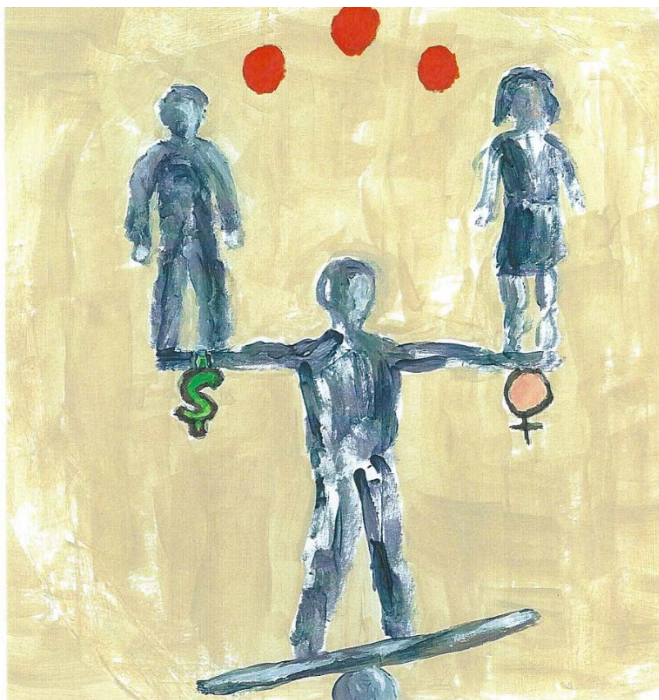


Three Poems & Art by Gene McCormick



Buying And Selling

At eleven o'clock this morning, two hours from now, I will meet a stranger to sell him something he contacted me about. He has negotiated a forty percent discount (someone must have told him I do not like to haggle pricing) which makes me feel like I am gifting him the item rather than selling it. It is not always better to gift than receive.

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I am five minutes early, he is five minutes late, a typical buyer seller head game. Identifying the stranger is not difficult; we are the only two people around. Pleasantries are exchanged, he looks at what I am offering and is satisfied, the transaction made with no further negotiation. He pays by check with his name, address and telephone number on it and an hour later the check clears my bank. Transaction over and done.

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In my car and driving to an office supply store, the rains come, a hard July rain, and as I sit waiting for the deluge to let up a familiar car pulls into the parking space next to mine. I hadn't seen the driver for some time, and while our relationship is casual, there is a sense of possibilities now enhanced by coincidence. She sells things for a living, used houses, and is smart enough to let the rain subside before making a dash for the store, and I am that smart, too. We stand in the store foyer, dripping nonetheless: I'll dry you off if you'll dry me off, and the arrangement was struck.

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By day's end I had sold something and gained something. A good day, in balance.



The House In The Middle Of The Block

No alarm clock necessary as Mason-Dixon Line morning sun turns the bedroom window shades a fiery orange, yet there is no movement on the bed. Stretched straight beneath the bedcovers, her body a Tootsie Roll under a sheet of blank typing paper: hard to the touch, uninviting to look at, a story yet to play out but all in all, a confection.

Faceted blue dust is in evidence. It may not cover the top of the Bombay chest in the foyer or be on the glass-

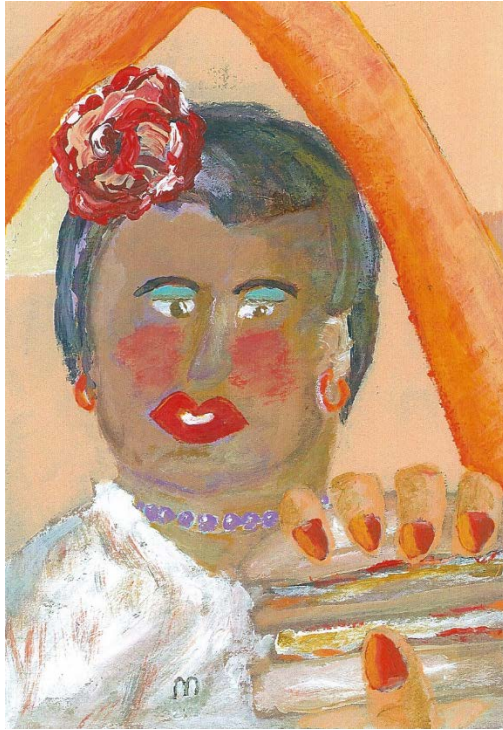
topped end tables or along the top edges of books in the library but hangs in the air, dotting the sheen of AM sun lamping through parlor windows, like an amber-trapped BC Egyptian scarab beetle, waiting to settle on whatever is beneath it but for now being an uninvited swarm bobbing in transparency.

The Concert Grand piano, certified in gold-leaf script across the frontispiece, gathers dust in the far corner of the Victorian wallpapered room that used to be a parlor, positioned aside ceiling-to-floor original glass French windows allowing sun and shadow to drape the keyboard while gauzy white curtains wind-brush against the legs and stool as alphabetical notes staccato through space, loud then soft, softer, then not at all before hammering again: scales, cantata's, simple notes banging about the parlor like a fly trapped in a mason jar—occurrences that haven't happened for 27 years as walls finally begin to heal from percussive notes...

No matter how wide the book pages are spread there is a thin, grey-black shadow line down the center, the binding edge, a grey strip unsullied by printer's type. Firmly grasping a cover in each hand, the book, a hardcover of medium heft, is cracked open and a forefinger is run along the shadow. The woman bends her face to the pages and runs her tongue along the same line, doing this with eyes shut before closing the book firmly and pressing down on the glossy dust jacket with the flat palm of her hand.

Two storeys down, on the ground floor, there are sounds, parts of words being spoken, entire words of which only fragments can be heard. For a while there was no noise except for heavy rain against the safety-glass picture window but the storm blew by too soon, leaving halves

of words and the fading wahhhh of an emergency vehicle siren, residue more a product of the squall than the inconsequential conversation.



Overtime At The Fast Food Restaurant

A hundred extra pounds doesn't slow down her job performance as an inside order taker working the restaurant's fast food counter, nor does the fact that English is her second—a distant second—language but a simple smile can't cover for her chronic inattentiveness to customer's orders and the consequent need for the order to be repeated as stubby fingers punch wrong register keys, thwarting her desire to well-earn a marginally above minimum wage and to keep an impatient line from blocking the aisle and there is always the hungry

young impatient customer who lacks understanding of the stresses put on a seventh grade scholar by having to learn a complicated, obtuse key punch system long ago eliminating the need or use of an old-fashioned order pad and manually scribbled orders on which “Cheeseburger loaded hold onions, small fries, coffee with five creams” was somehow deciphered by the cooks (food baggers) and making excusable the fact her mind now throbs with anticipation of meeting the assistant night manager out back in his 4x4 once their shifts are over and after she wipes perspiration from her forehead and from the darkish down across her upper lip.

Gene McCormick's writing is regularly seen in select literary journals as well as published collections. The author of eighteen books, a combination of fiction, poetry and non-fiction, he paints for diversion and is the regular illustrator for Misfitmagazine.net. His art is in private and commercial collections nationwide. McCormick lives in Wayne, Illinois, a general area which is the genesis for much of his narrative writing