

ADANNA
LITERARY JOURNAL

Founder/Editor
CHRISTINE REDMAN-WALDEYER

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

Adanna Literary Journal
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Credits

Front Cover Artist: Linda Murphy Marshal
Front Cover Title: Mirror Mirror

Artist Statement

I painted “Mirror Mirror” using two canvases [8” x 10” and 5.5 x 8.5”}, the smaller canvas glued on top of the larger. I used a palette knife for the most part, applying thick and textured layers of acrylic paint and some artists’ ink. This was a complete departure from my normal style of painting thin layers with a brush.

When I began the painting, I wasn’t sure of my end goal. I applied layer after layer of paint to the largest canvas, let it dry, and then began again after gluing on the second canvas. An anonymous woman gradually began to take shape, a featureless woman looking at herself in the mirror, maybe seeing herself as overweight, or maybe as thin; as viewers, we don’t know.

The title, “Mirror Mirror” is a reference to the Evil Queen in Snow White who studies her reflection in the mirror obsessively to ensure she is the fairest of them all. I see this same trait in so many women — myself included — judging ourselves using external, arbitrary standards, measuring our worth by societal standards, blind to what really matters in life.

—*Linda Murphy Marshall, Cover Artist*

Adanna's Mission Statement

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

— *Christine Redman-Waldeyer, Founder*

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POETRY

Emmaline Bristow

Big Dorothy's

I have never held the ring
strung in gold from Last
Chance Gulch. It was great
great grandmother's, harvested
when dust filled lungs
and prostitutes paraded
windows.

Big Dorothy's
is a restaurant now. A sports
bar. How fitting. Footballs
march down fields as men
once marched upstairs, drunk
and hard.

Big Dorothy:
a wealthy woman
who saved Helena,
who weighed 240 pounds.
My great grandmother might
have known

Big Dorothy.

Big Dorothy
might have known my great
grandmother, might have passed on
secrets of how to survive in snow-
ridden winters when food became scarce,
men became angry,
and women grew cold
as the mountain winds
they sought to escape.

Emmaline Bristow

Horsehair pillows

stiffen against my neck,
scratch at eczema
already red and flaking.
She sewed too many.
Horsehair pillows
appear in my grandma's house
like quilts appear across her bed
like drinks appeared in my great grandparents' hands
like Windex appears on my mother's counter.

An orange appears to ripen around Christmas
when my father's mother
sends a Harry and David box and late
cards to apologize forgetting the holiday.

Oranges are juicy and wet when ripe
like a teenage girl who first feels that warmth
between her legs, an ache to taste
something
but has no words for the juice.

My grandma could never return home
after bearing a child. Could never leave home
after not continuing school.

Sometimes this horsehair pillow strangles me
in my dreams, wraps its stringy, taut bands
around my neck, so thin they break skin,
warm redness wetting my chest.

Why do I write of suffocation?
Because I can't breathe without remembering
all the women before me.

Carol Casey

Generalities and Cliches

Prim suburban house-thoughts
with trim lawns, pruned hedges

safe, parceled out, no dandelions,
or patient friendly plantain,

no mess of entropy, no rusted
carcasses of well-loved vehicles,

no peeling paint or cockroaches
dare assert supremacy, no tangled

underbrush to trip and catch
just smart camera eyes seeking

violations. Never was a shell so
secure from wilderness, so sterile
of intrusive life, so defenseless

against the beasts unleashed
behind closed doors, curtains drawn,

pacing, restless, into many deviations
within respectable containers.

Carol Casey

Spider

The way forward
is through a spider's web
the filaments catch, cling.

We come out sticky, spitting
pulling off strands with shudders,
do not hear the spider's
tiny cry of angst.

She weaves again,
deadly, beautiful
and again
and till sustenance gone,
she shrivels into exoskeleton,
so strange, so familiar.

We trample, seek, destroy
as if she were mortal enemy
as if killing her
could make things right.

Carol Casey

Witch Time- With a Pinch of Shakespeare

Witches are walking.
Dress up like one.
Let yourself be green, grey,
warty, let yourself cackle, rhyme:
double double
toil and trouble

Let yourself be sharpened, free.
Toil to be trouble- all the things
nobody wants. Celebrate
what survived the burnings,
irreverent, probing,
poking fun, poking holes
nothing to lose,
falling through cracks
in the clay toes of the idol
underfoot,
toil and trouble

Stir it up,
watch it swirl, snail shell,
water down the drain,
Fire burn:

flames lick and destroy,
feel your bones crackle
with the bones
of your mothers
snap and sizzle,
suck the essence
feed the deluge left when
the righteous preen.

Cauldron bubble
throw it all in, stir it up,

make it nourishing
to little creatures
that get stepped on.
Make it soil the sterility
of the hollow soul.
Double Double.

Angie Dribben

Keep all the plates in the air

Now I know what mornings bring, coffee
percolated, time for the boil and first cup in bed.

My mustard and ketchup in full sized containers,
purchased instead of packets stolen from McDonald's.

Quit telling myself I like saltines and ketchup
better than shrimp cocktail. Now I always have another

roll of toilet paper under the sink. The man beside me
doesn't beat me as if I was his own chest.

I have forgotten where I keep my suitcase.
Started saving because I might want to grow old.

Now my words string lines, fold into stanzas,
find their way to permanence, to cradle meaning.

I've come to trust how sleep will find me,
belly down, an ankle tucked beneath his calf,

him face up, a hand cupping my bottom.
When life became something I wanted—

every pinched nerve threatens to be symptom
of nervous system disorder, every migraine a terminal diagnosis.

I count his glasses of water, asking questions,
Do you notice pressure on your colon?

It wasn't until I found a place I wanted to stay, that I felt
this kind of breath-holding, bees stinging on the inside,

keeping an eye on red solo cups shifting to hide the nut.

Angie Dribben

Remain

I read a book this time,
before packing
only what fit
in the back of a Wrangler
and taking off.

This book claimed marriage
may be about sitting
in my ratty used-to-be blue bathrobe
in my jeep in the driveway
all night long, but not leaving.

It's about early morning road trips
when starlight's still sleeping
on the road in gathered rain
and when he plays a love song for me,
I lean in real close, all of me soft,
letting him love me lyrical.

It's managing to breathe beneath
the weight of forgiveness, knowing
my heart tends to crinkle like sugar glass.
Wounds slow to close
make things worse than warranted.
Choosing to hurt rather than run.

Because to love is to flutter / falter / flutter again.
Because we said we are not leaving.

Angie Dribben

Stacking Stones

Lussier Hot Springs, BC

We sit in the middle of the middle pool, at the seam
of coldest and hottest. My shoulder tucked
into his wooly red armpit. Run my fingers across gravel
working an inch of tepid water, thumbs & fingertips.

Watch the river pass by as the sun slips
lower beneath the clouds. Minerals make water slippery
against our skin. On my knee bent and exposed,
my husband builds a cairn of tiny pebbles.

Precisely stacks each misshapen stone.
Each stone a line in a poem, its success dependent
upon a witness willing to recognize its intent.
My body the precarious parchment.

In the thirty-three days we dated
before we married, he stacked his three teenage children
in this same methodical manner on my heart.

*My oldest is a reader, plans to be a writer, she'll love
to share your books.*

*My athlete will run with you, she's on the track team.
She thinks farts are funny too.*

*When my son tastes your cooking, he'll say, "You should
open a restaurant." That's always what he says when he likes food.*

His oldest has still never spoken a word to me.
The athlete seems to have taken a vow of silence
and stillness. The boy did speak past me after he ate
my tenderloin, "Dad, remember that spaghetti and meatballs
you made before she came along? I like that."

His children tumbled quickly from my heart to rest around my ankles,
Shackle-beads on an abacus as I count down the days
until they leave home, having abandoned the hope of a bond.
Insults and rejections, a mound of rough stones, a cairn,
burial shrine, for the dream of a family.

After many failures, five years, five stones stay stacked on my kneecap.
Satisfied, my husband rises out of the water to cool himself.
My head rests on his thigh. I feel tissue become water,
become sunlight warming river, drawing rainbows to feed on the surface.

Lisa English

From the Emerald Island

From the emerald island
you emerged
birthed into a new world
one you didn't know, but you dreamed as a girl,
in a house like a sardine can with siblings lining each side.

You came with a bag of clothes and cured meats of all things
and entered the salty streets of New York
waiting to be bathed in its light

What shined forth was a fun but hard-working life
working at Schraffs, finding your way.
Pastries and coffees lined the path to fierce independence and wit
to carry you through.

It took you coming to the US to find a good Irish man to grow with
into 2 boys and an apartment
He left this world too soon and you were left again alone.
You only built yourself up- higher in spirit and love
Your humor brought people to you
and eventually to me

With stale corn muffins and butter with frostbite,
you taught me a woman can be alone and happy & full of wit
And laughter can heal any wound, any divide
even one that started across the Atlantic Ocean on an island
to here- a feeling, a place, a memory, a dream a life.
My Grandma Chris.

Lisa English

Hank's Poem

Wonder- I have had it around you
surrounded by glass, in ice for years
Years of wondering- are you cold? are you aware?
are you willing to wait? are you YOU?

I walked past you on other appointments
Asking "where is my son(sun)?"
seeing a capsule that looks like a time machine
and in many ways it is

You are suspended in time.
Your arrival hanging in the atmosphere
I think of you like an astronaut
existing at the same time, but time is not the same
You are here, but you are not
You are in two different worlds- one full of ice and weightlessness-
suspended in air but also here on earth tied to gravity and the tides.
You float
You exist
and so do we, but a world away
as we are now.

But now you have a warm universe to exist, to grow, to stretch finally
after one of the longest sleeps of your existence
you are really 3 years old, but you are also 26 weeks
you are a contradiction in many ways
but above all you are my son(my sun)

Another universe awaits full of light, sound, smells, tastes
constant surprise, and yes, cold again when winter comes,
but not forever, like you've known- and mangos, eggs, eggplants and
oatmeal, and a sister named June
who you are closer to in age than will ever be realized- a few months
apart actually
but she will seem like a distant planet operating in a much different

system than you

The sun breaks
you appear
shedding off all your past travels
taking on this new home and existence
you are YOU. And we love you.

Ariel Fintushel

Pensacola Brookline Pensacola

"Nobody deserves to walk through a metal detector to access health care"¹

They enter as ships and land // They enter as cows // imagined bodies
They enter as living women // Aurelia // as *sula* - flowering
They enter as sap // *sunoti* - pressing out juice
They enter as manure // as urine // medicinal // they enter as anatomy
as *sucan* // *linga* // to suck // they enter as broth, bread soaked in broth
milky ocean from which commodities derive // a whole new level
of dangerous // They enter as antimatter // as arsonists // carrying
maxi pad, tampax pearl, dental dam, condom // carrying only a long gun
growing from, flowers against // so low over your face // Look at the cute
dead, cute dead embryo // Pensacola Brookline Pensacola Buffalo
growing from, flowers against // cross, chain, long gun // grim boys
trimmed and crossing, trimmed and wanting // upheaval
24 rows of women head down the aisle, trimmed and crossing // trimmed
and waiting and wanting

// entrance

¹ quote by Vicki Cowart, CEO Planned Parenthood of the Rocky Mountains

Virginia Bach Folger

At the Honolulu Art Museum

A wall covered with blue,
brown and ochre faces:
Indonesian masks.

Japanese Courtesan in scarlet,
blue and purple robe, gazing
at Mount Fuji.

Nineteenth century Sargent portraits
of long-dead society matrons identified
by *Mrs.* and their husbands' names.

Woodblock print, black crow
on plum branch in the rain.
Brush-painted fans.

Yellow lotus blooming above
a reflecting pool
in the courtyard garden.

Trade winds sway invisible
palm fronds. Unseen ocean waves
crash onto sand.

Virginia Bach Folger

I Remember Being an Aerialist

“It is by no means an irrational
fancy that, in a future existence, we
shall look upon what we think our
present existence, as a dream.”

— Edgar Allan Poe

A trapeze artist
circus performer
climbing

the tallest ladder
up to the tent roof
climbing

up toward the sky
in soft silk slippers
climbing

a ballet dancer's grace
each arm over arm
climbing

each foot over foot
steady tempered calm
stepping

onto the platform
as the trapeze comes
swinging

slap my rosined hands
fingers grasp a hold
waiting

at the platform's edge

into the upper air
leaping

Deborah Gerrish

I Ask my Mother Her Favorite Color

Everything about her was pink. Her ruby
thinking deeper than optimism.

Even the dress we buried her in five
days after father died. Shell-pink

bordered in shiny sequins. The same
dress she wore to my wedding.

After twenty years, her joie de vive
wafts through my rooms like a blaze
of gardenias.

June Gould

Amends

*I feel the city among its late night news, the pouring in
of everything meeting, wars, dreams, winter night.¹*

We met at a poetry workshop at The New School in the sixties.
He was a poet refugee from Poland who wrote about loss, slaughter,
and dodging guns and bombs. I wrote about my aunt's dying,
being a mother, and my husband's sales trips away from home.
I invited him for dinner with my husband and daughter.

He glanced at my couch and chair, red Swedish rug, and pottery lamps.
He looked me over, said, *You are so bourgeois. Hasn't anything horrible
happened to you? Did you forage in a forest for food?
That's suffering! How can you write poetry if you haven't suffered?*

The term, *bourgeois*, startled and shamed me. Was I really
a female, materialistic cliché? *My cousins, aunts and uncles
suffered and died in Poland and Ukraine during WWII*, I offered.
*No, that didn't happen directly to you. It has to happen to you
for you to be a real poet*, he said.

Why didn't I stand up for the poetry that came from my life
as a child, a woman, a mother, a Jew? Why wasn't I strong enough
to debunk him, inform him, hear him without being thrown by him?
Why didn't I remember Muriel Rukeyser's poem, when she said,
*When we speak we are afraid our words
will not be heard nor welcomed, but when we are silent we are still
afraid, so it is better to speak.*²

Fifty years later, I shove open the sliding door
to my bourgeois balcony, and place a porcelain pot
of red Polish Poppies onto my outdoor table top.
The flowers are a reminder of the war-torn poet

¹ Audre Lorde quotes, www.goodreads.com.

² Overthrow of One O'clock at Night, Muriel Rukeyser

who broke into my life, as well as a bouquet of forgiveness
for my young, fearful, silence.

Maryanne Hannan

What I Need to Write

For my 8th Grade Imagination Assignment, which is: Write an essay, pretending you are an inanimate object. Where's the fun in that? A flight of fancy to nowhere? Inanimate definitely at loggerheads with imagination. But: *Could I pretend to be Imagination herself, unfettered, free, wandering the world without limit and write about that?* I ask my mother. My wise mother, my compass. She stops sweeping the kitchen floor for the third time since breakfast. Says: *Write an essay pretending you're a suitcase then.* What? Stuffed with other people's stuff, going to other people's places. A hard shell, kicked around, hidden in cargo. Dragged blindly, sat upon, emptied, stored once again. *Yes, my mother says, that would make a good essay.*

Maryanne Hannan

When I Dream of Freedom:

An Elegy for Ginny

A far forward field of daisies springs to mind,
earth so soft, it caresses my sore feet. I fondle
the flowers loosely, my cupped hand gliding
up tender stems to the bloom's scratchy
undersides. Is this how a cat's tongue feels?
And, is this the best I can do with imagined
freedom? When loss, all around,
topples what used-to-be. Was I lolling
in a field of daisies when my friend called?
She was back on chemo, but doing well.
Could I come for a visit? Said her message.
Sure, but it would have to be outside—
on her patio, or the park.

That was the message I left, with a little joke
about staying safe during quarantine.
She never returned my call and so many times,
I decided to defer. To wait till spring.
And then we'd catch up, somewhere pretty,
with the sun warming us. Today, I saw
her obituary in the newspaper. Contributions,
it said, could be made to our Gardening Club.

Elaine Koplou

Ordinary Day

When the phone rings,
I am on the deck watching
the dog nose into the bird seed
fallen to the ground
in the cool autumn breeze,
birds at the feeder, untroubled,
above him. A sprinkling of leaves
around us.

Late afternoon, he'd gone to the gym—
so she thought it was safe
to call. She said she was OK—
he was out. Even so, she whispers,
her voice like paper
on the other end.

Did I think she had to leave
him if he hit her? Just once,
she said. He had been having migraines,
work was tough. But, still,
it had been just an ordinary day,
unremarkable—the dishes, the laundry,
the cats—the typical. She was sure
she had done nothing
to provoke it.

Not a thing.
She was OK. It didn't show. Barely
a bruise, only a slight
discoloration—above her elbow.
Like bumping into a door.
Or the kitchen counter.

That small.
Did a person have to leave,
she asks again.

Michelle Lerner

Autopsy

in your big toe, the gout all these years
and the lake by our grandparents' cottage
the way we swam pushing water between our palms,
your toes in the wet sand sinking
brown water, cool air
as we stepped on shore.

your stomach, where your father left
the twists of your intestines
the way you panted, painted houses
making up for lost tuition.

your liver the half sister
you wouldn't recognize,
your kidneys
hanging up the phone.

your pancreas
the girlfriend in the rearview mirror
the new wife standing over you in the ER.

your pelvis, the way someone touched you
the way you were silent
and no one knows who it was.
the way you kissed your cousins
on the mouth, touched places
that you shouldn't
the way we slipped away, silent
and no one knows
who we are.

your throat
where you tried to speak
in ever shifting tongues
never forming complete sentences

in any one.

your lungs that felt so heavy
could not draw a breath—
clear of every trouble, every sign
visible to the medical mind
but stopping nonetheless
at fifty-six years
closing their palms
in prayer.

your brain never penetrated
before
refusing even now to let go
of the stories.

your body split, a gutted deer
a finger for each sibling
a parent for each ear
the mouth left open
where the air went out.

the teeth
that will remain
jutting, splintered
in the ash.

Heather Lee Rogers

Lighthouse Love Poem

Curious new me
I am divine
hot-flashing twice an hour
but my skin
looks fantastic
ready and rolling with
this fast-flying clothing
neglected again by
an over-extended man
(these disappointments
are so predictable)
but I remain
pulsing power and light
a beacon
illuminated in
who I finally am...
these men can crash
their ships in blindness
I don't care.

I shine
for my sister sirens
to see.

Heather Lee Rogers

Mammogram Poem

First mammogram
before the rain came
before the hurricane
before my appointment
I took a photo
of how beautiful
my body is today
to celebrate
how smooth and lithe
I felt in my own skin.
With my breast
clamped in the machine
I tried to remember
if any lover ever
pressed so tight
between the sheets
of rain falling
heavy on my window
rinsing grime and memories
with undue force
cold biting metal plates.
All relationships
need maintenance with time
in the name of beauty
in the name of pain
in the name of storms
Here I promise me
I'll love myself
I'll do that work
for me
for years to come.

Kelly R. Samuels

On the Screen, More Like

underwater, suspended, looking up
to where the surface is illuminated.

And, I suppose, this makes
a kind of sense, if you know anything
about how babies are contained
in this space—floating about in the early stages
before they fill it and push up against
the walls.

That one night I lay on my back and watched
his foot or his fist protrude, stretching my skin.

There's nothing like that here—rather, vastness.

We're on the hunt, she says.

And there's a turning. And a scouring
of the edges, as if we're down in the deeper depths.

Nothing resembles a pear.
Nothing seems that easy.

Kelly R. Samuels

Talking to Maya Gabeira

The still and moving are used to measure the height of the wave—
something about triangulation. Draw a line from here
to here, that

to that and we get some understanding. I'm sure you know.

I couldn't quite fathom, had to go out walking and cast upward
as you don't seem to do in the footage, as I've never seen surfers do.

Is it that the wall of deep blue and accelerating crush of its crest
are companion?

This broken bone. This stem, the spine, worked on more
than once.

This tenacity.

You say you'd like to shorten the gap between—between—

And look, now.

I say it's something like miraculous.
I watch you do it again and again.

Dipanwita Sen

Drudgery

I lay the table for breakfast.
My husband leaves with buttered bread clutched between his fingers.
The dishes grow cold;
He forgets he had asked for them
Just like he's forgotten my birthday, our anniversary, our...
They taste of sawdust as I stuff them down my throat.

I repair my daughter's party dress.
I sew buttons onto my son's coat.
Mu curlers lie at the back of the drawer,
Forgotten for the sixth consecutive week.

I clip at the shrubs in my garden,
I try to pull up weeks of weedy growth in one day.
'Mother,' says my son, 'There is a butterfly on your back'.
For a moment, I pretend I have wings.

VA Smith

Welsh Mythology

Each time my grandmother
bore at home
her thirteen children,
her legs spread wide,
bruised and bloodied
on the narrow bed,
back burning with labor
over twenty-two years,

my Welsh grandfather played his fiddle
as a birth announcement
in the cool dark of the parlor,
the coal town dim
behind lace curtains.

So many Smith tales told;
an arc of sweet myths
at Reservoir Park picnics.

Like my father's five year sucking
at Nannie's nipple,
wiping away the mustard
as she rocked and swayed him
to "The Highwayman,"
riding that ribbon
of moonlight over the purple moor.

Or how five Smith boys, a team,
shot baskets in the kitchen,
until Nannie, tired of weaving
among them to punch down her dough,
would swat them, send them off
with a "piece," bread thick with peach jam.

Smith lore banned darkness, it seems,

made sorrow a side note, like Aunt Ruth's
version of Aunt Jan who *died of leukemia,*
or we don't know what, at 21.

But Aunt Dot, wise and quiet
in her thin house dress
and soiled scuffs, framed this
slender story: Aunt Jan died
during an illegal abortion,
New York City, circa 1934.

Our plots join here
then divide. I thrived post abortion:
grad school, children,
teaching, only years later
waking in the night, mourning
a lost babe circling the earth,
longing to live.

Jan bled to death, her fetus,
like my own, a pink bud hacked
from our family tree. I replant
myth, give Rhiannon—Welsh queen,
horse goddess—water and air. Her
stolen son has always returned, as,
taken to the wind, she
blesses emptiness and births.

Thea Swanson

Atheist

At the end of it all, after inhabitations
were ripped from their hosts, he roamed

wide-eyed, through rooms, searching
for parts of himself he misplaced.

I sat, upright, in my chair, theologies crystalizing
in my palm. I flicked them, peered

at the dead things. How stupid. How
small. There is no mystery. There are men

who have made things in their image.
This puppet tires. This puppet stands.

Thea Swanson

Transformation

No ceremony for me, I was the one
who changed ontologically, watching

my husband's priesthood elevation: gold
threaded dresses adorning a swarm who

claimed servitude on a stage. My purpose:
to please. In a heavy discount skirt & bound

head, children in arm & at knee—Mom: remember
when we arrived at the dive bar? Me in my black

mini, red lips sticking to a cigarette & indifference
to every man in the room? *You're not playing the game,*

you observed. A drinker ambled over, got a good look
at my supple skin & lined eyes: *You look like you stepped*

right out of Playboy—Hey, you said. That's my daughter.
There are many rules but one game. I wasn't your antithesis

in any of my manifestations, after all. Flip a coin. There is only one,
forged by man: heads or tails, whores or virgins, servant or servant.

Janet Tracy-Landman

Deep Time

Time is not a line but a dimension . . .
You don't look back along time
but down through it, like water.
— Margaret Atwood, *Cat's Eye*

Her life task, says the sage?
To nurture the young. Or stagnate.

No late-bloomer he, the sage
never tasted the elder's envy

of youth, seemly youth.
Of handwritten sign on motel

wall admonishing: "No
Teenagers," while the bars of soap

in the rooms all gloat: *First Date*.
She lacks the excuse of youth.

The warning bell blares
as brown water rises,

threatening to bulldoze
the soft wall of sandbags.

Too little too late.
And yet.

Arctic lupine seeds
preserved 10,000 years

in prison-gray permafrost —
planted on drenched paper:

within 48 hours
some germinated.
One bloomed.

Janet Tracy-Landman

Don't Touch She Might Spill

They all do it,
that universal lift
of hand

wrist tilted to
flash light, to refract
hope.

No ivory brides,
these wives with their smashing
new rings,

high-priced fixes
for touch, whisper misplaced,
wrong address.

Not gone he swears
only somehow someplace
forgot.

With this ring he
promises never
again.

She staggers under
the 24-carat
payload.

Janet Tracy-Landman

Stars

1.

Today is the day
it plaits its lacey
ruff at the base
of a partner sapling,
entranced by what has trans-
pired. In a fortnight the young
tree bulks itself out in green.
Star Flower shrivels for
lack of light.

2.

Out of the tangle
Phoebus Apollo glimpses
a Quaking Aspen until
then lost in ungroomed woods.
He shines his director's
spotlight on her.
Does a reverse Daphne:
turns her into a woman —
a star. For he's a god
and she's the one.

Kelley Jean White

Blighted

A lethal condition, trisomy eighteen:
she's small, she's lived a week it's awful
to find how little I can tell
these parents; the hospital said she'd
beaten the odds, 5% chance of surviving
a year, and you, grandmother, trust me;
my daughter's due date's drawing near.

Kelley Jean White

Missed Miscarriage

Daughter, when you lost
the first I couldn't tell you
of the child I'd carried
and wished away

(the grandmothers say
each generation loses a child
or two, it's a lucky woman loses
none; and we know they're wise.)

You spoke of a 'missed
miscarriage,' such an early loss
a few decades ago
you wouldn't have even

known you were pregnant,
just a heavy, late period,
some genetic defect
a 'non-viable fetus.'

But we are mourning.
I'm five hundred miles away
and I'm crying sobs
more ragged sobs

than I've ever cried. I want
to hold you. I want to hold
this child. This grandchild
I didn't even know I wanted.

F

FICTION

Elayne Clift

A Thought in Passing

Sitting cross-legged amid the few remaining books waiting to be placed in labeled boxes, she lifts a second Chevas Regal to her lips and revisits the extraordinary drama the afternoon has yielded. It is a drama that has induced guilt and pleasure, anger and forgiveness, reflection and regret. As the sunlight wanes, then fades altogether, she soothes her aching shoulders and contemplates the nearly completed task with an odd mixture of remorse and relief.

She recalls her deep desire to purge this library over the years, fantasizing the choices she would make about what to be rid of, even before Ethan's illness. Now she is relieved, yet regretful, that she, the inveterate, compulsive organizer can jettison the tomes that had so often come to seem they were sucking the air out of the room. Finally, she can simplify, cleanse not only the books but the detritus of a forty-year marriage to one of the world's great hoarders. She can lighten the load of literature crowding the shelves and put in their place selected pictures, souvenirs collected during years of travel, and other favored treasures, dispersing them among the books from which she alone cannot bear to be parted. At the same time, now that she has come upon the secret epistles hidden among Ethan's books, she feels strangely bereft at the thought of turning over his collected works to strangers from whence they will disappear into the ether like gray, odorless fumes.

*

They were different in many ways. She, gregarious and playful but persistent and hell-bent on the urgency of relevance; he, clever but quiet, lacking in imagination when it required risk-taking, embedded in a profit-making world she could never embrace. Was it true that "opposites attract"? What would her life have been like had she married someone else, or no one? Had she loved him enough, really been in love with him? Had he truly loved her in a way that mattered? Why had they grown apart as the years passed until mutual irritation loomed large over little things? Why had neither of them been willing to put an end to it?

They'd met at a party, drawn to each other in conversation, neither physically attracted to the other, they later confessed. He'd

called, as he'd said he would, and they went to lunch, then a week later to a James Taylor concert. Dinners followed, they met each other's friends, shared a bed and had lighthearted, satisfying sex. She liked him, liked their being together, talking about people and politics, laughing at the same things. Most of all, she liked knowing he was smart and kind and someone she felt proud to be with.

After a year and a half, they married. Fourteen months later their first son was born, followed in two years by another. Life was comfortable in that unchallenging way that often leads to crisis or acquiescence. She had chosen the latter as a nagging question persisted, gnawing at her, scraping against her secret heart like sandpaper on tender flesh: Do I love him or only the comfort he brings? Am I living a lie?

To others they were "the perfect couple." They teased each other and showed affection in public, his attentiveness envied by other women. Each was successful, he a stockbroker, she a psychologist. Their well-liked sons excelled in college and careers and made good marriages. But there was, for her, a disturbing underbelly – isn't there always - and who knows the dark side of a marriage beyond the two people so intimately connected?

His darkness revealed itself when jealousy consumed him. When he thought she was overly attentive to male colleagues or friends he morphed into another persona, becoming Dr. Jekyll's Mr. Hyde. At cocktail parties, when she spoke at length to an attractive man, the color drained from his face and his eyes lost their color until he sulked his way home, accusing her of being "inappropriate" as she explained how silly he was being, drawing him out of his needless anger like a good social worker, never an angry wife who raged within at his oppressive stupidity.

Her darkness arose whenever she asked herself that awful question: Am I living a lie? It bubbled up within her when she fantasized leaving him and his jealous obsessions, and his books into which he retreated for days until he had recovered himself. Sometimes only the children and the fear of what others would think stopped her.

Still, they went on. Life settled down after the boys were grown with families of their own. She continued working when he retired, then undertook volunteer duties aligned with priorities about which she'd grown passionate. They traveled. Their life together became pleasant but for the irritabilities that encroached upon them from time to time.

*

The first letter floated out of a book about Machiavelli. She read it and snorted; it seemed an intentional metaphor for what Ethan must have been thinking when he placed it there: I'll show you! I know how to get you, he seemed to be saying. Part of his uncanny knowing, she realized, was in his reasoning that if he died first, she would go through his books, discarding what held no interest for her. The letter, written for another woman but not delivered she presumed, read in part, *"I sometimes wish things could have been different between us, but I was simply incapable of making change happen. I couldn't always do what was required of me. For that I'm sorry."*

The second letter was wedged into a volume of poetry by Rumi. Was it randomly placed among the great romantic poet's love verses? Was it meant for the same woman? *"I truly have loved you. You're an absolutely marvelous woman and I am quite unworthy of your affections. Don't deny it. You made that abundantly clear on occasion, but I got over it, even though it hurt me enormously, because I always believed you were right."*

Another one, also undated and written in Ethan's flourishing hand, fell from a biography of the intrepid Gertrude Bell. Intended again? It said, *"God, you could make me angry! Your intensity, your self-assurance, your propensity for saying something was black when I said it was white infuriated me! That's in part why I couldn't always be there for you - or even be with you - on occasion. I'm not proud of that. But neither should you be."*

One by one the letters came, in an order Ethan had anticipated, knowing that she would attack the shelves methodically, book by shelved book, until she had reached the end of them, where she would find the loving, vengeful, hurtful and happy, punishing and playful, multiple missives in a morass of never sent messages that captured a couple's emotional life together over many years.

The final letter told her, at last, for whom the letters were intended.

"Ours has been a long and often bumpy time, my love. But never doubt that I loved you with all my heart, always. You've been a good wife, a splendid mother, a treasured friend, a steady and reliable presence, an admirable crusader for what is right and good. You've been predictable most of the time (which is why I knew you would find these letters when they were meant to be read). You've also been a pain in the ass on occasion. I think you know that. You also know that I probably loved you more than you did me most of the time. Perhaps that is not

unusual between partners in long marriages. It doesn't matter now. What matters is that we built a life together, a life less fraught than forgiving - a mostly loving life that had its challenges, for which we were both responsible, but a life rich with meaning and resonance for all that is beautiful in human experience. Thank you for that, my darling. Thank you for all that you have given me. As for what I've given you - aside from aggravation and now a bit more space - I can only beg your forgiveness for my failings in the knowledge that loving you as I have sometimes made me crazy. Now, you must continue living well and boldly. Go on being all that you are and can be with the knowledge always that I love you."

*

She hugs the last letter to her breast, weeping. Never did she imagine that in the postmortem tasks following Ethan's death she would discover something seemingly outrageous, only to find it morph into a treasure trove, a love dump laced with an infusion of guilt that had dropped into her lap from the pages of books she'd been eager to discard. How will she live with what she has found - letters and their legacy bringing with them newly complicated feelings about Ethan and herself and them together?

In days to come, she will tackle copious basement files, Ethan's study, his closet and drawers. But for now, the books that have lined the walls of the study for so long, the sheer density of them, the secrets they've kept, and their new significance, arouse a desperate feeling that she needs time and space to blow away the dust which lies heavy on her heart now, as it does on vacant shelves. She must let light enter in order that she not be suffocated by a new loneliness borne of her own failings, already engulfing her. From that new space, quite alone, she will have to find her way to the largesse of forgiveness - for Ethan, and herself.

For the first time in a long while she wishes her husband was there to help.

###

Diane Lederman

The Sign

Shanna Spektor set her hand on the brass doorknob and looked up again at the sign rocking in the breeze above her.

“Madame Clara - clairvoyant, palmist, your guide on all affairs of life. Hours 10 to 9 p.m. daily. Yiddish, Italian, English.” The words and images were red on a yellow board. The sign looked freshly painted. She swallowed, her throat dry. She turned the knob, chimes announced her entry.

Two days before, she discovered the studio while looking for help wanted postings on the windows of shops that hugged Purchase and Acushnet streets. By the time she saw the sign, she was feeling hopeless, her feet aching from her 10-hour day on the factory floor running along the spinning bobbins, watching for fractured threads.

She had told herself to push ahead one more block before giving up and turning for home when she saw the sign for Madame Clara’s.

She wasn’t sure exactly what the words in English meant but the drawings of a palm and lobes of the brain were enough of a clue. She confirmed her guess by looking up the words in her Yiddish-English dictionary she carried in her purse.

For weeks, she had searched for answers to her need in letters in the *Forvert*. People like her, Yiddish speaking immigrants from all over Russia, wrote to this “Worthy Editor” in New York asking for help finding husbands who ran out on them, with bosses who docked pay unfairly, for help with oppressive conditions on the factory floor. But no one had written about having a husband like Lev.

He did not beat her with fists but with his words. And his moods wrenched her like a bit in a horse’s mouth.

When she saw Madame Clara’s sign, she remembered the stories in that same Yiddish newspaper about Professor Hochman who read palms and foreheads and could predict winners of horse races and locate missing husbands. Maybe Madame Clara would be like this professor and let her know what she should do.

Inside the empty parlor, her eyes adjusted to the room’s semi-darkness. A moment later, a woman wearing a green ribbed silk dress with a low neckline, her cheeks rouged and eyes rimmed in kohl

emerged silently from another room. She was round and large like Shanna's old Russian friend Olga.

"Madame Clara," the woman said, extending a ringed hand. "Welcome."

"Mrs. Spektor," she said taking Madame Clara's hand that was warm and dry to the touch. Shanna's palm was damp.

Madame Clara pointed to a sign that had some words Shanna couldn't read. "Fifteen cents," Madame Clara said as if understanding Shanna's confusion. Shanna nodded and took a dime and nickel from her purse.

"Yiddish?" Madame Clara said.

Shanna nodded.

"*Gut. Zitsn,*" she said, beckoning Shanna to one of two matching floral-patterned chairs in the corner of the parlor. Shanna settled into a chair that held her like a hug. Smells of tobacco and lavender scented the air. Madame Clara sat in the neighboring armchair.

Four wooden chairs were placed around a round table in the center of the room. Unlit candles sat on the table, covered with a green and orange cloth. Maybe Madame Clara contacted the dead there in a seance. Shanna did not believe that was possible. But, maybe it was.

Pictures of women with piercing gazes hung on the walls. Shanna wondered if they were friends of Madame Clara or relatives. She wondered if they too were soothsayers.

"Tea?" Madame Clara asked.

Shanna shook her head no, eager for her future.

"You've come about your husband." Madame Clara stated it as fact, not question.

Shanna lifted her eyebrows; surprised Madame Clara knew of her need before Shanna told her the reason for her visit. She nodded.

"You are contemplating whether to leave the marriage, but apprehensive too. You made a vow." Madame Clara's voice was deep, almost like that of a man.

"You believe that you should honor this promise. Yet, your husband does not always take care with you."

Shanna felt herself start to burn, as if she had a deep fever. She wanted to ask this woman how she knew all of this.

"You want to go. More than want. You need to go and yet from me you want this guidance, an affirmation what's already before you. Because you also have fear and doubt in your heart. Is all this true?"

Madame Clara's eyes seemed an almost unnatural blue, but it might be the way the nearby lamp lit her face. Shanna couldn't speak, she was so stunned by Madame Clara's clarity of vision. She merely nodded.

"I can use cards if you like...or read your palm. Some criticize – say that those in my profession are magicians of tricks not truths, but I have been affording my guidance for nineteen years and have many, many, who return throughout the vicissitudes of their days with further queries."

"My palm is worn from years of factory work, does that matter?" Shanna extended her hand, scarred from the constant twisting of threads and chapped from the cold.

"The lines of a hand cannot be erased," Madame said as she closed her eyes before running her fingers along Shanna's open palm. She studied the shape of her hand and examined Shanna's fingers one by one. Turning her hand over, she looked at the nails and the lines by her wrist. She examined it as closely as Shanna scrutinized the English alphabet until she was sure of the letters she was learning. Madame Clara pointed to various lines and seemed to be having a conversation with herself, whispering words under her breath.

"You have suffered in your country; I can see but I don't need to tell you what you've already experienced unless you need me to demonstrate to you my reading of the past so you trust in my appraisal of the future."

Shanna shook her head no. She didn't need to hear of the beatings, the shootings, the stabbings – she and Lev had fled nine months ago. She didn't want to say the word *shendung*, the rape her husband did not know about and never would.

"Very good," Madame Clara said as she traced the line from Shanna's third finger to her wrist. "This is the route of your future. Your new beginnings. Your fate."

Shanna nodded, waiting for more as she resettled in the soft chair.

"You are filled with worry and sorrow. But this will be brief. I see a new life for you. You are smiling. You are doing for others too. Part of some greater movement. But you must take care here because not all wish you well."

Shanna's stomach twisted. How did she know Lev despised unions as much as Shanna valued their agency? That he was trying to sabotage their work to unionize at her factory and others – any mill in

which his so-called benefactor, this *gonif* was involved. His work had become the latest rupture between them. One that impelled her here today.

“I also see great love... I don’t know when it will bloom, but you will not be alone. I see years of companionship and affection. If you know this person already, it has not become what it will be.”

Shanna felt butterflies in her stomach. She didn’t dare hope Madame Clara was speaking of her friend Ina. She was afraid to ask if she had fallen for Shanna as Shanna had for her. Instead she said, “You don’t see a way to stay?”

“Not without great despair and regret.”

“So, this is what is before me?” Shanna said, half statement, half question.

Madame Clara nodded. Shanna shuddered. This is what she wanted to hear. This was what she was afraid to hear.

“How do you know Yiddish?” Shanna asked. Her heart was racing, she needed relief from what Madame Clara was saying. Words that chilled her in their certainty.

“My grandmother. She spoke only Yiddish. I loved her and found the language comforting. I picked it up easily, much to my mother’s irritation. ‘American,’ she would say and pound her hand. ‘American.’ She spoke Yiddish too but only English to me. My grandmother, we had a secret understanding, and spoke Yiddish whenever we were alone. It is good. Several from your country have sought my help and word is spreading that I am here. One kind soul told me she had traveled to New York seeking guidance in her native tongue. She kissed me she was so happy to find me.” Madame Clara stated that as fact, Shanna thought, not as boast.

“You have not been here long, I know. But it will get better,” Madame Clara said, nodding to Shanna now.

Shanna looked at her again, this time with more intent and less apprehension. She wanted to understand who this woman was who could see so clearly into her life. She smiled, timidly.

Shanna’s father, a rabbi, would not believe in such a talent. He would be astonished Shanna was even here. Perhaps disappointed too. In the Bible it was written: “*Let no one be found among you who sacrifices their son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft.*”

“How did you know about this gift, these eyes that can see beyond this room?”

“I didn’t know it was a gift. I thought everyone had such a sense. It was only later that I understood. Like having the blessing of a musical ear. One could say being able to play sounds that no one else can hear is not unlike being clairvoyant.”

“Does it scare you?”

Madame Clara laughed. “I have never had a vision or a fortune telling that scared me. So, I guess the answer is no. But sometimes the work is tiring if I can confide a truth. And then I take my sign down for a few days and take shelter alone.”

“May I ask one other question.”

“Yes, we have a few more minutes and no one has come in.”

“I did not ask if you see problems at my factory with the union we are trying to bring in. Will we succeed. Did you see anything in my palm that could answer that?”

Madame Clara again took Shanna’s hand in her own. “I see a struggle in the near future. That might represent the troubles with this union work or with toil as it is. I cannot say. Your Fate line does not tell me. I am sorry.”

Shanna swallowed, feeling a despair that prompted memories of her first weeks in New Bedford when she spoke no English and had no friends only a husband she hardly knew. She had no hope then and felt the same now. She was scared, she wanted to go home to Kishinev to be with her father or at least to find her brother who was somewhere in this country, she just didn’t know where.

“Other things in your life will bring you happiness, Mrs. Spektor. Do not despair.” Shanna smiled. She felt as if she had spoken of her gloom out loud.

She saw the time on a clock she had not noticed before sitting on the sideboard, it had been an hour since she first arrived. She gathered her coat and stood to go.

“Come back if you need further clarity. And good luck, Mrs. Spektor. I hope I have helped.” Madame Clara stood now and extended her hand.

While Shanna believed everything Madame Clara told her, she would not tell anyone about her visit here now. Others might be distrustful and question her judgment in trusting this woman’s words.

But Shanna held Madame Clara’s words to her heart even the ones she wished she didn’t hear.

The chimes sounded as she left the parlor into the night. She turned right on Purchase Street but then turned back to the sign to look at the words again before starting her six-block walk home.

Kelsey McWilliams

Moonlight

TW: abortion, emotional abuse

“I miss him,” she said, looking out onto the backyard from the second story window of the master bedroom. She had continued to look, trying to find the moon. What cycle was it in? Maybe it would explain the mysteries of the day, she thought. Her eyes scanned the dark lawn. She imagined how it was in the daylight, the green, shortly cut fresh grass, the gardens lining the brown fence, the mounds of dirt.

Here was her life, she thought. The one she always wanted with the picket fence (not white, but brown) and the green grass (not freshly cut, but green), and the swingset, and the growing plants, and the mounds of dirt. Here was her life, before her. All she had worked for. Had she worked hard enough? She thought to herself. Or had she complained, like her mother, or her mother’s mother, or the mother before that? She never wanted to become her mother.

“You didn’t even want him. You hated him,” he said, sitting on the bed behind her.

She heard him rustling around. She imagined him taking off his dress shoes, placing them neatly beside the nightstand. And then his socks. And he had this horrible habit of smelling them after taking them off and she imagined him doing that and she felt a little sick in her stomach thinking about it.

“... at first,” she said. “But later... well, I hated him less, I guess. He was a good dog.” She could not see the moon. She felt a turning in her stomach, though. She knew there would be blood soon. It was coming.

There were arms on her waist suddenly, and breath on her neck. “Wait,” she said. She turned around to face him. His breath smelt like cigarettes. “Oh,” she said. “I thought you quit.” He had quit smoking several times. He was a smoker when they met. Though... she was only 13 and her best friend had a crush on him. He came around the school sometimes, with his brother, also 13. He was 17 years old then. Of course, everyone liked the older boy who smoked a cigarette outside of a junior high school. She had remembered getting a lecture from her principal. He was tall and had started balding. God, she imagined, it was

so stereotypical. He had told her to be safe. Her mother had never told her those words. And she thought he was rude and invasive, and she spread a rumor that he told her to wear less revealing clothing and snapped her bra strap.

It wasn't that that principal was right. She was safe. She felt safe with *him*. This is not a story of abuse. This is not a story of neglect. They had their happy ending. But now, she was here, in this moment, and soon the child from inside of her was going to be expelled out in the toilet and she was waiting for it to happen.

She looked at her husband. Well, they never married, actually. He laughed and she noticed his glassy eyes and the twisted smile. "You're drunk," she said curiously. "When did you have time to get drunk? Didn't you work late?"

"Honey," he said, and laughed a twisted laugh. "My dear," he continued, "my job..." he spoke very slowly, "my job... is to suck up to the *man*. And the *man* likes to drink. And if I suck up to him, I gotta be on *his* level. And he buys the drinks. He calls the shots." He took her face in his hands. "*Honey*, do you know what I do for work?"

She tried to pull away and he held on tighter. "You're a salesman?" she said, questioningly.

"Indeed," he said, confidently. "Today I am selling a birth control pill."

"I know," she said. "You only get your period four times a year."

"But we don't *need* that, do we, honey? Cause we're trying. We're really trying. Are we going to try tonight, baby?" he said. They hadn't had sex in two weeks. He had been trying. She had been secretly taking his pills. A sample he had brought home. She had looked through his briefcase, specifically, to find it. She kept them in an aspirin bottle in her purse. She took them at 9:00am, after he left for work, after breakfast was done, before she went to her part-time job where she did administrative work for 15 dollars an hour. She swallowed them without water.

But, it didn't matter. She got pregnant anyway.

His hands were sweaty on her face. She pulled away from him, turned around, looked back out the window. Her stomach churned. The cramps were coming. Soon, she would see the evidence in her underwear. How was she to hide this?

He sat down on the bed, laid back. His feet were dangling on the floor. "Come undress me," he slurred.

“I have to go to the bathroom.” She walked the few feet to their bathroom and shut the door, leaning briefly against it, catching her breath. She locked it, quietly, turning the lock, waiting for the click.

She turned the water on, burning hot, on high. Pulling down her underwear and jeans, she sat on the toilet and saw the blood in the pad. There was less than she thought. She was sure there was more to come.

6 hours ago, she had taken a pill. She was early. 7 weeks. Early enough to take the pill and to bleed it out. A nice woman with short curly brown hair and glasses explained it to her. She would take the pill; this would soften something... the cervix? She didn't know. The woman talked so fast. Then she'd take another pill and this would expel the...

A knock at the door. “What are you doing in there?”

She reached over, turned the water off. “I... I got my period,” she said.

“Should take those pills of mine,” he laughed through the door.

“But then I couldn't...” she began, but realized it was too quiet for him to hear.

“Get out of there,” he said, suddenly.

She looked down at the blood-stained pad and pulled up her pants. She had peed while she was sitting on the toilet and she noticed a lot of blood. Not just blood, but clots. She wondered if it was in there, floating around, ready to go into another world. Or if it was yet to come? “Just a... just a second,” she wiped up some of the blood that had escaped onto the toilet seat. She looked into the mirror, noticed her eyes were glassy too, but not from booze. She splashed her face with water.

“Get out,” he commanded through the other side of the door. She wasn't sure what she would open the door to.

It wasn't as if he was abusive. He was just needy. He was a man. Her mom always said men were needy. And jealous. Boy, he was jealous. He struggled being alone. He was afraid. He wanted to be in control. This was just what life was, wasn't it? Her mom said to just go with it and she did.

“What?” she opened the door, and he was standing in his shirt, tie and underwear.

“What do you mean, ‘what?’ I'm finally here after working all day and you get to stay at home all day and relax!” he moved towards the bed, his hand pounded his chest.

She felt her stomach churn and she couldn't help it; it just came up in her throat and out of her mouth without thinking. She laughed. It

was a hearty sardonic laugh. “What are you, the Hulk? Are you going to rip off your shirt with rage?”

“Mom?” their 4-year-old son was in the doorway, interrupting this display of posturing.

“What are you doing up?” She asked and he walked to her side, wiping his eye with the back of his hand. He was wearing his Hulk pajamas tonight. “You talked loud. I woke up.” She held out her hand. His small hand slid into it easily. She led him to their bed. Her husband moved out of the way, sat down facing the closet, away from them. She looked at his back. He was undoing his tie, sweat stains beneath his armpits darkened his light blue shirt. She could feel his seething rage radiating off of his body. She hoped her son didn’t feel it.

“I want to sleep here,” her son said. He was still wiping the sleep from his eyes. “I dreamed of Nico. He was licking my face and it tickled and I woke up. I miss him. I thought he was really there.”

“I miss him, too,” she said and pulled the child close to her breast. She missed breast feeding, feeling that closeness with her child, though she resented it at the same time. Her body was not her own during that period. Her body belonged to someone else. But, they had bonded and it was something she could do alone with her son, something that her husband could have no part of. Inside her, there was churning and expelling taking place and she could feel it very clearly now, like she was having heavy cramps. She bit down, held her son tighter, and tried to hide her pain.

“You don’t miss him,” her husband said. He had since laid down on her side of the bed, his arm draped across his forehead like he was fighting off a headache.

“You don’t miss him, mommy?” her child asked and looked up at her, his cheeks wet with tears.

“Yes, I miss him,” she pulled him closer again and looked back at her husband, giving him a look of death that only a wife would give to her husband. Only, his eyes remained closed, and he didn’t see her. “You didn’t even like him.”

She stood up, held out her arms for her son. He held out his own and she picked him up, rested him on her hip. She took him over to the window. She looked for the moon first. Still cloudy. The pain was becoming more intense and she stopped for a second. “What, mommy?” he asked.

“Over there,” she said. “See,” she closed her eyes, the pain was becoming too intense. “See, just under the moonlight. There he is. There’s Nico.”

“I can’t see him, mommy.”

“No,” she said, “I guess it’s too dark.” She set him down and looked back, trying to make out the mound of dirt in the moonlight.

Churning inside.

Nneamaka Onochie

Silencing A Buzzing Bee

It was the day Unochukwu died that the pepper you planted in a used large Milo tin sprouted its delicate leaves and the aching pain at the nape of your neck ceased.

His head rested on the glass table. His mouth hung open and saliva traced the corner of his lips. The tea you served him spilled on the table making a mess of the files he worked on. You screamed in a shrilled voice and your neighbours rushed into your house. Someone closed his mouth and his remains was taken to the mortuary. That day, you untied the wrapper on your waist, threw it on the ground and ran out like a mad woman. Your neighbours chased and held you down, tightening the wrapper to your waist. You rolled your head, stomped your feet and screamed. You rolled on the floor and firm hands held you tight, but you were inconsolable.

"Endure, Ngozi," a woman said.

"Take it easy. Remember your children," another said.

"What is my life without Unochukwu? I want to follow him." You cried.

"No, woman. Your children won't be orphans. Put them into consideration." Anele, your husband's uncle said.

Your mouth parched, and water was brought to you with pain relief drugs, but you would have none of those. Sympathizers trooped in and out. Women cried with you and men heaved. Some nestled close to you and watched you closely so you wouldn't harm yourself. Later in the evening, three women spent the night with you to keep an eye on you and tend to the needs of Cheta, Obi and Ndidi, your children. It was the morning of Unochukwu's death that Ndidi crawled to your side, stood up and took small steps for the first time in two years. It was like the dark cloud that hovered in your house disappeared and gave way to light. Though you knew you forced the hands of the gods and decided the fate of Unochukwu.

It had been a year after the death of Unochukwu and the thick red mud on his grave had erupted small weeds. Your shaved hair had grown, and you had dutifully laid aside your white gown of chord lace and scarf you used in mourning him. Wrapped in your long chiffon flowered gown, you sat on the veranda and extracted the gel from the

aloe-vera plant into a bowl and thought of how you would have excelled if you had ventured into acting career because even the gods would believe your lie. You had enough.

Unochukwu worked at the Elio Bakery at Amaokpala village in Amokwa, where he lived with your little family. He was the manager and brought home pastries every day for you and the children. There was constant flow of money though not in surplus, but you had enough to eat. You knew he was having an affair with one of his workers, some of your friends told you they constantly saw them in the bush bar at Ezianya. They said she was the girl who supplied them bread for their shops. They told you she was tall and ebony complexioned. She had dimples when she smiled, and her buttocks jiggled when she walked.

Then one-day you visited the bakery with the excuse of delivering an important message to your husband, you saw her, she was just like they described. It was she who supervised and helped with the supplies. She was beautiful and friendly, and you knew it wouldn't be hard for a man like your husband to be attracted to a girl like her. Her seemingly breezy nature endeared one to her. You caught the brief glint of surprise in her eyes when you mentioned you wanted to see your husband and it vanished just immediately. She might be beautiful, but you realized that she was also smart. She took you to your husband's office and informed him of your presence.

"Sorry to disturb you sir but your wife is here to see you."

Then she ushered you inside the office. Her nicety was convincing, but you weren't fooled. Later in the evening when Unochukwu came back, he warned you never to come to his office unless in emergency. When you asked him about that girl at his office, he told you that she was the woman you would never be. Then the bakery caught fire one-day and the owner, Chief Okoli said he would sell it and your husband became jobless. His constant kicks on your stomach, the barrages of slaps, became a routine. Once, your eyeball protruded out of the socket, alarmed you ran to the eye clinic and the optician said you were lucky to have arrived on time else you would have had complications. Twelve years of stale and daunted union submerged in fear and loss and resentment. Dreams burned to ashes and went up with smoke.

You went home that day and met his absence. The children were off for lesson, so you took broom and despite being told by the doctor to desist from hard-work and stress, swept and cleaned the house thoroughly. You entered the garden you grew at the backyard of the

house and plucked uziza leaves for jollof rice. Dinner was ready when the kids came back from lesson. You served them, and later helped with their homework. It was late in the night when you heard a thunderous knock on the door. He shoved you by the side and barged into the house like a manic, threw himself on the sofa and snored like a pregnant she-goat in labour. It was in the wee hours of the morning that you felt a nudge between your thighs and a sensation. You opened your eyes and it was late. He had already had his way. With your head on the pillow, you gritted your teeth and clutched tightly to the sheet as he rummaged you. He moaned loudly and his heavy breath stinking of the mixture of suya and alcohol. You memorized numbers in your head to preoccupy your mind then finally he was through and rolled to the other side of the bed snoring. You got up and rushed to the bathroom to wash him off your body and prayed nothing germinate of the seed he planted in you.

Three miscarriages and two children. Unochukwu wasn't the man worthy of offspring breeding. Two children were enough for you and you took every precaution to prevent conception, but the baby stayed. You birthed a girl who couldn't walk after one year and it shattered the base of your essence.

"She would be fine," the doctor said. "Some of the traumatic experiences you had during her pregnancy were a trigger to her condition. Also, some children take longer to walk but be rest assured that she will eventually."

You wept at any flimsy chance you got. When you diced the onions, you pretended their harshness brought out water from your eyes, and when you added condiments to the soup, you would say the steam from the soup watered your eyes, but you cried for your dear Ndidi and blamed yourself. Maybe it was a way of the universe to punish you for attempting to get rid of her in your womb.

"Will my daughter ever walk?" You muttered.

Unochukwu barely carried her and he looked at her with disdain. When she cried reaching out to him, he would scream at her and you would carry her to your bosom and shush her.

"You are yet to tell me how you conceived of that child because that girl is no daughter of mine." He barked.

"Let me remind you that it was the night you sneaked in-between my thighs and forced your way; one of those nights you came home drunk." You cried.

He stood from the couch and dashed towards you. Unfastened his belt and gave you some strokes at the buttocks like a headmaster

flogging a disobedient pupil, and like a dutiful wife, you clutched your daughter tightly in your embrace and bore the pain while Ndidi cried for you. That was the first time you never defended yourself when he hit you. Ndidi cried herself to sleep and you took her to the room and laid her on the bed. Her facial features were edgy and perturbed. Even in her sleep she was forlorn. With your thumb, you wiped away the flicker of tears below your eyes.

Your ma had told you that a wrong choice in life partner would be the greatest mistake one made, remunerating how it would mar every facet of one's life. It was inside her dilapidated kitchen. She steered the okro soup and tasted for salt. Her lips parted and the heat emitting from the soup smothered her face. Satisfied, she closed the pot, took it down from the fire and continued.

"In this part of the world, men are the gods and makers of our fate. Large part of our happiness solely relies on them. The portion of happiness you get relies on the head of your household. If you are lucky to get the good master, you wouldn't have to endure for the rest of your life. I hope that when the time comes that you will make a good choice." She concluded.

Ma had only you and your late brother who died of typhoid. Looking back at the marriage between your parents, it was like a coconut that lacked water in its belly. Ma was Pa's first wife. He had gone to his farm at Ogbaku and returned home with his pregnant girlfriend; a tall, robust girl with yellow skin. It was that day that he informed Ma that he had paid her bride price the past two market days. He took the girl into his inner chamber and shut the door in Ma's face. You knew Ma was broken but you didn't see her cry. The sound from Pa's room was loud. The bed creaked and you feared for the baby in his new wife's belly.

After the loss of your brother Lotanna, you knew they tried again for another child which never came. Ma accepted her fate and Pa's new wife Ebube. Pa would throw a fit if he found his new wife busy with chores. He would scold Ma and flog you. He massaged her legs with Ori and later in the night, you would hear the sound of the creaking bed and the loud moan of Ebube and you wondered if it was pain or pleasure. You would tighten the lids of your eyes and force yourself to sleep. In the morning, they would come out of the room smiling and flirting with some sort of naughtiness in their eyes and you were certain that she used juju for Pa.

Then she put to bed and it was a girl; a healthy robust baby that cried every morning and late in the evening. Then she would prepare

yam pepper soup with fresh fish and stock meat and make her drink. Meekness settled in her eyes as she looked at Ma detaching the uziza leaves from the fronds.

Early in the morning and late in the night, Ma would bath Ebube with hot water and you would hear her scream and cry in pain. Ma's hand was firm, and you knew that whatever she did to her in the bathroom was done with expertise. She would limp inside the house and Ma would tell her that the sweetness of a man also comes with pain and if she would like to comfortably take more of his sweetness, she should endure the hot water. Ebube would shriek and say that Pa would never touch her again. Pa never revered her again. He would shout at her for flimsy reason. He no longer bought bush meat. He complained that her food was either too salty or too peppery. When she conceived again and birthed another girl, Pa ignored her. You wished Ma was still alive. Ebube had her hands full, nursing your father who was down with stroke after Ma's death and raising two children with the meager amount she made from petty trading.

You got up from the bed and walked to the door but before you left the room, you turned to look at her again. It was the harmattan season and the period Unochukwu had frequent asthma attacks which were perpetuated by dry air. Often, he had severe breathlessness, he wheezed especially at night or in the early morning. You always pounded ginger with a little water and soaked in a handkerchief and stuff it to his nose to aid his breathing and it helped relax his nerve and steadied his breath. It had been long – he saw the doctor since his symptoms and his peak expiratory flow readings reduced. Three months ago, when he had acute asthma exacerbation, the doctor told him that he had respiratory failure. He barely went out and usually sat on the table working on some files and drinking hot tea and you wondered why it never burned his tongue. The attacks tended to sneak up on him before he noticed, it worsened. You were in the kitchen when he had one. He struggled with his inhaler which was under the table. He called out to you in panic, but you ignored him and peeped through the kitchen door. You watched him struggle desperately as he used his inhaler but there was no improvement after using the quick acting inhaler. He wheezed violently, grasping for air that seemed elusive. Then he resigned and slumped on the table, crashing on the teacup which spilled on the files.

The finality of it all was death. It had silenced the buzzing bee. At first, you didn't know whether to start crying or laughing. Your emotions were intertwined, and you tried to sort it out. Then you grabbed

your purse and rushed to the market. When you answered the question family and friends asked when they heard about his demise, your reply was that you were in the market and went home to meet him lifeless. That was when you screamed and alerted the neighbours.

Two years have gone by, there was a newness in your home. It was like the windows were opened and fresh air ushered in. The garden bloomed, and you blossomed. You wore a different glow that emanated from inside. Two of your husband's plots of land were sold to aid his burial and what remained of the money; you would use to start that textile business you had always wanted. You would have preferred a city like Onitsha or Aba but they were beyond your reach.

If there were any investment you would make on yourself then it would be on your children because they were the extension of you. Cheta will take you to America, Obi will take you to Germany and Ndidi will welcome you in Lagos. You weren't afraid to dream anymore.

Terry Sanville

Ledges

“Why’re those people up there?” Maureen asked. She clutched an empty cocktail glass in one hand and pointed with the other.

“Who are you talking about?”

“Those people...those idiots.”

Dale looked in the direction his wife pointed and grinned. “Those aren’t people, honey. They’re trees.”

“Trees? Can’t be.”

“Well, they are.”

“Nah. Look at ’em leanin’. See that bent one...looks old, kinda like you.”

Maureen chuckled and continued gazing skyward at the monolith of seamed red and tan sandstone that helped form Zion Canyon. Stunted junipers spotted the vertical peak’s lower flanks. But near its summit, three thousand feet above the couple’s window table at the Switchback Grille, a row of pines clung to a tiny ledge, having sent their roots deep into the rock.

A waiter arrived with another Strawberry Daiquiri and set it in front of Maureen. Dale gave a quick throat-cut signal and the waiter nodded.

“Just how do you think those people got way up in the clouds?” Dale asked.

“Don’t know. Better get down before dark. Musta taken a big chance.”

Dale reached over and stroked Maureen’s shoulder. “Yes, a big chance.”

“Ya ever think...what it be like?”

“What are you talking about?”

Maureen tiskied. “Be up there, stupid.” She pointed with a wavering arm, white as milk.

“No, I’ve never thought about it.”

“Well ya should. No way up, no way down. So you brace yourself, ya know.”

“I don’t know. I think you’d better stop drinking.”

She pushed his arm away. “That’s all ya got...stop drinking?”

“It would help.”

“Well, I was wrong.” Maureen reached for her cocktail but Dale moved it away.

“That’s a rare one. What were you wrong about?”

“Those people didn’t mean ta get stuck up there. Just bad luck...or they failed...”

Dale leaned forward and took her hand. “The wind blew the seeds of those trees there. Or maybe birds dropped them.”

“With our luck...some big ole buzzard took a dump.”

Dale laughed. “They do have Condors here in Utah.”

“Yeah, imagine seein’ those ugly things up close? Landin’ on that ledge. Waitin’ for us to kick...”

“Is that how...how you see us? Stuck on a ledge.”

Maureen sighed. “Ah, don’t get all weird. But sometimes I feel...feel the wind. Got my back against the rock...fingernails scratchin’ that chalky stone...starin’ down river...’cross desert.” Maureen shot a hand across the table, grabbed the cocktail glass and drained half its contents. “If ya wanna hear the story, ya gotta let me...”

Dale frowned and leaned back in his chair. “All right. Tell me about your ledge.”

“Our ledge, stupid.”

“Okay, okay, our ledge.”

“It’s maybe this wide.” She spread her hands apart, almost knocking over her cocktail. “It’s damn cold...the rain...snow...they hurt...sun burns our hides.”

“That would be a change. You never go out, except to—”

“Oh shut up... let me...talk. You never do, ya know.”

“Oh you talk plenty...but seldom sober.”

Maureen scowled. “I’ll ignore that. Been on our ledge so long we can’t move. Maybe you’re right...we’ve turned into trees. But there’s cracks in those rocks. We’ve got gear. Coulda climbed to the top. But you got...got scared.”

Dale bowed his head and stared at his folded hands. “Yes, I got scared that I’d drop you, that you wouldn’t be strong enough to haul your own weight.”

“Me? You gotta be kiddin’. My work lets us take these vacations, while you...”

“What? While I waste my life trying to design buildings? Yeah, after twenty years most think I should have my own firm. But...”

“You stopped tryin’. Stopped tryin’ with us.”

“And so you drink. Missed expectations. Right?”

“Yeah, somethin’ like that. Ah Dale, the top of the mountain seemed so close. Still does. You just quit.”

Dale downed the remains of his diet Coke and gazed upward at the stand of pines clinging to their narrow ledge. He imagined what it would be like to crouch there at sunset with Maureen: the redrock radiating the day’s heat while the chilling wind stole it away; California Condors circling overhead, their black-and-white suits adding solemnity; the ground beneath them crumbling, slipping; the pines bending in the breeze, a siren song whispering through their needles; mourning doves calling from the mesa top and ravens croaking their answers; the Virgin River snaking westward towards Hurricane and Saint George, city lights twinkling in the dusk; and in the far distance the sun catching the rim of the Grand Canyon.

“Did you ever think that our ledge might be enough?” Dale asked.

“What?” Maureen slumped in her seat and stared at him.

“Sure, I could have driven both of us crazy getting to the top. But is unbridled ambition what you expect from me?”

“No, I...”

“Look up there. Look at those trees clinging to that ledge. Do you think they wish they were somewhere else, maybe up on the mesa or down near the river?”

“What are ya talkin’ about?”

“You’re the one who reads poetry. Didn’t Gwendolyn Brooks say somewhere that *‘Wherever life can grow, it will. It will sprout out, and do the best it can.’*”

“Oh, so now you’re usin’ poetry ’gainst me?”

Dale grinned. “Truthsayers are everywhere. We have sprouted and done the best we can. Can’t we enjoy and take pride in that? The view from our ledge is...magnificent.”

“Ah come on, Dale. You’re just...just settling...tryin’ ta make sense of your failures...our failures.”

Dale sat back and frowned. “Maybe without unbridled ambition, there are no failures.”

The sun’s golden glow on the face of the sandstone monoliths lit the restaurant’s interior, then slowly faded to gray in the dusk. They sat across the table from each other, not speaking. Dale asked the waiter for the check. He’d think hard about that place on the long drive back to L.A.

Tanya E. E. Schmid

The Talisman

While studying traditional medicine in China in the 90s, several American students and I joined a weekend excursion to Jinshan Mountain. It was a joyous relief from the metropolis of Beijing and the University Hospital whose cement walls held onto the intense summer heat and smelled of urine.

Our bus stopped in a dusty village where a small, weather-worn woman grasped at our sleeves and offered us plastic trinkets for pennies. Her black eyes met mine, and she handed me a locket that depicted Quan Yin, the goddess of Mercy. The tour guide, who hurried us along, translated that the pendant contained a prayer. As the woman placed the talisman's scarlet thread around my neck, the guide tried to wave her off. I asked, "How much?" so he picked three Chinese coins from my palm and placed them in the woman's leathery hand. I added two more *yuan*, dropped the talisman under my blouse, and rejoined the tour group.

Eight years later, I was sound asleep in a lake-side cottage in Michigan when the phone rang in the living room. My husband and I had only lived there a few weeks, so I stumbled into a side table and lamp as I searched for the phone. I stopped short when I saw that an entire village had arisen just outside our large living room window. Lit by the moon were fishing huts that villagers had dragged onto the ice as the lake in front of our rental had frozen. The new little "town" was deserted that time of night, and it gave me goosebumps as I sat in my skimpy pajamas facing the window.

"Hello?"

"It's me." My sister choked on heavy sobs.

"Laura, what's going on? Are you okay?"

"I can't do it anymore. I just can't take it," her voice quavered.

"Honey, listen. It's going to be alright. Where are you?" I had said these words before.

Heavy sobs. "Here at Mom and Dad's."

My younger sister was suffering from another bout with depression, so she was living at home again. She had turned to alcohol at thirteen, coupled with bulimia a few years later, and in her late twenties she'd lost her high-end job as an art dealer when the stress—and addictions—caught up with her. It had all begun with our tyrannical

father who preferred leather belts to reason, so God only knows why she returned home in her darker hours. Our parents' house seemed like a tragedy magnet for my sister.

An *I told you so* rose from my gut, and my voice was about to get preachy when my sister said, "Jen? I've got Dad's gun."

A veil of clouds wrapped around Jinshan mountain and drifted down to meet the smoke rising from the Buddhist temple, where we joined other pilgrims in the ritual lighting of incense sticks. Then our tour group of Chinese Medicine students walked along the ochre stone out-cropping that overlooked the Great Wall. I leapt from rock to rock along the edge—my video camera in one hand and my other arm extended for balance—as I filmed the stone snake that slinked through the lush green forest to the valley below. My stomach churned from staring through the tiny lens, but the Great Wall's rollercoaster curves mesmerized me. The rest of the group had moved on when my foot slipped.

A gun. At my sister's words, my throat went dry. My hand tightened on the phone while my free hand dug into the couch cushion beneath me. My parent's house was thirty minutes away, down an icy, unlit country road. I tried to think of someone who could get to her fast.

"Sweetie, did you call your sponsor?" I knew Laura had regularly attended Alcoholics Anonymous meetings. *Were her recent smiles just for show?*

"Yeah, Tracy's coming. She told me to call you until she got here. But I'm too tired now. I just want it to be over. I can't talk anymore."

"Don't hang up, Laura." I pushed down the panic that rose in my throat and kept my voice steady. "This will pass. Let us help you." The Quan Yin Talisman laid next to the phone. How it ended up there after unpacking, who knows? I picked it up and pressed it to my chest.

The Chinese Wall disappeared from my viewfinder as both my hands went up in the air. My muscles clenched in panic as my feet, butt, then stomach slid down the stone face. Fear choked my scream. I craned my neck to watch the approaching thousand-foot drop, my hands helpless to slow my descent. Then the talisman on my chest snapped open, and my body came to a halt. The slippery surface of the rock had ended, and the traction had stopped me just inches from the cliff's edge.

"I'm here for you, Honey." I tried again.

I heard her set the phone receiver on what was probably my father's desk where he kept his gun.

"Laura?" My breath came in short gasps, and my eyes blurred with tears.

Instead of a gunshot, I heard an unfamiliar voice on the phone. "This is Tracy. She's okay. I got this, thanks." The phone clicked as Laura's AA sponsor hung up.

Frozen to the couch with the phone receiver clenched in my hand, the stillness of the living room fell on me. I stared out the window at the empty fishing village that glowed in the blue moonlight. The next day it would be busy with retired people drinking beer and ice-fishing. They wouldn't see me here, shivering in my pajamas, my face twisted in concern.

My muscles shook with adrenaline and my heart pounded as I scurried back up the rocks with my video camera still attached to one hand. When I reached the top and felt the buoyancy of recovered safety, I dared to look past the cliff.

"Oh, there you are," said the tour guide who had missed my slip-up.

I was about to follow him when I nearly tripped over a long, narrow trail of paper that came from under my shirt. From the ground, I picked up one side of the talisman and the thin, accordion-folded paper attached to it: an endless prayer hand-written in Chinese *kanji*. I took the other half of the talisman from around my neck, refolded its invocation and put both pieces in my pocket with a sincere "Thank you!"

In the early morning hours of the lakeside living room, I released my breath. As my shoulders relaxed, I looked at the plastic picture of beautiful Quan Yin with her graceful, merciful smile. “Thank you,” I said to the talisman, to the old woman who sold it to me, to Tracy the AA sponsor, to the people who produced telephones, and to anything that allowed me not to hear my sister end her life that night, just out of reach of my love.

Ted Shaffrey

Best Interests

James pushed the knot of his red-striped tie into the collar of his blue, buttoned shirt until it arrived at the place in the collar where it was uncomfortable but tolerable.

"Agh!"

He stretched his neck sideways, straining against the pressure of the tie as it rubbed against his freshly shaved skin, and looked at himself in a full-length mirror.

A small message was embossed in all capital letters on the lower right.

"THIS MIRROR HAS NO FILTERS AND YOUR APPEARANCE IS NOT ALTERED IN ANY WAY EXCEPT STANDARD REFLECTION AS CERTIFIED BY THE US GOVERNMENT OFFICE OF MEASUREMENTS AND STATISTICS"

James forced the sides of his mouth into a smile, and his cheeks flushed red.

He winked at himself.

"I look like a drunken elf in an old Christmas card," he thought.

He exhaled, and his face turned to a look of vague worry as he looked at his reflection.

"Shiny shoes, reasonable tie, symmetrical blue sport coat, matching pants. Why is this uniform not a relic from the early twenty-first century, seen only in historical recreations?"

He shuddered at the sneering tone of his own thoughts.

"That attitude is not going to help me win joint custody."

James closed his eyes and thought of Nicholas, his infant son, last week, jumping from floor to ceiling in his padded anti-gravity baby jumper.

"HA-HA- HA-HA!"

The baby's staccato laugh had filled the room.

James smiled at the memory.

He forgot about the tightness around his neck and caught a glimpse of his expression in the mirror.

"Aha!" He said aloud and thought: "That is the emotional realism I need to recreate in front of the judge!"

James did his best to bookmark the feeling in his memory.

"I need to be able to summon this smile on demand even when Nicholas is not around."

He pushed the mirror, and it spun back into the wall, making a 'click' sound as it anchored into place, triggering the virtual reality simulator.

James's tiny apartment, about the size of a walk-in closet, was suddenly transformed into an outdoor wooden observation deck. It provided a view of vast blue skies, anchored by cumulonimbus clouds as exotic birds flew by — all of it simulated.

He was old enough that this "new" technology still amazed him.

James could run a marathon, visit the Louvre, or roller skate on Mars. If he filed a request for the communal pots, pans, and fresh food ahead of time, he could even cook a seven-course meal without leaving his room.

"Infinity Space killed the real estate market," James sang aloud, changing the lyrics of an old popular song.

Infinity Space was the company that created the tiny virtual apartments stacked a thousand feet into the air, stretching, invisible to the naked eye, for miles. Anyone who wanted could afford to live in Manhattan now. It took only a moment inside an Infinity Space apartment to forget that you did not live in a mansion with endless rooms and possibilities.

James opened the front door to his apartment. It led to a city-wide network of transparent transportation tubes. James watched as people, nestled in elevator car-sized capsules — older people, younger people, confident people, exasperated people — whizzed by him. The vast machine was powered only by air compressed and uncompressed in a renewing loop of endless energy.

Seconds later, an empty capsule stopped at James's door. He stepped in.

"Where would you like to go?" asked a friendly, automated female voice.

"I'm going to a place that will never change," thought James.

"Family court," he said out loud.

The voice replied: "New York County Family Court at 60 Lafayette Street. Right away!"

Moments later, the tubes deposited James in front of the courthouse.

He gazed at the building, built in the last century.

To him, it looked like a giant ogre had pushed together enormous concrete squares and then penciled on windows and doors.

James breathed in and then exhaled slowly. He walked into the courthouse.

There was Stacy. Sitting outside the courtroom, waiting to be called. She wore a simple sundress with a flower pattern and flats on her feet.

"Ex-girlfriend," James thought. "That was being generous. Really, it was almost a one-night stand."

Stacy stared back at him. She did not know why she felt so much anger when she looked at James. And James did not know why he felt so much anger when he looked at Stacy.

But they both loved Nicholas. There was no ambiguity there. They could put a label on the emotion they felt for their son: love. It was comfortable. It relieved so many burdens of expectation. It came with a life plan: raise this child.

It was worth fighting for in a court of law.

An hour later, the bailiff called the two ex-lovers into the courtroom.

Instead of sitting behind a bench, the Judge, clad in the traditional black robe, stood on a round, six-inch-high, two-foot diameter wooden platform.

James watched the Judge shift his weight from one foot to the other, like a boxer waiting for the bell to sound.

"People used to sit all day at work," remembered James as he flexed the muscles in his left arm and inhaled. "Back then, it wasn't considered sloth or poor judgment."

The bailiff directed James and Stacy to stand on platforms facing the Judge. Above each platform was a biometric camera scanner.

Wires from the camera scanners led to a machine on wheels. It looked like an electrocardiogram but with lots of new buttons and connectors. It had a large display screen on the front.

The machine was stamped with a company logo, VPMP, in Helvetica font.

A thick cable ran from the VPMP machine to a long, wide silver stylus pen equipped with a small display screen that the Judge held in his right hand instead of a gavel.

"It looks like a magic wand," James thought.

"I'm Judge Davis," he said. "This court is interested in one thing only: what is in the best interests of your child?"

James exhaled.

"The advocates for the parties may now enter the courtroom," said Judge Davis.

The bailiff opened a side door, and into the courtroom walked Lucia and Angus.

Lucia had a wave of blonde hair streaked with magenta. Her eyeliner was mostly glitter, and a tight-fitting cyan dress hugged her curves.

"Lucia, you will be with the father, James," said Judge Davis.

Lucia shook James's hand firmly.

"I am here to fight for you," she said.

Lucia started her career as a hairdresser for a competition reality show. She then became a casting director because it paid better.

As a kid, she spent a lot of time in her dad's videotape rental store and studied the customers. She could tell if a couple was falling in love or breaking up. She judged people by how they treated the store's chubby cat. People lost themselves in movies about love, war, sex, and survival, and Lucia developed a knack for predicting what movie a customer would rent as soon as they walked in the door.

Except she could not read the emotions of her parents, despite all the arguing. After her mom and dad told her they were divorcing, she missed two weeks of school because she could not stop crying.

Years later, when voters passed the Virtual Predictive Model of Parenting or VPMP, Lucia signed up right away for advocate training.

As a new technology overlaid an old institution - family court - it meant she could help families agree more and fight less.

James didn't know any of this.

"My advocate is a woman," he thought. "Is she really capable of being on my side?"

Angus was a tall, skinny man in a paisley ascot tie.

He had tucked his ruffled shirt into his pants and pulled them up to his belly button.

"If he had a red flag, he could be a bullfighter," James thought, pulling the knot of his tie away from his throat so he could breathe.

Angus came from a family of circus acrobats. He fell from a trapeze at the age of 15 and broke his arm. Although he recovered from the injury, he never wanted to perform again. So, his aunt taught him the art of fortune-telling.

"Fortune telling is not supernatural," she told him when there were no customers around. "It is the craft of observing body language and making logical deductions."

Over the years, Angus learned how to tell when people were lying, whether they were cruel or caring; and what kind of person they would marry depending upon what opportunities they found.

When VPMP became law, he signed up right away for advocate training and was happy to set aside the tarot cards.

"Most people tell you who they are when you first meet them," his aunt taught him. "You must listen."

Angus shook Stacy's hand and looked her in the eyes.

"I want to be a good mother," she said to him. "I want to protect and raise this child."

Her words gave Judge Davis goosebumps. He would have given her custody right there and then if he could. But that wasn't his job anymore.

Soon after VPMP became law, divorce attorneys became obsolete, and judges became referees.

Now, the VPMP logarithm would decide who would get custody of Nicholas.

It made its decisions by measuring emotion and intention. It was the job of Lucia and Angus to evoke those feelings.

"Emotional intelligence," thought James, when he first heard the phrase in a VPMP advertisement. "Whatever that means."

Judge Davis cleared his throat.

"The Virtual Predictive Model of Parenting has gathered all available data on the mother and father. Police records if there are any, tax statements, report cards, addresses, social media posts, voting history, DNA results, and other sources of information."

Instead of legal arguments, VPMP gathered data in the courtroom in a different way.

"The mother and father may now remove their clothing," said the Judge.

James's knees trembled.

He knew this was coming but didn't feel any less exposed as he carefully removed his tie, shirt, and suit.

The bailiff handed both Stacy and James hospital gowns.

As he pulled off his socks, James caught a glimpse of Stacy's naked body as she put on her gown and wished he could kiss her.

Instead, the bailiff stuck electrodes on her chest, neck, forehead, and the femoral artery of her left thigh.

Wires from the electrodes led to the VPMP machine.

James suddenly noticed it was quiet. He looked around. While he had been staring at Stacy everyone in the courtroom was waiting for him to finish undressing and put on his hospital gown.

Stacy had worn clothes that she could easily slip in and out of. She was better prepared than he. His desire for her turned to anger.

He put on the hospital gown, and the bailiff stuck electrodes on him.

"Let's begin," said Judge Davis. "Your advocates are here to represent you. Just relax and listen to them."

Angus stood in front of Stacy and looked her in the eyes. He opened the palms of his hands toward her and waved them around like he was studying a crystal ball.

"Stacy, think of Nicholas...and nothing else," he said.

Stacy closed her eyes.

"This child is a piece of her," said Angus to the Judge. "Microbiome passed from Stacy to Nicholas when she was pregnant and gave birth. It gave him immunity from an uncountable number of diseases."

The camera that hung above Stacy shot biometric scans across her face and body, measuring her health and confidence.

"Stacy put your arms out," said Angus. "Remember the last time you held your baby."

The electrodes read Stacy's biorhythms, hormones and brain activity, feeding the information into the VPMP machine.

All of Stacy's data was translated onto the VPMP display screen as tall, pulsing, electronic red electroencephalography peaks.

Angus waved his palms at the machine.

"The fMRI, or the Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging, right now of Stacy's brain shows intense stimulation in the amygdala, the superior temporal sulcus, and other parts of her brain," said Angus.

He looked at the judge and held up the index finger of his right hand for emphasis.

"The non-scientific term for this is a 'mother's instinct'."

Stacy looked at James and then the Judge.

"James just wants to win," she said to Angus and the Judge. "If he's honest with himself, he doesn't even really want custody. I do. I want this child to be a good person."

Angus nodded in the affirmative.

"As Eve was built from Adam's rib," said Angus. "Nicholas was made from Stacy's lungs. She needs him to breathe. He needs her to breathe. This vital daily rhythm between mother and child is the natural continuation of her providing immunity to him from diseases of all kinds. It is clearly in the best interests of Nicholas that the mother has custody."

The electrodes and the biometric camera scanner read Stacy's response to Angus's declaration.

The red peaks on the VPMP machine shot higher than before and pulsed faster.

James looked at Stacy. She looked at Angus.

"Nobody here knows who I am," thought James. "I am forgotten."

"The VPMP has all the measurements it needs," said Judge Davis.

The stylus pen in his hand beeped three times, and a number appeared on the screen.

"Her score is 89," announced Judge Davis to the courtroom.

James reached up to pull his tie away from his throat so he could breathe easier, only to remember he was wearing only a hospital gown.

Lucia took both his hands in hers.

"Take three deep breaths," she said. "We can do this."

"The father may go now," said Judge Davis.

Lucia let go of James' hands and looked him in the eyes.

"Think of Nicholas right now and think of nothing else," she said.

The biometric camera scanner above James hummed to life.

James did his best to summon the natural smile he caught a glimpse of earlier while looking at himself in the mirror.

Data about his physical and emotional state flowed through the electrodes stuck on his body and the camera scanner and into the VPMP machine.

Lucia pointed to the display screen and James's pulsing, red electroencephalography peaks. His were shorter and steadier.

"His fMRI shows intense activity in the lingual gyrus, the bilateral fusiform gyri, and vast amounts of dopamine in his prefrontal cortex," said Lucia. "What does that mean? It means James cares deeply about Nicholas and that he, as a person, shares. He cooperates, he protects, he provides, and is loyal. He is a lifesaver!"

James looked at the Judge.

"Stacy is married to her job," said James. "She wants a baby because it looks good at work. The executives will relate to her will promote her to be one of their own. She's the selfish one here."

Stacy looked at James for the first time since they entered the courtroom. His words felt like a betrayal of the bits of her life she had shared with him on a night months ago.

A tear burst forth from her right eye.

She wiped it away.

Lucia addressed the Judge.

"It is in Nicholas's best interests that James should have custody. A boy and his father, together. He can understand the child and nurture him in ways she cannot."

The electrodes attached to James measured how his heart rate and the chemicals in his body responded to this statement.

The red electronic peaks on the VPMP machine were unchanged.

"VPMP has the readings it needs," said Judge Davis.

The stylus pen in the Judge's hand beeped three times, and a number appeared on the screen.

"It's reading me like the bar code off of a loaf of bread at the grocery store," thought James.

"Eighty-seven!" announced the Judge.

James's face flushed red and the energy drained from his body.

Lucia took his hands into hers.

"You will still get regular visitation," she said. "Weekends and summers."

Judge Davis put his right leg over his left leg and used the tension to spin around three times. When he stopped, he pointed the stylus pen at Stacy.

"The mother will have custody," said the Judge. "We are now adjourned. The mother and father may now put their clothes back on."

A half an hour later, outside the courthouse, James stepped into a transportation tube.

He pulled the knot of his tie away from his collar and looked at his reflection in the tube.

"Where to?" said the automated woman's voice. "Another question I can't answer," he thought.

"Where to, please?" said the woman's voice.

He breathed deeply and remembered his address.

"Infinity Space unit 794301," said James.

"Thank you," said the woman's voice.

An election advertisement played while he was riding home.

"Technology can't stop the tumultuous winds of relationships," said the announcer, over images of trees with leaves swaying smoothly in the wind.

"But it makes managing the fallout - a breeze. On November 6, vote yes to extend VPMP solutions to all U.S. foreign policy decisions. We've revolutionized the legal system – now let's bring peace to the world. VPMP is patent-protected and positively peer-reviewed in all three leading medical journals."

E

ESSAY

Susan Frattini

Transformation

I arrived in France in January with only a duffel bag and enrollment in “L’Institut Pour Les Etrangers,” (Institute for Foreigners.) I was twenty-five. The school was in Aix-en- Provence, in the south of France. I had approximately \$2000.00 American dollars, but no place to live. I was told by the school’s secretary “N’inquiet pas,” (Don’t worry) French families post rooms for let on the bulletin board at the Institute. She continued “Prends un avion et viens a la France!”(Just get on a plane and come to France!) And that’s exactly what I did. I left my husband, but not my marriage.

I first met Brigitte when she opened the front door to her home, after I had knocked twice. She was beautiful, the way only French women are beautiful. Natural. Glowing. Light brown hair coiffed around her face. Very little make-up, but radiant skin. “Bienvenue Suzanne” were her first words to me. I whispered “Merci.” Her smile and comportment suggested an obvious warmth. The room to let had a single bed, a desk and chair, and an armoire. It was spartan, but perfectly sufficient. As I perused the room, I saw hanging inconspicuously over the doorway a cross. My heart and whole body relaxed. I immediately said, “I would love to rent the room!”

I felt viscerally that my God had provided this home for me. I was certain that He would protect me with the help of this fresh and generous woman.

I promptly learned that Brigitte was an extremely devout Catholic, as were her husband and four daughters. France being mostly agnostic, it was not easy being a Catholic, particularly a woman. Women were barred from a position in the clergy which influenced their lack of say and prominence in the dogma of the church. However, Brigitte continued her pilgrimage.

Mass and Holy Communion were a daily ritual, whereas confession was weekly. Her mornings began early with meditation and prayer, while direction for her day was queried of her God, and most often revealed. Before she slept, she fervently prayed a supplication to God for forgiveness for the ways she had failed that day. It was not unusual in the Catholic church for the woman of the family to carry on the traditions of the faith. Women had the pulse and they passed it along

to their families. Brigitte was doing what her mother had done for her and her grandmother had done for her mother.

Brigitte was restless although God's teachings were present in every facet of her life. "How can I be a better servant to you?" she asked her God. It wasn't enough that she taught a Ukranian immigrant French, pro bono, nor did she feel satisfied with hosting weekly Bible studies with her "Petites Dames."

And to me, Brigitte was a living example of God's love. It was apparent in her overt affection, love and respect for her husband and teenage girls. Draping their long, lithe arms around Brigitte's neck and back, the girls whispered "Maman, je t'adore," (Mother, I adore you.) Also, they sought her advice and counsel about serious matters in their young lives, such as love and sex. Pierre, her husband, knew well he had a true partner in all their affaires. They discussed, at length: religion, their marriage, the children, finances, and the management of their homes. They had a special settee in the salon in which they sat, legs and arms touching tenderly when they had their tete a tetes.

Living with Brigitte, I began to question the demonstration of my faith. Since childhood I believed in God and Jesus, but did I live my faith daily? Absolutely not. I prayed when I needed something. I didn't trust God's will in all things. The family in which I was raised was Catholic, yet our faith wasn't as alive and vibrant as that of Brigitte and her family. We didn't have the personal relationship with God and Jesus that Brigitte had. The traditions of the Catholic religion were only passed along haphazardly, not lived out daily.

As the weeks passed, and my French improved, I wanted to talk, more and more, about God and traditional Catholicism with Brigitte. Questions such as "How do you know that God loves you if He allows you to suffer?" I asked her. She and I spent hours in her salon discussing the teachings of God, Jesus and La Vierge Marie (The Virgin Mother.) She imparted her wisdom on how to be a godly mother, in the tradition of the Catholic faith, "One must respect the child, as well as love her as a child of God. You only have about thirteen years to really influence her. You may guide and direct the child, but she is controlled by her own will, under the tutelage of God. Looking clear to my heart, she said, "Suzanne, you cannot control another person, that is God's work, in His perfect time."

Just as my faith began to grow, Brigitte reached out and invited me to go with her to morning mass. I was moved that she invited me and gladly said "yes." We got up early at 6 o'clock to have our petit dejeuner

and walked to the cathedral which was about a half mile from her home. When we entered the cathedral, no one was there. I was confused. She said to me in French “Viens ici” (Come here,) and we went to the front of the church. Before a stand, with about thirty votive candles, some lighted, some not, Brigitte asked me if I wanted to light a candle for someone who had died in my family. I lighted one for my grandmother and prayed that she was safe in God’s arms.

To the right of the candles was an intimate little chapel. I could see people praying on their knees or just sitting in chairs fingering rosary beads. Brigitte and I entered the chapel and knelt down together. My prayer was, “Thank you God for bringing me to this woman and her family.” It made my study rounded and complete.

The priest came to the chapel’s alter, and very quietly I heard nuns singing from behind a grate. This was a tradition in the Catholic church for centuries. They were singing acapella, and it was magnificent and transformative. It sounded other worldly. Brigitte turned to me and smiled, then took my hands in hers. She knew instinctively how touched I was by the music and the beauty of the chapel. The nuns continued to sing throughout the mass. I silently wept, feeling so close to my God.

On the way out of the chapel and cathedral, Brigitte put her arm through mine and said,

“Tu l’as aime?” (Did you like it?) I responded, “Oh no Brigitte, Je l’as adore!” (I adored it!)

“Je suis si heureuse!” (I am so happy!) I felt at peace at that moment and loved by my God. Of all my experiences in France, this was the single most impressionable. I will always have the gentle, sweet music of the nuns in my heart.

After that day in the chapel, I gradually began to pray in the morning and at night. I attended morning mass with Brigitte at least twice weekly. Conversations with my God filled my mind incessantly while my dialogues with Brigitte increased in frequency. As my hunger for God’s word grew, my daily readings of the Bible stayed with me throughout the day. Each Sunday, I attended mass with the family and wept. I had come to France completely alone, and now knew God, and traditional Catholicism, better through love and gentle example from this godly family. They lived God’s word and I was privileged to experience it.

Brigitte, she too, had her prayers answered. A hospice center had called looking for someone to read the Bible to the patients. The priest thought immediately of Brigitte. Her desire to be a servant of God

was closer, for her, to being realized. Being a servant of God was also a tradition of the Catholic faith. And I looked forward to the time when I could do as Brigitte and carry on the tradition of servanthood. I realized that Brigitte was being a servant in raising her girls and being a faithful wife to Pierre. I could do the same with my husband and future children.

It is now thirty-five years later and Brigitte and I are still in communication. Catholicism and motherhood and grand-motherhood, and great-grand-motherhood, in Brigitte's case, fill our French discourse. Mother, sister, friend, spiritual advisor are all the roles she filled for me. I tell her of my appreciation often. I pray that there are reciprocal blessings for us both.

Nancy Gerber

In Bessie's Kitchen

The fieldstone house on Chatham Road is where I see my grandmother in my mind's eye. I knew that house; I often stayed there. I see her bending toward her vast collection of plants lining the front and side balustrades of the front porch, watering the spiky dracaena, red coleus, ferns, and pale spiders.

I see her hunched on the tired gray sofa in the living room, hair white, gray-blue eyes wide in concentration as she draws her needle in and out to hem my new skirt.

I see her in the kitchen wearing an apron over her print housedress. My grandmother is always the first to awaken. I've been lured downstairs by the caramelized aroma of burned toast. My grandmother always burns the toast. After a few years the toaster stopped working and burned everything, bagels, bialys, bread, but my frugal grandmother refuses to replace it. She also refuses to toss away the burned toast, memories of the Great Depression's hunger still burning in her mind. We eat the dark brown toast with singed crusts. If you slather it with butter and jam it isn't too bad.

I see myself standing at the kitchen doorway, gazing at my grandmother as she sits facing the window, a plate of burned toast and a cup of hot tea with lemon on the table before her. The walls are painted a pale yellow and the room is bathed in the soft yellow light of early morning. My grandmother is staring out the window; it's a tall window with a yellow-and-white checkered valance and a few green plants on the sill. I imagine she doesn't know I'm there but that is a trick of memory; my grandmother's senses are preternaturally sharp, she has heard me but hasn't yet turned to greet me.

In the brief silence I try to imagine her thoughts. Are they occupied with meal preparations, alterations of skirts I've brought from home, the day's ironing and vacuuming? I wonder now whether we'd turned my grandmother into a servant, or whether these chores gave her comfort, kept her mind occupied and protected from thoughts about the mother she'd left behind in Russia, the grown son who lived with her and never married, the daughter – my mother – who was always irritable and impatient.

I enter the kitchen and take a seat caddy-corner to my grandmother, on a chair covered with red vinyl that's beginning to crack. My grandmother gives me a small smile. Her welcome is not in the lift of her mouth but in her storm-colored eyes, which become brighter. In a flash she is upright, moving swiftly back and forth between counter and stove, setting another place, pouring me a glass of orange juice. "Nency," she says, her Yiddish inflection ever present. "Would you like some toast?"

Lola Wang

Decisiveness and Transparency: What the World can Learn from Taiwan During this Pandemic

Fall 2020

Living in the midst of a global pandemic has been illuminating. We tend to worry about the big things in life – things that could pounce on us, like an animal in the jungle, or land on us, like an asteroid from outer space. Rarely do we consider that the deadliest thing is the thing that we can't even see with our naked eye.

The reaction to this threat has varied from country to country, region to region. I live in Taiwan, just a short distance away from China, where the viral outbreak first occurred. Thankfully, from the very beginning, our government handled the news of this outbreak as an existential threat. We were supposed to go back to school after the Chinese New Year on February 1st, but the principal, in fear of the coronavirus, pushed that date back to February 6th. A few days later, the government ordered schools to close for middle and high schoolers until Feb 25th. College students and lower schoolers were postponed to Feb 29th.

Admittedly, I was happy at first. After all, I'm 15 years old. A random hiatus from school has never happened before. I figured I could use this extra time to finalize my golf game for the upcoming tryouts. However, this good feeling did not last long. Once I better understood the reason for this unscheduled break, I quickly changed my tune. I got nervous. After all, it must be pretty bad if the Taiwanese government postponed school.

My imagination took flight. In my mind, the movies I watched about the zombie apocalypse were starting to come true. This reality clearly took hold everywhere else in the country. Most students stayed home, listening to the warnings of their school and parents. My mom, who works in public health, was especially concerned with the new disease. She did not allow us to go outside unless we had a mask on. She also sanitized our entire apartment. Even when pressing the elevator button, she used a tissue instead of her finger. At times, my siblings and I thought her methods of keeping us safe were too extreme. But day after

day of sitting in front of news updates on our laptops, we have come to learn how dangerous this virus can be.

Over the following 24 days, I observed a coordinated effort by all of our government's institutions to squash the rate of infection. On the streets of Taipei, close to the front lines of the battle, 95 percent of the citizens are wearing a mask, should they even dare to leave the house. Many people have decided to stay home. Even my mother, who lived through SARS and Avian bird flu, has never seen so many people wearing masks at the same time. Alcohol wipes, masks, even tissue paper, have been sold out at almost every single pharmacy in Taipei. People wait in line for over two hours to obtain a small box of masks that could be finished in merely 10 days.

Meanwhile, I did not hit the links. Instead, I stayed at home much of the time, reading textbooks and completing homework for online classes. At first, it wasn't so bad staying in the house. I could study without the distractions of my friends or peers, and I could enjoy the home-cooked meals which our school cafeteria could never produce. But then the cabin fever started to set in. I felt trapped. In the first part of the day, from nine to two, I sat on a chair in front of my laptop completing school assignments. I started to miss my normal life. The non-stop sitting and the glare of the screen became a type of torture. I longed for those moments in between classes when I walked from one side of the school to the other. I realized how chatting with friends at lunch was as much a part of my diet as the food I ate. On day 8, I was praying to get back into school. Though the pleasures of the comforts in my home were soothing and relaxing, I felt like I was trapped inside a box with nothing to do and nowhere to go.

At the same time, I watched how other nations handled things differently. I watched the UK's Prime Minister Boris Johnson on TV state that the government would not do anything about the virus. "If it is less than 20,000... that would be a good result, though every death is a tragedy." This approach did not turn out well: cases skyrocketed a few days after he made those comments. Today, the United Kingdom has a total case of 41,903 people. Johnson himself soon tested positive for COVID-19. In some countries, the population rejected sound advice. For instance, in Italy people protested against the government's restrictive measures, including pushing people to quarantine and restricting movement from cities like Milan and Lombardy. Believing that it is a democracy, "they would fight strenuously to defend the liberty of the

individual and the liberty of their family” wrote Mr. Barzini, journalist. Italy now has the highest death toll of any country: 15,362.

The United States, however, with its system of decentralized power, looks like it will surpass all nations in deaths. Currently, it leads the world in the number of cases. This was predictable. The United States, which notoriously has an inadequate health care system, never stood a chance. In a nation where doctors and medical supplies are extremely costly, most people are bound to slip through the cracks in a pandemic. Additionally, the preoccupation with liberty and individual freedom hampers the behavioral modifications that are necessary to curb the spread of a contagious virus. As a result, many citizens have rebuffed the quarantine directive, regarding it as an optional policy that hinders their personal choice and freedom. When the numbers began to mount, opinions shifted. But it was too late. Until the numbers skyrocketed to the tens of thousands, people started to half-listen. It must be difficult to commit to a strict policy when the messenger, President Donald J. Trump, continues to downplay the seriousness of the disease and the remedies required to stop it. When the CDC finally recommended that the citizens cover their faces when entering public spaces, Trump remarked that it was optional and he wouldn’t be doing it. And so America continues to reel from the mathematical reality of exponential growth.

When I see this, I can’t help but think how Taiwan’s policy managed to get it right from the beginning. A little pain and anxiety early on saved us from a lot of death and panic now. Taiwan has managed to keep the fatalities to merely five individuals. People trust their government in this epidemic. And the government, in turn, has been transparent about their actions and honest about how infectious the coronavirus is. Perhaps our proximity to China caused us to be super vigilant. We knew how close it was and how little time we had to prepare. Television stations continuously broadcast the government’s concerns and directions: stay at home, wear a mask whenever outside of the home, watch out for the health of others.

We listened. I hope the rest of the world does, too.

B

Biographical
Notes

Emmaline Bristow grew up in Helena, Montana and attended the University of Montana for her Bachelors in English with emphasis in creative writing and literature. She also obtained her Masters of Fine Arts in poetry from Drew University. She has had work published in *The Ekphrastic Review*, *ang(st)*, *Fatal Flaw*, *Z Publishing* and *Vasterian* among other journals, and she currently resides in Missoula, Montana where she works in communications for her local government. See more of Emmaline's work on Instagram @eande.create and on Facebook at E&E Create.

Carol Casey lives in Blyth, Ontario, Canada. Her work has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize and has appeared in *The Prairie Journal*, *The Anti-Langourous Project*, *Please See Me*, *Front Porch Review*, *Cypress*, *Vita Brevis*, *Blue Unicorn* and others, including a number of anthologies, most recently, *We Are One: Poems From the Pandemic* and the *TL;DR Hope Anthology*.

Elayne Clift is a writer, workshop leader and lecturer. Her collection of short stories, *Children of the Chalet*, won First Prize/Fiction from Greyden Press in 2015. Her most recent book and 4th edited anthology, *A 21st Century Plague: Poems from a Pandemic*, was published in 2021. She lives in Vt. (www.elayne-clift.com)

Angie Dribben's collection, *Everygirl*, a finalist for the 2020 *Broadkill Review* Dogfish Head Prize, is out with Main Street Rag. Her work can be found or is forthcoming in *Orion*, *The Night Heron Barks*, *Cave Wall*, *EcoTheo*, *Crab Creek Review*, and others.

Lisa English lives in Monmouth County, N.J. with her husband, daughter June, 2 dogs and soon to be son Hank. She is a local realtor and musician in the area and enjoys travelling, nature, animals and food! Lisa wrote poems at a young age but has recently picked it up again- thanks to a maternal journaling group she is part of. Lisa is excited to share some of her voice here with you.

Ariel Fintushel is a multimedia poet with an MFA from SF State and winner of the Mark Linenthal Award for poetry. She was nominated for a pushcart prize by *A3 Review* and has publications in *Red River*

Review, Everyday Genius, Bop Dead City, The Ekphrastic Review, Baltimore University's Welter, Zaum and elsewhere. She is also a visual artist who enjoys handmade broadsides, facilitating workshops for the unhoused, and co-curator of the annual Joshua Tree Experiential Arts & Writing Retreat. See more at arielfintushel.com

Virginia Bach Folger lives in an 1888 Victorian house in Schenectady, New York. She is a member of the Hudson Valley Writers' Guild. She has worked as a gas station attendant, paralegal, claims adjuster and corporate learning manager. Her poetry has been published in or is forthcoming in *Eclectica, Concho River Review* and *Main Street Rag*.

Susan Frattini lives and writes in Antrim, NH. She lives with her husband, Peter and her Great Dane, Sam. She has worked in numerous art galleries and artisan shops. She has also been the owner and co-director of a student exchange organization called Atlantique Exchange.

Nancy Gerber has published fiction, poetry, and creative non-fiction in *Mom Egg Review, Still Point Quarterly, Writing in a Woman's Voice*, and other journals. Her most recent book, *What the Living Remember* (Apprentice House, 2020), is based on her father's experience as a German-Jewish refugee from Nazi Germany. She lives in Connecticut.

Deborah Gerrish published three books of poetry, was awarded the Fry Fellowship for dissertation work at Rutgers University, published in the *Paterson Literary Review, Lips, The Still Water Review, The Practicing Poet, A Constellation of Kisses*, and others. She earned an MFA from Drew University and teaches poetry workshops. Her fourth book is forthcoming in 2021.

June Gould, Ph.D author of, *The Writer in All of Us*, E.P. Dutton. She's led IWWG poetry workshops for thirty years. Recent poetry: *Serenade, Gallery&Studio Arts Journal, the Journal for Psychohistory, and Humanism Evolving through Arts and Literature*.

Maryanne Hannan has recent or forthcoming poetry in *Cider Press Review, Christian Century, Persimmon Tree, Slant, Spillway*, and *Xavier*

Review. A resident of upstate New York, she is the author of *Rocking Like It's All Intermezzo: 21st Century Psalm Responsorials*.

Elaine Koplow is Director of the Sussex County Writers' Roundtable and Associate Editor of *The Stillwater Review*. Her poems appear in the anthology *Voices From Here* Volumes 1&2, *Spillway*, *Edison Literary Review*, *Wawayanda Review*, *Adanna*, *Exit 13 Magazine*, *U.S.1 Worksheets*, *Tiferet*, *Journal of New Jersey Poets*, *The Midwest Quarterly*, and elsewhere.

Diane Lederman was a reporter in daily journalism for 40 years in Western Massachusetts and has been writing fiction for nearly 30 of those years. Since leaving reporting two years ago, she has been writing fiction full-time. Diane has taken myriad workshops at the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown and the Muse in Boston. She recently had a story published in *Jewish Fiction. net* and participated in an international program to talk about the work with Haddasah at Brandeis University in Waltham.

Michelle Lerner received an MFA in Poetry from The New School. Her chapbook *Protection* was published by Poetry Box in 2021. Her poetry and fiction manuscripts have been selected as finalist for the Poetry Box Chapbook Prize, Book Pipeline Unpublished Contest, Bridge Eight Fiction Prize, and Fiction Five Award; semifinalist for the 2018 Pamet River Prize and 2020 Willow Run Poetry Book Award; long listed for the Dzanc Fiction Prize; chosen as a Notable Selection for the Chapter One Prize, and recognized by multiple contests for individual poems. Her poems can be found in numerous journals and online for a including *Virginia Quarterly Review*, *Connecticut River Review*, *Paterson Literary Review*, *Lips*, *Wordrunner*, *Adanna*, *Pipeline Artists*, and others, as well as several anthologies. She's a recovering public interest lawyer currently emerging from late stage Lyme Disease, living with her family in rural New Jersey.

Linda Murphy Marshall is a multi-linguist and writer with a Ph.D. in Hispanic Languages and Literature and an MFA in Creative Writing. Her essays and stories have been published widely and her memoir, *Ivy Lodge: A Memoir of Translation and Discovery* comes out in 2022.

Kelsey McWilliams is a writer and Social Worker. She has a Bachelor of Arts in English Literature and a Bachelor of Social Work. Kelsey's writing mostly focuses on women's issues and she is passionate about social justice and advocacy. Kelsey currently resides in Calgary, Alberta, Canada with her partner and cat.

Nneamaka Onochie is a writer whose journey has been nothing short of inspiring. She started writing as a teenager and never relented. Through her works, she indulges her readers to view the world through her eyes.

Christine Redman-Waldeyer is a Full Professor of English at Passaic County Community College. Christine's publications and experience include writing for magazines, newspapers, as well as publishing poetry and short memoir pieces in journals such as *Caduceus Magazine*, *Catalyst Book Press*, *Contemporary American Voices: a journal of poetry*, *Exit 13*, *Lips*, *Mom Egg Review*, *Paterson Literary Review*, *Presence: A Journal of Catholic Poetry*, *Schuykill Valley Journal*, *The Seventh Quarry*, *Shot Glass Journal*, *The Texas Review*, *Verse Wisconsin*, among others. She has been featured in *Literary Mama* and *Pink.Girl.Ink Press*. Poetry books include *Where We Nest* (Cyberwit.net), *Eve Asks*, *Frame by Frame*, and *Gravel* (Muse-Pie Press). She is also a co-editor of *Writing After Retirement: Tips from Successful Retired Writers*, (Rowan and Littlefield, 2014), founder and editor of *Adanna Literary Journal*, and has earned her Doctorate with a concentration in creative writing at Drew University. She has worked in the field of higher education for over twenty years and is certified in Educational Leadership: Community College Leadership Initiative (CCLI), Rowan University.

Heather Lee Rogers tells stories as a writer and an actor in NYC. Her poems have appeared in: *The Rat's Ass Review*, *Harbinger Asylum*, *Here Comes Everyone* (UK), *Leopardskin & Limes*, *S/Tick*, *Adanna*, *Mobius*, *Eunoia Review*, and *Bombfire Lit*, etc. heatherleerogerspoetry.com

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Janet Tracy-Landman's poetry has appeared in numerous literary journals, including *The Dickinson Review*, *Icarus*, *North American Review*, *Rattle*, *Salmagundi*, and *Washington Square*. "Blue Fire", was awarded first place in the 2002 National Writers Union Poetry Competition, judged by Adrienne Rich; "Sinkhole" was the winner of the 2010 *Bellevue Review's* Marica and Jan Vilcek Prize for Poetry, judged by Marie Perle; and "Middle Age Anniversary" was nominated for a Pushcart Prize, 2020. Landman is a research psychologist and author of two nonfiction books, *Regret: The Persistence of the Possible* (Oxford 1993) and *Looking for Revolution, Finding Murder: The Crimes & Transformation of Katherine Ann Power* (Paragon House 2019).

Lola Wang is a sophomore at the Taipei American School in Taiwan. She wrote a lot of personal essays but is starting to write some flash fiction and short stories. She loves drawing too, mainly sketching and painting. Golf is another hobby she likes to do. She has work published or forthcoming in *Blue Marble* and *Euphemism*.

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