



WINK

Issue 18

Writers in the know

KIRK HOUSE PUBLISHERS



**Princess Kay and Me: Stories about the Minnesota Butterheads and much more
by Linda Christensen**

Little did Linda Christensen know when she walked into a 40-degree, rotating cooler in 1972 that inside that cooler, over the next 50 fairs, she would carve 41,500 pounds of butter into the likenesses of more than 550 young women involved in dairy farming.

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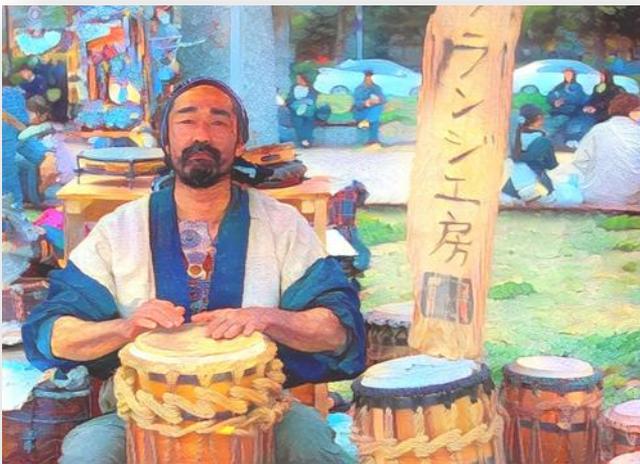
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Charlatan

I wish I could write poems that make you dance
when I feed you donuts and wildflowers,
but the twostep and waltz aren't choices.

If I could compose operas like Rossini or Berlioz
you'd play the lead role, and I'd play chopsticks
while you danced, danced until, out of breath,

you sank on the stage and I would come to the rescue
from the orchestra pit and bring you back to life,
my lips pressed against your painted lips, treacherous kiss.

If you found a brand new harpsichord I'd find a way steal it.
Please, not an old one played by Mozart. It's haunted
and I am deathly afraid of ghosts. I'd learn a new song,

maybe something from a romantic comedy that won an Oscar,
then steal something from Bach and mix it with Motown.
God knows I'd like an organ, too. I could hide it in the attic.

When I revive you the show will go on, as it must.
The general public paid with flesh and gold for this,
this masterpiece that I composed with you in mind.

I will shine in the finale. You'll dance and I'll sing
the metaphor and simile, all the alliteration,
using obscure words I find in the Oxford English Dictionary

to make me seem smart, an astute man who peruses tomes
and subsists on their dust and definitions, bites the blooms
of dying wildflowers and enjoys glazed donuts for dessert.

Since I can't really compose music or play an instrument,
I dream of writing a new book for the Bible, or at least a hymn.
You can be my muse. Don't hide your wings.

They look good on you.

—James Tyler

Gray

The deep gray sky
ubiquitous
and inverted.

Keeping the soot
and particulates
closer to the ground.

Grounded,
the ice chunks
resilient against the asphalt.

The gray imbues
the tree trunks
and sidewalk.

Somewhere close
the new snow is falling
mostly white.

The cars pass at a slower
rate
the world not yet recovered.

—Morgan Bazilian



Dinkinesh Rising from the Savanna

Some say the world will end in fire
 some say it will end in ice
 either way it's going to end
 there is no doubt about that
 for in thinking about our future
 we think about our end
 millions of years mark those moments
 when time stops
 like on that Kenyan plain
 when Australopithecus aferensis
 Lucy
 first figured out that a sharp stone shaft
 cuts hide better than her
 gnarled nails
 at that point in our existence
 as a species
 the savanna shook
 jolted our brains into opportunity
 and as she took those steps
 on the staircase to infinity
 she knew that one day
 we would move beyond the grass
 beyond the rivers and mountains
 continent to continent
 world to world
 as we descend from dark matter
 moments before we land
 on the surface of Polaris
 light years beyond redemption
 returning to our origin
 how where we came from
 is where we return
 how in our search
 for our selves
 means going back
 to where we were spawned
 inside our mother's womb
 in that moist floating sea
 where the future
 is yet to be created...

—Mark Hammerschick

Kid Terpsichore

"I wanna fight da Kid," the Gert Town fighter said.
 "Twelve rouns', no more. Wit' ol' Terpsichore. I'll
 put him on da deck ..."

He swung at the air.

He paced the gym.

Old Skool trainer just stared
 and spoke quietly to him.

"I done tol' ya fifty times, m'boy,
 an' I ain' gonna tell ya no more.
 You punchy mofo—
 YOU Kid Terpsichore."

—TD Conner



Death Certificates

We all wait for our death certificates—
 aging bodies, sagging arms, necks with wrinkles.
 We drag our bodies around shopping malls
 in all shapes, funny forms, walk
 around in tennis shoes early mornings.
 Don't stretch out here too far.
 Just get our groceries, see our grandchildren,
 Lucky Charms, no witchcraft, but Jesus
 finds our way home.

—Michael Lee Johnson

The Promise of More Tomorrows

As told to Connie Anderson

It's true. I died three years ago!

On the twenty-mile trip, my husband and I were discussing our next vacation, and it was going to be a fun one. Mike and I arrived at a grandson's hockey game in a nearby town. We were so proud and in grandparent heaven—both of us were full of high energy, and excited about cheering Robby on.

This game was sponsored by the local medical clinic that had sent two EMT teams—and they were busy interacting with the enthusiastic crowd of family and friends.

We were standing, talking in the aisle—when to my surprise, I slowly crumbled like someone had let all the air out of me. On the way down, miraculously I didn't hit my head or hurt myself.

The rest of the story happened with only my body being present—I was in limbo between life and death. I could hear Mike calling my name for a few seconds; then silence. Mike told me later that he was happy the kids were not on the ice yet so our grandson did not have to see this happen.

Almost immediately, EMTs surrounded me, and others held up blankets to make a privacy wall. I sure wish I could have been there to observe the whole hectic, yet orderly episode. First, they cut off my sports jersey; then quickly started CPR using the new life-saving technique where a machine now does the compressions.

One, two, four...and finally it was almost at eight minutes before my heart started again. When I regained my life, my shocked husband was still holding my hand. If this scenario was reversed, and he was the one on the gurney, I would not have been so stoic—no, I'd have been sobbing the whole time.

The EMTs carefully put me on their gurney, carried me up a bunch of cement steps, and wheeled me out to the waiting ambulance. Off we went to the hospital, lights flashing and sirens wailing. The next day, doctors inserted a defibrillator—and I have not had any more heart trouble.

Once I was back among the living, I

remembered nothing of those long minutes. Did I have any vision? Did I have any out-of-body experience? No to both questions; at least not that I recall. Many times I've been asked: Did this scare change how I looked at life? At first I answered that it didn't, but I was lying to them—and myself.

Unlike three years ago, the idea that today could be my last day on earth is less frightening than it was then. Now I value each day and say what needs to be said—and do what needs to be done—with family and friends. I never wait “until tomorrow” for positive and affirming words to come from my heart and my mouth.

“Regret for the things we did can be tempered by time; it is regret for the things we did not do that are inconsolable.” – Sydney J. Harris

Now with much love, I am sharing my vision for each new day:

1. Value every minute, from the time you wake up until you drift off to sleep.
2. This beautiful day is not the time to think about all the *should've*, *could've* and *would've* in your life. It's the day you start changing how you think of those things.
3. Today is also a great day to forgive yourself, and others—as forgiveness is the greatest gift you give them and yourself.
4. Some of the best words to ever hear are: “I'm so proud of you,” so when it's appropriate, say that to those in your life.
5. Today is the day to start completing all those “I wish” messages you had for yourself.
6. Don't wait until (whatever)...spend time with friends and family now. Send a card, email, call or meet in person.
7. Do things and get them off your “bucket list,” especially the most-fun ones.
8. Do yourself a favor—and be true to “yourself” every day. You deserve it.
9. Life is a very precious gift; be sure to unwrap and live it fully every day.

Yes, I did die three years ago for more than seven minutes—and since then I have lived every day filled with joy, love, empathy, honesty, forthrightness, and hopefulness—valuing every moment.

Boy, am I glad I am alive!



ALMANAC 46

Moët & Chandon succours passion.
 Telecaster gabbles.
 Engine check.
 Chequered flags hurly-burly.
 Mercedes lead is fixed
 To smash the huddle.

—Christopher Barnes

ALMANAC 47

Double-decker chock-a-block rumbustious.
 Watering hole swill is mandated.
 Turnstyles exact forbearance.
 Spirit-hurling uproar.
 Chants rehash.
 Thwack into barriers
 Unnerves.

—Christopher Barnes

ALMANAC 48

Taxi doors unlock on gladdening avenue.
 Booking-in is conventional.
 Pillow impresses.
 Luggage disperses into drawers.
 The shot-up hotel
 Collapses before pudding.

—Christopher Barnes

two self-portraits

and all of this meaningless
 wasted sunlight at the dying end
 of january and you, caught
 in it, standing three inches
 above the drowning man and
 he opens his mouth to tell
 you the truth

he sinks down deeper like
 you always knew he would

—John Sweet

The Sin of Thin

Oh, holy, thin, angel hair pasta,
 Give me your al dente soul,
 So I may guiltily devour it in thick, red sauce,
 Leaving not one splatter of evidence.
 Oh, holy, thin, angel hair pasta,
 I want to be thin, but as hard as I have worked
 To eat only some of your large portion, I have
 Failed in the eyes of God, in the judgmental
 Stare of the full-length mirror, and with my
 Angry jeans zipper that will not shut its mouth.
 Oh, holy, thin, angel hair pasta,
 I bow down to your taste,
 I care not if there is anything left,
 I will wash my plate of its sins.
 God, do not expect me to be a saint.
 God, do not show me the light, for
 My senses burst with joy as I slurp down
 The very last bite.

—Gloria Fredkove



...and he was gone

Dwelling on the scraps of despair
 counting the blessings in greasy wrap
 he waited for the opportune hour
 to begin another cycle with this world.

T'was eight before horns clamored again
 pearls of mist adorned his shaggy faded locks;
 was there room at all for a slight dream
 behind these eyes blind to compassion?

Upon vespers he stood by the concrete pillars
 folding an invisible robe of Hermine and gold
 he confused the torn plaid of a found coat
 for the fleece of the realm's emperor.

He greeted those who passed by in their carriages
 words lost to the turbulence of mechanical winds
 the drivers barely saw this semblance of a man
 thin with hunger of a thousand years.

And then it was twilight on a Saturday eve
 many stood at attention before the scene
 upon the embankment, bleachers to the theater
 for the first time a great audience beneath a show of lights.

Not one could pass the road any longer
 as humanoid shapes were busy at the task
 behind the black and whites of the cruisers
 the fire engines and emergency transports.

It has been weeks since the road was blocked
 now the grass is quiet under the concrete shade
 there is no need to slow one's pace any more
 for he has gone if he ever was.

—Fabrice Poussin

**When I Was New**

When I was new
 and the world was new.

So many roads to wander
 under a cerulean sky.
 Forbidden fruits to savor,
 forbidden lips to taste.

Full of promise, flowers
 budding on the vine.
 Their perfume covering
 my fingertips.

I hurried through each day
 alive with my songs.
 The moon rose just for me and
 stars burned just for me.

Every morning brought
 sunshine to my window.
 Another day filled with wonder
 waiting at my doorstep.

Spring was greener then.
 When I was new
 and the world was new.

—Joan Mc Nerney

refusing to subside

never recovered from her defeatist remarks
 the poison of her
 tattooed in my head like bruises
 refusing to subside

watch what you say
 an accurate string of words can inflict
 permanent scars; while the effects
 of apologies and rationalization

always seem negligible.

—Lee Clark Zumpe

The Music Box

the smell of age

my grandmother's music
box

i open it and it tells a
story

the smell of god
from a bible
the smell of dirt
under my grandmother's nails
from digging for
fishing bait

the pungent smell
of anger
in her armpits
after she whipped
me

the smell of Mogen David
wine
she served with Sunday
dinner

—Erren Kelly

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.

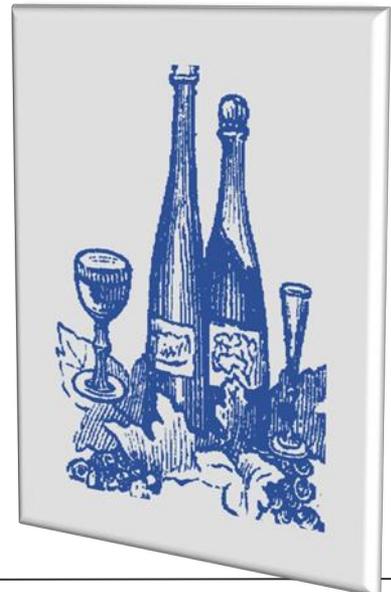
If only I could rise like this.
I wouldn't need to step outside.
I'd just grab the nearest mirror.
Or one of you at least, I don't care who,
would tell me what I know already.

—James Keane

one jilted lover, one bottle of whisky

brown paper bag affair—the kind you take to all the joints
you never go to anymore; you don't bring her home,
you don't even want memories bumping into this one;
no, you can't flaunt her, you already know what your friends
will say; still, she tags along—and she must realize she's only
a hitchhiker and you can't afford to take her where she wants
to go; she'll whittle out sympathy with tears if you let her, she
learned to cling early and she holds tight once you've let her wrap
herself around you; you drop her off, eventually, leaving her
miles short of her destination with tokens to burn
and a bottle of whisky to spill

—Lee Clark Zumpe



Paltry Trade

In and out, through window blinds,
 schadenfreude, drawing out
 specific emotions.
 A distorted model of
 Jackpot chasing,
 letting-down the vulnerable
 and those in greatest need,
 with a lack of funding.
 Cracked from greed,
 illnesses of the social and economic orders.
 Visceral eviscerations,
 attacks on marionettes,
 public baiting and coursing,
 often for nothing, dragged to the ground,
 from up on high, to be repeatedly kicked in the head.

Some snarky apes, around sheets
 and light-emitting diodes,
 bearded devilry and intentional, sensational,
 inflammatory negativity, for money.
 Falsity, false-hearted double-dealing chicanery,
 prone to charlatanry.
 Faux-human pontificating and postulation,
 fiendishly lowering the tone,
 of the record player, for the highest bidders.

Lackadaisical laughing at others' expenses,
 around canteen tables, of little or no ethics.
 Photographing tragedy delightfully,
 base instinctually.
 Vulnerable exhibitionists,
 fed to the lion's dens of voyeurism.
 To groom with hard news and stratification policing.

—Gavin Bourke

Your Acceptance of Your Place in the World

In the morning, you mull over
 the bloody reverie of last night,
 and why there's not the same regret
 as there was in years long past.

Werewolf. Damn that word.
 Why give it a different name than your own.
 You accept yourself.
 The hairy beast, the man of letters,
 are of the same body, the same mind.

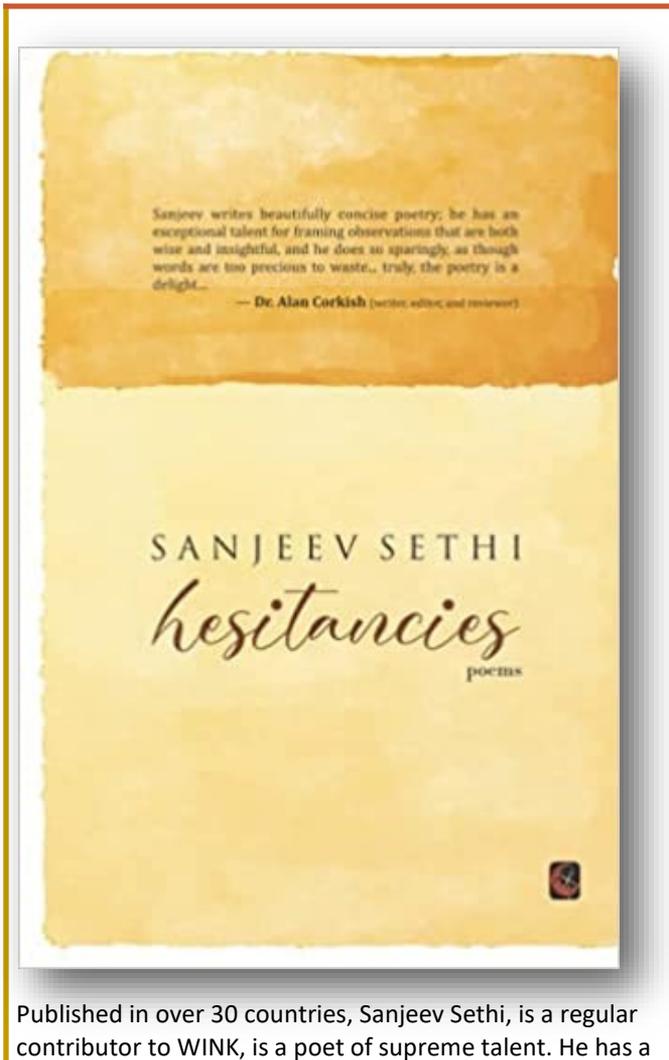
You salute the day with hot coffee,
 the crackle of hearth wood.
 Normal is today's fare.
 You'll grab your share of ordinary life,
 even express shock
 at the news of the one found by the river
 with shredded throat, half-eaten torso.

The change that comes over you
 is other people's problems.
 Everyone dies eventually.
 Surely there is room among heart failure,
 cancer, tragic accident, for wolf attack.

Once you feared this other you.
 Now you glean its monstrousness for insight.
 Some are predators. Some are prey.
 There's just one moon.
 But many phases.

—John Grey





Published in over 30 countries, Sanjeev Sethi, is a regular contributor to WINK, is a poet of supreme talent. He has a command of the English language few native-born Americans can boast. When he turns that skill into poetics, few can match his use of layered meaning and metaphor. As an example, his fifth book, *Hesitancies*, published by CLASSIX (an imprint of Hawakal, New Delhi, and Kolkata) <https://www.amazon.com/Hesitancies-Poems-Sanjeev-Sethi/dp/8195256228> opens with the following poem:

Rake-off

There is no suitcase, no cabin baggage to pack.
No air ticket, no hotel booking to be locked in.
There is no fear of red-eye. When my poems
globe trot, a part of my longstanding love affair
with myself, travels with them. They carry my
flavors, my failures.

—Sanjeev Sethi

Hesitancies is garnering rad reviews across the globe: *Colorado Review* (USA), *Mad Swirl* (USA), *Cajun Mutt Press* (USA), *Synchronized Chaos* (USA), *Sentinel Literary Quarterly* (UK), *Dreich Broad* (Scotland), *Compulsive Reader*, (Australia), *Outlook Magazine* (India), *Muse India* (India), among others.

Life in Flux

Laughter, momentary,
marked upon the face.
Mirth, ephemeral,
small insignificant lies.
Apparently smiling
countenances hiding sorrow.
Individual or collective,
melancholy pervades the air.
Intense, lethal, crushing,
diffused, endurable, forgettable,
ever changing as the time,
hovers menacingly, foxily.
Dissimulating its own demise
Hidden in the wings,
Crouching to pounce suddenly,
Upon the unsuspecting prey.
Puny deteriorating bodies
Crushed, exposed, unprotected.

—Rajnish Mishra

The Mask Rack

White surgical ones for shopping.
Sober black for work. Flowers
delight your Mama. Skulls
impress your buddies in the bar.

Artfully you match
audience with motif, from your
tie-turned-mask rack.

Between doffing and donning, your grin
is revealed. I gaze back and wonder,
Is there no design to hide you from me?
No kittens? No balloons? No heart-shaped
lollipops? Perhaps it hangs from a different rack,
one made of bone. Perhaps it is not made of cloth
or fear.

I follow the lines on your face, yearning for patterns
of trust. But I dread they have merely been drawn
by countless shrugs of indifference.

—Anita Haas

She Weeps

Sap from a Maple tree
Sticking to her broken heart
Gluing it together again
Clumps of sapling
Drip hot as syrup
Upon her scorned heart
Setting a flame within
Molded wax upon bare skin
Peeling back her outer shell
Burning holes into the place
That a lonely soul lives
Building its heated flames
That stick to her like glue
Bringing forth the hidden self
Her mask now disfigured
From the scorching
Of her soul;
Visions of past events lead
To her self-destruction as
The psyche within her now awakens
Looking for a path through
To escape from her inner burning...
Smells of burnt ashes upon dead skin
The death of her spirit
Stuck in a time paused
To stop the growth
Of addiction within her
Dripping now upon her heart—her soul
Melting them together
Healing her inner self
Soldered together one more time
She arises from the smoky flames
Takes a deep burning breath
Gasp and cries out
For help one last time
As she weeps for her lost soul!

— Eva Marie Cagley

Memories, memories ...

Did you make any plans for tomorrow, or at least this week?
Did you keep up with your alimony and funeral plot payments
and keep food down after breakfast?
Did you recite your evening prayers
and put out clean underwear for tomorrow?

How many times did you forget your phone number today?
Is your favorite actor still Clint Eastwood
and your favorite team, the Redskins?
Did you see the Skins lose big time yet again this week?
Do you remember how that feels?

Has your sister ever said “thank you” to you?
Have you ever said “thank you” to her?
That girl you dated in high school—
Do you still have her photo with her husband framed?
Did you take out the trash today in time for pick up?

Will they ever find pills that will help you?
Can you find the pills they prescribed last time?

Do you manage to say, “excuse me” each time you belch or fart?
Did you figure out what you want for Christmas?

Will you ever get over the fact that your old, lost friends
are more successful, healthier and happier than you?
When was the last time somebody called you a friend,
took you seriously
or pointed out a redeeming quality in you?

Is it your favorite hobby still the same—
to count the minutes before an hour has passed,
before the door opens,
before it’s time to smile
though there’s precious little for you to smile about?

—Paul Brucker



Unforgotten

In memory of Camp Jened (1951-2009)

Here comes a rolling train
the like I've never seen before. The slowness
of its movement
captivates. Six cars
to this train—no engine, no caboose—but
six strong engineers, one
behind each passenger.

The passengers
lay back helpless, silent
prisoners in leg irons, arms stiffly
dangling, too useless
to be bound. The engineers tend
with murmured singing
of ice cream and sodas, but never
a candy bar.

Lead prisoner, you
never move your face—your eyes
unblinking, fixed on me. But
rolling past slowly
all the while
your open
mouth sags
in a wan
smile.

—James Keane

*inspired by a line of disabled in wheelchairs I noticed
being conveyed up a road in Hunter, NY, from Camp
Jened many years ago. Camp Jened and its members and
advocates were the subject of the documentary "Crip
Camp."*

February Springs

On the 25th the snow
was more than a foot deep.

By the 26th it had melted
down to less than six inches,

and small green sprites
pushed through the ground.

Earth wears a tentative smile,
As the Sun turns to look.

—Joseph Nagarya

Daffodils

A chorus of children
nodding in agreement with the breeze.

—Joseph Nagarya

The Day

As ash or dust
I'll lie with you
one day. How course
these grains which scrape
humanity away. How easily
this soil erodes souls
as they seep deep
to trickle through an inferno
Dante knew. The path to heaven
is paved through hell, the flickers
of heat from which we rise
and swell. Before our eyes
reopen to blink in surprise,
while feeling every sense
you've ever took inside
merge you whole, you'll know
it's the day you return your soul
back down through the rabbit hole.

—Shawn Nacona Stroud





A Succulent, You Say?

By Mary K Crawford

From an eco-friendly paper gift bag with organic cotton handles my friend lifts a medium-sized potted plant.

“For you!” she says, delighted to present the ruffle-edged greenery with pea-sized pods clinging to the edge of each leaf like bloated insects.

“It’s not poisonous?” I ask, drawing back. A narrow green ribbon has been tied with a bow around the plastic pot to enhance its appearance.

“No, not poisonous. I bought it from a Vietnamese woman at the St. Paul farmers market,” my friend says gleefully. “The woman told me it’s a succulent.”

“Maybe a Venus Fly Trap?” I suggest.

“No”, she repeats slowly and deliberately, “A s-u-c-c-u-l-e-n-t.”

My knowledge of plants being more extensive, I know that a ‘succulent’ is a *plant family* with many species found within them.

The plant remained unspecified.

“See these round pods?” she says pointing, “they fall off and grow on other plants.”

Sure enough, her finger bumps the ruffled edge of a single cushion-like leaf, and we watch

as several round pods clinging to the edge of the leaf drop to my kitchen floor with surprising weight.

“Maybe it’s a tropical plant,” she adds quietly as though contemplating the universe.

“Is it from Viet Nam?” I ask.

My husband was stationed in Viet Nam as a Marine and had his share of harrowing encounters with venomous snakes, poisonous plants, topical skin irritations and foot fungus that he treated with Tiger Balm. Survival against the odds. *War.*

I couldn’t help myself, “*Little Shop of Horrors*”, I murmur.

I had never felt this way about a plant. Panic, alarm, horror, or as George Eliot put it... ‘the presence of Nature in all her *awful* loveliness’. My friend, with the artist’s eye, captivated by the fleshy curl of the plant’s pale green leaves, imagines the pods clinging to the edge of each leaf as delightful and decorative as yellowish-green-hued beads plucked from a vintage ball gown. This wondrous specimen with the ability to dismember itself and reproduce anywhere on a host plant. *Fascinating.*

After she left, I hurried down my building’s long hallway holding the plant at arm’s length. I propped open the steel trash door and dropped the succulent down the narrow aluminum-lined chute, hearing the satisfying, echoing thud, as it lands in the belly of the basement dumpster.



Behind Scenic Fantasy

Behind the glamour
Of what many consider
Beautiful is Fact

—Alex Andy Phuong

First published in *Art Block Zine*; Volume 5, Issue 2: “Out of the Spotlight” in September 2020.

Death of a Sperm Whale

With her calf she dives
 Into the darkness a mile below the waves
 Where great squid abides
 Ferocious Goliath monarch of oceans deep.

Singing lilted lullaby to her calf
 In darkness she swims in playful mood
 And for an hour remains down in the deep
 Swimming side by side with her son.

Largest of toothed whales
 The sperm whale comes to the surface
 Spouting water through her blowhole
 Smacking her great tail upon the waves.

Japanese harpooner takes aim
 Deadly bolt plunges home
 Explosive charge detonates
 Mortally wounded she calls to her calf.

Hauled up dying by her tail
 Against the side of the whaling ship
 In agony she dangles with head in the sea
 Bleeding slowly to death.

Her calf calls out in anguish
 Following the ship for hours
 But there is no lilted answering lullaby
 Only blood in the water.

—Colin Ian Jeffery

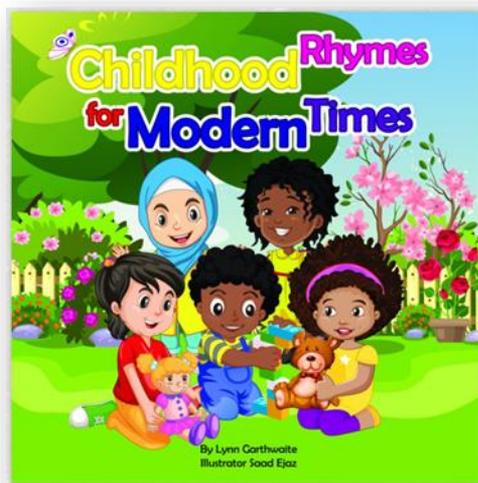
Serving Service

Help heal the helpless
 Do more than one deserves
 Serve the underserved

—Alex Andy Phuong

First published in *Art Block Zine*; Volume 5, Issue
 2: “Out of the Spotlight” in September 2020.

KirkHousePublishers.com



<https://www.kirkhousepublishers.com/product-page/childhood-rhymes-for-modern-times-by-lynn-garthwaite>

Universal We

Hopes dashed on the rocks
 it all falls down
 and I'm alone
 But
 am I alone
 or am I expecting
 loneliness
 the wheel turns
 and I turn with it
 I dance to music
 only I can hear
 the world crushes
 but sometimes gently
 There's a spark
 between us
 a soul cry
 and I sigh it away
 my breath matching the clouds
 my friends and I
 we are living on our own
 native life in the wilds
 we dance free
 and then live among the stars.

—Randi Whipple

R-Amen

By Ryan Nadolny

Alright noshers, I'm back with another delicious recipe that none of you asked for. Much like you, it's simple, cheap, and delicious! I can't take credit for this masterpiece, but I do make it quite often. It comes from Chef Roy Choi. If you've ever seen the movie or the series "Chef", you'll recognize him. He's the brains behind the operation with loads of unique talent.

This ridiculously easy dish starts out with a single pack of ramen noodles with the little pack of magic soup dust. That little MSG-packed foil pouch is important, so don't lose it.

You're also going to need a chicken egg (preferably, unfertilized) and two slices of American cheese. Trust me! Don't go gettin' all fancy and trying to use a better cheese. Nothing melts like American singles. Fight me.

You will also need toasted sesame seeds. I used to toast my own until I found out you can buy them already toasted! I know, right?! No need to complicate things.

The last two things you'll need are a pat of butter and some sliced scallions, green end only. That's green onions for you culinary deficient folks.

Now, this isn't fancy ramen like the kind you get at some bougie place in downtown Ann Arbor, that you waaaay overpaid for. This is sustenance. This is life. This feeds your soul.

You're gonna start off by boiling two cups of H2O and cooking the noods according to the package. I believe it's three minutes. Let's just go with that.

Here's a pro tip: Break up the noodles while they're still in the pack. Makes life easier. And who doesn't want easier, amirite?! Dump that freeze-dried pack of pasta (that looks like Justin Timberlake's hair circa 1995) into the pan and add that concentrated powder pack of flavor and stir to combine. The instructions say to do it at the end. But they're wrong and I'm right. When there's 30 seconds or so left on the timer you forgot to set, toss in that butta and crack

the egg right into the water. Fold some of the noodles over the egg and let it poach. Now turn off the burner. I like to break the yolk almost immediately and stir it right into the soup, or you can leave it whole and let it continue to cook. This is your slop to eat, so you do you, boo!

If you've made it this far, congratulations. It's time to transfer this scorching hot goodness to a bowl. I prefer using a bowl instead of a plate, because it's a bowl and bowls are good for things like soup. Plates are not. I also find it helpful if you don't burn yourself during this process. Once you have it in your vessel of choice, slap those two pieces of American processed plastic that we talked about earlier, right on top. I know this goes against everything you've ever learned about cooking soup. You must trust me. Have I ever let you down before? If you know me, then the answer would be yes, but that's a topic that only my therapist is privy to.

As the "cheese" begins to melt, you will start to understand the beauty of this uncomplicated dish. Sprinkle the top with those toasted sesame seeds and the green onion. I like to add a little (a lot) sriracha to mine or if I'm really hating myself, I'll add a few dashes of Bravado's a.k.a. Miso Ghost-Reaper sauce. This stuff is seriously hot and will give you something to cry about other than your life choices.

It's time to stir up this crazy concoction and get to slurping! I prefer to use one of those deep spoons you find at Asian restaurants. You can get them online for souper cheap. Chopsticks are another option, but I'm not coordinated enough for that noise. This dish represents comfort. If food could wrap you up and give you a big hug, this is what would do it. If you suffer from depression, you will still suffer depression after eating it. It's food, not bourbon. So, build a blanket pillow fort, put on your most comfortable clothes, (as if you weren't already in them), que up Good Girls on Netflix and remember that a happy belly is a happy mind. Bone Apple Teeth!

—The Depressed Chef



At Twilight

Let's talk, then, just you and I.

Tea or coffee, perhaps a glass of wine,
and a fire flickering in its place
will set the scene.

You lightly brush my spine with tentative fingers
then slowly open my cover with a lover's
savoring anticipation.

I will talk of loves lost and loves dreamed,
of words never spoken,
silence between spaces,
commas between words, quiet nights,
bird songs and ordered words,
as if words could order our lives.

I will tell you of sorrow and pain,
of laughter and joy, and

You will say "yes, I recognize that,
I have felt that, I know that,"

Or you will say "I don't understand,
what nonsense, get over it."

And at the end
when you close my cover,
will you throw me aside as if I were an
old dream, no longer of any use.

Or, will I become a treasure,
something to come back to
at twilight when you feel most alone.

—Kate Petit

Clouds of Strbske Pleso

They ooze through the trees
and each other with ease.
Twists and turns
keep wisps in a whirl.

Their lifts and their dance
give hope for a chance
this hazy ballet
will not go away.

A chill fills the air
it seems like they dare
to challenge each gust
as rain dampens us.

They're ready to meet
the high Tatra peaks
a violent ride
to the other side.

—Jan Strootman

Trees darkened by evening

Trees darkened by evening
in the lambency of lilac
that shrouds the land
Await shadows of portent
spectres from another dominion

Which beset the realm
as it sinks into the consolation of night
And assumes the garment of grief
for a lamented yesterday
that recedes into the opacity of the past
Where sorrows languish in a deserted wasteland

Melancholy pervades the skies
while a mystical glow emanates
from a tremulous moon
that shimmers
in the enigmatic mists of night
As it ascends the indigo canvas
towards the unfathomable heavens

—d.a. simpson

Blessings of the Aurora

Fighting off my clinomania, waking up
from a chasm of dark waves, tossing and turning
Inured to the soulful, heart-wrenching
Goodbye of the two paradoxical siblings

from the window, the dark as ebony prince,
and the princess with the silver tresses—
Seeing the sunlight kissing the tilted faces
Of roses and periwinkle in my garden

When they smiled at me with cynosure
I could almost feel their euphoria
Filling my inner-most morbid mania
Chasing away the darkness within

Like an unseen invisible cord
They seemed to send a shock wave
Of glee to my lamenting cave
Aghast by a dose of epiphany was I

As pink and violet hue blushed
Through ribbons of hope and joy
The pish-pish of the wren's ploy
Arose with the koo-ooo of the koel

Upon the wonderment of the aurora
My heart fusillade in pure sanguine
Of inhaling the birth of another day to win
Of being blessed with yet -another chance

—Aminath Neena

Don't Judge a Word by How it Sounds

“Clandestine” sounds nice
Yet secrets obscure the truth
It IS a big deal!

—Alex Andy Phuong

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2020.

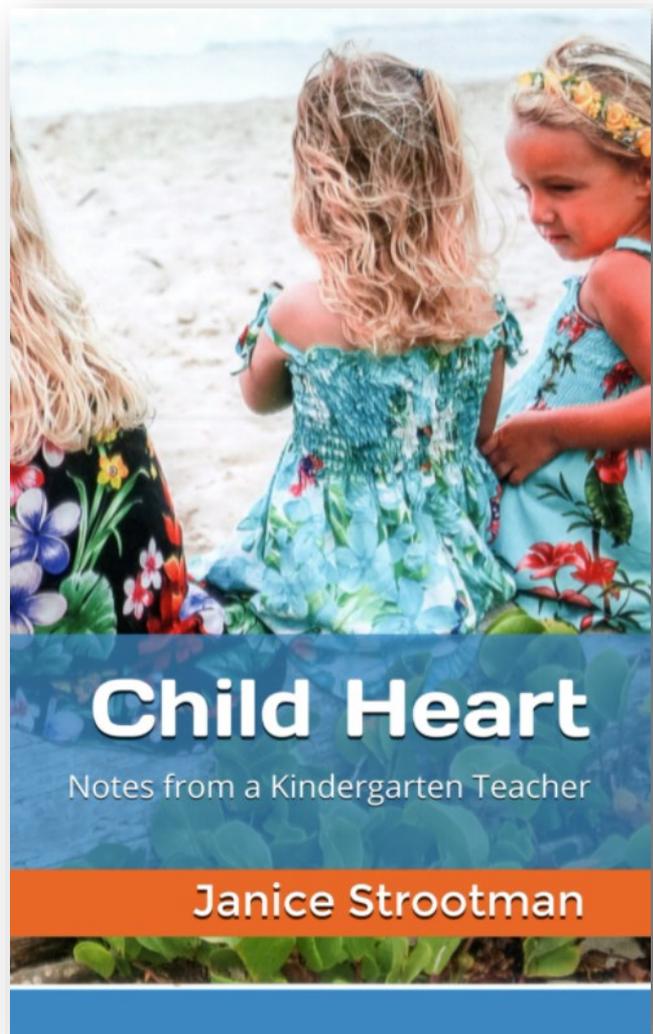
Ended, Ere It Begun

One day I'll ride on that gurney,
sheet as a shroud over my head,
and laugh at the people around me
not realizing that I'm dead.

A laugh that echoes like a specter
mimics the life it once led
as my giggles taper into a poem--
I am the ghost of things left unsaid.

—Shawn Nacona Stroud

*From Cloud 9 Publishing:
find it on Amazon.*



Day in the Life of a Salesman

“Sure, I’d love to hang in the Haight with you.”
When she said this he was filled with joy.

C’mon baby, do the Locomotion!

On the road, he calls her through bluetooth:
“Bet your dancing would burn the floor tonight.
How about the Torch Club? See you there
at nine in your pointed boots and black tights?”

GPS on the fritz, he takes the long, looping
route through the delta on two-lane roads
to highway 4, arrives gift in hand just in time
only to have his appointment cancelled
by a dying man’s daughter. She’s wearing
a surgical mask. The father
coughing up sputum, diagnosed
with some unidentifiable virus.

How many roads must a man walk down?

“Can’t get you off my mind
little diamond girl.
Did your mother teach you
how to fry a steak?”
he utters out loud to himself, then
“You’re a hippie Lady Chatterley,
would like nothing better than
a vibrating chair that arouses you.”

He arrives promptly at his next appointment.
Silly, he forgot the orbital massage wand
in his SUV, has to go back and get it.

The Crimson Dynamo went along for the ride.

His demo goes well, and they would buy a bed
but are flat broke. So it goes. He peels out, hits
the open road, nothing to see for miles and miles,
pulls off at a 50’s roadside diner, one of few left
along the monotonous Central Valley interstate.
He walks in, cases the joint, soon leaves
because portions look small and food greasy.

Oh how he wants her lips on his now
when 92 miles remain on the highway
to Modesto. There it’s to be a familiar
case, another dysfunctional appointment
in a tough neighborhood along the freeway
with mostly slum-row houses, stoned bums,
liquor stores and sex for sale on the streets.

Boiling past Vallejo at 80 miles an hour.

Toward the end of the day, on his way home
with a view of the Tiburon peninsula he spots
San Quentin sequestered on a promontory
as he approaches the San Rafael bridge.

He’s thinking of his last call, how the lady
relished the full body massage. He rolled
his magic wand over shoulders, across
the back, then low so as as to tease buttocks,
and romantically stimulated her plump thighs.

Oh what a night—late September back in ‘63.

He’s thinking he’ll take her to O’Shays
this weekend, that cozy bar across from
Golden Gate Park. When he was but a boy
he had to wait outside there while his dad
and pals would down hot Irish Coffees
prior to attending 49er games in the days
when Brodie threw Alley Oop passes.

Then from O’Shays
it’s a leisurely two-block stroll
into the heart of the Sunset District
with its fancy boutiques, bakeries
and colorful Victorian homes.

Afterwards they can head to the Haight.

—Thomas Piekarski

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 centre of palms
 lending only a speck of light – deliberately,
 comfortably

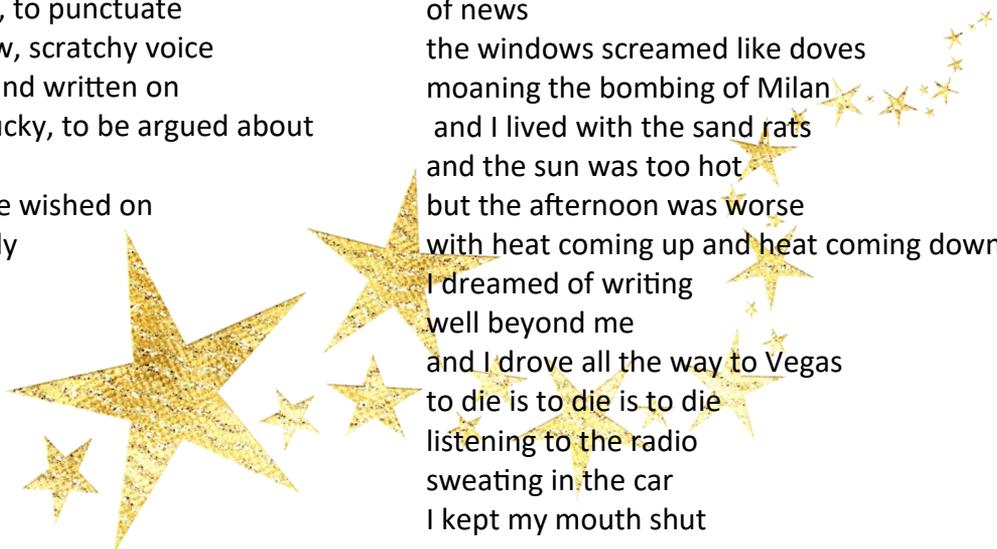
to fold myself between pages, that hold
 unsteady, uncertain, unknown poetry
 and despite knowing, that poetry is uncertain
 to still cling onto every word
 to rise, and tower over those watching me
 to fall and drop like dew on velvety leaves
 and when I fall, to see if those who watched me
 when I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



Cottage Lane

weathered windows
 scratch shut

a screen door
 slides gently
 like a morning
 foot into a slipper

sea breezes
 and familiar voices
 cross easily
 through the porch

a fog horn
 and captain's bell
 send signals
 into the dark

smooth stones
 from the point,
 painted with
 names and faces,
 lay gathered at
 the center of the
 table

—Dr. Roger Singer

Just Outside of Vegas

There was a landscape I
 wanted to paint
 The dust blowing around
 the blue mountains
 and I would descend
 at 4:00 in the afternoon
 I died the only way there is to die
 without a phone, without the threat
 of news
 the windows screamed like doves
 moaning the bombing of Milan
 and I lived with the sand rats
 and the sun was too hot
 but the afternoon was worse
 with heat coming up and heat coming down
 I dreamed of writing
 well beyond me
 and I drove all the way to Vegas
 to die is to die is to die
 listening to the radio
 sweating in the car
 I kept my mouth shut

—Randi Whipple

Ten Commandments

By Niles Reddick

The organist played soft music at All Saints, and I took a seat a few rows from the back. I liked to be one of the first to exit. I felt relaxed and wondered why I didn't come more often. I was a good person, believed, and obeyed the commandments, but most of the time, I slept late, watched the news, sipped coffee, and ate a late breakfast. I didn't like getting dressed in church clothes, but the stained-glass windows with sunlight casting color onto the walls and tile, the decorative columns, scrolls carved on ends of wooden pews, and the statues of saints carved on the walls keeping watch over parishioners were holy reminders and functioned to pull me back to my boyhood when I was sinless.

As I listened to the organ, I wondered about my stock, if the recent change in politics would have a negative impact on the market or if it might increase even more. For my adult life, I had focused on making money, piling up treasures for senior years like my cabin in the finger lake district, my convertible Audi, and my art collection that doubled in value, except one painting that god-damned art dealer scammed me on. I lost fifty thousand dollars, and if I found him, I'd kill him and maybe spray paint the son-of-a-bitch to look like that abstract fake art.

I wondered if my parents could see me from heaven or purgatory or wherever they were. They'd be proud I'd made it back to All Saints. Even though they'd stayed humble and faithful, they'd also stayed poor. I was living damned proof one could make it financially and still attend church. I probably should have given them more when they were in the nursing home, when the nursing home folks took their inner-city shack of a house because the Medicaid wasn't enough to cover the bills. I should have gone to see them more, but I hated the smell of urine in that facility. I had

told them I had to work, and they believed me.

People had shuffled in All Saints and plopped in their same pew I recalled from childhood, and I caught a side view of Samantha joined by her bald and bloated husband plus three rug rats. Side view wasn't bad and either she'd had a nip, tuck, and boost here and there or she'd been working out at the gym. I wanted to slip her my card and fantasized we would meet up and rekindle our friendship with benefits. I wondered if her family had the new Land Rover SUV by the curb outside. I'd toyed with the idea of buying one.

The minister read some passages about forgiveness, there was some special music, and an offering was collected, but I'd left my wallet in the car. I fanned the deacon away, tried to stay awake during the special choir music, but slipped out as soon as I could, flashed a quick wave to Samantha, and figured I'd try to call her this week. I reasoned that visit would hold me over for a while, and I'd try to come back to All Saints at Christmas.



New release on Amazon now.

Front Row Gal



a memoir by
BARBARA LA VALLEUR

Poet Eternal

by Nolo Segundo

What is the role of the poet in society, in life? The first part is easy: there is little or no role for poets in American society today. (It was not always so: in 1850 Longfellow sold a single poem for the price of a modest house.) Most Americans today wouldn't read a poem if you put a gun to their heads, perhaps because so much of contemporary poetry is obscure, idiosyncratic, abstract, leaving the reader wondering, what the heck does it mean? It is as though so many "modern" poets are competing for the you'll-never-figure-this-one-out-award: if the reader "gets it", the poem is a failure. This is sometimes characterized as show-don't-tell, but often, what exactly is it that they are showing?

Great poetry, the poetry that resists time's relentless collective memory wiping, is never off the wall. It is accessible, often simple in its wording, and most of all, it talks to you: to your mind first, then your heart, and the very best poems will sing to your soul—and maybe sting it as well! Homer shows us the utter brutality of warfare: read the opening lines of the *Iliad* and you realize that war was as deadly and vicious three-thousand years ago as it is now. But he also tells us the terrible price both the Greeks and Trojans pay to wage their war— he makes it clear there are no winners, there are no heroes, there are only fools.

And I meant it literally about great poetry being able to sing to the soul: that is why one can see—even without being religious—the profound beauty, angst and wonder in the poems called Psalms even though written thousands of years ago. This is because human nature never changes, nor ever can change, despite there being a plethora of ideologies—communism, fascism, humanism, political correctness—that keep trying to mold it to their liking. It can never change because we are not the rational creatures we think we are but are emotional beings at our core, and all our thoughts have an emotional underlay. (Something I learned in a terribly hard way when as a young man I suffered a deep clinical depression and all my affect gradually withered away—my emotions were dying, and so soon actual death looked like the only escape.)

Poetry may not do very much for society today

but it can do a great deal for life, for the living of a life in truth and beauty, as Keats put it so well. Not so long ago all the creative arts—literature, music, art—were seen as a way of attaining such, but no longer. Today it is brutality and ugliness, that plays well amongst us "moderns": incredibly ugly art that sells for multi-millions, extremely violent films, songs that sing not of love but hate and debasement, fiction that is detached, cold, dead. It all makes sense in a way, for though we see ourselves as advanced, progressive, enlightened (unlike our ancestors who built great houses—temples, mosques, cathedrals—for their "imagined" Deity), we are in reality far more brutal, uncaring, egotistical, and often downright mean than probably most people in human history. It is quite possible that more people (with estimates in excess of a quarter of a billion) have been wantonly killed in the past 120-odd years by a slew of atheist dictators—Hitler, Stalin, Mao, Tojo, Pol Pot, and many more minor despots, than in all of recorded history. We have created the means to destroy all life above ground: What species in their right evolutionary mind would do that?

Yet, poetry today may answer an even greater need in the lives of its readers. All writing is transcendent and may be the singular achievement of our species; in its ability to encapsulate thought-emotion, poetry is the most transcendent of all, fiction or non-fiction, because it can create a moment of awareness in the reader, a thing so remarkable and profound that I call it the "satori" of poetry. And as in that Zen term, the reader can suddenly, unexpectedly, have an awareness of a transcendence that for a moment lifts one out of the mundane and touches upon...something more, something far, far beyond even one's imagination, perhaps the ultimate in beauty and truth.

Now there are many fine poets who believe in only this world as experienced by our senses: no God, no soul, no heaven or hell, no re-birth. Larkin, Plath and a poet/astrophysicist/atheist friend of mine come to mind. Yet as my friend will admit, seeing sentient human lives as ending in extinction can only mean life is meaningless: there really is no way to sugarcoat it (though some atheists resort to a kind of grin-and-bear it stoicism). I suppose I would have counted myself in that group if I had not almost drowned at 24 and had what since has come to be called a near-death experience. For half a century I've been trying to understand what it all means. The

only thing I can be certain of is that I have a consciousness that existed before I was born and will exist after my body dies—a soul that exists endlessly, has always existed. People will believe or not based on their own intuition, reasoning, and experience. (Oxford University did a study showing that 71% of the population had experienced at least one paranormal event in their lifetime.)

So for most of my adult life I've known that the problem is not that life is meaningless but that there is so much meaning to life, the world, the Universe, that the best of us can only get a small part of it... fragments. But this is exactly where the poet can come into his/her own, for the poet's unique apprehensions when "caught" in the right words can hint at the pervasive mystery of the Eternal as it weaves itself through the temporal world: what a great poet called "intimations of immortality". [Walt Whitman was another great poet who seems to have had some personal metaphysical awareness that is often striking in his "Song Of Myself," as when he writes, "...I am the mate and companion of people, all just as immortal and fathomless as myself; They do not know how immortal, but I know."]

I try to do this myself whether it's looking at that not-so-brave new world called old age or how the soul might feel when, freed of its mortal body, it finds itself in eternity longing for its loved ones who are still in the temporal world, the world of time, of life and death, who doubtless themselves are mourning the person/soul that has "moved on."

Some—those materialists who see only matter as real—will see such poems as nonsense while others may see some beauty in them. And in truth, I don't write my poems so much as they write me; they always come to me unbidden (often in the morning) and if I don't write them down soon, they'll likely leave, never to return. So where do they come from? My unconscious mind, or somewhere deeper than even that?

That is a tough question to answer because it touches on the old debate about nature vs. nurture. How can an ordinary couple give birth to a genius like Einstein, or a stable, middle-class family a serial killer? How in the world was Mozart able to compose music at 5, when most of us haven't learned how to read yet?

Today thanks to Freud most people are at least somewhat aware of the power of the unconscious

mind to affect consciousness. What we've lost is the sense of how our souls affect us, drawing us either towards Light—and the freedom and warmth of that light—or else dragging us into an ever-deepening and terribly engulfing Darkness, be it depression or addiction or greed or racism or narcissism—evil comes in many forms.

Perhaps, just perhaps, it will be poets who lead the way, as they did throughout history until relatively recently. For each time an awareness is sparked, an opening towards the Light, a small miracle happens: one human mind reaches out to another human mind, unseen, unknown, while creating an awareness, even if ever so brief—a little awakening from the slumber of the ego. Such has taken me a lifetime to learn: When I was young I wanted to write but only if I could be a great writer, an immortal writer whose words would never die—in short, another Shakespeare. And so—bounded so tightly by my ego—when I encountered problems, like a rejection of a novel I wrote based on my time in war-torn Cambodia, I gave up! For over 30 years I wrote nothing, and then—for some reason, God knows why—I began writing poetry again, and in the past half dozen years have had some modest success getting published online/in print. And whether it's one or a thousand who read a poem of mine, I'm happy, for I have been part of the miracle of creation, and the wonder of transcendence.

And if we wonder why it's so hard to apprehend God or the Big Mysteries, well, we often don't even see the small ones. As I'm writing this, a pair of birds alight onto my brick patio just outside the glass doors. They're a couple: I can tell because one is the male, handsome with a red head, and moreover he seems to be feeding seeds or whatever he's finding scattered about to her—they dance about each other as he appears to put something into her mouth. Perhaps I read too much into it, or perhaps not enough: for could this be love, maybe not so different from what my wife and I feel for each other?

Now if I could only write a poem that ensnares this little mystery....



Clouds

As the sun slipped through mounds
of sour cream in the sky
the way water flowed through the
oolong tea leaves in Papa's evening cuppa,
I imagined iridescent angels frolicking
while I lay on bendy grass
growing like the waves of whiskers that
sprouted years later
along with puberty
and anxiety
and profanity.
Now in a front aisle seat aboard
a propeller plane jerking and rocking its way
towards the Saint Lawrence River,
I peer past the
burly businessman in earbuds,
whose elbow battles mine for the armrest,
and out the cushion-shaped slab of window
into white wisps like
the fog in films featured on
Halloween horror marathons.
Trying through turbulence
not to spill a bilingually labeled
bottle of water,
I surmise that the
seraphim must be on strike.

—Adrian Slonaker

The Indispensability of Light

The evening fog has made the moon a blurred, golden smile.
The evening star, a tear-filled eye, glistens vibrantly, about
to cry for sorrow or for joy.
The night is anyone's guess—yielding girl, satisfied boy,
the tenderness, the careful ploys of love that bring the roof
down.
Moon and stars, the planet turning round and round,
grinding truth against beauty, leaving scars
too deep to be removed.
Leaving misty memories of the fragile moods of love
that wax and wane and conclude in darkness
that ruins but ultimately proves the indispensability
of light.

—Dr. P.C. Scheponik

Moment of Truth

I remember it so clearly—
the morning, the lawn, the red-tailed hawk,
the mourning dove in the hawk's sharp, red talons,
the tufts of dove down clinging to the blades of grass
like an erasure smear from the side of death's hand,
brushing the debris from life's page.
I remember the fierce look in the raptor's eyes—
piercing determination to take its share of nourishment.
I don't know if the hawk partook its breakfast on the lawn,
or if the winged carnivore spirited the dove's corpse to
some limb in a tall tree or to the top of a pole from a
telephone line to devour its fill of pleasure, to obey
the mandate to survive.
I know there are laws in this world, written in the blood
that flows through our veins, savage statutes that allow
Us to thrive at the expense of other lives—
A beautiful brutality that makes us sigh
That moment the truth bleeds through.

—Dr. P.C. Scheponik

Ember

People will revise your reality
into their fabulous fiction,
all packed with addiction
and friction, and lovers. Oh, the lovers—

men I could never captivate
as I sit alone watching days slide
through time. I've slipped
off that mask—litter tossed

beside my gravel strewn path of 2013.
I dumped it like my last
trash-boyfriend back in O-Town junk
for some other fool to maintain.

I am cinders burning to ashes,
merely the remnants of that fire,
and everyone has left my cooling coals—
I've no more warmth to acquire.

—Shawn Nacona Stroud

WINK GUIDELINES – SHORT VERSION:

We are a digital magazine with a full-color print companion. (We pay contributors in digital copies. See below.) We produce the magazine anywhere from 2 to 3 times per year on an irregular schedule.

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Yes, we are now accepting submissions for upcoming issues. We are interested in original artwork, photography, essays, short stories, poetry, and articles. We especially want articles on writing and the writing life (500 to 1200 words). Space is limited. Short stories/flash fiction (up to 1200 words) can be on virtually any subject. We like unusual stories with a twist at the end, and we LOVE super short, quirky flash fiction. We prefer free verse and form poetry (up to about 32 lines). Artwork or photography is best sent as a high jpg.

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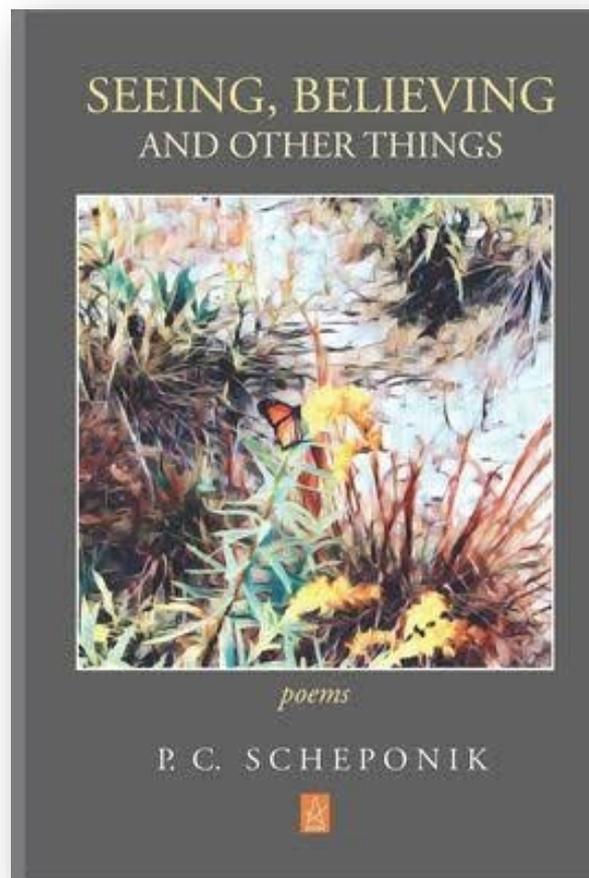
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<https://www.amazon.com/Seeing-Believing-Other-Things-Poems/dp/1954351968>

LOOK FOR IT ON AMAZON

“From the first time Dr. Peter Scheponik’s poetry arrived in my editor’s inbox, it was clear this was standout material in a league with the best I’ve read in all the years I’ve been publishing literary magazines.” —Nadia Giordana



Technicality

Technically
Life can be technical
Yet people are not machines
Human beings have brains
With the gift of intelligence
But only the ones willing to think
Can change the world for the better
Especially since the mind
Is more powerful than any computer

—Alex Andy Phuong
Previously published in “The B.K.
Vol. 11, Issue 4, Fall, 2020

To Ed Dormady, Whoever You Are:

I Entrust Her to Your Care

One cold summer's day
She looked inward, then twisted;

Now her thoughts wind down upon themselves.
She is an itinerant without limbs,
A jester without a court
Performing still, although no one laughs.
If you think you can save her,
Please try;
She means the world to me.

—Michael Rossberg



Freaky Feather

A walk-on extra in her own life,
 Sainly housewives thought her a freak,
 Found it surreal to be a wife,
 Of independence had a broad streak.
 Couldn't bake bread, nor cake, nor bun,
 Her voice got drowned by all magpies,
 But learnt wretched French just for fun.
 With the right shade couldn't whiten her lies.
 As human drama surged apace,
 To be Ms. Beautiful, Ms. Best, Ms. Worst,
 All too quickly, dropped out from the race,
 For cheap thrills soon lost the thirst.
 Who wouldn't want bright jewels or cars?
 The most freaky thing was hard to define.
 Or be admired in uber-cool bars?
 Her "lunacy" was an unplumbed mine.
 Why would she live like a lonely mole?
 In quiet corners wasn't forced to stay.
 Why not capture youth that time stole,
 Before charm or sparkle faded away?
 By leaps and bounds, she outstripped time.
 But no juicy gossip could really be found,
 As numbers of her books began to climb.
 Gossip's conversations, went round and round,
 Except for speculation on money she'd made,
 The colour of cushions, how clean was her floor,
 From their minds, freaky bird would fade
 'coz of hubbies, kids, cooking, make-up tips galore.
 With strange plumage, other birds she'd find,
 Like most avians, wouldn't stick to one tree.
 With whom at least, could share her mind;
 At least in fantasy could fly high and free.

—Sultana Raza

Take Off Your Mask

Who are you when no one is there to see you?

What secrets lie behind your eyes,
 Deep in your heart?

I stopped creating art
 Because it's hard to start with pieces.

What I long for is the wholeness
 I could not find
 Or feel.

Covid is real.

Now it is more than time zones
 That separate us.

If I turn my heart to steel
 Will you manage to peel it back
 To find simpler days?

A rainy Sunday morning
 Together on the grass

At last, I have found you again
 In the memory no pandemic
 Could take from us.

Don't break from us.
 Please keep me whole.

—Sarah Routman



Please Forgive Me For the Negative Experience You Had

By Zary Fekete

Officer Timothy walked down the hall in between the holding cells. He noticed that the new weekly prompt signs had been tacked to the bulletin board. On the signs the bright face of the Mrs. Reminder smiled. In the word balloon she said, "Remember! Speak now and sleep sound!" In another one she was smiling and saying in Mandarin, "Were you kind or sassy? The future is tricky...better be safe!"

Officer Timothy removed the cell key from his pocket, nodded to the guard on duty, and quietly let himself into the second cell.

He smiled at the prisoner and greeted her, "I apologize in advance."

"I apologize in advance," she said.

He looked at her. She was dressed in the standard-issue distort-suit which prevented Officer Timothy from being able to detect her weight, curves, or hair color. Standard common era issue. No triggers.

Officer Timothy placed the prisoner's folder on the metal table and took out a recording pill. He held it up for the prisoner to witness, and then he swallowed it carefully and showed her his empty tongue. He clicked a button on the table and a digital clock appeared on the wall and begin to count down from 30 minutes.

He sat behind the table and briefly glanced through the prisoner's file. He had been given this case because there was a standard apology line-item missing in the report. This was rare but still occasionally happened.

He looked up from the file and said, "I apologize in advance. This says your name is Pamela. We are yet unfamiliar. Will it harm you to hear me call you that?"

"I apologize in advance," she said as she straightened. "Yes, that's fine."

"I apologize in advance," he said. "Pamela, will you stipulate my continued pre-apology?"

"I apologize in advance," she said. "If you will."

The both took a breath and relaxed for a moment. Officer Timothy made a few notes and then clicked the video display button on the table.

The wall opposite from the digital timer lit up with multiple camera angles showing a downtown traffic crossing. The accident had taken place at 12:14 p.m. last Tuesday. Officer Timothy quickly flicked forward until the scene was prepped at 12:13 p.m.

"Are you ready?" he asked.

"Yes," she said.

He pressed the button and the scene slowly played forward. The various angles showed Pamela from last Tuesday, reading a book, standing at the crosswalk. Slowly another woman approached from the opposite direction, pushing a baby carriage. On the screen Pamela and the mother said something to each other and then looked out at the traffic. Officer Timothy paused the video.

"What did you say to her?" he asked.

"We just apologized," she said. "And then we were waiting for the light to change."

"And that's when it happened?"

"Yes."

"Do you remember what caused it?" he asked.

She looked at the wall video and pointed, "It was the next car. The one that will arrive in a moment. The horn was calibrated too high."

"Yes," he said. "That has been a problem. The older models can still cause involuntary surprise. Is that what you think happened?"

She nodded.

He pushed the button halfway and the scene slowly inched forward. The car in question approached, and even though the scene had no sound, it was clear when the mother was startled by the horn. Her body lurched, and the baby carriage rolled toward the street.

Officer Timothy paused the scene again.

"Now, what exactly happened here?"

The prisoner smiled, clearly embarrassed, "It's...I'm such an idiot. The book...the novel I was reading...it was published before the common era. All the characters talk differently. I

was kind of lost in that world. I wasn't thinking. So when I saw the carriage move I just grabbed it to stop it."

"Without pre-apologizing..." he said.

"Yes, I... like I said, I'm an idiot."

Officer Timothy nodded. He clicked the button and they both watched the scene conclude. In the video as the baby carriage moved, Pamela grabbed the handle and stopped it from rolling—and the mother slapped her. The police cars arrived a moment later.

Officer Timothy looked down at the file again.

"Well, it's fairly straightforward then. I'll get this cleared up in the file. You agreed for liability for any future discomfort for the mother and the child due to your unapologetic action and the mother agreed you would serve just one year and then she would drop the case."

The young lady smiled with relief, "Yes. That would be great."

Officer Timothy closed the file folder and stood.

"I'll leave you now. I apologize for any future impact of my words and actions," he said.

"I release you for any future impact of your words and actions," she said.

He left the cell and closed the door.



Не бойся.
Возьми мою руку.
Прийти.
Пойдем.
До ночи,
Для больше не быть.

Do not be afraid.
Take my hand.
Come.
Let's go.
Till night,
To stop to be.

Ivan De Monbrison
Poem in Russian, then English

Worn Out

Discarded words

Once crimson with passion

They crunch underfoot now

Their meaning forgotten in the autumn breeze

Golden rainbows of dreams

Now shriveled into piles

Ready to be bagged and buried

In someone else's garden

Rust does not describe the color of falling leaves

Save it for peeling layers

Of grief turned to powder as the years grow shorter

Once the sun and blustery wind

Bantered about, tossing carefree

Utterances toward my open window

Shuttered now against winter's cold,

Only an echo hides and howls

In the empty branches

Whispering of all the what-ifs

And might-have-beens

Stuff all the bags

Leave no words as witness

No chance of reprieve or repeat performance.

They will not pass this way again.

But oh—had you seen it

You would have known a magic

Even words could never capture

Still, some nights there escapes

A thin line of smoke trailing up from

A smoldering fire

We never tire of imagining

Them still together

—Sarah Routman

Spring At Last

I can feel the breeze
In the warm weather,
And I can see the bees
All together.

I can smell Pine
Flowing in the air,
A nice feeling in my spine,
And love in my hair.

This is all part of the year,
That we all fear
Will end too fast,
It is Spring, at last.

Upside Down

My feet were once on the ground,
My life was once normal.
Now every time I turn around,
I wish I could be formal.

The floor is the ceiling, and the ceiling is the floor,

I used to play here happily.
Now I am alone, it's worse than before,
All I have is my family.

This virus was once small,
But it soon took over all.
Everybody was once grinning,
But now the world is spinning.

I know what's going on,
I wish it was a con.
I wish this virus would drown,
But the world has gone upside-down.

The Black Cat

Looking out the window, the dark with the light,
This cat will win any fight.
The spirit of Fall,
Looking over it all,
This cat can fly higher than a kite
Silky black fur
And dark green eyes
My cat of purrs
Is the cat of the night.

A Hug From Nature (Haiku)

The wind is blowing
The trees are shaking outside
A hug from nature

A little about the poet:
Zoey Flasher is 10 years old and lives in Marietta, GA. Her many interests include baking, a love of science, her dog, Chewbacca, and anything Star Wars!

Young Poet, Zoey
Flasher, shares
thoughtful insights



In the Early Morning

It is odd, yet strikingly pleasant
When you awake while the rooster
Is obnoxious and you hear the paper
Hit your front door as you sit outside
On the balcony smoking the day's
First cigarette and see what the spider
Has created during the night
Waiting for the sun to rise and able
To wear a sweater because there is
An autumn chill in the air
At this point going back to sleep
For a few hours is not an option
So, you wait for your day to begin
Thinking about falling in love
With a different woman who just
Might feel the same.

—Grant Armstrong

I Burned a Poem Today

I was writing a poem
this morning
and I burned it. I just
wanted to color it
a little, make it golden.
But it got too hot
and I burned it.
Not just dark,
but charred, black, crispy.
Ruined. Tossed it out
and started a new mix
with fresher words
not too spicy. Can
you taste the difference?

—Nadia Giordana
From "The Emerald Green Horse"

Spring of Whisper

Galleried forever in the fortune cookie of life.
Garnished with dandelion.
Frenzied with the idea that forever might be
a makeshift elation
assembled from recycled scraps
collected on the shore of yesterday.

Whatever you say in a whisper holds my voice.
In the void of patience, we cast our pennies.
They shimmer gold and silver
in the underwater sun.
Glorious is each new day.
Endless are the jarring blows
that shake us trembling off the path.

Notice yourself at the bottom of each fall.
Hey there, say, I'm with you.
See how it feels to touch your chest
and listen to your breath.
In which cupboard are you hushing your hopes?

See that closed-off corridor
within everyone
you love
to name each desire
to see them elated.
Here is the resolve
to resurrect
listening to the call.

There is a lion
leaving messages
for you on the wind.
Listen, he says, to the sound of how you love
and glide softly on that breeze.
Humans, wake from your endless night.
This is not my voice, but the one who calls to me in sleep.
Wake up and hold the new born day,
lift your head and look around at the air that holds you,
forever in the embrace
that knew your nuances
before you knew your name.

—Luke M. Armstrong

The Hollow Tree

Sitting by a crackling fire
on a still autumn eve.
I thought about an old oak tree
that grew on this very spot
where the firepit now rests.

I never thought to worry about
that hundred-year-old tree.
Until October thirty-first, many years ago.
Comeuppance for my apathy
found me on that starry, moonless night.

While leaning against that gnarly trunk
the darkness settled in.
And with it brought a bitter frost.
The roots began to groan and growl.
The ground swelled up with rage.

Oh, what becomes of roots and leaves
that succumb to earthly evils?
The answer came most hauntingly
when the roots and trunk exploded.
I ran. But not quit far enough.

For as it fell, the tallest branch
knocked me to the ground.
The grand old trunk and brittle limbs
shattered all around me.
What happened next, none dare imagine!

Oozing from the roots
into that hollow stump
appeared a thousand goblins!
They spun around my head
with sinister laughs and shrieks.

Rapidly that fire grew
as I gathered up the branches
and quickly tossed them in.
The tree began to hiss and spat
as flames licked at its limbs.

Then a whisper filled the air.
It spoke of a Halloween Magic
that happens on moonless nights.
It brings a special power to things
that have no voice at all.

—Leanne M. Benson

Never, Never, Land My Ship

Never, never, land my ship,
For now would be too late.
I always dreamt someday you'd come,
But my days were spent in wait.

If you had come when I was young,
What shores we might have found,
But I was closely watching,
And you never came to ground.

So never, never, land my ship,
I'm too old to sail the seas.
I'll finish out my days ashore ...
But, wait, I hear a breeze--!

Could it be my ship has come at last?
I squint my eyes to see,
But the sound was just my own deep sigh,
No speck disturbs the sea.

So never, never, land my ship,
You've taken far too long,
Seek out some younger dreamer,
For I'm no longer strong.

—Mark Pearce



From Pixabay.com

The ER Exam Room

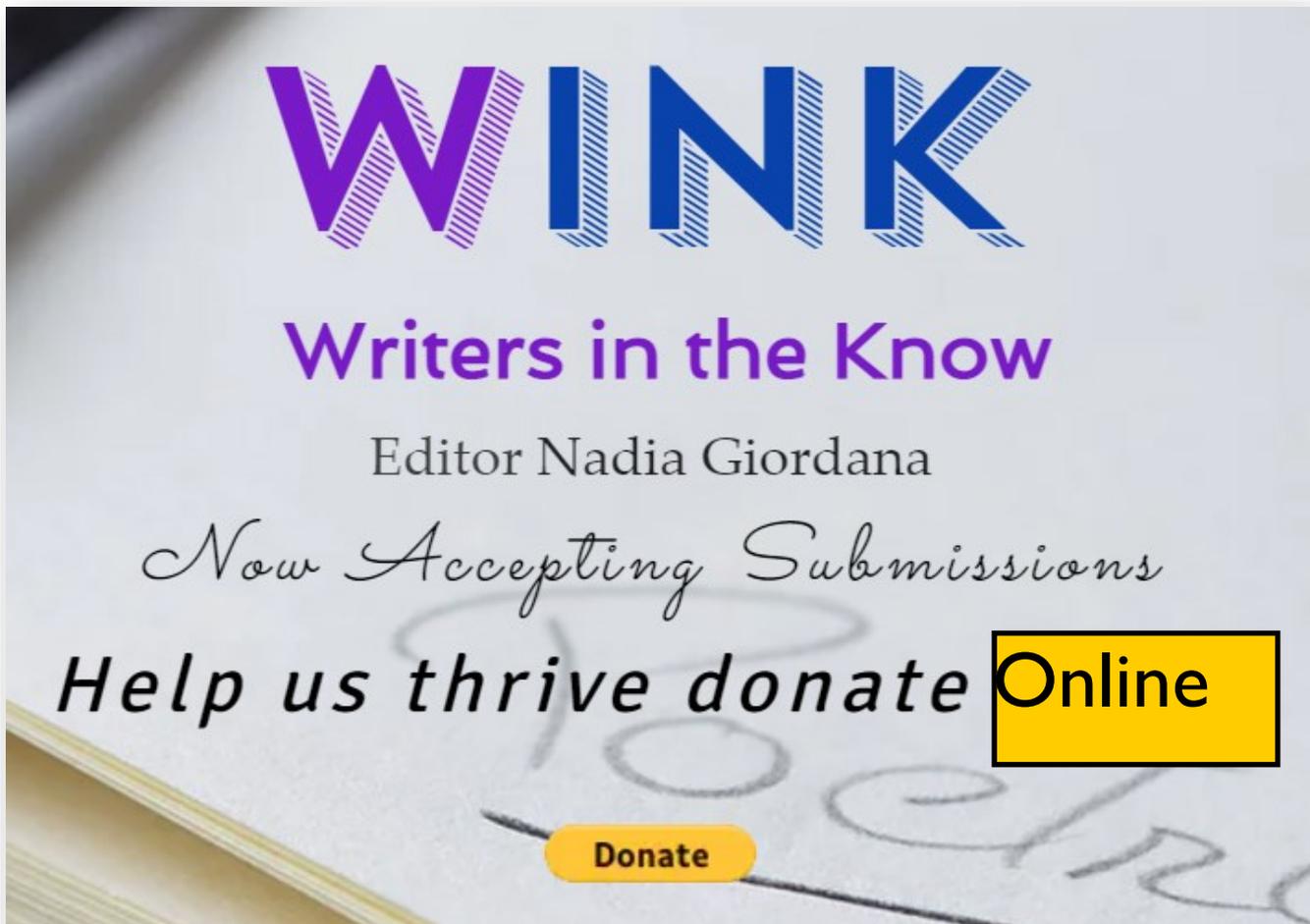
Mom's gone to get a CAT scan of her throat
 Doc said no eating or drinking allowed for Mom. For now. Until further notice.
 I'm not eating or drinking to show support
 I'm rethinking that decision, but not interested in the fun-size Snicker bar
 resting in the royal blue tote hanging from the plastic hook next to me
 I look around the ER exam room for distraction
 Breakfast was a long time ago
 Lunch was large coffee and fun-size Snicker bar forever-ago too
 I look at my watch — 2:08 p.m. — I stare ahead at nothing
 Suddenly I see lavender nitrile gloves peeking from boxes loosely organized by size
 in a dispenser mounted on the wall across from me
 What a lovely and delicious shade of lavender
 The milk and dark chocolate faux wood cabinets next to the doorway stretch from
 floor to ceiling and my mouth is watering

While I sit in the folding chair with my back against the wall
 I wonder how many shades of off-white are in this exam room
 Cool off-white and gray marble veins in the vanity sink (is it faux marble?)
 Warm chalky off-white drywall stretches from sink to ceiling
 Plastic off-white panel extends from the sink to the wall and down to the floor
 Rubbery Off-white base trim joins the off-white wall and the off-white speckled
 vinyl floor, each a different shade
 Multifold off-white paper towels hang from the plastic charcoal-colored dispenser
 Soap dispenser is another shade of off-white
 Disinfecting wipes container is the lightest brightest off-white thing in the room
 held in place by the darker off-white plastic holder
 Nitrile glove dispenser is off-white powder coated metal
 Adhesive-affixed hook on the wall holding the metal scissors is off-white too
 Semi-transparent plastic trash bags, layered, folded and draped over the plastic gray
 trash container, are an off-white all their own
 The articulating arm of the electronic medical record workstation is off-white
 The off-white powder coated metal rack affixed to the wall with screws is a vertical
 dashboard — off-white plastic plates cover electrical and other outlets — off-white
 baskets hold medical equipment and cords
 The off-white ceiling tiles surround an off-white ceiling vent cover which is big
 enough for "MacGyver" to escape through
 Recessed ceiling light trim is dull off-white metal
 Rolls of off-white tape are stacked next to off-white tissue peeking up from the
 Kleenex box on the marble vanity (is it faux marble?)
 Hand sanitizer dispenser, affixed to the brown cabinet, located above the vanity is off-white plastic

While I sit with shades of off-white, I wonder who is their decorator
 Who picked that rolling recline-able patient care chair in the center of the room
 Who picked that patient care chair's mint-colored shade of green
 Mmm, mint.
 It's 2:42 p.m.

—Teresa M. Riggs Foushee

We at WINK are grateful to the “silent benefactors” who unselfishly donate funds small and large, to help us thrive, because as most of you already know, WINK is an “out-of-pocket” labor of time effort, and most of all, LOVE, on the part of our volunteer staff and editors. We are dedicated to the purpose of providing a platform for both emerging and accomplished poets and writers from all walks. If you are wondering how you can help, or donate via PayPal, there is a convenient link on the front page of our website, <http://www.winkwriters.com> (see image below) or you can inquire to our executive editor, Nadia Giordana at iinadia@msn.com.



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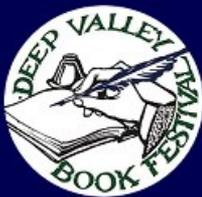


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THE WOLF WHO ARRIVED HOME EMPTY-HANDED

After rehearsing the lie he planned to tell his wife as he paced back and forth outside the den, the wolf finally broke down and entered the den and told his wife the truth.

"I was over by the McCoy house again," he said. "The house on the hill."

"I know where the McCoy house is," the wife said.

"I heard a baby crying inside the house," the wolf went on. "So, I snuck a little closer."

"Of course, you did," his wife said.

"Anyway," the wolf said. "As I stood there listening and staring at the open window of the house, the mother of the baby, at least I assume it was the mother, tried to hush the baby. 'Shhh,' she told

the baby. 'Shhh.' But the baby kept crying and crying and the mother was beginning to lose it, you know, she was going crazy with all that crying, and she yelled at one point, 'For God's sake, stop crying! I swear, if you don't stop right now, I'll throw you out to the wolves!'—"

"Let me guess," the wolf's wife interjected. "You believed her."

"What reason did I have *not* to?" he said. "She sounded like she meant it."

The wife shook her head. "Men," she muttered. "You guys are so clueless."

"I went closer," the wolf continued. "I know it sounds stupid, but I half expected a baby to come flying out the window."

"It's a turn of phrase," the wife said. "You know. Like when someone says *it's raining cats and dogs*, or *I'm so hungry I could eat a horse*. Or when someone says *it takes forever* to get to some place. You can't take words like that literally."

"I know."

"People do this all the time. They say one thing but mean another."

"Can I finish the story?" the wolf said.

"That poor mother," the wife said. "I know what she's going through. Do you remember when our little one was born? I didn't sleep for two months."

"So, the mother tells the baby she'll throw it out the window," the wolf continued. "She yelled this so loud I could hear it fifty feet away, and of course mothers don't mean things like that when they say them, but the very idea she said it made me think she might, that it was possible, and I got excited about seeing that baby come flying through the window and I tiptoed closer and closer and I stared at that window. The smell made me stop. I froze. I sniffed the air. I didn't know what it was, then I saw the two German Shepherds. They were sniffing the air too. They were coming around the house, walking toward me, but they hadn't yet seen or smelled me—luckily, I was downwind—and so I bolted around the other side of the house and took off running, and I heard the dogs start barking a few seconds later and so I ran even faster and I didn't stop, which is why I was panting so hard when I arrived."

"And also," she added, "why you came home without supper." She looked at their pup over in the corner. "Let's talk about this later," she said. "The baby *you're* responsible for doesn't care why you have no food for him, only that you don't have it. Can you go and get something, please? A squirrel, a mouse, or even a lizard? Anything."

"Of course," he said obediently.

He loped off into the forest and felt secretly glad with himself for telling his wife the truth, even though he knew it reinforced the idea she had that he was dumb—or rather, not that he was dumb, but that he made poor choices sometimes. The truth was, he did. He knew it was stupid to go poking around the human neighborhood. He knew he had no business there. Right then, he realized he was trotting in the direction of the McCoy house again, and he laughed at himself. Yes, he would go back there. He would go there and he would end up admitting this to his wife, and he would get in trouble all over again. But not that day. That day, he turned and headed east, toward the river. Every animal stopped there to drink and so it was usually a great place to hunt. He knew what his role was and he played it. That's why he went to the river. But the whole way there he thought about that baby, its mother, and the dogs. He couldn't wait to go back and see what was going on at the McCoy house.

—Wes Tern