

PhiladelphiaStories

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

SPRING / 2021 / FREE



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ART



BioStripes 2 by Florence Weisz

Florence Weisz is a collage artist who explores different visual ideas and seeks distinctive materials and innovative ways to express herself. She appreciates the warm welcome received in the vibrant art community of Philadelphia. She has joined InLiquid, ARTisters, Tri-State Artists Equity, DaVinci Art Alliance, and CFEVA. Weisz is a Professional Artist Member of the Mainline Art Center and a founding member of Philadelphia CollageWorks. www.florenceweisz.com



Monsieur Le Beau by Barbara Dirnbach

Barbara Dirnbach holds a bachelor and master's degree in art and art education from New York University and was a highly praised art teacher in both New York & Philadelphia. Mid-career she earned a degree in interior design/space planning from University of the Arts. Dirnbach resides in Philadelphia and shows at many area galleries and art centers where her work has been recognized with awards.

She is a member of several art organizations and a board member of *Artists Equity*.



Kindred Posts by Abbey Stace

A Philadelphia based mixed media artist, Abbey Stace studied at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts and the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. Inspired by natural textures, her current works are investigations into materiality, light and composition. Stace's process involves the extensive layering and subsequent sanding or rubbing away of media and paint. These works reflect on the effects of time on matter. www.abbeystace.com.



Broad Street and City Hall by Mick McAndrews

Mick McAndrews' award-winning paintings strive to capture the mood and atmosphere of a subject, combining the magic of watercolor with reverence for the principles of design to create works of sophisticated simplicity. He is a member of the Philadelphia Watercolor Society, the American Watercolor Society, the National Watercolor Society, the American Society of Marine Artists, and the Mid-Atlantic Plein Air Painters Association. McAndrews has exhibited in numerous high-profile exhibitions including the 148th Annual International Exhibition of the American Watercolor Society. www.mickmcandrewsfineart.com.



City Hall by Ernest Koch

Ernest Koch's heart was always in his photography. Upon an early retirement from commercial construction, he was able to devote his full attention to that passion, focusing on landscapes, seascapes and cityscapes in black and white or color. Since his first group exhibition in 2008, his work has appeared in many group, solo and juried exhibitions in Philadelphia, Montgomery and Bucks counties. Koch serves as curator for the annual Pennypack Ecological Restoration Trust photography contest. www.ernestkoch.com.



A Moment Together by Rodney Miller

With over thirty-five years' experience as a Fine Art Photographer/Digital Abstract Artist, Rodney Miller has exhibited his artwork throughout PA, NJ and Ohio. His artistic process involves photography, digital arts and mixed media. Miller He is a member of the Artists of Yardley, the New Hope Art Center, member and former Vice President of Artsbridge and the Arts and Cultural Council of Bucks County. He currently serves as President of the Artists of Bristol on the Delaware.



Window in Beijing by Jerry Di Falco

An award-winning visual artist, Jerry Di Falco has exhibited works in over 500 shows across the US and abroad. His work is held in many private and public collections. Di Falco has received grants from the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts and from the Pollock-Krasner Foundation. His numerous Artist Residencies include The Philadelphia Museum of Art. Since 2008, Di Falco has acted as an artist's mentor and studio manager at The Fleisher Art Memorial's Open Studio in Printmaking.

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Letter from the [Poetry] Editor



Sandy Crimmins

Philadelphia Stories is excited to share the winning poem in this year's Sandy Crimmins National Prize in Poetry: Caitlin Kossmann's "Airborne." This year's Crimmins Prize was judged by poet Airea D. Matthews, director of the creative writing program at Bryn Mawr College and author of the critically acclaimed *Simulacra*. Kossmann along with the other winners will be celebrated with an online reading and awards ceremony to wrap up the LitLife Poetry Festival on April 17.

The 2021 Crimmins judge, Airea D. Matthews says that "Airborne" offers "an opportunity for stillness" as it "[reflects] on longing and the quotidian aspects of our cloistered lives." The absence depicted in Kossmann's poem is palpable and familiar, but so is the urge to tidy, to care for, and to protect.

This focus on small, meaningful detail is evident in the runners up for 2021 selected by Airea D. Matthews. Sean Webb's "On a Day's Pause from the Rigors of Metastases We Walk through Laurel Hill Cemetery, You and I" and Jessica Chretien's "Plural" draw the reader's attention to the granular, but build mosaics and colonies out of tiles, ants, years, and days. These runners up will each receive \$250 for their poems and are invited to join us on April 17.

Many of the poems we reviewed for this issue speak to the obviously *precedented* dangers of systemic injustice, white supremacy, unemployment, and disease. The current moment exposes how interconnected and incapacitating such threats are. Widespread grief and frustration have been more than some of us can process in our own writing. Thankfully, poets like those included in Philadelphia Stories' Spring 2021 issue have been able to offer us their work, helping focus our own sorrow and anger. Reading these poems feels to me like holding the hand of someone a step or two ahead on an unfamiliar path. They cannot answer our biggest questions, they cannot solve our hardest problems, but they can remind us—crucially, unexpectedly—of the points where we connect.

Philadelphia Stories thanks Joe Sullivan for his continued support of this contest and his enduring friendship with Philadelphia Stories. We also welcome Jackie Domenus in the role of contest coordinator and thank Jackie for consistent, helpful, and organized communication with our poetry editor and poetry screeners. We perpetually thank Yalonda Rice, managing editor, for her flexibility and patience in assembling the magazine. Above all, we thank the poets who trust their work with us; reading your poems each year humbles us and reminds us how connected we are.



Airea D. Matthews

We will celebrate the winning poets of the Crimmins contest and the new poet laureate of Montgomery County in an afternoon reception which will be online, free, and open to the public as part of the LitLife Poetry Festival on April 17. Visit philadelphiastories.org for more information and to register for LitLife.

— Courtney Bambrick, Poetry Editor, *Philadelphia Stories*

WINNER OF THE 2021 SANDY CRIMMINS NATIONAL PRIZE IN POETRY

"Airborne," Caitlin Kossmann (New Haven, CT)

RUNNERS UP

"On a Day's Pause from the Rigors of Metastases We Walk Through Laurel Hill Cemetery, You and I," Sean Webb (Philadelphia, PA)
"Plural," Jessica Chretien (Concord, NH)

EDITOR'S CHOICES

"Why I Never Talk About My Mother," Joe Cilluffo (West Chester, PA)
"A Black Body Stuffed in a Villanelle," Jaya Montague (Philadelphia, PA)
"Warning, Do Not Eat Your Fortune," S. Erin Batiste (Brooklyn, NY)

"Dad, Because You Made Me Destroyer of Worlds, Yours, Too," Judd Hess (Huntington Beach, CA)

FINALISTS

Catie Barrett (Ithaca, NY)
Imani Cezanne (Oakland, CA)
Curtis Christler (Fort Wayne, IN)
Dillon Clark (Egg Harbor Township, NJ)
Christian Collier (Hixson, TN)
AE Hines (Portland, OR)
A Kaiser (New York, NY)
Darius Simpson (Oakland, CA)
Lupita Eyde Tucker (Palm Bay, FL)



Airborne

Poem by Caitlin Kossmann

While they are sitting
with the empty seats between them
I am cleaning the flies
stuck, dead, to the toilet seat
in the apartment no one has touched
for four months.

Waiting for me
was the musty damp
of unwashed clothes in the laundry
and two rolls of disinfectant wipes
on the made bed.
Today, this is care:

methods to kill what can't be seen,
maybe isn't even there,
packaged neatly
for my arrival in their absence,
and the exaggerated repulsion of strangers
long in advance

avoiding meeting.
They breathe through cloth and plastic
even sealed among the clouds,
as I waste sodden paper towels,
lift a window
for a gust of sound to feed the candle flame.

When they land
their message is the same as if
they'd just pulled up downstairs
or at the grocery store on Harrison.
I can't tell
if they made it there alone.

I am trying to read out of the air
what I can't hear: the ticking
of the next second,
the shape of air currents
around missing bodies, the things
those molecules run into,

the pressure drop of a kiss.
The sigh before the mold blooms
already like an aftertaste
as I fold the sheets.



Caitlin Kossmann is a PhD candidate at Yale University in the Program in the History of Science, currently completing a dissertation entitled 'The Myth of Gaia: Gender, Ecology, and Community in the Making of Earth System Science.' A dancer and rock-climber originally from Santa Fe, New Mexico, this is her first poetry publication.



On a Day's Pause From the Rigors of Metastases We Walk Through Laurel Hill Cemetery, You and I

Poem by Sean Webb

We have returned to see the lion, his human-like fingers
of stone gripping stone where he sits above the river
in the rain, high above us on a massive pedestal. Fall
colors are muted now but still beautiful against the gray.
The river is rising. Bright wet leaves stick to everything.
Our current distance between the dead can be measured
in the peculiar family names no longer heard of—
the Herknesses, the Spancs and Frinks, all folded
into other nomenclatures, other families persisting.
Colossal mausoleums anchor the familiar names—
Elkins, Widener, Lippincott. The die is cast so early
for some, there seems little variance, even over time.
Out over the river I see no evidence of living things.
What I think of living, movement over time. The river
is moving faster and becoming muddier as it rises.
Between headstones, we notice a flash of color—
a red fox with sprays of white on his chest and tail
loping over wet grass between stones and monuments.
He notices us but has little concern. Our distance is
insurmountable and we do not matter. Like everything
he is dead and not dead, living and not living as time only
seems to move. The still air in the empty spaces inside
the mausoleums do not support anything living. The illusion
of death persists. If it is an illusion to the dead, it is quite real
to the living, and not real, of course. I try to will my mind
to images of those underground in various states of decay
but I cannot. That reality is unknowable. Biocentrism postulates
that existence cannot suddenly become nonexistence.
(The pallor of death has left you and yet it is with us.)
Last night, we watched a fire on a large screen television.
A beautiful fire at the base of snowy mountains. Wind
whipped flames higher and we enjoyed it at a cellular level,



Sean Webb says, " I have received many honors for my work, including fellowships from the Arizona Commission on the Arts and the Utah Arts Council. Recent awards include the Passages North Neutrino Prize and I was the winner of the Gemini Magazine Poetry Open. My recent chapbooks include "The Constant Parades" and "What Cannot Stay Small Forever." My work has appeared in many publications including Prairie Schooner, North American Review, The Quarterly, Seattle Review, West Branch, and Schuykill Valley Journal."

something deep in us connecting to ancient advents of survival. We started noticing the points where the fire was revived as it was digitally morphed to a return of the robust fire. The fire was neither real nor without bounds, endlessly looping for the hours it was created and we consumed it with our eyes. And what do you make of the notion that all this may just be a vast simulation? The possibility that all of existence as we know it is something like a video game created by greater beings. Maybe we are simply dream factories firing up pre-programmed sequences of events. Just as the lion was created to honor a General whose life spanned two centuries and several wars in a time far removed from us and unfathomable. The lion, though stately and august, has unmistakable fear in his eyes. The sculptor could not help himself. Try as he might to create a representative lion, he kept creating himself. The knuckles that resemble exposed birch roots—his knuckles. The mouth articulating awe and terror—his mouth. The tense haunches—what he sees in his own legs. On our way back to the car, hidden under a holly tree, surrounded by a manicured hedge, we stumble across a remembrance in mosaic. Tiny bright tiles that have been assembled to create a map of this exact location. You would hardly notice it unless you just happen upon it, or already know from some divine guidance that it is here. We are walking past Millionaires row now, I imagine straight lines leading up to mountains. Well planned grids of cities laid out in valleys all around the world. Uniform roads, regulated development, routines and codicils. There is sense in the thoughts. Order in the musings. Civilization, even at arm's length, returning us to the rest of our lives.



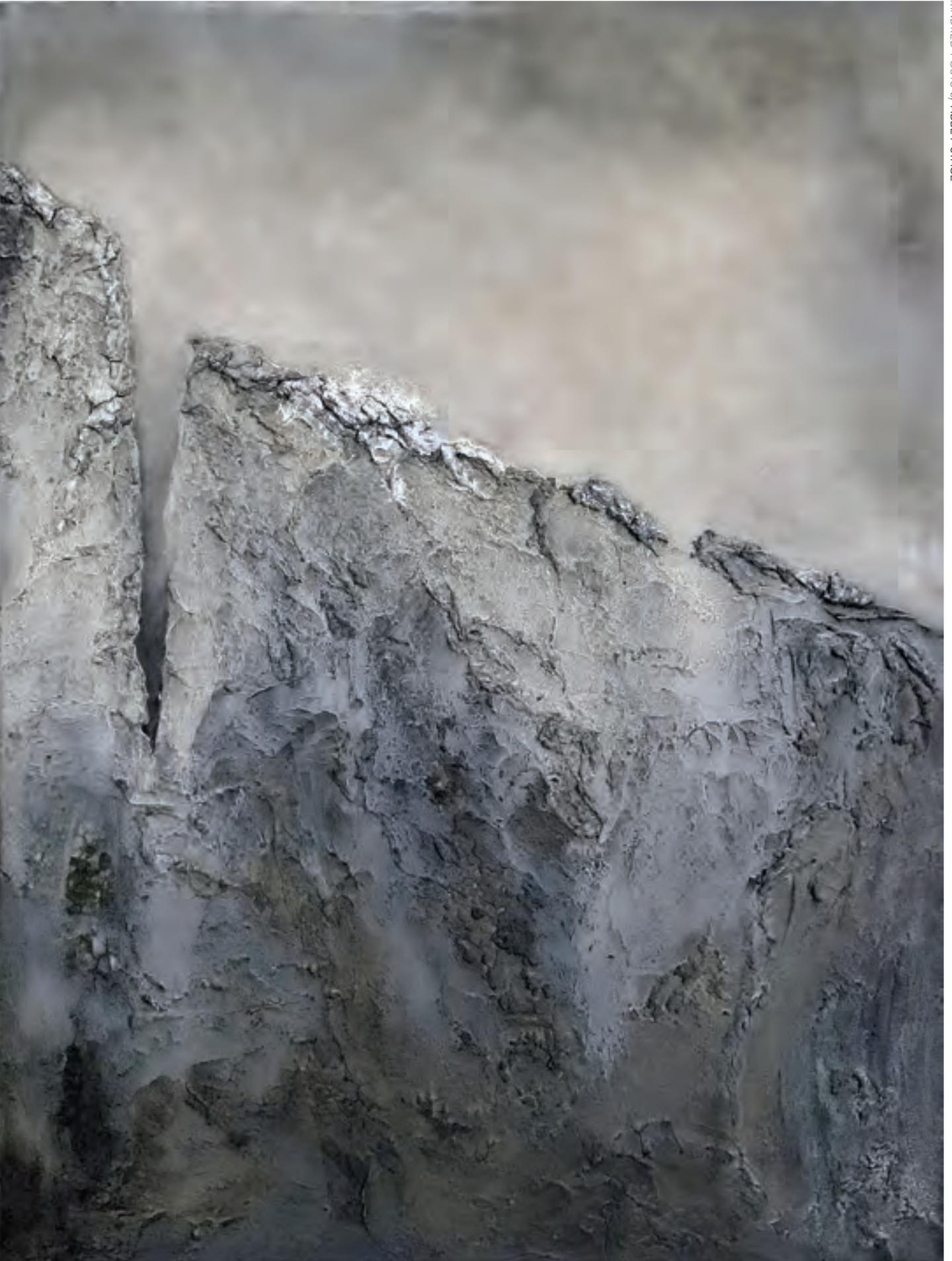
Plural

Poem by Jessica Chretien

are the ants and the petals
the smooth red turned orange
turned the beginnings
of wilt plural
are the legs of the ants I drown
spraying their tiny bodies I don't
want this but do and plural
are the presses of my index finger
the trigger the ants stopped dead
in their busy tracks frozen
on the windowsill as they keep coming
up from the baseboards plural
on the stems of the tulips on the rims
of the mason jars I emptied plural
are the bunches I bought the delight
a bit of ground I had forgotten
there was to lay on plural
were the bottle caps I poured
from the jar into the trash plural
were the years
I worked to save them and not
the ants or the plants I abandon
outside plural are the drops
that do not fall that I do not weep
for the ants but have wept
for myself plural
were the boy's fists against the back
of my skull the lessons
he tried to teach me plural
were the spiders
he saved the dishware
he repurposed to carry them
free plural were the ants
I murdered thoughtless
before he taught me
otherwise plural
are the ways we move
through the world
this hand doing this the other
doing that plural are the ants
the next morning stiff
where I left them not at all
coming up



Jessica Chretien is a person and poet from New Hampshire who only recently discovered, after twenty-five years of living, that she likes the sun, the ocean, plants, poems, making meals, reading Critical Theory, crying with gratitude, and being alive. She doesn't seem able to stop overflowing with wonder and suspects everything might just be okay. This past spring she won the Victor Howes Prize in Poetry through the New England Poetry Club.



Why I Never Talk About My Mother

Poem by Joe Cilluffo

When my father remembers my mother has died,
 when he realizes he had forgotten, and he cries
 — if that's the word for those great, wracking peals of thunder
 I feel against me, holding the hollow tree
 he has become as it waits to fall — he shudders
 in the sudden storm of memory, and I know
 I brought this down upon him,
 the lightning bolt loosed from my callous hand.
 I decided, then and there, I would never
 speak of my mother again. I would lie
 if he asked where she was. The dead die
 again and again in their remembrance.
 It is I who would kill her, the coward with my words.

But there is this: they are also reborn in the forgetting.
 I become young again, the little boy he expects
 when the nurse tells him I'm here, your son,
 here to see you. Maybe he thinks to bounce me
 up and down on his knee, a bronco I tried to,
 but could never, tame. Up and down
 goes time, rushing, fierce in its will to throw me.
 But in that moment of his expectation, my mother is alive
 and she is young and, oh my, so beautiful.
 I never knew how beautiful she had been,
 as she is again in his mind
 when he hears the words *Your son is here*.
 We are all young, and strong, and not even a little
 bit broken. It's why I lie.
 It's exactly what I wish I could see.



In addition to Philadelphia Stories, Joe's poems have appeared in journals such as the Schuylkill Valley Journal, Philadelphia Poets, and Apiary. He was the Featured Poet for the Fall 2014 Edition of the SVJ, which has nominated two of Joe's poems, "Light" and "Forsythia," for the Pushcart Prize. Philadelphia Stories recently selected his poem, "Hospice," for their 15th Anniversary Edition. Joe's first book of poetry, *Always in the Wrong Season*, is available on Amazon.com.

A Black Body Stuffed in a Villanelle

Poem by Jaya Montague

One day, I'm going to be a star.
Immortalized on a t-shirt at a justice walk,
Momma pray that I make it to the squad car.

Bury me in my hood. I don't want my soul too far
and save my voicemail for some rapper's album, real talk.
One day, I'm going to be a star.

Spray paint my face on the hearse's hood. Clean up the shot scar.
My copper brown skin decayed to a grey cast; they'll gawk.
Momma pray that I make it to the squad car.

Bathing in blood for wearing a hood. This life is bizarre.
My starring role on CNN, cemented like caulk.
One day, I'm going to be a big star.

My killer will don their white hood. Press my head to the tar
and slather my entrails to serve the best hawk.
Momma, is being a nigga, all we are?

The bullets still go through the cap and hood. Never on par,
they can't ignore me in death, even after the cleanup of chalk.

One day, I'm going to be a star.
But Momma, if you're reading this, I didn't make it to the car.



Jaya Montague is a 2018 graduate of Temple University's journalism program. She was the first runner-up for the first iteration of the Youth Poet Laureate of Philadelphia and mentored under poet Sonia Sanchez. She has work published in *Apiary Magazine* and is based in Philadelphia, PA.

Warning, Do Not Eat Your Fortune: 40 Dating Reminders Every Woman Over 40+ Needs to Hear Now!

Poem by S. Erin Batiste

1. You are not a ghost.
2. Welcome the change coming into your life.
3. The world may be your oyster, but that doesn't mean you'll get its pearl.
4. You must try, or hate yourself for not trying.
5. Birds are entangled by their feet and men by their tongues.
6. Land is always in the mind of flying birds.
7. Nothing is as good or bad as it appears.
8. Benefit by doing things that others give up on.
9. Alas! The onion you are eating is someone else's water lily.
10. In case of fire, keep calm, pay bill and run.
11. A man without aim is like a clock without hands, as useless if it turns as if it stands.
12. You are often asked if it is in yet.
13. Try everything once, even the things you don't think you will like.
14. Bend the rod while it is still hot.
15. You learn from your mistakes, you will learn a lot today.
16. Never cut what you can untie.
17. Remember this: duct tape can fix anything, so don't worry about messing things up.
18. Finish your work on hand, don't be greedy.
19. Happiness is often a rebound from hard work.
20. If your desires are not extravagant, they will be rewarded.
21. Your tongue is your ambassador.
22. Hard words break no bones, fine words butter no parsnips.
23. Your mouth may be moving, but nobody is listening.
24. Think of mother's exhortations more:
25. Don't worry, half the people you know are below average.
26. "Accept yourself."
27. If everyone is a worm, you should be a glow worm.
28. It's tough to be fascinating.
29. Sometimes you just need to lay on the floor.
30. The quotes that you do not understand are not meant for you.
31. Today is an ideal time to water your personal garden.
32. Patience is bitter, but its fruit is sweet.
33. The secret of staying young is good health and lying about your age.
34. Take the chance while you still have the choice.
35. Being alone and being lonely are two different things.
36. Some dream of fortunes, others dream of cookies.
37. Today is the tomorrow we worried about yesterday.
38. Next time you have the opportunity, go on a rollercoaster.
39. When all else seems to fail, smile for today, and just love someone.
40. If you eat a box of fortune cookies, anything is possible.

*This cento is comprised of lines borrowed from Fortune Cookie Message:
http://www.fortunecookiemessage.com/archive**



S. Erin Batiste is an interdisciplinary poet and author of *Glory to All Fleeting Things*. In 2021 she is the recipient of PERIPLUS, Jack Straw Writers, and the dots between fellowships, and is a Writer in Residence at Prairie Ronde and the Helene Wurlitzer Foundation. Batiste is a reader for *The Rumpus* and her own Pushcart nominated poems are anthologized and appear internationally in *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *Puerto del Sol*, and *wildness* among other decorated journals.



DAD, BECAUSE YOU MADE ME DESTROYER OF WORLDS, YOURS, TOO

Poem by Judd Hess

To you, connoisseur of cave mushrooms,
imperious orderer of the underground,

when you finally shuffle out from your hidey-hole
into the clean random dark
and look up in desperation again after a turn of stale seasons;
to you, gruff reactionary; to you, bigot;

the night will read as though
I, devilishly,
will have collected with the left hand
a swath of stars
and shaken them out again from between thumb and forefinger
familiarily, both too brilliant and made too strange.



Judd Hess holds an MFA and an MA from Chapman University. He won the 2014 Fugue Poetry Prize, the 2011 John Fowles Creative Writing Prize for Poetry, the 2009 Ellipsis Prize, has been a finalist for several other awards, and was nominated for the 2013 Pushcart Prize.



CITY HALL by ERNEST KOCH



Sunrise

Dillon McLaughlin

I knocked on my aunt's door as insistently as my cold knuckles and army gloves would let me. The sound was pathetic and I'd be surprised if she could hear it. But just in case she could, I took a step back to wait.

This was the kind of cold that stabs through whatever you're wearing, including skin, fat, and muscle. Newly-made blood cells were chinking off each other as they came out of my bone marrow already frozen. I pulled my overcoat tighter around myself, no mean feat considering the thickness of the sweater I was wearing, and buried my chin, mouth, and nose into my scarf.

I wasn't wearing a hat, but I'd piled up a bunch of my hair on top of my head to imitate one. It didn't really work. All it meant was loose strands caught the breeze and fluttered around my head, occasionally whipping at fresh snow.

"January fucking sucks." The steam from my muffled voice puffed through the folds of my scarf. I rubbed my gloved hands together in a caricature of hypothermia. My brother mailed me these gloves from Vietnam. Apparently some bureaucratic fuck up issued his artillery battalion cold weather uniforms, despite Vietnam not having a winter worth mentioning. Pat made sure his sister came out ahead though and swiped me some gloves and socks. Thick wool and olive green. I was wearing the socks too.

I wanted a cigarette, but I didn't want to deal with inarticulate wool fingers fumbling around in my coat pockets trying to find my pack and lighter. So I suffered.

I turned back to face my aunt's house. It was a two storey row home of red brick that could probably stand up to nuclear war, despite being built forty years before that was something we had to worry about.

The first floor only had three rooms, the living room, dining room, and kitchen. Naturally, it's where we spent most of our time. Listening to the radio, playing card and board games, cooking, backing, eating, and talking well past everyone should be asleep.

Upstairs was two bedrooms, so space for guests. But usually the guest space was for me and my five brothers and sisters when we needed to bail out of our own house. We'd all used it. I once stayed for two weeks.

It was why I was there now.

All in all, it was a respectable home for someone in her situation. Her situation being that of an unmarried woman. An unmarried woman on that side of forty. An unmarried immigrant

woman on that side of forty.

I put my ear up to the door. I couldn't hear anyone behind it. "Fuck it." I pulled the glove off my right hand, brought my balled up fist to my mouth, and breathed into it, trying to defrost them to the point where they could function. When I was satisfied I sent my half-feeling fingers into my overcoat pocket for my cigarettes. I took the pack out, shook it, caught a cigarette and put it between my lips. The pack went back in and out came the lighter, another surplus gift from my brother.

I flipped it open and flicked the flint. The flame kissed the front of the cigarette and I sucked. With a metallic snap, I shut the lighter and dropped it in my pocket. My hand wandered in after it and I thumbed the edges of the departing bus schedule folded in my pocket.

I'd picked it up after a particularly ugly debate with my parents. You'd think they wouldn't take my political dissent so personally, but I guess when one of your sons is wrapped up in a war that looks like it won't end before another one has to go over too, dissent gets sharply intimate.

I let out the smoke from my first drag slowly, trying to get it to catch in my scarf and hang around my head like a cloud. Instead, it was whipped up and whisked away by a sharp winter wind that stung my cheeks and threw snow in my face.

I don't blame Pat for getting dragged overseas. I couldn't even if I wanted to, he was drafted. And it goes without saying I wanted him home, safe and sound, as soon as he can make that happen.

But it's well within my rights to parse out where my support begins and ends and it begins and ends with Pat. I'm not buying into the rest of it the way they have and I'm not going to stick around so that every single sit-down dinner devolves into a diatribe on threats both foreign and domestic.

I put the cigarette back in my mouth and figured I might as well try another knock now that it had been a little while and my glove was off.

Almost immediately, the door swung open and my aunt, Bridget Collins, appeared. She looked perpetually windswept, with wild gray curls and stinging red on her cheeks. At five-foot-ten, she had a good four inches on me. She was certainly wider. Her shoulders were used to work and constant movement. Coming to America had put a few pounds on her, but they added to her overall sense of resilience.

She looked me up and down with gray-green eyes, no smile



or tension on her face. "Put that shit out." She turned to go back in the house, leaving the door open for me to follow. "Nineteen years old, thinking she can suck down tar and fucking smoke and there'll not be consequences for it."

Even though she was laying out an early death for me, her voice made me smile. Hers was the music of a working class, west-Irish woman. Conviction was in plentiful supply and the edges came off when it was time for tenderness. It carried me along, soft and firm, insistent and pleasant.

I dropped the cigarette into the deepening snow and stepped across the threshold.

She was already in the kitchen, evidenced by utensils thumping and metal racks clanging. Making noise for noise's sake.

Her voice curled through the house. "Wipe your shoes. They're using too much salt on the street and it ruins my carpet."

I dragged my boots across a bristled welcome mat, then sat on the chair just inside the door to unlace them. My breath fogged in front of me. "Bridget, it's barely warmer in here than it is outside."

"We're at a generous 60 on the thermostat. Are you wearing my jumper?"

I glanced at my torso to confirm what I already knew. It was one of hers. A big, itchy, coarse thing, made for warmth in air that never fully dried. Definitely not style.

I couldn't remember if she'd brought it with her when she followed my dad to America or if she'd knitted it herself. In either case, it hadn't actually been given to me. I found it in her closet a few years ago and just took it. She never asked for it back, but she also always referred to it as "hers."

"Yeah."

"Then you'll be fine. Come grab an apron."

I put the boots back on the linoleum and walked to the dining room to hang my coat on one of the chairs. I took a moment to admire the decor.

It was a fairly simple room. The only furniture was a table, six accompanying chairs, and a buffet. All were solid wood.

On the buffet were a few keepsakes, mementos, and photographs. She had my dad's war medals from his time in the Pacific, a letter my brother wrote her from Vietnam, and a couple photos of us kids at various holidays and events.

There were sketches too. An old stone archway, a fishing boat, and a handful of Celtic knots. One of a pub with an Irish name I couldn't pronounce. They were snapshots of her childhood and adolescence in Galway, done by her own hand.

On the wall was her contribution to the watercolor medium. The sun was rising or setting, I couldn't really tell. An orange-red sun spilled hazy light over a coastal city and its marine environs, both bathed in purple and pink. Smudges in suits, caps, and dresses filled the cobbled streets and watched fishing boats head into the bay.

Bridget's voice jolted me back to her house. "Where the hell did you get to?"

"I'm coming, I'm coming."

When I joined her in the kitchen, she was holding out an apron for me. I dropped the top loop over my head and bent my arms behind my back to tie the string.

"Let me." She spun me around, pulled the strings around my waist, and tied them tight. She turned me back to face her and

A ring of wet dairy clung to the sides of the bowl, refusing to be mixed into the rest of the batter. I dug the whisk deeper in and turned it like a spoon. I sped up, hoping the shock of having the metal cage back on them so quickly might scatter the grains.

lit up with a smile. "Katherine. Hello."

I always liked the way she said my name. Most other people I know put it through their fucking noses, but here she was, putting that music back into it.

Dad talks this way too, which you'd expect since they both came from the same place, but there's a hell of a difference between listening to a paternal lecture and an aunt's pleasantries.

She released me and turned back to the counter. "What's on the menu, Bridget?"

"I was in the mood for scones."

I injected some sarcasm into my voice. "Homesick?"

The answer came offhand. "Always." Her eyes flicked from the mixing bowls on the counter to my sweater then back.

I felt blood rush to my cheeks and bent to look in the baking cabinet. Sacks of different kinds of flours, sugars, syrups, powders, and spices stared back at me. I pushed a few sacks from side to side, lifted brown sugar and white sugar, poked a bag of chocolate chips.

"Self-raising flour and caster sugar, Katie." Her voice was level.

~

The crumbs of flour, sugar, and butter pushed between my fingers and through the creases in my palm. They combined, balled up, and fell out of my hand. Dry, greasy, unappetizing balls of grittiness that in no way indicated they'd eventually turn into the sweet, breadly companion for a strong cup of tea.

Bridget was at my shoulder, watching me push the flour and butter together. She nodded her approval. "That'll do us nicely."

I took my hand out of the pile of crumbs and rubbed my fingers together, trying to get as much of the butter and flour as possible off my hands and into the bottom of the metal mixing bowl. When I was done, I went to the sink and turned on the hot water. I kept a finger under the water to monitor the temperature.

Bridget was giving me side-eyes as soon as I turned the tap handle. "I'd say that's hot now, no?"

"If I try to wash my hands with this, all I'll do is make another big pat of butter at the bottom of your sink. Nothing's melting right now."

"So you'll dump half the fucking Brandywine down the drain?"

I sneered, hopefully playfully. "If that's what it takes."

The hint of a smile twitched at the corners of her mouth as

she went to the fridge and pulled out eggs and milk. She put them on the counter next to my bowl full of crumbs. "One of these, then the milk until it looks wet enough."

Warm water finally came from the tap, so I rubbed a bar of soap between my butter-greased fingers and got to work.

I felt eyes on the back of my neck, so I turned my head to peek over my shoulder.

Bridget was standing in the doorway, staring at me. The gears in her head looked to be turning. "Does your father know you're here?"

"I'd say he's safely assumed where I am." I muttered the next part. "And why I'm here."

If she heard my dig against her brother, Bridget didn't let on. "Will you be spending the night?"

"Could I?"

"You're always welcome here, I just need to know so I can make up the guest room. I washed the linens and they're not on the bed."

"I don't want to put you out."

"Not at all."

"Thanks, Bridget."

She went upstairs, still wearing her apron.

~

A ring of wet dairy clung to the sides of the bowl, refusing to be mixed into the rest of the batter. I dug the whisk deeper in and turned it like a spoon. I sped up, hoping the shock of having the metal cage back on them so quickly might scatter the grains.

"I don't know what the fuck is wrong here." I held the bowl out for her to inspect. "Maybe I put in too much milk."

"It's possible." She took the bowl and whisk from me and mixed. The metal of the whisk gave a ringing scrape along the bottom of the bowl. "No. No. Just pockets of crumbs stuck on the bottom. Not quite mixed yet."

I huffed.

"Don't let it bother you." Bridget smirked. "For time immemorial, bakers have been vexed by clumpy flour."

I shrugged. "I'm better than this."

"You are." There wasn't scolding in her response. Just a statement.

She turned her attention to the bowl.

Since I was ten or eleven, I'd been walking down and dropping on an apron to join the production line. I've made at least six different types of soda bread, another twelve breads that required yeast, and three more that had us pouring bottles of stout into the batter.

We've churned out biscuits, "biscuits," muffins, barmbrack for Halloween, and virtually every birthday cake me and my siblings have ever wanted, along with a few we didn't.

Small hand-held pastries pour out of this kitchen with the kind of regularity military commanders kill for and in numbers that could feed the Marines and Vietcong, with enough left over we could host tea for even our most casual acquaintances.

Some days, I saw more of Bridget's kitchen than I did my own bedroom.

But for all the time I'd spent here and with everything I'd put in and taken out of the oven, I'd never actually watched my aunt work. So I did. I leaned back against the sink and watched her fix my careless mixing.

She pulled the whisk in firm, steady circles. When she wasn't satisfied with that, she stabbed at the clumps with the foremost



wire. The metal from the bowl and the whisk scraped and rang against each other to a slow beat that would shame a metronome.

It was an effortless thing. I knew she baked before she came here. Some bakery in the middle of Galway, at the intersection of an unmarked street and mislabeled lane. Long closed by now.

Her gaze left her kitchen, her house, her street, our city, our county, our state. Her eyes looked instead at something a few feet below her and three thousand miles to the northeast.

And she was singing. There weren't notes. There was no tune. It was only breath, re-enacting a song she'd already sung.

"I must away now..."

I was an intruder. Out of place in the kitchen where I'd supplied armies of relatives and neighbors.

"This morning's tempest, I have to cross..."

I shifted my weight from one foot to the other. The floor's linoleum cracked against its aging adhesive.

"He knelt down gently upon a stone..."

I went to her glassware cabinet and clinked glasses against each other, some so hard I thought I might chip them.

"And more than near drenched..."

I took one from the cabinet and put it below the tap. Water

rushed from the faucet.

"Until that long night was past and gone..."

The words left Bridget. As they did, she adjusted the bowl in the crook of her arm, stopped mixing, and turned her full attention to the batter.

I slurped my water.

Bridget looked up at me, smiled, and handed me the bowl. "We're grand now, so."

~

The two of us looked proudly down at a row of three-inch, raisin and chocolate circles, salvaged from heinous mixing and distraction.

Bridget handed me a brush, a fork, an egg, and a bowl. "You know what's next." She turned to heat the oven.

I cracked the egg into the bowl, beat it to a yellow foam, and dipped the brush. Anywhere I saw flour dust or dry dough, I dragged the brush. There were thirty-six in all and I treated each one as if it was going to a photoshoot for Julia Child, if she would ever deign to dignify Irish baking.

Bridget opened the front of the oven. "It's bound to be hot enough by now. Stick them in there and set yourself a timer."

The baking tray scraped along the rack and I clicked the timer

to seventeen minutes.

On top of the stove, steam poured from a cast iron kettle I hadn't seen or heard Bridget fill. She wrapped the handle in a towel and poured the water into a teapot. "We'll have one while we wait?"

I knew better than to treat it as a genuine question.

She waved me away. "Go sit at the dining room table. I'll drop it down to you."

~

In the dining room, I stood in front of her watercolor. The scene was devoid of minute features, mostly due to the limitations of the medium, not Bridget's talent. It didn't matter. I filled in the details myself.

The women had gray-green eyes, just like Bridget. The men looked out through the blue gradients of my father, a dark navy that turned to ice closer to the pupil.

Some of the landlubbers had kempt mustaches and others were clean shaven, but the fishermen had red and brown beards that would catch the spray coming off the bow of their boats. Their shouted orders, jokes, and shanties carried between boats.

Women's silver earrings, brand new purchases they were showcasing to friends and neighbors, caught the multicolored light. They emitted bashful laughs at compliments and pointed to jewelers' storefronts.

It seemed like a cold day, whatever time it was, and the people's cheeks were red and drying out. Wind rushed off green mountains and the calm bay water to whip across the gentry's faces. Men held their hats against the wind, desperately trying to hide bad haircuts and bald spots, but women let their brown, black, gray, and red locks bounce in the gust.

I heard Bridget's feet behind me, along with the sound of her fully stocked tea tray being placed on the table.

"You painted this, right?" I didn't turn around as I asked.

"I did, aye." She stood up and went back into the kitchen. I could tell from the noise that she was rummaging through her liquor cabinet. She came back in with a half-empty bottle of whiskey and dropped it on the table. "Would you sit down? You're making me nervous, putting all that stress on your knees."

I picked the seat catty corner from her, the one with my overcoat hanging off the back.

She held my eyes for a moment and I got the sense she was calculating.

She poured a healthy measure of whiskey into both of our cups. "Don't tell your father. He's bought into the drinking age here for some reason. I suspect it's because he has American kids."

I added milk and sugar and stirred both into the tea and whiskey and jerked my head toward the watercolor. "Have you told me what it is?"

"If you're asking that, probably not."

There was a long pause. There was the clink of metal on porcelain as she scooped sugar from its dish.

Impatience got the better of me. "Well?"

She stirred in her milk and sugar. "Not much to tell. I woke up too early one day. There was no going back to sleep — believe me, I tried — so I threw something on and headed out. That jumper, actually, if memory serves. That's what I saw that morning."

I fingered a few of the gaps between the yarn of my sweater. "Short shrift for something that you clearly spent so long on."

She smiled, sighed, and changed the subject. "Your brother sent me a picture."

"Oh, lemme see." I held out an expectant hand.

She went to a pile of mail on the buffet. "Apparently some journalist popped round with one of those cameras. You know, where you take the picture and it comes out and develops as you shake it. He had a regular camera, too, like. But that was for the papers. The instant was for anyone who wanted to send something home."

"It's a good thought."

"I'm inclined to agree. Here it is. Right on top." She took the picture from its envelope and handed it to me.

My breath caught. My oldest brother, Pat, was leaning on 155mm Howitzer like it was the wicker furniture on our front porch. There were sandbags and guard towers and bunkers visible in the background, and jungle hills behind that, but those barely registered. I could only see my brother.

He hadn't wanted to go in the first place, but when they called his number, there he went. Now here was a pale Polaroid facsimile of the man we sent away.

He was smiling, but it was a begrudging smile, at ease in spite of himself. He wasn't necessarily having a bad time, but it certainly wasn't the way he wanted to spend his mid-twenties. There was a cigarette in his mouth and his red hair was shorter than I'd ever seen it. His shirt was unbuttoned almost halfway down his torso and his sleeves were rolled up past his elbows. Dog tags glinted against his bare chest.

I flipped the picture over and found my real brother. On the back was his chicken-scratch, recognizable immediately, immediately frustrating. "Vietnam is lovely this time of year. A bit noisy. I hope you're well, Aunt Bridget." There was a line break, then under it, in parentheses, "You too, Katherine."

I sat back in my chair and blinked tears from my eyes. I dragged one hand across my nose. With the other, I pushed hair off my forehead and behind my ear.

"Six months. It feels longer."

She took the picture back and looked at it, pride written in bold letters across her face. "It always does."

She traded the picture for the whiskey bottle and swigged directly, then offered it to me.

I took it. "Sláinte."

"You listen to me sometimes."

"When you're being interesting."

I put the bottle back halfway between us.

Bridget had a face on her similar to when she was mixing in the kitchen, and she was tapping her spoon against the table. Her voice lapsed into an odd sentimentality I'd never heard. "I think one of the things I miss most about home is when the winter rain finally breaks."

She laid the spoon flat and picked up the teacup. "You kids, and this is nothing against you, but you kids don't seem to appreciate the kind of sun you get here. Even on the coldest winter day, you might still see the sun. The sun's a bit sarcastic about it, I'll grant you that, because the day will still freeze boiling water. So it's not so pleasant, but at least the sun is out. At home, you might as well replace the sky with a thick fucking blanket of damp and wind between the months of October and March. Throw on your wool everything, because this is the way we're living for the winter. Indoors at home or sprinting to the pub or indoors after sprinting to the pub. If you have a job, you'll go

“But everyone was out that morning.
Like we had an alarm clock set
for the only sunrise that would be worth
watching. And we went down to watch the
fishermen go out from the Claddagh, all
of us pretending the winter wasn't going
to punish us for it later.”

there for the day, but eventually you have to leave and face the rain and there it is again.”

She put her empty cup back on the table. “It was February and it was cold. Not cold like here, but home's humid cold. So I threw on that jumper and went outside and I'm glad I did because it started raining later and fuck did it keep going.”

She looked up at the painting for the first time since she came in the room.

“But everyone was out that morning. Like we had an alarm clock set for the only sunrise that would be worth watching. And we went down to watch the fishermen go out from the Claddagh, all of us pretending the winter wasn't going to punish us for it later.”

She poured two fresh cups of improvised toddies. As she did, she examined every available inch of my face. She even ventured down to my shoulders to see if the slope or lack thereof would tell her something.

Evidently it didn't, because she reached into the apron she was still wearing and pulled out the Greyhound bus schedule that was previously in my coat pocket. She slid it in front of me. “Big plans?”

Instinct took over and I threw my hand into the coat pocket. It was empty. “I was brainstorming.”

“This is more than throwing spaghetti at the wall to see what sticks.”

I paused. I had to.

Bridget kept probing. “Is there a destination in mind? The wild west is written all over this schedule, but there's nothing

final.”

“San Francisco. I have the ticket already. One way.”

I nodded.

“Any particular reason?”

“It's always warm. I like hills. I think the lifestyle might agree with me.”

“I think it might too.”

My eyes snapped to hers. “What?”

“From what I've heard about the place, it'd suit you. Young people, war protests, female liberation, flowers. They seem like things you'd like.”

My voice fell to almost a whisper. “Dad's not there.”

With a barking laugh and a nod, Bridget said, “You'll miss that one day. But not while you're young.”

We both took another swig from the whiskey bottle.

“You asked me if I was homesick. I know I'm American now, with the immigration and naturalization and citizenship and voting and true-blue all that. And I love this house. I love this city. I love what I found here.” She reached across and squeezed my hand to emphasize the point.

A flash of guilt crossed her face. “But those pink and purple and orange and red sunrises, mornings you can't get here, never go away. They don't. They just don't.”

She looked at me and I stared at our joined hands.

After long seconds, she released me. “When will you go?”

My voice betrayed me as it shook. “Two days.”

She nodded. “Do your parents know? Does your father know?”

“It hasn't come up.”

She didn't say anything for a minute. When she finally did, we were finishing a conversation she'd been on the receiving end of decades ago. We were standing on a wharf in the west of Ireland. A suitcase with enough fresh baked scones to take me across the Atlantic sat next to my feet and we were watching deckhands extend a gangplank down to a waiting crowd.

Bridget saw me off. “We'll be here when you get back. However long you're gone, however long you need to stay away, we'll be here when it's over.”

Dillon is from Wilmington, Delaware. His fiction has previously appeared in *Caesura Literary Magazine*, *The Main Street Journal*, and *The Broadkill Review* in the United States, and *The Galway Review* and *Ropes Literary Journal* in Ireland. Most recently, he had poetry appear in *Vox Galvia* in Galway. He also completed his MA in Writing at NUI Galway in Ireland.



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Summer's End

Isaac Sauer

Don't talk about them.

Don't talk about that family at the end of the street, don't talk about the house with the woods beside it.

Just ignore them, and don't talk about them.

And they didn't really talk about the grass that always grew too long. Nor the disarrayed wooden front porch, which rotted away a little more with each season. Nor the tattered screen door, hanging limply on by its rusted hinges.

They didn't talk about the boy who lived there, nor the two girls, and how they seemed to vanish each time a neighbor came much closer than the sidewalk.

They didn't talk about the odd clothes those kids wore, like hand-me-downs, both too big and too small and mismatched from shirts to sneakers.

The closest they ever got to saying anything at all was a Sunday morning, where they had stopped by the woods to strip some bark from the loose branches, to play swords in a backyard.

One of the boys nudged another and breathed as quietly as he could, "look."

They watched as the father and son got into the front seats of the tan-brown station wagon and the mother and teenage daughters into the backseats. The car drove up the gravel path and past them as they watched, gawking awkwardly from the corner.

The car drove away down the street and turned out of sight.

The neighborhood went quiet. It remained quiet for some time. And for that strange amount of time, the boys seemed just to wait, as though the scene had not entirely ended, as though the other shoe would soon drop.

Something sodden seemed to form over them, inarticulate and heavy. They stopped playing.

And after the short time had passed for waiting, they quietly threw down the sticks among the trees' roots and picked up their

bikes where they had left them. Without speaking, they began to walk home.

"Did you see their faces?" one of the boys asked after they had walked past a few houses.

"My mom says not to talk about them."

"Yeah, that's probably right." A pause came, and then went. "But did you see their faces?"

"No. I don't know."

"Why did that boy sit in the front seat?"

"I don't know. We shouldn't talk about it anymore."

"Yeah, I guess." They quietly walked on for a bit. "Has your older sister ever let you have the front seat? - And he didn't look any older than us. And - Why did their mom sit in the back seat?"

"I don't know. Maybe we shouldn't talk about it."

The neighborhood fell quiet again.

The tread of the bike tires purred on the street as they walked back home. It felt like the only noise in the entire neighborhood - or the entire world.

A breeze passed, but it was not cool, and they passed under the shadow of one of the cedars.

Soon, very soon, the summer would end, and they would go away again - away from here, away to school, away from childhood - and these strange and quiet moments would fade.

"I mean—did you see their faces?"

Isaac W Sauer is a writer and poet currently working as an investment analyst in Plymouth Meeting, Pennsylvania. He received his Bachelor's degree from Eastern University, studying literature, politics, and philosophy.



Making Eggplant Disappear

Caroline Kalfas

Every day for two weeks, my refrigerator vegetable drawer, stocked full on grocery day, slowly emptied.

The carrots accompanied paper bag lunches. The mushrooms, celery, and zucchini complimented several evening stir-fry meals served over rice or noodles. The seedless oranges and Red Delicious apples vanished as mid-morning and afternoon snacks.

The eggplant remained.

The vegetable rolled back and forth each time someone in search of food opened the bottom drawer, and after finding nothing but the eggplant, quickly closed the drawer again.

Knowing that a return trip to the grocery store to restock our fare would be irresponsible without cooking this sleek dark-purple vegetable, I resolved late on a Saturday evening to complete the task. This vegetable that no one would touch, this vegetable that refused to wilt or wither its way to the trash can, this vegetable that occupied too much space in the refrigerator drawer would become Eggplant Caviar, a dish that tastes better than any fish roe could match. I needed to make this leftover vegetable disappear.

The best pan for this task was the 16-inch frying pan buried in the back of my cabinet behind several more useful-sized pots and pans.

"Loud noise!" I called like a golfer who shouts "Fore!" Then I squatted and pulled the rimmed pan by its handle from among its counterparts causing a clang and clatter that would have startled my 12-year-old son Nick when he was a toddler.

I set the heavy pan on the stovetop, grabbed a knife and dinner plate from the top cabinet, and set up my dicing station on the counter above the dishwasher.

Nick wandered into the kitchen.

"What are you cooking?" he asked, seeing the green pepper, onion and eggplant lined up for chopping.

"Eggplant Caviar," I answered and pointed to the recipe. "It's a dip to eat with crackers. I have whole-wheat sal-tynes, as you call them. And butter crackers."

"Mom, I don't call them sal-tynes anymore," he said. "Can I help?"

Back when my son was a little boy who mispronounced the word saltine, finding a way for him to assist me cooking a vegetable like eggplant was difficult. He stood on a chair to reach the countertop. Few jobs were appropriate. The risk of danger prohibited him from chopping vegetables with sharp utensils or

working with heat over a hot stove. He was reduced to measuring and stirring ingredients into a bowl. To assert his authority over the task, he would add extra spices to the mix when I wasn't looking.

Now he was on the verge of becoming a teenager, and we prepared dinner shoulder-to-shoulder in our sock feet. I still cut the vegetables while he mixed ingredients. But seemingly overnight, he had graduated from a bowl on the counter to a pan over the stove.

"Sure, you can help," I said, relieved to pass the bulk of the chore on to somebody else. "Get ready for the vegetables."

The green pepper was a rich forest green. Using a dull knife, because that's all we own, I cut through the tough skin of the pepper to make thin strips, discarding the seeds and stem on top of a grocery bag on the counter. I then chopped the uneven strips into smaller pieces like confetti. With the same blunt tool, I scraped the chopped vegetable from the dinner plate into the pan where my son waited to begin cooking. I repeated the task with a medium onion, adding its discarded brown skins to the trash pile and the tiny, white, nose-stinging squares into the pan.

My son added olive oil and garlic to the mix and increased the gas flames underneath the pan until the vegetables sizzled, turning pungent and raw into pleasant and sautéed.

Looking over his shoulder, I saw steam rising from the pan. I wanted to nudge Nick aside and take over, turn the heat down, and stir the mix to prevent the onions from burning. I was just about to step in when Nick adjusted the stove himself and added a slight flow of chicken broth to get the simmer under control.

"Do you want me to stir?" I asked.

"I got this, Mom," he said, giving me no room to intervene.

Nick stirred vegetables with a plastic, ochre spatula at the stove while I tackled the awkward eggplant with my insufficient tool. The blade of my knife was too short for the task, but no other cutlery we owned could get the job done. I adjusted the knife's position each time the blade slit into the vegetable but stuck, barred by the curb of the knife handle. Good-bye you plain, purple vegetable that's been in our refrigerator forever.

After creating rings of eggplant stacked like pancakes on the side of the plate, I cut through the edges of each slice and delicately peeled away the black skin, careful to separate the tough peel from the spongy meat I wanted to keep and cook. After all of the skins were discarded, I lay the beige circles one at the time on the open side of the plate and began slicing each in a graph

paper pattern, dropping the resulting squares of eggplant into the mixture being stirred by my son.

"What we need is some music," he said, temporarily leaving his post to find a pop station on his red I-Pad touch that he placed on the counter, closer to the refrigerator than to the stove. We listened to a singer I had never heard before release his emotions and somehow – abracadabra – carry away my worries about the eggplant, too.

My child worked at the stove, and I erased final evidence that the raw eggplant ever existed. I threw away the grocery bag filled with the inedible vegetable scraps and wiped the counter with a paper towel after spraying the surface with cleaner. Lifting the kitchen faucet handle and nudging it few times to adjust the running water temperature from scorching to tolerable, I rinsed the dirty prep utensils and dishes and placed them one by one out of sight in the dishwasher.

"I'm going to add more olive oil," Nick said as he worked behind me. "Do we have any hot sauce?"

"No, I need to add that to the grocery list," I said, continuing to move dishes between the sink and dishwasher.

"But let me see what I can find," I said, scanning the different spices on the shelf and reaching for a familiar choice. "How about red pepper flakes?"

While I rummaged through a utensil drawer to find a measuring spoon, he jumped ahead and started sprinkling the dried herb over the pan. He also freely added oregano and basil.

"Wait, you might add too much," I said.

"Mom, it's fine," he said.

I went around the counter and sat on a stool. Nick continued to transform the eggplant into an incredible dish. He added canned tomatoes, Worcestershire sauce and more rogue spices. When he declared the recipe was ready to try, I opened the crackers. We both chose the butter-flavored and ignored the whole-wheat saltines.

We moved to the living room. Nick put down a yellow placemat on the coffee table and served the caviar in a pottery dish I usually reserved for company. He set the crackers between us and scooped a helping of the appetizer onto a plate for me to try first.

The caviar tasted nothing like eggplant. Its savory flavor and texture had just the right kick.

"Is this good or what?" he asked, putting another spoonful on his plate.

Then we sat at opposite ends of the worn, tan couch, each of us blankly putting dip on our crackers while watching a re-run detective show on TV, enjoying the caviar, and making the eggplant that wouldn't go away disappear.

A former newspaper journalist, Caroline Kalfas writes in Woolwich Township, NJ. Her work has appeared in various newsletters and the 2018 and 2019 editions of *Bay to Ocean: The Year's Best Writing from the Eastern Shore Writers Association*. She is a graduate of N.C. State University in Raleigh.

Philadelphia Stories shares our heart-felt condolences with the family and friends of artist, Nancy Kress upon Nancy's passing in January 2021.

A supporter of and contributor to *Philadelphia Stories*, Nancy shared her artwork in our 2016 spring and summer issues as well as in our themed winter 2019 issue and the exhibition of that edition's art held at Philadelphia City Institute Library. When we celebrated our 15th anniversary in 2019, Nancy and her work were an integral part of that milestone, as two of her paintings were included in our anniversary exhibition at Cheltenham Center for the Arts and her winter 2019 magazine cover artwork appeared again within the cover of our 15th anniversary anthology.

Man (at right) by Nancy Kress, published in our summer 2016 issue, embodies the expressive qualities found within Nancy's figurative and landscape work and the trademark, stylized way that the artist combined realism with abstraction. Nancy is missed within our Philadelphia-Area arts community.



Artist Nancy Kress at Philadelphia Stories' 15th Anniversary Gala in 2019 with her painting "Flutter" prominently displayed at the Cheltenham Center for the Arts.





Dearly Beloved, You are my people

Do not pass on this story

Jeannine Cook

As He says also in Hosea: "I will call them My people, who were not My people, And her beloved, who was not beloved." Romans 9:25

I am convinced Toni Morrison is sending me messages from the other side. Maybe those are her knuckles brushing against my cheek when I sleep. Maybe those are her footsteps that come and go after things go silent. And that is why I've returned yet again to her story, *Beloved*.

This time, my sister Jazzy and I are using our new podcast as an excuse for yet another walk down Morrison's Bluestone Road looking for clues to heal the chokecherry tree society's back—clueless about what I mean? Then you have your homework.

This is not the first or the last time that my sister and I will read *Beloved* or reread the screenplay or rewatch the film knowing that the answers are all there. Our continued question—how do we complete the ultimate social exorcism and banish the evil of colonialism once and for all? We both agree wholeheartedly that *Beloved* holds the answers; it is just a matter of respecting the text and respecting our foremother enough to take a second look.

In our work as facilitators, before the bookshop, we reminded youth in countries around the world that the etymology of the word respect means to look again. We find that in our society it is all too easy and highly common to make assumptions and conclusions about people, art, philosophies, and books based on our first impressions.

But respect requires us to return and see more—ask more questions—a second (or even in our case six hundredth) look lets you see what you never remembered you'd forgotten. Like it was Toni who took a second look at her own Black Book to better understand the woman she featured there, Margaret Garner. This woman who at first glance is seen as a wild slave and a horrific child murderer; at a second glance, she becomes a beacon of motherhood and the definition of freedom.

So, because we respect the heck out of this book and Toni Morrison, we find ourselves reading it like it is the first time. I am recognizing how much I've changed this time around simply by the questions that I find myself asking myself. Like, in 2012, I was

obsessed with the feet. In 2014, it was the colors. In 2016, it was the men. In 2018, it was the mothers. And this time around, I am caught up in the Fugitive Slave Act and what its modern equivalent may be, and how we treat felons, and how we know that we are free. I always wonder how I miss so much. And wonder who I will be the next time I read it and what she will see that I cannot yet see.

So, the other night, my sister and I spent the night in the bookshop determined to unpack this book once again. "We have to do it for the podcast," we said laughing. We poured libations for the ancestors, held hands, and invited Toni Morrison and Margaret Garner to "Come on. Come on. You may as well just come on."

"60 million," I say reading the book's dedication out loud out of respect for the 60 million who died during the transatlantic trade of people.

"60 million," Jazzy repeats.

"You are my people," I say out of respect for the book's opening biblical quote about second chances.

"You are my people," she repeats.

"This is not a story to pass on," we say in unison.

From 9 p.m. to 9 a.m., we post sticky note after sticky note on the walls asking ourselves who was Beloved? And why we are being haunted by her. And whether we are wild or free. And how we are Sethe. And whether we have two legs or four. And why the community failed Baby Suggs. And what it means to be loved. And finally, when we run out of sticky notes. We sit on the floor staring up at the wall and realize, once again we've only just begun.

My hope is that that on your journey to wherever you may be headed, that you will return to the books and the authors who are your beloved and take a second look. And that you will find your people and discuss it with them. And that you will find the clues to join us on the ultimate social exorcism so we can banish this thing once and for all.

Ase.

For the last 10 years, Jeannine Cook has worked as a trusted writer for several startups, corporations, non-profits, and influencers. In addition to a holding a master's degree from The University of the Arts, Jeannine is a Leeway Art & Transformation Grantee and a winner of the South Philly Review Difference Maker Award. Jeannine's work has been recognized by several news outlets including Vogue Magazine, INC, MSNBC, The Strategist, and the Washington Post. She recently returned from Nairobi, Kenya facilitating social justice creative writing with youth from 15 countries around the world. She writes about the complex intersections of motherhood, activism, and community. Her pieces are featured in several publications including the Philadelphia Inquirer, Root Quarterly, Printworks, and midnight & indigo. She is the proud new owner of Harriett's Bookshop in the Fishtown section of Philadelphia.



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