

PhiladelphiaStories

Cultivating a community of writers, artists, and readers across the Delaware Valley

SPRING / 2020 / FREE



CONTENTS

POETRY

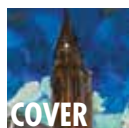
- 4** MILK SICKNESS: A MOTHER WORRIES AS HER CHILDREN SLEEPKARI ANN EBERT
6 FEEDING MY FATHER PUDDING WHILE WATCHING *BONANZA*CHAD FRAME
7 LUKENS STEEL, COATESVILLE, PENNSYLVANIAKYLE CARROZZA
8 HOW TO RIDE A TRAIN IN THE ANDESLUPITA EYDE-TUCKER
10 ON WASSILY KANDINSKY'S PAINTING: "LITTLE PAINTING IN YELLOW"KATHLEEN SHAW
12 MATTHEWCHAD FRAME
14 MOTHER EXPLAINSJANE C. MILLER

FEATURES

- 16** TEND (fiction)NATALIE GERICH BRABSON
20 END TIMES (fiction)MELANIE MOYER
24 A NON-FAIRY TALE (non-fiction)NANCY FARRELL

WEB EXTRAS: SANDY CRIMMINS POETRY CONTEST: EDITOR CHOICE SELECTIONS

ART



Girard Avenue by Joe Brenman

Joe Brenman's life was defined through his lifelong journey as an artist. Working in many mediums: drawing, clay, wood, mosaics, and collage enabled him to explore personal, spiritual, and social justice themes. His work is in El Salvador, Vietnam, and locally at mosques, churches, synagogues, and Septa Church Street. Brenman lived and worked in his Olde Kensington studio and used collage to capture the spirit of his longtime Philadelphia neighborhood.



Ecstatic Orange by Sandi Neiman Lovitz

Sandi Neiman Lovitz graduated from Penn State University with a bachelor's degree in art education. She is now on the board of Da Vinci Art Alliance in Philadelphia and is very active in ARTsisters, a group of professional women artists who not only support each other, but also reach out to women and children in the community. Lovitz paints full-time in her studio in Havertown, Pennsylvania.



Under a Blue Umbrella by Catherine Kuzma

Born in Philadelphia and residing in New Jersey, Catherine Kuzma earned her Bachelor of Arts degree from Rutgers University. Kuzma's oil paintings have been shown in the Philadelphia area, New Jersey and NYC in solo, group and juried exhibitions and publication of her work includes the cover of the July 2018 Tishman Review. Sparking the rich, meditative process of painting, nature and landscape serve as the initial inspiration for Kuzma's paintings. More of her award-winning work can be viewed at www.catherinekuzma.com.



A Sense of Place by Lee Muslin

Lee Muslin has participated in over 300 exhibitions throughout the United States, including 21 solo shows. Many New York and Philadelphia gallerists and museum curators have selected her art for juried shows. Muslin has been privileged to receive 35 awards. She attended the University of Delaware as a fine art major and subsequently received a degree from Parsons School of Design in New York City. Visit www.leemuslin.com.



Scene from a Revolution by Constance Culpepper

Philadelphia artist Constance Culpepper received her B.A. from Southern Methodist University and an M.A. from Bryn Mawr College. Her paintings are narratives on personal space and perspective. She was a featured artist at the 2016 Democratic National Convention Headquarters and worked for the Mural Arts Program of Philadelphia in 2018, painting murals in the East Falls and South Philly neighborhoods of the city. Culpepper is Director Emeritus of 3rd Street Gallery in Philadelphia. www.constanceculpepper.com.



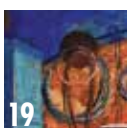
Spring Planting by Corinne Dieterle

Originally a textile artist, Corinne Dieterle made the leap to painting some twenty years ago and has benefited from the instruction of several talented teachers. Based in Conshohocken, Pennsylvania, her work can be found in exhibits in galleries, annual juried shows, several Delaware Valley art centers, restaurants and libraries and is held in numerous private collections. Dieterle was the recipient of a 2016 Mt. Gretna School of Art Summer painting residency.



Memory Fragment No. 6 by Constance McBride

Constance McBride's work addresses the human condition in relation to nature with an emphasis on women's issues. She earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from Arcadia University. Her work appears in public and private collections and is exhibited nationally in galleries and museums. Living and working in Chester County, Pennsylvania, McBride's current affiliations include Main Line Art Center, Philadelphia Sculptors and Women's Caucus for Art. She serves as a board member of The Art Trust in West Chester and teaches ceramics.



At the Close of the Day by Bill Sweeney

Bill Sweeney lives in Chadds Ford area and has been painting since 1981. He is a member of the Pastel Society of America, and a signature member of The Philadelphia Watercolor Society and the Maryland Pastel Society. His work has received awards at the PWCS International Exhibit of Works on Paper, the Images exhibit at the Central Pennsylvania Arts Festival and a number of art association exhibits. His work can be seen at www.billsweeneyart.com.

Publisher/Editorial Director

Carla Spataro

Publisher/Executive Director

Christine Weiser

Managing Editor

Yalonda Rice

Fiction Editor

Trish Rodriguez

Creative Nonfiction Editor

Adriana Lecuona

Poetry Editor

Courtney Bambrick

Poetry Assistant Editor

Nicole Mancuso

Art Editor

Pam McLean-Parker

Art Director

Derek Carnegie

Marketing Assistant

Dorn Saunders

Event Director

Lena Van

Board of Directors

Concha Alborg
 Alex Husted, President
 Daniel Johns, Vice President
 Jim Knipp
 Carla Spataro
 Gary Zimmaro, Treasurer

Fiction Board

Aimee LaBrie
 Sharon White
 Walt Maguire
 Elizabeth Greene
 Lena Van
 Kate Blakinger
 Nathan Long

Creative NonFiction Board

Andrea Vinci
 Brittany Leonard
 Debbie Fox
 Deborah Off
 Jacqueline Massaro
 Rachel Mamola
 Susette Brooks

Poetry Board

Peter Barath
 Kathryn Ionata
 David Kozinski
 Pat Green
 Liz Chang
 Hayley Allison
 Luke Stromberg
 Basia Wilson
 Vernita Hall
 Margot Douaihy
 Thomas Jay Rush
 Donna Wolf-Palacio
 Blythe Davenport
 Nicole Mancuso
 Maria Thiaw
 Deb Burnham
 Liz Dolan
 Donna Keegan
 Shira Moolten

Author honoraria made possible by the generous support of the Conrad Weiser Author Fund

Philadelphia Stories, founded in 2004, is a non-profit literary magazine that publishes the finest literary fiction, poetry, and art from Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware and distributes free of charge to a wide demographic throughout the region. The mission of *Philadelphia Stories* is to cultivate a community of writers, artists, and readers in the Greater Philadelphia Area. *Philadelphia Stories* is a 501(c)(3). To support *Philadelphia Stories* and the local arts, please visit www.philadelphiastories.org to become a member today!



SUPPORT PROVIDED IN PART BY THE PHILADELPHIA CULTURAL FUND.



Letter from the [Poetry] Editor



Sandy Crimmins

Each year, Philadelphia Stories celebrates the memory of poet Sandy Crimmins whose poem "Spring" appeared in our first issue. Sandy served on the Philadelphia Stories poetry board until 2007, and her influence on the magazine has been felt ever since. We use the prize named for her to celebrate risk and innovation in poetry. This year's Sandy Crimmins National Prize in Poetry was judged by poet Iain Haley Pollock, author of *Ghost, like a Place* and *Spit Back a Boy*. Many of the poems we sent him raise important questions and give voice to unsettled feelings. Pollock says that, "[W]e live in an exciting, efflorescent time in the history of American poetry." We can see that flowering in the poems listed below. Pollock continues:

These poems explore diverse subjects—the lonely offices of grief, the deterioration of our public discourse, the cruel legacies of our national history, the triumphant possibilities of migration, the wistful complications of eros, and the sustaining inheritances of family. But no matter the subject the unflinching clarity of each poet's vision and the precision of each poet's images tap into a deep well of emotion. The pleasures of these poems are not easy but lie in knowing that out there other humans wrestle to make sense of the intractable world around them and perhaps even find within it cause for hard-won celebration.

The winner of this year's Sandy Crimmins National Prize in Poetry winds itself in the conflicting but complementary threads of care and fear. Vigilance is exhausting but necessary, "Milk Sickness: A Mother Worries as Her Children Sleep" by Kari Ann Ebert seems to tell us. About the winning poem, Pollock writes:

We become "milk sick" when we drink milk from a cow that has grazed on poisonous plants. In "Milk Sickness: A Mother Worries as Her Children Sleep," Kari Ann Ebert makes this condition a metaphor for maternal apprehension. The poison here is ophidian as snakes menace a pail of milk, "swim in sacrifice," in that part of the body a mother gives up that her children might live. As with many parents, having children has expanded the speaker's capacity for love and also her capacity for fear. As the speaker's dread deepens, Ebert overlays a deft sonic network, heightening the poem's emotions. In the end, the snakes' movement and attendant noise become, as does fear, so encompassing that relief from them seems manufactured or illicit—"like stolen butter." All in all, with an expert command of sound and image, Ebert captures how fear, especially maternal fear, acts on us and threatens to overwhelm us in the "opaque" hours of our lives.

Philadelphia Stories thanks Joe Sullivan for his support of this contest and his enduring friendship with Philadelphia Stories. We also thank Nicole Mancuso, contest coordinator and assistant poetry editor for her solid and consistent energy. We thank Yalonda Rice, managing editor, for her flexibility and patience. Mostly, we thank the poets who generously share their work with us and we encourage local writers to continue to do so throughout the year. — **Courtney Bambrick, Poetry Editor, Philadelphia Stories**

WINNER OF THE 2020 SANDY CRIMMINS NATIONAL PRIZE IN POETRY

"Milk Sickness: A Mother Worries as Her Children Sleep,"
Kari Ann Ebert (Dover, DE)

RUNNERS UP

"Feeding My Father Pudding While Watching *Bonanza*,"
Chad Frame (Lansdale, PA)
"Lukens Steel, Coatesville, Pennsylvania,"
Kyle Carrozza (Coatesville, PA)
"How to Ride a Train in the Andes,"
Lupita Eyde-Tucker (Palm Bay, FL)

HONORABLE MENTIONS

"On Wassily Kandinsky's Painting, 'Little Painting in Yellow,'" Kathleen Shaw (Schwenksville, PA)
"Mother Explains," Jane Miller (Wilmington, DE)
"Matthew," Chad Frame (Lansdale, PA)

EDITOR'S CHOICES

"Lightbearers," Tyler Dunstan (New York, NY)
"Inventory," Cindy Ok (Iowa City, IA)
"On the Solitary Death of Uncle Mike,"
Sean Webb (Philadelphia, PA)

FINALISTS

"The Others," Ginny Pina (Wayne, PA)
"Darlings," Dana Jaye Cadman (Mineola, NY)
"Heirloom," Michelle Flores (Jacksonville, FL)
"What a Mother Lays on Her Son," Jane Miller (Wilmington, DE)
"CDG," Tyler Dunstan (New York, NY)
"Smoking Shelter," Chad Frame (Lansdale, PA)
"That Long Haul," Mary Finnegan (Philadelphia, PA)
"Ode to la Conquista" Lupita Eyde-Tucker (Palm Bay, FL)
"A Herringbone Pattern of Tiny Iowas,"
Sean Webb (Philadelphia, PA)



Milk Sickness: A Mother Worries as Her Children Sleep

Poem by Kari Ann Ebert

sometimes I see snakes in a milk pail
noisy tumbles of coils & scales
I lie awake steeled vigilant
absorb the discord of writhing
bodies in my opaque world

I wonder if they know they swim in sacrifice

maybe they think it's water edged by meadow
maybe they dream the spinning of their skins
will loose them to catch the scent
of mouse or egg
in a dreamscape of venom & froth

or is it panic
black thick rich like cream
panic that weighs them down
roiling blind only to find they're trapped
and soused in humors

maybe the milk's a mirror
a mother-of-pearl shine that splashes
the black snake hole in my eye
if I stare at the waves the sloshes of nacre
maybe my tongue will smell a way out
lift me with a swell as the vipers sink
like weighted calcite beneath the tide
black pearls lost at sea
maybe then stillness will claim me
a silence only I can taste like stolen butter



Kari Ann Ebert is a poet & writer living in Dover, Delaware. She was recently awarded an Individual Artist Fellowship by the Delaware Division of the Arts (2020). Winner of the 2018 Gigantic Sequins Poetry Contest, her work has appeared in Mojave River Review, Philadelphia Stories, The Broadkill Review, and Gargoyle, as well as several anthologies. She was selected to attend the BOAAT Press Writer's Retreat (2020) with Shane McCrae, awarded a fellowship by Brooklyn Poets (2019), and selected to attend the Delaware Division of the Arts Seashore Writers Retreat (2016). She also enjoys making up-cycled art and collaborating with local artists, musicians, and writers.





Feeding My Father Pudding While Watching *Bonanza*

Poem by Chad Frame

All any relationship boils down to
is are you willing to do this for me
or aren't you? Hoss and tapioca

and what remains of your life all balanced
precariously on a plastic spoon.
Every week, the grown Cartwright boys learn

another life lesson from their father
who has seen *some things* in his day, who knows
better. And maybe all death really is

is gradual unlearning, the pudding
crusting in your beard like infant spit-up.
I have driven two hundred miles each day

for two weeks to be here to watch old shows,
nurses prodding, your chest rising, falling,
but these are the distances that matter—

spoon to mouth, screen to face, son to father,
father to grave. Your thousand-yard stare's fixed
vaguely on the wall-arm television

where Michael Landon is falling in love
with Bonnie Bedelia, and we know
(half-century old spoiler) that Hoss dies

offscreen because Dan Blocker dies offscreen
from botched surgery. But it is enough
to know the twangy theme is still playing,

galloping into and out of the room,
even when the spoon scrapes an empty cup,
even when we pull the sheets all the way up.



Chad Frame's work appears in *Rattle*, *Mom Egg Review*, *Barrelhouse*, *Rust+Moth*, and other journals and anthologies, as well as on iTunes from the Library of Congress. He is the Director of the Montgomery County Poet Laureate Program and Poet Laureate Emeritus of Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, the Poetry Editor of *Ovunque Siamo: New Italian-American Writing*, a founding member of the No River Twice poetry improv performance troupe, and founder of the Caesura Poetry Festival and Retreat.



Lukens Steel, Coatesville, Pennsylvania

Poem by Kyle Carrozza

And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.

The steel mill that sprawled across the city
reached toward the sky with the roofs of each wing.
Even on Sundays, the men in torn
khakis and faded t-shirts filed into the mill.

My father was one of them. In Sunday School,
I imagined him standing around, shooting the shit
about recession or politics, waiting for his shift
to begin. Punching in is a ritual of Wonder
Bread and pocket change.

The body of Christ, given for you.

He made huge sheets of steel, long,
pure, and absolutely silver until
outsourcing turned emblem into epitaph—
Bethlehem Steel's takeover could not save the place.
Still, the mill stands, decaying, hollow
monument to itself, the rituals abandoned.

*The Lord loves the gates of Zion
more than all the dwellings of Jacob.*

Almost no steel is produced anymore;
instead, the silver pours out onto the faded
streets, the concrete walls of the city's banks,
into the hair of old men.



Kyle Carrozza is a teacher and soccer coach who lives and breathes Coatesville, PA. His journalism has been published in *The Coatesville Times*, *Scarecrow Grin*, and *The Korean Quarterly*. His poetry has appeared in *The City Key*.



How to Ride a Train in the Andes

Poem by Lupita Eyde-Tucker

In a coastal sweatland shanty town, I vowed
to clamber onto the corrugated steel
roof of a train car, to throw my life

up first like a knapsack, charcoal-cleanse
my nose, my lungs, my pores— be delivered
aching, for twelve-hours up a shifty seam

of steel my Abuelito laid
the one who carried the train on his back
Hold my breath, stay low, remember

to not drink chicha on the roof with the local boys
not to lose my head, or turn my back
on the tunnel like bisabuelo did. Hold tight

until the train stops just past Devil's Nose
in a tiny Andes town, overlooked
by wooden window balconies

steel-sliced cobblestone kingdom
bearing a cordillera crown. Here
I let my fingers stroke the velvet mountain's cloak

and from the furrows of the knitted fields
I see my Abuelita come running
the one waiting for the whistle

tired of air-kissing the cheek of fate
watch her smudge coal off her brow
watch her tuck family secrets down her blouse

purchase a ticket to another life
The first man who crosses my path
she vowed: *con ese me largo.*



Lupita Eyde-Tucker writes and translates poetry in English and Spanish. She's the winner of the 2019 Betty Gabehart Prize for Poetry, and her poems appear in *Nashville Review*, *SWWIM*, *The Florida Review*, *Asymptote*, *Columbia Journal*, *Raleigh Review*, and are forthcoming in *The Arkansas International*, *Chautauqua*, *Yemassee*, and *Waccamaw*. She's currently translating two collections of poetry by Venezuelan poet Oriette D'Angelo. Lupita and her husband live and homeschool their children in Florida. Read more of her poems at: www.NotEnoughPoetry.com



HONORABLE
MENTION

On Wassily Kandinsky's Painting: "Little Painting in Yellow"

Poem by Kathleen Shaw

Just before the Great War, Kandinsky
took time to paint something yellow,
something little, something that looked
like nothing anyone had ever seen. How
shocked they were— how outre to
paint something so unwarlike, how
perverse to veer from standards.
Is that an egg? Is that a sun? Is that
a cloud? Is that a mouth?
Yes, yes, yes, yes and no, no, no, no,
said Kandinsky, silently out loud,
thinking, while not thinking of war.



Kathleen Shaw is a semi-retired assistant professor of English at a community college. She has had poetry published in Philadelphia Stories, Anthology magazine, Derail, Schuylkill Valley Journal and online journals. She is now in the process of completing her first novel.



HONORABLE
MENTION

Matthew

Poem by Chad Frame

We're twenty, nude, everything firm
and responsive to the touch, soft
breeze cool on our flanks as the pool
laps small waves at the edges, night
purpling above us. You tell me

you have feelings, but I am young
enough to believe chemistry
waits dormant in all things for fire
to ignite—that perfect bonds form
on a whim. Years pass by in months,

six not talking, three back in touch,
each fuck-of-the-week with his flaws
you sob to me—the built frat boy
with awful car playlists, the twink
who texts you from across the room,

the circuit boy who makes the *clack-*
clack of credit cards on mirrors
every morning as he cuts
his breakfast lines. And each painting
you finish with a casual

mastery, sneaking some aspect
of one of them onto canvas—
the hyperreal Spartan soldier
who looks exactly like the guy
really into getting tied up,

the abstract square that is the house
you move into for a few months
with the one with the high-pitched voice
that drives you to drink and tell me
in some drab diner, like always,

that you wish we could have made it
work. A tentacle of cold cream
slowly wraps around my coffee
as I joke *At least you'd paint me,*
and the whole dark is strangled pale
again.



Chad Frame's work appears in *Rattle*, *Mom Egg Review*, *Barrelhouse*, *Rust+Moth*, and other journals and anthologies, as well as on iTunes from the Library of Congress. He is the Director of the Montgomery County Poet Laureate Program and Poet Laureate Emeritus of Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, the Poetry Editor of *Ovunque Siamo: New Italian-American Writing*, a founding member of the No River Twice poetry improv performance troupe, and founder of the Caesura Poetry Festival and Retreat.



HONORABLE
MENTION

Mother Explains

Poem by Jane C. Miller

Where your brother went, a river met him at the shadow's edge, a river he walked on we cannot see, though it flows near us and all the small fish you can imagine wait, circling as if on a merry-go-round until he toes in; and it is then they feel his small steps, each vibration a plated splash and they rise: blue gills, pygmy puffer fish, black mollies, orange clowns, all clamber, making for him a path.

He is not alone. Every step he takes, a fish takes its place underfoot, each fish a finned rock holding him as he walks so that your brother who cannot swim begins to hopscotch, sinking ever so slightly and then popping up, the fish under him shimmering like landing lights; in the dimpling water, the kiss of stars where he treads. He twirls and looks back; his arms spread wide beckon us, but the shore he left is fogged and fading.

Now he is distant and small, but in the vanishing I see him crawl into fins and scales and become one of them, joyous and teeming. He has learned a new way to live and here inside us, who are mostly water, when you least expect it, you will shiver and feel him.



Jane C. Miller's poetry has appeared in numerous journals. She received first prize in Naugatuck River Review's 11th annual narrative poetry contest. A fellowship recipient from the Delaware Division of the Arts, Miller is co-author of the collection, *Walking the Sunken Boards* published by Pond Road Press (2019).





Tend

Natalie Gerich Brabson

Sam's final aching breaths, and the silence between, woke Miri, and she rose from the tangled blankets she slept on beside his hospice cot to hold his hand until it went cold in hers. She had been prepared for weeks now, and the phone was hooked up beside his cot. Her family arrived by dawn, first her grown daughter, Sonya, and then the rest. Some of her cousins brought food when they arrived. After embracing Miri, they pulled off the lids to show her what they had brought—soups, fruit salads, pasta dishes—saying, "So you're all set for now." They piled the containers in the fridge and began filling their air mattresses. Miri had insisted that no one get a hotel. She had plenty of space. She helped her family scatter their mattresses around the living room, where she had already dismantled Sam's cot, and she moved back up to their room, alone.

Under Miri's direction, her family busied themselves with the arrangements, all the appointments, the calls that needed someone to attend to the line during holds, the normal bills that, in this time, still needed to be paid. Whenever possible, Miri went at tasks alone. Alone she selected the prayer to be read for Sam. She chose the cards she would send out to all who came to the funeral, including the same family members who surrounded her now. She failed only at writing Sam's eulogy, beginning several times over and never writing more than, *What am I going to do without you? What am I going to do?* Sonya placed her hands on Miri's shoulders, almost motherly, and then slid the paper away from Miri. The eulogy no longer her responsibility, Miri asked her cousins what she could do to help make their stay more comfortable, but they always shook their heads, no, no. Eventually she could only stand back and watch the activity around her. Everyday someone had to do laundry before the appointments, the funeral, the reception, the burial. Everyday someone swept the kitchen to attack the footprints of too many shoes. Downstairs, in all moments, there were the sounds of squeaking sneakers on the polyurethaned floors, the faint beeps when someone lifted the phone from the receiver and dialed, the low murmurs as her family tried to prevent Miri's overhearing. These sounds layered over the silence Sam had left in his wake, and over the many years of his laughter, the scratching of his frantic note-taking each morning before they left for work, his soft coughs of habit, and rendered his presence in their house gone.

The last morning, after all others had departed for their homes, Sonya cooked breakfast for Miri a final time.

"I'm making extra oatmeal. I'll leave the pot in the fridge, so you can just heat it up this week. Raisins are in and everything." Sonya placed the pot next to the containers Miri's cousins had left her. Sam and Miri had never kept this much food in the fridge. On the fridge door, Sam's picture was posted. The two of them. Miri didn't know the year it was taken, but it hadn't been in the last two. In the picture, Sam's cheeks were not yet gaunt. In the picture, he held her close.

Sonya served this morning's oatmeal. When Sonya ate, Miri did too. She hardly tasted the oatmeal. It dropped to her stomach and sat heavy there. Sonya's car waited in the driveway. They both looked at it as they ate. When Sonya said she could stay no longer, they stood and shared a long, uncomfortable hug.

Miri murmured, "I'll call you later, when I expect you've settled in."

Sonya shook her head. "I'll call as soon as I get home."

Miri didn't argue, knowing this was Sonya's way of expressing care, of needing care. "We'll talk later."

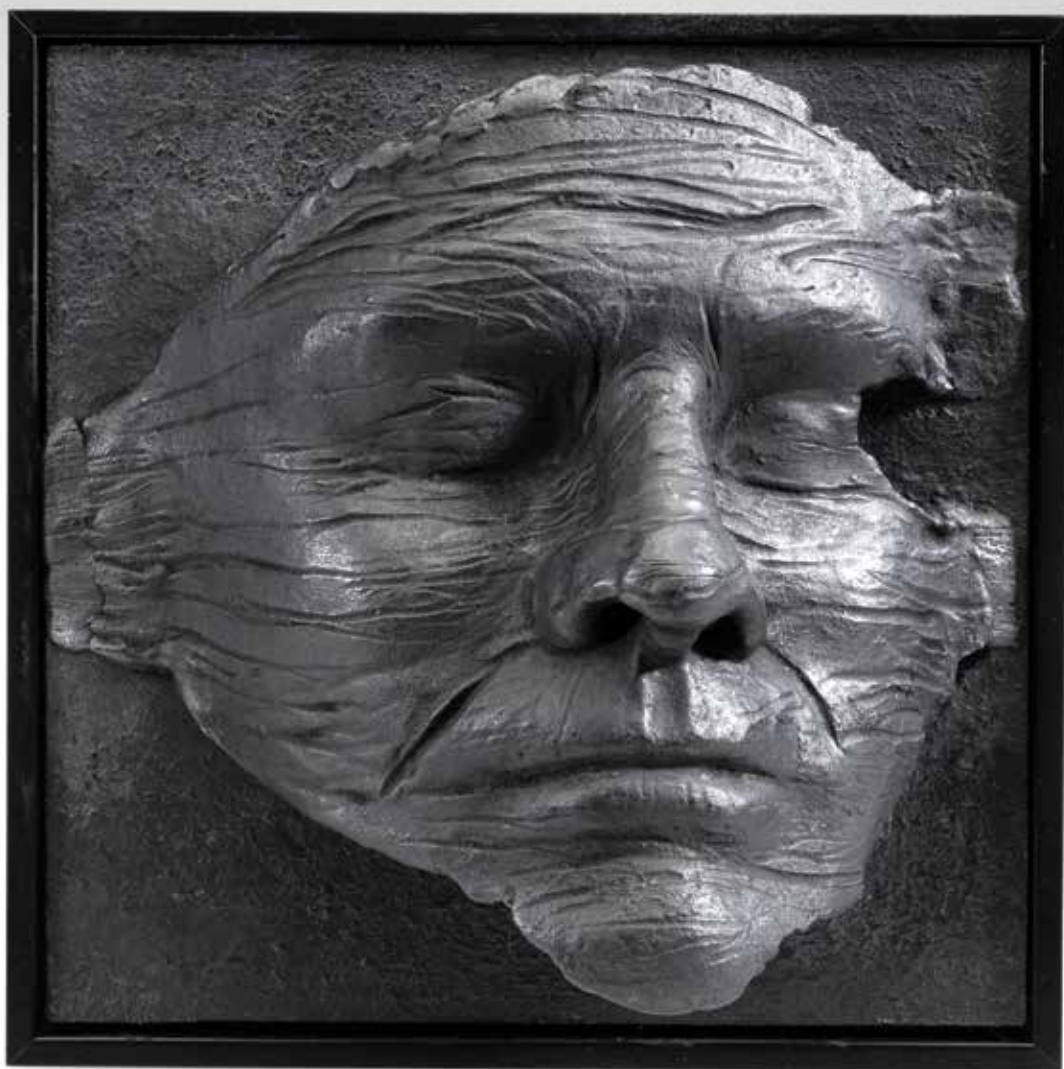
"Right around 5:00."

Falling silent again, Sonya tucked her chin over Miri's shoulder and squeezed hard. Miri let her, as she had let her daughter try to take care of her all week. Though Sonya was grieving, expressing her grief in the same outreaching manner as Miri, Miri did not worry for her. Sonya had always been close with Sam, and she'd visited enough these last years. And, when she finished the drive, she'd be back to her work, her own life, her own husband. They were hoping to have a child soon. Miri knew Sonya must be in deep pain too, but she was not experiencing the same final loss, the beginning of solitude.

The house went silent once more. Miri reclined on Sam's side of the couch and closed her eyes for hours.

In the early afternoon, she trudged upstairs and busied herself to try to quell the ache. She made their bed. She only had to tuck the covers over her side. She did not need to lift the covers to her nose to know that they no longer smelled of Sam. He had not slept in their bed for months. She wiped the bathroom counters. Opening the medicine cabinet, she counted Sam's bottles, six, then tucked them behind her own medications and closed the cabinet. In the mirror she watched herself lift and drop her shoulders once, twice. Through the silence cut the loud crackle of her joints. Miri studied her reflection as she brought her hands to her neck and rubbed. The ache endured.

Downstairs, she unpacked the fridge and freezer, decorated



the kitchen table with Tupperware containers. She pulled off the lids. Miri's cousins and Sonya had preserved the food perfectly, all of the quick-to-spoil foods in the freezer. With the fruit salad alone, she had enough food to last for days. Tiny crystals formed on the berries, reflecting under the kitchen lights. Miri replaced all the lids and returned the food to the fridge and freezer. She would eat another time, later. She did not look at Sam's face as she closed the refrigerator door.

Drawn curtains darkened the living room. The shadows nearly obscured the carpet imprints where her family had set up their mattresses, where Sam's cot had stood. Miri would not go in there again, not right now, and she retreated back into the kitchen until she stood near her walking shoes. After studying them a moment, she put them on.

Outside, the temperature had risen since she'd last been out. "It is summer," Miri whispered. Soon sweat bloomed on her brow, and the arthritis in her knees warmed, flared. She would not turn back yet. It was only 2:00 when she left. She did not have to be home for Sonya's call for hours. She pressed through, kept going, went all the way downtown. She had nearly reached the river and could go no further, and she thought to turn back, but to her left she spotted a cafe she and Sam had never been to. She would order sparkling water, or iced tea, and return home. She chose a table outside under an umbrella.

A quiet waiter brought her a menu, and Miri requested water, said she'd have to look over the menu. When he went inside, she did not open the menu right away. Only a few cars were parked on this street, and fewer drove by. Nothing caught her eye, and she soon thought of home, of the grating, interminable silence. Only two or three months ago, when Sam had the strength to sit up, she'd moved him from the living room cot to the porch for a few hours. He knew it was her spring gardening weekend, and he said he'd like to watch her work. She could not bear to tell him that she hadn't been able to buy the topsoil this season—she hadn't been able to step away from home to do so. She'd left him on the porch to catch her breath inside; and even now, replaying this moment, she fought to keep her breath unchoked.

But seated in the shade, the breeze was good on her scalp. Her sweat began to dry, and she first forced and then allowed herself to pay attention to the wind lifting her hair.

The waiter returned with her water and asked, "What else can I get you, ma'am?"

Miri hadn't looked at the menu. She wanted nothing, felt no hunger, and said so, but added quickly, "An iced tea will do."

"That's a good choice for a day like this. Sure you don't want something to eat?"

"Oh..." Miri started, thinking of the piles of food at home that her cousins had prepared for her, how if she let it go bad, she would not be returning their care. But to get to the food, she'd have to reach past Sam's picture. She'd be haunted, while eating standing up in the kitchen, by how she ended up with this food. By the silence around her.

If she ate a bit now, she could delay it all, and she said, "Perhaps you can point me to something light."

The waiter gestured as though to hand Miri the menu, then stepped back, clutched the menu to his chest. "The scones are good. They'll brighten your day. Just baked this morning."

Miri nodded, and he returned inside.

Under the umbrella, she was no longer overheated, was simply warmed, swaddled. The sun was not directly overhead any-

more, but still it couldn't be near 5:00, when Sonya would call. Soon, Miri would have to trudge home to catch Sonya's call—soothe her from a distance, assure her there was nothing more they could do for her father—but not yet.

Miri watched those passing by, and those coming to the cafe for a light bite. A family entered—a couple with a young child, perhaps nine. Soon a man and dog approached the cafe, and the man secured his dog's leash near Miri's table. He went inside. Miri watched him order, watched him wait. He glanced toward the door often, craning his neck to see his dog, checked again for his food at the counter. His dog, large and long-eared and hairy, some sort of spaniel, stood patiently, panting in the sun. Miri scooped an ice cube from her water glass and threw it to the dog. The dog sniffed the cube, licked it once, then sat up straight again and resumed panting. Droplets formed on his tongue, fell to and darkened the sidewalk. It was the hot part of the day, perhaps unsafe for a dog to sit in direct sun on concrete. Miri patted her thigh, and as she hoped, the dog scooted closer and stood within the umbrella's reach. The dog looked up at Miri, the whites of his eyes flashing, his mouth open as though smiling, and then faced the cafe, watching again for the man.

Miri reached out, hovered her hand near his shoulder. The dog did not turn to snap, and Miri extended her fingertips to touch his coat lightly. The dog shifted his stance, his hip against Miri's leg, almost leaning. Miri rested her hand on his back, warm and damp beneath her palm, but then the cafe door opened, and the dog leapt from her touch to greet his companion.

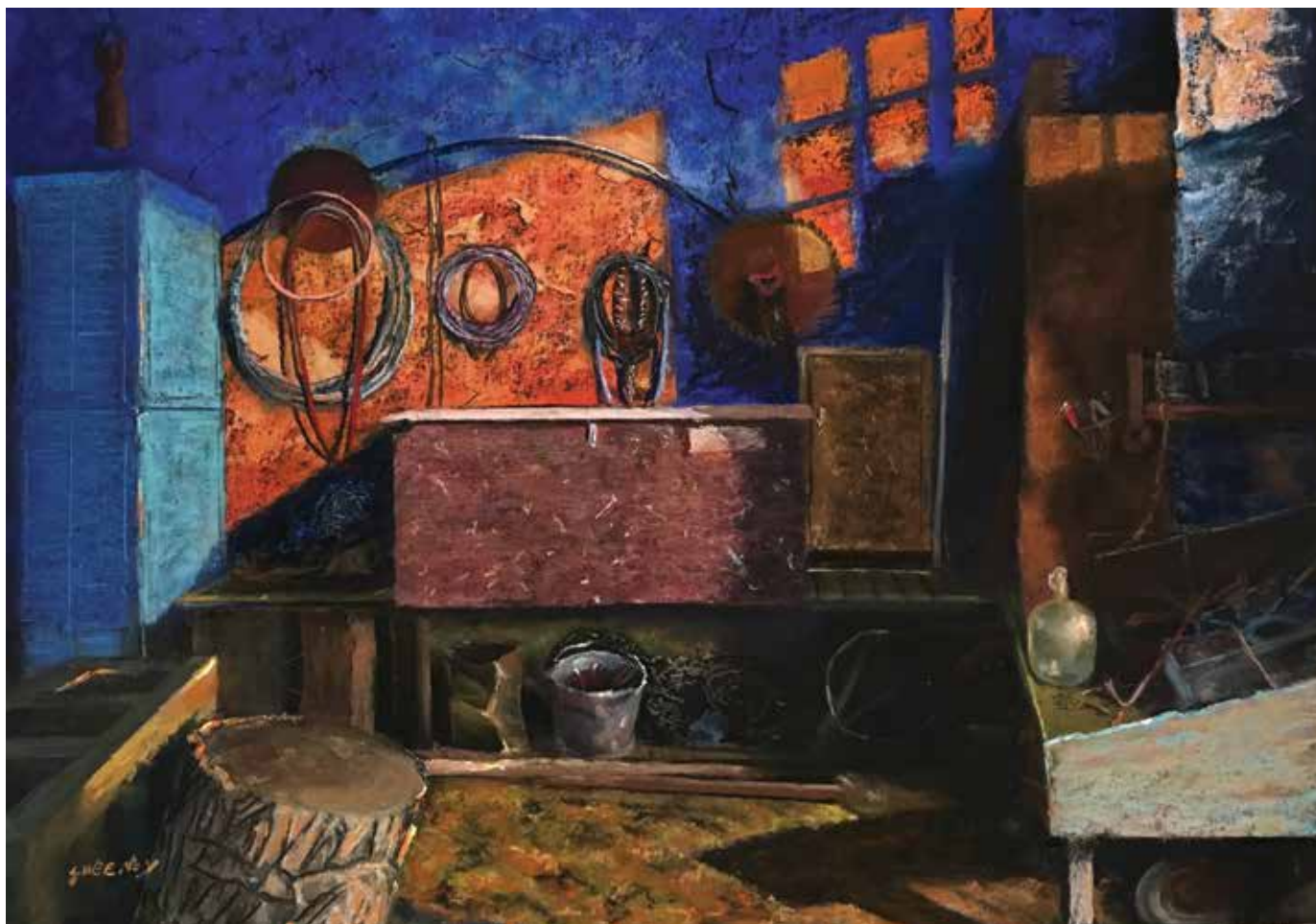
The man flashed Miri a quick smile but did not speak as he stooped to untie his dog. She watched them go, holding her water glass. Her palms chilled once more. Sonya would be crossing the state border soon, would speed up, mesmerized by her nearness to home.

The waiter came out and presented her with a scone on a little dessert plate.

"This is one of the last of the day. They sell out quick."

"I'll be glad to eat it. Thank you," Miri said and waited until he was inside to try the scone. It had a cakey quality, the butter a little too noticeable, but it crumbled nicely with each bite, and the subtle flavor did not overwhelm her. On this day, this was something she could eat, and she ate it slowly. When she finished, she leaned back in her chair. The sun lowered and grew more glaring.

When the waiter brought out her check, he met her eyes and smiled at her, but other customers needed him, and he said no more before returning inside. Miri might not have another unstrained exchange for weeks. She reached for the bill and held the edge. The thermal paper crumpled easily, and she rolled the bill's edge between her fingers, made the paper even softer. Then she tucked it back into the presenter, but not yet with her payment. It had to be nearly 5:00 now, and Miri could not walk home in time. Sonya would soon call to tell Miri she arrived safely. If Miri were home to pick up, she would note the relief in Sonya's voice, always present after a long drive home, but weaker than usual, toned down perhaps for Miri's sake. In the background, she'd hear the blaring TV as Sonya's husband watched his after-work show. She'd point this out to Sonya, draw her back to her life and the goodness in it, and soon Sonya would excuse herself from the call. Other family members would call too, arriving home after long drives or flights, asking one more time if Miri needed a gift card for additional meals. And their check-ins,



Sonya's included, would overbrim with love, and yet they would each take something out of Miri.

Warm in the day's last strong rays, Miri did not have it in her to push her aching body away from the chair, rush home, and listen. The calls would end, and she'd be left keenly aware of the empty house, its hush.

Now the city was growing louder. Sitting outside this cafe, she heard the traffic in the distance, the voices of workers leaving corporate buildings down the street, and the afternoon wind rushing the river along. Miri sat awhile longer, listening to these sounds. She clasped her hands together and placed her chin atop her folded, warm hands. She closed her eyes.

Natalie Gerich Brabson is a recent graduate of Sarah Lawrence College's MFA program and holds a BA in Hispanic Studies from Vassar College. Her fiction has been published in Cleaver Magazine, New World Writing, and Eunoia Review. In 2017 she was selected as Go On Girl Book Club's Unpublished Writer Awardee. She lives in West Philadelphia and is at work on her first novel.

Monk's Café



“Top 5 Places in
The World
to Have a Beer”

All About Beer Magazine, 2010

Full Menu 'til
1 AM Nightly

16th & Spruce

215.545.7005 • monkscafe.com



End Times

Melanie Moyer

I stare at my therapist's coffee cup the entire time she talks to me about the importance of communicating. I'm focused on the yellow Sunoco logo that hasn't changed since 1995 when I would see its sign across from our first house on Lewis Road. What I'm truly thinking, as she talks about advocating for yourself and not running from conflict, is if I can really trust the advice of someone who gets their morning coffee from a shitty gas station that doesn't even let you pump your own gas. Did she pay the grizzly old man with oil-stained callouses to run inside and grab her this too?

I nod and nod and wait for the small timer to go off because I know it's got to be time soon. I give little *mmhmm*'s when a pause is long enough and wonder if getting her a Starbucks gift card for Christmas is passive-aggressive. Do you get your therapist Christmas gifts? Is that like a conflict of interest?

Time's up.

The chime is still going off by the time my coat is slipping on, and I'm on my feet. Unless she has a patient lined up right after me, she always finds ways to make it all go another 10 or 15 minutes, until my left leg starts bouncing. I tell her bye, that I'll think about what she said, that I promise to actually keep that thought journal she asked me to do from two weeks ago and look into reading that book about love languages.

I choose to miss the bus and run to the coffee shop across the street to sit for a few minutes. One of us should have a reasonable cup of coffee.

The good news is Aly thinks I spent extra time with Dr. Wasterman. I finish the coffee before I get home and toss the cup in a trash can outside a different coffee shop two blocks down from our apartment. This one has stickers with rainbows and things about trans rights and all that good stuff in the window, but the one barista creeps me out. He works on Sundays and right when they open on the weekdays and always looks pissed off.

The bad news is she wants to go out.

I really would rather only do one thing a day. And therapy is like three things already before 11am. But she wakes up when I'm already gone and gets stir crazy waiting for me to come back and the sun is popping in and out between clouds today with a nice, even high of 55 or so. She wants a hike. Fresh air, open space. I can't accuse her of cornering me if the conversations I don't want to have given myself over to the wide-open outdoors where I have everywhere to run. That tactic didn't come up in Dr.

Wasterman's long monologue about communication. Or maybe it did. I was focused on the coffee cup.

On the edge of the city lies a valley of trees and climbable rocks. Over a couple hundred or thousand years, a few streams scored through the trees and ground, causing ridges to rise up on either side and eventually dumping into the Schuylkill. This is where she wants to go. She looks me dead with green eyes and says, *Diana, you said we could do something today*. I meant puzzles or baking something or finishing any of the fifteen shows we were trying to watch at once.

Yeah, okay.

I change into boots and put on pants that I care a little less about. I fill up the water bottle she got me for my birthday. She packs snacks, and I realize it's not going to be a short hike. I ask if we can stop for coffee.

We take my car because it's the one that has the parking permit. We cut through Manayunk and up the hill into Roxborough. While we drive, I ask if she ever thinks about how many dead bodies are probably just strewn and hiding in the woods around the city. She shakes her head and tells me something is wrong with me.

People talk about the bodies in Washington Square. Something like 20,000 under the nice, clean concrete paths and fountain welcoming you to Old City. *It's not just me*.

I didn't think I could afford therapy. I'm pretty sure I still, technically, can't. This therapist has a way of billing for like four sessions at once. Rather than \$80 a week I see an occasional bill of a couple hundred, followed by incessant payment reminders on my phone. She once refused to take my calls or set up an appointment until I paid off the \$50 that I owed her. I get it. We all have to make a living. But everyone saying *we should all be in therapy* like it's something anyone can afford or something insurance companies give a shit about.

After our third reenactment of the same fight, I had a moment of some kind of clarity and said *fuck if we're doing this again*. Everyone talks about insanity and its definition as doing the same thing the same way over and over again and expecting a new result. I don't know if that's true, but every time a line like that came out of a book or a TV, I felt them talking to me.

Why am I the only one of us in therapy, though?

I think about the bodies again because this place is old. Not old-old, but it saw a colony and a revolution and all sorts of other

stuff. A friend from my old D&D group out in the suburbs once said that you can tell there's a body because the ground does kind of a six-foot by three-foot dip where it's decaying, and the earth is filling in. Like I said, it's not just me. But Aly doesn't like macabre or do horror.

We pull off to park along Hermit Lane because she wants to take the Yellow Trail to Lover's Leap--the long way--probably take a photo and call it a day.

The first paper mill in British North America was here, she says while we walk along the trail. *This was all industry*. I nod. She tells me about the Battle of Germantown that happened farther down the trail, about an abandoned trolley bridge, about the legend of a Native American couple who couldn't be together because of tribal disputes jumping from the rock we're heading to. She never does her research halfway.

On our first three dates, she was swimming with facts. I had smiled and nodded and found it cute. Figured it would go away the more comfortable with me she got. It's almost two years later now.

We walk to the trailhead beside a cream and yellow house with a sign outside that says Hermitage, with some stories about the Russian entrepreneurs who lived there and made a couple gazillion for their descendants. I follow her down the trail, which bends and turns sharply. The leaves hide the path every couple of yards, and I think about grabbing her hand to make sure she didn't slip.

I want to show you something cool. I nod and follow and think about Dr. Wasterman and how she tells me things like *You're afraid of vulnerability* and *it's okay when relationships don't work out*. I wonder when you know. Is it in the first couple months when something is just not working? Is it when you get to a year and no one wants to tell anyone else that they love them? What happens when you're two years deep and you feel numb in your shared apartment, numb when she's holding your hand?

America's first doomsday cult was here, she says. *The Hermits of the Ridge lived out here and waited in the woods for the world to end*.

That I can get behind. She shows me a stone plaque next to the black mouth of a small, man-made cave. Inside it's about the size of a guest bathroom, rectangular, and surprisingly tucked away from the air of the park outside.

Johannes Kelpius used this place to meditate and think and study--

And just wait for the world to end.

She tells me about how they built a tabernacle and observatory, how they practiced chemistry and astronomy. People say they had the philosopher's stone, and that Kelpius had thrown it into the Schuylkill before he died, or that it was buried with him, depending on who you ask.

Where's he buried?

She shrugs and tells me no one knows.

I think again about the bodies.

I don't want to go to this party, but I need to get better at being social. It's all her friends and people who now say they're my friends, but if we broke up, I'd never hear from them again. I add that to my growing list: how do you deal with a failed relationship when it makes you a friendless loner afterwards?

We walk south, cross Baltimore, and make a few turns I don't track, but she knows West Philly better than I ever will. It's some

kind of housewarming party a few months late. We know every housemate, but it will be fun to guess which guest got invited by which person. We've brought a bottle of wine that's just for us because they're the kind of people who offer Yuengling and PBR to guests alongside cheap tequila and vodka.

It's loud. I always wonder what neighbors are doing when parties are this loud. How close are they to calling the cops?

I stick close to her, our hands laced. It's a survival tactic. There's no soft grip or thumb running across the soft skin at the back of either of our hands. It's hot and tight, and I wonder exactly how many people this apartment floor can hold while a group of women jump around to Robyn playing over the laptop speakers. Furniture has been moved out of the way to create a makeshift dance floor, and we find a spot on a couch in the corner of the room. No cranny is quiet, but we feel separated from the crush of bodies. We pass the wine bottle back and forth and look at each other. We give up on trying to shout over the music and we've stopped holding hands. A year ago at a party, she pulled us out to the balcony and asked if we could make out, and we giggled and held each other where no one could see us. Now it's like that first night in the Mexican restaurant where we couldn't keep eye contact. The difference is that back then felt like a start. This feels like we've finally tunneled to the other side of the Earth and said *now what?*

People talk to her. People who have known her far longer than I have and maybe still know her better. I sip the wine from the mouth of the bottle, grip tightly at the neck like I could snap it, and smile when I make eye contact with people. The heavy weight of the wine settles over me all at once when it's half gone from the bottle and the clock is just past midnight.

She's good in a crowd. She wouldn't agree. But she's good with her friends. All fifteen of her closest friends in one room. I don't talk to anyone from my college. Maybe I should have been in more clubs.

I have a dream about the cave. Or, at least, because of the cave. The outside was the same, but this one went deep and winding. I was pushed down into it by something behind me, and I was tumbling for hours or at least what I understood to be hours in dream time. I never find the bottom because eventually, a work alarm goes off.

I'm in the shower thinking about how cold it's going to be today and wondering if, with my boss up at the New York office for the day, I'll have time to just put Netflix on in the bottom corner of my screen and watch something.

I do end up having time. But instead, I google the cave.

Johannes Kelpius was born in the same village as Vlad the Impaler. I hoped that would lead to stories of human sacrifices and Satanic carvings along the ravine in Wissahickon. But the monks were surprisingly kind and open to anyone who stumbled on their sanctuary. When the end of the world came and went, they did too. No fanfare, no Kool-Aid, no shootout. The world didn't end, but that part of their lives did and they moved on.

I go home and we talk about absolutely nothing that matters over dinner. She puts on sitcoms from the couch, and I clack away at my laptop reading about Kelpius and a faction of historians who actually went on dredging missions in the Schuylkill to see if the philosopher's stone was really down there.

Aly says she's going to bed and closes the door without much else, and I'm left in the kitchen by the light of my laptop screen. I

wonder if they put enough thought into this elixir for all diseases to make it cure mental ones too.

A week later my therapist is talking, and I'm not listening until she says the words *break up*, and I lift my head. I think it's a joke for a second. I think maybe she said it because she knew I wasn't paying attention and wanted me back in the room. But she repeats it again with dead eyes at mine, and I feel that tightness you get at the front of your throat when a good cry is going to come on.

I think it's something you need to consider, whether this relationship is healthy and sustainable. I wonder if therapists are always this blunt. But I have been focusing on her shitty gas station coffee for two weeks, so I don't have much to compare it to.

I actually do consider it on the walk home down Chestnut. I pass the City Tap, where we went one Saturday night on the way back from watching a friend play indoor soccer. We got two beers and maybe a little tipsy and didn't have to pay for our pizza and then went home and had sex. I move past the bagel place we would go on Sundays, trying to get there before the Penn students roused themselves from sleep. A bookstore with a friendly, fat cat that I constantly sent her pictures and videos of. A beer shop where we built overpriced six-packs and got popsicles when it was summer. I can feel all these memories rotting under a time-lapse video like a carved out pumpkin left too long on a stoop. They belong to another part of me now. I can see the pair of us, young, moving down the street, holding hands, and thinking this has to be for forever.

I walk past them. They're farther behind now. I can't even hear their footsteps. I do not go back to our apartment.

I get in my car and drive. I think I put on my seatbelt. I don't remember the car dinging at me. I use turn signals and don't think I blow through red lights, but I also don't remember the drive as I move out of West Philly and up through Bala Cynwyd. I cross the river and bob and weave through the tight turns to get to the top of the ridges of Manayunk. I'm not sure what the speed limit is.

I park my car as the sun settles low beneath the trees. Without the leaves, slices of sunlight slide easily between the thick trunks. I follow the path and think about dead bodies and cheap coffee.

It looks like the shadow of a jail window.

She'll have noticed an hour ago at least that I'm not back yet. I think about meeting her parents and how much I'll miss them and how I'm supposed to tell my mother that we're breaking up. How many clothes I'll have to return. How many gifts strewn through my stuff are things she gave me that will forever carry her aura. I think about sleeping in my bed by myself and all the times I used to wake up confused in the middle of the night when we lived in separate places, and I wondered where she'd gone. Would that be my world, now?

How did those guys camped out here think the world was going to end?

I sit on the dirt floor of the small cave. People could think in here, meditate if you were good at that sort of thing. It'd be even easier back before the screaming cars on Lincoln Drive and Henry Ave.

I think if the world would just die in its sleep, that'd be best. Maybe this is how you do it. In this cave. It's chilly in here, and the sun's gone now. I'd like to sleep in here, but I'm not sure I can do

it. Hours must have passed now. Is my phone still on?

If you knew the world was going to end, what would you do?

It was one of the questions she asked me on an early date. She had at least one odd question every time we went out somewhere. I wondered if she picked it up on other dating apps or had done one of those strange speed dating things. I told her I would eat everything without worrying about carbs or sugars or what happens to my hips and stomach. The answer was the same as if I knew I had a terminal disease that would get me in a couple months.

But I guess I lied. I guess I'm doing this.

I see why he did it. It's small and contained and a little chilly, but nothing a fire couldn't handle. I can do it, I think. Trees and leaves and eating berries and finding dry wood and making a small civilization onto myself out of nothing. Monks who were alive and kicking before George Washington ever set foot in Valley Forge did it. And the Lenape long before them. Maybe that Bible passage they named themselves after, the woman in the wilderness, was me after all. Is this how messiah cults start? With someone deluding themselves into thinking they're the second coming? At three in the morning, anything feels possible. Maybe I'll find that stone at the bottom of the river. Everything will suddenly click into place, the base metal of our waning relationship transfigured.

The sounds from the road slow and fade, the lights from Center City are something I understand exist but cannot see. She is in a warm bed somewhere in a pocket outside of me, and I think it's best if she stays there, gets used to it, learns how to live there. I'll do the same.

And then the sun comes up like it always does. Outside the cave there are animals and early morning hikers and the sounds of Henry Ave and racing cars. I step out of the hole and walk back to my car, which has not been towed. I charge my phone to a herd of missed texts and calls, and I'm terribly hungry, and I think maybe gas station coffee wouldn't be so bad because coffee is coffee and sometimes life is like that.

When I get to our front door and she hears it open and comes running into the living room with dark circles under her eyes and justified anger, I don't know what I'll say. I didn't like that cave. I don't do well with long silences.

I start by opening my mouth. I think it's the better route.

Melanie is a copywriter and author living in Belmont Village. Her short fiction has been published in *Ghost Parachute*, *Meat for Tea*, and *A Woman is a Cinema*. Her nonfiction reviews and criticism have appeared in *Boulevard*, *POPSUGAR*, *Prometheus Dreaming*, *DIYMFA*, and *Write Now Philly*. Her debut novel was published in 2018 through Waterton Publishing, and her forthcoming second novel is set for publication in 2021 through Lanternfish Press. When not writing she serves as the Marketing & Outreach Coordinator for the 215 Festival, cooking, and exploring Philly's restaurant scene.



Immerse yourself in the writing life.

2020 Rosemont *Writer's Retreat*

Rosemont College is a peaceful sanctuary located just minutes by train from Center City, Philadelphia. The Writer's Retreat offers either a weekend, a weeklong, or combination session featuring workshops run by accomplished writers and experienced teachers.

Weekend: June 19-21

Trish Rodriguez, *Flash Fiction*
M. Nzadi Keita, *Poetry*
Erin Entrada Kelly,
Writing for Children and
Young Adults
Margo Rabb, *Creative Nonfiction*
Eric Smith, *Agent-in-Residence*

Weeklong: June 17-22

Artress Bethany White, *Creative Nonfiction*
Liz Abrams-Morley, *Poetry*
Jennifer Steil, *Novel Writing*
Elise Juska, *Short Story*
Julianna Baggott, *Writer-in-Residence*

ROSEMONT COLLEGE

the POWER of small

For complete information
or to register please visit:
rosemont.edu/summerretreat



A Non-Fairy Tale

Nancy Farrell

My daughter fell under the spell of fairy tales early on when, as a toddler, she watched *Lady and the Tramp* for the first time on a VHS tape that I'd rented at a Delaware County Blockbuster while she fought a stomach bug. She'd enjoyed the movie so much that we gifted her with Lady and Tramp stuffed toys for her next birthday. Thereafter, she gradually became enamored of everything else Disney, until we got an inkling that this might be coloring her world view. We'd warned her about stranger danger as a youngster, and yet she'd extend the perkier of hellos to folks we'd pass on the street, as Goofy might. And, as a teen, when our family visited Disney World, she'd had to be reminded to breathe as we'd embarked on Main Street USA, despite our caution that while that Main Street USA's souvenir shops were beguiling, they were also pricey. Fortunately, even a souvenir as unexceptional as a bag of Mickey Mouse-shaped pretzels made her smile.

As a college freshman, she met a young man who was honorable and hardworking, and they fell for one another over afternoons at Linvilla Orchards or the Sproul Bowling Lanes and evenings at Friendly's restaurant or the AMC Theater. In their mid-20s, he proposed marriage. She had officially found her prince, and they said their vows in 2013 on a bright, fall Saturday. Soon after, they found a place to live in Wilmington with copious drafts and missing shingles but a good configuration, and they slowly turned it into a home that included a Cinderella snow globe and a Mickey and Minnie alarm clock.

But these fairy tale associations would come to an end, and the beginning of the end fell on Christmas Day in 2014, when my daughter and her husband, both age 27, excitedly shared with me their desire to start a family. They'd been helping me peel our dinner potatoes in the kitchen, when she'd excitedly let slip, "Mom, we're trying for a baby." I saw my son-in-law blush and hugged them both. "How wonderful!" I cried out.

They spread the news to the rest of the family as we gathered in the dining room. Then, my daughter leaned toward me and whispered, "Who knows, mom? I could be pregnant already." I nodded and put my hand in hers. We had no idea what was coming.

My daughter was not pregnant on that Christmas Day in 2014, nor was she pregnant on Christmas Day in 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, or 2019. Instead, they were diagnosed as the one couple in eight who suffer from infertility.

In 2015, after one year without success, my daughter's gynecologist

had various recommendations, such as ovulation predictor kits and fertility monitor bracelets among others. However, no amount of calendar marking, temperature taking, or urine dip sticking resulted in pregnancy.

In 2016, they visited an infertility specialist. The hope was that medical breakthroughs would step in and solve the mystery. Coinciding with this time was a career opportunity for my son-in-law, but it required that he live out of state for a couple of months. My son-in-law didn't want to live away even temporarily, but the Intra-Uterine Insemination (IUI) procedures they were about to begin at the Reproductive Associates of Delaware would be costly, and my daughter reassured him that a better job was for the best. It was determined that, with meticulous planning, the procedures could take place while my son-in-law was away, and that I would accompany my daughter to the infertility appointments.

Ahead of the first IUI, an exploratory surgery was performed to check for cysts or blockages. I sat in the waiting room wishing that *something* would be found because then *something* might be remedied, but the surgical results were inconclusive. The diagnosis was unexplained infertility, which doesn't sound like a diagnosis at all, but is one, we discovered. Our drive home from the surgery center involved my getting hopelessly lost, while my daughter endured post-anesthesia vomiting in the passenger seat. Eventually, I got her settled at home with a blanket on the sofa, unearthed old coloring books and crayons, ordered a pizza, and then slipped *Mulan* into the DVD player, and there we sat for hours.

In July of 2017, I held my daughter's hand as she underwent IUI #1. Post-procedure, the doctor left the room while my daughter and I remained for a recommended 20-minute period of lying supine. In the sterile environment, I rubbed her stomach to soothe her and decided to sing Hap Palmer's *My Mommy Comes Back*, her favorite childhood song. She laughed and shushed me, but I saw tears slip from her eyes, so I continued. I sang dreadfully but hoped it would generate good luck. Then, two weeks later, when we returned to the doctor's office, her pregnancy test was negative.

In September of 2017, we were back at the Reproductive Associates of Delaware, ever hopeful, as my daughter underwent IUI #2. "The odds are better the second time around," the doctor opined. This didn't seem logical, but my daughter lit up, so I nodded and said, "Well, here we go then!" As she laid on the

table afterward this time, I didn't sing, but I dug deep for words of comfort as she closed her eyes. We'd brought along what we hoped were good luck charms - a photo of her as a baby in my pocket and a prayer bead bracelet on her wrist. Two weeks later, we returned for her pregnancy test, and once again, there was no pregnancy. We traversed the parking lot as she sobbed.

Then my son-in-law returned home from training. He was assigned employment in New York, and we all did our best to focus on that instead of on the IUI failures. We threw them a going away party with decorations and gifts for their new place in Queens. No one mentioned babies. Instead, we spoke of the excitement of the Big Apple. It was a fresh start.

They signed on with The New York Fertility Center in Flushing. Other than adoption, their last-ditch effort was looming, namely In-Vitro Fertilization (IVF). Their leadup to IVF was chock-full of doctor appointments, injections, and medications. They needed to create a poster board to keep track of everything. There were injections of Gonal, Menopur, Ganirelix, Progesterone in Oil, and Ovidrel. The drugs included Letrazole, Medrol, Estrace, Zithromax, DHEA, CoQ10, and Prenate. After weeks of prep, the doctor inserted a needle into my daughter's ovarian follicle and retrieved six eggs. Those eggs were placed in a culture dish, where sperm was waiting.

My husband and I visited them the following weekend. We explored Queens for hours, but mostly listened for a call from the doctor to learn how many of the six eggs had been fertilized. When the call finally came, the doctor reported that two eggs had been fertilized excellently, two acceptably, and that two were not viable. The four useable embryos would be allowed to remain in the culture dish until they became blastocysts, about five days post-fertilization. It was decided that the two excellent blastocysts would be transferred to my daughter's uterus, while the two acceptable ones would be frozen for future use.

IVF #1 took place in April 2018. The injections and medications continued, and they were scheduled to return to the doctor's office in two weeks for a pregnancy test. That day, my daughter phoned me from the doctor's parking lot in a downpour, "I'm spotting, mom, there's a discharge, so I guess I'm not pregnant," she despaired, her fast-moving windshield wipers delivering a background whoosh. However, the news they received was just the opposite. They were pregnant! The doctor said that a discharge can be normal, and implantation is often the cause. I wanted to hoot and holler with joy but found that I was paralyzed with fear. There was so much at stake.

In the weeks that followed, our family and my son-in-law's family hoped, prayed, and begged for a viable pregnancy. My husband visited his father's grave to ask for this one favor, this one blessing, if possible. The waiting was terrible, but something that we would bear gamely, if it resulted in a healthy pregnancy.

Yet, on the Friday of Memorial Day weekend, 2018, they suffered a miscarriage. The discharge had increased. It had not been from implantation, but had been a slow breakdown of the implanted blastocyst. Afterward, they drove from NY to the NJ shore to spend the rest of the holiday weekend with family in Brigantine, where my mother owns an always-crowded, but much-loved, 1950's era bungalow. We sat on the weathered porch and waited for my daughter and son-in-law to arrive, and when they did, everyone went inside to console them.

IVF #2 took place in July 2018. The two frozen blastocysts were thawed and then transferred. For this go-round, my daughter

"My husband visited his father's grave to ask for this one favor, this one blessing, if possible. The waiting was terrible, but something that we would bear gamely, if it resulted in a healthy pregnancy."

ter took a leave of absence from work in the hope that being inactive would boost their chances. After two weeks, they returned for a pregnancy test, and once again, it was positive. I tried my best to slay negative thoughts. There was no discharge. How could there be back to back miscarriages? It was finally their turn, wasn't it?

At four weeks of pregnancy, my daughter and son-in-law had their first ultrasound. There wasn't much visible on the screen, but the technician called this normal, so we sighed in relief. My husband and I visited them again in Queens, bringing grocery bags filled with healthy food and drink. The desire to do something helpful was palpable.

At five weeks, an ultrasound showed a yolk sac — great news — but a fetal pole was to be expected and was not there. The technician said, "No worries, the fetal pole will probably be found next time."

The next ultrasound was scheduled for the following week. We wanted to jettison the days that stood in between.

At six weeks, we learned the fetal pole was visible. Once again there was a caveat. My daughter told us, "They *did* expect to see the heartbeat today too, but they didn't, and so they hope to detect it next week."

At seven weeks, a miniscule heartbeat was seen on ultrasound. It was termed a "flicker." Then, another caveat, "We should also *hear* the heartbeat, however," the technician said, but added, "let's see what we've got next week."

But what they heard the next week was not the sound of a heartbeat. Rather, it was the sound of the technician's voice letting them know that the "flicker" had vanished.

It was the beginning of the Labor Day weekend, as fate would have it, and another miscarriage was diagnosed. This time, an examination of the uterine contents revealed a female embryo with an extra chromosome that would have led to serious birth defects. After resting for a day, my daughter and son-in-law joined family once again at the bungalow in Brigantine. Like before, we waited for them on the porch. That evening over dinner, we talked about how their miscarriages had bookended the summer of 2018—Memorial Day weekend and Labor Day weekend. It was a summer we were eager to put to rest.

As I write this, 2020 has just begun, and my daughter and son-in-law remain childless. Following the IVF procedures and failures, they decided to try for adoption. They met in early 2019 with a NY adoption lawyer, who gave them loads of advice, but no distinct path to finding a child to adopt. The lawyer explained

that couples today advertise in order to locate potential birth mothers. We found this unusual until some Internet investigating proved it to be true. The lawyer also explained that my daughter and son-in-law would first need to become NY-certified adoptive parents. The process took six months to complete. The contents of a packet that was placed before a NY judge and scrutinized included employment and financial records, background checks, fingerprinting reports, and a home study report by a licensed social worker. Their marital relationship and mental health were studied, and queries responded to about extended family. Today, my daughter and son-in-law have created a website, as well as social media accounts, all of which endeavor to encapsulate who they are and the unconditional love that they long to share with a child. They've designed and printed postcards that communicate their desire to adopt, and they've placed ads in church bulletins. Thus far, their luck hasn't changed, but they tell us they remain more devoted to one another than ever, a silver lining. They now have two nephews and can often be found building Lego towns with them or treating them to Disney on Ice and Paw Patrol Live.

While the physical and emotional hardships are unmistakable, there is another hardship that bears mentioning, and that is the financial toll of infertility. Treatments are not covered by the majority of insurance plans. IUI procedures can run from \$2,000 to \$4,000 each, inclusive of pre-testing, medications and follow up. My daughter and son-in-law were able to use savings for their two IUI procedures, but for IVF, they were forced to use credit cards. The cost of the two IVF cycles they underwent was \$17,500. They opted for the "special rate," which meant they signed on for two IVF cycles from the get-go. Credit card bills of that heft are not paid off quickly or easily. Moreover, the monthly credit card statements are a reminder of what might have been.

My daughter and son-in-law tell us that everything they've gone through will be worth it when they finally bring home a child, no matter how it happens. As for me, I imagine that day, picturing my husband and me showering our future grandchild with kisses. I can almost see it: my daughter leaning toward me to whisper, the same way she did on Christmas in 2014 when everything started. Only this time, she will say, "Mom, can you believe we have a baby?"

Nancy Farrell is a lifelong writer with a focus on autobiographical works. She works as a legal assistant in Media, PA. If you would like to connect with the couple featured in "A Non-Fairy Tale" about your own infertility struggle or if you are considering giving up a child for adoption, feel free to visit <http://www.mandmadopt.com>.

PHILADELPHIA STORIES ANNOUNCES The 2020 Annual Marguerite McGlinn Prize for Fiction



About the 2020 Judge

Karen Dionne is the *USA Today* and #1 international bestselling author of *The Marsh King's Daughter*, a psychological suspense novel set in Michigan's Upper Peninsula wilderness published by G.P. Putnam's Sons. Her next psychological suspense novel, *The Wicked Sister*, will publish August 4, 2020. Karen co-founded the online writers community Backspace. She is a member of the International Thriller Writers, where she served on the board of directors as Vice President, Technology.

This annual national short fiction contest features a first place \$2,000 cash award and invitation to an awards dinner on Friday, October 9, on the campus of Rosemont College; a second place cash prize of \$500; and third place cash prize of \$250. Requirements: unpublished works of fiction up to 8,000 words; \$15 reading fee. The Marguerite McGlinn Prize for Fiction is made possible by the generous support of the McGlinn and Hansma families.

Deadline: June 15, 2020

PhiladelphiaStories
Building a community of writers, artists, and readers across the Delaware Valley

www.philadelphiastories.org



PS Teen is an annual magazine published each Fall featuring local writers and artists aged 13-18.

PS Junior is by local writers and artists aged 12 and younger and is published each Spring.

Submissions open year-round:
www.philadelphiastories.org/junior





MIGHTY WRITERS

**THINK CLEARLY.
WRITE WITH CLARITY.**

mightywriters.org



FREE WRITING PROGRAMS FOR AGES 7-17

MW STUDIOS ARE LOCATED IN EIGHT NEIGHBORHOODS:

MW EL FUTURO, 1025 S. 9TH ST., PHILADELPHIA, PA

MW CAMDEN, 1801 BROADWAY, CAMDEN, NJ

MW KENNETT, 122 ROSEHILL AVE., WEST GROVE, PA

MW MILL CREEK, 4700 BROWN ST., PHILADELPHIA, PA

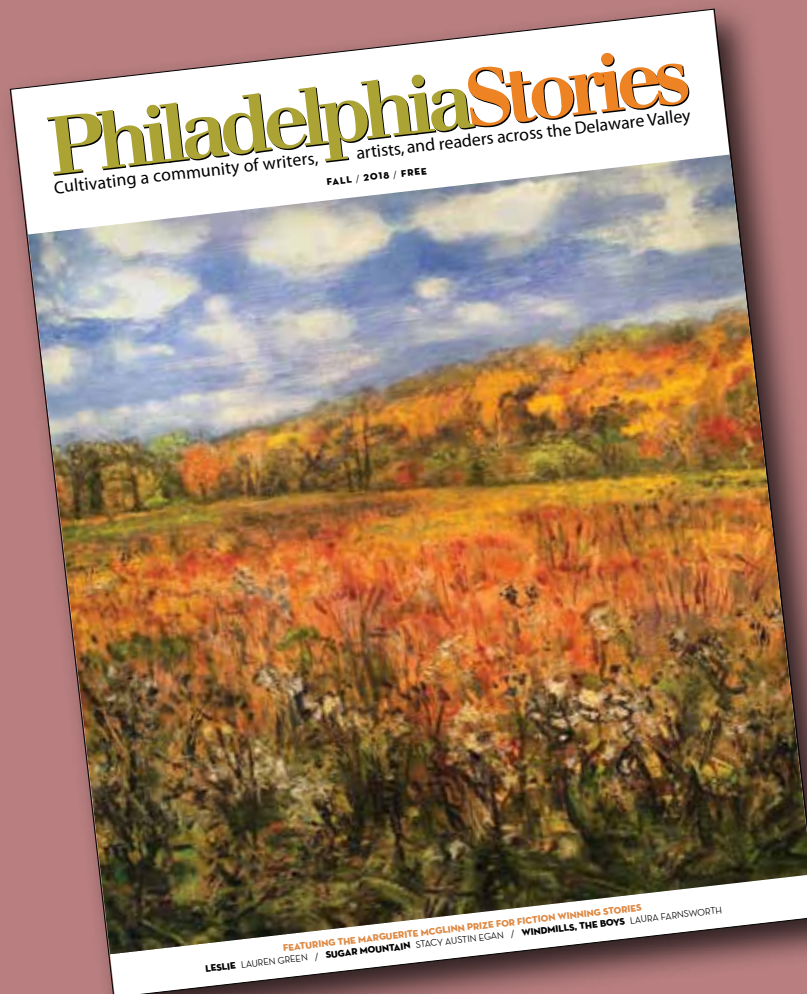
MW NORTH, 2300 MASTER ST., PHILADELPHIA, PA

MW PENROSE, 1101 SUSQUEHANNA AVE., PHILADELPHIA, PA

MW SOUTH, 1501 CHRISTIAN ST., PHILADELPHIA, PA

MW WEST, 3520 FAIRMOUNT AVE., PHILADELPHIA, PA

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS




Philadelphia Stories is a free print magazine that publishes fiction, poetry, essays, and artwork from writers and artists from PA, NJ, and DE and makes it available to 5,000 readers every quarter. We'd love to see your work!

Find submission guidelines at
www.philadelphiastories.org
Free to submit year-round!

RESOURCES

Philadelphia
Great Books



Interested in joining a Great Books discussion group?

There are over 50 groups meeting regularly in PA/NJ/DE using the Shared Inquiry Method for discussing significant works of literature or non-fiction.

Contact us to find a Great Books discussion group in your area:

philal@greatbooksdiscussionprograms.org

For further information about Great Books events on the East Coast, see www.greatbooksdiscussionprograms.org

ALL READERS WELCOME!

GREAT BOOKS WEEKEND
AT SEAVIEW, A DOLCE HOTEL, GALLOWAY, NEW JERSEY

NOVEMBER 6-8, 2020

<p>CHILDREN AND ADULTS: Short Stories: A.B. Yehoshua & Philip Roth Silas Marner, George Eliot The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie, Muriel Spark What Maisie Knew, Henry James</p>	<p>\$385 PER PERSON DOUBLE OCCUPANCY, \$485 FOR SINGLE OCCUPANCY meals, accommodations, books included</p>
--	--

FOR MORE INFO, CONTACT **JOHN DALTON @ 610.608.7711**
OR EMAIL **JDS258875@AOL.COM**



Porches Writing Retreat
overlooking James River Valley in the Virginia Blue Ridge
open all year to artists | www.porcheswritingretreat.com



Publishing services for fiction writers who want to polish their novel, hook readers, and leave a lasting impression.

For more information about **Polished Print editing services**, visit www.polishedprint.com or find us on Facebook.



Polished Print
Editing Services

Creative Writing Workshops
Express your unique voice. Find joy in writing.

Evening and daytime workshops
Flourtown, PA • Center City, PA • Ardmore, PA

Writers of all levels welcome
Fiction • Non-fiction • Creative non-fiction • Memoir • Poetry

Find out if a workshop is right for you.
Sit in on one workshop meeting as a guest,
by appointment only.

Alison Hicks, MFA, Greater Philadelphia Wordshop Studio
www.philaworkshop.com • ah@philaworkshop.com • 610-853-0296
Monday evenings in Ardmore • Tuesday evenings in Center City
Private Consultation for Manuscript Development

Rachel Kobin, Philadelphia Writers Workshop
www.phillywriters.com • Rachel@phillywriters.com • 610-449-3773
Tuesday and Thursday evenings in Flourtown
Private Editing Services

PHILADELPHIA STORIES MEMBERS AS OF MARCH 9, 2020

Michener Level

(\$30 - \$49)

Adriana Lecuona
Adriana Rosman-Askot
Aimee LaBrie
Amy Small-McKinney
Brit & Herbert Stickle
Carolyn Guss
Christine Obst
Christine Schuster
David Koba
Devin Voorhees
Diana Krantz
Diane Donato &
Christopher Palmer
Douglas & Peggy Gordon
Eileen Sanchez
Elizabeth Childs
Elizabeth Cosgriff
G. Andrew & Stephanie Kirk
Gina Kaiser
Gloria & Neson Whitney
Irene Fick
John Benigno
Joseph Quinn
Joseph Wechselberger
June Flavin
Kate Blakinger
Kathleen & John Brown
Maria Ceferatti
Marie Anne Nowak
Mark Cofta
Marlene Richter
Mary & Owen Gilman
Mary Erpel
Maryann Macartney
Nancy Kress
Nicole & John Monaghan
Pam Mclean-Parker &
Gregory Parker
Patty Thorell
Ramona Long
Richard Pagliaroli
Robert Freedman
Robin & Glenn Worgan
Rosina Coltellarò

Sandra Thomas
Sharon Steinhof
Shirley Grallnick
Susan Breen
Susan O'Connor
Susette Brooks
Suzanne Comer
Tamara Peace
Terry Mergenthal
William Hemmig
Yalonda Rice

Buck Level

(\$50 - \$99)

Aaron Bauman &
Leigh Goldenberg
Alice Chung
Alison Hicks Greifenstein &
Charles Greifenstein
Catherine Johns
Cecile Lefebvre-Burgert
Cheryl Fedyna
Christopher Beardsley
Constance Garcia Barrio
David Sanders &
Nancy Brokaw
Deborah Burnham
Dennis Lawson
Dorothy Fulton
Eileen & Thomas Clark
Eileen Cuniffe
John Fischer
Kay & Roy Peters
Lee Weinstein
Lois Schlachter
Mark McCabe
Martha Bryans
Mary Donaldson-Evans
Mary Scherf
Mo Ganey & Don Kates
Paul & Hairong Dobias
Renae Croy
Robert & Judy Schachner
Robert Kravis & Maxine Scherz
Robert Ratynski
Roger Hart

Stanley Syzmanski
Susan Etkin

Whitman Level

(\$100 - \$499)

Annalie Hudson Artist
Barbara Bloom
Chery Laren
Dennis C. McGlade
Elisa & Victor Sheronas
Jacqueline Hopkins
Jane Day
Joan & James Husted
Julie Cohen & Nigel Blower
Kathleen Furin
M. Kathryn Taylor
Margaret Mebane Rash &
Jeff Hornstein
Martha Bottomley
Nancy Davis
Nathan Long
Paul Pat
Paul Smith
Ralph & Lee Doty
In Memory of Susan Kozak
Sue Harvey & Scott Jahss
Vernita Hall
Walter Curran

Potok Level

(\$500- \$999)

Gary Zimmario
Thomas Rush & Meriam Zandi

W.C. Williams Level

(\$1000+)

Barbara Holmberg
Daniel V. & Michelle Johns
Heather McGlinn Hansma &
Scott Hansma
Joseph A. Sullivan
Michael Ritter & Christine Furtek
Thomas McGlinn

Sustainer Members

Alex Husted (W.C. Williams)

Andrew Nunez (Whitman)
Bryan Skelly (Buck)
Carol Oberholtzer (Potok)
Concha Alborg (Potok)
Courtney Bambrick &
Peter Baroth (Buck)
Dana & Chris Scott (Whitman)
James Blanchet (Buck)
James Zervanos (Buck)
Julia Arnold (Potok)
Julia Chang (Buck)
Julie Odell (Whitman)
Katherine Santoro (Buck)
Kimberly Rivera (Michener)
Lawrence O. Spataro (Buck)
Madeleine Keogh (Whitman)
Madelyn Devlin (Buck)
Mark Weiser &
Amy Punt (Whitman)
Maureen Fielding (Buck)
Mitchell Sommers (Buck)
Nancy Jackson (Whitman)
Pamela Fox (Buck)
Susan Karol Martel (Buck)
Tara & Andrew Smith (Buck)
Thomas Baroth (Whitman)
Trish Rodriguez (Whitman)
Walter Maguire (Buck)
Will Woldenberg (Michener)
William & Lisa Sweeney (Buck)

Corporate & Foundations

Cozen O'Connor
Foundation (W.C. Williams)
The Philadelphia Cultural
Fund (W.C. Williams)
OGS Recycling (Potok)

Matching Gift Partners

Merck Partnership for Giving

Author honoraria made possible
by the generous support of the
Conrad Weiser Author Fund.

You can help keep Philadelphia Stories in print
and free by becoming a member today at
www.philadelphiastories.org/donate/

A MAGAZINE THAT CREATES COMMUNITY

THANKS TO MEMBER SUPPORT, *PHILADELPHIA STORIES* HAS BEEN SERVING THE WRITING COMMUNITY OF THE GREATER DELAWARE VALLEY SINCE 2004 IN THE FOLLOWING WAYS:

- Connecting local writers to readers through 5,000 print copies of a free quarterly literary magazine, distributed at more than 200 locations, including all branches of the Free Library of Philadelphia and The Delaware and Montgomery County Public Libraries.
- Supporting a community of young Philadelphia-area writers through *Philadelphia Stories, Jr. & Teen*, print and online magazines by young writers.
- Offering affordable conferences and workshops for writers.
- Hosting readings and other social events for writers.
- Publishing books through our boutique imprint, *PS Books*.
- Hosting two national contests, one for fiction and one for poetry.

YOU can help keep *Philadelphia Stories*—a non-profit 501c3—in print and free by making a donation today! For as little as \$30 a year, you can get home delivery and know that your gift directly supports the local arts community.

I would like to support local art & literature by making a contribution today.

MONTHLY PLEDGE:

☐ \$5/Month ☐ \$10/Month ☐ \$20/Month ☐ Other _____

ONE-TIME MEMBER PLEDGE:

☐ Michener (\$30-\$49) ☐ Potok (\$500-\$999) ☐ Buck (\$50-\$99)
☐ W. C. Williams (\$1,000+) ☐ Whitman (\$100-\$499) ☐ Other _____

NAME _____ ADDRESS _____
CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____
EMAIL _____ PHONE _____
CARD NUMBER (MC, V, DISCOVER) _____ SECURITY CODE _____ EXPIRATION _____

Thank you for your generous support of Philadelphia Stories

To donate online please visit www.philadelphiastories.org/donate/,
or mail to: Philadelphia Stories, 93 Old York Road, Ste 1/#1-753, Jenkintown PA 19046



Come Write and Publish

ROSEMONT
COLLEGE
the POWER of small

rosemont.edu/doubledegree