

Börkur Sigurbjörnsson

Small Talk

flash fiction



Urban Volcano

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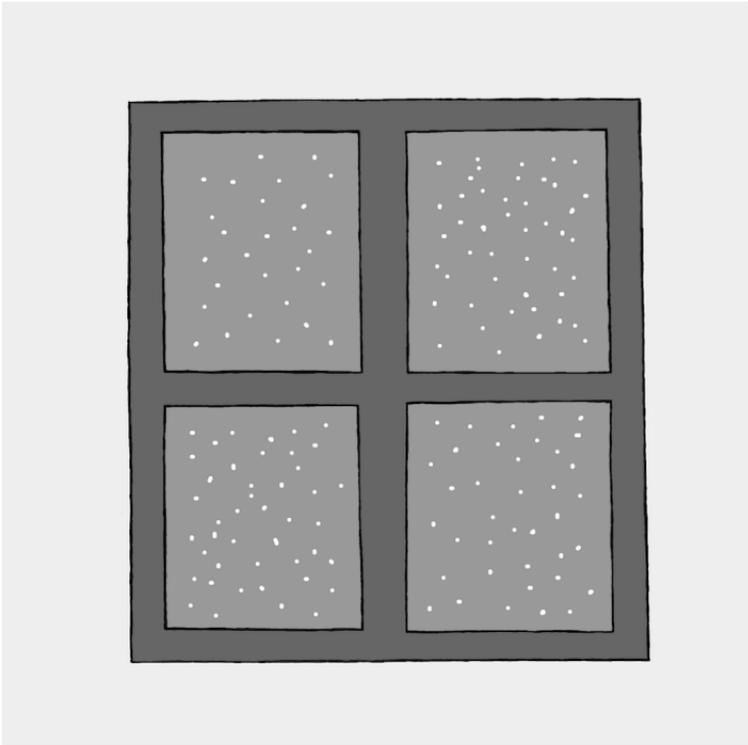
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Small Talk

I stood by the window and looked out as I sipped the thin coffee. Outside there was a snowstorm raging. Everything was white.

I turned around and looked over the room. Some people were sitting down while other stood upright. Everyone was sipping their coffees and either looked down into their cup or into the air without saying anything. I felt this party was missing some small talk—something to liven up the atmosphere. Yet, I couldn't think of a subject that might raise the interest of people around here.

What was I doing here? That was easy to answer. I was learning to write poetry—in a course I had been given as a Christmas present by my parents. But what was I doing HERE? What was I doing in a community center in the countryside in the middle of January. What was a high school student from Reykjavík doing at a poetry course with middle-aged farmers? Middle-aged was a flattering choice of phrasing in this context. What was the city-slicker doing in the countryside?

The course was actually good. It was working from the point of view my parents had intended. They had had enough of their son's contemporary poetry style that completely disregarded the rich Icelandic poetry heritage and wanted him to get to know the traditional structure and form. The heritage was definitely to be found in this countryside community center with post-middle-aged poetry loving farmers in a January snowstorm. To my surprise, I was enjoying myself and learning quite a lot.

The poems resulting from this course were diverse. I wrote under the influence from Lord Byron and Rousseau. The farmers wrote under the influence from Birgir the ram and Sólveig the sheep. Maybe I was exaggerating a bit the cultural difference between myself and the farmers. Over lunch I had learned that at a farm nearby, Hegel and Kierkegaard were chewing hay side by side and Augusta Ada Lovelace Byron had given birth to three lambs last summer. Despite my prejudgement, the farmers were no less knowledgeable of the classics than I was—on the contrary in some cases.

We were maybe not as different as I had imagined—the farmers and I. Weren't we connecting with each other through the poetry? Who knew if I could maybe make some coffee-break small talk around here. There had to be something I could think of saying. A couple of farmers had been talking about snow coverage a few moments ago. Now they were silent—like myself—staring into the blizzard raging outside. Wasn't that it? I could make a comment about how strong it was blowing today. Something like that. It would no doubt be a successful conversation starter around here.

“I guess this is what they call a snowstorm in Reykjavík,” commented one of the farmers before I had been able to put my thought into words.

The other farmers laughed and then returned to their silence. I settled for an awkward smile. Maybe I wasn't yet ready to make small talk in this crowd.

About The Author

Börkur Sigurbjörnsson is a computer scientist by training and makes his living by developing software, but writes fiction in his spare time. Börkur is born and raised in Reykjavík, Iceland, but has over the past decades lived in various cities around the world, with prolonged stays in Amsterdam, Barcelona, Burseid, Düsseldorf, London, Montevideo and Reykjavík. Börkur regularly publishes flash fiction and short stories on his website Urban Volcano.

Books By The Author

Talk To Strangers, short stories (2019)

Flash 52, flash fiction (2017)

999 Abroad, short stories (2012)

Other links

Börkur Sigurbjörnsson (homepage)

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