***Slate & Style***

**A publication of the Writers’ Division of the National Federation of the Blind Spring 2016**

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**Table of Contents**

[From the Keyboard of the President;](#fromthekeyboardofthepresident)

by Eve Sanchez; page 2

[On the Slate;](#ontheslate) page 2

[**Drunk Cats at a Concert**](#Drunkcatsataconcert) by Kelly Coleman; page 2

[Ship Shaped or Ship Shocked](#shipshapeorshipshock)? None So Blind than Those Who Are At Seaby Janet Di Nola Parmerter; page 3

[**Invinsonites**](#Invinsonites)**, Adult Fiction Honorable Mention** by Atty Svendsen; page 8

[**A Successful Hunt**](#asuccessfulhunt), Adult Fiction **Honorable Mention** by Heather M. Rasmussen; page 16

[**Memory 75**](#memory75)**, Middle School Fiction Honorable Mention**, by Avery Poland; page 23

[**75 Birthday Candles**](#birthdaycandles)**, Middle School Fiction Honorable Mention**, by Yael Korc; page 23

[**75 Winners**](#winners)**, Middle School Fiction Honorable Mention**, by P’Tress Franklin; page 26

[Tree](#tree) by Eve Sanchez; page 29

[Hurry Outside](#hurryoutside); page 29

[Overnight Oats](#overnightoats); page 29

[Pita Pockets](#pitapocket); page 29

[Dinner Made Easy](#dinnermadeeasy); page 29

[Don’t Forget Dessert](#dontforgetdessert); page 30

[Inside the Dictionary](#insidethedictionary); page 30

[Let’s Write the Lives We Want;](#letswritethewordswewant) page 30

[2016 Writing Contest](#writingcontest); page 31

**From the Keyboard of the President** by Eve Sanchez

*Spring is a time of growth and new beginnings. Life is beginning, life is continuing and life is changing. It is all part of the growth that we each face.*

*Let your creative juices flow whether it is in an artistic form, the garden or in the re-creation of who you are. This is another quiet issue of Slate & Style, but as promised, it is timely.*

*Perhaps everyone is busy putting the last finishing touches on their contest entries. The Annual Writers’ Contest comes to an end on April 1st after all. Many entries have already been received, but that does not mean that everyone does not have a chance to win.*

*I look forward to reading all of the entries and have peaked at some as they came in. Shhh. This year, as per member request, there is no theme, but there is a new category for the youth. Only in this one category of Federation History must a theme be followed, but what a theme. And the winner of that single category will have the chance to present their piece at National Convention.*

*So if you have not gotten your entries in yet, you had better put a move on it. Make sure you are hydrated and your fingers are limbered up. Please though, be sure to take a look at all of the guidelines for contest submissions before you send.*

**On the Slate**

As mentioned, this is another light issue of Slate & Style. The last of the 2015 contest winners are here along with a few other pieces for your enjoyment. Of course there are the recipes too, so you will never go hungry with Slate & Style. Let us dig in now.

**Drunk Cats at a Concert** by Kelly Coleman

We were all quite happy you know.

All of us in the house couldn’t have been more ready.

Plant whispered from her place on the window ledge to Fridge about it all day.

Walls muttered to Clock as the time grew nearer.

Bed welcomed me with a happy creek as I settled with the rest of them to listen.

The concert was about to start!

Wind started first in her high soprano.

She was followed by Thunder’s booming base and Rain’s quiet percussion.

The song continued until rudely interrupted.

A group of stray cats were yowling drunk on sex and adrenaline.

The performers stopped politely waiting for the drunks to leave.

When they didn’t, I wanting to be helpful threw water on them yelling,

“Stop that noise! You’re ruining it!”

They stopped and the rest of us waited anticipating more music.

But thunder gave a low growl of disapproval.

Rain and Wind swept away in a haughty farewell.

The rest of the house and I would just have to wait for another night concert.

Damn those drunken rude drunken stray cats.

My name is Kelly Coleman. I am from Lincoln Nebraska, but am currently living in Ruston Louisiana getting my master’s degree in teaching blind students. I have always enjoyed writing in all forms and I have been a member of the national federation of the blind since 2007. Let me start out by saying this is a first draft. I usually don’t send in first drafts, but I thought I had to get this one out before I forgot it and it just doesn’t seem to want to be rewritten.

**Ship Shaped or Ship Shocked? None So Blind Than Those Who Are At Sea** by Janet Di Nola Parmerter

For independent blind people, or those with low vision, using a white cane has numerous advantages. However, before being trained to use mine, I experienced many tragic yet humorous situations which I called, “The comical sagas of my fear of white canes.”

Thankfully, I smartened up enough to realize I needed proper mobility training, and now always use the white cane, or my proverbial, “white knight in shining armor!”

Nevertheless, the introduction to a humorous article I wrote called, “There Are Two Sides to Every Ski Button story,” explains my past reasons for not wanting to use a white cane.

http://www.aisquared.com/blog/2011/10/there-are-two-sides-to-every-ski-button-story/

In the past, after finally agreeing to mobility training, incredibly, or perhaps I should say stupidly, I *still* refused to use the cane. Thus, over and over again, when my caring and persistent friend Kim saw me, she repeatedly asked, “Janet, where is your cane?” That did help me use it more, but, unfortunately, with this issue, it took a few bad experiences to convince me to always use my cane. Why? Because I kept thinking, “Next time I’ll do that better and have a better outcome.”

From youth, my Italian grandparents always told me, “Hai una Testa Dura!” Which literally translates into, “You have a hard head!” More or less that idiomatic phrase means someone is a very determined, tenacious, and yes, stubborn person. Not that having a “hard head” is limited to Italians, but, I know one stubborn Italian from New Jersey, who proudly boasted after he slid off a roof onto his head, “The sidewalk cracked, but not my head!”

Speaking of roofs, a prior article I wrote after falling through one, was initially titled, “Determination to bathe.” Fittingly, THAT article summed up my strong-minded persistent and perhaps a tad stubborn personality. With three plaster casts on both legs and one arm, against the doctor’s advice, but, with my determination to bathe, I *tried* to invent new ways to wash, while *TRYING* to keep dry all three casts. Humph! Maybe I really am a Testa Dura. For sure, Doctor Hammerschlag, my brilliant and comical orthopedic surgeon thought so. <http://www.aisquared.com/blog/2012/05/splish-splash-i-cant-take-a-bath-even-if-its-saturday-night/>

In any case, some Italians would say being a testa dura makes us strong and others would say it makes us stubborn. Yet, looking back on the humorous situations in my life, I can testify from experience, sometimes it simply makes us look dumb. If Doctor Hammerschlag were asked for a second opinion, I’m sure he would agree with that diagnosis.

Wisely, the fact that now, I do not go anywhere without my trusty white night, the cane, proves I finally learned from my mistakes. However, *before* I learned that lesson, the following “Ship shaped or ship shocked” situation occurred. No matter what reason people do, or do not do things, at this point in my life I was still resisting my white cane. Consequently, while Keith and I were on our two week European honeymoon, my cane issues created another uncomfortable, yet humorous situation. Was it fear of looking vulnerable? Was it vanity, or just plain stupidity? Whatever I was thinking at the time, I still had trepidation about using a white cane.

In 2000, my new husband and I left romantic Venice via an Italian cruise liner, on our way to the gorgeous Greek islands.

That first moonlit night on deck, with the speed of the ship and the cool June breeze it was a bit chilly. Keith, my ever considerate husband, offered to return to the cabin and bring me back a woolen shawl to wrap around my thin summer evening gown. Yes, he is definitely sweet and considerate, but, since I also wanted to change into more comfortable dancing shoes, I suggested he wait for me on deck. After a quick shoe switch, I touched up my make-up, dabbed on more French perfume, reapplied my ruby red lipstick, and took off to dance the night away with my new hubby.

When I returned to the deck, I found Keith with folded arms leaning on the ship rail. In deep thought, he was pensively staring out to sea. Deviously, I snuck up behind him, slipped my arm past his bent elbow, laid my head on his shoulder and in a sultry voice said, “SO, what do you want to do now?”

Gently, in a warm tender manner, he slid his hand over mine and slowly whispered, “I not know, what YOU want do?”

Hearing this deep voice with a foreign accent, I immediately jerked my hand and arm away from him, whipped up my head toward his face, and stared up at the grin of a wide-eyed smiling stranger.

In a second, with a blood curdling scream, simultaneously I pulled my body away from him as though I had been struck by an electric shock. The scream was SO LOUD; people thought someone fell into the Adriatic Sea. While people rushed to look overboard, I pulled away from this shocked stranger and yelled, “You’re not my husband! You’re not my husband!”

With a wide smirk, he stroked my arm and in broken English snickered, “No, I not husband!”

With my red embarrassed face, and visibly flustered, I backed away from him with arms wildly flailing side to side like a woman who was ready to be bad, but, just repented and changed her mind. In between the ums, and the ohs, I stammered, “I’m sorry, um, I’m so sorry! I’m on my, um, honeymoon and I thought you were my husband! I’m sorry, um, I mean I’m married and I just got married! Oh, REALLY, I’m so sorry! Um, oh my, this is my honeymoon and, umm, anyway, ciao!” And in a split second I whirled around and fled.

Embarrassed and annoyed at myself, I left muttering under my breath, “If I only had my white cane there would be nothing to explain! Without a word, Mister X would have immediately understood the entire awkward situation, and I would not be stammering like a babbling idiot! If I only used my cane!”

Frantically looking side to side, I nervously tightened my shawl wondering if Keith had seen me snuggle up to this, wanna be more than friendly foreigner. What a relief when I found him on the other side of the ship, facing the opposite direction, and oblivious to everything including my screams. Drink in hand; he was peacefully sitting at a table and thinking, as he later admitted, of absolutely nothing at all.

Keith was ready to relax and enjoy the quiet music and evening ambiance, so we slid two lounge chairs together and stretched out. Well, at least I *tried* to relax, but, since that was the first evening of a seven day cruise, my thoughts caused me some apprehension about the possibility of facing Mister X aboard ship. In my mind I rationalized, “Why should I worry, I have no idea what he even looks like.” Consoling myself I reasoned, really, I’ll never see Mister X again. I won’t see him, because I literally CAN’T see him!” Further analyzing the situation, I thought, “The best part is, he doesn’t know I can’t see, so perhaps he will think I am flippantly ignoring him and never approach me at all. Within a few minutes, I talked myself into a calm state of serenity.

Feeling a bit more at ease, I sat back on the deck lounge chair and from a fluted glass, sipped a refreshing Prosecco and Peach Bellini. Seconds later, my anxiety waned and I totally convinced myself to be unconcerned about the earlier, “shocking ship shenanigans.”

Putting our lounge chairs into reclined positions, we silently gazed up at the stars and held hands like two school children. With Vivaldi playing in the background, and a second Bellini, it proved to be a stunning end to a disconcerting beginning. Soon, I relaxed, closed my eyes and enjoyed the cool sea air fanning across my cheeks.

As much as I tried to control my thoughts, slowly, they drifted back to the humiliating event earlier in the evening. Over and over, my confused stammering comments raced around my mind. As the words played and replayed, “You’re not my husband, I just got married, I’m on my honeymoon.” “You’re not my husband!” “You’re not my husband!” You’re not my husband, kept screaming through my brain.

All these uncontrolled thoughts put me into the overpriced expensive Italian shoes of Mister X. Now, what was ***he*** thinking?

What could he have possibly thought of me? What could he have…oh no!

Immediately, I opened my eyes, sat up, and came to the realization of what he probably imagined. Oh I’m sure of it, oh yes, I’m sure that is exactly what he thought! Once again, I dreaded the thought of running into that forlorn foreigner.

Oh yes, he knew I just got married, and yes, he knew I was on my honeymoon, and yes he probably felt very sorry for, what he undoubtedly thought was that “pitiful drunk American, still on a bender because she doesn’t even know who she married or what her new husband looks like!”

**Invinsonites, Adult Fiction Honorable Mention** by Atty Svendsen

Sean gripped the steering-wheel, knuckles white, teeth clenched. His heart felt like it was doing the jitter bug, jumping and banging against his ribs. His stomach quaked, as if the core of him had lost all heat. Next to him Karen clutched her shiny red purse to her stomach, mascara making runny black tracks down her cheeks, dripping off her chin onto the front of her dove-gray jacket. The look of terror on her face filled his chest with pity. “Kar, he said softly. “It’s going to be all right.” It sounded lame to him, but somewhere under the despair he meant it. She jerked away, as if he’d tried to touch her. Heard her sob. She pressed her forehead against the side window. “No. Just no. It won’t. I can’t talk, so please, leave me alone.”

She’d gotten as far from him as she could in their Fiat, but he knew she was much further away. Some untouchable place. My wife is raining like this horrible fricking day. Everything’s weeping, inside and out. Abruptly he flipped on the windshield wipers. Thunder grumbled far to the west.

Glancing in the rear-view-mirror he saw Alicia’s sound asleep, one fist against her little pink mouth, her soft wool hat matched her mothers, framing her sweet little face. His girls, his precious girls and he couldn’t fix it. Anger and helpless misery swelled in his chest, trying to force its way out. If he could just punch something, God or fate or at least curb-stomp their shitty gene-pool.

He put the car in reverse and backed out of the medical center’s parking lot. Rush-hour traffic swooshed past, spraying the windows, edges all blurred. Driving took all his concentration and for that he was absurdly grateful. Fifteen minutes with nothing but the thwib-thwub of the wipers, the drumming of the rain, and absolutely no Leber's Congenital Amaurosis, just a man and his family heading home.

He pulled into their driveway, their yellow house looking cheery even as the clouds darkened the sky, like a spot of sunshine in the middle of a stormy sea.

Karen jumped out before he’d completely stop. She fled inside, leaving both the car and front doors wide open. A gust of wind blew water onto the leather seat, something that would have, two hours ago, annoyed Sean, but now he didn't care. Getting out he went around and closed it. Opening the back he gently unhooked Alicia’s car-seat and lifted her out, shielding her with his jacket from the rain. "It's all right little princess,” he murmured, “Daddy’s just taking you nappy-nap.” His baby didn’t stir an eye-lash, as he carried her up the stairs to the nursery. The warm weight in his arms, the sweet pink smell of her, filled him with a fierce protective love. Tenderly he took off her hat, leaving her wrapped snuggly in her fluffy blue blankie. She sucked on her knuckles, made baby noises but didn't wake. He turned on the monitor and quietly left the room

He went in search of his wife and found her in the living-room staring at Alicia’s first picture. It sat in its place of honor in the middle of their mantle. The bright orange sleeper made their baby’s dark fuzzy hair look silky black.

"I can’t do this," Karen said, her tone flat. She'd wiped her face but still wore her jacket.

"Do what?" Fear opened in Sean’s stomach, a hollow thing that kept expanding till it felt like it might tear him in-half.

"Her," that single word sounded like a stab.

"What does that mean? There isn’t anything we can’t do. He wanted to go to her, make her look at him, but she stood rigid, muscles tensed, as if a single breath could shatter her.

"You know what I mean." She glanced at him, such terrible grief in her eyes that he went to her anyway, tried to hold her. At first she resisted, body wooden, then with a shuttering sob, she melted into him. Burying her face against his chest she wept. He patted her back, stroked her dark hair, so much like Alicia’s.

He stayed quiet letting her cry it out. His eyes prickled, big sharp rocks in his throat but he didn’t give in. His girls needed him to be strong and he would be.

"I can't handle it," she said, her words muffled against the warm damp cotton of his shirt. "It's not fair, it is so much bull shit. Why her? Why us? She's supposed to be a model or doctor, something great. She's supposed to be healthy, happy, normal. And instead, she's broken and useless."

“You don’t mean that, she’s the same baby.”

Karen clung tighter to him but instead of holding her his hands went to her shoulders.

She gripped his shirt, bunching it in her fists. "Our perfect baby is a joke. She's not even a whole person. She's crippled, she’s broken, she's not us." Her voice rose, “I fucking won’t do this!”

"Don't say that. She's beautiful. She doesn't have to be perfect. We're not. No one is. She’s the same baby..."

Karen wrenched herself away from him and snatched up the treasured picture and heaved it into the fireplace. The glass exploded; the carved wooden frame splintering. “That’s not my baby! You hear me Sean, I don’t want her!”

"Yes she is," he realized they were shouting and lowered his voice. “It doesn't matter what she has. She’s our baby, yours and mine. We made her.”

“A mistake. We made a huge mistake. We should have been tested. No one in my family is blind, no one. You said everyone in your family was fine.” Then with a desperation in her sky blue eyes she said, “Maybe they gave us the wrong baby at the hospital and ours is out there somewhere, with some blind people.”

“Karen, do you hear yourself? No one switched her. We both had the gene. That gave her a 25 percent chance she’d have it. That’s all, that’s it. No conspiracy. It’s just bad fucking luck. But we’re strong, we can handle this.”

"I didn't sign up for this," and her eyes that had always reminded him of a summers day, stared at him with a furious torment. "I'm not raising a broken kid. What sort of life can she possibly have? We'll end-up supporting her her whole life. Taking care of her, for, decades.” I'm not doing it, you hear me, Sean?"

"Karen," and he tried to sound reasonable, "she's blind, not retarded, the doctor said there is nothing wrong with her but her vision. We can teach her; we can learn how. The doctor said a social worker has all kinds of information and tons of groups.

"Groups?” she sounded incredulous, “You think that’s going to help?? I don't give a fricking-shit about their stupid groups! And I, don't, want her!” I want my healthy, smart, perfect baby back."

“Kar, she’s the same baby,” he had to make her see that.

She stared at him like he couldn’t possibly be the same husband, then, ran. Her sneakers pounding through the dining room and out the kitchen door with a slam. Her car started, squealed as she peeled out of the driveway.

Sean stood stunned, what had just happened? Surely she hadn’t meant any of that. "She's just scared and freaked, that's all."

Over the monitor he heard Alicia making small sounds. Not crying, just awake. Maybe talking to her toes. He knew blind babies still did that.

He went upstairs and peered down at her small sweet face. "Hi beautiful girl." She turned toward his voice, reaching for him. A powerful rush of love and dreadful sympathy filled him. He picked her up, checking her diaper. “Licia’s wet.” He nuzzled her soft baby cheek, kissed the damp warm of her neck. "I love you," and with those words his own tears fell. "I'm sorry,” he whispered, though he wasn't sure why. Maybe because his baby girl was blind and he couldn’t fix it, or because Karen didn't understand that it would be all right. Alicia made little hungry sucking sounds as she searched around for a nipple, for Karen. He took off her diaper, his perfect little girl waving her feet and arms. He talked to her, like he always did, kissing her feet, bicycling her chubby little legs then put on a fresh diaper, and carried her down stairs. Karen was still nursing but they had some formula just in case, so he heated up a bottle and took her to the rocker. Gently he held his baby staring into her eyes, wishing it was him instead. Alicia spit out the nipple twice, cried a little bit, and then agreed to drink this rather poor substitute.

He wanted to call Karen, see where she was, find a way to let her know everything would be all right. Thinking the tension in his voice might frighten Alicia he decided to wait until she’d finished eating and he could talk in the kitchen.

He burped her then lay her on her blanket. This time instead of putting toys around her like he used to he turned on piano music and gave her a jingly little rattle.

Standing in the kitchen doorway, keeping one eye on the baby, he called Karen’s cell. It went straight to voice-mail. Next he tried her parents and got their machine. He figure Kar was there. He hoped Mary and Fred would be able to help her deal. Somehow he doubted it, they were distant, rather cold people. He wished his brother Kenny wasn’t in rehab, he’d understand. But He’d be there for another three months. He’d never call his parents, they hadn’t talked in ten years. He just couldn’t handle the drinking.

He plugged in his cell to charge then hurried into the den and grabbed his laptop. He settled on the floor at the edge of Alicia’s blanket. She was trying to get on hands and knees and doing a good job. He wondered how safe it would be for her to be crawling when she couldn't see anything.

He Googled about blind babies, and was astonished how many hits came up. He clicked on wonderBaby.org, then the American Foundation for the Blind. “They have places right here in our own town, Licia,” he didn’t have to pretend to make his voice sound happy. Karen had to see these sites. “There is a Commission for the blind, the national federation for the blind, parents of blind children, so many baby-girl, daddy’s going to send these all to mommy.” The frightened knot of shock began to unravel in his stomach. He texted Karen the links. When she saw them she’d feel better too.

He kept reading long after he put Alicia to sleep. Around 3 in the morning He climbed in bed, held Karen’s pillow to his chest and finally slept.

In the morning he called work, told his boss he was having a family emergency then dialed Karen.

“Hi Sean,” her voice sounded all stuffed up like she had some nasty cold.

“Hey Kary, you OK?"

"No, I'm not." She didn’t say anything else.

“Did you get those links?”

“Yeah,”

“What did you think?” He wished they were face to face. “I took off work, I’ve been giving her the formula…

“Just listen for a minute Sean.” She sounded so desperate.

“OK.”

"I love you,” she paused then added in a joked voice, "and I love her too."

Fear and tears battled in his throat. He stroked Alicia’s fluffy blanket, the light green one with cartoon elephants, sad she would never see it. But it's soft my sweet girl, he thought, picturing her little face. “It’s soft.

“In college when we met, you told me about your parents being alcoholics. How you and your brother called yourself the Invinsonites because despite it all you were invincible together.”

“Right.”

"Then, when we got married you said I was one of them too, armored against the world.”

Hope rushed in to Sean’s heart. “We are, we can,”

“No, I’m not.”

"You just need time honey, it was a shock, it’s scary."

"It is a fricking nightmare, and,” she paused then tonelessly, “I don't want her."

The words kicked him in the stomach, hard and brutal. “I can’t believe that. You just said you love her.”

You’re disregarding what I’m telling you. I, don’t, want her. I can’t raise her.” Then in a rush, “We could give her up for adoption, let people who can handle it take care of her.”

Sean was so stunned he couldn’t speak.

“We’re not right for her, and she’s not right for us.” The desperation in her voice was clear and horrible.

“Karen,” Sean kept his voice even and reasonable, “I’m hanging up. You need time to think this out. I am not giving her up. I don't care if she can't walk, talk, think, hear or all the above.”

“Then you have to give me up instead,” and she hung-up.

Sean pressed the baby blanket to his face and wept. Only Twenty-four hours after diagnosis and everything was falling apart.

He called Alicia’s day-care, told Elli about the blindness and was surprised when she said, “My mother-in-law is blind, I think we can handle it just fine.”

Sean was so relieved he thought he might cry again. “Wow, that’s great, I mean, well you know.”

Elli laughed, “Yes, I know.”

They chatted a while, arranged a 7:30 drop-off and hung-up.

A few days went by and every night he tried to call Karen. She never answered. Seven more days and he stopped calling. A week after that Karen came while he was at work and packed most of her stuff. She didn't take anything else. When he came home and found the note telling him she didn’t want to see them, he took his baby girl in his arms and rocked her , spilling silent tears onto her silky head and kissing her soft little face., ”It’s okay baby, it’s OK, I’m here Daddy’s here, Mommy will be OK too, she’s just scared, she’ll be back.” And for a while he believed it because he just couldn’t comprehend how she could just leave them.

Thirty days after the diagnosis she called. “We need to talk. The flatness in her voice made his stomach hurt.

“Sure, any time.”

“Now will do.”

“Over the phone? I want to see you, this is still your home.” …

“I’m not coming over there.”

“We miss you.”

“Don’t Sean, or I’ll hang-up, this is hard enough as it is.”

“We need to talk face to face. I could come over there if it’d be…” She hung up.” He thought it’d hurt but instead he just felt numb.

Forty-five days after the news his baby was blind and his wife had walked out, Sean realized there was a special sort of magic caring for Alicia. He bought funny sounding rattles, toys that squeaked, clicked, and played jaunty little tunes. He named everything, carrying her from room to room, telling her “we’re going left into the kitchen. Right into the hall.” So she always knew where they were in her baby way. He put her in front of the glass doors so the morning sun was warm on her skin. When the birds sang he told her which ones, when a loud noise startled her he held her close and spoke gently so she knew she was safe. He put her tiny hands on his face to feel his nose and long lashes. He kissed her fingers and even sang to her. He thought he sounded terrible but she seemed to love it.

Karen faded from their daily lives. Once in a while at night he’d hold her pillow, wonder who she was, if she’d be back. But mostly he learned about blindness, worked and took care of his baby.

Sixty days after the day that changed everything, Karen called again. This time Sean just listened, feeling sad, cold and resigned.

“I filed for divorce and am giving up parental rights. You’ll be getting the papers. I don’t want anything,” she sounded so brisk.

“Just like that?” He kept his voice even and neutral.

After a long empty silence she said, ‘Yes.”

“All right,” he said, because there really wasn’t anything else to say.

“I’m sorry,” she said but he didn’t think she sounded like it.

“Right,” he answered and hung-up.

Seventy-five days from diagnosis to divorce, Sean thought as he signed the papers. Two and a half months and his four year marriage was over.

Oblivious, Alicia cooed happily in her walker, banging her rattle and singing in her chirpy little voice. Watching her he grinned. “You’re my little invinsonite. It’s you, me, and Uncle Kenny.” Sean picked up a different rattle, the red one with the bells, and banged it next to hers, singing along, knowing that was how she could watch him to.



**A Successful Hunt**, Adult Fiction **Honorable Mention** by Heather M. Rasmussen

They say that in the larger cities you don’t see sprites anymore, but we still do. They are little, winged Faeries who steal our crops, take our cows’ milk, and are rumored to curse the soil and cause children to have nightmares with their eerie little songs. These ugly little creatures stand about four inches tall and carry tiny bows and quivers of needle-sharp arrows. Mind you, I’ve never seen a live sprite up close. I’ve seen several at a distance: they look like colorful birds flitting through the trees. Dead sprites resemble shriveled insects: they’re all brittle wings, shrunken eyes, and snarling teeth. Disgusting!

My name is Faren. I live in Kammdeer, a good-sized village in the great forest, about a day’s ride from the stone hills. I come from a family of hunters. Both men and women in my family are experts, and some of us even have a strange sixth-sense which makes us unparalleled trackers. I have been striving to seek sprite blood for years. This year I turned fifteen—finally old enough to join the great sprite hunt—and I have been chosen!

Once Sprites were plentiful in these parts, but there are few of them left now. Every year near the summer solstice, when the sprites’ magic is supposedly weakest, there is a great hunt for them. Each village selects its best hunters for the honor, and the pressure to bring down at least one of the monsters is very great. Last year my older brother Alfred brought back two dead sprites from the hunt, which sets a high bar for me.

This year is the seventy-fifth anniversary of the sprite hunt! A superstition runs deep in our people holding seventy-five as an almost sacred number that can herald bad fortune. Thus the honor—and pressure—are greater this year than any other. The sprite hunt always brings great excitement, but this year it’s reached fever pitch. I am beyond honored to be chosen on this great occasion; I must prove myself!

Just before dawn I set out with two other hunters heading due north. No sprites have dens within several miles of the village nowadays: however malicious and disgusting, the little devils are clever. There isn’t really any point in going our separate ways for a few hours at least. We ride for about three hours in single file, and then stop at a stream to water the horses and eat a quick lunch ourselves.

“That’s quite the little crossbow you’ve got there.” Henry, one of the hunters, comments to me dryly, testing the string of his own long hunting bow as we prepare to ride again. Henry is in his mid-twenties and a good hunter who’s been successful on the sprite hunt once before. He holds a low opinion of women hunters, and I detest him. How dare he insult my weapon! I nod coolly at him.

“It’s new; got it just last year. It’s light, quiet—perfect for getting quail.”

“And sprites?” Shea, the other hunter, inquires, fingering the trigger of his own larger crossbow. I smile grimly and fit a bolt into its slot.

“I think so; we’ll see, won’t we? When do you two want to part ways?” I ask as I mount my gelding.

“Oh, anxious to lose us, are you?” Henry asks with a sneer. “Afraid we’ll get to the little devils before you do? We may as well stay together till dark and make camp. You know, always good to protect the little lassie.” He says, giving me a disdainful look.

“I’m twice the hunter you are; don’t worry, I won’t fail.” I shoot back. Then I turn away from Henry’s smirk and nudge my gelding into a trot; it doesn’t really matter what he thinks anyway. What matters is bringing down an accursed sprite.

As the afternoon progresses, the constant conversation begins to wear on my nerves. Can’t they shut up? Any sprite will hear us coming a league away! More important, this constant chatter is distracting me and blocking off my sixth-sense tracker’s instinct, which puts me at a disadvantage to finding anything. I start to seriously think of heading off on my own, regardless of what Henry thinks, but when darkness falls I change my mind.

I have never slept alone in the forest before, and it puts me on edge. There are wolves in these parts, maybe bandits, and this far out there are definitely sprites. Especially at night they can be dangerous. If there are several together, they might harry or injure a human with those little painful arrows or binding spells. Spending the night with these two irritating men is probably wise.

We make camp in a little clearing in amongst some pines, with a large, dying Hawthorne tree on the south edge. We build a small fire and sit around it, eating bread and cheese from our packs and sharing a water skin. Henry recounts to us in vivid detail how he chased down, killed, and brought back a sprite two years ago.

“Was it a boy or a girl sprite?” I inquire without thinking when he finally finishes, then blink. Why does it matter? Aren’t they all the same?

“A boy I guess,” Henry answers, giving me a rather strange look. “It had on britches of sorts. Dirty little rags of course—they’re all the same to me anyway.” He spits into the fire. “Maybe this year I’ll find a nest of them.” He muses. Shea laughs.

“Oh come on; they’re nasty, but they’re not stupid. You’d never find a nest of them. I’m going to search the streams and water meadows a bit west.” He turns to me. “Isn’t that how your brother caught those two last year?” He inquires. I nod; that’s where Alfred found them resting. Shea smiles at me. “So then…what’s your plan this year, Faren? Surely you’ve got a good one.” He presses, poking the fire.

I study Shea for a moment. Although he is an annoying boy, Shea isn’t arrogant or malicious like Henry. He at least has the decency to respect my hunting abilities, and honestly he’s not bad looking either. I have a plan of course, but…

“Well that’s a secret.” I answer, laying a finger to my lips. Shea shrugs and then yawns. “All right then, have it your way. I’m going to get some sleep; wake me when it’s my turn to watch.” Without waiting for an answer, he lies down in his cloak and instantly falls asleep. Henry follows suit, leaving me on first sentry duty. Finally some peace and quiet!

I inhale the moist, sweet night air and take in all the smells of the woods: pine, earth, a hint of lingering smoke, and faintly the smell of dung somewhere near. I stare around me intently, catching the flickering movement of insects and even a night bird at the edges of my vision. I listen to all the nocturnal chirpings, rustlings, and other small movements around me. Lastly, I reach out with my tracker’s sense, exploring the area with it slowly and carefully. Finally I can really tell what is around me, without all that needless chatter!

All the nearby life of the forest comes into my consciousness. There are trees of course, silent and still. There are insects flitting about pursuing their small lives and night birds hunting them. Further away there is some kind of night mammal: a fox or wildcat—something on the ground but too far away and busy for me to quite tell. I relax, and then suddenly my senses perk up again. On the left…what’s that? It is closer than the fox, in the trees but something…different. Is it…?

I turn slowly and scan the lower branches across the clearing. I close my eyes and tune out everything but the creature I’m seeking. Something small, something frightened something very curious. I open my eyes again, and move my gaze up into the upper branches of a young silver birch tree…There!

A brief flicker of movement catches my eye, and I see beady eyes flash at me before disappearing. I can still feel it there for a moment watching me. Sprites can sometimes turn invisible, but that doesn’t hide this one from my tracker’s sense. A moment later the sprite moves away with a tiny rustle of wings. One of its arrows zips by my ear and buries itself in the Hawthorne as a parting gift. I pluck it out and study it. Although miniscule, the arrow is well-made and needle-sharp. I flick it into the fire dismissively.

When my allotted time has passed, I wake Henry and settle down to catch some sleep myself without a word to him. A sprite! A live one--it was there! If only I can sense it again and pick up its trail.

It will honor my family and my gender: a woman of the common classes bringing back a sprite! On the seventy-fifth anniversary of the hunt no less, when the honors are even more meaningful… I can catch it…surely I can…I have to…

I wake before dawn. Shea is keeping watch, alert and quietly greasing his crossbow.

“Up already?” He asks with a friendly smile. I nod and smile back at him.

“Good luck Shea. Beat Henry if you would.” I say, stuffing some bread in my pocket and grabbing my saddle. Shea stands and puts a hand on my shoulder.

“You’ll get one of those things, Faren; you’re the best tracker around. You’ll only be the third woman to take down a sprite you know; don’t fail. Good luck.” He gives my shoulder a squeeze and returns to his weapon.

The gelding and I travel north for half an hour or so with no sign of the sprite. I saw her on the west edge of the clearing…her? What makes me think the sprite is female? Anyway, it flew away overhead to the north. Actually…that would make sense: there are no villages for some ways in this direction. The soil is poor and rocky, the trees small and stunted. Higher up are jagged rock formations—a perfect place for a sprite den! I give the gelding a slight heal to quicken his pace.

As we reach the edge of the forest, my sixth sense tingles ever-so-slightly. I rein the gelding to a stop, glance to my left, and…there. My vision lights on a slight discoloration in the lower branches of an elm. Averting my eyes slightly and using my peripheral vision, I examine it. Suddenly the discolored lump moves and wings unfold. Clearly the sprite has been resting, exhausted by the chase. I fit a bolt into my crossbow, aim, and fire just as the creature takes flight. It’s faster than I first imagine, and I miss my target of her back. The bolt clips a wing, though, and sends it spiraling to the ground with a shrill cry.

I throw the horse’s reigns over a branch and give chase. Now I have another advantage; the wing injury from my bolt has, for the moment, robbed the thing of its magic. While it still manages to fly jerkily away, it stays visible. Good luck; hopefully it’ll hold.

Now that I’m on foot, I can move more stealthily. Although sprites have wings, they also walk or hop at times. I've seen footprints before in the dust around our storage chests in the barns. An injured wing should also force the sprite to fly more slowly. It might even stop to rest or leave a blood trail, making for an easier shot. The going proves harder than it first appears. The scree is slippery and unstable, forcing me to go at about half my normal swift pace on the hunt. Upon cresting the first, lower hill, I slump panting on a boulder to rest. I try reaching out again with all of my senses, but nothing comes. Great: I’m tired, starving, and have apparently lost the trail…for the moment anyway. Lunch might help, I think. A squished piece of bread, a thick slice of sharp cheese, and half a water skin later, my disposition has much improved. Onward march, I order myself.

On and on I trek over the Mooreland. Twice I lose the trail, but eventually manage to find signs of my prey and pick it up again. The first time I spot its tiny footprints in the dust along with splotches of its green blood. A little further on I find a few more drops of blood on a boulder. When next I lose the trail, I look up to see my prey, standing atop a small hill just out of range.

At sunset I make camp about a quarter mile from the formation. It’s too dark for visual tracking now, so I’ll have to wait until morning to make my kill. I light no fire to avoid attracting attention. After eating more bread and cheese and finishing my water, I curl up for a chilly night drifting in and out of restless sleep.

I wake about an hour before dawn and make my way as quickly as possible to the cliffs. I scour the rocks in the dim morning light, hugging the cliff and probing every inch with all my senses. After about a hundred yards, I finally find something. The sprite has been here alright, leaving little footprints in the muck at the base of the cliff. It isn’t bleeding anymore, so there is no blood trail up the rocks. I stare upward and spot a small crevice about twenty feet above me and slightly to the right. Eureka! My instinct tells me this is the sprite’s den.

As quietly as I can manage, I scale the cliff and plant my feet on a ledge beneath the crevasse. I have to lean a bit to the left, but the crevasse is face-height and I have a decent angle for a shot. I steel myself and look inside.

This is indeed a small sprite cave! There’s a pile of what appear to be tools in one corner, some nuts and roots piled in another, and even what look oddly like two stools facing a shelf on the right wall. So the little savages apparently have primitive furniture. Directly in my line of sight, at the rear of the cave, is a bed of piled feathers and leaves. In it is a twitching lump that must be my quarry. My heart skips a beat; I have it! I shift in order to bring my crossbow up into position, aim, take a deep breath…and sneeze.

Startled, the sprite leaps from the bed and faces me. I re-position my aim, cock the string back--and then freeze.

In front of my bolt is standing a tiny, very frightened person! I have never seen a live sprite up close. She no longer looks like a colorful bird in the trees or a dead insect; this isn’t an animal.

She is a girl probably not much older than I am. Her feet are bare, her long, blue hair dirty and tangled, and she has fragile little butterfly wings. She has on a dress! It’s ragged, but clearly a short dress of died, yellow fabric cut and sewn like any other. In her hands, which are shaking, she holds her tiny, empty bow. Her face! That’s what gets to me. It is sharper, more angled than human features. She has pointed ears and slatted eyes. Still, it is undoubtedly the face of a person staring at me. She’s not snarling or grinning cockily as others have described the sprites they’ve cornered: she just looks terrified. I keep my aim true but ease the tension from the string. We stand there for a long moment, staring at one another. What’s going on? This isn’t how it’s supposed to work.

“Well get on with it.” The sprite says, dropping her bow. “Kill me; you win.” Her voice is very high and squeaky, higher than a human’s ever could be. It’s raspy too, with fear, exhaustion, and probably pain from the torn wing I’ve given her.

I stand there, a battle in side me. I think of Henry, who has scorned my skill and doubted me from the start. I think of what the village elders entrusted me with—taking part in the seventy-fifth sprite hunt, to help rid the land of our hated harassers. I think of Shea, urging me to prove that women can hunt as well as men. I remember my family’s proud faces as they waved goodbye. How can I prove the doubters right…how can I disappoint those who believe in me? And yet…in front of my bolt stands a person… My jaw is clenched so tightly with the tension of the moment it hurts. My hands start to shake…I can’t kill a person! That’s…murder!

I look right into her frightened, green eyes, and make my choice.

“No.” I tell the sprite girl quietly. I pull the bolt from its slot and sling the crossbow on my back. “I…I don’t want to.” With that, I clamber back down the cliff, sling my pack on my shoulder, and begin scrambling back down the scree hills to the forest.

My heart is light, and I smile as I walk. It doesn’t matter what the doubters think: I know my own success. I tracked down a sprite, cornered her, and could have killed her easily. Few can truthfully say this. My skill is equal that of any hunter living. Nor does it really matter that my family and admirers will be disappointed. There are times when one must decide what’s right for oneself. Although I am returning to my village empty-handed from the great seventy-fifth sprite hunt, my heart is full—fuller than it ever has been. I haven’t failed. For myself and another, very small person, the seventy-fifth sprite hunt has been a great success.

**Memory 75, Middle School Fiction Honorable Mention**, by Avery Poland

A little boy who got a seedling for his birthday was so excited to grow it.

A small boy plants the tree seedling.

A small boy grows up with the tree and protects the tree from small animals.

The older boy keeps the tree alive by watering, trimming and fertilizing.

The older boy leaves the house to go to college and returns in four years.

The grown man with a wife and children.

He puts a rope swing up for his kids to play on.

The grown man is moving out and gives the house to his grown children.

Many years later the old man moves back into his old house to live with his children.

The old man turns 75 years old at his old house at a big birthday party.

He enjoys watching his grandchildren playing on the very old, very tall tree.

The old man goes to bed that night and dreams about the 75 years of memories about him and the tree that he planted as a very young boy.

**75 Birthday Candles, Middle School Fiction Honorable Mention**, by Yael Korc

“Hey, Liana! Over here!”

I turn around and see my best

friend Alicia running toward me.

I’m in the school playground,

looking for something fun to do, when

Alicia calls my name. She’s

standing with my two other best friends,

Sophie and Jasmine.

I hurry over to join them. “What’s

up?” I ask.

“Nothing much,” Sophie answers,

twirling around gracefully. She

loves ballet.

“Hey, I just wanted to ask you

something,” Alicia says.

“What’s that?”

“When are you having your birthday

party?”

I shrug. “I don’t know.

Probably next week.”

When you find out , can you tell us?”

Jasmine asks.

“Of course,” I agree.

“I can’t believe you’re already ten,”

Sophie says with a sigh.

I can’t believe you’re still nine,”

I say. We laugh.

We’ve been friends since we were

little. I think we make a great foursome.

“Hey, Soph,” Jasmine says.

“Yeah?”

“When do you turn ten?”

“In a few more months,” Sophie

says glumly.

“Too bad for you,” Alicia says.

“Guys, stop it,” I say, and we

laugh again. Then the bell rings and we

go inside for lunch.

After school, my brother Ian

Greets me. “Hi, Liana!”

“Hi, Ian,. I reply. I walk

inside the house and dump my backpack

on the floor.

“Hi, Li!” Mom calls from

the kitchen. “How was school?”

I walk into the kitchen. “Fine. Where’s Maya?” Maya is my big sister.

“She’s in her room,” Mom

answers.

“Hey, when are we having my party?”

“I don’t know, honey. Next week,

I think.”

“Okay, thanks. That’s what I

told Alicia.”

Later, after dinner, I go up to my

room and fall asleep thinking about

my party.

The next day I meet up with my

friends while we’re walking to school.

“Hey, did you find out when you’re

having your party?” Alicia asks.

I shake my head. “Not yet.”

“Oh,” Sophie says.

“Wait a sec! I just remembered!”

I cry. “Mom told me last

night. We’re having it next

Saturday.”

“I won’t be here!” Sophie

wails. “I’m going to Iowa.”

“I’m going to Minnesota,”

Alicia says.

“And I’m going to Alabama,”

Jasmine adds.

I put my head in my hands.

I would never have a party now.

When I get home that day, I

tell Mom what my friends told

me.

“Oh, honey, I’m sorry,”

Mom says. “We’ll still do

something special, okay?”

“It won’t be the same,” I

mutter. “My party is ruined.”

On the day of my party, I

wake up with the horrible thought that my

friends won’t be there. I get

dressed slowly and go downstairs for breakfast.

“Good morning,” Maya says.

She is the only one in the kitchen.

“Hi,” I reply. I sit down

and pour myself some cereal.

By the time the party starts, I’m

in a terrible mood. I’m about to open my family presents when the doorbell rings. Ian runs for the door. “I’ll

get it!” He returns with Sophie,

Alicia and Jasmine behind him.

“Surprise!” they yell. They are each carrying a big

bakery box.

“Let’s go sit down,” Mom

suggests.

We walk to the table and Sophie

sets the boxes down. “Open

them!” she urges excitedly. I do and find three big

cupcakes decorated with tiny

candles.

“The 75 Cake,” Jasmine

explains, “because it has 75

candles.”

“I love it!” I say. The party isn’t ruined after all.

The next day at school, my

friends and I talk about how great

the birthday party was.

“Thank you guys so much,” I

say.

“No problem,” Sophie replies.

“Hey, should we tell her?” Alicia asks. She looks at

me.

“Tell me what?” I demand.

Jasmine takes a deep breath. “Well, we felt bad that we

had to go on trips the day of the party,

so we convinced our parents to go on

the trips by themselves.”

I smile at her. “Thank you

so much.”

“Oh, it was nothing,” Alicia says.

“The seventy-five cupcakes were the best part,” I go on, as

if she hasn’t said anything.

“We had fun buying them,”

Sophie says.

“Well, I’m glad you did,”

I tell her. “It was the best

birthday ever. I’m so glad

you guys are my friends.” We all smile at each other and walk

into the building for lunch.

**7****5 Winners, Middle School Fiction Honorable Mention**, by P’Tress Franklin

“Hey Josive, knock’m dead!” Mea yelled from the high platform her and her team were standing from. The tigers were going to the 75th game, if they won that they’d win the record of best in the world. Josive was the best of the Tigers bass ball team.

The horrible sound of braking glass came from a far distance as Kai, a Hong Kong police detective, and Annamaree, a normal singer from Sweden chased a villain. The criminal ran faster as Kai and Annamaree pursued with great effort. This criminal has stolen something very valuable … Josive’s hat. “Why! Why does Josive have to have this ridiculous hat,” Kai asked. “Because he wouldn’t stop begging you, it’s his lucky hat. You know how people get with their superstitions.” Annamaree explained. So they continued to run after the violin.

“Fransisco!” Annabeth called, “Fransisco! Fransisco Cortes, where are you!?” Annabeth came running out the door shouting to Kai and Annamaree to wait. She told them that Fransisco had gone missing, and on the day of his rodeo. “Yes that is a mystery,” began Kai, “But we’ve got bigger fish to fry, like this hat stealer. If I don’t get it back, Josive will have my head.”

Leonna is the most popular girl in the world, and leader of the cheerleading squad. “Look here Jin, those guys are missing the big picture.” Leonna said. “What do you mean?” Jin asked. “Well let’s just say that Kai is taking this mystery too far. I know exactly who the crook is. It’s much too easy. In fact I’m helping that someone. Or I already have; besides it’s just a hat.” Leonna explained.

Kai had been chasing that criminal for the longest, so long it was 7 in the evening. Josive’s game was just about to start, how were they going to catch this guy? As he got closer, Leonna cut him off. “Leonna!” Kai screamed, “I almost had him! UUgh!” “Sorry,” Leonna said with a wink. “Josive’s game is about to start,” warned Annamaree. “Don’t worry, they won’t start without Josive,” Leonna assured. At 7:15 the streets were practically empty, everyone wanted to see Josive’s 75th game.

“Okay I give up!” Kai shouted, “I’ve been chasing you since 7:50 in the morning!” “Gosh you don’t have to be such a baby,” said a voice. “Wait a minute, I know that voice,” Kai said. “Fransisco!!!” He yelled. “Ha ha ha ha ha ha,” Fransisco, “Gee Kai, who knew you could be so slow. I’ll tell you why I took Josive’s hat as long as you don’t go “what! You!? No!” ok?” “Huh,” Kai, Annamaree, and Josive asked in unison. “Josive how’d you get here,” asked Fransisco. “I came when you told everyone you took my hat,” Josive answered. “Okay well look,” Fransisco started, “You know how every time on TV shows someone always says what, you, or no?” Nobody answered. “Well anyway,” he began, “I stole your hat because I knew you wouldn’t go to your game without it.” “And,” Josive pushed. “Look around,” Fransisco yelled, “Guys where are you going this evening?” “To Josive’s game,” everyone answered happily, “Oh.”

“Yeah,” Fransisco said, “Josive isn’t the only guy who does something cool! I have a rodeo, my 75th to be correct. Josive took my 75th fedora! This would be my 75th time wearing it on my 75th rodeo! Boom! How’s that for breaking the 75 record? And guess what, none of my friends care.” “What,” said Josive calmly. “You!?” yelled Annamaree. “No,” shouted Kai. Unbelievable,” Fransisco said with a hand jester of throwing his right hand up, and the bringing it down hard to his side, “Now why did you take my fedora?” “Because,” Josive started, “You were going to break the 75 record for sure. So I took your fedora so you wouldn’t.” Josive and Fransisco stared at each other for a while, and all they could was the crickets. “Boo,” Leonna screamed. With a scream, Josive and Fransisco both jumped, the hats they held flew to each other, and they both had their hats again. “Now go play your games,” Leonna laughed, and everyone else did too. in





Both Josive’s and Fransisco’s game were intense, but they both ended winning the 75 winner title. Sooner or later they’d be throwing a contest of who could be the real winner. Josive spent his night after his game relaxing. While Fransisco had to apologize to Annabeth for ditching her completely for a hat. Unfortunately he had to make it up to her by taking her horse riding. More horse riding, but they were all happy.

**Tree** by Eve Sanchez 

I have always been a tree

A tree of many kinds

My roots are deep within the Earth

Though my canopy grows high

I know what a tree knows

I hear the whispers in the leaves

And feel all a tree has felt

I can see all as a tree sees

I wish to share the secrets

To tell what I’ve been told

To learn what I am saying

Try now and listen well

To the rustling overhead

**Hurry Outside**

Spring is here and with it some beautiful weather, so who wants to be inside cooking? We have gathered some quick healthy options for your days’ meals so you could grab and go.

**Overnight Oats, the perfect ready to eat breakfast**

**Ingredients;**

**½ cup oats**

**½ cups almond milk**

**Some frozen berries of choice**

**Some almond slivers**

**Directions;**

**Mix the oats and milk in a container with a lid. Top with berries and nuts and refrigerate overnight. In the morning, it is ready to enjoy.**

**Pita Pocket**

These are great because they are literally made in pockets. Just fill this unique sandwich with some hummus and your choice of vegetables. I suggest cucumber, tomato and even a bit of shredded carrot for crunch.

**Dinner made Easy**

Throw some Idaho potatoes in the oven and let them bake while you are enjoying the sunset. When you go in toss a salad and top your spuds with whatever your imagination can come up with.

**Don’t Forget Dessert**

While the potatoes are baking you can put that heat to another task. Mix a box of your favorite store bought brownie mix with one can of pumpkin and bake per directions.

**Inside the Dictionary**

In the wake of the United Kingdom announcing that they will stop using vellum to write their new laws on, it seemed appropriate to look at the word for fiction writers, horror fiction to be specific. Vellum is baby animal skin. Yep, for hundreds of years they have been applying ink to the skins of calves and have a huge storeroom of rolled up skins. Aren’t we glad we read Braille?

**Let’s Write the Lives We Want**

Slate & Style is a quarterly publication of the National Federation of the Blind Writers' Division. It is dedicated to writing pursuits such as literary pieces, resources, and information about various writing styles. A majority of Slate & Style's contributors are blind, but we welcome submissions from any contributor. We also accept submissions touching on any subject matter. We encourage submissions from both experienced and beginning writers with our goal being to hone our writing craft and share our thoughts.

Slate & Style accepts short fiction, short creative nonfiction, poetry, articles discussing and providing tips for various writing styles including literary, technical, editing, public relations, and academic, literary criticism, resource information, and book reviews.

Subject matter is not limited but will be up to the editor's discretion to publish.

Slate & Style accepts material from adults and children. We require email submissions.

Below are some of the highlights for submitting. Go to writers.nfb.org/Slate&StylePage for the full submission guidelines.

Include an attached cover letter and a short biography. This should be no more than 150 words. Keep your bio to the key items you feel are important for readers to know.

Multiple submissions per email are fine, but all must be listed in the required cover letter. Use Microsoft Word or RTF. No other formats are accepted. Send all submissions and questions to [s-and-s@nfbnet.org](mailto:s-and-s@nfbnet.org).

Please read through all the guidelines carefully. Submissions that do not follow these guidelines may not be considered for Slate & Style.

Though submissions are welcome at all times, if your submission is specifically about a particular season or time of year and you would like your submission to appear in that corresponding issue, please read the dates and submission deadlines in the guidelines.

For the Summer issue, which will come out on June 21st, the closing date for acceptance of submissions is May 31st.

**2016 WRITING CONTEST GUIDELINES**

The annual youth writing contest to promote Braille literacy and the Adult Writing Contest, sponsored by the NFB Writers’ Division, are open just until April 1st. Hurry and get your entries in.

\*The complete guidelines can be found by going to the Writers’ Division website, <http://writers.nfb.org>

**Read those guidelines carefully and good luck. Remember that when it comes to your contest entries and your submissions to Slate & Style…**

\*\*\*\*We look forward to seeing your words.\*\*\*\*



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