

ADANNA

LITERARY JOURNAL

Founder/Editor
CHRISTINE REDMAN-WALDEYER

Issue No. 10

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

Visit our website for further details: www.adannajournal.blogspot.com

Adanna Literary Journal
P.O. Box 547
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Credits

Front Cover Artist: Patricia Callan

Front Cover Title: *Expectant*, acrylic on paper

Artist Statement

As someone who lives and writes kind of internally, I got into visual art in an attempt to help myself learn how to describe the world's physicality. This experiment was largely a failure—my writing is no more descriptive than it was—but no matter how nominally art has improved my writing, it has improved my life to an extraordinary degree. Simply put, it makes me happier. The subject in *Expectant* is a version of the woman I was before I had my daughters. She's surrounded by color and anticipation while the fanged danger of miscarriage creeps into frame from the bottom. There is a lot of pregnancy and motherhood in my work, all of which is decidedly not metaphorical. I want to convey what creation actually is, as opposed to what it can be symbolic of.

—*Patricia Callan, 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

Kristin Berkey-Abbott

Midlife Spells

Some see the new star as they study
the skies each night. Some find
a trail of crumbs made from inedible
heels and crusts, or larger meanings in the detritus
of daily consumption. Angel choirs
will sing to a few, but most of us
will hear no message.

Study the texts, the ancient
ones and those composed
by your compatriots.
Pray the words in your ancestors'
book, a litany in words both strange
and familiar. Write the codes
on the soles of your most rugged shoes.

Collect your treasures, the buttons
from your grandmother's blouse, her ring
that fits on your slimmest finger.
Keep the best recipes and the best photos.
Cast away the clothes that never fit.
You can have one shelf of books.

Winnnow your possessions down
to your favorites and your constants.
Avoid the houses made of gingerbread
and all the traps the world will set.
Make your way through the forest
of enchantments with the protections
only you can carry.

Kristin Berkey-Abbott

Oregon Trail

She leaves it all behind:
the furniture that never fit
her life, every cabinet full
of dishes that she always hated,
the art supplies, and every key
to locks known and unknown.

She leaves the interview suit hanging
in the closet, along with all the shoes
that pinched. She closes the suitcase
that holds only clothes in her current size.

She thinks of refugees and all they carried,
jewels sewn into hemlines
or those who flee without papers.
She checks her wallet one last time,
all the plastic cards that define
her in place.

She leaves the door unlocked
as she eats one last supper out
with a grad school friend. She writes
the wrong forwarding address on a napkin
before boarding the plane.

Cheryl Caesar

Relief in age

Leaving the dentist,
teeth like china, far too white
to be soiled with food;

Or the hairdresser,
with a bag roofing my head
against wind and rain;

Or a manicure,
my nails too new and perfect
to do a hand's work;

I think: now, no more
of new romances, pristine
like dolls in plastic,
or comics in their wrappers,
new cars waiting for a scratch.

Paige Caine

What Can I do for you?

She got her first job at sixteen; Ten Oaks Tavern, dive restaurant, family owned, the kind that buys its ice cream from the gas station across the street. They had her fill out her application on the white folded napkins she learned to space evenly on the table.

It was innocent independence, pocket money for a cute scarf. It was after school twice a week and every Saturday. It was a bright yellow dress, greeting customers with a brighter smile, “what can I do for you?” and answering questions emphatically. Nothing was ever a problem, dealing crayons to the children and high chairs to their parents. It was proud of herself, it was little girl in the big world, it was being the girl other staff stood up for — No, you may not buy her a shot, she’s sixteen, as the old men hung onto the bar til it closed, slurring speech.

But that bright yellow dress made her such a good hostess it maybe made some of that staff forget she was just sixteen, just a kid the day the bartender looked her up and down as she perched behind that hostess stand, thirty-year-old eyes too comfortable on sixteen-year-old skin. He was a manager, friends with the owner and that day he wrung out his dishtowel, smiled and said “Damn, I’d like you to ride me like a Shetland pony”

A sixteen-year-old mouth laughed like it was funny, like it was okay, as her eyes widened and everyone went back to work like normal.

Patricia Callan

On My Eighteenth Birthday,
My Friend Gave Me a Playgirl Magazine

and a scratch ticket—
a kind but insensible gift since it was the
first day that I could have bought them for
myself. No stranger to the human
penis, I found it shocking, nonetheless—
over-exposed in glossy color.

Yet it elicited no other response, attached to a
man who was giving a bath (and other things)
to a woman who was not me. And that's
never changed, nor has the pervasiveness
of pornography improved either of these reactions
to virtual sex, my ordinary narcissism
requiring both eye contact and at least the
vague possibility of mutual attraction.

The scratch ticket was a dud, too.

I love the internet, though— the rapidity
of change and the shiny new opinions.
I wonder if eighteen-year-olds still get porn
on their birthdays or if they ever get shocked
or bored, if they know how to doodle, or spell.

I think I'm forgetting.

I'm forgetting how the first time I sounded out
the word "beaver" it was spread across
a woman's legs, wide in an open
magazine in my uncle's truck, how I
suddenly understood why my mother wanted me to
sit like a lady when I wore a dress.

Elizabeth Cohen

Dogs Can Smell the Dark

In fourth grade our teacher
told us dogs could smell darkness

and furthermore cancer
and that hospitals

sometimes bring them in
to help spot it early on

it was remarkable
to think

those same animals that begged for dinner scraps
and made chaos of the trash

at the skatepark could do that
they had *abilities*

At home, our own dogs
dug a hole

behind our father's rose garden
so deep he said

we could probably peer down
and see Antarctica

We used to listen to them howl
when the other dogs howled

in people's yards far away
thinking maybe they were telling

each other how to do it
or describing what darkness smells like

or furthermore, light

Elizabeth Cohen

Checker

Sometimes I check my phone
in the middle of the night
to see if the world is ok, how
things are going, all around

I check the time and the weather
and then check on
the continents
one by one

Africa, South America,
Asia, Europe, I check to see
if Greenland has melted
into a soup of moss

or if Australia
is still in flames
Next, I check on the governments
to see if they
have gotten
out their warships
in the night,
are volleying ballistic missiles
like tennis balls, across the seas

On that topic, I always do
check up on the seas, Mediterranean
Caribbean, Black, Dead
and the oceans, too

I want to know how
all the fish are doing
and the sea mammals
and the delicate lace of the reefs

I sometimes check on stars and planets
and even the Crab Nebulae (beautiful!)

and our sun and the moon, of course,
to make sure it is still securely
locked in orbit and I check to see
what phase it's in—waning crescent
waxing gibbous, new or full –
this is important to me

Last of all, I check on you, my love
I check to see if you have sent me little messages
or videos from where you
are studying in Europe

a text about some funny musician
you saw playing spoons
or to see if you have sent me a little song
you made up about biscuits or rain

Sometimes you tell me you
have a rash or a fever
or about a test you are concerned
you might fail

but usually, knowing
about this checking
thing of me, you will send me
a picture of a single flower

(calla, orchid, caladium,
bloodroot), or a passing cloud,
just a torn piece of white
flying over the place you are

so far away
and write "it's ok, mama
go back to sleep"
because you know how I worry

at night about the rabbits
and the mother foxes in their dens of kits
and each and every infant born and all the dying
how that is going for them

Elizabeth Cohen

The watch

This is the last of my mother's
many gold-plated watches--
a *Timex*, the sort you wind up

with an elastic band that might catch
on the small hairs of your arm,
an experience that provokes a twinge

something not quite pain
but certainly not pleasant
not so unlike the flutter in your chest

each time you see this watch
still sitting on the bathroom shelf
all these years later

as if the ghost of her might be wondering
what time it is
or if she might step out of the shower

or wake from a nap
and think *where is my watch*
where is my daughter
where is my life

Katherine Flannery Dering

Self-Portrait as Overtime

Becoming Miss America was out, I realized at 13, peering at the women parading on our Zenith in swimsuits and high heels.

O! for long legs, blue eyes, beautiful teeth, adulation.
Pfft. You don't want to be like that anyway, Mother would say.

Her answer to envy: don't want. Making do became my mantra. I'd never be a tall blonde with nice clothes, cute boyfriend,

and spring vacations in Bermuda. I marched with the drill team, paddled with synchronized swimmers, and blended in.

I managed to stumble through motherhood and career
and was expecting to spend some years like my great aunts,

wearing odd hats and brooches on out-of-style dresses with peplums, and at some point, fade away.

But instead, my thoughts drifted to the boys,
the ones playing basketball right up to

the closing buzzer, then sudden death overtime—
now men who decide what they want and go for it.

And I, who had never thought much about what I *wanted*,
decide minutes before the game ends that I do want.

I want an overtime. I'll keep *mater familia* and business woman, sure. But I also want artist and world traveler,

author/philosopher/theologian. And I want my old hair back
—thick, shiny smooth, and russet brown to my waist.

Juditha Dowd

Benediction

Last night I held my grandmother
for a moment in my arms.
My mother had brought me to where
she reclined in the depths of an *easy* chair—
that's what she'd have called any seat
more forgiving than the plainest wood.
Reclined as she'd never have dared—
warned by her minister father
against the slouch, the sloth of relaxation.
Her hair still had the jet-black sheen
of the sensible shoes she polished daily,
right after she cleaned the chamber pots.
Briefly she turned her face toward mine,
decades younger than I'd seen it in life,
her eyes dream-bright and for once unclouded
by worry. Brief, but it stayed with me long after
I poured my tea and scratched my breakfast toast
with the dull edge of a table knife—the way
she'd made our butter rations last through WWII
(although now I was only minding calories).
I'd seen myself again beloved, and in that moment
almost worthy of it.

Alan Elyshevitz

Elizabeth Holtzman

Elizabeth, I want to apologize. I was a rapid constituent, but the Flatiron Building's elevator was slow. Inside the skin of a bike messenger, an all-purpose celebrity was taking shape. I moved through the urban flutter of pigeons, dodging the hard heels of busses. On rubber-stained permutating streets, only the odd rec center breathed a little light from within. Laundry looked dead without me in it. Still, I sensed the smoggy cogitation of two rivers poised to retaliate. Forgive me for wanting higher and higher education—and politics that took care of itself. Bodies, you warned, actual bodies are ferried underground.

Maryanne Hannan

Rereading the Classics

Pare them back, all the way back, to one small animal cry. How I see the classics now. Shakespeare's Jews, hey, the whole Western canon's Jews. Don't even mention blacks. Or the less than virtuously sexed.

Because you know what I discover? Myself.

Of the last century, yes. But a reading self barely taking note. Did I even pray with the psalmist that the Lord smite my enemies? From these, lips working with eyes in service to a brain hungering for metaphor, assonance, and Old World pastoral tea parties, from a heart smitten with its own super-pseudo-smugness. *People are the same throughout the centuries*, says my book club friend, *with the same struggles and yearnings today as ever*.

True it is, man- (and woman-) kind's pearls and offal lie buried together. Henry James said, *three things in human life are important. The first is to be kind. The second is to be kind. And the third, to be kind.*

Yet even the goodly grope blindly in the dark—
alone. I hear Emily, unleashed, unadorned.
After great pain, a formal feeling comes.

Gloria Keeley

Down The Long Night

think beehive and
private tiny entrances
the Poseidon of the garden
through the maze
the span to the end
a trail of stings

four quiet wings
flap timpani
float nectar to nectar

returning to their hive
crab-cracking percussion
shakes down their dreamland
notes progress horizontal
soft now, like cotton
“Nature Boy” by Miles Davis
lulls baby bees to sleep

Elaine Koplou

To the Women Across the Street

To the women across the street
who watered my plants:
thank you.

When the world unraveled
that snowy weekend in December,
splintering, scattering cohesion
like confetti
in all directions,
I fled, taking only the dog,
alone, broken, and bereft,
writing them off as
yet one more casualty.

Now when I come to claim them I see
in their leafy greenness,
resilience—
and begin to feel something
vaguely resembling hope
in the way they reach for the sunlight
always
seeking it out
from whatever direction
it can be found.
Unyielding in their search
however pale and clouded
they find it.
Watching them
I marvel at the way they lean unflinchingly
toward life.

Elaine Koplou

Holiday Party

It was the way she was being led
out from the bar, a woman
with eyes like no eyes. Limp.
Two men propping her up,
one on each side. Walk-dragging her
through the lobby. Hurrying
to the elevator. Their eyes alive, watching
for watchers. Her face blank,
steps faltering as they steered her
around the Christmas tree, past the candles,
the reindeer.

“Frosty” piped in from speakers
above. People coming and going, wishing
Happy New Year, hugging
under the chandeliers, the light
dancing around us. And the room
smelling of pine like the picnic
grove at South Mountain.

So, you could almost believe
it was a silent night, a holy night,
that all was well—the way people
just drive under overpasses not expecting
the concrete to fall. Or their assumption
the old oak tree won’t land on the house.
So, I was slow on the uptake, slow
to see her eyes were like no eyes,
her body like no body. Their arms
propping her up, weaving through
the music. The room like a pine forest,
and everyone thinking of cinnamon
and nutmeg and pecans and walnuts.

And that must be
what the security guard was thinking
of, too, when I rushed to him, pointing
That woman. That woman.
Why he nodded and shrugged,
“It’s OK; those guys are with her.”

Because it was Christmas
and outside the entrance moonlight
sprinkled the patio and all was calm
and all was bright.

Lisa C. Krueger

Granddaughter

Her body a whisper of girl, unlike
any I birthed - mine were sturdy,
solid; *Germanic*, my mother said.

Mama, am I fat?
my daughter used to ask.
This child pulls up pink ruffle

from hip to shoulder,
A mini-luau, I think to myself,
illogically, suddenly hungry,

thinking how I never believed
in starvation for beauty.
She watches me change.

My first bikini had pink hearts;
I didn't recognize my reflection.
After surgery, some women

can't look. Flowers on my suit
are gray. Sash of sun dress, zipper,
everything falling away.

We are together in the mirror.
I always told my daughter,
Magnificent, you

Jan LaPerle

Cupboard

One day I decide I'll do something
good for people,
but then I forget, then I nap,
then my daughter wants to make
lemon cake so we do that.
I stand on the stool
and begin this great hunt
for poppy seeds.
Hours pass and I'm on my tiptoes.
I stop searching for a minute to listen
to the wind. The branches snapping.
My daughter ran off again to her swing.
Her swing tied to the branch
of the tree she climbs.
The tree run-through with electric wires
in the yard she flies her kite in.
She flies it high as the cell tower.
Her dragon kite breathing fire.
Her dragon kite headed in a nosedive
straight into those electric lines.
I can't do anything about anything.
I'm trapped in the cupboard
forgetting what I'm searching for.
I dust the spice tops; they go on forever.
My hair too tight in its bobby pins.
Here as good as any place to pray.

Jan LaPerle

This Thing Like That

When she was little
my daughter would pull
a cotton ball from the bag
and place it in the little yard
of her hand, then shelter it
with the roof of her other hand.
She'd whisper into the windows:
I love you, I'll keep you safe.
If there ever were
a happy cotton ball.
Like coming home.
Like pulling off new shoes
at the end of the day.
Like sitting in my flowered chair
beneath the window looking out
and hearing it, suddenly,
almost too quick to catch,
like a car passing,
like wind.

Jan LaPerle

We Hold Up the Weight That Will Bring Us Down

The day the musk deer dies he falls
to the ground, his horn punctures
his stomach and what escapes
is the beautiful scent he'd spent
his life searching for. I'm thinking
of this when my uncle calls,
when he tells me my grandfather said
he is ready to die, and he's going
to take his little, black dog with him.
Sometimes when I swim in the pool
at lunch I pretend my worries
are washing off and falling like
river silt to the bottom.
Sometimes my coworker comes
with me and just stands there
in the middle of the lane we share,
and I pass her, lap after lap.
I catch a glimpse of her on an in-breath,
there smiling, her swim cap and goggles,
her nose pinched with a clip.
She tries to tickle my foot as I pass, but I'm
serious about my swim, I keep going,
my laugh, a half-submerged laugh,
which I imagine sounds like
the quick sound of a loud room
right before the door is shut.
Like how my daughter and I opened
the car door at Cumberland Falls a few
weeks ago and heard for the first time
the great sound of the river falling.
We stood on the concrete platforms
below the falls, by the side of the falls,
at the top of the falls where my daughter
and her little friend threw sticks into
the river and watched them catch
and disappear over the edge. Each time
they would holler, *that's my stick*,

as if it were a magnificent accomplishment,
and I think, no matter how often the world
replays the ends, I still can't get used to them.

Caylee Lyman

Nasty Woman

They call me Nasty Woman.
Gap tooth so wide the
Grand Canyon is jealous,
no brackets
or wires
could fence in these pearls,
pearls that cannot be coerced
out of their oyster.
My caterpillar eyebrows are
two long lost lovers
inching closer
to each other
everyday
aching
to crawl under the covers.
Sunflowers grow out of my skin,
fuzzy and tall and proud,
they dance in the breeze,
why would I ever cut them down?
My thighs make waves
the Moon could never,
she envies
the lack of effort,
throws her hands in the air at the sight of me.
I am the world's phenomenon,
a Nasty Woman.

Joanne Mallari

After close

the DJ asks me to sing one
we both know by Priscilla Ahn.

I say yes because I love
the resonance of an empty bar,

how words search for an ear
to land on, and I can untangle

myself from prying eyes, but even
this is uneasy. Underneath

the sappy crooning, I wonder
how it worked out for Priscilla,

taking long walks in the dark
and asking God who we're supposed

to be when nothing is constant
and everything turns—an hour

into a day, a rule into a reason
to do it anyway. From the patio,

two stars pierce the sky like diamond
studs in her cartilage. We inhabit

the space between the worry and
the what-if. She leans in, never mind

I haven't—hadn't—kissed a woman before.

Joan Mazza

Conessione

Beyond the clichéd link between butterflies and hurricanes, all events and living beings are interconnected. Trees branch like fractals, blood vessels divide like trees and roots, like rivers, streams. On a Tilt-a-Whirl, you feel the forces that created galaxies, and our tiny system of sun and planets. Kill weeds among vegetables and fruits, you kill the bees and bats who pollinate. One drop of pond water holds all secrets to life's web, its origins, and future health. Mosquitoes, snakes, rats, and wasps have their assigned jobs. Who can say if you are the warp or woof in the tapestry of another's life. Snags and ripples shine.

Joan Mazza

Shedding Pounds of Old Papers

Because I don't want to leave a tangled mess
for my personal representative, I promise
to find the Title to my house, discard old Wills
and insurance papers. Two hours on this dig
to fill two bags for recycling with documents
I didn't know I had kept: Florida licenses

as microbiologist, psychotherapist, teacher, Real Estate,
Out with proof of continuing education, handouts
for the workshops for those creds. I'm recycling
records of rabies shots, exams for dead pets, receipts
and business cards for exterminators and house
cleaners I no longer employ. Folders of poetry

rejection slips from the days when online
submissions were a fantasy and poor poets
paid for postage. A fat envelope of certificates
for poetry awards suitable for framing. Who
would do that? I discard old calendars, confident
I'll never be asked to testify to offer evidence

that I was in Monday morning book-making
classes in August 2018 or have to recall the names
of others present to support my claim of innocence.
Goodbye to the box of software manuals for programs
long defunct, and a box full of poetry journals
and magazines with my published poems. What

will I do with overhead transparencies for seminars
I won't teach again, and can't use this technology
even if I do? I've gone digital. It's all in my computer,
backed up to hard drives, flash drives, in the cloud.
How little I need. How much lighter, thinner I feel.
Surely I can fit into a size 6 again.

C.T. McClintock

Papagayo Lover

each and every year
you are born half goat
and die full ram
or is it a bull
something with horns
that exist to wound
those you use
I caught it one year
caught you charging
to your goal
whipping the world
into a panic
the leaves on the bushes
crying clutching
at the breast
of their mother
the hammocks
fwap-fwapping furious
snapping at you
you were ruining
the ladies' good hairdos
but I was proud
of the guinea hens
swaying in the jicaro
chattering gossiping
indifferent and unhurt
proof of solid life
thriving in the mess
that you leave behind
each and every year

Ranjani Neriya

Someone Sings

rose-bud and hawk-view
silk pewter ink
is the bodyless-ness of sleep
whence sun wakens
and in my mind someone sings
soft as lamb fleece

a bent woman in a purple cape
taps her cane, past
cloud pebble stream
keeps time to someone singing
in my mind an old pastoral ditty,
as she walks by the potter's wheel
where a knob of clay
pirouettes to shape
to the tune of someone
singing in my mind;

I distil birdsong
into a cup and drink,
follow the bent woman
as far as the potter's wheel
and we sit on a ledge amid
a slowness in the girth of trees,
the bent woman and I
hard by the pirouetting urn
on the potter's wheel
and we listen companionably
to someone singing in my mind
that longago pastoral ditty.

Janet Reed

Mud Turtles

*You strode deeper and deeper/ into the world, / determined to do
the only thing you could do – determined to save/ the only life
that you could save. “The Journey” Mary Oliver*

After the sun puddles the first frost,
wet leaves mulch my shoes,
the smell of compost and a poultice
of mud already seeding a new season
despite the sun clinging to still green grass.
My friend and I walk this trail debating
when to leave, when to stay, how to know.
I’m doing, I say, the thing I think I must do.
She points at a line of mud turtles
sunning their necks of the backs of old oaks
bent bare across the lake, little Rockettes
posed shell-to-shell poised for a cue
to dance I won’t see coming.
Knowing when to jump matters, she says.
I point to the trunks bearing turtle bodies --
horizontal bones in a vertical world --
and note the knots of roots swelling the bank,
stretching for soil and water, the burden
of those barkless trees theirs alone to bear.
It’s like that, I tell her, not giving up,
not letting go, no matter what.
The turtles one-by-one kick and plink
their return to the bottle-green pond.
One small ripple, then nothing.
No second act. No encore.

Shoshauna Shy

In The Dress Room Mirror
@ Goodwill Industries

What a shock that's you
in the body your mother gave
all the dancers in her paintings: tiny
waists atop voluminous hips, flesh
curving from the groin like ocean waves,
what your Polish great-aunts called *zaftig*.
You had long assumed the sylphic grace
of your limbs were yours for keeps, but they
were only on loan through your 40's. Now every
pretzel freshly-baked and exuding its aroma through
the mall, every cup of dipping sauce, every mound of raw
cookie batter you snatched from the bowl sits between
kneecaps and hips, a bulk you can't shoehorn into
A-lines anymore.

Those men in your household who with age got lean
and sinewy as strips of beef jerky don't balance
paunches, don't shave jowls; one of them
your husband who reminisces how he
once slipped a pair of your jeans on
by mistake, and you can't blame child-
bearing because that shared pair
happened in the decade *after*
they got diplomas.

Face it. Unless incapacitated, you will never
denounce walnut streudel long enough
to share Levis with your husband again.
But does that compare with the heft
of a hot Monte Christo; with dollops
of guacamole crowning a taco;
the opportunity 3 x per day to dance
between hunger and fulfillment

when not everybody is bequeathed
with responsive taste buds nor
functional digestion; not everybody owns

a pocketbook capable of providing abundance,
so why deny this joy? Why die like a corseted lady
on the Titanic, who with teeth gritted, had no
idea what was coming and waved away
the dessert cart?

Shoshauna Shy

Knitting Lessons

Delightful, so! – my 8th grade daughter
on our long walk home
from a knitting lesson
asking did I know I wanted her dad
the day I saw him.
As if wings sprouted from my shoulder blades,
I'm on my toes
to supply that story – the assurance
in his grip as he steered the boat
through Lake Parr and up the river; the laughter
that led to wine and lilacs; our straight shot
down certainty's stream.

*Well, is it possible for me to have
a marriage that's better?*
asks this child I toted through thick and thin,
now a virgin near-woman through whose skin
has emerged a spectator
and critic.
I see the back of her father's head – his
workbench weekends and solo studies,
the cold dinners I tuck away.
A trapped bird flaps inside my skull,
scatters rote relief he does not drink nor stray

while this daughter sees not the knots
that bind – but what lies loosened.
In the sidewalk stretches between the shade
of arching trees, her searchlight shines.
And before I can censor my response
to this tender youngest of five,
words burst like bees
from a stirred hive --- *Actually, yes,*
she hears me say, *don't have so many
children.*

Linda Ann Strang

Mother and Daughter Understory

In my feral fantasies
of American hemlock,
you should have been born
in Olympic Park:
amber maneuvers

of butterflies felt
through amniotic fluid;
child of a fiddlehead,
dogwoods, ardor,
rhododendron, dog star, other;

moss on the rocks
to mattress my travail,
volcanic sand
beneath my fingernails.
All the living must rise above

the lochia scented layette of blood.
Then received by yttrium,
and other rare earths, the afterbirth.
Hummingbirds to fan your neonate face,

bright-eyed beadles,
fern vernix the bed,
butterfly midwives –
my Hades princess.

RC deWinter

saudade in blue flat minor

he was woodsmoke and whiskey
and what's left in your eyes
after every tear has been cried
and skin so hot it singed me
when he stretched himself along my thirsty body

his eyes the manytinted sky just before a storm
his hands tools of love
but his voice is what i remember most
i wanted to smear that butter melted over gravel
head to toe

i knew from the beginning
he wouldn't stay
i was too old
he was too restless
i never let myself love him
he never loved me
but for the time we were together
satan blushed
with every masterpiece we painted

Hannah Wynne

Sugarcoated

I learn to put on lipstick in the car before my first shift; soft on the
 cupid's bow, heavy on the pout. Put

my finger in my mouth & pull out the excess so that
 when I smile, my teeth are white; when I speak,

I taste *lanolin, alumina, parfum*, but look like *creme*.
 Buttered and slippery as the warm rolls I carry,

soft as the eyes of the men that look at my hemline
 instead of their filets, innocent as the quick touch

of my boss's hand in the place where my dress stretches
 when I bend over to get silverware napkins.

All I ever did was smile; opening my mouth
 would have cracked the glaze. I have

held the word *No* in my mouth so many times
 it's become round and polished, smooth as

the cigarettes I shared with Holly by the hood of my car
 outside the coffeeshop, freshly shaved legs

tucked up in the dirt, sweet nicotine fingers up to my mouth
 as she asks *Have you?*

Have you done it yet? & it was so easy to exhale
 as I said *No*.

F

FICTION

Linda Boroff

Dead Weight

Robinette Alcorn slept poorly at fourteen; her body did not seem designed for comfortable repose. When she lay on her side, her bony hips grew sore. The back of her head grew numb when she lay supine. Phantom itches sprang up on the backs of her thighs, the soles of her feet. She sweated or froze. Come morning, she left for school puffy and sullen, red creases in her face, her hair awry. Weekends, she slept until noon, waking ferocious and unrested. This morning, Saturday, she had been awakened a little after nine.

“Get dressed,” said her mother, Louise, “and not that skirt, you know which one. We’re going to see Grannie.”

“But today’s not Sunday,” Robinette pouted into her pillow.

“Well, we’re going. And your father too. I just had a call from Mrs. Von Bukus. Grannie’s had another stroke or something.”

“Oh no!” Robinette bolted from the bed in her long, baggy red T-shirt. She was nearly five feet ten already, with budding breasts, long arms and fingers, a thin, swanlike neck and a small, close-cropped head with large blue eyes and full lips. “Is Grannie going to die?”

“Who knows?” Louise picked up a sweater from the floor and folded it in three quick jerks. “I have a million and one things to do today, and now this.”

“Don’t break down with grief or anything.”

“And don’t start.” Louise was a tall, hippy woman with straight, shoulder-length brunette hair and an incongruously beautiful face, weary and exotic, like the faces of cinematic European spies. But behind the dark, sloe eyes lived a cypher. To Robinette, her mother led a meaningless existence, obsessed with the strategic details and machinations of her boss at work, a woman she called “The Red Queen.” Louise would spend hours on her phone or email concocting strategies with her office allies, plotting coups, trying to outguess and outmaneuver their adversaries.

“Ten minutes, Missy,” Louise called back over her shoulder as she departed.

Robinette rose and drifted to her window, lifting the shade. The morning sun shone gold through the brilliant green fronds of the palms across the street, like Pearl Harbor just before the attack. Robinette placed herself there, in Hawaii, beneath the palms at night in a strapless peach organdy gown, sipping rum with a doomed young pilot. The ocean

shimmered in the moonlight under a sky innocent of warplanes. Robinette constructed the pilot's face carefully, a blend of Pete Bestrom, her school's football captain, and Rupert Brooke the poet. Pete-Rupert gazed at her steadily above the rim of his glass. His eyes dropped to her swelling bosom. Soon, they would be lovers, and tomorrow morning, The Attack.

"You always get like this," came Louise's voice from downstairs. "You guilt-trip me into visiting her week after week and then get utterly vile when I suggest you take some responsibility on yourself."

"I suggest," said Alvin Alcorn, "you shut up and let me eat."

"That woman never gave me a good word in her life. And now who's her only visitor? Me. While her precious son sits in front of that TV all weekend like a goddamn Buddha." From the staircase, Robinette saw her father bolt from his chair, hitting his thighs on the underside of the table, which heaved upwards, jolting the pitcher of grapefruit juice. Louise caught it in time, but Alvin's chair teetered backward and fell with a crash.

"Have a tantrum," shouted Louise, hurling her spoon onto the table, "but you're coming today. She's your mother, for Chrissake."

Alvin kicked at his upturned chair. "Piece of shit." He set the chair on its legs and lurched from the room. The torn air reverberated as if following a gunshot, traumatized molecules dashing around pell mell. Frowning, Louise peeled an egg.

"It's not Grannie's fault she's in the nursing home, Mom," said Robinette, descending the stairs cautiously.

"That's just it. It's not. But he can't stand her, is the sad truth, and she has to be visited, so he sends me. God forgive me, I can't stand her either. Why do you think we moved down here, back when your grandpa was still alive? To be away from her."

"Mom."

"Do you know what she used to do? When your father and I were just married, she used to snoop through my closet and read the labels on my clothes. 'A Pendleton sweater, aren't we the fine lady,' she said once in front of the whole family, all those pinch-faced hausfraus from Minneapolis. 'How can you afford Pendleton sweaters on my son's salary?' And those were *my* sweaters I bought with my own money, before I was even married. Sure, I had nice things when I was single." Louise, mouth full of egg, burst into tears.

Robinette rolled herself a breadball and sank her teeth reflectively into the dense gluten. It was hard for her to imagine Grannie as anything but bedridden and null. There were pictures, of course: the

young Melissa (Missy) Dahlen, born 1932 in Minneapolis. Grannie at five years old was a solemn, pale-eyed child in a sailor suit, blonde curls in corkscrews down her shoulders. And teenage Grannie perched on a splintery-looking front porch rail with her brother, looking like Bonnie and Clyde. Grannie's stockings had seams and her hat was tilted over one eye.

At eighteen, Missy had married Chuck Alcorn, a cabinet maker of great precision, thrifty, tyrannical and dull. He had been saved from war service by the loss of three toes to frostbite as a child. Two years later they had moved to Watsonville, California, where they lived out a joyless, provident domesticity, canning produce, clipping coupons and bickering over issues trite and unresolvable.

They had had four children: Robinette's father, his younger brother, Sam, and two girls who had married and moved far away, to Delaware and Florida, so that Robinette rarely saw her cousins. Uncle Sam had gone to war and returned an alcoholic. He lived in Minneapolis because they had "good program" there, meaning Alcoholics Anonymous. Every time Sam fell off the wagon, he would call Robinette's father in L.A. and rant and sob by the hour. When he finally hung up, Alvin would call an ambulance in Minneapolis and get Sam to the Veteran's Hospital.

Grandpa Alcorn had died five years ago, and Grannie had lived on in the old house alone, seldom visited. But after her stroke, Robinette and her family had driven up from L.A. and moved Grannie down to the Casa Contenta, close to their home.

They had found Grannie's house crammed with paperback novels of passion, duplicity and scandal, some dating back to the Forties. While her parents sorted through furniture and mementos, Robinette had closeted herself away with the books. On the covers, ruby-lipped adulteresses and wanton barflies with massive cleavages gazed provocatively at blue-jawed detectives. Remote Caribbean jungles teemed with lustful colonists' wives in ripped blouses, luring muscular overseers in bulging jodhpurs. Reading the fragile yellow pages, Robinette had wrinkled her nose at the clumsy language. She knew that this was bad writing, yet it seemed to flow pretty well, holding her attention despite herself: "Even murderesses need love," Rae whimpered at me. I never could resist the tears of a blue-eyed broad, so I gave it to her all that night, and a little extra in the morning, because I knew that where she was going, men would be in short supply."

Los Angeles seethed and simmered in its midday miasma. Despite the air conditioning, the sun came hot through the windows of

the Buick. Traffic was bumper-to-bumper both ways on Santa Monica Boulevard; indifferent faces peered from creeping, honking Volkswagens and BMWs. The homeless wandered along Veteran Avenue, pushing carts or dragging bags. Robinette turned and looked out the back window; in the distance, more cars sat stalled on a web of freeway overpasses.

Cursing, Alvin Alcorn turned into a small parking lot and stopped the car. He took a deep breath and rubbed his eyes with the heels of his hands. He smoothed the sparse blond hair back from his temples and took another deep breath. When it came to Granny, Robinette thought, her father was a sort of human hand grenade. Alvin worked as a surveyor for the City of Santa Monica. He intended to get a civil engineering degree, but that was not “coming together for him right now,” was what her mother said to friends. That was how people in her mother’s world talked to each other, using English words that were somehow another language entirely. They said things like “we may have to elevate this,” instead of “I’m mad at you.”

It’s my fault, thought Robinette. If I hadn’t been born, Daddy could have gone to school until the cows came home, and so could mom have. Louise would not have had to be a marketing secretary writing schedules all day long. She could have written a novel, which she insisted was her true calling in life. Robinette thought of Granny’s novels. Writing those must have been fun in a forbidden sort of way. She decided to try writing one when they got home, as long as nobody read it.

Before them, sandwiched between a supermarket and a discount shoe store, awaited the Casa Contenta, a single story of spangled lime stucco with a flat roof and white trim. Two shrubs curried into lollipops protruded from a small lawn of bluish pebbles. A thin sidewalk bisected the pebbles, and just before the front door stood a black plaster gnome in a jockey cap with a ring through his nose.

“Take that look off your face,” said Louise to nobody in particular. “Hello, Mrs. Von Bukus, we’re the Alcorns, all of us for *once*.” She looked significantly at Alvin.

“Well I guess I know the Alcorns by now,” said Mrs. Von Bukus, rising from behind a beige metal desk. “Nice to see you here, Mr. Alcorn.” Her mauve lips drew back to expose an arsenal of gleaming teeth. She wore a button on one lapel of her blue suit that was a pair of praying hands. The other lapel sported a happy face with one eye a winking slit. On her desk, in a heart-shaped frame, was a portrait in profile of her Doberman, with the word *Schwanli* underneath in Gothic blackletter. Alvin Alcorn, deadpan, studied the portrait.

Mrs. Von Bukus, smiling now with lips closed, picked up a clipboard and briskly led the way down a chilly iodofomed hallway lined with stainless steel dollies and bags of laundry. In the background, over Muzak, came occasional chanting, singing and ululating. They turned into a ward of four women, all of whose television sets were on different channels. The room was warm, sunlight pouring in through a glass wall beyond which Los Angeles retreated in hazy perspective.

“Look who’s here to see Grannie Alcorn,” bellowed Mrs. Von Bukus, and unexpectedly grabbed Robinette by the shoulders, thrusting her forward and down, so that her face encountered the brown tissue of her grandmother’s face, mottled and flaccid. One side was weakly animated with greeting, but the hemiplagia, dull and glum, kept its own counsel, staring half-lidded straight ahead.

“Hi, Grannie,” said Robinette, and held her breath against the fusty old woman smell. Louise, smiling like a rictus, bent and kissed Grannie’s forehead. Alvin hovered in the background, starting forward then catching himself, swaying and nodding.

“Mom?” Said Alvin Alcorn, “How have you been? They tell me not so hot.”

“Alvin!” said Louise.

“Goddammit, Louise,” said Alvin. Grannie did not respond, but looked down and began plucking at her blanket with her good hand. Robinette glanced quickly at the other grannies in the room. Two munched their gums avidly, one without comprehension of the scene before her, one apparently with. Another, comatose, had tubes in her arms and nose. At a loss, the Alcorns gazed about them with false interest, peeking from the corners of their eyes at Grannie, who sat hunched and lanky and stoic, like an old lioness, ignoring them. Two minutes passed heavily in the hot, cacophonous room,

“Oh, for heaven’s sake,” hissed Louise to her husband. “She won’t even talk to us.”

“Well maybe she can’t, Mom,” said Robinette.

“Jesus this room’s hot,” said Alvin. “Can’t you open those windows or something, let some air in? This can’t be good for them.”

“We get cold,” said one of the other women, “yi yi yi.”

“Louise,” said Alvin, “will you come outside for a minute? Ma, we’ll be right back, I promise.” Grannie did not acknowledge them. Robinette moved closer and sat in a chair beside the bed. She took Grannie Alcorn’s claw in her hand.

“I hope you feel better soon, Grannie,” she said. Grannie Alcorn did not reply, but a trickle of drool leaked from her mouth. Robinette

dabbed at it with a corner of the bedsheet. “There’s this boy at school, Jack James,” said Robinette, “I used to think he liked me, but I found out he really likes Terri Kleist. All the boys like her because she’s developed.”

“He came to me last night,” Grannie Alcorn suddenly said, clear as day.

“Who, Grannie?” said Robinette.

“He was in a blue Duesenberg,” said Grannie, “upholstered in kid.”

“Kid?” Robinette’s eyes widened. She glanced around for her parents but they were nowhere in sight.

“He was at the wheel, my Ramon, and his hair was so black and smooth. Oh my, he was handsome. And it began to rain. And suddenly we were standing in the street, but he wasn’t getting wet. And I got soaked.”

“Oh, that’s too bad.”

“Of all his women, why would he return to me?”

“I don’t know, Grannie.”

“They stabbed him fifteen times,” said Grannie Alcorn, “In broad daylight, outside a bar in Salinas.” Robinette’s eyes grew wide again.

“Is that from one of those books, Grannie? Is that what you’re dreaming about?”

“Don’t be stupid. It was Chuck’s men. I know it was, sure as I’m alive. They murdered my Ramon. Murderers. Murderers!”

Robinette looked around wildly. “I’ll go get somebody.” She rose, but Grannie Alcorn reached out quickly and grabbed her arm, pulling her back into the chair with astonishing strength. Grannie’s covers had fallen away, and her bosoms lolled beneath her thin hospital gown. Her gnarled, varicose feet protruded from the covers at the end of the bed.

Grannie Alcorn began to tremble. Foam appeared at her mouth.

“What is it, Grannie?” said Robinette.

Louise and Alvin reentered the room. “Ma, what’s wrong?” Alvin peered down at her with alarm. “Louise, will you get the goddamn nurse?” Louise turned and went outside.

“Daddy, she was talking just fine a minute ago,” said Robinette, feeling guilty: had she caused this?

Mrs. Von Bukus swept in, followed by a nurse. “Why she holding your hand, isn’t that nice,” said the nurse. “C’mon, Grannie

Alcorn,” she leaned close, “it’s Ruby who bring you cold soup that time.”

“Every time,” mumbled Grannie,

“You see?” said Ruby to Robinette, “she her old self. C’mon, Grannie, give us a little hell. Things ain’t been the same around here.” Ruby turned to Louise. “She must have had a little stroke.” Louise came over and tugged at Robinette’s arm once, twice. The arm slipped from Grannie Alcorn’s grasp, and Louise walked her daughter quickly out of the room.

“Mom, who’s Ramon?” Robinette looked back in at Grannie, who was shaking her head over and over, eyes closed.

“What Ramon? I don’t know. Ask your father.”

“I don’t think I will,” Robinette said.

“Suit yourself.”

“This,” some man was saying in the corridor outside, “is the last time you put me through this.”

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Halley Fehner

What Was Dropped

His wife told him on the ferry to Calais that she wanted a divorce. She looked out at the white cliffs of Dover, her hair whipping around her face, and said it so quietly that her words blew away as soon as they were out of her mouth. “What did you say?” he asked, and she repeated it, this time leaning toward his ear. Then she fumbled with her wedding ring, twisting it around and up her finger. “Here,” she said, dropping it into his palm, but the ring slipped through his fingers and fell, without even a splash, into the white foam below. “Oh,” she said, staring down at the water. “I’m sorry, Luke.”

His wife dropped things for a living. Luke had met her six years ago in an art gallery that was displaying her work. The large canvases were covered in splatter marks of all colors—huge star-shaped forms of green, blue, magenta, and red. He was staring at one when a woman came up behind him. “I drop paint balls off of buildings,” she said. She cocked her head, her long earrings tangling in her dark hair. “This one I made from the top of the Leaning Tower of Pisa.”

He walked with her around the gallery, listening to her explain each painting’s origin. The gallery consisted of what she called a “European series”—works that she had made from atop buildings in Europe. “This one I did from the Tower of London. Let me tell you, the Beefeaters were not happy.” She laughed, then pointed to a large painting made up of blue and yellow splatters. “This one I made from the castle in Bratislava, and, well, nobody cared at all.”

By the time they had reached the gallery’s end, he was captivated. When she handed him a brochure on her work, he fiddled with it in both hands, then asked if she would go to dinner with him. She smiled and shook her head. She couldn’t, she said. She didn’t go out to dinner with strangers.

He found articles about her in the *Times* that compared her to Pollock. “Ms. Michaela Rossi achieves what Jackson Pollock might have come to artistically had he lived longer,” one reviewer stated. “Her work is a natural termination of Pollock’s, and perhaps even more interesting than Pollock’s in the public disruption it causes.” The reviewer went on to explain how Ms. Rossi caused outright disorder on 82nd Street when she dropped paint from the tenth floor of an apartment building and accidentally colored a woman’s white poodle green.

Luke went to more of her gallery openings, found her among the crowds. “I’m not such a stranger anymore,” he said, after their fourth meeting. “Will you go to dinner with me now?” She agreed, and he took her to a French restaurant, where they ordered too much wine. He told her of his job teaching European history at Columbia and his ex-wife, and she told him about her large Italian family in Brooklyn. They talked until midnight, then stumbled their way to Central Park, where they kissed on a park bench. They married six months later.

She moved into his apartment on the Upper West Side, and spent the first year of their marriage completing a series of paintings that she made from their bedroom window by dropping paint onto canvases in the enclosed courtyard below. “I’m going to call it the ‘Honeymoon Series,’” she told him. He hung a set of paintings in the living room—three large canvases with green and blue that matched the sofas. Sometimes, when she wasn’t around, he sat on the couch and stared at them, wondering why he liked them so much. At dinner parties, he would ask people what they thought they looked like, and the guests would supply answers—Flower petals! Sea shells! Australia!—until Michaela, embarrassed, would motion everyone into the dining room.

Over several semesters, he taught a series of classes that made a steady chronological march from the French Revolution to World War II. Michaela grew bored with paint, and, in a fit of post-modernism, started using other liquids—Windex, red wine, bleach. Her art morphed into something he didn’t recognize, more vulgar and less beautiful. One afternoon, he came home to find her standing over a canvas on the floor, digging a paring knife into her finger. Drops of blood fell next to a larger, redder stain. “Oh my god,” he said, “Michaela, what are you doing?”

“Comparing,” she said. “What do you think? Does this color look anything like blood?”

He grabbed her hand. “Why are you doing that?”

“It’s art, Luke.”

“Making yourself bleed?”

She smiled. “Suffering is the life of an artist.”

“Michaela, that’s not funny. What happened to paint?”

She sat down on the sofa and sighed. “I’m tired of paint. I feel like a teenager, lugging around all these paint balls.”

He began watching her, following her as she walked around the kitchen, asking her every evening what she had done during the day. “Stop it, Luke,” she would say. “Stop bothering me.”

He went downstairs to talk to Gloria, an elderly woman who could be counted on for neighborhood gossip. It was Gloria who informed him of the new things his wife was dropping—eggs, tomatoes, globs of soft cheese. Gloria had seen these items fall past her window and spatter on canvases in the courtyard below. “She used to make nice-looking paintings,” Gloria said, shaking her head. “Such pretty colors.”

“What’s wrong?” Luke asked Michaela that night. She was setting the table for dinner, plates in her hands.

“Nothing’s wrong.”

“Why are you dropping food?”

“You’ve been talking to Gloria.”

“Can’t you tell me what’s wrong?”

She let go of the plate, and it shattered in all directions across the kitchen floor. “Stop asking me questions!” she shouted. “I can’t stand it. You’re suffocating me.”

So he stopped. He stopped following her around the kitchen, stopped coming home early from work. He started staying late at the university, tweaking the book he was writing on World War II, meaning to rework chapters but spending more time looking out the window, watching the wind blow through the trees and expose the leaves’ white underbellies. When the leaves began to fall, he found himself even more distracted, and had to close the blinds.

Inexplicably, she grew more famous. A San Francisco gallery put on an exhibit that broke her work into artistic periods (the current, Luke noticed, being “New Mediums”). “Good lord,” said Michaela, shaking her head. “I must be washed up if I’m old enough for a retrospective.” Luke missed the opening because he was giving a reading for his book, finally released. The reviews were decent, but Luke couldn’t help noticing that the critics mentioned Michaela was his wife, as if that made any difference in a book about World War II.

Coming home late one evening, he met Gloria in the elevator. She told him that Michaela hadn’t dropped anything lately. “Not even food?” he said, half-joking, but she shook her head in grave seriousness—nothing. When he entered the apartment, he found Michaela lying on the sofa, her eyes closed. He crept up to her, cautious. “Michaela?”

“Mm?”

“Are you okay?”

“Sure.”

She was tired, he thought, tired of this apartment, this city. She needed inspiration. “Why don’t we take a trip?” he asked her. “How about Europe?” She nodded, then got off the couch to cook dinner.

They flew into Heathrow and spent three days in London, walking along the Thames and visiting museums. At the Tate, they sat for a while in the Rothko room, where the giant monoliths of color glowed in the low light. “Would you like it better if I were boring like this?” Michaela asked. He had thought it was a joke so he laughed.

On the fourth day, they drove to Dover to explore the white cliffs and caught a late afternoon ferry to France. And on the ferry, Michaela told him she wanted a divorce.

It hadn’t occurred to Luke that Michaela might be tired of him. He had thought about the city and her art, but he had never thought it was him. He stared down at the water, trying to pick out the spot where the ring had disappeared into the Channel, vaguely understanding that it was nearly a mile back by now. Had she dropped it? Had he? Did it matter? He searched the deck for his wife, but she was nowhere to be seen. The wind slapped against his face, making his eyes water.

The ferry came into Calais as the sun was setting, giving the water a red glow. The dark clouds had cleared away, and sun came out for the last hour of the day, bathing everything in soft light.

“Where do you want to go?” he asked Michaela as they buckled themselves into the rental car.

“I don’t care,” she said. “It doesn’t matter to me.”

He drove through northern Calais slowly, unsteadied by driving on the right side of the road in a British car. He contemplated going to their hotel, but the thought of being alone with Michaela in a small room worried him. He parked the car at the beach, the most open space he was going to find. Michaela peeled off her shoes and socks, then walked out toward the water. Luke followed, walking parallel along the shoreline. He kept his distance. She was more beautiful from far away.

He saw large concrete structures ahead—solid trapezoids with wing-like buttresses. Michaela ran up to them, then turned back to him. “What are they?” she said. He stared at her blankly, surprised.

“They’re German bunkers,” he said.

“Oh.”

He wanted to explain the history of Calais to her—how the Nazis had fortified the French coast, how Calais had been a launching point for bombing raids on London. He didn’t tell her, because he knew she didn’t care. She was examining the bunkers’ colorful graffiti.

There were scraps of metal lying around the bunkers, parts of old chairs and strange rusty shapes. He almost told Michaela to be careful where she stepped but didn't. He imagined her stepping on a piece of metal, her foot bleeding. He imagined himself taking off his shirt and tying it around her foot, then scooping her up in his arms. "Don't drop me, Luke," she would say, her arms around his neck, and he would tell her he would never let go.

"Why do you want a divorce?" he said, coming up to her.

She looked out toward the water. "I don't want to talk about it right now."

"You can't just tell me you want a divorce and then not talk about it."

She picked up a handful of sand, letting it slip between her fingers. "I'm tired of it."

"Tired of what?"

"Of being married. You make me feel trapped, Luke. You were so excited about my art when we first met. But then, I don't know, I started dropping other things and you didn't like it anymore. And it was like you didn't like me anymore, either." She turned to him. "You never realized that I was using household products. The reviewers saw it, but you didn't. One reviewer said I was reflecting the confinement of every housewife. But you never read the reviews. You didn't care." Her hair blew around her face, and she pushed it out of the way. "So, I don't want to be married anymore. Not to you. Not to anyone. I'm sorry, Luke."

She looked at him for a moment, then walked off toward the ocean. He sat down in the sand, sinking into its softness. He thought about all the things she had dropped—spaghetti sauce, wine, bleach, eggs, cheese. She had been systematically destroying pieces of their domestic life, and he hadn't noticed. He realized then he was the last thing to go. He was what was dropped.

Jonathan Ferrini

Tea with Old Friends

It was a weekly treat for me to attend an elegant, afternoon, “High Tea” at the beautiful “Mark Hopkins Hotel” after church services across the street. The “Mark” held a commanding view of San Francisco from its location atop Nob Hill, and provided a beautiful view of the iconic bridge, bay, and city below.

I was always welcomed by my waiter, Franco, a fifty year employee, who reserved my favorite, long, green, supple, silk covered, chaise lounge, which included two long arms, and a matching foot rest. With charm and grace, Franco would gently roll up a brass serving table with a glass top, displaying my assortment of English teas, finger sandwiches, and exquisite pastries. Franco always included a glass of sherry which often times induced an afternoon nap, and dreams of our exotic travels as a family.

Across from my chaise lounge, was its “sister”; a beautiful, vintage, velvet, bright red sofa with gold leaf accents. It looked as if it previously held a prominent place within the palace of Czar Alexander. The red sofa was so elegant, it appeared to be a museum piece, and only on occasion, would people sit upon it with reverence. Both furniture pieces were handcrafted at least one hundred years earlier. I always admired people with an appreciation for fine furniture who would photograph, and admire the beautiful red sofa.

We were situated in a quiet corner of the magnificent hotel lounge where I could sit alone with my memories, nap, or watch the hotel guests come and go. My heart was always warmed by watching a young mother introduce her daughter to High Tea, reminding me of my precious moments with my daughter, now grown with a lovely daughter of her own, attending Stanford.

Franco wore his spotless, white waiter’s jacket, white shirt, black bow tie, pressed black trousers, and shoes shining like mirrors. Franco put two children through college working at “The Mark”, and was the last of a dying breed of professional waiters. He felt like family and treated me like royalty, greeting me as “Madame”, and always nearby at my beckon call. He remembered the many private dinners my husband and I shared, our anniversary celebrations, birthdays, and lavish New Year’s parties we hosted. He was careful to remind me of these precious memories because it always brought me tears of joy, albeit, bittersweet, now that I’m elderly and alone.

The chaise lounge and I became friends because I believed it had a soul. Its arm rests were like the embracing arms of a loved one, comforting me as I reflected upon my long life; a depression era teenager, soldier's wife, mother to a beautiful grown daughter with an equally beautiful granddaughter, and a handsome son killed in Vietnam, whose untimely, and unnecessary death, left an open "wound" within my heart. We had a comfortable life in San Francisco, and managed quite a bit of international travel as my husband was transferred around the world in the course of his business. We fell in love with San Francisco and decided to make it our home when we retired.

I often fell into a deep sleep within my chaise lounge, and awoke to find a blanket carefully placed over me by Franco, and a plush pillow beneath my head. I had a dream that my departed husband was calling for me from the opposite side of our home, as was his custom. I hadn't dreamed of my husband for decades, and surmised, I was being called to "join" him shortly. I welcomed the day when we might be reunited in the afterlife. I missed him, dearly.

I was ninety years old and watched my friends die over the years. Except for church, periodic visits from my daughter and granddaughter, I lived a reclusive life, but was content.

I returned one Sunday afternoon for High Tea to find the entire hotel lounge had been remodeled. I walked about, hurriedly looking for my chaise lounge and its "sister", the red sofa. I believed that I might have entered the wrong hotel until I was met by Franco.

"Franco, what happened to the lounge? Where are my chaise lounge and the red sofa?"

"The hotel management remodeled the lounge last week to attract younger guests. I miss the old décor, as well, Madame."

"Where did the chaise lounge and red sofa go? Perhaps, they're in storage? I would like to purchase both immediately!"

"The work was completed during the overnight hours so as to minimize our guest's inconvenience, but I will inquire on your behalf, Madame."

The General Manager, a young Swiss hotelier, soon thereafter, approached me, apologizing, "I'm sorry Madame but the previous furnishings were taken away by a moving company to an undisclosed location at the behest of our interior designers who don't have any further information on their whereabouts."

The General Manager and Franco knew I was heartbroken by the loss of my favorite chaise lounge and its "sister" sofa. They provided me

with a beautiful Queen Anne chair adjacent to the fireplace, and graciously provided my “High Tea” at no charge.

I considered my favorite furniture as friends, and was thankful for the privilege of knowing them. I prayed both the chaise lounge and red sofa met a beautiful fate, perhaps displayed with honor in a vintage furniture shop, soon to be purchased, hopefully together, and appreciated by new owners for decades to come? If I knew which store, I’d immediately purchase them both and move them into my Pacific Heights home.

At ninety, I had grown accustomed to losing friends and loved ones, but the loss of two inanimate, beautiful, vintage, furniture pieces, providing only comfort, never the pain and sorrow humans mete out, devastated me. I dreaded the thought they may be sitting in a landfill, slowly decaying, like an elderly woman. I prayed they did in fact, have souls, and would fondly remember the many guests they comforted, including me.

Adjie Henderson

The Wine Glass

The holiday lights lit up the cabinet making each wine glass a part of the decorations of the season. The glasses passed the blinking lights back and forth as if preparing for a dance. The little wine glass stood proudly among the other assorted glassware in the cabinet. It was different from the others. Older perhaps, with decorations around the edge.

The night bombers flew over Vesuvius, hidden until the sky lit up over the city like a fireworks display. The people of the parish spent days in and out of the grotto and the surrounding caves located under the old church. It was crowded, cold and dank. There was little food or water, no heat, and no electricity. The children cried from hunger and fear. Food was so scarce that the exotic animals in the zoo had been eaten long ago. The priests did what they could, but the noise of bombing was deafening at times. The explosions were followed by absolute quiet and then they began again as the bombs rained down on Naples.

They left the caves under the city only to find their neighborhoods destroyed. After gathering whatever belongings could be rescued, they returned again to the caves. At night, hundreds came underground when the air raid sirens began. Above the caves, there was theft and prostitution and the selling of anything to trade for food. Women and young boys offered their bodies to allied soldiers and then stole their supplies for sale on the black market. The streets were filled with people selling jewelry or paintings or even their clothing. For the poorer classes, this was a way of life; for the middle class, it was shameful; the rich either fled the country or became helpless with no servants and no funds. Through it all, there was still dignity and courage in their resourcefulness. There is a story, perhaps untrue, but perhaps not, of an entire naval ship being taken apart in the harbor overnight. It just disappeared. After all, survival is what Naples is about.

The bombing went on for months. Rosetta helped at the church with the younger children, but she was also frightened. They all thought they would die. Her fidanzato was drafted into the Italian army and she had no idea of where he was or even if he was alive. Franco was not from her parish. Her parents would not approve a marriage unless they

had known the family for centuries. Rosetta sat on an old bench in the cave with her head in her hands and prayed for a miracle. The young priest came over, put his hand on her shoulder and handed her a box.

“The box has something for your wedding,” he said. “We will all be fine soon enough. No more bombs. You will be married soon and drink to love and peace on earth.”

She didn’t open the box, but hid it under her bed.

Franco returned home for a short time as the war was ending, but he was not the same. He had participated in the Four Days in Napoli uprising and watched his friends and neighbors die. He was no longer the loud-mouth kid showing off on his Vespa. He left immediately for the US and an army post there. He had worked for the US guys after Italy surrendered and this gave him his naturalization papers. He promised to send for her as soon as possible. In a few months, she received a cryptic letter in English. Her family, one of whom would assuredly open the letter, did not know English.

“Dear Rosetta,

Soon the young priest will receive an American novel, “The Web and the Rock”. Everything you need to know will be in the book.

Love, Franco”

Inside the book was a ship ticket and enough American dollars for the trip. She would stay with his aunt in some place called Harlem until they could arrange a proper marriage. Her parents had an Italian fit when she mentioned she might leave. Her mother was hysterical, crying and weeping on the arms of her neighbors. Her brothers began to follow her everywhere. Her father set up his domino games by the front door of their apartment so he always knew her coming and going. The only place she was allowed alone was confession. She could not go to a foreign country with no chaperon and marry a man born in another district. Anyway, he was too worldly now since he had been in the army and then travelled to the Americas.

The local church was the center of everything Rosetta knew, and the elder priest also watched over her.

“You must find a nice boy in the neighborhood before it was too late. New York has street gangs and they kill people. They are on every street. They all have knives and rape young women, particularly young Italian women.”

She wasn’t sure what it was too late for. She was not yet 18. Every night the kids would go to the church and play games and listen to clandestine radio programs. Stories of New York gangs threw the old priest into spasms.

“Your roots are in Italy,” he said. “Listen to your family telling you the path to follow.”

One afternoon she announced she was going to confession. Her brothers assumed she was going to the church - a good, safe place to meet a local boy. She was careful not to take too much, in a small bag. The young priest met her at the confessional booth. He removed his frock and the two of them jumped on the Vespa and headed for the harbor. The harbor had been badly bombed and the waters were filled with wrecked ships and boats. People were going to their ships over makeshift platforms, put together again Neapolitan style. She ran from the Vespa to the boat.

“You have the box?” the priest yelled. “God be with you.”

“Indeed,” she said and ran and ran away from her life and with fear she would change her mind. She was leaving her Spaccanapoli neighborhood and its venders, guitar makers, fruit sellers, and women in black. And the priest flew back to the confessional booth, grabbed his frock and began his session of listening.

She watched Naples retreat into the distance from the ship, the harbor crawling with well-wishers and petty thieves picking the pockets of the well-wishers. She sat on the deck and read and wrote in her diary as the boat bounced over the ocean, the white waves coming endlessly. She missed Naples, but there was no going back, ever.

Franco met her at the New York harbor and delivered her, as promised, to his aunt’s apartment in Harlem. Rosetta was frightened, but there was a comradery among the immigrant Italians and his aunt was from a small town near Naples. They were married at the Church of Our Lady of Mount Carmel on 116th street. There was a reception in the church basement. The aunt had laid out enough wine and food for the entire city. It was here Rosetta finally opened her box. It was a beautiful wine glass. They drank from the glass and then it was washed and put back in the box for a future event. The glass was there for their first apartment in an Italian conclave in the Bronx overlooking the trash-filled banks of the Bronx River. She could watch the Italian women from her window. They came with small paring knives, to go for “chicory,” the dandelions that grow by the parkways and she felt at home. The Americans call them weeds. It was springtime.

She wrote: “I was lonely here and missed Italy and my family. They would never try to find me. Then I realized that living in the Bronx was like living in Italy. It was as if you were on the streets of Pozzuoli-the stores, the shop windows, the evening strolls, everything was in Italian.”

She was content in the small apartment. Franco loved her, but it was different now because he was so Americanized. With time, the passion of young love on the streets of Naples became a routine fuck on Sunday morning after the kids were dropped at the local church. She was older and more tired each day.

The wine glass came out for holidays and the birth of her children.

I took my place at dinner, much too late and much too sober in a group that had been there for hours. We chatted about things, just things of no consequence. My wine was delivered to the table in the little glass.

“The wine glass at your place was a glass at the wedding of my parents,” she said.

It was beautiful and stood with pride, as if waiting for instructions. I told a story about delicate glassware and hoped the little wineglass would live forever, perhaps for all holidays.

“They were married in the fifties,” she said. “My brother and I grew up in the Bronx in the projects. People thought of the Bronx as poverty-stricken, even though we never felt poor.

Somebody, I think my mother, came from southern Italy to meet our father, Franco. Maybe she brought the wine glass, although it was probably in someone’s trunk and a miracle it made the trip without breaking. Maybe it was my great aunt who packed it and brought it up for the wedding. After my mother died, my father packed up everything that belonged to her. The little glass was wrapped in newspaper and placed in a box under his bed. We were still in the projects; nothing was safe. We finally unpacked my mother’s stuff when we moved out of the projects, but my father never spoke about her again. Her diary and anything else I remember is gone, except for the little wineglass. They rang the bells at her church in Naples when she died.”

I looked around the dining room, crowded with pictures. The pictures askew on the wall over the table were done in sepia as if someone had pulled them from an old attic trunk. Her parent’s wedding photo was the most prominent, hanging rakishly over the table, prepared to check out the pasta. They weren’t smiling. Rather they were serious and standing as if they were posed for a vintage photo requiring no movement. His military uniform was buttoned precisely, his cap was exactly straight ahead. Her white gloved arm rested formally on his.

The evening continued, with more and more drunken talk of little things among friends. We began to prepare to leave as the hostess looked up with drooping eyes and sudden tiredness. The little glass was filled for the last time with an excellent red. It was finished with love. I moved it carefully away from the nearest table edge. I was protecting it.

I turned to wish the last person at the table a good night and he reached for a hug. My body became unbalanced and my arm struck the little glass. We all watched it as it rolled over the edge of the table into freefall and onto the edge of a rug—all thinking perhaps it was going to be OK. It was broken. The owner watched in shock from her chair as I helplessly picked away glass from the area. The couple in the wedding picture were staring at me as I raised myself from the floor. I could not look at the people around me. Their faces were blurred. No one had moved from a position I remembered them being in when the wine glass began to fall as if a movie had stopped at a frame where pieces of glass were still in the air.

Somewhere along Spaccanapoli the young, now the old, priest still rings the bells on the anniversary of her death. Does he know the wineglass is gone forever?

Jon Kemsley

A Mother's Story

Her children came to her, each in turn, and asked, mama, why are you sad? And she made a gentle excuse to reassure them but in truth she was quite unable to answer. How to explain the compromises of adult life to a child expecting flying warriors and animals that could talk? Well, it just wasn't possible. And then she cried and drew them to her, and cried and shook, and there was nothing they could say to console her.

There was money, a little money, after the fine had been paid. Both from the husband, whom she'd left when the fights and the cheating became more than she could bear, and from the lover, with whom she'd tried so hard to make it work and from whom she'd fled shortly after the birth of the little one. What is wrong with me, she often wondered, that I cannot find a man to be happy with? She was certain she knew what her friends thought, in spite of their assurances, which made her draw back from them until now she saw almost no one. Her father, too, had grown distant these past few years, and his disapproval was a source of great distress to her.

On brighter days, when her children took their classes and she could afford a few hours away from work, she would travel down to the sea and listen to the wind and waves, the gulls calling to each other as they circled and rose into wide grey clouds. Stood quietly at the water's edge, her shoes dangling by their straps from one hand and footprints all the way back to the breakers. Memories of another beach, another country, ice cream and lemonade and the sun beyond its highest point. Simple times. And then home, still sad but somehow satisfied, to meet her little family, catch the smallest up in her arms and swing him round until he laughed with the dizziness of it all. Time enough for silly games and show and tell and funny little faces. Time enough for the here and now. Yes, it was enough.

The weeks came and the weeks went and nothing could be said about any of them. It was true, bringing up two children alone took the best of her. The eldest was getting to be quite a handful, restless and inquisitive, the little one bobbing along behind him and copying everything he did. She allowed herself to imagine a daughter but she supposed she had only been capable of boys. The eldest knew what animal his year had been and wanted a puppy, like this one, mama, but the apartment was really too small for it and besides nobody ever kept

pets. She knew what her father would say, that animals in the home belonged on the dinner plate, and she felt the same way and would change the subject whenever it came up.

She took them to see their fathers as often as she was allowed, which wasn't nearly often enough, she thought with a sigh, for the boys or for her. Both men were more than happy for her to shoulder the burden and she knew this would never change and accepted it without a word. Like dogs they were, all the fuss and the mess, the fighting and the sex, especially the sex. She felt herself blush. She remembered a song about it being a man's world but she didn't know the rest of the words and anyway wasn't it even truer here? And then a smile as she thought of her boys as little emperors. She couldn't help but spoil them whenever she got the chance and nothing gave her as much pleasure as seeing their little faces light up when she did so. But there was always an underlying note of sadness in everything she did and she was unable to silence it. One day when they were much older and could take care of themselves they would have to care for her.

To treat herself she paid a visit to a small studio, no more than a shop front, tucked in between a phone store and a liquor store in the street behind her apartment block. Just for fun, she thought. The man flirted terribly with her and she allowed herself to feel flattered. She collected the photos an hour or so later and was pleased to find that they had come out well. Dressed in classy modern fashions she looked quite the model and, thank god, she still had her figure. Oh, she had been so big when she was carrying the little one. She blushed to remember. It was curious that she couldn't recall the pain although the doctors had been especially worried that time. Because of her age she supposed although they never said as much. She leafed through the photos and took them back home, only to hide them away in a bottom drawer where she guessed they would probably stay. And then off to meet her sister at a coffee shop in the centre of town, where they discussed work, their father, and children. What to do without her sister, who was some four years older and childless but happily married, she wouldn't know and it troubled her to be such a burden.

Later still, she collected the boys and took them home and fed them and played their games until it was time to wash up and turn in. The apartment smelled pleasantly of rice steam and shower steam. How dreadful it had looked when she first saw it, dark and dirty and run down, but her sister's husband had helped to fix it up and they'd bought rugs and furniture which she'd accepted under protest. And even her father had stepped in that time, covering the deposit and a month's rent,

although he said nothing about it and never came to see the place. Now it was clean and bright and there were photos of the children and their toys and drawings everywhere and she was proud of what had been achieved.

Out on the narrow balcony she looked up at the black sky and thought about the little dog they'd sent into orbit just to see what would happen to it. It seemed like such a cruel thing to do. Somewhere out there still among the stars. She remembered learning the names in school but she couldn't remember any of them. How bright they'd looked in that other sky on almost the other side of the world. A few of the very brightest ones had been pointed out to her. The dipper, funny name, she remembered that one because it was like a dipping spoon, and what else, something to do with dogs, wasn't it? Always dogs. People supposed you couldn't see the stars for the pollution but, in her city at least, that just wasn't the case. Of course, if you went further east it was true, and the smell, oh dear, but here it was much cleaner and really quite pretty.

She shivered and hugged herself, rocking gently on slipped feet as a cool breeze picked up from nowhere. She leaned over the rail, swinging her arms. The moon, that was a funny thing too, wasn't it? Sometimes she could believe it really was a moon with its own orbit and its own shadow and sometimes it seemed so unlikely that there must be another reason for what she was seeing. Perhaps those stories about the landings before she was born were true after all. Was it any more ridiculous than a big grey rock in the sky that could cover the sun? She giggled. And now her country had entered the space age and was sending people up there. She knew it was just showing off and she disapproved. Her father would have something to say about it. He did not like the vulgarity of the modern world and what he referred to as troublesome western influences. He would say what he thought, quite sharply and simply, and then keep his silence about the subject for the rest of the day. They never had conversations. She smiled to think she must have learned that from him because she was the same except with her sister when the talking never stopped.

But conversations have to end and people have their own lives too. She shivered again and went back inside, sliding the door shut behind her softly so as not to wake the little sleepers. She sat for a while in a chair at the dining table, folding tiny stars out of wrapping paper and scattering them there to amuse the boys at breakfast, before retiring to her narrow bed, exhausted, to dream of beaches white and smooth as paper stretching on and out for miles and strewn with pebbles that shone like glass in the late summer sun.

Karen Kotrba

And Your Name Is?

Thank you, but no, I never eat potato chips in public. Not since the third grade when the other kids made fun of me. My mother always packed my lunch, see, and sometimes she'd put in a little bag of potato chips for a special treat — DanDee brand potato chips. And since my name was DeeDee, the other kids started calling me DanDee and I hated it. I wanted to change my name, but I couldn't. I was just a kid, so I told my mother that the potato chips made me sick so she'd stop buying them. Eventually the kids stopped teasing me, but even so, I could never eat potato chips again. At least not in public. But thanks anyway.

See, the problem with DeeDee is that it sounds like a nickname for something longer — Dorothy, maybe, or Diana — but it was my real name. It's not an awful name. I don't fault my parents any. It's just that it's such a young name. DeeDee sounds like the girl who sits next to you in biology that you invite to your sleepover. Or the babysitter you hire to stay with the kids while you go out to a movie. It's not a terrible name. It's just that I got older than my name, that's all.

The year I turned 50 I thought about what present I might give myself and it occurred to me that I could change my name. I got to thinking about this when I was talking to a friend of mine, Lorraine Wilkins. She goes to our church and on the weekends she waitresses at Red Lobster, the one out by the outlet mall. Dick and I loved to go there and sit at one of her tables because we didn't even have to ask, she would just automatically bring us more of those cheesy biscuits, and if we didn't finish them, she would always say, "Go ahead and take them home. We're just gonna throw them out anyway." Well, Lorraine has a daughter named Mary Beth. A couple of years ago Mary Beth, who must be about 40 now, saw an ad in a magazine that said if you send this man in Arizona \$125, he would reveal your true name to you. Now, according to him, your true name is not the one your parents gave you. It's what your name should have been. He claims that just discovering your true name unleashes your personal power and enhances your creativity. So for a fee he somehow divines what your parents would have named you if they had his sensitivity to names, and then he writes it down and sends it to you. Mary Beth must have shipped off the \$125 because shortly after she mentioned this ad to her mother, she starting telling everyone that her real name was Bellphoebe Coyote Spencer and not Mary Beth Wilkins.

Anyway, Lorraine complained about this a lot, about how could any child of hers be so foolish as to send \$125 to a stranger just to be told something so silly, something he was just making up and all it cost him was the price of a stamp, but while she was complaining, I was wondering, what if this is true? What if we are all supposed to have a certain name, but our parents got it wrong and named us after Uncle Al or cousin Margaret? Is something in us squashed down, you know, stifled, if we go through life with the wrong name? I was just about to ask Lorraine which magazine Mary Beth found this ad in, when she started complaining about Mary Beth spending hundreds, maybe a thousand dollars, to get all the fillings in her teeth removed because she'd heard somewhere that the metal fillings sap your creative powers. Lorraine said that Mary Beth blamed her because Lorraine had raised her in a backward town that didn't want to add fluoride to the water because two of the councilmen said it was a Communist plot and an especially evil way to undermine Americans. But that was years ago. We've had fluoride for oh, a long time now and I don't see any Communists around, do you?

So I decided not to ask Lorraine about the ad. Instead, I got a book of baby names from the Friends of the Library's used book sale and flipped through it but didn't like any of the names. I skimmed through all the female names backwards and forwards and didn't see anything I liked. So then I tried what my Meemaw used to do with the family Bible. You know, I always wondered about that Bible. You know how the front of a Bible has these pages where you write down important family matters, like births and deaths? Well, when we'd ask Meemaw about who were those people named in our family Bible, she'd say, "Never mind" and change the subject. The names weren't any names we knew, they weren't anybody that Meemaw ever mentioned when she told us family stories. That seemed strange. I talked this over with my older sister Amelia once — oh, years later — and she said that our people probably stole that Bible from somebody else's people on the boat coming over. I'd like to think that it's not true, but...

Where was I? Oh, yes. When Meemaw had a question, like what to do about Grandpa Fred who was such a drinker and always causing trouble, she'd get out the family Bible. She would sit in her chair with the closed Bible on her legs and pray out loud, asking the Lord to show her what she should do. Then she'd close her eyes, open the Bible and point to a verse, open her eyes, and read that verse out loud. She was living with us by then, always cooking cabbage and staring at our friends. Most of the time what she'd read didn't make any sense to us. It

didn't seem to have anything to do with Grandpa, but she'd think about it for a couple of days and then, at dinner one night, she'd tell us what she decided it meant. Once I remember her finger landed on one of those long begetting parts of the Old Testament, and when we were all at the dinner table next evening, except for my brother Daniel who was in the Army by then, Meemaw said, "The Lord wants me to accept Fred's other children as if they were my own." Well. We all sat there quiet for a long time and then my sister Eileen and I, who were hearing about Grandpa's other family for the very first time, started asking questions. I think we wondered if there were other grandchildren we could play with. We were about 11 and 10, I think, and pretty sick of each other's company. Eileen and I adored Grandpa because he used to call us "the twins" and we loved that, but Amelia, our oldest sister, got angry. And what was the point of getting angry about it? He'd already been dead a year. But Amelia said she'd always suspected such a thing and was not surprised at all. Mother, meanwhile, just stayed quiet. She stared down at the food on her plate, but I could see the sadness in her eyes. She never would talk about it though. Not even after Meemaw died too or even toward the end of her own life.

Now as far as I know, Meemaw never did a thing about that other family, whoever they were. For years though, whenever Eileen and I saw kids about our age we'd say, "Could those be Grandpa's other grandchildren?" We used to make up stories about them and give them crazy, exotic names like Orina or Ariadne. The other grandchildren were always wild, as wild as we would have liked to have been if we had dared, shoplifting toys and candy, and skipping school, and in our stories they always got away with it. I think we made ourselves jealous of those other grandchildren which seems odd since they might not have even existed.

So I tried Meemaw's method with *What Shall We Name the Baby?* book from the book sale but gave up because it kept opening to the boy baby section and my finger would land on names like Greyson or Bartholomew. After the third try, I forced it to the girls' names and found my finger on Harleen. I took that as a sign that this was not going to work and I quit. Even donated the book back to the Friends for their next sale.

Well, then I got to thinking why not just drop one of the Dees, so I would be Dee. You know, like Cher is just Cher and Beyonce is Beyonce. I went back to the library and did some research on what you have to do to legally change your name. You have to petition a judge and pay some money — it always comes down to money, doesn't it? But

Dick, my husband — yes! We were Dick and DeeDee, can you believe it? ever since the 11th grade — he said, “Honey, I could buy you a case of White Out for a lot less money and you could change your name yourself.” So I dropped it, the idea of officially dropping a Dee, that is. And then on my fiftieth birthday, which was a Tuesday, Dick gives me this box wrapped in beautiful paper with the most beautiful pink roses on it and tied with a big pink bow and inside there were twelve bottles of White Out and a note that said, “Let’s use the money we saved on your name change to celebrate your birthday in style.”

And that’s what we did. We took a three-day cruise to the Bahamas and had a great time — oh, the shows and the island tours — it was great, the trip of a lifetime. One afternoon we were on board and while Dick was taking his nap, I sat at the little desk in our cabin and wrote out postcards to our friends back home and signed them, “Dee.” Just Dee. No, I didn’t write “Just Dee”, but you know what I mean.

So I’ve been just Dee for five years now. Dick still likes to tease me. “Which Dee did you drop, honey? The first one or the last one?” And Jeremy, our youngest who was about 17 at the time, gave me a card that said, “Happy Birthday to The Big D.” He said it was very cool to have a letter for a first name just then. I didn’t want to tell him that my name is D-E-E and not just the letter D. It’s been a very long time since Jeremy thought that anything I’ve done was acceptable, let alone cool. Let alone very cool.

Now what was that you were telling me about these potato chips?

Oh, they’re on sale? I love a good sale.

Alissia J.R. Lingaur

The Life They Both Wanted

Rena presses the small red button on her phone screen and silences her mother's words as if without them, reality will realign. Though Rena feels no comfort, the heating pad across her lower belly massages warmth from her breasts to her knees. To the left sits her husband, Jacob, his phone six inches from his nose, as he peers over his glasses and actively composes an email, both thumbs skittering across the keys. Rena shifts in her striped armchair, feet atop a matching ottoman exactly paired to Jacob's.

Their master bedroom displays more coordinating prints and his and hers acquisitions: his cherry dresser, her armoire; his nightstand with tablet and Dan Brown, hers with smartwatch and *The New Yorker*; and into the on-suite bathroom, his sink with toothbrush, aftershave, Calvin Klein cologne, her sink with hairbrush, moisturizer, and Lancôme eye shadow.

Within this carefully accessorized and arranged room, the only partnerless piece is a wicker bassinet given to them by Jacob's grandparents eleven years earlier. Rena wants to paint it, or wanted to during the first IVF cycle.

Jacob clears his throat, hits *send*, and sets his phone on the glass table between their two chairs. "Do you need anything?" he asks Rena.

She stares at him until he looks away. "No," she says, pushing the heat harder against her satin pajamas.

Jacob stands. He steps in front of Rena's ottoman then pauses, reaching toward her foot, her pedicured toenails. With his pointer finger, he taps the top of her big toe lightly and then resumes his walk to the bathroom. Door open, he halts before the toilet, releasing a stream of urine into the bowl. This he can control.

In the bedroom, Rena closes her eyes at the sound of Jacob's piss, a memorized cadence after eleven years of marriage, even down to the number of finishing drips. She lowers her feet and leans to unplug the heating pad from the wall. Unable to reach, she stands and something tears within. She squeezes her legs together. For ten seconds, Rena freeze hunches, her hands to either side, muscles clenched, willing her body to behave, to follow the course she has carved for it. A cramp, like a hot poker, stabs her mid-section. Ever so carefully, Rena waddles to the bathroom.

At the sink, Jacob stares at himself in the mirror, especially at the flesh flap beneath his chin that makes his face appear larger, rounder, like his father's had as he neared middle-age. His eyes catch Rena's gaze as she pauses at the open door, one hand on the frame, the other on her lower abdomen. Quickly, he dries his hands on the towel hanging to the right of his sink. But as he reaches for Rena, she pulls back, scowling. Jacob eases around his wife, and she shuts the bathroom door.

Rena, alone in their master bathroom, pulls her pajama bottoms and underwear down as she sits on the toilet in a movement she now knows well. Just as she settles, a slimy glob escapes her body and plops into the toilet water. Again, Rena pauses, understanding what she will see when she is able to rise, but wishing this moment different all the same.

After dabbing her skin with toilet paper and applying a fresh pad to the crotch of her underpants, Rena lifts herself off the toilet. She doesn't want to look into the bowl, yet she must. Within the murky water, floats a red and purple bloody mass. She stares, and at the center of the placenta, a peach flesh bean nestles without definition, but still there for her to witness. Rena flushes the toilet.

As Rena washes her hands, she avoids the mirror, avoids studying the body that can not sustain life even though she's doused it in vitamins and all the latest theories about health and wellness, teaching herself the foods to eat, the caffeine to avoid, the number of hours to sleep, all with the studiousness she'd applied to her MBA.

Jacob, waiting for her on the edge of their bed, jumps when Rena shuffles out of the bathroom and meets her near the armchair she so recently vacated. Rena eyes the heating pad, cord dangling over the ottoman.

"Let me get that," Jacob says. He reaches down and lifts the heating pad into the air. Walking to Rena's side of the bed, he kneels, his hand guiding the cord around the nightstand's auburn wood, searching until he finds the outlet and inserts the plug. He smiles at his wife, triumphant.

Rena whispers, "Thanks," before turning out her bedside lamp.

She lowers onto the bed, easing her head onto the pillow and as she turns to lift her legs onto the mattress, a cramp lightens her middle. Rena winces. With gentle hands, Jacob circles his wife's ankles and raises her legs to the bed, tucking them beneath the covers. She rolls onto her left side, away from him, and snuggles the heating pad against her stomach. She hums quietly, a bit of Beethoven or maybe Bach, certainly something melancholy.

Jacob listens to Rena's muffled tones a second or two more before he again rounds the bed's foot and sits on his side. He lifts the duvet and top sheet and easily swings his legs under them, but he remains upright, his back propped against pillows. Jacob reaches across his nightstand to turn off his lamp, identical to Rena's, chosen at an earlier moment when they could still imagine the life they both wanted, the life they'd visualized since their first date, a dinner of fish tacos and locally brewed beer shared by two thirty-somethings at their peak. He stares into the dark. Slowly his eyes adjust, and Jacob sees the furniture outlined around the room, their dressers, the chairs and footrests, the barren bassinet.

Though Rena rests beside him, her humming almost sounds like it's floating on the hallway air, past the home office with their degrees framed in dark walnut and the empty guest room with the cleaning woman's vacuum stripes, oozing from the small room they'd been painting a pale mint. Three coats to cover the earlier mauve, which erased the previous sky. Jacob's hands knead the duvet as he waits for sleep.

Warmth from the heating pad soaks into Rena's skin, easing the spasms that began earlier that day. She rotates onto her right shoulder, pulling the sheet tight to her heart as if the bedding can silence the voices whispering in her ears: her doctor's wait-and-see advice, her husband's assurances of bank account savings, her best friend's statistics and probabilities, even her mother's remark on the phone that evening, "You've been telling your body *no* for so long."

She wants them all to SHUT THE HELL UP.

Rena hums louder.

Yawning, Jacob succumbs to their bed's comfort, enhanced by the electric heat, and slides down his pillow until he's prone. His right foot searches beneath the covers, skidding across the sheet. He's convinced that once their toes embrace, the earth will be solid beneath them again, and this moment in their marriage, like the times before, will become an unfocused image, a haze of memory that, at some point in their future, they will philosophize about or at least consider with appropriately sentimental smiles. There's even room for God's plan should they decide to become religious.

Rena's silken toes perch on the bed's edge almost dashing over the precipice to the carpet below. Jacob's first toe, crisscrossed by pale, wiry hair, stretches toward her heel and very lightly kisses the smooth swatch of skin covering her foot's arch. Rena recoils, and her legs bend away from him, compressing upward and inward, until she is half the

size of her normal self, a parenthesis, chasing the darkness and safety of the womb.

Vincent Panella

The Dress

By the virtue of last names, his Arlotti, and hers Atkins, their offices are adjacent and sequential, and this forces her to pass his open door on her way to work. Sometimes she brings her daughter, a six-year old with polio who walks with one foot dragging behind. When waiting for the daughter to catch up she stops within view, and since it's the beginning of the school year and they barely know each other, their greetings are brief. She often wears an orange dress with white flowers, a dress he will fix in memory long after they separate. She's older and he's drawn to that, and when she passes by he studies the way her hips have narrowed and how the dress hangs with a touch of looseness suggesting a vulnerability that makes him want to protect her. When her students arrive for conferences he rises from his desk and puts his ear to the wall. With a growing desire he's drawn to her lisping voice and flawless pronunciation and he sees in her a remedy for his loneliness.

He manages to sit next to her at meetings and she seems to like his jokes. He begins to visit her office with egregious passages from student themes. As his visits become more frequent they learn more about each other. She's a single mother, and he's recently separated and living alone, sharing custody of two children with his wife.

One day when she's alone in the hall he asks why they can't go out for a coffee or a beer. She fixes him through cat-eye glasses, her eyes wet from reading.

"I have to pick up my kid and I'm late."

Encouraged, he gives her his phone number and says he isn't the type to push. He returns to his office which overlooks the parking lot where she tosses her brief case into a VW Beetle, starts the motor with a rumble from a bad muffler, and pushes the gears to the limits. He watches until she's out of sight.

A few nights later his phone rings and she says her parents have taken Bethany for the weekend.

"So will you buy me that beer?"

At a student bar he talks about the failure of his marriage and the difficulty of shared custody. She says, "What you're going through isn't easy, but at least you have a marriage to dissolve. 'Mister Atkins' said he could never have fathered a child with polio. He moved out of the country and now he's unreachable."

He asks her why she keeps the name of the man who fathered her child and refuses to support her.

“Is it less of an insult to bear his name rather than your own father's?”

“Life is full of insults. One has to choose.”

“What was wrong with your father?”

“We lived on a farm and he wouldn't let me have a dog.”

“I don't believe that.”

“There are things I can't tell you.”

After leaving the bar they drive out to his place, a fourteen room farm house on a gravel road. Many of the rooms are crammed with old furniture as part of the landlord's collection of antiques. While going through the rooms they find themselves in a small space that could be either a study or a closet. They're close together and when she doesn't move away they kiss, gently at first. When he tries for a harder kiss she bites his lip.

“Why did you do that?”

“Because you're going to hurt me.”

“How do you know that?”

“You'll see.”

He visits her at night when Bethany is asleep. She lives in graduate student housing, one of the military surplus huts known as The Barracks. She's a PhD candidate in Linguistics and books are stacked in columns on the cushions of a cheap couch. She always greets him in a robe held closed at the neck and he smells the lotions used to protect her skin from the dry heat of a space heater.

One night he shows her how to make spaghetti with clam sauce using fresh garlic and canned clams. After the dinner Bethany dances in the living room to an old Beatles album. She pivots on her braced foot and spins with arms outspread and long hair flying.

“Mommy dance with me!”

“We're talking now, Sweetie.”

“I'll dance with you!” he offers.

“NO!” She goes to her room.

“She gets cranky when she's tired, just like her mother.”

“No, she resents me, it's understandable. It might help if we lived together. Look at all the room I have.”

“That's not possible.”

“Why not?”

“It's too complicated. You're better off with a younger woman.”

“I don't want a younger woman.”

“She’ll find you, don’t worry.”

She removes her glasses as the start of a story she’s about to tell. It will be about men who take advantage. These are her favorite stories and his too because they allow him to think of himself as better than the men she describes.

“My thesis advisor came into my office a few nights ago. There was nobody in the building. He said, ‘I just wrote thirty pages of my novel and I’m full of sexual energy.’”

“What then?”

“I told him to roll it back through the computer.”

“What was his reaction?”

“He told me to get another advisor.”

“Did you?”

“I quit the program.”

“What will you do now?”

“I don’t know. I’m writing now.”

“Will you show me what you’re working on?”

“Probably never.”

“Why not?”

“For the same reason I won’t tell you my age or my father’s last name.”

In her bedroom the mattress and box spring are now on the floor. They squeaked too much when mounted on the frame. A bulb on a lamp wire hangs above the pillow. He lights a candle melted into a saucer and they keep the door half-open so she can listen for Bethany. When they make love he uses the word *love* but she never returns it. He searches for the word beyond her pleasure but the word is hiding behind a door he can’t open.

“You never give me that word.”

“We take what we need.”

That summer he goes away to teach. He meets that younger woman she talked about but resists the temptation to sleep with her. The catholic in him decides to confess – thought and act being the same—and he writes her a letter to explain why he was tempted. He says, “I wanted you to say that word but you never did.” She doesn’t write back, and upon his return he visits her in The Barracks. They sit on opposite sides of the small living room. The stacks of books on the couch are gone and she hugs her knees to her chest as if to protect herself.

“I’m leaving town,” she says.

For decades his memory of the dress instead of fading becomes more vivid. The orange color deepens to burnt sienna. The white flowers

become larger and he imagines them as hibiscus. He follows her online and discovers her father's name, Visser. He finds an aerial view of the farm she grew up on. A high school yearbook shows her in a round-collared blouse buttoned to the neck. From the date he calculates that she's fifteen years older.

An image search brings up a single photo. She's standing with a group called Seattle Women Against the Iraq War. They hold a sign saying "Not In Our Name." Some of the women hold umbrellas and she wears a white rain hat with the brim turned down all around. He reads the angry set of her mouth. Her hair, once down to her waist, is cut short. Her email address contains the word *femme* and she lists herself as a community activist. He finds discussion threads where she writes about social security, the environment, sexual equality, the homeless, the raft of government failures.

Through an interlibrary loan he finds her thesis, a collection of three stories called *The Rapist in the Dressing Room*. The stories place the same female character in situations where men try to dominate, in Laundromats, offices, the dressing rooms of clothing stores, places where women are physically and psychologically trapped. In one of the stories her character lists the men who took advantage, not as individuals but as types—the pseudo-intellectual, the conceited artist, the narcissist and ego driven, and finally, the Vermicelli and clam sauce man.

The bitterness doesn't surprise him. After all, he didn't inherit a child with polio whose father wouldn't support her, he didn't have a thesis advisor who practiced sexual blackmail, he hadn't suffered as a single mother with very little money, he didn't have a lover who complained of his inadequacy. And if she couldn't acknowledge the best of what they'd shared, at least he had the dress as a reminder.

He's sixty years old when he takes a plane to Seattle. Why not? The Lyft car leaves him in the driveway of a small house with a lake in the distance. The car in the driveway is a late model SUV with a radar detector on the dashboard. He remembers how she baked bread to save money when she lived in The Barracks, kneading the dough roughly to pick up more flour with those cat-eye glasses over her nose and her eyes leaking tears from reading too much. She baked the loaves in square pans, the kind of bread his family called "American."

The door opens to the bones of her clavicle, to a field of liver spots and freckles, to a necklace of deep colored stones of different sizes strung on a silver chain. Her hair is short and combed upward all around. He waits for the recognition, studies her eyes, gray as his hair, gray as her hair. A few seconds seem like an hour. He searches for the most

honest thing he can say, words that will preserve the best part of what they had.

“Maybe you don’t remember the dress....”

She shuts the door in his face.

#

Terry Sanville

The Japanese Wife

Minako liked the way Harry dressed. Her husband wore brown tweed suits, white shirts with cufflinks, and dark Florsheim wingtips. But before he slipped on his suit coat, he'd pull a polished holster from a locked drawer, strap it to his shoulders and slide his S&W .38 Special into the pouch. It made a small bulge under his coat. It made her feel safe, protected – at least in the beginning.

After a quiet breakfast with Harry and his departure to the Santa Barbara Police Department, Minako crept down the hall to her son's room and woke him. She had less than an hour to get Robby ready for the bus and his trip to school.

“Morning, Mama,” he said and smiled.

“Good morning, Robby. The bus is coming. We must hurry.”

“I will, Mama. I will.”

“It is so pretty outside. No need for a jacket today.”

Minako took him to the toilet and left him to do his business. She helped him button his shirt, combed his straight brown hair, cleared the wax from his small ears, and kissed his forehead. At eight years old, Robby had attended Alpha School for three years and could speak, dress himself with a little help, and take care of his bathroom needs. She felt proud, knowing that other mentally retarded children were not as capable.

Robby loved eating breakfast. He was “Cuckoo for Cocoa Puffs,” although Minako never used that word in front of him. They sat in their kitchen at the rear of the house, tucked up against a hillside covered in oaks. Cars roared down Calle Poniente, taking working class fathers to their jobs. Then a steady stream of children walked or rode bicycles downhill to Harding Elementary or the Catholic School further on. Minako marveled at how most families had more than two children, with more on the way – but none like Robby.

A stubby little bus pulled in front of their house and beeped its horn. She opened the front door and Robby lumbered down the steps, across the front lawn to the street, and climbed aboard. She waved to him and he smiled, then joined the other flat-faced children in gazing at the world around them. Minako dabbed at her eyes with a hankie and turned inside for a morning of housekeeping for her husband and sweet sweet boy. Then it was off to Saint Francis Hospital for hours of cleaning rooms and patients.

Minako had met Harry in Tokyo after Japan's surrender in August 1945. He was part of the Eighth Army's occupation force, an MP helping to keep order among the soldiers and sailors. She worked as a nurse in a hospital where injured or sick military men received treatment. Their courtship lasted a year, Harry being a reserved man wanting to respect Minako's proud but poor family. The couple married, left Japan in 1950 and settled in Santa Barbara's Westside neighborhood. Then Robby was born and everything changed.

Minako got home from work just before the bus returned with her son. He looked excited, eager to take up his station on their front lawn and play with his favorite pair of socks. Every day he greeted the children coming home from school. At first, Minako worried that they'd pester him, make fun of the way he looked and talked. And they did. But as time passed, Robby became a neighborhood fixture and Paul, the slender boy from up the street, would sometimes stop and talk to him.

Robby memorized the names of a lot of the children. "Hi, Paul. Hi Johnny. Hi Becky, Hi Larry," he called out in his thick voice.

"Nice socks you got there," Paul called back and grinned.

Except on rainy days, Robby sat on the lawn until supper, slowly rocking back and forth and fingering a pair of argyles. Over time, he wore a bare patch in the grass.

By the time Harry got home from work, Robby had eaten dinner along with Minako, then holed up in his room and watched TV. Harry had started drinking early. Minako found receipts from Mariette's Liquor Store in his coat pocket along with a half-empty pint of Old Crow.

She'd fixed him steak and mashed potatoes with corn and didn't serve him the rice she'd steamed for herself and Robby. She left Harry at the kitchen table, reading the evening paper and cursing to himself, and joined her son watching TV. After she put him to bed, she found Harry flopped on the living room sofa, still wearing his white shirt, loosened tie and shoulder holster. The half-empty bottle of booze stood on an end table. He sucked on a can of beer. Three empties littered the carpet.

"Must you drink so much?" she scolded.

"Yeah, I sure do. Where the hell have you been?"

"With Robby, watching TV. I just put him to bed."

"Why are ya always doting over that...that retard?"

Minako sat in an armchair, facing her husband. "Do not call him that. I love Robby; he is such a sweet boy."

"And what am I, chopped liver?" Harry crunched the empty beer can in his fist and tossed it onto the floor.

Minako shuddered. She watched her husband closely. He seemed drunker than usual and ready to pick a fight. She struggled to decide how far to push it, whether to tell him what caused the pain in her heart and the shame she felt.

Finally, Minako blurted, “You...you do not want me anymore. You never come to me at night, ever since...”

Harry pushed himself to his feet, his body swaying. “Damn straight,” he yelled. “I wanted a son I could be proud of. And what did *you* give me?” He pointed down the hallway toward Robby’s room.

Minako bowed her head. “We could not help it. But we can have more—”

“Are you crazy? We could end up with two of ’em.”

“The doctors say that it is—”

“Screw those idiot doctors. I wanted a boy to, ya know, take to ballgames, go camping, teach him how to fish, ride a bicycle, throw a football. You know damn well that’ll never happen.”

“You can still do much of that with Robby.”

“You don’t get it. You know what people think about mongoloids...and they’ll look at me and think it’s my fault.”

“Nobody knows that.”

“Well, that’s how I feel. I wanted a child that would grow, do things better than me. I sure the hell don’t want a permanent four-year-old who plays with socks.”

Harry grabbed the bottle of booze, gulped it down, choking, then staggered backward, slamming against the fireplace. A framed wedding picture of Minako and Harry fell from the mantel. He kicked at the glass shards and swore, stood with eyes closed, swaying.

“You have had too much to drink, Harry. Let me help you—”

“Just...just stay away from me.”

He put a hand on the mantel to steady himself. The sound of his hoarse breathing filled the room. As the minutes ticked past, he quieted, opened his bloodshot eyes and stared at Minako. “Ya know, when...when an animal’s born and somethin’s wrong, they put it out of its misery.”

From down the hall came a grunting sound. Robby stood in his doorway, dressed in Hopalong Cassidy PJs, wide-eyed, mouth open. Harry took a step toward him, stumbled and fell to the floor. Minako ran to help but he pushed her away. Pulling himself up on an armchair, he yanked his revolver from its holster and staggered toward Robby, the pistol held down at his side, finger on the trigger.

“No...Harry...no!” Minako pushed past him and ran to her son, shielding him from any assault.

Harry waved his arms. “Get...get outta the way...get outta the...” His slurred voice trailed off, knees buckled, and he fell face-first onto the carpet, groaning.

Minako clutched Robby and brushed away her tears.

“What wrong with Daddy?”

“He...he just got real mad. But he is better now.”

She held onto her son, felt his heart beating with a strong rhythm, even with its defect. She stood and ushered Robby back inside his room and into bed. Returning to the living room, she picked up the revolver from the floor. After some effort, she opened its cylinder and removed the bullets. She dug into Harry’s pocket and found his keys, unlocked the gun drawer, and took out the box of cartridges.

Pushing through the rear screen door off the kitchen, she walked into the damp night, under the pungent smelling oaks. With an angry cry she hurled the bullets into the dense undergrowth of poison oak. She lowered herself onto a patio chair and wept, shaking from the cold and from sorrow. A light clicked on at the rear of the adjacent house, a door opened, then footsteps sounded on the other side of the fence.

“Are you all right, Minako?” Mrs. Sanders asked. “Do you want me or Richard to come over?”

“No...no. I will be fine, Elaine.”

“Your...your husband didn’t hurt you or Robby, did he?”

“No. We are both fine.”

“We heard breaking glass. We could hear you...you two arguing. I can’t believe what he said. I’m so sorry, Minako.”

Minako’s face burned with embarrassment. “Things will be fine, Elaine. Harry had too much to drink. Hard day I guess.”

“Well, if you need anything, just holler. Okay?”

“Yes...thank you.”

The quiet night returned, cold but somehow comforting. With a shudder, Minako rose and went inside. She carefully swept up the broken glass near the fireplace then straightened her husband’s snoring body on the carpet and slid the unloaded pistol into its holster. From the hall closet she retrieved a blanket and spread it over him, slipped a sofa cushion under his head.

From the same closet she took down a huge suitcase and filled it with Harry’s clothes, toilet articles, framed photographs of him from his Army days. She lugged the suitcase into the living room next to where

Harry lay and left a note tucked under its handle, "Please leave, and do not come back. We do not want you anymore."

She entered Robby's room, shut the door and slid a dresser in front of it. Minako lay on the carpet next to his bed, her mind reeling but determined. The sound of Robby's steady breathing finally put her to sleep.

In the decades that followed, petite Minako and lumbering Robby became a West Side phenomenon: pushing their shopping cart to the grocery store; riding the bus downtown; pulling weeds in their flower garden bordering the front lawn. They seemed happy, always smiling, envied by the other mothers on Calle Poniente for the simplicity of their love. It took years after mother and child finally moved away for the bare patch in their lawn to disappear.

Fin

Rena was weighed down by bags of swim toys, snacks, and sunscreen to the point where no one at the hotel pool could see her Fendi bikini. So much for making an entrance. Rena flopped the bags at the feet of the nearest pool attendant as she adjusted her bikini to cover the tattoo of a serpent on her breast. She shooed her children away from her and toward the water, regretting firing the nanny based entirely on her own suspicion. There was no proof that Rodger had slept with her.

“Cabana,” Rena said, palming the cell phone that she stole from Rodger before leaving the suite. “Also, a bottle of Dom Rose.”

While the attendants scrambled to prepare Rena's cabana, the two youngest of her brood splashed in the pool. They shrieked in delight, eyes squinted against the sun. Rena recoiled at how predatory they appeared, mouths open, white milk teeth lined up toward their open gullets, waiting for a kill. The oldest child tugged at her arm, and Rena fought the urge to pull away from their slightly sticky hands.

“Will you get in the water too?”

“Since when do you require an adult to have fun?” Rena asked, the ocean breeze ruffling her hair, right before she gagged. “What is that putrid smell?”

“Mommy, it’s the seaweed. We’re used to it now,” the oldest child said, puffing their chest out with a strange sense of pride.

“Apologies for the temporary odor,” a uniformed employee said. He tried to hand Rena a flute of Dom, but she refused to remove her hand from her mouth.

“It smells of *merde*,” Rena mumbled.

The employee drew in a deep breath as if inhaling the notes of fine wine.

“There’s a rotten egg quality to it, yes,” he said, nodding in agreement. “This happens at the end of the season here in Florida, the seaweed bloom. That Sulphur smell is released as the plants are crushed against the rocks and under people’s feet.”

“Dying seaweed stinks,” the oldest added, unnecessarily.

Rena inhaled sharply, disliking that it sounded like she was holding back a sob. She didn’t want to breathe in the toxic air. She grabbed the flute of Dom from the pool attendant’s hand, her four karat pink diamond glinting in the sun as it cut across his finger.

"Ouch!" he cried, examining the cut. Rena wondered if her own ivory skin was marred with this man's blood. "That's some ring," he said. "The size of it! It's like you've weaponized love."

The ring, all sharp edges and shine, cost more than her college education. For years Rena believed it showcased how much Rodger loved her.

"I'm sorry I cut you," Rena said. "That's never—oh for the love of God! Are you really licking blood from your cut? Filthy."

The attendant sucked on his bloody finger, a wry smile turning the corner of his lips.

"Zeke! Gross!" the oldest child said, laughing at the vampire in the uniform.

Another ocean breeze wafted across the pool area, causing Rena to gag once again.

"You are aware, aren't you, of how much people spend to vacation here?" she complained. "Why wouldn't the hotel have a mitigation plan? Who wants to spend their afternoon inhaling the air from Shit Beach?"

"Right this way," Zeke said, ignoring her comment and slurping the last of the blood from his cut. "Your cabana is ready."

Rena and the oldest child approached an elderly couple lounging near the pool as they were being shown to their cabana. The woman, not a day under eighty, wore a string bikini that did little to cover her wrinkled body. The man looked like he was playing dress-up in boardshorts and trendy sunglasses that Rena typically only saw on young surfers.

"These are taken!" the old woman screeched, jumping up to pull empty chairs closer to her. "All taken!"

The woman's loose skin wobbled with the effort. The man propped himself on an elbow and removed his sunglasses. He glanced apologetically at Rena and the oldest child, frowning his overgrown brows and offering the slightest of shoulder shrugs.

"Okay, Mrs. Card," Zeke said. "We're going over there. We won't bother you or your chairs a bit."

"This area's taken!" the woman repeated, pointing to the chairs surrounding their area.

The cabana was a blissfully air-conditioned living room with views of the pool on one side and the Atlantic on the other. Rena was sure that blasting perfumed AC into an open-aired structure was a bit wasteful, but she was starting to sweat, which made her pricey salon

blowout frizz, and she wasn't certain her new Fendi bikini was meant to get wet.

"Perhaps a little doggie friend for the child?" Zeke asked, already shaping a towel like an animal.

"The children are too mature for terrycloth canines," Rena said, lounging on a couch.

"Yes, Zeke! Please!" the oldest shouted. "Just like last time."

Zeke ruffled the child's hair and continued work on the towel turned dog.

Shit Beach, Zeke the Blood Eater, and the unhinged old woman were enough to take Rena's mind away from the stolen cell phone in her hand until it buzzed with a new message for Rodger. It was from a contact named Austin, but Rena knew it was from a woman and that was her actual location, not her name. Austin's contact picture showed her pouting on the screen, fake tits, fake hair, fake lips, and a fake tan. "Missing you R. See you next week at the conference."

"Voila!" Zeke said. The towel-dog stood on a lounge chair wearing Zeke's sunglasses. A drop of blood colored his stubby tail.

"Oh really, that's infantile," Rena said to her oldest child. "Go get in the water with the others."

"I love him," the child said. "He makes it feel like summer's not ending."

"When does school start?" Zeke asked.

"Next week," the oldest said.

"Summer?" Rena asked, softening toward the child. "Yes, I suppose that's about to end too."

"Too?" The oldest child scanned Rena in an unnervingly predatory way that the siblings shared.

Rena didn't answer, too preoccupied by the photo of Austin. The oldest stroked the towel dog like it was a goddamn pet. She looked at the photo of Austin. Maybe she could ignore this, just like the breeze from Shit Beach. As her empty champagne flute dropped to the floor, Zeke was already rushing to retrieve it.

She zoomed in on Austin's rib, a tattoo of a petite rabbit. How meek. Rena pulled her Fendi top aside to examine her own ink, a winding serpent, its venomous head poised at her nipple. She'd had the tattoo before she met Rodger, before he'd lay claim to her body. He didn't flat out tell her, but he encouraged her to change everything from her weight to the color of her hair. "Rena, Rena, Rena. You're gorgeous already," he'd said. "But my God, you'd be a perfect ten with hair extensions. Longer, fuller hair would take years off your face."

That had been in the beginning of the relationship, when she found his repetition of her name endearing, instead of language that claimed her as his own. She'd worn the extensions and did most things he wanted, but she wouldn't augment her breasts for fear of ruining the tattoo that Rodger hated. She'd thought Rodger disliked all tattoos, considering them white-trash, but perhaps he just hated serpents.

"Sweet ink. Powerful," Zeke said, handing her a full flute of Dom.

Rena fought her first instinct to cover her nipple and looked down at the art on her breast. "It is nice," she said. Her nipple hardened in the frigid blast from the air conditioner and Rena felt aroused by her own body. She wondered if she had the same effect on Zeke.

She downed the Dom in one long slug, covering her breast as Zeke took her empty glass for a refill. The oldest child chimed an unnerving peal of laughter at something his towel-dog said. Zeke returned with a full flute. Rena removed her pink diamond ring and dropped it into the champagne.

"This was how Rodger proposed," she explained to Zeke. He nodded, glancing away as an elderly woman in a bikini stomped toward the cabana.

"Mrs. Card, what can I get you?" Zeke asked. The elderly woman mumbled something under her breath. "Mrs. Card, your seat is over there," Zeke said.

Mrs. Card stepped into the cabana, grabbed the oldest child's towel dog, slammed it onto the ground, and stomped the life from it with her bare foot. The oldest wailed a bit too hysterically at the loss of his terrycloth animal.

"Oh really, that's quite sufficient," Rena said. "He's flatlined. There's not even a heartbeat."

Mrs. Card cackled as she continued to stomp, demolishing Zeke's sunglasses until Mr. Card appeared with a team of pool attendants. As they pulled Mrs. Card back toward her chair, Mr. Card removed his sunglasses, his wild eyebrows trying to escape in different directions.

"I'm sorry about this, truly sorry," he said to the oldest child. He turned to look at Rena and dropped his voice to a whisper. "We got bad news yesterday...cancer's back and it's not treatable this time."

"Oh, it's quite alright. It's not like she killed an actual living thing," Rena said, throwing a loaded look at her oldest child. "I'm sorry about your news. Is she acting that way because she's sad, or is she acting

like an angsty teenager because it's her last chance to do whatever she wants without consequence?"

Zeke and Mr. Card shared a look that Rena couldn't decipher. She burped and wondered if she'd had too much to drink.

"She's sad, of course," Mr. Card said. "This is the end, and endings should hurt. Hurt means you've had a good ride, that you want it to continue."

"Ending's should hurt," Rena repeated, feeling the words taint her tongue. She sipped from her flute and let the massive ring enter her mouth, clicking against her molars. The two men were staring at her, expecting some answer or dismissal. She pushed the ring into the side of her cheek.

"That's okay, Mr. Card. The child's really too old for such nonsense," Rena said.

Mr. Card issued a sharp nod of his head and turned to join his wife. Zeke refilled Rena's glass, looking too closely at the flute, likely wanting to comment on the missing ring. The oldest child shuffled to the pool, and Zeke started work on a new towel dog.

Rena swished the ring in her mouth, savoring the cut of the diamond's edges on her soft palate. Rodger would be awake at any minute now, rushing to the pool. Not to join his family, of course, but to find his phone and monitor his sexy texts from women named after Western cities. She should feel something when he arrives. Rena swallowed the ring with the rest of her Dom. She choked at first but managed to squeeze the diamond down her throat. White-hot pain seared a trail as the diamond cut its way to her stomach.

She only had a moment to consider what this symbol of love would do to her intestines before a commotion erupted poolside. Mrs. Card had removed her dentures along with her bikini top before she cannonballed into the water with the children.

Rena stood and pulled her off her Fendi top, exposing the serpent to the air. She grabbed the newly crafted towel dog and walked to the pool.

"This is yours," she whispered to the oldest child as she dropped the canine in his lap.

"This isn't a topless beach," a pool attendant yelled as Rena jumped into the water with Mrs. Card.

The cool water sluiced over her serpent tattoo as she floated on her back, catching Zeke's gaze as he smiled, still sucking blood from the wound she had given him.

E

ESSAY

Nitza Agam

Women's Work



*“Hope” is the thing with feathers -
That perches in the soul -
And sings the tune without the words -
And never stops - at all -
Emily Dickenson*

As I was listening casually to NPR during a drive, a story caught my attention. It was about an elderly woman named Rita whose unfinished quilt had shown up in an estate sale. She'd passed away in her nineties without completing it. A woman artist who enjoys completing unfinished work purchased it. It was comprised of each state with the state flag, symbol and bird. Only in its beginning stages, the artist knew that the quilt would require a community of women to help finish it. Around the country, women responded to her invitation, signed on to the project, and worked together until it was completed.

The artist spoke about how women's projects so often remain unknown, whether they be art, journals, or incomplete manuscripts. How

much do we have a responsibility to help those works continue, though the original artist could not? She may have given up or passed away before it could be shared. Completing women's unfinished artwork became this artist's mission, her way to support unique women so their work would no longer lie in drawers, hidden away for no one to see. It moved me.

I thought of my best friend who died a year ago, an artist who'd proudly created a collaborative women's quilt entitled "Twelve by Twelve." Each woman participating was responsible for twelve embroidered squares that were quilted together and shown at annual exhibits. Every year my friend proudly brought her twelve squares to my home to share with other friends and me. She'd place the squares on the floor, we'd gather around, and marvel at the colors and designs. I wanted to attend one of her annual quilt exhibits, but because of distance, I never made it. Now, in her memory, some of those squares hang on my wall.

But it is what my friend chose not to share or display that I now contemplate. Stacked in thick, taped, battered folders leaning against the wall in my office are hundreds of paintings she created during her years of art therapy in the 1980's where she allowed her uninhibited pain and vision to be expressed. With their rawness and intensity, and her focus on skeletons, fetuses, body parts and bright bold colors, they resemble Day of the Dead paintings influenced by artists such as Frida Kahlo.

She'd stored them in her attic, unknown and unseen, a trove of her soul hidden away in her intimate cottage, filled with art and nestled in lush gardens. These works were not on her wall and, like Rita's incomplete quilt, were never shared. Yet these paintings are completed pieces of art, colored in vibrant deep blues and reds, greens and orange, shades of purple and black. There are faces with thick black tears falling from their cheeks. The figure of a giant woman, like a hybrid of an octopus and skeleton, repeats through many of the paintings.

While she chose to display the more decorative art and her "Twelve by Twelve" quilt, these other deeply intimate, profound images of women trying to give birth, or expressing regret at not bearing children, stayed in her attic. Perhaps she'd had an abortion or had been trying to figure out what role bearing children had in her life. She died childless, and while I assumed she may have had regrets, she seemed to relish her single life as an artist with a love of her home, two dogs, friends, and family.

These masterful paintings remain a mystery, with my office a virtual museum of her work. I've become the curator of these personal paintings revealing my friend's inner visions and longings. They are

beautiful and compelling and deserve to be shown. She may not have intended them to be shared, but she also often repressed thinking of herself as an artist, fearing family censure. *Art will not put food on the table*, her father told her, prompting her to keep her work largely hidden. Hidden and unfinished works of art left by our treasured friends provide hope for the future of women's stories and artistic expression. How many other attics hide women's creative work? How much talent lies unfinished in estate sales or in refuse bins? How many women hide their work with shame, embarrassment, or fear? It's important to remember that if it were not for family members who found Emily Dickinson's poetry after she died, and who decided to publish it, we might not have her poetry today.

I miss my friend, and hope she would encourage me to celebrate her artistry by bringing these bold, powerful paintings out of the dust and darkness into the light and the public eye. I will do so with pride and with love. I do it in her memory and in memory of women like Rita, and all the women who felt compelled to hide their art in attics. Women's unfinished and hidden work deserves to be completed and shown.

Joan Potter

You Go, Girl

My son Jonathan and I are visiting a Buddhist monastery. He's brought a walking stick for me to use, and I have to remind him once again that, although I'm in my mid80s, I have no trouble covering long distances.

We spend some time in the vast, serene Great Hall, admiring a thirty-foot Buddha statue and an array of smaller ones. Then we enter the gift shop, full of colorful jewelry, decorations, statuettes, incense holders. I notice a slender Asian woman and a large older white woman wearing too much makeup standing behind the counter. I choose a bracelet of small amber beads and a keychain attached to a carved wooden gourd engraved with Chinese letters.

When I bring my two choices to the counter, I see that the older woman is now sitting at a nearby desk, eating out of a plastic container. As the soft-spoken Asian woman picks up the keychain, she says, "Do you know that you can unscrew this gourd and find your mantra?" She demonstrates, revealing a tiny piece of paper folded inside.

I ask her what the mantra is; she offers to search for it on her phone and find the English translation. "You can take a picture of it and Google it when you get home," she says.

After she finds the site, I raise my phone to take a picture of her screen. At that moment, the large woman, who has apparently taken an interest in an old lady with an iPhone, shouts, "Look at you! Taking a picture with your phone!" I ignore her.

She calls to Jonathan: "Is that that your mother?"

When he nods yes, she can't contain herself.

"She's so iPhone savvy," she bellows. "You go girl!"

A few days later, I'm reminded that not only do old women amaze onlookers when we use technology, but we can also be very annoying and sometimes screamingly funny. I belong to Facebook. I rarely post anything, but I look at it a couple of times a day to see what other people are up to and to envy their wonderful lives.

I have ninety-two Facebook "friends." Five are dead, twenty rarely post, several have closed their accounts, and I've hidden the posts of a few others. One very active Facebook friend, though, is the daughter of an actual friend, Ann.

A week after the monastery incident, I see that Ann's middle-aged daughter, a well-regarded writer and teacher, has posted a little

story about a recent experience. She and her boyfriend were in a theater watching the Quentin Tarantino film, “Once Upon a Time In...Hollywood,” and were annoyed, she wrote, by “two little old ladies talking VERY LOUDLY.” She and her friend wondered, she continued, what the little old ladies were doing at a Tarantino movie. “Had they wandered in by mistake?”

Others quickly joined the conversation. “I am quite sure they have never heard of Tarantino,” commented Robbie.

“I hate to say it,” wrote Scott, “but elderly people tend toward massive discourtesy that way.”

Michael gave his analysis: “I’ve found that auditory special awareness decreases in the elderly, especially in movie theaters.”

Ned then offered a little old lady (now referred to as LOL) joke:

LOL 1 – The food in this restaurant is inedible.

LOL 2 – Yes, and such small portions.

Barbara followed up with what she claimed was one of her favorites. It was a photo of three grey-haired women with canes and walkers superimposed by several lines of dialogue. The joke was that none of the three could understand what the others were saying.

Reflecting on the possible popularity of this category of humor, I leave the Facebook thread and Google “Little old lady jokes.” I’m led to page after page of links. I can click on funny pictures of old ladies in bikinis, a farting little old lady joke, and old lady knock-knock jokes. I keep going, and I count up to 112 links before I give up. Then I Google little old man jokes, but there are only a handful.

When I read the ignorant Facebook comments, I think of strong, intelligent old women – Ruth Bader Ginsburg, for example, who is exactly my age. And my friends. Alice, a voracious reader who used to love movies, but can’t go anymore because of her hearing loss. Rosemarie, whose failing vision doesn’t stop her from volunteering four days a week in a hospital thrift shop. And Carol, who’s crippled from multiple sclerosis but still lugs her walker out of her car to shop for groceries and attend her weekly chess class.

And there’s me – being mocked in a monastery gift shop by a woman who probably thinks she’s paying me a compliment.

The mantra in my keychain gourd is the Shurangama, which I discover is the king of mantras, the longest, and the most important. The

many benefits for its practitioners include “Every wish granted, whether it is for children, longevity, fortune or health in the life.”

This can apply to all practitioners, I assume, even little old ladies.

Reissa Schrager-Cole

My Mother's Hat

When I landed in Montreal a day after my mother's death, I went to the board and care house where she had been living. There was a summer rain falling, the soft kind that makes everything silent and dreamy, but on that day, it exposed a hard-edged street lined with identical flat-roofed brown brick row houses, each fronted by a small cement porch and black iron railing, one after another. I found the right house and opened the unlocked front door and stepped into a small foyer, dark and quiet. There was no one to greet me so I wandered about on my own and shortly found my mother's small room down an equally dark hallway. I sat on her bed with the mahogany headboard and stared at her mahogany dresser. It was the same bedroom set my father had purchased when they married. In the top drawer she kept mementos which she would show me from time to time when I was a girl. I decided to rummage through those drawers hoping to recover them, but they weren't there.

Instead, I found two old photos dated May 12, 1940, written in her own hand on the back of each one. The setting was not recorded but I knew it well from growing up in Montreal. Here was my mother so young and attractive enjoying a Sunday outing on top of Mount Royal the iconic city center of her world that lay a few blocks west of the working class Jewish neighborhood where she grew up. I was looking at the mother I never knew, a pretty, smiling woman age 21 dressed in a well-tailored wool suit hugging her trim figure, its cinched-in-the-waist jacket emphasizing her curvy shape. She is wearing the most amazing hat shaped like a flying saucer. Its front brim skims her broad forehead and then tilts upward, perched at a precarious angle that exudes self-confidence. It perfectly counterbalances her round Romanian face which is framed by soft curls. The best part is the long feather that soars from the headband straight up, towards the treetops and sky. What a bold hat for a woman whom I knew as sad and reclusive. She is looking straight at the camera smiling broadly, arms at her side, eyes half-closed. In the other photograph, she is crouching alongside a handsome man with wavy hair who is also wearing a beautifully tailored tweed suit as well as a tie. Together they are holding onto a puppy. They lean into each other, shoulders touching, and smile into the camera. My mother has an unmistakable flirtatious look as she faces the unknown photographer. The man kneeling beside her is not my father, and I wonder if he is the

person behind the camera. My parents were married in November 1941 so they might have been engaged then. But she looks so happy and comfortable with that other man, the one in the photo, like they were the lovers. I want to enter that image and ask, “What happened to that Sunday afternoon girl? Mother, how could you have been so carefree after a week’s work at the Ex-Lax factory where you received a block of chocolate at Christmas, where you worked to give up your earnings to that embittered woman, your own mother?” Instead, I recall those other Sundays when my father would take my sister and me to that same mountain for an outing. She would pack us a delicious lunch – always the same- salmon salad sandwiches, crisp McIntosh apples, and homemade chocolate chip cookies. She never came; I would think about her when we were up there on Mount Royal with my father roaming those same trails she must have taken back in 1941. I wondered why she stayed at home when she could have been enjoying our picnic and feeding the ducks on Beaver Lake with the stale bread she had saved during the week. Sitting on her bed staring at these two photos, I return to this woman who was a distant figure in my life. Sometimes she stepped out of her shell to mother me, but not nearly often or regularly enough.

In daydreams, I would recreate a mother I would have liked to know, one I could make happy by being her daughter. That phantom mother would hug me; she would talk to me and maybe even say, “I love you.” That never happened. When I left Montreal at age 21, I also left her behind with a sigh of relief from the emptiness of longing for something I could not have. When I did see her on infrequent visits to Montreal, I would try to provoke her with jabs of sarcasm, or glaring silence. She would not respond and finally, I just gave up. Nevertheless, I was sad that she died alone and yet, I was detached sitting in her bedroom at the board and care facility. But those two photos intrigued me.

On the day of the funeral I asked my uncle to tell me something about her. He answered with, “As the eldest child, she naturally bore the brunt of hardships of the times and of the family. She was a kind and loving sister.” She was born in 1919, the eldest of five children. When I was a little girl, my mother would take out her school report cards buried in the top drawer of her mahogany dresser. “See”, she would say, “I was an “A” student,” but my mother made me leave school and go to work. She took my pay and only gave me enough back for carfare’. Oh, how I hated my grandmother. No one had stood up for my mother - not her own father, nor her brothers who were allowed to remain in school. Her

father- my grandfather- had a steady job but never gave my grandmother enough to manage the household although he seemed to find the money to dress smartly and go out to restaurants on his own or with his sons. My grandmother earned extra money as a wet-nurse but not enough I suppose to keep my mother in school. I didn't know what to say to her then, but now my uncle's words made sense. She did carry the weight of a troubled family and maybe that's what ultimately emerged as the quiet and introverted person I knew.

I want those two Sunday photographs of a joyful woman to speak to me. I plead with her: "Why, mother didn't you marry the handsome man in the photograph instead of that ill-suited, childish one who became my father, the one who was too self-absorbed, too needy himself to handle your sadness, to comfort you, to make you smile?" Once I did ask her why she had married him. She thought for a moment and said that he was a good wage earner offering the example that he had paid cash for their mahogany bedroom set. I didn't understand then. Now, I am sorry she traded the joy I saw in those photos for a bedroom set.

I returned to my home in California a week after the funeral, taking the photos from 1940 with me, and tucked them away in the bottom drawer of my own dresser.

Now, 17 years later at age seventy I find myself again wanting to reconcile the engaging woman in the photos with the detached woman, my mother. Five years before my arrival, she had suffered through a 3-day labor with my older sister where at one point the doctors thought of saving either my mother or my yet -to- be born sister. Then, there was a "miscarriage after which I came along two or three years later. That I came after the lost baby might have explained the absence of joy towards me; I had arrived in the wake of death. Nevertheless, if prompted, she maintained I had been her birthday present since she delivered me one day after her own birthday. I wonder now if that was her way of saying, "I'm glad you came along." But then I think of all the birthdays she forgot - mine and her own. Some years I would say to her, "Do you know what day it is?" She would have no idea. "It's my birthday and yesterday was yours." "Oh," she said, "Happy birthday. Would you like orange juice with your breakfast?" And that quickly, the chance for a little shared celebration was dismissed.

I tried to please her. When I was eleven, I took a bus on a Saturday morning with a neighborhood friend to the nearest Kresge's five and dime store where we each purchased a Mother's Day gift - a 25 cent lipstick called "sweetheart pink". When I handed it to her, she

looked at it and said, “why did you spend your whole allowance on this?” “But it’s ‘sweetheart pink’ for mothers”, I explained still clutching the tube. And then she returned to whatever was occupying her attention in the kitchen. I laid the lipstick on the counter and left.

That day in her board and care room, I also found a wrinkled and unlabeled photograph wedged between the wall and the second drawer of the mahogany dresser: a group of girls- nine to be exact which I immediately identified as “The Jolly Nine” the neighborhood friends from her girlhood she would often mention over the years, like a reference point of fun and laughter.

For a few years, “The Jolly Nine” was reincarnated when my mother, suffering from acute depression, left the house one day and landed a job working in ladies “foundations” at Eaton’s Department Store in downtown Montreal. She had endured electro-convulsive shock therapy; she kept a stony silence during psychotherapy sessions; she dutifully ingested anti-depressants. But she knew better what she needed. She developed a lot of skill fitting women for bras and girdles, and eventually earned a management position as a “signature” who had the authority to authorize certain sales transactions. She was proud that she had passed the written test for that promotion. She was happy. She became a different person.

At Eaton’s, my mother worked with a group of women who became her buddies, her “Jolly Nine” recovered. They attended lingerie and underwear fashion shows together, went out for cocktails and meals, and just had a good time together. She would go on and on about the “girls” at work; I never saw her so cheery, so talkative, as at that brief time in her life, in our family life. But my father eventually shut that door when he insisted she quit her job once he retired. And of course she complied, saying goodbye to her girlfriends, the job she loved, and quickly retreated into the quiet sadness that she had abandoned for a few years.

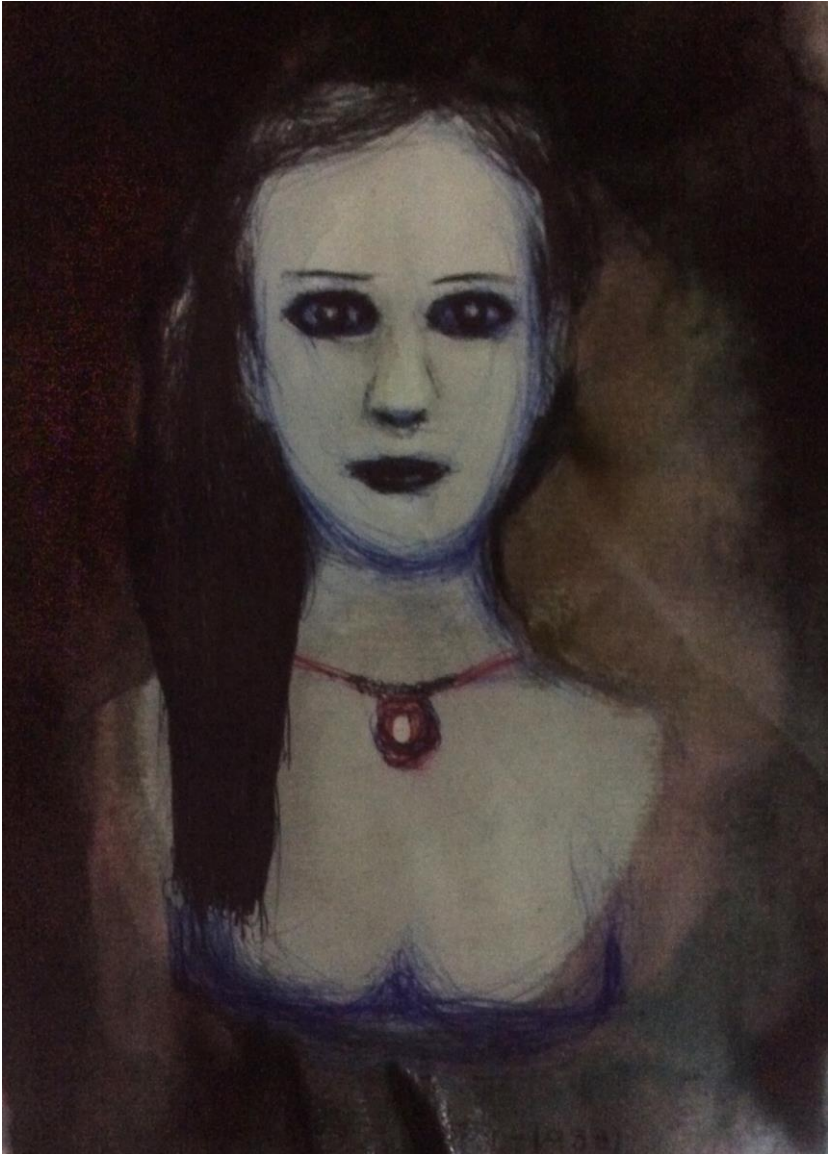
That job gave her what her marriage and her family could not provide. At Eaton’s Department Store she was smart again and confident, healing the insult of being forced to leave school. She belonged somewhere as she had in the “Jolly Nine”.

I struggle to understand what my mother could not give, and love her anyway. Accepting that she loved me is hard, and maybe that’s where I need to be, on that path where love eluded us, where we both lost. Rainer Maria Rilke said to, “Have patience with everything that remains unsolved in your heart. Try to love the questions themselves, like locked rooms, ...”. I’m trying.

I do know that my mother's hat sat like a bold extension of her thoughts and hopes on that day in 1940. The feather aimed for the open sky like an optimistic shot of youthful power. This was her truth. I wish that glorious hat had been saved in the top drawer of the mahogany dresser along with her report cards. I would have asked her to try it on for me.

A

Art



Andrew Mitchell Schaeffer

“Liberty”

B

BIOGRAPHICAL
NOTES

Nitza Agam is a writer and poet living in San Francisco. She has a Master of Arts in English Literature from San Francisco State University and a Master of Arts in Comparative Literature from San Francisco State University. Some of her recent publications are *The Open Forum* in The San Francisco Chronicle on Sept. 15th, 2017 titled: *Sadly, handicapped people remain invisible to many*, about daily life with her handicapped husband. Another article was published in *Momentum Magazine* Summer of 2015 titled "The Purple Parachute." She has had poems and articles published in various literary and educational magazines and published two memoirs titled *Scent of Jasmine* (2011) and *Love Letters to my Mother* (2016). Nitza was born in Newark, New Jersey, and lived in Israel where she attended Hebrew University in Jerusalem, and left Israel for San Francisco in 1976 where she now resides with her husband and two adult sons.

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).

Linda Boroff graduated from the University of California, Berkeley, with a degree in English. Her writing has appeared in Gawker, McSweeney's, The Guardian, Epoch, Prism International, and others. She has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize. Her suspense novel, *The Remnant*, was accepted for publication in 2020, as was her short story collection, *All I Can Take of You*. Linda has written one produced film. She has a short story currently under option to Sony and director Brad Furman (*The Lincoln Lawyer*).

Cheryl Caesar lived in Paris for 25 years; she earned her doctorate in comparative literature at the Sorbonne; she now teaches writing at Michigan State University. Last year she published over a hundred poems in the U.S., Germany, India, Bangladesh, Yemen and Zimbabwe. Her book *Flatman: Poems of Protest in the Trump Era* is available from Goodreads.

Paige Caine is an undergraduate senior studying creative writing and biology at Bucknell University in Pennsylvania. Her poetry has also appeared or is forthcoming in *Star*Line*, *The Ekphrastic Review*, *The*

Merrimack Review, and *ANGLES*. When she isn't writing, she can be found pursuing biological research by studying invasive argentine ants.

Patricia Callan is a writer, artist, and educator living in Beverly, MA with her husband, daughters, and a little beagle named Cricket. She received an M.A. in writing from Salem State University and served, for a time, as the fiction editor for the school's literary magazine, *Soundings East*. Her work can be found at *Unstamatic*, *Dream Pop Press*, *Drunk Monkeys*, *Hawaii Pacific Review*, and elsewhere.

Elizabeth Cohen is an associate professor of English at the State University of New York at Plattsburgh where she teaches undergraduate creative writing and co-edits *Saranac Review*. She is the author of 8 books, most recently, *The Patron Saint of Cauliflower*, poems.

Jonathan Ferrini is a published author who resides in San Diego. He received his MFA from UCLA in motion picture and television production.

Katherine Flannery Dering published a memoir, *Shot in the Head, a Sister's Memoir a Brother's Struggle* (Bridgeross, 2014) which deals with caring for her schizophrenic brother. Her poetry chapbook, *Aftermath* (Finishing Line Press) was published in 2018. She holds an MFA from Manhattanville College and her website is KatherineFlanneryDering.com.

Juditha Dowd's most recent book is *Audubon's Sparrow* (Rose Metal Press, 2020) a hybrid verse biography in the voice of Lucy Bakewell Audubon, the remarkable but largely unsung wife of the naturalist. More at www.judithadowd.org.

Alan Elyshevitz is the author of a collection of stories, *The Widows and Orphans Fund* (SFA Press), and three poetry chapbooks, most recently *Imaginary Planet* (Cervena Barva). Winner of the James Hearst Poetry Prize from *North American Review*, he is also a two-time recipient of a fellowship in fiction writing from the Pennsylvania Council on the Art.

Halley Fehner is a writer and interpretive planner. Her fiction has appeared in *Scissors & Spackle*, *Berkeley Fiction Review*, and other

journals. She lives in Rockville, Maryland with her husband and two sons.

Maryanne Hannan has published poems in *Rattle*, *the minnesota review*, *Oxford Review*, and many other places. One of her poems appeared in *Adanna's* inaugural issue. She is the author of *Rocking Like It's All Intermezzo: 21st Century Psalms Responsorials* (Resource Publications, 2019).

Adjie Henderson is a scientist and previously a Dean for Graduate Sciences. She has published over two hundred articles on diverse research, from molecular genetics to setting standards for environmental controls. She has made numerous public appearances related to science education—CBS, Good America, and National Public Radio—and been interviewed in the *New Yorker*, *Science News*, *Scientific American*, and *Popular Science*, among others. More recently she has published 20 short stories, none of which have to do with the credentials above.

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*, *Adanna*, *The Ocotillo Review*, *Slipstream* and other journals.

Jon Kemsley has been published in *the Fiction Pool*, *New World Writing*, *New Reader Magazine*, *Ellipsis*, *Storgy* and others. He lives and works on the south coast of England, listens to old jazz records and occasionally remembers to call his brother about whatever it was he promised to do the last time.

Elaine Koplou, retired English teacher and union organizer, is Director of the Sussex County Writers' Roundtable and Associate Editor of *The Stillwater Review*. A three-time Pushcart Prize nominee, her poems appear in the anthology *Voices From Here* Volumes 1&2, *Spillway*, *Edison Literary Review*, *Exit 13 Magazine*, *U.S.1 Worksheets*, *Tiferet*, *Journal of New Jersey Poets*, and elsewhere.

Karen Kotrba is a 2020 recipient of the Ohio Art Council's Individual Excellence Awards for fiction. She is also the author of *She Who Is Like a Mare* (Bottom Dog Press, 2013), a poetic sequence about Mary Breckinridge and the Frontier Nursing Service which put nurse-midwives on horseback in the Eastern Kentucky mountains in the early 20th century.

Lisa C. Krueger is a clinical psychologist. Her poems have appeared in various journals, including *Ploughshares*, *Alaska Quarterly Review*, and *Prairie Schooner*. Her most recent collection of poems published by Red Hen Press is *Run Away to the Yard* (2017). She has written articles and interactive journals about psychology and creativity and maintains a psychotherapy practice in Pasadena.

Jan LaPerle lives outside of Fort Knox, Kentucky with her husband, Clay Matthews, and daughter, Winnie. She has published a book of poetry, *It Would Be Quiet* (Prime Mincer Press, 2013), an e-chap of flash fiction, *Hush* (Sundress Publications, 2012), *a story in verse, A Pretty Place To Mourn* (BlazeVOX, 2014), and several other stories and poems. In 2014 she won an individual artist grant from the Tennessee Arts Commission. She is a master sergeant in the US Army.

Alissia J.R. Lingaur's stories and poems have appeared in *Unearthed*, the *Crab Orchard Review*, *The Villa*, *The Offbeat*, and the *NMC Magazine*, of which she is the literary adviser. She is the author of the novel, *The Trainstop*, available at Amazon.com and is currently at work on a second novel. Along with teaching developmental reading and writing, composition, and creative writing at Northwestern Michigan College, she has also taught English to non-native speakers at Berlitz Language Center in metro-Detroit. Find out more about her at alissiajrlingaur.com.

Caylee Lyman is a poet and proud feminist residing in the San Francisco Bay area. She is pursuing her bachelor's degree in English with a minor in Creative Writing at the University of California, Berkeley. She enjoys performing her poetry and won 2nd place in Wrightwood Literary Festival's Poetry Slam in 2018. She is currently writing her first collection of poems.

Joanne Mallari holds an MFA from the University of Nevada, Reno, and she served as the 2019 Nevada Humanities Poet in Residence. Her debut chapbook, *Daughter Tongue*, is forthcoming from Kelsay Books in November 2020.

Joan Mazza worked as a medical microbiologist, psychotherapist, and taught workshops on understanding dreams and nightmares. She is the author of six books, including *Dreaming Your Real Self*, and her work has appeared in *Italian Americana*, *Poet Lore*, *The MacGuffin*, *Prairie*

Schooner, *Crab Orchard Review*, and *The Nation*. She lives in rural central Virginia where she writes a poem every day and has been baking bread since before Covid19. www.JoanMazza.com

C.T. McClintock lives in Brooklyn. She is a Doctoral Fellow at St. John's University in Queens where she teaches undergraduate writing and works as Assistant Editor of the *Humanities Review*. Her most recent work can be found in *Remington Review* and is forthcoming in *SoFloPoJo*.

Ranjani Neriya is the author of 2 books of poetry- *Batik* and *Promise-a life*. Her poems have appeared in many journals in India and the U.S. Born and educated in the coastal town of Mangalore, S. India, she resides in Michigan.

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Joan Potter is a writer and memoir teacher whose creative nonfiction has been published in anthologies and literary journals, including *Iron Horse Literary Review*, *Longridge Review*, and *JONAH magazine*. She is the author or coauthor of several nonfiction books, including *Still Here Thinking of You: A Second Chance With Our Mothers*. She has taught at writing centers, libraries, and community centers.

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Janet Reed is the author of *Blue Exhaust* (FLP, 2019), and a multi-year Pushcart Prize and Best of the Web nominee. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Sow's Ear Review*, *Emry's*, *Tipton Poetry Journal*, and others. She began writing knock-off Nancy Drew stories on wide-lined notebook paper at age 11. Now, she teaches writing and literature in a community college and is currently enrolled in an MFA program in Creative Writing at University of Missouri-Kansas City.

Terry Sanville lives in San Luis Obispo, California with his artist-poet wife (his in-house editor) and two plump cats (his in-house critics). His short stories have been accepted more than 350 times by journals, magazines, and anthologies including *The Potomac Review*, *The Bryant Literary Review*, and *Shenandoah*. He was nominated twice for Pushcart Prizes and once for inclusion in *Best of the Net* anthology. Terry is a retired urban planner and an accomplished jazz and blues guitarist who once played with a symphony orchestra backing up jazz legend George Shearing.

Andrew Mitchell Schaeffer; 1956: born October 17 in Brooklyn, New York to Stanley and Violet is the second of three children. "Liberty" is an interpretative sketch of Elizabeth Rothschild. Ink Drawing, 17 cm x 22cm, Fabriano Classic Artist's Journal, white paper. Andy is the author of *The Political Poems of Andrew Mitchell Schaeffer* available on his website <https://www.andrewmittellschaeffer.com>.

Reissa Schragger-Cole lives in southern California. She has written reviews, critiques, and articles for the *Inuit Art Quarterly journal*. Presently, Reissa focuses on writing non-fiction essays and narrative fiction. Another piece, *A Song for Rose-Rose*, will be published in the San Diego Writers, Ink 2020 Anthology.

Melody Sinclair has been published at *Avalon Literary Review*, *Blognostics*, *Prometheus Dreaming*, and more. She lives in Highlands Ranch, CO with her husband and two kids. www.melodysinclair.com

Shoshauna Shy is the author of five collections of poetry. Her poems have been published in over 200 journals, magazines, anthologies; as videos, inside taxis, community cars, and on the hind quarters of Madison Metro buses. She usually gets ideas for new poems while stuck doing something else.

Linda Ann Strang is the author of the poetry collection *Wedding Underwear for Mermaids*. Her poems have appeared internationally in *Poetry Kanto*, *The Malahat Review*, *PANK*, *New Contrast* and elsewhere. Her work was nominated for a Pushcart Prize in 2007. She has an MA in English and lives in Port Elizabeth, South Africa.

RC deWinter is a Connecticut writer, digital artist and sometimes chanteuse. Her poetry is widely anthologized, notably in *New York City Haiku* (New York Times, February 2017), *Cowboys & Cocktails* (Brick Street, April 2019), *Nature In The Now* (Tiny Seed Press, August 2019), *Coffin Bell Two* (March 2020), in print in *2River*, *Adelaide*, *Event*, *Genre Urban Arts*, *Gravitas*, *Kansas City Voices*, *Meat For Tea: The Valley Review*, *the minnesota review*, *Night Picnic Journal*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Southword*, among many others and appears in numerous online literary journals. Her art has been published, too, and was licensed to ABC-TV for use on the show "Desperate Housewives."

Hannah Wynne recently graduated from Virginia Polytechnic Institute with a B.A. in Creative Writing. Her work has appeared in *Silhouette Literary and Art Magazine*, and she received an honorable mention in the 2019 Steger Poetry competition, hosted by renowned poet Nikki Giovanni. She now writes for the Silver City Independent.