

WAKING HOURS (Fiction)

By Tina Cabrera

This story, together with ‘Waking Hours (Anti-fiction)’ posted below it in the TOC, are both from Tina Cabrera’s latest collection *Giving Up the Ghost (and other Hauntings)* published by Atmosphere Press, Spring 2020. Reprinted with kind permission. Atmosphere Press is ‘*an independent, full service publisher for excellent books in all genres and for all audiences.*’ Visit them at atmospherepress.com

*In an email to Charles, Tina Cabrera writes: I wanted to invite you and the other editors to contribute to an online journal I’m starting called **HYBRIDITIES**, the first issue to be themed Life in the Time of Corona. The link is **HYBRIDITIES.com/submissions/**. I’m planning to publish pieces as they come in and eventually turn it in to a pdf. **Please submit!***

WHY I LIKE IT: Guest editor/author DIRK VAN NOUHUYS writes:

I like Waking Hours because it stirs my mind. It throws up clues, like a mystery story, but in a mystery story the author has arranged the clues rigorously like Gretel and Hansel's white pebbles, and they lead you to a comfy conclusion. That's the deal between the author of mystery stories and the reader. Waking Hours throws up only clues and the crumbs are scattered by the birds as in Gretel and Hansel's second journey, then re-scattered by the anti-birds, which force us to wander into a dangerous confection. The confection houses a series of statements that are repetitive, but distinct. For Gilles Deleuze difference precedes being. Cabrera prompts us to consider the connection, but does not guide us, among such things as: sleeping cats, the consciousness of deaf and blind, and Gilles Deleuze. Anti-fiction provides snatches of background material, like disorderly footnotes. She also leads us off the page: I watched the movie she tells about, and only partly agreed with how she saw it (I need to ponder that). I read the Wikipedia pages on Gilles Deleuze. I searched the Internet for who said, "Do not be sad when death arrives"—you may be surprised at the answer. The deal in this fiction is: there's no simple answer. More thought provoking than Agatha Christie and more fun.

Waking Hours (Fiction)

The cat – in play-dead position, marble eyes rolled back – murmurs like a dreamer. Maybe she is prey in some exciting chase. Maybe the fluttering of her eyes and the quivering of her mouth are merely a reflex.

The man who looks like a child sits on the floor, dressed in a sweater and tie. The documentary film camera focuses on him for a (painfully) long time. Both deaf and blind, he's forgotten how to speak and write. Incapable of dressing himself and maybe of abstract thinking. When he spits and drools and slaps his cheek, listen to what he is saying.

The philosopher threw himself out the window. Maybe death's delay was too much to take, and after years of deliberation he took the leap.

If you could pray, maybe you would ask to die a sudden death unexpectedly. Or maybe you would choose. Time to pay. Time to pay.

Do not be sad when death arrives, someone somewhere must have once said. Welcome and accept it, rather than crying like a lost child.

The man-child can't help it. He spits and dribbles. He winks.

The cat can't help sleeping through the waking hours.

There are worse things than death.

Hand the man-child a banana and he will eat immediately. He may never think of a tree the way a philosopher thinks of one, but he can feel one with his hands and climb it without analyzing what makes a tree a tree.

If the man-child could speak, maybe he would say: This constant buzzing in my head. Make it stop—please. If you do, I'll stop slapping and scratching myself, stop crawling on all four of these things you call hands and feet.

The philosopher threw himself out the window. Suddenly. Maybe it was merely a reflex. Contradiction. After several years of struggling to breathe.

Look before you leap.

The philosopher starts from the position of thinking.

The cat stares for hours on end, when she's not sleeping. Maybe daydreaming. In between.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: *Waking Hours is part of my manuscript called Counterbook: Fiction, Anti-Fiction, and the In-Between, a series of narratives that present two forms of the same story. For this particular pairing, I think I was compelled by a desire to understand the relationship between memory, dream, and the waking world and by a sort of Zen concept that they are all interlinked. The "anti-fiction" version is especially interested in exploring the various versions of stories whether "factual" or "fiction," and what can be gained (or lost) by exploring them all. I was definitely influenced by Borges and his philosophical style, especially this quote that serves as the epigraph of the collection: "Works of fiction contain a single plot, with all its imaginable permutations" and a "book that does not contain its counterbook is considered incomplete (from Borges's short story, "Tlon, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius").*

AUTHOR'S BIO: *Tina V. Cabrera currently resides in the ATX area with her husband, dog and two cats. She teaches as Assistant Professor of English for Temple College and devotes her free time to writing and making art. Visit her website at tvcannyuncanny.com*

