# ADANNA

## LITERARY JOURNAL

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**Founder/Editor**
**CHRISTINE REDMAN-WALDEYER**

Issue No. 8

*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.

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*Adanna Literary Journal*
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## Credits

**Front Cover Artist**: Jane Shoenfeld
**Front Cover Title**: *Intimate/Elemental* GridScape in Nine Panels

Pastel on Black Paper Outer Dimensions 10" x 13"
Individual Panels 3" x 4"
Individual Panels are Hand Beveled and Mounted on Archival Board

**Back Cover Art Artist:** Jane Shoenfeld
**Back Cover Title:** *The Ceremony of Innocence*

Acrylic on Yupo, 5 5/8" x 4 1/2"

# *Artist Statement*

*Intimate/Elemental* is from my Gridscape Series. Many of my grids are abstractions of landscape, but in this piece I show woman's body merged with forms from nature. Since I live in the Southwest, the peached clay color was a natural color choice, as was the blue sky. The medium is pastel on black paper. The individual sections of the grid are hand bevelled (torn), then pasted onto archival board. When creating a gridscape, I work on all the small panels simultaneously, rather than finishing one panel and going on to the next in a linear way.

I start with a specific image in my mind. Within the container of the grid, my process is kinesthetic, energetic and spontaneous. Imaginative narratives unfold in myriad directions through abstract marks, colors and shapes. Surprises emerge. I work with prime numbers so the sequence can be viewed diagonally, horizontally, or vertically.

The final format can emphasize clear boundaries between perceptions, merging of aspects, narrative sequence, or a nonlinear series of impressions that go back and forth in time. One can create one's own narrative while viewing my work. Woman as moon face becomes intimate female form in desert crevice, becomes woman as cliff face among sensually folding limbs. I keep the defining shapes open enough that viewers can put it together in their own way. I hope that my audience will linger and wonder, merge with the image and become receptive to the collective unconscious and the imagination.

I always experiment with boundaries and edges. I am interested in dissolving edges, literally and metaphorically. My natural mode of visual perception is a kind of scanning, including what is considered "peripheral vision." Whether I am painting outdoors or in my studio, I work at the boundary of conscious and unconscious. I follow the energy of the unconscious and create subtle transitions and shifting figure ground relationships to engage the imagination.

In five years I created over a hundred gridscapes. I then moved on. I gradually relaxed the edges between the images, still seeing the grid in my mind. I dissolved it bit by bit. From there I went to a series of extended horizontals in pastel. I eliminated the ground and horizon lines of landscape. Because these pastels contain forms and light that evoke nature, a feeling of nature remains, but without the boundaries or the

directed vanishing point of traditional landscape painting. Within this series, I focused on poems from *The Water Leveling With Us.* This book by Donald Levering is centered on global climate change.

*The Ceremony of Innocence* is very recent. The title comes from a phrase in W.B.Yeats' prophetic 1921 poem *The Second Coming*. In response to this poem, I am working on large pastel abstractions and small acrylic paintings on polypropylene (Yupo), a synthetic glossy paper. Each painting is titled with a line or phrase from the poem. The series began because I was hearing the lines "things fall apart, the center cannot hold" in my mind, over and over. I reread the poem and began these paintings shortly after the election in 2016. I memorized the poem. I begin and continue a painting with Yeats' words repeating themselves in my mind; sometimes I hear phrases when I go to sleep. Sometimes I am chanting lines as I paint. My long-term project includes an installation of these pieces combined with voice-overs of the poem.

The pieces start in one orientation, and then are turned in all directions to discover what images may emerge. In this way, I evoke and encourage the unconscious process. Works in this series have ominous overtones, but *The Ceremony of Innocence* is more delight. The final two words of the phrase "the ceremony of innocence is drowned" is eliminated. I see a vulnerable, colorful, feminine figure combined with nature colors and forms.

Another note regarding boundaries and edges. My office where I write my poems, is separated from my studio by a door. I often leave the literal door open. The metaphorical door stays open also. Often when I am painting, I find that I need to pause. I walk through the door into my office and work on my most current poem.

*— Jane Shoenfeld, 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 issue or topics, celebrate womanhood, or shout out in passion.

— *Christine Redman-Waldeyer, Founder*

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**POETRY**

# P

# POETRY

*Sidney Bending*

## Guatemalan Gifts

*Wanted: prosthetic breasts for Guatemalan cancer survivors. – Oceanside News*

I live in a land without jaguar, where the condor doesn't fly.
Live where accountants rescue retired greyhounds,
where whales breach near a marina of yachts.

I do not know her name but call her Consuela.

Outside my window, the gardener pauses his leaf blower, stoops,
hand-picks one leaf. Consuela's travels hours to pick firewood.

We have the same winter rain. While I am tucked inside
my weather-stripped condo, her god of rain and thunder –
*he who lights the sky* – punishes her adobe's metal roof.

Consuela cooks for her daughter: plantain, cassava, cardamom.
Slips her from a back-sling down on the reed mat.
Prompts the child to tell her troubles to worry dolls
made from yarn scraps. Saves one for herself.

Long hours sitting on the earthen floor at the backloom.
Consuela will bring to market her woven and embroidered smocks,
her hand-dyed reds – carmine from cactus insects.

She unwraps, unweaves her headdress from long black locks.
Lowers her gift from the basket on the rafter. Unties its blue ribbons
curled tight like the blond woman's hair in the photograph.

A small card she can't read. She will ask for the words:
*Best wishes from Canada, Con amo.*

This gift may not be the best shape, not the best size.
Still, it is better than her rolled up rag.

For this woman, whose hand I can only hold in a poem:
I offer in a frayed bra's secret pocket,
the colour of a pale woman's skin,
a stranger's breast . . . my mother's breast.

*Kristin Berkey-Abbott*

## Blistered Palms

When the last china cup cracked,
we found the courage to face
the future. The oracle couldn't tell
us, but we knew.
We needed no tea leaves; the blisters
on our hands gave the palm
reader all the information needed.

In this month of broken jewelry
clasps and missing wedding rings,
tattered ghosts haunt the hurricane wreckage.
Branches claw the debris piles of our hearts.
We see the water marks even though the floods
have receded. The decaying mums
keep watch.

I have dined on stinging nettles
before sunrise. But I am ready to jettison
this suitcase of loss and longing
that I've been lugging
through the fading autumn light.

I will steal a sailboat
and glide to the place
where the deep
waters of the ocean meet
the mouth of the Bay.

I will cast my nets again
into the depths.
I will wait for new fish.

*Jessica Beyer*

## Epimeliads

He palms her stomach round
as the blow-up globe they tossed
in 6th grade geography
Singapore
Tunisia
the fabric thin over her.
He wants to lift
the hair from her eyes
but is waiting
Venezuela
Newfoundland
for a shifting of plates
a tremor—
he flinches
when the baby moves
Armenia
Mississippi
even though he thought
he was expecting it.
Maybe pregnancy
is becoming an ocean.

*Jane Blanchard*

## At Publix

Lately estranged from my first daughter, I
encounter one of her acquaintances,
who also happens to be one of my
past students. “John!” I say, then smile at his
small son in some large cart constructed to
look like a dinosaur. Second to none
in manners, John gives me a hug with due
exchange of salutations. We are done
in seconds since we both want to move on,
my former name still sounding in my ears,
more than a decade after it was gone.
(So many joys and sorrows in those years!)
As I leave him whom I taught long ago,
John bids, “Tell Laura that I said Hello.”

*Lisa Brognano*

# Flux

Spinning her body in a circle,
arms outstretched, a row of storefronts
twirling, pedestrian
walkways gyrating,
the shapes of men and women blurred—
one pirouette after another—either she
was performing them or the world was,
she hadn't the foggiest notion
until she stopped and fell to the ground,
the cold temperatures making her laughter
sound harsh; what a rush
to dance in the streets,
something she rarely did anymore, those
years of dance academy untapped;
how she'd gotten the courage today
was a mystery; it could've been
the chocolate croissant
for breakfast or her grandmother's pashmina around her shoulders;
either way, it felt good to experience a world in motion

*Lisa Brognano*

## Ivan and Tara

Tenderness in mammoth
amounts
dragged out the ceremony;
the couple kissed, hearty love-lock

What a surrender to value
their love so much, but confessions
were few—neither one betrayed
an instinct to run

Mid-June and mild,
trees swayed to summer songs
while Ivan and Tara cuddled fondly,
secure in the way they made
each other feel

Not abysmal to think
of what could have been
if the vows were put back
into their mouths, eaten and swallowed,
soul-morsels, salty-tasting
the kind Tara found humbling

Ivan preferred to nibble, naturally,
with teeth and tongue,
accepting his decision with one hand
on her breast

*Cheryl Buchanan*

## At the Yoga Shanti Class for Cancer Survivors

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

One hundred years ago,
Dr. MacDougall weighed six bodies

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

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

Feel the ground beneath you now.
*You are a warrior.*
*You are a tree.*

*Jennifer Campbell*

## The Lost Years

The time between fertility
and its dramatic halt
women line the coliseum
fighting for position
battling for attention
from the indifferent guard
and the young women
in attendance are amused
by such energetic jostling
from the middle-aged

The ones who've turned the corner
forget how it stings
to be invisible
and so easily divisible
having settled into wine
and supportive conversation
with their counterparts

In Red's strongly worded letter
to the editor she warns
against the "emerging"
and "seasoned" categories
knowing it's nearly impossible
to come out with a good result
in your forties
despite all you've learned
about the warrior position
its balance of strength
and vulnerability

*Susan B. Cowger*

## January

Elbow on the kitchen table
She cradled the orb in her palm
She says to him *I am nothing*

He watches her catch the wound
Slide a thumb under the skin
And open the flesh

She strips the cover in one long peel
And curls the wrapper back
Into a semblance of wholeness

Slumped and squatty
She wrenches the pith apart
Separates her life into segments

Even the sweetest juice
Burns the raw places on her hands
She shoves the whole lot his direction

Him arranging the fruit
Picking up each slice
Savoring swallowing

They sit quietly touching hands
Listening to time
The fathomless globe between them

*Maril Crabtree*

## Rabbit Snow

Fluffy snow, rabbit snow, my father called it,
maybe because when he grew up in Arkansas
in Depression days and went hunting,
it was easier to find their tracks in a bit of snow.

My father knew things like that, how to hunt and skin
rabbits and squirrels, things he never taught me
because I wasn't a boy. He did try once
to teach me how to shoot. I was twelve years old

and the rifle, a Winchester .22, bit into my shoulder
each time I pulled the trigger. I aimed at beer cans
on fence posts but nothing moved. Lord knows
where the bullets went. Embarrassed, I felt sure

that if I'd been a boy I could have knocked
down every one of those cans, buried them
in the soft dirt of the field beyond, and my shoulder
would have ached with triumph, not shame.

*Natalie Crick*

## Childless

I lost six children here in the wood.
Even now, I see
bright hair flashes in pools of sun;
babies' hair.
Gestures flake away
warm and human,
their pink light bleeding and peeling,
falling like blessings.

My womb rattles inside its cage:
this body
ungodly as an infant scream.
I spin on my own spike.

If I call,
they might crawl out,
death-gowns frilled at the neck,
wet waxen feet.

The moon has nowhere to go.
I have been
filling and emptying for years.

*Suzannah Dalzell*

## Namesake

Sunlight lingers,
slips yellow through cedars
and pink tinged alder
the sky beyond a watery blue,
very like my grandmother's eyes
those last years of her life.

Startled from a doze
by bee buzzing,
clock ticking, dog's nails
clicking across the polished floor
she'd surface
in random decades
call out – *Who's there?*

*It's Sue* – I'd answer
then wait for my cue,
as she tacked back and forth
through time – daughter,
granddaughter, even her mother

who graced the room
in gilt frames – a dowager
draped in black, a grim-faced girl
with blond sausage curls.

And over the mantle
in white muslin and straw hat laden
with silk roses, a young Sue
who – *is exceedingly pretty,*
*goes out a great deal*
*and dances like a fairy.*

The end quote is from: The Social Mirror: A Character Study of the Women of Pittsburgh and Vicinity During the First Century of the County's Existence. Society of To-Day - A Centennial Souvenir 1888 by Adelaide Mellier Nevin

*Julianne DiNenna*

## Gifts to Myself

I want the hair of Samson to hide
Worn, bulging willow bunches at my midriff,
Floret deliveries, gifts from God,
Badge of honor for stares,

Stretch marks, endowment for bearing.
Willow creepers emblem blazed deep into my skin,
Gold medal for starving, shrinking to lesser scars,
I want coiled locks surging from my temples.

Visible varicose veins illuminate cubic legs,
Proof of blood-letting lifelines to myself,
Rooibos tea pouring under palpable glares.
I want blood-red beanstalk willow branches brimming from my head.

Balloon magic uterus, blown up still life,
Entrustment for conceiving neonate presents,
Attracts covert glances for the flab of remembrance.
Samson shall swing, slide along my slow curves.

The 'hate' rants hurled from daughter's mouth,
Giggles from my mother; blessings she says,
Blossoms sprouting from sprawling roots.
Samson will wind like veins around my wrinkles, lurch from my trunk.

Of these opulent weeping willow bequests,
Just a parting one to myself, please:

I want hair of Samson
Bounce me back at each rant,
Lash out at each critical eye, slap mean mouths,
Fill the idle womb of *infans* or hysteria.

Let my weeping Samson ringlets whorl
Buffer my Delilah daughter under burgeoning boughs,
Buttress her with sweeping bestowal, and

Topple temples of non-believers.

*Laura English*

## Roof Over Their Heads

The porch as main character,
maybe the villain,
but first the guy you'd never suspect,
waves with his coffee from the mailbox,
without cursing fixes his truck,
clears snow from your walk unasked.

The way the porch saves the woman and kids,
allows them to stay month after month
in the stucco house with black shutters.
If forced to leave altogether—
ladder of sheets, duffel of clothes,
bushes like hands that pass them on in the darkness.
If keeping watch from a nearby attic.
If a taxi idled for them.

The porch, so good,
so kind like that quick handout.
A fish when hunger pines for a wide net.

Twilight's last gleaming. Drawn by the fireworks.
Neighbors convening. The mother and three children
not coming out to join the celebration—
a fleeing from.
See them, pretend not to notice
four bodies that cling to each other.
The floating structure we can't step onto,
deck of a boat lost in deep waters.
The baby's head, round and delicate,
how the skull needs time to harden after birth.
How not to think of a sparrow,
an egg fallen from the nest.
And if it can't go back, then where?

*Louis Gallo*

## Fiona Came By

Fiona came by today
and she smelled like sage
and oregano, rosemary and
musty delicious herbs
and she told me I looked great
(which ain't necessarily true)
and I told her she looked great
(which is true)
and we couldn't stop smiling
and alas I had about fifty emails
to answer, which I hate,
and had to cut it short
which I will regret for a long time
because what is more valuable,
answering emails or spending time
with Fiona?

*Deborah Gerrish*

## Prewriting

Suddenly, heaped on
her mid century modern
loveseat—

leopard
pants with zippered-pockets
gray lace & denim
skirt
white tennis t-shirt
black leggings
black silk blouse
pleated dress with torn bric-a-brac hem
blistered matelasse jacket
red tattersall
vest with missing buttons
brushed
velvet headband—a jumbled pyramid

A leaning tower—

Tossed striped stained scarf
jacquard Aztec sweater
paisley mismatched socks
navy leather
belt
faux fur
cross-body,
blue brocade heels
flip
flops

—an assemblage
of conspicuous consumption
stockpiled in
her California closet.

*Becky Gould Gibson*

## Hera's Tutorial for a Gulled Wife

You must have known long before you knew it.
A trusted friend
you trusted with your husband—
like you a civil, a civilized woman.
Innocent, they had to be.
The jealous wife—
not a role you relished.
Surely you'd outgrown that outworn trope,
a fiction invented by men
to boost their egos
and keep women in their place.

Then he tells you.
He's fallen for her.
*Love* he calls it.
*We're crazy about each other.*
A punch in the gut.
Believe me, I've been there—
too many times to count.
If you could claw her eyes out, you would do it.
Change her into a bear,
a child-eating serpent,
a wry-necked bird
a pile of ashes.
I regret nothing.
Those whores had it coming.

So much for theory.
The veneer of civilization
has never been thinner.
Consciousness raising.
Support groups.
Meditation circles.
Everybody *nice.* There's nothing like hate to scrub
the mind of rubbish.

Sorry, sister.
Love's a zero-sum game.
Either you win at it or you don't.
In such matters it's every woman for herself.
Lips red to knock 'em dead.
Stilettos.
Thongs.
Teddies.
Phone sex.
Sexting.
Whatever it takes to get a man
or take him from another woman.
Hang the sisterhood.
Viper coils and hisses:
*Keep her off the premises.*
Love is mean. Love is dirty. Love is for keeps.

*Becky Gould Gibson*

## I Love Old Women

I love old women.
I love them for their unbounded, abandoned geographies.
I love how they let gravity play,
have its say with them—
gravity a final kindness, a release.

*Give it up, sister, take a step back.*

Even my mother, once sleek as a cat,
every hair in place—
in bed those last months—
allowed her hair to mat, nails grow yellow and thick,
as if she were going somewhere
we weren't invited and only she knew the code.

Her gown rode up past her knees,
almost to her navel,
as though her sex, a hairless egg, no longer
belonged to her exclusively,
but was universal, a harmless fact of nature.

She'd removed her rings and watch.
Time had stopped. She'd take
as much time as she needed.
Neither art nor artifice left,
she would face
the unknown
as is—
sans makeup.

*Becky Gould Gibson*

## What Renoir Would Not Paint

"Flesh! That's all that matters!"

*Renoir*
director Gilles Bourdos

Once-beautiful women like you, Mother,
though intravenous needles leave bruises
in reds, blues, purples. He's not interested

in skin thin as paper. Would not waste such
stunning light upon it. Nor must he touch
the model. Tits blush, lift slightly to brush

his brush-tip. His bristles kiss her nipple.
Clever. He need never leave his easel
to lay her in paint, have his way with her.

*Sandra Graff*

## Death of an Ironing Board

The baby's cries pressure
my breasts as I press a blouse
to get ready for work

afraid that my husband
will not get home in time
for me to get to work on time
that I have not pumped enough milk
to be away for five hours
that later, milk might seep through
my breast pads, wet my blouse while
I explain the predicate nominative

A sparrow flies into the deck door
a hard limitation that looks like air
Thunk – the sound
of the ironing board
as it slams against the floor
making a dent in the new linoleum

a senseless sparrow rolls over
stiffening legs point skyward

*Kathleen Hellen*

## ego godiva

in the north window of St. George's
church at Woolhope, the glass decores
the myth derived in Coventry, before
the word "voyeur" applied to bad behavior,
the peeping the point, the nude ride, not the taxes
she despised, the human suffering. Under the mantle
that suggested linen stores, the light illuminates the downcast
eyes, the famous hair restrained in two long braids the color
of canola, while in her mother-hold, embraces, the tiger
she had cubbed, the god reflected in the glass, at the center
of religion, and two white dogs like converts to submission,
lapping for her grace, the white-on-black inscriptions
on her robe like magic, white to purify the lack,
protect the ones who have no house, no land,
no shield from hunter-actaeons.

*Donna Isaac*

## Suggestion

Now that the technician has run the radioactive wand
over my left breast, over and over and over, pushing buttons that beep,
she and I both silent, anticipating the worst,
tangles of white, for example, that may (or may not) signal disease,
I await alone in the dimmed cubicle,
lying back, a towel on my chest
in a robe more sack than habiliment,
nothing to look at but cinderblocks,
black and white images still on the screen,
hieroglyphics yet to be interpreted
my name and birth date emblazoned on top
of this flesh she has mapped.
At least leave a lamp on,
a philodendron, maybe, or a fish tank bright with swordtails and guppies.
A stack of glossy magazines might be nice
or some piped-in tunes even if it is Taylor Swift Muzak
rather than this dark *memento mori* of a room,
small and shadowy as the human condition.

*Terry S. Johnson*

## If I Had Married You

I'd have learned to make ravioli from scratch. Mix egg yolks
and semolina, knead the dough lightly. Then, roll, roll
roll. Mix the stuffing, cut the squares. Fill, fold.
Stack properly for use that same day.

I'd have learned to ring a chicken's neck, gut its innards, pluck
each feather, skin smooth for the spit. I would have
learned to keep a house dust free, to iron even
the sheets, dishtowels, underwear.

I'd have learned the Italian name for each part of a door handle,
window lock. Sat a desk, translated letters about ordering
bronze hardware. Queen *Regina* with a cheap metal
crown of a minor principality, the factory office.

I'd have learned to wait all Sunday while you rode your white
Arabian stallion over steep trails. The laugh of the town,
you spending more time with your horse than riding
me, your foreign wife. I would, however,

have born handsome children of sturdy stock. But no, not enough,
this education. Desire's hot furnace, stoked by youth's
kindling, would choke my future. S*ottomettere*,
to be subjugated, to be put under.

*Claire Joysmith*

## Quiet Threading

She stills herself
words lost to the world
her dreams an excuse
for each shade of loss

nimble fingers threading
daisy chains
sailor knots
stranded stars
jellyfish ghosts
fleeting colors
sequined moons
and a hearth of suns

strand by
simple strand

hummingbirds, too,
plucked gently
from southern winds

the butterflies
she finds folded into
the seams of her dresses

softened stitches
for every wound

compassion a silent
shimmer
as she murmurs
a cricket oracle

a siren unfurling
silvered arias
into the night

her lovesong
pure azure

perhaps lightly frayed
at the edges.

*Gloria Keeley*

## To My Sister

it took all summer to make biscuits in
our easy bake oven
mommy's peach-print apron
my Alice In Wonderland apron
your Snow White
putting Tiddly Winks in our noses
to make mommy laugh
helping Winky Dink cross over the river
marking crayons right on the tv screen
clothes pins & playing cards on bike spokes
motoring around town
"the girls are here"
laying on the evening grass
while frogs hitchhopped
the crickets croaked
we counted the stars
our wonderful pets:
Cajun birds
Scotty dog, fallen from Oz
at night with the lights out
listening to the sea in that big seashell
from our stash at Pismo Beach
the abalone shells at the side of the road
driving south on 101
making up images about the moon and sun
"the moon is a soothing bandage" you said
"the sun and moon divide their lights" I answered
colorful posters, tie-dye shirts
psychedelic music tuned our ears
the climb to adulthood
our journals filled with memories
written in bed under covers
flashlights in hand
you went on to write beat fiction
I taught poetry to children
the family reunions found us
storytelling and remembering

how we'd sing and dance
by the light
of that sliver of moon

*Susanna Lang*

## Dear Shayna,

Sometimes your voice is all you have, and enough.
Sometimes the dreams are true, and they give you the words,
sentences that rise like waves in the sea where Pharaoh's army drowned,
where Miriam the prophet raised her voice with the other women
as they praised the water rising in a flood to save them.
Sometimes you dream of the boy cousin you followed everywhere
and the way he touched you, the places he asked you to touch him.
The dreams waited until you were ready to receive them,
until you had learned the words you needed to recount them.
The holy books are named for the men who prophesy in them
but when yet another king came to oppress the people, the men were afraid,
and it was the prophet Deborah who called her people to resist.
After the battle it was again a woman, Jael, who took a tent peg
and a hammer to pierce the king's temple: he lay dead on the floor,
wrapped in the blanket she had given him for his comfort.
Young prophet with your clear voice, you do not ask for the peg
and the hammer; you do not ask for a knife to sever his hand
from his wrist. You have forgiven the boy, you have forgiven
yourself, you no longer ask if there was anything you could have done,
little girl that you were, to shield the ins and outs of your body.
You do not ask for an army but only for believers, only
that we gather up the next girl child in her basket of rushes,
that we keep her safe from hands like the hands that touched you,
that still touch you in your dreams, that will visit other girls' dreams
if we do not make of ourselves a flood to rise up over the land.

*Joan Larkin*

## In Heaven

Winged babies hover.
A boy angel holding a lily
brings pain. I had an angel
once—his name was Max—
but I lost his card, after the abortion
that's haunted my whole life.
He shoved coins into my hand,
I still feel their weight,
and stood outside a phone booth,
Walgreens, Chicago, holding
a sign up to the beveled glass
in pencil: *PEACE OF MIND*
while I called home. Peace,
if it was that, didn't last
though I did go to college—
for that I'd like to thank him.
He'd be in heaven now
with wings, if they still wear them.
Maybe he did know what was best for me,
as they say they do, in heaven.

*Eve F.W. Linn*

## A curtain of live tangle

just once I wanted to brush your hair
it would have taken all night
starting from the widow's
peak all the way past your knees
just wilderness of hooves and gallops
I kept my wish sequestered oh entirely
I saw the lack of you what had been beaten
out of us both (our Cracker Jack decoder rings
flashed signals across the room)
when the robins' eggs fell out of the thick
coiled wisteria onto the flagstones
bits of blue studded the mess
I couldn't stop crying

*for Lucie Brock-Broido, beloved teacher*

*Katharyn Howd Machan*

## Again Demester Folds Her Summer Robe

knowing Hades is flexing his muscles,
maybe putting on a new black leather vest
to show off the tattoos her daughter hates:
dead owl, crossed swords, bloody poppies.
A new one writhes on his right bicep,
huge scorpion curling to sting. God
of shadows, he prefers dim light, but
each year Persephone returns
he allows fat candles, white flames.
Demeter knows he'll grab her daughter
greedily at the last dank step, then
slam the door to the living world,
laughing to know the goddess of harvest
was the one who turned pomegranates red.

*Marjorie Maddox*

## The Smell of Urine

Dribbling down
her own soft-down legs,
waiting, please,
for the key
to the gas station bathroom,
her mother clucking beside her,
“I told you,”
her father’s face scolding,
“stopped just a town back,”
her brother’s eyes smirking,
“that’s what you get
for slurping
my Slurpie,”

and even
the stink-limbed girl herself,
turned gutsy after all these years
of silent quivering,
pushes her now perfumed body
too close to my fifty-year-old
premenopausal lower
flesh-shelf, suddenly slack,
refusing to hold
the weight of wet,
that sneering girl of a bully,
shaking her finger
in my past,
“Again, not again.”

*Gloria g. Murray*

## In my daughter's house

I'm told not to look
in the cabinets for a cup
when I ask for salt
she hands me a box of diamond crystal to pour
watches to see if I'm watching her
while she is cooking, burning the oil
tells me I forgot to close the bathroom door
so the cats won't get in
forgets to put the outdoor light on
when she knows I'm coming

in my house she is the girl again
leaving her shoes for me to trip over
changes the channel on the TV
in the middle of a show
after she eats, leaves her dishes in the sink
makes a pretense of wiping the table
leaving a crumpled napkin or two
makes one cup
of tea when the water boils

I say nothing—I want her visit
no matter what

*Gloria g. Murray*

## is that me

over there in the library
on senior game day—
still slim but with a few extra around the middle
jogging pants covering
the hysterectomy scar
the rich color of my dark hair faded

the atheist—when atheism was a whispered word
poet/artist, feminist, therapy patient
when therapy was also a whisper
once sexy, skinny in a tube top, tight jeans
long, delicate nails polished red

now dropping the mahjong tiles—
*crack, bam, soap, east, west*
between gulps of Poland Spring
and a low calorie granola bar

maybe I died and instead of hell or heaven
went to little old lady land
complaining about the air conditioning, sciatica
in my butt, arthritis in my fingers

*O god…who I swear I don't believe in…*

if that's me…please give me amnesia
or a lobotomy Medicare will cover
but don't let me forget my foldable cane
my tote bag, my glasses
or what the *F*— I'm doing here, anyway

*Gloria g. Murray*

## The Fall

I showed my scar to everyone
they all had to know
how I fell on concrete, broke my nose, went all alone
in the ambulance to the ER, made a big
hullabaloo, wanting to be waited on *immediately*

to hell with the heart attacks, strokes,
bleeding arms and legs, gasping asthmatics…
I cracked my head on concrete, broke my nose
(probably had a blood clot)
you know, like Natasha Richardson, when
she went skiing into a tree and four days later, died

at first there was sympathy, the *oh, my god's* and
*oh, you poor thing, how awful!*
after a while, I sensed boredom when I started to ask
over and over whether they thought I would heal
or have an ugly scar, as if the whole poetry community

cared about my injury, Natasha Richardson or the plight
of one poet who had been
on the possible precipice of death
or at the very least
had a scar under the half bang on her temple

*Nina Murray*

## Alcestis Discovers her Colonial Consciousness

I am five and ethnically ambiguous: Asian eyes,
wide cheekbones, but indisputably white and thus
not classifiable as Gypsy,  that most familiar Other. Also,
exceedingly dutiful, and so I don't mind when it is decided
I am the best fit for the role of the Tajik girl in the pageant
for the International Day of the Solidarity
of the Working Class. The model in the picture book
wears at least two dozen braids and harvests cotton.
My hair often gets me called "boy" and I've never laid eyes
on a crop, an architect's child in a city full of decrepit baroque
cathedrals.
                My costume's hat comes with
shoe-laces sewn into the rim and braided, the problem solved.
I'm delighted--exactly until I see the girl in the Russian
costume (she's not Russian, but blond): with down-trimmed
satin sleeves and a crown like a flattened onion dome,
in glitter and gold. The cotton-picking dance shows
the important contribution of the Tajik people to the GDP.
I turn my wrists to showcase pinches of cotton wool
and become alert to the irony. The Tajik girl and I--
just two subalterns, interchangeable and for the moment, swapped.

*Brenda Nicholas*

## How Long Can a Butterfly Live?

In 1976 a photographer catches Farrah,
casts her in a net. She sits
with her left arm on bent knee,
mounds of blonde pile around her face, linger
over her shoulders, and she smiles with teeth shining
like white specs on silky wings, an image of her
in a red bathing suit permanently pressed
into history's page, never to fade.

In another photo, on the set of Charlie's Angles,
she stares into a mirror the size of a tennis racket,
admires her winged locks illuminating her
youth, knowing they are the golden coins
of her worth, like she is looking at her reflection
in a drop of rain on a flower,
wondering, *how long can a butterfly live?*

After O'Neil left her, it is said she flew away
for hours at a time. I can almost see her
circling around her room on a cloud of cannabis
and tequila before her transformation
back into caterpillar. How she must have crash-landed
on her dresser, fallen
onto her bed, wrapped in a cocoon of blanket,
her winged-hair flattened, her face pressed into pillow.

*Marjorie Power*

## Silver Sequins

This has come to her attention:
she hates me.

Doubly
because I've noticed.

For the most part the woman's a fish,
one of the strongest that oceans witness.
Ceaselessly calm in black murk
she'll shove her way through trunks
in the staterooms of sunken ships.

And she has aim.
A hurled-overboard wedding ring
can get spat back into the hand.

I've kept a safe distance
till last night after a dance.
The new moon made me an offer.
In high heels I was extra careful
stepping along that pier….
Help! My sequin dress!

Ten feet deep
and still I shone
like a mirror.

Now we're both dry.
She's a hawk – released
from a lifetime in fins and scales.

Awkward, old.
Missing my jugular.

*Mary Retta*

# Whispers

I.

With you I speak only in whispers. Your words echo off walls, make my ears ring, become fastened in my mind. Mine are soft and too easily forgotten. At night you scream broken moans into the space between my lips while I lie silent beneath you. I check the reflection of your iris to be sure I have not disappeared.

But I believed in you, in the size and sheer force of you, in the solid walls that your arms could encase me in. So I cherished the muscles rippling beneath the skin of your arms. I let them give me bruises. I held your hands that could draw blood and shared my body with a man who could break it.

In the darkness I'm brave. I breathe words of desire, of tender skin and gentle fingers. But you never hear them. The whispers.

II.

It's a windy Tuesday morning and we're late for something but don't care. You shift your eyes, nervous. Into a no longer comforting silence you finally confess to me, whispering

*When I feel weak I turn to Aphrodite*
*Somehow she knew that soft could be strong too*

In your gentle muted way you showed me so much. How small can be strong and that there is power in standing still. You kissed my curls and stroked the skin under my eyes. You taught me that love can be quiet.

*Margaret Rutley*

## What Happens When You Start Over?

He isn't remembered when I need someone's hand.
Dad ate cabbage for breakfast, standing at the sink.
What happens when you start over?
He always said, *Go ask your Mother*.

Dad ate cabbage for breakfast, standing at the sink.
He never walked if he could drive.
He always said, *Go ask your Mother*.
If only we had gone to Disneyland when I was seven.

He never walked if he could drive.
Sawdust and cigarette smoke coveralls.
If only we had gone to Disneyland when I was seven.
Even girls need to chop wood.

Sawdust and cigarette smoke coveralls.
He dies in his dream of war, calling for his men.
Even girls need to chop wood.
If you argue with a god, can you win?

He dies in his dream of war, calling for his men.
What happens when you start over?

If you argue with a god, you can't win.
He isn't remembered when I need someone's hand.

*Mary Schmitz*

## “For Bernie”

My grandmother calls me by my mother’s name,
a two-syllable burst of memory when the days hurt.
When I look at her, totally and completely, I am
so aware of the age and heart that she carries.

I want to know everything, I tell her like clockwork,
I have so many questions about what you know.
She smiles at the family pictures, then looks at me,
and says her mother's name, my name, whispered.

*Mary Schmitz*

## "For Onah"

An ode to you
who carried mountains to America
and children in your arms.

Did you plant flowers
at the feet of your ancestors
and whisper goodbye to the shore?

Did you pray to the water
just as Jochebed had before she
cried Moses down the Nile?

*Mary Schmitz*

## "If No One is Around"

I took my prom pictures next to a birch tree.
Or, to start again, next to a specific birch tree
that my grandmother stole off the side of a
state highway and planted in our yard when
both her and the tree were young and healthy.

My grandmother rests several miles from here
in a nursing home bed while oxygen hisses
and residents wheel themselves down the halls.
The tree, past its weathered storms, lays too
in front of the house that it shaded for so long.

I know it might be silly to cry for a tree or
to feel so sorry for everything it won't see
but, goddamn, I loved that tree and the
woman who tended to it and who taught
me everything I know.

*Jane Shoenfeld*

## Flashback

We keep walking. The night goes black.
Others depart for nearby cabins, not Holly and me.
We walk fast.  Her pony tail swings,
our sandaled feet in rhythm on seamed earth.
Time waves us backwards to the block

where we grew up. Sniping neighbors,
town homes stuck together in lines of five.
Moms shut up in mailboxes.
All the kids seen by all of them through their lit up
window holes. The yellow glare staring us in.

Holly's bought a fancy camera. She sights, snaps,
shoots in the dark. We're spinning in her zoom lens.
The shutter clicks. Caught in the flash,
we're propelled into night where we hear
our mothers sighing and calling us in.

*Jane Shoenfeld*

## Whirl *For My Mother*

A curl falls to the floor.
Is it cat fur, silver hair, a strand of wool
from Edna Catherine's blue afghan?

Edna Catherine was my grandmother.
Rosemary was her first child,
my Mother, Rosemary.

In third grade I admired her,
the writer typing on her black Underwood.
Home from school at noon,
I'd open the front door,
Mother at her mahogany desk,
bright light on her hair.
She'd turn to me, smile and sandwich,
before I went back to school.

In sixth grade I gave her a scarlet
valentine with an acid green eye.

My first year in college,
she divorced.
I was sprawled on her bed
when she told me to shave
my legs and underarms.

I moved away from her scrutiny,
shut her out the door.

She had her face lifted twice.
Her cosmetics stand, a still life.
Cut glass dish with cotton twists,
abalone shell, next to silver bell,
Degas's *Dancers* by the door.
Her typewriter by the window.

In the evening, she had a stroke,

Chopin nocturnes on the turntable.
She fell to the kitchen floor
There she lay till the next day
when a man in the hall
heard her cat cry, noticed
her uncollected *Times.*

She was alive, left side paralyzed.
I flew across the country
to hold her hand before she died.
She squeezed my fingers, when I said
T*his could be me lying here.*.

I want her back, her close up face,
her *darling* at the door.
It's been over twenty years now.

I hold the whirl of wool in my hands.
Strains of Debussy on the radio,
threads of orchid, teal and tangerine.
Braided colors separate, intertwine

*Jeanine Stevens*

## Yesterday's Laundry

Light is the moon and my mother's name. Wait
for the angle and curve. Next thought is Sunday

after a slow week, a cavalcade of false urgencies,
fake news. Take a slow drive along the turnpike,

here matrix spilling green neon. Miles of going.
Did I unplug my iron; put the roast in the oven?

A sign for Big O Tires reminds me of the seatbelt
recall.  Why am I driving among RAV4'S

and Hondas when meditating with my olivella
shell seems more reasonable? Bee Hive Cluster

flashes like a monk's retreat on remote islands,
What shines through grabs me. Midnight.

Nothing burning. Mother asks, "Why
is yesterday's wash still pinned to the line?"

*Maxine Susman*

## Hairbrush

At night a hundred strokes,
right side, left side, underneath,
in the morning a hundred strokes.

Kent's of London, the perfect gift.
Genuine boar bristle, genuine tortoise shell,
dead animals parting the living scalp.

You never hit me with it.

A lifetime later your empty hand
could not straighten.

*Don't soak it too long in soapy water,*
the bristles will loosen and fall out.

But you never lost all your hair.
You didn't lose all your teeth.
Your skin stayed clear and smooth.

That's how I found you, curled like a seed.

*Maxine Susman*

## Pandora's Box

In the hallway to my parents' room
a small naked figure reclined on a marble base,
one hand lifting a strand of beads from a jewel box,
its lid barely open. Behind her a plume of colored glass
concealed a little bulb my parents kept unlit.

She is Pandora, my mother told me.
Perhaps my mother had been told the same.

Stupid vain girl, they said not to peek,
keep the lid down, box closed.
The gods instructed her. Male gods.
And why high-polished naked, if not
some erotic glint she's better off concealing?

Wasn't she bound to disobey? How can a girl
be trusted with a secret, why won't a girl
show some self-control? No one said Why.
Just *No* and *Don't* and *You Must Not* and *Do As I Say*—
All the evils of the world suppressed, as long as,
until, she thought she wanted some easy pearls
and lifted up the top. Her fault. Sound familiar?

She shut the box in panic before hope flew out—
meaning hope was lost or saved? The gods don't say.

In my home she lounges in the living room,
on proud display. I love her because she's curious.
Sometimes I plug in the electric cord so a glow
lights up sleek Pandora and her casket of jewels.

*Therese Tiger*

## My Sister and I

didn't expect to sip vodka tonics after school
at our sixth-grade gym teacher's house.

His name, Mister Guy, it really was.
Drink sparkly, lime green, like us.

Mom fussed, *so sweet of you to give them a ride home.*
She never did the school runs, even in first grade

even if the sidewalks were covered with snow on Route 18, we walked
single file, book bags tight to our chest as the trucks slammed by.

If too late to walk, *run quick to the Marshalls' house,*
squeezed in their backseat, it's only now I realize there was no
arrangement with them.

I am the seventh daughter, Mom begged for birth control after the fifth,
Priest said she would go to hell.

*Seven Cinderellas* my psychiatrist called us,
gold among the dross.

When of age, I preferred Kamikazes,
sweet orange muddled with bitter peel.

*Therese Tiger*

## Self Portrait, Philadelphia Museum of Art

I'm better than you.
I know the niece of the collector who donated this exhibit.
That painter, I know a poem about his work,
Duchamp's *Nude Descending A Staircase*.

I am nothing, worthless.
When the light hits me a certain way
I go dark.
I have holes, shadows,
I waste time

*Gail Tyson*

## For Anne on Her 90th Birthday

Memories of pleached trees
bloom amid these hours,
weak branches woven into strong ones.

You have always been a gardener,
bending the ear of your heart
close to the roots of each story,

to this one pecked speechless
by her vulture-mother,
to that one withered by fear.

You know the ones who talk
and talk—and those who can't—all
yearn to cut away the pain.

You distanced your demons too,
slashing the stem of anguish
close to the core, enough

to bend your frailties, plait them
into your strengths, now grown
together, greening the soul.

*Gail Tyson*

## Paperweights

Instead of dolls, the girl collects
glass paperweights. She wants to keep
her feelings from blowing away,

like hope her mother might come back,
track her down at the Antique Mall,
where the school bus drops her.

Today her Gran hung a neon
Harley-Davidson sign. It reminds
the girl of a distant man, his anger

idling until the day he took off.
Every month Gran lets her choose
a paperweight, her reward

for waiting ’til dark when they go
home. She recites the names Gran
taught her for what never moves

inside these domes: thistle, jellyfish,
millefiori, syllables
razor-sharp, cutting her mouth.

*Ekweeremadu Uchenna-Franklin*

## Satellite

Is this crescent your smile

are these winking stars your eyes

did you suffer jet lag
traversing space to Paradise

is it truly littered with streets of gold
orchards of crystal fruits
canals of sparkling wine
and mountains of ice cream

were you assigned a million angels
to clip your nails and braid your hair
to massage your back and sing you to sleep
as the preachers make us believe

did you meet your mate in Eden
is he still gorgeous
as in your night of nuptial
when he first mined your nectar

*Gina Valdés*

## The Gift

In a wide-lined tablet appeared
simple geometric forms that bent,
diversified, gained sound, my hand
guided by the steady hand of
la maestra Cuca. Cuquita.

With each new musical letter
my eyes grew wider, prompting
a boy to say, *You look like an owl.*

When the letters assembled
into my name, I scanned the room
for applause, saw thirty busy hands,
pocked desks and blackboard,
floor and walls giving off disinfectant,
a jar with a green shoot pushing
through cotton.

Words followed me home, found
paper to dance on, linked into poems
inspired by poems in yellowing pages
of abuela's books.

In our kitchen, I embraced
a large pumpkin destined for syrupy
pulp floating in milk

and dashed out, the globe carrying me
to Cuquita's house.

It landed on her porch, back from carriage
to pumpkin. I knocked until before me
stood her half-blind sister with sunglasses.

I lifted and offered the autumn fruit—
cucurbita pepo—for Cuquita who
gave me words, names, stories, poems:

the alphabet cornucopia.

*Kelly Garriott Waite*

## Decision

Four brine shrimp
– coral fingernail trims -
swim in a closed glass sphere.

Water, three thimblesful of stone,
a mossy frond draped upon a plastic branch,

all their needs are met, save freedom.

Shall I destroy the glass?
Spring them from their prison?
Leave them gasping among
saltwater shards?

Or should I let them continue
believing in boundaries?

It's all they have known.

Does that justify?

*Florence Weinberger*

## Pitcher

My grandson gave me a small pitcher he made with his own hands. I could brag, staggered by its simple lines, its clever glaze. I could be amazed the drips he placed to look like accidents were evidence of still deliberation. But I won't say any of that, I know better. Young and deep, having learned to love early, he inhabits clay and fire as well as his elders make use of their symphonies. The handle curls like a multi-chambered heart, the colors gleam more precise than the ways in which I have come to burnish praise beyond praise. I pick daisies, their uncontained grins steeped in water, in place.

*Florence Weinberger*

## That's Not the Way I Raised You

Hollering as my mother did, I raised my children with overcooked conjectures and too early bedtimes, their pillows wet with evidence. Every peace vied with trend, my righteousness a worn excuse, my admonitions dragged into a century already behind the times. There were instructions to cancel every intuition, uncles and neighbors to hiss their disapproval. I tried a kiss for every contradiction. For every blow a new dress. What was it all for? To grow them into citizenship? To teach them how to hold a pen, a ballot? I am not their change. I am only their past. I will be rewritten, even as I bless my parents, their heavy lifting. At this juncture, love's come back home in the sweet unconditional. My mother made the best strudel. I could only come close.

*Geraldine Kloos Weltman*

## Stargazing with My Father

At his place in the country, my father
insists we go outside to see the stars.
Here, away from city lights, the lid
is off the world. Stars wink and beckon
amid the deep emptiness of space.
He shows me how to find the Big and Little
Dippers, then he's on to Cassiopeia
and the Pleiades. He always taught me
what I needed to know—how to drive
a stick shift, how to sing harmony—
and he exemplified the qualities
to avoid in a husband—a tendency
to sleep past noon, a fondness for martinis.
Now he's eighty-four. He's handing me
the binoculars, pointing towards
the heavens, saying, *Want to see*
*the North Star? This is how you find it.*

*Geraldine Kloos Weltman*

## Teaching My Mother to Swim

Entering the pool, I pause on the ladder
to get used to the water, so cold on my feet,
and prepare for the underwater silence.
I'm teaching myself to breathe on my left now,
after fifty years of breathing only on my right.
So hard to learn to do an unaccustomed thing.

When I was thirteen, my mother asked me
to teach her to swim. As a child
in a Pennsylvania coal town she'd nearly drowned
falling head first into a water-filled hole
dug six feet deep for construction in an empty lot.
She never wanted to learn to swim after that.

But once I passed my deep-water test, she feared
I would leave her behind. She'd pull on her white
bathing cap, strap it under her chin, her head
small and round like an egg. Her stick arms would slap
at the water like spider's legs. She never learned
to come up for air, but finally made it
to the other side without taking a breath.

*Kim Zach*

## With Apologies to Julia Child

Never mind *Mastering the Art of French Cooking.*
Those dishes require days of shopping, chopping,

planning ahead. No fewer than fifteen ingredients,
a culinary army gathered on your granite countertop.

Tonight, leave behind copper pans, white sauces,
red wine. Just say no to bread pudding, rich

with eggy brioche and clotted cream; dismiss scallops
sautéed in extra virgin; forget the triple chocolate torte.

Refuse to wrestle with a silver-scaled fish, who reclines
whole, eyeing you blandly from an herb-garnished

platter. Ignore the Cornish hen whose gamy breast
must be stuffed with lemon and thyme. Have no appetite

for simmering lobsters, clattering to a bubbly death.
Tonight, desire something less *compliqué*, more

*élémentaire*. Maybe that Midwestern mainstay—tater tot
casserole from a dog-eared, grease-spattered church cookbook:

microwaved ground beef, frozen mixed vegetables, the ubiquitous
cream of mushroom soup. Really, who can cook without it?

Perhaps to please your palate, the lowly grilled cheese—
fluffy pillows of white sandwich bread and American slices,

those squeaky plasticized orange-yellow squares, peeled
slowly from their crinkly wrappers. After, wipe buttery

fingers on a cheap paper napkin. How wonderfully simple,
how très *délicieux*.

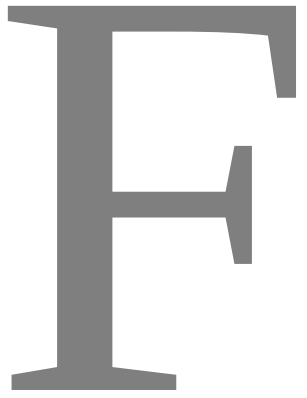
*Caroline Zimmer*

## Chant

*For Maria Sabina*

I am the woman with the raised hand,
hand like a sundial
with knuckles and underground veins.
I am the woman open mouthed in the chalky rain.
I am the woman and my veins survive.
I am the woman of coal
and dividends.
I am the woman with the cure of soup.
I am the woman over the bowl
of the living.
I am the woman, the shaman.
whom the gods have crowned
with infinity's wormy diadem.
I am the woman and the gods sound
from every hole in the earth, moaning,
from the holes I've stabbed in the earth myself.
I am the woman, unreal
as clothing,
the woman with finger nails and antler velvet,
The woman whose spit is sacrosanct.
I am the woman in scraps of shade
with shafts of agave.
I am the one
raising a cool hand to the dawn,
its aquarium of omens,
woman pure, woman immersed
and the commerce of my heart
does not unnerve me.
I am the one
with everything:
the torch to light the back of the throat that swallows me
the sword that splinters white and commands
the candle
the ankh
the altar of stone
the pragmatic pentacle

the cup of bone.



# FICTION

*Tera Joy Cole*

# You, Too

I

You are galloping and pretending that you are a horse, and you don't care if anyone sees you. It's been a great day. One of the best days you can remember so far in your ten years. You turn left onto a street densely forested on both sides of the road-the part of your walk home from school with very few houses. Over the sound of your footsteps, you hear someone loudly whisper, *Hey you! C'mon here, little girl*. You turn to face the voice coming from behind you. Curiosity pulls you against your better instinct toward the sound. What you see is something difficult to comprehend because it's something you've never seen before. A man is standing in the brush. You don't see his face (this is what the police later ask you-to describe his face). All you see is that he is only wearing socks. He is naked and hairy and laughing at you. For a moment, you are frozen in fear until you hear the other boys on the opposite side of the road. One of them is yelling, *Wha, wha look at the little baby cry*.

You've been trained for a situation like this. You run; run to the nearest stranger's house and knock on the door. The door you pound on is dark, heavy wood, and it takes a million years for the woman to come to the door. You tell her something that makes her face turn grey, and she pulls you into the house. *Sesame Street* is on the television, and the young children on the floor turn away from Big Bird to look at you. Suddenly, you feel so grown up. She insists on calling your parents. You want her to call the police, but instead your step-father shows up and retrieves you. At home, you tell the same story that you've told the lady, but unlike the nice lady, your parents don't seem to believe you. They call the police, perhaps thinking this will get you to tell the truth-that you made this story up. But, you didn't. You can still see his white socks and….The police and all of their questions arrive. They want to know what the man looked like. You are unable to describe him. Your parents call you a *little liar*. You are embarrassed. Your step-father insists on driving back to the *scene of the crime*. You are terrified but unable to resist. He takes you there and says, *See? There's no one here*.

II

You are at the country club waiting for your dad who has just finished up a game of tennis with his friends and is probably in the locker room right now walking around naked with the other naked men. But,

you don't want to think about naked men. You've seen the naked women walking around the locker room, and that's been enough for you. To get the idea, that is. You are sitting in a darkened room and at the moment there is no one else there. The room, when it is busy, is used for luncheoning. This is a thing that grown-ups you know do-lunch.

Business lunches, lunch dates, lunch after tennis, and then there is always the bar. That is where you sit. You are drinking a Shirley Temple that the waitress, who has disappeared, brought for you. You told her to put it on your dad's tab. You like to put things on your dad's tab; it makes you feel grown up. You are drinking a Shirley Temple because you are only thirteen. After a few minutes, an old man walks into the room. Although the room is otherwise empty, he takes the seat right next to yours. He smells of cologne and ham. You don't recognize him. He wants to buy you a drink. You ask for another Shirley Temple. He is making conversation with you, and since you don't want to be rude, you make conversation in return. He wants to know your name, and even though you've been instructed not to tell strangers your name, you tell him. The shoulder of his shirt jacket is itchy and tweed when it scratches up against your bare shoulder. You want to move away but you don't. He is saying something about how good of an athlete you must be and how he can tell this just by looking at you. You are not a good athlete, but you don't tell him this. Instead, you nod and giggle politely at what seem to be appropriate intervals. His hand is on your knee now and working its way up your thigh. You keep hoping that someone else will come into this room because what is happening feels wrong. You don't move his hand away. He asks your age. You are accustomed to lying about your age to boys, but this is no boy. You tell him that you are *only* thirteen. He snorts just a little, but he's in no hurry to move his hand away.

III

You are babysitting for a family who lives right on the beach. They have a little girl who is a total brat, but they pay you well enough. One day, while pushing the little girl on the swings, you run into two boys from your high school. Popular boys. You are trying hard to fit into this new school. You tell them that you are babysitting tonight. You tell them the parents won't be home until late. You tell them too much. Later that night, there is a knock on the door. You know you aren't supposed to open it when you are babysitting, but you are curious, so you only open the top half of the Dutch door. The two boys are standing outside in the bright porch light. The nosey neighbor might see, so you tell them to come inside, but stupidly, you keep the top of the door open. Anyone

looking out a window or walking by the house could see them inside. Maybe they are just there to talk to you, but you know that boys never want to just talk. They get right to the point. They want to take turns *sucking on your boobs*. You've never had a boy do that to you. You tell them *no*, but they say if you don't, they'll tell everyone at school that you are a *slut*. What choice do you have? You pull up your shirt. You will only give them one. As requested, they both take a turn. You keep your eyes closed until it is over, and as you are watching them leave, you see the neighbor lady close her bedroom curtain window. You are never called back to babysit. The boys still tell everyone at school that you are a *slut*.

IIII

You are all grown up now and in college. You know a lot about boys and even men, or so you think. The plan is to major in Women's Studies, and your dad is mad that you have become a *feminist.* There's a party at a friend of a friend's house. You've been to these kinds of parties. A lot. You are planning on drinking exactly four wine coolers. No more, no less. But at the party, the temptation is too great, and the wine coolers pave the way for shots. Pretty soon, the room is spinning, and you try to make your way to the bathroom. There is a line of people waiting, so you take your place and try to concentrate on a picture hanging on the wall of wild horses running somewhere really beautiful. Music and voices are pounding in your ear. It is difficult to stay awake. It is difficult not to puke. You must have fallen asleep for just a minute, but you become aware that someone is sitting next to you. You're hoping that it's your friend, but it's a guy. A guy you don't know. He looks pretty cute, but you can't even move your mouth to say anything to him. You think he says, *you're so pretty*. You think he puts your hand inside of his shorts. Your eyes are closing, and your head is against his shoulder. When you come to, there's no line for the bathroom. You are alone. There's something on your hand. Nobody has to call you a *slut* now. You know enough.

*Jennifer Companik*

# "Cream"

The waiter leaned his handsome head over the booth in response to Gwen's beckoning look—a look that was all Gwen had ever needed to do to summon a man.

This dimple-smiled man smelled like French toast. Maybe.

The whole room smelled like French toast.

His smile licked at Gwen's vulnerabilities.

"What do you need?" He asked.

Her marriage counselor had asked the same question.

Gwen needed to ask herself: Is this the right decision for my marriage? Instead of: Will this make a good story? And behave accordingly.

But the month-long writers' retreat had left her feeling touch-deprived.

And the waiter was close enough to touch.

"Cream," Gwen said—and touched his chin quickly with her right index finger. He had that trendy five-day stubble every man under fifty was wearing these days. His was softer than she expected.

His smile didn't falter, but his eyes widened.

"Is half and half okay?"

If only it were.

But Gwen understood that marriage was all or nothing.

"Half and half—yes. Thank you."

He left.

Lana returned to the table.

"I touched his chin," Gwen muttered.

"You what?"

"I touched his chin. The waiter's chin. Just for a second. Not even a second."

"Hmm." Lana swirled a poached egg into her grits.

Gwen picked up a strip of bacon and held it, without taking a bite.

"Am I a creepy old woman?"

"Nah." Lana speared a piece of pineapple into her mouth.

"How old you think he is?"

Lana glanced at the waiter, who was taking orders a few tables away. "Twenty-seven?"

They pondered the number in middle-aged silence.

"I thought he looked twenty-eight."

"Okay."

Gwen spooned honey onto her oatmeal. "Which still makes him ten years younger than me."

"Did he mind?"

Gwen tried not to assume every man she met wanted to have sex with her—but she'd learned, with some difficulty, that there was a world of difference between assumptions and reality.

"I don't think so—but maybe he's polite. Maybe he's just a good waiter angling for a tip… I crossed a line, Lana—

"Jesus, how creepy! Imagine if I were a man and he was a girl!"

"I think the double standard works in your favor here, Gwen."

Gwen regarded her plate, uncertain now, of her appetite.

"I'm gonna apologize."

Lana put down her fork. "Seriously?"

"I don't know."

Lana picked up her fork and attacked her food.

Gwen pushed aside the bacon and eggs and ate her oatmeal slowly. It was the steel-cut kind: creamy and satisfying. And, unlike bacon and eggs, it would not harden her arteries. She was old enough to care now, about the consequences to her heart.

The waiter arrived with Gwen's cream.

"Can I get you anything else?"

Lana's phone rang and she excused herself from the table.

The waiter stayed.

"I'm sorry," Gwen said.

"No problem."

"No, I mean, I'm sorry I touched your chin before."

This was not altogether true, but it was the right thing to say.

"You're good."

Was she? She'd spent the entire retreat avoiding adultery—and succeeded in the face of sensual poets, wry novelists, and very sexy, very direct journalists. That was good, wasn't it?

"No, I mean, I thought about it and if I were a man and you were a woman it would be, well, kinda criminal—"

"I don't mind."

He smiled at Gwen in a way now that made her blush; in a way that made her pat her scruples, to check that they hadn't melted—for she would not fail on her last day in town—and most certainly not with a waiter pouring coffee at a brunch buffet—no matter how tall, dazzling, and sweet-smiled he was.

"Can I ask you something?" Gwen said, tilting her head, inviting him closer.

He inclined his body toward her. "Sure."

"How old are you?"

"Twenty-four."

Gwen winced.

"Why?"

"I thought you were a little older."

"Nope, must be the beard," he touched his cheek, "I'm still a child."

(More of his swelter-inducing smile.)

"If I weren't a happily married woman, I'd make all kinds of indecent proposals to you."

The waiter straightened up, then stepped a bit closer and offered Gwen his hand to shake: "I'm Patrick, by the way."

"Gwen."

"Nice to meet you."

It felt great, his hand—warm, smooth, firm.

They shook hands for a long time, deaf to the din around them: neither of them let go.

Gwen held his hand in both of hers.

"Are you from here?" He asked.

"No."

"How long are you staying?"

"I leave tonight."

Lana returned to the table.

"I gotta go. Anna's having an issue checking out. I gotta hurry," she dropped an appropriate amount of cash on the table. "She's worried she'll miss her flight."

Lana left.

"This is hard," Patrick said, still holding Gwen's hand. "I have a girlfriend."

"I understand. I'm married, remember?"

Gwen's smile failed. Patrick's, too.

"I've been with her three years," he said. "It's a lot of work."

"I know."

She and Matt had been seeing a marriage counseling for over a year. They could talk to each other again—disagree without resorting to war. Gwen no longer wept in the shower each night, wondering how they'd share the kids without destroying everyone's lives.

"How long you been married?"

My entire adult life, Gwen thought, but didn't say. “Eighteen years.”

Patrick’s eyes widened slightly. He did not say she was older than he’d thought.

“So…” He said.

The baby at the next table let out a lusty, operatic scream.

“I’m happily married, like I said…" Gwen released Patrick’s hand. "But I’m not sorry I touched your chin.”

He laughed, rubbing his chin where she'd touched it.

“Me, neither.”

He left to wait on other tables.

Gwen finished her coffee, added her cash to Lana’s and headed toward the door.

She knew these opportunities would diminish as she got older. They hadn’t yet. But they would. And she wondered, as she often did, if making the right decision had robbed her of a good story.

She glanced over her shoulder one last time, before pushing the door into the fresh, virtuous air of this unfamiliar city: she found him looking at her, a platter in one hand, waving with the other.

*Elizabeth M. Dalton*

# Odalisque, or Sunday Afternoon in Hotel Olympia

"The principal person in a picture is light." Edouard Manet

Victoria throws back the bedding, and Kleo complains at the end of the bed. He stands, arches his back, and moves away from her feet before settling into a cloud of discarded blankets behind her knees. She says his name but he lays back his ears and curls into a square of sunshine.

Light cut by another pane of glass travels up her legs, crossed at the ankles, resting finally on her shoulder--the warm hand of late afternoon. She gazes toward the window, through the falling sunlight at the branch-scratched sky outside, and arches back against the mattress, her right arm gathering the pillow behind her head, her left resting in her lap. The garnet stone on her ring finger kindles.

Her childhood priest, her father, her old girlfriends—what they would say if they knew about the heat in her belly, and how it radiates right through the gold-pink tips of her fingers, her nipples, and the fiery insides of her eyelids? She points the toes of first one foot and then the other. The glitter on her toenails flashes and she smiles. All would be appalled. But well-being gathers inside her as she awakens naked on a Sunday afternoon in Hotel Olympia.

She runs a hand toward her bent knee along the skin of her thigh. Full and strong and stretching toward her toes, her legs are miracles of practicality, for walking and running, yes, and leading eyes up, up. In the sunlight, they have a sheen, as though they have been polished by all the eyes, and mouths, and hands. Her belly, a small mound of cream in the bowl of her hips, is not less lovely than it was the night before or the night before that. And, in fact, it is hungry, a truth only she can know. Here is another, suddenly blooming: She understands—and pities—the yearning men and women who grope her breasts and climb her just to shudder for a moment in the skin she wears.

A step on the landing outside her stairs brings Kleo's black head up and around. His eyes open, green lantern lights in a triangular face. She looks at him and yawns. Someone raps on the hollow wooden door: Vicki, you in there? Hey, Vicki! I can't stand here all day.

The sun has withdrawn, leaving nothing behind but gray and cream and the faint odor of warmed wood. Victoria's robe, limp and robbed of color, clings to the back of a chair in the corner. She glances at the door that rattles in its frame. The lock, unturned and forgotten again,

is little but a vertical smudge of bronze against the patchy paint on the door. The chain dangles on the frame. She tugs at the sheet. It's only Ardis after all. Come in, she says. Just come in.

Ardis shuffles in soiled house shoes, the plastic sleeve of flowers crackling in her hand. You'll come to no good this way, she says, tilting her gray head toward the door. The smell of summer, months off now, issues from the flowers bunched in her dark, arthritic hand. Another offering, you lazy thing. The voice is softer now. Her eyes, crowded between their creped lids, widen and follow the curve of hip right up and over a breast to Victoria's face. You look like a picture, the old woman says. Just like a picture on a wall.

Victoria looks at the roses in Ardis's hand—what color are they? White? Yellow? She shrugs; they're nothing to her.

Shoo! Ardis sweeps her fingers at Kleo, and he moves, a thick arcing brushstroke, to the other side of the tumbled bed. She places the flowers at Victoria's feet. Here, she says. Here.

A flash, like the opening of an eye, as sudden as the flinging open of a door: there is the autumn sun, blazing on the roses, which are yellow after all. Kleo purrs. Toenails sparkle at the end of Victoria's legs. In her lap, beneath her gilded breasts, the garnet on her finger burns again. Ardis, dazed and blinking, gazes at Victoria, who turns to greet the sun that rushes through the window.

*Sarah Evans*

# Happiness

Like all stories, this one has different places where it could begin.

Starting with a typical morning...

I wake with my heart in overdrive. I breathe: slowly in, out. The fret of a bad dream lingers. But did I also hear something?

I stretch, turn, senses on high alert. Matt's side of the bed is empty. But where...? My brain catches up and remembers. He's away, sleeping deeply in the wide bed and calm nothing of a business hotel. Germany? Slovakia? It would come back if I focused.

I listen to the usual night noises: distant cars; the mains buzz of the bedside clock; a radiator clunking into life.

Reassurance doesn't settle, so I battle the deadweight of slumber and lurch out of bed and into the frost-bite air. I stop by Ella's room. The bed is a tangle of limbs and mermaid-patterned duvet. A pink foot pokes out. Small fingers clutch a stuffed cat. Her face is smooth with sleep, the bruises long healed. I could bend in, check she's breathing; it would only take a moment.

I fist my hands. *Don't*. Once started, I'll never stop.

Then she shuffles, releasing me.

On the landing, I hear a definite something. The dull beat of wood against wood. Fear glides into annoyance. *Alright, I'm coming*.

On the floor of what used to be our living room, I discover Mum on hands and knees: a heap of bones and sagging flesh and stained nightclothes.

'You mustn't get out of bed alone.' How many million times have I told her?

She has bypassed the rails of her hospital-style bed and occupies the nowhere space beyond which lie our comfy chairs, sofa and TV, all unnaturally pressed together. A mug is on its side beside her, the stain of gone cold tea spreading and sinking into the pale carpet which until recently looked quite new. The contents of the bedside table are scattered. Packets of pills and tubes of various creams. Reading glasses, books and magazines. The buzzer that I bought as a means of gaining attention. Tissues and boiled sweets and the glass containing her false teeth.

Her nightdress and the sheets are soaked yellow.

Me, last night: 'You need to wear incontinence pads in bed.'

Her: 'I'm not wearing those things.'

I gave up, abandoning the argument as unwinnable.

The walking stick thumps against the back of the sofa with surprising vigor.

'What happened? Are you alright?' My voice emerges weary.

'Of course I am. I just need a hand up.'

Problems with my back are accumulating; lifting aggravates things. But my daughter needs to get to school. I have a job to get to. A carer is due, but not yet. I cannot just leave Mum on the floor.

She is bird-thin, but improbably heavy, her body unwieldy, thrashing limbs acting as a hindrance. 'Keep still, Mum. Just relax.'

'I only need... No, not like that... If you could just... A bit of a hand up... You don't need to...'

Fracturing her hip seems to have unsettled her mind as well. Or perhaps her mind was already drifting and the shock hurried things along.

The smell of old-woman pee is pungent. Piss is part of life, not a big deal; since when did that make it easier?

*I can't do this*. *Can't.*

Have to.

'I'm so sorry, but we need the bed.' This from the hospital six months ago.

Me: 'She isn't well enough to go back home.' Certainly not to *her* home.

Them: 'A bed is available at Flintwood care home.'

'But that's miles away.' Fifty rolling miles give or take. I visited with Matt. The rooms were unclean. Residents wandered aimlessly in food-splattered dressing gowns. Staff were rude, or spoke no English.

'We can't leave her here. There must be somewhere better. Nearer,' I said to Matt.

Those places had waiting lists. Waiting for residents to die. In the meantime, the best we can do is care for her at home. *Our* home.

I get Mum upright. Get her out of her unclean nightie and into something fresh along with a perfunctory wash. 'It's OK,' I keep saying, in response to her apologies and explanations. Apparently, I failed to hear the buzzer, which I don't for one second believe she actually used.

'What was I supposed to do? I needed the bathroom.'

So the accident – in both senses – is my fault.

'Yes, yes.' Impatience doesn't help, yet I slip into it so easily.

I call upstairs. 'Ella. Are you up yet?'

I put out juice and cereals. The first batch of toast sets the smoke alarm wailing. I feel like joining in. I make more.

Ella: ‘Don’t we have pop-tarts?’

‘No.’

Mum: ‘Where’s the honey?’

‘You dropped the pot yesterday and it broke.’ A sticky mess all over the floor.

‘No I didn’t.’

I fail to eat myself. I’ll pick up coffee and pastry en-route to work. Expanding my waistline, decreasing the petty cash.

The carer arrives. She looks barely out of school. Her thirty minutes are nowhere near enough, but it allows me to get out of the house. I drop Ella off, only a few minutes after the bell. I’m half an hour late into work, shuffling stealthily into my seat, caffeine life-saver in hand. I’ve reduced my hours, for now, but we cannot afford not to have my wage coming in. My supervisor glares my way. Sympathy doesn’t extend indefinitely and I need to be pulling my part-time weight. Details of insurance claims fill my screen. *Concentrate, Karen.* I seek the mind-flick into efficiency, disciplining my thoughts to line up tasks in a regimented order and work through them.

My mobile rings, setting my heart thudding. What now?

The second carer: ‘I found her sitting on the kitchen floor.’

Mum is supposed to remain in her wheelchair, which means staying in the living room because the hallway in our terraced house is narrow.

‘Can I speak to her?’

‘She isn’t safe to leave on her own.’

‘Can I...’

‘Is that you, Karen?’

‘Are you hurt, Mum?’

‘No of course not. I was just...’ Her tone is indignant.

‘Put the carer back on.’

‘I was only...’

‘Now.’

‘She isn’t safe.’

*Well, she’ll have to be*.

My hand shakes as I return to my attempt to usefully work for my employer.

My phone rings.

‘It’s Mrs. Lewis from Springfields.’ One of the care homes we deemed acceptable; the longer we looked, the wider the definition of *acceptable* became. A resident has been taken into the hospital. A room

might become available. *Please may the woman not recover*. My own hopes will have no effect on the outcome: this is my excuse.

Back to insurance claims. Another phone call. The estate agent: 'We've had an offer on your mother's house.' The sale is needed to cover coming care home costs; I am not convinced my mother has understood and agreed to this. Catch her when her mind is clear and likely she'll refuse to sign anything: 'I'll be fine in my own home.' Catch her when it isn't, and her signature isn't legal, never mind ethical. *Don't go there*. 'We'll get back to you.' I try not to think of the hassle of clearing the overwhelming clutter of the place.

Emails are stacking up in my inbox querying things that should have been dealt with days ago and which are not yet on my horizon. My back aches.

I am sinking under the layer by layer silt-up of demands.

This is my life and this is how my days are spent and it takes a conscious effort to pause and remind myself of what I have learned: *this is happiness*.

I muddle through. I'm late picking up Ella. The last in the classroom, she looks forlorn. Her teacher opens her mouth, but then relents. She knows the circumstances; doesn't mean she'll remain tolerant forever. In the car, Ella is in misery mood, 'you didn't come. I was the only one there.' I lack the patience to properly listen and provide understanding.

Back home, my mother is in a state, unable to get up from the sofa. 'It's too low for you.' How many million times have I told her?

'The wheelchair isn't comfortable.'

*Tough.*

Unidentifiable food stuffs spill down her front. The TV blares with some cartoon and the zapper has disappeared. 'It was here a moment ago.' Crumbs litter the sofa and floor, enough to feed a flock of sparrows. Part drunk cups of tea sit alongside a mound of books and magazines. The room, the sofa, her: they all need a clean and tidy. She needs engaging with, listening to, but I have things to do.

Washing machine on. Cooking. Washing up from breakfast. Ensuring everybody eats. Hanging wet washing up. Remaking Mum's bed. Supervising homework and TV and baths. Preventing my simmer from boiling over.

Ella: 'I don't want to go to bed.'

Mum: 'It's too early for bed.'

Me: *I long to go to bed*. But too much needs doing.

I reach for the eternally-replicating pile of ironing. The phone rings. Matt. His voice is warm and close as he chats through the orderly events of his day. 'What about yours?'

'You don't want to know.' But I tell him anyway. 'Sorry. I'm going on and on.' I rest one palm on my lower back and slowly arch backwards into the pain.

'It won't be forever.'

'I know.' All we both know hangs unspoken between us. I listen to the silence and close my eyes. *This* is what I crave: not having to talk, or do, or provide care. But phone silence has limited shelf life.

'Goodnight then,' Matt says.

The house is quiet. Child and mother are tucked away. So much remains undone, but I'm heading for bed too.

I check in on Mum. She is sleeping the unsettled sleep of the aged. Her mouth is a gummy hole. She snores, a harsh rattling at the back of her nose. She looks desperately fragile and old.

I check in on Ella. She is sleeping the black-out sleep of the young. Everything – her skin, her hair, her flop of limbs – looking so very fresh and new.

*This is happiness*.

My story has many places it could begin.

Six months ago...

Mum had picked Ella up from school, and yes she was getting older and a bit forgetful, but the arrangement had always worked just fine.

They took the route along Roman Road, Ella skipping alongside the mobility scooter – *Grandma's chariot*, we called it – babbling away, the urgent retelling of playground intrigues.

Reaching Globe Street, they turned sharp left, following the curve to where the kerb dipped sufficiently to allow the scooter to cross.

And a car pulled out left from the wide slipstream. Forgetting to slow. Expecting the scooter to stay put. Failing to see the child who was too absorbed chattering to look.

Ella stepped off the pavement. The driver was going too fast. The scooter shot forward. Mum has no recollection of events, whether she acted on instinct, reason or by chance.

Metal collided with metal. Mum went flying. Ella was knocked sideways and both of them hit the tarmac.

Time is not linear; it loops back on itself. Constantly, I relive the heart-stop terror of the phone call. 'Is that Ms. Scott? Your daughter and mother are here at the hospital. They've been in a car accident.'

My hand shakes, my spine jellifies; I taste the burn of vomit in my throat. I replay the nurse's reassurances, but the words feel unreal. Not until I hold Ella's squirming weight in my arms – *Mum, you're hurting* – do I accept, she escaped with no more than bruising.

Mum's hip was fractured, but it would heal.

This story starts in many places. A reeling, rambling route separates then from now. I am curling up into the end of this particular day. Exhausted. Anxious.

*Happy*.

*Anita Feng*

# What to Do With a Rongo Jar

Once upon a time, back when the earth was still soft and aching, a potter was born onto a ratty shawl in the rainy season. Her mother named the infant Ajide, which means "born during a rainstorm,"and then went about her business.

Ajide was no one special. She was born into poverty and later married into the lowest class, a family of potters and tinsmiths, on her eleventh birthday. No one envied her husband-to-be, apprentice to the worst tinsmith of the village. In all of the great wide lands of Ekiti, his choices for a wife would have been few, even if he was good-looking. No young woman would be crazy enough to want to be a potter. But that was the established rule. Men worked with hard materials like tin; women worked with clay.

Ajide was the only daughter of an unhappy mother who kept an untidy house, so she was the likeliest bride. Also, her hands were big, which boded well for someone who would work coils of clay for the rest of her life. It was settled quickly. Even if the child's mouth was too big, they figured she would shut up once she had children of her own.

Soon enough, she learned the ways of the potter's life. The rongo jars the women made punctuated the rhythms of their life on earth.

This is what Ajide learned about her trade:

The God Amma created humans directly from clay.

New pots are made for a marriage.

A husband can insult his wife by roughly handling her pots. He can let her know that he doesn't want any more sex with her by breaking one of her pots deliberately. She, on the other hand, could cut off his rights of sexual access by turning the rongo jar upside down.

Time passed. Troubles, children and pottery came and went. It had been a long time since Ajide was a child and it had been a long time since she'd been bitter or afraid.

Finally, when Ajide was fifty years old, the oldest living person in her village, maybe even the whole of Africa, how would she know, she set out for the forest of the dead. Maybe that day she was happy. But it was a quiet, not-good-not-bad feeling, and she took notice of it.

Night and morning had only just begun trading places, and the

creatures of the forest were still asleep. She sat beside a quiet pool to rest -- its placid surface, a mirror. Ajide, being old, was not much to look at. She laughed out loud. Who cares now?

She remembered. For the first couple of years of their marriage her husband paid no attention to her. He would go hunting with the men, or work at tin. Ajide stayed behind with the other girls and played with them. She cooked yams in the rongo jar when he returned, and he would eat, making such annoying noises with his lips, that she hated to look at him, why couldn't he close his mouth and chew like everyone else. But over time, they got used to each other.

One day Ajide was kneading a fresh batch of clay, a huge pile, her feet stamping and wedging the huge pile of clay in the courtyard. Together with the other potter girls, they worked their feet in unison and sang. To keep their balance, the girls held onto a bar that had been hung just above their heads, tied from one hut to another. Ajide's husband, passing by, stopped and came close to her and took hold of her breast between his thumb and fingers with a farmer's squeeze. He said, "Oh, these are getting to be good and ripe!" She was confused. Her feet kept on doing their feet's work. Her arms hung from the bar, but her face burned.

She felt a hurt in the place that his hand had just left, and soon after, an ache in her lower parts.

The old Ajide looked up at the sky to see what kind of day it was because it was generally a good idea to match your mood to the day. This morning had a brooding sort of look to it. The sky was a thick color the shade of yams that were past ripeness. No clouds, but the sun wasn't shining clearly either. She placed the rongo jar carried from the village on the ground beside her. It was the day after her husband's funeral. She was delivering his pot to the place in the forest where his spirit waited, she reminded herself. Well, his spirit can wait a little more, she reasoned. She dipped her hands into the pool and took a good drink.

She remembered when she was soft and her skin was smooth. They had grown fond of each other. Their appetites keen. Her work at that time, as a beginner potter, was to roll out the coils of clay. It was an easy, but heavy task. She would take a ball of clay that she could barely carry and then roll the clay from the center, moving her hands outward as the thick mass unwound into a coil. When she squatted in the courtyard rolling out these great heavy balls of clay into perfectly shaped coils between her thighs, desire for her husband dripped down her legs. Their longing for each other only intensified on the days when Ajide was making rongo jars, when intercourse was not permitted. That was why

no young woman in her right mind wanted to be a potter, not with her eye on a man. Sex was not permitted during the making of pots, during menstruation, during pregnancy. And how much time was left after that?

Yes, she thought, it was much easier to be an old potter than to be a young one, even if your hands were ugly with painful joints, but there was no other way around it. You had to start somewhere, get thrown into a certain kind of life, and end up in a pocket of mud.

Ajide yawned, and thought, if she didn't have to go to the forest to deliver the leftover pots of life to death, she would have stayed in her daughter's house and slept. Her grandchildren would have peppered her daydreams with agreeable nonsense.

Her husband had been a good tin worker. After they had been married for several years, he started to apply thin strips of stamped metal to the rims of her rongo jars. His designs matched to the patterns that she etched into the surface of the jars. They sold well, and for a good price.

But like all things, there was a rise and fall to every condition. One evening when she was twenty-six, Ajide had just brushed clean the inside of the bottom of a broken rongo jar, the surface that she would use to begin a new pot. She sprinkled clay dust all over it and thought, I'll make this rongo jar really wonderful, something really different from before. It was for a Big Man, being groomed as the next chief. If the rongo jar came out well, her standing would be enhanced, and her children would be in good favor someday.

She took the long thick rolls of clay which her daughters had rolled out earlier, and coiled it about a couple of times inside the base of another broken rongo jar. Pounding it thinner and thinner with a stone, she smoothed the sides with the palm of her hand. To make the walls smooth and even, she had to bend her back, walking backwards around and around the pot, paddling and smoothing as she went.

By then, she had two children living, three dead. At fourteen, she had born the first of her dead children. Only the last two survived. Ajide and her living daughters sang together as they worked.

At evening time, Ajide paused to straighten her back. Facing the woods, she saw some movement in the bushes and there it was, her husband with a young girl, whose back arched up to him, and he was working her like a hammer beating into pliant, cheap tin.

Okay, she thought to herself, for every rule there are at least two who can break it.

Later, in the middle of the night, Ajide gathered up all her unfired pots in the courtyard. She set out a layer of sticks on the ground and placed the pots on top. Even though she was tired, she worked up a

sweat, a hot and heavy sweat. She laid out the rest of the sticks around the outside of the heaped up pots, and over that she placed dry palm leaves. She worked all night, alone, and by dawn it was done.

As soon as her husband stirred inside the hut, Ajide got her starter flame ready. As soon as she saw him stick his head outside, she set fire to the load of pots, which instantly burst into hot flame.

This was her revenge. Not only were men forbidden to make pots or to see the making of pots, but firing in the presence of a man would render him sterile. Which was what Ajide had in mind.

It did what it was supposed to do. Sure, he became sterile, but then, he was relieved of the responsibility of caring for other women's' children. She had just made things easier for him, hadn't she?

The place where dead people's pots were abandoned was two miles to the south and a woman could not go there until she was old and no longer able to bear children. Ajide was plenty old enough now. She could see in the distance where the dead pots were piled high between the trunks of trees, or scattered in the clearing. It didn't matter how they were arranged, so long as they were there.

The pond where Ajide rested was rimmed with a yellow clay. Her hands started to poke around of their own accord, looking for a good vein of clay.

She scratched out a handful, moistened the center of it with a little spit and worked the wad into a figure of a man and set it down in front of her. She made several more, some women and children too. Then she said to them,

"Though we potters are the despised class, I don't care anymore. When I was young I wished I had been born to another family. But now I am satisfied. Why?

"Because I have my own story. There are a thousand shapes to it. And it is a story like a jar rubbed smooth with use."

Ajide smelled the yams roasting in the coals of her village and she reminded herself that she should be moving on to deliver her husband's pot to the forest of the dead. But instead, she spoke again to her little clay people, "But never mind about that. I haven't even started to tell the whole story from the inside out."

She squeezed the neck of a little clay man to make him look straight at her. Ajide had always known that things tend to take care of themselves, stories too. Now, even though she was covering the path with too many words and playing with clay like a child, she was enjoying herself.

"The important thing," she continued, "is that whenever a

character in my story speaks out, you must put yourself in their shoes. And another thing:  whenever a character in my story makes something, find out what you are doing there. Okay? Okay."

*Robin Littell*

# Woman to Woman

I was twenty-four when I robbed my first bank. The teller started crying as soon I pointed the gun at her. I told her I just wanted the money, that I didn't want to hurt her. I told her the money was gonna help me start a new life. I could finally move to a farm and wake up every morning to the sound of my chickens pecking around the yard and birds chirping in the trees. I wasn't gonna have to take care of anyone but myself and my animals. "Doesn't that sound nice?" I asked her. Tears ran down her face and saturated the tiny pink flowers on her polyester dress. The pattern reminded me of my mom.

My mom worked too hard her whole life. It showed in the dark circles around her sunken-in eyes, the crooked yellow teeth she never had the time or money to have fixed, her wrinkled hands — the way her knuckles were enlarged from years of work, making her fingers look swollen and gnarled. She would come home after cleaning hospital rooms all day, fill up the tub with hot water, and try to soak the aches away. Then she would emerge from the steamy cave in her robe and cook dinner for whichever man happened to be hanging around the house at the time. For certain, he was either a drunk, a gambler, or a liar just down on his luck. Sometimes all three. She wore the dress with the little pink flowers twice: once when her dad died and again when I graduated from high school.

The teller couldn't hear me over her own wails. I had a gun, and I kept swinging it around when I talked. "Don't worry," I told her as her eyes followed my hand. "My grandpa used to talk with his hands too. I picked it up from him."

She didn't care and wailed some more. Good thing the bank was empty except for the two of us. Her boss, who was probably having an affair with one or more of his tellers by my assumption, was across the street picking up lunch when I rolled in. I had planned it that way. I had done a little recon.

"Please don't hurt me," she kept saying, even though I was trying to talk to her woman to woman. Women should understand each other. Finally, I'd had enough of her crying and told her just to give me the fucking money. She said her boss would be back any minute. I said she better hurry up then or she'd have a dead boss. This made her cry more, so I knew she was the one he was bending over his desk every night after closing time.

"He really isn't worth it," I said on a hunch. "You aren't special." Then I really knew I was right about her and the boss. I could tell by the way her brow furrowed and her eyes focused in on mine for a few seconds.

She was a mess by this point. Her eyes were red, and snot and tears were running down her chin. Her thick layers of mascara were melting away, darkening the skin around her eyes every time she wiped at the tears. Her red lipstick had smudged, making her lips look big and distorted. It was sad really because I could tell she was a natural beauty underneath all that paint.

She handed me the money.

"That's all I've got in the drawer," she said. "And I don't have access to the safe. You'll have to wait for my boss if you want that."

"Tempting," I replied and unlatched the safety on the gun. She stopped crying and took a deep breath, followed by what my mom would have called "gettin' all up in arms."

She smoothed out the non-existent wrinkles in her dress and crossed her arms over her body. "Why don't you just go? she said. "Take the money. Go buy your farm."

Her voice was surprisingly strong. It didn't crack at all. Finally, I thought. Some spunk. Some gusto. I smiled at her. She smiled back, or at least I thought it was a smile. It might have been a frown. It was hard to tell with all the makeup oozing everywhere.

Our connection was broken by the wail of sirens punctuating the stillness of the hot afternoon. I looked out the front doors and back at her, then lifted the gun so it was pointing at her face. She had triggered the alarm anyway. Even though I thought I'd gotten through to her.

I ran to the car and prayed it would start. I'd seen enough movies to know the game. That karma has its way of making an appearance when you least expect it. It did though, and I took off out of there, running every stop sign in that dusty old town, heading out into the open plains. I finished off the beer I had started on the way to the bank to calm my nerves and threw the can out the window, watching it in the rearview mirror bounce against the hot pavement and down into the ditch.

I couldn't get that teller out of my head though. By the time I reached the highway headed toward Indiana, I was sure that she had reapplied her makeup and was brewing coffee for her boss and a room full of policemen while she tried to hide her trembling hands, watching her boss from a distance, his hands planted on the hips of his cheap suit in outrage over the money I'd taken, running his hands through the remains of his thinning hair, as if he had been the one with the gun in his

face. I imagined that later that night when the teller approached him and asked if they could get a drink, he would say he couldn't meet her tonight or any other night because he needed to get the insurance papers in order and, besides that, his wife was upset because it could have been him in the bank during the robbery. He could have been shot.

I pushed the pedal to the floor, and the old Chevy lurched forward in response. Soon cars full of men in blue uniforms would be hot on my heels.

*Sue Powers*

# Last Call

After Katie gave last call, a customer - a regular of Katie's - bought her a beer. Katie set the bottle down next to herself and counted out what she owed the house, aware that this woman was asking her a question.

She was one of the solitary ones that all the wait staff liked. Came into the bar alone, sat alone, drank her dark beer alone, or when she had the money, Jack Daniels rocks with a twist of lemon. When she had too much to drink of either, a surprising measure of subliminal sadness rose to the surface along with a set of deeply recessed lines around her startling sea-green eyes. Now it was evident that JD-rocks, as Katie and the wait staff called her, had had less than usual tonight and was in a playful, flirtatious mood.

"How come I never saw you here before?" JD-rocks asked her, her voice softly teasing and resonant, a stark contrast to her sharply chiseled features. She wore ironed blue jeans, and her silver grey and dark blonde hair in an oddly misshapen buzz cut that left a tiny, vulnerable bald spot on one side of her head. Katie recounted her tips and drank the drink, thinking about this odd woman who ironed her jeans and was coming on to her.

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Outside, JD dug her hands into her neatly pressed pockets and walked a step behind Katie. "I could use a place to crash," she said.

In Katie's mind, nothing much had happened that night. The usual drunks, the usual tips, a low energy, half moon hanging in a cloudless sky. She was twenty-three with thick, auburn hair she wore long and loose, and a curious, restless nature that so far had not given her much trouble. Well, why not? she thought. She often took in all kinds of strays. Sometimes a cat, a bird with a broken wing, and once during a thunderstorm, a drenched hitchhiker who looked like a twelve-year-old girl, but turned out to be twenty.

"You homeless?" she asked curiously.

"On occasion," JD smiled, her teeth white and nearly perfectly aligned.

Katie took in the pearly teeth, the ironed jeans, the sad bald spot on the side of JD's head. Forty-something? And where did she iron her jeans? Still, no alarm bells rang in her gut.

"One night, but that's it. I've got a couch you can crash on. I don't swing that way. It's just not my thing. Got it?"

"Crystal," JD said, bowing deeply before her.

When a cab pulled up, JD opened the door for Katie and slid in beside her. After a few moments of silence between them, she quietly began a series of stories about herself in her supple, factual voice, relating the various tragedies in her life. At one time, she'd had a hard, unhappy life with a woman of questionable sanity who'd once shaved her head while she slept, and once when she was really drunk, the other place. From the rearview mirror, the dark-eyed cabby chewed tobacco and silently watched them.

The proverbial train wreck, thought Katie, yet her heart went out to her. "You left then, right?"

JD shrugged. Although she had an uncanny sense about how people operated, if they were one of the Givers or one of the Takers, she'd allowed herself to be needed by this woman.

"My problem is being one of the Givers," she said.

JD had other categories. There were the Users and the Abusers, the Deep and the Serious, the Hip and the Happening, though these sometimes crossed over into the category of the Fakes and the Frauds.

The woman of questionable sanity was obviously an Abuser, but also one of the Hip and Happening who also happened to be a Fake and a Fraud. JD could tell a lot about a person from the first moment of meeting. She knew for instance that Katie was a Listener, a person to whom people told their darkest stories. If she were a betting woman, she'd say Katie was also one of the Deep and Serious.

Katie laughed, for the sum of her seriousness was a paperback mystery or the occasional Enquirer left at the bar. "I bet you see the future," she said.

JD spoke rapidly, asking questions to which she did not seem to need Katie's reply. What was Katie's threshold for pain? Did she know? Could she say who she was? How far would she go for approval? For love? Living with this woman, JD said, nearly made her crazy. Did Katie know what she meant, crazy?

How odd, thought Katie. It felt like a game that she had no idea how to play. Still, she could sense JD's gentleness, her need.

On the sidewalk in front of Katie's apartment, JD touched the small opal ring on Katie's left hand and asked if she was engaged.

Katie laughed. “It’s just an opal.”

JD shrugged. “What do I know?”

“Don’t you people buy rings for each other?” Katie asked.

JD studied her for a moment. “Got keys for this place or what? My people don’t like the cold,” she deadpanned.

A small “Oh” slipped out; then Katie recovered. “Whatever.”

JD laughed. “Just giving you shit.”

Inside the apartment, JD took in the sparsely furnished living room: Katie's one armless chair, a nubby brown couch partially covered by an earthy Navajo throw, a gun-metal-green table apparently used as a filing cabinet, bills and papers carelessly strewn over it, and next to it, on the floor, an antique manual typewriter and a laptop.

“I’m into the old stuff too,” JD said nodding at the typewriter.

“It was here when I moved in.”

“But you didn’t throw it out,” JD said and sat down on the couch.

From the living room, she got a glimpse of Katie’s bedroom, the single futon, small dresser, no side table, lamp or TV she could make out. “You don't own much,” she said. “Good for packing up fast.”

Katie leaned against the table and shrugged. “I'm not wealthy, if that's what you mean.”

“Just an observation on your readiness for flight. I'm the same, you know? There isn't a place I go that I don't check the exit.”

JD was between jobs, she said. She brought the jobs listing she printed out on the library’s computer to one of the local bars each day where she read the ads, circling prospective jobs with a yellow highlighter. Sometimes, she'd call one of the circled ads, then order another beer and circle another ad. She'd worked as a print press operator, done some technical editing, general warehouse and office work, but none of these jobs lasted more than a few years, a few months. She required very little: her own responsibilities, some respect, a decent buck. Her employers were autocratic, childish, miserly, abusive. Much like the woman she'd once lived with. "So unlike you," she told Katie.

What a line, Katie thought, then let it go. She looked at JD, at the soft lines around her bloodshot eyes, and thought about the tough life she’d led. It was hard not to feel for her.

JD started in on other ideas. “You could use a roommate,” JD said, envisioning herself reading the want ads with Katie between rushes. In the evenings, after work, they'd go home and JD would cook for her. “You wouldn’t have to worry about money. My specialty is the Meal

Made From Nothing. I improvise side dishes, a bouillabaisse from mere vegetables or my famous mock meatloaf."

"No meat," Katie smiled. This game felt more familiar.

"And no animal products. I've seen you eat your pickle sandwiches at the bar."

"You see a lot."

"I'll make you the best vegetarian sandwiches you ever ate," said JD, whose vision was growing. She imagined organizing Katie's papers, dividing her tips and putting them into envelopes for food, the gas bill, the rent. If something was left over, they could go to the movies or over to Katie's bar for a drink. Or on the nights JD was short of cash, she imagined taking Katie to Pauly's where she had credit, although a lot of the regulars there were construction workers or just old sots whose manner would strike Katie as bolder than what she was probably used to.

Scratch Pauly's, JD thought, reconsidering. Katie would be completely unnerved. The customers leaning into the bar with one knee, the bawdy conversation and unveiled looks at her small hips and breasts, her gorgeous hair and full lips with the hint of lipstick.

Katie yawned, made a motion for JD to stay put. She went into the bedroom and grabbed a pillow off the futon for her and thought about changing the pillowcase. She thought about how she was twenty-three and single, no career, no boyfriend, and in a surprising moment of clarity, she saw her life moving forward on its own momentum. She thought about JD-rocks then, how she'd suddenly come into her focus, then she went into the kitchen and brought out some beers.

JD wanted to know: had Katie had her share of unhappy affairs, dead end jobs, boring lovers, selfish friends?

"I've had my share," said Katie.

"Screw the Users and the Abusers, all the Fakes and the Frauds. It's the end of the road, Jack. Last call, you know? "

Katie nodded. She could tend bar anywhere. Buy a car, take a train, a bus, but go. Maybe it was time for a change, she thought.

JD watched her move through the three rooms of the apartment, watching Katie's form move inside the fabric of her jeans. Finally, Katie stopped moving and joined JD on the couch.

"Charged up tonight," JD said.

Katie felt JD's sudden intensity, the heat behind her gaze, and rumblings of disquiet rioting in her stomach. "Maybe."

"See, I know more about you than you know about you," JD said, and without warning, leaned in and kissed her.

Katie pulled back and stared at her for a moment. She'd half expected this. Still.

She rose, gazed down at JD as if expecting her to be gone.

"What's your name anyway? We call you JD-rocks at the bar," she said without waiting for an answer.

"They call me Anna. Hey, it's Anna Marie," JD called after her, a vision of Katie's small hips behind her eyelids as she watched Katie stride away from her and lock the bedroom door. Of course, she'd gone too far. Her other specialty.

She found Katie's headset and pulled it over her ears, wrapped herself inside the Navajo blanket and let Adele lull her into a light, restless sleep.

Sometimes she dreamed in color, vivid and often disturbing dreams of being lost, being chased or of chasing some elusive someone or something. This night she dreamt she was in a kitchen cooking her famous mock meatloaf when suddenly the kitchen turned into a deserted road, not a single person, broken down house, or Joshua tree in sight, only rocks and brown scrub as far as she could see. She could feel the desert empty into her, and she began running, lungs aching, running and running until she awoke with a start in the middle of the night, her neck and chest soaked in sweat, her heart racing.

At the threshold of Katie's bedroom, Anna Marie leaned her forehead against the closed door and held her breath, a vision of their life in the tiny three rooms closeted in her breast.

Katie heard Anna move towards the door and got up. "I don't use and I don't abuse," Katie heard her say.

# E

# ESSAY

*Carol Fixman*

# Finding My Mother

Rocking gently on the front porch in St. Louis, gazing at the trees, she seemed lost in thought, with the slightest hint of a smile forming on her face. Visitors to her assisted living facility nodded when she absently looked their way. Perhaps my mother was withdrawing from her surroundings as she prepared for the quick decline that her doctors had predicted.

But my mother was a fighter who did not give up easily and usually got her way, even when her three daughters regularly tested her strength. Secretly my sisters and I wished that she would stop resisting and admit defeat. But none of us dared say this aloud. To wish the end of our mother's life seemed callous, even though her illness and the effects of her treatment were painful to watch. Perhaps as she rocked on the porch, she was already leaving us on her terms. And that would have been in character for her. In the end she died at 93, with my sister, a nurse, quietly urging her not to fight it.

My mother was a strong woman. But sometimes her insecurities peeked out from deep within her. When people she met in her adopted city of St. Louis didn't recognize a native accent and inquired about her hometown, there was a hardly noticeable pause in my mother's voice, before she offered *from the East* softly, but in a tone that did not invite further query. Well, Virginia was east of Missouri. Only when I was an adult did it occur to me that she might not have wanted to be seen as a small-town southern girl. But that did not come to me until much later, because for us children, Leesburg, Virginia was a small-town paradise, where our grandparents spoiled us during our summer visits. And my mother's accent—*turrible* instead of *terrible*—was more Mid-Atlantic than Southern.

My mother's passion was writing. She wrote poetry and stories, but in the 1950's she discovered jingle contests that food companies sponsored. Because she needed box tops and labels from cans and jars to enter these contests, we often ate cereal from topless boxes, and an entire shelf in our pantry was devoted to mystery cans and jars with no labels. My mother won more than a dozen transistor radios, a trip to Ireland, an electric stove, and countless other prizes that piled up in our basement and attic. Occasionally the prizes came in my name, my sisters' or my father's, since entries were usually limited to one per person. I took all of this in my stride, as jingle contests and collections of transistor radios

were as much a part of our lives as green stamps and white bread.

Today, eight years after my mother died, she still enters my thoughts sporadically, as if she thought I was looking for her. Sometimes when I climb the stairs to my attic desk in the sunny morning light, she surprises me. For my mother avoided bright light. She wrote her contest entries, her poetry, and prose in a half-darkened bedroom, while dressed in a bathrobe and propped up against pillows on her bed. She would just be getting up when my sisters and I left for school, my father having made sure we ate something, *c'mon just something*, for breakfast. And by the time we returned late in the afternoon, my mother would be cooking dinner with a slightly preoccupied glint in her eye, humming quietly to herself with the same rich tone that she and her brother—our beloved uncle—shared.

Late at night after we had all gone to bed, she stayed up reading novels and biographies of writers, movie stars, and other celebrities. Then she watched late movies on TV. She was a night owl, her thoughts shimmering through stories, as she imagined the lives of others from her easy chair in our den. She loved conjuring up what they might have felt in places and times she did not know. And not surprisingly, the stories she told us about her own family sometimes seemed to mix fact and fantasy, as we gradually learned that she wasn't the most reliable source for family history.

She had an image of our family that she wanted to project, in her case an image vaguely reminiscent of Normal Rockwell's pictures. But in reality, she juggled so much that Rockwell would have been challenged to capture her life graphically.

When I was six, I was ready to leave for school one day, when I reminded my mother that I was supposed to go dressed in a Halloween costume. Rummaging quickly through her closet, she pulled out a Chinese style jacket and put it on me. *But what am I* ? I cried, horrified and unhappy. *A Chinese cowgirl*, she shot back hastily and without another word urged me out the door to school.

Where were her thoughts that morning? With my two little sisters screaming for attention? With my father, for whom she took business calls at his home office? Or perhaps with the poem that she was composing in her head? Poetry was fast becoming her lifeblood. What was she writing about—Chinese cowgirls? The pristine families in Norman Rockwell's pictures would have dressed their children in store-bought Halloween costumes.

My mother had grown up as the only Jewish girl in her small town. And when she attended Goucher college, she was made painfully

aware that she was one of a small minority that was not always welcomed. Appearances were important, if you were different from everyone else. And despite the squabbling and the strong emotions that rocked our family house, my mother wanted to project a conventional American family happily seated around the dinner table carrying on civil conversations.

My teenaged rebellion cast shadows on my mother's family image. And the sparks that flew made it difficult for me to know her. Sometimes I've thought the process of writing might help me better understand her, for she kept to herself and rarely let us into her world. When my sisters and I were grown, she attended writers' conferences, but never showed us her work, unless it was published. Whatever did she do at these conferences? And how did my introverted mother muster the courage to expose her poetry and prose to criticism from others? After she died, I found magazine rejections of her poetry recorded on index cards. And I found letters from established writers. *You have talent, or I would not bother to write,* they offered, before launching into their critiques. Why did she not share these moments with us? My down-to-earth father offset her almost religious fervor for poetry. He told a cousin my mother was writing poems, just *ask her for one, she'll whip one up for you*.

Even late in life, she wrote in pencil on a yellow pad of paper, then painstakingly typed her manuscripts on a manual typewriter. Once I offered to type a collection of her poetry on my computer for her. But she was reluctant to share her poems with me, and only after several months did she finally agree to accept my offer. Her poems were vignettes. I imagined them as songs that she might sing in her resonant voice. They were straightforward, and yet almost shy at the same time. There was no hint of the imaginary voyages she took at night while watching movies on TV or reading novels and biographies.

Whenever my mother came to visit my husband and me in Philadelphia, she was fascinated by thoughts of who might have lived in our 200-year-old house. She slept on the bottom bunk in my stepdaughter's bedroom and imagined seeing ghosts of past dwellers slipping in and out of our closets and rooms. As she described this, her eyes took on the somewhat absent gaze that I remembered from my childhood. I had no response and could only offer a faint smile. There were no ghosts in the 1920's duplex where we lived in St. Louis, or in the 1930's house where we later moved a couple of miles up the road. Or perhaps the ghosts were there, and only my mother saw them.

Our colonial spirits in Philadelphia enchanted my mother. And

spirits or not, I too loved our house, as I constantly looked out the window and waved to passers-by, while I cooked. *Why don't you hang curtains for privacy,* my mother would insist. But I treasured the nearness to our neighbors. *You could put a powder room in your first-floor closet.* But we coveted every inch of space in our tiny house, I tried to explain, while controlling my impulse to object automatically to anything she proposed. Perhaps she was intentionally provoking me, but I reacted right on cue according to script, while she returned to her preoccupation with our house's resident ghosts.

Could someone this self-aware really believe in spirits? She would often claim she had premonitions that something was amiss before family members called her with bad news. And she was not at all surprised when a stiff wind blew across the cemetery when we buried my father. *It's your dad*, his cousin announced to us. And my mother nodded knowingly, as I blanched.

Many years later, at my cousin's beachside wedding, on a calm day, a strong gust of wind suddenly blew across the wedding party during the ceremony. Shuddering, I remembered my deceased uncle's promise to his daughter that he would be at her wedding. But surely my imagination was playing games with me.

My mother was at home in the twilight of the day when outlines blur and dreams take hold. She wore sunglasses even when there was no sun, while I relish the bright light and embrace every moment of it.

I especially love my sunny attic hideout. Here in the treetops, I am temporarily removed from the gossip and activities of daily life below. Is this the quiet my mother found in her dimly lit bedroom and darkened den?

Encouraged by the serenity of Virginia Wolf's portrait on my desk, I take a deep breath and start writing. My keystrokes on the computer come quickly, almost lending a rhythm to the trees and rooftops, to our attic's slanted walls and worn floors. While I was growing up, my mother wrote on notepads with a pencil, the light in her bedroom dim, with the curtains drawn, so that she could see nothing but her writing. Friends I brought home from school in the afternoon found it strange that my mother was sometimes still in her bathrobe. *Was she sick?* They would ask. I would simply shrug my shoulders. *No, that's just the way she is.*

What would she think of my attempts to play with words? Would she think me glib for the occasional limerick, for the frivolous stories I write for friends and for my grandchildren on their birthdays? Anything to make people smile and sometimes cry. And what would she

think of my writing about her, a very private person?

After my father died, she never shared her personal life with us. Not even my uncle knew who her friends were. Perhaps she had a boyfriend or led another life under a pseudonym. Maybe my otherworldly mother had discovered computer games and had an avatar. Why did she keep her life so private?

My mother is no longer rocking on a porch in St. Louis, gazing at trees and offering passers-by a faraway smile. But she is somehow present within me.

My mother would nod knowingly if she heard this, and I would probably object to losing yet another battle with her. But maybe this would not matter, as I playfully jumble and re-assign words on my computer screen. And perhaps, just perhaps, my mother would be pleased.

*Two Poems by Adeline Fixman*

## When You See Violet

"When you see Violet, cross the street, y'hear"
Mothers in the small town warned young daughters
That name they called her,
At five I didn't know exactly what it meant,
Something bad, the way they said it.
Do I have to cross the street when I see Violet,
I asked my mom, relieved when she said "NO"

One day when Violet walked past our house,
Her spike heels clacking on the sidewalk,
I ran out and walked with her,
Holding her hand, admiring her curled hair,
Her red lips, her low-cut blouse, her long earrings
Her lovely lily-of-the-valley smell,
And most of all the many jingly bracelets
On her arm.

When we stopped at the corner
She took off one of her bracelets
And slipped it on my arm.
It was the jingliest one of all
And it was mine for keeps, she said so.

I ran home, jingling all the way,
Glad I didn't have to cross the street
When I saw Violet.

## The Wrinkled Nest

Some think the old must sit
Huddled like winter birds
With folded wings
Forgetting how to fly.

In our ageless eagerness
To learn and give
We glide like the eaglet
Rising high and higher still
Above his wrinkled nest.

Like the rose that blooms
In late November
We shiver in the snow, but grow.

*Nancy Gerber*

# Searching for the Golden Land

My mother's parents arrived on America's shores battered, frightened, and alone, wearing coats tattered and torn, with hopes for a better future their only companion. My mother's mother, Bessie, came from somewhere in the Ukraine, my mother's father Philip from Lodz, which was part of the Russian empire. Both left their homelands to escape anti-Semitism – rampaging pogroms led by Cossack soldiers where Jews were shot and killed. I know tatters of my grandparents' stories from what I heard from my mother and learned from Bessie. There was so much to their lives, but I was too young to know the right questions to ask.

Bessie came to Philadelphia around 1910 to live with her older sister, Ensa, for whom I am named. The story I was told was that Philip had been courting Ensa, but when Bessie opened the door, he was smitten with the younger, prettier sister and ended up marrying her. I can't imagine Ensa was any too pleased that her sister had stolen her beau; perhaps I am named for my great aunt because of my grandmother's guilt.

My grandfather Philip, who arrived in 1909 on a ship that sailed from Liverpool, worked as a tailor, aided by his older brother Max. I'd never known that Max, the eldest sibling and family patriarch, had given Philip money to start a business. I learned this a few years ago when I met Max's grandson, my cousin, for the first time at a funeral. By this point, I had little contact with my mother's side of the family. Both Bessie and Philip had each had four siblings. How had such a large family completely fallen apart?

When I was a young girl I used to sit on the front porch of Bessie's semi-detached house in Ardmore, a suburb of Philadelphia, and ask her to tell me about my great-aunts and uncles. Bessie's siblings were Ida, Ensa, Joseph, and Elick; Philip's were Rose, Max, Joseph, and Israel. What had become of these great aunts and great uncles, their children, and their grandchildren, my cousins? Why didn't we know them, visit them, embrace them?

Bessie would not answer the question of why no one spoke to anyone anymore. Either there were no clears answers, or she didn't want to speak of what had happened. I imagine her reticence hid the same kind of ugliness that tears any family apart: jealousies and resentment, grudges real and imagined but never forgiven.

I was fascinated by Bessie's story, a real-life adventure starring my grandmother as a fourteen-year-old girl who left home for a better life in America. America, she'd heard, was the *goldeneh medina*, a golden land whose streets were paved with gold and opportunity. On board a passenger ship in the tightly-packed steerage below deck, she had her period for the first time. She did not know what was happening to her; no one had ever told her about menstruation. Thinking she was dying, she silently wept into her pillow.

I never thought to ask Bessie what it was like to say goodbye to her mother, knowing she would never see her again. I was a young girl; the last thing I wanted to imagine was a separation from one's mother as eternal as death. I did not completely understand I was related to Bessie's mother, my great grandmother, because Bessie did not include her in the story. She did not describe her mother's terror and sorrow at Bessie's departure. Bessie talked as though she gave birth to herself aboard that steamer bound for America. No one ever mentioned my great grandmother; it was as though she'd never existed, a poor, unlettered woman left behind in a blighted land, obliterated from history.

I do not know my own great-grandmother's name.

Genealogical records for Bessie have been difficult to find. My son, an amateur genealogist, has persistently tried to reconstruct the details of Bessie's emigration and her early life in the United States. Any record of Bessie's existence emerges only in her relationship to her husband Philip, with their marriage certificate. Early 20th century census records do not name Bessie. Only registered voters were named, and women were not allowed to vote until 1920, by which time Bessie and Philip were married.

My grandparents' lives were difficult. Like so many others during the Great Depression, they barely scraped out a living. My grandmother worked alongside my grandfather in his shop: he made fur coats by hand; my grandmother made dresses and did alterations. She also kept house, cooked, and raised three children. Bessie and Philip spoke English with thick Yiddish accents in a community where they were seen as outsiders, not only because they were poor foreigners but also because they were Jews living among people who despised them as descendants of those responsible for the death of Jesus.

My mother used to accompany her father on his rounds as he made his deliveries of handmade fur coats to wealthy families who lived along the Main Line. When they arrived at the Tudor mansions atop manicured lawns they were told, "Use the back door." The shame of not

being good enough, of being less than the people who lived inside those houses, stayed with my mother her whole life.

My grandmother was not able to read or write. Until the day she died, at the age of 93, she signed her name with an X. Someone once asked me why she'd never learned, as though poverty, endless hours of work alongside my grandfather, the language barrier, and giving birth to three children in a place thousands of miles from home were not enough of an explanation.

Reading and writing are privileges we often take for granted. Not everyone has access to education, particularly women who are poor.

By the time I was ten, my grandmother was nearly 70. She seemed to exist in a state somewhere between sadness and mania.

During her moments of sadness she would sit quietly, either in the corner of the living room sofa or the rocker on the front porch, and all the sorrows of her life – the mother she'd left behind, the grown son who lived with her at home and struggled with depression – were written on her face. At other times, when we went to Strawbridges department store to shop for clothes, she seemed to fly around the clothing racks as though propelled by octane. In her house she would furiously cook and clean, or embroider with intense concentration, making perfect, even stitches as she drew silken floss through clouds of white linen.

I adored my grandmother, and our closeness created a problem for my mother, who felt excluded. My mother was not close to her mother. My mother and I were not close to each other. I suspect my mother also suffered from depression and anxiety; she was much more volatile than my grandmother, much angrier, and she did not display the same bouts of energy or affection. My grandmother called me *shayne maidele,* Yiddish for her pretty girl; no one else ever called me that.

After the war life was easier for a while. The economy was booming; anti-Semitism was less apparent. But, by the 1960s, Philip developed dementia and became too difficult for my grandmother to care for. He would wander up and down Chatham Road in the middle of the night; my grandmother would awaken to an empty bed and, frantic, rush outside in her nightgown, searching for her husband, calling his name. Eventually she was forced to put him in a nursing home, flooded by guilt even though there were no other options.

My uncle, the one who lived at home with my grandparents, retired from accounting in the 1970s. He'd never married and had long been gripped by a depression that originated, my mother believed, from shell-shock after seeing heavy combat in World War II. "He was so

young and sensitive," my mother would say. "After the war he was never the same."

In 1983 my uncle took all his medications with a bottle of vodka and left a note saying he was sorry, but he just couldn't take the pain anymore. At his funeral my grandmother tried to climb into his grave and had to be restrained by several of the men. She lived four years after my uncle's suicide but she was quiet and withdrawn, the manic energy she'd once had sucked out of her by sorrow.

My grandmother's memory lives within me. I reach back to those unknown ancestors in the Ukraine, the long line of men and women who came before Bessie whose names I will never know. I reach into the future with my own children, one named for her, the other for my uncle. In my devotion to a life of reading and writing, I carry the awareness of my privilege as a contemporary woman for whom education was a birthright. In my blood run the struggles of my immigrant grandparents, teenagers, young and unworldly, turned their backs on a history of discrimination and persecution and set out for a foreign land so that their children and children's children might know what it is to be free.

*Skye Marzo*

# Sweethearts

The kitchen was empty. We had waited until everyone had left and the floors were mopped before taking out the sheet cake and two half-spheres baked earlier that day.

The cake was red velvet.

"This is going to be gory when they cut into it," I said.

We got to work. Jackie was meticulous in her calculations as we carved the hips and placed the domes on the top half of the sheet cake. She was probably sticking out her tongue a little bit, the way that she did when she concentrated. Her bleached blonde hair was pulled back in what she considered a perfect Cinderella bun at the top of her head. She turned toward the table, her back to me, and I could see tattoos showing just above the collar of her shirt—a column of diamonds all the way down her spine.

We spread a layer of buttercream over the cake, trying to get it as smooth as possible. Any lumps or flaws would show through the fondant. Then, we cleared space on the wide wooden table and sprinkled it with a dusting of cornstarch to roll out the Satin Ice which had been mixed to some approximation of skin. The fondant had to be an even thickness and wide enough to cover the entire cake. We smoothed it carefully, and could see our frosting flaws appearing like cellulite on the surface of the fondant.

"It's all smoke and mirrors," Jackie said.

It had become her mantra. Decorating cakes wasn't always about the right technique. It was about learning to hide your mistakes. Normally we would cover the imperfections with the corset, but most of the "cellulite" had appeared at the top of the breasts. All we could do was draw attention away. We put her into the walk-in fridge to let the frosting firm and to prepare our tools. If it was a real torso on the table, these might look like implements of torture—sculpting needles, sharp knives, carving tools, and something that looked like a mini pastry cutter that left lines in the soft fondant to simulate stitch marks along what would become fabric.

There were many late nights like these, sometimes lasting until early morning, just the two of us, elbow deep in cake batter and frosting, finishing orders for 300 cupcakes or a five-tier cake that would be delivered in two pieces, almost as tall as me when it was put together.

We carved cakes into owls or mountains. We stacked tiers into vintage luggage for a travel-themed wedding.

We marveled at what we were doing—cutting and sculpting and coloring. The sort of arts and crafts practiced in elementary school. Skills too often neglected over time because they were deemed useless to us as adults. Almost as if reaching for those lost pieces of ourselves, the inner child who used to color with crayons and cut shapes out of construction paper, we rocked out to the Disney station on Pandora as we "played," singing along to every princess song as loud as we could. Cake decorating was the thing that made us whole again.

Our conversations were silly, but existential. Does cake ever go through an identity crisis? Does it wonder, am I cake or am I a headless woman in a sexy corset? By the time the cake was fully dressed, stitches in place, and fishnet stockings painted in glittery Black Disco Dust, the cake was convinced it was a woman.

"But," Jackie said, "At some point, it's going to have to face the fact that it's really cake."

We boxed her up and put her in the walk-in, then cleaned and locked up the bakery, crossing the street to Beaver Street Brewery. All we had eaten that day were crumbs of red velvet and cream cheese frosting.

The restaurant was warm, filled with orange light that reflected off lacquered wooden tables. A group gathered around the bar to watch a game, some wearing football jerseys. I didn't know anything about football, but Jackie had been to every game as a cheerleader.

"That's how I got my tattoos," she said. To cover scars after she was knocked off a pyramid with a football. "He never apologized—the guy who threw the football."

After we were seated and had ordered drinks, our winter coats hanging heavy on the backs of our chairs, Jackie started talking about an article she had seen online.

"Did you know that more people watch the Super Bowl than vote?"

She was looking at me like she was trying to figure something out. I knew it was coming. She had been dropping casual political remarks leading up to the election, trying to determine where I stood without committing the sin of asking me outright. I measured the best way to sidestep the issue. It was like figuring out how to hide an imperfection in a cake. Smoke and mirrors. Make sure the seams of the ribbon face the wall. Place the flower in such a way to draw the eye away from a flaw.

"I heard somewhere that sports were invented as a distraction from politics," I said.

It looked like some tension in her shoulders eased a bit, and she sat back in her chair. It shifted the conversation just enough and supported her implication. For the moment, I thought I had tricked her into believing we were on the same side, because that's where I wanted us to be. I wanted the two of us to keep existing in this powdered sugar haze of friendship; two girls who had skinny dipped together as strangers in a cold, unfamiliar river, looking up to realize we were surrounded by houses with their lights on; friends who shared stories about hitchhiking, miscarriage, date rape, and property damage. We were two of the sweetest girls anyone could ever meet, made sweeter because all we did day and night was think about cake. We lived in a conservative state, but a liberal town. I didn't want to answer her real question, because I was afraid to find out how much the answer would matter to her. I loved her so much, the rift it would create between us was terrifying. The waiter came to take our order.

We shared steamed mussels in Thai curry sauce. Our friendship remained intact for one more night.

*Gloria g. Murray*

# Roller Coaster

My lover of four years of screaming battles, angry silences and wild love-making finally packed up and left. He met someone when his best friend sent him a singing telegram for his fortieth birthday. She was the telegram.

I was walking through the apartment, staring at the empty place where some of his things had been when I discovered a small piece of blonde moustache behind the toilet bowl while washing the floor and wept for almost an hour.

It became increasingly difficult to concentrate on my job and after numerous mistakes, I got fired last week. It's been my fifth job in five years, so that averages about a job a year. I suppose I deserved to lose it since some of the things I did were really stupid. I was working in an accountant's office and accidentally threw a check into the garbage. Another employee and I spent our whole lunch hour looking for it in the trash before it was finally found with a large tomato stain across it and some mozzarella mixed in. Then I would keep setting off the alarm when I opened in the morning because I kept forgetting to put on my glasses when I punched in the code. The alarm company would have to call to verify my password.

You see—stupid mistakes? I just don't know why. I suppose I was always sort of ditsy. Maybe that goes with being a poet. At least I can say that's why. My grandmother used to call me Calamity Jane, Jane being my middle name.

Well, to get back to the jobs: once when I made coffee I forgot to close the filter cup and it all exploded. Coffee grounds covered the ceiling like a muddy abstract painting. And if that weren't enough, I jammed the photocopy machine with my poems. I changed the screen saver on my computer to a jungle theme and we had to listen to screeching monkeys before I figured out how to fix it.

By now I sort of knew that my life wasn't really going anywhere. I never continued with school and just ended up with a GED (which I describe akin to toilet paper). I drive around in an '98 Mercury Cougar with 130K on the odometer, a persistent oil leak and a passenger seat that only reclines. It has a couple of dents (well, maybe more than a couple).

I've also got this annoying backache from lifting a large watermelon one Fourth of July. I spent six months in P.T. when I

strained my shoulder on one of the machines—only it turned out to be more than just a strain. It was called impingement syndrome that eventually required surgery and P.T. for another six months.

And then you probably won't believe this, but it's true—my therapist who I'd been seeing for almost seven years, well, she developed this neurological condition, which fortunately was not deadly, but caused her to have facial tics and sporadic stuttering and because of extreme embarrassment took a temporary leave of absence, taking with her all of my horrible childhood that I couldn't imagine explaining all over to anyone else. I called the other day and left a message saying I was thinking of killing myself, and guess what? She never called back. I couldn't believe it!

So, you see, what else is here? I'm sitting here with a bottle of Valiums, not the generic, but the ones with the little heart in the middle and a large cup of filtered water (you have to really be careful about the water these days) and planning my farewell. I thought of writing a poem in lieu of a suicide note, but I just happen to be suffering from writer's block. Heart pounding and shaky hands sloshing the water, I open the pill bottle. It looks like about fifty in there. That should certainly do it. That is, if nobody finds me first. But what if someone does and they get me to the hospital in time to have my stomach pumped and now I'm labeled suicidal and they put me in a psych ward? I mean I just couldn't bear it—walking around in those orange and green slipper socks and sipping juice from those little containers because my mouth is *sooooo* dry from all the meds. And a perky nurse walking in and asking: *Well, how are we doing today?*

Well, I'd better not screw up, make sure I do it right, take the phone off the hook, put on clean underwear and take my computer off stand-by. So now I'm holding the pills, trying to get up the nerve when the phone I forgot to take off the hook rings. I hesitate a moment or two before picking it up. It's my therapist and she apologizes for not getting back to me sooner but she was away at the Mayo clinic, trying to get treatment for her odd condition and she's so relieved I'm still here. They gave her some experimental medication that really seemed to help and so she was calling to give me an appointment.

Then I get a call waiting beep and it's an old boyfriend who wants to have dinner tomorrow night. Then my cell phone is ringing and it's a response from one of the companies I sent my resume to. Well, now I'm juggling between three calls when the doorbell rings and it's my neighbor whose calico cat caught its paw in a mousetrap and she *really*

needs my help.  So, I'm beginning to think—well maybe now isn't really the time to pack it all in…and promise I'll be right there.

. . . . .

*Hayley Shucker*

# Advice for Life

"Kidnapped, raped and killed." She is like that, always in a list, always in that order. "You'll be kidnapped, raped, and killed." I should explain that while we didn't live in the grandest of places, we did live in a nice, clean apartment. The area was pretty safe; it wasn't as if there was a high crime rate or drunken, disorderly neighbors for her to worry about. Nothing about our area seemed to whisper, "Kidnapped, raped and killed."

For her, things came in threes like that. My value as a person, a woman, really, because I wasn't a person so much as a woman, was based entirely on men's perception of me. Me being, of course, my body. "Pussy, tits, and ass," she said to me growing up. "That's all men think about, all they want." And while she presented this as a catastrophe, as if men shouldn't be so shallow, she also lived for it: she wore water proof mascara and 8-hour lipstick, control top pantyhose, and she'd periodically go on crash diets with little success. It seemed like, on one hand, she wanted to find a man who would love her for her, but she was frustrated that she kept meeting the men only interested in sex. On the other hand, though, she acted as though a man whose only interest *was* sex was not only normal but expected, excused. In other words, I grew up with a mother who believed it was a man's world and we just laid on our backs and spread our legs.

Thankfully, my mother wasn't the sole source of my identity; I had friends, television, books, and some teachers who showed me alternatives along the way. However, one incident in particular really sticks with me. When I was around six years old I received one of those My Size Barbies complete with the matching ballerina outfit. While I didn't play with the doll much, I spent a decent amount of time in the white stretchy leotard and pink tool tutu. At a young age, I fell in love with dance, with ballet, so I asked to take ballet lessons. And I knew we didn't have much spare money, but my dad and my mom's on-again/off-again boyfriend had both agreed to help pay. Only I couldn't take ballet; I wasn't allowed because my mother was worried the tight leotards would stunt the growth of my developing breasts. "She won't find a husband," she'd said to them. My marriageability rested on my breast size, my face, my waist size, and my willingness to put out, but not too much or I'd be "Whore." She always drew it out when she said it:

“Hoorre,” with a heavy, hard H and an R with a pointed end that stabbed me.

I guess you could write her off, call her crazy or overbearing. But I think, while potentially accurate, it is also too simple. Perhaps she wasn’t all wrong; I mean, it’s 2018 and pussies are still up for grabs.

*Suzanne Farrell Smith*

# War and Love

The bleat starts in his belly, skims his throat, and blasts out his mouth. I apologize, but my mother enjoys pacifying the baby while my sister and I work. It's June, and we're sweating through chores because we like checking them off. Plus, in her decline, even mundane tasks—fetch mail, rotate plants, clean Homer—outmatch my mother.

I wrestle the vintage stool under Homer, the flannel-and-corduroy polyester-stuffed moose head we bought in Skagway, Alaska, decades ago—our last family vacation. Dust camouflages its antlers, and its cloudy amber eyes reflect gloom. I begin wiping him down.

At a tap, I turn to see my sister's paled face. "There's poop in the basement," she warns. "Mom says she knows." Long has the cat peed on rugs, by doors, under the stool under my feet. But poop is a new assault. My sister, who won't change her nephew's diaper, falters. "Let me," I say as I descend and head for paper towels. She whispers: "You'll need the whole roll."

Years ago, when she could kneel, my mother painted the basement floor green and sponge-spackled it red to mask stains. It looks like a blood-spattered field. I find poop in high piles and single spheres. Crooked poop lines crisscross the cement landscape. It sticks, requiring fingernails and strategy. My biceps press with urgency, as if my body senses something advancing. Cancer is growing in my mother's kidney; cells are already choking off her renal artery and invading her liver. Soon they will spread to her bones and brain. A massive urinary tract infection is developing, while unchecked diabetes is skyrocketing her blood sugar. Her lumbar spine is collapsing, causing pain and weakness that will nearly paralyze her. It's the back that will finally conquer her defiance toward medicine. She'll live, ashamed of the body that's growing more symptom and less function, until the back gives us a sort of gift. We'll call an ambulance. She'll never return home.

But I don't know any of this yet. What I know is that there is a tremendous amount of cat poop in the basement, and I've got a whole roll of paper towels. I'm resolute.

While I scrape poop from my mother's floor, Electric Boat engineers build military submarines seven miles south. Navy officers train recruits down the road and, across the river, Coast Guard cadets practice rough-sea rescues. One hour away, the Army National Guard prepares for the next domestic disaster. In the basement of this bandaged

house, I scour the worst of the offending poop, a heap the size of a grenade, while my son surrenders to my mother's tickle buggy, and the cat eats another meal.

*Lisa Whalen*

# My Modest Proposal

"Awww, look at the baby! Isn't he precious?" I exclaimed, pointing to the figure curled on the sofa. His belly rose and fell as he teetered on sleep's edge. He sensed my gaze, looked up, squinted, and formed what looked like a satisfied smile. Then he blinked and settled deeper into the cushion, resting his chin on the sofa's padded arm. He knew I was talking about him, even if he didn't have the words to reply.

"We can't call him that anymore," my husband, Chad, said as he watched water drip from a colander he held over the kitchen sink. "At least not in front of the neighbors."

"What, . . . baby?" I asked. "Why not?"

We'd called our hefty orange and white tabby cat "baby" since I'd adopted from the animal shelter where I volunteered three years prior. He responded to "baby," so we'd all but given up using his real name, Jackson.

"Well," Chad began. Then he hesitated as if absorbed by cleaning and slicing strawberries. I knew better; he managed a multi-million-dollar restaurant and was more competent in the kitchen than I'd ever be. He was stalling, which meant I wouldn't like what was coming.

"You know when we had them over for dinner last month?"

"Yeah."

"They heard you call Jackson 'baby,' and Ellie whispered to Tom, 'They need to stop calling *him* that and have a *real* baby!'"

Heat flooded my face. I slammed the refrigerator door and spun to face Chad. "Un-be-*lieve*-able!"

"Don't be mad. I probably shouldn't have told you."

Too late. I let loose. I paced the kitchen tile spewing justifications, rationalizations, accusations; words tumbled from my mouth to form a jumbled stew of righteous indignation like none I'd uttered since my teenage years: "Our life! Our business! Our decision! No one else's!"

Our childless state shouldn't have come as a surprise to Ellie, Tom, or anyone who knew me. I'd begun declaring my desire to avoid parenting in early childhood.

"I know, I know," Chad said. "Calm down. She didn't mean anything by it. It's no big deal."

I promised Chad I wouldn't say anything to Ellie, but he was wrong: She did mean something by it, and it *was* big deal.

*  *  *

Spring in Minnesota was also a big deal. When May chased out winter's chalky skies and subzero temperatures, I didn't mind raking liquefied leaves left over from fall or balancing on one foot to reclaim a rubber clog the mud had sucked from my foot. Jackson lolled on the back step, sunning himself and watching squirrels dance across branches. Birds twittered cheerily from a phone line that ran to our house from the alley. Even my pale Irish skin welcomed the sun.

One May afternoon a few weeks after Ellie's declaration that Chad and I should have children, I pulled Lilly of the Valley from our yard. Its shoots had tunneled beneath Tom and Ellie's fence to pop up among our grass like green periscopes. Its white bells' delicate scent and scalloped hem disguised hostile takeover attempts I battled every year.

The cottonwood tree overhead presented a more daunting challenge. It, too, sent up shoots—suckers that sprouted at the trunk's base. By the time they grew tall enough to catch my attention, they couldn't be pulled by hand. I hacked at their woody stems with sheers until my palms blistered.

Our cottonwood was female, so it produced two types of seeds annually. Every May, sap-covered slivers of what looked like banana peel rained down. They choked the lawnmower and speckled our once-white gazebo roof. They littered cars parked beside the garage and oozed snot-colored sap, which the sun baked into the paint. They matted Jackson's paws until he abandoned licking to clamp his teeth between his pink pads. The seeds stuck to shoe soles like gum, staining our entryway tile a tumescent green I could only remove with bleach and an old toothbrush.

Every June, feathery white tufts floated in the air and coated every surface. They left behind tan hulls that collected in corners, along fences, and anywhere grass met concrete. They clogged the gutters, which sent sheets of water cascading onto our home's foundation.

The seeds seemed like hints Mother Nature dropped as unsubtlety as our neighbors—a protest against my refusal to follow Her fecund example. Her hints joined a chorus of comments from others who felt compelled to weigh in. The first had done so before Chad and I were married.

*  *  *

"Wait for me!" I told Chad as I jogged to catch up. I'm a fast walker, but my black boots' three-inch heels were no match for icy patches dotting the sidewalk. I wrapped my arm around his elbow like a Victorian lady and hoped he could keep me upright if I slipped.

"How long does this go again?" he asked.

"Nine hours today, seven hours tomorrow."

He sighed.

"My sentiments exactly," I replied.

We crossed the University of St. Thomas quad in St. Paul on our way to a marriage preparation retreat the Catholic Church required for engaged couples. I squelched dread pulling at my ribcage and vowed to be open-minded.

I broke that vow 60 minutes in, when the retreat moderator announced the next session would focus on natural family planning (the rhythm method) for birth control. Chad dropped his head and peered at me from beneath his eyebrows. I rolled my eyes.

A guest speaker described his faith and explained how the rhythm method had enriched his family life, which included a wife and . . . five children. I chuckled politely at what I assumed was a joke. Heads snapped in my direction, and they didn't bear smiles. I glued my eyes to the tabletop and stifled a giggle. *How can I take seriously a father of five advocating for the rhythm method's effectiveness?* I thought.

The speaker demonstrated with illustrations how to take a vaginal basal body temperature, measure cervical mucus levels, and chart ovulation. He described variations in the amount, color, texture, odor, and slipperiness of mucus and what each meant for fertility. He recommended we tack a calendar by our bed and note our daily observations about mucus.

I didn't consider myself a prude, but I didn't want anyone examining and writing about my cervical mucus. I didn't even want *myself* examining and writing about my cervical mucus.

*Finally,* I thought, when the speaker sat down. *Now we'll move on to something useful, like financial planning, communication, or how to argue productively rather than destructively*.

But then a priest rose to preach the benefits of . . . natural family planning. He insisted we couples would become closer, more intimate and able to weather challenges if we measured and charted cervical mucus.

*And from what wealth of experience do you speak, celibate male?* I wondered.

The priest concluded by admonishing us not to be lured into the sin of contraception.

*What sin*, I wanted to ask, *would we commit by conceiving a child we are not prepared to raise?*

* * *

"So," I began on a different St. Paul college campus a year later, "what problems is Jonathan Swift trying to solve?" I scanned five rows filled with my Introduction to Literature students, who shifted uneasily in their seats.

"Starvation," one student replied.

"Poverty," another said.

"Right. And what solution does he suggest? What's his modest proposal?"

Silence. Eyes avoided my gaze.

"Eating . . ." A girl in the front row ventured. She paused and then added, "babies?"

"Yes!" I replied.

Incredulous laughter fluttered across the room. A few noses wrinkled in disgust.

I explained that when Swift wrote his essay, "A Modest Proposal," in 1729, aristocrats in England owned most of Ireland's fertile land. Irish farmers tilled land they had recently owned but now had to export what they grew for English consumers. The English taxed the Irish so heavily that farmers couldn't afford to feed their families. Tongue planted firmly in his cheek, Swift suggested that since impoverished Irish women produced so many offspring and couldn't feed them—thereby burdening society with their poverty—their farmer husbands should raise some of the children like cattle, fattening them up until they could be sold to English aristocrats, who would savor them as a delicacy.

Though Swift used the term ironically, he referred to Irish Catholic women as "breeders." Those women didn't have the birth control pill, of course, and even if they had, the Pope wouldn't have allowed them to use it. What more could they have done to reduce their "burden" on society?

Each time I read Swift's essay, I remembered anew how long and hard women all over the world had fought to be viewed as something more than incubators. It piqued my frustration that women, of all people, faulted me for choosing not to reproduce. Strangers, acquaintances,

clergy, and even the media called my choice selfish, as if I willingly denied them something they had a right to demand.

*Why,* I wondered, *do they—women especially—treat me like a piece of land from which society is owed the fruits?*

* * *

Though less critical than women, men couldn't resist inquiring about my childless state.

"That looks nice," Tom, said a few weeks after college classes let out for summer. He nodded at daisies I'd planted near the cottonwood's trunk.

"Thanks."

A breeze sent cotton swirling in the space between us. Tom waved it away from his face and gave me a rueful smile.

He and Ellie had brightened when I'd asked the previous fall whether they'd mind if Chad and I had the tree taken out. Its trunk stood in our yard, but its branches straddled the fence.

"Those seeds ruin the kids' clothes," Ellie had added to her approval.

I'd nodded in sympathy, imagining how quickly laundry must accumulate in a home populated by six kids.

Chad and I had been shocked by quotes to remove the tree: $2400. Removal would have taxed our budget beyond any burden we were prepared to weather. Fortunately, Tom and Ellie had been as understanding about our decision to forego cutting down the cottonwood as they had been enthusiastic about our proposal to get rid of it.

"I'm hoping they'll seed," I added, as Tom studied the daisies.

He raised his eyes, nodded, then gestured to a house across the street.

"She's due any day," he said of the expectant mother and her husband, who'd moved into the house.

I picked at a cottonwood seed that had glued my gloves' fingers together. "Oh? That's great! They must be excited."

"Yeah."

Tom paused a beat, then asked, "So, how long have you and Chad been married now?"

*Ah, there it is*. I'd known it would come eventually—the offspring question. Tom studied my midsection every time I set foot in our yard.

"Four years," I replied.

Tom nodded again but said nothing.

Rather than my usual annoyance, I felt sympathy. He probably hoped his younger kids would have playmates and his older kids would have babysitting opportunities. He seemed cautious, afraid of broaching the topic directly. Maybe he worried we were struggling with infertility like other couples I'd met. I wanted to put him out of his misery, to explain that Chad and I didn't have children by choice and were comfortable discussing it. But I feared stating our preference might be misunderstood for judgment of theirs.

*How to explain what we haven't acknowledged? How to acknowledge what Tom didn't ask?*

We'd hit a crossroad.

"I should probably get started on the lawn," I said, tilting my head in the direction of the mower.

"Yeah, have a good afternoon," he replied.

I kicked at white fuzz clinging to the grass and watched it corkscrew into the air.

* * *

Resigned to the cottonwood's presence, I decided to focus on the positive: Even the messiest and most inconvenient life forms contributed to creation. Mosquitoes and Mayflies fed the bass my in-laws cast for in dusk's pink light on White Earth Lake and the walleyes we breaded and fried to a flaky golden crisp during Lent. Earthworms cultivated the soil where grandma had grown her famous tomatoes—meaty as portabellas and savory as all-spice. Bees pollinated the Calla Lilies I'd carried in my wedding bouquet and the carnations I'd plucked from atop Grandma's casket. The cottonwood rolled out its leaves like solar panels, shading our house, preserving our lawn, and converting carbon dioxide to oxygen.

* * *

As much as it pains me to admit, I'm not unlike the cottonwood. I'm designed to reproduce. I'm inconvenient and full of flaws. But I also contribute to creation. I'm a teacher and a writer. I'm a wife, sister, daughter, godmother. I pay taxes. I help facilitate cat adoptions at an animal shelter. So I wonder: *If I can respect the cottonwood's contributions enough to overlook its reproductive habits,*

*why can't others do the same for me? Where is it written that every married couple must have children?*

The Bible orders husbands and wives to be fruitful and multiply (Genesis 1:28). But it also tells parents to kill children who prophesy falsely (Zech 18:3) and to stone sons who are stubborn (Deut. 21:18-21). The Good Book is hardly a child-rearing authority.

The same people who wouldn't dream of telling Tom and Ellie, "You shouldn't have so many children" feel comfortable telling me I should have more. What they consider a suggestion is actually a judgment. It conveys, "Your choice isn't valid" and implies "I know better what's right for you, your marriage, and your life." The key word is "choice." Were I unable (rather than unwilling) to have children, those same people would shield me from derision. I know; I've seen it happen.

What if parenting *isn't* a choice? What if I was born absent the parenting "gene"? I can't remember ever feeling differently about having children, despite adults' insistence that I'd change my mind, so perhaps not wanting to parent is coded in my DNA, like blue eyes, brown hair, and freckles. What would that reveal about people who declare me selfish?

The irony is that the same cottonwood seeds I complain about help justify my childless lifestyle. Most seeds, from cottonwoods' to humans', never come to fruition. The sheer number deployed suggests Mother Nature knows most won't germinate. If every seed became a cottonwood, if every egg became a human, the Earth couldn't sustain life. Each life is more precious because of its rarity. I help maintain that balance, and my choice should be respected accordingly.

During the 10 years that Chad and I have been married and lived beside Tom and Ellie, we've lent ladders, jump-started cars, and commiserated yearly about cottonwood seeds. Our childlessness hasn't come up since my backyard conversation with Tom. Tom has intuited the answer—if not the reason. It's a relief not having the question dangle overhead like the cottonwood branch that once threatened our power line.

But if I were to publish my own Modest Proposal, it would declare childbearing a matter for couples to decide—no one else.

My Modest Proposal would insist society judge women by their character, not their reproduction.

My Modest Proposal would conclude with an offer: Don't tell me to have children, and I won't tell you to adopt a cat.

*Joanne Jackson Yelenik*

# Lost and (Not) Found

Not everyone finds his way home. Not everyone, not everything. For instance, my black traveling digital alarm clock; small enough to fit into the tiniest of purses, self sufficient with precise settings for hour and alarm, giving forth the most delicate of rings. We were together for some fifty years. After the first ten, with our compatibility clearly established, the clock continued running without need for new batteries—ever. If sometimes, the clock ran one or two hours ahead or behind, I never fussed or became irritated; I recognized that it was simply following my own erratic sense of time. After a while, it righted itself, or I accommodated by adding or subtracting whatever was required to keep it in perfect form. We were like an old couple who, over the years, compensate for one another's limitations.

The clock asked nothing of me in return, only that I take it everywhere I traveled and that I ultimately bring it back to its rightful place on my night table. In this, we had a flawless record; that is, until this last, final trip. I will never forget, nor will I ever forgive myself. We were returning from a visit to Minnesota to Israel, where I live. Our domestic flight landed on time at JFK International Airport and we made our way to the gate, with a five-hour wait before boarding on El Al began. The departure area was packed. I had—and here was the fatal flaw—removed my clock from my carryon bag to place it in my purse, so that I would have it close to me during the ten to twelve hour trip home to Israel. I placed it alongside my lipstick on my seat, and, in that minute, the world shifted course. I had to go to the desk to retrieve a new boarding pass and, in the rush, forgot to take my things off the chair and put them into my purse. Sadly, I never thought further about the clock until I was home and unpacking my belongings. It was then that my heart sank. I could picture the waiting area very well, but—life not being a Star Trek episode—I could not beam myself back to the airport to search high and low for my treasured friend. I called El Al and Kennedy Airport to no avail, though the personnel were very empathetic and understanding. It was bitter salt on the wound of my loss that a person to whom I had been talking while seated spotted the lipstick, an item easy to replace and devoid of any sentimental significance, and returned it to me while I was boarding. By then, to my eternal regret, the clock had slipped from my mind and was gone for good.

This grievous lapse on my part is one for which I continue to suffer and blame myself to this day. My faithlessness haunts me; also, my carelessness. (Both qualities surprise me; I thought I knew my faults and these were not in the litany—not until now, anyway.)

On the flight that night, during one of many walks taken to combat risk of blood clotting, entirely oblivious to what was already no longer mine, I met a woman. About my age, she, too, was walking. We stopped in the same spot, at the bulkhead, turned to each other, shrugged our shoulders and exchanged a smile which conveyed, "What else can be done?" Her eyes, though, said something else and she did not quite smile. I'm certain there were some introductory words between us, such as, "Where are you from?" or "Do you live there, in America, or in Israel?". But the truth is that I don't remember any initial interchanges. What I remember is her whispered breath articulating, "I lost my husband. I'm going to Israel to bury him."

I blurted out, "I'm so sorry," before my brain had absorbed the weight of her words. Here she was walking in the plane in the middle of two nights, Israel's and America's; and there, somewhere in the cargo area, especially reserved for such items, was the coffin of her husband, in which he lay silent, still, ready for his eternal rest in the homeland of the Jewish people.

She continued: "He went so fast. It was just October when he was diagnosed. Now it's January. We thought he would have at least a few more months, maybe a year. We had almost forty years together. He was a brilliant man. A physician. A writer. A historian. I knew him since I was in grade school."

What more can be said of a life by a grieving wife in the middle of two nights on a walk in a plane? And there I was not knowing what to say and not even knowing I had already lost my good luck charm, my clock, my traveling companion and friend of some fifty odd years, through innumerable vistas: sand-swept beaches, rain forests, and icy plains such as the Minnesota farms where last we visited together.

(Does it feel strange to you, dear reader, to roam with me a surreal landscape where I seem to be creating an equivalency between a clock and a person? Let's reflect, then. Sometimes in a dream, a window is huge and people appear to be tiny, much smaller than objects. Sometimes when a person wakes up from such a dream, the window remains large in her mind and memory and she cannot figure out who were the people in the dream. The image remains, without satisfactory explanation as to why objects and people appeared so out of proportion. I know that a clock, even a cherished one, cannot be compared to a person;

and certainly the loss of a clock cannot be compared to the death of a man. But dreams come as they do. All that I am writing happened in reality, yet, to me, it is as if it came in a dream.)

Gazing directly into the face of the woman, my mind landed on one of the many poignant things to which she had alluded. "What did he write?" I inquired. Not, what was your wedding like; what did you enjoy about him since you were a girl; was he a good conversationalist, a passionate lover, a kind father, a tender, interested companion? Not what kind of doctor was he, where did he study, where indeed did you live when you both were alive and he was not, as he is now, lying in a coffin in the cargo area while you talk to a complete stranger about the love of your life?

"He loved history and wrote about it. We became religious together. Later in life. That was his world. People would always ask him, 'Which yeshiva did you attend?' Truth is, he never attended a yeshiva. He was just brilliant. Writing was in his blood. It relaxed and stimulated him. And he, my husband, wrote about history and Jewish faith. He became learned on his own. He learned all the time. Our sons were learning at his bedside with him when he died. My daughter and I arrived a few minutes later, after his death. When he was in the hospice, he was never alone. One of us was always there. And everyone there loved him. The nurses, the other patients. He was exceptional.

"I will be alright. We all will be. But we've lost him. It's so sad. A brain tumor. The worst kind, where there's almost nothing to be done. He tried everything. He never lost hope, nor allowed any of us to lose hope. That was the nature of his faith, really exceptional. We did everything together. Together, outside of Cleveland, we, really he, created a new Jewish community, an observant Jewish community. They are thriving. I don't even know if they know who began it, and how it started. That's the way life is. Some things are never known."

Somebody trying to sleep hushed us. We paused, then she turned to me and asked, "What do you do?" "I write and I teach." "What do you teach?" "History and literature, the two going together as man and wife." "Oh, I must get you his book, the latest one. You'll love it. We'll get you a copy. Maybe that's why we started to talk. Maybe that's why we had to meet."

Always an interesting and important question. Why things happen the way they do. What is the meaning of things—not only of the big issues, such as bad things happening to good people, but of everything that we experience and think? Propelling this universal question is the human compulsion to *know*. Velvel Greene, a scientist

who worked for NASA, and the father of a good friend of mine, wrote: "What drives humankind and separates people from monkeys is curiosity. Not skill, not brilliance, just curiosity." Greene also found an answer to the question at hand in an explanation by his cherished teacher, the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson: "Everything we do and everything that happens to us is there to help us to get closer to G-D."

When I arrived home and unpacked, and to my horror failed to find my faithful timepiece among my packed items, I thought about my clock and the unexpected conversation I had with that woman as we flew between two countries, two life histories, two time zones—with one loss felt and deeply acknowledged, and one loss yet unknown. How would all of that, my missing clock and the woman's true tragedy, shape up to a circle coming round? Was there significance in this random encounter? True, I could explain my carelessness as a consequence of my growing older, a senior moment of misplacing and forgetting, confusing priorities. Bottom line, though, I did not need to lose my clock to be reminded of my limitations.

Perhaps what was at issue was loss itself. Where is loss felt? Is loss like fear, a cotton ball lodged in the brain? Does loss locate itself in eyes that burn and fill with tears? Does loss bring in its wake several phases, accompanying syndromes, as death itself does? First emotions such as anger, denial, grief. Second phase filled with pain, hurt, and sadness. One faces the truth of what cannot be changed. Finally, grieving, remembering, healing, followed by acceptance and seeing reality as it truly is. Life goes on and with it comes the triumph of survival, and hopefully, eventually, serenity.

Not only his family experienced great loss, but the man who died did too. He lost his family and all plans for the future. His dream to live in Israel transformed into an unalterable reality of burial there. His wife, who was his best friend and great love, told me: "He was spared from losing hope; he hoped until the end; he continued to do what he could, trying to live a bit longer, to make things easier for us even as everything became harder for him." She continued talking as if to herself, her words a memory essay describing what she had felt during his time in the hospice: "His faith deepened and he inspired us all with a richer sense of our own faith. We were all together with him on that playing field."

I arrived home from the flight on Friday afternoon, in time for the start of Sabbath at sundown. The woman had mentioned that her husband's burial would take place the afternoon of our arrival. Her three grown children, two sons and a daughter, were on the plane too, traveling

to Israel without their spouses for the funeral. Following this, the family would spend Shabbat, the Jewish Sabbath together, eating and praying as usual, for mourning is not permitted on this day. After Shabbat, for an hour or so, she and her children would be observing the Jewish custom of sitting shiva, in which people come to visit the mourners and offer their condolences. Then they would take a taxi to the airport and catch a flight back to the United States, there to continue the week-long period of mourning in her home.

I had asked in passing at whose home the Saturday night shiva would take place, since she herself did not live locally. She told me that it was to be held at the house of a cousin and his wife who, though only distantly related, had made great efforts in recent years to visit and remain in touch: "They loved my husband; they are completely broken up." As it happened, I knew the family well. I had looked at this stranger and thought: It is only by chance that she is not a friend.

After Shabbat, I knew what I needed to do. I went to see the woman and her children and pay a shiva call. They were surprised that I would, simply as a result of a chance conversation, take time to offer condolences for the loss of someone I never knew, but who, as it turned out, took his very last ride on the same El Al flight as me. They brought me a copy of his book, and his daughter showed me his picture on her smartphone: a handsome, rather young-looking man, appearing intelligent from his expression and pose, seemingly happy and at ease.

The son of their rabbi in the United States arrived with his wife, declaring: "How could we not come?" The mourners spoke about their memories, narrating stories, funny and sad. The wife and her children, more than through their words—through hands held, attentive listening as family memories were evoked, and unselfconscious tears flowing—conveyed that they were a good family, loving, devoted and close to each other. I thought they were certainly a source of *naches*—pride, pleasure and comfort—to the man who died. Through each of them, we visitors received a picture of him as husband, father, son, writer, teacher, physician, and observant Jew; a faithful and bright, caring human being. Their stories told of someone who had lived life completely and purposefully for the time granted to him. His intimates would remember him; and strangers, like myself, would also hold him in our memories.

I went home. Yes, it had been good to pay that visit and speak again to that woman. No, I still lacked answers to the questions floating in my head. Yet some of the layers of meaning of loss were revealing themselves, speaking to me, haunting me.

It was late when I arrived home. No one was up. I was tired. I undressed and got into bed. Sometime during the night, I awoke, remembering that I'd best check to see whether it was time to give my sweet 103-year-old mother her pill. Rather groggily, I reached out my hand to my night table. In the darkness, my fingers swept through the air, and brushed the wood of the table. Nothing was there. I felt a sickening sensation in my stomach. Nothing to pick up. Nothing to hold onto. Nothing to shine at the mere press of a tiny button and light up a small patch of darkness. Nothing to tell me what time it was, to serve me faithfully as I had served it until that last regrettable moment when I failed it. I would have kept my clock and cherished it, working or not, functional battery or none, right time or wrong. But it was lost, gone, because of a brief moment of forgetfulness. My fingers touching the empty air told my brain and my heart simultaneously the bitter truth.

*Lost.*

*Loss.*

*I lost.*

*Lost to me.*

*I miss.*

*I'm sorry.*

A sense of loss is ingrained into the collective consciousness of the Jewish people. How often when we Jews pray or talk do we refer to the loss of our two Temples— one destroyed by the Babylonians, the second by the Romans—and of the Divine presence that dwelt in them: the Divine feminine, the *Shechinah*. Loss is the story of our history: the Crusades, the Spanish Expulsion, lost homes, lands, family; the loss of six million of our people. We Jews are familiar with loss. A visitor parting from mourners says: "*May you be comforted among the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem*." Time contracts; loss from thousands of years ago becomes as immediate as the loss of the moment.

Our existential condition as Jews is determined by loss. It will change only when that which has been lost to us is found, or, as is said theologically, returned. Anthropomorphically, G-D too is defined by loss—of every being who does not long for his or her Creator. The

Jewish people's loss, however profound, cannot be compared to G-D's loss when we remove the Divine from our lives and hearts. The disparity is too great; as great, perhaps, as that between the death of a man and the loss of a clock.

How many people whom we pass on the street, or stand next to on a check-out line, are dealing with loss? How much kinder we all would be if we only held onto that thought.

One thing though is clear: only redemption, when it finally comes, will give to everyone and everything its true value and authentic place in creation. All will know their honor and love as allotted, and return to that status. Redemption, whether theological, literary, or philosophical, is associated with feelings of serenity, and also peace. The quintessential nature of redemption can be defined as a time when that which is lost will be found, and storm clouds will be removed from upon the face of the deep.

# B

# BOOK REVIEWS

*Maril Crabtree*

# The Luminous World of *Light in Light*

Mary Oliver observed in *A Poetry Handbook* that "[a] mind that is lively and inquiring, compassionate, curious, angry, full of music, full of feeling, is a mind full of possible poetry. Poetry is a life-cherishing force."

The poems of Deborah Gerrish in her newest collection, *Light in Light* (Resource Publications, 2017) show us a mind that runs the gamut described above, and in every poem – from those capturing childhood vicissitudes to lyrical paeans to robins and pear trees – there is an Oliveresque sense of gratitude for life itself, as well as an insistence on celebrating life for the roller-coaster that it often is.

Several poems echo Oliver's insistence on bringing eternity down to the reality of the individual life. In "Oh, If I Were a Bird and Could Fly Away," Gerrish poses a provocative question that immediately focuses the reader's attention:

> What will you carry
> to the other side –
>
> a scratched gold cross
> a package of saltines
>
> the parka that covers you
> as you bike across Europe
> as you escape the ovens
>
> What will you carry
> when death corners you,
> unbuttons your soul.
>
> What will you carry?

That plaintive but challenging question stays with the reader through the next poem, "Dear White Star Line," a brilliant prose poem filled with specific items and images from the night the *Titanic* sank. It continues with "The Liberator," a narrative poem that begins with the poet's lament that "[f]or many days now the world has been growing emptier" and moves into a compelling history-based narrative of the

rescue of concentration camp survivors at Buchenwald "filing out in grave clothes" to greet their rescuers. A similar question concludes "After Ravensbruck: the Woman from Holland Speaks to Me in a Dream: ". . . Her wrinkled hands cupped my hands –/Asked what I will do with the rest of my life."

Even in a poem with the lighthearted title "Amusement Park," Gerrish manages to make us go deeper (higher?) than amusement. The speaker's agony speaks to many who don't like roller coasters:

my hands claw the safety bar
knuckles pale,
flesh drained of color

an odyssey of
swerves, curves,
jolts, drops
chops, whiplash –
sweaty palms, pulse-stopping
corkscrew turns, breaks that screech.

She observes that "all of nature screams – /in some way,/we each live/our own hell – /just the details are different." In the end, though, she returns to that Oliveresque question:

But tell me –
in the middle of the test,
what is in your gratitude box?
What is your claim to heaven?

Don't think that all the poems in this fine collection have to do with death, however. Several poems focus on childhood memories and events full of arresting detail and imagery. In "That Winter" the poet describes "the October air turning crisp like white transparent apples,/the slanted sky against the day's final hour." She concludes with a wistful tone:

If only my childhood contained me like the heavenly bodies protected by stars. I wish I could say I didn't see nightfall coming or that I wasn't so lost in a retinue of dreams.

There are also poems that give the reader a laugh-out-loud respite from such wistful thoughts. One of my favorites is "The Anointed

Cow," a prose poem that details all the heirloom items the poet's daughter does *not* want and the one item she is willing to inherit, an elaborate Victorian butter tub with gargoyles hauling "their load into the/next century." Another is "Portrait in the Trees" which describes the poet's sojourn among various costume-party "trees": Swigging a martini, a hemlock swayed under its curled/branches. Another spooned caviar, worked her limbs/like an aerobics instructor wrestling time."

And there are several three-line gems that leave an indelible image, as in "Memo":

Memory of you –

a torn kite undulating

through the galaxies.

Ultimately, Gerrish speaks to us of the connections between and among everyone and everything. In this intimate world of interconnectedness, cats and robins and pear trees are as sacred as lost loves, a father's "wild watercolors," or a grandmother's porcelain dinner plates. With her carefully crafted words, Gerrish gives us a rich glimpse of what it is to be human, so that we can say, along with her, "I love this earth with its pastries & plenitudes."

*Maril Crabtree*

# Unfinished Journeys, Lessons Learned

On the cover of *We Became Summer* (NYQ Books, 2017), Amy Barone's first full-length collection, several objects capture the reader's attention: a well-stickered suitcase with a bright yellow jacket folded over it, a 40's photograph of two young women, and a grand piano. The piano, keys gleaming, rests in front of a bank of windows filled with bright sun and trees in full foliage.

Each of these items relates to at least one poem in the collection, and in some cases to an entire theme. The significance of each one unfolds as readers travel through the book's five sections. Although some poems are straightforward, others leave readers with a taste of mystery that evokes the interplay of time, memory, and evolving awareness.

Barone's introductory poem, "Safety," hints at that interplay with these lines: "I often found safety on the driveway as I sat perched/on my purple stingray, cycling in circles watching the world,/especially handsome males, unwittingly writing poetry."

Much later in the book, the poet returns to "Views from the Driveway," reminding us of its "promise of escape from harmful clutches that lurked inside." This time she plunges us fully into her coming-of-age era with its innocent daring:

> On steamy, sultry days, the surface shot off a pungent perfume.
> Mixing with the sun's scent on young skin and nubile grass clippings.
> Summer in the suburbs had arrived. Butterfly days called for loose plans
> and clandestine trips to the private duck pond
> to roll down grassy hills and puff on stolen cigarettes.
>
> Time answered most important questions. . . .

In that poignant line, we see the poet peering into her memories from a more mature perspective, one that traverses both outer travels through her ancestral land of Italy and the inner geographies of longing and spirit. "Some traditions stay etched on your soul," she observes in "*Festa Della Donna*," one of several poems exploring the delights of her five-year sojourn in Italy as Italian correspondent for *Women's Wear*

*Daily* and *Advertising Age*. Here, she spent time contemplating "something authentic to prolong the hush," and traded the safety of her driveway for adventure "in the land of tortellini,/where my taste now ran to fire-engine red motorcycles/whose drivers were devastatingly handsome and spoke perfect Italian."

Then there's that yellow jacket, a genuine Versace. When she heard of his murder, she rescued it from the consignment shop she had taken it to. "Today when I wear that jacket on the streets/of Manhattan people wave and yell out./It makes them smile."

And what about that grand piano? Music plays a large role throughout the collection, and we see the poet both as a performer and a listener. "Music Lessons" portrays the bittersweet experience of piano lessons forced on the poet from age four. "A new teacher each year, but none can foster a passion./She prefers to sway to the sweet ballads of Al Green,/listen for favorite hits on her radio or play the new/Carly Simon record." Through this and other poems we begin to see the "harmful clutches" the poet referred to earlier. We see glimpses of a hard-working but at times abusive father, and a mother who required years of care after a stroke. We see the struggle to put it all into a perspective wrought by time, distance, death, and maturity.

One of the most poignant poems in the collection, "Travels with You," addresses this life-journey directly:

> Thank you for the gift of wonder,
> for raising me with the zest of discovery,
> for instilling me with the grit to journey alone.
> You taught us not to fear life,
> but to grab it, inhale it, run to adventures.
> Maybe you weren't the bad parent after all.

In one of her best poems, "Lessons Learned from Moths," Barone speaks of having "learned the art of detachment/from a destructive pest." She describes the life lessons learned from these moths:

> Celestial nomads that feast on
> leather, wool, silk, felt
> and thrive on night
> taught me to let go of longing –
> . . .
> Moths cunningly coached me to occupy now,

Not dwell in closets lined with past lives

Jill Bialosky, in her memoir *Poetry Can Save Your Life* (Simon & Schuster, 2017) says that poems "can be read for many reasons. For the pleasure of interpreting meaning, for the cadences and images, for what a poem can convey. The wonder of a poem is how the reader, through the act of imagination, can insert herself into it, and travel along its roads."

The poems in *We Became Summer* offer many points of entry for the reader's imagination and memory, while appreciating the poet's own unique journey through both.

# B

# BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

**Sidney Bending** is a retired graphic artist. Her award-winning poetry and flash fiction have been published in North America, Europe and New Zealand. A chapbook of small poems, Mute Crows, is available from leafpress.ca. She collaborates with Margaret Rutley and Nika who send out poetry as The Heron's Quill.

**Kristin Berkey-Abbott** earned a Ph.D. in English from the University of South Carolina. She has taught at many colleges, and she is the Director of Education at the Hollywood (Florida) campus of City College. She has published 3 chapbooks: *Whistling Past the Graveyard* (Pudding House Publications), *I Stand Here Shredding Documents*, and *Life in the Holocene Extinction* (both published by Finishing Line Press).

**Jessica Beyer** is a writer and educator from Baltimore, MD. Her poems have appeared in *Muse/A*, *The Adroit Journal*, *decomP*, and elsewhere. She has an MFA from NYU and a BA from Emory University. You can find her waterskiing, SCUBA diving, and giving in to wanderlust whenever possible, but also online at jessicabeyer.com and @JessicaHBeyer.

**Jane Blanchard** lives and writes in Georgia. Her poetry has been published around the world as well as posted online. Her two collections—*Unloosed* and *Tides & Currents*—are available from Kelsay Books.

**Lisa Brognano** is the author of the novels, *In the Interest of* Faye and *A Man for Prue*, as well as a book of poetry, *The Willow Howl*. Her poems and short fiction have appeared in national and international literary journals. Brognano holds a master's degrees in English and another in Fine Art. She lives in New York with her husband.

**Cheryl Buchanan**, a co-founder of Writers Without Margins, is an attorney who learned the power of storytelling and silence-breaking when she worked for a decade on over 500 cases of childhood sexual abuse. She earned her MFA where she taught at Emerson College. Cheryl has been the recipient of the Academy of American Poets Prize, the Boston Mayor's Poetry Prize and the Naugatuck River Review Narrative Poetry Award as well as nominated for a 2016 Pushcart Prize and twice for Best New Poets. She is the recipient of the 2018 National Association for Poetry Therapy's Social Justice Award and a producer of

the 2019 documentary, In Their Shoes: Unheard Stories of Reentry and Recovery.

**Jennifer Campbell** is an English professor in Buffalo, NY, and a co-editor of *Earth's Daughters*. She has written two books of poetry: *Supposed to Love* (Saddle Road Press, 2013) and *Driving Straight Through* (FootHills, 2008). Several of her poems appear in journals such as *Pinyon Review, The Healing Muse, Xanadu, Sow's Ear, Comstock Review, The Prompt, Oyez Review, Common Ground Review, Saranac Review, Mom Egg Review, Pennsylvania English,* and *Fugue.*

**Tera Joy Cole** is the author of "Franny" a flash fiction piece which recently appeared in *Sky Island Journal's* online spring 2018 publication. She is also the author of the short story, "Coyotes Don't Litter" which appeared in the online literary journal, *The Writing Disorder* (Winter 2015). Her first literary publication, "Where Things Are Made" was published by *Blunderbuss Magazine* an online journal in April 2015. She holds an M.A. degree in English and teaches composition, literature, and American cultural studies at Idaho State University.

**Jennifer Companik** holds an M.A. from Northwestern University and is a fiction editor at *TriQuarterly*. Her accomplishments include: a 2016 Pushcart Prize nomination, *Border Crossing*; and publication in *Take a Mind Trip*; *The Bryant Literary Review*; and *Muse Literary Journal*. By reading her work you are participating in her wildest dreams.

**Susan Cowger**'s Chapbook, *Scarab Hiding,* was released December 2006. Susan's work is forthcoming in *Perspectives*. Her work has most recently appeared in CRUX, *Poem-a Week, AllWeCanHold.com* (Sage Hill Press), *McGuffin, Wising Up Anthology on Joy,* and *The 55 Project.* Susan's work has *also* appeared in various publications such as *CALYX, The Healing Muse, and Thema.* Susan is founder and past editor of *Rock & Sling: A Journal of Witness*.

**Maril Crabtree** grew up in the South but calls the Midwest home. Her book, *Fireflies in the Gathering Dark*, is preceded by three chapbooks. Her work has appeared in journals including *The DMQ Review, Literary Mama, Main Street Rag, Persimmon Tree,* and *Earth's Daughters.* She is contributing editor for *Heartland! Poetry of Love, Solidarity, & Resistance.*

**Natalie Crick** (UK) has poetry published in *Bare Fiction, Poetry Salzburg Review, The Moth, Rust* and *Moth, The Chiron Review, Red Wedge Magazine, The Adirondack Review* and elsewhere. She is studying for an MA in Writing Poetry at Newcastle University (UK) and is currently taught by Tara Bergin and Jacob Polley. Her poetry has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize twice**.**

**Elizabeth M. Dalton**'s fiction, poetry, and creative-nonfiction have been published in *r.kv.ry quarterly literary journal, The Clockhouse Review, Sliver of Stone, Earth's Daughters, upstreet: a literary magazine, New Millennium Writings,* and *glassworks.* In 2016 she received an MFA in creative writing from Spalding University. She lives in Mooreland, IN, with her husband, John.

**Suzannah Dalzell** lives on Whidbey Island north of Seattle, Washington where she divides her time more or less equally between writing and land conservation. Her work has appeared in About Place - Black Earth Institute, Cosmographia, Flyway, Pilgrimage and The Raven Chronicles. She is currently working on a collection of poems exploring the places her ancestry bumps up against race, class and environmental wreckage.

**Julianne DiNenna**'s poems and short stories have appeared in Months to Years; *Gyroscope Review*; *Every Day Reading*; *Airplane Reading*; Italy, a Love Story; Susan B & Me; Offshoots; Grasslands Review; as well as others. She has won two literary prizes for poetry in the Geneva Writers' Group of Switzerland and poem of distinction from Writecorner Press in 2011. She works and writes from Switzerland and Italy.

**Laura English** lives in Pennsylvania where she teaches memoir writing to people from all walks of life. Her poetry has appeared in various journals including Slant, Straylight, Sow's Ear, and Connecticut River Review. She can be contacted through her website: www.living-muse-with-laura-english.com.

**Sarah Evans** has had many short stories published in anthologies, magazines and online. Prizes have been awarded by, amongst others: Words and Women, Winston Fletcher Prize, Stratford Literary Festival, Glass Woman and Rubery. Other publishing outlets include: the Bridport Prize, Unthank Books, Riptide, Best New Writing and Shooter. She has also had work performed in London, Hong Kong and New York.

**Anita Feng**'s publications include a cross-genre novel *Sid*, and two books of poetry, *Internal Strategies* and *Sadie & Mendel*. The story published here is excerpted from a memoir-in-progress of her career as a ceramic artist. Currently, Anita maintains a ceramic studio in Issaquah, WA, teaches Zen in Seattle and writes just about anywhere. More information about her work can be found at http://anitafeng.com.

**Carol Fixman** has written personal essays, stories and family memories, which she is slowly beginning to share with others. Recent publications have appeared in *Adelaide Magazine*, *Jewish Literary Journal*, and *This I Believe: Philadelphia*. Retired from the world of universities and non-profits, she is a transplanted Midwesterner living in Philadelphia.

**Louis Gallo**'s work has appeared or will shortly appear in *Wide Awake in the Pelican State* (LSU anthology), *Southern Literary Review, Fiction Fix, Glimmer Train, Hollins Critic,, Rattle, Southern Quarterly, Litro, New Orleans Review, Xavier Review, Glass: A Journal of Poetry, Missouri Review, Mississippi Review, Texas Review, Baltimore Review, Pennsylvania Literary Journal, The Ledge, storySouth, Houston Literary Review, Tampa Review, Raving Dove, The Journal (Ohio), Greensboro Review*,and many others. Chapbooks include *The Truth Change, The Abomination of Fascination, Status Updates and The Ten Most Important Questions*. He is the founding editor of the now defunct journals, *The Barataria Review* and *Books: A New Orleans Review.* He teaches at Radford University in Radford, Virginia.

**Nancy Gerber** has published fiction, poetry, and essays in various journals. Her newest book is *A Way Out of Nowhere* (Big Table Publishing, 2018), a collection of short stories featuring female protagonists who find themselves negotiating the complex edges of relationships: with mothers, lovers, husbands, and friends. She holds a Ph.D. in English from Rutgers University and a M.A. in psychoanalysis from the Boston Graduate School of Psychoanalysis-NJ.

**Deborah Gerrish**, author of three collections of poems, *Light in Light, The Language of Paisley***,** and chapbook, *The Language of Rain***,** is an award-winning poet whose poems appear in numerous journals and anthologies. She received an Edward Fry Fellowship for scholarship research work at Rutger's University and received her Ed.D. in Literacy Education. She holds an MFA in Poetry from Drew University, teaches poetry at Fairleigh Dickinson University, and hosts the *Visiting Poets*

*Series*. Visit her at deborahgerrish.com.

**Becky Gould Gibson** has published her poetry in journals, anthologies, and in seven collections, among them, *Need-Fire* (Bright Hill Press, 2007), *Aphrodite's Daughter* (Texas Review Press, 2007), *Heading Home* (NC Poetry Society, 2014), and *The Xanthippe Fragments* (St. Andrews University Press, 2016).

**Sandra Graff**, whose poems have appeared in Fourth River, Rhino Poetry Journal, and SLAB, authored two poetry chapbooks, *Girl in Garden* and *This Big Dress* (Finishing Line Press). She teaches English at SUNY Orange and lives with her family and four cats in the Hudson Valley. Her poems find her in the corridors between the busy rooms of motherhood and teaching.

**Kathleen Hellen** is the author of the collection *Umberto's Night*, winner of the Jean Feldman Poetry Prize, and two chapbooks, *The Girl Who Loved Mothra* and *Pentimento*. Her collection *The Only Country was the Color of my Skin* is forthcoming in 2018. Her poems have been nominated for the Pushcart and Best of the Net, and featured on Poetry Daily.

**Donna Isaac,** teacher and poet, has published a collection of poetry, *Footfalls* (Pocahontas Press) and two poetry chapbooks: *Tommy* (Red Dragonfly Press) and *Holy Comforter* (Red Bird Chapbooks). Her poems can also be found in many literary journals including *In Plein Air, The Martin Lake Poetry Journal, Shark Reef,* and *Perfume River,* (donnaisaacpoet.com).

The first born of a Chicago airman and a Southern Belle, **Terry S. Johnson** has explored careers as a newspaper advertising clerk, a library assistant and a professional harpsichordist before serving as a public school teacher for over twenty years. She earned her M.F.A. in Writing from the Vermont College of Fine Arts. *Coalescence,* her first poetry collection, won an Honorable Mention in the 2014 New England Book Festival.

**Claire Joysmith** is a bilingual writer, poet, professor and translator, whose work focuses on gender and transborder issues. She has published throughout the Americas. *Silencio de azules* is her latest poetry chapbook, and *Ecfrasis* is a poetry-image dialogue (paintings by José

Díaz). Her poetry has been translated into Spanish, English, Mayan, Italian and Turkish.

**Gloria Keeley** is a graduate of San Francisco State University with a BA and MA in Creative Writing. She collects old records and magazines. Her work has appeared in Spoon River Poetry Review, Slipstream, The Emerson, Adanna and others.

**Susanna Lang**'s third collection of poems, *Travel Notes from the River Styx,* was published by Terrapin Books in 2017. *Tracing the Lines* (2013) is available from Brick Road Poetry Press. Her poems have appeared in such journals as *Little Star, december,* and *Verse Daily.* She lives with her husband in Chicago.

**Joan Larkin**'s most recent collections are *Blue Hanuman* and *My Body: New and Selected Poems,* both published by Hanging Loose. A teacher for many decades, she has taught at Brooklyn College, Sarah Lawrence, and Smith, among others. Honors include the Shelley Memorial Award and the Academy of American Poets Fellowship.

**Eve F.W. Linn** received her B.A. cum laude from Smith College in Fine Art and her M.F.A. in Poetry from the Low Residency Program at Lesley University. She has attended the Bread Loaf Writer's Conference, the Frost Place Conference on Poetry, and the Colrain Manuscript Conference. She lives west of Boston with her family and two resident cats.

**Robin Littell** holds an MFA in Creative Writing from Miami University. She lives and writes in Yellow Springs, Ohio, where she also manages a bed and breakfast. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in Tin House, Gravel, Literary Mama, Found Polaroids, NoiseMedium, Visual Verse, and Fiction Southeast.

**Katharyn Howd Machan** is the author of 38 published poetry collections, most recently *What the Piper Promised*, winner of the New Alexandria Press chapbook competition. Her poems have appeared in numerous magazines, anthologies, and textbooks. She is a professor in the Department of Writing at Ithaca College, emphasizing fairy tales.

**Marjorie Maddox,** Sage Graduate Fellow of Cornell (MFA) and Professor of English at Lock Haven University, has published 11

collections of poetry—including *True, False, None of the Above; Local News from Someplace Else; Wives' Tales; Transplant, Transport, Transubstantiation; Perpendicular As I*—the short story collection *What She Was Saying; Common Wealth: Contemporary Poets on Pennsylavania* (co-editor); and 4 children's books. Please see www.marjoriemaddox.com.

**Skye Marzo** is a writer and editor living in Los Angeles. Her work has appeared in several publications including *The Rumpus*, *Blue Heron Review*, and *Enchanted Conversation*. She baked and decorated cake in another life. Find her on Twitter @zozozozoezooey and Instagram @zoe.marzo

**Gloria g. Murray** has poetry and prose published in journals such as The Paterson Review, Poet Lore, Third Wednesday, The Ledge, The Literary Quarterly and others. She is the recipient of the 1st prize in the Anna Davidson Rosenberg poetry award from Poetica and 3rd prize in the Writer's Digest Poetry contest. Two of her one-act plays have been performed on Long Island, NY.

**Nina Murray** is a Ukrainian-American poet and translator. Her debut collection is *Minimize Considered,* by Finishing Line Press. As a U.S. diplomat, she has served in Lithuania, Canada, and Russia.

**Brenda Nicholas** is an Assistant Professor of English at Temple College and lives in Austin TX. Her work has appeared in *The Painted Bride Quarterly, Main Channel Voices, Red River Review, Illya's Honey, Menacing Hedge*, *Snapdragon, The Helix Magazine,* and other literary journals.

**Marjorie Power**'s newest poetry collection, *Oncoming Halos,* is forthcoming late this year from Kelsay Books. Her *Seven Parts Woman* appeared in 2016 from WordTech Editions. She has poems in recent issues of *Negative Capability, Slant, Turtle Island Quarterly* and *Blueline.* She lives in Denver, Colorado with her husband after many years in the Northwest.

**Sue Powers** has a dazzling array of publishing credits. Among her favorites are *New Millennium Writings, Blue Earth Review, Funny in Five Hundred, Another Chicago Magazine, Happy, Facets, The Writer's Place and Samizdada*. She is a recipient of a fellowship and grant from

the Illinois Arts Council Fellowship and Grant in Prose, and two of her stories have been nominated for the Pushcart Prize. She now has 18 fictions published.

**Christine Redman-Waldeyer** is a poet and Associate Professor of English at Passaic County Community College, N.J. She earned her doctorate from Drew University with a focus in creative writing. She has published three poetry collections, *Frame by Frame*, *Gravel*, and *Eve Asks* (Muse-Pie Press), co-edited *Writing after Retirement: Tips from Successful Retired Writers* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers) and is the founder of *Adanna*. Her poetry has been published in numerous journals.

**Mary Retta** is an award-winning queer black writer and college student from Virginia. Her work has been included in various publications such as Local Wolves, EFNIKS, and Station 8. She is also a contributing writer at Luna Collective Magazine. Apart from her writing, Mary is also passionate about food, music, and her family's Netflix account.

**Margaret Rutley** has published poetry in literary journals in Canada, USA, UK, and New Zealand. She has been in several anthologies including They Gave Us Life -- Celebrating Mothers, Fathers & Others in Haiku which was shortlisted for the international Touchstone Distinguished Book Award. Her concrete poem can be found on underthebasho.com. Margaret collaborates with Sidney Bending and Nika and they are published as The Heron's Quill. Her haiku/senryu have won awards. She is a member of Haiku Canada, The Haiku Society of America, and the British Haiku Society.

**Mary Schmitz** is a New England based writer, artist, and avid traveler. She is an undergraduate student of English at Lyndon State College in Vermont and a graduate of Edwin O. Smith High School in Connecticut.

Due to the impact of the McCarthy Era on her journalist father, **Jane Shoenfeld** grew up in a low-income, high-creativity family. Her mother was a published short fiction writer at a time when women were expected to be housewives. Jane is both poet and painter (janeshoenfeld.com) and her poems have appeared in *Iconoclast*, *Santa Fe Literary Review*, *Malpais Review*, *Sin Fronteras*, and other publications.

**Hayley Shucker** has a Master's Degree in English and has studied literature and creative writing. One of her favorite time literary time

periods is the early modern period with Margaret Cavendish being her favorite period author. Daily, she strives to be a strong and brave woman.

**Suzanne Farrell Smith**'s work explores memory, health, education, and parenting, and has been published widely in literary and scholarly publications. A former elementary school teacher, Suzanne earned an MA from The New School and an MFA from Vermont College of Fine Arts, and now teaches courses on literacy and writing. She lives with her husband and three sons in a wooded wildlife-filled valley in southwestern Connecticut.

**Jeanine Stevens** studied poetry at UC Davis. Winner of the Ekphrasis Prize and National Poetry Award from WOMR Cape Cod Community Radio. *Brief Immensity,* won the Finishing Line Press Open Chapbook Prize. Poems have appeared in North Dakota Review, Pearl, Evansville Review, Forge, Tipton Poetry Journal, Provincetown Magazine and others.

**Maxine Susman** has published six chapbooks, most recently *Provincelands (*2016) and her poems appear in *Fourth River, Ekphrasis, Blueline, Adanna, Paterson Literary Review, The Healing Muse,* and elsewhere. She received Third Place in the Allen Ginsberg Contest, Honorable Mention for the New Jersey Poets Prize, and finalist for the Letheon Contest of *Anesthesiology*. She teaches poetry writing and short story classes at the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute of Rutgers University, where she earned the Marlene Pomper Teaching Award. A resident of Kingston, New Jersey, she belongs to the Cool Women poetry ensemble.

**Therese Tiger** is an emerging poet whose poems have recently been published in The American Poetry Journal and The RavensPerch. Tiger's poems are informed by her work leading workshops and support groups for parents, her childhood as the youngest of seven daughters, and her role as the mother of two young adult women.

**Gail Tyson**'s poetry appears in The Antigonish Review, Appalachian Heritage, Big Muddy, Cloudbank and other journals. An alumna of Centrum and the Dylan Thomas International Summer School, she has participated in juried workshops at Collegeville Institute, Looking Glass Writers Conference, and Rivendell Writers Colony.

**Ekweremadu Uchenna-Franklin** writes from Kaduna, Nigeria. His works have appeared in Transition Magazine, Grub Street Journal, Saraba Magazine, Wilderness House Literary Review, Coe Review, A&U American AIDS Magazine and elsewhere.

**Gina Valdés**'s poetry has been widely published in journals and anthologies in the U.S., Mexico, and Europe. Recent work appears or is forthcoming in Spillway, Huizache, 50/50: Poetry and Translations by Women over Fifty, and Full Bleed, full-bleed.org/verse.

Having lived in several states and outside the country, **Kelly Garriott Waite**, is happy to have recently returned to her native Ohio. When she's not writing, she spends her time walking in the woods, baking sourdough bread, and making jam. Her work has recently appeared in *BioStories, Allegro Poetry Review,* and the *Fourth River (Tributaries).*

Four times nominated for a Pushcart, **Florence Weinberger** published four books of poetry, a fifth, *Ghost Tattoo*, forthcoming from Tebot Bach. Poems have appeared in journals including Calyx, Rattle, Miramar, River Styx, Ellipsis, Poet Lore, Comstock Review, Nimrod, Cider Press Review, Poetry East and numerous anthologies. In 2012, she served as a judge for the PEN Center USA Literary Contest.

**Geraldine Kloos Weltman** is a retired New Jersey government researcher and manager. She now lives in Chicago, Illinois, after living for many years in Central New Jersey. Her work has appeared in *Adanna*, *U.S. 1 Worksheets*, and *Paterson Literary Review*.

**Lisa Whalen** has a Ph.D. in postsecondary and adult education and an M.A. in creative and critical writing. She teaches at North Hennepin Community College in Minnesota. Whalen's writing appears in *An Introvert in an Extrovert World*, *WorkingUSA*, *The Feisty Writer,* and The Emily Program blog, among other publications. Her blog is *Writing Unbridled*. Find her on social media as @LisaIrishWhalen.

**Joanne Jackson Yelenik**'s prose poem, "A Chat," Unbroken Journal, # 10, was a finalist in the 2017 Best of the Net Anthology. Her current project, a novel, Ocean Castles, speaks in various voices, demonstrating Joanne's enthusiasm for writing between genres, from lyric to prose poetry, and fiction to non-fiction prose essays and stories. She's added

the garden roof tops of Jerusalem to the familiar Judean Hills of Beit Shemesh as her favorite writing sites.

**Kim Zach** is a poet whose work has appeared in *U.S. 1 Worksheets, Genesis,* and *Clementine Poetry Journal.* Her poem "Weeding My Garden" was nominated for a Pushcart prize. She is a lifelong resident of the Midwest where she teaches high school English and creative writing.

**Caroline Zimmer** is a lifelong resident of the French Quarter in New Orleans. Her work has appeared in *The Maple Leaf Rag, Califragile,* and *Jabberwock Review,* where she was recently named a finalist for the Nancy D. Hargrove Editor's Prize for Poetry. She writes, paints, reads Tarot, and bartends in New Orleans.