



The
Summerset
Review

Fall 2008

The Somerset Review

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The Sunnset Review



For three quarters now, we've awarded prize money to selected *readers* of this magazine. Do you know of our reading contest? Write fifty or more words about a story appearing in the current issue, and a check may soon appear at a mailbox near you. Last December, we sent \$50 to a reader in Israel. In June, we sent \$150 to a reader in Texas. This month, we are sending \$100 to Ontario, Canada. These readers, and others, have also received free copies of our first print volume.

Are we doing this out of the kindness of our hearts? Not exactly. We are trying to inspire more reading. And we intend to keep this contest going quarter after quarter. So read a story, write about what you liked, or what you didn't like, check our guidelines page on how to submit your entry, and go for it. It's easy.

Our first print issue, collecting a sampling of stories that appeared online from 2002 through 2006, was released early last year. We are happy to announce a second print issue is in the works, collecting a sample from where we left off. We hope to have Volume Two out by late winter. If you have a favorite piece that you've read here, starting with this issue and going back to our Winter 2007 issue, we'd be happy to take your nomination for inclusion in our printed volume. The decisions we need to make are never easy; the pieces we have published the past two years, and every year, every issue, are done passionately, and we'd like to collect all of the stories in Volume Two if we had the means.

Putting our first print issue together did not happen without a few surprises. For one, having little experience in the print industry, we thought extravagant editing and typesetting software was needed for the printing of an entire book. After laying out the money for one such product, and going through great pains on how to use it, we found out all we needed to ship was a simple PDF file. Live and learn.

The second surprise had to do with the artwork which appeared on the cover. Though all the cover art online at *The Summerset Review* is created ourselves from scratch, for the cover of our print issue, we wanted to contract a worthy artist rather than promote our own little dabblings. We went to several gallery fairs and expositions in New York City, selecting various pieces on display and trying to strike a deal. Unfortunately, the modest payment we were offering caused most people we approached to literally take steps backward and look the other way. We're extremely grateful to the artist Adia Millett, and the staff of Mixed Greens in Chelsea, for believing in our magazine and going with us.

In this issue, we're giving you not one, but two recommended Lit Picks of the Quarter. The few times we did this in the past, the stories came from the same author. This time we highlight works from different authors, in different literary magazines, linked by a common theme: a tension between a mother and a daughter.

Issue 102 of *One Story* features the writer and *Redivider* editor, Laura van den Berg. The piece is entitled, "What the World Will Look Like When All the Water Leaves Us." It is set in Madagascar and narrated by the daughter of a woman studying the rainforest. Here are a few excerpts -

... lists I started keeping on my own, different from the ones my mother encouraged me to memorize. The one I thought about the most was famous disappearances: Amelia Earhart, Jimmy Hoffa, Ambrose Bierce. I wonder if the mysteries of their lives would ever be solved, how long someone would look for me before I was added to such a list.

...

My mother sat a little straighter in her chair before telling us meaningful scientific research was best done in solitude, that collective thought only diluted the strongest ideas.

...

... the five layers of the rainforest: the overstory, the canopy, the understory, the shrub layer, and the forest floor. She said each part had its own little ecosystem, its own little universe. And weren't people like that too, she continued, worlds onto their own.

The Spring 2008 issue of the literary magazine *Lit* includes a story by Irina Reyn entitled, "The Firebird." The family in the story are Russian immigrants to the United States, and, in contrast to the above, the piece is narrated by the mother. A few excerpts –

... it felt just like Inna's first words when she was two-and-a-half. The wonder that something so tiny and unformed had managed to pluck a few words from the dizzying array of language around her. And then, most shocking of all – that she actually used them, spoke them out loud. How brave, I thought then, to make your choices, to be at peace with them.

...

It is up to me to break the silence. "I will tell you what I know, Innochka," I begin. To my surprise, with every miserable word I utter, I watch the features of my daughter's face soften. One story bleeds into another – one man described, the second and then the third. After a while, something truthful begins to take shape before us, mammoth and dangerous, its beauty blinding. And I start laughing nervously, hysterically, because I realize that all I need to do is grab its tail and announce that there is no more need to lie, because I too have seen what I have seen.

The Sunnset Review

Joseph Levens - Editor
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A literary journal released quarterly on the 15th of March, June, September, and December on the Internet, and periodically in print form. Founded in 2002, the journal is devoted to the review and publication of unsolicited short stories and essays.

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The Summerset Review



Let me start by saying that this is Vassily the monkey's story. Not mine. I am Auguste, a simple man who has spent his fruitful years toiling as a clerk for the United States Postal Service in Arlington, Virginia. I have lived all but two of my seventy-seven years in this hot state. Visiting the city of my birth, Montreal, is one of many dreams I harbor. In my mind, it is a gleaming city of ice, sculpted by men with fine chisels, polished to a crystalline gloss by wintery princesses. We are in the midst of a punishing summer in Arlington. I have never returned to Montreal, and I probably never will. But I have other dreams.

Vassily is a squirrel monkey, that particular kind with a white band around his eyes, and ropy arms and legs that make the joints look like square knots. The rest of his fur, other than the mask around his eyes, is a dull pepper gray with a streak of yellow on his back. He is the type of monkey who doesn't look so human, which I don't mind. But he is as smart as a young child.

I should say here that Vassily can talk. Only to me, that is. To you his utterances would sound very much like the screeches and squawkings one would expect most any squirrel monkey to make. But I've learned how to read his inflections, interpret his tones. I can hear what he is saying. Of course, I don't tell most people about Vassily's talking; it wouldn't sit well. And I'd just as soon not draw undue attention to him. For that matter, I

cannot tell you how exactly I came to possess Vassily, for I know the laws regarding exotics are strict. But I can tell you that I acquired him after it became quite clear that my wife and I were far too old and barren to have children of our own. That is at least part of the reason I am glad Vassily doesn't look so human. Grace, my wife, died two years after Vassily came into our lives. Perhaps she saw him as an admission of defeat.

I retired from my position with the U.S. Postal Service three months ago. While there is no mandatory retirement age for postal employees, my superiors made it clear that they considered me too old for the job. After months of ignoring their hints and slights, I finally gave them what they wanted. I filed my paperwork and I now live off the meager pension I earned during fifty-five years of service.

Retirement has put a strain on my relationship with Vassily. I think he used to enjoy having the apartment to himself when I'd leave for work in the mornings. I never knew exactly what he did in those hours I was away sorting letters, but I'd return in the evenings to find little things moved around. A pipe lying on the dining room table with a dusting of black ash spilled from its bowl. The magazines shuffled out of order in the magazine rack. A bookmark placed at the wrong page in a book. Vassily would be napping in his fruit crate, or sitting on the recliner in the living room looking as innocent as a newborn. Grace, before she passed on, would say she saw evil in Vassily's stares, said he was the embodiment of misplaced desires. I would tell her that in life one had to embrace the things one could not easily understand. She would shake her head and tell me my platitudes left me defenseless. My wife was a wonderful woman, but I'm not sure she always understood the nature of love.

Before my retirement, I allowed Vassily his misdemeanors. Better he should commit these small acts of indiscretion than do something downright awful, like turning on the oven and striking a match. But lately, my constant presence in the apartment has tried Vassily's nerves. I've disrupted the easy rhythms of the life to which he'd grown accustomed. He's taken to watching me as I move about the apartment, preparing breakfast, reading the news, puzzling over the crossword. Then he knocks the apple slices and melon pieces from his food bowl, scattering them across the kitchen linoleum.

"What is wrong, Vassily? Why do you act this way?" I ask.

"I don't know what you're talking about, Auguste," he answers. "To what way are you referring?" Then he stares morosely at his half-visible reflection in the dining room window, or picks at the fringe of the living room carpet, pretending to find and eat mites.

I can't bear the weight of Vassily's angry stares; I can't stand to face the accusation in his eyes. It's easier to stay in bed, keep the covers pulled up to my chin, which I've let get scruffy with gray whiskers lately. Each day, I get up a bit later. Tuesday at 9:15. Wednesday, 9:56. It is now 10:22 on Thursday and I have no intention of setting foot on the floor any time soon.

"Are you going to get out of bed?" Vassily asks me from the bedroom doorway.

I don't answer him.

"You're wasting your life, Auguste." Vassily skips across the room and leaps into bed with me. His light body makes the springs in the mattress sing like the sound of crickets at night.

"Wake up! Wake up!" Vassily is screeching. He stands on my chest, balancing himself with his tail wrapped around the bedpost. He bounces

on me as if I were a diving board. I roll onto my side, spilling Vassily across the quilted bedspread.

"Why should I get up? Give me one good reason to leave this bed today."

"Because, Auguste, a life without meaning will wither."

There are notes of sympathy in the way he says this, and I am momentarily touched by his concern. It makes me wonder if I have been misinterpreting his angry stares these past months.

"You've got to do something with the years you have left," he says. "You're driving me crazy with all this moping around the house." His teeth are sharp needles, the perfect size to crush a large grape or olive.

"Fine," I say. "I'll get out of your hair. That's what you want, isn't it?"

I brush Vassily aside and raise my heavy body out of bed.

"You don't have to be so huffy about it," Vassily says. But I ignore him as I dress myself in a manner appropriate for going out.

Vassily follows me at a distance; he knows I'm angry with him. I snatch the keys from the bowl, and just as I'm pulling the front door shut, he asks, "When should I expect you back?"

I hold the door still for a moment so he knows I've heard him. Then I pull it closed behind me without answering his question.

I wish I would have thought to bring a handkerchief with me. By the time I've walked to the corner of my block, I'm perspiring fiercely. When I'm certain no one is looking, I wipe my forehead on the sleeve of my shirt. The sun shining off the sidewalk is so intense it makes my tired eyes throb.

The bank building is artificially cool when I go inside. The white marble floors are freshly waxed and slick as blocks of ice. I stand just inside the main doors a moment and let myself acclimate to this cool air. I think Vassily might enjoy being here with me right now; he might relish a break from the heat, and the quiet solemnity of this great marbled hall. Then again, he's probably just as happy back at the apartment, just as content with whatever mischief he's getting into at this moment.

I turn and see that the guard near the door is eyeing me suspiciously. As if I'd do anything untoward in a bank! An old man like me! Though I admit, I've let my hair grow past my ears as of late. And I've already mentioned that I don't shave as often as I used to. I nod politely at the guard and smile and then proceed to a set of couches forming a semicircle around a flat TV, which airs a flashy newscast with an array of graphics crawling across the top and bottom of the screen. The couch is shorter than my knees, and after I lower myself as far as I can, I lean back and fall the rest of the way onto the cushion. When you reach my age, the simplest functions can become terrifying acts of faith.

The air conditioning in the bank is quite powerful and it's beginning to have an effect on me. The sweat on my face is drying, leaving a salty crust on my skin. Grace hated the heat as much as I still do. That is one thing we had in common. Vassily, I think, is indifferent to the heat.

The man on the TV is sitting behind a desk, leaning forward as if every

word he utters is important for us to hear. But the screen is too cluttered and my eyes don't know where to look. I begin to feel dizzy, nauseous. I close my eyes, in the hopes that when I open them things will have calmed down.

"Can I help you, sir?"

A young woman is standing in front of me. She's stooped down, with her hands on her knees, the way a teacher would address a schoolchild.

"I'm sorry," I say, rousing myself. "Were you talking to me?"

Her dark hair is pulled back in a ponytail and she's wearing a blue suit with a nametag I can't quite make out. "Did you have any bank business you'd like to transact, sir? I'd be happy to help you with that." I notice the security guard lurking behind her. To the left, a bank of idle tellers are staring like witnesses at an altercation.

The fact is, I know I came in here for a reason, some odd bit of finance I wanted to take care of, but I can't for the life of me remember what it was. These minor mental glitches occur from time to time, but they usually happen around the house, where no one has to see them.

"I'm fine," I say. "Thank you very much."

The woman turns and glances at the tellers behind the counter. Then she looks back at me, and I see a strange sadness in her face. "Well, you see, sir, these couches are reserved for bank customers."

"But I *am* a customer," I say. "I have a checking and savings account with this establishment."

"And we're very grateful for your business, sir. But the couches are really for people waiting to make actual transactions. If you'd like to rest, there are plenty of benches outside."

"But it's so hot."

The security guard edges forward; he's bracing himself for action. I realize I've become a nuisance, a pebble in the shoe of these bank people. And it is this realization that causes me to feel more embarrassed than I can ever remember feeling.

"Sir, it's just that we can't have people coming in here and..." she swallows her words for a moment, "and sleeping in the bank. It gives the wrong impression to our customers."

"I understand. If you could help me up, I'll be on my way."

She looks around uncertainly for a moment, then extends a hand. I'm surprised by the softness of her skin and the firmness of her grip.

"Do you have anywhere you can go?" she asks, her voice quiet and close to my ear. "You know, some place you can stay?"

I'm not entirely sure what she's getting at, but when I turn to answer her, I see two small tears working their way down her young cheeks.

"I should be heading home. Vassily is expecting me."

"Is that your grandson?" she asks, a look of hope creeping into her eyes.

"He's my son," I say, because explaining the truth would be too difficult.

The heat has taken on a disposition of its own, as if it's an angry character in a play. I can almost feel its rage penetrating my skin. It takes me a long moment outside the bank to recall which direction my apartment lies. It's the kind of temporary confusion brought on by strong daylight and the sudden switch from cool to hot, a faint whisper of mortality. I prop my arm against the bank building while I regain my bearings. Squirrel monkeys are a variety known to live well into their thirties. Vassily will be fifteen years old in September.

I am two blocks away from the bank building when I notice something taped to the pollen-coated glass of a shop window. It is a poster for an ice show with a picture of a woman skating, her body forming a line so graceful that it nearly wounds me. As I bend to get a closer look, I recognize something familiar in the woman's face.

When I was twenty-eight years old, before I met Grace, a friend of mine at the post office gave me a ticket to an ice show that he didn't need. Not having anything better to do, I went and there I saw a beautiful, slender woman glide across the ice, jumping and floating and spinning. A ballerina on skates! This I had never seen before. She performed to a sad piece by Tchaikovsky or Ravel, I'm not sure which. The ice was as smooth as a mirror and she traced thin loops on it. She walked on her toes as the plucked strings of a cello echoed in my ears. The rink was dark except for one solitary spotlight that followed her like a halo. I suppose the event was some kind of competition, though I was scarcely aware of the judges or the other competitors, or even the audience members around me. Somehow I could tell that the woman on the ice felt the music in a way no one else did.

When her performance was over, I looked at the program and saw that her name was Helena. I was intrigued because she was named for a city. Helena, the capital of Montana, a cold, fortress-like place with its own set of myths, like Montreal.

This one slender ice princess was the closest I've ever seen a person come to achieving pure grace. After Helena's performance, and before I took the train home, I found myself sitting on a bench outside the rink, weeping like a child into my cupped hands. I can only guess what the people walking by must have thought.

On the way home that night, I vowed I would always seek out that kind of grace in my life, that proximity to perfection. It was the kind of promise, I think, young men foolishly make to themselves in moments of elation or desperation. Three months later, I met my future wife. And I married her nine months to the day after that night I saw the ice princess skate.

As I stand here on the sidewalk in the fierce Arlington heat, my heart goes slow and my fingers grow cold. The woman on the poster is Helena. I know it for sure—the unmistakable lines of her body, the imperturbable smile on her face that radiates like a sun. It is like seeing a ghost that was almost, but not quite, forgotten. Perhaps the photo was taken long ago because she looks the same as she did that night I saw her.

Studying the poster, I see that there is to be an ice show two days hence in the city, and a secret thrill rises in me. I glance around to make sure no one is looking. Then I delicately peel the tape from the window, fold the

poster, and slip it into my trouser pocket.

The second I return to the apartment, I know something isn't right. Vassily is sitting on the recliner with his knees tucked up under his chin. He rocks left then right.

"Where have you been?" he asks, or maybe the question is only implied by the dark stare he has fixed on me, black buttons peering out from his white mask.

"I had several errands to run."

"You were gone a long time, Auguste. You shouldn't have left without telling me where you were going." Vassily picks nervously at the fur on his right arm and then begins licking his fingers.

I walk into the kitchen and pour myself a cold glass of milk. I do this with an air of casualness, but I'm actually surveying the apartment, looking for evidence of whatever it was Vassily did while I was away. I sip my milk slowly and turn until I see what Vassily has done.

I keep a small jar of honey next to the toaster on the kitchen counter. I use it to sweeten a cup of tea, or to occasionally put on a peanut butter sandwich. The jar is broken and a small river of honey has flowed across the counter and onto the floor near the wastebasket. A mess!

This is by far the most destructive thing Vassily has done. The worst part is that it seems so intentional, so purposely designed to hurt me. I cannot fathom why he would do this. I run cold water into my milk glass and set it on the counter. I find a sponge under the sink and some vinegar, and I set about the sticky task of cleaning up after the monkey.

It is the evening of the ice show and I have managed to keep Vassily from finding out my plans. But it hasn't been easy. Making the phone call to order my ticket to the show, looking at maps to plot my route to the arena—all of these things have roused his suspicion.

He sees me putting on a suit I haven't worn in years, and his level of agitation creeps higher.

"Why are you getting dressed up, Auguste?" He's standing on the recliner. "Where are you planning to go?"

"I've got some errands to run, Vassily. I won't be long."

"You never wear a suit to run errands," he says. "What's going on here?" He leaps from the recliner to the mantelpiece, toppling a glass vase. The vase hits the red brick hearth, bounces once with a heavy thunk, then shatters on second impact.

"Vassily, calm down," I say. He's looking madly about himself now, leaping up and down, screeching incoherently. He finds a letter opener with a turquoise handle and flings it to the floor.

I don't react negatively. I don't lash out or rise up in anger. I sit down on the recliner and rest my hands in my lap. I regard Vassily with a calm,

peaceful face. And I think my reaction disarms him. The force of my compassion soothes him. Very slowly, he ceases his leaping and screeching. His movements return to the normal tic-like movements one would expect from a squirrel monkey his age.

"Come down from there, Vassily," I say, patting my hands on my lap. "Come and talk with me, please."

He uncoils his long limbs and climbs down from the mantel. He leaps onto my lap and curls into a ball. We haven't sat like this for many months. It stirs my heart to have his precious weight in my lap. I can feel his lungs inhaling and exhaling, his small heart hammering away in his chest like an engine. Sometimes it frightens me how very much alive he is.

I begin by telling him of that night, long ago, when I saw Helena perform. I tell him how it moved me like nothing I had ever seen before. And then I explain how I saw the poster in the shop window, and how I want to go to the ice show, with the hope that I might be lucky enough to see Helena perform again.

Vassily takes this in with eager, earnest eyes. "But what do you hope to find, Auguste? Even if she is there, and she does perform, what could possibly come from it?"

"Grace," I say. "I hope to find grace."

"But Grace has been dead thirteen years now," Vassily says, not unkindly.

"Not Grace, my wife," I say. "But pure grace. True grace. The kind of thing you're lucky enough to experience even once in your life."

Vassily rests his head against my thigh. "I want to go too."

"I don't think it's a good idea, Vassily."

He turns his head so that he's looking up at me. "I want to experience this grace, Auguste." His tail flicks lightly at my wrist and I wonder how I could possibly deny him such a thing.

There have been occasions when I have taken Vassily out with me in public. But it's not something I'm comfortable doing. As I've said, the laws regarding exotic animals are strict and ever-changing, so I'd rather not put myself in a position to find out if I am violating those laws.

We are sitting on a Metro train, heading through a tunnel into the heart of Washington, D.C. Vassily is tucked inside a bag I purchased some time ago which was originally used for carrying a bowling ball. He fits rather comfortably in the bag, but after extended periods, his legs begin to cramp.

The train is crowded with people, some of them professionals at the end of a long day's work, some of them children headed into the city for whatever trouble they may hope to find. It's been a long time since I've found myself so surrounded by humanity, and the experience is not one I relish.

"Auguste, I need to use the bathroom," Vassily says through the top of the bag, which I've left open so he can breathe.

No one is sitting next to me, but I glance nervously at an academic-

looking man reading a newspaper across the aisle.

"You went before we left, and there are no bathrooms on this train. You'll have to wait." I whisper all this so that my fellow passengers can't hear me. I'm confident they haven't noticed a thing. To them, I'm sure I just look like an old man traveling alone.

But Vassily lets out a protracted groan that's loud enough to cause the academic-looking man to glance over at me from his newspaper. He has round, wire-rim glasses and a suspicious nose that looks as if it might be accustomed to sniffing out things that are untoward. I smile at the man and he turns back to his newspaper.

To comfort Vassily, I reach my hand inside the bag and rest it on his belly. His breathing settles to a steady in and out. I often used to lie on the carpet next to his fruit crate and tune my ears to the frequency of his breathing. And slowly, my own breaths would fall into line with his, until it was hard to tell the difference between the two. I feel it happening again now and it soothes me, clears my mind, allows me a moment of anticipation for what lies ahead this evening.

The train comes to a halt in a poorly lit station. A few people get on and a few get off. The academic-looking man glances my way, folds his paper, and moves to another section of the train car.

After a jolt and a short kickback, the train lurches into motion again. The click of the wheels rolling over the tracks assumes a comfortable rhythm that assures me we are headed toward something important.

The train stops at the station nearest the arena and a crush of bodies moves toward the door. It's hard for me to find my footing in the crowd and I'm jostled on all sides. I hold the bag containing Vassily to my chest to protect him as best I can. As if by some miracle, I find myself on the platform and the train doors whisk shut behind me.

I thought I had left myself plenty of time to make it to the ice show. But, looking at the clock in the station, I see there are only ten minutes before it is to start. I look around the station for a sign indicating the arena, but I can't seem to locate one. People are streaming past me and I feel my head going light. Blindly, I merge with the river of bodies and find myself on a long escalator headed toward the surface.

When I reach the sidewalk outside, I see that the arena is right next to me—a monstrously large structure of gleaming metal and glass. With a little luck, I may be able to get inside and allow Vassily to stretch his legs in a bathroom stall before the ice show begins.

I find a window booth with a sign saying "Will Call." After a short wait, the woman at the booth slides me a ticket under the thick glass window. Vassily is not moving inside the bag; I think he's trying to stay still while these moments of tense transport take place.

The line to enter the building is long, but I wait patiently. When it's my turn to produce my ticket, I do. The man scans it under a red light and just as I'm about to walk through the turnstile, a hand grabs me by the elbow and squeezes.

"I'm sorry, but if you want to take that bag inside, you'll have to go through that line over there." A burly man with gray eyes points toward a short line to my right.

"Very well," I say, stepping a few paces over to this new line.

It moves more quickly than the first line, and when I reach the head, a squat-looking woman with short hair reaches for my bag.

"Excuse me," I say, pulling away from her.

"Security procedures," the woman says flatly. "We have to screen all bags entering the building." Behind her, uniformed men wearing rubber gloves are opening various purses and pawing through their contents. A surge of dark panic races through me and settles in my stomach. It is only now that I see the folly of this plan, only now that I recognize the peril into which I've placed both Vassily and myself. I am in danger of losing all I have left.

"I really don't think that will be necessary," I say. "I'm an old man."

"Old man, young woman, it don't matter to me. We have to ensure security."

Her hand lashes out and seizes the strap of my bag. "Just hand it over and everything'll be fine." She jerks at it and I feel a burn run through my shoulder. This is all the torture I can stand.

I turn on my assailant and show her the full measure of my anger, the intensity of my passion. I can't imagine what I look like, but it must be a terrible sight to behold. As I pull back on the bag, the woman—perhaps in fear—lets go of the strap.

Not expecting this sudden release, the bag whirls around in a blinding arc. And it makes horrible contact with a brick column to my left. The sound it makes when it hits is a final one. The sound of soft flesh hitting an unforgiving thing. The kind of sound after which you believe there will be no more sound.

I kneel down on the dirty floor. The security woman and some people in line lean over me as I slowly pull Vassily from the bag's dark insides. His hair is downy and moist. His body is limp like a sleeping child. But one eye is open and it tries to gain focus on my face.

"Vassily, can you say something?" I ask, my voice quiet and gentle like a lullaby. "Say something if you can."

"Auguste, I'd like to go home now, please."

"You're all right, Vassily. We'll go home and everything will be fine again."

There's a commotion in the crowd behind me.

"He pulled it out of that bag," the security woman says. "But I don't know what the hell that thing is."

Someone shouts: "Oh my Christ!"

"Auguste." His voice is thin and frail. I can see the act of speaking is sapping Vassily of his remaining strength.

"Shhh, little one, you need rest right now."

"Auguste, I'm sorry about breaking the honey jar."

"You can break a thousand jars, Vassily, when we get home." I hold him to my chest, as if my beating heart might somehow sustain his.

"Auguste, I only wanted to taste the honey," he says.

Then his eye goes opaque and my hands know that he is no longer alive. His walnut-sized heart is still. I can already feel his body cooling.

I suppose one might think it natural for me to cry at a moment like this. Certainly that would be called for. But I don't weep. Some emotions, I believe, are too powerful to consecrate with tears. And so I only hold Vassily's small body to mine.

"What's that guy doing?" someone asks.

"He's worked up about something."

A circle of people has formed around Vassily and me. I wonder what we must look like to those who came here to see Helena enter a state of temporary grace. They probably see an old man, rumped, disheveled, holding onto a thing so tightly, you'd think his life, and all he held dear in the world, depended on it.

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The Summerset Review



Stand Up,
Scout

by

Katherine
Karlin

Paper on pallets, freshly printed cutoffs, crosshatched and shrink-wrapped, lifted on the prongs of forklifts and loaded on trucks. Paper shreds in canvas gurneys. Paper in rolls like giant wheels of cheese. Butts of paper, too small for commercial printing, left out on the curb for butchers and art teachers to carry off under their arms. Maybe after the attacks the work slowed, but now, a few years later, the printers were recouping their losses: every investment house in lower Manhattan was rushing out a prospectus or a shareholder's report, and the narrow cow path streets were choked with the scrimmage of business. When a good wind blew the autumn air filled with paper like snow.

Penelope dressed like the traders and stock analysts: she studied how they looked and talked. On the street, dodging the hand trucks and dumpsters, she might have been mistaken for one of them. But when she returned from a quick lunch to her place of employment, she did not walk through a marble lobby, past a security guard and a sign-in book. She entered a dented metal door without so much as a sign or a window to distinguish it, so corroded and smoke-stained it blended into the brickwork; if a passerby bothered to notice the door he might think it led to a boiler room or an obsolete coal cellar. That's the secret of lower Manhattan—there's manufacturing going on all over the place, a shadow economy that runs below the financial district like a subterranean river of ink. Once at a party, she told a woman that she worked in a print shop on Vesey and the woman said, without irony, "I didn't know those places still existed."

After she shoved the metal door open she could hear the thumping of the web press, the shouting of the press operators, the rhythmic chomp of the three-knife guillotine. Paper. She loved the smell of it, the feel of it in her hand—she could tell you blindfolded if you gave her a forty-pound vellum or a forty-eight-gram newsprint. She had to cross the factory floor to reach the office, which she shared with three other customer service reps, two salesmen, a receptionist, and a human resources specialist. It was cordoned off from the pressroom by glass and sheetrock and insulation, and the insulation did a surprisingly good job of keeping out the noise. Every time an operator came in for a press check or to ask the HR specialist about his benefits, Penelope and the other office workers had to yell "Shut the door!" so the thrum of the machines wouldn't drive them crazy.

Ernie, the male receptionist—and that was *his* designation, not theirs; he greeted customers with "I'm Ernie, the male receptionist"—pushed himself from his desk when he saw Penelope. "We just got a call from Miller-MacDonald. Rush job. They printed half a million forecasts with some bargain-basement printer before they caught a typo. Now they need the whole run reprinted by four tomorrow morning."

"Who did they go to with the original job?" Penelope asked.

"They didn't say."

"That's dandy. When are these people going to learn you get what you pay for?" But she was pleased. An emergency like this and she could charge whatever she wanted. Even with overtime costs they'd make a fortune. She called the client and named her price, upholding enough professionalism not to point out what happens when you try to save money by going to a cut-rate printer. Then she went out to talk to the press foreman about sending half the crew home so they could rest up and come in to work the overnight shift. When she got back to the office Ernie was sulking. She could tell by the slope of his shoulders.

"Hey, this is good news," she said.

"I know. It's just that *my* job is the one getting pushed aside." Ernie was

trying to build a client base of his own. "It's a new account. No big deal or anything. Just a print broker. But it's our first job with him so I wanted it to be on time."

"Do you want me to talk to him?"

Ernie shrugged and turned away. "I don't know if it's such a good idea. He's Orthodox."

"I'm good with the Orthodox."

"I don't think they care for women in the industry."

"Nonsense. They're shrewd businessmen and do what they have to. Besides," she added, swiveling in her chair, "I'm a good bat mitzvah girl myself. I can always play that card."

"You are not," Ernie said.

She raised her hand in a pledge. "Scout's honor. What's the client's name?"

Ernie opened his drawer and picked a business card from the pencil tray. When Penelope took it she said, "I know him."

"Get out."

"I do. I know him." She dropped the card in her purse. "I'll go over there."

"He's all the way in Brooklyn."

"It'll make a good impression. I'll go over there."

Penelope's bat mitzvah almost didn't happen. It was the result of a long, complex, contentious negotiation between her mother and father. From upstairs she could hear them arguing, her mother's machine-gun voice, hardly stopping for a breath, and her father's exhausted interjections.

"Why should we capitulate to some medieval rite of passage to satisfy the expectations of people we hardly know?"

"What do you mean, hardly know?" her father answered. "They're our family."

"Your family. Not mine, Stuart."

"And Penelope's."

"So a rabbi says a few words and poof, she's a woman? That's so paternalistic. Did it ever occur to you she becomes a woman on her own? Through *her* experiences?"

"All right already."

"This is so typical of organized religion. You need a man to stand up and tell you when it's O.K. to move to the next phase of life."

"It doesn't mean anything to us. It means something to them. I thought it would be a small price to pay."

"And then what? Gift certificates? Jewelry? What kind of values are we teaching her?"

"We can ask for contributions to charity."

"Charity?"

"Forget it."

"What are we now, *noblesse oblige*?"

"I said forget it."

A few minutes later her mother was sitting on Penelope's bed, explaining what to expect on her bat mitzvah. That's the way it was with Mother. Usually she ended up conceding, but only after a good fight. Fighting was her oxygen. Penelope's mother was not at Woodstock. That's the way she put it: "I was *not* at Woodstock, Penelope." She might have been; she was the right age and she had friends who were there. But Mother sniffed that Woodstock was nothing more than unserious people taking hallucinogens and listening to bands—some of which had talent, she'd allow—deliver substandard performances. Women were on their backs in the mud. "On their backs," she stressed, while Mother remained in the hot city, cranking flyers out of an old Gestetner mimeograph for a rally to legalize abortion.

"It just shows how superficial your generation is that you hold Woodstock up as some romantic emblem of the counterculture."

Penelope shrugged at this point, not aware that she held Woodstock up as anything.

"It had all of the depravity and none of the politics."

Once Mother acquiesced to the idea of the bat mitzvah, the three of them sat at the kitchen table to make plans. Penelope would not read from the Torah. She didn't speak Hebrew, and even if she learned enough to fake it, like the other thirteen-year-olds did, it would be an act of hypocrisy to recite the teachings of an ancient (and deeply sexist) spiritual text. Instead, Penelope would take on a research project under the direction of Rabbi Pearlstein (who was Reformed, and a good man, for a rabbi—an old anti-war activist) and deliver a short talk to the congregation.

"It can be very creative," Mother said, now warm to the idea. She was very touchy when it came to her husband's family. She always suspected they hated her. Hated that she kept her own name, hated that she wanted only one child, hated that she was uninterested in synagogue or Hadassah. Before every family event she was nervous for days, and her nervousness took the form of bolstered militancy. She perceived misogyny everywhere, even on *The Cosby Show*. "They both work, right? So how come she's always unpacking the groceries? Why can't his ass unpack the groceries?"

Then there was the gathering, during which Mother would remain cool and silent. Penelope could not understand how her mother picked up so much hostility; the grandparents, uncles and aunts, and many cousins on her father's side always seemed warm and receptive. And after the visit, she endured the stages of Mother's grief: sniping on the car ride home ("I can't believe your cousin Denise is pregnant again. What is she, a cow?"), followed by a tantrum once they reached the house ("One question—they can't ask one question about how *I'm* doing? Would it kill them?"), followed, the next day, by a period of depression ("Am I a monster? Am I such a monster that they want to *shun* me?"), followed, a couple of days later, by penitence ("Denise! It's Vera, Stuart's wife. Listen, I need your address so I can send a little gift for the baby").

Penelope learned early there was no comforting Mother. If she tried to commiserate, saying something like "Yeah, they're pretty old-fashioned,"

Mother would snap, "Since when are you so judgmental, missy?" If she tried to reason with her, saying, "They weren't really mean," Mother would accuse her of being on "their side." Better to stay quiet.

Still, when she was riding high, Mother was better company than anyone. On Penelope's favorite days they took a field trip to Greenwich Village, where they revisited Mother's youth, and Penelope learned exactly where the Stonewall Riot began and where Dylan was photographed with his girlfriend for the cover of *Freewheelin'*. These visits would end up at the Café Figaro where Penelope, feeling very grown up, would drink a hot chocolate sprinkled with cinnamon while mother had a cappuccino and told Penelope about her favorite movies.

"*Breathless* was a revelation. Jean Seberg with that haircut. I wanted to be just like her, with that androgynous sexuality, you know?"

Penelope nodded, unsure what androgynous meant.

"Poor Jean! She tried to speak truth to power. Nice girls don't do that. But we're not nice girls, you and I. Are we, Penelope?"

"No."

"Because we speak truth to power. Even when it's unpopular. The rewards are few but they are deep. Like Atticus Finch, when he walks out of the courtroom. Remember?"

In fact, Penelope had not yet seen the movie, or read the book. But her mother had described the scene so many times and in such detail she felt as if she had. *Stand up, Scout. Your father's passing.*

"Stand up, Scout." Mother shivered. "That gets me every time."

When Penelope began to prepare for her bat mitzvah, she had decided to research the Holocaust. But she was sidetracked by the TV news, footage of boys and girls throwing stones at Israeli tanks. The tanks swiveled their gun turrets, faceless like robots. Penelope was rooting for the children.

"How's your research coming on the Holocaust?" Mother asked.

"Actually, I decided to do something else. I'm going to talk about the establishment of Israel."

"Israel?" Her mother compressed her lips.

"I thought it would be more relevant."

"The Holocaust is always relevant."

"Rabbi Pearlstein said this would be good, too."

"Oh. Well. If you and the *rabbi* have discussed it."

"Don't worry, Mother. I won't disappoint you."

Penelope was free to concentrate on her research while Mother arranged everything else. The reception would be catered by a friend. The guests would consist mostly of Dad's family. Mother's family, resolutely secular, thought the whole thing was a bad idea, so she didn't invite them. She asked Penelope if she wanted to have any friends from school, but Penelope didn't; this was a family event. Besides, Penelope was too busy to issue invitations, since she had two papers to write: one that she would give to Rabbi Pearlstein for his approval, and the real one, which she would read during the actual service. It was a guerrilla action, planned with precision. At night she paced her room, practicing her talk, picturing the

ruckus it would cause when she told the truth, and how she would emerge, battle-scarred but saintly. A Jewish Joan of Arc.

The morning of the service they woke up early to get ready. Penelope wore a red dress. Her mother, in exceptionally good spirits, put on makeup and perfume. As Penelope watched her at the bathroom mirror, Mother said, "How about a little sparkle?" And Penelope closed her eyes with pleasure as Mother applied gold eye shadow, first on the left lid, then the right, with her gentle thumb.

The synagogue lobby was already buzzing by the time they got there, and Penelope suddenly understood why girls pine for their bat mitzvahs. All these people—to see her. They all wore their best clothes and brought boxes wrapped in gold from Tiffany and Godiva and Macy's and piled them on top of a glass table with a huge lilac vase. Penelope wanted to head straight for the presents, but she restrained herself. She knew what the protocol was. And all the introductions—there was Uncle Ira who pinched her cheek, hard, and Second Cousin Ramona with hair as stiff as ironwork, and Great Aunt Sadie with her big brown eyes that seemed to be filled with tears, but they were just rheumy. There was Cousin Zach with MS who zipped around on a motorized wheelchair and at one point crashed into the table, nearly upsetting the huge vase, as a general cry went up from the crowd. Aunt Celia ushered three boys, Ethan, Daniel, and Yael. "You remember? You and Yael used to play together?"

She did remember, once, somewhat sickeningly, when they were about four, running up to her room and pretending they were married. Now Yael was a thick boy with a round face and freckles.

Celia kissed her and immediately took out a tissue to wipe off the lipstick.

Mazel tov! Mazel tov! Such a blessed day. So many well-wishers. Penelope began to have misgivings about the talk she was about to give. Maybe it wasn't too late. She could switch to the one the rabbi had approved. Then she saw her mother in the corner of the lobby, aloof and alone. On her own daughter's day she was all but ignored. Penelope had to honor her, make her proud.

She sat in the front row between her parents while the rabbi said a few words about the solemnity of the occasion. She was too nervous to listen. Then he called her up, and in the silence the room seemed to be alive with the movement of ions. She took shallow breaths, her legs like water, but somehow she reached the podium.

"Good morning."

The mic squealed feedback. She stepped away, startled by the sound of her own voice, amplified.

"For my talk this morning, I would like to address the question, what does it mean to be a good Jew?"

Some movement: Yael and his brothers kicking each other in the third row.

"And in these troubled times, does being a good Jew mean the unquestioning support of Israel?" She waited for discomfort: nothing. She continued. "Today, as we watch on television as Palestinian children throw rocks at Israeli tanks, we must remember how the state of Israel began."

Penelope caught sight of her Aunt Celia nodding appreciatively, the gold light from the window catching her earring. The temple smelled deeply of Obsession.

"On April 9, 1948," Penelope recited, "two militia groups, Irgun and the

Stern Gang, attacked the peaceful Arab town of Deir Yassin."

A sharp motion to her left: Uncle Saul lurched forward. Cousin Yael had a weird smile pasted on his face.

"According to *The New York Times*, over two hundred and fifty people were murdered. The militia men sealed families in their homes before razing them. They beat children to death and threw the bodies into wells." People in the audience turned to each other, shaking their heads. Yael kept grinning, wider and wider.

Penelope's heart beat faster. "Women and girls were raped and killed." The words echoed.

"Shame on you!" That was Cousin Zach, rocking his scooter back and forth in the outside aisle. Penelope fixed on Yael's smiling face. A shadow fell on her script; Rabbi Pearlstein had left his seat to stand next to her.

"Today, as I become a woman we remember the girls of Deir Yassin who never reached womanhood."

"All right, dear," the rabbi murmured.

She talked rapidly. "And we remember the names of the men who led the assault. Begin! Shamir!" She looked for her mother's face in the crowd and, not seeing it, returned to Cousin Yael's.

"All right, then." He put his hand on her back. "Let's call it a day."

Staring straight at Yael, who grinned wider than ever, she blurted out her last bit before the rabbi could drag her off. "Therefore, in answer to the question does a good Jew support Israel, we must answer perhaps, but not a good human being."

"O.K., O.K.," the rabbi said. He stood there while Penelope took her seat on stage.

Penelope's Great Uncle Mordy, waking from a long nap, called "Mazel tov." His voice cracked the silence.

"We must remember," Rabbi Pearlstein said, "at times like these, the passion and idealism of youth. The young may have much to learn, but if this passion can be harnessed it can be used to the good of the Jewish people."

Penelope sat on the stage and winked at Cousin Yael.

Only about half the guests stayed for the reception, and Mother greeted them all graciously. Some of the gold-wrapped presents, Penelope noticed, had disappeared. It was a small price to pay. She had spoken truth to power.

During the car ride home only one thing was said, around the time they crossed the Brooklyn-Queens border. Her father said, "At least the food was good."

Penelope sighed. She was looking forward to being alone with her mother.

Later when she was in her room, hashing over the triumph of the day, her mother knocked on the door and slipped in. Penelope, sitting on the bed, hugged her knees in giddy anticipation. Her mother was in a bathrobe, her makeup washed from her face and her hair held back in a ponytail.

"Hi," Penelope said shyly.

Mother closed the door behind her. "How could you do this to me?"

"What?"

Mother grabbed the sash of her robe and yanked it like a noose. The skin on her knuckles was translucent. "Do you want to kill me? There are easier ways to do it, you know."

Penelope turned her head. She could feel the vertebrae grinding in her neck. "I thought you'd like it."

"Like it? We're officially banished from this family now. You understand that?"

"Oh, I don't know."

"Officially banished."

She shrugged. In a day or two her mother would come around. "Maybe that's a good thing."

"Banished."

The client's office was in a row house on a shabby street in Crown Heights. He was just a broker, a middleman: he took in jobs from customers and meted them out to printers, but he didn't do any real printing himself. Penelope reminded herself that each client had to feel like the most important name on the roster. She mounted the front steps and pushed open the door. The corridor was dark, with dingy white and black tile in a faux Egyptian pattern, some of the ceramic chipped, and the building had a mix of smells: sauerkraut, fried onions, metal, cat piss. It felt very comfortable to her.

She saw an open door on the right and peeked in. It was a mess of a room, jammed with file cabinets, a wood desk, an old chair on casters, piles of job jackets and cutoffs haphazardly tilting toward each other or away, and a cat or two on top of the piles. An old computer sat dead on the floor. A few color wheels from ink manufacturers hung on a wall, and a single, high window let in a beam of yellow light on sparkly particles of dust. Penelope called a couple of times, and finally she heard the flush of a toilet and a door at the opposite side, which she hadn't noticed, unlatched. The broker emerged, wiping his hands with a paper towel.

He was enormously fat. His pants had a front panel like a sailor's that accentuated his belly, and he wore a synthetic-blend shirt that gaped between the buttons, revealing patches of his undershirt. Although she knew he was her age he looked as if he were from a different generation. On his head sat a purple yarmulke embroidered with gold. When he saw her his tongue moved, and a lozenge clicked against his teeth.

"Can I help you?"

"I'm the senior customer service agent from Blackwell O'Donnell," she said. "I've come to discuss your job."

"The job was due this afternoon. I assume if you're here to discuss it you missed the deadline."

"It is late," she admitted. "But I thought we could offer you some favorable terms."

He balled up the paper towel and threw it toward an overflowing wastepaper bin. "Could you wait one moment please?"

"Of course."

"I want to hear these terms of yours. But wait one moment please."

"Certainly."

He didn't offer her a seat, so Penelope stood in the corner of the office, trying to take as little room as possible. He steered himself past her, into the hallway, and called down the corridor. "Joel! Asher! Ben! Come here, please."

He walked back into the office, and in an instant three pale young men crowded in the door. Penelope flattened herself against a file cabinet and the broker lowered himself into the chair.

"All here?" he said. "Very good. You see this woman? This woman has come all the way from Manhattan to tell me that the job her firm has promised to do will miss its deadline. Did she pick up the phone to call? No. Send an email? No. She came herself, the senior customer service agent, with her heart in her hands, in order to negotiate new terms. This is a woman who values her customers. This is an honest woman. Listen! And learn." He turned to Penelope. "Go ahead, please."

With the young men looking at her, their mouths slightly open, she explained that a longtime client came in with an emergency, and out of loyalty she had to give his job priority. But, because the broker's job was late, she would give him a fifty percent discount, and if his customer would be willing to have his job on forty pound offset, they could use the leftover rolls from the previous job, and incur no cost for paper.

The broker clicked his lozenge. "No paper cost?"

"None. We should have plenty left."

"That's very reasonable." The young men lingered in the doorway, like shirts on hangers. "I'll have to discuss this with my customer, of course. But I will pass on that I think these are excellent terms."

"We do value your business," Penelope said.

"Yes. I'm very impressed."

After a silence, Penelope said, "Don't you remember me, Yael?"

"Should I?"

"I'm your cousin. Penelope."

Yael stood, swaying slightly. "You boys can go." The young men scampered down the hall. Yael took a folding chair that had been resting against the wall and set it up for her. He pulled a handkerchief from his pocket and dusted the seat. "Please. Please. Sit down."

Penelope sat. The office was so tiny their knees almost touched, and she had to twist uncomfortably to avoid grazing him.

"I was sorry to hear about your mother," he said.

"Thank you." Then, remembering her manners, she asked, "How's *your* mother?"

"Oh. Good. You know. My brother Ethan is a physician. Daniel runs a garment factory in Montreal."

Penelope tried to attach faces to these names. She could barely remember them.

"I never saw you after my bat mitzvah," she said.

Yael sucked on his lozenge and nodded. "That was some day."

"I always wanted to thank you."

"Thank me?"

"I remember how you smiled at me. It was encouraging."

"Did I? Probably it seemed funny to me. In those days everything did."

"Still, you seemed very kind. Over the years it's cheered me up to think about it."

Yael's chair squeaked as he leaned back. "I'm sure I didn't mean it that way."

"I think I pissed off a lot of people."

"Nobody blamed you."

"But it was my doing."

"Nobody blamed you. It was the mother."

Penelope took a moment to understand: he meant *her* mother. The use of the third person seemed rehearsed. Maybe he had told others the story of her bat mitzvah. Maybe several times.

"It wasn't, though. She had nothing to do with it."

"No." He waved his hand dismissively. "It was her."

She realized what the bat mitzvah looked like to Yael: a youthful folly. In fact, it shifted everything. It wasn't so long after that her mother started lighting the Sabbath candles, waving her hands over the flames as if she were summoning courage. Then she had a rabbi—not Rabbi Pearlstein, but a rabbi who smelled like fish—come and torch the oven to exorcize non-kosher demons. At first, Penelope's father accepted his wife's sudden zealotry with a shrug, but after a couple of years he left her. That didn't stop Mother's march toward Orthodoxy. She charged on with blinkered determination. When Penelope was about sixteen, Mother announced she would take a mikvah.

"A mikvah?" Penelope had asked. "Isn't that about washing away the shame of menstruation?"

"You're so linear," her mother replied.

On the morning of Penelope's Regents, Mother waded into the sacred water. After darkening an oval, Penelope dropped her number two pencil on her desk and said aloud, "Oh, Mother." She imagined her at that moment, Mother's body thin from self-denial, her breasts falling, nipples dark, her pubic hair rusty and wild, stepping into the pool and letting the water lap her—this woman who, as a tough-talking nineteen-year-old, organized the first feminist printing collective in New York—rinsing the sin from her womb, erasing the ligature left by Penelope's umbilical cord.

"Your mother didn't live to see the attacks, did she?" Yael asked.

"No. She had her heart failure the January before." It was actually the elections that did her in. Her mother grew obsessed with chads and absentee ballots. "Everyone's worried about Florida," she told Penelope. "But it's Ohio. Ohio's what you gotta watch." Penelope was encouraged by this brief flare of interest in secular life, as if it might signal a return. But eventually Mother just lost strength and gave up.

"Maybe it's a blessing," Yael said.

"I don't know. She was only fifty-three."

"The things we live to see."

Penelope changed the topic. "Are you married, Yael?"

He shrugged. "Of course."

"Children?"

"Three boys. Just like my father. You?"

"I'm engaged."

"Don't waste time. Married life is a joy."

Men always told her that. She wondered if married life was such a joy for Yael's wife. "How long have you been Orthodox?" she asked.

"Since I met my wife, actually. It's a good way to raise children. You give your day some structure."

Penelope nodded. She wasn't sure if there was anything left to say.

"Why don't we have some tea?" Yael said.

He picked up an electric kettle that had been perched haphazardly over some Pantone books, went to the bathroom and filled it with water, set it back on the books and plugged it into a surge protector. From a filing cabinet drawer he pulled out a sleeve of Styrofoam cups and a box of Tetley teabags.

"My mother became Orthodox, you know," Penelope said. "Late in life."

"It didn't matter." Yael placed two cups on top of a job ticket and draped a teabag in each. His words stung her. "It didn't change a thing."

"I think I drove her to it."

He smiled a little. When the kettle snapped off the overhead light blazed a little brighter.

"And my mother," he said, "isn't too happy with my direction. She thinks I'm moving backwards. This is what we crawled *out of*, she says." He poured the boiling water into the cups. "Sugar or cream?"

"Do you have any Equal?"

He held the kettle high, looking exasperated.

"O.K., Sugar," Penelope said.

"Crawled out of, like a cave." He fetched a couple of sugar packets from the filing cabinet and flapped them. After he sweetened her tea, he handed

her the cup. "Like you, I wasn't raised this way," Yael said. "My parents wanted to fit in. But as soon as I met my wife I felt like I was home."

"Saudade."

"Excuse me?"

"It's Portuguese," Penelope said. "Something I heard on the radio. People of the diaspora say it. It's a nostalgia for a place you've never been."

Yael's breathing was labored. She could tell he was moving around more than he was used to. "Not that I don't want to fit in," he continued. "It's just fitting into a smaller space."

"I think I understand."

He settled into his chair and placed his cup of tea on a stained job jacket. "That seems to be the way with our generation." He brought his hands together and divided them, as if he were doing the breaststroke. "Either you become Orthodox or you leave the life completely. My brother goes to a Unitarian church. He says Unitarians don't believe in God, so it doesn't count. I say, 'If they don't believe in God, what's the point of their church?'" He rested his chubby hand on the job jacket. "It's his wife's doing, of course."

Penelope noticed that in Yael's moral universe trouble seemed to begin and end with women.

"But look at you," he said. "Big-time businesswoman."

"I just dress the part."

"You're good at what you do. I can tell. I work with printers all the time. You're good, all right."

"And you. Three pale lads down the hall." She tilted her head toward the adjacent room. "You have your own apprentices."

"My wife's nephews. What choice do I have? They couldn't get a job bagging groceries at D'Agostino's."

"Still."

"I'm running a nursery school for adults. About this time in the afternoon I feel like I'm supposed to serve them Hawaiian Punch and graham crackers."

Penelope smiled blandly. "So you're funny. It must be genetic."

"You kidding? Our family wouldn't know a joke if it ran over them with a Zamboni. They're too busy gossiping."

"About what?" she asked, half-dreading the answer.

"Don't get me started. There's more scandal in this family than—you remember Zach?"

"The guy in the wheelchair."

"He's dead."

"Oh."

"Not how you think. He died of food poisoning. Turns out he was on one of those sex tours of Thailand."

"Come on! He was in a wheelchair."

"They make accommodations. The Disabilities Act has opened up all sorts of activities for the handicapped. The differently-abled. And Uncle Mordy, you know about him."

"What?"

"Married to Estelle forty years. Turns out he had three kids with the maid."

"No."

"Why would I lie? They live around here, his kids." He gestured toward the street. "I see them in the neighborhood from time to time. If you can imagine three black kids with Mordy's nose."

"Get out."

"I wanted to hire them instead of my idiot nephews," Yael said. "They seem like nice enough kids. What can you do? I have to keep her happy."

Penelope nibbled on her Styrofoam cup. "You're a nice man, Yael."

"Not really. And all of that's nothing compared to my mother. After my father dies she pulls out a photo album. My mother in a beehive hairdo and a tight sweater standing next to some greaseball, leaning on a 1963 Tempest. 'That's Eddie Falnieri,' she tells me. 'He died in Vietnam.'" Yael paused for effect. "'And he's your father.'"

Penelope gasped. "Is it true?"

Yael rolls his eyes toward the ceiling. "Does it matter?"

"Yael! Don't you want to know who your father is?"

"I know who my father is. Bernard Himmelfarb. Unless I stand to inherit that Camaro, I don't see any reason to say anything else."

"You must be curious."

"I would look swell in that Camaro."

Without asking he poured more hot water in her cup.

"They lie, you know," he said. "Our parents. They lied all the time. It always threw me off balance."

Penelope watched the caramel light pour through the window. It was cozy: the light, the lively dust, the stacks of papers leaning like decaying monuments. The three dim-witted nephews. She said, "My mother always told me her favorite part of *To Kill a Mockingbird* was when they say 'Stand up, Scout.'"

"I never saw *To Kill a Mockingbird*," Yael said.

"No?"

"Or read the book."

"Well, there's this scene where all the poor black folk are up in the balcony of the courthouse, and the little girl, Scout, is hiding up there with them, watching her father defend a man who's about to get lynched. When he walks out of the courtroom they all stand in his honor."

"So?"

"Well, it turns out that's *not* what they say. A few years ago I watched the movie three times just to make sure. The old man says, 'Mary Louise, Mary Louise. Stand up. Your father's passing.'"

"Well. I heard Bogart never said 'Play it again, Sam.'"

"She lied to me, though. My mother."

"That's not a lie. That's just forgetting."

"But it's completely different. It changes the whole meaning of the line. That old man was too obsequious to have called her Scout. Besides," she said, "it's not cool, all those Uncle Toms bowing and scraping in the balcony. They should have taken Atticus Finch out back of the courthouse and beaten him up for losing their case."

"Now, now."

"Really."

"Keep going and you'll start spouting off about Deir Yassin."

She slapped her hand over her mouth. "I'm done."

He looked at her sternly, from underneath his bushy eyebrows. Then he winked.

"As lies go," he said, "it could be a lot worse."

"I suppose."

"You could have had a wop father."

"Yael!"

He turned away, his big shoulders blocking out half the room. Penelope wondered if he found her worthy of conversion, if he'd invite her to his home to meet his kosher wife and three boys, to light the candles with them as the Sabbath evening fell. Shtetl life—people helping their relatives, living busy and purposeful lives. Everyone in his place. She wouldn't mind spending more of her days wedged into Yael's little office, watching him pour tea and listening to his stories about the blood they shared. If he asked her she would say yes.

Yael cleared his throat.

"It's getting late," she said preemptively.

Yael hoisted himself from his chair. "I'll see you out."

The wind was beginning to kick up as the sun dropped. It smelled like fall. Yael lowered himself down the stone stairs one step at a time, wincing slightly, as if he had a bad hip.

"I'll get in touch with my customer right away," he said. "Explain the terms. Like I said earlier, they're very good terms, so I don't expect a problem."

She wanted to kiss him, but realized it would be improper, out here in his community. That much she understood.

"Just let us know," she said.

"I'll call—what's his name? Ernie?"

"Ernie, yes. He'll be looking forward to hearing from you."

She waited for him to extend an invitation, to determine a next time for them to talk. But no invitation came. And she understood she wouldn't see him again. Not socially. He had no reason to include her in his life. And not in business; he was too humble a client for her to oversee personally.

"Goodbye, Yael." She offered her hand.

He looked at it. "I'm sorry."

She looked at it too, thrust pointlessly between them. "Oh."

"I can't. I'm sorry."

"I know." Men don't touch women in this universe, she remembered. Even cousins. There's too much stench of disgrace. Still she found herself unable to drop her hand, and Yael regarded it as if she'd bared her breast.

"I'll be in touch with Ernie."

He lumbered back up the stairs. Penelope looked up and down the street for a cab, and she started to walk. The wind created little cyclones of trash at her feet—coffee cups, newspapers, Chinese take-out menus—and pieces of paper wrapped around her shins. As she walked, more of it collected on her. Auto glass circulars, slam poetry fliers, parking tickets, pages from the *Daily News*, *People en Español*, and the *Forward* clung to her thighs and arms and chest and forehead. She had to walk deliberately, as if she were wearing a coat of mail.

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The Summerset Review



As the train swept around yet another green hill, I caught, or thought I caught, my first glimpse of Bath. The hills nestled the city in their folds, as if it were cupped in the palm of a giant grassy hand. A translucent mist, leftover from the afternoon rains, clung to the sides of the hills, shrouding the valley. The buildings, made of the famous, creamy Bath Stone of the region, glistened like gold where the sun pried through the fog. The chimneys and angular roofs hid behind the trees that ran along the tracks, making it difficult for me to get a good view of the coy city. Bath finally showed itself to me fully as the train slowed coming into the station, but still the city shimmered and wavered in the mist like a mirage. Even at first glance, Bath honestly seemed too good to be true—a mysterious, hidden place blessed by Midas' touch.

My own condition couldn't have helped the dreamlike impressions of the city that would be my home for the next couple of months. I had spent the train ride from London banging my head on the table in front of me, where I passed out as soon as the train left Paddington Station, having lost my battle with a raging hangover. I was scheduled to begin a semester's study of Shakespeare at a college in Bath, sponsored by my own university back in Ohio, and I was dreadfully late for our first meeting. I had a hard time leaving London, where I made friends with some interesting Finns in the hostel near Hyde Park but, alas, the Bard, and Bath, beckoned.

The taxi I hailed outside the train station wound around in incomprehensible spirals. Bath is an old city, dating back at least to the time of the Romans' settlement of Britain. Like all old cities, Bath grew in a chaotic manner, so the roads are a mangled twisted web, ill-suited to modern automobile travel. At times, like Alice, I thought I must have eaten the wrong cake and the taxi and the driver and I were all shrinking in order to fit on the cramped roads. It seemed that at any moment the cab would take a wrong turn and I would find myself down a rabbit hole. On the other hand, there was something undeniably charming about the cramped cityscape that rushed by the windows. For a Midwesterner, accustomed to a landscape that seems to be constantly sprawling out of reach, the way the buildings of Bath huddled together and crowded the street was remarkably intimate and inviting.

I was dropped unceremoniously at the top of a steep hill in front of my new address, Somerset Place, a dormitory in one of the crescent buildings that Bath is so well known for. The crescents are regular townhouse structures that are curved back from the road. The graceful arc of the building made the uniformity of its three stories and rows of windows seem less menacing than they might be on a flat façade. As the cab pulled away, I was struck by the quiet. I checked my watch again and saw that I was now almost an hour late. I had expected to find a place bustling with students, but instead found myself all alone at the top of a windy hill, confronted with a building locked up like a fortress, with a worsening headache and no clue as to what I was supposed to do.

I hoisted my backpack onto my shoulders and started walking around the building, hoping I would eventually happen upon a cluster of students enjoying the arrival of sun after the afternoon rain, but the place seemed deserted. As I rounded the left corner of the building, crossing a patio area and continuing on a walkway that climbed further up the hill, I encountered the first person I had seen since reaching the school. He was a man of about thirty or so, dressed sharply in boot cut jeans and a vertically striped maroon and grey button-down shirt. As he drew closer, I could see that the rest of the man was as attractive as his clothes. His wavy, light brown hair was short, but long enough to be lightly tousled. He had just the right amount of stubble across his chin and a nose that dropped just a little above his mouth. As we passed, he nodded hello, looking me straight in the face with warm brown eyes under some serious lashes.

After he passed, I was embarrassed to notice that my heart was pounding and that my face seemed stuck in a smile. Even the fog of alcohol lifted a bit and the world seemed a much clearer place. Hell, maybe even the sun shone brighter. I became more aware of my own appearance, tattered jeans rolled up above my goofy looking high-top Chuck Taylor's, my tangled hair pulled into a limp ponytail and secured with a navy bandanna. I was a mess and in no shape to approach an attractive man, who I assumed must be a graduate student at the college, maybe finishing up some research before the summer break. Just as I was about to push the alluring stranger out of my thoughts for good, I heard a voice call out behind me.

"Excuse me!" he called, his accent twisting around the words.

I turned to see the man standing in the open patio area, considering me with an openly inquisitive look. I instinctively began walking back toward him.

"Are you one of the Ohio students?"

"Yeah..."

Before I could say much more to explain myself, the man became animated, a charming smile breaking across his face. He held out his hand, "Hello then, I'm Greg. You must be Kara. You're the last to arrive; we've been waiting on you."

Taking his hand, I replied, "I am. Sorry. I got caught up in London..." Greg. Greg was the name of our British program director and professor. A month earlier, at the first orientation meeting in Ohio, two girls spoke to us about their own experiences in Bath the prior summer. When they got to the subject of Greg, they just smiled at each other knowingly and said, "Well, you'll see about Greg."

Indeed.

Greg didn't seem to need any explanation of where I had been, or why I was so late. He seemed only interested in welcoming me, "All right then, shall I help you with your luggage? Did you bring a cab?"

"I did, but actually, this is all I have," I said, shrugging my shoulders to emphasize the pack on my back.

Greg hesitated, "Really? Well, I'm impressed."

I was glad to hear it.

Greg had a personality that hit like a tornado and I was swept up in it. Talking at breakneck speed, flailing his hands around in hyperbolic gestures, asking questions and supplying answers all at once, Greg gave me a tour of the dorms at Somerset Place. We whirled past the kitchen and descended on some of my fellow students there. I noticed that Greg's mere presence seemed to cast a spell over everyone in the room. He had a kind of magic that, when he was around, caused you to forget anything else existed. Time froze for however long he was near.

Male and female students alike were drawn to him. All the boys talked to him as if they were childhood friends and all the girls eyed him, shifting their weight into more flattering poses. He had a way of addressing everyone in the room in only a matter of moments. He made everyone feel comfortable and important. He was a force to be reckoned with.

Finally, Greg led me to a door near the end of the hall. He opened it with a key and showed me into a tiny, plain room that would be my own for the next two months. His voice became more hushed and his frantic pace seemed to slow as he pointed out the obvious.

"This is your bed. And here's the desk."

I sat down on the lumpy mattress and just watched him as he roved around the room. I knew that he had done his part by showing me around and that soon he would leave, and I dreaded it. When he finally stopped moving, I stood. He held out his hand again, looked me in the eye, and said softly, "It was nice to meet you, Kara." Maybe I imagined it, maybe it was a part of his spell, but there seemed to be a moment then, before he dropped my hand, that something significant transpired. I felt like the train had just come around the hill again, and like Bath rising out of the mist, something important had been revealed to me.

If there was a moment between us, it passed quickly and Greg left, leaving me devastated in his wake. I took a deep breath and sank back onto the mattress. I had no reason to believe that the pounding in my chest was more than the excitement of arrival or if the glances between us meant anything at all, but as Greg stepped out of my room, for the first time since I had arrived in England, I felt utterly alone.

Bath is a city imbued with romance. In the eighteenth century, the city's preeminent citizens conspired to make it so by building the graceful limestone buildings that still stand today, and by luring visitors with the promise of healing waters, cards, theatre, and dancing. Bath was England's biggest destination next to London, especially for young, single women looking to make a proper match with the many attending gentlemen at the balls. Because Bath was also the center of high fashion, these marriage-seeking young ladies would visit the shops in Bond and Milsom Street to deck themselves out in the latest high-waisted muslin gowns and decadent, fruit bejeweled hats, which they could then wear to the infamous Assembly Room balls.

The high society and romance of Bath in its heyday was perhaps best captured in the works of Jane Austen that take place in the city where the author once lived. In *Persuasion*, "Prettier musings of high-wrought love and eternal constancy could never have passed along the streets of Bath," when the pushed-around Anne Eliot is finally reunited with her beloved Captain Wentworth. In *Northanger Abbey*, the plain, common Catherine Morland experiences the bedlam of the Upper Rooms during her first ball, where she also meets her future husband, the "strange" Henry Tilney. Indeed, the balls of Bath must have been affairs to remember, where the most esteemed of English society crowded against one another, uncommon in an era where propriety kept men and women chastely apart. The ladies in their finery would hope to catch the eyes of a rich gentleman, and a man down on his luck might encounter an independently wealthy young woman. They would dance the night away, with hopes of love and marriage filling their heads.

Another one of the longest standing traditions of bath arises from the fact that the town is built on the site of naturally occurring hot springs. Indeed, this is what first attracted the Romans to the site during their British invasion in the first century. The Romans channeled the natural hot springs into a bath complex and built up the town from its Celtic roots. The town was referred to as Aqua Sulis, or "the waters of Sulis," for a Celtic goddess that had much in common with the Romans' Minerva; they both valued wisdom and healing. Although the town fell into disrepair and Aqua Sulis was lost to time and erosion, the baths would rise again. The remains of the old Roman complex were gradually uncovered during the eighteenth century and the town, now known as Bath, was revived to its former status as a place of healing and leisure.

The characters of Jane Austen's novels, as well as the real life people they were modeled after, would have also flocked to Bath to "take the waters." The spring waters are heavy in mineral content and said to have healing powers, a general curative for almost any ailment. In the late eighteenth century, the Pump Room, another sophisticated meeting place, was built to accommodate the process of taking the waters in style, allowing for socializing, eating, and, most importantly in Bath, being seen.

Not much has changed since then. It is still a popular tourist destination, where the well-heeled shop the boutiques and bask in the general luxury of the town. The Roman baths are open to tours, although actually coming into contact with the water is discouraged since it still runs through the Roman lead pipes. One can even still visit the Pump Room, where a servant in eighteenth century garb pumps the vile-tasting water into a plastic cup to drink. Given the history of Bath, the writings of Jane Austen, and my own experience of enchantment upon arriving in Bath, one must wonder if there really is something in that water. I might argue that its

power is far from healing, but rather, induces a romantic fever.

I knew none of this when I came to Bath in the summer of 2004. I ended up in the city almost by accident when I decided, on a lark, that I wanted to study abroad. Early in the academic year, I had gone to the Office of International Education and scanned the bulletin board for programs for English majors during the summer. I finally found, and settled on, the two-month summer semester on Shakespeare, to be held in Bath. I only cared that it was not in Ohio. I wasn't really in the program for the education, since my own focus of study was on nonfiction writing, decidedly not about Shakespeare. I even wrote so much in my application, where I stated that my main reason for wanting to study abroad was to cultivate some interesting writing material. I can only assume that the Office of International Education had a good sense of humor, or a lack of interested applicants.

Of course, if I had been completely honest in that application, I would have admitted that study abroad was really just an excuse for an escape. I was only two quarters away from graduation and college life had become tedious and grueling in a way I thought a trip abroad might alleviate. My personal life was also in shambles. I had a habit of pursuing doomed relationships with men who Miss Austen might have considered "inappropriate matches" for someone like me, who had often been referred to, in all honesty and care, by friends as "too emotional" (which is a nice way of saying: depressed-and-whiney-and-clingy and dependent-on-attention-from-men and prone-to-fits-of-hysterics and overall-closing-in-on-bat-shit-crazy). In many ways, the trip to Bath was my attempt to escape from my miserable romantic habits and to be alone for a while, to try to be happy on my own. I promised myself during the flight across the Atlantic that the only love affair I would have over the summer would be with me. I had no idea I was throwing myself into the most romantic city in England.

The day after my arrival, classes started with poetry. I had always had an uncomfortable relationship with verse. The words felt impenetrable, opaque. I was a sucker for a story, narrative full of action and character and dialogue, but the finer points of language, rhythm, and metaphor often escaped me. They certainly weren't getting through that day. I sat in a daze through the morning's session on Shakespeare's sonnets, guzzling coffee I had brought, French press and all, from the dormitory kitchen only a short walk down the pavement. I gazed out the glass doors of Cavendish Hall, which opened to a small lawn on the down-slope of the hill towards Bath, where one scraggly tree swirled in the breeze, casting dancing shadows in the grass. I only half-listened to my fellow students' intimidatingly brilliant insights on the depth of the sonnets, my ears perking up only when the conversation turned to the topic of the possibility of sex, scandal, and affairs hidden in the verse.

I tried to muster more enthusiasm for the afternoon session since it was Greg's class on contemporary British and Irish poetry. Eager to seem eager, I arrived early and sat in the front row of desks. I tried to seem casual, joking amongst my classmates and looking over my notes from the morning, which were relatively uninformative. When Greg entered the room, in the same sleek yet casual style of dress, with the same bouncy step and mischievous smile, my heart hit my stomach and I couldn't hide the smile on my face.

Greg brought the same energy to his lessons that I had witnessed on our first meeting. He started the class by reciting Lord Tennyson's "Ulysses."

Speaking the words loud and clear, his voice pierced the dust that hung in the warm air. He took long strides like a dancer across the front of the room. Every hint of a smile was erased from his face as he became the suffering Ulysses. The room around me disappeared and I was lost in his feathery, accented voice. No words had ever seemed so important, but their meanings morphed and disappeared until all that was left was the sound of his voice. I was Penelope waiting forever for him to come home as he chanted that last line: "To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield." It felt both like a battle cry and an intimate whisper, meant only for me.

In the silence that followed his recital, the world came rushing back to me. The faces of my classmates showed mixed reactions—some seemed about to laugh, being unaccustomed to such earnestness and animation from a professor, and others, like me, were enraptured. Whatever world he had taken us to vanished when he spoke again to ask, "What is the difference between prose and poetry?" We were to work in pairs to try to hammer out an answer to this unanswerable question, so I turned to the girl on my left, then immediately regretted it.

Jen's vibrant red hair tapered around her pale, slightly freckled face. Her wide toffee eyes were topped by severely arching brows, one of which was pierced with a silver barbell. She had a face that made you think she was a girl who didn't take shit from anyone, yet one of those few who seemed perfectly comfortable around all the different students. I remembered her from the orientation meeting in Ohio, where she had sat amidst a group of boys, holding court over a conversation on some literary matter. She was full of clever cultural references and a teasing wit. I decided then that I didn't like the girl, as I sat alone feeling under-read and under-dressed. Even though she was sitting, I could tell she was a petite girl. Compact, curvy women always made me feel uncomfortable in my tall, straight figure, which at twenty-one, I was afraid I would never grow out of. In the end, I was able to acknowledge that my dislike was actually jealousy of this popular, smart, beautiful girl. So, since I at least wanted to make some friends during my summer abroad, when I turned to Jen that day in Greg's class, I was willing to forgo my first impression.

When it came to Jen, all was given away by her mouth, her thin lips able to convey a shocking range of emotion. When she turned in her desk to face me, I thought I saw a slight twitch, or a certain tenseness in her glossed lips that gave her away. I thought then that maybe this seemingly self-assured girl was really just as scared and shy as anyone else.

All I remember about our initial conversation that day is that we vehemently disagreed. Despite my discomfort with poetry, I maintained that prose and verse were really pretty much the same thing, just words on a page, while Jen insisted poetry was truly a higher form of art. When we presented our argument to the rest of the class, I was disappointed to find that Greg agreed with Jen and they spent a good while rhapsodizing on the merits of poetry. Greg claimed poetry was more like music than prose, more about rhythm, sound, and recital and Jen fervently concurred. I thought to myself, rather smugly, that I had never heard a wicked guitar solo in any poem.

I watched as they interacted, how they both seemed to forget where they were. I remembered the moment in my dorm room before Greg left, a moment that maybe wasn't a moment at all, and I thought for sure he and Jen were having one of those maybe-moments then, right in front of everyone. I felt the jealousy I had for Jen creep back in my stomach. Then I reminded myself that I had no reason to be jealous. Greg was just our professor, not a potential lover for any of us. I reminded myself that I wasn't looking for love or romance. I reminded myself I was trying to make friends.

The Hat and Feather Pub, where we went for drinks to celebrate the completion of the first day of classes and to see an unusual local DJ, sat halfway down the ridiculous hill upon which Somerset Place perched. The Hat and Feather might have been one of the sleazier pubs in the touristy city of Bath, a place meant for residents rather than visitors. The windows were stained glass and dark, casting psychedelic beams of color over the proper British drizzle outside. Stern-looking thirty-something locals sat around the bar in their dripping wellies, casting a disapproving eye at the large group of loud, American college students who had just entered their sacred space.

I sat on a bench looking out the colored glass at the park across the street. I was feeling down without exactly knowing why, although I suspected it had something to do with feeling alienated from my classmates. In all, there were twenty-two students in the program. We were from the same university, but I had never met any of them, owing to the ridiculously large size of our school. Already, many of them were starting to form little cliques, but I still felt uncomfortable because I didn't seem to fit in neatly amongst any of them. A core group seemed to be average college students in every way—by dress, ambition, interests. They tended to behave and act attentive in class, wear sweatshirts with our college logo on it, and look for every chance to party outside of class. There were a handful of stoners, a small group of pretty girls who seemed to bond together based on that fact alone, an even smaller group of nerdy, serious students, and the rest of us—some who fit into one or more of the groups fairly easily, and some, like me, who didn't, but still tried.

I wasn't good at making new friends and on top of that, I was in a stage of my life when everything was a little rebellion. All my friends back home shared in my anti-everything sentiments, which made it even more difficult to try to reach out to people who seemed so different. I had recently stopped shaving my legs, wearing makeup, or even using deodorant to rebel against the insane beauty standards for women. I only wore secondhand clothes and refused to shop at chain stores. All of this made me perplexing to most the girls on the trip, most of who had brought at least two giant suitcases of their nicest clothes and spent the majority of their time in Bath's boutiques. The boys were a bit more receptive to me, since I was good at playing "just one of the guys."

I was approached by several of the boys on the trip, Phil and Jeff, two of the general fun-loving students, who were from Kentucky and southern Ohio respectively and had the manners to prove it. They offered to get me in on a round of Jack Daniel's, which they were drinking in copious amounts "to remind them of home." When the whiskey came we toasted all around, to our home, to Bath, and to each other, and I found that the spirits began to lift my spirits, and our group's volume.

Before long, the infamous DJ Derek took the stage, or rather, took the stance of someone taking the stage, at the empty space at the back of the bar. He wore high-waisted trousers held up by suspenders and a khaki vest. His large, square glasses magnified his sunken eyes under his bushy grey brows. He hunched over his equipment, or rather just hunched, always, bobbing his head of thinning hair. DJ Derek, Bath's premiere ska and reggae disc jockey, was certainly well into his sixties. The combination of his age, accent, and Rastafarian slang made him completely incomprehensible to us, but the music he played was often quite recognizable.

Greg was with us that night and was the first to take the dance floor. He

jerked back and forth, back and forth, in a way that always made it seem like he would forget to pull the left side of his body to the right before he snapped in two. He held his chin up toward the ceiling with his eyes closed. His movements were completely uninhibited. I watched him for a while from the corner, as some of the other students started grooving towards the dance floor too.

Soon, I felt someone tugging at my arm and I looked over to find Jen, the last person I had expected.

"Come dance with me," she insisted, trying to drag me out to the dance floor despite her small frame.

I declined, even as the smiles of my classmates and their laughing conversation with Greg enticed me. By then, there was a whole group of students in a circle with Greg, variously bobbing, shaking, shimmying, grinding, and swaying to DJ Derek's beats. Even some of the surly locals had started dancing. Jen looked up at me with her big brown eyes. To this day, I remember how she seemed so young, even though we were the same age. There was something desperate about her. I saw some of that same glimmer of self-doubt from earlier. She asked me again to dance with her and in a quieter, pleading voice, she said, "I need you. I'm too shy to dance alone."

I believed her; believed that she did, and would, need me.

I let her drag me along, half drunk and half mortified. Jen made a beeline for Greg and stood beside him in the circle of dancing students. DJ Derek started playing a remix of a Bob Marley song and we all shouted along.

"Sun is shining, the weather is sweet!"

I looked around at the group of smiling faces and felt my earlier anxieties start to melt away. Somewhere in the whiskey, or the music, or the soothing movement of dancing, we began to connect.

"Make you want to move your dancing feet!"

Soon the circle had shifted and Greg was at my side, his arm occasionally brushing against mine. Such inconsequential contact had never felt so good. I found myself obnoxiously happy, in love with this new place, these new people in my life. Jen and I laughed together, sticking close all night, an unspoken alliance growing between us, any intellectual disagreements, or imagined rivalries, long forgotten. My other classmates danced with me too, some expressing their amusement at discovering that I was actually not a terrible dancer.

The group shifted again and Greg was across from me, dancing close to Jen, which I could tell she enjoyed. I couldn't get over the strangeness of it all, how I could be there in Bath, dancing with a professor, something very unlikely to happen back home, and forging a friendship with a girl I had only earlier that day despised. My own propensity for happiness, for love, surprised me. For a moment, I caught Greg's eyes, and even though we couldn't hear each other, we sang the next lyrics together.

"I want you to know, I'm a rainbow too!"

The nights in Bath ended earlier than in the U.S., since last call is around eleven. It didn't matter that night, because by then we were mostly drunk and worn out from dancing. The drizzle from earlier had become a

downpour, and to save us from getting soaked from the trudge up the hill, Greg made several trips in his car between the Hat and Feather and Somerset Place, ferrying students home for the night.

Jen and I ended up in his car at the same time and were delighted to find that he was blasting an old Nirvana CD. It turned out that Greg had a thing for early '90s American rock, Nirvana and the Red Hot Chili Peppers being amongst his favorites. For some reason, it struck me as charming and silly, that I would travel all the way to England to end up in a car with a bunch of Americans and one Brit who idolized American culture. I chuckled to myself and peered out the window into the sparkling rainy night.

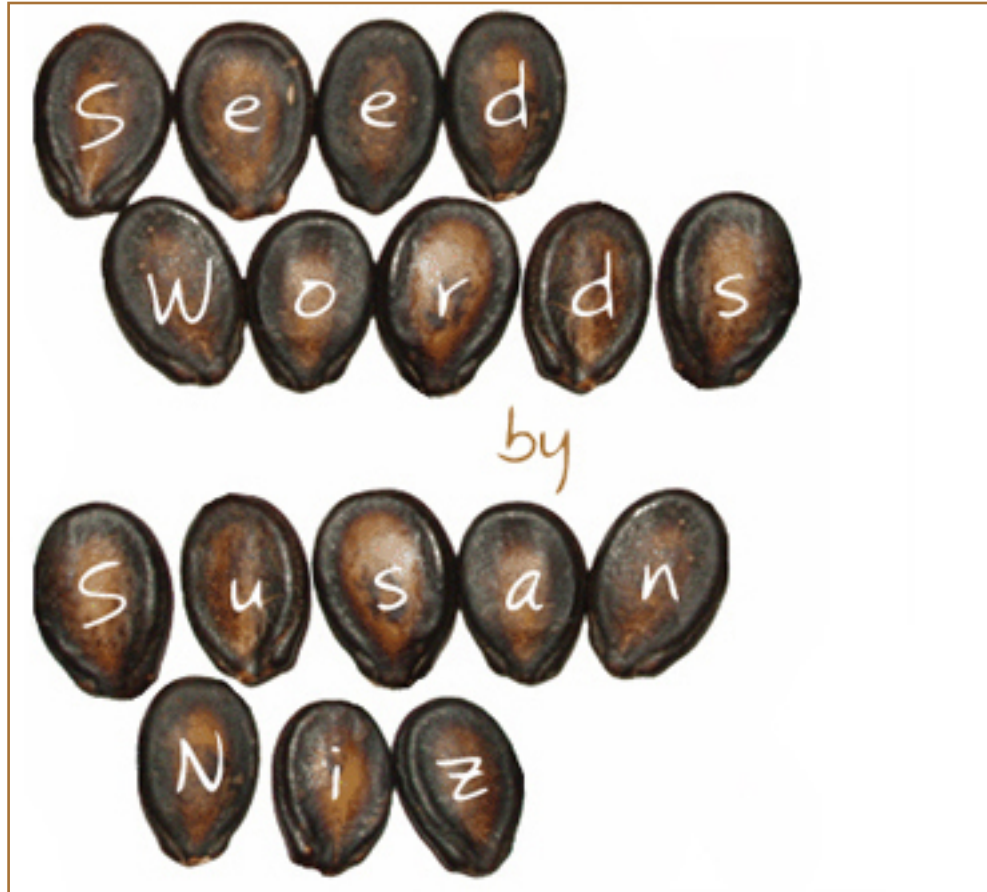
When we reached Somerset Place, I was reluctant to get out of the car, but I was near the door and soon my classmates were pushing up against me. I dashed through the rain to the door and let the other students pass. I watched Jen walk to the other entrance to the building, since she was in another hall. I wondered if we would speak again tomorrow. I stayed for a while in the yellow light of the arched doorway, leaning against the cold stone of the building and feeling the damp of the night creep into my clothes, making me squirm. I watched as Greg's car came up the drive again and again, a group of drunken students tumbling out each time. I felt my crush on him start to evaporate, or at least change, since I knew that nothing could ever come of it. But I didn't feel disappointed at that thought. I was relieved, since if no romance could ever come to fruition, there was nothing to ever mar the moments of intense flirtation. No future fights, or future physical contact, could overshadow the shock of his skin on the dance floor. This was no Jane Austen ball, where the woman always met the right man; this was Bath in the real—I could see it below me, shimmering again in the night.

When I knew that Greg would not be coming back again, I turned and went inside. In the plain white room I put out the lights and got in bed. In my mind, I played over and over again scenes from the dance floor as I tried to sleep.

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The Summerset Review



She walks to school with her head down. Strands of silky black hair fall to her cheeks. A stick in her small, strong hand drags through the pale dust. She glances behind her at the snaking line accompanying her footprints. If she were to go to the edge of the dense jungle and her tracks stopped there, everyone in the pueblo would think the snake took her away, charmed her into another life.

Instead, she follows the winding path to school. Study hard, her papá had told her. Then you can read to me, her mamá had said. She loves to sing and draw and race in the field, but words on a page are a puzzle to her. To others, they have a pattern. Señora Cruz can hold the book at half an extended arm's length and fly across the words as swiftly as a swallow gracing the cerulean heavens.

Sliding into her desk, the bough of a high oak waves to her from the sliver windows, drawing her attention. Each leaf appears as a green letter, as perfect and mysterious as the hard, angled book in black and white that her teacher holds. The story streams from Señora Cruz. The girl understands how it works: eyes take pictures of the words, words dance from mouth with meaning and rhythm.

At recess, the teacher calls her to a shade-speckled bench below the oak. From her lap, she pulls the slim book of words and stories. "Read this to me, please." The girl takes the open book in her hand, slides her fingertips across the page as if to brush the letters to the ground. But they stick. A black-and-white image of a butterfly is suspended in flight at the top of the page. The girl traces the words and weaves a story about a butterfly that becomes lost in the jungle. He must pretend to be a regal quetzal with vibrant, curved plumage in order to earn the respect of the other animals.

As she tells the story, the words take flight on the page. They dance around like hundreds of little flies, taunting her. Sit still, she tells them. They slow their dance, like lazy moscas do on a hot day, and settle into straight lines, but they keep themselves locked. Señora Cruz winks at her with a magic eye capable of deciphering the words.

Today she brings home her grades and Papá is disappointed. "You are not passing reading, mi'ja." He pulls the newspaper that Mamá was cutting a watermelon on, and points to the inky black words. "Lealo." Read it.

The words become ants. Each letter forms a bulbous segment of an hormiga. They begin their march towards the sweet, red watermelon, carrying pieces as large as themselves off the page and across the table and down the legs and out the door and towards the jungle and she wants to follow them. The girl turns to see Papá shaking his head at her; heavy disappointment emanates from his eyes and creeps over her like stinging nettles. "You need to learn to read. You must pay attention to the teacher." Looking back at the newspaper, damp with watermelon juice, she sees the ants are gone and all that remains are the slick tear-shaped black seeds sitting as scattered as the little letters on the page.

"I'll make it up to you, Papá." She wraps her stick-like arms around him and he softens. Mamá resumes slicing the watermelon and the little girl asks her for a clean page. The black letters are seeds and they will grow if she plants them. "Papá, I will practice reading this." She slides out the door with the newspaper a folded tail trailing behind her.

In the backyard, she walks the black soil between the sweet hibiscus and the elegant snapdragons, before the overgrown bougainvillea crowded with ruby-stained blossoms. She smooths out the newsprint on a clear patch of ground. So many little black seeds, thousands on a single page. Señora Cruz would trace them with her fingers, take pictures with her eyes, and news from all over Guatemala would come from her mouth in stories.

She runs her finger along the lines, but the letters bounce from the page and she's afraid they will turn into moscas again. So quickly, before they know what is coming, she pulls the page to pieces, little strips. The lines shred apart. She crumples the little strips into balls. She digs little holes with her small, strong hands, buries the seed words into the black earth where they will grow, grow into stories and songs and poems that she could read. She covers the seed words, she waters them, she waits for them to grow.

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The Summerset Review

Mermaid Baby

by

Sarah
Orton



My daughter was born a mermaid.

No gills or flippers or waving hair. A human tail, smooth, pale-fleshed.

I hold her in my arms, bending to adjust the water temperature. The tub is nearly full, fringed in tangerine-scented bubbles. She does not sleep; she looks at me in quiet study, still blue eyes so solemn for a baby so young.

I dip my foot in the water. The heat pulls upward, coiling in my stomach. I put my daughter on a layer of towels while I undress. First, my jeans and T-shirt, stale with sweat and worry. Then my underwear, my socks, until I stand naked. I free my hair from its elastic and let it fall in twisted waves down my back.

I lift my daughter up against my breasts and step, without making waves, into the tub.

When I looked at my daughter for the first time, the throbbing between my legs cooled, and a rush of awe surged in its place. She opened her eyes and I cupped my hand against her skull, my fingers laced through the soft brown fronds of her hair. She held her arms like folded wings, fingers pinned into her chest, like sleeping petals. I traced the new skin of her belly and looked at her legs. They converged in a V, her feet merged, a pointed-toed ballerina. Her knees pushed up in soft joined mounds, warm rising dough. I kissed the top of her head. My mermaid baby.

I was nineteen when I held a cup of my urine. I counted under my breath, then held the stick up. The urine moved like a cloud over the result window; changing pink to purple. The minus sign morphed into a plus. I held the stick and blinked hard. I smacked the cup over the edge, urine falling in an arc to my feet.

Charles asked if I was sure. I showed him the stick and his face blanched. I counted three shades of white. He took off his gloves and sat heavy in the kitchen chair. I passed him a mug of coffee, took my own place opposite him. He stared at it, but wouldn't drink. I'm not contagious, I said.

At night, Charles climbed in bed naked and held me against him until we were one warmth. He was careful of my belly, lowering his hand to my thigh instead. He whispered that we couldn't afford this. I closed my eyes into his neck and nodded. He said the car needs a transmission and you don't have a job. I found his hand and rubbed his palm, where his skin had scaled. He didn't say anything when I carried his hand with mine, and fastened it to my belly.

I found a job at a grocery store. Charles made me promise to tell the manager that I couldn't lift heavy boxes. I arranged cans of vegetables so their labels made one long ribbon of color down the aisle; corn to green beans to beets, then I moved to the peas and tomatoes. I filled the holes when cans were taken, felt sorry when no one would buy the okra. I ate sandwiches from the bakery for lunch, discounted half price. The bakery lady asked me how far along I was. My hand curved to my belly. It had only risen a crescent; I hadn't thought anyone would notice yet. I told her just three months and she nodded like mothers do. She said I was twice as big as you with my son at three. Doctor thought he was triplets for sure. She gave me a bottle of juice and said she'd pay.

Charles came home dusted in soil. I would take his jacket and gloves, wipe his lips, kiss him with my eyes open. I made spaghetti sometimes, took the recipe from the back of the seasoning packets I'd sorted at work. I made a bean soup. I bought three cans of okra and served them warm. Charles didn't know what it was.

I ran him a bath and washed his back, muscles lined with earth, like a shadowed statue. He told me the names of the flowers he had planted that day. Delphiniums. Amaranthus. Helianthus. Arachnis. He spoke the words like wine, and I lay my head on his back, my hair sticking to his skin, long rust-colored seaweed.

Afterward, he held my body with nervous aching. He centered my head on the pillow and leaned toward me, holding each breast like weighted porcelain. He was wet and cool still, water in droplets running down his back. I found his legs with mine and cooled my skin with his. He lifted me, palms flat, eased me onto him. I watched him backed in moonlight, shoulders angled, his hair so dark it melted into the walls. Sleep found him curved into my hip, one arm slung across my thighs.

I waited at the clinic for a turn to see the doctor, watching women with three children, five children, one with six. Some tried to read magazines, others chattered in unknown languages, grasping for wrists or ankles. Some nursed one child while bottle-feeding another. I laced my hands beneath my stomach and waited for my name.

The doctor weighed me, asked me questions, examined me with latex. He said schedule an ultrasound, come back, I have too many patients today. He made notes on a thin piece of paper without looking up. I nodded, and he asked me to bring my husband next time if we'd like to know the sex of the baby. I said we aren't married, and he handed me the paper. Prenatal vitamins, he said. He looked old, etched lines snaking beneath his eyes. Make an appointment next time. There are a lot of girls like you in that waiting room.

My mother cried when I told her. She said your poor sister's been trying for years. She dabbed at the mascara streaming from her eyes and looked at me seriously. Make sure he's sticking around. Babies scare men. Then she walked to her bedroom and came back with a photograph. She handed it to me. It was me, six months written on the back. I had on a red-checkered dress and an elastic headband. You cried every night until you were three, she said, folding her arms.

I told Charles I wanted to be surprised. He said he didn't care if it was a boy or a girl. We made a list of names we loved, and a list of names we hated. Loved: Marion Charlotte. Daniel. Hated: Melissa. Robert.

Tiffany. I showed Charles the picture of me and he laughed. He said you look the same, but different. He taped the picture by the bedroom light switch. While he brushed his teeth I stared at myself. My face was full, red-cheeked. I wanted to know if this baby would take my eyes, or Charles' nose, or my hair color. Little baby with dark red hair and blue eyes. Maybe Daniel. Or Marion.

The doctor squinted at the screen, pushed his glasses up the bridge of his nose. He had said nothing when I came alone. I watched him, and waited. He moved closer to the monitor, breathed in sharply. Then he left the room, and came back with two other doctors, a withered nurse behind them.

He said, there's a problem.

I looked at the screen, connected dots of white and black.

I could see my baby's hand.

Charles bought a pink blanket. I folded it and put it in with my clothes, nestled against my shirts, and touched the fleece backing with the curve of my fingertips. I imagined her palm pressed into the fabric, touched that ghostly imprint. I remembered the doctor's face, the slow pronouncement on his lips.

I did not tell Charles.

At night, I held my belly in both hands, tried to find the top of her head, a balled fist. She floated. No struggling, no kicking. Home in my belly, suspended in an ocean.

I spelled the word in my head.

Sirenomelia. *Siren*.

I sang to her, quiet so Charles wouldn't hear.

One night, before Charles came home, I filled the tub to its rim. I lowered myself slowly, water rolling onto the tiles. I buried my bulging belly, my breasts buoyed above the surface. Underwater, my skin was softer, moon-tinted; my clay-colored hair lay sticky against my chest. I remembered taking baths as a child, filling the tub with pink bubbles, maneuvering plastic boats and rubber animals across the waves I'd make by seesawing my body in counted rhythms. I would soak for hours, until my mother forcibly pulled me out and circled me in a towel. I'd watch the water drain to nothing, my toys beached on the bottom.

I sunk beneath the water, held my legs up against the wall. I wanted to speak there, breathe water in and out. She twirled.

I spread my hands against my belly, pushed into my skin. A push back, something hard, insistent. I smiled underwater, tiny bubbles moving past my teeth.

I mouthed: Marion.

I quit my job at the beginning of my ninth month. The bakery lady, Jeanne I knew now, gave me a pink frosted cookie and asked me to come back to let her hold the baby. She patted my stomach.

Charles put together the crib, painted white. He moved it against the wall in our bedroom and spread the pink blanket on the mattress. I sat on the edge of the bed. He rubbed my back in circles until I fell asleep.

At night, I dreamed of waves, high-crested and foamed, lifting me from bed, then sending me barreling underwater, past eels and coral and sandpaper-skinned sharks. I did not resist; my lungs filled with seawater, and I exhaled, serene, setting back into the ocean.

That day Charles ran three red lights, swerving past slow cars and pedestrians. The hospital had no records of me. Charles filled out forms while I paced, counting. A nurse found us a room and Charles thrust the forms at the front desk, guiding me into the elevator, then down the maternity ward. He held my hand, fingers rigid. I smiled into his neck, left a kiss. He whispered, everything will be fine.

I woke, blurry-eyed, rising from a pool of sweat. The room was crowded with doctors and machines, surrounding me like ancient, immovable rock. One doctor cried. Another talked rapidly, excited. A nurse held her hand over her mouth. A doctor said, I'm sorry Mr. Matthews but she will not live long. Bladder is undeveloped. Genitals are rudimentary. One kidney. He held her up in his hands. My baby. She cried out, strong.

I watched Charles' face crumble.

My mother asks me how God can be so cruel. She won't hold the baby. She holds a tissue against her face and cries, her voice angry, high-pitched. When she leaves, she won't look at Charles.

The doctors tell me the operation will be very expensive, and may not be successful. They tell me about steel bones and tubes. Artificial organs. A reconstructed vagina. I watch Marion beside me, connected

to machines; I hear a low robotic hum, not her sounds. He says, she can breathe on her own. Her heart is healthy. But she will need dialysis to keep her alive. Surgeries will be necessary for the first ten years of her life. She holds her tail up; I can see her buried toes.

The ward is quiet with breathing. I take her from all that plastic, remove tape and tubes, slowly. Charles is sleeping in the corner. I take his keys. I find my clothes in a duffle bag. I wrap her in blankets and move into the hallway, slipping past the main desk as the night nurse walks to the bathroom. I place her on the passenger seat, swaddled tight, one hand holding her body as I drive, so slow I pray no one will follow behind me.

The water is warm, tingling my skin. I sing her song. Her cheek rests against the rise of my breasts, her chest lifting and falling like the tide. I touch her back, her neck, the smooth underside of her tail. I lower my head, hold hers in the curve of my neck. We slip beneath waves, blinking up at the world, undulating in blue, my baby's skin seal smooth on my belly. Her breath echoes mine, ebbs and flows in our own sea. The only sounds here: breathing, trickles of water, distant ocean swells.

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The Sunmmerset Review

Contributors' Notes



Kara Mae Brown is currently an MFA candidate in Creative Writing at Emerson College in Boston where she is the nonfiction editor for *Redivider*, a graduate literary magazine. Her nonfiction has been previously published by *The Susquehanna Review*. You may contact her at karamaebrown@gmail.com.

Giano Cromley is a graduate of the fiction MFA program at the University of Montana. He has appeared in *The Threepenny Review*, *Literal Latte*, the German edition of *Le Monde diplomatique*, *The Externalist*, *Swill Magazine* and *Word Riot*. He recently won an Artists Fellowship Award from the Illinois Arts Council, and teaches English at Kennedy-King College in Chicago. Write to him at gianoc@gmail.com.



Katherine Karlin's work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *One Story, Other Voices*, *ZYZZYVA*, and elsewhere. Her short story, "Bye-bye Larry" won a 2007 Pushcart Prize. You may reach her at kkarlin@usc.edu.

Other stories by **Susan Niz** from this series set in Guatemala, have been published in *Opium Magazine* and *flashquake*. A collection of some of the stories was named honorable mention in the 2008 Loft Mentor Series Competition with The Loft Literary Center of Minneapolis, Minnesota. Susan can be reached at susannizfiction@gmail.com.





Sarah Orton is a graduate of the University of Utah's Creative Writing program, and her work has appeared in *The Harrow*, *Mytholog*, and *Prick of the Spindle*. Contact her at sarah.rakel@gmail.com.

The Somerset Review

Fifty-for-Fifty Contest Award

We are awarding a monetary prize and a complimentary copy of Volume One to the reader who submits the best feedback on a piece appearing in each issue of *The Somerset Review*. Runners-up receive complimentary copies. For information on how to submit your feedback, see our [Guidelines](#) page.

For the Spring 2008 issue, we awarded \$150. For the Summer 2008 issue, we awarded \$100.

For the current issue - running now through December 1st, 2008 - the prize money is again set at \$100.

Award winner for the Summer 2008 issue:
Tanaz Bhatena of Mississauga, Ontario, Canada

Runner-up:
LuAnn Schindler of Ewing, Nebraska

We want to thank all those of you who submitted entries. We recognize the investment you've made to read our publication and write to us. We sincerely appreciate the interest.

Tanaz writes about Joe Ponepinto's "The Art of Waiting" -

The conflict between the narrator and Mueller reminded me of certain instances in my own life: trying to please an anal professor in college, attempting to create the perfect sales pitch for a nit-picky customer. But that was only on the surface.

On a deeper level, it reminded me of a Buddhist theory called *Pratityasamutpada*, or "dependent co-arising." In layman's terms, it means that everything in the universe is created by a never-ending chain of cause and effect. Everyone and everything is interdependent. The smallest of creatures in the world have a purpose; the most unskilled jobs can be important when one looks at the big picture. Perhaps you may call this common sense, and indeed it is true that many of us have heard of a similar theory from different sources.

But how many of us have realized and accepted this very simple thing in life? Very few. For many, including myself, shame and ego come in the way. The idea of a job being even close to menial, is embarrassing.

The narrator's transformation in this story, from an embittered artist to a complacent waiter, is inspiring. Unlike the sharp flash of enlightenment common to practitioners of Zen Buddhism, the narrator's nirvana is more subtle - more like the delicate clink of a pair of wine glasses than the hard smack of a bamboo on one's spine. However, as a reader, I thought the effect was just as powerful.

The Somerset Review

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Guidelines for Submissions

Fiction and Essay Submissions

Writers are invited to submit literary stories and essays of up to 8,000 words. To get more of an idea of what we are looking for, please read *The Somerset Review* or consult our [Recommended Reading List](#). We are currently not accepting poetry or book reviews.

Email submissions to editor@summersetreview.org as an attachment in MS Word, or as plain text. We suggest you include the word "Submission" in the title of the email, so that we don't mistake it for junk mail. Be sure you specify whether your piece is fiction or nonfiction.

You may alternatively submit in hard-copy by sending to 25 Summerset Drive, Smithtown, New York 11787, USA. We prefer disposable copies of manuscripts. We can respond via email in lieu of a SASE if you so designate.

All submissions receive replies as quickly as possible. If we have not responded within three months, please hassle us. We read year-round and never go on hiatus.

Book excerpts will be considered if you believe the work stands alone. Reprints will be considered if the work has not appeared elsewhere within the last two years. Simultaneous submissions are encouraged.

We do not give previously-published authors any more attention than new writers, and judge submissions objectively on literary merit. Even so, a brief note accompanying the submission is preferred. We are not sure what we want to read in this note, but would appreciate the extra effort, rather than a blank email with an attachment. We are always interested in knowing how you've heard of us, and what you like about us.

Authors will see drafts of accepted pieces for review prior to release, and will receive twenty-five dollars at release time for their contribution.

Writers retain all rights to use their work elsewhere, however, we reserve the right to republish the material, without modification, in a nonprofit print volume. We also reserve the right to quote brief excerpts of text at literary events, with no connection to monetary gain, crediting the author in all cases.

We have nominated stories annually for various anthologies and awards, including *Pushcart Prize*, *New Stories from the South*, *Creative Nonfiction's Best Of anthology*, *storySouth's Million Writers Award*, *Sundress Publication's Best of the Net*, and others.

Enter Our Free Fifty-for-Fifty Contest

Readers are invited to submit comments on stories and essays (excluding photo essays) appearing in the current issue of *The Somerset Review*. We award at least fifty dollars and a copy of Volume One to the person contributing the best entry over fifty words, and will include the comment in our next issue, along with the reader's name and home town. (For the exact amount we pay each quarter, see the Fifty-for-Fifty Contest for Readers page.)

Reader comments can be in any form and there is no fee. Only one entry is allowed per person, per quarter, and the entry must pertain to a piece appearing in the current issue. We are particularly interested in how the story or essay affected you; what impact it had, what memory it stirred, what idea it precipitated. Be honest and lucid. Writing style is not critically important.

Email your entry to editor@summersetreview.org. Include your name, town, state, and country (if outside the USA). Qualified entries will receive acknowledgement of receipt within a few days. The winner will be notified when the new issue is released. The deadline for comments is two weeks before release date. Issues are released on the 15th of March, June, September, and December. Entrants who have not won will not be individually notified of contest results.

Email addresses will not be published, circulated, or archived. Writers making content submissions are eligible to participate as long as they do not discuss their own work.

We may choose to publish more than just the winning comment. If we decide to do so, readers will be notified and although it is not likely monetary awards will be given, we may send complimentary copies of Volume One to runners up.

By offering this prize, we hope to increase the awareness and appreciation of literary magazines in our world and culture.

Questions for Reader Groups

Readers and Reading Groups are invited to provide answers to questions we have posted on the material in our current issue. See "Questions for Reader Group Discussion" in the Table of Contents for details on how you can win a complimentary copy of *The Somerset Review* if you or your reading group provides meaningful answers to all questions.

The Somerset Review

Recommended Reading List

Author	Title	Source
Aciman, Andre	Cat's Cradle	From the November 3 issue of <i>The New Yorker</i> , 1997
Altschul, Andrew Foster	From A to Z	From Issue #1 of <i>Swink</i> , 2004
Anderson, Dale Gregory	The Girl in the Tree	From the Spring/Summer issue of <i>Alaska Quarterly Review</i> , 2003
Ashton, Edward	Night Swimmer	Online at <i>The Blue Penny Quarterly</i> , Spring/Summer 1995
Baggott, Julianna	Five	From <i>Other Voices</i> #28, 1998
Bardi, Abby	My Wild Life	From <i>Quarterly West</i> #41, 1995
Baxter, Charles	Snow	From the collection <i>A Relative Stranger</i> , published in 1990
Benson, Amy	Vectors: Arrows of Discontent	A memoir excerpt in Issue 29.2 of <i>New Orleans Review</i> , 2004
Borders, Lisa	Temporary Help	From the Spring/Summer issue of <i>Bananafish</i> , 1998
Brooks, Ben	Wildflowers	From the Spring issue of <i>Georgetown Review</i> , 2005
Broyard, Bliss	Mr. Sweetly Indecent	From the Fall issue of <i>Ploughshares</i> , 1997
Burns, Carole	Honour's Daughter	From <i>Other Voices</i> #31, 1999
Cain, Chelsea	Pretty Enough To Be a Showgirl	From the Spring issue of <i>Grand Tour</i> , 1997
Cheever, John	The Stories of John Cheever	A collection published in 1978
Christopher, Nicholas	Veronica	A novel published in 1996
Clark, Susan	Besides the Body	From the Spring issue of <i>Red Rock Review</i> , 2004
Coake, Christopher	Solos	A novella from Vol. 9, No. 1 of <i>Five Points</i> , 2005
Crane, Elizabeth	When the Messenger Is Hot	A collection published in 2003
Crowe, Thomas Rain	Firsts	Online at <i>Oyster Boy Review</i> in January, 1997
Dancoff, Judith	Vermeer's Light	From <i>Alaska Quarterly Review's</i> Intimate Voices issue, 1997
Dormanen, Sue	Finishing First	From the Summer issue of <i>Lynx Eye</i> , 1998.
Doyle, Larry	Life Without Leann	From an issue of <i>The New Yorker</i> in Fall, 1990
Glatt, Lisa	A Girl Becomes a Comma Like That	A novel published in 2004
Hyde, Catherine Ryan	Dancing with Elinor	From the Summer issue of <i>Gettysburg Review</i> , 2006
Kennedy, Thomas E.	Kansas City	From Vol 62 No. 4 of <i>New Letters</i> , 1996
McInerney, Jay	Model Behavior	A novel published in 1998
Millhauser, Steven	Enchanted Night	A novella published in 1999
Moses, Jennifer	Circling	From the Spring issue of <i>Gettysburg Review</i> , 1995
Murakami, Haruki	South of the Border, West of the Sun	A novel published in 1998
Nadzam, Bonnie	Moon Helmet	From the Fall/Winter issue of <i>Alaska Quarterly Review</i> , 2007
Offill, Jenny	Last Things	A novel published in 1999
Orlean, Susan	The Bullfighter Checks Her Makeup	A collection of essays published in 2001
Peelle, Lydia	Reasons for and Advantages of Breathing	From No. 87 of <i>One Story</i> , 2007
Perry, Rachael	Sullivan's Inventory	From No. 82/83 of <i>Confrontation</i> , Spring/Summer 2003
Pope, Mary Elizabeth	Divining Venus	From the Spring issue of <i>Florida Review</i> , 2007
Raboteur, Emily	The Eye of Horus	From <i>StoryQuarterly</i> #40, 2004
Reyn, Irina	The Firebird	From the Spring issue of <i>Lit</i> , 2008
Robison, Mary	Why Did I Ever?	A novel published in 2001
Row, Jess	The Secrets of Bats	From the Fall issue of <i>Ploughshares</i> , 2000
Russell, Karen	Haunting Olivia	From the June 13 & 20 issue of <i>The New Yorker</i> , 2005
Ryan, Jean	Paradise	From the <i>Massachusetts Review</i> , Autumn 2001
Salinger, J.D.	For Esme - With Love and Squalor	From the collection <i>Nine Stories</i> published in 1953

Sellers, Heather	Tell Me Again Who Are You?	An essay from Fall/Winter issue of <i>Alaska Quarterly Review</i> , 2006
Somerville, Kristine	What the Heart Doesn't Know	From Volume I, Number 5 of <i>Many Mountains Moving</i> , 1995
Tilghman, Christopher	The Way People Run	From the September 9 issue of <i>The New Yorker</i> , 1991

The Somerset Review

Questions for Discussion



Readers and reading groups are invited to discuss the topics below relating to the material presented in this issue. Send answers to editor@somersetreview.org and you will be eligible for a complimentary copy of Volume One of *The Somerset Review*. All questions must be answered and received by December 1, 2008.

Include your name, town, state, and country (if outside the USA) in your entry. The editors will decide the winner(s) and send out notification when the new issue is released. We plan to announce the names of those who are awarded free copies, so if you do not want your name to appear in the journal, please let us know. Postal and email addresses of all entrants will not be published, circulated, or archived.

-
1. In "Mermaid Baby," immediately after learning there was a problem, the protagonist narrates, "I looked at the screen, connected dots of white and black. I could see my baby's hand." This section of the story then ends abruptly. Discuss the effectiveness of the narrative approach used here.
 2. In the end of "A Thing Held Dear," Vassily says, "I only wanted to taste the honey." Relate this to Auguste's desire to see grace, both in the form of the ice performer, and perhaps more substantially in the form of his deceased wife.
 3. Discuss a particular portion of "Bath Romance" that made the city especially alluring to you.
 4. Discuss the use of seeds as a metaphor in "Seed Words."
 5. In "Stand Up, Scout," Penelope's speech at the bat mitzvah comes about from her mother's insistence of speaking truth to power, even when it's unpopular. Many years later, Penelope criticizes her mother, believing the woman lied about a quote from *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Discuss whether you feel this actually was a lie, and if Penelope's underlying sentiment might be more regret for her own actions and discretions when younger.

The Somerset Review

Previous Issues

Type Ctrl-F to search for a particular author's name.

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Catherine Brown, Jack Cobb, Bill Cook, Allie Larkin, Naomi Leimsider, Didi Wood

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Anne Corbitt, Julie Dearborn, John Hansen, Scott McCabe, Thaddeus Rutkowski

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Karen Kasaba, Chris Ludlow, Court Merrigan, Michael F. Smith, Mark Vender

Scott Carter, Alan M. Danzis, Gerard Marconi, Jordan Rosenfeld

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Eric Bosse, Sarah Maria Gonzales, M.M.M. Hayes, Janice J. Heiss, Pia Wilson

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Kit Chase, Diane E. Dees, Edison McDaniels, Regina Phelps, Jacob Fawcett

Fall 2002
