

2015

THE CALIFORNIA WRITERS CLUB

Literary Review

Disturbance Call ... p4
Anatomy of an Orphan Mind ... p3
Redeemed in the Sacred Valley of the Incas p16
And others



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FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK



Again I am pleased to present to you the best of this issue's submissions from members of the California Writers Club. Today, our *Literary Review* is becoming a force among published anthologies, and those authors included here are encouraged to take their share of the pride. The Club takes great satisfaction in offering its members this opportunity to see their work in print and circulated.

The *Review* is published annually, and in a private distribution reaches two-thousand readers throughout the state, a few in Europe and one in Kansas. (Good things still happen in Kansas.) The work included is blind-selected by a team of qualified editors. You see them listed in the masthead, and my personal thanks to all.

A few words about the club - after the San Francisco earthquake of 1906, friends known at the time as the Coppa Four—Jack London, Austin Lewis, George Sterling, Herman Whitaker—escaped across the bay to Oakland to continue gathering socially. In a picnic setting, they might sip a little wine, talk politics and story, and continue to motivate the pursuit of their passion—writing. Soon others then associated with the Alameda Press Club, joined in—poets, Ina Coolbrith and Joaquin Miller, worthies among them. From this group, in 1909, the California Writers Club evolved and has flourished since. Today, with some 1900 members in twenty-one branches reaching from the north coast and Napa to the southern edge of Orange County, The California Writers Club invites the professional, and the aspiring to join the picnic.

My favorites included here? I've enjoyed them all, but invite your eyes to "Anatomy of an Orphan Mind" by Pratibha Kelpure if poetry is your interest, or "Disturbance Call" by Julie Royce if your preference is fiction. For a solid essay, "Redeemed in the Sacred Valley of the Incas" holds my attention. Take time and enjoy. If you are a member, consider submitting this fall.

Regards,

D. L. LaRoche

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THE GOODBYE

Ana Hays McCracken

The Christmas presents I needed to mail at the post office teetered precariously on my arm as I waited to cross Avy Avenue. This wasn't how I'd planned Christmas. Dad was supposed to fly to San Francisco on Thursday. Instead, I was racing around to catch a flight to Illinois. Cell phone pressed to my ear, I concentrated on my sister-in-law's staccato voice.

"I asked your dad to meet with the hospice nurses last week so they could explain the dying process to him," my sister-in-law said.

"I know. He mentioned Mom's feet started turning blue over the weekend. Couldn't someone have called me," I said.

"It's hard to know if your mother will live another day or a week. She'll either wait for you to get here or she won't. I told her the family's here since I think she confuses me for you. And since she's agitated, I told her it's okay to die."

"What? Hold on while I cross the street."

A nurse, my sister-in-law had advised my parents for several years about my mom's "forgetfulness," and helped my dad to admit my mother into an Alzheimer care unit in April. On November 18th Mom broke her hip and now, a month to the day later, her death was imminent.

"Uh, what you told my mom doesn't work for me. Tell her I'm flying home tonight. Ask her to wait."

As my flight circled O'Hare at 11:30 pm that evening, I tried to reconcile myself with what my sister-in-law had told my mother. The rational side of me imagined it was her way of soothing my mom's agitated state. Dying I knew from my hospice work was a scary thing—for the person dying and for family members waiting for death. Comforting my mom, I told myself, must have been my sister-in-law's way of calming everyone in the room. But the sad part of that for me, was losing my mother before she could say goodbye, and I hoped my sister-in-law had gone back to my mother and asked her to wait. I stared out my window. The darkness reflected my anxious face in the glass. Silently I pleaded with my mother. "Mom please wait."

As the plane landed, I turned on my iPhone.

A missed message and voice mail alert flashed on the screen—y brother. He seldom called. I braced myself as I held the phone to my ear.

"Ana. Mom died at 11:39 pm. We were with her."

Nothing more. I sobbed.

Forty minutes later, I tossed my suitcase into the trunk of my rental car. Somehow I had managed to hold myself together on the shuttle ride. As I slid into my rental and pulled the door shut, I could not contain my tears. I was disappointed, angry, exhausted, and sad. I had tried to make it in time to say goodbye. But she hadn't waited. I pulled a damp tissue from my coat pocket and blew my nose. Why hadn't I chosen an earlier flight that day? Why hadn't I gone home sooner? When

ANATOMY OF AN ORPHAN MIND

Cities and countries

Fresh cow dung on the dusty roads

Rangoli drawings and water well pump

A hundred words spoken on the streets

Rickshaws, bicycles and rumbling railcars

A hundred elbows creating space out of nothing

A hundred strange voices day after day

The young voice inside frozen, muted, waiting

Waiting for a decision,

waiting for a clue,

a signal from an adult to let her

gather the rain in her palm, to

release her song to the wind,

waiting for a voice that never speaks

Memories thinly stitched together,

A patchwork of childhood in a paralyzed brain

and

A hundred indecisions of adulthood

— Pratibha Kelapure

Mom had broken her hip, the nurse explained to me over the phone that statistics showed Dementia patients tended to die within a month, six months tops.

"Will you call me when she's dying?" I had asked the nurse. "I know you nurses know these things."

"We'll do our best," the nurse assured me.

I could have gone home then, to see Mom. But I hadn't. I hadn't because I knew that my mom no longer remembered me. The last time I'd seen her during the summer in the Alzheimer's unit, she'd stared vacantly at me and asked, "Who are you?"

"A friend," I replied.

"Oh that's nice," Mom said.

Would it have made any difference if my sister-in-law had told my mother that I was flying home to be with her instead of telling her I was in the room with the rest of the family? Who knew? And if she didn't remember me, how could she still know my sister-in-law?

The car rental office went dark and a silhouette stepped through the front door, turned and locked it. Time to drive to the hotel. After midnight, it was time for bed. Somehow I needed to sleep; rest up for the

early morning drive to my father's home.

As I reached for the ignition key, I thought about today's date—now December 19th. A year ago on this same day, I had visited my parents for an early Christmas because they could not come to California to celebrate with Ed and me in our new home. On that night, the last night of my visit, I was exhausted from five days of listening to my mom's repetitive stories. Through them I had gleaned she'd forgotten my brother's name. Sometimes she forgot and then remembered mine.

When my dad arose from the couch for bed, Mom and I followed. As I bent to hug her good night, she reached up and tightly gripped my shoulders pulling me towards her so we were eye to eye. She looked as if she were looking for something. I waited for her to speak.

"I know I know you, but I keep forgetting your name," she finally said.

"I know, Mom." I inhaled slowly to hold back tears.

"LISTEN," she said sternly." Startled, I held my breath afraid to move. "I want you to know that I love you. Do ... you ..know ... that I love you?"

"Yes, Mom. I know that you love me. And I love you."

"That's good," she replied. We stood. Eyes locked. I waited.

"Where's Bill," Mom said to no one. Her hands dropped to her sides and she shuffled past me towards her bedroom in her tattered faded robe she refused to remove, slip hanging askew below it, and mismatched blue and pink fuzzy socks.



I released my grip on the steering wheel of the rental car. My tears abated. My tense tired body began to relax. I hadn't made it in time today to say goodbye tonight, but I had a year ago. *You never know when the words I love you will be goodbye.*

This is what I will remember every time I berate myself for not picking the right flight from San Francisco to Chicago to make it to her bedside in time for her death. I will remind myself we said goodbye while she still had an inkling of me.

A car sped out of the Enterprise parking lot. I hugged myself amazed that I could still feel my mom's fingers with her pointy fingernails digging into my sweater as she gripped my arms. Remembering that moment I saw the intensity of her gaze. And I heard her voice, "Do .. you ... know ... that I love you?"



TOUCH ME

The night is late,
Touch me.

The sun slid behind the moon
waiting for you to
Touch me.

The stars boldly shine
granting light
so you can
Touch me

Touch my smoothness,
my cheek, my lips,
my throat, my softness.

Touch my longing,
my aching,
my wanting you.

Fill the void
inside me
with your firm touch.

Touch me to keep me safe
from falling off the cliff
into the dark abyss
into empty
into alone

It's late,
but it's never too late
for you to
Touch me.

—Loralie Kay

JOURNEYS

Joanna H Kraus

Her fingers traced the engraved calligraphy. A wedding. A distant cousin. A reception in a Normandy chateau. She sighed then bit her lip. Peter would never agree. But the cream colored invitation stirred an irrepressible longing to see more of the world, to go beyond their comfortable retirement condo, to stroll foreign gardens, to paint more than Florida flowers.

When her husband came in from golf, Lily brought him a glass of iced tea with a twist of lemon, the way he liked it. After he'd thirstily gulped down half the glass, she showed him the invitation.

Glancing at the ornate printing and deckled edges, he commented, "Must be a big do if they invited us."

"It's family," she said, trying not to sound exasperated. "You remember Anne Marie, don't you?" Lily twisted a lock of red hair around her finger. At seventy-eight her body was trim. In her paint splattered t-shirt and shorts and flip-flops she looked almost youthful. "She was at our wedding, Peter."

"Fifty years ago," he said with a dry laugh.

"Family's family," she insisted.

"Yours," he snapped. "Not mine. How'd she even get this address?" At eighty he stood tall and commanding with a full head of white hair.

"Christmas cards," Lily said.

He shrugged, settling his tall frame into a rattan chair to finish his tea. "That's your department."

"Peter," she hesitated. "It would be fun to go."

He looked at his wife sharply. "A mob of strangers, most of whom don't speak English? I'd feel like a fool."

"We can afford it," Lily persisted. "We're not getting any younger." ▶