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Like Baked Alaska

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BIG SKY, SMALL PROSE FLASH CONTEST 2021

The Big Sky Small Prose Flash Contest is *CutBank's* annual prose competition for pieces under 750 words. This year's contest was judged Daryl Scroggins.

Daryl Scroggins will be judging this year's Flash contest. He has taught creative writing and literature at The University of Texas at Dallas, The University of North Texas, and the Writer's Garret, in Dallas. He now lives in Marfa, Texas. His fictions, poems, and creative non-fictions have appeared in magazines and anthologies around the country and abroad, including *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *Blink-Ink*, *Carolina Quarterly*, *CutBank*, *Dime Show Review*, *Egress*, *Fiction Southeast*, *Green Mountains Review*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *KYSO Flash*, *New Flash Fiction Review*, *New York Tyrant*, *Northwest Review*, *Quick Fiction*, and *The Portland Review*. Nominated for a Pushcart Prize several times, his flash fiction and prose poems have also won a number of contests and awards. He is the author of several poetry and fiction chapbooks, as well as *Winter Investments*, a collection of stories (Trilobite Press), and *This Is Not the Way We Came In*, a collection of flash fiction and a flash novel (Ravenna Press). One of his microfictions was reprinted in *Flash Fiction International* (2015; in the Flash Theory section), and another microfiction has been included in Best Microfiction 2020.

The following pieces are this year's contest selections.

FRANCESCA LEADER

LIKE BAKED ALASKA

- *Runner-Up: Big Sky, Small Prose Flash Contest* -

“At last!” Uncle Fi grins.
“Yes!” I say.

Our room at the Renaissance Philadelphia has just one queen-sized bed.

We take turns changing in the bathroom, and climb in, side-by-side, naturally as an old married couple. Uncle Fi puts the ice bucket on the floor near him, just in case the combination of Percocet and alcohol and an immense Morimoto meal erupts like a fifth grader’s science experiment. The meal he drove all the way from the Bronx to eat. Not a last supper, maybe. But one of the last.

People in our family aren’t photogenic, so I distrust the old pictures of him. Bet he was really something with that dark, curly head of hair (now just fringe) all teased out for the disco. Bet he had a tight ass and a warm, sly mouth that drove the boys wild. I was just a baby then. Looking up at a bug-eyed man who cooed and rolled his tongue at me, vying to be the first to make me laugh.

There’s a Marilyn Monroe movie on TV. While we try, drunkenly, to figure out which one, Uncle Fi says, “Kinda like baked Alaska.”

“What, Marilyn?”

“No, that fiery chocolate tart thing we had. The burnt miso ice cream. Hot, cold, bitter, sweet. Incredible interplay.”

“Worth the trip?” I ask.

“You kiddin’?”

Uncle Fi nods off. I stay awake, watching him, watching the movie.

It’s *Let’s Make Love*. I find out at the end, when the commentator comes on in a green corduroy jacket. He says Marilyn had an affair with the French actor. It didn’t turn out well. For her, nothing ever did.

I imagine the moment Uncle Fi got sick. Who the guy was. Where they met. What they did. The moment the virus entered his bloodstream. Sweet as heaven, cold as death.

Uncle Fi wakes up. He smiles, in the blue TV light, like I’m an angel. I may be young, blonde, pretty. But I feel those damn dark circles under my eyes, like the ones under his. Patient black holes that pull and pull, knowing eventually the brightest stars collapse inward.

“Hey, you.”

“Hey.”

He reaches over, touches my face.

“I’m tellin’ you. If you were a boy. . .”

“Yeah. I know.”

If I were a boy, there would be just one wall (blood), instead of two (blood and sex). And it wouldn’t be enough. Our love would tear through. Ignite a family scandal to make Woody Allen blush.

I hold Uncle Fi’s hand holding mine, a bunch of twigs wrapped in dry leaves. And he’s gone again. I shut the TV and lie awake awhile. Listen to his teeth start grinding.

I think about Marilyn. How she didn’t always want to be in that body. How Uncle Fi doesn’t much like the body he got, either. How my love for him makes me not want mine. And if we’re all stuck in boxes that don’t match our contents forever, in this life and others.