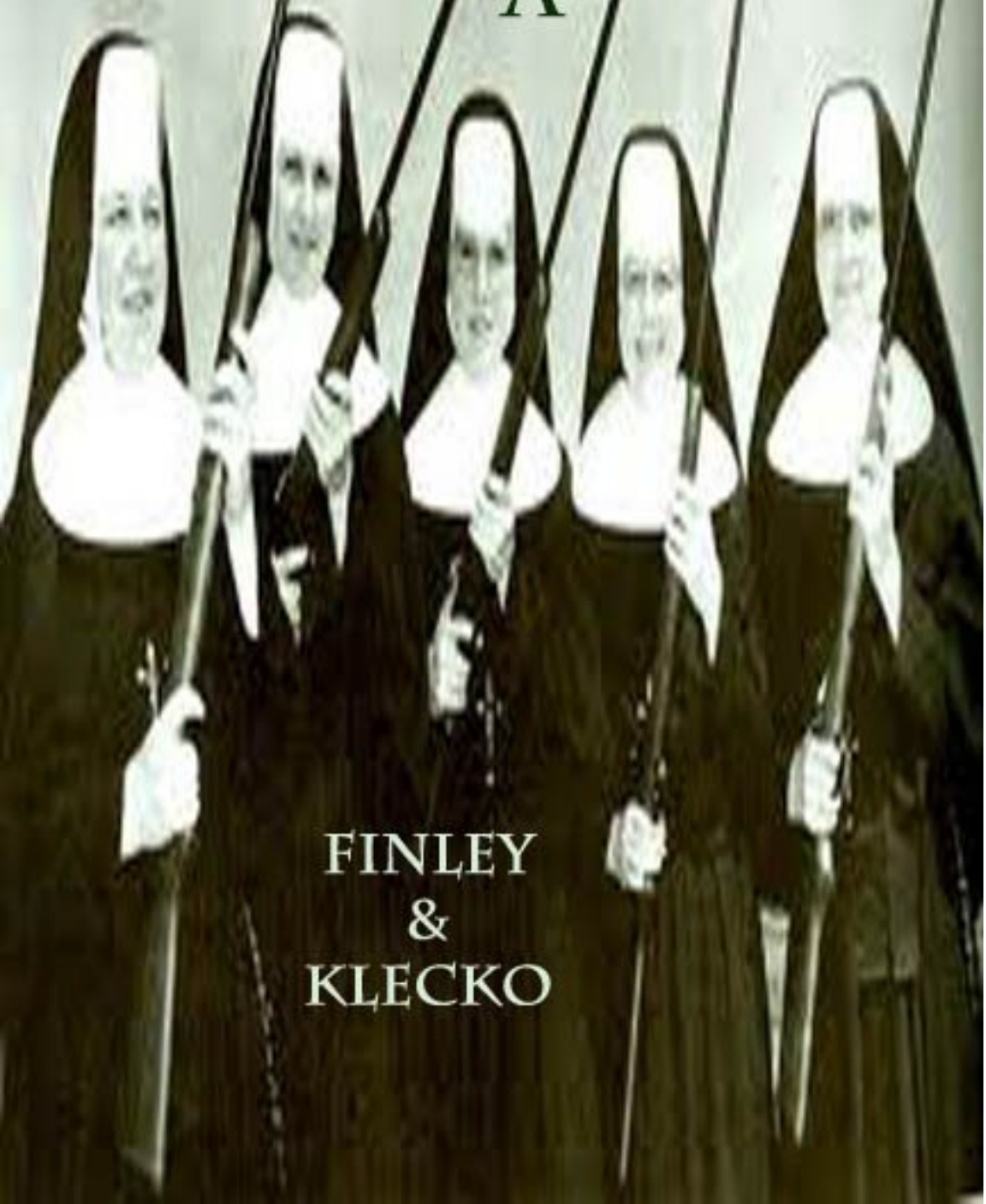


OUT FOR A LARK



FINLEY
&
KLECKO

OUT FOR A LARK

by Klecko & Finley

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INTRODUCTION **BY FAMOUS AUTHOR**

Finley & Klecko. Each one of them regularly baffles me. Together. Something else.

It's pointless to try to figure out who is who. Together—they take great joy in women, birds, dogs, work, old Saint Paul.

One thing does lead to another. As in a conversation. Or a friendly game of ping pong.

All you need to know—they each remember those nuns. Good boys at heart. In the back of the room, egging each other on.

Turns out—they loved those nuns. And the nuns loved them. You will too. Especially if you're a nun.

TIM NOLAN

13 YEARS OLD

Tom Thumb closes at 11 p.m.
At 11:06 a Bonneville pulls up
And two nuns pop out and bum-rush the door
They are in need of cigarettes
But the cashier must be a Lutheran
Because she refused to answer the ladies' prayers
So the brides of Christ are in a black mood
And brush past me and a friend
Who have spent most of July in this parking lot
"Excuse me sister," I call out
"Would you like a Marlboro Red?"
I light it for her as she pulls back her wimple
Exposing her hair, and closes her eyes
And when that smoke shoots down the pipe
The Holy Spirit gives me reason to know
For the first time...I am absolved

I WOULD SAY

That women are like
beautiful birds, sleek
and hollow-boned, long
of leg with velvet throats
and rustling wings

Except that in reality
the most beautiful birds
are males and that
is just something I
have to deal with.

RESPECT

In a bakery
When your wife files for divorce
The dough mixer will tell you
He never liked the bitch

In a bakery
When your dad dies
The oven man grows hostile
Itemizing his father's drunken exploits

In a bakery
When your dog dies
The crew will mourn in silence
Knowing certain forms of suffering
Are sacred, and require reverence

I'M GLAD I DON'T HAVE BIRD FEET

It would be so hard
to put socks on.

THE BLIND OLD MAN AND HIS CANCEROUS DOG

The man with cataracts looked up while he stroked the retriever's shoulder.

He had just been informed that his companion of twelve years had cancer of the stomach and would have to be put down.

"I'm sorry to hear that," I said. "How terrible to lose your friend, that you rely on so much."

"Yeah," the blind old man said, kneading the dog's ruff. "But I've been through a lot of dogs."

SKULLS AND AIRPORTS

I took the wrong turn
I cut through the airport
I got to the place where you drop off travelers
I almost drove by, but then saw an old man
Embracing a woman who may have been his wife

Their moment of separation was telling
Touching enough to turn off the ignition
And watch people step away from one another

On a sidewalk that offers
Departure to each corner of the globe
If you wait in one place
Engulfed in this mob
You'll witness people exercising emotions
Ranging from despair to elation
I only stayed 7 minutes

People are flawed
People are stupid
They disappoint
And seldom deserve trust

But if you stand outside an airport
Where people send the ones they love away
It might be just enough to give you hope

WHY GREEN IS GREEN

Maybe what we mean by green
is different to every person.
Except don't we all mean
the same exact thing
when our hearts crack open
and we embrace —
we know it's the same when
we break into a gallop
dashing seven blocks
at a clip in the moonlight,
on account of our kissing,
on account of feeling impossible love.
We are drunk and laughing,
whizzing on a rose bush behind
somebody's garage.
Certain of everything we stand
hand in hand as the sun
breaks through the backlots
and lights up the green
underneath our dancing feet.

NOTE TO HUSBANDS

If you are alone with a woman and
She mentions she's getting divorced

If you are alone with a single
Woman who stares at you in silence

If you are alone with a redhead
And she so much as cracks a smile

It might be in everyone's best interest
If you turn around, and run like hell

INK FUNERAL

She sat in silence
Empty eyes
Never flinching
While the tattoo artist
Did a cover up on her Tramp Stamp

The original tattoo was the name
Of a former lover
Of the father of her daughter
Of the guy who put a bullet
Preciously through her ribcage

Some memories fade
The woman explained
But this motherfucker
Is getting covered with roses
I don't want the bastard to vanish

I want him buried forever

THE GRATE ON CARROLL AVENUE

Lucy pauses at the storm sewer grate
and she trembles.
Imagine having a nose
that can process so much information
and having the underworld snoring below.
Even a little dog like her understands
we are living above a giant living thing,
and we feel the heave and fall of its ribs.
It may be sleeping,
posing no immediate danger,
but a dog can smell the smell
of dogs and fish and cats and rats below,
their meat still strung between the plated teeth.

A CATHOLIC PERSPECTIVE

Driving through Deadwood
We saw an older couple
Walking down the street
Wearing matching windbreakers

They must be Lutherans, I said
My wife was not convinced
But how could she understand
After all, she is a Jew

The Missouri Synod have their ways
Baking Bundts instead of lemon bars
You almost never hear them swear
And they vacation in a cottage

They actually read the Bible
And claim we worship Mary
As a mother; I would think
You'd support a messiah's mom

My wife reclined her seat
Stretched out and closed her eyes
Instructing me to wake her up
Before we arrived in Hell

TOOTHBRUSH

My brother and I peed into the toilet,
our streams dueling one another,
the amazing hydraulics of a seven and nine year old.

Then we brushed our teeth and Pat bumped me
and my toothbrush sprang into the unflushed water.

If we flushed away the evidence it might
break our grandparents' pipes.
If they came upon it they would surely be annoyed. I had made up my
mind
I was not going in after it.

Grandpa Lawrence, thin and diabetic,
stood in the doorway and without a word
knelt and retrieved the dripping toothbrush.

We'll get you a new one, he said quietly,
and rinsed his hands.
We didn't know he was a farmer
who lived his whole life in piss.

But we gaped at each other, the way kids do,
realizing someone was wholly on our side.

ALONG THE BLACK SEA

Most of us drank too much the previous night
We had to start our shift much too early
In silence we entered a windowless building
Under a cloak of darkness lasting hours,
All thoughts were isolated
Our boredom seemed independent
Because each of us thought
Our drudgery was exclusive
Finally there was a murmur
Forcing everyone to give attention
To a spectacle
Through the keyhole streamed a razor of light
As if to fill a pocket with sunshine
And give our dark day meaning

ON THE BOULEVARD

Walking past the café before dawn,
the young couple are swinging their held hands,
they are ecstatic and uncool.
He steps behind her and starts massaging her shoulders,
then decides Oh, the hell with that and hugs her
around the middle, hands coming to rest on her breasts.
He is grateful that she has shown him her nakedness.
It was the greatest event of his life, bar none.
She walks in a skip step,
leaping at one point to swat the overhanging leaves.
The look on her face is one of accomplishment and joy.
This boy adores her and she was equal to the challenge.
She does not look at him directly,
but she grins as she advances down the sidewalk,
jubilant in her power.

FACTORY TOWN

Production takes place
In the part of the city
Where beauty will take no root

Cinder-block borders
Turn back confident musings
Squelching all hopes of escape

Yet, there she sits
Alone in the break room
Next to the Coke machine

And it's that very moment
His fortune whispers
This is the place to be

SENTENCE

Nature divides us into male and female.

The woman is the object of loving,
the beautiful, the one acted upon,
kissed and caressed and implanted
with the substance of life.

The man is the subject of the sentence,
the one doing the loving,
he acts and is not much acted upon.

Like a hunter or a soldier he
isolates the object and sends forth his sting,
which is why, as I stand before you
at the cash register paying the tab,
on the line that says tip,
I always enter forty percent.

RANDOLPH AVENUE

There's nothing creepier than walking home
After closing down a pub
With the wisdom of your elders echoing in your mind

Don't go outside after midnight
Nothing good can happen
Safety is accompanied by sunshine

But perverts, addicts, and thugs
Typically close their shops of chaos
At about 3:30, when their plunder has disappeared

Between this moment and sunrise
Sanity is briefly restored to the world
Because God's whispering is no longer contested

GAS AND PLASMA

This is what fire is about,
and stars.

Gas, and plasma
and idling cars.

Whippoorwill
at the windowsill,

robots wobbling
in the sands of on Mars,

Why all this flapping
flaming feeling?

It's because.

124 DEGREES

With two hours before sunrise
The last baker enters the break room
Joining a crew, soaked and faded

Their shift hasn't started
Condensation on windows
And Gatorade puddles
Serve as warnings
That this won't be a day for talking

In silence they wait
Listening to the compressors
Wheezing for air on the other side
Of the oven room door

Each considers leaving
But fears being the first
To turn tail
While their brothers face the dragon

Only years later will they realize
Why they had to carry on
It wasn't for themselves
But each other

DON'T

Don't get too attached to your feet.
They'll soon take off for the hills
because they must be going away,
leaving you on spinning stilts.

Don't plan on holding onto your eyes.
They have things to see on their own,
and all this time, all the livelong days
they were only on loan.

It's possible to go about your
business without skin,
but you will need a soft, wet coat
to hide within.

FORSWEARANCE

My brothers and I glance up from our Sugar Pops.
There was our mother standing by the kitchen sink,
the back of her hand pressed against her forehead,
opera-style, as if taking her own temperature,
which always ran high.

Things like this tend to be hereditary.
I was fortunate to grow up to be a poet,
so when that mood or any other mood overtakes me,
instead of passing it on to the people I love,
to the unformed and innocent gathered around me,
it goes into a drawer, hurting no one.

A MAN WITH A HOLE

There was a man with a hole in him
that he thought nothing of.

When he showed it to people,
they said to him,
That doesn't look right at all.

But don't all men have holes?
the man asked.
Yes, they said, but you should really
have that looked at.

A FINAL STROLL

When Judas placed his kiss upon the Christ
Crucifixion was not the issue
Betrayal crushed the Savior's heart

Such a blow has toppled me
From the hand of my own daughter
When she announced her intention to marry

I offered gifts to keep her with me
Unicorns and ponies
However, my tribute held no sway

My arm linked in hers,
Momentum whisked us down the aisle.
The spirit of redemption filled my soul

When I saw the trembling groom
Just now realizing how much more
He would need her than she would need him

How Good Of A Guy Was He

He worried that the flesh-eating bacteria were not getting enough.

BREAKFAST IN NEBRASKA

On the first day Joe's Cafe
Hung a big screen TV from their wall
All of the customers watched CNN

There was a special presentation
Of the Diamond Jubilee
Where the Queen floated down the Thames
On a royal barge, red and gold

One thousand vessels floated past
Fourteen miles of Union Jack bunting
And a belfry boat glided close behind
Mimicking Big Ben's ringtones as they passed

When the waitress returned
She became caught up in the fanfare
And placed her order pad on the table
While informing all her customers

"You won't see that in Omaha!"

DISHWASHER

It's by far the best job in a restaurant
The cooks are up to their elbows in anguish
racing to meet their exacting requirements

The waitstaff are scribbling salad orders
The barkeep's pretending to listen to stories
The coat check stares from her darkened box

But the dishwasher warms his blood at the wrists
And it goes to his heart like wonderful liquor
Everyone yelling, but he doesn't hear

PRIESTS

Even on the most sweltering days
when cement workers and waitresses
were tottering in the pews,
the priests suited up in all the layers —
alb, cincture, chasuble, stole.
The acolytes looked on with open mouths
as the priests dressed, muttering.
They appeared powdered, as if with corn starch,
their pale parts blanching in the gymnasium light.
Their hands fluttered through the blonde cabinetry
alighting on oils and incense, linen and gold,
muscatel, ribbons, and thin coins of bread,
the looks on their unlined faces all duty,
half lonely men, half swans.

GOOD THING

We forget the names of things
or else they get common

That thing over there, it's a --
but what *do* you call a thing like that?

I know, don't tell me,
It's on the tip of my tongue

No, that's wrong, it isn't there,
it's light years from my tongue

But the more we forget the more
we become like poets

each moment new to us,
this impossible now

like just waking up
and stretching in sunlight

everything strange
and unknown

GHOSTS

I have it on good authority
That after a man passes middle age
But hasn't quite approached *old*
A small window of time opens
And his sleeping pattern
Will return to its infant cycle
Where every hour, on the hour
He awakes and is visited
By ghosts from the past
Who enjoy nothing more
Than illuminating moments
That everyone else has forgotten
If the memory is tragic
His wife cannot help
Because in the dark
When he hears her breath
Soft and rhythmic
The universe makes it apparent
He is on his own

THE WRITER

I am the one who paints WASH ME with his finger
on the filthy backs of semis.

I am the one who writes on the laundromat wall,
FOR A GOOD TIME, VISIT VALLEY FAIR.

I am the fellow whose note you find on a wet sidewalk,
on a sheet of damp, blue-lined paper,
just the words I CALLED BUT YOU WERE OUT.

Wherever a plane is towing a message over a stadium
saying MELISSA WILL YOU MARRY ME?,
wherever someone has spray-painted DON'T atop a stop sign.
wherever a list is wadded up with the crossed-out words
MILK PEANUT BUTTER GARLIC SALT TUNA FISH,
that's me.
I'm the writer.

INSIDE A CHICAGO MUSEUM

I would come from Wrigley
And she from the hotel
To begin our evening of romance
At the museum

But the Cubs went extra innings
And my arrival was delayed
I found her in the foyer
Hypnotized by a chandelier

Unnoticed, I watched the light
Illuminate her face
Like it does with those halo ladies
On religious postcards

I emerged apologetic
Offering to buy the chandelier —
That's when she told me
It's better to just claim the moment

BEATING HEART ON SIDEWALK

What do you do about it?

It's not cool to kick it under the hedge.

You could take it inside and try to raise it like your own,

but it's hard to see where that will go.

You could call the American Heart Association,

but this isn't really their bag.

Police are no good, they'll tag it and bag it.

you can see the dog in the screen door

licking its lips.

This is the problem with every heart.

We see it huffing, a little bit scuffed

from passing traffic, so brave, so hopeful,

so eager to get back to business.

We know it's there, but we don't know

what to do.

BIG ASS ANGELS

Beauty has always distracted us from the truth.
Adam was deceived by Eve.

Was she good or did she just look that way —
a man never knows.

Artists likewise get taken in.
Given a choice between naked beauties
to model the saints
and lumpy people from around town,
you know which way they're going to go.

Women of the world, take heart!
from the knowledge the masters could not see,
that no one is prettier than anyone else.

Did you think that after wading through this life
with all the misery caking its sides,
heaven is going to taunt us with nubile starlets
and upturned breasts?

The eyes tell lies,
what we call beauty
is just temptation.

Help is coming, dearest friends.
A bell will sound and all will know
what we hoped was true,

but could not quite believe.

We are beautiful, lovely ones —
so beautiful.

And then we are beautiful
beyond even that.

MUTTNIK

Laika heard the children laughing
From what appeared to be a distant room
The most beautiful sound she ever woke to
When Victor brought her home from work last night
And took her straight to bed
It seemed natural to assume they were alone
Fraternizing was considered unprofessional
But this secret would remain safe
By this time tomorrow she would be gone
Boarded onto a tin can
Filled with rocket fuel and no parachute
All the more reason to break protocol
This is why the entire science team
And the launching crew
Held their tongues and looked away
While Victor escorted her
Off the project site
So her last day of freedom
Could be spent outdoors
Getting belly rubs
From his daughters

YOUR BEST FRIENDS WON'T TELL YOU

What is it that is holding you back?

It would be so easy to say

You talk too much,

You think you're so smart,

You're chickenshit about this and that.

If we knew perhaps

we could change and stop

annoying others so.

But our friends don't want to hurt us. They don't want to be the ones
who tell the terrible truth.

Neither do they want to lose us,

to be left behind as unloyal

while we skip off to be with new friends

who see the selves we have repaired,

but will never really know.

DOG HALFWAY ON BED

She knows she's not allowed on
and she would not cross
that line of prohibition
but that doesn't mean
she won't cheat.

Look at her, standing on her back legs
with her body draped over the comforter
arms stretched out straight like a sphinx
so that her body is at a perfect right angle.
Uncomfortable-looking and yet
you can hardly hear her snore.

THE CREATION OF WOMAN

There are 1,189 chapters in the Bible
In the second chapter of Genesis
Adam was promised free rent
Complimentary groceries and eternal life

The only requirement was compliance
But paradise remained for only a few short verses
By the end of Genesis 3
Adam tried to impress a woman

Everything was apples and snakes after that

While this took place
The seraphim sat perched on cloud tops
Pointing fingers of indictment below
But woe unto them

Angels had never seen women
And upon further investigation
They passed through the veil
With the hope of impregnating the fair ladies in Genesis 6

Everything was floods and arks after that

For the next 1183 chapters
Only one concept remains constant
Angels and men find a new object for their affection
Girls had become a higher priority than the Creator

BUILDING A POEM

A mighty gate swings open
with the very first line,
it is your declaration that something great is underway,
and the reader must pull over
and idle his engine.

The opening stanza has a curse placed upon it —
it must be very good but it mustn't swamp the boat.
You have to have something to follow it up.

And isn't that the problem with everything, the middle?
Being born is amazing, and going out again at the end
is inevitably dramatic,
but in between is where the good ideas get stifled
like sneezes into handkerchiefs,
in between is where we sow sunflowers and salt
to keep people guessing.

And now the suspense builds, as the first plates
spun on sticks start to wobble,
and the performer furrows his brow
and glances up
at the source of clearest danger,
all this while perched on a steel cable stretched taut
with one end in the tenement,
the other on Park Avenue.

This is a good time for the neighborhood clown
to reveal his broken heart,
with a brief digression about childhood disappointment

.

And then, not with a clap but something like a hush
as the crowd parts and the donkey
shambles into the courtyard riderless,
but dragging a rope of clanking cans,
between its clapboard teeth
is a pink begonia as big as the world.

I LOVE YOU, JANE GOODALL

I would pay to share your silence
While bugs crawl on me
Secretly hoping a chimp or two would surface

We could sit on beds of leaves
Or maybe empty Scotch cases
I'm told you are partial to Famous Grouse

If the jungle remained silent
And we were left to our devices
Maybe that wouldn't be so bad

We could climb into your tree house
And you would make us Oolong tea
While I tell you how beautiful you are

DOROTHY'S SLIPPERS

~A Smithsonian Postmortem

They weren't actually red
But more of a dull burgundy
Otherwise Technicolor
Would have made them fluorescent orange

They weren't actually ruby
Sequins were glued in place
This made the footwear lighter
Not to mention cost effective

A sign behind velvet ropes explained
Three other pairs existed
Each set of slippers
Created for specific duties

You stared into the display case
Remained silent
I wondered if such functionality
Crippled your lifetime of fantasy

Not a word was spoken
As we filed through the exhibit
Until we stepped outside
And you announced

"Wasn't that spectacular?"

LESSON

There are people who have not been held in twenty years.
Understandably they are easily reduced to tears.

If one were just to see them and press close
All the built-up aching inside explodes.

Why can't the wounded have what the rest have?
It's because heartache is unattractive.

LIQUOR STORE PARKING LOT

Hula Girl — Hula Girl

Dance beneath the raindrops

I'm pretty sure my windshield will keep you dry

Left/Right — Left/Right

Your hips gyrate with fluidity

As if your balance was determined on a spring

Tick-Tock — Tick-Tock

The clouds eclipse the moon

But it's still engaging when you dance in the neon

Hula Girl — Hula Girl

I am fearful that our tryst must end

My girlfriend is headed towards the car and she has Tanqueray

CONVERSATION IN SILENCE

I took you to the playground at night
So you could have the swing set to yourself
You said – Push me higher
Push, me higher
And I did
The chains began to creak
Your body became a blur
Silhouetted against the stars
A tiny frame whooshing like a comet
There's going to be hell to pay
When Grandma discovers our adventure
Explanations will be pointless
You said – Push me higher
Push, me higher
And I did
Because nothing is more beautiful
Than the glowing face
Of a granddaughter
Who smiles back
At the moon

NOTE FROM THE **A**UTHORS

Danny Klecko and **Mike Finley** both live in Saint Paul. They have been friends for 25 years. Klecko is CEO of Saint Agnes Baking Company. Finley writes websites for law firms.

In recent years the two have mounted several arts events in the Twin Cities, including the annual KPV Kerouac Award and the annual State Fair Blue Ribbon Poets competition. They are coeditors of an online publication, *LIEF* magazine, executive producers at Lucky Park Productions, and editors in chief at Kraken Press.

Asked why they chose to publish a book of short poems together, instead of separately, like most people do, they answer that it's more fun this way, and at least each is assured one faithful reader. Klecko and Finley are married to Sue McGleno and Rachel Frazin, respectively.

Special thanks to copyeditor and quality assurance director Dara Syrkin for her proofing and reproving.

Some of these poems have appeared previously online or in Lucky Park albums.

Finley



Klecko



**"I never thought I would live to read the likes
of Danny Klecko and Mike Finley, and I didn't."**

John Ciardi



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