

*November*

*Seas*

winning entries from  
the Written Word  
short story competition



# Novembre non esiste

by Lavalpe Kamachi

Un vecchio e un bambino camminano, mano nella mano, sulla strada che porta lontano.

“Che cosa è il tempo?” domanda il bambino.

“Il tempo è il tempo”, risponde il vecchio.

“E di che cosa è fatto il tempo?”

“ E’ fatto di giorni, di mesi...”.

“ E che mese è oggi?”, chiede ancora il bambino.

“ Oggi è novembre.” Risponde il vecchio.

“ E quando è novembre?”

Il vecchio si ferma a pensare.

Dopo qualche istante risponde: “E’ novembre quando un corpo può stare per giorni su una spiaggia senza che nessuno se ne accorga.

E’ novembre quando il mare prende quel colore che non ha ancora un nome e tu cerchi di trovargliene uno, ma non si può, è un colore senza nome.

E’ novembre quando il vento ti entra nei vestiti, sporco di sale e di bagnato, e tu non l’allontani perché assomiglia al tocco delle braccia perdute del tuo amore.

E’ novembre quando la barca dei pescatori resta in rada, ormeggiata accanto alle altre barche, tutte schierate contro i flutti che scavalcano la diga foranea, come l’apocalisse. Un piccolo esercito silenzioso che sbatte e tremola e scroscia e scricchiola e geme e stenta, aspettando che il Drago dell’inverno passi in fretta.

E’ novembre quando il molo solitario, abbandonato e fragile, ( il cemento sotto gli schiaffi del mare è fragile) si fa sbattere dalle onde come una donna dal suo amante più raro.

E’ novembre quando la pioggia è un flagello sottile, l’espiazione del sole dell’estate.

E’ novembre quando il telefono tace, ma sulla riva, portato dalla corrente tempestosa, tra i resti del naufragio del tuo cuore, arriva improvviso un messaggio in bottiglia.

E' novembre quando scrivi una lettera a nessuno, con le parole più vere che conosci, perché a novembre essere soli è una prigione che non concede nemmeno l'ora d'aria.

Il bambino si ferma a riflettere.

Poi dice: " Novembre non mi piace... E quindi se non mi piace non esiste."

Il vecchio sorride e scuote il capo. " Hai ragione Aprile... Novembre non esiste."

Poi riprende a camminare col bambino accanto.

## **NOVEMBER**

**(English translation by Adele Ward)**

An old man and a child are walking, hand in hand, on a road that stretches into the distance.

"What's time?" the child asks.

"Time is time," the old man replies.

"And what is time made of?"

"It's made of days, of months..."

"And which month is it today?" the child asks again.

"Today it's November," the old man answers.

" And when is November?"

The old man stops to think.

After a few moments he replies: "It's November when a body can lie on the beach for a few days before anyone notices.

It's November when the sea takes on that colour that doesn't have a name yet, and you try to find one for it, but it's impossible - it's a colour with no name.

It's November when the wind gets inside your clothes, dirty with salt and damp, and you don't resist it because it resembles the touch of the lost arm of your love.

It's November when the fishing boat stays in the harbour, moored next to the other boats, all lined up against the storm-tossed waves that leap over the dyke like an apocalypse. A small silent army that beats and trembles and crashes and creaks and groans and resists, hoping that the dragon of winter passes quickly.

It's November when the solitary breakwater, abandoned and weak (cement is weak against the slaps of the sea), allows itself to be beaten by the waves as a woman is by her most rare lover.

It's November when the telephone is silent but on the bank, carried by the stormy current, among the debris from the shipwreck of your heart a message in a bottle arrives unexpectedly.

It's November when you write a letter to nobody, with the most honest words you know, because in November being alone is a prison which doesn't even give the reprieve of an hour of air."

The child stops to reflect.

Then he says: "I don't like November. And so, if I don't like it, it doesn't exist."

The old man smiles and shakes his head. "You're right, April. November doesn't exist."

Then he starts walking again with the child beside him.

*(This story was the runner-up in the competition)*

## November's Seas

by Zane Nordlicht

Nothing pleased him more than the clean crisp curl of a wood shaving, as he stroked the hand plane along the plank. It was what he loved. Folks often figured he loved nothing else since his dear Angel died. It was part of the reason the boat was taking so long. Fifteen years now. At fifty-three, it had not seemed so overly ambitious to convert that life-long dream into a plan. A forty-two foot ketch that he had based largely around a L. Francis Herreshoff design, traditional keel, sea friendly, fine accommodation for two. He had figured he could finish in four years, maybe six on the long side. It would be perfect; retire early and set sail to the Caribbean with his wife. Her name was Angela but he had called her Angel since they first met. And when he met her, it was one of those things he had just know would be true; he was going to marry her and it was going to be wonderful. And in this case it was true.

He had started the project with all the vigor of a new commitment. He canvassed the sawmills along the East Coast for the logs he wanted, even cutting a white oak on a friends farm that would become the keel. He enjoyed the time spent finding the odd branches that would become the knees, selecting the best grained board for the ones to steam into frames. Planning out the lists of materials, a concession made to go with stainless fasteners and rigging, Barient winches, each detail considered for suitability, safety and look. It was not a labor. It was a joy. That is until Angel took sick. It was the cancer; still mentioned in a subdued voice, lest one invite it back.

The cancer was aggressive as was the treatment. Nathan turned his complete attention to her. The work on the boat left to an occasional fiddling about until it languished in the shed essentially forgotten. The ten years that they fought that beast were long and hard. There were moments of great hope as it seemed that things were turning around, and the long periods of pain and struggle as she endured chemo, radiation, operations. Those last months, when she had rarely woken, he was usually at her side, and he was there holding her when her last whisper of breath departed.

He was a lost man about the town for a while after that. Though he was never much of a talker, he was less so thereafter. After some months, he began to putter about on the boat again. Playing with the wood really, making bits of

progress but without passion. It was more a welcome distraction. He was in no hurry to finish, truth is, he probably didn't want to finish. Why sail off now?

So it came as quite an irritation when Nancy walked into his shed one afternoon with a, "Well what are you up to here? Do you really intend to ever finish this thing?"

"What? What is it you want?" he answered in an almost angry challenging tone.

"I just want to see what the hell you are doing with this thing and with yourself." she shot back. There was a sparkle in her eye, that he noticed and it set him off balance a bit. It being a small town, he knew who she was of course. But he really didn't know her well. She was about four years younger than him but always fit as a fiddle. He recalled that her husband had died about eight months after Angel, and that had been about two and a half years before she walked into his shed.

They couldn't have been more different Nathan and Nancy. He was scruffy, with well worn and worked flannel shirts, and coveralls. While once, he had pondered rather poetically, he now was more inclined to simple phrases with pragmatic purpose. She was bright and focused, always crisp in dress, a sense of style even when in workshop clothes. She knew a good bit about boats too, commenting on the work Nathan was doing. He took to ignoring most of her comments when she originally started stopping by. Thinking maybe she would just go away and leave him be. But she came quite regularly, "I like the way you have handled the sheer strake", "How are you going to work the anchor roller and lock on the bow?", "Have you decided what you are going to do with the companion way hatch?" She would ask these things as he worked the wood with a renewed interest and pleasure in the work and the material. Gradually he came to anticipate her visits, looking out into the night with a hint of concern if she didn't show up. He valued her questions and comments too. They developed into conversations, debates even when considering what compromises to trade off on some detail or another.

Eventually they would be seen going into town for coffee and pie at Pat's Coffee shop, or a rum and tonic at the Star Fish Tavern. But it was not without preparation that these outings started. "You are not coming with me that way." She would say when he first suggested a walk into town. And he would stop at the house and change out of his worn flannel shirt and sawdust covered coveralls. He would put on a clean flannel shirt, and fresh jeans, which more recently show the skillful touch of an iron, Nancy having appointed herself as in charge of spiffing up old Nate. And if truth be known, he really didn't mind. He even started shaving on evenings when he thought a coffee or a rum would be in order.

The progress on the boat picked up nicely as he came to welcome her visits. It was early in the fifteenth year of construction that they began the final finish

work: the painting and bright work. Nathan was no longer surprised by Nancy's versatility when he learned what a good hand she had for the varnishing. It was in September that they worked the rigging and the sails and October when they were fitting out with the running gear, a good Bruce anchor forward, with plenty of galvanized chain and nylon rode. A good Danforth, with nylon rode as a good spare in the lazaret. They brought on the provisions, cans stripped of paper marked with sharpies as to contents, lacquered and stowed about the boat, Nancy making a careful ledger with locations. The shake down runs went well, the rigging tuned, the weight trimmed, the instruments tested and gear stowed. Then on one of those warm days early November, Nathan had his old friend, Turner, hang a scaffold from the tender's davit on the stern, and apply the gold leaf name: November's Seas. It seems old Nate's tongue was stirred anew to the poetic.

Watching the weather window, a few days later, Nathan and Nancy waved to a group of friends who stood cheering on the dock, as November's Seas carried the pair out of Providence, RI bound for Bermuda, and then St. Thomas, and then wherever their poem would lead.

*(This story was the winner of the competition)*