

*SLO Night Writers*

**WORDSMITHS**



**February 2021**

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# President's Letter

by Janice Konstantinidis

Dear Fellow NightWriters,

Michael Connelly, the author of many successful detective novels, wrote this about writing:

Writing, whether you consider it a craft or an art, or both, is something that should get better with practice. It stands to reason. Writing comes from experience, curiosity, and knowledge.

Personally, I think it is part magic, for who knows how creativity and imagination emerge spontaneously from these feverish brains of ours?

But Mr. Connelly has a point. How are we to improve our writing if not by practice? I am reminded of the quote by the famous coach, Vince Lombardi:

Practice does not make perfect. Perfect practice makes perfect.

So how does one accomplish this perfect practice? One writes *every day*. One immerses oneself in the details of the life and environment of the characters one has imagined. One researches a subject to exhaustion. One studies the writing of others

A speculative bird in a tree,  
wondered what he'd have for tea.  
He was quite over bugs  
and not into slugs;  
he spotted a worm with such glee!

*Janice Konstantinidis*



and one studies the beautifully complex mechanism we call language.

Those are huge tasks. To me, it is similar to mining. You dig and dig and dig, but once in a while, you find a diamond. Keep digging!

Stay safe and happy writing.

*Janice Konstantinidis*



Photo by Jun Zhang

## General Meeting Previews

Tuesday, February 9

**5:15 pm: Join the Critique Table**

**6:30 pm: Jordan Rosenfeld**

### ***How to Write With Page-Turning Tension***

Tension in novels, stories, and even memoirs is like the connective tissue that allows muscles to attach to bones, and thus flex their might. It's the heart of conflict, the backbone of uncertainty, the adrenaline rush of danger. When it is present, stories leave readers breathless and wanting more. When it's missing, scenes feel inconsequential, plots drag, characters meander.

Learning the basic building blocks of story craft is not enough to write a page-turning story; you need to master the art of tension on every page and within every element of the story. In this talk with Jordan Rosenfeld, author of *How to Write a Page Turner* and five other books on writing craft, participants will learn the essential elements of page-turning tension.

Jordan Rosenfeld is author of the novels *Women in Red* and *Forged in Grace* and six books on the craft of writing, most recently *How to Write a Page-Turner*, the bestselling *Make a Scene*, *Writing the Intimate Character*, *A Writer's Guide to Persistence*, *Writing Deep Scenes* and *Write Free*. Her freelance articles and essays have been published in hundreds of publications, including: The Atlantic, The New York Times, Scientific American, Writer's Digest Magazine, The Washington Post and many more. She is also a freelance manuscript editor.



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## General Meeting Previews

Tuesday, March 9

**5:15 pm: Join the Critique Table**

**6:30 pm: Anne Janzer**

### ***Get the Word Out: Write a Book that Makes a Difference***

Did you know that only 6% of nonfiction writers stick with their initial outlines? (That number *must* be smaller for fiction writers!)

Did you know that while most books take longer than anticipated to write, most authors find that the experience exceeds their expectations?

And for many published authors, the biggest surprise about the process of writing is what happens afterward—marketing.

In this session, Anne Janzer will share the results of a survey of more than 400 authors, which she conducted as research for her most recent book *Get the Word Out: Write a Book That Makes a Difference*. We'll cover insights about publishing, book marketing, motivation, and of course the writing process. Anne will also share the words of advice and wisdom from the survey participants.



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## General Meeting Previews

Tuesday, July 13

**5:15 pm: Join the Critique Table**

**6:30 pm: Ava Homa**

### ***A Best Book of 2020: Daughters of Smoke and Fire***

Mark your calendars for July 13 when we will have a special guest presenter, [Ava Homa](#). Ava's [Daughters of Smoke and Fire](#) was named "A Best book of 2020." She was nominated for the Frank O'Connor International Prize. Her book has been described as an unforgettable, haunting story of a young woman's perilous fight for freedom and justice for her brother.

Set primarily in Iran, this extraordinary debut novel takes readers into the everyday lives of the Kurds.

Leila dreams of making films to bring the suppressed stories of her people onto the global stage, but obstacles keep piling up.

Leila's younger brother Chia, influenced by their father's past torture, imprisonment, and his deep-seated desire for justice, begins to engage with social and political affairs. But his activism grows increasingly risky and one day he disappears in Tehran. Seeking answers about her brother's whereabouts, Leila fears the worst and begins a campaign to save him. But when she publishes Chia's writings online, she finds herself in grave danger as well.

*Daughters of Smoke and Fire* is an evocative portrait of the lives and stakes faced by 40 million stateless Kurds and a powerful story that brilliantly illuminates the meaning of identity and the complex bonds of family, perfect for fans of Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*.

*Daughters of Smoke and Fire* "unfurls the history of an oppressed people fighting for their right to live, love, thrive, and create. Homa peels back layers of sorrow and injustice to reveal the resilience and hope of so many Kurds living in the stateless nation."—[Chicago Review of Books](#)



## Critique Group News

### North County Critique Group Currently Open to New Members

The **North County Critique Group** is looking for a few new members. Are you a fiction, or creative non-fiction writer of intermediate to advanced ability who is looking for a group with which to share your work, listen to others, and grow your craft? We are currently meeting via Zoom on the Second and Fourth Thursday of the month at 1:30 p.m. If interested in joining this amenable group, please send a writing sample to coordinator Lillian Brown at [lilliofslo@aol.com](mailto:lilliofslo@aol.com).

## Notices

### SLO County Publication Seeks Submissions

The San Luis Obispo County legal magazine, the *Bar Bulletin*, is expanding its range of articles and is seeking submissions from the community. Tara Jacobi, editor of the *Bar Bulletin*, states that "I am looking for articles about anything from the history of SLO, the latest book mystery you read, work-life balance, a lifestyle choice that made the difference and more. Generally, I am open to almost anything that writers wish to write about who may wish to obtain the experience of being published."

To submit an article or to ask any question, contact Tara Jacobi at [slosafire@icloud.com](mailto:slosafire@icloud.com).

### Monthly Online Zoom Meetings

During the pandemic isolation, we are offering online meetings and presentations via Zoom (see page 3 for details of our February 9 General Meeting). We encourage interested visitors to join us. The meetings will be held on the second Tuesday of the month. The Critique Table will begin at 5:15 pm and the General Meeting will begin at 6:30 pm.

If you have any ideas or comments about our online presentations, please contact our Program Director, Steven Mintz, at [smintz@calpoly.edu](mailto:smintz@calpoly.edu)

Visitors are always welcome. For details, visit our website: [www.slomightwriters.org](http://www.slomightwriters.org).

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## How to Join the Monthly Zoom Critique Table

1. If you desire to have your work critiqued, send your chosen two pages to Susan Tuttle ([aim2write@yahoo.com](mailto:aim2write@yahoo.com)) and Terry Sanville ([tsanville@sbcglobal.net](mailto:tsanville@sbcglobal.net)) by the Saturday before the meeting.
2. Login to the monthly Zoom meeting a few minutes before 5:15 pm on the day of the meeting using the link below or the link provided in the email that is sent to members. You are welcome to join us even if you just want to listen and hear the critiques.
3. If you have any specific issues or questions you'd like covered at the Critique Table, just let Susan ([aim2write@yahoo.com](mailto:aim2write@yahoo.com)) or Terry ([tsanville@sbcglobal.net](mailto:tsanville@sbcglobal.net)) know before the meeting.

## The Zoom Meeting Link

[Click Here to Join the Zoom Meeting](#)

## Moved or Changed Email?

Please notify NightWriters of any change in address or email: [jkon50@gmail.com](mailto:jkon50@gmail.com). Join NightWriters and send dues or renewal checks (payable to SLO NightWriters) to: SLO NightWriters, PO Box 2986, Paso Robles, CA 93447. Or join/renew online through our website: [www.slouightwriters.org](http://www.slouightwriters.org) and pay with a credit card.

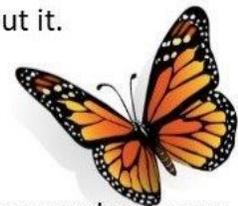
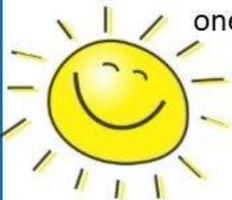
## Sunshine Corner

Need a Little Sunshine?

Into every life a little rain might fall, times when we long for sunshine, but no one notices.

NightWriters would like to send a card to any of its members who are ill, have lost a loved one, had surgery or an accident, but we don't always hear about it.

So, Fellow Writers, we need you!



Please email me, Judythe Guarnera: [judy.guarnera@gmail.com](mailto:judy.guarnera@gmail.com) and let me know when someone you know needs a little sunshine.

## IN MEMORIAM

It is with heavy hearts that we note the passing of Anthony Toscano on January 5, 2020, at age 70, in Morro Bay, California. Anthony was a long time member of SLO NightWriters, a board member, and especially, a friend to many. He is remembered for his outgoing spirit in the face of severe medical issues and his passion for Morro Bay, nature and writing.



### Elegy Poem For Anthony

The fog hung dank and heavy, covering the rock,  
 morning gulls stood still; they were indeed in shock.  
 The tide incoming calmed each wave, it paved the way ahead,  
 for the solitude required that day; dear Anthony is dead.  
 A whispering wind meandered, along a well-walked trail,  
 the trees nearby began to sway, as now they'd heard this tale.  
 The birds that sat on every branch flew off haste, each and every one,  
 to spread the word that they had heard, their journey had begun.  
 From Monterey along the coast, they told all on their way:  
 "Please spread the news to all you know before the end of day."  
 From butterfly to marigold, from evergreen to leaf,  
 the coastline and the hinterlands were bowed beneath their grief.  
 An empty bench was heard to say: "Alas, his time has come,  
 he sat upon me many morns; he knew he would succumb.  
 But brave soul that he was, took cheer, in all he saw,  
 from glistening water, sun and bay, in truth, there was much more."  
 His writer's hand recorded all, politic or nature,  
 sometimes with a teacher's voice, in classic nomenclature.  
 Other times, he wrote of joy, so tender were his words,  
 content was he there by the sea, accompanied by birds.  
 The gifts of God were his; in times his body ached,  
 the pain was eased by what he saw; his soul it was awakening,  
 thankful for the sweet respite he took from waves heard breaking.  
 the blessings of the Bay were his just for the taking.  
 The gentle gift of sleep was his, as he went on his way,  
 to meet his God and maker; thus, in heaven, he will stay.  
 Janice Konstantinidis.

# WORD PLAY

by Morgann Tayllor

## FERRETING OUT THE FUNNY

In these days of disorder, animal antics are booming on social media. We all need a chuckle and a smile—and many of us have a stash of animal stories we can share in writing, including those about wild or exotic animals.

\* \* \* \* \*

**Ferrets** are members of the weasel family and apparently they'll steal anything they can hoard—as a TV commentator found out when he narrated a short feature about a ferret sequestered in a small chain link enclosure.

Someone poked a finger in bulky work gloves between the chain links. Without warning, the ferret grabbed the gloved finger, then yanked the entire glove through the chain link fence and disappeared down an open drain hole with it. The astonished commentator could only say, "My WORD!"

\* \* \* \* \*

Animals such as these can indeed have the last word(s). *Ferret can be a noun, adverb or idiom. The reporter was good at ferreting out the facts—to uncover or bring to light by persistent searching.* Few ferrets thrive in the wild, having adapted to the human environment. Due to their tunneling talent and flexibility, they were domesticated some 2500 years ago to hunt rabbits by driving them from their burrows and to kill and eat rodents, an early form of pest control.

Ferrets are intelligent, social, energetic and uncommonly curious. Today they are popular as pets, even as they continue to serve and amuse mankind: (1) They threaded underground sound and TV cables for the wedding of the Prince of Wales and Lady Diana at Buckingham Palace. (2) Drainpipes

or flex tubing above ground are used in ferret races in the UK. (3) In English pubs there was a sport called Ferret Legging, popular for centuries until recently. A ferret was dropped inside the patron's pants after strings tied off the openings in pant legs and waistbands were tightened to thwart escape. During the event, the ferret might bite, whether in play or with purpose. The winner was the man who kept the ferret down his pants the longest, sometimes for hours.

\* \* \* \* \*

A bright summer day in Canada at a golf clubhouse: Out on the deck facing the 18th hole a few yards away, couples lounged in their chairs and sipped drinks as they watched a foursome hit long drives down a steep incline to the final hole.

Suddenly a **weasel** darted onto the fairway a few yards from the green, snatched a golf ball and dashed back to its ground burrow beyond the rough. The foursome was still too far away to notice what happened, while the clubhouse onlookers began to roar with laughter.

When the golfer arrived to chip onto the green, he couldn't find his ball. Bumfuzzled, he shifted into a 360-degree search mode, while the gallery on the deck waved, whistled, yelled and pointed in the direction of the purloined ball, to no avail. The golfer was too far away to hear, so he just substituted another ball in the approximate location. Meantime the thief had a toy to chew on and **managed to weasel out of being nabbed with the stolen goods**—in this case, *slinking out of, or evading the consequences of unacceptable behavior.*

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\* \* \* \* \*

Don't mess with **badgers**. They're also members of the weasel family, but they are mean and aggressive. Badgers only average around 25 pounds, but they have built-in body armor and are not afraid to attack predators or intruders many times their size.

With ferocious foreclaws, they tunnel into ground burrows, as did one next to a small Central Coast airport runway. Whenever an aircraft began a takeoff roll down the runway, the badger popped out of his hole to charge the accelerating plane as it roared past. But **constant badgering**—*unrelenting, annoying or aggressive behavior*—didn't get the badger what he wanted, which was to permanently scare away the perceived predator or intruder.

Several times daily, aircraft continued to encroach on his habitat.

Finally he had enough. The unofficial airport mascot departed one day, presumably for a quieter neighborhood.

\* \* \* \* \*

Such stories witnessed or historically recorded can pack the power of laughter. Lighthearted humor is a fortress against dark days, a bridge over troubled waters and paves a smoother road forward. Writers have the words; they can go verbal, viral or "*writ lit*" (*written literature*). Time to tap into your funny bone!

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Bethel Road After the Rain

Photo by Morgann Tayllor

## TIPS AND TIDBITS

by Judythe Guarnera



### DO READERS HAVE DIFFERENT READING NEEDS DURING A PANDEMIC?

"May you live in interesting times." Sir Austen Chamberlain, brother of the British Prime Minister, used this phrase, which is considered to be a Chinese curse, in 1936. Perhaps its significance today depends on how we define 'interesting.' Living during political upheaval and a world-wide pandemic, *interesting* seems to carry a lot of weight.

Interesting times, indeed, but trying times as well. Many people have lost jobs. Many are overwhelmed with working at home, while entertaining their kids and keeping them occupied with virtual learning. Many are ill or are grieving the loss of a loved one.

Neighbors and friends agree with each other that it's difficult to concentrate. Add to that, people being in varying stages of depression having been isolated and restricted, and it's a wonder that anyone can sit down and read. Whether it's a fantasy, romance, or a collection of short stories, books sit on desks and bedside tables, unread, untouched.

If someone does sit down to read, they may find themselves re-reading pages that don't seem to make any sense.

Sarah Watson, author of *Most Likely* and creator of *The Bold Type*, says that the constant stress of the pandemic has weighed on her more than the changes in her routine. "I've also always been a person who, if I pick up a book, I'm going to finish it, but recently I start books and put them down a lot."

Let's imagine that a writer, Joaquin, is completing his novel or a short story. He

might ask himself if he needs to do anything different than usual because of the pandemic before he prints and publishes.

I believe the answer to that question, in general, is a resounding no. Pandemic or no pandemic, we need to offer our readers good writing and make sure it is well edited, removing superfluous words.

Given today's distractions and fears, would I step up the intensity of my editing? Definitely. All the things that distracted the average reader a year ago, both in the world and in the story they're reading, have intensified. Many readers have normally short attention spans, but now, our minds are distracted by fear for our very lives.

Let me introduce you to three readers who could certainly represent today's readers. Their brief bios will give you a hint as to the interferences they deal with every day.

**Immanuel** is a forty-two-year-old coffeehouse barista who hasn't worked for six months due to pandemic restrictions. The owner couldn't financially sustain her business with greatly reduced clientele. Immanuel had to drop out of college because he could no longer afford the tuition.

When he was working and going to school, Immanuel was too busy to read for pleasure as he had loved to do since childhood. Now, with no income and nowhere to spend his time and/or money, he peruses his bookcases. Immanuel needs to read

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something which will entertain and distract him from his fear of impending eviction. How can an author hold his interest?

**Heidi**, a seventy-five year old widow whose children and grandchildren live on the opposite coastline, has begun to wonder if there's any reason for her to live after almost a year in isolation. She pays to have her groceries and medical supplies delivered and sees her doctor via telehealth. At times, she has tried to engage delivery people in conversation, but they kindly advised her they had a deadline and could lose their jobs if they stopped to chat. Her religion forbids suicide, so she is struggling to distract herself until the pandemic ends.

An average student in high school, Heidi had been more interested in boys than in school or reading, although she got high marks in reading comprehension. Recently, her son sent her a box of paperback books, and after reading the blurb on the back cover, she experienced a twinge of interest. But what will keep her reading?

**Rachell** is a thirty-two year old wife and mother working at home during the pandemic. Recently her children's school switched to virtual classes and she found herself with no teaching experience, trying to juggle her job requirements, entertain her children, support their learning process, and complete all the normal household chores.

She has no spare time, but after her husband leaves for his 6 pm to 6 am shift at the hospital, and the kids are in bed, she can't sleep. She hopes a good book will help her relax and has ordered Kindle books online, but they haven't held her attention.

These three individuals live in the same neighborhood. They discovered an online chat group at their local library. Heidi posted: "What should I look for to find a book that I'll like so much, I won't want to put it down?"

By the next day Immanuel and Rachell had

responded and shared their own frustrations. They chatted about what they most liked in a good book. They intended to follow that with the kinds of things authors did that drove them nuts and lead to them discarding the book.

Immanuel, Heidi, and Rachell, though different ages, backgrounds, experience, and interests, had similar needs, many no different than before the pandemic. On the flip side, because of the pandemic, they admitted that their lives were in such a state of upheaval that keeping them entertained was critical to help them face another day.

Here are some of the things they identified:

- They were all attracted to unusual, dramatic covers and titles that promised something unexpected. When they looked at the back cover, they wanted to get a hint as to the challenge the protagonist would face and some of the obstacles that would keep them from achieving the challenge, without giving the story away.
- They liked the idea of reading a page or two at the beginning, middle and end to see if they found the style of writing and the voice compelling.
- They liked a fast-paced story with a lot of action and interesting, realistic dialogue.

Sounds familiar, doesn't it?

On the negative side:

- They hated it when they found more than an occasional error. They found that paragraphs that went on sometimes for a full page and sentences so complicated they had to read them at least twice, a turn-off. Life was complicated. They were looking for respite when they were reading a book. And they wanted a good read, professionally put together.

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- They agreed with Leonard Elmore, famous author, who said he tried to leave out the writing that readers skip over.

After being bombarded with political and pandemic information, some readers find that even though they may have more time to read, they suffer from short attention spans. They're not adverse to learning new things through their reading, but distraction and entertainment are a must.

One of today's writing memes is that you must keep your reader reading, because if they put the book down, they might not pick it up again. That remedy is good anytime, but especially during pandemic reading.

A writer's imperative is to:

- Make the story super interesting with a good plot line and hooks that will pull the readers in and keep them coming back for

more.

- Cut unnecessary words; get to the point without dwelling on overly long descriptive settings, character description or backstory.

If you give readers a tight, compelling story, they may lose focus and put it down, but will be anxious to pick it up again when they are ready to be entertained again.

And last of all—probably no *War and Peace*, or *Anna Karenina*. Save those for happier times.

*In the Rhythm of Writing,*  
Judythe Guarnera

## Submit Stories, Photos and Ads to the Newsletter

We will publish advertisements for NightWriters' books and book writing related events. This advertising is Free For Members. Please provide the graphic (book cover or other graphic) for the announcement.

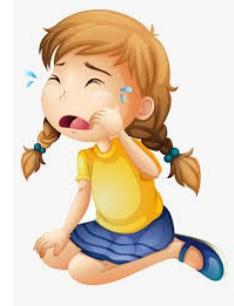
We will also accept original photographs, and unpublished Flash Fiction between 400-800 words from current members. Excerpts from published works, if they stand alone as their own mini-story, are also acceptable. We are also interested in articles, kudos and event notices. And if you have any other ideas for content, please let us know.

Send all submissions as attachments to:

[slonnewsletter@gmail.com](mailto:slonnewsletter@gmail.com), and put NEWSLETTER SUBMISSION in the subject line. We're all writers... so, take advantage of this opportunity to be published in your newsletter.

## Kudos, Kudos, Kudos...

No kudos submitted in the past month...



### Have Kudos to Crow About?

**Do you have a recent article or story published in a local, national or even international print or online magazine? Or a book published?**

**How about a review, or an award, honor or recognition of your writing?**

**If so, we'd like to know about it. To have your literary kudos included in *WordSmiths*, send an email to [slonnewsletter@gmail.com](mailto:slonnewsletter@gmail.com) by the 20th of the month.**

**President:** Janice Konstantinidis  
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**Contest Director:** Vacant  
**Welcome Committee:** Vacant  
**Sunshine Chair:** Judythe Guarnera  
**Website Master:** Janice Konstantinidis  
**Web Assistant:** Steve Derks  
**Newsletter Editor:** Steve Derks  
**Photographer:** Vacant  
**Member at Large:** Susan Tuttle  
**Hospitality:** Mary Silberstein

### We Need Your Help

The success of non-profit organizations like SLO NightWriters depends on its members. We all have talents other than writing that any organization could make use of. NightWriters has many special opportunities for members to get involved, working "behind the scenes." If you'd like to assist in any capacity, email: [jkon50@gmail.com](mailto:jkon50@gmail.com).

# The Trees Are Singing

by Sarah Newfeld Green

The trees are singing!  
Oh how they've tried to raise their voices  
These past four years - to shout and scream  
Their horror.

These years of dread and destroyed happiness.

Now the wind blows away unholy coldness  
With boldness  
Opening this land to joy and gladness.

We cry and laugh  
We've turned the corner  
Life is warmer  
After four lost years -

Years we've walked in trepidation - waiting  
For our hearts to open like sunflowers in summer  
For our breath this past year to ease it's thrumming

For a new vaccine and  
For this new man  
Of great experience to  
Honor his code to bring  
America back to wholeness so

America the Free can sing.

## The Dutiful Womb

by Janice Konstantinidis

"Why would I want to go on living?" Beth thought, her fragile hand stirring her tea. She looked out her window as she sipped, then she picked up her pen and began to write in her journal.

*What does life hold for me, except for the daily awareness that I am old, frail, and not much use to anyone - even myself?*

*The encroaching disability of old age has been a threat for a long time. Still, its awareness was driven home acutely today. I said goodbye to Jean. I can't find the words to express the grief I feel.*

*I don't think I would have been quite this distraught had she died. People die; it's expected and can happen at any age. However, my friend didn't die. I grapple with this puzzle as I sit here pondering my own existence.*

"A Goodbye Gathering," the invitation read. Hastily written, summoning as many of Jean's friends as her daughter could on short notice. "Mom is coming to live with me this week. I can't leave her alone here. Please feel welcome to visit tomorrow between 2 and 4 pm."

Their health had been declining for years. They had talked about it over cups of tea and cakes they knew they shouldn't have, but said, "What the heck?"

They had played countless games of Scrabble, decried the state of the world, and joked about racing each other on Zimmer frames when they were in their nursing homes.

They had reached the stage of life where they acknowledged that they had been upstaged by the years. They had clung to their independence like limpets to a rock. They took each other to their cataract

surgeries and hair appointments. They had dodged the question of when they would be forced to stop driving.

Maybe if they didn't mention it, they needn't confront it. God forbid they would ask for help. That would be a concession to the ghoul of age, the unseen but known shadow that occupied their closets, sneaking out while they slept, to rob them of their once smooth skin and their lustrous, thick hair. The specter haunted their awareness no matter how they tried to deny it.

They scoffed, but they didn't really. They tried to escape, prolong, even deny at times, when days were good. They exercised and walked. They said they were doing okay. They created a sense of security from the magical thoughts they permitted themselves. They walked a tightrope, wondering how long they could keep this up; so far they had had the final say over each day.

The ghoul had delivered the first of the final blows to Jean. A fall had bruised her wrist. The house cleaner they shared had expressed concern but was placated by Jean's fabricated account of spilled water on the kitchen floor when she had watered her plant.

"We need to take care," said Jean over tea after the cleaner had left. "She has a mandate to report anything like that. It's part of an agreement we signed when we moved into these apartments."

"Yet another nail is driven into the ever-eroding fabric of my notion of self," said Beth.

Beth continued to write.

*The bruises hadn't faded when Jean's daughter had arrived for the yearly*

*conference she attended while catching up with her mother. Amelia saw the dent in Jean's car as well. "The sun was in my eyes," Jean said.*

"Amelia is adding all this up," Jean said when she spoke to Beth on the phone later that day.

Amelia had wanted Jean to move closer to her ever since she and her family had moved to Oregon seven years ago. "Come home with me, Mom," Amelia said. Jean protested but Amelia remained firm this time. "No, sweetheart," Jean parried. "I have things to attend to."

Amelia didn't like that she was so far away from her mother. Amelia and Jean were both strong-willed women; there was a good relationship between them, but they had never been close. Amelia had tired of the distance factor for practical reasons."

Jean called Beth while Amelia was at the conference. "Come around, please," Beth asked. Jean took her handbag and walked the short distance to Beth's apartment. They'd lived in the same aged care apartments for ten years.

Jean recounted Amelia's conversation with her yesterday afternoon.

"You know you'd have a private room and bath," Amelia proffered.

"No, Amelia, I like my home here, and I don't want to move."

Jean looked at Beth and said, "I got up from my chair to clear the teacups and fell flat on my face! The doctor at the ER tried to reassure Amelia that my faint had been stress precipitated and wasn't that abnormal or dangerous. He wrote 'Vasovagal syncope' on my discharge papers when we left the ER. He said I would be fine. No need to worry; I had checked out remarkably well for my age."

Beth looked at her friend in dismay. She told Jean they may be headed for unknown and deep waters; the sharks were circling.

Jean continued. "Amelia is on a mission. She's using this incident to convince her brother that I

am at risk while living alone. Amelia can be very persuasive when she puts her mind to it. She put her brother, Evan, on the spot."

Jean told Beth of a phone call she'd overheard.

"Well, will you come to see Mom more? I've done my bit for this year. Maybe I can manage another visit, but I'm caught up with the kids and work."

When Evan resisted, Amelia said, "Well, don't say I didn't warn you." Then she hung up.

*Jean told me that she'd begun to feel weak, old, and unable to cope.*

*The ghoul had advanced a great distance that day. I could tell by Jean's face that her veneer of courage and her will to fight the beast of age had taken a huge hit. She'd given in to Amelia's litany of reasons why she should go home with her at the end of the week.*

*In my opinion, Jean is okay where she is and would cease to live as uniquely Jean if she became absorbed into the dutiful womb of her daughter.*

Beth looked up. It was getting dark, but she continued writing.

*The Goodbye Gathering was as sad as any event I'd ever attended. I didn't have an opportunity to speak with Jean. There were at least 30 people there on and off. Jean was well-liked. Some hadn't been able to come on such short notice. Jean seemed remote and resigned.*

*I thought she had assumed that look of sameness, of uniformity that age is wont to confer on some people. In reality, I think it's the look of resignation and of closing one's book on life.*

*Amelia's protestations have snuffed out her mother's will to live. The will that had been keeping her alive all these years.*

*I am saddened beyond words. Heartbroken. I watched, knowing there was nothing I could do to avert the unfolding tragedy, the theft of identity, the remorseless depersonalization of a once vibrant and vital woman, my friend, Jean.*

Beth looked up at the clock on the sideboard. "You've kept good time for sixty years," she said aloud. Watching the pendulum moving slowly from side to side, Beth knew that the clock was marking the time, her time, her life.

*I'll be lonely without Jean. I sense an emptiness; why, Jean was almost my other half these past few years, and I hers.*

Beth put her head down on the desk. She felt very weary. Fears began to flood her mind, but she didn't want to think about them. She knew that the clock would continue to tick, moving her life along with each sweep of the pendulum. She wondered how long it would continue to do so. "Ignorance may indeed be bliss," she thought, as she closed her eyes and dozed.

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