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The Book

Smuggler's Den

February
2019

LET'S CHAT
WITH AUTHOR

*Julian K.
Jarboe*

WHAT DO YOU LOVE
ABOUT WRITING?



PLUS

A detailed guide for writing memoir you need in
your library of writer resources

Contents

February 2020

Letter from the Editor

Nonfiction

- SHALIMAR*, Cara Lorello.....2
A MEMOIR OF ONE'S OWN, Diana Raab, PhD.....4

Fiction

- The Escape, By Maureen Mancini Amaturro.....13
Rebirth, Nitin Chawla.....18
Burnt Bridge, Ken Kapp.....22
The Garden, Jack Wildern.....29

Poetry

- Amour, Dr. Priya Dolma Tamang.....37

Let's Chat

- with Author Julian K. Jarboe.....38

Book Reviews

- Other Words for Home by Jasmine Warga, Reviewed by Sascha Harris.....41
Fever Dream by Samanta Schweblin, Reviewed by Karisma J. Tobin.....42

Contributors

Writing Contest & Guest Post Opportunities

Letter from the editor

"Substitute 'damn' every time you're inclined to write 'very;' your editor will delete it and the writing will be just as it should be." -Mark Twain

Well put Mark Twain!

We're not much for Valentine's Day. Rather than a day to get a heart shaped box of chocolates, it makes for a great day to reflect on why we enjoy the craft or writing. We love to write because it makes for an excellent outlet to vent! In my most recent issues, I poured my heart on paper cursing and saying nasty things about others. When I took it to my writing group, I apologized. Embarrassed to read what I want people to hear. I want people to read the raw story of my emotions that I felt when banged angrily on the keyboard. They all laughed, "That's what you got to do!" said one of the recently published authors who shares my genre. Come back to it in a few weeks, clean it up, and be proud of yourself for sharing something so personal.

I was glad to take her advice, and Twain's as well. After cleaning it up, I was proud to have a clean essay that told the story I wanted to tell. I took the same piece and fictionalized it into a story completely different. The raw anger was there, and I was happy with it.

And that's what I love about writing. To all of those who submitted this month, I could see the same passion behind each piece. Congrats on all your hard work. You should be proud to be a writer and have the confidence to share your heart and soul.

Happy writing,
Dani & The Book Smuggler's Den community

Dani Watkins

Dani Watkins

Editor-In-Chief, Book Smuggler's Den Literary Magazine

SHALIMAR

By Cara Lorello

Lipstick and perfume, two things my Nonna never left the house without. It was not for vanity as she was never a vain woman. It was simply the custom in her day, and nothing more, really.

There was a bottle, half-full when I found it some weeks after she died. Found it tucked away inside her old make-up bag in the spare room kept for her in my uncle's house before the nursing home became home. Among the bottle were wads of tissue she'd used to blot away coats of the 10 lipsticks she carried around at all times, all different shades of the same two colors: coral and red. Nonna's favorite was there, too: Avon Red Plum No. 7.

I could not classify the bottle's odd shape, holding the heavy glass sphere against the overhead light, admiring its lemony liquid color and tiny scattered prisms reflecting on my lap like a compact mirror. It resembled a squat vinegar cruet, or the steeple dome of an ornate tower from some far corner of the world. Even the name sounded exotic: Shalimar.

The name, a Wikipedia search later informed me, belonged to a botanical garden in Kashmir India. Introduced to America in 1925, some three or four years before Nonna emerged safely from great-grandmother Corvi's womb, Shalimar was a mix of vanillin and an 1885 Parisian fragrance, Jicky, concocted purely by experiment. A second note said the inventing chemist was fixated on the legend of an Indian queen whose image inspired her king's design and erection of the Taj Mahal.

Nonna came from a generation where women were made to feel as naked without lipstick as they would without clothes and proper hosiery. A woman's choice of fragrance, too, said just as much about her as her choice in husbands. For Nonna, both said 'expensive;' Shalimar meant style, and poor Papa never refused a poker game in his life.

The silver triangle cap was a twist top, not a spray press, meant for lightly dabbing on the flesh—wrist or neck only, never areas your clothes cover, Nonna told me at 7 years old as I helped her get (in her word) gussied up for a late dinner party at the local Italian diner where all food was served on square platters and had a live accordion player.

I would always insist she let me wear the lipstick she chose for whatever occasion, which she would apply with a Q-Tip, making me blot once with a clean tissue.

Nonna, too, let me have, no more than one dab of perfume to brush along my jaw line, because 'the best scent on a little girl is her youth,' she'd say. Nonna always said my scent was one-of-a-kind: hints of Ivory soap, Mr. Bubble shampoo, and the saltiness of skin. Until I began sprouting hair in dark places, or went to bed with a man, my natural scent needed no covering up. This she insisted.

Naturally, I'd ask her why she wore so much perfume. She always gave the same answer:

'I haven't been little like you in a long time!'

Nonna's room always carried a familiar scent same as her clothes, purse, and red Toyota: Marlboro ash and Jergen's body lotion. Over-powering and calming all at once to me, like the poppy fields in *The Wizard of Oz*.

The day I found her last bottle of Shalimar, Nonna had been gone scarcely a week. Naturally I was far from comfortable being surrounded by a roomful of her last few belongings, all their scents still so fresh.

I thoughtlessly began to dab what likely were drops older than me over the same spot Nonna's long nails last brushed, nearly too long ago to remember, where now tears from both my eyes met and pooled to my lap in large, dual drops. I was especially careful not to wash the spot clean that night before bed.

It was still there, though faint, when I woke the next morning to my father playing Frank Sinatra down the hall; likely one of Nonna's records from the nursing home. My face was rubbed bare from sleeping face-down. My pillowcase bore the proof in water spots and the unmistakable shade of Red Plum No. 7. I had no memory of putting it on the night before. Staring into the mirror, fully clothed, I felt naked in a way only my Nonna would have understood.

Now I rarely leave the house without lipstick or perfume.

A MEMOIR OF ONE'S OWN: The Psychology of Being a Memoirist

By Diana Raab, PhD

One of the primary reasons someone decides to write a memoir is that they have a burning need to do so. They have a relevant story which they're compelled to document and share. They might want to explore a trauma, a loss, or a memory that remains unresolved. Another reason to write a memoir is to study or examine a question, a person, or an unexplainable mystery. Strong emotions or feelings can inspire someone to capture a memory through the written word, which they may choose or not choose to share with the universe or keep as a family legacy.

It can be said that writers tend to be highly emotional people. In fact, at the core of being a good writer is a person who is easily touched, and cognizant of his or her emotional self. Writers feel the ebb and flow of their lives and the lives of those dear to them. They feel the joys, trials and tribulations, and ecstatic moments that happen to themselves and others. To some extent, they are *driven* by their emotional selves, to the situations and feelings that move them, to the moments that make their hearts race and the moments when they feel as if their hearts are going to stop.

On the continuum of feeling these emotions, there might also be a tendency to easily celebrate successes and dwell on failures. Self-doubt sometimes manifests in insecurity, which might stem from one's personal history and/or fear of rejection. Is the story worth telling, and what if no one likes it? These emotions and those that accompany the sharing of stories may act as an adrenaline rush, spurring the creative impulse to further document the details of what is happening in writers' lives.

Regardless of the inspiration for writing a memoir, it takes a great deal of courage and strength to write about one's life experiences.

Fearlessness

During my graduate work in creative writing, I couldn't even count how many times I read or heard that the best writers most likely confronted obstacles during their childhoods that set them on their writing paths, and that you really can't write a memoir unless you've navigated a chaotic or traumatic upbringing. Even one of my favorite writers, Anaïs Nin, was quoted as saying, "Great art was born of great terrors, great loneliness, great inhibitions, instabilities, and it always balances them." While this might be quite true, and many memoirs are written by those who have overcome obstacles, such trials are not always prerequisites to writing these works. The most important character trait for writing a poignant memoir is fearlessness. Writers must have the courage to dig deep into their own inner psyches. But this isn't always easy. For a decade before he died, I helped John Steinbeck's son, Thomas Steinbeck, write his memoir. Through my recommendations and those of his wife, he realized the importance of documenting his family's story.

As a short-story writer, Thomas found the task of memoir writing to be quite daunting, not only from the aspect of navigating the blurred boundaries between fiction and nonfiction, but also from the standpoint of trying to maintain a positive mental state during the writing process. There is no doubt that our pasts haunt us. As a matter of fact, Thomas admitted that on numerous occasions, he had to stop writing because he found that he was tapping into some very painful memories that he'd locked away for many years. He was afraid that he might have an emotional breakdown while reliving some difficult images and memories from his childhood.

There is definitely a risk involved in visiting the dark places of our lives. However, the rewards of visiting those places are huge and have the potential to lead to transformation and growth. In Thomas's case, it was important for him to keep his legacy alive, so the incentive to complete his memoir was vibrant and compelling. The old saying "No pain no gain" holds true for both physical and psychological endeavors. There will be rewards at the end of the road, but memoirists need to give themselves the freedom to be vulnerable and to be open to their emotions, both good and bad.

In addition to the fear of tapping into the darkness of our lives up to the current moment, the past often leaves us with many unanswered questions. This is certainly what happened with poet Kim Stafford, son of William Stafford, who found that sometimes answers become clear in the course of the writing process. Memoir writing is also a way to arrive at some peace with the past, and Stafford admitted that this happened to him. While writing his memoir, he said, "I had this physical experience when I first opened my own book, where I had off-loaded some of the weight of my grief. But I realized it was a physical weight, like an extra fifty pounds, I off-loaded into this book." He went on to tell me that after the book was released, he was walking with a lighter step and felt much more at peace with himself. Without peace, fear can be palpable, which can impact our physical and psychological well-being.

Seventeen years ago, when diagnosed with my first bout of cancer and living in Florida with my husband and three small children, my father-in-law heard the news and immediately phoned me from Canada. Without hesitation, his first words were: "Diana, have no fear." He was a man of great wisdom, our family patriarch, and someone I deeply admired, so I took his words seriously. He was a Holocaust survivor, so I knew that he had come face-to-face with fear and uncertainty and the possibility of death. He knew what he was talking about.

Since then, I've come to realize that having no fear transcends so many realms of our lives, whether it is overcoming health obstacles, dealing with loneliness, loss, or even writing a memoir. There are many causes of fear, but basically it arises from sensing a potential for physical or emotional pain. Fear can also become apparent when we confront a new or unrecognizable life event. This can give us a feeling of uncertainty and of being unsure how to handle the situation. Fear of the unknown can certainly be daunting. It may be thought of as a survival mechanism as someone prepares to flee from what appears to be a dangerous situation. Psychologically, fear can be triggered by frightening images and events from the past. Physically, the muscles freeze, and people may feel paralyzed, especially if they don't have the tools to cope with this emotion.

When writing memoirs, many writers feel vulnerable and more emotional, especially when writing about difficult past experiences. In this context, fear is sometimes triggered by those events or traumas that lead to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), whether the initial cause was from trauma or a particularly stressful life. Facing one's demons is often a poignant risk of memoir writing. In general, fear becomes overwhelming when people feel as if they've lost control of their lives. So one way to deal with it is knowing what causes fear, and trying to remain in control of one's life.

It's not always easy to navigate through fear, but there are things that can help. For example, it's important to be mindful of the triggers in your life that manifest in fear. Equally important is having something in your life that provides you with a sense of calm during times of stress. This diversion might be something that helps you get in touch with your inner life in a safe and productive way. Some people resort to pharmaceuticals or herbal preparations to help them navigate fear and increase self-awareness, but there are alternative methods (listed below) that can help you monitor your reactions and responses to different situations. Being self-aware holds the key to transformation and change. Through increased awareness, you can learn what works in your life and what does not. If you remain self-aware while writing a memoir, you're able to identify certain issues and negative emotions that might come forth, affecting the quality of the writing process.

Being self-aware makes you more mindful of each moment and also stimulates the mind-body connection. It contributes in a positive way to well-being, offering the opportunity for positive change, which ultimately results in happiness. There are many ways to foster self-awareness, and you need to find what works best for you. Some of the most common ways to build self-awareness are through mindfulness training, yoga, journaling, psychotherapy, creative visualization, and meditation.

Creativity and State of Mind

Many studies and reports have shown that creative writers write best when in the midst of chaos, whether that means recalling a challenging childhood or dealing with present-day issues. The question as to whether creativity causes madness or if tormented individuals tend to be creative is a topic of great discussion and controversy. It seems to be a chicken-or-egg sort of situation. Some claim that creativity might be a result of some type of mental illness, and that a creative endeavor is born as a result of some anguished or tormented state. Others say that the act of creating actually creates mental illness. The thought behind this theory is that the irregular or long work hours and lifestyles of creative individuals result in a particular kind of anguish. One of my favorite writers, Gustave Flaubert, who wrote the classic novel *Madame Bovary*, adhered to a very strict writing schedule, and when he was really "on," he would work up to 14 hours a day. He also said that you should "be regular and orderly in your life, so that you may be violent and original in your work."

One more thing to consider is that writing is a solitary and isolating endeavor, and it also tends to be low-paying. Many writers engage in this practice because of their need to be heard. Sometimes to nurture the writing passion and also make ends meet, creative writers might need to secure one or more jobs, which require working irregular hours and juggling a number of

responsibilities. Very few writers support themselves solely by writing. They often have to supplement their incomes with another type of work, which might or might not be in a related field. This sort of gear shifting and/or schedule balancing (late nights, early mornings) might result in psychological anguish and in some cases lead to drug, alcohol, gambling, sex, or love addictions. Others believe—and I fall into this camp—that writing involves the constant interplay of stability and instability, resulting in creativity.

Alice Flaherty, in her book, *The Midnight Disease*, claimed, “When depressed people do write, it is generally when the depression is agitated; that is, when it contains a mix of manic and depressed features.” It seems to depend upon individual writers and their preferred writing disciplines.

Those who have been identified as having histrionic personality disorder (HPD) are of particular interest to me, since Anaïs Nin was reported to have had this condition. HPD is characterized by excessive emotionality and attention-seeking behavior. Often, those with HPD tend to be quite seductive, individuals who are very social and who love being the center of attention. Nin’s 35,000-page diaries spanned more than 40 years. She used her journals and novels as a storehouse for her deepest and most psychological musings. Beneath her prolific and impactful literary life, however, was a woman haunted by the trauma of her father leaving the family for another woman when she was ten years old. This experience led the young Nin to write a letter to her father, explaining her sadness while trying to convince him to come back. Although she never sent that letter, it formed the origins of her lifelong passion for journaling and the springboard for her career as a writer. Nin’s psychological healing occurred between the covers of a journal. It is important to note that even the most prolific writers require a balance between social and solitary time. We cannot work as hermits; the art of seeing and observing others is inherent in being a writer and certainly nourishment for our souls.

Kay Redfield Jamison, in her book, *Touched with Fire*, addresses the idea that most artistic personalities are manic-depressive, and this feeds their creativity. She says that it is the interaction, tension, and transition between changing moods and times of emotional stability that feed creativity. She claims that a number of eminent writers have been plagued with depression, such as poets John Berryman, William Blake, Paul Celan, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Emily Dickinson, T. S. Eliot, Victor Hugo, Sylvia Plath, Edgar Allan Poe, Ezra Pound, Anne Sexton, Sara Teasdale, Lord Alfred Tennyson, Dylan Thomas, and Walt Whitman. Other writers who suffered from depression include Hans Christian Andersen, Honoré de Balzac, Samuel Clemens, Joseph Conrad, Charles Dickens, Isak Dinesen, Ralph Waldo Emerson, William Faulkner, Maxim Gorky, Ernest Hemingway, Henry James, Charles Lamb, Herman Melville, Robert Louis Stevenson, Leo Tolstoy, Ivan Turgenev, Tennessee Williams, Virginia Woolf, and Émile Zola.

Essentially, what happens is that sometimes a mild melancholic state may inspire a creative writer to reflect upon painful experiences. A sense of loss feeds creativity and gives power to artistic expression. By sharing painful experiences, writers transform their psychological pain into stories and/or poems that present universal truths and concepts that help their readers navigate their own journeys.

Consciousness and Creativity

In his book *The Courage to Create*, psychologist Rollo May wrote about creative breakthroughs and suggested that there's a struggle that goes on within individuals that involves what they're thinking consciously, and other insights or perspectives that want to erupt or be born. In effect, these insights are often accompanied by anxiety, guilt, joy, and gratification, all mixed into one. When these insights occur, people usually see everything as extremely vivid and clear. They become tuned in to their environments and emotions, and they are mindful and focused on everything around them, just as if they'd just put on a new pair of prescription glasses.

Sometimes people encounter creativity during altered states of consciousness or altered states of awareness. In this situation, writers alter their minds as a way to stimulate creativity. That alteration can be initiated through physiological, psychological, or pharmaceutical interventions. One method of transcendence is alcohol or drug usage. According to transpersonal psychologist Stanislav Grof, the deepest force behind alcoholism and addiction is an unrecognized and sometimes misguided craving for some sort of transcendence or stepping outside of the ordinary. An example of prominent writers who have been plagued by alcoholism include John Cheever, William Faulkner, John Steinbeck, and F. Scott Fitzgerald.

In *Writers on the Edge*, the anthology I edited with writer James Brown, we mention in the book's preface that those writers who are on the edge of addiction are typically searching for something beyond what readily meets the eye. Whether they have succumbed to addiction because of the nature of the writing life or have written to navigate through the addiction is unclear. There are many possible scenarios.

The Psychology of Flow

Mihaly Csíkszentmihályi, who has written a great deal about creativity and the sense of flow said in his book *Creativity*, "Creativity is any act, idea, or product that changes an existing domain or that transforms an existing domain into a new one." For creative writers, it is common to feel inspiration and flow one day and then wake up the next day to find that the words are not flowing. Just about every creative person has experienced this problem. At the same time, we just never know when inspiration strikes and what it is we can do to remain inspired. It is a phenomenon that has been studied for years. To minimize the difficulty of facing the blank page, novelist Ernest Hemingway made a point of finishing his work for the day midsentence so that it would be easier for him to pick up the following day. I have adapted this practice in my own writing process and find that it truly helps prevent me from becoming blocked.

When you are in the flow of your work, you will not feel time slipping away; you will go into a sort of trancelike state. It is a blissful state. It is a state of ecstasy. Those who have experienced it say that it is a high like no other. Even when you achieve this wonderful state, there will be times when you feel stuck and words do not flow easily. You might want to try the Proust approach, which involves engaging in stream-of-consciousness writing to release unconscious ideas and fresh ideas from your mind. This type of writing will be discussed later, but basically it helps you reconnect with your inner psyche and allows the thoughts and words to flow as they want to—in no particular pattern. It might feel as if you are simply "dumping on the page." However, you never know where the dumping will lead, and if it never leads anywhere, that's okay, too!

Finding Comfort in the Written Word

Undoubtedly, creativity is often born from our joys, tribulations, and sorrows. Life grants us opportunities to experience joy, ecstasy, pain, and grief, and any of these extreme emotions can be springboards for creativity. In fact, the mystics have specific terms for these times in life by saying that joyous moments are called *via positive*, and negative moments are *via negative*. These can be intense moments when individuals feel a strong sense of connectedness with their environments or another individual, possibly the person who inspired them.

Writers often do so during periods of extreme emotions, and more commonly, during difficult periods. Solemn or tenuous times can be triggers for creativity and an effective way to turn negatives into positives. When we encounter difficult times, we make our hearts and emotions more vulnerable and open up to additional insights and creative thoughts. In fact, I have a writing colleague who practices this and whose favorite motto is: “Direct the rage to the page.”

The idea of turning negatives into positives has always been a fascinating area of inquiry for me. Perhaps this originates from my being raised by a narcissistic and depressed mother who slept for hours on end in a fetal position on the sofa. She was not an advocate of either psychotherapy or drug intervention of any kind. I vowed to grow up differently, have a positive attitude, and not make my loved ones feel miserable and sorry for me. In a sense, my mother’s issues were a gift for me in that being raised in that environment drove me toward a literary career. My mother performed a wonderful service by giving me a journal to help me cope with my grandmother’s suicide when I was just ten years old. That was my first exposure to turning a negative into a positive. Also, that journal probably set the foundation for my life as a writer. I have met and read about many writers who will actually admit that their chaotic childhoods led them to the writing path, and I tend to agree with this. Author Flannery O’Connor (1969) poignantly stated:

Anybody who has survived childhood has enough information about life to last him the rest of his days. If you can’t make something out of a little experience, you probably won’t be able to make much out of a lot. The writer’s business is to contemplate experience, not to be merged into it (p. 84).

If we take a few moments to review most of the memoirs in today’s market, many are solemn or address challenges. From a transpersonal perspective, in addition to being a source of inspiration, examining and revisiting painful events from childhood can be a cathartic and healing exercise, if done in conjunction with psychotherapy. A number of therapists recommend journal keeping as a way to empower individuals to deal with these issues. Journaling is a transpersonal practice I have incorporated in my life for more than 45 years, and many of my musings have inspired me to create published works.

Writing about Loss

Many memoirs deal with some sort of loss, whether that of a loved one, loss of health, or a loss of one’s culture. This was the basis of my doctoral studies. Readers who have encountered loss often gravitate to this topic because it empowers them and helps them navigate and deal with

their own lives.

Reading about how others have coped with difficulties offers ideas on how we can navigate turbulent times. One of the many advantages of memoir writing is that readers learn from other people's experiences, especially if the story resonates with them. For example, in my memoir, *Regina's Closet: Finding My Grandmother's Secret Journal*, I heard from many readers who had experienced a similar loss in their own lives. My memoir opens with the scene of my grandmother's suicide, and how as a ten-year-old I found my grandmother dead in her bedroom, which was next to mine. Through the writing process, I realized that as children we take a great deal in stride, and that it took writing my first memoir to help me understand the profound, long-lasting pain of that particular experience. This scenario shares both a personal story and universal truths. Because I wrote about my grandmother's life more than 40 years after her suicide, many of the details of her life were idealized. Her death had a huge impact on me, and thus, I painted her psyche to be larger and more powerful than it was in reality. This is where the imagination and memory come into play in memoir writing. However, during the writing process, I did suffer from a few bouts of depression while I relived the experience of my grandmother's suicide, although I never felt responsible for it.

Memoirist Maxine Hong Kingston, who wrote about the loss of her Chinese heritage and the ghosts of her past, received many messages from readers saying that they loved her book *The Woman Warrior* because much of her story resonated with them. People wrote to her from all over the world, saying, "Oh, this is the story of my life." Kingston recalled, "This is how I changed their lives. And from so many writers who say that it helps them write and tell their stories."

Writing about loss at a later stage of life might be motivated by inadequate childhood grieving, and this phenomenon connects with my own story. For example, there was no formal closure for me after my grandmother's death. It was the 1960s, and many secrets were kept from children as a way to protect them from emotional harm. My parents didn't allow me to attend my grandmother's funeral. In fact, she was simply taken down the stairs by the paramedics, never to return. This was a clear case of unresolved trauma that left residual feelings of loss, accompanied by intermittent depression throughout my life. Other writers who, as adults, wrote about loved ones lost during childhood include Emily Brontë, J. M. Barrie, Isak Dinesen, and Jack Kerouac.

Detachment and Disassociation

Writers write not only to express themselves, but also to disassociate and come to terms with past experiences. Disassociation is a psychological term that involves being disconnected from something someone was associated with. Typically, it refers to a disconnection from some experience, which has left the realm of the person's conscious awareness. There are different forms of disassociation; from a more basic perspective, people who miss their exit on the freeway or forget where they left their reading glasses can disassociate. They make these mistakes or forget unconsciously. At the other end of the spectrum, when people disassociate from past experiences, this can affect their entire personalities and is sometimes connected to dissociative identity disorder. Often, this latter type of disassociation is connected to a trauma, PTSD, or a form of anxiety. Basically, the person becomes detached from reality. Anaïs Nin, for

example, disassociated from her past in the sense that she re-created her own reality and memories of it. Other writers such as Primo Levi and Elie Wiesel, survivors of the Holocaust, have used disassociation to re-create the stories of their Holocaust experiences, which in the end were enhanced by the writing process.

While detachment from the past might be a necessary way to write about lived experiences to offer universal truths, part of being a writer is practicing the art of detachment, a Buddhist and transpersonal characteristic. In addition to detachment, the writer is driven to deep reflection about the fundamental issues of human existence. This is an important hallmark of creative individuals who tackle universal questions and struggle to provide answers for their readers.

Maxine Hong Kingston says that when you write a story, there is a resolution, recognition, reconciliation, and realization about the story being told. “There are a lot of wonderful things that happen through art and story,” she has said.

Memoir Writing as a Spiritual Practice

Memoir writing can be considered a spiritual practice because memoirs inspire us to dig deeper into the essence and emotions of our lives. Spirituality may be seen as the search for truth in one’s life in the interest of being happy. Writing as a spiritual practice can connect us to what seems most right for us, both personally and professionally. It can help us pinpoint our mission and reason for being by encouraging us to reflect on our feelings. Writing also helps us create a more profound sense of harmony and peace of mind.

Sometimes starting to write about pivotal or life-changing experiences can also confirm our identity. When I look back at my own life experiences and reflect on those that have truly transformed me, challenged me, or made me feel more aware or more alive, I must say that these were pivotal events involving the deaths of loved ones, the forming or evolution of relationships, becoming a parent, sexual encounters, and meaningful conversations with others. They have all been subjects of exploration in my journal writing, which has led to some form of change or transformation.

Transformation may be defined as a dramatic change in our physical or psychological well-being. Basically, the path of personal transformation is a process of becoming aware of, facing, and becoming responsible for our thoughts and feelings. When thinking of writing in this way, we can say that it can be considered a spiritual practice.

Most writers like myself will confess that they write because they *have* to write, not necessarily because they want to write. We write out of necessity because it either makes us feel better or we want to share our stories with the world.

The Writing Journey

The writing journey begins with the decision to write a memoir. Then we visit the closet of our memories, the people who inhabited it, and the life experiences that molded us into who we are today. We journal to tap into the creative mode and to engage in stream-of-consciousness writing. We write freely. We write to remember. We are brave.

Fear and negativity sometimes show their faces and we lose confidence in the project. We doubt our memories, we doubt our story. We read other memoirs and start comparing, thinking we don't write well enough or that our stories are not exciting enough. Sometimes it's a good idea to put our writings aside for a week, month, or year—whatever it takes for us to gain a new perspective.

Also, writing can become tedious at times. We get bored with the story. We just want it done and out the door. We feel a sense of loss of control of the story. That's the time to put it away and return to it with a new eye or perspective after we have worked on something else.

Tips for Writing a Memoir

- Be kind to yourself.
- Be patient with the journey.
- Think about the journey, not the destination,
- Trust your creative instinct and muse,
- Listen to your inner voice,
- Allow your unconscious to speak through journaling.
- Be tenacious.
- Join writing groups.

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The Escape

By Maureen Mancini Amaturro

I didn't want to go. I didn't want to leave my home, but I had to. Lord knows I had every reason to leave—to leave him, to leave Brussels, to leave it all. The man I married was killing my soul, and I was afraid he would eventually kill me. That one night, I was grateful he lingered at A La Mort Subite, a local bar with so many beers to keep him engaged. I would have enough time to assemble a few things and make my way to the train station. A La Mort Subite, how appropriate he should spend our last moments as husband and wife in a place named sudden death.

Careful to create as mundane an appearance as is usual in our pauper's flat, I left his dinner bowl on the table, his napkin and silverware alongside. I had run to the bakery earlier, the little one next to Place Flagey, where the old bread chef was my friend. He always gave me two or three stalepistolets, in secret, of course. One pistolet I placed alongside my husband's bowl, on our table. I kept two of the pistolets for myself, wrapped them in my scarf, tucked them in my bag beneath the few belongings I had planned to take with me. As usual, I left a soup pot on the stove, although, that night the pot was empty, as our flat would be when he returned.

The family in the flat below seemed to be making an extraordinary amount of noise, and that worked in my favor. No one would hear the pressure of my boots on the groaning, wooden stairs as I left. I tied my wool shawl—charcoal color, it had been my grandmother's—over my head and around my shoulders, hoping it would blur my silhouette against the night allowing me to escape invisibly. That's what it was, an escape. I did not desert him. I did not run away. I escaped. There is a difference.

With a baby crying and young ones playing or fighting, I couldn't tell which, in my neighbor's apartment, I was free to make my way down the narrow, dark stairway undetected and out the back door of what was once my home. I looked back, not out of regret, not out of hesitation, but to be sure I had left a light burning in our kitchen to create the appearance I was there preparing his supper like an obedient wife. Relieved to see the soft glow framing the ragged curtains that didn't quite fill our window, I ran. Though that night was darker than any I remember, I saw my path clearly. The train station was not far, and with luck, I knew that I'd be well down the tracks before he discovered I was gone.

Often, I thought of leaving him. More often, I thought of doing him harm. After all, he had done me harm. If I stayed, it would only be a matter of time before he would have consumed me altogether. As it was, by his decree, I made no decisions, had no option to think outside of his needs. And there were his mistresses. Honestly, I could have run faster that night had he, in a drunken stupor, not pushed me down the stairway in our house only a week before. My ankle was still quite swollen. It was just a sprain, fortunately, less restrictive than the injury I sustained when six months earlier, in a rage, he broke my arm. I can't help but believe he targeted my left knowing I would need my right arm to cook his meals, wash his clothes, scrub. I continued to do all that. I continued to hate myself for doing it. I continued to hate him, so I limped to my freedom.

Slicing the dark, I stepped over slippery cobblestones, wet from mist and drizzle. Though compelled to run, instead I crept cautiously to hush the echo of my boot heels against the hard, uneven street. To remain a shadow was of more value than speed. Jittery, damp, and not all too sure I had not been spied by one of his beer companions through the half-curtained window of a drinking establishment on my route, I slithered as if I were the snake. I, innocent, moved with guilty steps, my back against house fronts, side-eyeing alleys, glancing behind, ahead, everywhere hoping his silhouette would not appear in the gaslight. I bore the burden of my sounds, my movements, my breath. Every few doorways, I stopped to breathe deeply and pull my shawl higher against my face and over my hair. To blend better with the night, I wished I had inherited my father's darker looks instead of my mother's green-eyed, golden color. "Engelenhaar," angel hair, my father called me. He had always said my hair was my halo.

The train station came into view before the pain in my ankle became unbearable. I reached into the small pocket I had sewn inside my only coat to retrieve my ticket. How I managed to accumulate the money for the fare is in no small part thanks to Cheval Claes, a man so unlike my husband. Cheval owned a restaurant near the bakery. I often saw him in the evenings when I made my trip to beg for the stale pistolets. Usually, he was welcoming guests at his café's front door. Soon, he began to smile at me, then, eventually, say hello. Over time, I stopped to talk, staying only briefly at first. Later, knowing that my husband's workplace and his favorite beer halls were far from Cheval's café, I became more bold, and our conversations grew a little with each encounter. When he asked my name, I lied. I told him, "Mia Vluchten." I am Mia, but Vluchten is my father's name, not my husband's. Only a short time later, we were no longer Mevrouw Vluchten and Heer Claes, but Mia and Cheval.

He was charming, this Cheval. A festival of dark, wild curls framed his square face and deep-set, chocolate eyes. His brows—unusual, I thought—with their pointed arch, a bit of playful evil in contrast to his lips, full, soft, and tempting like beignets. Cheval seemed always to be at his business, whatever day, whatever time I walked by. I saw no signs of a wife. He never spoke of children. Giddy infatuation, a tingle of attraction, collected compliments weren't enough to seduce me, I dare say. Caution is my guide having endured the man I married. I knew all too well how deceptive a man could be. I found the moment and the nerve to ask, "Where is your wife?" because, of course, what good could come from leaving one bad man for another? Cheval's eyes widened, panic or surprise, I wasn't sure.

"My wife? Mia, you think I would betray a woman to whom I made promises? That I could count the hours until I knew you'd walk by, that memory would become my best friend because it allows me to repeat our time together over and over until sleep stops me while a wife sleeps next to me? Mia, you think I'm the devil."

With no evidence encouraging me to doubt him, I believed. We continued weeks of secret smiles, embraces in the shadows, hidden talks. And what wonderful talks they were, so carefree, so caring. Though I have been married these four years, the passion and giddy nature of new romance fell away very early with my husband, but I do remember the first stages of falling in love. When I spoke with Cheval, my cheeks tingled in that way. My skin warmed. My heart felt

happy and young and hopeful and all the wonderful feelings that come with a new flirtation. In a short time, I sensed his flirtation had deepened. Not long after, I fell in love with him. Love brought honesty with it. I told him I was married. His eyes melted. His hand slipped away from mine. “Married,” he said looking to the ground. “And you suspected as much of me, yet held that secret yourself? Which of us is the devil?”

“I am married, but I am not in love.” I found the courage to look up and face him. “No, I am in love, but not with my husband.”

Cheval almost smiled. I could tell he wanted to. He looked at me, his eyes sad, but suspicious. “But you are married still?”

“I am. Only because I see no way out.”

He folded his arms across his chest, pressing so hard, he caused his coarse apron to gather and fold. “Out? You want to be out of your marriage?”

I noticed the sky welcoming the dark and realized my husband would be home soon, expecting his dinner. “I can’t stay any longer. Perhaps...or perhaps not...I’ll tell you more another time.”

There was no need to tell Cheval anything more. He surmised. When he noticed bruises on my face, I no longer struggled to invent stories to explain them. Now, when Cheval asked questions, I told him of my husband’s temper and infidelity. When Cheval saw my bandaged, broken arm, I told him everything.

Cheval conceived of this escape. I merely followed his plan and my heart. One evening, as I passed by his restaurant door, he handed me a small, yellowed envelope. He said, “It’s all in there. Go. Go now.”

“Go where?”

Cheval looked left, then right. “The train station. Shhhh...away.”

“Without you? Leave you?”

“I have business to arrange, things to care for. Now, go. I’ll see you again.” Cheval quickly went inside. He didn’t stay to talk, as he usually did, and I wondered how, when, where would I again see him.

After I begged for my stale pistols, I hid behind the bakery, in the shadows, near piles of rotting trash, flies, and stench, where I knew no one would linger. I opened the envelope and strained to see in the dim light. A train ticket, cash, and a note—instructions to continue to a restaurant in Paris, its address at the bottom of the page. No word if Cheval would meet me. I toggled between the heartbreaking thought of leaving Cheval and the immeasurable relief in my freedom.

In my mind, Cheval was St. Michael, and he had just slayed a dragon that had been devouring me piece by piece for such a long time. Cheval, I was certain, was Divine intervention. Or true love. And I wondered in that moment if there was a difference.

With that ticket in my hand, the only work ahead was my escape. Since my husband was usually detained in the company of beer or jenever, his wits dulled by their spell, I knew I would find my moment. And I did. That night, that was my night. I would escape. I would heal. I would love again.

As you know by now, I escaped to the train station. A talkative woman holding an impish dog filled every minute of the time it took for the conductor to collect our tickets. Feigning exhaustion, I excused myself and cuddled in the velvet of my train seat. The bounce, the whoosh of the rushing wind against the window, the repetition of the metal wheels on metal tracks, soothing. I slept the sleep of a true rest. When the steam rose from the brakes and the whistle announced what I thought was our arrival at Gare du Nord, I was still drowsy from sleep. The ride did not seem long enough for me, for someone who had not known rest for so long. Once I had my wits about me, I inquired of the conductor if we had arrived in Paris already.

“No, Madam. Some mechanical trouble. Unscheduled stop. Could be here one hour, maybe two for repairs. Some passengers are going to find a warm cafe. You’re welcome to leave your bag.”

Hot coffee sounded tempting. The damp air, the drizzle on the windows had set a chill in my bones. I left my seat and took my travel bag with me. That chatty, well-dressed woman, who had introduced me first to her little dog, then to her son and his wife when I first took my seat on the train, invited me to follow her and a small group. I sensed a shadow near me each step of the way. I heard one too many sets of footsteps. Fear that my husband had followed haunted me. Could he have seen me? He would stalk rather than pounce. I inserted myself among the passenger group and moved as quickly as possible toward shelter.

We entered the first establishment we came to as the weather grew increasingly wet. Once inside, I brushed heaven’s water off my shawl and coat. This café had a bar, liquor bottles lined atop the shelving like the disheveled men lined along the bar rail. I had never gone to a place like this alone. Actually, I had never gone to a place like this. Pretending to have a headache, I excused myself from my chatty train companions and scanned the large, dark-walled room for a hidden place to sit. Squinting through the yellow light cast by candle sconces, I spotted a corner table in the shadows. I squeezed the small cross on the prayer beads I carried in my glove and asked God to send me another angel. I thanked Him as he had already sent St. Michael in the person of Cheval. I prayed that perhaps one of his other archangels might come to my aid at that moment. I knew my St. Michael had customers to cater to, a business to run. It would be too greedy of me to pray for Archangel Cheval to be beside me. I prayed anyway.

There were mirrors on the walls all around the room. As I sat in that bistro, in a small wooden chair at a table meant for two, I glanced around taking in the glowing sconces, the discolored wallpaper, the well-worn wood of the tables. My image in the mirror on the far wall stopped me

cold. Where I had hoped to meet comfort from coffee, I met him, here in this place, in this room where I was a stranger. Cheval's image stood beside my own reflection. I turned to see if it were true, if he were really there. I met Cheval in this faded restaurant in a small, rainy town on the main line between Brussels and Paris. Cheval approached and kneeled beside me. "You escaped."

My eyes filled. "How...but you...you were on this train?"

He smiled then lifted my hand and kissed my palm. "Yes." Cheval wiped away my tears with the yellowed linen napkin from my table. "You're safe now."

"Why didn't you come with me?"

"Business, dear Mia. I was to leave tomorrow. I had planned to meet you in Paris, but plans changed, as they often do. When chance presented itself tonight, I took it. The train was already pulling away when I arrived. It was only thanks to the whisk of the wind at the train's end car that I was able to jump aboard. I was not certain I would make it." He held me, his arms like giant wings encasing me. "I am here for now. I have much to settle at the restaurant, but that is for later. First, this moment. For now, we are together."

For now. Those words repeated in my mind, and I could not focus on anything he said after. For now. For now. Those words became a whirlpool pulling me down until I felt Cheval's lips on my cheek. I felt his breath on my skin. I was close enough to his eyes so that I could see my reflection in their darkness. He pulled my head beneath his chin and smoothed my hair. I was wrapped in his muscles, soothed by his mouth. I told him, "You are my guardian angel."

He stepped away and held both my hands. "Guardian? You have my word. Angel? That I cannot promise."

Rebirth

By Nitin Chawla

“I don’t like being stuck at one place for long. I like to go around and see new places. I want to keep moving.” I had said to myself, as I was trapped for three weeks, in a warehouse, forty kilometres outside Shanghai. Back then, it was not uncommon for someone like me to be totally immersed in dust before anybody would notice and do the cleaning. I had several unpleasant experiences earlier, but this time, it was different. There was not much air around, making me sick. Darkness made me blind, I could not see anything and no signs of human around, was terrifying. Even today, whenever, I recall that experience, it sends the chill down my spine.

Those were the difficult moments. On one side I feared I would die there alone, while on the other, I wished death to free me from the unbearable agony. Smell of the rotten rats and stagnant moist air was so disgusting that I had forgot the basic fact that I wouldn’t die, at least for a few hundred years. I was made of stuff that lasts for ages.

That day in the evening, I had seen a dozen people working at some distance. It was good to see people after long. My hope had further leaped, when two among them walked towards me. They came close and one of them rested his hand on my head. I was relaxed that finally someone had cared for me and finally I would be out of the confinement. One man lighted a cigarette and then offered the lighter to the other. I kept waiting all the time for them to finish the cigarette but as soon as they finished they left the place without doing anything with me. They were just smokers who came to this corner of the warehouse to find a private place to smoke. I could do nothing but to curse them for their carelessness and ignorance of me. It was two more weeks of pain before four men came and lifted me and all my cousins, who were attached to me since birth. Men took us outside the warehouse to stuff in a truck docked nearby. I still cherish that moment of my life when I was brought out of the warehouse, like it was a long-denied freedom. It was in year 1995. I am a small piece of packaging and was manufactured to keep the potato chips safe.

I had seen sunlight after a long time. It was then that I could see myself completely. I was groomed to perfection, uniformly coloured from all sides. Neatly printed words all over my body, added meaning to my beautiful self. Well, a coated layer of aluminium on my inner skin is something not many could see, but I was there to admire for it. It was plain, yet beautiful and strongest part of me. It was to keep the potato chips safe from moisture and air. Sufferings of past few weeks were gone. I was totally lost in self-love, just when another man closed the doors of truck from backside and we had started moving.

I am not sure exactly how my forefathers looked-like. My blood line was invented in year 1861 in a laboratory in Birmingham, England by Alexander Parkes. Like many other scientific inventions, it was a discovery with limited uses in initial years but with gradual modifications, its

applications grew steadily. However, world came to know about our true potential only after 1907 when Leo Baekeland, a Belgian Chemist created a fully synthetic version of plastic. He had then claimed that the new material invented had thousands of applications. We all can see today, he had highly underestimated our potential. We, the plastic, were lighter than steel and more easily mouldable than many other materials available then. Most importantly we had a long life that impressed the people most. It helped them to use us in multiple applications.

Today plastic is an integral part of human life. Alarm clock that wakes you in the morning, tooth brush, comb, paste tube, kitchen utensils that human use. Mobile, car, table chair, food packaging, TV and so many other things in the house. It was nowhere few decades ago, but today it is integral part of human life. Despite that plastic is among the most misunderstood things on the earth. It doesn't feel right that something so useful is hated blindly.

Truck had arrived at a building next morning. It was a potato chips making factory. I and my cousins were stacked in front of packing machine from where I could see the other packaging plastics, going through the painful process of high temperature sealing. A few tiny pieces of potato chips were being filled in each pack. We, the plastic packs, were entrusted to guard them from moisture, air & damage of careless handling during transportation. It was the feeling of being a saviour for somebody that filled my heart with pride and all the pain of the process was gone.

That day, after the job in the potato factory was over, we were stuffed again inside the boxes and placed back on the truck. It was time for another journey. Since, I was tightly packed along with my other cousins in a box container, there wasn't much space to move. During the journey, whenever there was a push or jerk, I had tried my best to not pass on the pressure to the small potatoes inside me. Afterall, I was the guardian.

For next few days, I moved from one warehouse to another before finally landing into a retail shop, where I was placed on a front shelf, and I could clearly see the wonderful activities inside the shop. If not more, it was as joyous a moment as the one, when I was released from the warehouse outside Shanghai, few weeks ago. I was happy that I reached the place, I truly belonged; it was my destiny.

Today when look back, I can only say how naïve I was. I used to love myself more than anything. People used to look at me with cravings, which always boosted my perception of self-worth.

It was just two days into the new place, when a middle-aged man, wearing loose Jeans and shirt half tucked-in, picked me and put me in his grocery basket along with a bottle of tomato sauce with chilly flavour. It was a slim and well-curved bottle. I could hardly take away my eyes of her

and I knew instantly that my life was complete with her. I was dreaming a life together but Alas! it was a short-lived dream. Man's wife jumped on him and cruelly picked me from the basket and threw back to the shelf. She yelled to the poor man, "You can't have these. How many times, I have to warn?" Her target wasn't as sharp as her angry-looking nose was, and I fell short of the shelf and dropped down on the floor. There was another man near-by who picked me and put me back on the shelves. This guy was even worse, he had put me on shelf in reverse. I was facing one of my cousins who was placed just behind me. I couldn't see anything that day for rest of the evening.

Late at night, a kid came inside the mart. He straight came to me, picked me from top corner and teared my head off without a warning or without going through the standard process of purchase-payment-consumption. There was no warning. He had just chop-off my head. Merciless boy crumbled me with his hand and started to crush the tiny poor potato under his ugly-looking jaws. It was the first time, I felt so much pain for anybody other than me. I, the protector couldn't do anything to save the potatoes. I didn't know then, that it was the ultimate fate for potatoes.

I remember that he had eaten all pieces except few which he saved for later. He kept me inside his pocket and the memories of the that claustrophobic warehouse was back. Those few minutes when I was inside his pocket, I, once again started to hate my destiny. Occasionally, he took me out to eat one or two small pieces until he had gulped them all. He then, crushed me and tossed inside a dirty blue colour bin on the side of the road. I was suffering from the pain and stretched myself until I started to smell rotten eggs. I was surprised to see so much filth around. All my life I knew, dustbin as a place where all the unwanted stuff is dumped. I was thrown in the dustbin. It was the first time, I had thought, if I wasn't needed anymore. Suddenly, it was difficult to believe that I was not a useful being. Where were those cravings and want for me? It took some time, but I realized what people truly sought was, what was inside me and not me. I was only needed till I was doing my job. Once out of work, I was worthless.

I was still questioning the meaning of life. "Do I have to live like this forever? Was good life only a matter of few days for me?" Memories of good old days of shelf in the shop, made it only worse. I was busy cursing myself just when I heard a familiar voice. One of my relatives who was with me in the factory was buried beneath a tray of leftover rice. I could see his head coming out of dump among other materials. His condition looked pitiful; it comforted that I wasn't the only one with a bad fate.

He said with his head trembling. "All is not lost for us, my friend. We are not like other waste materials. We are different, we live forever. We would be sorted carefully, cleaned and recycled and will be new again like we were earlier. That's our rebirth. We wouldn't even remember this tragedy and insult. We will be heated melted and remade totally, new.

His words struck me hard, especially the fact that we wouldn't remember the anything of our

past. I asked him to clarify. “So, we won’t remember any of this? What about the memories of little girl who picked me caringly yesterday. What about that spicy ketchup bottle? I don’t want to forget those moments. I want to feel the two days I spent on the shelf, again and again. I don’t want to forget when, potatoes inside me slept without worries.”

“Yes, we have to forget everything.” He confirmed. “We had to die to relive a new life. It is the destiny.”

I wasn’t ready for this sacrifice. Somewhere inside me I had chosen not to go the recycling path. Next morning, when trash pickers came to dump me into the garbage truck, I took the help of the wind and slipped down to the side of the vehicle. I further glided to the other side of the road as one man chased me; but wind was my saviour that day, I was soon in a drain and the man didn’t pursue me further.

Since that day I travelled places to places ultimately reaching to the East China Sea, my home for last twenty years. Years of travelling in the harsh conditions has exhausted me. I cannot even recognise myself anymore. Sometimes I think of good days while other times memories of bad times haunt me. Years of introspection have taught me that it was not that stifling warehouse outside Shanghai, which was the worst phase of my life. Nor was it the filthy dustbin, near that retail shop. I think far worse is my unfulfilled potential. Far worse is being irrelevant.

Today, I am ready to go the recycling path, ready to forget all the good memories; but I don’t have the choice any more.

Burnt Bridge

By Ken Kapp

Sun

Charlie pulls his SUV into the primitive campsite on the upper Peshtigo River in northeast Wisconsin. Frank bets he can't remember how many times they've been here. "I'll give you a hint. The first time was in 1972. I'm going to write the DNR and tell them they should hang a "C & F" under their signs for FS 2134." As they unload, Charlie lectures him once again. "The only thing we got to worry about is bears coming into our site at night. We have to police the area before it gets dark and make sure our food is sealed in a tight cooler locked in the SUV. And don't be stupid and bring a liverwurst and onion sandwich into the tent for a midnight snack as you did three years ago. Boy, what were you thinking? Good thing the bear was clumsy and we were still up. I tossed that stinker out the tent flap as far as I could once I heard at the back. Must not have liked your liverwurst, he didn't come back the next night."

Frank replies. "You should talk. You were the one putting our empty beer bottles around the perimeter claiming they'd keep the bears away. You'd blather how bears are clumsy suckers who'd end up kicking them. And I quote, 'Make enough noise to scare themselves. Whoosh, gone in a flash.'"

Frank shakes his head and continues. "And if they drop 'em and they break, you'd be just the one to get up in the middle of the night, wander around to our so-called perimeter to take a piss, and step on the broken glass. Hoot and holler sure to keep them away for the rest of the night. Dumb idea."

Charlie goes to the cooler for a six-pack. "OK, Frank, I conceded your point and the next year I got a case of cans. Nothing to break there."

"It was still a stupid idea. A Park Ranger came by, warned us about littering. Said she'd give us a ticket if she found any cans in the area. Just to be on the safe side we had to pick up rusted cans that must have been lying there for years."

They finish setting up the tent in silence. Frank volunteers to transfer their air mattresses and sleeping bags from the car while Charlie brings in deadfall from around the camp. "Don't get lazy with the wood. Good fire the first night's always fun."

Frank gets the fire going as soon as there's enough wood. "Hey, get more wood. We're going to need more after we grill when we sit drink our homebrews."

After supper, they sit quietly around the fire. One or the other occasionally moves an isolated

piece of smoking wood back towards the center of the flames.

Frank prods Charlie. “OK, Charlie, you figure out how many times we’ve been camping here?”

Charlie guesses. “Thirty years – twenty five times.” He knocks one log against another setting off sparks and quickly asks one of his own. “And most years we see bears on the forest roads when we bike?”

“You betcha. I remember the first time, coming around the crest on forest road, FS 2131, wasn't it, and there at the bottom was this big, black thing. Your eyes were bad even then. You started to say, ‘What's that VW bug doing across the –’ when it got up and took off into the woods. That sucker was big.”

“No shit, Sherlock. How about getting us two homebrews; time we get serious. Yeah, and then your *brilliance* says, ‘You know maybe we should use our horn?’ Like what horn? Thanks for the brewski. So then, what you do is start singing. Heck, your singing would make a concrete bear get up and run.”

“What’s the matter? You don’t like my barrack-room ballads?”

“They’re OK, better than the horse you rode in on. It’s your voice, Frank, it’s your voice.”

“But it works.”

“Yeah, I’ll grant you that; it works but so does a cow bell!”

They sit silently until Charlie remembers the peanuts. “Frank, what’s a fire without peanut shells – a buggy without a baby.” He gets up and brings back a bag of salted stadium nuts from the trunk of the car and two more homebrews. “Now we’re camping.”

A half-hour goes by. Frank gets up. “My turn to water the daisies. Getting time to call it a night. I think we can safely bank the embers; the rangers said there’s a minimal risk of fires. No shit, it rained four days last week and there are enough mosquitoes to prove it!”

The nuts are no longer. The sky is clear. The river sounds are constant and a fine mist floats down the forest road.

“Hey, Charlie, you remember last time we were up here we started talking about childhood memories. Kind of mellow. You said, ‘Well, it was what it was.’ No denying that. Another year pushes them further away. Any new thoughts now?”

“Nah, but this homebrew got me thinking. Some of the older memories keep coming back. When I packed for this year’s trip, I remembered how we sat here last year drunk as skunks one night and rambled on about memories. Damned if I can recall one thing we said. Then all of a sudden, I remembered a couple of things about my dad from when I was a kid. I’ve enough beer in me now to have those memories bounce back from the past like the signal from a clear channel AM bible station reflecting off the night sky.”

Frank coaxes the embers together and a small flame results. “A lot of words there Charlie, so?”

“Yeah, so. So, I remembered how my dad was working all the time. Maybe he had two weeks off a year. Probably my mom made him take a vacation. Told him he had to do something with the kids in the summer or she’d go nuts. He finds a shack at the beach to rent for a week. Must have cost a month’s wages. We had a great time. My brother and I lay around on a blanket near the surf, played in the waves until our lips turned blue. Yeah, it was great. I can still taste the salt.”

“Sounds like fun. And if I give you a trumpet fanfare can you recall the best thing from back then, the greatest?”

“I’m waiting...”

“Yeah, right. Ta-ta, ta-ta, ta-ta.”

“Good thing I’m six sails to the wind. Yeah – ta-ta, ta-ta. I remember the greatest. We did have to come out of the water occasionally to warm up. We’d spread a towel on a blanket and lie on our bellies reading comics. One time my dad came in from swimming and swooped down on me. He cradled me and rocked me back and forth in his arms. I must have been ten at the time, probably weighed 80 pounds but my dad was strong. He just swung me back and forth. It was mid-afternoon and the sun beat down on my chest. I felt super warm. The sun was coming over his shoulder so I couldn’t see his face. He ran down to the ocean, went out knee-deep, one more swing and then I went flying into an incoming wave. That I remember. Yeah, the warmth of the sun. Speaking of which, I’m bushed and cold. Time to call it a night.”

They both stand. Charlie spreads the embers and they empty the last drops from their bottles onto the coals. They go to the edge of the campsite to relieve themselves. Frank remarks that this is another way to mark their territory and keep the bears away.

Sound

A couple of years go by. Charlie’s complaining. “We’re getting too old for this rough camping: primitive fire ring made of stones, a squeaky water pump, and the same splintered seat in that outhouse. Christ, Frank, how long have we been doing this?”

“I’m guessing thirty-five years give or take. Don’t complain – the hard ground’s going to keep your back young and you’re only as good as your spine. Think about it. Everything hangs off that sucker and your head is stuck there on top. Just put the cooler on the picnic table, pop us a couple, and then go gather wood for the fire. Remember, never enough and when the wood’s gone, so are we!”

“Jeez! Who put you in charge? You mean, ‘When the *beer’s* gone,’ don’t you?”

“Well, I’m in charge by dint of my superior wisdom and six months’ seniority. Chop, chop, but first pop, pop.”

Thirty minutes later, their tent is up with the air mattresses and sleeping bags tucked inside. Frank gets the fire started and waits for the wood to burn down to embers before putting the grill over the stones he’s set up. The potatoes and onions are wrapped in foil. There’s a single fist-sized ball with a garlic bulb.

Early on, Charlie had complained that chomping a whole onion and garlic bulb each day was costing him friends. “We get back to civilization and I go back to work where the garlic and onions that keep off mosquitoes also keeps off everyone else. My coworkers were none too charitable. Didn’t give a damn about how the oily nose that results from the garlic can be used to grease the ferrules of your fishing rod. They thought I was crazy”

Frank had then agreed they’d share no more than *one* garlic bulb and *one* onion each day. He did the shopping so he just bought bigger onions and bulbs. He was now making room inside the ring of hot stones for the potatoes, onion, and garlic bulb.

Charlie continues to bring deadfall back to the campsite. After thirty minutes he asks, “How’s the chef doing? I’m starving.”

“Ah, the poets sing of how the great outdoors stimulates the appetite and sharpens the palate. Twenty minutes. I’m just about ready to put on the burgers. Burgers the first night, *comme d’habitude*, then barbecued chicken the next two. After that – fish *du jour*: whatever we catch or the can of tuna that I’ll toss at you.

“Why don’t you get out the paper plates? I’m going to go up the road and see if I can spot that old guy. Every year he keeps coming back. Don’t know how he does it. Walks up nice enough, asks how we’re doing and what we’re drinking. I asked the rangers – no old squats for miles around. Oh well, guess we can spare a homebrew. Old guy never stays for more than the one. You may as well get three out to honor the gourmet meal about to be served.”

Fifteen minutes later Frank’s back at the fire pushing the embers around with his fire stick. “Burgers on as soon as I grease the grill. I hope you’re hungry.”

Charlie lets out a long, hollow burp. “That’s my empty stomach in anticipation.”

Ten minutes later the two friends bring their evening meal to the picnic table. Charlie opens two homebrews and comments, “Not much can beat this.”

It’s Frank’s turn to burp. “Nope; just one thing – this without the mosquitoes.”

Meal over, they toss the dirty paper plates into the fire and straighten out the aluminum foil from the onion and garlic for the next day. As they sit down closer to the fading fire, a loud, hoarse voice is heard coming around the bend of FS 2133 singing, “We are three bums, three jolly old chums; we live like royal Turks...”

They look at each other, then to the forest road as the old man approaches their campsite dragging his walking stick in the loose gravel. He stops at the edge of the road. “Greetings, my friends. I see you survived another winter. Request permission to come on board.”

“Pull up a seat, old timer. We just about finished cleaning up and Charlie’s about to get our nightcap. I take it you wouldn’t say no to a homebrew?”

In an affected Irish brogue that comes from out of nowhere, he answers, “An old man could hardly refuse such a generous offer, could he now?”

Frank pushes the embers together and throws a couple of small branches on top. The fire starts to flame and they lift their bottles, toasting old times and surviving another year.

Ten minutes later the old man gets up and puts his bottle on the table. “Tis time I be getting my old bones home while there’s enough pixie light to guide me. You boys be having a good time then.”

They both get up and walk with him up the road. Frank’s curious and asks, “How do you know it’s us camping here again? Rangers just put up our camp dates, could be anyone at this spot.”

“Not at all hard. My bones may be old but my ears are sharp. Homebrew produces a rather distinctive burp. Likewise, my nose remains young: onions and garlic. My hat off to the master chef, and now I bid you, *adieu*.”

Frank and Charlie stop and exchange puzzled looks as the old man goes off into the mist. They listen as he picks up his song. “...and have good luck, to borrow my chuck and down with the man that works.”

As Charlie rolls over in his sleeping bag he mutters, “Nothing in that song about beer.”

Fire

Frank has just gotten comfortable in his sleeping bag, moving his hip off a rock that was insistent on pushing up through the air mattress when he hears Charlie yelling.

“Move the camper! Move the stupid camper, you idiot! Damn it!”

He squirms out of his sleeping bag and grabs the pants he was using for a pillow. He pulls them up to his knees shoving his feet into the boots. In his haste to get out, he almost pulls down the tent and has to go back and zipper the tent door to keep out the mosquitoes.

Shit, what’s going on? He looks around and spots flames on the other side of the Peshtigo. He moves across the bridge as fast as he can in his unlaced boots. Charlie’s standing on the edge of the road yelling at a guy in a camouflage outfit to leave the gas can alone. “Flames hit that and it can blow up. Get a long stick and push it away!”

There’s a camper-trailer hitched to a beat-up truck at the far end of the alternate canoe take-out across the river. He goes up to Charlie and asks what happened.

“I went out to take a piss and saw this guy pull into the parking area pulling this tiny old camper. I watched. He opened the side-door of the camper and tossed out a lawn chair and a couple of armfuls of wood. He just kicked the wood a foot or two away. Guy was staggering and went around to the back of the camper. It sounded like he was pissing the dust off his taillights. On my way back, I watched him push the wood into a heap and get a gas can from the back of the truck. He poured it all over the wood and then dropped the can. He was swaying. I almost lost it watching him search his pockets for a match and then – whoosh! Flames up to the sky and creeping over to that can. That’s when I started yelling at him to move the truck and camper.”

“So?”

“He looks at me as if I’m crazy and then decides to play it safe. Puts his hand up on the side of the camper and finally gets to the cab of his truck. Got it jerked up there to the far end.”

“He say anything?”

“No. And I’m not about to start a philosophical conversation with a drunk about fate or shit happens. Especially out here where everyone but us got guns!”

They watch as he drags a large downed tree into the landing and sweeps the gas can away

towards the river cursing to no one in particular.

Frank bends over and ties his laces. “Hey, buddy, can you use any help?”

“Hell no! Want to keep all this fun for myself. I came out here to roast a couple of marshmallows in peace and got this shit to show for it. Ain’t going to happen. No more gas in this stupid can. Shit. Gonna have to run back home now. No sense camping without a campfire is it.”

Charlie asks, “Sure you’re OK?”

“Yeah, right as toast. Wood must have been wet. Had to pour the gas again. When the flames shot up onto the can, I dropped it on my foot and then the sucker decides to roll right into the fire. Almost made me pee my pants. Damn. Guess it was fun though.”

“You going to stay?”

“Just ‘til I finish my last beer. Finish that and spread the coals. Be gone in an hour. You guys got beer?”

Frank looks at Charlie. “Nope, sorry, last night here. We’ve drunk what was left. Heading back to the Twin Cities in the morning.”

“Yeah. My way of camping too – beer gone, I’m gone.”

Charlie says, “OK then. We’re going to crash.”

They cross the river. “Well, Charlie, that was interesting. I wonder if that’s how this site got the name Burnt Bridge in the first place.”

“Keep going. We can piss by the deer cut up there a bit. I asked a ranger once and he told me it was a lightning strike in the 1950s that set the bridge on fire. If that drunk’s still here in the morning we’ll have to move.”

“Let’s wait and see. Meanwhile the mosquitoes are buzzing like crazy. Better get into the tent before we’re eaten alive and please, there’s no need for you to start singing, ‘There’s a ‘squita on my peter, don’t you know.’”

The Garden

By Jack Wildern

There is nothing I could say that would convince you of my sanity. I need you to understand that I am in law and by virtue of my surroundings, mad. Psychotic if you want a proper term. I tell you this because I am tired of trying to convince those that sit with me that I am anything else. I will tell you the story of what happened to me as best I can describe it. But you will have to accept that how I came to be here, in the immediate aftermath of my unfortunate incident, is not clear to me. I will not discuss any aspect of my sectioning or subsequent hearings. If you want that story, speak to the doctors.

I'll start by saying that i've no idea what the house looks like now. I assume you could pay it a visit for your research, but I'll describe it anyway. It was a sixties build. Semi detached and generously sized. I bought the place in two thousand and fourteen but the original decor had been largely retained. The three bedrooms were pink. The living and dining rooms a pastel green and the bathroom and kitchen a colour that was described to me by the estate agent as "jonquil," which is basically yellow. Outside there was a detached garage, large driveway and a good sized back garden. Sixties houses tend to have more of a footprint because back in those days growing vegetables and fruit was still popular. I digress slightly but safe to say for the price I paid, I got a nice if dated space.

The circumstances that led me to acquire the house is a bitter tale that has no bearing on this story. It was my solution to a protracted divorce deal that saw me lose over a hundred thousand pounds in cash and about a stone and a half in weight. Luckily I had no children to think about. You could reasonably argue that a house of that size is pointless for a single man, but I was forty two years old and the thought of living alone in some fancy modern flat made me feel uncomfortably desperate. In truth, I guess I saw the house as a chance to reinvent myself along with the four walls surrounding me.

I moved in on the sixth of May. The weather was stunning. I've always said that you can't beat a British summers day and that year we had been blessed with sunshine and warm breezes since April. The move itself didn't take long. My ex wife had our existing home and most of the content and so my life in possessions consisted of a single luton van. By early afternoon I found myself sitting amongst a few old boxes, a cup of coffee and for the first time in twenty years, complete silence. Actually I was very aware of the lack of noise. Amongst the general exploring and rummaging in my new surroundings, I hadn't heard so much as a footstep from my neighbour. I made a mental note to give their door a knock after I was settled and decided instead to take a look at the back garden.

I wish I hadn't. It was a jungle. Browning grass, sick from a lack of sunlight was knee height. Weeds and plants battled for space amongst the overgrown shrubs. What passed as bird table jutted up from this mess, old as time, as if the birds themselves had disappeared and left it as a forgotten relic for us humans to mourn. I should point out that my gardening experience was little to none. Against my ex wife's protests I had our previous garden stripped and laid to

synthetic grass. I spent many summers smuggly drinking beer while my neighbours fired up lawn mowers and strimmers. I was a very different man then and that alluring odour of freshly mown grass meant nothing to me.

I was about to turn in for the day when voice distracted me.

"You've got your work cut out there."

Her name was Daphne Rhodes.

Your wondering what all this has to do with my situation. How on earth I went from living in a three bedroom chalet to a room with a lock on the outside. I don't blame you. I can't explain it either. But it happened quickly. On that beautiful afternoon in May, I stood in the warm sunlight, listening to the birds chirping happily in the trees. By June the first I was watching the shadow from the barred window in my room creep slowly across the tiled floor and listening to the sounds of doors slamming shut in empty corridors.

Daphne looked at me with a smile that made her younger than she probably was. Deep lines punctuated her face, particularly around her eyes. It was as if they had been grooved out over time by too much laughter. She wore a large rim hat in a splendid blue colour, fastened with cord below her chin. A curled lock of white hair peeped out from underneath the hat onto her forehead. Resting on the small fence that separated our gardens she wore thick green gloves and in her right hand held a menacing looking pair of clippers with the remnants of some unfortunate weed streaked across the blades.

"Hello."

"Hi." I returned the smile and waded closer to the fence, offering an outstretched hand. "John. Sorry I've not been over to say hello yet." Daphne waved away my hand on the pretense that her own gloved fingers were covered in Alsomeria. Which in case you are wondering, is a type of lilly capable of irritating the skin. We spoke as people who do not know each other do, going through the motions in a pleasant but cautious way. She enquired as to my situation and after a brief but honest answer politely brought the conversation to an end. It was an easy meeting and she made me feel welcome. I must say that I liked her immediately.

In the days that followed I spent more time outside, picking and ripping my way through months worth of overgrowth. Daphne was always about on her side of the fence to offer advice. The garden she tended was nothing short of beautiful. The grass was an emerald green, flowers of all shapes and sizes filled out immaculately cut borders and despite the dry weather the earthy fragrance of fallen rain frequently wafted gently across from her garden to mine. I often stood outside in the mornings quite mesmerised by the smell and feeling of serenity that her garden protracted. It was during one of those mornings that things took a turn for the strange.

I was referring to Daphne about low maintenance shrubbery when, from the corner of my eye I caught movement from the upstairs dormer window of her house. I turned my head to see a stooped gray shape of a man disappear behind a draped curtain. The mind plays awful tricks on us when we are caught unawares and in that moment I was almost certain that I'd seen a ghost! I actually let out a brief shout. Upon realising my alarm, Daphne followed my gaze toward the glass.

"Oh, lord. John I am so sorry I should have said. That's my husband...Michael." I stood, trying to process the name in the wake of my growing embarrassment, acutely aware that I had just cried out in front of my elderly neighbour.

"Husband?" In the days following our first meeting I could not recall Daphne ever mentioning such a person. In fact I couldn't recall her mentioning anyone else at all. Looking back on it now, this was odd and maybe if I'd noticed, the events preceding wouldn't have come at such a shock. But hindsight is a wonderful thing is it not? "I...well I thought you were alone?" I said, perhaps too abruptly as Daphne's smile faltered. "I'm sorry, I meant no offence."

"That's quite alright. I sometimes forget he's there myself," she joked.

My nerves safely back to normal I listened as Daphne explained that her husband had become quite reclusive in recent months and that his interaction with people was minimal. He was in essence a very lonely man. She delivered this message with such disappointment and sadness that I felt quite hopeless. We spent the rest of the day in silence going about our business with the nod of a head or passing smile. Of course I wanted to ask questions. I wanted to know why her husband found himself bound to the house but it didn't seem right to ask and so I did my best to forget about it. And yet, even in the warm afternoon sun I thought I felt a chill whenever my back was turned against that window.

I saw Micheal again later that week while Daphne and I were chatting over the fence. I'd never enjoyed gardening but with a little guidance I was starting to make some real progress. The lawn, though yellow was at least mown and I'd removed the best part of three sack fulls of weeds and unwanted plants under Daphne's watchful eye. I was about to lift one out to the garage when I saw him. Occupying the same place as before, he lingered slightly longer this time and I was able to make out a crooked nose and bird like stature. Whether she noticed him or not, Daphne paid no attention. I decided to take her lead and get on with my day.

A few days past before I saw Daphne again. The weather had taken a turn and I spent the majority of three tedious days in hardware stores trying to decide how much paint I would need to resurrect the living room. I guess you could say that the time was well spent as I'd managed to get three coats done with enough left over for the hallway. However, the fine rain and dark clouds let a poor light in through the windows and turned my off white walls into a depressing grey canvas. I went to bed that night feeling as heavy as the sky and I think for the first time in my life, genuinely lonely. You probably think that I'm being melodramatic but you have to understand, this was the first time I'd been on my own. My ex wife and I, well we hated each other by the end, but it's funny how little you appreciate life other than your own filling up the

space around you. It didn't help either that I'd taken several weeks off of work in anticipation of the move and subsequent works to the house. Time started as an abundant nicetie but very quickly it had become an ominous weight.

The next morning brought an end to my self pity. The sky was a glorious blue and the smell when I opened the door to the garden was beautiful. I couldn't wait to be outside. Daphne was already pottering about on her side by the time I got out there but one look at her and my lust for the day died. She looked like she'd aged years in the few days that we hadn't seen each other. My concern was enough to ask a very direct question about her wellbeing. She smiled, though the lines around her eyes looked more like trenches of sadness than the rivers of laughter that I'd become accustomed to. She explained to me that the days before had been difficult. When I pressed her on this she simply moved her eyes toward the dorma window and shook her head.

"He needs help John. He's so lonely. I can't remember the last time they he held a conversation with anyone." By comparison, my days of painting and self wallowing seemed positively redundant in comparison to Daphne's. I listened with concern as she described how Michael had taken to pacing the floors of the house and shouting out in his sleep. "I shouldn't ask it of you John, but I'm at my wit's end. Come around will you? Perhaps see if you can get him to pop out." While I doubted that I could tempt this reclusive man to join me in anything social, I did nevertheless agree to call around and perhaps persuade him to put the kettle on. And so later that day, as the sun finally started to give way to night I plucked up the courage to knock on the door.

You would like me to say something like "the door opened on creaking hinges," yes? Well, you will be disappointed and to be honest I would have taken that over what did happen. Or to put correctly, what didn't. You see there was no answer, no sign of life whatsoever. The curtains were drawn and no light escaped between them. Also, considering how beautiful the back garden was, the house itself looked quite scruffy. The windows were smeared, the facings looked dirty and the welcome mat was worn and frayed. I told myself that I shouldn't see any of these things as unusual. Daphne was a very pleasant lady and I was quite sure that she would have had many friends or social activities to fill her evening calendar. Micheal, well I had some idea of his background so I hadn't really expected him to come to the door. But yet, Daphne had asked me specifically to visit and I questioned why she would do this and then leave, knowing full well that her husband would be unlikely to entertain a guest on his own. And would a woman of such meticulous attention to detail and beautiful things be content with the house in its current state? I stood for a few more seconds, debated giving another knock and thought better of it. This wasn't my problem afterall and I had done what was asked of me.

Later that evening I found myself relaxing a little with some music and a few cold beers. A sofa had arrived a couple of days before and I lay content. My miserable grey paint looked quite handsome by lamplight and I created hand shadows on the wall while looking at my newly callused fingers. The beer had kicked in nicely and I was feeling very manly with my new found freedom and batchelor status. I was mumbling along to the music when three loud thumps disturbed my front door. I flicked a quick look at the clock as I approached the hallway. 10.32pm and wondered who on earth would be knocking on my door at this hour. My heart returned to a normal rythm as I spied a shape in a dark coloured hat through the frosted glass. Daphne had

obviously returned home to the disappointing news from her husband of my visit and his refusal to come to the door. All of a sudden I felt rotten for her and angry about him. Why would he put his wife through that? Worse still, make her apologise on his behalf.

"It's ok," I said, opening the door, "really Daphne I unders_" A police officer stood stoic under the porch light. His frame almost completely filling the doorway. I could just make out a yellow and blue cruiser parked up adjacent to the pavement.

"Good evening sir." I opened my mouth to say something and closed it shut when nothing came out. Sensing my shock the officer laughed. He informed me that there was nothing to worry about. PC Howard was his name. He wanted to know if I was settling in ok and smiled when I commented on his astute awareness of the comings and goings from the area. "I wouldn't be a very good police officer if I didn't notice these things would I?" We chatted for a minute or so before I could stand it no longer.

"Officer Howard, please can you tell me why you are really here?" He nodded his head gently. It transpired that earlier that evening the police had received a call from a Mr Micheal Rhodes. His words drifted through my brain, failing to attach themselves to any coherent node or electron.

"Mr Rhodes says that you were banging on his door earlier and_"

"Wait,what?!"

"Banging on his door, at approximately..." Howard removed a small notebook from an overstuffed breast pocket. "Eight forty-five this evening."

"Well I_"

"He also says that since you moved in you've been hanging around by his fence, sometimes leaning on it and acting strangely." I burst out laughing and questioned the whole incident as some sort of elaborate joke. "It's no joke sir. Mr Rhodes has been quite disturbed." My confusion was slowly giving away to anger and I tried to assure Howard that I only knocked on the door because I wanted to introduce myself and...my god, I was ever only trying to be pleasant! He asked if I was ok and I said yes, but that I was upset. He said that he understood. "But look, people have very different tolerance levels. Can I give you some advice?" I was so dumbfounded that all I could do was shrug my shoulders in defeat. "Leave each other be. Live your lives and stay out of each others way in future. Trust me, you don't want to be drawn in to a dispute."

"A *dispute*?" Howard started to turn. As he did I spotted another officer in the cruiser talking on the radio. He was looking right at me. And that as they say, was that. Off they went. I stood looking out at the dark sky, smelling the rain brew overhead, wondering what on earth just happened. It won't surprise you to learn that Howard was one of the officers who would eventually take me into custody.

I suppose what really upset me about Howard's visit was the language he had used. How I was "acting strangely." You sit with me now and do I strike you as strange? Do any of my actions that I have described come across as odd in any way? I'd like to think not and I was angry, if not furious that this *man* who I didn't know from Adam could accuse me of such a thing, simply for striking up an over the fence relationship with his wife. I mean we were neighbours for Christ sake!

In the days that followed I grew increasingly paranoid. I couldn't understand what I had done to offend Michael. Daphne had warned me that he was reclusive, but I started to believe that he was in fact mentally ill. What sane person would call the police for knocking on their door? Then, one restless evening I heard what I thought was a person crying in the night, deep lumbering sobs through my bedroom wall. Whether it was him or her I couldn't be sure but it convinced me that one of two things was likely. Either Micheal was seriously unwell or he was abusing Daphne. The more I thought about it the more the latter made perfect sense. Our conversations in the garden, they were just subtle cries for help. The front of the house was in tatters because Daphne never saw it. The garden was her prison and a simple front for keeping up appearances. I suddenly felt very sick. That night that I knocked on the door must have been hell for her. She wanted help and I had failed miserably.

The next morning I had every intention of calling Howard and explaining the situation. Surely after hearing my side of the story it would lead to an investigation or at least a follow up visit. Michael could deny me access to the house, but he would struggle to justify opening the door to the police. I was about to make the call when I heard a crash from outside. I bolted for the backdoor and out into the garden. A light rain was falling and despite the season a chilling breeze whipped across my face. This was no day for gardening and yet there Daphne was, her back to me staring at a shattered plant pot. Black soil gathered around her feet, turning to a wet mud.

I wasted no time. "Daphne I need to speak with you."

It was the strangest thing. She didn't move, and yet I heard her as if she were standing right next to me.

"I'm sorry John. For all of this. I just thought you might have been able to help him."

With that she fell and the sky, I'd swear to you it darkened right there and then, as if someone was controlling it with a dimmer switch. My first instinct was to jump the fence but no sooner did I put downward pressure on the damn, rotten thing, it started to bow. My mind raced, there in front of me my neighbour and friend lay motionless. The rain had turned heavy and drops hit her hat, bouncing off with an awful hollow noise that seemed maddening to me in my state of panic.

Here is where things start to get foggy for me. I hope you can appreciate that I am doing my best to give you an accurate account. But my god it was...well it was as if I was watching the whole thing play out on an old, out of tune television set. Something must have snapped me out of my

stupor as I found myself running across the front lawn of my house and leaping the short distance to Daphne's front door. I didn't knock this time. Instead I pounded and kicked at it, shouting and raving at the dreadful occupant, who I'd never met but harboured so much anger for.

"Micheal! Christ man open the door. It's Daphne, she's fallen!"

My blows became stronger, the door knocker clattered back and forth like judges hammer. Had I carried on, I think I might have actually broken the damn thing off of the hinges. Then, in the melee I heard a click and a turn. There was this silence, this complete and utter silence as the door opened and an elderly man stood weeping in the entrance. I can not describe to you the feeling that I had. The sadness was insurmountable. It was like it just spilled...no, popped out, like a cork from a shaken bottle. My heart pounded and we stood there for maybe a fraction of a second before he raised a crooked finger.

"You...you go away."

I raised my hands in front of my chest. Our dislike for each other could wait for another day.

"Daphne's fallen. Let me in. I can hel_ "

"Why are you doing these...these things?"

"Daphne!"

A tear spilled from one of his rheumy eyes at the mention of her name.

"How dare you. Why would you say that? Why would you say her name!"

"She's fallen_."

"She's *dead* you evil bastard! My wife has been dead for just three...for three months." He collapsed in the door way.

Shock is a funny thing and it's true what they say. You can never tell how you will react to something until it happens to you. But fear...I can tell you about fear. I can tell you exactly what you will do when faced with something so extraordinary that your brain simply cannot process it. I shoved passed him, his words not having the time to settle and ran through the hallway. It was *cold*. I thought, god it sounds ridiculous, but I thought I could see my breath hanging in front of me. Behind, I could hear crying and I knew then that it was him that I'd heard through my bedroom wall.

Try as I might I cannot remember how I ended up outside. But I do remember that *fear*. It was a feeling, like being weighed down under water. That's what it feels like, you understand? This whole *fight or flight* theory, it's nonsense. Real fear pins you in place and drowns you until your

mind can't take it anymore. Logic and reason cease to exist and in that moment when sanity hangs by a thread, your brain begins to accept that everything you thought made sense in life is utter rubbish.

I vaguely recall the rain hammering down on my skin...and bouncing from a hat, faded and barely visible amongst the tall brown grass.

The doctors told me that when the police arrived they found me outside on my knees, sobbing uncontrollably. I don't recall this at all, but the guilt I feel for what I did to Michael will stay with me. I've tried writing to him but my letters are returned unopened. They won't tell me if he still lives there, although after what happened, it would come as no surprise to learn if he had moved on.

I suppose you would like to know if I've seen anything strange since that day. Well I can honestly say that I haven't. You would like to know if I live in fear of the dark or check under the bed before I go to sleep at night yes? I don't, and I like the dark. It makes me feel at ease. No, the thing that really gets to me is *why*? I've played it over and over again in my head and the only conclusion is that somehow Daphne...or whatever it was knew that Michael and I needed help. That maybe we could have found something in our loneliness, maybe even a friendship. Now that you've met me and heard my story you will have to make that judgement for yourself. Or perhaps the doctors are right, perhaps I am mad. Either way our time is up. I really do hope that you have everything you need. It might be worth your while speaking to some of the other patients, although I doubt you will find another one with a story like mine. Anyway, it was good meeting you, I'm off to see a friend now. If you think my story is far fetched you should hear his. He thinks that hell follows him wherever he goes. Now that's a story worth listening to.

Amour

By Dr. Priya Dolma Tamang

I am in love with you, for you are hauntingly human.
Broken beautiful, free like the sea, yet bound by boundaries.
Fitted for honour but often gifted betrayal,
with tested sight though tender the foresight.
Shall your reality not be my validation vain,
nor your desires be drained in my ventured gain.
In different sides of you, I see a similar me.
Through and through, tried and true.
Let me narrate your story, as you listen to mine
and entomb the bygones for a new sunshine.
I am in love with you, for I know no other way to be.

Let's Chat with Author Julian K. Jarboe

MORE ABOUT EVERYONE ON THE MOON IS ESSENTIAL PERSONNEL

In the titular novella, Jarboe situates us in a dystopian near-future as a group of teens, in the throes of generational malaise, consider finding employment on the moon. In "The Heavy Things," a young speaker experiences their maturing body as a flow of sharp objects and tools. Their struggle for bodily integrity is waged against time itself, as well as family and caretakers who use love and nurturing to control.

"The Nothing Spots Where Nobody Wants To Stay" spotlights a teen whose dad died in 9/11, their secret school makeout sessions, shoplifting stints, and nonbinary gender expression, offering a knotty take on American victimhood. In "Estranged Children of Storybook Houses," Jarboe nods to classic fairy tales while exploring changelings, fairies, and how we define family and belonging.

At a time when the trans community is under attack from the highest seats of power and the storm clouds of environmental calamity and extreme inequality are darkening, Jarboe's writing, with its singular voice, keen sense of humor, and unwavering humanity, is a vital addition to today's literary conversation.

AN INTERVIEW WITH JULIAN K. JARBOE

Many of the stories in this collection are backgrounded by what feels like an imminent collapse of society as we know it, brought on by a heady mix of climate crisis, unregulated tech companies, and late capitalism—issues not far off from our current reality. What do you hope readers take away from these pieces? Should they serve as warnings? Guidelines for survival?

I think for some readers, the social and environmental circumstances in a number of the stories will feel like a warning about the near future, but for other readers these might reflect the past or the present. The typical survivalist apocalypse genre is fundamentally reactionary: it's a fantasy about indulging brutality and individualism, and placing the worst things imaginable just ahead of us so bright and loud that nobody can bring up that settler colonialism and genocide and slavery and war crimes have been happening, are still happening, all along. Some of the characters in my stories joke with each other about preparing for the eventual end of the world (or subsume themselves in nostalgia for an irretrievable past) as a way of putting off dealing with the problems right in front of them. A few months ago a friend of mine said, "Things may and probably will get worse, but there will be no pre-apocalyptic moment where you get to shrug off your life. You have to keep living," which resonated with me a lot as I was putting the book together. I'm a pessimistic person (a negativity apologist?), but I think if I'm offering a guideline for survival it's that accepting just how bad and confusing things are can free up a lot of energy, clarity, and compassion to actually do something.

You've said that you are, and have been for some time, "incurably online" in a way that impacts everything you do. Can you speak to the relationship you have with technology—specifically the internet—and how it has affected your writing?

I've never known life without the internet but I'm also just old enough to remember certain shifts in attitudes about its use. At some point it was felt, not without reason, that it wasn't a place for real research about anything serious, and so being online for hours was about the same as watching too much TV. I would sneak down to the family room in the middle of the night and hope that the 56k modem didn't wake anyone up, so I could read about dragons and anime and things like that at very niche levels that weren't available in a lot of library books. I got real into LiveJournal and AIM and so forth. It was expressive and social in a way that felt very safe for me, and so that's where I ended up practicing my creative writing and conducting most of my social life for a while, too. So when I say that I'm "incurable online," I mean that it's impossible for me to disentangle some deeply set formative aspects of how I learn, think, and communicate from the technology of the internet. My biggest literary influence in the most literal sense has to be social media, because I have simply poured so much time into reading from it and writing on it. And I guess I'm impatient with the moralizing about whether or not this way of life is good or bad, stunting or enlightening, isolating or connecting. It's more complicated than that.

Like many of your characters, you are a part of the queer community and have faced violence, discrimination, and anti-queer sentiment throughout your life. In the midst of the apocalyptic backdrop of your stories, the bonds between queer characters in your stories act almost as lifelines. Is this true to your lived experience within the queer community? Was it important for you to represent these relationships in this way?

It's necessary for some groups of people, such as queer people, to at least be aware of each other, even if the infighting never ends (it will never end). People I've never met in person have saved my life, and that doesn't even mean we're friends, but that doesn't matter. You might be insufferable and kind of dangerous and I still care if you live or die. I've still noticed you're there, and want you to stay alive to be an annoying jerk well into old age, maybe even a sober one. It's that deadly serious. And I am not talking about pity or romantic notions of shared experience. Community might be a cozier way to say interdependence, for better or worse. I didn't set out to represent these kinds of relationships as a goal in itself, as some moral instruction, but how could I not write about them? It's only because of people who have this habit of looking out for each other that I'm still around to write at all.

Faith and family are common motifs across this collection. What is it about these themes that compelled you to explore them? Why tackle them through the styles of magical realism and surrealism?

God shows up a whole lot in this book! Sometimes as an inscrutable tyrant, sometimes as the assurance of your inherent worth, and sometimes as your problematic mom. Faith and ritual are present in life whether we think they are or not. When I really started writing more and more to ask questions that I didn't have a clever answer already lined up for, I discovered that I have several more thoughts and feelings about growing up Catholic than I previously believed. Speculative fiction, broadly, and magical realism or surrealism more specifically, offer me a way to externalize the sublime and irrational and extend points of view which might not otherwise develop or work in mimetic fiction.

The impermanence of one's physical body and the myriad ways it can be altered, disrupted, or changed—by choice or by circumstance—is central to many of your stories.

What is it about physical bodies that spurred you to examine both their capacities and limitations?

I'm continually fascinated by how our bodies are, literally, shaped by our environments, our experiences, and our choices, and by this weird ideology that there could be a "natural" state for a human body to inhabit. Things are done to our bodies that get called natural when they affirm some hierarchy or another, and everything else is supposedly artificial. You don't even have to deviate on purpose to be artificial, you could do as little as be considered ugly or strange by others through no fault of your own (look at how we regard fatness as the failed modification of a hypothetical thin person, autism as a "stolen" neurotypical person, and so on). A lot of my characters are either living with the consequences of major change in their bodies or about to enact one to change their relationship with their circumstances, and either way they want to or have to disregard this trap of naturalness to pursue their ends.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Julian K. Jarboe is a writer and artist from Massachusetts. They are the recipient of a Writers' Room of Boston Fellowship (2018), a graduate of the Odyssey Writing Workshop (2018), an Honorable Mention from the Tiptree Fellowship (2018), and a residency from The Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts (2016). They graduated from The Massachusetts College of Art and Design with Academic Honors (2012).

Other Words for Home by Jasmine Warga

Reviewed by Sascha Harris

The novel, *Other Words for Home* by Jasmine Warga, documents the life of Jude, a Syrian refugee that moves to Cincinnati, Ohio at the start of the Syrian War, leaving all that she knows behind. As Jude slowly adjusts to her new home, her surroundings and American culture as a whole, become more familiar. Upon moving, she deeply misses her family and friends in her war-torn coastal hometown in Syria. Jude meets many new people and learns many profound lessons through her experience moving to America as a Muslim refugee.

I feel that this novel gives readers a clear depiction of an immigrant or refugee experience moving to America. Within the book, Jude faces discrimination because of her religion, struggles learning English and ultimately feels out of place. Since this book is written in first person, readers are able to learn, on a personal level, about the experience of one of millions that have gone through something similar to Jude. It was interesting for me to learn about life in Syria before the war broke out and also how it deeply affected the lives of the people living there. I also enjoyed that the book was written in a free-verse poetry style, similar to *Brown Girl Dreaming* by Jacqueline Woodson. The rich figurative language and detailed description within Warga's writing helps readers to truly know how Jude felt throughout every given moment in the novel. The following quote demonstrates this: "Sometimes it feels like when I boarded that plane to fly to America I left my heart behind, beating and lonely on the other side of the ocean," (78).

Other Words for Home is a story of immigration and assimilating into a society so much different than what one is used to. Jude learns to adjust to her new surroundings, while still honoring the life (including tradition, religion and family) she left behind in Syria. At certain points, Jude feels like an outsider, like she doesn't belong. This novel can teach readers that one can always get through a hard time, no matter the circumstances and know that it will get better. Jude exemplifies bravery and courage as she endures many difficult moments in her life in America. She experiences highs and lows, but ultimately comes out of every situation a changed and wiser person.

Fever Dream by Samanta Schweblin

Reviewed by Karisma J. Tobin

Samanta Schweblin's *Fever Dream* tells the haunting story of a mother's experience of an unfamiliar town. Vacationing with her young daughter, Nina, Amanda finds herself unsettled. It soon becomes clear that there is something strange about this place.

It's the worms. You have to be patient and wait. And while we wait, we have to find the exact moment when the worms come into being (2).

As Amanda recalls—a woman in a gold bathing suit, shoes thrown to the bottom of a pool, a prize horse mysteriously poisoned, a mystic healer-woman in a green house—David guides the conversation, insisting that they are running out of time, that they must find the worms. As each new question comes to light, a sense of unease burrows further under the reader's skin, and we wonder with increasing urgency: Where is Nina?

“When my David was born, he was the light of my life, he was my sun [. . .] The first time they put him in my arms, I was so anxious [. . .] I swear, until I counted all ten of his fingers twice, I wasn't convinced everything had turned out all right” (9).

Fever Dream is a story about mothers, about the fear and anxiety they feel for their children, about the ways they try to understand and cope with these feelings, the sense that it might already be too late.

“My mother always said something bad would happen. My mother was sure that sooner or later something bad would happen, and now I can see it with total clarity, I can feel it coming toward us like a tangible fate, irreversible. Now there's almost no rescue distance, the rope is so short I can bare walk” (76).

Mysterious and suspenseful as it may be, *Fever Dream* is not a mystery. It is an exploration of the depths and kinds of motherhood, a questioning of the boundaries of the single, human soul, an acknowledgement and calling-out of ecoterrorism.

Contributors

Maureen Mancini Amaturio, a New York based fashion and beauty writer and columnist, teaches creative writing, leads the Sound Shore Writers Group, which she founded in 2007, and produces literary events. In addition to her fashion column and two published beauty how-to guides, she is an award-winning writer, and her personal essays, creative non-fiction, short stories, humor pieces, articles, and celebrity interviews have appeared in many magazines (Bluntly Magazine, Eunoia Review), journals (Manifest-Station, Drunken Pen Writing), and anthologies including: 'Breakfast Served Daily,' in Flash Non-Fiction Food Anthology published by Woodhall Press coming Spring, 2020; 'The Couch,' featured in, THINGS THAT GO BUMP Anthology, available January, 2020, from Sez Publishing. A handwriting analyst diagnosed her with an overdeveloped imagination. She's working to live up to that.

Nitin Chawla is a writer, with creative blend of mixing fiction with the current global challenges. He is an engineer by education and works in Kuala Lumpur as a Manager.

Sascha Harris lives in New York City. She enjoys writing, singing and photography.

Kenneth Kapp was a professor of Mathematics, a ceramicist and a welder. Then he traded his shop apron for a white shirt and suit, working at IBM until he was downsized in 2000. He now teaches yoga and writes. He lives with his wife and beagle in Shorewood, Wisconsin. He enjoys the many excellent chamber music concerts available in Milwaukee. He's a homebrewer and runs whitewater rivers with his son in the summer. Further information can be found on www.kmkbooks.com.

Cara Lorello is a freelance writer currently residing in Spokane, Washington, and the author of the chapbook, Magnum Opal. Her work features in past issues of Noble-Gas Quarterly, FWS, Vending Machine Press, SlushPile, The Sun, and the Spokane-based poetry anthology, Raintown Almanac (Sage Hill Press).

Diana Raab, PhD is an award-winning poet, memoirist, blogger, speaker, and author of 10 books and over 1000 articles and poems. She's also editor of two anthologies, "Writers on the Edge: 22 Writers Speak About Addiction and Dependency," and "Writers and Their Notebooks." Raab's two memoirs are "Regina's Closet: Finding My Grandmother's Secret Journal," and "Healing With Words: A Writer's Cancer Journey." She blogs for Psychology Today, Thrive Global, and PsychCentral and is frequently a guest blogger for various other sites. Her two latest books are, "Writing for Bliss: A Seven- Step Plan for Telling Your Story and Transforming Your Life," and "Writing for Bliss: A Companion Journal" Visit: www.dianaraab.com.

Dr. Priya Dolma Tamang is a medical graduate from the north-east Indian state of Sikkim. With her tribal Nepali roots and deeply seated Buddhist beliefs, culture and mindfulness have

both been active themes in her writing. Her debut book, [Ivory Gleam](#), was published by Leadstart Publishers, India, in 2018. Priya's poetry has found home, among other places, in International Times, Urban Magazine, Artvilla, Headline Poetry, Tales of Reverie (Paragon Press, 2019), Gravitas (Pub House Books, 2020), Acclamation Point, Just Milieu and Spillwords. She writes as @poetryandprosebyk on Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook. You can also follow her on [Goodreads](#)!

Karisma J. Tobin is an MFA candidate at Sam Houston State University. Her work appears in THAT Literary Review (forthcoming), Beacon, and Leonardo.

Jack Wildern is a writer from the UK, currently studying creative writing.

Writing Contests & Guest Post Opportunities

There are many sites that allow guest posts, too many to list here! Rather, visit [Advanced Web Ranking](#) for a list of over 150 websites that accept guests posts. Categories ranging from health and fitness to finance and more.

The Diana Woods Memorial Award in Creative Non-Fiction Creative nonfiction essays of no more than 5,000 words on any subject, are eligible for consideration for this award. Works must not have been published elsewhere. Award winners are required to submit a 100-word biography, recent photo and a short note thanking the Woods family for their generosity and support. Deadline: February and August of each year Fee: None Prize: \$250 and publication in Lunch Ticket

Flash Fiction – True Story For this contest your challenge is to write a flash fiction story – that is a true story. Share your humorous, serious, embarrassing, life-changing or any true story for this flash fiction writing contest. Cash prize to the winner! Deadline: 6/3/2020 Fee: \$9.95 Prize: \$100

Erma Bombeck Writing Competition The Erma Bombeck Writing Competition, sponsored biennially by the Washington-Centerville Public in conjunction with the Erma Bombeck Writers' Workshop, pays tribute to Erma Bombeck, one of the greatest humorists of our times. Previously unpublished personal essays of 450 words or less that capture the essence of Erma's writings will be accepted in the humor and human interest categories. Entries are accepted from anywhere in the world, and all will be blind judged by a panel of accomplished authors, columnists, screenwriters, stand-up comedians and writing teachers. Bill Bryson, best known for his humorous books on travel as well as a variety of other genres, including the English language, science, history, and non-fiction, will serve as the finalist judge for the humor essays. Jess Montgomery, a columnist and author of historical mysteries, will serve as the finalist judge for the human interest essays. Deadline: Current not accepting submissions. We'll update you as soon as they reopen again.

Non-Fiction Writing Contest Share your non-fiction writing to enter this contest. Share your writing on any topic. Can be a funny piece, serious, true story or informational. Any type of non-fiction is welcomed. Deadline: 02/21/2020 Fee: \$9.95 Prize: \$100

100 Word Flash Fiction Writing Contest Can you share a complete story with only 100 words? That is the challenge of this writing contest. Enter a story but use only 100 words. Cash prize to the winner. Deadline: 02/28/2020 Fee: \$9.95 Prize \$100

2019 Accenti Writing Contest The contest is open to prose works. Entries can be fiction, non-fiction or creative non-fiction. Entries must be previously unpublished and not under consideration by any other publication. Entries must be original and not a translation of a previously published work. Deadline: Currently not accepting submissions. We'll update you as soon as they reopen again.

2020 Killer Nashville Silver Falchion Award Since 2008, the Killer Nashville Silver Falchion Awards have recognized the best stories from the previous year told through various media utilizing the elements of mystery, thriller, and/or suspense. Judges are professional writers, book reviewers, librarians, academics, and—in specialized cases—specific industry peers. Focus is on quality, not popularity. Deadline: 06/01/2020 Fee: None Prize: \$250

Arizona Mystery Writers Mary Ann Hutchison Memorial Story Contest for Youths All writers 9-16 years of age (at time of entry) can enter – and anyone can win! Send in your short story in mystery, suspense, or thriller style. Entries may be up to 2500 words (about 10 double-spaced pages). It's loads of fun and a good exercise of your writing skills. You can submit more than one story if you like. Entries are judged "blind," that is, without the judges knowing who wrote the stories. Everybody is equal before the panel of judges! Therefore DO NOT PUT YOUR NAME OR ANY IDENTIFYING INFORMATION ON THE STORY. If you're too old for this contest, give the information to your children or grandchildren. Deadline: 6/01/2020 Fee: None Prize: 1st Place – \$50

Annual Barren Flash Fiction Prize Our first annual flash fiction contest. Rules and instructions are listed on our website. Deadline: Currently not accepting submissions. We'll update you as soon as they reopen again.

Chicago Tribune's Nelson Algren Literary Awards A nationally recognized contest for original short fiction, named in honor of the Chicago literary great Nelson Algren. The contest has been held annually since 1981. The award has been presented to a number of distinguished authors, including Louise Erdrich and Stuart Dybek. Deadline: Currently not accepting submissions. We'll update you as soon as they reopen again.

Daisy Pettles Women Writers Writing Contest The Daisy Pettles Women Writers Writing Contest is open to women writers, age 40+, published or unpublished. Fiction or Non-Fiction writing projects are eligible. Poetry is excluded. Deadline: Currently not accepting submissions. We'll update you as soon as they reopen again.

Dream Quest One Poetry & Writing Contest Open to anyone who enjoys expressing innermost thoughts and feelings into the beautiful literary art of writing a story that's worth telling everyone! Welcome to all, having the ability to dream. Write a short story, 5 pages maximum length, on any subject or theme, fiction or non-fiction (including essay compositions, diary, journal entries, short screenplays, and screenwriting). Also, all entries must be either typed or legibly hand-printed. Deadline: 8/15/2020 Fee: \$10 per short story Prize: \$500

fresh.ink (that's an intentional lowercase), a new platform that connects writers with beta readers. Submissions will be judged by readers on the fresh.ink mobile app, based on how many people finish reading your work and how they rate it. Deadline: Currently not accepting submissions. We'll update you as soon as they reopen again.

The Jeff Sharlet Memorial Award for Veterans This creative writing contest for U.S. military veterans and active-duty personnel is hosted by The Iowa Review and made possible by a gift from the family of Jeff Sharlet (1942–69), a Vietnam veteran and antiwar writer and activist. The contest is open to veterans and active-duty personnel writing in any genre and about any subject matter. Deadline: 05/31/2020 Fee: None Prize: \$1,000 plus publication in an issue of The Iowa Review

L. Ron Hubbard Writers of the Future Contest L. Ron Hubbard’s Writers of the Future Contest is an opportunity for new writers of science fiction and fantasy to have their work judged by some of the masters in the field and discovered by a wide audience. Submissions must be short stories or novelettes (up to 17,000 words) in the genre of science fiction or fantasy, and new and amateur writers are welcome to apply. Deadline: 3/21/2020 Fee: None Prize: \$1000

“Motion” International Call – Art & Literature Journal Moving or being moved. Shifting, stirring, changing places. The rise and fall. Progress, flow and change in self and society. Dance, sports, adrenalin. Pushing limits, breaking boundaries. Motion is all around us and lives through us. Share your vision of MOTION. Deadline: 2/28/2020 Fee: \$15 + Prize: \$500 for first place; \$250 for second and third place

New Voices Award This award is given for a previously unpublished children’s picture book manuscript (of no more than 1,500 words) written by a writer of color. The 2019 deadline has passed, please check back for updates Fee: None Prize: \$1,000 cash and a standard publication contract

Halloween Flash Fiction Share a Halloween Horror story for this writing contest. But the catch is you only have 500 words (or less) to do it. Share your horror story by Halloween to enter this flash fiction writing contest. Deadline: Currently not accepting submissions. We’ll update you as soon as they reopen again.

Scribble Short Story Contest for Beginning and Emerging Writers The Editors of Scribble welcome those who have never been published and those who’ve had short fiction published up to several times to submit for the chance to win a cash prize and publication in Scribble’s January 2020 edition. Deadline: Currently not accepting submissions. We’ll update you as soon as they reopen again.

ServiceScape Short Story Award For this award, any genre or theme of short story is accepted. All applicants should submit their original unpublished work of short fiction or nonfiction, 5,000 words or fewer, to be considered. Deadline: 11/29/2020 Fee: None Prize: \$1,000.00 USD, and the winner will have his or her short story featured on the blog

The Cosmos Prize First Fandom Experience is a cooperative publishing project whose goal is to honor, preserve, and bring to life the story of the “first fans” — the pioneers who were

instrumental in defining, driving, and growing science fiction and fantasy in the 1930s and beyond. First Fandom Experience is so-named because we hope to capture — or even recreate — the sense of what it was like to participate in the inception and early growth of organized science fiction fandom. To this end, we're pleased to announce our first writing contest: The Cosmos Prize. Deadline: 3/21/2020 Fee: None Prize: \$500 cash prize pool as well as copies of publications

The Writer 2019 Fall Short Story Contest Submit your very best fictional short story in 2,000 words or less. Any theme, subject, or genre is fair game, as long as it falls under 2,000 words. Deadline: 3/3/2020 Fee: \$25 Prize: \$1,000

This Story Starts With This Sentence Write a story with the sentence: We heard something. You can write about anything – just start the story with the provided sentence. Cash prize to the winner. Deadline: 7/15/2020 Fee: \$9.95 Prize: \$100

Virginia B. Ball Creative Writing Competition The contest is open to students who are in grades 8–11 during the 2019-20 school year. Students must submit writing samples in at least two of the following genres: fiction, poetry, personal essay/memoir, screenwriting, playwriting, and hybrid genre. You should submit no more than 5 pieces total. Deadline: Currently not accepting submissions. We'll update you as soon as they reopen again.

Writer's Digest Competitions One of the longest-running writing competitions, this contest spotlights up and coming writers in a number of categories, including Memoirs/Personal Essay, Print or Online Article and Genre Short Story. Deadline: See link for multiple deadline Fee: start at \$20 Prize: The Grand Prize winner gets \$5,000, a feature in Writer's Digest magazine, a paid trip to a writing conference and more

Write the World Each month Write the World holds a new competition, developed around a particular idea or genre of writing, such as poetry, fantasy, sports journalism, or flash fiction. Competitions encourage you to dig deeper into the writing process, try out new genres and share your work with a sea of eager readers. Deadline: Monthly Fee: None Prize: The winning entrant receives \$100, and the runner-up and best peer-reviewer receive \$50. All three winners will be featured on our blog, with commentary from our guest judge

15 Syllable Writing Contest Write a poem that only has 15 syllables to enter this poetry contest. You can write about anything. You can write a poem of any type. The only requirement is that the total number of syllables in your poem is 15. What can you write when you only have 15 syllables to work with? Deadline: 8/6/2020 Fee: \$9.95 Prize: \$100

2020 Sonia Sanchez-Langston Hughes Poetry Contest

Each year, Split This Rock sponsors a national poetry contest which serves to raise the visibility and prestige of poetry of provocation and witness. Formerly known as Split This Rock's Annual Poetry Contest, the contest was renamed in 2017 as the Sonia Sanchez-Langston Hughes Poetry

Contest. The new name honors two poets significant to Split This Rock: Langston Hughes who penned the poem “Big Buddy” from which Split This Rock takes its name and Sonia Sanchez who opened the very first Split This Rock Poetry Festival in 2008 and served as guest judge for the 2018 contest. Contest winning poems are published on Split This Rock’s website and in The Quarry: A Social Justice Poetry Database. Deadline: Currently not accepting submissions. We’ll update you as soon as they reopen again.

3 Line Poetry Contest Share a poem that only has three lines to enter this poetry contest. The syllable count for your poem should be 5-7-5 or 5-7-7. So the first line has five syllables, the second line has seven syllables. The final line either has five or seven syllables. The topic is open – so write about anything. Cash prize to the winner. Deadline: 7/24/2020 Fee: \$9.95 Prize: \$100

The Brunel University African Poetry Prize The prize is open to African poets who have not yet had a full-length poetry book published. Self-published poetry books, chapbooks and pamphlets are exempt from this stipulation. Only poems written in English are accepted. Poems translated into English are also accepted with a percentage of the prize going to the translator. Each entrant must submit 10 poems to be eligible, no more and no less. There is no stipulation as to the content of submitted poems but no poem should exceed 30 lines in length. Deadline: Currently not accepting submissions. We’ll update you as soon as they reopen again.

Faith Poetry Contest Share a poem of faith. How does your faith impact you? Your lifestyle? Write a poem of any type. Deadline: 7/19/2020 Fee: \$9.95 Prize: \$100

Halloween Poetry Contest Share your Halloween Poem for this poetry contest. Write a poem of any type – but keep in mind the theme. Cash prize to the winner. Deadline: Currently not accepting submissions. We’ll update you as soon as they reopen again.

James Laughlin Award Offered since 1954, the James Laughlin Award is given to recognize and support a second book of poetry forthcoming in the next calendar year. Deadline: Submissions are accepted January 1 through May 15 each year. Fee: None Prize of \$5,000

Lune Poetry Contest

To enter this poetry contest write a Lune. A Lune is a poem that follows the 5-3-5 syllable count. So the first line will have 5 syllables. The second line will have 3. And the final will have 5 syllables again. Cash prize! Deadline: 5/30/2020 Fee: \$9.95 Prize: \$100

Love Poem Poetry Contest Share a love poem to enter this poetry contest. Your poem can be about anyone (or even a special pet). Write it any way you choose. Deadline: 03/25/2020 Fee: \$9.95 Prize: \$100

ZenGarden.club

We invite you to create a very short story (350 words or less) based on the picture prompt on the

contest page. Use your imagination, and see what stories you see in this picture, entitled “Scary”!

Tanka Poetry Contest What’s a Tanka? A Tanka is a poem that only has five lines. Each line has a specific syllable count. That count is 5-7-5-7-7. So the first line of your poem will have five syllables. The second line will have seven. The third line will have five again. The fourth and fifth line will have seven syllables. Cash prize to the winner of this poetry contest. Deadline: 7/31/2020 Fee: \$9.95 Prize: \$100

The Tufts Poetry Awards Based at Claremont Graduate University and given for poetry volumes published in the preceding year – are not only two of the most prestigious prizes a contemporary poet can receive, they also come with hefty purses: \$100,000 for the Kingsley Tufts Poetry Award and \$10,000 for the Kate Tufts Discovery Award. This makes the Kingsley Tufts award the world’s largest monetary prize for a single collection of poetry. Deadline: The 2019 deadline has passed, please check back for updates Fee: None Prize: \$100,000

Two Line Poem Our two line poem is fun and a bit of a challenge. Write a poem that only has two lines. The twist is that there should be an internal rhyme and an end rhyme. See an example in the contest announcement. Deadline: 7/3/2020 Fee: \$9.95 Prize: \$100

Wingless Dreamer Poetry Contest This is an open letter to all the aspiring writers around the globe to participate in our Wingless Dreamer Literary Contest 2019. After a huge success of our first edition, “Passionate Penholders” we are happy to announce that we are seeking submissions for the second edition of Wingless Dreamer. We give emerging writers a platform to gain recognition through their Literary submissions disregard of their nationality, gender, age, disability or race differences. Deadline: Currently not accepting submissions. We’ll update you as soon as they reopen again.

Dream Quest One Poetry & Writing Contest Open to anyone who enjoys expressing innermost thoughts and feelings into the beautiful literary art of poetry. Welcome to all, having the ability to dream. Write a poem, 30 lines or fewer on any subject, style, or form, typed or neatly hand printed. Also, all entries must be either typed or legibly hand-printed. Deadline: 8/15/2020 Fee: \$5 per poem Prize: Poetry First Prize is \$250

The Anisfield-Wolf Book Awards recognizes outstanding works that contribute to our understanding of racism and our appreciation of cultural diversity. Awards are given for fiction, poetry and nonfiction. Books must be written in English and published and copyrighted in 2019 to be eligible for the 2020 prize. Deadline: 12/31/2020 Fee: None Prize: \$10,000

Cabell First Novelist Award Seeks to honor first-time novelists “who have navigated their way through the maze of imagination and delivered a great read.” Novels published the previous year are accepted. Deadline: Currently not accepting submissions. We’ll update you as soon as they reopen again.

Minotaur Books / Mystery Writers of America First Crime Novel Competition

Writers 18 and older who have never had a novel published (in any genre) are eligible for this prize, awarded for an original book-length manuscript where murder or another serious crime or crimes is at the heart of the story. Deadline: Currently not accepting submissions. We'll update you as soon as they reopen again.

Friends of American Writers Chicago Awards Each year FAW recognizes new emerging Midwestern authors or those whose novels or non-fiction writing are set in the Midwest. Each year the Literature Awards Committee reads and reviews dozens of books for selection of the current year award winners. The author must be a resident (or previously have been a resident for approximately five years) of Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, North Dakota, Nebraska, Ohio, South Dakota or Wisconsin; or the locale of the book must be in a region identified above. The books can be fiction or creative non-fiction. Self-published (vanity press) and e-Books are not eligible. Deadline: Currently not accepting submissions. We'll update you as soon as they reopen again.

PEN/Faulkner's Youth Essay Contest is open to students in Grades 8-11. Each year, students submit a personal essay inspired by a theme. Submissions must be between 500-1,000 max. words. Submissions must be in the personal narrative essay genre (no academic essays, please). This year's theme is TRANSFORMATION. Deadline: 6/19/2020 Fee: None None Prize: Two winners receive \$100 and the opportunity to read at a PEN/Faulkner event. Two runners-up receive \$50 and acknowledgement on their website.

The Restless Books Prize for New Immigrant Writing Looking for extraordinary unpublished submissions from emerging writers of sharp, culture-straddling writing that addresses identity in a global age. Each year, a distinguished panel of judges will select a winning manuscript to be published by Restless Books. We can't wait to read and share what the new voices of the world have to say. Fiction manuscripts must be complete. Nonfiction submissions must consist of either a complete manuscript, or a sample of at least 25,000 words and a detailed proposal that includes a synopsis and an annotated table of contents. All submissions must be in English (translations welcome). Deadline: 03/31/2020 Fee: None Prize: \$10,000 advance and publication by Restless Books in print and digital editions

Tony Hillerman Prize for Best First Mystery Set in the Southwest Competition Each potential entrant must not be the author of a published mystery novel and must not be a party to any agreement with a publisher pursuant to which a mystery novel written by the entrant may be published. For purposes of these Official Rules, "mystery novel" means a book of fiction in which murder or another serious crime or crimes is at the heart of the story, and emphasis is on the solution rather than the details of the crime. of at least 40,000 words and "published" means a work that has been published or made publicly available, in whole or part, as a print book, e-book or in any other media. Deadline: Currently not accepting submissions. We'll update you as soon as they reopen again.

W.Y. Boyd Literary Award for Excellence in Military Fiction This award honors the best fiction set in a period when the United States was at war. It recognizes the service of American veterans and military personnel and encourages the writing and publishing of outstanding war-related fiction. Submissions may be adult or YA novels. Deadline: Annually Fee: None Prize: \$5,000

BlueCat Screenplay Competition The BlueCat Screenplay Competition, now in its 22nd year, is open for submissions for its 2020 competition. BlueCat remains committed to the undiscovered writer and continues its tradition of providing written analysis on every script submitted. BlueCat accepts features, shorts, and pilots and awards over \$40,000 in cash prizes each year, including the Fellini Award, which gives \$2,500 to the best script written by an international writer. Deadline: Currently not accepting submissions. We'll update you as soon as they reopen again.

Contact us today if you have a writing contest you'd like to feature here!