

f(r)iction



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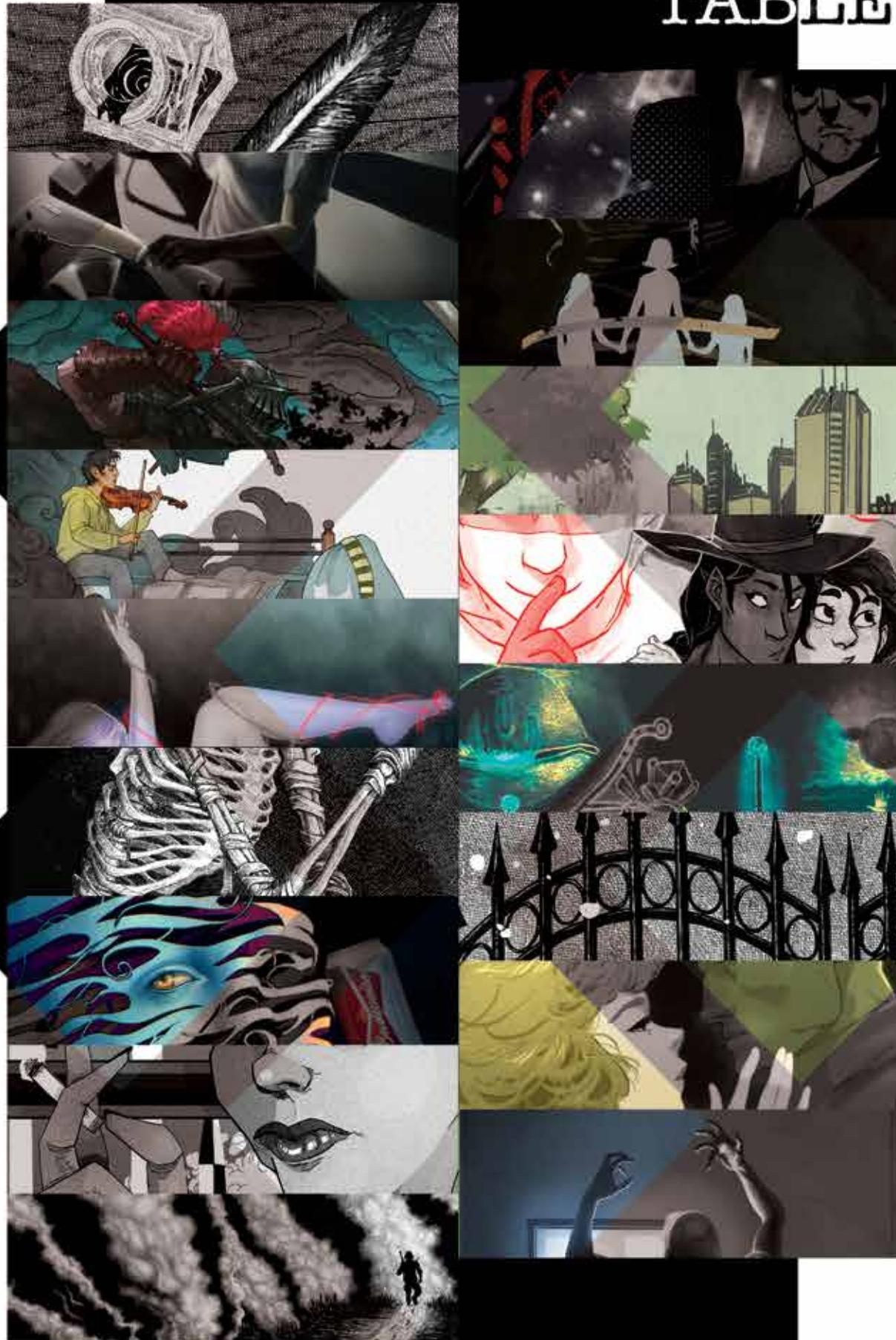
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I am a Person

by Tim Cummings

I will kill my child.

This is a certainty, as right as rain—and the rain will come again soon. Water shall descend in sheets from the sky, and everything shall be saturated. Everything thirsty shall be quenched. These are facts: I will murder my child and rain shall fall.

I am a person, a human, who lives a life—my life. And life is all about choices. All we ever do during this lifetime is choose.

I play the piano. It is nighttime, December. A cold clear night. I have chosen to play Claude Debussy's *Beau Soir*. I play with a somewhat sorrowful ease—attempting, as I do, to soften an edge in me.

Two months ago, in October, President Truman established the Joint Long Range Proving Grounds in Cape Canaveral, just across the water from my house in Merritt Island. The region proved “adequate” for testing new rocket technology. Specifically, the German V-2 rockets, rumored to have been confiscated and brought to America at the summation of the war.

Home has become a noisy place.

Home has become a place of fear, of suspicion and dark curiosity.

There are women around here whose husbands did not return from the war. There are women whose husbands returned as heroes. There are women whose husbands returned, in boxes, stiff and cold and white as the ropes on a new mop. There are women whose husbands returned wounded and not decorated—but, nonetheless, returned. These returned men do nothing but sleep, eat, drink, and talk to themselves in the harsh sunlight on back porches, or quiver on wounded legs as they mumble in the middle of unmown lawns. Yet they are alive.

I am a person, a woman, whose husband did not return.

Massy—Melissa—my daughter, has returned from a short stay in southern California. She went to visit my sister Laura, whose husband did return from the war, though she was not married to him before he left. Laura has a small boy and a new baby on the way. Massy is fourteen years old, an incorrigible age, and she has recently begun to bleed. She believes that her existence as a young girl is gone like a flower in winter, and that it has been replaced with more “womanly” concerns.

She declares to me, ever so sophisticated: “Aunt Laura is pretty, mother, with pretty clothes, but she always, always smiles when she speaks, which means she is not happy, yes? Little cousin Richie cries and cries if she walks but ten feet from his sight.” I do not wish to remark on my younger sister Laura, nor Los Angeles, which I left behind when I changed from Theresa Katherine Zielski into Mrs. Theresa Katherine Sterling.

Am I a widow? I am. A widow of sorts.

I carry a small pocket mirror with me wherever I go. I find myself retrieving it from my purse to gaze upon the rectangular sliver of glass and say to the reflection I find, “Just making sure you’re still there.”



I play the piano. In this moment, I am a person whose fingers dance up and down the keys. I care not that it is Christmastime. I disregard the urges of Massy to be given “a

remodel of the kitchen, mother!” Massy is a person who learns in school about how to be a good wife someday: to cook, to clean, to administer to men. To be a prize worth winning, and worth fighting for. Our daughters believe wholeheartedly in female perfection as it pertains to domesticity, appearance, filial responsibility—and Massy, despite my example, lets her life be guided by this horrible ruse.

For instance, it is Massy who takes control at the grocery store: “Oh, mother, these peaches are *divoon*,” she says, and re-shapes the perfect little flip of blonde hair at her shoulder, smooths her perfect skirt. “Mother, this fresh bread is positively *swallowful*,” she says, and adjusts the thin, silk scarf she has borrowed from me without my permission. Massy does not know—or does not let on—that “swallowful” is not a word.

It could be a word created by her friends, who have a club together. A union. I drive her to these meetings, which take place at a house in Orlando. Once, I asked her what it is she does at these meetings. She sighed dramatically: “Girl stuff, mother. We talk, and cook, and dress up, and do each other’s hair, and look at magazines, and fantasize about boys. I am given...*special attention*...because of father. As are you, mother,” she added as an afterthought.

I am a person who, while driving Massy to one of these meetings, would not feel guilty were I to pull the car to the shoulder of the road, clear my throat, calmly reach across and, with both of my hands firmly in place, yank my daughter’s head off her body—which may or may not sound somewhat like the forceful removal of the moist, rosy innards of a Thanksgiving turkey.

I play my piano. And I imagine.

Off in the distance men work with missiles, and cigars that dangle from corners of bushy-lipped mouths signify pride in having won another war—one that has allotted the men guiltless hours of camaraderie over their stealth and perfection, the abduction of German weaponry. All through the night they work. All through the morning. All through the day.

There are women in this neighborhood who, I imagine, bake cakes and cookies for these secretive men. In my mind’s eye, I see them drive across the bridge and park their husbands’ new cars somewhere within walking distance of a site where, splayed on the ground, giant rockets lay, vivisected. Men kneel before these helpless, stolen German machines, holding a clipboard

in one hand and a walkie-talkie in the other. The men take notes, talk of sports, of food, of breasts, carefully touching with hairy fingers the most particular components of these impeccably engineered rockets. The women stand in a syncopated line—a semi-circle around the men and the rockets, all holding out pans of freshly baked cookies, cakes, muffins.

These are the women whose husbands came home from the war.

This is what they do.

They smile, aching all the while, with rosy cheeks and manicured fingernails that mask their fear and sorrow—for although they have returned, their husbands are not the same men who left them. Rather, they are strange beings, different sizes in different places—in kitchens they are small; in garages, large; in the bedroom, tiny. The proud men are dressed in beige with dark blue insignias patched on their left breast-pockets. They smile and take the baked goods, wink, chew, chat, then get back to work—for America’s safety cannot be compromised by war-brides. But this dotting is all these women know now, and all they have to live for. Womanly purpose in the face of male province. They lack the freedom I possess because my husband is missing, or dead, or both.

It is a freedom my daughter will never understand.



It is morning now. Sunday.

I sit at the kitchen table, admiring the shadow of rain dribbling down the wallpaper replete with yellow roses, Clifford’s favorite flower. I light a cigarette and blow the fine gray plume of smoke at the wall, where it mixes with the sodden shadows cast by the rainwater.

There are three seats around this table, one of which is the chair Clifford preferred to sit in. He may never sit there again. The chairs are all the same: blue, tall, stately. There is a fourth one that came with the set, but it lives against the wall near the stove, having become a reluctant collector of discarded newspapers. Perhaps Clifford’s chair will become a reluctant collector of dust.

I want new chairs. I want new things.

Perhaps Massy is right in wanting a re-decorated kitchen. A new decade is upon us, after

all. The *Journal for Ladies* magazine emphasizes the importance of warm, pretty kitchens and the comforts of a well-kept home for husbands, sons, and all other kinds of male creatures. I take my little mirror from the pocket of my robe, look into it, exhale smoke into my reflection, and say, “Massy, you win. We shall have a new kitchen.”

Massy bops in, pulling her lustrous hair into a ponytail.

“Mother, you *are* smoking?” She emphasizes the word “are,” as if she doubted me when I’d told her that I’d quit, months ago. She was right to have doubted me; I never stopped. She catches me with the mirror in my hand, so I place it down on the table. She looks at it and says, “Mother, that mirror again—really now, what is it with you and that silly mirror?” She giggles.

She does not know my secrets, my history. She does not know my life at all, and she cannot read my thoughts. She is a young girl who calls me “mother” when all the other girls call their mothers “mom.” For what can she hope? Who will ever love her? What a sad, pitiful thing, in her pink pajamas and slippers. Why should she want to live her life anymore? She does not know—or pretends not to know—that this little mirror, with its blondewood frame and its faded odor of powdery perfume, was given to me by my Clifford.

“Massy,” I say, turning my chair to face her, “Why do you never talk about your father?”

She turns and stares at me, a look of hurt spreading across her face—as if one of her girlfriends has scolded her for wearing the wrong colored scarf. She blinks. “I do, mother. Don’t be silly. I speak of father to Our Lord all the time.”

I am a person who could squeeze the mirror until it shattered, then take a sliver of jagged glass in one hand, and with the other, pin my daughter’s face to the kitchen table, and hold her down while she screams. Men have muscles, anger, and a primal urge to defend themselves; women have vocal cords.

“Father is with Our Lord,” she continues. “He watches over us. Are you having tea? Please bathe away the smell of smoke. I do not want to smell of it in church.” Massy carefully prepares everything for the tea. For her, it is not about tea—it is about making the tea: china to be set carefully on the table; water to be boiled; paisley-pink napkins and stainless steel utensils to be set. Bread to be toasted.

I glide my finger along the mirror’s edge,

ready for it to crack so I can carve her father's name into her cheek with a point of broken glass. CLIFFORD. The name will materialize in hot red blood on her pale white skin.

I turn my head away from it all.

I wonder about "Our Lord." For Massy, He is a being that belongs only to her and her young thoughts, hopes, and wishes. For me, "Our Lord" is something else entirely: a mystery, a questioning, a problem not unlike wondering what to do about the ants, mice, and bees that take over in summer. What I wonder is could "Our Lord" be a beautiful German woman with whom my darling Clifford ran off, staging his own phony death? He makes love to her passionately, violently, with the anger of war in his thrusts. Helga is her name, or Hannah, or Elsa, or Gertrude, or Gretchen, or Heidi.

Could "Our Lord" be an American Field Nurse named Fran, or Sally, or Trish, or Mary-Katherine, who wears sweaters like Rita Hayworth and administers extra special care to the ghastliest of gashes on the worst-wounded men? Was my Clifford one of the worst-wounded? Is it with this Nurse that he now lives?

Yes. Clifford lives his new post-war life as a person for whom the war removed memory; the way Massy removes perfectly toasted slices of bread from the perfect slats in the perfect little toaster.

I hate her.

But the war, too, is precise, cautious, and perfect—though not womanly. War leaves its mark like a stain, a discharge of sperm on clean, crisp sheets.

"We must arrive early to the chapel, mother, for I dislike having to sit in back with the minorities. Please bathe, and then dress so we can be on our way."

You are not the daughter I wanted. You are merely a petty thing, a prisoner of war. A lost piece of jewelry. A girl without a father, you will need men desperately. You, who would yield to a man's every desire, you will die. Do not have any hope, Melissa. Do not dream of boys and houses, of blankets and cookies, of pretty pink cakes.

Quickly, I peer into the mirror—I am still here. I am in the glass, in this moment. I leave the kitchen table to wash and dress for church. If only my closet held on its shelves an array of faces I could wear, rather than dresses, I would know which to put on today. As for the dresses, I haven't a clue.



After my bath, I stand naked in my bedroom, staring out the window. In the garden, against the fence at the far end of the yard, I spy a crimson beacon amongst the dried stems and bony black branches: one lone rose has grown, a deep blood red. A breeze picks up, and the rose sways. In my terry-cloth robe, I run a comb through my hair and place warm, wet feet into my slippers.

I walk through the kitchen and out onto the back stoop. Startled, Massy says, "You're going outside? In your robe?" I close the door behind me and walk like a mist across the yard. I can smell the rose as I approach, see its velvety petals. I smile when I touch it: it is real, it is here, it is somehow a miracle.

Clifford, you and I planted these rose bushes. It was one of the first things we did when we moved here. We spent a spring afternoon plotting out the yard—a vegetable garden there, a flower garden here. "Sterling Roses," you said with satisfaction. Remember? It was a sunny, breezy day, and the sound of the wind through the palms was so soothing. The damp, brown earth was tinged green and smelled of sulfur. Floridian soil, swampy and suspicious. You did not worry, though. You carried on. You plotted and you planted in unsuitable earth. Cliffy, no one ever told me that if you lose the thing you love the most, all the rest of your love goes with it. No love remains for anything else.

He built himself a hovel in the garage, stocking metal drawers with gum wrappers, screwdrivers, and discarded pennies; broken golf tees, bolts, old keys, and newspapers. Despite his efforts at ownership, he was worried—but still so kind. I could see in his smile that he knew it was the beginning of things slipping away—first his hair, then his freedom. Later, his wife and daughter. And still later, his entire life. Gone like the puff of smoke from a soldier's shotgun, a tiny sulfurous cloud and then nothing.

Massy has followed into the yard. She places a soft, creamy hand on my shoulder. "Look, mother," she whispers. "A rose!" If only its red petals were razor sharp, or that their scent kept a poison in them. I would only need to slice her cheeks, make her breathe in the toxic perfume.

"Mother, these rose bushes have not birthed

roses in ages! It's Our Lord," she says, cupping the bloom in her hand. "I know it. I've been praying for fruitfulness, in every aspect."

I nod, wondering if the thorns on the stem are deep enough to puncture her jugular.

Suddenly there is a thunderous sputtering in the distance and she gasps, drawing her hand to her heart. Missile testing. I look to the sky, but see only raspy plumes of smoke in the reach of the site, east of us, across the bay, where the returned men discuss strategies and congratulate themselves. The earth rumbles slightly. Massy tugs at my arm, cajoling me back inside to get ready for church. We walk, and she says, "I am certain that the rose is a sign from Our Lord that father is vibrant in the afterlife. You always spoke so fondly of how the two of you planted this magnificent garden, didn't you?"

I shut my eyes and feel a hiss form on my tongue: *Shut your mouth, demon. I will destroy you before I let you be loved by a man.*

Blinking, instead I sigh. "My little darling. Such a good girl. What would I do without you?"

She giggles, wrapping her arm around me as we head back inside, where the smell of toast and tea awaits us. I sit, sip, light a cigarette. Massy sighs, exasperated, but I do this on purpose. We will be late for church, and she will be embarrassed.



We are, indeed, late for church.

I smile as we sit in the back pew with the immigrants, the most interesting people here.

Massy, straight-backed and tight-lipped, smiles too—a terse, counterfeit smile as she adjusts her hair and dress. I watch with curious admiration. There are black women, Hispanic women, and even a few of Middle Eastern descent. They are all wearing diaphanous wraps of cheap silk purchased at second-hand stores; nylons covered in bursting flowers of green, gold, and silver. These women do not have husbands present, only children, and many of them. How do they do it? How do they live in a country so cruel to them? I smile, a genuine smile filled with welcome and warmth. They look at me like I am nuts.

Father Gregory recites from the Bible. Saint Timothy and Saint Paul. Paul, enamored of Timothy's faith, asked him to be his companion,

but unlike Paul, Timothy had not been circumcised, so Paul addressed this problem to ensure Timothy's acceptance by the Jews. Father Gregory's basso tones reverberate through the chapel, rattling the colorful kaleidoscope of Bible stories depicted in the stained glass. It is raining again, and I watch the water glide down the panels of glass. His voice booms. I am not sure why he feels so adamant about this tale of companionship—of circumcision—but he does.

I, on the other hand, feel adamant about rain, about the ornately decorated stone cauldron standing just inside the entrance, adorned with poinsettias and holly—the one that holds the holy water. I wonder whether it is deep and wide enough to hold Massy's head. Surely I'd be forgiven by "Our Lord" if I were to send my daughter straight to him through it.

I gaze out across the congregation. Everyone is rapt. The impassioned priest is still screaming about unclean penises, but soon his voice seeps into gentle piano notes, and my hands mime the chords to *I Know Who Holds Tomorrow*. I see the backs of hundreds of men who have returned from the war, only to sit dutifully beside their wives. Some sit alone, having never been married, or having left their wives when they came back, wounded and ruined.

The backs of their heads grow hairy eyes and stare at me—willing me, daring me, to pluck the pen from the pew pocket and stab my daughter in the neck.

My hands pause their movement and I reach for it: thin and white, with a faded religious logo embossed into the side. Fingers tapping it in time with the piece, I glance sideways at Massy. She is listening, nodding, solemn. I stare at the hairy eyes on the backs of the men's heads. They will me to do what I know I will do, what I was made to do: to protect her. To save my daughter from each of them. At that, I smile. Massy reaches her hand across and pats my thigh. She thinks I am smiling for the same reason she is.

She is wrong.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Brown, Randy

Randy Brown embedded with his former Iowa Army National Guard unit as a civilian journalist in Afghanistan, May-June 2011. He authored the poetry collection *Welcome to FOB Haiku: War Poems from Inside the Wire* (Middle West Press, 2015). His poetry and nonfiction have appeared widely in literary print and online publications, and he is the current poetry editor of the literary journal *As You Were*, published by the nonprofit Military Experience & the Arts. As “Charlie Sherpa,” he blogs about military culture at redbullrising.com.

Craig, Karen

Karen Craig is the author of the poetry collections *No More Milk* (Sundress, 2016) and *Passing Through Humansville* (Sundress, forthcoming in 2018). She also has a new chapbook, *Escaped Housewife Tries Hard to Blend In* (Hermeneutic Chaos, 2016). She maintains *Better View of the Moon*, a daily blog on writing, editing, and creativity, and she teaches writing in Springfield, MO. She is the nonfiction editor and former editor-in-chief of *Mid-American Review*, as well as the interviews editor of *SmokeLong Quarterly*.

Cummings, Tim

Tim Cummings holds a BFA from NYU's Tisch School of the Arts and is a current MFA candidate in Writing for Young People at Antioch University Los Angeles. Recent publications include the online literary magazine *Lunch Ticket*. Born and raised in New York City, he now lives in Los Angeles.

Getz, Brandon

Brandon Getz earned an MFA in Fiction from Eastern Washington University in Spokane, WA. His work has appeared in *Versal*, *Burrow Press Review*, *The Delmarva Review*, and elsewhere. He is currently finishing a serialized adventure novel about a werewolf in space. He lives in Pittsburgh, PA. Read more at brandongetz.com.

Goff, Nichole

Nichole Goff graduated with her MFA in Creative Writing from The University of Notre Dame in 2016, where she studied poetry. She is a former assistant editor at Action Books and a current editor at Spork Press. She resides in Tucson where she teaches writing classes, binds books, practices martial arts and dance, and continues to write poetry. You can find her work in *Smoking Glue Gun*, *O-Dark-Thirty Magazine*, *The Fem Online Magazine*, *Witch Craft Magazine*, *entropy.com*, *The White Stag*, and *Quaint Magazine*.

Graham, Aaron

Aaron Graham is the poetry editor for *Muse/A*

Journal, assistant poetry editor for *The Tishman Review*, and co-editor of the *Squaw Valley Review*. An alumnus of Squaw Valley Poets, he is the current “Cecilia Baker Memorial Scholar” with Seaside Writers. Aaron is a veteran of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, where he served in The Marine Corps as a Human Intelligence operative and linguist under the auspices of Counterintelligence and Anti-Terrorism Force Protection. His chapbook, *Skyping from a Combat Zone*, was a finalist for Tupelo Press's Sunken Garden Prize, and his full-length collection, *Blood Stripes*, was a finalist for The Berkshire Poetry Prize. Aaron is finishing his PhD at Emory University and teaches at Kennesaw State University.

Higgins, Matt

Matt Higgins is a bald man. He knows this because strangers on the street will rub his head sans permission. Matt's main gig involves teaching high school students how to pass standardized tests (oh, and reading and writing too). Although a New Jersey native (Exit 38, son!), he escaped the mass unemployment of the Garden State in order to pursue a much warmer existence in Houston, TX, where turn signals are outlawed, the pizza is terrible, and the oil and gas industry is God. Matt's fiancée, despite her love of pizza, followed him, for which he'll be forever thankful.

McCarthy, Christopher

Chris McCarthy is a retired Marine, having completed 30 years of service. With the help of The Muse Writers Center in Norfolk, VA, he is working on his poetry and learning the difference between Lord Byron and Billy Collins. He prefers Billy Collins. His work has appeared in *3Elements Review*, *O-Dark-Thirty*, and on historynet.com. He and his wife live in Virginia Beach, VA.

McManus, Michael

Michael McManus's work has appeared in numerous publications. He is the recipient of an Artist Fellowship Award from the Louisiana Division of the Arts and numerous Pushcart Prize nominations. He has received The Virginia Award and The Oceans Prize for poetry. He attended Penn State and The University of Louisiana at

Monroe. He currently lives in Millheim, PA. He is a Navy Veteran and service-connected Disabled Veteran. His book of poetry, *The Buddha Knot*, is forthcoming from Prolific Press.

Mobley, Matthew

Matthew J. Mobley is a poet, essayist, and former career U.S. Army Infantry Officer, Paratrooper, and Ranger with multiple combat tours. He currently works as the Assistant Professor of Military Science at the University of Tampa, though he considers military service much more of an abstract art than an exact science. A graduate of North Carolina State University and the University of Tampa's MFA program, his previous work has appeared in *McSweeney's Internet Tendency*, *O-Dark Thirty*, *Bridge Eight Literary Journal*, and *The Sandhill Review*.

Reid, Paddy

Paddy Reid writes primarily about army deserters and their families. For three decades he campaigned for his dad, along with about 5,000 other Irish soldiers who fought for the English Army in WW2, to be officially pardoned by the Irish government. Paddy has written thirteen interconnected “Portside” pieces, hoping that all may someday be collected together in book form. His stories have been published previously in *Primavera*, *Whiskey Island*, *Connecticut Review*, *Sou'wester*, and others.

Reynolds, TJ

TJ Reynolds has published non-fiction and poetry with *NAILED Magazine*, *The Hour After Happy Hour Review*, *The Deadly Writers Patrol*, and *Ash and Bones Magazine*. He writes about war, violence, the fickle nature of power, and how these intersect with gender and racial politics. From 2004-2005, TJ served an infantryman in Iraq with 1/24 Infantry in the city of Mosul. He has 3 gorgeous children and works as an English Instructor at Cypress College in Orange County, CA. The work of crooked politician tycoons and iconoclasts has inspired him to fight back in the war against hate and oppression.

Ruefle, Mary

Mary Ruefle is the author of *My Private Property*, *Trances of the Blast*, *Madness, Rack*, and *Honey: Collected Lectures*, a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award in Criticism, and the winner of the William Carlos Williams Award from the Poetry Society of America. She has published ten books of poetry, a book of prose, and

a comic book, *Go Home and Go to Bed!* She is also an erasure artist, whose treatments of nineteenth century texts have been exhibited in museums and galleries, and published in *A Little White Shadow*. Ruefle is the recipient of numerous honors, including the Robert Creeley Award, an Award in Literature from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, a Guggenheim fellowship, a National Endowment for the Arts fellowship, and a Whiting Award. She lives in Bennington, Vermont.

Simonian, Kate

Kate Simonian is an Australian citizen of Armenian descent. She holds a BA from Sydney University and an MFA from Brooklyn College. Her work has been published by, or is forthcoming in, *The Kenyon Review Online*, *Passages North*, *Colorado Review*, and *Best Australian Stories*. She's pursuing an English PhD with a creative writing emphasis in prose at Texas Tech, where she's a Presidential Fellow and a managing editor for *Iron Horse*.

Umlas, Alexandra

Alexandra Umlas lives in Huntington Beach, CA, with her husband and two daughters. She has an MA in Education with an emphasis in cross-cultural teaching and has taught middle and high school English. She is currently a graduate student in the MFA Poetry program at California State University, Long Beach.

Weisz, Noah

Noah Weisz holds an MFA in Fiction from the New Writers Project at the University of Texas at Austin. During his graduate studies, he received a fellowship from the Michener Center for Writers, was a finalist for the Fania Kruger Fellowship for creative writing with social vision, and served as associate fiction editor of *Bat City Review*. His master's thesis, a young-adult novel, was recently shortlisted for the Bath Children's Novel Award. Currently, he teaches creative writing and children's literature as an adjunct at St. Edward's University in Austin and leads creative writing workshops at two elementary schools.

Whitelaw, Karen

Karen Whitelaw is an Australian writer and teacher of creative writing. She completed a MCA at the University of Newcastle, and her work has appeared in numerous anthologies, including *Cutwater Literary Anthology*, *Newcastle Short Story Award Anthology*, *Award Winning Australian Writing 2016*, and *Mascara Literary Review*. Her fiction has won or been a finalist for the Katharine Susannah Pritchard, Newcastle Short Story Award, Wollongong Writers Festival Prize, NWF/Joanne Burns Microlit Award, and *F(r)iction* Fall Flash Fiction Contest. Her work has been performed at various Writers' Festivals, including as a visual presentation. She is currently working on a collection of short stories.

Williams, Brandy

Brandy R. Williams served in the USAF from 1997-2010 as a jet engine mechanic and an Independent Duty Medical Technician. She earned a BA in English from Louisiana State University at Alexandria in 2014. That is when she fell in love with writing and began to use it as a therapeutic tool, and went on to earn an MA in Southern Studies from the University of Mississippi in 2016. It is her desire to become a professor so she can teach the power of the written word. Her previous works are published in the *Jongleur*, *The Report: O-Dark-Thirty*, and *Confluence*.

Yardley, Mercedes

Mercedes M. Yardley is a dark fantasist who wears red lipstick and poisonous flowers in her hair. She is the author of many diverse works, including *Beautiful Sorrows*, *Apocalyptic Montessa* and *Nuclear Lulu: A Tale of Atomic Love*, *Pretty Little Dead Girls*, and the Bone Angel Trilogy. She recently won the Bram Stoker Award for her story "Little Dead Red." Mercedes lives and works in Las Vegas, and you can reach her at abrokenlaptop.com.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Angiolini, Enrica

Enrica 'Eren' Angiolini was born in Rome in 1988. Raised in a family rich with creativity, she developed a deep love for art—illustration and photography, in particular. She studied foreign languages in high school and college, gaining a Bachelor's degree in Japanese Language and Culture. Throughout her entire life, she never put aside her passion for drawing. She worked as an illustrator and cover artist until she started a career as a comic colorist in 2015. After some brief collaborations with several editors (Dark Horse, Aspen Comics), she is now working on her first full series for *Titan Comics*.

Featured Artwork: "Microchimerism" and "Unity Orders"

Asa, Arthur

Arthur Asa was born in Monterrey, Mexico. He studied graphic design and industrial design but decided to leave everything behind and become a construction worker. During this time he discovered all he ever wanted to do was draw and tell stories. He is now an illustrator by afternoon and a comic artist by night—sometimes both by night. He has a comic called *Where the Heart Is* that you can find online.

Featured Artwork: "Three Poems by Mary Rueffle," "Three Poems by Karen Craigo," and "View from the Surface: an Author Feature with Hart Hanson"

Champion, Tyler

Tyler Champion is an illustrator and designer working in Nashville, TN. He graduated from the Joe Kubert School of Cartoon and Graphic art in 2010. He has worked on an array of projects including gig posters, concept art for video

games, comics, shirt designs, and advertisements.

Featured Artwork: "Mummies of the World Exhibit..." and "Shrapnel Shell"

Demers, Brian

Brian is a graduate of the Art Institute with a BA in Game Art and Design. Currently, he is a project manager for Electronic Arts. He prefers to work in ink.

Featured Artwork: "Loving you Darkly," "A Wake in Portside," and "Blood Stripes"

Gajda, Ryan

Ryan Gajda is an illustrator based in Bristol, UK. He spends a large amount of his time making scratchy portraits of Bill Murray and you can see more of his work on Instagram or Twitter: [@ryangajda](https://twitter.com/ryangajda). He also has a blog—sundaydogparade.com—where he posts a new piece of work every Tuesday and has done for the last three and a half years (in spite of overwhelming public apathy).

Featured Artwork: "I am a Person"

Lockamy, Michelle

Michelle is an illustrator orbiting around Philadelphia, PA. She has a BFA in Illustration from Moore College of Art & Design, and has wanted to be an illustrator her entire life. Her whimsical award-winning art has appeared in games, books, and even as a window display in a department store. She spends her time illustrating personal and client work and working as the Gallery

Manager of the Philadelphia Sketch Club. View her work a michellelockamy.com and follow her sketch adventures on Instagram [@michellelockamy](https://www.instagram.com/michellelockamy).

Featured Artwork: "Quartet in D Minor, Opus 30"

Menold, Alyssa

Alyssa Ann Menold is an illustrator currently working out of Grand Rapids, MI. She was inspired to pursue illustration as a child, when she'd spend hours browsing books, not just for their content, but for their beautiful covers. That childhood love of magical dragons and spaceships never faded, and today most of her work is in the science fiction and fantasy genres. She received her BFA from Kendall College of Art and Design, where she currently teaches as an adjunct. She is currently working on her MFA in illustration at Hartford Art School.

Check out her work at alyssamenold.com.

Featured Artwork: Cover

ABOUT THE WEIRDOS WHO MAKE THIS BOOK

F(r)iction is the imprint of Tethered by Letters (TBL), a nonprofit devoted to helping creatives reach their potential. Through our Education, Community, and Publishing divisions, TBL works to foster a love of literature, increase literacy rates, and help new creators succeed in the publishing industry.

In our education division, we shop thousands of writers through our Free Editing Program, lecture in high schools and colleges around the world, and provide hundreds of free online resources, teaching tools, and industry articles!

Partnering with leading universities in the US, we offer internships to over fifteen students each year, helping bridge the gap between learning about literature and actually working in the industry. We even teach in the Denver Prison System, using the graphic novel medium to increase literacy, critical thinking, and personal development through storytelling.

Olenason, Mowgli

Mowgli Olenason originally hails from New York, but has meandered to the foothills of the Rockies in Colorado. He is quite fond of doodling, reading, tattooing and imagining the future horde of cats that shall be his minions. He works out of Coven Tattoo.

Featured Arwork: #BlinkTBL

Reneau, Daniel

Daniel is a Denver-based illustrator skilled in digital and traditional mediums, and specializes in horror, fantasy, science fiction, and comic book illustration. He is the co-creator of the graphic novel *Zombiraq*, a winner of the 2013 L. Ron Hubbard Illustrators of the Future Award, and a graduate of the Academy of Art University in San Francisco. Learn more at danielbdemented.carbonmade.com

Featured Artwork: "What is There to Say" and "The Great Passing"

Our community division is also bursting at the seams! Each month, a bestselling author donates their time to mentor budding creatives in our forum. We run portfolio critiques at Comic Con (we are mega geeks!), organize a slew of readings, publish awesome group-writing projects, and host boisterous get-togethers to make the craft of creating a little less lonely.

F(r)iction is the culmination of all these efforts. Led by a passionate team of artists and editors, *F(r)iction* embodies our zany mission to #PublishWeird—to offer opportunities to outstanding writers, no matter their style or genre. We are based in Denver, but our staff is spread across four different continents, joining forces to create one of the most beautiful (and bizarre) books you'll ever read.

If you want to learn more about these lovely individuals—and the Blots determined to destroy them—check out our swanky website: tetheredbyletters.com.

