

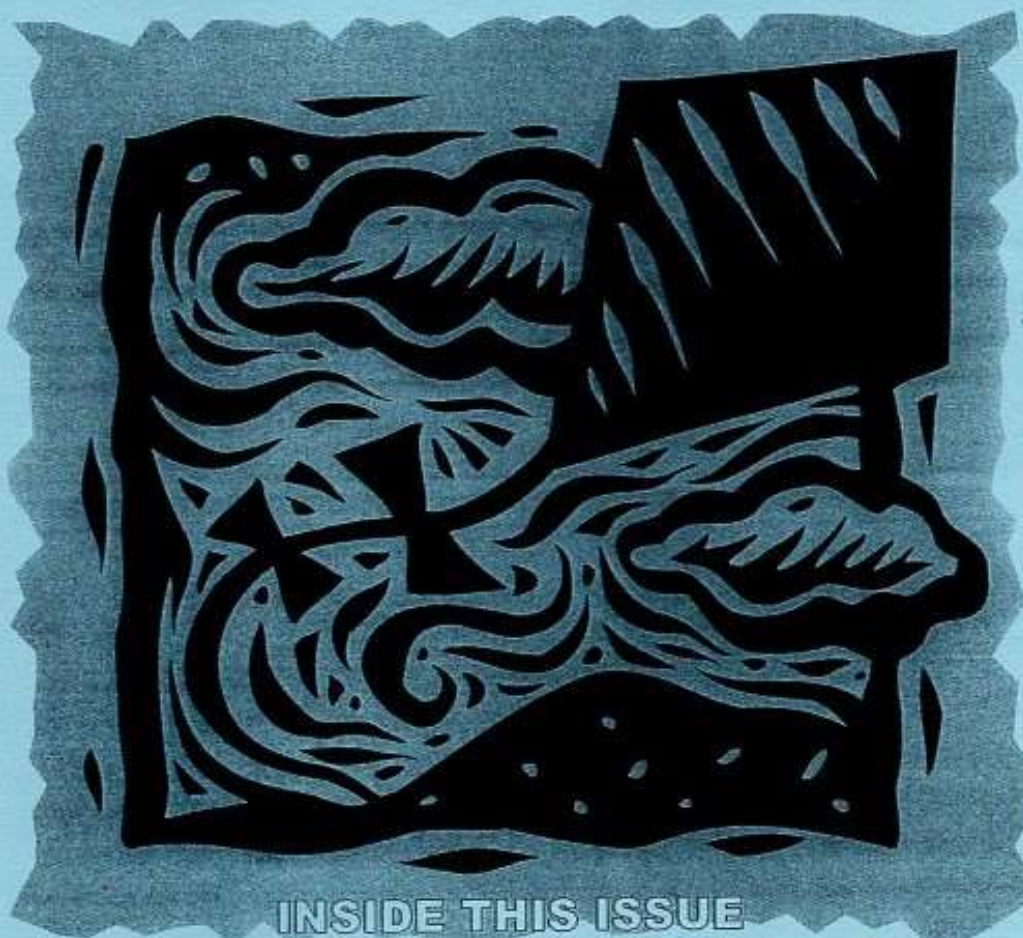
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Calliope

A Writer's Workshop By Mail



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2004 FICTION CONTEST FINALIST

BY MAIL

By **EVA SCHULTZ**

She was laughing too much, and she knew it. A proper lady would have kept her mirth inside, gazing in dignified silence from the stagecoach onto the mining town for the first time. But it didn't matter what a herd of scraggly miners thought of her. She had worked harder than all of them to get to this gold-flecked place. Inhaling the sharp, mossy scent of the mountains, she let out an open-mouthed laugh.

The stagecoach driver must have found her strange, enthralled as she was by every detail of her journey. He had probably brought other mail-order brides west, but he couldn't have met any as green as she. When she'd climbed into the coach for the first time, she had stopped to run her fingers over the dark cloth seats. Sometimes she grew entranced staring down at her traveling suit, smoothing the fitted jacket and long skirt. At every stop, she stared at the cow-town setting and had to be prodded to enter the boarding house.

Putting her feet up on the empty seat opposite her, she decided she didn't care what the coach driver thought of her. He was just an unkempt old man, with poor English and a chaw-stained beard. She had much grander thoughts to occupy her mind.

Today was the fulfillment of her plan.

She was going to be rich. Once she was married to the simple, hard-working Jonas Trent—a necessary step to ensure a woman's safety in this unruly country—she would lead him to the richest gold vein in California. She would feign surprise

when they struck the lode, and then she would sit back, richer than the greatest businessmen of the east.

She had slaved in an eastern city for years, unappreciated and unacknowledged by those around her. As much as she hated all the stupid, short-sighted people she worked beside, none had been worse than the foreman, Robert. He criticized her work, offered no praise, and never allowed her to forget that she did not belong.

She knew he was right—she did not belong there. She had no friends, and they all knew it. No one invited her along to supper or engaged her in conversation as they worked. She hated being asked why she was always alone, almost as much as she hated being ignored.

Even when Robert suddenly left, replaced by some new dullard, it wasn't enough to make her life in the city tolerable. She had to leave them all behind, to finally grasp the life she deserved.

It took months of reading and careful study to learn how to live in the stark western lands, and all that time, she corresponded with Jonas. She chose a new name, building herself an elaborate history and weaving it into her letters. By the time he proposed, she had cut all ties to her old life, and, when she climbed into the stagecoach that day, she wished everyone that she despised was watching so she could laugh at them as she rode away.

Calliope

Of course, they didn't know where she was. They probably hadn't realized she was gone yet, though they would on Monday morning when she didn't report in to the front office. Even if her colleagues at the temporal sciences lab figured out that she had used their developmental time machine to escape to 1848, there was no way they could find her under her new name, living a life of leisure as a rich California mining magnate.

She rather regretted that she would never be able to show off to them. But at least they could never tease her again about her obsession with history, her inability to fit in among them, her daydreams of escaping back in time.

Robert, as always, was the worst.

"You'd pass up a movie premiere to go chop wood on the prairie, wouldn't you?" he'd tease. He laughed when she spent her lunch hours poring over old documents about gold mines that had run dry back in the 1800s. "Someday, I'm going to be richer than any of your old dead hillbillies," he would taunt, rolling his eyes at her. Now she would laugh at the very thought of him, every time she counted her money.

She gripped Jonas' stack of letters in her gloved hand, wondering what he would be like, wishing he had sent a daguerreotype. The coach stopped alongside a rudimentary saloon. Giddy with anticipation, she waited while the driver opened the door and helped her down. "Miss Caroline Withers, may I present Mr. Jonas Trent."

Her greeting died in her throat when she looked up at her fiancé—Robert—one-time foreman of the time travel project at the Institute for Temporal Studies.



About The Author

SIG member Eva Schultz is a business proposal writer from Plainfield, Illinois. She has drafted several novels, and her fiction has appeared/will appear in: *Mensa Bulletin*, *Downstate*

Story, *The SiNK*, *Peeks & Valleys*, *ChiMe*, *Santa Maria Sun*, *New Times*, and *The Pegasus Review*. She attended the Iowa Summer Writing Festival in 2004 and hopes to return in 2005.

Along with writing and reading, Eva likes to paint, draw, and attend historical reenactments and renaissance faires.

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I noticed they were planning several mentoring programs and critique groups. The workshop would include a critique from a submissions editor with a major publishing company. I dispatched my Picture Book manuscript and a check and marked my calendar.

I arrived safely at the home of the workshop coordinator. "I would never have gone out in this weather!" she said, greeting me at the door. I then learned that her co-coordinator had decided not to make the trek. So much for my fears of being labeled a weather wimp!

The dozen or so women who did make it were quickly divided into two critique groups. We had all received each other's manuscripts to review several days earlier.

The accomplishments and experience of my new colleagues, many of who had been published and some who had contracts pending impressed me. Although intimidating, it was also brought hope.

To accommodate those who traveled the farthest, I was escorted to my one-on-one critique with my editor from Dutton. I was immediately put at ease by her compliments on my writing skills. She had many questions for me regarding the intended audience and marketing strategies for my Picture Book. She also suggested a few possible publishers (not hers unfortunately).

Of course I brought a copy of *Calliope* with me, which contained a short story I had written. She inquired about it and congratulated me on my accomplishment. I gave her a quick synopsis for the story and she seemed more interested in that than my Picture Book manuscript! That was fine with me.

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