

Six Minute Magazine

Volume 1 / Issue 3 / Winter 2012

6M

A SHORT MAGAZINE OF FLASH FICTION, IN SIX MINUTES

EDITOR'S NOTE

The last three months have been rather interesting ones for me, and have brought my attention to an interesting subject that I hope all of you will find equally thought-provoking. I've spent a lot of time in my office the last several months, beyond what's been required for work. The lighting is low, softer yellow light (I keep the fluorescent light above turned off), the temperature is controlled by an air conditioner / heater, and the door can be closed to provide a rather quiet atmosphere. With headphones on, I can listen to anything from the soundtrack of my favorite film, to an opera from a rather nostalgic video game, to an hour long recording of a rainstorm. I spent nearly a month working on a writing project that I'd been looking forward to, and came out of it with an interesting topic that I later share with you in this magazine: the environmentalism of writing.

As our submissions started coming in, I started wondering what kinds of writing environments our contributing authors write in. I began to wonder what kinds of things influence my own writing, what kinds of lights, sounds, and sights actually play a role in my writing. As it stands, the corkboard behind my monitor has two stick-it notes on it, one on either side, where my eyes tend to wander when I'm thinking. On the left piece of paper, a handwritten message reads: This is what inspiration sounds like; on the other, another handwritten note reads: This is what inspiration looks like. Both are blank below their words. Since my eyes tended to come to rest in those spots, without really looking at what was there, that's where inspiration came from.

Inspiration can come from any number of places, and any number of sights and sounds. For me, inspiration can be anywhere. Once I've found it, I have to isolate it. I can only imagine where our writers have found their inspiration. I only know that, wherever it came from, it's done them well. We saw a great number of wonderful pieces come by our magazine, and are pleased to bring you the winter edition! Inside, you'll find works from all around the world, as well as an interview with our staff (Clint Rhodes and myself), as well as a very informative article on copyright. We finish the magazine with a two part exploration of the environments writers choose to write in. Please enjoy the many works our talented authors have contributed. We look forward to bringing you more delightful, thought-provoking, insightful flash fiction in the future.

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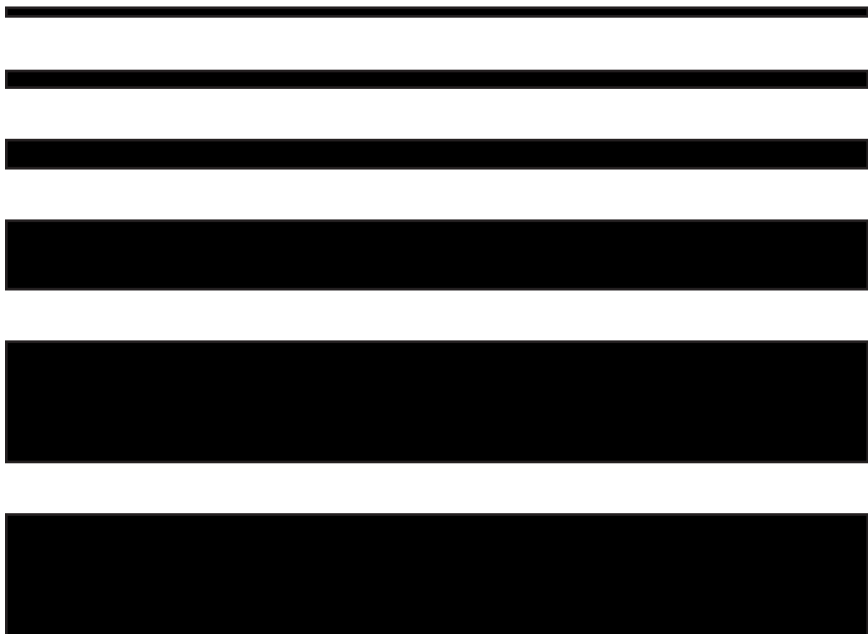
Borrowed Gas Can, Hwy 99

Natalie McNabb

He wears his overalls too loose and without a shirt; so does his gray-ing mutt. The newspaper he tucks into his armpit proclaims: “Nowhere Safe in Africa.”

I ask if he thinks it’s true.

“Hell,” he says, “nowhere’s safe—Africa or America,” and smashes out his cigarette on the pump as he fills my can.



SWAN SONG

Katya Cummins

He had promised to fulfill my dreams. Apparently he thought they were located in the last available room at Motel Six just off the freeway.

I flopped onto the bed. He perched on the armchair beside the tan curtains. We ignored the cigarette smoke that soaked into our skins. He was wearing the square framed glasses that I disliked, but his hair was still black and wild. He had driven six hundred miles to discuss our relationship – and for one last fuck. I searched for faces in the bumpy ceiling and let the silence drag on.

“Are those clothes new?” he finally asked.

“No.”

The green wallpaper was spotted with white flowers. It reminded me of the afghans Grandmother Rose crocheted.

“They’re so... you.”

I was wearing a black shirt and dark washed jeans. I still remembered him saying he only found me attractive in a skirt. “Easy access,” he had said.

I looked at him and wondered who he thought I was. He had giggled and called me crazy when I slammed the passenger door shut. It had been easy, even thrilling, to deceive my parents. They had been screaming at one another. “Just drive,” I said, slipping my hand from his, already bored. I rolled down the window to smell the wet. It had rained earlier that day.

“Can I kiss you?” he asked.

I found his uncertainty amusing. I slipped from the bed and

brushed the curtain aside. Twilight had come and everything felt wrong. It would be so quick, the sex and the pain that came with it, and then I would fall into restless dreams and wake to glimpse a sliver of light through the curtains. We would have breakfast of pulp filled orange juice and stale cereal. He would turn onto that freeway and be gone.

“Fine,” I said and let him kiss me.

He had been angry because I hadn’t gone to Michigan and had skipped out on New Mexico and Germany after that. He said my parents controlled my life, that I let days stream past by my bedroom window. I was uninterested in broadening my horizons and the writing would lead to nowhere.

“Forget everything,” he mumbled, through another kiss. He had no limitations, no parents to disappoint.

Later, we fought about the hotel too. He said I had never let go. I said it was the first and only time he had made love to me while sober.

“I think it’s time to go our separate ways,” I said.

“No, you can’t do this. I finally love you.”

“How about that?”

“Why are you doing this to me?”

“Because I don’t like the person you love,” I said.

Subterfuge

Pamela Evitt-Hill

*Deception by artifice or strategem
in order to conceal, escape, or evade.*

My husband, Charles, and I were partners during that last game of spades during which we cheated because Charles didn't like to lose. Sheets of rain battered the windows that night as the chandelier lights flickered in our dining room. If only the lights would go out, I would have a reprieve, I thought. Instead of playing cards, the darkness would force the neighbors to go home, and maybe I could slip away into my respite of sleep. Sleep was the place of dreams.

Charles drummed the table, watching me. "Come on Karenina, play a card."

I held the queen of hearts and a duce and glanced over at my neighbor and opponent, Dan, who would play after I. Dan had the king, which at that point in the card game was easy to discern. If I played the queen, he would take her with his king, and Charles would keep me awake all night berating me for my obvious lack of intelligence. If I played the duce, I would have one more chance to save my queen and win a trick. I felt as if I had already lost my soul, must not lose the queen too, and I looked at Charles. He was frowning at me again and beating a rhythm on the table, sending me a message by code, similar to Morse Code. The dots were soft and dashes loud, just one of his many devices for conveying messages during card games. He wanted me to play my queen. I stared into Charles' cool green eyes in conflict as I realized I would not do as he wished.

"What are you doing over there, Karenina? Throw down a

card.” Charles said.

My hand trembled slightly when I placed the duce on the table.

Charles slammed back into his chair when he saw the duce. “Must be time for another drink,” he said.

Thunder cracked, averting attention to the window. A lightning bolt revealed the Weeping Willow branches buckled by the wind, and I fought to hold steady, determined I would not buckle like a Weeping Willow in the wind.

“I’m so sorry, I don’t know what’s wrong with me,” I began....

“Well, I do,” Charles said. “You are too simple minded to be my partner in a card game.”

I felt my face flush and lowered my eyes. I was beginning to buckle and sheepishly looked at Charles. “I was sure Dan had the king.”

Still crimson in color, I turned to Dan, the opponent whom I thought had the power to take my queen, and I whispered to him, “Don’t you have the king?”

“Yes, I do.” Dan flashed the king of hearts at me before flicking it onto the table, where it landed atop the duce. The image of the king permeated my mind the way the lightning bolts permeated the night sky; a confirmation I had been right all along about the king and about most things for which I had been deemed simple minded throughout the years.

One thing Charles hated worse than losing a card game was a correct assumption on my part.

He stood abruptly. “I’m going to bed.”

I gazed at Charles as he marched out of the dining room. His power over me had disappeared in a flash of the king of hearts. I saved the queen, I thought, and smiled. One does not have to sleep to dream.

TRIAL

by HAPPY HOUR

Harriet Showman

They chewed her reputation like spring rolls, always delectable when mixed with Bloody Mary's. "Maybe she's unstable." "I am not going to let her ruin my Bali high." "Let's be yogic." "Agreed. Nothing but happy talk." "There she is, y'all."

Entering the bar, Miranda felt their eyes avoiding her. Sigh. Another descent into high school.

Obituary

Harriet Showman

"We're like dead leaves drifting down a river." James struggled with his grief. "The current controls our lives."

"Change course, find another channel," Lila responded.

"I lost my mother when my twin sisters came along." (The tangent a variation on the topic.) "They were cuter than me."

"Aw honey, can't imagine anyone cuter than you."

copyRIGHT

Staff Writer Clint Rhodes

What is your favorite law? It seems a strange thing to ask, certainly... Like what is your favorite tooth to get pulled (wisdom) or your favorite late-night infomercial (anything dubbed into a foreign language subtitled back into English.) But if you're a writer, or love a writer, then you should have a favorite law: Title 17 of the US Code. We call it the copyright law.

Section 106 lays out all the exclusive rights protected by the copyright act, and a quick glance over them makes it clear why we as writers love the law; it protects our work. It grants us just what it says, the right to the copies of our work. When you write a story or a piece of music or paint a painting or design a building the copyright act gives the exclusive right to make copies of that work, to make alterations to that work, to distribute that work to the public, and to present performances of that work in public.

It is because of this law that it is possible for authors to be paid for their work. Imagine what a world without the protection of the copyright act is like for a writer. Well, you don't have to imagine, just look back to before 1709; the Statute of Anne, the first copyright statute passed.

Since the times of the Greeks it has been understood that products of the mind, our literature and our art, these were properties that deserved to be regarded the same as any other property we might hold. For literature this changed slightly with the invention of the printing press. A pain staking and arduous task of hand inscribing a tome, a task that takes as much care and skill as painting a great painting, or sculpting a statue had been reduced to setting type in a frame and wheeling ink and paper across it. Making copies of books had just become easy, quick, and cheap.

But what does this mean for our intrepid authors of the time?

Surely easing the passage of works into the hands of an audience is good for the authors, right? Unfortunately, not good for the authors because they still had no right their own work. What they had was a monopoly of printers empowered by the crown. The printers owned the rights to the work, not the authors, and in exchange for quashing dissident or blasphemous authors (as deemed by state and church; yay Clarendon Code...) the Stationer's Registry Printers was allowed to bilk authors out of earnings for their hard work. There are a lot of reasons for this and it is well worth your time to look into this important time in world history: birth of intellectual property as a concept, birth of capitalism, early rumblings of the French and American revolutions... But this brief summary of copyright history has already rambled on too long, so I'll continue.

What changed all this is the Statute of Anne, after Queen Anne. For the first time it codified a protection to the author of their own work. The original statute was exclusive guarantee for a term of fourteen years, which could be extended for another fourteen if the author was still alive; such was the eighteenth century. It is from this act that most western copyright law is based, slowly refined through the years to what we have today.

But what prompted my writing about this is not a general disparagement on the digital age and it's profound impacts on intellectual property and the problems we have today in flagrant piracy and anti-piracy-reactionism. Personally, I feel both sides have only been incrementally making things worse until we get stuck with such drastic measures as SOPA. What I actually want to talk about is not in the news currently, it's the grey-area of the copyright act; the second exclusive right, the right to make derivative works.

From Title 17:

A "derivative work" is a work based upon one or more pre-existing works, such as a translation, musical arrangement, dramatization, fictionalization, motion picture version, sound recording, art reproduction, abridgment, condensation, or any other form in which a work may be recast, transformed, or adapted. A work consisting of editorial revisions, annotations, elaborations, or other modifications which, as a whole, represent an original work of authorship, is a "derivative work".

“Pride and Prejudice”, the book by Jane Austen, is an original work. The movie “Pride and Prejudice” (2005) is a derivative work. So is the tv-miniseries of 1995. So is “Pride and Prejudice and Zombies” by Jane Austen and Seth Grahame-Smith.

This prompts my article because of a series of arguments I’ve been having over the years with people (even myself at times) regarding the line between derivative work and inspiration. And the stance that I’ve come up against time and again is, “Why should copyright law stifle artistic endeavors; enriching lazy publishing houses/authors and keeping me from publishing Harry-Potter fan-fiction... Or my Star Trek Disco-Musical ‘To Boldly Go-go’, or my epic poem of Moby Dick in rhyming couplets.”

Actually the last one is fine, because Moby Dick is in the public domain, but serves to illustrate that at least with the people I run into, a little education would go a long way.

Now, I call this the grey-area of copyright law because the definition is both encompassing, and vague. It covers any possible means of changing a piece of work, but draws no clear lines of distinction. Purposefully, so that every case must be measured of itself; in its own context. And by clear lines, consider that Grahame-Smith is deliberately creating a derivative of a public domain work, but something like “West Side Story” is its own work, based on themes and ideas from Romeo and Juliet, but not a recasting of the play into a musical, and is historically considered to not be a derivative work. But where is that line between derivative and “based on”? How different must it be? And granted in these instances it is less material of a question, both works are well within the public domain. But that is also not the heart of the matter when I get into these arguments. It has nearly always been the case that they knew their work was derivative, purposefully so in most cases, and the question was to why their artistic endeavor should be repressed for an intellectual property that didn’t already have a web-comic version.

And I grant that it is a shame when artistic impulses are needlessly repressed. But the whole idea of copyright is a protection of our cultural heritage. By ensuring the livelihoods of creative people against those that would profiteer off their works, like greedy businessmen, or perhaps copycat opportunists looking to piggyback

on someone else's hard work and good fortune. What these people, who seem to feel they are being stepped on 'by the man', are actually enacting is a sort of theft, or fraud against the original artist, and the copyright act is designed to protect artists that create original work that enriches our culture. But instead of merely a tirade against ignorance, let me leave you with a few tips and thoughts that may help you if you find yourself questioning just how original your own work may be.

First off, if you purposefully want your work to be recognizably "inspired" by another work, then it is almost certainly derivative. If the work in question is public domain, then there's no problem. A query with the library of congress can answer that if you have doubts... But certainly anything published in your lifetime is not public domain. The 1976 act has thrown everything off in calculating public domain, but we're still waiting on even orphaned works from the '40s to enter, so the best we can say is anything before 1911 is certainly public domain.

Next consider just what can and can't be copyrighted. You can't copyright a title. (Although you can potentially trademark one.) You can't copyright basic plots or characters. Now there have been several judgments in the past twenty years or so that have been pushing the lines on that. And characters especially, because of the Sam Spade decision the backlash has clamped down and the courts now do allow a certain degree of special property rights over created characters. So while a strict reading might lead that characters are not copyrightable, recent court rulings have been in favor of original artists retaining control over their own characters, even if they no longer have the copyright for the story that character was in. So if you want to put Harry Potter in your story, you need to get permission first.

Which leads me to my final thought on the matter (for now.) The advice I most often hear other people give on the matter is, "Go ahead and publish your derivative work in some shady publication with a low circulation, that way it's not like they'll even know." And certainly if you do that, the chances are slim anyone would find out. But if you look at the recent rash of plagiarism cases that have hit the industry in the past month, you see that clearly people are paying

attention. And probably they won't be paying attention to your work. But isn't that the whole point of publishing? To get people to pay attention? You publish because you have an idea that deserves to be shared, that contributes to our culture, that demands eyes on it, or ears, or for people to move through it, whatever your medium of choice. Being seen by people is the point of publishing. Why would you go through the pains of trying to get work published if you don't want people to see it?

In that case write for yourself. Write to learn how to write. If you have a burning need to write some fan-fiction, then do it. Write it. These already established characters and already established dynamics can help us learn as writers. We don't have to wonder what sort of dynamic Scooby and Shaggy have, or how they might react to a plateful of sandwiches, so we can focus on other aspects of craft: pacing a plot, or foreshadowing a reveal, maybe setting or mood. And in the process, pay attention to why these dynamics work so well. What is so compelling about these stories that you want to continue or expand the universe they live in? What draws you to them? And use that in your own writing. Figure out what works in those stories beyond the surface of those particular characters in those particular situations. And once you find what makes these stories work, you can use those tools to make your own work better.

Clint Rhodes is a staff writer and associate editor with Six Minute Magazine.

PASSION

S. L. Corbett

She was heavy to carry up the stairs, but Leo wanted them to have a room to themselves. Too often did they have to share their space amongst others, but now they could be alone. It was something Leo had wanted for a while now.

He admitted to feeling a little nervous, wondering if he was going into this too quickly. She had to be treated with an expert's fingers; with as much care and gentleness as he could find in himself. He set her down and removed her jacket, revealing her beautiful curves. Eyes wide with excitement, he allowed himself to run his hands over them just once. Perfect.

Leo sat down, holding her close to his body. Most men would act differently with such a beauty enveloped in his arms, but Leo was a pro. He knew what she needed, and he intended to give it to her. Like an artist, he knew exactly where to place his fingers and when.

It was hard, exhausting work sometimes, and had taken years of hard practice and effort. But when he reached her crescendo, Leo knew he'd created something special, believing it to be something only he could create. Leo bathed in her glory. It had been worth the wait. Worth every second of every minute of effort passed learning her until they were one.

Leo spent an hour in that room with her, until all his energy was spent. It was getting dark, and he needed to be getting back to his wife and children. They'd be waiting for him, and he'd got carried away.

Quietly, he zipped the cello back up in its case and carried it down the stairs, packed it into his car and drove home.

ALLEY

Brian Maurer

She's two lanes over and sips a cola. He slides his shoes on pretending not to glance. She walks to the lane, silver ball in hand, pretending she doesn't notice. She's graceful, moves forward, every curve dances slowly until the ball leaves her fingers. A seven-ten split; not a problem.

I remember back fifteen years, bowling league night, quarter pounder, extra onions, coke no nice, side of those fries no one else got. Was on the team with what's-his-name, guy that threw lefty. Every Wednesday after school, that was us. Fifteen years later, I get it. Don't throw the ball.

Angela doesn't like gin and hates juice. She throws alone because why the fuck not? Ring finger still has that damn indent and lighter tone. Has to look at it each time her hand comes up. Number two won't go down. Not all night. Goddamn this alley, and goddamn Richard.

Brian Maurer is a staff writer and Editor of Six Minute Magazine.

Dear Mildred

James P. Hanley

April 12, 1969

Subic Bay, Philippines

Dear Mildred;

You're nearly 40! Or should I say turning forty. I love that expression—as if tanning, first one side of your life, that's done, then the flip side. I'm not far behind (38), the Major reminded me after he reached that milestone. Everyone calls my husband "Major"; I once thought it was out of respect, but then I realized it makes them interchangeable, one dies in combat and the next one steps in like a replaced light bulb, no need to remember names. Oh, I am a cynic, I know. It's just that I'd hoped the many processions of grief we saw as children had ended.

Back to a lighter subject. We live in a beautiful house on base and have wonderful trees out back called Narra, and in a further clearing, Traveler's Palms, which look like great fans in windy weather. Naturally, we have snakes, odd-looking bugs, and geckos that are everywhere munching on mosquitoes and other unsuspecting insects. The spiders frighten me, especially the hairy tarantula. I understand some people buy them as pets, but I cringe when I see one, although they remind me of Uncle Bert. I'm making dinner in between penning this letter. I'm dining solo—again. Ernie (alias the Major) is

back in-country, as they call it, as opposed to in-the-country, a more idyllic location. You've seen pictures of my husband; he's handsome, even with the sides of his head shaved of hair, but in combat gear, he is altered, not just in appearance, his demeanor changes—the warrior. I don't understand how a uniform comes with a persona like a lining. We Marine wives take our morning stoic pill, smile, chat in the commissary, and lie to each other about the dread. I'm glad you're married to a stateside civilian!

Did you ever wonder why we don't have children? We could do it. I mean by do it; oh, you know what I'm trying to say. There was always the next duty station that would be a better place to raise children, but eventually, it was too late.

The sunsets here are beautiful. During the day, waves of heat move along the ground and at times, the haze blends with the cooking smoke and the burning garbage in the village outside the gate, and you can't see beyond a quarter mile. But then the sky is swept by the slightest breeze, and you are suddenly staring at a huge orange disk on the horizon. The setting sun pulls down all the impurities in its wake and the night takes over a cleared sky. Stars glisten and the yellowish moon takes center stage. I sometimes sit outside, ignoring circling bugs, watching bats fly, and listen to the sounds of people living their momentarily oblivious lives: music, blaring televisions, voices raised, laughter, all seeping out doors and windows. I think about making love—the enviable intimacy.

I heard Lorraine's nephew was killed in Viet Nam last week. Ernie knew the place and said the fighting was fierce. Oh, damn, I'm back to depressing! So, how is Mark? What about the kids? Write me about the trivial things, the ordinariness. Sometimes I feel such sadness, not the kind that needs medication or a somber conversation with someone taking notes, but the sudden concentration of sorrow that forms like a beam and penetrates deep. I watch sad movies so the unhappiness will come out, and I often cry at the wrong scenes. You must think I'm insane, switching back and forth.

Wait, you have to hear this—I adopted a cat, me, the anti-animal lover (or is it animal anti-lover?). She’s a fussy ball of fur but she’s company (not much of a conversationalist, though). Know who is the most popular man on base: Jim Beam. Ha, ha. Do you remember that expensive blanket we bought last time I was home, it’s unraveling. This place does that.

I love the Filipino people here, they are so accepting, so fatalistic, not afraid of uncertainty. Have you ever heard of lumpia, it’s like egg roll, delicious.

I want to come home, Mildred. I want to go back in time, rewind. I’m not sure what I’d do differently, maybe just be more prepared. Please don’t misunderstand, I love Ernie, it’s just the circumstances: war, loss, separation.

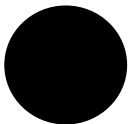
Oops, there’s the doorbell. Funny, I can see Father Coughlin (he so baby-faced, we call him Mikey) peering in the window, must be checking up on me, ensuring I’m being faithful.

oh god oh god

Later. My flight’s Thursday the 29th. Please pick me up.

Love;

Fran



Business Trip

Kaleigh Maguire

“**Y**ou know, true success can be found in unexpected places,” my boss winks, raising a tumbler of scotch to his lips.

What am I doing in his hotel room so late? He asked me up to run through strategy for tomorrow’s meeting, but has yet to open his briefcase.

“Bottoms up!” He drains the scotch in one gulp, locking eyes with mine. I raise my own glass, sipping awkwardly. He laughs, his bright blue eyes twinkling. Without dropping his gaze, he reaches over and releases the glass from my hand. I feel his hand press down against my thigh, his touch warm and inviting.

“This isn’t really a business meeting, is it?” I stammer.

“It can be whatever you want.” He reaches out and runs his fingertips along my jawline. I swallow. He leans in, and brushes his lips across the trail he made with his fingers. I can smell the scotch on his breath. “Tell me if you want me to stop.”

Of course I don’t. He’s all I’ve wanted ever since I started at the firm three weeks ago. As I sink into his embrace, he murmurs against my ear, “You’re going to fit in just fine, Brad.”

WALKING

in a Winter Wonderland

Mark Rosenblum

Snow flurried aimlessly with purpose. Minute crystals conspired to coat the sullied sidewalks of New York with the temporary purity of a winter's mask. Dissenter flakes strayed and settled where they pleased. A few fell upon her knit cap, dissolving quickly into carrot-hued cotton fibers. She tugged the cap lower to cover her ears. Strands of auburn hair stuck out haphazardly as she trudged along, fighting gusts of wind stalking the corners of the brownstones. Her perfume lingered briefly between snowflakes while slender, brown legs balanced with proficient ease on tall heels. As she waited at a corner for traffic to pass, a white man in a pinstriped Armani glanced her way. She smiled. She would soon be warm.

Sacrament of Reconciliation

Heather Magruder

Ciaràn Dempsey fixed cars. Specifically, he fixed my mum's BMW. Often. The repairs were obviously exhilarating and exhausting. I deciphered this from the way Mum sat, flushed, on the burgundy velour sofa when I came home from my school, which was also a convent, on repair days.

Mum's body curved back into the low-slung middle chair of the sectional. It was the same one we'd had before we moved to Ireland, only then it had been creamy leather. My cat had clawed it relentlessly so it got recovered for its new life. So, apparently, had my mum.

"Ciaràn," she'd breathe, as though he was still there. "Fixed it."

Most days, I came in through the kitchen and tried to glide, unnoticed, down the small hall that led to my room. On Ciaràn days, Mum seemed always able to catch me.

"We went for a test drive. Got up to 90 miles an hour." She'd sip her Scotch. "It's definitely working now."

But a week or so later, some wee noise would start. "Germans," she'd mutter. She'd follow with something about the war, something about how you couldn't trust them. Ciaràn was different: young, Irish, trustworthy. Not a warrior, not at all.

In school, Sister Mary Francis had been preparing me for confession. I was behind, owing to the fact that my Scottish family wasn't Catholic. In her cramped office behind our classroom, Sister Mary Francis taught me about sins, the venial and the mortal. I'd begun to think about what to confess; I feared I may have committed

more than venial sins. Hadn't I envied Siobhan her new shoes, the ones with little heels? Snuck extra bites of mashed potatoes at Easter dinner? Been proud of my ability to keep my best friend's secrets? I had committed nearly half of the mortal sins. What would happen if I confessed? And what of my mother, if she couldn't confess her own mortal sin? As I prepared, I imagined Mum's confession.

*Bless me Father for I have sinned. And then the list:
I have let Ciaràn Dempsey repair my car. A lot.*

I have let him drive my car, fast, down curvy roads and across humpy bumpy terrain and over hills, peaks, into valleys and nooks and crannies.

Ciaràn has tested the brakes in some of those nooks and crannies. He has idled there. He has revved the engine and then zoom, zoom, zoomed down that straight bit of road between the village and the city of Cork, along the River Bandon.

Bless me Father for Ciaràn and I have braked and idled and zoomed all over County Cork, once even stopping at the shrine of Our Lady between Kinsale and Summer Cove.

I imagined myself kneeling in the confessional, holding my lips close to the grate, whispering the words on her behalf – a venial sin, perhaps, but worth it if I could say a few extra Hail Marys and absolve us both.

JENNY

Jacqueline Primo

The heel of my shoe kept catching in the cracks in the sidewalk. I heard the gurgling, the churning of the earth beneath the concrete, could see its glowing eyes peeking out through those cracks, could almost feel the earth sigh, vindicated, when it thought it finally had me. *Pick your damn feet up!* I kept telling myself. *Pick your feet up and don't fall in!*

Images of her funeral came to me like a very sudden and immediate fever in the weeks preceding her suicide. I would imagine her funeral and I would imagine me getting the call, my mother disheartened but unsurprised, telling me my big sister killed herself and it would not be news to me. To me, the sister who knew weeks before, because a fever is hard to ignore. And I would watch these images from the vantage point of my sister in her coffin, her body emaciated from her self-starvation beneath the black lid, as my little sister and my mother and father and I almost shrugged as they lowered her into the earth.

So you see how vital it was that I not lose myself in the sidewalk cracks. I knew with what anticipation the earth was waiting for me, too, to succumb. But I would not grant it that. No, I would not allow it the satisfaction. I pulled my sweater tighter around me and wrapped my arms around my chest. I clomped vehemently in the center of the sidewalk slabs now, watching my feet step defiantly over the cracks that were suddenly so like spikes on the heart monitor I imagined she was illuminating moments before her death. But I knew that wasn't right. She died on her bathroom floor.

They lowered her down into the earth and someone, maybe me, sighed softly, resigned. Because like a fever breaking this had been a long time coming. She had made sure everybody knew this was on the horizon. And because you do not know her, because you do not know us, I know well the look on your face as you read this.

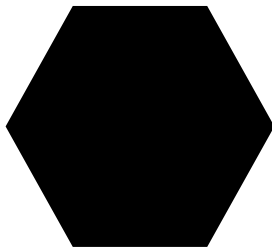
Why didn't you stop her? you ask. Why didn't you do something? She warned you!

And the earth's great chewing mouth breathes its stinking, steaming breath from the bared teeth of a subway grate as I round the corner. I can almost hear the earth chuckling at your foolishness when it hears this question of yours. *Stop her?* the earth grumbles. *She thought she could warn you? What could you do!* I almost smile when it says this last bit because I once questioned her, like you.

If only she knew with what furor she was perpetuating the cycle onto her own two daughters, maybe she would have changed her mind. If only she knew with what force she was keeping that wheel turning, spinning it faster and faster until it sucked her daughters in, too, maybe she would have chosen to stay. Maybe she would have. But of all the thousands of attempts we made to tell her, there was not one in a language she could understand. She spoke only grief and blame.

The wind blows my sweater open, my thin t-shirt now exposed to the air and to the earth. So distracted am I for that moment that I felt the heat of the earth on my heel as it caught in a crack, but I lifted my foot out so quickly that my shoe stuck. I watched over my shoulder as it melted and I stepped, bare-footed, on the cement.

Our words blew through her by way of that very wind, and there was no redirecting the gust to head toward her again. The words were gone and she had not heard. Thirty-two years of trying and blowing and telling and screaming, but it was never enough. She was encased in her convictions like Styrofoam around a glass vase in a cardboard box. But they could not protect her from herself, I thought watching the earth close in over her, the padding of her victimization replaced now with the padding of her coffin.



IDA

Excerpt #2 from a Novel

Jacqueline Primo

Sam and Lyla had made subsequent trips to their house next door after those fall breezes blew straight through the thin summer dresses they were so fond of wearing. Laurie and Jack helped them drag boxes of stored fall and winter clothes up the stairs of her house, the girls pulling old sweaters and outgrown jeans out of the boxes, Lyla passing some on to her sister. So used to summer air and sun were their bare legs and arms that now, hidden beneath denim and cable-knit, their ivory skin bloomed with goose bumps at the slightest breath or breeze of autumn against the fabric.

Ida, for one, was silently grateful for the end of September and the boxing-up of Lyla's summer wardrobe. So tired had she grown of always averting her eyes anytime Lyla was around, with her summer dresses and sun-pinked shoulders, that she had not thought ahead to the cooler months. So looking forward to the end of summer was she that she hadn't the idea to consider the burden of fall. Ida only expected relief.

She knew Lyla had some power over her, flipped some switch within her that hatched butterflies and stirred her stomach until she lost her appetite. There was something about the way she lifted her heels when she walked, tilted her head when being spoken to, covered her eyes when she laughed really hard. And oh, those eyes behind the hand. A novel on their own. How badly she wanted to get at the soul behind them. How badly she wanted to uncover the jewel she knew must be under her skin; fuel for the fire of that walk, that tilt, that laugh. How badly she wanted, but how hard she

berated herself for wanting. How hard she kicked, whipped, screamed at the desire within her that sat so neatly wrapped inside her consciousness, teasing and taunting her to *just pull the ribbon loose!*

In the first weeks after she met Lyla, Ida battled with her wills only when she closed the covers over her vacant body each night. The house whispered its quiet song of her children's rustling blankets and the padding of Ollie over the various floor coverings and the whir of the air conditioning. It was then Ida wrestled with that walk, that tilt, that laugh. She lay beside the empty pillow her husband's head had left and counted backward from one-hundred over and over until she fell asleep, a method she had developed in order to avoid the terrible places her mind would go when left to its own devices. She would count and she would glue her hands to the sheets beside her and train her mind on the insides of her eyelids. She would wake up in the morning and make her children's breakfast and go to her new job at the grocery store and her mind would come with her. For a while, this worked. For a while, she was in control.

But after a month, a month and a week, a month and two weeks, Ida slowly found herself thinking of the girl when she should be counting a customer's change, straining pasta, rinsing the shampoo from her hair. Over the summer she had allowed her son to grow close to the girl and Lyla was now a constant presence in their lives. Ida could be guaranteed a visit with her every day after school, apart from the days Jack went to her house instead, as well as a sight or two of her on Sunday mornings despite Ida's efforts at avoiding them.

After seven weeks, the summer wilted and birthed orange trees and Ida surrendered to the demands of the sickness infesting her life. She accepted the swelling of guilt within her, accepted that she now thought of the girl daily and often and now no longer just at night, but first thing in the morning. The dark face of Ida's desire... how she hated to admit the word...grew tired of how she so persistently threw rags over it and shoved it back down under. How she buried it with the store of secrets scratching at her conscience. But after seven weeks, Ida surrendered to the disease that had been

blowing its cool breath at her neck, pinching her waist, tickling her foot. It slid its dry cracking hand up its throat and gave the rag a calculated tug loose, opened its eyes and stared back at her. She hung her head and at that signal, opened the floodgates and the desire consumed her.

So rabid had the beast become by September that, despite her best efforts, Ida could not bind it. The demon she had before caged and starved now clawed and feasted on her willpower. It sucked her dry. Ida dreaded more than ever seeing Lyla, for it was then the guilt of her...*desire*...would emerge and sneak behind the girl, just past her shoulder, and dance, tease, taunt Ida when nobody else was looking. When only she could see. She felt she had violated the girl. She felt she time and again robbed Lyla of her innocence anytime she imagined her, thought of her, looked at her. Ida felt she owed Lyla the virginity her desire stole over, and over, and over again. And the guilt this desire caused beat Ida over the head when she saw the girl anywhere, but when Lyla was inside Ida's home, she was dealt the worst of blows. She bruised and bled from the guilt.

At the onset of fall Ida expected relief, but relief did not come and her husband did not come home. Her husband left and did not come home and this little girl graced her way into Ida's life and the life of her son and she could not rob her son of a friend what with his father gone. She could not prevent him from seeing her for fear it would kill him, so attached to Lyla had he grown. No, she could not do it and she could not bring her husband back and she could not have the girl. Oh, to even think the words of what she wanted but could not do...She was left with no choice but to tolerate Lyla in her home and in the life of her son and in the dungeon to which Ida was thrown and tortured each night when she shut out the light in her bedroom.

The Boy

Who Learned to Forgive

Rinzu Rajan

He typed hastily into the body of the e-mail, with the subject that read “Uncle Gupta harassed me when I was all of seven.”

He typed and retyped into the subject line, while his eyes were fixated upon the picture of the lady who had considered cooking for him, her sole ambition in life. She placed the stuffed paranathas on his table and said “Eat them before they get cold and stale.”

He closed the lid of the laptop and went over to the seating area, holding the stuffed brown paranathas his mom had made for him.

He stared at the tiny scratch on his left forearm. And remembered the kiss she had planted on it, the last time they met. He had forgiven him.

Correspondence

Amy Henry

While the stationary was hers-- expensive, deckle-edged linen in cream with an elegant bronze font-- it was he that wrote the letters; long and chatty missives in a cryptic slanting cursive variegated by the nearly depleted disposable pen.

BEING HERE

Harriet Showman

“I just want to be sure we’re in heaven together,” Piper insisted, in her witness mode.

Sheila gazed at her old friend’s face and thought, why would Piper want to spend eternity with me when she didn’t invite me to her daughter’s wedding?

“But Piper. I’m in heaven now.” Sheila paused. “How are your children?”

UNBALANCED BEAM

Samuel Cole

He parks the neighbor girl's pink bicycle and runs barefoot across the indigenous pasture, vein toes cooling themselves inside half-muddy puddles and squishy horse apples that catch him off guard a plenty. The wind plays dress-up with his hair.

"Yes."

A wooden fence—half-trailed apart, fully sun-peeled, wildly abandoned—beckons him like a promising whisper. Rough against his level skin, silvery splinters, like his mother's hair, his father's death, forever seared as memory and brain. Abandoned timber his only friend—or foe? Secrets he now knows.

"Well."

He crawls up the fence, arms outstretched like a lower case t. Fingers curled, pointing skyward. The wood tickles the bottom of his tickly feet. The air swirls without negotiation. Down and back, he grows bolder, fonder with every pass. Proud almost. Happy. Super dizzy.

"Fun."

Then imaginary cartwheels, round-off's, and high-extended Russian splits forged perfectly on the thin unbalanced beam. Mostly tens. Never anything below nine-and-a-half.

"Ta-dah."

And again.

"Ah-ha."

The warming sun lures him into skipping dinner as the night fades into fireflies growing dim.

"And now."

Hand over hand, feet miscalculating the span, landing face down in a ditch of irrigation grim filled with slimy blue algae of rot.

"Damn."

EDITOR(S)

Get To Know Your Editor and Associate Editor

Clint Rhodes and Brian Maurer have successfully hosted Six Minute Magazine for the last year, and couldn't be happier with it's success. It being a year into publication, the two thought it would be a good idea to do a short write-up on who they are, what they do, and their thoughts on flash fiction. What follows is a brief interview with both Clint and Brian:

INTERVIEWER: Please, your name and occupation:

CR: I'm Clint Rhodes, and I'm an A/V technician, fleet manager, site coordinator, and receptionist for HAI (Arts access non-profit for New York City), technical director for The Respect Project (theater piece targeted to at-risk urban youth, directed by George Faison), production assistant for film and television. (New York is expensive, I need a lot of jobs...)

BM: I'm Brian Maurer, and I'm a program assistant for the University of Missouri's Community Development ExCEED program, which helps small businesses in rural areas develop commerce. I'm also an instructor at the university, teaching film production and scriptwriting. I'm also the founder, director and producer of Burnt Bridge Films, I'm working on a six part television series, and of course, I own and operate both Six Minute Magaizne and our partner site, www.FlashFictionForums.com.

INTERVIEWER: What are some of your favorite texts?

CR: Gaiman: American Gods / Barth: Lost in the Funhouse / Borges: Labyrinths / Eco: the Name of the Rose / Hesse: The Glass Bead Game / Stephenson: Snow Crash / McCann: Let the Great World Spin / Dickens: A Tale of Two Cities / Ferris: Then We Came to the

End ... this just goes on for a while...

BM: Yeah, my list can go on and on as well. Primarily though, anything Vonnegut. I love *Snow*, by Pamuck, *Time's Arrow* by Amis and *Blindness* by Saramago. Then there's the weirder stuff, like *Box Man* by Abe, and *Pale View of Hills* by Ishiguro. Again, the list can go on and on...I keep telling myself I'll read more. I've got *The Kite Runner*, and *The Song of Ice and Fire* in queue. Oh and *The Big Friendly Giant*.

INTERVIEWER: Why did you choose flash fiction, and writing in general?

CR: I had an English teacher in high-school who taught that poetry was density. That everything in a poem is carefully considered to have the most meaning possible. I choose not to restrict that idea to poetry, and have found that flash fiction is close to that ideal in prose.

BM: I think it was after reading some interview of Vonnegut, hearing that he'd never advance to the next chapter until he was certain that the previous was perfect. Such tight writing inspired me to spend ages on paragraphs, even sentences. I actually wasn't able to write more than 1000 words without freaking out about going back and making changes. Making it more perfect. The idea that one can tell a story in such a small amount of time interests me. And choosing language to convey those images, yeah, that's pretty awesome.

INTERVIEWER: What are your greatest influences?

CR: Paying attention. What I see and experience is the source of all my ideas, and I try to see and experience as much as I can, so I will never want for ideas.

BM: In the end, for me, it's life. The stuff I do, the stuff I see, and the feelings that I have throughout the day will ultimately find its way into my writing. Music plays a big role as well. Sights, sound and love.

INTERVIEWER: What's the worst criticism you ever received?

CR: "That was good." I'm glad you like my work, but I want to know why it wasn't great. The same goes for, "That wasn't good." I'm sorry you didn't like it, but why?

BM: For me, that's easy. It was when I finished my first feature. I sent it to someone I really respected, a guy in "the industry," and he told me that he "hoped [he] didn't read in the paper tomorrow that a young filmmaker killed himself, but [he] thought absolutely terrible and that [I] should consider not doing any more film work." I mean, just as Stephen King says in his memoirs, *On Writing*, there's always going to be a market for your work, and there's always going to be people that hate it. They've never met you, they've never shook your hand, but they'll hate the work you do. It's just something you deal with, and move on.

INTERVIEWER: Best advice for writers of flash fiction:

CR: Flash fiction is more than "1000 words or less." Flash fiction is a story that demands to be told in 1000 words or less.

BM: It's not a word count you need to be concerned about. When I edit friends work, or work on the boards, there's always something that can be cut down, take out, or reworded. Getting to the point where you can't do that, not because you don't have room, but because it's so damn tight that you just don't want to, that's when you know you've got something special in front of you. Use every word as if it were a gift. 50 word micro-fiction, every one of those words counts. Every word has to have a meaning, and I'm not talking about a definition. You've got such a short time to grab an audience, you need to make sure you value every word you choose as much as the reader does as he or she reads it.

Environmentalism

A two part study of the writer's environment

Brian Maurer

When you hear the word Environmentalism, you may think politics. Words like treaties, agreements, polar ice caps, jet streams, ocean temperatures, carbon emissions, and the sort come to mind. But what I'd like to talk about today has nothing to do with those words, and everything to do with ambience, lighting, sounds, head count, color of light and comfort. I'm talking about the environmentalism of writing and what it means to be an environmental writer. Sights, sounds, temperatures, layout of a room; all these things can impact the success or failure of a writer. For some, it can be crippling; for others, so long as there's a pen in hand, words can flow. I'm an environmental writer. I have very specific attributes that have to be met for writing success. And by that, I mean that I actually get words on the page.

In this two part series, I'm going to explore what it means to be an environmental writer, and offer a number of interviews with writers to explore the differences in writers around the world. This by no means is a true sample of the writing population; rather, it's meant to illustrate the possibilities, and the attribute that can affect writers.

I am an extremist. Or rather, I classify myself as an extremist. I cannot write in uncontrolled environments. But before I go into what that means, let me first define the attributes of a room, or rather, location, that can both positively or negatively affect a writer's ability to write. Firstly is exposure. Exposure refers to your orientation in a room, and the access that others have to said room. Take for instance a coffee shop. For those that are able to write in coffee shop, exposure is not an issue. People can walk around, chat loudly, and more importantly, can see the writer. For some, not a big deal at all. For others, tremendously stressful.

Sound is another issue. Let's look back at our coffee shop writer. What sorts of sounds is our fictitious writer subjected to: chatter and conversation, cups and silverware on plates and tables, that obnoxious cappuccino machine, and of course, the trendy tunes of [insert local band name here]. Again, for some, this is an ideal environment for creating colorful settings and characters. Inspiration could be at any corner, or during any song. A glance from the woman across the way could set your mind aflame with the perfect prose. For others, it's a myriad of distractions and a mess of unorganized sound.

Lastly, light. Let's take one last look at our cafe writer. Consider the lighting of this coffee shop: are there fluorescent lights above, flickering and humming? Most likely not; maybe there's overhead bulbs casting a soft yellow light on the writer's table, giving them just enough light to see their pen and paper. Or perhaps our writer has chosen to write during the day, and is sitting next to a window well lit by an afternoon sun. It's hard to say, as there are so many different options. And yes, each one influences people in different ways.

So, let's go back to me being an extremist. By that, I mean that I can't write in exposed areas. I write in my office: a closed room, with one door and one window. I write up against this window, though almost always I have the shade drawn, especially if it's during the day. I have overhead fluorescent lights, but I can't stand them. I always have them turned off. Instead, I've brought in two of my own lights, that are fitted with 60wt bulbs, casting a warmer yellow light in the room. I always write with the door shut. I can't stand people talking outside my room while I write, nor can I stand both the temperature change and the uncontrolled sounds. With the door closed, I can control the temperature with my AC / heater. And with the door closed, I can easily slide on headphones and listen to a number of pieces of music that I've chosen for writing. Sometimes it's an opera I've heard dozens and dozens of times; other times it's a rainstorm. Depending on the mood, it could be absolutely nothing. All I know is, I can't write to anything with lyrics I can easily understand. That's my controlled environment. No people. No sounds. No temperature issues. No outside light I can't control. There. I've said it. I'm an extremist.

Does that sound familiar to you at all? Maybe that's you to an exact T. For others, it's not even close. I wonder just how our fabled cafe writer can sit amongst people, loud as all hell, in the middle of a room with their back and subsequently, their writing, exposed for anyone to just walk up and see. It's not something I'm used to, but certainly something that some writers absolutely need. Every writer is an environmental writer. Be it an extremist, or not, every writer has his or her place, or places. In the coming issue, I will interview a number of writers about their environments, find trends if any exist, and explore what it means to be an environmental writer.

What follows now is a brief interview with our staff writer Clint Rhodes, on what it means to be an environmental writer:

** **

I tend to find that my style and tone is impacted primarily by the content of my pieces. The plot, characters, and themes of each piece determine that for me, and I usually have an idea before I ever sit down to write.

My writing environments change depending on what draft I'm writing. For a first draft my environments must have noise and movement, a tight time constraint, and easily accessible caffeine; I need distractions to make that editorial voice in my head shut up long enough to put a rough draft down on paper. Revisionary drafts must have a comfortable chair, internet access, and easily accessible caffeine; some place I can sit for a while and read, and think, and read, and think, and finally write. Here quiet is more necessary so I can hear how the words work together.

Angry bees are unacceptable distractions in any writing environment... so are crying children... and medical emergencies.

For first drafts I like writing in public places: cafe', bar, park, subway, ferry, or library. Anywhere there are intransitive distractions, noise and movement that I can choose to observe or not, but doesn't demand my attention. Writing at work, for instance, is not possible for me because too many things happen that demand my attention, phones ring that I have to answer, or people ask questions

that need response. But noise and movement that doesn't actually require my attention help soothes the savage editorial voice... or at least distract it so that I can get a rough draft out.

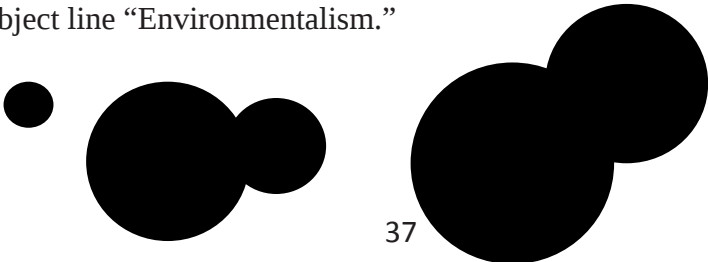
The most important aspect of determinign where that environment is, is what works for the writer. Some people need seclusion in isolated places, some people need to face a window, some people need a particular fountain pen, some people need a particular musical soundtrack for each piece they write... it all depends on what works, do that.

Creating a space is on the whole a positive, but with one important caveat; don't let a disturbance in your personal space be an excuse not to write. Writing spaces are supposed to facilitate a writer's obsession with writing, to make that transition from idea to words as smooth as possible. They are not supposed to be another thing to obsess over and neglect your writing.

My best advice for writers of flash fiction trying to figure out what environmentalism eamans to them is simple and and easy: Be open to new things. You won't know if something works for you or not until you try it. We are not born knowing how to write, and everyone is different, so if you find that the words don't come, try changing your clothes, changing your scenery, your desk orientation. Again, don't let your writing environment become as big of an obsession as the writing itself, but try new things and pay attention so you know what works and can do it again.

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As you can see, environmentalism means something entirely different to our staff writer than it does to me. I hope to coninue this exploration with several of our contributing authors over the coming months. If you have thoughts on environmentalism, please feel free to forward them to editor@SixMinuteMagazine.com with the subject line "Environmentalism."



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