

ADANNA
LITERARY JOURNAL

Founder
CHRISTINE REDMAN-WALDEYER

Issue No. 5

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

Copies of Issue 5 will be available for a limited time. To order additional copies send a check made out to *Adanna* for \$14 a book plus \$5 shipping within the United States. Orders outside the United States add \$10 shipping and handling.

Adanna Literary Journal
P.O. Box 547
Manasquan, New Jersey 08736 USA

ISBN-10: 0983646392

ISBN-13: 978-0-9836463-9-6

Credits

Cover Art: Marcos Salazar

Cover Title: Untitled

Cover Design: Marcos Salazar

Copyright © 2015. All rights reserved by *Adanna Literary Journal*

About the Artist

Of Dominican heritage, Marcos Salazar was born in the Bronx, New York, in 1993 and moved to Paterson, New Jersey, in 2011. As a young artist, he is constantly exploring the world around him. Working predominately in pen and ink (or feather and ink), the people, places, architecture and monuments of the City of Paterson provide an unlimited source of inspiration for Salazar. He often takes photographs of the places that interest him and uses the images as reference for his artworks. From a sketch, the artist's imagination and emotions take over to create his work of art.

Forward

It is with pride I present you with this issue of *Adanna*, a literature collection that began with a want to address women's issues of the day. Approaching our fifth year I would like to thank our guest editors, contributing writers, artists, and readers that have helped launch the birth of this journal. My hope is that through the arts we can name the unnamable.

Editing *Adanna* has been a rich and satisfying experience. I have been blessed that so many have embraced the mission of *Adanna*. I have been able to publish first time writers as well as very accomplished and established writers.

Adanna grew out of a need to communicate nationally and globally. I wished that we could listen to the women's standpoint, visiting a multicultural, postcolonial world. Feminist research is to recover and reexamine the underpinnings that motivate and disarm us. I struggled as a child with the many blockades associated with being a girl, initially exposed to this in the church. My parents knew my frustration with my inability to participate fully as a member and searched for a new home where I felt I could worship and serve without the former chains that bound me. It is that support that facilitated a never-ending probing into the trappings of feminine experience.

Adanna serves to house our stories as artifacts. In this way we can visit the many rooms that inform and enrich our identities. It is my desire that these works present our readers with validation, a means to express and accept another's internal experience that resonates with our own. I have endeavored to make this anthology accessible as well as relevant. I hope you enjoy all the works presented here and encourage you to take the time with each and every one of them as well as the biographical notes of our contributors. You will be amazed at the many accomplishments and credentials of this distinct group.

Christine Redman-Waldeyer, Founder

CONTENTS

POETRY

Pamela A. Babusci	11
Janet A. Baker	13
Candace Bergstrom	14
Kristin Berkey-Abbott	16
Laura Bernstein-Machlay	17
Sheila Black	19
Jane Blanchard	21
Virginia Boudreau	22
Deborah Brown	23
Jessica Buda	24
Abby Caplin	27
Audrey T. Carroll	28
Julia Crane	29
Marie Davis-Williams	31
Holly Day	34
Kika Dorsey	36
Zoë Etkin	37
Irene Fick	38
Kelly Fordon	40
Laura Freedgood	42
Gail Fishman Gerwin	43
Cleo Griffith	45
Penny Harter	46
Kayla Helfrich	49
Tina Kelley	50
Claire Keyes	52
Iryna Klishch	53
Michelle Lerner	54
Angie Macri	60
Marjorie Maddox	63
Gigi Marks	64
Heather Martin	65
Ann E. Michael	66
Judith H. Montgomery	68

Tara Mae Mulroy	70
Deborah Murphy	71
Sharon Olson.....	72
Andrea Potos.....	73
Marjorie Power	74
Ivanov Reyez	75
Heather Lee Rogers.....	76
Sarah Sansolo.....	77
Rikki Santer	81
Shoshauna Shy	83
Stephanie Silvia	85
Evelyn A. So	86
Jeanine Stevens	87
Carole Stone.....	88
John J. Trause.....	89
Anastasia Walker	90
Emily Wall	92
Tiffany Washington	95
Geraldine Kloos Weltman.....	96
Lori Wilson	97

FICTION

Atoke.....	103
Nancy Canyon.....	107
Susan Cohen.....	109
Sarah Evans.....	117
D Ferrara	122
Dawn A. Fuller.....	126
Nancy Gerber	130
Katherine Hannula Hill.....	136
Melissa Miner	140
Amber Moore.....	143
Katie J Schwartz	145
Barbara Siman.....	151

CREATIVE NON-FICTION

Everly Anders	159
Zeze Hoffman	164

ESSAY

Iris Dorbian169

BOOK REVIEWS

Toti O'Brien175

Biographical Notes181

P

POETRY

Pamela A. Babusci

Tanka Sequence

holocaust of the heart

he was
crippled emotionally
not physically—
the slow descent
into despair

after he jilted me
my outer layers
of protection
peeling off like veneers
in heavy rain

separated—
i lie in a cold
death bed
thick with parched
tears

nothing would
sway his mind
not my love
not my thirst
not my ardent prayers

the bone silence
of an empty tea cup—
deep into
the night
my suicidal breath

holocaust
of the heart
unrepairable
pulverized
into red-rust dust

dark notes
of a howling pound
my sheltered mask
i sink deeper & deeper
into an ebony funk

Janet A. Baker

The Lost Egret

Dry flowers bloom above our desert beach.
The lost egret steps along the cliff side,
wades through dry chaparral. Like a white snake,

the great neck stretches, points upward,
as though her beak could penetrate thick coastal layers,
as though inquiring.

I walk parallel along the shore,
mind swollen with thoughts that drift westward,
hopes layered in smog.

I am husky with language, words weigh me down.
All my words ask something,
past children shoveling sand into castles,

young bodies slathered with coconut oil.
I stretch sideways toward savannah grass,
toward the long neck straining, the sad grace

of the white egret who can't compete with grasping gulls
for morsels at the border of the sea,
her willowy steps--tragic, elegant white plumes.

Candace Bergstrom

Bodies

In small homes, the ancient peoples
of Anatolia buried the dead
under their beds in womb-like tombs.
Draped strings of colored beads around the necks
then curled the bodies, folded them up
into spirals and slept on top,
year after year in seasons of drought, war,
death, of plenty, of joy, and birth.

The earth takes you back without judgment.
Without asking where you've been,
what you've done—not done.
In the way a woman's body opens
like water for other bodies to enter
a broken dream, a cracked world.
The way she opens for the trees
to shoot up toward darkness
and stars, holds their roots
firmly, so they don't take flight.

Candace Bergstrom

Six Miles

This is not the kayak. It is a poem
of the woman and the boat gliding swiftly across oily water.
It is her breath in and out, the grunt-work
of arms pushing back against gusting wind. It is sweat pooling
in the small of her back, the force of her
legs pressing feet against pedals. It's stumps, boulders, and massive
trees submerged in a lake where once
there were rocky ridges, woodlands, hillsides. It is white
water lilies flowering in the distance,
undulating against wave and wind, the yellow pond-lily emerging
from black depths, an urn-shaped offering.
It is the blissful discovery of Pickerel Cove, undisturbed miles
tucked away off the lake's northern narrows,
and the woody rattle of the Kingfisher darting back and forth atop
shoreline pines.
It is the woman, her boat, her body moving as one.

Kristin Berkey-Abbott

The True Miracle of Saint Brigid

You know about the baskets
of butter, the buckets of beer,
the milk that flowed
to fill a lake.

You don't know about the weeks
we prayed for the miracle
of multiplication but instead received
the discipline of division.

I managed the finances to keep us all fed.
By day, I rationed the food.
At night, I dreamed of a sculpture
manufactured of metal.

I didn't have the metal
or the time, but in the minutes
I had, I illuminated
any scrap of paper I could find.

Lost to the ashes:
The Book of Kildare, but also
my budget ledgers, flowers
and birds drawn around the numbers.

Laura Bernstein-Machlay

Dr. Joe

Meet me in the waiting room
of your little yellow hippie house where I'll be
picking the nubs of my fingernails, waiting

on today's first blood. Dr. Joe, chiropractor
to rock stars—*Jimmy Page, all
the Red Hot Chili Peppers, most of Kiss—*

you've come like new-age Jesus
to my dirty city, bringing absolution,
bringing sacral-cranial, colonics, meditation.

Your worried forehead, Dr. Joe—I would
smooth it, your briar patch
of hair and beard. Tibetan prayer flags, gold

and zinc and jasmine tea, 100 little tinctures all
in a row. Dr. Joe, generous with shroom-visions—
love it's all love— just when I need

drum circles on Wednesdays,
sitar and tambourine, woman's voice floating lazy,
loping like water from the speaker

somewhere above. Dr. Joe, this
world strangles us to switch-blades.
The creaking in my neck is louder than a calliope,

my vertebrae like castanets
cracking each other senseless.
I'm cock-eyed and grimacing, my stigmata

has grown wings, Adjust me, Dr. Joe, pull me
upright, dig in where it hurts, with the heels
of your hands, with your elbows, with all

ten fingers climb into that ache. Oh,

I'm spitting comets, bleeding fire—see me
Dr. Joe, every inch of skin breaking out

in jewels.

Sheila Black

Odd Fellows

The possum and the dog sleep together on the bean bag chair. The possum no longer wild when with the dog sleeps beside him, and he watches her with his hairless pink-rimmed eyes half open. By the back fence of chicken wire, the pear tree falls into the willow until one almost imagines they might grow together into a strange hybrid of a tree, globed fruit and long curtains of leaves. I want to believe if I listen hard enough I might fall in love with anyone at all. In fact, I love so few—a handful like a handful of ruby seeds. What are the lessons of loss? How do you practice letting go? The willow slides into the concrete of the driveway where in spring heavy rains create a kind of pool. The stone cracks, the sand comes in—like a bandage healing a wound. I imagine sometimes the world as mud—all rich and oozing, cracking under the sun. This is what the body does—it takes in, it gives up; everyone part of something else. Years ago, in the neo-natal unit, my son required many transfusions. The blood room frightened me—those dense plastic parcels, the black ruby of the chilled blood. But then a transsexual nurse, six foot six in her flat sensible shoes explained—she said once the iron smell disturbed her, the process of feeding the cold blood through the artificial veins of the IV, but then a rainstorm came, and she saw it was the same—a blessing like water from the sky—blood taken from bodies, put into other bodies, a communion of survival. That night I saw a rush of voices passing over my infant son. What cells do we contain— who and what do they belong to? The possum snuffles off before morning. The dog yips lightly in her

aged sleep. Does she know what the possum is or just a warm body—a mystery that steals her food? The possum lives under the porch, when not sharing the bean bag chair. He never shows himself to me, but I hear him sniffing the air; I hear him moan as if in a dream.

Jane Blanchard

Knocked Out

Trimming the remnants of roses,
I wonder when
these bushes will bloom again.

Is there time for another
burst of color
this late in the season?

Must summer yield to autumn
and autumn to winter
before spring puts out pink?

Virginia Boudreau

The Sand Dollar

Only silver sky, skittering pipers
are here to witness my slow blooming

a sand dollar rises, delicate
leaking its violet onto rippled sand.

Oh, how this fragile disc, newly surfaced
draws me. My fingers worry the surface

Faintly warm, surely alive but
I know it will die brittle and devoid

of color. Other hands will shake it, hear
skeletal debris rattle, lost somewhere inside...

and wonder at how hollow
it has become.

“MY COLORS ARE LEAKING!!!”

Nobody hears,
but, that’s okay

it’s taken years to walk this far
on a familiar stretch of shore

Deborah Brown

How I Go Through Life

In Jan Vermeer's painting, a woman holds a balance.
Maybe she weighs alternative lives. Nothing like that
here where all is out of kilter, skewed—
the furniture tilts, the woodpile falters,
the night sky is ringed with white orbits.
The pecking order of the birds
flutters while the seasons play roulette
and lose. I've waited for it all
to fall back into place, for the stones on the path
to align neatly beneath me, for the planets to protest
their innocence of this
derangement of mind and senses inflicted on me—
perhaps not on me alone—
by the century, by the moment in history,
by family, by this partner, this employment,
this physiology, this brain chemistry, this DNA,
that adds up to an inhuman human condition.

Jessica Buda

A Mother's Nature

"...and she loved a boy very, very much--even more than she loved herself."-Shel Silverstein, *The Giving Tree*

The forest is almost silent.
There's only
steel against bark,
leaves beneath boots,
and the hiss
of sharp breaths between
clenched teeth.

Her limbs are the first to go.
Swoosh of the axe
and a sharp burn in his wrist
leaving her an amputee.

Next, her feet,
sharp metal cutting
into roots, ripping
the ground beneath her, slicing
arteries, hacking off
toes that grip—
stability ripped away.

His hard blows come last,
when he's splitting
the wood of her chest, slicing
into her stomach, chopping
into thighs.

She lets him saw into her, swift hacks
leave her gaping,
sap running from her body
in thick rivulets.

It's cold now,
night falling fast,

sounds of scuffed boots fading
until all that's left:
warped roots,
severed wood, craters
cut out from careless
hacking, a lonely
stump.

Jessica Buda

Hurricane Katrina

She came out of nowhere.
Tore through homes,
drowning whole subdivisions,
made craters in streets.
She was vicious, cruel, vengeful—
angry that soon she'd have to
stop, pack her winds into tin cans,
her rain into pockets,
all her beautiful, black love.
She was offended by weather mans' predictions
that "she's not too bad, she'll be gone
soon." And like any woman, scorned,
she fought back. "I'm not going anywhere."
I wish someone could have told her
that storms don't have to be F5's
and lightning never strikes
twice in the same place. I wish I could have
been the one to tell her that her
tornado love would whip a whirlwind
even we couldn't fix. It's been years, Katrina,
and you're still here.
You stayed in the taste of the rain,
the whistle of the wind,
the hum of the sky.
You stayed in the families
who only just
rebuilt their lives.
You didn't have to
tear walls down, rip the ground up,
flood the city until all that was left
was your name on their lips.
You didn't have to. But you did.
Because we name all those who are born,
but only remember those
who leave a mark.

Abby Caplin

Women

At Blue Bottle Coffee
she speaks of her friend,
the rounds of chemo,
how close they were.
It's weird, she says.
One day we're here,
the next we're gone.

A caffeinated refuge from
dishwasher repairmen,
not-a-slam-dunk socks
tossed from son's bed,
the shuddering car,
treks to Trader Joe's,
vet's for vitamin
chicken chews.

Be for a moment
at the brown-sugared shore,
consider the thin beak
of the sandpiper,
palms bearing blessings
from their slender minarets,
newborn curls of water,
the promise of beach.

Loving this kissed time of
sister-dreamer woman,
the tamp of baristas,
guitarras and *claves*,
hair tinted lighter than
greener selves.

Audrey T. Carroll

Repressed Paradigm

Celestial wishes dust

Wuthering rhetoric bridges
clawing Shadows & tweed facilitator:

working, shifting,
trading common storms toward
cosmic pleasures

Tapestry of Victorian firearms
strike a spark

Expansive archive language
bars her from felicity

Julia Crane

My Hades

It was a companionable
enough stasis—

you, grim-faced on the couch,
unable to let go

of what you couldn't hold onto—
and me, gleaning your presence

from absence, nursing the dry breast of time.
O, it was dark, it was beautiful enough

that I couldn't tell
how many days you had been missing.

I came to believe the prop
sitting beside me was you

and not the life-size
crime-detering mannequin

my handmaidens dragged in
from the real world.

Julia Crane

The Ring

I want to lose it
like a fake smile,

a false limb, tarnish
it black, cut

it in half,
so I take it off,

seamless gold circlet, signifying
what—eternity?

What a crock!—as if
projectile infatuation lasts.

Look, the inner rim is hatched
with our initials—those smarmy

gestures at permanence—
and the florid date of our pact,

sealing the circuitous illusion.
I drop it

into the dark triangular
pubic obscurity

of the lingerie drawer's corner.
My finger feels weightless, panicked,

a pink fox
freed from its metal snare.

Marie Davis-Williams

Silk Mill Girl

Mother wakes
to the sound of the earth
cleaving long
before daylight.
She wakes and sends me out
to stand like flax
planted among the potatoes.
To stand tall
under the spire
and wait for you,
my root father, to appear.

She assures me
I will recognize you
by the white
that remains around
your eyes.
But she does not say
your eyes
are the same as every man's
who climbs out of the ground
and is homing.

You will
find and walk me to the mill
where, your stories told me,
the silkworm
confesses his transgressions
against the mulberry tree.
And where,
the mulberry tree is allowed
to portion out the worm's
penance, pulling from him
his gossamer in long, shiny threads
to be plied and beaten
into broad cloth

Though it is tightly plaited,
you will let the Mill Man cut my hair.
You will nod an agreement with him
that my dress be trussed
so close to my body
that there should be no
great worries
of my getting caught
and jamming up
his twisting machines.

Drink courage Father, drink courage!
Collect your flock of dusty soldiers
as they sprout
one by one from the ground
and rather, steal
the Mill Man's silk.
With it, bind my dress to me
that I will not get caught up
in his gears.

Wind me up
tighter still
until every spool
in his silk house is spent,
until I am no longer your daughter
and set me on a high branch
of the mulberry.

Then
when the mine owners
go looking for silk thread
and a child
to weave fine towels
for their wives
and their daughters,
lead them here.
I will break off the smallest
branch of this mulberry
and beard them to find
a master carpenter

who could build a loom
from the twig.

Holly Day

Grief in Perspective

we drive back from the hospital, and I
can't talk anymore, he wants to talk. I
nod my head at all the appropriate moments,
smile, laugh, agree. he seems happy
to talk about mundane things, the weather
his mother, my parents, how weird it'll be
to go back to work after the last couple of days.

we pass playgrounds full of children,
schools standing empty for the day, pro-life billboards with smiling
cross-eyed babies
unwelcome platitudes about life beginning at conception
reminders that the poor sexless little squirrel that died
somewhere inside me really was a baby
the grief that has replaced it is profound. I close my eyes

tell my husband we need to find
a different way to drive home, we need to change
our patterns of return for just a little while
please don't ask me to explain.
he startles out of his reverie, his ramble about
the beer cheese soup
his mother's bringing over later on so I won't
have to cook, the houseplants
she's had delivered already
how sad his grandmother was
when she heard I was in the hospital.
he puts his free arm around me, wedges it
between my neck and the back of the car seat,
I pretend he's comforting me, that I feel comforted.

Holly Day

The Place of Future Thoughts

A crazy lady who says she's my mother
is giving a lecture on dark matter
to a large group of crazy ladies in the other room,
all of which claim to be scientists
of some sort of another, which worries me because
I know for a fact they are not scientists.
The lady who says she's my mother waves
a piece of paper in my face, says
she's even written a paper on the subject,
on dark matter, it's supposed to prove to me
that she's serious. She says her other scientist friends
are very interested in her revelations on the universe,
of the origins of myth, on the paths stretching into the past and future of
humanity
but she won't let me read what she's written.

Upstairs are two children who are supposed to be mine, and I wonder
how much of the nodding and agreeing
that goes in my house is simply to placate my own insanities and
inanities. The lady who is my mother
wonders why I don't speak up more in crowds,
in groups, why I don't share my own theories
about the relationships between
the opening of tiny flowers in the morning
and the art of trephination
the sound of lightning and the invention of the wheel
with more people, how come if she's brave enough to speak her thoughts
out loud

why I keep my own ravings so still and quiet.

Kika Dorsey

After the Plagues

The lamb's blood on the doorway
is the Eastern horizon at dawn
dismantling prison bars,
with bodies thick as the dark,
deserts stretching like arms
trying to catch a falling child,
taste of the Iron Age on the tongue,
the flooding river that cleanses
water of black mold.
The thirsty barley and wheat drink
and the storm ceases
where feet tread across dust
and the sky unlocks and opens,
dangling its defeated chains of thunder,
its blue journey a yaw
where the vertical axis
took so many
and the kestrel's wings folded,
the thorny bramble burned,
and the women wore black
and looked to the ground.

Zoë Etkin

“Funeral”

How many times
can we say *Jesus*

really?

At the fake funeral
the four of us lined up
whispering

Jesus, Jesus—

And the preacher
hollering

heaven, heaven

to the exit sign
at the back of the room

How will we ever spit the word
out of our mouths

go back before we knew it
unlearning its copper taste

Will we let go of it
if we mix her ashes
with warm water

and goldenseal
Apply it as a poultice
to our tongues

Or will we scream
Jesus, Jesus

even as we sleep

Irene Fick

Asunder

Divorce is a moan in the night
and when that moan swells
to the wail of a stale country song,
divorce is that song played over
and over as you cruise in a borrowed
old Buick down a single
lane road, and divorce is that road
that dead-ends into a splintered
split-rail fence, and that fence flanks
a small patch of land left untended,
and when that land swallows
itself into a sinkhole, divorce pushes
you down until there's nowhere
to go, and when there's nowhere
to go, you collapse at the bottom,
and when you collapse at the bottom,
you shatter into pieces, then you clutch
those pieces to heave and claw
back up, spitting dirt all the way,
and when you do that, you find
that asylum of sunlight, that funnel
of air, and that's when you begin
to breathe.

Irene Fick

I Lost My Aunt at K-Mart

I searched all over...Pads & Pantliners, Fleece for the Family, Wall Décor, even power tools.

Defeated, I flagged Security, described Aunt Consolata.....*She's old...very short, a little round. She walks fast. She's wearing white sneakers, purple sweats. Her grey perm is tucked into a snug knit beret she crocheted when her hands were nimble. Did I mention she's 91?*

We arrived an hour ago and she wanted to shop by herself, cruise the aisles of this retail abyss with a long list and a big cart, buy what she needed, buy what she never knew she always wanted.

But I seem to have lost her somewhere in this store, and I'm afraid she may have tripped, fallen, or dropped dead, unnoticed among the shelves.

God, what if she died in K-Mart? What if *I* died in K-Mart, browsing through Replacement Parts, or large-print self-help books or Jaclyn Smith pantsuits? My psyche cries out for a spectacular or noble demise, perhaps a dramatic air crash, or a long, courageous battle with a rare disease, my farewells compelling and literate, my goodbyes witnessed by loyal, distraught family and friends. But not K-Mart. Never K-Mart.

Finally, Consolata surfaces, anchored to her cart, now jammed with throw pillows, a slipcover, socks, curlers, mop and bucket, more. She is miffed by Security's queries, annoyed at my panic, palpable relief. We leave the store, and still I wonder: how could I have lost her? How could she have disappeared so easily?

Kelly Fordon

Midlife Anorexia

The women disappeared one by one,
chalk paintings on the sidewalk,
slid through mail slots, lozenges
on their lovers' tongues, so slight
the sunlight shone right through them.
Children tried to catch them as they

floated up over the playgrounds toward
the city where they landed in nightclubs.
In the dark, with their skinny jeans and
extensions they might have been twenty again,
out with boys who don't want to be anyone's
father, who won't surf porn sites or trade up.

The days are for counting cups and crunches,
everything has to be perfect, except
for the hunger, so insistent that filling
the hummingbird feeder is too tempting.
The only thought how long until bed, where
no one eats. In dreams they are always gorging.

Much later, officially old, they'll slip into
their own pocketbooks, into their flasks,
spry old ladies in swimming pools
standing on their heads.

At least we didn't let ourselves go.

Kelly Fordon

This is a Man-Factured Land

Sidewalks replete
with roving red-eyes,
swindlers who swarm
our daughters, slip
into their ear buds,
caress their baby faces,
lull them into dreams of
the perfect *Still-life in Bloom*.

Laura Freedgood

You Are

gorgeous
he says.
Appraises your

grass-green eyes,
the hilly slope of your neck.

Gorgeous.
You want to think
he means

your heart's faint alarm,
the etched veins
along the inside of your wrist,

the breath that comes
uncertain at night,
struggles for dawn.

Anyone can dazzle
held up against candlelight,
backlit by fireflies.

You want him
to see you
unshielded,

crinkled,
the way you were born
the way you will leave.

Gail Fishman Gerwin

Night Flyer

Above us stars. Beneath us, constellations . . .
Ted Kooser, "Flying at Night"

My first flight from the old Newark Airport in an Eastern Airlines plane with four propellers launched me toward my parents, already in Miami Beach, maybe dancing the cha-cha in the hotel lobby, maybe dining at Cooper's Roumanian, where skirt steaks drooped over dinner-plate rims, where chopped liver came with crispy morsels of chicken fat, charred onions, not a statin in sight.

They'd driven south from Paterson the week before, school still in session, left me with Dotty, the next-door neighbor, and Elinor, who trailed me in age by a year. Two blizzards came that March week but Dotty's freezer promised pierogies from the new Food Fair on Madison Avenue.

Dotty's husband Jack was in the hospital, recuperating from a mild heart attack, spurring Dotty — who'd told my parents I'd be good company for Ellie — to put on snowshoes and tromp a dozen blocks to visit him while Ellie and I, on a sudden snow vacation, shared girl time, listened to records, foraged for freezer fare.

The night after the second blizzard, more snow in the air, Dotty drove me to Newark for my night flight. The porter took my blue Amelia Earhart suitcase, and I climbed tarmac stairs toward the sky, no jetway to shield me from the chill.

Once aloft, though I couldn't see heavenly bodies (snow again), only fire from the propellers, which I pointed out to the stewardess (not yet called a flight attendant). *No danger*, she said, *normal*, and I sat back,

ready for adventure, not aware that the arms awaiting me at the Miami airport wouldn't be there forever, that my friend Ellie, my blizzard compatriot, would die too soon after we'd renewed our friendship in the shadow of our senior years, that the propeller's flame would return only in the bright softness of my memories.

Cleo Griffith

Pages of Sad

(For Connie)

You have torn pages
from the bloody book
of your history,
buried those paragraphs
of sad and sinister,
buried them deep
and covered the ice-cold ground
with icons and antidotes,
but
never deep enough,
pages coil, worm upward
to be tamped down again
and again
by your painfully-obtained
cleansing ink.

Penny Harter

The Fox-Collared Coat

I remember the small town boutique
window I first saw it in, struck by its rich
brocade of muted blues and golds, and the
glorious red-gold collar at the neck.
I had to have it, had to feel that silky fur
frame my cheeks, caress my rosy face.

I remember first wearing it in the city,
pausing on the sidewalk now and then
to see my reflection in another store
window, savoring the surge of warmth
in my veins, that heady youthful power
of unearned desirability.

And I remember walking toward the one
who waited for me, eager to warm his
hands on my naked flesh as if I were
radiant with heat—and I was.

Penny Harter

The Solitary Birch

The solitary birch in the center
of the greening field by the train tracks
stretches slender bare limbs skyward

as if it were a woman transformed
after forbidden union with a god—
rooted there forever.

Over time, she will forget having
been mortal, will forget her longing
for the family of tree, will learn to

expect nothing more than the budding
of new leaves, the heat of summer sun,
the autumn winds of quivering gold,

and winter's letting go. On the horizon
ancient ones watch her—mountains purple
in the coming dusk. At field's edge,

a stream disappears into the undergrowth,
carrying last light toward the darkening
center of an old growth woods.

Now the train we are on carries us into
the landscape of night, whistling past
flashing red lights at the crossings.

The birch is long gone, yet it lingers
glimmering white as bone, learning
to expect nothing, not even itself.

Penny Harter

Watersheds

At the Continental Divide, I should have been
a bird. Barely able to breathe in that rarified
air, I gave myself to range upon range of the
Rockies, my head spinning as I rose.

Once in a voiceless movie, shot from the
perspective of a hawk, I became both adult
and chick, flew high above the fields and
villages below, my wings rowing air.

Following the silver membrane of a river,
I traced its twists and turns through rosy hills,
cast my shadow on a thread of stream,
carried pungent wood-smoke home to nest.

The humans below me, what did they know
of the great water course? Did they feel the tug
of the moon on distant seas, the ebb and flow
of saline tides in mortal blood?

Yet back in my body, I remember a dowser,
my late husband's grandmother, who, holding
a forked stick between her two gnarled hands,
almost lost her balance at the source.

Kayla Helfrich

Counting Sheep

At night I count my words,
Sheep hurdling fences,

Then group them into
Say and *don't say*.

Say: I have dreams
That won't fit in this room.

My brave face is not a façade.
Don't say: I'm afraid of failure.

Now that you've given me a ring,
I don't feel any differently.

My hand may shine like the sunflowers
I'll grasp when walking down the aisle,

But if I were a betting woman,
I'd put all the chips on stagnation—

You and I will never change,
And I'll say whatever I want.

Tina Kelley

Monastery for the Modern Journalist

I am done
and ready to be
more useful.

I can no longer fake my way in to the hospital
saying my mother is having gall bladder surgery
to find the cop's family members, here to ID the body.

I can no longer stand the breastbones of purple martins
protruding skyward from trembling breasts as they lie
dying from pesticides.

And while I know in theory it is important to ask the mother
about her stabbed son, "so people can understand what was lost here,"
I let her walk by, folded over, uninterrupted.

I can't place another call to widows of bond traders and firefighters
and hear how Daddy would pick up the boy and play him
like a banjo, but Mom isn't strong enough now.

I have sought this quiet room, quietest room, where no wires
enter, none leave. No cell service, just a cell,
a cot with faded cotton blankets, a bureau
with two drawers. One candle.

I remember, quietly, and ask:
Something, who knows what,
for the municipal landfills left to leach
because capping them is too expensive.

Something, God alone knows,
for the ten-year-old, who,
when undressed for examination,
kicks her legs apart, stiffly, spreading them
as the stepfather taught her years ago.

A carbon scrubber, a bee reviver,
the reinvention of the dusky sparrow,
a fairer solution than capitalism, and schools
for everyone, that nurture each child's special gift.

That would be a start. Almost enough
to make me come back and write those stories.
And suggest a thousand more

Claire Keyes

Landscape, with Three-Year Old

The three year old insists on walking naked
in the woods then howls at the ferocity
of the splinter in her foot.

When her mother takes her on her lap
to pluck it out, when she fights like a polecat
not wanting help or petting, she is unconscious
of her nakedness, at one with it all.

And everywhere she looks, Monarchs
flit from blossom to blossom, fattening up
for the trip from Vermont to Mexico.

What she doesn't know about
the most beautiful of all butterflies:
they fear no predators, being poisonous,
their caterpillars nurtured
on noxious milkweed.

No exotic poison will protect this child
from predators. Not with that will
to experience every sensation within her grasp.
Nor will those clumsy adults
who brought her into this world,
who nurtured her and marvel at her.
With no shield against the suffering
that will descend upon her, may the beauty
that pulses in her three year old body
burn quicker, burn faster.
What's up, we won't tell.

Iryna Klishch

In Your Mother's Journal

In your mother's journal you will find teeth and lemon cough drops. Her words will feel like marbles in your mouth and you will want to swallow them so they can make a home in your liver, your lungs, your gut. It will be February and everything around you will be the disease of snow, spilled over the ground like milk, burying the city in a soundless white. In your mother's journal you will find nails and heartbreak. Her words will taste like cinnamon and burn the back of your throat like stomach acid. It will be March soon and your wrists will feel heavy. In your mother's journal you will find allergy medicine and theories. In bold writing it will say, "I have found the meaning of the universe." You will believe her and realize that perhaps humanity isn't going forward at all, perhaps time is reversed and we are living it backwards. You will hold in your palms the theory that Happy was in love with Sad, that unlike Romeo and Juliet, they were meant for one another. In his bedroom, on her doorstep, you will sing about the theory that you have been God all along. In your mother's journal you will find memory and the summer of peach iced tea. In your mother's journal you will find hurricanes and lies. In your mother's journal you will find bits and pieces of your bones, of your soul. In your mother's journal you will find it.

Michelle Lerner

Birth

What was the first thing I saw
when they cut me from my mother's belly
and pulled me to the light?

Leaving home each morning,
I see people I've never seen before.
At the end of the day,
I can't remember their faces.
Though I may remember the slipping sound
of the rain on my windshield.

I emerged from the bath
naked and wet, in the dark.
I turned on the light.
I recall the feel of the towel on my legs,
the smell of lavender.
I don't know what I saw
when I crossed out of darkness.

Soon I will sleep, and then sleep will end.
And my eyes will open
like doors.
Like doors

my eyes will open.
Soon I will sleep, and then sleep will end.
When I crossed out of darkness
I don't know what I saw.
The smell of lavender, I recall,
the feel of the towel on my legs.
I turned on the light,
naked and wet in the dark.

I emerged from the bath
of the rain on my windshield.
Though I may remember the slipping sound,
I can't remember their faces

at the end of the day.
I see people I've never seen before
leaving home each morning,
pulled into the light.

When they cut me from my mother's belly,
what was the first thing I saw?

Michelle Lerner

Jigsaw pieces

At 35, our ages do not seem that different
eight years at this point
just isn't that much.
But when you were 28, I was 20
when you were 20, I was 12.
You forget this as you say
you remember us
as children, together.
You say you wanted
to marry me
when I was twelve
that we laid together, you and me,
in the basement of my parents' house
our bodies touching, your hand upon my back
that I startled easily
at steps on the stairs.
You are not ashamed
when you say this,
are surprised I don't remember.

My memories of the early years
at our grandparents' house--
first cousins swimming in the lake
seeing how long we could hold our breath
trying to talk under water
and watching you do jigsaw puzzles
in the attic
pieces so small
I could not fathom how you knew
where to put them.
You remember none of this
only kisses and the thrill of breaking a taboo.

I want to ransack my mind
throw open drawers and closets
look for the small pieces
of memory

you describe,
hidden somewhere
under layers of old blankets
in some old cigar box
musty and frayed.
But the drawers are locked.

What I do remember
is being newly 20
moving in to my college room,
visited, by you.
You kissed me at the train
talked of sex over dinner
tried to tumble me on the wood floor
of an empty dorm room still unpacked.
And I hated you
and loved you
unaware that this
was just a tape
running on repeat
my copy still unpacked
from where I had placed it
broken in small pieces
a decade before.

Michelle Lerner

The Bicycle Lesson

It was Easter morning and I was only seven,
standing by my bicycle on the driveway to our house.
My father loomed over me
training wheels in hand
shaking his finger and shaking his head
tired of my lingering, my longing
for the house.

He told me he would wait all day
and sit out every hour,
skipping every meal until I rode along the driveway
fearless and painless, on my own without a cry.
And I remember that my mother stood
so silent in the doorway
calling to me now and then
worried that her little girl was hungry
and afraid.

So I glided down the driveway
ankles dangling, legs hitched up
terrified of stopping and terrified of falling, feeling
for that balance that would finally send me pedaling
up the long stretch of the driveway.

And then, years later, when I could barely drive
my mother's car,
at seventeen I stopped one day
along the road to your apartment
to make my first grown purchase at the drugstore in the mall.
I gave myself five minutes
to wander down the aisles, to choose between the condoms,
leave my money on the counter, and head back towards the car.
And when I got to your apartment and
we lay down on your bed, I tried
to find my balance, tried to open up a space
inside, a passageway to lead you
to the center of my body—
but I cried with such intensity
that you refused

to push in deeper.

You held me in your arms and tried to tell me
not to worry, that there would be so many nights
of that quiet concentration, of making love so slowly
in rituals of penetration, of listening to you whisper
that I didn't have to cry, that I didn't have to find
a perfect end, a perfect start.

And you were calling like my mother,
you were reaching from the doorway,
I was standing by my bicycle, staring at the driveway,
fearing that by waiting
I would never get it right.

Angie Macri

This is Venus

in the garden looking for a table.
She goes beyond the apple orchard, able
to move fast around sandstone
and the thorns of somber roses.

This is Venus in the city looking for butter,
wandering down a lane of cypress
past a house with seven
windows left open to hunger.

This is Venus in the painting looking for a mirror
so she might see herself better
than any man who might die by a bullet sooner
than later. She would tune

her hair with a bit of orange as the butter
softens on the table like a planet
opening in the sky above the house with seven
windows, each for a day, its portion

of the week. She is looking in the garden
of paint that becomes a city, and all its glass
a faint mirror, able to count time
on the windows like fingers of the moon's hand.

She has bought eggs with the butter
and will break them from their shells
to the oil of wheat raised in sun
outside the city lined with cypress.

She will break them in a house surrounded by apples
like bullets falling in the somber shades of roses
which offer oil when hot, both in the garden
and when cut and set at the table's center.

She carries eggs in their shells before the man hangs
the oil painting beside his mirror in the city, before the house

loses one of its windows, before the trains
take the paintings away. This is Venus.

Angie Macri

The Pillar of Cloud by Day

Slow as the word to come, slow
as a cow, love is not sudden
as some say, like flame.
Instead, it's ten months coming,
and to the arms a son, and then
another, one son for each arm,
a balanced weight.

Wait, that I might find you. Wait,
that I can hear them say
a word. Wait, because I'm lost
and God has hidden me, has not
shown me a way
across the desert of prairie
that bends like a flame.

All the words I've spoken, all
the colors of the cloud
by which he has covered
me, standing, or lying down,
a son in each arm and I'm not told,
no, no one knows. Wait,
that I might hold
them one more day.

I hear the cloud of words
like birds in wild pear,
and in the cloud hangs the one word
I heard—come—as the pillar
at night turned to fire,
as the pillar rose like thunder
past lightning flame.

Marjorie Maddox

Oceanside Pool at Three

In your peripheral, or not quite:
my body going down
and staying, the absence
of laugh and splash,
a clue unnoticed,

like something, anything—
a bucket, a shovel,
a glass empty of bourbon, left
out so long in the sun
you undid ownership—

like now, the edge sudden,
as far away
as close is to keep,
as loud is to faint
“Ohs” ballooning past bubbles,

just a slight murmur of meaning really,
tiny SOS echo, small blip
registering on the screen,
as you start, any moment now,
to turn your head, get ready to see.

Gigi Marks

Handwork

Two cedar waxwings have
feathers that are a pink-colored,
brown-tinged gray; that is
a rich, sweet color, I say
to myself; it shifts the space
between my ribs to accommodate
a fuller breath, and my heart
feels bigger, and one of the birds
has the tippet feathers pure
yellow to border its back,
and both have the familiar
tuft that is shared with the cardinal
and jay, and they lie together
on the macadam road, which
heats up in the middle of the day
and shimmers a bit as it
softens. I move each to the grassy
shoulder, my hand is a stretcher,
my hands can do only this.
My daughter who is with me
says, oh no, did they get hit by
a car, why are you moving them,
oh they are so beautiful, the two
of them, at least now they are
back in the grass.

Heather Martin

An Epithet

An epithet: effeminate,
And women can't write, spin
Worlds, words, name birds,
(Have you seen a flamingo?)
Like Adam did in Eden,
There's no tradition for the female:
The counter-part, fraction, co-captain, a complement
To the ever growing summa, amassing,
Great ball of heaving words to call
This, That, He, She, You,
And Here's Why.
But before Adam could have ever damned Eve: SHE
There were just two naked men in a garden.

Ann E. Michael

Dicing Onions

I think of Neruda's ode
and of a long-ago companion who said
to hold a piece of raw potato
between my lips
to mitigate the sting. I think of Eve then,
how the tree's fruit tempted—
when young, I never doubted it was sweet.
But knowledge also stings,
makes tears run, roughs up the senses
even as it mellows in the soup.
Earth knowledge sweetens in the dark
and then grows bitter:
after paradise, we sowed onions.

Ann E. Michael

Mum

Between rows of parked cars
she stands, stunned, plastic
shopping bags rustling in the breeze
that bounces a soiled napkin
origami somersaulting on macadam,
recognizes herself as having been
prepared for just this:

skull trepanned, brain extracted,
sternum split, entrails in a basket,
heart in a coffer, lungs boxed,
child laid in her arms, mask
over her stretched-taut face
painted into serenity—
all her energetic systems
separated and dispersed.

A driver, backing out, hits
the brakes. She gathers together
her grave goods, sees the
red taillights, blinks
her lapis lazuli eyes.

Judith H. Montgomery

If Perfect

I take up too much
space would be
one silk slip hung

on one hanger
leaf shut back
to bud hollow

cradle— would dis-
appear into slim
bones posing cat-

walked sleek in crêpe—
come hungry lenses
worship my pelvic

tilt I one bite shy
of perfect
freedom from any

one's control—
I vow my belly one
carrot stick one

apple bite once
to cinch waist hips
thigh measure my—

*

I had stopped but
cannot stop:
mirror sing my frame

to size (*zero, zero*)
scrub free
of flaw— if

perfect I stand
outside any clock
I will stop one

one step short stop
breast blood stop
up the drain

of eggs I shall be-
come a polished shaft
of light white

slice transparent as
china *knock*:
my collarbone

rings to chime
free from sweat-
press of flesh *stop*—

*

I will not not
choose the path
of ease shall

shape this taper—
purify be purified
shall be *have been*

whited pearl
stayed bud
dead
perfect

Tara Mae Mulroy

How to Talk About Your Miscarriages

Mention them by number only. Give their name's solitude.
Let them be no more than phantasms. Don't

talk about their hands, their palms, how they never
developed a line of life, a girdle of Venus. Remember their faces

on the ultrasound monitor, in your mind: their unopened eyes. Talk
about the smell of clean linens in the room they were never taken to.

You can't resurrect them. Instead, remember their feet
against the enclosure of your belly, you and your husband watching

fascinated. Motherhood a country you weren't meant to reach.
The natives smell failure on you. They pity you.

Deborah Murphy

Peeling Back

Sundays, my mother stood at the kitchen sink,
slippery brown peels and milky flesh of potatoes
falling from the sharp blade of her paring knife.

I slouched next to her, half-heartedly scraping
a dusty spud and imagined myself
striding across Lexington or 5th Avenue,

flinging my beret into a limitless sky,
the same one that stretched over Mary Richards'
perfect, celluloid world every week.

I hardly noticed my mother reaching
across the sink, finishing what I had started.
I never bothered to ask what she was thinking,
the tune she hummed only now filling my head.

Sharon Olson

Material, Suspended

My mother has stepped up the campaign
to be remembered, starting to appear
nightly in my dreams, she is either
stuck in limbo or perhaps come back
to apologize, all those interruptions
at dinner just at the climax of our stories,
orchestrating the tempo of the evening
and unwilling to let go of her baton,
a sad look to her now, open-mouthed.
I remember how difficult it was
to get across how Bob,
the house cleaner, had placed
his hands inside my bermuda shorts,
I guess I didn't explain it well,
words hung back behind my ears
unbidden, no matter—I think
she said—Bob only came to our house
once or twice a week, and those days
I could sleep in, was this her idea
or mine, and who was being punished
here, the long summer mornings
I spent hidden in my room,
waiting until the house was clean.

Andrea Potos

Proust and Panera

Sliding into my usual booth with the faux leather seats,
spreading open my notebook, arranging my mug
of light hazelnut roast and my cinnamon scone, suddenly the air
ushers in the scent of just-on-the-verge-
of-being-burnt-toast,
and I wonder if someone cranked open
an oven door to the other world
so that now she is here,
my diminutive Yaya, wrapped in her floral apron
with the burgundy rick-rack, she is smiling near me now
saying *Here Koukla* with her silver curls
and large eyeglasses, approaching my booth
with butter plate in one hand and her toasted-to-autumn
thick cut of bread in the other while I say *yes*.

Marjorie Power

Watching for Lightning

I need to speak
to my son. I need to speak
with my son. I need

to speak of my son.

The boy who chattered his way through childhood
has turned, at mid-life, as quiet as a cloud.
A heavy cloud that doesn't leak.

Bachelors, Masters, Doctorate, Post-Doc.
He climbed a ladder by day.
By night, earned a little money –
this lab, that lab. Sweden, Italy, France.

He stepped off the highest rung and into the gray.

If he wanted to develop new weapons
he'd land a career in a heartbeat.

If, as promised, God is everywhere,
then God permeates what's gray.
I pray for my son. But I don't let on
when I see him, with his
wife and chatty children.

My son is a laser physicist
which is not to assume
he no longer believes
in God. But this isn't the time
to ask what he hears, when
the rumble of thunder comes close.

Ivanov Reyez

Suffragette

Freedom did not belong to the male.

You did not need to cut your hair short
and dress like men to claim
what your long hair and skirt already commanded.

Had you subtly slid your hand
out of his in the middle of a romantic play
he was scoffing, you would have seen
the shriveled man, the anxious child; you
would have gotten the phone call at midnight,
the roses at your door in the morning.

Even if you had marched the streets emptyhanded,
out of the kitchen, out of the bedroom,
your absence would have been the banner
to start his tears and clamor to join you.

Freedom did not belong to the male.
It was the illusion you armed him with
when he left your floral house.

Heather Lee Rogers

Hysteria

In plays
when women are too smart
they go crazy
you see traditionally
wisdom
makes women hysterical
and men geniuses
and insane women
always want to fly
like wild witches on brooms
or goddesses swimming
with stars like fish
or housewives whose minds
shoot out from their faded bodies
while mankind men and mankind women
struggle and scratch
at their sleeves and their skirts
to hold them fast to the earth
and more women than ever
are riding motorcycles
because a wise woman needs to fly
to harness power and violence
between her thighs
and know the heat
of a big bold rocket
against her
divinity
I want to ride too
to fly over the road
up into the sky
to roll and dive
with celestial queens
to cackle and scream
till I burst
in a bright hot flame.

Sarah Sansolo

Lullaby

You never saw him,
just the hospital crib
that wheeled him away.
Your lullaby: falling water
as you cry, naked
and finally unpregnant
with gore swirling down
the shower drain. Your body
still outstretched, too soft
but ever resilient.

After a few months you forget him
for hours at a time.
But his first birthday,
when you try to sleep,
your lullaby: the city
below your empty apartment.
You can hear his new mother
singing, you can see her hanging
blue and yellow crepe
paper chains for the party.
The boy, just out of frame.

Sarah Sansolo

Forcible I

“That man was very strong. I wasn’t kissing him. He was kissing me.”
- Greta Zimmer Friedman

Sudden hands, Times Square blurs,
he twists her into position, her shoes ungrounded
from the confettied asphalt,
her careful braided hair jammed
in the crook of his arm. She plays dead
like she’s back in Austria watching
uniformed men cattle-car her parents away.
His fingers bruise her waist beneath her nurse’s dress,
his beer-sour mouth victorious over her tight lips.
He’s a man who gunned down Japanese
white-capped, too intent to fight. All this
over in a camera’s flash and he leaves her
to stagger back to work or to fall
and rip the knees of the new silk stockings
for which she saved pennies.

Sarah Sansolo

Forcible II

I followed the first boy
who spoke my name like an incantation.
He creep-crawled over bed, over body,
took my mouth too fast, claimed
what he came for, his chin chafing mine,
his cigarette-and-sweat smell hanging
in the air. I want you to think
how new small things get eaten up
in fairytales, I want you to think
how the sailor's knotted fist
keeps the nurse in place.
Alone at 3 AM I washed my sheets,
my dress, my hair,
slept on the plastic mattress.

Sarah Sansolo

Rapunzel

I was named for a parsnip, sold
not for the blossom but for greens,
root bursting with seed
to conceive my replacement.
The first man at my window
brought a purple-white flower
not knowing it was rampion.
No use saying it was my twin—
he unlistening as the bell petals,
stamen firm, erect, gossamer-furred.
His starving eyes on me
so I plucked them out.
If I must be a flower
let it be poisoned, devastating.

Rikki Santer

Walking With My Mother

Deep in wings I can't
recall your easy
sway of hips
or the rhythm
of your heels;
instead there is
the plumage of
lavender cane,
violet walker, then
orchid wheelchair
that names you.
Your purples were
your feathered
campaign.

The folklore
of our strolling,
me the pusher
you the pushed
and the craning
of our necks
to meet each
other's eyes.

I know in your dreams
your legs walked
along beaches,
through strange lagoons,
around the rooms
of your last home.

Tonight I glide
on air currents
searching for you
in the ether
until I spot
a great morph

heron striding
through her shallows
eyes sparkling
amethyst
 in moonlight.

Shoshauna Shy

Have & Have-Knotted

\$2.15 an hour plus meals
at the Main Course Café,
first job after leaving home,
thumb the ticket down
Nakoma Road in time
for the dinner shift, 1/5th
my rent paid in produce
to the landlady's crisper
drawer – no college, no car,
no bank account.
Didn't consider myself
going without

not even at nine when
Carol Goodeany's mom
wrote her a blank check
just to outfit her Barbie
at Marshall Fields while
mine was stashing hand-
marked cash inside
cookware to stretch us
to the 31st. Didn't think
I was *with* either until

at 21 lifting Suzanna Jane
from her wheelchair onto
the commode, she exactly
my age, both of us bred in
Illinois except my neck had
not twisted in a tractor crash.
When the pencil between
her teeth tapped out the date
of the hysterectomy so that
those like me wouldn't have to
change her cotton pads month
after month; so no willful egg
mistakenly meet any spark

that could ignite it into life -

I finished the shift, shucked
my shoes at the bus stop,
walked home swinging
them by the straps, wanted
bubbled curb ramps, city silt
and grit, the crunch
of sunburnt grass.

Stephanie Silvia

I am afraid, yes yes yes I am

“Not being afraid feels so much better than being afraid”

And here it is \time for another scope\way up in\my ass
another opportunity for every cell to stand on edge my drying
mouth

searching for breath with dark thoughts of deep earth

taking me forever

away away away from my love away away away from my love

all this getting older the biggest shock the great surprise the
inevit—phone ringing the doctor that is the way with these
poems the interruptions outside and inside the fears that long for
distraction the fears that didn’t plague my youth, Sure, there
were artist money struggles

but still so much

time to work it out—

6 ft 3, the teenager in the kitchen frying

3 eggs for breakfast

awake the voice that pulls at my hairline driving the car

lying in bed (rushing to sit in front of screens to forget)

afraid of not being able to pay the rent to feed myself to send

my son to college(and what then?) of the car following me down

our wooded road in the dark the loss of another job temporary it

has

ended the lack of jobs the invisibility of a woman with strong
ideas

and a knowing that doesn’t transfer into a paycheck (the market
economy the super market the stores our clothes the plastic
trinkets and what O what about the Earth Home)

I lived. 5 yrs ago I DID (go on go on) I lived. (go on go on)

The cancer it came and it went. I LOVE THIS SCOPE.

I LOVE THE DRS & THE NURSES. I write poems to ward off
fear.

I have my words these glorious words these symbols of the vastness.

Evelyn A. So

One of Your Favorite Singers is on T.V.

and there's nothing else worth watching, so I tune in. I'd forgotten the way Tori Amos brings the piano to a crescendo, then cuts back for vocal intimacy. How she lifts certain lyrics with her voice so they sound like questions waiting for a response. The plaintive melody repeats...Something about China, something about New York...I expect you to say something when she swivels to a second piano (you like how she whirls between keyboards) but you're not here for close-ups of her hands on the keys, flaming hair, pale skin. Not your tanned cheekbones. I hear the emphasis of arpeggios. Foot pedals sighing.

Jeanine Stevens

Leger

*~lair, couch, bed, lying, illness
leggerbed. (old Eng. /Anglo-Saxon)*

Remnants of a 7th century monastic order found
on the banks of the River Cam! Tombs
of young women unearthed, only one placed
in a burial bed complete with iron springs.

Were her trinkets odd, ordinary?
(I think not.)
Look at the rare pectoral cross stitched
to her gown, garnet studded brooch,
and iron belt, her chatelaine.

She is the only one placed among a robin's
delicate bones. The grave goods: a small purse
with glass beads and a single violet that says spring.
I imagine spindles spinning, chimes singing.

In earlier times this ground held a marsh,
no zephyr's sweet breath, but home to the pox
and poisonous berries mistaken for tender shoots
of yarrow and yew. And, like a pillow on a bed,
a pregnant bank swelled and overflowed.

Chaucer's Reeve lived right here not knowing
what existed beneath. The River Cam
still lingers, watches the next layer begin.
And here I find her simple loom,
yarn still attached, weaving unfinished.

Carole Stone

In the Tropics

Hundreds of newly born turtles
erupt from the sand.
Will I be back

to see next year's hatch?
Me in some state
of metamorphosis.

Who am I?
What work shall I do?
Shall I move to the city

or stay in New Jersey?
Live here in Zihuatanejo?
Why am I

so extraordinarily happy,
and irritable?
Being old is like

a second adolescence.
Is there any consolation?
The turtles climb over each other

like rush hour subway riders
until the last newborn
is one with the sea.

John J. Trause

The Way of St. Kitty of Kew

And I have traced the via dolorosa of St. Kitty of Kew
up Austin Street near Lefferts Boulevard
past the Mowbray Apartments
the pub below her apartment building
the stretch where she was stabbed
the train station parking lot
the back alleyway where she felt safe haven
the doorway along the alley
in which she was stabbed again [and died] and raped [post mortem]
in a little hallway behind a green door
and I have looked down from the West Virginia Apartments to the spot
below
and I have faced the first spot from in front of the Mowbray Apartments
and I have dined in the pub below her apartment building
and I have soaked in all the details of her death
and I have traced the stations of her passion
and I have heard her cries 50 years later and did nothing...
but write this poem.

Anastasia Walker

Eleusis

No heavier heart than the mourning mother's,
No eye more colorblind – her world
A waste of winter grays scoured by
Melancholy winds that stymie
Seeds in their seedbeds, and throttle song
In the young lark's throat. So dark cloaked Demeter,
A crone holed up in Eleusis for grief:
Persephone, the bud of her youth, plucked
By the King of Shades for bride, the bridles of
His black horses foaming in frenzy.
What words to console her,
What reasons to dispel her pain?
The seasons' wheel turns – spring to summer,
Summer to fall and winter and spring again;
But though the orchards cast forth
Stray blossoms, no fruit comes
To their boughs. To her own mother
Rhea, and the other envoys
A contrite Zeus sends, she can only reply:
My greening, my best self, buried so deep in the ground.

The cycling of weeks and months and years
Scabs over wounds, but the seasons
For the heart's healing, like a melody
Scatted over the tick-tock of a metronome,
Heed no measures but their own; and though
The hearer seems deaf to it,
Her ear is not untouched, as her swelling
Hope at the rumble of chariot wheels
One morning bears out: her child
Leaps forth, radiant still as she falls
On the white-haired woman's fragrant breast.
O mother! and her tale gambols like a spring flood
Over a parched riverbed's rocks: a bloom,
The pale, puckering narcissus, the snare –
The yawning earth, and her playmates,
Okeanos' lovely daughters, swept off

In a whirlpool of fear and fading hopes –
The Host of Many's lordly scowl: *Not for you*
The sun's light, but a life in shadow –
The gloomy hours on the golden bridal couch
Weeping to her echo's taunts – then a voice,
Sweet as a summer morning mist, envelops
The dark chamber and tingles in every pore
Of the touch-starved girl: *Time to be born.*

But her doting mother's brow has darkened
Like a flash November storm: *Please say, child,*
Your lips touched nothing, not even to taste,
In your captivity. Her own heart knows
Aïdes' icy grip, how it chokes
Even the hardiest sprout; but her daughter's voice,
Though the news is sad, soothes like a June shower:
In a few words the girl describes
Her bridegroom's trick, a pomegranate seed
Planted beneath her tongue, token
Of the budding time he has stolen,
Never again theirs. *No more tears,*
She pleads, wiser than her years for sorrow,
No use in tallying the sum of our tomorrows:
Ours to embrace the fullness of the day,
To live into this promise late sprung
And the wonder of all growing things under the sun.

Emily Wall

Do Not Look at a Lunar Eclipse

Do not place scissors in your bed
or the baby will have a cleft palate.

Put a paste of ginger tea and coco butter
on your belly, to avoid stretch marks,
dress warmly, always, for this hot condition

never braid your hair, wear rings
or necklaces
or the umbilical cord will choke the baby.

Don't let anything ugly be seen,
don't criticize anyone
or the baby will be disagreeable

don't cry out during labor
don't attract evil spirits.

Slip a necklace around her neck
before the cord is cut
tethering her to this world.

No drinking hot coffee,
no heating hot chilies
or baby may get rashes.

Eat sesame soup, cream,
coconut milk, ginger tea
to make sweet milk

take the placenta and bury
it under a fruit tree
or cut it up and bury it, away from animals.

Never give birth in the *aanigutyak*
you live in. Immediately after birth go
into the tent prepared with steam and lemon grass

stay inside after the baby is born, wrap him
in socks and blankets, let no rain fall on him
take no baths.

Eat only vegetables and rice.
Eat lots of moose, seal, caribou.

Let the priest baptize her, the shaman
name him, let the monk place the woven band
on his wrist, let him bless her.

Let him bless her
yes, let him bless her.

*Note: These traditions come from the following cultures: Thai, Inuit,
Hispanic, Chinese.*

Emily Wall

In the Birthing Tub, Afterwards

- *after an Amanda Greavette birth project painting*

Look at the swollen, squash
of my belly, no longer sleek and fat.

Look at the broken blood vessels
in my face, in my eyes

look at the torn door
between my legs, at my stiches

at the baby's left ear
folded the wrong way

her color not yet peaches
and cream, a trace of vernix

left in the creases of her arms
and her own vagina looking

swollen and bruised. In these
minutes we lie back in the water

and we are not
beautiful, we are not lovely,

baby and mama. We've arrived
on your doorstep, late at night

after walking long through
a forest that was not easy or kind

or sunlit. Look at the snow
on our shoulders. Now look at us,

just beginning to shine.

Tiffany Washington

Posthumous Publication

Something for Sylvia

She wasted not a word,
But painted even strawberry fields with poetry.

Raw words – hardly thought before pen hit paper.
No second drafts.
No revisions.
Fuck the writing process.
Just thoughts, ink, paper –
Private.
Published without permission.

The evil dead father analyzed and cliff noted,
her poetry lost in lectures.

Desperate desires to be loved
tucked tightly between paragraphs
of parties and partings.

Ted's words lingered
in letters between them,
before (head, oven).

Geraldine Kloos Weltman

Eternity

A man and woman argue
on the steps near the ornate
cemetery gate. She bellows
obscenities, then stumbles
away down the block.

When she keeps going, he jogs
in pursuit, pinions her arms,
and carries her, still cursing,
back to the steps, where he drops
her like a sack of laundry.

After that, they sit in the shade
of the whispering trees while
weather-beaten gravestones
sink and lean towards each other
in the unmown grass.

Lori Wilson

Let Me Speak Plainly

I don't care that tomatoes rot on the ground.
I don't give a damn about the basil,
less about pokeweed taking over the yard.
I'm paring down—
I stopped flossing,
I don't make my bed.
I'm tired.
In fact, I may go to sleep right now.
I may just lay my head down right here and rest.
I don't want to drive to Charleston.
I don't want to drive to Pittsburgh.
The cactus is thirsty,
bills lay unpaid on my desk.
I haven't picked a single berry
(a pound of Oreos: gone).
I don't care to wash my hair,
don't care about mowing the grass.
Boxes of stuff in the basement,
overflowing recycling—so what
if we can't open the door?
I'm out of fish oil.
I'm out of money or nearly so.
I think these lumps should find some other breast.
I'm not boiling over—
don't you get it?
The liquid is gone.
I'm burned to the bottom of the pan.

Lori Wilson

What Is She Now, Without Red, Red?

Breeze blows the lily's arched petals—

glistening bead at the stigma's tip
quivers,

anthers bob, pollen sifts
silence / yellow
down.

If thin folds chafe and open to nothing...

One day equals another:
this slow dissolution.

Lori Wilson

Sign in front of the Spruce Street Church: *Empty Is Good*

Empty like a dishwasher ready for loading
or empty like a cupboard and the paycheck spent?

Empty's the flattened box in the trash

the boarded house on Kingwood, condemned
roof a sluice, yard a sea—

I mean *echo* / *hollow*

a hike on the freeway at night hauling a red plastic can.
Empty's the bed where grief sleeps.

Bag without ballast easily pierced by a twig,
in the end, *empty* caves in.

If I tell you I'm empty, I'm telling you *feed me*
and when I say *feed me*
I really mean *stay*—

make of your broad back a shield
hold me up with your practical hands.

I'm all out of muscle / vision / grit—*stay*.

F

Fiction

Madam Shalewa

Seven; it was that time in the evening when I was supposed to do the one chore that was allocated to me outside the kitchen. Drawing our threadbare curtains to a close was not supposed to be as enjoyable as I found it, but there was something fascinating about fabrics. The curtain that prevented prying eyes from looking into our scant living room was bright red in its past life. Intricate wefts of yellow and purple were woven through it in sharp diagonal angles; and although the places where yellow met purple was no longer distinct, I imagined how rich they were when they just left the loom.

Father thought they looked garish, and reminded him of a ‘whorehouse.’ My mother would hush him every time he said this: “Folabi please! Not around the children.” Children? Maybe my brother was too young to know what it meant, but there the import of the word was certainly not lost on me.

The curtains came from Aunty Tess, who gave them to us after she said she had turned her life around. Everybody called her Madam Shalewa before this life change. Now, we call her Aunty Tess, because the person who preached to her, and helped her see the light enough to give her life to Christ was called Tess. She told Mother that she owed Tess a debt of eternal gratitude.

I had heard Father complaining to anybody who cared to listen that their parents would turn in their graves if they knew that ‘Shalewa dared to discard the name Iya Agba had bestowed upon her on her dying bed.’ I didn’t think Aunty Tess cared very much for Iya Agba’s posthumous feelings because the name was firmly engraved over the door of her new restaurant in Surulere.

The curtains, which now covered our little windows, used to grace the walls of the establishment now called *Tess’ Home Cooking*. I imagined the curtains had a lot of secrets to share, as Madam Shalewa’s was very popular in our town. Before Aunty Tess found Christ, and gave away the things that reminded her of her past life, my brother and I anxiously looked forward to her visits.

We would conveniently play outside our little house on any Sunday we heard Aunty Tess was coming. The first one to open the door of her car, was slipped a crisp one thousand Naira note. Our mother, on the other hand, was thrown into a constant state of unrest. She would fixate on whether we were wearing the right clothes – it wasn’t right for

Aunty Tess to see us in our regular house clothes. Our Sunday best, pressed and donned, in time for her visit. When Aunty Tess settled into our living room, she seemed to suck out all the air with her presence. I didn't understand why my father would sit quietly and not speak to his own sister; my mother replaced the silence with constant babbling with different food choices. The chicken reserved for Easter or Christmas would have been killed and prepped in anticipation of whatever Aunty Tess preferred. In the old days, she would ask for peppered chicken, and some beer to wash it down. Mother would quickly get to work, dragging me in tow. "Funto, bring the black stone out and grind those peppers for me. When you're done, cut the onions and grind that too. I want the chicken to be well flavoured. You know your aunty doesn't like it when it isn't well flavoured." My brother would be dispatched to procure the bottle of Guinness. We all had to play our parts in hosting our esteemed aunty with the gleaming big black SUV.

The more enjoyable the chicken, the thicker the envelope my mother stuffed under her pillow – away from the prying eyes of Father. I knew Father knew she hid whatever money Aunty Tess gave her. I had once heard him telling her that he refused to be a part of 'Ashawo money.' I thought money was just money – you know? to buy nice things which we never had anyway. Father's refusal to collect Aunty's gifts was strange to me. Until I found out what 'Ashawo' meant, and it left me confused. If Madam Shalewa was now Aunty Tess, the money wasn't bad anymore...

The nomenclature didn't seem to bother my mother; and when she used some of the money to pay for my Girls' Guide uniform kit, I was sure that if God could change Madam Shalewa to Aunty Tess, then 'Ashawo money' could become 'Good Girl money.'

That evening, as I drew the curtains after Aunty Tess left, I could still smell the lingering scent she left on my dress as she hugged me goodbye. "You're a big girl now, Funto. You should be wearing big girl clothes now. You should come over to my house and we'll go dress shopping together." She'd lowered her head towards mine and whispered the latter part of her message. I ran my fingers lingeringly on the fabric of the curtains; with my eyes closed, I imagined the dresses of different textures – velvet, silk, cashmere and cotton.

White; everybody said the white cotton dress I wore for my confirmation ceremony made me look angelic – well, according to my boyfriend. I didn't argue with him; Dotun would have said anything if it meant me allowing him to touch my breasts after church. There was

something intense about the way I felt; it left me breathless and thirsty every time we snuck to the back of the choir room. The goose bumps on my coffee black skin would rise, and my face would burn when his lips grazed my tiny, taut nipples. I loved discovering my body, and the excitement of knowing that 17 year old, University student, Dotun was the Vicar's son. We sat together at teenage church for five weeks before he told me he liked me. I followed him with suspicion when he told me he wanted to talk after the service. My apprehension fizzled every time he made me laugh. I asked if he knew I was the daughter of the church cleaner; I reckoned if I talked about my station enough, then it wouldn't matter to me what people thought about me.

His laughter was strange. It was light and easy and I wondered whether there was something about being in the vicarage that made life more bearable – maybe my laughter wouldn't sound as guttural as it did if I slept on a feathered bed donated by foreign missionaries, or drank cold water from a dispenser instead of plastic sachets. "I didn't know that 'Daughter of the Church Cleaner' was a description anyone would use on themselves. But if you're asking if I know your Mum, yes I do. She's the very kind lady who tells my friends and I not to leave our cigarette stubs behind the children Sunday School Class." It was the brazen way with which he spoke about it that made me want to follow his lead.

He asked me to go steady after the Valentine's day event organized for teenagers. That night, I let him kiss me. I imagined being one of Madame Shalewa's girls; tilting my neck back, I allowed him slowly lick my earlobe, down to my collarbone. "You're so beautiful" he crooned, nibbling the soft flesh of my neck. I felt beautiful and fierce. If Auntie Tess was still Madam Shalewa, maybe I would have asked her for tips on how to make Dotun want more. But that night, after confirmation, I was content with having the white cotton dress from Auntie Tess as the witness to my becoming a woman.

Freedom; it is that liberating feeling you're supposed to have when you're guiltless, pure and blameless. It is what they say knowing the truth bestows upon you. They lied. Freedom and truth are estranged distant cousins.

That night, I had pulled down our old curtains as instructed by mother, and was replacing them with the new ones our aunty brought. Now hanging on a drooping frame were pale blue lace curtains with green squares arranged in cross sections. The choice of lace as the predominant fabric was a strange one – how was this supposed to protect us from the blinding Lagos sunlight? My gaze and fingers lingered – trying to sense the idea behind the choices that went into the final

product. When my gangly 11 - year brother came into the room crying, it was my grip on the curtain that kept me steady.

“They were talking about you. I heard them saying rubbish about you and I told them to stop. They wouldn’t stop. They just kept laughing and talking. And laughing. And ...”

“Who said what? Who was laughing? Stop crying, and talk!”

Now I heard father’s feet being shuffled into his slippers and making their way to the parlour. Father was standing in the doorway, with the same downcast look I’d seen on his face all 15 years of my life, when my brother wiped the snot from his nose and said, “The boys in church – Dotun and his friends. They said they had bet 700Naira that you would *straff* Dotun the same way Madam Shalewa used to *straff* the Vicar.”

Nancy Canyon

Anvil Cloud

A giant anvil cloud looms over Grangeville. The towering top is brilliant white, popped like white corn, highlighted in pink by the setting sun. The bottom is flat and stained black as a Smithy's iron.

Dad taught us kids to recognize thunderheads. "See the shape," he said. "See how the top flattens out in the updraft? It's shaped like a blacksmith's anvil."

I feel the coming storm in my bones: air crackling with static. I'm stretched out on the bed, too hot to move. My skin smells of sweat. I taste salt on my upper lip. The stillness has trapped my inside heat, blackening my pain, pulling me into the dark abyss. I sigh and turn over, facing the prairie and the coming storm.

My body is finally gaining its strength back after the miscarriage, but my emotions remain charged. I try not to think about the baby washing away, tumbling down the pipes to the septic tank, but I can't help it. Especially here in the middle of nowhere, in all this silence. I made a mistake. I should have looked at my child, seen whether it was a boy or a girl. All that blood. Those horrible contractions. And the bath afterward, the teary water stained pink. Now I will never know the sex of my baby.

Earlier I begged Jack for us to try again. He hissed at me, "No baby."

"My clock is ticking," I argued, "Let's try. I'll see the doctor in Grangeville. If he says it's okay, then we can."

Jack stared out the window, pulling at his beard. He's so nervous these days. I knew to stop pushing him, so I turned away and flopped on the bed. Now we're both silent.

My underwear's stained still from the mess—three months-worth pouring from me like a gully washer. My hormones fell along with the baby. Gone my mothering instinct, the gagging at the scent of bay leaf, the repulsion over hardboiled eggs; gone my nesting urge. Now I feel nothing. No flutters. No cravings. Nothing!

I punch my pillow, raising my head a bit so I have an eye-level view of the spreading anvil cloud. "Winds," Dad said, "are turbulent around thunderheads. Dangerous to fly into." The day Dad flew me to Priest Lake from Spokane to visit my friend for the week in July, he brought along a major airline pilot to co-pilot the small Cessna. He was afraid of the black clouds towering large at the end of the airstrip. My

friend's family waited, parked on the side of the highway. He set the Cessna down. I jumped out and ran across the field. He took off again.

During that week at the lake, I frenched a boy for the first time. And I drank too much beer and threw up in the small bathroom at the back of his cabin. Last summer, while perusing the Avon catalogue with a customer, I learned that the French kissing cabin was the same one the resort hairdresser lived in with his new wife, his ex-wife and their baby. *Weird*, I think, studying the flat bottom of the cloud. *All of them living together*.

Jack says he's hungry. I pull myself up from the bed, shuffling through the electrified air to the counter. From the cupboard I take a loaf of bread, a jar of peanut butter and jelly. In slow motion I make him a sandwich. As I slide it onto a paper plate, I look up. Jack's drying his hands on a not-so-clean dishtowel. He catches my eyes. His are dull and bitter. The standoff continues.

"Here," I say, smiling weakly. I hand him the sandwich. "Fuel for the big storm." I turn back to the counter and make a sandwich for myself: peanut butter and pickles. I take a seat at the picnic table just in time to see the first strike.

Susan Cohen

Devoted

“Oh my lord, it’s a wicker tomb.”

“Don’t unpack, there must be some mistake.” Lisa rushed back to the lobby.

Out of breath, she pounded on a silver bell until a girl who looked younger than her daughter appeared from an opening in the back.

“Show me the best room you’ve got.”

There was the sound of metal clanging together while the girl fiddled in a drawer. Slamming it shut, she growled with someone on the phone, and then disappeared behind a black curtain. Tapping her nails on the desk, Lisa considered pounding on the bell again. Finally the girl marched through the lobby towards the garden path, waving at Lisa to follow. She clutched a key that was attached to a golden ball, with a seam down the middle like a peach.

When she swung open the door, Lisa saw palm trees bowing to the wind through a wall of polished glass. This private villa was so light and airy that she had to have it, no matter what the cost. No problem, they’d scrimp on other things. She’d cancel the restaurant with two Michelin stars.

When she showed Scott the room, she waved her arm to direct his gaze to the catamarans flitting across the quiet cove. It really was heavenly.

“The desk clerk confused us for a couple of college kids! Same last name, unbelievable!”

“This is ten times better. I love it.”

Now he had no limits, and didn’t even ask about the price tag. Just one year ago he wasn’t prepared to fix the leaky roof for fear she would get the house.

Lisa hated it when the little voice inside her reminded her of their separation. Like an annoying dry cough it popped up unexpectedly and didn’t do her any good.

Through the sparkling plate glass window she saw a bride and groom posing by the water's edge. They were radiant, and she wanted a closer look.

“Ready to explore?”

Scott didn't hear. He was too busy putting his underwear and socks in the top drawer, shirts in the next drawer and then pants on the bottom. He took over almost the whole bureau.

It's rude of him to think his things are more deserving of drawers than mine. Can't he see that my suitcase is bulging with clothes waiting to be unpacked?

A year ago this would be the point where she could start a fight. She would accuse him of only thinking of himself. Instead she said in a teasing tone, “It doesn't matter you didn't leave me any room. I'll just leave my suitcase open on the stand.”

“Oh, sorry. Like a dog I am claiming my territory. I guess I'm just a beast.” Then he flashed that charming smile of his. “Let me make you some room.”

“Really, it doesn't matter. I just want to go before the sun sets.”

She was itching to feel the soft sand between her toes. As they took their first steps on the beach, the sand was so deep and soft like white flour that she had trouble keeping her balance. She placed her hand in the hook of Scott's elbow. As they approached the shoreline the sand was firmer underfoot. It was the perfect time to reach out and hold his hand. But right as Lisa was about to slide her hand into his, she heard the sputtering of an engine approaching and jumped towards the wet sand to get out of its way.

Scott looked longingly as clumps of mud flew off its rear wheel. “If I knew that having a motorcycle would make me so happy I would never have left home.”

Just when she wanted to be romantic!

That's just his way, she thought to calm herself. He blurts things out, without thinking. His soul is filled with little sparks that fly out of

control. But if that's what he wants, she will prove to him that she's game for a little adventure.

"How about we explore Koh Phangan on a scooter tomorrow?"

His eyes lit up.

"Why not, great idea!"

She had never ridden a scooter, but it looked like fun. It would be nice to feel the power of the engine, sailing by lush green forests, peaking at sandy beaches in between the fans of palm trees. Although a voice inside of her strongly objected.

It's dangerous. What would happen if you had an accident and were stuck in a hospital so far from home? You should really think about the kids.

The risks didn't matter. She wanted to have fun, and she felt safe with him.

As they packed the bag the next morning with swim suits, towels and sandwiches from the breakfast buffet, she remembered that during their vacation in Maui Scott felt sick when they sailed the catamaran. But they just had to try again, maybe it was a one-time thing or he'd outgrown it.

But sure enough, just ten minutes after they were sitting in their hard plastic seats, the ferry began to rock from side to side and Scott felt nauseous. Lisa found a TV monitor which showed their destination looming in front of them to ease his queasiness. "Wow, thanks this feels much better." As he put his hand in hers it felt cool and clammy. It reminded her of how he squeezed her hand riding up the cable car to the top of the Alps for their fifth wedding anniversary. Their son was conceived during that trip.

As they merged with the crowd and descended down the ramp they followed the sign to the rental store. The scooters were lined up with their front wheels at the same angle like dancing girls. He was pleased to see they were powerful enough to handle the steep hills, but disappointed that the store didn't offer full helmets with complete protection.

You see he is very protective of me. He still cares very much.

Lisa had the owner snap a picture on her cell phone of the two of them; Scott looking ridiculous with a white helmet that barely made it down to his ears, and Lisa wearing a pink one with a black panther on top. The scooters didn't have a navigation system but Scott managed to use his smartphone, which he put in Lisa's clear cosmetics case, and then secured to the handle bars with a shoelace.

"Gee you are still the most resourceful person I know", she told him. "Remember when we were first married you made a whole meal in the toaster oven?"

Scott smiled, "Yep, chicken breasts rubbed with paprika and garlic."

"Yes, it was very yummy."

Yes, we both remember how good we were together.

Lisa grabbed a map from a display case illustrated with cartoon depictions of waterfalls, mountains and cliffs. She let her finger slide down to attraction number eight, which showed a gorgeous bay and pristine beach she hoped no one else would notice so they could enjoy paradise with a little bit of privacy.

"What do you think?"

"I'm in. Let's hope they're not." The Scott raised his eyebrows and motioned to an overweight French couple, where the husband was struggling to get the scooter started. Scott leaned in and whispered, "The scooter will never be the same. It's an accident waiting to happen."

He would never fumble with anything mechanical. He's a man who is always in control. I'm safe with him.

As she hopped on the scooter, she recalled when the children were small they would ride mountain bikes together on Saturdays. Her daughter loved to peddle on the tandem bicycle behind him. He was always careful to avoid the deep sand and ride slowly so her little feet could keep pace.

They pulled out and headed up a small hill. Grabbing Scott's waist she leaned forward to help push them forwards. When they reached the top of the hill she felt like she was flying. Her spirit was shooting up into the sky until she felt the pressure of her body against Scott's back as they descended back down to earth.

"I can see why you like this!" she shouted but he couldn't hear her over the wind.

They passed two girls with long brown hair flapping against their tan backs, wearing thongs and Scott strained to get a better look. He missed the exit to the beach and they had to turn around and go back.

He would rather be with someone a bit younger, firmer, with long blond hair flying behind her under the pink helmet, someone who looks more like his secretary.

She remembered screaming at Scott when she found two tickets to Paris in his computer bag.

"It's company policy for secretaries to go to sales meetings."

"But your meeting wasn't in Paris it was in Cannes."

"We had a stopover on the way."

"How convenient!"

They'd rattled off one-liners like rapid fire machine guns. Lisa, who'd never paid attention to where he went or what he did, found herself checking his phone bills, staring at the clock if he spent more than a few hours at the club. The tension was unbearable so, when a friend was stationed overseas for three months he decided to move out.

Scott called complaining that he felt lonely and empty living in a one room studio with bare walls. He asked if he could come home in the evenings to visit. Lisa agreed as long as they never touched and he didn't sleep over.

After dinner they didn't watch movies or entertain, they just talked. Something they hadn't done for a long time. He said their business travel was putting a strain on the family, and he was sick of both of them doing emails until 11 at night.

They discussed watching their parent's marriages unravel as they got older. His father left the family to move in with his mistress, her

father often came home late at night without a phone call or explanation while her mother waited by the door gathering ammunition for the shooting match.

She also suspected perhaps it wasn't what was lacking in their marriage; it was what they had in great abundance: the sameness, the monotony. They were together since the age of 20, and neither one of them had lived alone.

After he went back to his apartment and she put the kids to bed, she found herself drawing circles defining different levels of intimacy, and completing questionnaires about her body image and sensuality from the book "How to Save Your Marriage." The book said that women own the relationship, if she chooses to love him, she'd have him. She just needs to know what she wants.

Meanwhile Scott decided to follow his dream. He bought a motorcycle and volunteered for the highway police. After each shift he was flushed with excitement from hunting down drivers talking on their cell phones, or taking an illegal left turn. He wanted to trade up to a more luxurious motorcycle so they could tour together. Lisa saw this as a trail run, their first time riding on two wheels together.

After parking in front of a reception area, Lisa jumped off the scooter and together they made their way through a jungle forest. Lisa crossed a bamboo bridge that covered a windy river and walked through a cluster of palm trees. She was forced to shield her eyes from the bright light reflecting off the white sand. The beach was soft and pure, unblemished by rocks, shells or seaweed. The only burst of color breaking up the white sand were bell-shaped evergreen trees planted every few meters to provide relief from the burning sun. The inlet was framed on both sides by the gentle slopes of mountains covered with towering palms and other tall leafy trees

"Welcome to paradise," Lisa commented to Scott, who selected a spot where the sand and the forest met. He threw their beach bag next to "his" and "her" hammocks, so they could lie down feet to feet and they could both gaze out to the waves lapping the shore.

Lisa reached down to gently swing herself. She stared up at the palms gently swaying in the breeze when her head felt fuzzy and she slipped into a gentle slumber. Suddenly, she was awoken by a male

voice speaking German. She remembered her friend warning her about the typical couple in Thailand; middle aged European man with huge bellies holding hands with a young Thai girls.

Lisa turned to see the source of the voices. Against the green rope of a hammock was a bald man whose skin was so white, it looked like poached chicken. But more shocking than his skin color was the sight of his ribs sticking through his skin, and his arms that were like tooth picks. Whatever was consuming him, left very little behind.

The Thai woman who accompanied him was not so young but middle aged and voluptuous, covered from head to toe in a colorful dress that shielded her body from the sun. Between them was a slim, adorable little girl, neither light nor dark, busy playing in the sand. Her hair was cropped to her shoulders, a gentle curl at the end.

Lisa got of the hammock and stood next to Scott's head and whispered "Do you think they're married?"

"Why does it matter? He chose the right way to go, enjoying a beautiful view with people he loves instead of wasting away in a hospital bed."

Lisa wanted one last look to decide for herself if they were a family. She stood up and walked to the shore with the excuse of sticking her toe in the sea. She saw how closely the couple and child were huddled together; exchanging smiles and bursts of laughter. As Lisa settled into her hammock, she whispered to Scott, "They appear to be very devoted to each other. That's all that matters."

Then little girl began to sing, with a voice so pure and strong. She wasn't self-conscious, as if singing out loud was the most natural thing in the world. She was busy making something in the sand, a castle perhaps, and it seemed her song expressed the pure delight of creating. The joy of feeling the cool sand slipping through her fingers.

Scott reached over and touched her hand, it felt warm and natural in hers. They gently swung together. She took it all in, the white sand, green trees, his light touch deep and preserved the memory, so that whenever she was frustrated, jealous, angry, or just tired this image would remind her of the wise decision they made to stay together.

Lisa felt a warm glow from within. Nothing was certain, she

would probably always have fleeting doubts. But at this moment, she wasn't aware or concerned about what lay ahead, she was just enjoying.

Sarah Evans

Failings in imagination

But she had always known this moment would arrive.

Sooner or later.

One way or another.

I'm being moved on, he'd said, a strangely passive expression coming from someone who never, ever, as far as she could see, allowed things to simply happen.

She could not pretend this came as a surprise, nor accuse him of deceit. She did not possess any way whatsoever to protest, to let go the inner scream and fight. Fight for him. For her rights.

What bloody rights?

'I see,' she said. How frightfully civilised. But that was her way; she did not have another way of being. 'How soon?'

His eyes were drawn together in sorrow and she looked aside. What possible use was it for them each to observe the other's pain?

You knew, she told herself. *You always knew*.

'Two months. Nearly two months. No precise date yet, but by end January.' His soft American drawl irritated her; it never had before. 'Hong Kong this time.'

They were lying, naked, in her bed. As prelude, he had shifted a little apart, breaking the skin on skin contact before saying anything, wanting – perhaps – to watch her reaction. *It's come through. A new posting*. Precise words, cleaving time between before and after, with just a second's pause, the reflex of *no*, before understanding was absorbed.

Now he shifted closer, back into the groove their bodies made, offering solace for the blow he was inflicting. He had not told her, had not said a word, not until after they made love. She imagined his deliberations, the weighing up, whether to do the more honest, honorable thing of telling her in the cold light of fully-dressed day, versus the cop-out of the falling darkness of a winter's afternoon, the post-coital intimacy in which forgiveness – kindness – might come more easily.

She wondered how long he had known and chosen not to say.

Already there was a barrier between them, resentment at the way he presumed he still had sufficient claim to pull her tight. Thighs interlocking with thighs. Her breasts squashed against his broad, hard chest. The truly awful thing, the very worst of it, was the way she craved his comfort, how the only person able to offer any kind of consolation was the very person who inflicted the bruise.

There was a word for that kind of woman wasn't there, some sort of syndrome, one of those emotional, state-of-mind afflictions that you felt both pity and revulsion for. The thought itched and she started fidgeting.

'I'll make coffee,' she said.

His hands gripped, then let go. His perception might be that she was *taking the news well*. She wanted him to know – to fully comprehend – just how much this hurt. She also did not want him to know that. They were reduced to this now, these games of dissimulation and pride.

She kept her back to him, refusing to dwell on his clean-cut good looks, his gym-honed body, his all-American hair. His hand traced her spine, fingers following the contours of individual bones until he was caressing her neck. She waited for his words. None came. This man who was so good with words was unaccustomedly silent. Perhaps the silence was as thought-through as any speech. This was not someone who left anything to chance. Perhaps he knew whatever he said could be turned against him. *Bastard!* He'd hate any sort of scene.

She realised, with horror, that her throat had seized and if she tried to say anything she would cry. Her throat and chest throbbed with the effort of not giving in to the indulgence, forbidding the temporary release, within which he might offer the crass charity of his muscled arms.

She hated the power he had, hated that it was her who handed him such power.

'Say something,' he said, his voice low and hoarse. 'Talk to me.'

She shrugged and stood up, pulling her thick dressing gown around her. 'Coffee,' she repeated. 'Want some?' Three words used up the extent of her strength and, out of view, salt water streamed down her cheeks. Silently. *See!* She was good at silence too. She turned the kettle on. She could smell the clementines she'd bought earlier, thinking to feed them to him, segment by sharp segment and knew she would never eat them now.

She slipped into the bathroom, pretending to attend to normal bodily functions, life proceeding as per normal, the flush of the loo and the running of taps providing cover up for her low keening – which she heard like a horrified observer – as if she was at her own wake. She bit her hand hard, then splashed away the evidence from her face as best she could, her eyes red-rimmed but only from close up.

She would clear all traces of him once he'd gone. His toothbrush, the scentless soap and particular brand of antiperspirant

whose twin sat in another bathroom. It wouldn't take long. If only she could be rid of her aching throat so easily.

Coffee! She was supposed to be making coffee. Her hands shook as she poured water from the kettle and she felt the urge to let her hands slip, to allow boiling water to splatter over her skin, replacing inner turmoil with the surface scald, which could be cooled under running water and soothed with Vaseline. The impulse, the compulsive strength of it, frightened her.

Self-harm. She'd never done that.

Other than in picking the wrong men. The married man who would never leave his wife, and worse, was posted in London only on a temporary basis. The man for whom she was a pause, who had a girl in every port, or rather, on every diplomatic posting. Was that really true? She pictured a slip of a Hong Kongese girl, sleek hair and large doe eyes. Did he always go for the local girl, forming quite a rainbow tribe, or did he sometimes go for ex-pats? She hadn't wanted to ask before and it was too late now.

Too late for further burrowing into intimacy.

Too late to undo what they had started, to unwind it back to the beginning and resist – *resist!* – his dark eyes, his teasing smile, the fake honesty of his pious little speech. 'Of course, I could never leave Marianne.' Couldn't abandon his job, his country. 'Guess I've not got much to offer.' Said with a self-deprecating shrug, palms open. Not much to offer, just passing pleasure. Passing – *but my god how intense* – pleasure, the sort to stake everything for, though it would not, could not, last a lifetime. The pleasure of two bodies, of whispered, covert love. Laughter too, there had been a lot of that. Along with the unravelling of unhappy childhoods, exchanged confessions. Him marrying young, the wrong woman; her failed affairs, hooking up with the wrong sort of guy, not seeing the irony of those disclosures until it was too late.

Pleasure replaced by pain. A kind of punishment. But for what? It wasn't her who betrayed his wife.

Punishment, perhaps, for the self-deceit, not of thinking this snatched happiness would last – she had never told herself that – but that it was worth it, that fleeting joy would compensate for future anguish, that present rapture could be hoarded up against its later withdrawal. Like on a hot day imagining your body can absorb enough heat from the sun to keep you warm right through the winter months.

That basic failure of imagination, the body forgetting just how quick the heat fades and the cold grips, failing to remember how all-

pervasive heartache can be. For it to happen once, well excuses could be found for that, but to let it happen over and again...

Fool!

When she could trust herself, she picked up the mugs and walked through. He was already dressed, sitting on the edge of her bed, concealed by clothes except for his feet which emerged, milk-pale and incongruous, from the ends of his tailored trousers. They were the least attractive part of his body, his feet, those messy, disordered toes. Not attractive at all. If she could just avoid looking at his face, into his dark eyes.

‘Caro,’ he said. ‘Caro.’ He was the only one ever to have shortened her name that way, shortening it to a caress, rechristening her.

She inhaled the bitterness of his favoured brand of coffee. If he asked her *how d’you feel?* she would throw the boiling liquid over him. That would not sufficiently assuage the anger. She would knife him. The thought of blood oozing from a centre-chest wound, the shock of pain on his face, was satisfying.

Only momentarily.

He talked a little then. He was hurting too. She heard it, not so much in the trite words – *so sorry...can’t avoid...I’ll miss you like hell* – as in his voice. Her arms ached with the weightlifter’s effort of staying pinned to her sides. She yearned to reach out, to touch, perhaps to repeat the act of love, sensing how it might be a desperate almost violent thing, lying topped of its usual, lying tenderness.

But already he was glancing at his watch and any minute now he would say he had to leave. Leave now, before the final parting in two months’ time.

He was used to partings; she had little doubt of that. Initially his wife might be moved back within the sphere of his affections, providing a distraction, if she allowed it. Hong Kong would be exotic and new; it would offer glittering parties. It was his job to meet people, to charm them; seduction was just a small step on.

How much then would he remember? She would be catalogued alongside his iconic images of London, along with Tower Bridge and St Paul’s. Together with those newer innovative buildings, the shards and cheese-graters and gherkins. And the Houses of Parliament – that fine example of Gothic architecture, symbol of democracy and power – which the two of them had gazed at, standing on Westminster Bridge one November evening, the haze of drizzle smudging outlines, providing cover for the rare and treasured risk of walking out together.

All these would quickly fade alongside a spectacle of sea and mountains, of dense skyscrapers and temples and colourful markets. Of the longest suspension bridge in the world. Of smooth and youthful Asian skin.

‘I think you should just go,’ she said, pre-empting him, her strength mustered and close to being expended.

‘It’s still several weeks off.’

She couldn’t do that, could not live with the knowledge, its vagueness turned to timetabled certainty. Could not deal with the inexorable progress of days, the creeping inevitability of a last, a final, meeting, counting down towards it, with the pretence that might creep between them that they might somehow *keep in touch*. Needing a decisive cut. Closing the file on him. *Now!*

She glimpsed the vacuum that lay ahead. The body-caving wound, the hollow-boned loneliness she already felt, these were just the very start. A heart did not break cleanly; damage accumulated over time and the knowledge that it would heal – eventually – would not help, not particularly. The only hope for quick recovery was to let imagination fail.

Again.

Which is how she came to be here, in this room, within this moment she had always known would come.

‘Just go,’ she said, eyes rising to look directly into his. *Don’t go yet.*

D Ferrara

Knowing

Shimmer snapped off the radio, sighed, and headed for the lobby, sorry, “greeting room.” *Hoity-toity bullshit* in Shimmer’s opinion, which she kept to herself. She needed the job, and her other one, just to get by. It was “the economy, stupid” as that guy said in his campaign ads, and Shimmer, who had never voted in her thirty-five years, heartily agreed. Not even the burst of mild patriotism she had felt over the recent golf war (which she thought had been about oil, not golf, but what did she know?) could change things. Mouthing off too much would get her fired. Shimmer knew the score.

In any case, there was a customer and she needed the money. The Sensual Arts Massage Spa did not pay her if she did not work, and little enough if she did. Checking her hair, makeup, and teeth in the mirror, giving her peach-colored uniform a last tug, Shimmer applied her professional smile and opened the door.

Immediately, Shimmer wanted to turn around. The only person there was a fat broad in a plain blue skirt suit that looked vaguely like a uniform. Shimmer hated fat broads. Every inch was extra work. But her smile never wavered. She held out her hand, ready for the usual small talk—*Yes, Shimmer is my real name. Ever had a massage? Everything, even the panties.* It didn’t come. Instead, the woman, very short, with oddly blue eyes, simply nodded, followed Shimmer’s directions to Room 6, and closed the door, almost in Shimmer’s face.

Leaning against the wall, Shimmer hoped that this one would tip better than her last fat broad. Shimmer glanced at the work slip for the customer name: Eve. No help. *Women named Candy or Tiffany tipped better*, she thought. *Fancy names, fancy ways.* She wished she could smoke.

It was time to tap on the door, and Eve said something that wasn’t “Go away,” so Shimmer came in. Eve was on her stomach, covered by a sheet to her shoulders. Her clothes were neatly folded—skirt, blouse, underwear, panty hose—on the only chair. Her jewelry, including a knock-your-eyes-out sapphire ring, was in her right shoe, under the chair. *How did I miss that rock?* Shimmer thought. Eve’s purse was on the hook, and Shimmer thought a smart woman would have put the jewels in her bag, but maybe it was a fake. She hoped so, because if it was real, then Eve was rich and rich women were crappy tippers. Shimmer knew that for sure too.

Eve's skin looked paler in this dim light than in the greeting room, with a satiny sheen. *No sun. Probably sits on her fat ass all day, playing cards.* Shimmer's patter rolled out on its own: *What kind of oil? Any allergies? Is the light okay? Let me know if it hurts.* She supposed she heard the answers. Shimmer always started at the head with a back-of-the-neck floating fingertip ripple, her signature move. The other students at massage therapy school had envied that move. At least two had stolen it. Eve did not make the usual murmur of appreciation, however. A little ticked off, Shimmer moved on.

Massage school had been a triumphant time for Shimmer. In her entire life, she had never done as well at anything as the ins and outs of muscles, ligaments, joints, and bones. To her astonishment, even the cadavers had not freaked her out. Instead, she had wished they had been alive, well, a little, so she could see the lactic acid actually squirt, to witness how muscle pain actually happened, instead of just reading about it.

For a time, it seemed she might graduate first in the class. She, Shimmer Sue Ellen Rudzianski, who had never been first in anything in her life! She had made the mistake of mentioning this to her loser boyfriend, Greg, who insisted on being called Gears. He decided to make sure she was first by hacking into the newly computerized grading system of the school to change her grades. Of course, he screwed it up, erasing all the records, so no one was first and all their licenses were delayed for six months.

But Greg—excuse me, “Gears”—was a man, a steady man, and nowadays a gal over thirty was lucky to have one, so Shimmer's mom and sisters all said. He always meant well, even if it didn't always turn out well. You had to take that into account.

Eve made a little squeak. Thinking of Gears had made Shimmer press too hard on Eve's lower back. Shimmer pretended this was what she had intended and that Eve was giving the right signal. In fact, she had sensed something particularly odd here as she made the first passes.

Shimmer moved across Eve's back, visualizing the bands of muscles, feeling the width, the thickness, the texture of each. She thought of her fingers as little cameras, finding knots—which were places where the muscles had pulled together tightly—coaxing them loose. Her sense of tension location was amazing, she knew. Eve had lots.

Despite her fat, Eve had hard muscles. Shimmer frowned. These were not aerobic-studio or dance-class muscles. Eve's back had tough bands that had supported heavy loads. (Shimmer wasn't sure how she knew the difference. She simply did.) The shoulders, wrapped to her

spine with a harness of flesh and blood, had hauled more than dainty shopping bags. Shimmer's fingers, alert as always, sent confused signals as they traveled down Eve's strong arms to small hands, which were edged by both polished nails and unmistakable calluses.

Returning to the spot where Eve had squeaked, Shimmer moved carefully. Her left hand, the more sensitive, cupped Eve's left side as if it were a baby's butt. Eve tensed briefly, relaxed, tensed again—not as much—then relaxed completely as Shimmer found the muscle contractions and made them release. In her head, Shimmer saw the stringy bands of flesh obey her, the blood flow more freely. At the same instant, she and Eve breathed a tiny “Ah-h-h.”

The right side was more difficult, although Shimmer didn't know why. Both hands were telling her not to go there, but she forced herself to rub around the right side of Eve's waist. Tension flooded Eve, pouring up Shimmer's fingers in a shock wave. It was all she could do to keep from throwing up her hands. Slowly, she rubbed a gentle fingertip circle on Eve's back, then moved down her right thigh. Eve relaxed.

Eve's thighs were hard, strong, without any fat. It was difficult to work on such muscles, taking all Shimmer's concentration. Both calves were rosy, tapering to small feet and ankles. The feet, like Eve's hands, were clean, polished, and callused.

To Shimmer's sensitive touch, the left ankle gave up secrets. The bones had been pinned together. Shimmer felt one, two, three metal screws beneath lumpy, barely healed scars. Eve made a small sound, something like pleasure, as her battered feet were rubbed gently.

When it was time for Eve to turn over, Shimmer held the sheet up. Normally, she'd make a big show of turning away, giving the customer privacy—as if she'd never looked at a naked body. This time, she couldn't help it: she looked at Eve as she turned. She almost gasped, then turned her head quickly.

Just below and to the right of Eve's navel was another wrinkled hole, larger, ugly, and crisscrossed with scars. Shimmer's brothers and uncles were hunters. She knew a bullet hole when she saw one. *Holy shit.*

Eve settled down under the sheet. Flustered, Shimmer found a gauzy square, applied a drop of fragrant oil, and laid it carefully over Eve's face. “Lavender oil,” she said, hoping Eve wouldn't say she puked at the smell. Eve smiled and Shimmer continued, relieved she did not have to risk being seen by those deep blue eyes.

The session continued in a blur, running a little long. Not that it mattered—not many people showed up on weekday mornings. By the end—the ritual of stepping out while Eve dressed, fetching her a glass of

water, telling her “rehydrate and relax,” walking her to the front— Shimmer had regained her composure. Eve detoured to the ladies’ room, and Shimmer heard a man’s voice talking to Jeannie, the receptionist. She couldn’t catch every word, just bits and pieces like:

“...ran back in at least three times...”

“...there was shooting all around...”

“...saved those kids...”

Eve came out, shook Shimmer’s hand, and said, “Thank you, Shimmer,” and “Good-bye,” in a soft voice. The man, dressed in a chauffeur’s uniform, smiled at Eve in a funny way, sort of proud and happy and respectful, like Eve was his favorite teacher and the President of the United States at the same time. He held the door for Eve, winked at Jeannie and Shimmer, then raced to a shiny car to get that door too.

Shimmer thought that he didn’t look much like a chauffeur, or Eve like a woman who had one, or the car like one a chauffeur would drive. Then again, maybe she didn’t know as much as she thought about such things. Maybe she didn’t know a lot about anything.

Jeannie babbled something about Eve and an orphanage in Africa, and how she was visiting the Shriners hospital in Watertown, and Eve being on television, and look, her chauffeur left your tip envelope.

As Jeannie continued to chatter, Shimmer took the envelope. She was thinking about how she would finally tell Gear they should do something about their relationship—break it off or get serious. Tonight they would begin that discussion. No tears, no yelling. She needed to get it resolved. Tomorrow, maybe she could look into volunteer work at that Shriners hospital, or at the VA—there were returning veterans, she had heard, in a lot of pain.

She could help them. Her fingers could help them. There were classes she could take too. Get out of this into something more serious. Somehow, it was time to Do Things.

She hardly heard Jeannie’s yelp as she folded the hundred-dollar tip into her pocket.

Dawn A. Fuller

Departures

“Warm enough?” he asked.

“Yes, thank you,” I replied.

The furious rain endlessly pelting the windshield was a welcome baptismal wash from the ugliness that hung in the air around us. I was trapped hopelessly - praying for the wet to reach me. The ride from Kent to Heathrow was just enough time to close my eyes and let worry, grief, and anger over the last six years wash over me like a running bath long forgotten on an upstairs floor. Granny was in the hospital back home, dying.

We met on a pen pal website. He lived in Kent – the Garden of England. I was his “California Girl.” He was a voracious reader, a prolific writer, and a brooding artist. Unending emails flew from shore to shore at top speed. I penned long lacy handwritten letters. He quoted yearning love poems by Pablo Neruda in his husky nighttime voice. We whispered secrets like kids in the still night playing telephone through discarded green bean cans with a spool of Granny’s bright orange knitting yarn connecting us for four years.

Granny begged and pleaded with me not to pretend that the phantom in England was real. It’s better to meet someone in real life, not on that crazy computer. He would never come. He was hiding something. Why wasn’t he married? Why didn’t he have kids? Why couldn’t he find a girl in his own country? He could be a criminal. If he did come, he could hurt me. I didn’t listen. I lay in bed at night with the thick covers pulled up to my chin, imagining us together. At the beach. At the movies. Mass. Family gatherings. Long walks. Late nights. Laughter. Houses. Children. Pets. Promises.

Granny was wrong. He was real. He came.

When he got off the plane at LAX with his old bald head and his shocking white goatee, my stomach flipped and swirled. He waved an excited fluttery five fingered hello with a broad smile plastered across his puffy wide face. The single red rose I held tightly with two hands in front of me dropped to my side. He wasn’t anything like I expected. I don’t know what I expected. Granny had warned me. It would be weird to see each other for the first time. Things would be much different in person. I had invested four years of my life. I loved who he was on the inside. His bloated geriatric figure moved towards me in warped slow motion, smiling greedily all the way. I was going to do this.

Even after days and weeks of sleeping next to the snoring stranger, I couldn't get my skin to stop pricking. Something wasn't right.

"I love passports. Let me see all of the places you have been," I said.

"My passport has nothing to do with you. None of your business. I haven't asked to see your driver's license!" he snapped.

He crept out of the room at night - sneakily checking the worn and cracked briefcase with the combination lock that sat permanently propped against his side of the bed. He turned the dial meticulously and cautiously in the dark quiet. He listened intently with a hooded robber's cocked head and a keen perked ear to the tick tick tick of the safe he was cracking. Opening. Closing. Opening. Closing. Repeatedly. Obsessively. Took things out. Put them back in again. He skulked around with the bulging briefcase of lies tucked safely under his long arm - a spy's treasured box of international secrets. He crawled back into bed steadily, purposefully, silently turning onto his side. He breathed heavily, poorly feigning uninterrupted all-night sleep.

He came a second time.

He came to apologize to my father for the unclimbable rocky mountain of black lies he meticulously built stone by stone on his first visit. He wanted to "make things right." He was going to show me that all of his "mistakes" were meaningless, not thought-out, or "in any way planned." I needed to "get over it." He loved me. He wanted to spend the rest of his life with me. Things were different this time. Each morning I would say, "When are we going to see my dad?"

"In a few days, in a few days," he said.

Granny. Hail Mary, full of grace. Our Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou amongst women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death.

"Traffic's a bloody mess," he hissed.

With my eyes shut tightly, I folded my arms rigidly across my chest, hugging myself.

Even after his feeble feigned attempt and remarkable failure to make things right on his second visit, I still couldn't leave him. I had to go to England. I had to make up my mind.

"Don't go," Granny said.

A true immigrant child of the Depression, Granny thought five dollars was a lot of money. Before I left, she silently led me by the hand into her bedroom. She kissed the top of my hand with her soft pale lips and gently folded a hundred dollars into my palm. The day I left for

England, an enormous black vulture alighted on the backyard fence, spread its monstrous wings to their fullest span, and trained its vacant black eyes on Granny.

I went.

I tried to talk to him about all the lies. I wanted to understand why. I tried to forgive. What else was he lying about? I was “crazy.” He wasn’t hiding anything else. He was who he said he was. He “resented” me. He resented being expected to “do things.” I was “self-righteous.” I expected “too much.”

Towering over me, he held the drinking glass high above my head - ready to smash my brains in. With an uncontrolled shake in his voice that I hadn’t noticed before, he roared that I “Shouldn’t leave things LYING around!” and that he “WOULDN’T TOLERATE IT!” It would take just one good shove from his massive calloused hand to topple me backwards. I would fly straight down the dilapidated basement stairs strewn with stringy gray cobwebs where I would lay in a broken, bloody heap. No one would ever find me.

Mom called. Granny was sick. The next call was, “Granny isn’t good. Get home.” When I spoke to Granny, her voice was already a whispery haunted shadow of her former self. I told her I loved her. Her reply seemed to echo as if standing small and alone, in the middle of a vast empty school auditorium during holiday break.

I had to get back and hold Granny’s crinkled spotty tissue paper hand in mine one more time. I stared hard at the bipolar rain pouring over us until my eyes burned as if in a staring match that wouldn’t end. I was flailing, helplessly drowning in a choppy black sea, as he cruelly held my head down under the water firmly with both hands - random bubbles escaping from my open mouth as the air in my lungs was replaced with salty, rancid water.

“I can’t see why we aren’t movin’. Bastards!” he growled through clenched teeth with droplets of poisonous spittle landing all over his sagging chin.

“Maybe there’s an accident,” I replied flatly with my eyes still shut.

Traffic stopped dead.

He put his hand on my knee. I wanted to slap his old, dried-up hand away. I wanted to extract his hand slowly, using a thin barrier of sterile plastic gloves to protect me and a sharp pointy metal tool. Extract it with masterful precision, like a masked dentist would a decaying blackened tooth - its bloody rotten roots dangling. I swallowed down my scream.

Granny was speeding through a never-ending tunnel as if expertly balanced on fancy blue and white tasseled 50s roller skates. At the end of the tunnel, she twirled around and around and stopped triumphantly with a final flourish. She waited under a great stone archway in her favorite smart pink suit. A fine net attached to her perfectly stiff pillbox hat hung over her face, revealing sparkling eyes behind it. Diamond-like shapes glittered around her, winking at me. A gentle knowing smile spread across her face. She looked deeply and longingly into my eyes - her gaze setting my body on fire. Her eyes, now my eyes. I jolted upright and grabbed his arm.

“She’s gone.”

Nancy Gerber

The Cruelty of Nice Girls

Nicole is in love with a boy in her English class. She doesn't ever speak to him, hoping her thoughts will somehow channel themselves into his brain. Their desks are next to each other, so close their shoulders almost touch, and she can't believe the electricity in her doesn't singe the hair off his corded arms. But Rob Silverman doesn't seem to know she exists.

The class is working on creative writing and Mrs. Stone tells everyone to open their journals. The journals are handed in on Fridays; each Monday Mrs. Stone returns them with a few lines written in the margins in turquoise marker, commenting on the week's work. Nicole writes poetry about unrequited love. She keeps hoping Mrs. Stone will say something about her pain but each week there's nothing, except, "Nice work, Nicole," written in Mrs. Stone's signature loopy script. Mrs. Stone wears bright, low cut polyester dresses that cling to her breasts and hips. Nicole's friend Sarah, who sits three rows down, insists Mrs. Stone could care less about the girls in class and wears tight clothes so all the boys will have the hots for her.

When class is over Nicole waits for Sarah.

"Well?" Sarah asks.

Nicole sighs. "Same. Nothing."

Sarah shakes her head. "I don't believe in telepathy. You're going to have to say something or this silence will go on forever."

"You don't understand. I'm in love but obviously I can't tell him. What should I say? 'Can I borrow a pen?' If he doesn't have any feelings for me, if he just sees me as someone to sit next to in English, what's the point of making small talk?"

"I don't see anything wrong with small talk. One thing leads to another, and before you know it he'll be looking for you at your locker or after school. Hey, do you want to go to Friendly's this afternoon?"

"I can't. I have Model U.N.," Nicole says.

Sarah laughs. "Good luck with that."

Nicole is president of Mountain Ridge High's Model United Nations club. Her presidency is a source of amusement for her and Sarah. They both know she has this position just to please her mother, who has been pushing for her daughter to attend an Ivy League university since Nicole was in the seventh grade. Mountain Ridge High has 400 students and Model U.N. is the smallest club in the school, with six members: five

skinny boys in plaid shirts and one girl, Nicole. Nicole's election was almost unanimous. Only Jake, the club's vice president, voted against her.

Today the club is deciding which country to represent at the spring regional convention in Hartford. The order of choice is determined by lottery, and Mountain Ridge has received first pick. The boys are jittery with excitement. They want to pick a world powerhouse like the U.S. or Russia, maybe Germany. Nicole suggests the Ivory Coast.

"You're joking, right? Jake says.

"No, I'm serious. I think it would be a challenge to represent a small country no one knows much about," Nicole says. "It would give us a chance to do some research."

What she doesn't say is that if their group chooses the U.S., or any other nation represented on the Security Council, as club president she is required to make a speech. The thought makes her sick to her stomach. She does not have enough knowledge about government, economics, or world affairs to do a credible job. She doesn't want to stand up in front of some of the smartest, most informed students in the Northeast and make a fool of herself. She's only in this club because it looks good on college applications and because the boys are mostly nice. One of them, Paul, has a crush on her.

Per club rules they put the matter to a vote. Jake and his buddy Nathan opt for the U.S. The other two boys, led by Paul, vote for Ivory Coast. Nicole's suggestion carries the day.

"This is an embarrassment," Jake says in disgust.

That night Paul calls Nicole on the phone. "Thanks for supporting my idea," she says. "I know it's a bit off the beaten path."

Paul laughs. "We've probably just made Model U.N. history."

"Well, I think it's important to think about the developing world. They need a voice, too," says Nicole.

"I agree," says Paul. "Kudos to you for being brave enough to go against the current."

The next day in English Nicole sits silently next to Rob, her body throbbing. She cannot bring herself to even ask him a question. His gaze is directed at the front of the room. She wonders if Sarah is right after all, that Mrs. Stone is the main attraction.

After class Paul finds her at her locker. Also a junior, he's not in Honors English, which mystifies her. He's certainly intelligent and one of the most articulate people she knows. He's not Jewish, though, and maybe no one at home is *hocking* him about college. Her parents

disapprove of her dating non-Jewish boys but she doesn't think of Paul as someone to date; she's not really attracted to him. They are friends, though she can tell Paul has feelings for her by the warmth in his voice and the way he looks at her. "Let me know if you want to meet in the library during free period to start researching," he says.

That night Paul calls again.

Nicole's mother picks up the phone in the kitchen and Nicole listens to her voice, friendly and interested. "Nicole!" her mother calls after a few minutes. "Telephone!"

Later Nicole asks her mother what she and Paul were talking about. "He was telling me how much he's looking forward to the convention," her mother says. "He sounds like such a nice young man. Why don't you invite him over? I'd like to meet him."

Nicole rolls her eyes. Her mother is so clueless. Why would she invite a boy she doesn't want to date to her house? "He's not Jewish," she says.

"That doesn't mean you can't be friends," her mother says.

Nicole doesn't tell her mother that lately she's been edgy and uncomfortable around Paul. He behaves now as though they are more than casual friends, as though they are allies. His intensity frightens her, as does his wiriness and piercing eyes. There's a line of blond, fuzzy hair above Paul's upper lip that disturbs her. He reminds her of a hybrid creature, maybe a centaur.

In the end Nicole and Paul don't do any research together. Nicole has the feeling Paul already has plenty of information to speak intelligently in committee. He's a serious student of current events and probably has been reading up on Africa since freshman year. She's not worried about him; it's her performance that concerns her. She'll have to do what she did last year, remain silent, even though last year no one noticed or cared because she was just a sophomore. This year she's president and her silence will seem odd. She's expected to act with authority, to represent her school so that it's visible. Luckily she doesn't have to worry about impressing her club's advisor, Mr. Williams, the chemistry teacher. He's a temporary replacement for Mr. Martin, their history teacher, who's recovering from surgery. She imagines Mr. Williams will install himself in the hotel bar on arrival and not reappear until it's time to go home. She's heard he likes to drink.

The convention is quiet and meetings go smoothly. No one pays much attention to the Ivory Coast; no one is very interested in the nation's politics or seems to know what they are. Nicole has a few pangs of envy when she sees other students proudly wearing badges that say

Japan or France or United States, but these moments pass quickly when she thinks about the long speech she would have had to make had their club represented a First World country. The five boys are enjoying the freedom of being away from home; she suspects a few of them are skipping meetings to drink beer in the empty stairwells. The only person who seems unhappy at first is Jake, who sneers at her whenever they pass each other in the corridors. Who cares? Nicole thinks. He'll be president next year and then he can do what he wants.

When the final evening's banquet is over, Nicole and the other club members gather on a landing in the stairwell. A few of the boys have managed to snag some six-packs of beer along with a few bottles of gin. The mood is festive; everyone is relieved of the pressure of having to be so serious and grown-up. Even Jake is cheerful. One of the senior advisors commended him on his familiarity with African politics and invited him to chair the Security and Disarmament committee at next year's convention.

Paul raises his Budweiser. "To the Ivory Coast," he says. He hands Nicole a beer. Nicole takes a small sip; the stuff is bitter, sour and foul tasting, and she puts the bottle down.

"To a better pick next year," says Jake.

"Don't be a jerk," Paul says. "You've done well here." Jake has told anyone who will listen that he's been chosen to chair a major committee.

"Who knows what number we'll get in next year's lottery," Jake says. "This was our big chance. We missed it." He glares at Nicole.

"Oh stop it already," Paul says. "It's our last night. Let's have fun."

The boys drink and drink. Nicole leans her back against a concrete wall and pretends she's alone with Rob. She imagines his strong arm around her shoulder. They wouldn't talk; anything that needed to be said would be communicated through hands and lips. She's jolted out of her reverie when she feels Paul's shoulder as he moves next to her.

"Hi," he says. The others are leaving, gathering up the liquor and taking the party to Nathan's room. They've hardly seen their advisor and agree it's safe to assume that on their last night he won't come looking for them.

"Hi." Nicole smiles. She knows what's happening. Paul must have told the others he wanted to be alone with her.

"Are you happy it's over?" he asks. That's one thing she'll give him: for a guy he's pretty intuitive.

“Yeah, I guess. I mean it’s fun to be away and some of the meetings are interesting but after a while I’ve had enough.”

“I know what you mean,” Paul says. “Sometimes I feel like all people want to do is show off to impress the advisors.”

“Like Jake,” Nicole says.

“Like Jake.”

Paul slides his arm behind Nicole’s back. Uh oh, Nicole thinks. He’s so close she can smell the alcohol on his breath, the sourness of ale mixed with a sweetness that seems to seep through his skin. Maybe it’s the gin, she thinks. I hope he doesn’t try to kiss me. Nicole has not kissed a boy since she played Spin-the-Bottle in seventh grade.

And yet she’s quivering. Maybe I want him to kiss me, she thinks. As her thoughts bounce back and forth Paul leans over and parts her lips with his mouth. His thick tongue wraps itself around hers. Then, before she knows what is happening, he withdraws, leans down, and vomits into her lap.

“Oh my god!” Nicole hears herself shrieking. “What have you done!” She shoots up onto her feet and watches as a puddle of fluids mixed with undigested food slides to the floor.

“Nicole!” Paul is almost crying. “Please. Please forgive me.”

“Don’t touch me,” Nicole screams. “This is disgusting.” She takes some tissues from her purse and tries to blot up the mess on her pants.

“Wait. Let me go inside and get a towel,” Paul says.

“Leave me alone! Stay away from me!” Sobbing and crying, Nicole clutches her waist and runs out the door. Behind her she hears Paul calling her name and saying he’s sorry.

The next morning on the ride home, Nicole refuses to talk to Paul. When she sees him try to catch her eye, his face pale and drawn, she turns away. No, she thinks. I will not talk to him. I will never forgive him for treating me as though I was a piece of garbage.

Nicole decides she will tell no one about what happened but in the end she tells Sarah.

“Well, I admit it’s pretty gross,” Sarah says. “It was an accident, though. He was drunk. I think you should accept his apology.”

“That’s easy for you to say. How would you feel?”

“I wouldn’t like it,” Sarah says. “But he’s a nice guy. I can see he feels terrible about it. You should let it go.”

But Nicole never talks to Paul again.

Twelve years later, as Nicole is getting ready to go to work, she picks up the *The New York Times* and sees Paul's name. He works in the press office at Amnesty International and is quoted about his organization's investigation into human rights abuses at Guantanamo. She looks him up on the Internet and sees he is married to a Pakistani woman who is seeking asylum in the U.S. but has not received it. She sits down at the kitchen table and sends Paul an email:

Dear Paul,

Many years have passed since I treated you so shabbily. I've thought of you often and wonder if you can forgive a callow girl who regrets the way she acted.

Sincerely,

Nicole

She checks her email daily, but Paul never replies.

Four Sisters

Welcoming the contrasting sweet and bitter of her morning coffee, Ana sipped delicately at it, savoring the small sin she was committing. Four small sips was all she allowed herself, four small, decaffeinated sips wouldn't hurt anything. Or anyone. She stood over the sink, turning quickly to look at the soft roundness of her baby's head, the soft rattling of her colorful toy. "Four and a half sips never hurt anyone," she said, taking one more tiny gulp at the beautiful, delicious heat. Deliberately, almost sadistically, she poured the coffee down the drain with a twist of her pretty wrist.

"Tulia, Tulita," she purred. "Tulita, mi Tulia." At the familiar sound the baby's wide eyes looked up at her, her little faced framed with her father's golden curls. A small smile pulled at one side of her mouth, as if not sure if her mother meant to be funny. "Let's go upstairs," Ana bent to pick her up, a mass of dark hair suddenly embracing her daughter, curtaining her off from the rest of the world as she so trustingly reached for her mother. "You want to go upstairs with Mommy, don't you?" she asked, carrying her across the living room to the bottom of the stairs. "Ready?" she said, widening her eyes with excitement. "A boom, boom, boom," she chanted, as they bounced up the stairs. "A boom, boom, boom," she sang with even more enthusiasm, rewarded by the merriness of her daughter's round eyes and bright laugh. "And one more, and here we are!" she exclaimed as if they had just reached the peak of Mt. Everest. For Tulita their home stairs were Mt. Everest, and Ana was going to teach her daughter to celebrate even the smallest achievement when it felt like the biggest.

"Tienes hambre, mi amorcito?" she asked. "Are you hungry? You must be hungry." The silk of Ana's voice – almost a song to her daughter's fresh ears – caught in the most beautiful way on the soft English H, a hint that this hadn't always been her home. She opened the door carefully to the subtle cheer of periwinkle walls. Tulita's room glowed with the soft inviting color, the crib a pure white with blue sheets. A little ocean of printed fish to keep Tulia company at night.

“Here I go, my love, on the rocking—” she paused, listening to the echo of that word. “Rocking,” she repeated. “Rocking chair,” she said, filling the room with too many R’s. Tulita’s eyes widened and Ana mimicked her daughter’s surprise with her own large eyes. “You won’t tease Mommy like Daddy will you, cariño?” She shifted her daughter in her arms, and Tulita began to search eagerly with the experience of her four months for her mother’s milk. “Allí tienes,” Ana said, pulling down to expose the dark contrast of her nipple against the light caramel of her skin. “There you go...” She felt the familiar pull of her baby’s small mouth and smoothed one blond curl down on her pretty head. “No, no. You won’t tease like Daddy. You will love to hear Mommy say rock—rocking—” she frowned in her attempt to shake out and straighten the word, but it was like folding a sheet in a windstorm. “Qué ojos más lindos tienes,” she purred, catching her daughter’s eyes with hers.

“Beautiful, beautiful eyes,” she said, searching in the little marble swirls of deep blue, hazel and brown for a hint of the color they would become. “Maybe you will have blue eyes like Daddy...” She felt the push of the ground against the ball of her right foot and began to gently rock back and forth. In this way, she created their own little boat for two, bouncing against the waves. “You could, yes, you could. Mommy’s mommy, your abuela, had blue eyes.” She felt another familiar pull, this time on her neck. The tiny hand had found the delicate golden T she always wore. “You knew I was talking about abuela, didn’t you,” she said, running her pretty finger down her baby’s nose. “You are so smart. This was abuela’s necklace.” She shifted her arm, lifting Tulita up towards her. “T for Tulia. Just like you, Tulita.” Back and forth. Back and forth. She lulled her baby on their own woman-made waves.

“Today you are four months old,” Ana said after a silence. “Four months. So fast, chiquilla, so fast.” She looked back down at the pretty head. “Four is a special number for the women of our family,” she said, caressing the whole of her daughter’s hand with the width of two of her fingers. A tiny hand, which still clasped the cross of her own mother’s name. “We came here when I was 14 and abuela was 34.” Her voice had lost its loving, motherly quality and to get it back she said, “Yes, we did. Yes, we did,” in the sing-song of so many parents, shaking her head and smiling at her daughter. Tulita opened her mouth in a reflective smile

and then closed it firmly again, determined not to waste a drop of her mother's gift. "Four months. With four months I will tell our secret," Ana murmured, the lulling quality of the little boat beginning to make her feel sleepy.

"Abuela met a man when Mommy was 9, because Mommy never knew her Papi." She again ran her fingers over her daughter's smooth skin. "I found you a good Daddy. A daddy who loves Mommy." She met the wall's gaze before continuing. "Mommy looked and looked to find you the best daddy in the world." Ana blinked, and her hair fell forward into her face. She shoved it back, jostling her daughter, whose small mouth lost its prize. The tiny eyes closed and she let out a wail. "No, no, cariño. It's ok," she hushed and lulled with the sweetness of her voice, guiding the small head gently back and soothingly stroking the pretty curls. "This man was nice to Mommy until Mommy was 10." She paused to close her eyes and reopened them. "For four years he was mean to Mommy, but Mommy didn't want to make abuela sad." The deep brown of her eyes focusing on where the pink of her baby's mouth, so small and pretty, met her own dark skin. "Abuela had been sad before and Mommy didn't want her to be sad again."

Ana watched as Tulita's eyes grew heavy, as if with the weight of her perfectly curved lashes, and she blinked slowly. "For four years Mommy was quiet, cariño. Four years." She let the words settle as she rested her head back against the wood of the rocking chair. "He had promised not to hurt, tía. Your auntie was so little," Ana shook her head. "He promised." She let out a sigh, a small breeze sweeping across her daughter's face, whose eyes opened to look at her. "He lied, little one. He lied." She brought her finger up to her mother's T and ran her finger down its cold, smooth surface. "So I told. When I was 14. I told." The many emotions that had crossed her own mother's face spread across hers now and Tulita's keen eyes followed them, before closing again under the heaviness of sleep. "Abuela packed up our life in four suitcases." Ana opened her eyes and lifted her head from the comfort of the wood to look again into her daughter's face. "Three big, big suitcases and one small one." Tulita's mouth, still clasped on her mother's breast, began to loosen as sleep took her.

“She burned the rest while he was sleeping,” Ana pressed a little harder against the floor and a larger wave rocked them. “We left la isla and Mommy, tía and abuela, lived with abuela’s sister,” she said, standing. “Two pairs of sisters is four, amorcito,” she said, moving her hips from side to side to mimic the rocking of the chair and soothe her baby back to sleep. When she was sure sleep was with her, Ana lifted her over the side of the crib and gently placed her on the blue sea of fish. Tulita opened and closed the perfection of her tiny mouth, and Ana watched her eyes move back and forth before resting on some creature in Dream World. Ana bent and kissed the soft forehead. “Soon,” she whispered. “You will have a sister.” She took a last look at the sleep on Tulia’s face and with slow, small steps moved to the door. “For that’s the way in our family.” Ana eased the door closed, waiting for the click of the latch before, whispering, “We never leave our women alone.”

Pizza

“Did you have fun?” Leah asked from the couch. She was three-fourths done with her bag of chocolate covered potato chips and four-fourths done with the crappy day that had just transpired, “was the third date with Sara as good as the first and second?”

“I guess you could say that,” Derrick hung his musky leather jacket on its hook and plopped down next to his teenaged daughter, “Anything good on tonight?”

“That Nicholas Sparks movie about the hot guy and hot girl just ended,” Leah popped another chip into her mouth.

“You could have just said no,” Derrick made a grab for the remote but he wasn’t fast enough, “come on, I just want to watch something with a little action.”

“Didn’t you already get enough of that tonight?” Leah stood and threw the remote at her father, hitting him in the chest.

“Leah. Leah!” He called after her, but she was already on the stairs. Derrick flipped from channel to channel. Even if there had been anything mildly entertaining on it wouldn’t have mattered, his mind was elsewhere. Women. Why did they have to be so confusing? Leah was the one who told him to start dating again. Why wasn’t she happy that he was following orders?

Derrick tapped gently as he creaked open the purple door and peaked his head through.

“Is it safe for me to enter?” He got no response, but decided to chance it, “I just wanted to let you know I survived the nearly fatal remote control attack.”

Nothing. Not a word. Leah glared into her latest read. It was one of those tacky YA novels that everyone cringes at, the kind where the girl is some wallowing waif and yet she somehow manages to snag the most popular boy in school. She didn’t care though, so what if her AP English peers didn’t approve of her recreational reading?

“How’s the book?” Derrick asked, taking a seat on the edge of the bed. There were clothes littering every inch of space in the room. He really should be more serious about chores.

“Leah?” Derrick ran a calloused hand over his three day beard growth, “I’m not leaving here until you talk to me.”

“The book is fine,” Leah snapped the teen romance shut, “now if you’d be so kind as to excuse me. I’m feeling exhausted.”

“What have I done now?” He was exasperated, “I thought you wanted me to go out. ‘Meet people,’ you said. You told me you liked Sara.”

Leah was struggling to avoid her dad’s persistent quest for eye contact. She couldn’t stand to look at him. She flopped down and pulled the blankets up to her double chin.

“You’re not really tired. I see the computer light on in your room all hours of the night. You won’t be asleep for hours... You know I hate it when you’re mad at me. Just tell me what I did? Or was it something else? Did something happen today at school? Was it that Jenna because I swear, if she said anything – ”

“Why do you buy so much pizza?”

Derrick was a bit taken back by the question. He hadn’t ever pondered his pizza consumption rate.

“It’s cheap? Easy? I don’t know. I thought you liked pizza.”

“I love pizza,” Leah whispered. She didn’t want to speak too loud; she didn’t trust her voice.

“You’re not making any sense hon, is this one of those girl things I don’t understand? Are you on your– “

“Dad, stop,” Leah couldn’t handle her emotions and her dad’s awkwardness at the same time. It was one or the other.

“Ok,” Derrick paused and tried to think of possible solutions, “I could get rotisserie chicken. Would that be better?”

“Is that what Sara eats? Rotisserie chicken?” Leah sat up and bore holes into her father with her laser eyes, “No wait, she probably gets a salad with no dressing.”

“So this *is* about Sara,” Derrick sighed, “Look, I know this is hard for you but Sara is a very nice woman. She wants you to come next time we go out.”

“Nice? She’s nice? Is that what got your attention? Her kind heart?” Leah couldn’t sit still. Anger was banging around inside of her, it fueled her as she pushed off the bed and stood.

Derrick was dumbfounded. He stared up at his daughter. His mouth was open but no words were falling out.

“Well?” Leah demanded. She crossed her arms and waited for an explanation.

“What do you want me to say?” Derrick countered; he couldn’t afford another wrong step.

“I want you to tell me the truth! I am so SICK of your lies,” Leah wasn’t even going to try to stop the fat tears rolling down her mound shaped cheeks, “You tell me I’m beautiful. You say the girls at school

are just heartless B words. You used to joke about all the boys you'd have to scare off when I made it to high school. Look around! There aren't any boys. There's just me and my fat."

"Honey," Derrick didn't know what to say.

"Don't lie to me anymore. Just say it. Say I'm fat," she had used up her anger reserve, now there was only sadness in her voice.

"Leah, baby, you're not- "

"SAY IT!" Ok maybe there was a little anger left.

"I love you, and you are the most beautiful girl in the world," Derrick was standing now too. He wanted to wrap his arms around his little girl and tell her everything was going to be ok, just like he used to.

"Mom was the most beautiful girl in the world," Leah turned and stared at the blackness beyond her bedroom window.

Derrick took a risk and laid a hand on the pajama-covered shoulder before him. The corner of his lips turned up a bit when his hand wasn't shaken off.

"I just always thought that I'd be beautiful when I grew up. Like mom."

"You have her eyes," Derrick offered. He soon regretted those words.

Leah shrugged off the hand on her shoulder and turned to face her father, "You realize that's a compliment fat people get all the time. Eye's can't be fat, so it's a safe compliment."

"Obviously wasn't safe for me," Derrick mumbled. He couldn't catch a break tonight. Father-daughter bonding would just have to be postponed, "Look, I love you. I don't care what anyone else says, you're beautiful. You are my beautiful daughter."

Derrick made a move to plant a kiss on his daughter's forehead, but she stepped out of the way.

"Good night," Derrick made it to the doorway before Leah spoke up.

"What if Sara weighed two hundred and thirty six pounds? Would you have talked to her then? Would you have asked her out?"

"I said good night Leah," Derrick said refusing to turn around and engage.

"Answer me!" Leah begged, "please."

"I don't know," he said.

He lied.

Amber Moore

Marrow and Marriage and Matt

“I planned my funeral and my wedding in the same year. I got to go to my wedding.”

Nobody knew how to follow that. Her skin looked almost wet; it wasn't oily, or dewy, just over moisturized maybe, with a brand like Vichy or Lancombe. It could be botoxed, but do cancer survivors do that? I think her name is Rochelle or some other nice name like Andrea or Lillian. Her husband asked her out when she was bald and very sick, planning freesia flowers for her memorial and choosing Simon and Garfunkel songs to be played while people nibble on tasteless cucumber sandwiches and sniffle. He took her for 'killer' Bolognese.

When my aunt beat leukemia she stopped brushing her hair when it grew back curly and dark, so unlike how it was before. She attempted dreads, but they looked a little limp as they swayed in front of her eyes. Vanity disappears after arsenic treatments, bone marrow transplants.

I'm here learning about trauma memoir writing. There are six other women who want to learn about how to write their cancer, bulimia, and divorce stories, all varying degrees of sad, except for Rochelle or Andrea or Lillian who has a happy ending with her RN husband.

After a few beats, the woman to my left clears her throat. “When my husband told me he was leaving me for a ‘Jessica,’ I started journaling again. I'd sit in our bed on the too-firm mattress he insisted on, in the middle now, and cry and write, with Netflix on in the background, drinking bottles of pinot. Then I found out he had fucked her there so I started sleeping on the couch. I thought I had a story; I'd never been more upset. But I don't think I have anything now. No one gives a shit about my divorce - everyone does it. It's basically a rite of passage. I guess I'm here to see what's salvageable or should I bother? It's a Lifetime Original Movie writing itself, practically,” she laughs, pulling on the peppermint tea string hanging from her travel mug.

Our teacher, who ghostwrote a book about someone who survived a childhood of incest, nodded empathically that yes, she should write her story. I blink when I realize that she and everyone around the table are looking at me.

“Sorry - what?”

She smiles softly and spins her pen on her yellow pad. “Why are you here today?” It's my turn.

“I want to write about being assaulted in university. He was a friend. It happened in my boyfriend’s bed while he was still downstairs partying. I was trashed. Matt- that was his name, didn’t get far, but it was scary and it bothered me for a long time. But like you,” I pause to motion to the woman to my left, “I don’t think my story is special. This kind of thing happens to most of us. It’s sort of another rite of passage, I guess. No one gives a shit.” I offer a short snort of a laugh and look around at their faces, twisting in sympathy and discomfort. This is the first time I’ve told anyone aside from my husband. The teacher shakes her head again.

“Of course this is important. Universal experiences are sometimes the best stories to tell because they help us connect. What we need to remember is to evoke rather than express catharsis. Offer your reader something that will nourish them, and remember *that* can undercut earnestness.” She smiles encouragingly at me again and I find this advice very encouraging. I have an urge to read everything she’s ever written including the incest memoir she wrote for someone who really couldn’t write.

Twenty minutes and two shares later, we’re set loose to grab lunch for an hour. The divorcee next to me asks if I want to get stuffed French toast down the street so we tie our pashminas on and make our way. We order mimosas and use so much syrup that we need to ask for another container, laughing about different stories of moving to Calgary with similarly sticky lips and complaints about slow drivers here.

Heading back for the remaining two hours of the workshop, she offers, “I just want to feel like I belong somewhere, you know? I can’t even write well. I love adverbs too much. Anyway, I’m sorry you were raped.”

“Thanks. It wasn’t rape, exactly. He just got his fingers in for a bit; does that even count? See, my story’s fucked too. I can’t write either.”

We return, knowing our stories have nourished the other.

Katie J Schwartz

Hush the Baby

No one had directly told you to watch the baby. But you are the oldest, and a girl to boot, so naturally the task falls to you when your mother isn't home, whether Daddy is in the house or not. You know that.

It wasn't that you didn't hear the baby crying, and you weren't ignoring the baby—you would never do that. But Grandma says that sometimes it's good to let babies cry, to let them “stretch their lungs,” she says. And Grandma is definitely the wisest person you know. You haven't seen her since the baby was only a few days old, around Eastertime, but Thanksgiving is coming, and Mama can usually convince Daddy to make the long car trip for the big holidays. You can't wait to show her how good you've been taking care of your brother and sister.

So you sit there, on the living room floor, waiting for the baby's lungs to fully stretch themselves out. Your little brother needs to have good lungs, strong ones. He was born early, too early, and Mama is always worrying about his heart, his lungs, his everything. You worry too, sometimes louder than she does. Your little brother needs his voice.

Listening to his cries is unsettling, but you know that it's safe right now. Daddy is outside fixing things, getting the house ready for winter; he won't hear the baby. You hope.

The wailing grows a bit louder. Almost there.

A sweet, oily chemical scent hits your nostrils, just as a pair of scuffed, steel-toed work boots appears in front of you on the carpet.

Your stomach clenches. When did the door open? The squeaking hinge—the one that you usually depend on—didn't alert you. Your eyes follow the work boots up, to dirty jeans, to a faded t-shirt, to Daddy's face. It's beginning to flush red.

He digs the toe of his boot into the side of your leg, not gently. “What's that I hear, Mouse?”

Your heart shudders. Your limbs shake. You're caught. Trapped.

His chapped lips curl, half smile and half sneer. “Is that the baby crying that I hear, Mouse?”

Your head screams *move!* but your body won't cooperate. His knees bend; he leans down, face looming close to yours, and your body snaps to attention. You scramble, gangly limbs catching on themselves, bringing you down before you can even fully rise. His laugh is rough and derisive, more a snarl than anything else.

“What did I tell you about the baby, Mouse? He's your responsibility—”

You stumble up the stairs two at a time, half-running, half-crawling. He follows, beginning to spew words that you'd surely be punished for repeating.

“You think you don't have to listen to me, Rat? Little bitch. Stupid fuckin piece of vermin—”

You dart past your little sister's room. Her dolls lie abandoned on the floor, and her dirty bare feet poke out from under the bed. In spite of your best efforts, she's not very good at hiding yet.

The crib is in the far corner of the baby's room. Standing on your tippy-toes, you can reach the baby just enough to lift him out. He fusses, squirming, his face red and tear-streaked. From the doorway, Daddy continues to scream.

His diaper doesn't smell dirty, but you poke two fingers in, wiggle them around. He's wet. You carry him to the changing table.

“Dumb bitch, fuckin little rat, tryin to get away with something, huh—”

It's a quick change; old diaper goes into the pail, two wipes, fresh diaper. You deftly slide the pins through the cloth—you don't really need to use your fingers to protect his tender skin, but you do it anyway.

Just in case.

“Lazy—sneaky—you know what your job is, stupid—”

The baby continues to cry at the noise. You lean down, gently press a kiss to his forehead. He doesn't stop fussing. He doesn't need a bottle; he just ate before his nap. So you pick him up, carefully, one arm under his bottom and one across his back, clutching him to your heart.

Back held straight as a fence post, you take the stairs slowly, one at a time. It didn't matter if you fell before, but you refuse to trip while you hold the baby. He's so much more important.

Daddy follows you back downstairs. Insults and obscenities continue to pelt the back of your neck, sticking and clotting thickly.

You settle into the wide, threadbare rocker in the living room. Your little brother squirms, cries into the crook of your neck. The noise is suffocating—his plaintive wails in your left ear; Daddy's angry words in your right.

All you can think to do is hush the baby.

*Lullaby and goodnight
Dear baby sleep tight
I'll protect you from harm*

Til you wake in my arms

“Sneaky little bitch, well you'll learn, stupid, you'll learn—”

When your little brother came home from the hospital, from his stay in the NICU, you and your sister were so excited to dress him in your doll's clothes. He was tiny enough to fit in them. You both delighted in putting him into the tiny lace bonnets and gingham dresses, some store-bought and some made by Grandma. He had seemed to like it too, gurgling happily and drooling onto the frilly pinks and eyelet bibs. Unfortunately, all you owned were girl dolls, and when Daddy found out about the game, he quickly put an end to it.

*Bye Baby Bunting
Sissy's gone a-hunting
To fetch a little rabbit skin
To wrap her Baby Bunting in*

“Lazy little bitch, can't even trust you with a simple task—”

The first time you made your little brother a bottle all by yourself, you forgot to test the milk on your wrist first. It was too hot, and you couldn't hush his crying quickly enough. The bruises lasted for weeks; Mama made you wear long sleeves to school, even though it was May and already stiflingly hot. You still don't test the milk on your wrist, but your own tongue. It's much easier to be certain that way.

A small part of you wonders if Daddy was this protective when you were a baby. You can't remember a time when he didn't raise his voice and punish with his hands, but it gets worse and worse, the older you get. Maybe if you weren't so dumb, then he wouldn't get so angry, but you aren't sure what you can do about it. Even trying your best, it's usually not what he wants. Still, you have to be learning something, and you suppose that all of this practice will make you a very good mother someday.

*When the bough breaks
The cradle will fall
And down will come baby
Cradle and all*

“Lazy rat, you're just like your mother, you dumb slut, just like her—”

Your music teacher says that you have a beautiful singing voice. Last Christmas, she gave you a solo in the school pageant—the only fourth grader who got one. You sang “Silent Night” so sweetly, she said afterward, that God's angels must have wept at hearing it. Grandma says that sweet voices are best used for lullabies and Church. You figure that Christmas pageants are pretty close to Church, but you still prefer lullabies. Sometimes Church songs are loud and forceful, and you like music to be soft and gentle. So many things are loud. Lullabies aren't.

Mama says that you're best at hushing the baby, so she lets you do it, more often than not. You're best at feeding and bathing him, too. “Much better than I am,” she says. “You have a natural talent.” When she says that it makes you so happy that your chest hurts. She didn't let you help so much when your little sister was a baby. Of course, you were younger then. You couldn't have reached her in the crib, or carried her around so well.

*Hush little baby
Don't say a word
Sissy's gonna buy you a mockingbird
And if that mockingbird don't sing*

“Stupid little—what kina fuckin idiot ignores a crying a baby—”

Your eyes can't challenge him, but at the questioning of Grandma's methods, your voice finds a shred of courage. “Grandma says that babies need to stretch their lungs.”

It's barely more than a squeak, but your minor rebellion is greeted with a jeering laugh.

“That old bitch? She's even worse than your mother. Ignorant busybody cunt—”

You press your lips shut tight.

His mottled purple face appears directly in front of yours, eyes wild and unfocused. You push your head as far back as the seat cushion will allow. Foul breath and spittle hit your face as he screams one more time.

“Don't you ever sneak out on your responsibilities again, lazy bitch. DO. YOU. UNDERSTAND.”

Each word is punctuated by his knuckles rapping, bouncing off of your skull, three times, hard. You move your hand to cover the baby's head.

“I said *do you understand.*”

You nod, rubbing the baby's back soothingly. He's still crying, but slightly softer now, snuffling little sobs.

Daddy leaves the room.

The breath that you didn't know you were holding leaves with him.

It's a brief reprieve. You'll have to make supper soon, unless Mama comes home on time tonight. Your teeth tear at the already shredded skin of your lower lip as you try to remember what foods are in the kitchen. There's noodles and jarred spaghetti sauce.

Your head throbs and smarts, but you know that this will fade quickly. You wonder if your head bruises like the rest of your body—if it does, your hair will hide it for you.

Your brother's crying slows and eventually ceases. Your shoulders sag with relief, and you carefully maneuver him, switching his fragile body around so that his head is supported by the crook of your arm. He turns slightly, searching for breasts that you don't have yet.

You hear a floorboard creak behind you. Your little sister sidles up to the side of the rocker.

"Is Daddy gone, Mouse?" she whispers. Her eyes are large and red-rimmed.

"Yes." You whisper too, your voice hoarse from lullabies. You scooch to the far side of the big chair, and your little sister clambers up beside you. She rests her head against your arm and pops her thumb into her mouth.

"You need a bath tonight," you say quietly.

Her nose wrinkles. "Don't wanna bath." Except she says it around her thumb, so it sounds more like, "Own unna ath."

Your lips curve faintly. "Too bad, squirt. Your feet are dirty. They probably stink."

"Do not."

"Betcha they do."

She doesn't respond; her eyes are beginning to droop. You take one arm off the baby to awkwardly angle it to the side and smooth her unkempt hair from her face.

The chair moves back and forth, back and forth. You struggle to keep your eyes open too. The baby was so fussy last night, and Mama worked late.

You wonder when Mama will be home tonight. It was hard to be sure when she came home last night, but you know she did arrive eventually. She's home when you can hear Daddy's voice, loud and accusatory, talking about how she must have found some faggot pencil pusher at the office.

She comes home later and later every night. You wonder if maybe she did find some faggot pencil pusher, whatever that is. You won't let

yourself wonder it openly, but somewhere in the back of your mind, a small voice wonders if one night she might not come home at all. She doesn't love you or Daddy anymore, and you worry that she might not love your little brother and sister anymore either.

You wish that you could talk to Grandma. Thanksgiving is still so far away. Her number is by the phone, but Daddy never leaves for long enough to make a call. You aren't really sure what she could even do about Mama and Daddy, anyway.

When it's summer again, you're going to take your brother and sister outside every day. You can put your brother in a basket and sit under a tree with him, like the gentle heroines in your storybooks do. Your little sister can play in the grass, and you can fill your lungs with clean, fresh air. Bright sunlight will warm all three of you, just you three.

Your sister's thumb hangs loosely in her slightly open mouth as she succumbs to a nap. Your brother is asleep now too, tiny eyelashes casting faint shadows across his delicate cheeks. You continue to rock back and forth, back and forth. A soft lullaby slides from your lips.

*Owlet is waiting
But mother shan't come
Young Owlet cries softly
What could she have done
Winter creeps nearer
Cold hushes the glen
And what will poor Owlet do then?
What will poor Owlet do then?*

Barbara Siman

The Favor

Soft rock music floats through the rooms of the bar. The two men sit at one of the four tables provided for those who wish to be private. Ferd sits across from Doug. He leans back in his chair and studies Doug. “You’re lookin’ good. You workin’ out?”

“Not lately.”

Doug looks back at Ferd. “You look – I don’t know - more mature? But you still got all your hair!”

Doug runs his fingers through his thinning brown hair and sips his drink.

Ferd laughs. “I’m thirty three years old. Give me a break, I hope to keep it for a while!” He pushes his glasses up onto his head. “How’s this?” He smiles, and poses.

Doug smiles back. “Better. Like yourself.”

“Like when we were adolescents, right?” Ferd raises his eyebrows.

“Right.” Doug takes another sip of his drink. “It seems like a hundred years ago.”

“Not to me. It’s thirteen years, I haven’t forgotten.” Ferd smiles at Doug.

Doug smiles shyly, back at Ferd, and finishes his drink.

“I liked you a lot,” Ferd whispers. “You knew it, didn’t you?”

Doug looks away and clears his throat. “Let’s just call it - Adolescence. I think we’ve both moved on since then, right?” Doug looks down at his empty glass. He jiggles the ice left in the bottom.

“Right.” Ferd nods his head. So, really, how’ve you been?

“I’ve been better, you know... Fair.” He looks away and back at Ferd.

“Only, fair?” Ferd continues to stare at Doug.

“Yeah.” Doug looks away again. “By the way, I heard about the mess you guys at the hospital were in.” Doug continues to look away. “You remember James Gotshall? He was studying to be a plastic surgeon?”

Ferd nods his head. “Yeah, how’s he doing?”

“He’s doing great! He was catching me up on the news. Told me Baxter was dismissed and lost his license. Was that true? He’s somewhere in France now?”

Ferd nods yes. “That was a while ago.” He tilts his head to hear what else Doug has to say.

“So what really happened?” Doug leans forward on the table.

Ferd smiles as he recounts the story. “Dr. Eliot Baxter. Head of the department, told the board he had no idea there were operations going on in those rooms after hours. He pulled the ‘innocent act’ but he was so in on it.” Ferd shakes his head. “James said there was a woman involved? She wanted lipo. Is that right?”

“They kept her in the hospital ‘til the infection was under control. But the lipo – was a mess. She pressed charges, sued the hospital, and Baxter got kicked out. Lost his license – Yeah, he’s in France.” Ferd picks up his drink and sips it slowly.

“So – Wow! Did that - What – I mean – So, what happened with you?” Doug asks.

“Me? I was just observing, as they say. They gave me a slap on the hand and said ‘Naughty, naughty.’ Lucky me, they let me go”.

Doug shakes his head. “Too bad. You were the Golden boy of your Med class. Everybody believed you’d wind up head of the department.”

Ferd laughs. “Nah. No future in that. And if you’re smart, you learn from everybody’s mistakes. You know what not to do – next time – huh?”

“I guess so. Me? Anesthetics. I just put people to sleep. What do I know?” Doug stares at his empty glass. Ferd pushes his drink over to Doug.

Ferd speaks softly. “So – I heard that you were, maybe, planning on getting ... married?”

Doug takes a large swallow of Ferd's drink. He looks at Ferd. "And you have become – the one to go to. The Doctor."

Ferd Looks around the bar and pulls his glasses back over his eyes.

"So – what can I do for you? Show me where it hurts."

Doug moves closer to Ferd. He begins talking in a low voice.

+++++

The following day, Francie is on the phone in her bedroom. She checks her makeup in the mirror and applies mascara to her bottom eyelashes. "Okay. What kind of food?" Picking up a comb, she runs it through her blond curls. She stands back and admires her hair in the mirror. "Sounds delicious. I could eat a horse." Laughing, she sprays herself with perfume. She smiles at how good her breasts look under the blue blouse she has put on. Pregnancy agrees with her. Doug was quiet when she told him but then he kissed her and said "Great." He is really such a good man! She's a lucky girl. Francie laughs and answers Doug on the phone. "All right. Just a quiet celebration. I agree." She pauses, "Doug?" She breathes deeply, "I love you." She hangs up and finishes dressing.

+++++

A half hour later, soft rock music fills the car. Doug and Francie sit in the front seat; Ferd is in the back seat.

Francie smiles at Ferd. "So you guys roomed together when you were in boarding school and you haven't seen each other since then?"

"Yeah. We were supposed to keep in touch, you know. But hey! He hasn't changed that much! Only," he pauses, "his hair got thinner."

Francie laughs. "We don't mention hair around Doug, do we, Darling?" Francie runs her hand over Doug's hair.

Doug pulls away. "Easy, I can't afford to lose more of it, Francie."

"Don't be sensitive, Doug. Some people look better when they're bald, and I like bald men!" She smiles at Doug.

“Thanks for the compliment.” Doug glances at Francie. “So I’m just dropping Ferd back at his motel before we go to dinner, okay?” Doug keeps his eyes on the road.

“Of course. Well, it’s a pleasure to meet you, Ferd.” She extends her hand over the top of the seat.

Ferd takes her hand. “Yeah, same here. It’s real nice of you to do this.”

“No problem. It’s on our way and I know Doug is thrilled to see you, and I am thrilled to meet you!” Francie flashes a big smile at Ferd.

Ferd nods. “Sure– only, Doug, can I ask you a favor?”

“Uh oh.” Doug laughs. They arrive at the motel.

“Would you spare me a minute and come in – help me move the desk out of the way. I bump into things at night when I get up to go to the bathroom.”

“Oh Yeah! I remember – scared the Bejesus out of me the first time.” Doug turns to Francie. “It’ll just be a minute, okay?”

Francie shrugs. “Okay – just so we’re not late for our reservation.”

They get out of the car. She calls after them. “Don’t get to talking and rehashing old times!”

Francie fiddles with the radio. We hear sports stations and spurts of static interrupted with messages about God on the religion station. She checks her watch and then reviews her calendar week on her blackberry. Finally, she grabs her bag and decides to go get Doug from the motel. She knocks on the numbered door.

“Hello?” she calls. As she enters Ferd’s room the lights go dark. She hears a stifled cry and knows it is hers. Then there is blackness.

Ferd holds a sponge over Francie’s nose. “She’s out.”

A middle aged woman stands in the bathroom doorway, she wears a white coat and moves to Ferd. She helps him on with another white coat.

Ferd walks Doug to the door. “We’ll administer a light anesthetic as soon as she starts to come around. She won’t feel anything ‘til later when it wears off. Come back in about one hour.”

Doug looks over at Francie lying on the bed. He takes an envelope out of his pocket and faces Ferd. “And she’ll be okay?”

Ferd looks over at Francie and back at Doug. He smiles, “Of course.”

Doug offers the envelope to Ferd. Ferd shakes his head no.

Doug puts the envelope back in his pocket “Thanks. I owe you.” They shake hands.

Ferd speaks into Doug’s ear while continuing to hold Doug’s hand.

“We’ll have to have a drink on that, eh?” Ferd squeezes Doug’s hand.

Doug blushes, he nods and retrieves his hand, opens the door as he leaves. The motor of his car rumbles as he drives off.

+++++

It is an afternoon a week later. In Francie’s apartment she sits on her sofa. Two packed suitcases are on the floor beside her.

“So you want anything before the car comes?” Sally asks Francie for the second time.

“I’m fine,” Francie answers.

“You know, it’s going to be at least two and a half hours ‘til we get there. How about some juice?” Sally walks to the refrigerator.

“No, thanks. I’m fine.” Francie sits quietly with her hands folded in her lap. “You were swell to come up to get me, Sal.”

Sally smiles at Francie. “I’m your sister! Of course I would be there for you.”

Sally puts her arm around Francie for a moment. “Well, I’m going to run down to the coffee shop and get a coffee and a muffin, anything I can bring you?”

Francie shakes her head. “No, thanks.”

“I’ll be right back.” Sally closes the door quietly behind her.

Francie closes her eyes. She remembers how proud and good she felt when her breasts swelled and she was ravenous, couldn’t get enough to eat. She was hungry and happy, so very happy! They would get married and live happily ever after. A baby! Who would’ve thought? Francie had been ecstatic. She was going to have Doug’s baby. She brushed a tear off of her cheek. Why did he pretend to be happy? He said “How wonderful.” They were going to dinner – to celebrate. But he lied to her. They didn’t go to dinner. He said he cared for her but couldn’t be married, couldn’t have a child. He didn’t want a child, he didn’t want her to have a claim on him for life. He needed to feel free; she had to let it go – he was out of her life.

Sally opens the door to the apartment. “I got you a muffin, just in case. It’s a long trip and you, we, might get hungry.” Sally smiles at Francie.

“Thanks.”

Sally sits next to Francie. “You know, this is a Godsend, having you come to live with me. I was trying to figure out what to do with Mom. She needs someone and I can’t always be there, with school and all. By all I mean, I wasn’t going to say anything yet, but, I met someone and so far, I like him. He’s so sweet and attentive and available. I was actually hoping to go away with him for a weekend which means I’m not there on Friday, and maybe they’ll let you sub... You still have your teacher’s license, right? Oh well, anyway, I’m happy you’re coming. Don’t be surprised if Mom doesn’t recognize you, she goes in and out of life. Where is our driver? He should be here by now.” Sally looks out of the window.

Francie wonders if it was a girl or a boy. She looks down at her folded hands. She brought him to court. He had no right to violate her body. The judge said there was no proof and the case was dismissed.

“Francie?” Sally speaks to Francie. “Our driver is here, let’s go.”

C

CREATIVE
NON-FICTION

Eating Babies

I sit here in my OBGYN's waiting room once again. The first time I was here, I was getting information on how to become pregnant. I sat in this light green room with all the pregnant women waiting for their appointments, and thought, *I'm going to be like you one day.*

The second time I sat in this room, I held my husband's hand excitedly. I was one of *these* women. One of the special women growing a miracle inside of her. I kept waiting for one of them to look over at me, so I could give her a knowing smile. *We are all sisters*, I had thought to myself.

And now I am back here again. I look down at my hands. *Don't look at anyone*, I tell myself. I am an imposter. I feel like a page out of that children's magazine, *Highlights*. *Which one of these things is different? Which one doesn't belong?* It's me.

My name is called and I look up to find the perfect embodiment of a soccer mom. She is middle-aged, wearing a bright orange top and white waist-high capris. The blond bob haircut frames her warm smile that says: *I am not overly happy, just kind.*

She escorts me down the back hall. We pass the room where I first met with my OBGYN, and then the room where I held my husband's hand as we listened to our first ultrasound. Finally she leads me to an office in the back that has a black-and-white placard on the door that reads: Sandy Smith, Grief counselor. I want to jump out of my skin and turn into a cartoon version of myself bouncing off the walls screaming, "This isn't real. This isn't happening to me!"

As I wait for Sandy to get some papers, I look at all the picture of newborn babies on her wall. There are dozens of little faces staring back at me. In my mind, they wave at me like the pictures in *Harry Potter*. A few pictures are obviously professionally taken, because the babies are sleeping inside baskets and drawers full of soft cotton or straw. Some of them are dressed up like flowers or angels, as if they aren't perfect enough the way they are, and need to be jazzed up to make them worth photographing. There are other photos clearly taken right after delivery, their little faces still scrunched up in a cry. Some of them are red or jaundiced. Some of them have their eyes closed tightly. And all of them belong to someone else.

I want to eat them.

I think about pulling the pictures off of the corkboard and ingesting them.

My mother always said, *If you eat a peach pit, a peach tree will grow inside of you.* Perhaps it's the same with these pictures. But I don't eat them, because that would be crazy, so I take a seat instead.

"How are you feeling today, Everly?" Sandy asks with a pad of paper and pencil on her lap.

"Why are you here?" I ask. "In this department I mean. I have to sit out there in the waiting room with all the pregnant women. It seems unnecessarily cruel."

"Where would you rather my office be?" she asks. *Great, I think. She is one of those counselors who asks a bunch of questions and never does any actual counseling.*

"Can't they put you in the child cancer wing or something?" I ask. "It would make me feel a little better knowing at least I am not watching my child die of cancer."

"Good choice," she says with a little laugh. I am relieved she at least has my sick sense of humor. "They keep me here because I work with women who are just high risk and haven't lost their baby. I also help women process their feelings when they do start trying again after a lost pregnancy or stillborn." She turns her attention to the wall. "These are the babies of the women who have tried again, or got through their complicated pregnancies." I don't listen to the end of what she is saying. Those babies can't hurt me anymore. In my mind, I have already eaten them.

"Do you have a lot of patients?" I ask.

"Several." At least she is letting me lead the conversation.

"Tell me about one of the worst cases."

"Pardon?" Her eyebrows rise and flatten out her crow's feet.

"I want to hear about someone's life who is worse than mine. Everyone I know, everyone I meet, my life is so much worse than theirs. I start to feel like I have the most horrible life in the world. I need to know that someone has it worse." I lean back on the loveseat, waiting for her response.

"Okay," she says, accepting the challenge. "I have a girl who lost her baby at eight months." I suddenly wish I had asked her to answer it like a Jeopardy question: *What is, dead baby at eight months?*

"Is she still married?" I ask with my eyebrows raised.

She nods.

I cross my arms. "Then she has her husband to lean on for support, and they get to try again." I see her glance down at my chart,

which undoubtedly mentions that not only have I just had a medically necessary abortion, but I am also getting divorced.

“You lose,” I continue with my arms crossed. “I still have the worst life.”

“Okay,” she says, looking up at the ceiling as if she was really thinking about it.

“I have a woman who lost her baby during childbirth, and as a result, she can’t have more children.”

I uncross my arms and lean forward. I hadn’t expected her to say that. The thought of someone not being able to have children again never occurred to me. For the first time in a long time, the pain in my chest is for someone else, and it feels good. Really good.

“My heart breaks for her,” I say. “I can’t imagine how awful that would be.” I am simply regurgitating all the cliché lines people had given to me in the last month, because really, there are no words.

“How is she dealing with it?” I ask, as if we are talking about a mutual friend.

“She is strong, like you.”

I hate when counselors say things like this. Give you compliments you haven’t earned. “I’m not strong,” I say, waving the statement away like it might stick to me if I don’t.

“Sure you are,” she replies. Her warm smile comes back. “You’re getting help.”

“I’m getting help because I’m not strong.”

“That’s not true. It’s hard to ask for help, trust me.” We don’t say anything for a few minutes while I wait for the compliment to pass.

“Thank you for telling me about her,” I say staring out the window behind Sandy. In the far distance is a green hill filled with little white houses and winding streets. I am no longer a house person. Houses are for husbands and wives with children and SUVs. I am a studio apartment girl now.

I look back and notice Sandy watching me. I guess I am supposed to say something. I want to skip all the bullshit with her. All the pointless, *getting to know you* crap that people do. I want to cut right to the important stuff people don’t talk about. I want to tell her that the pain in my heart is like nothing I have ever experienced before. I want her to know that I lay awake at night and try to think of all the words we have in the English language for pain, and see if one of them is big enough to encapsulate the enormity of what I feel. I want to tell her that sometimes the pain is so intense I bite my own hand, right under the thumb, just to remind myself that I am real.

I want to tell her that when I see a man walking down the street with a baby, it takes everything I have not to walk up to him and kiss him, hoping I can force myself into his mouth and into his life. I want to tell her all this, but what comes out instead is:

“I understand why women steal other people’s babies.” It is the truest thing I have said in a long time. My body seizes up with the admission and I wonder if she is going to order me a straightjacket or seventeen kinds of pills, but in reality she just cocks her head to the side and says, “Okay.” She says it as though that was not the most deplorable thing she has ever heard.

“I’m not crazy or anything, and I would never do it,” I reassure her. “I just understand it.” She doesn’t say anything as I pause to try and collect my thoughts.

“I was on the treadmill at the gym, and this news report came on about a woman who shot a new mother as the mother was taking her baby into a clinic for its first checkup. The lady with the gun just took the newborn and ran. It turned out she had lost her own baby just a few weeks before.” I look up at Sandy to see if she knows the story I am referring to, but if she does, she doesn’t show it. I look back down at my hands and begin unconsciously chipping off my purple nail polish. “I always saw horrible stories like that on the news and thought, *Who could do something like that?* There is a certain amount of satisfaction in not being able to fathom how a person could do something that horrific.” I look up at Sandy again. “That’s how we know we are good people. That’s how we know we are not crazy, because we can’t understand crazy people. The man on the treadmill next to me looked like he had just eaten a lemon as he watched the news coverage. ‘That woman is sick!’ he announced into the vacuum of humming treadmills. I just stayed silent because what I wanted to say was, *She is just in pain—my pain—and she can’t make it stop.*”

I suddenly feel self-conscious about my story and engross myself with more nail polish chipping. “Sorry about the tangent.”

“Did you name her?”

“The lady?” I ask, confused.

“No,” Sandy shakes her head. “Your daughter.”

The abrupt conversation change startles me.

“Yes.” I have never heard my voice so small.

“Can I ask what it was?”

“Sailor, her name is—was Sailor Grace.” I hadn’t said her name out loud to anyone I didn’t know before, and it felt strangely like I was introducing Sailor to this lady I had just met.

Sandy smiled. "That's beautiful."

I don't remember what Sandy said after that, because all I could think about was that once I put Sailor's name out in the universe like that, once I shared her with a perfect stranger, she stopped being an idea of a person that my husband and I had in our heads, and started being an actual person. My daughter Sailor, who I killed.

Zeze Hoffman

The Secret

The Stranger

A stranger came to town one morning in late May 1966. I had just turned eighteen, graduated days earlier, but there was no bright future ahead. Driven by my parents in their Buick Wildcat, I arrived at the imposing stone home on St. Charles Street, New Orleans, Louisiana, where I would live for the next four months among twenty others of my kind. I wiped away my identity as I wiped my Keds on the mat at the side door. In the office, I chose my alias, Bonnie. Once papers were signed, my parents hugged me good-bye at the office door. No outsider was allowed inside. I picked up my two suitcases and followed the clerk into the parlor, up the wide staircase, to the room I would share with two others.

Two months earlier, my father paced the kitchen floor, raging over the family disgrace, vowing never to send me to college, since I had failed to live up to the pricey prep school education he had provided. “You are not my daughter, you are a stranger to me.” My mother wept. He called me his wild child, and, indeed, I was a product of the 60’s when rock was the communal heartbeat, drugs were easy and love was free. My mother sat at the kitchen table as he continued to rant, stubbing out one cigarette after the other; I left the room. I slipped into the bathroom, closed the door and swallowed handfuls of my parents’ prescription meds. My mother found me in my room, the empty bottles in the bathroom sink. To admit the compounded humiliation of what I had done by going to the hospital was out of the question. A druggist, my father dosed me with an emetic and glasses of salt water. I vomited until I could do nothing but dry heave. No one spoke of that day again.

In New Orleans I developed a routine. I rode the trolley each day and walked downtown for hours. I quickly learned the stigma of my condition and bought a cheap gold band at Woolworth’s, so the waitress would serve me at the lunch counter. On rainy days, I walked four blocks to a public library to read. I could not check out a book because I did not exist. Sitting at a table, I read Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* and identified my father with Kurtz and his last words, “the horror, the horror.” At night I embroidered wild flowers on my denim jacket—thinking of my own wild flower. Residents shared small talk, music, and stories remarkably the same, becoming comrades but remaining strangers. We

also shared cooking, laundry and cleaning. My daily task was to polish the massive mahogany staircase and furniture of the front parlor where no one was allowed to sit, except on the night I sat alone, defiant, timing the intervals between pains.

October 2nd, my stay in the hospital was lonely and brief. My parents arrived the next day to take me home. They had made a bed for me in the backseat. Along the coast, we stopped at their favorite restaurant, Allman's, for the hallmark onion soup, as if the treat would make me feel better. We struggled to make conversation. In late October, my room was purged of clothes, letters, pictures, high school mementos. "Now you can start over. No one need ever know." Mother lit the fire in the back yard where the past vanished in a plume of smoke. Everything forgotten--except the baby no one was allowed to see, the stranger I left behind.

Hide and Seek

The secret tucked itself into a corner of my mind. My family behaved as if nothing had happened. We never spoke of my life in the home, of the baby. Life went on, but never the same as before. I dropped my family name and kept the name Bonnie. My father made good his promise never to send me to college. I enrolled in business school, a secretarial course. I fell in love with an accounting student. He joined a large firm and we were married. Soon I was pregnant again. The secret became restless as I lied. The doctor asked, "Is this your first pregnancy?" "Yes." This child was also due in October. I compared each month's progress to the pregnancy two years earlier. With the first, I never suffered with morning sickness, this time I did. The first time, I craved plums, this time I craved cheese. The first time, I had no health problems and exercised every day; this pregnancy almost miscarried and I was told to stay off my feet and rest. We moved in with my parents. They were overjoyed; finally, a baby they could love.

On August 19, in my sixth month, I awoke in a pool of blood. I clutched a towel between my legs as we raced to Providence Hospital. I was admitted to labor and delivery. Blood transfusions began. I was confined to bed. The doctor was cautious about the outcome, "We will see."

I was not in labor, so soon they moved me to an adjacent room with a single bed and no chairs. I supposed the worst. "This must be my punishment. I will lose this baby, too." Twelve hours later my labor began. Again, I was in a room alone and in labor. Same institutional grey

walls. My son Karl was born the next morning, weighing a bit over four pounds. His lungs were not fully developed so he was rushed to the premature nursery. I had not even held him. When I left the hospital, once more I left my baby behind; but three weeks later we brought our son home to the house that had always been home to me.

My parents moved to their beach house. We remained in the family home. Life was good. I did not work and devoted my days to Karl. Each August, we celebrated his birthdays with family and friends. Each October, I marked another birthday in my mind. I compared the milestones in Karl's life to imagined milestones in another child's life. I had a miscarriage. We bought land in Baldwin County with plans to build on the five acres. We planted a fruit tree each year on Karl's birthday, measuring his height against the tree planted the year before. I wondered how tall my first son had grown. I was reluctant to plan a new house, afraid to leave. But I kept the secret and never explained why. When Karl was ten, his father left. His parting words were "I'm taking the land. You can hide your life away in this house."

I am still in the house. I think that I should stay here. Perhaps there are records from the past with this address, with the name Bonnie. The secret demands not to remain hidden. In the past year, I have searched openly for my son. I told Karl that somewhere is the big brother he wished for at age seven. The house on St. Charles Street remains, but the unwed mothers' home closed years ago. I have been unable to locate the original birth record. Hurricane Katrina destroyed many records and Louisiana adoption records are sealed. I cherish the presence of Karl in my life. But I hold on to hope. Perhaps the question in someone's mind is seeking the answer hiding in mine. Perhaps the universe will cry "All-y, all-y, outs in free."

E

ESSAY

Yes, I'm Aging. So What?

I have a dire confession to make: I'm aging.

Yes, indeed. The ravages of time are absolutely, categorically and unequivocally rearing themselves on my face, hair and body. And no matter how often I dye the grey out of my hair, fill the marionette lines around my lips with Juvederm or cover my increasingly wizened neck with a scarf or turtleneck, the cosmetic conceits soon ebb, revealed to be the transitory fixes they truly are.

Honestly, I had no huge issue about aging—that is, until I was recently on the receiving end of a loaded question, which could have been innocuous (although I didn't take it as such as the time it was posed to me) and a remark that clearly wasn't. I thought as long as I took care of myself, aging would be a breeze. Maybe I'd be lucky and no one would notice. HA!

Only they did much to my wounded vanity.

The first instance came when a former male co-worker/friend whom I hadn't seen in a few years asked me point blank in a text the day after we met over coffee how old I was. I was baffled by the question considering I had known him for a long while and thought he probably knew. When I tried to joke my way out of it, he persisted, even approximating an age that he thought I probably was.

His conjecture was correct.

"I thought so," he texted back, when I finally admitted that I was most definitely eligible to join AARP. Radio silence on his part descended afterwards. (FYI, he's only a few years younger than me.)

What made his question about my age especially hurtful, even if he hadn't intended to fire a verbal dart at me, was that prior to my seeing him I had just come from my graduate school reunion, feeling really good about myself. Not only did I reconnect with a few old classmates but I was looking especially pulled together. Or so I thought.

My hair, newly re-touched and perfectly blown dried, had not a nary of grey in sight. The nascent lines that were starting to groove around my mouth had been temporarily banished thanks to cosmetic fillers. My teeth were whitened due to dental bleaching and the flurry of whiteheads that dotted my forehead, as well as a nasty little wart near the bridge of my nose, were obliterated courtesy of the skillful local dermatologist. I was prepared to go to my reunion and impress.

I basked in that afterglow; then my erstwhile associate threw that

question, like a cyber-gauntlet, at me. Throwing down my iPhone, I felt humiliated, my ego flattened into smithereens. So much for all that tweaking to keep the obvious signs of aging at bay.

But even if I am aging, which, of course, I am, so what? It's not like I committed a cardinal offense. I didn't murder or molest anyone. I'm just getting older. You would think, having had friends who died young (and relatives whose lives were cut short in the Holocaust) that some might consider the act of getting older to be a gift. I guess not.

Another instance that for me highlighted the disdain our culture, especially women, have about aging, was when a friend of my mother's, who is notorious for speaking without any filter, reprimanded me for "looking really old." And because of this unacceptable breach, I had lost my looks, she added.

The catalyst for her outburst was my slim frame (which I've had most of my life) and which she felt was the root cause of my appearing Jurassic. (Incidentally, the woman is older than me and about 50 pounds heavier). Infuriated by her flagrant lack of couth and sensitivity, I let her have it and have not spoken to her since.

Later on, I wondered was it really my slightness that set off the proverbial mean girl in my mother's friend? Or is it because I'm obviously aging and in seeing that in me, someone who is younger than her, she is only too sadly and odiously reminded that time won't pass her by either?

The aversion we have to aging is an unfortunate corollary to our singular obsession with youth. Seriously, do we really want to be 21 forever? When I was that age, my daily almanac was comprised of unending bad decisions made in the full flush of callow ignorance. Clearly youth is overrated.

Oh sure, there wasn't a crease on my face or any pestilent grey growing unimpeded in my hair. Plus, my ability to stay up until 5 am every day was unparalleled. Yet I was also very unwise and ignorant when it came to functioning like a responsible, sensible adult. Now I'm not. Why is experience-based wisdom considered so expendable when juxtaposed with glossily youthful stupidity? Is it because as we get older we get closer to another taboo--death? I think so.

Bette Davis once said getting older isn't for sissies. She was right but that adage doesn't make it any easier when confronted with age bullies.

Similarly, my grandmother used to say (translated from Yiddish): "If you don't want to get older, hang yourself when you're young."

No one is immune to the effects of Mother Time. Consider it a present for having lived a few decades and give me a break. Let me age in peace.

B

BOOK REVIEWS

Toti O'Brien

A Review of *After Abel and other stories*,
Michal Lemberger

Prospect Park Books, Altadena, 2015 – Paperback, 283 pages, \$16

There is much to enjoy in Michal Lemberger's first fiction feature, *After Abel* - a collection of bible-related stories.

Two elements make the reading extremely pleasurable. First: a smooth and well-paced narrative in storytelling style, leading us straight across (no way to be side tracked). Paradoxically also a taste for detail: vivid reconstructions of landscapes, interiors and daily flavors. With a magnifying effect Lemberger brings people, places and events incredibly close. Tangible. At hand.

Both a Jewish scholar and a bible expert, the author follows the "midrash" tradition: a re/telling of the sacred text "between the lines". This has been done before: it is an accepted approach, not irreverent or blasphemous.

What is new is that Lemberger picks for her re/rendition only women.

There are not many antecedents to her take. Certainly no one ever focused on minor figures such as Saul's daughter, Moses' sister, Haman's wife...

Lemberger selects nine women then she traces their stories - mostly in the first person. As if Eve, Hagar or Zerah were given the mic: that never happened of course. As if they were finally allowed to express their point of view: that of course nobody ever heard.

To each one of those heroines the bible gives a line or two, sparingly mentioning their name and the role they played in the sequence of events. Conscientiously, Lemberger provides the reader with the original data - then proceeds to her own confession/reflection, putting herself into her character's shoes.

What do we learn from her creative effort? For one she doesn't change the facts. The nine women she calls on stage do exactly what they allegedly did. Thus by the plots themselves we learn a general rule: through the millennia covered by the sacred books - civilizations following one another - women's role remains the same. Consistently passive: meaning not just devoid of major initiative, not only collateral or insignificant, but subjugated and suffering.

The fictional voice the author gives to her characters isn't one that can re/write history: it can only comment about it, from the standpoint of those who don't hold the pen. Those who aren't given a choice, do not set the game, have to stand by the norms created by others. Thus (having no part in their making) they see such norms from a distance: they spot their arbitrariness, contradictions and cruelty, with the wisdom of the by-stander.

That does not give them power. That does not change their destiny.

There are "echoes from the future" in the stories told by Lemberger – and in the way she tells them. Obviously the author's glance enfolds more recent events and they – willingly or not - resonate.

It's hard not to think of Malinche – for example - when reading the story of Hagar, the half-witted Egyptian girl sold to Abraham and Sarah to become a substitute mother, a womb. Witnessing her cultural shock (when her parents sell her to strangers), the brutality of leaving her world behind, her vain longing for home, her ultimate non-belonging, we recognize a known scenario. Like Malinche, Hagar is nothing more than a vessel – carrying a new life about which she has no say, bound to lose all sense of identity, forced into a reality not of her choice. Uprooted, severed off: she's a bridge for history to walk over.

Hagar also reminds of Margaret Atwood's *Handmaid*: she evokes a same feeling of objectification, hopeless of evasion or revolt.

Hopeless. There's nothing these women can do to alter the shape the world seems to have taken from the beginning. Meaning just after Abel, as the title implies.

Eve, at the dawn of times, has two male sons. She learns all about pregnancy, delivery and the strains of it – as God promised. Next thing she knows: one of her boys killed the other. She has to learn about death now – and the need to start over, procreate more, since the fruit of the womb is inherently at risk. She bears one more son: but those boys (painstakingly fed, looked after and kept alive) won't stop killing each other.

Since then, history loops around itself. Men kill men and they massacre women au passage. Women use their body to remake what men constantly destroy.

In the Bible no matriarchy ever replaces this system – not even temporarily, for a change.

Lembergers's heroines can only comment on the absurdity of such vicious cycle, justified by gods men create in their image.

When in most rare occasions a woman trespasses into action - as for Yael in “City of Refuge” - she still isn’t allowed to make a difference.

Yael belongs to the tribe of the Kenites: a nomadic group raised into the worship of peacefulness, tolerance, respect, non-aggression. Like modern gypsies they have the secret of metalsmithing: but they are forbidden to forge weapons. Not to kill other humans is their main commandment.

It is to stop the killing - in the person of the cruelest general of a dominant tribe - that Yael decides to murder him. That comes at the price of an inner torture worth that of Antigone. When finally Yael executes the chief – being then assailed by unbearable remorse – her feat is immediately recuperated by the logic she wants to oppose. She’s not given a chance to explain her bravery’s motivation: that is to stop the massacre... Nemesis implacably takes over: as soon as she’s taken a weapon in her hand, as soon as she’s dared breaking the taboo, Yael becomes a pawn into the male game of mutual annihilation. Nobody listens to her reasons: again she’s a tool in extraneous hands. A container for values not of her own.

The vision is dark in its repetitiveness.

Looking from the future, again, a parallel draws itself with the women-against-the-mafia movement of protest. With the concept of a loser-loser group: made of those who can’t avoid to be hurt by a specific system. Those who are victims-whatever-happens, since the up and downs of chance do not involve them. They have fallen off the wheel of fortune: they were never allowed on.

Whoever wins, in a mafia-ruled society, women still are at loss. They still mourn their fathers, brothers, partners, sons. They are not given the means to protect them, stop the massacre, say no.

Also in biblical societies – dominated by male autocracy and war – women always mourn. To give them a voice is to give voice to a grief that has lasted millennia. And it hasn’t stopped yet.

B

BIOGRAPHICAL
NOTES

Everly Anders is currently finishing a memoir dealing with the struggles of a late term abortion, and a difficult divorce. She also writes short Science fiction and Fantasy to encourage young women to read genre.

Atoke was born in Lagos, Nigeria with a passion for lifestyle and socio-cultural subjects. Atoke uses her writing to advocate for change. She has a Masters in Creative Writing from Swansea University.

Pamela A. Babusci is an internationally award-winning haiku/tanka & haiga artist. Some of her awards include: Museum of Haiku Literature Award, International Tanka Splendor Awards, First Place Tanka Yellow Moon Competition (Aust), First Place Kokako Tanka Competition (NZ), First Place Saigyō Tanka Competition (US), First Place Inaugural Tanka Festival, 6th International Japan Tanka Contest Certificate of Merit Award & 7th International Japan Tanka Contest Excellence Award.

Janet A. Baker grew up in the Iowa farm country and, like many Iowans, eventually moved to California. She has over a hundred poems published in literary journals and anthologies. She lives in San Diego and teaches at National University. Her poem "Burst into Blossom" appeared in the 2011 edition of *Adanna*, and her poem "Fallout Shelter" was included in *Women and War: A Tribute to Adrienne Rich Special Issue of Adanna Literary Journal* 2013.

Candace Bergstrom is a poet, writer and teacher living in New Hampshire. Her work has appeared in *Flint Hills Review*, and her chapbook, *Cord* was a finalist in the 2014 *Blue Light Press* chapbook contest. She earned an MFA in creative writing-poetry from Goddard College in Vermont.

Kristin Berkey-Abbott earned a Ph.D. from the USC and oversees the General Education Department at the Art Institute of Ft. Lauderdale. Her publications include the chapbooks *Whistling Past the Graveyard* and *I Stand Here Shredding Documents*.

Laura Bernstein-Machlay is an instructor of Literature and Creative Writing at The College for Creative Studies in Detroit, MI where she also lives. Her poems and creative nonfiction have appeared in numerous journals including *The Michigan Quarterly Review*, *The Alaska Quarterly Review*, *Poetry Northwest*, etc. She has work forthcoming in *The American Scholar*, *The New Madrid* and *upstreet*.

Sheila Black is the author of *House of Bone, Love/Iraq* (both CW Press) and *Wen Kroy*, which received the 2011 Orphic Prize in Poetry from Dream Horse Press. She co-edited with Jennifer Bartlett and Michael Northen *Beauty is a Verb: The New Poetry of Disability* (Cinco Puntos Press) named a 2012 Notable Book for Adults by the American Library Association. She lives in San Antonio, Texas where she directs Gemini Ink, a literary arts center.

Jane Blanchard lives and writes in Georgia. Her poetry has recently appeared in *Angle, Poetry Salzburg Review, Third Wednesday*, and *U.S.1 Worksheets*.

Virginia Boudreau hails from a lovely seaside community on the south western tip of Nova Scotia. Her work has appeared in numerous North American literary journals. When she isn't indulging her passion for poetry, she works as an itinerant Learning Disabilities Specialist.

Deborah Brown's book of poems, "*Walking the Dog's Shadow*," was the 2010 winner of the A. J. Poulin Jr. Award from BOA Editions and of the 2011 New Hampshire Literary Award for Outstanding Book of Poetry. The title poem of this collection was awarded a Pushcart Prize. Brown is a translator, with Richard Jackson and Susan Thomas of *Last Voyage: Selected Poems of Giovanni Pascoli* (Red Hen Press, 2010) and an editor, with Maxine Kumin and Annie Finch, of *Lofty Dogmas: Poets on Poetics* (Univ. of Arkansas Press, 2005). Brown is a professor of English at the University of New Hampshire-Manchester where she won an award for Excellence in Teaching. She lives in Warner, New Hampshire, with her husband and four cats.

Jessica Buda, 18, graduated with a creative writing arts seal, a scholarly designation and an honors diploma from high school at Douglas Anderson School of the Arts June 2015 and will be attending University of North Florida in Fall of 2015. She lives in Jacksonville with her mom, dad and little brother, Jack. She is taking a poetry class her first semester and plans to continue writing, in all its forms, for the rest of her life.

Nancy Canyon holds the MFA in Creative Writing from Pacific Lutheran University and a Certificate in Fiction Writing from the University of Washington. She is published in *Able Muse, Water~Stone Review, Fourth Genre, Floating Bridge Review, Into the Teeth of the Wind, Poetry South, Main Street Rag, Spirit First, Stone Path Review*,

Popcorn Farm, and more. Ms. Canyon is a creative writing instructor for Whatcom Community College Community Ed. She lives with her husband, cat and dog in Bellingham, Washington. She has penned three novels and is working on a memoir. See more at <http://nancyloucanyon.blogspot.com> and www.nancycanyon.com.

Abby Caplin is a physician and poet who practices mind-body medicine in San Francisco. Her poetry and nonfiction have been published or are forthcoming in several journals and anthologies, including *Forge*, *The Healing Muse*, *The Permanente Journal*, *Poetica*, and *Tikkun*.

Queens, NYC native **Audrey T. Carroll** is an MFA candidate with the Arkansas Writer's Program and graduated with a BA in Creative Writing from Susquehanna University. Her work has been published or is forthcoming in *Fiction International*, *Hermeneutic Chaos*, *Foliage Oak*, the *A3 Review*, and others. She can be found at <http://audreytcarrollwrites.weebly.com> and @AudreyTCarroll on Twitter.

Susan Cohen's work has appeared in *Cyclamens and Swords*, *All Things Girl* and will appear soon in *Blue Lyre Review*. She has been shortlisted for *Glimmer Train's* Emerging Writer and Short Fiction awards. Living in Israel with her husband and two children, she is also co-founder for a PR firm that promotes high tech companies in the US, Europe and Africa.

Julia Crane holds an MFA in Writing and Literature from the Bennington Writing Seminars, and is on the faculty at Granite State College where she currently teaches interdisciplinary courses in critical thinking. She lives in Vermont.

Marie Davis-Williams was nominated for a Pushcart Prize for her short story, *Anthracite*, which appeared in both *Philadelphia Stories* and the *Best of Philadelphia Stories Anthology*. She often writes about the women of her native Northeastern Pennsylvania in its early industrial age.

Holly Day has taught writing classes at the Loft Literary Center in Minneapolis, Minnesota, since 2000. Her poetry has recently appeared in *Oyez Review*, *SLAB*, and *Gargoyle*, while her recently published books

include *Music Theory for Dummies* (3rd edition), *Piano All-in-One for Dummies*, *The Book Of*, and *Northeast Minneapolis: A History*.

Iris Dorbian is a business journalist/blogger who resides in the greater New York City area. Her articles have appeared in a wide variety of outlets that include the *Wall Street Journal*, *Reuters*, *CFO.com*, *DMNews*, *Media Industry Newsletter* and *Playbill*. She is the author of “Great Producers: Visionaries of the American Theater” (Allworth Press/Skyhorse).

Kika Dorsey is a poet and professor from Boulder, Colorado. She has been published in numerous journals, books, and magazines, and her chapbook, *Beside Herself*, was published in 2010 by Flutter Press. Her full-length collection, *Rust*, will be released in 2016 by Word Tech Editions.

Zoë Etkin is a birth and postpartum doula, poet, menstruation enthusiast and educator. She earned her MFA in Poetry from CalArts, and was a recipient of the Beutner Award for Excellence in the Arts during her tenure there. You can find her work in [PANK], *Broad Magazine*, *Ballard Street Poetry Journal*, *Unlikely Stories*, and forthcoming in *Word Riot*.

Sarah Evans has had over a hundred stories published in competition anthologies, magazines and online, including by: the Bridport Prize, Unthank Books, Bloomsbury and Best New Writing. She has recently won first prize in competitions run by Fylde Writers’ Circle, Book Town Writers and Stratford Literary Festival. She has also had work performed in London, Hong Kong and New York.

Writing is **D Ferrara**’s obsession; several publications, including *Main Street Rag*, *American Writers Review*, *Broadkill Review*, *Amarillo Bay and Penmen Review*, have fed this mania. Her script, *Arvin Lindemeyer Takes Canarsie* was a Finalist in ASU’s Screenwriting Contest. Her play, *Favor*, won NJ ACT’s Outstanding Production of an Original Play.

Irene Fick’s first poetry chapbook, *The Stories We Tell*, published in 2014 by The Broadkill River Press, won first place in the 2015 National Federation of Press Women communications contest, and first place with Delaware Press Association. Irene’s poems have appeared in

Philadelphia Stories; Mojave River Review; Poet Lore (forthcoming) and Gargoyle (forthcoming). She lives in Lewes, Delaware.

Kelly Fordon's work has appeared in *The Florida Review*, *Kenyon Review (KRO)*, *Rattle* and other journals. She is the author of two poetry chapbooks and a collection of linked stories, *Garden for the Blind*, which was published by Wayne State University Press in April 2015. www.kellyfordon.com.

Laura Freedgood has published three chapbooks: *What I Would Paint If I Could* (2012), *Slant of the Heart* (2010), and *Weather Report* (2007). Her poems appear in *Lips*, *Adanna*, *Hawai'i Pacific Review*, *Stillwater Review*, *Wisconsin Review*, *Journal of New Jersey Poets*, and numerous other journals and anthologies. She received an Honorable Mention in The 2013 Allen Ginsberg Poetry Awards. Nominated for two Pushcart Prizes, she was also awarded a three-year poetry grant from the City University of New York, where she worked as a 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. When she is not writing, she is stalking wily trout in Mammoth with her dad and uncles. She currently resides in Los Angeles where she works for the University of California.

Nancy Gerber received a doctorate in English from Rutgers University. Her most recent book, *Fire and Ice: Poetry and Prose*, was named a Notable Book in Bowker's Shelf Unbound Competition. She is an advanced clinical candidate at the Academy of Clinical and Applied Psychoanalysis in Livingston, New Jersey.

Gail Fishman Gerwin's book *Sugar and Sand* was a 2010 Paterson Poetry Prize finalist, and her book *Dear Kinfolk*, (www.chayacairnpress.com) was a 2013 Paterson Award for Literary Excellence designee. Her poetry, essays, book reviews, and plays appear widely in print and online literary journals and on stage. She founded *inedit*, a Morristown, NJ, writing/editing firm and is associate poetry editor of *Tiferet*. Gail reads and facilitates writing workshops at varied venues.

Cleo Griffith has been published in: *Cider Press Review*, *Iodine*, *Main Street Rag* and many other journals. She is a member of the Modesto CA Branch of the National League of American Pen Women.

Penny Harter's more recent poems have appeared in, or are currently in press at, *Naugatuck River Review*, *Persimmon Tree*, *The Quotable*, *Tattoo Highway* and *Verse-Virtual*. Her recent books include *The Resonance Around Us* (2013); *One Bowl* (2012); and *Recycling Starlight* (2010). A featured reader at the 2010 Dodge Poetry Festival, she has won three fellowships from the NJSCA; the Mary Carolyn Davies Award from the PSA; and two fellowships from Virginia Center for the Creative Arts (VCCA: January 2011, and March 2015).

Katherine Hannula Hill is a short story author and translator. After double-majoring in French and Hispanic language and literature at Boston University, she lived and taught in A Coruña, Spain. She currently lives in New York where she uses her fluency in Spanish to work with children in foster care.

Kayla Helfrich completed her Master's degree in English with a concentration in Creative Writing from Monmouth University in May 2014. One month before graduating she began working full time for Macmillan Education. In her free time, she enjoys road trips, concerts, and watching terrible horror movies on Netflix.

Zeze Hoffman lives in her family home in Mobile, Alabama. Her work has appeared in *Frogpond*, *Sense* magazine, *Open to Interpretation: Fading Light*, and *Collected Words from Writers of the Gulf Coast*. Six poems are scheduled for publication in *The Stray Branch* in 2016. She is employed by the University of South Alabama and is an Editorial Assistant with Negative Capability Press.

Tina Kelley's second collection of poetry, *Precise*, was published in 2013 by Word Press, which also published *The Gospel of Galore*, a 2003 Washington State Book Award winner. She co-authored *Almost Home: Helping Kids Move from Homelessness to Hope*, (2012) a national bestseller, and won the 2014 New Jersey Poets Prize. She was a reporter at *The New York Times* for a decade, sharing in a Pulitzer Prize for Public Service for the Metro staff's coverage of 9/11.

Claire Keyes is the author of *The Question of Rapture* and the chapbook, *Rising and Falling*. Her new book, *What Diamonds Can Do*, was published in 2015. Her poems and reviews have appeared most recently in *Literary Bohemian*, *Sugar Mule*, *Crab Orchard Review* and *Blackbird*. She is Professor emerita at Salem State University.

Iryna Klishch is a young emerging author. She currently attends Denison University and is studying Creative Writing. She hopes her words find you.

Michelle Lerner holds an MFA in poetry from the New School. Her poetry can be found in various journals and anthologies including *Adanna*, *Lips*, *Paterson Literary Review*, *Sojourner*, *Harvard Women's Law Journal*, *Knock*, *Raving Dove*, *Crucible*, *Shotglass Journal*, and *Women in Judaism: A Multidisciplinary Journal*, *The Poetry of Place: North Jersey in Poetry*; *The American Voice in Poetry: The Legacy of Whitman, Williams, and Ginsberg*; and *The Great American Poetry Show*. She was also one of the initial poets published by Virginia Quarterly Review's Instagram series.

Angie Macri is the author of *Underwater Panther* (forthcoming from Southeast Missouri State University Press), winner of the Cowles Poetry Book Prize. Her recent work appears in *Arts & Letters*, *Cave Wall*, and *Cottonwood*. An Arkansas Arts Council fellow, she teaches in Hot Springs.

Marjorie Maddox, Professor of English at Lock Haven University, has published 9 collections of poetry—most recently *Local News from Someplace Else* and an ebook of *Perpendicular As I* (1994 Sandstone Book Award)—2 children's books, and over 450 stories, poems, and essays in journals and anthologies. For more information, see www.marjoriemaddox.com.

Gigi Marks lives in Ithaca, New York. Her first chapbook, *What We Need*, was published by Shortline Editions. A second chapbook of her poems, *Shelter*, was published by Autumn House Press in 2011. Her collection of poems *Close By* was published by Silverfish Review Press in Spring 2012.

Heather Martin was born in Westborough, Massachusetts and lived there all of her life before attending Boston University, where she

graduated this May with a BA in English Literature and American Studies. She plans to return to school next year for a graduate program in literature and will continue to write creatively throughout.

Ann E. Michael's poems, essays, and reviews are published in many literary journals in print and online; she is the author of four chapbooks of poetry and the full-length collection *Water-Rites*. She lives in eastern Pennsylvania, where she is coordinator of the writing center at DeSales University.

Melissa Miner spends her days zip lining through the tropical Hawaiian jungle. She enjoys daily trips to 7-11 for cold Pepsi and chocolate. Currently, her hair is blue and her favorite pair of earrings are the set she made from her own wisdom teeth.

Judith H. Montgomery's poems appear in *Bellingham Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, and *Cave Wall*, among other journals. Her chapbook, *Passion*, received the Oregon Book Award for poetry. Her second collection, *Red Jess*, and third, *Pulse & Constellation*, followed. She is working on a new manuscript, *Litany for Bloom and Wound*, on wounding and healing, especially for women.

Amber Moore is a Canadian English teacher. She holds a MA in English with a specialization in Gender Studies and is currently finishing her MA in Education. She has been published in numerous literary publications and is recently published in *FreeFall* magazine, *The Feathertale Review*, and *Room Magazine*.

Tara Mae Mulroy is a graduate of the MFA program in poetry at the University of Memphis and a 2015 recipient of the Tennessee Williams scholarship. Her poems, stories, and essays are published or forthcoming in *Third Coast*, *CutBank*, *Weave*, *Waccamaw*, and others. Her chapbook, *Philomela*, was released from dancing girl press in 2014, and she is sending out her first full-length collection, *Swallow Tongue*. She currently teaches Latin at a private school.

Deborah Murphy's poetry has appeared in *Adanna Literary Journal* (print version), *Connecticut River Review*, *Flint Hills Review*, *Third Wednesday*, *Concrete Wolf*, *Smoky Quartz*, *Soundings East*, *The Chrysalis Reader*, and *Flash!point*. Holding a BA from the University of Pennsylvania and an MA from Tufts University, she lives in Amherst,

NH, where she is an editor at Smoky Quartz literary journal and works as a freelance writer and as a tutor.

Toti O'Brien's work has appeared in *The Altadena Review*, *Poetic Diversity*, *Edgar Allan Poet*, *Litro NY* and other journals. She has published two children books, two collections of short stories and essay in Italian. She has contributed for a decade to Italian magazines such as *Mezzocielo*, *Salpare*, *L'Ostile* and *Inguine*.

Sharon Olson is a native Californian and retired librarian. She moved to Lawrenceville, New Jersey in 2012. Her book *The Long Night of Flying* was published by Sixteen Rivers Press in 2006. Her poems have appeared in such journals as *Arroyo Literary Review*, *Off the Coast*, and *Cider Press Review*. Two have been nominated for a Pushcart Prize.

Andrea Potos is the author of six poetry collections, including *An Ink Like Early Twilight* (Salmon Poetry, 2015), *We Lit the Lamps Ourselves* (Salmon Poetry), and *Yaya's Cloth* (Iris Press). Her poems appear widely online and in print. She lives in Madison, Wisconsin with her husband and daughter.

Marjorie Power grew up in the Northeast, then lived 45 years in the Northwest. She has just moved to Denver. Her collection, *Seven Parts Woman*, is forthcoming in 2016 from WordTech Editions. Her poems appear in six chapbooks from small presses. Journals and anthologies that have published her poetry include *Adanna*, *The Atlanta Review*, *The California Quarterly*, *The Random House Treasury of Light Verse* and many others.

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 *Schuylkill Valley Journal*, *The Texas Review*, *Verse Wisconsin*, and others. Christine earned her Doctorate of Letters from Drew University and is a doctoral candidate in Rowan University's Ed.D program in higher education. She co-edited, *Writing after Retirement*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers and is a freelance writer for *Exceptional Parent Magazine*.

Ivanov Reyez is a former English professor. His poetry has appeared in *The Café Review*, *Pinyon*, *Sierra Nevada Review*, and other journals. He is the author of *Poems, Not Poetry* (Finishing Line Press, 2013). His short fiction, for which he received a Pushcart Prize nomination, has appeared in *Sephardic-American Voices: Two Hundred Years of a Literary Legacy*, *Terra Incognita*, *Texas Short Stories*, and *The Mayo Review*.

Heather Lee Rogers writes and performs poetry in New York City. She has been the featured poet at the Art House Open Mic in Jersey City and at the "Parapluie" Creative Writing Series in Brooklyn. Recent online publications include *Why Are We In Iraq* and *Shouted Whisper*. More of her work can be read at www.heatherleerogerspoeetry.weebly.com.

Sarah Sansolo is a graduate of the American University MFA program. Her work has recently appeared in *The Rumpus* and *Big Lucks* and will be published in the upcoming Washington, DC issue of *VIATOR*. She was a finalist in the 2015 Bethesda Poetry Contest.

Rikki Santer is an award-winning poet whose poems have appeared in numerous journals. Her published collections are: *Front Nine: A Biography of Place*; *Clothesline Logic*, *Kahiki Redux*, and *Fishing for Rabbits*. She lives in Columbus, Ohio where she teaches literature, writing and film studies at a public high school.

Katie J Schwartz was raised in a small Missouri town, and now lives in another (unsurprisingly similar) small Missouri town. She loves fairy tales, bakes excellent cookies, and speaks abysmally poor French. She is currently pursuing a Master's degree in professional writing.

Shoshauna Shy's poems have recently been published by *IthacaLit*, *Red Cedar*, *Hartskill Review*, *RHINO* and *Sliver of Stone*. She is the author of four collections, and has lately been enamored with attempting to convert her narrative poetry to flash fiction. She knows how fortunate she is to have a day job that involves literature.

After years of living and dancing in New York City, **Stephanie Silvia**, resides on the north coast of California. A long-time student of Diane Di Prima, her work has been published in many reviews including *Pudding Magazine* and *The Paterson Literary Review*. Her poem, *The Plastic*

Tiara, recently won the College of the Redwoods, Poets and Writers, 2015 Poetry Prize Award.

Barbara Siman (Writer, Director, and Choreographer) recently completed a collection of short stories and is presently working on a novel. Her original works, *Stolen*, and *The Birthday Play* have been produced in regional theatres. Barbara is happily married and resides in New York City.

Evelyn A. So grew up on the East Coast and lives in northern California, where she has served as a board member for Poetry Center San Jose. Her recent work appeared in *Pedestal Magazine*, *Three: An Anthology of Flash Nonfiction*, and elsewhere. Her poetry has twice been published in *Red Wheelbarrow (National Edition)*, *Gingerbread House*, *Cha: An Asian Literary Journal*, *Caesura*, and other journals. This is her third appearance in *Adanna Literary Journal*.

Jeanine Stevens was educated at U.C. Davis, CSU Sacramento, and U.C. Berkeley/Oxford Program. She is the author of "Sailing on Milkweed," Cherry Grove Collections. Her latest chapbook, "Needle in the Sea," was released by Tiger's Eye Press. Winner of the Ekphrasis Award for "Frida in a White Dress." Recent winner of the MacGuffin Poet Hunt and a finalist for the William Stafford Prize. Poems have appeared in PMS, Clare, Pearl, Evansville Review and Earth's Garden.

Carole Stone's most recent collections of poems are AMERICAN RHAPSODY, CavanKerry Press, 2012 and HURT, THE SHADOW, Dos Madres Press, 2013. LATE is forthcoming from Turning Point in January, 2016. Her most recent poetry publications are Cavewall, The Bellevue Literary Journal, Blue Fifth Review, Exit 13, Marsh Hawk Review, and Talisman.

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, with his book of fictive translations, manipulations, and found poetry, *Exercises in High Treason*, forthcoming from Great Weather for Media. His translations, poetry, and visual work appear internationally in many

journals and anthologies. He is a founder of the William Carlos Williams Poetry Cooperative in Rutherford, N. J.

A Maine native but an academic gypsy for most of her adult life, **Anastasia Walker** is a poet, essayist, memoirist, and recovering English professor currently living and working in Pittsburgh. Her recent poetry speaks to the experience of being transgender.

Emily Wall is an Associate Professor of English at the University of Alaska Southeast. She has been published in a number of literary journals in the US and Canada. She has two books published with Salmon Poetry: *Liveaboard* (2012) and *Freshly Rooted* (2007). Emily lives and writes in Juneau, Alaska.

Tiffany Washington is a ninth grade English teacher, mother, and sometimes poet. Her work has appeared in many print and online literary magazines and journals including *Caduceus*, *Long River Run*, and *Chantarelle's Notebook*.

Geraldine Kloos Weltman has a B.A. and a Ph.D. in English Literature. She is a retired government researcher and manager, now happy to be spending her time writing poetry. She lives in Central New Jersey, but is relocating to Chicago, Illinois in August of 2015.

Lori Wilson is the author of the poetry collection, *House Where a Woman* (Autumn House Press, 2009). Her poems and reviews have also appeared in *Women's Review of Books*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *Salamander*, *The Laurel Review*, *Cimarron* and elsewhere. She is a graduate of the MFA Program in Poetry at Drew University and works as a software engineer in Morgantown, West Virginia.