Segue is published once a year in August. We accept submissions of high quality fiction, poetry, and creative nonfiction between August 1 and April 30 (closed May through July), and writing about writing year-round via email. Before submitting, please read past issues to understand the sort of work we publish, then read our submission guidelines.

Segue
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What’s a mother, anyway

Samantha keeps picking up strays

Jordan and his dog amble up cement steps to Samantha’s kitchen door, slap things with hands and rangy tail, knock over milk cartons, jars of toothpicks, and mugs of steaming coffee.

Samantha shoos them away but never uses a hand fiercely, can’t stand the physical implementation of anger, having seen hands sometimes worked into fists coming at her too quickly.

Calling

For years, Samantha thinks about adopting a girl, almost a goddaughter, a Mary, until the Mary, she imagines, is either dead or on another path. She looks through old phone books and eventually finds a number that could work.

She takes a deep breath.

The first attempt yields nothing, just an empty ringing. She tries again in the evening, perhaps a little late, she thinks, as she glances at the phone book and back to the phone, her fingertips pressing buttons, her ringless fingers flabby, she notices.

Mary picks up after one ring, recognizes immediately Samantha’s voice, calls her Auntie Sam, calls her “godmother,” the way Sam has been imagining it. Sam, Sam, Marzipan. A food, it will turn out, they both love.

Samantha says: “Would you like to come here and see me?”

This girl could be a godsend; she’s neglected the children of the world.

Mary does something not fully articulate into the phone.

“If that meant yes, I’ll put a ticket in the mail.”

Mary’s Life

When she arrives, Mary explains that she once had a priestly father and a down-at-heel mother, a twin brother with perfect pitch, and a younger one who, even older, continued to drool.

“I eat in colors, throw up in rainbows.”
Marzipan

Samantha brings a small white paper bag of candy shapes that Mary prefers to look at until she’s overcome by the desire to taste them. By the end of the week, the small gaudily-colored sweets are gone.

Willing Herself Lost

Mary needs to be lost beyond the lost she is now, which is a lost of her own making.

She’s alternately obsessed and chasmed by want.

New Name

Mary asks Samantha to call her Amber.

Amber, she says to the girl as if in offering, but also in query, and too, a little delighted. Like the color or the gem? The amber that keeps old things new. But really, just the fact of its thingness. And that it’s not a saint. Right. Who wants to be named after a saint.

Because Samantha says it rhetorically, Amber trusts her. It’s the first stage in abandoning Mary.

Swimming

At first, Amber refuses to do anything but swim in a pool. Samantha lets her do what she wants; her wanting seems to cover so little in the world.

Each day, they gather their things and walk to the pool when the sun is highest.

Chew

Amber can’t keep her hands off Samantha’s objects, the things she’s collected, painted, sewn. Soon, Amber’s mixing food of every color. Samantha tells her to chew, to breathe between bites.

Worried?

The next thing you know, Samantha thinks, Amber will be pushing her hands through flour and water, making the dough ball of a pizza pie. Will Amber be selling pizza on Samantha’s quiet, tree-lined suburban street where, behind ordinary walls, children have epileptic fits, refuse to eat, throw tantrums and heavier things, with real weight?
Hurricane

The boy, Jordan, like a brother to Amber, almost a son to Samantha runs through, a hurricane, past the two of them, their arms in dough. He knocks over cans and jars, picks up the broken pieces, bloodies his fingers.

It’s not the first time Amber’s felt that quick stab—jealousy—and is eager to do something with it.

Collecting

How is it that Samantha, until now a collector of men, is gathering a collection of children?

The sudden awareness of the area near her heart is not exactly a flutter—it’s more like a tiny trapped animal.

What Amber can do

Amber waits easily, knowing that look will come. It does, and she’s off. Around a corner, down an alley where, for small change, she does what she can do.

Past Midnight

Samantha drives around looking for the girl (what’s her name?) but every girl looks like the one she’s aiming to find. This isn’t how she planned to spend her evening.

Is this what owning a house does to a person?

Smirking

*How can you do these things with men you don’t know?*
*But I do know them.*
*For five minutes before pulling out their penises and sucking?*

*It’s another kind of knowing.*

Samantha can’t help smirking.

Samantha, Trembling

Amber’s face has gained something that makes it more interesting but also harder to look at. The knowledge makes Samantha tremble. She needs a glass of water but isn’t sure she can get to the sink.
When Amber comes close with a glass, Samantha notices her plumped sore-looking lips, her reddened skin.

**Months later**

Samantha pulls a cigarette from her bag then realizes that she can’t light it here, in the hospital. She’s had abortions, but for years now there’s been no need.

Her abortions were sad and small, the embryos undergrown. But Amber’s baby is strong.

Samantha holds an unlit cigarette while a small vacuum cleaner sucks away the small holding-on baby.

    What’s a mother, anyway?
Author Notes

Anne Germanacos' work has appeared recently in Santa Monica Review, Descant, Quarterly West, Blackbird, Salamander, Florida Review, Pindeldyboz, Agni-online and many others. She lives in San Francisco and on Crete.

About the Work

Samantha and Jordan had a story of their own called All the Men; Mary/Amber had her own story called Mary. But despite the fact that the stories were "finished" and published, the characters kept hovering nearby. I decided—as an experiment—to combine the characters in a third story. Thus, the genesis of "What's a mother, anyway." I'm pretty sure it was the first time I ever combined characters from different stories. I remember thinking that I would try to do the same thing with other characters from other stories but so far, I haven't done so. I've written stories about the same characters (older, younger, or a little different) but that's the only time I combined imagined characters in that particular way.

The form (short pieces within a larger piece) is one that came to me several years ago and keeps recurring in my work. It's a way of balancing the desire to use words poetically with the need to tell a story—or at least that's what it feels like to me. (Maybe it's simply neither here nor there...)

Consciousness sometimes seems to be a series of dots that may or may not connect. A story allows and also forces us to connect those bright dots of concentrated being. This form of writing seems to accurately articulate as well as represent the physical and psychological reality of that feeling.

At the same time, through the characters, I was exploring ideas about eating, identity, motherhood. Idea can be guide or afterthought.

Writing—both practice and product—needs to be playful. One can't achieve heights of inspiration and depths of insight and feeling without letting go of the commanding, domineering outside world. To write is to digest the facts of time and age while maintaining a fragment of childhood and youth.

Anne Germanacos on the Web

www.blackbird.vcu.edu/v6n1/fiction/germanacos_a/until.htm


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hitotoki.org/newyork/018

www.sidebrow.net/2006/a062germanacos.php