

# ADANNA

## LITERARY JOURNAL

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## Issue No. 7

*Adanna* accepts poetry, fiction, essays, and reviews. Please send a proposal for reviews. All submissions are electronically accepted in one file, preferably a word document file with a cover letter and a three to four-line bio.

Visit our website for further details: [www.adannajournal.blogspot.com](http://www.adannajournal.blogspot.com)

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## Credits

**Front Cover Artist:** *Paola Tavoletti*

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## *Artist Statement*

Art is just a very important part of my life. It is my connection to the world.

Creating with words and images is like cutting the surface of my skin to have the blood of my ideas spray onto other people.

My dream is to create a flow of communication between people living anywhere on this planet, belonging to any social level and any class. In fact, I address human beings as persons irrespective of their social class.

The world belongs to everyone. Social justice means giving everyone the right to express ideas. It requires giving all ideas our respect, even when we do not share them.

Artists should create links, not fractures, and look for those bits of truth hidden below the haze.

Artists should not seek society's approval. Instead, they should show the world multiple, different, and new ways to look at reality.

Some of my images address loneliness and the thunderstorms of life.

To me, it is through destruction and sorrow that a new light can be seen, somewhere beyond the wall. Sometimes these bridges to new horizons are hard to build and our days project long, dark shadows.

To come to terms with the fractures inside ourselves, and to collect and examine all the signs that life has carved into our bodies, minds and souls, is a challenging journey.

To me, the life we have lived is the subject matter. It can not be disregarded.

As an artist, I use this matter as the paste of my paintings, to give life to my images.

— *Paola Tavoletti*

# Adanna's Mission Statement

*Adanna*, a name of Nigerian origin, pronounced a-DAN-a, is defined as “her father’s daughter.” I chose to name this literary journal *Adanna* because women over the centuries have been defined by men in politics, through marriage, and most importantly, by the men who fathered them. In college, I was inspired by women such as Anne Hutchinson who had the opportunity to study under her father. Today women are still bound by complex roles in society, often needing to wear more than one hat or sacrifice one role so another may flourish. While this journal is dedicated to women, it is not exclusive, and it welcomes our counterparts and their thoughts about women today. I only ask that your submissions reflect women’s issue or topics, celebrate womanhood, or shout out in passion.

— *Christine Redman-Waldeyer, Founder*

## *Poems Without Borders*

in every  
town  
across every city

in each  
county  
each state & province

across many  
a country  
on many a continent

every sea  
and ocean—

and perhaps at

every space station. Touched  
by a star shooting somewhere,

—women composing poems.

Generations of mothers, daughters, aunts,  
nieces—

a trailing fire.

Ordained. Incantations. Sending

submissions to the cosmic  
anthology of choristers.

Ah, perpetual light—  
perpetual  
interstellarlight.

—*Deborah Gerrish*



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P

POETRY



*Kristin Berkey-Abbott*

## You Bring Out the Monk in Me

You bring out the monk in me,  
the ancient practices in me,  
the candles and incense in me,  
the Psalms chanted across a day in me,  
the calm of Compline in me.

You bring out the long robes in me,  
the rough fabric in me.  
You bring out the longing to know  
the social order by the length and color  
of our clothes, the simplicity of pattern in me.

You bring out the recluse in me,  
the one who retreats in me,  
the one accused of hiding in me,  
the one who prays for the world  
while the world carries on in obliviousness to me.

You bring out the silence in me,  
the longing for only the words  
that matter in me.  
You bring out the perfectly balanced in me,  
equal time for work, study, and worship.

You worry that there's no space  
for you in this equation,  
but I assure you that space  
remains in the silence,  
the work, and the worship  
because you bring out the monk  
in me, the one who knows  
what to keep and what to shuck away.

(after "You Bring out the Mexican in Me" by Sandra Cisneros and "You Bring out the Boring White Guy in Me" by Jim Daniels and "You Bring out the Mitt Romney in Me" by January O'Neil)

*Kristin Berkey-Abbott*

## History's Chalkboards

*"Every woman adores a Fascist,  
The boot in the face, the brute  
Brute heart of a brute like you."  
"Daddy" by Sylvia Plath*

Every woman adores a Fascist.  
Turns out men do too.  
But we imagine the boot  
on someone else's face,  
a face that doesn't look  
like ours, the face that arrives  
to take our jobs and steal  
our factories, while laughing  
at us in a foreign language.

No God but capitalism,  
the new religion, fascism disguised  
as businessman, always male,  
always taking what is not his.

Brute heart, not enough stakes  
to keep you dead.  
We thought we had vanquished  
your kind permanently last century  
or was it the hundred years before?

As our attics crash into our basements,  
what soft rains will come now?  
The fire next time,  
the ashes of incinerated bodies,  
the seas rising on a tide  
of melted glaciers.

And so we return to history's chalkboard,  
the dust of other lessons in our hair.  
We make our calculations

*Michelle Brooks*

## Bride of Frankenstein

She's a hard-drinking divorcee, I imagine, childless. Her friends speculate that she never met the right man. At the boutique, the girls ooh and aah as they try on dress after dress, saying, *It's my big day. It has to be perfect.* She adjusts straps, tells them they look beautiful. It's not a lie when you say it about brides and babies. Still, it takes its toll. After work, she comes home to her rented upper flat and smokes alone on the balcony. *You have to put yourself out there,* they say. They tell her to lower her standards. She nods and tilts her head, blows a smoke ring into the fading daylight. She doesn't begrudge these telephone sages, but she's decided the cooling board suits her. *I need to get ready for work,* she tells them. Her beehive doesn't fix itself. She lays out her bridal gown for work tomorrow, half-listening. *You need to get back on the horse.* They don't know she's burned down the stables. They try to fix her up. After their tepid descriptions, she demurs and they lose patience. *Don't fool yourself. Nobody's perfect.* You don't have to tell me, she wants to say. I've chosen some real monsters.

*Cheryl Buchanan*

## At the Yoga Shanti Class for Cancer Survivors

We stand in Mountain Pose, *Tadasana*,  
a giant step back with the right.  
Bend the left leg, left thigh parallel  
to Mother Earth. We lean,  
prayer-hands connected.

The Sanskrit *Yoga* gives us “yoke,”  
of the self and the divine.

We look like any class,  
but for the socks and the headwraps.  
We need to minimize exposure  
among the diagnosed and staged.

Feel the ground beneath  
you. Everything will pass  
and change...

In meditation I replay the burglary.  
I'm on my mother's back porch  
making her list of missing jewels.  
Neighbor women gather in the kitchen.  
Lilliana lives next door.  
She only grows what will bear fruit.

Avocado, pomegranate, mango,  
grapefruit blossoms and banana leaves.  
The detectives think it's gypsies  
from Miami. It is 85 degrees.

1. The wedding ring she made into a necklace  
after the divorce, 2. A charm bracelet of silver  
booties from her grandchildren, 3. An heirloom  
string of pearls.

One hundred years ago,  
Dr. MacDougall weighed six bodies

before and after death. *The New York Times*  
announced, “Soul has Weight, Physician Thinks.”

The word *Rei* means miraculous. *Ki*  
means gas or energy...

Feel the ground beneath you now.

*You are a warrior.*

*You are a tree.*

*Rita Cavin*

## Cups

Cricket sing outside my summer window.  
Under my cool sheet  
I cup one hand over each missing breast,  
Recognize the familiar weight,  
Sigh and drift to sleep.



*Rita Cavin*

*Nevertheless...*

*mocked, blocked, judged and scorned,  
excluded, threatened, often warned  
these American women resisted  
inspired and persisted...*

Amelia Earhart & Amanda Bloomer  
Ann Richards & Angela Davis  
Annie Oakley  
Aretha R-E-S-P-E-C-T Franklin

Babe Didrikson Zaharias bringing home gold  
Barbara Walters & Barbra Streisand  
Betty Ford & Betty Friedan soaring above expectations  
Billie Holiday & Billy Jean King

Chita Rivera & Rita Moreno  
Clara Barton  
Coretta Scott King & Myrlie Evers & Ethel Kennedy  
    *carrying the public face of grief*  
Corita Kent & Christa McAuliffe  
Crystal Lee Sutton aka “Norma Rae”

Danica Patrick & Diane Crump racing across the finish line  
Diane Arbus & Dian Fossey  
Dolley Madison & Dolly Parton surviving wretched poverty  
Dorothea Dix & Dorothea Lange  
Dorothy Parker & Dr. Ruth

Edith Wilson & Edith Wharton & even Edith Bunker  
Eleanor Roosevelt & Eliza Hamilton  
Eleanor Billington & all the Mayflower refugees  
Elizabeth Warren & Elizabeth Taylor speaking out for victims  
Elizabeth Eckford & Melba Beals “warriors don’t cry”  
Emily Post & Emily Dickinson  
Erica Jong & Erin Brockovich

Florence “Flo Jo” Joyner & Florence Chadwick going the distance

Frances Owens Thompson, Migrant Mother, hardship and pride etched  
on her face

Georgia O'Keeffe & Mary Cassatt painting their truths  
Gloria Steinem & Gloria Estefan & Gloria Allred  
all guts and glory-glory-glory  
"Amazing Grace" Murray

Harriet Tubman & Harriet Beecher Stowe  
Hester Prynne & Scarlett O'Hara not real, not perfect, but bold  
Helen Thomas & Helen Fabela Chavez  
Helen Keller & Anne Sullivan  
Hillary & Chelsea Clinton

Ida Tarbell & Nellie Bly digging in the muck

Jacqueline Kennedy & Jacqueline Cochran  
Calamity Jane "the heroine of the plains"  
Jane Addams & Jane Fonda  
Janet Reno & Janet Yellen & Janet Napolitano making tough calls  
Jaycee Dugard, the child & the woman  
Joan Baez protesting injustice with her silken voice  
Josephine Baker & Joy Mangano inventing themselves  
Judy Chicago & Judge Judy  
Julia Child & Julia Morgan

Karen Silkwood & Katherine Jefferts Schori  
Katherine Hepburn & Katherine Graham  
Katherine Johnson & Dorothy Vaughn & Mary Jackson  
aiming for the moon  
Kathy "Gidget" Kohner & Bethany Hamilton

Louisa May Alcott & Sandra Day O'Connor  
Lucy Ball & Lucy Jones

Madeleine Albright & Condoleezza Rice  
Mae West & Rusty Warren & Joan Rivers shocking us out of our socks  
Mamie Till wanting the world to see what they did to her baby  
Margaret Mead & Margaret Sanger  
Margaret Chase Smith & Margaret Bourke-White  
Maria Tallchief & Misty Copeland dazzling us on pointed toes

Marian Anderson at the Lincoln Memorial  
Mary Todd Lincoln & Mary Tyler Moore  
Maya Angelou & Mia Hamm  
Michelle Obama & Michelle Rhee  
Mildred Loving  
Mama Cass & Moms Mabley  
Mother Jones & Mother Cabrini

Nancy Kerrigan & Kerri Strugg pushing through pain  
Governor Nellie Ross  
Nina Simone & Simone Biles  
Norma McCorvey also known as “Roe”

Oprah

Pat Nixon & Pat Summitt  
Pearl Buck & Perle Mesta

Queen Latifa & Queen Lili’uokalai

Rachel Carson & Rachel Jackson  
Renee Richards & Laverne Cox transforming us  
Rose Bird & Rosa Parks  
Rosalind “Rosie the Riveter” Walter  
Little Ruby Bridges & her teacher Barbara Henry

Sacagawea & Sacheen Littlefeather  
Sally Ride & Sally Q. Yates  
Shirley Chisolm & Shirley Temple Black  
Dr. Shirley Jackson, inventor & Shirley Jackson, tale spinner  
Sister Prejean, Pacem in Terris  
Soujourner “Ain’t I a Woman” Truth  
Susan Lucci & Susan B. Anthony  
Dr. Sylvia Whitlock opening doors

Tammy Duckworth  
Tina Turner

Wilma Rudolf  
Willa Cather

Zora Neale Hurston – her eyes were watching God . . .

*they wrote & spoke of fairness  
rocked us with their boldness  
opened locked doors  
climbed shaky ladders &  
asked big questions .*

*we ride on their shoulders,  
follow their lead  
and live their dreams.*

*Roxana Cazan*

## Refugee

I gave my limbs permission to set my body forth,  
inching through cut tides, like a wax paper sail.

I stiffen with the exhale.

Fallen trees float on water.  
Murderous apathy grows on their bark like fungi.  
The water only ends at the entrance of pitched tents.

This land belongs only to those  
who carry quince memories  
making one's tongue coarse.

Disappointment coagulates along the sleeves.

People are forests of misfortune.

Scavengers for peace, how can you think of bones  
softly during the bitter seasons?

\*

Whispering your name bruises the tongue with anger,  
voice drying out in the moist prison  
of clenched teeth.

You watch me from the corner,  
and gnaw on patience.

The lonely cradle bombs as if they were progeny.

How could your wrists suffer  
the cruelty of twine and brittle spite?

How can I iron out crimped memory,  
bodies fanned out on the backbone of shores,  
pacing down the quick heartbeat,  
while the blood stains today's tissues

with permanence?

\*

They lift their arms up and spread their fingers  
as if to grab the sun by its toes,

A pity of prisoners dressed in the same amnesia suits.

Yarn unravels from used sweaters  
and crosses borders without a visa.

What heavy boulder can maim the ground it falls on  
worse than apathy,  
when a murder of the darkest crows  
cows with hunger  
on the banks of the same river?

Pity me, the one who watches  
and turns her back  
when the scene is too sharply bent.

\*

What can I do when death is falling from the sky?

We begin building highways like spider nets,  
trapping aquamarine corners of Turkey  
with oiled sands from Greece,  
and warm home shoes from Mitteleuropa.

People trap me inside walls  
like a 21<sup>st</sup> century Anarkali,  
and countries fasten these walls  
inside taller walls,  
so much breath wasted  
in pretend dialogue.

Borders crush dreams  
while bodies still walk aimlessly  
like in a zombie apocalypse  
where nothing billows  
save for fear scripted in bills.

\*

They throw away the bad apples  
and grin at the circus parade.

All clowns lost their crowns during the night,  
and their smiles began to deflate.

In the crowd, I see you,  
a wounded deer with a gaze that hits me  
in the pit of my stomach,

and I wonder—while the tides advance and retreat—  
if where I stand has become the circus,  
would I be wearing the glance of a wounded deer  
like a badge,  
sown across my chest?

*Sydney Choi*

## Marriage

I.

Above the television in my parents' bedroom, my mother tacked a pair of wooden masks on the wall. A souvenir from Je Ju Island. A man and a woman, two shoe strings hanging where the ears should be, eyes two pinholes, etched, and stained with black ink. The man's grin shows ten teeth in perfect rows. The woman, with two perfect pink circles on either cheek, has her lips pursed. She looks afraid. My mother explains that the man is about to have a person make every meal for him for the rest of his life.

II.

I suppose it would be something like purple orchids,  
Georgia O'Keeffe, the ones my mother lined up on a wicker basket  
Behind the shade of the living room blinds,  
German chocolate fudge and marzipan, like the cake  
I had on my ninth birthday that found itself half eaten,  
On the floor and crumbs on my prepubescent belly;  
White would only be ironic and God won't be there,  
Maybe in City Hall because of the grand staircase  
Which is good for pictures and the second dining room  
And my best friend from elementary school in powder blue,  
Holding my skirt and my hand like  
Every time we climbed Mission Peak against the wind.  
I don't often think of the most wonderful day of my life,  
And this isn't it.

III.

This is the part where the lovers are tasked with leaving their spouses.  
They tell each other they'll run away together, and one of them  
confesses to their partner about the affair. But the other doesn't. And  
the one that does is left alone in the mistake. And the one that is left  
wonders if love was ever there at all.



*David Crews*

## Lovers Before

A full moon  
                                sinks  
                into the dark blue dawn  
its glow a halo  
                                of song like love  
                                like the soft skin  
                of your cheek, your dark hair  
falling into my hair  
                                when your face  
                moves  
closer to mine, mouth  
                                of body     warmth  
                                into cold air.

In the eastern sky  
                planets align, points  
                of light  
                                that define distance  
closeness  
                                that shape  
and form  
                an image of you  
lying in the open bed  
                                of night.

                Your body     shutters  
under my touch  
                                fingers  
                around your breast , a soft  
caress, my tongue  
                your sighs.

                                We linger  
into sleep into  
                the sweet scent of breath  
lovers before  
                tonight  
                lovers from some  
                other night  
                                falling

again  
and the stars.

*Nancy Gerber*

## Curvature

My mother lies curved like a seahorse  
Bones poking bruised jellyfish skin  
Coiled in her shell, mind out of reach.

I whisper to her clam-shut eyes  
“I am here.” I place my index  
finger across her thin blanched wrist.

*Renee Gherity*

in my cell

*For Sandra Bland*

it was the blinker's fault  
that made him  
take me  
pull me from the car

it was the blinker's fault  
that made him  
throw me to the ground  
shackle me

it was not a rope  
but a plastic bag  
to carry out the garbage  
a simple plastic bag

that made me swing

*Renee Gherity*

## With This Ring

In black tuxes and wear-once dresses  
One white, three mint  
They stand before God  
And her mother's 100 closest friends

Face to face the lovers take their vows  
To ignore adversity in every form  
Until death  
Snatches one from the other

They pull carefully selected gold rings  
From puffy satin boxes  
To change everything  
Mortgage, insurance, conception, love

What do you do with the gold ring  
When you can't take it back  
The jeweler said  
To throw it from a bridge

Watch it sink into the water

*Judith Grissmer*

## Reminiscence of a Mother

*Before*

It is seven days before you die.  
You are ninety-eight, and I  
have scarcely seen you  
the last two years—the reasons  
all acceptable. Dementia has taken  
you back to before I was born.  
I enter your room, call you by name,  
am welcomed warmly by mine.  
For three days we are together,  
mostly in silence. You sleep—  
I surround you with love,  
tell you: “Mary, go to God.”

From time to time you awaken—  
for seconds what is called soul in us  
touches—beyond the reach of old pain  
and failure. We smile, kiss, and talk of  
our love. “*You are awfully sweet,*”  
you say to me. And for what I have not  
forgotten, for dance, for flowers, for the  
scent of your cream, for loving me, for  
worry and prayer, I thank you. And  
for what I have forgotten, I forgive.

*After*

Four days after I return home,  
bathed and anointed, you  
are propped on pillows to fall  
into final sleep. And I am left  
with the scent of your cream,  
the look of love in your eyes,  
and the gift of your final words.

*Now*

I sit on my bed alone—  
by light of a bedside lamp  
untangle your delicate platinum chain,  
remember in touch this quartz lavalier  
with a single shining stone.  
My mind fingers the edge  
of the space you have left behind.

How many times as a child  
did I watch you dress  
in silk or velvet gowns, did I  
unknot with near-invisible hands  
this chain, clasp it beneath  
your upswept hair, fasten  
the matched link bracelet  
on your arm? You were

everything to me, a  
fire that flashed and lighted  
my father's eyes—the hand that led  
to a world of feminine delight. You  
dressed me for dance in satin and lace,  
sewed red woolen skirts that flared on ice,  
braided flowers in my hair for  
May Day processions to the Virgin.

What does it matter  
that our journey was difficult,  
and the way seemingly endless?

Maryanne Hannan

## Judge

My cousin, family raconteur, entertains us—  
outlandish tales with a single characteristic—

how badly she behaved, how she erred  
not once in judgment, but time and again,

lapses ribboning consequence, catapulting us,  
our cups of tea, all hope of afternoon coziness

into murky shadows where she plies her trade,  
special prosecutor for sex crimes. *Stop. Why*

*such guilt?* I say. Some perps will always walk,  
and kudos when you nail the guilty. And doesn't

every family have peculiar aunts? a soul-sucking  
backstory? *I never feel guilt*, I tell her.

Even Medea, after scattering ripe pieces  
of her dismembered brother on billowing waves

to distract their madly pursuing father, after dousing  
her black-with-betrayal husband in the blood of their sons,

even she railed against the gods, fortune, that Euripidean  
man-fiend seducer, but never ever wasted time on guilt

or shame. Recalling the fun we'd had in my 50's  
wood-paneled basement, my cousin wildly mouthing

the words to my new Beatles' record, I lecture  
this fairest of them all cousin, *And you shouldn't either.*

No pause. *Sure you do*, she returns, *no one ever escapes.*  
That night in dismantled sleep, Medea weeps beside me,

strands of her mangled hair around my throat.



*See how wrong you had it.*

*Shirley Jones-Luke*

## Only God Can Tell Me About Myself

A voice with intonation - Caribbean cadence,  
Southern twang and Northern vibe - a combination  
created by my grandmother's tribe

I am my mother's mother daughter, hair that is  
a vine of silken tendrils and matted moss, a generation  
removed from the Civil Rights Era - we shall overcome

My family's debts were creaky floors, rusted pipes  
and roach-filled crevices of a first floor apartment  
where mice searched for crumbs of food

Each day we saw addicts on our street begging for  
change so they could purchase a pint from the  
local liquor store where our mother would take us

My body contains rivers of veins - my heritage is albino,  
mixed, one drop, paper bag rule, ebony and mahogany colored  
women, the women of midnight, who inhabit my sphere & chocolate  
vision

*Shirley Jones-Luke*

## Organic

Nature knows no shadows

Light has abandoned us,

Heat of the earth punishing doubters,

Air is moist a jungle brush of growth

Provides no shade

Tall grass wet soil huddle together

Nests in the eaves of houses path of a cool breeze,

saves us a warm wind slaps away the dew

our skin sweats a fly on a flower near a windowsill,

its flickering wings create ripples in the air

a natural rhythm clouds gather cluster in the atmosphere

rain comes

starting the process again

Cynthia Knorr

## Self Portrait as The One Who Fought Back

Not the one so tame she sobs with regret  
when stopped for a minor traffic violation.  
*Here's one we'll never have to worry about*  
thinks the police officer.

Here's one who colors within the lines,  
obeys curfew, says yes when she means no,  
no when she means yes,  
says whatever gets a pat on the head,  
who feels the fear but not the anger  
and panics like a turtle panics,  
tucked in and frozen, making it all too easy  
to get herself picked up and moved out of the way.

No, this poem is about the other one,  
the one who keeps talking even when no one listens  
because sooner or later someone will,  
who isn't called on but asks the question anyway,  
who won't sit down until it's answered  
then gets labeled misinformed, naïve, *hysterical*.  
And when shame doesn't shut her up  
finds herself banished, sprayed, cuffed,  
permanently placed on the Watch List,  
tactics proven to instill fear and panic  
in the disobedient but not so effective  
in one who turns fear into an ally  
and panic into a poem.

*Kassidy Lithgow*

## How to Make Chicken and Dumplings

You will need to ask She-Ma where in Texas she was born. Once she has said Tarrant County, then it's really time to get started.

Confirm with her that her mother's name was Troy, that the water should be boiling, and that she called her grandmother Mama Duck.

Admire her nails, round and maroon.  
Dusted with sparks of age on each hand.  
Ask about the men who held them.  
Ask about the men who didn't. Then  
accept her offer of another praline.

Listen to her say "Nash-Vull" after you ask where she likes best. Go with her to pick up the rotten apples off the lawn.  
She is saving the good parts for later.

Laugh as the afternoon turns to evening like she does.  
Study how she takes off what little makeup she wears.  
Sleep with the sound of her humming,  
an accent still peering through.

She will tell you when the dough is thin enough to cut.

*Katharyn Howd Machan*

## Poetry Didn't Save My Brother

in fact it sent him  
to the edge of the edge,  
curved hose stifling all the songs  
shaping his shattered mouth: I

identified his frozen body  
in the old house used for funerals,  
his flesh the coldest cold a hand  
could ever dare to touch

suicide's a black permission  
to anyone who finds the sky  
no longer offers dream and reach  
but a weight that crushes love

music was my brother's world  
but then his ears began to spin  
knives so small and sharp his fingers  
couldn't find the beat again

and then he learned I dared share words  
about the years he'd touched me wrong:  
Thursday morning, black air cold,  
dull gray dashboard, the radio dead

*Aryn Marsh*

Women's March on Washington  
Sonnet 1.21.17

I stepped into the metro car that day,  
squeezing past young women bubbling over  
with willful enthusiasm and drive  
adjusting their pink hats and checking texts  
I looked over at an older woman  
as she slowly sipped the contained raw spirit  
into her weathered body and released  
it slowly through the occasional tear  
that streaked her wrinkled face. She left it there.  
Unapologetic openness to  
feel the moment real spoke volumes to me:  
she felt the power of those around her  
amplify her own, she felt united  
with a fresh group carrying on the old fight.

*Charissa Menefee*

## After the Fever Sweeps Through West Texas

I sweep the dirt floor for the seventh time today,  
the broom's back-and-forth a rasping breath.  
There is no longer dust out of place, no inch not  
smooth, but the sound comforts me, and I sway  
with the broom, the way I swayed when I held a baby,  
back and forth, no effort, just the most natural of  
movements, an innate dance, the same rhythm a child  
feels in the rocking womb when a mother walks.

With my eyes closed, I can almost hear the children  
running around outside, their shouts outpacing the wind,  
their games free of worry, but when I open my eyes,  
the sounds are gone. I hear only the bristles on the dirt.

Carefully standing the broom in the corner by the door,  
I try to remember the other house, the one so far way,  
memory fading of the feel of clean wooden floors  
under my feet. Why hadn't I gone barefoot more often?  
Why hadn't I lain on those cool floors, my cheek to the  
polished wood, so that I could remember them now?

But thinking of cheeks, I plunge into another memory,  
unbeckoned, of the burning cheeks of the children, my  
cheeks against theirs, trying to pull some of the heat into  
my own face, my own body, away from them, willing them  
well, even if it meant gathering all the sickness to myself.

I search the room for a chore, but there is nothing, so I pull  
my bonnet from a nail on the wall and escape outside to  
fresh air, but the wind pelts my face with force, depositing  
layers of well-traveled grit in my eyes, my nose, my hair,  
my mouth. When I spit, the ground absorbs the moisture so  
quickly that I cannot tell where it was. I turn to the sun, feel  
its heat behind closed eyelids, radiating through my temples.

I open my eyes and walk away from the cabin, slowly at first,  
then my legs fly across the dirt and patches of prairie grass,



over the baked ground. I wonder if I have eaten today, seem to recall mixing biscuits, or was it cornbread, and then I know, as dirty tears sneak down my face and evaporate before they can drip off my chin, that it does not matter.

*Charissa Menefee*

## Waiting for Light

My only condition was that he not be there. I did not trust him, knew there had been violence. But she wanted to see her grandkids, desperately, so she promised he would not be home.

I recognized his pick-up at the turn-off. He escorted me to the house, a motorcade of two, and, exhausted from miles of driving, the hour late, my children hungry, what could I do?

Wary, weary, I strangled through supper and small talk, until he got called in to work, leaving a few peaceful hours for grandmother and grandkids to get reacquainted.

I lay awake, all night, on the double bed in the guest room that had no lock, holding one little boy close in each arm, my eyes on the doorknob, my mind on the minutes it would take to get through the window, waiting for morning light.

*Laura Metter*

## Fabrication Game

You once said orchids  
were your favorite flower,  
only because of the name.

That night I pictured stuffing  
your jaw with petals and buds,  
dried leaves jutting out of teeth,  
your tongue cottoned and swathed.

I overhear my mother lying to father  
about why she comes home late,  
booze heavy on breath and lipstick  
imprints tucked behind ears.

Saturday afternoons we sprawl  
over ragged rugs over hardwood  
tinder. I eye the space between you and  
I and think about other tongues, taste buds  
foreign from yours and how could the words  
of my mother summersault so smoothly.

Our shoulders brush and I understand  
you help me practice the habit.

*Laura Metter*

## Moth Mother

Each Spring my mother asks me  
to take care of the moths.  
They'll break into the cupboard,  
find birth canals in starches  
and suddenly we have a problem.

Before I begin the hunt,  
I imagine moths watching  
humans inspect their newfound  
home, ripping litter from nest,  
discarding children into trash  
next to broken eggshells  
and crying too subatomic  
for a predator's ear.

By the end, I wish I could speak  
to the moth mother, tell her  
she is loved and nature  
is just as cruel as the miracle  
she produces.

*Greg Moglia*

## Beyond the Bouquet

I give her the bouquet with what I dare to call a love  
She takes it with a thanks, it's lovely but then gets to work  
Snips away the leaves, cuts back the stem  
Sets the flowers now free to the water  
Then into a vase and when I look I think  
Colors for her, shades for her, shapes for her, bouquet for her  
Fool, silly plan, all part of my need but now in the vase  
I see my need passed  
How with her eyes, and then her fingers,  
She went about her task to deliver a blossom clean  
No need for a lover to direct her sight, hold her hand  
There before us a greater beauty  
Allowing me to be witness to love

*Greg Moglia*

## Mother Never Cries

*Come over she says I'll make you a tuna fish sandwich  
Lunch and Mother who lives in black and white  
Black - Brother Ado - Cheap bastard - money to him was everything  
Black - her friend Nina banished - Sent her sister away to a nursing home*

*Those in black we're dead but no tears only anger  
About her whites she has an ease  
Your father I kiss him once in the morning and once at night  
Now, as I bite into her sandwich she comes closer...leans in*

*You know I never cry, not even when my father died  
Me at a loss, what's this Mom? A mystery?  
I never cry - An uncertainty?  
Self-righteous...rigid...but here a complexity?*

*And what if it meant she can't know, did she think  
Here's my son see what he says  
Tell him of what I don't understand  
I with never a doubt about anything...ever?*

*And I think what a strange way  
It would be to tell me  
I love you  
What a strange way?*

*Greg Moglia*

## Sorry

Down the steps to my train, a stranger is a step ahead  
I brush her side. *Sorry* she says and I think, another sorry

In the market I wait while a woman reaches for a can of tuna  
She turns...sees me says *Sorry* and I mutter *It's ok*

*Sorry...sorry* all the women shopping away  
*Sorry...why?* I think 'sorry-making machines'

The 'sorries' point at me and I've no place to hide  
I see my daughter at my den door

*Daddy, I need a band-aid*  
And me cursing *Damn, I just lost my thought*

And she with *Sorry, Daddy but I'm bleeding*

*Terri Muuss*

*dear LOVE,*

You build landscapes in-

side eggshells, push

the invisible

b o r d e r

(inside)

me. Shaggy pines,

tree-line, marsh, ocean blue, cliff

plunge—

yes. Decay

crops up.

You beat it down

with seaweed,

basil, purple

garlic cloves, the world

rife with morning.

Our play:

a cabinet of curiosities.

Above our heads, the threadbare



cover of cosmos. Dark birds

rip daybreak

OPEN.

We begin

*Terri Muuss*

## When the Words Don't Come

My mother sits  
on the floor of our yellowing  
bathroom, wallpaper peeled to  
reveal crusted paste and trapped  
gnats. She grips a gun.

No. It is a Smith and Wesson 9mm  
semi-automatic, my father's department-  
issued handgun, the one I fired at 5.  
Before I held myself up on a two-  
wheeled bike, I held the power  
of this 11lb. piece of cold  
black machinery—two little hands  
aiming at the circle bulls-eye  
of an androgynous figure  
at the end of a gravel runway.

I stand on the other side  
of a carpeted strip, my mother  
caressing the gun like a baby  
as she rocks and cries and sings  
*ring around the rosey*  
*a pocket full of posies*  
*ashes, ashes*

slow and out  
of tune, like a deflated  
tire losing  
air. And she turns  
to me and smiles  
and my brother  
behind me screams in slow

motion with the sound turned  
down and I see the words  
I wish to say in front of me  
like they are illuminated  
on a big screen and  
we all fall

we all fall

*Jamie Marie Nelson*

## Diminished Fragments of Extinction

Carve me in steel.

Polished or pitted rust, like tracks riding  
beneath a caboose watched from a crossing  
in a town lost from the maps.

Smudge me  
in charcoal's gray shades—prolonging  
a presence I can't cast away. Leave me free-  
falling through states you don't understand.

Color me in crayon, teal & fuchsia,  
disregarding limits that break across  
boundaries, self-inflicted and exceeding  
my growing confinement.

Dream me . . . under moon's femininity  
and I'll ride  
until the taste of dust chafed off fractured  
shale, rains. Then look!  
I'll be that girl fading  
in the blackened bends of the oxbow canyons.

Dream me . . .  
a cowgirl—naked to rules  
unchanged in the womb.

Naomi North

## Call Me, All You Dead

The rotary phone sits on the basement floor; the bell  
chunks and chunks on the concrete,  
the moment he put it there perpetuates.

I am flicking pincher bug corpses across the carpet;  
I don't know if I can stop it—  
my father is gone.

The basement's mildewed closeness, windows crusted  
with grass clippings black against the moon,  
a stone so pitiful small I'd have to be

*en pointe* to stand on its pocked face;  
and God, too, it seems,  
is lightyears away.

It's midnight when all the phones in the house  
start ringing that unholy ring,

he's gone someplace the summer slows;  
that old rotary shakes its shard of time  
so hard the night pulsates, the nails

under the plaster pull free from the beams  
into which my father pounded them—

I am memory-wronged—if I answer, they will wake—

*Naomi North*

## Rootlessness

I have been myself  
where the water laps your right calf,  
wiry-haired like seaweed in the swell;  
each wave's ebb planted you  
with the certainty of a heartbeat.

For years I have nested  
in the hollows of your body:  
eyelids, elbow crook, and finger webs  
softening the ache of another place  
we must call home. My love,

we have become laughing gulls  
tearing flesh from fractured shells  
scattered on the rock, behind us  
the remains of so many houses  
with yellow kitchens and walls

splitting open. From the cracks crawl  
generations of men choked in brick dust,  
their wives with abdomens full of agony,  
their children dying of whooping cough.

Each meal I lay for you has become a picnic  
on a grave; we sleep in a mausoleum  
our lovemaking profanes until I can't

tell whether the water on my forehead  
is your kiss, a drop of rain that seeped  
through the ceiling, or holy water  
leaching out from a funeral mass. My bones  
rasp when I wake at night to open

window after creaking window,  
paint chips flying away, each piece  
sacrosanct in our loss of it. I have  
begun to pray for the rain-swept cars,

for the stink of crushed gingko berries in the fall,  
for petals that blow like cartridges from a barrel,  
aware of the bones they break. More

than this, I have prayed for my legs  
to ache when I can, at last, walk home to you,  
and still the current ingests us, and we take.

*Terez Peipins*

## Birthright

Past knots and tendons,  
I look  
to bone  
and see,  
centuries past.  
my face shrivels  
as flames rise higher.  
The point of a sword  
slashes my belly.

Today, head to toe in black,  
I barely breathe,  
walk the requisite  
steps behind.  
The open hand  
of my husband  
reddens my cheek.

In India and China  
girls form  
the chorus,  
and chant,

never born,  
never born.



*Whitney Rio-Ross*

## Eve

For weeks, my eyes have blinked open to my mother's nightgown dangling from the hook of my skylight. I often hang laundry there, and though it only took an hour for the sheer chiffon to dry, I can't take it down. Every time I reach for it, my fingertips lose themselves in slow circles, rubbing the delicate cream fabric between them, caressing the long folds the way I imagine my father might have, but probably didn't.

I took it from her when I visited last Christmas, having discovered it while cleaning her closet. Tucked between pants she might be able to wear again and sweaters I pray she won't, there it was, a garment made for Venus, elegant and seductive and nothing like my mother. I told her I was keeping it. She protested. I asked how many times she had worn it. Twice, maybe. I told her I would get more use out of it, and she blushed.

But it just stays there, floating above the foot of my bed. Meanwhile I spend the mornings watching the dawn glow through the translucent material, warming it from the inside like a body I can't quite recognize

*Heather Lee Rogers*

November 9, 2016

I woke up this morning  
in a bed  
that isn't mine  
in a country  
that belongs to someone else  
I woke up this morning  
not having slept still  
hoping it was just  
our bad election dream  
I woke up more afraid  
for my neighbors who wear  
hijabs and  
rainbows and  
hoodies and  
turbans and  
skin kissed by God  
and all the young girls  
who don't know any better  
I woke up with my  
"I voted" sticker  
still hanging  
on my jacket  
and my suffragist-white-shirt  
still wrinkled  
on his floor  
then I felt around a while  
for where I left my heart  
in this cold and rainy  
unfamiliar land  
but it was gone  
the first of many  
casualties to come.

*Heather Lee Rogers*

## Witchcraft

Night-tripped,  
Salem pilgrim girls  
run beneath the stony bridge  
just as the howling  
city bus flies over.  
Time bending  
under moonlight  
chasing dancers through  
Fort Tryon Park  
hand in hand with Lust  
in cold October.  
With nervous smiles  
we step across a holy book  
a stolen squeeze  
a secret glance  
subversive dance  
    the lewdness of a white hand  
    reaching through a lantern loop  
*hanging for witchcraft*  
*hanging for knowledge*  
*hanging for desire...*  
Heart pounding beside  
this stranger I've slept with  
aching to warm his  
bare hands and neck  
with Autumn's old damnation.

*Russell Rowland*

## Libby Thinks

I wait for him to get home and warm  
fitted bed sheets with his flatulence.

It would be nice if when he comes he turns  
into Kenny, the new driver at work—

the way I have turned into Jennifer, Larae,  
and what's-her-name. But he will not.

It's strange,  
how something impossible will keep you sane.

Twenty-eight years. Three children have left  
my body and our house: his input, my output.

I hear his pickup grumble into the garage.  
I have ten minutes to develop a headache.

*Russell Rowland*

## The Serpent Beguiled Me

...and I ate.

I do not blame the creature. This was my free choice. I have wished above all things wisdom; not to be just another pretty face. Also,

I needed to grasp what it means to die, thus understand how best to live—the man, our children, I.

You have not taught us to number our days; gave us hearts of innocence, not knowledge. Are we then grass of the field, that sways in the breeze today, and tomorrow withers brown, to be cast in the fire? Will you say?

I think it will cease to be with me after the way of a woman. Breasts will sag, desolation and drought replace fertility. And what of him?

You put the tree there. Yet I don't fault you, either. I am no child. I never prayed for you to spare us temptation, and know better than to ask you to deliver us from evil.

*Deborah Saltman*

## Beginners Guide to the Political Pirouette

Practice pirouettes in a safe place  
Clear of any sharp tweets or leaked emails  
Know your retracted position before you start  
Keep your shoulders and back covered  
Don't let your lip stick  
Arrange your weight so you can always push off the back foot  
Execute when ready  
Focus on going up not around  
Regroup after every turn

Did you ever wonder  
Why a mind ballerina  
Can go on point  
But not do the splits?  
Her political pirouette  
Lifted high on the shoulders  
Of her principals  
But their antlers  
When she does her stag leap  
always bring her down

*Darbee Shauers*

## Girl of Glass

You may find her in the wind.  
A minty winter's exhale:  
Frostbitten ecstasy...  
An inhale that rattles your lungs.

You cannot find a way to describe her.  
The dictionary is useless  
For these words do not exist.  
She is beyond your understanding.

She is made of delicate glass,  
Painstakingly worked to perfection.  
She is the stuff of miracles,  
Pirouetting over water  
That becomes wine  
In her wake.

You let your thoughts land on her  
And they crush her glass ribcage.  
You are so caught up in her beauty  
That you have forgotten her fragility.

She is so beautiful.  
The curves of her body keep you up at night.  
You are unaware that your desire is  
Shattering her.

You cannot feel her heart  
As it goes supernova  
And fractures everything  
That she is.

You will break her.  
She will forgive you.  
She has never belonged among mortals  
Anyway.

*Laura DiCarlo Short*

## Catacombs

In the caves of Cappuccini, a village,  
scuttle-boned and lilly-withered,  
dried and bouquetted against a wall.

Stalks of men, stalks of women

corridor-stretched –

in a cradled room, the bodies  
of babes, daffodilled  
in bonnets and lace, peering  
endlessly, up.

These are the withered petals

dressed in suits for Sunday,  
for someday, forever –

These are the mothers, these  
the boys, corridor-lined  
slipping, in time, off  
their metal hooks.



*Dorsía Smith Silva*

## Caribbean Woman

Caribbean Woman,

Did your Mama ever tell you  
that you are beautiful?  
That your breasts  
are more than mangoes  
ripe  
for the palming,  
that your rum kiss  
is purer  
than coconut's milk,  
that papaya  
is named  
after your breath.  
Don't hide in the mangrove.

Sway your gentle body,  
shake those bones.

Remember the sugarcane-roots  
from where  
you sprang.

*Dorsía Smith Silva*

## Gone Girl

Watching you stroll out  
like the foothold of our wounds,  
slamming the dark doors  
that you created.  
I want to run up to you and yell stay,  
you're going to regret this  
and break like bubbled glass,  
splinter your body,  
into straying veins of thread.  
He cannot save you  
from growing into a star of needles,  
withering like starving islands of cactus gardens.  
You will fall into the trapdoor of true regret,  
burst into a storm of nameless ricochets.  
Little by little, you will see  
pain is a contagious dance,  
not pausing for accommodation,  
or the twilight of yield.

*Evelyn A. So*

## Nocturne No. 20

And then there were the mornings when I found  
you still asleep, a bottle by your side,  
an hour just before you started work.  
I'd call your name and shake your arm and call  
your name again before you roused, convinced  
the lab had caught on fire, no remains  
but ash and smoke. Around that time you swore  
to chase the nightmares down the streets. You laced  
your running shoes and dashed into the dark,  
returned fatigued and out of breath. So you  
brought the bottle out from in between  
Thomas Wolfe's novels and Faulkner's books, and with  
a smile, you took a swig and sighed "good ole  
Southern Comfort." And though you held the bottle  
as you might a sleeping pup, I thought you spoke  
of hospitality. Where to find  
you next? The bed, the couch, the floor? The bar  
around the corner where you liked to tell  
my mother I was when she phoned and I was out?  
And then you laughed and laughed and laughed and laughed.

*Chris Souza*

## Knowing

And turning, you see Pyrrha with her husband  
rowing through the flooded fields, oars sorting  
the drowned, a collateral of carts, goats, and a nest

of pink footed moles, each one curled tight  
as a fetus. You realize this is legible and saying,  
the self that pleased you most warrants this.

The very moment the tripwire sang is marked,  
which now you can examine. Now you can lift it  
from the water, discrete between your palms,

and with your fingers pry the soft lid to the theater.  
You're surprised when by the second act your father,  
the real villain, has not arrived and that your aunt

showed up at all; twice your husband appears singing  
an apology, which is reasonable; you're partners.  
Finished, you lower the lid with its imp lashes, grateful

for the denouement (you tell yourself). This, you tell  
yourself is easier. And since you're dreaming, you ask  
your husband to row toward the shoal of a rooftop where

you can rest and turn this over in the sun, which is easier  
you tell yourself, before it's morning and while you're still  
someone with no one in particular to bury.

Amy Sprague

## Empty Churches

The space between  
faith and falling-as thin  
as my grandmother's sheets

my mother told me that before you died  
you used to go to the church  
when it was empty at 6 a.m.  
and pray for me

*she whispered to blessed wombs  
I mouthed the words to myself:  
"don't die"*

in the hospital, I imagined you  
on your knees in the pew,  
fingering the sacred beads  
your whisper, your serious face-  
like when you had inspected  
my wounds over the years, that  
serious look you had when you healed  
things you could heal,  
your hands starting to gnarl from arthritis,  
working out the sliver

*her repetition of deliverance  
to painted saints chipping off the walls  
as I plea further to nothing  
but my own will and hospital sheets:  
"don't die"*

the focus in your eyes-intent  
on faith healing wounds you couldn't touch;  
the focus in mine-the machinery of my mind,  
synaptic failure between  
iron gears closing their teeth

*her tarnished jewelry clicks against the beads*

*that slide into another prayer;  
I stand at the double-paned window in room six,  
watching the snow fall,  
emptiness annihilating the teachings  
“don’t die”*

I wish I could tell you  
what I saw. I wish I could show you  
the rot that was there-  
injections of anti-psychotics  
and sedatives like antibiotics for a chronic  
infection in the heart

*she reaches the end and sits for a few moments  
in the quiet; in my waking nightmares  
I stand alone before her memory, naked with shame  
and confessing in the dark  
“I want to die.”*

I imagine her up in a heaven  
I had pictured back in grade school,  
leaving the light on over the sink for me  
like she used to when I slept there  
on the nights the cancer took hold

The space between  
faith and falling-

blinding linens, her knotted hands  
on the clothespins, pulling down  
the white cord beneath white cloud  
by the Birch tree  
and myself  
discovering what she had always known:  
surviving doesn’t mean you believe,  
it means you love.

*Jeanine Stevens*

## Fine Dining

*Everything breathes again.  
The tablecloth is white. René Cazelles*

Room for four, yet underneath a well-built  
mechanism opened for twelve.  
Homework was completed here,  
birthdays celebrated, holiday dinners  
with hams and turkeys, orange placemats  
and linen napkins,  
then paper ones with Hallmark verse.

On this table,  
we filled out college entrance forms,  
wrote a draft explaining why  
a son was moving to Canada. Some,  
in anger, jumped back, the solid walnut chair  
clattered to the floor.  
We signed divorce papers on bare wood.

Grandchildren learned good manners here;  
now great-nieces and nephews  
dine with best behavior.

Today it serves as “poetry central,”  
with books about place, glance and lack of sleep.  
My lover makes allowances;  
books easily move aside for an evening meal.

We light candles, enjoy our view:  
the garden studded with variegated foliage  
glowing in gossamer twilight.  
On the chipped surface,  
an old print cloth with fat bees:  
ancient vessels with honeyed words.

*Vincent J. Tomeo*

## A Woman's View Of Wine And Other Things...

Men are grapes.  
Step on them.  
Keep them in the dark.

Let them mature until they ripen into something fine,  
good enough to have dinner with.



*John J. Trause*

## Working With Susan Sontag, Not Against

The first time I encountered Susan Sontag in New York City it was not pretty, as opposed to South Orange or Cincinnati. Oh, it was not pretty then either, but I won't be catty.

The first time I encountered Susan Sontag in New York City I was a librarian at The MoMA, my home away from home in those days before the art world collapsed on itself. I cataloged serials. I descended to the fifth floor on the way to lunch in the lunch room at the lunch hour. Susan Sontag in all her skunk-haired glory was fuming and ranting, "Where is everyone! I need to get into the Photography Department, and no one is around!" It was the lunch hour. It was Wednesday, when the Museum was usually closed. I tried to explain this. It was the lunch hour. She was not amused as she fumed and pulled on the doorknob of the Photography Department door.

The second time I encountered Susan Sontag in New York City I was a librarian at The MoMA, my home away from home in those days before the art world collapsed on itself. I cataloged serials. I descended to the lobby on the way home as the Museum was closing. Susan Sontag in all her skunk-haired glory was in the revolving door with me – she pushing in the wrong direction – ranting and fuming, fuming and ranting, "What? This isn't how it is in France!" I said nothing and left in the right direction, trying not to move against interpretation.

The third time I encountered Susan Sontag in New York City I was a librarian at The MoMA, my home away from home in those days before the art world collapsed on itself. I cataloged serials. I descended to the lobby on the way home as the Museum was closing. I walked home on the quick hike down the Avenue of the Americas and was about to step into the crosswalk at 46th Street still quickly. I saw a pair of long, lean legs lunge in front of me right to left, a mane of dark hair with a silver streak streak by across my path. Susan Sontag in all her skunk-haired glory just cut me off, me! – the fastest walker in New York City. I said nothing, trying not to move against interpretation.

*Lourdes Tutaine-Garcia*

## Drinking Sand

I saw how you survived,  
drinking sand,  
wearing burlap woven from dust  
to harvest fog in a sock  
and herd frogs into a kettle.

You croaked thunderstorms in curses,  
threw paperbacks like lightning bolts,  
vowed to scorch the earth by breathing flame  
until love returned, flexing its golden wings,  
so you could yell at it.

I understand your broken heart.  
More than ever, I wish freshness for your soul,  
although the screeching within you will not let it in.

I understand the only injury worth tending now  
is the heartache, but soon  
you will begin to feel the bigger injury:  
what distinguishes abandonment,  
is not how much you thought you were being loved,  
but how much faith you lost in love.

*Lourdes Tutaine-Garcia*

## When the Ashes Arrive

When the ashes arrive without the spirit,  
truth pounces with unimaginable harshness:  
too many parts, not just the breath,  
are missing for the resurrection promised.

Those who looked found  
the vitreous matter waterless and emberless,  
suggesting no soul had ever set up shop within  
to balance checkbooks  
because no moral person ever bounces checks;  
to bear headaches without aspirin  
because drugs are gateways to addictions;  
or sing a tune so off key,  
the composer might not recognize it.

The urn sits like a period  
after a long and convoluted sentence.  
The gestures of her hands swirl  
like auras around the bracelets she once wore,  
now gathering dust and talcum powder on a porcelain dish.  
The echoes of her cackles persist in the itch of her wool hats.  
A woman of few secrets, the cornbread recipe  
never turned out how she made it.

In the mirror where dwell  
the ephemeral dance of images,  
one daughter's gestures resonate  
like old music played on a modern instrument.  
There, she comes across a portrait  
of her mother with a younger face  
and sees her inheritance is the echo  
of her mother in the motions of her hands.

*Geraldine Kloos Weltman*

## Pasta Rites

Every year on your birthday  
I make tortellini from scratch.  
It takes me all day. I'm an assembly line--  
rolling and cutting pasta into squares  
dabbing on the filling  
sealing up the tiny packets.

It was fun thirty years ago  
when we returned from Italy inspired  
to cook food we'd eaten there.  
But later my stiff hands and aching back,  
the sour taste in my mouth from licking  
ricotta and parsley off my fingers,  
turned it into a test of endurance.

Now, when tortellini are spread out  
on linen towels, multitude of clones--  
like computer-generated images of tortellini--  
I just want to open a can of soup for supper.

Why do I do it? You don't insist.  
But without tortellini,  
I fear our good times might seep away,  
like rich filling leaking into boiling water.

And then I remember  
a bowl of lemony green beans,  
fragrance rising from the tortellini  
in their plate of marinara sauce.  
How you enjoy them.

*Kelley White*

## They Named Them All Chemical

1987

Balisan & Sheik Wassan, Iraq

It was a test run; this little village; when  
they started to get sick the wisest led  
the others into caves; as if air might be  
older there; the women went into labor;  
early; the babies had few breaths; mass  
grave; remains all run together; I see  
melted faces; I see pale children's faces  
open to a rocky sky; flies; black rot;  
people were running; the planes  
would carry more death soon enough.

**Estimates: 70,000 to 100,000 killed over  
16 months (or double that, or more)**

but this is not a political poem  
this is not a call to war  
the U.S. and England did nothing  
to act against these killings  
it is another century, another millennium,  
now

*Joanne Jackson Yelenik*

## Spell Out Water in my Hand

I am Helen Keller  
and all around, Annie Sullivans are spelling out water  
in the palm of my hand.  
I, a woman, who does not cry  
easily, a woman who knows the difference  
between amazing and sadness, am sobbing inside.  
I feel water as the pine cones spell out the word in my hand.  
The brown earth pulls from me, rain.  
If this is worship, and G-D is here,  
who is in my kitchen waiting  
to make Sabbath?

What shall I gather to season my tasty soups?  
Green leaf spices tickling my nose,  
the taste of bark in Eden's garden.  
Drench me you colors.  
I am soft and hard like the earth under my feet.  
Why have I not prayed here  
where the language of prayer is foreign to me?  
Spell out water in my hands, you rocks,  
welcome this stranger,  
free me from my silence, murmuring winds;  
you birds, let me taste the air in which you fly.  
Trickle down light, and lead me out of vague shadows,  
soak me in love for this spot, where water rests in my hand,  
leaving my mouth dry and me, thirsty, still.

F

FICTION





*Z.Z. Boone*

## Distance

She joins the class in early-April, along with nine other students. Rows are rearranged, new desks pushed into the spaces created, the already crowded classroom practically at overflow. Her previous teacher has died of a heart attack over spring break, and her class of thirty has been divided into thirds and incorporated into the three other sections of English 401. Forty-three kids in a space meant to accommodate around twenty-four, all seated—as the students say—“kneecap to asshole.”

Grace Edison is her name and she is seated next to you, close enough that if you place your hand on the back of your head you could touch her with your elbow. You haven't really noticed her among the other four-thousand at Tottenville, which is odd since she is one of the few black students enrolled. You won't speak to her that first day as she squeezes her pink nylon backpack onto the small patch of floor between your desks. But you will notice her unusual beauty: the slightly crooked teeth, the lush ponytail, the eyes as gray as late autumn.

A black dude named Branch claims he knows her. He tells you she's a senior, that she's been on Staten Island less than a year, that she's from Liberia. She isn't going with anyone and, as far as Branch knows, hasn't been invited to prom. You listen cautiously because Branch bullshits. Last year he told a freshman that the homecoming dance was a masquerade, and laughed when the poor kid showed up dressed as a pirate.

“She waits tables on Saturday,” he says. “Aunt Dottie's Barbecue.”

Back in class, you continue to study her. You like the elegant way she moves, but it's too early to tell her that. One morning you smile and say, “Hey. I hear you're from Liberia. I love Liberia.” She looks over. “Really?” she says. “Yeah,” you tell her. “Where is it?”

She shakes her head and almost smiles.

During class, you make a joke about the assigned text. You draw a picture of a huge mallard floating in the ocean, and you write “Moby Duck” underneath. You flash it at her, she looks over, her shoulders shake and she covers her mouth. You feel encouraged. You got her to laugh at “Moby Duck.”

Two weeks in, with the help of Wikipedia, you tell her, “Yaa-wun.” She looks at you, mystified. “It means good morning,” you say. “In Liberian.” She smiles and tells you she's Bassa, not Kpelle. “We say

‘Moin ley,’ she explains. You feel a bit foolish until she says, “But I am flattered by your effort.” The following day, even though you don’t have class together, she finds you in the cafeteria and hands you a sealed sandwich bag. Inside you see a square of what looks like gooey cornbread.

“I made this,” she says. “It’s Liberian cassava cake.” You put it gingerly into your backpack, while she returns to her table and everyone around you smirks.

You know the island; it hasn’t changed that much since your dad was a kid. Most whites live on the South Shore, most blacks on the North. Interracial dating is not encouraged. This one guy you know, Joe Santini, was going with a black girl until one day he walked out to his car and found a monkey doll tied to his door handle. There was a note rubber banded to one of the monkey’s legs. “Friendly advice,” it said.

That night at dinner, you tell your parents that you’re thinking of taking someone to the senior prom, and they light up.

“Who is it?” your mom asks.

“You don’t know her.”

“At least it’s a ‘her,’” the old man jokes.

“She’s black.”

Silence.

“African-American?” Mom finally asks.

You shake your head. “Just African,” you say.

Your father tells you he’d be careful if he was you, and when you ask why, he says, “Disease.”

“You’ll be picking her up at her place?”

You shrug. “I guess.” And then you say, “I haven’t actually asked her yet.”

A “promposal” is key. But it has to be original. No balloon bouquets, no personalized M&Ms. Then you remember.

By Friday night, your plan is complete. You’ll go to Aunt Dottie’s Barbecue the next afternoon, check the place out, find the section where Grace is serving, take a seat. She’ll be amazed when she sees you, your snowy face among all the others. You’ll make some small talk, eat quickly, call for the check. When she’s out of sight, you’ll leave some money on the table along with a generous tip. And on the front of that check you’ll write something clever. *May I check you out at prom?* You’ll wait outside—hopefully they’ll be a large front window—and watch her reaction. If you’re lucky, she’ll look up, your eyes will meet through the plate glass and she’ll nod. The people inside might even applaud. A Disney ending.

Except that the next afternoon, when you ride the SIR north, when you get off in Stapleton and walk down Front Street, when you find Aunt Dottie's Barbecue and go inside, you don't see her. What you do see is a few customers and a couple of employees, all black, all studying you like a trespasser.

You get nervous and need to use a restroom.

"Whatcha want, son?" asks an old man behind the register, the left side of his face sagging like a melted candle.

*I'm looking for Grace Edison*, you want to say. But you realize. There is no Grace Edison. Branch strikes again.

"Can I use your men's room?" you say.

"Customers only," Candle Face says.

You order French fries to go. Candle Face writes it up with a ballpoint pen, then uses the pen to point toward the back of the restaurant. You walk down a skinny hallway, past the kitchen entrance, past a door that a busboy, his arms loaded, is pushing open with his hip.

And you see her. She's wearing a plastic shower cap and a filthy powder blue smock and she has sweat stains that are evident even with her arms down. She's holding a gray plastic tub filled with dishes and glassware and she sees you seeing her.

The door swings shut.

You walk back out to the counter without using the restroom, wait nervously, pay for your food. Halfway back to the train station, you throw the warm greasy bag into a trash can.

The next time you see her is Tuesday, in class. She takes her seat, but looks straight ahead.

"Hey," you say.

She nods, says nothing.

And for the rest of the year, this will be it. You saying "Hey," Grace staring ahead. Neither of you will go to the prom, neither of you will see the other over the summer. By August, Grace will be flying south across the Atlantic Ocean toward West Africa, while you register at Wagner College, only a short bus ride from home

*Mary Katherine Crowley*

## “The Life of Lisa”

Somewhere far off, men were in space making history. Meanwhile, some on Earth carried on without knowing, or possibly caring. Some men had helped make this moment in history possible. The rest kept watch so that they could tell themselves that they were a part of that history, because people who look at animals in a zoo must of course be animals in a zoo themselves.

Lisa’s children were young still, and therefore in bed as they should be. Her husband sat next to her on the sofa. She had spent all week preparing for tonight. She had made sure the playroom was picked up, dinner dishes were done, floor swept, and the living room was tidy. Nothing was out of place, for she wanted no distractions. All through her neighborhood, in houses that were mirror images of her’s, the lawns were well kept, the flowers were watered, and not a thing was out of place. They, just like Lisa, sat in their living rooms breathlessly. All of society’s televisions were lighting up the houses, and before their eyes men were walking upon the moon. The world that they lived in had technically change, they felt changed, yet all was truly the same.

That night when Lisa tried to sleep she realized those men on the moon had reached the final frontier while she simply lay in bed. Their deliverance made her think back to junior high. Patriotic posters covered the walls, encouraging students to support the war effort. The Second World War was taking place, and everyone had victory gardens, men were enlisting to fight, and women were in the factories building war machines. Lisa remembered staring at a Woman Ordinance Worker poster. The woman’s hair was tied up in a kerchief and she wore blue coveralls. It was the look of pride on the cartoon woman’s face that made Lisa realize she could be more than a nurse in the war effort. She could be a soldier, a pilot; maybe she would live to see the day that she could be a general.

At that moment as a young girl, something flourished inside her, spreading its wings and gave her spirit flight. She imagined what it would be like to have a man listen to what she had to say- like a toddler whom for the first time said “candy” and got the piece of candy, would Lisa be when giving commands to a whole army. No, her voice would be more powerful than that. It would be like the decoded hieroglyphics, liberating an entire race of women.

Then she remembered that evening as the young girl at the

dinner table. Both her brothers, even the younger one, laughed at the idea of her being a general someday. It made her feel like a flightless bird; and with each stifled snicker they plucked another feather from her. Soon she was a naked bird standing as an exhibit on the kitchen table for all to see. She had been no eagle, not even a song bird. She was a silly, naked, dodo that was never able to fly. That was the last time she considered being a soldier, the last time she dreamed of commanding people. As an adult she rarely told people what to do, unless they were her children, and then she simply felt bossy, not commanding. As Lisa slept that night, her mind took her to distant planets, where the houses didn't look the same, birds were never in cages, and the people understood the words spoken by the wind.

Morning came as it always had, with the rising of the sun in the East. Lisa woke and prepared for her family's day. The children were dressed, she watched as they brushed their teeth, combed their hair, washed their faces. Breakfast was made, filling but light. The coffee was hot, milk cold, food good, as it was yesterday, and last week, and last year. The children sat jovially enjoying eggs and toast, the husband sat austere with the newspaper in his hand. Lisa enjoyed her food as she peered at the back side of her husband's newspaper. The front page had the story of the moon landing, but Lisa was forced to read the silly local articles that were on the back page.

Breakfast was over and all were out the door. The world had adventures for the children and responsibilities for the man. Lisa stood there as they passed, kissing each one goodbye. Then she was left standing there, by herself. She felt the wind greet her with a gentle hello, passing through her lungs into the depths of her veins. It was a summer wind, much like the ones that cajoled her as a child. The feeling brought her back to summer when she was five. There had been a day that the wind beckoned her to follow, so she journeyed to the playground with nothing but courage and curiosity.

Each step took her farther from home and felt as heavy as a wave crashing upon a boat, far out at sea. Each time her sole slapped against the concrete, young Lisa sank, just a little, beneath that weight. But then... the playground was in sight! The wind had guided her truly to a place of great wonder. She ran to the swings, knowing they would continue her journey to the sky. As her feet passed over the ground, sand and pebbles pressed between her toes, each one spurred her forward. Lisa swung for hours, lost in her dreams. It was a bright summer day; the kind where you see the sun and moon in the same sky, friends together to catch up on the passing of ages. As Lisa flew to the sky she listened

carefully and heard stories of great women through all of time: Amelia Earhart, Sacagawea, Joan of Arc, and Nefertiti.

Lisa walked home as an explorer back from expedition. In a few hours, she had journeyed not only back in time, but to new worlds that only young children can create. Although, once in her house she was quickly brought back to Earth, where she was no more than a senseless little girl. Her mother scolded her for her explorations. What in the world would make Lisa think she could wander off by herself, for an afternoon, without asking anyone for permission? What was worst is that her father followed suit, lecturing the child on how the world was large, too large for a child to take on by herself, especially a girl. No, Lisa should know better than to go off without her big brother by her side.

The wind wrapped itself, one last time, around Lisa's body, and she felt herself back in adulthood, still afraid to journey terribly far by herself. She closed the door and walked away.

The house was quiet and Lisa began tidying it up. She did the breakfast dishes, cleaned the table, the counters, swept the floor. Then she turned her attention the living room. The floor got vacuumed, furniture dusted, sofas straightened. Next was the laundry, then the playroom. Before she knew it, it was time to make a mess of the kitchen again. She started getting lunch ready for the kids. They ate. All was good. Off they went to make a mess of the playroom, while Lisa picked up the kitchen again, and then started preparing for dinner. Once the roast was in the oven she went to the living room.

There she sat and picked up her husband's National Geographic Magazine. He preferred Time, but Lisa was more interested in places than people. This issue had Jane Goodall on the cover. Lisa indulged herself in Jane's stories about Gombe and its chimps. She put the magazine down and pictured what her life would be like had she escaped to Africa to live with monkeys. Knowing her, even the monkeys would tell her what to do. Monkeys were what society had become, too dimwitted to do anything other than what was ingrained in them, too arrogant to know that they were dimwitted, and too intelligent to want to change. That wasn't fair, Lisa thought. Monkeys most certainly were not arrogant. Lisa's mind traveled to distant jungles where she lived in a tree befriending the wild. She dozed off in this state of mind.

When Lisa woke up, the dim light of the sun could barely be seen through the gray clouds. She noticed the tacky polyester valance over the window. The fabric stunk of the decrepit flowers that were left over from some funeral. As she stared at the valance she was reminded that she was not thirty-six. No, Lisa lay in the bed of the nursing home

she'd spent the last seven years in; she was in just another cage that she had truly spent her life in.

*Monic Ductan*

## Housekeeping

The first time Noah called me “mama,” I corrected him. We were in the backyard and I was pushing him in the tire swing. “Push harder, Mama!” he yelled, his voice carrying through the sound of the October leaves rustling. I reached out and grabbed the tire, stopped him from swinging.

“I’m Lena, baby. I’m not your mama,” I said gently.

He looked confused a moment and then said, “I wanna call you ‘mama.’ Or maybe I’ll call you mom, like Marcy calls her mom.” He wrinkled his forehead. “You make better cupcakes than Marcy’s mom, but you’re not as tall.”

I tried to imagine the situation as 6-year-old Noah saw it. I was a woman who cooked and cleaned at his house. I slept in his daddy’s bed. On the mornings when his daddy had to be to work early, I walked Noah to the main highway so that he could catch his school bus. At night, after the three of us had dinner together, I read with Noah from one of the books by his nightstand, usually the *Berenstain Bears* or one of his board books. His finger followed the words on the page, and he began to pick up on sight reading words: me, my, truck, house. He would yell those words aloud and then smile at me, awaiting praise.

I looked down at him on the swing. He wore that same adoring look he often had when we laughed or joked together. In that moment I thought I knew what it meant to be a mother, to love someone else unconditionally and want nothing bad to ever happen to them. Yet, I was so stupid. I’d jumped into this relationship with Patrick without thinking about how it would affect his son Noah.

“Push me, Mama,” Noah said again from his perch on the swing, and then he held his hand over his mouth as if he’d said something dirty. “Oops. I mean, *Miss Lena*.”

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I was having my lunch out on the back porch the next day when my phone buzzed. When I answered, a man identified himself as the nurse at Noah’s school. He said Noah had a low-grade fever and he’d tried to contact Patrick but couldn’t get ahold of him. Could I come pick Noah up?



When I got to the school, Noah was sitting on a bench in the front office. I spoke to the receptionist and signed him out. “I’m tired,” Noah said. He rose sluggishly and took my hand. He was much quieter than usual, and his eyes drooped.

Out in the parking lot, I realized I didn’t even have a booster seat. I’d have to buy one soon.

By the time we pulled into the yard, he had dozed off. I unbuckled him and carried him into the house. I tucked him into bed and then rooted around in the medicine cabinet for the children’s Tylenol. Where was it? I pulled open a drawer and found the bottle of purple liquid beside a small, blue thermometer.

In Noah’s room, I slipped the thermometer under his tongue. His eyes opened slightly. I pressed the button and waited for the beep. The black letters read 100.8, and I quickly looked up that temperature on my phone. A medical site said it wasn’t ambulatory. As I read the back of the Tylenol box, my phone buzzed.

“Patrick,” I said, “his fever’s 100.8. Now I’m trying to figure out how much Tylenol to give him—”

“Slow down, baby,” he said. “The school told me you picked him up. I was out on a police call when they first called me. I’m glad they got ahold of you. How’s he doing?”

“He’s sleeping now.” I balanced the phone between my shoulder and ear and poured the right dosage into the cup. “Hang on,” I told Patrick. I lifted Noah’s head from the pillow. I pried his lips open with one hand and held the little cup to his lips with the other. He opened his eyes.

“It’s done. I got him to drink the Tylenol.”

“Good, shug. You’re doing good. Listen, I’ll be home in about an hour, okay?”

“Ok, and Patrick? Don’t forget to call Joy. Remember she was supposed to pick him up today?”

“Yeah, I’ll let her know,” he said.

After I disconnected the call, I sat with Noah and stroked his hair. His forehead felt a little warm, but not much.

The doorbell rang. Joy, I thought. I took a deep breath and went downstairs. If it was her, would I be more or less comfortable without Patrick here?

I opened the front door, and there she was. She wore a red, silky-looking dress and had a leather handbag on her shoulder. She usually towered over me, and the black pumps she wore that day made her even taller. When I first met her, I noticed how unusually long her neck and

arms are. Elegant. And then there's the face—brown eyes with long lashes and a delicate cleft in her chin. Why'd she have to be so goddamn *pretty*?

Joy said, "Patrick called. He said you'd picked my boy up from school?"

"Yes. Come on in," I said and opened the door wider.

Joy followed me to Noah's room. She went over to the bed and put her hand to his forehead, just as I had done.

"His fever's 100.8. I just gave him Tylenol about twenty minutes ago."

"Thank you. I really appreciate it." She shook Noah's shoulder. "Wake up, little man."

He grumbled in his sleep. She patted his face. "Come on," she said. "Let's get your shoes on."

"No," he said. "I want to stay at my house."

She tried to put his sneaker on. He kicked it off. "I wanna stay here with Daddy and Miss Lena," he told her. He lay back down and rolled over so that he faced the wall.

Her eyes were bright, startled, as though she'd been slapped. For a moment I felt some satisfaction, but then a stab of guilt. Why was I satisfied? He was her boy, not mine.

"Maybe he'll want to go once he wakes up and feels better. The receptionist said kids with a fever should stay out of school the next day. I could drop him off with you tomorrow, if you want?"

"Tonight is my last night in town. I'm leaving in the morning," she said. Joy watched him sleep. "You'll call if he gets worse, right?" she asked me.

"Yes," I said.

After we exchanged cell numbers, we stood awkwardly for a moment. She said, "You're young, aren't you? Maybe twenty?"

"Twenty-four," I said.

She studied me as I studied her. The staring made me uncomfortable. I couldn't think what to say, so I blurted, "Do you want some coffee?"

She looked at me as if my words were completely foreign to her, but then she said, "Yes, thanks."

We walked downstairs and into the kitchen. I put coffee in the filter. I stood by the counter and waited for it to percolate. She opened the cabinet above the stove, no doubt looking for the mugs she and Patrick had kept there. A box of granola bars stared down at her. "Oh," she said and flipped the doors shut. She stepped back from the cabinets

and held her palms out, surrendering. She obviously thought I felt offended by her rooting around in our cabinets, but I didn't. I was just glad she was moving around, and that we weren't staring at one another.

I opened the cabinet by the fridge and took down two mugs, set each one in front of the coffeemaker.

"Noah talks about you, *constantly*," she said in the same accusatory way she'd asked my age.

She was doing what I had been doing: keeping score. Being younger than her gave me an advantage. And though my face wasn't as pretty as hers, it was completely line-less and fresh, so that was another point. Noah's constant talk about me gained me a third point.

Joy sat down at the table. I stood by the fridge and stared at her. I could comfort her, tell her that he talked to me about her, but the truth was he never had. She'd left when he was barely four years old, and he hadn't seemed to remember her by the time I came along. "I'm sure that when you go back to Atlanta he'll talk about you constantly," I said.

I took a cinnamon coffee cake from the fridge and then grabbed plates and silverware from the cabinet. Sitting down across from her at the table, I said, "Coffee cake?" and slid one of the plates to her.

I cut the cake and we each plated a slice. She took small bites, chewed slowly, and wiped her mouth on a napkin after each bite.

I said, "Why did you leave?"

Joy had been staring down at the coffeecake, but now she raised her eyes to mine, slowly, and then her head. "I married him when I was younger than you are now. I didn't know what I wanted until I hit my late 20s. And then I looked around and realized we didn't have as much in common as I thought. I liked going out; he was a homebody. I liked the city; he hated it." She stood and went over to the counter. With her back to me as she poured the coffee, she said, "Nothing about Patrick ever changes. When he comes home from work, he takes off his shoes, puts them in that closet," she said as she jerked her thumb toward the closet in the foyer. "He's thirty-three, the same age as me, but he's so *old*."

She turned from the coffeemaker and looked at me, reading my face as though she thought I'd be offended by her words. The things she complained about were some of the very things that caused me to fall in love with Patrick. I absolutely adored that he was so reliable and predictable. I loved those evenings at home with Patrick and Noah. I'd always wanted a family, probably because I'd never had a traditional family before.

The front door opened. “Lena, where are you baby?” Patrick called to me.

“In the kitchen,” I answered.

I heard the closet open in the foyer and imagined Patrick slipping off his black boots. The closet door closed softly. Patrick came into the kitchen and didn’t look too surprised to see Joy sitting there. He’d probably seen her car out front. He leaned down and pecked my cheek. “How’s Noah?”

“Still sleeping. I’ll take his temperature again in a minute.”

“I’ll go take it,” he said. He exchanged hellos with Joy before heading upstairs. He was already unbuttoning his blue uniform top as he walked up the staircase, just as he did every day when he came home from work. Patrick would leave his uniform in the hamper in the bedroom, and after a quick shower he’d put on his around-the-house outfit: a plain white t-shirt and a pair of shorts. I found a comfort in those little things he did. They were endearing.

“You’ll call me if he gets worse?” Joy said and rose from the table.

I walked her to the front door. “Sure,” I said. She gave me a little wave. As she walked out to her silver SUV, I thought again how elegantly she moved—fluid and confident. She backed down the driveway and disappeared.

When I came back to the kitchen, Patrick was cutting himself a piece of the cake. He used my empty plate.

“I’ll make a grilled chicken salad for dinner. Noah can have that, right?”

“Don’t see why not, shug, unless his appetite’s gone. We’ll know when he wakes up.”

I took the cutting board down from the cabinet. I cut the carrots while Patrick poured us each some lemonade.

*Alyssa Hubbard*

## Lilith

Lilith lived in the stairwell. Molded in bronze, she was a rendering of the female form, caged within the walls of a gaudy bed and breakfast The Garden Estates. She had been cast in a delicate, demure pose. Her hands held her face as if she was too embarrassed to meet anyone's gaze. She crouched along the window sill of the fourth floor, her knees tucked beneath her as she basked in the sun, maintaining her golden glow. Her eyes were shut, her lips puckered, as she mulled over all the days' happenings from her perch.

The owners surrounded her with gold things to highlight the bronze glow of her skin, but not to draw attention away from metallic beauty. Young men admired her body, young women often compared it to their own, and children hardly noticed it, but always made it a point to wave and pretend-speak with her on their way to their rooms. Lilith was a fixture of living and breathing. She was alive.

The Garden Estates caught fire in 1994, and poor Lilith was left in the stairwell to burn with the house. Though most of the house was saved, the bronze figure hadn't been so lucky. The fire had disfigured poor Lilith. Her hands, melted, were now black claws, tearing at the sunken flesh of her once supple cheeks. Her back arched as she curled in on herself, either as a painful shudder or in anticipation for prey that may meander up the steps. The most disturbing damage occurred to her eyes. They were once detailed eyelids with folds and tiny lashes that added life to her unmoving face. The lashes had melted and melded to her cheeks, creating two blank ovals, and the lifelike folds were nowhere to be seen. She was Lilith the sightless.

As old customers made their way back to the Garden Estates, many of whom once loved dear Lilith, they now begged the owners for her removal. She haunted them, they said. She was too ugly and disfigured. Children refused to walk up to their rooms beyond the third floor, fearing that Lilith might chase them as they passed by.

She was sent out of the Garden Estates in the back of a dump truck and was pawned off at the Goldman County landfill. She was then shipped on a ferry to New York and unloaded by a pair of Italians. The eldest went home and collected garlic cloves. He carried them in his jacket pocket to work for weeks. The youngest made fun of the eldest, but was wary of Lilith just the same. They moved dear Lilith from the port to another truck, wrapping her in canvas for the drive. It did little to

protect her charred outer layer as the rough canvas scraped and scraped with every jostle of the truck. The Italians hoisted her out of their truck with more enthusiasm than they had ever at any previous job. On the way back, the eldest threw away the remaining cloves at a gas station, all while the youngest mocked him from the passenger window.

Lilith finally found her home in the basement of a bookshop, The Quill and Ink. The owner was a lanky man with a pinched face, and the Italians called him Lucien. He took little care when stripping her of the canvas wrapping, ignoring the cloud of black dust that came off with it. Lucien studied Lilith closely. His eyes squinted in the dim lighting behind his thin glasses. He didn't need them, but he thought they made him look smart. His hand came to rest on one of her breasts. He took it full in his hand, then let his fingers trail down until they grasped the deformed nub that had once been her nipple. When he removed his hand, he found it covered in an obsidian-colored powder. He rubbed it between his fingers. It was oily. His lips puckered and his brows knit together before he finally shook his head and rubbed the grime off as best as he could on his tailored pin-striped slacks.

He wrapped unfortunate Lilith back in her canvas and stomped out of the basement, leaving her alone with boxes, books, and silence. There was the sound of metal scraping against metal, which made way for a near-silent whimpering that no one would be around to hear.

The next morning, Lucien came back to the basement where the weeping Lilith lived. He removed her canvas again and studied her closely in the fresh daylight peeking in through the single window at the far end of the basement. Dust floated around Lilith's head in a fuzzy halo, and he couldn't stop himself from running his finger along the knuckles of her hands, which covered her face and eyes. They looked dewy, and they felt wet. She seemed to be curling in on herself more than he had remembered on her auction page. Lucien peered around the room, checking the nearest box, but found the books were still crisp and dry. There didn't seem to be was any moisture in the room. He chalked it up to the move and the cheap Italian labor before pushing up the sleeves of his frock and digging in his back pocket for his sandpaper. He went right to work on her oily skin.

The metal screamed as he scrubbed, and often times he had to stop just to rest his ears from the screeching. The light was already waning by the time he gave up. The charred flesh never gave way to any bronze and the whining of her body was only getting worse. He surveyed his clothes, his arms, his floor: all covered in soot and metal flakes, but there was Lilith in her obsidian perfection. He hadn't noticed before, but

a pair of onyx eyes peered at him from between her fingers. Lucien went to feel them, but thought better of it and wiped his fingers on his frock.

He took a cigarette from his back pocket along with a lighter, took a drag as it lit and then released a sigh. A cloud of smoke billowed directly in Lilith's face. He took one more drag, surveyed his fruitless work efforts, then smudged out the end of his cigarette on the shoulder he had attempted to scrub clean, out of both spite and laziness. Either the ash had fallen off or it was too dark to see as there was not a single mark left on his sculpture. He set the remaining stub of his cigarette and his lighter on a box of unpacked books then stomped up the steps back to his shop. After some time in silence, the familiar sound of whining metal trickled into the room, careful and conscious of any eavesdropping. There was a light chuckle before all was quiet again.

Sunlight crested over the horizon and trickled in through the window, eventually illuminating Lilith in a hazy glow. Lucien was already clomping back down the steps, this time with a metal ice scraper in one hand and a broom in the other. He met Lilith's obsidian jeweled gaze with a grin. He stood before her and marveled at her ferocious beauty. Maybe all of his work had been worth it. She seemed taller, uncurling before him, and her eyes were much more prominent as she stared between her open fingers. He could even make out the top of her mouth, tweaked at the corners as if she might laugh. Lucien had only sanded her shoulder, but figured his persistence had done the job.

Even though she already looked better, she wasn't quite ready for his front window. There was still so much dark, burnt metal. Even if he couldn't work out all of her former hue, if he could at least cut through the top layer enough to make her shine, that would be enough. He pushed up the arms of his tweed smock, let the broom clatter to the floor, and began to scrape away at her left breast. There was no screaming this time. The metal seemed pliable, softer, and came off in long curls, like chocolate. Only a few swipes in and there, the virgin glow of bronze. He held his arms above his head in triumph, but his celebration was interrupted at the sound of a screech. His eyes trailed up to meet Lilith's onyx eyes. They had a bright glint in them, despite her facing away from the only light source rising in the room. She was also smiling. Full on smiling, though it didn't look nearly as inviting as he remembered.

Unconsciously, he fingered the front pocket of his smock, but paused when he found it empty. He spun around to grab his lighter and cigarette stub, but only found the cigarette – no lighter. He crouched down to search by the box, hoping he hadn't lost another one. Then,

there was a whisper, a whine, and finally a clatter. He turned his head just enough to see Lilith's lips part, which seemed to prompt an uproar of unfamiliar laughter, and at her feet, his lighter was beginning to melt in the flame of a burning book. Though his veins rushed with adrenaline, and his heartbeat throbbed in his ears, his body was locked in place.

As the book at her feet burned and the flames began to spring from box to box, among the plumes of smoke and ember, she glowed.



*Hannah Kludy*

## Dream Catcher

He kept dreaming about his fiancé being beaten to death. Joshua thought that this meant he was morally deficient in some way. Others, he was sure, would talk to him about possible stressors in his life, like his job and mounting bills, or the wedding that was slowly growing like a tumor in his brain. He thought it might be his depression, or perhaps his angry nature that he suppressed. No matter what, he couldn't get them to stop. Even if he drank himself into a stupor, took more than the recommended amount of lunesta, or smoked before bed the dream would come to him and he would see her, brown hair being pulled back and fist after fist ramming her already bruised, bloody face. He was never really in the dream, more like an omniscient observer. Each night.

During the day, he was somber. He spoke less, got irritated more, and as Ashley said, seemed to check out from life almost completely. She was a hippie at heart, she said. She tried incense, herbal teas, yoga, and more. She even agreed that he ought to see a psychiatrist, but even the strongest prescription hardly helped. Josh was hurting. He couldn't even make love to Ashley without seeing her body all broken and bloody, misconstruing her moans for something worse. Her climaxes made his body freeze in terror. The worst part was that he couldn't even tell her what his dreams were about.

"What could be so bad? I'll love you no matter what. You can tell me anything."

"You wouldn't understand. I am a bad fiancé."

"Are you cheating? We can work this out. Are you unhappy?"

He would shake his head and try to fall back asleep. He could feel the rift growing larger between them.

Ashley worked at a boutique that sold hemp products. One day, she came home and told Joshua that she had a solution for his problems. A new vendor had come in that day and he sold decorative dreamcatchers. Ashley had agreed, or course, to let take him on as a vendor. She didn't own the place, and would likely be in a spot of trouble for this, but she didn't really care that much.

"Do they really work?" she had asked the tall native American who was leaning against the counter shuffling several twenty dollar bills.

"These? Nah, that's why they're called decorative. You buy one and bring it to the rez and get a real Indian blessing for it, then maybe."

"When do you guys like visitors?"

So that was what they were doing Saturday morning. The whole thing would cost about a hundred dollars, Ashley figured, just based on the retail amount plus a little extra. She had the thing wrapped up in a little bag, and was wide awake and ready to go at nine in the morning. Joshua had barely slept after his first attack of the night, so he simply refused to get out of bed. By the time he was up and running, it was almost four in the afternoon and Ashley said he had wasted the whole day. She had been fuming, and he was sure that she had called her mother to complain.

In the car, they bickered a bit because she was impatient and he was exhausted and cranky.

“This is a waste of time and money. A hundred bucks? Fucking scam. Ash, you know it can’t work like this. Just poof, magic and I sleep like a baby?”

“Better than that quack we saw at the shrink’s office. ‘Just pop five pills nightly and you’ll be fine.’ This isn’t crap, that was. Plus, it’s not like you have much to lose. Nothing else is working anyway.”

“I know, I just feel silly. A goddamn dreamcatcher?”

“When you hurt your knee you scoffed at that hemp rub I brought home, and it worked great.”

“Fantastic, one success out of about thirty different tries.”

“I shouldn’t have brought you. I should have just gone to see them about this on my own.”

“Nah, I needed to come. Who knows? They might need some of my hair or piss or something.”

“You’re unbelievable. I’m doing this for you.”

The two-hour drive seemed much longer and by the time they arrived, Ashley was in tears. They had to wait in the car for ten minutes for her eyes to stop looking so watery.

The rez was exactly what Joshua had imagined it would be, with the dirt and the dogs barking and the sky full of rain that he wanted to make a snide comment to Ashley about but didn’t. They parked outside the main hall where the sign said a community dinner would be taking place. There were Indians everywhere outside, men and women and children all running around. He thought he and Ashley must look so terribly conspicuous.

“He said he’d be in here. Hold on, let me call him,” Ashley said, digging around in her purse for her phone. “Hey Jerry, yeah. Yeah, we’re here. Just had a very, very late start. Where are you? Okay, we’ll be inside in a second.”

She started walking into the community center and Joshua reluctantly followed.

“An Indian named Jerry?” He asked. She ignored him.

Inside, the food smelled spicy and there was too much smoke in the air. There was loud music playing, old rock and roll that his parents had listened to. Kids were crawling under the tables and screaming. Adults sat around with bottles of beer and heaping plates.

“Ashley!” a man shouted.

“Hey! Good to see you.”

“Happy you could come. Bring the dreamcatcher?”

“You betcha.”

“Eat with us, and then we’ll have one of our elders bless it for you guys. Hi, by the way.” He extended his hand to Joshua. “My name is Jerry. Good to meet you. Heard that you had some trouble sleeping lately.”

“Yeah, hope this stuff works. About at my wits end.”

Jerry clapped him on the back. Joshua thought he was a little bit too smarmy.

“C’mon man, come eat with us.” He led them to a long table set up as a buffet with plastic utensils and Styrofoam plates. He handed them each a beer and nodded to the food.

Ashley jumped on it and started piling her plate with anything that looked exotic. Joshua just grabbed some corn and chicken. He hadn’t had much of an appetite lately, and the smell of the spices certainly wasn’t helping.

Jerry wandered over to a table with a couple other Indians, close to the same age as Joshua and Ashley. They all sat down and shook hands. One was named Thomas, and his girlfriend was named Beth. Beside her sat Gloria, who looked so Indian that it astounded Joshua. She had the long black braid, intense eyes, prominent cheekbones, and when she stood and walked, she was so graceful that Joshua thought she must have never learned to walk, she just grew up gliding.

They ate and had too many beers. Dinner seemed to take forever, and Joshua kept watching Gloria and waiting impatiently for one of the elders to just get done with dinner and bless his stupid dreamcatcher. Ashley seemed to be having a good time, maybe too good of a time, and she was red in the face and getting louder by the minute. He had shushed her a few times, but she was thoroughly ignoring him. She was just about to go up and dance with Jerry when Joshua asked when they could visit the elder. Jerry looked at him real serious, then nodded and Joshua followed him to the table closest to the buffet where a wrinkly old man

sat and attempted to eat corn on the cob with very few teeth. Jerry introduced them and the elder nodded. He raised their dreamcatcher high above his head and the table grew silent. Then he began humming, and it seemed to fill the room and drown out the music around them. Even Joshua was held by it. Then, the elder kissed the catcher lightly and returned it. Ashley began to cry hot, drunk tears of relief and sank to her knees. From across the room, Joshua could see Gloria smiling at him.

He wanted to leave right after the blessing, but Ashley would not hear of it. She paid Jerry double what she had promised him, and then went off to dance. She pleaded with Joshua to come too, but he could barely stand he was so tired. He could have just laid on a table right in that room and slept, he thought. He sat back down at the table and Gloria leaned in close to him.

“You know that they fucked you over, right?” she said.

“What?”

“They just had the oldest guy here play pretend. You white people never get it.”

“I don’t want to hear this right now.”

She looked at him for a long time and he felt self-conscious so he lowered his eyes. “I keep having nightmares,” he said.

“You know how to really make those things work? Sleep with an Indian under it, that’s how. No good until you do it.” She rubbed his upper thigh and he pushed her hand away. “I don’t think you’re leaving tonight. Why don’t you just stay over?”

“My fiancé.”

“She’s drunk. Shit, she’s hardly standing. Let me take you both home with me. She’ll never know. You’re not looking so good either.”

“Look. I just can’t.”

“You gonna make it home? Be honest with me.”

An Indian command. Joshua was enthralled. He was tired, he knew that, but he also knew that he wasn’t being drawn into possibly cheating by the thought of a soft bed. More like the thought of soft, pillowy breasts and the way Gloria’s hair must look when she let it down from her braids. His resolve was weakening and he was hard. He faked a yawn.

“Fine, we’ll go. But nothing like that, you know? Strictly business.”

“Business keeps you up at night. I could do a little better.” She stroked him and he couldn’t quite manage to pull away.

Her house was a small trailer. It was filled with geodes, travel books, and rather messy. She dumped stuff off the couch while he held Ashley, who was unconscious.

“Put her in the bed,” Gloria said. Joshua did as he was told with ritual obedience. “Now lay down.” She patted the couch next to her and he laid down on it. She undid her hair and it smelled a little like sweat and sun and cheap shampoo. She kissed him and stuck her tongue in his mouth.

He thought he might kiss back, but guilt and shame filled his mouth and he thought he might throw up. He saw his dream flash in front of his closed eyes like looking hard at the sun and then blinking.

“I keep dreaming that Ashley is being beaten to death,” he whispered.

Gloria held still. Then she rolled off him and wedged herself between him and the couch pillows. She played with his hair. She reached out and took the dreamcatcher from his pocket and laid it on his chest. Then she kissed his forehead.

When he woke the next morning, she was gone, he was asleep next to Ashley in their car, curled up around each other. He never had his dream again. Neither he nor Ashley ever spoke of that night, and neither one would remember Gloria.

*Margo McCall*

## Laundry in La-La Land

Everything is spinning. My life is a whirlwind of tossing sheets and turning towels, bras tangled in pantyhose, sprinkles of All floating in suds, stray pieces of lint that stick to my soles, follow me out the door and inside my apartment where I wonder where they came from.

Here at the Super-Spin Dry Laundry, the air's supercharged with heat, the sorrow of soiled clothes, dirty things that need to be made clean. There's no floor or ceiling, only round and round movement fueled by quarters from the change machine.

The bottom's fallen out of my world. I'm a ball rolling downhill, an unknown planet stuck in orbit, dishwater spiraling down a drain. I take it one washer at a time, cross my fingers that the Unbalanced Load light won't come on. My clothes slog around in their misery, being agitated. The light comes on: Add Fabric Softener Now and soon they're spinning to a final conclusion. When I look inside the machine, the movement makes me dizzy.

I recently rejected the concept of marriage and the human form that went with it and moved into a terrifying world without my own washer and dryer. Today there's me, some guy washing his sleeping bag and Hawaiian shirts, an old man who lives in his truck, and a single dad tenderly folding his kids' clothes.

Here in SoCal, we venture from the boxes where we sleep to the grid of streets and ribbons of freeway where we really live, protected by shiny metal, flowing past each other in a stream of forgetfulness where nothing touches, diminished by arching blue emptiness overhead.

Here, you can glide along at seventy-five, grooving to your tires' connection to the road, watching scenery sweep by, clinging to ideas of freedom and destination. You better love rubber on road, for that's the only connection you'll make, aside from the stray pieces of lint that stick to the bottoms of your shoes when you fall from grace and end up in a laundry mat.

Nobody who washes their clothes in a laundry mat is important. We're poor or recent immigrants or have made bad life decisions—inexplicitly damaged. It's strange that strangers see my sparkly disco bra, my see-through panties, my holey socks—all the things that touch my skin—yet they don't see me.

But someone is spinning toward me right now—past the No Dyeing Allowed sign. It's the guy from Florida, Jimmy Buffet minus the airboat, records, and houses in Palm Beach, Beverly Hills, and St. Barts.

He's coming closer. He smiles and speaks. "Do you know if these big washers handle sleeping bags?" he asks.

I'm startled to have my protective bubble popped. "I don't really know."

"Me neither. Just stopped to wash off the road dirt."

"Where you going?"

"Just traveling around. Came up from Florida."

He's blond and tanned. A wanderer not interested in settling down. That's how he ended up in a laundry mat. He's wearing shorts, maybe his last clean pair.

He smiles. He moves away.

Then the man who lives in his truck shifts his small load of wet clothes to an available dryer and he and the guy from Florida start talking about fishing, all the

Everglades inlets and lagoons, egrets and marlin and 50-test. I feel the thick humidity, but it's only the dryers. As the old man talks, tendrils of gray hair reaching across his scalp for something to hang onto, I wonder how he moved into a pickup without even a camper shell.

I check my tumbling clothes and watch the single dad folding his kids' laundry. Piles of t-shirts and shorts folded neat and clean and brighter than bright thanks to Cheer. Folding the fabric that protects their bodies, love seeps from his pores like sweat.

Why do I remember some things and not others? Why is the face of the man I loved for fifteen years now obliterated from my mind? How did I end up living in a single with brown carpeting and no furniture or laundry room?

It's like what happens to the houses. You leave home in the morning and when you return a square of dirt for another apartment complex has replaced a house with lemon trees and bougainvillea where families once lived. That's how fast it happens.

That's how fast things change.

Why do I think of this morning in the laundry mat when I've been to so many? The one in Hollywood where you couldn't leave your dryer unguarded or junkies would steal your jeans. The one where the retired guy brought his golden retriever and where tired moms sweated over clothes, their children running in circles like the dryers.

It's because of the bird. It's because while I'm standing by the guy from Florida and the man who lives in his truck, there's a

commotion by the window. A starling, all glossy blue-black, flaps against the plate glass, its yellow eyes panicked.

Black feathers are scattered on the tile. The bird must be exhausted. But it still finds strength to keep banging against the invisible barrier.

We stand over the bird. Then the man who lives in his truck bends down, cups his hands around the bird and lifts it to his face. In a soft croon, he tells the bird it will be all right, and in that instant I think it will.

While I hold the door open, he carries it outside and places it under the shade of an oleander while the single dad and guy from Florida stand over it protectively. And as the bird stretches its wings and flies, everything stops spinning and is finally still.



*Sara Mortimer-Boyd*

## Salvations

“I’m worried for Jessie,” my mother called out to my father, who pushed a wheelbarrow of wood through the yard.

“He’s racing the streets—you already know that.”

“He asked for steak,” my mother said. “It’s hot in the pan.”

Our street was on the eastern edge of town. At night, a black void where cars gunned past and animals flattened beneath their wheels. There could be no sign that Jessie would be coming until his BMX tires hit the gravel driveway and his dark form floated through the gate.

Mother paced in Jessie’s bedroom, staring out the window that faced the dark street, waiting for him to ride up. Tonight, as usual, I lay uncovered on Jessie’s brown bedspread as Mother put her face an inch from the glass, possibly praying, or just waiting, every few minutes thinking of something that would make her have to wipe her eyes on the sleeve of her gown. I imagined Long Beach, the place we would be visiting tomorrow, with zooming cars, bikinis in the sun, waves roaring.

No one came. I fell asleep on Jessie’s bed and awoke to light and the sound of birds rushing into the cold sadness of the house.

I found my parents in the kitchen, helped my mother make eggs, then ate silently while my parents discussed Jessie’s absence. They seemed to reveal that he wasn’t coming home soon, and that it was all an inconvenience, an offense, but not a tragedy.

“I heard him listening to the Megadeth tape before he left,” my mother complained.

“Don’t worry, the army will straighten him out in a few years,” my father boomed.

“At least he’s been saved,” Mother said.

I went back into my brother’s empty bedroom and stood waiting and listening for clues. I stood for a long time in an awkward part of the room where I faced the wall and had nothing to really concentrate my attention on other than the white paint. Above me was the window, like a picture frame that must have held the empty street and the mail box, with the word ANDERSON in block letters, a red flag standing up sometimes to call out to the mailman who sped by in his truck. This window frame was my mother’s searching place, but I couldn’t reach it.

We would be heading to Long Beach in an hour.

My father said it would be a ninety-minute drive, which seemed like an epic adventure to me since I had only known this desert, this

house. For most of my life, I only knew this hot place where thorns ruined my socks and stink bugs strutted in the sun. Coyote Springs was the world.

We would be heading to Long Beach in an hour.

I was looking forward to it so much that I felt anxious like I needed to get things in order so I could really live every second of it once I was there. I thought about how Jessie had been saved just a week ago. Jessie and my mother returned late from an evening Bible study, and when they walked in the door, Mother pronounced, “Jessie accepted the Lord into his heart! He will go to heaven when he dies!”

Jessie’s eyes sparkled as he walked to his room and closed the door. I heard the blinds being pulled down, and that was it.

As I stood facing the wall, I saw with certainty that I needed to invite Christ into my heart before we left for Long Beach.

Mother was doing the dishes and seemed to have no idea that I was standing, as if possessed, in an empty corner of Jessie’s room. I silently recited the words I would say to her, long phrases about John 3:16. I convinced my feet to move into the kitchen, then I hurried in a small voice, “Mom, I have a question.”

“Yes,” she said, the smell of dish soap in the air.

“How can a person be saved?” I asked, looking up at her wide back.

Did she hear? “How can I be a Christian?” I shouted.

She dropped the dish into the sink and knelt down to pray with me, her eyes closed, her wet hands holding mine.

“Lord, thank you for sending your son to die for Jean so that she can live for eternity.” My mother stood up and cried, tore a fresh paper towel from the roll and wiped her eyes.

I had been saved. We could go to Long Beach now.

The prospect of our day trip started with a phone call from this man named Gerard: “Would you like to come to Long Beach, see the ocean, and try some top-of-the-line facial creams risk free?”

All we had to do was meet Gerard on the pier, learn about the cream, and take a sample home. If my parents completed these steps and answered a survey, they would return home with a brand new VCR. My parents had made this kind of trip several times before to bigger towns close by that were more or less like Coyote Springs. We acquired a pair of binoculars and a check for fifty dollars just for considering the offers of time-shares and investments.

When we arrived in Long Beach, Gerard took us out onto the pier where men fished and then gutted what they caught in sinks. Gerard

looked not much older than my brother. Unlike the red, greasy, bearded fishermen, he had some stubble on his face, and his skin looked pale and clean. When the sun went down, he led us through the lights of downtown where we walked in the breeze past windows with neon signs.

In the desert, I suffered from allergies and asthma, spent nights breathing in the scorching mist from the humidifier on my bedroom floor. Here, my lungs became empty, open windows. In Coyote Springs, I quietly observed my family from a few feet below with trepidation, curiosity. Here, the waves crashed right in front of me, stopped, and receded. My flip-flops suctioned themselves to the wet sand. I stood tall, steady, saved.

This day in Long Beach overshadowed Jessie's disappearance. Gerard's friendly eyes and his faint smelling, light-as-the-air sample of face cream seemed to enliven my parents. Then Gerard said the magic thing: "You make this cream yourself," he said. "You make it pure from the most simple and natural of ingredients. You control the outcome of every batch."

On Monday, Father took a loan from the bank and Mother cleared the knick-knacks from the bookshelves that lined the living room wall in preparation for the making and storing of *New Skin Face Cream*.

Jessie returned without his bike.

We all ate steak, and later, I stood alone at my parents' bedroom window. I could see beyond the horse coral, where Jessie had built his BMX track. He sat alone on top of the berm, looking onto the dirt road behind our yard.

I approached quietly. "What's great about Megadeth?" I asked.

He stood up. "If you don't get it, you don't get it," he said.

The following Sunday, my mother put in a special prayer request with the pastor for my brother, who had made the decision to stop attending church altogether. A white robed minister pulled me gently into shallow water, my sins sank down to the tiles, and everyone clapped.

After the service, the pastor asked the Lord to pay extra attention to the Anderson family who had recently fought with Satan and had barely won.

*Harleigh Orlando*

A Little Bit Everything

We'd been in the car for over an hour. Matthew said the drive from his apartment to his mom's place usually took thirty minutes. But it snowed yesterday. During the night it melted. Now the roads were clear, but paved with a sheet of ice.

Though I pretended to be irritated, I was relieved we'd be late. He told me all about his mom – the baker, the sewer, the crafter, the busy-body, always on the treadmill, always laughing, and always gossiping when she'd had too much wine. He told me about his step-dad, in less detail – the architect, the hunter, the grunter, and the *mmhmmmer* about everything except those few things he was most against. Anyone else that would be there I knew nothing about. The uncle, two aunts, grandma, step-sister, and any other wildcard relatives who hadn't sent their RSVP, but could potentially show up.

"You don't have to worry about any of them," he said. "Worry about Mom. She's the one that'll be hard to impress."

"You're not helping." I took off my hat. Even though I knitted it myself, I pulled at the stray frays inside of it.

"Listen, Brianna." He paused, so I actually looked at him. He rested his hand on my thigh, and focused his eyes straight ahead with a more serious expression than he'd worn all day. "There's a reason it took me this long to bring you home. And it's not because you're not the bring-home-to-mom type. It's because my last two girlfriends weren't and I brought them home anyway."

"Okay," I said. None of that helped either, but okay.

"I've waited this long to make sure you are, and you are. My mom would be hard to impress for anybody. But after those two? You're gonna look just fine."

I was torn between asking him what his last two girlfriends did wrong, and what I finally did right. He never talked about his exes, and I didn't ask. If I asked him about his, he'd ask about mine, and I'd have to finally tell him. Sometimes I thought I was ready for that. But he wasn't. He made that clear. First when I cut my hair too short, and he worried people would think I "looked like a dyke." Then when I made plans to "go out with a girlfriend," and he said, "Why do chicks have to say it like that?" And finally, last summer, when he hung up the phone with his mom. He told me his step-sister took "one trip to Europe and now she's a lesbian."

So it didn't matter if I was dying to know what rules his ex-girlfriends broke. I couldn't ask. I couldn't risk prompting whatever questions he might follow up with.

"What made you think I was the bring-home-to-mom type?" I asked.

Looking over his shoulder, he flipped on his turn signal before gliding into the right lane. In the dark and whipping flurries, he made sure to creep down the off-ramp. "Honestly? Okay, I wasn't going to tell you, but...I got a job offer."

"You did? But that's great, why wouldn't you tell —"

"Because I would have had to move out of state."

A moment of silence passed between us. I tugged on the frays inside my hat more. Then tied off the loose strands in an attempt to apologize to it. "Oh... Well, are you gonna take it?"

"No, I turned it down." He curved onto a new street with tiny brick homes and huge oak, birch and maple trees in every yard. Each home had Christmas lights shining in the windows and bordering their garages. Through the windows TVs flashed, lamps glowed, and people sat down on couches and at dinner tables. It felt too quaint and cozy to be any place my boyfriend grew up, with his white, empty walls, microwave-ready meals stuffed to the brim of his freezer, and houseplants because they didn't pee on the carpet.

"I'd rather be with you than move away and take the job," he said.

I knew I should be relieved. My first thought should have been, like: Thank God, me too. I want to be with you forever, or whatever.

And I do. I so totally do. Really.

That said, my first thought was actually: But you didn't even ask me if moving away meant breaking up. You didn't even think, hey, maybe I should bring this up to Brianna. Maybe this was a big deal, and as a serious long-term couple, we should discuss.

"Okay, so...*that's* what made you think I was a bring-home-to-mom type? How?"

"What?" He shook his head like he couldn't understand the question. "No. That you're more important to me than anything else. Even that job."

"Okay." Nothing was okay. He made a huge decision without even talking to me, without even realizing he should've talked to me about it, and now he knew I was a bring-home-to-mom type because he turned down a job I would have told him to take. I wouldn't have even broken up with him when he moved. I might have even moved in with

him. But I couldn't tell him this, or begin to think about *how* to tell him this, because the car slowed down. He turned the steering wheel, pulling into the driveway of one of the many gingerbread-house homes.

He stepped out of the car. I checked my makeup in the rearview mirror and brushed aside my bangs before I followed him up to his porch. He wrapped an arm around my waist. Then he knocked on the front door, which I thought was weird, since he used to live there and everything.

The door swung open, and I smiled like it was for the camera, right until –

No fucking way.

Both she and I gawked at each other for a second before controlling our expressions.

“Hey, Meg,” Matthew said. He gestured to me. “This is the Brianna I’ve been bragging about.”

I relived it all in a second. Not this past summer, but the summer before. She was my roommate’s best friend. I knew her for a while, but only hung out with her for the first time at my roommate’s birthday party in June.

My roommate’s boyfriend was staying over at our place that night and I didn’t want to be there, so Megan had invited me to her place. She had her own one-bedroom apartment. I went home with her, assuming I’d have a night filled with enough awkward small-talk to put me to sleep. Or, make me pretend to be asleep.

Instead, we sat on her bed and talked all night until the sun came up. With Sugar Ray, Everclear, Hoobastank and The Red Hot Chili Peppers playing in the background on her iPod dock, because that was the kind of crap she listened to. But it was so right, right then.

And around three in the morning, just early enough that she could blame it on being tired, or drunk – even though she wasn’t tired or drunk – she kissed me. And since I could pretend to have the same excuses, I kissed back. I’d never kissed a girl before but it was kind of this thing I always knew I’d do if given the opportunity. Something I wouldn’t go out of my way to make happen, but obviously wouldn’t turn down either.

Especially with her. With her plaid pajama shorts, oversized Packers jersey on, and her sloppy bun falling apart on her head. Her dancing on the way to the bathroom, and her snort in the middle of her laugh when I said something that wasn’t meant to be funny, but since she thought it was, then definitely, yes, I made that joke on purpose.

All summer we had this rule to not know each other. Because in the fall she was studying abroad in France, and I wasn't. Because she wasn't out and I still wasn't sure if I had something to be out about, and to what extent of out I needed to step, because maybe I'd only ever been one step in the closet and one step out. I didn't know the word for it then.

On the last day of summer before my new semester started, before the we'll-still-be-friends promises we made would be forgotten, and we'd pretend we didn't know each other, we lay on one of Lake Superior's beaches and watched the sun rise there like it did through her bedroom window that first night. I didn't kiss her, but I held her hand.

"I couldn't do long-distance," Meg said. "That's just not me."

"I didn't ask," I said, even though I was just about to, because maybe it was "just me".

"But it wasn't nothing. It was never nothing," she said.

It was everything. But I didn't say that. "Not even a little bit nothing."

She huffed out a humorless laugh. "If I wasn't leaving for France."

"But you are," I said.

"I know."

"It's okay."

"I'm just saying. If I had known I'd meet you. I never even thought..."

"I know."

"We could meet again when I get back." She shrugged, like this was so likely, and there was nothing to it. We'd just bump into each other again in the organic foods section of the grocery store because that was the shit she ate, or in the library, not a bookstore, because that was where she found books, or in the lake, in the AM because that was when she was crazy enough to hop in the freezing water. And after a year of pretending all this never happened while she studied in France, we'd pick up where we left off. Yeah, right.

"You never know," she said.

"I know."

We didn't speak again after that. When we left the beach, I left in my car and she left in hers. Only that beach and her apartment ever saw us together, ever knew anything about us at all.

Until now, I was certain I buried the memories of our summer under the sand there.

"So you're Brianna," she said.

“And you’re Megan,” I said, and glanced at Matthew. He looked a little uncomfortable, like he was being left out of an inside joke he wouldn’t get.

I knew then that I wouldn’t be able to keep this from him. That I was bisexual. That I’d met his step-sister. That I never stopped loving her. Megan wouldn’t tell him, but he’d figure it out. He’d see the fingerprints she’d left all over me. Because he’d catch me staring, or adjusting my bangs too much, or asking her questions that sounded scripted. She’d get everything right, I already knew. The pretending. Asking me questions she already knew the answers to, where did I go to school, did I have any siblings, that sort of thing. Nothing too deep for two strangers. But then I’d stutter on my response.

“I’ve been dying to meet you,” she said, grinning. Then she pulled me out of Matthew’s embrace into hers. She held me a moment too long. Long enough that my nose tucked into her wavy hair, and I breathed in the smell of her peppermint perfume, and curled my fingers in her cashmere sweater, so that she wouldn’t let go just yet.

“Me too.”



*Mary Ann Presman*

## To Lego or Not

Carrie chose the bright blue bra from her lingerie drawer and then the matching panties—a set Cliff had given her when their relationship was new. She knew the blue bra strap would be visible through her crocheted white top but that was the whole idea of flirty underwear, wasn't it?

Cliff's wife didn't wear pretty lingerie; she wore old-lady-white underpants. That's what Cliff called them. Carrie secretly wondered if his wife might wear sexy underthings if he would surprise her with such a gift, but she wasn't about to suggest it.

Freshly showered and seductively scented, Carrie was a fit and sturdy redhead who wore her hair short and curly. She returned to the kitchen where the aroma of vegetables roasting in the oven suggested she might open the bottle of good pinot noir even before Cliff arrived. But what if he brought a bottle? Would he be disappointed that she had begun their evening without him? Ah, well—Cliff was a big boy. There was that lovely pop as she pulled the cork from the bottle, then poured just a little into her glass. She was only making sure it would be right with the salmon.

The table looked beautiful—the plates were dark red Fiestaware, almost burgundy. The salmon would look so pretty on these plates, as would the vegetables. Some men could care less about a table setting, but Carrie had discovered Cliff respected her talent for food prep and presentation. It was how she made her living—a much less hectic way of life than that of chef in one of the fanciest restaurants downtown, which is what she had been doing when she met Cliff. Tonight marked the one year anniversary of their first “date.”

Being head chef at Narcissus paid well, but it was an emotional roller coaster and it also meant she worked late into the evening and was exhausted when she left the restaurant. So Cliff encouraged her to start her own business—a food blog. He even bankrolled her startup; they both called it an “investment,” that also made it possible for their relationship to bloom and flourish.

Carrie moved the bowl of orange tulips just a skosh. That was one of the idiosyncrasies of dating a married man—in her case, at least. She really had to provide her own flowers. What if he ran into someone he knew at the flower shop? Or heading down the street to her place with flowers in hand? Without the flowers, he could make up any sort of

story, but with flowers—that made it awkward.

It was okay, she enjoyed picking out her own flowers and had bunches throughout the apartment.

“I like coming here with flowers everywhere,” Cliff told her. “So much nicer than stepping over Legos in every room.”

Of course there were Legos all over his house; every time Cliff went on a trip he brought back a new set. Even when the “conference” was actually a romantic rendezvous with Carrie, they made the mandatory stop in the airport gift shop to purchase Legos. It seemed all three of his kids—two boys and a girl—loved building things and were creative geniuses.

The salmon was good—lightly crusted with Dijon mustard and then baked for just twelve minutes. It was the perfect dish for those rare occasions when Cliff could come for dinner because she just popped it in the oven whenever he arrived. So they had it often, but Cliff didn’t seem to mind.

And no dessert. One didn’t want to be stuffed when sex was on the agenda. Just the rest of the bottle of wine after they had cleared the table. Cliff always helped; Carrie felt it was his way of “playing house.” She wondered—and even asked—“Do you clear the table at home?”

“No, it’s one of the chores we’ve given the kids. I used to, but now the two older ones take the dishes to the kitchen. It’s good for them to learn some responsibility.”

They settled on her couch with half-full glasses of the pinot noir. “Good choice,” Cliff commented. “One of your many talents.”

“It’s part of my job,” she pointed out.

He set down his glass and leaned over to kiss her lightly. Her top slid off one shoulder and he reached for the bra strap. “Good color on you.” He pulled that nearly naked shoulder toward him.

Carrie put her glass down and kissed him back. She liked that he appreciated the way she dressed, her deliberately provocative way of tempting him. Not that he needed tempting. And the sex was always good.

“Where are you supposed to be tonight?” Carrie asked as he eased himself out of her bed afterward.

“Dinner with Jacobs,” Cliff replied, naming a client.

He was gone by 9:30.

Which didn’t bother Carrie at all. Another woman might have cried herself to sleep when her lover left to go home to his wife. But Carrie turned on the TV to catch up on “Dancing With the Stars”—which Cliff would have deemed silly. Maybe she just liked having her place to

herself.

Her cell phone jangled on her bedside table a little after midnight. “CLIFF” it said.

“She’s gone.” Carrie scarcely recognized his distraught voice.

“Who’s gone?”

“Sandy. My wife, Sandy. She’s left me.”

“Just now?”

“Yes. Just now. She was waiting for me when I got home and wanted to know where I’d been.”

“Didn’t you tell her you had a meeting with whatshisname—Jacobs?”

“I did. But apparently Jacobs called here looking for me while I was supposedly with him.”

“Oh, Cliff.” Carrie really thought he was smarter than that—would have considered all the possibilities when making up an alibi.

“We had a terrible fight. She was really angry. I thought she was gonna throw something at me.”

“But she didn’t?”

“No. She kept crying and making me answer all these questions and not even giving me a chance to answer.”

“What would you have said?” Carrie plumped up a pillow in back of her against the headboard.

“Oh, I don’t know, something. But I didn’t even have time to think of anything. She...she had a suitcase all packed and just walked out the door. I couldn’t believe it.”

“What did you think she would do when she found out?”

Silence.

“Cliff?”

“I guess I didn’t think she would find out.”

Right. And the moon is made of green cheese.

“Where are the kids?” Carrie asked, trying to picture the scene.

“Oh, they’re upstairs. Asleep, I think. It was a very quiet, very intense argument. A lot of hissing. I could tell Sandy didn’t want to wake them.”

“Well, that’s good, at least.”

“Yeah, so they’re good. But I’m not so good. This has been quite a shock.”

“I can imagine,” Carrie sympathized.

“So, could you come over?”

She wasn’t sure she heard him correctly—shifted the phone to her other ear.

“What?”

“Could you come over? Help me figure out what to do?”

“Cliff...”

“You’re always so good at logistics and...”

“That is definitely not a good idea, Cliff.”

“But what am I gonna do? I have to get to the office tomorrow, and the kids have to get to school. Sandy always makes sure they get up and have breakfast, and that’s usually after I’m gone. I have an 8:30 meeting.” He paused to take a breath and sighed. “This is gonna screw up my whole day.”

“Your whole *day*?” Carrie repeated.

“You know what I mean. I have to get a handle on things.”

“Here’s what you’re going to do, Cliff. You’ll call the office first thing and reschedule the 8:30. You’ll get the kids up and tell them their mother’s sister is ill in Buffalo or some such thing and then give them breakfast and get them off to school. Then you’ll call your lawyer. Because, Cliff, your wife is going to come back. She’s not going to leave her kids. She’ll return and then she’s going to tell you to leave and then she’s probably going to file for divorce. So you better have your ducks in a row.”

“When do you think she’ll come back?” Cliff asked.

“I don’t know that, Cliff. It may be tomorrow, it may be next week. Does she have her own credit cards?”

“What if I don’t leave? She can’t make me leave, can she?”

“Is that what you want?” Carrie wondered.

“But where would I go?” She could almost see him grimace.

“One of those extended stay places where all the kicked-out husbands go?”

“That wouldn’t be so bad, temporarily.”

“I could come stay with you...”

“No, Cliff. You couldn’t. Not now. Not six months from now. Not ever.”

She hated kicking a guy when he was down, but ...

*Jeanette Russo*

## Father Love

They say you marry your father. In my case, this couldn't be further from the truth. At the age of 16, I swore that the man I would call my husband and father of my children would be the antithesis of the man I called *Daddy*. I was determined to search until I found someone who was as different from my father as whiskey is to water.

From when I was a young girl, my father and I sat at opposite ends of our rectangular wooden kitchen table. My mother sat off to the side, next to my father, my sisters on each side of me. Looking back, it seems unusual but we had an unusual connection. I think it was because I always spoke my mind. He liked that about me. The interactions we had were not always pleasant. We had our share of screaming matches, and often, I would end up being punished but I always went back for more.

These positions at the table have remained ours throughout the years and I resume this place of honor whenever I am at home. After nearly half a century, we still claim these thrones like king and queen of our separate kingdoms, always engaged in making peace treaties.

In the United States, you can work legally when you're 16. I was in my sophomore year in high school and my father wanted me to find a job after school and on the weekends to help with finances at home. I knew his intention was to educate me, not to take a meager amount of what would have been my pitiful salary. I had been searching but I had to admit with the lack of the drive and absence of enthusiasm that he had expected of me. He tapped his nails on the table to the beat of a military tune that he had learned when he was a sergeant in the army. He sang it to us while marching through our rooms when he was trying to wake us up for school. It went:

*Oh how I hate to get up in the morning  
Oh how I hate to get out of bed.*

As he continued telling me what he wanted, the volume of his voice rose to such a level that I am sure would wake the hard-of-hearing woman who lived across the street. He pounded his fist on the table like a judge. He said, “You have to be responsible. Everyone has to pitch in here.” It crossed my mind to point out to him that he hadn’t always done his share, nor been responsible, but a moment of lucidity saved me from blurting that out and getting the shit knocked out of me. “You must get a job,” he said.

The bold and brazen adolescent that possessed my body at that time stupidly replied, “We’ll see what the law has to say about that.” his neck.

Thankfully, *my throne* was closer to my bedroom so as he rose with his hands in the choke position, I fled to my room and locked the door. By the time he had managed to bust the open the lock, I had climbed out the window and was hauling ass, like mine was on fire, to a friend’s house, feeling grateful that we live in a one-story building. The memories of my father’s beatings were still painfully vivid.

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The first time I remember that my father gave me a real thrashing was when I was in kindergarten. Nearly every day, I had to go to Ted’s Variety Store to buy him some Lucky Strikes. The shop was dark and dirty. Ted, the owner was dark and dirty too. Something about him gave me the creeps. But his store was an Aladdin’s Cave for a child of seven. He sold every sweet you could imagine—candy necklaces, wax sticks filled with sweet sticky juice and flying saucers that I imagined tasted like the Body of Christ that adults ate in church. Some days he would let me pick something for free. Other days my dad would give me a nickel to buy something. Each time I walked into that store I spotted something that captivated me. I especially had my eye on a small chalkboard with a wooden frame and a box of chalk that hung high on the wall. One would have had to be a saint to resist them, which clearly, I was not. Every week my father gave me 35 cents to pay for my milk in school. I stopped drinking

milk for a while, not the ultimate sacrifice for me, as I didn't like white milk, and saved the money for the chalkboard. When my father saw the chalkboard he asked me where I got the money for it. I was too terrified to lie. He took me over his knee and spanked me so hard that it felt afterward like I had sat on hot coals. He said I had stolen his hard-earned money.

Throughout the following years, there were many incidents like this. Once, I stole some gardening tools from a 'rich' friend's house to play in the giant snow banks that were on the street in front of our apartment. I believed she was rich because her father carried a briefcase to work. I later learned that he was the local drug dealer. While we played, I fantasized about what I could do with these shiny metal tools in the snow. I imagined that I would convert one of those colossal snow banks that were as tall as I was into an Alaskan igloo. When it was time to go, I arranged the tools discreetly, one by one, under my coat. I had almost reached the front door when my friend's mom called out to me. *Jeanette, how would you like to stay for dinner?* Panic stricken, I uncrossed my arms and all the tools clanged one by one in what seemed to be slow motion to the hard floor. The sound echoed throughout the house. I fled the crime scene but before I had arrived home, she had already called Zissy, my Italian aunt who lived downstairs from us, who called my father who then whipped my ass.

One Christmas day, I made the gravest error of all, telling my mother to shut up. I cannot remember why or how I could say that to her. My father came after me a mad dog. He was big on respect, the Don Corleone type of respect. He grabbed me by the throat and banged my head against the wall. Somehow, I ended up on the floor. He kicked me a few times while I was down. *Don't you ever, ever tell your mother to shut up again.* In later years, when I reminded him of this, he laughed and said it was nothing, that he was only kicking me with the top of his foot. Not the point. I was ten years old, a bit young to analyze the angle at which his foot was placed while it struck my small skin-and-bones body.

But no matter what happened, I was crazy about my father. I was like an abused woman, always going back for more. When I was

little, I remember waiting to hear his footsteps trudging up the back steps. I would fly to the door, as if he had been away for years, into his begrimed arms. I was happy. It didn't matter that we didn't have much because he couldn't hold down a job. It didn't matter that he reeked of whiskey. And it didn't matter that he hit me too hard sometimes. I was *his* girl. His favorite.

Oddly enough, he even shared this sentiment with me once. It was after the passing of my sister. I was 17. He said he had wanted me to know just in case. I didn't really understand what he meant, just in case I died or in case he died. I wasn't sure but it was something that made me feel good, like receiving an award. He was as handsome as any movie star, with brown wavy hair and beautiful blue eyes. I was the one who got to sit next to him each evening on the sofa while I fanned away the exhaust fumes from his Lucky Strikes. Not my sisters. Not my mother. I was the one who ran across the street to Ted's to buy him cigarettes or who would get him another beer from the kitchen. For me, serving him was a privilege. When he wasn't mad or drunk, he smothered me with love and kisses. He would pretend he was the big bad wolf and would eat me up starting from my toes. He would dance with me all the time and let me stand on his feet. He would twirl me around as if he was Fred Astaire and I was Ginger. He would sing Frank Sinatra songs to me. He had a beautiful voice. Those were the days.

As I approached adulthood and grew wiser, I began to see him through different eyes. He was irresponsible. He had dropped out of high school to join the army. He spent six years abroad doing his military service and when he returned with his Japanese war bride, his future looked bleak. He had no job, no money, and no home. When I was a child, I thought he worked at the unemployment office. He has relayed the story of the day I was born countless times of how he didn't have a job and only had two dollars in his pocket and a quart of milk in the fridge. But this didn't hinder him from practicing the sport of imbibing with the boys and often came home tanked. He verbally abused my mother who worked hard at a fulltime job in a sewing factory doing piecework while raising my two sisters and me. She was our rock. She never complained. She kept the house, cooked,



sewed our clothes, cut our hair and even acted as the local vet for the stray cats in the neighborhood, cleaning and lancing their wounds. She did everything that was expected of her as a wife and a mother. Her head held high, she remained humble. The only complaint she had, that she confessed to me in later years, was that she had never had a set of matching dishes. That always stuck in my head. The poor woman never had a set of matching dishes.

When I left for university, I could sense that whatever thinly stretched ties I had had that once tethered me to my father were now threadbare. I had no idea of what I wanted but I knew what I didn't want. I didn't want to end up like my mother. I was on a mission for a set of matching dishes. Little did I know that my father was the shadow stitched to my feet that I nonetheless thought I could outrun. In the end, he was much stronger than I had believed.

Rona Simmons

## Cloudy With a Chance

I arrived in Franklin with ample time to stop at the nursing home, but opted to go straight to my hotel. I needed to review my notes. That's what I told myself. After a five year absence from a town that was once home, I'd been invited to speak to the local college's symposium on climate change. I planned to stay overnight and then spend Tuesday afternoon with my sister Elaine and our mother.

Elaine had offered to meet me at the airport and chauffeur me to and from the conference, but I declined, rented a car, and found a hotel—one of a chain I'd avoid given a choice, but it was the only accommodation for miles.

###

Weeks ago, I had phoned to ask Elaine for the latest on mother and how I might help during my brief visit. She said she didn't see how meteorology or a one day stay would help.

"The word is climatology," I said. I left it at that, choosing not to engage in the old battle between us, her staying, my leaving. At eighteen, I had fled Franklin for an education and then a career that took me more places than I care to remember. I lectured and I wrote lengthy and weighty treatises on global warming. Elaine stayed behind, married in a hurry, and divorced almost as quickly. After dad died, she moved in with mom, a six-year-long arrangement that ended when mother needed around-the-clock care.

"Whatever," Elaine said, her telephone voice as thin and stingy as her words. "I'll send you the information I have."

The one-line email that followed listed a doctor's name and address, no salutation, no closing, yet in the white space above and below her message, I read Elaine's unwritten thoughts. *Do you think your expertise in what originated with the study of entrails of fowl makes you an authority on the weather inside the human body? What do you know about the decay of bone, the frailty of vessel walls, or the clouds of the mind?*

###

My hotel bed was uneven and the pillows lumpy. The blackout curtains failed—heavy and rubbery when I drew them over the window but an inch too short—and V-A-C-A-N-C blinked a burnt orange through the crack. I slept in spurts and woke in ill spirits for my lecture.

Later, at the podium, I explained how air masses sourced near the pole moved across the earth's surface and brought frigid temperatures to the temperate zones. I cited facts, hard, cold statistics, my voice rising with authority and enthusiasm. The hairs on my arms stood erect. But although the audience was tuned to the sound of my voice, their eyes, the ones not glued to smart phones and tablets, were fixed on the curtains behind me, or the ceiling, or the floor. Their minds were anywhere but on my message.

I ended the lecture. Polite applause followed, but no one raised a hand, no one asked a question. The small crowd of the environmentally conscious, an assortment of faculty, students, and representatives from the local media, rose from their chairs and filed toward the exits.

I followed, found my car, and drove the short distance to Quiet Meadows Nursing Center, a cluster of unmatched buildings snuggled on two blocks near the town's edge. One block to the east was a vacant red-brick building. Over its door, letters in faded and peeling paint spelled FRANKLIN GAZETTE. To the west was the government complex, a county jail, courthouse, and city hall. There wasn't a meadow for miles and, with the continuous screech of air brakes from trucks approaching the first of Franklin's two stop lights, quiet was miles farther.

I had lunch with Colleen Samples, the director of the nursing home. Colleen had spent her whole life in Franklin and claimed to know everyone who had ever lived in or near the town. Still, she couldn't recall having met me and spoke Elaine's name only after I did.

We ate surrounded by flax colored walls, walls I suspected were once a vibrant lemon or dandelion and which now bore a Jackson Pollack-like scatter of black marks where chairs and movable beds had left their imprint. The carpet had a curious pattern of wear. *Shush, shush.* A resident passed our table, nudging his walker forward. Cloven and impaled on the underside of the walker's aluminum legs, tennis balls born for another life skimmed the ruts left by earlier passersby.

Colleen had no insight on my mother's condition, commenting only that my mother was a sweet woman and was faring well. On her third mention that I address my questions to the charge nurse, I sighed and forked the last of the iceberg lettuce from my plate.

After lunch, Colleen led me to the Morning Room where she explained Quiet Meadows "guests" spent most of their time. I wanted to

ask if there were an Afternoon or Evening Room, but I held my tongue and surveyed the room. The elderly sat in clusters playing cards and board games or unmoving in front of the television, anesthetized by one of a rotation of talk shows.

At the far side of the room, I spied my mother seated with her back to me. Every woman including my mother had a head of gray hair, but my mother's hair was distinct, more silver than gray and with a gleam that hinted of an active youth and a preference for the outdoors.

I approached and set my hands on her shoulders, then bent to place my face where she could see me. Her face brightened but she returned to her cards, leaving me to wonder if what I thought was recognition was a trick of lighting or my imagination.

"Mom, it's so good to see you," I said.

"Two hearts," she said.

"What?" said a wheel-chair bound woman across from my mother, though it came out, "Whaaaa?"

"This isn't bridge, Betty, it's solitaire," said a third woman.

"Solitaire," my mother said, her tone flat.

Fingertips tapped a steady rhythm against the taut leather of a second card table to my left where a gentleman pondered his next move. I speculated the drumming was an involuntary tremor as he waited for a neuron to fire.

"Gerry! Gerry!" the drummer called. The tapping persisted.

A middle-aged woman in a mauve pants suit approached. The badge pinned above her left pocket read GERALDINE.

"What is it, Mr. Hanlon?" she asked.

"She's done it again." The drummer pointed at the woman facing my mother.

Gerry wheeled the woman from the table. As they passed, the odor reached me, the unmistakable scent of urine and old age.

Elaine arrived. She smiled, hugged, and patted her way across the room, the mood of each person she greeted changing from mild annoyance to calm. I studied her as she approached and swallowed hard. She'd changed. She was older, of course, but dulled, her once sharp edges worn away, whether from the burden of caring for mother or from years living alone in Franklin I could not say.

Elaine planted a kiss on mother's head. The old woman looked up, smiled, and then as she did with me she returned to her cards. But calm had fallen on her as well, smoothing the wrinkles around her eyes, the curve of her spine, even the waves in her hair. Elaine patted mother's shoulder and then drew me aside.

“Sorry I’m late,” she said, though the apology sounded hollow. “You’ve seen.”

“She’s better than I expected,” I said and realized we’d not greeted each other. We had skipped the niceties. I wanted to start over, to say hello and ask after her, but she handed me a page pulled from a well-thumbed notebook she carried. The page listed diagnoses in Elaine’s precise but artful penmanship. At the bottom, in capital letters MEMORY LOSS, the bulbous humps of the M’s and the looping tail of the lone Y made the word MEMORY appear lost itself.

“How have you been, Elaine?” I asked, determined to begin again on a better foot.

“Same, same. Things don’t change much around here. Oh, and here’s the list of her medications,” she said, handing me another page. “What good they’ll do you I don’t know. They say in a month, maybe two, she won’t recognize anyone. Or maybe just on good days. We talked about it a year ago. She circled the fifth of May on her calendar. She said she would stop remembering on the fifth of May. Can you imagine?”

“I’ve heard of an experimental treatment, something about ultrasound breaking up the proteins in the brain. Like what they do with kidney stones.”

Elaine, who’d been staring at mother while we spoke, grew silent, turned, looked at me and then over my shoulder. She kept the pose so long I was convinced someone was there and I turned. Behind me, an abandoned wheel chair and a meal cart hugged the wall. We might have stood frozen in that moment had my mother not interrupted.

“Three hearts,” she said, sounding triumphant.

“Mom, let’s go sit outside in the fresh air. You’d like that wouldn’t you?” Elaine asked.

“I’d like that, yes,” she said, parroting Elaine. She rose, one shoulder struggling upwards then the other in a stair step fashion, stopping well short of erect. Each of us slipped an arm under one of mother’s elbows and, after testing our strength, she yielded her body to us.

Outside, we found a bench and sat flanking her. Elaine folded her hands in her lap. I kept hold of my mother’s arm and stroked it, the skin loose over a twig-like bone.

“Look, mother,” I said, as a male cardinal settled on a nearby birdfeeder. Mother’s gaze was locked on my hand on her arm. I inched my hand upward and pointed at the feeder, hoping not to scare the bird.

The cardinal lingered, but was wary and twitched its head from side to side. “Can you see him? There, in the feeder?”

As mother raised her head the motion alarmed the bird and it took flight.

“Oh!” The smallest of sounds escaped her lips. Her blue eyes sparkled and wisps of silver floated over her forehead like clouds as she followed the bird’s path. For one instant, she was the woman I remembered. She was my mother.

“You saw him, didn’t you?” I asked.

She smiled and said, “He comes to my room.” After a pause, she added, “They all come. Every evening. And they stay and watch over me.”

I glanced at Elaine. She shook her head and looked away.

“Oh,” I said, echoing my mother.

“There you are, Miss Bodine,” Gerry said as she emerged from a doorway behind us. “I’ve been looking all over for you. It’s time for your pills. Besides, you know you shouldn’t be out here in the heat of the day, not even with Miss Elaine.”

Gerry hovered behind our bench then brought mother to her feet in one efficient swoop of her arms. “Why don’t we go take a nap before dinner?” Gerry was one of those people compelled to take charge of a situation, to remind everyone of her position of authority, and to silence opposition.

My inclination was to protest, but Elaine said nothing. Not wanting to disrupt whatever understanding Gerry and Elaine had, I remained silent and followed, trailing behind Elaine, Gerry, and mother.

We returned inside to the smart of sour air. While Gerry prepared mother for a nap, Elaine and I waited in the hall.

“How’s life treating you?” Elaine asked, breaking the silence.

“How’s *my* life?” I asked.

“Yes. Are you happy? Are you good at what you do? The weather people around here are pathetic. They never seem to get it right.”

“Well, I’m not exactly a weather people.” I laughed. “I’m a climatologist. It’s different. We take a longer-term view of the weather, so to speak.”

She nodded though I was not sure if she understood or cared. “And Will?”

“Oh,” I said. “Will. We’ve gone our separate ways. He’s remarried.”

“Oh.” It was Elaine’s turn.

“I guess I never told you. It was a long time coming. I suppose I spent too much time staring at maps and charts and he found other things to look at. Younger things. Prettier things.”

Elaine smiled as she had at mother earlier, a smile that was not quite a smile and was gone in an instant. I refrained from sharing more of the sordid little affair, the heartbreak of my discovery, and the months of anguish and pain.

“I thought you were the perfect pair.”

“So did I. Once.” I let the words fall to the floor. “Actually,” I said, beginning again, “I didn’t. He was the perfect husband and expected me to be the perfect wife. I knew I would never live up to his expectations.”

“I was in love with him,” Elaine said.

The words caught in the air. For the second time in one day, the hairs on my arms quivered in an invisible breeze. “What?”

“When you were dating in high school, I plotted against you. I told Will things about you. Things I made up.”

“Elaine . . .”

“I slept with him once.”

“I don’t believe you. Why are you telling me this? Why now?”

“It was a long time ago.”

“Jesus, Elaine.” Questions swirled in my brain but lodged in my throat. I was curious to know more, furious not to have known, and angry. But I refused to give Elaine the satisfaction I sensed she sought.

“I’ve been afraid to tell you. I didn’t know how you’d react or what you’d think. Of me.” Elaine shifted her gaze to her hands.

“Anyway, it only happened once.”

“Let’s just leave it at that.”

We turned away from each other, worlds apart yet side by side, blood tearing through my veins, Elaine taking small even breaths.

“Okay, Miss Elaine,” Gerry said as she came through mother’s doorway, “you can go in for a little while.”

Elaine led the way. At the threshold, I halted, taken aback. The ceiling was painted pale blue and here and there someone, my sister I presumed, had added sprays of white clouds. A rainbow in primary colors spanned the far corner and above the bed where my mother could gaze between naps or when she woke in the middle of the night were phosphorescent stars against midnight blue.

Limbs of trees snaked across the walls through spring, summer, fall, and winter in an array that circled the room. Near the window set in

the spring wall, two dimensional branches held a row of bird feeders, cardinals resting on one, bluebirds on another, canaries on a third.

I thought not of my mother and her failing state of body and mind or that I would soon lose the woman who brought me into this world. I thought not of my sister and her betrayal of my youth and my life. I thought of Elaine, the person who created the tableau of a world that would usher my mother out. And I realized she was not so much dulled as at peace with her role as daughter, and sister.

“You see,” mother said, pulling me back. Her blotched and wrinkled face turned, following her hand as she pointed to the cardinal on his perch. “There he is.” Then, her eyes panned to the opposite wall where the clouds were dark and lined with charcoal. “Do you think it’s going to rain?” she asked, turning to Elaine, not me.





C

CREATIVE  
NON-FICTION



*Nicole Carr*

## Never too old for cake

Age is one of those taboo subjects that most of us who are aging really don't care to discuss. In fact, we often try to hide our age. We misrepresent it, we go on fad diets, we dye our hair and we sometimes shave a year or two from our children's age--just to appear more youthful! So, as I turned back the pages of the calendar, it easily provided me with a flash back to my childhood years, when aging was a spectacular event—even a trophy!

Early on in life, birthdays or B-days were celebrated with cake, candles, song and quite a bit of fanfare. At the time and also now, it was a big event to celebrate children's birthdays and many parents particularly my mom turned into a giant, clown figure who danced around our home entertaining a room full of adolescent childhood friends who had consumed mass quantities of high fructose, corn syrup candies and were literally bouncing off the walls. My mom had the patience of a saint, so she relentlessly showed considerable tolerance for children screaming in high-shrill, whimsical tones expressing the excitement of the day.

Then, at the stroke of midnight, when I turned 16, it was as if a three-alarm fire had sounded and left an edict behind that no further birthday celebrations were permitted. I'm still not sure what caused 16 to be the golden age to end this tradition, but I sensed a family recession may have been the cause of the B-day celebration pause as well as the cancellation of a monthly allowance earned for completing household chores that I should have been doing for free. The allowance and the birthday celebrations disappeared like my brother when my mom called for help cleaning dirty dishes in the sink! Yet as the days grew longer, I continued to ponder if B-day parties were a lost tradition at my house and if the parties just like my allowance would fade into the shadows.

As the time drew closer to my actual birthday, I looked for signs of birthday celebration preparations like decorations or cakes, but I didn't see or hear anything remotely resembling the time-honored traditions of a B-day party. So, I asked my eldest sister for more information about the tradition, because she knew everything about anything that occurred in our home. Then, when I inquired about the possibility of another birthday party, she patted me on the head and kindly responded, "Oh, sweetie, no one told you, huh? You're too old for cake at 16." I was too old for cake at 16? My life started flashing

before my eyes and I began crafting my wish list, a 16-year old's version of a bucket list. My sister noted the panic-stricken look on my face and she softly whispered, "It will be ok." I counted to 10 and back, and I realized that birthdays funded by parents were like the cash left under a pillow by the tooth fairy -- here today and then gone without a trace; never to be seen again!

The next year, which was the summer before college, I got a job and saved my money just like my mother taught me to do. Then, the next four years sped by, I completed college and now I was looking for work again. How did that happen? It was as if I blinked my eye and nodded my head like a Jeannie in a bottle and then I was 20. After that day, time seemed to fly by like falling leaves tossed in the wind on an autumn day. And during those days, I wasn't quite sure why time was passing so quickly. But, there was one thing that I was certain about--growing older caused me to ponder about a quote by George Barnard Shaw that was commonly used by my grandmother: "Youth is wasted on the young." In fact, in my youth, I never quite understood the quote's meaning and why my grandmother consistently shook her head and recited it. But, as I began to mature, I thought about the quote again and it caused me to reflect about things that I should have done when I was younger as well as those that I still have time to do now.

30 rolled around and life got a little more serious because a decade had passed and I, like most 30-somethings, had previously been behaving like teenagers. We may not have taken our jobs seriously and some of us were still trying to find the *right* job. Many of us still had some growing up to do. So, when were we to grow up--in our 20s or in our 30s? The fact of the matter was this—once you become an adult, then you really may not want to be one. The added responsibilities of maintaining a household, children, significant others and jobs may not be what you initially signed up for, but you do your best because in life, there simply are no dress rehearsals.

As the decades trot by and we develop bucket lists and remember good times or bad, we learn to value life and the people with whom we share it. We realize that the rush to age we experienced in younger days was sometimes done carelessly as it was difficult to see past the precious moments in time. Yet, as we grow older and learn a few more life lessons, we make the most and best of life and we celebrate the gifts that it brings daily. We savor life like a fine wine and as I celebrate another B-day, I remember that I am never too old for cake.

*Kristin Kalsem*

## Purple Coneflowers

My Aunt Dorothy, farmer's wife and mother of six kids, retreated into her Harlequin romance novels while sitting in an overstuffed rocking recliner in her dining room in the midst of what to my only-child self was total chaos. Television blaring, doors slamming, feet on stairs, Snuffy the old dog snoring and Kool (named after the Cigarette brand) barking, with sports equipment, jeans, and newspapers strewn all over the house. When I was in fifth grade, I had a recurring dream that involved meticulously cleaning Aunt Dorothy's house. I would polish the dusty surfaces with Lemon Pledge and pair up the stray shoes that congregated in piles everywhere. I couldn't imagine how she could sit and read with obviously so much work to be done. Now, I have nothing but great admiration for how she took care of herself in this way. Aunt Dorothy was able to tune out all of the noise and internal chidings of what she *should* be doing. She loved to read, so she did.

I love to write. But even with four fewer children and a home much easier to keep clean than a farmhouse, distractions keep me from making space for writing in my life. This summer, however, I retreated myself, not within my own home, but to a week of writing at a Tranquility and Spirituality Center in a nearby town. This writing retreat was held from Sunday until Friday afternoon, during which time there were shared meals and much free time to write and walk and appreciate the beautiful grounds that surrounded the Center. Each day after breakfast, I would carry my cup of coffee and computer out to the gazebo and become totally caught up in the writing, something that is so challenging for me to do at home, with the busyness of teenage boys and terriers all around me, and always so much work to be done. In the gazebo, it was just me and the words.

I was able to write so much that week as well as have the kind of thoughtful, silly, intimate, funny, moving conversations that just happen when women spend time together. It was a days-long sleepover for grown women, with wine, yoga, and dreamboards replacing Diet Cokes, nail polish, and *Seventeen* magazine. Over lunch one day we were talking about the gardens and Kathy mentioned that she had seen a goldfinch that morning, feasting on a purple coneflower. The goldfinch is the state bird of Iowa, and when I lived there, I used to have a goldfinch feeder right outside my dining room window. I loved their coloring and perky confidence, the way they would linger at the feeder

seeming to enjoy having their feathery features appreciated up close. I couldn't recall ever seeing one in Ohio. "Oh," Kathy assured me, "they're here. My husband and I planted two purple coneflowers right outside the window of our breakfast nook in the kitchen. We enjoy those pretty birds every morning." Later in my room I wrote on my list of "want to dos" to plant purple coneflowers outside my own kitchen window.

Near the end of the week, we were all feeling that sense of melancholy that comes when something special is drawing to a close. Of course, I was anxious to see the boys and spend time snuggling with those noisy dogs, but I knew that I would be losing some things too--that glorious alone time to think and write and walk in solitude, the warmth of the women I had met, and the three home-cooked meals a day, made with fresh vegetables grown in the garden on the grounds.

During our last writing circle, we talked about leaving. One of the leaders encouraged us to be gentle with ourselves. Life is hectic and it was more than likely that we would be returning to some level of chaos. After a final meal together, we said our good-byes. I only lived 30 minutes from the retreat center but it felt as if I had been hundreds of miles away for a week. I wanted to arrive home after Kay, the woman who had been caring for my dogs, had dropped them off. She had been doing other odd jobs for me while I was gone and I wasn't quite ready to return to all of life's practicalities that she no doubt would fill me in on. Thinking how I might dawdle away an hour or so, I remembered that a market selling local produce and plants was not far out of my way. I headed to Pipkin's and purchased two purple coneflower plants.

When I arrived home, there were no cars in the driveway so I knew it was only the dogs to greet me. After a joyful welcome from them, I went out to rescue the plants from the hot car. I wasn't in the mood to plant them that day but they would be fine until tomorrow so long as I watered them. I noticed that Kay had set up the new sprinkler that I had purchased and not had a chance to use yet in the front yard. I carried the coneflowers over near the sprinkler, which was one of those that flows from one side to the other in a high graceful arc. I turned on the water and was immediately drenched as this brand new sprinkler must have been set on some powerful setting and aimed right at me. I scurried out of the way before it returned, but I was really wet. Still calm from my week, chuckling at myself, I shook some of the water out of my sundress and decided that I might as well not change clothes until after I had turned the sprinkler off again. I set to unloading my car and going through the mail. A little while later, I headed outside to turn off the

sprinkler. This time I studied the spray of the water, feeling like a little girl timing her way into a game of jump rope on the playground. As the water cleared the area near the spigot, I dodged in and started turning off the water. But that sprinkler moved *fast*. Before I could turn the knob all the way to “off,” I was doused again. I looked like someone had thrown a bucket of water at me, at close range. “Oh for heaven’s sake,” I muttered. But then remembering to be gentle with myself, I shook myself off yet again and headed inside to change.

The boys both returned from work later and it was great to see them. We went out for a quick bite to eat and then the boys headed out to be with their friends. It was still light outside and I decided I might as well plant those flowers.

I wish I were, but I am not, someone who really enjoys gardening. My dad was passionate about it and, well into his eighties, he made both his yard and my own look lovely. Freshly-cut flowers that Dad brought in and arranged in simple vases for my Mom graced the center of our kitchen table all of my childhood. Flowers carry much meaning and memory for me and I want them as a part of my everyday; I just don’t want to have to plant them myself. But that Friday evening, I was in a really good mood and happy about the coneflowers.

There turned out to be room for only one plant by my kitchen window so I decided that the other would go in my wildflower garden. I located the spade in the back of the garage and then struggled to dig holes deep enough in the dry earth, muttering all the while about gardening not being my thing. But I was pleased when it was done. The one coneflower plant, with six bright lavender flowers sporting plump orangy seedheads, would be quite a fetching invitation to breakfast for a goldfinch, and the other deeper purple one looked so majestic in the midst of all of the yellow daisies and black-eyed Susans. All that was left to do was to water.

Fortunately this was the back yard with a different water spigot. I had however bought a new sprinkler for the back too. Careful to place this new sprinkler so that it would shower the coneflower and not me, I went and turned on the water. “Oh no,” I yelled, realizing too late that this sprinkler had a wider span than the one in the front, and that more water was heading my way. I started to run but before I got anywhere my tennis shoes slipped out from underneath me, both at the same time, neither one able to find traction on the wet slippery stones. I fell splat, my left hand somehow slamming into the ground just in time to buffer my face. That hand and my right knee took the weight of my whole body, multiplied by eight my trainer later told me, since I had been



accelerating. And, of course, the water pounded down all around me as I struggled to pick myself up.

Years ago I made a commitment to talk to myself in the same way that I would speak to a dear friend. No insults, no nastiness, no pushing my own well-worn buttons. But come on, caught in the spray of the sprinkler three times in one day, maybe having cracked my kneecap and facing crutches for the rest of the summer. This was too much.

“You are such an *idiot*,” I berated myself. “I can’t believe this. How stupid and uncoordinated can you be?” All this I was sputtering as I limped to the door, knee all bloodied, left hand hurting really badly, but still so overloaded with adrenaline that it was impossible to see what damage had been done. I knew I should head directly for ice to stop the swelling, but I was shaking from the inside out and I knew that, more than anything, I needed the calm and comfort of a warm bath. I would wash my poor self clean and take stock of my injuries.

Once settled in the tub, I tenderly ran a wash cloth over my legs, wiping off the dried blood and tending to what was still bleeding. My trembling right hand gently pressed around the area of my knee, thankfully finding nothing that felt broken beneath the deepening bruises. This was entirely due to the heroic sacrifice of my left hand, the one that had now become almost impossible to open. I had never paid any attention to that small padded part of my hand directly beneath my thumb, but that day, it resolutely got to the ground first, unflinchingly absorbing the force of over 800 pounds.

The day after this fall, I had a manicure appointment. “What happened here?” asked Eva, the Polish woman who, over the years, has developed a close relationship with both me and my hands. The whole story spilled out, the joy of the retreat, my pleasure in writing, my hopes of making writing a daily practice, my fears of losing all I had learned in re-entry, my stumbles, and my fall.

“I have just the thing for you,” she said. She walked over to a cabinet in the back of the room and pulled out a white tube. It was a soothing lotion that she rubbed with great care into the palm of my aching hand. “It works wonders,” she assured me, “It has echinacea in it. Echinacea comes from purple coneflowers.”

My return landing from my writer’s retreat was far from smooth. It was hectic as predicted, even traumatic in pretty unanticipated ways. But that’s the way life is, isn’t it? Despite our best intentions, regardless of our preparedness, sometimes we fall flat on our face. But maybe, if we let ourselves retreat, take the time to make and notice connections, whether away from or in the very midst of the chaos of everyday life, it

can lessen our pain. It may even help us to heal from whatever it is that drives us to ignore what we really want to do and tidy up shoes instead. Did you notice? I'm home and I'm writing.

Gloria DeVidas Kirchheimer

## “Her Ring”

Some diamonds are missing and there are little black holes in my mother’s wedding ring. It still sparkles, as she did, but those black holes speak to me of absence--absence of attention, concern, love. I would like to think that by wearing it I’ll make it perfect again, make her the mother I wished I had.

She wore the ring for 50 years and the only time it left her hand was when she was on her deathbed and the nurse slipped it off her finger and gave it to me. Made up of tiny diamonds, it’s still beautiful and though it still fits me, it’s a bit tight now. I only wear it at home when I’m alone. Recently I thought I had lost it and spent hours searching for it. Is that a Freudian situation or what?

No matter how I turn it there’s always a gap where a diamond should be, a constant reminder of her imperfections, though to hear her talk about herself, one would think she had none. When I showed artistic talent or excelled in school, or was singled out for job promotions, she took full credit. “You take after me,” she said. “It’s in the blood,” reminding me of our illustrious 16th century ancestor, Elijah ben Moshe de Vidas who lived in Safed, Palestine, though his family probably originated in Spain. He wrote a famous treatise on morals for the general public, *The Beginning of Knowledge (Reshit Hochma)* which correlated Jewish ethical and moral teaching with the Kabala. Like the other Safed mystics of the time, he advocated humility, modesty, asceticism. He cautioned against anger, pride, envy, overeating, excess.

By the time it reached my mother the humility gene seems to have been eclipsed along with the one for modesty. Imagine my humiliation when she raised her hand in my 8<sup>th</sup> grade history class during parents’ week, to answer a question posed by our teacher. She said that I should be proud of her.

In my sanctimonious moments, I tell myself that I’m paying tribute to her by wearing the ring, keeping her memory alive. After all, she was my mother, she fed and clothed me and entertained me, always singing and dancing around the house. She knew all the words to songs of the 1920s, ‘30s, 40’s. The life of the party, even when it was my party, with my friends. Well, who else’s mother could recite French poetry by heart or interrupt a serious conversation by bursting into song—in Italian? Anywhere, any time. On the street, in a bus. Wherever there was an audience.

The ring had magical properties for me when I was a child. A great believer in the evil eye, my mother performed an incantation when I was sick with measles, stomach aches, chicken pox. A stream of--to me--gibberish flowed from her mouth while she waved her left hand over me, those diamonds shining with an unearthly light. I was all but hypnotized. The incantation went on and on, long stories about who begat whom, the travels of the prophet Elijah, prayers to extirpate the evil eye from my body and banish it to the nether regions. The ring, always in my sight, promised me a cure--which always occurred sooner or later. "You see, it works," she said when I scoffed at her superstitions. But secretly I was convinced that my return to health was due to the power of the ring.

It doesn't seem far-fetched to think of it as a cousin of the magic ring in Wagner's epic *Ring Cycle*. Whoever possessed it was assured of absolute power over gods and humans. If I wear my mother's wedding ring, will it change my memory of her? Will she appear to me as the ideal mother, rather than the one who commandeered the first Thanksgiving at my new home by bringing enough appetizers to stuff my 20 guests so that they were too full to eat the turkey dinner I had slaved over?

I can't help thinking of the loving letters written by Mme. de Sévigné to her daughter. Her only reproach was for the circumstances that required them to live far apart. What exquisite compliments to this daughter, seemingly a paragon of devotion and tact and wit. Once, when I was introduced to one of my mother's friends, the woman expressed surprise: Mother had never mentioned that she had a daughter. Those acquaintances of hers who knew of my existence told me how much my mother praised me. But what I recall is a reading I was to give at a community center to which I had invited her. When a friend of mine inquired if she was proud of her daughter, Mother answered, "We'll see."

That ring bound her to my father in a marriage where each of them referred to the other as Chéri or Chérie, even in moments of exasperation. When she expressed a wish to find a job—after all she was educated, multilingual, organized, diplomatic—his reaction was "No wife of mine..." etc. Relegated to volunteer work where she was responsible for juggling huge budgets, planning events, and dealing with the synagogue hierarchy, she didn't have the benefits I had, the freedom to come and go, to leave the husband alone some evenings, and to take separate vacations. She could have run a large company or a government agency. All the reports she wrote during her decades as a volunteer are now preserved in an archive on the internet. How proud she would have

been to know this, a woman whose timidity in the face of technology caused her to jump away from my desk when my computer addressed me by name (*Welcome, Gloria*).

Should I take my mother's ring to a jeweler and have those missing diamonds replaced?

Each gap is a black hole, a period of emptiness in my life as a daughter. Like my visit to the hospital recovery room after her hip surgery, where she lay groggy, in pain. When I said, "Hi mom, how are you doing?" she took no notice. But when my husband approached the bed and asked how she was, she fluttered her eyes open and murmured, "Oh honey, is that you? I know how busy you are. Thanks for coming." She ignored me completely. Until she couldn't.

"You should have been a nurse," she purrs when I bathe her. The sight of that frail, bent spine with the knobby vertebrae moves me. This virago, reduced to such fragility. I sprinkle powder between her toes, rub lotion into her papery skin, note the folds of the stomach I used to make fun of when I was young, a paunchy belly which I begin to see on myself, the genes again. What else have I inherited from her? Not, I hope, her Machiavellian tendencies. Although sometimes I hear the worst epithet possible from my husband: "You sound just like your mother." Yet he was her victim because he was innocent. Did he understand that when she said to him, "I know you are a fair-minded person," she was setting a trap, before I could rush in? As in: "I am having some friends over. Your wife says she doesn't want to come. You know how much my friends love you both. You don't need to stay long. I want you to bring the wine and open it for us."

Maybe little rhinestones will do as well as diamonds as replacements for the missing stones. Who will know the difference? I'd save a lot of money by doing that. Will I allow myself to wear it then, openly? If it's a little tight on me now, what will happen if my finger swells? It will fit like a vise and I won't be able to rid myself of it, a constant reminder of my mother's power over me. Do I want that? No, I do not. She's trying to ensnare me. Dangling that lovely enticing ring before my eyes.

I'll try it for a week or two, testing it carefully to see if I can remove it at will. This way I'll have some control over her, however belatedly.

*Vivian Lawry*

## Closet Bio

Blue and white bandana, age four. The August day hung hot and heavy, and I wanted to wade in the creek. Granny said, “Just wear your panties. Nobody’s around to see. We’re at the head of the holler.”

I pushed out my lip, dug bare toes into the dirt. “I’m too big to go around nekked.” I felt my face pucker, tears welling up.

Aunt Mary, nine, grabbed one of Grandpa’s bandanas, rolled it into a band, and tied it around my chest. “There. Just like a halter top.”

I wore it, but it didn’t look like a halter top.

White bucks, size eleven, age twelve. Mom bought everything a size too big so I could grow into it. The white bucks were two sizes too big and looked like boats at the ends of my long, skinny legs. I was already five-foot-seven. Everyone said I looked like Aunt Mary, six feet tall, still growing.

White wool blazer, age sixteen. My family didn’t do birthdays. I promised to do my sister’s chores for a month if she pretended to plan a surprise party for my sixteenth birthday. “Please. I’ll do all the work—address the invitations, decorate the basement, everything.”

At my insistence, she told my best friend that what I really wanted was a white wool blazer. Everyone was wearing them, with hip-stitched plaid skirts. When I opened the present from my classmates, I feigned surprise.

The blazer had an elaborate breast pocket crest worked in red, gold, and blue metallic threads. I wore it constantly. When it got grubby, I threw it in the washer and dryer. The crest curled up around the edges. The sleeves shrunk, exposing four inches of skin above my wrists. I was angry with Mom for a month—for not stopping me, for not having taught me how to care for nice clothes.

White nylon uniform and nursing shoes, age sixteen. My first non-babysitting job was waitressing at Root’s Family Restaurant. I had to supply my own uniforms. Dad advanced the money to buy them—sleazy translucent nylon and nursing shoes. He said, “On your feet for hours, you gotta have good shoes.” The shoes reminded me of the white bucks.

All that gear came in handy when I got a job at a golf club in Lake George after my sophomore year in college. I couldn’t pronounce the names of the wines, couldn’t understand even menu French, and felt gauche. But the Italian chef and the club manager liked me and gave me

extra hours whenever they could. One of my extra gigs was tending bar over the lunch hour for golfers. In Ohio, I was too young to drink and knew nothing. One time a customer ordered a seven and seven, and I had to ask how to make it. He laughed and said, “A shot of Seagram’s Seven and 7 Up on the rocks.” That summer, I earned more than ever before.

Bathing suit, two pieces, tiny blue and white checks, age twenty. I bought it for spring break in Florida. The rows of perky ruffles gave more width to my hips and more front to my bosom. I thought, Maybe my body doesn’t look too bad. Afterward, I thought of it as my traveling suit because I never lived at home again.

Vanity Fair underwear, age twenty-one. My high school dropout parents drummed into me the importance of education, the union card to a better life. I took extra college classes, studied enough to stay on the dean’s list and keep my scholarship, and worked three jobs at a time. Waiting tables for meals and tips nearly eliminated food costs. The extra credits were free as long as I stayed on the dean’s list. Cash went only to necessities: textbooks, rent, and Vanity Fair underwear. After I’d dumped my cat’s-eye trifocals for contacts and cut my hair, I dated several nights a week. The underwear was essential to the new me: matching bras, briefs, slips, and half-slips in floral prints and pastels. I felt I could do anything and look good. Vanity Fair was the foundation of my confidence, even though only my roommates ever saw it.

Brown suede minidress, age twenty-five. I bought it—a fringed tunic, the fringe hanging only as low as my fingertips—to visit my lover in Minneapolis. By Christmas, the relationship was over. The minidress hangs in my closet still—though now I wear it as a vest.

Maternity clothes, age twenty-seven. All maternity tops had puffed sleeves and ruffles and looked like the tops of baby-doll pajamas. I searched desperately for something special for the college president’s annual Christmas Dance, the most formal event of the year barring commencement. And for commencement, of course, I wore academic regalia. Marching in with other faculty, it didn’t matter that I waddled and looked like I was wearing a tent.

I found the perfect gown for the Christmas Dance—technically a lounging robe: black, with tiny polka dots and flower figures in white, red, yellow, brown, and orange, long-sleeved and V-necked, tied under my breasts. Even in this Vanity Fair robe, my pregnant body felt foreign.

Pendleton wools and leather, age twenty-eight. Living in the North Country of upstate New York—winter from October through April, temperatures dipping to twenty-five below—I rediscovered wool: Pendleton solids and plaids. Mix and match became addictive. I adopted

the plumage of cold climate faculty, adding long underwear, down-filled coats, Mukluks, and a leather shoulder-bag briefcase. I looked like other faculty members—but knew I wasn't. I'd dashed from high school diploma to PhD in seven years, with no time for frilly electives in art, music, English, history, or study abroad. I was impersonating an educated person.

Long Indian cotton dress in cream and red stripes, age thirty-one. Doing sabbatical research at Harvard, my North Country clothes suited the weather but not the place. I bought flowing dresses, tie-dyed skirts, and lots of chunky silver jewelry in the Harvard Square shops. Driven to be authentic, I wore nothing that looked like something it wasn't. I could afford silver and cotton.

Banker suits, silk, and pearls, age forty. I took a leave of absence from the university and launched a commuter marriage. In Washington, D.C., I directed an office at my professional association. I'd taught person perception for years and knew the truth of my theatrical friend's words: "You've got to look the part to get the part." I read *Dress for Success and Working Wardrobe*, and traded my North Country woolens for city wear. I rode the metro feeling vibrant and independent. My closets overflowed with banker suits and silk blouses, my jewelry box with pearls and gold earrings. When stressed, I organized closets: all the pants hanging together, then skirts, then jackets, each category grouped by color. I arranged blouses by color, collar style, and sleeve length. Rows of shoes lined the shelves, boxes labeled, matching shoulder bags on top. I got ulcers and high blood pressure and lined up the meds in my bathroom cabinet alphabetically.

Navy wool gabardine suit, age forty-six. My suit jackets all had inside pockets for gold Cross pen and pencil. I wore a navy suit to job interviews—the clothing equivalent of plain vanilla. As vice president and dean at a small liberal arts college, two-thirds of the college employees reported to me. I saved the pearls and diamonds for trustee events, embraced a heavy gold chain and tweed blazers with elbow patches to walk the fine line between administrator style and identifying with faculty. My ulcer raged.

Fleece and travel knits, age fifty-two. My husband retired. I debated whether to seek a college presidency or retire too. I retired—but felt like a quitter and was depressed for three years.

I started taking writing classes to reengage my brain. Now I quip that I've made a career of living in pajamas—i.e., fleece and travel knits. I wear fun earrings, and funky reading glasses hang around my neck. I have a two-foot-tall earring tree, three ring boxes, a jewelry armoire, six



closets, three dressers, and three cedar chests—stuffed with body armor, past and present. I'm still trying to write my way to comfort in who and what I am.

*Darlene Patrick*

## A Gordian Knot

Her trim, toned body was squeezed into orange-flowered capri pants, which she matched with an orange and white tee and strappy gold sandals. A stylish yellow sun visor and oversized sunglasses completed her outfit. Standing at the top of the stairs under the snack bar's veranda, several young men were gathered around her, captivated.

I was perched on the end of the low diving board, ready to plunge head first into the resort's swimming pool.

"Watch me, watch me," I beckoned to her, but she wasn't looking in my direction. I waved and raised my voice. "Moth, mma, mmm... " *oops!*

I was under strict orders to never call her 'mother' in public because if people knew she had a fourteen-year-old daughter, they would guess her to be in her mid-thirties and that wouldn't bode well for finding a husband. I didn't understand why age mattered if you loved someone. I tried to please her so she would love me.

"Aunt Sally," I waved again, playing my role, "over here, watch me!"

*Of course, she loves you, friends assured me. She's your mother.*

As a child, I was always hungry. "Nummy, nummy" I chanted that nauseating refrain whenever I wanted to eat, which was often. Mom didn't consider my hearty appetite a good thing.

"You ate a whole lamb chop before you were two!" she lamented, while meat was what she fed me.

I grew up on steaks, chops and beef roasts. Although I loved gnawing on spareribs and the tasty morsels on the bone of a T-bone steak, I dreaded the other slabs of meat my mom cooked in our ancient broiler and set on a plate before me. Those lumps of flesh were always well done, making them hard to chew, like chomping on cardboard. What was worse, they were naked, served without gravy, vegetables, or bread.

I employed the best stalling technique I knew to get through dinner. Cutting the meat into small bite-size pieces, I waited and then, the second Mom looked away, I chucked them into one of the drawers in the cupboard next to me. My stomach never sat empty for long since I kept a stash of candy on hand, bought with money I made babysitting and running errands for the neighbors. I'm sure she found the rotting

meat and yet, she persisted with the high-protein diet she felt was best for a growing girl.

Sunday mornings were different. Our breakfast table was transformed into a veritable feast of poppy seed bagels, lox and chopped liver from Louie's delicatessen. I was just eight years old when Louie, a short, wiry Jew in his seventies, became a mainstay in our lives. Once or twice a week, every week, Mother would pick him up and take him out to a drive-in restaurant. My job was simple: lie down on the back seat and go to sleep. Not a chance. I wasn't about to miss the action, but I couldn't see what was going on without blowing my cover.

Listening intently, I heard them squirming and making funny noises. After a little while, she would point to my curled-up body and whisper, "Shh, the kid, you'll wake the kid." The squirming stopped. Then, she'd drive him back, park in the alley, and get out of the car with him. I remember being scared, left alone in the dark, but it wasn't long before she returned, her arms laden with a couple bags of groceries.

*Whatever she did, she did for you.* An older friend of mine expressed admiration for my mother's ingenuity.

At twenty-five, I was in Seattle with a well-paying job, friends, and my own apartment. I also had a lover. Tibor, a domineering man from the old country, had charmed me with his cockiness and apparent desire to take care of me. After two years of living together, he proposed. Mom was so elated, she threw a wedding party for us in Palm Springs, California. Despite all the gifts and well wishes, our happiness was short-lived. Once I became his wife, he expected me to know my place. I could tell him whether I preferred boxers or briefs, but my opinion on anything else was ridiculed.

"Don't tell me what you think," he'd scream. "There's only one leader here and that's me!"

I wasn't his only target. He blasted waiters who didn't refill his coffee cup immediately after he finished his first.

"Hey moron," he'd stand up, "you there! What am I paying you for?"

I cowered in my seat, praying that a hole in the earth would open and swallow me up.

After the divorce, my mom bombarded me with calls.

"Where've you been?" Her shrill voice blared over the phone wires. "I call at all hours and you're not there. You must be whorin' around town!"

There was a momentary lull.

"Don't come crying to me when you get yourself in trouble!"

Slam!

Within a minute, she called back and apologized. A minute after that, the interrogation and accusations began all over again. I couldn't take it anymore. Living two states away wasn't far enough. I moved across the country to Chicago and left no forwarding address or phone number.

Aunt Loraine admonished me. *She's the only mother you've got.*

George and I met at a jewelry store. I was a part-time salesperson and he was the security guard. Other than working at the same place, we had nothing in common, but he liked me and I was no longer at an age where I could be choosy. I was forty-one; he was twenty-five.

"Keep him!" Mom advised me. "He'll work hard for you his whole life."

The marriage was a fiasco. I convinced him to move back to Seattle with me, but even though I had connections in the city, getting work for my minimally educated and unskilled husband proved impossible. I started hollering at him, berating him. Sex became a nightmare, like going to bed with my son. I left him one year later.

Floating between marriages and bad relationships, it wasn't long before I landed on the couch in my therapist's office. Interrupting my rambling, Barbara changed the subject.

"Tell me about your mother."

"My mother! What does my mother have to do with anything?"

I'd left home decades ago. My latest entanglement was different only in that Michael was more prone to violence than the others. A devious fellow with a thinning shock of white hair, a big toothy smile, pale blue eyes and a ruddy complexion, he looked like the proverbial used car salesman, ready to shake hands and get you the deal of a lifetime. I was an easy sell, still dreaming of Prince Charming and thinking *this time* could be it. What was it that Merle, my mom's only friend, told me?

*She wanted only the best for you.*

I loved Myshka. She was my baby girl, my beautiful longhaired feline with the big, fluffy tail. Rescued by the Humane Society and then by me, I knew from the moment I picked her up and held her in my arms that we would be inseparable...and we were, for nearly twenty years. At fifteen, she hovered close to death until Dr. Ralph appeared and extended her life by five years. It wasn't enough. When my third husband and I

were finally left with no choice but to put her down, an unbearable silence enveloped our house. I heard her everywhere: jumping on the bed, nibbling at her food dish, and meowing at the front door as we arrived home-- but the sounds were only in my head.

Steve, who was equally touched by her death, fashioned a beautiful oak box to house her remains, the top of which was inscribed with her name, the dates she lived, and her paw print. A tiny scroll, tied with a ribbon and placed next to her ashes, completed our memorial to her.

*Myshka was a deliberate, loud and unforgettable cat who often came when called. She was a scrappy survivor to her dying day. She will be with us always.*

My mother died five months earlier, in the spring. I had to fly out to California to clean out her last apartment and attend to various financial and legal matters. There seemed to be no end to the weirdness. Before her cremation, I was asked if I would allow her shoulders to be removed for some study! Although Mom was relatively tall for her time, about 5'7" with broad shoulders, I couldn't imagine how dismembering her dead body would advance science. I refused and a couple of days later, I was presented with all of her ashes in a lovely golden urn. My immediate reaction was to get rid of them, but there was no convenient pond or park around the funeral home to discreetly do so before boarding the plane for my flight home. As I was walking down the aisle to my seat with the urn under my arm, a lady looked up at me and said, "What an exquisite container!"

"It's my mother," I declared, looking straight ahead.

After the trip, I put her on a shelf in the garage, where she remained through the rest of spring, all summer and into the fall. Finally, on a cold, cloudy day in November, my husband drove us to the river's edge. Emptying the contents of the container into the water, I wished her well.

"Goodbye. I hope your hereafter is happier than your life."

*I'm the best mother a child could ever have.*

She used to tell me that all the time.

\* \* \*

About a year after she died, Merle called with some news.

"I was cleaning out my closet," she informed me, "and found a notebook of poems your mom wrote to your dad before you were born. She must have shown them to me..."

I didn't wait for the explanation as to why the notebook was in her possession.

"She wrote poetry?" I asked.

"Yeah," came her flippant response. "Anyway, I'll send them to you."

A week later, a large envelope arrived in my mailbox. Inside was a brown spiral notebook, clearly many decades old. Opening it, I read the neatly penned words: *I dedicate this book to the 'light of my life,' Mark, who was the sole inspiration for these writings.* The fifteen short poems, beginning with one entitled *Love*, could have been mistaken for a selection of children's nursery rhymes were it not for their sorrowful tone.

*Lifting me high on a cloud -- placing me upon a throne  
Then too soon overthrowing me -- leaving me always  
alone.*

I tried to imagine my mom as a dejected young woman, but instead of empathizing with her, I figured she got what she deserved. Landing a rich husband was her only concern. My dad would have been the perfect catch, except by the time they met, he was already married with three grown daughters and several grandchildren. I learned the secret of their affair and her unplanned pregnancy from Merle. Mom summarily dismissed questions about my father or her early life as *ancient history*. "Forget it. What's done is done."

Thinking about the ill will I harbored toward her, even in death, raised the specter of people everywhere scolding me.

*How can you not love your mother?*

I shrugged my shoulders and stared into space. Then, I closed the notebook and put it with the various letters and pictures I have of her, my mom, the woman I used to call *Aunt Sally*.

*Sharon H. Smith*

## Diamond L Ranch

It was short-lived, an ill-fated love affair. After leaving Michael for good, I placed an ad on the ride board in the Student Union at Kalamazoo College to see if I could find myself a companion for the trip back to California and help with the gas. When I spoke to Clara, she seemed right. She had one request if she accepted. Would I mind stopping at a ranch in Wyoming on the way back? We could spend the weekend there. She had friends she wanted to visit. *Why not?* I thought. I had my teacher retirement money and no deadlines.

The Diamond L Ranch was high in the mountains near Jackson Hole, Wyoming.

It was golden green acres of land, many handmade wooden structures and a view of the Grand Tetons in the high meadow. It was the “back to the land” days. The owner of the ranch was building a homesteading school, complete with a high-altitude garden, shower tepee made of wood and other experimental projects. A group of about 20 workers, ranch hands and young people like myself, were helping to build it: clearing roads, putting up hay, tending chickens and all other matter of country life. The setting inspired pen and ink drawings. While Clara visited with her pals, I spent much of the time drawing: the warm inside of the main cabin with the wood-burning cook stove, the cedar forests, pastures, the Tetons in the distance. When I got home, I had an idea of how I might show my gratitude for this very inspiring weekend. I decided to make my drawings into stationary by Xeroxing them onto different color papers. I sent the owner a large variety of them tied with ribbons.

His thank you came in a pale green envelope with the Diamond L logo in the left-hand corner:

Twenty-five dollars a day, room and board, he wrote. I’d like to invite you back to the ranch to do more drawings as soon as you can.

He wrote that he could use these drawings for publicity once he got the place up and running.

The timing was perfect. I was not in love, and still wanted to leave the small town of Benicia, hungry for an adventure, a new life. I was looking at it long-term. I put my belongings in storage and invited friends to my house for a going-away party. Concerned about my plan, one friend reminded me “my horse would know the way home.”

I packed up my old Buick Skylark, the glove compartment decoupled with photos of sky and clouds, and hit the road, this time solo. I traveled through California, Nevada deserts, by the Great Salt Lake, camping along the way. Finally, I drove over a magnificent mountain pass; the sky opened to reveal a bowl of land filled with smaller mountain peaks below: This was my destination.

An elk crossed my path, his antlers held high, as I traveled the last distance up to the ranch. It felt like a good omen. My sleeping quarters would be the attic room above the kitchen and dining room. Other workers were spread about in all kinds of structures, including the tepees. The room below, where we would all gather for meals had a long rough-hewn table. The floor was sawdust. I was told they would add more in the winter to help keep the place warm.

In my plaid shirt, jeans and Fry boots, I set to doing drawings and helping with chores when I could. I even got used to walking through a tunnel of logs to the outhouse. It was good I got many drawings done at the beginning, because later I would have a full-time job.

It was August close to the end of the season and one-by-one the workers and ranch hands were beginning to pack up and leave, leaving more responsibilities for those of us left behind. I had joined in on the field clearing, putting up the hay and helping with the chickens, all skills new to me, and found myself getting exhausted like the rest of them.

I even learned to ride a horse there. The men viewed me as a candy ass, a wuss, a wimp. The regulars were skeptical that I could pull it off, but I got it and proved them wrong. There was a lot of fear going on inside, but I did it. The owner, Chuck, one of the other workers, Dan, and I took off one day on horseback to visit the old cowboy Garl who lived in a shack down the road. My heart did skip a beat when we needed to jump over a small gully. Garl had a voice like John Wayne and wore a red bandana around his neck. We became friends. I occasionally went to visit him when I had a break on Wednesdays. I'd share cowboy coffee and listen to his stories of living in the valley, his work with cattle in the old days, hunting and fishing. He had many "the fish that got away" stories.

When the cook left the Diamond L, I was asked to take over. I needed to learn more new skills quickly: how to split wood, and cook on a woodstove. I was told it was important that I kept the fire burning all day, not only for cooking, but also for keeping the place warm at night. Waking at 5:30 in the morning I would split a tremendous pile of wood. The owner bought me my own leather-covered hatchet that came with



me proudly when I left. The job also required driving into Jackson once a week, with some others to bring back supplies: meat, canned goods, grains, wine, beer and the mail. Those days were non-stop. Early to bed, early to rise.

But I had the place to myself after 8:00 PM. During the late hours, I would develop menus, organize lists, and read while listening to Joni Mitchell, falling in love with her clarity, her romance. Those evenings I would sit by a kerosene lamp, the ranch dog at my feet, the smell of smoke and cedar in the air. Sometimes I would even listen to a mystery theatre episode on the radio. Occasionally I was lonely, but for the most part I was thrilled. Could this be my new life?

One night I came across a tattered copy of the New York Times Cookbook, and I decided for a change of pace I'd make Moussaka for the "cowboys:" ground lamb, eggplant, onions, tomatoes, cinnamon, rich red wine, nutmeg, all topped with a rich and creamy béchamel. Until now, simple fare in huge quantities was what I was asked to make. But this recipe spoke to me, and I thought I would treat them to it, knowing I would work harder to prepare this meal than any of the others. Alone by the stove, the smell of nutmeg and cinnamon filled the air much of the afternoon as it cooked. When I pulled the large casserole dish from the oven and saw the sauce on the top bubbling a beautiful brown, I knew I had done it. Bursting with excitement that evening, I brought the Moussaka to the table.

There was a silence, and then I detected some laughter. "What the heck is this?" the owner said shocked. "You know we have a good size side of beef." I was deflated.

But they ate it and I actually think they enjoyed it. I know I enjoyed it. I was filled with pleasure when I placed a forkful of the warm meat mixture in my mouth. I knew right then that in spite of the reception, cooking was going to become a passion for me. I went back to cooking their boring food for the rest of my stay: big steaks and potatoes. Three square meals a-day.

It was a shorter stay than I expected. The owner had a romance back East he wanted to tend to. Before I knew it, I was told to pack up. Opening up the trunk of my car, I saw there were some old cardboard boxes I had left there. When I went to pull them out, a family of field mice who had called the place home scattered about. I shooed them away, and knew I was onto another solo journey.

It broke my heart the day I drove down the winding road for the last time with my hatchet and drawing materials on the seat next to me. Three elk were heading up as I was going down. I had dusted off my

boots, said my goodbyes to the great gray owl I befriended up on the ridge, the ranch dog Sam, a couple of stray cats, a favorite cooking pot and my place at the ranch table. I had written the Moussaka recipe on an index card and drew a little Diamond L logo in the corner. I have it still. It is bent and greasy. If I hold it close to my face, I can almost smell the cedar smoke.

Gail Tyson

## Museum of My Identity

Let's begin in the elevator, which I ride to the basement with my recently mothballed work self. The marketing company suddenly prefers younger strategists, so 15 years of professional life—spent crafting identities for institutions nationwide—plummets to Storage.

*Devastation.* With quiet precision, the word brackets my yearning to stay in a familiar place with the soft slippage of the first syllable—like earth crumbling underfoot—and the limp finality of being shunned. I hear from former colleagues rarely; I'm irrelevant to their days gem-cut with deadlines, polished with self-promotion. I've aged out of our profession, shouldn't expect a sendoff. But how do I draw the line, after so many years, between colleagues and friends?

It's time to take a retrospective tour of my museum.

### **Traveling Exhibitions**

In my Hall of Interviews, glass protecting every portrait reflects my face, interrogating me: Could the pivots these people made in their lives, confided to me, give mine a direction? Gil, a Jesuit priest, pursued his desire to study architecture, despite denials from his religious order; later, asked to give up his practice to facilitate conversations between architects and parishes, he “discovered talents I didn't know I had.” For Jon, a physician treating hundreds of AIDS patients, a baguette dropped on a filthy bus floor unleashed a torrent of tears, the need to channel unexpressed grief.

In such transient spaces, boundaries become thresholds, like a relief carving that falls off the wall, showing the artist that she is ready to sculpt in the round.

### **Permanent Exhibitions**

Portraying each decade of my professional life as a work of art, these installations begin with my 30s, rendered as the Bayeux Tapestry. That medieval graphic novel, depicting armed conflict for the throne of England on 230 feet of tabby-woven linen, illustrates my battles to secure my reputation, executed with the painstaking control of a fine seamstress.

Next, that Mark Rothko abstract represents my 40s, its deep plums and chestnuts evoking the muse of Celtic melancholy; she attuned me to the undertow in interviews, how to listen to people whose stories I would tell.

Take a hard turn now, around the corner. Surprise! Surviving my dreaded 50<sup>th</sup> birthday, I shed self-doubt with the exuberance of Matisse's *Dance*. Absorbed in the beauty of our teamwork, I missed the signs as I was quietly written out of the ensemble.

What aches isn't the loss of prestige or success—rather, the end of my talent playing off the skills of others.

### **Field Trips**

Weeks before my last business trip with the head of the marketing firm, this dream: *I follow Kathy from our hotel to another part of town, where I lose her. Three women offer to show me the way back. The next moment they are flying over the inner city—Chagall angels, blonde hair trailing, long white dresses fluttering, and I am flying with them, grateful to be covering ground so quickly.*

### **Upcoming Exhibition**

Leading me to the museum's inner courtyard, those angels leave me there, streaking upward, stretching into cirrus clouds that reach toward the horizon. Sea-water laps the far edge of this graveled sanctuary. Pillars crest the water, flat and polished like stepping stones, so close I could easily skip across them.

My guides have brought me beyond my past incarnations, my archive of accomplishments. On the threshold of this moment, I see my life taking shape like an Andy Goldsworthy installation: finding artistry in a chalk stone trail or sheepfold, creating rain shadows, balancing boulders, "making art of the things that don't last." Where what is real is not something I deduce or analyze, but concrete details I observe: dampness like steel wool, a tunnel of birdsong, an adobe church hunched, sphinx-like. Where my task is not to fill the space, but to hold it, defined not by what is made, but by what is found.



E

ESSAY



*Lisa Mae DeMasi*

## Why I Love Bike Commuting in Boston

*“Don’t taunt the alligator until after you’ve crossed the creek.”*

Commuting to work in the city on my bike has brought my competitive spirit back—a quality I thought I left behind on the softball field when we lost at State my senior year in high school. My heart pounds in excitement as I gear up to ride, just like it did when I stepped up to the plate. The four-mile ride from Newton into Harvard Square means fun, exertion, and potential hostile territory as I move in and out of the flow of traffic through the densely populated Brighton and Allston neighborhoods.

I like the challenge of the road, the required vigilance. I’m one of the only girls out there except for college students on candy-colored bikes with wicker baskets, wearing headphones and flip-flops. For them, a bike is a frugal means to get from point A to B. Not me. I savor the ride, like to get down and dirty. Muddy. Sweaty. Parched. Rained on. How I love to move on my Jamis Coda, especially when I’m humming along in fifth, the gear that’s smooth like buttah.

Commuting during the summer was a piece a cake, the best of times. I had free reign over the construction-laden bridge into the Square and Bert’s Electric wasn’t squeezing me into the orange barrels vying for command of the lane. The driver, probably not Bert at all, had longed passed this way before me, eager to get a jump on his schedule so he could suck down beers and fish in the Charles come three o’clock.

Now, with Labor Day behind us, the worst of times, tradesmen aren’t reporting to work quite so early and city and school bus drivers are laying claim to the asphalt. I’m a part of this, a moving component amid congested traffic on Western Ave., doing my best to obey the rules of the road, give hand signals, and thank those drivers who are courteous. Courtesy is an act tradesmen do not extend to bike commuters. And city bus drivers? I’ve lost count how many times I’ve played chicken with ‘em and actually won.

Where do bike commuters draw the line? We have the state law on our side and we are a plus for greening the planet. But do we go endo to prove a point? Should we forfeit, or should compete for our right of way? To answer employing my \$82,000 Babson MBA education, it boils down to this: It all depends.



One morning this week on North Harvard Bridge I lay claim to my share of the asphalt by scaling my way in between a Jersey barrier and Stan's Heating and Cooling. That's one foot plodding along the van and the other along the barrier, when the driver catches sight of me in the passenger side mirror. He goes wide-eyed. I think: am I really doing this? Is it worth it? Hell, yeah, it is, and I slap my hand down good and hard on the front fender with a "You're-seriously-blocking-my-right-of-way" expression playing across my face.

*"We Are Not Blocking Traffic; We Are Traffic."*—Cycle advocacy slogan

It is dangerous out there. Risk, as I like to say, is 360, whether the bike commuter obeys the rules of the road or not. Drivers, you've got our backs. And I realize there are several commandos out there, spoiling our reputation, those long-legged boy-men on road bikes who dance on their pedals at red lights, waiting for clearance and then snake their way through it. Their egos piss me off, too. Ask anyone in Harvard Square what he or she thinks of bike commuters and they'll say they hate them all. Nevertheless, we have our rights.

*You are allowed to ride your bike on the sidewalk in Boston, but we encourage you to use the street.* Mass. General Law Chapter 85, Section 11B.

It is my conviction that because I behave on the road—we're all in this together, after all—I expect some respect. As with the tradesmen that squeeze me off the bridge despite the sign granting bicycles full lane access, when someone moves in on my turf, I feel compelled to take it back. This is bad; taking revenge always is. I'm asking for trouble—injury, death—even worse, wrecking my bike.

In my heart this is a competition and that's why I love riding my bike in the city rather than the country roads of Concord and Carlisle. Who wants to pedal by meadows and horses, breathe clean air, and listen to the calming effect of birds, crickets and cicadas? Give me the congestion, pollution and challenge of the city streets. *The competition.* Taking a little risk and venturing the unknown enables me to handle the challenges that life brings. The surprises, the detours. Being an athlete, makes me a competitor in life too. The lessons of the road infiltrate my home and work life and make me stronger.

Yesterday afternoon I embarked on revengeful behavior due to some bad sportsmanship. Out of Brattle Square, I ride unhurriedly

through the Kennedy School on a wide path that begins at the Charles Hotel and ends at the intersection of JFK Street and Memorial Drive. The area is usually a flurry of activity—genius academic types, tourists, and lovers—walking aimlessly. The world is their oyster.

At the busy intersection, I wait for the green then hoof it up over the bridge and take a hard right to make part of the ride home along the south side of the river. The Charles River is sparkling in the sun and I can't resist.

Along the path in Brighton, I part a flock of geese, gaze at the rowers to my right, the grass and trees to my left. Up ahead, a band of half-naked college boys jog and close in on me until they split in two and file by. At Watertown Yard, I break off the path and onto the road. About a mile from home on Adams Street in Newton, I'm up out of the saddle pedaling like hell in the middle of the right lane to catch the green to make a left onto Washington. But time runs out and the light turns red.

I'm closing in behind a Ford F150 when a hopped-up VW Golf passes me and zips in behind the F150. This infuriates me to no end, but damn, it's too bad he leaves a good five feet of space between his front end and the truck's bumper. Now, what do I have to do? Exercise my right to asphalt again. I ride past him and to fuel my road rage the 30-something driver has his window closed and stares straight ahead like he just didn't pull a fast one.

"Am I invisible?" I huff, and wedge what I can of my bike and myself between the two vehicles.

My focus steadies on the perfectly round, red light. The guy is seething, staring at the back of yours truly, a heavy-set chick on a sleek bike donning an orange jacket so bright you can see it from outer space. He's thinking, *the fucking nerve of this lard ass*.

Perspiration from my brow slips into my mouth. The outcomes of this pissing match run through my mind—he's going to steer me into the Jag first in queue on Washington or grant me narrow passage into the clear. Narration comes in the form of Judge Judy's voice. "Madam, you can't make it right with a wrong" and "Why would you jeopardize your safety over this lunkhead?"

*You are welcome to ride a bike on all public rights-of-way within the Commonwealth, except limited access highways. Mass. General Law Chapter 85, Section 11B.*

It is a matter of principal as well as law in the Commonwealth. I'm just after my share of the asphalt, fair play, and I'm willing to fight

for it. Sure, there's an obvious disadvantage. I'm on a two-wheeled 18-pound carbon frame and this guy's driving a ton of steel.

I'm ready, anticipating the light change. I've got one foot flat on the ground, the other poised on the pedal. I take getting out of people's way, to the right side of the road, very seriously, although its plain I'm not going to come out of this showdown with the least amount of respect.

There it is. The green. My foot plunges the pedal down and I'm standing up on the bike. Sisters are doing it for themselves. I pump hard, trying hard to break out in front. Lunkhead won't grant me any room. His zippy VW is in my periphery, squeezing me over to the median on Washington. Cars are backed up in two lanes, six deep.

The air moves in and out of my body in breathy bursts. The VW and my bike continue to advance, accelerating. He forces me to shadow the line of his car on the inside. I grunt, exasperated; want to pound my fist on his door. I could manage it, but my brain warns me good and loud that my jacket could get caught on his side mirror. What's even more upsetting is I'm incapable of conveying my disgust; he's still eluding eye contact. The bully has the upper hand.

"You bastard!" I yell over my shoulder. It's a novelty this outburst. Why I don't call him an asshole is beyond me, it's usually there handy in my on-the-road arsenal of expletives.

We're neck and neck, and hell, I'm still not afraid. Should I be?

*"It's a risky business being a cyclist in the UK; we're hated on the roads. We just hope people realize we are just flesh and bones on two wheels."* —Victoria Pendleton, Olympic gold medal winner, Women's Keirin, 2012

Eventually reality is too much for Lunkhead to bear; the witnesses are screaming lawsuit. He breaks away, swerving the VW to the far-right lane. I straighten out in the left. I'm not going to crash through the windshield of the Jag after all. Waving a clenched fist in his wake, I shout *you bastard, what a bastard!* and pump to the right side of the road knowing the traffic behind me is minding my back. He speeds his zippy car down Washington. I lose sight of him, stop to squeeze a squirt of hot tap into my mouth and catch my breath.

Once I'm seated on my bike navigating Boston's streets, I can't know the challenges I'll meet on a given day, but I do know I need to mind my safety every minute. Many people won't ride on city streets because they're afraid. The fear dissipates, just like with anything else, through trial and application. Employing sound judgment. After a while,

I got to be fearless; that girl I was years ago swinging the bat on my high school field; invigorated and ready for action.

The feeling carries through at the end of the day when I leave my bike in the garage and head into my house for my dinner, my books and my beloveds. For a while I've been a wild competitor, vying for space, making my way. Even when I encounter a jerk like Lunkhead, it is still worth it to be out here, competing, powering my way through the sea of cars.



B

BOOK REVIEWS



Maryanne Hannan

## Running Alongside a “Woman Catching Fire:” Angela Alaimo O’Donnell’s *Still Pilgrim: Poems*

To a world where stillness is elusive, the notion of pilgrimage quaint, and paradox an intellectual stretch, Angela Alaimo O’Donnell serves up her latest collection, *Still Pilgrim: Poems* (Paraclete Press, 2017). In truth, I have been a fan of O’Donnell’s work for many years, her seven poetry collections, three non-fiction books, her numerous insightful reviews and essays. But I’d hazard a guess that *Still Pilgrim* will become a classic, one that readers will turn to for many years to come.

An author Afterword describes the genesis of the project, a visit to Herman Melville’s grave near her home. In the poem she wrote about that experience, she addressed him as “still pilgrim,” and was thereafter struck by the many ways it is conceivable and necessary to be both still and “simultaneously on pilgrimage toward one’s destiny” (Afterword, 70) in life and, in Melville’s case as a writer, after death. In this collection, O’Donnell takes up the challenge of probing the tensions and insights in the oxymoronic persona of a “still pilgrim,” using the stuff of her own life.

Despite the many particulars of time, space, event and personal proclivities, the book never seems autobiographical. Carefully constructed, yes; as described in the Afterword, it contains a prologue and an epilogue, four sections of poems, fourteen poems per section all of them (fourteen line) sonnets. The gloss on the book and its further suggestion that the sections correspond to seasons of the year and the seasons of life, as well as the liturgical calendar can be read as an added bonus, or as a belated surprise. The poems themselves, sonnets of great skill and diversity, speak for themselves, or in the words of the *Still Pilgrim*, “Every pilgrim is a truth-teller. / Every pilgrim is a liar.” (“Prologue: To Be a Pilgrim, xiii) In this spirit, all is made new again.

Unlike the traditional *Pilgrim’s Progress*, O’Donnell’s contemporary pilgrim need not advance under the rubric of steady improvement, yet develops in her own way from one section to the next. Rather than negotiating a larger universality as the allegorical hero Christian does, this pilgrim, clothed in particulars, manages the same. Many of O’Donnell’s poems play off Catholic-Christian references, as well as familiarity with literary figures, Keats, Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Frost and, of course, Flannery. To enjoy the subtleties, the



poignancy and even the humor of this book, readers need to share the pillars of O'Donnell's spiritual-cultural-intellectual world, but not her dogma.

Each section offers a, shall we call it?, cosmologically chronological development: "The Still Pilgrim Invents Dawn," "The Still Pilgrim Recreates Creation," "The Still Pilgrim Considers a Hard Teaching," and "The Still Pilgrim Recalls the Beatitudes." Each section ends with an assessment of where the poet might be in her personal chronology: "The Still Pilgrim Runs," "The Still Pilgrim Gives Herself Driving Directions," "The Still Pilgrim Addresses Father Solstice," and "The Still Pilgrim's Refrain." The poem titles themselves further the tensions and paradoxes of the central "still pilgrim" metaphor.

If, as O'Donnell suggests, the sections correspond to the seasons of life, then no surprise to discover poems of youth and childhood in the first section: "The Still Pilgrim Recollects Her Childhood," "The Still Pilgrim Honors Her Mother," "The Still Pilgrim Learns to Write," to name a few. But, as a group, they are not typecast or expected. My favorite "The Still Pilgrim Tells a Fish Story" evoking Melville goes against the grain. From "Find the fish you need to kill and kill it," the first line challenge, the poem concludes: "Did you really believe there'd come a day / when you would be the one that got away?" (13). A nice set-up for the last poem, mentioned above: "She ran like rage. She ran like desire. / She ran like a woman catching fire" ("The Still Pilgrim Runs," 16).

The second section sees more gain than loss, the prime of life: "The Still Pilgrim Becomes a Mother," "The Still Pilgrim Sings to Her Child," "The Still Pilgrim Hears a Diagnosis," "The Still Pilgrim Discovers Botero's Adam & Eve." Hovering over all is the realization: "Summer comes once and never stays" ("The Still Pilgrim's Love Song to Lost Summer," 31).

In the third section, (can it be autumn already?) are "The Still Pilgrim's Displacement," "The Still Pilgrim's Insomnia," "The Still Pilgrim Talks to Her Body," "The Still Pilgrim Faces the Wall," the final couplet of "The Still Pilgrim Considers the Eye:" "The truth the wise eye grieves and knows, / that one day it must close" (43). But a radical acceptance of mortality undergirds it all: "You sing with me even when / I sing the same old song again" ("The Still Pilgrim Talks to Her Body," 42)

The fourth section opens with another dawn, slightly reminiscent of Eliot: "of how we bear the miracle / and find ourselves where we belong" ("The Still Pilgrim's Thoughts Upon Rising," 51). Other poems

attest to a joyful resiliency, even a recognition that each season contains them every other one: “The Still Pilgrim Recounts Another Annunciation,” “The Still Pilgrim’s Easter Morning Song,” “The Still Pilgrim Imagines the Eucharist,” “The Still Pilgrim Welcomes Pentecost” and “The Still Pilgrim’s Penance.” Perhaps a time paradox underlies the space through which the still pilgrim traverses. Or to share the final couplet of “The Still Pilgrim Celebrates Spring:” “All that leaves returns. It’s fact. / The light we thought we lost comes back” (60).

Angela O’Donnell’s *Still Pilgrim: Poems* can be enjoyed as a whole and in parts, not once, but many times over. I highly recommend this book to all readers interested in a woman’s journey, expressed in the context of her faith, and also to those no longer excited by the sonnet form. They will be surprised.



B

BIOGRAPHICAL  
NOTES



**Kristin Berkey-Abbott** earned a Ph.D. from the University of South Carolina. She has taught at many colleges, and she is the Director of Education at the Hollywood (Florida) campus of City College. She has published 3 chapbooks: *Whistling Past the Graveyard* (Pudding House Publications), *I Stand Here Shredding Documents*, and *Life in the Holocene Extinction* (both published by Finishing Line Press).

**Z.Z. Boone** is the author of the short story collection, *Off Somewhere*, published in 2015. Other work has appeared in *New Ohio Review*, *Eleven Eleven*, *The MacGuffin*, *2 Bridges Review*, and other terrific places. Z.Z. teaches creative writing at Western Connecticut State University.

**Michelle Brooks** has had her work published in *Iowa Review*, *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *Threepenny Review*, and elsewhere. She has recently completed a collection of essays, *Second Day Reported*.

**Cheryl Buchanan** earned her MFA where she now teaches at Emerson College. After practicing law for a decade she's interested in promoting writing from unconventional spaces and is a co-founder of Writers Without Margins. She's received prizes from the *Naugatuck River Review* and Academy of American Poets.

**Nicole Carr** is a writer and editor for the Amarillo Bay Literary Magazine whose work appeared in the Sacramento Bee Newspaper, ELJ Publications, London Journal of Fiction, Cardinal Flower Journal, Dual Coast Magazine and Close-Up Books' Poetry and Place Anthology. Her work has also been recognized with a poetry award from the California State Poetry Society and the Lilian Osborn Memorial Foundation.

**Rita Cavin** was the Interim President of Umpqua Community College when it was attacked by an armed student on October 1, 2015. In mere minutes, ten lives were lost. Thousands of people in the community were changed in both positive and negative ways by the horror of the experience. The community learned that they were much tougher than they thought. Since the shooting, Rita uses both watercolor and poetry to celebrate bold dreams and perseverance. In that spirit, this poem Rita published in this issue of *Adanna* honors the power of women who came before us and who lead us now. She established an endowment for a student poet laureate and that program continues to blossom under the leadership of faculty member Robin Havenick.

**Roxana Cazan** works as an Assistant Professor of English and world literature at Saint Francis University (SFU) in Pennsylvania. Surveying issues of gender, belonging, women's rights, and language, my poetry most recently appeared in *Allegro*, *The Pennsylvania Literary Journal*, and *the Peeking Cat Anthology*. My book titled *The Accident of Birth* is forthcoming with Main Street Rag.

**Sydney Choi** recently graduated from the University of California, Davis with a Bachelor's degree in both English and Italian. Most of her work focuses on the roles of love, feminism, culture, family, and anxiety within the context of everyday life. When she is not writing poetry, she works at a marketing company, writing web copy for furniture and appliance stores; therefore, she knows a lot more about washing machines than she'd like to admit.

**David Crews** ([davidcrewspoeetry.com](http://davidcrewspoeetry.com)) is author of the poetry collections *High Peaks* (Ra Press, 2015) and *Circadian Rhythm* (Paulinskill Poetry Project, 2014). New poems and essays are forthcoming or recent in *Canary*, *Tiferet*, *Bird's Thumb*, *Stoneboat Literary Journal*, *Flightpath*, *Platform Review*, and others. He serves as editor for *The Stillwater Review*.

**Mary Katherine Crowley** lives in Upstate New York, where she works at a small non-profit and has recently signed on as a Feature Writer for The Borgen Project. Mary uses her background in medicine and advocacy as inspiration, tying together science and emotion.

**Lisa Mae DeMasi's** work has been featured in *Unmasked, Women Write About Sex & Intimacy After Fifty* (9/17, print) and *The Best of Vine Leaves Literary Journal* (11/17, print). Her essays have been published in the lit journals *The Crux* (9/17), *Fiction Southeast* (11/17), *Gravel*, *Slippery Elm*, *Foliage Oak*, *East Bay Review*, and *Shark Reef*; and several times in media outlets. When she's not writing, she practices Reiki specializing in unblocking creatives in all mediums and moving them (with humor and love) to the highest vision of themselves as artists.

**Monic Ductan** has an M.F.A. from Georgia College. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *storySouth*, *Appalachian Heritage*, *Tahoma Literary Review*, *Shenandoah*, and *Water~Stone Review*. Monic is the winner of the 2015 Short-ish Poetry Prize sponsored by Blue Lyra

Review and the 2016 Garth Avant Fiction Prize. “Housekeeping” is excerpted from her in-progress novel. She lives in Mississippi.

**Nancy Gerber** received a Ph.D. in English from Rutgers University and is an advanced candidate in psychoanalytic training at the Academy of Clinical and Applied Psychoanalysis. Her most recent book, *Fire and Ice: Poetry and Prose* (Arseya, 2014), was named a Notable Book in Poetry in the Shelf Unbound Indie Books Competition.

**Deborah Gerrish** is the author of three collections of poems, *Light in Light* (Resource Publications, 2017), *The Language of Paisley* (Xlibris, 2012), and the chapbook, *The Language of Rain* (2008). Her poems have appeared in *Lips*, *Journal of New Jersey Poets*, *The Stillwater Review*, *Adanna*, *Ararat*, *Exit 13*, *The Paterson Literary Review* where her poems have received Editor’s Choice and Honorable Mention in the Allen Ginsberg Poetry Awards, and many anthologies. She was awarded an Edward Fry Fellowship for scholarship research work at Rutgers University and received an Ed.D. in Literacy Education. She holds an MFA in Poetry from Drew University (June, 2015). She taught English for over thirty years in NJ public schools. In addition, she served as VP of Programs (2012-2015) and Board of Trustees (2015-2016) for Women Who Write, Inc. She teaches poetry workshops at Fairleigh Dickinson University and organizes readings for *Visiting Poets*.

**Renee Gherity** lives in Maryland. She is a graduate of the University of Minnesota and Mitchell-Hamline School of Law. Her work has appeared in *Poet Lore*, *Innisfree Poetry Journal*, *Ekphrastic Review*, and other journals. She has been a featured reader in Minnesota and Maryland.

**Michelle Greco** is a poet who both lives and teaches in New Jersey. She holds an MFA from Drew University and is the author of the chapbook *Field Guide to Fire* (Finishing Line Press, 2015). Her poems have appeared in *Painted Bride Quarterly*, *The Stillwater Review*, *Edison Literary Review*, and the anthology *Dear Sister*, among others. When not writing, Michelle enjoys drawing, photography, and red dresses.

**Judith Grissermer** has been published in Sow’s Ear, The Alembic, Clare, Midwest Quarterly, Streetlight Magazine and in other literary magazines. She is a retired marriage and family therapist living in Charlottesville Va and the OBX of North Carolina.



**Maryanne Hannan** has published recent poetry in *Gargoyle*, *Minnesota Review*, *Oxford Poetry* (UK), and *Rabbit* (AU). Several poems have been reprinted in anthologies, including *The Great American Wise Ass Poetry Anthology* and *The World Is Charged: Poetic Engagements with Gerard Manley Hopkins*. Currently serving as Associate Editor for *Presence: A Journal of Catholic Poetry*, she lives in upstate New York. ([mhannan.com](http://mhannan.com))

**Alyssa Hubbard's** poetry has been featured in the journals *Crack the Spine*, *scissors & spackle*, and *The Highlander*, among others. She was born and raised in a small town of Alabama, where she also received a BA in English from the University of Alabama. Alyssa loves blogging and singing in public.

**Shirley Jones-Luke** is a poet and a writer. Ms. Luke lives and works in Boston, Massachusetts. She has an MFA from Emerson College. Her work has been published by Adelaide, BlazeVOX, Deluge, Fire Poetry and Mass Poetry.

**Dr. Kristin Kalsem** is the Charles Hartsock Professor of Law at the University of Cincinnati College of Law and a co-founder and co-director of UC Law's Center for Race, Gender, and Social Justice. She has a Ph.D. in English from the University of Iowa where she taught literature and nonfiction writing courses while pursuing her doctoral work. Her writings include a 2012 book entitled *In Contempt: Nineteenth-Century Women, Law, and Literature*.

**Gloria DeVidas Kirchheimer** is the author of a novel, *Amalie in Orbit*, and a story collection, *Goodbye, Evil Eye*. Fiction published in *The Antioch Review*, *Arts & Letters*, *Carolina Quarterly*, *Kansas Quarterly*, *Lilith*, *New Letters*, *North American Review*, and other magazines. Nonfiction in *Hippocampus*, *Music & Vision*, *Persimmon Tree*, *Yale Journal for the Humanities in Medicine*, *Women's International Perspective*, *Perceptive Travel* and other venues. Co-author of nonfiction book, *We Were So Beloved: Autobiography of a German Jewish Community*.

**Hannah Kludy** earned her BA in Creative Writing and Publishing at Northwest Missouri State University. She lives in Omaha with her husband and cat. Her work has been published in the *Northwest Missourian* and *Medium Weight Forks*, *Surcarochee Review*, *Red Mud Review*, *Broad Magazine*, *Unlikely Stories*, *The Progenitor*, *Drunken*

*Monkeys, Five on the Fifth, and The Bitchin' Kitsch*. She has also been published, and won the fiction prize in, *Cardinal Sins Journal*.

**Cynthia Knorr**, a medical writer in New York City, now lives in rural New Hampshire. Her poems have appeared in *Imitation Fruit*, *Shot Glass Journal*, *Atlas Poetica*, and others. She was awarded First Prize in both the New Hampshire Poetry Society's national and members' contests, and is a regular participant in the Frost Place Conference on Poetry.

**Vivian Lawry** lives and writes near Richmond, Virginia. Her mysteries, literary fiction, magical realism, and personal essays have appeared in more than fifty literary journals and anthologies. Like Vivian Lawry on Facebook and visit her website at [vivianlawry.com](http://vivianlawry.com).

**Kassidy Lithgow** is a native Utahan where she is an undergraduate student Utah Valley University studying Creative Writing. She has served as the assistant poetry editor for her university's student-run journal, *Touchstones* where her poetry has previously been published. Besides writing, she enjoys road trips with her husband, baking, and throwing parties for every occasion.

**Katharyn Howd Machan**, Professor of Writing at Ithaca College, has authored 33 published collections. Her poems have appeared in numerous magazines, anthologies, and textbooks, including *The Bedford Introduction to Literature*. In 2018 her *Selected Poems* will appear from FutureCycle Press.

**Aryn Marsh** is the owner and operator of Live Juice, a restaurant and juice bar in downtown Concord, NH. She graduated with honors in English at the University of Pennsylvania and holds a Masters Degree in English Literature from University of York in England. She has begun a low-residency MFA program at Stonecoast in nonfiction. Her work has been accepted by *Foliage Oak Literary Journal*, the *Tishman Review*, and the *Timberline Review*. Areas of personal interest include Eastern religious ritual, and ways in which movement, sound, and language intersect.

**Margo McCall** is a graduate of the M.A. creative writing program at California State University Northridge. Her short stories have been featured in *Pacific Review*, *Heliotrope*, *In\*tense*, *Wazee Journal*, *Sidewalks*, *Rockhurst Review*, *Sunspinner*, *Toasted Cheese*, *Foliage Oak*,

Howl and other journals. Her nonfiction has appeared in *Herizons*, *Lifeboat: A Journal of Memoir*, *Pilgrimage* and a variety of newspapers and other publications. For more, visit <http://www.margomccall.com>.

**Charissa Menefee**, poet and playwright, is on the faculty of the MFA Program in Creative Writing & Environment at Iowa State University. Her chapbook, *When I Stopped Counting*, is now available from Finishing Line Press, and her newest play, *Our Antigone*, had its premiere at Iowa's Story Theatre Company in March.

**Laura Metter** is an Assistant Editor at C&R Press and writes every day. Filled with her love for the fantastic, Laura graduated from Hollins University in 2017 and is thrilled to see where the literary world will take her. She currently resides in Greenwich, Connecticut with her two dogs and overflowing bookshelf.

**Greg Moglia** is a veteran of 27 years as Professor of Philosophy of Education at N.Y.U. His book of poetry *LOST BUT MAKING GOOD TIME* is just out from Finishing Line Press. His poems have been accepted in over 300 journals in 8 countries.

**Sara Mortimer-Boyd** grew up in Palmdale, California. She studied literature and creative writing at UCLA and Loyola Marymount University. She writes and teaches in Los Angeles and has been published in *LA Miscellany* and *Adelaide Literary Magazine*.

**Terri Muuss**, whose poetry has appeared in numerous journals and anthologies, has been nominated for two Pushcart Prizes in poetry. She is the author of *Over Exposed* (JB Stillwater, 2013) and the one-woman show, *Anatomy of a Doll*, named *Best Theatre: Critics' Pick of the Week* by the *New York Daily News*. The show has been performed throughout the US and Canada since 1998. As a licensed social worker, Muuss specializes in the use of the arts, specifically theatre and writing, as a healing mechanism for trauma survivors. [www.terrimuuss.com](http://www.terrimuuss.com)

**Jamie Marie Nelson**, previously published in the *Bluff City Review* studied at San Francisco State University and earned her MFA at the University of Missouri-St. Louis. She served as Managing Editor of their literary magazine and is currently working on two chapbooks.

**Naomi North** received her BA from the University of Pittsburgh and her MFA from Bowling Green State University. She currently lives in the Pittsburgh area and works at a local nonprofit serving the military community.

**Harleigh Orlando** is from Shakopee, Minnesota. She lives in Omaha, Nebraska with her husband where she attends school at the University of Nebraska Omaha. One day she hopes to write memoirs and novels for a living.

**Darlene Patrick** is a former librarian and ESL teacher who grew up in Los Angeles, California and spent her working years in Seattle, Washington and Chicago, Illinois. She has been living in Canada, mostly on Vancouver Island, for the past decade. As beautiful and contemplative as it is there, she misses her home and is currently making plans to return to the Midwest this summer. In addition to writing, she studies French, spoils her two cats and struggles with knitting patterns.

**Terez Peipins'** poetry, fiction, and essays have appeared in publications both in the United States and abroad. She is the author of three chapbooks of poetry. Her novels, *The Shadow of Silver Birch* and *Snow Clues* are published by Black Rose Writing.

**Mary Ann Presman** is a retired advertising copywriter with discerning, supportive writing groups in two places--Galena, Illinois, and Tucson, Arizona. (Rough life.) "To Lego or Not" is part of a collection of stories she is working on called "The Good Dishes."

**Christine Redman-Waldeyer** is a poet and Associate Professor in the Department of English at Passaic County Community College. She earned her doctorate from Drew University and published three poetry collections, "Frame by Frame", "Gravel", and "Eve Asks" (all with Muse-Pie Press) and has appeared in *Schuylkill Valley Journal*, *The Texas Review*, *Verse Wisconsin*, and others. Her latest credit includes *Writing After Retirement: Tips from Successful Retired Writers* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2014) which she co-edited. Redman-Waldeyer founded *Adanna*, a literary journal that focuses on women's topics.

**Whitney Rio-Ross** is a recent graduate of Yale Divinity School's Religion and Literature program, where she studied literature,

philosophy, theology, and feminism's importance within those subjects. Her work has appeared in *The Other Journal* and *Windhover*. She currently lives in Nashville, TN.

**Heather Lee Rogers** tells stories as an actor and writer in NYC. Her poems have appeared in these printed and online publications: *Adanna* (issue #5), *Harbinger Asylum*, *Here Comes Everyone* (UK), *The Rat's Ass Review*, *S/Tick*, *Waterways*, and *Jersey Devil Press*. [heatherleerogerspoetry.weebly.com](http://heatherleerogerspoetry.weebly.com)

**Russell Rowland** is a Seven-time Pushcart Prize nominee Russell Rowland does trail maintenance and baby-sits his toddler granddaughter in New Hampshire. Chapbooks "Train of All Cabooses" and "Mountain Blue" are available from *Finishing Line Press*.

**Jeanette Russo** was born in Hudson, New York but has lived in several European countries. In the last few years Jeanette has taken several online writing courses. Now, living in Palma de Mallorca, Spain, with her Spanish husband she was fortunate to find a writing workshop in English in 2016. She has concentrated on short stories and is proud to have her first published piece appear in this year's annual edition of *Adanna*.

**Deborah Saltman** is a physician and re-emerging poet living across the hemispheres and the Atlantic currently enjoying her London landing. She has 6 poems published in reviewed US publications in the last year. After twenty years of scientific writing, she is enjoying the return to her poetic calling.

**Darbee Shauers** is a business major at Utah State University. She is passionate about theatre and feminism and has always had a love for words. This is her first publication in a literary journal.

**Laura DiCarlo Short** is a writer and teacher living in Austin, Texas. She holds an MFA from Texas State University and her poems, interviews, and essays have appeared most recently in *The Knicknackery*, *The Literati Quarterly*, *Front Porch Journal*, and *Able Muse*, among others. Her poem "Cypress Trees Stretch" was a finalist in the 2017 *Adelaide Literary Award* and will appear in their annual anthology. Laura teaches writing at *Concordia University Texas*.

**Dorsía Smith Silva** is an Associate Professor of English at the University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras. Her poetry has been recently published in *POUI: Cave Hill Journal of Creative Writing* and *Mothers and Daughters*. She is currently editing two books on mothering.

**Rona Simmons** is the author of three novels and co-author and publisher of a book of WWII paintings. She is also a freelance writer and maintains two blogs, one about women in the creative arts and the other on local authors and bookstores, while also blogging for The Huffington Post Blog. Her stories, articles, and interviews have been published in literary journals and online magazines. Her short story "Cloudy With a Chance" was a finalist for the Atlanta Writers Club's 2017 Terry Kay Prize for fiction.

**Sharon H. Smith** is a writer/poet and long time member of Laguna Writers of San Francisco. Her work has been published in *From the Depths* by Haunted Waters Press, *Lake: A Collections of Voices*, *Juddhill.com*, *gravelmag.com*, *Tell Us A Story Blog*, *Eunoia Review* and heard on *KQED Radio Perspectives*. Her chapbook *Held* will be published early this Fall by Red Bird Chapbooks. [www.savorsmith.com](http://www.savorsmith.com).

**Evelyn A. So's** work has appeared in *Content Magazine* (featured writer), *The Pedestal Magazine*, *Measure: A Review of Formal Poetry*, multiple issues of *Caesura*, *Red Wheelbarrow*, *Gingerbread House*, *Cha: An Asian Literary Journal*, *Adanna Literary Journal*, and others. She is a former member of Poetry Center San Jose's Board of Directors and now a member of PCSJ's Advisory Board.

**Chris Souza** lives and works in Massachusetts. Previous publications include: *Gulf Coast*, *Bellingham Review*, *New Delta Review*, *West Branch*, *Baltimore Review*, *Sycamore Review*, and *Poet Lore* among many others. Her work has been featured on "Verse Daily" and has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize. Work is forthcoming in *Confrontation*.

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**John J. Trause**, Director of Oradell Public Library, is the author of *Picture This: For Your Eyes and Ears* (Dos Madres Press, 2016; *Exercises in High Treason* (great weather for MEDIA, 2016; *Eye Candy for Andy (13 Most Beautiful... Poems for Andy Warhol's Screen Tests*, Finishing Line Press, 2013); *Inside Out, Upside Down, and Round and Round* (Nirala Publications, 2012); *Seriously Serial* (Poets Wear Prada, 2007; rev. ed. 2014); and *Latter-Day Litany* (Éditions élastiques, 1996), the latter staged Off Broadway. His book of traditional and experimental poems, *Why Sing?*, is forthcoming from Sensitive Skin Press in 2017. He is a founder of the William Carlos Williams Poetry Cooperative in Rutherford, N. J., and the former host and curator of its monthly reading series.

**Lourdes Tutaine-Garcia** holds a B.A. In English (Vassar College) and an M.A. in Communications (Fairfield University). She's been a professional writer forever plus a day, pumping out poems, novels, and technical documents. Her work has been published in fiftywordstories, Avocet, The Hour, and The Advocate.

**Gail Tyson** publishes poetry, nonfiction, and fiction. In 2017 her work appears in *Appalachian Heritage*, *Art Ascent*, *Big Muddy*, *Cloudbank*, *EcoTheo Review*, *Presence*, *San Pedro River Review*, *Still Point Arts Quarterly*, *The Citron Review*, and the anthology, *Unbroken Circle: Stories of Diversity in the South*. Gail lives in Roswell, Georgia and in a log cabin in the Cherokee National Forest, East Tennessee.

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**Joanne Jackson Yelenik**'s poems and stories have appeared in anthologies and journals. Her prose poem, *A Chat*, appeared in *Unbroken Journal*, issue #10. The *MOON* showcases two of her poems in the February, 2017 issue. Her favorite writing spot is a picnic table in the neighboring Judean Hills. Her debut novel, "Eucalyptus Leaves: Deliciously Asymmetrical in Israel," will be launched in the fall.