

Fifty-Two Stories, (Issue 10 and 11, Vol 2)

Editors: Cal Morgan

Web Site: <http://www.fiftytwostories.com>

What they publish: short stories, no clear word limit

Submission Guidelines: Fifty-Two Stories is a “delivery service from Harper Perennial” that also accepts story submissions on a rolling basis. They publish once a week, every week of the year (hence fifty-two stories). They seem to accept longer work over shorter work, though the absence of clear submission guidelines suggests that they are versatile. Send work to: fiftytwostories@harpercollins.com

Description of Publication: Fifty-two Stories offers a venue for the reader and author to engage in discussion about “self-contained, crystalline, newborn perfect creatures” called short stories. They stream videos of their authors reading as well. They offer no monetary payment, but challenge: “what would you pay for the perfect short story? Don’t post your answer. Just write the story.” They utilize social media such as Twitter, Facebook, and Stumble Upon, in order to promote their web site and their authors in as many web venues as they can.

Prose Per Issue/Amount Published Annually: They publish 52 pieces yearly, as well as story collections.

Prose Reviews:

The Truth and All Its Ugly by Kyle Minor is a plain-spoken story in a domestic yet dystopian setting told from a close first-person perspective. Minor begins with a family tearing apart. The father punches the mother, Penny, so hard a tooth comes through her lip, and she leaves him and their son, Danny. The father and son amuse themselves by taking an axe to her piano, perverting her collection of Precious Moments figurines, posing shellac covered yellow jackets near their eyes, stinger first. The father and son bond over this mutual hatred, and eventually bond over drugs too, going harder, hardly knowing themselves anymore. Danny finally realizes that the best way to hurt his mother isn’t to break her things but to find the house where she’s staying, knock on the door, and when she opens it, to shoot himself in front of her. Unable to deal with his son’s death, the father goes to a clinic where Danny had been “scanned” as a little boy and has a clone of his son created, but the technology’s faulty. This new child begins to fall apart, and the father takes him into the forest with supposed mercy, closes his eyes, and takes an axe to the clone of the son he no longer has.

Minor uses a faint futuristic frame in which people have the capability to create echoes of their children. The brutality with which the father and son treat the mother, Penny, nearly dehumanizes them. Minor lifts them from villainy, though, through the bond that they share, and finally, the bond that the father and mother share over their dead son. As callous as it may seem, broken families can become old hat after so many similar sad stories-- Minor pushes past the clichés by the faulty logic that the father unwillingly endows on his son, ending in a cruel suicide. By forcing Danny’s father to see his son as the child he once was, vulnerable, sleeping, and to force him to break away from that echo of a child with axe-strokes, Minor pulls the story in a haunting, painful, full circle.

Rhoda by David Vann is a plain-spoken story written in a domestic setting and told in instances from a subjective first person perspective. The narrator’s father gets re-married to a woman half his age, a woman who cannot open one of her eyes, a woman named Rhoda. Rhoda is disliked by the family at the wedding, and she is careful not to upset them. Instead of going on a honeymoon, the narrator’s father and Rhoda give him expensive presents, such as a Walkman, which the narrator acknowledges as bribery. The father is afraid that Rhoda will leave him, and the twelve-year-old narrator seems to be haltingly attracted to Rhoda. The story finally ends with the father trying to shoot down a faraway bird. Rhoda tries to stop him, and wings burst from her back, and the barrel of the gun swings toward the narrator, but he isn’t shot.

Vann expresses *Rhoda* through vagueness, mirroring the lack of understanding everyone has for Rhoda. Rhoda is subtly magical, which comes both from her strange winking eye and from the history that clings to her

even though she is so young. The narrator describes her wearing a ball cap and jeans, but that she might as well have still been wearing her grandmother's yellow wedding dress. Though this story was difficult to follow, plot-wise, Vann rescues the story from disaster with his choice of character quirks, such as Rhoda's eye, and the real-ness of her parents' impending divorce.

Emerging Writers Rating: Five and a half. Fifty-two stories publishes high quality pieces like *The Truth and All It's Ugly*, though a piece as vague as Vann's was surprising to me, given that this magazine is a Harper Collins publication. Fifty-Two Stories should not be discredited for one dud of a story, however. They publish weekly, so there are many chances for an emerging writer to submit. They do not list author credits, which leads me to believe that they don't put a lot of stock in them.