***Slate & Style*** 

**A publication of the Writers’ Division of the National Federation of the Blind Autumn 2015**

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**Slate and Style Staff:** a team of dedicated members working together.

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**From the Keyboard of the President**

By Eve Sanchez

This is the first issue after my becoming president. I hope to honor the past leaders by carrying on what they have created and bringing changes that will move the division always forward. Slate & Style is one of the things that I am very proud of being involved with. We have a great team made up of officers and members who are dedicated to providing quality that all could enjoy and relate to. When I say that we want to make the publication relatable, I speak of the way the membership is to be reflected at all levels and encouraged to continually improve the craft of writing.

Another thing that the new officers and board has agreed on is opening up the Writers’ Division to more Federationists. One of the first steps in this process is that we are no longer holding Slate & Style for the members alone. It is being released for all to enjoy and become a part of. The members will still have it delivered directly to their inboxes though. Members will find some other benefits to their membership that will outweigh being the only ones to read this great magazine, such as discounted entry fees. Keep an eye on the division webpage.

There are some exciting things that will manifest in the coming year. We will have greatly informative and educational discussions for the members to take part in each month. We will have some side classes and groups online. And we will have new activities specifically designed for the youth of the Federation.

My hope is that we all embrace the philosophy of the National Federation of the Blind and work to pass that on through the division. My hope is that we keep and cultivate the creative spirit that makes us artists with the written word. And most of all, my hope is that we support each other to do our best, personally and through our combined efforts in the Writers’ Division.

**On the Slate**

 The S&S team wishes to welcome all readers, old and new, to the Slate and Style. It is a team effort made up of dedicated officers and members. And it should be noted here that there is always room for more team members.

S&S is published four times a year at the seasons’ change. We have an email address especially for S&S submissions and correspondence. S-and-S@nfbnet.org. We look forward to hearing from each of you, our readers and division members. Please use this new option of communication to submit, ask questions, make requests and express your interest in involvement.

 S&S is dedicated to showcasing members as they are in all their glory and levels of writing skills. Though, of course, we cannot accept all submissions, we encourage all members to get involved. We want you, as you are the membership we wish to showcase. So become a part of Slate and Style.

 Particularly, in this issue we are highlighting some of our writing contest winners. The writing contest is a big part of the Writers’ Division and all the entrants deserve recognition. Sadly we are not able to showcase every submission, but the winners will be here in our pages. If you do not see a winning entry in this issue, it is likely being held for another, later issue, so keep reading. And even if someone did not win, it must be known that they were up against some great competition. Everyone who enters is a winner just for putting themselves out there.

 Another thing to note here is the formatting. There is an attempt to be accessible to all, so if you are having difficulty, please let us know. If you are a JAWS user, you could use Quick Keys by pressing insert + z and then navigate by pressing b. Enjoy reading what we are all writing.

**One for Every Year**

**First Place, Adult Fiction**

by Chris Kuell

*“Life is not easy for any of us. But so what? We must have perseverance and above all, confidence in ourselves. We must believe that we are all gifted, and we must use those gifts to fulfill our life’s purpose.” - from the diary of Suzie Bauer*

The first hurdle of the day was getting down on the ground. Well, getting down wasn’t so hard, but doing it without spraining or fracturing anything was another matter. After a minute of pondering, in the end Matthew mostly just used his cane for balance and plopped down on his backside with a grunt, followed by a silent prayer of thanks that nothing had broken. Using one elbow for leverage, he rolled onto his knees and caught his breath. So far, so good. He extended his cane out to the left and felt the bricks edging the garden, then moved right until he found the angel statue.

Like an infant, he crawled forward until he found the plaque which read simply—Suzie. He traced the letters with his index finger, mind racing backwards at the smooth cold of the marble to the day his grandson Allan had shown up with it.

“I’ve got the bricks you wanted for Nana’s memorial garden in the truck,” the tall boy, well, man, said. “Instead of the plain red, though, I got nice white ones. I think it will look much better. They cost a little more, but don’t worry about that.” Allan paused before Matthew could ask him to drive his truck around back and help unload the bricks.

“I also got you this.” He handed Matthew the heavy piece of polished marble. It was maybe eight by twelve inches, and he immediately found the engraved letters. “I figure if you’re going to put Nana back there, you got to mark it somehow.”

That had been sixteen years earlier. His Suzie had passed in October of 1998, her ashes nestled in a brass urn until the following spring. They had both loved nature, loved to garden, and although they had never discussed it directly, he felt certain she’d want to return to the earth, her material self becoming a part of something beautiful and eternal.

Matthew took a handkerchief from his back pocket and dusted off the stone. He then took the hand spade from another pocket and carefully dug a hole about six inches to the left of the bottom corner of the stone. When he finished that hole, he moved up six inches and dug another, repeating the process until he’d dug six holes, two on each of three of the stone’s sides. He then fumbled around behind him until he found the old lunch tray with two dozen Dixie cups on it. Each of the cups was half filled with dirt and a small green shoot that would grow into a bright yellow black-eyed Susan come June.

Delicately, he removed the plant and soil from the cups, dropping one in each hole he’d dug. Then tender as handling a newborn baby, Matthew filled in the rest of the holes with dirt and patted them down safe and secure. He mindlessly hummed an old banjo song as he worked. “Black-eyed Suzie, there’s sunshine in your veins. Though the clouds are movin’ in, nobody hears you complain.”

When the first set of flowers were planted, he moved out another six inches or so and started digging more holes in an arc around the marble plate with his beloved’s name. Although he’d never seen a rainbow, this was how his mother had described one to him as a boy. “Black-eyed Suzie, nobody knows your name. Black-eyed Suzie, just waitin’ for a drop of rain.”

He ignored the aching in his knees as he worked, keeping a mental count of the number of flowers he’d planted. Ten, eleven, twelve…Running his fingers up one of the sprouts, he couldn’t remember when Suzie first told him Black-eyed Susans were her favorite flower, but he did recall driving with the family out to see Yellowstone. Along the way, somewhere in the middle of North Dakota, Suzie suddenly pulled the car over, gravel crunching, into the break-down lane. “Oh my Lord, will you look at that!”

The next thing he knew she and the kids were piling out of the car. He also got out, unfolding his cane and making his way to the voices of his family, which were coming from a field of some sort.

“Matthew!” Suzie called in that beautiful voice of hers. “C’mon! It’s a field of black-eyed Susans, as far as the eye can see.”



And it was. He reached down and felt them, everywhere he touched, flowers in full bloom. As he found his wife, she was plucking the petals off one. “He loves me, he loves me not. He loves me, he loves me not. He loves me!” And then she was in his arms, almost too wonderful to be real, joy and happiness bubbling out of her. She kissed him, they held each other, and the world was absolutely perfect in that moment.

Twenty-two, twenty-three… As he firmed up the soil around the last of the plants in this tray, he stuck the spade in the ground, handle up, so he’d know where he’d stopped. Despite the protests from his knees and back, he pushed himself first into a squat, then using his cane for balance, slowly managed to stand up. As the world settled in under his feet, he wiped his brow with his handkerchief and smiled. Ninety years young, he thought. Still going strong.

He walked, or perhaps ambled is a better word—across the backyard, up the driveway to the path that lead to the back of his house. The same house he’d lived in since 1978, when the place was a dump that probably should have been condemned. But over the years, with lots of hard work and determination, he and Suzie had built something strong and lasting. Sure, it was much quieter now that the kids and the grandkids were all grown. And of course, the first few years after Suzie passed had been almost unbearable. But there was also comfort in the familiar. So much had happened in this house that he felt like it was a part of him, and he a part of it.

Inside, he took a long drink of water and grabbed the next tray of flowers. The morning’s work had taken a lot out of him, but perseverance was his middle name, and there was much still to do. Tucking the tray across his hip, he made his way back to the memorial garden and once again, utilizing more gravity than grace, got himself down with his spade and started digging.

Matthew first met Suzie in late summer, 1940. His best friend Tony had heard that a bunch of kids were meeting up at Andy Carroll’s parent’s place at the lake. Andy’s Dad was away on business, and his Mom was helping a sick aunt in Indianapolis.

“No excuses,” Tony said, knowing very well how uncomfortable Matthew felt in social situations. It was awkward enough being sixteen-years old, never mind being the only blind kid in the entire town. “There’s going to be girls,” Tony continued. “Bill’s already in the car, and—“ he dropped his voice to a whisper. “We’ve got a bottle of hooch.”

Matthew remembered little of that day 75 long years ago, except for a girl who had spent time talking to him. Rather than focusing on his blindness, she asked about his favorite books, if he thought America would get pulled into the war, and if he liked to dance.

As dinnertime passed, most of the kids went home. A dozen or so stayed and made a bonfire on the beach. Fortunately, Suzie and her friend Ellen were among the stragglers. Tony brought out the whiskey. Cans of beer and who knows what else were passed around until the entire group of them were three sheets to the wind. Ellen was trying to get them to sing ‘Yankee Doodle Dandy’, but the ruckus that ensued could hardly be called music. When Matthew found he couldn’t remember the words, he figured he better pass when the next bottle came around.

As the next chorus began, one of the boys Matthew didn’t know belched out, “Stuck a feather in his ass and said it looked like Tony!”

The gang erupted into a puddle of laughter. Andy Carroll leapt to his feet all of a sudden and said, “I’m drunk!” which unleashed another barrage of laughter. Somebody else said, “Hey, why don’t we go skinny-dipping?”

A couple of the girls protested, but Matthew heard great enthusiasm from most of the gang. “It’s dark, anyway,” Tony said, already beginning to undress. “We’ll all be like Matthew tonight!”

A weight pressed down on Matthew with those words. The lighthearted, happy feeling he’d had a moment ago slipped away like the water the kids were now splashing in. For a while tonight, he hadn’t thought about being different. He was just having fun, hanging out with friends, and he wanted that feeling back. He slipped off his shoes and socks, then his shirt, and finally he stood and slipped out of his shorts. Whoever was at the fire could see him, but so what? He decided to leave his cane by his clothes and made his way down the beach.

The chill of the water prickled his skin. Feeling self-conscious, Matthew forced himself to dive in. He came up maybe fifteen feet away from where the boys were dunking, splashing, and mocking each other. He stood there, chest deep, outside the circle. His usual spot.

Behind him he heard movement, then two hands gently held his waist. Matthew started to spin, expecting to grapple with one of the guys, but a soft voice whispered, “It’s Suzie. Help cover me.”

He froze as she pressed in closer, her skin soft and warm behind him. “Move slowly backwards,” she whispered, holding his hips as they eased away from the rambunctious crowd.

She let go and he immediately missed her touch. Turning, he heard her move through the water. Matthew wasn’t a great swimmer, but he could sidestroke and hear where she was going. When they were well away from the others he lost her sound, so he stopped to listen. He jumped at her touch. She giggled, then spoke softly by his ear. “Can you see anything, Matthew?”

“No,” he said. “Can you?”

“There’s only a sliver of moon, but the night is clear, and there are thousands of stars in the sky. It’s hard to see, but there’s a silvery sheen so I can still tell how handsome you are.”

He wanted to say something clever—nobody but his mother had ever told him he was handsome before—but the words evaded his tongue. Fortunately, Suzie didn’t have the same problem. “Give me your hands,” she said, bringing his fingers to her face. “I’ll help you see me.”

Perhaps the greatest mystery in life was revealed to Matthew that night. He now had a mental image to accompany his late night fantasies. Best of all, as the party broke up and people got into their cars to return home, Suzie found him and kissed him softly on the cheek.

“What’s your phone number?” She said it, and he repeated the number to himself twenty times to be sure he wouldn’t forget.

Over the next year he called her every Sunday, and even learned to take the bus from Columbus to Pickerington to visit her. Sometimes they went to the movies, where she narrated in a few, select words, what was happening on the big screen. They’d go for walks, play horseshoes, or just sit on the porch swing drinking sweet tea and talking.

Following high school, when most of the boys who hadn’t joined up after Pearl Harbor went ahead and shipped off to Europe or the Pacific, Matthew once again felt like an outsider. His folks had pushed him to take a job at a local workshop making brooms for ten cents each. Suzie, on the other hand, pushed him to reach further. “Never settle for mediocrity,” she said more than once. “People will always tell you that you can’t, but I never will. I know better. I know you can do anything you set your mind to, Matthew.”

Despite his objections, Suzie signed on as a nurse and went to London to help the devastated Brits. While there, she taught herself Braille so she could send letters home to Matthew. Nobody had ever done that before. Her thoughtfulness moved him, and Matthew vowed to make her proud. The next day he put on a suit and found his way to North American Aviation, where he knew they were in need of general laborers. Despite being shorthanded, they showed him the door. The same happened at Curtiss-Wright, Alco Manufacturing, and General Electric. But the Continental Can Company, who had thousands more orders than they could process with the meager workforce, offered him a two-week trial that ended up lasting almost forty years.

The job at Continental Can did much more than increase Matthew’s independence, self-confidence and savings account. It proved to Suzie’s parents that he could provide for her. Six months after her return from England, on June 16th, 1945, Matthew Paul Bauer and Suzanne Lilian Miller were joined in Holy matrimony before 47 guests at the Pickerington Methodist Church.

The next fifty-three years seemed, from the perspective of the ninety year old man planting flowers in his backyard, to pass in the blink of a hummingbird’s wing. There had been innumerable highs—the birth of their three kids, the trip to Yellowstone, Suzie winning the Betty Crocker cook-off with her raspberry tart recipe—and some terrible lows. Little Michael getting hit by that car back in ‘56, Matthew’s being passed over for the plant manager job three times, the closing of the Columbus plant, and of course, Suzie’s cancer, and the relapse that finally took her. But life is a journey, and there were many lessons along the way. And with Suzie helping to push him, he’d achieved more than he ever could have imagined. The seven long years of studying late at night and weekends to earn his bachelor’s degree. The promotion that brought them to this house in Rochester back in ’78. The way they’d both learned to sand and paint and plaster and fit pipes to turn this shack into a beautiful home. And perhaps the scariest lessons of all came from raising the kids. Matthew had been petrified he’d break them somehow. He didn’t know how to teach the boys to throw a football or hit a baseball, to ride a bike or drive a car. But Suzie was always there, reassuring him. Trusting him. Believing in him. Never allowing him to doubt his capabilities.

And now he was on his own. Sure, he still had the kids, and his grandson Allan and his wife were godsends. It was hard without Suzie, awfully hard, but he’d made her a promise in the hospital, and he’d stuck to it.

The cancer had come back hard; her organs were riddled with it. They both realized her time was short. He’d held her hand, so boney and frail, and stroked her soft hair.

“We’ve had a good run, my love,” she said.

Lip quivering, Matthew simply nodded.

“You’ve come a long way from that shy, handsome boy at the beach party so long ago. We’ve made a wonderful life together, and I ...” she paused to gain control. “…I am so grateful for that. But Matthew, life is for living, and there is still much for you to do. I worry you’ll crawl back into your shell, and that would be a shame.”

“Sweetheart. Please, don’t. You’re going to get better, and soon we’ll…”his words trailed off.

“You’ve never been a good liar, Matthew. “She put her warm hand over his. “You need to be there for the kids, and the grandkids. You need to show the world what you’re made of, and that nothing can stop you. Promise me you’ll keep up the gardens. Keep helping at church. Keep talking to the schools about Braille and the abilities of blind people. Your work isn’t done yet, Matthew. There is still much to do.”

“I promise,” he said, then bent to kiss his lovely bride.

Seventy-three, seventy-four, seventy-five. The old man patted the dirt snuggly around the final plant, completing his homage to the wife who gave him so much in life. Still on his knees, he collected the now empty cups that he’d started the flowers in and put them on the old lunch tray. Mounting one final struggle, he pushed his way to a bent position, took the tray and his spade in one hand, his cane in the other, and stood. His back ached, and he knew it would take several Advil and a good night’s sleep before it subsided. But first, he wanted to dump the used cups in the trash barrel out front.

Having accomplished that task, he turned to make his way to the front door and heard a youngster walking down the sidewalk towards him, jabbering on about something called a Poky Man. Then the monologue stopped.

“What’s that?” The child was probably three or four, and Matthew couldn’t tell if it was a boy or girl. Either way, little kids were always fascinated with his white cane. Like a puppy or an ice cream cone, it always drew their attention.

“Hush, now,” the mother interjected.

“It’s fine,” Matthew said. “Hello there. I’m Matthew, and this is my cane. I’m blind, and this helps me to get around. I tap it back and forth like this. Here, want to try?”

**The Jidhe Ken**

**Second Place, Adult Fiction**

by Doris Hampton

Rural Oregon

Monday, April 30, 1945

Korin’s head spun, thinking about the pagan gramma who lived by herself in the woods and never went to church—the gramma that, until a few hours ago, she hadn’t known existed.

She stared through the windshield as the battered Chevy rattled up the steep, unpaved road, Daddy at the wheel. She sat in the passenger’s seat, on her way to spend the day with Mama’s mother—the gramma she’d never met.

“Why hasn’t she ever come to see me?” Korin spoke the words that had been bouncing around inside her head ever since they’d left home, an hour or so ago.

“I banned that woman from our lives, especially from yours” Daddy explained. “When your mama married me and joined the church she agreed to cut all ties with that woman and her heathen ways. But when you was born, your mama made me promise to let you spend the day with your gramma when she turned seventy-five.”

“What’s so special about her 75th birthday?”

“Your mama never told me.” Daddy maneuvered the car through a patch of small rocks and mud that had slid down the bank during last week’s rainstorm.

“Your gramma was always yammering on about the magical power in numbers. She was particularly fond of what she called the vibrations of seventy-five and seven plus five,” Daddy said, then shrugged. “Who knows what those numbers mean. That woman’s crazier than a pet coon.”

He frowned. “I ain’t happy about you hanging out with that woman,” he said. “I’ve been tempted to break my promise ever since I came up here last week to let your gramma know you were coming. That’s the devil’s doing—trying to make a liar out of me.”

Korin caught the tremor of fear in his voice. Everyone in their church thought they were entering the end times and the devil was stepping up his attack on them, because of it.

Korin wasn’t worried. The war was still going on over there across the ocean. But that was a long way off and didn’t have much to do with her little town nor their church’s congregation, as far as she could tell.

“Mama came to me again last night,” Korin said, disregarding Daddy’s warning to ignore the dreams she’d been having nightly ever since she’d turned twelve, three months ago.

“I told you to pay them dreams no mind,” Daddy scolded. “That’s the devil, playing like he’s your mama. She’s been gone five years now and you know the dead can’t be showing up in our dreams.”

“I know that,” Korin agreed, not really believing it. ”But this time she brought me a present.” She felt the weight of the flat river rock Mama had placed in her hand. She raised her chin and blinked hard against the burning in her eyes at the dream-memory—Mama’s soft, cultured voice, so unlike that of most folks she knew.

“Mama told me to listen to the words of the Jidhe.” She turned to Daddy. “What’s a Jidhe?”

After a long moment, he nodded and explained that he and Mama had studied the book of Jude the night before she died. “The devil was most likely aiming to say Jude, but it came out Jidhe. He can quote scripture. That don’t mean he can get it right.”

When silence hung heavy between them, he cleared his throat, shot a glance at Korin, then ventured, “What did your mama bring you?”

Korin curled her hand into a fist, clutching the memory of the gift—how it had felt when she’d held that river rock. The palm of her hand had tingled as if the rock were electrified. The current had been faint, not nearly as strong as that which had charged the new fence she’d once touched when visiting a neighbor’s farm. But that wasn’t a thing to pass along to Daddy just now. He was riled up enough, worrying about the end times and all.

”It was just a plain old rock,” she mumbled.

“That’s all it was and don’t you go thinking it was anything else but that.”

Daddy pulled the Chevy onto a wide turnout along the canyon’s edge. A single, grungy pickup truck sat at the far end of the turnout. Beyond the truck, a swinging foot bridge spanned the canyon above the river far below.

Korin stepped out of the car to the raucous cry of crows somewhere in the giant firs across the river. A pathway leading to the bridge ribboned past the twilight gloom of undergrowth beneath the trees.

She shrugged off a surprising flash of fear. She’d never been a scaredy cat, but for an instant, she had sensed something dark and malevolent watching her from the shadows beneath those trees. She raised her chin, keeping her imagination in check.

Daddy pointed across the river. “Your gramma lives in a shack, just beyond that path.” He waved a hand toward the pickup. “She has to park here and cross the bridge to get there.”

He moved to the bank near the bridge, cupped his hands around his mouth and yelled across the river. When there was no response, he yelled again, then again.

The cacophony of crows fell silent. The only sounds were the rushing of river over rocks and the rustle of breezes through tall grass at the edge of the turnout.

“She agreed to meet us on this side of the swinging bridge and she promised not to take you any farther than that grove of myrtle wood trees above the trail, over there,” Daddy explained. “I ain’t gonna have you messing around that heathen’s stomping grounds, even if she is your gramma.”

He yelled again, then gave the swinging bridge a final once-over, scanned the trail across the river and grinned. “That’s it! She’s a no-show. We’re out of here.”

He headed for the car, still grinning. “I kept my end of the bargain. It ain’t my fault she ain’t here.”

He stopped and took in the wide turnout, the grimy pickup standing there alone. “Her turning seventy-five must not be so important,” he said. “Looks like she forgot and doesn’t need your help celebrating her birthday, after all.”

“Who cares?” Unexpected emotions welled in Korin’s chest, negating those harshly spoken words—disappointment, hurt and an overwhelming longing for the gramma she would now surely never meet.

Daddy thumped the Chevy’s hood. “Come on! Let’s go!” When Korin didn’t budge, he leaned into the car’s open window and gave the horn an impatient tap.

Korin turned to leave, then caught movement from the corner of her eye and froze.

A diminutive figure, no more than three feet tall, came out of the shadows across the river—a tiny man with a long white beard and wild, flyaway hair, the shade of summer clouds.

It was the same little man who had stood at Mama’s side each time she had entered Korin’s dreams!

“Now what?” Daddy demanded as he strode toward her.

Korin pointed and described the white-haired figure, not daring to mention that he, too, had been appearing in her dreams.

Daddy scanned the trail, then frowned. “I don’t see nothing.”

Korin watched the little man turn and look their way. “He’s right there!” How could Daddy not see him?

Daddy shook his head. “I don’t see nobody.” He snorted. “That’s just the sun, bouncing off those logs over yonder.”

His eyes suddenly widened and his shoulders slumped.

An old woman emerged from the trees and onto the trail, quick-stepping toward the swinging bridge.

“You’ve arrived earlier than the time we agreed upon,” she called, then stopped for a brief exchange with the little man who shot a glance Korin’s way before turning to disappear back into the shadows.

The woman moved swiftly across the swinging bridge, oblivious to the way it swayed in response to each quick step she took.

“I’ll stick around for your meet and greet,” Daddy said as they watched the woman hurry toward them. “Then, I’m outta here.”

The Chevy’s engine faded into the distance as Korin’s gramma squared her shoulders and said, “I only have a few hours to teach you what you’ve been unable to learn since your mother’s passing. You may have the Jidhe Ken, as I do, but you can’t participate in what is to be done today unless you know how to use it.”

*The Jidhe Ken?* Korin raked a hand through her hair. “What…?”

“We must work together.” Gramma interrupted and continued as though Korin knew what she was talking about—a binding spell, magic and a world-wide epidemic of evil.

Seeing Korin’s confusion, Gramma heaved an exasperated sigh, then said, “K-O-R-I-N,” she nodded. “Thankfully, my daughter had the foresight to give you a name with the value of seven plus five. So, you’re surrounded by the protective aura of seventy-five. Today, you’ll need all the protection you can get.”

“Pro-protection?” Korin struggled to understand—the urgent pressure of time—the weird fixation on the number seventy-five—the birthday celebration that wasn’t a celebration at all.

Gramma’s green eyes narrowed. “Did your mother tell you of our alliance with the Jidhe? Do you understand the importance of what must be done before the sun goes down today?”

Korin shook her head. “But last night, Mama said I should listen to the Jidhe.”

“She visits your dreams?”

Korin hesitated. “Sometimes,” she admitted, waiting for a lecture on giving credence to dreams. Instead, Gramma’s emerald eyes began to fill with hope.

“Does someone come along with her?”

“Well…” Again, Korin hesitated. “There’s a little man who …”

“What does he look like?”

When Korin described the diminutive character, Gramma gave a sigh of relief. “That’s Sebastian, he’s one of the Jidhe—an ancient race of magicians called Dream Walkers. If you’re able to see Sebastian, he and your mother have been instructing you in your dreams, showing you how to use your birthright, the Jidhe Ken, to communicate with him and others like him.”

She took both Korin’s hands in hers and gave an encouraging squeeze. “We might be able to recharge the binding spell, after all.”

Korin’s bewildered expression caused the old woman to glance up at the mid-day sky, as if judging the hour. “I’ll start at the beginning.”

Korin listened with rapt attention as her family history unfolded.

“Centuries ago,” Gramma began, “Our ancestors and the Jidhe lived on Angainey, an island off the coast of Scotland. Over time, an epidemic of evil plagued Angainey, spread throughout the island by Taarn, a virus-like demonic spirit.”

She paused. “Just before a series of earthquakes caused Angainey to sink, like Atlantis into the sea, our ancestors helped the Jidhe cast a binding spell which imprisoned Taarn inside a stone. The spell must be recharged every 75 years. This is done by combining the efforts of three individuals—a Jidhe magician who has been chosen as the stone’s keeper, a grandmother with the Jidhe Ken and a granddaughter, born with the Jidhe Ken and taught how to use it.”

Gramma took a deep breath. “Now, Taarn is being summoned by an unknown man with incredible psychic powers—weakening the binding spell and drawing Taarn’s essence gradually, hour by hour, from the stone. There is only one way to stop this. Unless we can persuade the man, whoever he is, to take his own life before sunset today, when the earth’s vibration changes from the power of seventy-five, he will succeed in pulling Taarn completely free.”

Gramma clinched her jaw and looked past Korin, a troubled expression on her face. ”If we allow that to happen, the two of them will darken hearts throughout the world.”

Korin surveyed the shadows across the river. “Where is Taarn now?” she asked, remembering the sliver of fear she’d felt earlier.

“The binding spell still has much of his essence tethered to the stone. He’s not yet totally free, so he can’t go far from here” Gramma explained. “Sebastian is the stone’s keeper. He carries it with him at all times.”

As if responding to his name, the little man appeared on the trail across the river and stood looking their way.

“It’s up to the three of us to recharge the spell and recapture Taarn.” Gramma turned to Korin. “Since you’re unskilled at magic, you’ll do the visualizing, providing a focal point for our work.”

Before Korin could protest, Gramma gave a startled gasp as a sudden gust of wind whipped strands of gray hair across her face and moaned through the boards on the swinging bridge, as if the bridge cried out in pain. “Taarn is gaining power!” she cried. “The binding spell can’t hold him back much longer!”

She picked up her pace as she and Korin headed for the bridge. “Whatever happens, you must not show fear!” she warned. “Taarn feeds on fear.”



Wind tugged at Korin’s skirt as she started onto the bridge, then stopped. Gramma was halfway across before Korin took a few more steps and stopped again. The narrow bridge was suspended in mid-air with only a rope railing. It spanned the river, showing gaps where boards had rotted and fallen through. The bridge swayed with each step Gramma took, daring Korin to follow.

Gramma reached the other side and turned. “Hurry!” she shouted into the wind.

Korin took a deep breath and moved forward as the cold wind howled. The long expanse of boards and rope seemed to have expanded, stretching far into the distance ahead. Her pulse pounded in her throat. Wind swirled around her, growling like a living thing. She clung to the rope railing, paralyzed with fear as the bridge swayed and the wind moaned and shrieked.

After what seemed like hours, Mama’s voice came on the wind. Korin listened intently and, there it was again. Mama calling!

“Korin!” Gramma’s voice, not Mama’s, urged her on across the bridge. “Hurry! Time is running out!” Gramma hadn’t accused her of wasting precious minutes, but Korin heard it in her voice.

Wind continued to rage as Korin stood with Gramma and Sebastian. The little man balanced on a log in order to place his hands on Korin’s shoulders while Gramma laid her hands on Korin’s head. Korin held the Binding Stone, feeling its faint electrical pulse against her fingers, as Gramma and Sebastian merged their intent with hers, willing her to conjure up an image of the man who was summoning Taarn.

“Remember, don’t give in to fear,” Gramma warned. “This man, whoever he is, thrives on terror.”

Korin held the stone against her chest and closed her eyes. “I don’t know what to do,” she said quietly.

“Just trust that our combined efforts are strong enough to make his face appear,” Sebastian said. “We’ll do the rest.” meaning, they would persuade the man to take his own life, recharge the binding spell and imprison Taarn for another seventy-five years.

Moments later, a foggy image gradually began to form behind Korin’s closed eyelids. No matter how hard she tried to make out the man’s features, only his eyes came into view. Their pale blue depths burned with wild fury. As she watched, mesmerized, pure hatred that was not quite human focused directly on her.

She screamed, took a step back and covered her face with her hands, dropping the stone and nearly knocking Sebastian off his perch on the log behind her.

Everyone stood in stunned silence. The sun had begun sinking behind the mountain and the wind had stilled. Sebastian gave Korin a look, retrieved the stone, gave her another look and went to stand in a patch of dwindling sunlight.

“I-I’m sorry,” Korin said “I…”

Her words were cut off by the sound of a car horn, blaring, once, twice, three times, from the turnout across the river.

Tears filled Korin’s eyes. She had failed, not only Gramma and Sebastian, she had failed Mama, as well.

Gramma watched Sebastian move to another patch of sunlight, then looked up at the sky. “It’ll be another hour before we know whether or not the spell has been recharged.” She put an arm around Korin’s shoulders. “Maybe then we’ll find we were successful after all.”

\* \* \* \*

Adolf Hitler committed suicide by gunshot on Monday, April 30, 1945.

(Taken from the front page of the U.S. Armed Forces newspaper, Stars and Stripes, May 2, 1945.)

75 Days to Live

**Third place, Adult Fiction**

by Rowena Porch

My mum once said, "Live until the moment you breathe your last." At the time, the statement seemed fairly obvious. Yet I never understood its true meaning until I held her in my arms and watched as she, indeed, breathed her last. Three months ago, she had been given her final prognosis. This is where our story begins.

Mum and I never had a solid relationship. She lived her life and I lived mine. Being her only child, I was convinced I had been a mistake. In my mind, my mum was wild and hadn't grown up—had refused to grow up. Even my late father called her a woman with a gypsy soul; that about summed it up.

A day after receiving her bleak prognosis, Mum called me at work. "Summer, I want you to go on a trip with me." Her faded British accent made her seem far more sophisticated than her presence suggested.

"Excuse me?" I asked, certain I had heard her wrong. Our interactions with one another consisted of the token phone calls on holidays and birthdays. Now she was asking me to go on a trip? Hell, no. It couldn't happen—it wouldn’t happen.

"I need you to take three months off, dear."

"Three months? Mum, I can't take that much time off. I have a husband, kids—a job."

"Yes, I am aware. I will pay you for your time, but this must happen."

*Okay*, I thought. *My mum's cheese has finally melted completely off her cracker.* "Mum, what's going on?"

"Well, it might not be for the entire three months, but I'm trying to be optimistic."

"About?" I asked, harnessing what little patience I had left. My editorial meeting was scheduled to start within five minutes. My fingers started drumming the theme song for *The Lone Ranger* on the top of my desk.

Silence on the other end of the phone—never a good thing where my mum was involved. I waited as she cleared her throat a few times and took a sip of something—coffee with just a snippet of brandy and cream, I suspected. "I'm dying," she finally said. "I hate to be rude, Summer, but can we please work all this out during our trip?" Just like my mum—blunt and evasive all at the same time.

She had been battling with leukemia for quite some time, so the news should not have come as such a shock—but it did. "Um, look, Mum; I have to go. How about if I swing by your place after work?”

More silence. "That will be just fine, dear. Be packed and ready to roll." Click—and she was gone. The woman was like a Northwest storm—quick to stir and faster to clear.

"Shit!" I hissed, slamming my hand upon my cluttered desk as I stood. Mum would never take no for an answer. She was as convincing as a heart attack and just as unyielding. Time to kiss my family and career goodbye!

My boss was less understanding than my husband and teenaged kids. Given the circumstances, however, I managed to slip away with my job intact.

That evening, when I arrived at my mum's place in Silverdale, I noticed a motorhome parked in front of her building. Mum's tiny backside led the way down its stairs as she backed down one step at a time.

"Mum, what are you doing?"

"Packing," she said. "Do you have your personals? I left the bottom drawer and right closet open for you."

A middle-aged gentleman with a huge belly and a ruddy face approached the rig. He handed my mum her keys. "Your place is empty, Mrs. Greyson. Here are the keys to your rig."

"Thank you, Mr. Farley, for everything."

The man sized me up for an uncomfortable moment before saying, "Good luck to you, gal!" He then shook his head while walking away.

Mum placed the keys in my hand. "Stow your things. We're burnin' daylight."

*Lord, she has been watching too many John Wayne movies.*

I looked down at the keys. "Mum, can we—"

"Not now, Summer. We need to get moving. There will be plenty of time for us to talk on the road."

"You want me to drive … this … thing?"

She laughed. "Well, you don't expect me to drive it, do you?" She had been blind for over thirty years, and I doubted she even remembered how to drive.

"This beast is huge," I said.

"You'll get used to it, dear. Jack said she drives like a dream."

Jack, my dear sweet father, had saved for years to purchase this rig. When he passed away three years ago, it had ended up in storage. I looked up at the blue 2004 Newmar with *Kountry Star* written along the side. The rig was ten years old, thirty-five feet long, and had my dad's Jeep tethered to the back. My hands started to sweat. When I told my husband and children I would be gone for *a while*, I didn't count on it being a permanent thing. I was going to die in this tin can—I was certain.

"Hop to it, dear. We need to roll," my mum said, jerking me out of my stupor.

I didn't even bother putting my stuff away, just tucked it behind the dining room table since I doubted we would make it out of the city alive. Keys in the ignition, I started the engine, and it roared to life like a beast ready for the hunt. Good God, it even sounded huge. "Don't you need a special license to drive this rig?" I asked as Mum settled into the seat beside me.

"I don't believe so."

"You don't believe so?"

She shook her head. "Just don't get pulled over and it won't be an issue, yes?"

Life was so simple in my mum's world. I often wondered what it was like to be in her head. *Never mind; I didn't want to know.* "Where are we going?"

"Mr. Farley helped me map our trip in that GPS thingamajig. Just press number one, and it will guide you to our first destination."

I wondered whether it would also tell me how to get out of this parking lot designed for golf cart-sized cars. *How did Mr. Farley even get it in here?*

With a push of a button on the GPS, we were off. "What's our destination?" I ventured to ask.

"Kalaloch Beach."

With a deep breath, I shifted the gear into drive and allowed the beast to roll forward. I now fully understood the term "*land yacht*."

I had to admit that Kalaloch Beach was nice in the summer, and swimming with my mother in the waves was thrilling and more exhilarating than I had expected. After being confined to a house and an office building for over ten years, I found the much-needed swim more than exhilarating, and it brought back fond memories of a simpler time when life was not so hectic. My mother and I practically lived at Dana Point when I was a kid. I loved the ocean. How could I have forgotten so quickly? As I drove to our next destination, the thought that my own children had never experienced the coast saddened me.

"You're distraught," she said, buckled up in the huge captain's chair that made her look like a frail child.

"How can you tell, Mum?" After all, she was blind. I kept reminding myself of this because she certainly didn't act like it most of the time.

"You drive more stiffly when you have something on your mind."

I glanced down at my white knuckles cresting the steering wheel and forced myself to relax. "Where are we headed?" I asked, changing the subject.

"The Dunes in Oregon, the Redwood Forest, the California wine country …."

I listened as she rattled off the bucket list that she and my father had constructed years ago. He died shortly after they purchased the mammoth motorhome. They only took it out once, and then it sat in storage while my mother mourned his death. Now, she had me traversing the countryside with her—driving the beast.

She left for a moment and then returned with a can of Bush beer. "Mum, you can't drink that up here," I said.

"It's in a cozy; who's going to know? I'd offer you one, but you really shouldn't drink and drive.”

I watched as she took a long swig—from a can! *My mother drinks beer from a can? Did she always? I then realized how much I didn’t know about my mum.*

By the time we reached Oregon, I patted myself on the back; I was becoming quite comfortable driving the beast and treasured my new confidence. I was ready for our next adventure: driving a dune buggy over the Oregon sand dunes. I'd never seen my mum scream for the sheer joy of it before, nor would I forget the layer of sand that accumulated over her teeth, indicating she had been smiling the whole time.

Next stop: the Redwoods. I took pictures of her hugging a tree so large that her tiny arms barely spanned a fraction of the massive trunk. When she asked me to describe what I saw in the forest, I was in awe of it all and wondered whether mere words could even do it justice. Where would I begin? I described the tender wood sorrel that she had me sample, the sunbeams streaming through the canopies like wisps of angel hair, and the sheer magic of standing at the base of trees that stood over two hundred feet tall. I detailed them all with verbal flare—the way my father used to do for her. Her eyes misted as she listened to my simple illustration.

 

"You remind me of your father," she told me. "Your colorful words are more beautiful than anything I remember from my sighted days."

I glowed in the blandishment, feeling embarrassed and oddly uncomfortable. Mum was never one to dole out compliments. She had rarely criticized me, but her lack of praise often felt like a reprimand, so this declaration meant something special.

My most cherished times, however, were our evenings together, sitting by an open fire. She read her Braille books while I read *Arthur's Legacy* by Tyler Tichelaar on my iPad. I hadn't taken time to read a good novel since the day I got married. When the kids came, there simply wasn't enough time.

After the wine tour, we headed for San Pedro where we caught the Catalina Express. Nothing prepared me for the adventure ahead. My dear mother convinced me to try scuba diving—something I had never wanted to do. The dive master, however, would not take my mother without me. I was sure she had a say in that. The first hour was a lesson in fear control. Seeing my mother's face light up was my only thread of courage. Our first dive was short, only thirty feet deep, but it was an experience I would never forget.

"The ocean has its own language," said Mum. "Close your eyes and listen for a moment. The rhythm becomes apparent."

I took her advice and closed my eyes, curious about what she was experiencing. The life I felt all around me was indescribable. After our fifth dive, I was hooked, but my mum was weakening with each passing day, so our dives were cut short.

Our journey took a turn in San Diego when her condition worsened. It was the moment I realized she would be leaving me soon. When I asked her whether she wanted to go to the hospital, she scoffed and shook her head.

"Lord no! Take me to Dana Point," she said. "I want to enjoy one last sunset with you." The pain etched in her eyes was evident, but she remained stoic as always.

Dana Point was a place I remembered well. She and I used to ride our bikes there when we lived in California. With a heavy heart, I turned the rig around and headed north toward the one place I felt I had roots.

It had changed since our last visit. The Oceanic Institute was comprised of buildings now, not the temporary trailers as I remembered. The harbor at the jetty was landscaped. It looked nice, but it had become just as sterile as the city itself. The towering cliffs had eroded quite a bit, leaving the cresting homes sitting precariously on stilts and crumbling foundations—apropos for how fragile life was, even for million-dollar homes.

I grabbed a thick blanket and helped my mum out of the rig. She was too weak to walk, but walk she did. Her muscles trembled under my supporting hands and her flesh felt spongy and cool. She had to have been in terrible pain, but her face resembled a child's in a place filled with magic.

"Brings back memories, yes?" I asked, guiding her to the bench overlooking the jetty. I moved around and sat beside the woman I had truly grown to love over the past seventy-five days. Wrapping my arm around her, I pulled her against me, gripping back the tears stinging my eyes. The woman ate as if every meal were her last, yet she looked so frail and thin. In my mind, she had always been robust, athletic, and strong. Had I also been so blind these past few years?

"Thank you for this," she said, patting my hand.

"I should be thanking you." I could not hide the smile from my voice, and she sensed it.

"Life is meant to be lived, my dear. Do not allow your career to let you forget that." Her voice was frail, but very clear."

Are you enjoying our trip?" I asked, not ready to face my shortcomings.

She chuckled. "Oh my, yes. Although, I could have gone without the shark swimming between my legs."

I nodded. "Yes, that was quite an experience. I did enjoy it, though, when you tried to teach the fish manners when they came to steal your bread."

She glanced down at the still swollen mark on her hand where the fish had bitten her. "A lot of good it did me."

"Well, they did outnumber you."

"Yes, but they didn't get my bread. I made certain of that."

I laughed. "You most certainly did."

The sun had started its descent and was nearing the horizon. "The sky looks as if it's on fire," I said. "There are red clouds with bright pink highlights on an orange backdrop. The sun is clear and large; its reflection dominates the ocean's surface."

She smiled and turned her face toward the sun. "I can feel the warmth, yet my body feels so cold," she said.

I secured the blanket around her shoulders and held her close. "There, better?"

"Yes, thank you, dear." Her face was aglow, eyes closed and delicate lips curled up at the ends. "Do you know why I named you Summer Sky?"

I chuckled. "I always thought you did it because you hated me."

"Heavens no, child. You were my gift from God—my miracle. My uterus was weak and unable to support life, yet despite the doctor's opinion, you stayed with me and blessed me with the only life I would ever bring into this world. You are my breath of fresh air, my summer sky."

Tears pooled in my eyes, blurring the magic of the setting sun. I finally allowed them to roll freely down my face, grateful for the emotion they represented. My mother had loved me. Now that I looked back on my life, she was always there for me. She attended every concert, every play, and even gave me a complete makeover when I wanted to gain a boy's attention at school. For so long, I had ridiculed her—had thought her wild and careless in her ways. She was so different from me, yet she loved me as I was—never trying to change me.

"This is so hard, Mum."

"Death is never easy for those who are left behind."

"Can I ask what your favorite part of life was?"

She smiled, though the expression was weak and etched with pain. "Jack's and my honeymoon, the day you were born, and these past seventy-five days." She opened her gray-blue eyes, sightless, yet still full of life. "My favorite part, though, was our night in the Redwoods."

"Ah, yes. I remember it well. I haven't been that drunk since my college days."

Mum laughed. "You were singing the Oscar Mayer Weiner jingle all night long."

"No, I wasn't!"

She chuckled. "Yes, you were. I have it recorded on my phone." Her face grew solemn. "You were always such a serious child—always the over-achiever."

"I still am."

Her expression turned serious. "Promise me something."

"Anything, Mum."

She struggled to turn her head toward me. "Don't work your life away. I've left you some money. Please promise me that you will use it and live your life as if each day were your last. Can you do that?"

Looking back, I realized that I had not lived my life—not as I should have. "I promise, Mum."

The sun crept closer to the horizon, and we sat there in silence. Her breathing slowed, her body relaxed against me. With her last breath, she muttered, "Love is a gift. Thank you for being mine."

As the sun drifted down, the last crest of it disappeared as my mother passed from this life. I immediately felt the loss, but also the joy. She was free now, of pain and sickness. In return, she showed me true freedom. It was a gift I vowed never to squander. My family would grow to love everything life had to offer. I would make sure of it.

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**Writing: the What & Why of It** by Donna W. Hill

The written word permeates all aspects of our lives. Even if we exclude books, newspapers and magazines, our world is filled with documents of identification and ownership, insurance policies, medical records, instructions and warnings. The written word is etched into our sunglasses, emblazoned across our food and stamped on our underwear. It's so ubiquitous, in fact, that we rarely spare a thought for what a marvel it is.

**What is Writing?**

The ability to collect and organize thoughts, observations and opinions and to encode them in a format that others can access long after we're gone is the crowning achievement of the human race. It wasn't always this way. People have been trying to communicate all along. Before the development of language, we used the "point, grunt and shove" method. It had its place, but it couldn't keep up with the complexities swirling through our primitive brains.

Eventually, humans developed the spoken word. By using vocalizations, we could convey concepts that were far more subtle than what we could communicate through grunts and gestures. Yesterday, tomorrow, forever, nowhere, nothing, created nuances in our communications that further expanded our thoughts and imaginations.

The written word took things to a whole new level. By assigning little squiggles and lines to represent different sounds, we were able to make a lasting record of our thoughts. Everything we have achieved in science, technology, medicine, literature, music and so on owes its existence to the ability to write things down.

Sometimes when I say this, someone reminds me that we don't need to write things down, because we can make videos of ourselves speaking, and those videos will live on after us.

First, we can be more precise in writing. Flubs, incomplete thoughts and errors are far easier to edit in written form. But let's set that argument aside. Consider something we know from history. Simply put, we would have never developed the ability to record audio and video if not for the written word.

So many people living in different places and at different times contributed parts of the puzzle - math, science and technology. It was the ability of those who came after them - made possible by the nature of the written word - to read their thoughts and put things together, that enabled the discoveries and inventions that enrich our lives today.

**Why do people write?**

When we think of writers, we think of novelists, journalists, poets, playwrights and songwriters. These professionals, however, are merely the tip of the iceberg.

Writing is something people do for many reasons. Some write to entertain, to educate, to inform, to sell and even to deceive. As beings who have developed language as a way to communicate and the written word as a way to record that communication, we have an innate connection to the art and craft of writing. It is nothing less than our birthright as human beings.

**Why Should You Write?**

Why? First of all, because everyone has a unique, irreplaceable vantage point to observe the world. Each of us has something to contribute to the discussions around us, both minor and monumental. No one - not today or in the future - will ever be able to capture your point of view ... no one but you.

Secondly, it's your best tool for self-advancement. The ability to clearly express your opinions and observations is the pinnacle of literacy. Communicating with others enables us to resolve conflicts, make new discoveries, solve problems and elevate ourselves in the minds of those who are in a position to help us grow and achieve.

The people who provide the texts of our news and entertainment may be the most well-known of the writers among us, but they are by no means the only ones. Writing is an essential skill in many professions and a skill that can elevate you above your peers when you develop a level of comfort and proficiency in using it.

Even if you have no thought of ever being published, of ever writing the great American novel or being the next J.K. Rowling, Stephen King or J.R.R. Tolkien, the skills you develop when you write will give you a leg up in life. Knowing how to express the thoughts you have in ways that will be accurate and inspiring can help you elevate the thinking of others on any topic you choose. When you do that, people notice.

**Getting Started with Writing Your World**

Allow writing to become a regular part of your life. Remember that, like everything else, it's a skill that needs to be developed through practice. You're going to hit a few sour notes. You might walk into a wall. You might put too much salt in the soup. The important thing is to start somewhere and work on it.

One of the best things you can do to get started is to keep a journal. Write something every day. Write what happened and what didn't happen. Pick something and describe it as though you were talking to someone who was going to experience it only through your words.

Capture a bit of the dialog of your life by precisely quoting something someone said, complete with the misspeaks, slurred words and hesitations you hear in the world around you. Did you hear anything that puzzled or alarmed you? Did something strike you as funny? Write it down. It's your journal; you don't have to share it, edit it or even re-read it, but keep it and enjoy the process. You'll be glad you did.

**Donna W. Hill** is a writer, speaker and avid knitter from Pennsylvania's Endless Mountains. A songwriter with three albums, Hill, born legally blind from Retinitis Pigmentosa, is the author of The Heart of Applebutter Hill, an adventure-mystery with excursions into fantasy. It follows two 14-year-old friends - one of whom is legally blind - as they make their way in a new country and struggle with the consequences of learning a dangerous secret. Recommended by professionals in education and the arts as a diversity/anti-bullying classroom resource, it is available in print through Amazon, on all major e-book outlets and on Bookshare.

Donna worked for many years as a volunteer publicist for several NFB groups including the NFB of Pennsylvania, the Performing Arts Division and the Writers' Division. Her efforts led to stories about successful blind people and the issues we face in newspapers and other media throughout the country. Contact Donna at:

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**The Dragon’s Princess**

**First Place, Stories for Youth**

by Laura Nunez

 In the far off kingdom of Bree, there ruled an honorable king, King Rolland, and his lovely wife, Queen Emma. They treated their people well, giving to the poor, and regarding all creatures with kindness and respect. King Rolland and Queen Emma were madly in love, the only thing that could make their life even more magical was a child.

The Royals desperately tried to have a baby, but after several years of trying, they worried that Queen Emma may be unable to give birth. The King and Queen sought out help from the Royal Council of healers and wizards. Many tests were performed on The Queen to determine whether she could ever carry a child. They measured her belly, made her eat different roots and berries, and even advised her to rub the stomachs of female animals for good luck.

At last, the healers and wizards reached their conclusion. To their dismay, the Royal Council had determined that Queen Emma could not bear children. The Queen cried for days. The castle fell silent as word of the sad news spread. All activity ceased, and a day of mourning was held in the land’s churches.

Sorrow fell heavy on The King’s heart, but he knew the land of Bree still needed its leaders. To spread good spirits through the kingdom, The King organized a party at the palace. Scrumptious foods piled high on platters. Musicians played beats that made you jump up and dance. Colorful lights were strung up in the courtyard. Beautiful bouquets sat in the center of each table. The entire kingdom attended, and for the first time in some time, laughter and jokes echoed within the gates of the royal grounds

Right before the serving of the cake, a beggar approached The King and Queen. Promising incredible news, he pulled them aside to speak privately.

“Thank you for taking the time to speak with me your majesty.”

“No thanks are needed,” replied The King.

The beggar bowed in respect. “I may have a solution to The Queen’s problem,” whispered the beggar, standing on the toes of his pointed red shoes.

The Queen’s face fell in misery. “We have already received advice from our council,” The Queen said, brushing a tear from her eye.

“There is nothing we can do,” finished The King.

“I apologize for my honesty. Maybe your council can’t do anything, but I know someone who can help.”

A pause passed as the King and Queen exchanged skeptical glances.

 “Go on,” instructed Rolland.

So the beggar told The King and Queen of a powerful wizard known as the Red Warlock, who lived in an old abandoned castle on the outskirts of the kingdom. The Red Warlock had the power to do almost anything, but always required a hefty payment from those who asked for his assistance.

Wanting to keep their dealings with the powerful warlock secret, the king and queen journeyed to the warlock’s castle at midnight the next night.

A deep mote surrounded the warlock’s castle, with no drawbridge to cross. And ferocious alligators lurking beneath the water’s surface meant swimming was not an option. Feeling defeated, the King and Queen turned back for home. Just then, a loud roar erupted as a massive scarlet dragon swooped down out of the sky. He scooped up The Royals in his meaty arms and flew back towards the warlock’s castle.

The dragon landed near a set of run down stables where the Red Warlock stood waiting for his guests. He wore a red cloak and a red top hat. His red shoes pointed up at a funny angle. And though his cheeks were round and jolly, his eyes broiled bright with mischief.

“I wondered when you would get here. I almost thought I gave you the wrong directions while at the party.”

“That was you,” gasped The Queen.

“Of course,” bellowed the wizard. “Now let’s get down to it.”

“Yes yes,” said The King. “You can help us?”

“Child’s play,” he snorted. “Oh look at that, I believe I made a pun.” He pulled a single sheet of paper from the folds of his cloak and handed it to The Royals.

“The contract,” he announced with a grin. “I’ll be giving you a batch of enchanted rose petals to sprinkle into your tea every day for a week. These petals will make it that you can carry a child.”

The Queen clapped her hands excitedly.

“What can we do for you?”

The wizard scratched his head. “I have yet to decide, but when I ask for my payment, you must give it to me.”

“Anything,” agreed The King. Everyone signed the contract, and The King and Queen were escorted home.

Almost immediately, Rolland and Emma became the happy parents of a baby girl, Princess Annabelle. She became the light of their life, and the kingdom loved her as much as her parents. Emma taught her to sing and dance. Rolland taught her to ride a horse and hold a sword.

Years passed, and the royal couple had not heard from the Red Warlock. They almost forgot about their debt. But on the eve of Annabeth’s eighteenth birthday, the night she would choose a prince to wed, the Red Warlock returned. He had seen Annabeth’s golden curls, heard her angelic voice, and fallen in love with her striking green eyes.

Dressed in all red, the warlock entered Annabeth’s birthday celebration with The King’s debt on his mind. Confidently, he strolled up to The King and tapped him firmly on the shoulder. Rolland spun to face him and nearly dropped his drink.

“I know what I want,” announced the Red Warlock.

“You…” he stammered. “What?”

“Annabelle’s hand,” proclaimed the warlock.

The King gasped. “Anything but that,” begged The King, perishing the idea of his daughter marrying someone so slimy.

“No, I only want her,” demanded the warlock.

“I won’t,” replied Rolland.

In that moment the Red Warlock grew ten feet tall. With a wave of his hand, the wizard set the courtyard aflame. Party guests cried and ran for protection. The wizard bellowed for his dragon, which lunged out of the trees and clutched The Princess in his claws. The King’s army unsheathed their swords and swung at the warlock and dragon, but the dragon flew too fast, and the wizard’s magic shield was too strong to pierce. Bolts of magic flew from the warlock’s fingertips straight at the heads of The King and his soldiers.

“You say I can’t have her, I say you can’t have her,” shrieked the warlock, as he disappeared into a gray mist.

The royal cavalry hunted long and far, riding in every direction to search for the wizard’s lair. Some men found the wizard’s castle, but he had instructed the dragon to eat anyone who dared to enter.

Annabelle kicked and screamed as the warlock and his dragon threw her into the highest room of the tallest tower of the castle.

“I’m not afraid of you,” she shouted. “I’d rather your dragon eat me than marry you.”

Smiling at her, the warlock tucked a stray strand of hair behind Annabelle’s ear, his touch sickening her.

“You will marry me lovely girl, and I will rule over the kingdom.” He cackled sinisterly. “And maybe some time alone will set you straight.”

He slammed the metal door to the cell that was now Annabelle’s home and commanded Smolder the dragon to keep watch, and stop her if she tried to leave.

Annabelle didn’t cry. She didn’t beg for mercy. And when Smolder stuck his snout near the metal bars of the cell door, she threatened him with the heel of her shoe.

Weeks passed, and Annabelle fell into a routine. The Red Warlock would wake her up, force her to eat breakfast with him in his chambers, and try to impress her with his magic while she ignored him. Then, after hours of frustration with The Princess, he would lock her in her cell for the rest of the day.

In her cell, Annabelle found peace. She would sing songs taught to her by her parents, and write poems on the scraps of paper the wizard gave to her. She yearned for the tender touch of her mother’s hand, and the kind words of her father’s heart, and would sing a song in their memory every night before bed.

Outside of her cell, the dragon watched Annabelle closely, becoming more curious with the girl every day. Being a victim of the warlock’s captivity, the dragon could identify with The Princess.

“Mam,” Smolder whispered timidly through the bars of the cell door.

Annabelle looked up from where she was sitting on the floor of the cell. She had stopped singing halfway through her nightly song, suddenly overwhelmed with sadness. “Yes?”

“I know it’s not much, but I have a gift for you,” he said, dropping a small wooden flute into her cell.

She held the well-crafted instrument in her hands delicately.

“It’s beautiful. Where did you get this?”

“I made it,” he said softly, hiding his face behind his paws.

Placing the wooden instrument to her lips, Annabelle breathed out and a series of elegant notes floated through the air.

“Thank you,” she beamed. “And sorry for attacking you with my shoe the day I met you.”

Smolder laughed. “I understand. I am a prisoner of Red Warlock too.”

“Really?”

“Many years ago, when I was a baby my mother went looking for food. The Red Warlock had been watching our den for weeks, and had planned to steal one of her babies when she left to hunt.

“Why?”

“Dragon babies sell well amongst dark warlocks.”

“Oh”

“Anyways, out of my brothers and sisters, I was the worst at flying. When he attacked, I was the only one not to get away.”

Annabelle patted Smolder sweetly on the snout. “I’m so sorry. But why don’t you leave? You are stronger than the warlock.”

“He cursed me. If I fly past the mote without the warlock’s permission, I will die.”

Annabelle hung her head in sorrow. “Is there a way to break the curse?”

Smolder shook his head wearily. “It’s impossible,” he hesitated. “I must find true love. The warlock would rather taunt me with hope than just make the curse unconditional.”

Annabelle sighed. “Don’t think like that. There is always hope.” The dragon blushed. “And at least you can leave the tower,” she muttered

Smolder tiptoed to the staircase leading up to Annabelle’s cell. He listened and sniffed for a moment and returned to the cell door. “The wizard is out. I could take you outside for a bit if you would like.”.

Annabelle thought about it. Red Warlock would be furious if she left her cage, but she would go crazy locked up any longer.

“Let’s do it,” agreed The Princess.

At once, Smolder ran off to Red Warlock’s study where he kept the key to Annabelle’s cell. Bouncing on his heels, Smolder unlocked Annabelle’s prison and set her free. “Climb on,” he said, offering his back.

Carefully, Annabelle jumped onto Smolder’s back, making sure to avoid the sharp spikes stretching down his spine. Throwing open the window, they flew out into the night.

The fresh air felt amazing on Annabelle’s skin. It had been so long since she had ventured outside. She held tight to Smolder, leaned back, and let her hair flow in the wind. For the first time since her capture, Annabelle laughed and hooted with excitement. Smolder flew closer to the ground, touching down in the middle of the garden.

“Sorry my princess, this is as far as I can go.”

“This is wonderful,” she chimed. With a heart full of adventure, Annabelle sprinted through the flowers singing a joyful tune. Smolder watched from a distance, feeling happy that he could make The Princess smile. She plucked a blooming white rose from its stem and went to present it to her new friend.

“For you my dragon, as thanks for bringing me outside.”

Smolder tucked the flower behind his ear. A nervous puff of smoke slipped from his mouth, causing his scarlet cheeks to blush a deeper shade of red.

“Is something wrong Smolder?” she asked teasingly.

“Oh nothing. It’s just no one has ever given me a present. In fact, I’ve never had a friend.”

“Well, now you do,” she replied, giving his bulky body a cuddly hug.

“Princess…”

“Yes?”

“Uh. Well. I mean.” Smolder paced in circles.

“I don’t know how to say this.”

“Just tell me Smolder,” she encouraged.

Suddenly Smolder’s ears perked. His head tilted towards the main gates of the castle. “He’s back! Hurry, we need to leave.”

With Annabelle tucked under his arm, Smolder charged back into the air. Time was ticking, and surely Red Warlock saw them flying overhead. His paws hit the ground just as Red Warlock stormed the tower.

The silence was threatening. Red Warlock’s eyes burned with anger. Smolder stood still, terrified of his punishment. Annabelle tried to hide beneath the dragon’s wing.

“You disobeyed me dragon,” Red Warlock said coldly. “You know what I do to those who disobey me.” Red Warlock fixed his glare on Annabelle. “And you Princess, my bride to be, you disrespect me. I give you food, a roof, my love, and you want to escape.”

Red Warlock inched closer to Smolder and The Princess. The uncertainty of the warlock’s next move was torture for The Princess and her dragon. Suddenly he lunged for her, gripping her round the ankles and dragging her back into the cell. Smolder roared with fury, but the wizard blasted him with a petrifying curse. She kicked and punched, and managed to bite him on the ear.

“You spoiled little brat! Someone needs to teach you a lesson.” Annabelle looked longingly back at the dragon, wishing she could have escaped this torture with him. They were so close.

Catching the princess staring at the dragon, Red Warlock released her hold on her and turned to the frozen Smolder. “I think I know the perfect punishment.”

With a wave of his hand, a spiked whip appeared. “I could punish you Princess, but I think that little brave heart can take it. That’s why I like you.” An evil grin spread across his face. “The best way to make the message loud and clear is to make you watch your new friend take the beating for you.”

Red Warlock slowly walked up to Smolder, dangerously swinging the whip back and forth. Even though Smolder stood frozen, Annabelle could sense the fear coursing through his body. Ankles bruised from her attack, Annabelle struggled to her feet, scanning the room for a means to defend her and Smolder.

The crack of the whip broke the heated silence. Spikes dug deep into the flesh of Smolder’s back. Annabelle bit her tongue to stop herself from crying and alert the wizard to her search for a weapon. An empty water troth stood in the corner, Smolder had left some other wood project hidden under a cloth, and the pen she used for writing lie in her cell, nothing that would really give her the upper hand against a powerful warlock. Another blow to Smolder’s hindquarters seemed to shake the tower. It was now or never. She needed to rescue the dragon.

“Stop,” she screamed as strike number three neared Smolder’s wounded back.

Red Warlock whirled to face her. “Can’t take it,”” he taunted.

She cleared her throat. “Let him go!”

“Why would I ever do that,” he snickered.

“You are a coward!” she screamed. “You are too frightened to fight him. You hide behind your spells and pretend you are powerful.”

His hands shook with rage. The red cloak swirled around his feet as a storm of magic surged within his body. Dropping the whip, he marched straight up to the princess.

“What did you call me?”

“You are a coward. And Smolders is more kind and courageous than you will ever be.” She declared loudly.

It clicked inside the mind of the warlock. Princess Annabelle had fallen in love with the dragon.

“You love this creature? You want to be with this creature?”

“More than anything,” she said longingly.

“No my princess. If I can’t have you, no one can. I’ll curse Smolder to remain a dragon forever. A human cannot be with a dragon.”

Understanding the warlock’s plan, Annabelle jumped in front of Smolder as the gust of magic surged from the palm of his hand. Now before the wizard there loomed two almighty dragons. The light blue dragon that was once Annabelle stomped towards the warlock with fangs bared, claws poised.

“Maybe we could talk about this,” cried the wizard.

“Set him free!” she ordered.

“Yes mam,” he complied, waking Smolder from his frozen slumber.

“And break the curse preventing him from leaving the boundaries of your castle.”

“Me? You already did that.”

“What?” Realization dawned on her. “The curse… I… Because I…” she whispered shyly.

“Say it’s so,” murmured Smolder.

“Yes, I love you.”

“And I love you,” echoed the dragon, embracing his princess lovingly.

Unnoticed, the warlock regained his composure and lunged at the dragons with his wand raised high. But just as he was about to finish his spell, Smolder spun towards him, mouth open, and gobbled the wizard up in one gulp. All at once the dragons’ hearts were light with bliss.

“Seventy-five years in captivity, and now I can leave,” Smolder sighed happily. “And now I have found my true love.”

Immediately Smolder and Annabelle journeyed back to the kingdom. Upon arrival, and after convincing the guards that Annabelle was a blue dragon and did not plan on eating anyone, the princess was reunited with her parents. And even though it needed some getting used to, King Rolland and Queen Emma embraced their daughter and her beloved Smolder back into the kingdom with open arms, where they lived happily ever after.

**The Storyteller**

**Second Place, Stories for Youth**

by Jennifer Shields

 July 5

 They’ve been married seventy-five years today. I can see it in the way Grammy holds her pencil as she hunches over her morning crossword puzzle, her knuckles cracking with every written loop and line. I know it’s today because she stayed in her room longer this morning. I heard slight murmuring as I padded by her door in my slippered feet, so I know she was talking to Granddad again.

 Granddad’s in Heaven now. I’m not really sure what that is, but I think it’s a good place where grandparents sit in comfy chairs doing their crosswords and watching our lives pass on TV screens. Granddad loved TV. He loved crosswords, too. But I know he loved me and Grammy the best.

 Grammy lifts herself with care from her seat. She limps to the coffee maker and fills it with water. I would normally get up and help her, but not today. It’s been quiet for what feels like an hour, and I don’t want to be the one to talk and ruin it.

 I also know Grammy and Granddad have been married seventy-five years because I sneaked a peak at Grammy’s desk calendar when she thought I wasn’t looking. She had a heart drawn around today’s date. And that’s kind of silly. Girls at school draw hearts and boys’ initials in the margins of their homework papers, so the idea of Grammy doing it is weird.

 “Did I ever tell you about the time your Granddad dressed up as Willie Wonka?” Grammy asks.

 I look up, noticing for the first time the laugh lines folded into the skin around her mouth.

 “Yeah, at least fifty times. Don’t you have any new stories?”

 She laughs, a sweet sound that carries notes of the strange music she listens to on her radio when she’s balancing her bank accounts by hand. It reminds me of sunshine and the pain of a loose tooth and success when you finally pull the tooth out and put it under your pillow. It’s a real, true laugh, not the fake kind grown-ups usually force out when they want kids to think they care, but they’re really just distracted with car payments or jobs or whatever it is that adults worry about.

 “Your Granddad had lots of stories,” she says. “He used to be able to come up with one at the drop of a hat. Like you. His talent lives in you.”

 And I know she’s right, because my teacher, Mrs. Brady, says that a talent is something you’re good at, and I’m good at writing. I like to write stories about kids like me, but I also like to write about animals.

 “Did Granddad like to write about kids, too?”

She sighs and sinks back down into her chair.

 “Yes, but he never did. He had so many ideas…” Her voice trails off, and I know she’s somewhere else. Maybe in year sixty-seven, or forty-two. All I know is she’s not in year seventy-five anymore.

 “Grammy?”

 “Yes, Sweetheart?”

 “Can I tell you a story?”

 She smiles now, and I put my hand over my chest because my heart is beating real fast.

 “I’d love that.” The thing I love about Grammy, (well, one of the things; she’s great at lots of stuff, especially baking cookies), is she doesn’t say she wants to hear my stories because it’s what I want. She actually likes them.

 “Once upon a time, there was a little girl named Grammy,” I began.

 Her smile grew wider, urging me on.

 “She lived in a great big castle on a mountain, and she wanted to find a friend because she was lonely.

 “Well, one day, she met another kid named Granddad. He was taller than her and liked to write. And Grammy liked to read.

 “Well, Grammy and Granddad were such good friends they decided to get married. And they lived happily ever after.”

 “That’s a lovely story,” Grammy says.

 “But I’m not done yet!” I reply, getting to my feet.

 “One day, Granddad got really sick. Grammy was really sad because Granddad wasn’t feeling well at all and couldn’t enjoy stories with her.

 “But one day, an angel came to visit Granddad.

 “’I know you’ve been feeling bad, Granddad,’ the angel said, ‘and I want to help. Heaven needs a new storyteller. How about it?’

 “And so, Granddad was really sad about leaving Grammy behind, but he knew God and all the grandparents in Heaven were counting on them to tell his stories. So, he went up to Heaven with the angel, and he’s still living happily ever after. Just like Grammy.”

 I smile and turn to Grammy, but she has gotten up from her chair. Her back is to me, and I’m scared for a second that she hated my story. But then she turns, and I see she’s been wiping her eyes with a wad of tissues.

 “Come here, Sweetheart.”

 I run to her, and she folds her warm, safe arms around me. I press my face into her chest and smell the warm scent of soap, cookies, and Coca-Cola that is all Grammy. She unwinds her arms slowly, and I step back.

“That was a wonderful story,” she says, and I feel a weird tingly feeling in my stomach.

 Grammy hums quietly as she moves around the kitchen, pushing in chairs, scrubbing counters, and refilling her coffee mug. I sit down at the table and watch her. I wonder if Granddad’s smiling up in Heaven. Somehow, I know he is. And I also know I’ve given him a great story to tell.

**75 Cents**

**Third Place, Stories for Youth**

by Ginger Glick

 Samantha lay on the cool grass looking up at the clouds passing overhead. Her right hand was under her head like a pillow while in her left she held three quarters. Her palm was sweaty, but she held them tight like a precious treasure.

Earlier that morning, she was helping her mom plant some flowers in the garden. She dug the little holes with her trowel and her mom deposited the young plants before packing the dirt around the roots. At one of her last holes, she found the three quarters as she dug.

 “Mom, I found money!” she yelled happily. “How much is it Mom?”

 Samantha’s mom told her they were quarters and explained that they equaled 75 cents, almost a dollar. Samantha was thrilled. She held her treasure tight through the morning and now thought about where they could have come from. “How did they get in that hole?” she asked herself.

 First she thought that maybe a pirate had buried them there, because after all, it was a buried treasure. In her mind, she pictured a bearded pirate with a three cornered hat, digging a hole in her garden. She giggled as she remembered where she lived and that pirates were not usually found so far from the ocean.

 As she watched a long line of clouds that looked like a train, she thought that maybe it was a robber. There were plenty of trains in the area. Someone could have stolen the treasure and buried it here. She imagined that the train robber rode away from the Sheriff’s posse on a fast horse. When he was out of sight, after going through the canyon pass, he jumped off of his horse and buried the coins. He then got back on his horse, and when the posse caught up to him, he pretended to be an innocent farmer.

 Samantha sat up and looked around. She lived in a valley, so there was nothing that would have hidden the robber from the posse. He could not have buried his treasure without being seen, so that was not it.

 There were lots of farmers here in the valley though. Maybe one of them planted the quarters in hopes of growing a money tree. It would not have grown if he forgot to add fertilizer and water. Silly farmer, that had to be it.

 

 Just then, Samantha heard a familiar ringing sound. It was the ice cream truck coming around the corner. She looked at the three quarters in her hand. She may not know where they came from, but she had a good idea of where they were going.

 With her treasure held tight, Samantha got to her feet and ran for the truck that was coming to a stop in front of a group of her friends. As she got nearer, she tried to decide between an ice cream sandwich or a cherry popsicle.

**House** by Shelley Alongi

A well-manicured front lawn and a vinyl fence, a stone front porch with lights discretely placed so that anyone who came there was never completely in darkness. The awnings that protected guests from driving rain or hot, crushing sun welcomed Laurie Hensen to Brett McCarley’s house. The wooden carved door with swirls and circles spoke her name. Even the cool frosty morning welcomed her as Brett slid his key into the door and swung it inward to reveal the high ceiling entry hall way.

“A steam locomotive?” Laurie mused in her transfixed state. “You have a picture of a steam locomotive on your entry wall?”

She laughed with delight. What a strange thing to have welcoming a guest, but it was characteristic of him, being a locomotive engineer with an interest in old steam engines. This one wasn’t so old, she stopped, looking at it, reading the number on it, 3751.

“I took that picture when it came through our local station,” he explained, remembering the crowds, the anticipation, and the profusion of other cameras looking for the same best spot to snap a picture of the engine built in 1929 for the Santa Fe. His lips curved into a smile of delight in her enjoyment, his heart swelling with pleasure. It had been a long time since anyone had taken pleasure from the picture welcoming a rare guest to this house. “I promise the whole house isn’t done in locomotives. I’m not that much of an artist, or that dedicated.”

“I don’t believe that,” she said turning and hugging him. “I just like that picture; those brass stacks. It’s perfect.”

“Honey,” he rubbed her shoulder, “I’m afraid you’ve been a bit transfixed since I met you at Union station this morning. I don’t think it’s the picture on the wall.”

“Maybe not,” she conceded.

Brett, standing five feet eight inches, his right hand on the handle, holding the door for her, dressed in his casual blue jeans and flannel shirt, watched the woman who had finally gotten to him, though perhaps that was never her real intension. Laurie would be the first woman brought to this house, one he and his wife, Carol, had shared till her death last December from a fast moving unrelenting cancer. This place was his castle, when he was here; quiet, secluded in the forested property he had bought thirty years earlier at the beginning of a promising railroad career. A refuge, sending him off each early morning long before sunrise in most cases or in the velvet shimmering darkness of winter to run the massive powered freight trains and now the more sedate if still impressive passenger units, would now welcome someone else to it.

Brett watched her take it all in, his eyes drawn to her black curls, the comfortable way she stood here in her light blue top and blue jeans, his heart stirring within him. She took his hand and brought him along with her into the entrance, stopped and looked into his kind, brown eyes, eyes she swore saw into her very soul.

“What’s up?” she breathed with tranquility. “You look like you’re making a million dollars in your head!”

He laughed a rich, warm basy sound in the spacious room. He tousled her hair.

“Okay,” he said. “Okay let’s show you the rest of the place.”

The living room with the grandfather clock with the moon and stars in their cycles displayed on the ornate cabinetry, the wide velvet cushioned sofa with its carved arms, the two deep recliners, the deep piled carpet, and in all this luxury, on each wall, large landscapes of mountains, glistening with snow, a copse of trees covered in ice, shimmering like glass.

Brett moved beside her. Laurie’s face shined with delight. Soundlessly he left her and slid behind the sofa to a sound system tucked behind a sliding door that was part of the wall. The muted strains of solo choral music wafted through the air, echoing as if sung in a mountainous cavern, the notes blending in with the landscapes. Laurie looked up as the notes resonated through the room, notes lying gently on her ear, and notes she could not explain in her experiences, but that caught her attention.

Brett stood back still watching, patiently, as if he awaited a signal for his next move. Laurie turned to him; he drew her to his warm, strong body as the music softened around them. She removed his glasses, caressed his reddish gray beard letting her fingers linger on his warm skin for a moment. Their kiss came as the harmonizing voices faded away, leaving the room in quiescence. Now the ticking of the grandfather clock’s pendulum moving back and forth became the dominant sound in the room. Lost for a moment in the kiss and the colors and the silence, Brett’s house embraced Laurie, and yet, distant voices from the past echoed here, shrill cries of displeasure or accusation.



Held by arms that perhaps longed for security, finding it in this woman’s pleasure, Brett pulled back, feasting on this happiness with quiet eyes. “It’s been a pleasure,” he remembered saying the first time she met him outside his locomotive cab at Union Station, and now, surrounded by serenity, and the promise of warmth, here was the blending of memories and the making of their future. She held to him, responding to his touch, and then disengaged herself as she realized that to stay here would mean crossing a boundary line. She held his hands and stepped back.

“You like it?” he asked needlessly.

Her smile answered his question.

“You have so many memories here.”

“Yes.”

Brett couldn’t share all those memories with her today. Some of them were painful; the arguments, the sadness, the revelation of Carol’s infidelity, the choice she had to make years earlier before they first got married. Would she marry him or someone else? If Carol’s family was steeped in the railroading business, the world of politics and the constant quest for federal or private funding, rules, right of way wars, one railroad buying out another, and odd schedules, long hours, sometimes no work, sometimes too much work, never seeing him, it was the decision she made. She stayed in that world, she married Brett, and the journey had not always been easy. He had told Laurie of a few of Carol’s infidelities; her schizophrenic moments, her time spent in psychiatric hospitals. Here in this forested place, Brett the locomotive engineer could escape Carol’s confused world.

“Whose pictures?” Laurie wanted to know now. “Yours? Carol’s pictures?”

“Mime,” Brett said into the quiet space, feeling its emptiness, its memories, and her simple question leading him away from the precipice of his own unhappy thoughts. He looked up at two photographs, one of a small church nestled in some snow-covered mountains and one of a tree spreading its branches skyward, some rocky cliff in the background.

“My pictures. Pictures from places I’ve been on my train running journeys. Those mountains have railroads. I took the pictures and had them framed so I never bought a single one. I just had them enlarged and matted and framed.”

“Beautiful! Beautiful.”

Beautiful seemed to be the only word Laurie had to describe the rest of Brett’s dwelling. The kitchen even if its appliances were older, was cheerful, plenty of light came through the windows, the breakfast nook intimate, the dining room large and welcoming, casual or formal, its sideboards, its comfortable chairs. Carol, when she was well, gave parties for the railroad wives, younger women married to overworked conductors and engineers, some who became friends, some who left their husbands for more secure or stable lives, or simply because they were unhappy. A few like Carol stayed with their men of the railroad, and sometimes she entertained them. Most of the time, Brett ate at the breakfast nook, coffee in the morning before driving half an hour or an hour to his latest point of origin, and then making the journey back again.

Laurie could see people lining these walls, sitting in these easy, velvet and intricately carved chairs, talking, laughing. If the living room had presented her with more personal memories, the dining room spoke of lighter moments, and holiday meals enjoyed.

But it was Brett’s master bedroom that held the biggest surprise. The large simply furnished room was a personal glimpse into where and how he spent his quiet hours. Carol, he told her, slept in another room across the house. They had not shared sleeping quarters. He had to be up too early, she said. His early morning movements disturbed her. He preferred it that way, especially when he was up at 3:20 in the morning, showering, grabbing coffee, keys and his engineer’s bag and slipping quietly into frosty mornings to make his commute. It was possible that Laurie fell in love with this room much like she had fallen in love with the man who slept in it, perhaps before she met him, before she knew his name, and before she saw the room.

Rich cool blue carpet, light maple furniture with carved brass handles, a chest of deep drawers, a long dresser that matched the nightstands and the bed, the long top home to all of Brett’s personal items: keys, spare change, a pair of tweezers, small pocket knife, a railroad watch bought by his late wife. Now her already over stimulated senses took in cool blue backgrounds comforting to tired eyes, soft light played on the dresser from the lamp that hung on a hook from the ceiling.

“This can be yours,” he put his arms about her gently, looking down into her shining face. He hugged her to him, feeling her heart beat, her soft curves comforting something he had not known he missed; so used to Carol, her distance, her sometimes shrill nagging, her quarrelsome rages. It had been the way it had been, he supposed, too settled in his ways to shuck her off like so many of his colleagues had done, coolly, without respect. A man running trains so many years, caught up in his work he did not bring others to his rooms at night. Brett Richard McCarley, despite Carol’s infidelity, did not feel comfortable doing that. Carol was willing, she had been pleasant when she could be and maybe if he was gone so much of the time it was easier for both of them to interact.

Laurie was an entirely different story and he wasn’t sure he always knew how to respond. Responding to her, deciding to love her after years of casual meetings at the side of locomotive cabs and conversations that hadn’t always been technical. Now he stood there watching her face light up like a child’s, pleased by the simple, tasteful furniture that graced this large room. “It is yours,” he repeated, drawing her to him, her eyes making him lean down and kiss her on the forehead, on the cheek.

“There’s more,” he said quietly, richness in his voice. “Are you stuck on that dresser?” He moved his hand to her shoulder, let it move to the curls that hung down, found her neck, and massaged it. “Laurie?”

“Brett,” she breathed. “It’s beautiful!”

Brett McCarley was a mild mannered man, he could be outgoing and cheerful, but you couldn’t say that he was a swashbuckling character by any means. His smile, though, could light up the room and now it did, and he laughed richly, letting his fingers play with her soft bouncy curls.

“Here.”

He led her away from the dresser, placed her before the large king bed. He let her survey it, keeping an arm placed about the middle of her back. Laurie let her eyes roam across the high, intricately carved bed, neutral blankets, a muted comforter, inviting a tired, overworked body to stretch out in its warmth. She moved closer to Brett, letting her side rest against his. Her eyes roamed to the nightstand, the small maple wood clock with a brass face, its gold hands softly lighted, the reserved black of the nightstand elegant, blending in with the folding blinds, the big glass picture window. She moved toward it, saw a quiet yard below, gentle roses with vibrant reds and yellows deep as the summer sun.

“You belong here,” Brett now said, suddenly realizing it. “It looks good on you.”

Brett slipped warm, callused fingers through her’s , led her to the couch that sat against the wall opposite the window, its own quiet shades of blue comforting. He sat down, sighed, and patted the spot next to him. She joined him there, snuggled close, her body sinking into the velvet cushions. She leaned back into the welcoming embrace of the sofa, lay her head softly against his shoulder, a button on the sleeve of his flannel shirt pressed into her hair; she moved her head to look lovingly into his face.

“Tired?”

It was Saturday afternoon and sometimes the work week could linger in his eyes.

“Fine. Today is quiet. I turned off the alarm.”

“Did you?”

“Yeah. I did.”

They smiled, sharing a personal joke. So many Fridays at locomotive cabs, shimmering in their elegant dirtiness, beautiful with their chipped orange, or blue, or white paint, Brett explained that he would sleep in the next day, turning off his alarm. Over the next year or two they made reference to it in their phone conversations.

Brett took her hand in both of his, caressing it, relishing the peace of this Saturday afternoon.

“Now you’re the one who looks like you’re making a million dollars in your head,” he quipped. Laurie shook her head.

“No, sweet engineer, I’m just taking it all in.”

“Like a kid at Christmas?”

“Like someone who just loves your house!” She ran her fingers across the warm skin of his hand, feeling the hair across his knuckles, feeling a scar he had acquired in a railroading accident years back. “Just loving you.”

“Good,” he said, rubbing her hand and closing his eyes, leaning back in the comfort of the afternoon. Soothed from his weariness, he realized that peaceful Saturday afternoons hadn’t happened very often with Carol. He wondered if with Laurie something would be different about Saturdays. He decided not to analyze it, only to enjoy it.

They looked up as a black presence, sleek in the early afternoon light, approached the sofa, looked at Laurie, walked away and eyed them with suspicion from the middle of the room.

“Okay so your cat is not sure about me,” she laughed. “NO worries.”

“I’m sure about you,” Brett said. “You’re something else. You’re cool.”

She curled up beside him. Lulled by Brett’s warmth, Laurie opened her eyes now and thought that time had passed; maybe they had both fallen asleep. The sun had moved when she opened her eyes. Brett slept beside her, his head cocooned on the edge of the sofa against the back of it. She watched him for a moment and then got up and came to sit on the floor next to him. His left hand lay suspended over the edge of the sofa, she looked at it, his ring finger bare. He had taken off his wedding ring after Carol’s funeral one year earlier.

It had been a well-attended affair, many of Brett’s colleagues came to give him support and solace, Laurie had inserted herself unobtrusively in the middle rows, sitting between two solid women, perhaps railroad wives, and listened to accolades and stories, the pouring forth of memories, her heart full of love for this man who had been her silent friend. She had passed through the line, shaking hands with Brett, looking briefly at him and then slipping away into the hot, still afternoon that had formerly ended a rocky railroad marriage. Texting Brett in the months to come had opened the door to their friendship once again, culminating in a breakfast at Union Station and now ending here in this peaceful respite for a good man and the woman in love with him.

Now, in his master bedroom, she reached out and touched his fingers, resting her hand there, connecting in some kind of moment with his past. The movement of her fingers on his woke him, and he sighed easily, opening his eyes.

“What?”

“Diverging clear,” she said quietly.

“Huh?” He smiled, amused at her reference to the signal that meant when he switched to another track, all was clear for a full speed continuing on the way. It meant there were no obstacles, no speed restrictions, and no foreseen reasons for stopping the train until its next signal. Maybe it meant he was free to take this relationship where he liked?

“You’re silly, Laurie. Funny! What are you doing down there?”

“Just watching you.”

“Hungry?” he asked, retrieving his glasses from the arm of the sofa and placing them on his face.

“I don’t’ know.”

She sat there thinking for a moment. She loved this house, she hadn’t thought of food for quite some time.

“Lunch would be nice. Where should we go?”

“There’s a nice Mexican spot down the road. I’ll drive you home.”

“That’s a long drive,” she protested weakly.

“Not so long, sweetie,” he said gently. “I’m an engineer I’ve driven much longer distances to get to my trains. Besides, we don’t’ want to be rushed by a train’s schedule. Let’s just go let you digest this house. My treat.”

**Shelley Alongi** has served as guest and then full editor of “Slate and Style”, as well as having published many short stories online. She graduated from Cal State Fullerton with a music degree in 1994. She currently is preparing to self-publish a novel and is a newly elected Board Member of the Writers’ Division.

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 **The Amazingly Unselfish Couple** by Vejas Vasiliauskas

Matthew Mellcan and Mandy Fine were perfect for each other. This idea could be traced back to the fact that they had such similar personalities. Matthew was born in Inverness, Nova Scotia, Canada. He was a bright student and he got along with his parents and teachers well. The teachers were concerned though, because he didn't really care about talking with other kids.

He had a passion for birds while other boys had a passion for soccer. He tried to find the good in everyone. At parties, he would get intimidated by the many people, so he would just cling to one person and try to act relaxed. Matthew's greatest fear of rejection was so great that he decided that he would never marry. After all, he was happy on his own. Also he preferred leisure to the extra stress of having kids, though his Catholic faith was very important to him.

Mandy was born in London, England. She was part of a large family, and she never got into fights with anyone. She always seemed to have this feeling that everyone else was much more important than she was. Her siblings did not pick on her because they realized young that there was no fun in it. One day her sister Megan stole her doll, and Mandy, with a big smile, said, "You can have the doll forever if you want." Megan gave Mandy the doll back, realizing that there would not be the normal crying reaction.

Mandy also found that she preferred to be by herself. She baffled those around her quite a bit. For example, one day her mother treated her to Kentucky Fried Chicken. On the way to the car, with their carry-out meals, Mandy saw a group of Filipina girls begging. Making sure her mom could still eat what she wanted; Mandy divided her entire meal exactly evenly for the girls. They were very happy. She too, was a bird-lover, although she couldn't find a teenage bird forum. She resolved not to marry because she felt people would consider her quirky. Instead she would be an English teacher. She thought seventh grade would be the best grade to teach. She thought this because she had liked her seventh-grade teacher and because she could reach out to those in need.

The two met in Antwerp, Belgium, during a European tour, when they were 26 years old. Matthew had been taught by his family, "You're not the only one who's lonely. There's someone else out there who probably is alone." Matthew and Mandy began to hit it off right away. They realized they had a ton in common and maintained contact with each other. Their parents, glad to have their children happy, and with the prospect of possibly having grandkids, were very enthusiastic with their children’s new spouses.

They moved to Halifax, the capital of the Canadian province where Matthew came from. The first real problem occurred when they were discussing their wedding plans. They had just been engaged in Nova Scotia.

"I'd like to get married in London," Mandy said, "because that's where I grew up and it's so special to me. What do you think? Where do you want to get married?"

Matthew dismissed the second question and said, "Great. London seems wonderful. I'm good with that."

"Matthew, you don't look satisfied. Where is it you want to go?"

"I want to get married right here in Halifax."

"Then Halifax it is," Mandy said with a tiny smile.

"No, I want you to be happy in London. It's silly of me to expect your whole family to come to Canada just for a wedding."

"Oh no, it will be perfectly fine. They'll love it. They've always been so happy there."

"Your happiness is important to me."

"Your happiness is important to me, too."

After a moment of silence, Matthew said, "This is useless."

"Yes, it is," agreed Mandy. "We're arguing because we're being too nice to each other."

"We still have to find out where to have the wedding. What should we do?"

Just then Alma, their next-door neighbor, rang the doorbell. She was there with some apple pie a la mode. "Hi, Alma," Mandy said. "We're not sure where to get married, and we each want to do what the other wants."

"Okay, then," Alma said, "Each of you, picks a number between 1 and 60 and you get the first slice of pie."

"Okay," Mandy whispered. "Whoever gets the first piece of pie, the other person can choose the location for the wedding." Matthew guessed 12. Mandy guessed 19. The number was 16. Therefore, Matthew decided they would have the wedding in Nova Scotia. Next time there was a decision to be made for anything fun, Mandy would get to pick. Matthew will go the next time. Their system is going to work out great… Until they have children, and then they'll have to compromise.

**Vejas Vasiliauskas** is a recent high school graduate who is beginning his training at the Louisiana Center for the Blind. He has always loved stories from a young age. Before he began writing, he would dictate stories to his parents, who would write them down. He started writing his own stories in second grade on his Braille note-taker, and has not looked back. Although he does not know if he will write for money, he loves doing it as a pastime.

His story, "The Amazingly Unselfish Couple", came about because he had to write some stories about love, for his eleventh grade creative writing class, and he wanted to veer away from the usual stories he has read of couples who are unbelievably selfish. Vejas has amused those on Stylist for many years and though he is young, he is also getting started as a member of the Slate & Style team.

******The Dead Past**by Shawn Jacobson

Geoff cursed under his breath as he pulled the boat ashore. The hot metallic stink of tortured machinery assailed his nostrils; whatever had messed him up was serious. It was fortunate that his engine had given out close to an island.

The island was wooded. Sidewalks and roads crossed it at intervals. “At one time, this island had been high ground of importance to the city around it.” Geoff mused as he surveyed the remnant of land. At the top of the hill sat one of those old Southern mansions favored in cooler drier times. If his luck wasn’t horrible, the place might have hospitable people, who could repair his boat.

“Hello!” Geoff heard a man holler from the heights.

“Good.” he thought. The place was inhabited by a friendly person; his luck was not entirely rotten after all.

“What’s wrong?” the man asked again his loud voice carrying through the hot sticky air.

“Engine cut out” Geoff answered. “It got real hot, and then it died.”

“Let me look at it.” the other man said while coming down.

“Thanks.” Geoff said, “I was afraid I’d be stuck out here forever.” Then, “By the way, my name’s Geoff.”

“Joe.” the other man said. “Let me get my sons to come help turn the thing over. Then we’ll see what is wrong. Bill, Ken, come down here. We have a traveler in distress.”

Two beefy looking kids ran down the hill from the house. “Get the ropes.” their dad yelled.” One boy turned around, going back up the hill for the required equipment.

After a good deal of heaving, in which Geoff was happy to have younger bodies at his command, they got the tub up and turned over.

“Man what a mess. You ripped up the bottom something good.” Joe said. “Just because the water’s wide here, doesn’t mean you don’t need to take care where you navigate. There’s lots of stuff close to the surface once you get out of the main channel.”

“Think I hit a tree?” Geoff asked.

“Or one of those old war memorials.” Joe answered. “You’d be surprised how many people get hung up on The Flaming Sword. That thing will rid up a hull anything fierce.”

“Could be.” Geoff agreed as he looked over the river. “I’ve been lucky thus far, till today.” Geoff recognized the Lincoln Memorial across the way. He realized that the mansion on the hill must be Arlington House, the old Lee mansion. Funny how he had forgotten until that moment. The old patriotic places had lost their meaning over the years of water and rough travel.

“Damn hot.” Joe said, wiping his forehead with a sleeve. “Used to be this time of year you’d get some relief; not any more. Oh well, let’s head up to the house. The boys are good with their hands; they can put your boat back together, at least good enough to get you back to the main. As for me, I spent too much time in the office to be good with tools; it’s a good thing the kids got skills.”

“Thanks.” Geoff replied, with his own office workers’ clumsiness with tools on his mind. “It’s good to have someone mechanically minded out here. Lord knows I’m not. Any repairs I need get done back at the docks or get done by the shore people.”

“I don’t think I could live out here without the boys.” Joe affirmed. “I used to be an analyst for one of the universities out here, before they moved inland before the flood. It took brains and work ethic; it sure didn’t take being a mechanic, if I’d known…” Joe trailed off.

As they reached the house, Geoff heard the radio, one of the last games of the baseball season. The Des Moines Yankees were getting beat handily by the Omaha Red Sox.

“Did the Yanks get any better since July?“ Geoff asked. “they were in pretty bad shape then if I remember correctly.”

“Still are.” Joe said. “Yankees haven’t played worth a damn since they moved from New York. One more thing we lost with the tide. That old man Kochrander sure was foolish when he said that climate change was a hoax.”

“I worked for the guy for five years. He sounded pretty convincing, like he knew the arguments.”

“With all the scientists saying the climate was changing” Joe asked with incredulity. “How could you not be convinced with all the evidence?”

“According to the man, a lot of the evidence was contrived by people who had their own motives. He said a bunch of them were liberals who hate Americans.” Geoff continued defensively “and those folk who got caught faking data really helped convince me that he was right. It made all those scientists who said we were going to Climatological Hell sound like a bunch of ivory tower snobs who wouldn’t mind lying to prove their point.” Geoff remembered that a lot of other people had felt the same way, a feeling of resentment for the egg-head types. At the end, it was pretty much done as far as any reforms were concerned.

“Well, it’s not like we made it up, we just smoothed out the trends, got rid of the extraneous data and outliers, tried to simplify things.” Joe retorted. ”Your boss just blew it all out of proportion.”

“Yeah,” Geoff snorted. “you just explained away every observation that didn’t fit your theory. Oh well.” He said more softly, “I guess you were right, just maybe a little more respect for the truth and the public would have made people willing to sacrifice for the world.”

“Respect for the public?” Joe asked. “The people who put buying the next fancy toy in front of the good of the planet? Give them one cold winter and they’re out building igloos for Al Gore, like it’s some sort of joke. The public didn’t know; it had to be led. Not,” Joe continued sadly. “that our leading did any good. Not contending against Mr. Kochrander and the millionaire money behind him.”

They talked on. One of the Red Sox players hit a three-run homer putting the game out of reach. Geoff remembered the disclosures, the shady dealings, the money trails seeing the light of day and all the scandals breaking as the sea rose as if the rising water had the power to unearth such things; but that was after he had worked for the man, had done his part.

Finally, one of the boys, he thought it was Bill, came to the door.

“Dad” the boy said “I think we got it fixed, well enough anyway to get him back to the mainland.”

“Good” said Joe “looks like you can be on your way if you want. Though, by the way the clouds look,” Joe continued, looking out at the darkening sky. “I’d say you should stay over for supper, we have a spare bed to if you want to stay the night. I would if it were me. It will probably be dark before this blows over.”

Geoff thanked the man and got ready for another fish dinner. It was what you got out on the shore, where the last hearty souls who lived in the tops of old beach hotels and survived by salvage made the best life they could. Beef was for those who lived on the mainland.

 Geoff caught glimpses of a small slender woman, not black, but definitely having brown skin, and dark hair working in the kitchen. At one time, you could have assumed that she was a servant, but not anymore. Some things had changed for the better.

“My wife would kill me if I hadn’t offered you supper and a bed for the night.” Joe said. “Regardless of our pasts, she is very old school that way, from an old Pakistani Christian family, very much into hospitality.”

The smells from the kitchen became inviting, Geoff gave silent thanks for hospitality as he realized his hunger. The shore folk were good hosts in there way, but food was becoming scarce out at the old coastline as the fishing fell off.

“Wonder what ever happened to old Mr. Kochrander?” Joe mused. “He seemed to disappear after the water started to rise in earnest.”

“I was there when the shore folk pulled his body out of the water a year, maybe two, ago.” Geoff said. “He was on an artifact dive, and, well, something went wrong with his scuba gear. I never did find out what went wrong. They kept him above water just long enough to perform the last service for his soul, and then they buried him at sea. I took the rest of his family back to the main on my way home.” Geoff continued. “I’ve had several trips with refugees from the shore who wanted back to the main; it’s a hard life out there and keeps getting harder.”

“So they fished him out of the drink just to throw him back in.” Joe said. “Seems a waste of time, but I guess if you have religion, you want him to rest in peace, have closure and all that. And,” Joe continued. “I guess they don’t have cemeteries out there anymore. Not that the folks buried here got anything better nowadays. With all the honorable words said at their funerals, all the old soldiers buried here ended up with sea burial.” As Joe spoke, lightning lit the sky and rain hammered down onto the roof of the mansion.

“Man,” Geoff exclaimed “I’m for sure glad not to be out in that.” He took a mouthful of vegetables, savoring the varied tastes. Fresh vegetables were scarce on the shore.

Conversation wound down as they ate. The rain stopped, and started up again. Supper ended as the rain ebbed, and they moved to the living room for coffee.

The rules of hospitality forbade any conversation that would re-ignite the argument of the afternoon. So they didn’t talk about the mess that the world was in, and they didn’t talk about the weather. Joe talked about his family from Illinois and Geoff talked about relatives down south. He talked about the little he knew about his wife’s current life after she had left him for a man with the financial means to satisfy her tastes. He also mentioned is son who he almost never saw. Joe’s wife didn’t talk about Pakistan. Geoff guessed that he knew the reason.

Later, Geoff wondered about how Joe and his family could afford the gas for the generator, the coffee, and the rest of the good lifestyle. He guessed that they grew something besides vegetables, maybe tobacco and maybe weed, out behind the house and sold it to someone on the mainland. He didn’t ask. Hospitality also demanded the cultivation of the skill of minding one’s own business. This was especially true out here, where people had their reasons to flee the civilization of the mainland.

After the coffee, Joe’s wife spoke up. “I’ll show you where your bed is. We go to bed early out here.”

“Just like the shore.” Geoff thought, following the lady up the stairs. ‘The morrow would come soon enough.

The morning dawned hot and sticky. Across the river, the sun was burning its way through the haze. Geoff had slept fitfully, his sleep shattered by nightmares of ruined cities, submerged graves, and the new fierce storms of these times. Things pulled from the sea also haunted what little sleep he got.

“I’d better be going soon so I get to the Rockville docks soon. This looks like another day with early storms.”

“She’s down there, at the bottom of the steps.” Joe pointed to where the boat sat righted after being worked on.

As they walked, Joe asked, “Do you remember tourists?”

“Huh?” Geoff grunted.

“You know,” Joe went on. “people who came here to see the sights, the buildings, the monuments; all that stuff.”

“Yah.” Geoff replied, with the return of old memories. “I remember, when relatives would come in, I’d take them on a tour through the city.”

“Well,” Joe said, “I remember one tour guide saying that Arlington House represented the South, the Lincoln Memorial represented the North and the bridge between them represented the reuniting of the nation after the civil war.”

“Interesting.” said Geoff. “I may have heard the same thing, it’s hard to remember now.”

“Well,” said Joe, “I think it’s a bit different now.”

“Makes sense.” Geoff said, with indifference. “Everything’s different now isn’t it?”

“I think now,” continued Joe. “that Arlington House represents our desire to hand on to the old ways of doing things and the Lincoln Memorial represents our belief in our own righteousness in the face of all we’ve done.”

“And the bridge?” asked Geoff.

“The bridge is pretty much gone, as you can see.” continued Joe. “but the river represents something.”

“Yes,” said Geoff. “what does the river represent?”

“The river represents the flood that carries it all away.”

“Interesting.” said Geoff. “In all the time on the river, I’ve not thought of it that way. But, I must be going.”

The men said there farewells and Geoff pushed off into the swollen waters over the graves of the honored dead, heroes of yesterday’s wars, wars of a time as dead as they were, a past that could not be summoned by any act of contrition. Geoff realized, as never before, just how dead the past was. He could no more atone for the past than he could part the waters that had drowned the world.

So Geoff went about his daily task as man had done since the fall and would till the judgment traveling back to the new society over the waters and the dead past they covered.

**Shawn Jacobson** is an active Federationist locally, in the Maryland affiliate and nationally where he is a member of the Board of Directors of the Writers’ Division. He has worked as a mathematical statistician for Housing and Urban Development since 1999, and has previously worked in the same job position for the Bureau of Labor Statistics where he worked on the Occupational Safety and Health survey and the Consumer Price Index.

Shawn’s hobbies include reading, travel, and working on latch hook rugs. He lives with his wife Cheryl and his two children, Zebe and Stephen. He also has an increasing pack of dogs, Apollo, Penny and Bruce.

**Free Verse Sonnets Verses Blank Verse Sonnets** by Myrna Badgerow

If you are familiar with sonnets, you are probably aware that there are quite a few different types of sonnets, such as Shakespearean and French sonnets. They usually differ in rhyme schemes and sometimes in iambic meter as well. They are all 14 lines in length, however. But there are two forms of sonnets that many may find very confusing and others will find them to be very simple. They are blank verse sonnets and free verse sonnets.

Before I go any further there are terms and definitions that will be helpful. Metrical pattern--Basic meter is based on the fact that all syllables in English are either stressed at one of several different levels or unstressed. In ordinary speech, we pay no attention to the patterns of stressed and unstressed syllables, so that no pattern emerges--the "pattern" is random. In metrical poetry, however, the poet takes syllables and arranges them so that the stresses that fall normally will occur in set patterns, as defined by the various feet (iamb, trochee, etc.).

Iambic pentameter is a commonly used type of metrical line in traditional English poetry and verse drama. The term describes the rhythm that the words establish in that line, which is measured in small groups of syllables called
"feet". The word "iambic" refers to the type of "foot" that is used, known as the "iamb", which in English in an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable. The word "pentameter" indicates that a line has five of these "feet". An example of iambic pentameter-- "The sun, the moon, the stars for me now sing"

Iambic tetrameter--The word 'tetrameter" indicates that a line has four of these "feet".
An example of iambic tetrameter--"Be not afraid to live and breathe."

As mentioned above there is another metric pattern called trochaic meter. It refers to a line of four, five, or six trochaic feet. A trochee is a long syllable, or stressed syllable, followed by a short, or unstressed, one. Stresses on a syllable are detected by simply noting which syllable one puts stress on when saying the word. In many cases, this is the syllable which is pronounced loudest in the word, for example, the word 'purity' will take a stress on the first syllable and an unstressed on the others. An example of trochaic tetrameter (four trochee feet)--."Gone are words lost in the silence".

Now, onto the discussion of free verse and blank verse, a blank verse sonnet has these parameters... Unrhymed lines, but with a fixed metrical pattern. This metrical pattern can be iambic pentameter, iambic tetrameter, etc. Each line will use the same metrical pattern throughout the sonnet. Blank verse is often used when the author wants a dramatic effect created by needing to stay within a fixed structure, such as iambic pentameter. It can be an effective tool for more dramatic, epic, or reflective writings.

Here is an example of a blank verse sonnet which I wrote....

**Nature's Composition**

The rain begins in treble clef
It patters now against the roof.
Old tin becomes a mighty drum
Beneath the drops of nature's best.
Inhaling deep of freshened scent,
So charmed am I in disbelief
The symphony I nearly miss.
But I am drawn to sweetest song
That drifts upon a dampened breeze.
With melodies so very pure
Silent words heard to echo true
In nature's own composition.
On tin do raindrops fall, and I
Feel blessed to share their melody.

written by Myrna Badgerow

in nature's trek
Stars bow to moon and clouds acquiesce
To this ruler of midnight skies

Free verse sonnets, on the other hand, have other parameters. A free verse sonnet is variable with usually unrhymed lines, although free verse may also rhyme. There is no fixed and consistent metrical pattern. In other words, lines can have differing syllable counts. Free verse is usually used if the author seeks more freedom with words and thoughts than might be possible with a fixed structure. It enables a writer to elevate writings beyond a prose format and it is an excellent writing tool.

**Nature's Trek**

Come now to view the falling sun
In its colors vivid, vibrant, and bold,
And strokes of multicolored seasons,
Shadows of a day now spent.
In one breath it silently disappears
Below horizon's tightened belt
With naught but a golden smile.
The moon then awakens,
Rising, rising, holding court
Over time's impatient stars
Until dawn's destiny calls it home.
How odd it seems that in nature's trek
Stars bow to moon and clouds acquiesce
To this ruler of midnight skies

Give them each a try! You never know if you might enjoy the magic of the sonnet.

**Myrna Badgerow** is the 2nd Vice President and an active member of the Writers’ Division and a valued member of the Slate & Style team. She always has a word to say and a way to do it. Living in Louisiana, she is a true Cajun cutie, born and raised. Her stories have inspired generations and will continue to do so. Being a friend to many, one could never be surprised at who they find showing up in her writing.

**75 Years**

**First Place, Elementary Poetry**

by Delaney Brooks

What would it be like in 75 years?

Will people have smaller and sharper ears?

Will technology be better?

There might even be a new letter.

When I’m gone and there are other kids in school,

will they still think our technology is cool?

With all that’s changed in the last 75 years, I hope that playtime will still be here.

**THE GARDEN**

**Second Place, Elementary Poetry**

by Ryan Menter

Watch these wonderful crops,

Grow up where it's hot.

The sun is shining bright,

In the day and through the night.

These bananas are looking fine,

Let's make these grapes to wine.

Can you see the chives,

There must be 75.

Tomatoes are bright bright bright,

While these cucumbers get ripe ripe ripe.

This lettuce is going blue,

I don't understand do you?

Onions are blooming tall,

While these potatoes are going small.

I must harvest it all,

Before the fall.

These plums are shriveled pink,

These carrots are starting to stink,

I can see these yummy beans,

Growing from tree to tree.

So please stand up and look,

At this garden that I made.

Just look at all the beauty,

It's prettiest in the shade!

It's pretty and full of flowers,

And it's wonderful in the early hours.

It's amazing when the birds coo,

It's pretty just like you!

**Limerick**

**Third Place, Elementary Poetry**

by Sean Meek

We're traveling on route seventy-five during spring break,

Driving fast, through six states, we barely survive a big mistake!

We see seventy-five gators all in a row,

I yelled to my mom, it is time to go!

Back on the road, we head for home, we stopped at a lake, and the gators ate Jake!

**Lots of Dots**

**First Place, Middle School Poetry**

by Taengkwa Sturgell

You read with your fingers,

Then you feel bumpy dots.

There are tons and tons of them,

But still there are lots.

We touch them

We try to feel what they are,

Then, we find

They are the letters C-A-R.

We know that this represents Braille

You can write stories, poems or even tales.

Braille is fun and also very cool,

You can use different gadgets, items, and lots of other tools.

B-R-A-I-L-L-E,

That is for both you and me.

It can spell words like frogs and toads,

There are many types of codes.

There is one called UEB

We don’t know much but we shall see.

People think Braille is unique,

Some Braille machines are old, new or even antique.

Braille still exists today,

You can learn it in about 75 ways.

Braille was invented in 1824,

You can read it if you enter its open doors.

The number of symbols is 189

When UEB comes, they’re taking out nine.

**Seventy-Five Days**

**Second Place, Middle School Poetry**

by Jessea Vaughan

Beneath the willow tree

The eye may solely see

Fifty shades of gray

For seventy-five days.

The battle rages on

Till all grand space is gone.

Till all may fade away

Within seventy-five days.

With each and every shell,

A pair of eyes may swell

With tears and feelings gray

For seventy-five days.

For many hearts still flower

In the unforgiving shower

Of predators seeking prey

During the seventy-five days.

Love does not run dry.

And nor did so in times gone by.

Be it rest or be it shame,

Love will stand strong for seventy-five days.

The elements don’t give

Nor do they take.

Fate chooses who lives

Through these seventy-five days.

But what there should and should not be

Is not always what it seems.

Love will never fade away

During these seventy-five days.

So children, do you or don’t you see

Why the unforgiving should try for peace?

And end the trials fathered by hate.

It should be done within seventy-five days.

So the young ones may later see,

While sitting beneath the willow tree,

Not just fifty shades of gray,

But a world that does not fade away.

**Seventy-five Poem**

**First Place, High School Poetry**

by Amy Albin

Strength

A powerful force letting nothing interfere.

Effort

Working to make a difference year after year.

Vision

Though our eyesight is lacking, our vision is clear.

Energy

Join in the action; don't hesitate.

Nationwide

The Federation serves every state.

Teamwork

Everyone can participate.

Youth

The kids are the future, so teach them today.

Friendship

Making connections that won't go away.

Initiative

The blind are leaders; we have voices.

Variety

We have many opportunities and choices.

Evolving

We continue to grow and persevere.

A seventy-five poem for our seventy-fifth year.

**These Seventy-Five Years**

**Second Place, High School Poetry**

by Gretchen Brown

I stand here

on this cliff.

There's boulders on the bottom

and I'm afraid to jump.

Yet something inside of me says

that it's okay.

It's okay because I've lived

my life.

After all,

I am seventy-five.

I've been there for

people to cry on,

to talk to, to listen,

and to vent to.

I've been there,

when the world seemed so violent,

and cruel.

I've been there

when the children

died in the shootings at their school.

And during the wars

and the hard times

and the times when people were lost.

I was there to help them.

I've been there

and I've lived a good life.

I've made the best out of these

seventy-five years.

I've accomplished allot.

I'm ready to jump

off this cliff,

because even though there will be stuff

at the bottom, I can handle it.

Stuff that's going to be different then

what I have done so far,

I'm ready.

There will be people

in the future

and they'll tell me I can't

do this or do that.

But I've had seventy-five years

and I won't let them stop me.

I know that there will be

obstacles that will try to make

me turn away from what I know

is true.

I can survive them

because I've survived

these seventy-five years.

**Faith Alone** by Caitlyn Laster

Blindness can be many things;

To each the meaning is their own.

To some it is a dark expanse,

To others it’s an empty room.

To some it is a barrier,

A wall between two worlds.

To some it may be all of these:

Just a sightless, sound-filled swirl.

But this world that I inhabit,

Is like nothing you've ever known.

Each day I walk from place to place,

Not by sight but faith alone.

The colors in their many hues,

I see in a whole new light.

Red is fire, blue is water,

Black is calm and cool as night.

Gray is stormy skies above,

While white is pure, and diamond bright.

My mind's eye is filled with no faces,

Of my friends and family.

Instead my thoughts are filled with sounds,

Of voices, words, laughter,

And all those happy memories.

And so the fact that I am blind,

Is not a handicap.

For sound and smell and touch and taste,

Create for me the perfect map.

So to me sight is many things,

Though my eyes see not a thing at all.

Sight is sound, and smell, and taste, and touch,

And echoes bouncing off a wall.

And so my eyes are lacking physical sight,

But that does not mean I cannot see.

The way in which I view things,

Is simply what makes me unique.

**Caitlyn Laster** has been totally blind since she was seventeen months old, and never really liked writing until the sixth grade. Since then, writing has become her true passion. Her dream is to write fantasy and SiFi books for teens, and never expected that she would write a poem for anything besides a grade in English class. "Faith Alone" came about when given the assignment to write a poem describing a quality that makes her unique.

**Autumn** by William L. Houts 

Like all young men, I

summer better than all other months; the sun's

fire roasting me mildly and mad for pools

and waters cold as Europa. Now on my

downslope, it's Autumn I crave:

the wise bright colors,

the cool winds from Alaska paying visits

like some wild-foot uncle, drunk and storied.

Enchantment dire, it's his sharp failing breath

which captures me now,not summer's blunt benign:

his long brown-gold dive into winter's white sea

seizes me both mournful and glad, as leaves

in death-gilt shimmer, dance their

falling, their fragrance frank as labor,

wedding the soon winter, apple-strewn earth.

**William L. Houts** is 48 years old and lives in Steilacoom, Washington with his sister, one brother and his mom, who is known to all in the family as "Nana" and increasingly as "the General". He has been writing for more than thirty years, but feels that he has hit his stride only recently. Dickie, his cat, loves his work but his sister, Taylor, doesn't know quite what to make of it.

**Spirit Night** by Eve Sanchez

Ysbryd nos, Spirit night

Moon of orange, a wild light

To guide the bats

In their flight

Then fade and lighten

For Nos Calan Gaeaf.

Guide the spirits with renewed light

Ancestors too far to call

The veil thins for us all

On this night of Faes’ strength.

Come visit as we burn each light

In a circle where they are placed

On sacred alter which we face.

Graven images with things once dear

To remember those we wish were here.

Harvest past and bone fires burn

Waiting for the world to turn

As it does to death and dust

For later rebirth, this it must

But not without the guidance you bring

For this, your praise we do sing

Oh Samhain moon so full and bright

As say our brothers ‘cross the sea.

Our nations cannot renew

Without seven sisters holding tight

Just below your full orb

Seven like the banner waves

No coincidence tonight.

Facing the serpent whom breathes life

Into this night, Nos Calan Gaeaf.

**Autumn** by Eve Sanchez

Strip tease

Falling umber

And rich tones strewn about

Carpeting Earth with their discards

Bare trees

**Eve Sanchez** is your division president and is a complicated soul.

**What’s On The Hearth Fire?**

When the leaves are falling and the air outside is getting chilled, come inside for some true comfort food that reflects the season. Recipes have been contributed by staff and members to share with all.



**Fennel Salad**

Ingredients:

1 large fennel bulb, trimmed

2 Bartlet pears

6 to 8 dried apricots

3 ounces shaved parmesan

¼ cup quality orange juice

3 Tablespoons extra virgin olive oil

Salt and pepper

Directions:

 Slice fennel and pears into thin even strips. Cut apricots into strips also.

 Combine all with shaved parmesan in a storage bowl.

 Emulsify orange juice and olive oil, along with a pinch each of salt and pepper to taste, as best you can in a blender or food processor. Pour over salad and mix to coat.

 Cover and store in the refrigerator overnight. Flavors will be out of this world tomorrow. You can eat it sooner, but it will be worth the wait.

**Braised Beer Deer**

3 pounds venison shoulder

1/4 cup unsalted butter

Salt

Black pepper

3 onions sliced

1 ounce dried mushrooms, morel or porcini, rehydrated in 1 cup warm water and chopped

2 teaspoons dried thyme

3 or 4 tablespoons flour

2 tablespoons Dijon mustard

1 cup venison or beef broth

2 bottles of beer such as a good Belgian ale

2 tablespoons cider vinegar

1 heaping tablespoon brown sugar

Chopped parsley for garnish

Directions;

Cut the meat off the bone into 2 to 4 inch pieces.

Pat the meat dry with a cloth. Heat the butter in a large Dutch oven or heavy lidded pot over medium high heat. Brown meat well, salting as you go. You might want to do this in batches so you do not overcrowd the pot. Remove meat and set aside.

Put the sliced onions in the melted fat and mix well. Turn heat down to medium and cook another 20 minutes. About halfway through, add more salt, the chopped mushrooms and the thyme.

When the onions are ready, return the meat and all juices from the bowl into the pot. Mix in the mustard. Add a handful of flour to the pot. Reserve the water the mushrooms were soaking in.

Strain the water from the mushrooms and stir this into the pot along with venison broth and at least one bottle of the Belgian beer. You want the meat to just barely be covered. Pour in more beer if need be.

Bring to a simmer, add salt to taste, cover and cook slowly until the meat is really tender. This could be anywhere from 90 minutes to 4 hours

Once the meat is tender, whisk in the brown sugar, the vinegar and add black pepper to taste. Garnish with the chopped parsley.

**Mashed potatoes and Cauliflower**

Ingredients:

3 medium Yukon gold potatoes, peeled and cubed

1 small head cauliflower, separated into florets

2 cloves garlic

1/3 cup milk

3 Tablespoons butter or margarine

1/8 teaspoon salt

1/8 teaspoon ground black pepper

2 Tablespoons finely chopped flat-leaf parsley

#### Directions:

#### Place cauliflower and garlic cloves in a steamer, above water. Cover and bring to a boil. Turn off after a few minutes and let steam until tender.

#### At the same time, cover potatoes with water in a medium saucepan. Bring to a boil until tender. Drain well.

Combine all in a large serving bowl, mash and add remaining ingredients. Enjoy with no guilt.

**Autumn Bread**

Ingredients:

1 teaspoon active yeast

2 cups all-purpose flour

2 cups whole wheat flour

2 teaspoons salt

4 Tablespoons brown sugar

2 Tablespoons sesame seeds

2 Tablespoons poppy seeds

2 Tablespoons sunflower seeds

2 Tablespoons softened butter

1 ¾ cups warm water

Directions:

In a large bowl pour a bit of the water, flour and the yeast so that it could start to activate while gathering the rest of your ingredients.

Mix in all dry ingredients first. Add the butter, sugar and water and knead well. You may need to add a bit of water or flour depending on dough. You want it to hold together, but not be sticky on the hands.

Take note that the longer you knead, the more airy your bread will be.

Bake in a moderate oven, about 300 degrees, on a dry pan for 30 to 45 minutes. You want a solid thump when you knock on it.

Cool well before slicing or loaf will not hold shape. Serve with butter or sop up your dinner plate with it.

**Pumpkin Rice Soup**

 This is an unusual dessert, but you may never reach for ice cream again.

Ingredients:

1 can (15 oz.) pumpkin

½ cup granulated sugar

2 teaspoon pumpkin pie spice

½ teaspoon salt

1 can (12 fl. oz.) evaporated milk

2 cups vegetable broth

1 ½ cups white rice

Directions:

 Mix all ingredients except rice, in a large stock pot until blended and sugar is incorporated over a medium boil. Add rice and simmer for approximately 10 minutes. Cover and turn off. Rice will absorb liquid and cook quickly.

 If it is too thick, you could add a bit of milk or cream. This can be served hot or cold. Consider a dollop of whipped cream when serving.

**MULLED CIDER**

INGREDIENTS:

2 QUARTS APPLE CIDER

¼ CUP PACKED BROWN SUGAR (light)

2 STICKS CINNAMON

6 TO 8 WHOLE CLOVES

1/8 teaspoon GINGER

Place all ingredients in a large pot or crock pot. Let simmer for flavors to meld and make your home smell wonderful. Serve hot.

**Inside the Dictionary**

 Do you know when the Medieval times were? So many people think they do, but more often than not, they are mistaken. When writing fiction, it is important we have our terms understood before we start.

 A fun fact that will never trip you up again is that the Medieval times ranged from the 5th to the 15th centuries in Europe. It could also be called the Middle Ages, but it has nothing to do with Middle Earth. Now you know.

**Let’s Write the Lives We Want.**

Slate & Style is a quarterly publication of the National Federation of the Blind Writers' Division. It is dedicated to writing pursuits such as literary pieces, resources, and information about various writing styles. A majority of Slate & Style's contributors are blind, but we welcome submissions from any contributor. We also accept submissions touching on any subject matter. We encourage submissions from both experienced and beginning writers with our goal being to hone our writing craft and share our thoughts.

Slate & Style accepts short fiction, short creative nonfiction, poetry, articles discussing and providing tips for various writing styles including literary, technical, editing, public relations, and academic, literary criticism, resource information, and book reviews.

Subject matter is not limited but will be up to the editor's discretion to publish.

Slate & Style accepts material from adults and children. We require email submissions.

Below are some of the highlights for submitting. Go to writers.nfb.org/Slate&StylePage for the full submission guidelines..

Include an attached cover letter and a short biography. This should be no more than 150 words. Keep your bio to the key items you feel are important for readers to know.

Multiple submissions per email are fine, but all must be listed in the required cover letter. Use Microsoft Word or RTF. No other formats are accepted. Send all submissions and questions to s-and-s@nfbnet.org.

Please read through all the guidelines carefully. Submissions that do not follow these guidelines may not be considered for Slate & Style.

Though submissions are welcome at all times, if your submission is specifically about a particular season or time of year and you would like your submission to appear in that corresponding issue, please read the dates and submission deadlines in the guidelines.

For the winter issue, which will come out on December 21st, the closing date for acceptance of submissions is November 30th.

\*\*\*\*We look forward to seeing your words.\*\*\*\*