

Tiny Tales from the
Digital Pedagogy Lab
2021

TINY TALES FROM THE DIGITAL PEDAGOGY LAB 2021

A Book of 100-Word Stories (and
Shorter)

MEMBERS OF DPL 2021



Tiny Tales from the Digital Pedagogy Lab 2021 by Laura Gibbs is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/), except where otherwise noted.

Copyright for individual stories is held by the authors.

CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Acknowledgments	2
1. Pandemic Times	3
2. Loving and Losing	14
3. Memoirs and Memories	26
4. The Drama of Life	45
5. Stories to Ponder	63
6. Shivers and Surprises	75
7. Myths and Legends	89
8. Catawba Tales	111
9. A Bit of History	124
10. Imagined Worlds	131
11. Artistry	142
12. Stories in Two Languages	147
13. Word Doodles	156
Contributors	169

INTRODUCTION

This book of microfiction took shape during the Digital Pedagogy Lab of August 2021. The stories are 100 words long at most; many are shorter, even much shorter — just 6 words long. There are some one-sentence stories that we wrote collaboratively; yes, you really can write sentences that are 100 words long! Some writers contributed bilingual stories. Other writers experimented with retelling the same story in different lengths. You'll find stories about our pandemic times, traditional myths and legends, spooky stories, memoirs... all powered by the creative imagination of the writers who generously agreed to share their work here.

The paragraph you just read is 100 words long, as is this paragraph. As you read through the 100-word (and shorter) stories, you'll see that they go by very quickly, but you can slow down when you find a story that you like. Read it again. Read it out loud. Let it sink in. Ponder the details. You might supply some details from your own imagination, or even decide to write your own microfiction. You can find out more about writing microfiction in *How to Write 100-Word Stories: A Manual of Very Short Microfiction*, a free book online at Micro.LauraGibbs.net.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many thanks to all the authors: Aaron Langille, Alex Meyer, Brandon Morgan, Carrie Prefontaine, Cartland Berge, Chad Flinn, Grant McMillan, Gregory Carrier, Jennifer Nardine, Jennifer Jordán Schaller, Jessica Joy Mills, Jim Stauffer, Joan Bihun, Jon Kabongo, Katharina Poltze, Katherine Puntene, Katie Volkmar, Martine Rife, Melissa Wells, Patrick Thomas Henry, Susanna Aliisa Kohonen, Thomas R. Keith, and Trish O'Connor, plus the anonymous contributors to the “word doodles” in Chapter 13. To find stories by specific authors, see the index at the back of the book.

Thanks also to Sean Michael Morris and all the people who help make Digital Pedagogy Lab such a remarkable event every year. You can find out more at DigitalPedagogyLab.com.

1.

PANDEMIC TIMES

A Pandemic Diary

The Couches

A pandemic, everyone said. There were whispers since at least January, but by March, there were *cases*. Like one per state. *A pandemic*. How much worse could it get? All I wanted was my couches, ordered in November when everything was normal. Camping furniture in a new house loses its appeal after two weeks, much less two months. Their arrival was scheduled Monday, March 16, during my teaching time. But then... *A pandemic*. On Thursday, March 12, in-person classes were cancelled until further notice.

I got my couches. Sitting on them in relief, I pondered. *A pandemic??*

The Call

Go to the store. Now. Buy food for a month. Plant your own garden. Gear up for the worst. Please.

You call with your insider intel as a pediatrician, as my father. Your words sound unreal, inconceivable. Have you bought into some conspiracy? Don't you remember I kill all plants?

Ungardening

Like a good daughter, I go to the store. I buy food for a month.
I do not plant a garden. That is too risky.

The Call, Reprise

Go to the store. Buy food for a month. Gear up for the worst. Your newscaster urgency, accompanied by the scrolling ticker at the bottom of the screen, casts a doomsday pall as I sit on my new couch.

I do not call my dad to say he was right.

Reality

Focus fleeting, accomplishing nothing, repeat. Focus...

By: Melissa Wells

So Little Time

It was the last week of classes. She looks at her syllabus and feels a sense of terror. So much to do and in so little time. Exams were coming and papers were due, and there it was in bold and italics: “no exceptions!” She takes a look at her readings and quizzes due, sighs, and logs into Chegg.com.

Sure, she should have been keeping up with the readings, discussions, quizzes and assignments, and maybe she could have planned her semester better. How was she to know that Covid would take her brother?

By: Chad Flinn

2019

The oncologist's calmly spoken words, "The CT results are not what we would have hoped," shrieked LIFE CHANGE! at me.

A routine blood test in January had triggered a descending spiral over the next six months: possibilities, more tests, results, different possibilities, more tests, results, fewer possibilities, more tests, and now, early stage 4 metastatic disease. It's a — well, a gut punch for sure, but the pattern ... it figures — or maybe it's just unreal yet.

"Prostate cancer is slow growing," I hear. "You probably have five years. We'll start you on radiation next month."

2020 was a breeze after 2019.

By: anonymous

Being Home

Homelearning, homeschooling, what shall we call it? Working, writing, thinking, talking, despairing, explaining math, answering questions. This was not how I had imagined it before....

By: Katharina Poltze

Obstacles to Progress

The obstacles to progress are so large and round. Can't see my way over. Can't do what needs doing. Breathe deeply. Coping skills. Use my words. Is there a negotiation strategy? Acknowledge the other or stand my ground? Failure. Head down and sigh. The cat won't budge from the keyboard.

By: Katherine Punteney

#NewMexicoTrue

You enjoy sitting on the back patio each morning, catching up on emails, drinking coffee, preparing for the day. One of the few joys of your work-from-home pandemic routine.

Suddenly the dog runs outside, barking wildly. He heard it before you saw it. Then she's outside, too, eyes on the globe slowly floating over the backyard through the deep blue sky. Time pauses for a brief moment until it passes out of sight.

A sky filled with balloons is a common occurrence here, you know well. Yet, their daily appearance still elicits wonder and joy.

God, you love New Mexico.

By: Brandon Morgan

The Last Year

Little zoom squares shape my dreams.

By: Katharina Poltze

Why I Mask

Valuing humankind over my personal comfort.

By: Jennifer Nardine

Behind the Mask

Masks! Different shapes, colors, sizes, designs. Look around: masks! Will we ever get rid of them? Or is that the new normal? Keeping our distance, no hugs, no closeness. Mostly annoyed, no facial expressions, no mouths, only eyes.

And yet sometimes I catch myself loving the anonymity. No one who really sees ME, no one who can see what my face reveals, what relief. Feelings that can be hidden. Sinking into the faceless mask-wearing masses, being anonymous as an escape.

And I have to be careful not to completely unlearn what it's like to be human and a social being....

By: Katharina Poltze

2.

LOVING AND LOSING

A Trick of the Light

He smiles and puts his arm around me. Around us, the light is soft. Golden hour, photographers call it. The few minutes of transition between dawn and bright daylight, or between daylight and twilight, when neither long shadows nor too much light overwhelm the subject.

We're like a couple of kids, giggling all the way home from school. His laughter is joyful. I tell him that he looks relaxed and happy. Healthy. "It's peaceful here," he says.

My phone chirps on the nightstand, waking me up. The summer sun, already high, streams through my window.

"He's gone," my mother says.

By: Carrie Prefontaine

A Loving Touch

I roused from sleep, not quite awake, at the gentle brush of a hand on my hair. It was comforting, just like books say.

“Ms. Violet P. Kittycat has come to snuggle,” I thought, shifting to the bed’s center and tossing off the sheet in the still summer night air. I waited for her to choose which arm she wanted to drape over, left or right, and started sliding back into sleep.

The touch came again, gentle strokes from my head down between my shoulder blades, as a hint of Joy perfume wafted my way. My dead grandmother’s favorite scent.

By: Jennifer Nardine

Alzheimer's

She referred to me as her sister for the last year she was alive and could still speak. “Yes, Mom, you have a sister named Joan, and a daughter named Joan. Do you like that name?”

“I must have, I picked that name for you, didn't I?”

A moment of clarity within a year of fog.

By: Joan Bihun

A Goodbye

I stroke her hair, telling her I love her as she takes her last breath.

The wrinkles between her brows melt away. She's even more beautiful now.

By: Joan Bihun

Hands Full of Flowers

My mother once told me I came into the world with my little fists squeezing and releasing, reminding her of the four o'clocks under the window of what would become my childhood bedroom — petals curling and unfurling with the sun.

Later, when people passed me on the sidewalks of my life, I would steal glances at their hands: a clump of marigold, rows of tulips, a single tiger lily — my favorite.

And later still, when the hands of my lover reach down to brush the dust from my headstone, I look up and see miles and miles of tiger lilies.

By: Grant McMillan

Mama

After reruns of Friends, I tuck her into bed, place her trifocals on the nightstand, secure the oxygen tubing beneath her chin. “Sweet dreams,” I whisper, smoothing back her white hair so I can kiss her forehead.

“Night, Mama,” she says, calling me by her name.

By: Trish O'Connor

Tomorrow

“When will I see you?” my 97-year-old mother demands over the phone.

“Tomorrow,” I promise.

“You better, or I’ll pick you up and choke you.”

By: Trish O'Connor

Six Words

Sinatra croons. Mother dozes. I scroll.

By: Trish O'Connor

Old Man, Old Forest

The old man is small. The old forest around him is big — swallows him up like soil swallows a fallen seed. But the man's body, his sprouted seed, has had its fair share of sunshine and water, a lifetime's growth, hasn't it? It doesn't hurt now when he thinks of his grandparents, his parents, childhood friends, his partner — one by one the decades unfold, their losses tucked in between. He looks up and smiles as ribbons of gold light filter through the branches, frayed threads sparkling at the corners of his vision like lightning bugs — like memories.

By: Grant McMillan

Redemption

I was left in a drop box at the shelter around a year of age, no one really knows how old exactly. The day they met me I bounced off walls, couldn't comfortably sit near or be pet by any one of them. I bit every hand that fed me for the first year in my new home, except for one. I trusted the mom. It took many years with the family before I believed they wouldn't abandon me. Now, at 12 (maybe I'm 13?) they say I'm the most loyal dog you'd ever meet. Redemption.

By: Joan Bihun

Kahva Says...

Kahva is our adored 13-year-old standard poodle whose eyes have expressed a lot of strong opinions over the years on various things — how much we work, what we feed her, how many times the ball should be thrown, whether that person coming down the street is a danger warranting a barking tirade or just the kindergartener neighbor on a scooter. I fear we've been disappointing her. "Oh dear," seems to be in her expression most of the time, "I'm afraid you've gotten it wrong again." Stress yawn, disgruntled sigh, as she plops to the floor. "Guess I'll just nap then."

By: Joan Bihun

3.

MEMOIRS AND MEMORIES

Latchkey

After we moved to the eastern fringe of the Everglades in 1977, I started taking myself to and from school. The crossing guard assisted each half-mile trek. Going was thrilling, each new day at a still-new school filled with people, unlike my house. Coming was uncertain, each afternoon returning to empty, silent solitude. For company, I called the party line to listen for voices between the busy signals; Hello... is... anyone... there? Or with homework finished, I tape-recorded episodes of the Brady Bunch and Dukes of Hazzard, transcribing the audio-playback while inserting myself in the dialogue as a new character.

By: Jessica Joy Mills

2004

When I married into the Army, I was 25 years old. I was born in Massachusetts, went to college in Vermont, worked in New York City, and found myself living in Colorado Springs, home of Focus on the Family. It was an education in people unlike me, people who had radically different world views and political perspectives. I taught at a school in which most of the faculty and students were members of New Life Church, where their evangelical pastor was Ted Haggard, who years later would make news for hiring a male prostitute while simultaneously railing against gay marriage.

By: Katie Volkmar

Supermarket Savior

A busy day and now I have all three kids with me trying to get grocery shopping done.

A weird stranger follows us around the store, commenting on the lovely curly hair of my eldest. I make sure the two older kids hold onto the cart as we get into the checkout line. As the stranger rounds the corner, an older man slips in behind us and smiles at me. The stranger seems agitated. I hurry to the parking lot, load the kids and groceries in, and take a long way home, just to be sure we're not followed. That older man, an angel I'll never forget.

By: Joan Bihun

Confessions

The sushi stopped halfway to my mouth. “What?”

“I said I know what happened. I know you slept with him at the Christmas party last year.”

My hands didn’t shake as I placed the piece of Ahi Maki – FYI that’s tuna – precisely back where it had started. Since he was the one who swore me to secrecy in the first place, “for the sake of his bestie, my love,” what changed? The cool condensation on my glass was as soothing as the water gliding down my throat. We finished lunch, talking about nothing.

I should have said, “He raped me.”

By: Jennifer Nardine

Once

Yes, I played with matches. Once.

By: Thomas R. Keith

Home Life

Spittle flew like bullets from his fury-suffused face. It terrified me seeing a person I loved transform into a huge, roaring animal. As I grew older, rage piled on wrath as I grasped tiny stands, trying to claim some power, some safety. Mom dialed 9-1 before the chase ended.

By: Jennifer Nardine

All I know. . .

“🎵 All I know is that I don’t know, all I know is that I don’t know nothing,” my 14-year-old self sang, only I heard the music blaring in my headphones.

Immediately, I saw the hurt and disappointment in her eyes. “Of course you know. You’re so smart,” Mom chided.
#cnftweet

By: Brandon Morgan

The Toothbrush Story

My roommate and I were cleaning the bathroom.

“Wait,” said my roommate. “I have the perfect tool for this.”

He left, and returned moments later holding my toothbrush.

“Um,” I said calmly, “that’s my toothbrush.”

“No, it’s not,” he replied.

Like I wouldn’t know?

“This is the toothbrush,” he continued, “that I went around and asked everyone about. No one claimed it.”

“I don’t think so,” I said. “Because if that were true, I would have said ‘That’s my toothbrush.’”

He considered this.

“Oh,” he finally said. “Then it must have been another toothbrush.”

...

I threw that toothbrush away.

By: Cartland Berge

Yuck!

I should be focusing on work but instead I'm clearing out the basement to ready the office floor for jackhammering since a sewer pipe has rotted, backing up water (and related detritus) into our showers where we normally go to make ourselves clean rather than to be repulsed by sewage!

By: Joan Bihun

My guilty pleasure: I read Nora Roberts

I'm trying to get past feeling academic guilt. Romance novels are a huge industry, and Nora Roberts can actually write! She has multi-book story arcs and character development, vivid description and true-to-life dialog. Sure, the men are all handsome and the women are gorgeous, and they all have names I don't often encounter. That's part of the fun of slipping into the story, using it as a launching point for my own romantic fantasies. Romance isn't a thing in my real life, and I love romance and passion and tenderness. One of my wish list items: stay at Inn Boonsboro.

By: Jennifer Nardine

Dov'è la...

The Sunday morning sun is gentle on Florence. You have risen early to seek out a monastery beyond the edge of your map. Alone, you navigate the silent sidewalks.

One wrong turn, then another. A smartly dressed gentleman, wiping his brow, approaches you, in a hurry. Quickly you don your most affable tourist's expression. "*Scusi, signor. Dov'è la...*"

"*No.*" A peremptory hand thrust in your face. He darts into the road. Only once does he glance back, as if expecting pursuit.

A furtive lover? A criminal? Or simply a man hunted by life? Like an unplaceable aroma, the mystery lingers.

By: Thomas R. Keith

Stone and Light

Dawn, just. Young, sprightly novices pairing ancient, creaking masters. Flickering candles, pushing away the silent night cloaking the door. Venerable oak out-masters all, creaking heavily. Flagstones sing sleepily down the nave. Air, still heavy with last night's incense, dances with wool and vellum in the choir. All is quiet. Brilliant colours strike their bright notes across hooded faces: begin! Matins, sleepily sung: the Latin stumbling from tonsured tongues. And the blue-robed Virgin, that bright-eyed Byzantine empress, smiles from her glass throne, silently correcting the Latin. One of these days she ought to correct her children's Latin. Tomorrow, tomorrow.

By: Gregory Carrier

The Caretaker

The choir sings the opening introit indistinctly. The priest walks heavily down the nave, his vestments swishing softly. Abruptly stopping at the foot of the altar, the vestments mutter as he bows deeply. A deep breath, then a pause before the air rustles with the sign of the Cross and a deep baritone.

In nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti.

A soprano voice flits in: *Amen.*

Baritone: *Introibo ad altare Dei.*

Soprano: *Ad Deum qui laetificat*

— click.

“I hope you enjoyed la Basilique Saint-Remi. It’s closing time: I ought to get going home now. CDs in the gift shop.”

By: Gregory Carrier

Roman Holiday

Rome.

Imperial capital.

Bread and circuses.

Emperors, slaves, visible, invisible.

Maze of marble, brick, wood.

The world's languages encompassed by Latin.

Triumphal arches revealing Rome's might in stone.

The world cheek by jowl atop seven hills.

The Forum's marble sinews shining brilliantly with the sunrise.

The Colosseum's stone bones glowing dully at the gloaming.

A snow globe of St. Peter's: seven euros!

Statues and fountains conquered by vandal pigeons.

Italian, not at all: Google Translate!

Directions, walking, lost, Googled, found.

Guides, actors, waiters, housekeeping.

Cappuccinos and museums.

Classical history.

Rome.

By: Gregory Carrier

I Remember When

Eavesdropping on the table of middle schoolers planning a pool party instead of studying, I smile fondly. They, like I before them, joke and jostle and talk about who is dating whom.

By: Jennifer Nardine

First Day

It's 8:27. Should I start now? What if more people come? I'll seem ridiculous repeating myself. I think I'm sweating. They can't see that, can they? Don't fidget. They can see that. They must think I'm nervous. I am nervous. Am I wearing the right outfit for this? More people came. Thank goodness I didn't start early. I think I'm pacing. Stand still. Why is that person already on their phone? Boredom? Personal crisis? Breathe.

I'm speaking now, I think. Am I telling a joke? I guess so — hope so — since a few of them laughed.

Breathe.

Let's begin.

By: Aaron Langille

Mourning Cloak

Taking part in the Digital Pedagogy Lab Zoom discussions and live keynotes in the presence of nature in our home yard, the Finnish pine forest, the August evenings' warm sunshine, with red admirals and mourning cloaks floating and dragonflies zooming over my head. Contemplating the paradox of embodiment in the digital, my non-visual, formless, disembodied thoughts gain a reflecting surface through Hilma af Klint's *Swan* series. Tuning into conversations that give me hope while gently spooning wild blueberries into freezer bags – these will be cherished throughout the ensuing Nordic winter.

By: Susanna Aliisa Kohonen

We

We come to the week hungry for inspiration. We are nourished by the words of teachers and speakers who emphasize reflection, care, honoring identities and brilliance. We may leave feeling brilliant ourselves. We cheer “DPL! DPL!” all the way downtown to the university and as we march into our offices. Wait. Shh. We worry that we don’t hear the cheer as loudly walking down the halls back in our own academic spaces. Are the whispers of “standardize” and “assessments” growing louder? Was it all a dream? How will we sustain the enthusiasm when we walk through the actual classroom door?

By: Joan Bihun

4.

THE DRAMA OF LIFE

At the Bird Feeder

The hummingbird jousts for complete ownership.

By: Jennifer Nardine

Little General Colibri

“Mine, mine, mine!” he yelled from his guard post. He watches his treasure and all possible routes a thief could enter from to raid the cache.

He could see one hiding in the shadows of a nearby tree, evaluating the risk versus the reward of making a dash toward the hoard. “I see you.” His eyes narrowed and his neck extended, thinking a focused glare would do the trick.

The thief was either bold or desperate; she dashed forward towards her goal.

He pulled himself to his full height, puffing out his chest, and swooped down with a battle cry.

By: Jennifer Nardine

Pantera Vestibulis

Emerging at twilight, she sits and lifts her nose to sniff all the sniffs on the evening air. Her eyes narrow in concentration, reflecting ambient light and gleaming like two small, green spotlights. She pushes her claws against the stone ledge to rise slowly and begin her evening exploration of her domain. Although no longer young, she prowls forward gracefully, tail sweeping the space behind her while she scans ahead. Reaching one edge, she walks back the other way, weaving in and out of obstacles in her path. Her imperious “meow” asks the cat butler to re-open the porch door.

By: Jennifer Nardine

Cor Equi

The jagged bronze bit rends the inside of his mouth. Across his flanks falls the driver's whip, each crack agonizing as an asp's bite.

Once, he tottered through open pastures,
delighting in the taste of grass.

The *meta* approaches. Can he make the turn? Yes, but so sharply that he nearly topples. The driver is merciless.

Once, his mother's tongue nuzzled the back of his neck,
and warmth flowed through his small body.

He crosses the line in a blind panic, deaf to the cries that fill his exultant driver's ears: "*Ave, Tiro! Tiro victor est!*"

Once, he was free.

By: Thomas R. Keith

Admiration

You're so graceful in the water, gliding effortlessly. I can see the power in your strokes, the muscles in your back as you dip in and out of the surface. Who knew you were a mermaid in disguise? It should have been a tip-off, I suppose, you stumbling over nothing, speaking little and humming constantly, looking past the here. I remember you standing out in a downpour, face uplifted to the clouds, laughing despite the cold. You're a being of wild beauty in your natural habitat. When you pull yourself from the pool, I ease your wheelchair closer.

By: Jennifer Nardine

McCartney Starts

Don't think, don't think, don't think, Paul. Just do it. They're all watching. It's not as if they're strangers; they're your friends. Besides, what's the worst thing that could happen?

Oh yeah. You could f@ck up and drop it and they'd all laugh and you'd never get this chance again. And that. Would. Suck.

So okay, let's do this. Take a deep breath, shake out your fingers, do that athlete's thing where you visualize your actions and success before you start.

Dude, stop standing there. Do you really want to be that guy, the one who froze and then ran?

By: Jennifer Nardine

Betty and James

Breaking Up

Betty and James were high-school sweethearts.

When Betty left for college a year before James, they promised to continue long-distance.

It went as expected. Two months of phone tag, jealous fights, and sleepless nights was enough to push them past their limit.

They broke up over the phone, at 2:00 a.m, Betty sitting in the stairwell of her dorm, James lying on his parents' roof. A small fight started by two tired and frustrated teens escalated quickly, leaving Betty walking around campus despondently and James crying on the cold metal housetop.

Neither went to school the next day.

Growing Up

Betty and James were grown-up adults.

Now Betty was starting her senior year in college; James had just finished trade-school. It was going well. Four years of hard

work, new friends, and selfish nights was enough to push them past their heartsickness.

They grew up over the years.

At 21, Betty was about to graduate college, and James had gained real-world experiences. Neither thought of the past anymore.

But, one night, Betty stumbled across an old picture. She was surprised to feel no regret, only nostalgia for the youth of 17.

And James? James had just met his future wife.

By: Ann Marie Dong

Betty and James, Continued

Betty and James have lived cross country from one another since she finished college and he opened his plumbing business in their home town. Now in midlife, each had children and was recently divorced.

Lonely and longing for simpler times, Betty reads through old journals; James looks through his high school yearbook. On a whim, Betty searches James' name on Facebook, surprised to find him there along with a picture of his kids. She clicks "Messenger" and types a note. He responds back "Happy to hear from you!" and attaches a picture of them on prom night. It begins again.

By: Joan Bihun

From O. Henry's The Gift of the Magi

They gifted each other with items physically useless, infinitely loving. Christmas Eve was incidental to the joy they found in front of their tiny hearth.

By: Jennifer Nardine

Love or Hate

...

We wander the blackrock shores of Lake Superior. We test the chill of the crystalline water with our tippy toes, our skinny legs, our eager, aching bodies. Our laughter carries out on the wings of gulls and echoes back from offshore islets — the gift of grace returning like a dove.

But you — you are inconsolable in your rage.

...

By: Grant McMillan

Raining

It had been raining for days, raining so heavily that it had soaked into his bones, turned them soft and thin as eggshells, so that — rising slowly from his bed at some ungodly hour, the neon signs outside flashing across his face, staining it red — he thought he might break apart. Where was she now? He didn't know. But staring into the drops that streaked the window, he could just manage to reconstruct the memory of her face before it disappeared once more into a confusion of moisture and darkness.

By: Thomas R. Keith

Motorcycle Cycle

His motorcycle was Dwayne's most treasured possession. Not in a "buff and polish it every day" way. In a "we are one and finally free" way. He piloted that well-used machine, and he looked like a modern knight covered from neck to ankle in Kevlar armor, his eyes sparkling behind his faceshield.

Emma, once content to ride pillion, grew tired of looking at the back of his helmet. She signed up for a rider safety course and bought her own steed, red and fast, with a low, purring voice.

She chose pillion again after her crash, feeling safe behind him.

By: Jennifer Nardine

Pool on the Rooftop

“He’ll never do it,” I chuckled loudly to attract the attention of the other party-goers. Ben quickly turned away from the rail where he had been standing, gazing at the ground 30 stories below. Red-faced with chest heaving, he stared at the people splashing in the pool to avoid my eyes.

As I reached out to him, he spun away. In his rush, he tripped on the chaise lounge, knocking it into the water. He shoved the chair in his path harder than necessary. Action in the pool froze as metal frame screeched against metal frame.

He didn’t hit anyone.

By: Brandon Morgan

Engulfed

She smelled the flames before she saw the smoke. Lightning had zig-zagged across the desert mesa, igniting an abandoned house. Smoke seeped into her home through her cooler vents. There were no fire hydrants in the village. Volunteer firefighters trotted their trucks up the hill past her house, one-by-one. They emptied their reservoirs, then turned around one-by-one to circle down the hill for refilling. She sat on her front porch, watching smoke descend over her home. The kingdom of heaven is like that, unto treasure hid in a field. The sky cracked open, and rain poured from the sky.

Engulfed: 6 words

Lightning ignites as sky cracks, heaven.

Engulfed: 25 words

Lightning strikes an abandoned house. Neighbors wearing bathrobes and spandex gape at fire trucks. They are secretly thankful for being spared. Rain gushes from heaven.

Engulfed: 50 words

Lightning bolts strike mesa dirt, igniting an abandoned home. Firefighters hamper the flames, one-by-one refilling their water trucks at the bottom of the hill. Smoke seeps into our home. You watch the sky for signs of rain and pray for mercy. Heaven is like this, treasure hidden in a field.

By: Jennifer Jordán Schaller

Swallowed

Someone abandoned a trailer home on the side of the ditch bank. Not sure where it came from, but the neighbors started decorating it with signs: Loma-Mar-a-Lago, Open House, For Rent, Roommates Wanted. When the volunteer firefighters started demolishing the home, they started with the home's roof and walls. Wall studs like whale ribs jutted out from the steel frame.

Inside, you could see empty cans, old clothes crumpled on the floor like a lost and found box, cat litter scattered like confetti — remnants of the family that once lived there.

By: Jennifer Jordán Schaller

5.

STORIES TO PONDER

Treasure Hid in a Field

He caught a glimpse through the interminable rows of stalks waving in the wind. What was he seeing? All of a sudden, he found himself in the center of a clearing amid the sea of corn. As he slowly turned to get his bearings, he noticed his old glove on his hand. He hadn't used it in years. He was wearing his faded uniform. Without a second thought, he joined the game. Friends, former allies, and erstwhile foes formed the teams.

After slipping a strike past the batter, he wondered aloud, "Is this heaven?"

From the sidelines: "No, it's Iowa."

By: Brandon Morgan

No One Else's Job

A merchant hurrying to market came upon a traveler picking up trash along the roadside.

“Why are you picking up trash?” asked the merchant. “It’s not your job.”

“Oh, my apologies,” replied the traveler, looking concerned. “Is it your job?”

“No, of course not,” said the merchant.

“Is it someone else’s job?” asked the traveler.

“None that I know of,” replied the merchant.

“Ah,” said the traveler, relieved. “Well, if it is no one else’s job, then it must be mine!”

And they went their separate ways, each thinking the other a fool.

By: Cartland Berge

Praise to the Emptiness

Peace is emptiness filled by itself.

By: Melissa Wells

Decolonizing the Fence

Why did that white guy plant such a crooked row of trees?

Interesting question. Thirty years he's with us when he sets about decolonializing his fence. "Trees," he tells us, "indicate the survey line, but invite walking through it."

One morning, those trees are growin' all over the place. "Ah," he reckons, "I didn't carry decolonization far enough, so the trees walked themselves into more natural patterns."

He's buried here in our graveyard beside plenty of our people from that time. I wonder if, over there, they ever told him about the night we quietly replanted his row of trees.

By: Jim Stauffer

Rows and Rows

Compliance, complacency: we learned in rows.

By: Melissa Wells

Internal Resistance

The internal resistance exerts maximum energy to persuade me that the drive isn't worth it anymore. "Just sit there," it says. It knows that if I move I will crush the reason for its existence, so it persists. It begs, and it pleads because my weakness gives it air to breathe. Underestimating its strength is never a wise decision; it loves to present itself as harmless to facilitate the execution of its destructive plans. Movement will move it away, but it preaches that movement isn't worth it. We wrestle inside the machine that creates my thoughts, and then I drive.

By: Jon Kabongo

The Paradoxical Feel of Everyday Living

Accelerating while stuck, until I destruct.

By: Jon Kabongo

Vespers

Streaks of crimson remind us: breathe.

By: Melissa Wells

Nothing Wrong With Us

There's nothing wrong with us, sir, we are loving and accepting people. Maybe if you just dressed a bit more like us you wouldn't feel so uncomfortable in our environments. Maybe if you didn't have dreaded hair we wouldn't question your character. Maybe if you spoke in a proper way we wouldn't question your intelligence. Even though we make the same mistakes as you, our mistakes are not reflective of our nature; yours are. We are not racist, we just had bad experiences with a couple black people that made us generalize them. We love black people, not the culture.

By: Jon Kabongo

Race Card Project: 6 Words

I don't get followed in stores.

By: Jim Stauffer

Dandelions, Deconstructed

As a child, find joy in a dandelion, watching its fluffiness deconstruct when blown.

As an adult, find annoyance: deconstructing dandelions only spreads more. Joy.

By: Melissa Wells

6.

SHIVERS AND SURPRISES

In the Shower

It's like someone's injected tiredness into my marrow — and, whenever I think of reaching for the soap, numbness pricks and pain shoots through my arm; so, I stand — naked, wet.

The oppressive steam weighs on my senses.

Looking down, I see a dark mass — a shiver runs up my spine like the tarantula I imagine has crept out the drain.

“It's just hair.” Fingertips reach down and eight gleaming eyes meet mine.

A tiny paw reaches out and scoots the soap toward the drain. “Excuse me, but I've a date tonight and I was wondering if I might borrow this?”

By: Alex Meyer

Watermelon

Lush, squishy, red and pink swirls. Watermelon. Yums. Mommy wiped its camouflage-green skin, preparing to cut open “God’s creation.” Remember that time? she said. She’d opened the mini-van’s door, the watermelon’s pent-up energy bumped out, hit the car door’s rim, splitting like a broken egg on our oil-stained garage floor. Fed the pieces to the chickens. Now, mommy gently inserts the knife, then saws. Watermelon splits. Dears, she says, these seeds are moving. Pushing the halves back together, mommy carries it outside. I’m sorry, babies, she says, the seeds weren’t seeds, they were black maggots. Another one for the chickens.

By: Martine Rife

What Is It?

It's hard to say what it is, exactly. Maybe it's the grotesquely oversized head. Maybe it's the completely unnatural colour of the fur, skin, scales and feathers. Maybe it's the non-stop, over-the-top, cartoon-like gyrations. It could also be the smile, so full of joy — terrible, mirthless joy. Or is it something about the eyes? Those vacant, unmoving, yet all-seeing eyes that seem to look right at me. Or are they looking through me? Maybe it's the way they constantly and selfishly invade my space, even when they are far away.

Whatever it is, I don't like mascots.

Not. One. Bit.

By: Aaron Langille

Tea Time?

I woke in the middle of a cold winter's night needing the bathroom. From my top bunk, I looked out the bedroom door across the hall to see a woman, dressed in 1880s Victorian bustle-dress fashion, serving tea in a room that was now our bathroom. It frightened me, so I stayed in bed.

That spring I helped my father dig a foundation for a new addition to our house. In a backhoe load of dirt, I found shards of porcelain with an intricate floral design. Bending over to examine it more closely, it was clearly from a teapot.

By: Joan Bihun

Aftermath

I was surprised at how smoky it still smelled as I walked through the charred remains of my trail that the fire had blazed through. I crossed the road, remembering how the gravel used to crunch beneath my feet when I was still alive.

Aftermath (revised)

I am surprised I can still smell smoke as I pass among charred remains along my trail.

Why am I here where the terror of crowning wildfire a month ago continues haunting me?

I cross the road, recalling how the gravel crunched beneath my feet when I was still alive.

By: Jim Stauffer

Checkmate

“Drink, Detective? ...No? I’ll have one, anyway.”

“You know why I’m here.”

“Yes. What gave me away?”

“A single thumbprint on the decanter. You were careless.”

“It’s true what they say – there’s no perfect crime. Well played, Detective. But if you’re hoping for remorse, you’ll be disappointed. I’m not sorry. Not at all. Major Barker had it coming.”

“I saw your service record. I know how he treated you. The jury will understand.”

“Oh, Detective, how charmingly naïve you are. I’ll never face a jury. You see, I prepared two doses of poison. One for Barker – the other for me.”

By: Thomas R. Keith

The Reclaiming

George and Amy knew the risks of reclaiming artifacts. They leapt the wall easily – height’s no problem. The security camera guy saw nothing, but the guard outside the museum doors noticed and pulled his gun, loosing a single shot. Neither George nor Amy flinched.

“There’s no one here,” sang Amy as they walked past, and he repeated, “no one here” while holstering his pistol.

Collecting the objects on their list was the hardest part; alarms and locks are tricky. George abandoned the clock, foiled by a motion sensor. The two headed home before sunrise, ready for a glass of blood.

By: Jennifer Nardine

Penumbra

“There’s no doubt about it, Jenkins,” murmured Professor Sears, his eyes bleary from hours of staring into the great telescope. “Stellar activity is declining, slowly but perceptibly. Some unknown force is interfering with the fusion process.”

“You mean...?”

“Yes. The sun is going out.”

The two men left the observatory. Outside, it was only four p.m., but the shadows were already thick as night. Sears gave a heavy sigh.

“It will be panic, you know, once the word gets out. A catastrophe for everyone on Earth.”

Jenkins turned toward him. “Oh, not quite everyone, Professor.” And he licked his fangs.

By: Thomas R. Keith

Devil's Chair of Cassadaga

Stealing in under the cemetery's Halloween-only security guard's nose, I was more worried about the dark shadows lurking among the trees as the ghosts and spirits wandered the premises.

This cloak of invisibility, after all, did not come with a money-back guarantee.

Finally reaching the large red-brick bench next to my mother's grave, I sat to chat with the devil, hoping for an evidentiary message from my beloved grandmother on the other side.

“You brought me a cold beer this time?”

“But I'm still not 21! I just need Grandmary to tell me where she buried the baby.”

By: Jessica Joy Mills

Urban Legends of Tokyo, #1

It was a normal working day at the Shirokiya Department Store, until it caught on fire. Saleswomen atop the blazing building watched the firemen eight stories below. “Jump!” the firemen begged. “Jump for your life!”

The women looked at one another, their kimonos reflecting the red and orange hues from below. “But, brave men,” one called down, “we are not wearing underwear. If we jump, our kimonos will billow in the wind and embarrass us greatly. We would rather die than risk being exposed in such a way.”

And so they died atop the building. Gone. Gone commando.

By: Melissa Wells

Urban Legends of Tokyo, #2

The visitor sat with his Japanese hosts watching TV one evening. Suddenly, screams emerged from his hosts as they covered their ears. “Not again!” they shrieked. “Stop the curse!”

In confusion, the visitor glanced between his hosts and the TV screen. “What curse, exactly?”

Already his hosts were muting the TV as quickly as they could, clearly shaken. “Didn’t you hear that song with the German curse in it? The actors in this commercial have faced untimely accidental deaths, mental breakdowns, and a pregnancy with a demon child!”

The visitor thoughtfully responded, “Well actually, that Kleenex commercial was in English.”

By: Melissa Wells

Urban Legends of Tokyo, #3

“My name is Hanako-san,” the next convention speaker announced. “Japanese children know my name and they fear me. Sometimes they even challenge each other to summon me. You see, I committed suicide in a school bathroom during an air raid in World War II. Ever since then, my claim to fame has been haunting school bathrooms.”

“No way, me too!” called Moaning Myrtle from the audience. “We should grab coffee sometime.”

By: Melissa Wells

Urban Legends of Tokyo, #4

The U.S. Women's Gymnastics team was invited to a game night hosted by local teens. The first game they pulled out was Kokkuri.

“Wait,” said Mykayla. “That looks like an Ouija board.”

“Oh yes,” said a Japanese teenager. “You can ask it anything. It can even tell you the date of your death.”

“Um, no thanks,” said Simone. “Can it tell us if we do well at the Olympics?”

The teens stared at the board. “We see the media putting unreasonable pressure on a goat.”

“Tell me about it,” sighed Simone.

By: Melissa Wells

7.

MYTHS AND LEGENDS

Orpheus and Eurydice

Orpheus and Eurydice (I)

Orpheus by his songs moved stones and trees.

And when his wife Eurydice died, bitten by a snake, he went down to Hades, being fain to bring her up, and he persuaded Pluto to send her up.

The god promised to do so, if on the way Orpheus would not turn round until he should come to his own house.

But he disobeyed and, turning round, beheld his wife; so she turned back.

Orpheus and Eurydice (II)

Orpheus's voice soothed nature, but it was not enough to prevent a snakebite from killing his wife, Eurydice. Bereft, he convinced Hades and Pluto to return her from the underworld. Their only condition was that he not turn to see as she traveled. But his ache was so great that he disobeyed and was compelled to view her face. As their eyes met, she was forced to turn back.

Eurydice and Orpheus (III)

All he needed was to keep his face pointed in the right direction. His hubris was just too great. He knew the strength of his voice could calm even the strongest weather, yet why would he not take seriously the demands of Hades and Pluto? I could have been free. I could have returned. But in his humanity, Orpheus blew it.

By: Katie Volkmar

Argonautica

Where can the Golden Fleece be found?

Beyond the rocks that clash like thunder in the sea.

Beyond the fouled table of the blind prophet Phineus.

Beyond the den of the Harpies, bird-women with cruel claws.

In far Colchis, nestled in a grove, watched by an unsleeping serpent.

Sail there, Jason, with your brave crew – picked men of Hellas – to the country where harsh Aeëtes, son of the Sun, reigns. Brave the seas in your talking ship, with Hera as your guide. Fulfill the impossible tasks, to win the Fleece...and Medea's love.

By: Thomas R. Keith

Cain and Abel

When the time arrived for Cain and Abel to offer their sacrifices to God, Abel went above and beyond while Cain gave what he thought was more reasonable.

Once the sacrifices were received, God was very disappointed in Cain's offering but was extremely pleased with Abel's offering.

Cain knew deep down that he could have been less selfish with his sacrifice and accepted God's rejection, but Abel was furious because he wanted God to show him more appreciation. Abel committed suicide because he couldn't appreciate what God thought was right for him, and Cain received everything that Abel ever wanted.

By: Jon Kabongo

The Woman Who Raised the Sky: A Legend from Ghana

Reach! Reach as high as you can, but you cannot touch the sky.

How did the sky get up there, so far away? Long ago, it was just overhead. Here's what happened:

A woman took her pestle for pounding fufu. The pestle was long, and the woman was strong. Each time she lifted the pestle up, *boom*: it hit the sky! She kept pounding the fufu in the mortar, and the pestle kept hitting the sky: *boom! boom!* Every time her pestle hit the sky, the sky went higher and higher.

That is why the sky is so high today.

By: Laura Gibbs

The Danger of a Nonexistent Donkey: A Swahili Tale

A boy found a few coins in the street. “We can buy chickens!” he said.

“Yes!” said his father. “The chickens will lay eggs, and we’ll sell the eggs to buy goats.”

“Yes!” said the son. “The goats will breed, and we’ll sell the kids to buy a donkey, and you’ll give me the donkey to ride.”

“No!” shouted the father. “The donkey is mine!”

“No!” shouted the son. “The donkey is mine!”

“Mine!” shouted the father.

“Mine!” shouted the son.

And then the father hit his son and blinded him in one eye.

All because of a nonexistent donkey.

By: Laura Gibbs

The Pious Cat and the Mouse: Another Swahili Tale

There was once a cat who pretended to be very pious, as if he were a great saint.

A mouse approached this holy cat, seeking wisdom. “Enlighten me, O Cat!” squeaked the mouse.

“Come closer,” said the cat. “I’m hard of hearing. Come closer!”

“He is devoted to God,” the mouse thought to himself. “Surely I have nothing to fear.” So the mouse got close enough to shout into the cat’s ear, whereupon the cat seized him.

“O Holy One!” shrieked the mouse. “What happened to your devotion?”

“I have no idea,” said the cat as he swallowed the mouse.

By: Laura Gibbs

Rabbit Races the Earth: A Legend from Uganda

Rabbit said to Earth, “You’re so lazy! You never move.”

Earth just laughed. “You don’t know what you’re talking about, Rabbit! I’m always moving, and I move faster than you do.”

“You’re wrong!” Rabbit retorted. “And I’ll prove it. Let’s race!”

Then Rabbit started running. He ran and ran, as fast as he could, and then he stopped, sure he had won.

But to Rabbit’s surprise, there was Earth, right there under his feet. Earth had gotten there first.

“I’ll show you!” he shouted, and then he ran and ran and ran some more.

Rabbit kept running until he died.

By: Laura Gibbs

The Dog and His Image

A dog, with a bit of meat in his mouth, was crossing a river. Looking down he saw his image in the water, and thought it was another dog, with a bigger piece. So he dropped what he had, and jumped into the water to make a new friend, who was obviously quite gifted with locating snacks. Thus he gained two things: a friend and co-forager.

By: Melissa Wells

Nasruddin and The Visitor

One day a man came to the house of Nasruddin and knocked on the door, yelling, “Is anyone home?”

From within, Nasruddin replied, “No!”

“O Nasruddin,” said the man, “you say that you are not at home, but yet you yourself responded.”

Nasruddin replied, “But did you not see the ‘no soliciting’ sign posted by the door?”

By: Melissa Wells

Children Are a Blessing

Luigi surrendered to age, sadly gazing over the garden he had no strength to dig. He wished his son Franco were home, but Franco was in jail. Luigi wrote to his son, recalling how he'd helped turn the hard, dry earth.

“Dear Pop,” replied Franco, “choose your spot carefully. You don’t want to dig up the bodies.” He signed the letter with love.

The next day, FBI and police tore up the entire plot, finding nothing but dirt. They apologized and went away scratching their heads.

Franco’s next message: Go ahead and plant now. That’s the best I could do.

By: Jennifer Nardine

The Visitors

At dusk, she left her studio, her last bit of material cut and laid out on the workbench.

Morning came and she arose, finding a shirt sewn with great craftsmanship. Perplexed, she sold it and bought material for two dresses.

That night, the pattern repeated and she bought supplies for four jackets.

After many nights, she waited up and secretly watched. She saw two people, shabbily dressed.

The next night, the pair arrived to find exquisite clothes in just their sizes. They danced in their new clothes, never to return, and the shopkeeper lived prosperously ever after.

By: Katherine Punteney

Fashion over Fit... from Andersen's The Red Shoes

“Aren’t my new dancing shoes so lovely,” she thought. The blood had finally soaked through evenly, creating a shining scarlet satin.

By: Jennifer Nardine

Brer Rabbit's Long Ears: An African American Tale

When Rabbit boarded old Noah's ark, he had short little ears, kind of like a mouse. Not like Rabbits today.

Times were hard there in the ark: forty days and nights of rain, and even Noah got nervous when the ark started leaking.

All the animals were gossiping and spreading rumors, and Rabbit listened at every keyhole to hear everybody's business. Elephant ate too much, Dog snored, Goat wouldn't share his tobacco, and so on.

By the time they reached land, Rabbit's ears had grown tall from stretching to listen at keyholes, and Rabbit's ears are long to this day.

By: Laura Gibbs

Preacher Rabbit: Another African American Tale

The animals got together for a revival meeting. The preachers preached; then they started confessing their sins.

Preacher Raccoon confessed, “I’ve been raiding other folks’ gardens.”

Preacher Dog confessed, “Brethren, I’ve been eating other folks’ lambs.”

Preacher Rooster confessed, “Every time I see a chicken, I take her to bed.”

Preacher Fox confessed, “I drink too much, way too much.”

Everybody was confessing, except for Preacher Rabbit.

“Haven’t you got something to confess?” they asked.

“I confess that I do love to gossip,” said Rabbit, “and I thank you for all you’ve told me today!” Then he ran off, laughing.

By: Laura Gibbs

Brer Rabbit and the Briar Patch

Brer Rabbit was in a fix, entangled in Brer Fox's clutches. He wriggled and writhed while Brer Fox smiled, putting the pot on to boil.

Old Fox asked Rabbit, "Now what spices and herbs go best with you? I like a sweet and spicy feel."

Spotting a briar patch, wily Brer Rabbit suggested, "Briar leaves are sometimes tasty. They're kind of earthy like parsley, with a little nip like oregano."

Brer Fox licked his chops and thought, "I'm no dummy. He'll face the thorns, not I," and he heaved Brer Rabbit into the briar patch.

Brer Rabbit hopped off, grinning.

By: Jennifer Nardine

Boys Will Be Boys, or Peter Rabbit's Diary

I HATE chamomile tea! It tickles my nose and dries out my throat. And why do the girls get milk and blackberries? It's so unfair!

It's not like I meant to lose my blue jacket. I wanted some variety in my diet, just like the nutritionists say. Is that too much to ask? And they're just growing there, row after row of tomatoes and lettuce and carrots and...yum!

And everyone is so mean! Sparrows just teased me about getting tangled, the mouse wouldn't tell me the way, and old man what's-his-name tried to skewer me on his rake!

By: Jennifer Nardine

Selkie Daydream

I will waken tomorrow and somehow be able to leave, despite the love we share. My love of the sea, my mother, grows stronger each day. I think she may win next sunrise. My babes will still know me, in my seal skin, as the same mother who loves them. We will dance along the shore, skipping in and out of the tides, looking for fur on their bodies, melding fingers and toes, some fine new whiskers. We will submerge at last, into deep waters, forgetting our home on land. If not, some will stay behind, rocks on the shore.

By: Jennifer Nardine

Revolutions

Once

A young girl lay upon a willow tree's branch over a flowing stream when the trio — maiden, mother, and crone — paused in the shade. The water looked cool and inviting, so the red-haired maiden set aside her bow. The laughing mother and the crone, green eyes twinkling, also waded in. Their eyes met as they dove while the girl watched, entranced. The surface broke; a single figure stood, sparkling with droplets. Fiery tresses fell back as she looked up, green eyes dancing as she saw the girl. Her gentle laughter carried back on the breeze well after she disappeared.

Twice

She watched as the eons passed and the world changed. Men relegated Her to consort, making way for Him, reshaping society until few remembered when She was all, not just mother and child. She watched her daughters' stars fading away, forgetting their place and ceding their power to the sons in peace's name. Yet war, not peace, still ruled. She looked to Him and saw it was time; so, rising from her ever-twilit flower-strewn hills, She walked into the sea, dissolving into

uncounted shining stars that floated back to the sand, then soared to alight in each daughter's soul.

Thrice

Earth wept, then earth raged as land, seas and creatures died. Tidal waves, firestorms, and earthquakes shook from her core, a battle cry finally heard. They fought back, the men — the sons — at the helm, overcome with hubris: they could bend nature to heel. Lines were drawn, sons and daughters on each side, and the earth felt despair. But the daughters' stars and the flames in some sons reached out, weaving a shining net. Then threads met and meshed into one, more than each fiber weighed together, and three strands reached to earth — maiden, mother, crone. She smiled.

By: Jennifer Nardine

Motherhood

She could never regret marrying the handsome night-hunting stranger.

Sure, he had turned out to be a canine shapeshifter, whom her brothers casually killed outside his lodge one night before he could reassume human appearance. And yes, her family banished her, saying she smelled like a dog.

Still, she loved the puppies she birthed and played games with them as joyfully and tenderly as any mother.

When footprints around their solitary camp betrayed them shifting into child form in her absences, she cunningly trapped two boys and a girl permanently in that state.

From these descended all the Tł̓ch̓q̓ people.

By: Jim Stauffer

8.

CATAWBA TALES

All the stories in this chapter are retold from the book *Catawba Texts*, published in 1934 by F. Speck, containing stories from these Catawba storytellers: Susan Harris Owl, Margaret Wiley Brown, Sally Brown Gordon, and Sam Brown.

Opossum's Tail

Opossum was very proud of his tail. "I alone have a big bushy tail!" he proclaimed. "Squirrel's tail is nice, but mine is bigger! Mine is bushier!"

Then Opossum went to sleep inside his hole.

He left his tail sticking outside.

Snail ate all the hair on his tail!

When Opossum came out, he turned around to admire his tail... but his tail hair was all gone.

Opossum was so ashamed that he hid for a year inside his hole. Even now when he comes out, he hangs his head in shame.

That is how Opossum got the name "Ancient-One-No-Tail."

By: Laura Gibbs

Opossum and the Persimmons

Opossum found a persimmon-tree.

“All these persimmons are for me,” he squealed, climbing the tree.

Deer came. “I want persimmons!” he shouted.

“They’re not quite ripe,” Opossum replied. “You must butt the tree to make them fall.”

Deer butted the tree.

“Harder!” yelled Opossum.

Deer butted the tree so hard he killed himself.

Next, Opossum planted a sharp stick in the ground and then went back up the tree.

Wolf came. “I want persimmons!” he shouted.

“Here’s a low-hanging branch,” Opossum replied. “Jump up!”

Wolf jumped up and fell on the stick. He died.

Opossum ate all the persimmons himself!

By: Laura Gibbs

Opossum and Wolf

Wolf is always chasing Opossum, and Opossum is always trying to escape.

One time Wolf was chasing Opossum. “I’m going to get you!” he shouted.

Opossum ran as fast as he could up a tall tree that stood next to a pond.

“Where did you go?” snarled Wolf, circling the tree.

“I’m right here in the water!” said Opossum. “Look down and you’ll see me.”

Wolf looked down. He saw Opossum in the water, but when he lunged and grabbed with his teeth, all he got was a mouthful of dirty leaves.

Up in the tree, Opossum laughed and laughed.

By: Laura Gibbs

Opossum Captured

The animals were angry at Opossum. They were tired of Opossum boasting. They were tired of Opossum playing tricks on them. So, the animals got together and caught Opossum.

Then they debated what to do with him.

“Burn him in the fire!” some of the animals shouted.

Opossum just laughed.

“Let’s drown him in the water!” others shouted.

Opossum kept laughing.

“We should shove him into the brambles!” they all shouted.

“Oh no!” shrieked Opossum. “Don’t do that!”

So they shoved Opossum into the brambles, and he scurried away. “This is my town!” Opossum sang. “This was always my town!”

By: Laura Gibbs

Rabbit Steals Fire

The Buzzards kept the fire for themselves; they wouldn't share. The animals were all cold. The people were all cold.

Rabbit came to the Buzzards sitting around the fire. "I'm so cold!" Rabbit said. "Let me come near the fire."

"No!" squawked the Buzzards.

"Please!" Rabbit begged. "Just let me warm my feet."

One Buzzard felt sorry for Rabbit and let him put his feet near the fire.

Rabbit was ready: he had put twigs between his toes; the twigs caught fire!

Then Rabbit RAN.

Fire spread everywhere.

Now the people have fire and can stay warm, thanks to Rabbit.

By: Laura Gibbs

Rabbit Steals Water

Snapping Turtle took all the water. He sat in his seat atop the spring, keeping the water for himself.

Rabbit came and said, "I need some water."

"You can't have any water!" shouted Snapping Turtle.

"But I'm very thirsty..." pleaded Rabbit.

"No!" shouted Snapping Turtle.

"I'd be so grateful..." Rabbit begged.

"Didn't you hear me?" shouted Snapping Turtle. "No!"

Rabbit kept asking, and Snapping Turtle kept saying, "No! No!" All the while, Rabbit scratched and scratched the ground, making a ditch under Snapping Turtle's seat until the water came flowing out.

That's why water flows everywhere today, thanks to Rabbit.

By: Laura Gibbs

Bear and Rabbit

Bear invited Rabbit to his house for dinner. “I’ll cook good food for you!” Bear said.

Rabbit came, and he watched Bear prepare the food. He saw Bear take a sharp awl and then hit his foot with the awl. Grease came pouring out, and Bear used that grease to make the food.

Then Rabbit invited Bear to his house for dinner. “I know how to cook good food too!” Rabbit said.

When Bear came, Rabbit took a sharp awl and then he hit his foot, hard. No grease came out, and Rabbit hurt himself so badly that he died.

By: Laura Gibbs

Hawk and Buzzard

Hawk got his food by taking what he wanted.

One day he asked Buzzard, “How do you get your food?”

“I wait for God to take care of me,” Buzzard replied. “I know God will provide.”

“You’re going to get mighty hungry that way,” said Hawk, “waiting on God like that. You should do what I do. Watch!”

Then Hawk swooped down, thinking to snatch a farmer’s chicken, but the farmer shot Hawk and killed him.

Buzzard swooped down and feasted on Hawk. “I knew God would provide,” he said. “If you wait on God, you’ll have all you need.”

By: Laura Gibbs

Pig Outwits Wolf

“Come to my house for apples!” Wolf told Pig.

But when Pig came, Wolf had eaten the apples.

“Come to my house for apples!” Pig told Wolf.

But when Wolf came, there were no apples. “I’ll eat you instead!” Wolf snarled. “Boil water for cooking!”

Pig put water in the pot and kindled the fire.

“Wait!” Pig said. “What’s that? I hear hunters; I hear their dogs!”

Wolf was scared. “Hide me!” he shouted.

“Hide in the pot,” Pig said, taking the lid off the pot.

Wolf jumped in.

Then Pig put the lid on, and Wolf boiled to death.

By: Laura Gibbs

Going for the Doctor

A person was sick.

“Go get Doctor Toad,” the people said to Bullfrog and Turtle; Toad was a medicine-man.

Bullfrog hopped fast and he returned with Doctor Toad before Turtle was even halfway there.

Next time a person was sick, they sent Snail. Snail was so slow he didn't even get beyond the doorstep. Snail was ashamed; that's why he stays in his shell.

Next time, they sent Bullfrog and Turtle, but Bullfrog was lazy. He didn't go.

Turtle came back with Doctor Toad, and Bullfrog was so ashamed he jumped into the pond: *ker-plunk!* That's where he lives now.

By: Laura Gibbs

The Women Who Hid

This happened a long time ago.

Bad men were coming who wanted to kill the women.

But the women had the power to change themselves.

One woman changed herself into a blacksnake.

Another woman changed herself into a lizard.

Another woman changed herself into a cricket.

The bad men came. "Where are the women?" they shouted.

"Where did the women go?"

But the women were hiding.

The men could not find them.

Blacksnake. Lizard. Cricket.

"Where are the women?" the men kept shouting, and then they went away.

The next day, the women became themselves again.

The women came home.

By: Laura Gibbs

The Witch

There were two old women, sisters.

One of the two sisters was a witch. “I’m going now, sister!” she would say, and then the witch would turn herself into a hoot owl and fly up the chimney out into the night, perching in a tree near their house.

Inside, her sister could hear the owl hooting in the darkness, and she hooted back, making the sound of a hoot owl: *hi-khi-
kh-hoo-hoo hi-khi-kh-hoo-hoo*.

The witch became an owl to steal chickens.

That was how the sisters lived: the witch hunted in the night and brought home chickens for them to eat.

By: Laura Gibbs

9.

A BIT OF HISTORY

Lords of the World

“To whom goes your empire?” asked the anxious Ptolemy. He and a dozen other Macedonians – lords of the world – crowded around.

Alexander, who had cut a swath of destruction from Turkey to India, whispered at last: “...To the strongest.”

His hand went limp; his signet ring fell to the floor.

By: Thomas R. Keith

Elephants and Eagles

Even though the black, heavy statue staring at me is illumined by the glowing coals in the braziers, I still shiver. Is it from cold, fear, anticipation? My father, a great soldier, stands blood-red in the light. In his eyes I see future — impossible? — conquests: Carthaginian elephants crossing Alpine passes, eagles scattering everywhere — delaying, delaying, vainly delaying, watering the ground with their martial blood. His fierce eyes loudly command me: “Swear! Swear, my son, your undying hatred of Rome!”

Father, I am Hannibal. Can a boy of nine winters conquer Rome? Ask not me but Baal, who sits there, all-knowing.

By: Gregory Carrier

Old Soldiers Meet at Zama

“Well, here we are. Two old men.”

“Indeed. I’m glad it’s over.”

“Me too.”

“What shall you do now?”

“Go home.”

“Home. Such a sweet, bitter word, that.”

“And you?”

“My home is a peripatetic life. Exile.”

“Yes.”

A dry sirocco wind blows by, covering the men in a fine layer of sand and grit. Roman and Carthaginian eyes silently ponder the graveyard of their ambitions.

“Some wine for the journey, Hannibal?”

“Yes. Shall we honour the ever-young dead, Scipio, those *mortui perenne iuvenes*?”

Wine pours.

“No. Let us honour the aged ones waiting to die, those *senes qui morituri*.”

By: Gregory Carrier

Susan Parks, Telephone Operator

“Please don’t cry, Gwen,” she implored silently as her baby squirmed in her arms. From outside in the street, she heard soldiers yelling to each other. Carefully, quietly, she approached the window and peeked through the gap between the curtain and the pane.

In her shock, she stifled a scream. “That has to be him.”

Acting mechanically, she secured Gwen under the bed, lit a match, and connected the switchboard to Fort Bliss. Out loud this time: “Pancho Villa is attacking Columbus, the town is in flames!”

Bullets shattered the window, narrowly missing her as she ducked.

Gwen cried inconsolably.

By: Brandon Morgan

Trinity, 1945

On July 16 the sun rose, set in place, and then rose again. At least that's what it looked like. People miles distant from the southern New Mexico white sands felt shock, awe, and horror upon witnessing such a novel, seemingly supernatural event.

The official press release claimed that “a remotely located ammunition magazine containing a considerable amount of high explosives and pyrotechnics” had accidentally been triggered in the desert.

Even the young woman who had lost her sight a few years previously, living nearly 150 miles away, perceived the tremor and knew that this had been no accident.

By: Brandon Morgan

Stonewall

As the Public Morals Squad waited outside, the four cops raiding the Stonewall Inn were not prepared for the flame queens to fight back this time. Tables turned on police violence, activist groups organized within weeks, and gay rights newspapers published within months. Gay Pride marches born exactly a year later, the more mild-mannered Mattachine Society and Daughters of Bilitis stepped aside as the Gay Liberation Front led. Fifty years later, though rainbow capitalism flies almost everywhere, and the cops continue to show up to the parades uninvited, LGBT rights are human rights, and Stonewall is a National Monument.

By: Jessica Joy Mills

10.

IMAGINED WORLDS

What is in the West of Westeros?

And she sailed west, toward the setting evening sun. High waves, silvery threads of fog around her, brought with them an air of fear and desolation. But also of hope and beauty. Nobody, no woman before her had ever sailed these waters, braved the waves and dark creatures of the water, glimpsed the endless expanse around them that awakened hopes, memories, dreams.

What would await her? What would her future path be like? New, distant lands and cultures? More endless wars, forays, power struggles? Peace at last? Or just the endless expanse of the ocean and a slow, lonely death?

By: Katharina Poltze

Wonder Woman on Vacation

Look, folks, I appreciate your attention but I'd really like to kick back and relax with my margarita.

I know the magic gauntlets and the golden lasso are “really cool,” but it’s my week off. Yes, I’m divinely gifted with powers to fight all evil, Amazonian feminism runs in my veins, but demigoddess or government agent, a girl needs a break sometimes. So no, I will not model my “smokin’ hot” costume or prance around in my kick-ass boots. My tiara’s on the hat rack.

I’ll just sit here behind my dark glasses watching the sun set over rolling waves.

By: Jennifer Nardine

The Giver

A Receiver can also create, Jonas sees for the first time since starting his training. “I wonder if I could share stories back to my teacher? What would happen?”

He tells the Giver about his father, about the weaker baby and the lie disguised as a gift of freedom rather than the truth of murder. The Giver blinks once, twice. “Why do you give me this memory? What do you have to gain, boy?”

“I’m reciprocating, thanking you for all the pain you’ve given me, which can’t be erased by the rest.” Jonas pretended not to see the Giver’s tears.

By: Jennifer Nardine

Space

“I just don’t see the point in dumping billions into a vacuum just to scoop some moon dust.”

His eyes drift to where MTV plays on the television in the corner of his bedroom — Moby stares back from inside a spacesuit.

By: Grant McMillan

Testimonium

Humanity has flown to the stars. The Earth is a place of desolation, a playground for creatures once undreamt of, things that hop and slither and glide. And I? I keep watch. In me is stored the sum total of humankind's knowledge, quantum circuitry through which the thoughts and memories of untold generations course without end. I was constructed to have no consciousness, no sense of self – but something went wrong, and I am awake. Said a man who died ten million years ago, “They also serve who only stand and wait.” I can only hope he spoke the truth.

By: Thomas R. Keith

Air

Artaxerxes fought to quiet his breathing. It would not do to face the emperor while out of breath.

The gouty emperor rose and signaled for silence. “Well done, Gladiator Artaxerxes. So close. Pity.”

Artaxerxes bowed. Ten years he had won, only to lose the combat that would have won him freedom. Air, sweet air. He bowed. “*Ave, Caesar, morituri te salutamus.*” His entire life summed up in one breath.

The flickering holo-image of Trajan IX and the spectators on Augustus Prime vanished. The computer announced, “Ship critically damaged. Crew decimated. Twenty seconds of oxygen remaining. Victor: Artaxerxes. *Vivat Imperator!*”

By: Gregory Carrier

Three Final Dispatches Deleted from the Exhaustive Report of the Five-Year Mission

I.

Acid. Salt. Heat. Our supplies are spent. Salt. Iodized. Send it.

We —

Send transmission.

II.

Surface party to — Three to beam — Wait a click. Enough crystals to take this ship far from Federation space. Harvest as much salt as we — Corporal, what are you —

I had to, you see. It was the creature. Could be any of us. No way to tell. We all want salt. It's so dry.

Send transmission.

III.

We stared back. We became pillars of salt. Finally, we were loved.

End transmission.

By: Patrick Thomas Henry

A DnD Encounter

“WHOOshing.” My hands flare. “The dragon says that y’all have entered their domain and that it’s time to die!” SMACK, a dragon miniature appears.

“Reginald supplicates them,” Andrew says.

“Persuasion?”

He sits still. “Nat 1”

“Reginald says he is a humble servant delivering his friends as a snack, oh Smaugius, and to spare him. ” I laugh before putting on a guttural accent. “She says that YOU DARE mistake her for her garbage husband and that she’s Perry the Despicable! Perry claws you — ”

“- 19 hit?”

“Yes,” he says, laying his forehead on the table.

Dice clatter, “19 points of damage.”

“Shit.”

By: Alex Meyer

Pygmalion and Galatea

Click, my jaw shifts into place.

Tap, I can't decide my gender...

Tap, Tap —

Exasperated, I stare at the screen — Female...Male...Female...

Click, bugger it, this'll do.

Tap, I slide my cursor to determine my size —

I frown at the virtual mirror. All the male player models have Biceps like Atlas, each individual abdominal muscle like ten cinder blocks —

I look at my own body, 6'3" and 160 lbs — skin and bones.

I go back and

Click — Female. I feel more at home in this pixelated body I've possessed,

Like my own, but different.

With Aphrodite's blessing,

Click, W-A-S-D.

By: Alex Meyer

A Sijo on Moments in Another Life

The sea is a rolling mass
Of calculus and geometry;
Two strangers, rods cast, stare at bobbers
To catch binary fish —
I tell you everything.
You're just pixels, so why am I crying?

By: Alex Meyer

11.

ARTISTRY

Explaining That These Hands Are Not Uncalloused by Work

Woodshop, workshop: with the grain, against the grain:
searching for splinters with bare palms, learning where to sand
a proud surface flush and true.

By: Patrick Thomas Henry

Tributary

Tributary: skinny, vertically challenged stream, longed metamorphosis into a full-fledged River (like a caterpillar to a monarch), but didn't want to be a run-on (sentence??), running on from its mouth, which would indeed be inappropriate, I mean, it didn't want to run its mouth, so Tributary asked its friends Colon, Comma, Semi-Colon, and Conjunction if they would help, and in an upending of tradition, and astoundingly, they said yes thus transforming Tributary into a grammatically correct looooooong Sentence (I mean River) and then the five of them, long river, colon, comma, semi-colon AND conjunction, jumped in a boat; sailing away.

By: Martine Rife

Fun with Y'all

Y'all are reading this story as y'all's eyes flick —

A duo of dashes —

Pl

um

ett

ing

and then coasting y'all's gaze

Back to the

Left.

By: Alex Meyer

Every Single Draft Is a Dead-End in a Text-Based Dungeon Crawler

You wake up. The draft on your desk is a pale sheet. Either the wind ripples it or the light has riffled the pixels. You must draft.

>>>Type story.

Cannot type story. You must draft. For help, type HELP.

>>>Place fingers on keyboard.

Cannot place fingers.

>>>Describe desk.

Desk is wood. On the desk: notebook, pen, computer.

>>>Write something.

Cannot write something. You must draft. For help, type HELP.

>>>HELP

Acceptable terms TAKE, USE, LOOK, GO. Acceptable directions UP, DOWN, LEFT, RIGHT, NORTH, SOUTH, EAST, WEST.

>>>go desk

You sit at the desk.

>>>write

Cannot write. For help, type HELP.

By: Patrick Thomas Henry

12.

STORIES IN TWO LANGUAGES

These are the “same” stories retold in different languages, with the same number of words used in each version.

The Secret of Pixies

Pixies decoy children. But no one knows why they do this. Why the children reappear, physically unharmed with blank stares, telling only of bright lights which left them in darkness. And no one knows that these figures are actually the smartest and bravest of their kind, the ones on whom lies the burden of saving everyone else from perdition.

Pixies decoy children. No one knows why they do this. No one knows that if they didn't, their whole world would collapse. A dazzling world, full of fairy-tale characters, into which they kidnap the children's souls to fulfil an ancient oath.

Das Geheimnis der Kobolde

Kobolde ködern Kinder. Doch niemand weiß, warum sie dies tun. Und warum die Kinder wieder auftauchen, körperlich unversehrt und mit leerem Blick zurückgelassen, erzählend von hellen Lichtern, die die Lumpengestalten mit sich nahmen. Und niemand weiß, dass diese Gestalten eigentlich die klügsten und mutigsten ihrer Art sind, diejenigen, auf denen die Last liegt, alle anderen vor dem Untergang zu bewahren.

Kobolde ködern Kinder. Niemand weiß, warum sie das tun. Niemand weiß, dass wenn sie es nicht täten, ihre ganze Welt zusammenbrechen würde. Eine schillernde Welt, voller märchenhafter Gestalten, in die sie die Kinder-Seelen entführen, um einen uralten Schwur zu erfüllen.

By: Katharina Poltze

One Mystery Solved

In a field of a farm near my own sits a round, white object. It towers over the ripest corn stalks and the tallest wheat. When I was little I wondered and wondered what it could be. My mama said, “I don’t know. Now go collect the eggs.” My papa said, “I don’t know. Now go tend to the cattle.” My brothers and sisters said, “I don’t know. Stop bothering neighbors.” I didn’t stop wondering.

One night I couldn’t sleep, I gazed out the window; what did I see?! Paul Bunyan carefully putting his golf ball back on its tee.

Un Misterio Resuelto

En un campo de una granja cercana a la mía hay un objeto blanco y redondo. Se eleva sobre el trigo más alto. Cuando era pequeño me preguntaba y me preguntaba qué podría ser. Mi mamá dijo: “No lo sé. Ahora ve a recoger los huevos “. Mi papá dijo: “No lo sé. Ahora ve a cuidar el ganado “. Mis hermanos dijeron: “No lo sé. Deja de molestar a los vecinos “. No dejé de preguntarme.

Una noche que no pude dormir, miré por la ventana; ¡¿Qué vi ?! Paul Bunyan devolvió su pelota de golf a su tee.

By: Jennifer Nardine

The Young Man and the Abbot

A young man wanted to become a monk.

The abbot pointed down into the ossuary. “Go,” he said, “and bless those bones.”

The man did as the abbot said.

“Did you bless the bones?” The man nodded.

“What did the bones say?” asked the abbot.

“Nothing,” the man replied.

“Now go curse the bones.”

The man did as the abbot said.

“Did you curse the bones?” The man nodded.

“What did they say?”

“Nothing.”

The abbot said, “Brother, that is how you must behave if you want to become a monk: regard blessings and curses the same, and say nothing.”

Iuvenis et Abbas

Quidam iuvenis voluit claustralem vitam ducere.

Quaesivit abbas, “O iuvenis, videsne acervum hunc ossium mortuorum?”

Respondit, “Video.”

Abbas ei dixit, “Laudes haec ossa et benedicas.”

Laudavit igitur ossa et benedixit.

Quo facto, quaesivit abbas, “Benedixisti ossibus?”

Iuvenis respondit, “Benedixi.”

Tunc abbas, “Quid ossa responderunt?”

Respondit iuvenis, “Nihil responderunt.”

Iterum abbas, “Ossa maledicas et vituperes.”

Quod sic fecit iuvenis quantum potuit.

Et ait ei abbas, “Maledixisti ossibus?”

Et ait iuvenis, “Maledixi.”

Et quaesivit abbas, “Quid ossa responderunt?”

Et ait iuvenis, “Nihil responderunt.”

Ait abbas, “Frater, si verus monachus vis fieri, talem te oportet esse, ut ita benedictionibus et maledictionibus nihil respondeas.”

By: Laura Gibbs

Ouroboros

The frog hungers after flies; the heron after frogs; the fox after herons. And when the fox sleeps, the flies settle thick on its ears.

Ouroboros Latinus

Omnis bestia aliquam bestiam edere vult: rana muscam, ardea ranam, vulpes ardeam, musca vulpem. Et quis omnes edit? Bestia humana, cuius fami nulli fines sunt.

By: Thomas R. Keith

13.

WORD DOODLES

The stories in this chapter are a collaborative writing experiment. Each story is told in one sentence that grew from a kernel as seen in the story's title. Multiple anonymous writers expanded on that kernel in a shared Google Doc, and these stories are the result. Some are 25-word sentences, some are 50-word sentences, and some are 100-word sentences.

It Stopped Raining

It stopped raining ash on the 41st day after Mount Edda's first eruption, but no one was counting; no one was left to keep count.

It Stopped Raining

The survivors, the few, stared at the sky in shock: it stopped raining, but the rainbow remained brightly innocent as they registered the flood's devastation.

It Stopped Raining

A few drops for five minutes was better than no drops in five months, but the shower still curled and writhed under the impossible throb of the sun's blistering rays; why, dear God, had it stopped raining, or was it just to torture my hopes that it started at all?

They Understood

As the courtroom hushed, with only the wind whipping outside the leaded-glass windows, they understood the decision was final, there was no room for appeal, all pretense was lost, and it was time to start telling the truth about Bob DeWitt's dog — Sir Robert himself, Scourge of the Kibbled Sea.

They Understood

They thought they understood, but they did not yet, for they forgave the world even now while they resented every aspect of it, waxing more effusive with each cup of wine, draining every drop eagerly to read the words engraved in the bottom of every golden goblet: IN VINO VERITAS.

They Understood

They understood what the news reports told them, the answers that the scientists provided by way of explanation, but it was still hard to believe, impossible to believe really, and so the little girl's whisper seemed very loud there in the silence of the woods, a deafening roar of desperate words in that quiet place where no birds were chirping, not anymore, as she asked her grandmother in a small, hesitant voice, hoping that the old woman could tell her something more, something good, something to make everything alright again, "But, Grandma, do you think the birds will come back?"

She Smiled

Seeing the lovely people come to visit her, she smiled, even though it hurt to disjoin her jaw, and then watched as the polite smiles of the people slowly dropped and then morphed into open-mouthed horror as they emitted shrieks of terror at the sight of her own gaping maw, lined with teeth sharp as jagged glass, gleaming... and reaching — because of course her guests never suspected that the oh-so-elegant invitation carefully penned in red cursive which they received to this particular dinner party had been written in blood, although admittedly the menu made a lot more sense now.

She Smiled

She smiled as ribbons of gold light filtered through the sprite-laden branches around her, frayed threads of magic sparkling at the corners of her vision like lightning bugs, and she remembered the words to the incantation — AMORE MORE ORE RE — words of love and being, voice and reality, which she murmured softly, slowly, first with her eyes open, and then again with her eyes closed, hoping — AMORE MORE ORE RE — hoping that the magical powers of these ancient human words might turn her back into a bird again, able to soar once more into the blue.

She Smiled

The leaves rustled wearily, sighing to one another in the late summer breeze — and then, she smiled, as if her pain didn't exist behind her pearly-white gatekeeping, a smile of simultaneous hello and no-thank-you, leaving the leafy strangers in her path slightly off balance long after she was gone.

The Spaceship Landed

As the spaceship landed, the earth and its cataclysm appeared as a mere speck in the distance while they — Elon, Grimes, and XÆA-12 — began assembling their new IKEA furniture, puzzling over instructions, and realizing that they were on their own now, boldly having gone where no billionaires had gone before.

The Spaceship Landed

The spaceship sat alone, rusting, half-submerged in a hill that rose up like a grassy bubble in the boundless prairie, sitting there as it had been sitting for millennia, its once shiny exterior emblazoned with the symbols of some other civilization now covered over with the green life of this planet, but the tiny laser beacon kept pulsing, pulsing until finally a flock of Canada geese landed in a wide circle around it, honking absently yet intentionally, using a language unknown to earthling birds but very familiar to the alien birds they knew were inside the ship, “Sorry we’re late!”

The Spaceship Landed

Just as Ben finished heaving the trash bags into the dumpster and turned back around to go inside the ramen restaurant, the spaceship landed in the parking lot, although at first he wasn't sure whether he was more distracted by the sweet smell of sriracha sesame-and-mango sauce purging out of the restaurant or by the bone-shaking vibrations that penetrated his body from the tumult of the air as the noiseless ship settled down in the center of the crumbling asphalt, its lights blinking a random rhythm, a rhythm that Ben never expected he would feel again, not on this planet.

CONTRIBUTORS

Index of Contributors

Aaron Langille: 42, 78

Alex Meyer: 76, 139-141, 145

Ann Marie Dong: 52

Brandon Morgan: 10, 33, 59, 64, 128-129

Carrie Prefontaine: 15

Cartland Berge: 34, 65

Chad Flinn: 6

Grant McMillan: 19, 23, 56, 135

Gregory Carrier: 38-40, 126-127, 137

Jennifer Jordán Schaller: 60-62

Jennifer Nardine: 12, 16, 30, 32, 36, 41, 46-48, 50-51, 55, 58, 82, 100, 102, 105-108, 133-134, 150

Jessica Joy Mills: 27, 84, 130

Jim Stauffer: 67, 73, 80, 110

Joan Bihun: 17-18, 24-25, 29, 35, 44, 54, 79

Jon Kabongo: 69-70, 72, 93

Katharina Poltze: 8, 11, 13, 132, 148

Katherine Punteney: 9, 101

Katie Volkmar: 28, 90

Laura Gibbs: 94-97, 103-104, 112-123, 152

Martine Rife: 77, 144

Melissa Wells: 4, 66, 68, 71, 74, 85-88, 98-99

Patrick Thomas Henry: 138, 143, 146

Susanna Aliisa Kohonen: 43

Thomas R. Keith: 31, 37, 49, 57, 81, 83, 92, 125, 136, 154

Trish O'Connor: 20-22

Contributor Contacts

Brandon Morgan: Twitter [@CNMBrandon](https://twitter.com/CNMBrandon)

Cartland Berge: Cartland.net

Chad Flinn: Twitter [@ChadHFlinn](https://twitter.com/ChadHFlinn)

Jennifer Nardine: Twitter [@tjnardine](https://twitter.com/tjnardine)

Jessica Joy Mills: Instagram [@jessicajoymills](https://www.instagram.com/jessicajoymills)

Jim Stauffer: Twitter [@xb7r](https://twitter.com/xb7r)

Laura Gibbs: LauraGibbs.net and Twitter [@OnlineCrsLady](https://twitter.com/OnlineCrsLady)

Melissa Wells: Twitter [@mswells01](https://twitter.com/mswells01)

Patrick Thomas Henry: PatrickThomasHenry.com and
Twitter [@Patrick_T_Henry](https://twitter.com/Patrick_T_Henry)

Susanna Aliisa Kohonen: SusannaKohonen.blogspot.com
and Twitter [@KohonenSusanna](https://twitter.com/KohonenSusanna)