



RCP River City Poetry
poetry worth sharing

Vol 3, Issue 1

Edited by April Pameticky
River City Poetry
Rivercitypoetry.org
Wichita, Kansas

Wichita, Kansas

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Table of Contents

<i>iv</i>	
Introduction	15
	Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg
	<i>3 Poems</i>
1	18
Mostafa Ahmed	Amanda Rawlings-Evans
<i>2 Poems</i>	<i>2 Poems</i>
4	22
Roy Beckemeyer	Ralvell Rogers II
<i>3 Poems</i>	<i>2 Poems</i>
7	24
Dennis Finnell	Roy Stucky
<i>2 Poems</i>	<i>3 Poems</i>
9	27
Skyler Lovelace	Grace Ure
<i>3 Poems</i>	<i>3 Poems</i>
12	29
Bruce McCrae	<i>Contributing Poets</i>
<i>3 Poems</i>	

Introduction

It's spring here in flyover country, finally. Some of the bulbs didn't make it past the last mid-April freeze, and the pear blossoms littered the ground like snow. It's been quite a journey during our first year—and this third issue feels like triumph. The poems in this collection resonate with a turmoil that's shared during these uncertain times, each poet wrestling with some moment, some role. There's humor here, too, hopefulness that echoes the belated season, and a tireless pursuit to remain authentic to personal experience. As we at *River City Poetry* start to expand, we want to continue to celebrate poetry worth sharing.

April Pameticky

Mostafa Ahmed

2 Poems

The Great Little

Make America Great!
But there's no great
without little.

I am little. America
made me little
Inside little. Outside little.
It made my world
little. It took little, then little,
then little and left me
with so little,
then undressed me
from the left little and covered me
with little. Too little
that is not enough to cover
even my little. I am Mr. Little
living in a little earning
a little and learning a little
Everyone calls me little
since THAT what makes them great,
calling me little. Zoom out
a little, a little bit more
can you see now? We are all little
Even the GREAT is little
Zoom in now
a little bit more I am no more
little. So when you see me little
it's only because. you see little

Let the World End

I need to think
I need to reason
to find the real me
trapped in me
caged by iron ribs
disturbed by loud heartbeats
distracted by all the voices in my head.

I need to ponder the whims, desires and peculiarities within
I find a beast fighting to be unleashed
a dove roaming around in my head
a flowing waterfall of love descending in my veins
fragmented splinters of pain lacerating my flesh
an evil spirit devouring my soul
an enemy sheltering in my figure
firing at the closest to me using the gun in my mouth
using vulgarity that my conscious disdains
a naive child fooling around causing me embarrassment
a righteous Sheikh sermonizing a frivolous sinner
a great dictator struggling to suppress
met with a rebellion from anarchic revolutionaries

all me, all in one body

An Armageddon erupts between all the me(s)
swords clanking, horses neighing, and a continuous wail of pain never halts
arrows pouring down like rain thrusting soldiers on the ground
a knight slaughters another at the end of a cutlass
with a scimitar another penetrates an abdomen

and drags the intestines throwing them in the air
a cavalier with a flail plucks the pumping part of a brave soldier
soldiers die and others survive
in a battle that will only end
when the whole world ceases to exist.

Roy Beckemeyer

3 Poems

Family

*A Golden Shovel Poem after
Gwendolyn Brooks' "We Real Cool"*

There was no such thing as spare change. We didn't ask for pennies for candy. We really did know the score. If we wanted heat on cool mornings we needed to bank the fire at night. We ate what was on our plates; there were no leftovers. Walked through snow and rain to school. Arrived on time, mostly, although some days we dawdled, especially me. I would find a way to lurk out of site, in an alley, and then get to school late. Sometimes I look back and wonder how it is we poor kids made it through. We were strike-out kings, I suppose. We all seemed set to go straight from school to work the mines. But dad fixed that. We went together to the smelter. His friends would sing out "Hey, Pal!" I thought he had it made. "It would be a sin," he said, "for you to work here. Look at us. We break our backs shoveling coal. Paycheck too damn thin to pay all the bills. Might as well rub a lamp, expect a Jin to grant our wishes. You need school. Your mom and I, we want more for you." He liked country music. I chose jazz. I didn't know that he would be gone, that year, by June. The leukemia took him quickly. It seems now that we barely had him. He was too damned young to die. You think you have a world of time, but it ends so soon.

When Is It Summer In Kansas?

When the wind sends your words
back into your throat as you speak them,
when the sun banks its heat up under
your hat brim, and the cool of morning
is lost in months past, when robins thirst
thirteen ways for water, and the first cicada
rasps at the heat before noon, when leaves
curl and click rather than brush against
one another in the breeze, and turtles
scratch at parched earth for moisture,
when heat wavers above roads in spasms,
when farmers disk spindly wheat back
into dusty ground, when foxes dig their
dens a little deeper, and earthworms
are nowhere to be found, when storm clouds
say with lightning what they refuse
to speak with rain.

Breathe

Soon enough,
your ribs
will encircle nothing
but fallow ground
impoverished of hearts,
will expand
and contract only
when the earth's clay
swells and shrinks.

Revel, now,
in the way
your lungs burnish
your blood
to a brighter red
and your heart opens
and closes like a fist,
grasping at that
brilliant stream,
sending it off in spurts
to engorge arteries,
to sate cells.

Place your faith in
staunch corpuscles,
reliably climbing their
blue way back toward
alveoli and air.

Inhale deeply.

Breathe.

Dennis Finnell

2 Poems

The W Range

Once I wrote a real poem to thank
a student for Ice Mountaine Chocolates,
praising their "hazelnut centers"
loving their "lodes of rich ore
around which brown mountains solidified."
I said they loomed ceiling-ward on my
office desk, The W Range, named after her,
"twelve peaks each 1.25 inches in altitude."
She was the running office joke,
her gifts to our American noses fragrant
as bribes--a red, white, and blue
fountain pen and pencil set,
\$10 gift cards to Wal-Mart in tiny envelopes
to us teaching her the American way,
the Ice Mountaine Chocolates.
Words went on at her back
until someone spoke other words--
she was a refugee. Then our truth
about her, this W, faded to hearsay--she had
stopped speaking English,
she was confined to "the fourth floor,"
town lingo for the psychiatric ward,
one voice living in her ears, and she spoke
to it her own tongue--a hybrid Russian/
English, Russ-lish?--her talking cure.
I kept the Ice Mountaine Chocolates
for weeks in the freezer, then watched
myself take them at arms' length,
deposit them in the garbage,
thence to the Transfer Station, a place
in America for the too sweet
chocolate mountain ranges of life.
Last time I saw her I didn't see her
but I see her occasionally at dusk,
a superimposition, a cloud.

Breath, Shortness of

Not so much off my chest
as out of it, his
bearhug in the doorway
lasting what must have been
30 seconds, must now be
forever, his embrace not
a sign of love so much as
spasm, arms locked
about my chest, the symptom

but before his forever
as he squeezed
both of us near-breathless,
he shorter than ever, his face
now down at my neck,
an unknown pink rose
into my head, a wonder if
the embrace was fear, and whose,
or his wish that I not
leave him, or a third thing,

or a fourth, or on and on
and so, small vague
bubble rising, my chest (still
a little out of breath) says
yes, love, words now stuttering,
this squeeze his plea
to know him, this 30-second hug
for me squeezing him always,
all of the above plus
his passing on his passing on,
with each exhalation.

Skyler Lovelace

3 Poems

Avatar

I made her and clothed her and sent out into a Second Life.
I helped her interact with a parade of masked fools.
Finally, bored, I showed her how to build a shed by someone else's river
And posed her comfortably in a corner.

I don't remember her name
Or even the password to the site.
I wonder sometimes how she is. Has anyone found her?
I hope they're being kind.

In My Basement Studio

Some Objects of this work have a special meaning such as keys and buttons. Keys signify a tool of access. Cherry believes we are all trying to access something, whether it's material or spiritual. Buttons denote fasteners and our need to hold things together.

--Curator's note on assemblages by Schroeder Cherry

I have three shoeboxes of steel binder clips, all sizes,
So determined to hold things together, no matter how much it pinches.
And four rubber mallets, because I keep losing them, and buying another
Before I find the last one. So many things need pounding.

Five cans of spray starch, although I never iron.
Two shelves of frames for art I haven't made yet.
A small disco ball over the toilet
Because at y age, that passes for dancing.

My high school classmate Steve collected coins.
He died while jogging, age sixty, and his family cleared his house
Of jars and jars of commemorative state quarters.
Was he holding the country together?

Every afternoon the light slants across my drafting table
And a cricket or two leaps lazily, crazily across the tiles.
Every morning I find empty shells of crickets
Their lives scattered during the dark night.

The Year I got Glasses

When I couldn't read the numbers on the psalms board at church,
They realized my eyes were wonky.
My new glasses were cat-eyed-shaped with sparkly corner rhinestones.

And that's when I found out Pastor Smith *wasn't* surrounded
By an aura of light when he warned us not to dance, because
He'd rather *his* girl walked through the pearly gates like a Jersey cow
Instead of twisting gracefully down into the fires of hell.

He was just an old, short man, leaning in the dais
With the reading lamp shining onto his warty face.
And I was ten, and the president got shot last year,
But now the Beatles arrived in America and
Every girl in my class wore white go-go boots.

We went to school dressed to dance.
Everyone could see that, and my new glasses
Showed me more every day.

Bruce McCrae

3 Poems

Plain Spoken

There's no simile, but a slurred word.
No metaphor that doesn't outsmart itself.
Let's get down to the bone of the matter,
the bread and butter of plainspoken fact.
Let me tell you of the one I love
or our delight in nature or the kindest cut.
Children gambol, and there's joy in that,
in spite of wordy prettification.
So let's return to the source of the river,
every poem a meat and potatoes poem,
every story nuts and bolts, lean and mean.
Let's get down in the mud and wallow.

Mea Culpa

A brute inner force, forgiveness seeks you out,
your modality and tone, the hallowed ground you walk over,
and as an example of both progenitor and progeny.
All your transgressions, miniscule to massive,
and forgiveness longs to brush the kinks out of your hair,
to dress you down then lift you up to the light,
like a votive offering to the minor divinities of autumn.

Saints are dancing in their suits of flame
while forgiveness calls the tune and pays the piper,
our sins and misdemeanors meaning little to most,
our cries inaudible, like blunt smudges on the soul,
penance and punishment balanced in a black ledger.

Time will thin you out, forgiveness reminds us.
In the same way sunlight finds a way to reach the forest floor.
You're in over your head, but water attains its level.
These incendiary moments, they shall be stricken from the record.

Making Things

A portrait of creation's spark,
opus and epic of the right hand,
whirlwind invention beginning here,
the mind's glistening corpus
rifling a subconscious index,
a bit of neuronal foreplay,
the manufacture that makes a mind,
our clever monkey antics
giving us the handgun and lightbulb,
telescopes and buzzbombs and soda pop,
wristwatches, nerve gas, opium...
The mind that gives the gift
of spirituality and conscience.
Small wonder we need to rest come night.
When we dream through frenetic slumber.
Godlike and feral.

Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg

3 Poems

All I Have Lost to February

What do you have that you don't truly need,
and what's like your next breath?
I've emptied out the broken toys and water-stung books.
But the stories I've forgotten of that sudden blizzard,
the way my father called out of the blue one winter day
before he died, the birthday dinner we brought
to the hospital waiting room years ago, and all the babies,
blurring night and day like late-afternoon fog,
still not burned off—those are lost to February
with all its icy curves, and days of crockpots and hunger.

Because the shortest month is always the longest,
February dreams all night long, keeping us awake
with worries like ice storms, sure to coat everything
until it breaks. It makes us forget if we've planted
all those crocus bulbs along the driveway.
The snow melts too early or late, the bare cottonwoods
shake hard, then still themselves to frame the dark red fire
of the sunset. The first snowdrops surprise.

Then, without understanding how we got there,
we climb into March, and the world slowly
goes from black-and-white into technicolor
even though the ground still smells damp and old
like February, and the wind still reminds us
all we have lost that finds us the next beginning.

No One Tells You What to Expect

Downpours as you're running down Massachusetts Street
in sandals that keep falling off. Ice on power lines.
The dying who won't die, then a single bluebird
dead at the end of the drive in the wrong season.
The deadline or lost check spilling the orderly papers.
The part that isn't made anymore for the carburetor,
or the sudden end of chronic sinus infections.

Your best thinking won't be enough to save your daughter
from a bullying romance or your friend from leaving the man
she'll regret leaving. The sweet darkness of night might fill you
with peace while just across town, in a quiet gathering of maples,
someone drops to her knees in such sadness
that even the hummingbirds buzz through unnoticed.
Meanwhile, the dog you thought lost returns wet and hungry,
the phone call reports the cat scan is negative, and someone
brings you a tiny strawberry growing in your backyard.

Life will right itself on the water when the right rocks
come along, so put down your paddle and let the bend
tilt you toward what comes next: the bottoms
that fall out, the shoes that drop, the tops that unseal
all while a cousin you lost touch with decades ago
calls, his voice as familiar as the smell of lilac.
No one can tell you how that song will vibrate
through your own best skin.
Expect to be startled.

Everything That Rises

Rise up without fear
to the coffee and daylight
angling over the dark floor.

Rise out of the dream where you are lost
and standing at an broken payphone,
unable to remember the number anyway.

Rise toward the piano you haven't played
for months, and place your hands
on the keys of your memory.

Play badly but loud, and let the ringing
rise through your arms.

Rise into the first slant of light breaking
across the living room floor
to coat the sleeping dog.

Open the door into the cold and run
to the passenger door to lean in
and start the car in your slippers.

Rush back inside and let the next
vessel warm for you as you dress and pause,
breathe into one still drop
of this raining life,
the air heavy enough to hold you.

Amanda Rawlings-Evans

Let's Play Drella

Pretend I get to be Lou Reed
& you be Andy Warhol

Pretend that you do a screen print that's blue
& then do a yellow one & a hot pink one

Then you say, "I did 3 paintings today, what did you do?"
Then I say, "I just wrote this silly poem," then I storm out.

Or you can pretend to be Picasso
& I'll be Gertrude Stein.

Act like you come over to my house & paint my picture.
Then we can have a tea party
& one of the boys can pretend to be Hemingway.

We'll all be like brothers just having a tea party.
Then you say you don't understand my work.

Then I'll say I don't really know if art is good or not,
but I like to look at it.

You don't have to be Robert Mapplethorpe,
unless you want to be,

but I'll be Patti Smith all day long & make lettuce soup
& steal raw steaks for us in my coat pockets.

Or how about you be Jackson Pollock
& I'll be Lee Krasner,

& people will say I'm pretty damned good
for a woman.

Or I'll be Lawrence Ferlinghetti when he's writing,
& then you pretend to be him when he starts drawing,
& the same for William Blake.

Or I'll be William Wordsworth & you be my sister, Dorothy,
& we'll visit the spot beneath the dark sycamore tree
just one more time.

Or I'll be Adrienne Rich & her lover . . .
although we both know I've never
been to California.

If you promise not to be Charles Bukowski, I swear
I won't be Sylvia Plath.

Let's pretend I'm a princess named Charlotte or Virginia,
& the clock is about to strike 12 & I'm running for the door,
but I drop my favorite pen!

Then let's pretend that you're Andy again,
& this girl comes with a gun
& tries to shoot you,

but I'm a superhero & I jump in front of the bullet
& she yells, "Where's my script? Stop ruining my life."
& I say, "It's your life, just take control of it."

Then you just keep making more art forever,
but you're different after that, like, better?

This time I'll play the victim, & you can play the hero,
saving us both from our deep dark selves.

Let's both pretend to be a Rothko.
You be intense yellow,
& pretend I'm bright sky blue.

Let's play until we fight,

fight until we cry,
then take naps
& wake up believing again
that we can fly
& our magical force fields
will always protect us.

A Self-Portrait

Back then I loved art so much, I wanted to marry it,
so at age 20, I married a family of artists
and my life became, for awhile, a still life
or rather one still life after another—
drying the dishes, arranging the flowers,
hanging out laundry,
placing chocolate chip cookies
on a vintage plate.
Everything was beautiful.
Everything had its place.

Our lone goldfish swam in a crystal clear bowl,
there was wood and rusted metal,
bright abstract art pieces,
drip paintings on large panels,
glass tables and red leather chairs,
shelves full of brightly bound classics,
granite countertops and concrete floors,
plenty of peace and quiet,
and plenty of time.

And then one day we conceived a new plan,
a crib and a rocking chair, before long
toys were everywhere.
Mixed in with the paints were Crayons and Play-Doh.
Fairy houses were constructed among the rose bushes.
The shelves were crammed not only with books,
but dolls and stuffed animals and puzzles and more toys,
and our lives became a moving picture,
and the art is still there
all around us.

Ralvell Rogers II

2 Poems

Black Rose

I picked my rose from the streets.
It was growing black and green
from cracked concrete.

Its roots grew deep inside me.
Soil buried in my red blood,
I died and the rose revived me.

Same face, new voice,
and the rose clutched in hand.
As the black rose developed,
I became a better black man.

And now here I stand,
with my black rose.
Together we are fierce,
as our thorns grow.

So long ago.
I picked my rose from the streets,
and so long ago,
I incidentally picked me.

Journey to the Mountaintop

Look around and tell me
who you've seen.
I see white, black,

and everything in between.

My reflection is pivotal
when thinking on Dr. Martin Luther King,

The black man
who was blacked out
preaching love and harmony.

Who'd of thought he'd create
poetry in motion,
sailing anybody who believed
through treacherous oceans,

and he did it all
without a boat or a bus.
He did it all
with the idea of "us."

While some shore-watched,
this black man and his brigade
carried our burdens across.

Now remnants of his legacy
trickle down from his mountaintop.
And I'm there with my bag,
like a prisoner doin' community service.

I'm game to pickup all the shots
that make some of my peers nervous.

And the best part is
I think that we're all worthy.

So go on
and pick up your end
of this burdensome cross,
and we'll tread this ocean together,
all the way to the mountaintop.

Roy Stucky

3 Poems

Palms of Warning

Rage tastes pointless
Calm vanishes
Leaves
An ocean floor of fear
Exposed to a critical sun
That one day
Seemed deep
Between upraised
Palms of warning
Sea
A face where reason parted
Ways with grace to stare
In brilliant blindness
Beauty cried
To be.

Hear

I have been listening

Summits conclude

This is not the end

Though temperatures fall

I burn

Ever larger

 Ever smaller

Helix suspended

On forces I cannot perceive

Intersect

Times design converted

To ponderous plans I pretend

Tread among the shadow trees

Uproot

The conversation held

Inside my head

I have been listening

Hands

Silent sliding between wrecks
Stabbed bugs maps label reefs
Sleeping beneath fall tides
I can't decide if I'm lucky
Or guided by brilliance
Unacknowledged
When quartermasters rise up to play
Debris descends into deeps
No diver will ever allow
To grab his hands
In tug of quiet
Where sound goes to wait
With the midnight I carry
Beneath my coat of many shudders
I clutch the first prize
I touch with a fist
That shapes my chains.

Grace Ure

3 Poems

Argument Against Leftovers

I'm always giving you the ends
of bottles, written-in books, spare time
nervous with my completion drive,
a sparrow-footed stance
flits away toothless
to peck at the next assignment.

Meanwhile, behind that blind
we remain vis-à-vis via the written,
one-way mirror, auto-fillet, each missal
a vivisection of petrified forest.
Sifting through the exploded layers of ash
we meet like goo and lightning,
the one-off moment of understanding
galvanizing separate meanings of mutual respect.

A pair of pristine volumes in Osiris' scale
pull you down with more
regret perched on the six-foot ledge.
Instead, I mean them to tinder a fire-flight of you,
the embalmed in whisky, gin, and frankincense.
Though they won't curl like cannabis and avant-garde,
my gut says they will liquefy your brain like the other things,
reflect in your fractal-dark eyes the feather-
light hope of writing
yourself.

Autumn

Nature declares
That dying is glorious.
Every year's last drops of life
Seeping to the farthest edges
Turning leaves amber golden
Translucence gilded by sun after setting sun
Until they can hold on no longer
And fall from dancers' arms
Grey marble veins still-laced against the icy sky
Precursors of crackled frost
But unmelting
Suggesting the elsewhere-consciousness of sculpture
Suspended life
Waiting
Senseless of time
Patient of exposure
Frozen in the tableau of winter's death
Until
Laughing at those who sulk forsaken
It wakens new beckoning shoots to the faithless
And rises again.

The Weight of the Color Loud

The windchime sound stirs
My tea no one understands,
Makes me feel too loud.

Shoulders fold with care,
Appreciation mirrored
Only in my eyes.

Desk weighed down with hues,
Psychedelic lily pads
Fraught with mismatched wares:

Lavender teapot,
Neon watermelon mug,
Too-bright mystic art.

Pouring out my weight,
Heavy with nothing to lose,
Saturated light,

Insistent color,
Delicious contemplation
Sense and spirit join

Like swirlings of cream
That lift my eyes with sparkling
Wrinkles. I will smile,

Comfortable in
Skin steeped in satisfaction,
From the inside out.

Contributing Poets

Mostafa Ahmed is a Fulbright scholar. He came to the US in 2016 on a Fulbright scholarship. He has a bachelor's degree in translation and a diploma in education. Prior to his arrival to the US, he had been working as an English teacher for five years. He is now an English GTA working as a tutor in the writing center at ESU. He is a published poet, and he writes in two languages, English and Arabic.

Retired aeronautical engineer **Roy Beckemeyer** studies Paleozoic insect fossils. He also writes poems: they have appeared in numerous journals and anthologies. His poetry collection, "*Music I Once Could Dance To*" (Coal City Press, 2014), was a 2015 *Kansas Notable Book*, and he was a 2016 Pushcart nominee.

Dennis Finnell most recent book is *Ruins Assembling*, awarded the 2014 Things to Come Poetry Prize from Shape&Nature Press. Other books of his have won the Juniper Prize, the Bellday Prize, and been published in the Contemporary Poetry Series from the University of Georgia Press. He was born in St. Louis, has lived in Kansas City, and now calls western Massachusetts home.

Skyler Lovelace is a Wichita artist who works in both pixels and paint. She's professor of Digital Media at a local community college and owns Pixel Time, a digital arts business.

Bruce McCrae, a Canadian musician currently residing on Salt Spring Island BC, is a Pushcart nominee with over a thousand poems published internationally in magazines such as Poetry, Rattle and the North American Review. His books are 'The So-Called Sonnets (Silenced Press), 'An Unbecoming Fit Of Frenzy' (Cawing Crow Press) and 'Like As If' (Pskis Porch), all available via Amazon.

Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg, Ph.D., the 2009-13 Kansas Poet Laureate is the author of two dozen books, including, most recently, *Miriam's Well*, a novel; *Everyday Magic: A Field Guide to the Mundane and Miraculous*, and *Following the Curve*, a collection of embodied poetry. Founder of Transformative Language Arts at Goddard College where she teaches, Mirriam-Goldberg also leads writing workshops widely, particularly for people living with serious illness and their caregivers. With singer Kelley Hunt, she co-leads writing and singing retreats.

Amanda Rawlings-Evans teaches English and Creative Writing at The Independent School in Wichita, Kansas where she lives with her husband, daughter, and cat. As a 5th generation Kansan, she is inspired by the landscape and history of Kansas. A 2001 MFA graduate of Wichita State University, her work has been anthologized in the collection *Bend Don't Shatter: Poets on the Beginning of Desire* and has been most recently published in the EastWesterly Review.

Ralvell Rogers II is an ambitious storyteller and educator from Kansas City, Missouri, who focuses on realistic fiction and provoking poetry. He was the youth reflection speaker for the Kansas City Chapter of the Southern Christian Leadership Council's 2016 *Dr. Martin Luther King*

Jr. Celebration. During his time at Emporia State University, Rogers was managing editor for *The Bulletin*, the school newspaper, president and founder of ESU's Black Artists' Club, and recipient of the 2018 Presidential Award for Distinguished Service to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. Ralvell manages his own blog under pseudonym, *Valeer* at www.thesightofvaleer.wordpress.com.

Roy Stucky's latest publication is *Truth War: A Play in Three Acts*. He has also published *Transapparent: A Novel for Three-Dimensional Christians*. A graduate of Sterling College with a Bachelor of Science degree in Management Information Systems, Roy has spent the majority of his literary career writing song lyrics for the band Mirror Covenant. In 2016 Roy won second, third, and honorable mention for song lyrics in the Kansas Author Club (KAC) Literary Contest. In 2017 he was awarded Prose Author of the Year in the KAC Literary Contest. In 2017 his prose theme entry won first place in KAC District 7's Contest. He is now the president of KAC District 6. Roy works as the network administrator at a Wichita accounting firm.

Grace Ure will be graduating from Kansas State University in May 2018 with a Cultural Studies track MA in English. To date, she has only been published once before in *Touchstone* magazine during her undergraduate degree, also from Kansas State. After completing her BA, Grace went on to read for an MPhil from Oxford University. Next, she stepped away from academia to coach rowing for several years before embarking on her present degree. She currently lives in Manhattan, KS, with her husband and two cats.