

Title of Magazine: Fail Better

Issue: #47, Fall 2013

Sarah Stanley

Editor: Thom Didato

September 2013

Web Address: www.failbetter.com

What they publish: Original fiction (including short stories, self-contained novel excerpts, and novellas), poetry, and visual art.

Submission Guidelines: Fail Better is looking for new work that is “at once original and personal.” Submissions may be pasted into the body of an e-mail and sent to [submissions@failbetter.com](mailto:submissions@failbetter.com) with the subject “Submission” or mailed to failbetter.com 2022 Grove Avenue Richmond, VA 23220.

Description of Publication: The design of the website isn’t particularly attractive or interesting, but its plain interface makes it easy to focus on reading the stories themselves and the archive is organized in a way that makes it easy to navigate. The contributors are generally writers with experience, who have been previously published or have won awards. The magazine is free and contributors are unpaid. Publishes quarterly.

Prose Per Issue / Amount of Published Annually: Two to five pieces of fiction per issue, six to sixty pieces per year.

Prose Reviews:

*From Issue #47:*

*When the Rains Came* by Jonathan Papernick is a plainspoken magical realism story in a domestic setting. The story is told by an objective first person communal narrator, a town that is experiencing floods in which various sea creatures wash up and wreak havoc on the community. When “those of us still left” congregate at the church, the priest declares that God is punishing them for their sins. A little boy stands up, attests that he has not ever sinned and strips off his shirt to reveal that he has grown gills and fins. He dives into the water and swims away, followed by other children in the town, “like a school of fish in search of the light.”

Papernick presents the magical realism elements in the story at a very interesting pace. The story begins as though it could be about any normal flood. By the end of the first paragraph, we can sense a bit of hyperbole when the rain falls “for four long weeks with no pause.” However, by the time the sea creatures arrive, it is clear that the story is set in a reality separate from ours. This creates an interesting effect when the boy at the end reveals his gills. We are initially surprised by the bizarre image, but because of the world Papernick has set up, we believe it to be true. Because of this, the ending reads as calm and hopeful, instead of a horror story.

*From Issue # 45:*

*Bride of the Future*, by Peter Ho Davis is a plain spoken experimental story in an exotic setting. The first person subjective narrator describes her life married to Nostradamus who, upon meeting her, declares, “I’ve met the woman I’m going to wed.” They learn that, though he can see the future of anything else, he can’t see the future of his wife or—eventually—sons, because love dampens his abilities. As the years go on, the narrator grows tired of her husband’s gift and gloomy disposition. She comments that perhaps he feels immortal, having seen the future death of so many people. Eventually, he starts to be able to predict her future and she realizes that means he doesn’t love her anymore. As she looks on at him, stroking his beard and saying, “I’ve seen the end of everything,” she realizes that “in the end even his name would die along with everything else,” and sees the one thing that he can’t: his own mortality.

This story experiments with anachronisms and pulls it off almost flawlessly. We know the story takes place in the 1500’s because Nostradamus is a central character. However, the narrator’s voice is extremely contemporary, with lines of dialogue like, “Oooh! Spooky!” (when teasing Nostradamus) and, “You’ve seen my death, ain’t you?” In the few lines of dialogue we get from Nostradamus, on the other hand, he speaks more like how we’d expect him to, saying things like, “Just as

I have foreseen,” and, “We can’t change our destiny.” This tension between what is expected and what we are presented with creates an interesting kind of humor that is both silly and smart.

Rating: 6. The fiction featured in Fail Better is top notch and comes in a wide range of different styles. A writer who is not afraid to take risks could find a good home here. However, since most of the contributors are already established writers, it might not be the best bet for an emerging writer.