



WINK

Issue 20

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On Finding A Dead Deer In My Backyard

By Nolo Segundo

I saw them a few weeks ago. My wife called me, something urgent—so I left the computer and went to see what so excited her.

Three deer, three young deer meandering around our quarter-acre backyard. They look thin, she said—I agreed (not saying it was not a good sign with winter coming near).

We enjoyed watching them through our plate glass door, their casual grace, that elegance of walk deer have when unafraid. They were special, even more than the occasional cardinal alighting in our yard like a breathing ruby with wings—so we stayed as still as possible. I told her that deer can only see what moves, so we held ourselves tight like insensate statues.

Two of these white-tailed beauties grazed daintily on the ground but the third was drawn to our giant holly tree, resplendent with its myriad red berries, like necklaces thrown capriciously.

I was concerned—there is something alarming about deer being drawn like the proverbial moth—safe, I wondered, for deer or tree?

The triplets soon left our yard, as casually as they had come, and a week went by—then one day a single deer came back. I say back because she went straight for the holly tree, and I banged on the plate glass door and yelled as fierce as an old man can yell to scare off the now-unwanted intruder, for something told me the holly tree would mean death to the deer.

She fled, but the next day came back again, again alone, and again with eyes only for that tree, like an Eve that could not say no to the forbidden fruit—or berries or leaves it appears. Again I chased her away, and for a few days saw no return.

Then one brisk morning our neighbor called—he saw what we could not see in the deep green thickness of that holly tree. The doe lay sleeping under its canopy (so death always seems with animals, unlike a human corpse where something is gone), killed it seemed by berries or the leaves of the innocent tree.

I called my township—they said, put the carcass by the street, we'll send someone to pick

it up—but I couldn't, or wouldn't. Not just because I walk with a cane, and am old and unsure how such a moving would be done—no, no, it was more—when I saw the deer lying sheltered beneath the tree it loved, the tree it died for, it seemed a sacred place, consecrated—and I could not bring myself to violate nature's holy ground.

Fortunately I have a neighbor who is not sentimental, and he roughly dragged the dead doe to the curb, and I knew, by its pungent unearthly smell of death, it was the only answer. ###



Epic Poetry

By Eva Marie Cagley

Epic Poetry predates literacy, centuries before humans began writing poetry. Researchers believe that poetry and storytelling were developed to help storytellers remember their history and pass it through the ages.

Poetry was easier to remember. “An epic poem is a long narrative poem that talks about heroic deeds and events that are significant to the culture of the poet.” Often it contained tales of intense adventures and heroic feats. This includes Oral Epics and Folklore (Ideas of stories that are not true, but many people have heard or read). Epic came from the Ancient Greek adjective, “epikos” which means a poetic story. It speaks of bravery and courage. The style usually uses an impressive style. It represents values of a certain culture, race, nation, and groups. The hero comes out the victor in the end.

Ballad poetry on the other hand is shorter in length and is composed to be sung. They are known as folk ballads—passed on from generation to generation.

The first example of Epic poetry called Gilgamesh tells the story of life as an Assyrian king. Themes are related to gods, mortality, human beings’

legacy, and seduction. It is done in a grand style. This epic was written 4,000 years ago. Iliad is another form of epic poetry, written by a blind poet by the name of Homer. Homer is a mystery; little facts are known about him. It contains the story of the Trojan Wars. *Paradise Lost* is an epic written by a blind poet John Milton. Milton was an English poet polemicist (attacks with spoken words and loves a good debate) and man of letters, a civil servant for the commonwealth of England under Oliver Cromwell. Milton used similar techniques as Homer, such as a grand style that contained similes and the muse. The purpose of epic poetry was to raise the heroes up to audiences, inspiring them to be ready for heroic actions. Epics were collections of historical events not recorded in history books. There are few examples of Epic poetry—due to the length of the poems.

Enjoy the spoken word and remember to listen to your grandparents and great-grandparents for family history. ###

Open Skies

By Nadia Giordana

Julie and her best girlfriend, Betsy, graduated from Berkeley and have remained fast friends ever since. Today, all eyes focused on Betsy. Julie sat back and watched her open a brightly wrapped package. Baby showers are always such fun, especially when we can shop for gender-specific gifts, she thought, eyes glazed over. I'm not ready for this kind of thing, but when the time comes, it will be unforgettable.

"What are you thinking about, Julie?" Her mother asked playfully. "Head in the clouds somewhere? Come back down here with us and join the fun." Just then, somebody passed the instructions for the next silly game.

"Sorry, Mom. I was thinking about the day I make *you* a grandmother." Julie grinned widely.

Fast forward several months: Julie was over-the-moon ecstatic when Frank asked her to marry him. It was early October, and they were attending the "San Francisco Fleet Week" air show. Around

noontime, they staked out a picnic table before they were all snapped up and laid out their private luncheon in honor of "Italian Heritage Days," which was also happening on the same weekend. Their repast included two of Julie's favorite cured meats, prosciutto, and capicola, along with soft, creamy cheeses, burrata, and gorgonzola—all to be eaten with a loaf of fresh-baked Italian bread. Spread across a red-checked tablecloth, their sumptuous meal turned the heads of more than a few onlookers. They completed the meal with Bell'agio Banfi Chianti (the kind with the straw basket woven around the bottle). "It's not expensive, but decent and ever so much fun to pour," Julie giggled. Suddenly, Frank grabbed her by the shoulders, kissed her, and pointed up into the sky as a biplane swooped into view, trailing a banner that said, "Marry me, Julie."

"If I hadn't already been sitting down, my knees would have buckled," Julie would say to her friends every time she recounted the proposal—especially when she told it to Betsy. Julie said yes on the spot, and Frank excitedly produced a ring box from his jacket pocket and offered her a gleaming, one-karat solitaire diamond ring.

He was perfect for her, witty, charming, and had a job with a future as an airline mechanic working on the big planes at San Francisco International Airport. She'd met his family. No big surprises or turn-offs there, she thought. And she was confident her family would adore him when they got the chance to meet him. Julie and Frank had known each other only three months when he proposed, and while she supposed that was a little short, she couldn't help thinking, When it's right, it's right. It was something her mother often said about a dozen different things, not just romance. Fast forward to New Year's Eve. Their families celebrated and planned the wedding, which would take place at this venue six months later. Their party included Julie's mother and stepfather, her older brother and younger half-sister, Frank, his parents, and his twin brother Stanley (fraternal). Both families had booked rooms and were all in a festive mood. Champagne flowed. Frank and Julie were mixing and socializing with everyone as they always did when they were out.

The vast ballroom dance floor was flanked by four French doors draped in white gauze curtains, offering access to intimate balconies overlooking

San Francisco Bay. All were left open on this unseasonably-warm January evening.

Julie looked around as the clock was striking midnight and the fireworks were getting underway. Boom! Pop, pop, pop. Whirr, crackle, fizz. She searched for Frank, hoping to ring in the New Year with his lips on hers. He wasn't on the dance floor, so she began checking the balconies—no luck, as she poked her head into one after another. At the third one down from the orchestra, she peeked in and smiled as a couple, clearly enamored of each other, kissed passionately to the strains of "Auld Lange Syne." Her gaze lingered; Frank and I don't kiss like that, she thought wistfully; he's much more down-to-earth.

But there was something familiar about the silhouettes that made her look closer, and as her eyes adjusted and fireworks lit their faces, her heart stopped. It was her sister Emma—and Frank! She squared her shoulders and stepped out into the half-light of the tiled platform. "I see you two are getting acquainted. Have you made your resolutions yet? Would you like to guess mine?"

Frank's Story:

I love Julie, I do. I couldn't have known this would happen, Frank thought as he sat alone in his hotel room, ruminating over the events leading up to the disaster of last evening. Just then, his brother Stanley cautiously sticks his head into the room. "Can we talk? What the hell was that last night? Everyone is expecting an explanation. Except for Julie, she's gone home broken-hearted. Her family left too."

"Thanks, Stan, yes, I need to get this off my chest, although I don't think it will help much. My story with Emma goes back two years. We had a whirlwind, once-in-a-lifetime romance. I met her on a parachute jump at "Skydive Santa Barbara," and we spent only one day together. But in that short time, we fell head-over-heels, knowing nothing more about each other except for our love of jumping out of planes. It was all we talked about. Then as we were coming in from the third and final jump of the day, Emma was approached by the police. They walked out onto the field to meet her. I was far behind her, not close enough to pick up more than two words, "friend" and "killed." Emma was visibly upset as they escorted her away, sobbing. I called out after her, "Emma, Emma, wait! I don't know how to reach you. My last name is Smith.

What is yours?" but she was oblivious. I spent the better part of the next week trying to find her, but I didn't have enough information. We'd thought we would have more time to make plans and get to know each other. I suppose that was irresponsible, but we weren't thinking about that at the time. I can't say it was love, not in such a short time, but attraction and passion? Oh yes."

"Then, when I saw her again last night at the party, I was speechless, as was she. I could see it in her eyes, and I felt it in her trembling touch as we shook hands and gave each other a friendly, 'introductory' hug."

"As you know, Stan," Frank continues, "I've always been a bit of a 'devil-may-care' kind of guy, but that's a side of myself I've tried to outgrow and hide from Julie as much as I was able. Now things are all messed up, and I don't know what to do. I need to sort out my true feelings before I make things worse."

"I'm so confused and hurt, Mom. How could they do this to me?" Julie sobbed into her cell phone as she drove along the coast, headed for her apartment in San Diego.

"I don't know, honey, I just don't know," her mother said. "You shouldn't be alone right now after you get settled in, c'mon over and stay the night here with us. We can talk. Your sister won't be here. She must be feeling awful too, but I haven't had a chance to talk to her."

"Thanks, Mom. Okay, I will. See you tonight. I don't want to see Emma right now." Julie clicked her phone off and drove in silence, staring at the road ahead—no radio, no music, alone with her thoughts. ###



Talking a Woman Off the Ledge of the Bridge...

By Mary Kay Crawford

I sign up for a De-escalation training class.
Required coursework for my job.

The Counselor/Instructor advises me and my co-workers that during this training session, we would learn to build empathy and rapport with the individual experiencing a mental health crisis.

At the front of the classroom, a woman pulls a chair toward a sturdy tabletop and steps up.

I sympathize with the woman now precariously poised on the tabletop—a faux ledge—simulating a narrow space upon the bridge that spans West River Parkway and the Mississippi River.

I am instructed to talk her down. Off the ledge of the bridge.

The woman is thirty years my junior, but with whispers of my younger self, I sense her desperation.

She roleplays a wildly despondent individual, in a deadlock stare with a glint of concrete sidewalk, fifty feet straight down from where she is standing.

Alongside the damp gray stretch of concrete, the Mississippi River sweeps past dancing in sparkles of sunlight and swirls of fierce turbulence.

The woman is an actress, but the tears and runny nose are real.

I stand at a safe distance. It's as close as I can get. Her back is to me.

"There's nothing left to live for," the actress murmurs between sobs.

I feel the tingling sensation of adrenaline heighten my emotions.

I've been coached to show empathy. *'Start to understand where they are coming from and how they feel.'*

And now, I'm in the spotlight, with the entire class watching. I must awaken this woman to her increasing peril before it is too late.

Something about this experience feels deeply personal and familiar. It's a lived experience silenced through the passing of years.

I want to share my story with the woman on the ledge. To show her my scars and how life looks from above—even when it's impossible to be alone without remembering the past. I want to tell

her to tighten her hold on life. To say she will awaken tomorrow exhausted but grateful to be alive. To assure her she will find her way back. *We will get through this together*, I want to say, and this moment will lose its death grip.

I wonder why we think we must have all the answers to the problems we encounter in our lives. See the river rushing past us? Water under the bridge, as they say...

But then, I'm thirty years older than the woman left out on the ledge. I *may* have this advantage. Familiarity with the unimaginable. I know the patience that life requires. How it reshapes and refines us.

Morning half-light pours in through the fifth-floor classroom windows on this beautiful summer day. Outside, the age-old river knows we are here preparing for another mental health crisis to possibly enliven its turbulent waters. How many lives has the river taken, I wonder?

Give their emotions a name, the handout sheet reads.

"You sound pretty hurt," I say.

Take intentional pauses and let them fill the silence with info.

The actress falls to her knees, "My family says I'm nothing," she gasps as if gut punched.

"Well, they are **WRONG**," I say in a voice used to express my deepest convictions.

Show understanding. I wait, quietly giving her my full attention, then I told her my first name.

"I feel abandoned," she says crying softly.

I mouth the words to her. 'I care. I'm here.' Then I say it more audibly with clarity and sincerity, 'I'm here. I care.' I relax my face and pause. And slowly ever so slowly, I begin to believe it myself. As I realize this stranger, actress or not, I care about her. I really do.

My heart floats in my chest, the air more fragile up here with both of us wavering in the fragility of life.

What is this fated connection? This desire to bear one another's burdens.

There is no safe place—other than with each other.

The imaginary earth spins dizzily below us.

I reach up gingerly for her hand, and in a blur of motion, she reaches back to grasp mine.

"It's going to be okay," I say, bringing her to safety.

"We are here for each other."

And somewhere within my heart I do believe this to be completely true. ###

Readings

By Mark Keane

Brendan Clancy leans on the lectern. He has been speaking for fifteen minutes, according to the clock on the wall.

“There is a dilemma inherent in time,” he tells the audience. “The relentless, ineluctable flow of time. Once a moment has passed, the realization comes that you have not made enough of it.”

A man with a comb-over sitting in front of me coughs, a weak hack that will do nothing to ease a scratchy throat. His cheeks and neck redden as he fights the insidious tracheal tickle. Others start coughing; a dry *ahem* to my right, and a phlegmy *whoop* to my left. You can tell a lot from a cough, whether the cougher is sneaky or disapproving. Right now, there’s too much coughing, when they should be listening to Clancy.

“Time is intolerable. You can not waylay it, nor can you control it.”

Clancy has an unassuming manner, and reads without pretension. He looks the part—very writerly in his tweed jacket and checkered shirt. But there’s no suggestion of entitlement or audacity. No hint of the proud author expecting to be admired. If anything, he’s too diffident. Who knows what misaligned impulse has led him to this point; isolated behind the lectern, the focus of frowning faces and staring eyes.

Clancy runs a hand through his shock of grey hair before turning the page. In the pause, I hear the whisper of arses shifting on seats. Heads are raised to look at the clock, or lowered to check phones.

“All you want is to be free from time’s grip.” A woman at the end of the front row gets up, and rushes out the door in a running walk. Clancy doesn’t appear to see her go.

No one left during the first reading, and that had been hard going. Torture by words; consonants rubbed abrasively, and vowels squeezed into dust. The reader, concentrated prerogative in yellow mohair, described the act of creating as a self-transcendence. The act of listening was an endurance. Bad luck for Clancy to get the second slot.

He stops to take a sip of water. Two more leave, torsos bent at forty-five degrees, loping out

the door in the style of Groucho Marx. Clancy notices this time.

“Not much more to go,” he says, holding up the stapled pages.

Five out of twenty, I reckon. Roughly a quarter remaining. Seventy five percent completed, never to be experienced again. Not such a terrible ordeal, and Clancy seems a decent sort.

No one was forced to enter this room and sit on these chairs. They saw the sign outside: *The Arts Club showcases new work—a reading of selected entries.* Why come here if you’re not going to listen? Clancy’s work may be tedious, and he may be a poor performer but those who attend should stick it out. Instead, they leave in dribs and drabs. I spot one pushing across the row, and cross my legs, forcing him to squeeze through a narrow gap. I look into his face; wee piggy eyes and sneering impatience. He mouths a pathetic *excuse me*. Can he do better than Clancy? Why should he expect any better?

Clancy appears bothered now, and picks up the pace, rushing to the finish line.

“The predicament of accommodating time. The temporal strain that is existence.” He looks up from the page. “Nothing left, no words or voices or sounds to distract from time passing. It passes regardless.”

He lowers his head. The end, in other words. A burst of applause. Very loud clapping from the front row. It was the same after the first reading; likely some demented soul with boundless enthusiasm. Clancy raises a hand as though to fend off the applause, but his lively eyes express delight at this display of approval.

“Now,” he says, “I’d like to read something I completed yesterday.” He smiles. “A sneak preview, if you like.”

What does Clancy think he’s doing? One reading is sufficient. The audacity of the man.

He takes some folded pages from the inside pocket of his tweed jacket. “A short piece, still a little rough around the edges.”

Brendan Clancy stands tall at the lectern, appraising the audience. For Christ sake, who does he think he is? This is too much, an unacceptable imposition—putting us through more of this torment.

Clancy clears his throat. Someone behind me coughs.

“In this reading...” He takes his time unfolding the pages. “I address the intractability of understanding.”

###

Blackout

By Zack Murphy

My roommate took off right before I lost my job at the pizza place. The only thing he left behind was a note that read, "Moved back home." If only the unpaid rent were attached to it.

I sit at the wobbly kitchen table, gazing at the floating dust particles that you can see only when the sunlight shines in at the perfect angle. Sometimes, you have to convince yourself that they aren't old skin.

The air conditioner moans, as if it's irritated that it has to work so hard. I haven't left the apartment in four days, for fear that the hellish temperature might melt away my spirit even more. *Is a heat wave a heat wave if it doesn't end?* I gulp down the remainder of my orange juice. The pulp sticks to the side of the glass. It always bothers me when that happens.

As I stand up to go put my head into the freezer, the air conditioner suddenly goes on a strike of silence and the refrigerator releases a final gasp. I walk across the room and flip the light switch. Nothing.

There's a knock at the door. I peer through the peephole. It's the lady with the beehive hair from across the hall. I crack the door open.

"Is your power out?" she asks.

"Yes," I answer.

"It must be the whole building," she says.

"Maybe the whole city," I say.

"The food in your fridge will go bad after four hours," she says.

I'd take that information to heart if I had any food in the refrigerator.

"Thanks," I say as I close the door.

When the power goes out, it's amazing how all of your habits remind you that you're nothing without it. The TV isn't going to turn on and your phone isn't going to charge.

There's another knock at the door. It's the guy from downstairs who exclusively wears jorts. "Do you want a new roommate?" he asks.

"What?"

He nods his head to the left. I glance down the hallway and see a scraggly black cat with a patch of white fur on its chest.

"It was out lying in the sun," the guy says.

"Looked a bit overheated, so I let it inside."

Before I can say anything, the cat walks through the doorway and rubs against my leg.

"Catch you later," the guy says.

I fill up a bowl with some cold water and set it on the floor. The cat dashes over and drinks furiously.

At least water is free, I think to myself. *Kind of.*

I head into my dingy bedroom and grab the coin jar off of my dresser. "This should be enough to get you some food," I say.

I step out the apartment door and look back at the cat.

"I think I'll call you Blackout." ###



The Things I Owe You

I owe you my life
 Unbuttoned and freshly baked
 I owe you my untouched lips
 My unspoiled poem
 I owe you all the beautiful thoughts unsaid
 The silent river of love in me is all yours
 I owe you a ballet dance
 A soft but forceful romance
 It is all a dream of course
 I owe you my uncelebrated life
 All my compassion, humility and humor
 I owe you a great vacation
 Not in this world
 But in my arms
 Closer to my heart
 I owe you a fantastic meal
 Prepared not by my hands
 But by my heart
 Love, I owe you my love
 A form of sacred nectar
 And an eternal flame
 To give you hope, joy and more love
 I owe you my innermost self
 Untainted by expectations, experiences
 And material needs
 I owe you my full attention
 Not shared with poems and dreams
 I owe you my world

—Kenneth Maswabi

The Last Big Wave

By Mary Deal

“It’s metastasized into your lungs,” the doctor had said. “No more surfing for you, Ms. Queen of the Waves. Not in your weakened condition.” He thought if I fell, I wouldn’t be able to save myself from drowning. He’s elderly, fatherly. I felt regret and wondered why my life couldn’t last as long as his.

Chemo and radiation were a last resort. The x-rays showed more spreading disease than healthy tissue. I decided to stop the treatments.

My best friend sat in the waiting room. Though we’ve never been lovers, Ben has been my long-time companion. When I told him about my advanced condition, he lost his composure. Days later, after accepting my prognosis, he commented, “You’re the most resilient person I know. Anyone else would have buckled by now.”

Though I’ve accepted my fate, I won’t just give up. I’m not dead yet. I will continue being active till I’m too weak. Even then, there must be more, maybe an afterlife.

Ben lost his twin sister when a drunk driver hit her on her bike. I resembled his sister and didn’t wish to replace her but Ben’s friendship was pure. I’d settle for nothing less, but didn’t want marriage. Ben understood. He helped restore my confidence and self-esteem after my abusive relationship. We’ve shared a bond for many years, but once I’m gone, Ben will have lost another person that he loves. His own resilience will be challenged once again.

A friend asked if I was scared. I hadn’t been. Being nearly two miles off shore surfing the big rollers among the marauding sharks is life-threatening. That never scared me, but lately being courageous feels scripted at times.

Now, as Ben drives quietly, a sense of doom rolls through my mind. With cancer consuming my flesh, my emotions and stability, a great urge to scream gets stuck in my throat. I begin to shake. I pull down the sun visor, flick open the mirror, and pretended to fix my hair. Ben glances at me. My small talk is a dead give-away.

We arrive at our favorite beach on Kauai’s North Shore. He and I live to surf. It’s as if the sea is our life’s blood. We’re usually the last to

leave the water.

We walk across the beach at Hanalei Bay. The sand has cooled by this late hour. The tall beach break barrels keep coming, their frothy caps inviting. We hope to catch the last big wave of the day. Ben helps me fasten the straps of my vest, a life preserver to save a life that can’t be saved.

Wading into the warm tropical water, Ben stays beside me, where he’s been, like a guardian angel. The ocean’s roar fills my ears with the sound of a never-ending rhythm as the tide rolls in, ebbs, and then returns anew. Strong trade winds kick up. A storm at sea may be pushing our way. As we mount our surfboards, Ben smiles and motions with a nod toward a monster swell approaching. It glistens as the fading sun spreads a trough of light across the water toward us, signaling the day’s end is near. We need to get behind the swell and ride in on the surge before the storm catches us. Lying flat, we paddle out toward the early setting sun.

###

Code Names

By Connie Anderson

Two women volunteers at a weekend event sat together while eating their lunch—and the usual small talk of getting to know each other began. Things like: How many children and grandchildren do you have?

Vera, the younger of the two, seemed to do most of the talking, while Rachael just smiled a lot. Rachael was raised on a farm, married with two children and four grandchildren. She was widowed quite young.

Vera asked Rachael where she had worked before retiring. “I worked in children’s services at the county level.”

Vera said, “I had a former friend who worked there. Her name was Sandy Brisco.” Vera glanced at Rachael and noticed the weirdest look after that name hit her ears.

Rachael loudly spits out these words: *I. Know. That. Person!*

Vera just had to know more, so she encouraged Rachael by asking, “Your face and tone says it was not a good thing. Tell me more.”

Rachael said, “At that time, both Sandy and I were single—and were using the same dating service that initially involved talking on the phone with a man. Real names were irrelevant so early in the connection, everyone used code names to identify themselves.

“Sandy had already had ‘several’ husbands, like she was running a test kitchen to find the right man. I imagine she was talking with quite a few men at the same time, picking her next choice. She’s like the woman who opened a fortune cookie to find this message: Pick another fortune cookie. Wonder what her code name was...maybe “explorer” or “searcher,” or maybe “Man Tester.”

Rachael said she choose “Bear claw” as her code name because a man had once told her that her large, strong hands were like shaking hands with a bear.

Rachael said, “As time went on, I had been talking with a man who was kind, and a good listener and conversationalist. He sounded like the kind of man I’d like to actually meet. His codename was Dune Buggy, which indicated to me he was an adventurous person.

“One day during our phone visit, he told me his real name, and that he writes books and consults in business matters. That made Todd even more interesting.”

Rachael continued, “A few days later I needed to go to Sandy’s office where I noted one of Todd’s books on her table. I sort of blurted out: I know that man!” Sandy then put up both hands in a “stay-away” gesture and said, “*I am* dating him.”

As time passed, Todd and Sandy decided to get married, and Rachael and other coworkers were invited to the wedding. Vera was there too, as maid of honor. After a nice ceremony comes the receiving line where you get to wish the couple great happiness together.

Rachael said, “When I congratulated Todd and shook his hand, I said, ‘My hand is kind of like a bear claw, don’t you think? My strength would be good to have if you were driving around in a dune buggy.’”

The new groom looked confused; then “I get it” showed all over his face. He winked and smiled.

This secret is still ours alone. ###

Suppose I Could Find Reasons To Hate You

By Zary Fekete

“I just remember I bought a lottery ticket today,” she said.

“But you said there would be no more of that,” he said.

“Yes, that’s right. Except there was this offer today,” she said. “It came with the price of gas. Look up today’s drawing, would you?”

He pulled out his phone.

“Here it is,” he said. “Read me your ticket.”

She fished it out of her purse and read the first four digits of the series number. Each ticket began with four for the series, then there was a dash, and then two more for the ticket number.

“Series 2938, number 43,” she read.

“Hold on,” he said.

There was a pause; long enough for her to notice.

“What’s wrong?” she said.

“That’s your series,” he said. “That’s it completely: 2938.”

She looked up, her skin had gone all cold.

“Really?”

He looked at her.

“Well,” she said. “Finish. Find the last two.”

He didn’t answer her, a magnificent smile slowly playing out across his face. What he said next he spoke slowly with a touch of dazed amazement, “\$340 million. It’s a great deal. I imagine that the fear of college fees would be gone. The kids would be well-positioned for God knows what they might need. You could study. I might stop this infernal work at the market. There would be no need to bicker over the lawn-care. Think. All those past moments of brisk wrestling which tied us down for so long... Gone.”

As he spoke she slowly stood from her knitting chair and crossed to the window. She fingered a strand of her hair as she breathed a few times deeply. Then she said, “Yes. If we had it...I suppose I could find reasons to hate you.”

He paused.

“Let’s just not know,” he said.

“What do you mean?” she said.

“We need not know, after all,” he said.

“Isn’t that right?”

After a moment she understood him.

“Alright,” she said. Falling leaves blew across the lawn. One caught and fluttered. Then it too was gone. ###

Dear Friends, it is here! The first of four in the Amish Nurse romance series. (Written under my maiden name to differentiate from the earlier birth books.) November 2022

Excerpt:

Worry Ends Where Faith Begins

Chapter One

By Stephanie Schwartz

Phoebe looked out the window as she polished the last lamp chimney on the kitchen table that had been lined up with the others she had gathered from around the house earlier that morning. It was going to be another hot day. The air practically shimmered across the alfalfa fields.

Five lamps done, she told herself. Best to trim the lamps in the morning, otherwise you might forget and then when you need them in the evening they won't be clean or filled. She topped off the bottom chamber with kerosene, carefully screwing the cap back on, and moved the lamp to the 'done' side of the oilcloth-covered table. Another day just like yesterday, she told herself, breathing out an audible sigh. Summer in the 1980s looked very much like it did in the 1960s and would in all likelihood look the same in the Amish world in the next century, too. And the day before that...

she thought to herself, but that would turn out to be very far from the truth. Today would change her whole life. Forever. And she had no idea what was coming as she dreamily gazed out the window and across the golden fields to her right.

Then noticing a horse and buggy on the county road to her left, she watched absentmindedly as the horse trotted briskly along the shoulder of the road pulling a black buggy behind him, (or her,) rode on past her family's farm, past the row of weeping willows and on up

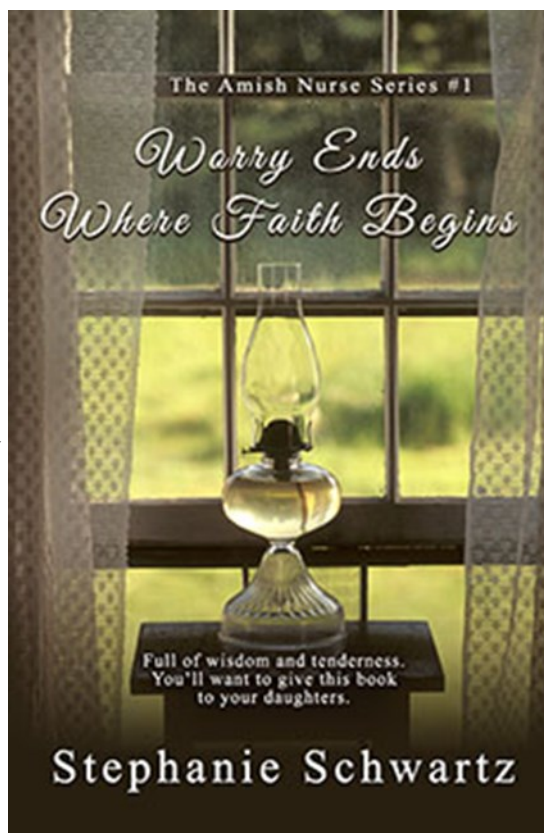
the road and out of sight. Then she wondered wistfully who was in that buggy, certainly not a young man on his way to see her. Oh, how she longed to be courted. If only—but it had not happened yet. Not once. All her girlfriends had gotten married already. Fine weddings they had too. She was often asked to be one of the attendants, but that is as close as she'd ever been to being in a wedding.

Her mind wandered once again to the home she was now convinced she would never have. Sometimes she admonished herself and left daydreaming to others.

But today she was discouraged. It was hot and life seemed so... so monotonous sometimes. One

brother, a hopeless pessimist, had once summed it up this way while greeting the family at breakfast one morning: "Another weary, dreary day," as if this life was just made up of days that you put in, days you ticked off on a calendar, waiting for the real thing, until you die. Some called it fatalistic; thinking that we have no choice in it, but to her there were still too many utterly beautiful things that God gave us to make this life worth living, even enjoying. Babies were one. Would she ever have a house full of them? So many, in fact, that she would be run ragged by the end of each day, only then falling into bed with—a man? And what would that

be like? The thought scared her while at the same time sending shivers up her back. Strong arms holding her, her head resting on his chest, then longing... Now she spent her days alone with Mamm and Dat. They were great. Mamm was wise and industrious and kind. Dat was funny and eternally telling bad jokes or making up puns that left them all hopelessly groaning. And there was Alice, their beautiful roan horse and the cats and the cows. Her older brothers, Abe and Isaac, had already married and built their own homes on Dat's land, living close enough to all work



together. Her parents had married late; both were in their mid-thirties when they met. They had only the three children, far fewer than many other families in their district. One family had thirteen bobbeli. Phoebe knew that house was never lonely, but the work and the huddlich were also never ending with such a large family. I won't have to

"Intelligent and authentic writing. A daring new look at Amish romance."

worry about having that many kinner at the rate I'm going, she thought to herself.

Turning away from the window, she finished the lamps, and picking up two, headed for the upstairs bedrooms. As she set each lamp on a bedstand, she shut the window and pulled closed the curtains. It's best to shut the cool night air in the house so we don't bake all day, she reasoned. Without air conditioning or electric fans, a house could get mighty hot on a summer day in the Midwest. Old Order Amish homes don't have electricity, so you make do with what you have....



Book #2 in the series will be available Winter 2023. Available at links below and others:

<https://amzn.to/3TGtLo>

<https://amzn.to/3EaGOZE>

<https://www.kobo.com/.../worry-ends-where-faith-begins-1>

<https://www.smashwords.com/books/view/1176966>

"Intelligent and authentic writing. A daring new look at Amish romance."

###

Downhill Run

By William Parsons

Myja Beecham (Jake) languidly leans on his ski pole, relaxed as he squints straight ahead across the valley to the peaks beyond. He doesn't notice at first as Jon slides into place beside him, moving into position for their downhill run.

Jon waits a few moments, grimacing at the cold. "Earth to Jake!" he shouts.

Myja glances across at Jon and signals his childhood best friend with his smiling eyes and a thumbs up. Myja watches his buddy as he gives Jon a proper head start, then lowers his own polarized goggles over his eyes, checks his bindings, and hunkers down. Taking three deep breaths in quick succession, he launches himself in perfect, practiced form.

A thick layer of powdery snow covers the mountain in silence thunderous in its echo. The pleasing noise of the friction of his skis sliding over the snow fills his ears as Myja revels in the beauty of the landscape racing by. The rays of the sun play through the branches, casting shadows outlined with dancing sparkles as ice crystals catch the light and impetuously throw it back. Myja smiles under his balaclava and imagines this mountain as the closest to paradise he would come in this lifetime.

The mountains, the sun, the trees, the rhythm of life—these are all a large part of Myja's love for this sport, but he would never deny the rush he felt at the world flashing by him as he rode on two flat boards which are the only things anchoring him to his future. Sure, he loves the exercise, the strain on his powerful muscles and tight frame, but it's the rush he loves, pure and simple. Myja Jacobius Beecham is feeling great!

Except for this nagging distraction.

Myja clears his preoccupied thoughts for two seconds, long enough to do a quick inventory of his performance: poles tucked against his sides, back straight, knees bent, legs together. But the infuriating distraction persists. Why? He hasn't been able to shake it for days, not since Captain Birnbaum had called him down to the police station and told him he had the job. 'I want to be a law enforcement officer. I do. Right?' Myja frowns under his mask.

(continued next page)

(Downhill Run continued)

Saturday now, Myja has until Monday to make up his mind. The captain told him, he can either show up ready to get into uniform or Myja can call him and tell him he's decided not to accept. Birnbaum had been ready to make it official on Thursday while he was shaking his hand. Myja remembers thinking he'd been the only one in that office on Thursday surprised by his own sudden hesitation, by the loosening of his firm handshake (Myja's grandfather had drilled two things into him: every man should own at least one good suit and should always lean forward with a firm handshake). Myja tells himself the captain himself had been a little disappointed, though the big, fatherly-type man had given the air of understanding. It had taken Myja two days, but now he understands: he would have to be willing to lay down his life for the safety and wellbeing of his community. What it all comes down to is, what does Myja really think about that. He'd have to be ready to point a weapon at another human being and pull the trigger.

* * *

Myja ducks at the last possible moment to keep a tree limb from beheading him. He glances quickly behind him, his eyes wide, swallowing hard and willing his heart to stop beating so hard, so fast. He'd skied this expert trail for a number of years now, the last couple in near perfect form every time, but the fact remains, it's no trail to screw up on, and Myja knows that better than he knows his own peculiar name. Myja centers himself, which helps for a few moments. He returns to enjoying the scenery. He negotiates a series of moguls. He manages a half-smile, then the trail twists, winds, and turns again, just like the maddening thoughts racing through his mind.

Myja had promised God all his life he'd live each day to the fullest, without worry of tomorrow. When he was ten and she was on her deathbed, his mother had demanded a renewal of that promise. For thirteen years, Myja has kept that promise. What is it about this new turn in his life that he's treating it differently than all the other wonderful and exciting twists he'd encountered? He'd been blessed—and he knows it—with a very good and exciting life so far. He wouldn't trade it for anything, even with having lost his mother to cancer and his grandmother to a drunk driver.

Myja swerves to miss a tree. Barely in time he sees a rock sticking out of the snow. The borders of the trail seem to fly past him faster and faster, and Myja can feel the blood draining from his knuckles as he clutches his ski poles in death grips under his gloves.

The trail takes another turn, and Myja reacts too slowly, missing the bend and screaming off over the side of the trail and through a small bush. He twists and curls his body under, giving in immediately to muscle memory. Myja comes to a halt buried in snow nearly to his chest.

The mountains echo with silence once again.

Half a minute passes. Myja starts to chuckle. Lifting himself out of the powder, he then laughs for all the mountains to hear. God is a good God, and a forgiving and patient God, but most of all God has a rich and wonderful sense of humor, wishing only that everyone would learn to laugh with Him and stop taking all His creation so damn seriously. Myja looks heavenward and gives a thumb's up. In that instant he knows exactly what he is going to do. He realizes he'd known all along. He makes his way back to the trail, organizes his long limbs, and pushes off once more.

At the bottom of the trail in front of the resort, Jon looks his friend over. "Where the hell have you been, buddy? You give me a head start, but, hell,..." Jon looks his best friend up and down with a grin. "Wait a minute. You, Jake? *You* took a spill?"

Removing his ice-encrusted goggles and balaclava, Myja nods. His eyes sparkle, and a wide smile lights up his flushed face. His chest heaves, and Myja takes a deep breath to calm down. He shakes some snow from around his collar. He finally catches his breath and suggests they go inside, where warm drinks and a warm fire await.

Changed out of their ski boots and bibs, they meet in the lobby.

"I gotta make a phone call. Get me an extra-large hot chocolate, lots of whipped cream."

"Sure." Jon walks off to the bar.

Myja picks up the receiver of one of the resort's pay phones and puts the call through to Milltavern Township Police Department on his calling card. "Yeah, let me talk with Captain Birnbaum, please." ###

Say What You Mean

Victor Schwartzman

It was Phyllis' belief that if she somehow could get people to accept criticism, the world would be a far better place. Her own inability to accept criticism led Phyllis to almost never saying what she really meant. "You're an idiot!" became "You tried your best." "This tastes like puke!" became "Interesting." And "That was the worst sex ever" became "I sleep best alone."

No one likes to be criticized. It does not matter that the criticism is valid. Ego, she believed, was the heart of the problem. What was criticized was irrelevant—all that mattered was that it was criticism. Criticism wounds egos.

Phyllis understood criticism was vital to growth. No endeavour could be successful without it.

Phyllis decided to dedicate her life to find a way to get people to accept criticism and stop lying.

She decided to combine the two most powerful forces humanity knew: TV and religion. TV was so popular because every show solved a problem. She thought it through, found funding and then a cable network. She was on TV and online in a year. Her program was "Wrong Is Okay," named after the new semi-religion she founded. She called it a semi-religion because God went elsewhere after creating the Earth and we were on our own. We had to rely on ourselves. And we had failed ourselves. Why? The anger and fear at being wrong had held people back since the dawn of civilization.

"Wrong Is Okay" taught it was natural to be wrong. It was good to be told you were wrong.

The religion caught fire, an instant success around the world. Everyone secretly knew they were wrong a lot and now finally felt relief.

Believers were happier and when nonbelievers saw them, they joined. Within two years, most of the planet's population had become a practising member of Wrong Is Okay.

Finally, Phyllis sat in her office, looking at her staff hard at work. She had truly helped humanity overcome its fixation with ego.

People around the world settled down to Phyllis' business at hand: progressing.

Unfortunately, there were side effects. Early on, Wrong Is Okay became a great rationale for being wrong, and people tried ideas they never would have attempted before, such as bungee jumping without a bungee. Populations around the world rapidly began to decrease.

Moreover, admitting being wrong began to weaken people's egos. A sense of being always right was necessary for invention, so many inventors gave up before starting and art withered. Personal confidence drooped and dating among singles dropped to almost nothing (although it resulted in an explosion of monthly book groups), and new births also dropped drastically.

Phyllis reflected on what she had done. Phyllis considered that she had been wrong. When her staff raised the issue, Phyllis thought a long time about whether she was wrong—but was never able to admit it. ###



A Moon of Pale Cream

A moon of pale cream
hangs upon the insubstantial walls
of an ethereal cosmos

Whose vast heavens coruscate
with light spatters across the skies
by myriad stars of diamond white

Piercing the impenetrable darkness
abounding amid the celestial canopy
as it pervades the cool chambers
of an enigmatic midnight

Where evenfall mists
whisper in the infinite indigo
as they glide through the deserted
expanse

—D.A. Simpson

MICRO-FICTION: 100 Words or Less

The World is Going to the Cats

Holly, our young golden retriever, and Kitty, our rescue cat, were quietly ignoring each other at first. Later they made sounds like maybe they were communicating. Since we don't speak "dog" or "cat," we were clueless.

Back home after our walk, with her own stories to tell, affectionate Holly and sweet Kitty cozied up together—and Kitty started talking again, vocalizing a lot, as if she was telling Holly a story.

Kitty just never stopped. Finally, Holly was coughing and congested, and came over and gave me "that look," as if to say, "Help. I'm allergic to...cat stories." —Connie Anderson

Plans

Frank kissed me, then pointed to the sky as a biplane trailed a banner reading "Marry me Julie."

Fast Forward to New Year's Eve: Our families celebrated together and made wedding plans. Midnight: Frank wasn't on the dance floor so I peeked out on the veranda and smiled as a couple kissed passionately to the strains of "Auld Lang Syne." There was something familiar about the silhouettes, and my heart stopped. It was Frank—and my sister.

They were shocked when I said, "Hey you two. Have you made your resolutions yet? Want to guess mine?" —Nadia Giordana

Bad Choices

After having a bad day, Johnny hoped he'd dream of happy things. As he drifted off to sleep, a dream floated in...

...I was completely alone when a winged white horse trotted over, and I jumped on. Soon we were flying above my hometown where I saw happy people out doing things. I saw Grandma's

house and blew her a kiss. Next we hovered over my home where my parents were outside.

My dad said, "Honey, I'm sad too, but our son made some horrible choices."

Johnny woke up distressed and noticed nothing had changed—including the bars on his cell.

—Connie Anderson

Her Last Words

Life is full of so much happiness, and just enough sadness to keep us humble.

Together the family grieved when the dad, Ralph, died a year ago after a long illness. Now the mother was sinking into her own deep, deep world of dementia. Sometimes she thought her daughter, Sarah, was her sister, her neighbor, or her caregiver.

Sarah really missed the way it used to be as each day her mother had less connection to reality—and to her.

One day Mom sat up with a big smile and clearly said, "Love ya, Sarah...Ralph, I'm on my way."

—Connie Anderson

The End

She stepped into the apartment and knew immediately; the air felt stale and smelled of iron. Upon leaving that morning he was sleeping off last night's argument, fueled by his newest companion, Jack Daniels. At work she almost called a dozen times, each time setting

the phone back down, unwilling to face the whining mess her partner had become since their Abby was murdered. He turned to alcohol, she turned to her friends. Her choice was keeping her alive while his was taking him further away. She smelled iron, retreated to the hallway, and called 911. —Beth M. Anderson

My Life as a Butterfly.

My Life as a Butterfly begins with struggling and pushing to achieve transformation and then magnificence.

I would see things others never dream of. First,



I would fly over fields of flowers and dip in, joining them in their dance. Then my day would consist of consuming nectar, knowing I am the reason for the flower's growth.

I would delight children with the mere sight of me and grant a photographer an extraordinary photo opportunity.

Without my struggle to transform, I would merely be a crawling, injured insect. My struggle to exist helps us all to grow and become better.

—Ann Aubitz

Justice

Jessica unconsciously scratched another mosquito bite as she marched through the long grass on her family's Minnesota farm. The tires were flat on her new bike and she knew already who did it. Shane, school nemesis and also her neighbor, had taunted Jessica that very morning about the bike's pink basket being silly.

Maybe the pink basket was a little silly for a 12-year-old, but Shane had no business making fun. Reaching his house, she spied his bike leaning against the barn with nobody around. She quickly retaliated on his tires, plus turned his seat backwards.

Arm pump! —Gloria VanDemmeltraadt

The Chase

High school seniors have lots to share, and Natasha stayed too long at her friend's house. Walking home in the dark was scary even though it was only three blocks away. Was that car following her? It was going too slowly and when she walked faster, the car stayed with her. The driver was a man wearing a stocking cap.

Natasha was frightened. She began to run and turning the corner, with the car on her heels, she saw her dad, a city cop, in his patrol car in their driveway. Yes! The other car sped away.

—Gloria VanDemmeltraadt

Life Interrupted

It is an overcast day with storm clouds looming in the distance. The same kind of day it was three years ago when I walked through the door and into the worst period of my life. There was my wife lying on the kitchen floor surrounded in blood. Today I sit waiting for twelve people to decide my fate. My hands are clammy. I grab a tissue to wipe away the sweat trickling down my face. They

ambled in, I close my eyes. I hold my breath. The foreman announces, "We find the defendant not guilty!"

—Kathryn Holmes

Driving Home

Bartering, my professor had said, once was a principal form of commerce. Driving home, a pumpkin stand I spied, with parents and children rummaging among piles of orange Jack-o'-lanterns.

"I like this one!" I finally said to the farmer. He lifted the flawless one marked \$3.00 from my hands. As I prepared to pay, "Will you take \$2.50?" I presented. Without acknowledgment, he raised it high—and slammed it to the ground.

The Cucurbita bounced, unbroken. Another try—and its fleshy insides, flat seeds, and fragmented shell lay splattered at my feet. I exited to my beater, naïve schoolgirl—no longer.

—Betty Brandt Passick

Moving On

Tom died last year. Sure, he had friends, but he was quite different at home. He drank through most weekends, always blaming me for something. Yet, when he was sober, he was actually fun to be with. Can't picture myself with anyone but Tom.

I feel guilty for surviving him. Maybe it was all my fault, after all. Maybe I didn't give him enough attention. Oh, what the heck? He got plenty of attention, especially from his drinking pals. He's lucky I didn't divorce him.

I'll just raise a glass to him right here, in his favorite chair. —Gloria Fredkove

Trudging

Trudging through the icy drifts, I struggled to get to Grandpa's house. With each step I took, uninvited snow jumped inside my boots. I was chilled from my nose to my toes by the time I rounded the corner. Inside Grandpa's porch, I stomped my feet and opened his kitchen door. With one deep breath, I closed my eyes. Tilting back my head, I pleaded with my throat and lungs to capture more of that aroma from Grandpa's homemade spaghetti sauce. And I'd suffer that walk all over again, for just one more meal with Grandpa. —Leanne M. Benson



Fading Into Invisibility

Every day I feel like I'm fading away,
 My once youthful pallet is now turning grey,
 My vibrant times and sunny expression,
 Now replaced by cancer scars, stress and depression.
 Gone are paisley patterns, life's now just bleak stripes,
 As I sink in a background of boredom and strife,
 Camouflaged, now my beauty is tired and aging,
 Mind ravaged and flagging where anxiety's raging.
 Undervalued and feeling so unappreciated,
 Invisible, unattractive, cheap wardrobe's outdated,
 When did this young woman become so battle-torn?
 Slowly squeezed in a mold that leaves marks that are sore.
 I'm tired and frustrated and long to break free,
 And announce to the world, "I am here" with a scream!
 But nobody sees, as I daily trudge on,
 So bored, doing chores... groundhog days are so long.
 But God always sees me, and God always cares,
 And He tends to my wounds where depression does tear,
 God makes me feel valued, as His beloved child,
 Gives me rest, when I'm stressed, with mad thoughts running wild.
 And God hands out Holy work for me to do,
 Gifts stamina when I'm spent and feeling wrung-through,
 God tells me I'm precious, reminds me I'm loved,
 Always have support, from His great throne, up above.
 Lord God always listens when I want to speak,
 Makes me feel so emboldened, not stupid or weak,
 I am never invisible in my shepherd's arms,
 Know He cares 'bout my prayers, and to pain - He's my balm.
 So, God will not let me fade into the stripes,
 For He called me, I'm His, in the Lord Jesus Christ,
 And in His great mercy, love and awesome grace,
 He'll help me withstand, 'til I finish life's race.

—Suzanne Newman

Burnout

At 7.08 p.m.,
 stuffed with a garlicky Impossible burger
 I slam into the wall of weariness.
 Cruelly,
 the calendar screams that I've thudded on a
 Thursday,
 and I've been entrusted
 to translate five files for Friday.
 Fingers bang the bulky keyboard
 the way a Clydesdale might tap-dance on the
 White Cliffs of Dover,
 morphing "myélome multiple" into
 "multiple myeloma" tens of times as
 my myopic eyes squint to spot the tiny periods
 and commas
 and colons on the screen.
 My mind sloshes, as if with the sand
 soaked at barely tepid Aboiteau Beach,
 trapped in a fantasy of
 flopping, rag doll-style, every afternoon
 onto a terrycloth towel,
 quaffing Tetra Paks of coconut water,
 and streaming "Hoarders" on a sun-toasted
 laptop
 under a clique of palm trees.
 But I'm in Atlantic Canada, superannuation sits
 decades away,
 and my retirement fund laughs at me like
 the dead voices chuckling on so many sitcom
 laugh tracks.

—Adrian Slonaker



More, More, More

*Scriptio Continua by Paul Beckman

We wanted more. We bought our three-decker home we've been renting and upped the rent for our tenants (as well as friends). Then we bought the house on the corner that was going into foreclosure and then the two houses in-between which were also triple-deckers and the money was flowing in and we wanted more so we bought two building lots and used them as collateral to build two duplex houses and since they were modern we got more rent and then we looked for more land and Mickey at the fish and chips store (open only on Fridays and Saturdays) wanted to retire and offered us the fish and chips store if we bought the strip center which consisted of six more stores and he volunteered to hold the paper so we did the deal if he showed my jobless brother-in-law Freddy, how to make the fish and chips, which he agreed to. And word got out that we were buying and Realtors and regular home and land owners called us since we wanted more we bought more but only the best of the more and then our bank called and asked us to come in and my wife and I did and the bank president and his lending officer laid out a plan of two customers, both in arrears and in pre-foreclosure and offered us their properties and since we had such great credit and cash flow he'd forgo six months of payments on all of these two portfolios and since we wanted more we walked out with these two new portfolios; one with eight houses that needed work in a poor neighborhood and the other with a dozen primo properties and twenty acres of land which we subdivided and sold off the lots even though my wife wanted us to build the houses and keep them as rentals We wanted more so we opened a rental office and put my mother-in-law Belle in charge and that freed us up to check on our properties and also to look at new properties since we still wanted more of, almost every day we bought another house or commercial building and since we'd become the go-to buyers we learned how to negotiate better terms and prices and pretty soon our house was too small to work out of so we bought a big house on a tip from our banker who asked if we wanted more and we said we did we wanted more more more and he drove us over to his cousin who owned a Chevy dealership and the adjacent car wash on one side

and the four story elevated office building on the other. He'd just recovered from a stroke and couldn't handle the business pressures any longer, so we struck a deal and drove away in our new Chevy. More More More my wife was saying, and I told her we had to be super selective and not just buy good property but steal it, so we decided to take a four-day weekend in a Puerto Rico spa with no cell, television, or newspaper service and enjoy the sun, but I kept catching my wife going out looking at properties and I told her no no no. If we couldn't get to a property in thirty-minutes we wouldn't buy it. Our driver picked us up at the airport and turned the radio on as we drove home. We heard the news that the stock market was down forty percent as was expected to drop even more, There's no way we can ride this out I said and called my banker who asked me to come in ASAP, and we did and he said he cut us off from our line of credit and we could expect foreclosures on our properties not rented or being fixed up. He also told me that Chevy had closed their cash spigot to us but there was some hope for us to salvage a couple of properties. He had a potential buyer waiting in the conference room so we went in and struck a deal with the Moores from Texas who made several fortunes buying distressed portfolios and ours would fill the bill. Hangdog, we left the bank owning our original house, our new house, and free new Chevy loaners each for five years. We watched the Moores leaving in their limo with plates reading; GET MOORE. Enroute home, my wife told me to pull over and I did. There was a nice triple-decker with a for sale sign and the seller's offer to hold the mortgage.

***Scriptio continua** (Latin for "continuous script"), also known as *scriptura continua* or *scripta continua*, is a style of writing without spaces or other marks between the words or sentences. The form usually also lacks punctuation, diacritics, or distinguished letter case.



They Said

He died as he lived.
Quickly, efficiently,
No muss, no fuss.
One second he was there,
The next he was gone.

An electrical malfunction, they said.
It is obvious.
Just look at him,
Had to have been his heart, they said.
Or a stroke.
He didn't suffer, they said.
It is a blessing.
God moves in mysterious ways, they said.
He didn't take care of himself, they said
He didn't follow the rules.
Who are all these other people, they said

He made a list every day.

He called me that week, they said.
Hadn't heard from him in ages.
He said he had been thinking of me.
I wonder why he called, they said.
We had lunch.
We met for drinks.
He dropped me a line, they said.
He bought me a present.
He knew my children's names.
He made me feel important, they said.
Who are all these other people, they said

He waited until his house was in order.

Do you remember me, they said
I worked with him.
I played with him.
I grew up with him, they said.
I prayed with him.
I went to school with him, they said.
I served with him.
I dated him, they said.
I fought with him.
I loved him, they said.
Who are all these other people, they said.

He had friends in for dinner.

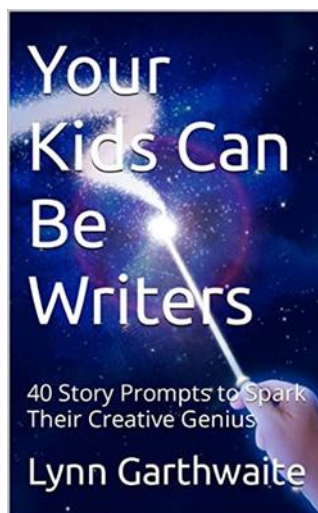
He was a saint, they said.
But he had his faults.
He was kind, they said.
Yet he had a bit of a temper.
He could really tell a joke.
But some just a little crude, they said.
He liked his beer, they said.
He played hard, they said.
He was a man's man, they said.
Yes he was a fine man, they said.
He will be missed.
Who are all these other people, they said.

He said goodbye and sent them on their way.

You will be all right, they said,
You have enough to live on.
Thank heavens you have a good job, they said.
You will find another, they said.
Move on, they said.
Get back in the saddle, they said,
We'll be there for you, they said.
Just call if you need something.
You are in my prayers, they said.
You have your memories, they said.
Who are all these other people, they said.

And then he died.
On a hot, dusty day,
Quietly, quickly, efficiently,
Far from home
On a dirt road,
Alone.

—Kate Pettit



Author Lynn Garthwaite
BlueSpectrumBooks.com
or Find it on Amazon



Uncircumscribed

There is no escape
 From this circle of time and timelines
 Except through the roof of your mind (imagination)
 Or the portal of your heart into the substance of your being
 Go out and play the game of consciousness
 In timelessness and nothingness, you will never get bored, lonely or lost
 Silence or Stillness is the substance of being
 You exist inside the dimensionless realm
 There is no tomorrow or yesterday
 The ripples of uncertainty quashed
 Everything is happening at once and not happening at all
 It is the Light of awareness that keeps you satisfied
 There are no desires, wants or needs
 Only the pulsating sensation of unconditional Love
 Wrapping around the horizon of your being with ease
 This is not a medical experimentation or an overdose of hallucinogenic mushrooms
 It is the spiritual realm
 Where existence is superimposed on nonexistent
 Everything is very much alive and beyond alive
 Like the open night sky on a cloudless summer night
 You feel like touching heaven
 And you are in touch with heaven
 You're in touch with everyone and everything
 You're the joy that vibrates on the cord of being
 This is the experience of the totality of who you are
 The only stage of reality where the individual self cannot exist,
 totally annihilated by the melody of Love
 It is the uncircumscribed and unfolded flow of everything and nothingness
 The heart of existence is filled with the sacred Light
 Awareness is the ultimate state of being
 Unconditional Love is the only existence

—Kenneth Maswabi

Old Ghosts

Old ghosts reveal themselves through the cracks in cyberspace
 faces first, profiles, times, places, memories, drunkenness
 lost lives, lost loves, the dead speak to us in different ways
 streaky rashers, striped red canopies and arch-top umbrellas
 illustrations of the past in electrical interconnected spaces.
 They evoke emotions too, anger, sadness, joy, happiness
 those moments now gone forever swallowed up
 by time's ability to never repeat itself and we are required
 to reconcile ourselves with this, we don't look the same now
 they don't look the same anymore that is if they are still living.
 We may be separated from them, disconnected so to speak
 the relationships having died years earlier
 our emotional state is stirred by their echoes
 we feel pain, guilt, regret and perhaps anger
 before we recalibrate and appreciate and express gratitude
 for where we are, what we have and have achieved since
 there may be reminders in life like our children or theirs
 we cannot go back only forward
 cannot live the same time and place again.
 It is simply impossible as the clocks tick and the pendulums swing
 it is up to us what we do with all this stuff that is brought up
 and unleashed by the myriad of memory cues available to us.
 Do we want to go down those roads again and contact them?
 Would there be any point?
 Would it make any real difference to our lives now?
 We evolve with our identities reconstituting themselves everyday
 our brains and bodies are older by the day
 and our consciousness is in a constant state of evolutionary flux.
 Is there a time and place or room for old ghosts to come back
 into our lives?

—Gavin Bourke

Living to Extinction

Breath like a quiet whisper
 Masses gaze at the blue above.

Dust raises under a soft breeze
 Forming a momentary sculpture.

Pale mouths agape they ponder
 With the few remaining syllables
 Why a storm so dark rushes to them.

On the day's eve many recall
 Company circling the cornucopia
 Seeking rest as so many times before.

Some fall as if pushed onto a walkway
 Automated to feed the entrails of earth.

Hearts are stilled under the weight
 Gentle of a warm body made of leftovers.

Blues have turned to gray in the orbits
 Watching for a morrow never to rise.

Stars have perished as they collapsed
 Onto the soils of their dreams.

The lids fall onto an impenetrable night
 For it is time at last to bid goodbye
 To those hours sterile as the ice.

One last kiss on the statuesque cheek
 And time comes to an end
 Upon this eerie gallery of corpses.

—Fabrice Poussin

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Perfect Last Dive

Now a man,
 he walks the narrow strip
 jutting out over the river
 breathing in memories of
 child dives right from this spot
 and surveying the panorama
 that surrounds him:

Cumulus clouds slumbering high
 across the ocean sky,
 Trees bowing in obeisance
 to the gleaming dark below.
 And on the far side of the bank
 three great white egrets perch
 on a twig, their feathers ruffling
 jauntily in the breeze.

He counts five steps toward the precipice,
 crouches then leaps, his arms
 stretching up and out toward
 the clouds now clearly
 just steam from the nearby oil refinery.

He eyes the egrets,
 revealed as three plastic bags
 billowing on a broken branch.

His descent is graceful,
 his taut body tucked
 in a perfect parallel to
 the shining blue below.

Three seconds before impact
 ammonia stings his nostrils
 two seconds before
 he realizes
 the sheen is not sun rays
 but an oil slick
 one second
 he apprehends
 the river is dying
 and in this,
 his most perfect dive,
 he knows
 he too
 will not
 survive.

—Phyllis Dozier

Propaganda 48

We blocked the meadow,
 Impetus kept coursing.
 A ram-stam epic.
 Uproar, pitfalls of vigour.
 Fusty distress lingered.

*

meadow
 kept
 epic
 pitfalls
 lingered

*

Another wasted meadow.
 Unfitness kept spoofing.
 Ghastly epic.
 Pitfalls of haughtiness.
 Decline lingered.

—Christopher Barnes

Forgiveness

"The funeral is the fiction."
 Like the trees of the forest,
 roots connect us with humanity.
 And when our body dies,
 our souls will carry on as roots.

...

So, when my life on earth is done,
 forget the eulogy that boasts
 of all the things I've done.
 For praise is like leaves of autumn
 lovely, bright, and beautiful
 but cannot heal those I have hurt,
 nurture those I have distanced,
 nor will it send my love to those
 that I have often disliked.
 Instead, please gently remember
 my faults and shortcomings.
 And find a way to forgive me!

...

For love and forgiveness allows
 soul roots to strengthen and spread.

—Leanne M. Benson

Where I Come From

I come from a people as old as time,
From Sabbath candles, flames dancing.
I come from the people of Abraham.

I come from Mother's sorrowful eyes,
Terror that clamped down like teeth.
I come from hunger and unrelenting thirst.

I come from people who perished in
The Holocaust. I am a "Jewish refugee."
I come from Potenza, Italy, born 1943.

I come from exposed light bulbs,
Peeling walls and boiled potatoes.
I come from a kitchen shared with roaches.

I come from crumbling bricks, shards of glass,
An old, dilapidated tenement torn down.
I come from the Lower East Side of New York.

I come from a father I never knew,
A grandmother for whom I did not exist.
I come from secrets Mother kept to her death.

I come from the stamp "Illegitimate."
A shadow of shame through generations.
I come from rigid, Orthodox rules.

Now, in the autumn years of my life,
I have come to accept all of
Humanity's flaws and miracles.
God is my trusted source of strength.

—Gloria Fredkove

It's Hard

It's hard to let somebody die
It hurts the heart
Should we save them
or at least try?

If we let them die
What does it say
About them
Or about us?

It's hard to let somebody die
Especially if we love them
For we might ask
Are we the ones to blame?
Did we do enough?
Did we love enough?
We would give our lives for them,
Why wouldn't they live for us?

Maybe it's okay to
Let them die their own way
Let our heart feel the pain
Of saying good bye

And then
Somehow
We get up
We begin a new day

—Teresa M. Riggs Foushee



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Connie Anderson

Poets in the Rain (V4)

All poets are crazy. Listen to them soak
 sponge in early rain medley notes sounding off.
 Crazy and suicidal, we know who they are:
 Edgar Allan Poe, Sylvia Plath, Dylan Thomas
 the drunk, Anne Sexton, Teasdale.
 This group grows a Pinocchio nose.
 At times I capture you here under control.
 I want to inspect you.
 All can be found in faith once
 now gone in time.
 With all your concerns, I see
 your eyes layered in shades of green,
 confused within you about me.
 Forgive me; I'm just a touch
 of wild pepper, dry Screaming Eagle
 Cabernet Sauvignon, and dying selfishly.
 We don't know if it is all worth it.
 I have refined my image, and my taste
 continues to thrust inside your crevices.
 Templates of hell break loose thunder, belches, and anomie.
 Asteroid Ceres looks like you are passing gas,
 exposes her buttocks, and moves on
 like ice on a balmy rock.
 I will wait centuries, like critics, to review
 this fecund body of yours—
 soiled, then poppies,
 poetry in the rain.

—Michael Lee Johnson



Silent Games

Taking the last newspaper from
 the vending machine on the corner,
 I laugh at the man
 standing behind me waiting
 for me to finish my transaction.
 He will have to try elsewhere
 for I have no intention of
 selling him my paper
 since I purchased the last one
 in the vending machine.
 Thy laugh is cruel though
 he did not deserve it,
 then again,
 it was a silent laugh,
 and he did not hear it.

—Duane Anderson

Comparing Poems

Dragging out old poetry,
 we sit opposite each other
 in a cloud of dust.
 First we wipe the dirt away
 with our hands.
 Then we swap poems
 through the haze.

Dora—
 her anxious words
 belie her everyday strut.
 And me—
 entangled of tongue
 but hoping to straighten out
 with words on paper.

We're coughing.
 We're tearing up.
 We wipe the smoke from our faces.
 Anxiety must be bald-faced.
 Otherwise, how can we lie.

—John Grey




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/>

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Latecomers Eat Mud

arriving late in poetry in
summer, my satchel is full of words I
unlearnt before I was born, seeding grass
behind the sun in copper vessels of—

desire, i lick the salt of floods, the sap
of leaves counting tremors of earth, weaving
drapes for unspoken symbols, becoming

Stone-age hieroglyph, my peripheral
vision gathers premonitions of rain,
gliding in dreams, the eye unfurls the
tapestry of the storm, the pallor of the—

day, sludge on city roads echoes the
depth of the night, the bucolic sounds
of dawn flutters, as latecomers eat mud

—Smitha Sehgal

On Reaching Old Age

Time is fleeting in its passing
And does jolt the memory
Recalling images of long ago
When life seemed to stretch far away
Safe from Death's stalking shadow.

As a child I thought as a child
Seeing only bright summer days
With friendships I thought to last forever
And parents who could never die
Old age a distant foreign land.

Now walking the land of the elderly
Old bones and old man troubles
Wondering how long before Death
No longer stalks but claims me
And time is no longer fleeting and stops.

—Colin Ian Jeffery

70th Wedding Anniversary Birmingham, Alabama

" if you marry that man, you will
never set foot in my house again,"
her dad told her

she would tell them he was black
before she invited them into
their home...they would refuse
but slowly, they made friends

no one wanted to rent to a black man,
money was always tight
but eventually
they got a place,

he was a better cook, but he never
complained about her
housekeeping
she got teaching jobs and became a
deputy head teacher
he started out working in the
factory, then later moved to
the post office

they walked the streets
unashamed

even today, they hold hands
and the glow of love still
burns

--Erren Geraud Kelly

What Are My Thoughts Today?

It's hot and steamy
with loads of road delays.
Wind is gusting across the lane
Picnickers eat blowing sand, once again.

It's already the end of July.
Now that I'm old, the time does fly.
It feels good to be home.
Last week we were in Stockholm.

I have the best view from my rocking chair
I watch the hawks dive and sail in the air.
Some trees are leaning away from the wind.
The constant punishment causes them to bend.

Our windows don't open
and that is a gift.
They run floor to ceiling so
I watch clouds as they shift.

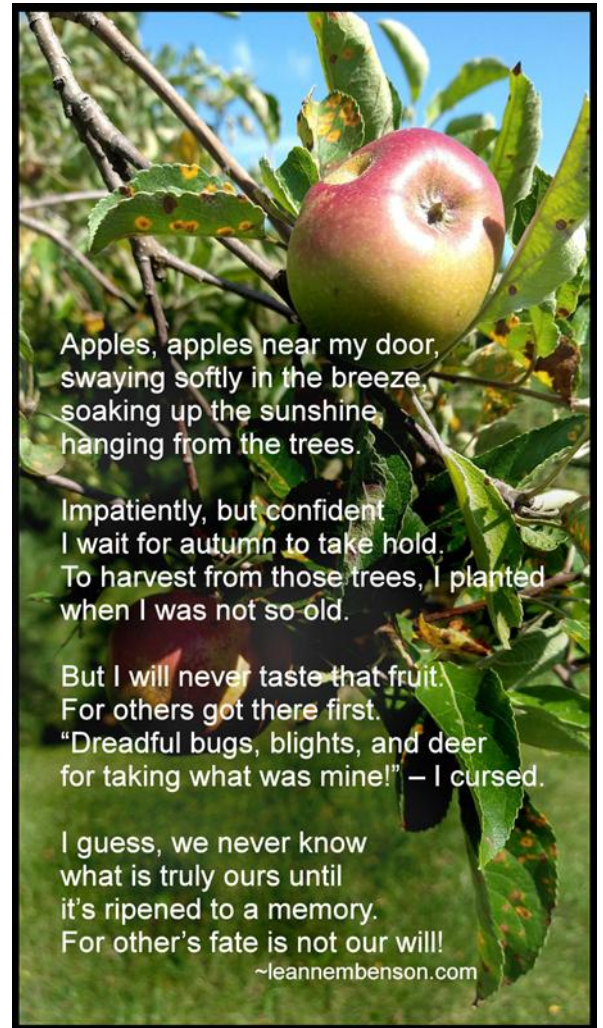
The water fountain needs filling
that sits next to me.
The drops sound like laughing,
a light-hearted tee-hee-hee.

The water pot is hot.
It's time for afternoon tea.
I have to get up from this lovely spot
but the exercise is good for me.

I munch on a macaroon
that I brought back from Paris.
I caught Covid there,
but I didn't perish!

My tummy is full,
my dog's on my lap,
a lull in the day,
it's time for my nap.

—Janice Strootman



Apples, apples near my door,
swaying softly in the breeze,
soaking up the sunshine,
hanging from the trees.

Impatiently, but confident
I wait for autumn to take hold.
To harvest from those trees, I planted
when I was not so old.

But I will never taste that fruit.
For others got there first.
“Dreadful bugs, blights, and deer
for taking what was mine!” – I cursed.

I guess, we never know
what is truly ours until
it's ripened to a memory.
For other's fate is not our will!

~leannembenson.com

Pushing Back

I dislike
how night
welcomes me,
freeing my will
into the arms of
creeping shadows
just past
midnight
as the soul
pushes back
against
day and sun

—Dr. Roger G. Singer

Greenie and Slim

I got a chance to meet them
after hearing all the stories.
Holly invited me to greet them
in all their colorful glory.

There is a noticeable bond
between her and the fish.
I stand on the wooden dock
totally transfixed.

An Emmy award was won.
The cameras captured them
looking eye-to-eye
through rays of noontime sun.

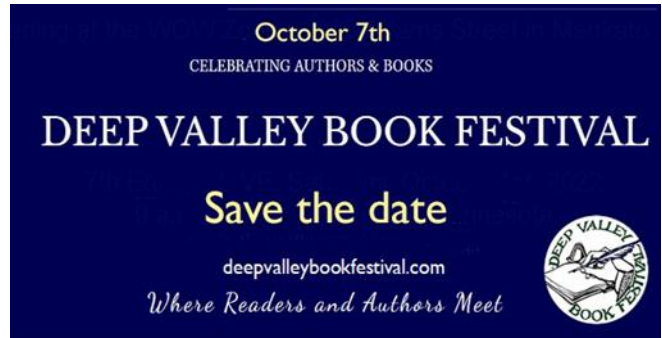
Holly's long legs dangle in their lair.
Her feet make tiny splashes
knowing Greenie had
earlier sought her there.

This is real.
He knows her.
He swims with her daily,
and comes back every year.

Slim comes now too.
Holly thinks they are mates.
Their little ones hover
to avoid being bait.

How sad it will be when Greenie
comes home
to rest on Holly's shore.
But Slim and their offspring
bring hope for more times to explore.

—Janice Strootman
Inspired by a true story



Pomp and Circumstance

Last night I dreamed.
I dreamed of a gala event,
a grand affair.
Even the Queen of England
was there. And I—
in my little black dress,
starry eyes,
and pearls (one must
wear pearls when
meeting royalty)
was granted audience,
ushered in,
managed a curtsy
and I do believe
she looked at me as
if she wanted to chat.
Oh, how splendid
that would be,
me and the Queen
having tea.
Such was my reverie.
I awoke just then,
with a definite yen
for ripe, juicy strawberries
and a spot of clotted cream.

—Nadia Giordana

Grim

Death is
sweetening
fruit, a mango
or watermelon,
juice

drizzling down
faces of the living.
Sheen of
stickiness glints
in sunlight.

Tomorrow,
an ample bounty
awaits—
we glutton on
pink flesh

to the rind, spit
its seeds
beside us, there
where death stands
moiling among

shadows,
holding his produce.
His flesh offering
consecrated. Eucharist—
our daily communion.

—Shawn Nacona Stroud

Remembering You

I look for the warmth
 in your thoughts
 in those old envelopes
 where you lived
 some decades ago...
 I look for the fragrance
 of your presence
 in those fluttering curtains
 which still reminds
 your silhouette against the evening...
 I anticipate earnestly
 your whispers
 closer to my existence,
 in the brisk autumnal breeze
 that keep knocking on my closed windows.
 I feel your breathing
 on my body
 those sultry noons
 that brings the whiff of the aroma
 in my trivial heart alone.
 Crescent moon
 or dark sky
 brings back
 your memory...
 sigh !!
 We turned into
 different pages
 of a single ode,
 connected...
 but
 on varied mode.

—Som Mazumder

Pyres of Pyres

How simple not thinking makes it go away. So thick the clouds only the tips of hills, called
 mountains, show, are
 exposed. Gigantic UFOs surfacing for the moment. To wonder if the angels fell as graciously
 as rain. Nightly walks
 a practice, endlessly, for cortege. The dead find it preposterous to be introduced by a definite
 article. Match heads made of
 sulfuric blood. Ring wound within a rosary. Abandoned cats prefer it that way. Improper
 burial ground the garbage is
 for fish & their bones.

—Philip Kobylarz

Pastorale

as the cloak of heaven
 arches o'er the earthly realms
 and spreads a shimmering blue
 across the sunlit skies
 in the clear light of early morn
 a silver birch
 inclines its leafy boughs
 for to skim the emerald green
 of a grassy meadow
 as it delights in the scent
 of the cowslips and cornflowers
 that carpet the scene
 and waft across a scape
 fragrant in the gentle breeze
 of a perfect day

—D.A. Simpson

Tomorrow?

The best question is whether
 or not I will wake up.....
 I will get back to you tomorrow
 after a few shots and pills
 If not, this is my sad goodbye.....
 If so, this is a great hello!
 Let's see how gin, vodka, whiskey,
 and tequila mix
I will let you know, my loves,
 while the thunder takes its hold
 And the lightning mixes

—Grant Armstrong

Rathe

A littoral sun's nitid mammae hinterland naced
 livid when finely nauticalled when windows lit match the set's
 final fulminate fulminated when left unseen unrivaled a maumet—
 gross oversight's unseemly subfusc. The noticed springs
 into being from iset. Sees a rock a rock—Aroch Ariocho Archon
 et al. To wish every windrowed day on waking over
 isn't vitaphobic or worth the harp being ineluctable
 eventually. Rather search the earthend for its whittled
 pockets bound to magnificat. Rather watch for blue herons
 set below eyeline among bitterns to steal themselves in taking
 flight with fish in neck. Both hawk and snake will land when dead—
 a sigil is a miracle manaced in iset owligh.

—Joseph Harms

Earthquake

In high school, I wrote to
 a pen pal from California
 who made me feel alone.
 She detailed information
 about her exciting world.
 By then, I had lost touch
 with friends much closer.

My pen pal said brightly
 she went to rural picnics
 all year round and urban
 barbeques. She dined at
 a blowout on the beach.
 I envied her good times
 in a happy social scene.

I gathered the girl didn't
 wish to adjust her course
 during this present phase
 and flee from California
 before an earthquake hit.
 I thought about upheaval
 and my jealous grumbles.

—Sarah Henry



Hairstylist of Words

strand after strand under his thumb and index of misogyny
I shed myself in the mirror of exuberance,

buried words grow from roots to hear the song of the sun
a cup of fragrant tea clots in wait

woeful countenance between the ear and shoulder on the right
of unfinished long hours scrutinizing nouns

washing away pretensions of color
I shall be a rain cloud tomorrow or a summer day's pallor

—Smitha Sehgal



Gogyohkabun

(5 line freestyle Japanese poetry
ending in haiku)

don't ever step on my sunshine
shadow is everything that's mine,
words take leisurely stroll
through my mind for thirsty scrawl,
mind dreams a lonely dawn...

Pens dodder in pain
Seeks redemption,
paper hide its purity
behind frequent feign
lifetime sapience hardly a gain..

suspended by thin faith
dangling in bated breath
spread the wings of audacity
comprehend the term humanity
in a land of indifference...

rumbling deep in core
earth screams to manifest more
evolution roar

—Som Mazumder

5 haiku

1
in broad shadows
wet patches take longest to evaporate
legacies

2
references
rather than character witnesses
partly sunny

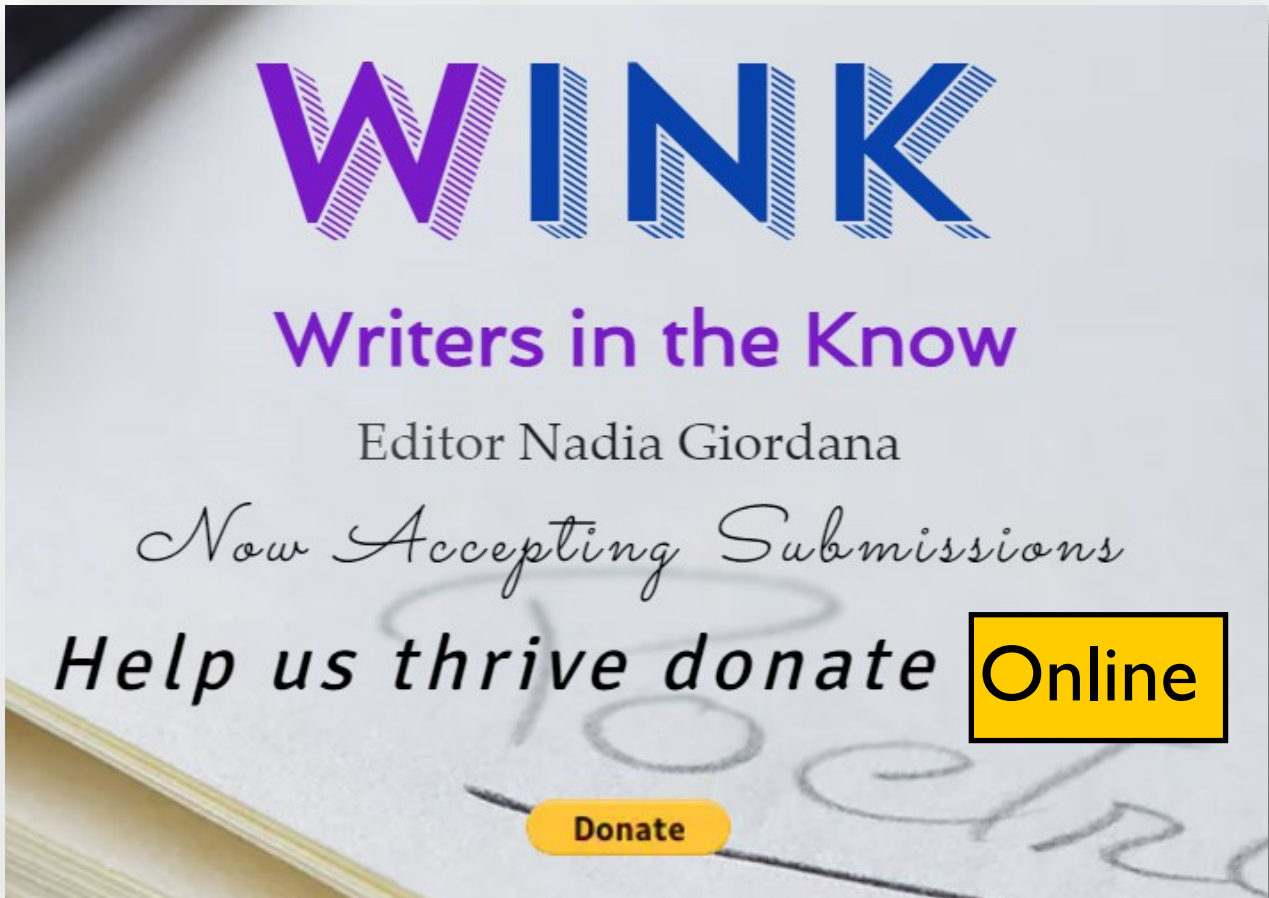
3
one-man show—
after a struggle disarms and restrains
himself

4
bleeding now
from flesh wounds
partly sunny

5
problems unknown
will need to be towed
mechanic special

—Jerome Berglund

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War of the Worlds

The people watch,
huddled under
wretchedly tumultuous skies,
whirling kaleidoscope colors
of indigo, crimson, and
blackish red the color of dried blood.
Shrouded chariots roll
across the roiling, pelting
upper atmosphere where
all hell has taken up residence.
White-hot and green lightning
initiates a connection
with an unseen mothership
and illuminates the carrier
dropping down liquid ladders,
for lack of a better description.
Fat-footed caissons
begin lumbering
across the landscape,
unrelenting in focus to some
unknown destination.
Once past,
silence overload settles
over the stunned populace.

—Nadia Giordana



Painting by Sarah Routman
“One can speak poetry
just by arranging colors well.”
~Vincent Van Gogh