

ADANNA

LITERARY JOURNAL

Founder
CHRISTINE REDMAN-WALDEYER

Issue No. 4

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

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Back Cover Title: *Neither Fish Nor Flesh— Fever Pitch* (2006); plastic “blister pack” pieces, stitched together and suspended by wire coat hanger to form a mermaid sculpture

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Artist Statements

My work explores memory, continuity and disconnection. I am interested in the restorative power of visual memories, and believe that in today's update-driven culture it is important to parse information for familiar forms, recognizing patterns in order to retain our sense of identity.

I highlight such patterns by reducing elements in my own memories to basic colors and forms. I sketch from life and then make monotypes based on my drawings, abstracting them to create archetypal scenes. Monotype's reductive process mirrors my interest in remembrance and continuity, as my initial "painting" on the plate is lost but a unique work on paper is created.

Through working to preserve and communicate my own memories, I consider the role that women have traditionally played in preserving and communicating shared memories – for instance, by passing down nursery rhymes, songs and stories. In my next body of work, I intend to draw on these ideas, exploring the concept of women as memory-keepers.

—*Rachel Burgess*

###

The inventive use of non-traditional art materials, such as soap slivers, dandelion fluff, molted cicada "shells," and plastic packaging are among the inspirations that form the collective vision for much of my work.

Neither Fish Nor Flesh – Fever Pitch (2006) is composed of plastic "blister pack" pieces, stitched together and suspended by wire coat hanger to form a mermaid sculpture, which looks like the shell of a mermaid. Much of the work is labor intensive like this, including such "women's work" as stitching and sewing, etc.

—*Jill Greenberg*

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

Introduction

For every poem, essay, story, and book review chosen I had one thing in mind—how does this work resonate with women’s experience. In Charles Simic’s introduction to his poem, “*The White Room*,” he discusses the inspiration of his poem which began with painting rooms in his house. He hated having to return the furniture back to a room now clean, now empty—*the mind is clear and serene...you don’t want to bring your dry cleaning into it, your lunch. You take your time bringing in the other furniture, the objects—first you bring a chair, two chairs; you sit down and look around.*

The absence of color, the white walls of his rooms resurrected the spirit of Emily Dickinson who he acknowledges made a surprise appearance into the poem—the association with white and whiteness. For many of our contributors I imagined that first chair brought back into the room. Sometimes it was a great grandmother’s chair, one much like the chair that sits in my dining room, an inherited object imprisoned with memory and story until I chose to take up the task of chair caning, working out the worn fibers that are incapable of holding the weight of next generations. Our writing is the chair caning of experience. To remove the clutter as Simic discusses is to remove the obstacles to healing. We repaint the room and slowly reintroduce our objects into that space.

Simic writes in his poem,

Storytelling. We were
Entering dark houses,
More and more dark houses
Hushed and abandoned.

There was someone with eyes closed
On the upper floors.
The thought of it, and the wonder,
Kept me sleepless.

The truth is bald and cold,
Said the woman
Who always wore white.
She didn’t leave her room much.

The subconscious has a way of reaching back into the cupboard where we can't see. Something too high on the shelf often with a lapsed expiration date finds its way to the front. I found myself confronting a repeating dream where I was expected to be in three or four classrooms at the same time. My schedule was overbooked and I couldn't reach my students in each classroom to explain to them that I was coming. As a teacher I could easily dismiss or diminish the importance of the dream but I knew it had the underpinnings of my subconscious at work. Where was I overbooked? and who would relieve me of that burden.

In this issue, the subconscious is working itself into women's experience resurfacing issues we are still negotiating, compromising, and talking to and with. Within this anthology topics such as divorce and step parenting are visited in Terry Sanville's "The Provisional Child"—in "All This Can Be" Maggie Veness takes us to a painful place of rejection when with child while Barbara Ashwood in "Naked" faces vulnerability—Amanda R. Howland's "Hunger Town" challenges sexuality and acceptance visiting danger in that aloneness—Wandajune Bishop-Towle speaks on the experience of mothering a child with special needs in her poem, *Burgers With Autism*—Ann Clark uses humor to discuss the resurgence of our lost virginity in her poem, *Prodigal*—Laura Freedgood compares her experience as a woman to others worlds apart in her poems *The Tourist* and *Putting on a Sari*—Patrice Pinette faces infidelity in her poems, *Green Flash* and *When My First Husband Made Another Woman Pregnant*—both Shanelle Galloway and Evelyn A. So revisit the story of Eve, our story, and redefine Eve as not sinner but liberator. I could go on but the list here is so extensive that I can only urge you to read all our contributors works carefully and in the white room of reflection that Charles Simic defines for us.

— Christine Redman-Waldeyer

Charles Simic, "The White Room" from *The Book of Gods and Devils*.
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To hear the introduction of the "White Room" by Charles Simic, visit
<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/243114>

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POETRY

Marci Ameluxen

Language

A female less than one year
is a pullet, the older bird a hen.
The young male is a cockerel

a year older he is a cock
and I am startled to hear
that word from my

eleven-year-old son's mouth.
In the poultry barn the word
is bandied about, written on

cage cards, discussed with judges,
and visitors to our county fair look
a little surprised, also, to hear

the word splitting from the mouths
of country children.
The human world

will bring its rough meanings,
but for now, these children are learning
the language of animals:

their names, their parts,
that they are good-natured and fickle.
How to gentle the fears of an innocent bird.

Marci Ameluxen

Radiation, Week Three

For Cory and Adam

Call it the beautiful ball,
this dance hall of low light and gleam,
where two young men in blue coats
wait for me.

One whispers my name, the other partners my hand,
bows, we swirl the carpeted floor.
Familiar, we know each other's
steps and glides.

I disrobe, my breasts mundane,
we speak of the coming spring,
our tastes and inclinations, children, careers.

Their talent is averted eyes,
these shy boys. Like a moon's cycle
for 35 days I will stand with others in gowns, waiting
each afternoon for my partner, the music more
whir than string, more hum than flute.
What lingers is the slender note of hope.

Marci Ameluxen

The Cadaver Lab

When the thick dermis is laid back
 like a deer's hide
my mouth opens at the simplicity,
the beauty of the body.

I had feared the silent machine undressed,
 its unknowable columns,
imagined bundles of color like old telephone wires.

How will I find the map, compass and its
points, to guide me through that
 devious scheme of ribbons?

But now I see the body for the first time
 and it is all rational extravagance—
braided muscle like a girl's hair,

arteries and nerves twining like vines
 through a fabulous jungle,
mystical tiers visible, palpable,
this world easy to understand,

and see my own body here, soon,
 laid broad, pale and secretive,
stripped, plain,
open.

Nancy Austin

Familial Rain

My mother's glossy-green schefflera
had tousled leaves that bounced in the breeze
like her once-full head of hair.

*A schefflera in the wild is an epiphyte-
a plant that grows on another for support*

she explained, as she palmed
the bluish- brown spots that covered
its umbrella- like leaves.

She folded her mottled, chemo-ridden hands.

Its sustenance comes from the air, from the rain
she told me, her eyes fixed on mine.

They both began to die at the same time
my daughter was growing in me.

I took a cutting from the last healthy stem,
and stored her Jardinière stoneware planter
in the garage of my home.

The cutting from its mother plant,
became statuesque, its leaflets like
dancing stars in the window breeze.

Grandma, mom, an uncle, an aunt
died midway through their lives, as did
this commemorative plant,
consumed by the familiar spots.

Now, decades later, a cousin has died.

I retrieved the Jardinière pot,
placed a lush schefflara in the corner window
to glean the late afternoon sun.

Together, we lean into the light
to take sustenance in the
sweet-scented humidity
that hangs in the air
before the uneasy echo
of familiar rain.

Onnyx Bei

"*El Rio Escondido*"
(The Hidden River)

She lost a semiprecious trinket
in the basin when she was a young girl.
It drained in the river.

She brushes her long, undulating hair
to unlock her longing,
& comb a path to all she lost—
the waves of *El Rio Escondido*.

She wakes with soreness
from phantom breastfeeding
after her son was lost to her.

She swims in the river of memory
where she embraces him,
smells the change of seasons in her hair
& the ripening cacao.

Her longing subdued—her hair knotted
at the nape of her neck with a hairpin,
a trinket found.

Onnyx Bei

Longing in Sally Peachie

The pain in my mother's eyes creeps like morning mist.
Her face, a weathered cliff, wears the tides of disillusion.

In the attic, she keeps photographs of the last time
she held me—broken dreams in an empty room.

Laments echo through her mind:
“*Ya no es más un niño,*” she mutters and weeps.

Her tears fall and glisten like pieces of piddocks—
slivers of her past scattered on the white sand.

Her sorrow ebbs with the tide,
sea turtles return to their natal shores,

and she awaits my return to Sally Peachie—
the blood of the island that runs through my veins.

Wandajune Bishop-Towle

A Visit with My In-Laws

All morning, spiders go about their tasks,
mending cobwebs, making pots of tea.

Lichen grows on every hour. A pair
of cats with tattered fur disdain their catnip

toys. They don't believe in mice.
Lunchtime brings us back in history—

*We had Spam in rissoles, spam in stew,
I never want to see another can.*

Just once, I'd love to see them tangled up
in pre-war kisses, dance the Charleston

on the beach, laughing with their friends.
On the far side of the picture window

a magpie saves up shiny bits of rain
She'll have enough to do the wash by six.

Evening comes without a drop of color,
afraid to fall, counting steps in years.

Wandajune Bishop-Towle

Burgers With Autism

Circling the grill, it growls,
a jackal waiting for lions to finish.
Anticipation sizzles with each flip
of the spatula. Lunch is late—
I'm hot. I'm hungry too. *Sit down,*
I say, *have some potato salad.*
Its face glows red as ready coals.
It doesn't want potatoes.
It wants meat.
The way a hunter draws an arrow
it draws its arm back
from the shoulder, bent-elbow,
its fist, a man's fist. My son's.
It is not my son.
David is my son.

April Michelle Bratten

Red velour, with gold flowers

Granny, you used to let me
stand in the shadow
of your tall ironing board.

With my small plastic one
next to yours,
we would synchronize our arms,
pull the weight of the iron smoothly
over your husband's clothing.

I remember your eyes,
as focused as an owl
on your slow hand,
back and forth.

We stood there,
a steady wave of domesticity,
for over an hour.

It was not until the task was complete
that you would finally release
the owl from the tree,
crinkle your eyes,
and realize I was still there.

You would then slap your leg in amazement,
cackle loudly,
and softly pat my head.

April Michelle Bratten

The Dress

The dress is a plum-colored, floor length Appalachia with a subtle heart-shaped bust and a swizzle-stick catch-me-if-you-can bodice. It costs 160 dollars. I can smell it. I can taste it.

I angle measuring tape over the fullest parts of my breasts, waist, and hips. I call customer service to reveal my numbers. The representative on the line is named Kayla. Her voice swallowed something sweet today.

Kayla squeaks out the heights and lengths, widths and circumferences expected to successfully wear the dress, while I wish for an old phone with a curled black chord that I can twist and manipulate. I bend my body instead, tiny cell phone up to ear, and peek through the calamity of my legs.

I tell Kayla that I am a contortionist and my mouth, a ballerina. I tell her the dress will fit.

We hang up and I can no longer smell the American air. I smell countries I haven't seen in years. I smell Canada. I smell Germany.

I can taste the plums that fall.

Lesley Brower

Passalong Plants

For my great-grandmother, Bertha Mae Houchin

After the funeral, I treaded past spills of daylilies,
the froth of Queen Anne's Lace, heavy stands of canna
shivering like a blooded sunrise,
looking only for a single stand of irises.

Years ago, we watched from the stoop
as wind fish-hooked clouds all day and you spoke—
just that once—of your sister,
how there had been no word for years
until she mailed you a packet of papery bulbs
the size of garlic cloves, wrapped in rags
and packed with a note that said only:
Iris siberica, Caesar's Brother.

In truth, he never had a brother,
that orator, conqueror, marrow
of the Roman Empire—
but the iris I unearthed
from the garden after your passing
now claims its own reign in front of my porch,
feathered sepal and amethyst overcoat.

In late fall it casts aside the scepter
of beauty, gathering the faded rinds
of petals into a pale fist.

Even now, the birch leaves rise
in husked applause.

Sherry Chandler

Eye of the Beholder

for Georgia

Goldenrod sways on its stem,
Queen Anne's lace stands as formal

as a maiden aunt's parlor,
butterfly milk weed ignites

the ruined hillsides, iron
weed hums its deep purple bass.

These late summer flowers rise
out of the dusty roadsides

and tired pastures, tall and tough
and a little bit gaudy —

mowed down by the farmer, shunned
by those who sneeze, they're manna

to monarch and finch. Arranged
in a slender vase, given

pride of place on a cherry
sideboard, they're as gorgeous

as any hothouse orchid,
or tropical bird of paradise.

Ann Clark

At a Pizza Hut in Texas

My cousin Charlotte was the family rip-Hell,
the one who skipped school to go smoke dope
and screw her boyfriend Chick Derosé
in an abandoned house off Hell's Kitchen Road.
She was the first of my generation to have
a pregnancy scare,
and then another one,
after we'd moved to Texas and she defied everyone
by dating a Mexican boy—
and worse—one who wasn't saved.

Even after she married a would-be preacher,
she scandalized the church,
cussing and smoking cigarettes,
and telling her husband Alvin to kiss her ass
when he said she was a bad mom
because the baby got diaper rash once.

Big breasted and petite, Char
could only fit into stretch-top sun dresses
after that first baby came.
Alvin was spending all the money
on a mail-order preacher's course,
so she couldn't afford new clothes.

She was drinking sweet tea from a red glass
across from me in a window booth
at the Pizza Hut in Angleton
when the baby started fussing,
so Char pulled down the top of her dress,
yanked the graying cup of her old bra away,
and hauled out a breast so huge and swollen
she had to thread a nipple through her fingers
to keep from smothering her child.

She never missed a draw on her tea,
made not a move to cover herself,

though the paper napkins
would have hidden nothing.

In the mid-eighties,
public breast-feeding wasn't
a beautiful expression
of love and maternal bonding—
not in Texas.

I didn't know where to look,
so my eyes strayed to the table across from us
where two twelve year old boys
in baseball uniforms held slices of pizza
motionless, strands of mozzarella strung
to their mouths, eyes stuck to Char's breast.

The strings of cheese broke unnoticed,
but their pizza slices never moved,
while the boy's mouths still nursed.

Char had seven children by Alvin
and everything about her now is gray
as her old bra.
Her wild ways
turned to an aimless trudge
from kitchen to laundry
to a minimum wage job
at the Lowville Nice 'n Easy
while she waits for child support
that never arrives.

But I like to remember her,
free, and making it the best day ever
for two 12 year old boys
in a Pizza Hut in Texas.

Ann Clark

Prodigal

I was cleaning out the junk room
after twenty years of living in the same house
when I stumbled upon my virginity
which I had lost in college.

How it had made its way
from Texas to New York
I will never know.
You hear about family pets
being left behind during the big move,
how they bravely follow,
make their way cross country,
through urban jungles, endless prairies,
and even climb the snow-choked single-lane
roads of the Rocky Mountains.
Finally, Tuffy the Staffordshire Terrier and Chachi,
the Siamese cat, thinner and somewhat scruffier,
are welcomed home by the young children of the family,
who had despaired of ever seeing them again.
The story becomes a book and then a major motion picture.

Somehow, the family has never adopted a new dog
or a new cat, so there are no awkward moments
where Dad tells little Johnny,
“Son, I’m afraid the Homeowner’s Association
is making us pick between Tuffy and Rex.
Which one should we shoot?
It’s up to you.”

I didn’t know how to tell my virginity,
after all the things it must have seen and done—
all the suffering it must have endured—
that it had been replaced.
I still can’t imagine how it got out
of the car I left it in,
much less across the Mississippi River.

But there it was,
not as pink and hopeful as when I was 21,
but shy and awkward as ever.
It was hard enough to get rid of the first time,
which it must have known or why else should it have
hidden in the junk room behind the strings
of tangled and broken Christmas lights?

Ann Clark

Sweater Meat

Mom always said, “Be patient,
yours will grow,”
and Dad said, “Good things
come to those who wait,”
but when I was still an A cup at sixteen
and my petite twelve year old cousin outgrew 36C’s,
I understood my place in the sweater-meat competition.
Oh, there are push-up, padded, demi, underwire, wonder bras
that give the semi, sort-of, kind-of, illusion that I have
what used to be so coyly called development,
but really

my monthly breast exam is more of a quiz.

Ann Clark

Zebra Boots

Today she struts the hall in thigh-high leather
zebra pattern boots with 4 inch heels,
and she's just a-poppin' it,
with painted-on black jeans
and a scoop neck t, topped by a
middie jacket, looped with silver chains.

Her hair is perfect,
long black waves that frame her face
and hang halfway to her elbows.
Who knows or cares if this is the work
of a hair press, chemicals, or
thousands of dollars of extensions?
Her eyelashes aren't any more real
than the iridescent shadow on her lids,
but she is cutting a damn swath through the dulled
rural college students in this northern town
and not paying them any mind whatsoever,
and for just one day,
wouldn't I like to have ever had the confidence
to swing a long stride in those
zebra striped
fuck-you boots.

H.V. Cramond

Vashti

Pitiless I may be
but you have no way of
knowing when he says jump
this time I did not ask
I only stood still

If I did take those women
and I'm not saying I did

Was it worse than what
he asked
of me and all the others
so many others
I was surprised he knew
my name so eager
he was to replace
me when I held it

as I would those women
and I'm not saying that I did

this space
you may enter but this time
this time I will not move

Suzannah Dalzell

Afternoon Bath

We stand behind the door
rarely latched – *what*
would be the point –
stand and steal glimpses
the curve of her back, freckled
arms, a thin high-arched
foot reaching for the tap.

Flopping on the unmade
bed, we listen to a trickle
of hot water, swish of cupped
hands – *Oh God, jus*
give me a little
more time – hear her sink
down with a sigh.

Scent of shampoo, coconut,
draws us in. We crouch
on the mat, giggle
as she molds lather
into waves, curls, spikes, horns
then with a scowl
sends us packing – *they'll*
be back soon enough
like sticky black flies
like midges

Jessica Evans

Chapped

from so much washing
trying to remove stench of
things I would rather forget,
my hands are rough
I worry that when you hold them
for the first time,
you'll think the lack of softness
means my heart isn't as well.
this week, I'll lather them
with lotions and creams,
push back my cuticles and
smooth over the rough edges,
so that when you do
pick up my hand,
at dinner, or before,
you'll find it as pure as this.

Irene Fick

How to Grow Old

You stumble, stunned and shaky
across the divide. You swap
your silk teddy for a flannel gown,
your queen for a twin. You settle
into a smaller space with grab bars, pulley
alarms, beige everything. You perm
your hair in tight ringlets, allow it to gray,
stock the closet with Chico-wear. Blend
with the ladies who lunch in clusters,
board buses bound for manicured gardens.
Cram your purse with pills and liniments.
Curl into a knot, shrink. Invisible.

Or, you stomp across the divide,
flip your finger. You parade naked
before the mirror, trash the sunscreen,
the floppy hat, bare your skin
to the afternoon sun, stock up
on lacy underwear. Turn up the volume,
sing *I Will Survive*, full crescendo.
Sip an aging Bordeaux on the sand,
toast and trust your moxie.

Laura Freedgood

Putting on a Sari

For Saloni

Asha's fingers
toss waves
of maroon fabric over my shoulder,

extract a safety pin held lightly in her mouth
and fasten the deep red cloth
to the under blouse,

the pallu
falling in folds
over my breasts.

Her hands hold 5000 years
of history, have already traveled
twice around my body,

the long lengths of material
carefully tucked into
the petticoat

and gathered at my belly button,
where she begins to transform
yards of bright silk

into seven 5-inch pleats,
measured only
by eye,

the size
of each pleat
locked

in her memory
the way her mother,
and her mother's mother,

formed and fit
into folds
the woven threads

that fall
like a thousand crimson flowers
about my feet.

Laura Freedgood

The Tourist: Patmos, Greece

Every evening she soaks another shirt
in the sink,

watches the day's pale dust collect
in the basin,

kneads the cotton
heavy with sun and sea,

feels its heft settle
in her hands.

On this Greek island
with its crazily clear stars

and shimmering sky,
she hangs the laundry out to dry

while local women sing
to the slowing waves.

Shanelle Galloway

Eve eats the Apple

At the first bite
she knew her name,
 Eve,
it whispered on the wind
Mother of Earth,
beautiful dark fallen *Eve*.

At the second bite
she tasted wisdom.
The sharp juices
quicken her tongue,
the crisp meat
crackled her intelligence.

At the third bite
she knew her body.
She looked down
and saw her bare,
Unsuckled breasts
such slender, vacant arms
and pampered hands
unweathered hips.

She looked and saw
the empty earth;
her empty womb.

Gail Fishman Gerwin

Seasons

*Our praise to You, Eternal our God, Sovereign of all:
for giving us life, sustaining us, and enabling us
to reach this season.*

—Shehecheyanu Prayer, Talmud

for Jordan

Your young friends in the back rows are silent,
maybe on muted cellphones (can't miss a text?),
perhaps as rapt as I am while I watch you, listen
to you chant.

The dusk you came to us, Caesarean delivery
after so many hours, you looked at me through
the goo they'd slathered on your eyes, you didn't
cry, not then, you simply stared at this tall woman
whose arms you trusted without choice, whose own
eyes would watch you bloom for these thirteen years,
could you feel my love?

On this equinox weekend, you sing from the Torah
without fault, you tell all how you intend to carry it
in your heart, in your deeds. From my front row seat,
better than any Broadway orchestra ticket, I hear you
thank those in your life who brought you to this day.

Little boy grown taller than most boys your age,
in your newfound voice, so deep, you gently chide
me, repeat advice you've heard from me, you call
me my short, short Nana, the congregation chuckles,
we lock love eyes, and I wish I could cradle you
again as I did that first night when I felt so very tall.

A.J. Huffman

Cabbage Leaves

Request for medical sation *denied*.
Yet the milk must dry, the pain must
stop. A sympathetic nurse advises:
avoid stimulation, direct contact with
warm water, arousal
of any kind. Life and sanitation get put
on hold. She suggests cabbage. Freeze
the whole head. Extract
individual leaves as needed. Place them
in bra cups for numbness. Incredulity grows.
This is the best that can be done? She continues:
you can always use the rest for soup.

A.J. Huffman

from Wine this Imagination

I take first tentative sip, the warming
fire of Bordeaux settles, passes straight
from stomach to flush of cheeks. Dark red,
this liquored water has infused me
with its hereditary baseness, I am suddenly
of earth. Rooted deep in clay-colored clods,
I am vine, rising both towards and against
the sinking eastern sun. I am ripe, rich fruit,
celestial orb. I am ceremonial. Drink of me,
for I am blood. Taste the celebratory
resurrection of tongue-blessing drops dancing
in crystal chalice. I am within reach.
I am draining, emulsified kiss, tempering
taste.

Kelly Ann Jacobson

I have conversations with you in my dreams

and when I wake, have nothing left to say.
We have leapt from chimney to chimney
to night sky; we have passed our offices
without a parting glance; we have danced
with the wind, our hips like cedars swaying.
You have held my hand and led me
to the moon, offered it to me like a dish,
and helped me strip it to its chalky center.
Like fish, we've dived into the stars that drift
like suspended sparks in a black backyard,
as God's hand spins perpetual circles
and tries not to get burned. I have learned
to leave the earth behind, its anchor pull
a burden to our gravitational release.
So how to wake in unfamiliar sheets
that I have washed a hundred times,
escape the lines of body in a mattress,
and speak of where I've been with you—
yet not with you, who slept as I flew,
but a different you who rose untethered
as a balloon and did not look down
as blue and green became marble-small.
We have done it all, yet I lie here silent,
searching, and withdrawn.

Maureen Kingston

Hope, Inc.

I pass the mortuary
on my way to work
each morning,
become accustomed
to seeing silent
ambulance vans
parked in the drive,
the sleek maroon hearse,
sprinkler heads
popping up on cue.
Today, though,
something new:
a pink balloon
lassoed
to a cinder block,
the preprinted
It's a Girl message
amended
by magic marker,
the funeral director's
proud boast
#5!
in midnight blue.

Adeline Carrie Koscher

We Make Mrs. Lake's Soap

Magic bar –
cleans everything.
Sensible shoe, square-cornered,
shoulders curve only slightly with age.
Mixture of lye and lanolin,
the cabbage soup of soap,
like turnip, like soil –
clean soil – cleans everything.

The necessary fat and a bit of grit,
a stray hair on the chin, strong
forearms, slight salty disposition,
no perfume of lavender or vanilla.
Clean is clean, like
a sturdy brassiere, like
a warm wet head in the sun, like
the first red stitch on white cloth.

Now graying about the temples,
wrinkled in the middle –
the way the spine of a book holds
the memory of the last reader,
the way a cheek holds laughter –
the yellow memory puddles
itself on the porcelain sink –
open mouth of time swallowing

this bar: molded on the back-porch
by twelve girls, twelve,
unbloodied, learning how
to be clean — clean like
the memory of sunlight,
clean like a dollhouse,
clean like the sound of twelve
afloat on a July picnic-table,
learning how to make Mrs. Lake's soap.

Joanna Kurowska

Vibrations

Shards of words bounce
against my skin; some,
like sperm, penetrate me
entering my bloodstream.

Long before my brain can
grasp the meaning, it crawls
up my veins and tells me
exactly who I am.

If I could trace that first word
like Helen Keller's water.
Was mine, too, soft—or cold?
My body's membranes keep

vibrating from a voice
I cannot grasp. Does it
hold my mother's rage at
an unsought pregnancy?

(She in a bomb shelter,
her beau in Siberia;
both the children of war,
what words did they hear?)

Perhaps it was earlier;
this tremor could have come
from an ancient god, who
roared angry—or benign?

Was her divine word pushed
off its course by a yell
schieß!—yōuēai!—*kick ass!*
or by a market spell?

If I could grasp that first
message, I would put it

in my mouth like a grape,
dissolve it on my tongue.

Kristin LaTour

Life Still

after Preston Dickinson's "Still Life in Interior" 1920

This is her life still:
her blue table,
tea and sake.

Her love of lemons and clocks,
the magazines she won't read,
dwarfed by chairs she has no

company to sit in.
Her vases are artfully placed
on shelf and mantle

but never hold flowers.
She lets the dust settle
turning all but the lemons gray.

Kristin LaTour

Tracing My Way

Pencils trace roses laid beneath onion skin paper,
and I learn how to draw. It's as if I'm behind a fence
watching flowers grow, unable to touch them, a faint
smell of dust and graphite their perfume. My fingers curl
into links connecting with the delicate chain of history:
my mother's recipe for rose petal wine, my grandmother's
essential skill at painting china in the empty hours
her husband was at sea. Would she forgive me
for tracing my way back to her? I finish another outline,
one outer petal, and wonder if an operator would connect
me to her. It's almost dusk, and my pencil is dull.

Kristin LaTour

Wardrobe

When I wear pink, there is no choice,
only need. Biscuits, gravy, and tea call for
its delicate shade tinged with grey
to balance their heaviness.

When I wear blue, helicopters swing overhead
holding my fickle admirers who love my sky
and lightning, the electricity of my smile
and my hair waving like a kitchen flame.

When I wear lime green, I am bright but
without consequence, foolish yet democratic.
I can nurse a glass of wine for three hours
and sing in a voice that's tart and sweet.

When I wear silver, I study and inscribe impromptu
diseases with names that roll off the tongue
like mercury. My lover leaves me flowers made
of aluminum and candy coated in zinc.

When I wear black, I will not share anyone's
secrets, but lick them into envelopes to send without
addresses. See the clouds gathering? They are
my fortress where I closet my hopes and yours.

Kristin LaTour

Warning

Marrying into a coven isn't advised
since your mother in-law might ask you
to flay a baby, dip its legs in flour then egg
then flour again, season with salt and pepper
and fry in canola until crisp. She will hum
if you ask whose it is, where it came from.

Your father in-law may request you rest
in the rafters with him, legs dangling,
and sing wordless songs to the dust, chew
the old wood, shove splinters into your shoes
as protection against pitchforks, pistols, fire.

You may find your husband's
sisters have stolen one or maybe two
of your teeth while you slept with your mouth
agape, your arm around your husband's waist
which meant they leaned over him, rested their arms
on his chest, naked and warm, breathing.

You will bring home a pet, before you have a baby,
but each will go missing after you've left
for something simple like milk or paper
and come back to find the front door open
even though you locked it, latched it
whispering the words your husband told you
would keep you safe, but he's nowhere now.

The worst is the relatives come back from
the dead, some afterlife they never visit
from under the dirt of the basement
behind the cracks in the old stone walls
their bones creaking and cracking,
teeth loose and looking like yours,
their breath always cold, and wanting
to hug you, hold you, know if you are carrying
their future generations in your hidden places.

No matter what spells he cast on you about love
about how the tingling in your chest is magic
and the touch of your fingers laced in his
is an unending bond, you need to find your own
old leather book, translate the pages of runes
into something that can save you,
take your golden eggs, escape the garden,
release all the dogs and run.

Yvonne Higgins Leach

What I Want My Daughters to Know

It is marketed as:

“A small book about the big issues in life”

targeted toward the young woman

starting her journey of motherhood

or the one who is halfway through and

feels she has done a half-ass job.

I am the latter.

The little book is meant to make me feel

confident. Instead, after reading chapters

on how to embrace change, prepare

properly, and be more understanding.

I place it between my poetry books

and last month's book club selection.

I hear my daughter's making exchanges

in the family room

and I join them.

Lyn Lifshin

Roses, Blue

when I go back and
look at those poems,
its as if Joni
dabbled in them.

A little jazz, a
blues riff. I think
of the woman on
the metro, sobbing
I think of rain.
I think of roses.
Of blues my baby
left me. I think
of Joni's woman
with her Tarot cards
and tears, of all
things that did not,
could not happen,
more haunting than
so much that did

Lyn Lifshin

Tin Angel

her words are my
words: "tarnishes,"
"beads" tapestries."
I think she's my
doppelganger with
her letters from
across the seas
and her roses
dipped in sealing
wax. Was there
something in the
water those rose
and butterfly years?
The white rose
Alan Ginsberg
gave me flattened
in a Shakespeare
Folio before wax
caked its leaves
could have been one
her tin angel sent.
The columbine
I planted in the
house I'm rarely in,
color of her lips,
her crying. I too sat
in a Bleeker St Café.
I used "tarnish" over
and over that year

Lynne McEniry

Olive Ridley

Some unpredictable act
calls this olive ridley back

to the sands of her conception.
She paddles ashore to do her work

among the ancient aggregate.
Swollen, she swims toward the arribada

ensuring the odds for a few of the hundreds
she will deposit in her nest.

At nightfall she digs
with the weight

of what she carries, tossing aside
grains until she has created the warm teardrop

essential for incubation.
This olive ridley

forgives her trespassers and drags
herself back into the sea, trusting

that some will crawl
to the surface

Rosemary McGee

What's There to See?

I see her, Marian
Sitting at the breakfast table
My breakfast table
Eating her daily oatmeal
1/3 cup oats to 2/3 cup water
Standard 1/2 cup too much for her.

She eats it plain, bland
But believes it has saved her
From a life of colitis and
Intestinal duress.

She sits there
Watching the squirrels and birds feed
Trees blossom
No cars drive by
No neighbors coming and going
It's more isolated than Phoenix or
Campgrounds where she and Dad
Parked their Winnebago.

She says, 'You know why I'm upset today?'
I say, 'No, why?'
Actually I didn't realize she was upset.
Perhaps I've grown weary of her moods
Of knowing her thoughts
Of her being in my space
Of her.

'Do you know what today is?'
She asks me.
'No, what is it?'
'It's his birthday, James Thomas.'

I'm stopped cold
It's the first time she mentioned him,
My brother,

Since she told me about him
About birthing him and
Giving him up.
It's also the last time
I hear his name.

Jean P. Moore

Block Island

You kept the postcard from that trip
tucked way back in a drawer—

it had a picture of the bright chairs,
atop the hill looking out to sea.

We took the ferry and were seasick
the whole way. It was after the season,

and everyone was gone. At first we
thought there was nothing to do,

but we made love all night long. We didn't
stop until we were crazy for it to end.

I wrote, one day, years from now,
we'll return,

sit in these same chairs, too old
probably to do much else.

Now I pull out that card and wonder
when we are going back.

Patrice Pinette

Green Flash

Rosebuds and rum;
a night that never happened
on Sanibel Island.
Gulls circling
a bar called *Green Flash*.

Where there is destruction
an aroma of smoke, must, musk, mulch.
Funny how forest floor sprouts pure
white mushrooms.

When he betrayed me
I didn't know how lucky I was.
Good riddance follows grief.

I just learned to step out of my own way.
Shake off the salt. Lift, bird-like
above the stained sidewalk, the arrows,
the macho hunters.

A woman must tend her feathers.
Bear an olive branch. Dive
for prey. Surrender to wind. Molt,
mate, and make the best of it.

Sunflower seeds in winter;
worms, in spring.

Patrice Pinette

When My First Husband Made Another Woman Pregnant

My teacher Adam
had a deliberate
tongue. It held its place
emphasizing *s*, was pleased with itself
rolling those English *r*'s,
bowed down to vowels.

He listened as intensely as he spoke
entered other people's sorrows
tasted other people's tears
always had a wise word.
And why shouldn't he?
He read the stars.

He gave talks in Shalesbrook
by an open fire: on destiny and
folk souls and the temperament of Hamlet.
He was an expert on betrayal,
a spiritual man.

I can't remember how he fell.
He took a wound that would not heal.

It was then the woman from India
began to serve him.
Her dark eyes, her philosophy, her gentle
touch. Old man that he was
he fell in love. Right under his wife's eyes.

They say it wasn't his first time.
He had a baby with someone else
a long time ago—in Scandinavia, I think.

So how could he be objective
when I told him about my husband?

What else could he say but—slow and deliberate
each word a stone on my heart:

Let him go to her.

Heidi M. Sheridan

Pomegranates in the Desert

Up here in the high desert, where quail
run a line toward the field of my parents'
house, a pomegranate falls into my palm
as I pick nine or ten for my mother's jelly.

Gardens, grapes, and strawberries
grow but nothing returns here like these: red,
red as a moon with a crown for a top.

Inside, like a honeycomb, a maze
of peach pulp cradles its seeds.
No easy way to put them in.
Only fingers will pop, pop seeds onto
the floor. *Be careful, they stain.*

Mom heats sugar slowly, hours pass,
days pass, years pass, and the tree survives.
Much less fruit now. No jelly wrapped
into green poinsettia paper. Merry.
Married for 38 years and still cooking, but
arthritic hands won't last through two days
of jelly making. Sugar turns. One jar is left
in the cabinet from the last time. And I hide it.

Evelyn A. So

Eve

Another day among trees. The man spent
after meeting with God
and a long day cataloging. She gave him
olives, sweetened his mouth with honey,
fresh figs. They laughed. Feeling the hard

rind of pomegranates split apart,
tasting each finger,
each jeweled seed.

No one to talk to while he slept.

It was the same the day after, and the next,
and each one after that. No one listened
but the bees, ants, trees. The same birdsong
morning to night. She would leave.

He could stay or follow. Something inside her cried out
to be fed.

Evelyn A. So

Jeffrey

to my brother

Once
you had no face.
I could not hear
 your babble

no matter how loud your calls. Could not see
no matter how you
 shadowed me. As long as no one spoke
your name, you didn't

exist. No one said if you smiled. Or if
you held your head,
fell asleep when someone

sang. No pictures of you reaching
for the world, mobile above
your pillow. Grinning, painted lions
and turtles flying by.

Did they place a hat
on your head
because of your wild

hair? Take you
for walks
and smile?

Once, you opened
your eyes and fists. They say you were
beautiful.

Evelyn A. So

Yeh-hsien

Ingrate, they jeer, and worse while I cook supper.
I scrape rice bowls, chopsticks with hunger.
Stupid, ugly, worthless girl they taunt, spitting.
I ignore them. Continue cleaning.

I tend the fire, warm my hands. Shiver
while they sleep all night on heated beds.
Why did father sell me after mother died?
Because unlike her, *I'm* alive.

My golden-eyed fish, my only friend, swims to me
at twilight. Our tears mingle with pond water.
Now I see that father went mad for mother's love.
How can he bear anyone else's love?

Some nights it seems she sings in the moonlight.
Sometimes I see her smile in the moonlight.
Can I help if I have her voice, her cheeks?
Can I help if I have her tiny, tiny feet?

J. J. Steinfeld

Is the Forgotten Poet Sad or Disconsolate?

She was famous, I assure you, but times and tastes change,
now she's sad because she is no longer lonely
because she no longer has vitriolic enemies
larger than life who threatened and banged at her door
in the middle of the night like inspirational clockwork
(shouldn't I write *disconsolate* instead of sad? —
she wouldn't think so, I suppose,
sadness is her daily attire
I hear her voice say *sad*
disconsolate is for you).

She is sad because she no longer fears dissolving
into a piece of gossip or rumour
because the world will not end
for at least nine or ten lifetimes
searching for sadness
a prospector looking for precious metals
because she doesn't care no one recognizes her
not even the ghost of her parents
not even her first and latest lovers
because she can walk away from mansions
metaphoric and real and without category
sad because it doesn't matter
she started too late in the day
in what is shaped as a life
sad because she forgets scars
and their narratives
sad because she knows who will be gone
and she can't place a bet
sad because her poem is nearly over
and you're not sad or disconsolate
because the secret is there will be
another poem.

J. J. Steinfeld

Nearby

This farm woman I heard of
past ninety-five with barely
a regret or haunting memory
a rural woman through and through
sixth or seventh generation
she or others weren't sure
accuracy lost in the hardships
lived a considerable distance
from her nearest neighbour
a third of her life, maybe a little more,
and besides, she was known
to be surly and somewhat unhinged
self-sufficient as a wild animal
wilder than most, with a roar of being,
legend and rumour had it.
Nonetheless, relatives worried,
she never,
God, she insisted,
with every hundredth breath
with every roar of being
was nearby
closer than any neighbours.

J. J. Steinfeld

Personal Mythology

She asked me on the day
her madness officially ended
why such darkness
in the middle of the day
shows all her betrayals
and such brightness
in the middle of the night
taunts her senses and memory.

I have no answer
no sweet reprieve from anything
but she will not move
leave my path
and she is as strong
as ten ferocious men
and as adamant
as a deity refusing
to leave its holiest shrine.

I need to find all I have lost
the small, sad items
and the large, difficult
to identify ones,
I say, part entreaty
and part admission
of humiliation.

She disappears as adroitly
as she had appeared
and already I miss
her strength and adamancy
walking forward to a different time's
geography and chronology
hoping for another stranger
worthy of worship.

J. J. Steinfeld

The Next Performance

She doesn't care
she cares too much
up on the tightrope
careless as a bird lost in flight
gliding to a new land
careful as a surgeon—
look, I have only so many images
and I'm mesmerized by her
so high in the air
abandoning the tightrope,
besides, I'm up next
and the audience is
already bored.

Emily Strauss

11 Bruised Strawberries

He brought me eleven strawberries
in an old egg carton carefully
lined in faded yellow crepe
the lid decorated in crayon flowers

huge strawberries the size of limes
each nestled in its own cup
slightly bruised they were, much handled
their green topknots drooping from the heat
one cup empty: conspicuously
dangerously vacant, an impression of
berry still visible in the paper

and he stood before me, hands out
stretched in offer, thin legs
a touch of red on his lips, eyes wide
Here, Miss, these are for you,
without breakfast, his offer of love.

Maxine Susman

Dinner for Two

She tries to envision some new way to live,
using herbs from her garden in novel mixings—
mint in the water glass, rosemary with fruit.
Al's framed photo above the fireplace
presides like a hearth god in business suit,
but that's the Al before Parkinson's,
Alzheimer's, before sickness erupted
in rage in the sunny kitchen and she'd jump
out of reach, keeping the butcher block
island between them. Now more space
has intervened: miles, lesions that show
on the MRI. She drives to Tucson twice a week
to see what's left. Tonight gets home
expecting friends for dinner, prepares
two perfect plates—sprig of rosemary, mint leaf—
sits at her empty place to watch them dine,
says it means so much when friends enjoy her food.
But she's thinking of heads bobbing over bibs,
how Al looked when he looked up to see her go.

John J. Trause

The Mermaid

I

I sing of Viking boats and manatees,
dugongs and diphthongs, faeces,
beautiful brown blooms born of a bellyache,
blubber, spermaceti, ambergris,
whalebone, narwhale spikes, and cuttlepiss,
of cabbages and kings...

II

I sing of hurricanes

/ // /
/ / / /
/ / / /
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III

I sing of cicadas by day,
by night crickets, of chiasmus
and aposiopesis—

IV

I sing of cicada shells
and shells of sea things,
of absence and remnants, of drift,
of less and more, when less is less
more and more and always less than.
I sing of that which neither fish nor flesh
at fever pitch *se relâche*...
I sing of the mermaid from her lair
who buoys up the drowning man,
the mermaid who lets her shift slip

off, a cuttle-cartilage, clear and plastic.
I sing of disasters and gastropods and
the shell of the mermaid barely there,
her slip, her a slip, her loosening lip,
her quivering, shivering lip, her shift.
I stare and weep and drown and surge again.

NOTE: “The Mermaid” is inspired among other things by Jill Greenberg’s work of art *Neither Fish Nor Flesh—Fever Pitch* (2006), a mixed media assemblage, *Adanna’s* backcover art for this issue.

Mary Winegarden

The demands and pleasures of seeing

and its rewards:

so Bonnard writes of painting
in his beloved Provence.

A sunflower-lit morning

at Le Cannet, 1937:

did he sense what

was in store,

or did he toss aside

Le Matin, dismiss its

grainy photos from Berlin?

And see only domestic

delights—the breakfast table,

its red-checkered tablecloth,

the saffron-yellow

bouquet of mimosas,

the honey-yellow

of his wife's shawl?

Her absence, her presence.

Even after death,

she is everywhere—

in the chirring of the mourning doves,

in the cicadas at dusk—

vermilion in the orange shadows.

NOTE: The title plus the first and last lines of this poem are taken from the journals of Pierre Bonnard, as quoted in an exhibit of Bonnard's paintings at the Metropolitan Museum in New York in the spring of 2009.

Laura Winters

The Man Who Owned the Alphabet

Not far outside our village
in a deep wood
a man opens the window of his well-insulated hut
and sells letters to our townspeople

We are told each night which ones we may buy
A rusty voice calls out consonants and vowels
We try to piece together
the few words we can afford

Most of us buy only letters
we absolutely need to get by
bankrupting ourselves for the wrong ones
kept in poverty just to be able
to say apples hatchet firewood

Still others pay exorbitant rates
from the little they have
In the dead of the night
they come to the very small black window
next to a holly bush
They go hungry to save for an L or an S
hoping to use the leftover characters one day

We'd all be killed
if he realized some of us saved these
wrapped them in plain paper
and hid them near the kindling
They say there is no place in our village
for letters used the wrong way

Still we horde them in secret
until we have enough to spell our own names



Rachel Burgess, "Elizabeth Marie," monotype, 19" x 14".

F

Fiction

Dawn A. Fuller

Crossing Yucca Street

Being the only freckle-faced Hungarian girl in a small Mexican farming border town is like a habit-wearing nun entering a men-filled mosque during prayer time belting out an Ethel Merman version of Ave Maria at the top of her lungs. Odd man out. That was me.

My pre-St. Bernadette's years were spent in relative symbiotic bliss, surrounded by my loud, overly-emotional, overzealous, loving, Hungarian family. I enjoyed long hot lazy days playing in the sweltering summer sun with farmers' children in endless fields of cotton, watermelon, and broccoli. I was only just slightly aware of the differences between myself and other town kids.

My best friend Rosa was Mexican but spoke English, so that was good. She never treated me any differently for being Hungarian. Besides, we both liked to run past my Grandpa Peanuts' giant glass jars of pigs' feet in abject terror and suck on the jumbo mouth-puckering pickles he made on the back porch. I did notice that Grandpa Peanuts had darker skin than the local Mexican population, a big sticky-outy nose, an unusually long grey goatee, and yelled a lot of bad words in both English and Hungarian that shocked other people. I also noticed that other kids had bologna sandwiches like me. They just didn't have thick pads of goopy Oleo slathered on every piece of sandwich bread, or had it vigorously rubbed into every cut, bruise, or imagined abrasion that resulted from crashing into nearby bushes on their skates. Other kids had fun birthday parties with friends, piñatas, hamburgers, and hot dogs. I had birthday parties with Grandpa Peanuts, Granny, and Töltött Káposzta (Stuffed Cabbage). I thought most kids were probably gypsies year after year for Halloween and that their moms sewed every-day wear of brightly colored too-long skirts with matching headscarves for them too. I assumed everyone sat around a giant table with ALL of their melodramatic aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents and parents, laughing and yelling while passing overflowing bowls of crisp Cucumber Salad, spicy Gulyás (Goulash), and sweet Kifli after Sunday Mass. Surely their grandparents lived with them too, and they had to know that a Cherry Halls Cough Drop was considered a "candy." Overall, I guess I felt pretty normal. I didn't really worry if people liked me. I had my family and Rosa who loved me.

My mom took a picture of Grandpa Peanuts, Granny, and me with my new uniform, on the front steps of our yellow house the day I started Kindergarten at St. Bernadette's. I proudly held my Miss-Piggy-On-A-Motorcycle lunchbox high in the air between them. My mom braided my hair perfectly and covered my head with a tiny scarf that Granny embroidered for me. At school that day, I noticed that I was the only one who had such a scarf. I felt special.

We learned the alphabet, colored, and had a snack and a nap before we went home at two o'clock each day. During recess, kids laughed and played jacks, marbles, and Chinese Jump-rope like Rosa and I used to, but now it was all in Spanish. Fernando became my first friend at St. Bernadette's. I guess he was different too, mainly because he was fat for his age and his thick black hair was cut in the shape of a bowl - framing his face like a creepy Victorian clown on a cracked picture postcard. While the other kids ran around in packs singing and kicking a soccer ball, off on our own, Fernando and I challenged each other to monkey bar races and sat under the jungle gym huddled together, pretending to read Walt and Pepper and Emmett Otter's Jugband Christmas. Fascinated by my golden hair, sometimes Fernando held one of my braids and rubbed it while we "read."

In First Grade, Fernando moved away and I was on my own. We learned to read, add and subtract. With Fernando gone, and without many friends, I was lonely. I chose to spend my free time at the convent with the sisters. I dusted the chapel, helped the sisters cut and arrange fresh flowers from the garden, or helped prepare their evening meal. Grandpa Peanuts picked me up from school in his dusty white station wagon which made clunk clunk noises as it went down the street. Grandpa stood at the front gate waiting for me to come out with his big black dog Buddy by his side, a lit cigar clenched between his dentures, and his dark arms held open for me to run into. When he saw me, he started shouting in his gravelly voice, "Gyere ide, kislány!" (Come here, little girl!). When the other kids saw Grandpa Peanuts, they pointed and laughed. I cringed. I could see them getting into their mommies' cars where they were handed tiny bags of candy for the ride home. Grandpa Peanuts handed me candy too - a Cherry Halls Cough Drop - because it "makes you feel better."

Second Grade started out great. We learned lots of new things from Sister Regina. Sister Regina was a young fresh-faced Sister Servant of the Blessed Sacrament who was sweeter than most, eternally patient, and exceptionally soft-spoken. I was still lonely without Fernando, but Sister made it better. I think she felt bad for me because sometimes she

would let me help clean the chalkboards and would secretly fold a small treat into my hand after class.

In Second Grade we prepared to make our First Confession and practiced reading aloud. We learned how to pray the rosary, sit quietly in Mass, and dissolve the Holy Body of Christ in our mouths, without chewing on Jesus. Second Grade was also our year to learn times tables, and the year I became best friends with Mando, for a few hours.

I liked Armando (“Mando”) Gonzalez from the moment I saw him. I wanted him to be my friend. Mando lived over the border in Mexicali, and early each morning, made the arduous trek into El Centro with his older sister who wore lots of jewelry and his heavily made-up Mom, to attend St. Bernadette’s. I wished I lived in Mexicali and that I had to cross the border to go to school. It seemed cool and mysterious. I just lived around the corner on plain old Ocotillo Drive. The only thing I had to cross was Yucca Street.

Mando’s best friends, Hector and Irma, were the class rowdies. Hector was shorter than the rest of our class by far. He had black curly hair that sat in an unruly single poof on top of his head, dark brown skin mottled by even darker patches, and permanently popped-eyes that made him appear “trollish.” Irma was the giant of St. Bernadette’s. It was quite a shock to see a second grader who was nearly five foot six, and just as wide. They certainly didn’t look like anyone I had seen before.

Mando, Hector and Irma smarted off to Sister, chewed gum (which was NOT ALLOWED and stuck it under their desks), hit you in the face with the tetherball as hard as they could, talked through sacred lessons about the lives of the saints, goofed-off throughout the ENTIRE Mass, and basically made Sister Regina’s life in our second grade class a hell on earth. Mando did the same, but when he did it, it was cool. I admired Mando’s starring role in the hijinks.

When I was by myself at home, I pretended to speak Spanish like Mando. I tried out my Spanish on Rosa from time to time. We would be playing dress-up, and in the middle of it, I would throw in “Boca chicka buja.” She giggled herself silly. When I sat next to Mando in class, I tried to say words that might be considered “Spanish.” I didn’t get the reaction I had imagined in my mind. Sometimes I felt like the practicing wasn’t worth it, but I still did.

During lunch, Mando sat and laughed with Hector and Irma. Mando ate the hot lunch the school provided him and drank the soda his mom sent along wrapped in tin foil. I never got soda for lunch. I had my packed milk, which was warm by the time lunch came around. I observed and studied Mando, Hector, and Irma during lunch, and much

of the day really. I copied their gestures – the way they pinched their index fingers and thumbs together and shook their hands in the air back and forth quickly when they thought something was cool, and the way they crossed themselves twice during mass with a kiss up to God on a closed fist at the end. I tried doing the double cross and kiss up to God at the dinner table with Grandpa Peanuts one time. He whacked me and told me to “do it right.”

During the day, I dreamily watched Mando with fascination and marveled at how all the kids laughed and vied for his attention. Since Mando, Hector, and Irma loved candy so much, I thought I might win them over by bringing some candy of my own to share. When I passed their desks, I placed a Cherry Halls Cough Drop in the middle, making a big theatrical swoop with my hand as if I were depositing a rare delicate European hand-made chocolate. They burst into laughter - with Mando laughing the hardest - until Sister walked over to where they sat and tapped her ruler three times on their desks. What was so funny?

Mid-year, we started to learn times tables. The real excitement of this was not in the tables themselves, but in the goofing around during the constructing of the times tables’ tools - popsicle sticks with uncooked pinto beans glued to the ends. We spent several days gluing the beans to the sticks under Sister Regina’s careful direction. Hector and Irma pegged each other in the head with beans, tried chewing on the raw beans, or tightly held them in their eye sockets briefly to give the look of “freaky eyes.” Mando used this time to make jokes, eat candy, and talk really fast in Spanish with everyone laughing around him. I couldn’t understand why they were all cracking-up, but I did my best fake laugh - pushing my stomach out hard and laughing really loud like “HA! HA! HA!” Sometimes my laugh went on longer than everyone else’s and they all stared at me.

One morning, Mando and I sat side-by-side at the table gluing beans to our popsicle- sticks and I got a great idea. With her sweet back turned to us, Sister Regina wrote the days’ lesson on the blackboard in her neat cursive. Without Sister’s blessed watchful eye, I told Mando he should stick a bean in each ear. Mando, a willing participant, did just that. He waved his arms around in the air and made jokes. Hector and Irma, seeing a potential for fun and trouble, came over and sat next to us. Once a bean was placed in each ear, I told Mando he should stick in another. Hector and Irma were laughing quietly and eating another treat I was never allowed, Saladitos. Mando obliged. Hector and Irma laughed harder. For once, I was the cause of the fun! They liked me! My plans were working!

By the time we got to the fourth bean, we were really laughing. Then, Mando got a weird look on his face. While we were tossing beans about and laughing, Irma said something to Mando and Mando starting saying, “What? Qué? Qué?” Hector shouted at Mando. Mando screamed, “I can’t hear you!” By now, Sister Regina had come over and wanted to know exactly what was going on. A fat tear slipped down Mando’s face and Hector shouted, “Sister, she told Mando to stick beans in his ears and now he can’t hear us!” - pointing to me as he did. I will never forget the look of mortification on Sister Regina’s angel-like face as she clapped her hands together as hard as she could in front of Mando, repeatedly asking him if he could hear what she was saying. Then, I saw a shower of sacred tears roll down Sister’s beautiful holy face.

After Mando was carted off to the emergency room for the bean removal, I had to sit in the corner by myself facing the wall for the rest of the afternoon. My plans had failed miserably. Everything was ruined. I would never have friends at school.

When class finally let out, I attempted another woeful apology to Sister Regina’s back. Without turning around, she said, “You are excused.” I burst into tears and ran as fast as I could out the front door. Grandpa Peanuts and Buddy were standing by the front gate. He was smoking his cigar. His arms were wide open. “Gyere ide, kislány!” he shouted. It felt like a long way to get to him. I hugged him and rubbed my wet face on his pant leg. Buddy licked me. I cried harder then I ever have before, and probably ever have since. Grandpa Peanuts scooped me into his arms, kissed my cheeks, and carried me to the car. He sat me down in the back seat, patted my head, and reached into his pocket. He handed me a Cherry Halls Cough Drop. As Grandpa Peanuts drove away, with the other kids, their mommies, and Sister watching, he stuck his head out the car window, yelled “Bastards!” really loud, and with a closed fist, did a kiss up to God. On the way home, in-between pitiful sobs, I un-wrapped the candy and put it in my mouth.

Amanda R. Howland

Hunger Town

Carmel angled her elbows around her doubled paper plate as she worked on loose shreds of roast beef, two soggy slices of wonder bread and potatoes coated in corporate Cajun spice. She was hungry and didn't want Mark to take her plate prematurely. Even though she loved him.

She ate her meat, bread and potatoes at the same curved corner of this bar most every night. She should feel safe. The bread floated away from the meat, hanging off the edge of her plate. She ate the bread last, even though she didn't want it. When she was done, she smoothed her hefty blond bob back behind her ears, pulled her blue knit cap down and pushed her ruined plates forward.

"What kind tonight, Carmel?" Mark's head was narrow, as if he'd been clamped too hard at birth, but his smile was genuine. Brave like a skull smile. One canine tooth gone from a fight back in high school. By the Coke machine, fifteen years ago. Carmel had been there.

"Rum and Coke. No. Vodka tonic." She tried to order a different drink each night, until one day she would finally hit on *her* drink. Something exotic, beautiful. Something he could *make* for her. But everything she thought of was so generic.

He zipped around, working fast, even though the bar was dead. One bar in this town, and it was dead every night except for Tuesday Karaoke. Now there were always a couple guys around in blue and red flannels and caps in the winter—by the darts, or laughing at the giant TV, which she hated. Tonight the TV was on mute and the radio played bland hits from the eighties and nineties. The guys were just like the squirrels she passed on her walk over, benign, but not company. And not really wild.

A woman walked in. The long rounded bar was empty, but she sat by Carmel. Heat came off the women, even in this cold bar, where the heat was kept low, and everyone else wore a hat and coat.

The woman slid forward, focused on Mark. Her smell was chokingly cheap jasmine and stale cigarette. Her color was dried out orange: hair crispy dyed, skin saturated with freckles. Carmel couldn't tell where her freckles ended and her lips began. Her lips were dry and cracked and bare, but her eyes were lined and shadowed in black. They looked weird because she wore no mascara, so her pale red lashes twitched against the black makeup.

Carmel had never seen this woman before.

Mark came up and let himself flop against the bar, exhaling and smiling at the woman as if he knew her, but Carmel knew he didn't. "What can I get *you*, sugar?"

Her body swiveled and scissored toward Mark, but her eyes flicked at Carmel twice. "Mmm . . . how bout a mojito with extra lime baby-man." Carmel strained to identify the woman's age. Somewhere between thirty-five and fifty-five—each micro-expression seemed to change her whole face.

He popped his eyebrows, then his body and hopped to it. Carmel wondered, how does he know how to make a mojito?

The woman leaned into Carmel, "He's a sizzler, sister, I think I'll be taking that boy home."

"Home—you don't live here. He's married. His wife just had a baby."

Mark came back with a beautiful emerald drink and, with his long elegance, handed it to the woman. He asked Carmel if she'd like to have another vodka tonic. Carmel pulled something out from the recesses of her memory. "No. How about a pale Russian?"

"Uh, *white* Russian, Carmel?" He smiled at the other women. "I don't have any cream, how about a black Russian?"

"Okay—how's Karen? Is she recovering from giving birth to the baby?"

"Oh yeah, she's happy as a horse."

When he left, the woman sucked her drink and nudged Carmel. "*A horse.*"

"You do not understand. He loves horses."

"What do you love?"

Mark brought back the dark drink and winked, zipping away, god knows why—there was no one waiting for service. He crossed his arms and looked at the giant TV.

"Come on, gal..." The woman gulped down her mojito, jerked her head at Carmel's drink and called to Mark, "Two double shots of Citron and the bill, kind sir."

Carmel wasn't used to two drinks followed by a double shot. She followed the woman out to the parking lot. The mud was hard, frozen dry. The woman had bare feet shoved into pink heels—it was too cold. She walked up to an old brown sedan and turned to Carmel.

"Where's your car, Babycakes?"

"I walk—I just live down the block, above the drugstore." She swallowed, wishing she hadn't told the stranger where she lived. Carmel

didn't work. She stayed with her father. The drugstore had been closed for nineteen years.

"Come on, it's early. Let's go drink by the river. Hop in."

A wind came up and knocked the car about. Then disappeared. If they were going to the river, Carmel was glad the air tonight was still for the most part, and dry. She looked out the window, feeling like a child. Trailing, sleepy. Not as curious as she imagined she should be.

Carmel asked, "Where you from?"

"Cross the border." Across the Ohio border into West Virginia. "But don't you even want to know my name?" She turned and smiled at Carmel, her eyes off the road a few seconds longer than Carmel was comfortable with. A canine tooth flashed gold.

Carmel looked back out the window. They wound down a side street, down to the riverbank. "What's your name, then." Like telling where she lived, she felt a stab of regret after the words left her mouth. As if speaking were more dangerous than riding.

"Star. I'm a *starworker*! HA! That's your oldest profession, okay?"

"How did you know people drink by the river?"

"You should get over that bar-keep, Carmel. Enough suffering."

Carmel felt her cheeks get hot and put her hand on her left cheek so Star wouldn't see. "I don't like him. He's married. Did you bring any wine coolers?"

"You're corny." Star pulled fast against the street closest to the river. They got out—the doors squealed like dogs. "You got family, Carmel?" She pulled out a bottle of something clear and they headed over to the river's edge.

They sat down on a rare patch of dry winter grass. Nothing was natural along the river: concrete, brown water. Maybe the brown was natural. Carmel was more careful this time, didn't mention her emphysematic father she lived with in the two-bedroom apartment above the closed drugstore. "No."

"Water looks like chocolate. Is it rusty?"

"I guess." Carmel tucked her hair behind her ears and pulled her cap down over them.

They passed the bottle back and forth in silence. It tasted like nail polish remover, but Star drank it like water. Again and again it returned to Carmel, who touched her lips to the bottle and just pulled a tiny kiss out of it, already feeling sick.

The orange streetlight fell dead onto the moving brown water. What makes it move? Where is its source? Where does it go?

Carmel said, “You stay in your car or what? What you doing in Crayton?”

Star turned.

As Carmel turned to face her, the world shifted and she realized she was very drunk. She put her hand to her mouth. Her lips were numb.

Star looked less dry here by the river. She looked clammy even. The harsh orange light was behind her, so it was hard to see her face, but when she turned and the light flashed on her cheek, it looked wet. They’d taken off their coats, the cheap vodka making them hot even as their breath was visible. Carmel’s eyes adjusted and she could see Star’s mouth, nose, eyes. For a long minute they looked at each other. Carmel felt a lift as their eyes locked. Were Star’s eyes grey, or silver? How long, maybe *never* had someone met her eyes like this before. She felt aroused and tried to hide her shaking.

“I’m in Crayton for you, Carmel. I came here for you.”

Carmel smiled. Closed her eyes then. This must be that moment before a kiss. Her chest opened, hoping for touch.

Knocked instead back into the ground, rough grass at her neck, concrete clanging the back of her head. Star on top, riding her like a fresh demon, slapping her numb face over and over again. Laughing. Laughing that was high pitched but quiet, like nails on glass.

“The hell you’re doing?” Carmel tried to say, but her cheeks, her mouth, were muffled with hits. Not devastating hits, but hits that stung, and were getting heavier.

“Ya ratty frump! Sitting around waiting for shit, ya shit.” Star stopped hitting and began to pet Carmel’s face.

Carmel’s eyes gently opened. Star’s hands, tracing unknown shapes on Carmel’s battered skin felt so good it made her mouth ache. Again, the orange light was behind Star, it was hard to see her face. Carmel wanted to ask what she was doing, but all she could do was swallow.

Star’s hands trickled down to Carmel’s throat and began to squeeze.

Her caged breath provoked rage, and though Star was planted firmly on the core of Carmel’s body, Carmel was bigger and stronger. She pushed the ground with her feet and they both toppled over, rolling, slipping into the water.

Frigid water. Carmel’s neck free, she exhaled heavy bubbles, and pushed off the muddy floor, aiming for the orange light blooming through the dirty water just ahead. But skinny white arms came out. White hands gripped her hands. No, Carmel moaned—her brain fucking

crazy with supernova fireworks, all she could do to keep from inhaling the water, taking it in. Kicking.

Star's face up in her face now. Star's smile gummy, no teeth. Carmel kicked. Star's eyes, still looking in. She held tight, laughing in the water. Just the orange light showing her face, her white hands. Carmel couldn't believe how deep the water was, and that she could see at all, but she could. She thought, *If only this were a dream, I could just breathe the water.*

Her street flashed in her mind. Hird Street. Empty. The drugstore next to the hardware store and the bar down the road. Her father on one end, Mark on the other. In her sock drawer, an ancient orange stuck with cloves she'd made with her mother the same year the hardware store closed. She felt sick for oxygen, and she felt sick about going back to Hird Street. Star moved her face closer. She said monster things in the dark, in the water. So much air lost, thickly flicking up into the space above them.

Carmel mashed her mouth to Star's mouth and sucked, their eyes still locked. Carmel sucked Star's air out. The air tasted like gas heat coming out of grates. Star's eyes were holes into her true self, but Carmel couldn't see what that was. She sucked Star's air. The irises were sealed grey like the lids on soup cans. The pressure of Star's grip on Carmel's arms faded. Star let go, and Carmel kicked up, bumping her lips together to conserve air.

Carmel broke the surface just above them, gasping, breathing. The drunk out of her head but still in her body, and the cold in her body, made climbing the little bank difficult. But she lay there on the hard grass, breathing. Feeling warm, but shaking.

The water moved in delicate weaving patterns, steady, unbroken. Carmel felt doubt. Dread shimmied up her legs. She'd killed Star. Star had just been playing, and now, Carmel had killed her. Still, she stayed, watching the water. Her whole body shook. She finally stood up. Darkness to her feet. Knowing, she had to get out of the cold, soaking wet, it couldn't be safe.

She heard splashing to her left, and staggered as she saw a longhaired figure pull itself out of the river maybe fifty feet away. Carmel ran. She ran home. She took a long hot shower.

The next day she watched the news—no dead people. Her father liked a TV dinner on a TV tray. She kissed his greasy forehead as he flipped the channel. She left as always, heading out to Mark's bar for her own meal. But then, she turned down Robin Avenue instead. There was

no traffic, really. A brown sedan drove past. She walked until it was dark again.

Patricia Striar Rohner

My Name is Rifkah

My husband had too much to drink on the night our daughter, Babes, got married and stepped on her wedding gown when he walked down the aisle. For a brief moment Babes stopped in her footsteps waiting for her father to lift his patent leather shoe from her flowing skirt. Everyone watched and waited, afraid Sidney would not obey and cause the bride to rip her white satin frock. Fortunately, my husband raised his leg and moved it away so she could continue down the aisle to her groom, Alan. Babes looked beautiful that night, creamy complexion, brunette curls, red lips. It was Christmas eve and large snowflakes were falling outside the Hilton Manor where we celebrated the nuptials. December 24 was the only night available with three months short notice since Babes was pregnant and we had to have the party before she showed.

I come from old-fashioned beginnings, the third of ten children, a first generation American. In my youth, Mama had matched me with Sidney because he was the son of an old boy friend she had left in the shtetl in Russia.

"Rifkah, you will marry Sidney Elentow, Meyer's boy. I promised him a daughter and you are the one. If we wait any longer there will be shame in having an unmarried girl."

Being a good child, I complied even though Sidney Elentow was a quiet, unexciting man who owned a shoe store in Waco, Texas, a place known for cowboys and later, crazies. I went to Waco in the year of the stock market crash, 1929, and worked side by side with my husband, putting people's feet inside shoes and bending over eight hours a day looking at the floor. I hated my life, but Mama said, "Go," so I went.

I made friends in Waco, mostly Gentiles, and there was one other Jew, Selma Shapiro whose husband sold steamer trunks to rich people going overseas. Selma and I used to go to synagogue together where during the long services we talked in whispers about our children. I wanted my three girls to have careers so they would not get stuck in a stale marriage like me. Selma felt the same about her twins, two fat girls with poor complexions.

I missed my family, especially my sisters. No one ever came to Waco, Texas.

"Rifkah, when will you come visit?," my sister Tzippy would ask in her letters. Tzippy lived up north and always wrote wonderful newsy correspondences, at least eight pages long with notes on the sides.

I would take a Greyhound once a year and leave my girls with Sidney. "I have to go and see someone from my past. I miss my family. You'll manage," I would say as I slipped out the door to the terminal. I remember the first time I went and arrived after a day and a half in a strange town and tried to figure out how to get to my sister's house.

"104 Rutland Ave., Southberry," I said to the black driver in a canary yellow taxicab. It cost twenty dollars, but I was so happy that I didn't care.

Banging on Tzippy's kitchen door, another black person in a uniform let me in. Tzippy's face lit up when she saw her older sister, tired and not very glamorous in Hush Puppy shoes that we sold at \$29.99 in four colors.

"Here I am. They let me out of Dodge," I cried as we embraced and sobbed from joy.

"Rifkah, you made it. Oh, sweetheart, you've come such a long, long way."

Over the years, whenever I arrived she would instruct the black maid to make tea and serve me in the dining room with the cut glass lighting fixture-tinkling overhead. I would tell my dear baby sister all about Sidney and the girls.

"Marriage is death," I said to her once.

Tzippy would fuss over me, taking me to her hairdresser and out to dinner. Her Benny was nice to me too. After three days of pampering I would reluctantly board the Greyhound back to Waco, carrying bagels and cream cheese in a brown paper bag.

When Babes got pregnant I turned to Tzippy for help. I had sent all three of my daughters to school, emphasizing their need for independence and then Babes, the oldest, went and got pregnant before she finished her last semester. Alan was a nice man, solid and hard working, so I prayed that my child would be all right. The Hilton Manor was a large function hall and Tzippy arranged the flowers' color scheme, red and white, due to the holiday season.

"I now pronounce you man and wife," the rabbi said after the breaking of the glass and the drinking of the wine. As we wept all the way back up the aisle, Sidney seemed to sober up some.

After the wedding, I returned to my life at the shoe store. My other girls got settled. Millie became a legal secretary and married a lawyer in the office. The baby, Annie, studied to become a teacher and

received a certificate for most popular in the school. Selma Shapiro and I were now old friends and her twins settled down with two brothers who ran the hardware store in Waco. One day, when I bent down fitting Mrs. Coleman's brown walking shoes, I started to get dizzy.

"What's a matter, Mrs. Elentow?"

"A little light headed, nothing."

"You look pale."

"I could use a glass of water."

"Mr. Elentow, your wife seems ill."

Sidney, who was out back stocking shelves, came with a paper cup and some tepid water. I drank and waited until the fainting feeling passed. I started getting headaches afterwards and once I lost my balance at home when I was going to the bathroom at night, and almost fell down the stairs. Sidney drove me to Dr. Green's office the next day and had me examined. They did an x-ray and a scan and said there was a brain tumor.

Babes called and cried. Millie and her husband came and visited. Annie drove from Florida and stayed a week because the schools were closed for summer vacation.

"Please take me to see Tzippy," I said when I left the hospital, my head taped in bandages. After recuperating, Sidney and I took a plane and he brought me to my sister's. She and I sipped tea and ate cake in the dining room with the tinkling chandelier. I could not get my hair done because they had shaved my head for the operation, but Tzippy treated me to a manicure and pedicure. I brought all my old letters that Tzippy had written to me over the years and she read them to me as I rested on her big king-size bed. We laughed and we cried remembering all the problems in our family.

"Remember when Lenny married that woman in France and he was so unhappy?"

"Don't forget the time Pam got dumped at the airport in Michigan. I never forgave that jerk."

"And Frank's new law book on the bestseller's list. Can you imagine?"

"Will we ever forget how Benny had to pay off Mike's gambling debt?"

I hated to leave, but Sidney said it was almost time to go. "I want to be buried next to Mama," I told my sister and my husband.

"Whatever you want," they said.

"Did I do okay?" I asked Tzippy as she drove Sidney and me to the airport.

"You did just fine."

"I could have done more."

"Sweet Rifkah, stop. You are good, in and out. You tried so hard."

"No more Greyhounds for me."

"Now you will go first class."

Terry Sanville

The Provisional Child

I remember her birthdays, but not her birth. My husband recently became an ex, and Julie, his grown daughter from a previous marriage, has vanished, sucked into the land of former in-laws, somewhere in New York City's lower east side. Rodger won't return my calls or texts, won't give me her new address or phone number. He claims that I wrecked our marriage, playing at being thirty while I'm well past forty. Maybe he's right. But who says I should stop expecting love?

I scour the internet and social media in search of Julie but find nothing. I send a slew of e-mails. They bounce. What am I supposed to feel? How can I stop worrying about her? Has she fled to the dark side and blames me for everything?

My office phone buzzes and I grab it, hoping that work will disrupt my thoughts.

"Ms. Simmons, it's your Mother on the line. Should I connect her?"

"Yes, go ahead."

I don't want *this* distraction. Mom's cheery voice pisses me off. She wants to know if I'm coming home for Christmas, how I'm handling the solitude, if I've found Julie.

"Relax," she says. "You'll find her, in time."

"In time for what? My funeral?"

"Look, honey, Rodger's family isn't going to feel warm and fuzzy if you bug them about your...your ex-stepchild."

"My what? She's my daughter...just because I didn't carry her doesn't mean that—"

"I know, honey, I know. But you'll just have to sit tight and wait for her to contact you. If she does, great. If not, well..."

"Well what? Julie's been my daughter since she was in grade school."

"Barbara, I'm not saying that you should forget about her. But life goes on and...and you can still have your *own* children if you would just—"

"Oh. Great. I should get knocked up and hope for a replacement daughter. Is that what you're saying?"

"No, of course not. But you're still pretty, a successful attorney, and there are, ya know, other fish in the sea."

"Just what I need, Mom, more clichés."

“Now hold on, Barbara. Sounds like you’ve been sitting on that pity pot of yours. Why don’t you come home for Christmas and we can talk some more.”

“We’ll see, Mom. We’ll see.”

Maybe she’s right. Maybe I should stop acting like a drama queen and let things settle down. I need time to adjust. I stare out my office window at the bay, at the late morning sun glinting off Alcatraz Island, at sailboats dotting the slick blue water all the way to Oakland. Rodger got the boat in the divorce, has it tied up at a berth in Sausalito. For a while, the three of us sailed almost every weekend until Julie left for Columbia University. I remember her crouching at the bow of our cruiser as we ran close-hauled on a hard tack, the jib taut, Julie’s trim body soaked by the cold spray, her face turned toward me, grinning. She has her father’s sharp features, perfect for New York City, and plenty of charm. I think she gets that from me, but I can’t be sure. When she left to study journalism, I knew we were in trouble...with only two of us left in the house and neither of us speaking. Talk about clichés!

Early Sunday morning, I run my five-k route across the Presidio, downhill through the woods, around the historic Army parade grounds and barracks, then back again. The scent of pines and the ocean clears my head, lets me think about the improbable, the impossible, the painful. Maybe Julie has tried finding her birth mother. She’s a smart enough detective...and kids are rediscovering their roots all the time. But why wait until you’re 25? Will a birth mother’s remorse substitute for a stepmother’s love? Was I just a temporary mom...and she a provisional child?

A thick morning fog settles on the tops of the Presidio’s pines. It wets the path. I turn uphill toward our... ah, *my* house on California, bear down, legs pumping. In my skimpy shorts I feel like I’m running naked. I know I’ll have that damn dream again. I stomp on some pine needles scattered across the trail and my right leg slides from under me. The world spins, a series of quick flashes, then goes black. When I wake, I’m halfway down the slope, staring into the shrouded sun. My right leg bends at strange angles, the pain burns like lava. I hear shouts and bodies pushing through the underbrush.

An EMT kneels by my side. “Try not to move,” he says. “We’ll have you out of here soon.”

“What...what happened?”

“You took a fall.” He wraps a brace around my neck then moves his hands over my body, pressing lightly, taking his time. “Your leg will

need to be set. Other than scratches, you look in pretty good shape. Your fitness helped.”

“Thanks.”

The guy can’t be much older than Julie...big arms with freckles, a redhead. I fight the urge to ask for his address out of gratitude. He and another guy lift me onto the stretcher. He gently brushes stray hairs away from my face and I tear up.

“Take it easy, Ma’am. We’ll have you outta here in a minute.”

And there it is...the dreaded “M” word. No woman feels sexy or appealing when they’re called ma’am.

The EMTs cover me with a soft blanket, my crooked leg sticking out, and haul me up the hill. Late that night, I stare at my computer screen and try to figure out how to tell Mom that I’ve broken my leg, got a bump on my head...and that a Christmas trip to Tarzana is out. She’ll want to come to San Francisco and take over my house. I decide not to tell her anything and search for some excuse for skipping a Chandler family holiday.

On Monday morning I call the office and tell them what happened, tell them I’ll be working at home and to reroute my phone calls. My administrative assistant sounds worried, says that she’ll come by after lunch and bring me up to speed on the new contracts. I tell Shirley not to sweat it...that I’ll be hobbling around the office in a few days. But she insists and I don’t argue. I’ll need the distraction.

I finish my breakfast coffee and yogurt and stagger to the closet to pick out some loose clothes to lounge in. The cast on my leg feels heavy and I’m clumsy with the crutches. Julie’s high school graduation gown hangs in the corner, wrapped in plastic that also protects her Valedictorian sash. I reach in and finger the slippery material. Will she want this back, now that I’m no longer her mother? She probably blames me for the divorce. They say you marry the whole family. But when you get divorced, do you divorce everyone – even adult stepchildren?

When Shirley arrives right after lunch, I’m still in my bathrobe, watching crummy TV and popping Vicodin for the pain.

“So have you found out anything about my daughter?” I ask before she can say a word.

“Not much. We checked with the New York Post. They said she hasn’t worked there for a couple months.”

“What happened?”

“Their HR people wouldn’t say...just that she left. We couldn’t get hold of her old bosses, but we’re trying co-workers.”

“Christ, she could be anywhere. What about the in-laws?”

“Nothing so far. Either they don’t know or won’t tell.”

“Yeah, that sounds like Rodger’s family. Circle the wagons against the California bitch.”

Shirley opens her briefcase and lays six draft contracts on my kitchen table.

“When do you need my edits?” I ask.

“The first two, by the day after tomorrow. The last four, sometimes next week will be fine. I’ve e-mailed you the files. Just send them back with highlighted changes.”

“Not a problem.”

“So...ah, are you going to be okay by yourself? Do you have enough food? Can you get around?”

I glare at the slender washed-out blonde. Shirley just graduated from Stanford and already has her own family. I guess her mothering instinct set in quickly...I know it did for me with Julie. I still remember the first time she called me Mommy. It was after a junior league tennis tournament in the fifth grade, with the other parents crowding around and Julie taking my hand, like she was proud to know me, and babbling about her first win.

“Yeah, I’ll be fine.” I tell Shirley and lay on a heavy New Jersey accent. “Don’ worry ’bout it.”

She laughs. “I’ll stop by on my way home just to check, okay?”

“Thanks, but you don’t have to.”

I’m glad she will. I spend the afternoon reading indemnification clauses, drinking Johnny Walker, and getting lost in the latest installment of *The Young and the Restless*.

The rooms darken and I click on the lights. It’s the nights that are the longest...in this too-big house with a muttering TV. I’ve been going to a little joint right outside the Presidio gate off Lombard. It’s a faux-English pub with a blazing fireplace and a noisy bar on the ground floor of a clapboard building. The food tastes decent and they leave me alone to stare at the big screen and watch the 49ers. But now with the bum leg, I don’t think I can drive and I don’t want Shirley ferrying me around to my nighttime haunts.

She arrives just after I’ve gobbled down a dinner of Stouffers lasagna, microwaved to perfection.

“You want me to help you take a shower?” she asks.

“Why, do I smell that bad?”

“Well, no. But it’ll make you feel better. Come on.”

I stand with my bad leg outside the shower stall, with Shirley steadying me as I one-hand the bar of Dove. The hot water beating on

my chest relieves the tightness, and my neck relaxes. Afterward, I shoo Shirley home and stare at myself in the bathroom mirror, embarrassed at how I look like a bag lady with tangled hair, bloodshot eyes and no makeup. My arms and legs are bruised and scratched from the downhill tumble. I rub some first aid cream on them. It stings.

I spend the next hour tugging a comb through my longish hair and watch *Jeopardy* and *Wheel of Fortune*, wondering if Julie is also watching them somewhere. They used to be her favorite shows in junior high. We'd slouch on that ratty sofa in our old stucco apartment on Cole Street and watch Alex and Pat, argue about the right questions, the right words, and make fun of Vanna's dresses. Julie always had good language skills, much better than mine, and in high school almost single-handedly produced her school newspaper. She has a flare for turning the ordinary into the exemplary and teases me about the jargon we attorneys use. I fall asleep at the kitchen table, head down on one of the contracts, opened to the dissolution clause.

Three days later, Shirley calls me right before dinner. "Our investigator in New York has got hold of Julie's ex-housemate."

"So what's going on?" My breath comes fast and I steady myself, expecting the worst.

"She says that Julie flew to London six weeks ago."

"Why? What the hell's in London?"

"A man."

"Oh."

"Yeah, evidently she met this guy at a press party. He works at the British Consulate in New York and had gone home on leave."

"Is it something, you know, serious?"

"The housemate thinks so. She says that Julie had been getting over a bad breakup and caught this guy on the rebound."

"Yikes, people can do stupid things when..."

What the hell am I talking about? I don't know diddly about my daughter's love life. When she was in high school, we'd talk about the boys who asked her out, who wanted to get into her pants, who had fallen madly in love with her. I helped chaperone her senior prom. She waved at me from the dance floor, to make sure I was watching, then pressed her gowned body against the boy and flashed me her minx grin. But once she left for college and afterward, I didn't hear squat.

"Yeah, men can make you stupid." Shirley continues, "and...and this guy is married."

"Christ, I wish that girl had called me before she...do we have an address in London?"

“The housemate gave me an e-mail address.”

“Thanks.”

I scribble it on my notepad, my hands shaking so bad I can barely turn off my cell phone. Maybe I’ve been imagining that Julie blames me for the divorce? Maybe, she’s just so blinded by love that nothing else seems relevant? But getting involved with a married Brit? What the hell is she thinking?

I shuffle over to the sideboard and pour myself two fingers of Johnny Walker. My bum leg itches and I grab a long-handled wooden spoon from the kitchen and slide it inside the cast, the itch just beyond reach. I grit my teeth and the torment fades slowly. Panting in front of the TV with the volume turned off, I try to figure out what to do. At my computer, I open my e-mail service, enter the UK address, and write:

*Do you know where my daughter Julie Simmons is located?
Please have her contact me.*

Thank you,

Barbara Simmons

The bottle of scotch is empty when I turn in. Dreams of my faux-English pub keep me tossing. I see Julie on the big screen, standing with the press corps at some stuffy political event. Then somehow I’m there. I wave and move toward her, but she stares right through me, like I’m a stranger, then like I’m an assailant. The bartender points the remote and clicks off the TV. I wake.

Morning light slices through my bedroom window. My head pounds. I hobble to the kitchen and make coffee. After burning my mouth on the first cup, I slump into my computer chair and stare at the dark monitor. Do I really want to turn it on...to see if my e-mail has been answered? My broken leg throbs. I down a couple Vicodin and continue to stare. Maybe Mom is right and I should just leave it alone. Julie will contact me when she’s ready. But what am I to her, now that Rodger and I have split? I thought I knew. My mind flashes to the empty clothes hangers in Julie’s closet. My heart joins my head and bum leg in pounding.

I power up the computer and open the e-mail service. There’s a message from the UK. I suck in a deep breath and open it. My tears spill onto the keyboard as I read:

Dear Mommy...

Barbara Siman

THE 29TH FLOOR

Miles removed his glasses and rubbed the already clean lenses against his undershirt. He stared down at Janna, still asleep, entangled in her pink polyester nightgown. The early morning sun snaked around the drawn shades and dimly lit the corners of their bedroom, a room they no longer shared. He could still feel the slam of Janna's words...

"I'm out of here."

Miles begged.

"It's over," she said.

He bargained.

The king size bed, the whole bedroom to herself; he would move his things to the other side of the apartment. "Stay, please," Miles pleaded, "for Becky."

Janna stayed.

Miles heard Becky's hurried footsteps on the black and white tile. "I'm going now," Becky poked her head around the open door.

Miles put his finger to his lips and smiled at his daughter's small face, half hidden, under her large orange baseball cap. He motioned her back into the hallway, keeping his finger on his lips, "Sshhh."

"Sorry," Becky whispered, and hoisted her back pack over her shoulder. She wiggled her hand under Miles' face. "I need extra moolah for photography today."

"Right." Miles walked down the hall to the library.

"And you were supposed to sign the permission slip," she reminded him, sing-songing her words. "Mr. Rogers won't let me go with the class unless—"

Miles interrupted Becky. "Here's the signed slip, the money and mmmuh" He hugged Becky tight against his chest. "I love you, Miss Dipsy Doodle, Rebecca Noodle. Remember that," he growled, and pushed her out so they stood facing each other.

"I love you too, Mmmuh." She blew an air kiss and pulled away. "I'll be home around four thirty.... Tell Mom when she wakes up, bye."

At the kitchen window, Miles tracked Becky's orange cap until it disappeared. He took his glasses off and stuck them under the hot water faucet in the sink. The lenses clouded up from the steam and Miles set them on the table to air dry. Whistling the new tune he had composed for his beer commercial, he rinsed sticky dinner dishes and scoured the

greasy insides of the pots he had stacked from last night's dinner. Finally, he finished and turned off the kitchen light, chuckling as he remembered what Becky had said. "I can help you write a lyric to that tune, Dad, just try me. I'll charge you one sip of beer, a tiny sip, you'll never miss it." She liked it when he let her have a taste of beer, and she loved writing silly lyrics.

Miles moved to the bedroom and checked Janna. She lay on her back, her legs spread apart, her breath hissing out of her open mouth. Rays of sun beat against the drawn shades. With his shoe, Miles nudged the pile of clothes Janna had dropped on the floor last night. He lifted her pink bikini pant on the end of his toe, letting it dangle before dropping it back on the soiled pile. He could smell the urine. She must have drunk too much again.

The loud and insistent ring of the doorbell buzzed the front door.

"Morning." The Fed-ex man smiled at Miles. "How you doin?" he extended a pen for Miles to sign.

"Great!" Miles answered, and signed for the overnight envelope addressed to Janna. He reached for his glasses on the top of his head.

"Ah, the kitchen," he mumbled and closed the door. His glasses, still resting on the table, were dry. He put them on. "The better to see you with." He smiled. His watch said eight fifty four a.m. He looked for the sender's name — Mark Sendog, Janna's lawyer. Inside the heavy legal document were little arrows showing Janna where to sign for the divorce. He returned the document to the envelope and carried it under his arm to his desk in the library. "Diddly hmm, diddly who, now there would be so many things to do...." Miles placed the envelope in his desk drawer and moved on to Becky's room. He tidied her unmade bed and put her pajamas in the laundry bag. Maybe he would put a rhyme in Becky's letter. She loved rhymes. Maybe he should put everything in a rhyme. He hummed the beer commercial tune as he collected a stack of papers and filed each one in the proper category. On his personal stationery, he drew a smiley face at the top. Dearest Becky, he wrote, and stopped as he listened to the short snarl like snores echoing down the hall from the direction of the bedroom. Continuing the letter, he wrote, "I Love you; you will always be my Dipsy Doodle." His watch read nine twenty three a.m.

Miles returned to the kitchen and put on his chef's apron. He chose his favorite knife from his Japanese collection and caressed the smooth black handle. He walked the short distance to the Master bedroom and sat alongside Janna on the bed. Her breasts rose and fell in

regular slow waves as she slept. Leaning into Janna's ear, he whispered, "Did you know that you snore?"

The first strike of the knife caused a great gulping sound echoing from Janna's throat. Small, bubbling noises gurgled out as the stabbing continued. He placed the knife next to the soaked pink nightgown, sticky red against the sheet, and wiped his hands on his apron. Quietly, Miles shut the door.

In the library, Miles finished his letter to Becky:

*I had a little hen, the prettiest ever seen,
She washed up the dishes and kept the house clean.
She went to the mill to fetch us some flour,
And always got home in less than an hour.
She baked me my bread, she brewed me my ale,
She sat by the fire and told a fine tale!*

He checked his watch and realized it was already afternoon. Where did the time go? Becky would be home soon. Miles took the elevator to the 28th floor and walked the short flight of stairs to the roof. It was a beautiful day, perfect for Becky's photography class. He whistled the beer commercial tune as he took his glasses off, wiped them on his undershirt and carefully set them down on the gritty surface of the black top roof. Facing backwards, he positioned his feet at the edge of the roof and allowed himself to fall.

Pictures on Radio

"Freshman don't make the cheering squad," whispered Bob, a brass section player with the school band, his black trumpet case beside him. He was sitting on a metal chair at a parallel table.

Susan flushed feeling anger. Was this guy sensitive or pleased he was offering fact? It was 10:30 in the morning, her high school lunch period.

"I know the head cheerleader." He pushed his chair. "Hi. I'm Bob Gill. And, I know, you're Susan Miller."

Susan pretended not to be upset, turned, smiled and said "Hi." Inwardly she felt exposed, wondered why this stranger knew that she had tried-out for the cheerleading squad.

"Can we have lunch together? I've gone through similar experiences; I learned to triple-tongue on a trumpet to make myself stand out at band tryouts." His smile showed even teeth. His light hair was thick and wavy, which was so different from Susan's babyfine textured blonde strands, and his square face had a few pimples that lingered above his shave line.

"Is this a sympathy lunch?" Susan blurted out what she was thinking, as she usually did. Fortunately she said it quietly so others didn't take notice.

"I haven't had a Pity Party for awhile. Sure." Bob was playful and moved his tray of food to Susan's table which had only a few others at it and they were sitting at the other end. "How'd you decide on the trumpet?" Susan asked.

"Next-date story. Are you coming to school's Nights of Music? I've a solo. Maybe your parents would like to come with you. Impressive event.."

Susan's cheeks flushed; her eyes watered without her being able to stop them. Barely audible, she said "thanks."

"I'm sorry," Bob said with real meaning. "Looks like I said something that's upset you."

Trying to keep her voice in a controlled pitch, Susan said, "My father is dead; tell me about the Nights of Music." She tried to run the two together as if to lessen the impact of the first words.

Bob played the 'I'm sorry' phrase through his head but decided that trite expression had little meaning. He hesitated wanting to sound sympathetic, not gushy. "You, your mother, might like this. The high

school looks strangely beautiful at night. Hallways echo from the few footsteps, and the building seems to protect the silence. You get the feeling of its short-termed power when you see empty corridors."

Susan listened carefully. His description sounded flowery and didn't feel ashamed of it. He was sensitive.

"The auditorium, especially from the balcony, doesn't seem like study hall. The school band plays, as does the orchestra. People dress up like it was an important concert."

"I play the piano," Susan stated, "my mother once played in Carnegie Hall."

"Really?" Bob seemed impressed.

"Really that I play or that my mother did in Carnegie Hall?"

He smiled, enjoying her playful words. "Both. Tell me about your mother."

Susan glanced at her watch, then cold food not yet eaten. She didn't want chewing noises or rubbery faces people make when they eat, so she pretended she wasn't hungry. She didn't like suddenly feeling uneasy about anything as it wasn't generally her personality, but gave in to these sensations today. "I've class."

"Tomorrow lunch? Unless you'd let me walk you home from school?"

"Let's have lunch first." Susan realized she might have to invite him in and her mother and sisters would later chide: 'a boyfriend'. She wasn't ready for that just yet. "Tomorrow. Oh. And thanks, about the Music. I'll talk to my mother. I'll need date and time."

"Tomorrow." Bob got up, pushed Susan's chair out to make her getting up from the table more comfortable. "By the way, met before. The hallway. Your first day when you were talking to yourself. I tracked you down but was invisible I see."

Susan grinned slightly and kept her lips together, feeling grown up yet awkward at the same time.

After school, once home, Susan asked her older sister, "Can you stop a minute?"

Carole, ever suspicious when Susan wanted to talk, paused.

"You've been in high school longer. Should I have Mom go with me to Nights of Music?" Susan wanted to see what kind of mood her sister was in before proceeding further.

"I never went." Carole simply stated. No emotion was detected.

With hesitation, Susan began, "A boy who plays the trumpet asked me to come with Mom and see the show."

"So? What's the problem? Ask Mom."

"Well," Susan spoke slowly, "I think I like him. Like a boy. It's confusing. It's not like the boys I do things with as friends."

Carole didn't know whether Susan was serious or testing her. Could Susan, confident and capable, pretty and talented, be confused? Carole just stared at her. "So what's your question?"

"Never mind." Susan wasn't getting the response she wanted, and, since Dad died, talking with her mother was awkward. How could Susan bring up boys as people who made her feel things she'd never experienced when her mother had no man to dance with, share with, kiss?

The shrill bell of the telephone ended the conversation. Cindy picked up the heavy black receiver, heard the message, then gleefully yelled upstairs to her older sisters, "We're going to have television. Can you believe it! Television. I saw a test pattern on June's screen last week, you know the girl in my class I told you about who's house I went to and saw this exciting moving picture thing, and..."

"Can't you take a breath when you talk, Cindy? Gosh, it's hard to understand you." Susan was still preoccupied with boys.

Very slowly, pausing between each word, Cindy shouted, "We are going to have a television."

"Wow." Susan tried to imagine radio with pictures now in 1948.

Carole said nothing, turned, went into her room, closed the door, talked to the air. "Daddy. You loved gadgets. Television. Why couldn't you be alive with us! Why!"

All This Can Be

Connie never planned on having an affair. She'd read that hormones could cause weird things to happen during pregnancy, like growing a beard or craving dog biscuits, so she put her heightened desire for physical attention down to crazy hormones. Initially, her boyfriend was greedy for the extra sex, but as her belly began to swell his interest waned.

'I still want to, Michael, and it's totally okay. It doesn't hurt the baby if that's what you're worried about,' she said one evening, and ran her hands up inside his shirt.

'No, Con. *Really*. It's only a few months. I'd rather wait, just take care of myself,' he said, and gently removed her hands.

'Oh. Okay,' she said. But it wasn't.

'Right now I've gotta make some calls.'

They'd been stacking the dishwasher. When he walked away her chest tightened and the floor began to swim under her feet. She grabbed hold of the kitchen bench. Obviously big stomachs turned him off. Why didn't he just admit it? While he was busy she combed through her books on pregnancy but found nothing on loss of libido in expectant fathers.

Connie's hourglass shape didn't change at all from behind, so at night she'd face away when they spooned. Sometimes she'd try pushing back rhythmically from her hips, hoping to get him interested. It worked a couple of times but as the baby grew, more and more often he'd kiss the back of her head then wander down the hall to sleep on the single bunk in the spare room with the flat pack eco-cradle and the change-table and the fold-away travel cot and the six boxes of disposable nappies and the two canvas bags filled with soft toys and rattles and nursery books she'd received at her baby shower.

Two months on Michael was well occupied with five days at the bank, four evenings at the gym, and surfing every weekend. Although she kept herself busy with girlfriends and medical appointments and driving across town to visit her mother, Connie had never felt more alone. In the shower she'd imagine it was Michael tenderly lathering soap over her enlarging breasts and belly. Sometimes she'd be overcome by self-pity and need to rub more deliberately between her legs, but the pleasure of release was forgotten when she glimpsed the discarded whale in the bathroom mirror.

Connie believed she'd failed somehow—that if she'd only said or done something differently at the very beginning he'd want to touch her and

hold her all night like before. She missed some things even more than she missed their love-making. She missed their drowsy after-sex talks; nestling her head on his chest as he idly stroked her hair; feeling his foot push up on hers each time she pressed down on his. She missed the refuge of proximity.

By her eighth month her breasts were so full and feminine it was difficult to believe Michael didn't even want to look at them. Following the clinic nurse's instruction, for five minutes every day she practiced drawing her nipples out. Lately, small beads of bluish pre-milk would pool and trickle down past her navel. She felt extremely proud.

One Sunday, after they'd assembled the cradle, Connie said, 'It's unbelievable. Three weeks from now I'll be breast-feeding our baby. I actually have watery milk in them now.' She began unbuttoning her denim shirt. 'Can I show you?'

'Umm, no, not right now, Con. I don't think I like the sound of that. Maybe another time—after I get used to the idea.'

#

Late one afternoon, when she was pushing a loaded trolley up the parking lot ramp, a man approached her from behind and insisted on wheeling the trolley to her car.

'I'm fine, honestly, but, okay. Thanks. I *am* a bit puffed. It's up on this next level; right down the far end I'm afraid.'

'No problem at all,' he said, and smiled.

He had a narrow face and beach-swimmer's hair, and when he smiled his blue-grey eyes lifted at the corners just like his mouth. She saw that beneath his white polo shirt he was bone thin and that the veins on his sinewy forearms protruded as he maneuvered the trolley. She guessed he was around fifty.

After lifting her groceries into the boot of her sedan he stepped around quickly and held the driver's-side door open. Before climbing in, Connie turned to him, smiling, and said, 'Thanks again.' He smiled back and gently placed one spidery hand on her belly. She rocked back on her heels with the unexpectedness of it and reached for the open door to steady herself.

'It feels wonderful. Do you mind?' he said.

The tender, respectful way he petted her belly seemed so natural that she didn't feel frightened.

'Umm, well, no, I guess not. Can't believe how massive it is.'

'How long to go?' he asked, placing a second hand on her.

She sighed and said, 'Ten days.'

He nodded as if he'd already known the answer. She wondered if he was a gynecologist. Then he spread his long, thin fingers and began moving them in slow circles over her loose, mauve dress. Connie gradually relaxed. Soon she was leaning into his hands.

'I think it's a pretty girl, like her Mama,' he said.

She giggled and tipped her head to one side. 'I *want* a girl. I've had a feeling from the start. But, wow! The whole thing, I mean, being pregnant. It's totally amazing.'

'Yes indeed. A miracle. Nothing more stunningly beautiful than a woman with child.'

The man's voice was soft, low, and soothing. Connie felt perfectly at ease.

They stood smiling at each other for a moment, then both looked down to watch his hands as they slid first to the underside of her belly, then continued down over her thighs 'til they reached the hem of her dress. When his fingers touched Connie's bare knees he paused and searched her green eyes.

From somewhere distant came the clatter of a shopping trolley. She checked from side to side. They were partially obscured behind her car door and there was no one nearby. When she looked back into the man's face she could find no hint of menace. She bit her lips together and nodded *yes*.

Slowly, he worked Connie's dress up until her belly was exposed. She grasped the gathered material, held it against the base of her ribcage.

He whispered, 'Oh, my. Aren't you beautiful,' and his fingertips swirled and tripped and swept over her like a master at work with his clay.

She felt her skin, all her senses responding, and closed her eyes.

'That feels so-o-o lovely. Don't stop,' she heard herself say. Her mouth fell open and her breathing slowed.

The man continued for a minute, then bent down and left a row of butterfly kisses across her taut skin. Trembling, she fumbled beneath the front of her dress, unclipped and lowered the cups of her maternity bra, then took his hands and placed them over her swollen breasts. He closed his eyes and took their weight in his palms, tenderly kneading and stroking.

'I wish I could find the right words. Your mama-shape is, well, simply exquisite.'

Connie felt the sting of tears and her nose began to run. 'Thank you. I needed to hear that,' she said, and sniffed.

The man's eyes opened. They were watery, too.

'That's all this can be. Exactly this and no more,' she murmured.

'I know,' he said, 'I know.'

For a few seconds he continued to caress her exposed torso, then suddenly he was kneeling, grasping his hands together behind her waist, holding her, one cheek resting on the slope of her belly. With tears trickling down her cheeks she combed her fingers through his salty hair, traced his eyebrows, his jawbone, cradled his head firmly against her. For a moment nothing else existed, only the man, her, and the baby—this intimate embrace between lovers.

Eventually the man loosened his grip and clambered to his feet. Together, they straightened her clothing, then she reached for his hands.

‘Angel,’ he said.

She held on, fingernails digging into his skin. The man bowed his head, kissed each of her knuckles, and when she relaxed her grip he pulled free and quickly walked away. She watched until he reached the far end of the lot and disappeared back down the ramp, all the while knowing he wouldn’t look back.

Connie sniffed and checked her watch. It was five. Michael would be finishing work. Later tonight, after he’d left her and her simply exquisite body alone in their darkened bedroom, she would gather up her sleep-shirt to gently cup and knead her breasts and sweep her fingers over her belly—the way the man had.

She sighed and climbed into the driver’s seat, turned the key and eased into reverse. The baby stretched and pushed hard against her ribs. She patted a tiny foot. ‘Angel,’ she said.

C

**CREATIVE
NON-FICTION**

Barbara Ashwood

Naked

He sits on the couch, drunk, a little delirious. A half-empty bottle of Maker's Mark rests on the coffee table dusted with ashes.

She curls up in a plush chair across from him, crying. Her throat aches from returning his roars, but still, she doesn't want a divorce.

The air is thick with stale smoke. He tells her to come and sit with him.

She does.

"Remember when we said we'd just get naked when we started to fight?" His words slur. "What happened to that?" He breathes whiskey onto her neck as his arms wrap around her.

She presses her forehead against his chest-- he smells like home. "I don't know. I forgot, I guess." Swaddled by his scent, she pauses and then lifts her face up. "Do you think it would make a difference?"

"I do."

A few weeks later there's another fight. He yells, and this time she doesn't. It's only evening, but she's in pajamas. They're worn and light blue and dotted with penguins. As his voice drowns the refrigerator's drone, she slips out of them. Soft waves of cotton drape across the tiled floor. She stands in front of him and offers herself.

"I'm naked." Her voice is low but edged with exasperation.

He faces her but doesn't look at her. His gaze goes over her slumped shoulders. "Go to bed."

The furnace kicks on and hums with the refrigerator as he turns his back and waits for her to dress. She slips one leg into the pants and then the other. She bends down, her breasts sagging, and picks the shirt off the floor. His silence shackles her.

She likes herself better when she rages at him. Clothed with an anger that defends.

She likes herself better when she's dolled up. Her feet elevated in heels, her flesh contained by stockings. Eyes lined. Skin perfumed. Armed with a kind of power. A half power.

E

ESSAY

Nancy Gerber

The Summer of Jody

August 1970 and I was fourteen. Abortion was not legal. My parents said if I even thought about kissing a boy I could get pregnant, and they would never forgive me for bringing such shame to the family. That was the summer Jody Weinberg showed up at my door.

I had met Jody the month before at sleep away camp. I was entranced by her auburn hair, blue eyes, pale freckles, sad smile. When camp was over she invited me to visit her in Radburn, a planned community of small Tudor houses that had been built in the 1920's. I fell in love with Radburn's Hansel and Gretel cottages connected by winding paths and inviting parks.

I was less enamored of Jody's friends, a bunch of tough girls -- very different, I felt, from Jody. They roamed the fields looking for trouble and interrogated me: Did I smoke? Did I drink? How far had I gone with a boy? As Jody's guest I could feign indifference to such probing questions, but I felt threatened -- frightened by their smirks, dreading they would call me names like goodie-two-shoes.

Then one Saturday night the doorbell rang at six o'clock, as my parents were getting ready to go out for the evening. I went to the front door, and there was Jody on the steps, wearing a sweaty t-shirt and baggy jeans, announcing she had run away from home.

I was beside myself with fear. I rushed her into my bedroom, locked the door, and waited to hear what had happened. She dropped her backpack on my bed, took out her hairbrush and began to brush her long, reddish locks, which were matted and tangled from her ten-mile walk. Then she dropped her head in her hands and wept. She had skipped a period. She thought she was pregnant. Could I hide her in my closet overnight, and tomorrow morning, before my parents woke up, she would leave? She begged me not to call her mother. She had taken some bills from her mother's purse and would figure out where to go and what to do next.

I was sick with worry. I, who always followed the rules, was at this moment harboring a pregnant fugitive. While Jody wiped her eyes on her t-shirt I excused myself and went to find my mother, who, without a moment's hesitation, picked up the phone and called Mrs. Weinberg.

Jody was furious. She sat on the living room couch playing with the strap on her knapsack and refused to speak to me. Twenty minutes later the doorbell rang again, and Mrs. Weinberg let herself in

unannounced. She stared at her daughter across the room until Jody lowered her eyes, picked up her backpack, and followed her mother wordlessly out the door. The two said nothing to me, or to each other, and it was the last time I saw Jody. In the weeks that followed I did not call her, afraid my mother would find out and punish me, and Jody did not get in touch.

So Jody was not a good girl like me, a girl who never disobeyed. I had been tricked by her lovely hair, her gentle face, her sad smile, her Tudor cottage. And what had she seen in me? A protectress? Should I have helped her run away from home? Or had I done the right thing by alerting my mother, who later told me Mrs. Weinberg was frantic with worry when she picked up the phone?

For many years I felt guilty about betraying Jody; I had acted to save my own skin so I would not get in trouble. I was certain we'd be discovered: the only thing I'd ever hidden in my closet was some make-up purchased surreptitiously because my mother did not approve. But maturity tells me something my inarticulate adolescent anxiety could not: that I did the best I could for Jody, because a pregnant teenager needs her mother, even if they are so angry at each other they can barely speak. The conflict between mother and daughter was one I knew well, since I had difficulty communicating with my own mother, who did not have the emotional awareness to talk with Jody before calling her mother.

In my experience, mothers and daughters did not talk about sex. My grandmother was an immigrant from the Ukraine who told me she got her period for the first time on the ship to America. When she found herself bleeding she cried because she did not know what was happening to her; she feared she was dying. I doubt she'd ever sat down with my mother and explained monthly cycles and how women became pregnant.

I have the idea that Jody had an illegal abortion in the days before sex education, Planned Parenthood, and Roe v. Wade gave teenagers more choices when it came to sex. The price of being a sexually curious teenaged girl was very high back then. But even the good girls, the ones who were threatened with parental abandonment and ostracism, paid a high price, too.

Annie Lampman

Confessions of Uncharitable Thoughts Toward Others

When a few of my grad-school writer-teachers gathered to give advice to us aspiring writers, I dutifully wrote down what they said, one statement in particular standing out: “Writers who succeed have: 1) tremendous egos, and 2) are as stubborn as hell.”

I knew number two posed no problem for me. *A dog with a bone*, my mother always said. Determined, a good streak of OCD, focused, stubborn—yes, my quirks actually good for something besides annoying my husband and three sons. But what about number one? Ego? This was the problematic area.

Born in 1974, I am the expected womanly outcome of the heavily patriarchal, fundamentalist-Christian, blue-collar backwoods where I was raised. I was trained from a young age to be self-effacing, obedient, servile. Nice. Women like this—like me—we don’t do ego.

We cook.

At a very young age, I learned how to best serve my father. After work, I took off his boots and sweaty socks and served him platters of food. At eleven I was responsible for him when my mother was gone—making dinner and cleaning up. Then, married at eighteen, I started cooking three meals a day everyday to feed my husband and later, three sons.

We clean—a lot.

We don’t flinch at nasty things—we scour. We dig in and scrub and wipe and vacuum and sweep and wash. With a houseful of four six-foot-plus-tall men/boys, I do loads and loads and loads of laundry. *Mountains* of laundry. Towels, sheets, jeans, sweatshirts. I sort sock mounds big enough to put a quaver in the heart of the bravest laundress.

We manage the household.

We stretch monies, grocery shop, pay the bills, cook, clean, and take care of the kids. I was married raising three young children while going to school and managing significant household concerns and finances before most of my current college students have learned how to heat up Ramen or effectively use an alarm clock.

But most importantly, we are nice.

We are kind and considerate. We put our needs second. We don’t complain—we defer and hold our tongue, carving out what space we need for ourselves without inconveniencing anyone, without interrupting dinner or laundry or homework help. We accomplish our

work without removing ourselves. We are always available and supportive for the ones we love.

These things fit the societal expectations of my upbringing, even fit my personality well enough, but they don't fit the extremely competitive world of academia and writing well at all. They don't fit *ego*.

It's puzzled me for years, this seeming conundrum. How can I succeed if I don't have the ego others have? How am I supposed to compete with men who have ego oozing out of their pores, who convince themselves and everyone else of their own immense intellects and writerly skills?

There are good reasons for my concern. Besides my societal anti-ego training, I forget names of authors and titles and don't really pay attention to who's-who. I can never remember things in time to bring forth pointed conversational references that make me sound smart. I misspell. I mispronounce. I bumble and blush. My memory fails me over and over again. I'm often shy and self-doubting. When it comes down to it, I'm not very "*academic*," although I always loved school, did well in classes, and now love teaching. I can clearly see the career advantages others—especially ambitious men—have over me.

I work hard at what I do, especially writing, but unlike Emily Dickinson who kept herself tucked away, I want to be published, want to be "successful"—publically. This I understand is an act of ego—the desire to be recognized, to be heard. But is it really tremendous ego? It doesn't seem so to me. I don't crave the spotlight, don't want to be the center of attention. I'm quiet in social situations and don't self-promote well. In fact, I'm exactly what feminists say is a woman formed by a male-dominant society; I do everything they say a woman like me does.

But one night as I whip up a tripled-recipe pineapple up-side-down cake, I tick off the things I've accomplished that day in my head, a sort of mental tally-sheet I often do: *Today I cleaned house, changed sheets, did seven loads of laundry, took a six-mile hike, graded twelve essays and twenty-four short assignments, went food shopping, revised chapter one of novel two, tweaked on one of the four essays I'm working on, made a nice dinner, made this pineapple up-side-down cake, had good times with my children and husband, chatted with friends and my sister. Not a bad day*, I think with pride. And there it is, staring me right in the face, hiding in plain sight all these many years—there is my tremendous ego!

When I finally recognize it, I realize it's been there forever. Perhaps because it wasn't a writerly ego, or an academic or career ego, I didn't see it for what it actually is: a *superwoman* ego. An *I-can-do-*

everything-and-do-it-well ego. And it's not just proud. It's angry. It's arrogant and profane. It looks out at the world and says, *That's right motherfuckers, I'm fucking superwoman and don't you fucking forget it!* The nice-girl me turns hard and blasphemous: *You want to know how far I surpass you?* she asks. *You want to know how far superior I am?* She scorns your soft-sidedness, your inferiority. *You want to complain?* she demands, but you dare not because if you did she would wither you with stories of long-suffering hard-working far-surpassing accomplishments that you can never compete with, not unless you too are a woman like her—someone who at thirty-nine-years old has been-there-done-that more than anyone but most people's grandparents: married twenty-one years, bought three houses and countless vehicles, moved five times, gotten two degrees, raised three sons while teaching full time and making over a thousand students care and like her classes, cooked and cleaned and done laundry for three decades (do you know how *much* that equates?), taken care of complicated finances, kept a nice house, painted and decorated inside and out, landscaped and gardened, stayed in shape, cut everyone's hair, not nagged or bitched, carried the emotional well-being of the family in her hand, written essays and poems and stories and novels and published them, been in a book club and a writer's group, taken care of business like no one else and been a really fucking good daughter and sister and friend and mother and wife and teacher and made the best fucking pies of anyone, because—fuck this, fuck it all—she is motherfucking superwoman.

How's that for ego?

The nice-girl me cringes in red-faced embarrassment and apology over the other's egotistical tirade, her cursing fist-lifting power. But secretly even she—even the nice-girl me—cheers the other one on.

In junior-high, the girls used to say about me: *She just thinks she's better than everyone else.* I could never understand why. As a child, I was paralyzed by insecurity, afraid of doing everything wrong. In disgust at my hand-wringing ineptitude over something as simple as making toast, my older sister once declared that I would need someone to do everything for me when I grew up. But I see now that the junior-high girls were the ones who got it right after all. In balancing all that I do, I *do* think I'm better than everyone else. My ego *is* enormous. She looks around the world in glaring challenge and says: *Go ahead, try to top that, quite certain you can't.*

My superwoman me. My stubborn, tremendous-ego me. I have finally found her.

B

BOOK REVIEWS

A Review of *A Solitary Woman*

by Antoinette Libro

‘Across the Dewy Path’: The Timeless Tanka of Pamela A. Babusci

A Solitary Woman: Tanka by Pamela A. Babusci

Introduction by David Terelinck.

Perfect bound; 76 pages, Copyright 2013.

Cover Art, *Still Water Bath*, Oil Painting by Larry DeKock.

Signed Copies Available from Author for \$15.

Please send to:

Pamela A. Babusci,
244 Susan Lane, Apt. B,
Rochester, NY 14616

In *A Solitary Woman*, the poetry of Pamela A. Babusci is imbued with inspiration from nature, art, and life. Her book transports us back to the ancient literary art we know as *tanka*, and at the same time, sweeps us headlong into the 21st century with a fresh, artful blending of form and content.

For those unfamiliar with the form, the *tanka* is a lyrical five-line poem that originated in Japan some 1300 years ago. *Tanka* means ‘short song’ in Japanese. The subjects of love and longing, beauty and sadness, life and death were frequently expressed by the women *tanka* poets who excelled in the writing of poetry during the Heian Period, when the arts flourished and poetry was a natural aspect of courtly life.

At that time *tanka* (or *waka*, as the form was then called) also mixed freely with prose in narrative works, as in the classics, *The Gossamer Years: The Diary of a Noble Woman in Heian Japan*, and also, in the first psychological novel in the world, *The Tale of Genji*, by Lady Murasaki, where some 900 *tanka* poems are interspersed throughout the engaging narrative. Two great poetry anthologies compiled in the eighth century, the *Kojiki* and the *Man’yōshū* contain the beginnings of the *tanka* form, and then, a little later, the celebrated anthology, the *Kokinshū*, shows the form in full flower. Today the *tanka* form is enjoying a resurgence of interest worldwide, and *Ribbons: A Tri-Annual Journal* published by the Tanka Society of America chronicles the depth and breadth of this literary movement.

As a foremost voice of the 21st century, Pamela’s subjects include familial conflicts and complexities; the existential awareness self, the body, and illness; and the intriguing aspects of romantic love.

Indeed, passionate relationships spring to life with a startling intensity as a result of Pamela's vivid imagery.

sky-gazing
the fire-red streaks
of shooting stars
our passion burns out
like a meteor shower

The irony of romantic relationships is expressed in deceptively simple, but powerful language, evoking the wry emotions of surprise and wonder.

when i think I know
everything about love
i fall in love
for the
first time

Familial relationships, particularly tensions between mother and daughter, are among the most moving of Pamela's *tanka*. In five concentrated lines, long-hidden expressions of affection cause the poet to reassess previous assumptions.

her love was voiceless
finding a note i gave
my mother
when i was eight
hidden in her prayer book

Nature and art inspire many of Pamela's *tanka* and are the source of much symbolic imagery. Striking references to color occur throughout *A Solitary Woman*, particularly various shades of red and blue, such as "garnet sky," "blood-red stilettos," "blue irises," "indigo dreams," "turquoise-blue hyacinths," and the sensual "scarlet petals" from the title *tanka*. Recurrent images that stem from nature include frequent references to the sky, wind, autumn, and water. These patterns and repetitions serve to unify the collection.

deep inside the core
of O'Keeffe's Red Canna

is a fiery river
flowing into the canyon
of every woman

Seeking an affirmation of the self in a vast and indifferent world, Pamela's *tanka* express the yearning we all feel for some sort of validation, no matter how small. The distant relationship of the self to the universe is reinforced by the use of the lower case "i" in this, and all other *tanka*, where the first person pronoun appears.

starless sky
i stir the windchimes
to convince myself
i am not alone
in this vast universe

Perhaps most exquisite are *tanka* written in the tradition of the ancient poets, where women who lived much of their lives in seclusion wrote about the passage of time, particularly those long rainy nights spent yearning for the object of their affections. The sexual politics of the day deemed that women mostly waited for their lovers to arrive, and men largely controlled their fates. In some cases these women might wait a lifetime for their lover's arrival. Pamela expresses an awareness of time and waiting with elegant imagery that creates an intimate tone and anticipatory mood.

her porcelain skin
newly washed like
a fresh water pearl
she awaits her lover's footprints
across the dewy path

In *A Solitary Woman* Pamela Babusci illuminates ordinary moments and scenes of daily life with devices and techniques that objectify the emotion at the heart of the *tanka*. Her ability to transport us back, as well as forward, on the dewy path of time and the continuum of *tanka* literature is not only impressive—it is truly timeless.

Note: Pamela A. Babusci is an internationally award-winning haiku/*tanka* & haiga artist. She is founder and editor of *Moonbathing: a journal of women's tanka*, the first all-women's international *tanka*

journal. An interview with Pamela A. Babusci, conducted by Antoinette Libro, appeared in *Adanna Literary Journal*, Issue # 3.

A Review of *Water, Earth, Fire, and Picket Fences*

by Lynne McEniry

A collection of poetry by Carol Smallwood

2014, Lamar University Press, Beaumont, Texas

Paperback, 101 pages

Carol Smallwood's newest addition to her already extensive list of published books is a collection of poetry, "Water, Earth, Air, Fire, and Picket Fences." The reader knows, from the moment she encounters the picket fences that wrap up the list of natural elements, that she will be immersing herself in estranging ideas and multi-layered experiences.

From fast food restaurants to the hospital's cancer unit, Smallwood asks us to consider these elements in ways both familiar and foreign. In "Falling Leaves" she writes,

Each October day driving by
I feel more the visitor
in strange land

And, in "A Styrofoam Cup" she writes,

McDonalds coffee is about the
Only thing chemo didn't alter

The speaker of these poems is on long and arduous journey, during which her experiences of the wind and sea and sky meld with her experiences with modern medicine, pop culture, and family challenges.

Smallwood's commitment to the communities created by libraries and families is also evident throughout this entire collection. She never lets her reader forget the natural settings and occurrences that impress and impact the understandings and choices the people of these communities make. Each depends on the other.

The collection is also evidence of Smallwood's commitment to a variety of poetic forms and styles. Here you will find blank verse and free verse, odes and elegies. The poems range from three-line lyric poems to poems with long lines leaning to the narrative and prose styles. There are formal and informal rhyme patterns...always with the natural elements to provide metaphor, image, fear, and delight.

Smallwood finishes the collection with a section dedicated to her addition to the list of elements: Picket Fences. The poem, “Whirlpool” begins this section by inviting the reader to reconsider what goes on behind white picket fences – bringing all the natural elements and human experience swirling together, striving to make sense of it all.

A Review of *Mango in Winter*

by Dr. Mary Ann B. Miller,

Professor of English, Caldwell University

A collection of poetry by Juditha Dowd

2013, Grayson Books, West Hartford, Connecticut

Paperback, 68 pages

In Juditha Dowd's collection of poetry, *Mango in Winter*, a woman in the autumn of her life reflects upon her ripened relationships with her faithful husband, adult daughter, dying mother, deceased father, and humorous sister-in-law. In this woman's reflections, we find a wisdom that comes from gracefully learning to live and love in the midst of that ineradicable tension between contented duty and a discontented desire for beauty, grandeur, and passion. This woman is able to love deeply not only because she accepts the inevitability of change but also because she has found that, like the flora in her garden and the fruit at the market, the human heart, by some divine gift, contains within itself the regenerative power to be fruitful again and again. The change from fall to winter pervades this book, and, yet it contains, like its title suggests, a strong faith in our potential for fruitfulness in the later period of our lives. The mango has two seasons, both spring/summer and fall/winter, providing the fullness of its flesh year round. So does human life.

While Juditha's poems begin with the underlying assumption that change inevitably occurs throughout our lives, they do not end with that idea. Her poems are not static, but instead are living, growing plants themselves, that encourage our growth precisely in the struggle to find the way to live our lives fully. Her voice often speaks in the imperative mood, challenging readers to embrace periods of *drought* and not abandon hope. In *Hoya Carnosa*, she tells us to *consider the lipstick plant that has weathered thirty years of flux, some years producing blooms / the size of tennis balls. / Next year the leaves fall off. She commands Never throw it out. / It will share your discontent. . . . Pretend it's an offering / to the sin of your neglect.*

In *Mapping the Flower*, Juditha asks readers questions to engage them in the important act of reflecting upon what nature can reveal to us about the growth pattern of our lives. In her generosity, she allows us to see her own mental and spiritual struggle with "*where to begin*" to understand our life as a process of growth, like that of a flower. Will we understand by a *persistent, patient* climbing from the bottom to the top of the stem? No, *that route is blind, defined by scent.* If we try to

understand through linear rational thought, we will always remain rooted in what we think we know empirically, through our senses. So then should we begin by taking an impetuous *dive like a bee* into the flower at the top of the stem? No because to grow we must meet growth on its own terms—see growth as change and allow ourselves to change too: *No, you must grow to it, grow small Let it take you / where it wants you to be.* The life-giving and life-sustaining principle is more mysterious than the extremes of rational thought or of reflex response to external stimuli. We must live without violating the principle that gives us life. Growing to fruition requires us to *grow small* so that we can *slide down filaments, electric / dusting [our] feet to remember*, living life rather than observing it, and like Plato, remembering the ideals that were stamped upon our souls at their birth. In this way, we do not see ourselves as larger-than-life or larger than the life-principle itself.

Simply recognizing our own smallness is not enough, however. We must "grow to it," this growth being itself a continual process because, as we see in *You Are the Culprit*, there is a willfulness in human nature that wants to control, find *safety*, or *conceal* one's *guilt*: *you hope your will might make it untrue / because you know it can, don't you, even in illusion.* Again, with a litany of imperatives, Juditha urges us, even as she urges herself, with humor and grace to break through the illusion that we control our own lives, to change, *grow small*, meet the growth of our flower-life on its own terms: *Be satisfied with warmth Isn't it enough that you weren't born a penguin? . . . Face it--you have a body for which you are responsible; you take efforts of concealment so that your guilt may not be welcome and assumed by others. You are thirsty in your skiff of discontent. So, she commands us, you better come clean, accept responsibility for your own self: Get up and get a glass of water. If you face that you are the culprit of your own life, all the evidence will lie open. You will see everything you must confess. The first step in starting to grow according to the terms of the One who gave us life is to come clean, a state in which we will have grown small enough to begin to live our life more fully from its center, like the questioner in *Mapping the Flower*, who, after growing small, is able to *slide down [life's] filaments, electric.**

Sliding down the filaments of life's flower means living in the moment, another imperative that Juditha finds difficult to achieve. In *Any Moment Now*, she plaintively asks, *When have I lived in the moment?* It was not during her father's funeral when she was more worried about whether her daughter would arrive on time than she was about singing the opening song. Maybe it was only once, during *the*

scared waiting for that moment of her firstborn girl's wail at birth. But even so, she has had a long life of watching [herself] live it, / absent from the hours, recalling them at night. Yet regardless of this recognition, still in the autumn light and in the autumn of her years, when she and her husband are digging up the garden to prepare for winter in Putting It to Bed, they dream of next year's green recruits, unable to celebrate what is and what may never be / as equal.

While the woman of *Putting It to Bed* chastises for looking toward *the life we keep meaning to live* instead of finding contentment in the reality of *the day we've been given*, in *Another Sunday*, she tentatively asks if her husband's optimism about the state of their garden *next year* is the virtue of *hope*. With this question, she suggests that hope is not the same thing as not being able to live in the moment. It is the proper spirit in which to look toward the future. The wisdom, then, in this volume comes in the moments when her poems call us to rise above the struggle through hope, praise, and ultimately love.

In *Lauds*, an aubade in which she admits her *words* are only an attempt to sing praise for an *orange sunrise, / surprising the eye into visible sound*, she nonetheless petitions: *but let me / not refuse to praise*. The sunrise, as well as the songbirds, cause her to launch spontaneously into the words of Psalm 24:7-9: *Lift up your heads, O ye gates . . . and the King of glory shall come in*. Just because her poem is like a mere *garment that pinches* and creates *gaps* in the *grandeur* of creation, it is imperative that she embrace her writing as the *day's new work* that has at its core *praise* for the King of glory.

For that is the ultimate way for a poet, wife, mother, daughter to love: to *return* her reader, husband, child, and parent *to the realm of praise*, just like Elaine achieves in the humorous poem *God Speaks Volumes to Your Sister Elaine*. Juditha narrates Elaine's story of her certainty that the second time God spoke to her, He told her to let her husband *have a TV*, which she had to interpret did not mean his current one, *a fat Motorola from the eighties*, but a *48-inch flat screen* that she had been denying him because *we know God's against the big box stores*. Elaine goes on to explain with equal certainty that this new TV *returns him to the realm of praise, / a happy man eating potatoes, / . . . / mysteries jangling in his pocket / like a good secret*. In Elaine's experience appears to be another imperative: we must not think we know what is good for the souls of others, but desire for them what will make them praise.

Once we let go of our will to control both our own lives and the lives of others, once we *grow small* and want instead to praise the

Creator--of the beauty of the sunrise, the song of birds, even flat-screened TVs--then we will truly love others in the ultimate sense. The best way to love is to create for others the opportunity to *grow small* and praise as well, connecting us to the mystery of that which gives us life and sustains us by making us able to bear fruit, like the mango, in all the seasons of our life.

This fruit is perennial love, and so, in the final lines of the final poem of this collection, *The Marriage Bathroom*, the woman is able to *pray* that *when morning dawns* on the day after she and her husband had spent a long, tedious day trying to match *half-roses* when wallpapering their bathroom *the light will be clear / and generous*. The sunrise itself reminds us that our hearts have the provision necessary for regenerative (and *generous*, to recognize the root) love.

A Review of *Render / An Apocalypse*, Rebecca Gayle
Howell

By Laura Winters

Foreword by Nick Flynn

Perfect Bound, Copyright 2013

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Copies available from bookstores or Cleveland State University
Poetry Center, www.csuohio.edu/poetrycenter

“This is your inheritance:
to be the singing bone meal”
from “As you have been stolen from, steal”

Run, don’t walk and get this volume. This is a game changer; it is like no other. This book should come with a warning label: Do not enter unless you want to be changed, unless you want to recognize parts of yourself and the world that you try politely to pretend do not exist. This is a visceral collection full of blood and guts and bones. This book is not afraid to get its hand dirty.

These poems embody every definition of render and every definition of apocalypse.

If Tom Waits and Patti Smith were looking for a self-help book, this would be it. Like all great literature, these poems are impossible to paraphrase. They are at once theatrical and reserved, violent and serene, political and private.

When I read this masterful collection, I am reminded of a poem by Izumi Shikibu:

Watching the moon
at dawn,
solitary, mid-sky
I knew myself completely,
no part left out.

This is a how-to book about blood knowledge. To say this is a book about farm life is like saying Moby Dick is about seafaring adventure. This collection confronts evil and does not turn away. As Howell suggests in the untitled elegiac prose poem, “You want. You want/ what you want. You cannot help that anyhow now”

B

**BIOGRAPHICAL
NOTES**

Marci Ameluxen's first chapbook "Lean House" was released May, 2013 from MoonPath Press. Her poems have appeared in *The Crab Creek Review*, *The Comstock Review*, *The Compass Rose*, and *The Dirty Napkin* among other journals. She lives on Whidbey Island, Washington, where she works as a pediatric Occupational Therapist.

Barbara Ashwood teaches creative writing, composition, and general honors classes at Western Illinois University. She is interested in environmental activism, gender studies, and growing beautiful flowers in the beds that surround her farmhouse. Her work has appeared in the *Journal of Rural Social Sciences*, the *Chicago Tribune*, the *River Rock Times*, and local nonfiction periodicals.

Nancy Austin was born in Whitefish Bay, WI, but has lived on both coasts, and points in between. She holds a masters in psychology, and writes both poetry and music. She has been published in *Sheepshead Review*, *Verse Wisconsin* and the *2014 Wisconsin Poets Calendar*.

Onnyx Bei received a BA in English from University of St. Thomas in Houston where he is currently pursuing an MA in Applied Linguistics. He is a recipient of the Susan T. Scanlon Poetry Award and the Danny Lee Lawrence Poetry Award.

Wandajune Bishop-Towle is a poet, a licensed psychologist, and co-owner of Seasons of Peace Yoga in Andover, Massachusetts, where she teaches yoga and provides body-oriented psychotherapy. Her work has appeared in *PMS poemmemoirstory*, *Quiddy*, and *The Comstock Review*, among other journals. She is the proud mother of a young adult with autism, who is the frequent subject of her poetry.

April Michelle Bratten has been published in *Southeast Review*, *Stirring: A Literary Collection*, and *Thrush Poetry Journal*, among others. Her book, *It Broke Anyway*, is available from NeoPoiesis Press. She edits *Up the Staircase Quarterly*.

Lesley Brower is a native Kentuckian. She currently works, gardens, and cooks in southern Illinois. Her most current work is forthcoming in *The Aureorean* and *Big Muddy*.

Rachel Burgess is an artist based in New York. She received a B.A from Yale University in 2004 and an M.F.A. from the School of Visual Arts in

2007. Her work exhibits nationally and internationally at galleries and museums, and also features in books and magazines. She has been recognized by 3x3 Magazine of Contemporary Illustration, CMYK Magazine and the Society of Illustrators Annual.

Sherry Chandler is the author of *The Woodcarver's Wife* and *Weaving a New Eden*. Her poems have appeared in many periodicals, including *Calyx*, *the Southern Women's Review*, *Flycatcher*, and *Avatar Review*.

Ann Clark teaches English full-time at SUNY Jefferson in Watertown, NY, and is pursuing a Ph.D. in English (creative writing emphasis) at Binghamton University. She is an avowed feminist and spends an inordinate amount of time defining feminism that have very odd ideas. Her poetry has recently been published in *Ragazine*, *Blueline*, and *Poetry Quarterly*.

H.V. Cramond is the founding Poetry Editor of *Requited Journal*. Her poem "War of Attrition" was a finalist in the 2013 Split This Rock Political Poetry Contest judged by Mark Doty. Recent and forthcoming work can be found in *death hums*, *Matter Monthly*, *Crack the Spine*, *BlazeVOX*, *Menacing Hedge* and *So to Speak*. You can read more of her work at hvcramond.com.

Suzannah Dalzell lives on Whidbey Island north of Seattle Washington where she divides her time more or less equally between writing and land conservancy. Her work has appeared in *Pilgrimage Magazine*, *Third Wednesday*, *The Oberon Foundation Magazine* and *Flyway Journal*. She is currently working on a collection of poems that explores the places her family history bumps up against class, race and environmental destruction.

Jessica Evans is a current MFA student at Spalding University in Louisville, Kentucky. Her work has appeared in *The Glass Coin*, *The Voices Quarterly*, *Crack the Spine*, and *The Commonline Journal*. She is an editor for *The Louisville Review*. When not writing, you can find her pounding pavement.

Irene Fick's first poetry chapbook will be published this summer by The Broadkill River Press. Her poems have also appeared in *Philadelphia Stories*, *Mojave River Review*, *The Broadkill Review*, *The*

Avocet, *Third Wednesday*, and *No Place Like Here: An Anthology of Southern Delaware Poetry & Prose*. She lives in Lewes, Delaware.

Laura Freedgood has three chapbooks published: *What I Would Paint If I Could* (2012), *Slant of the Heart* (2010), and *Weather Report* (2007). Her poems appear in numerous journals and anthologies. She was nominated for a Pushcart Prize, and received an Honorable Mention in The 2013 Allen Ginsberg Poetry Awards. In addition, she won a three-year poetry grant from the City University of New York, where she worked as Assistant Professor until 2010.

Dawn A. Fuller is a Los Angeles writer who grew up in the desolate, desperately hot (Hades-like), and nearly-forgotten Imperial Valley. She currently resides in Los Angeles where she works for the University of California.

Shanelle Galloway received her Bachelor's in Creative Writing from Utah State University. She considers herself to be something of a modern nomad, moving from place to place. She believes the strength of women can be found in all they do, from the power to create to the power to run countries. Her work has been featured in the *Origami Journal*.

Nancy Gerber received a doctorate in English from Rutgers University. Her most recent book, *Fire and Ice* (Arseya 2014) is a collection of poetry and prose that explores childhood longings, mother-daughter conflict, dementia, and the empty nest. She is an advanced clinical candidate at the Academy of Clinical and Applied Psychoanalysis in Livingston, New Jersey.

Gail Fishman Gerwin is author of collections *Sugar and Sand*, 2010 Paterson Poetry Prize finalist, and 2013 Paterson Award for Literary Excellence designee *Dear Kinfolk*, (www.chayacairnpress.com). She owns Morristown, NJ, writing/editing firm *inedit*, and is associate poetry editor of *Tiferet*.

Jill Greenberg worked as a photographer for *The Philadelphia Inquirer* during the decade that spanned the industry's transition from film to digital technology. Ms. Greenberg left her position there in 2001 to earn her Master of Fine Arts degree in mixed media art at Baltimore's renowned Maryland Institute College of Art. She attended University of Virginia her freshman year, where she studied literature and art history.

She left U. VA. to study fine art photography, film, and sculpture at the University of Cincinnati. She has received Individual Artist grants from the Maryland State Arts Council, the City of Baltimore Arts and Humanities, and in 2008 was awarded an Alumni Travel Grant to visit various locations in England and Spain by the Center For Emerging Visual Artists in Philadelphia. Ms. Greenberg's art has been exhibited extensively along the East Coast, as well as the Midwest and South.

Amanda R. Howland is a writer and noise musician living in Lakewood, Ohio. She has a degree in fiction from the Northeast Ohio Master of Fine Arts Program (NEOMFA). Amanda has been practicing yoga for years and is inspired by the wild power of nature and the organic texture of consciousness.

A.J. Huffman's poetry, fiction, haiku, and photography have appeared in hundreds of national and international journals, including *Labletter*, *The James Dickey Review*, and *Offerta Speciale*, in which her work appeared in both English and Italian translation. She is also the founding editor of Kind of a Hurricane Press. www.kindofahurricanepress.com

Kelly Ann Jacobson lives in Northern Virginia, and she is the Poetry Editor for *Outside In Literary & Travel Magazine*. She has published two novels, *Cairo in White* and *Dreamweaver Road* (the first book in *The Zaniyah Trilogy*), as well as edited the book of essays *Answers I'll Accept: True Accounts of Online Dating*. Kelly's poetry has been published in *Literati Quarterly*, *Wooden Teeth Magazine*, *Coldnoon*, *Blue Hour Magazine*, *Promptly*, and *Poetry Pacific*. Her work, including her published poems, fiction, and nonfiction, can be found at <http://www.kellyannjacobson.com/>.

Maureen Kingston's poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *B O D Y*, *Gargoyle*, *IthacaLit*, *So to Speak*, and *Verse Wisconsin*. A few of her prose pieces have also been nominated for Best of the Net and Pushcart awards, and named to *Wigleaf's* Top 50 (Very) Short Fiction list.

Adeline Carrie Koscher writes poetry and fiction on Cape Cod – mostly while sleeping, running, or kayaking. Sadly, whole novels have been lost this way. “We Make Mrs. Lake’s Soap” is one of the surviving poems. Others have been published by *Main Street Rag*, *ninepatch: A Creative Journal for Women and Gender Studies*, *Review Americana*, and *The Lyon Review*.

Joanna Kurowska is the author of five poetry volumes, *Inclusions* (Cervena Barva Press, 2014), *The Wall & Beyond* (eLectio Publishing, 2013); *The Butterfly's Choice* (Broadstone Books, forthcoming 2015), and two books published in Poland. Her work appeared in American and European journals such as *Atticus*, *Bateau*, *International Poetry Review*, *Kultura* (Paris), *Levure littéraire*, *Room*, and elsewhere.

Kristin LaTour's most recent chapbook is *Agoraphobia*, from Dancing Girl Press (2013). Her poetry has recently appeared in journals such as *Escape into Life*, *Massachusetts Review* and *Atticus Review*. Readers can find more information at www.kristinlatour.com.

Annie Lampman lives in Moscow, Idaho with her husband, three teenaged sons, and a bevy of hens; she has recently stopped sorting socks. She has a MFA and teaches writing at the University of Idaho. Her essays, poetry, and fiction have been published in: *High Desert Journal*, *WORK Literary Magazine*, *Wilderness House Literary Review*, *Dunes Review*, *word~river*, *IDAHO Magazine*, *the meadow*, *Copper Nickel*, and *Talking River*. Her first novel is currently under consideration.

Yvonne Higgins Leach is the author of *Another Autumn* (WordTech Editions, 2014). Her poems have appeared in *South Dakota Review*, *South Carolina Review*, *Spoon River Poetry Review*, *Cimarron Review*, and *Wisconsin Review*, among others. She earned a Master of Fine Arts from Eastern Washington University in 1986. She splits her time living in Snohomish and Spokane, Washington.

Lyn Lifshin new books include *Knife Edge & Absinthe: the Tango poems*; *For the Roses, poems for Joni Mitchell*, *All The Poets Who Touched Me*; *A Girl goes Into The Woods*; *Malala, Tangled as the Alphabet: The Istanbul Poems. : Secretariat: The Red Freak, The Miracle*; *Malala and Femina Eterna: Enheducanna, Scheherazade and Nefertiti*. web site:www.lynlifshin.com

Antoinette Libro was awarded Third Place in the 2011 Allen Ginsberg Poetry Contest. Her poems have appeared in *Moonbathing; red lights*; *Paterson Literary Review*, *Take Five: Best Contemporary Tanka, 2011*; *Bright Stars: An Organic Tanka Anthology* and the textbook *The Crafty Poet*. She is retired from Rowan University and holds a Ph.D. from NYU.

Lynne McEniry, MFA: poet, presenter, mentor, editor, with poems and reviews in *5 AM*, *The Stillwater Review*, *Paterson Literary Review*, *The Lake Rises Anthology*, and others. She won Honorable Mention for the Allen Ginsberg Poetry Award and was nominated for a Pushcart Prize. McEniry is a regular guest editor for *Adanna Literary Journal* for which she edited special issues, including "How Women Grieve" and "Hurricane Sandy: Students Speak Out." She regularly gives interactive poetry presentations, most recently on poems in conversation with the visual arts, and poetry and spirituality. McEniry works at the College of Saint Elizabeth in Morristown, NJ.

Rosemary S. McGee, holds a doctorate in Medical Humanities from Drew University, and her book, *Spilling My Guts*, was published in 2007. She is in psychoanalytic training at ACAP, an adjunct Drew professor, president of Arseya book publishing, and a humanities scholar at Atlantic Health.

Mary Ann Buddenberg Miller is a professor of English at Caldwell University in Caldwell, NJ. She is editor of *St. Peter's B-list: Contemporary Poems Inspired by the Saints* (Ave Maria Press, 2014), a collection of over 100 poems, written by 70 poets from across the USA. She frequently teaches an Introduction to Poetry course, in which she offers her students the opportunity to host public readings for local, published poets.

Jean P. Moore began her professional career as a teacher, moving on to a corporate position in education and training in order to support her two growing boys. Now that the sons are married with families of their own, Jean has returned to her first love, writing, and has published fiction, non-fiction, and poetry in literary journals, newspapers, and magazines. Her novel, *Water on the Moon*, will be published by She Writes Press.

Patrice Pinette teaches writing in Waldorf high schools and Antioch University New England. Her poems have appeared in *Northern New England Review*, *Poetica*, *Smoky Quartz*, and *New Hampshire Poets Showcase*, among others. Inspired by the alchemy between poems and visual art, she created a series of poetry-pastels exhibited by the Visual Poetry Collective.

Christine Redman-Waldeyer is a poet and Assistant Professor in the Department of English at Passaic County Community College in New

Jersey. She has published three poetry collections, *Frame by Frame*, *Gravel*, and *Eve Asks* (all with Muse-Pie Press) and has appeared in *Paterson Literary Journal*, *Schuylkill Valley Journal*, *The Texas Review*, *Verse Wisconsin*, and others. She founded *Adanna*, a literary journal that focuses on women's topics in 2011. She is a graduate of Drew University's D.Litt Program in writing. *Writing After Retirement* is forthcoming from Scarecrow Press and she recently contributed to *Exceptional Parenting Magazine* co-written articles with Lynne McEniry covering the Special Olympics New Jersey. Her poetry was recently featured on *Contemporary American Voices*: a journal of poetry.

Patricia Striar Rohner is a graduate of Brandeis University and Simmons School of Social Work. She is a LICSW. She has published five short stories and is finishing her first novel. She lives in the Boston area, has ten grandchildren, and is an avid Red Sox fan. In addition to writing, she loves to oil paint.

Terry Sanville lives in San Luis Obispo, California with his artist-poet wife (his in-house editor) and one plump cat (his in-house critic). His short stories have been accepted by numerous journals including *The Potomac Review*, *The Bitter Oleander*, *Shenandoah*, and *The MacGuffin*. He was nominated for a Pushcart Prize for his story "The Sweeper." Terry is a retired urban planner and an accomplished jazz and blues guitarist.

Heidi M. Sheridan was born and educated in California and currently lives in New Jersey. Her poems have appeared in literary journals such as *ABZ Press*, *Carpenter Gothic Press*, *Shaking Like A Mountain*, *Moebius*, and *Sophie's Wind*. She is currently Assistant Professor of English at Ocean County College. She recently received her MFA in Poetry at Drew University in New Jersey.

Barbara Siman (Writer, Director, and Choreographer) has recently directed and choreographed *RAGS, The Musical*. She is currently facilitating stage productions of original works *Stolen*, and *The Birthday Play*. Barbara is happily married and resides in New York City.

Evelyn A. So's poetry may be found in *Measure: A Review of Formal Poetry*, *Caesura*, *Red Wheelbarrow (National Edition)*, *Cha: An Asian Literary Journal*, and *Gingerbread House*, among others.

Canadian fiction writer, poet, and playwright **J. J. Steinfeld** lives on Prince Edward Island. He is the author of fourteen books, including *Disturbing Identities* (Stories, Ekstasis Editions), *Should the Word Hell Be Capitalized?* (Stories, Gaspereau Press), *Anton Chekhov Was Never in Charlottetown* (Stories, Gaspereau Press), *Would You Hide Me?* (Stories, Gaspereau Press), *An Affection for Precipices* (Poetry, Serengeti Press), *Misshapenness* (Poetry, Ekstasis Editions), and *A Glass Shard and Memory* (Stories, Recliner Books).

Lois Greene Stone, writer and poet, has been syndicated worldwide. Poetry and personal essays have been included in hard & softcover book anthologies. Collections of her personal items/ photos/ memorabilia are in major museums including twelve different divisions of The Smithsonian.

Emily Strauss has an M.A. in English, but is self-taught in poetry. Over 160 of her poems appear in dozens of online venues and in anthologies. The natural world is generally her framework; she often focuses on the tension between nature and humanity, using concrete images to illuminate the loss of meaning between them. She is a semi-retired teacher living in California.

Maxine Susman writes about nature, art, and shifting states of body and mind. She has published five chapbooks, and her work appears in *Fourth River*, *Paterson Literary Review*, *Blueline*, *Poet Lore*, *Journal of New Jersey Poets*, and many other journals and anthologies. She teaches poetry in adult education settings in Central Jersey and performs with the Cool Women poetry group.

John J. Trause, the Director of Oradell Public Library, is the author of *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); the chapbook *Seriously Serial* (Poets Wear Prada, 2007; rev. ed. 2014); and *Latter-Day Litany* (Éditions élastiques, 1996), the latter staged Off-Off Broadway. 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. His translations, poetry, and visual work appear internationally in many journals and anthologies.

Maggie Veness has a Nursing and Welfare background and lives in a beautiful seaside village in northern NSW, Australia, where she tutors short fiction writing at a local College. With stories print published in seven countries to date, her literary idols include Miranda July, Sam Lypsyte, Kate Kennedy, Raymond Carver, Tim Winton, and Helen Garner.

Mary Winegarden's debut poetry collection, *The Translator's Sister*, is a 2012 recipient of the American Book Award. Her translations of Russian poets have been published in *Crossing Centuries: An Anthology of Contemporary Russian Poetry*. Her poetry has appeared in *26* and the *Squaw Valley Review*. She is a member of the Squaw Valley Community of Writers, taught English at San Francisco State for more than two decades, and currently teaches at the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute in San Francisco.

Laura Winters, Ph.D. is professor of English at College of Saint Elizabeth, where she has taught literature, writing, and film for 32 years. For 20 years, she has been teaching in the graduate school at Drew University, where she was named Professor of the Year at the 2012 Commencement ceremony. Winters has recently used poetry as prompts for bearing witness and paying tribute in writing workshops for bereavement groups for families of firefighters lost in the line of duty, families of suicides, and families who lost loved ones on 9/11. A Cather Scholar, Winters is the author of *Willa Cather: Landscape and Exile* and is the editor of the Willa Cather Series of FDU Press.