

InterNations.org
Seattle - Riga

SHORT STORIES & POESY E-BOOK
EDITION 2020

FOREWORD

Standing at the start of 2021, we look back at the past year and realize a year ago we were unknowingly perched atop a precipice. None of us knew that in the following weeks and months, life as we knew it—the world as we knew it—would change irrevocably. In many ways the destruction of our previous life is complete; and yet, a phoenix has risen from those ashes of our former existence.

At the same time that global lockdowns built up walls to separate and “distance” us, InterNations broke down the walls of geography and brought us together in a new, online community. Our calendars, suddenly empty deserts devoid of commutes, office hours, and in-person socializing, instead offered us a new-found wealth of time, time we used to develop untapped talents and unexpected potentials.

The microfiction works contained in this collection are the fruit of these creative explorations. Over the course of 2020 dozens of InterNations members set pen to paper, many for the first time ever, and crafted mini-works around given themes and key words. With limits on length ranging from 250-350 words, together we discovered that writing was something of which we are all capable. We particularly applaud those who bravely shared pieces composed in languages other than their mother tongue.

We hope that you will all enjoy reading the stories and poems in this e-book, published exclusively for the authors themselves. And we encourage all the authors to continue nurturing their nascent literary talents as we very much look forward to seeing more of your work in 2021!

Margie Banin & Claude G.

InterNations.org

Seattle - Riga

SHORT STORIES & POESY E-BOOK
EDITION 2020

DIRECTORY

Foreword	page 1
Volume I	
Microfiction Challenge!	page 3
Volume II	
Story Writing Challenge in 250 words, Summer 2020	page 23
Volume III	
Free Language Microfiction in 350 words, Edition I – 2020	page 57
Volume IV	
Poesie in Motion between North and Middle East	page 73
Volume V	
Story Writing Challenge in 250 words, Autumn 2020	page 82
Volume VI	
Free Language Microfiction in 350 words, Edition II – 2020	page 94
List of authors and their countries of origin	page 101

InterNations.org
Seattle - Riga

SHORT STORIES & POESY E-BOOK
EDITION 2020

VOLUME I
Microfiction Challenge!
18 April 2020

Showcase your creativity in our Microfiction Challenge!

Have you ever thought of writing a book, or even just a short story? Here's your chance! With a 250-word limit, this is something we can all accomplish. :)

Here's how it works:

- 1) Pick one of the genre options below.
- 2) Compose a story including the designated action + keyword phrase.
- 3) Keep your word count to 250 or less!
- 4) Post your stories in the comments on this activity's wall so we can all read through them. Feel free to submit as many as you like!

Option A

Genre: Adventure

Action: Being chased by [something/someone]

Keyword phrase: "look over my shoulder" (*variations on verb tense/personal pronoun okay)

Option B

Genre: Mystery

Action: You wake up in a hospital bed and don't know who you are

Keyword phrase: "voices outside the door"

We'll all meet up via Zoom on Saturday, April 18 to enjoy discovering our literary creations together. See you there!

Activity Host:

Margie Banin, Consul

Seattle Literature Group

Written by:
Margie Banin,
from USA – living in USA

Option A: Adventure

“Banaaaaanas in pyjaaaamas, chasing teddy bears! Banaaaaanas in pyjaaaamas, catching teddy bears!

Banaaaaanas, banaaaaanas, banaaaaanas....! OMG, if the virus doesn’t kill me, this theme song surely will. We’ve barely been quarantined a week, but already the kids found this ridiculous cartoon on YouTube and are watching it endlessly. Definitely a recipe for parental insanity.

And the kids know it. I swear they have developed this sudden addiction purely because of my reaction. Well, I’ll show them a reaction!!

I snuck up to my room and found my husband’s striped referee shirt from the junior football league where he volunteers and then added yellow sweat pants and a yellow ball cap to complete my “banana look.” Waiting for just the right moment, I swooped down the stairs, bellowing out “I’m a banaaaaana, in pyjaaaamas, chasing MY teddy bears!

OMG, their expressions as they looked over their shoulders at me! I could have died laughing!

But I had no mercy and as I caught the first one I began to tickle her silly. Her brother, catching on, immediately took off for the dining room, but I chased after him, promising him the “Tickle of Death” as well. Soon it was me chasing him chased by my daughter as we circled the downstairs. Silliness upon silliness, but a welcome interlude to the tedium of being cooped up at home together day after day.

Collapsing in giggles, the three of us finally decided we’d all had enough of bananas in pyjamas chasing anyone.

Option B: Mystery

I couldn’t break free of the dream, but voices outside my door gave me something to latch onto and struggle the rest of the way out. But getting my eyes opened turned out not to be reassuring. This wasn’t my bedroom! Looking around, it seemed I was in some sort of hotel room. It was meant to look a bit posh, but the scent...was that disinfectant? Coming more awake, I realized I wasn’t in a regular bed either and I could hear equipment humming nearby. A hospital?

I tried to think back to what put me here, but I met with a blank. And then I really jolted awake because I realized that blank included ME! How could I not know my own self?

“Calm down, take a deep breath,” I told myself. “You’re still caught in that nightmare...” But even as I thought this, the last wisps of it melted away. All I was left with was a sense of urgency, of needing to flee. But had that truly been a nightmare, or was it my reality? Suddenly adrenaline was pumping through my veins and an alarm sounded from one of the machines.

Instantly the voices outside my door cut off and the knob began to turn. The desire to conceal myself was almost overwhelming, but this was my chance to discover my identity. I looked up as the door opened. A nurse came in, relief showing in his eyes. He said, "Thank God, Madame President, you're awake!"

Option A: Adventure

My breath was coming in deep gulps and my heart was pounding – but in a good, steady rhythm; nothing I couldn't handle. I was even clear-headed enough to think how everyone says adventures are only fun until they stop being fun. Being chased by a pack of wolves across the prairie wasn't enough to ruin my adventure. There was nowhere to hide, but I was confident in my ability to outrun them, or at least their interest. Soon they would drop off and return to their kill. Their goal was to protect their dinner, not add me to it.

I skidded on some loose sandy-gravelly soil, which momentarily threw my pace off. I quickly recovered and, looking back over my shoulder, it didn't seem as if I'd lost any ground. I put on a burst of speed, not because I needed to, but simply because I was enjoying the wind in my face and the sense of freedom – almost of flying – that this run was giving me. Another quarter mile and I would be home free; I was sure of it.

Until suddenly I wasn't.

The grasslands before me were rent by an invisible crack. A ravine, narrow but deep, had hidden itself until it was too late. Now I was flying in truth, and I had no way to save myself.

The wolves slowed as they reached the clifftop. The human lay crushed on the rocks below. Once more, all was as it should be in their world.

Written by:
Lucie Muema,
from Kenya – living in USA

Option B Mystery

Come with us, they pleaded. Come, see how beautiful this place is. Come with us!! Their frickle hands were stretched towards me as if trying to pull me towards them. Two oldl looking women were calling me. I didn't recognize them and I didn't understand their urgency. I could see from their faces they needed me to agree and follow them urgently.

But I was very scared of them and I felt I was in danger. I started screaming in a very loud voice Nooooooo, I was kicking and tossing, sweating, breathing very hard very scared. I continued to scream then I woke up and heard myself screaming! I realised this was not a dream. I continued to scream and heard what I was saying. ' I don't want to die!! I screamed "

Then I heard voices outside the door. And as ithe door opened someone said my patient is awake, she had gone into a coma. I screamed louder and started shaking. The doctor tried to calm me down but all in vain. They added another blanket because I kept saying I am feeling cold. The doctor assured me all will be well now that I am back.

I was in the Theater and I had gone into a coma after an operation.

Written by:
Ben Angel,
from USA – living in Poland

Option A, Adventure:

While casually looking left and then right at an intersection, I caught sight of the three of them. I knew I was in trouble.

Once across the vacated drive, I accelerated my pace a little. It didn't help; so did they. I clutched my purchase a little tighter to me and started to run.

I could hear them screaming, but it was in Polish. My panic told me that I didn't have to bother to translate. Whatever they were interjecting at me didn't matter as much as getting this little bag home.

Dare I look over my shoulder? Well, I had to - I'm not the sort that can wait out my own curiosity - but I'd at least make it a strategic look. It would have to wait until the next intersection.

Then I felt my foot hit a loosened cobble, and down I went, my arm flinging the bag ahead of me in an attempt not to break what was inside. My knee came down hard, the pain jolted up my thigh at the speed of electricity. I'd not make it home this time.

The angry Polish words became louder and louder as the three yellow vested officers approached. One collected the bruised tomatoes and carton of broken eggs back into the convenience store bag, while the other two sat me up on a nearby bench. Realizing I spoke English, one of the officers asked, "Are you crazy?"

"I was only going to the shop," I tearfully replied.

Written by:
Sanae Carr,
from Japan – living in USA

Option B Mystery

Ah yes, I have died.

As I opened my eyes to the white of the ceiling in the room, I thought to myself. The hospital room, I figured, was filled with the perfect amount of light that was not too bright or too dim. The temperature was so perfect that it felt like I was floating in amniotic fluid, and there was no sound, not even that background noise you usually hear in your head. It was as though I was in a soundproof chamber. It was comfortable and suffocating at the same time.

Now what. What does one do after one dies and wakes up in the next world??

I started remembering the last scene. A helicopter crashed into grandma's apartment. As soon as I threw futon on grandma and me, everything went black.

The room was not soundproof after all, the voices outside of the door invited me out. I slipped out of the bed, of course with no back pain or jerks I used to suffer when I was alive.

The door opened. A middle age woman sat behind a heavy black desk with a lit candle. She smiled.

"I died, didn't I?" I asked.

"Yes."

I did not despair for some reason. The woman continued rather pragmatically.

"You can pay visits to several people to say good-bye. Who would you like to go see?"

"Well, my mom, dad, sister, grandma..."

Then it hit me. I will not see them, ever again. Ever!

James woke me up before I found out what was supposed to happen next.

Written by:

Jamil Nahra,
from Syria – living in Spain

Option B

Just the Mystery :)

60 of Syria

The Story of Nemeh

My uncle registered my birth date as of 01 January 1966!

Uncle Mazen, whom I happen to cherish the most, asserts that I was born that day and that I was found as a single egg in the woods hatched at that day.

I love my uncle, I tend to believe him despite all that is rumored about him.

He is falsely accused of mental illness, only because he dreams for ten people and eats, sleeps and speaks for ten. What's more, he's up to his ears in love. He told me as I was about to join middle school and enter the world of manhood:

"When Maryam shook her shoulders, placed her right hand on her waist and lifted the other up in the air, and danced.. danced like spring and laughed..laughed so much

Only then dreams began to come true and the wind looked so colorful and tasted like sugar. And this is my son, how dawn was born."

My uncle loved her all his life and just like a first-class lover, he gladly sacrificed his heart and years for her.

He used to say: "Only Maryam can awaken my every possible sense. Every time I'm with her, I have feelings that I cannot describe.

One look from her eyes is enough to change everything I know."

Written by:
Mohan Tanniru,
from India – living in USA

Pleasing yourself – Never too late!

Being a middle child in a family of any size, let alone in a family with nine children can be an interesting challenge. You look for every opportunity to get attention or please others.

When I was six and broke my leg in the 50's (now you know how old I am), I used to complain a lot to get attention of parents and older siblings – so I get food first and have siblings carry me to the kitchen.

To get my dad's attention, who was a Gandhi disciple, I wore cotton cloths spun on a wheel and made up for the lost year by getting silk clothes every chance I got since.

To get my mom's attention as she hated wasting food, I used to eat all the leftover vegetable curries my mother made, and my siblings didn't like. I still like cooked vegetable curries today.

To please my dad on this death bed when I was 14, I promised I will become an engineer even though I hated math and wanted to be a doctor.

Well, after he died, a teacher helped me understand math to become an engineer. Unfortunately, I never worked as an engineer and decided to be a professor. Guess who I pleased.

I never asked my kids to choose any career, they all had engineering degrees. Someone up these is pleased.

Now I am retired and spending time in healthcare and sciences, I can finally please myself, 60 years later.

Written by:
Amir Huda,
from Bangladesh – living in USA

Option B
A Poem entitled, Post Fratricide

I meet you because none can command
An attention so well in the room
You say your name is Ryan
And you are six and a half
You hardly need a prompt because
your vessel cannot be contained
You talk about your friends
And a world so full of wonder
I can't help but enter this construct
Of memory, reality, and possibility
I see how you sometimes abandon reality
And climb on to imagination
And I marvel at your creativity
For you are determined and unstoppable
I feel you will make the unreal, real.
Now I see you or someone like you
on the other side
You wake up in a hospital bed
And don't know who you are
You say 'I will be 95 years old this week'
Startled, I say you don't look your age
I catch a hint of a smile and then quiet
I go on to ask how are you treated
You respond that you're in a jail
You hear voices outside the door
the world is so mean to you
I follow your suffering until it
Enters a wild world of imagination
From the far corner of the room
Your daughter is mouthing words to me
'De-men-tia! De-men-tia!'
I nod and wonder how did you end up here
This co-construct of reality and imagination
Has lost a brother somewhere
But then where was our lifetime spent?
Trying to keep our world coherent
Did we push aside our imagination?
The creativity that now demands its place
But fails to construct a rich existence
Without memory, post fratricide

Written by:
Karen Laing,
from Jamaica – living in USA

Option A Flash Fiction bio

One fist under the pillow, the other clutching the sheet above her head, Elle was not a member of the impartial mothers' club as she clearly preferred the micro-massage of her Terrier Chihuahua's paws along her back to the forced intimacy of the 60-lb Vizslador. She sighed knowing that working remotely as a member of the faculty and being a single mother to a preschooler within spitting distance of retirement barely qualified as first-world problems. To her mind, they were problems nonetheless. Yet even the passing Christian that she was knew enough to be grateful for another day above ground, global pandemic notwithstanding.

Casting caution and fur babies to the wind, she swung her legs over the side of the bed and made a mental note to unlock the gate for pest control. Breakfast would be a no-brainer. She'd made her first cheesecake in the Instant Pot the night before and given The Boss's sugar addiction, would have no problem selling the idea. The day was already showing promise. The Boss was still asleep. She had time to nuke some turkey bacon but remembered she'd made the last batch two days earlier. She'd add it to her digital shopping cart. Opening the door, she heard something in the gravel but saw no commercial truck in the driveway. Do I go in and wake a sleeping child or do I continue toward the noise? With a look over her shoulder, she took a deep breath and closed the door.

Written by:
Tony Tonev,
from Bulgaria – living in USA

In the dark musky night, I heard an earth shattering scream. I didn't dare look, so I just ran. I heard my mother scream and then ran in the darkness. I knew I was going to get killed in the woods. I looked over my shoulder to see how the dead man had walked out of a house. He was carrying a shotgun and he was walking from behind, I saw what was going on with him. He didn't hesitate to attack me. I grabbed his hand, held it open, and then pushed him out the woods. Now in the middle of a busy intersection we all saw a man, a white man standing in a car with a white hood. He grinned slowly. I had seen this man before and I am so sorry. He is my father. I had always thought my father was a monster. But in reality I was the one that could not stand up to him. I knew it was a ghost, but the man had been here for nearly twenty years. It was time to end this. The man took the shotgun out, and then pulled the trigger and started to kill me. I thought I was gone. But, I was suddenly rescued by a truck. I saw it coming off the side of the road and hit my mother. I couldn't help but think I was a hero.

Written by:
Alan Samai,
from Iran – living in USA

Option A Adventure:

A poem written by Alan about the beauty spring

On the garden enriched with flower spring,
Filled with blossoms surrounded by beauty.

Checking out the view over the sneak peak,
Throughout plantations surrounded by greenery.

Bringing love and tenderness over the edge,
Bursting hills with colors through the hedge.

Striving for the best with efficiency and dedication,
Savvyng the rhythms of edition and distribution.

Enjoying the splendor of nature in full bloom,
Nourishing the soul of creature in wild forest wood.

Bearing the peacock with charming welcome,
Casting the shamrock with significance of elegance.

Making a lifetime of memory at many years around,
Shaping a timeline of fidelity at century's paramount.

Written by:
Aman Sachdev,
from India – living in USA

Option A

The plank creaks, tired water laps at the hull. It mocks me. These ancient wet bones, condemned to lazy gods.

The pike-man presses the blade with an insulting delicacy. His diseased feet shuffle and the point quakes

between my shoulders. The sky is dreary and boring. The sea is full.

I heave back and the penetration is sudden. Deep. A strong movement. Wet and euphoric. I lose vision, struck,

and feel an ignition. The pull of memory. The executioner exhales. It's subtle, satisfying. Defying death's

practitioner.

A raspy laugh from nearby, followed by a moist slap. I crane my head over my bloodied shoulder, and the shapes

in my periphery swim, drowning. The dregs of a dying crew, momentarily distracted. Grinning, shaking erratically,

I step back and feel the blade press firm, and I leap blindly backwards with furious force into the pike-man.

He is weak, the spear's shift strikes him in the midsection, and he tumbles with me onto the deck.

The crash is violent and the steel impresses upon me further. A wail wells in me, transformative. And this old man, long

forgotten, senile, feels the echoes of remembrance, the faint music of life's many ages. The exploits of old

tumbling into the earth's oceanic archives.

Written by:
Karmen Spiljak,
from Slovenia – living in Brazil

Option B

I stared at the white ceiling, but the sharp white light hurt my eyes. The smell of sanitiser and stale sweat hung in the air.

Where am I?

All I could hear, were subdued voices outside the door.
'Anyone there?'

My voice sounded foreign, broken.

I tried pulling myself up, but my limbs were heavy and uncooperative. I picked up a tinge of urine from under my bed.

It's a hospital, then. The question that really puzzled me was much more basic. Saying it out loud, though, would make me sound insane.

Who am I?

The pictures came flooding in, as soon as I closed my eyes. The rain beating against the windscreen, a chipped ballerina figurine bouncing, lightning ripping the sky open, then a long shadow falling towards me. After that, the bright light grew even brighter.

The sound of a door opening brought me back. I caught a glimpse of a white coat. A warm hand on the back of my wrist, then the doctor's bespectacled face leaning over mine.

'How are you feeling, Mr Harrington?'

The name sounded vaguely familiar, like a name of someone I once knew.

'As if I was hit by a car.'

'A tree,' the doctor said, 'but you're in good hands now.'

In his glasses, I catch a glimpse of a bruised stranger.

'If your head feels funny, don't worry. Give it a day or two,' he said.

A peculiar sensation rushed through me.

What if I don't want to remember?

Written by:
Praline Hudson,
from South Africa – living in Spain

OPTION A:
NTHOMBI IN KWAZULU-NATAL

Nthombi heard the shuffle of the soft, grass curtain. Ssssh, sssssh, sssssh. Silent, squishy footsteps on the clammy mud floor. She saw how the shadows shifted as he moved around. Searching. She could hear the pounding of her heart.

Outside, the chicks were cluck, clucking. The music, boom, booming. The wet clothes, slap, slapping against the wash stone. The neighbours, chit chattering.

And there she was, her long, slim, chocolatey brown body huddled as small as an elephant shrew in a dark corner in the cool grass hut. Oh! He's going to find me, she thought.

"Gotcha!" Themba shouted. Ntombi shot past him, looking over her shoulder.

Her excited friends laughed, "ha, ha, ha!"

Themba had to count again.

"1, 2, 3..." , started Themba and everyone scattered to their hiding places.

Written by:
Angela Klein,
from USA – living in USA

Option A

Drenched in sweat I awake. “Ugh,” I think, “Do I have a fever? Is this it? Do I have coronavirus?” But checking my throat, predictably, I detect no soreness or prescient scratchiness. So I go to the bathroom, rationing my sacred squares of toilet paper (Kleenex soon), and return to my damp sheets. It’s 3 a.m. To soothe myself back to sleep I turn to my tablet, dimly glowing in the dark with the words of a youth from 80 years ago. “We don’t leave the house now,” she writes, “It is forbidden from 10 p.m. to 5 in the morning. At five the street looks almost funny, everyone rushes out.” How bizarre. We now stay in our houses, with curfew from 10 to 5, then stream outside with the sun, our faces covered, walking, running, biking, skateboarding, even rollerblading (“Is it the 90s again?”), and once a man pedaling an elliptical contraption down the street. Of course the surfers also persisted until the water was banned. “Keep reading,” I gently tell myself. And my eyelids grow heavy. And I turn out the light. And I dream of my ex-s and the best friend I grew up with who died suddenly of a heart attack when she was 33. Why appear now? And then the sun dawns. And I drag on my running shoes. And my Pandora starts to play. KT Tunstall. “As I walk away, I look over my shoulder, to see what I’m leaving behind.” And I run.

Written by:
Hyunsoo Hur,
from South Korea – living in USA
OPTION B.
Mystery
“In Search for a Lost Memory”

I hear vague noises. People seem to be talking but I cannot tell what. I see dim images. They seem to be objects but I cannot tell what. My eyes move slowly from one end to the other. The objects little by little appear to be in a better shape. I'm in a white room. There is a ceiling fan, a door, a closet, a chair... I hear footsteps, not loud but there is a constant movement. Where am I? I'm lying on the bed. I see a fly swirling around the room. I tried to move. "Ouch!" A sharp pain. Why this pain? What is blocking me? Then a shock! My body is tied to the bed all over. What has happened? I'm in the hospital!

I don't remember how much time has passed. What I remember is... It was late December. Holiday spirit was in the air. Christmas carols still on the street, ready-packed gifts in the stores waiting to be purchased... It was a cold night. The snow from two days ago left chilliness in the air. It was about 9:00PM at night. I was hurrying home after a Christmas party with colleagues, walking on the same street I frequented for the past 30 years, observing many people come and go, and hearing many life stories. Four more days till Christmas, the day we celebrate one of the famous birthdays in the world.

I hear a car stopping nearby behind me. A car door was opening and footsteps. Is that police? Are people too jovial that the police has to be on control? The footstep sounds were drawing near me. They seem to approaching closer and closer. I looked back...

Written by:
Renée Sproull,
from USA – living in USA

Hello all, I have never shared my writing before, so thank you for the opportunity. I wasn't inspired to write until this morning. My apologies it is a bit long, I didn't have time to edit it down.

The Menagerie Chasing Me”

Eyes tired but heart racing, inside with nowhere to go, the night comes welcoming a restless sleeper, tossed pillows and gnarled blankets between my legs. Deep confusion and anger swirl around in my psyche, remembering part of my day, how my manager questioned me over and over in a terse email exchange, nit picking on sentence of my email that she didn't understand. “Wow, I must really be off here, can you explain?” Regardless of my professional response, my heart thumps and bumps in my chest cavity, pain of feeling like I was I an idiot, confusing her as if I was a court jester dancing circles around me, teasing her and egging her on so she can't possibly understand me. The feeling passes, jolted by another memory, like electricity passing as a strong current meant to shock and awe. All in the confines of my tired brain and rumpled covers from tossing and turning, I am chased by another... I let the assault continue and the memory unfolds, the sweet, well meaning words from this man, drawing me in with tenderness and kindness with a storm brewing and inviting me to take part. I feel like I can't say no, so much to like yet so much chaos. I hear of his ex, she's moving to the PNW so we shouldn't be dating please don't contact me, no she's not coming she changed her mind, sorry and a day later oh yes, she is moving back with the family but we aren't reconciling. What a cluster *%\$&! My heart roils in frustration and pain to be tossed back and forth like this. I deleted the FB dating app that brought me here, perhaps it will sooth the chasing emotions that want to catch me....as the emotion wanes, a still hand taps me on the shoulder, I feel the hand impress on my shoulder and I look over my shoulder, stunned at this strong connection with a hand I seem to know. I deeply sense, I am Here, I AM with you. I feel this strong presence in my soul as if someone was in the room, a hand on my shoulder reassuring me. It's Him, he shows up during the wild chase of emotion that keeps me awake, he's there to sooth the wild animals of my emotional menagerie and I fall asleep.

Menagerie-a collection of wild animals kept in captivity.

“My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.” Exodus 33:14.

Written by:
Felix Gbemudu,
from Nigeria – living in USA

OPTION A
Defenseless

Contrast of two worlds
One rich the other poor
They are worlds apart
One lives in a palace
The other lives in a shack
It's the story of third world countries
I see poverty daily
Poverty the reason for vices
Women have turned prostitutes
While Men have turned robbers
Children hardly go to schools
There are malnourished children every where
Even street urchins and pick pockets
The leaders sit tight
Postponing their handover
When will it be over?
The people have lost hope
Some grope in hopelessness
The leaders grow fatter at our expense
Their children splash the largesse of their fathers' loot
Living in posh apartments in posh areas
While we languish in prison conditions
When will all this come to an end
Is there hope at all FOR US WHO ARE DEFENSELESS?

OPTION B
Transition to Immortality

When death comes will it be painful or painless
How is the other side, where spirits reside?
I wish I could catch a glimpse of the other side
I wish I knew the day I will die
So I can prepare for the journey
What do I need to go with?
How do I prepare
Which vehicle do I go with?
How far is the journey?
How come nobody wants to go in a hurry?

How come death is an unfriendly topic?
Is it not real?
Do we have a choice in the matter?
Transition from mortality to immortality

OPTION C

Love Tragedy
The end of another affair
When hearts are shattered
It's like a dagger through my soul
Many unanswered questions flow through my mind
Night cries
When the pillow is totally drenched in tears
It's sad but its reality
How do I repair my life?
I hope am not going mad
What really went wrong?
What does she have I don't have
How do I start again?
My thoughts pause from another round of crying
Soft quiet crying, with tears streaming down my cheeks
Tears punctuated by sniffing from my nostrils
My eyes are swollen from the speaking of tears
Will I ever laugh or feel joy again
Will I ever find love?
Will I remain single till I die?
Are my cursed
It's as if it's a bad dream
It's like sudden pitch dark night with no hope of day light
I have to protect myself, never to fall in love again
I tried didn't I?
Somebody tell me where did I go wrong
I need space for my heart bleeds profusely
My being has temporarily lost its glory
Does love have to hurt so badly?
Tell me is it worth the risk
It was beautiful while it lasted
A beautiful song now a dirge
Daylight turned darkness
My heart is broken
His heart belongs to somebody else
That really hurts
I feel a mixture of shame and foolishness
It's Love gone sour

InterNations.org
Seattle - Riga

SHORT STORIES & POESY E-BOOK
EDITION 2020

VOLUME II

Story writing challenge in 250 words, Summer 2020

27 June 2020

The Seattle Literature Group & the Riga Language and Literature Group are teaming up to hold joint microfiction challenges quarterly! Our first event will be Summer 2020.

Even if you've never written before, even if you've never written in English before, you can write microfiction! With a limit of 250 words, this is something we can all accomplish.

Here's how it works:

- 1) Pick one of the thematic options below.
- 2) Compose a story including the designated action + key word(s).
- 3) Keep your word count to 250 or less!
- 4) Post your stories in the comments on this activity's wall so we can all read through them. Feel free to submit as many as you like!

Option A

Action: You open the door and discover a trail of bloody footprints

Keyword phrase: "the squeak of [...]" (fill in the blank with whatever is squeaking in your story!)

Option B

Action: You find yourself in a place you do not recognize and you sense others watching you

Keyword phrase: "the uncertainty"

Option C

Action: You have a dream, a vision, a hope, but it has never come true...yet.

Keyword phrase: "finally, I got a magic wand"

Please post your story on the wall for your local group. Then feel free to visit the other group's activity wall to check out their submissions, too!

Riga and Seattle groups will meet up together via Zoom to enjoy discovering our creations.

Activity Hosts:

Antra M, Consul
Claude G, Ambassador
Language and Literature Group Riga

Margie Banin, Consul
Seattle Literature Group

Written by:
Ilóida Mota,
from Angola – living in India

Option A

12.30 pm. “Hey. Meet me at 5 pm inside the Oceanside Towers, please. I need to talk to you.” I read the WhatsApp message and the little monkeys inside my head started to jump: “What in hell has happened to her this time? Why can’t she call me? Why do I have to go to a building that is still under construction? Why did she choose such a place?”

The call went through, but no one was picking it up. It was her lunchtime but maybe she was having lunch with a co-worker and, knowing Elena as I knew, she gave her full attention to whatever she was doing.

4.30 pm. “Is your phone charged?” – a little monkey jumped. “Argh! Phone charged. Time to go.”

5 pm. I entered the building. My eyes were hyperactive and immediately saw the red on the floor. One little alarmed monkey: “Is it blood?” I knelt on the floor and my nose was filled with fresh paint. “No, paint.” – the little monkey was reassured.

“Elena?” Silence. Suddenly, the squeak of a door as I pushed it open. My ears and eyes were in full alert mode. My eyes got assaulted by a trail of... The little alarmed monkey knew this time: “It is blood! Call...” Before he could finish it, there, like a punch on the stomach. A pond of red coming from a wave of black. Phone, hands shaking, voice trembling: “I would like to...” Darkness.

Written by:
Stephen Kwasi Tufuor,
from Ghana – living in Ghana

Option A

I was strapped, masked and gloved. Simply put, I was prepared, or at least I thought so. The squeak of the door was subtle, elegant even but it came with a terrible revelation. "Jesus! Fuck!". How the fuck, no... what the fuck? Just a couple feet from me was the torso of my target, still drenched in blood, his eyes wide open with shock, much like mine.

That was when I noticed it, a trail of bloody footprints leading to what I presumed was the bathroom. I hurriedly raced for the door, when I heard a gun cock, it was followed by a female voice, "Take of your mask and put your gun on the floor", this couldn't be happening, I thought as I slowly followed her instructions.

"Turn around", she commanded.

Naturally she was blonde, but her hair was drenched in blood giving it a sort of brunette look. She had a saw in her hand and a psychotic look written all over her face. This girl was crazy, I thought.

"It was an accident", her voice croaked. She had a gun, and a chainsaw! This was no accident.

She started sobbing, and some blood entered into her eyes just as she let her guard down to scratch her eye, I rushed out of the apartment.

This was just another robbery gone wrong.

Written by:
Karen Laing,
from Jamaica – living in USA

Option B

I was hoping the beads of sweat pearling on my nose were the result of a hot flash, not a symptom of the virus. I'd been debating about trying on some slacks. Fitting rooms had never been my friend, but this being our first outing since quarantine restrictions had relaxed, I still wasn't quite comfortable with the cleanliness of any fitting room. Before I could make a decision, I looked over my shoulder to the shopping cart and my daughter was gone. The cart was still at the end of the aisle, but she wasn't in it. Suddenly, my mouth felt hot and suffocating like dry ice as I attempted to stifle rising panic. "NayNaaaaay!" I keened. Instantly, a small arm shot out from between the clothes hanging on the rack in front of me, followed by her head, and a smile stretching from ear to ear. Surprise! She shouted, in obvious self-satisfaction. Dropping my purse and the slacks to the floor, I knelt down and gathered her to me, ignoring any concerns about germs and hiding the tears streaming down my cheeks in her hair. She attempted to escape my stranglehold but relented, accustomed by now to the seesaw of emotions we rode regularly in this new abnormal. She put her arms around my neck and squeezed. "It's OK, Mama." She said in precisely the way I reassure her when she awakens from a nightmare. "I'm right here."

The uncertainty of motherhood is not for the faint of heart.

Written by:
Ali G,
from Scotland – living in England

A Colorful Squeak

Silent squeaks came out of the weird colorful slippers whenever the lady walked into the next door apartment. Chic, self-centered, and shouting with some agony this evening then lovely music started as it does always. She was stuck with her life, looking for a new start, and having strong desires for a change.

The bus was departing when the lift opens and she ran out with bare feet and a pair of slippers tied around her neck. She was catching a flight from Edinburgh later that afternoon for an interview in Brussels. Jumping across the Atlantic was always the light, but this will have to do for now.

California dreaming was last year, the sun, the burritos, and dogs running free in Berkeley. But the studentship did not get through, and her bid for the global domination of colorful footwear design was in tatters. This is not a place for me, she thought.

A hand gently touched her shoulder as she glanced over the runway and her heart danced. I still remember your different slippers that day, the voice said. Have you thought of my team in Belgium? She glanced back and it all came flooding in her head. So let it be a silicon glen where it happens.

She takes a deep breath while looking at the seafood menu. She was surrounded by her colleagues after the football match, and ladies just loved the colorful slippers.

The sun rises on Half Moon beach with families flogging to spend the weekend. A shop at the seaside stands out with its colorful merchandise. Ma'a, the girl shouts, them slippers are from Europe.

Written by:
Ben Angel,
from USA – living in Poland

Option A (Part 1):

Dark. Why is it that every time I wake up from a bender, it's dark? I read all the time about the hung-over staggering out with sunglasses on to shield their eyes from blinding daylight. I never seem to wake up that early.

Standing, I took a step on the hard wooden floor. Wood. Well, it's not jail, then. I can feel the draft pretty intensely as the wind whistles outside. Why is it so inky dark?

Thump. My nose hit the wall. After ensuring my nose wasn't broken, I felt the obstacle ahead of me. Log? Who do I know with a log cabin?

At last, the door. I open it, and the moonlight is so bright! I wished I had shades! As I shielded my eyes from the glaring reflected light of the moon, I notice the trail of bloody footprints. That must have been some party, I thought to myself.

I see a bench in my peripheral vision, and without looking, I sit down. "Squeak!" went the dog toy under my butt. I look around for signs of the dog it belongs to. The fir trees are much smaller here than I remember from yesterday, the time before the party - before the blackout.

As I get up, the squeak of the toy sounds again as the bone-shaped rubber form inhales and returns to its original shape. This is bad, I think to myself, not knowing fully what exactly I'm referring to. I guess I'll find out.

Option B (Part 2):

As I follow the trail of blood, the frosty wind chills me. What is this, winter? I could have sworn it was September. Did I sleep months? Why aren't I hungry?

I don't think I've ever seen fir trees this small before. Who do I know to be so into midget trees that he, or maybe she - I'm too hung-over to be woke - planted an entire forest of them. The bloody footprints lead to a dirt road, probably the only way back to civilization.

As I stagger forward, I feel cold shivers. No, I feel sick. This isn't going to end well. I run to the huge rock on the left and lay belly first, heaving down the other side of it.

Minutes later, I recover. That was rough. I mean, I've thrown up mid-hangover before, but that was painful. I roll onto my back and steady my head against the all-too-rapidly spinning world.

That's when I felt the uncertainty of being watched. What was creepy was I didn't know from where. Worse still, I didn't know by whom. Maybe this wasn't the place to stay while the world stops spinning. Maybe I should be in the middle of that road stumbling back to wherever they took civilization to.

Each nerve-wracking step seemed to have its echo in the moving brush. Was it wind, or was it Sasquatch? Was it serial killer or the ghosts of his victims? I sped up my pace, not wanting to find out.

Option C (Part 3):

The dirt road soon led to a rickety bridge. Through trees on the far side, a light flickered. Was it a street lamp? A home with electricity? No, it was a bonfire. Even from this distance, it looked huge.

I staggered forward, knowing that whatever was following me in the brush would either have to come out in the open to continue the chase, or give up at the water's edge. I glanced back as I started across the river. The wind continued to move branches in the forest behind me and shift the brush around, disguising the movement of whatever evil lurked beyond sight.

Turning forward again toward the bonfire, I pulled myself together. If it was another party, no one was going to welcome me if I came off as a nervous wreck. I had to find a walking stick to steady myself, something that helped me look mountain-man cool.

As if on command, it appeared. I thought to myself, finally, I got a magic wand! I wondered if there were any girls by the fire. Certainly a man can dream, can't he?

As I approached, though, no one was there. Not a single person was tending the fire. Who leaves a fire burning unwatched in a windy forest? Weirder still, who leaves all their clothes on the ground near an unattended fire?

On a stump, I saw the absinthe bottle. Finally, things made sense. Following suit, I took one magical, teleportational swig of that green fairy elixir...

Written by:
Mohan Nair,
from India – living in Qatar

I stared with awe, fascination and fear, at the height at which cantilever platform stood - a tiny speck, jutting out of the cliff overlooking the river valley.

With leaded feet, I trod up to the lift that took me to the top. The chatter of my friends were a distant murmur. My heart thumped with anticipation, of a fear to be conquered – of a new thrill that would engulf my being.

The next five minutes flew by in a daze.... The recurring dream came back to haunt – me falling from a height and getting up, leaving a trail of bloody footprints in the sand. Was this it? I was startled out of my reverie by the squeak of the lift door opening. I stepped out to the wide ledge where a harness rope was tied to my legs, and I was given a safety jacket and a helmet.

The beautiful vistas took my breath away. The endless blue sky stretched its wings, merging with the blue of the river gushing by. The trees on the shores swayed wildly as if beckoning me. One of friends laughed at my fear and apprehension and slapped me on my back and said - buddy, you can do it – close your eyes and let me do the rest. Like a fool, I asked him - what? He mockingly said – I will push you of course! I stood at the edge, closed my eyes & jumped!

My Wish list – Bungee Jumping - Ticked!

Hi Everyone,
My Magic Wand.....

With wind on my face, glancing sometimes, at lush green nature & sometimes at dreary stretches of long & winding roads flashing by, as I ride into the unknown, traversing the road less traveled by.

Since the time I started riding, every year has brought a new vision, a new dream of a place to see and explore, lands untouched by the orgies of greed & development.

There is something about travelling, and that too on my bike, that sets my soul free. It's a feeling akin to having an orgasm, a feeling of being unshackled, a feeling of being liberated/freed. Riding alone, exploring unseen places, understanding different cultures & people gives an acute sense of realization of the futility of the materialistic ambitions that my fallible mind falls prey to. A nomad on a bike requires very little of the world's pleasures to be & to feel happy. Nature has in its profound benevolence enough charities to cater to a human's intrinsic need for happiness. A ride always helps me realize that I have not strayed away too much into the caverns of the materialistic world.

The call of my bike and the unknown lands is something that gets answered only once a year from the time I got into the corporate jungle. I was fettered in suits & ties in a mad world shuttling between 8 am to 5 pm.

This pandemic will hopefully give me my magic wand – my resignation from a 9 to 5 job! I will be free... to RIDE!

Written by:
Citlalli Martinez,
from Mexico – living in Poland

The challenge

-tell me what happened. Asked the man in front of her.

-Two things called my attention when I entered home. Sunny was not there to greet me as he did every night, and Melissa wasn't watching TV in the living room, so the whole place was dark. Still, I could see the blood footprints from the kitchen to the stairs. The squeak of the bed from Melissa's room made me shiver. I dialed 911 , then I have no idea. I woke up here in front of all of you with the uncertainty of what had happened. Who are you anyway? Why are you all staring at me?

-Is this the phone you used? Asked the man showing the mobile.

-yes

-finally! I got a magic wand! This is the one where the portal was hidden, so let's get out now. My dream to go back to our dimension is in front of us!

They all stood up as the man was dialing a number and then they were all absorbed by the mobile, which felt next to the woman's hand. When she reached it she felt dizzying, closed her eyes, stood up and made her way to the kitchen. She felt sick when she saw Sunny fully opened without guts. She followed the footprints upstairs to Melissa's room. She was like Sunny, in her bed. The woman try to use the phone but then she threw it away and some how she woke up in her bed.

Citlalli Mayela Martínez Cano

Written by:
Lise Pedersen,
from Denmark – Living in Denmark

Option B
The Uncertainty

The fluorescent light blinded the main surfaces of the room, making them seem colder and more sterile than usual. The operating table in the middle of the room was hit the hardest by this piercing light making the woman lying on it look as white as the tiles on the walls surrounding her. She briefly blinked her eyes open, the harshness of the light forcing her to close them again immediately.

Behind her closed eyelids she sensed people watching her, her mind trying to fight its way through the fog and disorientation about where she was and who she was with.

The group of medical staff huddled around the woman in silence, the rustle of their operating gowns the only hushed sound in the room. Finally, the doctor cleared his throat solemnly. "As I see it, we only have one option left. The patient hasn't responded to any of the treatment we've given her so far. Even if we don't have final clearance on the drug and its effect I see no other alternative." The group of operating gowns nodded in concurrence.

No one noticed the slight shake of his hand as the doctor administered the drug, the deep breath he took as the last droplets of liquid passed from the syringe into the woman's bloodstream, the silent prayer he uttered as the drug started to take effect.

Even if his goal was to save lives the uncertainty of his choices killed a part of him every day.

Option C

Action: You have a dream, a vision, a hope, but it has never come true...yet.

Keyword phrase: "finally, I got a magic wand"

I've always wanted to help people; make them feel better about themselves. As a child I was forever putting bandages on my dolls to fix make believe broken bones.

Later on, I applied to medical school to become a doctor. I wanted to set real broken bones so that people could walk again, help burn victims with their disfigurements, give cancer patients treatment that would give their lives hope.

Sadly though, I too started to suffer. I developed a disease that robbed me of the feeling in my legs. I was devastated. My dreams of becoming a doctor were dashed. How could I help people get better if I was sitting in a wheelchair?

I still had the use of my hands though. One day when I myself was waiting to see a doctor, a woman in the waiting room asked me to help her put on some makeup to make her feel a bit better. Her hands shook too much for her to do it herself, she explained. I gradually started to help more women in the hospital with their makeup. Giving them a healthy glow, a pink cheek, luster around their eyes. They used to ask me to do my magic on them.

After a while it dawned on me that this way I could still help people to feel better. It was as if with my makeup-brush I finally got a magic wand that, even if only briefly, gave people hope back.

Option A

Action: You open the door and discover a trail of bloody foot prints

Keyword phrase: "the squeak of [...]"

I was starting to worry. I hadn't heard from my son, Troy, all afternoon. He hadn't picked up the phone when I called to say I was on my way home but that I'd be a bit late. He's only 10 after all, and he wasn't even supposed to be home alone this afternoon. I couldn't ignore the gnawing feeling in the pit of my stomach.

When I pulled up in the drive, I saw his bike lying across the sidewalk, one wheel sticking out on the road. My heart started to beat faster. I opened the front door of our house and gasped as I saw bloody foot prints on the floor. I ran inside yelling his name, but no answer. Only the squeak of the chew toy of our dog, Dan, that I accidentally tripped over on the floor as I rushed through the house.

"Troy! Troy!" I called but still no answer. The footprints went upstairs. I followed. They went along the landing. I followed. Right into the bathroom where I could hear the sound of running water. There was Troy kneeling by the bath tub, holding Dan. "Mum", Troy looked up with scared eyes, "Dan got hit by a car while we were playing on the street! He's bleeding so I carried him up here to clean him. Do you think he'll be alright?"

Written by:
Wei-Hai Chu,
from Netherlands – living in Czech Republic

Option A
The squeak of...

Ariesa flew in hurriedly. It was her turn to brood the egg. It was her second nest with Libro that year. They had nested again on the balcony of that nice old couple. Nice, because they left them alone. The small balcony had a planter on the side. They had built their nest behind that planter again. The green awning that covered that planter, sheltered them from the rain. It was perfect. Libro stood on the edge of the planter guarding the egg. His day shift was done, he was ready to forage. He pecked at Ariesa. After she settled, he hopped off the planter and flew away. Ariesa drifted off.

The cracking of the egg awoke her. The little squab squirmed and peeped. Ariesa moved around a bit and covered the yellow ball of fur. It was tantamount that the squab stayed warm. Libro sat on the edge of the balcony and peered at Ariesa. He understood what had happened and flew away to forage. The production of pigeon milk had to commence. Ariesa and Libro would regurgitate this into the squab's beak. This is how pigeons feed their young.

Libro should have been back hours ago. Ariesa was hungry. She flapped her wings and flew to the roof adjacent to the balcony. The squeak of the squab startled her. She looked back and saw the calico cat with the squab in her mouth. Her snout was smeared with blood.

Pigeons can breed up to 6 times a year.

Option B
The uncertainty

The noise is deafening. So many people are shouting. "Where the hell am I"? He staggered around like he was intoxicated. The street was filled with people and all eyes were on him. His head was fuzzy, he did not recall where he was, let alone how he got there. "What's going on"? He yelled. Moments before he had gotten out of his car. There was so much commotion outside. The people outside were gesturing at him. When he stumbled out of the car, a wave of nausea hit him between the eyes. It almost floored him, but he remained standing. He cut a strong and athletic figure. He used to play football, was a star even. "What do you guys want"? He screamed at the top of his lungs, but the words came out deflated. People kept yelling and gesturing at him. It clouded his head and fogged his hearing. He took a few steps forward as if to confront his assailants. He reached out his arms to tell them that he was trying to listen. To make sense of what the hell was going on. 3 people leaped at him and grabbed him trying to shove him into a car. His football instincts took over and he tried to shake them off. They wrestled him down to the ground and one of the people planted a knee on his neck.

"I can't breathe". 8 minutes and 46 seconds later he passed out. He never woke again.

Option C

We met at the tango lesson, intermediate level. We were paired up the first lesson. Both of us rose to expert level instantaneously. Our bodies found each other's rhythm. I moved my hands down and hers were there. "Rueda", body rotation, flowed naturally as if we had danced together forever. Her "cadencia" perfectly synced with mine, we moved like one. Our bodies acquiesced slowly, then surrendered unconditionally. The ultimate tango is where the woman leads almost equally to the man, mimicking the real-life interplay between man and woman. It was magical.

Our lovemaking that night was sublime. The perfect fluidity and cadence continued. Our bodies melded to sweet and natural rhythms. We clung to each other in tight embraces, disentangling when passion rose. She clutched me tightly when the flood subsided. Bodies intertwined; her olive skin contrasted exquisitely with my fair skin. The pale light amplified the glorious contrast. We were magnificent, beautiful and we became one. All night we danced. She is my Milonguera. She is perfect.

Soon my dark side emerged. I became possessive, obsessive. The sting of green-eyed jealousy hit me. It haunted me. I took her for granted and disrespected her, belittled her. The things we enjoyed doing together became routine in my eyes. There were many things we enjoyed together. She is the yin to my yang. I destroyed it.

I failed. She left.

I want her back. I need to find a magic wand. Make me a better man...with her.

Written by:
Frank van der Meer,
from Netherlands – living in Sweden

Option C: A Magic Wand
The Brit Who Awakened

I had a dream. As a European inspired by Brexit, I yearned to have that same free, liberal, wonderful feeling that the British always seem to have wherever they are around the globe. Just imagine not to be forced to speak a foreign language, like the British. Imagine, not having to translate your own words anymore without getting paid for it. Imagine that you never, ever have to invest any money, years, energy or courage to reach out and learn to speak a foreign language.

In my dream I did to the British just as the British do to others. I dreamt that I always spoke my own native language to every Brit I met. And when I visited their country, I expected them to speak my native language fluently. Just as a Brit. And then I waited for that wonderful moment of bliss!

And yes, that moment came. Suddenly. Unexpected. As if from nowhere ... A Brit comes to me and opens his mouth ... speaks to me ... fluently ... not in his, but in MY LANGUAGE! Oohh, what a miracle! But this did not happen because of him. Nor of his country. Nor of his teachers at school who had taught him to do so. In my dream, Brits were not like that. Not in a thousand years. It happened because finally, I got ... a magic wand!

Written by:
Conrad Byrne,
from Australia – living in Sweden

Option B
The Uncertainty

I find myself standing in the middle of Central station, Coffee in one have backpack in the other. I look around to see if I know anyone, but I don't. I start to panic when I begin to realize that I don't remember how I got here or where I'm going. I have the sudden urge to move, I don't know where, I just take off. I move through the crowd station, pushing my way past everyone, I don't know where I'm going, I just keep moving in the vain hope that at some point I'll remember what I'm doing here. I feel like I'm here with someone, but I don't know who.

The sense of urgency increases as I'm pushing past people, coffee going everywhere, the uncomfortable feeling passes over me that I'm beginning to attract a lot of attention. People are starting to watch what I'm doing, I'm the only person here that behaving this way. Everyone else is moving in an organized fashion, they are looking at me like I'm crazy and at the moment I feel a little crazy!

My pulse is really racing, and I make a sudden right turn and run out of the station into the city. I come to a grinding halt and I feel a panic attack wash over me when standing there in the city looking around and I finally understand that I don't even know which city I'm in!

Written by:
Denka Pérez Amézaga,
from Cuba – living in Turkey

Option B

Action: You find yourself in a place you do not recognize and you sense others watching you

Keyword phrase: "the uncertainty"

Heat. Unbearable heat. Beads of sweat ran down her skin like tiny salty rivers making the fabric of her dress cling to her body. From the threshold, she was able to glimpse high pillars rising infinitely up to the dome, lit with a reddish light that seemed to dance to the rhythm of ritual songs and drum beats. Dozens of dark silhouettes stirred voluptuously in the midst of a wild, untamed, chaotic dance.

She had arrived there after a long car ride in the middle of the dark night. She did not know where she was, nor did she recognize the structure. Slowly, she passed through the huge archway of the entrance and steadily advanced toward the center. Suddenly, all the voices and sounds disappeared. The surrounding figures stopped moving. As she moved forward, she felt all eyes turning to her. Their looks were undressing her, the silence penetrated her soul.

Despite the uncertainty, she continued moving towards the center like an automaton. She somehow knew he was there, waiting for her. The dark figures moved aside to let her pass. She arrived at the center where she was received by a tall figure smiling at her. The whiteness of his teeth contrasted with the brown skin of those arms that enveloped her.

As if by signal, the songs and the drumming returned. The figures resumed their euphoric movements. The sound grew louder and louder, rising up to the ceiling and beyond... Their bodies rose with it.

Option C

Action: You have a dream, a vision, a hope, but it has never come true...yet.

Keyword phrase: "finally, I got a magic wand"

"Those eyes ... looking into the void ... not recognizing me. How much would I not give for they would look at me as before? "

- Sorry, visit time is over.
- Already? How quickly!
- I know. How was she?
- As usual. I've shown her again the photo albums. I haven't stopped talking, and nothing.
- You know how this disease is (...) Hello Mary! Time to rest now.

"That gray hair, so long, so silky... At least she lets me comb it, although she still doesn't recognize me ... Those wrinkled hands that no longer caress me ... Just for a moment, I just want you to see me, even for a single moment! "

- Look, that's my son! My Gabriel. So good looking my boy!"
- Mom, it's me. I'm your Gabriel"
- No! My Gabriel is far away, he is studying abroad! You are an impostor! Go away!"

"Those arms that no longer hold me ... Those shoulders where I can no longer leave my sorrows ... Mom, please look at me, see me!"

- She is very sick (...)

- Mom, it's me...

- Gabriel ... my beautiful boy!

"Finally, as if I had got a magic wand, her eyes have recognized me, her hands have caressed my face, I have been able to cry on her shoulder. How I have missed you! Mom, I love you so much!"

"Those eyes are now closed forever... Mom, I know that you see me."

Option A

Action: You open the door and discover a trail of bloody footprints

Keyword phrase: "the squeak of [...]"

"What was that?" Carla wonders amid the shock that has made her waken up and sit up in bed. It has been a restless night in which she had barely been able to sleep amid the lightning and the onslaught of the wind that moved the curtains, slipping through the blinds. Under the dim light of the lightning bolts, her eyes could perceive the ghostly silhouettes of the furniture in the room.

"It was just thunder," she says to herself, somewhat calmer. Suddenly, she hears again that unequivocal noise that had waken her up. The squeak of hinges makes her shiver. She gets up. Her bare feet touch the slab and a chill runs down her spine. She is afraid to turn on the light, her trembling hand reaches for the handle. She takes a deep breath and, finally, opens the door. A breath of cold air comes from the dark hallway. Another lightning strikes.

The flashing light reveals dark spots on the floor. Her hand reaches the switch. The languid yellow light of the hallway reveals wet, dark footsteps from which an unmistakable sweet metallic odor emanates. She looks down the trail of bloody footprints that disappears behind a door. She looks around and her hand grasps a vase from which some dried flowers fall and, hesitant, goes down the hall. The door is opened. She freezes.

The noise of a fallen body and broken porcelain echoes throughout the hallway silencing the storm.

Published by:
Antra M,
from Latvia – living in Latvia

On request from and written by:
Jonathan L,
Pseudonym

Option C

When I was a child, I have always dreamt of being a seagull. Obviously my dream has never come true and it will never come true... When I was twenty four, I went to Canterbury and there I let me make a tattoo. Unfortunately, I looked for the word dove and not seagull in the library and I made a copy of the bird which I gave the man who made the tattoo... he said... you won't forget me all your life long... and he was right. Anyway, in my dreams I don't have a dove but a seagull on my neck now! But what would happen if I got a magic wand?? Maybe I could wake up like Gregor Samsa in the Kafka's Metamorphosis who wakes up one morning and finds out that he looks like a "monstrous vermin"! I would find out that I have wings... I can fly... so a wonderful feeling... I'm free, what I would do... I would go up and up and I would travel all over the world, I could see finally from the height what the poor human beings do in the different countries. I could have a look at the mountains, at the seas from another perspective! And I would be different, I would be a human seagull which can fly!!! After travelling the world I would go back to people and try to teach them how to fly and how to feel free. And then I would go up again and see from the height without return the sorrows of life!!! I'm free!

Written by:
Antra M,
from Latvia – living in Latvia

Option C

There is always a dream, a vision, and a hope. For something to happen, for somebody to be together with, for somewhere to go to, for something to be possessed. Never ending ones. If I would have a magic wand! Then the happiness is guaranteed. The same for all of us. The same for everybody. This feeling we know very well – I cannot enjoy this day, as I am missing this or I am missing that... Not being in capacity to have a full flavor for each and every day because of this, because of that... To think that the real happiness will come when all I want will turn into reality. To spend many years in this constant feeling of missing something. Too many years. And nothing is changing, and nothing is happening. All the time longing for something, all the time looking for something and that is it. Very little to enjoy.

But now I know!

The magic wand in everybody's hands is called Reality, Acceptance and Thankfulness! It is possible! We do possess it, it is besides us, and it is around us! We have to accept and be thankful for each and every day, not deceiving ourselves that only then you will be happy when having this, this and also that... No, it is just an illusion, a mirage, such day will never come. The reality is today! Being thankful for this very day – it is Your Very Magic Wand in your own hands!

Written by:
Sione Ponce,
from Philippines – living in Philippines

Option C:

You have a dream, a vision, a hope, but it has never come true...yet.

Keyword phrase: "finally, I got a magic wand"

My life is like a roller coaster. Living a life without certainty. My parents were not well-off but it did not block me to pursue my studies and career. I am originally, a daughter of a cigarette vendor a so-called takatak boys in my city. I was once a child, supposed to be with other kids but selling cigar is on my side. I grew up and realized that shouldn't be the life of a child. I struggled to finish my college life but it's not easy because I am the one who provide. I visioned not to give my child the same experience that I had. I can't bear the fear and anxiety but I consider that to motivate me. While doing the act, unfortunately, my mom gone and never felt the goodness of life. I dreamed to have them feel the essence of the real life - with abundance and worry free.

Once upon a time, luck is on my side, given our situation I thought it will never tired. Never thought that luck will end that fast when you never handle it right. My father died, I gave the best burial that we never gave my mom. When he was gone I felt awkward that I can't explain why I got tired and felt like there is melted candle on my back.

The story goes. I got my child and the luck began to fade and again it's like I am afraid that she will fall like her mother before. I told her the lesson of life I had and she began to keep her heart that she will never be on situation like that. But now, I know it right and finally, I got a magic wand.

Failures give a lesson and that lesson will motivate you. But your choice will matter too.

Written by:
Sofie H,
from Australia – living in Qatar

Option B

Action: You find yourself in a place you do not recognize and you sense others watching you

Keyword phrase: "the uncertainty"

The amount of uncertainty froze me while I felt eyes all around me. Although I cannot see clearly in the darkness and there is nobody at all in the proximity. I feel.... like I am being watched....so, where am I? I have no idea where I am, and how I got here. I felt as if I was Alice whom fell into the rabbit hole. Alice in wonderland has been my old time favorite. As a little girl, I read it over and over again wondering what I would have done if I was her. Now, where is that rabbit? I really would love to have a cup of tea with the Mad Hatter, play cards with the Red Queen, and smoke with the Caterpillar.... now, where are they??

I gained my balance and tried to regain my focus....it is complete darkness and my eyes don't work too well in the dark. I orientated myself and saw there were some dim lights from a distance. I walked towards the light. Then I saw they are flashing in the air and moving about. Are they fireflies or am I in the parallel universe where things are complete different from what I can see or understand? Will I see fairies and grand my wishes? If I was only allowed one wish, what should I ask for? All these anxiety makes me wake up....in bed... tossing and turning to continue my dream so I could finally be the Alice I wanted to be.

Written by "Dimples"

Written by:
Claude G,
from France – living in Latvia

Topic B

Action: You find yourself in a place you do not recognize and you sense others watching you

Keyword phrase: "the uncertainty"

Remembering my grandmother's words "money is lying on the street", I went this Saturday to Riga's city centre to find a group of tourists to guide.

I moved on through the crowd and try to find potential clients. They all look to me, especially the other tour guides. I feel like in a shark-tank. The uncertainty wins me over. Nothing has changed! If you want to work in another country, start at the bottom and try to understand.

A very well-dressed colleague sneaks through the audience with great elegance. She seems floating above the pavements, like a feather caught in a slight summer breeze. I followed her with my eyes. What should I name her? "Le Renard" - the fox, indeed! Suddenly, she looks at me and sends me a big smile. Hmm, ... the fox is now my friend!

Finally, I find a group of Austrians: twelve people, nice! We agree on an honourable price and the City Tour can start. Now 24 eyes will follow me during the next two hours.

The tour ended, and I even got tips. I remember again my grand-mother's words: "spend immediately all you have earned on your first day, otherwise business will stay poor forever". Let's go! I spend it all in the mall, buy a train ticket and drop the last 32 cents in a charity box. That's it! A very good day! Now, I don't have sense anymore for the others watching me. Tomorrow, I will do it again ...

Written by "The Early Bird"

**Written by:
Margie Banin,
from USA – living in USA**

Option B:

Action: You find yourself in a place you do not recognize and you sense others watching you
Keyword phrase: “the uncertainty”

=====

The Secret Service agent posted at the door held it open at my approach, greeting me as I entered.

“Welcome back, Madame President.”

I smiled tightly and nodded in return.

Gazing around, only the iconic shape of the room told me this was the Oval Office; I didn’t recognize a thing. I simply experienced the uncertainty of attempting to rapidly calculate the reaction that would best serve my needs.

I could feel the others watching me, waiting in expectation.

“Madame President, what are you feeling?” Dr. Klein finally asked.

Since awakening from the coma weeks ago, the only constant in my mind had been the urge to flee. But some sense of self-preservation kept me from running blind. I needed to discover what my amnesia was shielding me from before I had any hope of evading and neutralizing the threat.

I had been observing those around me just as closely as they watched me. I hoped to detect some word or action that would reveal my unknown enemy. I also needed to avoid tipping my own hand too early.

It was a fine line I was walking: one false move could eliminate me from the game altogether. But refraining from action carried its own danger, one that felt as if it was growing by the day. How much longer could I afford to wait?

I took a breath and turned to face those watching me. No risk, no gain. In measured calm, I replied, “Doctor, I’m feeling quite at home.”

Written by:
Amir Huda,
from Bangladesh – living in USA

Option B:

ADAPTATION

O: So, you find yourself in a place you do not recognize and you sense others watching you, and you feel what?

A: I don't know. There was, I recall, a dull pain in the back of my head but what I remember most was the uncertainty. I was literally and metaphorically struck. Dazed and left in a single moment. Both my past and future had abandoned me. I couldn't remember my history and couldn't imagine a tomorrow.

O: Have you seen the video of your accident?

A: No, no. I don't want to. I am told I took a somersault and landed unconscious on my back when my motorcycle hit something. Some memories are coming back slowly but my doctor tells me I need to work on drive and motivation. I laugh because my fourteen-year old niece calls me 'uncle zombie' after my TBI.

O: Were you a different person before?

A: People around me seem to think so. They say I had a fiery personality. I can't imagine myself like that and may be that's good. I don't know.

O: Your mom tells me you paint now.

A: I don't know about before but I do like painting landscapes. It relaxes me. Perhaps, we all change over our lifetime into someone else. The only difference in my case is that it was so sudden that the people around me couldn't adapt to the change.

Written by:
Roselyn Poon,
from Australia – living in USA

Option B - Slipping

How did I get here? This doesn't make sense. Right now, fear and confusion are fighting for priority in my mind. It seems that I am sitting on the edge of the universe looking into space while listening to a bunch of people in my head. The last time I felt like this was in high school when I was competing in the back- stroke swimming event. I was apprehensive and confused with no idea on how I ended up in the damn race, however what I did know was that there were hundreds of faceless people in the stands hoping I wouldn't win and a handful praying I wouldn't drown. The key difference between then and now is the absence of that nagging feeling of uncertainty which prevailed throughout my entire swimming career.

I can't make out who or what is calling me but their energy is loving and supportive. They are encouraging me to slip off the edge and fly with them towards what, I don't know, but they are very persuasive.

Let's do it! I've had an incredible adventurous life so far and adding flying to the list sounds like a great idea.

Wait a minute, a moment ago I was sipping tea as the sun dropped below the horizon and the sparkling ocean turned into that incredible midnight blue. I've experienced this scene thousands of times over the years and it never fails to lift my spirits. Even now as I slip off the edge of the universe and free fall I am filled with eternal warmth and happiness.

Written by:
Elizabeth Winship,
from USA – living in Poland

[Note: Option A ! This happened, Tbilisi, 2008. Let's see what I can capture in 250 words.]

I left her, curled up with a bunny and her dad. One quick cup of espresso, as on every Monday morning, and I was ready to go. Carefully I eased myself out, trying to at least lessen the usual squeak from three old hinges – rusting like red wounds where the door still clung to its ageing frame.

One foot over the rotting threshold was as far as I got. What lay before me turned this into anything but daily routine. Red blotches scattered across the grey cement landing. Had someone sloppily spilled fresh paint, intended for the blistering peeling balustrade, dripping a trail of bloody footprints from the stairwell to the balcony railing?

Side-stepping pools of bright red liquid shimmering in the sun, I made my way with trepidation to our landing's edge. Nine floors below, face down, lay our upstairs neighbour - a man I'd seen once and whose name I never knew. No words, no gasp, just a sigh of exasperation escaped my mouth. Below, no people, no police to be seen or heard. Just the silence of stone death hovered over the soft echoes of my daughter's sleep.

In a city where law and order were deteriorating as steadily as the buildings, I could only wonder: would someone arrive to mop up on time, before my daughter would emerge, and ask to play in the courtyard where a body had landed sometime in the early morning hours while she lay in innocent slumber by her father's side?

Written by:
Ellis Blackburn,
from India – living in USA

Option A

Action: You open the door and discover a trail of bloody footprints
Keyword phrase: “the squeak of [...]”

The drab, many-gabled house on the corner of Jessop and Clark looks haunted—as run-down Victorians often do. We mount the stairs and each step groans beneath our weight.

With a sidelong glance at me, my partner pushes the door open with a meaty index finger. The squeak of a corroded hinge announces our arrival, but no one comes forward to meet us. Monty immediately strides toward the body lying at the base of the staircase, while I pause to study the floorboards for traffic clues. So the assailant didn’t exit through the front, I note.

“I’ll see where those lead,” I say, referring to a trail of bloody footprints receding down the dimly lit hallway to the left.

“Mm,” Monty murmurs, nodding once, transfixed by the mangled figure and the crimson halo still spreading around her head.

I escape down the hall, away from the cloying smell and gruesome sight. And in a mop cupboard, I find a pair of slippers sopping with fresh blood, beside which is a puddle of water. The now watery tracks outside of the closet confirm my suspicion. Our suspect has exchanged one pair of shoes for another.

I pass a window curtained in black lace, and I push the gauzy fabric aside for a glimpse outside. As I scan the yard, my eyes fall on a ramshackle structure half-hidden behind a large evergreen shrub. A sliver of light from another open doorway seems to signal that the someone within wants to be found.

Written by:
Jamil Nahra,
from Syria – living in Spain

Option C

"Damascus is a brutal hunter and also a charming prostitute who opens her legs for each foreign conqueror and captures him with the smell of her vagina, forcing him within and later infecting him with a plague that cannot be cured, either by inviting him to stay or by shutting doors in his face. Damascus is evil. Even in her tragedies, she stabs you, injures you, and then blames you.

If she loves someone, she will trouble him so that he is not at ease, and if she rejects another, she will push him away so gently with such tenderness and sweetness that it will increase his longing and inflame the fire. ..This has been the case since ever."

My uncle is like my father but more handsome, younger, and taller than him by a few centimeters.

While I was growing up, I watched my father's belly grow, but my uncle kept an athletic body. He was famous for his physical strength, always arranged his hair carefully and cared for his clothes which were tastefully simple in just two colors – black or white. I will always remember Mary constantly calling him "my handsome model" before embracing and kissing him.

He sat quietly, pushing his hands in front of him and tucking his arms together so his shoulders appeared narrower under his corn-colored face. He said:

"Listen son! Some two thousand years ago, a young rebel arrived in the neighborhood behind the "Eastern Door" of Damascus. The door had been built to stop the Bedouin attacks and bandits from the Syrian Desert, it was built by a mighty Roman leader named Dimitris who had been captivated by Damascus and decided to stay.

The young rebel captured a hostel in a Damascus neighborhood and destroyed statues, images and everything that stood in his way. He was stopped only after the Roman garrison sent a group of 50 to arrest him and not before he had broken the ribs of half the men. The news of this came to commander Dimitris who asked that he be presented to him before he was sentenced to death.

The rebel was not huge or scary looking. The Roman leader also did not believe that this was the man who broke down a motel alone and needed a group of soldiers to arrest him. - why he had done that? He asked

The rebel looked into the commander's eyes and said, "Come to me, come down from your throne, I will tell you.'

The leader, whose mind had been polluted by the city took the risk and pardoned the young man released him safely.

He was also given 100 pieces of Roman gold on which the head of the emperor Augustus was cast upon.

On his way out with his back to the city, the young man stayed still until he too was hit by the fragrance of Damascus. By the time he moved, he was determined to have his own face on that gold.

He returned to a mountainous area at the top of ElQalmoun, and with the gold he possessed, he bought weapons and trained a group of young men to fight. He started to invade and loot from all the villages and towns nearby. The Roman garrisons could only watch him conquer cities one by one in this rocky region. A few years later, the rebel was leading a squad of ten thousand well-trained and well-armed fighters.

In the year 200 AD, the revolutionary was again at the gates of Damascus. This time, he cut off the water supply and held the city under siege for months. He contacted the merchants and manufacturers promised them he would preserve their property. He had come to seek revenge on the arrogant leader who had neglected the city and its people, crippled them with unfair taxes, and forced them into compulsory service in his criminal army.

After a short meeting, the traders opened the eastern door to the young invader's army.

Damascus, gets tired of her lovers and heroes, kills them after a while to dance with a new one greeted the new conqueror with flowers and palm trees, celebrations that lasted seven nights.

Written by:
Ben Angel,
from USA – living in Poland

All three options... :) :

Option A (Part 1):

The deafening wail of klaxons startled Bill from his computer-side lunch. He had only just completed work on the Smithers account, and his taste buds were savoring the first bite of his pastrami-flavored reward when that God-awful noise interrupted. Fire drill? Maybe, but no matter how good the sandwich, he decided against betting his life that it wasn't more than a drill.

Sandwich in hand, he stepped toward the door of his office... and opened the gateway to mayhem. Lights strobed as people ran from one room to the next, sheer terror in their eyes. Down on the ground, bloody footprints highlighted the awful reality that something had gone horribly wrong.

As Bill recovered from the shock of the moment, an explosion to his right sent a concussive wave of shrapnel past him. Smoke churned from the area of its ground-zero. Sheltering in place was no longer an option.

Gripping his pastrami sandwich for dear life, Bill darted to his left, away from the billowing toxic plume and in the direction of flight pioneered by the bloody footprints. As he began running, the squeak of a dog toy from under his right foot startled him. Who brings a dog toy to an office, he asked himself. If he survived this, the office safety committee would surely hear about this hazard.

Reaching the door to the emergency stairs, he pushed it open, only to be overwhelmed by hot gasses emanating from a fire below. How could lunchtime go so horribly wrong?

Option B (Part 2):

Then the lights went out. So too had the klaxon and the strobes. The resulting smoky darkness seemed sinister, unfamiliar. It was as if he had stepped from the boring world of a standard workspace - the graveyard of professional ambition, Bill had once joked - to something resembling a first-person-shooter game. With gloomy realization, he realized that if this was in fact a world where there were shooters and targets, he didn't have a gun.

Bill's ears still rang, even more than a minute after the klaxons turned off. That's about when he noticed the red laser beams probing around in the smoke. Instinct told him to dive under the nearest desk and hide. The utility of that instinct was confirmed when the thud of impacting bullets nearby resulted in the dropping of one of his co-workers, a young woman he had hoped one day to ask out. That wasn't going to happen now, he sobbed to himself.

The uncertainty of the continuity of even life itself reduced the size of Bill's known world to just the underside of the desk he was hiding beneath. He stared at his pastrami sandwich as a way of trying to calm himself down. He thought briefly that maybe he should enjoy it now, because in a minute or two he might be too dead to enjoy it later.

That's when his defiance kicked in. No, he'd save that sandwich for later. It'd be his reward, after he kicked ass and took names.

Option C (Part 3):

Bill had never played anything like Call of Duty or even Doom when he was going through school, but he had dreamed of being a Bruce Willis in his own Die Hard script. Despite the chaos and death around him, he knew this was his chance to make that dream come true. It would never come around again.

He reached out from his hiding place and cached his pastrami sandwich in a file drawer. Then, catching sight of the nearest fire extinguisher, he ripped the cylinder from the wall, pulled the pin, took hold of the hose, and aimed at the source of the nearest red laser. Foam hit the target, startling the shooter who dropped his weapon. The laser pointer guided Bill's outstretched hands. Screaming haphazardly his excitement, "Finally, I got a magic wand!" he pointed and shot at the other laser sights. Years of movie watching guided the office worker through his own first-person-shooter game set in real life. Before they knew what hit them, all the killers were terminated. "Terminated, with extreme prejudice," Bill laughed to himself.

When the police came, Bill was taken for questioning, but then later lauded as a hero. Meanwhile, a moment after order was restored, a young woman, still in shock, pulled her seat to her desk, and mindlessly tried to go back to work in the dark. She pulled open the file drawer, and without thinking, picked up Bill's pastrami sandwich and ate, all while humming to herself "Circle of Life."

Written by:
Denka Pérez Amézaga,
from Cuba – living in Turkey

Option A

"What was that?" Carla wonders amid the shock that has made her waken up and sit up in bed. It has been a restless night in which she had barely been able to sleep amid the lightning and the onslaught of the wind that moved the curtains, slipping through the blinds. Under the dim light of the lightning bolts, her eyes could perceive the ghostly silhouettes of the furniture in the room.

"It was just thunder," she says to herself, somewhat calmer. Suddenly, she hears again that unequivocal noise that had waken her up. The squeak of hinges makes her shiver. She gets up. Her bare feet touch the slab and a chill runs down her spine. She is afraid to turn on the light, her trembling hand reaches for the handle. She takes a deep breath and, finally, opens the door. A breath of cold air comes from the dark hallway. Another lightning strikes.

The flashing light reveals dark spots on the floor. Her hand reaches the switch. The languid yellow light of the hallway reveals wet, dark footsteps from which an unmistakable sweet metallic odor emanates. She looks down the trail of bloody footprints that disappears behind a door. She looks around and her hand grasps a vase from which some dried flowers fall and, hesitant, goes down the hall. The door is opened. She freezes.

The noise of a fallen body and broken porcelain echoes throughout the hallway silencing the storm.

Option B

Heat. Unbearable heat. Beads of sweat ran down her skin like tiny salty rivers making the fabric of her dress cling to her body. From the threshold, she was able to glimpse high pillars rising infinitely up to the dome, litted with a reddish light that seemed to dance to the rhythm of ritual songs and drum beats. Dozens of dark silhouettes stir voluptuously in the midst of a wild, untamed, chaotic dance.

She had arrived there after a long car ride in the middle of the dark night. She did not know where she was, nor did she recognized the structure. Slowly, she passed through the huge archway of the entrance and steadily advanced toward the center. Suddenly, all the voices and sounds disappeared. The surrounding figures stopped moving. As she moved forward, she felt all eyes turning to her. Their looks were undressing her, the silence penetrated her soul.

Despite the uncertainty, she continued moving towards the center like an automaton. She somehow knew he was there, waiting for her. The dark figures moved aside to let her pass. She arrived at the center where she was received by a tall figure smiling at her. The whiteness of his teeth contrasted with the brown skin of those arms that enveloped her.

As if by signal, the songs and the drumming returned. The figures resumed their euphoric movements. The sound grew louder and louder, rising up to the ceiling and beyond... Their bodies rose with it.

Option C

"Those eyes ... looking into the void ... not recognizing me. How much would I not give for they would look at me as before? "

- Sorry, visit time is over.

- Already? How quickly!

- I know. How was she?

- As usual. I've shown her again the photo albums. I haven't stopped talking, and nothing.

- You know how this disease is (...) Hello Mary! Time to rest now.

"That gray hair, so long, so silky... At least she lets me comb it, although she still doesn't recognize me ... Those wrinkled hands that no longer caress me ... Just for a moment, I just want you to see me, even for a single moment! "

-Look, that's my son! My Gabriel. So good looking my boy!"

-Mom, it's me. I'm your Gabriel"

-No! My Gabriel is far away, he is studying abroad! You are an impostor! Go away!"

"Those arms that no longer hold me ... Those shoulders where I can no longer leave my sorrows ... Mom, please look at me, see me!"

- She is very sick (...)

- Mom, it's me...

- Gabriel ... my beautiful boy!

"Finally, as if I had got a magic wand, her eyes have recognized me, her hands have caressed my face, I have been able to cry on her shoulder. How I have missed you! Mom, I love you so much!"

"Those eyes are now closed forever... Mom, I know that you see me."

Written by:
Giselle Roeder,
from Germany – living in Canada

Option A

I often worked on a Sunday. Today, I heard the squeak of a door as I went up the stairway. I was wondering if the lawyer was in his office. It never crossed my mind that it could be my door - but it was. Someone had damaged the lock and broken in. Carefully I entered, all was quiet, no mess, but when checking, I noticed the deposit pouch from Saturday was missing. I phoned the police, they came, took some photos and advised me to call a locksmith. He charged double because it was Sunday.

Since the old keys would not fit, I went to the office before my employees would arrive Monday morning. Our main entrance was between an ABC store and a laundromat, but not connected to either. I froze upon entering: bloody footprints were up the stairs, blood spritzers on the yellow wall. A murder? Oh, my God! I was scared. When I heard good voices, I made my way up, carefully avoiding the blood. Several male teenagers were sitting on clean steps around the bend, sipping Slurpees. But heavens, they looked a bloody mess! I froze, stared at them and offered to phone the police with a shaky voice. They started laughing uncontrollably, which made me angry, and I yelled at them.

They could hardly speak, but one uttered, “come on, lady, don’t get your knickers in a knot. We just had a bit of fun with a ketchup fight.”

True story.

InterNations.org

Seattle - Riga

SHORT STORIES & POESY E-BOOK

EDITION 2020

VOLUME III

Free Language Microfiction in 350 words, Edition I – 2020

29 July 2020

“What changes, endures” – by Rainis

Rainis – an ambitious idealist, dreaming of a new type of human, and of an independent Latvian Nation. Aspazija – a rebellious, extravagant, fearless woman, ready to bring changes to old-fashioned 19th century society. Both are Latvian poets, both are fighters, both are different, but united by love. (by Unesco) With their publishing activities Rainis & Aspazija also raised the issue of the freedom of expression and freedom of the press.

Have you ever thought of writing a book, or even just a short story? Here's your chance! Showcase your creativity in our Microfiction Challenge!

With a 350-word limit, this is something we can all accomplish. And even more! You can write your short story in your own mother language or in a language you would like to practice.

We do not impose a specific theme for this edition. So, unlock your imagination! Post your stories in the comments on this activity's wall so we can all read through them. Feel free to submit as many as you like.

We'll all meet up via Zoom on Wednesday, July 29 to enjoy discovering our literary creations together. See you there!

Activity Hosts:

Antra M, Consul

Claude G, Ambassador

Language and Literature Group Riga

Written in French by:
Claude G,
from France – living in Latvia

La chasse au zoom version 1.0

La crise, de laquelle on va se rappeler de celle qui a cloué toute l'humanité sur place et souvent réduite nos Dames les plus élégantes, sans coiffeur ni maquillage, à la simple expression d'un « retour à la réalité », aura également marqué mes esprits.

Le Dieu « Zoom » et sa conséquence directe « le Zoombie » nous sont apparus.

Cause à effets résultant d'un magnifique instrument de télécommunication moderne, ils font apparaître sur nos petits écrans tous les traits de caractères possibles et imaginables de notre piètre existence sur cette belle planète. Joyeux, tristes, explosifs, fiers, craintifs, sinistres, beaux, macabres, privilégiés, sincères, généreux, gentils, menteurs, fortunés, méchants, intelligents, lugubres, amoureux, contemplatif, voyeurs, ivre et j'en passe des vertes et des pas mûres, ... pour finalement passer par les solitaires pour lesquels la virtualité rapprochée de gens rencontrés sur le coin de leur table de cuisine et pourtant si cruellement éloignés, ne semble pas vraiment solutionner le problème déjà rencontré dans le bistrot du coin.

Et, ... je ne tiens pas à oublier ici mes favoris, celles et ceux pour lesquels une version détournée des paroles de la chanson de Schultheis leurs vont comme un gant : "confinement par confinement, je m'aime à travers vous". Probablement, les moins enviables de toute cette évolution orchestrée.

Et voici, la preuve en est, que l'on peut bien pondre une micro-friction en 350 mots sans parfaitement ne rien vouloir affirmer - vous m'excuserez pour les jeux de mots !

Ceci dit, mon message pour vous ne se cache pas dans ma dernière pensée mais bel et bien dans mes dernières lignes. Finalement, je vous aime tous, là-bas tout près ou là-bas tout loin ! Cette toute première tranche de confinement était franchement, épique. L'imbécilité humaine de vouloir jouer avec notre santé combinée à la merveilleuse idée de vouloir unir les gens via notre belle et riche plateforme d'InterNations, nous a donné la chance de pouvoir vivre tout cela.

J'espère pouvoir passer encore de nombreux moments savoureux et mémorables avec vous tous, mes chers amis !

Written in English by:
Marie-Gabrielle Bardet,
from France – living in Denmark

It was around 9 am and the sun was already up in the sky above Ringo's LOFT, not far from Copenhagen's airport. Once a translator at the Japanese Embassy in Denmark, Ringo was now an actor for TV commercials and documentary films. Raised as a Buddhist, he would occasionally do some RESEARCH on yoga and alternative medicine. The rest of his free time was dedicated to his painting, a hobby he had started some seven years ago.

As a matter of fact, after a delicious breakfast that he decided to take on his terrace, he was now heading to his atelier, a blue wooden house surrounded by a small garden with a huge Botticelli statue in one corner. We were mid-March and Ringo thought the weather was perfect that morning. Striking blue sky with white fluffy clouds and a gentle breeze coming from the seashore.

On the path, he noticed that spring was already spreading its confetti over the vegetation. Jasmines and lilacs - his favorite color was the purple one - were almost in full bloom and the scent was simply divine. Cherry trees also reminded him of his childhood in North Japan. He smiled and picked up some wildflowers to give them as a morning present to Katia, the local FLORIST, a Brazilian girl married to a friend of his.

Ringo loved the smell in Katia's tiny boutique full of gorgeous bouquets and also exotic plants from the other side of the planet but to him, the most fascinating thing was the impressive collection of BOTTLES and vases that she used for her colorful compositions. All kind of shapes and material found in her many travels abroad: Japan, Vietnam, Brazil, and South Africa.

Ringo then turned left at the crossroad, only to realize the streets were strangely empty. No cars but also no one in sight. That's when he remembered what his youngest daughter had told him over the phone the night before: "Daddy, don't forget. Beginning tomorrow, people are not allowed to go out. Please stay at home, will you?".

So, there it was. Day 1 of confinement...

One thing I did not anticipate when I cherry-picked Gabriela's home, is that eventually I would have to meet with a certain guy, called a veterinarian.

One night, after wandering on the lower roof to inspect the premises, I was so tired that I fell asleep on the tiles. And that's exactly where Gabriela found me. It was a hot summer day and my body was in full sun. But no sunscreen!

Don't laugh, please... I am dead serious.

White cats, even if you are not an albino, are not supposed to stay for hours under the sunbeams or you could catch yourself a skin melanoma. Ears and nose are especially subject to burns.

The veterinarian was a tall guy but gentle. He took his time to examine me "sous toutes les coutures". A real professional! He cleaned my ears, looked at my paws and opened my mouth.

"Twelve to sixteen months, give or take" he assessed.

Then the vet rolled me on my back to expose my furry tummy and tickled me with his hands. What a nice sensation!

"OK, it seems in good health. Nothing serious except for a dent in his tail, probably caused by an accident".

Then, as Gabriela was telling him about my "sunbathing" that morning, he frowned.

"Sun exposure is extremely dangerous for white cats. Let me check again".

And that's when he found a tiny scar that would not heal properly on the tip of my nose. He drew a sharp object that looked like a blade and, frankly, I was not too happy about it. I glanced at Gabriela: "What on earth...?". She then patted me on the head and said calmly: "Don't worry, little fellow. It is not gonna hurt, I promise. Just a little scratching, OK ?"

She was right. I almost felt nothing. After that and during all summer, Gabriela had to spray sunscreen on the tip of my nose and ears, but I had learnt my lesson and kept in the shade most of the time. No more naps on hot roofs for me, thank you very much!

Written by in English by:
Lise Pedersen,
from Denmark – living in Denmark

Safe for now

“I’m going to be the one losing my job today, I just know it”, Pete muttered as he got in my car.

“You heard they’re putting off more people this week, right?” he muttered while agitating with the seatbelt.

My heart went out to Pete, sitting across from him in the car. Things had never been easy for him; over 50 but with nothing to fall back on except his welder’s experience and 25 years of loyal work at the shipyard. If he was going to be put off, he would find it difficult get a new job. Close to retirement but not really close enough.

“How am I going to provide for me and the missus if I lose my job, eh?”, he demanded to the dashboard. “It’ll break her heart if I have to go begging for the dole. I’ll be letting her down if I can’t provide for her.”

We drove on in silence, every kilometre taking us closer to work and the looming fear of being made redundant.

“Maybe I can sell the car, it might fetch a few bob. And no more holidays in Spain that’s for sure. The missus will have to make do with a trip to the beach here, hardly Costa del Sol though” Pete mused.

I tried to reassure him that it couldn’t be that bad. He was the head welder after all, with the most experience. They couldn’t let him go, could they? It would be the end of him.

Pulling up at the shipyard, we joined the other workers streaming in through the gates. Everyone silently gathered in the main hall waiting for the foreman to arrive with the news.

He rushed in, hurriedly scanning the long list of names on his clipboard.

“Pete? Pete Hammond?”, he asjed. I looked across at Pete, who gulped and raised his hand.

“Pete, great news, a big project has arrived! I’m putting you in charge of the first welding crew. Get your men together and let’s get cracking. We’ve got at least 6 months of work ahead of us!”

Published "on request" by Antra M,
from Latvia – living in Latvia
Written in Italian by:
Jonathan L,
Pseudonym

Storie di tutti i giorni

Oggi ho voglia di raccontare una delle tante storie che ho vissuto nella mia vita, sicuramente ce ne saranno altre, ma questa è quella che in questo momento mi viene in mente. Cinque anni fa ho cominciato a entrare nel famoso mondo virtuale, come altre mille persone, ho conosciuto una persona che ho sentito subito affine. C'è stata la voglia di sentirsi, di vedersi, finché un giorno ho deciso che dovevo conoscerlo, Said era il suo nome. Impulsivamente, caratteristica che mi accompagnerà per sempre, ho prenotato un volo per Hurgada e sono andata a conoscere il mio amico virtuale, il quale fino a quel momento aveva avuto sempre una spiegazione per quello che stava capitando: una bella amicizia, tu mi verrai a trovare, io verrò a trovare te! Così è stato! Subito 1000 problemi, cosa penserà un uomo a cui una donna fa visita, che non conosce....primo giorno....ma perché non è venuto a salutarmi....secondo giorno ho compreso che abitava un po' lontano dal mio albergo, secondo giorno ci siamo incontrati....ogni giorno vivevo con la paura di non rivederlo il giorno dopo. È stato bellissimo, soprattutto vedere la sua terra attraverso i suoi occhi, attraverso le sue esperienze, con lui mi sono sentita capita, protetta, sicura e come se lo conoscessi da sempre....finché è successo qualcosa diinspiegabile..... I suoi pensieri erano altrove, con qualcun altro ...con un'altra e.....forse ho capito che questa amicizia non mi bastava più, che ci stavo soffrendo. Ho continuato il mio cammino con lui fino all'ultimo giorno, e' stato ancora più bello, ma ritornata a casa ho capito che era stata solo una gran bella esperienza ed era tempo di smettere di sognare. Tornare con i piedi per terra, ma affrontando magari le future esperienze in maniera diversa!!! Questo doveva essere il piano, ma come tutti sanno tra il dire e il fare c'è di mezzo il mare...così mi sono ritrovata a conoscere di nuovo una persona virtualmente che volevo conoscere di persona, com'è andata questa volta???

Jonathan L

Written in English by:
Sioni Ponce,
from Philippines – living in Philippines

What a busy day! People are chasing every minutes lost due to pandemic. There was a time when I am down and out, I am frightened of what life is in store for me. In the country I am living with is believing in tarot and fortune teller. I was once became an avid fan of it. When New Year is about to come, I keep my record to include in my itinerary of fortune teller thing.

Of course, all that good i wanted to hear happened, even that I will soon find my real man - to marry me?. One day, on the peak of my career, I never thought that there are some people will not be happy to my success. I enjoyed my earnings materially, but I never had a chance to go out and hang out with friends. Just work, earn and buy whatever I wanted. Then suddenly all the things expected started to deteriorate.

A spell that cant be expressed to words and its work. On a sunny Sunday, spending some quality time with the family, we had to roast some barbecues and had some sing -along. A continuous water running to our drainage from a neighbor, and my cousin noticed it and call the attention of the neighbor.

"Oh, just trying to check the drainage system" neighbor said. Neither did my cousin ignored the running water to the drainage. I am inside the house and made some party party... Then the days passed when a cousin felt something about his feelings-not feeling well.

So tried some easy medications when he always complaining that its really painful and and he cannot take it anymore. Again, because we believe in some witchcraft, we tried to seek help of the so-called Quack doctor . Three hours drive going to the quack doctor and cousin was very very ill, while entering the hut, the quack doctor said: "You better sit and lets remove that guy inside of you", I got shocked when I heard her say that. And even contest that was not true. Upon doing the ritual, the quack doctor changed her voice into an old guy and his name was the neighbors name...

The ritual was over and my cousin felt relieved I kept talking to him, that neighbor shouldn't do that to us. Then when we arrived at home, the neighbor is waiting and approach my cousin. But I am a bit afraid to talk because the quack doctor told us, dont ever ever confront that guy.

So, it was like nothing happen as the quack doctor require us to go back every tuesday and friday . We followed. We gave time and schedule. We even bought frankincense to light that up inside my house. Then suddenly, it goes on and off, I came back to my senses that this doomed me to wrong thought and realized that prayers is the most powerful weapon to curse and witch craft. From then on, I never ever entertain tarot, fortune tellers and witch craft to set my mind. I just prayed but I got gift to read peoples palm which I do not improve that might lead to doomed people's life.

Written in French by:
Nidale Bachir,
from Lebanon – living in Lebanon

Le village était calme ,trop calme même pour un après-midi du mois de juillet où les enfants se rassemblaient pour jouer et profiter des vacances à la campagne ,car leurs parents estivent seulement ici,vu que les routes sont difficiles en hiver.

La place de l'église était vide,sauf des balles et des bicyclettes que les enfants ont été obligés de laisser éparpillées partout ,empêchant même le passage des croyants venant assister à la messe habituelle du vendredi .

La femme du boucher appelait son mari en haletant,et tenant un balai à une main,elle brandissait l'autre comme si elle menaçait le gamin qui courait devant elle en trépidant le sol avec ses bottes mouillées

Brenda sursautait quand elle entendait tout ce vacarme ,car son voyage était long,et elle voulait siester un peu pour se reposer du trajet qu'elle avait fait ,son voyage du Brésil a duré à peu pres une journée avec l'escale qu'elle avait fait à Qatar...et comme elle n'avait pas pu dormir en avion, alors c'était évident qu'elle serait esquincée à son arrivée...

Tout avait changé pour elle, même les oiseaux qui bordaient les auvents des fenêtres , ils n'ont plus envie de gazouiller , la paresse les a contaminés à eux aussi!

Elle voulait oublier tout ce qu'elle a laissé à Sao paulo ,et rattraper le bonheur de son village natal.

-Brenda, il y a tante Olga avec sa fille qui sont venues te dire bonne rentrée , tu t'es réveillée?

-oui oui je viens !une minute.

Wardeh était trop contente que les voisins et les parents viennent voir sa fille après toutes ces années d'absence,il paraît qu'ils ont oublié le passé maudit, pour qu'ils viennent tous lui souhaiter la bienvenue...

L'arôme du café préparé arrive jusqu'à sa chambre ...une raison de plus pour elle pour qu'elle interrompe sa sieste !

Brenda sortit et salua les visiteurs sans aucun intérêt ; le temps a endurci ses sentiments, les épreuves l'ont accablée,et l'amertume l'a écrasée.

de "Cherchant l'amour à Budapest ..."

Elle était jeune,innocente,peu expérimentée, et elle croyait qu'elle avait trouvé l'amour de sa vie, et Raiif de même, il l'avait aimé sur un coup de foudre... c'est vrai qu'il était 10 ans plus âgé que Brenda, mais il est tombé sous son charme.Les premiers mois du mariage furent difficiles vu que le couple vivait avec la famille de Raiif : ses deux parents et son frère cadet ; donc pour Brenda,ce n'était pas l'idéal en tant que nouvelle mariée qui rêvait d'avoir une vie un plus privée avec son mari, une maison à elle ou au moins des horaires privés à elle-même, pour se réveiller, pour accueillir, pour dormir...

Sa belle-mère était une femme gentille et passive,contrairement à son beau-père qui décidait tout et son beau-frère qui était malin et prétentieux .

Son mari était un lieutenant à l'armée et il dormait 4 jours dans sa caserne et 3 jours à la maison, ce qui avait contraint Brenda à s'exprimer devant son mari,faute de temps ?! faute d'ouverture d'esprit ?! ou bien les deux à la fois !!

Hamid, Le pere de Raiif ne cessait d'insinuer devant Brenda l'urgence d'avoir un enfant le plus tôt possible avant qu'il meure, ce qui agaçait trop la jeune mariée, car elle ne pouvait pas lui expliquer que c'est l'absence de son mari qui en était l'obstacle !!!

Le 22 novembre qui tombait un dimanche cette année-ci, était un jour neigeux et glacial a Summahari, Raiif était exceptionnellement au service vu qu'il y avait plein de grèves à Beirut contre la corruption, la cherté de vie, le changement du premier ministre..

Tout cela rendait Brenda triste et inquiète du présent, du futur , de tout !

Amir le frère de son mari revenait tard de chez son ami où ils jouaient aux cartes comme chaque samedi et dimanche, et il était un peu ivre ;ses parents dormaient sinon ça aurait été la baguarre habituelle entre lui et son père qui le contrecarrait et l'intimidait toujours pour sa paresse et sa débauche.

“Cherchant l'amour à Budapest mais...”

Au début, Brenda était encore sous le choc de toute son histoire :son viol, son délaissement par son mari, son abandon du village, son mariage raté, alors elle ne faisait pas attention au temps qui passe, mais après un mois, elle commençait à s'ennuyer à la maison, vu que toute la famille était occupée :les cousines quittaient à l'université de bon matin, Zammou Farès au bureau et Tante Nazik à ses activités sociales : Brunchs, réunions pour son association, visites, etc..

Personne à qui même adresser la porte n'était là pour divertir ou consoler Brenda, à l'exception de Violetta la fille de la cuisinière Thérésinia , qui aidait sa mère en tout, ainsi que son père parfois dans son travail de jardinier chez les Hafez.

Les cousines aimaient Brenda, mais plein de contraintes les empêchaient d'être trop proches d'elle:

D'abord elles parlaient le portugais plus que le libanais, ensuite leurs études les gardent absentes de la maison la plupart des journées, et les sorties du weekend en sont la troisième raison;elles ont de la compassion pour elle mais la différence de culture et d'éducation entre elles et leur cousine était un obstacle pour sentir sa vraie amertume . Son oncle l'avait inscrit dans une école pour apprendre le portugais, mais Brenda trouvait de la peine à y aller chaque jour, car elle se sentait solitaire,dépaysée et triste!!

Un an s'était écoulé, et son moral etait encore bas, bien que tout le monde était gentil et généreux avec elle, elle avait tout à sa disposition pourtant au fond d'elle-même tout lui manquait , tout!!!l'Amour en premier lieu, la tendresse, sa mère, la vie du village, jusqu'à ces jours-ci , elle pleurait des nuits encore en se souvenant de tout ce qu'elle avait enduré.....

Chaque jour , en revenant à pied du cours ,elle passait à la librairie du quartier pour lire un peu ou acheter un livre pour renforcer sa langue....

Written in Japanese by:
Margie Banin,
from USA – living in USA

A little gardening tale...

漬物が大好き、特に洋風なピクルス。でも店で売っているピクルスは輸入ものとしていつも値段が高いし、ビンも小さいから食べたくても買わない。しかし今年は違う！なぜそうになるか？今年自分できゅうりを育てて自家製ピクルスをしようとするから。

庭を造るのは初めてだが、とても熱心で取り掛かって春から夏になって意外と成功していた。植えた種はほとんど芽が出てきゅうりのつるにたくさんの花が咲いてそれからちっちゃいきゅうりがいっぱい見えてきた。最高だと思いながら将来の収穫を楽しみにしていた。

が...

今朝家を出たときゅうりは一本もなかった。ショックだった。どうやってこれが可能か困っていた。もう少し庭に近づいたと水滴が幾つもあつたことを気がついた。小川に繋がったようだ。へえ？これが可笑しくないかと思って水滴を辿って小川に着いた。そしてそこで岩の上に嬉しそうな河童が座って私のきゅうりをむさぼるように食っていた。

まあ、せめてきゅうりを食べさせる河童は悪戯しないねと、将来のピクルスがなくなった私が思った。それで、庭に戻って今回河童のために再びきゅうりの種を植えはじめた。

Written in Spanish by:
Denka Pérez Amézaga,
from Cuba – living in Turkey

Espejismo

El viajero recorrió con sus ojos la superficie del oasis. Las dunas habían quedado detrás de la barrera verde y el desierto se le mostraba menos amenazante. La bondadosa sombra de las palmeras, el agua fresca de la laguna, la dulzura jugosa, casi lasciva, tras la dura piel del dátil, le hicieron olvidar sus innumerables jornadas sofocantes y noches gélidas en aquella caldera dorada. El cielo se le hizo menos despiadado bajo la protección del follaje. Ya no recordaba donde iba y no le interesaba pensar en ello. Recostado a un tronco, cerró los ojos. Acunado por la vegetación y arrullado por el trino de un ave cercana, se quedó dormido.

El olor de camellos y una conocida sensación ardiente le hicieron despertar. Escuchaba voces extrañas. Sus ojos solo percibían unas siluetas borrosas que le rodeaban. Sintió un líquido tibio derramarse por entre sus labios, mojando sus encías y su lengua; aliviando, a duras penas, su garganta afligida. Agua. Lentamente comenzó a definir los contornos, las figuras, los rostros preocupados de los beduinos. Miró alrededor. Las arenas se extendían ante él, infinitas, desafiantes. No era posible. Aún su boca recordaba el dulzor de los dátiles, la frescura del agua...

Volvió a mirar alrededor. Sus ojos escrutaban cada grano de arena que lo separaba del horizonte y, de pronto, sus pupilas divisaron una mancha oscura y amorfa. Allí estaba su pequeño paraíso. Corrió hacia los beduinos intentando hablarles, con el índice levantado, insistente, señalando el lugar. Lo miraron, lastimeros, moviendo sus cabezas en señal de negación y diciendo continuamente: "Sarab... Sarab" y comenzaron a alistar sus bestias para continuar camino.

"Sarab"... lo había escuchado antes. Exploraba en su memoria mientras miraba la mancha distante. Una mano lo sacó de su ensimismamiento invitándole a seguirle. Se negó. Ese no era el rumbo que habría de tomar. Se incorporó y dio un paso... dos... Quiso avanzar pero sus piernas y su voluntad flaquearon. Todo el peso de su cuerpo se desplomó sobre sus rodillas. "Sarab..." recordó. Un alarido desgarró su garganta. Y lloró.

Written in Spanish by:
Jessica Stueven,
from Peru – living in Germany

Una historia en tiempos de Corona

Acababa de cortar la llamada y ya le invadía ese miedo. No podía ser! pensó. Había esperado tantos años y justo ahora, cuando podía estar embarazada, tenía que haber una pandemia tan devastadora. Se preguntaba, porque el virus no llegó un año más tarde ó el año pasado, porque ahora?

La cita con el ginecólogo era para el día siguiente a las 10 de la mañana. Si por lo menos Roberto ó su madre podrían estar con ella. Pero por la pandemia , los dos se encontraban tan lejos y no sabían cuando volverían a verse. Pensó en lo bonito que sería estar acompañada y alegrarse todos juntos con la buena noticia. Y sí las noticias no eran buenas? quien la consolaría? con quien lloraría? Se sintió muy sola, quiso llamar a Roberto, pero, para que crearle ilusiones? ya habían vivido eso tantas veces durante los últimos años.

Esa noche Carmen durmió muy intranquila, escuchaba constantemente las sirenas de las ambulancias, y pensaba en la tragedia que estaban viviendo los otros, se sentía tan egoísta de pensar que sus angustias eran las más importantes. Trató de pensar en su bebé, su Roberto, su Madre, todos juntos...la alarma del despertador la regresó. Le recordaba que la cita con el médico se acercaba. Se arregló con mucha ilusión, se puso la mascarilla para cubrirse la boca y la nariz, y se alegró de tener una excusa para salir, hasta le salió una sonrisa que hacía tiempo no se le dibujaba en la cara. Decidió ir caminando, así aprovechaba esos momentos de libertad y de esperanza, vió muy poca gente en la calle , sintió que se escondían con las mascarillas y evitaban todo contacto. Como había cambiado la vida en esas últimas semanas? a veces pensaba que era una pesadilla y que se despertaría y nadie se acordaría del nombre del virus, ni del número de fallecidos, ni de los infectados....miró a la derecha y vió el consultorio del médico, se llenó de fuerza y se dijo: “esta vez Roberto, si lo lograremos” , y entró.

Written in Catalan by:
Montse Bcn,
from Spain – living in Spain

Of 'Late Birds' ...

No he parat mai de volar, fins ara. Literalment!
I, curiosament no m'havia fixat mai en els ocells. Bé, sí ..., no ..., però no com ara!

Aquest confinament m'ha fet descobrir tantes coses ... Una d'elles són els ocells. Els veia però no els havia mirat.

Planejen per sobre de casa des que ens hem aturat. S'ajunten tots cada tarda i fan uns balls interminables d'una harmonia increïble ... es parlen, es miren, s'avisen, s'hi posen i dancen. Uns prenen la davantera, d'altres es llançen com per un precipici amb els ulls tancats. Com sinó hi hagués demà. Alguns són entremaliats ... i fan petites excursions solitàries fent cabrioles. Són els gimnastes del grup. Als que no els hi agraden les regles ... Els últims tanquen l'escorta, amb elegància, com el gos de tura d'un ramat.

Tenen un efecte balsàmic, podria passar-m'hi hores. Em pregunto, on estaria jo, ara, si fòs ocell? A la cua, al capdavant ó al mig?

De fet, tots tenen una funció i es necessiten. Totes les tecles i el Zoom a Internations són les nostres noves joguines durant el confinament i estem aprenent a volar-hi.

Sóc Late Bird a l'invent de les 350 paraules perquè no trobo tema. I, de sobte me n'adonc, que els ocells que passen cada dia saludant són com totes aquelles tantes coses ó persones, que ens passen pel costat i no veiem.

Llegeixo que estan canviant tota la seva manera de cantar i relacionar-se amb el medi ... com nosaltres : 'Els nens/es del Zoom' d'Internations! ... piulant ... desenvolupant habilitats desconegudes i m'en recordo d'en Gaudi ... tota la natura és un mirall i una metàfora, per ensenyar-nos coses. Què veiem quan ens mirem??

La nostra presència on-line i absència off té canvis en tot.

Serem d'aquí 20 anys la Generació Internations?

Sabrem com els ocells volar la preciosa - fins ara – sinfonia de la vida?

Written in English by :
Ben Angel,
from USA – living in Poland

"Parable for a Tenth Great Grandfather"

--

"Put your father's body up against that tree, Joseph," Myles Standish quietly commanded.

Joseph Rogers dutifully slung its weight to the base of the ancient oak. Shockingly, the body grunted as it landed. "Is he alive?" the mortified boy whispered to his equally surprised elder.

Before the newly-elected militia commander answered, Thomas Rogers uttered in a halting whisper, "Don't be confused by hope, son. My body is already useless, broken by the sickness. Leave it here to fool the savages. I'll take my musket now, Myles. My soul is already walking the path to Our Creator's home."

With a scowl, Standish gave the dying man his prop. If the ruse worked right, the dead man would stave off attacks until the thaw. Without fanfare, he told the sobbing Joseph, "It's getting late, let's go."

But as his son and Standish disappeared into the trees, Thomas knew he lied. His soul instead drifted back to that fateful Friday, July 21, by English reckoning, or by the New Style Calendar that the rest of the world used, July 31, 1620. He recalled his soon-to-be widow Alice, or Elsgen as the Dutch called her, bite her lip as he bade farewell outside their house on Barbarasteeg, taking their eldest son with him. He didn't know it then, but she was right to believe that the next time they'd meet would be in that Biblical "house not made with hands."

His own hands were too weak to do anything other than rest on the broken musket, and as the cold removed the feeling from his extremities, his mind recalled the feel of the barge drifting from the Nonnenbrug through Leiden's Morschpoort and down the sleepy Vliet canal to the Speedwell. When that leaky boat sailed from Delfshaven out beyond the Hoek of Holland to its rendezvous with the Mayflower, he'd never guess that Holland would at the end of his life seem so much closer to Paradise than the snowy deathbed in which his adventure ended. With regret, it was to his wife that he mouthed his last goodbye before consciousness itself froze forever.

Written in English by:
Citlalli Martinez,
from Mexico – living in Poland

Old tomb.

Is it creepy to want to lay in an old tomb? I mean, look at this palace! It actually invites you to go in and take a sit, rest for a bit. What about just laying down in that wonderful white marble floor!? So fresh during a hot summer day! I mean I don't think anyone will mind it If I just take a break and enjoy the place a bit. I should have bring some food as Serbs do! Even read a book here would be nice... All of the sudden voices where there, talking to her and asking about the news. So she started to mention isolation, death, fear. The voices replied that it was still the same, nothing has changed, they said.

It was too cold, the sunlight was fading and she could feel her back too cold, however she felt lighter, as she could float in the air, in no time she was in her hotel room without remembering walking through the town. Strange! She couldn't turn the TV and the cereal box was too heavy to carry it to the kitchen. Well, she was not so hungry though. So she felt to sleep.

Next morning without warning the maid came in the room, made the bed over her body and totally ignored her shouting to stop it, was she blind? She thought to report it, one more inconvenience in this horrible accommodation. Then she realized that her phone was missing...must have been taken by the maid, I will have to go to the police, she thought. As if her wishes where true at every moment the police car parked under her window. The hotel doorbell rang and the maid's voice sounded alarmed. Then the maid appeared again in the room followed by the police who also ignored her complaints and questions. She couldn't believe it! Why everybody act as if she were inexistent? Then she heard the police again: -please let us know if anyone comes to claim the body's belongings. We will take it all now.

Written in Spanish by:
Citlalli Martinez,
from Mexico – living in Poland

Gato de cementerio.

Llegó al lugar y la primera sorpresa fue que había que pagar, la segunda sorpresa fue que, por ser jueves, los museos nacionales son gratuitos.

Caminó por el lugar, que parecía una jungla, los árboles rompían las lápidas, crecían plantas en todas las tumbas. Vio un gato que parecía esperarla, ella lo siguió. El gato caminaba por uno de los caminos marcados, pero de repente se metió entre las tumbas como ocultándose, ella caminó hacia él y entonces el gato corrió en otra dirección. Ella continuó su recorrido, buscaba algo que fuera diferente. Había letreros que marcaban ciertas criptas, ella no conocía la historia del lugar por lo que los nombres no le decían nada. Pero llego a esa tumba con la apariencia de pirámide, una que definitivamente era diferente. No sólo se detuvo para hacer una fotografía sino que además se colocó en el centro, mirando hacia arriba para ver el cielo claro y el sol del mediodía. Sintió la necesidad de hacer una invocación, una plegaria. Continuó el recorrido, pasando por otras tumbas mientras se imaginaba escribir una historia donde un personaje muerto volviera a la vida después de que una chica extranjera, ingenua hiciera oraciones por alguien en ese cementerio tan olvidado, sería un hombre muy guapo.

Llamó a más de un muerto por su nombre al leer en voz alta las inscripciones de las lápidas. Se sintió como en casa en una tumba que parecía un castillo y finalmente salió. Se sentía cansada y se sentó en

una banca a la salida. En todo ese tiempo no había visto a ningún otro visitante, sólo a los cuidadores del lugar.

Pensó en el gato que la había guiado hasta cierta tumba, pensó cómo recrear la historia, entonces miró a un joven saliendo del cementerio, caminando de un modo un poco extraño, que fijamente la miró, su mirada era como si la conociera, como si le agradeciera, pero no dijo nada. A ella le pareció que caminaba como un gato en dos patas, era un hombre muy guapo, justo como ella lo imaginó.

InterNations.org
Seattle - Riga

SHORT STORIES & POESY E-BOOK
EDITION 2020

VOLUME IV
Poesie in Motion between North and Middle East
12 August 2020

DinnerNations Beirut and Riga's Language and Literature Group are joining their efforts to organize a special night for poetry lovers!

This event will be dedicated to romantic poetry.

For our love and romance event in English language, we encourage you to publish at least one of your own poems on the wall. We will discuss and recite them during our tele-conference on zoom, together with Issa Maalouf from Lebanon.

This is your chance to become a poet, even if it is your very first experience with the form!

Fly with me...
You give me wings to fly
High above the sky
To a no man's land
To a world without an End!!!

Issa Riad Maalouf last of the Maalouf Legacy (All rights reserved) 03.03.2015

Activity Hosts:

Antra M, Consul
Claude G, Ambassador
Language and Literature Group Riga

Issa Maalouf, Consul
DinnerNations Beirut Group

Introducing message from:

Antra M, Consul,
from Latvia – living in Latvia
Language and Literature Group Riga

Dear friends of poesy,

“Dainas are ancient Latvian folksongs passed from generation to generation, from century to century. The main collection contains more than a million dainas.” Latvian poet Velta Sniķere has done translations in English, the book "Dainas" has been published in 2019.

We offer just couple of them, for your potential poetry inspiration:

I walked upon a meadow singing,
Singing a meadow song.
Blue blossoms fell and filled my shoes,
Blue blossoms and golden dew.

Dear Sun went to frolic
With clear sea water –
The sun let fall a silken cloth,
The sea threw tufts of foam.

Written by:
Ben Angel,
from USA – living in Poland

You can ride a train to far away
Delete your shared photo file
Erase hurtful words written earlier in the day
But despite these absences, all the while
Old emotions stubbornly stay,,,

Written by:

Thomas Eden,
from India – Living in Latvia

A Walk With My Lover

Moonlight gleamed on your elegant face,
As we walked down the streets together;
Your lips shone red in the night light,
And I craved for more.

Your heartbeat synchronised with mine,
In the eerie silence;
As we gazed at the night's blue sky.

I settled my head on your sleek thighs,
And began to drowse on your warm lap.
You whispered "I love you" as you got up,
And tore yourself from me;
You ran and vanished amid the labyrinth of narrow streets,
Tear drops ran down my cheeks.

I abruptly woke up, soothing myself
At the sight of your vibrant face;
Realizing - every moment is a Gift.
A gift that we share.

Your hands heal my wounds,
And your love heals my soul;
You, my love, are my home,
And my hope in the darkest days.

Written by:
Citlalli Martinez,
from Mexico – living in Poland

AMANTES EN VUELO
3 junio 2020
Olawa, Poland

Y entonces los vi volar
Volaron alto, como mis sueños,
alejados de todo y de todos los demás.
Y allí, donde creían que nadie podía verlos
Siguieron con su ritual de cortejo:
él la seguía con vehemencia
y ella lo probó, fijó su rumbo sin esperarle,
siguió su curso y él la siguió,
pero comprendió que él no era su objetivo
y cambió la táctica.
Entonces hizo un despliegue de valor frente a ella:
se elevó más alto aún y giró frente a sus ojos
bailando en su vuelo para ella,
pero ella no bailó con él,
decidió su rumbo y tomó otro curso.
Él estaba tan absorto en sus proezas
que ni cuenta se dio
del momento en que ella viró de rumbo.
Entonces, en una vuelta la vio alejarse
como las metas no logradas,
pero no se dejó vencer,
y voló de nuevo a su encuentro.
Ella voló, siguió su propio rumbo
y él la siguió.
Comenzó a disfrutar del aire, del viento
y ambos en su volar independiente
cruzaron rumbo en su vuelo.
Vistas desde el suelo, parecía que se besaban,
Que se quedaban juntas solo por un instante,
Y él procuró que ella lo siguiera,
pero eso no pasó
ella voló y él la siguió de nuevo.
Llegaron al borde de una nube brillante
Como si supieran que yo los veía
Ella voló detrás de las nubes...
Y yo supe esperar...
Se dejaron ver de nuevo
Ante de que la luz de la nube dañara mis ojos
y tuve que llorar para volver a ver,
para comprobar que ya no estaban,
se escondieron tras la nube,
estoy segura que sobre ella se posan para amarse,
pero la nube desapareció y yo no volví a verlos.

TRANSLATION:

Then I saw them flying,
They flew high, like my dreams,
far away from everything and everyone.
And there, where they thought nobody could see them
they continue their courtship ritual.
He followed her vehemently
and she tested him.
She set her course without waiting for him
She went away and he followed her,
but he realized tha he wasn't her goal,
so he changed strategy.
He made a courage display in front of her,
he flew even higher and turned in from of her eyes,
dancing for her in his fly.
But, she didn't dance with him.
She decided her direction and moved elsewhere.
He was so engaged in his skillful displays
that he didn't even noticed when she was gone.
Then, in one turn, he saw her moving away,
like the not achieved goals...
But he didn't give up
and flew to meet her.
She followed her course and he followed.
He started to enjoy the air, the wind
each one, on their own independent flight
Crossed paths as they were flying.
From the ground seemed like they were kissing,
As if they were together for a second
He try that she would follow him
butt it didn't happen.
She flew and he followed her again.
They reached the border of a bright shiny cloud,
as if they knew that I was watching them,
she flew behind that cloud,
I waited.
I could see them again
just before my eyes got hurt by the brightness of that cloud,
I had to cry to see again,
just to see that they were not anymore.
They hid behind the cloud
I am sure that they laid on it to love each other
but the cloud disappeared
and I never saw them again.

Written by:
Montse Bce,
from Spain – living in Spain

About when we Fall in Love, 'When' is the title:

QUAN

Quan el vent et posseeix
Quan ets esclau del matí,
Quan se t'ha robat la perla
Quan se t'ha desfet el niu.

Quan el mar t'ha revoltat
Quan la pluja t'ha comprès,
Quan unes passes t'han fet ser.
Quan un còs t'ha empressonat
Quan un gest t'ha emocionat
Quan una mà t'ha acaronat
Quan uns ulls t'han besat
Quan uns llavis t'han mirat
mentre un somriure t'han donat ...

Quan un silenci t'ha lliberat
Quan la natura has posseït
Quan posseeixes
Somriure, llavis, ulls ...
Mà, gest, cos,
... passes
És llavors quan ets capaç de tot,
..... i a l'hora, de res,
Quan simplement,
Sencillament,
.... Estimes.
Montse 19/04/80

TRANSLATION:

WHEN

When the wind possesses you
and you are a slave of the morning,
When your pearl has been stolen
When your nest has been broken.

When the sea is upsetting you
When the rain understands you,
When certain steps are giving sense.
When a body is trapping you
While a gesture is moving you
When a hand has caressed you
When certain eyes have kissed you

While his lips have looked at you
while smiling ...

When a silence has set you free
and you possess the nature

When you 'Own' :

Smile, lips, eyes

Hand, gesture, body,

... Steps

That's when you're able of everything,

... .. and at the same time, of nothing,

When simply,

Easily,

.... You Felt in Love/Love!

Montse 19/04/80

Written by:
Denka Pérez Amézaga
from Cuba – living in Turkey

That threshold I dare not to cross.
That light, my soul dreads to follow.
My hollow heart fears of sorrow
Of finding first, then... A loss.

These feelings, I want to kill
With a blow of cold steel.
This longings have no more place;
Fear I have of your embrace.

My cowardice is so strong
That I rather not belong.

InterNations.org
Seattle - Riga

SHORT STORIES & POESIE E-BOOK
EDITION 2020

VOLUME V

Story Writing Challenge in 250 words, Autumn 2020

26 September 2020

The Seattle Literature Group & the Riga Language and Literature Group are teaming up to hold joint microfiction challenges quarterly! Our second event will be Autumn 2020 and we're looking forward to having you join us.

Even if you've never written before, even if you've never written in English before, you can write microfiction! With a limit of 250 words, this is something we can all accomplish.

Here's how it works:

- 1) Pick one of the thematic options below.
- 2) Compose a story including the designated action + key word(s).
- 3) Keep your word count to 250 or less!
- 4) Post your stories in the comments on this activity's wall so we can all read through them. Feel free to submit as many as you like!

Option A

Action: You are describing a car race you witnessed first-hand.

Keyword phrase: "and then a penguin waddled onto the road..."

Option B

Action: You are living through a plague.

Keyword phrase: "Death didn't get a chance"

Option C

Action: A stray black cat has adopted you as its human.

Keyword phrase: "I'm doomed"

Please post your story on the wall for your local group. Then feel free to visit the other group's activity wall to check out their submissions, too!

All of us from both the Riga and Seattle groups will meet up together via Zoom to enjoy discovering our creations.

We're looking forward to reading your stories!

Activity Hosts:

Claude G, Ambassador
Language and Literature Group Riga

Margie Banin, Consul
Seattle Literature Group

Written by:
Travis Moran,
from USA – living in Latvia

“You get taffy?”

“I got caramel corn.”

“I asked for saltwater taffy.”

“Well, I guess you’ll just have to get your ass up and get some.”

She held me in a quizzical glare like a squirrel who’d just labored into a hollow walnut.

“His race is about to start, and you got me here with caramel corn?!”

“I did get you a lemon shakeup.”

“Well?” she asked, searching for the drink.

I shrugged. “I got thirsty.”

“Welcome everyone to Macon County Fairgrounds!” boomed a voice via bullhorns nailed to jack-pine utility poles. “Y’all ready for some racing?”

The crowd detachedly patted its hands together. A potbellied farmer a few rows back concluded a joke he’d clearly told a thousand times: “... and then a penguin waddled onto the road!”

No one laughed.

“Ten bucks says he doesn’t make it one lap.”

“He’s 11,” my wife insisted.

“I’m just sayin’...”

Our son strutted up to the bat-wing outlaw we’d rigged in the garage over the past year, waving at us proudly before buckling in. We waved back, my wife fabricating a wide smile.

“It goes ‘round the track once, I’ll give you twenty on ten.”

“Shut up,” she hissed.

Written by:
Citlalli Martinez,
from Mexico – living in Poland

GREEN

It would have been impossible not to notice her. She was the most beautiful, small, black, stray kitten I've ever seen. The wonderful color of her eyes named her Green.

It seems to me that she had just popped up from earth, like a miracle in my life...After the broken heart situation that I had been through the last six months, Green filled my days with lots of activities: I was going to the shops searching for canned food, a comfortable cat bed, new toys, and of course tons of new fascinating pictures that I was sharing with my social media friends.

Being an expat left alone by her partner in a strange city, where I was not even able to communicate because I didn't speak the language, was a big deal. But having Green forced me to move forward. All of a sudden I was going everywhere trying to get help to find what I needed. Nothing was as stressful as taking her to the vet. Oh dear! That was the most challenging bloody language speaking experience... but I really felt in hell when I saw the bill, then I thought: I'm doomed from now on with you! But Green looked at me with her gorgeous eyes, rubbing her body against my leg as a reminder that she brought life, joy and love in my heart and life again.

It's ok! I told her. I might be doomed, but I'm happy. I'm blessed with you, my angel.

THE KISS

He kissed me. In my dream I closed my eyes, but in my bed I woke up and saw... the black stray cat from the surroundings staring at me like asking: did you like it? How was it babe? I felt confused, he was looking straight into my eyes, looking for the answer, as I hesitated he lay down on my lap.

It took me a couple of minutes to finally realize it. How did he get into my apartment? I immediately got up and try to catch him, but he ran, of course. I followed him and finally caught him behind the sofa. When I held him I thought: I will take you to the rescue place. It is like I hear his voice in my head saying: I'm doomed!

What? I looked at him. His eyes looked for forgiveness like an innocent man who had not committed the crime.

- Nobody will ever kiss you every morning like I did.
- No way! I'm doomed for the rest of my life if I take you in, silly cat! This is a crazy conversation! Stop it right now!

I put him in a shopping bag and brought him to the cat sanctuary on the opposite side of the city.

Three months later I had the same dream. I was afraid to even open my eyes, then I heard his voice asking: Did you miss me?... this time it was Dylan, my cat-allergic boyfriend.

Written by:
Ben Angel,
from USA – living in Poland

Option A: (Part 1)

That hit of acid hasn't kicked in yet.

The kid revving his engine next to me does this with me every weekend. We steal cars and drag-race them through "The Plan" of Valparaiso. Eventually, we ditch the cars and let the Chilean Carabineros find them, usually very much worse for the wear, but we don't do any real harm to anyone.

This week, I stole the Russian Neva I had my eye on for weeks, while my racing partner has some sort of Subaru. Couldn't find anything better, chico? Oh yeah, the wheels are spinning while the car is still... the hit is kicking in...

Amazing how he flies off across Avenida Argentina like a rainbow comet... wait, he took off without me. Jerk! I'll show you who's faster. I go through the Neva's gears without hardly any grinding noises, and indeed I am one with the machine, flying through the night. Ha, he's stopped at Avenida Francia. Who stops for lights in the middle of a race, chico?

I fly through, the sound of metal hitting metal echoing beyond my rear bumper. I see the kid behind me, his car laughing like my kid sister in the last moment I saw her crossing the street in her school uniform. I'm getting lost in the memory... and then a penguin waddled onto the road! I slammed on the breaks and swerved, and the very last thing I saw were huge glistening teeth of window pane glass coming down on me...

Option B: (Part 2)

I awake, strapped to a bed. All around me are the sick and the ill of the city, many are moaning, few are sleeping. Foreheads beaded with sweat, they all sing a chorus that cries for relief. The smell of antiseptic descends on my taste buds as I try to work free of the bindings that hold me to the table. I've never been caught before, so I am not sure how I can get myself out of this.

"Is this the plague?" I ask myself. It's not an unreasonable question. The sweat looks like blisters in the right light. I'm not sure it's just the light. I'm truly scared.

Then my fingers find it, the buckle. Death didn't get a chance, not tonight. I pry it open and quickly unloosen my other bindings before heading out the door to the street. A guard sees me, but I disappear into the dark of a power outage on Avenida Colon before he can blow the whistle on my escape. A few streets later and I am back at the scene of my own accident. The dawn's early light is just starting to reach out from the hills behind the city as the tow truck takes away my prized Neva. I'm so sad.

But I survived. I wind my way back to the hills, make my way to the mean dirt streets of my neighborhood, and I hide out from everyone, just for another week. Another hit will help pass the time.

Option C: (Part 3)

I'm suddenly awakened by the feel of a tiny rough tongue on my face. I push the face it belongs to away and roll over, but its nose finds the side of my face again. I push it away again. I hate rats, particularly when they lick your face for food.

The rat comes back again, but this time it's purring. What the... who's cat is this? It's black. Who do I know who has a black cat? Who has a black cat these days?

I remember when I was a child. My sister and I would spend summers on my grandparents' farm out in Casablanca. It wasn't a big place, but it was quiet. My grandparents had a black cat. It would purr and nuzzle the side of my face while I slept, just like this one. Then it left the house one day and never came back. My superstitious grandmother said that El Diablo came to take it, as it was a black cat. Such cats were the devil's own, she would growl.

I looked down on this gatita, and stroked its fur. Maybe after last night's accident I had been cursed by the devil, I thought. Maybe he brought this little cat to me to mark me as one who would be condemned to hell. But I couldn't turn it away, not this little cat. It needed me so. Hell or not, I knew it was mine to care for. "I'm doomed," I said to myself.

Option A (Part 1):

"Get set! Go!"

With that, the Woodland Park Zoo 500 got off to a roaring start. Just after the heavily armored 4x4 pickup truck mowed down the entry turnstiles, subsequently crashing into ticket booth (the employees inside barely escaping with their lives), each of the seven souped-up restored 1974 Ford Pintos plowed through what remained of the gate and surged past the crowd, all of whom had fortuitously jumped out of the way in the last second.

A few heartbeats later, the sound of over-stressed engines echoed across the Beech Grove picnic area as the sickly lime-colored car pulled out into the lead. Its driver weaved past the Tropical Rain Forest exhibits, dodging startled pedestrians, many of whom ran off down the footpath toward the flamingos. Loudspeakers finally warned people to shelter in place away from the walkways.

Then came the split-second of that glorious miscalculation where the lime-green Pinto driver turned and collided head-first into the transparent barrier holding back the water of the penguin exhibit. Metal and plexiglass crumpled as a flood opened onto the walkway outside the so-called Reserva Guanera Punta San Juan. The force of water created the only rear-end collision of the day, but rather than explode, the poorly placed gas tank on the lead Pinto merely gushed petroleum into the surge.

The final car was the only one not to flood, and was quickly approaching the end of the illegal race. And then a penguin wandered into the middle of the road...

Option B (Part 2):

Herbert, the penguin, watched as the chartreuse Ford Pinto crashed into the trees, and gave a little penguin “caff” as it meandered its way to the wreckage. Those who were brave enough wandered behind the penguin to look at the metal hulk, its rear-facing gas tank shining in the sun.

“Caff, caff,” Herbert sounded as he wandered among the distracted onlookers, nudging a shin every now and then for a treat. Finally, a friendly little girl saw the coughing flightless bird, and after successful insistences directed to her parents, picked him up, and took him home.

This, unfortunately, marked the start of the dreaded Third Wave of SARS-COV-2, from which Seattle had become the epicenter of its earliest spread. However, death didn’t get a chance as city and state authorities moved quickly to contain the disease. The other penguins were captured and isolated, contact tracing by those nearest the crashed trailing Pinto shut down the spread, and after two weeks of a strict mask-wearing regime that smothered the city’s hands with sanitizer, the health crisis was halted.

However, the damage to the fledgling Ford Pinto restoration fad proved irreversible. The city council quickly followed the Green Lake District in becoming Pinto-Free Zones. Nationwide, protestors locked arms around the hapless cars in solidarity for the non-existent victims of the zoo race and subsequent outbreak. Bad press and its resulting public hatred and outcry resulted in the outlawing of the vehicle.

But where Pintos are outlawed, of course, only outlaws have Pintos...

Option C (Part 3)

That’s where I come in - allow me to introduce myself. I am Jeremiah Pinto, and without a doubt, I am the world’s most legendary Ford Pinto restorer.

I won’t tell you that I’m the man who was behind the Woodland Park 500, but let’s just say I know everyone who was involved. What’s with the sour face, all of a sudden? I mean, hey, we’re just a bunch of fun-loving car restorers who just happen to be on the national terror watch list because of our love for restoring poorly-designed cars. Is that really so bad?

Wait, come on out with me to my own personal Back Forty. Mind your step - that’s real electrical fencing material, and of course your head. Yes, that’s all camouflage netting, the special kind mad of aluminum foil that keeps spy satellites from finding hidden metal objects, like all my restored Pintos.

As you’ll notice, each one of my babies has a horseshoe hanging above it. No it’s not for that... well, I mean, yes, a Pinto is actually a horse, but the real reason for hanging them is of course for good luck. After all the negative press from the Woodland Park race, I think it’s fair to say that I REALLY NEED IT.

Wait, what’s that tucked into the corner over there, next to the used tires. You say it’s a bunch of cats, a mama and kittens. Ah, that’s cute. Wait! What color are the cats? Black? Cripes, I’m doomed!

Written by:
Amir Huda,
from Bangladesh – living in USA

Option B

Fatal Pandemic

At 99 years old, living through a plague at a nursing home with a major outbreak, the decision was unanimous. Life, death, all the caregivers of Mrs. Chatterjee, her only daughter, Meena, her COPD, and even Mrs. Chatterjee herself conspired to give in. But then fate intervened, the fate against which even gods yield. Death didn't get a chance since all the possible ways that would be a mechanism of death turned into ways for her to reach her 100th birthday.

First, her roommate died two weeks before the outbreak. Although, Meena believed that this would increase her mother's isolation, it served as one less vector of transmission. The caregivers were told to prioritize and Mrs. Chatterjee was written off. And so, fewer visits by the only possible vectors served to minimize chances of infection. Meena skyped every day and sent links on WhatsApp to see videos. Mrs. Chatterjee always had her nasal cannula providing oxygen because of her COPD. But another pathway was minimized quite by accident. A week before, the engineer found the bathroom exhaust fan not working. He replaced it with a newer one but because of the odor complaint, he increased the air changes per hour from outdoor air to 4.5 instead of the usual 2. The increased rate removed airborne respiratory droplets approximately 3 times faster and created a negative pressure gradient. This lessened the chances further.

When she celebrated her 100th birthday with cake on Skype, everyone thought it was a miracle!

Written by:
Giselle Roeder,
from Germany – living in Canada

Option C

“No. No more cats for me!”

That’s what I had told my children when I came back from the veterinarian. Our neighbour’s cat had attacked our ‘Minka,’ her wounds festered. Dad ordered, “Put her in a bag with a brick and throw her into the river.”

I stared at him, thinking of what I would do with him! The vet put Minka to sleep. It happened years ago, alone and retired; I wanted no attachments.

Sitting outside watching the darkening sky one night, dreaming, I glanced at a couple of glowing eyes. Then they were gone. I rubbed my eyes. It happened again the next evening and the next. To find out more, I left a few scraps of food. Yes, something was watching me each night. When I least expected it, a black cat was sitting there, her eyes on me. We stared at each other for a long time, neither of us breaking the contact. Ever so slowly, the cat walked towards me and sat down within a few steps. A slight movement from me, and it was gone. The same spiel happened for the next two nights. The cat had made a decision. It came closer, tail high, rubbed itself on and around my legs, purred, and unexpectedly jumped onto my lap. It pushed its little head into my hand, my elbows, and finally, into my neck; that little ‘Push-kin’ was making love to me. I was doomed... Adopted by a cat? Pushkin never left me again.

Written by:
Karmen Spiljak,
from Slovenia – living in Brazil

Option C)

There's no way out. I'm doomed. The cat rests in her basket, perched on top of the closet. Like a queen, she presides over the house, while I'm at once her servant and her jester. She doesn't care that I have work to do. Stretching her elegant paws, she parades in front of my computer, sits on the keyboard, adds illegible scribbles to my report. Then, as if just to torture me, as if she knows I cannot say no to feline majesty, she falls asleep.

My legs grow numb, but I don't move. I don't want to scare the cat that has adopted me as her human. Gently, I stroke her fur and try to ignore the tiny claws that dig through the thin fabric of my dress. I will stay like this for an hour, two, perhaps, until the queen in my lap decides it's time to wake up. Then, she'll blink at me with those emerald eyes and give me the look she always does, the one that says: You're still here?

Written by:
JJ Perdomo,
from Mexico – living in USA

I went for Option C:

It has been a few years since he passed away. I still remember the first time we saw him. We were walking by the neighborhood; we have just move to our new home. He came to greet us, jumping and curving his back, he was very friendly black cat.

He did not look that good, like he hasn't been cared for some time. But he had a spark that made you wanted to pet him. He followed us until we were back home but we were afraid he belonged to another family who could miss him. He was too friendly to be a stray cat.

He kept coming to say hi, every time we returned from work and went for a walk around. One day we saw him drinking water from a water hose. It made me mad, he looked so skinny and hungry, with none to give him shelter. I called him and started to follow me back home. Once there, I opened the door for him. He came inside and did not try to go back to the street. We were doomed; he had not only got into our home but into our hearts and he never left until it was time for him to say good bye.

We asked around, to make sure none missed him. We suspected he belong to a woman a couple of homes away who we have heard yelling at him with expletives a couple of times, but none knew him or at least they pretended to have never seen him.

He became our family; he was the sweetest cat.

Written by:
Christian Cuno,
from Australia – living in Czech Republic

Option A

The V8s

V8 engines burbled cavernously, pumping the hearts in the bodies of two grotesque metal creatures with big exhausts and fat wheels. The cars rocked and bounced, eager to spring forward, beastlike, anticipating the moment when their drivers would launch along the naked street. A dozen or so voices cheered: a chaotic unison of youth, urging the drivers on, snuffing up the smoke of fumes and rubber and gasoline. The boys howled; the girls whooped. A flag or cloth dropped, and the metal beasts leapt forward, racing for glory and triumph. Smoking tyres screeched and bitumen wailed, bearing the rubber scars of this chafing racket with humility. Tyres however, were not the only things smoking.

The drivers, Gaz and Mattie, gripped their steering wheels and revved hard. Gaz was the popular one: linchpin and turbine of the gathering. He looked out for everyone and no-one. His road was straight and defined. Mattie was the clown: envied by the boys, adored by the girls, loved by all. Reckless yet caring, his heart pulsed with iron, solid and faithfully entertaining. They catapulted away into the evening astride the hurrahs and applause of their tribe.

And suddenly a penguin waddled across the road, unnoticed in the dark of the evening. The cars vanished and were forgotten. The tribe gathered and blathered: a blathering gathering. The penguin shuffled onwards, fearless, adapting to the intrusions to life and nature, steady in its unwavering course and purpose to rejoin and nurture its nest, powered only by instinct.

Option B

Dementia

Death had no chance, because chance stole the release of dying. Decay was the way of this disease, a dry, constant fossilisation that began slowly and spread throughout the mind and body to become a horrible, embedded stench of stasis. Death had no chance to remember or celebrate the life that was.

The decay collects people and slowly turns them to dust, grinding every last ounce of energy and vigour from them. The eyes turn hollow, emptied of the wit, humour and love that defined them. The body vacates itself long before death can manifest; muscles atrophy and vanish into a siphoning vacuum, the result of motionless day's and weeks and years spent bent over in a chair, a very comfortable chair, watching endless TV repeats of Inspector Rex and other thefts of time.

Then, one day, all the organs expire at once, a great shutdown, and the shell of the person that remains simply implodes and vanishes, with no trace of the achievements, mistakes, learning and

living of that person. Only memory in those that witnessed and stayed behind remain, and in that is hope, peace and love.

(Sorry, it's a bit gloomy /o\)

Option C

The Black and Yellow Fog

The black and yellow fog strayed over the rooftops, moving silently along tiled ledges of insecurity. It paused, then swiftly pounced to the brick landing below, taking a moment to gaze through a sealed window; a glaze of pale twilight leaking into the gloomy interior beyond.

Blinking, the yellow fog pursued an opening in a grate, and the dark expanded with the silent, sable sheen of its body. The ink curled around tight corners and slinked forward, precise and deliberate. Briefly a paw raised and stretched to explore a deep corner, and finding nothing, the ink swiftly departed, a dark streak across the luminous city night. Stillness twisted through the streets, lingering and torturing, flickering only with infrequent bursts of roving vehicle lights. Suddenly below, the yellow fog reappeared, shining points in the dark. It scampered along the deserted city street, tail sleek and tall, and found its path to me as I stood beyond, buried in metropolitan structures and ossified feelings.

A natural tenderness rubbed against my shins, eroding my crumbling facade. I felt momentary confusion at the softness of touch but rewarded the fog with leafy avenues of love—a scratch behind the ears, a gentle ruffle along its dark lustre, a soft word spoken hoarsely and tenderly from deep in my throat. The fog mewed with appreciation and awakened memory, stirring the flowerbeds of my mind. My windows rattled, and gate latches shuddered somewhere, straining with the mists as they rolled across the urban plan of my heart.

InterNations.org
Seattle - Riga

SHORT STORIES & POESY E-BOOK
EDITION 2020

VOLUME VI

Free Language Microfiction in 350 words, Edition II – 2020

29 November 2020

“What changes, endures” – by Rainis

Rainis – an ambitious idealist, dreaming of a new type of human, and of an independent Latvian Nation. Aspazija – a rebellious, extravagant, fearless woman, ready to bring changes to old-fashioned 19th century society. Both are Latvian poets, both are fighters, both are different, but united by love. (by Unesco) With their publishing activities Rainis & Aspazija also raised the issue of the freedom of expression and freedom of the press.

Have you ever thought of writing a book, or even just a short story? Here's your chance! Showcase your creativity in our Microfiction Challenge!

With a 350-word limit, this is something we can all accomplish. And even more! You can write your short story in your own mother language or in a language you would like to practice.

We do not impose a specific theme for this edition. So, unlock your imagination! Post your stories in the comments on this activity's wall so we can all read through them. Feel free to submit as many as you like.

We'll all meet up via Zoom on Sunday, November 29 to enjoy discovering our literary creations together. See you there!

Activity Hosts:

Marie-Gabrielle Bardet, Consul
Claude G, Ambassador
Language and Literature Group Riga

Written in English by:
Marie-Gabrielle Bardet,
from France – living in Denmark

“Cat’s Book” extract 1

It was already five o’clock when we initiated the thirty miles final descent towards Paraty, an old city near the ocean. I mean old, by Brazilian standards, which is maximum five centuries ago since the country was discovered in 1500 by the Portuguese. Anyway, the city is worth the visit for the streets are still paved with rough stones. Tourists from everywhere visit Paraty the whole year around and of course, for the Flip literary festival, which attracts thousands of amateur writers who want to learn the ropes from established authors.

Since I am now writing my memoirs and apparently you are reading them, maybe I will be invited there, in the future, as a famous author? Not many cats would keep a journal or write a novel, right? But let me go back to the trip itself.

Even though Gabriela drove a Jeep, the road from Cunha was much worse than anticipated, not to mention they had completely overlooked the fact that in April, days are shorter and night falls around 6:30 p.m. It was a nightmare. No moon, no lights, or white strips on the asphalt. The descent seemed to never end, the car breaks were overheating and there was nowhere to pull over and stop. Gabriela thought they would never make it and when she touched down the tarmac finally at a big crossroad, she was so tense that she burst into tears. The following day, she was in such pain that she could not move her arms. Her husband had to steer the wheel.

So, it was not until 7 p.m. that we arrived at the Pousada do Francês, an enchanted place where Gabriela had reserved a chalet for us. The hotel was in the middle of the nature, with several waterfalls connected to a green-tiled swimming lane. Coming directly from the mountains above, the water was pure and crystalline but also freezing. Guests could dive after the dry sauna for thermal shock. Nobody dared except for a couple of Danish tourists, obviously. Needless to say, I kept a safe distance and watched them with contempt.

“Cat’s Book” extract 2

I was born in 2006, in the very humble home of a Brazilian blacksmith, in a house full of cats and dogs. The man was a nice human but when I was about to complete a year of age, he just vanished into thin air, out of the blue. Maybe he took la "poudre d’escampette" as in the French expression, because my Human is French and she speaks several languages, including Japanese. Very chic, right?

But how come a French woman ended up in this forsaken place, do tell me? Well, this is one of the stories I will tell later, in details. For now, you need only to know that this Frenchwoman is my owner ...or better, I own her, she is my Human. Because cats are the ones who do the choosing. And not the other way around, as for dogs.

I have great respect for the canine race, mind you. I got to know many dogs in my former residence. Also, there are many specimens around here. Some are huge but friendly, others are small but cranky. I am not afraid of any of them, I get along quite fine, they even steal my food occasionally, but I don’t mind. Dogs have no discipline like we, cats, do. They need to be trained, obey commands, and be fed in large quantities. Dogs are weak and unbearably needy for their masters’ attention. They are constantly whining, woofing, or even howling. On top of that, dogs are not very keen on cleanliness (yuck!) and they are required to take a bath regularly, with shampoo this and shampoo that... a real hell! Plus, when their masters are traveling, it is always the same dilemma: “Are we taking the dogs, are we not, who’s gonna take care of the dogs?”.

Kurt Tucholsky, a German writer, points out the main difference between us, with only one sentence: "Dogs have masters, cats have staff". I rest my case.

Written in English by:
Margie Banin,
from USA – living in USA

I looked down at the definitively not-done turkey I had just pulled from the oven. Twenty-plus pounds of semi-raw poultry, intended to be the masterpiece of the family holiday feast. The oven clearly had decided at some point in the past few hours to give up the ghost. The bird had begun to cook: its skin was slightly tanned, though far from golden and definitely not crisp. And while on the surface the flesh might appear ready, it was undeniably raw: oozing red blood when poked with the carving knife.

I'd planned a Michelin-star worthy menu and had a battle plan in place that should have culminated in culinary victory for my houseful of guests. Yet I had been foiled by a malfunctioning oven. "Trojan horse," I thought, malevolently glaring at the failed appliance.

With a cornucopia of dishes from appetizers all the way through to an array of pies, there was plenty of food for all. But the absence of a gloriously roasted turkey triumphantly borne into the dining room on its heirloom platter was going to be hard to disguise.

It was precisely then that Mom poked her head into the kitchen. "Honey, I'm just seeing if there's anything I can help with? I know you've got it all under control!"

"Mom, the oven DIED!"

I was a little panicked, but Mom appeared unperturbed. Until, that is, she turned and walked out the door to the carport.

Had she just abandoned me? I couldn't believe it. How could she fix this? But she was back before I knew it, lugging a huge, insulated box from the back of the minivan.

"What is that?" I exclaimed. She rolled her eyes a little, and said, "Your dad was worried you might have gotten in over your head. He baked a ham and insisted on bringing it, just in case. Although how he could've guessed..." she trailed off, shaking her head.

And that is the story of how a beautiful, glazed ham came to take pride of place on the family turkey platter that year.

Dad looked only a little smug.

Written in English by:
Ben Angel,
from USA – living in Poland

“There’s a hard rain a comin’.”

That was all the TV news said as the clouds approached our tiny village. It seemed hardly worth the time or trouble to tell it. Rains come and go every day. Sure, this one was acidic, it ate through umbrellas and clothing, and in some cases pierced skin, but what rain doesn’t do that? Every rainy season, you lose a few thousand to the downpour, and no one really cares.

Still, scientists from the neighboring village were all terrified at this new type of rain. The acid didn’t burn in the same way. It stuck to the skin and coated everything, and then the exposed died horrible deaths. An umbrella is a must, they said.

But then the leader of the great village on the hill decided that it insulted his manhood to worry. He called his villagers wimps if they used an umbrella. His followers echoed him. Village pundits started to question the value of umbrellas in such a rain, even suggesting that it was better to go without. The burns built scabs on the skin, making you effectively immune to the acid. If everyone did this, the weak would be culled and survivors would be sturdier folk.

Some questioned this leader’s sanity, but his followers spoke louder. Soon even otherwise intelligent villagers were using the same senseless arguments. Government warnings about protecting yourself from the rain were interpreted as decrees of a dictatorship. The most deeply affected panicked at a perceived loss of freedom and bought guns and EMF detectors, and stopped using their cell phones so that no one could track their movement. But the rains came anyway.

Granted, some walked through the rain unaffected. The acid, after all, came down unevenly. But not everyone was so lucky. In the end, the leader of the great village was overthrown for incompetence, and many who followed him into the rain died predictable deaths. But as the rains persisted, more survivors belatedly agreed that umbrellas were a good thing, echoing the scientists in the end with their own words: “Use the stupid umbrella!”

Written in English by:
Christian Cuno,
from Australia – living in Czech Republic

WILLY WAGTAIL MEETS MAGPIE

On a dewy morning, Magpie warbled. His song rippled across the plains, calling upon Sunshine, who inspires life in everything, even the rocks and other potent spirits of the elements. Just above the horizon, the dawn greeted Magpie's spell. Sunshine had been dreaming all night, and now the sky burned brilliant and soaked the land with lakes of gold and painted the trees in hues of honey and wattle. Magpie was a cheeky old wizard who had many spells and could summon the spirits of nature. From his high perch in the trees, he often swooped on the unsuspecting to remind them to always be vigilant.

Willy Wagtail, who had risen to seek and snack on the juiciest insects, every day heard Magpie's spell bouncing through the sweeping, morning mist, and sometimes felt the swiftness of his swoop as she neared his great trees of wizardry.

Curious, Willy Wagtail hopped towards the magical sound, not daring to fly. Drawn by the enchantment, she was especially fascinated by the spell which could summon Sunshine and dearly wished for this same skill to call her from sleep. Although her voice was lovely, she could only squeak and chatter and was unable to weave a magical incantation. Wagtail's heart fluttered. She found the spot of Magpie's perch. Cautiously, she gazed upon Magpie, and spoke:

"S-Sir M-M-Magpie, you make such beautiful opera. It travels across the world and awakens our great giver, our Sunshine, to burn anew. Your song must be very special. May I ask, how it is you came by such a magical tune? My voice is plain, and I cannot sing with such spellbound splendour. Teach me to sing for Sunshine. I will tell the world how I love her so. What is the secret to wardle doo as you do on this beautiful morning?"

Magpie swooped down to a branch and looked Willy Wagtail in the eye. Though not the wisest spirit of the bush, like quorky old Frog or little Hopping Mouse, Magpie was clever and well-versed in the fine arts of magic.

"Ms Wagtail," he began, "You may not ordle nor ardle, nor quordle nor doodle. That would be most imprudent! This is my voice to give, and if another coodled and doodled and awdled and arlded, the spell of Sunshine would be broken. Each of us brings our own love and magic to Sunshine. Even you Ms Wagtail, have much magic within you. Side to side and waggy flips your feathered tail. As you dance, the wind rises and reminds us that our land is living and generous. It fills us with gladness and gratitude. Wiggle waggle now and set your magic in motion."

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oYc8Ge3nw>

<https://www.dpmms.cam.ac.uk/~tf/poem10.html>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uUfdLr6mur8>

Written in English by:
Karen Laing,
from Jamaica – living in USA

She slipped out of bed silently. I don't know if it was the movement or the creaking door that nudged me from a dreamless sleep. There was no fogginess, no shudder to consciousness, just the awareness that the small form that had been beside me was now on the other side of the door. I don't remember what word I uttered. I don't think it was a full question, perhaps her name? Whatever it was she gave it little consideration, muttered something softly, and slipped out of the shadows cast by the nightlight.

The softness of her tone shocked me into action. I ran my hand over the side of the bed she'd abandoned and that's when I snapped to consciousness. It was cold and wet. For a moment, I considered waiting till morning to address the matter. Then rage invited me to barge into her room to perform the standard inquisition. Instead, I pulled back the corners of the fitted sheet to check for the mattress protector. Thankfully, it was there. So I took it, the soiled fitted sheet, and dumped both with the cotton comforter into the garden tub. I washed my hands and climbed back into bed, wondering what the loving, maternal thing to do might be. Resisting the urge to shriek her name into the dark house counted for something, but not quite enough so I slipped out of bed and down the hall to her room. I turned off her bedroom light after ensuring the wet nightgown was in the dirty clothes and that she'd put something else on as her room was always cooler than mine even though she liked it that way. I brought the comforter up under her chin and leaned in to whisper, "God loves you and so do I".

In the morning she said nothing. I decided to let her create the road to atonement. It hasn't happened yet. This too is life with a pre-schooler. Prayer and patience make it possible.

A SPECIAL THANKS TO ALL THE 45 PARTICIPATING AUTHORS FOR THEIR 105 STORIES WRITTEN FOR OUR INTERNATIONS EVENTS 2020 AND PUBLISHED IN THIS E-BOOK:

Ben Angel	from USA	living in Poland
Nidale Bachir	from Lebanon	living in Lebanon
Margie Banin	from USA	living in USA
Marie-Gabrielle Bardet	from France	living in Denmark
Montse Bcn	from Spain	living in Spain
Ellis Blackburn	from India	living in USA
Conrad Byrne	from Australia	living in Sweden
Sanae Carr	from Japan	living in USA
Wei-Hai Chu	from Netherlands	living in Czech Republic
Christian Cuno	from Australia	living in Czech Republic
Thomas Eden	from India	living in Latvia
Ali G	from Scotland	living in England
Claude G	from France	living in Latvia
Felix Gbemudu	from Nigeria	living in USA
Sofie H	from Australia	living in Qatar
Amir Huda	from Bangladesh	living in USA
Praline Hudson	from South Africa	living in Spain
Hyunsoo Hur	from South Korea	living in USA
Angela Klein	from USA	living in USA
Stephen Kwasi Tufuor	from Ghana	living in Ghana
Jonathan L	Pseudonym	living in Writers-on-Heaven
Karen Laing	from Jamaica	living in USA
Antra M	from Latvia	living in Latvia
Citlalli Martinez	from Mexico	living in Poland
Travis Moran	from USA	living in Latvia
Iloida Mota	from Angola	living in India
Lucie Muema	from Kenya	living in USA
Jamil Nahra	from Syria	living in Spain
Mohan Nair	from India	living in Qatar
Lise Pedersen	from Denmark	living in Denmark
JJ Perdomo	from Mexico	living in USA
Denka Pérez Amézaga	from Cuba	living in Turkey
Sioni Ponce	from Philippines	living in Philippines
Roselyn Poon	from Australia	living in USA
Giselle Roeder	from Germany	living in Canada
Aman Sachdev	from India	living in USA
Alan Samai	from Iran	living in USA
Karmen Spiljak	from Slovenia	living in Brazil
Renée Spoull	from USA	living in USA
Jessica Stueven	from Peru	living in Germany
Mohan Tannir	from India	living in USA
Tony Tonev	from Bulgaria	living in USA
Frank van der Meer	from Netherlands	living in Sweden
Elizabeth Winship	from USA	living in Poland
Rosie Zammit	from Malta	living in Latvia
Members from	InterNations.org	Seattle Literature Group Language and Literature Group Riga

Compilation from the poesy and short stories

E-book, edition 2020

InterNations.org
Seattle - Riga

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE GROUP RIGA

Claude G – Ambassador

SEATTLE LITERATURE GROUP

Margie Banin – Consul

Special Guest:

Issa Maalouf, Consul

BEIRUT DINNERNATIONS GROUP