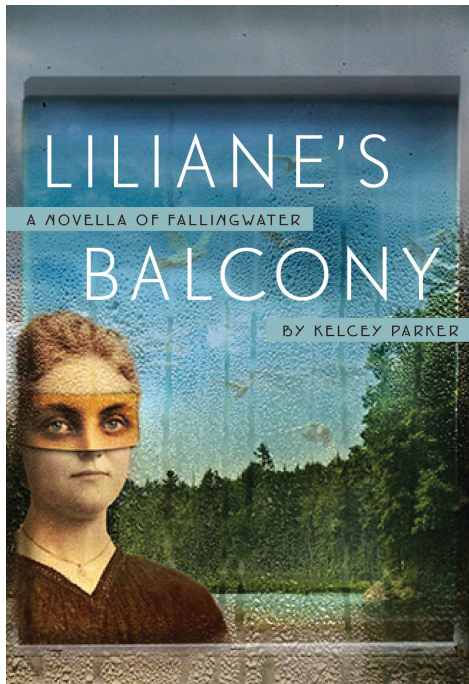


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Novella Excerpt by Kelcey Parker



Editor's Note: In September 2010, an excerpt from Kelcey Parker's then-unfinished novella appeared in the first issue of *Talking Writing*. Now, we're pleased to present another excerpt from the completed work in conjunction with Rose Metal Press, which is publishing *Liliane's Balcony: A Novella of Fallingwater* this month.

Kelcey's novella revolves around Fallingwater, the house designed by Frank Lloyd Wright in 1935 for the wealthy Kaufmann family of Pittsburgh. Kelcey weaves between many points of view, including members of a present-day tour group visiting Fallingwater; the imagined perspectives of Edgar and Liliane Kaufmann, mixed with their actual correspondence; and quotes from "FLW," the architect himself.

Liliane and Edgar Kaufmann were married in 1909. The sections below begin with the early years of their marriage.

Liliane

The worst part about it was that he loved her. The more he loved her, the more it terrified her because he was incapable of loving only her. Because she could not possibly love him more than she did—than she always had—she embarked on what would become a lifelong effort to love him less. Sometimes he made it easy, when his eyes and hands would stray. But sometimes he made it so hard. She never felt closer to him than when he was away for military training, writing letters and wiring her daily from Kentucky and Washington, D.C. *My own dear love*, he wrote. *My love*

child. Dearest of all and my beloved. Lillian my only love.

In her weakest, most hopeful moments, she would let herself think that maybe she could be his only love. She would find herself at her desk composing, not a letter, but a poem. She would not send it to him. *Do you find it funny*, she would write instead, *to hear that I am writing poetry?* And he would assure her: *No, not funny you are writing poetry. Keep it up, it always was your hobby only you allowed it to die for a time. Send them to me if you will, not that I am a critic, but they are yours and that is something.* She would write back, claiming that the days without him seemed like years. And he would reply: *How the days and weeks fly here. With you, you write, they seem like years. Well in a few more of my weeks and your years, I hope to be allowed a few days with you.*

But when they finally had even a day together, all the love and the poetry would get mixed up again with the heartache and the latest rumor.

Afterward, he would write: *Your few hours with me, did you really enjoy them? I was so hungry for you, not physically so much as just your presence and talk and discussion. After all I need you for all of these and the time will and shall come when it will all be forgotten as well as forgiven. So please be happy. You owe and deserve it to yourself, and besides you promised me you would. Can see you trying to smile now. Not only try but do, and day in and out.*

Yes, if only she would smile: *Keep well and be happy and smile, for when I come back, never anything in your face but a smile, so practice now for me, my love.*

Over and over he would implore: *Smile and be happy, you know we both need it. Especially you, so start at once. Believe me when I say I love you more much more than any woman in the world.*

At home, reading these words by firelight, she would almost smile.

He would close with love for her and Junior: *Give Jr. my love and tell him the days are near when I will see him again and you too my love. Write often and all the news.*

And: *Enjoyed Jr's. note. Tell him I love him more every day as I do you too, dear Lillian. Believe me I need you and am sure you need me.*

And: *love love and love to you my dear wife.*

Love the kind you long for.

But: Then it would happen again.

Letter from Edgar

My love: —

Needless to say a happy New Year to you both and my soul hope is that 1919 I can show you I am yours and all yours and that life for us in the future will be happy so much so that the past will be forgotten.

Believe me your husband and love,
Edgar

Liliane

But he was never *hers & all hers*. Not before 1919, not in 1919, and not since.

She did eventually send him a poem. She was so much braver by post.

And he so much kinder: *How I wish I could write poems in return for the one you sent me. I loved it and my heart melted and I had a little cry all to myself for you. I shall always keep it. It will mean so much.*

She'd included a hint of something in the poem, a desire that she hid behind a metaphor of spring and new life. Encouraged by his response and emboldened by fears caused by his reports on the flu—1,800 out of 10,000 men at camp had already contracted it—she broached the subject directly: what did he think about more children? She painted a picture for him of brothers and sisters for Junior, of family trips to Canada full of camping and fishing. The more she wrote, the clearer the picture became.

Certainly I smiled when I read your view of my future children. "Think it over" you wrote.

But her vision of his future children did not come to pass.

Instead, a decade later she suffered the birth of his daughter by one of their department store's models. He'd name the girl Betty after his own beloved mother and parade the infant around the store as if she were a legitimate princess.

Liliane found herself happy, nearly, when he left the girl's mother for someone else.

Now in the painter's studio, she removes her robe and sits on the cloth-covered chair before a vanity. She places a gilt jewelry box on an adjacent table. She opens the box and withdraws a purple pearled necklace, which she unclasps and hangs in a single strand over the side of the open case. She lifts her arms so that they are the inverse of her husband's arms in his portrait—his arms stake a claim; hers open to the heavens—and so that she might feel the warm Florentine air brush her skin. She has left a white veil over her head, a thin wall to protect her from the painter's eye, and to thrust her into another time, another context. She is an angel, a bride, a Jewish Madonna. Then she changes her mind, lifts the veil, and holds its sheer edge in one raised hand. "Paint," she says.

The printer paints. *Vanitas*, he will call it. One cannot simultaneously gratify the desperate desires of the moment and create a legacy that lasts beyond the grave. The wealthy are always caught in such a struggle between the future and right now. They forget the spirit. That is what he will capture in this painting. The jewelry, the wealth, and the possessions will be as meaningless after death as beauty is once the bloom of youth has wilted.

Nonetheless there is something about this woman, something behind the furs and pearls—behind the veil—something to do with spirit. Yes, it is as she lifts the veil that he can see that she wants to reveal herself plainly. (So uncharacteristic of the rich, who, in his experience, prefer deception: *le trompe l'oeil*.) Her body, her face, her eyes—he must capture the eyes, the hollow eyes—her very soul laid bare.



[4]

This excerpt from [Liliane's Balcony: A Novella of Fallingwater](#) [5] appears in TW courtesy of Rose Metal Press.

More on "Liliane's Balcony" in TW

- [Liliane's Balcony: A Novella of Fallingwater](#) [6] by Kelcey Parker, *Talking Writing*, September 2010.
- [Kelcey Parker: "A Total Dork for Vintage Machines."](#) [7] interview by Rebecca Meacham, *Talking Writing*, September 2010.

Art Information

- [" \[7\]Fallingwater \[4\]"](#) by Jack E. Boucher; courtesy of U.S. Library of Congress

Liliane's Balcony: Part Two

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Kelcey Parker's first book, *For Sale by Owner* (Kore Press), won the 2011 Next Generation Indie Book Award in Short Fiction and was a Finalist for the 2012 Best Books of Indiana. She directs the creative writing program at Indiana University South Bend.

Kelcey has published a number of pieces in *Talking Writing*, including a previous excerpt from *Liliane's Balcony*. She conducts the "[Becoming a Writer](#) [8]" interview series of TW fiction authors. The interviews are also published as part of her blog [Ph.D. in Creative Writing](#) [9].

Source URL: <https://mail.talkingwriting.com/liliane%E2%80%99s-balcony-part-two>

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