



The Masters Review Blog

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Shortlist — 2019 Flash Fiction Contest

Please help us in congratulating the authors selected for our 2019 Flash Fiction Contest shortlist! The

Masters Review editors selected these 15 pieces from over 2,000 submissions. We now await the decision from guest judge Kathy Fish — the finalists will each earn a spot in her Fast Flash workshop, in addition to the cash prizes! Thank you to all of our wonderful submitters. We greatly enjoyed reading your work.



The Basement Beneath the Basement, Dale Gregory Anderson

Box of Ghosts, Joy Baglio

Right Before We Fall Apart, Elizabeth Crowder

Some Meaning—, Leonora Desar

The Remains, Felicity Fenton

When the Bank Took Our House Back, Juliana Jarrett-Morales

Observation Tube, McMurdo Station, Antarctica, Justin Hermann

Simple Physics, Kevin Leahy

There, I Said It, Tori Malcangio

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The Drive, Dalton Monk

Blood in the Mouth, Melanie Moyer

Homecoming, Kathryn Phelan

You Two, Alana Reynolds

Caregiving, Corinna Vallianatos

Shall We Dance, Lavanya Vasudevan

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we assure you
our spam is **GOURMET**

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New Voices: “The Engagement” by Stacey Wang

We are proud to present Stacey Wang's first story: “The Engagement.” A story of generational and cultural differences, Wang deftly illustrates the strain these differences can place on familial relationships. Wang commands attention with this powerful debut, and we are thrilled add “The Engagement” to our New Voices catalog.



At the Thanksgiving table, I bit my tongue and swallowed my food. I didn't want to embarrass you, so I pretended not to notice that you had stopped talking. Instead, I offered you some tofu.

Here, daughter, I wanted to say. Mama knows what it's like to be told by a man, to shut up, to stop being an embarrassment. Mama knows. Have some tofu.

1.

The world was too new for you. You lacked words and understanding. Flailing fists and splitting cries, you made your suffering known.

In those first days of your life, we lived on the grounds of the Tianjin New Star Textiles Factory, in a square room with a bed and table. The paper-thin walls conducted the cacophony of lives. Woks hissed and beds squeaked. You wailed, but our neighbors were kind. “She is a singer,” said Old Man Lin, insisting that your cries didn't bother him when we visited for the Mid-Autumn.

Your father spent most of his time at the Factory, but I didn't mind. It gave me time to be alone with you, to study the dimple in your cheek, the silk of your feet. One flesh cleaved in two. *Wo de nu er. My daughter.*

Somewhere I heard that if you looked at beautiful girls, your daughter would be beautiful, so I cut pictures of pretty women from magazines and taped them above our bed. I studied those photos,

even held you up close so you could see them too, because I believed then that if you wanted something badly enough the universe might pay attention, might mold your wanting into reality, and I wanted you to be beautiful. Beautiful girls attracted the best husbands, and a good husband was the key to a good life.

I read that if you ate walnuts your breast milk would produce a compound that made your child clever, so I went from vendor to vendor until finally I found someone who sold me a half-kilo for two weeks' salary. "Foolish woman. How could you be so wasteful?" your father said when I returned with nothing from the market other than that bag of walnuts. But I was happy. I ate the half-kilo in three days, munching on the walnuts even after they started to taste like chalk and blister my mouth.

Your father was right. I was foolish. Wasteful. I spent my energy asking the universe to give me a beautiful, smart daughter who could make it far in life, who could achieve things. I forgot to ask the universe to teach you respect, and now you are a daughter who hangs up on her own mother.

To continue reading "The Engagement" [click here](#).

AUG 16 | New Writing on the Net: August

This month's New Writing on the Net comes to us from former reader Areej Mehdi. Areej has highlighted some of the previous month's most interesting speculative fiction written by women, published across the net at Tor, LightSpeed, The Dark Magazine, Strange Horizons, and Beneath Ceaseless Skies. Look no further for your weekend reading.



["Blood is Another Word for Hunger"](#) by [Rivers Solomon](#) | [Tor](#), July 24, 2019

Before, Sully thought it was her lack of want for anything that made her feel so shapeless and void, but her relief at seeing Ziza upon her rebirth upended that notion. She wasn't numb for lack of want but for wanting too much. She was ravenous for the whole world. The sky and the oceans and the creatures in those oceans and the cities and heartbeats and Ziza and Miles and Bethie and Liza Jane and Nathaniel and the mountains and brass and harps and pianos and wildflowers and glaciers and brothers and sisters and cousins and picnics and the sun and telescopes and a treehouse and sausage and winter and the height of summer, when the air was so thick it stuck to your skin like pecan brittle in your back teeth.

Even as she imagined possessing all these things, she wanted yet more. It was strange, she thought, how limitless a void inside of a person could be. It was strange that a person could be killed, but not anything that that person had done.

["One Thousand Beetles in a Jumpsuit"](#) by [Dominica Phetteplace](#) | [LightSpeed](#), August 8, 2019

Isla was sorry her parents had fallen for this. Time wasn't going to be rewound. There was no going back to a prelapsarian state, but things could be mitigated. Forests could be replanted, factories could pollute less. Mars could turn green, maybe the moon too. It was so childlike to wish things were different than they were. The grownup thing to do was to take stock of the trouble you were in and walk the best path out. That's what her parents had taught her before they had forgotten it themselves.

[“The Dead Kings”](#) by [Teresa P. Mira De Echeverría](#) | [The Dark Magazine](#), July 2019

When I was six years old, I began to pray to the god of the ash tree that stood at the edge of our farm, and to the god of the cross that hung on the walls, and to the god of the stars that cover everything. I was too young to protect my parents. But it was obvious that they were as helpless as I was.

By the grace of some power I do not understand, perhaps the spirits of friends who had gone to the other side and returned as protective angels, we endured many years of famine, fear, pain, and gnashing of teeth. We came through unharmed. My one solace were the few hidden books that we had kept and that taught me there were other kingdoms, other skies, roses that bloomed alive and even without thorns.

[“On the Impurity of Dragon-kind”](#) by [Marie Brennan](#) | [Uncanny Magazine](#), August 6, 2019

I won't be here next week, Magister Broughton—nor any week after that—so let me close by addressing a few of the things you're probably going to say then. I imagine you'll talk about impurity and how good things can become polluted, like a person can become polluted by touching the carcass of an unclean animal—the way my mother has done many times in the course of her research. But the Book of Priests says that uncleanness only lasts until evening. It doesn't taint a person forever, even if she's from a priestly line, much less threaten to taint her son if he doesn't repudiate her and all her work.

[“Someday We'll Embrace this Distance”](#) by [Niyah Morris](#) | [Strange Horizons](#), August 12, 2019

“I'm sure you want to know what I'm doing here,” you said.

I nodded. It wasn't that I was afraid. We'd had a meal together, after all. And if I thought about it, you weren't a complete stranger. We'd met in the supermarket. You'd called me by my name.

“It's a bit of an odd story,” you said. “A long one, too.”

“That's fine,” I replied. “Start from the beginning.”

“That's the thing.” You took a sip of water and set the glass down again. “It's hard to tell where the beginning is. There isn't one beginning. So I don't know where to start.”

[“That August Song”](#) by [Benjanun Sriduangkaew](#) | [Beneath Ceaseless Skies](#), August 1, 2019

She opens her robe, bares her secondary mouths, and gulps in air. In so confined a space, her diaphragm will not be able to expand to its fullest, but any melodist worth their training can sing under worse limitations. Not that she has any idea. She knows hymns and canticles; she knows dirges and paeans. She does not know how to sing at behemoths. But she begins to harmonize to it, to the behemoth refrain. When its cadence shifts, so does hers. When it rises and falls, she follows in precise parallel.

Curated by Areej Mehdi

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A Conversation with Gabriel Urza

The White Death: An Illusion (Nouvella, 2019), is the first novella from author Gabriel Urza (*All That Followed*, 2015). Within its svelte sixty pages, Urza explores themes of parenthood, craft, and our fear of the unknown, all through the lens of professional stage magic. Seeking to recount the life of Benjamin Vaughn (stage name: *The Great Bendini*), a magic phenom who died tragically at the age of fourteen, the unnamed narrator of *The White Death* grapples with the struggle of having bore witness to the danger of obsession. Behind it all is the often unglamorous world of magic-making, a life confined by secrecy and order, control and faith. The Masters Review reader Benjamin Kessler caught up with the author.



BENJAMIN KESSLER: Did you do any magic as a child?

GABRIEL URZA: In my entire life I've only possessed three magic tricks. My main one was the standard rubber thumb, but the skin color was always off so it never looked quite right. I used to make it look like I was putting out my mom's cigarettes in my palm, hiding the ashes in the tip. I think that trick is still legitimately used, just in more impressive ways. There's some magic tricks which just require no skill, they're just gimmicks. As an eight or nine-year-old those were the ones I was most interested in.

I was never really wanted to do the work to become a magician, I just wanted to *be* magic. I had a stripper deck, trick playing cards, essentially, with deckled edges and specific details on the card backs. But I was also so bad that every time that someone pulled a card out I would have to stare at the markings and then reference the color sheet.

BK: It was subtle.

GU: Very.

BK: Were you the kind of kid who went around a parent's party and showed off your tricks?

GU: I was a complete introvert. The idea of actually performing for anyone to me was absurd. I would show it to my parents, but the idea that I would show it to say, a stranger, was always totally off the table. That would have been a nightmare. I actually might have had nightmares about that. That's essentially where my interest in actual magic ended.

BK: Because of performance anxiety?

GU: Partially. I think I ultimately knew that magic would be just for me. At nine years old I didn't really want to do the work. What's the payoff if it's never going to be seen? Nowadays I'm uninterested in the gimmicks or tricks of magic. I'm drawn in more by the performers and the obsessiveness the craft requires.

[Click here to continue reading.](#)

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Call for Readers: Summer

The Masters Review has an open call for readers to add to our team starting this summer. If you love literary fiction and nonfiction, and three to four hours of reading submissions a week sounds like fun, we encourage you to apply. Our readers work remotely and can set their own schedules. This position begins in September and involves a commitment through February. PLEASE NOTE: readerships are unpaid and on a strictly volunteer basis.



[|||APPLY HERE|||](#)

If interested, please send cover letter, resume, and at least one writing sample by Friday August 23.
We look forward to hearing from you!

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Smart Submitting

So, you've written a story. You've had it workshopped, or your friends read it and didn't hate it. In fact, you think you want to get it published. Now what? The world of submitting can be daunting, full of rejection and long waits. But by following a few tips, you can greatly improve your submitting experience.



1. Wait.

This one's the easiest. When you think a story is ready to be published, put it in your drawer. Step away from it. Don't think about it for a week, or a month, or a year. Then come back to it and see how you feel. We're often most excited about our work in the immediate aftermath – which isn't a bad

thing! But it can blind us to its flaws, whether in structure or logic or even small things like grammar, flaws which are quite visible to a reader less attached to the work.

2. Proofread!

This may seem obvious, but it's important to mention. Editors will take risks on works they truly see potential in, but too many easy-to-catch mistakes will turn a reader off of the piece. Did you change your character's name during one round of revision? Make sure it's been changed in every place. Did you somehow accidentally replace all the commas in your story with question marks? Give your story one last read before sending it off to be sure it's free of any of these obvious errors.

3. Know the audience.

All right. You've written the story; you had it workshopped; you've waited long enough to separate the euphoric *I've just finished the best story ever* emotions and when you read it again six months later, you tweaked the ending a little to be more emotionally resonant, and now that you're ready to submit, you gave it one last glance and noticed a couple times you wrote "it" instead of "is". Now, where to submit?

This one is one of the biggest reasons a story gets rejected from any literary journal, but it often gets overlooked. Know the audience. Not just of your work, but you need to know the audience of literary journal. If they don't intersect, there's a very slim chance your work will be published by that journal. And when it comes down to it, it has nothing to do with the quality of your writing. Simply put, your work and the journal are trying to do different things.

Recently, we've had an influx of poetry submissions. The submitters have perhaps confused us with another journal because we don't publish poetry. In these cases, I do my best to reach out to the author to let them know that we're rejecting their submission not because of the quality of the poems – they might be quite good, I'm not sure – but we simply have no place for them in our journal. Again, it's not a reflection of the quality of their work. Their audience is not the same as ours.

How do you know the kind of audience the journal is reaching? How do you know if the audience of your work overlaps? The easiest way, the thing nearly every literary journal in existence advocates for: read back issues. Read what the journal has selected to publish in the past. Does it sound like the kind of work you're writing? Read a few more stories. Read yours again. With some effort, you should be able to work out if your writing would be a good match for what they're looking for.

And when you're reasonably sure the audiences overlap, hit that submit button. When the rejections come – and they do come, because every writer gets rejected at some point, even for their best work – you'll know at least it had a fair chance in the review process.

Another small hint: Look at the story collections of your favorite authors and see where they've been published before. It's not a way to skip the *read the back issues* step necessarily, but it can help find new markets for your work.

| By Cole Meyer

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Summer Workshop Open for Registration!

*Our Summer Workshop returns! Registration opens today and space is limited. Participants receive **personalized feedback** on a story or essay, detailed **suggestions for improvement**, and **resources for submitting**—all from an experienced instructor. The workshop allows writers to work with instructors remotely and strives to provide a workshop experience that can easily fit into their lives.*



2019 Online Summer Workshop

Submissions are now OPEN!

COST: \$299

[Click here to Submit](#)

Powered by Submittable 

Participants Receive:

- an editorial letter from your instructor with specific suggestions and developmental edits that will help elevate your story to the next level
- PDF of materials including craft essays from The Masters Review, editorial notes on what we see from the slush pile, information on submission strategies, and additional advice on submitting
- automatic inclusion in a forthcoming Masters Review contest
- suggestions on literary magazines and contests that would be a good fit for your work, along with reading recommendations from your instructor
- an archived copy of The Masters Review anthology
- **Writers will receive feedback no later than September 30.** Early submissions may yield earlier feedback.

Nate Brown is the managing editor of the Austin-based literary journal *American Short Fiction*, he also teaches creative writing at Stevenson University, Johns Hopkins University, and at the George Washington University in Washington, DC. His stories and essays have appeared in the *Iowa Review*, *Mississippi Review*, *Five Chapters*, the *Los Angeles Review of Books*, *Publisher's Weekly*, *Lithub*, and *Barrelhouse*.

Adeena Reitberger's stories and essays have appeared or are forthcoming in *Black Warrior Review*, *Mississippi Review*, *Cimarron Review*, *Nimrod International Journal*, *Sierra Nevada Review*, *NANO Fiction*, and elsewhere. She lives in Austin, Texas and is the co-editor of *American Short Fiction*.

Lauren Kane is the assistant editor at *The Paris Review*. Her writing has appeared on *The Paris Review Daily* and in *Publisher's Weekly*. She lives in New York City.

Michelle Wildgen is the author of the novels *You're Not You, But Not For Long*, and *Bread and Butter*, and the editor of the food writing anthology *Food & Booze*. A longtime executive editor with the award-winning literary journal *Tin House*, she is a freelance editor and creative writing teacher in

Madison, Wis. Since 2013 she and novelist Susanna Daniel have run the Madison Writers' Studio, offering a variety of creative writing workshops and classes.

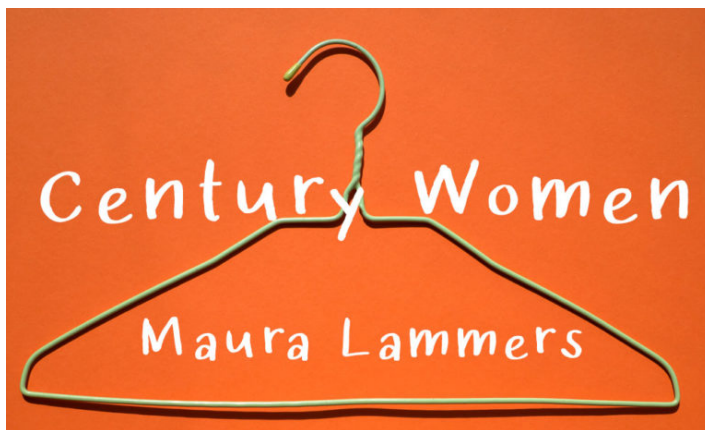
Jeff Gleaves, a California native, received an MFA in creative nonfiction from California State University, Fresno. Before joining the Academy of American Poets, he was the Digital Director of *The Paris Review*, where he digitized the *Review's* entire archive, directed an award-winning redesign of theparisreview.org, and led the digital content team, which was nominated for eight Webby Awards. Prior to his time at *The Paris Review*, Jeffery worked at Dzanc Books and Counterpoint Press, during which he was also a web advisor to *Harper's Magazine*. He lives in Brooklyn, New York.

[Click here to view praise for our Summer Workshop.](#)

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New Voices: "Century Women" by Maura Lammers

When Serena's plan to teach English abroad goes awry, she finds herself returning home and working at Century, a high-end women's fashion store. "We have high expectations for our Century Women," her manager tells her. But what does it mean to be a Century Woman? "Century Women" tells a story of shifting identities, and Serena must decide between being herself and satisfying the expectations of others.



Later, Carey says maybe she needs to see a hypnotherapist. Or a tarot card reader. Or maybe any old psychic will do. She says, maybe one of them will tell me what's wrong with me. Serena does not see anything wrong with Carey. She can never tell if she's joking or not.

The manager says, We have high expectations for our Century Women.

Serena nods her head yes.

The manager says, Our customers pay top-dollar not just for the clothes, but for the experience they have when they walk through the door. We need all our Century Women to uphold certain standards.

They sit in the break room at Century, the store where Serena works as of today. The fan in the corner is broken, and the air feels as stagnant as pond water. The manager is named Courtney, and as she flips to a new page of the employee training handbook, Serena notices that her nails are almond-colored. She never knew that nail polish came in shades of brown. Sweat seeps through the back of her linen dress. This job was a fluke, an off-chance application that led to an interview where she wore her best dress and hoped she looked like someone who could sell expensive clothes.

Courtney looks up and says, Imagine a woman you deeply admire for her persona and style. We all have women like that in our lives. A woman who inspires you in everything she says and does. She is good at her job, and looks good doing it. From head to toe she looks like herself. From her shoes to her perfume to her eye shadow. She is exactly what you hope to be. That's the Century Woman. That is how we want you to look every time you show up for work.

In the first two weeks, she gathers that the Century Women on staff do other things besides work at a high-end clothing store. They are teachers, photographers, graphic designers, musicians, dancers, or stay-at-home moms. They are graduate students studying speech pathology, dental hygiene, physical therapy, nursing, or counseling. This is no one's full-time job and no one's first priority, but based on the enthusiasm and attention they bring when face to face with customers, no one would know otherwise. Serena hears about her coworkers' lives during training sessions at the register and in the fitting room, shared thirty-minute breaks, and long opening and closing shifts. She doesn't know what to say about her own life.

To continue reading "Century Women" [click here](#).

JUL 28 | August Deadlines: 8 Contests With Deadlines This Month

The summer heat seems like it's here to stay, but these prizes aren't going to last nearly as long... We've done the research, and now it's time for you to submit your best work!



[FEATURED Summer Short Story Award for New Writers](#)

There is no need for modesty here, when it comes to our biggest submission period of the year! *The Masters Review* is looking for stories under 6000 words, written by emerging writers who have a way with words and a passion for prose! The winner receives \$3000, publication, and agency review, and the runners-up also receive cash prizes, publication, and review. Judged by Tope Folerin, don't let this opportunity slip by! [Details here](#).

Entry Fee: \$20 **Deadline:** August 31

[Emerging Voices Fellowship](#)

Meant for new writers who are unfamiliar with the literary establishment, this prize provides financial support, professional mentoring, classes, and public readings to poets and writers of fiction and creative nonfiction! This 7-month fellowship awards a \$1000 stipend, but participants must reside in LA for that period and housing is not provided. Applicants need to provide a professional CV, two letters of recommendation, and a writing sample. [Learn more here!](#)

Entry Fee: \$10 **Deadline:** August 1

[2019 ½ K Prize](#)

Indiana Review and judge Megan Giddings are looking for writers who are sharp, short, and definitely not shy – could that be you? Entries must be less than 500 words, but multiple entries are allowed! Fiction, poetry, and creative nonfiction are accepted, and first place receives \$1000 and guaranteed publication in *Indiana Review*! [Details here](#).

Entry Fee: \$20 **Deadline:** August 15

[2019 Barthelme Prize for Short Prose](#)

This is *Gulf Coast's* current contest, and they're looking for a very specific and very succinct sort of entry! Submissions can be prose poetry, prose, or essays, but they all need to be less than 500 words. The winner receives \$1000 and publication, and it's judged by Ben Marcus! [Apply here!](#)

Entry Fee: \$20 **Deadline:** August 15

[Poetry and Short Fiction Prizes](#)

In these contests offered by Kallisto Gaia Press, contestants can submit entries for short fiction or poetry. The two winners of the Chester B. Himes Memorial Short Fiction Prize and the Julia Darling Memorial Poetry Prize will receive \$1000 and publication in *The Ocotillo Review*. Make sure to choose the correct category when you submit, and good luck! [Submission information here.](#)

Entry Fee: \$20 **Deadline:** August 20

[2019 Publishing Lab Prize](#)

The University of New Orleans Press is looking to publish the best novel/short story collection written this year, to bring innovative publicity and broad distribution to authors! The contest is open to all writers, and entries are allowed any length and any subject. The winner receives a \$10,000 advance and a publishing contract, along with promotion from The Publishing Laboratory at the University of New Orleans. [Submit here!](#)

Entry Fee: \$28 **Deadline:** August 31

[Gemini Magazine Flash Fiction Contest](#)

Here is a great chance for writers of all stripes, as *Gemini Magazine's* contest is open to any subject, style, or genre! Entries must be unpublished, and the maximum length is 1000 words. The winner receives \$1000 and publication. [More details here.](#)

Entry Fee: \$6 **Deadline:** August 31

[The St. Lawrence Book Award](#)

If you have an unpublished poetry or short story collection, this could be your big break! Black Lawrence Press is currently accepting submissions from any author who has not yet published a full-length collection. The winner will receive book publication, \$1000, and 10 copies of the book. [Learn more here.](#)

Entry Fee: \$25 **Deadline:** August 31

| By Kimberly Guerin

JUL 26 | Debut Author Spotlight: Caitlin Horrocks

In a new edition of our Debut Author Spotlight series, Caitlin Horrocks discusses her path to publication, and how she approached her seeming inability to come up with a "novel-sized idea." Horrocks's debut novel [The Vexations](#) is due out next week from Little, Brown and Company.



As a graduate student, I watched writer after writer in my MFA program turn in the-short-story-that-needed-to-be-a-novel. The class would begin our workshop discussion praising the story's strengths, slowly circling around and then landing on the fact that the piece didn't, shouldn't would likely never work as a short story: the writer could narrow her focus, or she could let the piece grow into a novella or novel. The writer in question sometimes nodded eagerly, sometimes ruefully, sometimes with exasperation or despair.

My story drafts were all clearly stories. During graduate school and for years afterward, my ideas were eight or fifteen or 22 page ideas. For one entire, weird year, they were all exactly eighteen-page ideas. I got ants: How was I ever going to write a novel if my brain couldn't even cough up a single promising novel-sized idea, let alone deliver on the concept? And did I even really *want* to write a novel? If so, why? Only the pressures of the market? "Are you working on a novel?" literary agents and editors inevitably ask short story writers, and I always felt that the "correct" answers ranged from "Yes, and it's done, let me send it to you!" to "Of course, and when I finish soon it will be wildly marketable." I didn't want to declare myself exclusively a short story writer without having at least tried and failed to write a novel.

I wish I had better resisted that stew of externally and internally generated pressures, but the one smart thing I managed was to resist forcing a novel-sized treatment onto a story-sized idea. I didn't wait patiently, exactly, but for the most part I waited. For a while I researched and even started writing what I thought *might* be a novel inspired by a historical reference I was fascinated by, but had no idea what to do with: I could recognize its scale, but struggled to find the story.

Then one summer I headed off to a week-long writing workshop. There hadn't been any communication from the organizers about bringing or preparing anything in particular, so I hopped on the plane assuming the class would be generative. The first email I saw after we landed was from the program coordinator, requesting that participants show up with copies of an unpublished story, ready to be workshopped. I did not have an unpublished, ready-to-be-workshopped story. My stomach dropped through the floor and landed somewhere in the baggage hold. I started counting hours: I'd arrived one day early to visit my sister, who lived nearby. I calculated that, if I rudely ignored my sister and didn't sleep, I had exactly one day to write a story.

The first idea floating at the top of my panicked brain wasn't the topic of my abortive-maybe-novel, but an old interest in Erik Satie, a French composer (1866-1925). I'd been assigned his "Gymnopédie no. 3" as a piano student, and loved its elegant melancholy, but had quickly learned that most of his music veered towards experimentation, humor, and eccentricity. I had a longstanding curiosity about the person who had created that divergent range of music.

The resulting short story did not solve that mystery. It solved zero mysteries, including why I thought alternating scenes set in 1925 with a modern-day tale of a frustrated music student attempting to research Erik Satie would be a good idea. Subtle, the story was not. Nor was it a short story. The concept was novel-sized in time scale, in ambition, in the ways I was trying to speak both about a life and about a body of work, as well as the intersections of that life and work with major historical

events. By writing a really bad, rushed, short story, I'd finally written my short-story-that-needed-to-be-a-novel.

I was glad I'd waited for it, although once it showed up I knew with mingled joy and terror that I now had to figure out how to write the damn thing. That would take me another several years of trial and error, and if I could go back, I'd have some advice for myself on the process of actually researching and writing a historical novel. I *might* also tell myself to have some unpublished story drafts ready to go, or to at least ask questions about upcoming literary events before getting on the plane. But it turns out I work pretty well under deadline-stricken panic. So I might instead just tell myself that I did the right thing by waiting for the novel-sized idea, and keeping the faith that one would, eventually, show up.

"Are you working on a novel?" the chorus of literary agents and editors asked, and if I'd had more self-assurance I could have answered "Not yet." I could have occupied that "yet" not with artistic or career worries, but with patience, and with openness to the unexpected directions even last-minute, half-baked ideas can move in.

JUL 25 | New Writing on the Net: July

July's edition of New Writing on the Net comes to us from Kimberly Guerin. We're excited to share new work from Josh Potter, Keen Short, Steve Young, Shasta Grant and Anne Rasmussen, Karen Kao, and Nato Green. Find your weekend reading list below!



Stories about families, endings, and beginnings – and how we relate to one another.

[“Beautiful in the Distance”](#) by [Josh Potter](#) | [Guernica](#), June 24, 2019

“We pitched camp hastily and slept intermittently, anxious from the unfamiliar energy haunting us in the total silence and dark that only a foreign wilderness can contain. The moon looks different in every new valley. This fresh information—the Earth as an infinite geography that expands into both constellation and bedrock—unsettled me. Until then, I had been convinced that everywhere was the same; that every mother drove a Ford Windstar minivan and said *I love you* even when they were mad; that everyone I will ever love I’ve already met. But beyond the steep, sharp edge of the eight-thousand-foot Half Dome Mountain was an unknown distance into unknown dark I hadn’t known existed.”

[“All Good Things”](#) by [Keene Short](#) | [Bodega](#), July 2019

“She said the newest commandment, which was more like an afterthought on God’s part, was that all good things must come to an end. Someone pointed out to her that this wasn’t really a commandment so much as a proverb or a general state of things, but she pointed a long fish-caked finger at him and

said in this loud, crunchy voice that it was a direct order from God. That good things must come to an end, that all of them, wherever they are, must be put to an end. We should love our neighbors and put good things to an end.”

“[Balloons](#)” by Steve Young | [Pif Magazine](#), July 2019

“He shut off the light, stepped into the tub, and stood behind the half-drawn shower curtain — the perfect hiding place. Too perfect; the kids gave up and forgot about him. From somewhere distant, through the party noise, he could make out the trills of Jordan and Emily’s excited laughter, the thumping of kids’ feet on the stairs. But he lingered, stood rooted in the darkness, cherishing this thin and precarious sanctuary, the innocent smells of Ivory soap, Janet’s apricot hair conditioner. A strange, whimsical feeling overcame him, hiding so successfully in his own home, in the middle of his own birthday party. At the center of things, yet invisible.”

“[Grapevine](#)” by Shasta Grant and Anne Rasmussen | [Little Fiction](#), July 2019

“When Jill came to visit me with blue highlights in her hair, swiping through pictures of men on her cell phone, I should have told her that she was acting like a fool, that if she wasn’t careful, she’d lose everything we’d worked so hard for. But it wouldn’t have mattered, Jill never listened to me. It was certainly not my idea to park me in that facility and yet here we were now, moving me back home. And it wasn’t because of that spat I’d had with the director. No matter what Jill said, I knew it was because there was no more money.”

“[The Mapmaker](#)” by Karen Kao | [The Common](#), July 11, 2019

“The mapmaker rummages through a kitchen drawer 3,000 miles and a lifetime away from the place she once called home. At last she finds what she needs, the nub of a waxy green crayon to show her daughter where the fruit trees stand. The mapmaker is tempted to draw herself onto the page but which of her many lives should she choose? Her fingers turn black and blue. Her thumbprint is a whorl of geography. As she props her chin onto her inky palms, meaning transfers from page to cheek. Her hand is tired but her heart is hot. Memories flow quicker than ink.”

“[Introducing Lamoishe and Hezbollah Schoenfeld](#)” by Nato Green | [The Rumpus](#), July 23, 2019

“Naomi and I wanted to buck the archaic patriarchal tradition of assuming that children automatically get their father’s last name. Making the kids Schoenfelds wasn’t a hard choice for us. In a relationship, if you both have strong opinions about something then you negotiate. But if only one of you feels strongly, the person who wants the thing wins. I don’t need to invent opinions about barstools (actual recent example) or lineages, to create leverage for negotiation. Curtains and surnames can be her choice. I’ll play hardball about the serious stuff—light fixtures.”

Curated by Kimberly Guerin

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New Voices: To Kill The Second: Part 3 by Di Bei

Today, we conclude Di Bei’s “To Kill The Second.” Part 1 can be read [here](#), and Part 2 can be read [here](#).

Or, you can read the piece in its entirety at [this link](#). “To Kill The Second” chronicles young Jade’s celebration of her first-born status in the wake of the repeal of China’s one-child law, and her rebellion against the social stigma of her sex and intelligence. This is Di Bei’s first English publication, and we are thrilled to share her story.



Doctors were not allowed to reveal the gender in China. If it was a girl, they would say a long list of the sweetest things: your baby was healthy, was strong, well-developed. If a boy, they would simply say, “Congrats.”

Mom was out for the weekend. “Business trip,” Dad said. He cooked spicy beef tendons with lots of cilantro. It was my favorite three years ago. I pushed my plate away.

“Can’t Mom go some other time?” I asked. “I thought she would miss me.”

Dad said he was sorry. Of course Mom missed me.

“Do you need pocket money?” he asked.

I shook my head gloomily but he insisted. Just when I was about to give in and accepted his generosity, we heard a knock on the door.

Swallow was knitting a scarf for Chen Ben, and she came for advice on the color. “White,” I said. “The color of sleeping lotus reminds me of you.”

The color of dough. The color of rice. The color of colorless. Swallow blushed a little and smiled. She looked around and asked, “What are you going to do for the final?”

“Study, I guess.”

“What if you lose?” she asked. “Oh Jade, why would you bet your hair?”

I sighed. Swallow clenched her fists. She looked around again, then whispered to me, “Have I told you that my uncle is a chemistry teacher at No.7? I could try to – get his passwords, you know? I might access the tests –”

She really thought of me as her friend. I didn’t have much experience with the kindness from my own gender, and it was overwhelming. I stared at Swallow too hard. She stopped in the middle of her sentence. “I’m sorry,” she said. “I wasn’t –”

“Thank you,” I said softly. “But it’s about my dignity. Sometimes we have to fight wars that we are destined to lose.”

It was such a great line. Swallow must have been worshipping me. After she left, I threw Li Jun’s jacket into the washing machine. He was one of the few who stayed on campus during the days off, and I had offered to wash his jacket since I wore it so often. Before I returned the jacket to him, I sprayed a little perfume on the collar.

To continue reading “To Kill The Second: Part 3” [click here](#).

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