

Yellow Confetti
fiction by Jeff Corey

The confetti fell from the balcony in primary colors. The red and the blue were unabashedly patriotic. But the yellow was out of place. Like a daffodil in June, it playfully bobbed with the wind before finally falling to the ground much later than expected. I asked a fellow festivalgoer if he had any idea what the yellow meant. He didn't, but he lived in the apartment below the lady that was throwing it. She was a crazy old hag, he said, that was probably making some kind of statement.

Some towns were built for train routes, and others for truck routes, but Marysville was built for a parade route. The main street---State Ave---was lined with enough vacancy signs to avoid the hassles of shutting it down for the procession. Yet summer had arrived, and vendors filled the sidewalks with fresh strawberry shortcake and rainbow sno-cones. The crowd unfolded their lawn chairs and unfurled their flags. The first troops were returning home from the war. Over. Finally. Supposedly.

The troops marched along to snare drums and catcalls, while the yellow continued to fall. I picked up a piece of the yellow confetti---which was cut from ribbon---as her voice, quivering yet stubborn, began shouting from the balcony.

"The war hasn't ended, until the past is mended."

Others began shouting also.

They risked their lives so you could scream at them like that and Why don't you throw yourself off the balcony?

My older brother would've killed me if I didn't scream back at her too, but who knew when I was going to see him again anyway. I hoped there would be another parade for his return.

I raised my head skyward and hollered.

"Hey! Down here!"

She was more interested in her own voice. I felt like a child screaming at a Popsicle truck, chasing in vain as its music drowned me out. She finally noticed.

"Yes?"

"Why are you throwing red, blue, and yellow confetti?"

She gripped the second-story railing, leaned forward, and spoke like she knew a thing or two about a thing or two.

"If you come up here I'd be happy to tell you."

The door opened to a smiling face, slightly wrinkled, but far from needing an iron. The rest of her body remained behind the door, not like she was hiding something, but needed to get back to something.

"I throw the yellow confetti for two reasons: One, white is misleading. Two, I'm tired of waiting."

She began to close the door.

"Hold on. You can give me more than that."

"Okay, I'll make it quick. Red stands for valor, which this country has displayed at times. Blue stands for vigilance, which this country is obsessed with. But white stands for purity and innocence, which this country lost the day that blood was first shed in its name."

"So why yellow?"

“Yellow is the color of the ribbons, the ribbons I’ve been tying for forty years. But I’m done now. They’re never coming home. Not my kids, not your kids, not ever.”

I walked back down to the parade. The strawberry shortcake was delicious.

###

Power Failure

fiction by John Bruce

George was new at the bank, but he'd discovered he had a good group of guys to eat lunch with. All he had to do was listen, and they'd bring him up on the oral tradition of everything. The subject, soon after he'd started, had been Jim Torsion. The government had recently decreed that any bank that didn't have a plan to recover its operations following a disaster, like an earthquake, hurricane, fire, or terrorist attack, would be declared insolvent. As a result, banks needed to hire people in a hurry who had some idea of how to put such a plan together.

Jim Torsion was the guy they wound up hiring to do this, or actually, they hired Jim Torsion and two guys to work for Jim. This is to say that Jim's job would be to go to meetings and write memos while the worker bees did the actual job of putting a plan together – but that's how these things happen. Lorne Ballardash, the CIO, often picked people for how they looked to the bank's board of directors, and he clearly had a hand in choosing Jim.

"Once I was in a stall in the men's room," said Al Shultz, "when Lorne came in with some other higher-ups. They were talking about a presentation that would need to be made at an upcoming board meeting. The others were suggesting that new guy, the one with the glasses and mustache who always seemed to be giving a military report. 'Yes,' said Lorne. 'That's Jim Torsion. Isn't he really professional?'

"So Jim's star was quickly rising," Al went on. "Nothing was announced, but Ballardash started informally treating him as if he were his number two and heir apparent. Jake, whose cube was next to mine, and I noticed this one New Year's Eve. Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve are officially full working days here, but the managers usually send people home at noon. Even so, you have to wait for your manager to tell you it's OK to leave.

"But that particular New Year's Eve, it wasn't Ballardash who told us. It was Jim Torsion, who stuck his head in our cubes and said, 'Better leave now, guys. That traffic will be bad later on.' I was ready to leave and didn't much care who told me. Jake saw things differently.

"Oh," he muttered after Jim had left. "I guess I can leave now. Mister Torsion told me I can leave." He started packing his things into his briefcase and putting on his coat. He kept muttering under his breath, "Mister Torsion says I can leave. . ."

"But it was through some guys in Operations that I found out the result of Jim Torsion's disaster planning. I don't think the real story would have ordinarily have gotten up as far as our floor at headquarters, and it never got to Lorne. One night the data center had a power failure. Everything was out, the only lights were the little emergency beacons in the corridors, and then not for long. In fact, the elevators were stuck between floors, and people were in them."

"Wait a minute," said someone else at the table. "Aren't you supposed to have a generator backup in cases like this? Or a connection to another grid, or something like that?"


"Normally you would," said Al, "but I guess Jim hadn't gotten around to it. No, we didn't have any generator backup.

"Anyhow, with the power out and the elevators stuck, that meant someone called the fire department. The fire department doesn't screw around. If they get a call because someone's stuck in an elevator, they don't play mother-may-I. The captain in charge of the incident took one look at the place, people wandering around in the dark, the elevators stuck, and he ordered the whole building evacuated.

"And in nearly every case, that would be the end of it. Except the data center belonged to a bank, and banks are squeamish about evacuating buildings with money in them. So the bank had a policy that said no building can be evacuated without the approval of a vice president.

"So someone at the data center called some vice president and told him that the fire department had ordered that the data center be evacuated. The vice president had no idea if this was a good idea or a bad one, but he was sure of one thing: he wasn't going to be the one who'd be blamed if anything went wrong when the building was evacuated. So he said he didn't see any reason to evacuate the building, and he wouldn't approve it.

"Meanwhile, the people who'd been in the data center were gingerly feeling their way down the stairwells to evacuate, just as the fire captain had told them to. They got down to the



ground floor and opened the emergency exit doors, which of course set off the alarm – probably the one system in the building that had adequate backup power. The bank security guards were there in a flash. Guns drawn. Leaving the building by the fire exit doors was a terminable offense. Not only would the guards shoot you, but you’d be fired to boot. No vice president had approved an evacuation. The employees were to turn around and go right back upstairs.

“Half an hour later the lights came back on. The elevators started working again before the fire department had to pull the people in them out. All that the rest of us learned about it, except for the guys in Operations who talked to me, was that Lorne gave Jim Torsion a special employee appreciation award for how he’d handled the episode.

“The way you avoid problems like that, by the way, is to have language in your policies that says employees are always to obey instructions from fire and police in emergencies. That was the kind of thing Jim Torsion never had time to think about.”

###



Shadowboxed
fiction by *J.R. Angelella*

Morning on the corner of East 4th and Second Avenue, ginned to the gills, Ransom Black shadowboxed without a ring.

A bell rung and a bottle gone, Ransom went welterweight.

He danced on his toes, light footwork, pacing the fight with passivity. Ransom beat his chest with his fists, before switching to Southpaw. His staggers were bobs-and-weaves. There were no body shadows this early, only buildings, but Ransom released calculated combinations, nevertheless, punching no one's solar plexus with precision. Power pumped from his legs, before he feinted his way into a rope-a-dope: lamppost, stoop, trashcan, curb. He littered uppercut combinations with jabs and a dirty elbow bash. He boxed against the day.

Another bell and the end of the round.

On his way back to his corner, his cornerman arrived.

She said, "Drink this. I bought it for you." A teenage girl in a Catholic school uniform—grey blazer with an ornate emblem, white blouse, matching grey skirt, knee-high grey and black argyle socks with black saddle shoes—held out a cup of hot coffee, her nails painted billiard ball blue. "Nova," she said, then: "I am on your side, so don't box me."

Ransom sipped the gift, but didn't find anything to say.

Nova said, "This stoop has your name on it," and guided him down by his elbow. "By my count, that last round was all you." She sat next to him and put a black vinyl purse in her lap. She poked through it, pulling out a tube of lip-gloss. She applied a layer, then capped the top, before handing it out for him. "Keep you from getting a fat lip." It smelled of sugar and fruit.

Ransom took it, touching her young fingers by accident, and rubbed a coat of gloss over his lips.

She demonstrated: pressing her lips together, smearing the gloss around.

He followed suit.

"What are up against out there?"

"You have blue nails."

"How many rounds?"

"I lost her."

Nova touched the bottom of the cup, lifting it, a signal for him to sip.
He smiled. Anything for her. He swallowed. A lip-print of pink gloss appeared at the edge.

Nova said, "Every boxer has a name that's not their own."

The sun bellied up behind the East Village buildings.

Thumb in his chest, Ransom said, "Ransom." Then, "Black." And when he heard another bell ring and another round begin, she held his coffee for him, waiting for it to end.

###

The River
prose by *David-Glen Smith*

The Mississippi runs black and thick under the bridges, where the Homeless gather, walking over the muddy waves, over the ebb tides and stiff currents. While burying empty bottles in the waters, they place tarnished coins in the mouths of the blue catfish that swim up close to the surface with unblinking, gold eyes. As the Displaced wander, meandering in the middle of water trails, they dodge fishermen's lines, low kites hovering from the orphanages.

Sometimes they shuffle their remaining possessions between themselves, their backs weighed down with cardboard suitcases and plastic garbage bags stuffed with family histories. A waterlogged book occasionally opens, a rough hand thumbs through passages.

The Forgotten pass the dilapidated coastlines, following one another, thick as bibles, into the Ponchatrain, down to the Gulf, through the Deltas. They gather at the edge, a scattering of crows, waiting for a ferry to take them out into the warm hurricanes, to look for a new island of their own, a land riverless and cool.

###

My Father, Unaware He is Watched from the Other Side of the Room
prose by *David-Glen Smith*

When he sleeps, nothing can wake him. Not even the small black and white television in the next room buzzing with mid-day news. Not even the blinds swinging back against the open mouth of the window. Not even the horsefly trapped inside the room, sputtering out its own little language on the glass, a dirty old man with only a trail of dirty words: *jesus*. trapped inside again. *christ*. *shit*. locked between two worlds, neither hell nor heaven. neither sea nor shore. no woman in sight; not even my fat wife around— she’s probably laying eggs on some road kill, in the mouth of a rabid dog, or in a rotten tomato smashed behind a copse of trees. *damn*. *shit*.

Dad sleeps, oblivious —as a mountain, —or as a Goliath, mumbling from submerged depths of his dreams. —a ship-wrecked sailor, six fathoms under green-blue waves, wearing only a faded t-shirt and boxer shorts.

My father transforms on a daily basis; he shape-shifts frequently, shifts into a different understanding. My mother, I understand without question, it is the sameness of my Father that disturbs; he is the mirror of my image, the woven replica which shifts in tides. Until this moment, this now, my role was specific and on schedule: I could become the stray cat in the doorway, the alarm clock ticking to itself on the back headboard, the radio, the television, the girl outside singing on her back porch wrapping her damp hair in a towel.

Dad shifts in his sleep; the fly discovers an opening in the screen. In the other room, someone turns off the television. Outside, the girl casually tosses a rock at a squirrel. In the resulting silence, I curl up into the bed with him: parent and child. I am consumed in my new role.

###

September
fiction by *Tawnysha Greene*

Norah hadn't been sleeping. Not for three days. But she must have slept. Because she remembered her dreams. Fleeting images of a red patchwork quilt from her grandmother that she couldn't bring herself to put on her bed, a wooden banister whose splinters she still carried in her right thumb, and a white Toyota truck that smelled of her dad's cigarettes. It was September of her freshman year in college, and every night, she woke up to a darkened room in Leischuck Hall, the only light coming from beneath the front door—the hallway light. It was always on. She waited under her covers until morning each day, as the images of home in Ozark, Alabama, 124 miles away from her dorm at Auburn University, began to fade.

She could still smell her father's Camels when she woke up from her dreams. A pack, half empty, rested in the pocket of her jeans, slung over the back of her computer chair. She wasn't addicted, she kept telling herself. She had only started a month ago and smoked one or two each night before she went to bed, sometimes sleeping in her clothes. Often, the only way she could close her eyes at night was when she could smell the smoke on the sleeves of her blouse. It was a coping thing, she reasoned.

Norah was sitting at the Lupton Deli on campus at her usual table, long after the lunch crowd had gone away. But in front of her was a daily planner next to her diary.

Today was highlighted and circled. It was the one-month mark since she had started school. She had had to try it for at least that long before her parents would take her back home. So now she had tried, she told herself.

Norah was 18 and not one of 860 students like she had been at Carroll High School, but rather one of 24,137 here at Auburn. Her finite math class in Parker Hall had stadium seating, holding more than 300 students. The lights had dimmed for a PowerPoint presentation during one of the classes and Norah had fallen asleep. She startled awake halfway through the next class, a chemistry lecture in which the teacher was speaking in a thick Indian accent as he drew

hydrogen bonds on the chalkboard. It was a graduate class, all the students around her dressed in khakis and button-down shirts. She had crept to the aisle and walked up the steps to the exit in the back, but no one had noticed. No one seemed to see her.

Her freshman composition class had only 25 students, but she sat in the back and never raised her hand. During the in-class writing assignments, her pen lay unused at her desk as she spent the class hour watching the other students. Audrey, the girl who sat in front of Norah, leaned to her right and twirled her hair with her finger—just as Norah’s mother did whenever she talked on the phone. Sometimes, Norah spent the entire class watching the way Audrey moved her fingers through the strands of hair behind her right ear. Norah wondered if Audrey’s hair smelled of mango shampoo, the way her mother’s did. Norah watched the boys, too, the way they checked their text messages on their phones, and she wondered if any of them hoped—the way she would have—that one of their messages would be from home.

In the late afternoons, she sat alone at one of the tables inside the Lupton Deli. She was always at the table near the Coke machines, the table farthest from the door. Sometimes she brought her diary, a leather notebook with lined pages. It was half full. The writing was different in this one than in Norah’s other notebooks. Rather than her usual loose script, the letters were small, almost tiny. She put so much pressure on the pen that it hurt to write in the diary lately. She’d started writing this way, in her diary, after Sam, her cousin and best friend, was killed in a car accident in April of last year. He was 18, the same age she was now. For three months, Norah had stayed up late in her bed with a flashlight, writing hard in tiny letters through the journal’s pages. Only a year old, the cover was already creased, the pages bent, from her reading it at least once a week. Her words were the only things she had left of him, so she held on tight to them. “You hold on too tightly to everything,” Jenna, her roommate, had said. Jenna had only known her a month, yet Norah didn’t understand how she’d known that about her.

In front of her today, September 16th, was a computer printout of her test results from Dr. Lishak’s Biology 1000 class, asterisks over the questions she had gotten wrong. In the corner was the grade 62%. Four neatly filled-out drop slips were spread across the table in front of her. All of them had the teachers’ signatures. Except for one. She had an appointment for the last teacher to sign it in 27 minutes. Norah looked at her watch, although there was a clock above the Deli’s front door. 26 minutes now. She had not told her parents that she was leaving school.

Her left thumbnail scratched at the base of a Styrofoam cup holding Diet Coke. The cup was still full. Her nail imprints on the side of the cup formed groups of parallel lines so by the time she had paused to look at her work, the Styrofoam looked like the side of a prison wall, scratched for each day a prisoner had lived inside.

Norah had been reading the diary entries she had written after Sam's death. In the pages, she could almost see the poster he had put on his wall after enlisting in the Army, the one he had put up just before he left for basic training in Fort Jackson, South Carolina. It was a silhouette of a group of soldiers, some kneeling, some standing, their guns slung over their shoulders. Their faces were hidden in darkness, the soldiers nameless. It was hard for her to think of that poster and she focused instead on the cafeteria line in the deli. At home, the women working in the cafeteria at Carroll High had known her well, but here at the Lupton Deli, the woman behind the counter never spoke to her and she took Norah's ID card every day, an orange card with a number beneath her picture. No one looked at her face. The Coke machines looked the same as they had at home, except that there were more of them here, five instead of two. The chairs here were tall and empty, the windows painted shut, and the floor mopped, everyone's footsteps wiped away. Everything was in a different place now.

Norah went over in her mind what she would say on the phone to her parents. She would say that she wasn't happy and that she wasn't learning anything she couldn't learn while living at home. Then, Norah knew, her mother would pick her up in the morning. Norah's suitcases were already packed, her books, still sealed in plastic, refunded. She had kept their receipts when she bought them. She looked at her watch. Her appointment was in 2 minutes, but she didn't move.

Outside the window, the sun was hanging low in the sky, casting a glare over the pages in Norah's open journal. Norah reread the entry she had written today, and it was what Sam had said to her when she had asked him if he had missed home after his graduation from Basic Training. "Home is what you take with you," Sam had said. "It's pieces of everything you love."

Norah thought of her grandmother's blanket, the photographs of her home in Ozark, and her diaries, all in a box beneath her bed—the bed she slept in now, here, at school. They were still there, she thought. She had brought them with her from home. Everything that had

belonged to her before, still belonged to her now. Closing her journal, she gathered her things from the table, keeping the class withdrawal slips in her grasp, and when she walked out the front door of the Lupton Deli and passed beneath the clock, the drop slips fell from her hand, some landing in the trashcan, some on the floor, still wet, as her path wavered, then continued, unbroken.

###

Poetry

Prose Bios

Contents

Prose

Poetry Bios

Visual Art

Visual Art Bios