

## Welcome from the Editor

by Beth L. Virtanen

In this our second issue of *Kippis! A Literary Journal*, we are pleased to publish the second place winners in the Creative Writing Contest sponsored by the Finnish North American Literature Association and judged by Sheila Packa from Duluth, Minnesota. Ms. Packa was awarded two Loft McKnight awards for poetry and has received two Arrowhead Regional Arts Council fellowships also for poetry. We really appreciate her work on our behalf, and we believe she has done an excellent job in selecting our winners whose work is presented here.

This issue also begins the work of presenting the literary products of a broad and multicultural authorship. We include pieces from authors and poets across the US, from Asia Minor, the Korean Peninsula, Canada and across the US. With such a broad authorship, we are approaching our goal of publishing works that are pertinent to a global readership and representative of our growing multicultural experiences.

Finally, in this issue, we are clarifying more carefully our editorial policy which reflects our interests in making available that global and multicultural experience; the policy has been graciously drafted by our Associate Editor, G. K. Wuori whose voice and critical eye for perfection I both appreciate and admire.

We provide a synopsis below, with the full version available on the FinNALA website: *Kippis* welcomes submissions of fiction, poetry, and creative nonfiction from both emerging and unpublished writers as well as more experienced writers. While we are open to any style and subject matter of material sent to us, we do have a strong bias in favor of work that stresses the increasingly cross-cultural nature of the human experience. The immigrant/emigrant experience, strangers in strange lands, language barriers, unique foods, music, social practices – all of these and more are part of the forces that can either unite us or divide us as a species, and these kinds of themes are what we love to present in *Kippis*. Regardless of subject matter, however, make sure the work you send us is your best: revised, corrected, proofread, all those good things.

*Kippis! A Literary Journal* is indebted to the Finlandia Foundation National for their generous support of the first two issues which have appeared in print. We would like to thank them for that support. We would also like to thank the Paloheimo Foundation whose support of my position at Finlandia University allows for my attention to the matters of the Finnish North American Literature Association, the *Journal of Finnish Studies*, *Kippis!* and my other research endeavors.

# Creative Writing Contest

## Second-Place Winner

### Three Poems

by Elaine Moe

#### *Flush With Egg Money*

Second Place, *Kippis!* Creative Writing Contest

He comes home Saturday afternoons  
in his yellow UCF<sup>1</sup> hat and pinstripe  
delivery overalls, not the everyday  
plain blue denim, manure-bottomed  
overalls he has hung on a hook behind the door.

He removes the carbon papered  
sales receipt pad from his pocket, scans  
the amounts to be entered and tallied  
in the farm ledger later.

He pulls paper bagged groceries from the Jeep,  
hugged tight one in each arm, the way  
he might pullets, before wing clipping.  
He unloads food he doesn't grow or have  
in season, staples of yeast, root beer extract,  
bricks of cheese and wheels of hard tack,  
dry goods like Boraxo, Fels Naptha, witch hazel.

During the week the Finnish baker comes, a chubby  
man with glasses, too afraid of the farm dog to open  
his truck door until someone comes out of the house.  
He brings pulla, reikäleipä,<sup>2</sup> cardamom coffee bread and pastries  
in addition to the pies, cakes and cookies baked on the farm.  
Sometimes the Fuller Brush man comes, the Avon lady,

---

<sup>1</sup> United Cooperative Farmers.

<sup>2</sup> *Pulla* and *reikäleipä* are types of Finnish bread.

school clothes from Sears and Roebuck.

The teenaged boys come, learn to lift and bend, return  
to dark brown places all things. The eggs get washed,  
graded, and packed into 3- by 4-row boxes, grey with blue  
lettered lids. The cows get fed, watered, milked.  
Gutters get cleaned. Hay gets baled, pitched,  
stacked. Wood gets cut, hauled, split, stacked, and burned.

There is always abundance. 10 cases of eggs packed  
by the dozen are delivered to Gardner twice a week.  
Hauled up tenement stairs with the milk.  
Gallons of milk roll away every other day, first  
in 20 gallon milk cans, then stainless steel trucks.

The double door upright freezer in the attached barn  
holds stacked trays of homemade Kool-Aid popsicles.  
There is homemade ice cream. Vanilla. And always  
wayward cats, tame, lost, wild or stray, unwanted litters left  
by the roadside. At least there will be warm hay, mice to catch,  
milk to drink they are told just before the car door slams.

There is also abundance of missing tools, broken  
teeth on the mower's cutter bar, saw blades left to rust  
in rain, tines busted off the pinwheel rake, spliced  
belts, mismatched hoses, screws, and lug nuts  
so a jerry-rigged thing might go one more season, or at least  
one more time; tires on the silo, frozen water pipes, ripped  
and ragged shirt cuffs, hollering, bills to pay, and tension taut to breaking.

But on Saturday, after the egg route,  
after the forearm wipes the brow, the UCF cap  
reclaims its grooved circumference,  
after the mail and afternoon coffee, in a resting  
beat of this rhythm, sun and satisfaction,  
possibility can be mulled and sifted, poured  
like clattering grain in the bin  
when you are a young man flush  
with egg money.

--

*What Comes*

Honorable Mention

What comes to me  
is the occasional penny  
found in a parking lot,  
small, face-up luck.  
What comes to me is  
cinnamon raisin toast,  
coffee and the Sunday paper,  
bluejays at the feeder.  
What comes to me  
is email from Finland  
in good-enough English  
and the dirt driveway  
to my grandma's house  
where I sit in the kitchen  
rocking chair  
with its extra-long rockers,  
listen to towels  
tumble in the dryer.  
What comes is the memory  
of being wrapped in warm,  
soft towels after Saturday  
night baths  
before I started school,  
before we left the farmhouse,  
its long, dirt driveway,  
before I outgrew  
the brown-buttoned navy sweater  
my grandma knitted me,  
before I was big  
enough for coffee,  
before the tune that I would cry  
when what comes to me  
are my mother's eyes,  
two dark birds  
singing.

--

*My Obituary*

Honorable Mention

I want my obituary to say  
I was an alchemist  
whose ragged hands  
turned apples into pie,  
coaxed yarn into sweaters,  
kneaded love in warm kitchens,  
pressed and turned it  
round and smooth  
on a floured board, set  
a red, checkered dish  
towel over its bald head.

Don't tell them

I pared down, knifed  
and needled, pushed  
and prodded,  
fed the family a slurry  
of yeast, water,  
salt and flour,  
covered up  
all rising ambition.

# Creative Writing Contest

## Second-Place Winner

### Two Poems

by Johanna Rauhala

#### *Iron*

Second Place, *Kippis!*  
Creative Writing Contest

--for Eino Rauhala

1.

In 1939, the Finnish National Railroad  
ruined a man's back. Winter—  
a room where skin peels from tongues,  
where night needles stars into shards—  
moved into his lowest vertebrae, froze  
his bones into a lost season.  
A cane curled his lips  
into the bent bow called age, and though  
he was young, no more  
would the steel spine spanning from home  
to war, to men hiding in snow—  
Molotovs and rifles shot from the snow—  
no more would men breathing  
air below forty degrees Celsius, breathing  
below each plank's spike— no more  
would they know  
his silence.

2.

Imagine  
the next years. His children  
pull their fingers from the rail  
just before wheels crush

coins they've left.

They remove the oblong  
disfigurements and bow to the scream  
a train makes before recalling  
home.

Next time  
the children plot stones.

Imagine him picking them up.

3.

He lived near  
the Pieksamaki - Hankasalmi  
line. Ten meters from the track  
to his door: local runs twice a day,  
fast train to Helsinki at nine.  
Conductors knew him and waved—o  
hopeful one! Two worn palms aloft,  
known— two parting landscapes  
beamed to a man now  
checking his clock  
slow  
against faces flashing an archive  
of passing elegies; an old man  
sitting  
alone on the stoop.

Each hour fixed in ice.

Each day a cold map.  
Each breath a wreath  
of one lived moment, held  
in his heart,  
the one aching place  
still warm.

--

*Imagination Speaks*

--*For Annika*

Child, remember your limbs?  
The tree faces a word

your mother had for you— a  
name blooming yesterday

kindness beaming  
the gentlest starlight home.

Take what once had hands  
around your skin

turn and turn its longing, turn  
its knowing and forgetting,

its wheeling song, sing  
a new galaxy of every storied  
dead and dreaming thing.

--

## *Rebirth*

by Mary Kay McAllister

They bought the ivy on a Thanksgiving Day. They said to each other later it was like something out of "The Gift of the Magi." Everyone else in the family had been busy, all the kids were out of town with the "other" parents, and they were fancy free.

They had gone to Brodick Gardens, a beautiful estate, left to the state by a wealthy publisher who had loved carillons, vistas, flowering trees and shrubs, and unusual plants. It was a place of peace and calm and a favorite of theirs.

They considered this particular day especially serendipitous. There was no traffic to speak of, the day was clear and crisp and the temperature was stolen from Indian summer. They drove the winding back roads across the state, thinking to stop at a quaint little restaurant along the way. But they found nothing open until they reached the Gardens. They thought it a stroke of amazing luck that the tea room was serving Thanksgiving dinner, and they found a table with a lovely view of the carillon tower at the top of the hill. To add to the perfection of the day, they arrived just in time for a concert by Heinrich Augustin, master carillonneur.

Their table had as its centerpiece a large pot of unusual ivy. The leaves were edged in a soft cream color. An impressionist's brush painted the centre of each leaf with strokes of dark and light

gray-green. No two leaves were alike. It was a special hybrid developed in the Brodick greenhouse and named for a famous gardener, Lady Martha. Although the man and his wife were different enough to have diverse opinions on many things, they were completely in harmony about the loveliness of the ivy.

Their dinner was delicious and they enjoyed coffee on the verandah outside, listening to the notes of the carillon float over the entire garden. She excused herself to go the ladies' room, and he said he wanted to go to the greenhouse, to see what new things the gardeners had working.

They met at the car fifteen minutes later. Both were carrying big pots of "Lady Martha" ivy. They laughed, and hugged each other around the ivy, and said "Gift of the Magi," out loud, as one, and laughed again. They talked about that day often. It was the last perfect day they had together.

Later, she told her children it was like being struck from behind by an assassin. One minute the world had spun silently on its axis as it was supposed to, and the next it careened out of control, the ground unsteady beneath her feet, the walls as soft and slanted as those of a carnival fun house, with all the attendant vertigo of spirit.

“He's had this problem for quite a while,” the doctor said. “Your husband is extraordinarily strong and has always enjoyed robust good health. It's why we haven't picked up his disease before. He was rarely sick, and almost never here.”

Together, they learned the blessings of ordinary days. There were doctor appointments, treatments, and an increase in medications that warded off pain. They were determined to make life more than bearable, to make it as joyful as possible. They did silly things like going on a drive most afternoons, picking out homes they might buy, knowing it was a game. But every day, after they got home, they would look at each other and say, “Let's keep this one,” touting all its advantages to each other, this home where they had raised children, played with grandchildren, entertained friends, had arguments, been sick and well, happy and unhappy, the place where they had shared a life.

When even that gentle level of activity, imaginary house-hunting, was beyond him, she re-organized the bedroom so he could look out the sliding glass door into the patio garden. She grouped some things differently every few days. He would laugh at the splashing and pushing and preening of the small birds that gathered at the birdbath each morning. He gave them names like Ali, Shaquille, Popeye, Flash, and finally, Superwoman, for she insisted all his other names were sexist. There were whole hours when they could forget that the pain which hid in deep dark corners could jump out at any

moment and tear at him physically and her emotionally with sharp, terrible, invisible talons.

One of his favorite plant groupings was the one that featured “Romeo” and “Juliet,” names he had given the ivy plants, now grown huge, cascading in lovely green and cream from two portable stands. He wouldn't let her move them. So they became a centerpiece for all her other arrangements, amaryllis when they were in bloom, buckets of impatiens, red hot geraniums that loved the sun. He said the ivies meant love, and he liked to be inspired every day.

Weeks passed and they began to talk just a little about the inevitable. Everything legal had long been done, for he was a careful man who loved his family deeply. But the question of what was facing him was harder than discussing wills.

“I don't think this is fair,” he'd say with a smile. “You should go first, so you can pray for me. You're the one who goes to church every week.”

“You have to get to heaven under your own power,” she'd say, holding his hand. “And however will I know if you made it or not?”

But then she would tell him how good a man he was and how she knew he'd be right up there with the biggies.

“Maybe I could hang out with Dante Alighieri,” he said one day. “Who do you want to hang out with besides me?”

“Oh, I think Will Shakespeare.”

“No, then you'll like him better than me.”

She'd squeeze his hand then, and say, "I won't ever like anybody more than you. But you'll have to figure out how to send me a sign."

"I love Irish women," he'd say. "They are so off the wall."

She'd finish the discussion by saying, "We Irish call that 'fey' and we consider it a blessing."

The illness came to an end finally with the inevitable result. And she was so devastated that she thought of nothing but putting left foot after right foot to get through endless days. She ignored housework. She gave up cooking and discovered "takeout." She dutifully sent thank-you notes for funeral flowers, and contributions to Hospice, and dinners brought to her door every few days by kind neighbors.

It was weeks before she noticed how poor the patio garden looked, and she woke up one morning with determination and bought fertilizer and plant food for the orchids and a new garden hose and went to work. One of the first things she noticed was that the birdbath was green with algae, and she remembered she hadn't seen Shaquille or Popeye or Superwoman in quite a while. The next thing she noticed was that the ivy had died. It had never belonged out in that hot sun on the patio—she had always known that, but he loved it, so she had over watered and over-fertilized it until his death. And then she forgot it.

The leaves were brown. The branches on which they grew were dry and brittle. She often moved plants into an area under the lantana in the side yard, which

she referred to as "The Infirmary." She left the two big pots of ivy there under the bushes, with a few other plants that weren't flourishing. "Let God and Mother Nature take care of them," she said.

He had died right after Christmas. She re-discovered her garden at the end of February. It was restful, peaceful, energizing in a quiet slow way, to gradually build up this interior garden where they had both worked for many years. She never looked at "The Infirmary."

Then it was spring. And she had new basil to plant, new parsley to grow, new rosemary to put in a larger pot. So she went to visit "The Infirmary." She was about to dump dirt and old leaves and sticks from serviceable pots. And then she saw it: one apparently dead branch of one of the ivies showed a solitary leaf. She wouldn't let herself think about what it might mean. She carefully trimmed the plant and repotted it with fresh soil in a new clay pot. She put it into its original place on a shady bench next to the garden wall, and fertilized and watered it.

Each week the tiny little branch grew longer. One leaf became two and then three. She was determined to treat it objectively like all the other plants. But after six weeks when the ivy began to reach out and climb the wall, she knew. And she knew she must acknowledge what she knew. So on a sunny Sunday morning she stood beside the strand of ivy struggling bravely up the wall, stroked it gently and said. "Hi Romeo. How's Dante?"--

## Three Poems

by Jeanne Maki

### *Summer Mist*

Frogs trill  
as fog rises from the creek.  
Slowly shrouding the fields,  
it nears the house,  
mutes the yard light.  
Trees dissolve  
into the mist.

Smoke ascends  
the sauna chimney.  
Stream water steams  
from heated rocks,  
moistening wood benches,  
soothing and cleansing.

Host and hostess, gentle spirits,  
open the sauna door, move  
through the cooling mist  
to the house,  
where guests murmur  
around the kitchen table.

When I follow them in  
for sauna coffee, no  
one is there...

--

### *Deja Vu*

Steam puffs out  
the sauna door  
as I step into the cool air.

I throw my damp towels  
over my arm and  
begin to walk  
up the path toward  
the house,

Part way up  
the gentle slope  
I stop to catch my breath  
and hear the little girl  
behind me calling  
“Grandma, wait for me!”

I take her hand  
and pause another moment  
to gaze across the creek  
to my hay fields.

Just as we turn again  
toward the house  
I glimpse a woman  
opening the sauna door.

My grandmother  
walks slowly through the mist  
up the sauna path.

She pauses a moment,  
presses her right hand  
against the small of her back,

takes a deep breath  
and exhales with an audible  
hoo-hoooo.

She gazes  
across the creek  
to her hayfields,  
then walks on  
into the twilight.

Steam puffs out  
the sauna door  
as I step into the cool air.

I throw my damp towels  
over my arm  
and begin to walk  
up the path  
toward the house.

Part way up  
the gentle slope  
I pause for a moment.

I press my right hand  
against the small of my back,  
the place where it aches.

I take a deep breath  
and exhale with an audible  
hoo-hoooo.

Before I go on I  
turn  
and gaze out  
over the creek  
to her fields.

--

### *The Old Man and the Brusher*

Long-necked leviathan roaring,  
heavy body steaming, lumbering,  
hungry steel jaws  
tearing, ripping,  
gnashing, crushing —  
the county calls it brushing.

Turned out to be a two-week project:  
both sides of a two-mile-long dead-end road,  
a third of the road bordered by field.  
Up one side, back down the other.  
One man worked the brusher,  
his buddy in a pickup  
moved the “flying debris” sign once a day.  
They came at eight to warm up the beast,  
waited in the truck, engine idling.  
A half-hour lunch break,

they were gone by three.

The day before they passed the old man's clearing,  
he cut a 12-inch piece off a one-by-eight,  
took a black marker and printed:

TREETRIMERS  
WISH THAT YOU  
WOUDANT HAVE TO  
TRIM ALL THESE  
SPRUCE TREES  
IN THE OPEN ~~FIELD~~  
FIELDS NEAR ROAD  
SO PRETTE

A couple mornings later he hailed them driving by.

“Yah, we saw your sign,” they said,  
“even checked with the foreman.  
Everything's gotta get trimmed  
so the county can work on the ditches.  
But he said we could let you  
trim those branches yourself.  
Just go up 8 or 10 feet,  
cut' em off on the road side.  
Do it before we come back through.”

The old man sat quiet at the table  
with his cooling coffee,  
rubbing his sore legs  
and looking at the floor.  
He peered out the window at his windbreak,  
crossing half a forty,  
the spruce dense and full and tall.  
He sighed, passed his hand over his eyes.  
“Too much work anymore,”  
he said, finally, “too hard.  
If they come to ditch  
they'll tear up the roots  
and the trees will die anyway.”

“Go ahead if you have to,”  
his second sign read.

When they had finished with his trees  
the branches were gone,  
up twenty feet, not ten,  
bark gouged, ragged shards flung across the road.

“That was some brushing,” he said later.  
“Couple guys with chainsaws  
could'a come here in a pickup.  
Could'a trimmed nice,  
up eight, ten feet like they said.  
Could'a done the whole road  
in half the time.”

The brusher roars,  
swings its jaws,  
rips and tears.  
In the cab bared teeth glisten.

--

## *Finnish Blueberries*

by Anita Erola

I was back on cherished ground, the granite cobblestones of the farmers' market, or *tori*, near the harbor in Helsinki, Finland. There, the sights, sounds, and aromas were both familiar and new to me. It had been more than three years since my last visit, and my senses were taking it all in. A mild breeze off the Gulf of Finland lightly salted the different smells of fresh and smoked fish, vegetables, and fruits. Also in the mix were various languages of the locals and tourists checking out the produce, handicrafts and tourist mementos. In addition to Finnish and Swedish, I heard English, German, Russian, and other languages I didn't immediately recognize, and was reminded that the harbor area is a popular destination.

I needed blueberries. No visit to Finland is complete for me without them whether they are handpicked, *tori*-bought, eaten fresh, cooked, baked in a pie, a pastry, or soup. Making my way past the various vendors, I finally had my bag of berries. I contentedly began popping them into my mouth one after another. It was the shape, texture, and the squish in my mouth releasing bursts of sweet juice that tasted so good. The Nordic variety, known in England as a bilberry, is darker blue, less meaty and much juicier than the ones available in California. In fact, the Finnish word for blueberry, *mustikka*, translates to blackberry, and blackberries are known by a different name altogether. The skin of blueberries is also thinner and stains the

fingers easily. I kept reaching into the bag for more of that comforting taste. My fingers were blue, as they had been many years before.

I was about five years old, and my stained little fingers reached into a brightly colored basket of woven birch. As usual, I was spending the summer at the Lake Oksjarvi cottage, or *kesamokki*, with my grandmother, and it was our berry-picking day. We had rowed across the lake to the best spot known to her and had been there awhile already. It was mid-morning, the air was mild, and the sun filtered through tall pine trees. We were on a gentle incline of forest, the ground vegetation included heather and lingonberry bushes with the blueberries we had gone to gather. I remember wearing my red rubber boots to keep the dry heather branches from scratching my legs. Typical for me, more berries went into my mouth than in the basket; they were too tasty to resist at my young age. I also knew that my grandmother, *mamma*, was good at picking and there would still be plenty even if I ate more than I gathered. When I noticed that my fingers had turned blue I felt grown up. Looking around for berries, I realized that my grandmother was nowhere in sight. All of a sudden I felt alone, it was quiet, the forest seemed huge and the pine trees very tall. I sampled a few more berries, and thought to myself that my *mamma* was somewhere, I just couldn't see her. If I looked around again,

she would magically appear, but she didn't. Then, it became quieter than before, and the trees were taller than before. I called out, "mamma, mamma," and waited for what seemed like a long time. A familiar voice finally called back, "I'm over here, I'll be there in a little while, have you gathered lots of berries?" I was calmed. "Yes, I have!" I called back, and ate a few more. Blueberries have always been my comfort food.

My hometown, Lahti, is one hundred kilometers north of Helsinki. I usually visit there within a week of each trip back to Finland. I had planned to meet my aunt, Pirkko, at the *tori* in the center of town. Pirkko and I had spoken months earlier, when my uncle Olle died, about the two of us taking flowers to his grave the next time I visited. We'd agreed on our meeting spot at the Vapaudenkatu street side, near the bus stop. I had lived on Vapaudenkatu as a child, and that market square was as familiar to me as just about any place could be. I recognized her out the bus window, talking with someone, as it pulled up to the stop. I walked towards her and waved, but she didn't seem to recognize me right away. "That was one of Olle's old pals," she said. He had asked his friends, she'd learned after his death, to stop and chat, and see how she was doing when they ran into her in town if anything were to happen to him. It had barely been six months since his passing, and Pirkko was still learning to cope. So, it wasn't odd that she didn't immediately recognize me, though it seemed ironic to me at first, in a place that was so familiar to me.

After our greeting and hugs, we crossed the *tori* to one of the flower stands where I picked out a bouquet of roses. Walking back to the bus stop, I kept looking around, taking in the familiar, wanting to know the new. We'd lived on the street bordering the square, and I looked for the ice cream stand in its usual place, but it wasn't there that day. As a child walking home with my mother, I would spot the ice cream stand and ask for a vanilla cone, sometimes strawberry. Once in a while my mother would say yes, reaffirming a child's eternal hope, so I always asked. The memory made me smile.

Pirkko and I lingered at the cemetery for quite some time. The roses I placed on Olle's grave looked fine, but I kept arranging and rearranging them, wanting them to look just right. It was a large graveyard, but my uncle's grave was easy to find. Pirkko mentioned that I could find it on my own in the future, implying that I'd find it to visit even after she too was gone. There was a bench nearby, and we sat and talked for a long time. My mother in California was curious to know if she had dreamt of her husband yet. Pirkko had always had some psychic tendencies; she might well have "heard" from her husband of more than forty years.

"Yes, I had a dream about Olle," she told me. He can hear again, he had told her. After many years of working around heavy, noisy machinery, Olle had nearly lost his hearing. But, he died of cancer that had not been detected early enough and it had spread very quickly.

Later, we left the cemetery by a shortcut through a wooded area back to the center of the city.

"The blueberries are large this year," my aunt commented as we passed some on the path. "They'll be ripe soon."

Pirkko, like many Finns, picks, buys, and freezes various berries for the long winter ahead. Could I do that? I wondered. Could I move back to Finland, and pick and freeze berries to brighten winter meals? Similar questions come to my mind every time I visit. Would I be happy living there, would it satisfy me, have I been away too long, is the San Francisco Bay Area really my home now?

That evening, I had coffee with my cousin Pia at Pirkko's. We were looking at photographs of my uncle, aunt, cousins, and their children, of various celebrations, holidays and vacations. Many pictures were taken at the Oksjarvi cottage, the same one where I'd spent every one of my childhood summers. Familiar places, I told my aunt.

She didn't know of the bittersweet good-byes my heart was feeling for my uncle and the summer cottage. There were pictures of another cousin with her family and children whom I'd never met playing in my familiar places. Pia mentioned the initials my sister and I had carved on an attic beam when we were sixteen and seventeen. My sister and I weren't sure whether we'd get into trouble for doing it, so we never told anyone. My eyes began to tear and I tried to not let it show. I glanced at my cousin, and noticed that her eyes were tearing up too.

Later when I was alone, I cried that my uncle had died, and that I would probably never visit Oksjarvi again. And if I did, it wouldn't be the same. Olle had been my connection to the cottage; the cousins and their families spend their summers there now. It wasn't mine in the same way anymore, ownership had changed to the other side of the family. It was Pirkko's *kesamokki* now, and I would only be a visitor, a guest.

Lahti, as I remembered it, had a certain quiet air about it on Sundays, especially in July when most Finns were out of town, on vacation, or at their summer cottages for the weekend. It was a Sunday afternoon when I went and walked around the neighborhood that was my home turf. The building that we had lived in, known as the "bank building," had gotten a new coat of paint a few years earlier. I tried the front door, but it was locked.

I longed to go inside the lobby just to look around, and up a flight of stairs to see the door of apartment #1 where we had lived, but it was not to be. I strolled along the street, slowly examining each shop window, looking for something familiar, wanting something to be the same. The toy store on the corner now sold shoes. The incline up Rautatienkatu wasn't quite as steep as it was years ago. Somewhere along the street my grandparents on my father's side had a gentlemen's clothing store until they sold it and retired. I couldn't pick it out for sure; several shops had similar storefronts and others had been remodeled. Visiting the old haunts, I felt the old haunts, in turn, were visiting me.

Since I didn't have plans until later in the day, I ambled up and down the streets I knew. As a child, I would have run into somebody familiar, a friend, and would probably have gone and played at the playground with them. But that Sunday, I didn't run into anyone I knew.

I made my way up Rautatienkatu in the opposite direction, to see where my maternal grandmother, *mama*, had lived. The building she lived in was gone, and in its place were modern townhouses. Nice actually, I thought, as I looked up at it, counting the stories and figuring approximately where my grandmother's windows would have been. I could live there, I thought, and picked out a particular corner unit with a balcony that would give me a good view of the city to the south, and the park to the north. I wondered what kind of prices they were going for. I walked into the yard area, and looked around for something recognizable, but everything was new. I tried to place where the lilac bushes had been. With their sweet fragrance, they announced spring's arrival each year. I sat down on a bench and reminisced about what the place meant to me. I didn't think anyone would mind if I did.

After a while, I crossed the street to the park where I'd played, and looked around for the area where the neighborhood kids had a wooden toboggan slide each winter. I remembered a particular time a bunch of us were on the slide. One kid fell from the top, and hurt his head. Many of us ran home in a panic to tell the adults that he didn't get up right away and that he was bleeding.

But this was summertime; the same granite cobblestone steps were still in the park, so I walked up and down them, too.

Lakes are an integral part of the Finnish summer. Like at the Oksjarvi lake, the sun danced and shimmered on the water's surface at lake Arkiomaa. It was the day before I was leaving for home, and my brother asked whether I'd taken a sauna or had been swimming in a lake yet.

"No summer visit to Finland is complete without that," he said.

I stepped off the pier into the water slowly; the water was unusually warm, and I dove in and swam for a long time.

I heard familiar sounds in the distance, "Mommy, mommy, look at me, I'm going to jump!" followed by several splashes, giggles, and shouts of delight. "Did you see me? Watch me now!" Siblings barely able to wait their turns: playing, jumping off a pier and splashing in the water. The place was different but the sounds were the same, generation after generation: kids playing, and adults keeping an eye. The sun's rays warmed my face as I swam.

Nearby, a fish jumped in the water, probably a perch. My *mamma* used to clean and cook my grandfather Kurt's catch. He had a net somewhere in Oksjarvi; sometimes he'd come back with a catch big enough for a couple of days, but not always. I had a fishing pole too, and Pirkko and *mamma* tried and tried to convince me that I could catch a fish just as well without a hook and a worm. I knew better, and wasn't happy that I wasn't old enough for a sharp hook. I have a photograph of myself, at about age four,

with my aunt sitting at the end of the Oksjarvi pier. Both of us have our fishing poles, and my expression is skeptical at best about my fishing prospects. My uncle Olle took the photo. He and Pirkko had just recently gotten married, and he took a lot of pictures back then.

At Arkiomaa I swam for a long time, enjoying every moment, while sounds in the distance reminded me of the past. I'd set my camera down on the pier, and decided to go and set the self-timer, swim back out, and smile and wave to the camera until I heard a click and a whirr. I called to my brother and sister-in-law to join me in the water. My brother chuckled

at the idea, but they both joined me nevertheless. We took several shots, each time I swam to set the timer, and back out quickly, all of us treading water, waving to the camera, and laughing.

My travel alarm was set for four-thirty a.m., and I sat up in bed pondering the few more hours left for sleep. Had I packed everything, forgotten anything? It was an eight a.m. flight from Helsinki back to San Francisco, California. I was looking forward to going home, but I did not want to leave Finland. I got up, remembering that there were blueberries in the refrigerator.

--

## *Pulled Under, Set Afloat*

Honorable Mention  
by Aoise Stratford

He was obsessed with weather. That is what Lanh thought as she sat on the bed in his tired little room, watching him work. Obsessed. Of course, he would have said that wasn't true. He would have said he loved it, but that love was not always an obsession.

*No*, Lanh thought, *not always*.

And perhaps that was the thing that was missing.

Once the initial cacophony of America had settled around her, Lanh had grown restless. The other Vietnamese students talked to her, but she wasn't interested. She wanted something thrilling. It was as if she were poised on the edge of a fathomless pool but had not yet jumped in. And then she had seen him in a geography lecture towards the end of her freshman year in college. He was sitting right at the front scratching his long straight nose with the end of his pencil, his left knee jiggling up and down. He looked impatient—coiled—and she found herself suddenly weak, pulled to him as if on the end of a fishing line. By the fourth class she had made up her mind. She sat next to him, said something silly and flirtatious she now couldn't remember, and he had smiled.

Her mother had told her not to date an American, told her she'd be disappointed, discarded, dried up. But

what did her mother know? Nothing! She had lived in that same small town on the outskirts of Da Nang all her life. She knew only what she saw sometimes on their small black and white television, or what she glimpsed in the glossy magazines Lanh's aunt brought with her when she visited from Hue.

Lanh's aunt was nothing like her mother. Aunt Kai smoked cigarettes and plucked her eyebrows. She had a boyfriend who traveled on business. She knew things about the world, she *got out*. When Lanh told Aunt Kai she was applying for scholarships to America, Aunt Kai winked! *Oh, American boys*, she said, *what a life they lead!* Lanh's mother, however, had turned thin-lipped. *By all means go to an American college*, she'd said, *but stay away from American men, Lanh. They are reckless.*

Lanh smiled. Yes, she thought. Yes!

At first she hoped they might love publicly, the way some students do, strolling hand in hand across the lawn, sprawled together on the library steps, entwined in cafes. But nothing here met her expectations.

Still, in those first weeks it hadn't mattered what he was passionate about, simply that his passion hummed in the air around him. Lanh sat beside him in the lecture hall and watched his knees jiggle

up and down, his fingers drum on the notepad in front of him. When he got excited his voice cracked, and he squeezed her arm like a kid at the market. This was the new world. At night in his room he twitched with desire, and though it wasn't always clear whether his longing was for her or for some intricate puzzle only he could solve, Lanh was happy enough for a while. But as the months accumulated behind them Lanh began to see his impatience for what it was: not barely contained energy but an intolerance for anything he couldn't draw, anything he couldn't pin down.

Even now, as their bodies took up space in the same room—he at the small wooden desk with the splintering legs, she on the mattress sinking wistfully into its rusted frame—again he was doing what he loved and she was alone. She doubted he even knew her eyes were on him.

“What are you working on, anyway?” Lanh propped herself up on her elbow.

“A new project.”

His eyes were lamps as he told her this, and his pink tongue darted between his lips. It was a curious habit, this constant licking of the lips, like a dog begging. Lanh watched the little bumps on his tongue as it moved, in and out, in and out, against his teeth.

“So . . . what is it about?”

She waited for him to tell her that she shouldn't bother him, he'd finish up and then maybe they could go out for a walk.

But he surprised her. “It” had to do with wind velocity and precipitation. Just

imagine it: to be able to predict the correlation between these things, those life giving forces that only God can control, such things as shape our planet, our destiny. Just imagine.”

“Very interesting,” she said, trying to sound like she wasn't lying.

And maybe she wasn't. After all, she loved these things too, that was why she had taken that geography class last semester even though it was far removed from the predictably paved path of the business major that her mother had insisted on. Lanh had always had a fascination for climate, the cycles of nature, the infinite and surprising offering of landscapes that clung to the Earth's surface. But she knew they couldn't truly be measured and she had no desire to try, no urge to set down, transform or diminish. What was the point in taming something wild?

As a girl Lanh loved to run with her face tipped up to the sky. Her parents never even looked up, it seemed to her. Nobody did. Everyone crept through life with eyes glazed. Her father was always tired and angry, so many hours given to the packing plant where he worked. Her mother was shriveled and beaten, though he never touched her. It was pointless, Lanh thought. Pointless and empty and small.

On stormy afternoons when she'd finished her chores and homework she'd escape from the cloying little apartment with its odors of grease, mold, her father's deodorant, clothes not yet dry, and tear through the narrow alley past the market,

down the hill, zip-zip past the boarded up storefront of the poultry factory to the marshy fields beyond, her eyes straining upwards, her blood pounding in her veins, her breath rasping and bubbling as she laughed and ran until she could feel the thick cool grasses around her knees and smell the dampness in the air, the salt, and at last—the sea. *You can't see where you are going*, her mother scolded. Stupid girl *to run like that, you'll fall*.

Reckless.

Lanh collapsed back on to the sagging bed. She was so tired lately. Disappointment robbed her of energy and the weight of a novelty grown old tugged her eyes downward. She looked around at the map—endless maps—row upon row of them along the wall, their edges peeling up like autumn leaves. Torn post-it notes, stickers, pins, all manner of dots and squares and triangles, an infinite array of shapes and colors marked these maps showing points of interest, points of comparison, and they swam before her eyes like the brush strokes of an impressionist painting.

Lanh wondered if a triangle marked the place she came from. Certainly the sweep of Vietnam was peppered with his shapes and colors. How strange to think that the streets of her home, busy with boys and bicycles, women carrying chickens in wide wicker baskets, men wiping mud from their shoes with bamboo brushes, were subject to this man's storms and rains.

Her mother said that the act of living was a struggle. She said it was like

being trapped on a beach in a storm. Helpless, you stood with your feet in the sand while everything blew around you. Life sucked at you like the sea, rushing away then roaring back. Love pulled you under. Lanh didn't understand.

And what did her mother know about living anyway? Then again, what did she know? Here in this room nothing roared or rushed as she had hoped. Perhaps she was in the storm's eye and the rain was falling somewhere else, somewhere far away. She felt stupid. She had come here for an education. And now, studying only the crown of her lover's head tipped towards his charts, she could not decide whether she had gotten one or whether she had been looking in the wrong place all along.

Lanh chewed her lip and watched him making notations on his graphs. His face was partially hidden by the pages of a book, only a sliver of forehead visible, like a light glowing under a closed door. A single bead of sweat shone on his forehead and she imagined that she could see herself, stretched and reflected in the dome of its surface, caught for a moment before it rolled off his paper-white skin.

The room seemed suddenly stuffy. Dust lay in a veil along the skirting boards. The air was gray and heavy. She longed for a gentle breeze, so she imagined it, softly stirring the dust on the blinds, tap-tap-tapping the chord against the window ledge in the echo of a heart beating, flowing in from the rice fields so many miles away.

“Eric, can you open the window?”  
Lanh asked.

He shook his head. "It will disturb my papers."

Once she wouldn't have bothered to ask. In the beginning she would have simply heaved the sash up, thrown the window wide and leaned out as far as she dared. But not now. And this is how she knew she would have to pull some momentum from him, like a top being wound, and summon up the energy to go.

"Tell me about the stars," she said, sitting up.

"What?"

"Please, Eric. The stars."

They had talked of these things once, months ago when she had still thought their love was possible. Weather still happens *at night*, he'd explained to her. *Even when we sleep the universe is in motion*. Back then they stayed out late, they sat on the roof of the library, their heads tipped up, close together as they talked about the night sky and the clouds that guard the moon, the wind, like the breath of God himself, making trees bow down and whipping the water to foam at sea.

"Are there storms on Neptune, do you think?" Lanh asked now.

He looked at her.

"Just imagine it, Eric. Thunder on Venus, for instance. Wouldn't that be something?"

He smiled. It was okay when she spoke his language. She stretched her arms out to him, a final gesture, *come to bed*, said her arms. *I am the eye and yet I am solid. Reach up and hold me*.

Softly, Lanh caressed him with her voice, a final dance, her words like water

running over rock, and slowly he put aside his books, his maps and graphs, and came to her, his body a series of planes and hills, meeting against hers on the sagging mattress as the earth meets the ocean, a gentle tide pulling each of them, pushing. Closer and away.

As Lanh lay there folded in his arms, she watched the small sketches of freckles on the backs of his hands, felt the warm moist breeze of his breath in her ear. She stroked his hair and listened as he talked, not to her, but to himself. His body moved against her but he was somewhere out of reach in his own private landscape.

Beneath his sounds she heard the wind dancing in the ragged leaves of the lilac tree beyond the sealed window. She closed her eyes and felt herself being pulled down, felt herself floating away from the room, up above the dust, out through the closed window, back to a place where the earth was swollen and ripe.

Lanh would take nothing of this room with her when she left, she knew that, even now. She was charting a fresh course and this room held nothing for her but the vague and already fading imprint of memory. When the child was born it would split her open, she knew that too. It would tear her apart. She would bleed and cry. Life would pour out of her—a torrent, a flood. When the baby was born she would feel something at last. She would drown in love.

*Yes*, she thought. Outside she heard the soft approaching footsteps of rain.

--

## Three Poems

By Wendy Anderson

### *Holding On*

My best friend, Vicki, is in our kitchen  
playing dolls. She yanks a sweater  
over Tressy's big head and topples  
Kool-Aid over.

My mother is on her fast.  
"My God. I just washed that floor an hour  
ago.  
I told you to be careful  
with that drink."

"I told you and told you," she says.  
Mom talks loud  
as head of our Sunday School;  
and in the choir she is the fiercest voice.  
"Just go outside!" she shouts suddenly.  
"This instant! Scoot! Scoot!"

Then her delivery drops.  
"Better yet, Vicki, you go back  
to your own house.  
Let your own mother  
clean your messes.  
You can't even be trusted  
to play right in other people's homes."

She gets in Vicki's face.  
"I know you'll end up  
a fat little whore  
like your mother,  
so why don't you  
go on home?"

The only sound is the slamming door  
And Vicki's shriek across our yard.

I run down behind the barn  
to the garden, to my dad.

"Oh Lord,  
what did she do now?"  
he asks, and I tell,  
and he drops a bunch  
of carrots to hold onto me.  
He covers me with  
his thick, muddy hands  
and holds on.

"I don't know why your mother  
says these things.  
And to a kid. I just don't know."  
He mutters a Finnish word.

Once my bawling stops,  
he pulls quarters from his pocket.  
"Why don't you ride uptown?" he says.  
"Get yourself an ice cream cone."

I stop long enough  
to fetch my banana bike,  
and pedal off, hard as I can go.  
At eleven years old, going  
for a ride up the road  
is the only way  
to run away  
I know.

--

### *Whatever It Takes*

Remember that night I kissed you,  
New Year's Eve at my friend Pat's party?  
I'd said no to you weeks before  
and set you up with my best friend,  
who'd come to the party,  
that night, with you.

And then that kiss, in the cloakroom  
in the half-dark,  
noticing for the first time

how tall you were,  
 as I stood on tiptoe  
 and said “Happy New Year, Tom,” just  
     like that.  
 You were surprised.  
 I was drunk and exhausted  
 and uneasy in new leather pants,  
 wondering why, exactly, I was there.

Not for any celebration.  
 I was flying home to Maine  
 the next day because  
 my father was dying.  
 So I kissed you, a kiss full  
 of wet snow and slippery emotions.  
 You were kind enough to leave it.

I drove back to my apartment alone,  
 sat by the window in my pink robe  
 and big slippers, curled my toes  
 and watched snow  
 light the courtyard.  
 It snowed all night  
 and closed O’Hare.

My father did die,  
 before I got there.  
 Sis embraced me at the airport,  
 and handed me a bag of his clothes  
 fresh from the hospital  
 to hug to my lap  
 all that dark ride  
 through the thick trees  
 home.

It was a terrible time for the holidays.  
 Snow and grey and phone calls,  
 neighbors, Mom, and food tins,  
 preachers, funeral, warm gin.  
 Still breathing was me  
 under the weight of our kiss.

Such a heady thing.  
 When my father died,  
 it was everything.

--

### *Sighting*

We were at the breakfast table  
 when I told my girls  
 about the first time I saw a moose—  
 not the storybook they knew  
 but a real one, that graceless, prehistoric  
     creature  
 from my Maine past.

I was in pajamas then, too.  
 They were pink, I was maybe five.  
 I’d bathed and was on my way  
 to bed when a car pulled up.  
 Bobby and Ron, my teenage brother’s  
 friends, had heard it on the CB:  
 Someone on the Greenville Road hit a  
     moose.  
 This being a small town on a Saturday  
     night  
 in nineteen-sixty-something,  
 car accidents of this caliber were big news.  
*Let’s get up there*, they said,  
 and Lauri grabbed his coat.

*Can I go? Can I go?*  
 I begged my mother.  
*I’ll be OK; Lauri will watch me.*  
*Can I go, please, pleeeeee?*

And for some reason, she said yes.

I was a-tingle, in the backseat of a Chevy  
 in the arms of a brother-god.  
 We zoomed through the pitch black  
 on that long stretch of woods,

and then, lights ahead, lots of them.  
 A single cop, and a caravan of  
     neighbors—

Ansel LaPointe, the Ullmans, the Faviers.  
 We coasted to a stop,  
 and Lauri held my hand.

There it was, halfway down the shoulder,  
 a VW bug, baby blue,

and there, on the steering wheel,  
the head of a bull moose,  
driven so far back into the driver's side  
that its nose was crushed.  
Red painted the seat-back.  
One antler rested on the passenger's side,  
one spilled through the driver's window—  
I could have touched it, we were that  
close.

The once-massive neck  
draped across the windshield  
in a crimson clump  
of rubber bands and paste,  
the legs splayed  
along the hood, as if to ride it.

*Jesus*, said my brother. *Jesus Christ*.  
I didn't ask, but I knew,

Someone besides this moose has to be  
dead.

I don't remember getting home.  
I don't know if I wondered, at five,  
whether he saw it coming, that young man  
from Connecticut—the flatlander we heard  
was  
driving—when enormous death slammed  
into him.

This is all a memory, wrapped in the dark  
and the woods,  
in the protection of brother, and in blood,  
in childhood and a mother's judgment,  
in fantasy and fear and the faint beginning  
of loss.

--

## Finnish American Heritage Center & Historical Archives

### *The World's Largest Finnish-American Collection*

- Audio-visual records
- Genealogical records
- Photographs
- Library monographs
- Manuscripts
- Newspapers/periodicals
- Oral History
- Finlandia University Repository



Open to the Public    On the campus of Finlandia University in Hancock, MI  
Information: (phone) 487-7347, (email) [archives@fnlandia.edu](mailto:archives@fnlandia.edu), (website) [www.finlandia.edu](http://www.finlandia.edu)

## *Rebound*

by Rekha Ambardar

It was the open, vulnerable expression that made her stare at him longer than was necessary. The bell over the door of her costume shop, The Quick Change, told her a customer had just walked in, and she'd better stop fidgeting with the pirate costume she held. Early on a Saturday morning, there were few people looking for costumes. It gave Kala a chance to take care of some housekeeping in the shop, and help her assistant with alterations in the back room.

He had a thick shock of sand-colored hair that dipped over his forehead. Gray eyes twinkled behind glasses. Even from where she stood she could see small laugh lines crinkling the corners of his eyes. Far from looking geeky in the glasses, he fascinated her. Maybe she could find out more about this man. That was what introductions were for, she reminded herself.

"Hi," she said, dumping the slippery mass of satin material on a chair. "Anything I can help you with?"

"Er—yes. "I'm new in town and I'm looking for a costume," he said with a quirky grin, as if he made a habit of stating the obvious.

"This is the right place."

"I didn't expect to find your shop so easily." He eased toward the front counter with an athlete's grace, and stood leaning against it, arms crossed. "The Huron Fine Arts Council sent me."

"It helps that this is the only costume shop downtown."

"Nice," he said, looking at the racks of clothing, some trimmed with sequins, the more elaborate hanging in clear plastic bags. "We're putting on *Pirates of Penzance*, and I need a pirate costume that fits. What are the chances I'll find one?"

She laughed. "It so happens that this bundle here is just what you want." She lifted it off the chair and held it up, watching his eyes widen with surprise.

"This might work. Can I try it on?"

"Of course." She showed him to the dressing cubicle and went back to sorting through a pile of clothes and marking them down.

After a few minutes he came out. "Well?" He stood in front of her wearing the costume.

She blinked, taking in the sight of him. White muslin shirt and black pantaloons fit him to molding perfection. She never imagined he would capture the image of a pirate so well.

"Very nice."

Kala went around, checking a tuck here and there, and adjusting the collar.

"Where do you get your costumes from?" he asked, obviously enjoying the feel of the muslin ruffles falling over his hands.

"I make them," she said. "I began sewing costumes for my niece and nephew, then I decided to open this shop

for our local amateur theatrical aficionados—like you.”

Images with her own brush with stage plays floated through her mind—helping behind the scenes with props, rearranging them at a moment’s notice. It had helped after losing her fiancé, Prasad, in the car accident. But sometimes, she couldn’t tell what was real and what was only a play with players going through their motions. She often asked herself if she was only going through the motions too. But then, Nowroz entered her life just in time. . . .

She shook herself awake from the sideshow of her reverie, which seemed to carry her away on its wings from time to time when she forgot to take her medication.

“Are you okay?” he said suddenly.

“Sorry,” Kala replied. “I had no time to eat breakfast this morning.”

What with the Saturday morning phone call from her brother, Raju, and then having to talk to his wife, Lata, and two teenage children, it had slipped her mind. Much as she loved to chat with them, she could never get off the phone in less than an hour. It was a good thing they lived in Huron too, or they would all have had whopping phone bills.

“By the way, I’m Nate Potter,” he said, extending his hand and clasping hers in a firm handshake.

“Kalavathy—Kala, for short.”

“Kalavathy,” he said slowly, emphasizing the third and fourth syllable, instead of the second, but she was used to that. “Pretty name.”

What a nice way to begin a Saturday morning, she thought, looking into a pair of smiling eyes and seeing herself reflected in them.

“You mentioned you were new in town. What do you do?”

“I’m a claims investigator for an insurance company. Needless to say my work takes me out of town sometimes, but I’ve always been in amateur theatricals and I love it.”

He looked as if he had something more to say. “My girlfriend thinks it’s a wimpy hobby.”

“Too bad. Maybe if you took her along, she’d see what it was like.”

“She’s never wanted to come to the rehearsals.”

He looked away, his face suddenly flushing. “Well, I won’t take up any more of your time,” he said. “I’d like to take this costume.”

“I’ll write up an order for you. You can buy it or rent it.”

“I’ll rent it.”

He disappeared into the dressing room to change and was back in a few minutes holding the costume.

Kala wrote up a slip, put the costume in a bag and handed it to him. He took it with a smile that told her she’d be seeing him again--soon.

She was wrong. She didn’t see Nate again for days.

Her brother, older by thirteen years, worried about her not being married yet. She smiled wryly to herself as she drove home one evening, dog-tired from staring at lab specimens. Through the beat of the windshield wiper she thought she

heard his voice, “Our parents, had they been alive, would have wanted you to settle down. After all, you’re close to thirty-six.”

An old maid, no doubt.

The phone rang as soon as she reached home and she grabbed it. “Hello?”

“This is Nate.”

A thrill of expectation raced along her spine. Why had he called?

“Sorry to bother you. My pirate shirt has ripped along the sleeve. It happened somewhere between a leap and a swagger, and I dare not fix it myself since I’m all thumbs when it comes to sewing,” he said with a chuckle. “We have a full dress rehearsal this Saturday. Could you possibly fix it for me?”

“How did you get my phone number?”

“Your assistant gave it to me at the store when she knew I was in a bind.”

“All right, you can come over and I’ll fix it.” She told him her address.

Forty-five minutes later, he stood at her doorstep holding a plastic bag.

“Come on in,” she said and stood aside.

“Thanks for taking this on. I wouldn’t have bothered you. . . .”

He looked sheepish and she felt sorry for him. She caught the faint whiff of his spicy cologne and breathed it in, loving the aroma which mingled with his own scent and the freshly laundered clothing he wore.

“I understand. I was going to warm up some spaghetti,” she said. “You’re welcome to join me if you haven’t eaten.”

She was happy to have his company, someone to talk to instead of turning on the national news for background noise.

“Oh, no I couldn’t impose,” he said. “Please go ahead with your dinner. I’ll wait.”

“I refuse to eat alone,” she said feeling stubborn.

“In that case, I’d be happy to join you.”

He followed her to the small kitchen area that could barely hold two people. “Can I help?”

“If you like, you can take out two plates from the cabinet and fill two glasses of water. I also have Pepsi, if you’d like some.”

She was aghast at herself, giving orders as if she’d known him for a long time and they were comfortable roommates preparing for dinner. It was even more confusing that he didn’t seem to mind.

“This is surreal,” Nate said with a smile as he seated himself next to her. She noticed he smiled a lot and realized she liked it.

“I come here to get my sleeve sewn back and I’m invited to dinner in the bargain.”

She twisted the spaghetti with her fork. “When you called I thought it was my friend, Nowroz. I usually have him to dinner.”

She didn’t quite know why she put it like that. Too late to change it now.

“I’m a poor substitute for Nowroz,” he said.

She heard the teasing in his voice.

“But seriously,” he added, “do you have folks in town?”

“My brother and his family. During the week I have no time to see them with working and costume alterations.”

“Do you have another job besides sewing costumes?”

“I’m a biologist working for a lab.”

His eyes approved. “You’re talented.”

“Talented or not I don’t know, but my work keeps me busy,” she said. “You see, five months ago my fiancé died in a car accident and working helps.”

“I’m so sorry to hear that.” He looked at her for several moments without speaking. “And so young,” he said, shaking his head.

She threw back her head and laughed. “Young! I’m thirty-six.”

“That’s young.” He showed no bumbling embarrassment at his remark.

“How old are you?” As long as they were exchanging information, she thought she might as well ask.

“Thirty-two,” he said. “It must have been a terrible experience, losing your fiancé.”

“It was, although I didn’t know him very well. It was arranged by my brother,” she said. “Now he’s pressuring me to marry, but I’m afraid something else will go wrong. Then along came Nowroz, so they leave me alone, except occasionally, I get a comment from an acquaintance, ‘It’s Now or never.’”

She couldn’t help smiling, even though it sounded like a tasteless joke when she heard somebody say it—

couldn’t remember if it was a male or female voice she’d overheard.

“Now is a lucky guy,” Nate said, gazing at her with a look she couldn’t fathom.

“Thank you,” she said, pushing her plate away. She found his gaze unsettling. “I’m ready to fix your shirt.”

Nate held up the shirt and showed her the rip on the seam where sleeve attached to the front.

“This is easy to fix.” She pulled out her sewing kit from a narrow wall closet and set to work, while he sat watching her quietly.

A few minutes later, she held it out to him. “There. All finished.”

He stood up. “That settles it,” he said. “I have to repay you for your kindness. So here’s what I’m going to do, subject to your permission of course.”

He sounded so mysterious and ridiculous as the same time that she laughed and he joined in.

“With that build up it better be good,” she said.

“I’d like to invite you to my basketball game. My insurance company is playing the State Farm team.”

“You play basketball?”

He nodded, beaming with pride, almost like a child. “I’m good at assists and rebounds,” he said. “You know what they are?”

“I’ve been to my friends’ kids’ games so I know something about it.” She hoped. But she didn’t have to worry, Nate obviously loved the sport.

“I’d love to come, let me know when.”

“What about Now—won’t he mind?”

Kala shrugged. “It’s just a game. But why not take your girlfriend along instead.”

He ran his fingers through his hair and turned to look out of the window. “We broke up.”

“Sorry to hear that.” Or was she? “I’d love to see your game, if you’re sure I won’t be in the way.”

She suddenly felt awkward, but knowing he had no attachments made her feel free to learn more about him. There was something restful and trustworthy about him; he appeared to be in no hurry to move things along.

“It’s settled then,” he said, picking up the bag with the shirt in it. “It’s next Thursday evening at six o’ clock. I’ll pick you up.”

He stopped for a second and glanced at her hair slung over one shoulder in a long braid, reaching almost to the knee. “You have the most beautiful hair. Don’t ever cut it.”

And then he was gone.

She stood there biting down on her lower lip, staring after him.

The Midwest Mutual Mauling Marauders’ game against the State Farm Jailbirds proved to Kala beyond a doubt that Nate was the Marauders’ most valuable player, but he had the good grace to downplay his contribution to the scores.

“Hope you weren’t bored,” he said, much later, driving her home..

“Of course not. Thanks for asking me.” Kala said, getting out of his Chevy.

“Sorry I can’t invite you in. I have an early day tomorrow.”

She made it a point not to call Nate, or sit by the phone like a teenager. For the first time, Kala felt she was living her own life, something she hadn’t done in since she was a child. She wasn’t exactly sure what she expected of this new intruder in her life, but she didn’t tell her family about him. She wanted to savor the vibes she got from Nate and process them in her own way. But there was Raju and his expectations, his help, his concern. He loved her and wanted her to be safe and protected. He wanted her to settle down.

She had strung along the specter of Nowroz because she wanted to know that Nate was really interested. She wanted it to progress naturally, and when she saw it might happen she was going to tell him that Nowroz was non-existent. Until then, she hadn’t wanted to seem desperate when desperate was what she had really been. Desperate to make her own choice.

With a terrible headache, Kala awoke to find herself in the hospital. She’d fainted at work. When she opened her eyes, she saw Raju peering down at her, furrows of worry lining his forehead.

“How are you feeling?” he asked.

Kala tried to sit up. “Groggy. . . . How did I get here?”

“You fell at the shop, and I found you when I stopped by to check on you. You hadn’t called.” he said.

Kala furrowed her brow. “How long will I have to be here?” she asked.

“For a day or so, until they complete some tests. They want to be sure it’s nothing.”

Raju looked as if he might start weeping and Kala felt a wave of pity for him.

“We hadn’t heard from you in a while, Kala,” he said. “We’ve been worried about you. Is everything okay?”

Kala said nothing. Her head ached. She wished her headache would go away.

“Yes.”

It sounded feeble. The stress from living a lie had been too much for her. Going through an arranged marriage would have killed her spirit, and she hadn’t been able to open up about it to her brother and sister-in-law. So Kala had invented Nowroz, the phantom lover who would keep her family at bay for just a while longer.

And Nate? Why had she put up this charade for him? Especially when he seemed caring and sensitive unlike any man she’d met recently? Fear. Fear of being hurt by someone she’d started to think about too much. But then it had been like that when her brother had broached the subject of meeting Prasad, the fiancé who had died.

“It’s time you settled down,” Raju had said. “You should meet Prasad, a consultant for Fidelity.”

She’d shaken her head and said, “What makes you think we’ll have anything in common?”

“You won’t know until the two of you meet,” he said complacently.

While she didn’t want to, Kala had given in. What was the point in resisting

when her brother had her future well-being in mind?

After meeting Prasad, it was clear than he hadn’t grown up in the US. He’d expected her to carry most of the responsibility of homemaking and child-rearing in a traditional way. It wasn’t quite what she had wanted, but she’d agreed to marry him to close the matter with her family once and for all.

Kala shook free of the memories and watched as Raju pulled up a chair to the bed.

“I’m convinced that something is eating away at you,” he said. “We’ve had our problems as a family, but you know that Lata and I are like parents to you.”

“Sorry if I seemed distant,” she said finally. “There have been things. . . .”

“We hoped you would confide in us after Prasad died.” Raju looked at her with concern. “Maybe you’d feel comfortable talking to Lata.”

“It isn’t that.” The throbbing in her head redoubled. “The possibility of yet another arranged marriage is too much to take.”

“We just want what’s good for you.”

“I’m nearly forty. I can arrange my own life.”

“You’re still my kid sister. Lata feels the same way.” He leaned forward and patted her hand. “And I know you’re tired of us carping at you.”

Kala smiled weakly. His attempts at trying to understand her were almost comical.

“I have a confession,” she said.

A furrow creased Raju's forehead.  
"What?"

"There's no Nowroz," she said.

It was time to spill the facts. She watched her brother closely as she spoke. Was it her imagination or had the furrow vanished?

"When you never brought him around to meet us, I wondered why." A faint smile replaced the frown.

"You're not mad at me?"

"I'm not thrilled. But more than that, I just regret that you were unable to reach out to us, and had to make Nowroz up," he said. "Or we were unable to reach out to you."

He cocked his head to one side with a half grin, the way he used to do when he caught her in a childish prank when she was a kid. "But that's all over now."

"There's something else," she said. "I've met someone. His name is Nate."

His eyebrows rose as if his interest was piqued. Then he raised his hands in mock surrender. "We're staying out of it this time. I'll just say—wish you the best."

"That's different," Kala said with a chuckle

"I always wanted the best for you, Kala. It just didn't come out right." He stood up. "Ready to go home?"

"I'm so ready," Kala said. "The nurse will be in soon to help discharge me."

Her spirits soared. When she got home, she'd consult Nate on a set of costumes she was making for the musical "Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves," to be performed by the City Players.

Kala's spirits inched up.

Back at work the next day, her assistant told her that Nate had stopped by. He'd been worried about Kala.

At closing time, Kala called him back to explain that she had a case of exhaustion and that she was now okay.

"Nate, there's something I have to tell you," she said, during a lull in their conversation. She said it plainly, "Nowroz was fictitious."

Then she waited for an outraged reaction from Nate. But none came. . . .

"I don't know why you took that route," Nate said, "But if you're ready, I want to give us a chance. And to celebrate, I'm coming over to take you to dinner, if that's all right with you."

"All right with me?" Kala said. "That's just what the doctor ordered. After that, we'll need to get to work, you and I."

"Work?"

"You're my technical consultant for costumes for a new play."

A low chuckle drifted over the line, and she savored it as she hung up.

--

## *A Rainy Night in Burma*

By Frank Kinikin

After a long night in Suratthini my wife packed up our daughter and went back to Korea.

At the airport my girl hugged me quickly goodbye and ran to her mother. Then she suddenly rushed back and hugged me again. This time with more ardor and covertly whispered, "I love you Daddy."

I said I did too and meant it. But felt numb. As mother and daughter walked into the twilight of the departure gate, everything faded to black. The next thing I remember is sitting on the bed in the hotel room, stupefied from relinquishing the tyranny of the known for the terror of the unknown. Good thing I wasn't driving.

But regardless of any other circumstance, I had to leave Thailand immediately and go to Burma and back to renew my tourist visa. There was some urgency because this was the third time I had attempted to do a "quick" visa run and the overstay charges were adding up. The first time an immigration drone told me my passport was too full. There was no place to put a stamp. So I went to Bangkok and had new pages added at the U.S. Embassy. The second time another agent claimed my last visa extension was invalid and asked me to pay an exorbitant fine. Which of course he would have pocketed. I refused, but as I was leaving dropped the name of a Thai senator whose wife had

recently befriended us. Magically, the third go around there was no problem.

After leaving immigration I went to the harbor in the southern Thai city of Ranong, to take the twenty minute boat trip to Kawthaung, formerly Victoria Point under the British. The seasonal rain was coming down in blustery sheets. I was hustled onto a maybe thirty-foot long boat which had a raggedy piece of blue plastic covering a rusty frame above. My companions were Justin, an eighteen year old from Vancouver, who was spending his gap year traveling around Asia with his parents' blessing before beginning university. Long Toed Tom was a lanky Australian surfer who spoke good Thai and was working as a gardener in Phuket. And finally there were the female members of a Burmese family: a youngish mother and two teenage daughters.

As we headed out to sea it was obvious we were in for a rough ride. The boat would bounce up in the air on the large waves, then come crashing down with a thud. To be able to chat to the two westerners I sat facing the stern. Between the rain slanting almost sideways and the waves coming up over the side of the boat, we were all soaking wet within minutes. Justin and Tom had done this before so they knew to wear rain gear. Like the Burmese women, who couldn't afford such luxuries, I was bare to the elements.

Facing backwards, I got to watch our young boatman battle the waves while he tried to keep us on course in zero visibility.

As the waves got bigger the mood became more somber. The eldest of the two Burmese daughters, I would guess fifteen, was sitting next to me facing the bow. Every time she got slapped in the face by a wave, she came closer to crying. Finally she reached over grabbed my hand, buried her face in her lap, and began sobbing gently in a chanting prayer. She had long elegant fingers with extended cobalt nails that were inconsistent with her teenagey sweat shirt and workaday features. She continued to firmly hold my hand for the rest of the voyage.

After two hours, we finally reached the other side. I wasn't ready for the onslaught of young Burmese entrepreneurs, who accosted us en masse at the pier.

"You want go to pharmacy? Valium and Viagra only ten cents. You want see lady show?"

A boxy, drunken lad, Mr. Lucky, with hepatitis tinged eyes and betel nut teeth, lurched forward, "You want motorbike? How 'bout beer? You need hotel?"

The boatman decided to go back. But I wasn't about to chance it. I said goodbye to my lifeboat buddies and spent a rainy night in Burma.

Out of exhaustion I went with Mr. Lucky, telling him I needed a room.

Most hotels in Kawthaung are government controlled, therefore, double

the price of comparable Thai accommodations. It's illegal for a foreigner to be a guest in a private citizen's home. The Ruling Junta don't want foreigners to find out too much about the unnecessarily onerous life of the native population. Mr. Lucky took me to the Taninthary Guest House which was decent and privately owned. When I tipped him, way too much because the look on his face screamed, "I can drink up a storm on this much gelt," he disappeared.

The hotel was clean and the friendly sarong clad manager reassured me, "Leave passport in room. Very safe here."

And he was right. Wherever I went the rest of my eighteen hour stay in Burma, I never felt in any jeopardy. I believe I could have flashed wads of Thai currency, more than an average citizen's monthly salary, drunk on my ass in an anonymous back street, and virtually no one would have taken advantage of the situation. Why? The kind-hearted nature of the Burmese people of course.

But also because the populace is terrified of the government backed security forces. They're afraid of being thrown in prison and tortured arbitrarily for any imagined infraction. And stealing from a foreigner who is bringing in much needed convertible cash? That could bring even more severe punishment to the perpetrators and probably their families. That realization made it difficult to enjoy any emancipation from danger.

In the hotel room a horrifying remorse took hold of me. The rain was still cascading down outside the window. I was

soaking wet, chafing and marooned. Why had I stayed? I lay paralyzed on the bed replaying my recent transgressions over and over. Ashamed of the past and terrified of the future, I had to get into motion in the present, or things could quickly deteriorate.

So I ventured out between downpours to the only place I knew: the harbor.

The waterfront neighborhood was pretty depressing. Semi-sidewalks buckled in front of crumbling buildings. Stray dogs looked for a handout from people with little to spare. The mixed smells of spice, human endeavor, and primitive sewers filled the air. Typical of so many tropical nations that have been ill served by their rulers. And Burmese are among the most victimized.

In the late eighties the United Nations declared Burma the least developed nation on earth. A country that was so rich in natural resources, it had been declared "the rice bowl of Asia," was now on economic par with Ethiopia and Chad. Thanks to a bunch of generals who, because they didn't have a clue what to do once their coup actually succeeded, ruined a functioning economy with extreme isolation and nationalization. The ringleader of the 1962 military takeover is the now ninety year old General Ne Win, whose nom de guerre means "brilliant like the sun." Ironic, since he irrevocably led his nation into total eclipse.

After years of cruelly imprisoning Nobel Prize winning democracy advocate, Aung San Suui Kyi, without adequate food or medical care under the euphemism

"house arrest"—her beloved piano, the sole consolation in a bookless existence, decimated by tropical rot—the Burmese government's international image was in the toilet. So they hired Washington D.C. based Burson Marsteller, the world's largest public relations firm, to spruce things up. The BM image mavens earned their money by convincing The Generals to change the ruling party's name from the harsh State Law and Restoration Council (SLORC), to the cuddlier State Peace and Development Council (SPDC).

Back on the waterfront the variety of ethnic groups was much more interesting than the buildings. Chinese, Malay, Portuguese, Tamil, Karen, Mon, Moken, exist together. And along with all these varicolored folks winding down their work day, were the ever present Boy Soldiers. Their oversized automatic rifles imported directly from the Middle Kingdom. China arms and trains the Burmese military in exchange for sucking up its natural resources.

It was just beyond dusk and I wanted some dry clothes. I found a well stocked clothing store in a quiet side street. The skull capped patriarch greeted me warmly with "Assalmu Alay Kum." Mom and the kids ate supper in the back room apartment. Most everything was too small, but I found some tolerable if snug fitting threads. The patriarch asked me if I was a Christian. I replied that Jesus, Allah, and Buddha were all alright with me. He nodded in accepting contemplation.

Feeling better, I headed down one of the main arteries that ran through the middle of town. The blocks tended to be

much the same. The apartments were scruffy British colonial but still quite handsome; an aesthetic relief in spite of being symbols of oppression. Groceries, pharmacies, and other staple goods stores had shelves three quarters empty. Still, the congregated families seemed cheerful.

Those that had televisions sat transfixed. The programming was limited to traditional song and dance or noisy propaganda rants. Other families played traditional stick games. Some people gently called out "Hello," the extent of their English vocabulary. The parents were happy if I gave a curious child attention. As almost everywhere, neighborhood restaurants were busy serving the universal need for sustenance and socialization.

My feet started to blister in wet sandals so I began the long walk back to the hotel. A fortyish man pulled over on a motorbike. His smile was amiable with gleaming white teeth against a Tamil-hued complexion. He stuttered, "Hello."

I returned the greeting and asked his name. I could only decipher "Joe," so that's what I called him.

Mr. Joe concentrated very hard and then asked, "Want drink?"

I was intrigued. He wasn't a youthful tourist peddler hawking cut rate gratification near the pier. He didn't seem a Burmese hooligan. I rather doubted he was gay. Before my sensible self could intercede, I got on the motorbike. Being driven away by a complete stranger, no matter how beatific his smile or how intimidating the police, in the dark of night, in an off the map country, where people are choking on poverty, to go to

probably just the kind of place where stupid foreigners always get shanghaied? Were ye daft mate? Pretty much.

We headed away from the center of town. The streets quickly became unpaved as the cityscape transformed to rural. Except there were still shops and houses. Teenagers hung around what passed for corners to escape the heat still trapped indoors. The warm air was pungent with earth and cumin. We drove around a large deserted bay. A three-quarters moon shone over the water so beautifully it seemed a diorama. A magic moment dependent on a poverty of development.

We pulled into a vacant lot next to a three story barn-like structure. On the other side of the street was a row of narrow two story teak houses. Directly across the street, one glowing front door was open. The rest were dark. A flickering light shone out from inside the barn.

I followed Joe into one large room that extended all the way to the rafters. Two goateed men, one middle aged and the other in his twenties, perched on crates, calmly talking around a solo candle melting atop a barrel. They gave Joe the traditional Muslim greeting and nodded politely to me. The room was full of stuff: broken furniture, piles of clothes, a bicycle with a flat tire, a small stove with a pot boiling, and other indefinable belongings.

In America this could have been a scary place. But the atmosphere wasn't jagged or edgy. If anything there was a void of feeling. Something akin to boredom. Apathy probably. Joe asked a couple of questions. The elder man nodded

to the house across the street. Joe motioned for me to follow.

As we walked inside we were greeted by a handsome gray haired proprietor. The room was medium size. Not much there really except for a couple of tables and chairs. A doorless opening led to a back room. Hung on the walls were pin up calendars. But instead of bikinis, the ladies were clad in chaste traditional costumes advertising products I couldn't decipher. In the corner two nondescript women were sitting on a bench silently playing cards. The proprietor enthusiastically motioned for us to follow him upstairs.

The second floor was much the same except there was a cordoned-off sacred area in the extreme front of the room that housed a large Buddhist shrine/spirit house. It was done in the Chinese style with sharply angled gold and red spires. There was also a four headed, multi-armed representation of the Hindu god Brahma. Various offerings of fruit had been placed in front of the shrine. Off to the side on a pillar, hung a huge un-husked coconut wrapped in a red turban. A nod to traditional Burmese nat (spirit) worship.

Nats are the old animistic gods that hold dominion over a person or a place. The Burmese hedge their devotional bets according to a hierarchical sphere of influence. First Buddha covers future fate, but is not a god so cannot be asked to intercede in everyday problems. Second and third are Brahma and the various nats who provide help with those pain in the ass diurnal conundrums. A scent of sickly sweet perfume wafted out toward us.

A woman sat at a table. She stood up when we entered, shook my hand and in coping English said, "I'm Maki. Pleased to meet you."

She wore no makeup and was mid-thirties attractive with a friendly smile. She looked very Semitic with light skin and dark wavy hair down to the waist. She was dressed in a gauzy blouse, traditional sarong, and comfortably barefoot.

She motioned for us to sit down. Embarrassed he didn't speak English, the proprietor excused himself and went downstairs.

It finally dawned on me that this was the brothel on the edge of town. Ah, yes, the women downstairs. The whole affair was so low key as to be almost indiscernible.

Maki offered me beer. She quoted a quite reasonable price, proudly letting me know there would be no foreigner inflation here. She hurried downstairs. Her gait was swift and graceful. Her bottom had a distinctly Mediterranean contour to it.

Maki was gone quite a while. I found out she made the effort to procure hard-to-find Thai beer, assuming I would want the imported stuff. So Joe and I had a chance to "talk." What could have been headache-inducing was enjoyable because Joe was an affable dude. I confirmed Joe was Muslim. He has three sisters and is not surprisingly unemployed.

Maki returned with two large bottles of beer. Then it was her turn to offer up some information. She was thirty seven. She too embraced Islam. She had no children and had never been married.

She wouldn't talk any more about family or lack thereof. She averted her eyes when I even mildly tried to pursue it. Otherwise she made direct eye contact and impressed me with her intelligence and wit. In different circumstances we might have been friends. The world's might-have-beens made me melancholy.

I was facing the doorway that lead to a murky back room. I had earlier noticed there was a small enclosed space on the right side in the darkness. While we were talking a woman silently exited the space, eyes down, and went downstairs. Soon thereafter a man followed. They'd certainly been reserved in their lust. I was embarrassed to think it was because of me.

The time of reckoning had come. Did I do the right thing? What came to mind as I sat there contemplating my immediate future was a story that my daughter's favorite English uncle had told me. The BBC was interviewing a former poet laureate before the ancient kicked the bucket. They asked him what had he done in his life he had regretted. He regretted what he hadn't done. He said he definitely would have had more sex. Then I pondered that for a long time my wife had been telling we should forget any corporeal fealty to each other. Convenient rationalizations? I suppose.

Joe excused himself and went downstairs. Maki led me back into the enclosed chamber that was the size of a walk-in closet. She apologized for there not being a "lamp."

Sex can be transcendent or not. With a partner or a stranger. The mechanics don't change all that much,

excluding fetishes, costumes, and toys. Anything beyond the predictable is rare; particularly when commerce is involved. So I was grateful when Maki wrapped her limbs around my lower legs and tenderly rubbed the tops of her feet back and forth across the backs of my calves, a gift of intimacy.

The following morning the weather had cleared. While waiting at the pier for an early boat out of town, I had a chance to speak to one of the waterfront lads in a more relaxed setting. Mr. John was nineteen. Like many around the world who can't afford formal classes, and some who can, he taught himself English by watching American movies. He was well groomed if in need of a haircut, neatly dressed in frayed clothing, and smelled strongly of the disinfectant soap he jokingly referred to as "Burmese cologne." A motor bike accident had left him with a scar on the left side of his forehead. As he politely asked me questions about my life I realized he was both bright and inquisitive.

He had successfully managed to carve something, no matter how modest, out of the rotten piece of wood he'd been given. He apologized for the day before. During the rainy season it's more difficult to make a living so the guys get frantic when the boats arrive. I know he was working me but also fundamentally telling the truth. When I dissed Mr. Lucky for his overall loutishness, John defended him. "Lucky have many mind ghosts. So he little drink too much."

He asked if when I returned he could take me to a pharmacy that he assured me has a variety of low cost

products. I agreed and paid him for helping me find a seaworthy vessel back to Ranong. A savvy business kid, he gave me a souvenir twenty Kyat note. "To remember your visit to Myanmar."

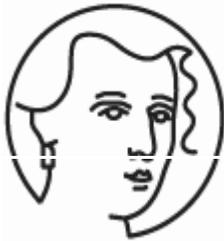
I miss my kid most in the morning. So that's when I call her. At first my wife railed at me. Sometimes I would lose it and rail back. No surprise we found out we have a duplicate pattern of miniature marital ulcers. Who pushes whose buttons first? I think we are equally guilty, but my wife would absolutely disagree. But these lapses of emotional temperance put a heavy burden on our daughter. After my wife told me she never wanted to talk to me again, my daughter would get on the phone and say only, "Hi

Dad. Bye Dad." But that's past for now. My wife is bringing my daughter back to Thailand soon.

I woke up at three AM fretting about my daughter's emotional well being. After an hour of miserable rumination, I sat up in bed and tried deep breathing to relax. I sensed my girl sitting on my lap and felt her hugging me around the waist. "Don't worry daddy. I'll be fine," echoed internally.

I simultaneously observed her sleeping in our bedroom. And for two or three heartbeats in this theoretical exile, we shed the illusion of anguish, and let the anguish embrace us, and the dream, and the daughter, and the dreamer were one.

--



## ASPASIA BOOKS

Established in 1999, Aspasia Books is a publisher of books and CDs designed for those interested in things Finnish: Finnish literature in English translation, Finnish immigration history, language text, children's books, and Finnish cookbooks.

### **Aspasia Books Inc.**

25040 Maple Beach Road, R.R.#1

Beaverton, ON

L0K 1A0 Canada

Tel. 705-426-7290; Fax 705-426-5690;

E-mail: [aspasia@aspasiabooks.com](mailto:aspasia@aspasiabooks.com)      [www.aspasiabooks.com](http://www.aspasiabooks.com)

## Secrets

by Wendy Anderson

All the patching up the two women have done hasn't helped a thing. Rain still squeezes through the cracked slate shingles and tarpaper on the porch, along the eel, into the upstairs hallway, where it drips onto the floor and makes a big brown gob on the ceiling. And Lou's mother, Mae, who is sixty-five, thin, and ferocious in her nagging, still treats Lou as if it were her fault.

Her fault the roof leaks, her fault there's no money to fix it, her fault it's not even mended properly. Her fault, too, that her mother has to stand on a kitchen chair at the top of the stairs to bend at a dizzying angle to spread more spackling paste, readying for another Hebron Marsh winter. She and Lou have gone over this too many times—Lou says she will do more fix-up if her mother will just give her time. Mae says, *You'll never do it. You haven't yet, no matter how much I've asked you to.* Lou says she will too, if her mother will stay down from chairs. Her mother says, *This roof shouldn't even need fixing yet. A good roof should last twenty years.* Lou says that kind of talk does not make things easier. Then Mae says, *He didn't do the job right. He was a lout. Just a lazy no-good lout.* Lou says nothing, but the words sizzle like raw biscuits dropped into hot oil.

She is talking about Dick Bell, a drifter Lou's father, Matti, hired thirteen years ago to replace the roof, when Lou was barely out of high school. He was

older than she by a good ten years and not from around here. He wouldn't say where he came from, which led her to suspect he might be French-Canadian; she'd heard her share of jokes about dumb and dirty Frenchmen, and maybe he had too. Although they were far outnumbered by the big, blond Swedes and Finns like Matti, a number of them worked in the woods and slate pits of this part of Maine. Her own mother was at least partly French, she knew that much. LaPointe was Mae's name before she married Matti Vainio, and she was black-eyed and big bosomed like Lou imagined Frenchwomen to be. Lou was proud she got her looks from Mae. And she was ever grateful she got her quiet nature from her dad.

Dick Bell said he was looking to settle somewhere. Hebron Marsh was nice. Said he liked to hunt and asked about his chance of getting a moose in the fall. Said Louisa was a pretty name, for a pretty girl. He'd give her his hands as she climbed the ladder to fetch him ice-cold water from the sink fed by their well, and they'd sit amid the hammers and nails and big sheets of shingles. He had black curly hair, the darkest eyes, and the biggest arm muscles Lou had ever seen. He was a talker, a looker, and a liar, too, and he disappeared the moment the roof was done. Lou is glad her father died when she was but three months along, before she started to show.

She doesn't know why her mother still brings up Dick Bell. She doesn't

know why her mother brings up a lot of things. Like getting the roof fixed, or last week telling her the posts under the porch were rotting. Just let's fix it all up as best we can and get on with it, is what Lou thinks. They both know she'll never have money for major repairs.

Lou feels like she swims fast all the time against a hard, cold current. They barely get by, she, Mae, and Lou's twelve-year-old daughter, Maddi, on what she makes at Dagel's. Dagel's Diner is one of the last businesses left in these parts since the Portland-Hebron Slate Company shut ten years ago and the schools went south to Farley, with most graduates going farther still. Dagel's holds on because of tourists on their way to Moose Point about forty miles north, home to the biggest recreational lake in the state.

Lou makes a bit extra now on whoopie-pies she sells at the restaurant—both tourists and locals seem to love her cream-filled chocolate-cookie sandwiches—although she has to laugh or cry sometimes, the money is so little. And sometimes she sells Mae's homemade donuts. But Mae doesn't make them as often as Lou wishes she would. Just the other day some fellow stopped by for donuts and left disappointed. Telling Mae about that doesn't matter. Mae has always done pretty much what she pleases.

And that's how it happens one bright-cold Saturday in early October. Lou has just hung the last sheet to snap on the clothesline and is craning to see if that could really be a robin on the fencepost. And Mae, inside, starts to pirouette from where she has reached with a putty knife

toward the ceiling of the upstairs hallway, her leg a bit too close to the chair's edge. She slips and turns slightly, lets out a small shriek, and proceeds to bang her way down those long, uncarpeted stairs before she ends up with her legs akimbo, her head bent at a sharp angle at the bottom, unable to take a breath anymore at all.

Lou puts all this together later. For now, as she rushes from out back, her eyes light on the deepest red around Mae's nose and lips, and she hears an awful sound, like that of some small, frightened animal. She soon realizes the whimpering comes from Maddi, who is crouched a few feet from her grandmother. Near Maddi and Mae in the tight space at the bottom of the stairs, upside down with its leg snapped off, is the damned chair.

Lou concentrates on the scene before her. She wipes the hair from her eyes and looks at Maddi, a deer in the headlights. She is too young for this, Lou thinks. She bends down.

"Ma? Ma, can you hear me? Ma, say something."

Her fingers reach out to touch the thin greying hairline, once thick and dark and glossy. She winces.

"Ma?"

She is almost whispering now, but what she really wants is to slap Mae. To slap her awake. To slap her into saying something.

"Mom?"

Mae does not respond.

Without quite knowing how, Lou finds herself at the phone in the kitchen. Maddi has followed, for she is sitting at the table. Lou picks up the receiver. She

puts it down. Her heart is doing a crazy dance. She fumbles through the cookbooks and cereal boxes and crackers and bread on the counter, then sweeps them all to the floor.

“Dammitall!”

She finally finds, in the spread-out heap, what she is looking for. Inside the phonebook in her mother’s fierce, looping handwriting, are all the numbers she might ever need—Dr. Tobin (home, office), the County Mounties (Mae’s term for the sheriff’s deputies, *blockheads every one*), and Emergency. She dials. She sucks in her breath. When she answers the voice on the other end, she is surprised she sounds normal.

It had been over fast. Lou gets that much from Maddi as they wait for the ambulance to drive the twenty miles north from the Farley hospital. There is no neighbor close enough, in any way, to call.

“She just fell. She was standing on the chair, and she just fell. She screamed, and I ran to see, and it was awful, it was so awful. She just kept falling and bumping, and I couldn’t do anything to stop her.”

Maddi starts to cry then, and Lou reaches for her hand, about to say something to soothe her, when she wells up, too. She cries and cries, and she doesn’t know why. She has never much liked her mother. But Maddi is right; this is really awful. She lets herself bawl and her eyes swell and she can feel the snot on her upper lip and wipes it away with her hand. She and Maddi sit at the table and cry and hold hands until Lou hears the siren tearing up the dirt road in the distance. Then she goes to the pump at the

slate sink that has been there since she can remember, and she splashes ice-cold water on her face. She wets the dishcloth and uses it to wipe Maddi’s face. She smooths back her daughter’s hair and kisses her, firmly, on the forehead. She begins to put back all the things she’d knocked to the floor. She stops and goes onto the porch, to wait.

There is no family to inform of Mae’s death. Matti’s father died years ago when a slab of slate fell and crushed him on the spot. His mother passed one winter from pneumonia. His older brother, Leon, who spoke only Finnish, spent his youth drinking and his final days in the Bangor State Asylum. Lou has a vague memory of a bearlike man talking jibberish from the depths of a huge brown overcoat.

Lou knows Mae came from somewhere far north, but she doesn’t know where. She knows Mae’s mother died when Mae was very small—but not how she died—and she knows her father worked on woods crews. Mae may as well not have had a family for all she mentioned it. The only time she heard Mae speak of her father, it was with venom.

“I *hated* my father. He was a short man, built like a bullet, and he was always cross with me. He made me do all the housework and get the meals on, too, and I was just a little thing.”

Mae said if she did have any family left, it was no one she wanted to know about.

“They’re probably dead, and those that aren’t ought to be. They can go straight to the devil, bunch of lazy no-good louts.”

Thinking about these family connections, and the lack of them, Lou realizes she and Maddi may be the last of a very strange breed.

The next day, the two of them visit the funeral home in Farley. Lou selects a white coffin with gold handles and a red lining. She knows Mae would have hated it, but it is the cheapest one.

She and Maddi also visit Pastor Maki at the Lutheran church in town, who remarks that he never met another woman quite like Mae. She was not the most regular churchgoer, he says, but she had a fiery spirit, and how very good her beans were. Mae was the only woman in town who never missed bringing two big pots to the church suppers, he says, and now she is through with earthly sustenance and tasting the food of Jesus.

Lou doesn't know what to say. She is not altogether comfortable with this church she hasn't been in since she was a teenager, or for that matter with Pastor Maki, whose nose is purple and whose car she's seen more than once in front of the J&T Tavern downriver.

She's not sure Mae believed in God. Specifically, Mae had said, *Any god that would take my Matti the way he did, and let you end up in such a mess, with no life to speak of, is no god to me. Any god who'd let my old legs ache when some of the old bitches in this town prance around like nobody's business is no god to me. Personally I think it's all some foolishness somebody made up to satisfy folks who don't have brains enough to make up their own minds about anything.*

No, Pastor Maki doesn't need to know that Mae, despite her good beans and often-enough attendance, had her own views about religion.

The house takes on new abundance as the sideboard and refrigerator begin to fill. Baked apples. A cherry pie. A roast chicken. Two Jell-O molds, one green with carrots, which elicits from Maddi a big "Ewwwww!" Someone leaves a bag on the porch that contains brownies and a bottle of Peppermint Schnapps. Miss Peck, the bald old postmistress with the hooked nose—who still drives and has to be in her eighties—brings rock-hard molasses cookies, which Maddi tosses to the squirrels. Lou's friend Dee Spack, who manages Dagel's, brings a ham with pineapple sauce.

"Now don't you come back to work till you're good and ready," she tells Lou, as she presses Lou's cheek with her own plump one and enfolds her in big, soft arms. "We'll get along just fine. We always do."

Lou is grateful for this kindness. She knows Dee must be frantic. It is hunting season, the place is packed by five in the morning, and she and Dee are the only waitresses. She thinks that Dee's daughter, Candy, who is seventeen, must be helping out, but she doesn't ask.

In the evenings, Lou slips into pajamas and Maddi gets into her big sweatshirt with the moose, which she wears with red-flannel bottoms. Lou sips the schnapps, sometimes in her tea, and brushes Maddi's long, yellow hair. She is glad for this slow time alone with her

daughter. This time, when Maddi will sit still for her, and talk.

Maddi says she was going to clean her room that morning of the accident, which was why she'd gotten up so early; Maddi had reached the age of sleeping in on weekends. She was under threat: The week before Lou had stuck her head in past the hand-lettered sign DISASTER ZONE—DO NOT ENTER and the David Cassidy poster on the door, and she'd seen enough—the bunched-up quilt on the floor, the dust-coated pant legs and panties and shirtsleeves visible from its folds, the piles everywhere, the brown apple core. She told her in no uncertain terms to clean the mess or stay inside all weekend.

“So I went to the kitchen for cereal, and Gram said I should be ashamed to live in such a pigsty.”

Maddi starts to sputter and cry as she repeats Mae's last spoken words to her only grandchild: *No man will ever want a damned silly girl like you.*

*You're just lazy and no good.*

*You should try a little harder to earn your keep around here. Just whose house do you think this is, anyway?*

Lou rubs her daughter's shoulders and back as Maddi talks. And she cringes. She wishes she hadn't told Maddi to clean up, wishes she'd told her just to get up and go to a friend's house, to have fun. She knows Maddi is mostly a good girl, who sweeps the floor when Lou asks, does the dishes, and half the time gets the meals started. She even brought wild flowers once this summer, and left them about the house in jars. But despite these deeds, she had heard nothing but criticism from her

grandmother her whole life. Just as Lou had.

Just as Matti had. These same types of things, in the same tone, she'd assail her husband with. Called him a damned fool, or worse, a blockhead Finn. Maybe her mother loved Matti once, but Lou never saw it. Whatever he did was wrong. When he got a deer for their freezer, he shouldn't have bothered with such a runt. When he bought her a pretty new coat, why did he pick such a cheap one? When he and Lou drove way downriver to see about a car—his had 150,000 miles, leaked oil, and Mae had been on him—she was mad that they stopped for lunch on the way home.

“Sure, you'll take your little girl out to eat. But you don't take your wife out much, do you?”

To Lou, her mother sucked the joy from everything, and she didn't know why. Mae was an unmatched cook, and Matti never stopped praising her creations, from thick stews to baked mackerel to breads and sweet-smelling pastries. She had gorgeous legs, which Matti often remarked on—“nicest legs in the county”—just as he raved about her voice. She could sing beautifully and did when she was cleaning, sometimes in French, in a manner that was boisterous or overwhelmingly sad. And she kept a spotless house and seemed happy enough when Lou picked up a broom or dust mop to help.

On an old sewing machine she made Lou jumpers and jackets and even a beret of bright-green felt. But then she'd stop speaking to her daughter and husband

for days, for no apparent reason, or she'd disappear for hours.

Lou assumed she went for walks along the woods roads, something she herself loved. But Mae would return from her outings angry and upset and slam around the house. Matti retreated to the barn or garden at these times, but Lou was afraid to. As much as she hated being in the house, she hated more the idea of leaving her mother alone. She was in awe of her mother, and was frightened by, and for, her, too.

She had nothing but adoration for her father. They rambled in the woods, where they saw deer and rabbits, once a bear, and even a porcupine in the crotch of a tree. He taught her to identify stinking Benjamins, trout lilies, lichen, and wild mushrooms. She'd play nearby when he worked in the garden or cut up wood for winter. He, not Mae, planted flowers along the back fence by the field.

From these times Lou learned that he met Mae when he was already in his thirties, and he thought he'd remain a bachelor. He'd gone way up by the border to fish the many lakes there, and she was tending a tiny store. He was pawing through an assortment of sandwiches, and she apparently thought he'd looked enough.

"She said I ought to make up my mind before her eightieth birthday, and that's when I took a look and saw the prettiest thing I'd ever set eyes on."

So Matti's fate was sealed.

Lou's fate was sealed when Matti got sick soon after she graduated from high school. It took hold in midsummer,

and she was bored and restless, working at Dage's and flirting too much with the bored and restless men who stopped to drink coffee and jaw. They distracted her from thinking about her father, who'd grown so thin his clothes shook around him when he coughed. And cough he did, as vigorously as he'd spent his lifetime tearing slate from the belly of the quarries. He took to carrying a coffee tin around the house to spit black phlegm into. There was her shrunken father, setting the tin beside his easy chair as he tried to read the paper or muster the strength to trudge with it up the stairs to bed. Only later, when she had hashed out and rehashed all the tin's meanings to her—how it made her feel embarrassed for him, how it almost made her gag, how it horrified and terrified her to see him this way—did Lou take a more practical view. The can meant he didn't have to take the chance of making it to the bathroom or spilling onto a rug. In the interest of life and a small dignity, Lou decided, Matti was just doing what he could. The thing he couldn't do was spare her.

In the time it took Matti to die in November, Hebron Marsh had grown small and scary to Lou. Years later she is certain this mix of fear and fitfulness—and having begun to grasp that death might be what she saw when she looked at her father—made it easier for her to clutch at things. Things like that lying bastard Dick Bell.

The morning of Mae's funeral is bitterly cold. Lou has tucked Maddi's hair into a long curl down her back, and swept

her own hair up. They are both wearing black wool skirts they dug from their closets, and Maddi's is pinned at the top, because it doesn't fit. They also wear heavy sweaters, Maddi's borrowed from her mother and long enough to cover the pin. Lou lets her wear faintly red lipstick.

The church is cold, despite the turnout—a good one, even though Mae cultivated no one. Lou figures the old timers respected her father enough to attend.

Lou doesn't listen much to Pastor Maki, and she feels strangely detached from the proceedings. She studies the white Jesus attached to the plain wooden cross on the wall behind the pulpit. Even with his eyes closed, he has a look of kindness about him and soft features like a girl's. Lou hopes the pastor is right; she hopes her mother has at last found some relief with Jesus. She believes, as she sits there, that she is just going through the motions, that she has cried for her mother that morning of the accident all she is going to.

Everyone stands for the closing hymn. *Amazing Grace* is the one song she insisted be part of the service, and she had to argue about that. Seems they never sing it here because the ancient, half-deaf organist, Mrs. Plotz, has trouble with it, and the congregation, the one time it tried, couldn't hit the notes. Lou doesn't care; she has always found it to be beautiful. She sang it alone in the woods as a girl, as she sang other songs. Her mother gave her the voice for it, she guesses. She sings it now, robustly. Her voice rings clear and true in her own ears. Normally the song

itself makes her cry, but not today. She feels Maddi's eyes on her, and others watching, too. Listening to her strength.

They come up to her afterward. Dee and her family and the regulars from the restaurant. Miss Peck. People her mother's age. Men she remembers from Matti's quarry days. Maddi's friend, Mary Beth, and a few other schoolmates. Most of them hug her. Some, like Dee and Mary Beth, she even hugs back.

All the while Maddi is by her side, taking her cues from Lou, only she is sniffing and dabbing a tissue at her nose and eyes. Lou rubs her daughter's arm. Mostly she is eager to be done with this. When she thinks she is, she is surprised to see heading toward her old John Kekkinen, widower of Beulah, once Mae's only real friend. Mae and Beulah had gotten into a fight about some silly thing, Lou can't recall, and Mae never spoke to her again. Beulah would call, and Mae would hang up. And when Beulah died in an awful car crash on the Farley road, Mae refused to go to her funeral. Lou remembers her father dressed and ready, and herself, ready to go with him. But Mae would not get dressed and ready. And before they left, her mother turned her back on them.

"Mae was a strange one," old John says to her now.

He is her height and barrel-chested. He has no upper teeth and the effect, with his many wrinkles and the curly grey hair he has let grow long, is to make him look slightly batty.

"Never knew much about her, even Beulah used to say. She was all bottled up

in some way. But I guess people are entitled.”

He takes her hand in both of his large ones. “She was your mother, Louisa. And I am sorry.”

He is so sincere, she feels her eyes start to redden. It takes some coughing and a few tissues from Maddi before she manages to compose herself.

Days have passed, and Lou spends this afternoon, as she has many afternoons lately, going through her mother’s belongings, in drawers and boxes in the closet, in the cedar chest at the foot of her mother’s bed. She already has three bags of clothes for the Salvation Army in Bangor, although she doesn’t know when she’ll drive the seventy miles to get them there. Her mother has more stuff than Lou would have guessed. She has found several bottles of Lily of the Valley perfume, which she doesn’t remember her mother wearing and frankly can’t imagine her wearing, the scent of the daintiest spring flower. She’s found old photos, one of herself as a child, nearly bald with a few sprigs of hair scraped together into a bow, one of Matti standing by an old truck, one of Matti and Mae dressed up like they’re going someplace special. Matti’s arm is around Mae. They look happy.

She has been amazed by the cards Matti gave Mae for Mother’s Days and birthdays. These are big and expensive-looking, adorned with silk hearts or lacy flowers, inscribed with *My love forever! To the best gal in the world! To a good mother and a real peach!* Her favorite is more elaborate. *Never was a flower*

*sweeter than you—a darling lily, a dusty rose, a violet blue.* They are all signed *I love you! Matti.*

She doesn’t remember ever seeing them in the house. She has also found older photos with people she doesn’t know. One woman in a real-fur coat stands by a sled and a horse. This same woman and a man, dapperly dressed, stand by a barn she doesn’t recognize. She wonders, whoever can they be? There are no names, no dates. In a tissue on which her mother faintly etched *Feb. 15*, she finds a dried, crumbling corsage. Several things Mae had dated. No years, but the months and days. She finds that to be odd and annoying.

Lou straightens up and rubs the small of her back. She looks at the clock. She’ll have to get something to eat soon, Maddi will be home. She has but one small pile left, and she wants so much to be through. She picks up the envelope on top and opens it. Inside, on a piece of paper, are these words: *I don’t want a child. Rose said you gave one away once. So give it to someone who does want it.* Spaced apart from those words, are these: *Here’s \$300. Don’t ask again.* Beneath the note, in her mother’s writing, is the notation *arrived from D. Belle Jun. 12.*

Lou is so bowled over, she stops breathing. She reads it again several times. She grabs the envelope from her lap and turns it over. No address. Nothing. She looks at the note once more and turns it over once more. She reads it five or ten or twenty more times. Her heart is beating faster than the moment when she saw her mother at the bottom of the stairs.

She digs through the pile, tearing open everything, searching. She uncovers an old watch, her birth certificate, more cards from her father, and she doesn't care. She starts to go back through the piles she's already gone through. D. Belle. Dick Belle. *Belle, B-e-l-l-e*. Isn't that French? He was not a drifter. He was someone her mother knew and knew where to find. The note is intimate, its mention of Rose. Who is Rose? Was she the woman in the photos? Did she know Dick Belle? How did her mother know either of them? Dick Belle sent her mother money. In June, apparently. Her Maddi was born in May.

*Rose said you gave one away once.* Could he really be talking about a baby? My god, did her mother give away a baby? *Give it to someone who does want it.* Is this Maddi he means? Sweet Maddi? *It?*

Over the next few days, whether she's in the kitchen or in the bathroom or upstairs in her mother's room, Lou goes through papers and belongings over and over. She thinks on things. She drinks tea. She drinks schnapps. She drinks schnapps in her tea. She fixes meals for Maddi but decides, for now, not to tell her anything. She somehow carries on.

As she does this, the wind howls and rain pours down till the earth goes thick with bruises, some six inches deep and some bubbling on the surfaces—a murky black gash. Rain stands in pools around the brown mums and tansies and threatens to uplift them, to hurtle them away.

Anyone would be a fool to live here, is one of the things Lou thinks. She

should have left, even with a baby. She should have taken little Maddi and gotten the hell out.

As she sits in the chair in her mother's room, she is surrounded by Mae's belongings. Small items like cards and cheap, spring-scented perfume. Enormous things like photos of strangers. Her mother's mysterious life. She wonders, very briefly, if there is anyone, anywhere, who could fill her in. She has gone through Mae's items so many times, she can't do it anymore. She has gone again through all the purses, the nightgowns and bras and panties, the pockets of jackets and skirts and slacks. She has pulled out an old suitcase and checked all through it, even its liner, which she cut with scissors, five times. She has done much the same with the drawers, yanked them out and turned them over, looking for hidden compartments or writing or some clue. This news has unhooked her from her moorings.

Who was Rose? Who *was* Dick Belle? There is no one to say. Everyone is dead. Her mother, once fit as a fiddle and strong as an ox. Her father. Not a soul. For twelve years, she believes, the paper she found has sat, neatly folded, in an envelope in a drawer, not twelve feet from where Lou slept. All her mother's remarks and strange behavior take on new meanings. Did her father know who Dick Belle was? Did he know Mae had another baby, maybe before he met her? Is that even true? There is no answer. This story, so new to her, may end right here.

She is too tired to think straight. She can hear a chain saw in the distance,

someone in a shed or beneath a tarpaulin, struggling with remaining wood.

Winter is soon coming and coming hard, Lou can feel that. Any moment she expects to look up and see the rain turn to flakes. Winter with its frozen drifts and banks so high they can keep out the sun for days, she thinks, and then there'll be no chainsaw whine or old flowers standing in the yard like soldiers struck dead. Then there'll be no leaves heaved up in sudden blows along the roadside. There'll be

nothing but white unforgiveness then, buffeting the wall and chilling toes that are propped by a fireside, keeping anyone from venturing far without a fat wool blanket wrapped around her. Then where will I be, she wonders. Dreaming of a boy I may have loved when I was far too young, of all the people I've known and somehow trusted. Or maybe just of a perfect jar of dandelions left on a tabletop and wrapped in green ribbon, for Mom.

--

## Study English at Finlandia University

[www.finlandia.edu](http://www.finlandia.edu)

\*problem solving \* critical thinking \* communication \* writing\*

The English major prepares students to work in positions with a traditional focus on writing, editing, grant production; on the arts; and in education, business, government, and social services. Studies in English also prepare students for graduate study in English, Writing, Communication, TESOL and English Education.



Old Main



Finlandia Hall



Maki Library



## About Our Contributors

**Rekha Ambardar** has published two contemporary novels, *His Harbor Girl* (Whiskey Creek Press) and *Maid to Order* (Echelon Press). She also has over seventy short stories, articles, and essays published in print and electronic magazines, including *The Writer's Journal*, *ByLine*, *The Indian Express*, *WritingWorld.com*. Her mysteries have appeared in *Shots in the Dark* and other mystery anthologies. Ambardar is a regular contributor to *The World and I Online* where she has published articles on current topics. Ambardar is also instructor at the International School of Business, Finlandia University, where she teaches courses in marketing and business communication.

**Wendy Anderson** is a published poet and essayist and a longtime professional writer. She grew up in rural Maine, where her Finnish father taught her to cherish woods, water, and wildlife, while her old-Yankee mom instilled in her a love of "book learning." Wendy has edited for many magazines, including *Chicago* and *Outside*, and her work has appeared on [Bookslut.com](http://Bookslut.com) and in *Down East* and *The Sun*, among others. She taught in the grad-level journalism program at Northwestern University. She leads creative writing workshops in the Chicago area: [www.writersattic.webs.com](http://www.writersattic.webs.com).

**Anita Erola** was born in Lahti, Finland, and has lived in the San Francisco Bay Area since age ten. She graduated from San Francisco State University in 1985 with a Bachelor of Arts in Fine Art, photography emphasis. She is a member of Left Coast Writers, and Poetry Farm of Novato. The latter has published four volumes of members' works. Her writings appear in *Poetry Farmers Almanac, Volumes II, III, and IV*. She is currently working on a memoir about her experiences when she first arrived in the U.S., and attended elementary school, without a word of English in her lunch bag.

**Faye Hirvi** is a poet and song writer. She lives in Toivola, Michigan, near Agate Beach, with her husband Alden and children, Daniel, Megan, and Bobby. Her work has been published in *Treasured Poems of American* (1995), *Ebbing Tide* (1996), *Poetic Voices of America* (1996), *Poetry Gems* (2000), and *A Treasure of Great Poems* (2000). With family and friends, she loves exploring nature and enjoys the beach. Of writing, she says, poetry is the music from her soul.

**Frank Kinikin** has been involved with numerous projects, including writing and directing *Man in the Bath*, for which he received a Drama Critics Circle Award, and his most recent work, *Native Speaker* (2002) was one of the finalists for the Sundance Film Institute Fellowships. He was managing director of the Olympic Theater and creative director of Primary Vision, Inc., and has been a guest lecturer on both financing and creative development in the motion picture industry. He also served as a screenwriting instructor at the Playwright's Center. Kinikin was a guest lecturer at Marmara University, Istanbul, at the invitation of the United States Information Agency and the Turkish Cultural Ministry. He was also an honored guest at the Istanbul International Film Festival. Kinikin is a former member of the Board of Directors of the American Arts Festival, Episcopal Group Homes, the Screenwriters' Workshop. He was also a member of the Writers' Guild of America, and a Director of the Eagle Tail Wilderness Society. During his stay in Korea, Mr. Kinikin has brought his unique

creative perspective to his job as an English professor at Dongju College in Busan. Frank.Kinikin currently resides in Korea with his wife and daughter.

**Jeanne Maki** is a native Minnesota Iron Ranger of the war baby generation. After forty years of city life, she returned to her first home, her maternal grandparents' farm in Idington. She meets monthly with fellow writers who provide her with motivation, encouragement and a little discipline. Most of her writing is creative nonfiction and poetry, based on observation and memory.

**Mary Kay McAllister** writes from Juno Beach, Florida, where she has lived half her life. She fell in love with the short story form as a teen-ager and has since added the short-short story and flash fiction as new favorites. "One of my first jobs was writing label copy. Maybe that's what did it." She believes firmly in writing groups. McAllister's publishing credits include *Thema*, *Sunscripts* and *The Houston Literary Review*.

**Elaine Moe** is a Massachusetts native currently residing in the western Massachusetts town of Conway. She has twice visited Finland, from which all four of her grandparents emigrated. Elaine began writing poetry in high school and has had an "on-again, off-again" relationship with it most of her life. She has placed twice as a winner (second place and honorable mention) in the Worcester County Poetry Association's annual poetry contests. Her poetry has appeared in *The Worcester Review*, *Peregrine*, and *Southern New Hampshire University Journal*, as well as the *Raivaaja* newspaper.

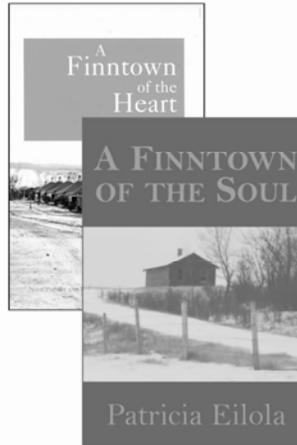
**Johanna Rauhala** has taught English and history in California public schools for fourteen years. Her parents are both from Finland, and both her mother and brother have recently moved back. Johanna enjoys reading, writing, Middle Eastern dance, hiking, and history. She's currently finishing her MA in Creative Writing at San Francisco State University and enjoys spending time with her husband and little girl.

**Aoise Stratford** has an MFA in writing from the University of San Francisco. Her stories have won several awards including the Writer's Digest Literary Story Award, and the Philadelphia Writers' Conference Literary Story Award. She has been a finalist for the Julia Peterkin Short Story Award and a Runner Up for the Reynolds Price Award. Her stories have appeared in *Zaum*, *Santa Clara Review*, *City Works*, and others. She is also a widely produced playwright. Her website is located at [www.aoisestratford.com](http://www.aoisestratford.com).

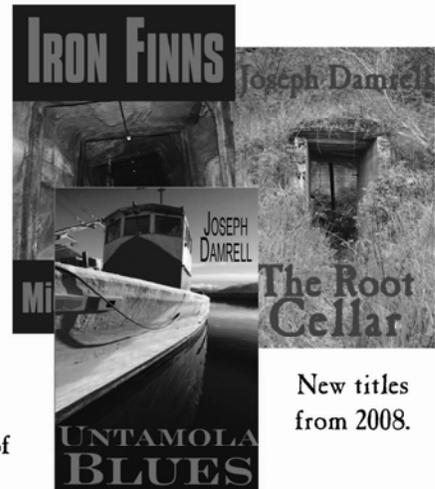
## Finnish-American Titles from North Star Press



*Mosquito Conversations*, the new book from Lauri Anderson that Beth Virtanen says is "not to be missed!"



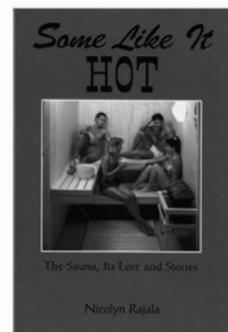
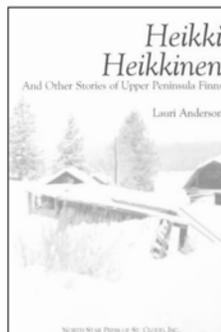
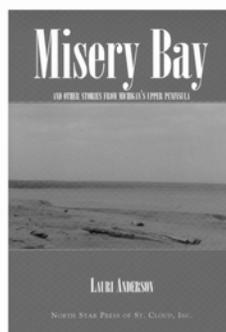
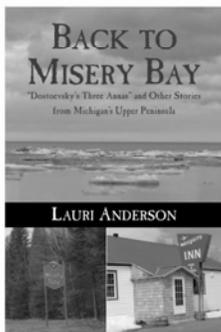
*A Finntown of the Soul*, winner of Best Fiction in the Northeastern Minnesota Book Awards, and sequel to *A Finntown of the Heart*.



New titles from 2008.

North Star Press is your source for good fiction, histories, poetry, and memoirs of the Finnish-American experience from authors such as Lauri Anderson, Joseph Damrell, Patricia Eilola, and many more.

Visit our website at [www.northstarpress.com](http://www.northstarpress.com) to order.  
ORDER **THREE** BOOKS AND RECEIVE FREE SHIPPING.  
ORDER **FIVE** BOOKS TO GET FREE SHIPPING & A FREE T-SHIRT!





## THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

### Why Scandinavian Studies at UW-Madison?

The Department of Scandinavian Studies, established in 1875, is the oldest such department in North America. It offers comprehensive study of the language, literature, and culture of the Nordic countries at undergraduate and graduate levels. Courses in the following areas are currently offered by the Department on a regular basis: Danish, Norwegian, Swedish, Finnish, and Old Norse-Icelandic language; Scandinavian linguistics, Scandinavian literature, Old Norse-Icelandic literature; and Scandinavian folklore. Advanced seminars and directed courses are also offered in all these areas.

### Who is Scandinavian Studies?



Julie Allen	Danish & German literature, cultural studies
Susan Brantly,	Swedish literature
Thomas DuBois	Folklore, Finnish & Sami culture, Viking Age religion
Peggy Hager	Norwegian, SLA, CALL
Jim Leary	Scandinavian American folklore
Scott Mellor	Language, folklore, literature
Nete Schmidt	Danish language, Scandinavian literature, area studies
Tanya Thresher	Norwegian lit., Scand. drama & film, postmodern narrative
Kirsten Wolf	Old Norse-Icelandic language & literature, Scandinavian linguistics

### What programs are offered in Scandinavian Studies?

Undergraduate: The department provides the opportunity to learn a Scandinavian language (Danish, Finnish, Norwegian, Sami, Swedish and occasionally modern Icelandic). The literature, folklore, and culture of the Nordic countries are taught both in the original languages and in English translation. Partly in cooperation with other departments, courses in Scandinavian Areas Studies are offered (history, social institutions, geography, art, archaeology). Students who major in the field may continue on in graduate study.

Graduate: Students may earn a master's degree in Scandinavian Philology, Literature, or Area Studies and continue on toward a Doctor of Philosophy degree in literature, philology or Scandinavian Folklore.

Visit us: <http://scandinavian.wisc.edu>