

Spring Edition

**FEATURING
HAIKU AND
FLASH FICTION**



Lanthorn

Steps Towards a Definition

by Ben Murphy

Like any story, flash fiction is narrative. There is character, plot and development, but it all comes at once so it must sink-in fast. Thus, brevity, charm, and lucidity are essential. Flash fiction ends and begins with razor sharp precision. Not a jot wasted, every word in a punchy sentence packing a walloping punch. Imagery is desirable, though one should never overdo. And don't forget sentence rhythm, which is always marvelously crucial. Flash fiction is all of these things...

Alternately, flash fiction is the story composed by the cursive lines of ink etched on the skin of a man who once exposed himself to a young woman in a grocery store.

For years this man frequented the numerous tattoo parlors dappled along Main Street, adding each time a line or two to the tale unfolding across his body. Between sessions he saved money from his work in that downtown restaurant where his friends called him Scrawl because it rhymes with his name.

At first it was only his friends who understood this nickname. Only they had surveyed the bits of script usually hidden by clothes. But eventually his story charted more visible anatomy. His hands and his head, for example. So after one particularly painful tattoo appointment he began to wear gloves. Then, after shaving his head, he wore a wool hat until his hair grew back so that the words on his scalp were visible only to someone who expected them, a friend, for instance. He got a line or two dashed off across his jawline and endured quizzical looks until his dark beard filled out.

The day came when words appeared on his forehead. Beginning above one eye and ending over the other, it reads, "If you are reading this, then you are close enough to receive a head-butt."

Though it's hard to imagine exactly how this line coheres with the narrative arc of his body, one can't help but appreciate the humor. I myself received the two black eyes and bruised nose that resulted from stopping to read the man's forehead. That was the day before he was "put away," so to speak, like a book shelved in a locked and dusty vault.

I was head-butted on Fourth Street, where I understand he was on his way to a particularly seedy tattoo parlor for the finishing touches. Two exclamation points, I'm told, one for each delicate eyelid.

It must have been after this last session that he went home to remove every hair from his body. Only then was the story revealed in entirety. And even then, perhaps, the tale was not wholly readable, what with bit of Ys and Ps getting lost in folds of abdomen flesh and the Os alternating oblong shapes in rhythm with his breathing. I can only imagine that he stood for some time in a room full of mirrors, admiring himself. Reading himself.

Sometime that evening he approached a young woman while she was squeezing mangos to test ripeness. He let his trench coat fall to the ground and pirouetted once, slowly. As I understand it, she fainted, only to regain consciousness, screaming, hours later. Likely this reaction had something to do with the large naked and hairless man twirling in front of her. Likely her continued reticence to discuss the details of the story on his skin has much to do with her repressing a moment of shock that has taken a weighty toll on her psychological well-being. Likely she will never be able to tell us what his body said.

But we will continue to ask.

His friends cannot help us; none of them had seen everything that needed to be seen. The tattoo artists regularly convene to swap notes on the work they did. They each have pieces but no way to be sure of how to put them together. Do we start with the writing on his head? On his back? Are some lines meant to be read multiple times? Which pronouns belong to which antecedents? They have published numerous possibilities, but ultimately they cannot be sure.

So we will continue to ask the young woman, and she will continue to rock back and forth in silence. Her fancy doctors will continue to tell us that she is disturbed, and we will continue to say, yes, yes, we understand.

But we will continue to ask her because we cannot help supposing that it was the fiction, not the flash—the story, not the shock—that has set her to silence for so

Nippon

By Judith Marklin

*Dedicated to Ms. Matsubara –
survivor of the atomic bomb.*

Sometimes I catch her
fingering the soft fabric
of her kimono,

tucked away behind
years of handshakes and pancakes
and mispronounced words.

Hidden in the folds
dwell memories of a time
lived in black and white.

Once, my fingers grasped
worn photographs stuck between
books of unknown script:

her eyes disappeared
as joy filled her eager face
with a gap-toothed grin.

1945:
my textbook described it as
a huge mushroom cloud,

but it forgot to
mention the years of scarring
on hearts and faces.

It forgot to tell,
how it haunts their steps with grief,
shadows in their eyes.

But I can see it,
the pain masked in the deep folds
of cherry blossoms.

Everyone else says
that it's her age catching up,
weights upon her feet.

And there's a longing
that I'll never understand,
slipping through fingers.

A yearning after
sticky rice, respect, temples,
silent forgiveness.

This land I won't know,
those crowded streets, bamboo groves,
and sticky summers.

Those stories I won't
hear in her incasing voice,
but I will see them,

her eyes show landscapes:
curving rivers slicing through
ancient solid rock.

To others they seem
dead, but I remember the
girl with the sun beams.

Halfway around the
world, how will I comprehend?

We have the same eyes.

Your Place

by Leah Doty

What you've got to do is find a bookmark. Any old slip will do, anything that can hold pages apart without imprinting its own width into the binding.

Begin by looking in your brother's room. He's always taking your things, so don't be surprised that he's preemptively taken the bookmark you haven't yet found. It's under his bed, a crumpled boarding pass from last week. Uncrumple it. Mark your place in that book about the hungry caterpillar and ask your mom to return it to the library.

And keep looking. One of your teachers—Miss Heidi, the one with so Southern a drawl she calls herself “Hattie”—will hand out homemade bills in exchange for good behavior. At the end of the year the papers will turn into candy, but store one in the classroom copy of *The Giving Tree* and leave the rest in Sarah's desk because she remembered your name on the first try.

You'll find a wooded shortcut after just a few days in town, but you won't learn the roots in time to keep yourself from tripping. Don't stand up too fast when you drop your book in the early snow, because autumn hasn't left yet so you might as well take it in. Grab the brightest leaf from under the book, and make sure you shake it off before flattening it between Wonka's lined face and his lines and lines of wisecracks. Drop off the book at your local Goodwill and move on.

At the Tulsa public park, make eye contact with the homeless woman before you scrape a Queen of Hearts out of the dirt near her bench. Put the card where it belongs in your neighbor's copy of *Alice in Wonderland*.

Look through the reference books in every public library for strangers' forgotten shopping lists. Add a few entries and return the papers to their places, because someone someday will need a reminder to buy dish soap.

When your dad writes down his number on a Post-it note, stick it in your pocket and, later, into the big yellow book of a payphone. Say “wrong number” to whoever calls while you're in there.

When worst comes to worst, it will take more than a moment to remember the name of the town you're in. Look away from Cosette's stare and the burning flag, and rip a bit of cover from the back and stick it up in the spine. Now leave the book on Mr. Solano's desk and don't think about how you would've done on the exam.

Someday, your child will have a favorite. She will open it all the way, right in the middle, so wide that it creases the binding. Let her be. This is her home, after all. Watch, when you call her for dinner, how she leaves it spread across the shelf, and, later, how she comes back to it. Take your place next to her knows no other way. and marvel that she

Movements

by Amanda Irwin

The wheel hums rhythmically.

My cracked fingers
guide the wet earth.

I hold years.

Three Color Haiku

by Laura Johnson

Yellow and white
Seasoned man's soft remarking,
"That's one foolish bee"

The turtle's thick throat
Black against reds and yellows
Lone, nighttime highway

Child, gold and green
White patches, balding father
Paradox of Spring

Untitled

by Cory Brautigam

Weary hearted girl
Follow your heart to freedom
Love is a fetter

March Around The Quad

by Lydia Snouffer

Cake: Had and Eaten
when youths throw snowballs under
warming rays of sun

Untitled

by Allyson Murphy

Bike riding with you
Cold mud skids up my bare legs
As we race the rain

Untitled

by Ava Bergen

Ache, deep-rooted claw
devour gnawing moments
I forget to pray

Untitled

by Emily Morrow

sleep away in bliss
waiting while the whole world
tears itself apart

TLC

by Tori Bachman

He pulls the chord hard.
The rumble builds in his hands.
Grass won't stand a chance.