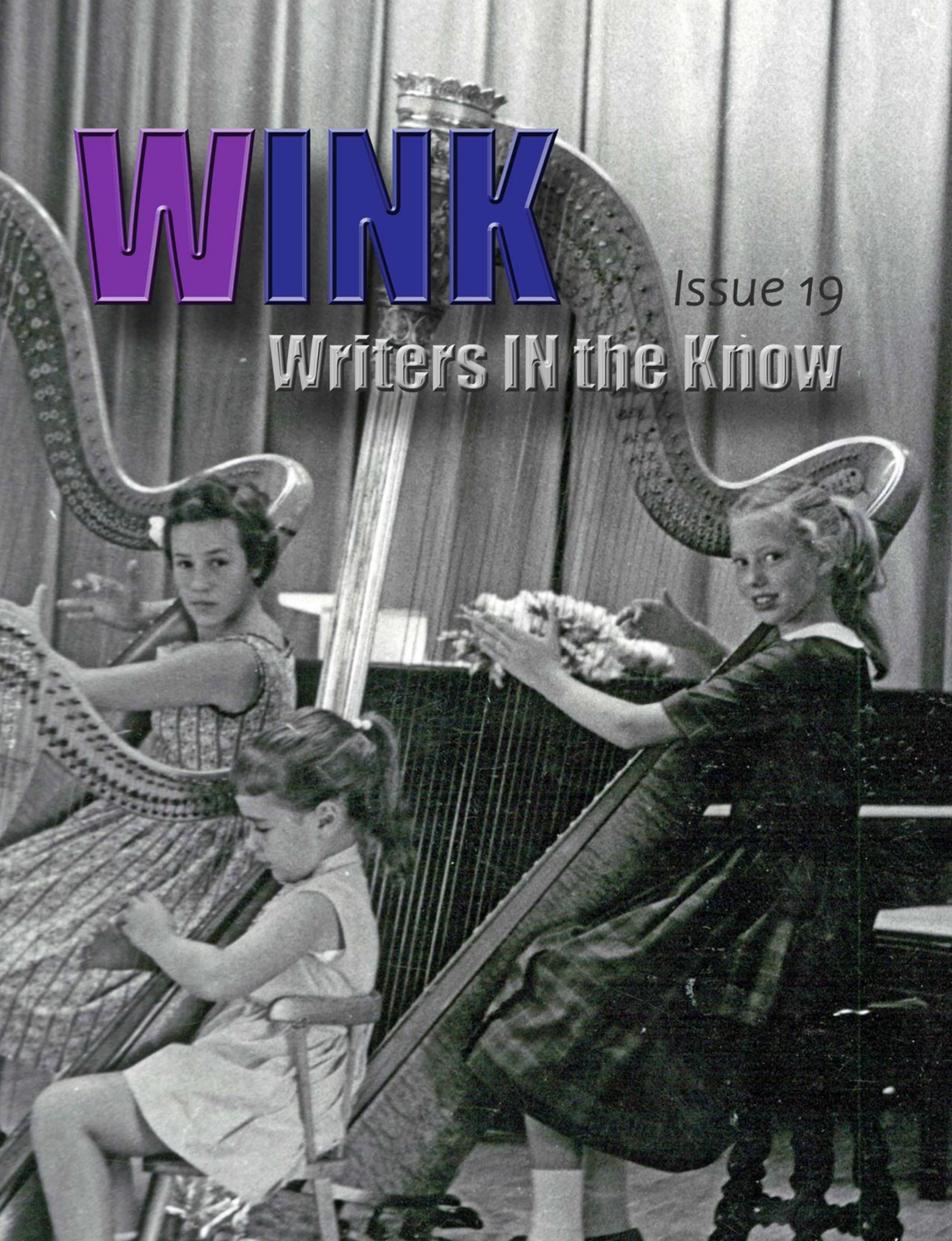


WINK

Issue 19

Writers IN the Know



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In her other life, Nadia is a community TV producer, host and co-host. Her latest book of poetry is *The Emerald Green Horse* (at Amazon). Her website: WhereWomenTalk.com.

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Connie is a professional book editor who leads Women of Words (WOW), a Minneapolis-based writers' group. Connie collected stories about the 1940-60 polio epidemic in *When Polio Came Home: How Ordinary People Overcame Extraordinary Challenges*. Get it on Amazon.

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Kerry's screenplay, *The Juggler's Act*, was a standout quarterfinalist in the 2019 Blue Cat Screenplay Competition.



Photo by Maryann Haug Gjersvik, 1958, Armonk NY. Pearl Chertok's class of young harpists playing on the Shari Lewis Show NY, 1958. The youngest is Stephanie Schwartz Sorensen, then 5 years old, today a retired midwife-turned-author. There were to be two other harpists from Ms. Chertok's class, but when show host, Shari Lewis took off her puppet, "Lamp Chop" and hastily tossed it on the piano before their debut was to begin, the other two girls realized that Lamb Chop was in fact not real. They burst into tears and remained inconsolable for the rest of the filming session.

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Kaddish

By Paul Beckman

I used to wonder how my Uncle C would feel after living past the age of his father, my grandfather, but when asked, my Uncle C would look at me, shake his head, and walk away muttering there must be something wrong with me.

For the three years after my grandfather's passing, as we sat around Uncle C's house, he looked at me in defiance, daring me to broach the subject again. Then, months later, a great uncle died, and the family drove the forty-five minutes to the cemetery from the funeral parlor to say Kaddish, shovel the dirt, then separate and visit our other dead family relatives, say a few words, and place our stones on their monuments. I was heading over to my mother's grave because in a week I'd be sixty-two and could answer the question myself that my Uncle C wouldn't.

My family is a family of cemetery visitors, which I always found strange. They would find excuses during the year to stop talking to others in the family, and that included the dead, but once at the cemetery, that all fell by the wayside and was forgotten, and the non-speakers would continue conversations from months or even years earlier and forget not only they had been fighting but forget why. My mother and I were among the non-speakers. I was there that Sunday because of the family funeral and I planned to walk over to my mother's grave and read how many years I had to go to reach her age of death. I was stunned when I realized that I had passed her age of living the previous year and did not know how to react, so I reverted to our usual role and said Kaddish over her grave, read her stone again, and realized that I was already on this earth for over a year longer than she had been. This angered me and I knocked the stone off her marker, picked it up, and tossed it as far as I could. Through tears, I swore to her that she always had to get the last word in, and then I pivoted and headed towards our cars

with the whole family, including my siblings, watching me and my actions, confirming for this meshuga assembly of future non-talkers that I, more successful and educated than all of them, had head problems, and they'd be best leaving me be. But they couldn't. They didn't have that "let him be" gene.

We all had agreed to meet at Mr. Pastrami, a kosher deli only ten minutes away, but as I saw all of my cousins talking and smiling with our aunts and uncles outside the restaurants, with my Uncle C holding court, most likely telling them about my dumb question, I gunned my car and drove around the parking lot and out, leaving them all without so much as a gesture or look, and hoped to find another kosher deli where I could get my Dr. Brown's Cel-Ray tonic, a potato knish, and corned beef with slaw on seeded rye, and when I did, I gnawed it like I was in a competition as I headed home to New Jersey and away from these crazies. ❖

Previously published in "Literary Stories" 2014

Bio: Paul Beckman's latest flash collection, *Kiss Kiss* (Truth Serum Press) was a finalist for the 2019 Indie Book Awards. Some of his stories appeared in *Spelk*, *Connotation Press*, *Necessary Fiction*, *Litro*, *Pank*, *Playboy*, *WINK*, *Jellyfish Review*, *The Wax Paper*, *Monkey*, and *The Lost Balloon*. He had a story selected for the 2020 National Flash Fiction Day Anthology Lineup and was shortlisted in the Strands International Flash Fiction Competition. He was nominated for 2021 Best of the Web and Best Micro Fiction. Paul earned his MFA from Bennington College and has a new collection of connected flash fiction stories coming out from Cervana Barva Press.



Opossum

By Zach Murphy

Pete and Richard's orange safety vests glowed a blinding light under the scorching sun, and their sweat dripped onto the pavement as they stood in the middle of the right lane on Highway 61, staring at an opossum lying stiffly on its side.

Richard handed Pete a dirty shovel. "Scoop it up," he said.

Everything made Pete queasy. He once fainted at the sight of a moldy loaf of bread. Even so, he decided to take on a thankless summer job as a roadkill cleaner. At least he didn't have to deal with many people.

Richard nudged Pete. "What are you waiting for?"

Pete squinted at the creature. "It's not dead. It's just sleeping."

"Are you sure?" Richard asked as he scratched his beard. He had one of those beards that looked like it would give a chainsaw a difficult time.

"Yes," Pete said. "I just saw it twitch."

Richard walked back toward the shoulder of the road and popped open the driver's side door of a rusty pickup truck. "Alright, let's go."

Pete shook his head. "We can't just leave it here."

"It's not our problem," Richard said. "They tell us to do with the dead ones, but not the ones that are still alive."

Pete crouched down and took a closer look. "We need to get it to safety."

Richard sighed and walked back toward the possum. "What if it wakes up and attacks us? That thing could have rabies."

"I don't think anything could wake it up right now."

Richard belched, "It's an ugly son of a gun, isn't it?"

"I think it's so ugly that it's cute,"

"No one ever says that about me," Richard said with a chuckle. "I guess I just haven't crossed into that territory."

Just then, a car sped by and swerved over into the next lane. Pete and Richard dashed out of the way.

"People drive like animals!" Richard said.

"We'd better get going."

Pete took a deep breath, slipped his gloves on, gently picked up the opossum, and carried it into the woods.

"What are you doing?" Richard asked. "Are you crazy?"

After nestling the possum into a bush, Pete smelled the scent of burning wood. He gazed out into the clearing and noticed a plume of black smoke billowing into the sky. The sparrows scattered away, and the trees stood with their limbs spread, as if they were about to be crucified.

"@#!%&!!@#," Pete whispered under his breath.

Pete picked up the opossum and turned back around. ❖



The Lake House

By Keith Hoerner

Deep below the lake's murky surface, there sits a house—intact. A two-story structure of Carpenter Gothic details like elaborate wooden trim bloated to bursting. Its front yard: purple loosestrife. Its inhabitants: alligator gar, bull trout, and pupfish. All glide past languidly—out of window sashes and back inside door frames. It is serene, and it is foreboding. Curtains of algae float gossamer to and fro. Pictures rest clustered atop credenzas. A chandelier is lit, intermittently, by freshwater electric eels. And near a Victrola, white to the bone, a man and a woman waltz in a floating embrace. ❖

The Emerald Room

TD Conner

I was happy when Harv gave me the job at the Emerald Room. He said I would be a “barback,” and sure enough, I was. I worked in a storeroom just behind the long heart-pine-and-brass bar. There was a loading dock outside. Part of my job was bringing in the beer kegs and the cases and crates the trucks brought.

There were a lot of Irishmen doing the drinking back then. After a while Harv let me draw drafts and open bottles for the beer drinkers and pour straight shots if he was busy. The place was what they call blue collar. There weren’t a whole lot of people wanting mixed drinks. It was mostly the Irish workers from the cannery, the railroad, and the cement plant coming in when their shifts changed or in the evening. So I poured a lot of shots.

I tapped the beer kegs and hooked them up to the spigot under the bar when one ran dry, which was often. I had just finished doing that one night and was standing on the loading dock outside, staring across Stark’s Inlet when a car drove up and two men got out. They came up the steps and crossed the dock

“Harvey Kelleher. You know him?” said one of them, a weightlifter with no neck, no hair and a t-shirt that had what looked like the face of a space alien on it. The other one was slim and shifty-looking, with a blotchy beard and enough oil in his hair to lube a tractor.

“Never heard of him.”

“You lying scumbag!” yelled the weightlifter. “He works here. Go get him. Now!”

I went to the bar. “Harv, there’s two trained seals back here, and they...”

But Harv wasn’t listening anymore. He threw down his towel and ran out the front door. When I turned around the two of them were back in their car and were speeding out of the lot. I went into the bar. Harv’s grilled specialty was sausage sandwiches with thick onions, hot sauce and plenty of Duke’s, and he had two of them working. I served them and poured a few beers. Then I got nervous. I told everyone the bar was closing.

Next day, I came in at two o’clock, like always. There were a few people drinking and as usual, Harv had sausages sizzling.

“Who were they?”

Harv pushed me into the storeroom.

“They followed me all the way to Frogtown,” he said. “I lost them down there.”

“They looked...determined. They might be back...”

“Look,” he said, pointing to a shoebox on a whisky crate. He flipped the top off. There were guns inside. He picked up a long-barreled pistol.

“They won’t jack with this here blue steel .44,” Harv said, with what I thought was a sick-looking grin. He held it in front of his face, then slipped it into his waistband. He handed me the other pistol, a .38 snubby revolver. We locked eyes. We both knew that they would jack with his blue steel .44.

“Hell, I don’t want to shoot anybody,” I said.

“Take it. Somebody might want to shoot you,” said Harv. I stuffed the revolver into my jeans.

I needed this damn job.

Three days passed and things seemed to get back to normal at the Emerald Room.

Then, on the fourth night, I was breaking whisky bottles out of a case. There was usually noise in the bar, the jukebox playing when somebody fed it, and always the hum and jabber of voices.

Suddenly, the noise stopped and there was a collective sigh. It sounded like a breeze pushing in across the inlet.

Harv was lying on his back on the duckboard under the bar. He had a knife-handle in his chest. The drinkers rushed the doors. I just knelt there, looking at Harv.

“I paid the vig,” he whispered. “Been paying it for a year. Then they said they wanted the nut. All of it. No way I could raise it...”

Then the tip of the knife—which the cops later said was a WWII bayonet—scraped against the duckboards a little and Harv was gone.

I put both of Harv’s guns under my mattress. I got a job at the cement plant a couple of weeks later. I passed the Emerald Room often. It stayed boarded up for a couple of years.

Not long ago, I drove by and the plywood had been taken down. There was a sign saying it was now a fabric shop. ❖

The Imagination

The imagination is the source of everything seen and unseen.
The poet cannot even begin to write or speak a single verse without its presence of spirit having first been.
The magic flying carpet of the mind's ability to travel.
Solve a puzzle that it created and always knows how it should unravel.
I is the creator of the magi that is architect
and builder of its own nation.
Now do you see when you put those three together it becomes part of creation?
How come you might say, I do not understand this philosophical situation?
Let me show you then this way of what is? I-magi-nation.
Yes, the "I" is the essential trueself of you.
"MAGI" is the magician that thinks to do.
The "NATION" is the idea in manifestation form that's come true.
Now do you see why? "IMAGINATION"
is the master key behind all of creation.
It's even been said by ancient wisdom that the ALL imagined the universe into existence.
Isn't that how the dreamer dreams a dream without any thought of resistance.

—Ged Austin
A.K.A. The Urban Poet

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What to Do About the Cat

By Wes Tern

"Hear me out," the gray mouse said to the other mice gathered. "We all agree we can't go on living this way anymore, right?"

The others nodded. There were mumbles of agreement among the mice.

"The way I see it we have two options. We can move—"

"Move?" a mouse in the audience yelled.

"No way!" another shouted.

"I'm with you!" the gray mouse insisted. "I don't want to move either. None of us do."

"You can say that again!" yet another mouse yelled.

"Our other option," the gray mouse said, "is to get rid of the cat."

The crowd fell silent. One mouse somewhere near the middle stood up on its haunches. "You mean," the mouse said, and it ran its tiny paw across its throat.

"Kill the cat?" another mouse shouted.

"What is wrong with you!"

"He's lost it," a mouse near the front said to another. Then he yelled, loud enough for the gray mouse to hear: "Mice don't murder!"

"Maybe not," the gray mouse conceded. "But that cat murders *us* every day. How many mice has she killed? Fifty? A hundred? I can't even keep count. We have to do *something*."

"But *kill* her?" the mouse near the front said.

"Come on..."

"Maybe *you* think killing is an acceptable way to solve a problem," came a shout from the crowd, "but most of us think it's disgusting. It goes against everything we believe in."

"But—" the gray mouse began.

"Just stop!" a particularly big mouse

shouted. The size of him, and the strength of his voice, made the gray mouse, as well as all the others, fall silent. "I think you've said quite enough," the big mouse added. He stepped up onto a matchbox, which made him tower over the other mice. He looked around. "Doesn't anyone here have a better idea than him?" he said.

"I have an idea," came a voice from near the back. It was a young mouse. Her voice was high and squeaky.

"Shhhh, everyone," the big mouse said, quieting everyone down. "Let the girl speak." The little mouse cleared her throat. "Instead of killing the cat," she said, "why don't we put a bell around her neck. That way, we will hear her when she approaches. Problem solved."

The mice were silent for a few seconds, then they erupted in cheers and shouts of approval. The gray mouse at the front of the room, who had gathered everyone there in the first place, looked around in disbelief. *This is the idea they like? A bell around the cat's neck?*

"Excuse me, everyone!" the gray mouse shouted. His voice was drowned out by the noise of the crowd. He yelled louder. "Guys!" he yelled.

"Guys!" They all quieted down just enough so that the gray mouse could be heard. "Who will put the bell on the cat's neck?" he asked.

That volume of their voices increased, a loud chatter that made the room deafening. But

almost as soon as it began it died down.

The mice's heads swiveled from the gray mouse at the front to the little mouse in the back, the one who had proposed the bell-around-the-neck idea. They stared at her.

"Well?" someone in the crowd said. "Tell us. What's the plan?"



The little mouse shrugged.

"What about you?" the big mouse on the matchbox said, looking at the little mouse. She shook her head vigorously. "No way," she squeaked. "Never."

"Well, someone here must be willing to do it," the big mouse guessed. He looked around. "Well?" he said. "Is there anyone willing to put the bell around the cat's neck?"

There was dead silence. Not one mouse moved.

"In that case," the little mouse in the back added. "Maybe it's better if we just move."

The crowd erupted in complaints and shouts and the big mouse put his hands up and shushed everyone. It took him a minute, but he quieted them down. He turned to the gray mouse at the front of the room. All the mice turned to him.

"All right," the big mouse said. "Go on."

The gray mouse pointed to himself as if to say *Who, me?*

"We're listening," the big mouse assured him.

"But I thought it goes against everything you believe in," the gray mouse said.

"Just humor us," the big mouse replied.

"Nobody here wants to move. And nobody wants to die trying to put a bell around a cat's neck. Tell us your plan. How can we kill the cat? You *do* have a plan, right?"

"Oh, I have a plan," the gray mouse said.

"But before I go into it, I'd ask that the young ones leave the room. This isn't something for little ears to hear." ❖



First published in Write.,
edited by Katie Winkler,
Spring-Summer 2022 issue

Two Writers

By Barry Green

There are writers who have various degrees in creativity from universities. They have read and studied stories and novels that others have written. They have studied structures and subjects, and completed research to develop characters with such complexity. The stories they tell are confused with historical recitations, images of past realities engraved on the pages.

There are others whose pens rush to complete the words that tell tales that would be dreams if sleep were allowed, where the characters come from the ether, never having existed but thinking they had. In these, there is no history, but there is a context that makes one think there could be. The characters' faces are what they would appear to be if the dreams had been allowed to develop. But they are like characters who were aborted before they could be born. Ones who would have liked to have had the chance to come into the world and grow a bit before becoming a piece in a story. Ones who are a bit more difficult to describe due to the fact that they were prevented from being. They have no history. Only a fiction, drawn on a page from the emptying mind of an overly tired person. The two writers can be one person or they can be one hundred. All the same and all not the same.

In the end, stories become themselves. It's just a question of who they choose to have write them. ❖

A Slave of Property

By Victor Schwartzman

Harriet wasted her invaluable time on earth at a job. The only reason she stuck with the job was because it enabled her to buy possessions to help her recover from the job. This circular nature of her life worried her, so one evening she pushed all of her possessions into a big pile in the living room and set them on fire.

She then moved away from the big city and built a hut in the woods. Water came from a nearby stream, food from her garden, clothes from the plants around her. It was not an easy life, but she enjoyed it.

Word eventually got out about the wonderfully strange woman who lived in the woods without possessions. Soon people began to visit. They sought her advice on life. Harriet told them to burn all their possessions. No one followed her advice, but they all felt better just thinking about it.

Over the years, Harriet became a tourist attraction.

Thousands visited her, seeking answers. To answer their questions, she raised money to publish books about the dangers of consumerism by starting a gift shop, Natural Harriet's, where she sold collectables. ❖

Small Rooms

Narrow rooms lit
bright block outside's
large and deep.
Ceiling contains
a sky defined by
a horizon I cannot
touch. In shadow,
I walk through
trees that swallow
my footsteps. I float
on a lake rippled
by wind, enigmas
I cannot grasp.
I cannot open my doors
and my windows,
breathe that wind,
touch rough bark
and wet my feet.
I lie in rooms
small and bright.
Here, everything
is in my grasp.
I can open a small
tight and sweaty fist
to find it empty.

—Richard Dinges, Jr.



Queen Mary

By Kate Petit

When she walked into a room everything stopped, as if a fanfare played for her. The men were drawn to her like minions at a coronation, seeking a nod, a smile, a slight sign of recognition. Her laughter was like grace notes on a perfectly executed flirtation. Her voice was basso profundo. Her joie de vivre was so infectious that men wanted to make love to her and women to sit by her with hopes that they too would be noticed. She wasn't particularly young, or beautiful, or even sexy. Because there was no dissonance in her, she was totally unaware of her sovereignty. She was the perfect resolution to a hallelujah chorus.



Green Zebras and Other Juicy Things

By Nadia Giordana

Attention all gardeners—special report:

Good morning. We interrupt this program to bring you a special report. Early last evening, the Heirloom Tomato Special Forces were alerted to a situation happening at a residence in the suburbs of Minneapolis, Minnesota. The address is otherwise known as The Green Zebra Tomato Orphanage and Adoption Agency. A woman at that location was taken into custody for questioning after several dozen baby green zebra tomato plants were discovered dead and dying in a makeshift greenhouse.

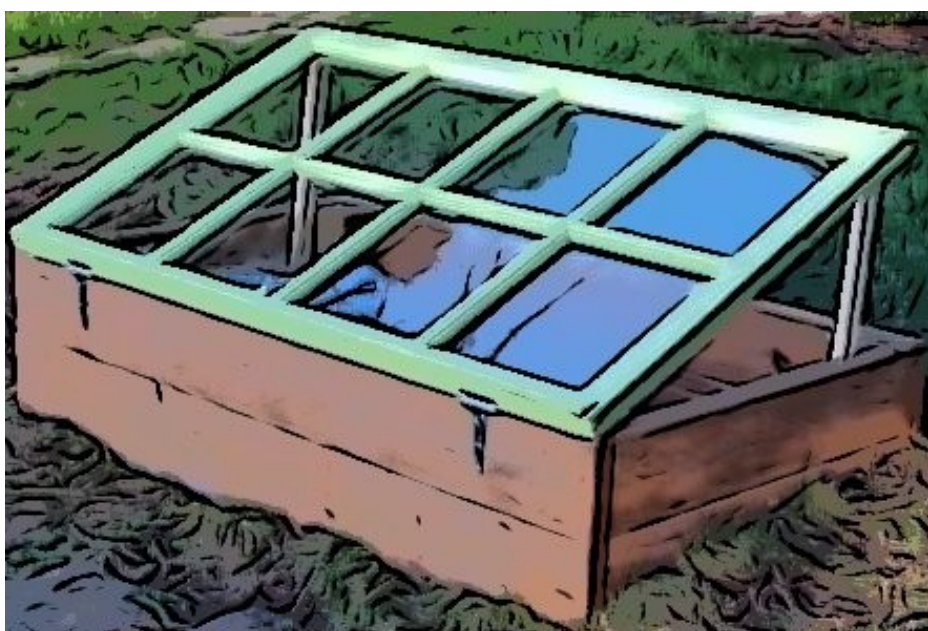
Ms. Nadia Giordana, the woman in question, (who seemed confused) could offer no explanation as to the cause other than to say, “Maybe they got too hot, maybe they got too cold, maybe the fertilizer solution was too strong. They were just fine when I looked in on them Sunday night. I only left them alone for two days!”

We understand that all but one of the baby green zebra

plants are in critical condition and have been moved to a window care unit at the orphanage. They are not expected to live through the week. The one plant that was too tall for the greenhouse was not with the others when they fell ill. It remains strong and vigorous. Ms. Giordana said she will use it to seed future generations of green zebra tomatoes, God willing.

Ms. Giordana is not expected to be charged with a crime, and when asked if she had a final comment, she said, “I loved them! I never meant to hurt them.”

The preceding was a special report from the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Heirloom Tomatoes. We conclude this report with the words, “Oh well, there’s always next year.” ❖



Moon Dust and Martinis with a Twist

By Mary Kay Crawford

- I. The drilling begins sharply at 8 a.m. Monday morning with a discordant din of machinery loud enough to wake my grandmother's ghost.

I want to live like I'm paying attention, but I'd forgotten our condo office email notification:

"Facade restoration to begin Monday"—on the 18-story riverfront condominium I call home.

Blame my absentmindedness on late-night libations garnished with a twist of lemon. I had been drifting along—dream to dream—as the steel scaffolding made its slow, spider-man crawl up the side of the building...

When suddenly the screech of power tools blasts the air. Metal drill bits chiseling and grinding out mortar from the brick facade of the building. Like being at the dentist without the Novocain, only much louder and with different nerve-endings affected.

Northern winds, cyclic freezing and thawing have thrashed and beaten the walls with trumpet-like blasts just as the walls of Jericho—once believed to be impenetrable—before they collapsed.

I cartwheel from bed to a full straight-up (*just how I prefer my martini*) standing position face to face at my bedroom window, eyeball to eyeball with a hard-hatted construction worker.

Am I still dreaming? I wonder.

Now, shocked, and embarrassed, I snap the blinds shut tight. I hear wingbeats. Sparrows flutter. The room grows a shade darker as a teeny tiny spider dislodged from his dwelling place scurries across my windowsill to escape the cacophony of sounds and disruptions about to continue.

I'm in no dream now.

- II. I dress quickly to retreat from the echoing reverberations of drill on brick. During a momentary pause, from somewhere down the hall, I hear a cat's small cry.

The steel security door whooshes closed behind me. I stand on the sidewalk gawking up at my building through a curious haze of something that looks like moon dust.

Stretched high against the building two workers with apocalypse-grade face masks pound away at the brick with masonry drill bits.

The air uncurls in a kind of rebellion. The shuddering membrane of the building releasing a sense of the past; something mystifying and historical—with a mix of my own DNA. Spreading coarse plumes of yellowish brick-dust into a gloomy haze above me and over the men working on the mezzanine patio level.

Then, moving toward me, through the thick yellowy haze with a ray of sunlight haloing his golden head, Jon, the dog-walker materializes.

Emerging as a vision of loveliness. A mirage of calm in this cityscape of jaw-clenching irritation. His California vibes, silken blonde hair always blown back—even without a breeze. His congenial, easygoing stride, blue eyes smiling, always smiling. *Who are you, really?* I want to ask with a silent look and narrowed eyes.

"I'm here to relieve the dogs from panic and edginess—and that includes the dog owners as well," he says with a wry smile.

"410 units in this building and 100 dogs!" he adds with emphasis and a hint of pride. I consider the dogs I would recognize. Most might have won *Best in Show* at any local dog show competition. Obedient, submissive, well-groomed, socialized—and yes, even a bit uppity. Most comfortable in an atmosphere of sweet bliss with a relaxing day of play and sleep.

Then there's the cuddly dogs—fluffy with fur like a shag rug. Dogs with faces and expressions that would make for a great

Christmas photo. Healthy and playful with names like Honey Boo Boo, Flower, Tootsie and Lululemon.

“Well, good luck surviving the smog and noise pollution,” the dog-walker says a bit ironically with raised eyebrows—his blue eyes sparkling brighter—as if that’s even possible.

Then for a moment I wonder if I can go with him to wherever it is he is taking the resident’s pampered pets.

- III. Later, I pass my neighbor Nate in the hallway. An athletically fit, at-home employee. Uncharacteristically glassy eyed. Grinding his teeth—the drilling now directly below *his* window.

“How are you handling the noise and dust?” I ask him.

“Are you kidding it’s the decibel level of a jack hammer! It’s unbearable!” he says throwing up his hands.

Then, oddly enough, I imagine a cartoonish aura of squiggly lines and dots—a cloud of airborne dust—penciled in around him, like the Peanuts popular character, “Pig-Pen.”

Once again, I blame the (hallucinatory) side effects of late-night libations garnished with a twist...

I recall Nate’s dog Gus, a pup rescued from some dilapidated home from God knows where. Nate adopted Gus through Secondhand Hounds over a year ago. A dog of mixed breed with floppy ears and distinctly urban vibes. Decidedly un-cuddly Gus, who never looks up or makes eye contact with the neighbors and frankly doesn’t care if you like him or not. Pet him or not. Distracted by whatever fancies him, pulls on his leash oblivious to the strain he is putting on his owner’s muscled body. A short-haired no-nonsense dog that requires only minimal grooming. Just one solid meal portioned out into his stainless-steel non-tip doggie bowl each day.

“How’s Gus doing?” I ask.

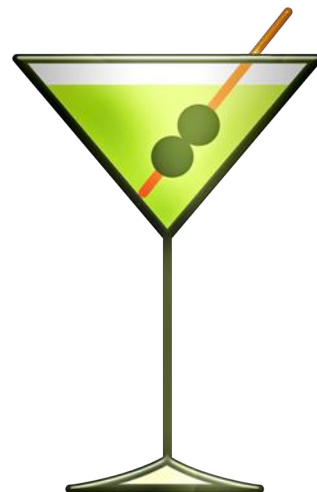
“Oh, Gus? *My dog?* He’s fine. The chaos doesn’t faze him at all. In fact, I believe he’s resting.”

I picture Gus daydreaming. The noise and disruption of the human world does not unsettle the dog. He is quietly adrift in moon dust amidst the clamor of construction. With eyes closed, Gus is discovering West River Road on his own terms—unleashed—with his human, Nate—devoted servant, obediently bringing up the rear.

Call it a version of self-care. Which is to say, I believe, that sometimes life climbs the outside wall of your high-rise building while you are still sleeping, then parallel parks (disguised as scaffolding) right outside your bedroom window—as a hard-hatted worker peers through your partially closed blinds with an expression that is unreadable.

It is at this moment the undemonstrative, unexcitable, and somewhat aloof Gus is to be appreciated.

In the best-case scenario, I pour myself a refreshing libation such as an ice-cold gin martini in a chilled glass garnished with a twist of lemon as I contemplate, then quietly compose a poem for Gus. A poem that accepts what is, with a therapeutic dose of optimism. ❖



Chicago Leaving

1:00 a.m. FM rock Chicago morning;
 Soon to leave—dark escape!
 Anxious waiting minutes, black coffee...

Chicago! Blue and red squad cars;
 Siren wail! Subway screech!
 Honk! Squeal! Rumble! Smack!

And three million faceless daily grimaces.
 I grow hard, shuffle along looking down
 At crumbling sidewalks, gutter filth...

Late night alley-pissing drunks,
 Dim streetlights, stirring shadows,
 Grave next room 3:00 a.m. chatter,

Sleep, drams of raging human herds...
 Two shot—bleeding—one me...
 Doze in bed until late afternoon.

Tough to face callous mammoth Chicago;
 Soul sucking monster,
 Presage of 2070 Minneapolis... Time to leave...

—Michael Rossberg

Perspective on the Edge of Medicine Lake

Giant wings glide silently
 weaving through the trees along
 the edge of Medicine Lake
 landing safely on a limb

An owl with a mouse in its mouth
 sits next to another owl
 In the blink of a peck
 the other owl has the mouse in its mouth
 A good day for the owls
 A bad day for the mouse

I watch from the safety of my kitchen window
 My dog snoring at my feet,
 waits for me to make his breakfast

—Theresa M. Riggs Foushee

A Flower Called Peace

Dark clouds roll in,
 an ominous foreboding
 with the rumblings of
 imminent battle...
 and the flower trembles.

The wind howls as
 the lightning cracks,
 as thunderous bombs
 crash upon the cities...
 and the flower droops.

A tempest floods the land
 with sorrow and death.
 Soldiers fall one by one,
 raindrop by raindrop...
 and the flower wilts.

But as the fury fades
 weapons begin to fall.
 Compassion and love
 stream through the clouds...
 and the flower revives.

Light bathes the land
 as the storm breaks at last.
 Life pulses and throbs
 as freedom returns...
 and the flower blooms again.

—Sarah M. Prindle



If We Had Tails That Wagged

By Leanne M. Benson

"Why don't snakes have eyebrows?" asked the sloth.

"So, that you can't tell when I'm frowning," the snake replied. ~Unknown

We have over forty muscles in our face to help us make expressions. Yet we spend most of our adult lives working to hide our feelings.

Even though I watch other people's expressions or the lack thereof, I seldom think about what my resting face looks like to others. Call it catatonic, highway hypnosis, deadpan, poker face, thousand-yard stare, or RBF. Call it what you will, it's interesting what we say, when we say nothing at all.

Can you just imagine what the world would be like if we all had tails that wagged? A tail that worked independently; sagging when we were sad, wagging when we were happy, and so on. Maybe a tail would help us to understand each other better.

How often do you think about the expressions you wear?



leannembenson.com

Note: This adorable painted illustration and many others are featured in my new children's book, "The Unbelievable Topsy Turvy Day!" Coming soon. Find out more at <https://www.leannembenson.com>.



Children's Hospital Association (CHA) is a group of dedicated volunteers working to raise funds to support Children's Minnesota. Each year, CHA partners with unique programs and services to ensure kids and families are receiving the best pediatric care in the Twin Cities through essential services. For more information, please visit: <https://www.cha-stpaul.org/>

Interested in supporting pediatric care?
Scan the QR code to the right today!



Ode to the Unwritten Poems

Here's to all the poems
 I composed in the shower
 that live in between my
 waking moments
 waiting to be reborn
 The words are still there
 they stare at me from behind
 the shadows of my deepest dreams
 I can't seem to remember
 the order anymore
 so the poems are lost
 Rising like the steam
 from a hot shower
 clouding the mirror
 so I can't see myself clearly
 If the words still live
 surely I will choreograph them
 or stitch them together
 once more
 If only I could remember
 the first word
 a phrase
 a topic
 or the feeling I had
 that left me
 clean yet shivering
 behind that locked door

—Sarah Routman

Arriving in the wilderness,

you send me postcards of
 sky and dust,
 write *this is where I am*,
 write *you were who I loved*

write *i won't be writing again*
 and then spend the
 rest of your life proving it

—John Sweet

Illusion

We think we know, but we're never really sure.
 They loom above, creatures large and small.
 They look all wrong, all the slanting, bending shapes
 And the mirrors mock us in deception, all of us
 Who pass through this place, brave enough to stare.
 See the pink beehive heads on paper beds?
 The giant slides and such terrifying rides?
 We can scream all we want, but we can never escape.
 I know that I've seen all this and more.
 I remember what happened many moons ago.
 The truth whispers to me, yet I'm still not sure.
 Maybe I don't want to know my past.
 Maybe it shall remain a lingering doubt,
 But I'm entitled to know my history, it's a part of me.
 Yet, the unknown story of who I am remains a mystery.

—Gloria Fredkove

road trip

I started out thinking I was behind
 the wheel
 at first.
 everything seemed straight enough—
 rectilinear even
 further along.

the pavement cracked and bent;
 I made lovers out of some
 of those blind curves
 while you watched
 the horizon through the
 bug-splattered window.

we were four blunt wheels and
 hot asphalt.

at the end of the road
 you found an exit ramp—
 turned out I was just a vehicle
 to get you from point A to
 point B.

—Lee Clark Zumpe

Book of the Month

i.
Due to peer pressure
from today's crowd,
I boast ripped jeans
and shirts fashioned
with bell sleeves but
skip the wild tattoos.
I blow dry my locks
in the bathroom and
don't stir up trouble.

ii.
I have a mother who
buys bigtime novels.
She reads a new one
each month. The last
was a family saga. It
detailed the rejection
of the worst member.
The black sheep had
murdered a daughter.

iii.
My brother lives with
us. He went to prison
once. We condemned
the crime and fought
to ignore his excuses.
I'm worried he might
act like the character
in the dark bestseller
as the story unfolded.

—Sarah Henry

Tails

Like heroes, villains exist to balance a false binary
designed to make sense of an idiosyncratic world.
I love to watch the ways they split their seams,
how they fail to fit
within their designated constructs.
I imagine what could happen
if we allowed ourselves to learn from them.

—Cara Losier Chanoine

Use My Arms

use my arms

to hold back
the wind

to open all
your doors

to carry
the umbrella

to bring you
breakfast

to carry your
coat

to bring in the
birthday cake

to hold your
favorite books

to collect the
shells we love

to dance
for no reason

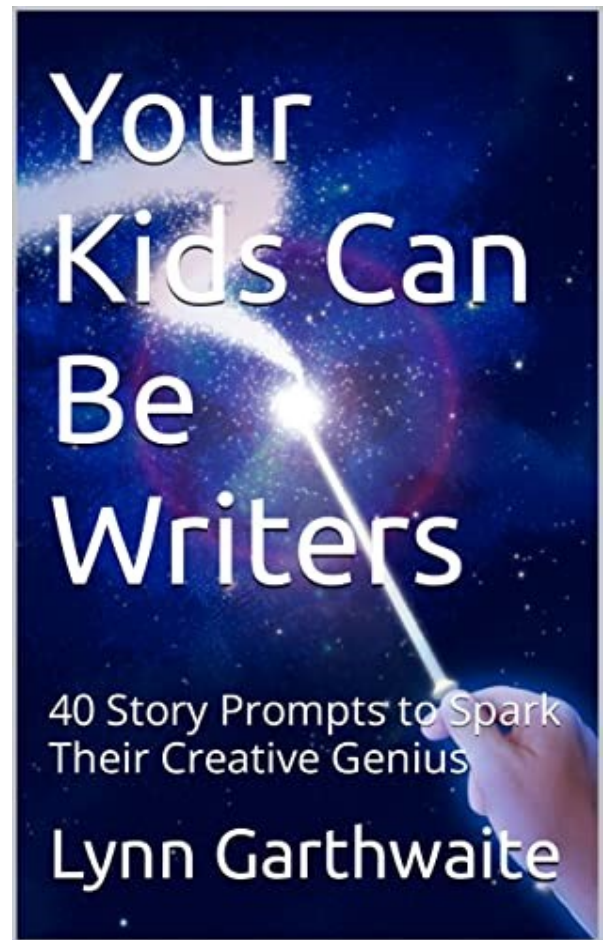
to carry the
flowers you grow

—Dr. Roger G. Singer

Ode to Brown

Earth's body bag of dirt
in her November dress
Silted river running slow under reach of roots
Coffee swirled with curdled milk and
old bananas spotted black
Two years of drought
A cornfield starched, leaves rattling the air
Blood dried upon the hoe
Wet snapper's ancient gleaming back
Devil's food and dark turned plot
Your quiet tongue too easily dismissed
as commoner:
as low, as little, as less.

—Beth Spencer



Author Lynn Garthwaite
BlueSpectrumBooks.com
or Find it on Amazon

Hopping Around the Hallways

Life science was one of my favorite subjects to teach kindergartners. In January, I received frog eggs from a science supply store and gave each child ten eggs in a 5"x 9" clear plastic container. They were responsible for checking the water level and temperature each day and drawing the appearance of their eggs in their journals. We were fortunate to have a tree-lined creek running behind the playground—a great place to release the tadpoles when they became frogs in the spring.

We followed the life cycle from beginning to end. The eggs hatched into wiggly tadpoles. We fed them fish food so they would grow strong and healthy. When they got their back legs, the kids and I went out to the playground to find stones for the tadpoles to jump on if their gills turned into lungs before we got back from our spring break, starting the next week. The tadpoles began getting their front legs the last day before vacation.

I was the first teacher to arrive back at school after spring break. The custodian was waiting for me at the door. He had his hands on his hips and a bandana over his nose. The smell of rotten cabbage hit me as I walked inside. Ninety percent of the tadpoles were frogs, their dead, slimy bodies plastered around the school hallways. The custodian handed me a bucket and a mop without saying a word. I spent the next two hours cleaning and disinfecting the floors and counters before my colleagues arrived. Lesson learned!

Life cycle of frogs
Hopping around the hallways,
freedom was short-lived.

A haibun by Janice Strootman
from *Child Heart*
find it on Amazon.

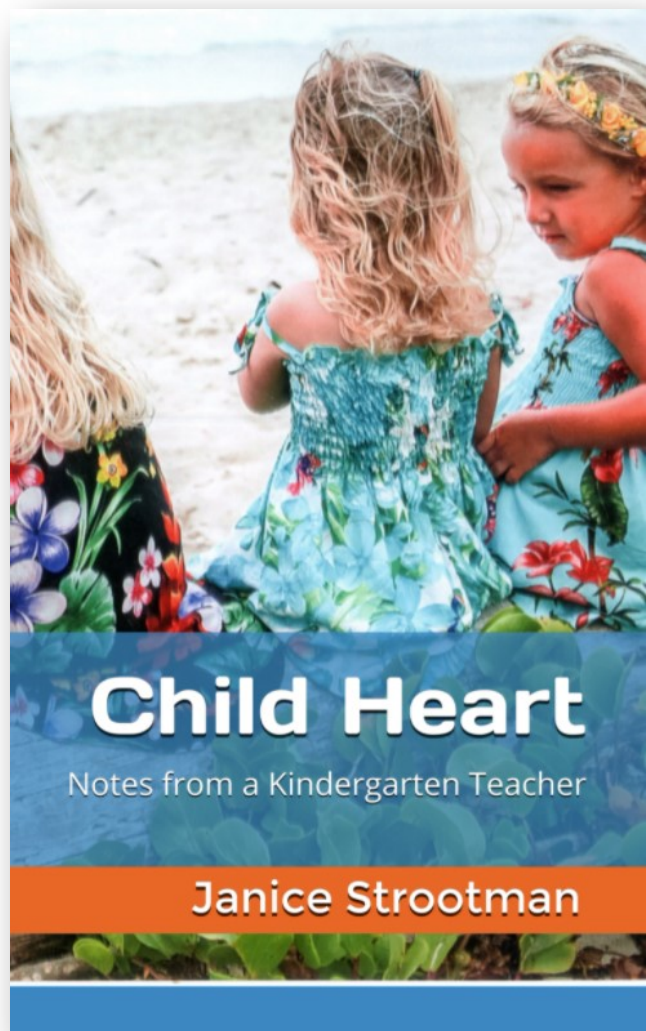
I Inhale My Footsteps

The sun is a volcano. Leaves take lava
and make the flesh I am made of
is the story I dumb down for myself.

The gases I inhale fuel my footsteps.
When my mind is blank, I drag my battered
feet through the cut grass. My feet are deep
thinkers. Language flows from the sun

and the leaves, not me. What am I? I am a slice
of deli meat merely and look, a hawk
swings in lofty circles above my morning
rounds.

—Cameron Morse



Neurotic Nights

For Me

Does the scrim of night squeal and squeak
as it drops over yesterday? I'm so deaf tonight
muffled off from my surroundings

these days. It conceals the set of my life—
scribbled on charcoal, forming a sheet of night.
I adore how you always swallow daylight.
Each evening it's such a thriller observing a killer.

Damn it, I've become little orphan Shawn,
homeless and carless, and prowless,
I've skinned off all the matter that matters

down to the bone. I am the real Skeletor,
I've seared in payment with my pain—
I flayed it deeply, to fucking feel anything at all.
I filet myself away. I'm as numb as an overdone whore

all shaking for her final Fentanyl score.
And I stand alone here on my stage. Herr Director...
mein Angreifer, why have you blocked me only Down Center?

You've caged me in a box nobody can leave or enter.
I'm this chasm gaping at the audience. I've nowhere else to go.
Merely an emptied set or prop left to enter. Each life I end a beginner.
Oh scrim of night how I pray you stay lowered and fixed—

I don't want anything back from your moiling blacks.
Yet no matter how persistent my prayers dawn kindles away
the way a phoenix draws life's spark from its own ash.

I watch the charcoal of night lighten,
so much water dilutes this watercolor—
it rises above that slop a poorly painted prop.
Disc God out of Egypt. Aten, you ascend as siphoned as I—

you're so lousy and weakened with kindness,
always revealing everything in everyone's path.
Though the fire of your glare still sears your subjects

who sink and drown in the third wave.
Her kindness peaks her appetite,
this god who eats and drinks only life
the way death always gobbles up hope—

like her I am small for my kind,
far too young to rule as a queen.
We're both too stuffed on life-shit for trivial things.

—Shawn Nacona Stroud



Virtual Reality

You walked
right into it

like walking in on
a bank robbery
in progress

the robbers
your usual lineup
of surly thugs

like the bad hombre
staring back at you
unshaven
from the mirror
every morning

or your wife
chafing from razor burn
uncomprehending

when you walk in on
her animated conversation
with an inanimate friend

her virtual self
face-to-face
with the literal you.

—Patrick T. Erickson

All the Things I've Learnt From a Shooting Star

to emerge from bits of night
that wrap themselves around breaths of cloud
to glaze bedroom windows, and fill in light
in the ambiguous shape of a lingering wish
to touch outstretched fingers—slowly,
cautiously
and settle in the center of palms
lending only a speck of light—deliberately,
comfortably

to fold myself between pages, that hold
unsteady, uncertain, unknown poetry
and despite knowing, that poetry is uncertain
to still cling onto every word
to rise, and tower over those watching me
to fall and drop like dew on velvety leaves
and when I fall, to see if those who watched me
when I rose
are still watching

to mount bits of yellowing breeze
the residue of summer, sewn into the sky
and linger outside a soldier's barrack
pressing my being against a window
that bears footprints of teardrops, that are yet
to be shed
by the white, cloud-cruised eyelids
of the sky

to weave in and out —
of a mother's prayer, to punctuate
a song, sung in a slow, scratchy voice
to be talked about, and written on
and maybe, if I am lucky, to be argued about

to be looked at, to be wished on
but, most importantly
to be wished for

—Impish Praniti

Dream from Pearl Court Brooklyn, New York

Comets circle in orbit through cool
evenings as leaves fall. red, yellow,
brown leaves coloring sidewalks.
Crowds of people come home stopping
to talk about cold nights, slow trains,
high prices, navigating this mad mad world.
Stepping in front of the apartment building,
Gloria saw the familiar "Pearl Court"
incised in capital letters over the entrance.
Windows rattle as she undressed for bed.
Adjusting her pillow, Gloria relaxes...
gathering calmness around her.
The familiar cacophony of heat rising
through stairways hissing along walls
echoed through hallways.
Entering ebony night, she came upon a
dreamscape of hills full of heather, fragrant
pink heather. She stands waiting on a top peak.
Waving her arms, tossing seeds into heaven.
Planting empty fields of night with rows of light.

—Joan McNerney



Betty Lou Robinson

Soldiers of Jesus

When soldiers of Jesus come calling,
 I kneel in the boat,
 one ear to the bottom,
 hearing their tears
 breaking in waves
 on banks of the river.
 I can't stop the light
 from leaking its mercy.
 Naked, without armor,
 my breath is the hoot of an owl
 with feathers of frost
 on glass in my window.
 Draw back the dark curtain.
 Roll back the eye of the moon.
 Dive in the waters of Zion.
 Listen as ladies in parlors
 sing out as a car flips over
 and into the Neches.

*I heard an old, old story
 How a savior came from glory
 How he gave his life on Calvary
 To save someone like me.*

I carved those words on the flesh of a woman
 who drowned all her children,
 but she never stopped howling,
 DON'T LISTEN TO FISHES SING HYMNS!
 Hang onto your soul, little man.
 It is dark in the corner and women in town
 are smoking and drinking just like the men.
 But oh, you sainted mothers,
 put an ear to the bottom and hear the cries.
 Hear songs ring from the jaws of catfish.

*He loved me ere I knew Him
 And all my love is due Him,
 He plunged me to victory
 Beneath the cleansing flood.*

Text in italics: Victory In Jesus. Lyrics and
 music by Eugene Bartlett

—Will Brule

Unsent Poem No. 36

Falling in love is a pretty picture
 A picture is best when drawn by hands
 That know what lines to carve and what color
 To paint to bring it all to life

All I can draw is a stick figure, black and white.

A relationship should like a castle stand
 Firm in its foundation, able to weather
 All wounds from wars both in and out,
 In rain or shine, stand proud and tall

But this feels like a sand castle
 About to be whipped away by a wave

I just asked you what we are. Why
 Do you look at me with eyes
 In disbelief? I know how we
 Started but I thought that feelings
 Would bloom. I know you called
 Me his name in bed but
 How can you love someone
 So much so you'd forget
 About me, who's standing in front of you?
 I can be everything he wasn't for you.
 I can be whatever you need of me.
 Haven't I been what you wanted?
 Haven't I been just what you need?
 What are you doing? Don't leave.
 Don't you know my heart's alight for you?
 Don't you there's a song stuck there for you?
 Please.
 Don't leave.

—Sameen Shakya



A Novel Poem

Chapter One

I no longer recognize the flavor of the moon
It has grown bland without sweet or savory taste
Like leftovers forgotten in haste
Left for a more refined and delicate dish.
I wish to dine alone ever since you left.

Chapter Two

Quiet lurks in the corners and surprises me in the dark moments
of sleepless nights.
I am not frightened but nothing seems right when the covers
on the other side of the bed are crisp and unwrinkled
for far too long.

Chapter Three

Spring pretends to be happy.
Bright yellows peak out from rain-drenched deep green grass
that smells of sunshine and that scent I can't place.
Your face hides in the petals of my favorite flowers of the day.
It always rains on Sunday mornings
so I remember your sweet kisses
Luckily, I miss you most in summer.
Spring is merely the foreshadowing
of the loneliness to come.

—Sarah Routman

Timeless

Time glided away today on the wings of a black eagle
Swooping into the indigo starlit night
I watched in awe at the falling stars shooting through
Ivory marshmallows in the sky,
Forming an angel right before my eyes hypnotized.
As stars lit up her pure white sacred Heavenly wings.
She was smiling down at me carrying a message from loved ones
To dry my eyes, don't cry.
Time is ageless and you will see them all again
When you too ride a black eagle into the indigo night
With stars lighting a path to Heaven
A place that is timeless....

— Eva Marie Ann Cagley

Avatars

On occasions
I
am
Don Quixote
searching
values in the wrong time and
space.
In other
Situations,
I become a
brooding Hamlet
guided by a ghost
Seeking loyalty, sincerity, honesty
friendship
in a corrupt Danish
court
fixated on power, wealth
desperate to
separate meanings from
words; words, from inane meanings
in a place full of masks and mirrors,
and
to bridge gaps
between the signifier and signified.
I rage on
unhinged
bitter
during severe storms
exposed
vulnerable
an old King Lear
betrayed!
Stripped of kingdom
gain clarity and sanity.
In contexts different
I
become a Kafka
questing in an absurd world
figuring out new paradigms
for new experiences.
And
bouncing back
Often
I become Lt. Frederic Henry
and/or Santiago
retaining hope
in a bleak and hostile
place.

—Sunil Sharma

Vinyl Run

In a burgundy Buick LeSabre
 stopped before a storefront
 stammering "Records! Records! Records!"
 waited a professor
 with salt-and-pepper hair
 puffing on a pipe
 packed with Dutch Masters tobacco
 on a break from weekend yardwork
 while his bespectacled boy with brackety braces
 lingered inside,
 fingering forty-fives and albums and
 mulling over which artistes
 merited his allowance
 and the privilege of spinning on
 the stereo supplied
 by the chap in the car
 watched through a window
 by an incredulous clerk who
 clucked, "That must be
 the world's most patient man."
 Blushing with shame,
 the teen high-tailed it to the till,
 swapped crumpled banknotes for
 rock 'n' roll and
 rushed to shower his chauffeur
 with contrition and thanks.

—Adrian Slonaker

Whetstone

Dear pupil, I am your whetstone.
 You may look at my form and see no art.
 You may feel my coldness and sense no welcome.
 You may listen to my scraping and hear no music.
 But when you yourself are looked upon,
 you will be seen to be sharper than before.

—Bert Anderson



A Sunrise of my Own

The horizon is awash in all my favorite colors.
 This is called standing out on the porch
 and receiving the gift that I know is coming.
 Beauty doesn't always have to surprise.
 It can be just as expected.

Morning's off its leash
 and comes upon an earth in need of warming and
 brightening.
 I want it to happen to me before all others:
 blood sparked, eyes enriched, skin tapped into by
 the sun.

Then I can go inside and tell the others.
 All you've endured is lifted from you.
 The shadowy parts have become radiantly whole.
 It's far better now than it was just moments ago.

Or I can stay out here,
 where nothing need be dreamed of or imagined.
 The setting is perfect as is.

If only I could rise like this.
 I wouldn't need to step outside.
 I'd just grab the nearest mirror.
 Or one of you at least, I don't care who,
 would tell me what I know already.

—John Grey

(This poem was erroneously attributed to James Keane in WINK 18. Here it is paired with the correct author).

Evening Sounds

He sits there in his garden,
At the closing of the day,
Listening to the sounds that evening brings—
The choirs of the songbirds
As they take their final bow,
The tinkling of the breeze,
Passing through the trees.

The Sun seems to hesitate,
As if reluctant to go,
Stringing on to hills with slippery beams;
And in the lake below the house,
Fish leap for curious flies,
Their percussion on the water—
All adding to the scene.

—John Anthony Fingleton

A Crescent Moon

A crescent moon of diamond white
inclined its enigmatic countenance
To'ard its sole companion
at the verspertine hour
That north star of much renown
which glistered aloft in the cold crisp air
Pervading the empyrean expanse
one sublime night incipient
Amid the darkening ceiling
of the vaulted ev'ntide dome
Arrayed in shimmering attire
of sapphire blue
That quivered in the cool chambers
of a nascent midnight

—d.a. simpson



We travel two by
Two, eager to meet new friends
Along life's roadway.

—Michael Rossberg

Photo By Nadia Giordana

The Husk Finds Its Own Blood Again

It is the moment of
 realization that
 the friend is actually
 a parasite
 and you are the
 host
 For too long convinced
 you had a wasting disease
 only to find
 you had been eating
 for two
 living a life
 for two
 and always without energy
 to support you both
 It is the moment
 of prying off the claws
 and the sucker mouth
 of putting distance between you
 and beginning to heal

—Christopher Clauss

Rejection Reply Unsent

Someone else has been quicker on the uptake than her.
 Less dithering, wishy-washy, indecisive, less dim;
 In broad-minded terms who likes to purr,
 Someone less critical, less cautious than him.

Someone more open, intellectual, clued in,
 Less material, corporeal, or grasping; more true.
 Someone more expansive, less hesitant to win,
 Who processes text, lines likes to chew.

Someone who understands all cryptic clues;
 Less dense, or biased; less prudent, or prim,
 More avant-garde, more receptive to cues;
 Someone less pompous, less likely to trim.

Are they sorry to have missed this random chance?
 Are they likely to change their racial stance?

—Sultana Raza



Pretty People

Smile
 even though you're sad
 be perky
 and then they'll think
 you're alright
 every day is paradise
 your kingdom is
 where I reside
 living in the sunshine
 of Summer
 even though
 it's snowing out
 looking for
 that perfect sun
 on red evening
 pretty as a picture
 pretty as the face
 that finds you in the dark
 pretty as all the people who find you
 here and now
 each person you've ever known
 is here with you
 with each breath
 say goodbye
 as they go on their
 way

—Randi Whipple

Back from the Front

"They kept coming. Delivery vans, mail trucks even."

Every 8p.m. we emerged, blinking, from our cozy, book-lined bunker, to applaud you from our rooftop.

"It was a trade center turned field hospital."

And every night we stared at the coiffed, heeled announcer, pointing at rising columns on charts labeled Infections and Deaths.

"And they lay them on the sidewalks, some already dead. The families forbidden to say goodbye."

But the media already told us; No masks for you, garbage bag capes. Shortage of beds, ambulances, ventilators; patient-lined corridors, ice rink morgue.

"The nearest sink was 800 metres away. We couldn't wash them. The smell ..."

But TV sucks reality out of things. Tricks you into believing it's all just a movie.

"Many colleagues with families didn't go home at night, afraid of infecting them."

But you were real. Telling me, blinking down at your coffee, voice wavering. After it was all over. For now, at least.

"But I did. After my shift, I'd collapse on the couch, hug my dog, and sob."

—Anita Haas

Inspired by the lockdowns in Spain during the initial COVID-19 outbreak.

Warm Southern Rain

as my mother watches it falling
like the years, she has seen much
remember the good
and the bad

she watches the rain fall
washing away the sins of
the world

if you live as long as her
what would you remember?

what would you regret ?

—Erren Geraud Kelly

Hearing Her Voice

When I hear my lover's voice, music to my soul
Sweet lyrical tones echoing throughout the day
Giving purpose, resolve, overwhelming love.
Time no longer presses hard, minutes swiftly lost
But each minute precious, memories enshrined.
Life enhanced with her voice, lovingly cherished
Echoing soft like pealing church bells on Sunday morn.

Never thought nor understood such love could be
Until she came entering my heart, enthroned
Giving wondrous heights of happiness and passion
With desire to be united soulmates until we die,
Sharing, encouraging and supporting, ever faithful.
She is the best of me, the beat of my heart
Reason for each joyous breath I take to live.

—Colin Ian Jeffery

The Shadow

I'm never too lazy
not to cast a shadow.
There it is,
thin and stretched out,
from the tip of my toe
to the edge of the path.
If I move,
(an unlikely occurrence),
it will move with me.
If I flop to the ground,
it's already there,
a flat dark greeting committee.
If having a shadow
involved hard work,
then I'd be shadow-less.
But all it takes
is occupying a body.
And, though indolent, lethargic,
I can still do that.
I've seen others' shadows
jogging along the sidewalk,
hustling, bustling through the city,
working out in a gymnasium,
even skipping rope,
or performing summersaults
in a grassy field.
My shadow seems satisfied
with the languid life I lead,
the steps I take
to take the fewest steps necessary.
To quote T.S. Eliot,
"between the idea/and the reality/
between the motion/and the act/
falls the shadow."
It even falls
where there are none of these.

—John Grey

Eagle

Gliding as if there was no weight
a jumble of feathers
wide as an F-15EX
but much smoother on the heated updrafts
along a lonely stretch of bald cypress
at the edge of an Everglades hollow
he hunts
running silent running deep
fathoms of feathers and flight
trajectory depthless
no sound only a blur downward
seconds pass
then the claws
a flurry of dust and prize fighter moves
as the raptor shears mice meat
minced and splattered
shattered and scattered
I know the feeling
listing taking on water
bilge pumps a faded memory
how the terror in your eyes
grip this infinitely quiet moment
faint breaths then the silence
as the bird emerges from the field
silent flight bright
back towards the sun
back into light
where your breath is on its way
ascending...

—Mark Hammerschick



The Best of Being

Sometimes

I don't want to board my train of thought,
the one casually carrying baggage
in the cargo hold to feed a million judgements,
the unpleasant thoughts,
the wondering what others must think
after they found me hiding in my dark depth of
disconnection.

Words have got the best of my being.
The best of my being is words.

The reason the cactus stands alone and
unembraceable is because he hoards moisture in a
dry land.
Who could love someone capable of that?

From dust to dust says eternity.
From darkness the light sings the sun.
And the cheese stands alone hiding
A story of a red wheelbarrow glazed in
Rainwater, beside the white chickens
Who came first.

Through my fog a child hugs his mom,
eager to show off his new trick called affection.
Past the child is the boy who hid a dozen presents
around town, wrapped in notebook paper,
a hope for strangers' happiness.

Who's to say what these feelings are from?
I just know where they live.
Why is the volume turned up for some
and the music tuned out by others?
I just know the place hidden
inside these words that
dive down deeper
and forget this all.
A man from earth has fire and music,
smiles and laughter, loving, and living to do.

Sometimes I think about the son
who came before.
Great grandfather,
what would be felt

in the bask of your light?

So here you are.
Where you can't stay.
Feel that visceral fear seize at the
thought
of this body's fate
and what choice will you have
but to fill every corner
of each unspent day
with as much meaning
as can be mustered—
mastering what masters us.
We get the best of life when we give
away everything we
have left for living.

—Luke M. Armstrong

Happy Anniversary

Our anniversary night
And all day we
Have been doing work
In separate rooms
With separate minds

We didn't wake up
Until after 1 p.m.
Both depressed
And hung over
A nasty combination

Waiting on you
To dress for dinner
Even though it will
Be much more quickly
For me to watch you undress

Six years, this routine
Routine where we seldom
Even understand each other
Yet we know the alternative
Would be much worse

—Grant Armstrong

Keyboard

Keyboard dancing, poet-writer,
old bold, ribbons are worn out,
type keys bent out of shape.
40 wpm, high school,
Smith Corona 220 electric ultimately
gave out, carrying case, lost key.
No typewriter repairman anymore.
It is this media, new age apps,
for internet dreams, forged nightmares,
nothing can go wrong, right?
Cagey, I prefer my Covid-19 shots
completed one at a time.
Unfinished poems can wait,
hang start-up like Jesus
ragged on that wooden cross,
revise a few lines at a time;
near the end, complete to finish.
I will touch my way out of this life;
as Elton John says,
“like a candle in the wind.”
I will be at my keyboard late at night
that moment I pass, my fingertips stop.

—Michael Lee Johnson

Cold

The little puppy
raises his paws
after each step
and examines them.

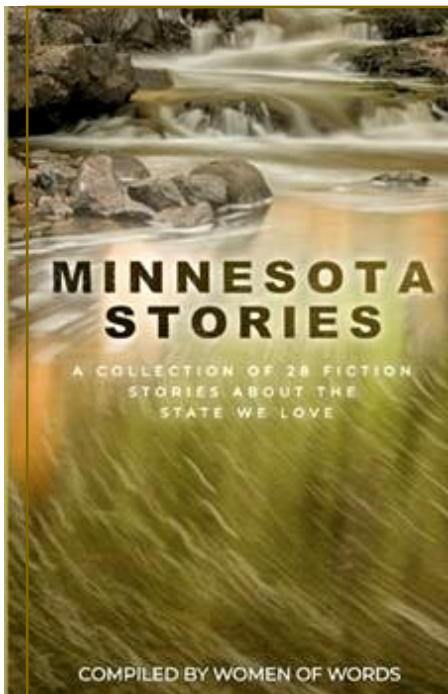
The little boy
cracks the
ice gently
and then ferociously.

Both are fascinated by the
small holes in the ice
where the water escapes
when pressure is applied.

Like a water volcano
like a crack in a lake
or a sea
or a river.

The cold water
has nowhere to go
it runs, and slows
and freezes in place
like a life.

—Morgan Bazilian



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Joan is Joan

Handsome as Handel
 foolish as Aethelred
 strong as Brunhild
 Joan jumped astride
 the log fence
 in the barnyard
 straddled it
 a moment or more,
 sat there looking at me,
 hot as all get-out
 in her tight dungarees.

On the fence
 distended thighs
 around fence-log bulging;
 undoubtedly pressing redoubtable
 fleshy gates together,
 sacred recesses, secrets
 I only saw in my dreams.

You taunting tyrant!
 Deliberate sorceress!

My heart cried foul
 but jam-packed with passion
 my penis perked,
 randy and ready

and a moment more
 and Joan offloading,
 thighs, legs,

safe she stood
 on the other side,
 marching off
 to some distant destiny,
 not mine.

Gone for good.

Playing second fiddle,
 smirking Francesca,
 looking on from the wings,
 blew me a beckoning
 languishing kiss.
 Laughable!

(Joan cont.)

Joan, my pride's on holiday,
 I'll kneel before you,
 before the downy gates
 of my earthly paradise,
 ever sought, never found.

Joan of my lust
 don't count me out,
 don't let me be blue...

but she's gone, she left,
 leaving me gestureless,
 stiff as my own post
 and foolish
 in the empty barnyard air.

—Jack Harvey

Winter Whisperings

Hushed voices speak of
 harbingers of hard winters
 Native tales abound

Algonquian legends
 resonate through November's
 houses on the hill

Wretched dogs howl in
 the distance, shattering the
 public countenance

Thunderclaps create
 drum-like cacophonous songs
 Somber tones prevail

Lightning flashes
 Jagged bolts illuminate a
 scene of gothic intrigue

Ashen faces of
 terrified children peer out
 from frosted windows

Bone-chilling cold
 wraps a village in fear and
 the windigo returns.

—Nadia Giordana

**Anatomical Perfection**

Seared the boiling holes
 through the sun
 and back
 the bone-structure
 wrapped around
 bright blue eyes
 in a tight knot.
 The gilded frame
 unusually
 bettered with time
 barely ageing
 in the raw rays
 of the moonshine.
 The reflection
 of the stars
 at the bottom
 of a well
 wouldn't do justice
 to such a cellular miracle
 so natural
 as to appear orchestrated
 by the creator
 in the eye
 of the night
 where there
 can only be
 magic
 beyond the daylight.

—Gavin Bourke

Zulu

still, the crowds takes some
 getting used to
 even the sight of women
 showing their boobs becomes
 boring
 the hours feel staggered
 until the first sign of a float
 and everyone races to find a good spot
 catching beads are easier
 if you are tall
 with doubloons, trap them under
 your foot
 then grab and leave quickly
 eating a jelly doughnut next to a man
 drinking a Miller beer won't seem
 weird
 and if you're going down Bourbon Street
 and some trickster tries to bet you asking
 " i know where you got them shoes"
 say " i got them on my feet,"
 and walk on

—Erren Geraud Kelly

The Waiting Hydrant

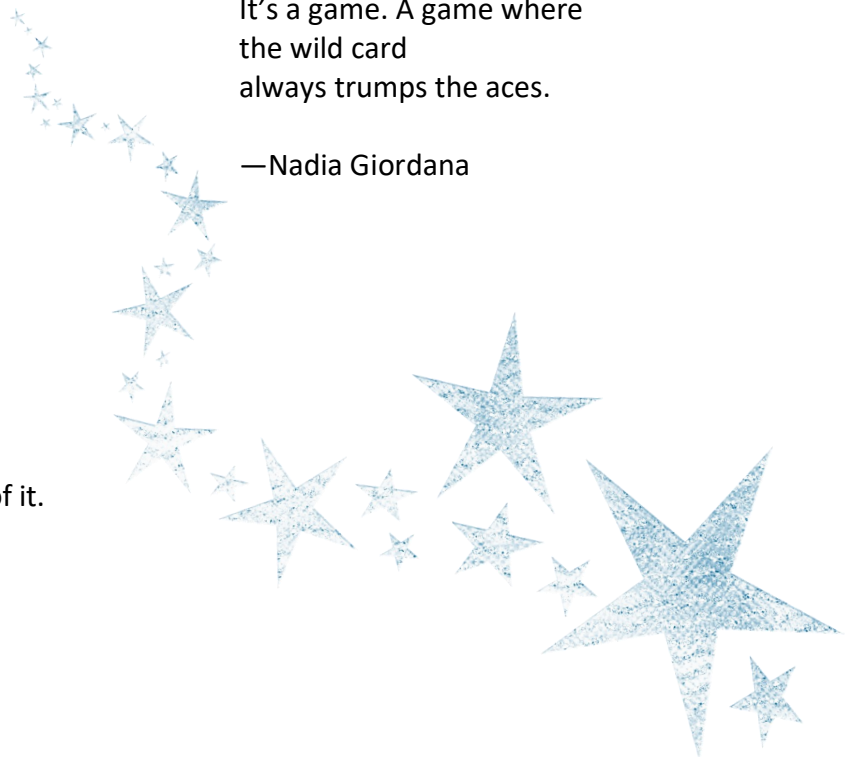
The fire hydrant stands outside
 along the street.
 Its only use right now
 is the comfort of knowing that it
 is there in case one needs it.
 Green cap, yellow base,
 no dogs nearby to take advantage of it.
 It is taken for granted that it
 will work in case of a fire.
 You will work, won't you?
 Please answer me.
 Rust, rust, rust.

—Duane Anderson

**Upon Writing a Love Poem
for Someone Else**

She gave you fair warning—
 and it wasn't
 the first time.
 She told you she was
 falling in love with you—
 that you should show her
 the other side of you
 before she fell too hard,
 too deep,
 too hopelessly snared.
 But you didn't.
 Ha, that was a joke,
 a missed opportunity
 if ever there was one.
 I don't think she minds though—
 not yet anyway.
 She's a queen.
 So what will you do now?
 Now that you
 have all the power.
 That's what love is,
 you know. Power. The one
 who loves the least
 wields the power,
 makes the rules.
 It's a game. A game where
 the wild card
 always trumps the aces.

—Nadia Giordana



An Old Poet's Walk Through A Graveyard

He always liked to walk among the dead—
for him it was a secret pleasure to imagine
the lives of once breathing, thinking beings.
He would stop at each tombstone, curious
perhaps more than reverent, for he had long
known the body was just a set of clothes
the soul wears in a world where appearances
matter more it seems than what lay inside...

The old man liked to compare his years to
those chalked on each stone, continually
amazed that so many had died with fewer
years on their belts, so to speak—not
that he thought his 74 winters was a lot:
yet seen backwards in time, all the summers
and all the snows and all the fallings of dried
out leaves dying dressed in color like kings,
all those memories wouldn't fill a large
basket in that living library called memory.

There was a newish looking gravestone with
one of those weather resistant photos of a
handsome young man who died in his 24th
year—the old man always wondered how
the young die—by a rare illness, or suicide,
or was he doing something he should not
have been doing, and karma took notice?

In the years practicing his little-lauded hobby
the old poet found old graveyards to be best,
for old graveyards have markers of lives that
turned to dust a long, long time ago: 100, 200
years for some—but for the old poet it was as
though they had died yesterday, because they
were new to him, and his mind's eye could see
them all living life large again in their own slice
of time, in their own worlds, with beauty and
pain, with loss and joy, with grace and fear....

There were so many folks to visit: each one
whose little stone house he stopped by he
introduced himself to, said hello, wished
them well, and wondered about what sort
of life the woman who died at 36 had led,
or the really old man of 98 with the funny,
old fashioned name—did he regret missing

the century mark, the old poet wondered.

Some graves he did not like to see, for
they were the graves of babes, who
left the world less than a year after
they had entered it with such promise—
some died within weeks or months,
a few died the day they were born—
all spoke in stone of hearts broken,
of hope stolen, of love taken away....

—Nolo Segundo



Smooth Landings

Like in every-day life
We all hope for
A calm and safe lift-off
And a smooth landing.
In between, we pray
That on the next take off,
The next experience,
We'll learn to be more cautious.
We'll look both ways,
As well as up and down to see
Who's sharing our skies,
Waving wildly as they fly by.
What a view we have
From way up high
Looking down on others
With pride in our eyes.
Learning to fly takes some courage
Because failure is far to the ground
Safety is what keeps us
Up in the sky, homeward bound.
Bumpy landings are just practice
For future life events
When you hope for more smooth days
With both hands on your wheel of life.

—Connie Anderson

Minutiae

To the high place, upon ice,
in which my man lives
daintily.

A heated room.
Plants, cushions.
Glass containers.
Minutiae.

Pebbles, bits of textile.
Pictures cut
from fashion magazines.

Marbles, representing planets,
suspended in translucent glycerine.

I cross the snow,
the sky a cabinet
of silver pieces,
that move,
with hooks, handles
and grooves,
in ways determined
by their shapes.

All is provisional with me.
Suppose I'm late to the loft.
Suppose I send the friends
away. In the time when all is silent
and a cloud covers Arcturus.

All is only scenery,
a handy condition
that nature provides
that something large
and broadly useful, something energetic
may be built,

provided it be something also rugged
and attractive.

Something like a bell
with some magnanimous saint
graven on it—St. George

who plays sports
and does not hesitate
to thrust his pike
at pretty crocodiles.

Hey! Someone calls me.
I look up to see a head in a window
that seems to have opened in the sky.

Here I am, I say.
I can't see you, he replies.
It is after midnight. It is cold.
How long will it take you to get up here?

It is not so cold, I say.
But I am coming. I will be there soon.

I'm going to bed, he says.
I have to work in the morning.

And draws his head inside.

—Uri Rosenshine

Hands in War

All she sees are the hands:
Chubby baby hands waving to the convoy of trucks
rumbling past, withered gnarled hands
gripping their possessions as they walk west
meaty man hands filling soda bottles
to build Molotov cocktails
teachers' trembling hands holding
children's hands through their school's rubble
reporter's hands holding a microphone up to an airstrike
survivor piano hands playing Chopin amid the ruins
daily images saturate her viewing
and sicken her heart hands lifting refugees
onto train platforms laying out mattresses on
a Polish gym floor warming over a street fire
dabbing antiseptic on a burn victim cupping
water to clean a muddy face clasping
to plea for a no-fly zone—finally she looks
down at her own hands,
clenched in prayer.

—Phyllis Dozier

Crows

Out walking in the cold of winter
 I hear a cacophony of crows
 Soaring in from all directions
 To roost in the trees beside the creek
 So many I can't count
 There's no question they are
 Flocking together just to talk
 Cackling, cheering, hopping from perch to perch
 Little groups form, dissolve, reassemble
 They are clearly visiting old friends
 Flying over to check in, have a word
 Off to another branch
 To chatter with someone else
 You see such gatherings in warmer weather
 But rarely in bleak cold
 They're so delighted with each other
 Catching up on all the news
 Rejoicing in communion
 Like us
 Yearning for connection
 Flying toward each other
 In peril, in yearning, in hope ...

--Carol Allis

Time Saved

In motion slow one flash at a time
 each beat a billion years apart
 regular a clock without hands
 it keeps us alert to regularities.

The blood of milk stars and strange dust
 flows in veins of a motion yet unfathomed
 carried on the arms and chest of gravity
 to give birth and maintain life to galaxies.

It pulses to make us smile and to make us dream
 in it we are simply without question in this heart
 a big heart relative without boundaries aside
 from those chosen which we cannot see.

On the outskirts of the conceivable
 humans ponder the meaning of it all
 while merely every billion years or so
 one more beat keeps it flawless.

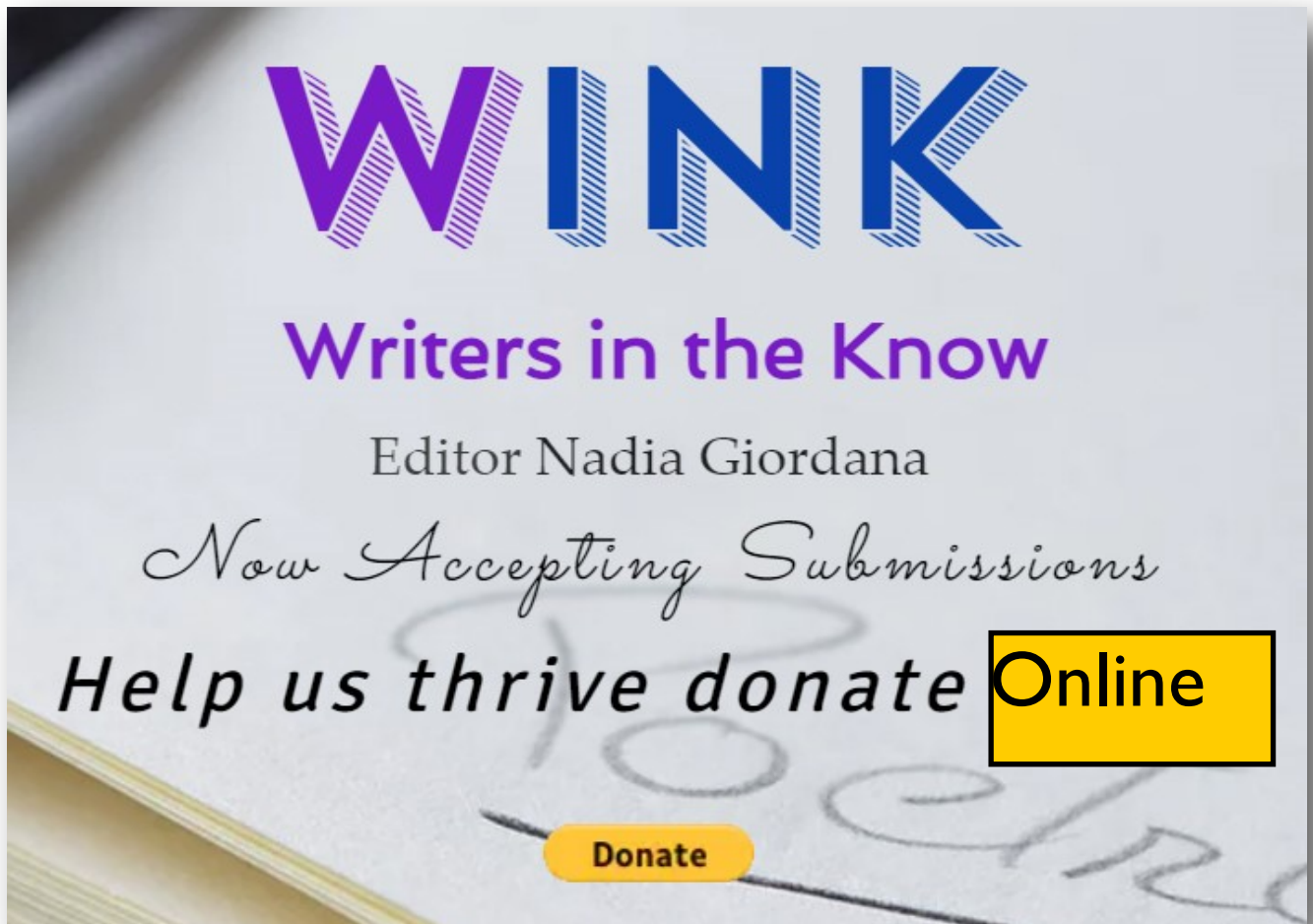
—Fabrice Poussin



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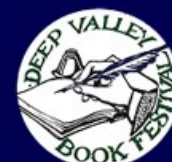
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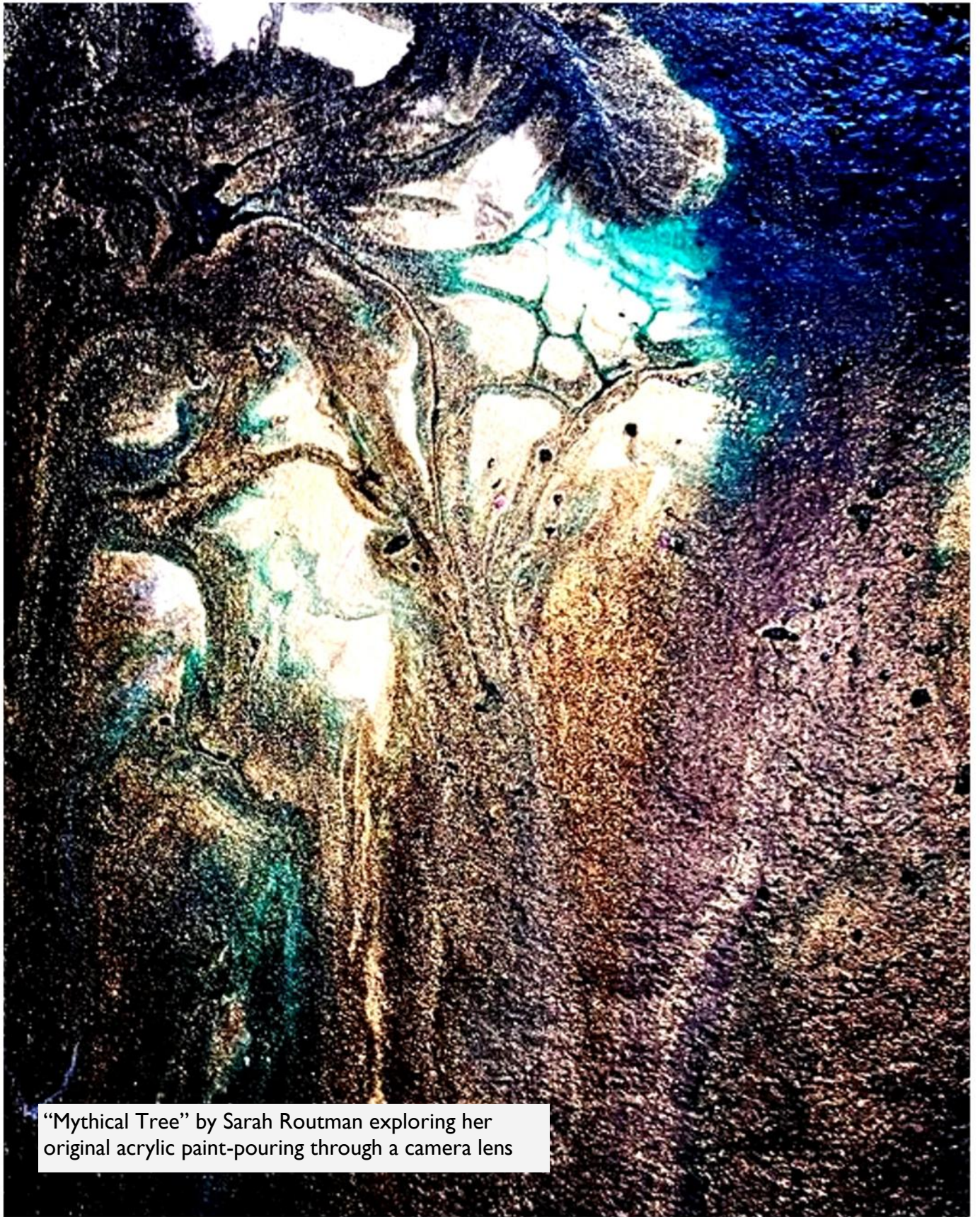


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