The Treefrog Tattler
from Leapfrog Press

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Welcome to The Treefrog Tattler, the semi-monthly newsletter of Leapfrog Press. Here you will find information for writers, Leapfrog news, author interviews, and more. To submit an article, writing tip, or news for inclusion in the Tattler, email leapfrog@leapfrogpress.com.

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The Seed of a Story
by George Rosen

"A Good White Hunter" in The Immanence of God in the Tropics

The seed of "A Good White Hunter" was seeing, forty years ago on a side street of a small Kenyan town, a man--an obviously unhappy man, wearing that grim look people wear when they're doing work they don't like, for a person they don't like, for money they need to have. He was loading or unloading something from a Land Rover; you couldn't tell which because he was in a moment of stasis, just staring at some shapeless sacks.

He was unshaven, dressed in a sleeveless undershirt and khaki pants, stained like all cloth in that part of the country, with the red laterite dust of the roads. The remarkable thing about him, what made him much later (I'm not the world's fastest fiction writer) turn into a story, was that he was an mzungu, a "European" as they say, with cultural accuracy, in East African English: a white man. I spent two years teaching high school in Kenya as a Peace Corps volunteer, and he was the only European--an Englishman, I guessed, I imagined, not hearing him speak--I ever saw doing menial labor for somebody else, in his case an Indian store-owner next to whose storage godown he was standing.

This certainly was not what the British colonial regime had intended. Nor was it anything typical of the then newly independent Kenya, where in a few parts of the country--particularly in the richly soiled, fertile areas of the "White Highlands" that had been kept off limits to native Kenyans by the
"It's been sitting in the drawer for 10 years." The manuscript, that is. The digital drawer of any writer is full of these. Sometimes we can beat an ornery and recalcitrant manuscript into excellence by sheer persistence. Other times, the best thing we can do for a manuscript is forget it. Let it rest. A writer may feel she lacks the skill, will, or interest to do what she knows the manuscript needs. Maybe in a few years or a few decades she'll revisit and find that she's finally able to turn it into something good. It may even be good already, but sometimes an author knows he hasn't really done the story justice, and doesn't know how to. The ability to let go and work on other books is an important skill for every writer, just as important as the ability to go back to old writing years later and see potential in it.

So I wondered how it had happened, how it had come to pass for this one guy contemplating those sacks of, who knows, those sacks of something. There was, of course, a "real" story, one I didn't know. If I'd been braver or more obliviously curious, I might have just walked up and asked him. But I didn't, and it's inside such fortuitous, sometimes intentional, ignorance that a storyteller's imagination often starts to work. What I saw then, and it took me twenty years to figure out, was the Atherton of "A Good White Hunter," a traveler who maybe was, or maybe not, going to make it home.

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George Rosen was a Peace Corps volunteer in Kenya, an experience that inspired the East Africa stories in his collection. He has also worked as a political speechwriter, a high-school debate coach, a low-income-housing consultant, and a semiprofessional actor. His short stories have appeared, among other places, in Harper's, the Yale Review, the Harvard Review, and a Harcourt Brace anthology of crime fiction, A Matter of Crime. Rosen has reported on West Africa for the Atlantic and on Mexico for the Boston Globe, and writes frequently for the Globe's op-ed page.

"The seven stories in Rosen's vivid collection declare their directness and transparency from the get-go.... Rosen is a yarn spinner in the best sense of the word.... Energetic and lovingly described stories."

--Publishers Weekly starred review/pick of the week

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N.Y.) and Guernica Editions (Montreal, Quebec). Leapfrog Press seeks writing that expands our connectivity to other human beings and to the range of emotional and literary journeys. Guernica Editions celebrates the pleasurable and profound understanding created along the border where different cultures meet. With Crossborder, the two publishing houses combine their visions and endeavor to give voice to beautiful, powerful literature for the world.

Stay tuned for more information as we come closer to release of our first issue, which will be entirely short stories.

News

Listen to a lively and highly educational interview with Mick Carlon, author of Riding on Duke's Train and Travels with Louis, on WCAI's The Point with Mindy Todd.

Suzanne Kamata, author of Losing Kei, is one of five winners of the Fall 2012 Sustainable Arts Foundation Contest.

Non-Leapfrog books we recommend

Brother's Ghost, by Stephen Spotte, one of Leapfrog's 2009 fiction contest awardees, has been published by Northwestern University Press. Scientist and author Stephen Spotte's compact tale captures the tensions of this unnamed South American country, of its cities and interior, and the confusion of straddling two cultures while belonging to neither.

Here Where the Sunbeams Are Green, Helen Phillips' new novel, it out! (author of And Yet They Were Happy). And a truly wonderful tale of sisterly love, grits, adventure, and mystery it is. Watch the trailer.

Reviews
DEATH MY OWN WAY
a novel by Michael S. A. Graziano

Publishers Weekly

Graziano (God Soul Mind Brain), a Princeton professor of neuroscience, writes with intelligence, mischief, pace, and economy, and seems to care little about telling a story. He uses a whiff of outrageous plot--a naked, terminally ill man perches on a wall in Central Park--to bat around the big questions. “What is love? What is art?” he asks playfully, though not frivolously. There is a bit more plot when a helpful woman, mistaking him for a suicide case, falls from his perch to her death. This accident turns blame on the man and the flurry of activity that follows allows him to flee deeper into the park, all the better to join the fun and provocative discussions that constitute the bulk of this book. In a touch of irony, the philosophic circle with whom he discusses not just love and art but also religion and death (he calls them “the committee”), are a ragtag group of homeless people, given names like Chair Lady, Knee, Guitar, and Bottle Rat. The kind of entertaining and piquant talk that you hope to hear in your favorite bar or on cable TV, but almost never do.

THE IMMANENCE OF GOD IN THE TROPICS
stories by George Rosen * November 2012

Midwest Book Review

An intriguing and riveting assortment, very much recommended reading.

Booklist
review by Leah Strauss

Rosen's seven tales find characters coping with everyday realities--love, death, parenthood, and faith--as well as wide-ranging internal observations and provocations large and small. In the tender "A Second Language," Albert Benson ventures to Oaxaca, Mexico, to immerse himself in the country and take Spanish lessons. While there, he meets Maria, who is accompanying her elderly mother on vacation, and the two form a meandering relationship that reawakens the prospects of love as well as its haunting memories. The title tale follows a mission boat on its way to Africa in the mid-1800s. When one missionary becomes seasick, he begins to reconsider his connection to God as well as his intentions to fulfill his service, much to the chagrin of his fellow missionaries. With "A Good White Hunter," a displaced Englishman living in Africa finds himself unintentionally married to three women. Unable to pay for his many children's school fees, he attempts a slipshod robbery of his employer's store. Settings fluctuate between Africa, Mexico, and New England, incorporating varied textures of landscape and culture within Rosen's measured stories.

Peace Corps Worldwide
review by Susi Wyss, author of The Civilized World
All seven stories in George Rosen’s new collection, *The Immanence of God in the Tropics*, were previously published in top-notch literary magazines such as *Harper’s* and *North American Review*. I was surprised to learn that these stories were published over a 31-year period. Of course, Rosen produced plenty of other work during that time. But I can’t help thinking that the long period over which these stories were written attests to the labor and care—not to mention sheer life experience—that is so evident in this impressive collection. Moreover, it highlights the timelessness of his stories, since even the ones from the 1970s and 1980s read like fresh fiction.

[Read the complete review](http://www.tufts.edu/~magazine/articles/01/02/american.html)

*Tufts Magazine*

George Rosen, former lecturer in English, served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Kenya, and it shows. The characters in his compelling short story collection find themselves in exotic locales, often exhilaratingly out of their depth. A Victorian missionary en route to Africa discovers a more personal God under the dizzying oceanic sun, while an American studying Spanish in Mexico finds that the most impenetrable language is love. Even the stories set in Rosen’s native New England thrust their protagonists into foreign territory: in “On the Flats,” a father’s sense of community is challenged by his daughter’s encounter with the town lunatic, and four friends in “The Sauna After Ted’s Funeral” contemplate death as one of them recalls a long-ago flood in Mexico.

**DANCING AT THE GOLD MONKEY**
stories by Allen Learst * October 2012

[New York Journal of Books](http://www.nyjournalofbooks.com)
review by Ethel Rohan

The 12 linked stories in Allen Learst’s collection, *Dancing at the Gold Monkey*, introduce us to five Vietnam veterans struggling to overcome the horrors of war.

This visceral collection is the winner of the 2011 Leapfrog Fiction Contest and begins, “It was spring at last.” Edgar Allen Poe insisted that a story’s effect should be created from the first line. The effect created by this first line seems hopeful: spring and all its promise arrived.

Yet this isn’t a collection about promise and rebirth. Nor is this a collection about childlike anticipation or the gratification of the wonderful arrived. These 12 honest, brutal stories depict the ravages of war on the individual and ultimately on the collective whole and are more fitting to an opening line about gore and dismemberment and demons—images that go off throughout this book like grenades.

Nonetheless, Dr. Learst does succeed in creating this collection’s effect from the first line: he challenges our assumptions and takes aim at our complacency—we are thrust us into a world of harsh realities, cruelties both small and large, and savage violence….

These hard-hitting war stories twist the familiar, thwart our expectations, and fittingly provoke and disturb….

*Dancing at the Gold Monkey* leaves us with no illusions as to the damning affects of war on the body, spirit, and the psyche… Dr. Learst’s
rapid-fire collection demands we not look away from the horrors of war but stare long and hard into the carnage. Perhaps if we “at last” allow ourselves to acknowledge these hard, grotesque truths of war, we will be moved to honest emotions and action.

Read the complete review

**The VVA Veteran**  
review by David Willson

Allen Learst served in Vietnam as a combat infantryman in the 101st Airborne Division. At eighteen, he went to work at a Chrysler tank plant, and after coming home from the war worked in a series of blue-collar jobs. Later he received a PhD in creative writing from Oklahoma State University. [These stories] are gritty as they grapple with elemental passions and all the varied and complex aspects of war--past, present, and internal.

This small book packs a powerful psychological punch. I highly recommend it to readers who think they have seen it all where Vietnam War literature is concerned. They have not.

YOU'RE MARRIED TO HER?  
essays by Ira Wood * August 2012

The absolute worst thing you can do to humor -- especially written humor -- is analyze it. It's like shoving a hanky down the lead soprano's throat and then opening the curtain for the opera to begin. But *You're Married to Her?* is so blatantly candid--brazenly so--it seems to beg for just that.

When Ira Wood was 26 and unknown in virtually any category of life, he met his direct opposite who was an internationally known poet and novelist, the feminist activist Marge Piercy. They did, however, share two passions: anti-war activism and sex. But then, that's certainly not the first time two like-minded people have hooked up.

Mr. Wood's conversational style and startling confessions (he is quite open about his various drug dalliances, especially cocaine) make for wonderful bedfellows...Wood does not always follow a chronological progression in these essays; the book is more a memory of scenarios, embarrassments, triumphs, failures, and sex. Lots of sex. It is of the greatest irony that the author's last name is “Wood.” And when Mr. Wood enters the bedroom, he rarely closes the door on us.

Read the complete review

**Fifth Wednesday Journal**  
review by Adam Gallari

You’re Married to Her? feels in many ways like a second coming of A Fan’s Notes -- a sharp, biting, unceasingly funny collection of thirteen essays and a brief epilogue that, for all their pith, are still rendered with such compassion that we cannot help but read on, no matter how awkward or unsettling the situation being described.

Wood thrives in the awkward, painful moments that constitute a life. His candor is self-effacing yet never forced, and at times You’re Married to Her? has the wonderful feel that we are sitting in a bar, listening to a new acquaintance regale us with the chaotic happenings of his youth
while simultaneously allowing us to forget that fifteen minutes ago we'd been complete strangers. Wood is a unique stylist in this regard: matter of fact, but never pedestrian. His prose possesses the practiced sardonic wit of Woody Allen at his best, yet never becomes neurotic or overly self-aware, and as such he allows us to immediately accept the intimacy he offers, one that entertains everything from venereal disease to a near coup in small-town politics to a foiled attempt at romancing his first love.

In these anecdotes we are offered a pathos from a writer who seems to be in the process of figuring things out on the page, things that otherwise might remain inaccessible, and it is this unguarded offering of Wood as Wood that makes You're Married to Her? as poignant as it is comic.

Read the complete review

IN THE LAP OF THE GODS
novel by Li Miao Lovett* 2010

Society of Environmental Journalists Quarterly
review by Karen Schaefer

The waters of the Yangtse River are rising rapidly, swallowing the unharvested fields, and lapping at the door of a small, deserted house. Illiterate scavenger Liu Renfu knows he has little time left if he wants to find anything of value the owners may have left behind in their haste to escape the flooding. But before he can begin his search, Liu hears the cries of a baby. Scooping up the child, Liu rescues the abandoned infant, setting himself on a path that will lead him to try to reclaim his life in the new, industrial China.

In the Lap of the Gods is San Francisco writer and debut novelist Li Miao Lovett’s fictionalized account of the human story behind the physical and cultural displacement of more than a million Chinese people by the creation of the Three Gorges Dam on the Yangtse River.

It’s this mass migration of villages, towns and farms -- and the cultural and economic upheaval it engenders -- on which Lovett focuses her story…. Her sparse prose and almost journalistic approach sharply characterize the lives of Chinese people in the ongoing human drama that is the ever-changing landscape of globalized China today.

Stamped in red letters on the book’s cover -- and on every chapter page -- is the Chinese character written on every building along the Yangtse destined for demolition. That subtle symbol alone is enough to convey the message that China’s past and present are still in constant flux.

Read the complete review on pg. 27

Upcoming Titles

All Sins Forgiven: poems for my parents
by Charles Coe * April 2013
No relationship is more personal, yet universal, than that of parent and child. These richly detailed poems, begun as a way for the author to understand his own mother and father, connect readers with their own experiences in that most fundamental of relationships, and are poignant reminders that the lives of those closest to us sometimes offer the deepest mysteries.

"Reading these remarkable poems is like the shadowed, soul-affirming joy of discovering old family photographs in a worn grocery bag in your attic; yes, I am here in this body on this earth because of them, this man and woman who loved and lived and did the best they knew how to do, even if it did not always seem like quite enough at the time. All Sins Forgiven: Poems for My Parents is such a deeply evocative and loving rendering of Charles Coe's persevering mother and father that this book does what art is supposed to do; it delivers to the reader his or her own stumbling, flawed, largely well-meaning flesh and blood portals to this world. This is an immensely satisfying collection!" --Andre Dubus III

The Giulio Metaphysics III
stories by Michael Mirolla * June 2013

In The Giulio Metaphysics III, a character named Giulio frees himself from his creator in order to write his own story, only to find himself lost and confused, unable at times to recall his own name. He wanders through landscapes both familiar and alien, struggling to return home. These are tales on the fluidity of identity and the power of the word.

"Influenced by Beckett, Joyce and Kafka, yet clearly on a path of his own, in The Giulio Metaphysics III, Mirolla has managed to once again redefine the literature of place and time. Both very funny and disturbingly sad, this latest work weaves an evermore relaxed surface over an ever more acute set of questions."
--Michael Springate, novelist, playwright, screenwriter

Lone Wolves
a novel by John Smelcer * September 2013

"A beautiful and moving story of courage and love." --Ray Bradbury, author of Fahrenheit 451

Deneena Yazzie isn't like other 16-year-old girls. While most teenage girls spend their time listening to music or watching music videos, surfing the net, talking or texting on the phone for hours, Deneena spends her time in the woods or on the trail learning to run a dogsled with her grandfather.
We welcome news from our authors and contest winners. Please let us know of your upcoming book events, new reviews, publication news, and anything else writing related.

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