



# Library podcast

## Virtual It's About Time Writers' Reading Series #383

### 00:00:02 Peggy Sturdivant

Good evening, and welcome to reading number. I get my numbers wrong, I believe. Let's see we're at reading number 383 and I'm very pleased to welcome three writers from this year's Jack Straw Writers Program. It's become an annual tradition in the fall to welcome some of the years writers. And tonight we have with us, Paulette Perhach, Greg November, and C R Glasgow. And we are going to be starting with Paulette and then, C, and then closing with Greg November, who is going to be able to read a story in its entirety to us. We discussed whether he would stop and leave us with a cliffhanger. And I'm happy to say that we're going to be able to hear the whole thing. So welcome everyone. As a reminder, the It's About Time Writers Reading series was founded by Esther Altshul Helfgott, who was a curator from 1990 to 2011 and is dedicated to the memory of Anna Helfgott, her mother, who began writing at age 70. And to the memory of Nelson Bentley, the quintessential teacher who gave Anna and scores of others help and hope. It's About Time is dedicated to an end to racism, homophobia, anti-Semitism, homelessness and war. Our first reader coming to us tonight from a state other than our own not to be revealed until perhaps after the event she's attended is Paulette. Paulette Perhach is an award-winning writer and writing coach. Her work has been in the New York Times, Slate, Hobart, The Journal, Mcsweeney's Internet Tendency, and Vice. She is best known for writing the globally viral essay, The Story of a Fuck Off Fun, and for her book, Welcome to the Writer's Life, which poets and writers selected for its list of best books for writers. She continues the conversation at [welcometothewriterslife.com](http://welcometothewriterslife.com). You can write with her every morning through her meditation and free writing group called a very important meeting by signing up [averyimportantmeeting.com](http://averyimportantmeeting.com). So welcome. All of you. And it's over. Paulette is going to be reading to us from an essay. C is going to read from poems and Greg from a short story. Welcome Paulette.

### 00:02:44 Paulette Perhach

Thank you so much for being here for having me appreciate it. My essay is called "Yes and No." An application asks, have you ever been suicidal? offers two options: Yes or no? At first, I think, yes. One Thursday, not long before high school graduation. My best friend and I sat in class joking about me peeking at her test the day before. When an office assistant came in. His lips parted out of breath as he handed a slip of paper. So the teacher who called to us, we were wanted in the office. We walk down the hallway, busted for the umpteenth time. Whatever this trouble was, it couldn't touch us. We were set to go college that summer. So all we did was laugh. This is how I remember the end of my childhood. Weirdly, my mom stood outside just from the deflated look of her. I said, oh my God, Mom, what happened? Daddy's been in an accident. I pictured my six-foot-six bear of a father in a

wheelchair instead of his usual dancing and whistling as he made pancakes, a bandage now around his head, as if he just been wheeled in from off stage. It was going to be weird to see him in a wheelchair for a while. Honey, my mom said, her face constricting, daddy didn't make it. Whatever I screamed, it brought the whole class outside. Then I was rubbing my Mom's arm and saying it will be okay, Mom. And I did not feel a thing. I was walked out to the car and put inside it alone. Kid Rock sang on the radio that only God knows why. All I could think was, oh, Jesus, please do not let this be the song serenading this moment. When I left home two months later, the house was stagnant, having long since exhaled this scent of funeral flowers. No one was home to wave me off for to tell me I needed to pack more than clothes and a radio. I drove myself to to a college of 40000 students, ranked as one of the top ten party schools in the nation. My best friend would start after summer. In a dorm. I watched father's reach into car trunks and carry the heavy things for their daughters and wondered if my dad had time to think of us before he died, knowing I'd have to delete his number from my cell phone soon. Once when I called home and heard a man's voice 17 years of muscle memory kicked in. And my voice said, Dad? My brother and I pretended it didn't happen. Nights I'd writhe and tangle twin Excel sheets, damp with sweat and tears, gritting my teeth and crying as if a lifetime of the love my father had given me was being pulled back out through my heart in my throat. Other ghosts haunted me every time the phone rang there had been another accident. My brother died in a car crash. My mom had cancer, my friends who were too young to die, prove that phrase to be a mere wish. You have 11 saved voicemails, and 11 voices you're afraid you'll never hear again. On drives back home to visit my mother, how many people saw me stiff arming the wheel and screaming? To everyone else I must have looked like just another freshman walking to class on brisk, fall days, eating pizza with roommates in front of a TV, or studying for exams as if I really were one of them as if I cared about, or even believed in the future. Sometimes I'd be distracted enough. But then I'd remember that my father went to work one day and a crane crushed the place I wash and brush his hair every morning, and I'd never hear him laughs at his own jokes again, or call me yetter or stop me in the hallway to play that Slappy hand game I was too old to play, our hands speeding up faster and faster until we were just smacking each other, until he bundled me up in a hug laughing. There would be no father/daughter dance at my wedding. And then I'd be crying again. The friends and roommates turned friends who'd been rubbing my back since March, 23rd, who brought over so many tissues, who put in so many hours of knotting, should I call them again? Do I need them one more goddamn time? I hear them out there. Yes, I want them to knock. Yes, I want to pretend to want to be alone. Yes, I want them to insist. You're not missing kickoff, are you? People in my classes and at bars assumed we were embarking together in the best years of Our Lives. They wondered which sorority they'd get into. And if we would win the big game, I wondered how many sleeping pills I could swallow yet still stay tethered to life. Not a decision. Just to break two, four, six, eight. Eight, and I didn't even sleep through Saturday. My best friend dragged me out of bed to horrific energy draining activities I so badly wanted to enjoy. I dab eyeshadow on My Cry puffed eyelids and remind myself not to talk about death at this party. But my resolve would weaken, as I Disappeared into the rooms of college freshmen until I'd reach out and grab someone who seem too happy for me to stand. Oh, you got a c-minus on your exam bummer. I've been struggling a bit too since my dad just died. I'd watch her squirm against the terrible things of the world and feel a dark power. The only kind I had. They could not face what they really wanted to do, what I wished I could do. Turn and walk away from it. So they give me their five minutes of a wrinkled pitiful face. Their sorries. I feel a glum sense of stolen

pleasure, like when someone tells you you're pretty, but only because you asked. Then they look into their empty Dixie Cups and notice they had an excuse to leave. But maybe I'd get drunk myself, but all it took was someone to mention her parents that quick plural word and the damn I'd built would collapse. I'd lock myself in some stranger's bathroom, lean stiff-armed against the sink and watch myself cry in the mirror, hoping someone would notice me missing and asked if I was okay. Then I'd slink out to find my best friend, sit within the orbit of her knowing and try not to say anything. Once she invited me, but what she really hoping I wouldn't go. Tubing at a guy's lake house. We'd been strung along behind a speeding boat a thousand times as kids. But now it just seemed like one more way to be dragged out of control. Every second, the second, before the next thing we'd called the accident. I couldn't ignore the risks when even a Thursday could kill you. But I went anyway to pretend and held my breath as I watched from the boat. Later half-drunk. I took a Waverunner speeding across the lake, gunning it up to 64 miles an hour as if to ensure any crashes would be head-on and quick. My decision. Then I stopped surrounded by opaque water, and looked back at those young women lying on the beach together and drinking beers with guys. I wanted to be the way they looked in the distance. But I could never Escape being inside myself. After a while, it seemed better for everyone. If I didn't even try to pretend. The idea of suicide became a place to rest, a place I went for a little mental pleasure, something else to turn to. I didn't want to bother my friends with more of the same old same old, not when so many months already passed, not when every platitude have been played out when so many silences have been sat through. Every time I went to the drugstore, I'd look at the economy size bottles of Tylenol PM and think there's my instrument right next to the baby aspirin. Two, four, six, eight, maybe I'd write some incredible note, then buy one of those gowns with my student loans, something gorgeous that would Shimmer in the candlelight, sparks dancing against my dead skin. In my fantasy. Someone would push open my bedroom door, and they'd see me lying there, looking peaceful. And knowing something was terribly wrong. Someone would scream, then the scene would cut straight to the ambulance sirens. It would be too late, of course, but I'll watch my covered corpse being wheeled into the ambulance, a pair of new shoes from the money I was supposed to spend on textbooks, peeking out from the sheet. And then there was this day just a day. I hadn't bought a dress, didn't even have a rough draft of a note. Completely unprepared. I woke up and just wanted to die. I drove to the mall, perhaps a silly thing to do on your suicide day, but in order not to kill myself, right, that second, I had to surround myself with the fantasy that life was a place of exciting fall fashion, bright colors and pretty happy girls who never had to help toss their brother's ashes into the sea. I succeeded in arriving without unbuckling my seatbelt and slamming my car into a sturdy wall. I haunted stalls that sold bumper stickers, shirts and baby cheerleading uniforms in my University's colors. I always look for the sticker that said, proud dad the way one might press on a bruise, only to say that it hurt. I passed a woman, some idiot who didn't even notice I was dead already. I thought, what if I had a gun? What if I had gone? I just randomly chose her. And I stepped in front of her, pulled it out and shot myself in the mouth. I made it home. ER was on the TV in the living room, my dad bleeding out on the screen in front of the couch. I went straight into my room and imagined what my friends would do with my stuff. It had been 8 months of grief, like constantly cracking ribs, almost 250 days of living in anxiety at the next person that would be taken from me, 250 mornings waking up and remembering, I had a lifetime of fatherlessness ahead of me. This was how life was. And there was nothing to do, but take it or leave it. The bottle of pills waited under my bed, minus a few from those trial runs, but surely still enough. All I wanted was for the world

to go on. Me to bow out without hurting anyone. I just wanted the cool nothing relief from the burning numbness of living in a world, only I could feel. I went through a mental checklist as if I was about to go on a long vacation. But my thoughts turned to my mother. I could not do this without doing this to her. This thought turned me from an unknown pain to a burning pain and Alive pain. And I began to cry surprise. Surprise. If I called anyone, there would be no relief, No Rest. I'd have to wake up the next morning and look at myself in the mirror, and I'd probably break down. There would be no such thing as bowing out without hurting anyone. So I called my best friend and said, sorry to bother her during her freshman year of college. But I thought of nothing but killing myself all day. And she asked that I want her to come over. And this time I didn't lie, even though her apartment was Far, Far Away across campus in the land of the living, even though I'd been nothing but a burden for so long, even though she'd heard it all before. And even though there was nothing she could do, she came over anyway. She listened, and then she said, I love you more than you'll ever know. More than I'll ever know. Her words opened a window to the thought of all I didn't know. I was betting my life on something I'd taken for granted, but it wasn't taken for fact that it wasn't worth living. I thought for sure life was only a haunted weight ticking toward the next terrible loss. I thought for sure. I wish you're going up and dying. Anyway, you know how teenagers think they know everything. But if life could be unknowable, if there were tragic losses, then perhaps there could also be glorious surprises. If there was still wonder in the world that I couldn't say with absolute certainty that I'd never be happy again. My imagination could think of a thousand ways for my loved ones to die, but I couldn't conjure one scenario in which life would be worthy of living. So I lived. I lived to see the bloom of stars we call the Milky Way over the Pacific, to meet the nephew named for my father, to fall in love with men who make me laugh, to diagnose and handle the anxiety disorder that made it all so much worse, to feel pain again. But no, nothing could ever be as bad as what had already been through the feel that off swell of watching the world work waves crashing on rocks, lava, dripping into the see a toucan flying by and the valley of Palms to learn Spanish well enough to make the cab driver laugh, the one with my dad's smile, to make him laugh again and again, just to remember, and to think so many times I lived to see this. I made it here. The possibility existed. Even then. Thank you.

**00:14:41 Peggy Sturdivant**

Thank you so much. Paulette for sharing that beautiful... and I'm honored that you shared that with us tonight. Now remind me, because I think I was nervous when you started. What is it titled? Was the title? Do you say? I don't know?

**00:14:58 Paulette Perhach**

Yes And No.

**00:15:02 Peggy Sturdivant**

Thank you so much. Okay, I forgot to tell anybody that there are three moment at Open Mic opportunities. And if anybody were suddenly to say, yes, I want to read after that, we don't go. Yeah. Okay, go for it. But I think that since you are in the Jack Straw ohort was C Glasgow. She knows that she was following a powerful writer. C Glasgow is a non-binary, queer, first-generation Afro-Caribbean (or should I say Caribbean). Doc serves as writer, psychologist, spiritual, creative and public speaker. Doc has been writing since 7 years old, beginning with poetry. Doc won than NYC

Borough President's Award at the age of 10. Doc's creative offerings compel the audience to feel the inseparability of composer and audience through time-bending arresting imagery, daring questioning, bold answers, and abstract glimpses of the mundane. Previous publications in Butch is Not a Dirty Word, Issue 6, "These Roots," The Arrow Journal "Con\*cept\*ion" (Blogs & Essays -October 27, 2020) and upcoming pieces in anthologies Refuge in the Storm: Voices in Buddhist Crisis Care and Afrikan Wisdom: New Voices Speak Black Liberation, Buddhism and Beyond. Welcome, C

### **00:16:37 C R Glasgow**

Thank you. Peggy. Thanks. Paulette. Wonderful to hear cohorts' work. So I'll give a little preface to a couple of these. Since these are pieces from a larger manuscript. The first piece I'm going to be reading is from the Jack Straw Anthology, titled "Conception." 1 (b) Beginning Granny's for Granny sails alone, a teen by boat, legs spread for her by some unwanted, familiar old. Darkness eclipsed. Averted birth seeing realms beyond. Child of the pandemic. She said just one photo sumo-sized little man with violet eyes, a quick snap. Flash. Followed by a quick snip. Child gone too soon. Another quickly followed, and he's breath gasps, months of adolescence encased in sterile white walls, shining against her crimson highlight. Child of the institution. The world powers feuded a second time. Ration cards filled to the brim once, and Auntie's eyes beamed joys of deflated balloon and noisemaker. Child of the war. She thought that was the last, but Mom tottered in, pistol and machete, grease brown bag rolled in two year old fists, abandoned. Shadow child. Apparition. Now I know of spirits lost, floating bodies, hollow and numb. Fluffy white clouds, anything but pure. I never knew. I never knew clouds anything but pure fluffy, white, hollow and numb, floating bodies of spirits lost. Now I know. Time slips of moments, numbered dance steps between the Sun and the Moon. Ungraspable overlord, murderer of space. Shackles. What keeps dreams forgotten at night, measured productivity, the white man's joke, the illusion of living, immersion of mass occasions of entertainment, Eden. (And this was a part of like a, I call this a pandemic series. So this is part of that, as we're all still in that period of time.) Be like tomato, poison the wealthy, nourishment for the poor, travel by wind, create your own seed without suitor or dowry. Alone by the sun of midday. Be like amaranth, the one that does not wither for 40 days on its own substance, 40 days kissing the clouds scorched by the Sun, burn bright and gold, purple, and red. Offer yourself to the Gods.

### **00:20:52 C R Glasgow**

And this last piece is inspired by the author Edwidge Danticat in their book called "Krik? Krak!" And one of the questions in the book asks: if we were painters which landscapes would we paint. And that is the title of this. This piece. Spaciousness rolled on blue black canvas. So your mark is always light. Have your palette full. Hues of nature as guide and Simon risk the stroke without guide of pencil, image, or conjurer of another. This is yours. Stare boldly in its eyes and mimic the lines of its locks, turn it inside out, etch the veins and arteries. Make bright the Shadows. Let the paint find patterns on your face, allow what arises first to be enough, for inhale and exhale. inhale, exhale. Laugh at your reflection, and bring that to the canvas. Rinse each experience fully from the brush. Start anew. There is no mistake. No way. Stroke over and over the same spot till it's blue black. Trust you will know when to pause when to highlight when to highlight, to high light, to highlight know you can paint across time. If you listen all our mothers sing on tune vibrating the brush. Thank you.

### **00:22:53 Peggy Sturdivant**

I wish we were going to be hearing more from you. But thank you for sharing what you did. I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge the Jack Straw dot org program, which... I lose track of what anniversary they have celebrated, but in terms of how they support artists, oral histories, you know, the spoken word as well as their own Gallery. They are such a treasure in Seattle. And we're so fortunate that they, even though there's so much talent in Seattle, they constantly introduced me to people that I haven't met before and new talent. And so I'm just I think we're all grateful for Jack Straw, and certainly for the opportunity to host you each year. So thank you all. Our next writer, writer/reader tonight is Greg November. We had originally planned to have five writers, but life intervenes. And so the bright side of this is that we get to hear Greg's story in its entirety tonight. And we have plenty of time for a nice, tight, little, tight little reading. So it's going to be a wonderful opportunity to not leave us hanging. Greg is originally from the Northeast, which is probably evidenced by at least his mom tuning in tonight from Connecticut. But he has called the Northwest his home since 2010. He earned his MFA at UC Irvine and teaches writing at North Seattle College and Highline College. His stories have appeared most recently in Boulevard, Carve, Epiphany and Juked. He reads submissions for the New England Review and was a finalist for the 2020 Kurt Johnson Prose award in fiction. Welcome Greg.

### **00:24:58 Greg November**

Thank you, Peggy. Thank you. Awesome reading so far, Paulette and C, I'm honored to be reading with you both tonight, and I hadn't planned this at all. I didn't know what you were going to read, but I think there's some possible echoes between my piece and Paulette your piece, and hopefully that works. This is the newest story that I have completed. I think it's complete. And I had read it once to a part of this group of writer friends that we get together and read in my friends, backyard and sort of Debut new work had read a draft of this, but I haven't read it to anyone since. So you are now, except for myself. I timed it twice, but you are the first audience for this for this full story. This is the story Pothole Goblins. These days, Tim walked the stretch of Old Road behind Furniture City instead of the shorter way along the new main drag out front, which is two lanes, each Direction, landscaped median populated with colorful composite sculptures meant to evoke the shore 30 miles away. The Old Road, sandy, weedy rambler that it was let him walk alone in quiet, which suited his aching head and overall fatigue. While the new boulevard thundered away, on the old road sounds were dampened by the enormous furniture warehouse and a stretch of woody overgrowth still harboring workers detritus from an 18-month project updating three miles of the centenarian old Albany Highway. Some folks valued new and fancy, but Tim wasn't one of them. Last night, Shep came by for cards and beer, and it wasn't until three in the morning before they turned out the lights. Four and a half hours later, Tim crunched along the old gravel of the old road, squinting behind his shades. He fondled a polished Agate in his pocket. The latest unsolicited gift from Shep. It had been raining when Shep arrived and heavy winds kicked up shortly after. They heard sirens around 10 and the lights flickered periodically for the next hour. Can I stay? Shep asked. In the morning Channel 6 reported 20000 without power, just another spring storm. But it got Shep to moaning the same tune he did every year around this time. The seasons just keep getting hairier, don't they? This summer, Tito, I'm gone for the desert. You watch. Shep had taken to calling him Tito and account of a particular night a few months back and Senor Poncho's Cantina in Southington, where Tim took his age and tequila

shots and ripped a bolted piece of art off the restaurant wall. By the light of day, rank and unshaved, Tim couldn't bear the sight of Shep sitting there at the table in his boxer shorts. Finish your coffee, Tim said, I'm a head to work now. Here. Shep pulled the Agate small object, the size, color and relative shape of a dried apricot from the pocket of his pants on the floor, and held it out to Tim. I polished this one myself. Since his car had been impounded, Tim had been riding the shoe leather express as his father would have said. The warehouse was only a mile from his apartment, and despite the recent storm April wasn't a bad month to be outside. Chilly air, but also the vague scent of coming summer, grass and Dogwood Buds and such. His parents had been fanatics about spring, usually taking the season's first hike before all the snow had melted. When he was younger, they took Tim and his older sister along on what they called family expeditions, and he grumbled the whole way, sometimes faking stomach or kidney pain so he could be left home to sing along with the radio, put on his father's clothes or sketch his own maps of invented topography. Janet never seemed to mind the walks and even took their parents side and hammering at him to get outside and breathe the freaking air. Well, now he was. Out along the new boulevard power and telephone lines were buried in the ground with the fiber optics. But here on the old road, the old utility poles ruled, stanchions for an old world in which Tim felt he belonged. This road, like him, was potholed, unlooked-after. As he walked it, Tim greeted each pot hole. He knew them all most having been part of the road since Tim was a kid. Now 28 he felt a hundred years older. There were a few ramshackle homes along the old road, crumbling artifacts, seemingly forgotten by the rest of the town as that went about updating, upscaling up everything. They were clapboard places with pitched roofs and cockeyed porches, stained curtains or broken blinds in the windows. The front yards were weedy, sandy patches separated from the road and each other by chain-link fences. In the yard of one of these houses a rusting skiff sat on cinder blocks, in another, the valiant attempt at a vegetable garden adjacent the rotting porch. The yard of the penultimate house sprouted some colorful plastic pails and shovels, as well as a grimy children's play set, the kind Tim

### **00:30:54 Greg November**

remembered from his own childhood. When he lived on a similar Road elsewhere in the town. He supposed these houses were part of why he walked the old road. Rarely did the residents, the boat owner, gardener, child, or anyone else ever appear. But this morning something was different. Beyond the last house, a power line dangled from its pole 20 feet, up with its other end in the road. Where the wire touch pavement there is a new hole about a foot in diameter, and almost perfectly round. This distinguished it from the roads, other crags and pits, all of which were oblong, misshapen, timeless. When the wire snapped in last night's wind it must have sparked cutting this new hole. Tim took care not to touch the wire. He looked around then, getting an idea, tossed Shep's agate into the new hole. At the warehouse he phoned Utilities and reported the downed line. He spent the rest of the morning on the fork, repositioning skids of vinyl compensation tile to allow space for the large carpet rolls due that afternoon. Around mid-morning Cloud, banged into the warehouse, demanding to know if the new shipment had arrived. Tim pretended he couldn't hear until Cloud appeared before the fork, gesturing for Tim to kill the engine. Cloud repeated his question. You see a truck? Tim said. Cloud was an old friend, although it stretched the word to near meaninglessness to use it in their case. They had known one another, since high school, had run in overlapping crowds, although Tim had never found it just the two of them at any table, anywhere. In the ten years since graduation,

Cloud had gone to college and become a manager while Tim remained in the realm of hourly employees, although he'd essentially maxed out that designation in becoming warehouse supervisor. He had vacation and sick days, a bit of a retirement plan, but all he supervised were carpet rolls, shrink wrapped skids of VCT and the periodic college kid that came into work June through August. Look, Cloud said, I'm not saying it should be easy. No one's saying that you got a raw deal. No question. I'm sad for you, but shit, I don't know what's it been a year now? Cloud paused, seeming to reconsider this line of reasoning. You need time off? Take your days more if you need. No flack from me. But if you're here, you got to be on top of things. When Cloud was gone, Tim hopped down, grabbed his soft pack of camels from the aluminum desk in his oily closet of an office and sat in the old folding chair positioned at the mouth of the loading area to await delivery. At 4:30 he locked up and left without a word to anyone. This was part of what he liked about his job. Aside from a few months in summer and Cloud's periodic interruptions, it was an entirely solo thing. Tim took the old road home slow smoking, his camel as he walked, watching birds swoop around and make their spring sounds. Aromas of tree bloom and cut grass mixed with diesel fuel and grease coming off his own skin and clothes. When Tim came to the line of houses, he saw the downed wire had been removed and replaced but the new hole remained. He guessed that wasn't surprising. A free hanging wire was a hazard and a liability. But why fix the newest of 1000 holes in the old road, not seen by anyone outside of five or six dilapidated houses and Tim. He paused at the hole, kicked some sand into it. Then he noticed the Agate was gone. He crouched, sifted through sand and gravel in the hole. No agate. Tim stood. He peered at the houses, the cinderblock, skiff, the weathered children's toys, tomato sprouts in their circular cages. What did you see? But whatever secrets, they knew they kept. Back home, Tim poured a Genesee, into a mason jar and sat at his kitchen table. Around dinner time. Shep phoned, wanting to come over. Not tonight. You like the agate, Tito? I polished it myself. You told me. Tim refilled his jar. Shep's call had interrupted his thinking about the disappearing agate. Why was he thinking about some rock? But Tim knew. To keep himself from thinking about certain other things. Deeper muck, quicker sand. It had to be one of the folks who lived along the road. Besides himself and the workers who'd fixed the unslung line. Who else would have gotten up close enough, or been able to distinguish the new was Pothole from all the rest, unless they just looked upon it? Tim didn't believe in luck, and he didn't believe in utility workers who took polished rocks from potholes. or mysterious folks who appeared only for the purpose of taking the Agate. In all the months of walking the old road Tim had not once encountered another walker, a biker or driver. Not even the boat owner or gardener had shown themselves. He'd never witnessed the child use the play set. It had only been Tim and the birds and the wind and the sand. And those quiet houses. Tim had searched the area around the new pothole, even in the knee high weeds along the shoulder. Now he sat hand on jar and table, half his beer gone in two sips. Why did he even care who took it? Hadn't he been trying to rid himself of the unwanted object? Shep and his stupid gifts. What did the man think? And who polished rocks anyway? If anything that was Old-Timers work, but not even them, was fools work. In the morning, Tim sat up from the sofa where he'd slept in his clothes. His head pounded and he had a dozen texts from Janet, the earliest from around 8:00 or so when he must have fallen asleep. She did this from time to time, when she had a second glass of wine. The first texts were gentle in tone. How are you? Do you need anything? Then call me please. You don't have to be alone. The last one was a gem. No one knew the storm would be that bad. It's not my fault you prick. Not alone? Wasn't he? Janet had a husband, two kids, the whole thing. She lived in another state.



What did Tim have? Shep? He had fucking Shep. On the road to work, Tim's head began to clear in the crisp air. He was whistling when he came up to the wire cut pothole, but stopped. Something was in the hole. The agate? Tim crouched. No. Half an oyster shell. Tim peered at the new object. He stood and looked around. An oyster shell. Tim looked toward the homes, but sure enough, they weren't talking. He left his shell on the ground and headed off to work. In the afternoon the shell was still there. Tim crouched again. This time he picked it up, hopped the shell in his palm a few times, then thinking it's somewhat silly, slipped it into his pocket. Why was he taking the shell? He was just glad no one was with him to explain it to. At the shop the following day, he swiped a tester patch of burgundy carpet. And that afternoon, as he walked home, he dropped it in the hole laughing to himself. He was still shaking his head about what he'd done when he came up to his apartment. Shep sat on the concrete steps out front. He stood as Tim approached, his imploring expression was too much. Tim looked to see who was noticing them. Jesus, Tito, I'm just sitting here. Let's go inside. How about we walk to Mitty's for a few beers? I just walked from the shop, I'd like to sit for a bit. Okay, let's sit out here on the steps. Breeze feels nice. We can talk about anything you want. You know anything? Tim felt a surge of anger. Jesus, Shep, he thought. Look at yourself. If I needed to talk, I'd talk, I don't need it pulled out of me. Instead of speaking, Tim went up the steps, and Shep touched his shoulder as he passed. Instinctively Tim shoved the other man hard. Knocked off balance, Shep staggered, slipped on the steps, and ended up ass in dirt. The men stared at one another. Tim went inside. Next morning, the carpet patch was gone, and its place, a blue glass marble. Tim, put the marble where he put the shell, in a coffee mug with a broken handle on his desk in the warehouse office. The mug had been his final birthday gift from Janet before their parents died. It was it cheaply done photo mug with an old picture of the four of them on Tim's graduation from 8th grade. Tim and Janet stood between their parents comically different Expressions, Janet two years older and a few inches taller frowned like she just picked up a bad smell, while Tim's face split open mid laugh, his eyes pressed almost closed. In what turned out to be an ominous sign, the mug had slipped from his hand the very first time he lifted it from his package and the handle broke. He looked under his desk hoping to reafix the handle, but he never located it. A few days later, their parents died in a car wreck on their way to visit Janet. For the rest of the week. Tim exchanged items with the pothole. What he left in the on the afternoon walk home was gone in the morning, meaning whatever Goblin he was exchanging with did its work on an opposite schedule. Tim left a colorful mini bathroom tile and other such items from the warehouse, while the pothole gave him another shell and marbles of varying shape and size. He kept them all in the mug. At some point, the word talismans struck him, and he grimaced. His parents had been empirically minded academics, and most likely would have chastised him for thinking in such ways. There is no luck. And there are no talismans. We are polymers moving about the environment. That's all on Friday, the pothole gave him something new, not a shell or a marble, but the plastic leg from a doll. Who's warm, Tim squinted in the early morning, glare of the sun coming up behind the homes. This time in the toy-strewn yard of the penultimate house, a little girl stood watching him. She was dressed in dull green pajamas in a bright yellow tutu. By the looks of it, she seemed to be the age of Janet's oldest. Six, maybe. But Tim knew he was a poor judge of such things. They stood like that. Tim and the girl, staring at one another until the girl abruptly ran into the house, banging the screen door behind her. Tim waited for the sounds of shouting, but they didn't come. In the street with his doll leg, he considered walking away, but didn't. Why? The doll leg had changed things, but not just the doll leg. The girl had changed things. From his parents. He knew that

in trying to observe the path of an electron you changed that path. Tim, the dislodged electron didn't have to wait long. The girl shot out of the house her tutu winging around her, holding a one-legged doll in her hand. She unlatched the fence gate, and without looking either way, set out across the road. Tim stood with the doll leg and watched his fellow Goblin approach. Ten feet away or so, she stopped, brushed hair from face, and held up her amputee doll. Lorraine hopes you like her leg. Tim let a smile take hold. Your doll's name is Lorraine? That's what I call her. She came with another name that I didn't like. Doesn't she need this leg? Not really. I can make her another one at a cardboard or something. Besides, I was out of marbles and shells, at least the ones I didn't mind losing. Tell Lorraine I say thank you for the leg then. Tell her yourself! Well, sure. Thank you. Lorraine, Tim wanted to say that the things she'd given him weren't lost, that they'd become a new collection somewhere else, and that that was repositioning, not loss. The girl looked toward her house, then back at Tim. She was peering at him as if trying to decode a message, and he knew he was probably looking at her something of the same way. For a week or so they'd been secretly exchanging items through a pothole on an old road. And now here they were facing one another, looking for answers to questions they hadn't asked, maybe hadn't even thought of. Or maybe this kid was just playing a game. Maybe Tim was frightening her. He was suddenly aware of standing in the street with a child he didn't know. And had this been another road, a road folks used, there would be plenty of eyes to look askance, maybe even a few fingers hitting numbers on a dial pad, a siren starting up somewhere. This was the old road somewhere in those houses was the boat owner, The Gardener, the girl's parents, maybe, but they've not shown themselves once in the months timid, been walking this road. Where'd you get the funny little carpet? She said. Work, Burroughs flooring. You steal it? No. Then what? Didn't your parents tell you not to talk to strangers? The girl didn't say anything. She manipulated Lorraine's arms and legs. Tim made her other leg look like it was kicking. Hi-yaw, he said. The girl smiled. I saw you toss that rock in the pot hole. You're the only person ever walks by. You started appearing about the time my dad left. I thought maybe you were leaving messages from him in the new pothole, the one cut during that storm. I'm sorry. For what? I didn't even know you were there. You look over all the time. I thought you were looking for me, looking to make sure I saw you and could get your message before someone else. I'm sorry. You weren't leaving me messages? Tim kicked the gravel, made Lorraine's leg do another kick. But the girl kept peering at him waiting for an answer. He knew he had to give one. Couldn't walk away without saying yes or no, and it mattered. His answer mattered. One was a lie, and the other wasn't, but shit if it was clear which would do the most harm. Tim remembered the feeling when, as a kid, you wanted something to be true so badly that it was almost a physiological imperative. But he didn't know this girl, didn't know the father, or where he'd gone, or why. She hadn't taken her eyes off him. What do you think? He said. I think you were leaving me messages. Well, Tim said, don't let anyone shake you from your position. I have to go to work now. As he walked away, Tim compelled himself not to turn around, not to look back to see if the girl was standing there are still. Or if maybe she'd run back to the house full of joy being right. He couldn't say whether he done the right thing or not. Now, he supposed maybe it didn't matter. We all make meaning in the ways we need to. Whatever he told the girl, she would fold it into a narrative that worked until it didn't anymore. And then she'd be grown up. It happened to everyone, and he hadn't exactly lied, had he? Besides whatever sort of mother moved about in that house would do what she could to Aid the girl, or destroy her, far more than one

encounter with a pothole Goblin, Tim Tapley rains, small plastic leg against his own, and went off down the road to work. Thank you.

**00:47:51 Peggy Sturdivant**

I'm so glad we got to hear the whole story. I kept worrying that you were going to stop. It's lovely to be able to hear, you know, both, Paulette's essays, not enough of C's poems, in my opinion, but a full rich story, and not just an excerpt. So what a sweet evening. So I'm going to allow people if they want, because one of the nice things about being online is we've been able to have, you know, if we want a little dialogue. And, you know, people want to ask you something. something I'm curious about. Well, one, I want to know if you were going to have left a cliffhanger and you couldn't, you could only read 15 minutes. Where would you stopped?

**00:48:38 Greg November**

So the 15-minute mark is when he finds the doll leg.

**00:48:47 Peggy Sturdivant**

Okay. Okay, alright.

**00:48:49 Greg November**

So we would have taken it to blah, blah, blah doll leg.

**00:48:55 Peggy Sturdivant**

I was afraid it was going to be when in an ominous kind of, you know, in a seemingly ominous thing, the handle broke off the first time, you know, the handles of the parent? Yeah, that would have been really pretty abrupt. So yeah, I'm also curious since you're the last to read, then you know, open up. Do you think that your writing has been changed by being a parent?

**00:49:21 Greg November**

Oh, most definitely. Yeah, I didn't know a thing about children, or really think about children, or particularly find myself enjoying children. None of that until I had kids. And now it's sort of all that I write about in one way, shape or form is I have a collection of stories that right Now, That is all really about about that, about parenting, but not just from the perspective of a parent. I write a lot from I write kind of like adolescent narrators or step parents or Partners, or on Lookers to a situation. And so, yeah, most of the families that I write about are incomplete ones, and that's what the story is about. There's some missing piece, some thing that's not there. And the family is dealing with that in one way or another.

**00:50:33 Peggy Sturdivant**

Interesting. Yeah. So interesting, because I think because you referenced Paulette's essay, we knew we had a pretty good guess what the similarities are going to be there. But the appearance of the child, hey, I was, uh, I was thinking Crow at first with those shiny objects. I was thinking, sorry, you're seeing stuff that isn't there. But the child, you do children. Well,

**00:51:00 Greg November**

yeah, I think I was thinking a crow to at some point, crows are really are really cool. But the little girl I didn't I actually was talking to EJ about this. I was talking to her about this story, and I didn't know that the girl would be there, and I was writing a different scene. And then I just wrote the sentence, the like the girl was standing there or something like that. And I just stopped the part that I was writing on and just jumped straight to that and wrote a version of the final moments. They really well, there's a girl there. Okay, so there's a girl. Now,

**00:51:43 Peggy Sturdivant**

yeah, maybe we should all have people who put people in our stories. I remember at an It's About Time some years ago [name unclear] was talking about creating fiction and how she was telling somebody about a book or story. She was writing on. Somebody said, well, when they went to the Philippines, do they have an affair like? And that becomes kind of crucial. So very interesting. All right, silent audience, you're allowed to like, be there. You get to ask anybody anything you want. I know they're there. I can't be the only one who's curious. I know.

**00:52:25 Paulette Perhach**

I also want to say, I found the the children and C's poems very poignant and was curious about them. I don't know if you want to talk anymore about it, C. But kind of the inspiration for that?

**00:52:39 C R Glasgow**

Yeah, sure, the children, I also love writing about children, and I have a very large inner child. So that part of me is always talking interrupting. You know, I'm trying to write something serious, and they kind of just jump in. So a lot of my pieces have that element to it. But a lot of these are based on my family on stories of children that we hear about children that are yet to be. children that have passed, children locked in particular times. I'm always like curious about their vantage point and what they're seeing as we're moving through a particular stage in time. So that's that's the think, all of them, almost there were more abundant in the rest of the manuscripts. And thank you for the question.

**00:53:33 Peggy Sturdivant**

I love, particularly in your piece, tomato. I can't quote it because I was trying to write it down fast enough. But in terms of like that, each, you know, carry your own seed. I believe you had it just love that image. Plus, I'll just that's that's an unforgettable name in terms of, like what I'll be able to think about. When I look at it. Tomato, now be able to think of a poem. So what have things changes are clearly, you've been able to interact with EJ Koh during your year. And as you prepared for the Anthology, has it changed, anybody else's work?

**00:54:16 Paulette Perhach**

She's just incredible. But yeah, I'm not sure, you know, there's like a heightened sense when you're, you know, reading and not last time I had to read after C, and I was like, oh, no, I better bring it. She read so incredibly. And so you know, when you're whenever you're bringing something to someone whose work you admire so much definitely makes you want to kick it up a notch or two or three?

**00:54:41 Peggy Sturdivant**

Yeah, yeah, I remember there was somebody. I think it was Rena priest. A couple years he was talking about how, of course, what she said she was going to do in her Jack. Straw writing was not what she did at all. It's like she had this idea. And then that wasn't coming. So but I do so much loved what she did.

**00:55:00 C R Glasgow**

I just want to make one. Note that I just appreciated the ability to curate anytime. I mean, putting together an anthology is not easy. And so not having, you know, read The Works of a lot of the other members of my cohort, I was like, how we all connect what's good? What's the connection going to be? And so I was just really, you know, deeply like, moved and entrusted by EJ's like perspective of like, how these hang together, and also to stick with something for me that I was not going to stick with the yeah, just keep sticking with it. It just like very simple and to the point. And and it's become like this reverberation. So I really appreciate that.

**00:55:39 Peggy Sturdivant**

Yeah. Once or twice in our Jack Straw events, we've had the curator come. And so then we like get to question them, which is really been fun, because they have a tough position for making their choices for starters. And then is probably just such a relief, although hard. Once they can do that, to figure out how to kind of find those connections that people maybe didn't realize existed between the work. That is really... the the synchronicity between each of yours. Tonight was really a lovely part of the reading. So I love how that happens. All right. Well, I hope that you will encourage all your friends to, you know, fellow writers to join us another time. I'm booking in Jan through Jan. Well, I'm starting to starting booking January. Now, I kind of do it in fit sand starts. It's about time, as I hope you can tell in its 31st 32nd whatever year is a very welcoming place for new and experienced writers. It's always a lovely evening, and we're happy to welcome someone. For the first time, reading or you know, someone who's a longtime reader, everybody's welcome to come back, and I'm been actually enjoying the ability to reach any more people online different experience. But no problem with parking, getting to Ballard on a Thursday night. We get to have podcasts afterwards. This will be a YouTube which will be uploaded on the it's about time YouTube channel within a couple days. And that way, if someone wasn't able to attend tonight, you can. But if you know anybody who you've been encouraging to read, or certainly be reaching out to the other next our writers, or won't able to join unite, just have them contact me Peggy Sturdivant at gmailcom. And thank you all. So much for tonight.