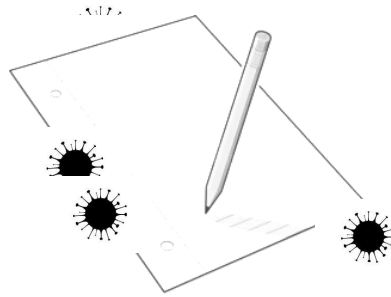


Sharing Stories in Times of Coronavirus



*Poems, Stories, Songs, and Essays
presented at the
Community Writing Project's
First Virtual Citywide (and Beyond) Reading*

December 13, 2020

Original work by members of the following community writing groups:

Budlong Woods Branch

h Library Writing Group

Chi-Noodin Writing Group

Edgewater Branch Library Group

Sunday Zoom Writing Group

Harvest Commons Writing Group



**On the occasion of this reading, the CWP would like to honor Abel Angeles, a long-time community writer and workshop facilitator at the Telpochcalli School writing group. Abel was an amazing woman who was tragically taken by the corona virus. She was an inspiration to all who knew her. We hold her memory close to our hearts.*



PART I



Staying Positive

by Queen Brown

Something I missed because of Covid, is that I didn't get to visit my children this year for my birthday. It's something we have been trying to do as faithfully as possible, not just on birthdays, holidays too. Well, I guess I can be grateful for technology, zoom, video chat and Face Time. I'm trying to stay positive through this all. Again, I have to stay positive and prayed up, that this too shall pass. I'm grateful for the roof over my head, a place to clutter. All this buying stuff and cluttering is making me feel like a hoarder. I'm not complaining, just grateful. I pray for the helpless and homeless all the time, and thank God for his blessings.

I had a small luncheon on the patio here amongst a few neighbors. My children and I chatted on Facebook and then I went to Indiana for a couple of days. I can always find peace and quiet, I just have to be still. Stop trying to figure everything out, or worrying about things not in my control. I do have my days, but then I pray and read and talk about how I'm feeling. I refuse to give my worries, doubts, fears and so on, power that don't belong to them. They will consume me if I give in. So, being still works for me. I've learnt, can't catch a bus that's already left. Patience and acceptance is the key.

Let us not be discouraged, but hold on to Faith. Blessings to you all.

The Redline

by Lisa Williams

*You can't have that house
Enact laws, correcting wrong
Now done covertly*

They said we couldn't move in, if you were different,
apathetic toward your inquiry,

predisposed your application to decline,
but we could fly by on the redline

See the city from afar,
non-stop, not regulated by a car

"L" stands for elevated, thoughts not included
To some the reference to the name feigns sad memories, past injustices alluded

Soothing voice of the conductor to remind us of our stop,
Gently breaking up those engaged in thoughtful conversation or emerged in your hip hop

From the South Side to the North many stories that unwind,
Musicians, brokers, single moms, students each situated with their kind

Discrimination is as deadly as the third rail
Systemic denial made into a policy, democracy for all, yet another fail

Draw the line in the sand,
Red means stop, take a stand

Hunger in the Time of COVID-19

by Jeanne Mayer

Desperate to cram as many 50-degree days as possible before the frigid winter air of 2020 forced us to isolate in our respective caves like bears, my COVID buddy, Audrey, and I spent a chilly, sunny Saturday Halloween touring the graveyard-like campus of Northwestern University followed by lunch. I parked my car at the Evanston Public Library lot to be near the campus and Frida's Breakfast and Lunch restaurant.

As we sauntered around the campus, the warmth of the sun bathing our faces, we admired still-verdant trees and bushes dotting the landscape and the late 19th century architecture of some of the buildings, like the Neo-Gothic Charles Deering Library. Our hunger for beauty was fed.

After an hour, our growling stomachs broke our reverie. And the parking meter had lapsed. While Audrey fetched take-out from Frida's, I fed the meter and moved my car to a southern exposure in preparation for us using it as our dining room. We had done this before when a thunderous down-pour erupted on our way to a picnic at a friend's backyard one muggy August afternoon; a flurry of text messages had canceled the plan. As our hot carry-out pizza grew cold, we drove to Evanston's Lighthouse beach for the sheltered picnic tables. Too late. One table was occupied with a family and the empty one was too close for comfort. We ate in the car.

Audrey sat in the back using the dog kennel as her make-shift table and I sat in the driver's seat, balancing a plate of pizza on my lap and a glass of wine on the console while cracking the windows open for air and shut to prevent rain pelting through the open windows.

That was the plan when Audrey returned with our juicy Mexican burritos smelling of fried potatoes and eggs. I helped Audrey arrange her food on the dog kennel. As I carried my food to the front of the car, I felt a sudden panic strike me as if I had been punched in the solar plexus. A chorus of voices appeared in my mind whispering: "social distance." I recalled Dr. Fauci's warning – fall will see a surge of COVID-19. Audrey should eat in the car, I thought.

"Audrey, I am going to spread out on the hood of the car."

"What? Well, OK, then so will I."

I sensed her reluctance, or was it mine that I was projecting upon her?

The voices returned: "Really? Eating on the hood of your car? What will people think?" "What else are we supposed to do? There are no benches or tables anywhere," I countered.

"Isn't this fun, Audrey?" I asked, as if to allay my uneasiness.

"If you say so."

"It's like tailgating at a football game," I said, wanting to reassure us both.

A woman appearing to be 60ish, her snow-white hair arranged in a ponytail, walked past us on the way to her green Subaru Forester, carrying a stack of books and giving us a deadpan stare. She paused before the open door and continued staring. What was she thinking? I wondered. Hoping to interrupt whatever her impolite stare may have meant, I blurted with a smile, "This is how the Germans eat lunch - not on the hood of a car but standing at high tables. So much more efficient when you are in a hurry."

"Were you there?" she asked.

"Yes!"

"Only Germany?"

"No. Also, Italy, Austria, France, and Belgium."

"I've been to Switzerland, Norway, and Japan," she countered.

And so went our conversation while library patrons came and went and stared at us conversing as if we were at a four-star restaurant.

Smiling for the first time, the white-haired woman wished us a good day and drove away.

"What an interesting woman," mused Audrey.

"I had forgotten how much I missed connecting with strangers. "

The loneliness of isolation from other humans gnaws at the soul as surely as hunger gnaws at an empty stomach.

10:38 AM, Saturday, November 7th

by Jared Hackworth

I am sitting in Washington Park.

Thinking: Washington owned slaves.

So did Jefferson, Madison,

Monroe, Jackson and Van Buren.

Harrison, Tyler, Polk,

Taylor, Johnson and Grant.

One Thousand, Nine-Hundred and Eighty-Two enslaved souls.

America has never been great.

The "least racist person in the room"

Is now destined to a life of civilian golf.

Good. But we still have another old white man.

Sometimes I think every leadership position

Should be held by a 45-year-old lesbian.

That's how to make America great.

Paul's Dreams

By Dave Daniels

Verse 1:

When Paul has dreams, looks forward to the visitors
Who Paul can't see in the real world anymore
And then one night Paul saw John again a blast from the past
Said love you do my friend by the way your work has lasted

Refrain:

Paul's Dreams Paul's Dreams
Paul's Dreams Paul's Dreams

Verse 2:

Guitar covered in sticky tape, but John's still witty
Paul asks, Could you say hello to George for me
And Miss our sessions together, because none of them was dry
The tiny piano by my bed helps me not to cry

Refrain:

Paul's Dreams Paul's Dreams
Paul's Dreams Paul's Dreams

Verse 3:

He wrote Yesterday in the autumn in his sleep
And the next day wondered is this something I can keep
Paul asked around, have you heard this one before
Everybody else said no that's new and will be adored

Bridge:

So Paul thought well now it's his rhyme
He's glad his mind writes during REM time

Refrain:

Paul's Dreams Paul's Dreams
Paul's Dreams Paul's Dreams



PART 2



Democracy

by Faith Arnold

Recently, I heard the word Coup.

Here, right here I heard the word Coup.

Now, I'm hearing that there may be a Coup.

Here, right here there might be a Coup.

THE END

After Walking in the Rain

by Sheila Lynch

I move, motion is forward.

I am followed by a shadow who catches my words, thought strings, observings, responses

As they spill from me.

Then backward slowly

Shifting direction ideas get jumbled

I lose my balance

I slow down, attempt to feel the ground.

Pause

Drag my body

Towards

The unknown.

Next time maybe

Move sideways

In a new direction

apart and with.

The Simple Things

by *Brittany Roque*

“As the moon sets in and I lay to rest at her arrival, when the cold air of November freezes the streets and lakes of Chicago.” Damn it, there’s nothing else to add. As I stare into this misery-enriched piece of art, I hear a familiar knock at my bedroom door and I turn to greet a face peeking in through a half open crack. Leo, my best friend, is surprised to find I am still working on last week’s homework . He asks me when I began and, once hearing I started just now, he lets out a laugh. I tell him I am stuck and, taken aback, he suggests I go with him to a Thanksgiving party going on tonight. I try to plaster a smile on my face at his request but I feel irritated. I can only place hope on my mom’s shoulders and pray that she will decline in my place. But instead I am disappointed when she agrees to it because it could help me in finding an inspiration – “a little spice,” in her words.

It takes just about thirty minutes tops to get to that house. But instead of seeing high schoolers dancing with no rhythm, I find something entirely different inside. Upon entering I see people of all ages and nationalities just talking and laughing all together, like a family that had been separated for so long that once they were all in one place they held every moment precious in each other’s company. Colin, Leo’s cousin walks over to welcome and embrace us warmly. Noticing our confusion of why a lot of people, he explains he invited everyone from the neighborhood because the families all have grown up together for generations. Hearing Colin’s reasoning, I can’t help but not understand why someone would invite their neighbors to a family celebration. But I decide to push that aside and focus on my assignment for now, when I hear a ring coming from a wine glass and see Colin standing in the middle of the living room to give his speech. I don’t know what he is saying at the moment nor do I care; I just continue to think about my assignment.

Feeling that I finally have a grasp of a great idea, my attention is suddenly and strangely drawn to the speech Colin is giving. “Before we fill our bellies with all this good food, I want to say something. That today we are all blessed to be all together even for just this meal; everyone in this room has struggled differently in life but has kept hope close in their hearts. I just want you to know you aren’t alone; we are all family here and if you came to this party angry, depressed, or for some . . .” He chuckles looking at me. “. . . forced. I hope you can leave here feeling happy and ready to continue on with the adventures life gives us.”

Listening to his words and realizing perhaps I haven’t really been appreciating every day as much as I should, I think to myself that perhaps maybe the most amazing stories and poems written by famous writers are really just based on the simple things in life.

We had so much fun that night that we were the last to leave the party. Interestingly, on our way back home, I finally felt my mind was at ease because I now knew what I was going to write.

History Lessons

by Salvador Martinez

I

Chains can stretch great distances,
sometimes even through histories,
like an echo just below a whisper.
Occasionally, we are so wrapped
in these iron links like a corkscrewed snake
rattling its tail, until our sight is inflamed.
It's sleight of hand,
an asphyxiation for
ancient traditions; inborn outdates.
It's okay to yell, and tear down old monuments,
but we should also look in the mirror,
and be wary of what we see.

II

An idea is like a great harvest.
Folks only remember the ones
who tilled the seeds, but smaller
hands tend them all the time.

III

It looks like there was a statue made of copper here.
I saw it on TV when a bunch of people fought over what
to do with it. Destroy it? Remove it? Both? Or leave it alone?
I always believe that there are two sides to every story;
it's the proverbial and literal flip of a rusted, coin of solid nickel
against the backdrop of political decay on Pennsylvania Avenue.
I can't help but ask the same question: How did we get here?
When did we go from having a civil debate (preferably over tea or coffee),
to yelling, "COMMIES! FACISTS! Er, wait, FACIST COMMIES!"
Does that even make sense? Of course not, but now everyone acts like bulls now.
Hmm, maybe we've always been here, now it's just with masks (not masks).
So, as I watch us all rip and tear into each other beneath this statue
of a Confederate whose name is completely lost on me with a testosterone rage
eclipsed only by the withering visage of the Doom Slayer,
I can't help but notice those ominously dark,
DMT tripping clouds heading straight for us.
I realized that Laura had come knocking.
I guess Mother Nature doesn't like to be kept waiting.

Homeless James Thomas

by Kathy Powers

(sung to the melody of "Eleanor Rigby")

Ah, look at all the homeless people!
Ah, look at all the homeless people!

Homeless James Thomas
Picks up a tarp and the mat where his home tent had been
Breathes in dirt air.
Limps on the sidewalk
Begs snippy NIMBYs for fast food or change they might spare.
Nothing is there!

All the homeless people,
Where do they all come from?
All the homeless people.
Where do they all belong?

Homeless James Thomas
Wipes off the salt sweat that drips from his fever-pitched brow
Coughs up green phlegm.
Look at him dying,
Wears dirty dust he collects that's continually there
Nobody cares.

All the homeless people,
Where do they all come from?
All the homeless people.
Where do they all belong?

Moving

by Donna Pecore

Moving my body
moving my arms
fingers curved
around a bowl (my ball substitute)
the arm extending
a wrist caressing the shape
and her voice
cheerful urging
pushing past age
marching in place
still feeling the years
achilles tendon workout
stretching more
moving my eyes
following my hands
past a spot behind
an arm like a wing
grabbing a bag (my replacement towel)
and stretch from side
to side moving
one arm up in back
and one arm down in back
stretchin' the bag
then pinky finger up in front
alternates with thumb up
vision focus on right left
and back again
which one up

which one down
she moves too fast
its only minutes
not even thirty
thirty accelerating
relaxing time for moves
moving to the garden
filled with sun yellow daffodils
I am lost in their petals
the sound of a
a water fountain
her voice draws attention to
floating petals
in moving water
reaching
reaching for more
catching the flow
of the movement
of the water
running through my fingers
moving freeing changing
adding to my future

after my first Sit and Be Fit Workout with
Mary Ann Wilson Certified
Nurse/instructor
on public television



PART 3



Muse Meltdown

by Heidi Massis

Because my Writing Muse has been drowning in insidious lockdown.

Muted agony...devils serving burnt toast & Ebola caviar..

I took compassion on my Muse in Solitary Confinement...begging..whimpering...please oh goddess of writing...expressing my brokenness...soliciting & bargaining 2 be set free

FREE

FREE

FREE

to fly..to breathe once again the words the letters...flying thru plastic cyberspace.mmoh sweet dear goddess...

Take pity on me...my mouth & heart are parched & despairing of 20 years of blank writing spaces....

I AM THAT I AM

HMMMMMM

My Writing Muse is languishing from lack of the bread & water of writing

RESURRECTION

Her glimmering brilliance

So she can once again dance to the rhythm of the ages & sages whispering

To the nakedness of our souls

TO WRITE IS TO LIVE

The Nine Kinds of Love: For John Lewis

by Judy SooHoo

Storge -

familial love for sharecroppers,
Willie-Mae and Eddie, parents of 10,
“accepting” of John’s calling for
higher learning at school, not farm chores
freedom, not the safety of his denizen.

Philia -

affectionate love for his many
cousins, nieces, nephews, and friends.
At 21, on buses as a Freedom Rider,
at lunch counters and sit-ins for the
“Beloved Community” of the nation and its citizens.

Eros -

romantic love for a stylish Lillian Miles.
Wife, advisor, lock-step partner of 44 years -
teacher in Nigeria, Peace Corp volunteer, librarian,
whip-smart of people details, problem solver,
together, hopeful for humanity through their Foundation’s affairs.

Ludus -

playful love for adopted son, John-Miles.
Love at first sight at two months old, not a moment later
teaching “Learn from the past!”
Embracing hip-hop music of a new generation
enlightened by the struggle recounted in son’s song “Political Behavior”¹

Mania -

John’s obsessive love of his farm chickens.
At 15, Emmett Till his George Floyd,
on the radio, Martin Luther King, Jr., and later
“Workhorse not show horse”, the “Soul” and
“Good Conscience” of Congress, “Good Trouble” to be embroiled.

Philautia -

self-love
organizing a peaceful protest in ‘65 at 24
barely surviving Bloody Sunday on the Bridge at Selma
that passed the Voting Rights Act,
that Obama wrote to his mentor on a 28^o inaugural day, “Because of you, John”.

Agape -
self-less, universal love,
proud of his 40-some arrests
many times beaten, risking life and limb.
To Act - complicit, if tolerated - a silent tour-de-force
against those who fought and opposed him in protest.

Pragma -
enduring love
for Gandhi's non-violence
for Douglass' equal justice
for all the oppressed
of the past and the present.

And, Unio Mystica -
a return to the historied, blue-signed Ebenezer Baptist Church²
iconic of leaders and martyrs in the guiding light of truists.
Laid now to fitting rest at South-View³ where MLK was first buried⁴
and black slaves and their free, first-born lay in dignified godspeed.
Storied to all, mystical with God, John Lewis.

¹ Chu, Louise. "Staging Their Own March." *Washington Post*, 18, Jan 2004, digital archives. "Political Behavior" was a hip-hop song written by John-Miles recounting his father's and other activists' struggle in the civil rights movement that changed John Lewis' mind about his son's choice of a music career.

² Suggs, Ernie. "Ebenezer Baptist Church fitting site for John Lewis' funeral." *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 29, July 2020, digital edition. Ebenezer Baptist Church where: John and Lillian were members, their marriage officiated by Rev. Martin Luther King, Sr.; a number of other King family members were pastors including Martin Luther King, Jr. as co-pastor; the site of MLK's and more recently, Rayshard Brook's funerals; esteemed church where Atlantans gather to mourn including the nine killed at an Episcopal Church in Charleston, SC, in 2015, and in 2016 when 49 were killed at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, FL.

^{3,4} Toone, Stephanie. "What to know about the place where John Lewis will be buried." *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 29, July 2020, digital edition. South-View Cemetery located outside of Atlanta founded by nine black businessmen for the dignified burial of black slaves who at the time were segregated in cemeteries, required to go through the back gate wading through swampy land and in response to "If you don't like it, start your own cemetery." Home to over 80,000 blacks, including notable military heroes, musicians, athletes, civil rights icons. Original burial home to Martin Luther King, Jr. and Dr. Benjamin Mays who were later relocated to the Martin Luther King Center and Morehouse College, respectively.

On Going Grey During the Pandemic, May 2020

by *Eve Pinsker*

Only go to the store for essentials, they said.

I brought back a box of hair dye. It sat there.
Reminding me, before I found my hairdresser
Who only charges fifteen dollars a dye job,
I would sit on a tarp in the bathroom, trying to not dye the walls.
Or the towels. Or anything except my hair.
Squatting cold and naked for forty five minutes.
Greying hair now seems the lesser burden.
I've reached the age when my mother let hers go white.

Eyeing the cardboard box of hair dye, weighing the worth
And the consequence of its contents
I did what one does in this twenty first century –
I looked online for guidance, wisdom, or solace.
I saw glamorous models displaying their “granny hair,”
A trend I'd been barely aware of, begun in 2011
With beehive gray hairdos marching down a high fashion runway.
In videos, young women with taut and luminous faces
Were giving each other instructions for turning their hair grey or silver.

Also on youtube, dozens of self declared silver foxy ladies
In their forties or fifties declaimed the virtues of dispensing with hair dye.
Describing their own journeys through a transition that gave them, they said,
Confidence, authenticity, and self-affirmation,
Once they conquered their fear and dealt with the dreaded demarcation line.
The stark and daunting boundary between artifice and reality, embarrassingly visible
To anyone talking with you in the flesh
Or online or Skype or phone with the camera on.
Some wore hats. Or scarves. Or spent more money than their former regime demanded
To have their dyed hair stripped or toned and made grey at one go.

Don't do it, most said. It wrecks your hair and only delays
The slow process of revealing your hairs' own proper story.
It will be unique, they promise: like crystalline snowflakes, no one's pattern of silver and dark
Or whatever color your ancestors gave you, displays the exact markings as any other:
Impossible to duplicate by even expert artistry,
Coding inheritance, experience, chance, and fate. Like life itself,
Confounding expectation: you won't know what it looks like, until it grows out
When the glories of your own signature will finally be revealed.
Have patience - As on the meditation cushion, doing nothing can be difficult.

It's easier now, with public life on pause.

I can hide in my house, I don't need a hat. I can turn my video camera off if I want to.

I don't need to explain, I can claim insufficient bandwidth,

Though such dissembling denies the act of authenticity counseled by the online chorus.

However, regarding my video reflection is surprisingly supportive:

Three months in, I can see patches where more of my roots are still dark.

The demarcation line is probably most visible at my crown, where the new growth is silver.

One thing that stopped me from growing the grey out before:

People told me ages ago I have to dye my hair more often

Because I'm really short (4'11"), so people are always looking down at my roots.

But now: who knew the computer camera would be a boon to us Hobbit like folks?

Others can only see the top of my head when I bow.

So I bow to myself, accept the gleaming silver that I see,

And I wait patiently for whatever emerges from my scalp and the world.

Timeless Hands *by Delores Tolliver*

When I look at my hands, it is evident that I've had years of experience living.
The skin is deep brown with long and short crinkles.
The elasticity is gone, and placed with thin skin.

The lines in my palms are dark, long and jagged
and reconnect, as if denoting life starting again.
So far longevity is on my side.

Pretty hands are not one of my better attributes
for the rearing of children does not denote beauty as much as it does love and hard work.

When I look at fine lines on my hands, they remind me of waves of sand on a beach
that vary in color as the seasons mutate.

My hands reveal my life in full circle
They've allowed me to experience the virtue of a young wife and mother,
The beauty of a lean-middle age grandmother and great-grandmother.

They've taught me how to embrace maturity as a trusted friend, enjoying the
gifts and productivity of longevity.

My hands have comforted me through sorrow, anger, and forgiveness.
They have sanctioned me with strength that only comes with time.

My hands embrace what's valuable in life: Family and good friends.
Not titles, wealth, jewelry or other fancy things.

My hands express humility, and they fold to the Reverence and miracles of all mighty God.

There is great history in a pair of mature hands. And I would not move or rearrange
one single line created by time.

LORD, LED MY LIGHT SO SHINE
LET MY HANDS SO EMPLOY
THAT OTHERS MAY SEE YOUR CREATION THROUGH ME.

Excerpt from A Rez Tale: A Novel

Ernest Whiteman III

"How's the writing going?"

Now, it is Brock's turn to be quiet and thoughtful. No one other than his grandpa asks how his writing is going. To be fair, no one besides Michael and his grandparents know that Brock wants to be a writer. He is honest.

"Troublesome," Brock responds.

"In what way?" Michael seems genuinely interested. He shifts in his chair. Like doing so would allow him to hear Brock's answer better.

"I have a bunch of ideas for stories. It's all up in my noodle. But, I start to write scenes and shit, but I can't think of any ways to connect them." Michael nods. Brock continues, he suddenly realizes that he is comfortable talking about this with him, "I was reading in this writing book – a book about how to write – that I should come up with themes or some shit. A broader, 'idea' I guess to hang the scenes from. But I can't really figure out what the themes would be."

Brock takes another sip, before Michael can offer a response, Brock continues, surprising himself in how he is opening himself up, "Gramps keeps telling me to write about 'Rapaho stuff, the old legends and stuff, to be someone to revive and record them for the tribe. I dunno, I kind of hate the idea of stealing from the tribe to sell books. You know? Indians cry around about 'appropriation' but never think that what they do when they take from their own tribes is doing the same thing. Don't make sense to me. You know?"

"Top Man," Michael says. Brock realizes that it is a compliment. Michael continues, "You know, it can be pretty tough to start something new like that, especially, something as creative as writing. Have you thought about writing about what you know?"

"You mean prison? Dunno if I want to relive that shit."

"Fair enough, but you don't have to make it about prison exactly."

"What do you mean?"

"Use metaphor, or allegory. Make up a story that reflects your experience. But couch it in something different. A setting. I mean, in some sense, anything can be a prison, right?"

Brock nods his head. It always seems simpler when Michael Redshade explains it. They both take another drink. Brock is enjoying this. Just hanging out. When was the last time he just hung out with someone? Michael rolls his coffee mug in both of his hands, "Speaking of stories, I went up and visited with Martha Stands a few months ago. Asked her about those old Arapaho stories. She told me a few, then sent me to visit a bunch of elders, who told me more. More than I could remember."

Brock looks up at Michael. Is he confiding in him now? What did this mean?

“Why’d you go looking for those old stories?” Brock knows Michael’s skepticism about such things and it surprised him that Michael would seek out the old ways. He stares at Michael, who seemed to be stalling himself know. Or, at least, figuring out his answer. It is such a strange thing to be unsure talking about.

“Well, I have been getting interested in, especially lately, how something becomes a myth, a legend. It has always fascinated me that something, like lightning for example, began as an ignorant explanation for a complex thing. Charged air in clouds creating a large electrical spark becomes a giant bird flapping its wings.”

“How the Golem became Superman,” Brock adds.

“Exactly!” Michael is suddenly happy. Brock is surprised. He cannot ever recall seeing Michael Redshade happy. It makes him sad for a moment. Most of the time, he showed no expression. Not stoic, but aware, present, is how Brock describes the neutral look Michael wore constantly. Maybe, for all of his success, Michael Redshade is really just a lonesome loser.

Michael presses on, “Now, think about something experienced in real life, a person, an event, a ‘freak’ event, and how the stories told about that event, or person can become a myth, or mythical figure. What if we encounter something now that we cannot explain? Just think of the stories about it a hundred years from now. ”

Brock understood that old stories had a grain of truth. He had heard of the wreck that Michael was in. Would people still talk about that a hundred years from now, or would humanity simply forget it. Who cares what happens on a reservation anyway. The reservation lines isolated Brock from the world as much as prison did. Maybe Michael finds himself in the same situation – isolated because of who people think he is. Just like an ex-con. He never expected to connect with Michael like this.

Brock felt the sudden need to explain himself. He did not know where this compulsion came from, “I read about the Golem in prison. Also, about the creation of Superman.”

“No need to explain intelligence,” Michael says.

‘Intelligence’, the word sticks in Brock’s mind like a wet candy on a shirtfront, sweet to taste but ugly when stuck on your front side and seen by others. Who wants an intelligent Arapaho? Michael notes Brock’s reaction to the word, like he did not deserve to be referenced in such a way.

“You are intelligent, Brock, all that time in prison? You avoided conflict, the cliques; you found a way around those. You earned a GED and an Associate’s degree. You navigated the system. That takes intelligence.” Michael smiles at him.

For the first time in a long time, both men felt they had made a true friend. The quiet between them stretches a bit too long. Maybe both are uncomfortable making such a connection. Making friends has never been a problem for Brock, quiet as he is. But for Michael, making a friend is tough, usually because his reputation precedes him everywhere. The quiet needs breaking.

“Well, I need to get going on my writing. But I keep thinking, who cares about the words of an Arapaho ex-con? All anyone wants is rez tales, you know?”

"I get it. You don't want to deal in grief porn," offers Michael.

"I guess. I can't wrap my head around what I can speak about without getting into those things. I wonder why that stuff's popular?"

"Most people love to think reading words from a Northern Arapaho makes them feel what we feel," Michael goes on, "and that they 'understand' you, or are aware of you now. But that always going to be enough for them - to read the words and 'understand' you. The thing is, they can close the book anytime they want and still have the privilege of going on with their lives. As long as they are able to get their coffee, right?"

Michael holds up his cup. Then, setting it back down, "You and I? We don't have that because it's our lives. But it's always enough for them to 'understand' without doing any of the heavy lifting of actually being a Northern Arapaho. They want to understand Arapahos, but only on their terms. Not ours. That way they can speak to our pain, but we can't. We lose the authority over our own pain. But..."

Brock sees the point, "What if the story doesn't go the way they want?"

"Exactly. What if the story does not go the way they want it to go? The rez tales are what they want. But what if you and I, *determine* a different story? Few years back, I talked with an old school mate of mine about something like this. We talked about our roles in this story."

"Which story?"

"This story 'Life'.