
Half Full

Literary Zine of the OUUC Women Writer's Group

December 2017



Photo by Nancy Pierce

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The OUUC Women Writer's Group is for women wanting to be inspired, supported, or accompanied upon their journey of self-expression and creativity. We meet at the Browsers Bookshop in downtown Olympia from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. on the first and third Saturdays of the month. For the first hour or so, we read work that our members have brought and give gentle feedback. Towards the end of the meeting we generate new work inspired by a writing prompt. We strive to publish a zine every other year. After publishing a zine, we have an open enrollment period when we invite new members to join. If you would like more information about our group, email Amy at awakewalking@gmail.com.

Soul Retrieval

By Josie Solseng

A part of me is missing
Not a finger or an eye or anything
You can see. Nothing quite so obvious
A piece of my soul, she said.
I can't feel the emptiness,
There's no hole I can point to
And say, ah, there's the spot that
Needs patching. Let me get my tools.

A piece of my soul, she said.
Not quite ready to come back
Still out tilting at windmills
Sword fighting with demons
Or whatever yang soul parts
Like to do for fun. Or maybe
Just bored, looking for trouble
Waiting for my call.

We're a little scared of each other
Last time we were together
You left quickly, knowing
I'd be safer without
Your fiery restlessness.
I became less of a target
And I thank you for that gift
Though I missed you fiercely.

Peace of my soul.



Forsaken

By Maureen Canny

As if alive
An organism
Cleanses quenches ebbs
Seeps into every space
Liquid tentacles reaching for perch
Upon an impervious land
That won't let it settle

This creature
Inviolable they used to say
Purity now eroded
Poisoned by greed
Forced into grimy action
Pumped and fracked
Wasted and defiled

A soul
Freed from its frozen barges
Melts drips cracks
Pure molecules tainted by salty ions
Nauseous with brackish bitter taste
Creeps beneath a parched earth
Spawning drought and thirst
Heat and levels rise
Vaporizing temperamental liquid
Into a cloying mist

A force
Placid no more
Its glacial speed revved up
Unleashed interplay
Matter energy fury
Precipitating deluges
Swamping torrents
Violent surges
Hell breaks loose
Its now fickle phases
Solid liquid gas
This abused servant
Fights back

Early Release Wednesday

By Anne Kohlbry

November's torrential rain continues
cars whoosh through puddles
spray arching to the curb

I stride towards the park
cinching my hood
postponing tonight's homework
grateful for even dim daylight
wanting solace

Turning into the woods
I enter nature's cathedral
towering trees flank the trail
lichen and ivy-clad trunks darkened
their branches partially bare

Moved by fall's bittersweet beauty
my focus draws inward
dear ones' absent presence envelops me
a poignant reminder of their loss
seasons we will never share

Melancholy closes in like a vise grip
waning freedom—
schoolyear constraints
waxing darkness—
workweeks never feeling sunlight
winter's windy wetness
strings of solitary evenings

My damp boots tread on autumn's crazy quilt
a yellow, brown, and fir-needle copper calico
soon to blanket every fern and nurse-log
when the last leaves
release
softly spiraling
their purpose transformed
forever

Yet even as my heart aches
weighted with another ending
the forest lifts my spirits
revealing not loss
but completeness
the rightness of rhythms

Suddenly
beneath the canopy of big leaf maples
an ethereal golden glow
illuminates the rain-spattered woods
snatches my breath
pulling me back to this holy Now

I return to the road
glistening under streetlights
knowing this, too,
is sacred



Before

By Ali Foster

I envy how your father died.
My mother died too,
Only my mother
Turned from me
When she was
Five years old or so,
Though she couldn't remember
Because she wore a Southern Belle
Smile painted over her trauma.
Even at the end
Of a white corridor, in a white room,
My mother didn't speak my name.
She was in a polite coma
When I came. The only sound was her
Breathing. She did that
Darth Vader-death-bed-rattle.
It wasn't peaceful or noble.

The room wasn't sterile either.
Everyone always says that
About hospital rooms
But really they are the dirtiest places.
They're like subway stations:
Babies come in,
Dead people go out,
Ladies and germs.
Like my father
He was a germ,
Or so I thought. He was a virus
A desperate alcoholic
Stealing from my mother
What little life
She had. Not that
She didn't want him to.

Later, I knew my mother
Had wanted to die
Ever since age five or so
When something happened
Where she lost part of herself
And another part of her went
Looking for it.

The part that stayed ate
Eggs every day. She told me,
She was raising her cholesterol
To die young like her mother.

She'd hoped for a heart
Attack. She got cancer. So,
I was angry for a long time
When I realized that
She knew she had a lump
That she carried next to her
Heart for years before
The doctor cut it out
So she could live. But
It was so very late for that.

In the hospital room,
As her breathing stopped,
I held her hand as one tear fell
From her dry eyes that were
Frozen open on death.

It was too much
A tragedy for me then.
To know only her
Shell self,
To see the half of her
Slip from me
In that way.
I couldn't
Let go and
Part of me too
Left with her.
I could not mourn well
Because I believed
That for her there was
No escape,
No sterile room,
No blackout to end the act,
Only her remains,
And a ghastly
Twilight.

Poetry Lays Bare

By Maureen Canny

I don't really do poems
My writing is more like prose
Stretched out in short lines
On a page

No rhyme or rhythm
No subtlety or subtext
I may tell a sappy story
Or bemoan injustice

No deep undertones
No double entendres
No furtiveness

Real poetry exposes a shadow side
Involves dismantling barricades built
To protect my soul
From being laid bare



Beside Myself

By Maureen Canny

She hovers
Watching me
Make the chili dinner we often shared
She stays close
As I glean the last of the fall harvest
A shadow
Not menacing
Not angry

I glance at her
More than twenty years of her
A ghost beside me offering comfort
As I remain
Grieving, unsettled
Beside myself



Beloved

By Maureen Canny

She misses him
At night, in particular
He's been away healing
A Rumi poem

Sensuous and tender
She reads to her husband of sixty years
A woman so deeply in love
Passionately voicing
In front of all of us
Her desire for intimacy
Her longing
Beyond duty and devotion
Resilient, robust
Yearning

Westport

By Anne Kohlby

I

Mounds of white shell shards
scattered bits of driftwood
fractured fronds of seaweed
ocean beaches shout impermanence

One blink

one crushing wave stretching
foam-edged fingers up the sand
all disappears
death and destruction
inescapable

Sandpipers scurry
racing receding waves
thrusting their beaks into saturated sand
foamy froth shudders against raging gusts
shedding blobs that wobble then fly
rising into mist

I stride doggedly
hood tight against driving rain
face dripping
grateful being a part
however briefly

II

Returning from the jetty at first light
I notice them
most broken
but a few whole, white discs
intricate center inscriptions intact
not even a tiny pecked puncture
I hardly believe my luck

All the way back I stoop
thumbs emerging from mitts to lift
first one
then another
lily side up
edges buried in dark sand



Suddenly I picture Longboat Key's white sands
that 1968 spring break of firsts
first flight
first palm trees
first ocean
turquoise and powerful
offering sand dollars to the earliest eagle eye

Intrigued by their legendary markings
thrilled by the challenge
I stalked the tideline at sunrise each morning
filling a box with white treasures

But here the rain slants
wind wallops
gray surf pounds
remorselessly

Midday, heading south at low tide
I carry a bag
seeking More
spotting More
collecting More
until the sheer profusion of perfect specimens
wakes me up

At last light I walk in gratitude
leaning into buffeting gusts
savoring the surf's thunder and whispered retreat
crunching through piles of crumbled shells
admiring dozens of sand dollars
leaving all in place

White Noise

By Josie Solseng

Reeds and twigs poke up
Through the chardonnay sea
Sprigs of brilliance
Ferns unfurled
Blossoms of shy beauty

Everywhere I look there are
Branches with buds
Inviting me to write
Begging me to compose
Scaring me with urgency

I stop at the store for
A nice bottle of white
Noise to hush their voices
Remove me from the responsibility
Of tending these sprouts

When the sea rises
The surface turns glassy
Not a tendril in sight
The writing stops
The music drowns

Sister Scorn

By Josie Solseng

Her words hit me square
In the chest, an arrow
Of scorn piercing
My heart, tears
Burning my cheeks
Shame staining my breast
No shield at the ready
For sister judgement.

Those same words spoken
By anyone else
I could catch
In mid-air
Flinging them back
Absorbing not a syllable
Her words smother me
In congealed contempt.

Sister words are heavy
Weighted with family stories
Casting me in amber
That I've long since shed
A lash of her tongue
Pins me down
And I struggle
To breathe.



Fade Out

By Josie Solseng

Cancer ate him up
From the inside
The hungrier it got
The less appetite he had
For donuts or steak
Gardening or life.

That August afternoon
He intended to nap
And fell asleep forever.
He woke on the other side
Sure he'd been drinking
Seeing his dead parents.

He had always believed
Once you're dead, you're dirt
But he might have been wrong
Vaguely aware of his wife's sobs
His kids making phone calls
His cats meowing for him.

End of Term

By Anne Kohlby

The ebb tide carves a path
across the sand
to the Sound
as wind wafts waves
incessantly
covering each Now
in a blink

Now you
too
are leaving
carving
a path across my heart

To whom then
shall I write my poems
without a mirror as witness?
Having glimpsed my reflection
in your presence
I feel a spark
a whisper
a bud

*It's not that you can't stay in touch
you won't
you let go like the beach
holding and releasing with equanimity
whines my inner child
yearning
despite your unwavering
No.*



After

By Ali Foster

I cannot write cool
Poems any more
Than I can despair
Or talk
Of death like it is
A winking out of
A never-more-ness
An agnostic theory of
Non-exist-ence

Not since
My dog died happily
At the vet's

She was
The last vestige
Of a marriage I wanted
To be without
And when the car
Hit her
It was
As though I had
Dreamed it
Wanted it
And I knew in that moment
A dread, remembering it
As she sprang
Away from me
Running joyfully into traffic
And I could not
Call her back

I could *never*
Call her back

She was her own
And I simply lucky
To have been
Her companion
Good dog
Bad dog
Nice me
Mean me
Just Us

But I ordered her to die
In the little room
Of our 24 hour Emergency
Where We lay
Whimpering
My hand on her chest
Trying to be
Brave enough
As We breathed together
I understood
What it meant to have
A blank mind
For when I tried to think
The unthinkable
My mind slipped
Sideways into Nirvana
And saw without seeing the
Unmistakable shimmering that
Crazy people talk about

IT was
A golf-ball sized globe
Vibrating
A few inches above
The rising
And falling of her
Body where it lay
Yet she was in the glowing
The essence of my dog
And It, She
Was more excited
Than I'd ever seen her
Even when I came home
After a long trip
And that is saying something
Because this dog loved
Me and I her
More than anything
Or anyone, ever
She was my heart
My baby after my miscarriage
My lover during my divorce
My family after it

Yet she ran straight
Into traffic
And now she wanted
To leave

And I knew as I felt
Her soft fur
And saw her soul
Her SOUL!
Rising
That she had places to go
Friends to see
And the trembling thread
That held her here
She held out to me
Like a child with something
That needs to be
Cut

And so I got the doctor
And did as my dog asked

And in that hanging
Moment
After the injection
She turned her head
Her eyes seeking mine
She looked to Me
Not recognizing
The sensation of death
Claiming her body
My Dog
Looked to me
Asked me for understanding
Before obeying my final command
And leaving me
No longer the skeptic
My mind blown
Apart. I knew nothing
After I had done it but
Before I threw up
What it meant
As I sat with her body
Stiffening under my hand

My unfamiliar mind
Blank
But for one impossible image
A shimmering
That erased myself
Replacing it with the
Knowledge that I had been
Horror of all horrors
Born Again
In all it's cliché glory
I was
The weeping Marys
And the laughing
Buddha with my hands in the air
Surrendered to the shimmering
Light and all
The colors of the rainbow
And Pain
Beyond anything I had ever been
Warned about
I knew then, after
She had gone
But before
I walked out of the emergency
And threw up in the bushes
I knew
I would never get to sit sullen

In a bar with jaded poets
Or read Nietzsche without pity
Or talk of abortion
As though choice were easy
Or of my mother
Who raced towards death
Leaving me
Nested in a hardened house of cool
A beatnik in black shades
Provisioned as I thought I was
With dark poems for all time
Until the dog died happily
And set Me free
Cool falling from my eyes
Colors shimmering
In the dirt where I threw up
Kneeling before my mother's cross
My dog's cross
And every cross
In every graveyard, now
And for all time, Sweet
Mother of Dog!
I say unto you,
Peace
Joy and Howl
Howwwwwl
Howl-lelujah!



Close Encounter

By Anne Kohlby

Shiny splashing near Priest Point
seal?

just a sea bird?
from afar I can only hope
and paddle nearer

yes
yes!
now your smooth round head
is unmistakable
sleek wet fur
dark puppy eyes
long silver whiskers

I stroke slowly
singing softly
gliding without a ripple
thrilled you're lingering
lured by my song

our eyes lock
suspending time

but
your quivering
nostrils flare
and close
as you tip back your muzzle
to slip beneath the glassy surface
a mirror for me
a window for you

I pull back my paddle
propelling forward
alone
wistful
hoping you'll reappear

Kersplash!

I whip around
expanding circles sparkle
right beyond the stern

so you *do* want to connect...
on your terms

Cabin on Guemes

By Josie Solseng

I heard a rumor
You might sell the cabin
I'm not supposed to be here
I needed to see it again

The quiet is unsettling
I'd like to stay for a week
Drop into myself completely
And hear my own voice again

On the beach, waves lap unendingly
Gulls cry, carrying on a conversation
Or maybe an argument
I disturb a heron's focus and she flies off

A few things are different
But when I go looking for a napkin
I know right where to find them
Second drawer down, next to the sink

If I had a chunk of money
I'd buy it myself, knock it down
And start over. Build again
Away from the encroaching beach

Maybe I'd decide to live here
Year round, few people do
Learn to set crab pots and dig clams
Learn the names of the ferry crew



Cat Tactics During Meditation

By Anne Kohlby

Oly

By Amy Taylor

Meow
insistently
rub cheek against hand, nudging it off her knee
dig claws into upholstered chair beside her
repeat
sniff other hand
lick the closest finger
scratch behind ear with back foot
momentarily distracted

jump onto buffet and nibble new plant
land behind her
on all fours
leap onto piano keys
bat the pencil onto hardwood
chase till it disappears under sofa
pin down tail to clean
momentarily distracted

softly step onto lap
place paws on her shoulders
nose to nose
mew
knead cushy lap blanket with front feet
turn 180'
relax
settle
cross paws on wrist
rest chin on paws
purrr....

Raccoons steal
Into our yard
Making off with
The raspberries
And I am glad
To know that lawlessness
From furry footed anarchists
Is alive and well
In the capital
Of Washington state



Blue

By Josie Solseng

Blue
As sky
At twilight
A bit of green
Turns heavenly teal
Till stars appear
Moon light shines
Fades to
Black

These Women Who Write

By Maureen Canny

They draw me in
Their compassionate verses
Their perseverance, and prodding
Keep molding the clay

They teach me to document
My rage, joy, curiosity

That spoken conversation only dances around
They know how hard it is to write
How vital it is that we do

Feeling nerdy at first
They are so cool
I get to learn new stuff about chakras
Poetry slams and anthroposophy
And how to wrestle life's intangibles

I witness word combinations
Graceful, powerful, purposeful

They express with such clarity
And discernment
Their beautiful stories
Rich fodder of humor and surprise
Even their tragedies nourish me
Reveal the remarkable depths
To which a soul can be mined

I tread all over genres and styles and topics
Invited to participate in this process of creation
A garden poem, a rant about politics
Or a gentle letting go of despair

I cannot *not* write
I have been lassoed by
These women who write.

