

Our Stories Literary Journal Standard Workshop – Fall 2008

Tatjana Miloradovic-Lindes, Writer, Philadelphia, PA

“Beware of the Moon” – Story 3 Draft 1

Feedback By: Josh Campbell, Fiction Editor (RED Track Changes)

Additional Feedback By: Alexis E. Santi, Editor-in-Chief (GREEN Track Changes)

More on Microsoft Word’s Track Changes see Microsoft website below:

<http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/word/HA012186901033.aspx>

* * *

Tatjana

See bottom for extensive written feedback, some of which is culled from (and expanded upon) the track changes in the right margin, which refer to very specific parts of the story.

What’s important is to carefully appraise these comments and suggestions, given your own aesthetic preferences and also that which you are simply not willing to compromise or part with, and do something that feels the best—hopefully better. Don’t change stuff simply to appease us.

Nice work.

JAC

Beware of the Moon

Count: 1582

The scalpel glinted in the orange light pouring in through the window of the operation room, like a broken-off golden wing. A young Gypsy woman was lying on the table in front of him with an IV needle inserted into her arm, her eyes half-closed in a grey shadow. The woman was young, twenty-two. When he stopped by her room that morning, she was braiding her charcoal hair. A sheaf of light was cutting her face into two, the dark forehead, and the shiny nose and dimpled chin.

“Will I die?” the girl asked and looked at him with quiet blue eyes.

Josh Campbel 10/12/08 10:20 PM

Comment: Remember to paginate for reference, as you did with your first two pieces.

me you 10/8/08 10:02 PM

Comment: Not only is this a teasing first line that hooks the reader with a bungee to the chest, makes them curious, the last metaphor represents your metaphor and color savvy at its shining best. “Broken-off golden wing” is simply delicious writing. Ahhhh: sexy writing here.

AE Santi 10/8/08 10:02 PM

Comment: I think you can do better than this.

AE Santi 10/8/08 10:02 PM

Comment: Whose room? Wife or patient? Braiding with and IV? This scene needs some structure and buttressing.

me you 10/8/08 10:02 PM

Comment: I agree with Alexis. We’re in the room but the connection aren’t defined, and therefore not important to us yet.

me you 10/8/08 10:02 PM

Comment: You use shiny to describe the doctor’s face below.

me you 10/8/08 10:02 PM

Comment: Nice unusual word choice here.

“People don’t die like that” he said sauntering sauntering towards the window. He knocked at the windowpane twice, then looked back at the girl. Her elongated dark fingers were folding and unfolding with an unusual speed. In that moment, the fact that she had a small tumor on her liver sounded like a lie to him.

“Last night was the night of a full moon. My grandmother always tells me, ‘Beware of a full moon.*’” That’s what the girl said before he walked out of the room.

~

Last night, when he opened the heavy black door on his house, his wife greeted him naked, staring at him from the dusk with murderous blue eyes. The house was silent and smelled of dust and rosemary.

“That’s not why I married you,” his wife was saying in a whisper that sounded deadly, “the piles of trash in front of our house. I married you because I expected you to take me to a place where no one has taken me before. I expected you to wash the smell of trash off me. What did I get instead?”

At this point, she was screaming, and he could hear the next-door neighbor shut the windows.

“The stench that can kill...did kill me. Kill, do you understand?”

Knowing that there was nothing he could do to calm his wife down, he still extended his arms towards her tanned shoulders. That’s what he had always done when she would start yelling, every time hoping that her eyes would open up for him, that she would be able to see him.

She slapped his hands away from her and spat at his chest. He pushed her aside, turned on the light and walked past her towards the staircase.

- AE Santi 10/8/08 10:02 PM
Comment: Not so sure what this means.
- me you 10/8/08 10:02 PM
Comment: ? Like what? Does she do how he means she can’t die? I feel like the reader doesn’t get quite enough here, **though I would keep his response tease.** That definitely works.
- me you 10/8/08 10:02 PM
Comment: WW too fancy—Do people really saunter in operating rooms? OH, OK, not the doctor, her man. Got it.
- me you 10/8/08 10:02 PM
Comment: Again, little detail that speaks in the negative space as well; word choice of “unusual speed” is highly effective at being highly evocative.
- me you 10/8/08 10:02 PM
Comment: Yes. Excellent.
- me you 10/8/08 10:02 PM
Comment: Always is a little flip or folksy to me here.
- me you 10/8/08 10:02 PM
Comment: Is she saying it to him, or just into the room, like a general warning?
- me you 10/8/08 10:02 PM
Comment: This need to be two different tweaked; the recollection of the grandmother’s admonition and he actually saying it don’t work together. Maybe something like my change above*.
- AE Santi 10/27/08 9:32 AM
Comment: I think if you add one sentence of description to this scene would enhance it tenfold.
- AE Santi 10/8/08 10:02 PM
Comment: Something I kept wondering about is what does this house look like? I was wondering where we are... village, city?
- me you 10/8/08 10:02 PM
Comment: Very nice. Love the quirky naked-greeter detail.
- me you 10/8/08 10:02 PM
Comment: Feels like this is spoon-feeding us as reader a bit much. Show us this state she’s in. He knows her well—he can spot details that are off, things that make him concerned.
- AE Santi 10/12/08 9:59 PM
Comment: I’d love a montage of the trash that is sitting around. (JAC-I agree. It (... [1])
- AE Santi 10/8/08 10:02 PM
Comment: Very good.
- me you 10/8/08 10:02 PM
Comment: Succinct characterization detail.
- me you 10/8/08 10:02 PM
Comment: This sentence is so much more deeply telling and successful as your las (... [2])

“Like a fish, a little beautiful shimmering fish. I am that fish, do you understand? A little beautiful shimmering fish. Coiling, weeping, dying. I want back into the sea. Take me to the sea...please,” his wife whispered just before she broke into tears.

His legs got heavy, he felt the darkness rising in him like fog, but he kept walking away from his wife until he couldn't hear her any more.

Hours later, while he was lying in the dark and looking at the changing patterns on the ceiling, his wife walked into the room on her tiptoes, sat next to him and put her hands on his chest. Her face was shiny and white. She was wearing a lacy nightie, through the strands of which he could clearly see her voluptuous body, heavy hips, large breasts, wide folds of fat.

“You said you married me because you fell in love with my sunset-colored coat,” she said. “I cut the coat into pieces and threw the pieces out the bedroom window, one by one. It's spring now.”

She started laughing loudly while caressing his neck with her cold hand. Her open mouth looked like a giant dark hole to him, and for a second he could clearly see their daughter, even himself, disappearing in it.

~

“Naked, I want to always be naked,” his wife said many times when she didn't have anything else to say, when she was tired, hot, cold, scared. When she ran to any corner of the room, crouched, and started taking her clothes off frantically, never failing to rip her bra and panties off her, piece by piece, using her nails, sharp like razor blades.

He **didn't know what to do because she was his wife**, the woman he married, the woman he loved. She was not his patient. She slept in his bed. She ate at the same table with

- me you 10/8/08 10:02 PM
Comment: Fits with purple iridescence later on the beach.
- me you 10/8/08 10:02 PM
Comment: “Quiet tears began to wet/stream down her face.”
- Does this simple grammatical change feel different, change the feel of the scene and sentence for you? Just curious. IT may keep the scenic cues active versus recounted. Make sense?
... [3]
- me you 10/8/08 10:02 PM
Comment: Good.
- AE Santi 10/8/08 10:02 PM
Comment: I love this fight between t(... [4]
- me you 10/8/08 6:42 PM
Deleted: to
- me you 10/8/08 10:02 PM
Comment: Good. Intriguing.
- AE Santi 10/8/08 10:02 PM
Comment: It's odd that she gets dress(... [5]
- me you 10/8/08 10:02 PM
Comment: You're giving us all we ne(... [6]
- AE Santi 10/8/08 10:02 PM
Comment: And do we really think th(... [7]
- AE Santi 10/8/08 9:29 PM
Formatted: Highlight
- AE Santi 10/8/08 10:02 PM
Comment: More more more..
- me you 10/8/08 10:02 PM
Comment: I need a little scenic block(... [8]
- me you 10/8/08 10:02 PM
Comment: This tripped me at first, th(... [9]
- AE Santi 10/8/08 10:02 PM
Comment: Time is odd here—becau(... [10]
- me you 10/8/08 10:02 PM
Comment: Nice. Is this him becom(... [11]
- me you 10/8/08 10:02 PM
Comment: Do you, as writer, know (... [12]
- me you 10/8/08 10:02 PM
Comment: ALWAYS? Or only in t(... [13]
- me you 10/8/08 10:02 PM
Comment: I'm waiting for her to be (... [14]
- me you 10/8/08 10:02 PM
Comment: I like this: it's like a pers(... [15]
- me you 10/8/08 10:02 PM
Comment: Regarding the wife, how (... [16]
- AE Santi 10/8/08 10:02 PM
Comment: Stay here. Separate with(... [17]
- me you 10/8/08 10:02 PM
Comment: What was it like before, (... [18]
- me you 10/8/08 10:02 PM
Comment: He's a doctor? Is her the (... [19]

him. She bore him a child, a beautiful golden-haired daughter that liked to wear frilly dresses and bows in her hair, ran into his arms whenever she saw him and called him "Papa-zo."

AE Santi 10/8/08 10:02 PM
Comment: Gimme name.

Whenever his wife took her clothes off, his daughter circled around her mother's naked body and kept repeating, "Mommy, it's OK, it's OK." He would sometimes sit on the chair, close his eyes and just listen to the child's tender voice. At least for a fraction of a second, he believed that everything was indeed OK.

AE Santi 10/8/08 10:02 PM
Comment: Nice moment. He just watches though. Doing what?

me you 10/8/08 9:29 PM
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When the sunlight landed on the scalpel, he thought of the small pot of gold he saw hidden under his father's hay bed. And the golden tooth that fell out of his father's mouth just hours before the old man died. And then the gold of the trumpet to the sound of which he left his village when he was fifteen. The village drunks were playing a harmonica too, and an

me you 10/8/08 10:02 PM
Comment: Keenly recounted.

accordion, but the only thing that came back to him that morning was the trumpet, that desolate sound of the shimmering golden trumpet. Loud and frightening. Transparent and beautiful.

me you 10/8/08 7:09 PM
Deleted: the

me you 10/8/08 10:02 PM
Comment: "Shimmering golden trumpet": adjective pileup.

me you 10/8/08 10:02 PM
Comment: Nice adjective choice.

The music of the trumpet went wild a few hours later, after the young woman died. It pressed on his forehead and pulsed in his eyeballs, stark-naked, piercing, maddening. It throbbed in his chest after they tried to bring the young woman back to life. After the electroshocks. After the machine signaled an irreversible death with a continuous level sound that lasted and lasted and lasted, and eventually faded into faraway music, indigo-dark, beautiful.

AE Santi 10/8/08 10:02 PM
Comment: BRILLIANT now, can you stay here for a little bit longer? I'm thinking two or three more sentences and give us him and what he's feeling in that moment.

(JAC) NOW the chronology question AES and I raise earlier is becoming more nagging to me

me you 10/8/08 7:08 PM
Deleted: , too

AE Santi 10/8/08 10:02 PM
Comment: I feel like we are in a Kustruica movie, amazing. Yet, this doesn't allow you off any easier. Where is the trumpet? In his head, is he having a vision. You have to enhance this a bit.

The young woman had a heart attack while he was operating on her liver. Because last night was the night of a full moon, that's the only thing he could think of later, after the trumpet stopped. After the woman was wheeled out of the operation room. When he finally looked out the window, at the afternoon sky. Because last night was the night of a full moon, the girl had said.

me you 10/8/08 7:11 PM
Deleted:

AE Santi 10/8/08 10:02 PM
Comment: Stay with the sound. Describe.

me you 10/8/08 10:02 PM
Comment: Good.

AE Santi 10/8/08 10:02 PM
Comment: Good.

me you 10/8/08 10:02 PM
Comment: Beautiful.

After his wife left his study the night before, he got up and walked to the bedroom window. A full moon was spilling its light into the backyard. The ripped pieces of his wife's coat were gleaming in the dark grass like snowflakes.

- me you 10/8/08 9:29 PM
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- me you 10/8/08 10:02 PM
Comment: Yummy language.
- me you 10/8/08 10:02 PM
Comment: Gorgeous.
- AE Santi 10/8/08 10:02 PM
Comment: Good. What else is there, the contrast of the grass, the light of the neighbors, his shadow somewhere else. Give a little bit rounder of an image. Not much.

Without changing his clothes, with a single spot of blood on his chest, he ran out of the hospital, got into the car and drove to the beach. His wife and his daughter spent many afternoons there, close to the sea. He liked to join them after work, sit next to his wife's soft body, watch seagulls, the sun, the sea, his daughter playing in the sand.

- me you 10/8/08 10:02 PM
Comment: Simply note below the adjective usage on the next page. I have highlighted many of them in bold.
- Again, sometimes maybe a little too thick with the adjectives in places; other times they work and are lovely. You're a color girl, and usually that works well for you. It's about being judicious so they don't outshine each other and the actual characters or events—or draw us away from the narrative.

When he got closer, he saw his wife sitting near the water, naked and alone, like a big fish ablaze with the purple light of the late afternoon and the glare of the sea. The ripped rainbow pieces of her clothes were flying over the beach. He shivered. Those hours that the three of them spent at the beach were the happiest moments of his life. His wife had always been calm, his daughter playful.

- me you 10/8/08 9:29 PM
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- me you 10/8/08 10:02 PM
Comment: Nice moment in this sentence. Yes. Puts us there.
- me you 10/8/08 10:02 PM
Comment: Iridescent? Like she's hard to pin down or elusive?
- AE Santi 10/8/08 10:02 PM
Comment: Contrast of place, she is alone against the shore but what else is there. One, two more sentences.

He got out of the car and broke into a run. His wife got up from the sand.

"She is gone," she said when he approached her gasping for air.

He was motionless for a second, then shook her fat shoulders.

"Our baby is gone," she repeated in a deep, distant voice. "She walked into the beautiful blue sea and didn't come back to finish the castle."

- me you 10/8/08 9:29 PM
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- me you 10/8/08 9:29 PM
Formatted: Font:Not Bold
- me you 10/8/08 9:29 PM
Formatted: Font:Not Bold
- me you 10/8/08 10:02 PM
Comment: This evokes crazy, mental illness well—especially "back to finish the castle."

His wife was nodding her head as if it were only halfway attached to her shoulders. Her heavy breasts and belly glistened in the golden light while her mouth kept opening and closing like a crab.

- me you 10/8/08 9:29 PM
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- me you 10/8/08 10:02 PM
Comment: Excellent.
- me you 10/8/08 9:29 PM
Formatted: Font:Not Bold

She was saying that the wind was strong, very strong, like a monster pushing the small body into the cobalt water, that it was a beautiful sight.

- me you 10/8/08 9:29 PM
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- me you 10/8/08 10:02 PM
Comment: Maybe use metaphor here—a dramatic and nebulously real moment anyway—as I've notice quite a few sit ... [20]
- me you 10/8/08 10:02 PM
Comment: This, too, is a style prefere ... [21]

“Beautiful indeed, the golden hair and the blue sea, and the wind on my face like the veil I was wearing when we got married, you remember, the beautiful purple veil getting into my eyes and my mouth... I wanted to cut it right then but couldn’t because I didn’t have scissors...no scissors that day,” his wife said and clapped her hands, almost cheerfully, the way their daughter used to do, “no scissors that day.”

She extended her limp arms towards his face. She was grinning while kicking the remnants of the sand castle next to her with her bare feet.

“We don’t need scissors. You can just pull your hair out. I can pull your hair out. Hair by hair. Until you are bald. And your head looks like the sun. I want to touch the sun. Where are you, my sun? Come to me, beautiful sun!”

A flock of seagulls took off from the beach, screaming into the air. His body was shaking like a slaughtered chicken. His wife was staring into the darkening sky, now laughing loudly, her big head swaying back and forth, whispering every now and then, “Come to me, beautiful sun...big beautiful sun.”

Hours later, when he looked at the black sky, he noticed that the moon was missing a slice.

Tatjana:

This is very strong piece Tatjana—one that I will be pushing for publication in Our Stories Journal. Take some of the feedback here into account, and seed me you new ideas (you really don’t need much here, tweaks, really), in a second draft as soon as you can.

Killer beginning: Not only is this a teasing first line that hooks the reader with a bungee to the chest, makes them curious, the last metaphor represents your metaphor and color savvy at its shining best. “Broken-off golden wing” is simply delicious writing. Though it might sound word nerdy (like I care), the golden wing image will be one I think about for days when I see light like that. Ahhhh: sexy writing here. Nice understated ending too.

Regarding the wife, how long has she been like this? What precipitated the change? What has he tried so far, leading to there being nothing to do? When did he first see her on tiptoes,

me you 10/8/08 10:02 PM
Comment: I don’t she’d say this in her fugue.

AE Santi 10/8/08 10:02 PM
Comment: Pause here and have something happen. Pause the moment and refocus on something else. Footprints, horizon, sand, her body, anything.

me you 10/8/08 10:02 PM
Comment: And now her hands are like scissors. Nice.

me you 10/8/08 10:02 PM
Comment: I want an adverb here.

me you 10/8/08 10:02 PM
Comment: Sky=blue. Sea-blue.

AE Santi 10/8/08 10:02 PM
Comment: I like.

me you 10/8/08 9:07 PM
Deleted: blue

AE Santi 10/8/08 10:02 PM
Comment: I don’t like.

me you 10/8/08 10:02 PM
Comment: Also, again, some metaphors are awkward or unneeded. This may be a prime example. Though I’m the king of unusual metaphors—and truly love some of yours--some paint an image that is too strong, out of scale, or just wrong. I was resistant to this at first—same with word choice—in my first few undergrad workshops BUT soon began to feel the discordance to which my professor was alluding. For example, describing a coat p1: “meat that stayed in the fridge too long.”

Though I’m feeling what you mean, is the choice of “chicken” symbolic or thematic? I think in this case it detracts versus helping to draw us in a make the action more vivid.

In fact, upon third read through, I like it best, find it most punctuated and potent as “His body was shaking.” Period.

AE Santi 10/8/08 10:02 PM
Comment: Great.

me you 10/8/08 9:29 PM
Formatted: Normal, Indent: First line: 0.5", Line spacing: double

naked, shimmering like a fat, midnight mermaid? I feel like we need a little more about her to fully sympathize with her, or at least the husband.

I'd like to see you play up the fish-like qualities a hint more—perceived by her or real—a bit more. I definitely found myself imagining her as a crazy self-styled mermaid here. It's a really nice character detail—and characterization builder.

Again, sometimes maybe a little too thick with the adjectives in places; other times they work and are lovely. You're a color girl, and usually that works well for you. It's about being judicious so they don't outshine each other and the actual characters or events—or draw us away from the narrative. For example, “that **desolate** sound of the **shimmering golden trumpet**” reads to me as an adjective pileup (above in **bold**).

Also, again, some metaphors are awkward or unneeded. This may be a prime example. Though I'm the king of unusual metaphors—and truly love some of yours--some paint an image that is too strong, out of scale, or just wrong. I was resistant to this at first—same with word choice—in my first few undergrad workshops BUT soon began to *feel* the discordance to which my professor was alluding. For example, describing a coat pl: “meat that stayed in the fridge too long.”

Though I'm feeling what you mean, is the choice of “chicken” symbolic or thematic? I think in this case it detracts versus helping to draw us in a make the action more vivid.

In fact, upon third read through, I like it best, find it most punctuated and potent as “His body was shaking.” Period.

In light of this development, we may be shifting our workshop schedule to work more intently on the two other stories you submitted, particularly working to help you get over your inflexible attachment to both the stories, as they are, and the characters within them.

I'm excited both about the strong possibility to see your work in the next issue of OS—and to have a little more time to work on these other pieces!

Whoa hoo! Congratulations. This is a strong, strong piece.

Josh