



Magazine Report

By Pete Nichols

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## {Fact Sheet}

**Magazine:** Lady Churchill's Rosebud Wristlet

**Web Address:** [www.smallbeerspress.com/lcrw](http://www.smallbeerspress.com/lcrw)

**Address:**

Lady Churchill's Rosebud Wristlet  
150 Pleasant St., #306  
Easthampton, MA 01027

**Editors:** Gavin J. Grant, Kelly Link

**Founded:** 1996

**Founders:** Gavin J. Grant, Kelly Link

**Current Editors:** Gavin J. Grant, Kelly Link

**What they Publish:** Short fiction, non-fiction, poetry, even a comic here and there.

**Submission Guidelines:** Snail mail submissions only; email is strictly verboten. They do not accept multiple submissions, or simultaneous submissions, so limit your self to one piece.

**For-Profit:** Yes.

**CLMP:** Yes.

## Why I Chose Lady Churchill's Rosebud Wristlet

Prior to my market research, I had never heard of Lady Churchill's Rosebud Wristlet. Wandering into Quimby's, on the prowl for literary magazines, I stumbled across a copy of LCRW. It was printed on rough paper, had sharp cover art and exuded a charming DIY quality that the glossies lacked. So, charmed, I cracked it open and gave it a read. And I was blown away.

LCRW is unique in that it focuses solely on "speculative fiction," a slippery definition that can cover anything from straight fantasy to deadpan magic realism. The sheer variety of stories the thing contained, mixed with a charmingly cracked sense of humor that the editors and writers seemed to share, transfixed me. Here was a lit mag that was small, yes, but scrappy and taking some nice chances on some pretty out-there fare. The biggest problem facing emerging writers is that so much of this stuff so goddamn *staid*; small family dramas, old-hat epiphanies and familiar milieus. It's enough to stultify an emerging writer's creativity. Here, though...here was a place where a tale about a giant, dapper man of concrete could stalk a taciturn father and his psychic daughter while they drove around in a van with a vintage cannon in the back with the express purpose of murdering said concrete man before he could kill again. Try finding *that* in a collegiate review.

## Issue Comparison

	LCRW #24	LCRW #25	LCRW #26
Prose Writers M:F	4:5	9:2	5:4
Protagonists M:F	4:5	9:2	5:4
POV 1 <sup>st</sup> : 3 <sup>rd</sup>	5:4	7:4	4:4:1* (2 <sup>nd</sup> )

On the whole, LCRW is a very balanced literary mag, and according to editor Gavin Grant, that's not on purpose. According to Grant, he just takes the stories "that appeal to me" with no consideration to the gender of writers, nor their relative experience. So, with that in mind, it's fairly impressive that save for the aberrant #25, the gender breakdown is evenly matched. Also amusing is the fact that no writer, despite their adventurous subjects and styles, dared venture from their gender comfort zone. The only real surprise here, looking at it in graph form, is that there wasn't more 1<sup>st</sup> person. The stories that I connected to most were the 1<sup>st</sup> person tales, and I just assumed they'd heavily outweigh the 3<sup>rd</sup>. I stand corrected.

## {Prose Reviews}

### LCRW, #24: July 2009:

*Leave the Dead to the Living* by Alissa Nutting is a first person story, plainspoken, infused with deadpan magical realism in a domestic setting (well, as domestic as a funeral parlor can be, I suppose.) The story concerns A Girl (name never given) and Her Friend, a cheery bloke who, in between embalming dead people, likes to smoke locks of their hair, for when he does, he experiences their memories. Both romantically interested and morbidly curious, The Girl goes to a salon to lop her locks off and have her post-mortem paramour smoke them; not only to have him smoke away the memories of a bad breakup, but so that she does not have to tell him she loves him. He smokes her hair, understands, and as the memories of a fucked up relationship drift into the ether, the two kiss passionately amongst rows of the dead.

*Dead*, flat out, is a fantastic story. It's an uncomplicated tale, but its simplicity works greatly to its advantage; we know just enough to understand and empathize, and we need no more. The story moves with the economy of Hemingway, mixed with the macabre romance of Tim Burton (*Beetlejuice*-era). The voice is simple, effective and walks a nice line between romantically descriptive and coolly detached. Consider when our Girl and her follicly-inclined Cheech Marin kiss, "So we kiss, and the weird smells of the morgue suddenly turn tame and slippery, something my lungs can slide over easy as jelly, something that can hold my heart steady for our own, quiet death rattle." I wouldn't go so far as to say it's a love story for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, but it's certainly one for people who want to punch Edward Cullen in the throat. *This* is how you mix death and romance, Stephanie Meyer.

*The Broken Dream Factory* by Dennis Danvers, offers a different take on the human condition. *Factory* is a first person tale, plainspoken in a slightly surreal domestic setting. Meet Stran Fellowes, a 27-year veteran of The Broken Dreams Factory. As befits a man with such a vocation, Stran is melancholy, but mordantly funny. One day, ready to clock in, Stran discovers that The Broken Dream Factory has closed (via an impersonal note from -mgmt). Despondent, Stran strikes out to the local store to see where people are getting their broken dreams. As it transpires, all they're offering now is the American Dream and sundry happiness. Broken Dreams are no longer in demand. Stran goes home to his wife, Jane, whom he quickly realizes never supported him. He leaves her and, after discovering that sans broken dreams, not even the ghosts on the moors were haunting people, he returns to spurned lover Wanda and two try to restart the factory, know that life is nothing without the bittersweet. Eventually, they have a child named Orph and he, in going out into the world, breaking girls' hearts and trying, but never quite succeeding. His broken trail of admirers, feeling empty, begin to place orders to The Broken Dream Factory. They'll be opening any day now. Stran and Wanda couldn't be more proud of him.

#24's really on a roll, isn't it? *Factory* is yet again a sterling piece of work. It takes what is an already amusing conceit (the eponymous factory) and manages to wring real pathos and emotion from it.

Stran knows what everyone else, devoid of broken dreams, doesn't: For life to have meaning, there must be pain, there must be disappointment. Otherwise, what's the point? Stran and Wanda wax romantic on the concept of broken dreams, "Jane was right. The world was a plain plane. But I couldn't give up. The world needed broken dreams more than ever. Warped visions, pointed remarks, twisted individuals." And that's not even getting into Stran's treatise on God.

*Factory* is an elegy for life; a love letter to the beauty of failure; success just out of grasp. Just enough pain to make you realize you're alive. A heavy melancholy hangs over the piece, but it is not one without hope. The point is that everything can't break your way; you'd never know how good you had it if you did. Stran is a hilarious, engaging narrator, and the pieces move like quicksilver through a skewed version of our reality where dreams can be purchased like plywood and old lovers remember making love while watching "The Man With the X-Ray Eyes" from their bedroom on the Drive-in across the way. It's wistful, elegiac, tragic and beautiful all at once. Few stories can reach this kind of profundity in nine pages.

### **LCRW, #25: May 2010:**

*This is Not Concrete* by Ben Francisco is a third person tale, plainspoken and steeped in magical realism. The story focuses on Theresa, a college student on her summer break who is traveling with her stern, taciturn father Gregor, across the country on the hunt for The Concrete Man, a large dapper gentleman decked out in a black suit and bowler hat, replete with umbrella as cane. The pair are chasing him for divergent purposes: Gregor to avenge the death of his wife and child at the hands of The Concrete Man, Theresa to get her life and father back. Did I mention they're tracking him via Theresa's precognitive abilities and planning to kill him with an antique cannon bolted in the back of their van? The tale ends on a dispiriting note, however, with Gregor incapacitated and Theresa essentially alone, watching the Concrete Man recede slowly into a parking lot before noting, glumly, "There is more concrete in the world than there is of any substance made by man." Ouch.

*Concrete* is one hell of a story. For a magic realism tale, author Francisco really plays the story straight. The most ridiculous twists and turns the narrative takes are played absolutely somberly, with nary a smile or wink to be found. This is a story where a nearly silent father and his psychic daughter attempt to kill a living statue with a cannon, yet stay at a Super-8 Motel and smoke Camel Lights. Despite this, though, the reader is never knocked out of the narrative. This *Concrete* has a slow, sad pull to it, dragging the reader ever deeper into darker and colder places, like an Arctic undertow.

The descriptions are vivid and terse. The Concrete Man, for instance, is precisely what he sounds like; a slim man seemingly made of concrete. Quoth Theresa, "If you glanced at him quickly, he'd look like any ordinary man, but hairless and with an unusually pale complexion. It's only when you look at him closely that you notice the grainy texture of his skin, like the rough face of a cinderblock."

On the other hand, *The Famous Detective and His Telepathy Goggles* by Sean Adams is delightfully goofy. It is first person, plain spoken, steeped in magic realism, flash fiction and seriously deranged. Meet The Famous Detective, a man...well, famous for his detecting. The secret to his success? A

big, ludicrous pair of “telepathy goggles” that allow him to read people’s minds. But what happens when the Famous Detective meets his match in a suspect who *also* owns a pair of telepathy goggles. It ends after decades of telepathic stalemate, the pair thrust into the future. The suspect is stunned, but our Famous Detective, ever-unflappable, remains cool.

Fantastic, fantastic, fantastic. *Detective* is deft and funny, mixing absurdity with a nice light touch that makes every paragraph a delight. In a scant nine paragraphs, we get brilliant insight into the Famous Detective, a self-consciously cool egotist who, with his goggles, can “solve three cases in twenty minutes.” But he’s sharp and pragmatic, too. Calling suspects into his office, he comes face to face with a beautiful woman, because when FD is on the case he “always makes sure on suspect in every batch is a beautiful woman.” After reading her thoughts and discovering that she finds the art of detection sexy, he has sex with her for an hour. He leaves the goggles on: “I know exactly what she wants and when she wants it...I decide from now on I will always wear the telepathy goggles while engaging in sexual intercourse.” That dry, deadpan sense of humor pervades the piece, lending *Detective* a jaunty tempo that never lingers on the bizarre too long, but is never a sentence away from new, amusing weirdness or a thoroughly cracked observation from our hero. The language is spare and clean, with every sentence seemingly calibrated for maximum effect; there’s not a stray word in the lot. In all *Detective* is a beautiful piece of flash fiction: short, sweet, vivid and memorable. That is strongly resembles a bite-sized version of Jonathan Lethem’s *Gun, With Occasional Music* only helps it further.

### **LCRW #26, December 2010:**

*Elite Institute for the Study of Arc Welders’ Flash Fever* by Patty Houston is, to put it mildly, quite a thing. It’s a first-person story, plainspoken, morbid and surreal in a domestic setting. The story concerns Howard and Aida are arc welders, and they’re damn good. They work in a run-down little shop working on old rods converted to racers (“Barracudas, Mustangs, Firebirds, that variety, with monikers like *Banshee*, *Belly Up*, *Burn in Hell*.”) and they love their work...save for the fact that at present, they are participating in an ever-changing experiment to test the effects of fumes on arc welders, and The Toxicologist, the administrator, is beginning to suspect that Howard is covering for the ailing Aida (he is). If he does that, they’ll never be able to test their new meds, and no new meds means no money. So when they admins take away the fume extractor (which helps them breathe) Howard finally caves and turns her in. When she is replaced, Howard being to ail. The circle of life.

*Fever* is an interesting story. It contains a lot of great stuff: When Aida is concerned about the inhumane working conditions, she doesn’t head for a union rep, she gets in touch with Rev. Francine, Angel Communicator, a kind of Cathlo-Buddhist medium who (sort of) brings hope and solace to those who need it. The atmosphere is thick, painting actions like working without the extractor with a thick coat of grime: “When Aida turns the juice up, spatter burns our hair since our skullcaps are on our faces; in the moment before the spray lands, Aida strikes me as a wonder, like a bottle rocket, a Roman candle.” The story carries with it a Kafka-esque uncertainty, as bizarre, impersonal messages begin to pop up around the

extractor (or where it should be) and the paradigms of their test shift beneath their feet. The story is funny, very funny, as it blends bleakness with absurdity, never quite letting one tone win out over the other. *Fever* is another story that has a lot on its mind; like *Broken Dream Factory* from #24, as it deals with institutional corruption, abuse of the worker, and the “interchangeable parts” nature of manual labor. The story takes a while to turn over, but once it does, it fires on all cylinders (see what I did there?)

*Death's Shed* by J.M. McDermot is a first-person tale, plainspoken, and (can you guess it?) in a domestic setting, but this time the world is adorned with ghosts, the land of the dead, and hoboes in sheds. The story concerns our unnamed narrator, who's mother has recently died and who has moved with his father to Toronto, where the father has set up a steampunk train set in their basement to aid with his grieving. The boy, while adjusting, meets two girls, twins: A gangly one and larger one, as these things seem to go (save beer commercials, I suppose). He also meets a crazy old hobo in a shed, who smokes his own teeth. The girls beat the kid, the hobo offers sage advice, the father remains obsessed with his increasingly intricate train set. We discover that the boy's mother was very sick, and his steampunk-obsessed father gave her a blood-steam heart. The boy, savaged again by the girls, brings the skinny one into the shed and Death, deciding to help the boy out, kills her a little. He takes the corpse to his father, and he revives her with a steampunk heart. The older girl wails on the kid, then they become friends. They call out into the land of the dead (the kid had visions shortly after his mom died), but to no avail. They bang. The end.

*Shed* is an odd duck. It's the first real dud I've come across, but it doesn't dud for the reasons that you may be thinking. The storytelling is elegant and gorgeous. The descriptions of the father's increasingly-elaborate train set are captivating in their bizarre detail and the story lingers under a nice stratus cloud of gentle gloom and deadpan weirdness. But it simply doesn't *grab*. Perhaps it has to do with the fact that the tale is broken up by numbered sections, which always seems to draw the reader out of the story. The events in the story simply...happen, rather than flow into one another and the vagueness regarding what, precisely, the father is doing with his trains (is it the Elysian field that the kid can see? How does he resurrect the little girl?) goes from “sad whimsy” to “cloying irritation” quickly. Surreality and a dearth of specifics are the nutmeg of speculative fiction: In just the right proportion, they enhance. Use too much of both, and your story is overpowered by the tang of, “Why should I care?”

## Interview With Gavin. J. Grant

**Q: What makes a story right for LCRW?**

**A:** Well, like any editor, it's a story I like or a story I think our readers would like. My tastes run towards the longer stories, the weirder stories. It just comes down to, basically, what I like.

**Q: Why choose speculative fiction as your primary stock and trade?**

**A:** Our focus is primarily speculative fiction, but we publish other things as well. We have published non-fiction, interviews, even reviews. But when it comes to this, it comes down to personal taste. I'd rather read something that's slightly unfamiliar to me. Speculative fiction does that. I rather read that than just something that replays my life back to me. I'm not interested in the small epiphanies of middle class life. The world is particularly weird. If you take any time to consider it, the world is very odd. How is it that evolution brought us to where we are? What course of events have lead me, today, to my office, and you, a student in Chicago taking class, to interviewing me out here? What series of events, decisions, bits of fate brought you to Chicago? Explorations of that – the uncertainty and weirdness of life — are very fun.

**Q: LCRW puts out both a print edition and a digital version via Weightless Books. What do the sales look like when comparing e-purchases with that of the print edition?**

**A:** Well, that's hard to say. Complicating things, we've also started offering e-book subscriptions in addition to our subscriptions and print sales. So we've been doing that. It's hard to say. We moved our all our e-books over to a new site, Weightless Books. It may loose us some sales, it makes it simpler for Small Beer Press. Most sales of LCRW, however, are the print editions. A quarter of what we print goes out to stores, the rest to subscriptions, and then to reviewers. The e-book subscriptions make up 3 percent, I think, of LCRW's bottom line. But, in truth, when it comes down to it, I think a lot of people like to read (LCRW) and they do not care what the medium is. They are looking for the reading experience.

**Q: You only offer samples of writing on your website, not full stories. Was the move to e-publish a decision born of your desire to get out in front of the internet and not solely depend on print sales?**

**A:** We've been selling e-books since 2005, the Press has, or maybe longer... I know I can that was when we started uploading things to fictionwise.com which was very useful and quite popular. LCRW didn't hit the web until 2007. We looked at the way e-books were going. It seemed there was a possible to change, room to expand. We

didn't want to be caught short when the "Jesus Tablet" from Apple came out. A lot of literary magazines, in CLMP, they offer e-books through Amazon or their site. We'll offer it around and see what happens. We wanted to test the idea. If you go around and read publishing gurus, e-books will be 25 percent of the market by 2050. A lot of people don't want books, they just want to read. We want our books to be available to our readers no matter the medium. We always wanted our reading to be accessible. Our print edition is simple: Black and white, no fancy paper. We could go color, but the market is small. If you're at a bookstore, looking at literary magazines, and you're 15, or 20, or 35, you'll go for the [magazine] that's \$5. Making it accessible is important for us getting our content to readers.

**Q: In light of scale backs in print, and the overhead involved, is LCRW going out of its way to court new readers via the web?**

**A:** Because we're small, we can only go so far, then we have to balance out. LCRW is a break-even proposition. Say I started a Twitter. If I start Twittering and spend 30 minutes a day on that, that's less time I can talk to a book store, designer, agent, interviewer... all this stuff. It's a balance between how much we can do, how accessible we can be personally. We have a blog, we have facebook, we are definitely accessible. None of us here have the kind of personality who is online all the time. That is not me. That's not Kelly [Link, editor and co-founder]. So we're not going to try and replicate something like that. We have a different model, I suppose. So we'll see. We'd like more accessibility and more getting the name out there, we'll do some more ads on the web and we'll occasionally do interviews, or, you know we released a collection celebrating 10 years of publication, so we'll celebrate that.

**Q: When it comes to writers and submissions, do you explicitly look to publish emerging writers?**

**A:** No. Actually it just works out that way. We don't go out and say, "Hey we need a new writer, an old writer, and a writer of this and writer of that." We're a small magazine, that kinda thing's never gonna work. It works for us to spread the word that we're looking for interesting fiction. I'm very happy that we seem to cross the genres very well, readers who like speculative fiction and what that encompasses. When we open up submissions, I don't look at cover letters, I don't look at the address, I just read the story. That's what I try to do. We get lots of different people, lots of different subs. We don't solicit, we put three issues a year. And fall's edition is already full. So the word is getting out there.

**Q: The first story I read in LCRW that really grabbed me was Ben Franciso's "This Is Not Concrete." What was it about that story that grabbed you; made you want to put it in LCRW?**

**A:** Frankly, it was something along the lines of a story that I hadn't read before. It was ridiculous, fantastic. A simple scenario playing out with the inevitability with a horror story. The language was spare and tense. I liked it.

**Q: Between “This Is Not Concrete” and “Welders,” many of the stories found in LCRW walk a fine line between the grim and the hilarious. Is that intentional? Is that a balance you look for when looking at submissions?**

**A:** I’d rather not have the grim, but life is pretty grim. I very much enjoy the humor. But, you have to be careful: I don’t say I’m looking for a funny story, cause then you broad stories and that kind of thing passes me by. We like humor, and we like the weird. That’s quite a fit for us. Take “Welders” for instance. I love that story. I was very happy when she sent in another one for our next addition. And how she heard of LCRW I have no idea...I’m drawn to humor... If you have a friend who has a story, you know, you tell them to send it to the New Yorker, or send it to the Atlantic. But you have a friend, looking to publish a weird story, an amusing story? You can say, “I know exactly where you can send it, you can send it to Lady Curchill’s,” We bring stories to the scene that lends us to a nice range so it’s not just cheerful speculative fiction stories, but also, not stories that are completely dire.

**Q: Where do you see LCRW going into the future? Do you think, given the way things are advancing, you’ll ever see the end of a print edition of LCRW?**

**A:** We’ll just keep going. I think there will always be paper edition. There’s always going to be some part of the readership that’s gonna want a paper copy of Lady Churchill’s in their hand. After all, our subscribers? They get chocolate with their print editions. We toyed with bringing that over for e-subscriptions, but I think I’d rather just have that be something odd and great with the paper edition. I’d be very curious to see if the e-book gets popular... I don’t know if were gonna do extra content for the web.LCRW is kind of a break-even proposition. Small Beer Press is small, we have to do things to pay the rent, feed my daughter, and I can’t do that if I’m fiddling around producing web extras that people aren’t paying for. It’s sometimes crucial when you think of money in, money out. You can’t just go to the printer, the landlord, and ask, “Is it okay if I pay you next month for this month.” I have to do things that can pay the rent.

## Lasting Impressions

Lady Churchill's Rosebud Wristlet is one hell of an operation. Small, independent to the core, and delightfully willing to engage the weirdest stories, the strangest tangents, the loopiest goddamn stories in the search for literary neat. And they've found it. Lady Churchill's Rosebud Wristlet is the finest collection of off-beat literary fiction you're gonna find on-shelves or on-line. In short, it's incredible, and for emerging writers, it's vital. Not every story has to be some sad-ass dirge about Uncle Leo dying of prostate cancer, or a kid with polio discovering the joys of sex before dying, or whatever other sackcloth and ashes (or worse, trite middle class epiphanies, to paraphrase Mr. Grant) kinds of stories you may find choking your nearest literary review. There is more out there, and this stuff is out-there. Weird fiction, bizarre stories, and off beat characters have a home. And that place, ladies and gents, is Lady Churchill's Rosebud Wristlet. Step right up.



Finis.