

FOLKLORE & FAIRYTALES

Issue 27: Autumn 2023

OpenDoor

magazine

**FOLKLORE &
FAIRYTALES**

NEW AUTHORS

**The Raven
Maiden**

ASLAN &

COCO

JAMAIS VU

Welcome to our AUTUMN ISSUE! Folklore & Fairytales have perpetually captivated writers and artists across generations. These are tales handed down from the young to the old, rooted in some semblance of truth, and at times, more than just a mere fragment when they were first shared. Our goal is to craft narratives that spark a transformation in our world or to weave stories where love conquers all, birds serenade the princess, and the sun never sets. Yet, the concept of a 'fairytale' varies for everyone who writes or reads it. What did it signify for our storytellers, poets, and artists? Dive into the pages to find out! And as always, remember... "YOUR WORDS MATTER!"

Thank you for continuing to share our magazine with your friends and family and allowing our audience to keep growing. We are so incredibly thankful for each one of you!

Kassie & Mel



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A watercolor illustration of a floral wreath. The wreath is made of a brown, textured circular frame. It is decorated with various flowers: a large yellow rose, a pink rose, a red rose, and several smaller yellow and orange flowers. Green leaves and stems are interspersed among the blooms. The text "Folklore & Fairytales" is written in a black, cursive font across the center of the wreath. The background is white with scattered green splatters of varying sizes.

Folklore &
Fairytales

The Raven
Maiden

BY THETA VANZANDT



THE RAVEN MAIDEN – THETA VANZANDT

There once lived a tech witch deep in the wood, dark clever gothic she. She sat near her hearth and composed sonnets to her fae neighbors. Once every new moon, they'd gather round the Isle of Bone to hear her tales of algorithmic sorcery.

"The lovely raven maiden," the witch began, "was no fair-haired fairy. She was dark through and through but no darker heart as dark as hers was purer than she."

~~~

*Once upon a time...*

*The maiden was a princess held captive in her castle far far away in another kingdom.*

*One day, a young prince came and stole her away. He scaled the high walls of the castle and stealth like a cat in the night. The prince and the maiden ran away and hid in the villages near her kingdom until they had saved enough money to sail away to another.*

*They dressed as the villagers did, stole their clothes, and their food, and vandalized their shops for goods; fancying themselves as pirates and giving the loot they stole to those who needed it more than they. After all, they were royalty, and how best to mask their identities than as those who steal the wealth of their kingdoms for themselves.*

*One day, the maiden and the prince were resting on the banks of a reflecting pool. The pool was a secret outlet of the mightiest river in the kingdom, The Marrisphrates, hidden deep in the forest, a beautiful oasis away in the trees. Lush green grass and flowers grew but were covered by mist and hidden by overgrowth. The surrounding willows curved at their trunks and appeared as a cave to those who were unafraid to continue down the long secluded dark path. A perfect place to stow away and count their coins collected from the day and contemplate whether to kill something for dinner or lift it from one of the passing royal tax collector carriages scheduled to collect from the nearby villages soon.*

*The maiden lay delicately on her back on the limb of a tree, dangling one of her legs as the prince knelt down and washed his face in the pool.*

*Suddenly, a dark mist began to sweep across The Oasis. The animals of the wood abruptly fell silent, and all grew quiet around them. Violent bubbles began to erupt in the pool. The water grew excruciatingly hot and burned the prince's face and singed his skin. It was as if someone had turned on a cauldron and brought the pool to an intensely heated boil. Suddenly, the voice of the maiden's mother, the queen regent, boomed throughout The Oasis, in her most furious tone. Somehow, she had heard the stories in her kingdom from the nearby villages about two vagrants pirating the lands, who seemed a little too clever for even some of the most seasoned of thieves.*

## THE RAVEN MAIDEN – THETA VANZANDT

*“Someone you trust!” the regent’s voice thundered.*

*The prince screamed as an arm reached up through the pool and pulled him down to the depths below.*

*Bewildered, the maiden fell from her perch in the tree and landed on all fours, softly, like a cat, and ran to the pool, but it was too late. Her prince was gone. His body had disappeared under the water. She ran in after him, but it was no use.*

*“Come home!” the regent boomed.*

*With a cackling burst of lightning, the mist, the oasis, and the bubbling pool vanished.*

*Furious, the maiden fainted and forgot all about dinner that night.*

~~~

“Oh no! Oh, wait! Oh, no! Oh, wait,” the voice cried.

“Oh no!”

The maiden slowly opened her eyes as they adjusted to her surroundings. Her eyes followed the sound of the voice.

A small grey and brown rabbit sat beside her.

“Oh, wait,” the rabbit exclaimed.

The maiden looked around the room at the quaint cottage, felt the warm fire burning, took a deep inhale, and smelled a hearty soup cooking. The air was thick with tobacco smoke, carrots, herbs, the brine of fresh game, and something vaguely floral, like lavender.

“Where am I?”

“Oh, my home,” replied the rabbit. “I found you in the wood one-day last year and brought you here.”

“Last year?” the maiden asked, shocked, and rising to stand up. “I’ve been asleep for an entire year?” she asked.

“Yes, it must have been that curse she expelled;” the rabbit explained, “it appears you awoke just in time for The Games,” wringing his paws.

THE RAVEN MAIDEN – THETA VANZANDT

“The games” she inquired, “what games?”

“Oh, the games for your hand, my dear.”

“The games for my hand ... What are The Games?” the maiden pressed.

Nervously, the rabbit began to explain that her parents, the King and Queen Regent, were hosting a series of games to select her royal suitor and that the winner would win her hand. A proper marriage ceremony celebration and festivities would be held in front of the entire kingdom for several weeks, as custom.

“Notice was sent out to all worthy kingdoms some days after you ‘disappeared’. Only qualified participants: princes of the respected kingdoms and highest-ranking members, such as dukes of great households, may enter.”

“But I already love a prince!” the maiden exclaimed.

The rabbit replied with an ominous knowingly blank stare. “Disgraced sons of tyrant outland kings do not fit the bill, my dear.”

“How do you know all of these things about me?” asked the maiden.

“I have interpreted the Scripts of Balfour!” he proclaimed, fluffing his chest.

“ I am well versed in the Ekbloian texts and have dedicated my life to preserving the history of our great kingdoms as well as interpreting the magical languages, and I dabble,” the rabbit expressed, proudly.

“According to the Scripts, there is only one whose power is strong enough to keep them alive as long as you have. Only one strong enough to challenge the regent and her curse and that is you, my dear.”

“Your age and features match the description outlined in the Scripts, so when I saw you asleep in the woods, all alone that day, I brought you with me.”

“My father was a treasured informant at your father's Court. He was well respected and brought me up within the vicinity of the castle walls studying the royal texts and libraries.”

“How did you know to look in The Oasis?” the maiden asked.

“The Oasis?” the rabbit echoed, puzzled.

Their gazes responded back at each other blankly.

~

THE RAVEN MAIDEN – THETA VANZANDT

The games are harrowing displays of valor and bloodshed. Strapping young princes and nobility from far and wide come to showcase their aptitude, endurance, and wit in grandiose sports designed to test their capabilities to protect the Kingdom of Sapphire. The victor can receive no higher honor. They play to the death with each game more intense and daunting than the next. Each challenge becomes more immersive and psychologically taxing than the last. Few will survive and only one will win.

~~~

*In their chambers on the 6th day of their wedding celebrations, the maiden and her new husband, Prince Njörðr of Vvestfiodvng, prepared for the much-anticipated consummation event.*

The maiden sat at her vanity table in front of her mirror gently working fragrant rosewater and argan into her long locks of dark hair. She meticulously wove pearl beading and golden trim into her braids and carefully swept her wispy bangs away from her face as she gazed absent-mindedly into the mirror nearby.

"Someone you trust," she tutted, whispering to herself, "who could that be?" she said with a smile as Prince Njörðr's reflection appeared in the mirror beside her.

"You look beautiful, my bride," his voice, a sonorous bass, resonated across the room as he strode with thundering footsteps that seemed to make the stone floor beneath them quake as he approached to greet her and stand by her side.

"I brought with me a gift for you," he said, his voice thick with accent and vigor.

In his enormous hands was a small wooden box intricately inlaid with engravings the maiden did not recognize. Atop the box laid a large slightly crooked ribbon made of the finest silk from the merchants of Fairvaisa, her favorite fabric of choice for underwear.

"What is it?" she asked with a grin, arching one of her eyebrows.

His eyes flickered with satisfaction, yet his mouth said nothing.

The maiden took the box from his hands and set it down on her vanity to untie the ribbon.

As the last of the fabric fell to the ground below, the maiden uncovered a silver etched dagger inlaid with gemstone, with tangs made of clarified blood diamonds, and rivets of onyx. It was the most beautiful blade she had ever laid her eyes upon.

Aghast, the maiden's mouth fell open. The prince smiled.

~

## THE RAVEN MAIDEN – THETA VANZANDT

*“There, let it be, someone has to die,” echoed the voice, as the tremors of woe filled the room.*

*The Raven Maiden lay beautifully lovely on the stone in a pool of her own blood, her ruined gown clung to the ground beneath her. From left to right and right to left, the slashes across her throat gashed openly.*

Theta VanZandt specializes in dark fantasy, horror, and mysteriously macabre musings of the mind. A lifelong resident, she is intimately acquainted with the world where her story begins.

## LET'S REALLY TALK ABOUT GOLDBLOCKS

Joan Gerstein  
California, United States

Little Goldilocks wanders through the woods,  
our fairest maiden with hair the color of wheat.  
She enters a stranger's house, tests furniture,  
then finds the kitchen for something to eat.

The first porridge's too hot, the next one's too cold.  
Conduction may explain how that could take place.  
But how do you explain such entitlement?  
She's trespassing in someone else's space.

Well, wouldn't you know, the bears return  
to feast on their porridge, honey sweet.  
Goldie hightails out of there so fast,  
she doesn't even have time to tweet

and tell all the world of her escapades.  
I can almost hear a southern drawl.  
She not only had a video to show  
She did interviews, wrote articles withal.

She never mentioned she left the house a mess,  
nor admitted this home-invasion was not right,  
but the bears feared to call the cops on her  
because they were brown, she was very white.



## STRIVE FOR PERFECTION

Mara RZ

I tried to be perfect

To fulfil my role

Not dishing neglect

Needed be my goal

Cleaning and birthing

Servant and whore

When I realised

Not ever more!

"I'm sorry

I can't be all that you dream

I'm just me

so's time to self 'steem"

## a-Maying

*A found poem from the words of A. W. Pollard's 1903 edition of Le Morte d'Arthur, Book XIX, Chapters I-II.*

**Rachel Finney**

**United States**

**<https://rachelmcfinney.wordpress.com/>**

I have loved you many a year—  
you season, clad in green silk;  
you castle of herbs, mosses, and flowers.  
Your woods and freshest fields  
are long and many,  
be-dashed with light  
on every early morn.

In this month,  
each knight shall walk  
with a lady beside him;  
the queen shall be with king again;  
the day shall meet the morrow  
in the east.



A decorative border of watercolor illustrations surrounds the text. It includes large yellow flowers, green leaves, ferns, and small purple and orange blossoms.

*The Healer  
Of Hamelin*

BY GABBY GILLIAM

## THE HEALER OF HAMELIN – GABBY GILLIAM – DC, UNITED STATES

If this was a fairytale, it would begin with once upon a time or in a kingdom long ago, but this story begins and ends with Enede.

There wasn't a family in Hamelin who didn't owe Enede a debt. Whether she had set a broken bone, brought a new life wailing into the world, or painlessly ushered an old one out, the villagers of Hamelin had all begged for her aid. Enede was always quick to give it. She never asked for payment, though she accepted the gifts of fresh-baked bread or a cluster of chickens when they appeared at her doorstep. She had once found a tiny brown calf tethered to her front gate. She named her Yenna and was grateful for the fresh milk now that Yenna was grown. Enede was a natural healer, and happy to help any who called on her.

When she walked through town, men removed their hats as a sign of respect. Women bowed. Many a child had offered her fresh-picked wildflowers. Their gratitude and love made her labors worth it.

When she was just a child herself, Enede's mother, Agathe, had served Hamelin as its healer, as had generations of women in Enede's family. As soon as her chubby toddler fingers could hold a pestle, Enede had crushed herbs for her mother. Agathe would name each one and recite its uses as she dropped it into the mortar.

"This is willow bark," her mother said, holding it up for Enede to see. "See its furrowed surface and grayish brown color? It will relieve pain." Enede nodded her head to show her mother she understood.

"This is fennel. It will quiet the cramps in one's stomach and relieve bloating when brewed into tea."

Agathe filled each day with these lessons as she prepared cures for the people of Hamelin. Enede learned to tell which plants harbor cures, and which cause harm. She learned that moss could staunch a bleeding wound. That ginger root could bring on a woman's monthly blood. That licorice root and red clover could help a woman conceive a child. Enede also learned to cultivate her own herbs. Which berries and mushrooms could be gathered from the forest and eaten—and which were poisonous. She learned that a knock at the door is always answered, even if it's the middle of the night. That chamomile tea can help calm a worried mother when her child is ill. The hardest lesson Enede learned is that, sometimes, there is no cure.

When Agathe herself took ill, Enede didn't worry at first. She brewed a strong tea of yarrow, willow bark, and lemon balm to help draw out the fever. She soaked a cloth in lavender water to help cool her mother's brow. And yet, Agathe's fever raged. She began to thrash in her sleep. She mumbled nonsense and cried out, sometimes needing to be restrained so she wouldn't fall out of bed. None of Enede's remedies had any effect. In less than a week, her mother was gone, taken and buried in the churchyard beneath the willow whose bark was unable to save her. Enede had briefly considered abandoning the healer's call after that. Stewing in her own failure, it seemed impossible that she would ever be able to help anyone.

## THE HEALER OF HAMELIN – GABBY GILLIAM – DC, UNITED STATES

But then there was a knock at the door and the anguished face of a mother whose child was in bed with the same fever. Enede grabbed her mother's healing bag and followed the distraught woman home. Her teas and tinctures saved the child and many others in the town that winter—though not all. There were a number of fresh graves beside her mothers by the time the illness finally left Hamelin.

That was nearly five years ago, and Enede had seen her fair share of births and deaths since then, though she succeeded far more than she failed. She was every bit as skilled as her mother had been, and the village of Hamelin was grateful.

The spring brought a fresh crop of babies, both human and livestock, and Enede was busy birthing them. The warm weather also brought traveling merchants and fresh stories in the local tavern. While passing through town on her way home after a particularly difficult birth, a man called out to her.

"I have a powder that will lift the blood right out of your skirt," he said. Enede knew with only a long soak in vinegar and a bath of cold water, her clothes would be back to themselves, but she was intrigued by what the man might be peddling.

"Is that so," she asked. "And how much would that miracle powder cost?" She was startled to discover that the merchant was young, a few years her senior at the most, and he was handsome. He watched her with a lop-sided grin, no doubt convinced this would be an easy sale.

"I have a special offer, just for you," he said. Enede scoffed. She was sure his special offer was extended to anyone fool enough to converse with him. She had heard enough. She turned away from him to head home, where she could use the items on hand to clean her soiled clothes. Who even knew what was in that miracle powder? Probably a bunch of old soot.

She heard hurried footfalls on the road behind her and sighed. The merchant had left his perch on the tavern steps to follow her.

"Don't you even want to hear what the offer is?" he asked from behind her.

"And here I thought walking away was a clear indication that I wasn't interested," she replied. Her words were clipped and laced with irritation.

"How'd a fine lady like yourself find her clothes in such a state? Are you injured?" he asked, though his tone was light and teasing.

"Killed a man who offered me a special deal," she said without slowing her pace. The merchant laughed. It was deep and relaxed and Enede found she liked the sound of it. "Do you mean to follow me home, then?" she asked. "I don't take in strays."

## THE HEALER OF HAMELIN – GABBY GILLIAM – DC, UNITED STATES

The merchant put a hand to his chest as if she had wounded him. "You've left me with no choice but to buy you dinner. Honor demands it to prove I'm no beggar."

"I have plenty of food at home, merchant."

"That's very kind of you. Offer accepted," he said with a smile. Enede groaned. She had walked herself into a trap. She hadn't meant to offer an invitation, but he had twisted it into one. She had to admit, a part of her was glad for the unexpected company. The house had been a bit lonely since her mother had passed. Villagers called readily enough if they needed her help, but no one ever paid a call just to be social.

She made him wait outside while she removed her bloodied skirts and blouse. Once she had them soaking and was in her spare set of clothes, she allowed him into the house. He chattered amiably while she pulled out some jam, hard cheese, and a loaf of bread someone had dropped off that morning. He could have paid for a heartier meal at the tavern, but he made no complaints about the simple fare she served.

They talked until the daylight faded and Enede had to pull out a candle. She enjoyed the merchant's company, charmed by his stories of other villages and the world outside of Hamelin, which Enede had never seen. She surprised them both by asking him to stay for the night. When he agreed, she snuffed the candle, and led him to bed.

He was gone when she woke the next morning. She was disappointed, but not surprised to find that he had left town. Her only regret was that they had only had the one night. She would have given him more, if he'd offered to stay.

Her monthly course was late, but Enede wasn't too concerned. It always turned up eventually. When the smell of frying eggs sent her rushing out the door to be sick in the grass, she knew her course wasn't coming. Not for another nine months at any rate. The merchant had left her with a special offer after all. Enede's life continued much as it always had for the first few months. She tended the sick. She birthed more babies. She fed the one growing within her own belly. It wasn't until the baby ripened past the point of concealment that things began to change.

The women in town no longer bowed when she passed them in the street. They only glanced at her out of the corners of their eyes or whispered behind their hands as she walked by. The men no longer tipped their hats. Instead, they eyed her with contempt. One had even spat at her feet when she had asked after his pregnant wife. Children no longer approached her with flowers, or at all. Their mothers pressed them behind their skirts as if Enede might burn them with a touch. The knocks at her door came less frequently, and only for dire emergencies. It was rare that anyone approached her house unless under the cover of darkness; those who ventured out ashamed that they needed her services.

Enede endured it as best she could, though bitterness began to creep into her heart. After all



## THE HEALER OF HAMELIN – GABBY GILLIAM – DC, UNITED STATES

of her years of service to the people of Hamelin, how could one rounded belly make them forsake her so thoroughly?

When the time for her own baby's birth came, no one offered to assist her. Enede boiled her own blankets as she hissed through contractions. She drew her own fresh water to have on hand as she labored. Her screams shook the walls of the homes nearest hers as her labor peaked, but still, none of the women from town came to check in on her or to offer her aid. Her contractions quickened, but she spent a sleepless night with no baby to show for her efforts. She labored late into the second day, chewing on willow bark and shouting curses through her open window. The baby was taking too long. She feared the baby hadn't turned, but she had no one to help ease it into the right position. She squatted over her bed and pushed, praying to any god who would listen that the baby would find its own way out. And she did finally slide down into the sheets, but she was blue and too quiet. Enede picked her up and held her close to her chest, massaging the baby's arms and legs and back with a clean blanket, trying to rub life into her. When the baby finally let out a wail, Enede thought it was the most beautiful sound she'd ever heard. She clutched the baby even closer, whispering nonsense into her wispy black hair.

She named her daughter Agathe, after her mother. She fashioned a sling so she could keep Agathe close as she tended her herb garden. The bitterness that had taken root in Enede's heart as she labored grew. As she pulled weeds, she mulled over how Hamelin had chosen to repay her for years of healing. She had guided every child under the age of five into this world, and some of the older ones as well when she had joined her mother in the birthing room. She clenched her fist so tightly around the weed she held that her fingernails dug into her palm. She looked down at her hand and the strangled weed. Wild asparagus root. Useful to induce sleep and help cure night terrors. She was about to toss it over her fence, when she reconsidered and placed it in her basket instead. The people of Hamelin had forsaken her in her time of greatest need, and she had nearly lost her daughter as a result. Enede would have her revenge, and this wild root was the key.

For the next few days, Enede spent her time hunting down as much of the wild asparagus root as she could find. She also hunted down mugwort. She piled the plants on her table, plucking the leaves from the mugwort so that they would dry faster. She ground the wild asparagus root into a paste, cooing at Agathe as she worked. She scooped all of the ground root into a large pot and boiled it with water and peppermint leaves to make tea. The mugwort leaves she wove into sage sticks, binding them loosely with twine. When she was convinced, she had enough tea prepared, she loaded her pot into a wheelbarrow and pushed it into town.

She stopped at every house. She pasted a smile on her face and held false cheer on her tongue.

"I've brought some tea for your children," she said to each mother. "To celebrate Agathe's birth." She kissed her sleeping daughter on the top of her soft head. No mother could refuse

## THE HEALER OF HAMELIN – GABBY GILLIAM – DC, UNITED STATES

a toast to a healthy child. They let Enede pour their children tea and offered their hollow congratulations to the new mother.

When she had visited every home in Hamelin, Enede pushed the wheelbarrow back to her house. She waited until the sun hung low on the horizon, and then gathered her sage sticks. As mothers tucked their children into bed, Enede wandered the streets of Hamelin, burning her sticks of sage and mugwort. The smoke found its way to the sleeping children and circled their heads. As the moon rose, and the quiet of Hamelin deepened, Enede walked the streets, the sage and mugwort still burning. She sang softly at the door of each house as she passed, calling to the sleeping children. The wild asparagus tea and mugwort smoke kept them lulled and they walked, still sleeping, out of their homes. They followed Enede as she sang until they reached the edge of town. Enede turned to look at the sleeping town of Hamelin, at the dark houses and streets she knew so well. She looked at her entranced flock of children, heavy lidded and thick with sleep. She pressed a kiss to Agathe's head and lit another sage stick and led her parade of puppets into the forest. Neither Enede nor the children were ever seen again, but it's said that the cries of the mothers of Hamelin could be heard for miles and their misery still echoes in the wind at the forest's edge.

**Gabby Gilliam is a writer, an aspiring teacher, and a mom. She lives in the DC metro area with her husband and son. Her poetry has appeared in *One Art*, *Anti-Heroic Chic*, *The Ekphrastic Review*, *Vermillion*, *Deep Overstock*, *Spank the Carp*, and others. Her fiction has appeared in *Grim & Gilded* and multiple anthologies. You can find her online at [gabbygilliam.com](http://gabbygilliam.com) or on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/GabbyGilliamAuthor](https://www.facebook.com/GabbyGilliamAuthor).**

# FIREBIRD SUITE

Phyllis Meshulam

## 1. Arts Program, 2003

*We are here to show what people, even little children, can create. It's a shame our government is poised to destroy.*  
Music Teacher, Oak Grove School

School arts assembly  
on the eve of the Iraq war.  
Music teacher speaks  
to an audience of parents.  
Children create rivers  
with scarves and rhythms,  
villages with song.

Later I scan  
the broadcast,  
x-ray of an invasion,  
for tell-tale  
silver streamers of  
depleted uranium.



*Nab the banned: sub: stance: deflect: defect: of birth: of birds*

## 2. Arts Program, 2011

School chooses *Firebird*  
arts theme. Children  
construct forests with xylophones,  
turn their bodies into horses and birds.  
Then Fukushima,  
then memories of Chernobyl.  
Fifth-grader Quinn writes,

A bird, all life on the tips of its wings.  
If it flaps them, a giant earthquake  
cracks the earth in two.

*Who can: forget: the hearth heap: or: remember: the kin: ship of  
skin: and fin.*

**[continued on the next page]**

## [FIREBIRD SUITE cont...]

Ukraine's Red Forest  
begins to sing again,  
sometimes through double  
or crooked beaks.

Firebird, flitting  
racing, tracing  
a way out, a way forward?

*How to: reap reply.*

### 3. In Search of Story Serum

*The Firebird in fairy tales is usually as an object of a difficult quest, initiated by finding a lost tail feather, most often at the bidding of a father or king.*

Stories haven't saved us yet (except  
Scheherazade, saving herself).  
Still slip me a potion, sail me away  
on a Kafka-craft, in search, in search.

*It seems there is a tsar who can't abide  
the nightly loss of just one golden fruit  
from his royal grove. He sends his sons, one  
by one, at dusk to find the orchard thief.*

A library table as my craft,  
a raft to ride me from the high seas  
of my emotions. At least save me from  
a melt-down thanks to the interruptions  
of the couple at the desk nearby, loudly  
(and badly) teaching and learning geometry.  
Don't they know what's at stake?

*Each son will say he kept his watch but sleeps  
then lies about it. Until Ivan, the youngest,  
anoints his eyes with dew, keeps vigil, observes  
a midnight sun appear, a flaming peacock  
which gobbles the radiant fruit.*

*Ivan lunges and captures a single tail-feather torch.  
And then the orchard thieving stops.  
But the tsar burns for the rest of the bird.  
He commands his sons, "Now, go bring me that feathered  
fire."*

[continued on the next page]

## [FIREBIRD SUITE cont...]

And I keep asking myself, "where is the map, the blueprint, the key to the code?" It must be around here somewhere. Over that horizon. On that shelf.

*Hard-hearted tsar: feathered fire: untethered fire: nuclear fire*

### 4. At Sunset

*The future can exist only when we understand the universe as composed of subjects to be communed with, not as objects to be exploited. Thomas Berry, The Great Work*

I am trying to make the shape of  
that cloud into a dragonfly  
but really, it doesn't look like one.  
The only cloud that looks remotely  
reptilian (I do think of dragons  
as reptiles, even when they are insects)  
is long and snake-like,  
perhaps a feathered snake, which,  
like all the clouds right now,  
is the color of nectarines blended with cumulus.  
I am trying to make the color of the sky  
into the blue of the Virgin's mantle,  
that shade of blue so precious,  
ones made from ground-up Lapis lazuli,  
or Egyptian blends of copper and sandstone.  
But really, the sky is a much lighter  
blue right now. It holds the deeper  
blue in reserve, whistling Delft  
for another twenty minutes or so.

But back to the non-dragonfly cloud.  
It now looks more like a baby bird  
fallen from its nest: unfledged, scrawny,  
wings skeletal, a fire-bird chick  
flattened against blue tile.

*Tile fire blue*

# Little Franzzi Kern

BY LAURA GREVEL



## LITTLE FRANZI KERN – LAURA GREVEL - AUSTRIA

Franzi Kern was small. In fact, he was the smallest of four small brothers, and the third born, so he shouldn't have inherited the farm at the top of the steep hill in the Austrian highlands. A farm where the cold wind hit hard and never stopped, where the view was all sky and clouds and green hills arching down the mountain's back. Where on a clear day, far in the distance, he could see the snowy Alps.

As a boy, when he wasn't shoveling snow, cutting firewood, scything, or raking grass, he'd sit for a few minutes under a birch tree on a rise toward the village and chew on a pine needle and wonder what he would be. The farm would go to the youngest—that was the Austrian way. His eldest brother wanted to be a baker. The second brother liked building things and wanted to be a carpenter. Franzi thought, well, I like chewing on pine needles and sitting here under this tree. And he kind of liked girls.

Word came that Austria joined Germany, which didn't make his independent neck of the country very happy. Then news of the war came, which made them even grumpier—because they had so much work and if all the boys left, who would chop wood, clear snow, milk the cows and make hay?

The Kern boys did feel a thrill of freedom as they stepped out under the low stone door lintel for the first time without a chore in mind, and a thrill of fear, for there was a risk they would never return. All were sent to the Russian front and only little Franzi was taken alive—a Russian soldier found him chewing a pine needle under a tree in his one single moment of peace of that war. He surrendered and his captors trundled him off on an interminable train ride to a POW camp in Siberia, where he admired how the Russians could work in that cold. For they *all* worked—guards and prisoners—building structures to house more prisoners. They worked outside unless it was *under* 40 below Celsius. How could Franzi not admire that! And how Franzi wished his second brother were there to help build, for Gerhard would've known how. He shook his head.

As for himself, he felt weaker and weaker. True, he didn't get a lot to eat—just watery cabbage soup—but the cold seemed to have frozen his insides to sleep, and he couldn't wake up. After two and a half years of failing, he turned nineteen, and they sent him back home to die. But on the train ride which took weeks and weeks, he felt happier and happier, warmer even, the closer he got to that old birch tree, and he remembered the little neighbor girl Maria, and how she smiled. She'd be older now. She was only a girl when he last saw her.

Unluckily, his region of Austria was currently occupied by the Russians and as he got near home, they gave him a physical examination. The Russian orderly stared at Franzi's face, pulled down his lower lids to see the whites of his eyes, listened to his heart and then pinched his cheeks. "Your skin is pink!" he accused. "March back and forth!" He did so. "You're fine," said the Russian. "We have more work for you!"

## LITTLE FRANZI KERN – LAURA GREVEL - AUSTRIA

So, he was sent back on the train, traveling for weeks and weeks, until he reached the Siberian camp again, and again built houses daily unless it was colder than 40 below Celsius. He was sad. There were no pine needles and little Maria was getting older. She might have picked someone else.

A few years later, the Russians reluctantly let him go. He'd again weakened but he felt lucky. Other POWs were kept for work even though word had come that the war was long over. He sighed and got on the train for the tedious journey home. He fell asleep and dreamed it was early spring and his mama was making a syrup from the sweet pine needles. And that he walked out to the birch and saw how it had grown, and waited, hoping little Maria who'd be almost sixteen would come sit with him. Then he woke and remembered he'd have to think what he would be—maybe a baker like Robert, or a carpenter like Gerhard, but not a farmer like Alfred.

On arrival, his tiny mama grabbed him and wept. She answered his questions. "Your brothers are dead. You're too small but you're the farmer now. There is so much work. Here's your scythe—I kept it sharpened."

As he scythed the meadow, he paused now and then to use his whetstone, and to glance towards the neighboring farm. In mid-afternoon, outside on the path appeared a young woman, grown so beautiful, surely taller than he. He barely recognized little Maria, till she smiled at him.

<https://www.instagram.com/lauragrevel>

<https://twitter.com/LauraGrevel/>

<http://lgrevel.org/>

<https://lgrevel.wordpress.com/>

<https://www.facebook.com/LauraHGrevel>

[https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCx1dH7vxwlljVxPd8fs\\_9xQ](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCx1dH7vxwlljVxPd8fs_9xQ)



## A MORNING'S WALK

Nolo Segundo  
United States

## BROKEN-SLEEP WONDERLAND

Ann Howells  
Carrollton, Texas, United States

My wife and I walk every morning,  
a mile or so--  
it's good for us old to walk in the cold,  
or in the misty rain, it makes less the pain  
that old age is wont to bring to bodies  
which once burned bright with youth,  
though now I wear braces on ankles,  
braces on knees, and I walk slowly  
with 2 canes, like an old skier,  
sans snow, sans mountain.

We passed a tree whose leaves had  
left behind summer's green and now  
fall slowly, carefully one by one  
in their autumnal splendor.

My wife stopped me--  
listen she said-- but  
I heard nothing—hush!,  
stand still, she said,  
and I tried hard to  
hear the mystery....

Finally, I asked her, knowing my hearing  
less than my wife's (too many rock concerts  
in my heedless youth), what we listen for?

She looked up at my old head, and smiled--  
only she could hear the sound each leaf made  
as it rippled the air in falling to the ground.

White Stetson and hand-tooled boots,  
a jackrabbit rustles chamisa,  
*I'm late! I'm late! Me?*  
I'm crying on shoulders of field mice.  
He, bloated and grotesque,  
blocks chamber exits -- swollen cork  
wedged in a bottle. He's consumed  
everything labeled *Drink Me*.  
Caterpillar draws his pipe,  
skunk smell wafts. I'm not surprised;  
what is a caterpillar anyway,  
but a three-inch worm in fake-fur chub.  
At Hatter's mad, mad, mad party,  
tea is pre-sweetened, place cards blank.  
Hare wears a side arm;  
Dormouse is decidedly uneasy.  
Cards wobble when I trump the Queen,  
throw down a harlequin:  
tri-belled cap, leotard, fringed boots.  
He behaves as Jokers always do.  
Mock turtle tears trickle my narrative.  
I am not the person I was.  
Sea-dark eyes lock into mine.  
Someone rattles teacups.

Red Riding Hood  
Reminiscues

BY SYLVIA CLARE



## RED RIDING HOOD REMINISCES – SYLVIA CLARE

Mother always fussed over Granny, living alone in the woods. Still, the old superstitions about wildlife being 'something we need to keep in check, to dominate and control.'

A seriously 'humans first' attitude. Not like nowadays. Conservation finally became more important. And I have my dream job, Senior Wildlife Officer for the whole forest, checking in on the top predators, the wolves and bears are my favourite.

I remember the day I realised that was what my future held.

I'd been asked to go over to gran's house with some food for her, the usual cupcakes and casseroles in a basket that people think it is good for someone who is a bit off colour.

Anyway, I got there easily enough, bit chilly still so I wore my favourite red poncho with the hood and some good strong thigh boots, very sexy if I say so myself.

When I got to the Gran's door though, she was already well enough to get up and about, though still shuffling in her nightgown.

We were having a lovely chinwag and sharing the muffins when we heard the howling in the background.

It seemed a long way off but then a second howling came from a different direction, the other side of the cottage. We didn't think anything of it, just the wolves getting ready for their evening chat. I was staying the night anyway, so it didn't matter. Then we heard the sound of guns cracking loudly through the forest evening.

I shot out of Gran's front door immediately. I knew they were some idiotic rednecks who seem to hate wolves just because they had previously got some bad press. But they are such magnificent creatures, though mum is still wary of them, and the bears. Treat them with respect though, don't interfere with them and they leave you right alone, mostly.

I followed the sound of the guns and quickly found the men stalking the wolves. They are so easy to find compared to their prey, lacking style and class really. The wolves know you are there.

I stepped into the clearing and called out to them. All three of them stopped dead in their tracks. Remember the thigh-length boots, well they did the trick. I wasn't born yesterday. I know how to divert the attention of a couple of horny rednecks. But I could still run in those boots. Cross country champion at school back then, still dressing to kill for no reason, except that I found my reason, dressing to stop killing instead. I still wear boots of course, but more the sturdy marching variety. I managed to lead them right away from the wolves and that was when I realised, that was what I wanted to do from now on. Protect the wolves from rednecks. They still try to get past me, but I have their numbers. The wolves and I get on very well, first name terms, never any trouble.



**FAIR ROSAMUND**

Wendy L. Schmidt

United States

<https://www.instagram.com/lulubird1957>

# WONDER AT THE WATERING HOLE

Jennifer Kindler

United States

Deep in the forest was a watering hole.  
It must have been there since long ago.  
But then I must say I really don't know,  
Because until lost I came upon it one night,  
It had never been mentioned that I can find.

But there I was that night lost and alone,  
Getting deeper in the forest and further from home,  
Fear telling me I could never get out on my own.  
When there suddenly shimmering in the moonlight,  
My eyes met a most incredible surprise!

Fear now forgotten my eyes stared in disbelief.  
No longer was my heart bogged down in grief.  
This watering hole brought to me great relief,  
For it was not the watering hole usually found;  
This one had bubbles floating all around!

The moon found the glimmer of some of the bubbles.  
Curiosity found me soon forgetting my troubles.  
I walked over closer through the forest stubble.  
The world around me seemed all black and white,  
Just the dark night forest and the white moonlight.

Around the water then I noticed some flowers.  
Above the forest floor they towered.  
Yet this was a very unique encounter,  
For the flowers had no color or dimension,  
As shadows around the water, they stood at attention.

What was going on? What to do?  
It wasn't too long before I knew.  
Hot and tired, my attraction to the water hole grew.  
I went over and began to check it out,  
Convincing myself it was safe beyond a doubt.

So, I eased on into the water and there I lay.  
In soft moonlight and bubbles there seemed a way  
To believe that come day, everything would be okay.  
Having fun in the bubbles, I created a splash,  
And then as if by magic in just a flash –

**[continued on the next page]**



## [WONDER AT THE WATERING HOLE cont...]

As the bubbles hit the shadows that as flowers stood,  
The flowers began to expand; it was so good!  
Then to their added dimension bright color could  
Be seen in all the flowers even in the dark forest night;  
In all my living days, I will never forget that sight!

The next day finally able to walk out of the forest,  
I felt as if bird angels were serenading me in chorus,  
And wanting me to always remember evermore –  
That in the scariest night, still are blessings to be found;  
And the happiness you find, may spread happiness all around!

## **THE DAPPLED FOREST** **Chuck Madansky** **United States**

In the old stories, one tree looks just like another  
and soon, you are hopelessly lost.

You come to a clearing—a cottage—and your panic melts.  
You just feel sheepish, relieved.

Smoke, the sweet smell of barbeque, pours from the roof—  
maybe they'll ask you to lunch. The knocker crumbles like sugar.

Naive to think that things are better, just because  
we can see the sun. The old ones knew about shadows,  
how night is the shadow of Earth, and the absence of light  
is the least of what blooms at dusk.

The forest reveals itself in moist fragrance, quiet tones of rust  
and green, in stillness the brilliance of daylight dissolves.

Turn and re-enter the uncertain light.



The  
Steadfast  
Cadet

BY LUISA KAY REYES

## THE STEADFAST CADET – LUISA KAY REYES – ALABAMA, UNITED STATES

Once upon a time in an old southern college town, there was a strapping young man who attended the local military institute. Tall, handsome, and broad of shoulders, the cadet was also known for his honesty and integrity. So much so, that his nickname at the institute was "Steadfast." He was very studious and taking a full load of difficult courses, one of which was physics. One day, as the new semester began, his professor told him that there were now two sections of physics. The main one which all the military cadets took and then another section which included some of the young ladies from the women's college nearby. The section with the students from the women's college was more advanced and the professor was wanting to make sure some of the cadets signed up for it. Steadfast hesitated since he already had a full load of coursework, but the professor assured him that he wouldn't regret it. Especially since one of the young ladies in the class was also a ballerina. Steadfast signed up for the class.

On the first day of the new class, Steadfast arrived early and took his seat. Shortly after his arrival, one of the young ladies from the women's college arrived. Steadfast knew immediately she must be the ballerina. For she opened the door to the classroom with a flourish of her arms and walked so smoothly to her seat, that it looked like she sashaying across the floor. In a few minutes some of the other students in the class arrived, but Steadfast could only think of the ballerina now sitting in front of him.

With the arrival of all the students in the class, the professor began teaching the principles of gravity while they took notes as rapidly as they could. After covering the basics for the day, the professor decided to introduce everybody to one another. He introduced the ballerina as one of the young ladies from the women's college, then he introduced another one of the military cadets taking the class, and then he introduced Steadfast. When the ballerina turned to look at him while he was being introduced, Steadfast felt pleased as he detected a look of approval in her eyes. After completing all of the introductions, the professor began talking about some of the student groups on campus and he mentioned the Sons of Washington. Much to the shock of Steadfast, the ballerina quickly stated that she had heard negative things about the Sons of Washington. The professor was momentarily caught off guard, but as soon as he recovered his bearings, he gave the homework assignment and declared the class to be over for the day.

Steadfast immediately pulled out his notebook and approached the ballerina, asking her where she had received her information. The ballerina declined to answer, until finally asking him why he was so interested in knowing. At this point, the



## THE STEADFAST CADET – LUISA KAY REYES – ALABAMA, UNITED STATES

professor intervened on his behalf, explaining that Steadfast was the commander of the Sons of Washington. It was quite an honor for a cadet to be given such a position, but the ballerina merely hurried out of the classroom and made her way back to the women's college without saying a word.

Before the next class, the military institute announced it was hosting a ball that weekend in conjunction with the neighboring women's college. The student bodies at both institutions were eagerly looking forward to the event as they began pulling out their formal attires and making plans for the event. Right before the next class began, the students began talking about their plans for the formal evening. One of the cadets asked the ballerina whom she was going with and Steadfast held his breath. Thankfully, she very nonchalantly stated that she was on the student committee that was involved in the planning of the ball, and she would be helping serve the punch as well as being busy with other details of the event. She added that she had rehearsal earlier in the day and would be barely making it to the ball in time to fulfill her responsibilities. Steadfast took note.

The evening of the ball was a lovely one with the stars shining brightly in the sky and lending a soft glow to the sparkling jewelry the young ladies had donned for the event. As the commander of the Sons of Washington, Steadfast greeted the attendees as they arrived and kept an eye out for when the ballerina would be making her arrival. When the line to enter the ballroom wound down, it appeared that the ballerina was going to be arriving late, if at all. Working hard to maintain his composure in spite of the disappointment that was filling his chest, Steadfast ordered his men to begin escorting the ladies onto the dance floor and he took his leave to inspect the premises. For sometimes, some of the cadets who weren't able to attend the ball were so disgruntled they would make plans to sabotage the evening.

As he circled around the building and came back around to the front, noting that everything was in order, he saw a lovely young lady in a soft pink formal dress rushing towards the entrance. Steadfast knew immediately she was the ballerina, for her dress seemed to flow with the wind behind her as she ran gracefully like a gazelle. Suddenly, she began hobbling on one foot. One of her heels had broken, so hurriedly has she been running. Steadfast rushed to her side. Upon seeing him, the ballerina seemed startled. But then gave him a beaming smile. He found himself left speechless by the beatific light in her eyes and then felt his heart race as she told him that she apologized for what she had said earlier about the Sons of Washington. She explained to him that she had since heard very good things about him and Steadfast took the moment to assure her all was well. He then asked her if

## THE STEADFAST CADET – LUISA KAY REYES – ALABAMA, UNITED STATES

she wouldn't mind dancing with him once before taking her post serving the punch. The ballerina deliberated for a moment, but then acquiesced and said she thought she could spare him one first dance. Steadfast swept her in his arms and led her into the ballroom. With kind fortune smiling upon him, the band was playing a waltz and the two of them took everyone's breath away as he twirled her around on one leg as smoothly as the swan over the lake in the early evening.

The End.

Luisa Kay Reyes has had pieces featured in "The Raven Chronicles", "The Windmill", "The Foliate Oak", "The Eastern Iowa Review", and other literary magazines. Her essay, "Thank You", is the winner of the April 2017 memoir contest of "The Dead Mule School Of Southern Literature". And her Christmas poem was a first-place winner in the 16th Annual Stark County District Library Poetry Contest. Additionally, her essay "My Border Crossing" received a Pushcart Prize nomination from the Port Yonder Press. And two of her essays have been nominated for the "Best of the Net" anthology. With one of her essays recently being featured on "The Dirty Spoon" radio hour.

Water Sprites  
and the  
Bluebell Girls

BY HEDLEY GRIFFIN

A CHAPTER FROM  
"MEMORY OF AN ILL WIND  
AND OTHER STORIES"



It seemed strange, but since I had been born at an early age, it was miraculous that I was already more than six years old, although people often said I was old for my age. I never knew what that meant. It was even more strange that I was seeing these Bluebell Girls sitting on a chair in the bathroom in their wide flowing, blue dresses and large bluebell bonnets.

“Mum, no, no, be careful. Don't sit there. You will sit on the Bluebell Girls.”

“Oh, the Bluebell Girls are here again, are they? Does that mean it is going to be a sunny day?”

“Oh yes. They always appear when the sun is going to shine.”

They were also my friends, often sharing my days and listening to my concerns.

Not that my mother understood or took any real notice other than to spare me the indignity of questioning my mental state. I was a young child, and anything was possible with young children and excusable in certain circumstances and situations beyond the reason of grownups. Besides, the Bluebell Girls normally lived in the high elm trees in the garden and seldom ventured indoors, preferring to be in their natural environment, with nature. So, Mum could be forgiven for not expecting to see them in the bathroom, but I wish she would show them a little more respect. They understood, of course, knowing full well the attitude of grownups and their arrogant dismissal of anything like a nature spirit.

“But it is going to rain later.”

“Oh, why do you say that?”

“Because I saw the water sprites this morning in the garden. They will bring the rain. That is what they told me. Cafusha saw them too and he went racing over to them, wagging his tail and barking.”

The water sprites were different, another thing altogether. Slightly smaller than the Bluebell Girls they only came into the garden when a storm was expected or when rain essence was needed for the trees and plants. I always knew when they were about because I would notice the rain essence showing against the black surface of the garden shed, never wet, only falling like rain. This was most needful for the plants and vegetation and would feed everything. The essence was also in rain which was why tap water was never as nutritious as water from the water butt, but Mum would never believe me when I explained it to her.

“Oh, you and your imagination,” she would say. Of course, a child could never teach a mother anything, or so she thought, especially one who had survived the cold indifference of a Mankind's World for only a whole six years.

“Yes, I have seen your rain essence when you showed me, but is it that important?”

“But it is not wet, is it? What does that tell you? It is the Water Sprites that bring this rain essence, and it is full of energy, vital for the garden.”

The water sprites were a little more mischievous than the Bluebell Girls, although they were very committed to their responsibilities of inducing rain when it was needed. So, they were a cheeky necessity, like their rain, an uncomfortable essential but a blessing and I loved them. Considered to be the most common type of faerie, sprites were always known to live in the deep woods, behind the elm trees. Well, this is where I always saw them. Some would live high in the branches, but others preferred to hide in the grass at the foot of the hedges and at the edge of the woods.

One morning I heard them singing soft songs as they lured the clouds into the sky and blew fierce winds to call upon the thunder and rain. Invisible to many, especially grownups, but I always saw them and heard their siren calls. They were my friends, and they knew that.

The water sprites were essentially responsible for all forms of water, elemental guardians of nature’s energies. This was why they would often spend time around rivers and streams, testing and maintaining the purity of the water, only to return to the woods at night to rest. In spite of my mother’s insistent disbelief, I would still tease her with what I knew.

“I also saw the water sprites down by the stream this morning.”

“Why do you believe in this silly nonsense?” asked Mum.

“It is not nonsense! The water sprites are needed. All life needs water to exist, and these nature spirits are here for a reason, like all creatures. They are part of the balance of nature.”

But she did not believe me, and I was wasting my breath, not that that mattered because I had plenty to spare. Adults can be so narrow minded and fixed in their lack of appreciation of anything that does not fit their regular pattern of life like newspapers, milk delivery and horse racing.

“Water sprites can breathe under water. Did you know that, Mum?”

She was washing my hair and I thought perhaps the importance of water for this activity might inspire some interest.

“So, you say, child.”

Mum always called me ‘child’ when she wanted to show me, she was a grownup and therefore knew better, but was it my fault she could never see these things? Quite plain in my view there was no question of their existence, only some people’s blind ability to see.

“Well, I have seen them do this when the dog gets too near and sniffs them. They will dive into the stream and disappear. They are not too keen on dogs. Dogs are as unpredictable as they are, themselves.”

“Well, I have never seen one,” said Mum.

“That does not mean they are not real. I have never seen a kangaroo, but I know they exist somewhere.”

“What are they for, these sprites you talk of? What purpose do they have?”

“They look after all forms of water,” I said patiently. “I see them, but I never interfere with them, just leave them be. I am sure they would never speak to me again if I ventured too close.”

“Oh, they speak to you, do they?”

“Yes, and they explain both the purpose of essence and of rain and how important they are to plants and trees. They told me that water contains a memory and that it is an essential commodity of nature.”

“Memory? Whatever next?”

“It is true. All life has a memory. That is why when you bend a stick or a branch enough it will stay in that position, like metal does.”

“I wish our dog would remember to do what he is told. This all sounds as mystical as your faeries!”

“Ah, but listen, Mum. If rain did not have a memory, how would it induce the energy into the earth as it does? How would it flow and give of its essence if it did not have a memory?”

“Are they dangerous, your sprites? It seems to me you are learning a lot of silly nonsense.”

“No, of course not, unless I hurt them, and I would never do that. They are my friends, and they tell me such a lot about nature.”

“Such as?”

“They tell me the rain must only come when it is necessary, because the plants need to appreciate it, just as we should, us people. When the ground is dry, and the plants are thirsty that is when they truly appreciate the rain when it is delivered. Then the water sprites dance and play in the rain, thrilled by what joy, sustenance and life it brings. They love to see the rivers flow with energy. It makes them feel lively and invigorated.”

“My, that’s a big word, ‘invigorated’. Mm, what else do they tell you?”

“That Man is cruel to nature and ignores the Natural Law. Rain is an essential commodity of the Natural Law and like all nature’s energies it must be respected, otherwise it will destroy.”

“That sounds a little frightening? Why do they want to put fear into your small mind?”

“Perhaps, so that I tell you and other people, to put these thoughts into people’s minds to help them understand what is happening in the World. Mankind must start to listen to nature.”

“I see. Well, let’s dry your hair before it becomes unmanageable, like your garden water sprites, although I don’t believe they exist.”

“Some people can’t see them because they don’t look.”

Mum suddenly looked out the window.

“You were right. It’s beginning to rain now.”

## BEAUTY SPINS NEW THREADS

Nadja Maril

Maryland, United States

<https://nadjamaril.com/>

<https://twitter.com/SNMaril/status/1513551773847506952>

<https://instagram.com/nadjamaril/?hl=en>

<https://www.facebook.com/nadja.maril/>

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/nadja-maril-2090a07/>

Throughout the castle the court slumbers,  
At the top of the tower the princess sleeps,  
Waiting for the right hero.

The wise fairy won't let just anyone past the brambles  
To change destiny.  
Thorny thickets preserve the status quo.

They say a person needs a knife  
To cut their way through it all.  
But you can coax the vegetation  
To yield with the right intentions.

Anxious to be the hero  
You cut down branches with axe and scythe  
Magic keeps them growing  
Despite desire to restore her life.

To a spindle she touched her hand  
Despite spinning wheels banished from the land  
Tempted by the disgruntled fairy, 'Dearie try this.'  
The princess falls asleep to await her kiss.

One hundred years, one hundred ways  
To ignore an ancient castle  
Surely if she'd awaken now  
To the world she'd be forgotten.

A kingdom without spinning wheels  
Stops making yarn and thread.  
Synthetic textiles replace natural fibers.  
Fabrics cease to decompose  
Plastics pollute the earth.

**[continued on the next page]**





## [BEAUTY SPINS NEW THREADS cont...]

The land and sea is filled with trash.  
Nothing is saved, but the memories  
Of a fairy tale happy ending.  
Could there be a rescue not involving cash?

I've been waiting to find a girl like you  
Together, says the prince, we'll start a farm  
Raising sheep, goats and greens  
We'll grow linen, cotton, and beans.  
The good fairy knew her stuff.  
The site of a tragedy  
Can become the kingdom's redemption.

The lovers minister to the world  
Tenderly  
Resisting personal greed  
Weaving new threads of inclusivity  
Hosting a celebration  
They remember the need  
to invite everyone.



## YOCKENTHWAITE KEEPER

Molly O'Dell  
Buchanan, Virginia, USA

I float up the Cenozoic staircase  
to catch a ruckus in our clearing.  
Knapweed and salad burnet bloom.

There's a lass dancing the circle,  
chews burnet and slips a sprig  
of pignut behind her ear.

Her lad fishes the river Wharfe  
and she wanders the dales, discovers  
our ring of stones

pirouettes between boulders,  
naught pierced by sunlight,  
then arabesques above my space.

Our clearing invites walkers  
and airmen who crash. We keep  
watch over all who come and go.

She hears me stir, hops down  
and bows to try and wrest me  
but I'm too long set,

since the Bronze Age, in a ring  
cairn proper, a small circle of stones,  
us kerbs all what's left.

## IN THIS VERSION, EURYDICE ESCAPES THE UNDERWORLD

Rosie Garland

Manchester, United Kingdom

<https://ninearchespress.com/shop#!/What-Girls-Do-in-the-Dark-Rosie-Garland/p/215785787>

I make it on my own. Months of hard slog crawling  
back to light, shadows snarling at my heels. *Don't  
look back.* Washed up on a tough shore,  
mouth clogged with silt, on all fours  
and retching, coughing  
mud. *Don't  
look back.*

I am no savage god. No Lord of Death. The Lord of Absence,  
perhaps; my subjects locked into private loneliness. This is  
not the first time you have visited, adding your unique variety  
of sadness to the void. Think of it as a time for letting go.

Yes, my night is dark. Like the night, I wax and wane.  
Enjoy your return to light. We shall know each other again.

I have been  
a ghost of myself.  
Surfacing at last into taste  
and touch, I sour the pomegranate  
sweetness on my tongue. He's waiting,  
reaching out tempting arms, weaving old  
magic. Next time, I will still be terrified, but not lost.

A watercolor illustration of a floral wreath. The wreath is made of a brown, textured material, possibly twigs or straw, and is adorned with various flowers and foliage. The flowers include a large orange and yellow peony-like flower, a pink and orange flower, a purple iris, a blue and white flower, and a small pink flower. The foliage includes green leaves, blue leaves, and a sprig of purple lavender. The wreath is positioned on the left side of the page, curving from the top towards the bottom.

# The Timepiece

BY ANTHONY SAMUELS

## THE TIMEPIECE – ANTHONY SAMUELS

Karl studied the address on the business card, 2775 Cardinal Street. He kept looking for the establishment his wife had told him about. There, next to a pastry store sat the picturesque Bavarian style shop complete with white plaster walls and dark brown wooden crossbeams. A sign that read "Watches Repaired Here" was above the proprietor's name of Ludwig Lieberman. Karl's wife broke the crystal on her Cartier and had it repaired there. She also told Ludwig about the recent loss of their seven-year-old son, Klaus, struck by an automobile riding his bicycle. The watchmaker handed her his business card and said he may be able to help them with their grief.

He opened the door to scores of timepieces ticking, cuckoo clocks chirping, and alarm clocks ringing. The air was thick with the pungent odor of cigar smoke and the entire shop was small, no bigger than the two-car garage at his villa in nearby Stuttgart. The shop housed over 100 watches and clocks all crowding the shelves that covered the four walls. No one else was in the shop except for an aged Doberman Pinscher lying on a brown carpet that looked as old as the dog itself. A workbench was to the left with many trade-related tools and timepieces requiring repair. The gray bearded watchmaker was hunched over his chair working on an item with a magnifying monocle in his right eye and an unlit cigar stub dangling from the side of his mouth.

When a chime rang as Karl shut the door, the old man did not get up from his armchair. "Sit please," the watchmaker said with his back still facing his new arrival.

Karl took a seat on a stool behind the counter. After a few moments, something prominent caught his eye. It was an antique hourglass, ten inches tall, composed of bronze with Gothic statuettes as the four posts. The glass was pristine with pale yellow sand granules inside the lower chamber.

While being mesmerized by the timepiece and not wanting to disturb the elderly fellow with questions about the hourglass or the loss of his son, Karl instead asked, "May I pick up and look at this hourglass?"

Roused, the watchmaker finally stopped working and raised his head turning it just far enough to the side to establish eye contact over the top of his wire-rimmed glasses. "Why yes," he responded. "We deal in nothing but time here. That hourglass is special. If you are the proper individual, it will reveal a tale about yourself."

"Thanks." Karl turned the hourglass over and gazed at the granules of sand funneling into the bottom chamber. "It flows swiftly," he remarked.

The old man, still working on the timepiece, finally introduced himself: "*Guten Tag*. My name is Ludwig. What's yours?"

"Karl Johansson from Stuttgart."

## THE TIMEPIECE – ANTHONY SAMUELS

“Karl, there was a man here, a nice gentleman such as yourself who swung that hourglass over and was intrigued by the flow of sand. About halfway through he stopped speaking and his face turned pale. Then his jaw dropped, and his forehead broke out into a sweat. Without speaking another word, he looked up at me from his stare into that hourglass and shot out the door without uttering so much as an *auf Wiedersehen*. Make yourself at home. Look around the shop. I have unusual timepieces – many are antiques.”

When Karl turned the hourglass upside down, he left both hands on the antique timepiece, working his fingers over its miniature statuettes that formed the four posts. While tilting the angle of the hourglass to garner a better view, he detected a strange sensation, a surge of power - of sheer energy, flowing from the tips of his fingers, through his arms, then radiating throughout his entire frame. The sensation was gaining in strength but was not a disagreeable feeling. He experienced mild vertigo and sat once more on the stool. Then the watchmaker became hazy and the lights in the shop started to dim. Karl experienced tunnel vision as his mind drifted away.

While he continued his trance like stare into the hourglass, Karl began to envision and hear his mother singing to him as a ten-year-old. She was singing classic ballads and fashionable songs from the radio while hanging linen on a clothesline. He picked up the fragrance of freshly cleaned clothes and his mother's perfume. Upon completing her chores, she pushed her blonde braided pigtails from either side of her face. Then she stooped over and gave her son a big kiss on the cheek that left behind a lipstick mark.

The flow of sand into the hourglass, at first silent, now became quite audible in Karl's ears. The stream of particles brought back sounds of his youth. He perceived the clamor of his adolescent playmates on bicycles and of wooden airplanes with props driven by rubber bands. He saw his neighbor's dog, Shadow, the adopted mixed breed of Fred and Gilda Schultz. While he peered into the hourglass Karl could also view images – figures similar to holograms of his father arriving home from the second shift at a nearby BMW factory.

Karl, his mind in disbelief, let the hourglass rock back in his palms in order to rest the piece on its base as the last grains of sand were funneled into the lower chamber. When the figures finally disappeared – so did the sensation running throughout his frame. Then the room brightened. When he started to speak his voice was trembling. Searching for words to express himself, he told Ludwig, “Those images in the hourglass, those illusions, they seemed to depict actual individuals from my past.”

“Yes, when it's working the antique hourglass never lies. Did you see anything of importance from your memories? Perhaps a dream similar to Franz Kafka's *Metamorphosis*?”

“Tell me Ludwig, what will take place if I swing the hourglass upside down once more and reverse the flow of sand into the other chamber? Will it let me visualize my dead son? My wife, Hilda, said you may be able to help us with our grief.”

“Yes, I remember your spouse. She was here only last week. Turn the hourglass over.”

## THE TIMEPIECE – ANTHONY SAMUELS

Karl's hands shook ever so slightly turning the timepiece over. Then his eyes widened as his face melted into an expression of joy. Tears began trickling down his cheeks as he gazed once more into the chamber.

"Ludwig. Ludwig! That's my boy in there. He's walking down the same cobblestone street where he was struck by the car riding his bicycle. He's waving at me as if he was trying to tell me something. 'Come with me, Papa. Come here with me'."

In a hushed voice Karl began talking to his deceased son. "Klaus. Oh, dear Klaus. I should have never let you ride to the park that day. I should have listened to your mother's warning. I can't wait to tell her about you. Maybe we will all be together again one day soon," he said as his gaze shifted upward toward Ludwig with eyes that beckoned him to work his magic one more time.

## ADONIS

Ben Groner III  
Tennessee, United States  
<https://bengroner.com/>

Before sharing about my ailments,  
she figured I'd had an easy life:  
popular, carefree, getting by on  
an aquiline jawline, an aqueous gaze.

*Like Adonis.* It reminded me of  
the friend in high school art class  
who said, *You could play Adonis,*  
hiding her blush behind her brush.

The acrylic auburn horses were  
a wilderness reborn from her wrist.  
But I am no lord, dying and rising  
again. No alluring youth, desired  
by a pantheon. I should have told  
them. We all get gored by mirrors  
when we're alone. I'm just as lost,  
inchoate, feeble, bewildered as you.  
Just as thrumming, as resplendent.

## BAD OMENS FOR OCTOBER

Kait Quinn  
United States  
Instagram @kaitquinnpoetry

A yellow orchid with one petal folded  
over signifies betrayal.

Mid-October snow: prepare  
for a winter that blizzards  
into April.

A ring finger bends back at first  
knuckle;  
a grave has been disturbed.

When the neighbor's row of marigolds  
wilts all at once overnight, scorned  
corpses will meet at midnight  
parched for blood, giddy  
for revenge.

Watch the sugar bowl. A topple  
with a spill  
welcomes poltergeists.

If the fairy lights are strung and the apples  
bob, but the spiced candles  
on the mantle won't light, a witch  
is casting obsidian spells  
with cold, cardamom breath.

A white squirrel caked in cemetery dirt  
does not bode well for this year's harvest.

Pin your gaze to rabid eyes, and you will spend  
your life searching for more  
beyond the more  
beyond the moor.



of  
MEN  
and  
HARES

BY SARAH DAS GUPTA





## OF MEN AND HARES – SARAH DAS GUPTA

The hiring fair in Ballymena was busy that May morning as dairy farmer, Sean O' Hara looked for a young herdsman to work with his cattle. Women in bonnets, with brightly coloured shawls, mingled with men in fustian frock smocks and breeches. The sheep sale had just finished, and the sun was high in the blue sky as Sean looked at the lines of young and old men waiting in the hope of being hired. Most had tickets stuck in their hats to indicate they were looking for employment. Many of them held shepherds' crooks in their rough, weather-beaten hands but Sean had no need of a shepherd. With the spring sun on his back, for the first time in months, he felt life was at last rising from the bleak graveyard of winter.

Right at the end of the line of hirings, Sean suddenly noticed him. He felt sure the boyish figure had not been there the first time he had walked slowly down the line of hopefuls. Twisting an old cloth cap slowly in his hand, the young man looked Sean straight in the eye. His look was neither desperate nor brazen. Sean liked a man who was confident but not reckless, frank and not devious.

'You're a cattleman?' It was more a statement than a question.

'Aye, sir. I'm good with cows, so I am.'

Further questioning revealed the boy had worked on a farm in the south, but the family had emigrated to America and the farm had been sold. The terrible Famine of the 1840's had left death and devastation in its wake. Many had come north in search of employment. Sean shook hands and handed over a penny, known as an *arle*, in the time-honoured manner. The boy picked up a small knapsack, all his worldly possessions, and followed Sean out of the fair.

At first the noise of the fair echoed in their ears. The shrieks of the youngsters on the swing boats, the fiddlers tuning up for the dancing, the whinnying of horses being ridden off to new stables. Gradually the noise faded. As they walked along the cliffs only the sound of waves, crashing on the rocks below and the cries of the wheeling seagulls, disturbed the afternoon silence. Sean was a man of few words and the boy remained silent, always a few deferential paces behind his new master. Standing at the head of the valley, they had the first view of the old farmhouse, nestling at the lowest point, surrounded on three sides by steep green hills. In the far distance a herd of black and white cows was dotted over the lush green pasture, like old fashioned lead farm animals from a traditional toy box.

'There's your new farm,' Sean called over his shoulder to the boy who nodded approval. The two, half walked, half scrambled, down the steep, grassy slope to the farmhouse door. Sean pushed the battered door open with his shoulder, beckoning the boy into the small kitchen. He showed him how to pump water into two large wooden buckets out in the yard and to boil water for tea. The two sat drinking milky tea from chipped tin mugs, while Sean explained the simple routine of farm life.

As the evening light began to fade, they walked over the darkening pasture to drive the cattle home for evening milking. Sean was surprised by the animals' response to the new

## OF MEN AND HARES – SARAH DAS GUPTA

boy. Normally they were wary of new faces and new voices. Yet the moment they heard the boy speaking softly in Irish, the cows lifted their heads and walked towards him. Soon he had disappeared in the middle of the black and white herd.

'Let's be taking them back or it'll be too dark for milking.'

The boy nodded and began leading the cows towards the farmyard, like some bovine Pied Piper. As they neared the yard, three hares leapt out of the tall grasses in front of the boy and the leading cows. In a few seconds their long ears and bobbing black-topped tails had disappeared into the darkening wood. Sean quickly crossed himself, these creatures often brought bad luck.

As the spring turned into summer, Sean depended more and more on the boy. The herd was thriving, and the milk was richer, creamier. The milk yield had increased, and Sean was considering extending the herd. He was only waiting for the midsummer fair at Ballymena.

The boy was happy to sleep in an empty stall in the barn which Sean had made into a simple lodging. He was up and milking before Sean appeared, and the cows were devoted to him. Even the young heifer which had been wild and difficult, came to his call. For the first time since Sioban's death, Sean felt life gradually returning. He looked at the gold of the buttercups in the water meadows and his heart seemed to beat again to the rhythm of the seasons and the beauty of the fields.

Autumn had arrived. The chill in the morning air, the mist over the valley, the evenings closing in were reminders that summer was fading. Sean had bought the boy a new woolen jacket and leather gaiters, ready for winter. He'd never bought gifts or clothes for anyone before, that had been his wife's job. After the death of the baby, she had ordered the tiny white coffin and sown white burial clothes for six months old Patrick. Sean thought of that winter's day. The village had struggled through the snow to the farm and walked in procession to the funeral mass. The white of the coffin had seemed to merge with the falling snow. For the first time for months, Sean went to bed with a deep emptiness in his soul. In the middle of the night he awoke, feverish and sweating, despite the cold. He lit a candle which flared up casting a halo of light on the image of the Virgin and the rosary beads hung from Her shoulders. In the corners of the room, darkness gathered. Not even pinpricks of light from the candle could penetrate this gloom. In the silence, Sean could hear the wind howling round the house and branches tapping on the windows. He looked at the empty half of the old wooden bed, but he could see only the figure of the boy, stretched out naked in the candlelight.

He dressed quickly and battled to open the front door in the face of the wind and rain. Pulling his cap down over his ears, Sean struggled along the stony lane out of the farmyard. Sheets of rain were being blown across the valley as he fought his way towards the village.

## OF MEN AND HARES – SARAH DAS GUPTA

After what seemed an age, Sean saw the church, its stone cross lashed by the storm. He opened the gate into the churchyard and heard it blown shut, with a loud clang, behind him. However dark the night, Sean knew the small graveyard like the back of his hand. Bent double by the wind, he stood in front of a small child's grave. A flash of lightning revealed 'Patrick' and 'Beloved son', before darkness descended again. Next to this plot was his wife's grave. Sean traced the well-known letters engraved in the hard granite. 'Much loved wife'. The headstone dripped water into the grass beneath until the grave itself was flooded. The white lilies which had been left in a green, metal vase, lay drowning in the waterlogged grass. White petals splashed with mud, stuck to Sean's wet boots.

The dawn was breaking as he walked back down the lane. It had become a stream with the water racing down into the valley. As he looked back from the farm door, the sun was rising, a red rimmed eye just above the horizon. The storm had blown itself out. A beam of sunlight lay along the top of the valley. A brown hare was framed in gold light as it crossed the sodden field.

It was a week later and again Sean awoke hot and sweating. He reached into the empty, cold space beside him. It had been Siobhan's voice he had heard. She had been sobbing uncontrollably as on the night Patrick died. Sean dressed quickly, running his fingers down the rosary beads. He sat in the kitchen with a lantern on the table and a shot gun. The barrel shone in the light; the wooden stock gleamed wickedly. He had loaded the gun and locked it. Gun in one hand and lantern in the other, Sean walked slowly to the end of the barn. Pushing open one of the doors, he looked at the boy sleeping on his straw mattress. He was naked, as he had been in Sean's vision on the night of the storm. As he looked at him, the smooth, tanned skin, the shock of brown hair, the strong muscles across the shoulders, something strange began to happen. Slowly he was changing. In the light of the lantern his smooth skin gradually furred over, like mould on stale bread. His mouth split, his ears grew long and furry, as a stag's antlers are covered in velvet. Sean raised the gun; his finger was on the trigger. The half-hare, half-boy suddenly opened his eyes. He stared at Sean with a puzzled, resigned expression. Sean pulled the trigger. The bullet went straight to the heart. Blood splashed on the barn walls. The straw was dark red.

Sean picked up a sack from the floor of the barn. Gently he put the body in and tied the sack up. As he walked across the fields, a great orange moon hung in the sky. It cast a path of light over the dark fields. The cows looked up as he passed but did not approach or follow him. As he climbed the stile out of the field, they were all huddling in a distant corner.

As Sean walked to the cliffs, he felt the sack become lighter. It was after all only a hare. In the distance, he could hear the sound of the waves far below, breaking on the granite rocks. The turf here had been cropped short by sheep. Their droppings made the surface slippery. Standing on the cliff, Sean looked down into the darkness. There was only the sound of the ebbing tide. Suddenly the scene was brightly lit as the moon sailed out from behind a bank of dark clouds. Sean could see the rocks far below with the foam surging over the granite blocks before being sucked back by the tide. He held the end of the sack, swung it

## OF MEN AND HARES – SARAH DAS GUPTA

round once, then hurled it over the edge. He watched as it twisted and turned until it hit the rocks and was pulled down by the retreating tide.

Sean looked out at the moonlit path over the sea, narrowing to the horizon.

As he walked slowly back to the farm, all the old tales of witches and hares flooded back into his thoughts. All the stories of 'shapeshifters' taking the form of hares. His grandmother had spoken of them as harbingers of death, tricksters who brought messages from the other world. Everyone knew that witches turned themselves into hares to steal milk from their neighbours' cows.

Neither male nor female, hares moved by moonlight between that secret, enchanted world and the everyday world of humans.

Next morning Sean spent over an hour driving the cows in for milking. The heifer was as wild as ever. The milk yield began to decline. Some days Sean would forget the evening milking. He would go twice a day to confession. Even Father Connolly began to wonder about his sanity. In the village there were rumours that the fairies had stolen Sean O'Hara's brain. On moonlit nights hares fed on the grass on the cliffs. Perhaps they drank the milk from the cows?

Next year at the Ballymena fair, farmers walked along the lines of those looking for employment. A young boy stood at the end, twisting a cap in his hands.



**Sarah Das Gupta is an 81-year young retired teacher who taught in India and Tanzania as well as the UK. She began writing in October 2022 while bored in hospital, following an accident. Her work has been published in over 50 magazines in ten countries, including: US, UK, India, Canada, Australia and Nigeria.**

## THE MOTHER HOLLE FAIRY TALE: A MODERN RETELLING

Sister Lou Ella Hickman, OVISS

United States

Once upon a time there was a widow  
who lived with her two daughters.  
One was ugly and greedy.  
The other was good and beautiful.  
Because the daughter was good and beautiful,  
she was treated badly by her mother.  
Even though her chances of being loved were slim to grim  
she still swept, cleaned, and spun her spindle  
until her fingers bled.

One day when her fingers bled while spinning  
she tried to wash her hands in the well.  
However, her spinning spindle seemed  
to have had a mind of its own  
for it sprang out of her hand  
and into the well.  
Of course, her mother blamed  
this good and nameless girl for this mishap.

Since she good and obedient,  
she followed her mother's orders to retrieve the spindle.  
She jumped into the well  
and as she fell, she fell asleep as good girls are wont to do.  
She woke up in a different world—  
a meadow replete with sunshine and flowers.  
Walking out of what seemed like heaven,  
she heard loaves of bread in an oven cry out,  
"Help us, help us lest we burn.!"  
So, she did.  
Then she walked on.  
As she did, she heard an apple tree speak,  
"Shake me for my apples are ripe!"  
So, she did.  
Third time was the charm when she met Mother Holle.  
"Stay with me."  
And so, she did.  
True to form, she did as she was asked:  
she swept and she cleaned.  
She even shook out the bed linens.  
During her stay, Mother Holle cared for her.

**[continued on next page]**

## [THE MOTHER HOLLE FAIRY TALE: A MODERN RETELLING cont...]

As a result, the beautiful, obedient girl felt appreciated and loved.

During her stay, she became homesick and decided to go home.

She told Mother Holle goodbye;

thanking her for her appreciation and love.

As the beautiful, obedient girl

walked through the courtyard gate

she was promptly showered with golden rain.

A gift from Mother Holle.

After sharing her story when she got home, she returned to her spinning.

Not only was her sister ugly; she was also greedy.

It was no surprise when the mother told the ugly one,

“Now’s our chance to get rich.”

Agreeing, she knew she would be a far more golden child than her sister  
so lickety split she leaped into the well.

She woke up in the same almost- heaven world

her sister spoke about.

As she left the meadow, she heard the same loaves of bread cry out,

“Help us, help us lest we burn.”

“Sorry, I can’t get my pretty hands dirty.”

Walking on, she heard the same apple tree cry out,

“Shake me, my apples are ripe.”

“Sorry, one of them might bonk me on the head.”

Like her golden sister before her,

she met Mother Holle.

But being the lazy girl she was—

she couldn’t hold down the job

of sweeping, cleaning, and shaking out the bed linens.

She left, lickety split,

only to be doused with pitch

as she passed through the courtyard gate.

A gift from Mother Holle.



## PEGASUS ON STRIKE

Petrouchka

*(The winged unicorn is called Pegasus, a winged divine stallion, a symbol of poetic inspiration.). Its flight is an allegory of the soul's immortality.*

I was sitting at my corner this morning  
Thinking to write something poetic,  
Something for love,  
Something that melts the heart,  
Something that burns the imagination.  
And...I wished myself very good luck.

My Pegasus was curled on the floor  
Resting next to my couch.  
I hoped he'll get up and fly,  
I hoped he will glide,  
But... he said "I'm on strike"  
And pointed out the dazzling chandelier  
With his twisted sparkling horn. Oh, Dear!

My pen began dripping blood.  
Dark blue cloud darken the sky  
And purple hell began drumming on the path  
Of my creative imagination.  
Then, came the flood of useless words,  
a tornado of unfitted verse after verse -  
With no rhythms, no rhymes.

The page became thin, almost transparent.  
My magical feather made whole after hole;  
Scratching deep to the table.  
I was thinking: "I'd better  
Write on paper tissue".  
My stallion nodded his horn: "True"  
And went back to sleep.

How I deserved this?  
– He telepathically read my mind.  
"You abused me every day and night.  
From sunset to sunrise you write  
And you write, and you write...  
I am hungry and tired, I cannot fly.  
So, I'm on strike. At midnight  
At least you can share with me glass of wine."

## THE DRAGONFLY

Briana Bostic

United States

With shaking wings,  
Moving along the root  
Of a tree

Crawling along,  
Before still  
To rest

Glinting in the sun  
Talking to the magic  
Of the dust

Finding the treasure  
Of the mushroom  
The vine, the bee, the branch

Levitating  
In the mist of dawn  
Raising a new beat in flight



*the  
Loneliest Man  
in  
Hicksville, California*

BY JOHN C. KRIEG



## THE LONELIEST MAN IN HICKSVILLE, CALIFORNIA – JOHN C. KRIEG

He wasn't called "Old Woody" for nothing. He was old. Really old. Legend had it that he was the oldest man in Hicksville, and even more pathetic, that he was also the loneliest. He filled his days with fuming resentments held towards those that had wronged him in the past. He filled his nights with seething hatred towards those that had wronged him in the past. Nobody could understand why Old Woody was so preoccupied with the past during his every waking moment, because his present was no bargain either. In fact, Woody's present sucked; it sucked donkey ears, and it might even begin to suck worse than that because old Sally was barking up a storm out front.

Old Woody looked out at an unfamiliar beat-up car that had just lurched to a stop in the driveway. The amount of dust kicked up told him that they had probably driven down it at forty-miles-per-hour. What was the rush? He stepped outside his front door and waited for them to approach him. When they were within 15 feet, he held up his hand palm out, "That's close enough. I don't know you." "We mean you no harm, sir. We had heard from Raymond Caviler that you might be renting one of these two houses here, or the RV you have out back," the young man said. "And I mean you no disrespect, hell I don't know you from Adam, but a referral from Raymond is just about the worst recommendation you can have, as far as I'm concerned. He really screwed me over years back, never paid any rent, and left the place in shambles." The young man couldn't pivot fast enough, so the young woman stepped in trying to be as sweet as honey as reassuring as an old pair of slippers. "Oh, he just overheard us talking to a group of people outside the Post Office and suggested this. We don't really know him. We aren't from around here. We're from Texas, and just trying to get a fresh start." The sound of a woman's voice was hypnotic music for old Salley. Something that she hadn't heard much since Heather had died ten months back. She cautiously walked up to the girl, while tentatively wagging her tail, and plopped down to the ground beside her. *Damn it Sally! I'm trying to run them off. And you pull this shit?* Old Woody thought. The girl took full advantage, bending down and stroking Sally's ears while saying, "Your dog can tell we're okay, I see."

They were young, perhaps you could even say attractive if they just cleaned up a little and dressed in any semblance of self-respect, most likely in their early to mid-twenties, and probably had never worked at a real job in their entire lives – just like most of the lost and rudderless young people who stayed in this valley. He had seen them coming and going for the past quarter-century. Jesus, didn't anything ever change? The majority of the lives of the young people living in this place mirrored living in a time warp: a cross between the repression of the fifties and the hedonism of the eighties, only they never seemed to wear condoms, and cocaine had been replaced by crystal meth and heroin. If these two weren't full-fledged addicts, they probably had a chippy going, which was atrocious in the case of the girl, because she was pregnant.

This was bad. Really bad. Bad because it had always started just like this in the past. Old Woody was congenitally unable to not help people even when his instincts were virtually screaming inside his head, "Don't do it! Don't do it." "What made you decide to move here from Texas? There's a hell of a lot more jobs down there than there are up here." The young

## THE LONELIEST MAN IN HICKSVILLE, CALIFORNIA – JOHN C. KRIEG

man had regained his composure and started in with the conman's greatest asset – the ability to lie with such conviction and such enthusiasm as to simply wear their marks down through confusion and tedium. “My uncle on my mama's side said he had a place for us and some work, you know, in local agriculture. So, we high-tailed it up here three days ago. When we got here, just yesterday, he was in the County holding tank, and his wife says that she don't want nothing to do with us.”

There had been another round of busts that occurred yesterday that were the talk of the town. Riverside County Sheriff Chad “El Choppo” Bianco was at it again. With the 2024 election coming up later this summer he was back up here on a mad chopping frenzy busting Mom and Pop marijuana growers to get the squares, bible thumpers, and Fox News watching local octogenarians ginned up to vote for him. This kid could have gotten that information from the town's conservative newspaper that rapturously rushed the news off the presses this morning and had stacks of copies sitting at every local shop and store by 9:00 a.m. Big news in a small-town travels even faster than in a big town because the inhabitants are ravenous for anything that could possibly brighten up their miserable lives. Old Woody hadn't read the account yet and wasn't much into the local pot scene anymore since El Choppo had finally gutted him two years ago as a part of his never-ending inquisition upon the undesirable citizens of this valley who he apparently felt were the scum of the earth and deserving of his unending harassment.

“What's your uncle's name?” “Clemon White. You know him?” “No.” Old Woody could see the kid exhaling a sigh of relief. If you watch them close enough, conmen always tip their hand. But he had to hand it to the young man, he was good, and Old Woody suspected that the young lady was even better. His instincts started up again, “Send them on their way! Send them on their way!!” The car displayed Oklahoma, not Texas plates. “Let's see your license.” “Why?” The kid asked incredulously. “Because, if I were to rent to you, I want to know exactly what I'm getting myself into.” The kid walked up and handed over his license. Arkansas. There was no ring on his finger so Old Woody asked, “How far along is your gal?” “Six months.” He immediately seized on the sympathy card saying, “I really need to get her someplace comfortable. I'll work like a dog if you'll help me do that.” God he was good while trying to draw Old Woody in. The noble guys banding together to save the damsel in distress.

“How are you planning to pay rent?” “I can't right now, until I get a job, but I can start working it off right now. How much is it, anyway? And, for which house?” “Thousand a month. You pay utilities for that one with three bedrooms, Five hundred with utilities paid for the RV out back, the one Raymond left in such great condition.”

The early May sun was starting to sharpen its teeth. Old Woody looked at the girl leaning against the car and could see that she was breathing heavily, probably even starting to sweat. “How about you get her seated at that picnic table under that shade tree over there. I suppose you have some water. Then I'll show you the RV.” The girl wouldn't hear of it, she wanted to see the RV too, so he led them out back. The RV was nestled into a fenced

## THE LONELIEST MAN IN HICKSVILLE, CALIFORNIA – JOHN C. KRIEG

garden overgrown with weeds. There was enough trash and junk strewn around it to fill a pickup bed at least a half-dozen times. The only reason Old Woody left it, aside from overwhelming depression, was that he could close the garden gate and forget about it. Out of sight, out of mind. “The air conditioning works. You can find her a seat in there somewhere. I’ll pull my truck around, and you can start filling the bed. Every time you get a load, let me know, and I’ll drive you to the dump.” “Ain’t we gonna’ sign a contract or something?” “Nope. A man’s word is only as good as the man that gives it. I want your word that you won’t fuck me over. Once I see that you got this place cleaned up and looking like something, we can talk over the particulars. The only things I want you to know right off is no Raymond Caviler or any of his bunch. No sloppy-assed drinking, and no hard drugs, and keep your car parked in the driveway where it is. Let’s people casing the place know that someone’s around.” “What about the money?” “Am I insulting you if I say that I doubt that you have any?” “Down to my last twenty.” “I can’t afford to go into my pocket for you. Hell, once you turn on that air conditioner, it will start to cost me. I’ll take you to this church’s food drive tomorrow and introduce you. That will get you something to eat, and you can tell those people your story. If they start helping the two of you it will tell me that someone’s willing to stick their neck out for you.” The girl had switched on the air conditioning and was already throwing rubbish out the front door. “My name’s Eddie. She’s Nora. What’s yours’s?” “Didn’t Raymond tell you?” “I wouldn’t want to repeat what he called you.” “Sounds about right for him. See what you think of him after you clean up after him. People around here call me Old Woody like it’s a big fucking joke, but my real name’s Zakery; Zakery Pepperwood.” “Should I call you that?” “No. That was in another life. Just take the Old out of the front of Old Woody. Just make it Woody, and that would be fine with me.” “Okay Woody. I’ll get to work.”

As Woody drove his truck out back, his mind was already filling with fantastically daunting scenarios of all the bad things that could happen. Hell, they could be murderers for all he knew. And he didn’t discount his thoughts as paranoia because bad things had been happening for the last five years, pretty much right after El Choppo had come to town. In fairness, Woody knew that it wasn’t all the lawman’s fault, but his inquisition was just too much of a downer to discount as mere coincidence. His best friend Roach had gotten himself shot and killed trying to break up a brawl at a Trump rally in 2023. Roach’s wife, Starsong, Heather’s best friend since high school, moved away shortly thereafter, saying that she just couldn’t bear to look at this chaparral for another day without him. They understood, because there were days that they just wanted to pack it in and leave. Clarence became so embroiled in Reservation politics right after he was elected Tribal Chairman that no one ever saw him in town again. Samantha and Kenny moved to Carlsbad over on the coast years ago after her grandmother left her a beachfront home in her will. Stonny left with Juanita and their three young children for Mexico after Heather died because Juanita said she just couldn’t live here without her. Stonny broke down at the funeral and just laid down crying in the isle and curling up into the fetal position blurting, “Leave me be. Just leave me be.” So, they did as they left the church.

Which brought him to Heather, the love of his life. When they married in 2008, she was 34,

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and he was 55. The wagging old tongues in this glorified little Peyton Place labeled her a gold digger, which was hard to square with the facts because he moved in with her. She tended her stable of fine Arabian horses on 400 acres, and he tended to his guerilla pot growing operations with his friends and neither had been happier in their entire lives than they were in each other's arms. It wasn't supposed to go down the way it did. He was supposed die before her, she was supposed to reluctantly remarry, all were supposed to tell the tale of the legend of Old Leather Lungs and his wild and beautiful red-headed girlfriend for many years to come. Then came the diagnosis – *ovarian cancer* – the silent killer. She was already a year to a five-year survival rate projection of 46%. They sold everything they had in anticipation of the medical bills and bought this dilapidated homestead. He would grow onsite in a fenced back garden just to be near her and be able to pay the most pressing bills. Gone were the days of 330-pound harvests. He would be lucky just to get by with less than 70, and he would have to have help in the clone room, the garden, and in the trim house; and that help brought on an endless succession of town losers and cheap country conmen. When El Choppo finally rolled him up in 2022 he almost welcomed it, although it was enforced, rest had finally come. He embraced it, and then a year later Heather finally died, and he immediately looked twenty years older, which when it happens at 71, makes you look a century old, older than death itself.

So, the truth of the matter was that Woody was just hanging on; for what he wasn't really sure, but he wasn't ready to go just yet. There were more books to write, more environmental warnings to chronicle, more social injustice to expose. His work on this earth wasn't done yet, he was sure of it. But his world had changed for the worse, and he was lonely. He was in fact, the loneliest man in Hicksville. That's why he would give these kids a chance. The truth was that deep down inside he saw it as *his* last chance to believe in the goodness of humanity, and in all that doggerel he had written in the past about the family of man. Although he knew these kids were laying a con on him, he also knew that anyone could change if shown a better path in life. And besides, conmen or not, with them around, he might be perpetually disappointed, but at least he would no longer be lonely. And he wouldn't be a complete sucker, because when it came to conmen, he had seen every trick in the book. So, they thought that they had found their patsy, did they? It wasn't going to be quite that easy.

Eddie was knocking at his studio door. "Got the first load ready to go, Woody." When they walked back to the old garden the girl was out in it hand pulling weeds with Salley at her side. "Should she be doing that?" Woody asked Eddie. "Just try stopping her. Besides, she's as strong as an ox. You wouldn't mind if we got a vegetable garden going, would you? She grew up with one at the orphanage she was at. Says it took her mind off of things, and she really really likes vegetables. Besides, it would save on food bills" "Just Vegetables?" "Well, aren't you allowed six Cannabis plants in this state?" "Yes, but don't push it. And I'll want a cut of both. It's my water, after all." "Fair enough. Suppose you could help find the clones?" "I know just where to look."

The ride through Hicksville out to the County dump revealed the usual cast of characters,

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and all the usual sordid events. There were unwed girls, less than a year out of high school, sporting fatherless babies like six shooters on their hips. Boys, with bottles of malt liquor squeezed between their knees, cruised up and down the highway strip that was less than a mile long. Older men drank from bottles encased in paper bags while they sat under the shade structure in the town park. The parking lot of the liquor store was jammed packed. Hobos bummed change and cigarettes outside the Circle K. Open sales of crystal meth occurred on the side streets. A line of eight Police Cruisers sped at sixty-miles-per-hour through town returning to their cities of origin from a recent marijuana bust followed by the reviled chop wagon. Raymond held court outside the supermarket. Eddie waved excitedly at him. "You know that guy has a line of bullshit a mile long. Seems like the nicest guy in the world when he wants to be. Killed a good friend of mine during a riot at a medical clinic back during the pandemic. Don't know how he got off. Some fucking technically, I suppose. But watch out for him. He's not what you think he is, I can guarantee you that." "I can take care of myself, Woody." "I'm sure you can, but it's not you I'm worried about, it's me. Killers of old men are sure to kill again. Easy targets, you know. Please don't bring him anywhere near my place. I wouldn't go around him, except in a very public place." Eddie seemed disinterested, so Woody let it drop, but maybe a seed of caution had been planted because this young man had a woman and a baby on the way to think of beside himself.

On the way back they stopped at the garden center where Woody bought vegetable seeds and potted tomatoes and peppers. Woody had Eddie run into the Post Office for his mail, and unexpectedly called in an order to the Mexican restaurant. Returning to the truck he gave the bags to Eddie saying, "To hold you two over until the food drive tomorrow." "Thanks"

When they got back Nora was sitting in the shade with Salley's head in her lap. "Hope you don't mind that I've stolen your dog?" "She'll come in when she's ready. Misses her master." "What kind of a dog is she?" "Australian shepherd," Woody replied and was surprised at the lump forming in his throat, "They were always Heather's favorite." He turned and left quickly.

Eddie came to the studio an hour-and-half later saying he had another load ready to go. The scene in town was no different than before, save to say that the Police Cruisers had dwindled to six, but the chop wagon was full, and you could smell the pungent raw colas from a mile away. They must have raided an indoor grow. "Is it always like this?" Eddie asked. "No, just on 'Bust Thursdays,' they want to get in their overtime before the weekend. Speed labs everywhere, eight women gone missing for over three years, and all that matters to them is busting marijuana growers. It's like a phobia with these guys." "Jesus." "Yeah, Jesus help us all."

Nora and Eddie had the RV cleaned out, and the garden cleared by Monday. Woody showed Eddie where to go clip apples for a hundred bucks a day, although that work would only last another three weeks at best. It was something at least – the best kind of cash with

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no questions asked. Nora planted and watered in the garden and started to revitalize the old compost pile. It was obvious that she had some experience, and that this work nourished her. They came to the studio on Friday with Eddie's \$500.00 in hand. Woody was at a crossroads. His instincts told him to take it and remain the tough guy. You have to watch out when you start an association with tenants because a tough guy can always get nicer, but it is almost impossible for a nice guy to get tougher. Once people have a nice guy pegged, they just won't buy it. The problem was that Woody had always been a nice guy, and this afternoon was no different. "Keep it for groceries, and the laundromat. You're gonna' need gas. And there's surprisingly decent cloths at the second chance shop in town" "Well, that's nice," Nora said with just a hint of sympathy in her voice, "But what about you?" "I'll let you know when we need to draw up something formal, but for now, let's just let things ride." The kids were shocked. How could they continue to con someone that didn't need to be conned? This was entirely new territory for them. "Look you two, I know that you never knew Clemon White from Jesus of Nazareth. You don't have to con me. I can see that you're in love, true love, it just shines through." He handed Eddie a set of keys saying, "Go ahead and move into the house. I couldn't stand living there after Heather passed. Use what you can, sell what you can't, but remember that that place was built on love." "Are you sure?" "Go on, get out of here before I change my mind."

While Eddie was off working at one place, or another Woody helped Nora tend the garden and the six stellar Granddaddy Purple marijuana plants. She was a hard case with her cynicism honed to a sharp edge by those years in the orphanage. But the plants softened her, and she wanted to learn as much as she could about how to care for them. He taught her the nuances of organic fertilization, and that timing was everything in its application. And then one day with the start of the molasses applications, just prior to flushing, Salley yelped, and Woody knew that something was horribly wrong. He rushed to her, shovel in hand, and his suspicions were confirmed. He struck the rattlesnake across its back three times with the shovel, with each strike more violent than the last, and then he pushed it away. Yeah, that snake was one of God's creatures, but this one had just killed Heather's favorite dog. He couldn't abide that. Salley was spastically shaking uncontrollably, and Nora was apoplectic screaming, "God dammit, God Dammit, God dammit!" Then she charged towards the snake. Woody held her back. "It can still bite you. Stay away. Think of the baby." Nora staggered back, dropped to her knees, and let out huge resonating sobs. "Nora, listen to me, you have to go back to the house." "Can't we take her to the vet?" "Nora, her time is at hand. I can't let her suffer any more. Now please – go!" Stepping on that poor creature's neck, seeing the light go out of her eyes took it all out of Woody. Sally had had run ins with numerous rattlesnakes during her life and had come out unscathed, but her reactions had just gotten too slow with age. The way of the world. He buried her right there in the garden, disposed of the snake, and went to check on Nora.

More drama was developing just when he felt he couldn't take any more. Nora's water had broken onto the kitchen floor; and she was staring down at it in apparent shock. He walked her to the bedroom, got her settled, and then called the midwife. When the midwife arrived,

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she estimated that it would be at least an hour before delivery. Woody drove out to the ranch where Eddie was working as a day laborer. "Come on! The big moment has arrived." Eddie was so excited that Woody told him, "Leave your car. We'll come back for it. Come with me."

The baby came a half hour after they got there. Eddie held the little boy and just seemed to transform on the spot. It was like they both glowed, there was such a light in the room. As Nora put him to her breast the men went outside. Eddie unexpectedly hugged Woody saying, "Thank you. Jesus, thank you. I've never met anyone like you. I didn't think anyone like you existed in this world." Woody started crying too. He wasn't exactly sure why, but the release after burying Sally was needed, and he was grateful it happened. Big life changing events were piling up one on top of the other.

In the next few weeks, the colas of the marijuana plants thickened to outrageous proportions, the pumpkins swelled brilliantly orange, while the remaining vegetables started showing signs of fall's demise. The changing of the seasons, the changing of the guard, the changes needed to let life run its course. The baby was doing well. Eddie and Nora were proud parents. Zakery was happy for them and was once again receptive to all of the everyday miracles of life. And then the letter he was waiting for arrived in the mail. Changes. Changes were coming as Zakery reflected on his life.

Life sure can be a shitty proposition. You just don't think about how bad things can get when you're young and strong. In the back of your mind, you truly believe you can weather any storm, overcome any obstacle, defeat any enemy; especially if you're fighting it out with the person you truly love at your side. It's you against the world, until the world shows you just how much bigger and ruthless it is. Your friends die or fade away with their own hardships, cancer takes your wife, aging takes your strength, death will ultimately take away any notions of literary immortality and laugh as it does it.

The last five years were hell, pure hell, but he had to suffer them to learn life's biggest lesson: stay the course, just stay the course. Everything else will fall into place. Just don't let life beat you; stay the course.

These kids had wormed their way in, and after so doing clung to the faintest premise of the American Dream like barnacles clinging to a ship's hull. The baby changed everything. From comen to citizens when the midwife laid the first slap on the little boy's ass. His crying was the starting gun to responsibility. In an instant they got it. Zakery just stared at the grand farce of it all. Another child coming into this world as he was about to leave it. But one more adventure, at least, before he did. He volunteered to babysit while the kids went down the hill for groceries and supplies. They suspected that something was up, but they said nothing as they were leaving.

The journalism school up in Utah had accepted him as a writer in residence for a year, and would possibly take him on as adjunct professor if they liked what he produced during that

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year. The great American novel. The one he had told Heather he was going to write when they got married. It had so far eluded him. Or rather, he had avoided it. There wasn't much time left to face the challenge of it. What was he afraid of? What had been holding him back? And what would he tell those bright-eyed bushy-tailed college kids? Write what you know. Write what you love. And if you're not sure of either, write anyway. Writers write. Just write. Well...the semester started in two weeks...

The kids could have the eight-pound weed harvest and it would yield them at least four grand in the right circles with at least a pound for their own private stock. Zakery had little doubt that Eddie would know what to do. The apple harvest would kick in by October and run for four weeks. Another two grand. Enough to clear the year's property taxes and buy quality Christmas presents for the baby. Between the studio and the RV, they could collect another \$1,500 a month in rents, and Nora would make sure to collect it. God help anyone who tried to stiff her. A decent start – much more than he had when he started out; young, strong, ready to take on the world.

As the baby softly slept in his crib Zakery taped the manila envelope containing the deed to this piece-of-nothing farm to the mobile that hung above it. He thought back to that day when he had given his spread to Stonny and Juanita on their wedding day all those years ago. They made that place magical with the laughter of their children and the depth of their love for each other – and Heather – she was the anchor that kept them all in safe harbor, and when she went on, they all drifted out to sea. No more of that. No more of that.

All this place needed was a young man's energy, and Eddie would just have figure it out. A stake in life for Nora who didn't trust anyone or believe in the goodness of anyone either. Well...what would she believe now? The full moon had risen, and the coyotes howled in appreciation. He heard the car doors slamming out in the driveway and knew that they would be hauling in the groceries soon. He spirited himself out the rear door and walked briskly to his truck parked out back by the garden; the garden that had changed all of their lives for the better. When he saw the lights come on in the baby's room, he started the truck and silently left the property. He didn't hear their shouts of joy, but he had no doubt that those two would be whooping it up. As he turned onto the asphalt highway that would merge onto other highways that would take him to his new life, he no longer thought of himself as the loneliest man in Hicksville, California, but rather, as the luckiest man on earth.



**Author's Note:**

***This finally puts to rest the open-ended questions concerning the fate of the central characters that occurred at the end of Old Leather Lungs a novella that is contained in Zingers: Five Novellas Blowing Like Dust on the Desert Wind (2020) published by Anaphora Literary Press.***

John C. Krieg is a bitter and contemptible old geezer who is about to die. For kicks John allows his 9-year-old granddaughter to sit on his lap and drive his decrepit car around at a high rate of speed on their five-acre lot located up on the high chaparral of Southern California while blasting Johnny Winter on the stereo. In another life, John was a landscape architect, swimming pool contractor, and outlaw pot farmer. Gone, all gone now, and for sustenance John now sits at the keyboard daily and tries to write something of significance for the family of man. One family tradition is to bury all of our deceased dogs on site, give them festive markers, and miss the hell out of them. Late at night John visits the grave site of Luke the Legendary Bloodhound and mournfully howls in remembrance of their better days gone by. When he finally kicks, John wants any of his usable organs donated, and then to be composted so as to give what little he has left back to Mother Earth.



# BABA YAGA

Diane Funston

Marysville, California, United States

Glass cobalt evil eyes from Turkey  
hang in a window in each room.  
A hammered tin Hamsa  
hangs outside every doorway entrance.

These baubles I placed for protection  
from all harm, the seen and unseen.

After passing centuries of abuse,  
words and other wounds  
I forgave Baba Yaga,  
whom I believed could no longer eat children.

Her advanced age, gnarled weak bones  
grew frail in unforgiving winters,  
she grew lonely with failing powers.

I moved her out of her high-rise hut  
into our warm home  
far away from black ice.

I tended my garden  
as she grew accustomed  
to nourishing meals and healing sun

I began to wonder if there was a little love  
or merely a place to eat and rest.

->

Her voice regained familiar strength and timbre  
I heard her chanting spells behind her door.

Her responses to questions growled back  
while her elderly hands grew talons  
ready to pierce and slice  
even the most innocent requests.  
I found myself denying recent scratches  
rinsing drops of blood down the drain.

In between battles from last century's war  
I prayed daily to my god of poetry.

I shielded torn flesh from my loved ones  
I was cursed with guilt  
for welcoming her in.

When the plague locked us all inside for months,  
it was easy to cover my scars and wounds.  
After all, Baba Yaga hissed one day,  
after she again drew blood with her tongue,  
"Mother knows you still need mending".



## SPIDER LORE

Mary Janicke  
United States

O Children  
Beware the spider  
She lurks in corners  
Ever watchful

Her home built of silky strands  
Her offspring hidden in  
glistening sacs

So, watch out  
Who knows  
She might be a deadly  
Black Widow or  
Brown Recluse

O Children  
Be vigilant  
And patient  
And brave  
As a spider

Don't get snared  
in her sticky web

## SANTA, BUNNIES AND FAIRIES

Julie A. Dickson  
Exeter, New Hampshire, United States

1  
No surprise, brother and I had peeked inside,  
parents gone to a party; mom wore black crepe;  
carefully peeled back tape on wrapped gifts,  
sweater in itchy wool, scarf hand-knit by Nana,  
books and drawing set. No Santa anticipation  
by morning, stockings weighed down with oranges.

2  
Hand bloody, violently forced rhythmic twist  
just to present tooth. Father exclaims, rinses  
fairy-bait wrapped in tissue under pillow, check  
repeatedly before succumbing to sleep - See?  
brother chides in morning, shiny half dollar  
in my palm, sore mouth already forgotten.

3  
Notes followed room to room, under table  
skirt, in the garage, run upstairs to bedroom  
closet. [That bunny gets around!] Back to kitchen  
peering inside dishwasher to discover bright yellow  
wicker basket stuffed with annoying fake grass found  
everywhere for months, candy long since eaten.

4  
Childish fantasies dissipate, tiny molars, bicuspid  
moldering in bureau drawer, no pillow dreams,  
each ebbing away as fine sand through fingers,  
pebbled memories, marbles rolling under sofa,  
lost among dust bunnies too far to reach  
with broom, escaped smoke up the chimney.





# Storyteller

BY DAWN COLCLASURE



## STORYTELLER – DAWN COLCLASURE – OREGON, UNITED STATES

The Evil Wizard stomped towards May, cackling with glee. "I've got you now!" he said. "No dragon or Sword of Wisdom to save you!"

Princess May gulped. The Evil Wizard had a most hideous face, with warts all over his nose, a ghastly mane of orange hair, red evil eyes, and he towered over her by practically ten feet! He held his magic wand that could only do evil magic, and he pointed it at the princess as he drew closer.

"I will end your reign!" he threatened. "Your kingdom will be mine!"

But Princess May had one last trick up her sleeve. "Not today, Wizard!" she cried, and with all of her strength, she threw the very last of her fairy dust at him and made a wish to banish him from her kingdom.

The fairy dust fell over the Evil Wizard, and he cried out in pain as he started to disappear. "This isn't over, Princess May!" he warned, as he faded away. "We will meet again!"

The Evil Wizard was gone, and Princess May lived to defend her kingdom from evil yet another day.

Chloe Brashears threw up her hands and said, "The end!"

"Yay!" her 8-year-old sister, May, cheered as she clapped. "That was such a great story!"

Chloe grinned. "Thank you. And tomorrow, I will tell you more adventures of Princess May."

And that was how May ended up at her open bedroom doorway the next evening. "Tell me a story!"

Chloe smiled. She and May, didn't usually spend much time together since she, at 15, was too old to be hanging out with her little sister. Anyway, she was usually too busy with sports, cheerleading, writing stories and creating art. But May loved Chloe's stories, and every night, she wanted Chloe to tell her a new one.

She turned away from the clothes she had just hung up in her closet. May stood in the opened doorway of her bedroom, dressed for bed and clutching her stuffy.

"Sure thing, May," she said, walking to the door. "Did you brush your teeth?"

May eagerly nodded, smiling just to show how clean her pearly whites were.

"Good job," Chloe observed. "Now get into bed and I'll be right there with your story."

May excitedly ran to her room. Chloe chuckled. Story time was always the highlight of their bedtime routine. Forget the goodnight kisses by Mom and Dad or the whole "getting tucked in for the night" thing. It was stories May wanted.

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And, as the writer in the family, it was stories Chloe delivered.

Chloe sighed. She wondered how long she would just be a “writer” and not an “author.” Maybe telling stories made her an author, but she always hoped to see some novel with the name “Chloe Brashears” as the author.

Well, maybe someday.

She smiled and perked up, getting back into story mode. Her sister was patiently waiting for her story, so it was time to deliver.

Shutting off the light in her bedroom and closing her door, Chloe walked to her sister's room. The sight of a princess-style bed with a rainbow canopy over it and Disney Princess comforters met her eyes. May was going through a princess phase and she especially loved anything princess, especially stories.

Which was why Chloe put together yet another story of a princess named May each night she told her sister the stories she so loved to hear.

As she walked into her sister's room and settled onto the side of the bed next to her sister, she asked, “Another Princess May story?”

“Yes, please,” her sister answered. “But no evil wizard. He's too scary.”

Chloe nodded. First May didn't want anymore stories about the Burping Monster and now she didn't want anymore stories about the Evil Wizard. Both of those things scared her too much.

“There was once a beautiful princess named May,” she began, using the same beginning she always used for the stories.

May squealed with anticipation.

Chloe smiled before continuing. “And this princess lived in the most beautiful castle in the entire kingdom. One day, another royal family moved into an abandoned castle in another part of the kingdom. The king fixed up the old, dusty castle and turned it into a magnificent castle that was just as pretty as Princess May's!”

“Bad king!” May commented in an angry tone.

“Yes, the king was very proud of his work,” Chloe continued. “And he told everyone in the kingdom that his castle was the best one ever. It had gold walls and a golden drawbridge. It had the most beautiful and most expensive furniture. And the princess who lived in it had the most beautiful clothes! This made Princess May very sad, so she hired the best carpenters and the best smiths to make her castle even more beautiful. But no matter what they did, she kept thinking the other castle was better than hers. Then, one day, an old traveler came

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to her castle begging for food. Princess May took pity on him and gave him a royal feast. She gave him lots of water to drink and a lot of nice clothes to wear. She invited this poor old man to stay the night at her castle."

"Yay!" May cheered, smiling.

"Then, the next morning," Chloe continued. "After they ate breakfast, the old man said he had to leave. But he told Princess May, 'Your castle is the best castle in the entire kingdom.' Princess May grew sad and said, 'You are very kind, sir, but my castle is nothing compared to the other castle in the eastern kingdom. That castle is much grander!' The old man smiled at her and said, 'It may be grand, but what matters is what is inside the castle. Before I came here, I begged for food and water at that other castle. They turned me away. 'Get your dirty feet off of my property!' they said. 'This castle is too fine for the likes of you!' Then I came here. You gave me more food than I have ever eaten in my life. You gave me beautiful new clothes to wear and a warm bed to sleep in. You gave me water for my thirst and money for my travels. That makes *your* castle the best one.' This cheered May's heart and, ever since that day, she didn't care if her castle was not as pretty as any other castle, because she knew that what was important was the person living in it."

Chloe held up her hands. "The end!"

"Yay!" May cheered, clapping. "Good story, Chloe! More, please!"

Chuckling, Chloe got out of the bed and adjusted the covers over her sister. "Maybe tomorrow, okay? It's time to go to sleep." She kissed her sister on the forehead. "Goodnight."

She turned to leave the room, smiling at her parents as they entered to tuck May in for the night.

*Another story down, Chloe thought to herself as she walked to her bedroom. I'm so glad I can make these stories up and make May happy with these stories too. Maybe someday I can make other people happy with my stories.*

"Great storytelling skills!"

Chloe smiled as she looked at the teacher's written comment on the paper she just got back on her desk. She moved her gaze up to see the grade and her smile broadened as she caught sight of the giant "A" at the top. She put her paper into her notebook then opened her textbook for English class.

Once her teacher finished returning the homework assignments, she returned to the desk at the front of the class. Chloe listened intently as the teacher spoke about the difference between reality and truth.

"Most stories are works of fiction," the teacher explained. "But even in fiction, you need to

## STORYTELLER – DAWN COLCLASURE – OREGON, UNITED STATES

have some kind of realism in them. You can't just have a character who has never gone to medical school suddenly turn into a doctor one day. Readers are too smart for that. Some writers of fiction try to suspend reality in order to make their stories work, but even then, it still has to be realistic and logical."

Chloe smiled, eagerly taking in the discussion. She loved this class. It was her favorite of all the classes she took at Merryweather High School. This class encouraged her to tell stories and to write different things. She always got an "A" on her assignments and that could only mean she'll get an "A" for the class. That would help her when it came time to think about college.

"Are you thinking about college?" her best friend, Millie, asked her later, as they exchanged textbooks at their lockers.

Chloe smiled at her friend. She usually wore her long blond hair in a ponytail, since she was usually practicing at track, but today she had it down. She wore a long velvet blue dress with white stockings and boots. Chloe thought her friend was overdressed for school – after all, she only had on blue jeans and a red T-shirt with her sneakers – but maybe Millie had something going on after school today. "Of course!" she finally answered. "I'm thinking Smith College or Brandeis."

Millie frowned. "The liberal arts college?"

Chloe nodded. "Yep. I'm going to major in communications."

"Just make sure you apply for a teaching credit," Millie reminded her. "It's so hard to make a living as a writer. Just ask my dad!"

Chloe chuckled. Millie's father was a freelance writer and had the occasional article sale, but as far as being able to provide a roof over his daughter's head and put food on the table, he also worked in construction.

She closed her locker then turned. Her smile disappeared and she gasped in alarm at the sight of her other friend, Louisa, glaring at her with her arms folded.

"Where is my jacket?" Louisa asked.

Chloe sighed when she remembered Louisa's jacket she had borrowed – the same jacket that she forgot to bring back to school to return to her for perhaps the tenth time!

"I'm so sorry," she said. "I spilled ice cream on it last night and I forgot to clean it off."

Louisa huffed. "Yeah, right. You're always making things up to get out of trouble, Chloe!"

Chloe gasped. "I do not! That's the truth!"



## STORYTELLER – DAWN COLCLASURE – OREGON, UNITED STATES

“Spoken like a true writer,” Louisa sarcastically replied, then she marched off.

“But it's true,” Chloe responded in a whisper, sadly looking away.

Just because she made things up for stories, it didn't mean she made things up in real life. Why didn't Louisa believe her? She hadn't lied.

She tried to get through the rest of the day forgetting about it, but when she sat at the dinner table with her family that night, it still bugged her.

“Chloe! Are you listening?”

Chloe snapped out of her thoughts. “Oh! I'm sorry,” she apologized, looking at her mother. “What did you say?”

Her mother smiled at her. She still wore the suit she'd had on at work and her black hair was still up in a bun. “I was asking you if you've had any luck with job applications lately.”

Chloe sighed. “Well, I haven't gotten any calls. I did have an interview, but the guy said he wasn't interested in hiring any redheads.”

Her father chuckled. “Good one, Chloe,” he said. “Tell us another story.”

May laughed as though she was enjoying the sudden burst of inspiration.

Chloe frowned. “But it's true.”

Her mother smiled as she shook her head. “Chloe, that's ridiculous. Nobody gets turned away from a job just because of the color of their hair. You have got to stop telling stories when people want the truth.”

Anger flooded through Chloe, and she hardened her gaze. “Everybody thinks that all I do is tell stories and that I never tell the truth! It's not fair!”

She stood from the table. “I won't tell stories ever again!”

She turned and marched to her bedroom. When May came into her room later that night, she was still mulling over her anger and lying down on her bed.

“Please tell me a story, Chloe,” she said.

Chloe sighed. “Not tonight, May.”

She heard May sigh behind her before leaving her room.

*No more stories ever again, Chloe thought, before drifting off to sleep.*

## STORYTELLER – DAWN COLCLASURE – OREGON, UNITED STATES

Chloe ran through the Magical Forest. She could hear the dragon roaring behind her. She had to get to the castle and save the princess. That was all she knew.

But when she reached the clearing, a gigantic foot the size of a mountain stepped in front of her, bringing her to a quick stop. As she moved her gaze up to see what this thing was, a vibrating, rumbling burping noise shook the air. The ground beneath her quaked and she fell. She crawled backwards to look up at the enormous Burping Monster towering over her.

The monster looked down at her, its yellow eyes glistening with hate as they shone down on her.

Chloe got to her feet and ran between the monster's legs. The ground shook as the monster chased after her, burping its very loud burps with every few steps.

Just before she got to the castle, the monster scooped her up in its claw. Chloe screamed as it lifted her through the air and brought it up to its mouth. A burp escaped past its lips and Chloe made a look of disgust as the terrible smell hit her face.

Then she tried to think. What did Princess May do to beat the monster?

The memory hit her, and she looked at the monster again. "Begone, Foul Beast!" she screamed, saying the magic words. "By the power of Princess May, *disappearis malignas todas!*"

The monster howled, dropping Chloe as it writhed in agony. Chloe yelped as she fell, but luckily, a giant tree caught her and gently brought her to the ground.

"Thank you," she said to the tree, before she bolted towards the castle. But when she got to the castle, she could only hear the Evil Wizard's laughter.

"Chloe! Help!" her sister's voice cried.

Chloe awoke from the dream, gasping. "May!"

She got out of bed and ran to her sister's room. But right when she threw the door open, a torrential wind nearly blew her back out of the door. Chloe held up her hand to protect her eyes and she struggled to make sense of what she was seeing. A large vortex was swirling behind what looked exactly like the Evil Wizard from her stories.

"Catch me if you can, Storyteller!" he sneered. He threw a sack over his shoulder. The sack appeared to have someone in it, who was struggling to get out.

"Chloe! Help!" May's voice sounded from behind the Evil Wizard.

Chloe looked to see that May's bed was empty. Gasping, she looked at the large wizard again and realized he had her sister in the sack. "May!"

## STORYTELLER – DAWN COLCLASURE – OREGON, UNITED STATES

The Evil Wizard cackled and disappeared into the vortex.

Gathering her strength, Chloe ran right into the vortex to chase after him.

Chloe landed in the Evil Wizard's castle, the most horrible place in all the world. Prisoners in chains had their skin torn off of them, cruel monsters roared as they stomped around, hideous beasts spitting fire were everywhere and ghoulish creatures oozing with a thick green stench stumbled towards the prisoners.

Chloe kept her eyes off of these horrible things and ran after the wizard that had kidnapped her sister. When they finally arrived in his throne room, Chloe shrieked with alarm.

There, in the middle of the room, an enormous, hissing red snake snapped at her. The wizard ran right past it unharmed, coming to a stop next to where he kept a golden sword on a white table.

Chloe gasped when she saw the sword. "The Sword of Wisdom!" She looked at the Evil Wizard. "You stole it!"

"Not only did I steal it, but my soldiers will be killing the dragon, too!" the Evil Wizard said. "And now, in order for the kingdom to be mine, I will murder Princess May!"

He put the sack on the large table next to the sword and when he removed it, Chloe gasped. Her sister was dressed up just like a princess! That is, if her hands and feet weren't tied with brown rope.

"Let me go!" May cried

"Never!" the Evil Wizard cried. "I must have the blood of the innocent, and my spell will be complete!"

Chloe shuddered as she watched him pick up the sword. He moved it closer to May, aiming it right at her heart.

Chloe looked at the Wizard as an idea formed in her head. It was time to tell a story.

"But that's not how it works!" she said. "Her blood will only weaken your spell; it won't make it stronger!"

"Silence, Storyteller!" the Wizard raged. "Your stories won't change anything for me!"

"You're wrong!" Chloe replied. "Stories have power!"

*I made you, Chloe thought. I can unmake you.*

"Your stories have no power here!" the Wizard screeched, looking at her.

## STORYTELLER – DAWN COLCLASURE – OREGON, UNITED STATES

Chloe took a deep breath. “There once was an Evil Wizard who tried to take over Princess May’s kingdom,” she began.

“Stop!” the wizard exploded, running to her and pointing his sword at her. “No more stories. You said you would never tell them again, remember?”

Chloe ignored him. “But Princess May was too strong for him or his spells. She had a special power, the power of being able to tell stories, too. And since this was her story to tell, she had the power to make anything happen.”

The wizard gasped when he realized what Chloe’s words meant. He slowly turned and Chloe looked past him. The snake was gone and Princess May, her sister May, stood in front of the table, looking directly at the wizard. She pointed her wand at him. “Begone, Evil Wizard!” she cried. “By the power of Princess May, *disappearis malignas todas* forever!”

“Nooooo!” the wizard cried, dropping the sword as his body crumbled into ashes.

Once the Evil Wizard was vanquished for good, the castle slowly faded from view. Chloe and Princess May were right back in May’s room, with May holding up her wand.

She smiled up at Chloe. “The end!”

**Dawn Colclasure is a writer who lives in Oregon with her husband and children. She is the author of three novels: *Shadow of Samhain*, *Faded Reflection* and *Imprint*. Her short stories have appeared in magazines and anthologies. Her website is at <https://www.dmcwriter.com/> and she’s on Twitter @dawncolclasure.**

## FAIRY TALE

Gene Goldfarb

New York City, NY, United States

If wit desert me be gentle friends  
for knives amuse and dullness offends.

There was a man who loved a maid  
over and over it's been said.  
What have we here: a comedy  
or dark and rueful tragedy?  
Patience, sweet patience—persevere!  
Listen, be good and you will hear  
a tale of woe and merriment  
of earthly cares and heaven sent.

The princess lived in a treasure land,  
the prince in a kingdom just as grand.  
They met one morn' in a wooded glen.  
He could only cough and say "ahem!"  
She softly urged him, "Oh, speak, dear prince."  
He could barely sigh and gave a wince.  
She took this for a boorish token  
of dumb retreat from true words spoken.  
With a grunt of disgust cold she turned.  
He'd lost his tongue and she'd been spurned.  
She mounted her steed and off she flew  
cursing the prince and this rendezvous.

So, our sad tale would here have ended  
were strange fate and chance not so blended.

Then a fortnight anon one fine day  
prince and princess on horses astray  
chanced to meet in a market square.  
He'd learned to be bold, and she was fair.  
"Dear princess," he said, "forgive my tongue  
afraid to sing when it should have sung."  
"Sweet prince, I listen. Present your song."  
He knew to speak and make it not long.  
A crowd had gathered and close on pressed  
the prince to hear the words from his breast.

**[continued on the next page]**



## [FAIRY TALE cont...]

"Oh fine lady," he exclaimed for all,  
"You own my heart, a thing not so small.  
In deeds or songs though the price be steep  
I'll pay it in full without a peep.  
Be mine and glow 'neath the jealous sky.  
We'll be for we 'stead of me for I."

The crowd held its breath the sun its heat  
the princess to speak, the match to greet.

Her answer rang like a joyous bell,  
"I'll be your bride and forever dwell  
with me at your side and we on high  
will rule together, not you or I.

The crowd resounded with thund'rous glee.  
All were for all 'stead of me for me.

And so this tale is brought to good close,  
welcome our beds and happy repose.



## SCOTTISH CHILDHOOD

**F. Kate Langan**  
**Canada**

There is magic in the fields  
with sheep all around  
but the wind sends us kids  
hurtling into the woods where  
ghosts of fallen soldiers  
still dive for cover  
in the air-raid shelter  
at the roar of overhead bombers.  
We are running like death  
between the lowering shoulders  
of sharp-nailed spruce  
until the light changes  
to echo softly off the bark  
of birch and beech,  
and we, glancing back, see  
the pursuing ghosts  
remain enmeshed, trapped  
within the dimmer sentry  
of clawing evergreens,  
freeing us to play once more.

# **JACK AND NO BEANSTALK**

Judy DeCroce

New York, United States

[https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0BCSCZGZD?ref=cm\\_sw\\_r\\_cp\\_ud\\_dp\\_NK26XGC7WEC6KB0C99E0](https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0BCSCZGZD?ref=cm_sw_r_cp_ud_dp_NK26XGC7WEC6KB0C99E0)

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/judydecroce/>

**“Boy, where are you going with that cow?”**

“We’re going to town so I can sell her.”

**“She is a very skinny cow.”**

“Yes, sir, she is thin but from exercise.”

**“You mean walking to town?”**

“No, sir, she dances.”

**“Oh, come now, a dancing cow. I don’t think so. Make her dance.”**

“Sir, she will only dance for her owner.”

**“Well, boy, you are the owner so...”**

“I no longer own her for I am going to sell her and because that process has begun she is no longer mine.”

**“Then you have no proof that she can dance.”**

“Oh, I do, sir, I have a certificate. Read this.”

**“Yes, it’s a certificate and appears to be valid. But it’s for 7th place in the 3rd Grade Spelling Bee.”**

“Sir, if I was to lie, I would have claimed to be the winner.”

**“That is true. Hmmm... How much for the cow?”**

“5 gold pieces, sir, I am to take no less.”

**“Well, I have no gold but I do have 5 magic beans.”**

“Sir, those don’t look magic.”

**“Ah... but the magic is hidden inside so it can’t be seen. I tell you... plant these and their power will take you to treasures you won’t believe.”**

“This is true?”

**“Yes, son, I’m as honest as you.”**

**“Deal?”**

“Deal.”

Hmm.... if strength comes from these beans, I’ll swallow them here, and be the strongest, smartest, cleverest, boy ever! There, done...Poof!.....”Moo.”

# Carbon Tea

BY SEAN CAHILL-LEMME





## CARBON TEA – SEAN CAHILL-LEMME – PARK RIDGE, IL, UNITED STATES

I understand that people process death in their own way, I really do. But this wasn't *our* thing, it was *their* thing. Hell, even if it was *our* thing, I would never suggest something so disgusting. What did she expect? For me to take my shoes off, sit cross legged on the floor, and start sipping when the clock struck midnight? At what point does grief become insanity? I wasn't going to do it, simple as that. They never invited me anyway; it was *their thing*.

"It wasn't always our thing," Bowie said, "not at first. She asked you to join so many times and you always blew her off."

"I never blew her off. I was just busy." Bowie waltzed a Yuka plant toward the front door. "I'm sorry I didn't have time to drink Yerba Mate in Patagonia, or Chai Tea in the Himalayas," I said. "I had a daughter to take care of."

"We never went to the Himalaya's. And okay, so you were busy, how is that her fault? You would get annoyed whenever she invited you anyway."

"Because she invited me on purpose," I said. Bowie was orbiting around me, picking up poetry books and wooden idols and putting them into specific boxes.

"What could you possibly be talking about?" she asked.

"She knew I couldn't come, Bow, and she asked anyway. It was like her little way of digging at me because I chose to live a normal life with the man I—"

"That doesn't go in that box," Bowie interrupted. She took the vase from my hands. "It's a Dharmachakra. Tibetan things go in this box here."

I looked around the room. Everything could have been Tibetan. "I'll just pack the tea," I said. Bowie stopped and turned to me.

"How about you do picture duty? They all go in that box there."

If she wasn't going to let me help, I wasn't going to argue. I picked up the first picture and looked at it. It was the most colorful picture I had ever seen. Bowie and my mother wore flowing dresses with ornate braiding and beads. Bowie's dress was a bright canary yellow, and my mother's dress was a vivid red. They sat outside a building that was impossibly blue, drinking tea, of course, and looking more like sisters than Bowie and I ever had.

"Is this in India?" I asked. I felt Bowie over my shoulder.

"That's in Chefchaouen," she said. "I love that picture; mom looks so beautiful."

"So, not India?"

"Morocco. The Riff Mountains."

## CARBON TEA – SEAN CAHILL-LEMME – PARK RIDGE, IL, UNITED STATES

I went around the world with them in each picture I packed. They drank tea in France, Kenya, Sri Lanka, Turkey, and other places I didn't recognize. "So where do you plan on doing this?" I asked.

"Downstairs."

"Can't I just watch? Do I have to...participate?"

"It's what she wanted." Bowie pulled a poster off the wall. "Do you want this?" she asked. The poster was of Joni Mitchell's *Ladies of the Canyon*. I could see my mother swaying in the kitchen while she cooked, pointing the wooden spoon at me when it was my turn to sing. "She bought it for you in San Francisco," said Bowie.

"No, she didn't," I said.

"Yes, she did."

"Then why is it here?"

"Because you didn't want it."

"I've never even seen it," I said. "How could she know I didn't want it?"

"She brought it over to your house when we came back from San Francisco. She had it wrapped. You stopped her before she could even open it. You said, 'Mom, if that's some crazy piece of art you expect me to hang, I don't want it.'"

Bowie was still holding the poster waiting for me to decide. "She spent a lot of time picking it out. I remember my feet getting so tired standing in that gallery. It was between this album and *Blue*, and she picked this one because you guys sang it the most. The rest of the day she kept asking me if she made the right choice."

"Why wouldn't she have just told me, like an adult. That's so petty."

"I guess she didn't think you deserved it, and frankly, I agree with her." Bowie let that last comment trail off. "So, want it or not?"

I shook my head. "I have nowhere to put it."

There were these glass orbs hanging in the windows. The sun set through them, and the light shimmered around the room like water. It danced all over Bowie, and it must have been dancing on me too, because she smiled at me and said, "Sun Catchers." She walked slowly around the room with her arms raised, trying not to make any sudden movements, like she was covered in butterflies. I knew she was going to try and say it was my mom there with us, but I wasn't going to let her.

## CARBON TEA – SEAN CAHILL-LEMME – PARK RIDGE, IL, UNITED STATES

“How should we pack these?” I asked. “Are they expensive?” I unhooked the Sun Catchers from the window and laid them out on the couch. The strings of light fell away. I switched on a lamp; its shade was embroidered with jewels, and their gaudy colors splattered against the walls. “Jesus,” I said, and switched it off. I thought I heard Bowie laugh but she might have just been clearing her throat. I found a different lamp, a crescent moon with a bulb that was hanging at the center, kitschy, but at least it had normal white light.

Bowie walked to the couch and held up the sun catcher. “They’re not expensive,” she said, “but she blew the glass herself—we need to be careful with them.”

“Never volunteer to move a sentimental person,” I said. “Is there anything in this house that doesn’t have some strange significance?”

“Why would anyone put something in their house that isn’t significant to them?” Bowie asked.

We cleared everything out from the first and second floor. We stood in the middle of the empty room staring at the red spiral staircase that curled down into the basement. Bowie looked back at me. “Thanks for helping,” she said, “You don’t have to do this part. I got it.”

“Bow, you’ll be here all night. I’ll help.”

“This part is important to me,” she said.

“I know,” I said, “It was *your* thing.”

Bowie rolled her eyes. “I want to show you something,” she said. “Let’s go down.”

So, I was finally going to see it. My mother’s sacred room. She talked about this room so much that I made it a point never to go down. She brought it up in every conversation, like when you’re fresh in love, and you wait in the wings for a seamless opportunity to talk about the person you’re in love with, and you think you’re being subtle or maybe you just don’t care. *Mel, you have to see this compartment I just added. Mel, you need to try this Cambodian tea. My shoulder has been hurting too, I think it’s from hoisting up that bamboo lattice.*

I followed Bowie down the stairs, expecting to slip at any moment. “What’s wrong with normal stairs?” I asked. “If she had gotten older, she could have fallen down.”

“But she didn’t, did she?”

We reached the bottom of the stairs, and much like I had expected, it wasn’t a room that could be processed all at once. Open bird cages overgrown with ivy hung from the ceiling, stone fountains of women pouring tea were placed around the room, every wall was made of bamboo lattice except for one—the fourth, and biggest, wall was a map of the world. Tea

bags were pinned across it in chaotic fashion. Bowie walked up beside me like an art seller.

“So, like what,” I asked, “each of these bags are from the place they're pinned to?”

“Right,” said Bowie, “and the colors are coordinated with the shelves in the next room.” She pointed to a small door that I hadn't noticed.

“It must have cost a fortune to order all of it,” I said.

Bowie laughed. “She didn't *order* any of it. She bought every bag in person.”

“That can't be true; you were never in Russia.”

“I was never in Russia,” said Bowie. “She went by herself after college. A lot of these places she visited before we were even born, Mel—I told you, it was *her* thing, and she wanted it to be *our*—”

“What did you want to show me?”

“It's in here.”

I followed Bowie into a room that wasn't really a room at all. It was more like a small, very colorful, cellar. “Didn't she ever get claustrophobic?” I asked.

“Don't you?” asked Bowie.

“Show me what you're going to show me.”

“This is it.” Bowie motioned around at all the boxes of tea.

“It's just more tea,” I said.

“It's *your* tea.”

“I'm not taking mom's tea, Bow.”

“It's not mom's, it's yours.”

“Listen, Bow, I'm really tired and—”

“Everywhere we went she bought a third box for you. I think she put notes in some of them. I don't know what her plan was, because clearly you were never going to take them. And I wasn't going to show you, but I thought she deserved for you to know.”

“Again, why wouldn't she just give them to me? I like tea as much as the next person.”

## CARBON TEA – SEAN CAHILL-LEMME – PARK RIDGE, IL, UNITED STATES

"Maybe because you would have dumped it into a thermos and drank it while you filled out a spread sheet."

"That's exactly what I would have done, Bowie, and do you know why? Because that is what people do with tea."

"I'll never understand why you place so much importance on the things you do," said Bowie.

"That must be a joke," I said. "It's tea Bowie, fucking tea. And you know, it would be nice to have the time to travel, to not have to answer to anyone, but I chose to have a family and to have people that I care for and that care for me, and that takes having a job, Bow, and having health insurance, and going to teacher conferences, and sometimes it sucks, but you know what? I have them now. What do you have?"

Bowie didn't say anything. I walked back up the absurd spirals and stood for a second to breathe in the empty house—even empty it looked whacky, not a single square frame, and I thought, *what other way could she have decorated this house? It begged for the Sun Catchers, and the Dream Catchers, the Totems, the plants, the god damn tea, and for her.* I heard Bowie starting to pack up the tea boxes downstairs. I stopped and stood in the empty room. Then I turned around and walked back downstairs.

"Alright," I said, "where is it?"

"Where's what?"

"The Carbon Tea."

"Mel, you don't have to."

"I want to."

Bowie walked to a small cabinet and pulled out a triangular box, ornate—each corner had a beautiful engraving of a woman's face, each different but familiar.

"It's us," Bowie said. "She made the box herself; it's what kept her busy all that time in bed."

"It's beautiful," I said. Bowie looked at me with the same incredulous smile she had as a girl, when we would say liberating things under our bedcovers, like sex and *penis*, and the most scandalous of all: *Like like*. Bowie smiled so widely at me—was *beautiful* a word I so seldom used? I had said it to Jane after her recital last week, hadn't I? Or when we visited Artist's Point in Yellowstone. I know I *thought* it, but did I say it? No, I guess I didn't. I said it was nice. *Yeah, let's not get crazy Melanie, it's nice, it's fine, maybe even pretty, but beautiful? That's a word for little girls.*

Bowie opened the box and pulled out a jar that was—since I've already said it once—also beautiful. After the jar, she pulled out a spherical sift that attached to a silver chain. She sat pretzel style on the floor and began packing the sphere with the contents of the jar. I had never seen Bow put that much concentration into anything. When it was fully packed, she swung the sift back and forth like a hypnotist to make sure the contents were secure.

Water started boiling in the corner and she walked over and took it off the heat. I could feel my heart beginning to pound; my stomach turned a little. She placed the sift into a glass pitcher and I watched the colors travel through the clear water like lavender smoke. It filled the entirety of the pitcher, and then Bowie poured it into cups. She walked over to me and held one out. "This cup was mom's," she said and handed it to me.

"Should we say something?" I asked.

"The steep time is five minutes."

"The steep?"

"The time it will take her to fully release. We usually meditated while we waited."

"Bowie, can I just—"

"Just count your breaths...one in, one out, one in, one out, until you reach ten, then start the count over."

"What should I think about?" I asked.

"Nothing—that's the big misconception about meditation—people think they need to think. If you're thinking, you're not in the *present*. Just focus on your breaths."

And so, I did.

I counted my breaths, and every time I wandered up to the cluttered attic of my head, I would gently escort myself back down. I could hear my mother's voice throwing out that cliché: *Live in the moment*—for all her eccentricities, she was quick with a platitude.

"Should I close my eyes?" I asked.

"I do," she said, "but you don't have to. Keep counting."

## CARBON TEA – SEAN CAHILL-LEMME – PARK RIDGE, IL, UNITED STATES

I kept my eyes open and counted my breaths. At first, there was nothing, but then, something changed. For a very brief moment, and for the first time since I was kid, I was present in my own life. I was sitting across from my sister, and I was *there*, or *here*? And the philosophy of living in the moment, the one that had been beaten into a meaningless cliché, suddenly became the only truth I knew.

And then it passed.

Sean Cahill-Lemme was born in Park Ridge, Illinois—yes, he does consider that to be Chicagoland—to a family of raconteurs, the Northside descendants of Erin. He has no problem admitting he's not the best storyteller in his family (you wouldn't either if you ever shared a pint with his gramps), but he does believe storytelling can be more than just entertainment after the real work is done.

He has always been hesitant to share his stories, but encouragement from an incredible culture of Chicago writers has convinced him otherwise.

When it comes to writing, Sean puts truth above all else—if readers walk away feeling something real, he will have done his job. Beyond that, he hopes that readers enjoy his stories as much as he has enjoyed writing them.



## MAGIC ON GRAVEL LANE

Mike Ball  
United States

At her wooden shack on Gravel Lane, Granny Shank  
was a sorceress who looked like a movie witch.  
Plain as a pickle, a dill pickle,  
Granny was sweeter than her creased face.

My uncle's wife was blood kin to her,  
so by Southern rules, I was once removed,  
but for no good cause, we kids avoided her.  
Yet I sought her on the advice of Uncle Bill.

You see, my left thumb had two warts,  
and Bill said Granny could talk warts off.  
I was in fourth grade, read lots of science,  
and I remained to be convinced.

Climbing three wobbly, tilting stairs to her porch  
was one act of a 10-year-old's courage.  
Knocking on her bell-less door was another.  
The floppy screen door bounded back with each knock.

Bill had told her I'd visit.  
She was as cheerful as a country crone could be.  
She quickly asked to see my warts and  
droned an appropriate hmm as she bent close.

Would that be witchcraft or feral medicine? No matter.  
Cupping my thumb gently in calloused hands,  
she rubbed the warts, then muttered  
words too low for me to know.

I would have loved a cartoon resolution  
—two warts flying off at once.  
Instead, four days later, they were gone,  
just gone, after years of living on me.

I was convinced. Pickle power.

## TAPESTRY

Rina Malagayo Alluri  
Austria

The rhythm of the traditional  
pedal loom, *pangablan*  
keep the wheel spinning  
their voices keep on singing

sharing Pinoy folk tales of  
cunning animals  
glowing in deceit

swift calloused hands  
cautious so the *kapas* thread  
does not tangle

turtles outsmarting  
greedy monkeys  
out of banana trees  
with crocodile warnings

a knot would cause turmoil  
for the weaver and the weaved



# BESSIE

Cora McCann Liderbach

Lakewood, Ohio, United States

Sunset fades to indigo above the shoreline's  
fairy lights / Lake Erie's frigid waters murmur

You're here now, you're here / waves relax you, invite your  
imagination to roam / plunge into the murky depths / in your mind's

eye, you spot her / long, reptilian body slithering /  
on sand and silt / large eyes sleepy, watchful over

triple rows of teeth / fins ever so slightly rotating / tail trailing behind /  
but the Lake Erie Monster is shy / doesn't like attention / passing

sailors have fired muskets on her / labeled her  
vicious / likened her to a *sturgeon*, surely the ugliest

beast in the Great Lakes! / Bessie is tired of the outlandish  
fiction / has lived for three centuries now / heavy body

dredging the lake floor / hasn't she earned the right  
to peace in home waters? / to pause, as you do

even now / watch  
the moon mount

its sapphire dome?



## ESCAPE FROM THE GINGERBREAD HOUSE

Abigail Elizabeth Ottley  
Cornwall, United Kingdom

<https://www.facebook.com/abigailleizabethottley/>

[https://www.instagram.com/abigail\\_elizabeth\\_ottley/](https://www.instagram.com/abigail_elizabeth_ottley/)

I hush back to sleep the brindled cat that  
dozes, its head between its paws

then I slip the latch and tiptoe out  
softly closing the door.

I plead with my crows not to raise their voices:  
Caw, caw, caw. I promise them tidbits,

chicken bones to pick at. Cat kibble,  
all they desire.

Silent as mourners in their smart black suits  
they signal their sly assent.

Grark demands the fledgling, baby-gaping pink.  
One by one, they turn to watch me go.

But I am not free yet. I look over my shoulder,  
see your malted door closed like

an eye. I think of you then, snuffling through  
your dreams, rooting for pignuts,

turning up truffles like moist, black jewels,  
pink trotters tidily tucked in.

## THE DIVINE FOLKLORE OR FAIRYTALE?

Daya Jagers  
United States

<https://society6.com/ladydaya>

The Divine dream  
Constantly recreating

Infinitesimally  
will always remain  
being able to be

Because  
We are it and

It is we

It just is

No need for  
Apology

Just come along  
soar with the endless spark

The unknowing

The show

The yarn

The myth

The mysterious

Or

Relish in complexity

Ponder Wish Adore Despise

Conjure Practice Multiply

Embody Play Decide Divide

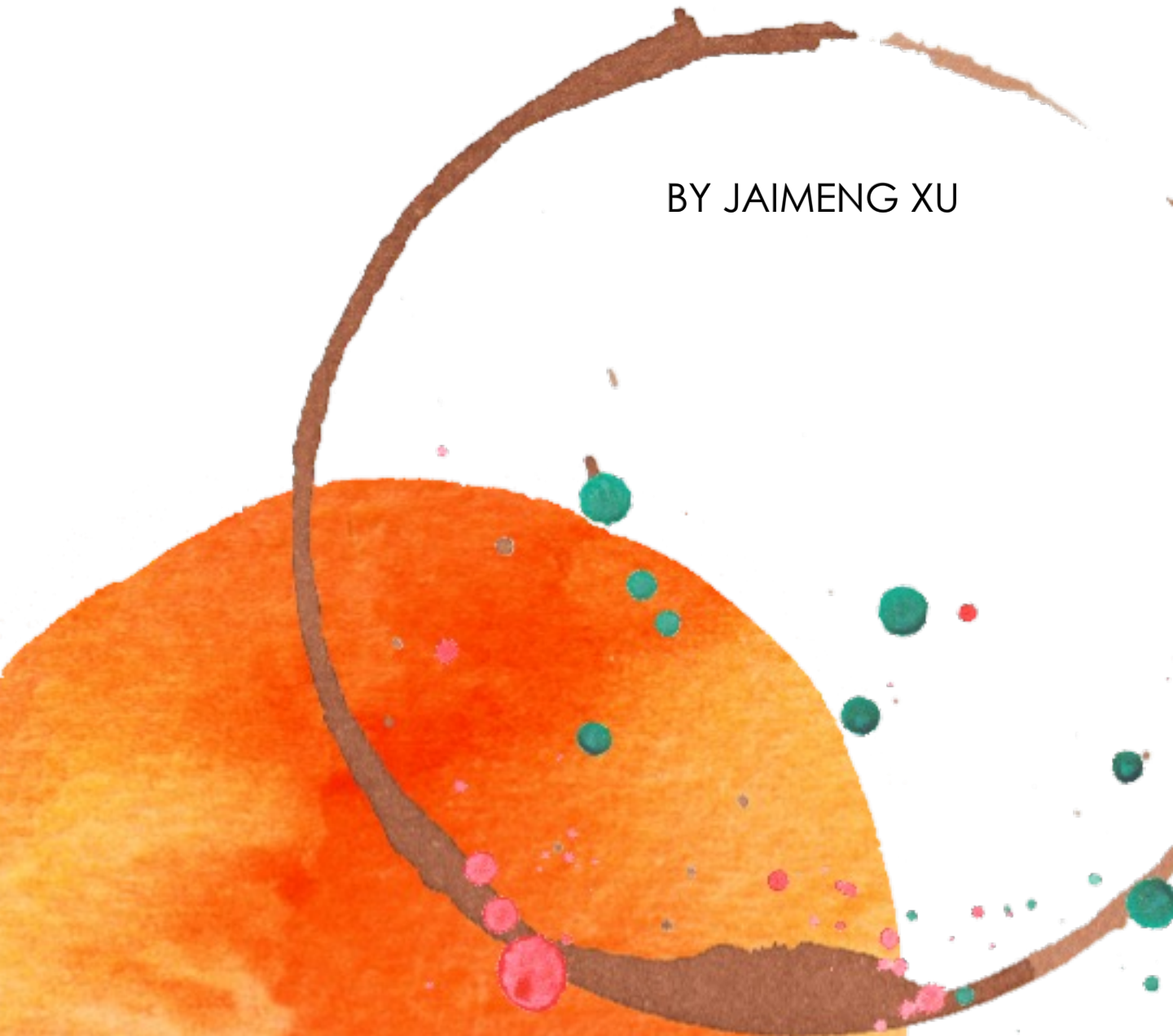
Congregate

Enjoy coming and going

Through the Lore

# A Refugee Fairy Tale

BY JAIMENG XU



## A REFUGEE FAIRY TALE – JAIMENG XU

As he watched the militia set fire to his mother's house, he believed the roof would be the first to fall. It was only when the wooden beams had burnt to spindles, and the entire structure could no longer be supported, that the roof collapsed in a crackling heap. Flames rose, bright and rapacious, a bonfire where eleven people had lived. Somewhere his mother and brother were weeping, but he could not see them nor the soldiers who had taken them.

Later, as his captors beat him, as he was freed and taken to Mundemba, he dreamt of the ruined house becoming a luminous, burning skeleton against the night sky. At the border town Mercy, his wife, was already waiting. Together they travelled on foot into Nigeria. In Port Harcourt they could finally rest and decide what to do. An immigration agent told him that with his Master's degree, there was a good chance Canada would grant him asylum as a refugee.

On the morning of his departure, he promised his wife that he would return. Upon landing in Montreal, he took out the address he had been given on a slip of paper. It was a men's shelter downtown. He ate meat for dinner for the first time in weeks. Afterwards he tried to sleep amongst the snoring and shifting of other men in the dormitory. In his dreams his mother knelt before a pile of ashes with a bowl of water, and Mercy hid her face.

The next day he used most of the money he had to buy a cheap used cellphone. He walked block after block until he came to a McDonald's, connecting to the free Internet to call his wife. She assured him everything was fine. With no direction in mind, he wandered up and down the streets of the city. At dusk he went back to the shelter.

"You have come too late," he was told. "All the beds are taken for the night."

Head bowed; he turned back to the street. The windows of houses have become lit now as families sit down to dinner. He wondered whether his mother, his uncle, his brothers were still alive, whether they were in jail or have been freed. When he could walk no further, he laid down on a bench by a three-tiered fountain. Orange floodlights illuminated the cascading water from below. Nearby, a flock of pigeons pecked at the ground, the white of their feathers a deep blue in the dark. He dreamt of the roof of his mother's house burning, the orange flames rippling like water, cool upon his hand. In the morning, he woke to someone tapping his shoulder. The man introduced himself as Jean-Pierre.

In the YMCA where Jean-Pierre worked, they talked of the many languages spoken in the city. He told Jean-Pierre about the decades-long civil war in Cameroon between the Anglophone and Francophone peoples. He spoke of meeting Mercy, and how he fell love in with her because she allowed him to bring her strawberries. He started to speak of how he had lost his home, but he could get no further than the flames.

"I am free in this country, but life is still difficult," he said.

"You can stay here," replied Jean-Pierre, "until you figure things out."

## A REFUGEE FAIRY TALE – JAIMENG XU

He was grateful that instead of asking him questions, Jean-Pierre gave him things to do. He cleaned the kitchen and sorted clothing and books. He listened to people talk about how he could become a member of Canadian society, of Quebec society. He helped to cook for the other residents and received two free meals a day. The people he met were kind and did not ask for his time.

Between all his new activities he continued to walk around the city. A listlessness settled in his body. He could not understand how the people lining up for busses could go to work, how children could leave their parents for school, how each day people parted from the ones they loved and still expected to return to them. It all seemed to require a faith that he did not have. Calling his wife no longer brought him comfort. He heard fear and dread in her tone, yet she assured him that everything was fine. "It's just the stress," she explained. She would not say more.

As days passed, he rose from bed with a leadenness in his limbs. Nightmares still visited but now he could not remember what they were. He struggled to eat. Mercy's voice remained tight over the phone, and he heard in all she was not saying a thousand possible calamities. On Friday when Jean-Pierre told him he had received official refugee status, he burst into tears.

"What's wrong?" Jean-Pierre asked over and over.

He could not answer.

"I can't go on," he choked out. "I need hope, but everything is lost. If something has happened to her, I don't know how I can live."

Later Jean-Pierre would bring him to the hospital. He waited, exhausted and heavy with shame, amongst the moans of fellow patients, the smell of urine, vomit, and drying sweat. When the emergency room doctor came to see him, he was shivering uncontrollably. They asked him what his name meant in the language of his country.

"Beauty," he replied.

Before sending him out of the hospital, the doctor gave him a prescription. "You have lived through disaster," he said. "You have a very long journey ahead of you."

Back in his room, he found a thick, red sweater folded and placed on his bed. "For your first Canadian fall," Jean-Pierre later told him.

He signed the documents that would make him a legal person in Canada. He continued to clean the kitchen and to make the meals. Jean-Pierre encouraged him to start looking for paid work, to consider perhaps continuing his studies here. At the church group he listened to other refugees talk of what they had left behind, and wondered when he would ever be able to speak his own story. One evening, his wife broke her silence.

## A REFUGEE FAIRY TALE – JAIMENG XU

"I am pregnant," she said, taking a shuddering breath, "because I was raped."

Hearing her voice crack, he began to weep silently.

"I could not tell you before," she continued, "because I was afraid. I could not talk to anyone, but today I went to the center. They examined me. They asked about the father. They offered abortion. They said the law allows it, because it was rape. God will not judge me, they said. But I don't care what the law says."

"What do you want?" he asked.

"I want her to live," she answered, crying. "Against everything I have wanted for myself, for us, I want her to live. She is a child of war. She is a child of disaster. Her father is my attacker and I hate him. But I want her to live. Can you forgive me?"

"Oh, my love," he whispered, "there is nothing to forgive. But I must think."

The next day, for the first time since his arrival, he did not call her in the evening. Nor did he call her the next day. On the third day, he resumed his walks around the city. At night he returned to the fountain and, sitting on a bench, fed the pigeons the bread he had carried in his pocket. He watched a young girl wearing blue ribbons in her hair walk beside her mother. When the pigeons had finished their meal, he got up and headed back to the YMCA.

He decided to take the longer way. The tightness in his chest had lifted, and he felt an urgent desire to walk alongside the other inhabitants of the city. He glanced at the faces of the men and women eating at café tables. He nodded to the homeless man sitting cross-legged on the stoop. Tomorrow he will tell his wife that he would like their daughter to be named Hope. He will say to Jean-Pierre that he is going to be a father and ask if there is any way he could bring Mercy to this country. In time he will look for strawberries at the market, and together they will tell their daughter of their journey.

A sound he had never heard before, neither a voice nor a machine, stopped him. He followed the lilting tune to a balcony on the street opposite. In the dark he could make out the figure of a man playing a flute. He raised his arm tentatively in greeting. Through the darkness he saw the flute player raise his right arm in turn, heard the tune pause as the man took a breath. Standing upon the sidewalk, he let the melody flow through him, rising and falling as a buoy bobbing upon a dark sea.

## RANI'S NOSEPIN

Tulip Chowdhury

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/tulip-chowdhury-32077220/>

<https://www.facebook.com/tulipchowdhury11>

Looking into the table mirror, Rani sighed  
There was no nose pin on her nose anymore  
an ornament that had been a symbol of her married life  
sign of being a wife in the village of Bangladesh, her home.  
It meant she had her husband Rahim to protect and provide  
but the absence of a nose pin announced in silence  
an endless void in her life.  
The nose pin, a tiny glass piece, a small but significant  
twinkled when the sunlight played on it.  
The nose pin brought envious glances from other women in the village  
The nosepin was her proud status among them.  
Long before the nose pin brought Rahim to her  
Rani's mother pierced her nose upon puberty  
a village norm in readiness for marriage  
and fed sweets to women who chanted with the ceremony.  
Inside the mirror, Rani looked long at the pierced spot on her nose  
at the soft hole whispering of days gone, times spent in loving care  
The empty place reminded her of a life chapter gone forever.  
Rahim was no more.  
A widow's symbol was no nose pins, and neither did Rani.  
In the mirror, she envisioned Rahim's face where the nose pin used to be.

## The Lawson Lane Witch

Maya Klauber

New York City, NY, United States

I'd talk about it to anyone who'd listen:  
our steep climb above grampa's house.  
Stone by stone, I knew you were behind me.

You said, *I heard her soup's made from  
children's knees*, and I said, *I know*  
(over a puffed-up chest). We caught one

glimpse of somebody and fear tightened  
around us. Then the dizzy, screaming run  
downhill! Still, I knew then what I know

today in this hospital: although I'm tubed  
& tendrilled and hurting like hell, that  
you're here and *nothing's gonna get me*.



## THE HUSBAND SUIT

**Shaun Anthony McMichael, MAT**  
**Seattle, Washington, United States**

**<https://shaunanthonymcmichael.com/>**

*Then up got Jack and said to Jill,  
'Brush off that dirt for your not hurt.  
Let's fetch that pail of water.'* –English Nursery Rhyme

Do you remember how young we were  
when we bought this field? Old enough to know  
of the risks, too young to care  
about things like infertility and thirst.

That great teacher of ours talked a lot about living water, yet  
I feel more like Jack and Jill, having to daily draw  
water just to sweat it out again. If we knew  
how hard we'd have to work to get a decent yield,  
would we have bought the field  
in the first place? We might  
have at least waited.

Time has taken us to task, making us fitter  
for the tending and falling. I stumble  
just to find my way up to our well.  
Sometimes I think you 'tumble down after'  
just to make me feel better, just to give  
me an occasion to rise to, to get over my broken  
crown by helping you up, my hurt eclipsed by caring  
for you, by hurry, by thirst. Taking care  
of this 'ours' is my husband suit, my best fitting.

Some seasons we've had only tears for rain,  
like a tide in our separate sets of eyes, lit  
inside by the same fire. Each time we fall,  
we rise a wiser pair, our two lives working  
as one life, feeding each other with hands washed  
not by lye but by earth whose fruit,  
to our mouths, we lift. And maybe this is the water  
by which the teacher meant for us to live.

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## **Nymph among flowers**

**Janis Butler Holm**

**Los Angeles, California, Unites States**

**<https://www.janisbutlerholm.com/>**

**<https://www.laplaywrights.org/member/Janis-Butler-Holm>**

**<https://www.facebook.com/janisbutlerholm>**



*Blood  
Moon*

BY KATHLEEN CHAMBERLIN

## BLOOD MOON – KATHLEEN CHAMBERLIN

"There will be a Blood Moon tonight, Grandma. Mother told me."

Frederick Fallon announced this with the assurance his eleven-year-old self attached to most things his mother told him. His grandmother, Gloria Cole, was kneading what appeared to be pastry when Frederick had taken the seat across from her, tired of the game he had been playing on his tablet. Gloria was a slight woman in all aspects except her hands. They were large and out of proportion to the rest of her, marring what otherwise would have been called "the complete package." They worked the dough as she weighed her response.

"Did she? Well, yes, that's true. The moon will turn red tonight. Did your mother tell you why the Blood Moon is important?"

Frederick squirmed and felt his face redden.

"She didn't really *tell* me. I overheard her talking to Loretta last night when she thought I was asleep."

Gloria added some pungent herbs to the mixture from the glass jars above the window. Her eyes on her grandson were stern. "Some things are not meant for young ears," she said her thick fingers threading the new ingredients throughout her dough. "Your mother meant only for your sister to know."

Frederick ignored that and arrived almost breathlessly at his point.

"Loretta asked Mother if she should stay with you to help. Why would you need help? If you do, Grandma, I could help you. I help a lot around the house with all kinds of chores and Mother says I'm a good helper."

"And so, you are. But there's no need. I'll be fine. I am prepared."

Those were the same words Gloria had spoken to her daughter and all she ever said about the times when a Blood Moon was forecast. Frederick had no idea what "being prepared" meant and his grandmother didn't offer any further explanation. Frederick decided not to ask.

For as far back as his memories went, his grandmother had been an intimidating figure. Her back was straighter then, her hair raven black, not streaked with silver and gray as it was now. The only thing time had not altered were her eyes. They were dark blue, almost navy, but unlike the placid surface of a pool of water, they snapped with energy, eclipsing her other features. He had only recently learned that her legal name was Gloria, but she didn't seem like a Gloria to him. Maybe she wasn't Gloria, at all, he had thought. Maybe it was just a name she was hiding behind to prevent her past from being uncovered. Frederick's imagination conjured up images of a dark secret which, if revealed, would have devastating effects on his family. Something somehow connected to the Blood Moon. He had settled on

## BLOOD MOON – KATHLEEN CHAMBERLIN

this theory as he moved out of childhood into the outskirts of puberty. He had no facts to suggest that he was right, just a feeling in his bones. He didn't yet have the courage to ask his mother, but he knew that he would. Some day, maybe soon.

"Grandma, can I ask you a question?"

"You just did, Frederick," she said as she cut the dough into strips and set them on the cookie sheet. "Is there something you need advice about that you don't want your mother to know?"

Frederick half-smiled, aware of his grandmother's tone and not sure if a smile was appropriate or if he had crossed into a no man's land, littered with landmines, just below the surface of his next words.

"Nothing like that."

Gloria put the tray into the oven and poured a cup of tea. She brought the decanter of whiskey to the table, setting it down next to her tea and waited. She poured a dram of bourbon onto her spoon back, allowing it to disperse evenly in her cup. Still Frederick remained silent, rubbing his chin, trying to find the right words to launch his opening gambit. But they eluded him, and his discomfort grew with his silence.

"Well? What is it? Out with it then. We don't have all day. What do you want to ask?"

"Can you tell me why everyone is worried about the Blood Moon?"

Gloria looked at her grandson and weighed her words before she spoke. "Do you know what a legend is, Frederick?"

"Yes, kinda. It's like a story about something that everybody knows, but nobody can prove, and everybody believes might be true anyway."

Gloria smiled. "Yes, that's about right. When early humans saw things in nature that they couldn't understand, they made up stories to explain them. The Blood Moon frightened them because it was so different. Some believed that a giant animal had devoured the moon and would try to devour the earth as well. It's always been the belief that while the moon is red, the powers of evil are stronger and must be confronted before they can do harm."

Frederick didn't ask who would confront them. He suspected it was his grandmother.

"Can't I stay here with you tonight, when the Blood Moon comes? I can help with whatever you need. I'm nearly twelve and I'm not afraid of anything."

Gloria looked at him over her teacup. She breathed in slowly, closed her eyes for a moment, listening to a voice only she could hear. "I know you're not," she told him, omitting the

## BLOOD MOON – KATHLEEN CHAMBERLIN

second half of her thought: but you should be. She looked out the window at the blazing sun making its steady decent towards the horizon. "I appreciate your offer, Frederick, but I am nearly done. And I won't need help. I told your mother and sister the same thing. Now let me ask you a question. Do you doubt my abilities? or do you think that *if* I required help, I would choose someone who has no knowledge of what is to occur and cannot be taught at the eleventh hour?"

Although Gloria had not raised her voice, Frederick felt the rebuke, each word smarting as if it were the lash of a whip. He was near tears as he tried to explain.

"No! No! I'm sorry, Grandma. I love you and I was worried because Loretta said this one is the *longest* Blood Moon ever and I didn't want you to have to be alone. Nobody who knows you doubts what you can do. Nobody. You can beat the pants off anybody who messes with you. *Everybody* knows it."

"Don't fret, child. Your heart was in the right place and your intentions were good. These responsibilities have been mine for a very long time. There will come a day when I will relinquish them to someone younger. But whoever is chosen will be schooled, as I was."

She reached across the table, capturing his hands in her larger ones and squeezed them lightly. Frederick saw the long silver scar on Grandma's arm and wondered what had caused it. It wasn't quite straight, but it wasn't jagged either. She ran a finger absently over it as she released Frederick's hands. "Now, it's time for you to hurry home. Your mother wanted you home before sunset and you don't have much time. Off you go."

She released her grip and walked him to the door. He went reluctantly, then turned quickly to kiss her cheek and breathed in her smell, an earthy perfume that reminded him of burning leaves. Then he hurried down the steps and turned toward home, his mind filled with unanswered questions about his grandmother and the Blood Moon.

Frederick knew Grandma would watch him until she was certain he had turned the corner, before she would close the door and resume her unfinished tasks. What she wouldn't know was that Frederick was doubling back, cutting through the yard next door. He crept along the side of his grandmother's house, crouching under the window so she wouldn't see him, then hid himself under the canopy of the maple tree in the yard. He would wait and watch. If Grandma needed him, he would be close enough to help. He could see her moving around in the kitchen. He watched as his Grandma unlocked the corner cabinet and withdrew a polished blue bowl, an ornate ebony jar, and a pewter flask. She set them on the table between two blue candles and began to croon a song whose words Frederick didn't understand as she uncorked the flask and poured something green into the bowl. Her melody continued as she stirred herbs from the jar into the bowl before lifting it to her lips and drinking deeply.

As the sky darkened, the air took on a different smell: heavy, and hyper-charged with

## BLOOD MOON – KATHLEEN CHAMBERLIN

energy, like an impending thunderstorm, although the sky was clear. Frederick tried to imagine what might transpire when the full moon turned red. Grandma had almost confirmed those whispered tales of a battle between good and evil. He envisioned spirits rising from their graves, pounding on his grandmother's door. He envisioned a slimy, giant behemoth emerging from the depths of the sea, thrashing and snarling outside his grandmother's door. He scanned the ground and found two sharp stones and put them in his pocket. He would use them against such a creature. He next envisioned a solitary figure dressed in black, carrying a black satchel climbing the steps of his grandmother's porch, the moonlight revealing an ancient dagger. The stones could take care of him, too. Frederick would be a hero and celebrated for his bravery.

The ground around the tree was coated in a sheen of dew, a glistening carpet of green and brown. Everything shimmered in a silvery mist as the moon rose and bestowed its magical light. Frederick felt drowsy as the evening insects began to whisper to one another. Then the change began. The full moon was larger than any Frederick had ever seen. And it was no longer white. It was deep scarlet, casting an otherworldly quality over the house, the lawn, and Frederick.

The ground began to tremble all around him with an undulating carpet of fur. The scampering mass of red-eyed rodents bolted towards the house. Rats. Legions of rats. His two stones would be useless. Frederick held his breath as the wave of rats sniffed the air anxiously. His lungs were about to burst when the door to Grandma's house opened and a figure stepped out, throwing freshly baked thin loaves into the center of confusion. The melee intensified as the rats fought among themselves for the offering. The snarls were accompanied by yelps, and blood began to flow freely from unstaunched wounds, coating the grass.

The figure in the doorway opened its mouth and a high-pitched keening echoed against the ground and sky. Frederick reached for the nearest branch and pulled himself up, first to one, then to another until he felt safe and unseen. The figure who had emerged from his grandmother's house couldn't be anyone other than Grandma. But this woman was dressed in the remnants of the grave, a tattered white shroud. Her hair was loose about her shoulders, streaming behind her as if caught up by the wind. Her eyes were no longer blue, but deep red, no remnant of white remaining. Her mouth was wider and longer, revealing rows of razor-sharp teeth and her hands had doubled in size, ebony talons at the tip of every finger.

When the keening stopped, it was answered by a booming, guttural snarl. The ground shook as the snarls grew closer and more enraged. The woman on the porch stood her ground and opened her arms wide in what could be taken as surrender. Frederick was sure he was going to watch his grandmother die and that he was powerless to stop it. He tried to close his eyes against the scene unfolding but he was transfixed, forced to bear witness. Sleek black fur streaked past him as the creature leaped against his grandmother, its fetid breath making his eyes water. She took the blow full on and it drove her against the wall. Her arms tightened around the head of the beast and twisted it as she drove her teeth into the

## BLOOD MOON – KATHLEEN CHAMBERLIN

underside of its throat. It cried out in surprise, then pain, before one anguished cry escaped its lungs when its neck snapped. The creature sagged limp in his grandmother's arms as she tore pieces of its flesh with her mouth and her hands. Frederick watched as she threw them to the rats. She wiped her mouth on her sleeve, closed her eyes, and slowed her breathing. The Blood Moon was over. She had vanquished the threat to existence once more. She had been prepared. She threw her head back, releasing an otherworldly, triumphant yowl. Then she rose and reentered the house.

The moon was no longer crimson and the world around him had resumed a semblance of normality, but Frederick remained in the tree. He had survived the Blood Moon and witnessed its secret threats and secret cures. He had seen what his grandmother's preparations had produced. Burying his face in the comforting trunk of the tree, Frederick wept.

## CINDERELLA IN SNEAKERS

Laurie Kuntz

Florida, United States

<https://www.facebook.com/laurie.kuntz.7>

<https://kelsaybooks.com/products/talking-me-off-the-roof>

<https://www.finishinglinepress.com/>

<https://lauriekuntz.myportfolio.com/home-1>

She had nothing,  
but work and soot,  
ashes, cinders, and harsh crones,  
who spun envy into a cloak of abuse.

She had her night,  
as if one night could suffice.

When Prince Charming sought  
to fit her life into a slender glass slipper,  
caped in her new-found strength,  
she remembered all eyes on her,  
and the dance she could shimmy to.

Now, with no curfew,  
she flung broom and dust pail  
to her spinster -to- be step-sisters.

Spurning the glass slipper,  
that one day will shatter  
and settle in dusty corners,  
she put on her sneakers,  
stretched her strong legs  
and began to run.

## THE WITCH PRAYER

Genevieve Ray

England

**In the hands of emerald green** In  
hands cut with shame **Facing the**  
**Northern star Facing the**  
**thickening air She, with no**  
**Name**

Just a title

Just a direction

Just a place

**In hands, pointing to the dawn** In  
**fingers an ancient tom**  
**Rocketing into the sky**  
**Vanishing from the world below**  
**She, without a family**

Just a talent

Just a mission

Just an expectation

**In hands shaping destiny** In  
**black cape and gown Graduating**  
**from lonely child To exceptional**  
**magical woman She, with a retold**  
**Story**

Just an emblem

Just a villain

Just a Musical heroine





*Making Room  
For Nora*

BY ELIZABETH BIRD

## MAKING ROOM FOR NORA – ELIZABETH BIRD

If you've never heard of Leonora Blanche Alleyne, you're surely not alone. But if you've ever coveted a Princess outfit, or even rolled your eyes when a favorite niece shows up in a sparkly tiara, you've experienced her legacy.

Though you may not have known it, perhaps your first taste of Leonora's world was *The Blue Fairy Book*, which in 1889 introduced Victorian children to Sleeping Beauty, Rumpelstiltskin, Beauty and the Beast, Hansel and Gretel and over 30 more. Or maybe it was the *Red Fairy Book*, from which you became acquainted with Rapunzel, Jack and the Beanstalk, or even the Enchanted Pig?

But if you remember those books, or any of the dozen *Rainbow Fairy Books*, each with its own distinctive color, you might recall the author whose name was emblazoned on the covers. Andrew Lang, right?

Indeed, a recent edition of the Blue book enthusiastically touts the 37 tales, "narrated in the clear, lively prose for which Lang was famous ... His first-rate literary abilities make his collections unmatched in the English language."

And they are great stories. As a child I owned several of the Rainbow books and used my family's weekly library trips to devour more. I journeyed through the forests of Germany, the fjords of Scandinavia, and far into the Russian steppes. Later volumes, compiled as the flow of more accessible European tales began to run dry, introduced me to the Bunyip, a magical creature from the Aboriginal people of Australia, and the exotic Snake Prince of the Indian Punjab. Those tales lit a spark of curiosity that helped lead me to anthropology, where I made my career.

It wasn't just me, of course. The Fairy Books are a cultural phenomenon, reprinted and repackaged for well over a century, and read all over the English-speaking world. In his time, Lang was a literary giant, gaining fame as a journalist, historian, poet and critic. He was one of the Victorian generation of "armchair anthropologists" – scholars who never left home, but wrote monumental works about the customs, folklore and mythology of "primitive" people across the globe. Lang's fellow-Scot and contemporary, Sir James Frazer, wrote the most celebrated of such tomes – *The Golden Bough*.

Lang himself wrote hundreds of books and articles about world mythology, as well as commentaries and criticism, original stories, and histories of notables from Homer to Mary, Queen of Scots. Along the way, he developed a deep appreciation for the richness of the oral tradition, at a time when many educated people dismissed the old tales as crude and violent.

Some of his sentiments, expressed in his prefaces, grate on us today, such as references to "savages" and "primitives." But his love of ancient myths and tales allowed entry to a world of marvels. As he wrote, "The old fairy tales are really 'full of matter,' and unobtrusively teach the true lessons of our wayfaring in a world of perplexities and obstructions."

## MAKING ROOM FOR NORA – ELIZABETH BIRD

Lang credited fairies with inspiring a love of books, “the magic key that opens the enchanted door.” Much like the Harry Potter series a century later, the Rainbow books were a gateway to young readers and earned a permanent place in our cultural heritage.

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Yet in his introduction to the last volume, *The Lilac Fairy Book*, published in 1910, Lang sounds positively anguished:

“The reputation of having written all the fairy books is ‘the burden of an honour unto which I was not born.’ It weighs upon and is killing me...”

And here's where we finally return to Leonora Alleyne. Known as Nora, she became Mrs. Andrew Lang in April 1875. She shared his love of literature and world cultures, and the couple became a fixture of literary circles in London and Edinburgh. While he was the undisputed star, she published articles and reviews in a wide array of newspapers and magazines. And together they decided that the oral tales of Europe, collected by scholars like the Brothers Grimm, could be reworked to make them child-friendly, without sacrificing the serious themes that some found disturbing. *The Blue Fairy Book* was never intended to launch a series, but its spectacular success demanded more, and color after color was added to the rainbow.

And so, it came to be that for all Andrew's academic renown, “he is best recognized for the works he did *not* write,” as one critic put it. You see, the “clear, lively prose” that delighted young readers was not Andrew's but Nora's. Andrew usually sourced the tales, but Nora, aided by a team of other women writers, translated and wrote them for their young audiences. In *The Green Fairy Book*, the third in the series, he briefly credits the contribution of “Mrs. Lang;” by the time *Lilac* appeared, he acknowledged she was responsible for the entire rainbow, drily noting, “My part has been that of Adam, according to Mark Twain, in the Garden of Eden. Eve worked; Adam superintended.”

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And what work it was! The Rainbow books take us on a wild journey across the world, filled with beautiful princesses, handsome princes, malevolent witches, miraculous transformations, and beings from brownies to banshees to boggarts – though actual fairies are few and far between. Those raised on cartoons may be surprised to see the resourcefulness of so many heroines, even as they are traded from father to husband. It is Gretel whose ingenuity saves the life of her brother Hansel, being fattened up for the witch's supper. One of my favorites was always the strange and mystical Norse tale “East of the Sun, West of the Moon,” which begins with our Princess being sold off to a White Bear. An enchanted bear, naturally. She travels with him to a frozen castle, where every night he lies down beside her and transforms into a dazzling prince. Hmmmm ... She falls in love, loses him, but eventually travels the length of the world, navigating trial after trial, to save her lover from a coerced marriage to a troll. A super-woman indeed.

## MAKING ROOM FOR NORA – ELIZABETH BIRD

All the tales originated with the people, but everywhere we can see Nora's hand at work. It is a delicate hand, bringing hope and benevolent magic. The Grimm brothers gave us the ancient tales in all their gruesome glory – their Cinderella's stepsisters sliced off their toes to fit in the slipper, before having their eyes pecked out by birds. Nora's heroine forgives her nemeses, and even finds them good husbands.

In some editions, the later books included her name on the cover – Mrs. Lang. By then, it was too late for Nora to step out of the shadows. Could Andrew have done more? It's easy to blame him for preventing Nora from receiving her rightful recognition. But by all accounts, he was a good man, with enlightened views – for his time. His public acknowledgment was significant, although probably went unremarked. Sadly, her neglect was a product of her era – a time when the idea of a “woman of letters” was almost inconceivable, especially if she were married.

Nora understood that, even while she used her talent to gently protest. In an article published in 1898, she wryly reflects on the “Trials of a Wife of a Literary Man,” who “must be prepared to be ignored, consciously or unconsciously, by people who are either unaware that she exists at all or are profoundly indifferent to that fact.” The literary wife must patiently listen to her husband expound on his current enthusiasm “morning, noon and night” -- although she draws the line at an invasion of her daily walk. “She must possess her own soul for some part of the day. The demon might breakfast with her, dine with her, mingle with her dreams. But take a constitutional with her? He may not!”

And in a conclusion that reverberates over the years:

“If she, like him, occasionally has a fancy for dabbling in literature, every word she writes (as long as it is worth anything at all) will be ascribed, directly or indirectly, to her husband ... No wonder literary ladies are proverbially somewhat short in their tempers.”

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Nevertheless, the Langs had a happy marriage. In 1912, the year Andrew died, Nora published a collection of her essays – including her advice to literary wives. She writes affectionately of her husband: “we had chosen them together and laughed over them together.” Her last fairy tale collection, the *Strange Story Book*, was published the same year. Her preface, a loving tribute to her husband's inspiration, complicates any simple narrative of the downtrodden wife. She writes about Andrew's love of countryside, cricket and cats. “He never could resist a cat, and cats, like beggars, tell each other these things and profit by them.” Most of all, he loved children: “Wherever he stayed, children were his friends. He would tell them stories and write them plays and go on expeditions with them to ghost-haunted caves. He would adapt himself to them and be perfectly satisfied with their company.”

Nora lived on for 20 years after his death. While I'm sure she mourned him, she was her own woman, and lived a rich and fulfilling life. Fluent in French, she also learned Russian, using it

## MAKING ROOM FOR NORA – ELIZABETH BIRD

not only to read classic literature, but also to communicate with Russian soldiers in British hospitals and camps after World War I. She wrote a novel, *Dissolving Views* (appropriately now available from Forgotten Books), and maintained her flow of sharp-witted magazine articles. She was much more than a literary wife.

Nora and Andrew had no children of their own, which makes me a little melancholy. In the Victorian age, remaining childless was rarely a matter of choice. But perhaps if they had, the world would be a less magical place. Andrew's career would undoubtedly have forged ahead, while Nora would likely have had little time to create her astonishing legacy. That legacy was profound, inspiring generations of readers and writers with new respect for the richness of the folk tradition. J.R.R Tolkien, oblivious of his slight as he wrote from his Oxford study, remarked that without "Andrew Lang and his wife," we might not have the mythical world of Bilbo Baggins, Frodo, and the Ring. C.S. Lewis drew on the Rainbow books for his *Chronicles of Narnia*, and Margaret Atwood, that inspired spinner of fantastical and visionary tales, remembered reading them "with wonder" as a child. As did I.

In recent years, feminist scholars have labored to rehabilitate Leonora, and her contribution is now appreciated in academic circles. But in the popular imagination she remains deep in her husband's shadow. It's a sad irony that the tales most deeply cherished by women are even now defined by "great men." The Grimms, Charles Perrault, Hans Christian Anderson -- even Aesop and Oscar Wilde -- are all there with Andrew Lang in the pantheon of fairy tale collectors and authors. But nothing should be forever; surely, it's past time to make room for Nora?

**A retired professor of anthropology, I have published seven books (most recently *Surviving Biafra: A Nigerwife's Story*), and I now focus on creative non-fiction. My essays appear in *Under the Sun* (winner, Readers' Choice Award 2022), *Tangled Locks*, *Biostories*, *Streetlight*, *Dorothy Parker's Ashes*, *Ariel's Dream*, *The Guardian*, *Mutha Magazine*, *3Elements Review*, *Heimat Review*, and elsewhere. My website is: [www.lizbirdwrites.com](http://www.lizbirdwrites.com).**

# ITHACA

Jen Colclough

Massachusetts, United States

<https://www.jmcolclough.com/>

*I want to leave you with something,*  
the mother says.

*A feeling that swallows every other one,*  
*lovingly.*

She chops her lettuce on the table,  
beheading it.

A mother  
is anyone who looks for you.

Odysseus could have come home sooner.  
The hearths were more than ready,  
Penelope's hand in the doorway,  
doubling as the ground beneath his feet.

*Come home to Ithaca.*  
*Odysseus, come home.*

The mother turns on the stove  
and tosses in the broken heads,  
weeping for none of them.

*I want to leave you with something,*  
she repeats.

And though you don't know why,  
little 'sorrys' fill your mouth like wine.

Dinner isn't ready yet.  
Don't spoil it by swallowing the silence  
down  
& down  
& down.

Silences  
are their own alphabet.  
In classical music,  
the un-played note is also a choice.

The mother  
is asking you to come home  
even as you pass her the salt,  
still trailing three years behind.

Tied to a mast,  
you peel the carrots  
to shield yourself  
as the black-seed sirens chant:  
*Welcome home,*  
*Welcome home,*  
*Come home,*  
*among the rocky breakers.*

You will have many homes  
before you're done  
and most  
will be made of paper.

You will knock on doors  
with bread in your hands  
—an offering.  
And when a man answers,  
you will ask him to  
tell you your name  
in a language you can  
understand.

Inside your body  
lies the potential for violence  
— your task is to beg your own  
forgiveness.

A hand extends,  
but some people  
can only love through windows,  
or gloves,  
their breaths fogging the glass  
they do not dare to breach.

*Come home,*  
the mother says,  
this time in words.

"Dinner is ready."

# FLOWER

BY ALWYN GORNALL



Her laughter and song would carry on the breeze and dance with the dawn chorus. With Cullen, she walked across these fields and through these woods lightly, following the natural trails; documenting the plants and animals and how they interacted and supported each other. That is how they worked their small area of land on the edge of the woodland: working with nature; being sensitive to their impact in this place.

The chrysalis moves in a quick jerking action. Cullen watches intently as the casing splits. A small crack at first, then longer and wider until it bursts open in a rainbow of colours. Everything is squashed together. It looks helpless, hanging from the leaf stem, waiting for the sun's warmth. The wings slowly open and quiver. Cullen looks in wonder as the butterfly breaks away and zig-zags through the air, between the trees, following some imprinted map, until it is out of sight, and he immediately feels that recurring sense of loss.

It's always the same. The same as that devastating day when Elowen faded away as fast as a morning mist under a hot sun. As Cullen held her hand for the last time, he felt the pulse of life leave her. Since that day he wears the loss like a heavy woolen blanket.

Two years becoming accustomed to a new, solitary, routine. Up at dawn to feed the animals and inspect the crops – following their natural cycle of life and death. Repairs to fencing and buildings – watching their decline and renewal. Wandering through the forest – absorbing its energy, soaking up birdsong, breathing in the smell of bark, leaves, flower, and feeling the caress of air as it flows through time. Each day he became closer to nature and now he feels part of it. He stays for as long he can. He's even made himself a shelter of branches, moss, and leaves, where he sleeps most nights during spring, summer, and early autumn.

Today, Cullen sits in the hollow between two tree roots that thrust out from the trunk of a great oak and plunge deep into the earth. A large chrysalis hangs from a sprig of ivy. Its outer coating is hard and rippled like goat horn. It starts to quiver and swing as the butterfly pushes against the hard shell. A split appears at the bottom then widens as it opens along the edge. It breaks away from the ivy, falling onto dry, compact earth. The chrysalis bursts open and a butterfly rolls into a dust hollow. It lays still, curled up into a tight ball. A breeze flows through the trees and a rain of dew drops falls onto the still body. There's a slight movement and the wings start to spread – as they stretch out, they become slender arms; delicate fingers open to feel the cool forest air. The body unfurls and two legs stretch out. Elowen stands up with her back to him and shakes her head. Her hair streams out and tumbles over her shoulders, pulsating with a rainbow of colours in the dappled sunlight. Her skin shimmers with the green and brown shades of Mother Nature. She turns, smiles, and as she takes his hand; Cullen feels the woolen blanket fall away. She leads him through the trees, lightly; becoming one with the forest.



## BEAUTY AND THE BEAST

Duane Anderson  
La Vista, Nebraska, United States

Two knees sit before me.  
I never thought I would call  
one of my knees beautiful,  
but as I look at both of them  
after a surgery to repair one,  
I now call one beauty, and the other beast.

Beauty, the boney one,  
and beast,  
the one branding a new scar  
down its front, swollen,  
after taking a beating from the surgeon's knife,  
along with plenty of scabs from a rash.

The beast, having a fierce competition  
with my face. They could be twins.

Now, newfound friends,  
with something in common.  
They are in love with each other,  
while I, once again, lose out.



## TAKE ME TO NEVERLAND

Linda M. Crate  
Meadville, PA, United States

let's write our own fairy tale,  
you can be Tinkerbelle  
and i'll be Wendy;

this time it's a love story  
and the magic is in our love

more than that faerie dust—

i'll write my books and show you  
whispers of light from the moon  
of my soul,  
and you'll silhouette me in all of  
your golden sunshine and show me  
every shade of green;

we'll build our dreams  
twining ourselves deeper and  
deeper in our love—

they'll understand then that  
no laws could ever stop love,

because love is beautiful no  
matter what shape she takes;  
so take my hand and take me  
to never never land because reality  
is too heavy and too harsh  
for me to accept.

## JACK WHO...?

Karuna Mistry

United Kingdom

<https://karunacreations.wordpress.com/>

<https://www.instagram.com/karunamistrypoetry/>

Morning lads, I'm looking  
For a chap named Jack  
Have you seen him?

Saw him last autumn  
Was into scary costumes  
I recall the Jack O' Lantern

You mean mechanic Jack?  
Worked at the local garage  
Further down our road

Was telling stories all the time  
Yeah, like Jack & Jill or  
Jack & The Beanstalk

Always eating his favourite food  
Jacket potato with cheese  
And Jackfruit for dessert

Thought he was a plumber?  
No sir, Jack of all trades he is  
Joined the workers' union too

Is that the famous Union Jack?  
United the land, fine lad  
God bless him and his soul!

Hmm, I think I know Jack  
Always brought his own playing cards  
Ace, King, Queen and ...Prince

Funny, saw him at the casino once  
Yes, that was Black Jack that night  
He even wore four suits

He was always at the gym, that chap  
Jumping Jack, number one  
No one could ever beat him

Those well-toned muscles  
And high stamina, all jacked up  
- Could only be pumping drugs

My, what a jackass idiot!  
Must be some kind of donkey  
...Or mule, whichever

Soon after, he stowed away  
Flew on a cargo plane  
A real Jack in the box

Where did he end up?  
Australia or somewhere  
What a silly Jackbird!

You may have heard  
Many more tales  
Of Jack as whoever

But we still don't know  
Who Jack really is  
Or what he'll do next...

How Macaw The Messenger  
Brought Rain

BY AVA WOLFE



## HOW MACAW THE MESSENGER BROUGHT RAIN – AVA WOLFE – USA

One day Macaw was flying around on her normal patrol for any trouble occurring among the people. She half expected to find Jaguar harassing a band of hunters, but he was nowhere to be seen. Nevertheless, Macaw continued flying cautiously, over mountains, meadows, and creeks.

Finally, something caught her attention. Macaw was taken aback when she spotted a tribe in a clearing waving their arms towards the sky. Their cries reached Macaw, and this is what she heard: *"We are hungry! There has been famine and disease in our land. We can't survive much longer!"*

Macaw landed on a snag, shocked, and said, "I didn't realize this part of the land was dying. I must find some way to help these people. I'm the messenger, after all, so it's my job to care for them." So, she promised the tribe that relief would come very soon.

Determined to find out some way to help the tribe, Macaw flew higher to hide in another tree to think.

"There has to be some way to wash away the disease and restore water to earth to refill the rivers and lakes again." She pondered for a moment longer but was interrupted by the tree she was perched on. It had started to move!

Yet Macaw was only surprised for a minute. Her presence often awoke the more ancient of trees so they could share their wisdom with her; she had forgotten this fact because she'd been so deep in thought.

The tree started to talk saying, "Hello, Macaw, I must have dozed off! I know what troubles you; I was listening but couldn't react because of my dreamlike slumber. I will offer you some advice to help save us. You must ask the Sky Gods to give up some of their water and give it back to earth. This way the people can grow medicine to become well again. My, am I thirsty..." (The earth was so young at that point, that it had never needed water returned to it.)

Macaw was thankful for this idea and thanked the tree before he fell asleep out of exhaustion again. Because of its good deed she left one of her feathers on the ground to sustain the tree and his neighbors until water returned. She whispered a promise to them that she would ask the Sky Gods to return water to earth.

Macaw was going to tell this good news to the tribe when she stopped in midair and thought to herself, "Every living thing is depending on me, and I can't waste any time. They have hope in me. I will go to the Sky Gods right now."

After Macaw had gained some altitude, she found a stable section of cloud to rest on. There, she transformed into a human so that the huge Sky Gods could see and hear her better.

## HOW MACAW THE MESSENGER BROUGHT RAIN – AVA WOLFE – USA

When she was ready, she continued her ascent towards the Sky Tower.

The Sky gods and goddesses, including Sun and Sunray, Moon and Moonbeam, recognized Macaw right away and welcomed her, listening to what she had to say.

Macaw was in a rush. "Please, my friends, I need your help! The people need you to be generous and keep the earth flowing with water. For the first time there has been a drought and severe disease at the same time."

The gods and goddesses didn't hesitate for a second, for they trusted Macaw and this news disturbed them. "We will return water to the people and animals of earth, and it will be called rain," they replied.

The gods and goddesses went lower into the clouds. They all linked hands, making a long chain. One of them, who was positioned the closest to the mountain peaks, reached out their hand. Life water from all the Sky Gods combined flowed out of their fingers, turning into all forms of precipitation, including rain, snow, sleet, and hail.

Upon seeing this, Macaw was grateful again but started down briskly towards earth, turning back into a bird as she fell through the dark clouds. There could be a new problem if the tribes didn't figure out how to protect themselves from the heavy rain. Luckily, there were spider monkeys nearby. Macaw commanded them to spread the news as quickly as possible and in all four directions to get to higher ground.

The excitement eventually ended, and the earth was restored again. The rain fell for many hours, in order to fill up the lakes and rivers again. The people were relieved and grateful after the rain let up and they could plant again, the trees thanked the Sky Gods. Even Jaguar postponed his tricks to let everyone refresh and relax. Now, every time there is drought and famine, the Sky Gods remember Raven's loyalty and give rain.

## MORE THAN ONCE UPON A TIME

Ken Gosse  
United States

On the first day of spring Adam found he was sprung  
(an amazing physique which was very well hung)  
but he hadn't a clue what that one piece was for  
till a rib was removed and was tossed on the floor  
(or the ground, we should say, since it wasn't a room—  
without roof, doors, or windows, no need to assume  
that a visiting neighbor would soon make a call—  
there was no need for privacy, none for a wall  
in those days before anyone else would arrive)  
then he noticed his spare rib had started to thrive.

On the first day of summer, young Eve came around,  
more lithesome and lovely than all else he found  
and he noticed another bone rising in awe,  
overwhelmed by the shape of the creature he saw.  
The hint of her smile would entice his first grin  
and he sensed what he thought was original—sin—  
when she reached for an apple and offered a bite  
as they fell to the ground where they spent their first night.

The first fall arrived with their fall before dawn  
(the seasons were young; summer came and was gone)  
but the sunrise that day brought a chill to the air  
and the garden they lay in was suddenly bare  
because winter had brought the first fall to its close  
and the cold, not their shame, showed them they needed hose,  
pants, and shirts, even hats to protect their bare breasts,  
thighs and nethers and heads, from their toes to their crests  
as they headed out east in their search for fresh loam.  
Where the first day had dawned, they might find a new home.

Soon, spring sprung again as did women and men  
from the body of Eve since they still had a yen  
for the apple they tasted upon their first date—  
hence an orchard was first to put food on their plate.  
They tilled and they toiled, they roasted and boiled  
the food that was needed to feed their new brood  
but it seems that today, though they each had their way,  
their descendants condemn that first coupling as lewd.



# The Window

BY CATHERINE A. COUNDJERIS



## THE WINDOW – CATHERINE A. COUNDJERIS – FREDERICK, MD, USA

Once upon a time there was a woman who sat by a large picture window overlooking a wooded area. She could watch the seasons pass by and was always enchanted by their beauty and the antics of the wildlife. Birds, deer, and squirrels visited, and passed by her view, as well as an occasional fox or two. She loved to watch all the foraging that went on and was impressed with their hard work and beautiful coats and feathers. Her favorite was a bright-eyed wren with up turned tail and a russet back. It never stayed long but when it alighted by the window it lifted the woman's spirits.

This was good because the woman lived alone, and she was very sad indeed. She longed for company and thought how merry it would be if the animals could speak.

Now as the seasons filed past, they were getting progressively harsher. The summers were hotter, and the winters were colder and snowier. The spring and fall were getting shorter and shorter. This did not dim their beauty in the eyes of the woman. It only made the change of color dearer, and the new green of spring more precious.

Soon a winter befell unlike all the others. It snowed and it snowed with little relief. The woman put out seeds, nuts, and peelings for her wild friends, and watched with eager eyes as they supped. But it got colder and colder and she noticed her little friends were so cold they could hardly move. So, she opened up her window and invited them in to sit on the sill to warm up. Some little birds came right up to the open window and looked at her with their shiny eyes, taking seeds from her extended hand, but they did not come in. Only a bold, grey squirrel hopped in and took a nut, but it didn't stay. It came and went gathering a supply. Upon seeing this the other little ones did the same. They came to the sill and warmed themselves and took the fresh supply of food and darted back out into the elements. They did this all winter long and into the early spring.

She spoke to them with soothing words trying to win their trust and maybe just maybe start up a conversation with one. But all the animals were silent when they came to the window. Not a peep or a growl or a sigh did they give off.

She did not see her favorite wren, but there were juncos and sparrows and a cardinal couple. They were joined by two silver squirrels and a chipmunk. She only kept the window open when she sat there in the morning with her cup of coffee, but the animals soon got used to the routine. As the days passed the same few came to sup at her window, but gradually they were joined by others who heard about the buffet she offered them. The same rhythm played out. She would feed them, and they would take a little at time careful not to get too close. This continued well into summer when Maisy started to get troubling calls and confusing notices in the mail which disturbed her greatly. She chose to ignore them all and continued to engage with her animal friends.

Once while feeling worried about the letters her favorite wren came upon the sill and sang to her in the loveliest of voices. It hopped right onto her finger as she sat with the window opened. Her heart leapt and she believed it was a sign that things would be okay in the end. Days went by just like the others, and so she fell into the rhythm of feeding her friends.



Until one day, several crows alighted on the windowsill and the other little animals and birds scattered back away. The old lady was not choosy as to which animal needed her help. She fed the crows as happily and generously as she did the others. A pattern soon developed that the crows would feast after the songbirds, squirrels and chipmunks. They would come in waves like a great dance of life. This happened day after day for a whole month in late autumn.

Sometimes the crows would come with presents for her. Usually organic things like leaves, mushrooms, and pretty rocks. But sometimes they would give her shiny things and once they came with a beautiful gift: a thin sterling band ring. She always acted quite pleased and thanked them profusely, giving them extra treats such as oranges, suet, and sunflower seeds.

They were quiet voracious eaters though and soon her supply started to dwindle, and she had to go into town for more. She got into her old jalopy and drove the 20 miles into town over hills and meadows and forests and bought her own food and bags of seeds and nuts enough to get her through the next cold winter.

### **Part II - In Town**

To an observer at the store, she appeared to be a small round figure with long silver hair wrapped up on top of her head and beautiful dimples upon her ruddy cheek. She had smiles for all the people she ran into, but she said very little to them. The clerk noticed she had two sparkling blue eyes clear as a summer sky. She didn't come often to the store, but he was used to seeing her several times a year and remembered her because she was so quiet and peaceful. She reminded him of his own dead grandmother.

It was then that he was very upset to see a newcomer in town, approaching her with a gleam in his eye and a plastic grin on his Ken-doll face. He had already visited quite a lot of families in the area and the clerk knew it was bad news. The town was a buzz with the awful story.

"Ms. Attleboro? Hello my name is Tom Bracken. Can I have a word?"

She turned to face him such a petite woman against his massive form. He had to stoop to meet her eyes. "I have been trying to reach you. My office has been attempting to contact you for months. You haven't returned my calls."

"I am not interested in your offer. I am not moving," she insisted with her soft voice.

The grin didn't leave his face as he spoke, "The bank notified me that they are going ahead with the foreclosure on your estate, and they are willing to sell my company your property."

"They have no right! It was my father's property, and it was all paid for!" she said firmly.

"You haven't kept up with the taxes it would seem. At your age you should downsize anyway," he said in an ingratiatingly kind voice.

"It's my home," she sighed visibly shaken.

"You will have to vacate the premises within the month. I'm sorry to tell you this, but we are going to begin building the Datacenter in the spring and need to clear the land to lay the groundwork," he explained jangling something in his pocket and shifting as if he had a better place to be.

"I'm afraid you are mistaken. It is my home, and I am not going anywhere. Excuse me. I have to get back," she said and continued out of the store without waiting for his reply.

### **Part III - Homeward Bound**

That afternoon she decided not to stop at the diner like she usually did. But to pick up as many supplies as she could afford and head back home as soon as possible. The sky was a heavy grey, and the air was cold, and she suspected that there was going to be some more weather. That developer had no brains on him. This land would not be cleared willingly. And out her way the wilderness had a mind of its own. Where would the bears and wolves go if they took down their forest?

And what of the others she knew and loved? Where would they go? No, she won't think about it. It was all too upsetting. She drove her jalopy at a moderate pace and all the town traffic dwindled away and a few tractors were her only company. Soon as she headed towards the mountain they faded away as well.

After a while a few flakes fell. It was light snow at first, but then the wind began to blow, and the visibility was limited. She slowed down considerably and continued at a crawl. A few farmhouses dotted the landscape, and they were lit up as afternoon turned to evening. And then it was just Maisy on a mountain road all by herself. Her farm was the one at the top of the mountain. Fortunately, she had changed her tires and had her chains in place. She knew she would make it. Though she worried a little. Anything could happen up here away from everyone and everything.

When she reached her estate, as the man called it, she had just enough time to get her supplies put away and her fire started before the real storm took hold. It had all the ear markings of a doozy as her father used to say.

She looked out her picture window and just as the light was disappearing the shroud of woods in the distance were shadowy and mysterious. She hoped her little friends had a good cozy place to spend the night. She was very grateful for her home and trembled to think of spending such a night anywhere else.

The snow was coming down fast and all definition had disappeared as everything outside

was covered up in a thick and mounting blanket of snow. She fixed herself a cup of coco and wrapped a pale blue knitted shawl about her thin shoulders. She took a book down from the shelf and began to read a fairy story called "The Happy Prince" by Oscar Wilde. She fell into the solemn story, crying with joy at the end. She moved on to another story about a Nightingale and realized that she wished life could be a fairy tale where the good prevailed against the miscreants of the world. With these thoughts dancing through her head, she fell into a deep winter sleep.

### **Part IV - A Visitor**

Awakening to a tapping at her door, it was an odd sound, nothing like a knock, and she startled awake thoroughly discomfited by the thought of a visitor. She looked about her and saw that it was morning. The sun streamed in through her picture window now a bit covered by a layer of snow and ice. Already there were birds gathering there and a squirrel, too sitting on its hind legs with his nose pressed up against the glass a good deal higher than the sill because of all the snow. The squirrel was at her eye level, as she stood there and looked out.

The tapping commenced again, and she was curious when none of the animals scattered away from an impending intruder.

She went to her door and opened it wide and there was snow up to her shins against it. She would have to shovel her doorstep and walkway. She looked out and saw crows gathered about the front of her house, sitting on the bushes on either side of the door; one perched in the crepe myrtle and another in the dogwood. Several walked about the surface of the icy snow and looked at her expectantly. And then the most remarkable sight caught her eye, coming from around the corner of the house. It was a little bundle of coat and mittens, and scarf and hat with two green eyes looking back at her apprehensively.

"What have we here?" she asked the crows and they looked at her proprietorially as if they had brought her the greatest present of all.

"Well, come here my darling. What is your name?" she asked the small child.

The bundle came closer on tiny feet and Maisy could see long gold hair rippling down her back over her winter coat.

"My name is Annabelle. And I am...I am lost...can you please help me?" she asked with a high, little voice.

"Why of course I can help you. Come in come it and warm yourself!" she cried and took hold of the mittened hand and guided her inside by the fire. Maisy put another log on right away and helped the little girl out of her coat. Standing before her was a very young child of six.

## THE WINDOW – CATHERINE A. COUNDJERIS – FREDERICK, MD, USA

Maisy wrapped the child in a blanket and sat her on the armchair nearest the fire.

"I got lost when my family came up for a drive," she said in a matter-of-fact tone.

"And how did you do that?" asked Maisy conversationally, trying to make the dear feel at home.

"I saw a beautiful silver fox and followed it and soon lost sight of everyone. I've been walking and walking and almost gave up when something strange happened."

"What was that?" Maisy asked as she fixed her hot chocolate.

"A black crow hopped down in front of me and stared at me with its black, black eyes. And then it said, *Follow me. Follow me*, as plain as day!" said Annabelle.

Maisy was so startled she spilled a little of her milk as she poured it out for the hot drink. "It talked to you, or you thought it talked to you?" she asked incredulously.

"It talked to me with clear words!" said Annabelle.

"Are you sure child?" asked Maisy setting down the milk carton.

"Why don't you believe me? You could go outside and ask them yourself!" she declared pointing at the door. "They all talked to me. The fox and the bear that kept me warm overnight. They all spoke in perfect English. That it is how I knew not to be afraid."

"Of course, you did, child," said Maisy stirring the cup. She set it down in front of Annabelle who clapped her hands and cried, "This is just like Christmas!" And the child crossed her arms and had a big pretend pout on her pretty little lips,

"I am not a child!" But then she relented and took the hot chocolate in her hands and said, "Thank you ma'am."

"You can call me Maisy, dear heart," said the older woman as she went to the door and opened it up. She had every intention of talking to the crows herself, but they were all gone.

"There at your window, Maisy," said Annabelle as she blew on her drink.

And they all were. Even the bear and the fox were at the window peering in at them.

Maisy was taken aback not having fed the bear before, but something about all their intelligent little faces made her trust them, and she walked over to the window and opened it. A squirrel hopped right onto the sill, and Maisy reached into the nearby bag of nuts and gave him one. He took it eagerly but would not leave. He held it in his little paws and looked at her intently, and then chattered at her in quite a conversational tone.

“He wants more than that, Maisy. And so do the others,” said Annabelle from her perch on the armchair. Indeed, the animals were making a lot of calls and clucks and grunts and groans, and they sounded almost human.

“What do you mean more?” asked Maisy a little alarmed.

“I’m afraid they’ve heard my father talking with his work friend, and they are not happy,” said Annabelle primly taking a little sip.

“What did they overhear?” asked Maisy wanting to know more herself.

“Well, you see, Daddy is a builder. He plans on taking down the forest and building a great big data processing center.”

“Whatever for? Isn’t there enough cities and city things in the world, and all the forests are vanishing away! That is terrible,” fumed Maisy forgetting that she was in the presence of a little girl. Annabelle must belong to the developer. “What was his name? Tom—

“Bracken,” offered Annabelle.

“What do the animals want?” asked Maisy coming back to the point of their conversation. She didn’t much want to talk about Mr. Bracken. It wasn’t Annabelle’s fault who her father was.

“They want you to help me. They want you to stop him,” said Annabelle in her tiny voice.

“Well, I would like to help, but I don’t know if I have any pull with your father or your father’s sort. Oh dear!” Maisy let out a huge sigh. The fox had come up to the windowsill and was sniffing around looking like he wanted a treat. He emitted a couple of sounds that seemed like he was trying to speak to them. She could almost hear frustration in his voice. Maisy put a handful of nuts and seeds on the windowsill. Then she brought over some fruit.

The animals feasted and Annabelle spoke to each of them. The bear especially liked eating grapes from Annabelle’s little hands. All that morning while Maisy drank coffee, she watched the child feeding the animals and chatting amiably with them as if they were speaking right back at her and could understand every word, she said to them. Maisy was a witness to all the commotion but didn’t quite understand them like Annabelle did: however, she did notice their intelligent eyes and their gentle ways with the child. Something was afoot and Maisy was right in the middle of it.

### **Part V Three Days of Snow and Ice**

After a while, the animals and birds receded back into the woods and the snow began to fall again. Lightly at first, but soon it was blowing like mad, and the visibility was very poor. Too poor for Maisy to drive in. Maisy had tried to call the town and let them know that Annabelle

was safe up on the mountain lodge, but her phone did not have any service. It was as if the towers were out. They were cut off for the remainder of the storm at least.

But this was no normal storm. It was as if the old Mountain herself would not let go of them. The snow fell all day and into the night. And then the temperatures dropped quite low until all the top layer of snow was icy and too hard to dig out.

They snuggled down by the fire and Maisy told Annabelle beautiful fairy stories reading her Oscar Wilde and Hans Christian Anderson tales. Sometimes Maisy didn't even have to read them but told them from memory which really delighted the little girl with all her marvelous voices and her deep rich singing voice.

For Annabelle imagined that Maisy was like a fairy godmother and that her cabin on the mountain was a magic place where all the living creatures could find refuge. For the worse the weather became, little visitors would come from the wood, enter through the window, and bed down near the fire until they had two bears, two fox, two coyotes, and a flock of various birds as well as the little animals such as squirrels and chipmunks and a few mice. They all nestled in front of the fire on the oriental rug in one big circle of life. And the wren sat right on Maisy's shoulder.

Try as she might Maisy could not understand the animal's speech except to witness, they did have a language, and they were quite raucous at times. She had never had so much excitement in the long years she lived on the mountain. There was something giddy and joyful about it as well as solemn and sacred. As if she were involved in a great Council of nature trying to find a solution to their coming doom.

For soon the storm would end and the temperatures would go up and there would be mud and officers of the law looking for Annabelle.

### **Part VI The Resolution: A Happy Father**

On the third day, Maisy tried her phone for the millionth time, but it finally went through, and she reached the police department.

“Yes, I have Annabelle Bracken here with me. She has been safe through all the storms. Yes, we have tried to reach out to you before, but the phones weren't working. Of course, she can speak to her father. Here you go, Annabelle, it's your Daddy.”

“Daddy! Have I got a story to tell you! Maisy has been ever so nice to me! She lives in a beautiful lodge! You have to see it! I can't wait to see you either!”

She handed the phone back to Maisy, and Maisy found herself on the phone with Tom Bracken. There was an awkward silence and then Mr. Bracken asked for directions and said he would make his way up soon, with a snowplow, to get through all the weather to see his daughter. They should be there by mid-morning.

## THE WINDOW – CATHERINE A. COUNDJERIS – FREDERICK, MD, USA

After Maisy hung up, she felt let down. She wasn't sure what she was expecting, but she was hoping for something, and it had not transpired. She would miss the little Annabelle. She had filled all the corners of her home. And now she would be going and soon, soon they would be tearing down the wood and she would have to move away from her beloved home....

But she didn't have time to fret because all the animals were at the window. They were calling out in their many different languages and Annabelle was listening with a rapt expression on her face. Then she reached into the seed bag and started feeding them.

"Yes, yes! I will do my best! I will do as you say!" she told them, but what she was promising Maisy had no idea, for she still could not hear the animals speak in English as Annabelle insisted that they could.

"When my father gets here, I am going to speak to him," said Annabelle. You will have to back me up!" she said in a serious tone to Maisy.

"Of course, child. I will support you. But what a strange thing to say!" laughed Maisy as she made some oatmeal.

A couple of cardinals had flown into the kitchen countertop, and the little wren was perched on the banana holder. They were all singing to her and giving her a serious scolding.

"What is this all about?" asked Maisy laughing at their antics.

"They are telling you to ask my father for a boon."

"A boon? What language my dear!" laughed Maisy.

"You know what they mean. Daddy will want to give you a reward," said Annabelle her dimples were showing prettily on her shining face.

And Maisy knew just what she would ask for. She would ask Tom Bracken to spare the mountain and the forest. She would stand up for all the animals and for the spirits in the woods. She would ask for a reprieve of sorts. Whatever that Tom Bracken could arrange.

She didn't have to argue with him. Tom Bracken had had an experience with a bear that pushed his snow plow out of a large snowbank. To his amazement the bear stood on its hind legs and talked to him in his bear language. Tom didn't understand, but he it opened his mind and heart up to possibilities.

He was so glad to see his daughter alive and safe that he was willing to grant Maisy's wish in the first few moments of arriving at her cabin home. He pulled out his paperwork from his ever-present brief case and wrote a contract right then and there giving Maisy's property

back to her and included the mountain and the woods in his arrangements with her. They would remain pristine and untouched for as long as Maisy lived.

And in truth it is still rumored that Maisy is living and in good health up on top of the Mountain. Remarkable good health, for the forest is lush and thick and full of life and the lodge at the top of the mountain is always bustling with activity with Annabella's family visiting and bringing their children and grandchildren to meet their fairy godmother every summer and every Christmas.

Catherine's poetry is published in literary magazines, including Paper Dragons, Kaleidoscope, Jalmurra, Cholla Needles, Bewildering Stories, The Raven Review, Open Door Magazine, Stone Hill Journal, Honeyguide, Zephyr Review, Phare, Blue Bird Word, Life and Legends, Jonah Magazine Avatar, Heart of the Flesh Literary Magazine, and Home Planet News. She also has stories published in Proem, Quail Bell, and KeepThings on Instagram. She has published an essay, "Éowyn as Light Bearer," in an anthology from Luna Press called *Not the Fellowship Dragon's Welcome*. In addition, she recently published an essay, "The Christian Fellowship" in a Luna Press anthology called *Follow Me*. Catherine is passionate about adult literacy and ESL learning.





## **BOWL OF BLACK PETUNIAS**

**Michael Lee Johnson**

**Downers Grove, IL, United States**

<https://www.illinoispoets.org/>

If you must leave me, please  
leave me for something special,  
like a beautiful bowl of black petunias—  
for when the memories leak  
and cracks appear  
and old memories fade,  
flowers rebuff bloom,  
sidewalks fester weeds  
and we both lie down  
separately from each other  
for the very last time.

## **I'VE BEEN WRITING THIS SONG SIXTY YEARS.**

**Kelley Jean White**

**Philadelphia, PA, United States**

I wanted to name myself Sparrow  
though I'd never heard that bird's song,  
I had walked through three houses with rage  
and forgotten the cause of my pain  
and my mind had filled up with such smoke  
I decided to name myself Ice.

And I'd move to a house made of ice  
beneath the deep snow where the sparrow  
might heal, be reborn through the smoke  
of those nights and relearn her song.  
I knew ice was good to numb pain  
but it wasn't a known cure for rage.

I was proud of it, carried my rage  
out into the bright sky of ice  
I'd forgotten the cause of the pain,  
thought soon I would fly, little sparrow  
and surely, I'd grow my own song  
mind clearing its memory of smoke—

I forgot hidden flame made new smoke,  
hadn't known hidden pain made new rage.  
I found I had no gift for song  
and my voice had been numbed by the ice.  
The bird I had chosen, the sparrow  
could not fly high enough to leave pain.

It kept ruling my life, that pain  
though I had forgotten it's source. Smoke  
hid memories in the little bird, Sparrow,  
my little girl heart. She whispered to me rage  
was his message, born of ice,  
winter wind and cold struggle. Her song  
wanted the voice of an eagle, a song  
less her own than the pain's.

Like wind chimes of ice  
it rattled in sunshine and through smoke.  
I owned this new song of rage,  
whistled by the little wise sparrow.

Oh, bird born of smoke, little Sparrow,  
lullaby, cradle, this little girl's pain,  
teach her song born of rage, melt her ice.

## THE WOLF AND THE SEVEN YOUNG KIDS

Mark Hudson  
United States

(Based on the Grimm's Fairy Tale)

Once there was a goat with seven kids,  
no one loved them as much as she did.  
She had to go to the forest on a mission,  
She said, "Avoid the wolf. Use suspicion."

She knew the wolf liked to eat goats,  
and if he ate all seven, he would bloat.  
So off she went into the woods,  
hoping her seven kids would be good.

Sure enough, the wolf appeared,  
"Open up," he cried, and they feared.  
But his voice was rough, and gruff,  
the goat children called his bluff.

The wolf came in a different disguise,  
he caught the children by surprise.  
He ate them all with an intense hunger,  
the only one who escaped was the younger.

The wolf fell asleep underneath a tree,  
when the mother returned, shocked to see.  
The younger one called to her, alive,  
they went to see if the wolf did survive.

He slept under a tree, belly full,  
but he ate all the children whole!  
The mother took scissors, opened his tummy,  
and the kids leaped out of the dummy.

The mother placed in the stomach stones,  
and back together, the stomach was sewn.  
The wolf woke up and stumbled to a well,  
and to his death, the big bad wolf fell.  
The family of goats was reunited,  
and that left the family very excited.

## TRAILS OF GLITTER

Pratibha Savani  
United Kingdom

<https://www.facebook.com/pratibhapoetryart>

<https://www.instagram.com/pratibhapoetryart>

Shimmer glides as they pass on by  
Kicking freely in air  
They somersault and sigh

Beautiful stretches of colours flow  
Magical gentle beings  
With an impressive horn that is  
powerful

Trails of rainbow glitter  
Drift infinitely high  
Leaving their mystical mark  
As they touch the blue sky

Every time we see  
A glimmer or a glow  
They sparkle in the sunshine  
We just don't ever know!



A decorative border of watercolor-style flowers and foliage surrounds the central text. The border includes large yellow flowers, green leaves, ferns, and small purple and orange blossoms.

# *Aslan & Coco*

BY KIMBERLY REISS

## ASLAN & COCO – KIMBERLY REISS – TEXAS/CALIFORNIA UNITED STATES

When I enter the wardrobe, I am wearing jean shorts, flip flops and a red t-shirt, completely forgetting that it's probably cold in Narnia, at least colder than the 90 degrees it is today in Austin, Texas. It's inky black inside the wardrobe, so I put my hands out in front of me, and grab onto what I believe is a fur coat. I am rushing. As my eyes adjust, I rummage through the bottom of the wardrobe and put on the first two furry boots I can find, a hat, gloves, a scarf and some wool pants. Anything to stay warm. Bundled up, from head to toe, I push my way through the rest of the hanging fur coats and then come out the other side in Narnia.

It's all white, the ground is entirely covered in pure, untouched snow. The Fir trees are dusted, like God sprinkled powdered sugar on the tops. It's Friday, market day in Narnia. As much as I would love to take my time and browse, find the best Turkish Delight and maybe some maroon pears to bring back home, I have no Narnian currency, and I am on a mission. I need to find Aslan. It is urgent and time is ticking. I have a message for him that he must know before 12 noon, or 12:15 the latest. I start walking up a cobblestone path that has been scraped free of snow. I think this is the right way, it looks a little bit familiar. But, since I'm short on time, I turn to the illuminated lamp posts and shout,

Am I going the right direction to find Aslan?

The lamp post flickers on and off, and its metal post bends in the direction I'm walking, so I take that as a yes.

Bless you lamp post! I shout behind me as I pick up the pace to a run.

I'm panting and sweating underneath all these suffocating layers but keep moving until I see a hill off to my left.

Thank you, cobblestone path! I yell and begin trekking up the side of the hill.

The powdery snow comes up to my knees, so I have to take big, wide, almost comical steps. When I reach the top of the hill, I see him, sitting atop a low stone throne. He is bigger, even more regal-looking and glorious in real life.

Aslan! I say, panting in front of the throne.

Yes, my human child. he says, looking deep into my eyes.

Aslan, I need you to know that my beloved Coco is dying at 12:00 human time. Central Standard Time, to be precise. Could you please insure her a safe passage to the other side? She she saved my soul from despair 14 years ago, and I need to be sure she knows how eternally grateful I am for her love and friendship. Can you please tell her?

Yes, my human child. I knew you were coming, for Coco is a sister to me and my kind. You can be assured that she will have an easy and safe passage. She also wants me to tell you that she is equally grateful to you for your love and care. You gave her a most adventurous

## ASLAN & COCO – KIMBERLY REISS – TEXAS/CALIFORNIA UNITED STATES

and precious life. But, as is true of all living things, it is her time. She is ready to go, and she is suffering. Thank you, dear Aslan, I say.

My human child, Aslan says with deep tenderness, You must go now. She is waiting for you. Okay, I say. I throw my arms around his neck, and let my face bury into the deep inches of his fur. He is musty earth mixed with a sweet, rich nutmeg.

I turn and run as fast as I can in my big boots. Down the hill, tripping, tumbling, wet snow covers me. I reach the cobblestone path and pick up the pace, sprinting past the lamp posts who bow slightly as I pass. I am running faster than I ever have. I dart past the market, a blur of red, orange, green, purple. I stop suddenly, and search for the wardrobe. In my haste to reach Aslan, I didn't look for any landmarks. I search the trees, on my knees in the deep snow looking for clues, and cry out,

Help me, please help me find the wardrobe! I am running out of time!

A little chipmunk hops up right in front of me and points with his tiny paw. He guides me exactly to the place where the wardrobe sits! Out of site you don't know its there, and perfectly visible if you do. I bend down as low as I can go, look into the tiny black eyes of the chipmunk and nod my head in thanks. He nods back. I push through the heavy wooden door with all my weight and am hit in the face by the wardrobe smell. I grab one wet boot and pull it off, then the other, then the soaked coat, hat, scarf and gloves. Usually very orderly, but with no time to spare, I leave everything on the ground, grab my flip-flops and push through the other door.

I am back in my bedroom in Austin, sitting on my bed. The sun is shining in slits through the half-way closed blinds. I see my husband, holding Coco's head in his lap, and Coco, splayed out, frothy grey fur around her mouth, panting in short breaths on her bed, which is in the middle of our bed. The vet sits on the bed frame's wooden edge, close to Coco, flicking a long syringe. Our new puppy sits as still as I have ever seen her, just her nostrils moving, staring directly at Coco. The vet told us that other dogs in the pack can smell when a pack member is dying, and it's important for them to be present, so they're not confused when the dying pup is gone. My husband is stroking Coco's head, and I am taking in her cedar-scented, brindled, thick fur in my fingers, and tell her over and over, I love you Coco, I love you Coco. Thank you, Coco.

It's time, the vet whispers.

I watch as she pulls apart the fur to get to Coco's skin and injects the needle deep into her body. I move my body so I can look into Coco's eyes. Her black eyes look right through me. Within a few seconds, I hear the panting slow, then watch her body go limp, and then, at rest. She is gone.

Kimberly Reiss is a licensed psychotherapist and writer of poetry, flash fiction and memoir. She is the co-author of an award-winning play entitled, *Man In The Flying Lawnchair*, which was included in Best Plays of 2000, appeared in The Edinburgh Fringe Festival (where it won the prestigious Fringe First Award), and was re-recorded as a radio play for the BBC. She is the creator of an on-going workshop and forthcoming workbook, *MOTHERHOOD SELFHOOD*, born out of her extensive experience working with mothers raising children (and losing themselves in the process), and her own experience of raising her daughter while juggling a full psychotherapy practice. Her poetry has been published in *Boats Against the Current*, *Roi Fenéant Press* and others. Kimberly divides her time between Austin and Los Angeles.

IG: @motherhoodselfhood  
[www.motherhoodselfhood.com](http://www.motherhoodselfhood.com)

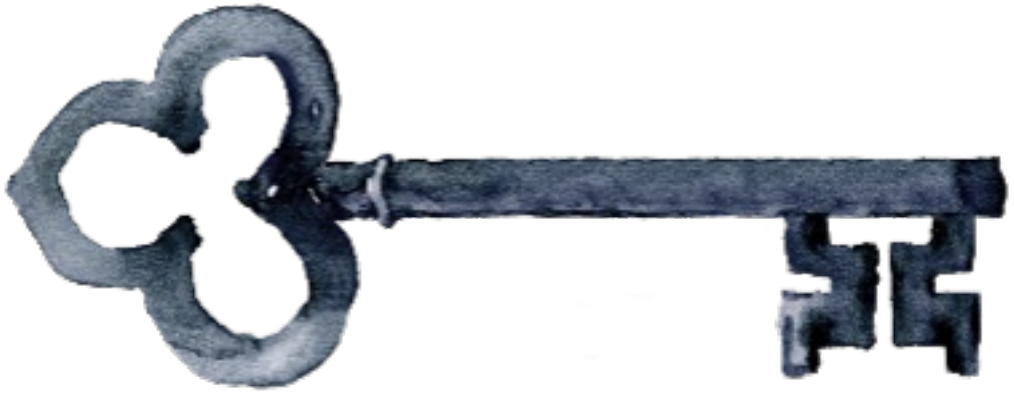
## THE TIGER GROOM

Shampa Saha

West Bengal, Kolkata, India

A big tiger was eager to marry a little girl  
when she was playing on the ground with her pal  
The girl had long black cascading hair  
The tiger passing by the field, with a fear  
that if the people can see him,  
they will shout loud to call Jack and Jim!  
"Oh my god! How big the giant,  
How long the tail!"  
They could shout and make a crowd,  
To tell everyone the tale!  
But the beauty of little girl,  
forced the tiger to meet her father,  
and make a deal.  
The girl's father was a poor farmer,  
he shivered to see the groom!  
Roared the would-be-groom so very loud,  
"I want to marry your daughter", being proud!  
The farmer just nodded his head,  
but had a lot of tears to shed!  
He started to cry in a pitch so high!  
Oh God! Save me, and my little girl,  
and rebuked his wife, why had she said to play it out,  
and now what a dilemma, and what of the drama,  
if a tiger would be groom!  
But all the villagers and all his neighbours,  
patted his shoulder and said to be calm.  
Then they invited the tiger for his turn.  
As they waited, the tiger came  
wearing a coat, trousers, and crown with gems.  
In the meantime, all the villagers  
boiled oil in large containers and covered them all.  
And they made loud noise, danced and joy,  
that made the tiger happy!  
The tiger groom, before entering the room to see own bride,  
was told to have a seat, on the top sheet,  
over the overcooked oil!  
Tiger in joy, jumped on to the sheet with hay  
that made the groom hot and boil  
The pretty little girl and her father  
were saved by their neighbours  
by the little trick  
and became free of being stuck.





*The Dwarf Boy*  
*(folklore)*

BY NAJMA BHATT





## THE DWARF BOY (FOLKLORE) – NAJMA BHATTI – SINDH.PAKISTAN

Time is a great healer, but some wounds become festering and with time their roots become stronger. Characters change but time repeats the story. The story is of the 18th century, of a young boy who was known as Gona in the whole village because of his short stature. He was the eldest son of his parents, In the morning, he used to go to the forest to graze the flock and in the evening to cut wood, his father was a man of mark and used to work as a physician in the village, but perhaps it was his misfortune that the boy himself was suffering from a disease for which at least there is no treatment in this village and nearby. he was suffering from the disease in which he passed through miserable condition of seizures and gone out of control, when he had seizures, he would have such strength that even four men would not be able to handle him, sometimes he had completely lost his sense and started to beat the people then he would be forced to tie up ,After that, everyone in the house was worried, but there was nothing they could do. One day, he had a severe seizure and he gone out of control, so he climbed on the roof of his uncle's house and began to eradicate bricks from there. It is a fact that where there are good people, there are also bad people who do not leave any opportunity for taunt, so something like that was the case at that time, Guna was throwing bricks, and the people of the whole village had gathered, and someone shot a taunt from that group, asking why they don't tie up their crazy son..... the work of good time is passing so it..... That sad evening was probably also in their fate, it came and took a lot with it...That evening was also cloudy when Guna was going to cut wood... On the way, he took some toffees from a shop, put two of them in his mouth and put the rest in his front pocket and walked... after cutting wood he came to the canal to take some rest and then... there he started having seizures and fainted.... There was a fruit orchard nearby and its Gardner was working there when he saw that Guna was unconscious, Gardner was worried that if he wakes up, he will kill me, so the Gardner threw him into the running canal and started walking from there. When Gona was late to return home, his mother got worried and went out to look for Gona. When she reached the canal, she saw that the sticks were lying there, but Gona himself was missing. The people also reached here.. The Gona's uncle picked up a stick and put it in the water, and with it, the shirt of Gona came up, then instant he jumped into the water and pulled him out, his uncle put him on his shoulder and headed to the doctor's room, where his body was immediately put in salt, but it was probably too late...he breathed his last. It was over and thus ended a chapter of a story to turn back once again.....Months later, the sounds of a young man shouting and quarreling started from a house, and it is known that people said that this is the house of the same man who advised Gona's parents to tie him up...

Stories don't end, only characters change....

## IF NOT HIGHER

Neal Whitman

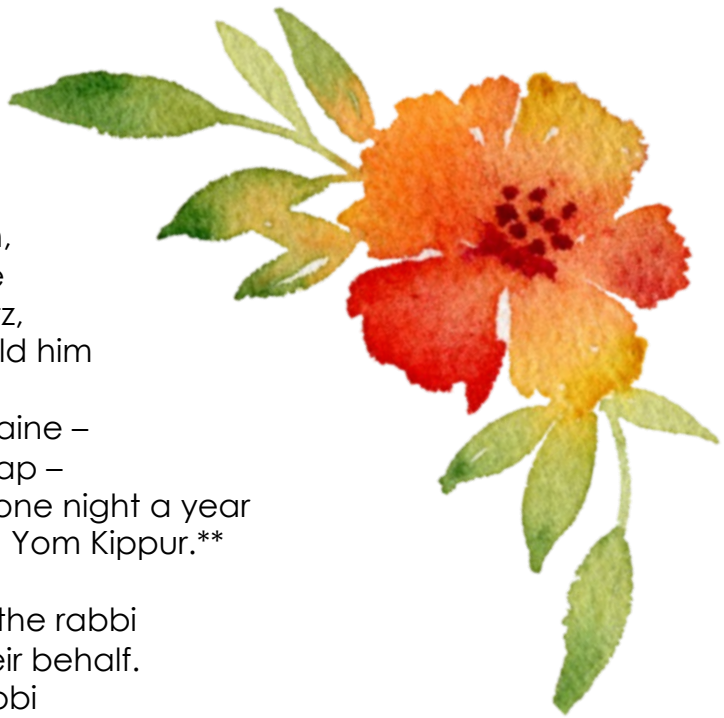
California, United States

Once upon a time  
my grandfather, Moses Vitman,  
sat at my bedside and told me  
that his grandfather, Issac Peritz,  
once sat at his bedside and told him  
that once upon a time  
there was a small village in Ukraine –  
it can longer be found on a map –  
where the rabbi disappeared one night a year  
between Rosh Hashanah\* and Yom Kippur.\*\*

Villagers wondered if perhaps the rabbi  
went to Heaven to pray on their behalf.  
The devout hoped that the rabbi  
would be interceding for the whole village  
and asking G-d to forgive  
their wrong-doings of the past year.  
Even good people sometimes  
fall short of the Mosaic law  
that whatever is hurtful to you,  
do not do unto others.

One young man, a skeptic,  
not much older than me,  
did not believe such things.  
He hid under the bed to see  
where the rabbi went.  
Surely, not to Heaven.  
I, too, am a skeptic.  
I asked my grandfather  
what his grandfather told him.  
Here is what I learned.

->



Before sunrise the rabbi  
dressed as a common woodsman  
and went into the dense forest  
to chop wood he brought to the home  
of a widow who was old and poor.  
He kindled the wood. In the warm hut,  
he prayed with her and readied to leave.  
She apologized for not having six kopeks  
to pay for the wood, but he told her  
it was a gift from Heaven.

That young man became a disciple  
of the rabbi. When anyone says  
on the day the rabbi is missing  
that perhaps he is in Heaven,  
the disciple adds quietly,  
*"If not higher."*

A good-night story is supposed to make  
children drowsy and ready for sleep.  
But the story my grandfather's grandfather  
told him kept me awake for hours.

\*Jewish New Year  
\*\* Day of Atonement



The River Where  
There Are Forks

BY JAMES PENHA

## THE RIVER WHERE THERE ARE FORKS – JAMES PENHA - INDONESIA

Long before European colonizers set foot in what we now call Pennsylvania, indigenous tribes lived mostly peacefully albeit purposely separate from groups competing for land, resources, and wildlife. Shock and surprise rippled therefore through the Lenape community emptying their longhouses one morning to see Nanatchies, the son of Onutpe, the most celebrated hunter of the tribe, bound in cords and fibers to an Iroquois stranger. The two were fully naked and roughly escorted by a scouting team who announced that the pair had been discovered like dogs in heat in a forest within Lenape territory.

The crowd opened a corridor among themselves to make way for Onutpe and the Sachem to face Nanatchies. "And what," said Onutpe flicking his hand toward the Iroquois, "is this?"

Nanatchies, standing firmly upright replied without hesitation, "His name is Ho-sa-gowwa."

"I am a man of the Longhouse, the Mohawk tribe," Ho-sa-gowwa unashamedly announced.

Onutpe addressed his son, "I do not know if I am more appalled by your spending your seed on another man or that you bring a rival into our fold."

"A crime of intrusion punishable by death," intoned the Sachem.

Nanatchies fell to his knees and begged the Sachem to relent. "Ho-sa-gowwa's tribe is our rival, but not our enemy. This man intends no harm; he followed me here for love. Perhaps a love my father cannot understand, but love, nonetheless. Let him go."

"So, you can follow him to Iroquois land?" demanded Onutpe.

Nanatchies turned to the Sachem. "Chief, if you allow Ho-sa-gowwa to return to his people, I swear to remain here to follow my father's path and plans for me." He added, "I love this Mohawk that much."

"What if we were to set your friend far upstream on the opposite bank of this River Where There Are Forks. Do you love him enough to swim to him so to release him from a death sentence?"

"I do," said Nanatchies.

"The river is deep, rapid, and treacherous this time of year," the Sachem reminded Nanatchies.

"I would rather die than forego the chance to save Ho-sa-gowwa."

The Sachem ordered the scouts to take the Mohawk, hands and feet bound, in a canoe upriver for the time it takes to skin a deer. There, they were to dump Ho-sa-gowwa on the shore. If Nanatchies drowned in the river, the scouts would build a fire to which they would feed Ho-sa-gowwa.

## THE RIVER WHERE THERE ARE FORKS – JAMES PENHA - INDONESIA

Soon after the canoe departed, the Sachem ordered Onutpe to undo the remaining cords from his son and lead him to the river for his struggle against its current.


The Sachem and Onutpe followed soon after in another canoe to ensure that the swimmer did not drag himself to land on which he could run to rescue his lover. What they would have done if an exhausted Nanatchies floundered in the flow we shall never know, for the young man proved himself more powerful than the river. When he reached the Mohawk, he embraced him before turning to his father and chief as they disembarked from their canoe. "We both shall live," whispered an exhausted Nanatchies.

Onutpe nodded.

"Together in our community."

The Sachem nodded.

An abundance of crops and venison was delivered annually to the Mohawk clan to compensate for the defection of Ho-sa-gowwa who became with Nanatchies the most revered and beloved of the Lenape's braves.

Expat New Yorker James Penha (he/him ) has lived for the past three decades in Indonesia. Nominated for Pushcart Prizes in fiction and poetry, his work is widely published in journals and anthologies. His newest chapbook of poems, *American Daguerreotypes*, is available for Kindle. His essays have appeared in *The New York Daily News* and *The New York Times*. Penha edits *The New Verse News*, an online journal of current-events poetry. Twitter: @JamesPenha

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Jamais

Vu

BY MAUREEN MANCINI AMATURO

## JAMAIS VU – MAUREEN MANCINI AMATURO – NEW YORK, USA

The boom and thwack of the front door she knew was bolted, the scuffling of shoes that weren't hers, the crash of the frame that so carefully housed her dead husband's first love letter did not scare willful witch, Deirdre, now in her second century. "How dare you, whoever you are! Out!" she yelled, her voice rising to squeeze curdled words through a burlap throat. "Go away, I tell you. Leave me be!"

The intruder laughed. "And what will you do if I don't? You can't even see me, you old hag." Feeling invisible, the thief helped herself to Deirdre's drawer full of crystals, her pouch of coins, and her potion shelf all the while warbling a song the locals sang at solstice celebrations, full moons, and weddings. The tone suggested this housebreaker was no crone. Scabrous, shrill, and shallow this voice likely had pierced the air of no more than ninety harvest seasons.

The singing, the banging, clinking, thuds, and scrapes cued Deirdre to exactly where in the room the burglar was rifling. Without her glasses, Deirdre was feeling a bit like a corpse in a fog and reached for her wand instead of her walking stick, but as fate and force would have it, that was the right move. If she could have seen the rude fiend perfectly, she could not have made better work of it. Facing the thief's direction, she whispered, "A curse on thee to leave me be. May your spiteful gall wane weak and small."

She released a puff of magic, and a bolt rendered the invader a three-legged field mouse. If she squinted, Deirdre could just about make out the slight, shadow-colored form scurrying in circles, squeaking in panic. She patted a nearby tabletop for her glasses and put them on. "See there. You got what's coming to you." Then, her loyal cat, Jamais Vu, took over. Deirdre could tell by the smacking, scratching, chewing, and snapping that Jamais Vu was now enjoying a rich dinner.

Outside Deirdre's window, Arlynn stood in the after-dusk and mumbled, "Needles and pins! A curse on her and still I cannot get the better of this woman." After a covey of dawns and so many midnights, Arlynn remained a bitter and jealous sorceress, and damage done was not enough. As suns set and moons rose, she cast spells and inflictions on Deirdre, and this night's intruder was just one of many. With patient evil, still Arlynn worked to manifest her desire: that she would win the one thing Deirdre owned and magic could not tempt. Yet none of her ill intentions had come to fruition. Since using magic to murder would abolish her powers of enchantment, Arlynn decided long ago not to kill her outright and played other means to rid her. Should Deirdre succumb to illness or even death as a result, so mote it be. And when the moon appeared on the eve Deirdre was present no more, Arlynn would have her way. Again, Arlynn slipped into the night cloaked in defeat. While fading into the dark, already she tumbled plans and conjured ideas for the next curse to cast upon Dierdre—to wrong, weaken, or worse. Arlynn looked back one last time before disappearing and saw the cat watching her through the windowpane, his back in a hump, his teeth bared.

Inside the cottage, quite returned. Deirdre winked at her cat. "We can take care of ourselves, you and me." She nodded. "What would I have done, Jamais, if you hadn't come to me after I lost my husband?" Jamais Vu made a sorrowful sound.

## JAMAIS VU – MAUREEN MANCINI AMATURO – NEW YORK, USA

With a broken heart, Deirdre maintained the day-to-day she was accustomed to while her husband was alive. She cared for their cottage. She gathered herbs. She helped heal a neighbor, set a young one on the right path, open blind eyes to true love. But the day-to-day was only that now. Without her true love, her husband, joy was scarce. He was a far descendant of the Crown of Gwynedd and known as a Count, not that his status meant a hill of hyssop to her. She had fallen under the spell of his dark hair, gentle demeanor, and romantic nature. That he treated her like the most beautiful witch in this world or the next was the bubble in the brew. They were madly in love for all of the one-hundred-plus years they were together.

Deirdre reached for her cane. Her fingertips found its gnarled surface, and she commanded it, "Come now." It rose and snuggled into her palm. She steadied herself then tapped the cane in front of her, its form awry, bent, contorted, not unlike her hands. With small steps, she doddered catawampus across the knotted wood floor until the tip of her stick tapped the broken frame that had held her husband's letter. "There you are, my love." She pushed her glasses higher on her nose. Relying more on magic than manual effort these days, Deirdre, her wand still in her free hand, chanted the frame into repair and back to its place on the wall. She couldn't resist reading her husband's words in that cherished love letter again, but Deirdre was distracted by her own reflection in the frame's glass. "Older, I am. And lost without my glasses these days." With her hand, she combed the cascade of chestnut waves now twined with grey. "A little baggy under the eyes." She lifted Jamais Vu and cuddled him. "He loved my eyes, he did. Said they were warm, like cognac." With her cheek pressed against the cat's, she moved her hand across the glass and traced her still firm jaw and perfectly straight nose in the reflection. "But all in all, fewer wrinkles than most my age." She placed the cat on the floor. "Don't you think, Jamais?"

Jamais Vu circled her feet. He rubbed his head up and down her leg.

"At least I still have my figure...almost." She patted the folds of her frock, which did hang more loosely these days. "If the next world brings us together again, I'll be ready." Deirdre placed her hand on the framed letter and closed her eyes. "All I have left of you, my love." For good measure, she cast a protection spell. "Sky and sea, keep harm from thee. Earth and fire, bring my desire." She turned and waved her wand around the room. "By stars and moon and mist and moor, treasures strewn about the floor return to where I keep you stored." She heard the scraping and clanking and tinkling and listened as the wardrobe doors squeaked open and each drawer made a thud. "As it should be." Pointing to her entryway, she whispered, "Power of wind and flight of wren, doorway close secure again. Bolts and locks repair and mend." Metal clinked. Wood thumped. She reached for her cat and lifted him to her chest. "We'll be fine, me and you, Jamais Vu." The cat rubbed his ears against her lips. "We have each other."

Deirdre placed Jamais Vu on the floor and touched the framed letter again. "If only I had gone to that new moon feast with you. I should have been there, my love. I should have. But the universe set me to task with curing our cherished friend on the very same night. I remember how you so dearly wanted me to help him. Put others above yourself, you did."



## JAMAIS VU – MAUREEN MANCINI AMATURO – NEW YORK, USA

She shook her head. “Magic failed me that night, or something worse was at work.” She looked at Jamais Vu. “Do you know the story, dear? I don’t believe I ever told you about that night.”

Jamais Vu stood against her skirts rubbing his head up and down. He stretched his paw across her hem.

“I left with my potions and herbs to help our ill friend that evening, and when I returned, I never saw my husband again, Jamais. Townsfolk searched, they did. Not a trace. At the next new moon, the Council concluded he had perished.”

Rubbing against her leg, Jamais Vu rolled his head and mewed more loudly than he had ever mewed before.

Her husband’s demise scarred her heart, but the law of magic that prevented her from bringing him back from the dead infuriated her. There was, by order of the Universal Constitution of Wizardry and the Dyfarniad Articles of Magic, no spell to bring back the dead. And all were forbidden to bring one to being. She turned to Jamais Vu. “Thank the stars and orbits you came to me.”

Deirdre walked back to her favorite chair, her worn shoes scratching the dry floor planks with each step. She plopped onto its velvet, peacock-colored cushions, leaned into its circled back, and rested her can against its curved arm. After pawing the mouse bones into the hearth, Jamais Vu leaped onto her lap. She smoothed his fur from ears to tail. “Yes, we can take care of ourselves, you and me.”

Jamais Vu wound around her arm.

“We are quite a pair.”

Jamais Vu answered with purrs and mewing. He nuzzled his nose into the crook of her elbow and spewed a loud meow and a growl. “What is it that has you in a bother?” Deirdre asked. The cat stood and put his front paws on her shoulder and nudged her glasses with his nose. Looking her right in the eyes, he repeated the meow and growl. “No more fuss, now.” She stroked his head and snuggled him close. She closed her eyes. “I wish you could have met him. I wish I could bring him back to us.” Deirdre kissed the top of Jamais’ head. He mewed twice. She slept, and Jamais Vu settled into the folds of her frock, nestled beneath the fringe of her shawl — awake, watchful, protective.

Moonlight gave way to dawn and dew. Jamais Vu climbed up to rub Deirdre’s cheek with his whiskers. He nudged her chin with his nose. When Deirdre awoke, he jumped away and trotted to his food bowl. “I’ll fix your breakfast,” she said. Deirdre lifted herself from the pillowed chair. She reached for her cane. “Coming, my dear. Coming.” After serving her cat, she warmed one brown egg for herself, nibbled dry bread with raspberry jam, and sipped hot dandelion tea. Then she brewed her daily morning potion: turmeric, ginger, and a touch

of thunder god vine to relieve the ache in her aging knees and gnarled fingers; some St. John's wort, saffron, and chamomile to ease her grief. A dose a day, yet her grief remained.

Deirdre tied her deep-pocket apron on and slipped her heavier shawl around her shoulders. She removed her glasses and wiped them clean with the corner of her shawl before replacing them. "Be back soon, Jamais. Time to collect herbs to replenish my jars." Before leaving, she filled a new pouch with lavender and rosemary and placed it on the table closest to her husband's framed letter. "Every day, my love. I remember you every day. Still, I am yours."

Jamais Vu meowed three times and scratched at the floor.

"I'll be careful. I'll mind the oleander. No need for worry."

Circling her ankles and climbing over her shoes, Jamais Vu pawed at the hem of her skirt.

"I'll miss you, too. Go on, now. Rest easy, love. Get yourself cozy." Deirdre fastened the door's bolt behind her and toddled off to the woods.

Neither easy nor cozy, Jamais Vu growled and prowled and padded and paced from corner to corner. While he could do nothing about his situation, he knew the contents in the veined, amber glass bottle with the lapis stopper could. He had watched over the years as Deirdre cast her spells. He had listened. He remembered the power of each potion. That this bottle sat behind a closed cabinet door he couldn't open with his swift but clumsy paws caused him frustration he was not able to express, except for a hiss. Even if he could open the door, the amber bottle had a special place, far back in the cupboard, behind other potions. If only its contents could fall into his food, if only a few drops would spill within his reach, all would be reversed. He would be Deirdre's husband once more. Jamais Vu despised the jealous wench who had cast a spell on him that night.

###

The night of the new moon feast had passed, and a grey day yawned. Deirdre was still away tending to their friend's health. While he slept in the vulnerability of the pre-dawn — when the mischief of the night and the promise of the day are vying to find their place — the Count fell victim to an ex-lover, Arlynn. She had never forgiven Deirdre for winning his affection. Over time, magic proved no match for love. So, since her spells could not sway the Count's heart, Arlynn weighed the most vengeful options. Still in love with him, she dismissed killing him. She dismissed killing Deirdre, too, knowing if she did, no matter the method, surely the Count would know the truth, and that would do her no good. She would never win his love. And, of course, there were the repercussions of murder, losing her powers of enchantment completely as ruled by the Dyfarniad Articles and Constitution of Wizardry. Arlynn decided on a long-term punishment for them both. As the night of the new moon feast crawled toward dawn, she stood among the tree shadows outside their cottage window and cast her spell. If he and Deirdre wanted so badly to be together, she'd let them;

however, not as man and wife. If Arlynn could not have this man, she decided he would no longer be a man, and with a wish and witchery, the Count became a cat.

When Deirdre returned after healing their friend, she was surprised to find their home empty and no note, no inkling of where her love could be. *Likely out for a morning walk*, she thought. Deirdre heard a sound and turned. A mist-grey cat sat atop her favorite chair, mewing, stretching his jaw, baring his teeth. His tail straight in agitation. "And where did you come from?" He calmed as she approached. She cradled him. "There, now." She looked into the cat's eyes. "Hungry?" Deirdre poured some milk for the cat and set a few berries on the floor. "I've never seen you around here before. I've never seen a cat like you in our part of the woods." She stroked his back as he ate. "I've never seen a cat quite as handsome as you." She stood. "I think I have just the name for you. Jamais Vu. Yes, that's who you are. Never seen."

When Jamais Vu licked the last of the milk from the bowl, he ran to Deirdre and pawed at her skirt. She lifted him. "My husband is going to love you, Jamais Vu. Just as I do. Yes, I love you already." Deirdre looked Jamais Vu in the eyes. "You are a charmer, you are. There is something quite special about you."

Jamais licked her cheek, nuzzled his nose beneath her chin, and seemed to cry.

###

Deirdre returned from the woods, her pockets filled with leaves, flowers, berries, and stems. Minding the cobbled stones and thick hazel roots leading to her door, she did not see the nearby figure lurking in the mist, melting into the trees. Deirdre chanted as she approached her gate. "Myself and spirit no longer roam. Door be open to welcome me home."

She entered. "Here I am, Jamais." Her cat ran to her. "Easy, dear, while I empty my harvest." She limped to the cupboard and opened the doors.

Jamais Vu pushed his milk bowl closer to the cupboard then jumped up and stood atop a cupboard shelf. As Deirdre placed the lavender in its bottle, the thunder god vine in its bottle, and the St. John's Wort in its bottle, a deafening rumble of thunder shook the cottage. In seconds, a powerful wind slapped the walls and tree branches scraped the windows.

Outside, Arlynn stepped from behind an elm. "Elements all, I call you now. Force this wench to tremors bow. I call the earth beneath today to quake and send her far away!"

The tremors caused Deirdre's floors to shift and walls to quiver. "Oh my stars, Jamais! Blessed be, I returned home just in time."

Vibrations rattled and toppled the bottles on each shelf. Jamais Vu looked up. With so many potion jars out of place waiting to be refilled, nothing stood in the way of the amber bottle.

## JAMAIS VU – MAUREEN MANCINI AMATURO – NEW YORK, USA

Thanks to the storm's agitation and earth's wobbling, the bottle most important to him was teetering on the shelf's edge. Thunder boomed. Deirdre startled. The amber glass bottle hit the floor, and its lapis top loosened. The liquid inside drained onto the wood. Jamais Vu leaped down and licked at the drops.

With the sky darkening and the wind battering and the lightening sparking, Deirdre scooped Jamais Vu from the floor and grabbed a blanket. "Let's set ourselves safe, my love." She locked the shutters and drew the curtains. She lifted Jamais Vu, reached for her wand, and climbed into bed, pulling the blanket about them both. "Chores can wait. The earth is telling us to huddle and rest." She pet the cat's head. "Nature is amiss, my love." Deirdre waved her wand across their blanket. "Elements all, I bid you hush. Make serene all nature's fuss."

The rumbling weakened. Quiet crept over the cottage, except for the tapping of the rain. Beneath the arms of the trees, Arlynn fell to her knees, her fists buried in the draping sleeves of her robe. "Needles and pins! Not this day, but one day." She rose and skulked away.

"There now," Deirdre cuddled Jamais. "A good nap and things will be better in a little while, my love. Things will be so much better."

Jamais Vu wriggled. He preened and purred and smiled a cat's smile for the last time.

Maureen Mancini Amaturro, New York-based fashion/beauty writer with an MFA in Creative Writing, teaches writing, leads the Sound Shore Writers Group, which she founded in 2007, and produces literary and gallery events. Her fiction, essays, creative non-fiction, poetry, and comedy, are widely published appearing in: *Half Hour To Kill*, *Paper Dragon*, *The Dark Sire*, *Every Day Fiction*, *Coffin Bell Journal*, *Drunken Pen*, *Flash Non-Fiction Food Anthology* (Woodhall Press,) *Things That Go Bump* (Sez Publishing,) *Film Noir Before It Was Cool* and *Attack of the Killer* (Weasel Press), *The Year Anthology* (Crack The Spine,) *Little Old Lady Comedy*, *Points In Case*, and others. Once named "America's next Flannery O' Connor," Maureen was nominated for The Bram Stoker Award and the TDS Creative Fiction Award in 2020 and 2021 and was awarded Honorable Mention and Certificate of Excellence in poetry from *Havik Literary Journal* in 2022. A handwriting analyst diagnosed her with an overdeveloped imagination. She's working to live up to that.

The  
Invisible  
Boy

BY MARK JONATHAN HARRIS



## THE INVISIBLE BOY – MARK JONATHAN HARRIS

Not so long ago, when people were neither crueler nor kinder than they are now, a boy named Allen dreamed of being invisible. He had his reasons.

Allen lived in a small western town of swirling winds amidst grasslands brimming with cattle. His father was a skilled shoemaker who made boots for all the ranchers, but his mother yearned for a life where the air didn't stink of manure. To avoid her constant complaints, the cobbler would stop at the tavern after work. When he finally stumbled home late at night, Allen's mother was waiting at the door to berate him for his drinking. Within minutes they would be throwing dishes at each other, waking the neighbors, and driving Allen under the bedcovers.

Everyone seemed to know about his father's drinking and his parents' ugly fights. At school the children constantly taunted Allen. "If you smell booze/ Allen's daddy made your shoes." And "Bang. Boom. Crash/ How many dishes can your parents smash?"

Allen's cheeks burned at their barbs, but unable to answer, he would drop his eyes and pretend he hadn't heard or skip school to avoid their jeering. If only he had the power to vanish with the snap of his fingers, then no one could torment him or see his shame.

One afternoon, when he'd spent the day at the creek instead of school, he caught an unusually large fish on his line. As he reeled it in, he noticed a figure emerging from a stand of weeping willows in the distance. An old man carrying a heavy burlap sack shambled toward him. His cragged face was the same earthy color as his sack; his white hair flowed to his shoulders. Around his neck he wore a necklace of colored stones that glittered in the late afternoon sun. The man dropped his pack and watched Allen carefully unhook the fish.

"That's a handsome bass," he said.

"Biggest one I ever caught."

"What would you trade for it?" the old man asked.

"I don't want to trade. I want to take it home for dinner."

"A fish that grand deserves to swim another day. What if you could have anything you wanted for it?"

"Anything?" Allen laughed.

"If it's in my power. . ."

"Can you make me invisible?" Allen blurted out.

The old man considered the idea a moment, then opened his burly sack and pulled out a long, intricately patterned snakeskin. "If a snake can grow a new skin, why not you?"

## THE INVISIBLE BOY – MARK JONATHAN HARRIS

Allen had heard stories about sorcerers and shamans who possessed magical powers. He didn't know if this old man was one of them. "How can I be sure?" he said.

"Give me your fish and I will show you."

Allen handed him the quivering bass, still gasping for life. The old man gently rubbed the snakeskin over the fish and began chanting in an unfamiliar tongue. First the head, then the body, then the tail of the fish vanished. The enchanter suddenly threw up his hands and tossed the invisible bass toward the creek. There was a large splash followed by a rippling of the waters as the fish darted away.

Still, Allen doubted what he saw. "Is it really alive?"

"As much as you. I can cover you with a skin just like it that no one can see through. But think carefully before you agree. By the time the moon turns full, the skin will harden and can never be removed."

Allen barely hesitated. "You've taken my fish. Now grant my wish."

The sorcerer slowly rubbed the snakeskin over him and began to chant again.

Allen watched his hands and arms, then the rest of his body disappear. He cast no shadow on the ground; saw no reflection of himself in the creek. He turned to the sorcerer with a hundred questions only to find his voice trapped within his new skin. The old man lifted his sack to his shoulder and shuffled past as if they'd never met.

Allen walked slowly home, kicking up clouds of dust, no more visible than the wind. As he approached the town, an older boy who'd tormented him at school gaped at the fishing pole Allen was carrying, which seemed to dance in the air like a kite on an unseen string. Seeing his astonishment, Allen jabbed the bully with the rod and chased him through his yard until he ran screaming into his house. Allen danced in triumph, waving the fishing pole in delight at his unexpected revenge.

Entering town, he saw his father's shop was still open. He stepped inside and perched unseen on an empty stool. Allen liked visiting the shop, inhaling the tangy odors of leather and shoe polish and watching his father work when he was sober. This evening his father's hands were steady, his stitches tiny and tight.

One of the town's richest cattleman strode into the store in a black Stetson hat that matched his leather jacket.

"I've come for my boots," he said.

Allen's father produced them, polished and gleaming.

The rancher examined them in minute detail. "You've been drinking again."

## THE INVISIBLE BOY – MARK JONATHAN HARRIS

“Not while making your boots,” the shoemaker protested.

In fact, the hand-tooled boots appeared flawless.

“No, these are shoddy and poorly made,” the rancher insisted. “I shouldn’t accept them, but since they’re already done, I’ll do you a favor and take them off your hands—but only for a quarter of the price we agreed.”

Allen’s father started to object.

The rancher cut him off. “Do you want people to think you’re a cheat as well as a drunk?”

“Whatever you think is fair,” the shoemaker meekly agreed.

It pained Allen to see his father treated so badly. But invisible, he didn’t need to lower his eyes. When the rancher took out his silver money clip, Allen saw how to strike back. He waited until the rancher tried on his new boots, then swiftly picked the pocket of his leather jacket. The rancher never noticed. Pleased with his own cunning and the excellent boots he’d swindled so cheaply, the rancher left the shop whistling.

Allen waited until his father’s back was turned to remove the crisp bills from the silver clip and place them on the counter. When the shoemaker saw the money, he stepped back in alarm, unsure how the bills arrived there. He started to go after the rancher, then abruptly stopped, confused what to do.

“The money’s yours. You earned it fairly,” Allen shouted to no avail since his words couldn’t penetrate his new skin.

He watched in disappointment as the shoemaker put the money in his bench drawer and locked it. Then he closed the shop and headed for the tavern. Allen tugged at his arm to lead him home, but his father kept brushing him away as if he were an annoying fly.

The tavern was dingy and smoky and smelled of beer and sawdust and too many people crowded together. When the other customers saw his father enter, they cheered. A smile broke out on the shoemaker’s face.

“A beer for my friend, to wash away the day,” called the town’s barber as the bootmaker sat on the stool beside him.

Allen’s father quickly drained his glass and asked for another.

Standing behind him, Allen stepped forward and tipped over the new glass.

“Watch out! You’re spilling your beer,” the barber warned.

The shoemaker quickly righted his drink.



## THE INVISIBLE BOY – MARK JONATHAN HARRIS

When he ordered another, Allen knocked the glass over with such force that it drenched the barber. "Now look at what you've done!" the barber exclaimed.

"That's not my doing, clumsy!" the shoemaker shoved his friend. The barber shoved back. In an instant they were cursing and swinging wildly at each other. The barkeeper quickly separated them and threw them out of the tavern.

Allen's father trudged slowly toward their house, muttering to himself.

Allen followed invisibly behind. His mother was surprised to see her husband home so early. "What happened? Did the tavern run out of beer?"

The shoemaker ignored her sarcasm and sat down at the table. "Where's Allen?" he asked.

"I don't know. He didn't come home from school. I thought he might be with you."

"Can't you even keep an eye on your only son?"

"My son? He's yours as well, and about as useless."

Within minutes they were yelling at each other again. Instead of cowering under the covers as he had before, Allen grabbed a frying pan and began banging it on the stove. His mother shrieked as the skillet hovered in the air.

The shoemaker recoiled in fright. "Maybe I have drunk too much," he said.

Allen banged the stove to signal his agreement. Then he rapped the frying pan again for the sheer pleasure of it.

The cobbler rushed out of the house.

Allen's mother fell into a chair, trembling. Her hair stood on end and her teeth chattered.

Allen replaced the pot on its hanger, pleased with himself and his new power. The sorcerer had indeed given him a magical gift. If he could stop his parents fighting, what else could he accomplish?

The next morning, he awoke before his parents and left a note on the kitchen table: "Don't worry about me. And don't bother looking. I'll be home when I'm ready." Then he left the house and waited impatiently to pay his classmates back for all their sneering.

On the way to school he pushed boys into ditches or each other, provoking them to shove and strike each other. Inside the schoolhouse, he pulled the braids of one girl, jabbed another boy with his pen, knocked over inkwells, spilled ink on his classmates' copybooks and clothes. The frustrated teacher banged two erasers together to restore order. "What's

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gotten into you today?" she scolded from behind a cloud of chalk. "It's not me," the children shouted, pointing to another girl or boy. Allen watched the turmoil with amusement; he was only sorry no one realized he was causing it. When the classroom emptied for recess, he wrote in large letters on the blackboard: "I am rubber, you are glue. Your meanness bounces off me and sticks to you." When the children returned and saw his message, they started arguing and accusing each other all over again.

Happy with the disruption he'd created, he wandered into town. Since no one could see him, he could go anywhere he wanted, do anything he wished. He stole doughnuts from the bakeshop and fistfuls of jellybeans from the huge jar in the general store. At the stables, he listened to men gripe about their wives; and in backyards he heard women belittle their husbands while they hung their laundry. Tired of everyone's grumbling, Allen walked to his father's shop, only to find that that it was closed.

Despite the note he'd left, his parents were frantic with worry. Allen returned home to find his father had spent the day combing the woods for him. Allen watched helpless, as his father turned in desperation to the sheriff --only to be met with scorn. "With a drunkard for a father, and a shrew for a mother, no wonder he's run away," the sheriff said.

There was more grief to come. When the rancher discovered his money clip was missing, he also sought the sheriff's help. The last place the rancher remembered having his money was the shoemaker's shop, so the sheriff accompanied him there to investigate. They found the bootmaker slumped over his workbench, reeking of beer. The sheriff shook him awake and accused him of theft. The cobbler denied he'd stolen anything, but the sheriff demanded he open the drawers of his workbench. Inside the top drawer was the wad of bills-- the exact amount the rancher claimed was stolen. The sheriff promptly arrested the shoemaker and locked him in the town's jail.

When Allen's mother learned of her husband's arrest, she groaned, "Poor me! My life is so wretched. My husband is a thief as well as a drunk and now even my good-for-nothing son has run away."

Allen ached for the trouble he'd caused-- his father jailed; his mother driven to despair. Invisibility may have spared him mockery, but it only brought more misery to his parents. His attempts to help them had done more damage than all their shattered crockery. Broken plates could be mended or swept away. Neither glue nor broom could fix the problems he'd created. He had to make up for his mistakes.

In his wanderings through town, Allen saw that his parents weren't the only ones who fought. Many were as mean to their children as they were to each other. And those children were the ones who had been meanest to him. He also discovered that the arrogant rancher had swindled others besides his father. Yet no one had stood up to him. Maybe invisible, he could do what they feared.

Jumping onto the back of a hay wagon, he headed for the cattleman's ranch to find a way

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to prove his dishonesty and free his father from jail. That very evening the cattleman was hosting a barbecue for his friends and neighbors. The sheriff mingled with the ranchers laughing and drinking and boasting about their wealth.

The greedy rancher enraged Allen. How could he give such a lavish party for his friends yet refuse to pay the fair price for the elegant boots his father had crafted? Allen watched unseen as the shameless thief bragged to his guests about his land and riches. Finally, Allen could bear it no longer. When a dark-skinned serving girl, barely older than he, brought a huge bowl of chili to the table, Allen pulled it from her hands and dumped it on the rancher's head. The cattleman leaped from his chair, beans trickling down his forehead, and slapped the girl across the face. "You stupid girl! You'll pay for this!" he shouted. She fled in tears.

First his father, now the girl, both unjustly punished because of him. He wanted to shout to everyone: "See how cruel he is!" But if no one could hear his words, how could he undo the damage? Without a voice or body, how could he help the people he'd harmed? The guests watched in silence for a moment as the rancher wiped his face with the edge of the tablecloth, then quickly resumed their eating and drinking.

The sky darkened, a glowering blue-black that matched Allen's gloom. A cloud parted revealing a three-quarter moon. Tomorrow, or the next night, Allen realized, the moon would be full, and his new skin hardened. He had little time to act. The party was still going on when he began the long walk back to town.

At dawn's light, he set out to search for the enchanter to reverse the spell. When he didn't find the old man by the willow trees, he followed the creek upstream, trekking for miles along its banks without sighting him. The sun moved across the cloudless sky as steadily as a ticking clock. The lengthening shadows made Allen despair. Soon it would be dusk, then nightfall. He felt his skin tightening around him. If the moon turned full tonight, he would be imprisoned forever in an invisible shell. No one would ever know or care that he was alive.

Weary from walking, he sat down on a large rock to decide what to do. Glancing in the distance, at a bend in the creek, he spotted a figure leaning against what appeared to be a heavy sack. Allen jumped up, splashed through the water to the other side of the creek, and yanked the sack away to announce his presence.

The old man's eyes snapped open. "Is that the invisible boy?" he said.

Allen rustled the sack in answer.

"You've come a long way to find me," the sorcerer said. "Are you unhappy with your wish?"

Allen shook the sack even harder this time.

"I know how lonely it is when no one sees or hears you," the old man said.

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Allen felt tears rising to his eyes. They added to the puddle where he was standing.

The sorcerer gazed at the empty space he occupied, as if he could see through his invisible shield. "I suppose you want me to remove the skin I've made for you."

"Please," Allen silently begged, tugging at his leathery arm.

"What will you give me in exchange this time?"

"Whatever you ask," Allen said as if the sorcerer could hear his words.

"If I restore your voice, you must promise to use it well. If you don't speak up for what you know is true, I will hear about it, and find you, and mute your voice forever."

Allen pushed the sack toward him to signal his agreement. The old man reached inside and pulled out another snakeskin. Allen knelt on the ground and the sorcerer rubbed the snakeskin over him and began chanting.

Allen watched his body slowly emerge, from head to toes, like a figure rising from the waters of the creek.

The sorcerer studied him a moment. "I hope you see now that no one can go through life without casting a shadow or shedding a tear," he said.

Allen didn't wait for more lessons or advice. He knew now exactly what he needed to do. He rushed to town to find the sheriff, who was astonished to see him. "We thought you'd run away for good," he said.

"You were wrong," Allen replied. "Just as you are about my father. He didn't steal anything."

"Why should I believe you?" the sheriff said.

"Because I was in the shop that day and can prove my father's innocence."

"The word of a drunkard's son is hardly better than his father's."

"What about the word of a sheriff who beats his children?"

The sheriff paled at Allen's accusation. "Watch your mouth, boy," he warned.

"Or what? You'll beat me too. Give me a chance to tell my story, or I'll tell everyone what I can prove by the welts on your son's behind."

Reluctantly, the sheriff agreed for Allen and the rancher to come to the jail the next afternoon.

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Then Allen went home to meet his mother, who was so relieved he was still alive she didn't even reproach him for running away until the next morning. Although Allen had recovered his body, his skin had thickened while he was invisible, and he barely listened to her chiding. His only concern now was to free his father.

When he arrived at the jailhouse, he was stunned to see a crowd had gathered. Somehow the word had spread that he'd come to confront the haughty cattleman. Allen's stomach clenched in doubt as he waited for the rancher to appear. Would anyone believe a boy more than this wealthy landowner? Then he saw the serving girl at the back of the crowd and remembered how the rancher had humiliated her. And his father.

The rancher finally swaggered through the crowd. "What's all this fuss about?" he said to the sheriff, who motioned Allen and the rancher to come inside the jail.

"I'd rather say what I have to out here," Allen said. "Where everyone can hear."

"Let the people decide," someone shouted. The call echoed through the crowd.

"I have nothing to hide," said the rancher.

Allen took a deep breath and faced the cattleman. "My father didn't steal your money," he said in as loud a voice as he could muster. "I know because I was in the shop that day."

"That's ridiculous. There was no one there but your father," the rancher said.

"How is it I have your money then?" Allen produced the silver money clip he'd tossed in a boot after he picked the rancher's pocket. Now the clip bulged with money Allen had stolen from the rancher at his party.

The cattleman snatched it from Allen's hand. "Where did you get this?" he demanded.

Allen was about to say he found it in the street when a flash of colored light distracted him. He shifted his gaze and saw the sun glinting in the distance from the sorcerer's multi-colored necklace. The old man was standing by himself apart from the crowd.

Remembering his promise, Allen corrected the lie he was going to tell. "I have this because I took it from your pocket," Allen confessed. "I took it to pay my father the money you owed him for making your boots, money you cheated him, the way you cheat everyone in this town."

The crowd gasped and the rancher turned pale.

"It's true," a shopkeeper shouted. "He cheated me too."

"And me," another man echoed.

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"Then you blame everyone for wronging you," Allen added. "Like the girl who lost her balance and spilled chili on you at your barbecue."

"That's right. I saw him strike her. The sheriff saw it too," another man called from the crowd.

The serving girl lowered her head in embarrassment as people looked at her.

"He shouldn't get away with it," someone yelled.

"Release my husband. He's innocent," Allen's mother demanded.

The sheriff scanned the angry assembly and made a quick decision. "You have your money back. I think that ends the matter."

The rancher glared at Allen and the sheriff. "Next time I won't be so forgiving." He pocketed the money clip and stomped off.

The crowd cheered his departure, even though none of them had found the courage to confront the rancher before. Allen's mother rushed to hug him. "I never knew how brave you were," she said. The barber clapped him on the shoulder. "You should've kept the money," he said. "Then your father could buy us all a drink tonight to celebrate."

"Not if I can stop him," Allen said and pushed past the barber to find the sorcerer, but the old man had disappeared. So had the serving girl. A few minutes later Allen's father emerged from the jail and embraced his son and wife. He felt so fortunate to have his honor restored that he vowed never to tarnish it again with drink. And Allen's mother was so happy to have her son and husband back that she determined never to drive them off again with her complaints. Although his parents didn't always keep their promises, and sometimes argued and flung dishes at each other, Allen had discovered that he could also bang a pot or two when needed.

And he didn't have to be invisible to do it.



*A Survival Guide  
For The  
Contemporary  
Princess*

BY TEIKA MARIJA SMITS

Like many girls, you dream of marrying a handsome prince. But princes are thin on the ground in Alabama. So as soon as you scrape together enough cash, you leave your drunk of a father and head north-east, never once looking back at the trailer park which has been your home for almost sixteen years.

You find yourself a job, cleaning up after rich people. Yet it's only after the third week of washing blood-stained shirts that you make the connection between your employer's Italian surname and their particular brand of family business. So, when the boss's son takes an interest in you, he's difficult to refuse. Besides, he is a prince. Of sorts. And it sure is nicer to be treated like royalty than the help.

But then there's an almighty shoot-'em-up between the rival families, and your prince shoots dead two innocent bystanders. Kids. The police can't ignore that. They ask you questions, and they know that with your cooperation they can get him put behind bars. "Testify," they say. "We'll give you protection, a new identity. Justice needs to be done."

You want to say yes, but you're scared. So, they sweeten the deal by offering to throw in one of the new AI companions. He'll be your round-the-clock protector, capable of overwhelming anyone who tries to hurt you. And he's fully functioning, "In a number of physical capabilities, if you get my drift," says the cop. He also happens to be gorgeous. You say yes.

You never figure out how a being of metal and plastic and whatever his wonderful, soft skin is made of can be so beautiful. But you know your heart aches for him. You get one precious year with him as you build a life for yourself in Seattle, a place where it never stops raining. But then the cops want him back. You beg to keep him; say you wouldn't feel safe without him. They let you have him for another six months.

You know he cares nothing for you. That after you've made love to him, he doesn't sleep. That he simply closes his eyes and goes into standby mode while you listen to the rain and dream of an impossible future in which the love you feel for him is reflected in



his eyes. You know he's like a drug, and that you're addicted to him. What will you do when he leaves you?

An old woman at the diner at which you work says you'll manage. "I seen it all before," she says. "You're sick with love. But this love you think you're feeling, it's all in your head. You created it all on your own. Pour it into yourself, into your life, instead."

You know she's right, but you don't know if you've got the courage to do what she says.

"You ever walked away from something really bad and never once looked back?" the old woman asks.

You nod. And then you smile.

You've got this. You *think*.

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**Teika Marija Smits is a UK-based writer and freelance editor. She writes poetry and fiction, and her speculative short stories have been published in *Parsec*, *Shoreline of Infinity*, *Best of British Science Fiction* and *Great British Horror 6*. Her debut short story collection, *Umbilical*, was published by NewCon Press in August 2023. A fan of all things fae, she is delighted by the fact that Teika means fairy tale in Latvian.**

The background features a large, textured orange circle with a dark brown border, resembling a slice of citrus. Scattered around and on the circle are numerous green splatters of varying sizes. The text is centered within the orange circle.

*Shannon's  
South Florida  
Vacation*

BY ANTHONY SAMUELS

## SHANNON'S SOUTH FLORIDA VACATION – ANTHONY SAMUELS

Shannon woke up early to prepare her husband's breakfast before he left on his hunting expedition into the Big Cypress Preserve near the Florida Everglades. Two scrambled eggs with hash browns, lightly toasted bread with butter and a tall orange juice – his favorites. She was glad something went well this morning. Shannon had struggled for a considerable length of time in the cramped bathroom of their camper putting on her makeup and combing her long, platinum blonde hair.

"There. Just the way you like it," she remarked to her spouse after serving his breakfast.

"That hit the spot," Todd said after eating. "I best get on my way to Gary's tent so we can get an early start. He's always up before me. Goes back to our basic training days at Camp Lejeune."

She kissed her husband goodbye as he departed out their camper's door. Gary had already been up, waiting for Todd, sitting on a folding chair next to his tent.

Shannon waved to the two hunters as they both strolled down a scarcely discernible trail in the dim predawn hour. Gary led the way with his compass. Each hunter carried a shotgun slung over their shoulders along with a light knapsack, ammunition, and a water bottle. Both men were looking forward to the prospect of landing a whitetail deer or a wild turkey. She followed them until they were out of sight behind the timberline and heavy underbrush. She climbed back up the two steps into their camper and washed the breakfast dishes and made up their tiny bed. The air conditioning unit was small but adequate – an unmitigated blessing in this sultry weather. Gary and his wife, Tracy, languished in the tent they both shared. Neither dreamed it could get so hot during the fall months in southern Florida.

She called Tracy's cell phone to determine how prepared she was for the day, "Ready for our photo excursion? Yeah... Right... Okay... About 10 more minutes? Sure... Come over whenever. Just let yourself in. I'm all ready to go." Both Tracy and Shannon worked for Sky Blue Airlines in Cherry Hill, New Jersey as ticket agents and were in their late twenties.

Tracy opened Shannon's trailer door shortly thereafter bringing her Cannon 35mm camera, binoculars, and her backpack. "It was hot as hell last night. Gary tossed and turned. The mosquitoes didn't help either. Gosh, this air conditioner sure feels wonderful."

The website for the Preserve was very useful for Shannon and Tracey. Their map showed the campground as being within hiking distance to the hunting range. While the men are away, they will take their binoculars, cameras, and birdwatcher's book Shannon requested from the Audubon Society and head out on their own. They just hoped the photography was as great as they said it would be.

"While our husbands are out hunting deer with their shotguns, we'll be out hunting birds with our cameras. We'll show them. I'll wager we'll do much better than the guys. And I am definitely not helping Todd clean any damn deer either," Shannon exclaimed. "They left us both alone on the first day of our vacation...Bastards."

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“Forget it,” Tracey said. “Let’s just enjoy the day.”

Shannon, tall with an athletic build, grabbed her 35mm Nikon camera with its telephoto lens along with her handbag and water bottle. Then it was off on their own into the wilderness as they embarked on boardwalks elevated above the marshland and swamps. The walkway meandered through the vast and desolate Preserve where in some locations the lush forest overhung the boardwalk and virtually obliterated the sunlight. They merely had to travel a short distance into the woodlands to capture unbelievable photographs: alligators, herons, egrets, and many other wild birds and parrots. Tracy, short in stature and petite, worked out with Shannon at the gym. They both kept themselves in excellent shape - a plus under these circumstances.

Where a break existed in the walkway over a large dry land area, the two young women exited the boardwalk and entered into a nature trail that a Park Ranger said was not on the map. He maintained the trail zigged and zagged through a densely forested location full of brilliantly colored tropical birds then looped back into the starting point at the boardwalk. They eagerly began their trek into the dense woodlands and after only 15 minutes on the footpath they observed a white Ibis perched on a cypress tree branch. The bird was resting motionless and seemingly posed as it spread his wings out completely.

Shannon whispered to Tracy with her hand cupped over her mouth, “What an incredible shot. Our coworkers at Sky Blue will be amazed at these photographs.” She attempted a shot, but the snap of her shutter frightened the bird. Now it’s in another cypress tree nearby and is almost out of sight.

“Tracy, look over there. I’ll point the bird out for you. You know, while Todd was sleeping last night, I read in the Audubon Society book that these birds were almost wiped out. They were hunted for their feathers and just about sent into extinction along with the alligators.”

They left the trail and pushed through the dense foliage in quest of a suitable vantage point for another photograph. The novice photographers camouflaged themselves for closer shots with military style clothing over their frames. A baseball cap partially covered Shannon’s brightly colored hair, an absolute giveaway in these woodlands. Tracy, a brunette, wore her sunglasses on the top of her head.

“Damn, it took off again. This time I can’t see it anymore. It must have flown near those pines,” Tracey remarked.

They discerned a gap in the dense vegetation and pushed further into the thick forest in pursuit of the Ibis.

“Oh well, it’s gone now. We should be happy with the photographs we have already. We’re too eager to show the guys up. Better make it back to the trail,” Shannon said.

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They both trudged through the heavy underbrush. Gradually it became apparent to the two women the trail was becoming broken up in a few spots and the canopy of pines became so thick it blocked out much of the light making for a very dim forest. They couldn't find the yellow flowered bushes they used for a marker either.

"It can't be. Are we on the right trail? I don't recognize any of this," Shannon said.

Tracy shrugged her shoulders, "This doesn't look familiar to me also."

"Nah! I know my way," Shannon said. "This has to be the path. We'll make it back okay and surprise our husbands when they look at these photos, we both took of all the other birds."

Then suddenly, from out of nowhere, an excited Tracy burst out, "What the hell was that! Sounded like a rock flying through the trees and thrown in our direction. I hope we haven't wondered too close to the hunting range. Is that Gary?"

Another stone crashed through the woodlands and splashed into the marsh nearby.

Shannon's voice trembled, "Where the hell did that rock come from? Is that Todd hiding in the bushes playing a joke on us? Well, that's not funny, mister. You scared the life out of the both of us. Todd, is that you? Where are you? Todd... Todd!"

The only sound was the wind rustling through the trees and the intermittent chirping of birds.

"Todd? Gary? Is that you?" both cried out repeatedly.

Then Shannon hushed Tracy, "Quiet. Standstill. That sound. That commotion in the bushes. So damn dark in here. For God's sake what is it?"

On the nature trail in front of them. The shadows were hiding it. She pointed to an enormous brown figure that emerged from the cypress dome about 100 yards away. "Tracy is that a huge bear standing up right?"

No response.

"Tracy?" Shannon glimpsed to her left. Tracy was nowhere to be found. Startled and appalled at her friend's departure, the abandoned woman froze, paralyzed by an overpowering sense of fear as the binoculars and camera fell from her loosened grip and landed on the trail beneath her feet.

Now the creature began moving towards her into the scant sunlight by the Yucca trees. Its features fell into view: gigantic – eight maybe nine feet tall, muscular with dark brown hair. The beast's weight and forceful movements broke through the tree branches and snapped the forest beneath its feet sending screeching birds into the air. Soon it was almost halfway, walking upright on its hind legs, moving more like a man, not like a bear.

## SHANNON'S SOUTH FLORIDA VACATION – ANTHONY SAMUELS

Shannon's heart was racing. She was sweating, dripping wet. "Tracy, where are you?" she whispered.

50 yards away...

Shannon began to feel ill, nauseous. She tried to breathe slowly, in and out ... in and out. Now the creature's pace quickened. Closer it moved, fiercely charging forward, smashing through timbers and heavy underbrush. Grunting and growling his face became clearer – furled eyebrows, clenched teeth, and a face contorted with rage. My God... it's apelike, Shannon thought. "Todd! Todd! Help! By the trail. Todd over here!" But her lips did not move. Her voice was silent, mute. Then the blonde's legs began to tremble and soon weaken. She felt like she was spinning, whirling as the forest dimmed. Her surroundings became obscure. Shannon felt herself collapsing, helpless onto the pathway. Everything was now black, but she still visualized in her mind those angry eyes – those angry, angry eyes. Shannon faintly heard his footsteps and heard his harsh breathing. Then... nothing.

She woke up for a second or two, long enough to realize she was being carried like a limp rag doll, swaying back and forth over the shoulder of this beast who was very hairy, profusely sweating, and possessed a ghastly stench about him. He grunted and growled and crashed through the tree limbs and branches. Then darkness overcame her once more.

.....

The black veil gradually receded. Shannon woke up and discovered herself lying face down in what appeared to be wet gravel. Slowly she visualized her surroundings. By the amount and angle of sunlight, she had the vague sensation of the passage of time. Water was running, burbling through what sounded like a nearby stream and birds were chirping. After a few moments Shannon thought she possessed enough energy to move. She spit small grains of sand from her mouth and had scarcely sufficient strength to raise her head off the gravel to peer around. Shannon located herself on a sandbar near the embankment of an irrigation canal. It was next to a dirt access road for ATVs – the same canal and road that passed by their campground further downstream. And the ranger's tower, almost indiscernible above the treetops, was one half a mile east of the campsite. She felt some consolation – the base camp was not too far away at least. But the serenity was shattered by what sounded like two apes chattering and quarreling loudly. She turned her head, stretched out and peeked over the embankment...

At first their immense stature and power immobilized her. She recognized the larger of the two beasts. He was the same one she had seen in the forest earlier. A great muscular brute, at least nine feet tall, with masculine features, shrouded in long brown hair except for its apelike face. He stood next to a shorter, thinner, and less powerful female, evident not only by her diminutive size but also her sagging breasts and broad hips.

Shannon's mind flashed back to the images of yesterday – the old Native American woman

## SHANNON'S SOUTH FLORIDA VACATION – ANTHONY SAMUELS

at the Miccosukee Indian Reservation. We saw her on the way to our swamp buggy and airboat rides. She warned us both of several sightings in the area. There were large, hairy, apelike creatures in the Preserve where we were heading. Many campsites had been ransacked with food and belongings taken. She further revealed the Native Americans of the Big Cypress Swamp had a unique name for them. Because of their foul, overpowering odor, the Miccosukee and Seminole Indians called them "skunk apes". Just stupid folklore we thought. Foolish rubbish. Bigfoot? Sasquatch? Now the blonde airline ticket agent was staring not only at one, but two of these giant, apelike creatures.

Shannon judged from her expressions and gestures the female creature was not happy with what her mate had brought back, as if the blonde's very presence infuriated her. She constantly yelled and howled at him, raised her voice above his, and flailed her arms about. Then the female reached down and picked up from her mate what appeared to be a crumpled magazine that rested between his feet. She rolled it up and repeatedly slapped him with it while she continually pointed at Shannon. Whop! Whop! Whop! To the head, face and shoulders. The male only squatted there and occasionally raised his arms up in defense, chattering back in rebuttal.

The badgering continued for several more minutes until the female skunk ape felt her mate had enough. She stopped thrashing and sauntered back to a large bed made from leaves and Spanish moss. It rested in the Sawgrass next to the tree line where she eventually settled down. Her attention soon focused on a few nearby cans, bottles, periodicals, and scattered clothing they had plundered from nearby campsites. The male creature continued to squat – content just to watch over his captive and helpless bounty.

Now Shannon noticed something unusual. There were subtle movements in the obscurity beyond the branches of the tree line. The sounds of rustling and crunching leaves proceeded two pairs of sinister eyes that came into view and intensely peered at her. Gradually their faces, then their entire bodies emerged into the light. Shannon's jaw dropped as she looked at two more of these apelike creatures, each about 5 feet tall. Slowly they shuffled towards her in a cautious and timid manner. By their height, build and mannerism, she surmised they were juveniles, one female and one male. The female had on a tattered white "Miami Beach" tank top draped over one shoulder and to Shannon's bewilderment, the male counterpart awkwardly wore a set of headphones that partially covered his right ear, but not his left. The adolescent male seemed more inquisitive than the female and steadily approached. The female lagged and fell behind.

Shannon did not fear these two creatures as she did their older and much larger parents. The male moved closer and reached out with his hand to stroke her arm while the female was content to sniff her blouse. Unexpectedly a loud growl from the mother sent the two juvenile skunk apes back into the bushes and from the sounds of their crashing footsteps, deeply into the woods.

Twilight approached. A sense of urgency overpowered the fear that paralyzed Shannon

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speechless on the trail earlier. The blonde ticket agent conceptualized a plan: The female creature just can't sit there the entire day until darkness arrived. She was furious at Shannon and what's keeping the male from becoming more aggressive and attacking? Perhaps she could distract them long enough to gain a few strides on the two, make a frantic dash across the shallow irrigation canal and up the embankment to the footpath. Maybe she could run quickly enough and far enough through the forest for Todd and Gary to hear her screams. A shotgun blast into the air should frighten these beasts away. It's her only chance. No telling where Tracy ran off to. Hopefully she'll be able to locate their husbands or a park ranger. The male was the one she should focus on. He was closer. The female was picking wild berries and appeared to have lost interest. Shannon only needed a couple of steps on him.

The camouflaged adventurer searched the surroundings for an object to catch the attention of the male skunk ape. She so wished her coworker was here. Shannon thought she will look for something within easy grasp that will distract him, but nothing seemed available. Then a thought became apparent. A keepsake. The wedding gift from Todd's mother - the compact mirror. Maybe her mother-in-law's karma will have a magical effect on the brute. She hoped he becomes enchanted enough with its shiny diamonds and his own mirror image for her to pick up a few strides on him. She reached into her front pocket, opened the compact, tossed it at his feet, and waited.

It took about five minutes for the monstrous animal's curiosity to build sufficiently to the point where he stood up and cautiously poked his way to the compact mirror. When he bent over with his arm stretched out to retrieve it, a tremendous shrieking sound emanated from the background, as an immense brown blur hurtled itself air borne towards them.

In one enormous flying leap, the female skunk ape landed on her mate's back and knocked him down. She screeched, cackled at him, and swung her arms about terrifying both the male skunk ape and Shannon. The female creature slapped her mate again and again with the rolled-up magazine in her fist. The male got up and babbled loudly back at her, shielding himself from some of her blows. Fearlessly she struck her much more powerful mate, yelling at him constantly. But it did not take long for the male skunk ape to tire, wither, and lose interest in the battle altogether. Not wishing to accept any further scorn, he pushed the thrashing female away and walked face down in submission back to their nest, sitting down holding his head.

Then the female creature turned and resumed her vicious rampage as she stepped in Shannon's direction. Panting, the blonde ticket agent stumbled in retreat. Her color ashen, as beads of sweat rose across her forehead and perspiration soaked through her blouse. Soon the beast overtook her. She was in her face. The creature shoved Shannon backwards into the canal. Next the skunk ape pushed her up the embankment, chattered loudly, and pointed towards the pathway. Finally, with one massive shove, Shannon was flat on her back, defenseless on the trail, with the angry beast's enormous body towering over her. Shannon sensed her impending doom and covered her eyes with both hands. Mentally she prepared herself to see the face of God.



## SHANNON'S SOUTH FLORIDA VACATION – ANTHONY SAMUELS

But during the following moment, the fierce yelling and babbling ceased. She only heard the wind streaming through the trees, birds chirping, and the great beast breathing deeply and slowly through her nostrils. While both hands still covered her face, Shannon curiously peered through her partially open fingers and looked at the beast scowling down at her, both fists resting on her hips. Just when she thought a search party will never be able to recover any remnants of her body, the skunk ape hurled the magazine down at her landing on Shannon's chest. Then the creature snorted one last time, turned around and stormed back, crashing through the forest. Back to her bed made of leaves and moss. Back to her mate.

As Shannon sat up and started her run for freedom, the magazine slipped off her chest and down to the ground beside her. Before she scampered away, Shannon paused for one last second and looked down at the front page. She was astonished. It was a crumpled photograph of Marilyn Monroe on the cover of *Life Magazine* lying in tall grass.

Shannon thought: What the hell? I can't believe it. All this because of a photo on the cover of *Life*? Damn jealous female.

Her gazelle like speed soon carried her down the pathway towards the campsite. She promised herself if she ever made back to the camp alive, she would never try to upstage her husband again for abandoning them earlier this morning. As she approached, she saw a frazzled Tracy talking to the two hunters, frequently pointing back towards the forest. She just can't wait to tell the three of them her story.

A decorative watercolor floral border surrounds the text. It features several large yellow sunflowers with dark brown centers, pink and red hibiscus flowers, and small blue flowers. Green leaves and ferns are interspersed among the blooms. The border is contained within a simple, hand-drawn brown rectangular frame.

*Featured  
Authors*

# Laurie Kuntz



<https://lauriekuntz.myporfolio.com/home-1>

Laurie Kuntz has published two poetry collections (*The Moon Over My Mother's House*, Finishing Line Press and *Somewhere in the Telling*, Mellen Press), and three chapbooks (*Talking Me Off The Roof*, KelsayBooks, *Simple Gestures*, Texas Review Press, and *Women at the Onsen*, Blue Light Press). *Simple Gestures*, won the Texas Review Poetry Chapbook Contest, and *Women at the Onsen* won the Blue Light Press Chapbook Contest. Her new book, *That Infinite Roar*, is forthcoming in 2023 from Gyroscope Press. She has been nominated for three Pushcart Prizes and a Best of the Net Prize. Her work has been published in Gyroscope Review, Roanoke Review, Third Wednesday, One Art, Sheila Na Gig, and many other literary journals. She currently resides in Florida, where everyday is a political poem waiting to be written.

## LAURIE KUNTZ – AUTHOR FEATURE

<https://kelsaybooks.com/products/talking-me-off-the-roof>

Laurie Kuntz is an award-winning poet and film producer. She taught creative writing and poetry in Japan, Thailand, and the Philippines. Many of her poetic themes are a result of her working with Southeast Asian refugees for over a decade after the Vietnam War years.

She has published two poetry collections, *The Moon Over My Mother's House* (Finishing Line Press) and *Somewhere in the Telling* (Mellen Press); and two chapbooks, *Simple Gestures* (Texas Review Press) and *Women at the Onsen* (Blue Light Press); as well as an ESL reader, *The New Arrival, Books 1 & 2* (Prentice Hall Publishers). Moment Poetry Press has published a broadside of her poem "The Moon Over My Mother's House" on [their website](#). Her poems "Darnella's Duty" and "Not Drowning But Waving" have been produced in a podcast from LKMNDS, and her poem, "Darnella's Duty" is published in a new Black Lives Matter Anthology from CivicLeicester. Her two ESL books have been featured on the podcast [ESL for Equality](#).

Her poetry has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize, Best of the Net, and her chapbook *Simple Gestures* won the Texas Review Poetry Chapbook Contest. She was editor-in-chief of *Blue Muse Magazine* and a guest editor of *Hunger Mountain Magazine*. She has produced documentaries on the repeal of the Don't Ask, Don't Tell Law, and she is an associate producer for a documentary on the Colombian peace process and reintegration of guerrilla soldiers in Colombia. She is the executive producer of an Emmy winning short narrative film, *Posthumous*. Recently retired, she lives in an endless summer state of mind.



### ANHINGA DRYING HER WINGS

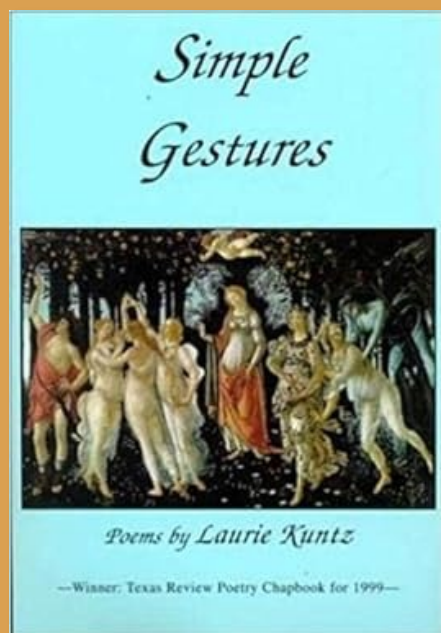
Where has she flown  
for the need to stop  
on a lily pad and spread  
wet tipped wings  
under the ebb of day?

What venture caused  
her to dive into this lagoon  
black with its endless bottom?

Who are we, passersby,  
to disturb her stance  
on reeds fragile to sight  
and thought of these steps  
we both make on sandy roads?

Under waning suns  
winged and footed journeys  
are beginning anew  
and ending, marked  
with the coming  
of first snow and last rose.

Poem from upcoming book: *The  
Infinite Roar*

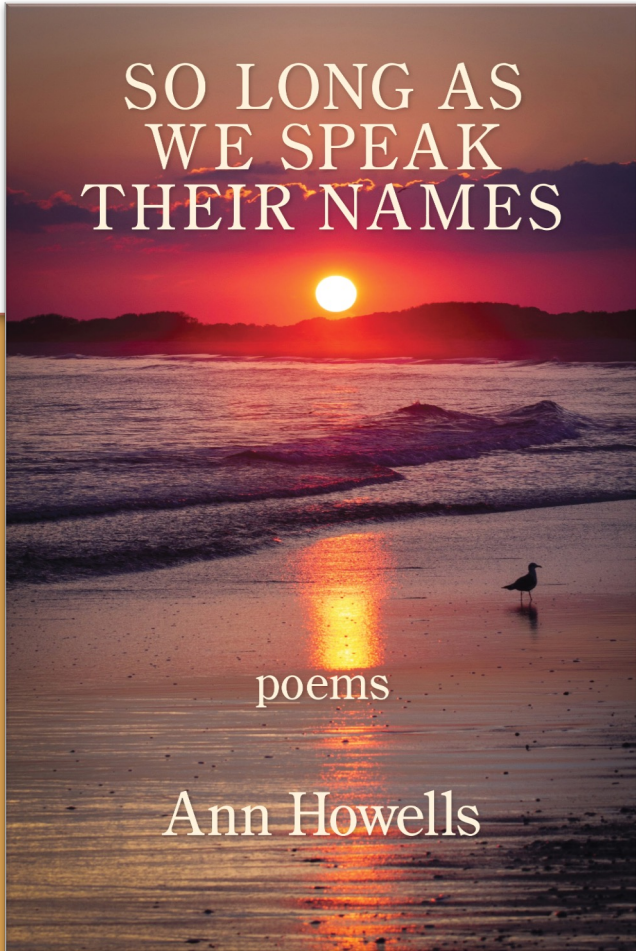


# Ann Howells

Ann Howells was born and raised on the shores of the beautiful Chesapeake Bay which informs much of her poetry. She moved to Texas in 1979. Ann is both a poet and a visual artist. She edited *Illya's Honey*, a poetry journal, beginning in 1999. The journal was published at first in print. The final three years appeared online, and she alternated issues with her co-editor Melanie Pruitt-Helsem ([www.illyasHoney.com](http://www.illyasHoney.com)). Ann's books include: *Under a Lone Star* (Village Books Press, 2016) illustrated by Dallas artist J. Darrell Kirkley; *Cattlemen & Cadillacs*, an anthology of D/FW poets which she edited (Dallas Poets Community Press, 2016); *So Long As We Speak Their Names*, poems about watermen who harvest Chesapeake Bay (Kelsay Books, 2019); and *Painting the Pinwheel Sky*, persona poems in the voices of Van Gogh and his contemporaries (Assure Press, 2020). Her four chapbooks include: *Black Crow in Flight*, published as Editor's Choice, 2007 Main Street Rag Chapbook Competition, and *Softly Beating Wings*, 2017 William D. Barney Memorial Chapbook Contest winner (Blackbead Books, 2017). Named a "Distinguished Poet of Dallas" by the Dallas Public Library in 2001, she served as President of Dallas Poets Community (501-c-3 non-profit) for four years and as Treasurer for many more. Her poems appear widely in small press and university journals including *Spillway*, *THEMA*, and *San Pedro River Review* in this country, *Magma* (England) and *Crannog* (Ireland). Ann has received eight Pushcart nominations. She resides just outside Dallas in Carrollton, Texas USA with her husband, daughter, and the two most recent in a long line of rescue dogs.



## ANN HOWELLS – AUTHOR FEATURE



<https://www.amazon.com/So-Long-Speak-Their-Names/dp/1950462501/>

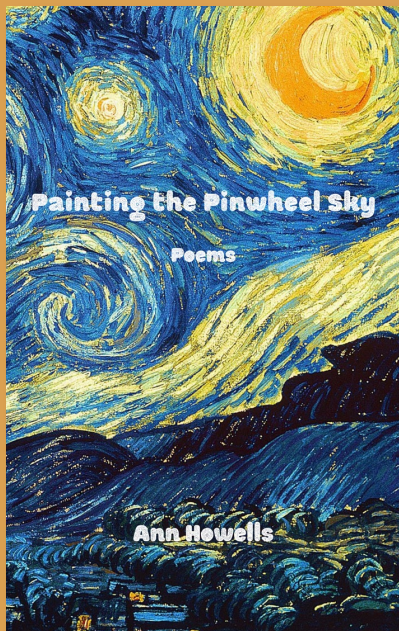
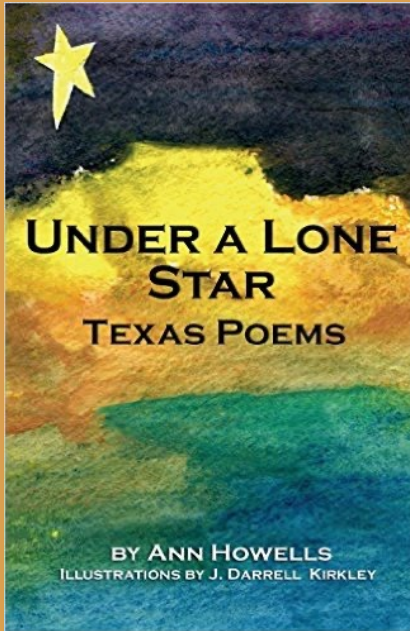
Dallas poet and editor Ann Howells left rural Maryland's shore long ago, but that region of mists and dangerous work on the water never left her. In *So Long As We Speak Their Names*, she beautifully, evocatively recreates the world she grew up with and in. She brings us not just that marshy land where land meets sea, but even more so, the watermen who risk their lives hauling their livings from the sea, and of course their children and wives, who wait, pray, and hope the sea won't take their men forever. It's a hard life, a dangerous life, but as one character states, "I'm cast iron." The lives portrayed here should never be forgotten. We should indeed speak their names, but even more, read their stories, over and over.

Robert Cooperman, Author of *In the Colorado Gold Fever Mountains*, winner of the Colorado Book Award for Poetry

Take a water globe that includes the coves of Whidbey Island, and the weather, and weathered people of "The Shipping News", place it gently, with calloused hands, into the area of the Chesapeake Bay, and you have *So Long As We Speak Their Names*, a glorious collection by Ann Howells. Where names are old-fashioned but work ethic isn't, this is set in the time of our parents and their parents, where each cruel winter brings new widows, and everyone has just a drop of "that damned Twilley blood!"

I loved this collection. The watermen and their women—Ann taught me all about them. I want to eat wild asparagus, stain my lips purple with berries, learn how to can for the winter. This is not a book I'll read and put away, I'll keep it close-at-hand forever. And I bet you will too.

## ANN HOWELLS – AUTHOR FEATURE



... He's not spent so many days  
in company of women since he was a child,  
but arthritis gnaws his joints, back stiff

as old rope -- still he gazes seaward. A rime  
of spindrift edges pers, crab shacks,  
rip-rap, like old dogs greying

at the muzzle. even the snow plough  
has slipped; men in bulky jackets, knit caps  
and gloves, wrestle it

from the ditch. Grey is the color of the day.  
His wife, fingers blue from hanging laundry,  
tosses a teabag in her constant cup,

pours water from the simmering kettle,  
clasps the cup in two hands. *Tea*, he scoffs,  
adds another measure of Old Crow

to his coffee. Impatience plucks his sleeve.  
*He's useless as gills on a cat*, he thinks. *Gills.*  
*On a damn housecat.*



# Dawn Colclasure

Dawn's books:



*365 TIPS FOR WRITERS: Inspiration, Writing Prompts and Beat the Block Tips to Turbo Charge Your Creativity, BURNING THE MIDNIGHT OIL: How We Survive as Writing Parents, Love is Like a Rainbow: Poems of Love and Devotion, Songs of the Dead, TOTALLY SCARED: The Complete Book on Haunted Houses (with Martha Jette), The Yellow Rose, DOGS FOREVER: Poems for the Dog Person (with Jennifer Wilson), Follow That Dream, On the Wings of Pink Angels: Triumph, Struggle and Courage Against Breast Cancer, The Perfect Christmas, A Million Doughnuts, Hunter's Upcycling Adventures, Satyrs Are Cool: Poems of Mythological Creatures (with Jennifer Wilson), The GHOST Group, Book One (The Ghosts of Sarah Travers and The Crying Valentine), Touched by Fire, Shadow of Samhain, Terror In The Night I - Alien Abduction Exposed! (with Martha Jette and Usko Ahonen), The Warrior Way, Parenting Pauses: Life as a Deaf Parent, April Showers, The GHOST Group Book Two (The Ghost of the Irish Setter and The Ghost of the Missing Hiker), Remember the Soldier, Wolf Whispers, A Ghost on Every Corner, Yesterday's Words, Faded Reflection, Wandering Soul, God's Birds, Burning the Midnight Oil Revisited, Seasonal Songs, Fabulously Frugal: How to Manage Your Money, Live for Less and Build Up Your Savings, Poems for the Grieving Heart, Imprint, Ramblings & Misgivings, Dream World, We Will Never Have Enough Days, Savage World, Remembering Sunny, The Dream Forest, Self-Care Suggestions Book, True Ghost Stories, The Idea Workbook: How to Choose and Use Your Ideas, 101 Quotes on Poetry, The Big Book of Writing Challenges, 10 Ways to Boost Your Mental Health, Meditating Heart, The GHOST Group: Book Three, Free Stuff For Writers, Lost Soul, 5 Tales, The Power of Words, Tarnished Heart, Write for Your Life! The Health Benefits of Writing, A Tiny Light, The Newbie Author's Guide to Getting Your Book Published, Write Like the Wind! Inspirational Notes for Writers*

<https://www.dmcwriter.com/>

<https://dawnsbooks.com/>  
<https://dawncolclasureblog.blogspot.com/>

<https://twitter.com/dawncolclasure>

<https://www.amazon.com/stores/Dawn-Colclasure/author/B006H3H9FS/>

<https://www.instagram.com/dawn10325/>

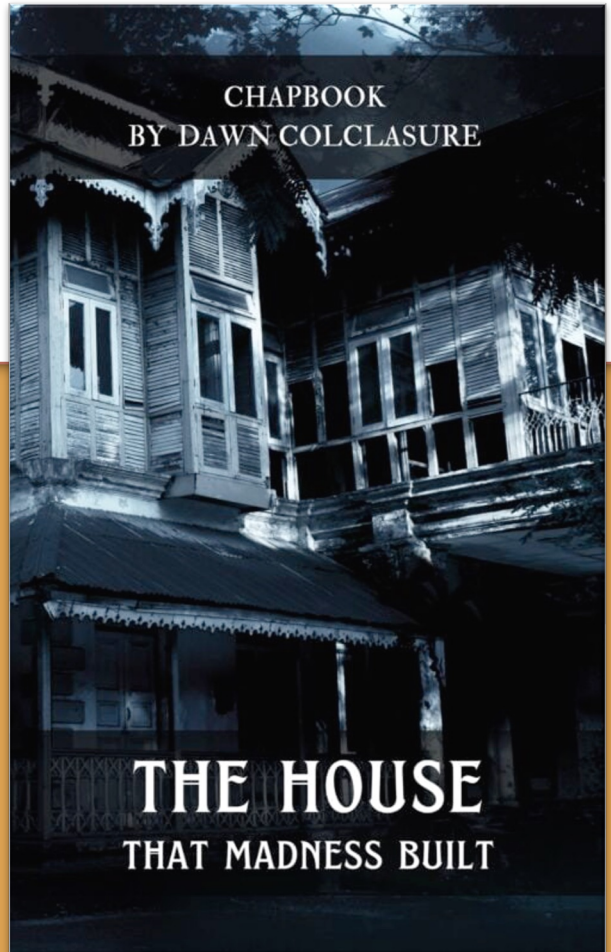
Forthcoming book: Make Someday Today!

## DAWN COLCLASURE – AUTHOR FEATURE

<https://www.amazon.com/House-That-Madness-Built-ebook/dp/B0CJ8FSW>  
M5

Within the pages of this chapbook, you will delve into the profound and harrowing journey of author Dawn Colclasure. Her collection of confessional poems is a reflection of the darkest chapters of her life. Dawn's narrative unfolds from the haunting echoes of a turbulent childhood marred by abuse and violence to the heart-wrenching betrayal of trust through sexual assault. Through her verses, you will bear witness to the moments when hopelessness eclipsed the possibility of a brighter future, prompting her to grapple with thoughts of self-harm. As a survivor of severe burns, Dawn endured relentless bullying and painful rejection, ultimately leading to a profound sense of low self-esteem, self-hatred, and the suffocating embrace of depression.

"The House That Madness Built" stands as a testament to a life entrenched in turmoil, a life that spiraled into the depths of alcoholism and despair. Yet, it is also a story of resilience, redemption, and the stark moment of reckoning when Dawn was forced to confront her addictions. This collection takes you on an exploration of her choices between life and death, a profound and transformative odyssey that paints a striking portrait of the human spirit's enduring will to survive.



### BURNED

All I remember,  
I flew through the air—  
My parents told me the rest.  
A van hit my mother,  
and I was tossed from her arms  
That explains the memory of flying.

It didn't end there,  
as all tragedies that result  
from drunk driver accidents never do.  
My mom and I were both hospitalized,  
she's missing half of her left leg, and I,  
a burned left arm and cheek  
with both our bodies' casualties of that day.

I was forced to live with third-degree burns,  
something I hated in the beginning.  
The burns made me vile,  
my fingers removed,  
from the left hand, which I rarely used.  
I endured years of being labeled a "freak,"  
Because of those burns that left me disgraced,  
Alone with marks on my face and my arm.

Years of surgeries to alleviate the damage;  
at least my left ear was restored,  
and I received fingers for my left hand,  
from the toes in which I had.

Skilled surgeons and compassionate nurses  
helped throughout those painful years.  
And to this day, I'll never forget  
the compassion and kindness shown.

I still live with scars from the burns I endured.  
Only now, it's not so bad.  
The scars on my face  
and those on my arm  
are a part of who I am now.  
I embrace who I am as I stand out,  
and I'll never hide away again.

### A JACK-IN-THE-BOX KIND OF WAY

The jack-in-the-box suits me.  
Innocently minding its own business,  
yet in a craze,  
it leaps out;  
a smile pasted on its face  
to give the impression  
that everything is fine.

No more tears.  
No more sorrow.  
No more sadness.  
No more anger.

The empty beer cans  
scattered around it  
act as a testament to those  
who know better.

## DAWN COLCLASURE – AUTHOR FEATURE

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### RAGE

rage

the burning fire in my heart,  
the lingering sense of hatred.

vengeance.

knowing that no one can stop me  
in my maddening nightmare.  
a thorn lodged in my brain,  
blindness to all light.  
where darkness is my only friend  
and hatred my ally.

caged

like a wild animal. a beast of utter burden.  
a dream that is crushed beneath the feet  
of giant lords of sanity.

a hope dashed,  
a speck of sand flicked into the air,  
as though all other life is so easily eliminated.  
as though there is no limit  
to the powers of abomination and doom.

a bird wailing in agony for mercy from his pain.  
the phoenix submitting to the flames  
of its own making.

injustice that reeks in this godless world.  
a sail across Hades' river of Cocytus,  
were nothing but wails for mercy  
ricochet in my mind;  
souls that only wander, never rest.  
the only way out is death,  
and even death eludes me



Our  
Co-Creators

# Kassie J Runyan



I've always had an affinity for reading and writing. I heard that every good reader is also a good writer. If that's true, then I'm in luck. I was always the odd kid walking down the hallway while reading a book... which may also explain my clumsiness... or had book(s) hidden in various places around the house, just in case I had a spare minute while I was supposed to be doing chores. Nothing has really changed all that much. My writing started in much the same way. Here and there, scribbled into notebooks, starting when I was younger. With the start of my first novel when I was 18. It was almost an escape from the real world at a time in my life where I needed it most. Eventually life got in the way and I put down the novel for over 10 years, picking it back up in my early 30's and finishing it. Poetry is my 'magazine writing.' When I have an emotion or an idea and I have to get it on paper but didn't have time to work it into a book, it came out as a song or a poem. That makes this endeavor with Mel even more special. It's something that we both love to write and read, and we get to help build others up while also getting some wonderful things to read. Best of both worlds!

I have three poetry collections out currently, as well as my debut novel, "The Death and Life of John Doe" All available wherever books are sold! These are for sale along with other reader/writer gifts on my website at [KassieJRunyan.com](https://www.KassieJRunyan.com)

<https://www.KassieJRunyan.com>

<https://www.Facebook.com/kassiejrunyan>

<https://www.Instagram.com/kjrunyan>

<https://www.Twitter.com/kassandrerrunyan>

[https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLvSEcLEfE196OE\\_Ya2LNNN3kjFp82Kt2](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLvSEcLEfE196OE_Ya2LNNN3kjFp82Kt2)

## KASSIE J RUNYAN – CO-CREATOR

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### MY FAIRY TALE

Once dwelled a young woman  
residing in her brick tower  
where serenity reigned  
Candles emanated a golden glow  
Companions sang and danced merrily  
Even cozy pants with stretchy bands were the norm  
Beyond those walls lay a world of trepidation  
A realm filled with strife and worry  
Responsibilities weighed upon her shoulders  
Ensuring her people were fed and clothed  
Amidst fire-breathing dragons and irate villagers  
She had to venture out,  
concealing her hair beneath a hood  
And confront the outside world  
For without it, her tower's tranquility couldn't endure  
With a brave smile, she took one step after another  
Enduring the scorching heat and biting cold  
Each day was a new challenge  
She attempted to sing with the rats  
That lived beneath the ground  
But they rarely sang back  
instead responding with bared teeth  
In search of the tranquility of a candle's glow  
She encountered flames from a lit bin instead  
She tugged at her snug dress  
wiggled her toes in her high heels  
Attempted to tame her wind-blown hair

Smile girl, just smile  
soon, you can return to your sanctuary  
And dream of lush lands  
painted with green and blue  
Leaving your tower behind for a calmer world  
Where the outside matched the inner serenity  
Sleep long and dream  
Of your prince.. who is bed beside you  
And cuddle with your loyal companions  
Who purr and snuggle closer  
One day, my dear, you can cease  
Venturing out into a world teeming with evil queens  
And wrathful witches,  
And self-absorbed, irrational people  
Who shout at the heavens over perceived wrongs

But not tomorrow...  
Tomorrow, she would once again leave her tower  
And the day after that  
And the day after that  
Yet she continued to dream  
Of that "someday" that might arrive.

## THE DEATH AND LIFE OF JOHN DOE – KASSIE J RUNYAN

<https://www.kassierunyan.com/thedeathandlifeofjohndoe>

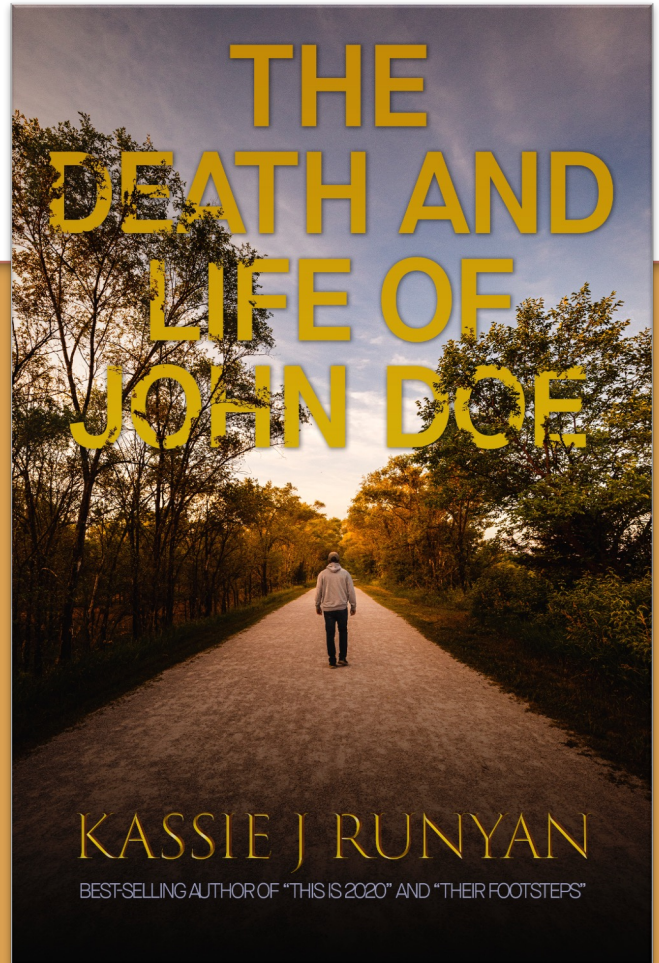
From best-selling poet of "This is 2020" and "Their Footsteps," Kassie J Runyan, comes her debut novel, "The Death and Life of John Doe," which takes a deep look into trauma, the human psyche, and the struggle of living on the street.

Our nameless nomad walks out the front door of his suburban home, leaving his life behind. Not knowing what it is he's looking for... or what it is he's running from. He closes the door and walks into a world full of the pain and joy that waits for him with each step. He keeps moving forward; driven by a desire to find a reason for his life and to discover his forgotten past. What he wasn't prepared for were the dreams.

*What is your name?*

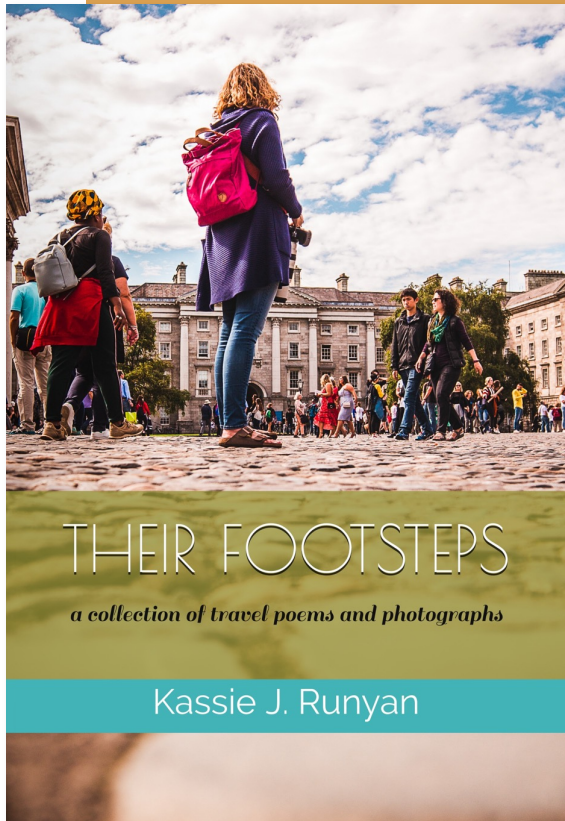
**"The Death and Life of John Doe is a mesmerizing book that takes you on a cross-country journey and makes you question your own perception. "**

**- Joni Rachell, Author**





## KASSIE J RUNYAN – CO CREATOR



<https://www.amazon.com/Their-Footsteps-collection-travel-photographs/dp/1735514020/>

<https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/1735514004/>



# Mel Haagman

I am a special needs teacher from the UK. I live by the sea and love nothing more than walking along the beach with a coffee from my favourite café. I have always loved reading and writing poetry and I am so excited to begin a new venture with Kassie on OpenDoor Poetry magazine.

I have written three books. My first book, 'Open Heart Poetry' was self-published in 2019. This book of poems aims to break the stigma attached to living with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder. The first part focusses heavily on mental health and the second part contains more relatable, light-hearted poetry about a range of everyday life subjects.

My second book, Lexical Lockdown: Poems about Binge-Watching, Exercise Mishaps, Fridge-Surfing and other Pandemical Pursuits was written throughout the UK lockdown. It is written in a diary format, chronologically capturing the daily updates from the pandemic in rhyme as well as the difficulties we all faced being in lockdown. It is written in a raw, honest and at times comical way. Lexical lockdown will be a historical keepsake that accurately portrays the challenging times we have faced and are still facing.



<https://www.Facebook.com/girlontheedge90>

<https://www.Instagram.com/girlontheedge90>

<https://www.Twitter.com/girlontheedge1>

[https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCjh8b4Y7gSFGKe\\_wzPKZH8lw](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCjh8b4Y7gSFGKe_wzPKZH8lw)

## LOST IN MIND: FOUND AT HEART – MELANIE HAAGMAN

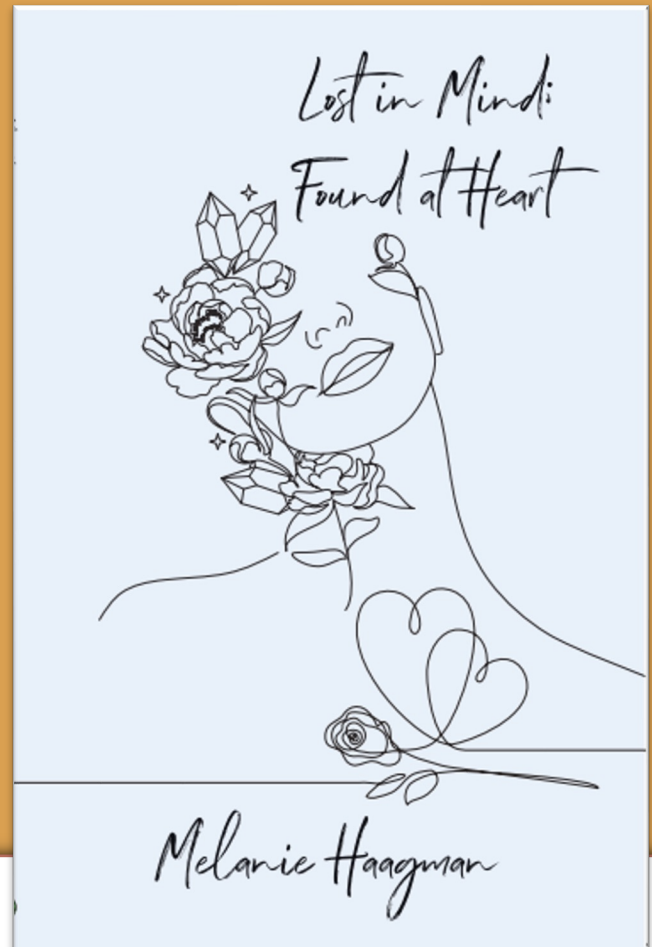
<https://www.amazon.com/Lost-Mind-Found-At-Heart/dp/191491354X/>

<https://www.facebook.com/Girlontheedge90/>

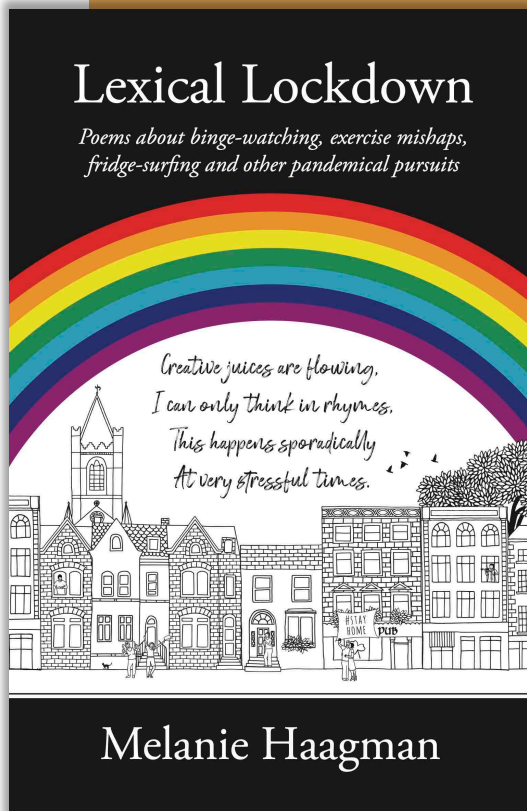
Lost in Mind; Found at Heart really did write itself. Every time I feel a strong emotion, whether it be a negative or a positive one, I find nothing more therapeutic and satisfying than writing a poem about it and of course they have always got to rhyme!

Poetry for me is an innate coping mechanism to deal with whatever life throws at me. I do my best to try and write honestly and always aim to end with an uplifting line. This book reflects that no matter how hard things get, when we are truthful and transparent with our emotions, we can make meaningful connections with others who will in turn help us to get through. As well as learning how to get back up when we fall and realising that this is how we learn, develop, and grow.

It has never been more important to speak out about mental health and the similar struggles that we are facing. I hope that these poems can help others to know that they aren't alone with their feelings. This book is divided into subsections to quickly help you find the perfect poem to get you through the day. Whether you need advice, a little injection of humour, a poem about feelings, down-days, or even friendship! I hope that you can laugh, cry, smile, relate to and most importantly enjoy this book.



## MEL HAAGMAN – CO-CREATOR



<https://www.amazon.com/Lexical-Lockdown-binge-watching-fridge-surfing-pandemical-ebook/dp/B08D6RPYY7/>

<https://www.amazon.com/Open-Heart-Poetry-Melanie-Haagman/dp/1527238407/>

## Open Heart Poetry



By Melanie Haagman



**CALLING POETS, AUTHORS, SONGWRITERS,  
ARTIST, AND WRITERS! WE WOULD  
LOVE FOR YOU TO  
SUBMIT AN ARTICLE, POEM,  
CREATION, SHORT STORY,  
PAINTING, NEW BOOK FEATURE  
- AND AUTHOR FEATURES!**

**WINTER ISSUE = FROST & FIRELIGHT**

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<https://www.patreon.com/OpenDoorMagazine>

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A watercolor illustration of a windmill with four sails. The sails are light yellow with a dark grid pattern. The body of the windmill is painted in various colors including purple, orange, and blue. The base is green and yellow. The background is white.

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CREATED BY MEL HAAGMAN AND KASSIE J RUNYAN

DESIGN AND LAYOUT BY KASSIE J RUNYAN