

SHORT STORY NIGHT

**Read these stories and join
library staff for a discussion at
Lion's Tale Brewing
Monday, Sept 12th at 7:00pm**

Flash Fiction Bonanza!

**Featuring a phone
interview with author
Kevin Brockmeier!**



"Jumper Down" - Don Shea

Henry was our jumper up expert — had been for years. When the jumper was up, by which I mean when he or she was still on the building ledge or the bridge, Henry was superb at talking them down. Of all the paramedics I worked with, he had the touch.

When the call came in 'jumper up' Henry always went, if he was working that shift. When the call was 'jumper down' it didn't matter much which of us went — we were all equally capable of attending to the mess on the ground or fishing some dude out of the water.

The university hospital we worked out of got more than its share of jumpers of both varieties because of its proximity to the major bridges — Manhattan, Brooklyn, and Williamsburg. Over the years, dealing with his jumpers and the other deranged human flotsam the job threw his way, Henry had become a tad crusty — you might even say burned out — although he was still pretty effective with the jumper ups. He always considered them a personal challenge.

Henry was retiring. On his last shift, we threw him a little party in the lounge two doors down from the ER, even brought some liquor in for the off duty guys although that was against the rules. Everyone was telling their favorite jumper stories for Henry's benefit; he'd heard them all before, but that didn't matter. Big John told the story of the window cleaner who took a dive four stories off his scaffolding. They got him in the bus, started a couple of IV lines, and John radioed ahead to the ER, "Bringing in the jumper down." Now this guy was in sad shape, two broken legs, femur poking through the skin, but he sits right up and says with great indignation, "I did *not* jump, goddamit! I fell!"

Just as Big John finished this story, a call came in. Jumper up on the Brooklyn Bridge. Everyone agreed it was meant to be, it was Henry's last jumper, and I went along since it was my shift, too.

The pillar on the Manhattan side of the Brooklyn Bridge is over water. Our jumper up had climbed the pillar on the Brooklyn side, which is over land. By the time we got there, the police had a couple of spotlights on him, and we could see him clearly, sitting on a beam about a hundred feet up, looking pretty relaxed. Henry took a megaphone and was preparing to climb up after him when the guy jumped.

It looked like a circus act. No exaggeration. Two half gainers and a back flip, and every second of it caught in the spotlights. The guy hit the ground about thirty yards from where we were standing, and Henry and I were over there on the run, although it was obvious he was beyond help.

He was dead, but he hadn't died yet. His eyes were open, and he looked as if he was somewhat surprised by what he had done to himself. Henry leaned in close and bellowed in his ear.

"I know you can hear me, 'cause hearing's the last thing to go. I just gotta tell ya, I wanted you to know, that jump was fucking *magnificent!*"

At first I considered Henry's parting shot pretty insensitive. Then I thought about it some. I mean, it was clearly not the occasion to *admonish* the jumper, who had obviously suffered enough defeats and rejections in his life. Why should he spend his last few seconds on earth hearing how he blew it once again?

Seems to me if I was a jumper on the way out, right out there on the ragged edge of the big mystery, I might, indeed, upon my exit, find some last modicum of comfort in Henry's words, human words of recognition and congratulation.

The Corner of My Eye by Doris Cheng

I saw Meredith at breakfast today. It had been two, maybe three years since I'd seen her—really looked at her, that is. She usually resided in my peripheral vision, like a dust mote floating in the corner of my eye.

“Hi, Mom,” she said.

I was overcome. I loved my girl so much. “Honey, how did you sleep? How are things at school? Tell me everything.” I noticed her hair was in a complicated French braid; she must have learned to do that on her own.

She proceeded to tell me all about a fifth-grade project that involved toothpicks and copper wire and teeny tiny robots. There was some sort of classroom drama. I tried to pay attention. But I was packing her little sisters' lunches and trying to remember who needed to bring their violin and who needed to return their library book. The dog tipped over the garbage pail and I had to wrestle a chicken bone from its mouth. I know I missed some details. But I thought, thank God I never have to worry about Meredith.

Around then Hallie's anxiety got so bad she began levitating. I had to meet with the principal and child psychologist and drive her to a social skills group twice a week so she could play board games and practice keeping both feet on the ground. On top of that Fiona developed amblyopia. Her left eye starting rolling around in her head like a greasy marble in a ball socket. When I wasn't driving Hallie to therapy I was on the Internet researching “levitation treatment” and “child has loose eyeball.”

I ran into Meredith in the kitchen. I'd come in to fix myself a cup of tea and saw her peering into the refrigerator.

“What's going on, sweetie?” I was happy she was there. I hadn't seen her in a while though I knew she was around. I could tell she'd gotten taller and more womanly.

“Nothing much. Everything's fine.” She closed the fridge door. “We're out of yogurt.”

“Sorry. I've been so busy I haven't had time to get to the store. Your sisters, their appointments—”

She told me it was no biggie. She was understanding, full of grace. I told her I was grateful to have an independent and resourceful daughter who always did what was expected of her. I hugged her.

I'm kind of fuzzy on Meredith's high school years. I remember her little sisters were putting me through the wringer. Hallie needed gravitational therapy, which meant I had to tie cans of soup to her feet every night and force her into a heavy-footed walk. Fiona's doctor recommended she get a mechanical eye. I was buried in insurance paperwork and probably a little depressed. I think Meredith played field hockey. Or maybe it was lacrosse. I vaguely recall there being a stick of some sort. Whatever it was, I'm sure she did well because she's a team player. Other kids might drink at parties and throw up on

people's lawns, but not her. She's too considerate for that.

I passed her on the stairs from time to time. Each time she was more self-possessed than the last. Sometimes I felt a hand reach its way inside me and strum a high minor chord along my rib cage. The note reverberated in my chest cavity.

The last time I saw her was in the spring of her senior year. Or maybe she had already graduated, I can't say for sure. I woke up, looked out the window, and saw her in the yard tending a roaring flame. She was inflating a hot air balloon.

I ran downstairs. By the time I got outside she was already in the basket. The balloon began to float upward.

"Come down, Meredith!" I told her she had to let me know where she was going. She wasn't licensed and besides, she would need a warmer jacket if she was going to spend time in the stratosphere.

Meredith untied the ropes. She tossed out some ballast and the balloon began to climb. I shouted at her to be careful. I wanted her to know that a mother's love is infinite, but I wasn't sure if she could hear me at that point.

She waved. The balloon crested the tree line and found an air current. A sudden gust took it up and away. I couldn't tell if she was smiling. She kept waving until she was just a dot on the horizon, no bigger than a dust mote. The dog started barking and I turned to shush it. When I looked for her again she was gone.



Doris W. Cheng is a Taiwanese American fiction writer. She received an MA in English Literature from Columbia University and teaches fiction and poetry in NY and NJ. Her stories are forthcoming or have appeared in *New Orleans Review*, *Witness*, *Berkeley Fiction Review*, *The Normal School*, *The Cincinnati Review*, *miCRo*, *The Pinch*, and other literary magazines. She is an alumna of Tin House and the recipient of a 2020 Barbara Deming Memorial Fund Grant for feminist fiction. <http://www.doriswcheng.com> (<http://www.doriswcheng.com>)

I Like Your Shoes

 [newyorker.com/books/flash-fiction/i-like-your-shoes](https://www.newyorker.com/books/flash-fiction/i-like-your-shoes)

Kevin Brockmeier

July 25, 2019

The note read “I like your shoes.” She found it spelled out in the condensation on her living-room window, written glidingly, with a sort of throwaway prettiness, in strokes the width of a fingertip. When she attempted to wipe it off, her palm came back dry. Even so, it took her a moment to understand the situation. The writing was—had to be—on the *outside* of the glass. Her apartment was on the sixteenth floor, with no balconies or even window ledges. How such a message could have gotten there, who could have composed it, eluded her. The heat of the morning took hold as the sun crested the high-rises, and she watched as, all at once, the words were inhaled back into the air.

The second note arrived a few months later: “I like your shoes,” written in the same pleasingly rounded hand as before. She pressed her cheek to the window, searching for a suspended platform, a bungee cord, some scaffolding or suction marks, but the face of the building offered only glass and aluminum.

The third note appeared early the following winter, lingering in the frost above the kitchen sink as she washed the dishes. The familiar words—“I like your shoes”—almost escaped her notice, since the sky behind them was the same marmoreal gray as the ice.

The fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh notes arrived on a hot April afternoon within the span of a few minutes, fading away and then replacing one another with a bellows-like breathing rhythm: “I like your shoes,” “I like your shoes,” “I like your shoes,” “I like your shoes.” By then, she had moved to a third-floor walkup in a converted school building. Her new boyfriend, obliged by his commute to wake an hour earlier than she did, often left little goodbyes for her on the kitchen counter or on the dry-erase board, but his crabbed script was nothing like the declarations that had pursued her across the city, so fluidly, so puckishly made. She was certain they were not from him.

What she was starting to suspect was that the notes would accompany her for the rest of her life. That some god, ghost, or demon would go on, until the day she died, liking her shoes. And that even after eleven different houses and apartments, hundreds of guest rooms and hotel suites, seven boyfriends, two husbands, and several checkerboards’ worth of windows, she would never be sure whether the message was meant to be a compliment or an insult. The phrase reminded her of the roundabout observations of teen-age girls, the kind who put just enough sugar on their barbs to disguise them as flattery. Every time she went shoe shopping, she found herself asking the same question: But what do they *really* think?

Sandwich by Sara Cappell Thomason

This morning I watched my ex-husband assemble our daughter's lunch on the hood of my car. He was grocery-less and late to drop her off at school. He called to ask for help, begged me really, and I thrilled at his desperation—went so far as to picture him here, on bent knee. I was invariably prepared, ripe for gloating.

Yeah, yeah. Sure.

It has been eighteen months since he left and still, I am so often surprised by these fragile moments, stunned into silence by a slice of provolone, or a packet of turkey, my car still wet with dew, the notion that this man who once kept a pair of my sandals at his office as a talisman, would stand in the driveway rather than join me, if even for a moment, at our old kitchen counter to make a sandwich.

Let's just do this out here.

He carefully rolled lunch meat and cheese in tubes like little horns of plenty, while our daughter began a discourse on bowling. I stood nodding and aching as if I had somehow sucked down a bright balloon and was forced to hold it in my throat. Frustrated that I could not summon a smile, or properly employ the trick of rapid blinking, to keep water from snaking my cheeks. Because, of course I hadn't been there to see her strike, to clear the lane, to crush a nacho with her knee.

And when he was done?

Fin.

He said this and bowed—hand on his heart, head low. It was a thing he used to do right before bed to make me laugh. And against my own will, despite everything—I did. I laughed. Because of course this is how the whole thing would end. With a curtain drop.

Fin. Fin. Fin.

Sara Cappell Thomason holds an MFA in fiction from Sarah Lawrence College. She was awarded second prize in the *Zoetrope: All-Story* Short Fiction Contest and has been long-listed for the *Wigleaf* Top 50. Her work has previously appeared in *Electric Literature*, *Tin House*, *Witness Magazine*, *SmokeLong Quarterly*, and *The Citron Review*, among others. Currently, she lives on Isle of Palms, SC where she is hard at work on a novel about prehistoric monsters. She can be found on Instagram and Twitter [@saracthomason](#)

← Previous post

Next post →

THE VOICES IN MY HEAD

Jack Handey

I never know when the voices in my head are going to start talking to me. I might be coming out of my apartment and I'll look up at the clouds. Suddenly, the voices in my head will tell me to go back inside and get an umbrella, because it might rain. Sometimes I'll obey the voices and go get the umbrella. But sometimes I muster my strength and refuse to get the umbrella. Still, the voices don't let you forget that you disobeyed them, especially if it rains. They'll say, "I knew you should have gotten the umbrella. Why didn't you?"

I don't expect you to understand what it's like to have voices in your head telling you what to do. But it is a nightmare I live with all the time. Right now, for instance, the voices are telling me to go back and change the word "nightmare" to "living hell."

The voices torment me from the time I wake up. They'll say, "Get up and go to the bathroom to urinate." Throughout the day, they never let up: "Go get something to eat," "Go take a nap," "Go to the bathroom again," "Get ready for bed." On and on. Sometimes the voices even talk to me in my sleep, telling me to get up and urinate. My fear is that the voices will tell me to do something crazy, like go look for a job.

I used to think that drinking alcohol would calm the voices, but it usually makes them worse. They'll say things like "Go tell that person what you really think of him" or "Get up on that table and do your funny cowboy dance."

The voices used to talk to me about the Beatles. When I was young, they'd tell me to go buy a certain Beatles album. "But I don't have any money," I'd say. Then the voices would suggest I mow some lawns to earn some money. "But that's a lot of work," I'd say. "Well," the voices would say, "do you want the album or not?" (Wait. That might have been my father.)

Sometimes I go for relatively long periods without the voices talking to me, such as when I'm watching TV, or watching ants, or lying on the floor and trying to blow lint balls into one big herd of lint. Or seeing which one of my cats is most afraid of "pillowcase head." But these golden moments are fleeting, and soon the voices return.

I just wish the voices would tell me something useful once in a while, like how to say things in French or where my gloves went. But they hardly ever do. In fact, many times the voices like to taunt me, telling me, for instance, to turn left at an intersection when, it turns out later, I clearly should have turned right. Or telling me to wear a tie that obviously looks ridiculous.

Even worse, sometimes the voices themselves don't know what they want. They'll tell me to go up and talk to a pretty woman, then they'll say, "No, wait, she's too pretty for you," then they'll say,

“Oh, go ahead,” then they’ll say, “What if your wife finds out?”
(Man, make up your mind!)

When you tell people you have voices in your head, they think you’re crazy. But when you don’t say anything at all, and you just sit there and stare at them, they also think you’re crazy. So you can’t win.

I thought about going to a psychiatrist to get rid of the voices, but the voices said it would be expensive, and would probably take a long time, and that I’d have to put my pants on and go to the subway, then come all the way back on the subway, then take my pants off, and who knows if it would even work? Sometimes the voices have a point.

One day, I decided that I couldn’t take it anymore, and I decided to silence the voices in my head once and for all. But I couldn’t figure out how to do that, so I never did.

Maybe the answer is not to try to get rid of the voices but to learn to live with them. (I don’t really think that; I’m just saying it for the voices.)

Will I ever be able to fully control the voices in my head? Probably not. But will I at least be able to adjust my life style so that the voices are not a threat to me or others? Again, the answer is no.

But I’m not ready to throw in the towel just yet, because one thing I have learned is this: the voices may be bossy, but they’re really stupid.

Girl

 newyorker.com/magazine/1978/06/26/girl

Jamaica Kincaid

June 19, 1978

Wash the white clothes on Monday and put them on the stone heap; wash the color clothes on Tuesday and put them on the clothesline to dry; don't walk bare-head in the hot sun; cook pumpkin fritters in very hot sweet oil; soak your little cloths right after you take them off; when buying cotton to make yourself a nice blouse, be sure that it doesn't have gum in it, because that way it won't hold up well after a wash; soak salt fish overnight before you cook it; is it true that you sing benna in Sunday school?; always eat your food in such a way that it won't turn someone else's stomach; on Sundays try to walk like a lady and not like the slut you are so bent on becoming; don't sing benna in Sunday school; you mustn't speak to wharf-rat boys, not even to give directions; don't eat fruits on the street—flies will follow you; *but I don't sing benna on Sundays at all and never in Sunday school*; this is how to sew on a button; this is how to make a buttonhole for the button you have just sewed on; this is how to hem a dress when you see the hem coming down and so to prevent yourself from looking like the slut I know you are so bent on becoming; this is how you iron your father's khaki shirt so that it doesn't have a crease; this is how you iron your father's khaki pants so that they don't have a crease; this is how you grow okra—far from the house, because okra tree harbors red ants; when you are growing dasheen, make sure it gets plenty of water or else it makes your throat itch when you are eating it; this is how you sweep a corner; this is how you sweep a whole house; this is how you sweep a yard; this is how you smile to someone you don't like too much; this is how you smile to someone you don't like at all; this is how you smile to someone you like completely; this is how you set a table for tea; this is how you set a table for dinner; this is how you set a table for dinner with an important guest; this is how you set a table for lunch; this is how you set a table for breakfast; this is how to behave in the presence of men who don't know you very well, and this way they won't recognize immediately the slut I have warned you against becoming; be sure to wash every day, even if it is with your own spit; don't squat down to play marbles—you are not a boy, you know; don't pick people's flowers—you might catch something; don't throw stones at blackbirds, because it might not be a blackbird at all; this is how to make a bread pudding; this is how to make doukona; this is how to make pepper pot; this is how to make a good medicine for a cold; this is how to make a good medicine to throw away a child before it even becomes a child; this is how to catch a fish; this is how to throw back a fish you don't like, and that way something bad won't fall on you; this is how to bully a man; this is how a man bullies you; this is how to love a man, and if this doesn't work there are other ways, and if they don't work don't feel too bad about giving up; this is how to spit up in the air if you feel like it, and this is how to move quick so that it doesn't fall on you; this is how to make ends meet; always squeeze bread to make sure it's fresh; *but what if the baker won't let me feel the bread?*; you mean to say that after all you are really going to be the kind of woman who the baker won't let near the bread? ♦

The Study by Ryan Griffith

■ macromic.org/2021/04/23/the-study-by-ryan-griffith/

April 23, 2021

On the record Lydia Ruslanova was singing a war song, the wounded bird of her voice trying to fly, quivering, hurt, temporal, employed not as an instrument of beauty but of grief, so that as we sat in Slava's study—dusk, cognac, *The Fall of the Roman Empire*—we were all wounded in time, together but solitary in the particular cages of our memories, our losses, our deaths, the feeling I once had many years earlier as a child at the circus in Fresno, California on a hot September night before school had started, when as a final act they removed the net for a family of Romanian acrobats, and under the sickly spin of light I saw a woman on the high wire teeter and drop, alive briefly in the fall, grasping and gorgeous, a dilation of time forever caught in the cinema of remembering, and the crowd released a collective animal sound before my grandmother clapped her hands over my eyes and there was the most perfect silence I have ever heard, each of us trapped in the specific machines of our grief as the lights went out and darkness came on.

Ryan Griffith's fiction has appeared in FlashFiction.net, Fiction Southeast, NANO Fiction, and The Wigleaf Top 50 Very Short Stories of 2012. He currently runs a multimedia narrative installation in San Diego called *Relics of the Hypnotist War*. You can visit his website at relicsofthehypnotistwar.com.

Morse Code by Elizabeth Cabrera

 newflashfiction.com/morse-code-by-elizabeth-cabrera/

August 3, 2022

The old man fell asleep in his car, his nostrils pressed softly against the steering wheel, but the car kept going, because the old man's foot was not asleep, was still pressing down hard, and later they would say, *it's not really his fault, he's such an old man*, because the man had been at the pier very early helping his friend with his boat, and when you are almost 80—every hair follicle bleached of color, face mottled with radiation either natural or manmade—it is very tiring to get up early and engage in all the motions required to bring a boat to land, and I imagine this man was quite narrow, perhaps his arms lined with weeping tattoos the color of veins because isn't that what men who deal in boats look like, ropy and mean and marked, but I guess I'm thinking of poor men, as rich men also play in boats, only they call them yachts and cruisers, and these are the things I'll never know because my father's death wasn't litigated in court—just handled quickly between lawyers, two white men shaking hands, a judge's stamp, a small insurance payout—so let's say that maybe this man was very wealthy, and he's leathered instead of mottled, his awake foot slipped in a driving moccasin and not a sneaker, but either way he could not be as substantial as my father at 25, whose hair was the color of a crow's feather, who was walking home from his new job at the jewelry store just two weeks in this new country with traffic laws and yachts, walking through the wild grasses that line suburban roadways, who was pinned between the old man's car and the guardrails, and maybe he died fast and maybe not, again there are no court records, though certainly he died, and that part isn't surprising considering how delicate my father's soul is, lighter than soap bubbles in a child's bath, so when the old man's car ripped his flesh, his soul had nothing to tether it to our dirt, the old man now awake and quivering, the tang of urine sinking into the upholstery, but that wasn't the very end of their story because then—and this is the only part I can really know—the police were dispatched to my mother, me the size of an ear of corn curled up inside and tapping against her stomach, and a policeman drove her to the hospital and made her sit three hours in a linoleum chair, waiting for news that could never be good, until finally a doctor in a stained coat said in a low voice, *I'm sorry, he's gone*, so I tapped my mother to tell her that I was still there, pushed her hard so her muscles would shake, and gauzy stars would form behind her lashes, so she would feel the heft of a baby, the weight of tomorrow, but she didn't understand, didn't know Morse code.

Elizabeth Cabrera works at an animal protection nonprofit and writes at night. She lives outside of Washington DC with her family.

Blocks

 shotgunhoney.com/fiction/blocks-by-chris-l-robinson/

Chris L. Robinson

The newspapers once called her whole neighborhood an “open air drug market”, which was bullshit. But you couldn’t tell by what she was seeing now. Four guys off in a corner of the huge park are doing some kind of transaction in a stand of trees while she sits on a bench nursing her bad knee. The men are less than a hundred feet away, silhouetted by the fading evening light.

The trees shields her from their view. She’d come here several times in the last year, running around the park—jogging really—trying to capture some of the spark she used to feel on the track. Back before injury made her lose her scholarship to the small college she’d attended for less than a year.

Back then, all she’d needed was a head start and she was gone. They said she came out of the blocks like a rocket. Then one day she’d jumped in victory to celebrate winning her third race of the season and landed wrong on a photographer’s camera bag at the edge of the track—the same photographer that would take the photo of her on the ground in agony—and it was all over. Her knee healed, but that extra step was gone. And soon she was back in a different set of blocks. The same ones she’d tried to run away from.

Now she was a cashier in a grocery store with “some college” on her resume, working second shift. She had steady hours, but that didn’t stop the rent from being late on an apartment so dated that her bedroom still had linoleum on the floor.

She had heard about a new kind of surgery that might be able to repair her knee, one a lot better than the one she’d received through her school health insurance. Maybe if she’d had that things would have been different.

Maybe.

She’d always thought she would run straight out of the neighborhood to something better. But, in her worst moments, she remembers that tracks are a circle. Especially for someone like her.

The dudes are arguing now. Something is wrong. Bad product? Is someone’s money short? She didn’t really know anything about drugs, except that they’d killed her older sister when she was almost too young to remember.

Almost.

Their voices are getting louder. She can’t quite hear what they are saying at that distance,

but she shrinks back on the bench, now more than her aching knee keeping her in place. She doesn't want to be seen. Then one guy, very tall, tries to snatch away a backpack held by another one. The smaller one resists for a moment, then lets go as he reaches into the pocket of his oversized jeans and starts shooting, hitting the tall guy twice before the other side returns fire. Within seconds it seems everyone is down. Are they all dead? Not all, she can hear moaning and cursing.

But no one seems to be in condition to get away. The city has this thing like a microphone that can tell when shots are fired—she isn't sure how—but the cops will come soon. They don't get to ignore shots the system detects.

So she needs to go. She's a witness. It would be dangerous for people to even think she knows something. She looks over again. They are less than a 100 meters away, the silhouettes. Less. That was her distance in college. The 100-meter dash. They're all still down and she begins to wonder—can she get whatever they had been fighting over? Had those shots been like the starter pistol she'd heard so many times before? She could start over somewhere else. Maybe even get her knee fixed. Try again.

Maybe.

Was there money in the bag? Or drugs? What was it worth? Didn't matter. Had to be worth more than she had. A lot more.

She slides from the edge of the bench, goes down low in her sprinter's stance, feels the familiar coiled tension in her legs, the pain in her knee momentarily drowned out by adrenaline, by the scent of a chance. Against the roar of the sirens she fits her feet into the imaginary blocks.

Bang.