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Camelia Nocella

Biography:
As a Teacher for the School District of Philadelphia, Camelia Nocella has studied poetry at the University of Pennsylvania, Temple University and the University of the Arts. She has been a featured reader at Robin's Book Store in Philadelphia, the Manayunk Art Center, Barnes and Noble and Borders Book Stores. Camelia has given poetry presentations for Poets and Prophets, the Delaware Valley Woman’s Conference at CCDC as well as participated in the Painted Bride’s Word-Up, South Street Arts, Media Arts and Philadelphia Fringe Festivals. In addition, she was the associate editor of The Mad Poets Review and an award winning poet at the Philadelphia Writer’s Conference. Camelia has been published in the Mad Poets Review, The Philadelphia Tribune, The Schuylkill Valley Journal and online at www.wildwomenburn.com. Currently, she is hosting a poetry series and working on publishing a chapbook.

Advice for Writers:
The blank page can be most intimidating; therefore, Camelia’s advice for beginning writers is to read the literature of your favorite poets and study various poetic styles. Also, she suggests writing daily through journaling or creating a poem each day with your “first thoughts,” allowing the editor or critic within you to stay silent. In this way, your honest feelings expressing your experiences can come through without being cut off by the inner voice that keeps nagging what you are writing is incorrect or not very good. It is after these “first thoughts” writing unfolds then the editor in you can polish and finalize your work. In order to keep the mechanism of your mind’s inspiration well lubricated, Camelia Nocella recommends the writing exercises of Natalie Goldberg in Writing Down The Bones. Moreover, for having fun in writing or checking out different styles of poetry, she suggests Patterns Of Poetry by Miller Williams.
Mirage

Camelia Nocella

Within the waterfalls of Logan Square
I eyed a captain of time past, a man
Cemented in an auburn mirage sight
He was wringing dry his tattered grey socks
Quite at home, pleased with such a mundane chore
Practical use granted by the fountain.

Within the flowing fortuitous fountain
The statues stationed at Logan’s grand square
And I fixated upon this peculiar chore
Nonchalant voyeurs floated past the man
Without horror, the horror of washed socks
Painting a Van Gogh mist September sight.

Marigold rays could not erase the sight
Decorating the concrete edged fountain
Grey, those once bleach-white pair of traveled socks
Whose voyages laundered in Logan Square?
This place unintended for the crushed man
Wrinkled in the ritual of his chore.

The washing, wringing dry repeated chore
Smattered my rosy-colored pupil’s sight
Red-scent begonias disarray, the man
A crouched weed plastered into the fountain
Park where pedestrians of Logan Square
Accustomed to landscapes growing washed socks.

Dignity recovered in clean paired socks
Reward endured from his seaworthy chore
Bleaching the colors, the gold and red square
With stanched awareness of the homeless sight
Traditions kept by a city fountain
Symbol—civil existence for this man.

No longer will I perceive, taught the man
Worn like his socks, his never-white socks,
Sprayed city beauty is reason for a fountain
Where an eye-awakening dismal chore
Gave me an enlightened reality sight
As I left the autumn in Logan Square.

The square where the grandfather man sight-search
For beauty, in shabby socks, is a chore
Mirage in the water colored fountain.
Surrender

Camelia Nocella

The day, today is lost in search of you
Among the weepy woods of death dark trees
Shadows lose light in search of skies of blue
Honey sours within hives of prickly bees.

In the forest you ran from me your love
Frightened deer that loses trust to stand lone
The violent cat grabs the peaceful dove
Whose wings are clipped, lose flight to broken bone.

Wanton gift my earthly flesh rejected
Though moonlit owl howls of love hopeful
Creatures burrow deep, with mate selected
Beastly passions subdued become social.

Sun drenched the woods shed gloom transform tender
As I, wolf, draped in your wool surrender.

The Bag

Karolina Urban

I see the bag, and I know it's coming.
My legs stand still, yet my mind thinks of running.
The brown bag balances in Babcia's grip, the dark stench reaches me from here.
The cardboard bag's like wet dog mixed with sweat; this is my biggest fear.
Grandma says, "I've got some old clothes for you, dear!"
Mother of God, I need a beer.
Smiling, she says, "Surprise, surprise, sweetie! I've saved something special, secretly for you."
"See this shirt? It's from World War II!"
I look at the shirt, and quiver a little.
What are those stains? Is that dried blood in the middle?
"And look at this dress! Isn't it unique?"
"It's a certified, eighty-year old antique!"
And out of the mocking bag
Comes a long, tattered rag
"I was going to use this to wipe my dogs butt,
But then I thought of you, what luck!"
"Th-thank you, Babcia," I say through clenched teeth.
"Your Grandfather loved this. He'd wear it for weeks without even one shower!"
Grandma giggles girlishly. I cry a little inside.
Why didn't they bury that jumper with my Grandfather when he died?

“That’s not all, my little sweetheart.”

Then out of the bag comes a dead-animal looking part.

“Real mink! When I was your age, this was my favorite fur scarf.”

Upon closer inspection, I feel about to barf.

It seems long ago, the mink started decaying.

Insects took notice, and started nest-building and egg-laying.

Beaming, Babcia brings out a vest.

It smells nothing short of putrid death.

“I was wearing this vest when I gave birth to your father,”

Well, that explains the placenta shaped mark on the collar.

Why must the Polish hang on to things older than Moses?

“That’s all I got dear, ’til next spring cleaning.”

I cross my chest, and finally continue breathing.

Just as I believe it’s all over, I get a whiff of stink.

First thing I think: Is that the old mink?

Too quick to react, too quick to think.

BLAH!

“Sorry Grandma. I didn’t mean to puke all over the kitchen sink.”
Before I turned twelve, my grand mom taught my sister and me how to play cards and gamble with stale Doritos and party mix. She took us to the park across the street from her Southwest Philly row home when it was in good repair. When it wasn’t, she told us the “bad kids did it.” To me, she was a wise old woman who knew her neighborhood and how to make meatballs, squid, and gravy better than anyone. She made popsicles out of grape juice for us in the summer and hot chocolate on the stove in the winter. Her living room smelled like musk, and the upstairs of her house smelled like baby powder and moth balls. On days my mom would stay too, they’d sit and talk while my sister and I watched MTV (back when they actually played music) on the polyester blue filigree couch until they ran out of smokes and sent us to the corner store to buy a couple packs for them and ice cream for ourselves.

After I turned twelve, my grand mom couldn’t live on her own anymore, so she moved in with my parents, my sister, and me. By then there had been enough discord within the rest of the family because of a falling out between her and my uncles’ families. Her house, the only anchor and gathering place left, was gone, and she wasn’t too happy about the new arrangements. She stayed in her room most of the time while my parents worked, mostly opposite schedules. For four years, there was palpable tension between her, my parents, and us kids.

While my parents were busy, my sister and I were getting into trouble at school and at home. She acted like she felt in the middle, disrespected, and resentful, but the words were never said.

I felt blamed and ignored, but I never said what I wanted to either.

One day when I was sixteen, I heard some noise outside of my room, so I opened the door and found the paramedics coming to my grand mom’s aid. My sister and I were the only ones in the house at the time. My sister called 911 because my grand mom fell against the bathroom door, and it couldn’t be opened without hurting her.

She was lifted out the window, sent to the hospital, and nursed back to health in ICU and then rehabs. We never said our good byes that day because it happened so fast; before my sister and I knew it, she was out of our house, leaving only her things behind.

Around this time, I found out I was pregnant. We started to grow close again, and I visited her often. She was looking forward to a new baby in the family and was sensitive to what I was going through. I knew she was disappointed for me, but she didn’t judge me. When she stabilized, she moved into my aunt and uncle’s house because my aunt was a nurse, but in reality, my mom was the only person my grand mom ended up trusting enough to tend to her needs.

We talked more than we had in years, and I’d drive her stores and pick her up for visits when she needed me to. A lot of things remained unsaid, but I was just happy to have a relationship with her again. I decided I wanted her in the delivery room with me when my daughter was born.

I wanted to tell her one winter afternoon during the early part of my third trimester, but I was having a bad day and didn’t feel like talking about the baby. I figured I would tell her the next time I saw her, but she died suddenly later that week.

She wasn’t around anymore to tell us about the latest pay per view event she’d ordered, or to make her pizelles and biscotti for the holidays or to find her in the dim light at my aunt’s house, flipping through the TV Guide, sneaking a smoke when she wasn’t supposed to be smoking anymore. She wasn’t around anymore for me to tell her that day, like it had been her last day, how much I loved her.
I took my family’s burden and strapped it to my chest, 
Carrying it like a treasure waiting for what would manifest. 
Being the oldest brings unreasonable expectancy; 
Peacemaker, Solomon, perhaps the art of Rhabdomancy.

All I want is someone to understand my lifelong misery; 
Lose the career of false empathy and see options more visibly; 
Find solace in the bond of love and hate – a confusing entity; 
Try to make sense of it all and solve the ongoing mystery.

I want to scream out loud in self-defense; 
These times I am living in make no damn sense. 
What is truth and what is fear? 
How do I distinguish – is it buried out there?

I’ve been told the battle’s now over; it’s time for a change; 
Let bygones be bygones, quit acting so strange. 
Live for today and forget about the past, 
But it’s always right in my face like a daily forecast.

I have wrestled with my demons 
And wake up with only me; 
Pinned down and suffocated, 
Where the hell is my reprieve?

All my muscles tighten, especially those in my face, 
Can I bury my soul in one warm embrace? 
Feel the anguish of my world vanish without a trace, 
In the strength of your arms as I fall into grace?

Most of each day is full of tired processes, 
Giving up so easily, my mood depresses; 
Drawing into myself to avoid the stresses; 
So much better than dealing with the messes.

The bombshells of my daily fears explode 
Causing my panic light to dim and corrode. 
I suddenly realize it has started to unload, 
An emotional meltdown, a pathetic episode.

Watching spent and wasted energy flush down the drain; 
Once again I retreat internally from the pain. 
It would so much easier to be totally insane; 
After all, who would bother to ask you to explain?
Every day, I tell myself to be a better person. I tell myself to give him another chance, to let him redeem himself to me. Maybe it’s all the years of anger and frustration. Or maybe it’s just that my heart can’t take any more pain. I have grown up dealing with my brother’s constant drug addictions, watching him go to rehab after rehab, meeting after meeting, and doctor after doctor. Every day, he tries to make things better between us. He is trying to mend our broken relationship. But sometimes, things are broken into too many pieces and they can’t be put back together again.

I flash back to a few years earlier when things in our house were really bad, all of our lives overtaken by my brother’s drug abuse. I’m sitting at the dinner table staring at my brother because he’s so messed up on whatever he took that night that he can’t even function. His eyes are far off in the distance, so glazed over that he doesn’t even look human. I can barely make out his pupils because they are the size of pin dots. It’s just a sea of blue. He starts to pile mashed potatoes in his mouth, not quite making it, and letting them slowly dribble down his chin and get caught into his beard. He looks as if he has just given up. I start to feel sick to my stomach, and realize I can’t live in the world of denial that my parents have tried to create. I slowly push my plate away and silently stand up.

“Where are you going, Dan?” My dad asks between bites.

“I can’t pretend like everything is fine like the rest of you.”

I make my way up to my bedroom, my only sanctuary. I pick up a book and try to get lost in its word of make believe and fantasy, of places that don’t exist, places where people have happy endings. I remember hiding up in my room at a very young age, listening to my mother’s loud screams echoing throughout the house as my brother, who at the age of thirteen, already stumbled through the house, trying to act like everything was normal, already unable to control his drug problem. That book was the only thing I had to take me out of that house. As the screams got louder and the crying became more constant, that was my one escape. I was forgotten and hidden where no one could find me.
There were a few cases that I can recall coming home and finding my brother passed out on the floor. My heart started thumping against my chest as my breath caught in my throat. I walked over to him cautiously, hoping that everything was going to be okay. I bent over and took my right hand and lay it across his chest. As soon as I could feel his chest rise and fall, my feeling of anxiety and sadness is quickly diminished to anger. Burning, raw anger.

Things, especially mine, would start vanishing from our house: DVDs, gaming systems, any kind of technology you could imagine. Even though it annoyed me to the point where I had straight-up hatred for my brother, I kept reminding myself that these were just material things that could always be replaced. And I kept telling myself that until the day that my deceased grandmother’s necklace had been stolen out of my jewelry box. That’s when my heart stopped beating. That’s when I knew that I could never feel the same way towards him, that the one thing I owned that meant more to me than life itself had been taken, stolen by my own blood. I cried and moved on. That’s how it had to be. It was talked about once, and that was it.

If we bury it deep in the back of our closets no one will ever know, maybe they’ll even think we’re perfectly normal.

“I know its hard Dan, but you can’t look back on the past. You have to learn to forget and maybe forgive. You’re a better person than he is.” My parents would constantly try to preach these words to me. Were they trying to stick up for him? Were they trying to justify his behavior? Maybe it was my fault. Maybe I should have hidden it in a better place. But it was no use crying over it now. It was gone, along with my love. If I could build myself up and learn to forgive people, I could make myself into a better person. It’s easier said than done, that’s for sure.

Some days are better than others. Sometimes I can feel that he’s trying to reach out to me, trying to gain my trust and love back. It’s sad in the way that we have let ourselves get this way. I block him out. I shield myself from the pain and disappointment that drugs bring with them. I sometimes pretend that he doesn’t exist. That’s wrong. I know it is. But I can’t help it. Maybe one day I’ll overcome my weaknesses and someday be able to forgive him. Maybe one day I’ll be able to let him redeem himself.
You look so happy there  
Red and free  
A perfect square  
All for me  
I will devour you  
Reduce you to belly goo  
You’re too sweet to pass up  
Nourish my body  
So soft and chewy  
I savor your flesh  
As it melts in my mouth  
And then you died  
But I won’t cry  
You won’t be missed  
You have thousands of brothers  
And sisters  
And they’ll all meet the same end together

It had been months since I had been in a relationship of any sort. I was with my last boyfriend for two years when out of nowhere, he decided it was time to end it. To make it even better, he did so through a text message while I was at work. At the time, all I could do was laugh because, seriously, who does that? However, as the days passed on and I dwelled more and more on why he may have decided to do this to me, I became very bitter. This really annoyed my friends, and they decided it was time for me to get out there and date again. So we went out to the bars and looked for a man for me.

I am not really a big fan of bars, so I was miserable. Most guys do not choose to hit on the girl standing in the corner alone staring into her beer bottle looking like she just sucked on a lemon. I decided that this was not the way that I was going to meet a guy, so I left. When we got back to my place, my friends thought it would be funny to sign onto eDate and post a personal ad for me to see if anything came from it. For about a week, I ignored the emails I was receiving saying that I had matches in my area. But one day, when I came home from work, I decided Hey, what do I have to lose? So I signed into my eDate account.

I clicked through the lists of guys, each one looking creepier than the last. I was about to give up when one of the guys caught my eye. His name was Tom and he had the most amazing eyes I have ever seen, well in a picture at least. I read over his profile and decided he was worth a try. I wrote down his phone number that he had posted on his profile and put it in my purse, waiting to get the courage to call him. A week went by, and I still hadn’t used the number, but it was slowly burning a hole in my bag. I did not want to spend another Friday night at home alone.

Thursday came, and I decided it was the day. I dug the small piece of paper out and laid it flat on the table. I poured a glass of wine and sat down at the table, staring at the piece of paper and giving myself a pep talk. After about a half hour and three glasses of wine, I decided it was time to call. I picked up the phone and slowly punched in the number. The phone rang for what seemed like hours, I was about to hang up when a strong deep voice answered on the other end.

Love at First Sight... or Not

Meghan Williams

Starburst

Frederick Brown
“Hello?” I froze for a minute and the man repeated himself “Hello?”

I coughed “Hi my name is Jen I got your number off of eDate?” I could hear a smile in his voice.

“Oh, hello Jen. How are you?” We talked about our lives and started to get to know one another. We were about to hang up when Tom quickly kept me on the line “Jen would you want to come to dinner with me tomorrow night?”

I was so excited “I would love to!”

He laughed. “Great I’ll pick you up at 8?”

I smiled into the phone. “Sounds great see you then!”

The whole next day at work, all I could do was smile. The day crawled by, and spent most of my time thinking about what I was going to wear. Once five o’clock hit, I grabbed my things and just about ran to the elevator. When I arrived home, my friends were already there waiting for me. No one trusted me to pick my outfit for my first date with Tom. We finally decided on a black skirt and a red shirt. I had just finished putting on my lipstick when the doorbell rang. This was the first time today that I had actually been nervous. I opened the door, and there he was. He was about six feet tall with big brown eyes and blonde hair. He smiled at me, and his smile was absolutely beautiful. He had some of the whitest teeth I have ever seen.

We walked down the three flights of stairs from my apartment to his car. He opened my door for me, and I climbed in. On the way to restaurant, he asked how my day was, and I told him about my job and the people I dealt with as a Drug Rep for a pharmaceutical company. He didn’t have much to say, so I asked him about his job.

“Oh, I work at a bar in Philly during the week, but I volunteer at a sports center for underprivileged kids on the weekends.” I thought this was so sweet. This guy really likes kids. As the night went on and he loosened up, however, the conversation took a very strange turn.

We had just ordered dessert, and I thought the night was going really well. This was until he reached across the table and took my hands in his; this was cute and made me feel good. He looked into my eyes.

“Jen, I know I have only known you for a little over twenty four hours, but I feel like I have known you forever. Thinking this was just a line, I went with it. “I know exactly what you mean, I feel like we have been friends for a long time.” There was intensity to him now “I think I could spend the rest of my life with you.”

Okay. This was no line. I was feeling extremely uncomfortable, and if it wasn’t for the dessert that was on its way, I might have found a way to get him to take me home. After dessert, he paid the bill and we walked out to the car.

The conversation on the drive home was even more awkward than in the restaurant. Well, I guess it wasn’t really conversation seeing as how he was the only one talking.

“I was thinking maybe we could drive out to Manhattan next weekend and meet my parents for dinner. Then on the way back we could stop at my sister’s house in Jersey. I would really like for you to meet my niece and nephew.” I sat there in silence thinking this could not get any worse when he turned to me with a smile “So do you think we should do Christmas at my parents or yours?”

I looked at him in disbelief, I wanted to scream. ITS ONLY MAY! GIVE IT A REST! Instead I smiled “I don’t know let’s talk about it when it gets closer.”

When we pulled up to my apartment, I did everything I could to keep myself from jumping out of the car and running up the stairs into my apartment. He opened my car door and walked me up to my apartment. Once at the door he kissed me goodnight and looked for the invite inside. I told him I was very tired and had a lot to do tomorrow and that I would call him later. I quickly closed the door and walked into my room and laughed. Not just a giggle, but a full out laugh until you cry laugh. I would, I would find the guy who is ready to get married after the first date!

I spent the next month avoiding his phone calls, emails and even letters. Sometime around Thanksgiving I think he got the idea that we were not going to be doing Christmas at his parents or mine.
Darling

Samantha Anderson

Darling this will drive you to the ends of this earth
You will taste the lush fruits of distant places
Nourish your thirsts in cool clear waters
With the wild fawns you will lay quietly
Stretch your arms in the soft grasses
And you’ll stand high in the warm air
Look down upon the world as you know it
You’ll sit with hands covering your face
Experiencing the beauty you’ve found
Standing in the dewy wet forests
And nothing but the wind in your hair
Quietly reminding you that you are alone
If you had told me two years ago that this was how my life would end, I would have called you a liar. I would have told you that love conquers all, that love can overcome all obstacles in its path and that love is never ending. Standing here in front of him, unable to breathe, unable to come up with words to speak to him, feeling betrayed and confused, I see that there are things that love cannot overcome, that love cannot conquer. The fears of the ignorant and the pressures of society can sometimes force someone to choose the will of others over the love in his heart. However, even as they drag me away from him, I hold that one thing is true: that love is never ending. He can sentence me to my death, but he can never take away my love for him and what we shared. He knows this, which is why he cannot bear to gaze into my tearing eyes as they drag me into the darkness.

It was an unusually cold September in 1934 Germany. I lived in a small town outside of Dresden. This is where I was born, learned how to ride a bike, went to school, and where I met Alexander. Alexander and I first met in second grade when we were eight years old. Our teacher, Mrs. Mayer, partnered us up for a class science project. The chemistry between us was almost as undeniable as the excellence of our volcano, gushing with a cream soda, dirt, and gravel mixture. And from that point on, we were inseparable. Alexander and I did everything together from playing hide-and-seek when we were younger to sharing secrets as we grew older. It also helped that he lived with his family directly across the street from my house. His father was a stern man, a general in the German Army, and his mother was the traditional soldier’s wife, sewing charcoal buttons upon freshly ironed slacks and jacket adorned with striking mustard five-point stars. He had one older brother and a younger sister. Alexander had beautiful waves of golden blond hair, ocean blue eyes and skin freshly tanned from the sun. His brother and sister were mini-versions of him. They were the perfect German family.

Growing up, I always realized that I was different from Alexander, that I didn’t fit into the perfect German family mold that he did. I went to synagogue while he went to church. I celebrated different holidays than he and his family did, and I even looked a little different from him. The sun had little effect on my skin, and I didn’t have waves of golden blond hair.
My hair was dead straight and chestnut brown. None of these differences ever mattered though.
Not to me, and not to Alexander. It never stopped us from being best friends. It never stopped us from telling each other our hopes and dreams. And when we were both sixteen, it didn’t stop us from sharing our first kiss.

It happened suddenly, like a volcanic eruption of emotions that had been pent up over the years, just waiting to explode. We were talking and laughing as we always did. But as he held out his hand to lead me up the cherry wood steps to his room, time slowed around me, the demons of the outside world snarled and cowered behind the curtain of hope borne from the purity of our love. The magic of the moment lit my mind’s eye, everything around me stroked and laden with a penetrating, luminescent shimmer. I was captivated. The yellows and golds of Alexander’s perfectly quaffed curls kissed his strawberry cheeks, complimenting the bronze contours of his carefully carved features. He was a vision. He was my vision, God’s gift to me. An angel sent to lead me from the land of my people to a safe haven, impenetrable from the devil’s hand, even in his human form. As I peered into the waves of his blue eyes, the white pearls of his mouth flashed at me as his raspberry lips stretched and rose into little quarries in his cheeks. I hadn’t even realized my arm had lifted and my hand taken captive by his until I felt the silky smooth wrapping of his fingers around my rough, unworthy hand. Sitting upon the age-ridden quilt his mother had pieced together with fabric from his childhood blankets and shirts, it felt as though we were the only two people in the world. Alexander had an alluring look in his eye that was screaming out to me. Though our lips never parted to allow our thoughts the freedom to become words, it wasn’t quiet. The pounding of my heart was like a jackhammer. The banging was so fierce I was sure Alexander must have heard it. But if he had, he never let on that he did. He sat there, across from me, just staring into my eyes as if he were looking into my soul. He slowly reached his hand out and touched my shoulder. His touch sent an avalanche of little bumps down my back as he slid his hand up my neck and into the brown locks of my hair. What was he doing? He leaned in towards my face, his eyes, never leaving mine. I could feel the warmth of his breath brushing against my skin. He pressed his wet lips against mine and kissed me firmly on my mouth. My body went limp, succumb to the alien feelings that swam through me, toying with my mind. It was spectacular.

Deep inside, I always knew I liked Alexander more than just a friend. I just never knew if he felt the same way, and I was always too scared to act on my feelings. I didn’t even know if it was okay to have these feelings. They made me feel like there was something wrong with me, but I couldn’t control it. Our love was too strong to be caged by society’s scrutinizing eye. Alexander was never scared though. He always took risks. He was the outgoing and aggressive one. And I was glad he was.

From that point on, Alexander and I became more than friends. Every Friday I would excitedly scurry over to his shed after school. I was always careful as to not be seen. We had to be sure as to not let on what kind of relationship we had. If anyone found out what was going on, we would be in the kind of trouble only sinners knew about. People didn’t normally accept relationships like ours. When I would open the doors to the shed and step in, Alexander was always there waiting for me, leaning against the wall in the back by a tiny window, the only reminder of the real world. He would immediately look up and say “Hey stranger” with a flirtatious grin on his face. He would step over to me, grab my body with his hands, push me against the rusty shed wall, knocking the rakes and sod ridden shovels from their resting point and kiss me. We would be in the shed for what seemed like hours sometimes, just the two of us. I never wanted to leave and go home, but sooner or later, our parents would wonder where we were, so we had to leave our alternate universe of forbidden love and return to the real world.

In the winter of 1934, Hitler began a crusade against homosexual relationships. After hearing the news, Alexander and I had to limit the amount of time we spent with each other. We were terrified that if we didn’t, we would be caught and taken by the Nazis.

I once said to him, “I don’t care if we get caught, as long as we’re together, as long as I don’t have to be apart from you.” Alexander blessed me with the sight of his starch white smile like a clam revealing its precious pearl, but didn’t say anything back. Hitler and the Nazi party had a different effect on Alexander than me. His dad was in the military, and with the war at large, was pressuring Alexander to join as well. He didn’t want to disappoint his father and family, but he loved me...
Later that year, Hitler began a mass extermination of the Jews. People in the neighborhood stopped talking to us. Whispers on the street from voices which once called out pleasantries, wicked glances from eyes that once sparkled with admiration for my mother’s exquisite, blossoming yellow roses, haunted my existence.

Things became so unbearable that I had to stop attending school. In the beginning, when I told Alexander I was scared, he told me not to worry. He assured me he didn’t care what Hitler said and that he loved me no matter what. However, as time progressed, Alexander started to change. He suggested that we only meet up every other Friday as to not draw unwanted attention. He also started acting different when we were together. He wasn’t all over me as he once was. We would kiss and then he would pull away.

I asked him, “What’s wrong?” He didn’t say anything. To look into his eyes was no longer to see the soul whose match was my own. His gaze no longer penetrated my body like a bullet, but rather, left me feeling like a ghost, banished from his sight. I called out to the heart that must still bear the handprint of my unrelenting love, but nothing. I longed to be engulfed by the warmth of his arms. I opened the door and froze. There stood Alexander with two Nazi soldiers behind him. He looked up for a second as I opened the door, but as soon as I tried to make eye contact with him, he turned his head to the floor.

A note from Alexander beckoning me to return to our love’s sanctuary come nightfall silenced the painful quarrel in my mind. When the time came and darkness had its grip upon the world, already tormented by the shadows of hell, I forced myself into the night. There was a cold breeze in the air and little droplets of water were beginning to fall from the cloud-covered sky.

I crept from the back door of my house and snuck over to the shed. I stood in front of the rickety doors for a minute, and allowed my lungs to fill with the crisp night air. I couldn’t wait to see his face, to touch him and kiss him, to have him hold me so I could feel safe and loved.

Three weeks passed by without me hearing or seeing him. Germany was now a mere shadow of how life once was, a nightmare that no amount of pinching could awaken me from. Many Jews were being ripped away from their homes and loved ones by the Nazis. My mind was completely engulfed by the terrifying possibilities of what could happen to my family and me. I dreamed of the devil in man’s clothes, a Nazi uniform, kicking down my door and laughing an inhuman laugh as his red gaze pinned me like a laser and his faceless minions, in similar dress, dragged my family and me from our home. Despite this, Alexander never left my thoughts. Did he stop loving me because I was Jewish? Did Hitler and the Nazi party really have this much of an effect on how people viewed us? My mind was torn by the nightmare and the reality, though I would later find the two to be the same.

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I was so confused! What was happening? The Nazi soldiers started heading towards me, the devil’s minions with the nerve to call themselves men. My waking nightmare had become my reality and no amount of blinking would make the demons disappear. I didn’t know what to do or say. My eyes started to tear and burn, transforming my lashes into torches as I stared at Alexander. How could he do this to me? He said he loved me. The Nazi soldiers grabbed me and started to drag me out of the shed and away from the love of my life. That’s when I realized that love can not conquer all. The fears of the ignorant and the pressures of society can sometimes force someone to choose the will of others over the love in his heart. Even as they dragged me away from him, however, I held that one thing was true, that love would remain never ending. He could sentence me to my death, but he could never take away my love for him and what we shared. He knows this, which is why he could not bear to gaze into my tearing eyes as they dragged me into the darkness.
They say they are wonderful high-achievers  
We say they are greedy unbelievers.

Hypocrites, deceivers, and liars  
It seems they have only terrible desires.

"Trust us! Trust us!" they cunningly chant  
What they don’t understand is that we simply can’t!

Honor, concern, and dignity is what they lack  
How can we trust them when they stab us right in the back?

“Our fathers would be so disappointed in you,” I wish I could say  
Judgment is quickly coming, I can’t wait for the day.

Like prowling lions they move in the shadows of the night  
Too cowardly to lift the curtain that is blocking our sight.

They may have fooled some of us but we know they are aware  
Of all our brewing anger and penetrating glare.

But we are slowly waking up and the blindfolds are coming off  
No longer will they shove away our deepest opinions with a conceited scoff.

Their suffocating grip will soon cease to exist  
And, believe me, they surely will not be at all missed.

Silenced Truth

by Heather Stepien

Leo Konda
Colleen DeMenna

Casualties of Society

by Sara Cocchi

Every morning I make the commute
And see the casualties of night.
Our way of life takes three more.
No news flash.
No vigil light.

Just their bodies twisted and torn.
The road repaved
With chunks of membrane.
Tire treads run through a torso.
Face unscarred.

Stares empty at the sky.
Savagely we reap innocent lives.
No one stops to grieve.
Our busy schedules drip relentlessly on our minds.
There’s no time to notice this genocide.
As feet press the gas pedal
We mustn’t slow
We are part of this machine
Accelerating faster, faster.
Dare not to step in front,
For we will plow you down.
Your vital organs explode before you
The hum of an engine
Buzzing between your temples.
From your veins, life does ooze.

These strange creatures
Riding their metallic beasts, so pristine,
Zoom by in a cruel blur,
And now you see
The misery our life does bring.

Sara Cocchi
Derek Mahoney

Looking at the passing trains
Focused on the tracks
Each click-clack vibrates my brain
As I think of going back
But there’s no going back I know
As minutes turn to miles
So I search deep down below
And try to find a smile
But all the pain I left behind
Will slowly tear me down
As I pass the city signs and only find a frown
The days are long and nights are cold
And I’m too young to be this old

Summer Rain

Maureen McBeth

One summer when my children were small, it rained. I don’t mean once or twice. It rained almost daily, and I guess you can understand that I almost lost my mind. Jack was seven, and Amy was four, and they were bored because “there was nothing to do.” This was in spite of the 123 games of Junior Monopoly, 687 hands of Go Fish and the 300 rounds of Red Light, Green Light. They watched Ghostbusters so many times that I can still quote it today. Additionally, we visited the public library several times a week for a change of scenery.

In the meantime it was only the second week of July, and I had mediated more arguments than the Supreme Court. So while they were enjoying the second showing of Ghostbusters that day, I made my way into the kitchen. Seeking divine intervention, I asked for the Lord’s help.

“Lord, please help me to be patient and keep these kids busy. Oh and by the way should we build an ark?” At this point I started to make lunch. Suddenly, a memory popped into my mind. When I was little, my Mom would take us for walks and let us play during a gentle summer rain! I could see her standing by the screen door in her sleeveless yellow summer dress, the one with the sash adorned with white daisies. My brother Kevin and I were playing cards on the living room floor and I looked up as she passed us, the clean scent of her Jean Nate wafting through the room. “Come here you two,” she said. We got up and went to the door quickly to see what was going on. “Take a deep breath. What do you smell?” We took deep, deep breaths and Kevin replied “It’s going to rain.” We knew this because Mom had called this smell to our attention many times before. I always thought the odor was like a wet penny, he thought it smelled like wet grass.

“To each his own,” my mom would say. Also, along with these observations she pointed out that because the backs of the leaves were showing, we could tell the backs from the fronts by color. The fronts are usually a deep green while the backs appear to be a light green. This was a sure sign of impending rain.
Not long after the first drops would begin to fall, the big ones that go “splat” as they hit the hot sidewalk would cause it to smoke. “Let’s go take a walk,” she’d say as she grabbed her yellow and white striped umbrella. Kevin and I did not carry umbrellas and the rain felt cool upon my warm skin. Raindrops sat on my arm for a moment before running towards the ground.

We stopped to look around our yard. The rose bush that spanned the left side of our house with its pale pink flowers seemed to dance in response to the gentle breeze. Small brown sparrows, waiting out the rain, hid among the branches. To the right, yellow day lilies sparkled like golden trumpets along with the pale purple lavender. The scent of the lavender grew stronger the wetter it became. We moved down the walkway to see how this was affecting the big anthill taking up almost a whole block of cement. I asked my Mom “Where did all the ants go?” “To the basement to do laundry until the weather clears,” she answered. We all giggled at that silly thought.

Next we proceeded to the curb where a stream of water flowed down towards the creek at the end of our street. We watched for a bit before taking turns putting objects in to see if they would float. Rose petals and grass will but sticks and stones will not.

We would follow the stream to the creek at the end of our street. The creek was not very big, six or seven feet across and about eight inches deep. We looked at mom for approval to go in. She nodded, and in we went. We waded in and peered down into the clear water. There were small silver fish, green plants that swayed with the current, and rocks of many colors. We would have been content to spend an afternoon exploring it. All of a sudden, the sun burst through the clouds, bringing with it a beautiful rainbow. I silently wondered if we would ever find the pot of gold and how much candy we would be able to buy with it.

I was brought back from the past by argument number three of the day. I stood still for a moment, embracing the memory. Then I took a deep breath and walked towards the front door. I silently walked past them in my yellow summer dress with the white daisies on the sash and grabbed my yellow and white umbrella.

I looked at them and said, “Come here, you two. Let’s go take a walk.”
Serenity

Donna Lee

The splashing sound of water flowing down a stream,
the snap and crackle of a fire in the night,
a cricket chirping its song,
birds swooshing by in flight.
The whisper of the wind blowing through the trees,
the sigh of a dog resting on a porch, ice cubes settling in a glass,
flames flickering from a torch.
The joyful laughter of children playing,
wind chimes clinking in the breeze, a fawn dashing through the brush,
the scent of blooming roses, so fragrant and sweet.
Sublimity and splendor, not a single disturbing sound,
just the divine gift of nature and the beauty of its surroundings.