



Jen's Notes

As I read the stories in the New Writers contest, I was struck by the power of imagination. In fact, some of these stories felt a little bit dangerous. The winning story reminded me of Kafka's "Metamorphosis"—and the fact that sometimes it takes stepping out of our mundane reality to experience the raw feeling of a story. When we just go with it, it has a whole sense of its own that resonates. That's my lofty explanation for why a gingerbread cookie made me cry.

I've also been thinking a lot about the upcoming Stories That Need to Be Told contest and what it means to me, as entries roll in for the fifth annual competition. Recently, I sat through an hour-long phone call that was supposedly only going to last fifteen minutes. It was with a company that was launching an admirable-sounding project (read: sales campaign of their own) to help more women entrepreneurs be successful. I thought it was worth a listen.

However, the first forty-five minutes was spent trying to get a word in to explain to this saleswoman that I was talking about a *publishing* company, not an editing company. Before I knew what was happening, she had me "scaled-up" to supervising a whole team of other editors, rewriting my contracts (i.e., losing literally all of my current editing clients, who don't play like that), and supposedly doing less work making more money while effortlessly securing a veritable assload of *new* clients

to keep my whole team busy—as if it hasn't taken *years* to build the client relationships I have just to keep *me* busy.

I interjected with apparently vague objections, such as, "but I want my *publishing* company to be my primary business" or "okay, I would just need to see how that would work for a *publishing* company." But it wasn't until I went on an actual rant about how exciting it is to me to see contest entries come into my little inbox from all over the world that she finally seemed to get it. She hastily threw together an imaginary sample marketing plan for my company, but by that point, I had zero confidence that the two-grand investment would be well spent.

What I did get out of that phone call was the happy realization that I really do still get giddy when I see the stories coming in—the huge variety of places they originate from, the intriguing and promising titles, the occasional background note with a story. And I know these are the building blocks of another great collection. It's the most beautiful gift of my business. And it's worth insisting that it is so.

Another big part of the STNTBT contest is the nature of the stories. I mentioned resonance above, and it's an important guidance device for me. This contest resonates with people, and I find that both exciting and meaningful. There are, of course, so many stories that *need* to be told, so it's fair to wonder what that even means.

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On that note, you may have seen my new mantra: *It's a new Earth. We need new stories.* After all, what are we doing here if not trying to save the world? And because **the world is created and understood through stories**, it matters a lot to me that the same old (really shitty) ones don't get another minute of airtime.

Don't get me wrong, I think all stories are important for the perspective they give us: they may inspire us, inform us,



enlighten us, or flat-out repulse us, and understanding why they have any given effect on us at all gives us more understanding about ourselves. But as far as what I'm going to put my energy and love into publishing, I am looking for stories that give us a new perspective, stories that get us out of old ways of thinking, stories that show us the bright potential future of the planet. And perhaps even more than that, I am looking for stories about why it's worth saving at all—stories that show some reason to believe in humanity. Stories that can actually help us heal from the old unhelpful ones that have been playing out for way too long.

But hey, no pressure.

Seriously.

I feel like more and more people are being called and feeling compelled to do just that, otherwise I wouldn't be here, doing this. So, tell us your story, and let's see what happens when we put it out there into the world. Chances are, it is exactly what someone needs to read at the exact right time to make a life better. Yours or someone else's.

Contributor News



Congratulations to **Dean Gessie** for his second prize win (out of 2,000+ submissions) in the Short Story Project: New Beginnings competition in New York. In Australia he was shortlisted for the Mallacoota Prize in the E. J. Brady International Short Story Contest. He was also a finalist in both the *Freefall Magazine* International Short Story contest in Calgary, Alberta, and the Enizagam International Poetry Contest in Oakland, California.

Congratulations also to **Mitchell Grabois** on the release of his new book of poetry, *The Arrest of Mr. Kissy Face*, and its positive reviews, like this one:

Do the poems in most contemporary literary journals give you a headache? Are you tired of not knowing what the heck they are talking about? Then *The Arrest of Mr. Kissy Face* might be for you. Mitchell Grabois grabs his readers by the short hairs—his poetry is described by Robin Ouzman Hislop of *Poetry Life & Times* as “lucidly readable . . . delivered in a paced, snappy, even raunchy style, a mix of compassion with often hilarious black humor.”



[Click here to buy](#)

Think Charles Bukowski meets Charles Bukowski. All kinds of stories make their way into these pages—stories about women, family, neighbors, random encounters, women—did I say women? As in the title poem:

I kissed the woman who slices lunch meat
at King Sooper's
She shoved smoked turkey at me
leaned away
and called: *Next!*

I kissed my doctor
I'd been wanting to do it
since she first told me to stick out my tongue
and complimented me on its smoothness
and the elegance of my taste buds
I kissed her and she asked
On a scale of one to ten, how have you been feeling this week?
I kissed her again

For me, Grabois is at his best when he lets his imagination run wild—which is often. In “One Universe Too Many” he writes,

The alternative universe
in which you're not a colossal disappointment,
where is it?
It rode the Diphtheria Nebula
slid into the Oppenheimer Black Hole and hid there,
rested in perfect silence
before disappearing

He doesn't shy away from the big questions:

What if my grandfather had not stopped in the Bronx
and become a presser in the garment industry?
What if he had continued west
to become a bronc buster in Colorado?

Grabois covers a lot of ground—from an animal control specialist who picks up the corpses of birds at a wind farm, to having car trouble at Walden Pond and getting help from a nun, to hiding overnight inside the Van Gogh museum in Arles and sleeping in the artist's bed, to becoming a dumpster diver at the behest of a landlady who drives a pink Cadillac.

One of my favorites is "The Moment Gone," where he recounts a childhood memory of wandering off when he was two years old and sitting beside a swimming pool:

A huge mass of possibilities began to coalesce
and I felt certainty begin its approach
an unprecedented feeling
No one had yet asked me what I was going to be
when I grew up
a silly question for a two-year-old
but I had a sense of the future looming . . .

I sat patiently waiting for the answer . . .

Then my mother
whose approach I had not heard
grabbed my arm

and pulled me to my feet
She knelt and hugged me fiercely

You could have drowned, she cried
You could have drowned

Pski's Porch Publishing prides itself on promoting passionate, weird, unfashionable poetry, and *The Arrest of Mr. Kissy Face* is a prime example—far, far away from the MFA poetry mill, and a breath of fresh air.

Mitchell Krockmalnik Grabois has had over 1,500 of his poems and fictions appear in literary magazines in the US and abroad. He has been nominated for numerous prizes and was awarded the 2017 Booranga Writers' Centre (Australia) Prize for Fiction.

Reviewer: *Cynthia Anderson*

This review first appeared on the Cholla Needles Arts and Literary Library [website](#).



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