

Mobiles

by Gita M. Smith

Your stories are marvels of precision.

Like Calder's mobiles, they move in perfect balance on the slightest updraft.

How do you put it all together with beginning, middle, end, the rising action and firm-handed resolution (just like they taught in school)?

My stories are ramshackle; they lurch along in old sweaters with holes and missing buttons, drinking from mismatched cups and saucers.

They mutter; yours crow.

Mine hide behind dark glasses and long bangs while yours step out into the glare of flashbulbs, square their shoulders and accept the Big Prize with the Foreign-Sounding Name never before given to Anyone So Young.

There is no use to rallying around me and saying things like, "the short story is much harder to pull off than the novel" or buying me rounds at the pub with shoulder pounding good cheer and "buck up gal" bravado. The agent -- the one who emailed me from New York City with a query -- said he wants a novel.

"Short fiction is all I've got," I said.

"You have to write a novel," he said, as if I could just pull something from my ass, like some sous chef whipping up a Hollandaise on short notice.

I've been despondent ever since.

I'd like to tour the world of mobiles. I'd like to go from Gdansk to County Clair, Majorca to Mount Airy. Wherever there are mobiles in haylofts or museums, I will be there, studying their lazy drift.

Out of my travels a book will come. No one will hold it for long. It will raise the reader's sight line, inflate his hollow spaces, and up he will drift to take his place beside the birds of Calder -- as light as balsa, as integral as the dna we share.

