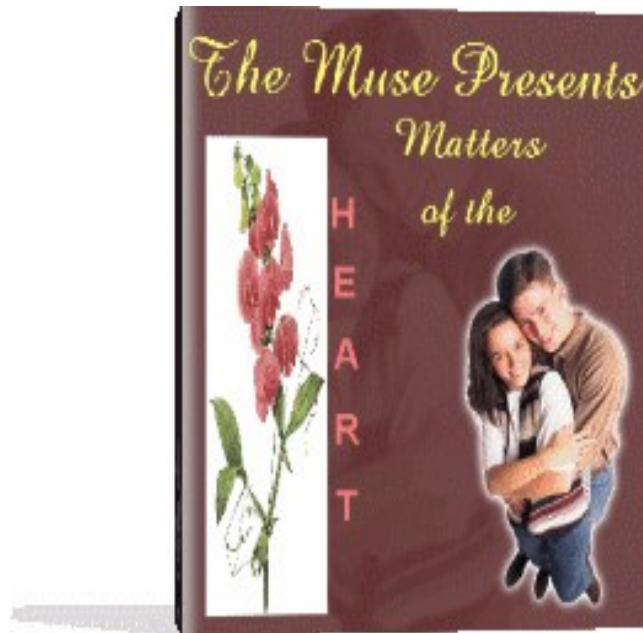
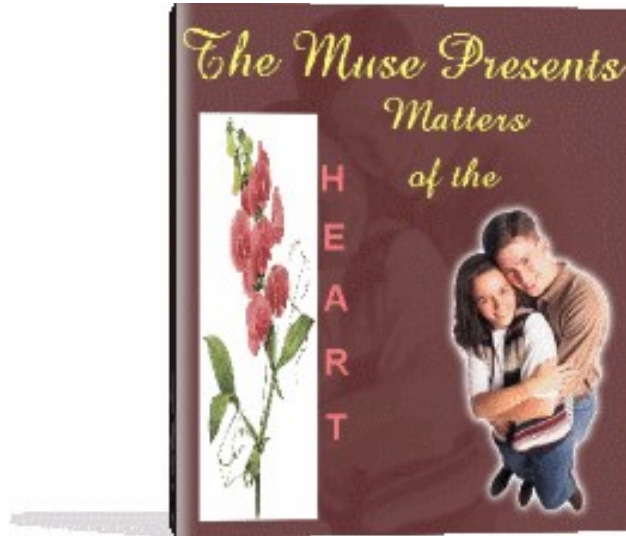


The Muse Presents:

*Matters
of the
Heart*





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Lea Schizas

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***What comes from the heart, goes to the heart.*
- Samuel Taylor Coleridge**

Acknowledgements



I'd like to thank all the writers who participated in our first FREE ebook giveaway.



Alan. M Toback
Beverly Papizan
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Kathe Gogolewski
Lea Schizas
Magdalena Ball
Michael Kechula
Nancy Famolari
Raymond Grant
Susan Stephenson

"A heart that loves is always young."
-Greek proverb

Contents



Poetry

By Alan M. Toback

Two Card for Two Couples

&

All It Took Was a Telephone Call

By Beverly Papizan

The Gardenia

By Carol A. Cole

A Woman's Heart

By Carolyn Howard-Johnson

Baker's Dozen

By Magdalena Ball

Lost Love

By Charles Massop

Perfectly Presentable

By Glory Watts

Heavenly Harps

By Jan Verhoeff

The Love Letter

By Joyce Tres

Half Moon

By Kathe Gagalewski copyright 1997

I Never Kissed Judy Garland

&

Lunch with T

&

The Sign

By Michael A. Kechula

A Valentine for Mom
By Nancy Famolari

Whispers
By Raymond Grant

Two Micro Fictions
By Susan Stephenson

S'agapo, I Love You
&
Season of Sorrow
By Lea Schizas

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*Slow down and enjoy life. It's not only the scenery you miss by going too fast -
you also miss the sense of where you are going and why.*

Eddie Cantor (1892 - 1964)

Poetry

By Alan Toback © 2007



A Valentine's Wish

Valentine ... Love ... Romance
A time to speak to thee
Sharing a slow, misty dance
Wanting to tell your heart "be mine"
A sweet, precious moment we share
In each other's arms so divine

We're letting our romantic feelings touch, our bodies so entwined
This a shame that this special day comes but once a year
For love springs eternal in life's own way
We need not wait to express joyous tears
Love, romance and joy wrapped up in a package of yellow and red roses

Red as the ruby lips of a princess
White as the pure skin of an angel
Rosy like the cheeks that let her
Face glow with undying love
With this bouquet I vow my love and devotion
The powers of heaven have been set in motion

I, therefore, say with deep loving sigh
"Be My Valentine"

Alan M. Toback
Copyright February, 2002



Love's Embrace

Waves kiss the shore
Of a lovely sandy beach
Two figures lie near water's reach
Hearts entwining, bodies so pure

Seeking love's embrace forever
And the gentle breeze from heaven
Descends upon them as birds soar
To think of parting, never

To blow away the boundaries that surround
And vow never to leave
For they are locked in heavenly loves resound
For a true love do their hearts weave

Alan M. Toback
Copyright 2001



MATURE LOVE

As the days grow longer
Emotions filled with life
Nights follow even stronger
Holding my darling wife

My existence was almost gone
When you arrived within screen
I was so broken, so forlorn
At first, didn't know what I'd seen

Love is blind, so they say
How well I can attest to that
What past emotions belay
You melted with a finger snap

My heart grew nervous meeting you
Before then, had been broken
With your first words I heard spew
Loves warmth seemed to awaken

It took barely a month online

We bantered our relationship
Hemming, hawing about if time
Realizing yes, like cracking of whip

Five wondrous years of marriage pass
I feel more in love then ever before
We go about thinking will it last?
Not getting younger, yet both still adore

Maturity in life doesn't mean just friends
Man and wife still may feel great love
Not thinking when earthly existence ends
Joined together through Heaven above

Alan M. Toback ... (C) 07/2006

AUTHOR'S BIO:

Alan M. Toback

Alan ... a man with endearing dreams ... has reached the young age of 67, but has lived a lifetime. He was born in Brooklyn, N.Y on July 12, 1939, youngest of 2 other siblings.

While growing up he dabbled in writing poetry, bored with basic elementary school tasks. He never felt grabbed by schoolwork, so he left at age 16. Later on in mature life, he now realizes what he missed. He has gone through a stroke, many after mini-strokes, and diabetes now set in. Nevertheless, the passion of 'writing' gets his mind into happiness and fulfillment.

His work published in *Shadow poetry's anthology*, *Literati* journal, and *Passages in Time* anthology by JMW Publishing Co., on *Apollo's Lyre. Com* and *Thoughtcafe.com*, just to name a few. At this time, Alan is also working on a full-length novel, a romance-suspense story. His inspiration is, and has been, his charming, adorable wife Mary. Alan is a very caring, sensitive, loving man. He writes in free verse style because the words come straight from his heart.

Alan has now moved on also, to writing some flash fiction as well as some religious poetry.

The Muse On Writing Book-

<http://www.freewebs.com/themuseonwriting/>

THE writing reference book to get you on the right track!

Everything needed from beginning to end and more!

Alan M. Toback ... An author and poet

...<http://www.apolloslyre.com/January%202005/TravellronAlanMToback.htm>

<http://tri-studio.com/Guestpoetrypage2.html>

<http://www.freeweb.com/themuseonwriting/>

<http://www.double-dragon-ebooks.com/index.asp>

Two Cards for Two Couples
By Beverly Papizan
© 2007



Two valentines share their thoughts before the store opens.

“Not one man opened and read me yesterday. Lots of browsers, but no buyers.”

“I know what you mean. It was a slow day for me, too.”

“I hate it when some guy picks me up but never initiates anything.”

“Like what?”

“You know. Feeling the embossed design, grinning with a sparkle in his eye when he reads the message, anything! Once, a guy picked me up, took a fleeting glance, and then crammed me between two ‘Sorry You’re Sick’ cards. After all, my unique shape needs a little more shelf space, if you know what I mean.”

“Have you ever been taken seriously?”

“Oh yeah. One guy really looked me over. I could tell he was picturing his honey reading the message. Then his cell phone rang and he put me back in the rack. He’ll be sorry.”

“So true.”

“How about you?”

“Well, I’m not as easy to read as you are, kind of shy. I don’t get as many looks as you do either, but several guys held me close for a few minutes then put me back in the rack.”

“You’ll get your chance one day, sweetie. Look! The doors are open. Maybe we’ll both get chosen today.”

As Leslie sat in front of the fire on Valentine's night, her fella gave her roses and a card. She placed her wine glass on the table, read the valentine then put her arms around his neck and whispered, "I hope this card is a preview of the coming attraction."

Heather looked at the return address on her valentine – so far away.

She read it and whispered, "I love you, too. I can't wait till we're together again."

All It Took Was a Telephone Call
By Beverly Papizan
© 2007



It's been twenty-six years since I fell in love over the telephone, and I wasn't a dreamy-eyed teenager. I had moved back home with my seven month old son after my first husband had died ten months earlier.

My tenth high school reunion was scheduled for late July, a gathering of twenty-two young adults who wanted to renew friendships and learn the scoop on those who were not in attendance. A friend at the reunion asked if I was interested in meeting someone. Duh! What a question for a single, twenty-seven year old woman!

She described her next door neighbor as a nice guy who had just obtained custody of his two sons, ages eight and five. I thought for a micro-second and then said, "Sure! Here's my number."

He called on Wednesday night, and we talked for an hour. Such an enticing voice – as smooth as caramel. I overheard him remind his sons to finish their homework and thought, He must be a good father. He called again the next night, and during a two hour conversation said that he was making cookies for the boys. Oh, my gosh! He's making cookies! Who cares if they're slice and bake?

Our first date was Saturday night, the ninth of August. The next weekend, our three sons accompanied us for hamburgers and a movie. We were together every weekend after that, the head count rotating from two to five. We married October twenty-fourth, but the boys did not accompany us that weekend.

Almost exactly one year later, another son entered our lives. The most recent addition to our family is our first grandchild - a boy.

In twenty-six years I've never had difficulty finding my underwear in the dryer!

AUTHOR'S BIO:

Beverly Papizan

Beverly is a speech-language pathologist in Mississippi. Her flash fiction has been accepted by Apollo's Lyre, the Muse Marquee, Long Story Short, FlashShot, and CBH Ministries. She has four grown sons and rather enjoys having options for her time when she's not at work.



"The best proof of love is trust."
-Dr. Joyce Brothers

The Gardenia
By Carol A. Cole
© 2007



“What’s wrong, Grandma?” Robert asked as the frail elderly woman began to cry. She clutched the small potted Gardenia in her lap; her weathered hands gently stroking the petals and leaning forward to inhale the fragrance. “Momma said this was your favorite flower.”

“Oh dear, it is,” she replied. “I’m crying because it reminded me of your Grandfather. We were just married and I was so young.”

* * *

A sharp pain in her right side awoke Julia from a restless sleep. Her stomach had ached all day and she hadn’t been able to keep down any food. She didn’t want to disturb her husband. He needed to leave for work at four in the morning. Michael looked so handsome in his uniform. He was a runner for Western Union Company. He actually used roller skates to get around the huge building delivering the telegrams to the messengers who rode bicycles through the crowded city streets. New Yorkers struggled in the midst of the depression and they were lucky he had a job.

She gasped in pain and Michael stirred next to her. “What’s wrong?” he asked, concerned for his young wife. He was eleven years older than Julia and had promised to take care of her.

“I don’t know. My side hurts and I’m so cold.”

He gently placed his hand against her cheek. “You’re burning up. We need to go to the hospital.” He dressed quickly and helped her into a dress and winter coat. February had been exceptionally cold and it had snowed again that morning.

They managed to hail a cab and after weaving through the late night traffic, arrived at Roosevelt Hospital. Doctors diagnosed appendicitis and whisked Julia away to the operating room. Michael held her hand until they reached the doors and he was told to wait down the hall.

Several hours later, Julia awakened when a nurse came to read her vital signs. “I’ve had a big operation and my husband couldn’t even be here when I woke up. He said he’d take care of me,” she sniffled.

"Honey, he was here until he told me he had to leave for work. He'll be back this afternoon."

"He doesn't love me," Julia said closing her eyes.

"Well, if he doesn't love you, I'd like to know where that cabbage on your chest came from." The nurse chuckled.

Julia opened her eyes and glancing down noticed a huge Gardenia corsage pinned to her nightgown. "It's my favorite flower."

The nurse handed her a bright red envelope. "He left this for you too."

Julia opened the envelope to find a beautiful Valentine's Day card inside. "He does love me." She smiled.

"He sure must," the nurse replied. "Do you know how hard it is to find a fresh Gardenia in this city in the middle of winter? I wish my husband loved me that much."

* * *

"Your Grandfather was so sweet. He must have walked over half the city streets before he found a florist with that corsage." Julia drew her grandson into a hug. "This is the best birthday gift ever. Thank you, Robert. I love you."

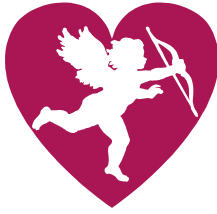
"I love you, too, Grandma." Robert returned her hug.

AUTHOR'S BIO:

Carol A. Cole

Always a voracious reader, Carol began writing four years ago. Her stories have been published in Futures, Good Old Days, and The Storyteller magazines, and online at Apollo's Lyre, Crime and Suspense, Coffee Cramp, and Flashshot ezines. She has stories in two anthologies "By the Chimney With Care" and "Aleatory's Junction". She lives with her husband and son, a sophomore at college who put up with her tapping away at the computer at all hours. She can be reached at <http://www.carolacole.com>

"By the Chimney With Care" www.wolfmont.com
"Aleatory's Junction" <http://aleatorysjunction.tripod.com>
www.carolacole.com



A Woman's Heart

By Carolyn Howard-Johnson © 2007

The heart of your woman is not so easily read
as your girl's. Wisdom and doubt are matched

rings, once a perfect fit, later tight, soon will not
slip from your finger, must remain with you

through the night. Once you prayed for his call.
Warmed by his glance you watch him. Balanced high

on a ladder, you twist crÃ¢pe paper streamers, tack
them with the heel of a loafer to the boys' gym

wall, a diversion that fools no one. Today, given
roses you hold them to your cheek, revel

in the colors. Coral and Cream. You smell
bruised gardenias from another bouquet.

Over the years you have learned
to smile with your lips and lower the lids of your eyes.

Carolyn Howard-Johnson from *Cherished Pulse*, an e-chapbook of unconventional love poems.

It is available for only \$3.95 at

<http://www.compulsivereader.com/html/images/cherishedpulse.htm> Carolyn is also the author of the award-winning chapbook of poetry, *Tracings*, as well as a novel, *This Is the Place* and a book of creative nonfiction, *Harkening*, both also award-winners.

"You don't love a woman because she is beautiful, but she is beautiful because you love her."

-Anonymous.

Baker's Dozen

By Magdalena Ball © 2007

it's nearly too close
amongst the constant background buzz
action, need, hunger for attention

i have to stop
stand back and squint
gain perspective

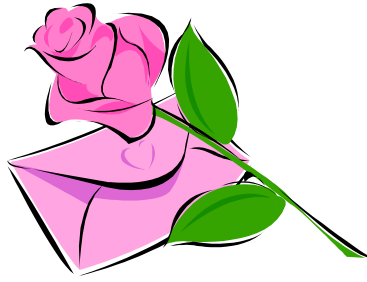
to see your laughing
blues
in the kitchen
a baker's dozen
near lifetime
pain and pleasure
care so overwhelming
it's almost an irritant
till it isn't there

engagement
intensity
sacrifice
beyond what I could ever have dreamt
in the empty
self-absorbed days
before
i met
you

Magdalena Ball, from *Cherished Pulse*, an e-chapbook of unconventional love poems.

It is available for only \$3.95 at

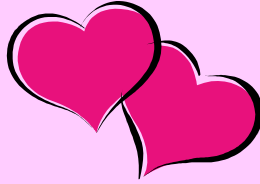
<http://www.compulsivereader.com/html/images/cherishedpulse.htm> Magdalena is also the author of a book of poetry, *Quark Soup* and editor of the CompulsiveReader.com site.



Lost Love

By Charles Mossop

© 2007



How shall I remember her,
Now that I have lost my love?
Shall I tell the world
She was as beautiful as a rose
In radiant bloom
On a calm and dew-kissed morning?
No, I shall remember her as more than that.
For all the springs and all the summers
In all the golden meadows
That lie beneath blue-vaulted heaven,
Have never seen a flower to compare
With that love I now have lost.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Charles Mossop

Charles Mossop is retired after a thirty-two year career in post-secondary education and international development.

He now lives in western Canada and publishes non-fiction, fiction and poetry. His short stories have appeared in *Over My Dead Body*, *Amazon Shorts*, *Futures Mystery*

Anthology Magazine, as well as ebook and print anthologies. His specialization is historical fiction and he contributes a monthly column on that subject to [The Muse Marquee](#). His novel *Jade Hunter* appears from Double Dragon Publishing in 2007.

Visit his Website at <http://cmossop0.tripod.com>.

Perfectly Presentable

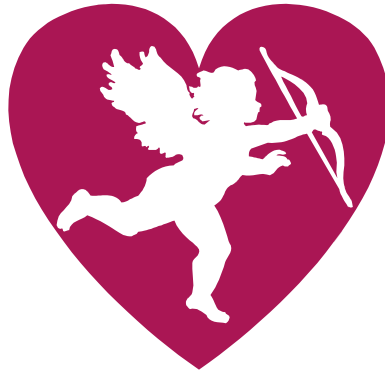
By Glory Watts

© 2007



A perfectly, ordinary, tall, dark-haired, blue eyed man; the kind of man you could take anywhere. Mother loved him. Dad didn't care. So on it trundled, our affair.

Time passed by, we tied the knot. Were we happy - sometimes, sometimes not? Then came the day I said goodbye. And, oddly, it seems he left a space, I can't say why. But, when in memory I trace, remembered contours of his face; sharp tears escape from faded eyes and love wells up; I'm not surprised. For overall, he was my perfectly ordinary, presentable man.



AUTHOR'S BIO:

Glory Watts

Gloria Watts, a retired Further Education College lecturer, lives in a small Market Town in Northamptonshire, England. She spends her time writing flash fiction and short stories; several of her short stories have been published online. When not writing, Gloria likes to keep busy. She enjoys watercolour painting, playing piano, gardening and yoga.

"Love takes off masks that we fear we cannot live without and know we cannot live within."

-James Baldwin

Heavenly Harps

By Jan Verhoeff

© 2007



Pink lights twinkled in the window. I looked across the room and noticed more than one indication that I was alone in life. The pictures on the wall were of only one genealogical strand, more pink than blue decorated my home, and it was Valentine's again. I sat quietly alone in the room with no date in sight. Life raged on, and I felt lonely.

One more glance was enough to get me off my droopy butt and into the shower to do something about it. I considered my options while the water ran down the drain. I'd tried online dating, what a bust. I'd visited every church in town, not a single man in sight. I'd done everything single people do to meet someone special, and still I lived alone.

The Valentine's party at work had been enough to convince me I wasn't interested in doing another year alone. I stood off to the side of the room watching happy couples talk and chatter, being ignored by everyone but Harley Silva, the cocky salesman from first floor who thought everyone adored him. I rolled my eyes at the thought and tipped my head upside down to dry my hair. The thought of him was about as attractive as a ride to the cemetery in a broken down hearse.

The coffin shattered in my imagination as I pulled on a soft heathery gray jersey dress and arranged it smoothly over my hips. I added a belt and the deep maroon jacket, zipped up a pair of leather boots, and strode confidently out the front door. I knew where I was going.

"Cherry Chocolate Latte, Tall, with crème." I ordered my favorite coffee from the gangly boy behind the counter. I felt ancient in comparison to him.

"Here you are." He handed my Latte across the counter and took the money from my fingers. His hand touched mine for just a moment and electricity pulsed through my veins. It had been a long time since I'd actually felt that surge of power from human touch.

One glance around the room led me to a sofa in the back where a few people sat reading magazines and books. I took a deep breath and walked to the end of the second couch. "Is this seat taken?" I asked politely.

"No, be my guest." A blonde haired man with searching green eyes scanned me up and down as I sat down. I opened my book and sipped the crème from the top of my latte. The book revealed a little about my choice at the moment, Dean Koontz mysteries were notoriously bone chilling. I shivered at the thought. A simple dawning of realization crept over me and I realized I was alone in a room of strangers reading about the result of such dangers.

Over the top of my book I studied the man across from me, sitting with his ankle across his knee, intently concentrating on a business magazine report. Next, a young woman in a yellow jersey and ball cap curled into the corner of the sofa with her feet up, she appeared submerged in the biography in her hand. The man in the chair at the end glanced up and our eyes met over his book, some title I didn't even notice. He lifted his latte in salute to me and took a long sip.

I motioned to a table nearby and stood up. Moments later, he joined me at the table, his book closed, with no marker visible.

His hand was warm and firm.

I smiled, "You come here often?"

"Not often enough." His smile touched my soul.

How did we end up here, in this space and time together? I wondered, looking deep into his eyes. I felt contained. Suddenly, I wondered where I'd be in two hours, in five years, in ten decades. I felt complete.

I shivered away the feeling, "So, what brought you out on this chilly winter night?" I whispered, in an almost normal voice, the room deafeningly quiet around us.

"I believe it must have been you." He nodded. "I have more books at home than I'll ever read." He admitted. "And that one isn't particularly interesting."

I gazed down at his book and realized it was the same title as my own. "No, it didn't capture my attention either, although, I love reading Dean's work."

His eyes traveled down the front of my jacket and stopped at the end of my sleeve on my left hand. He smiled.

"So, what brought you out?"

"Karma." He met my gaze and power surged through my mind. "I couldn't stand another moment in my silent apartment with all the reminders that I was going to be there alone, again."

"Honesty." He spoke the word I'd been thinking and I felt another surge of electrical power flash through my brain. "An unusual quality in such a short span of time."

"It carries reality." I shifted slightly in my chair, suddenly uncomfortable with my own level of sincerity.

"Is it lust, or is it love, that brings you here this evening, my honest friend?" His voice took on an ethereal substance, and I heard concern in his tone.

"I believe it is more than the sum of both of those. It's the desire to never feel lonely again. Some voyeuristic desire to have the love of my life, sharing my life, forever more, as if I could find that in one night." I revealed the dream and opened up my heart to opportunity. "So, what about you?"

"No. I never dreamed I could find love and lust and more, in one night." Warmth filled up the void between us and I realized he'd taken my hand in his. "But, it could happen with you?"

"Perhaps..." I admitted, envisioning myself in white satin gliding down the aisle at a local church, colliding with reality at the front of the church, where no one stood waiting. But in the mist, I could see a shadow, someone might be there. I allowed that thought to linger, until the mist evaporated and I could see

who stood in the shadows. Just a dark form, but at least there was a form of someone there. “You?”

“I’d like nothing better.” His eyes blazed for a moment with something I considered lust, and the cool green returned. “Marriage continues to be a dream for me. I want the gold ring, the trumpets, and a forever relationship. Until now, I seemed destined to be alone.”

“Do you believe in love?” I spurted out the thoughts in my mind as the shape in the shadows suddenly became clear.

“I didn’t before tonight.” He answered.

Around us the room began to spin, time shuttered, and I felt lifted into space, the reality of the night closed in, and we were one in a universe of only the two of us. I gathered strength for the moment from his fingers touching mine. Sounds that might have disturbed us became heavenly harps that drew us together. In the long hours of the night, we danced a trilogy of knowledge, gasping at matters of import, and reeling from the emotional assault of years alone. I trembled with comprehension, understanding the whirl about me to be exposure of a different sort.

“Cori, I believe they’re locking us in.” He took my hand and led me down the center aisle toward the door. “Wait,” he spoke to the man locking the door. “We have to slip past.”

We hurried out the door into the cold night air. I didn’t know where we were going, but we walked. A few moment’s later I found myself handing him the key to my apartment and we walked inside.

“Coffee?” I offered, suddenly timid and shy. I didn’t know what to say.

“No,” he smiled.

When his lips touched mine the lights went out. Sparks formed halos above our heads and the harps played from the heavens. I fell into the slow waltz step with him, my feet carried on pillows, my heart melting from cupid’s touch.

“Was this love?” The thought crossed my mind, “or lust?” But, it flittered, left and moved off into the space of time.

“You know, sweet Cori.” He paused, his lips so near mine I could feel them move. “If I stay for breakfast, I’ll be staying forever.”

“I expect no less, Harley.”

AUTHOR’S BIO:

Jan Verhoeff

Jan Verhoeff writes creative essays, short stories, and fiction, including Children’s Adventure stories. An author of more than 300 essays, books, and articles, Jan lives in Colorado with her children who are a constant source of inspiration. Her books are available at her online bookstore located at

<http://janverhoeff.com>

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"Love has nothing to do with what you are expecting to get, it's what you are expected to give -- which is everything."
-Anonymous.

The Love Letter

By Joyce Tres

© 2007



“No one loves like a dead memory, Susan. I can’t compete!” Gage said, and stormed from the house.

Susan pushed Gage’s words into the back of her mind. Three years wasn’t long enough after twenty years of marriage. Three years was an honoring of memory. Gage expected too much from her. She looked at the pictures of Victor around the room. She’d spent a life-time with him yet it wasn’t long enough. How can you place a time limit on love or a memory?

Susan went to the drawer. The locked drawer she kept of Victor. After unlocking and opening it, she ran a hand over what she’d saved of him. She settled on the scarf he wore around his neck in the winter, a favorite blue shirt, a black tee-shirt that had fit a bit snug; she picked up each, held it to her nose, inhaled deeply; each held his aroma and a touch of Aramis cologne. The entire drawer smelled of her Victor. Susan’s senses became alive with him. The letter lay between the folds of the shirt. Over the years Victor showed his love in many ways gifts of jewelry, candy, flowers and cards, trips to exotic places but words never came easy, actions took precedent. The letter was as precious to Susan as diamonds to other women. The letter lay beside their wedding announcement of so many years ago.

She heard the words her mother spoke on that very wedding day. *Victor’s a diamond in the rough, Susan. Rough diamonds can cut be very careful. You don’t need to go through with this.* Her mother had given an out to her on that beautiful May morning, but Susan loved the top layer that passed for roughness as much as the gentleness beneath. She loved with the free abandonment of twenty youthful years and as she aged and grew, so had her love.

With the letter in hand, Susan went to the kitchen, poured a glass of wine, then went into the dining room where she and Victor shared meals. She placed the letter down and lit the candles which stood in crystal candlesticks on the table. She sat down, took a sip of wine and savored the taste. She looked upon the living room which had held the hospital like bed. Victor had spent his last days in that bed. Cancer had taken his six foot, two-hundred pound frame and turned it into a skeleton weighing one-hundred and twenty five. For awhile Susan would help him into their bed at night, but when things became bad he’d spend day and night in that bed. She’d bathe him until she could no longer do it, then nursing aides took over. In his last days, he’d worry about her.

“I want you to marry again. You shouldn’t stay alone,” his breath gasping, his body shaking.

“Don’t worry, I’ll be alright. I’m strong.” She didn’t feel strong though, she felt like she was dying too.

One day while Susan was at work, Victor told Angie the hospice nurse. “It’s my day today. I want to shower and dress.”

“You need to come home right now!” She heard Angie choke back tears.

Susan didn't remember telling her boss Jim, but he told her later she refused the offer of a ride home. She didn't remember the drive home; automatic pilot had taken over. Victor had already died by the time she arrived home.

Angie told her about Victor's request that morning. “It was as though he knew, Susan, and waited until you left for work.”

Though kind, those words had held little solace. She'd cried, held him. They called her sister. It was Cathy who called the mortuary. The week before Susan had forced herself to make the arrangements that Victor had wanted. She remembered kissing Victor's cold lips; she remembered them taking him away; she remembered chasing everyone out of her house; she remembered the need to be alone, totally alone in their home. The bed sat there empty, tears stained her face. She poured a glass of wine then too. The door bell had rung interrupting a broken spirit. She went to the door thinking it was a neighbor, friend, her boss; someone who'd heard. Bad news traveled fast, she'd thought. It had been a delivery of her favorite flowers, wild and beautiful. Someone had worked fast, she remembered thinking. She took the flowers and put them on the dining room table and sat down. She remembered being amazed that there was still beauty left in the world when her world had shattered. She reached for the card. That's when she recognized the handwriting, though shaky, it was Victor's. The flowers, the card; it was Valentine's Day. This was his last gift to her. She opened the card and the letter fell out. Even three years later the remembrance still sent chills through her.

Susan opened the letter to read again.

My Dear Love,

Thank you for all you have done. Angels walk among us and you were always mine. We have been together through the good and bad. This is the worse of it, but I am alright and I don't want you to be sad. I don't want you to be alone either. I want for you; life, love and to be as happy as you've always been. I'm not good with words, you know this. When love comes to you again, he will be an angel. Open your heart and let him in. I'll be with you too.

I love you forever and always,
Victor

Susan ran fingers over the words, then brought the letter to her lips. A woman can be lucky enough to have two great loves in one lifetime, she thought. She decided it was time. She rose from the table and put the letter back into the drawer. The front door opened and she knew it was Gage. Love didn't leave and she'd known he wouldn't.

“Susan,” Gage called from the front of the house.

“Coming,” She closed the drawer that was Victor, then went to greet Gage.

“I couldn't stay away. I love you. Happy Valentine's Day.” he held out a box for her to take.

“I love you, Gage. Happy Valentine's Day.”

As their hands touch, they came into each other's arms and kissed. He gave her a watch with words engraved on the back; *Love waits forever*. Susan knew she was a lucky woman; she had love, time and angels did indeed walk this world.



AUTHOR'S BIO:

Joyce Tres

Joyce Tres lives in California with her husband and Siberian Husky. Her stories appeared in Chicken Soup's syndicated newspaper column and Sister's Soul 2. Joyce is published in Kedco Studios' Millennium Dawn Anthology, Echelon Press' Crumbs in the Keyboard and under the pseudonym Patricia DiMiere, she co-authored with Sara Russell, Quickies a collection of short stories. Joyce recently completed her first novel Danger in Tahiti .

Visit her website at <http://joycetres.net> for more on Joyce.

"Sometimes the heart sees what is invisible to the eye."

-H. Jackson Brown Jr.

Half Moon

by Kathe Gogolewski

© 1997



I looked up, surprised, to see a perfect half moon
Cleanly sliced in exquisite symmetry and equilibrium
It appeared neither reticent nor hasty
And sat instead rather complete in its halfness
Undiminished in the entirety of its half world
And willing...to be what it would become



AUTHOR'S BIO:

Kathe Gogolewski

Kathe Gogolewski is the award winning author of fiction for both children and adults. She has published one romance novel, *A Promise to Keep*, available from Double Dragon Publishing at www.double-dragon-ebooks.com. Another, *Flight of the Gryphon*, is due from Double Dragon in 2007. You can find out more about Kathe and her books at www.TRI-Studio.com

"The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched - they must be felt with the heart."

-Hellen Keller

I NEVER KISSED JUDY GARLAND

By Michael A. Kechula

© 2004



Every Valentine's Day, I look through my collection of photo albums and think of unrequited love that still lingers. As I turn the pages, I touch her lovely face and trace the outline of her lips. Those bewitching lips I'd so often longed to kiss, but never did.

The first picture in the album commemorates the blessed day I first saw her. I'd just been hired as an understudy for Mickey Rooney. During a new-hire tour of production sets, we came upon one in which another new hire, Florence Gumm, renamed Judy Garland, was sitting in a bedroom. She was writing a fan letter while glancing worshipfully at a framed picture of Clark Gable. She sang something that haunts me to this day, "You Made Me Love You."

She was 13 then, unsophisticated, padded with baby fat. But no child sang that song. She'd become a worldly paramour confessing by song how she tried hopelessly to resist Gable. And how he made her love him anyway, when she didn't want to do it. And how he made her sigh for things she really didn't want to tell him. The words were voluptuous, torturously lustful. Emotional and physical stirrings overwhelmed me.

I immediately fell in love with the girl-woman chanteuse.

My exotic dream was that one day she'd sing that song to ME with languid eyes, moistened lips, flushed face. Just the two of us by a fireplace in a Frank Lloyd Wright, Rocky Mountain home. Through massive picture windows, we'd watch the poetic splendor of descending snowflakes. Stirred, she'd sing that song. And I'd kiss her. Softly. Then harder. Then mercilessly. She'd swoon at my touch. Swaddled by passion, we'd edge slowly toward a bearskin rug. Hopelessly lost in the spell I'd cast, she'd love me, although she didn't want to do it. I'd make her sigh for---things she didn't want to tell me. But all along, I'd know what she wanted.

Later, in the enchanting afterglow, she'd whisper, "You made me love you. I didn't want to do it. But I'm really glad I did."

Extremely shy, I loved her from afar, though I was often in her presence during the Judy-Mickey movie heydays. Filling in for Mickey, I danced with her, talked with her in ice cream parlors, and discussed how we might have a show to raise money for the orphanage. She was sweet, loveable, charming. And she could belt out songs in ways that always tore at my heart.

But for all the times I filled in for Mickey, I never got to kiss her.

There was a time when it almost happened. The director ordered the filming of some kissing sessions with Judy and Mickey. Mickey suddenly got ill. They summoned me. Oh man, it was glorious. Finally, I'd get to kiss Judy Garland. Oh, would I ever make her love me.

The moment my lips moved toward hers, somebody set off fire alarms. They quit shooting for the day. Damn!

I was fully prepared the next day. Worked out with weights. Soaped down four times in the shower. Put on some great shave lotion. Gargled extra long.

When I got to the set, Mickey wasn't there. My sixteen year old heart pounded with anticipation. But they'd stopped shooting kissing scenes. MGM's president ordered them archived. Judy and Mickey would not kiss just yet in their movies. Fans might be upset by the sudden onrush of romantic slush. Things had to be kept ultra sanitary between Mickey and Judy.

When the movies with Mickey were no longer popular, I was able to stay on with MGM as a set builder. Sometimes I got bit parts. They'd put a beard and hat on me so it didn't look as if Mickey Rooney had suddenly stepped into the movie. Anyone who looks hard will see me on the St. Louis trolley when Judy sings, "Clang, Clang, Clang Went the Trolley." I'm also one of the passengers hanging out a window of the Atcheson, Topeka and Santa Fe.

She married Vincente Minelli, the big shot director. Broke my heart. I knew then he was wrong for her.

I wanted to go to the church. That way I might be able to kiss her after the ceremony. It'd be a peck on the cheek, but at least I would have kissed Judy Garland. Unfortunately, wedding plans were never announced to shield them from disruptive publicity.

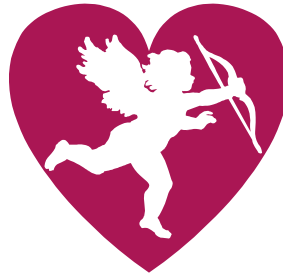
One year on Valentine's Day, Judy gave valentine cards to everyone on the set. She'd put on fire-engine red lipstick and kissed each card. Mine seemed to have a heavier imprint than anyone else's. What luck! I must confess: I've kissed that imprint countless times.

Here I am pushing 90, and I just pressed my lips against her lip outline once again, on Valentine's Day. Nostalgia swept over me as if I were sixteen again.

When running my fingers over the card's red flocked heart, I heard her wistfully singing "Over the Rainbow." While touching her "Luv, Judy" signature, I visualized how grand she looked strolling down 5th Avenue's Easter Parade with Fred Astaire.

I keep the valentine card on the next-to-last page in the last photo album. The last page has her obituary.

I still yearn to kiss her beautiful face, just once. So, in my waning years I have but one wish. When I go through that tunnel of brilliant light and see people waiting for me, reaching for me, I want Judy Garland to be there, arms extended, lips ready. And when I kiss her, I'll make it last for eternity.



LUNCH WITH T
By Michael A. Kechula©



I met T in Human Sexuality class. She was twenty-one with a three month old infant. I was more than twice her age, estranged, close to a divorce.

T's life had been terrible. Anyone who'd mattered to her had died. She felt lost, and was waiting for someone to love her to bits. That's all she wanted. I wished I were her age. I'd love every shred of her. Tenderly, savagely, passionately, madly.

When the semester ended, I thought I'd never see her again.

The next semester, I saw her at a table in the university library. I went over to say hello. She looked terribly distraught, and told me how miserable life still was.

I sat across from her. Her hand was resting on the table, and I did something atypical. I slid one hand, palm up underneath hers. Our palms were pressed together. Then I put my other hand on top of hers and pressed down. My hands said, "I'm here. Don't be afraid."

Meaning only to comfort, I found the intense skin contact surprisingly erotic.

The moment I sandwiched her hand between mine, she broke down and wept uncontrollably. Students stared. The research librarian kept glancing our way.

I didn't care. T needed me.

She wept for half an hour without letup. Deeply. Profoundly. It shook me. But I said nothing. Just focused on her, listened intensely, and gripped her hand.

Finally, the sobs died down.

I asked, "Do you want me to give your hand back." Strange way to say it, but it seemed I now owned her hand.

"No," she said. Then wept again. So pitiful. So vulnerable. So touching.

After a while, I asked again, "Do you want me to give your hand back."

"No."

When her weeping dissipated, she sighed deeply and said she felt better. "I want my hand back now," she said softly.

When I let go, my hands were drenched from the heat we'd generated. I felt drained. I wondered if my physical energy had passed to her. I could barely get off the chair, while she rose easily. She said she felt stronger than before.

Two days later, same library, same floor, same table. Again I approached. This time she babbled, as if out of her mind. We found a table away from everyone. Once again, I sandwiched her hand between mine. She wept again, saying bizarre things about the Last Days, and how her infant was gonna die. Then her, and everybody else. Armageddon was here.

Sleep deprivation, I guessed. Fatigue chemistry was putting her thoughts in a vicious circle of anxiety. Slowly and patiently, I tried to explain that she suffered from lack of sleep.

Entering her disturbed fantasy, as if I too believed all was lost, I assured that God would send angels for her daughter before things got too bad.

“Will God send angels for me, too?”

“Of course. God will spare you and your daughter from witnessing the final destruction.”

Those illogical thoughts calmed her illogical mind.

I suggested she go to the campus psychiatrist, immediately. He'd give her something to sleep. I figured he'd take one look and do more than that.

A week later, she found me in the library. She'd seen the psychiatrist, and he'd given her sedatives. She was sleeping better. But at that moment she felt shaky inside. I asked if she'd eaten anything.

“No.”

“C'mon,” I said, “let's get some orange juice into you. You might need potassium for those shakes.”

“I don't have any money.”

“Don't worry. I do.”

At the nearest campus eatery, I poured a huge glass of orange juice. Had her drink it immediately, even before paying. Then I told her to select anything she wanted for lunch. She hesitated, so I filled a tray with food just for her.

My guess about lack of potassium was correct. She felt better right after drinking the juice. Then she ate every scrap I'd put on her tray, thanking me repeatedly. I told her to relax and eat. No thanks necessary.

She ate with one hand, and grabbed my forearm, above the wrist, with the other. She held on to me while she ate, and for the rest of the time we were there. Her touch felt sooooo good.

She kept thanking me. I said it was an honor and privilege to help, and that she needn't feel obligated. There were no strings attached.

I had to get to class. Still holding onto my arm, she said, "Please stay. Don't go to class."

"I have a Midterm. Look, if you're broke and hungry, find me in the library, and I'll get you something to eat. There's no need to go hungry---not as long as I'm around."

Teary-eyed, she kept thanking me as if she'd been saved from something.

Again, she asked me not to go. Her expression of need nagged me. I desperately needed to be needed by someone. But I was married. Estranged, but still married. Softly, I reminded her that I had to go.

After that, she'd seek me in the library once or twice a week. I'd always ask if she'd eaten. Sometimes yes, other times no. I'd drop everything and take her to lunch.

In time, with the doctor's help, she snapped back. She came to show me her new self. How beautiful! *Could she love an older, married man?* I wondered.

Then I didn't see her until the last month of school. I missed her. Even more, I missed her not needing me anymore.

When we had lunch on the last day of the semester, I wondered about fate and timing. *Was I sent just for a while? To help when others wouldn't? Was this now the end?*

But what about me? And my needs? Would T the normal now rescue me, the lost?

Then I remembered what I'd first said to her. "Don't feel obligated. No strings attached."

I should never have said that.

THE SIGN

by Michael A. Kechula©



You can see it if you are driving slowly on one of the backroads, just south of San Jose. Drive a bit faster than the speed limit, and you'll probably miss it. I almost did, as it flashed past the corner of my eye.

My first impulse was to take a second look, but a U-turn was not possible. I decided that I had more important things to do than drive in circles to see something that aroused my curiosity. I made a mental note to drive more slowly the next time I was in that part of town.

But, I forgot all about it.

Several weeks passed before I went that way again, and when I did, I saw that it was still there, attached to a wooden light pole, surrounded by a dreary landscape. It was a sign that said, said, "I STILL LOVE YOU."

Simple words. Direct and clear message. But its very presence in such a place adds a touch of mystery. The letters are bright red, crudely drawn, and handpainted on a jagged piece of card-board. It looks much like any of the ordinary garage sale signs that are scattered throughout this area. But this piece of card-board offers nothing for sale. It offers something money cannot buy.

This is the stuff that fantasy is made of. I've found myself wondering about that sign and its true meaning. Is it a joyous reminder to someone who is greatly loved? A valentine message placed a few months early? A cheap alternative to skywriting or a newspaper ad in the personals column? Maybe a few words are missing, but understood by the person for whom the sign is written. Maybe it's supposed to say, "I still love you after all these years."

Or is it a message that implores? A forlorn, final effort to reach a chilled heart? A touch of bravado that shows how far the writer is willing to go to reconcile differences? It may have been missed--or worse--ignored, because it has been there for several weeks. Maybe the person who's supposed to see the message has left town or takes a different road these days.

The fact that it hasn't been removed or defaced in all this time tells me that there is something special about this sign. Maybe it evokes the sympathy of the several hundred people who pass it every day.

No garage sale sign could ever hope for such longevity. Try hanging one to direct people to a sale and watch how quickly it is defaced or torn down by mischievous kids or disgruntled adults. Even the metal road signs in that area are peppered with holes from pellet guns. But the sharpshooters have not put a single round through the sign that tells someone that they are still loved.

Somebody knows what's behind the sign and why it was put there for all to see. But, we will never find out. Just as we will never be able to find out whose initials are carved in bus stop benches and trees in the park.

I like that sign. I like it so much that when it finally falls victim to age or the elements, I'm going to make a new one and put it in the same place. After all, who will remind hundreds of people who pass every day that they are still loved?

AUTHOR'S NOTE: The sign really existed. Weeks later, I drove by, and it was gone. I felt disappointed. There were no parking spots near the pole on which the sign had hung, so I drove the backroad until I found one. Then I walked the mile back to look for the sign. I found it! It was on the ground in two pieces. It was made from two pieces of cardboard that had been used to package beer. The lettering of the message was brushed on rather crudely using red paint. Both pieces had been taped together.

I picked up the pieces, put them in my car and took them home.

Though I've moved three times since then, and have thrown away all but essential things, I still have the sign. I can't tell you why I treasure two pieces of cardboard that have a message painted in red.

AUTHOR'S BIO:

Mike Kechula

Michael A. Kechula is a retired technical writer. Switching to fiction in 2003, his flash fiction works have won first prize in six contests and honorable mention in three others. His stories have appeared in sixty online and print magazines and anthologies in Australia, Canada, England, and the US. He's authored seven books of flash fiction stories and a self-study book that teaches beginners how to write flash fiction. He's owner of Flash Tales Magazine, an online magazine specializing in speculative fiction in the micro and flash fiction formats. www.flash-tales.com

"Can miles truly separate you from friends....If you want to be with someone you love, aren't you already there?"

-Richard Bach

A VALENTINE FOR MOM

By Nancy Jamalari© 2007



"Stay on the sidewalk with your bicycle," I called.

The door slammed behind my furious six-year-old stepson. "You can't tell me what to do. You're not my real Mom."

I collapsed on the steps. I was a failure. When I married Ken I thought Timmy would need me after his mother's death. I tried to be understanding, but he hated me and lost no opportunity to tell me so.

Tomorrow was Valentine's Day. Ken was away on a business trip and putting up with Timmy's sullen silence wasn't very romantic. Wearily I gripped the banister and pulled myself to my feet. Outside, brakes squealed, a car door slammed. I flew down the stairs and flung open the door. Mr. Simms, our neighbor, was kneeling on the street in front of his car. Timmy's bike lay inches from his front wheels. Timmy lay curled on his side as if asleep. Mr. Simms was bending over him. "He just slipped out into the street. I stopped as quick as I could."

I knelt and felt Timmy's arms and legs. His eyes opened. He struggled to sit up. "I'm fine. I just fell."

Together, Mr. Simms and I got Timmy and the bike back to the house. A long scrape decorated his left arm, but no bones were broken. I wanted to shake him. I wanted to frighten him so he would never do something that dangerous again.

I cleaned the scrape and applied antibiotic. Timmy stood rigidly. I drew him into my arms and hugged him. "Timmy, you must listen to what I say. I know I'm not your real Mom, but I love you and I don't want you to be hurt. Your real Mom is watching over you and she wants me to help protect you."

I pulled him close. His body remained inflexible, but as I held him, he began to tremble. He felt like a wounded bird. I gave him a bath and put him to bed.

The next morning we maintained a truce. Timmy wouldn't look at me as he ate breakfast, but he didn't make his usual mess. He had been known to spill whole glasses of orange juice when he thought I wasn't looking.

When Timmy left for school, I tried to forget that it was Valentine's Day. At three o'clock, I heard the school bus and hurried to the window. The front door opened and

Timmy sidled into the hall.

He thrust a wrinkled envelope at me. "It's for you. You're supposed to open it."

I took the envelope and lifted the flap. Inside I found a red Valentine's heart, a bit ragged about the edges, resting on a paste-cruled piece of lace doily. "Timmy. It's beautiful. Thank you."

He twisted his toe in the carpet. "I made it at school. It's for you. The teacher said to give it to your Mom."

My tears dampened his shaggy hair as I hugged him.

AUTHOR'S BIO:

Nancy Famolari

My husband and I are retired. We live in northeast Pennsylvania with our also retired Standardbred race horses and broodmare band. I have always wanted to write and am finally finding time to do so. I have finished two Nanowrimo novels and am in the process of editing them for possible publication.

*"A kiss can be a comma, a question mark or an exclamation point.
That's basic spelling that every woman ought to know."*

-Mistinguette

WHISPERS

by

Raymond Grant

© 2001



Do not tell me that I may walk away.
I know that I may; I choose not to.
I prefer to tear from joy for
I am fulfilled and happy.

Do not tell me that I am unbound.
I know I am free; I choose to be with you.
I prefer the road to your smile for
What greater pleasure could I create?

Do tell me that I am your friend,
And as friends we share secrets.
For are not friends such that they
Exchange inner thoughts and goals?

Do tell me that I am your companion,
And as companions we share a lifetime.
For are not companions such that in
Doing the mundane they create the unusual?

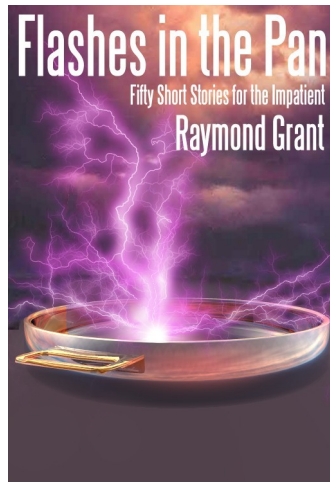
Do tell me that I am your love,
And as lovers we shall simply know each other.
For are not lovers such that they
Know love's soul and by knowing
Strengthen love's spirit?

AUTHOR'S BIO:

Raymond Grant

Over his professional lifetime, Raymond Grant has been a teacher, a government employee, a corporate VP, an entrepreneur, and a financial planner. He even picked up a Ph.D. along the way. He retired from all that about five years ago.

Now, he writes poetry, flash fiction, and short stories. He is a TRI Studio Author, and a member of The MuseItUp Club, Zoetrope Virtual Studio, and Publishers & Writers of San Diego. His new book, *Flashes in the Pan, Fifty Short Stories for the Impatient*, is available in electronic format from Double Dragon eBooks and as a trade paperback from Lulu Press. For more of his writing, visit <http://tri-studio.com/RaymondGrant.html>.



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for the large print paperback version.

"Being deeply loved by someone gives you strength; loving someone deeply gives you courage."

-Lao-Tzu

TWO MICRO FICTION

By Susan Stephenson

© 2007



Heroically he forded swollen rivers, repelled raging rhinos, swung across swamps and evaded the deadly, scarlet, Umba Jumba beetles. Breathless, torn and bleeding, he staggered into the clearing. With an exhausted bow, he presented her with a heart-shaped Valentine's card.

"Oh Tarzan," she cried, "that's cute! Now quit fooling round and put out the garbage."

Susan Stephenson

Romeo crept along the alley. How shameful that he, young and virile, must keep so furtive a tryst. Longing for Juliet welled and throbbed inside him.

Night time silence shattered. "Hey, you in Number 42. Keep that damned tomcat locked up or I'll contraceptualize him!"

Favouring baritone over soprano, Romeo renounced love and crept home.

Susan Stephenson

AUTHOR'S BIO:

Susan Stephenson

Susan is a passionate, enthusiastic Australian writer who constantly hones her skills with study and practice. She loves to capture a sense of place, to transport her readers so they can taste the tang of a salt breeze or feel the delicate flit of a butterfly's wings against their foreheads.

Susan has been published in print and online. Both editors and readers have applauded her ability to weave factual text with creativity and humour. To see some of Susan's published clips, link here:

<http://www.coffscoastwriters.com/about.html>

S'agapo, I love you
By Lea Schizas© 2007



The lights of the nursing room were unusually bright this evening. An outsider had visited Mrs. Sophia Adamopoulos earlier in the day. She brought a Greek dish, pastitsio, filling the halls with its aroma of cinnamon and pasta...a welcome change from the lingering odors of *Lysol* and urine.

The nurses greeted her, comforted her and explained the state her mother was in.

Armed with the latest update, Maria Adamopoulos stepped into her mother's surroundings. Childhood memories hit her hard. The vision of her mother combing her beautiful long tresses and hugging her as she said, 'Maria, s'agapo, I love you', enveloped her heart. Her mother cheering her at every track meet, making sure she was never late. Her mother's laughter filling the house with joy as Maria practiced her words for Saturday's Greek school. All these images flashed before Maria as she faced the cold aberration she stepped into. No embroideries hung on the walls like in their family home. Mom's cassette player, blaring the cherished Greek songs she sang to, was missing, as well.

But the single picture that broke her heart was to see her mother sitting by the window, emptily staring, not outside at the panoramic garden view but at the empty walls within.

"Hello, mamma." As Maria approached to hug her, Mrs. Adamopoulos flared her arms in front of her, terrified.

"Who are you? Help me!"

The nurse ran in and immediately soothed her.

"Sophia, Sophia, calm down, you have a visitor. This is your daughter, Maria. She's come a long way to see you." Maria felt like running and shaking her mom to the present, to try and get her out of this Alzheimer stupor that had gripped her.

Guilt rose in Maria. She thought *I should never have listened to my brother. I should have stuck to my guns and brought mom back to Greece.* Her brother had stopped visiting. He told Maria mom doesn't recognize me, so why bother. Maria was here to bring her mother back home.

Sophia stared at Maria as if trying to bring about a memory forever lost in this mind disease. The nurse left them alone once more.

Slowly, Maria again approached her mother. "Look, ma, I made you your favorite dish." She gently lifted the tinfoil and let her mother take a look.

"Maria?"

"Yes, mamma. It's Maria."

Tears flowed down Sophia's cheeks. "Where is my memory when I really need it," she cried.

That night the dim lights magically lit brightly as if Sophia's memory and those dim lights were one.

Maria had entered her mom's hospital room as a stranger but for one magical moment her mother embraced her like she used to, a long time ago, whispering the words Maria needed to hear once again.

"S'agapo, Maria. I love you."

Season of Sorrow
by Lea Schizas © 2007



His paws were all but frozen as he lay, angelically placed, with a blanket for warmth by the side of his favorite tree, looking up into the star lit sky stretched above him.

Linda sat beside her friend of many years, viewing the majestic trees that surrounded them. Winter was always a season of sorrow, she had replied once to her father when asked what she thought of all the beautiful trees that stood, sprinkled with icing, by their cabin.

Linda had associated the snow and the cold with death ever since her grandmother and mother died tragically two winters earlier. Her mom had gone to get grandma from the nursing home to celebrate Christmas with them. All was well till the phone rang.

As she stroked Candy's cold head, she recalled her father turning a ghostly color a little after he answered the telephone. Then the tears began to drip about his cheeks, gently touching his quivering lips.

"Daddy, you ok?"

"Linda, take Candy and go in your room, sweetheart."

"But, I didn't do anything!"

"Please, honey, I know. Just..."

That moment, Linda recalled, was when she became the lady of the house.

Now, just two years later, she once again was given the task to grow up again. Her beloved Candy was dying. What better place to sleep than here, surrounded by the white-kissed trees of God, like her grandma used to call them.

"I promise to cover you well, Candy. I'll never forget you. I love you." She bent her 9 year-old head and gently kissed her dog's snow-flaked nose. "Momma, grandma, please take care of Candy."

With every ounce of life he still had in him, he licked her nose and then passed away.

Linda hugged him till her daddy finally came to take her home.

"Daddy?"

"Yes, princess?"

"You think this is the best place for Candy to sleep forever in?"

"What do you feel?"

Linda looked all around them. The tranquility in the air at first had haunted her but now appeared to ease her.

"What better place, daddy, than within God's white-kissed trees."

She placed her gloveless hand into her dad's, gave it a squeeze, and said; "Now we have three angels to take care of us, daddy." And they walked home.

AUTHOR'S BIO:

Lea Schizas is an award-winning author/editor, a short story competition winner, living in Montreal with her husband Jimmy and five children. She describes herself as "finally woke up after a 23-year self-induced coma taking care of the family, and rediscovered my passion for writing."

She is the co-founder and Editor in Chief of two Writer's Digest 101 Top Writing Sites of 2005 & 2006 and recipients of the Preditors and Editors Most Useful Writing Sites Award: Apollo's Lyre, an online writer's Zine: <http://www.apollos-lyre.com> and the online writing critique community The MuseItUp Club, <http://museitupclub.tripod.com>

- Founder of The Muse Online Writers Conference, <http://www.freewebs.com/themuseonlinewritersconference/>
- Founder of The Muse Marquee, <http://themusemarquee.tripod.com>
- Founder of The Muse Book Reviews, <http://themusebookreviews.tripod.com>
- Co-founder of Coffee Cramp eZine <http://coffeecrampmagazine.tripod.com>
- Reviewer for the award-winning site AllBooksReviews.com
- copy editor for Double Dragon Publishing

She is the author of the Young Adult fantasy/adventure novel “The Rock of Realm” (<http://rockofrealmnovel.tripod.com>) and co-author and editor of the nonfiction writing reference book “The Muse On Writing” (<http://www.freewebs.com/themuseonwriting>) and the fantasy “Aleatory’s Junction” (<http://aleatorysjunction.tripod.com/>) Her newest paranormal/thriller “Doorman’s Creek” will be released early 2007 by eTreasures Publishing.

You can read more of Lea’s bio and accomplishments at:
<http://leaschizeditor.tripod.com>

MEDIA RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

Poets Take a Swipe at Hallmark

Award winning poets Carolyn Howard-Johnson and Magdalena Ball have teamed up to produce a book of love poetry which is anything but syrupy. The poems love in unconventional ways and offers mature, deep, reflective sentiment for those who want to say something a little richer, a little deeper than simply "I love you."

According to Joyce Mishaan, AC Content Producer, "It's a rough world and it's easy to look around and feel that love is nothing more than a hopeless cliché." *Cherished Pulse* moves beyond those clichés, and explores real love -- the kind of love that may take many years to build. No pussyfooting. No excuses. It's a sensual, beautiful book which can be read again and again.

Of the collection, Howard-Johnson, author of *This is the Place, Harkening: A Collection of Stories Remembered*, and a poetry collection *Tracings*, says, "I think there is a market for stuff that doesn't look and feel like Hallmark. I can never find a commercial card that isn't too mushy or too cutsey."

The chapbook is a miracle made possible by the net; the two poets hail from different continents, Ball from Australia and Howard-Johnson from California, USA.

Cherished Pulse, an e- chapbook of unconventional love poetry, perhaps an industry first. As a downloadable e-book, it costs less than a single paper card. It Give a copy with a rose the color of your choosing or a locket and watch your Valentine smile.

Magdalena Ball is the author of the poetry collection *Quark Soup* and her novel *Sleep Before Evening* is due for publication early in 2007.

Cherished Pulse also has original paintings by artist Vicki Thomas.

For more information on *Cherished Pulse*, visit <http://www.compulsivereader.com/html/images/cherishedpulse.htm> or contact maggieball@compulsivereader.com.

Learn more about Ball at <http://www.compulsivereader.com/html/>

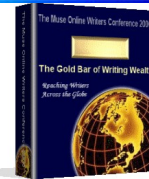
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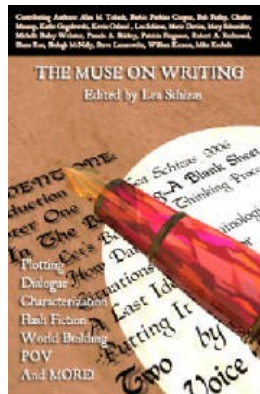
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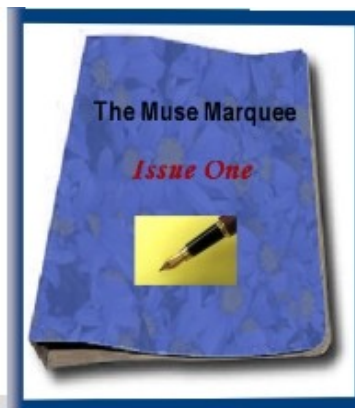
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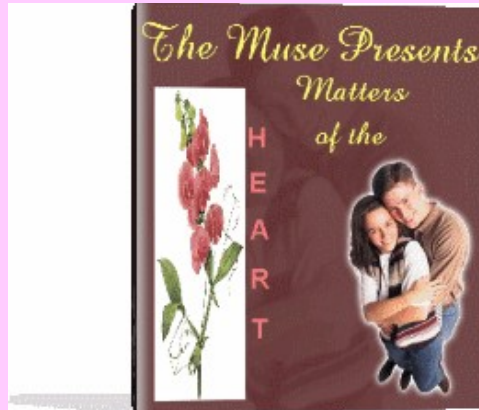
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"The only abnormality is the incapacity to love."

-Anais Nin