

PANDORA



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VOLKSHOCHSCHULE, FRANKFURT AM MAIN

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Cover Art: “The Interior of My Soul” Oil on Canvas by Al Preciado.
Courtesy of 10 TEN Gallery, San Jose , CA.

Letter from the Director

News of Francesca Krueger's all too early death shocked us all, and it is most fitting that this edition of Pandora be dedicated to her memory. I met Francesca in October 2006 as one of the nine pioneering participants in our first VHS English creative writing course. I was immediately struck by her enthusiasm, unpretentiousness and optimism. Her positive attitude was contagious, spilling over to her fellow writers and to me. Francesca threw herself into her newly discovered world of writing. After only one writing course, she contributed to and designed the layout of two beautiful VHS anthologies - the forerunners to this literary magazine.

In only two years Francesca's confidence as a writer grew considerably. When Peggy Preciado, the founder of the VHS creative writing programme, had to step down, she knew that Francesca - with her natural energy and her knack for supporting and nurturing others' hidden talents - was ready to take her place. Francesca taught two courses of her own at the VHS, maintaining and building on the success and momentum of the existing programme. Such a leap - from participant to course leader in only two years seemed at first both to me and to Francesca unimaginable, but oh, how she rose to the challenge. I know she put everything she had into it, pushing herself to new limits, unwilling to accept compromise. I was excited for Francesca and relieved that the creative writing department would not flounder with Peggy no longer at its helm. Francesca's passage reinforces for me the very purpose of a VHS - to facilitate, to enable our adult students to discover, nurture and develop their as yet untapped skills and expertise. Francesca played a crucial role in the development and establishment of the creative writing courses here at the VHS and I am truly grateful to have known her as a passionate course participant and a dedicated teaching colleague.

Julia Shirtliff, Director of Studies/English

Letter from the Editor

This fall our close knit community of writers lost one of our most dedicated and beloved writers: Francesca Krueger Manganelli died on October 31, 2010. She was forty-six years old. Francesca was an enthusiastic writer and a dear friend of mine. She began as a writing student at the Volkshochschule and blossomed into teaching writing with us here at the VHS, Frankfurt. She wrote under her own name, Francesca Krueger, and under the pen name Elizabeth van Brooks. She wrote essays, prose, and poetry beautifully. We featured many of her pieces in Pandora.

This special issue of Pandora is dedicated to Francesca, who in life inspired so many of our writers here at VHS. Although her light was extinguished far too soon, her spirit will continue to live through the many lives she touched. The contributors to and the editor of this issue are just a few of those lucky souls.

Patricia Bartholomew, Editor Pandora Literary Magazine

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Where I'm From a la Francesca

By Francesca Krueger

I am from pink nappy pins,
From Marsiglia, Clorox and Ponds.

I am from the dusty, dark
and warm spaces under the stairs.

I am from moss, grass, and
dandelion milky stickiness.
I am from turkey dinners and Worriers,
from Wohlgast, Curley and Meschiari.

I am from Talkers, Travellers and Restlessness.
from war times my mother remembers
and fairy tales in many colored books.

I am from guilt, incense and clay miniature camels.
I am from apple orchards, eternal cities, ocean liners,
Spaghetti al tonno and Sweet Corn.
From Grandpa Krueger delivering no more and from the eye my
Father lost,
Though life was returned to him.

I am many-numbered folders on simple wooden shelves
Carrying images of people in places I will never go,
Of voices I will never hear.
They will come to me in my dreams
Telling me, maybe in a whisper,
Everything will be
All right



“Francesca Series” Brush and Ink by Hye yeon Cho

I Write, So I Am

by Beate Fritz

Was that Francesca? Yes – No. It must be her. “Francesca” I shouted.

She turned. The sunlight danced on her shoulders. Her head was covered by a brown straw hat, her face in the shadow. I smiled. Francesca loved hats, sometimes even funny ones. However, this straw hat was new to me and very becoming. I approached her. I could see Francesca’s long hair falling down to the waist. Her brunette hair was flecked with gray. She never hid that sign of coming age, but wore it naturally and lightheartedly. She greeted me with one of her lovely smiles, showing a row of almost perfect white teeth. Her eyes beamed with “joie de vivre” and invited me to join her good mood.

That morning, we had met on the Römerberg in Frankfurt. It was a late summer day. Our group of aspiring writers planned to visit an exhibition called “Blickwechsel - Frauenzimmer um 1800.” As the clock struck ten, we headed for the nearby History Museum, where the rest of our group was already waiting. Remarkably, Francesca had dressed-up in a most elegant summer outfit. She wore a long summer skirt combined with a shining silk blouse.

Maybe she did it in honour to the women we were going to visit. This would have been typical Francesca.

Around 1800 the term “Frauenzimmer” was used for bourgeois women of fortune, stemming from good families. In contrast to their poorer sisters, these women were citizens of Frankfurt with certain privileges of their own. The term “Frauenzimmer” was neutral and still a synonym to “Dame”. In the museum their portraits greeted us from the walls, like old Dutch paintings. We got acquainted with the elegantly dressed women with stylish hairdos and serious facial expressions in the pictures. They certainly knew their importance and exuded a natural authority.

Despite all the glamour, these bourgeois women scarcely had higher education. It was considered unfeminine and highly inappropriate for them to know too much. Exquisite needlework and excellent musical skills were more important for women. Their ability to read and write was a already privilege. Higher education was an uncommon stroke of luck for just a few. They may have had money, but the decisions about it were usually made by a male member of the

family.

The “Frauenzimmer” in the exhibition had left their limited private space. They had helped their husbands or had led a trade of their own. Some of them had been extremely successful, yet documents demonstrate severe restrictions. A widow could continue her husband’s trade. However, she wasn’t able to hold a diploma of her own, no matter how skillful she might be. A woman was considered an unprofessional person. These strict business rules matched the traditional view of women, being responsible for family and social representation only. These women’s success in business made us tremendously respectful of their achievements in crossing a borderline. They managed it all, despite a lack of formal education.

Gathering in the nearby café, we started our usual freewriting round. This time, the topic was clear: the exhibition. As usual, Francesca took out her paper notebook and put it on the table. This was the starting signal. She would time her watch for ten minutes and off we went, busy scribbling away. With increasing writing practice ten minutes got shorter and shorter. After that first writing round we would read aloud to each other, one by one. No comments were to be made. Usually, a second writing round would follow. Here, the thoughts and reflections of my peers would mingle into my writing, leading to unknown shores. Sometimes the result would be strong first thoughts, ideas full of surprises. After the second, even more inspiring reading round, it was time for a final chat.

International women, blonds, reds and brunettes, mingled around the writing tables. Francesca herself was the most International. She was half American and half Italian, while spending swatches of her childhood in Germany and England. After the writ-

ing practice, the table was usually covered with papers as well as half-drunken cups of coffee. It was a Bohemian and chaotic, yet a very productive writing atmosphere. Unlike the “Frauenzimmer”, all contemporary writers had had an excellent education. Although there was a difference in age of almost twenty years, we were tied together by the writing experience. Some of us had children, others were still studying or changing profession. Most of us stood at a turning point in our lives. Some were at the beginning, others headed to more fulfilling fields. Dreaming on paper was an excellent opportunity to carry out possible options in thought, enhanced by ideas from group members.

Francesca was the driving force behind our regular weekly meetings, her eyes gleamed with enthusiasm. She was highly dedicated to writing. She had gotten into the habit of carrying along a small notebook all the time. She loved to jot down interesting bits and pieces whenever she felt like it. That reservoir of ideas helped her to create witty and illustrative pieces, seemingly off the cuff. Francesca had become a writer in her heart and soul.

That day, Francesca blurted out upon leaving: “Aren’t we ourselves a sort of “Frauenzimmer”? There was silence: “Certainly” Francesca continued, “If these women could cross the borderline into business, we can make a living of our own, too. We have no legal restrictions any more, we have free access to higher education and, we have a right of self-determination. I hadn’t known how privileged we were,” she mused with a smile. Francesca waved us good-bye, heading home to her beloved family. Again, she had got to the point, sharing that piece of wisdom with us. Typical Francesca.

My England

Non-fiction by Francesca Krueger

Reprinted from Pandora, Issue 02, Fall 2009

26th of July 2005, heading back to our holiday home in East Finchley, London, England, Suburbia:

It is the first day of our vacation.

We have just been diverted from the High Road on to Summers Lane, a shortcut I use sometimes. It is a small road, with many roundabouts, recognizable only by the painted white dots in the middle of the road and now this small road has to hold the traffic of a three lane road in its entirety. The police give no explanations and politely but resolutely wave puzzled drivers on into a humble residential road, past hastily erected cordons. I assume there to be trouble on the Motorway again, which runs under the bridge leading to East Finchley. I turn on the radio and am informed that our corner of the world and its High Road unbelievably are in the middle of terrorist investigations, connected to the July bombings and would-be bombings on the London Underground. While we were at lunch Police found a car with traces of explosive material.

I concentrate on the task of getting my two boys home. A ride that on a bad day takes 10 minutes, turns into two hours of snails travail. The picturesquely named road is lined on both sides with parked cars and two-story terraced houses built too close to the road. They are nothing more than doll houses, leaning together as if for support. Peeling paint, cracks and grime belie their tutti-frutti colouring and regal architecture.

“When are we there, what is happening, why is it taking so long?”, the children quiz me through the air that is ripe with car fumes. We cannot keep the windows closed as the car heats up under the sun.

“We can’t go any faster. Please understand, be patient, it will take as long as it takes!”, I answer, with increasing impatience towards them and the situation.

Outside no claxon is impatiently sounded. Drivers temper their emo-

tions with a stoical English resolve, so as not to show they have been inconvenienced by something negligible as terrorists. Car motors hum patiently in moral support.

I feel guilty relief as the children finally sink into a sticky slumber. They are only 6 and 11 years old. They don't understand my panic, the moment, the weight.

I curse the arrogant assumption that after the attacks there would be no safer place. I should have stayed away. And yet this city belongs to me. This is where I know my way around, where unknown ladies call you darling, where Sundays are spent on a Heath. A Heath, like Wuthering Heights kind of Heath! I long for its green from this cemented moment.

We squeeze across the bridge over the

tracks of the Tube, moving ever closer to our safe haven. I try a stoic face.

I worry that my parents will worry. Little do I know that amongst the barrage of news about a tracked down would-be assassins, the crawl down Summers Lane is not even a shadow of a sigh in world events.

It feels so much bigger as I live it.

Wikipedia, amongst entries about the failed suicide bombing in London of the 21st of July 2005:

“On 26 July it was reported that police had seized a vehicle abandoned in East Finchley, north London. The BBC reported that the vehicle was a white VW Golf which was not owned by any of the suspects but which was thought to have been used by them.”



“London in Winter” Photo by M.P. Olinger. <http://mpo-art.com>

Francesca

by P. Rosana Preciado

Francesca came to the first creative writing class that I offered at the Volkshochschule in Frankfurt. She entered the classroom with great trepidation, for she was convinced that she could never become a writer. Her love of writing kept her returning to class. She wrote poetry and short stories, transforming herself into a cheerleader for all the other shy writers in the class. She gathered an international group of aspiring writers around her, eventually creating a writing group of her own in the cafeteria of the Deutsche National Bibliothek.

Once, we decided to head towards a yoga class after a writing class. We both had biked to the class and were chattering away after the meditation and stretching. Taking a yoga class on impulse was very Francesca, and it revealed her innate playfulness. She wore life light around her shoulders and had a ready smile on her lips. As we were unlocking our bikes, my cell phone rang. It was the visionary English department director at the Volkshochschule, a British woman who fostered the development of the writing courses in English from the beginning. A local newspaper wanted to interview somebody about

the program. I related the news to Francesca, who mouthed, “let’s go” and I told the director we would be there right away. I didn’t tell her that Francesca wanted to be dressed up, so we raced to my nearby home and I grabbed a summer dress from my closet, which she wore beautifully. Then we sped off in my car to the Volkshochschule, catching the journalist just as he had given up on us and was unlocking his own bike to take off. We launched into a narrative of how creative writing began at the Volkshochschule, or at least, I tried to convey the story in broken German. Francesca, a naturally gracious and generous spirit, saved the day. She took over in German and enthusiastically built a whole fancy story about how we founded creative writing at the Volkshochschule, leaving me staring at her in wonder. This was the American cheerleader in her that I grew to love so much, for it reminded me of my homeland and the unabashed enthusiasm that characterizes so many of us from America. Francesca exuded that enthusiasm in her playful approach to life.

But, of course, that was only one facet of her personality. There was also a quiet wisdom that emanated from her in the most unlikely moments. In her last letter, she wrote of chats with Lorenzo about his many options for univer-

sity study, Leonardo's fencing, and of her husband. "Silvano," she wrote, "is always stressed. What should I say: those Italians." This made me laugh out loud. We shared not only a love of writing and of unbridled enthusiasm, but we were also both married to Italians. She often surprised me with her pithy remarks about emigration, in particular, because she knew that it was my own very special theme in my life's writings, and she understood the issue from the inside because not only was she a foreigner herself, but she also was married to one like me. One day, I drove her home after a writing class. At that point she had become my apprentice in preparation for teaching writing herself. I had a bad bout of homesickness, which she in her gentle way was trying to address. "You know," she began, "Silvano often speaks of his childhood home and how he wished he could provide the same special type of upbringing that he knew in the area where he grew up to his sons." I nodded. It had always been my own deepest wish to return to America and drag my whole family with me, the lot of them, including the Italian I married. "He wants to go home," she continued. Then she looked at me sideways as I turned the corner towards her home. "But he would never be able to go home again, and he would never be able to offer the home he dreams of to his sons. It is gone." She gave a quiet little laugh, grabbed her funny hat and millions of bags and papers, and waved good-bye, leaving me with a chunk of her wisdom to digest. I am still working on it.

I had the great privilege of watching Francesca become a writer, her heart's desire. She was truly happy doing writing practice with virtually anyone. When we went our separate ways into other circles of activity, she continued gathering writers around her and ventured into blogging and even publishing. We lost touch but resurfaced in each other's lives briefly, to touch base. Last spring, she told me she had been diagnosed with cancer but that the prognosis was good. Then our lives moved apart again, and she dropped out of view.

When her husband read one of my emails

a couple of months ago, he contacted me. She had taken a turn for the worse and was receiving chemotherapy at a nearby hospital. She requested that no visitors disturb her. I told her husband I never listened to her anyway and drove to the hospital. When I entered her room, she burst into tears. Her long hair was gone and she wore a hospital gown that scarcely covered the bandages on her shoulders. I asked her why she insisted on being alone and wouldn't allow visits from the writer friends who knew her and cared for her. She tried to joke about it, but then the harsh reality of her illness spilled from her lips. We spoke of our lives, our sons, our husbands, and our love of writing. She wanted to ease the burden on her family, but she could barely take care of herself. She gave me permission to load up an iPod with audio books about writing and my favorite salsa music along with jokes from an American comedian. When I visited her a week later, I gave her a sketch of a blue angel that my brother, an artist, had given me years ago. We laughed as I whipped out adhesive strips to affix it to the hospital wall, probably against regulations. She insisted it be hung straight. She told me that she would contact me when she was in the mood to see me again. I tried to send her text messages and emails asking if I could take her out or even drive her to her chemotherapy treatment. She told me not to worry about her. Not long ago I saw Lorenzo in front of his school and asked about her. She sent me the letter I spoke about shortly thereafter. "Today," she wrote, "was actually one of the first days that the whole crazy puzzle is falling into place, such that life can be actually lived again, different yes, but lived."

Francesca loved life, she loved her sons and her husband, her mother, father and sisters—I heard about them all. In fact, she let me treat her like I treat the sisters I had left behind in California. After our crazy dash to the Volkshochschule to catch that speedy journalist, she whirled around in the summer

dress I gave her to keep. “That’s it,” she said, smoothing down the dress. “This makes you into a sister.” “Oh, no,” I replied, “you already have your sisters.” Secretly, though, she touched me like my younger sisters, and she was kind enough to let me take her under my wing for too short a while before we went our separate ways.

One morning I received a call from one of the shy writers she rallied about her so long ago in the Volkshochschule class. Francesca died on a Sunday. I never got to say goodbye. So I

do it now the only way I know she would like—writing. Francesca leaves behind a living legacy in the creative writing program at the Volkshochschule in Frankfurt. She helped breathe life into the program—with her laughter, her big heart, her craziness, her wild hair popping out from under those silly hats, roping international students into the joy of a writing life.



“Francesca Series” Brush and Ink by Hye yeon Cho

Why In Such a Hurry

by Núria Planas

She had been spying on the woman, the young and beautiful woman.
She had been there for a while wrapped in Her black cloak;
She had been hovering, harassing, and watching her.
She was patient and still She is, but adamant.

The woman could smell Her breathing, Her cold and odorless breath.
The beautiful woman was still beautiful although her body was exhausted.
The woman was cold, very cold. Amidst the coldness and pain, the woman whispered:
“Wait, wait a little! Why in such a hurry?”

For a while that hushed but omnipotent Creature
stepped back, although without getting away from the woman’s proximity.
Her breathing was slow and deep. Her nostrils widened to take the woman’s scent.
She could see the tired and sad look of the woman.

The woman did not seem to care anymore about the unscented Being’s presence.
The bushy woman with a last effort opened her blue eyes and told Her:
“You came too early, but I am ready to go.
I am too tired to keep breathing the essence of life.”

For the first time, the dark Shadow talked to the nice woman:
“I did not come too early. The Evil disease made you suffer. I will take care of you.”
Gently, She took the woman and wrapped her with Her breath.
“Don’t be afraid. Now, rest and close your eyes.”

The woman could smell the scented breath of the Shadow, now with Her white cloak.
The woman was not cold anymore. Amidst the warmth and peace,
the woman allowed the Silhouette to take her, and her
weightless body leaned backwards, while her arms hung from each side.

While the Shadow, carefully and graciously,
was lifting the beautiful and rested woman away and away,
the woman with blue eyes heard:
“I love you Mom.”
“You are the light of my life.”

Francesca
Beyond the Veil
by Marie-Paule Olinger



“Dawn is Breaking” Oil on Canvas by M.P. Olinger. <http://www.mpo-art.com>

As I stare into the night
I still my mind and wonder.
I wonder what lies beyond
Beyond, the great divide?

And as I ponder on Francesca,
Her dreams pending on a star,
I keep thinking, did she find,
Find her way into the Light?

And as I sit and stare: Silence speaks.
Silence roars, silence whispers.
And as I keep staring into the night,
I ponder on Francesca's inner Light.

I wonder did she take a chance,
A chance to dance to the other side?
And as a silver moon rolls across the sky,
Frosty snowflakes dance nearby.

While the universe keeps breathing,
Silence tolls loud and clear.
And I wonder does Francesca hear,
Does she hear the world's gentle heaving?

My mind keeps wandering,
Wandering through the night.
And while dawn is breaking,
Pearly snowflakes dance and hide.

And while the world keeps humming,
Francesca explores the great divide.
And as I feel her walking,
Walking on the other side,
I still my mind, and I keep listening.

My Name is Francesca

by Francesca Krueger

My name is Francesca. I live in Frankfurt (at the moment). I like Spaghetti al Tonno and Hampstead Heath. True, the Heath is not in Frankfurt, but we have the Grüneburgpark. It does not have the same atmosphere, but it is green.

I am travelling a new road. I have gone from taking a Creative Writing Course to being the teacher of a course. Two years ago I had tried so much and still had no idea what the next step would be or where I wanted to go. Then I walked into a course with the innocent name “English Writing Skills”. Instead of a classroom I walked into a world which was headed: “The Power of Writing”. All the pieces of my life puzzle fell into place and shaped into an enormous arrow that indicated: “This Way.”

I am 44, have two children and have held more jobs—from Secretary, to IT support, to Spacecraft Operations—than I can remember. I had no plan. Life

just happened and I was beginning to get used to the idea of my personal chaos being just that – chaos. As we know from chaos there came life, my genetic make-up, which is multicultural to exhaustion point, and my experiences are shaping into something new and unique from the chaos. My American grandfather and my English grandma are saying: “We started over again several times in our life. We possessed the gift of writing and thought and hand it now to you.”

My Italian ancestry is saying: “Do not forget your passion, your laughter and tears. Do not let the years on your back exhaust you and rob you of your love for life.”

They are I and I am them: the Explorers, the Country-Leavers, the Writers, the Dreamers, and I see their light shine in the eyes of my children. My name is Francesca.



“Francesca Series” Brush and Ink by Hye yeon Cho

Not Everything is Lost

by Núria Planas

As the letters interlocked shaping words,
she was there with her children
teaching them those words
such as *mom, child, love*.

As the words played together building sentences,
she was whispering to her husband
simple but nice sentences
such as, *I love you*.

As the sentences danced creating paragraphs,
she was teaching her students,
how to create a first powerful paragraph,
such as, *I believe in the power and beauty of words...*

As the paragraphs decided to tell a story,
she showed her family and friends
the sadness but beauty of a simple story
such as, *I know that I will leave soon; however...*

However, not everything is lost.
If the letters had not interlocked,
and the words had not played,
and the sentences had not danced,
and the paragraphs had not decided to tell stories...

Now, we would not been able to cry,
or to miss,
or to yearn,
or to remember her,
and then, everything would be lost.



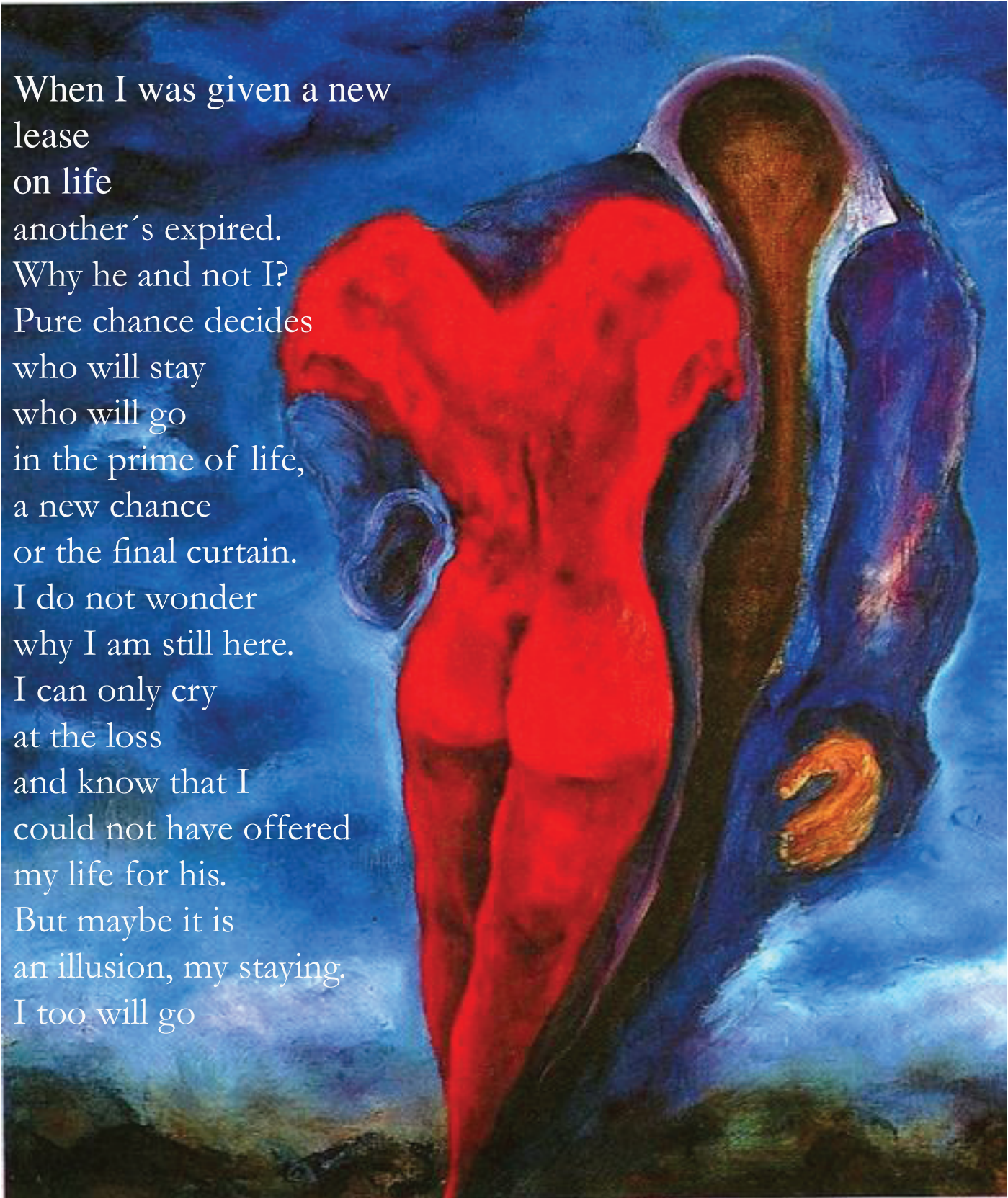
“Pensive” Photo by Unyoung Park

Lease

Poem by Elizabeth van Brooks

Originally published in Pandora, Issue 3, Spring 2010

When I was given a new
lease
on life
another's expired.
Why he and not I?
Pure chance decides
who will stay
who will go
in the prime of life,
a new chance
or the final curtain.
I do not wonder
why I am still here.
I can only cry
at the loss
and know that I
could not have offered
my life for his.
But maybe it is
an illusion, my staying.
I too will go



“Metamorphosis” Oil on Canvas by M.P. Olinger www.mpo-art.com

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Francesca Krueger Manganelli

June 25, 1964 - October 31, 2010

You sang for us like an angel