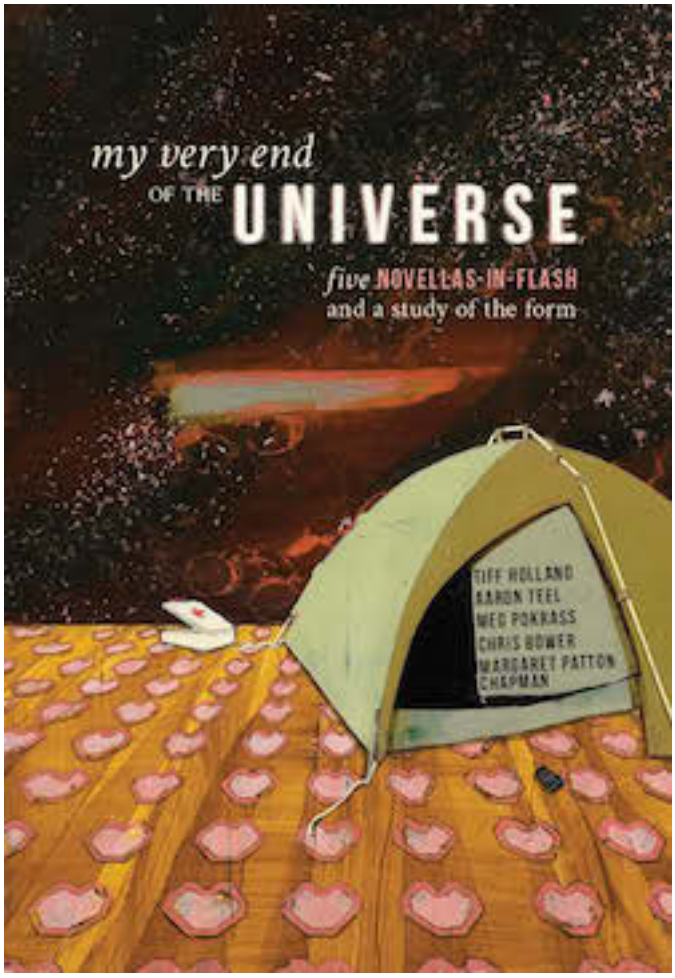
Sparkly Plans, Grease, and Luck [1]

February 23, 2015 Flash Fiction [2]
TW Reading Series [3]

Flash Novella Excerpt by Meg Pokrass

Three Pieces from *Here, Where We Live*

Editor's Note: The complete text for Meg Pokrass's *Here, Where We Live*—22 chapters in all—is part of a terrific 2014 anthology of five flash novellas from Rose Metal Press: *My Very End of the Universe*.



How long is a flash novella? *Here, Where We Live* is under forty pages. The other works in this volume range from just under thirty pages to just over sixty. But the key to this hybrid form has more to do with linking a series of flash fragments (or brief chapters) into an overall narrative.

In a craft essay that prefaces her novella, Pokrass likens writing this kind of flash to piecing together a crazy quilt. As she also observes:

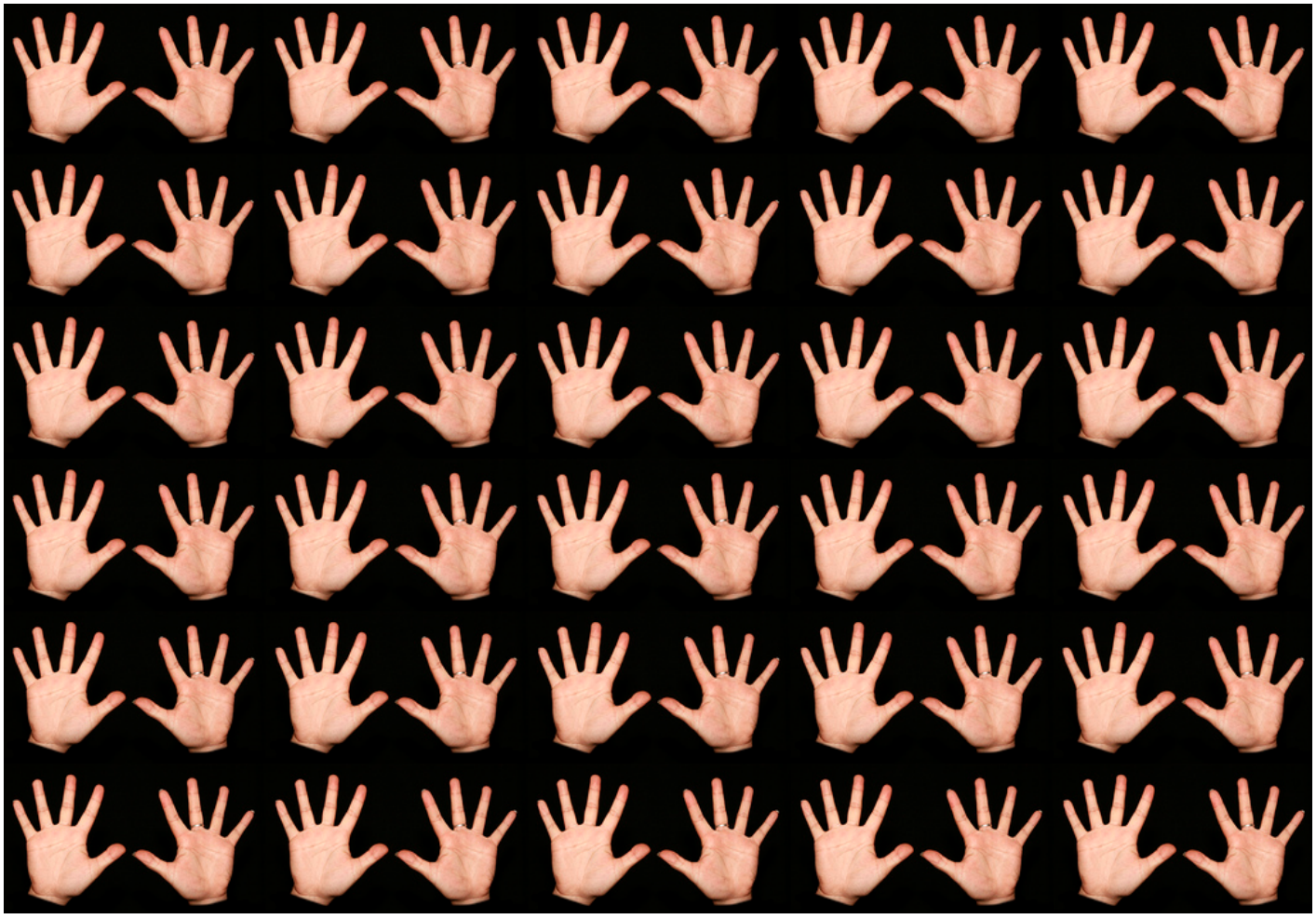
> We humans frequently have very little perspective on our own stories while we are living them. The novella-in-

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> flash, divided into tiny bits of action, mirrors life this way. I do not believe that life as it is being lived has a 'narrative arc'—and if it does, it does not become clear until a person is gone.

Pokrass's essay discusses her process for creating *Here, Where We Live.* Along with the following novella excerpt, we've reprinted her essay in the TW Reading Series: "The Craft of Flash Novella Writing." [4]

For more about her flash novella and the others in this volume, see the Rose Metal Press page for *My Very End of the Universe.* [5]



Sparkly Plans

A few months after chemotherapy, Mom got a part-time telemarketing job selling ballet season tickets. She didn't sell enough, though, so they fired her after just three weeks.

Mom said she hated selling people tickets they didn't want. She would tell people not to buy anything over the phone if they sounded old. She was proud of getting fired.

Unemployed, she still sends money to Friends of the Bird Refuge, The Homeless Coalition, and Save the Trees. I worry about where she is finding money to do this. Daniel works, and he lives here rent-free, so I figure they must have some arrangement to even things out.

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I look at old photos of Mom from when she was an actress—her hair all modelish and her eyes full of sparkly plans.

Now she wears hats, scarves, hoop earrings, wigs. But nothing makes her look normal.

The new baby-chick fuzz on Mom's scalp feels so soft that sometimes I pet it and say “nice nice fuzz,” but Mom touches her scalp too much. When she does that, even at the beach art show, even where everyone is supposed to be interesting and artsy—even there, she looks like a bald weirdo fingering her head.

Grease

The Renaissance Faire is coming up in just a few weeks. My best friend Junie’s brother Kyle, a few years older, will drive us an hour south, to Agoura Hills. In photos, Kyle doesn’t look like anyone interesting.

The Faire is a place where teenagers can roam around without anyone bothering them. This sounds good to me, because lately, older guys have been gawking at my tits, and it makes me feel weird.

Junie says people who don’t like attention are gay, which makes no sense, and has nothing to do with anything.

I try not to be mad, because Junie is my only friend and hanging out usually takes my brain off of all the crap at home.

Mom is on a very restrictive diet prescribed by a nutritionist. I’m sick of vegan everything. Our kitchen overflows with unbleached sesame seeds and fake-meat patties made of tofu turds.

At the Faire, I’ll be free to wander around with Junie and eat all the junky food I want.

What I crave most are those huge turkey drumsticks they sell in greasy food carts, the heavy taste of meat fat.

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Luck

On our stoop, luck clears its throat like a Mormon missionary and walks away.

We can't afford a therapy dog, so we rescue a pound mutt called Bruno. The dog, though friendly, has a permanently depressed expression. A plastic surgeon would take his downward hanging cheeks and move them up, above his ears.

"I'm sick and tired of it all," Mom says, folding kitchen dish towels. I used to try to help, but apparently, I don't fold towels right.

Our luck is a flat can of open Pepsi left out all night. Normal people would toss it, but Mom never wastes anything.

Sometimes she talks about how I was born with colic, wanted nothing to do with her milk.

"That is you all over," she says.

I imagine Mom whisking soy powder with water, the rise and fall of her functional but useless breasts.

I make a mental list of recent unlucky things:

- We got a dog who looks sad but was supposed to make us feel happy.
- Dad died making an old building new.

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- The front of our house is sinking into the ground.
- Daniel and Mom talk about my attitude when they think I can't hear. They say I don't listen, but I'm just trying not to hear the idiotic things Daniel says to Mom.

To protect my luck, I've become good at:

1. Not thinking when it makes things worse.
2. Chopping onions with my eyes squeezed shut.
3. Brightening my nights by moving things along the softest part of my body.

Art Information

- "Day 65: How Many Fingers Am I Holding Up? [6]" © Ansy Wong; used by permission.
- "Day 37: Can You Feel It? [7]" © Ansy Wong; used by permission.

Meg Pokrass is the author of *Damn Sure Right* (Press 53, 2011) and *Bird Envy* (Printed on Paige, 2014). Her flash fiction appears in 200 literary journals including *Green Mountains Review, Five Points, McSweeney's,* and *Flash Fiction International* (Norton, 2015).

Meg is currently cowriting humor with Bobbie Ann Mason and was recently commissioned to write an original film with veteran screenwriter Graham Gordy. She serves as associate editor for Rick Barthelme's *New World Writing* and lives in San Francisco with a dog and two cats.

Find out more at Meg Pokrass's website [8].

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