

Pen & Ink Writers' Group

The truth is...we gather on the Third Monday of each month to practice our writing skills. We listen and share in each other's work. We are small in number and our commitment is strictly to produce and foster creativity among our members.

We started in July 1999 and consist of adults that enjoy writing memoirs, commentaries, essays, poems, and/or prose. Our simple method each month is to use a pre-selected word or phrase as the basis of a story, an idea, an opinion, a derivative of, or an implied essence of and write a 1 to 1 ½ page document. We share our stories, comment, and in that way build up our writing skills through practice and presentation. The atmosphere is friendly and supportive, and the feedback is gentle.

Curious? Always wanted to try writing for fun, entertainment, or even profit? Come visit with us at any of our open meetings. Bring a sample of your work. Sit in and see what we do. If you like it, join us every month and become a member.

Original Works by Members of the Pen & Ink Writers' Group © 2015 Pen & Ink Writers' Group

February 2015 selection – Queen

My Queen

By Susan J. Wilfong

Her legs are stubby
And she's over weight
Her walk is unsteady
And so is her gait.

Her ears are too big
For the size of her head.
She is my queen
When we crawl into bed.

Her body is warm
As she lay next to me.
A happier person,
There could never be.

We are not married,
She's not a common-law-wife.
She is my Basset Hound,
And it's a wonderful life!

###

The Queen
By Valerie Collins

She was beautiful. She was elegant. She was a vision of loveliness. She was the queen. Oh how her subjects loved her! Just to gaze upon her countenance was thrilling, for there in her face was a sweetness that surpassed all others. Perfect were her eyes, large and round like circular swatches of the finest brown velvet. Her complexion glowed like alabaster of unique quality with a tinge of petal pink. The nose was perfection in its delicate shape and dainty size. Her hair was her crowning glory for it was as soft as a kitten's underbelly with curls gently framing her face.

This queen was called Stella for she had a twinkle in her eyes like the stars that hung in the night sky. Her subjects were loyal and wanted to please her in every way. They had waited a very long time for this queen and needed the perfect monarch to sit on the throne of their cherished kingdom. Queen Stella was the perfect fit. Her lady-in-waiting was at her beck and call and catered to her every need. This was a good thing because although she had all the qualities of an angel, Queen Stella could be very demanding and heads would roll if she so desired. She insisted on comfort. Clothing must be smooth and delicate in texture. The environment around her must be temperate and calm. That is why the royal musicians played music of soft and soothing tones. But when in a playful mood, the court jesters especially pleased her with their frolicking antics and gamesome pranks. Their capers could set her off into a fit of laughter that was music to the ear. Her food requirements were simple but here again Queen Stella wanted the luxury of refreshments delicate in texture. The royal cooks heeded her demands for her highness's royal temper could flare! Perhaps it was the nature of living in the environment of royalty or perhaps it was just the nature of the queen herself (the latter being the more likely), Queen Stella could be demanding and persnickety. The libations might not come soon enough, the entertainment might not be of pleasing caliber, the clothing might lack the required measure of comfort or any number of things could set Queen Stella off into a fitful rage that would resound through the castle with regal reverberation. Yet in spite of this, all Queen Stella would have to do was to turn her delicate lips upward into a sweet smile, her eyes would twinkle and all the harshness was forgotten. Therefore pleasing her was the simplest solution to peace and tranquility in the royal court and indeed in all the kingdom!

News of Queen Stella spread throughout the land and her subjects would come from far and wide to see her. They brought her gifts of the most charming nature and all would agree that the kingdom was so much better with Queen Stella at the helm.

Yes she was adored. She was revered. She was loved.

And Queen Stella was three weeks old!

###

Queenie
By N. Stewart

Queenie ruled the household with shrieks, howls, spits, and bites. Queenie was an orange tabby with a tail that twitched and swooshed, it being as long as the length of her entire body. She'd perch herself high on top of the refrigerator and she'd swoop down on the unsuspecting. If she tolerated you, it would only be a paw slap as you passed by. But if she didn't, she would jump off, screaming, teeth bared, and land (her preference) on the head of the passerby or (her second choice) land on a back or shoulder. What a surprise that was as she affixed herself to hair or clothing, clinging while the unsuspecting shouted, shook and whirled, trying to get her off.

Why would anyone put up with such a cat? Queenie lived with an elderly aunt for many years and they were loving companions until my aunt suddenly died. Queenie is 20 years old and knew only love and kindness from Aunt Lizzie. She was lost, never able to adjust to a new home and spent many months, being moved from one relative to another as her attitude became worse and worse. As humans, life is not easy when you lose the person you love, but we pretend we are fine and we trudge along. Queenie missed Aunt Lizzie and their routine. No one really knows if a pet grieves the loss of their human companion, but I believe it to be so.

It was my turn to give it a try. Aunt Lizzie provided for payment of vet bills, medicine, and food in her will, so Queenie was not a financial burden on anyone. Every afternoon for many weeks, I sat in a comfortable chair, reading as Queenie tentatively stalked around, but never got close. I would talk softly to her as she approached and I would offer kitty treats. One day with Joshua Bell playing violin on a CD, Queenie jumped in my lap as I read, arranged herself and settled down. She began to softly purr.

Did I find the secret? Was she a classical music lover of the violin? Or was her grief now lessening and her heart opening up to accept love from another human? Only time would tell. I tentatively stroked her head and to my amazement she let me. Queenie seems comfortable with me, and we have started to develop a bond. Yes, she still paw slaps or jumps off the refrigerator at the unsuspecting, but with considerably less aggression than before.

###

TheFarm
By Phyllis Babbs

When my family moved west to the vast expanse of Du Page County, our Chicago families and friends christened our property "the farm." And I wondered about their

choice of words. Initially, the only building on the property was our house, not even a garage let alone a barn. But, from day one, we did have an unusual collection of animals. Living rurally, all animals served a purpose. Dogs were watch dogs and cats were mousers; animals had to earn their keep. The animals at our house each had a job. My father worked in a defense plant during WWII, working 12 hour shifts and with his commute, he was gone from home almost 14 hours a day. So he became creative. He got sheep to “mow” the grass, which was almost counterproductive because the sheep were also fertilizing the grass at the same. We had pigs to eat organic matter because that was the easiest way to dispose of it. We had a goat called Nanny and she produced milk which we drank and also used to make cheese. The goose we had functioned as guard dog, attacking anyone who came on our property.

At times, my mother said we should have called the property the funny farm. There were days when the ram would break its tether and chase me around the yard in an attempt to butt me; I’m screaming and the ram is baaing. Following closely behind was Nanny, going maa and trying to get between me and the ram. And bringing up the rear was the goose, wings flapping and hissing.

The neighborhood kids thought there was always something interesting going on at our house; the ram chasing me around the yard; the pigs knocking down the fence and running amok in the neighborhood but they all agreed the event they liked the most was when Nanny had the two kids. Everyone had watched in fascination as the kids were born. But, for me, the most interesting thing was the day the bees arrived. An assortment of bee had attached themselves to a branch of a tree. Somehow I knew this was unique. But I also knew it was too early to wake my father. So I went in the house and got my mother. She stood guard with me and watched the bees, and waited. When I did waken him, my father was delighted by the sight of the bees. He knew two queen bees didn’t live in one hive. And often the queen bees would fight to the death. What process the one queen uses to entice drones and workers to leave with her is still unclear to me. But this queen bee was successful and she was ready to start a colony.

My father put some sugar water nearby and took off to see what he could learn about establishing a new hive. Even though we had a phone, not all of our neighbors did. And he needed to learn as much as he could about making a bee hive and quickly. So he drove around the area hoping to find someone who could give him guidance. The general opinion was he could use a wooden barrel. And he immediately began to improvise a bee hive. He gave me the job of watching the bees. But, I wasn’t sure what I would have or could have done if the bees had decided to leave.

There probably wasn’t a beekeeper alive who would have looked at my father’s contraption without thinking it was a Rube Goldberg. The next challenge was to get the bees inside the contraption. He raised and levered the barrel carefully under the branch. With one fast clip, the branch holding the bees it fell into the barrel. Every step my father took was done carefully and slowly.

It didn't seem as though it was too long and we had honey. It was such a heady feeling, for a four year old, to know this queen bee had chosen your property to make her home. And to know those bees were making honey just for you.

Unfortunately, it was an extremely cold winter that year and the colony didn't survive. But, to this day, I have never tasted anything as sweet as the honey my bees made for me.

###

Treat Me Like a Queen?

By Sara Schupack

I have no interest in a man treating me like a queen, a princess, or any other kind of royalty. I find the notion appalling, and it surprises me how entrenched in our culture that thinking remains. That kind of queen wields a false, empty power, based on superficialities. Even if it is a power I could have, I do not wish to toy with or control a man. I want to earn his love and for him to earn mine. Real love, not fleeing attention, flattery, or material goods. I recall overhearing some of my young community college students in their boy talk. These were women who cared about equality and wanted to be taken seriously as they fought against all odds to get themselves a college education. But they were complaining about a guy not paying for their meal or showering them with gifts. Certainly romance includes treats and surprises, but these should never be one-sided. I remember too, a ways back, when I was just starting to date a fellow who drove a fancy car. I think it was a Mercedes. My neighbors noticed that, as well as the large gift basket he showed up with. They were impressed. I was not. This was our second date, and I felt like a whore. I hate those ads for diamond rings that say "She's worth it," as if the woman is the product he is purchasing, or at least her value is measured by the size of the rock. Why couldn't this date reach me with words, intelligence, and genuine kindness instead, which I of course would reciprocate, and not simply receive passively, simpering and coy?

I have noticed in my dating experiences that men who claim not to understand or care about "playing games" know nothing but those silly games, which reinforce the 'battle of the sexes' narrative. In this narrative, the main, perhaps even the only, attribute a woman has to offer is her body. No one would admit that outright, but why else play hard to get and make the man 'wait for it'? The implications are multiple and equally troubling: a woman doesn't want sex, she simply allows it. Sex is such a draw that once she gives that away, she doesn't have much else to offer, except more sex. She uses this for bargaining, holding out for gifts and pampering, or withholding sex if the man is behaving badly. The man's job, which he complains about but secretly enjoys, is "the chase." This also leads insidiously towards the conclusion that "no means yes." It is his job to pursue the woman, to push past her resistance, to win her with gifts and flattery, to enjoy the titillation of hints and promises and physical contact offered in stages that will surely one day soon lead to the ultimate goal. This narrative, this game, is demeaning to men and women, but most damaging to women. Women play along and reinforce the narrative, of course, but I

recognize that the impulse comes from a long history of reaching for whatever limited power and control appears available.

Think about how revolutionary it is simply to be a woman who asks a man out on a date. With the younger generations and this free-for-all 'hooking up' that seems rampant, things probably go differently, yet I suspect that stifling gender roles still persist even in that setting. I do know from my own, older person's experiences, that being a woman who takes the first step with a date or with physical contact, brings all sorts of problems. How hard it is to be the one to have to take the risk of asking someone out! Why should that always fall to the man? But, I often end up with passive men who think that since I am willing to do that work, I should be able to do all of the relationship work, and then of course when it fails, that's my fault too. Or I'm taken for granted, because surely if I wasn't able to sit and wait patiently, flirt and retreat, hint and play coy, and let the man do his macho mating dance, I must be desperate or easy or willing to put up with all sorts of crap.

Fairytales are romantic, in a Disney sort of way. Beautiful gowns, charming princes rescuing a damsel in distress, all of this has an appeal. Can a strong, confident woman be charming and sexy? Of course. Is there room for a man to need support and encouragement? Absolutely. We pay lip-service to nuance. Even Disney movies like to offer up a beautiful princess who is also smart and willful (but still has the impossible hourglass figure, while her lover has his impossibly triangular torso.) But we don't go far enough, not in our movies, not in our dating practices. Maybe couples play certain games until they're together, and then the depth and subtleties of commitment change behaviors. But, I don't want even to play such games while dating, and I worry that habits formed then linger throughout relationships in unhealthy ways.

I am not a cynic. I consider myself a romantic who does not believe in marriage or think sex is a big deal. Here is another dating experience as example: A guy I was getting to know came over. We talked, he asked lots of good questions, we cuddled, we drank some wine. He asked if I had old yearbooks, and poured through them, commenting that back then too, I would have been the kind of girl he would have liked. Odd, but charming, quirky, intriguing. I invited him to bed. He paid attention to my bedside reading, showing appreciation for a book of poetry and sharing that he wrote poetry too. The sex was not very good and that didn't matter to me. I felt very fond of him when he left and hoped we'd spend more time together. To me, his words, his ideas, his gentleness, these things were romantic and compelling. Sex is just part of a complex story. I would like to be appreciated for the things I feel I have to offer: compassion, humor, intellect, fun conversation, careful listening, and whatever physical manifestations there are for these qualities, from looks to touches to activities in bed. There is plenty of nuance to physical intimacy and how it is woven through romance, as well as how friendship and love comingle. There is a continuum within each moment and over time. That's certainly the way I appreciate men.

###

“Queen for a Day”
By Elvira K. Castillo

Those of you born 70 years ago may remember the early reality show which began on the radio in 1945. “Queen for a Day,” originally called “Queen for Today,” was created over lunch when two advertising men met with Dud Williamson, suggesting he host a new radio series that would bring out his interviewing ability. Williamson told them about an interview show he used to do, where he stood on a street corner and asked women passing by, “What would you do if you had anything you wanted?” One of the advertising men said, “That’s our program. Let’s give women some of their wishes and have real fun on the air.”

Thus the audience participation and reality show was created - “Queen for a Day.” Each day five women taken from the audience were asked to express their wishes. The audience would applaud to select the most deserving to be crowned “Queen for a Day.” The winner was then crowned, throned, and dressed in a robe and given her desired prizes as well as other merchandise. Of course, in comparison to prizes on today’s shows, the prizes seemed minimal. For example, one of the first Queens was given a new outfit and taken to dinner at one of New York’s hottest nightspots.

The show began in New York, but after a couple of months was moved to Hollywood. During the move Dud Williamson was no longer the host and was replaced by Jack Bailey. Bailey was an old vaudevillian, who knew how to work an audience. Bailey made “Queen for a Day” his career, as both a devilish and sympathetic host for 12 years on the radio and 8 years on television.

Bailey, the producer, and announcer went through the audience for potential queens. Age and appearance didn’t matter -- what mattered was personality! The women’s wishes were both common and bizarre. Some examples were: (1) a screen test, (2) meet Walt Disney, (3) new false teeth, (4) plastic surgery, etc. One woman wished for a burro for her prospector Mother. I’d say that was in the category of bizarre. On the touching side, on lady wanted a tattoo removed from her days in a German concentration camp.

As I said, “Queen for a Day” began on the radio in 1945, but came to television in 1956, and soon became the top-rated daytime show. It was a half-hour show, expanded to 45 minutes, and then back to a half-hour in 1958. Today they can’t pack that much fun in hour-long shows, but that’s just my opinion. Jack Bailey also took the show on the road from time to time. The show did remain on the radio one year until 1957 after its transfer to television in 1956, and was on NBC from 1956 to 1960 and on ABC from 1960 to 1964. In 1970 it was syndicated, so some of you youngsters born 50 or-so years ago may have seen it or heard of it.

I remember listening to the show on the radio and later on television. Jack Bailey really made the ladies feel like a Queen, and I’m sure many housewives loved the show. Fans of the show will never forget Bailey’s opening saying, “Would YOU like to be Queen for a Day!”

Ref: The Encyclopedia of Old Time Radio (John Dunning). Total Television (Alex McNeil)

###