

SPRING 2010 *ORLANDO* POETRY FINALIST EXCERPTS:

SHELLEY PUHAK, "THE CONSOLATION OF FAIRY TALES"

1. Rye-Mother

Dream-nipples split like tongues or
blossoms, crusted tough
with ingrown hairs, thick
as black elastics,
protruding from useless tips.

Lucky thing your baby died, the nurse says,
or else how would you have fed him?

What the nurse really said, when I asked to hold
him again: Sweetie, he's already gone.

I pick at my nipples and cry.

SPRING 2010 *ORLANDO* NONFICTION FINALIST EXCERPTS:

RE'LYNN HANSEN, "THE NEIMAN MARCUS CHRISTMAS BOOK"

Watching her hands is like watching a manta ray move across the ocean floor. I think to myself that my hands, and everyone's hands, must undulate in this way—the way of Spanish dresses, and butterflies, and sheets in the wind, and surface waves. But they don't, and I watch her hands in the fading dining room light. Her hands, at first, relaxed on my dining room table and then sweeping the crumbs. Again, relaxed. Again, sweeping.

It is enough for me, and I chastise myself—why is this enough—and feel guilty—why should this not be enough? Though I confess, it is enough for me to have her here waving crumbs from my table. And the crumbs are nonexistent by the way. We have not eaten. I have only cut her a pear which she likes cold, and in the bowl, and we are only here at the table to watch the fading winter light, the birds at the feeder, the last of the day, and to go through the Christmas catalogues. It is not a ritual, but should be, for the catalogues are spread out around us, and my mother is so well-paced in the paging through catalogues, and the stacking of those that she has interest in between us, and discarding those of no interest on a chair beside her (which I will later bag and bring to my small town recycling depot), that I think to myself, the sun is fading and I must remember. And then I think, remember what? Only that she sweeps crumbs from the table while the Christmas catalogues are awash between us like a run of river rock.

PEGGY O'BOYLE, "TOTEM"

I begin to pick at the crust of sticktights that have formed around my ankles. They are thick and, not wanting to carry any new burdens, I strip away my shoes and socks, letting my bared soles explore the ground unblindfolded.

To the right, my toes find the contours of rocks. I begin searching out a perfect one, one that's been worn down by the river's force until it's smooth and gently rounded. Love of rocks runs strong through my family, from my geologist father to his rock-hound grandson. My toes touch a larger rock. It's gritty, cold surface is split in the center--a jagged fissure runs nearly its full length. I reach down and take the rock in my hand. Its hour glass shape is topped by a small knob and the rock is slightly longer than my outstretched fingers. Its almost human form reminds me of the Hopi creation stories I heard when my father worked on the reservation. How God makes people from the mud and breathes life into them. I hold the rock to my mouth and exhale. Nothing. I am no god.

Despite the crack, I choose to keep this rock as a totem and slip it into my pocket. It drags the front of my sweatshirt down as if I was pregnant.

TERESA STORES, "LATOUR"

I rise at 5, as is my custom, to be alone in the loft with my words, my writing, my stories, watching the sunrise, watching for invaders, storing away the harvest for another, colder day. I don't know all that is hidden in the heart of this structure. It has not yet been revealed to me. The tower has not yet fallen away. Change will come though. I know it. And it may be the change of a tower falling, some structure tumbling, a rug pulled from under my feet. It has happened to me before: my coming out, my brother's death, my father's silence, even falling in love with Susan and the birth of the twins, the total demolition of my former life. I have learned that the tower falling can bring new light. We can rise to the challenges, embrace the changes, move into a new world.

Sometimes the words build the tower up. Sometimes they protect the secrets. Sometimes they reveal them and the tower crumbles. I seem to land on my feet, naked perhaps, vulnerable. But clean. Illuminated. The words are just a tower. The life within the walls is ordinary and divine in the same breath, the same light of heaven. Stones may crumble, but the light warms, a kind of magic. We must trust—not fear—the process of change. I signal the world miles away. We are safe up here together, even when the walls come down.

SPRING 2010 *ORLANDO* SUDDEN FICTION FINALIST EXCERPTS:

NUZHAT ABBAS, "DAGH"

The woman's body, pregnant, you found later, filled to the brim with the euphoria of little white pills to bring the darkness down. The stop of her death. How everything would tumble later, but now, as you stare into the quiet at the two bodies lying on white sheets, the dark frame of their bed glistening in the half-light of this shuttered room, you too are pulled into a twisted arc of time, fiercely slowed. Your own heart pulls you down. Your own dark body slumps against the tired wall.

There is a story here, you know, and one day you might even have to tell it. But right now, all you can see, and this afternoon seems to last for years, is that white bed, that grown woman's gently swelling body, that tiny comma of a girl with dark lashes shut down and the shifting stripes of light that cross the quiet room.

CAITLIN O'SULLIVAN, "HOW TO MAKE A FIST"

Curl your fingers joint by joint, creating a row of bones like bullets lined up in a clip. Fingernails dig into your palm. Metacarpals show up like white shadows under the skin of the back of your hand. Fold your thumb over your fingers like the safety bar on a carnival ride. No air pockets in your palm, just tendon pulling bone snug against muscle. Dry skin cracks on your knuckles. Blood outlines the weak places.

The asshole looks at you and you punch him. A bone breaks in your hand. The pain feels like manhood, like brotherhood, like doing your part.

SPRING 2010 *ORLANDO* SHORT FICTION FINALIST EXCERPTS:

ANNE DEMARCKEN, "SIGNS AND SYMBOLS"

I have always talked in my sleep and I used to be afraid that I would say something that would hurt Gib's feelings because dreams are so personal, so selfish. But instead she reports that I sometimes wake her up telling her that I love her, kissing her, snuggling up to her even when it is so hot we have the fan running on high all night. I never remember, but am relieved to learn that unconsciously I love Gib and need her. It is like reading in my horoscope that I am a kind and generous person. Now, I don't worry that she will find out I am pregnant because of what I might say in my sleep. I have come to trust that my secrets exist separately from my dreams. It makes me wonder if a secret is located closer to the center of a person than her dreams, because on their way to the surface, my dreams don't seem to brush up against my secrets. Maybe a secret is the center of every person, the soul, the undying part of us that is bigger, more lasting than ourselves.

COURTNEY MCDERMOTT, "SHADES OF WHITE"

Q sometimes wishes that she had a camera and could take a photograph, like the photos Jan takes for the hostel brochures - of golden walls and viney gardens and a pool that's bright like the underbelly of a seashell. Then she would have a photo taken of her and the baby Clara, sitting just like this on the rag carpet, with sugar in their mouths. Clara sitting in white ruffles and Q in her maid's uniform of blue polyester, the sun through the French doors shining equally on Clara's pink skin and Q's brown skin.

She would like a photo of herself on the beach too, barefoot in the white-peaked waves. But only tourists take photos like that, and even though the ocean is just over the building tops - a seagull's flight away - Q never has time to enjoy it. She went there once with Ana and Clara. Ana bought an ice cream cone and refused to walk on the sand, because Clara would get dirty. She ate the cone and Q held the baby and they watched the waves, but didn't touch them. So Q knows only the look of waves.

HONORABLE MENTION: JAMIE AMOS, "BEFORE THE BEND"; SHANTI BANNWART, "APRIL FOOL'S DAY"; KIT SOLEIL, "CHRIST JESUS WATCHING"