaps I’ll have to cut off commercial relations with non-Kingdom Muslims. But that would mean doing business with foreign infidels; how can I rely on such people for my livelihood?”

The older men in the group recalled how it had been. “Years ago, in the early days of the century,” one man began, “I thought that our country, too, should war against

terror. Islamic fanatics were ruining the reputation of everyday Muslims. We all had to take a stand against them. They were terrorists.”

A middle-aged man continued the thought. “But that was a different time. The world has changed, and now Muslims outside our country challenge our peaceful non-involvement. The frightening part is, I think they may be right. We should be fighting for a pure world, free from the influence of the immoral West. Worldly music dulls our children’s ears. Their eyes have become corrupt, seeing things that you and I never even knew existed. They want to be like the impure, the profane.”

“Perhaps we did a disservice to ourselves to preach peace so loudly against fellow believers who were only trying to keep our lives free from such stains,” another, older man said. “Perhaps the fault is our own. All I know is that I can’t abide the constant goading from foreign Muslims—devout men, not fanatics.”

They all agreed. Something must be done. But first, they needed to find out whether some wrong teaching was blinding the eyes and squelching the fire from their young men. Were teachers espousing anti-jihad propaganda at school? Was WWComSys (World Wide Communication System) responsible? (Oh, for the days of unsophisticated television, radio, and Internet!) Maybe youth clubs and teams were unwittingly—or intentionally—teaching perversion. Were the Mutawa, their own religious police, doing all they could to discover any adulterations reaching their young men? Someone should be monitoring all of these areas. The faithful must expose the menace creating their crisis.

Later, lying in bed with their wives, these same men again bemoaned the failure of Kingdom youth. “Why?” they asked, staring through the dark at the ceiling. “Why are young men today so unwilling to sacrifice for the cause of Islam? Have they so little devotion to their God?”

“Oh, husband,” not one, but many of the wives responded. “You’re overreacting. We have good young men. I, for one, am glad that my son doesn’t want to throw his life away. The thought of him strapping a bomb onto his body or crouching to avoid being seen while he fights in some battle we’ll never win makes me shudder.”

Some husbands were silent at this reaction. Some raised their voices. Others lashed out with hurtful words. A few responded to their wives with harsh slaps.

Their women did not understand. They were women.

“So,” Sabira said, “are you going to tell me how I can do this in Iran?”

“You realize, don’t you, that this will turn your country upside down. That the lives of everyone—from girls about to be married, to grizzly fanatics, to ordinary men who seem to find nothing more enjoyable than sitting around and talking—will be different if you do this.”

“I’m counting on it,” Sabira answered.

The End.

At a Monastery Near Pasing, Bavaria

Geordie de Boer

Bare-armed brothers dressed in blue-jeans
gravity-drawing steins of light and dark,
beer so clean you'd swear honey caressed
your throat. The large, peeled radish looking
like a monk's white shanks, flanked by a brick
of liver-sausage as if pried from the wall,
ricks of drying hay, plowed and unplowed
fields below, cows grazing, cries of magpies,
horses in halters, supine farmers, the once
blazing sun faltering in the tops of the pines.

Chányuán

Paula Berman

I.

The Taiwan moon
keeps her gibbous watch
over jungled mountains.
No ping there lies untouched.
Towns grow,
cities are overgrown,
the hungry jungle eats all:
only the moon knows
what was there.

II.

I have watched her
through inversion haze,
clear desert nights and dust storms.
Shining dim through Northern fogs,
Mirrored by water
in the dark before day.
Pallid at noon,
blazing on midnight snow.
I have not seen the same moon
Twice.

Something Physical

Nina Romano

My psychic grandmother believed in dreams and Sicilian customs, so I grew up placing importance on them. I awoke on an Easter Sunday and felt a quickening and remembered my dream. I was entering my sixth month of pregnancy, and had slept soundly except for a kick and the dream, which took place in my Grandpa's basement workshop of his old Dyker Heights home. Where I remembered a window, I now saw a door. I saw it plainly, even passed through it to make sure; I stuck my head outside and looked around to see the cut tree trunk I used to stand on near Grandpa's hydrangea bushes. Even in the dream, I puzzled over the door.

I lived in Rome. So I phoned my mother in the States to wish her a happy Easter and tell her what I'd dreamt.

She said to me, "Before you were born, there was a door where you remember the window." How did I know? Did I know encased in my mother's womb? I'd never heard about the door. Ever. Mom assured me it was never discussed. When I played in Grandpa's workroom, there was no trace or outline of a door.

The next day, Pasquetta, or Little Easter, was an Italian holiday. I walked my gray, cotton-puff poodle Napoleon, returning home with a strong urge to urinate. At noon I felt intense pressure cramps in my vagina and lower abdomen. My husband worked at the Cavalieri Hilton minutes from our home on Via Alberto Cadlolo. I called to tell him I had severe pains. He must have run the whole way.

Minutes later we drove past the Vatican wall to Salvador Mundi Hospital. I walked

into Admitting and was wheeled to Maternity. The midwife, a German nun, said my doctor, an ex-Army physician, was advised of my condition and was on his way. “Rome traffic is bedlam,” I said, but I’d be fine. She told me I was having contractions, but I contradicted her. No, just strong pressure pains. When I coughed, I felt as though my period had started, or I had to wee. Trying to suppress my coughing from nervous tension and spring allergies, I all but stuffed the pillow in my mouth.

“What’s wrong?” she asked.

“I’m trying not to cough. When I do, I wet myself.”

She said, “Your water broke.”

All of a sudden I was drowning in the realization that my labor had begun. The doctor arrived wearing a green sweatshirt and jeans. The stethoscope hopscotching across my abdomen felt cold, but no colder than my sinking heart when I saw the doctor shake his head. No heartbeat.

“But only yesterday,” I said, my voice pleading.

“When something’s physically wrong in nature, it rights itself. The fetus is expelling itself. You’re fully dilated. It’ll be a natural birth—”

“—Except my baby’s dead. I’ll never have another one.”

“Sure you will,” he said. “Make a date for next year. Right here. Same time.”

I thought about my girlfriend Nelsa whose baby had calcified inside her; she almost died of peritonitis. She’d said, “They took my baby piece by chiseled piece.” What consolation to know my stillborn child’s passage into the world would be natural.

I miscarried a baby boy. My doctor assured me losing a first child is common.

“Not for me.” I looked at the crucifix on the wall.

“Wait and see, you’ll have another baby,” he said.

“I won't.”

“Everyone says that, but you will.”

I had waited, hoped, prayed and done everything humanly possible to conceive this child I was losing. It took thousands of dollars, novena prayers, hysterical fights with my husband, bouts of depression over suspicions of his infidelity, and the raw exposure of soul and body to a baker's dozen doctors using me as a pet Guinea pig.

A nurse wheeled me into Labor and Delivery. Did I want to be awake? If I was going to have my baby, yes. But why would I now? I looked at the clock: 7:25. April 23. I spoke to God, confessed sorrow for my sins. I thought of my parents and husband, how much I loved them, and closed my eyes.

I've regretted that decision. After I came to, I asked the midwife what they had done with my baby. Had he been christened and buried? She assured me. Christened what? Buried where? I never had the courage to ask.

The day after I was released from the hospital, my mother called. I heard her voice and choked, “Oh, Ma, I lost the baby.”

She said to me, “My darling girl. I dreamt about you and woke up Monday morning calling your name. I knew something was wrong. I wanted to call; Aunt Jay told me not to worry, but Daddy told me to call. I'll put him on.”

“Hello, you old geezer,” I said, but he couldn't talk to me; his voice was gravelly and tearful. He passed the phone back to Mom.

My mother reminded me of an old Sicilian custom. If you're pregnant, never be seen in a place of prominence. Don't be a bridesmaid, never hold a child for Baptism. Unlucky. Although we're religious, old superstitions root deeply. I was Godmother for

my nephew Jon, and had held him at his Baptism a few months earlier. Unbeknownst to me at the time, I was expecting.

After trying for three years to conceive naturally, I began a one-woman crusade to get pregnant. It had taken me six years of every kind of treatment for infertility that existed short of in-vitro, and when that came around I was considered too much of a risk because of my age. I took the prescription Sequenz, a birth-control pill, for months. This contraceptive renders the body more fertile following medication. Then came exercises for a retroverted uterus to right itself in order to become pregnant.

Next followed three *salpingographic* analyses. The mere name sends transverse shivers through me. It's a method of shooting dye through the Fallopian tubes in order to ascertain openness. Once the dye is inserted, an X-ray is taken. The first time I had this done I wasn't warned it would be painful; I assumed it was a radiograph. I wasn't given anything to calm me. No pain killers. When I exited the clinic near Piazza Giouchi Delfici, I vomited. Convulsing with pain, I drove the corkscrew Via della Cammilluccia to the top of Monte Mario, parked illegally on the sidewalk like any true Roman, and entered Lo Sport Bar where I had a shot of Fernet Branca. The herbal drink has restoring properties if it doesn't gag and kill you first. My other two experiences having my tubes forced open were equally impressive.

For months, I'd received a series of hormone injections during ovulation. How does a woman know she's ovulating? Without getting out of bed to go to the bathroom or brush her teeth, she measures her basal temperature anally every morning of every month for years and records it. Doesn't sound like such a difficult thing to do, but I can guarantee it inhibits your sex life, especially when the sex becomes a forced issue for the

three days: before, on and after ovulation. Command performances crimped spontaneity to the max, and strained my marriage. The guilt involved in missing one of these possible miracle days was astounding.

At the end of the lunar cycle, when cramps or staining indicated a new menstrual cycle, I was devastated and depressed, wondering if I'd ever stop crying, or ever again want to have sex for the sheer fun of it, instead of doing it in the most favorable position to conceive on the most opportune days. I'd already given up smoking, but wine was another biggie to be avoided—counter-productive and an inhibitor. I stopped drinking.

I failed to become a mother and failed to produce an heir for my husband, an only child. I no longer celebrated the changing seasons. Autumn and winter didn't matter, but spring and summer brought tortuous sightings of maternal love in every Roman park, street and thoroughfare. Mothers and mothers-in-waiting were abundant as cats in Piazza Argentina.

Then a new problem arose for me. All of a sudden I started passing tremendous blood clots during my periods, and the flow afterward whooshed like the flooded Tiber River after heavy rains. On my way to New York to visit my folks, I decided that since I had to have a "dilatation and curettage," or "D&C," I'd have it done at St. Claire's Hospital. However, the operation, or *scraping* as it's commonly known, was performed at the wrong time of month, and when I got back to Rome with two of my former students as house guests, I began hemorrhaging. The awful part about not being able to staunch the flow of vaginal bleeding for me echoed through my brain in a single name: Patty. My cousin had hemorrhaged to death a few years earlier, after a third pregnancy, when her uterine wall collapsed. These things don't just happen in novels, Patty's doctor had told her inconsolable mother; they're common. I recalled the helpless terror, my strength no

match for hers, as my Godmother bashed and beat her head against the cement wall of Brooklyn's Victory Memorial Hospital.

Another difficulty developed Sunday in the heart of the night, I became lightheaded with the loss of body fluid, and felt my life ebbing away. We had no phone to call a doctor. My husband rushed to the third floor and woke our neighbor, but her husband, Doctor Calderaro, was on emergency calls. The shops in the nearby Piazzale Medaglie D'Oro were closed. My husband drove to the Hilton Hotel, phoned my gynecologist-of-the-moment, and got the name of a medicine made from a small, deadly serpent. He called his mother, told her to dress, picked her up and continued to an all-night pharmacy. He purchased, over the counter, without a prescription, both the medication and the syringes. Only in Italy. My mother-in-law administered the shot to me when they arrived home just before dawn.

I had been artificially inseminated with my husband's sperm for six months, and was on the medication Dufaston for several more months. When these methods failed, I traveled to the overcrowded Terme di Salsamaggiore for a two week cure of thermal baths and daily vaginal irrigations with natural spring waters through a glass tube. These douches were not private, but administered by workers, who made conversation while hosing in liquid that seeped out into a ceramic bowl. A degree of modesty returned only when I sank my body into the mud bath or the scalding hot sulfurous water bath that followed.

Holed up in a small hotel in walking distance from the Terme, I knew no one, spoke to no one, took my meals in silence like a nun. Each night I drank a *digestivo* called Amaro Averna, its dark bitterness a reflection of my soul. After dinner, I started writing a

novel and I read *Roots*. Every night at bedtime, sustenance, in the form of a long distance phone call from my husband, infused my will to face it again the next day.

My last attempt at conceiving was to visit Dr. De Watteville, Sofia Loren's famous gynecologist and an infertility specialist in Geneva. After months of scheduling, I finally arrived in Switzerland. Two things happened. My period, due the following week, presented itself unexpectedly early. Stuck in Geneva for a week with the orderly Swiss, I subdued urges to rant, rave and smash. At the week's end, when I was able to have a gynecological examination, the doctor contracted measles.

For years, I'd pitted my mortal strength and will against God's to obtain something physically impossible for my body. God launched a scepter that lodged in the spokes of every wheel I turned advancing toward motherhood. Although I won a few skirmishes, I lost the war.

Would I do it again? If I knew for certain I'd carry the infant to term and have the baby, most assuredly yes—but never, never in exchange for the Karmic child I have today. He is a son so much like his father, so much like me, yet not a drop of our blood courses through his veins. I've learned at high price that carrying an infant in the womb doesn't make a mother—but caring for him as I did, through his first febrile convulsions, does.

I guess you could call my motherhood tenancy vicarious because I substituted for the genuine article, experiencing the role of another. I fit all three definitions of this word. I have substituted my son's birth mother's role throughout his life. I carried this

child, now grown to manhood, in the womb of another, holding my breath till he was born and handed over to me when he was thirteen days old. I may be just a “Secondhand Rose” mother, but when I told my son I’d help him find *her*, and when I asked him, standing at the kitchen sink, tears falling into soapy water, if he ever wanted to look for *her*, he answered, “No, Mom, you’re my mother. You’re the only one I’ve ever had or want.”

Well, then, I’ll take vicarious over something physical, even blood ties, anytime.

About the Authors

Lark Beltran

Lark Beltran is originally from California, but has lived in Lima, Peru for over 30 years as an ESL teacher, along with her Peruvian husband. Over the past several years, she has had poems published in a number of online and print journals.

Paula Berman

Paula Berman is an American expat living in Taiwan with her husband. She works in the semiconductor industry and finds writing poetry a nice change from engineering.

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L.K. Clark is a freelance writer of short stories and articles. She currently lives in Bulgaria with her husband.

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Geordie de Boer, writer of fiction and poetry, lives in Washington State. His poetry has been published by poetrymagazine.com, *Jerry Jazz Musician*, *Mississippi Crow*, *Frostwriting*, *fiction by SNReview*, *Side of Grits*, and *R-KVRY*.

Paul Handley

Paul Handley spent a career as a student and a student of odd jobs. He has a paralegal certificate and attended law school for a year; he has an MA, an MPA, and is ABD. He has driven a cab, scraped fish guts, sold meat door-to-door, directed a truck driving school, and worked in numerous other capacities. Paul has work published or forthcoming in *Bards and Sages*, *Breadcrumb Scabs*, *Burst!*, *The Driftwood Review*, *Gold Dust*, *Hobble Creek Review*, *iddie*, *Macabre Cadaver*, *the Maynard*, *The Northville Review*, *Ophelia Street*, *Poe Little Thing*, *Potomac: Poetry & Politics*, *Red Fez*, *Short Story Library*, *Shape of a Box*, *The Smoking Poet*, *Winning Writers*, *World Of Myth*, *Yellow Mama*, and *Yippee*.

Wendy Jones Nakanishi

Wendy Jones Nakanishi is an American who did postgraduate work in Britain, earning an M.A. in eighteenth-century English studies from Lancaster and then a Ph.D. on Alexander Pope's correspondence from Edinburgh University. Wendy has worked full-time since her arrival in Japan in the spring of 1984, employed by a private Japanese university. She has published widely in her chosen academic field. In recent years, she has also begun writing "creative non-fiction," describing her life in Japan as a foreigner married to a Japanese farmer and as the mother of three sons.

Gabriella Natal

Gabriella Natal lives in Switzerland but considers the Baltimore-Washington area her home. She has also lived in New York, Paris, Nairobi and Lusaka. Her fiction has appeared in such publications as *The Foliate Oak*, *Long Story Short*, and *The Shine Journal*. Work in progress includes a short story collection called "Liquid Crystals."

Nina Romano

Nina Romano earned an M.A. from Adelphi University and an M. F. A. in Creative Writing from Florida International University. Her short fiction and poetry appear in *The Rome Daily American*; *The Chrysalis Reader*; *Whiskey Island*; *Gulf Stream Magazine*; *Grain*; *Voices in Italian Americana*; *Vox*; *Chiron Review*; *Irrepressible Appetites*; *Roads Literary Magazine*, *Night Train*, *A Little Poetry*, and *GULFSTREAM!NG*, and will soon appear in *The Northville Review*. Excerpts from her novel-in-progress, *The Secret Language of Women*, appear in *Dimsum: Asia's Literary Journal*, and also in *Driftwood*. Romano's debut poetry collection, *Cooking Lessons*, was published in June 2007 by Rock Press, and was submitted for a Pulitzer Prize. Her new collection, *Coffeehouse Meditations*, will be published in 2010 by Kitsune Books. Nina Romano has lived in Rome, Italy, for twenty years and is fluent in Italian and Spanish.

Michael Shirzadian

Michael Shirzadian is a third-year English student at Cedarville University who aspires to enter an MFA program in creative nonfiction upon graduation. Michael works as News editor for his school newspaper, *Cedars*, and as editor for CU's almost-prestigious literary journal, *The Cedarville Review*. Michael enjoys pistachios, spontaneous road trips, and pictures of the ocean.

Doug Stuber

Doug Stuber is a visiting professor at Chonnam University in Gwangju, Korea. He toured the U.S. for 15 years as a rock bassist and vocalist; he has exhibited art on four continents for 30 years, and will publish his seventh volume of poetry in 2009.