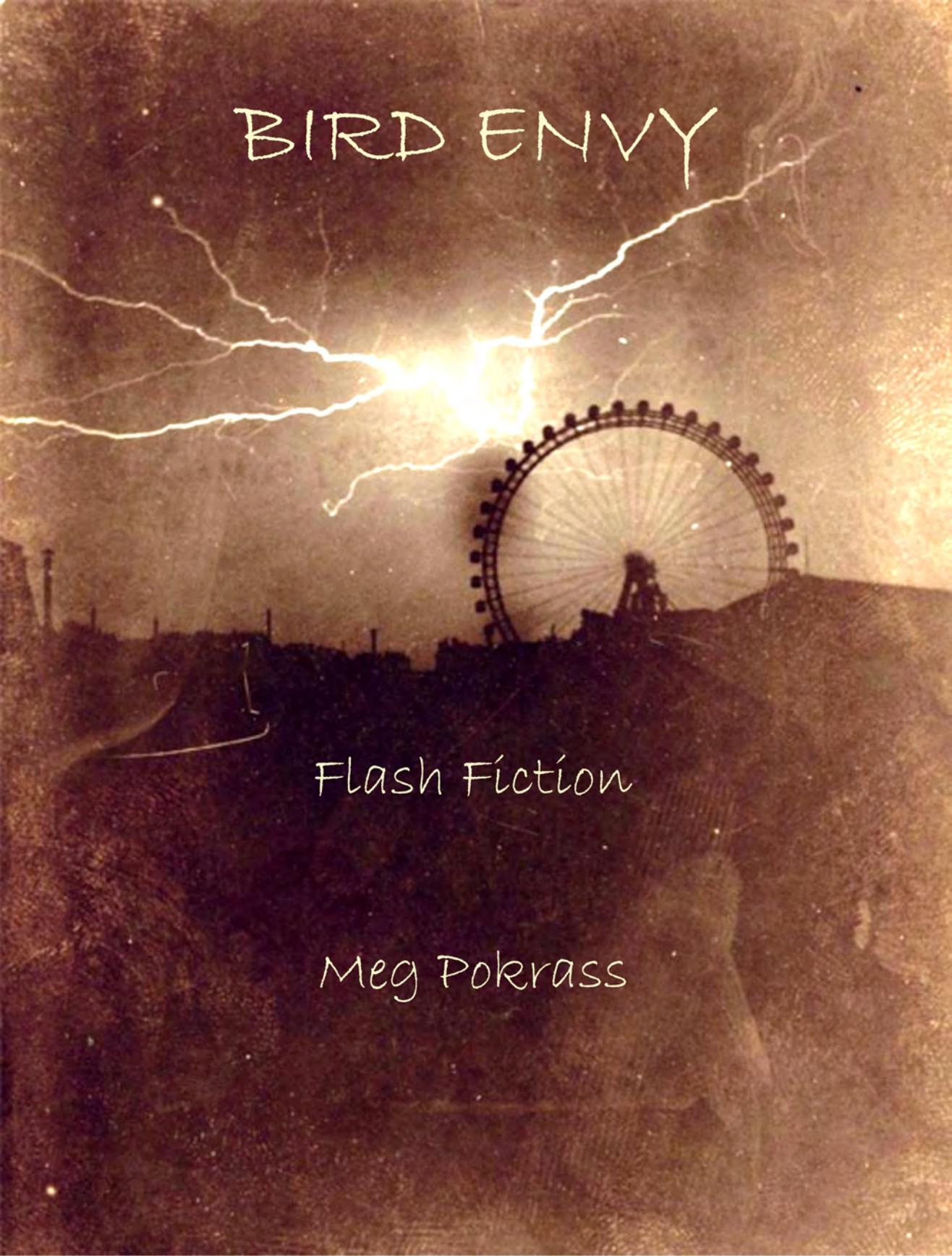


BIRD ENVY

The background of the cover is a dark, atmospheric photograph of a Ferris wheel at night. The sky is filled with multiple bright, jagged lightning bolts, creating a dramatic and somewhat ominous mood. The Ferris wheel is silhouetted against the lighter, stormy sky, with its spokes and outer rim clearly visible. The overall color palette is dominated by dark browns, blacks, and the bright whites and yellows of the lightning.

Flash Fiction

Meg Pokrass

Bírd

ENVY

By

Meg Pokrass

Copyright (c) 2014 by Meg Pokrass

All rights reserved. This book or any portion thereof may not be reproduced or used in any manner whatsoever without the express written permission of the publisher except for the use of brief quotations in a book review.

Printed in the United States of America.

ISBN 978-0-615-97087-5

Grateful acknowledgement is made to the following journals, in which many of these pieces first appeared in different forms:

Juked, New World Writing, Wigleaf, NANO Fiction, McSweeney's Internet Tendency, The Rumpus, Keyhole, FRIGG, Storyglossia, elimae, Literary Orphans, Camroc Press Review, Eclectica, Thieves Jargon, 3AM, Gigantic, Gargoyle, A Moveable Feast, LITnIMAGE, Pindeldyboz, Metazen and Prick of the Spindle

Book design & development: www.telepoeticsf.com

For Ruth, Etta and Fanny

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Bird Envy	1
Cellulose Pajamas	2
Traveler	3
Casting	4
Second Visit	5
Between Them	7
Movie	8
Emerald	9
Red Cigarettes	10
Toll Free Kale	11
Viking	13
Last Cause	14
Wading	15
Map	16
Worries of the Duck	17
Moments	18
Ruby	19
Hat, Boot, Scottie	20
Salty	21
The World	22
Others of Similar Dimension and Need	23
Infused	25
Stationary	26
Dough	27
Dive	28
Nurse	29
Lemon	30
Geese	31

Singing	32
Possession	33
Sentry	34
To-Do List	35
Guest Star	36
Los Angeles	37
Alarm	38
Dr. V.	39
Viewing	40
The New	41
Fillmore Street	42
Recognition	43
Knot	44
Petals	45
On the Sand	46
Nest	47
Peas and Cheese	48
Symphony	49
Fertile	50
Baking	51
African Butterfly	53
Knock	54
He	55
Arms Inside Phone	56
This One Now	57
Tick	59
Empty	61
Vault of Great Things	62

Bird Envy

These last few years, I've been haunted by gulls, their firm flight toward ocean. Just great to see them fly to something right. When I turn the radio on, I drive toward the gulls and that feeling of holding it tight. I remember holding weed inside my lungs, never letting it out as a kid. I like to hold things in. I have these colors and they wake up. To nestle with a man, to hold him in, in that way, someday I won't envy birds.

Cellulose Pajamas

I consult a nutritionist who believes in dark greens: collards, kale, chard. Hope blows in like swallows nudging the window ledge. I wash the dark green leaves carefully, softly, just for him. We will share them on the drive to the grocery store, wrap ourselves in their cool cellulose pajamas, tell each other in bird language again and again, how it was we grew too close.

Traveler

“Night monkey,” he said. Rain grabbed my window, settled as dust. My father, the world explorer, back from a mission of taking pictures, sneaking into ruins his face a crumpled map; streets, volcanoes, wind. God told me about you, I said. He laughed, told me the truth – world travelers search until they drop. His eyes sizzled like fat. I followed him anyway— to slums and secret meetings, to hear his laugh, to understand his game of secrets.

Casting

At the audition, he calls me in to his studio, looks me over. When he stands behind me my fingers stiffen. He orders me to open my mouth inspects my teeth, says I have an Irish-y, Jewish-y look. *Not sure it will work.*

He orders me to pose with arms outstretched, measures my waist with his fingers. When he stares at me I look back into his narrow eyes.

At home in bed awake, my nerves sit guard like lions. My hair coils around the last dream.

Second Visit

Dad smoked them, so I wanted to try a cigarette. Mostly my eyes landed on his dumb boots. Hiking made him seem mossy, old and exhausted. I told him that I helped mom with laundry and plucking weeds. I wanted to say I'd taken pictures of her boyfriend from our roof. Dad had thick glasses and birdlike arms. The only thing he looked good doing was smoking. To him we were starting all over again. To me we were treating an infection. He asked me if I ate salmon. I answered that I liked it poached and tender. He said he'd been off fishing a lot and would soon retire. I craved what was nestled in my night stand, a hand rolled joint. I wanted to free up all of this shitty silence. Can I light it? I asked. He laughed and I imagined him laid out on a long, white gurney

and how part of me would split. He let me strike the
match and place his cigarette inside my lips.

Between Them

Her apartment was filled with birds. They spoke to her but as birds do, so she could only feel what they said. She lay down on her mattress and imagined the birds between them. How one bird at a time would fly away to somewhere safe. How the shelf of time would be filled with seed. She'd put the wish on a thin slip of paper and let it blow away. *How will I ever know what it said?* he asked. *You won't,* she said, *because you already know it.*

Movie

I am playing the girl. The older sister is played by an actress. I watch it in the theater of my inner eye, kicking back, plucking Junior Mints from a long box, holding them in my mouth until they die on my tongue. One by one, her threats begin to bunch like beads along a narrow string—her lips moving off-screen when she says she wishes she weren't born.

Emerald

He asked her to choose a shade of green. He liked the way she stooped to tie her shoes like an old man, as though she could fall over very easily.

Go! he said.

The window was open and she screamed it. He asked again.

Red Cigarettes

If someone is married or impossible I'll hoard
images of their shiny smiles. Sometimes I'll spot a man
stroking a red cigarette.

Nothing bothers me and everything bothers
me.

I betray my husband with a dog... by loving a
dog—not the way stupid people think, by kissing his
glossy ears. I betray my husband by holding the pet rat
to my lips and letting her smell them.

Toll Free Kale

During the day, my husband snores in rhythm with the dog. Some may say it is cute. I would not say that exactly. Today, two or three beautiful women on Facebook offer me favors. One offers me something I'm too embarrassed to speak about, and another offers virtual grapes. Dennis offers to leave Facebook and does. There is something wrong with my home phone—the landline. It rings, and the caller ID says "Toll free kale." I knew Dennis was gay from day one. It is difficult for women like myself to accept certain things about the world's Dennises because they are perfect for us. Another vague come-on from a Facebook friend goes like this: I am a very straight man, but a lesbian in my soul..." I'm sure some men are, inside their souls, lesbians. Yet, if I wanted a

woman, I would find a woman. Also, I am married.

My husband is sleeping right next to my computer.

The dog and he.

Viking

I tell him he can watch, but he joins in. I wake up imagining him lying next to his wife. He comes here for something wild, our little game. I make him grunt. Later, we'll grill chops. On Thanksgiving he calls me at midnight to say I remind him of an Al Green song, though he can't remember the tune -- it's driving him crazy. He's lost his appetite, his scalp itches, he can't sleep. *What's happening?* he whispers. It's chasing him, he says. I tell him everything will be OK because I remember a few Al Green tunes. I start one, and he joins. Little boxes of metal next to our ears are singing, glowing in the dark.

Last Cause

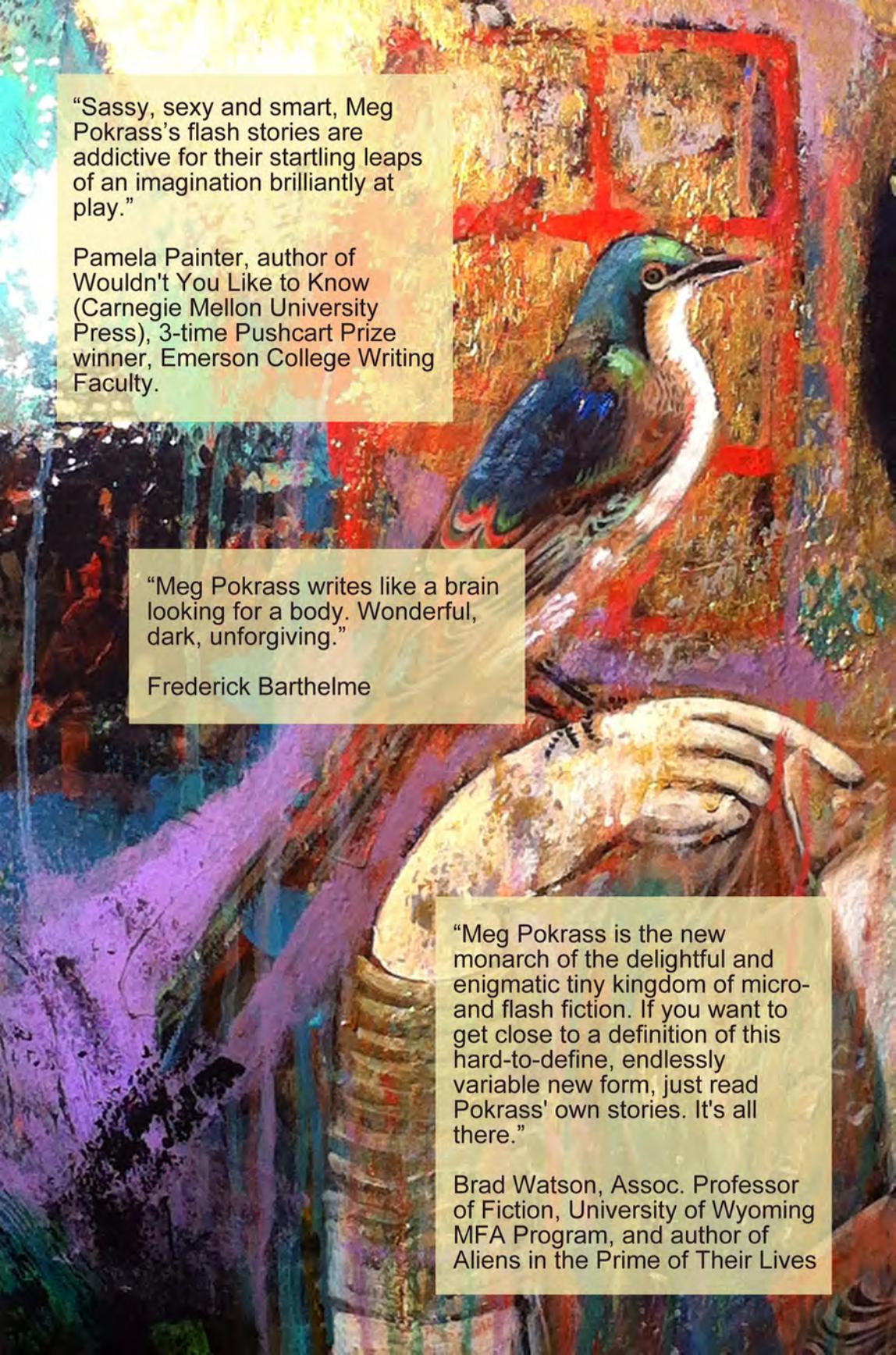
Tonight I ate crackers with guilt instead of
cheese, thought about my cousin who is round as
weeble. I see gum on the sidewalk, ignore it, I know
assholes and he is not one. He is tender, tucks it under
his umbrella, his mind can taste it. Let's say there is no
successful love poem. I compare this to a strike of the
heart toward the very last cause, maybe the only bird
born that round and soft, so much beauty that nobody
knows what the fuck to call it, what kind of bird it is.

Wading

Maybe it's his guarded step when his wife is near, how this man, that woman delete each other—his love for silly pet store fish, the way he gently taps fish food into their bowl. I imagine him wading through deep water to me—brown eyes flashing, his humid breath mixing with mine.



MEG POKRASS is the author of the forthcoming novella-in-flash *Here, Where We Live* (Rose Metal Press, 2014). Her flash fiction has been internationally anthologized, most recently in the forthcoming *Flash Fiction International* (W.W. Norton, 2014), edited by Shapard, Thomas and Merrill. Her work has appeared in 180 literary publications, including *McSweeney's*, *The Rumpus*, *PANK*, *Mississippi Review*, *The Literarian*, *The Center for Fiction (NYC)*, *MidAmerican Review*, *NANO Fiction*, *storySouth*, *Failbetter*, and *Gigantic*. Ms. Pokrass edits *New World Writing* and teaches workshops on both creating and publishing flash fiction. Visit her online at megpokrass.com.



“Sassy, sexy and smart, Meg Pokrass’s flash stories are addictive for their startling leaps of an imagination brilliantly at play.”

Pamela Painter, author of *Wouldn't You Like to Know* (Carnegie Mellon University Press), 3-time Pushcart Prize winner, Emerson College Writing Faculty.

“Meg Pokrass writes like a brain looking for a body. Wonderful, dark, unforgiving.”

Frederick Barthelme

“Meg Pokrass is the new monarch of the delightful and enigmatic tiny kingdom of micro- and flash fiction. If you want to get close to a definition of this hard-to-define, endlessly variable new form, just read Pokrass' own stories. It's all there.”

Brad Watson, Assoc. Professor of Fiction, University of Wyoming MFA Program, and author of *Aliens in the Prime of Their Lives*