



Bethlehem Writers Roundtable

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The Magazine of the Bethlehem Writers Group

Issue No. 61, Summer, 2020

BWG is happy to announce the winners in the 2020 Short Story Award

First Place

"Hubbard Had a Fancy Bra" by Brett Wolff, Sierra Madre, CA

Second Place

"Cosway's Confidence" by Paula Gail Benson, Columbia, SC

Third Place

"Last But Not Leashed" by Alexandra Otto, Kodiak, AK

Honorable Mentions

(in alphabetical order by author's last name)

"Wabbit's Carat" by Debra Goldstein, Birmingham, AL

"The Elevens" by Louella M. Nelson, Lake Forest, CA

"Clover" by Ramona Scarborough, Salem, OR

Watch for our Fall issue, where we will publish some of these stories.

Editor's Note



A.E. Decker

Crazy times.

There's really no other way to put it, is there? Meaning no disrespect to those who struggle with mental illnesses, the year 2020 has thus far been one wild ride. I hope you and yours are well, readers, even as I know that all of us are not. At the time I'm writing this editor's note, the USA has lost over 110,000 lives to COVID-19. There's been rioting in our streets as a system of injustice has (finally!) come under scrutiny.

I hope you are well. But beyond that, I hope we all come out of these crazy times better. Stronger. More compassionate. More thoughtful. More just.

In times of trouble, people turn to the

Our Featured Author ... The Top Ten ...

My top ten sources of inspiration:



Matias F. Travieso-Diaz is a Cuban-American engineer and attorney, retired after a half-century of professional practice. Since retiring, he has taken up creative

1. Classical and modern short story writers (Maupassant, O'Henry, Twain, Borges, Cortazar, etc.)

2. Mythological stories

3. Classical and operatic music

4. Landmark moments in history

5. Fairy tales

6. Cuban folklore

7. Biblical themes

8. Technological developments

9. Current events

10. And, last but not

arts, not only for a distraction, but also in search of answers and inspiration. Here at the *Bethlehem Writers Roundtable*, we and our featured authors are proud to offer our craft toward those ends. May reading these stories and poems bring you pleasure and comfort in these crazy times.

And yes, I realize it's a little on-the-nose that this issue's theme is Lazy, Hazy, Crazy. I assure you we didn't plan it that way!

Our featured story in this issue is "Tiger by the Tail," by Matias F. Travieso-Diaz, which spins a tale of jealousy and the misuse of power that resonates in these times, while James Thurgood's featured poem, "To a Teacher in Kangwon Province," details a friendship created despite cultural differences. Other stories include Don Noel's "Rescue," Heather M. Browne's "Splitting," and Peter DiChellis's "Hidden."

As usual, we also have our usual Betty's tips to help the writers among us perfect their craft, and our Literary Learnings column, penned this month by editor Jerome McFadden, who is also our guest interviewee.

writing and authored many short stories of various genres. His stories have appeared or are scheduled to appear in more than 20 magazines, including the New Reader Magazine, the Dual Coast Magazine, the Lite Lit One Journal, the Theme of Absence Magazine, the Night to Dawn Magazine, the Jerry Jazz Magazine, the Dream of Shadows Magazine, Jitter Press; the Bethlehem Writers Roundtable, Emerging Worlds, the Patchwork Raven, Czykmate Productions - How HORROR-able Anthology, the New Orbit Magazine, Clarendon House - Maelstrom: The Inner Circle Writers' Group Literary Anthology 2019, the New Accelerator, Tell-Tale Press, Gypsum Sound Tales, Alban

least, my own dreams and nightmares

We also have two exciting announcements to make. We have the winners for our 2020 short story competition. Check the heading for the names, and congratulations to all who participated. Second, in 2021, we hope to begin a column where we review the works of independently published authors. If you've written a novel or memoir and are seeking a little publicity, please consider submitting your work for our review. Details are given in this issue's Readers Review column.

That's it for this month's editor's note. Stay safe, and happy reading!

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present the work**

Lake Publishing –
Frostfire Worlds,
Selene Quarterly
Magazine, Somos en
Escrito, *the Literary
Hatchet*, and
Aurora Wolf.

A Tiger by the Tail

*Matias F. Travieso-
Diaz*

He was in the predicament of a man who had got a tiger by the tail – it was neither safe to hold nor let go. – Chinese (?) proverb

He circled the display table three times before he made up his mind. Among the countless drawings, portraits, pictures of angels, demons, shepherds, maidens, and other objects of diverse shapes and colors, he finally selected a hand-sized blue ensemble that appeared to represent a boy, head a tad too large

of established and emerging writers to enable them to receive attention from readers and other writers. Feel free to submit your comments using our [Submission/Contact form](#).

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but otherwise finely carved, holding onto the tail of some unrecognizable animal, threateningly turned towards its captor. He carefully picked up the bauble and declared: "I guess I will do this one."

The Proctor shrugged. "Well, I will enter it in the ledger. Remember, you have one week to do an analysis of the candidate and submit a report. Next Monday, by noon." The Examiner looked again at the lapis-lazuli lump of carved stone and read the tag dangling from a cord on the animal's neck. "Vanessa Lynn. # 34887-C. Chatham House." He sighed.

As an upper class man, it was his chore of interviewing potential candidates for admission into the Art School. He hated this. Ninety-five out of a

hundred times, he had to hand out disappointment to worthy, but not worthy enough, applicants. It was not fair. But of course he had made it in three years ago even though his skills as an abstract painter were middling. He should not be complaining.

* * *

“Why do you want to enter the Art School?” He was mechanically going through the list of questions.

The girl’s unseeing eyes were aimed at a spot on the back wall of her small apartment. “That should be obvious,” she replied. “What job can a blind girl aim for, when all the skills she has are on the tips of her fingers?” There was bitterness and defiance in her reply.

“But most art forms are unavailable to you, Miss Lynn. Even as a sculptor

your range of activities would be limited. You would not be able to do large bronzes, and even man-sized work may be denied you because your subjects might refuse to let you touch them with the frequency and intimacy that is required. And....”

She interrupted him, not trying to disguise her scorn: “I am not the first, or only, blind person who has succeeded as a sculptor. Think of Tagliaferri, Ellis, Naranjo, many others. And I can not only sculpt, but do wood carvings, textiles. It is only the prejudice of the seeing ones that keep us back.”

“That is all well and good, signorina. But why should the greatest art school in the world give up one of the few available places in this year’s class to someone who admittedly has a serious handicap

that would require extra care and attention, and whose prospects as an artist are dubious?”

Vanessa frowned, but her answer shot out like a dart: “First, because I am better than most of your applicants, as you must have noticed. Second, because I am sure my name will add luster to your school’s fading reputation. And third, because I am a woman and a blind one at that – you guys owe me.”

It was the Examiner’s turn to frown. “Fading reputation? How do you mean?” This interview was going nowhere fast.

Again, the reply came without hesitation: “Come now, sir. There have been at least three major scandals concerning your faculty and students in the last five years. You are a favorite of the tabloids.

Donations are
dropping; it is all
over the papers.
Sexism is one of the
lesser sins of which
you stand accused.”
Her voice had
climbed until it was
almost a shriek.

The Examiner
stopped to consider
what his next
question should be.
“What makes you
think you are better
than the other
applicants?”

Her answer was
prompt: “You have
in your possession
my study of a boy
and a tiger. The boy
I carved from my
next-door
neighbor’s son.
Obviously, I have
not been able to
touch a tiger. Isn’t
that good enough to
get me in?”

The Examiner
opened his satchel.
The boy was indeed
finely rendered:
expressive face
showing stress and
puzzlement;
straining arms,
bulging chest
muscles, feet tightly
planted on the base

of sculpture. The animal, though, was something else: a large, misshapen lump with four stubby extremities and a cavern of a head from which protruded rows of sharp teeth.

“Couldn’t you have done better on the tiger? Maybe used a cat as a model?”

This time she hesitated a second before replying.

“The tiger can be anything. One’s fears and emotions, the threats of the world, the vagaries of ill luck. There is only one boy, there are many tigers.”

“That may be as you say, but as it is what I am holding is an imperfect work, which does not fully show what talent you possess.”

For the first time, there was a touch of doubt in her answer. “Well, let me prove it to you.”

“How? I am only allowed to judge

based on the sample you submitted.”

The girl took a deep breath and said in a low voice: “Let me do a sculpture of your head. I can have it ready by Thursday. If it does not satisfy, you can give me a bad report.”

The Examiner shook his head vigorously. “That is totally outside the rules. If you succeeded in persuading me that way, it would be unfair to every other candidate.”

She was almost crying now. “Fair? What is fair? Is being born blind fair? Is being born a woman fair? Is it fair that you can’t understand what it means to be faced with all these tigers?”

The familiar pain struck him again. Why did he have to be the one to crush another person’s hopes? Why couldn’t the faculty

do this? This was of course another test that the students of the Art School had to go through in order to graduate. He sighed.

She heard the sigh and brightened up at once. "See, you know it is not fair. Why don't you give me a chance to prove myself to you?"

"My opinion does not count. You might as well try to convince that fruit seller down the road."

"It counts for me. If I convince you, I will at least feel somewhat vindicated."

He pondered at this for a long moment. Finally, he shrugged his shoulders and said: "So be it. I will let you do a sculpture of my head. But it will not count officially towards my report. I will have to base it on your boy with a tiger by the tail."

“Thank you very much. When can we start?”

* * *

He was amazed how quickly she worked. Just two sittings, Tuesday and Wednesday, and a model was done. She had gone through his face over and over, as if trying to memorize his every feature, even the frown which betrayed his uneasiness. He looked at the misshapen lump of clay, and could not recognize any part of him. Was she some kind of a fraud?

Late Thursday night a boy delivered a message. Just three words. “It is ready.”

Friday morning found him at the door of her Chatham House apartment. He could not hide his curiosity: while the girl seemed talented, her technique baffled him. Not that it

mattered; it would have to be great for him to ever pay attention to it.

She opened the door at the second knock and ushered him into the small living room. “Just one moment, please,” she said as she retreated into what was probably her studio (and bedroom). “Please take a seat.”

The Examiner lowered himself into an armchair and readied himself to wait. But the wait was short: soon Vanessa returned, holding an object under a stained piece of cloth.

“Here it is,” she announced, placing the object on a small table by the armchair. With a flourish, she peeled away the cloth and took two steps back.

The Examiner gasped, and then remained silent for a very long time. He was staring intently at the small stone

bust that contained
a miniature
rendering of his
face. The
resemblance was
uncanny: it was
him, and then it was
more than him...
The statue captured
his features, yes, but
it also conveyed
ambition, thinly
contained rage,
envy,
ruthlessness.... All
the feelings that he
thought he hid so
well, and now lay
bare right in the
open. He was
confused, and then
bafflement gave way
to alarm: nobody
should be allowed
to see this, know
him as he truly was.
His career had not
yet taken off, but if
this damnable
portrait was seen
outside this room, it
never would. It
must be destroyed.

He rose slowly and
cleared his throat.
“Miss Lynn, this is a
fine work. Let me
take it with me and
ponder over the
weekend what light
it casts on your
application.”

As he hurried to the door, her words chased after him: “Thank you, sir. But please take care of that little trinket. I would like to get it back as a reminder of our meetings.” Then, after a short pause: “In any case, I shall depend on your integrity and good judgment.” Was there a touch of irony in her words?

* * *

It was a difficult weekend for the Examiner. Disposing of the bust was not the problem: he had barely arrived at the school workshop when, armed with a heavy hammer, he was destroying the evidence of his true character to bits. The question was what to do about the blind girl’s application.

He debated the question in his mind day and night. On the one hand, he was assuredly in the presence of a true and rare genius, one

who could bring needed luster to the Art School. However, if admitted she would require extra accommodations due to her handicap, and any inconvenience she might cause could be blamed on him. Also, if she was let in, what prevented her from visiting the same type of mischief upon others in the faculty, or doing other work that was too revelatory to be appreciated? She was clearly dangerous, and whatever ills she brought might be laid at his feet for getting her admitted.

Late Sunday night, he finally decided: he could not let her in. Whatever justice and fairness might have called for, he was going to take no chances with his career. He was aware of his limitations as an artist and the need to curry favor with the faculty. And,

behind it all, a little mouse gnawed at his heart, observing: “And she is a much finer artist than you will ever be.” He retired and slept through the night.

The following morning, he wrote a short memo to the Admissions Committee, justifying the rejection this way: “Miss Lynn is a serious artist who has managed to overcome a severe handicap to create interesting work. Yet her art is uneven, as shown by her clumsy attempt to create an image of a tiger. Admitting her would be a gamble that this school need not make. I recommend she not be admitted.”

* * *

Years passed. The Examiner became the Dean, the School prospered. Each new incoming class seemed more talented and promising than

previous ones. All was well in the art world.

One Friday morning, while thumbing through the announcements in the Times' Weekend Arts section, the Dean stumbled upon an advertisement by one of the finest galleries in the city: "The Seven Deadly Sins – Sculptures and Other Works by a Major New Artist – Vanessa Lynn – Opening October 3." The ad included a picture that the Dean knew very well: a teenage boy holding for dear life onto the tail of a misshapen monster.

No doubt, the prudent thing was to stay clear of this exhibition. Yet he could not help himself, and it was with a blend of curiosity and dread that he arrived in the gallery. He was late; the opening reception was winding down, yet there were still attendees milling

around. He even knew a few of them. One of the patrons, a desiccated old lady in a gray designer gown, gave him a startled look and muttered something like “it is you!” before turning away abruptly towards the table holding the white wine and the canapes.

The Dean shrugged and proceeded to examine the sculptures that seemed to crowd the room. He did not get to see very much, though. Against one of the walls, under a banner announcing in oversized characters “The Seven Deadly Sins” there were seven sculptures arranged in a semicircle and one other in front of the rest. His eyes immediately were drawn to the center piece, a large version of the familiar boy wrestling with the monster. A placard under the sculpture read: “Man and the

Passions that Seek
to Overpower Him.”
Right behind it,
bearing the sign
“Envy” was a full-
size bust of the
Dean, as he looked
when younger.
Despite the age
difference the
resemblance was
unmistakable, as
were the
covetousness and
jealousy that
surfaced over the
placid features of
the model.

The Dean was in the
grip of so many
emotions that he
failed to notice the
approaching steps
of someone who
drew near, gingerly
drawing a cane
before her.

“It seems to be the
favorite of many of
the visitors. I am
told by the gallery
owner that we
already got a bid
from some foreign
bank that wants to
display it in the
lobby of its main
office. Do you
remember it, sir?”

The Dean found
himself at a loss for

words. Finally, he grumbled: “How did you know it was me here?”

“I recognized the cologne you always wear. Cheap, but distinctive.”

The Dean finally recovered enough to raise his voice belligerently: “Well, you can’t do this. You don’t have my permission. It is theft, and defamation to boot. I will sue.”

Miss Lynn responded calmly: “I never gave you permission to keep the first version of this. You never gave it back either, and I don’t know what happened to it. Luckily, I kept the clay model. Anyhow, good luck with your suit. I am sure the bank will not want to part with what is likely to become a famous piece.”

Perhaps it was guilt, or the realization that any action against Miss Lynn,

the gallery or the
bank would only
bring more
unwanted publicity.
The Dean turned
around and began
his retreat. He
stopped when a
final thought crept
onto his mind: “I
wish you had used a
cat for your model
of the tiger. You
probably would
have gotten in and
all of this
unpleasantness
would have been
avoided.”

“I am deathly
allergic to cats,”
said Miss Lynn.

Other features in this edition include:

An [interview](#) with Jerome F. McFadden
A [poem](#) by James Thurgood
A [short story](#) by Don Noel
A [short story](#) by Heather M. Browne
A [short story](#) by Peter DiChellis
[Literary Learnings](#)
And [Betty's Writing Tips](#) from around the Web

Our Mission is to present the work of established and emerging writers to
enable them to receive attention from readers and other writers.

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