

The truth is...we gather on the Third Monday of each month to practice our writing skills. We listen and share in each other's work. We are small in number and our commitment is strictly to produce and foster creativity among our members.

We started in July 1999 and consist of adults that enjoy writing memoirs, commentaries, essays, poems, and/or prose. Our simple method each month is to use a pre-selected word or phrase as the basis of a story, an idea, an opinion, a derivative of, or an implied essence of and write a document of no more than 1000 words (approximately 2 pages). We share our stories, comment, and in that way build up our writing skills through practice and presentation. The atmosphere is friendly and supportive, and the feedback is gentle.

Curious? Always wanted to try writing for fun, entertainment, or even profit? Come visit with us at any of our open meetings. Bring a sample of your work. Sit in and see what we do. If you like it, join us every month and become a member. Contact Nancy at nestewart@ameritech.net for information. The Pen & Ink Writer's Group returns to the Eisenhower Library beginning on July 18, 2022.

**Original Works by Members of the Pen & Ink Writers' Group
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August 2022 selection – Gambit

**Knocking Them Over Like a House of Cards
By Katy Coakley**

After he was denied his dream role for Secretary of State, Rep. Francis Urquart was starting to feel betrayed by the men that inspired him to achieve. All he ever wanted in his life was to help the American people. He worked frequent hours from 7:00am to 11:30pm, which caused him to become sleepless. On the day of Inauguration, countless individuals watched the newly elected president, Charles Collingridge, take the oath. Francis sat in the front row looking depressed and angry with his wife, Claire, because all they ever wanted was to be the President and the First Lady. As the crowd stood up and cheered, Francis and Claire stayed in their seats and didn't even clap. After the Inauguration, the couple attended the celebratory dinner at the White House. Charles approached Francis to discuss his ideas for funding taxes, immigration, and peace treaties. "Now that I'm elected, we're going to change this country, Francis. I have my ways, but I will need your help to succeed." Francis pretended to agree, but he wanted all the power that he could ever get. It was the narcissism in him that he couldn't let go.

At 10:30pm, the dinner was starting to conclude, so Francis and Claire headed back to their townhouse. As they were driving back, Francis told Claire that this new president is dangerous. "He will do everything he can to prevent us from being the roles that we desire to become. It's about dedication, not happiness." Claire knew that her Machiavellian plans could hurt those around her, but like her husband, she was too narcissistic.

Once she graduated college, she decided to work for Homeland Security for five years until she met Francis in 1987. In order to impress Francis, Claire decided to quit the organization and work in politics. She now works as a political correspondent for AP News. “Francis, do you remember the head of AP News, Roger O’Neil?” He started to look confused as she discussed her plans. “Well, he has many files and records of Charles’ past behavior and let me tell you that this is going to destroy his image.” Francis was becoming relieved and mentioned how he and Claire can get into the disturbing lives of the Collingridge administration. “I knew I could trust you, but don’t you worry because sooner or later, we will be easily knocking them over like a house of cards.”

On Tuesday, Claire arrived early to work to talk to Roger. He was frustrated because the reports about the election had not been published in the newspaper. She told Roger that she needed his help and explained everything that she and Francis had been planning. Roger was shocked because he feared he could get into a ton of trouble for publishing information about Charles’ past. “I will offer you five million dollars in order for you to help get me to the White House,” said Claire.

Once he heard about the money, Roger agreed and decided to interview Charles’ family and friends. His estranged mother, Ann, revealed that Charles had previously harassed several of his former coworkers when he worked at a law firm. His former friend, Ben, showed documents of unpaid taxes that Charles was supposed to pay for and ended up using fake credit cards to buy whatever he wanted. He told Roger that the strangest part was that he was never caught. The total came to about \$12 million and still hasn’t been paid yet. Claire knew this would be a great stab in the back for Charles and decided to show Francis everything that she found. Until recently, Francis had heard several rumors that the Collingridge administration had been lying about recent deals with the Middle East about peace treaties and using fake propaganda for the discussion of social security. To make sure the rumors are true, Francis decides to go to the White House early and secretly leave tape recorders and security cameras around the building in order to prove to everyone how terrible the administration can be.

Claire decides to publish the articles, but uses a fake name titled Melissa Stewart in order to hide her identity. Once the articles are published, numerous readers start to become shocked and immediately call for Charles to be impeached. He was quick to deny the rumors. As she arrives back at the townhouse, she rushes to Francis and tells him that all of the documents about Charles have come out. “This is going to be a big year for us. Just wait and see. It’s an appropriate gambit that we’re using.” The House had made the decision for a trial to debate whether to impeach Charles or not.

On the day of the impeachment trial, it was a day of frighten for Charles and his administration, but it would be joyful for Francis and Claire. As they watched the trail on the television, they could see the hundreds of protests that included a mixture of defense and attack. The judge granted for article one that the votes for perjury for the harassment of coworkers, the peace treaties for the Middle East, and fake propaganda for social security was found guilty by

50 votes. For fraud, Charles was also found guilty and ordered to pay \$12 million by 45 guilty votes and 5 not guilty votes.

Charles' vice president, Seth Morris, announced that he would be resigning from his role due to a severe illness. This leads Francis to step up as his popular conventions score him a nomination for the presidential election. With the increasing number of votes, Americans were voting for a man, who they believed can protect, serve, and honor their country. Francis officially won the election and was finally getting the position that he wanted. On his inauguration day, after taking the oath, Francis tells Claire that life is about power and you cannot let anyone control us.

###

What Is a Gambit?

By Carol Karvon

What is a gambit?
To some, it's the first Chess move,
To others, a ploy.

###

Gambit

By Kelly Tansor

I recently watched the trailer for the show *The Queen's Gambit*. In the show, the main character Elizabeth is a competitive chess player, which was apparently an uncommon thing for a woman to be in the 1960's. She also showed addictive tendencies toward pills and booze, not surprising given her difficult upbringing. The show looked interesting – even though I know nothing about chess. I do, however, know a little bit about unhealthy coping mechanisms.

At the risk of butchering the show's premise (sorry, I don't understand chess enough to watch the show), Elizabeth believes she needs the pills and booze to help her be a strong chess player. Without them, she fears she can no longer visualize the board in her mind. Spoiler alert: She is able to play – and win – without any substances.

This got me thinking about my own relationship with alcohol. These days I have a good relationship with alcohol, but I've definitely been codependent on it in the past. I first started noticing alcohol really having a hold on me in 2019. Relationship troubles? Alcohol. Home alone when I'm already sad? Alcohol. Problems at work? Alcohol. Parents being judgmental for how much you drink? Alcohol – but wait until Mom is in bed.

Then 2020 hit. Boy, was I prepared!

At least that's what I thought in the beginning. As my already poor mental health declined in quarantine, I started leaning more and more on alcohol. Any little inconvenience warranted a drink – everything from missing my friends, to someone cutting me off in traffic, to someone at work saying something weird, to...I don't know, it's Tuesday, let's drink!

My roommates expressed concern, but not in a helpful way. It was very shame-y, literally talking down to me like I was a child. That just made me want to drink more, and go to greater lengths to hide it. Like I said, these days I'm much better about drinking. It certainly wasn't because of my roommates (I'm sure they'll take any and all credit, though).

I chalk it up to two things. For one, I finally realized drinking wasn't helping me. I always thought drinking would help me not to feel anything anymore, whether I was sad, lonely, angry, anxious, or all of the above. But, of course, it didn't do that. Alcohol only exacerbated anything I was feeling. Sadness turned to overwhelming sadness. Loneliness turned to despair. Anger turned to rage. Anxiousness turned to some pretty awful panic attacks.

Ultimately, drunken breakdowns with me crying on the kitchen floor started to get old after a while.

The other thing that helped me is...really, the only thing I'll credit my roommates for. One of them brought home a bottle of rum that she insisted we all try, including me. After my shot, she held out her hand and said, "Okay, give it," the same way I'd tell my 4-year-old niece to give back the cookie I told her not to have. After handing it back and a long enough death glare, I went to my room to vent to another friend of mine about this. He mentioned that I should be grateful that I have friends who are concerned for me (yeah, sure, buddy), but it's what he said next that really sealed the deal for me.

You should drink to *enjoy* the drink.

Drinking...for the sake of drinking? Because I like it? And nothing else? It sounded absolutely foreign to me.

Like I said, those drunken breakdowns in the kitchen had gotten old to me by that point. So, I decided to give this new way of drinking a try. I stopped drinking in times of distress. I stopped taking end-of-day shots. I would drink with friends – when *they* initiated – and genuinely enjoy myself.

It came at an optimal time. Very soon after all this, my grandmother died, and my mom's cancer progressed to Stage 4. Instead of leaning on alcohol, I leaned on friends and family. I can't imagine how much more sad and chaotic this all would have been if alcohol had been mixed in.

These days I still drink, but it's not to cope with life. I'll have a drink with friends, or on a date, or when I'm relaxing in front of the TV. And if I do drink on a bad day, I limit myself to only one drink. When my mom died earlier this year and I wrote the eulogy for her, I wrote it with a glass of Bailey's next to me. It wasn't so I could cope, though – my mom just loved Bailey's.

Getting back to *The Queen's Gambit*, I see where Elizabeth is coming from. Sometimes we can get so dependent on something, or even someone, that we can't imagine handling

anything without it. For Elizabeth, she thought she needed booze and pills to get through chess. For me, I thought I needed booze to get through life. In the end, though, it turns out we don't need those things. We're stronger than we realize. Sometimes, as impossible as it may seem, letting go of our vices is the best way to find that out.

###

Listen to Me!
by Vicki Elberfeld

I am trying to convince two of my friends to appreciate that a conversation is not at all the same thing as a lecture, as it requires the contributions of more than one speaker. So far, I have had next to no success. One friend complains that he can't complete a single sentence before being interrupted, yet his sentences go on and on and on forever without pause. He could give William Faulkner, who composed what was said to be the longest sentence in English of 1288 words, a run for his money. There are no periods in his talks or rather rants, and often there is not even the slightest hint of a comma.

Not to be outdone, my other friend is constantly shouting the words, "let me finish; let me finish" whenever I simply say "uh huh" or "yes" or "oh my!" and nod, mainly to express agreement or surprise and reassure him that I am engaged and actively listening to what he is saying. It isn't a gambit of mine to derail his topic and take it in an entirely new direction, thereby causing my hapless friend to lose control of the conversation entirely.

And unless I'm missing something crucial here, control seems to be at the very heart of the matter. In public speaking, we are told to avoid words like "uh" or "um," filler words. Such words are place holders for us; they signal to our listeners we are merely pausing momentarily to gather our thoughts, something we shouldn't need to do during speeches prepared well in advance. Yet in informal speech, some folks consistently overdo the use of these placeholders, exasperating the patience of their listeners

My parents taught me to avoid interrupting others, always insisting interruptions were rude. I perfected the art of allowing others the floor to such an extent that I was lauded by my elders as a model child, not necessarily well liked by other children. As an adult, it has become clear that my childhood strategy of giving way is too limiting. While conversation isn't primarily a competition, it's rarely free of competitive elements. Many, many decades later, I have concluded that I must, at times, do battle with my parents' injunctions. I love paying attention to my friends and hearing their ideas, but I need to shine as well. Otherwise, I risk being relegated to the sidelines in the role of audience, an observer of people and life instead of an active participant.

The *con* in conversation means *with*, and so a conversation is ultimately a negotiated experience. It's a give and take if you will, and one of the toughest challenges in life. "We have

two ears and one mouth so that we can listen twice as much as we speak” seems wise to me, as we all deeply, if not desperately, want to be heard.

###

Return of Apocalypse By Mark Moe

Professor Charles Xavier broke his mental concentration to Cerebro, the psychic enhancement computer and turned to exit the chamber in his golden, floating hover chair. He had a serious look upon his face as he opened the outer door of Cerebro. Jean Grey was assigned to guard Cerebro while the Professor was connected to it. She took note of his demeanor and said, "What is it Professor? What did you see?"

The Professor looked up to Jean Grey with her fiery, red, wavy hair and piercing blue eyes and said, "Apocalypse is being resurrected again. We need to stop his followers before they help him create new Horsemen out of other unsuspecting, desperate mutants. I need to speak to Remy, Shiro and Lorne Dane."

"We should assemble the main team of X-men to deal with Apocalypse, not just three of us," stated Jean Grey

He responded, "Jean, I want those three because they were once under Apocalypse's mind control and imbued with his power to become the Horsemen of: Death, Famine and Pestilence. Those three will have a unique perspective on dealing with the situation."

"Okay, that is three of the four. Who are you talking to about the last Horsemen, Death? Another X-men like Logan?" Jean questioned.

"The fourth Horsemen of War is not an X-men. In fact, he is an Avenger. We need to talk to Professor Hulk. Besides his perspective, I am hoping to combine the intelligence of Beast and Professor Hulk in order to design a technological solution to dampen Apocalypse's powers. I believe if we can weaken him, it might be easier to break the mind control effects of his future Horsemen."

"So would it be fair to assume that you already located Professor Hulk and relayed your plan to him?" asked Jean.

"I was in Cerebro, so yes, I have already made contact with Professor Hulk. He will take a Quinn jet to meet us here at the mansion tomorrow. He is currently working at the Avenger's research facility in Mexico. Professor Hulk has promised to be here by 10:00 a.m."

The next day, Professor X accompanied several of the X-men went to a nearby landing pad to await the arrival of Professor Hulk in his Avenger's Quinn jet. Fortunately, much like the X-men's Blackbird, the Quinn jet utilized Vertical Take-Off and Landing or VTOL technology that eliminates the need to have long runways and was able to land on a space that would be

sufficient for an attack helicopter. The Quinn jet could even fold its wings for a smaller footprint, but that was not necessary in this location. The jet's landing ramp was in the back and the X-men waited patiently for the hissing sound of hydraulics which would mark the opening of the ramp and the unmistakable presence of the green, muscled human who would walk down that ramp. The wait was not long and before they knew it, Professor Hulk in his trademark black and gray spandex shirt and short combo came up to the group and offered his giant hand to each of them in a firm handshake.

"Professor Hulk, it is so good of you to come. May I introduce you to the team you will be working with during the duration of this mission. Remy Lebeaux was the Horsemen of Death, Shiro Yoshida was the Horsemen of Famine and Lorne Dane was the Horsemen of Pestilence. This is Dr. Henry McCoy our resident scientist who is looking forward to working with you. Finally, to my right, is one of two other mutants who can use Cerebro, Jean Grey Summers."

"Professor Charles Xavier, it is good to meet all of you and I hope I can help you find some answers to this terrible situation. As you are aware, I was the Horsemen of Death for Apocalypse," replied Professor Hulk.

As the X-men made room for their new gargantuan friend to enter into the X-mansion, Professor X worried if they would be successful against Apocalypse this time. "Hopefully fortune shall smile upon us again," thought Professor X to himself.

Once inside, Professor X had the other three Horsemen tell their story to Professor Hulk and listened to his experience in kind. The Professor Hulk turned his attention to Xavier. "Professor X, what is your plan to deal with Apocalypse? My research regarding him and the occurrences of his Horsemen have shown increasingly difficult complications with releasing his victims in order to defeat him."

"I am well-aware of the strength of his mental abilities and how much stronger he becomes with every successful resurrection. That is why I need you to work with Dr. McCoy while taking in the valuable input of your other Horsemen to develop a psychic wave disruptor to dampen the effects of Apocalypse's mind control over his future prospects for new Horsemen. If we can break his hold before his influence becomes too dominating, we can prevent his full resurrection," responded Professor Xavier.

Professor Hulk tapped a pen to his yellow notepad as he responded, "Professor, this sounds like a huge "gambit. There are a lot of things that could go wrong with focusing delta and theta waves to block strong psychic wave projections toward his new victims, but this is why you brought me here and I will do what I can."

A half a mile away, two of Apocalypse's black clad spies were listening to the conversation between the X-men and the sudden, surprise visit of the Avenger known as the Hulk. The one holding the listening device gently put it down on a nearby rock and said what they were both thinking, "Why did the Hulk just show up to the X-mansion?"

The other one just shrugged his shoulders and said, "You can't be too surprised, superheroes tend to work with other superheroes. This will not stop our plans to resurrect our master."

###

Gambit **Pauline Bastek**

These days, when you hear the word, Gambit, you may connect it to the film "Queen's Gambit" which took home several Oscars a few years back. Or if familiar with the game of chess, you will immediately tie it to the familiar chess move, I, on the other hand, heard that word and I smiled and saw Michael Caine and Shirley MacLaine in the 1966 movie of the name.

Michael Caine as the suave, debonair British burglar. As an aside, whatever happened to suave, debonair actors? They seem to have been replaced on a wholesale level with grungy, unshaven men who mumble their lines.

Opposite Michael Caine, we had the glamorous Shirley, her hair tinted red, her makeup without a flaw, and her wardrobe. Oh, those wonderful ensembles, with high heels to match her bag, and often a hat that sent us searching for the closest copy we could find at the local boutique or inspire us to enroll in continuing Ed classes at our high school in millinery and dressmaking as I did.

My neighbor, Pat, and I escaped from our toddlers and kitchens as often as we could to the local movie theatre, before the prices changed at 6 p.m. and for less than \$2.00 we were transported to Paris or Rome or if it was a Hitchcock thriller to California or New York.

Of course, we enjoyed the stories and the worlds where they took place, but the hair styles, the makeup, and nail colors and most of all the wardrobes fed our fantasies for the following week, as we changed diapers, cooked dinners and raked our shag carpeting. Remember carpet rakes, only if you were a 60s housewife.

After the movie, we would stop at the local diner for pie and coffee and relive the movie and fashions all over again. Yes, the hippies were in Woodstock and Vietnam protests were going on but we didn't have the social media of today to awaken us to action. The sixties and early seventies to suburban housewives in their late twenties were far removed from the unpleasantness of the evening TV newsreels. We cooked and sewed, we gardened and planned progressive dinners.

Hearing the word, gambit, took me back in time. My neighbor, Pat has been gone for a good many years as is Michael Caine. I see on Google that Shirley MacLaine is still with us, but movies like Gambit are not. Oscars go to films considered relevant. I can only be grateful to movies like Gambit that kept us sane and happily functioning in the tumultuous sixties without instant information provided by I Phones.

Probably why actors are looking grungier by the day, they don't have time to shave and comb their hair and spend their time texting, not speaking, which explains their inability to speak clearly as actors in the sixties did.

###

Slight Threads of Agnes Martin

By J. Smetana

Hey man where was you today?

Oh man Jerry had to go to the DMV so we took him to the DMZ.

You mean that narrow strip of land between North Korea and South Korea?

Yeah man it was a GAMBIT – what can I tell you?

###

The Summer Cottage

By N. Stewart

I was three-years-old when my parents bought a summer cottage in a Southern Wisconsin subdivision. My brother had bronchitis and the family doctor recommended a place in the country where my brother could benefit from fresh air and sunshine.

The cottage was located on high land above a small lake. It was two bedrooms, with indoor plumbing, kitchen, central room (including a potbelly wood-burning stove), and a multi-windowed fully enclosed front porch. It sat on a wooded lot with a view of the lake.

My first remembrance of the cottage was sitting in the backyard on a swing my dad built with ropes suspended from two trees and a piece of wood planking for a seat. From the house next door, two little girls about my age appeared and walked slowly over to the swing, stopping at their property line. I invited them to swing with me and a friendship of many years was born. We were country girls in the summertime and along with 10 other girlfriends, we spent many days walking to the mail boxes on County O, hiking the woods behind our houses, picnicking, playing “Kick the Can,” swimming in the lake, tanning on the beach, enjoying after-dark popcorn parties, and walking into town to see a movie or walking down to the country store for candy.

Patti and Barb’s house was close to ours and the bedroom windows were separated by only about 10 feet. As we grew older, many times we would lay in our beds and talk to each other through the window screens about the happens of the previous day, or our plans for the next day, going well beyond our bed time. One or the other mother would say it was time for us to go to sleep. We’d stop talking, say good night and say that we would see each other in the morning. Sometimes at those nightly session, we told each other spooky stories while hiding under the bed covers with a flash light for company. One night after we were asleep, my brother and their brother snuck between the houses by our windows and make loud animalistic noises and scratched on the screens. We, the girls, screamed and screamed and the boys just laughed at us until they were summons by our parents and told to leave us alone.

My brother fully recovered from his illness and had friends of his own. They jumped off the channel bridge into the muddy, yucky water, cannonballed from the piers or raft into the lake, hunted the island for turtle eggs, played war games in the woods, and overall harassed their little sisters.

Over the years my parents upgraded the cottage, putting in a cement block foundation to replace the tree stumps holding up the house, installed new storm windows, new furnace, replaced the leaking roof, added a hot water heater, a tub and shower and had a well drilled.

Having access to the lake, my parents bought a wooden row boat. My father or brother would row us along the shoreline of the lake until my mother said it was far enough and we headed back. My dad, uncles and brother would go fishing from the boat. That boat was replaced with a bigger boat, having a 3 ½ horse power Evinrude motor for tooling around the lake. When I was older, I was allowed to take the boat and with my friends cross the bay to the Dutch Mill where we could purchase hot dogs and lemonade on the beach.

We had many friends and relatives stop and visit over the years. At times, my mother's brothers and sister would come to stay for the weekend. The men would sleep on the front porch on couches and cots, my aunt and uncle in my room and I had the pleasure of sleeping with my mother. Once awake, within a matter of minutes the blankets were folded, the cots and bedding stored until the next night's use and all were eager to eat. The kitchen cooks were setting out eggs and bacon, toast, fresh fruit, and coffee for breakfast. With ten people in the house, a numbering system was established and time limits set for morning bathroom routines. Night time was reserved for playing poker or other card games.

As my parents aged, I took over more and more of the responsibility for the maintenance of the cottage and eventually took over completely after my father's death. I remodeled the bathroom and the kitchen, replaced the old roof and replaced the boat pier while adding a Shorestation for the new 140 horse power speed boat. My father had been active on the Board of Directors for the subdivision, attending annual meetings and volunteering his help. I assumed those responsibility also as I wanted to give back for what I had personally gained from spending summers at the cottage.

The years moved quickly with weddings, baby showers, anniversary parties, retirement luncheons and funerals to attend. The cottage remained a sanctuary of sorts for all. Today, friends and the younger generation of relatives come to the cottage on summer holidays to spend the day. We walk to the beach, go for a boat ride, sit around the dining room table, grazing on comfort food and reminisce about the past.

The days and years recently have been moving along faster than they once did. Every summer I return to the cottage, seeking a place of peace, its quietness, and to remember a life-time of fond memories. It saddens me that my time at the cottage is drawing to a close. Some day I will not be able to drive there or I will have some age-related disability that will restrict my capabilities. I won't be able to... oh, heck...the cottage and I have had a good, long run. I need to stop thinking about what might be and think about what has been and continues to be an engaging lifetime experience at the summer cottage.

Gambit
By Edward Scheffler

A judicious silence is better than the TRUTH spoken without charity. -- By DeSales

For there are those who take pride in the direct approach.
Saying it as it is ...
Without considering what pain it may cause.
To shock others with a revealing bitterness or TRUTH,
Leaving permanent scares, and division which may never heal.

A TRUTH that's told with bad intent, beats all the lies you can invent. -- William Blake

Something much more than the slip of the tongue,
Indeed, some ill-tempered remark made intentional
As would critics of satire impose a condescending disposition.

Is it worth it,
The price of straightening someone out in rebuke,
To remind the unconcerned of their deficiencies
With an attitude of:
"I know what's best for you."

Certainly, parental guidance is to be required.
Yet even this can approach unreasonable demands.
As my brother who was most charming whence in a good-natured mood,
But whence confronted with irritants he became a monster,
Building himself up as judge, while degrading others as inferior.
When he died his children wouldn't attend his funeral.

I wasn't cruel in that fashion,
But through the years my sin has been thoughtlessness,
Without concern for others.

Fortunate indeed are the regrets in which present themselves,
Providing a chance to repent...
To mend the broken scattered pieces and start anew.

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