



**30
Days,
30
Writes** 2009

The best short writing
from
MySixWriMo

30 Days, 30 Writes 2009

Greta Igl, Editor
Stephen Book, Associate Editor

www.30Days30Writes.blogspot.com

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Foreword

Greta Igl

I think writing is, by its very nature, a gigantic leap of faith. Faith that one can conquer the blank page, the endless distractions, the laundry list of unknowns surrounding each new project. The truth is, every time a writer sits down to write, he faces the unknown of that first, unwritten sentence, the sentence he thinks he knows until his fingers unfurl on the keys and the sentence rewrites itself a hundred times over before it's finally committed to the page. Every act of writing—every scene, every story—starts fundamentally with not knowing how to start. The courage to face such a terrifying unknown, then, demands no less than the greatest leap of faith.

MySixWriMo was such a leap. It began with wanting to participate in Robert Lee Brewer's April Poem-a-Day challenge. My obstacle was that I was no poet. In the way of all creative types, I decided to forge my own path, working the prompts and writing six sentence micro fiction instead. For companionship and encouragement, I invited some good writing pals along for the ride.

We worked hard that month. Six sentences a day sounded easy, but not when every day started out fresh. Fresh new prompts, fresh characters, fresh story arcs. Soon, writing those six sentences felt like climbing the literary form of Everest.

At the end of the month, we reached the summit. We'd created some amazing stories. Funny ones.

Sad ones. Some that chilled the soul. Each of us forged new paths, writing in new genres, forms, and styles. We dug deeper, turning over fertile new soil. We got out our magnifying glasses and found the extraordinary in the everyday. We took the leap into the creative unknown and allowed ourselves to fly.

The dragonfly on the cover reminded me of that month. I discovered him early one morning while camping. The day dawned clear with the scent of dew heavy on the pines. Only a few campers moved silently in their campsites. As I left the shower building, absorbed in daydreams of steaming coffee, I almost walked past him—a huge, gorgeous, camouflaged dragonfly. He sat perfectly still on the concrete block wall, his blues and browns blending in with the embedded flecks of stone, his wings a transparent web of black lace. I knew immediately he'd make the perfect cover shot. He must have agreed, because he was still there, waiting, when I ran back with my camera.

As I clicked off a dozen shots, I marveled at how the universe supports creativity. Opportunities await everywhere. In quiet mornings and resting dragonflies. In talented friends and leaps of faith. It's up to us to keep our eyes open and our pens ready.

Long Road Home

Greta Igl

“She checked out last night.” The man behind the desk was small and round, his head as bald as a baby’s.

My insides clamped. “Did she say where she was going?”

His fingers curled the corner of the desk blotter up and down. His gaze slid past mine. “She didn’t say.”

I stumbled to the car, marrow hollow. After she called, I’d driven all night, heart fixed on bringing her home. Through mile after mile of black and purple night, things gone wrong threw stones from the shadows. An exhausted sun labored and a new, pink day was born. Now hope was gone. I sat empty in an empty car.

The sun dropped red against the mountains.

She’d changed her mind. My chest contracted.
She’d changed her mind, but I was still her mother.

Rules of the Game

JC Towler

There is a subtle change in the air when two people find an immediate, fundamental attraction to one another.

When you are young and single the feeling is borderline magical: you see that just-right girl across the room and know you can skip the small talk because you two are going to knock boots before the evening is over. It's quite another sort of feeling when you are meeting your best friend's wife for the first time: more of an "oh shit" sensation.

You know from that first moment you two are going to have to be very careful around each other. It will be a subtle glance or an inconsequential brush of hands while passing through a narrow doorway that will be the first clue to her husband, your buddy, and boy-howdy will the paradigms change then. So you keep your eyes on the TV, your friend, the veggie dip, or anywhere except those smooth, toned legs and that little crooked tooth that makes your skin tingle with anticipation of tasting the uneven contour with your tongue.

And you're extra nice to your friend, buying the beer, bringing the ribs for the cookout, and offering to lend him your pickup because you know, no matter what you do, in the end you'll need every single one of those chits when you and the girl break his heart.

The Problem With Uncle Mort

Greta Igl

“I want to talk to you girls about your uncle,” Daddy said a few days before Uncle Mort came to live with us.

Lucy and I sat on the wicker sofa on the porch, had sat there all that long hot summer, waiting for something exciting to happen.

Daddy told us Uncle Mort had seen terrible troubles, that he needed help, that we were honor bound to help him. He told us not to sit on Uncle Mort’s lap, not ever, not even if he gave us candy, because Uncle Mort was a man and a man had needs.

Summer melted into sweltering dog days and Uncle Mort stayed behind his closed bedroom door.

We watched, me and Lucy, but he never said anything, not about laps or candy or problems, just mumbling “Thanks, ma’am” to the tablecloth when Mama passed his plate and twisting his napkin until it fell in shreds under the table.

Freshly Canned

Jane Banning

Startled, I see a pink slip on my chair. The computer and copier wait, elbows out, all sharp angles and a stale sleeping smell hangs in the hallways. I make coffee, and it drips, sour. If I don't work, my Molly doesn't eat.

Molly doesn't eat much or ask much. Her thin, sunshiny arms tangle around my neck in the morning, hair sweet as new hay. I promise her Pixy Stix and Sugar Babies and macaroni for dinner. She presses one last kiss onto my cheek before I get on the bus.

If I don't work, Molly doesn't eat. And since Curt is long gone, I shop the dollar store and can peaches. Molly likes fresh peas, one by one from her finger and thumb, dimpled hands darting. So we grow peas in our garden and cherry tomatoes hang on their starry stems. We dine well in summer. We'll need beef and bread in winter.

Down the hall I hear Olive stump in, administrator's badge hanging from her greasy neck, sweaty from her commute. She picks at her ear wax, glances at my pink slip and says, "Your job was terminated. I was going to tell you."

I grab up my coffee mug and the photos from my desk: Molly grinning, August-brown and toothy, in the yard. For a moment I feel the heft of the home-grown tomatoes warm in my palm. Olive scritch-scratches her scalp with a gray fingernail.

If I don't work, I'll worry myself down to the bone,
but we'll have milky mornings and peas and lazy
bees buzzing until bread and meat must be on our
table. I gather up my things, light as leaves,
breathe "Thanks, Olive" and dance a running-
through-the-sprinkler jig to the bus stop.

Errant

Jane Banning

It's always the quiet ones, you know. It's always after glasses of wine, hoisin-garlic glazed chicken, haricots verts in the lemon-caper reduction sauce and chocolate sour cream torte, all of it roiling and coiling inside of you as you stroll through the parking lot to his car. He's wearing flannel-soft cologne; you hope it will cling to your cheeks and sheets tomorrow morning, as the top note, and underneath it, the warm base note, the leftover love tang. In the closeness of his car, his kisses taste like peach and persimmon. You lean in and entwine a hand with his, your nipples prick up and you swell with desire. You flail with one distracted hand for your Tums, but it's far too late: the quiet, deadly one has escaped.

Agnes' Drying Line

JC Towler

Agnes' drying line was as well-ordered as her life: clothes arranged in prim rows with two pins per shirt, one for socks and underwear, and a precise gap of two inches between each article.

That was why she immediately noticed a vacancy in the line when a red kerchief went missing last Sunday, followed by a white blouse on Monday and her gardening overalls on Tuesday. Vexed, she summoned the law and was doubly vexed when informed that the sheriff had many things to do other than sit on a clothesline stakeout.

After she stamped her feet and fumed a bit she did what any self-respecting country woman would do; she loaded up the shotgun with birdshot and kept watch from a window overlooking her back yard.

The moon provided plenty enough illumination for her to see the diminutive thief slipping across the yard at two o'clock the next morning, casting furtive glances over his shoulder. She unloaded both barrels and raced to the yard, yelling unladylike curses, just as the filthy little gnome scampered away holding his posterior.

"Thieving buggers!" She raised a fist after the retreating gnome. They'd been making clothes disappear from her dryer for years and were the main reason she'd gotten rid of the thing and put up a clothesline in the first place!

Hard Harvest

Jane Banning

October: a month of the continual snick and growl of the combine, of tired sunsets dull with cornstalk dust. The household lives on the run, gulping pork sandwiches and coffee, nothing else, nothing proper. Edith sighs and picks the last of the laundry from the rickety clothesline, the top sheet, scratchy and cool, rucked up in her arms, and fruitlessly searches for the fitted sheet, a wagging Maggie close at her heels. For pete's sake, where is it? Another thing, gone missing. Maggie whines, her eyes on Edith's and Edith walks, impulsively, with Maggie's cold and hungry nose under her hand to the corncrib where the sad bed lies, clean but rumpled, Maggie's only comfort in an overwhelming October.

Missing

Stephen Book

Carter looked up from his discovery, the result of a broken-down tractor and a long walk through the forest as the shortest distance between today's work and the farm house. He glanced around, thinking: Here's a nest full of unusual critters, but no mother or father. And they were unusual, their shape and color unlike anything he'd ever seen in *National Geographic* or on the PBS shows he occasionally watched.

Slowly, one of the babies lifted its head and blinked at him, so Carter kneeled down and reached out a friendly hand, saying, "Hey there, little fella."

The young creature sniffed at first, and then it snapped, shearing off his right pinkie at the second knuckle.

A cracking twig cut off Carter's wailings, and he whirled around to the form of a giant, lizard-like animal crouched, ready to strike, its long tongue licking at more teeth than he'd ever seen in his life.

Long Gone

Greta Igl

He'd been gone so long. Still, Ginny sometimes forgot and she'd get that electric jolt, the one that came with "I have to tell Jonathon."

But then she'd remember and the jolt would dissolve. The sorrow was a shadow that trailed or preceded her through their too-quiet bungalow.

Most painful was the stream of evidence: the pants hanging behind the bathroom door, the half-eaten sandwich, the book lying precisely as he left it. She never touched them except to clean, and sometimes, in weak moments, to bury a nose in.

She remembered the time he'd caught her, the disgusted look on his face as she stroked his dirty sock against her cheek. He'd left that night and been gone almost a week.

Her shadow covered her that week, wrapping her in sticky filaments. She cried and read the book he left three times over, but never understood a word.

The Down Town

Jane Banning

Fredericksville crouches along
main street,
a dirty brown dog,
head on its paws,
storefronts with cloudy eyes,
sweaters in the windows
smelling of furred basements.

Leaves mat the gutters and
men in overalls hunch over coffee,
leave thick cups half empty, then
sleep the afternoons away,
chins dusky,
hair flat against bony brows.

No one wakes them,
and a lone tom turns around
in an empty lot and
sinks down.

Same Old

Greta Igl

When Amanda was a baby, Carrie yearned for routine, for knowing when to wake and when to sleep. In the chaos of new motherhood, she longed for a slot to cook dinner, to exercise, to breathe, to make love.

The routine came all too soon, the daily activities that varied little from week to week: Mondays, the park; Tuesday, play at home; Wednesday, story hour; Thursday, lunch at Grandma's; Friday, playdate. And in each of those days, their own aching subroutines, the three meals a day with the handful of tolerated menus, the same three movies, two books, one cry.

Mommy.

She returned: to her friends, her hobbies, her work, to some semblance of the girl she'd been before Amanda, but always with the understanding that everything must fit, no matter how large and unwieldy, inside the tight buckets of routine—a time to play blocks, a time to read books, and even a tiny golden sliver to remember her freedom.

Lake of My Heart

Jane Banning

My seven year-old sat silently on the end of the dock, his outline black against the diamond-chip water, inky pines a backdrop on the opposite shore. Green and briny, a breeze pushed easy, swashing waves against the shoreline. A loon chick, downy and brown, bobbed nearby. It peeped, wobbly. The parent, profile sharp and regal, surfaced from the copper water and slid a slim, dripping fish into the baby's beak. My boy turned, his ear soft seashell pink, hair ruffled up in waves. His fathomable eyes shone clear and wide and he splashed a summer smile all over me.

The Lie

Greta Igl

The hand clamped over David's mouth, yanking him from the depths of sleep. A whisper rasped in his ear. He snapped upright.

Oh shit.

"You tell him, David. You have to!" Alice's eyes threw sparks in the moonglow.

A board creaked in the hall. Alice shrank like a beaten puppy.

David knew Dad would be pissed when he saw the car. He'd fling and smash things; David would sweep up the shards in silence later. But it would be far worse if Dad found out the truth. For David, it would be an irresponsible lapse of judgment that resulted in a dinged fender. But for Alice, it would be sneaking out like a slut with that piece of shit Monty.

The door scraped open a few inches.

Alice gasped. David's arm curled around her.

"I'll tell him," David squeaked.

The cat slithered in, arched its sinuous back and mewed.

They laughed, a tightly bandaged sound lacking humor. Alice rested her head on David's shoulder. He breathed in the warm smell of her shampoo and

the smoke must from Monty's cigarettes. After Alice left, he would spend the night tossing on his bed, tearing the story apart and patching it back together. The bruised and purple dawn loomed too close. He held Alice tight and prayed his story would be impenetrable. Only then would Alice be safe—until next time.

Focusing on the Future

Stephen Book

If anyone were to ask, Robert planned to pull out his photo journal, point to the empty box next to the title *Archilochus Colubris*, and say: “See, right here, the Ruby-throated Hummingbird, and she’s the only one I need to complete my full portrait.”

Robert snapped on the 80-400mm zoom lens, purchased with last year’s annual bonus, and then set up the tripod, hoping the extra green he’d paid for the exact location of this spot was worth it. His wife had already given him hell for spending almost two grand on the “stupid” camera lens, money they could have used to fix the bathroom plumbing; so, if the additional five hundred for the information amounted to nothing more than a day out in the woods, there would be some serious explaining to do. It wasn’t like he needed to spend anything else on his silly hobby.

He found his target through the viewfinder, focused in, and let the Nikon do the rest of the work: *Snick, Snick, Snick...*

Afterwards, he packed away the gear with a smile, knowing those celebrity shots of America’s Sweetheart, doing the dirty with a man who wasn’t her husband, were worth at least five Gs—maybe more, if he played it right—and had just catapulted the so-called hobby into a lucrative business.

Go Figure

Jane Banning

So we decided to get married after we'd been dating for six weeks. We'd had a t-shirt-style courtship and a barefoot marriage proposal, then the meeting with the prospective mothers-in-law. We all wore new stuff for that. Ten months later, in the spring, we threw a wedding. We had a sleeping-bag honeymoon. All in all, it hadn't a chance but, shoot, 20 years has been as soft as an old pair of corduroys.

Marked

Greta Igl

Our tasseled caps streaked through the cloudless sky; that night, our preppy clothes trailed across a beach silvered by an engraved moon. We dyed our hair pink and wriggled into jeans as snug as snake skin. We drank tequila and let boys run rough hands over our straining bodies.

Truth was, we didn't like pink hair and our tight clothes chafed. The heat of summer embossed denim weave and seam weals on our tender skin. But our suffering was our choice, not Cindy's or Suzy's or Melissa's. We jerked our chins at them and slept with their boyfriends.

White

Stephen Book

Rebecca opened the can and welcomed the sharp, acrylic smell. A year ago, if asked she would have said anything but white—white was dull, weak and ordinary—but this morning she dressed up in a pair of raggedy sweats, drove down to the hardware store, and asked the young man behind the counter for the purest white he could find. And none of that fancy stuff, like Antique or Eggshell or Milk; for her, it had to be as strong as ivory and as sterile as bleach.

She stirred up the mix, poured it into the tray, and then rolled the first ribbon of paint across the now bare walls. After an hour, she returned with tears in her eyes and gave the room a second coat, guessing she would have to apply a third to finish the job.

Later—a few weeks, or even a month if that's what it took—she would visit the shed again and figure out what to do with Nathan's crib and the bags stuffed with his clothes.

All I Want Is To Be Left Alone

Stephen Book

“All I want,” Callie said, curling into a ball under the covers, “is to be left alone.”

Standing in the doorway, her mother said that was fine, she'd give Callie some space, and then added, “I warned you not to go messing around with a married man.” That was Mother's way: always casting judgment, never considering there might be other issues at play and that maybe, just maybe, her own daughter wasn't as dumb as she believed.

The newspapers reported that the esteemed lawyer and well-known philanthropist, Richard Findley, died instantly when his car rolled off the side of the country road and plunged into the canyon below. His blood-alcohol level was more than twice the legal limit. In spite of his glowing history, though, this was the same man who had seduced Callie's cousin into an affair, only to leave her pregnant and mentally unstable.

Callie thought about the letter her cousin had left to explain things. She remembered standing by her cousin's casket and how she planned to meet up with this Richard guy. In the darkness of her room, listening to the sound of Mother vacuum cleaning now, she smiled.

Payback

JC Towler

Hani's nerves twisted his stomach in a painful knot. He'd never seen a dead body before. The medic's face remained neutral as he peeled back the sodden quilt covering the body.

Hani felt his legs shake and he clamped down on the edge of the stretcher with both hands. The distant roar building in his ears had nothing to do with the sound of tanks rolling through nearby streets.

The medic asked if he recognized the man.

"It's my brother," Hani said.

Like a cracking seed, the knot in Hani's stomach broke and dark roots emerged, creeping irrevocably toward his heart.

The Americans would pay.

Revenge blooms eternal.

Clyde Boudreaux

Stephen Book

“Well,” I said, letting the word hang out there so as to make them believe I was actually taking it all in, really thinking about things, like the clock and my life and what it amounted to. “Seein’ as how I got here a real nice audience, who’s got nothin’ better to do tonight than to listen to little ol’ me, I guess I might as well give you somethin’ good for your money—not that you paid anything for them seats.”

I paused to make sure I had their attention, and then told them I wasn’t always bad; in fact, I was once a good little boy, always doing what my daddy told me to, being careful to clean up my messes, so as I didn’t get the strap before the night was out. I smiled as I thought about how funny that last line was, me being strapped down right now, and then continued by telling those folks how I enjoyed each of my victims—the salty taste of their tears, their piercing screams, and the smell of everything left behind as I choked the life right out of them. I finally told about how the police caught me, just after I had finished my business with girl number eighteen, capping off the whole speech with: “And I said to myself, ‘That is the last time.’”

I turned my head and looked through the Plexiglas at all of the mothers sitting there—a few of them shaking, their hands covering their mouths—and gave them a big Louisiana grin, knowing it would be the last image of Clyde Boudreaux they would hold for the rest of their God-forsaken lives.

Poor Rich Boy

JC Towler

I remembered seeing the world upside down before it all went black. I woke up outside the pickup staring at the treetops, pain lancing into my lower back. I thought I was laying on a jagged rock and tried to sit up. A hand on my shoulder restrained me.

"You probably shouldn't," she said.

I've forgotten her name after all these years. Brenda? Brooke? Beverly? Something that started with a "B." She was just another summer girl along for the ride in the back of the pickup. There'd been four of them, all pressed from the same long-legged mold. I asked about the others. She said some hadn't been hurt too bad and had gone to get help. She didn't say about the rest and I didn't pursue it.

"So much for the road trip," I said.

"Ah, we weren't really going anywhere anyway."

I'd been driving too fast as usual, thought the fat tires could handle the curves and was proven wrong. The truck wasn't a concern; a credit card swipe would buy me another. Inevitable lawsuits and bad press would be handled by the lawyers. Mostly I was worried about my face. I couldn't stand the thought of being scarred. I touched fingers to my cheek. They came away bloody and I groaned.

She sat beside me cross-legged as the minutes dragged into an hour, keeping me awake, distracting me from the pain, and even finding ways to make me laugh. She offered to go find water. I was so thirsty I'd have drunk from the toilet bowl of a truck stop right then, but I quailed at the thought of being alone and asked her to stay.

I hid my cowardice behind a thin veil of nonchalance that was methodically shredded by the growing agony. Each new mosquito bite and ant sting felt magnified through a prism of misery. Sensation in my legs faded and I thought I was dying. I cried. I confessed to a life as frivolous as easy money allows, sparing no detail. She patted my hand and said nice things. I told her I believed this had happened as a punishment; that a celestial finger had nudged my pickup off the road and I was being made to suffer, a taste of what was yet to come.

I asked if God would forgive me.

She laughed, a reaction I found insulting. I said something rude. She stretched her long legs and stood. Dried blood caked her knees and she cradled her left arm against her body. I was afraid she would leave me then and fresh tears flowed.

“Poor rich boy.”

The words sunk in and I wasn't mad anymore, wasn't scared. It was one of those pivotal moments in life, one you never see coming and only realize the magnitude of it later. I saw myself through her eyes. Pathetic. Broken inside and out and in places

the x-rays didn't show. I didn't want anybody to look at me that way ever again.

Sirens announced the impending arrival of the cavalry.

She said, "Looks like you're going to make it after all."

"You bet," I said.

No Comfort

Jane Banning

“You want the ashes?” he asked.

“Like that would help,” I said.

I suppose I could keep them on the tile floor where his bones soaked up cool relief. Or on my knee, where his heavy paw curled. I could set the sober container by my bed where he always settled with a groan, twitching his dear, rough feet, hot in the night, dreaming of running through clear puddles.

“No, I don’t want the ashes,” I said to the vet, and the words, snatched by a winter wind, hovered sleety in the air.

Old Man Bascomb

Greta Igl

They don't come with their lights flashing or the siren howling, but I see the way they come up the walk, hands over guns, cop eyes moving.

They're right to worry; Old Man Bascomb's a mean one. One time, when me and Danny were shooting rusty cans off the fence, he yelled out the window, *you hoodlums knock that off or I'll put a cap in your asses!*

The cops knock at the door, but no one answers. Bascomb's not there; I saw him sneak out before, eyes patrolling, lugging that giant suitcase. He's a weird one. He always takes that suitcase, but he comes right back. No wonder his wife took off so sudden like that.

Sandbox

JC Towler

Sometimes the planets do align: some scrap lumber, a neighbor with leftover fill, a bored two-and-a-half-year-old, and a free afternoon.

"Watcha doing, daddy?" Sara asked.

"Making something," I said, trying to remember if it was $44 \frac{1}{2}$ or $44 \frac{2}{3}$ rds. Damn, I'd have to go back and measure.

Four hours and eighteen wheelbarrow-laden treks later, the little girl had her first sandbox. When I can make both the women in my house smile, I've had a good day.

Forever

Stephen Book

No matter what anyone else says, I want you to know that I do not hate you. In fact, truth be told, words are inadequate to express the depth of my need. The feel of your body, the softness of your cheek, even the smell of your skin, they all bring me a sense of calm that nothing in this life ever could—not the prayers of the Holy Father, not the love of my mother, not even the absence of a father who finally abandoned his family, which did bring some comfort, since his departure brought an end to the unanswered cries each night that he paid me a visit.

Tomorrow, they will find you, or rather what's left of you, and then the rumors will start—why this would happen to someone so innocent, and who could be so evil as to do it—but you and I will know the truth. You are not innocent, and I am not evil. We are simply two lost souls who found each other and by sharing this moment created a bond that will last for eternity.

Daddy's Girl

JC Towler

I don't hate you, Daddy. This wasn't your fault.
Your lips against mine; your hand on my chest. I'm
in-between here and somewhere else and your
voice grows faint. You're panting like a dog and I
hear you say you love me. I'm trying, honest I'm
trying, but I just can't.

Again your lips press against mine. Your palms
bear down on my chest, and the pain in your voice
makes me want to cry.

"Breathe, baby, breathe."

My stomach burns and I feel so tired, like I'm
swimming against a riptide. I want to float away,
but I'll try just for you, one more time, because I
really don't hate you, and I'll be sorry for the words
I said if I don't come back.

What Herman Discovered

Stephen Book

Herman knew he shouldn't have stopped, knew it deep inside just like he knew that heart attack was about to strike two years ago, but Vivvy said it was the "Christian" thing to do. How could they leave a stranded motorist way out here in the middle of nowhere, the nearest town like forty miles away? As he drove by the rusted-out Chevy with its hood up, she stepped it up a notch. "How would you feel if you were broken down and needed help and people kept passing you by?" He wanted to keep going, wanted to tell Vivvy to shut it and leave him alone, but the guilt she laid on him grew so heavy that a mile later he turned the car around.

Kneeling down at the side of the road now, the barrel of the man's pistol against his head, Vivvy crying like a woman who just lost her baby, Herman knew that life amounted to nothing more than the sum of his misfortunes, the first of which was marrying a woman who couldn't tell the difference between real life and the dream she'd made up in her mind.

Never

JC Towler

“I never dance to that song,” she says as she walks off the dance floor, one hand trailing behind her, an open invitation to follow.

“Aw, it’s a great tune,” I say, taking her hand, anchoring her in place.

She turns, gently slipping free of my grasp and faces me, her beauty diminishing in the terrible sadness haunting her eyes. The part of me that already wants to be a sponge to her sparkling water, soaking her all in, knowing everything about her, rebels at the notion that she’s already drawing lines. But, instinctively I understand if I press this issue I will never see her again.

I nod, take her hand again, and lead her off the dance floor.

Never Been Happier

Stephen Book

I lie awake at night thinking that marrying her was the wrong choice, you know? I mean, all I really wanted was someone to love me for who I was, not for who they wanted me to be. But then, like what's-his-face's thousand points of light, it was a bunch of tiny little turds, only they added up to one big one. Jered, take out the trash, mow the lawn, kick your boots off before you step in the house, you put the toilet paper roll on the wrong way...

Toilet paper, can you believe that one?

On and on, I thought the beat down would never end; and one day I would wake up, take a look in the mirror and say, "Who the hell are you?" Six years ago to the day, though, it finally did end. And though all I've got to look at now are cement walls and bunch of men in grey uniforms, I ain't never been happier.

Hands

Greta Igl

They were never there, the soft, cool hands on my fevered brow, the gentle rubbing on my back as my stomach heaved. There were no hands cupping my face, humming with pride. No reassuring squeeze of fingers over accomplishments, fears or heartaches. No hands wrung, one over the other, over my worries.

Instead, those hands doled out backhanded, pinching compliments. They pointed fingers, smothered dreams, and picked at tender scabs. I wanted to hold one, but they were always too busy. Now, all these years later, my own hands are too well-trained and skittish to pat hers with gentle comfort.

Contributors



Jane Banning

Jane Banning lives in Oregon, Wisconsin with her husband, son, small bossy dog and various reptiles (see earlier reference: son) She was a finalist in the Micro Fiction

Award contest in 2008. Her work has appeared in the *University of Iowa Daily Palette*, *Six Sentences*, *Tuesday Shorts*, *Long Story Short*, *Birds By My Window*, and *Boston Literary Magazine*.



Stephen Book

Stephen's short fiction has been published by *Flash Fiction Online*, *Crime & Suspense*, and *Boston Literary Magazine*. While he writes different genres--including literary and horror--he is most passionate about a good crime

story. He currently lives in Texas with his wife and two children. Stephen blogs about his writing at: <http://powderburnsandbullets.blogspot.com>.

Contributors



Greta Igl

Greta's short fiction has been published by an assortment of literary magazines and anthologies, including *Every Day Fiction*, *Boston Literary Magazine*, and *Word Riot*. Her short story, "In Limbo" was nominated for the 2009 storySouth Million Writers award. She lives in southeast Wisconsin with her husband, daughter and three unruly cats and tries to figure out how to fix her novel, *Jamieson's Folly*.



JC Towler

JC Towler spins tales of mystery, suspense, science fiction and is particularly fond of the deep, penetrating horror tale. The Outer Banks of North Carolina is his home, which is odd considering he's afraid of the ocean and doesn't eat fish. His stories have appeared in *Spinetingler* and *Every Day Fiction*, in the *Editor Unleashed/Smashwords Flash Fiction 40* anthology, and in anthologies by Permuted Press and L&L Dreamspell.

30 Days, 30 Writes 2009
30 Days. 30 Writes Publishing

\$10

In April 2009, I banded together with three friends to embark on a challenge: write a six-sentence story every day for a month. It wasn't easy. Some days, the muse didn't show up. Other days, the muse gushed and the six sentences sprawled to fourteen or more.

The challenge was a whetstone against which we honed our resolve. We dug deeper and struck gold. We found stories we would never have written without the prompts. Stories worth ferreting out. Stories worth publishing. Stories to remember.

Collected here are the best stories from that frenzied month. Some are offered in their original state. Others have been buffed to reach their full, gleaming potential. The genres vary: literary, memoir, horror, even poetry. But all affirm the question that challenged us each morning: what will I write today?

Greta Igl
Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin