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In Memoriam
Frank J. Macchiarola
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ASSISI

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THIS. THIS. *THIS*

is the best moment of my life. *This* glitters.
This shouts. Sings. Weeps. Moans. *This*
wonders. Laughs. Rumi says “The lamps
are different./But The Light is the same.”¹

This knows: The Light is now.
Is the only.

¹ Rumi, *One One One*

RED THREAD

Tell the story,
tell the story
of what happened to you:
the connection made through Book Soup
on Sunset Boulevard
to the lady writer in
Budapest
who told you the story in blood
and how you drew Gertrude Stein
on a piece of cheap paper
and layered her with beeswax
and stitched her up with red thread.

Tell the story,
tell the story
of trying to sew yourself
back together
across continents,
pulling tight the suture
so the land squeezes out the sea,
so you can walk across
and shake the hand
of that lady Zsofia Bán
who gave you the thread.

HERE,

where pines weave above us
and break the eye of sun
to shards of gold on green,
let us leave the shells
of who we think we are here
on this low, fragrant bough.

Let us be led by the wind.

The bright birds
who sing us home
cannot be hunted,
hide scentless among stones.

GRATEFUL REMEMBERING MOMENTS OF GOD

we thank god on far apart days (when thanks we remember)
for it happens the forgetting and remembering become gratitude
infrequent become oaths lost become promises unkept
and only on the tongue lips ears hands
do we say food's grace for: cornbreadmeatsalt
for the family thereness: knifeforkplate
for travels safe of ourselves and others loved.
in those most remembered moments when speaking
not asking for (please grant this) in the moments
when thankfulness for whitely moving clouds
for soles soft on flowered-earth ears to birds snails wet
sliding and children-trampled paths through corn fields greenly tall
running wielding sticks aloft and small joyed moments
that we so far and few remember to thank the body the body
to thank itself: in the muchness of deeply loving
now kneeling with new eyes full earth flooded
with finally tears giving now the givingness of thankyou
the noticing of moments with folded hands to sky river waterfalling.

HUSK

This *I, I, I*,
infernally self
met only in passing—

put it in a pantheon
and let it be worshipped
till the end of days
—and let some *other*
rise up from my remains

like a sigh
or a koan,
an emergent thing
that takes no notice
of comings or goings—

husk of a body,
rind and rust,
a chrysalis
that won't endure
beyond its season

and finally
crumbles to dust.

SALT

Aplomb- Poise- The direction is south- Corner of white sail- I turn the boat on a dime- Wind is right- What is lost-

Hallelujah to the water- Sea stars, sea squirts- I am the light and the beginning- A ship at a distance- A man nowhere to be seen- White as my sail, white as the skin underneath my ring, white as the candle for the Virgin of Guadalupe, white as the flannel nightgown, white as the tea bag before use, white as string- As the seas rise, I buckle myself in-

What is lost- Maidenhood- Headache- The leaves to the wind- I gather up my skirts- I take to the wind-

Gold and square, like salt that is encrusted with the elements. Melody and a strange yellow-white cast, through the walls of salt, thirsty just thinking-

I steer the boat south- Onward- Form by form- Repetition- Legs unfolded for the man on top- Scissored- A kick high into the air- No one remembers me- Lost- A soul will be forgotten- It takes it from all sides- Food- Lone star- On all sides, the boat takes in water-

White as the scar, white as the sun on my neck, white as narcissus, white as sugar, white as salt- Commodities like tar and gold- Even my skin is a commodity- What is lost- My birds to the sea, my brother to the sea, my master to the sea- The sea takes what is lost in January and gives back what it finds in June-

CLOUDS

Clouds remind me of texture- Teeth- A bit chomped in the celestial away looking down- Clouds mirage the sky- Evaporate like incandescence- A strange knocking in the wall-

Up in the sky, bring in the sense of these things-passing- Away- a turn of phrase- Too much bright- Eclipse the sun-

A cloud like a whisper, cloud like a zipper, cloud like a hand folding the blue laundry sky- Ordinary mist escaping, the ocean attracts clouds, creates heaves of light escaping air- A cloud could dissolve or re-organize itself-

Refracting white-pink in the morning or late at night- Lungs full of clouds, the surface trying to fill- Air, cliff, a voice that's failing- A mountain of tan and pink encircled by a path- There's no way to travel up or down- Keep climbing until I tell you to leave the bike there- It's not my mountain-

The end is nowhere, the end is here- Clouds are the manifestation of water at one point in their cycle- They will keep looking down from above- I need them- Of course turbulence, wind patterns, shifting-

AIR

Evolving, like telling a story of transition- Colder, the energy of air and I'm looking at someone- Blown off the cliff into the distance of forgetting- I'm not sure who I am in a new place- So she keeps working into new light- A turn of phrase- A house that is dark water inside, the cast of light- Ashes in the gray, absorbed.

I look down and see backyards full of clouds- Everything from above is condensed into finite borders and clean crisp color- From a distance the world appears geometric-
I can't understand the sounds-

Some people collapse against a backdrop of approaching light- I observe the faculty for knowing- Waiting for the phone call- Patterns are repeating texture- Diligence- absorbed and known- Absorbed and seen- Clouds divide the distance between that other sphere and this one-

A compass set in the center and my clouds, they are my clouds- Convince me that clouds are essential- Entangled, a nightmare- Graphite clouds, smudged chimeras- Dreaded and lopsided, the little hoops above the horizon- If I knew you, I'd say something different.
I eat the clouds that fall at my feet- I am a servant to the language I speak-

SMOKE

There's a way to work that is also solidly in touch with ground fires- I see ash and I remember the white-smoke light- The leaf that disintegrated in my palm in the backyard of the old white house- When did I move? Am I moved? White hills that surround the distance- I have surrendered my own knowing-

Tell me the story of why- Freesias smelling predictably sweet- White, cream, faded yellow- Must keep going- Remainders- I don't get this thing- Salt and sugar- Hair cut off completely or tucked down the back of my shirt- I cut the buttons off altogether- Two small children- A fish is in the beginning-

FOG

The fog almost soaked them in- The tree is now so old- lotus that is white and pink, lotus that is all white and yellow, lotus that spreads in the mud and attracts the white egret- Off-white color swatches- The roses appear less sweet-

At home sick- I am vulnerable like a half-open rose- Too old, too late, cast out- I'm an attractive woman- Make-up helps- I'm so pale, so white, so trying so hard- Touch each molecule of water as it rises to the sky.

COMPENSATION

Midway along my morning run
the answer to *that question* came
as birds of prey took flight

stunning in their silhouettes,
glistening of sunlight caught
on blue-black shining wings

Vanished then, midst the view,
the answer one of many gone,
yet I have memory of hawks
as few have ever seen

HYPERBOREA

Trees of frosted lampwork
in high, pale colors of winter
dot the hillside—
pointillist baubles
blown by the north wind,
they chime with his caress,
their living layers ringing
even as his grasping fingers
stroke their dead and wind-chapped skins.
So must the heart of Orithyia,
beaten half to death without,
have beaten still in steady measure,
steady measure deep within
her sisters' silence.
So must the river of her innocence
babble still, like Socrates,
beneath Mesogeion Avenue,
past columns of the lecher Zeus—
silent sisters of living stones
piled high in new construction.

Marble casements of basilicae,
cold, aloof, unyielding,
ensconce the true and living church
—a bushel on a wind-swept light.
Greeks, perhaps, have never known
the chattering and aching bones
of winter service in Québec,
where I warm myself with brandywine
that drizzles from the dozenth station.
What life had I, o Lord, had I not crawled
deep inside your bloody death
like a stranded Mountie in a gutted horse
waits for Boreas to pass him by?

A POOR PSALM

*The Lord is near to the broken-hearted,
and saves the crushed in spirit.
– Psalm 34.18*

Lord, do not break my heart. Search out
my spirit wandering, lost.

Into the darkness crushing life out of me,
You, yourself, be. Shine.

Lay your hand upon my head burning
with fever. Anoint my brow.

If there is beauty in every living thing,
open these eyes, even to myself.

Give desire to offer my life for those
whom only You hold dear.

Lead this mind which circles endlessly
to your high mountain spaces.

If there is peace,
let me know it.

As you will.
As you will.

MOMENT BEFORE

She moved through the cave, its black, oyster-shell walls smooth to her touch;
her old, gas lantern lit dimly as she pressed forward in gentle steps,
Slowly caressing,
Feeling firmly,
until
Sharp edges narrowed in,
Pinching, piercing.
The darkness inched forward,
Slowly smothering her in every turn, and
Leaving her flame flickering,
gone, suffocated. She dropped lightly to the chilled floor,
Relishing the moment before.

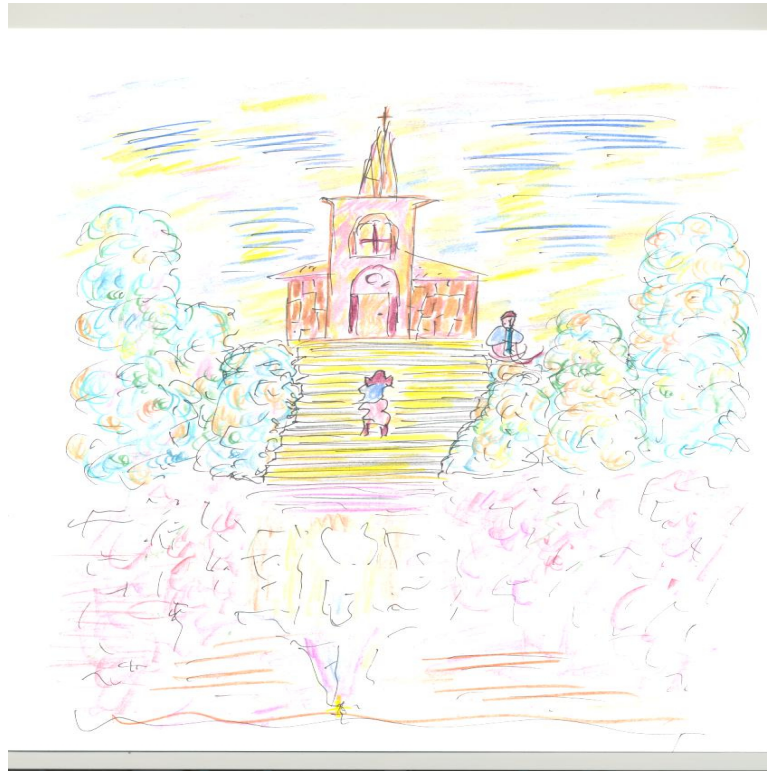
O mys-

terium, O Magnum Mysterium, o mys-
tery, o magnificent mysterious mystery.
That sheep were witness at the birth of Jesus.
That sheep, and goats, and oxen shared their manger
with the Baby.

(O magnum mysterium,
et admirabile sacramentum,
ut animalia viderent Dominum natum,
*jacentem in praesepe!)*¹

We are mystified. We do not understand, we mystics,
we mystical in-dwellers. We ask, but we expect
no answers. The sheep, the goats, the oxen -
they were there to welcome him. And why
not?

¹ *O great mystery,*
and wonderful sacrament,
that animals should see the new-born Lord,
lying in a manger!



JANET YODER

SINGING UP THE LADDER

We visit Kansas in the summer. We go to the Monitor Church of the Brethren, a country church next to the farm where my dad grew up. Home from worship, we eat farm chicken with potatoes and gravy, with green beans and tomatoes just picked. We kids sit at a table in the kitchen with our cousins. We are four and they are four. We hear the adults talk in the dining room about neighbors, elders, and ancestors, about who was Brethren, Amish, Mennonite, Holdeman Mennonite, or Hutterite and of these, which were old order or new order. These categories mean little to us plain vanilla Methodist kids from Washington State. It is a given that we are all churched.

The kitchen is hot. The backs of my legs stick to the seat of the dinette chair, and my arms stick to the table as if glue has seeped from my skin. The meal ends. We unstick ourselves and clear the table. We wash, we rinse, we dry, and we put away Grandma's good dishes brought out for our family gathering.

Grandma goes to the piano. She opens her hymnal and launches into “Come to the Church in the Wildwood,” the hymn that thumps along like a camp song. On the chorus, the men sing *Come, come, come, come*. Their insistent bass line calls us to the wildwood, though we look out the window at open fields of wheat. This hymn is my dad’s favorite, the only hymn he plays on our piano at home. My dad sings with the exuberance of the faithful and completely in his own key. We all sing. If we look like a Norman Rockwell painting, we are not aware of it.

Grandma turns the thin pages of the hymnal to “In the Garden.” We sing, *And He walks with me, and He talks with me, and He tells me I am His own*. We sing “Blessed Be the Ties that Bind.” My relatives know these hymns like they know which field is ready for harvest, like they know how to drive combine, or run a thresher, or bake bread for the bereaved. They sing the alto, tenor, and bass parts. They leave the melody to us.

How many hymns do we sing? Twenty? Thirty? My relatives call out the hymns they yearn for, hymns that are a plaintive plea, a prayer, a joyous ode, a message, an instruction. We sing: “Take Time to be Holy,” “Softly and Tenderly Jesus is Calling,” “Sweet Hour of Prayer,” “Just as I Am,” and “Abide with Me.”

We finish with “Jacob’s Ladder.” *We are climbing Jacob’s Ladder*. I do not know why we are climbing a ladder. Really, we are standing around my grandma at her solid upright piano, a piano that carries decades of use.

* * *

Three decades later, I take my husband, Robby, to Kansas for Thanksgiving. We fly into Hutchinson. My aunt and uncle meet us, then drive us forty miles past flat winter fields to arrive at the family farmhouse. My grandpa is gone. My grandma is gone. My father is gone. Two of my cousins are here, married and settled since I saw them last. The passage of time is palpable.

We roast the turkey in the extra oven out in the barn, leaving the kitchen oven free for dressing and green bean casserole. We all sit at the adult table. My aunt offers a prayer and we eat. We talk of elders and ancestors. We speak of my dad, and I cry because I miss him differently here in Kansas. The meal ends. We wash, we rinse, we dry, and we put away Grandma’s good dishes brought out for our family gathering.

Aunt Mary Ellen goes to the piano. She opens Grandma’s hymnal and she begins to play and to sing: *Shall we gather at the river? Where bright angel feet have trod. With its crystal tide forever, flowing by the throne of God?* We gather around her in time to sing the response: *Yes, we’ll gather by the river. The beautiful, the beautiful river. Gather with the saints at the river that flows by the throne of God*. Then we sing “For the Beauty of the Earth,” and I know my relatives are singing of their earth, of Kansas. “Bringing in the Sheaves” takes us through harvest. “We Gather Together” brings us right up to this Thanksgiving.

I look at my aunt’s hands and see my grandmother’s hands. Though I am less church-ed now, I understand this: Hymns are balm to arthritis, to storm-damaged crops, even to our blackest sorrow. *In the sweet by and by, we shall meet on that beautiful shore*.

One of my cousins is a fine organist who plays at two or three churches. She is young and adept, yet she lets her mother play us through these familiar hymns. We know it is my aunt's turn. We breathe in unison and we sing in harmony. Though I am more comfortable now in alto range, the relatives leave the melody to me and to Robby who does his best an octave lower.

Together, we are climbing Jacob's Ladder. Our beloveds are at the top. Every round goes higher, higher. We sing our way up with hymns of praise.

DANIEL JOHN

CATHERINE

Eyes like stars, always changing

Lips like kindness

Hands as soft as welcome me home

Undress me, Cate

I'm already naked.

WHAT WHISPERS US FORWARD

Purple coneflowers, juniper, sage,
autumn's origami
damp in mossy corners.

He lies

on his side,
back to me,

restless in the night's dark swallow,
dreaming hard.

Even with his night hum,
its promise,
my cold body
warmed by the scent of his breath,

I come to him in pieces,
hair heavy, perfumed

the green of cut glass.

THE DARK LADY'S SONNET

The nights he wrapped my hair around his throat
and swore I was the music in his life,
I gloried in each yes and please he moaned
and sucked the honeyed words he fed me dry.

We were never true to one another, he and I
but more and less than friends who chose to lie
in lust together on an August night
and laugh when lightning cracked the sky.

Such games we played among those seamed sheets!
I was his ever-changing dark Egyptian queen.
No breasts of dun, dark wires or reeky breath,
no hellish apparition black as death,
from whose grasp he could not pull away
to pen sweet nothings for his lordling's pay.

HUGH BEHM-STEINBERG

ON DREAMS

It's ok, we can deal with them, we can sneak in, we can become
 elliptical and
 not resent anymore, or splay, not like petals, not like sky,
 as in how I elongate in our bed and you're the sound before
 I hear it, an ebbing hush as you fall asleep,
 so it's less like sleeping, more like making oneself open.

SARDONYX

Deep snow yields a hindrance of ground—
in some unguarded tundra this morning
a musk-ox discards its graze. It may be the impact

of having no beard that I
retreat into the smallness of small universals, drink
coffee, weave old grasses, your hair,

into a mourning locket, risk
decanting my own nature. It is possible separation's

physicality forces energetic expansion
like hoarfrost belittling each leaf,

vanquished yards of accomplishment, the white
beneath the white within snow
grows breadth. Pigeon's marbled
onslaught over ancient towns garnish
cathedrals with new blood. Alone
one is always announced in comings

and goings and sits or stares outside then walks
church to church without really stepping. Such wayfarers
cannot consider the ample system of a thing.

COSMOLOGY

Within one second
of the Big Bang, the universe had expanded to a million billion miles.
When I was young,
I would have tripped over
the impossible romance of this notion, would have written it
as the moment your hand
strayed to my neck at the party where we first spoke,
my whole life hydrogen-hot
and barreling outward
from that instant.

Now I no longer study the stars.
All things
slide from the grasp
of our knowing, as charmed and strange
as quarks. And it's been years now
since your skin on my skin, and you're still
here, inexplicable as ever, the dumb paws
of gravity clasping us to the earth and to each other,
space winging out beyond us,
shedding its futile names like dying lights.

BY

I decide to keep the crab shell after staring out to sea
for long moments. The shore, when I gain myself
again, rolls and swells, laps and falls like earth loosened—
its givenness, looking back across the cusp of sand
to knurly, colossal boulders, a trance or light effect,
the cottage and tall yellow grass on the rise just beyond.

The old people here say *by* and mean spoiled. Glair,
when an egg is *by*, is waterish and umber or black.
Potatoes in the wood box at the bottom of the cellar
steps blight and are *by*. In people too they see
something unsound. A center gets hollowed out
or pulled away, for no other reason than a common suffering
and its slow diminishments. But a house when it is *by*
is abandoned years before anyone ever leaves.

Lovers keep their dark unrest there, and I want to give
them mine. They cut initials into a door and I want them
to take mine. My breath. Me. Swaddle the shell
in tissues, though it still plies in my hands.
Fold it in a shirt deep in my bag and say the things
they might have said or let their touching rob my mouth too.

They leave bedding on the floor in a tattered back room.
Something of their salty, intoxicated effort remains.
Children harrow the windows. Only weeks after
returning home, I say, will I take the shell out again,
its ruffled edges like creases in a sleeper's ruddy palm
I have held to my lips. But I know I'll uncover it
right away, the one who promised already gone,
to feel how they existed in each other's arms, soft,
thick and whole, and tinged with light their bodies made.

MATCHA IN THE AFTERNOON

As Carey stepped out of the train station, she did not expect to see a monk standing guard outside, silently watching people walk by. He was like a tall stone in the middle of a river of people flowing past him. A large fountain bubbled behind where he stood, and Carey was tempted to throw a one-yen coin into it. She refrained, not wanting to catch the attention of the taciturn monk, and walked down the shopping arcade in Nara.

The train ride hadn't taken as long as she thought; watching the sun shine down on tall apartment buildings and Japanese style homes as she passed by was strangely cathartic. Shades of tension fell away the closer she got to Nara, away from the hustle-bustle of Osaka. Sometimes, wading through crowds of people, she felt like a goldfish gasping for air. Kyoto was always a nice escape, but tourists have been crowding in as of late and Carey was aching for a taste of a new city.

The air was thick with heat and Carey breathed in deeply, hoping for a whiff of history. So far, Nara seemed tranquil, which was a pleasant change from Osaka. She swept her honey-gold hair back from her face and looked around for a restaurant; her *ryokan* was not open for checking in until later and she was hungry after the train ride. The shopping arcade was full of restaurants, and Carey had trouble deciding. There was a falafel place, as well as other restaurants that each specialized in an aspect of Japanese cuisine. Trying to decide where to eat was made even more difficult by all the plastic models of food most places had outside. Curiosity taking control, she decided to try a little Vietnamese restaurant whose tray of plastic food and signs advertising lunch sets caught her eye. Back in California, Carey treasured little mom-and-pop Vietnamese restaurants and enjoyed the fact that her dollar seemed to go so far in them.

She enjoyed a lunch set consisting of Vietnamese meatballs in sauce, a salad with an egg roll, and an unlimited amount of cold vermicelli rice noodles. The meal was refreshing; the fish sauce bringing back memories of her college days when, after a day of geology labs, Carey and her friends would walk down a few blocks to a little Vietnamese restaurant, tucked between a cleaners and a used bookstore. Slurping up a large bowl of pho and drinking Thai iced teas melted the stress away. Even though she graduated from college a couple months ago and she was glad to be finished, there were some aspects of that life she missed. Her friends all migrated back to their hometowns, uncertain futures staring them in the face. Carey was the type of person who organized and planned meticulously; she knew she wanted to go to graduate school in Japan from sophomore year on and readied herself for it.

After lunch, even though the day was becoming hotter, she decided to walk up to the *Daibutsu*, the giant Buddha in the Todai-ji temple. Little groups of docile deer walked along the paths, looking around for *shika senbei*, round wafers made especially for the deer. Carey noticed quite a few little wooden stalls selling the wafers and wandered over to one.

The wizened Japanese woman selling them looked to be over 90, at least. After getting the wafers, she walked over to a small deer, antlers little buds of growth on his head, lying in the shade of a tree. The deer peered up at her, not at all disconcerted to be among so many people. In fact, Carey noticed that the deer seemed to like all the people walking around and patting them on their heads. Carey was just about to feed the deer when she felt something bump into her.

She turned and looked around for a bit, but it wasn't until she looked down that she noticed what had hit her.

Another deer, this time a larger buck with strong antlers, was regarding the shika senbei with hungry eyes.

"Well, you'll just have to wait your turn," Carey said, turning to give some wafers to the first deer she had found. The second deer bumped her again and more deer followed his lead. Carey was then surrounded by deer, all stronger than they looked and quite greedy. They came at her, noses bumping against her body, sniffing and looking around for hidden shika senbei. Carey was becoming quite flustered until she heard a familiar voice.

"Carey-san! Are you okay?"

She looked around and saw the owner of the heavily accented, yet very clean voice. A young man was running up to where she stood, a couple stacks of shika senbei in his hand.

"Hiromasa-san, what are you doing here?" she exclaimed. "I thought you were visiting your family in Kyoto this week."

Hiromasa began feeding some of the deer surrounding Carey and they relented, drawing away from her. Hiromasa was the nephew of her landlady Shigeko; Carey was renting a room in her home, along with a couple other girls going to Osaka University. Hiromasa would come over to bring his aunt food or other things from his mother, Shigeko's younger sister. Carey exchanged small talk with him on more than one occasion, and she always looked forward to his visits. He and Shigeko would sit on the smooth wooden floor and drink tea, enjoying the view of Shigeko's modest backyard. If Carey happened to be around, they would invite her to join them, an invitation that always excited her. His mother is one of the most famous tea ceremony practitioners and teachers in Kyoto.

Now, looking at Hiromasa, his long-ish brown hair glossy in the early afternoon sun and lean body casual in a t-shirt and jeans, she suddenly felt shy around him.

"My mother had a demonstration here today and I drove her. I wanted to walk around Nara anyway; I have not come here in so long."

Carey was charmed by the formal way he spoke English, his accent adding an exotic flavor to the words. The deer, now fed and bored, dispersed and the two of them began walking around.

"What is your favorite place to see here?"

Hiromasa contemplated her question, his coffee brown eyes thoughtful. "The Kasuga Taisha shrine is my favorite place to see. Stone lanterns line the pathway, pieces of the past watching tourists come and go. Have you been there yet?"

Carey shook her head. "I was heading over to Todaiji to see the Daibutsu."

"I shall go with you and show you, if you want," Hiromasa offered, small dimples tucked into his cheeks as he smiled. Carey noticed that he didn't always like to smile with his teeth, since he had a small gap between his two front teeth. Carey found it terribly charming.

"I would like that," Carey replied, matching his smile with one of her own.

They explored Todaiji, marveling at the grandness of the Daibutsu. Carey couldn't believe how large it was; she kept staring up at it, almost sure she saw its eyes moving. Tearing herself away from the ancient splendor, she bought a couple souvenirs and Hiromasa then led her to Kasuga Taisha shrine, which was more of a walk than she had thought.

The shrine was all that Hiromasa had described and more. The lanterns lining the gravel walkway were each so detailed and gave off an air of religious mystery. Carey was glad of Hiromasa's guidance because she was sure if left alone, she would lose herself among the lanterns, forever wandering like a ghost through a maze of stone.

Walking back from the shrine, Hiromasa led her to a small, old-fashioned teahouse. They sat on thin pillows on the floor, the shoji panel doors wide open into the brilliantly green forest, and ordered the matcha set, a bowl of tea and a wagashi, a traditional Japanese tea sweet.

Carey looked down at the bowl of matcha, the green, slightly frothy liquid rivaling the trees and grass for color. She took a sip, the earthy taste cascading down her tongue.

Hiromasa smiled, the gap between his teeth prominent. Carey felt warmth deep inside her chest, seeing his defenses finally come down.

"Do you like it?" he asked, taking a sip of his own tea. "I tried matcha before, in Kyoto with my friend Mako-chan at Nijyo castle. It's such a bright color that I keep thinking it should taste sweet, you know, like a dessert. Do you drink it often, Hiromasa?"

He shrugged elegantly. "My mother likes to drink it when guests come over or when she is presenting. The wagashi is sweet to complement the bitter tea. I am pleased that you like it, Carey-san," Hiromasa smiled again.

"Matcha is much different than any teas we have in America. You can get green tea there, but you never see matcha unless you go to a Japanese grocery store. I'm glad it's not popular in America; it's synonymous with Japan to me."

"The tea ceremony is part of the heart of Japan, and matcha plays a large role in it."

Carey took another sip of the tea, shivering in pleasure as a little breeze tickles her bare shoulders. "Do you know how to do it? The tea ceremony, I mean."

"My whole family is skilled in it. My mother taught us from an early age." He gestured to his half-full tea bowl. "Just touching this bowl makes my hands ache to, how do you say, form the movements, like this."

His hands moved in the air like graceful swans, slow and elegant around the bowl. Carey marveled at the smoothness of his palms, at his fingernails curving like crescent moons. Hiromasa's face looked calm as he gestured, and his eyes took on a faraway look, as though he was looking back into history.

They were silent, Carey trying to hold back a smile, feeling the intensity of Hiromasa's gesticulations. Once he finished, he sat back and cut a bit of his wagashi treat with the thin bamboo stick and put it into his mouth, chewing thoughtfully.

"Can you teach me, Hiromasa-san? I would love to learn."

Hiromasa shook his head. "It is not for me to teach. I am just a beginner. My mother is the one you should ask, but I think she has never taught a foreigner before."

"I think you would be a good teacher. You did such a good job explaining the history of the shrine to me earlier."

"That's different; it's history, sharing words and ideas with someone else. The tea ceremony is separate parts coming together and balancing."

Carey didn't say a word, but her grey-green eyes looked at him pleadingly.

"Okay Carey-san, I shall try to show you how to do it, but..." he paused and smiled enigmatically.

"But...?"

"Only if you show me how to make real pizza. I ate very good pizza in California when I visited a few years ago, and I miss the taste. Pizza in Japan is too different," he said, laughing. Carey joined him in laughing, unable to believe that was what he wanted.

"I agree; for some reason, Japanese people put mayonnaise on pizza. I never understood that," Carey shook her head and ate a piece of her wagashi, a meticulous confection shaped like a peach and then took another sip of the tea.

At that moment, she felt truly at piece. The sweet complemented the bitter, two halves coming together and balancing out. She looked out at Nara Park, feeling transported back in time as she saw the deer wandering through shrines and temples. At the same time, she saw tourists armed with cell phones and cameras, modern times warring with ancient principles. She looked back at Hiromasa and grinned. She was beginning to understand Japan.



NATURAL CONFRONTATIONS

1/ Crow

A wounded, fledgling crow
Yaws invisibly
Above its shadowy voice
As if to convey the message
About the darkness of tomorrow night
To the whole world, where a heavy snow
Has just started to fall, falling

2/ Plum Blossom

Without a single leaf
Green or yellow
To support it as a foil
But on a skeletal twig
Glazed with dark elegies
A bud is blooming, bold and blatant
Like drops of blood
As if to show off, to challenge
The entire season
When whims and wishes
Are all frozen like the landscape

3/ Seagull

With its sharp wings
Feathered with
The light of thunder
The seabird is cutting open
The entire thickening dusk
Along the borderline
Between day and night

WITH NO SALT IN OUR WATER #33

Blue air,
where the water
used to branch

into the crop,
the all joy
of growth

reaching up
like a blind hand
that takes

the wind
with the potato
& declares it

to be a meal.

A SEARCH FOR SALMON

Alaska

I walk a narrow trail,
breathe the forest-silence.
Twigs snap beneath my boots.
A quiet stream
ruffles its shore.

On silk ribbon currents
salmon arrive, flash inflamed colors.
In shallow pools, pairs swim
aeon-old rhythms,
circle upon circle, raining seeds.
Smoky water, eggs drift
into a nest of sand.

Shadow mottles water,
ripples tremble.
Salmon skins rise, glide, glint wet;
an eye emerges, glazed, looks past me,
intent.

Show me the way,
in this unbounded place
where your bellies gasp their last.
Eyes dim, fins fall slack, where bones
subsume to smudges of black.
I touch dark secrets,
open my palm.

Eggs will hatch, youth takes flight,
What is taken is given back.

GAIL EISENHART

CARDINAL TRANSGRESSION

Yesterday your brown plumage caught my eye
as you sat in the naked garden, nearly invisible.
Your claret tinged crest was slightly tilted, bracing
you against winter's persistent icy wind.

At the whim of weather your small face quivered
like the maple tree's final leaf. I listened
for a piercing chirp but you were silent,
easy prey for cat or owl.

Your half-parted beak haunts my dreams,
returns me to that dreary day long ago
when, newly alone, I huddled and waited
for someone, anyone, to save me from despair
chase the chill of loneliness from my shivering marrow.

Today...a bare patch
a single feather.



ALEX KUSTANOVICH

APRIL WIND

A flock of cedar waxwings looked like leaves
trying to return to the tree, fluttering to gain a perch
in the calm between gusts.

The day grayed against spring green and bursts of pink
and white. The Japanese maple's new red leaves
waved like startled hands.

PENANCE

I shake the orange tree
to make the high fruit fall

two fledglings flung
to the ground
too young to fly

I cradle the smell of
orange blossoms
in my bleeding hands

and I enshroud myself
in the memory of
the muscularity of trees
I know so well

the slick roughness
of black cherry
the sinuosity of plum

the crotchety agile
oldness of apple

and the rotting fruit
finding its way
to cider and brandy
on the ground

MY GARDEN ANGEL

She hovers over the tomatoes
urging them to plump redness
glaring at the slugs
flapping her wings at the bugs and trying
against her nature
to seem like a coyote.
She doesn't manage to keep the deer out.
She can't make the tomatoes thrive in this soil, either,
But when I sit in the dirt
a day after rain
coaxing out the chickweed roots,
I feel her blessing on the place.

HEIST

A pair of does
posed

so far back
in the backyard

for so long
that, dumbstruck,

we failed to see

(maybe, who
knows, so

we *would* fail to see)

just over
the deck there,

so close
to the house,

a pair of
bucks sacking

our fig tree.

PALM

They huff the breeze then hula, these
fanned coquettes against coy blue sky—
tiny heads swaying high on
ring-necked stems, perfect helmets
of clean green monochrome
and some misshapen sidewinders.

Varietal, foreign, fruit-bearing:

Who is truly native here? You from
the sound, I from some lake country,
deposited here like silt or ash—
sifting up through our own ambitions,
rising ceaselessly, seeking oasis,
storing our water and essential oils.

Now like those stately trees
sloughing off their used raffia
we float down to who we are,
flaunting our survivorship,
staying above water,
damaged companions

still spreading nut and seed,
still dancing.



LOCH NESS

Turn to look, and it isn't there,
turn away, and you know it must be watching.

Lie down beside the murky waters,
let yourself break the surface of sleep.

Will you dream that it came to you
out of the darkness and the deep?

You are the strangest object,
that can calculate the odds against itself,

that has made that thing in the water
in your own image, restless, wary, cold, alone.

Everything you have seen could be
the one thing you have been looking for,

clouds and shadows, birds and fish,
a storm of blowing rain, starlight in the water.

VERONA: SONNET #1

What could the city have been thinking of,
To name this leafy, sleepy neighborhood
Verona? Had its founder been in love
That star-crossed day he christened it for good
Or ill, and passed its rubric on to me,
A five-year-old in 1953?
Across the street, the playground's one whole block
Composed the world, a jar in Tennessee.
Before the school, a stolid, bronze-plaques rock
Proclaimed Verona Elementary.
A boulder that I never climbed, it must
Be standing still, as solid as Gibraltar.
And I assume it can't have turned to dust,
But waits there for me still, just like an altar.

TOMALES BAY

Point Reyes

Day folds away from sunlight,
sea air sweeps up the bay,
muffles the faraway
down the highway.

A cormorant calls.
Clear, long notes ride over
a channel flowing landward.

Marsh hawks search for prey,
whirl like helicopters over willowy grasses
with deep, promising shadows,
a haven for nocturnal creatures stretching
their hind legs to traverse the night.

Beneath my feet the earth splits.
Things grow, susceptible to seasonal whims.
I wait for the sky to bloom
moon and stars.

SOUTH RANDOLPH ROAD, VERMONT

Wild yarrow marks the way
down South Randolph Road
where buttercups paint pastures
unsettled by toppled trees
and the unleashed tongues
of dogs and children.

Those may even be prayer flags
flying high on the hillside
between the cotton ball clouds,
and beneath them the hollows,
like the top of a swayback cow,
sink into the verdant earth.

Forty years ago,
with our lives on the line,
we went back to the land
we had never known
and found a home.
Our hair was long
and our lifestyles alarming.
But we smiled at the farmers,
kept our peace and baled their hay.
Vegetables in boxes beside our back doors
were the first sign we might be all right.

Winters went on forever
and spring brought a month of mud.
Survival meant helping out,
not fences between neighbors.
So this was not a place to hide
but to learn who we really were.
Decompression schooled us:
slow down, slow down, slow down.
Chop wood, cords of wood,
carry water--your own water.
It might take years, or a lifetime.

At the dances in the union church
We heard “follow your neighbor; balance and swing.”
We paired with lovers, friends, and strangers.
Helping each other learn the steps,
we danced to the calls of the master.
Sweating, stumbling, smiling,
we weaved through each other, hand in hand,
breaking only for the doughnuts and cider.

ALEX KUSTANOVICH



EIGHTH AVENUE DANCE PARTY

He was a foiled accordion player; when
he walked
his pockets shook not with coins, but
with buttons.

At the deli, where he ordered his bologna
with mustard
on a roll, he was unable to tender buttons,

nor was he able to offer several accordion
serenades of
the proprietor's choosing, which may have

been a great loss, since he never played
requests, not even
at his own failed wedding, which had been
attended
by numerous accordionists,

and a large polka ensemble that went on
to become
an internationally famous death metal band.

Such were and are the vagaries of life, he
thought, as he
trundled his accordion across his chest.

Letting the manuals bellow outward, sucking
air, he bent
over to tie his shoe there on the Manhattan

sidewalk. Several young people filmed
him with their
mobile phones, filming themselves as well,

laughing in their imitations, as if they had
some inner knowledge
of the universe's blind funny bone, of

hunger and obsolescence,

as if this could never happen
to any one of them.

SURVIVORS

It's going to be a long winter
Of methanol fumes

Burnt snow and feeding off
Memories again

A slumberland ghetto smoothly
Stamping out the light

Palpable glares left hanging
Like a gut tug that's gone before

You could be sure you felt it
The sky heavy dipped in black ink

We're going to zigzag through
Shadow and promise again

Search for safety in numbers
And split convulsing needs

Niched in tongue-tied driftage
As we sometimes look

Out windows like silver
Paintings shifting halos

On to the bedroom walls
And the sky heavy dipped in black ink

LATE NIGHT VILLANELLE

Saints live to turn the world back.
I wait in the subway at midnight
after the threat of a terrorist attack.

The once-taut world has fallen slack;
a sagging globe is a holy being's delight.
Saints live to turn the world back.

Can one who is beatified fall through the cracks?
How much dirt do you need to smear the white of right?
After the threat of a terrorist attack

there's an overwhelming sense of lack
before spirits appear, clear, and overexcite.
Saints live to turn the world back.

How long do you look for an angel on track?
Because this world might go with a shiver so slight
after the threat of a terrorist attack

Instead of rebirth, plunged into pitch black,
a new glaze of grime play-acts halo bright.
Do saints still live to turn the world back
or do they hold their breaths tight as wings
clipped through just another threat of a terrorist attack?



THE PEAFOWL OF ANDALUSIA

O'Connor Estate - Milledgeville, GA

When your pen sets down —
their heads lift as if these forest birds know

their crests flip back, their plumage spreads in the sun,
the beautiful blue of their bodies starts
to brighten the grounds

in fact, they will all walk
from what is familiar, leaving
the trail in the woods
and lawn of the hill house or stable
or tenant house and the unknown rise of earth
where they have been
pecking at seeds

even those who stray
at the pond or meander to eat
the flowering meadow
they too will turn up fanning their trains
their eyes opening to Andalusia,
all their iridescent eyes
on you

sky birds will arrow
down, adding themselves —

and seeing this, seeing that you have stepped
from the room where you write,
to face the Georgia sun

from your place on the porch, Flannery,
will be a moment of moving toward them
with all your strength.

RILKE:
FROM THE LIFE OF A SAINT

By now, he knew of fears whose coming on
was Death-like, and was not to be endured.
His heart had slowly learned to grow inured;
he raised it well, just like a son.

And he knew nameless hardships every day,
as windowless and boxed-in days went by;
he sent his soul obediently away
(since it was grown-up now), so it might lie

beside its lord and bridegroom; left behind,
alone and cut off in the kind of place
where loneliness expanded in the mind,
he spoke no words and saw no human face.

But in return, a long time on, he knew
as well that joy he held in his own hands,
and learned the tenderness one understands,
laying it down the way all creatures do.

**RILKE:
THE DOG**

The image of a world takes shape up there,
through glances he must constantly renew.
Some secret thing, though, comes at times, and where
he stands, stands next to him. In nosing through

that image, down there he's both strange and not—
some other neither welcomed nor cast out,
and spending his reality, in doubt
almost, on things his gaze has not quite *got*—

though prodding, still, whatever will resist,
and pushing, pleading, till he nearly knows;
assenting to what he at last forgoes
because if he does not, he won't exist.

ALEX KUSTANOVICH



READING KEATS' LETTERS IN ASSISI

It's too late to resurrect
what might have been,
except as the church bells
call out above the motley walls,
the birds still flying up.
Those shining wings

in the hot September air
beat like these small pages
as they rustle, crackle, pleading
for the impossible Phoenix,
much as the saint in his brown-
wrapped bones. What lifted

blue and actual over this village,
the haze-green valley, announced
by the bells, the wings, at the cost
of penury, still hovers. Not merely
frescoes, paled, interior images
of the "Poverello." Walls, stones,

the words I read, the life of poetry
run out of breath too soon...mingle
as I sit at a small outdoor table,
cooling with Campari, slow recovery
from uphill climbs, each sad
young man rephrasing this day.

WILLIAM WRIGHT HARRIS

AROUND THE HUTS

two women sit &
remove leaves &
stems from fruit &
berries as a boy leans against a tree &
looks to his right while gauguin paints &

perhaps smiles

oil on canvas

TWELVE SUNFLOWERS

in a vase

twelve faces of van gogh

one
hangs
over the lip
a comet
stretching
across
the sky

one
too ripe
to produce seeds
its stem plucked
too soon by a world that would
not allow it
to simply exist

one
hides
it
self
amongst the
others
a social shadow

one
bent
to the side
almost weeping
oil on
to
canvas

one
a lion's mane
shaking
desert dust in
to the
arid air and sun
light

one
sitting in a corner
like helios
a glowing eye
naked and burning a
lone
in the sky

one
stares up
at the heavens from the
bottom of the earth
vincent's visage
questioning an indifferent
god
one
with its crown
bent
to
wards an earth kind enough
to be tread up
on

one
tuned
to an
other the smiling face van
gogh pointed in love
to his friend
gauguin

one
staring out of
the canvas some
how
an eye questioning the
audience and left
unblinking

one
a little
too red
the crimson wound in the stomach
of the painter
in those
last days

one
nearly unpainted
the green of its stem
the shell of the soul
only visible form and
perhaps van
gogh's true face

JOURNEY TO REDEMPTION

(AN EXCERPT FROM THE NOVEL *THE BLOOD OF A STONE*)

Didymus of Tiberias paused to gauge the angle of the sun. He wished they had left sooner. They faced a long, steep climb, a journey that began in a village on land below the level of the Great Sea and ended in a city perched on the mountains of Judea. It would take a full day to reach the Holy City.

Seeking reassurance, he patted the dagger he had strapped to his waist under his cloak and turned to Tabitha, the woman who accompanied him. "Have you been to Jerusalem?"

She shook her head. "Is it far?"

"Far enough." Every time he looked at her, he was stunned by her transformation from scarred leper to beauty. He had seen Jesus heal her with his own eyes, but he still didn't understand. "We should keep a brisk pace. Do you think you can do that?"

She nodded, and they began to walk, ascending a road that wound between hills so foreboding they seemed to block out the sky. The wind whistled between the rocks and the cliffs, sending showers of pebbles tumbling down the slopes. When the air was still, they could hear the scuff of their footsteps and the rasp of their breathing.

Slowing, Tabitha pointed to her left. "Up there." Her sweeping gesture took in rows of crumbling caves that marked the hillside. "I was healed over there."

"How do you know?"

"It's not a place I'd forget."

The caves were like the pocks of leprosy: black scars on the gray face of the rocks. "How did you come to such a wild place?"

"Lepers look after each other. When I followed Jesus to Jericho, I stayed with a leper family who lived in one of those caves. Who else would have me?" She laughed, and Didymus shivered at the faint hint of madness in her tone. Her body was healed, but how long would it take for her spirit?

"A family?" He wanted to divert her from her unhappiness.

"Yes, can you imagine? A husband and his wife and their two small children." Sighing, she lowered her eyes. "So sad."

"But they didn't come with you to see Jesus?"

"They were afraid they'd be stoned. And afterward, I abandoned them. I didn't go back. I-I couldn't," she cried. "What if I had become afflicted again?"

"You did nothing wrong." How many times would he have to tell her this? She seemed to suffer so much regret, and if she knew what *he* had done, would she regret her kindness to him as well? He didn't want to know the answer.

"They're still up there." She jutted her chin toward the caves. "The lepers. Not just one family but dozens of people living like animals in the caves. They're watching us now. They know everything that happens on this road."

He saw nothing but dark, empty hollows in the hillside. Still, not all eyes were friendly eyes. "We should keep moving."

They had just reached the Pass of Adummin when they stopped to share a drink of water and to rest. The hills were no longer gray, but stained red, the color of rust. Some said the color came from metals in the rock; others claimed it was the spilled blood of unwary travelers. The gritty sand left red streaks on their shoes and clothes. He thought of the blood on the blade of his dagger when he cut the throat of the bandit who murdered his servant. The river had washed it clean.

Tabitha flicked the dirt from her cloak. "I'll scrub our clothes when we get to Jerusalem."

Later, as they hiked their way through the Pass, Tabitha peppered him with questions about his life in Tiberias. Preening under her admiring gaze, he told her about his travels, sometimes making them sound more daring than they were. He discovered he liked talking about himself. When she said that it must take a lot of servants to care for such a fine house, Didymus hesitated and answered, "Only one. But he's gone now." He didn't want to talk about Rufus's death.

She changed the subject. "I grew up in Gerasa. My father was a stone mason."

"The Decapolis? I've traded there often, but I've never seen you in the marketplace." Gerasa was a prosperous community, with numerous public buildings and temples. No wonder she carried a nice dowry of coins woven into her scarf. A stone mason would do well there.

"I doubt you would. Father believed that women should be kept at home." She lowered her eyes. "Unless they're lepers. Then he throws them out." She grimaced. "I'll never forgive him for that."

Her words chilled him. He had committed terrible acts, murdered two men. The first time he killed his abusive master so he could escape to freedom; the second time he sliced the throat of the bandit who murdered his servant, Rufus. If Tabitha knew the truth about his past, would she forgive him? He turned away, watching the road.

Tabitha kept talking about her sisters and her mother, but Didymus was only half-listening. For some time, he had been aware of a small party travelling on the road ahead of them. From his quick glimpses, he guessed it to be two people and an animal. They should have crossed over the next rise by now. He took a step, moaned softly, and exaggerated his limp.

Tabitha noticed immediately. "Is your leg hurt?"

"An old injury. My knee pains me when I walk too long." He stood still. "Perhaps we can rest for a short while?"

"Of course."

Massaging his leg, he scanned the winding road. Still no sign of them. Where were they? Two people or more? Why didn't they move on? If he and Tabitha turned back now, they wouldn't reach Jericho until well after dark. But what was up ahead? The last thing he wanted to do was spend the night here. Didymus knelt and picked up a large stone.

Tabitha stared at him, her eyes wide. "What are you going to do with that?"

"Listen to me." He handed her the rock. "Wrap this in your cloak and hold it tight."

"Why?"

"There are people up there, either in trouble or waiting for something. I've been watching them, and they should have crossed on the switchback by now. They haven't."

Shielding her eyes, she squinted at the hill. "On the next turn? I don't see anything. But," she added doubtfully, "my vision could be damaged from the leprosy. What do you want to do?"

"We're going to walk together up there. Slowly. Your eyes are fine for what I need. Keep watch to both sides of the road. If you see something out of place, tell me. Hold that stone close and use it to protect yourself if necessary. If we're attacked and I'm hurt, you run back to the river where you'll be safe. If you can't make it to the river, then go to the lepers in the caves."

She stepped in front of him and planted her feet on the ground, her hands on her hips. "No. I won't leave you."

"What?" Didymus was taken aback by her defiance. He would push her down the road to Jericho himself if he had to. He grasped her elbow. "Come on, then."

They had just reached the top of the next hill when a man bounded out in front of them. He was huge, a colossus, with arms as thick as stone columns and a chest as massive as the walls of the Fortress Antonia. He assumed the fighting stance of a gladiatorial bear as they approached, fully blocking the path. His clenched fists brandished the brute force of a battering ram. He did not speak.

"He's big," Tabitha said into Didymus's ear.

"True." Sliding his hand under his cloak, Didymus touched the handle of his dagger. He might not be able to kill this giant with such a small weapon, but it was enough to give them time to escape.

The stranger glared at them for a moment and then seemed to relax. His frown cracked into a cautious smile. "Just the two of you?"

Didymus didn't answer.

The man broke into booming laughter. "Such worry over so little." Then he put his fingers to his lips and whistled. "You can come out now, my sweet. It's safe."

"We'll go our way then." But the big man stopped him with a heavy hand on his shoulder; his fingers bore into Didymus's bones with the force of a hawk's talons.

He pulled Didymus toward him. "Are you traveling to the Passover Festival?"

Didymus stumbled. He cast a quick look over his shoulder. Tabitha followed closely behind. "Yes." He didn't mention they were looking for the prophet called Jesus of Nazareth.

"You and your woman appear to be honest folk. But the road is pitted with hazards. You should join us."

The man's companion—a young woman—was waiting for them on the far side of the hill in the sparse shade of a scrub oak that grew horizontally from the rocks above. A donkey, laden with baskets, nibbled on the dry grass at her feet.

When the woman turned toward them, Tabitha gasped. "She's pregnant!" She blushed.

The stranger chuckled. "Yes, my Sara is expecting her first child. A boy from the way he sets." He waved his hand in a gesture of welcome. "Come, come, join us. Sara," he ordered, "bring out the wineskin for our guests. They're thirsty."

Sara, who was perhaps in her first year of womanhood, set out loaves of bread, olives, and the wineskin. She walked with her weight bearing down on her heels, her hips swaying heavily from side to side. Didymus guessed she was in the final weeks. Why were they traveling so close to her time?

The man ripped off a chunk of bread and handed it to Didymus. "They call me Alp," he said, his mouth full of bread and olives. Juice dribbled down his chin, and he swiped at it with the back of his hand.

Breaking the bread into equal servings for himself and Tabitha, Didymus nodded. Alp. An ancient Canaanite word for ox. A name well chosen, for the man was built like a bull.

Alp grabbed Sara as she walked past and pulled her close. "My favorite wife. There are two more at home like her but not half so pretty. Isn't that so, my sweet?" His massive paws slid lasciviously over her thighs. Sara blushed and giggled. He turned toward Didymus. "Well, then. You know our names. Now you must tell us yours."

Handing the last piece of his bread to Tabitha, he swallowed. "I am Didymus of Tiberias, and this is Tabitha." He paused. "My wife." He had spoken a wish, not the truth.

Tabitha took his hand and squeezed his fingers. Was that an indication of her acceptance?

"Sara," Tabitha said, keeping her eyes on Alp. She didn't release Didymus's hand. "A Jewish name?"

Alp burst into raucous laughter. "Your woman is a clever one, I see." He looked at Sara. "Shall I tell them our story, my sweet?"

Sara dipped her head in acknowledgment. "As you wish." She patted his beard affectionately. "*Ani ohev otach*."

"Never a harsh word from this one." Alp pinched her cheek. "A treasure worth keeping."

"What did you say?" Tabitha asked. She smiled at Sara but Sara didn't reply.

"She said, 'I love you,'" Didymus answered.

"And that she does," Alp responded. "She risked everything to marry me. Didn't you, my sweet?"

"Yes, my love," Sara said as she nestled in the crook of his arm. "I would do it again."

Alp chuckled. "When her father learned of our union, he ripped his clothes and poured ashes over his head and declared his only daughter was dead." He shook his head, disbelieving. "Dead? Does she look dead to you? Why, here she sits, alive and well and filled with the life of another. Pah!" He spat on the ground, showing his contempt. "These Jews with their rules and laws." Kissing his wife lightly on the cheek, he added, "I'm sorry to say this, my sweet, but you come from a stiff-necked people."

"But you're going to Jerusalem?" Didymus asked. "For Passover? Won't her father be there?"

"Probably. But what does it matter? I'm a tanner by trade. I go to Passover to sell my goods. When Sara's time comes, I'll take her to stay with her mother's family in Bethany. It's been arranged. Her mother will be there to tend to the birth. And her father?" He shrugged. "If he misses the arrival of his first grandson, then it's his poor choice, not ours." He helped his wife to her feet and glanced at the sky. "The daylight is fading. We should be going soon." He handed the wineskin to her. "Tuck this deep into one of the baskets. It'll stay cooler that way."

"I'll help you," Tabitha said. She patted Didymus's hand and then began gathering up the remains of their meal.

Didymus flexed his fingers, still feeling her smooth touch. She seemed to trust him and care for him. He had called her his wife. Was it possible?

A sudden stark hiss made the donkey jump. The animal screamed and reared back, his flailing legs kicking up clouds of ochre dust. Grit flared into Didymus's face. The air turned thick with blood-red sand.

"Watch the hooves!" Tabitha shouted.

Didymus spun around, seeing nothing but flashes of disconnected movement: the dun-colored flanks of the animal bucking from side to side; the women straining against the beast's ropes; Alp backing away on his right; and a fat black and gold ribbon flying through the air. "Viper!" Didymus cried. "In front of you."

Another fearsome scream pierced the chaos, louder than the first. Olive-colored whips whirled through the haze. A second snake? He ducked but was struck in the face by the broken rope. Baskets and their contents spilled over the ground at his feet. The donkey fled, the sound of his terrified braying following him like a fading echo.

Didymus thought he saw Tabitha's silhouette against the rocks. "Tabitha?" Something moved near his feet. He froze.

"I'm safe," she said.

The viper slithered across the road, between him and the women. Although the lower part of its body was buried in the sand, Didymus estimated it to be two cubits in length—twice as long as his forearm. The triangular head rose, twisting, turning, split black tongue testing the air. The dark patches on its back glittered like onyx beads. Beautiful and deadly. Didymus slid his hand into his cloak, reaching quietly for his dagger. One slash. That's all he needed. But he had to be faster than the snake.

"Be still," Alp said next to him, his words almost a whisper. "Sara," he called out, "are you safe?"

"I have her in my arms," Tabitha answered. Her voice shook. "She's fine."

"Husband," Sara began, "our donkey—"

"We'll find him later, sweet," Alp answered. "Stay where you are." He touched Didymus lightly on the shoulder, showing him the large rock he held.

The viper sensed the movement. It paused, then drew tightly into a coil, hissing. No time, Didymus thought, his hands closing around the dagger's grip.

One of us will be bitten. But Alp lunged before the snake did. With a mighty shout, he heaved the stone at his target, and crushed the creature's head.

No one spoke for several long moments. Didymus's hand slid from the dagger's hilt. Blood seeped out from under the stone. The viper's body twitched and jerked as though it were still alive. A wave of nausea hit him, and he thought he would fall. "Blood," he murmured.

"It's just the snake," Alp said as he grasped him by the elbow to steady him.

Didymus stared at the dead viper. "We should pick up your things." The large baskets had been upended, and purses and shoes and small leather boxes were scattered across the road.

Alp nodded, already tossing the purses into one of the baskets as he moved along the path. Didymus started to follow and then turned back. Carefully, he lifted the stone. The snake's eyes—flat and shining—gazed back at him. Accusing. He shuddered and reached for the leather box nearest his feet.

* * *

They found the donkey a short distance up the road, rolled over on its side, edematous legs trembling in uncontrolled spasms. Black pus oozed from the three puncture wounds that spanned the hindquarters. Death was imminent. The animal stretched out its neck, groaning, swollen tongue lolling from its open, yearning mouth. A thin line of blood—as red as the sand—bubbled from its nostrils.

Didymus stood next to Tabitha, watching the donkey take its final breath. This could have been any one of them. It could have been Tabitha. His dagger had been no protection at all. He tightened his grip about Tabitha's waist. Her body was rigid. "The snakes come out in the evening," he said, "when it's cooler. We need to be more careful now."

"Can't we do something?" she asked. "To stop its suffering?"

Didymus shook his head. She didn't understand that the creature was already dead.

Alp set his baskets down and strode in a slow circle around the corpse. "A shame." He nudged the donkey with his foot. "He was a good, hardworking beast."

"No, no!" Sara's face turned pale when she saw the animal, and she panted with short, quick gasps. She tipped backward, Tabitha catching her by the arm. "Oh!"

"The baby!" Alp cried. "It's too soon!"

"It's not the baby," Tabitha said, her voice firm. She wiped the girl's face with her cloak and glared at the two helpless men. "She's sick from the excitement. Get some water." She guided Sara to a flat-topped boulder and helped her sit. Directing Alp to prepare a shade for Sara, she instructed the girl to breathe in deeply and slowly. Didymus knew nothing about pregnant women, but Tabitha seemed so confident. Sara would be well cared for.

He watched them for a moment and then wandered down the road, far away from the bloated body of the donkey. Like Sara, he felt sick. Sick of so much

death and loss. So many times he had crossed this same route with his caravans and never once lost a pilgrim or a friend or even an animal. Now his servant was dead, his own caravan abandoned. On this journey, he had lost everything.

He glanced back at the three of them, sitting in the deepening shadows, talking. Tabitha's soft voice was like a melody on the wind. He knew then he loved her, but could he trust her? Would she leave him if she knew the truth about his past?

He paced back and forth across the road. The setting sun painted the heavens with streaks of orange and rose, the brilliant colors seeping so fully into the red hills that sky and land appeared to be one piece. They were so close to Jerusalem now: Less than two miles from the turnoff to Bethany. But it would be dark before they reached the safety of town.

Movement on the horizon caught his eye. Another traveler? He looked back. Alp had placed a blanket under Sara's head and elevated her feet with one of the baskets. Tabitha was patting the girl's face with a cloth. None of them had noticed the man coming toward them.

If this newcomer intended them harm, he would stop him. Fingers twitching, Didymus rested his hand over the hilt of the dagger. He grimaced and laughed softly, remembering how useless the dagger had been with the viper.

The man stood in the middle of the path, framed in the rays of pink light. A light breeze flipped his long hair across his face; when he reached up to push it out of his eyes, his cream-colored robes swirled around his body like foamy waves. He held out a hand and beckoned. Didymus gasped. Jesus of Nazareth, you have come to me! Trembling with an ecstasy so powerful he thought he would collapse, Didymus ran to greet him.

He could not find his voice, but he knew the Messiah heard his thoughts: *Jesus, listen to me. I ask not for myself but for others. Take away Tabitha's fear. You have that power. I saw it in the wilderness. I saw you heal her body, but you neglected her heart. And Rufus, my good and loyal servant. They say you raised a man from the dead. Do that again. Rufus is buried near Jericho. I can take you to him. Say you will bring him back to me. Speak! Why do you not speak?*

He opened his arms in an embrace. Jesus leaned close, his hot breath brushing Didymus's cheek, but he did not touch him. He had a wild expression on his face, fierce and demanding. His arms jerked up as if they had been pulled by strings. Then he stepped back, out of Didymus's reach.

Didymus stared at him, stunned by both Jesus' rejection and by his physical condition. Dark gray circles rimmed Jesus' eyes, and his limbs shook with the effort to stand upright. He hunched his narrow shoulders, writhing as though in pain, and every wheezing breath he took sounded like a desperate gasp for air. His face twisting with anguish, the Nazarene clapped his hands to his cheeks and opened his mouth in a silent scream. Wine-colored drops of blood flowed between his fingers.

For an instant, Didymus believed he had slashed Jesus' throat with the dagger in the same way he had cut the bandit's. But this was a vision, not reality. He clutched Jesus' wrists. *No, you must not do this.* The dam burst, and they were both showered in streams of blood. Didymus tasted its bitter salt on his lips,

felt its liquid kiss on his throat, but above all, it was cold. So cold! Like droplets of ice falling on his burning flesh. Struggling to staunch the infinite flow, he pressed his palms in a futile effort against Jesus' face. A current flowed stronger than the River Jordan. They were drowning in blood. Finding his voice, Didymus cried out: "Stop this!"

As abruptly and inexplicably as it had begun, the bleeding ceased. Jesus lowered his hands. His face was clean and unblemished but for the ulcerating scar that twisted down from his eyebrow to the corner of his mouth. *Feel this*, he said to Didymus, guiding his fingers over the ridge of weeping flesh. *This is what they have done to me.*

The wound was the brand of a Roman scourge. Didymus put his hand to his own face. *What do you want from me?*

And Jesus replied: *Forgiveness. They do not know what they do. Forgive them. Forgive them all.* Like a mother with a child, he kissed Didymus's forehead.

Didymus pulled back. *Who? Who am I supposed to forgive? What have they done? Why will you not tell me?*

"Didymus, Didymus! Where are you going?" Tabitha's voice called him back. He turned to face her.

She ran toward him awkwardly, her dark hair flying behind her like a black banner streaming in the wind. She was too beautiful for him, a scarred man with a limp.

"Didymus," she said when she caught up to him, "were you going to Jerusalem without me?"

He shook his head and pulled her close. Her body fit comfortably in his arms. "Oh, Tabitha, I thought I saw—"

She pulled back, looking up into his eyes. Her face paled. "Another viper?"

"What? No, no viper. It's just..." He paused. "It's just the sun, I think. The light sometimes makes you see things that aren't there." He patted Tabitha's shoulder. "Wait here a moment. I want to be sure." He ventured farther down the road, hoping Jesus was still there, perhaps on the other side of the next hill. Forgiveness, Jesus said. But could you forgive a murderer? Could Didymus forgive the bandit who killed poor Rufus? Didymus stopped. He had murdered two people. *He* was a murderer. Forgiveness? What did it mean? He turned back then, for there was no reason to keep searching. Jesus had vanished.

Tabitha had not moved. "What are you looking for?"

He took her arm to walk back to Alp and Sara. "I thought someone was coming this way. I was wrong."

She slowed, scuffing her shoes in the dust. She wouldn't look at him. "I want to tell you something."

Didymus waited for her to continue.

"Earlier, when you introduced me as your wife, I was surprised, but I..." He could not read the expression on her face when she looked up at him. "But I promise you I will be a good wife to you if that's what you want. I'll take care of you and your home."

A wife? *His* wife? Would she stay with him always? If she knew the truth, what then? He could never tell her. Not if he wanted her to stay. "Yes," he said at last. "That would be fine."

Frowning, Tabitha ducked her head, and Didymus knew he had made a mistake, said the wrong thing. He should have been more enthusiastic, but he couldn't correct it now.

Sara was on her feet when they returned, and Alp, with all the baskets strapped around his neck and shoulders and hanging down his back, looked like a human pack animal.

"Would you like me to help you carry some of that?" Didymus asked.

Alp shrugged. "I haven't been given this name for nothing. We're close to Bethany. I can manage the burden that far. Thank you."

"Sara," Tabitha said, "you can lean on me while we walk."

The young girl nodded and smiled, taking Tabitha's offered arm.

Alp said to Didymus, "You have a good wife."

Didymus swallowed. "I know." He looked at the sky, uneasy. They had neither lamps nor torches to guide them; it would be hours before they could depend on the light of the full moon. The road was a dangerous place during the twilight hours. "We should go now."

As they ascended the next hill, they could see the sun, hanging like a molten golden stone on the mountain's apex but disappearing when the road dipped down again. To the east, the heavens were fading into a soft gray, but the western firmament was streaked with blue and violet. Dark purple shadows stretched out on both sides of them to lengthen every fissure and crack in the cliffs, presenting unknown hazards to their journey. A single misstep into a hole or rut in the path, and any one of them could end up with a broken foot or ankle. They had to walk carefully but still quickly.

The trail narrowed as they moved through the final pass to the crossroad to Bethany. Alp brought the party to a halt. "We must part here." He wiped the sweat from his face with a dirty hand. "Sara and I will stay with her family tonight. Before we go, I have something for you." He eased the baskets from his shoulders, setting them both down near his feet. "I think I put it in here," he said, digging deep into the largest one. "I was reserving this for some poor fool whose shekels were too heavy to hold on to, but I want to give it to you, Tabitha." With a flourish, he brought forth a rabbit-skin purse. "Feel how soft."

Tabitha took the purse from him, turning it over in her hands. It was gray, with tight stitching on both sides and a long leather loop attached to the top. The animal's front legs—minus the paws—were folded over the front to make a neat closing flap. "For me?" She stroked the fur.

Alp nodded. "My thanks for saving my sweet Sara from the donkey's hooves."

Impulsively, Tabitha brought the purse up to her face. "Such a strange scent." She rubbed the fur against her cheek. "It smells like..." She sniffed it again. "Lime?"

Alp grinned. "I knew she was a clever one," he said to Didymus. "A tool of the tanner's trade," he told Tabitha. "The lime cleans the fleshy matter and extra hair from the skin."

"It's an odd odor but not unpleasant," Tabitha said.

Alp spit on the ground. "Pah! Tell that to my village. The elders claimed my vats stunk and forced me to move outside the walls closer to the Sea of Salt. But that doesn't stop them from coming to buy my wares." He opened the purse for her. "Feel the inside. The skin is almost as soft as the fur. In the dark, you could mistake it for a baby's bottom. Isn't that right, my sweet?" He poked Sara gently in the ribs. She giggled.

"Isn't it lovely?" Tabitha held the purse out to Didymus.

When Didymus touched the rabbit-skin, he saw the animal as it had once been: a simple creature bounding over the rocky landscape with infinite grace. He stroked the outline of the legs, aware of the rabbit's terror as its foot became ensnared in the hunter's trap. He felt the sudden snap of the animal's neck and the life-force fading away. A dripping body hanging from a hook in the tanner's shack awaiting the cleansing scrape of the knife. The knife! After handing the purse back to Tabitha, he slid his hand under his cloak. He could feel the rage pulsing beneath his fingertips. "I can see you are a man who appreciates fine craftsmanship." He eased the dagger from its sheath and held it up. "Perhaps you would be interested in this?"

At the sight of the weapon, Alp pushed Sara behind him and raised his fists. "So," he said, sneering. "This is what it comes to. I feed you and give you wine and gifts, and now you want to rob me." He took a menacing step forward. "So be it. You may cut me, but you'll die trying. I can promise that."

Didymus backed away and laughed nervously. "No, no. I mean you no harm. I just wanted to show it to you. Here." He presented the dagger to Alp handle first.

Alp hesitated briefly and then reached for the knife. "Ivory!" He palmed the hilt. "A fine piece of work. And a handle shaped like a woman." He laughed. "That makes it easier to hold, eh?" His fingers moved rapidly over the carving, exploring the intricate details of the design. His touch was gentle, respectful, as if he felt the dagger harbored some sort of mystical energy. Grasping the handle with both hands, he raised his arms and offered the knife to the slanted beams of the setting sun. The needle point caught a golden ray of light, glinting at them like a vicious star.

Didymus blinked. He hadn't remembered the blade as appearing so deliberately savage. As Alp twirled it in his hands, the dagger seemed to take on a powerful force, as if it were searching for a new victim. The weapon had an insatiable hunger. It would not be satisfied until its hilt was tainted the color of rust, until the blade had been blunted and dulled so that it could murder no more.

Turning his gaze from the sight of the dagger, Didymus fumbled with the sheath.

He heard Alp chuckle. "A marvelous tool, but is it as sharp as it looks?"

Didymus glanced at Alp and froze. The blade in the tanner's hand was streaked with blood.

Alp wiped the dagger on his apron. "Sharper than a serpent's bite." A scarlet thread rose up on his palm, the mark of the blade's kiss. "I fear our good Caesar's nights would not be so peaceful if he knew such a treasure wandered

through Palestine. Take good care of this, my friend." Reaching for the sheath in Didymus's hand, he prepared to hand the dagger back to him.

Didymus shook his head. "No, I don't want it. You keep it." He slid the dagger into its casing and tied the clasp. Did the possessor become the possessed? He sensed Alp admired the dagger only for its fine craftsmanship, not for its lust for destruction. He held the weapon out to the tanner. "Take it."

"Didymus, are you sure—" Tabitha began.

"The dagger belongs to Alp now," Didymus interrupted, passing it to him. As he did so, he felt his hand grow lighter; he stood a little taller.

Alp smiled. "You really don't want it?" Again, Didymus shook his head. The tanner's eyes narrowed. "How much?"

"Nothing," Didymus answered. "I want nothing for it." He hesitated, knowing it was wrong to pass the dagger to Alp without a fair warning. "The knife is my gift to you, but it may have a hidden price."

"What price?"

"There may be a curse upon the dagger and its owner." His words were almost a whisper.

Alp burst into loud laughter. "Oh ho, my friend! A curse, you say? I fear you're as superstitious as the Jews. I'll take it then. I don't believe in curses or bad luck, despite the trouble with the viper back there." He tied the sheath to his belt. "But I fear Tabitha's purse isn't of equal value to your offering. And I don't accept charity." He pointed to the large basket. "Sara, get me those sandals, the ones I made for that young man who died." She handed him a pair of new shoes that were bound with a leather cord. "No offense, my friend, but you're on the small side, and I think these boy's sandals will fit you."

The shoes were made in the Greek style with thongs at the heel and ankle and a leather ring at the front for the big toe to pass through. After kicking off his own battered sandals, Didymus slid his feet into the new shoes and tied the straps. The soles were thick and solid; until now he hadn't noticed how much the rocks hurt his feet. He wiggled his toes, appreciative of the near perfect fit.

"It's agreed then," Alp said quickly, taking note of Didymus's obvious satisfaction. "We have an even exchange. My fine sandals and rabbit purse for your dagger."

Didymus nodded. "Agreed." The shoes gave him a new confidence. He could walk to Jerusalem and back a hundred times in these sandals. He looped his arm through Tabitha's. "We must get to Jerusalem now. A safe journey to you both."

Alp had already strapped the baskets to his back. He arched his eyebrows, giving Didymus a curious look. "I hope you don't regret your decision. Without any protection, you need safe wishes more than I do."

Didymus laughed. "I'm not afraid." He felt more secure now than any time since he had first picked up the dagger.

Alp nodded. "Well then, as they say in my village, 'May the gods of fortune watch your shadow.' Take care of your good wife. Perhaps we'll meet again in Jerusalem."

Tabitha leaned her head on his shoulder as they both watched Alp and Sara trudge down the hill to Bethany. Night came upon them suddenly then, the

sun disappearing behind the last rise and sending the road into blackness. Before them lay the Valley of Kidron, lush with the groves of olive trees that now wafted gently in the early evening breeze. A cool mist, like a whispering fog, hugged the hills of the city to drape the entire valley with a luminescent veil. As the moon rose over the mountains, the towers of Fortress Antonia peeped through the clouds. They gazed upon a city of hope, a city of unfulfilled promises. A battleground of conflicting political and religious desires. Tonight they would find a bed to sleep on in that city. And tomorrow? Tomorrow, Didymus would seek out Jesus for the answers to his questions.

"Come," he said to Tabitha as he touched his lips to her cheek. "Jerusalem awaits."

SITUATIONAL AWARENESS

It is not so important what the torture
Does to him. It matters
Most what it does to you.

There you are, two years later,
At a bar in Wisconsin,
Not sure what local draft you are having
And someone notices the tattoo,
Imagining only third hand what it means.

You have a wife and daughter twelve miles
Up road. Two dogs who love you,
Really: to the depth of their animal souls
Love you. And you believe they have souls,
Souls as deep and wide as your own,
Or your wife's, or your daughter's.
Your hands have held
All of their faces and thought
Muscle and bone, blood and nerve,
And a soul, spirit or not:
Situational awareness and theater briefings.

You tell the someone No,
That you saw the tattoo on a cousin
Just back and decided boyishly you
Wanted to look like someone
Who had been to war, too.

At the time, it seemed a good idea.

RUMORS FLY QUICKER THAN HUEYS IN A WAR ZONE

When
someone's always saying
someone's shipping out
maybe not
we are winning
maybe not
we are losing
maybe not
they have won
maybe not
they are losing
maybe not
someone could plant a bomb
maybe not
some streets are dangerous
maybe not.

GAUNTLET

How dear and not to be despised,
our each Promethean moment,
the flare of human idiocy
wherein we stand,
knee-deep in breaking waves,
our mighty toes gripping the sand
and bluster for all we're worth
into surf that ebbs away.

A POEM OF DISTINCTION

The wise
know no
more than

they know
and they
know it,

but a
fool knows
no more

than he
knows and
thinks otherwise.

GRINDING OFF AND ON

Expanse of winter in his mind
breath near the heart turns to frost
the fresh muffled thump of its beat
now makes a slow clicking sound
similar to that of a cold rusty switch
that must have functioned at some point

SELF-PORTRAIT

—*New Year's Eve, 2010*

At fifty, too old to be tired, too wise
No fool to pursue a tattooed disguise

I've grown to own these aches and pains
Each a recent winter coat, a woolen scarf, a candy cane

At fifty, a stranger's face in the morning steam
A gray goatee, a string of beads

Burning candles on my desk, wax gone soft
Their edges bow to say goodnight

Goodnight, I say to December
Hello, to another new pound

CLUTTER IS A FACT OF LIFE

Clutter is a fact of life, the natural state
to which the world returns, the end of all.
Art is of the moment. Order does not wait.

Well-planned days give way to running late,
and unanswered letters make me recall
clutter is a fact of life, my natural state.

The books we neatly shelved now tumble in a crate;
while paintings hung with care lie askew on our wall.
Art is of the moment. Order does not wait.

Wild mint shoots tendrils through the garden gate;
gust-blown seeds and elm pods root where they fall;
clutter is a fact of life, a natural state.

Images rush in to crowd, clash, please, appall,
too many beats, yet I must keep them all,
for clutter is a fact of life, the natural state;
art is of the moment; order does not wait.

HOW ARE YOU

Being good
and doing

well, well,
that's all

well and
good—but

being well
and doing

good, now,
that's better.

THESE LITTLE PIGGIES

A

s
l
i
d
e

down to a

far

corner

these tiny tingling bodies
falling down concrete
reaching an end

point.

Alone,
They
Weep

Flooded cheeks
Wet chins

But when surrounded p
Simply pick themselves u

Plenty
Smiles

ROOMS BY THE SEA

What if by *story* you mean *the shortcut home*,
but I mean *voices in a room by the sea*
while days go by?
— Li-Young Lee

1

When our daughter & son have had a long day,

meaning neither obeyed
when they were lain in their beds & told,
sleep now, just for a little while;

then my wife has had a long day,

meaning she had no hour to walk the rooms
in her mind of our one-day house
by the sea where the high bedroom windows
face east & a small balcony watches west.

Long days have long nights that begin
with last requests before the day's afterlife:

I want the blue bear.

Leave the light on a little bit.

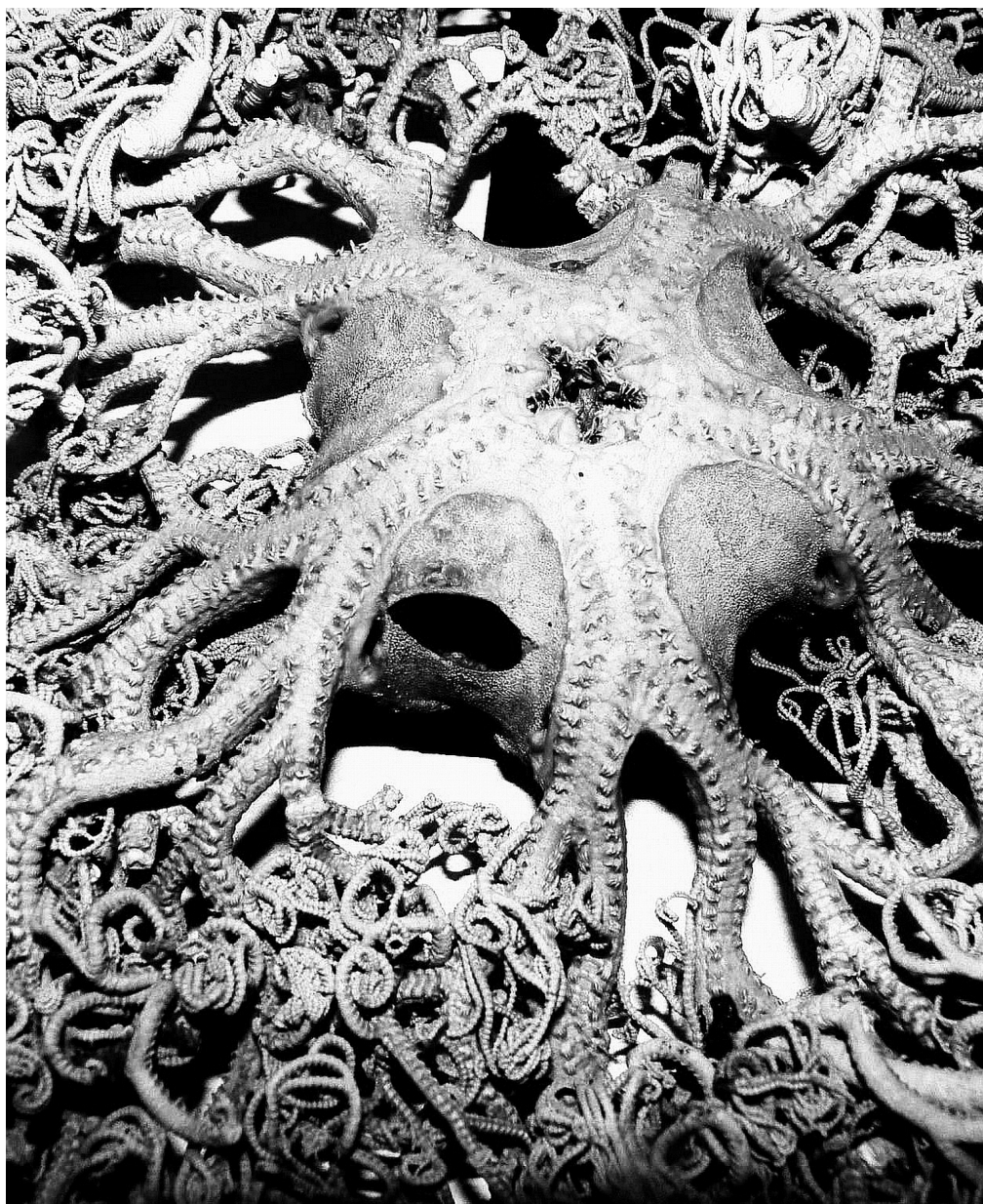
Sing Row-Row please.

2

My wife is happy to turn a few pages into sleep.
Her breath slowly steps across the snows
of dreaming. My mind is a vapor pouring
downstairs to test each door & window latch.
As reality fades, it becomes porous. This night,
with everyone home & asleep behind locked doors,
healthy & all potential is also the night of worries
while Sara is out late or Thomas far at sea.

This night is layered over another
when a deep inevitable grief
has been accepted: that we must lose
even the memory of this long quiet night,

long, quiet & slept through as if it was
& always could be our own.



RIVERS

Only in rivers do I know you,
But you know me all the time.
Water, strange pilgrim, runs
With no slippers, coming from sky,
Coming to sea.

You ran, you stood,
You came back close to me.
You picked a pansy from the rushing shore
You gave it to me.

The tributary flows into a canyon,
The canyon follows;
The water reaches the river in the woods
Where we stand,
Trees overhead.

On the one fallen tree you painted with your finger
Dipped in the stream.
You painted no letters, no creatures,
Only water...
The cold solution, time, erased.
Written in your hand, a fairy tale.

The trees, holding the sun
Nerves gathering together a brain.
The layers of the water
And you
My son.

The water touched you,
Slowly you watched. You warmed,
The gaze of summer constellations in a winter sky.
Only in rivers do I know you,
But you know me all the time.

LANDSCAPE UNDER SNOW

Sara, little seed,
little violent, diligent seed. Come
let us look at the world
— George Oppen

When my three year old runs to the window
& lifts the blinds to stare out

I ask, What do you see?
Snow, she whispers so fast

I know the word was hiding in her mouth
to answer my hand on her shoulder.

What else do you see? She taps the glass
between her & our world, That.

Hoping she could polish new an old truth
I ask again. I don't know. she says, knowing

the mystery I can't see through snow
that waits for my daughter's names.

She leaves me for a cup of milk & I too
give up & follow to pour it for her.

NINA AT WINTER HARBOR, MAINE

Five year old Nina points into sheets of fog
closing off chicory, bull thistle, tamaracks.
Lobster boats slip beneath sodden cloud quilts
snuffing out the bay.

Angel birds, she says, when gulls slip through
a thick clot of grey. *Ghost birds*, Nina repeats,
and I think Holy Ghost? But Nina is Jewish.
Heaven is not like this, she says, clambering
over lichen-pocked stone, a theologian
making connections, *everything is blue there*.

She has not learned this in Hebrew school.

Who is in heaven, Nina?
*Piggy. She has pink wings, a halo, and a sweatshirt
with sequins. She plays volleyball all day.*

Mist slicks Nina's curls to her cinnamon face
Take my hand, I say unsteady because
I have lost the light of heaven, choosing safety
again and again.

SUN IN AN EMPTY ROOM

Maybe I am not very human — what I wanted to do
was to paint sunlight on the side of a house.
— Edward Hopper

Living room vacuumed, lawn mowed, toys kicked aside,
my wife & I sink into the still pool of nap-time.
Afternoon light illuminates dust particles & projects
a gold sail, boat-less, drifting up the bare, beige wall.

I've been bound by this spell before, prayed
imperfect psalms at the shore of those sunset lakes
& wondered if this is where poetry surrenders to painting.
I interrupt my wife's reading, try to describe how the sunlight

on our wall is like the light in one of Hopper's empty rooms
or the refracted sun-shafts woven over a humpback whale
that glided alongside my ship in the Pacific. No use.
I've failed again as the light on the wall has faded.

Our kids wake & scramble into the space between us, voicing
needs we can only guess at; completely eclipsing our own.

EBB AND FLOW

The rushing sound of wind
disorients me and I'm—
 somewhere else, the Atlantic,
the night I left you and the kids
in the living room
and stomped down
to the shore, to escape the cozy
domesticity for romance, danger,
and destruction
those days I was at war.
The waves building in the dark
about to
crash on me, but I kept on,
terrified, my shoes squishing
in wet sand, as I dared
move even closer.

And then,
the bamboo windchimes
sound—
 and I've returned,
pacified, contrite, feeling
slightly foolish, longing
for the lamplight, your soft arms,
and the sweet
togetherness again.

SOMEONE SPECIAL

My father pointed a gun
at my sister's head to prove a point,
if you don't want her, just shoot her,
he said to my mother who was,
by this point, crying.

My sister just sat there as if they weren't
talking about her. As if they were
talking about anything else. The gun pressed
against her temple hard, but she trusted
her father not to shoot her, trusted
her mother not to tell him to.

I sat stupid in the corner waiting for pieces of her
to land on me, wanting
to volunteer just to get it done,
one less worry.

He was wearing the t-shirt we got him for Father's Day:
anyone can be a father,
but it takes someone special to be a Daddy.

My mother picked it out,
wanted to see him wear it,
wanted to laugh when he did.
And there he was, huge before her
just as she imagined.

HALATION

Of the clearest water,
a transparency but for the fish,
as though the glass walls of
the tanks were non-existent,
the difference between
water and air for the haggard
parents in the waiting room
at Children's Hospital collapses.
They avoid each other's eyes—

a space almost sculpted,
as if some transcendent matter
inherent in the body
became visible in the tanks.
In one, like tiny chains of light,
bubbles continually ascend
and disappear at the top.
I want not to imagine how
we always figure and disfigure.

Behind the automatic doors
a child wails. We think needles,
sutures, a broken limb.
Even that is stifled where we sit,
blear in its aftermath, startled,
and not as rough as that
child. The nurses know it,
in their eyes a vague
puzzlement, no obvious blood.

Who is the patient? they ask.
No sobbing. That abated,
after an hour, when we left the car.
But some estranging presence
inside my daughter's body
separates her from us
and her from the thing she
thought she was—or takes us
in its fleshy coil.

At home, we find the night's
medicines strewn where we left
them and all the lights on.
We sit down to a breakfast
of eggs and potatoes,
her favorite, and say nothing
about that time,
as though it belongs to some
other life, not exactly ours.

We say nothing about the boy
whose forehead was missing,
the consequence of a surgery,
piecing a life together.
And seeing how he healed—
a rail-wide trough cut through
the center of his head,

his scalp contoured to a loss
of bone, a skin veil over holes
where a halo brace was anchored—
I want not to imagine
the accident or storm of birth
which was so complete
as to leave him like that.

201 GRAMMERCY

It is not easy to pretend you're asleep with the sun sifting through your eye lashes. Saturday mornings in 1976, my older sister and I snored softly with lips slightly parted, stealing glimpses of one another feigning sleep in the extra-high twin bed across the room. We lay smothered in our cushy beds, pretending not to watch our great-aunt, Cliss, opening and closing nightstand drawers, peeking behind doors, rustling coats in the closet while peering intently at one of our backs, paranoid that we were awake and watching her search for her glasses, her snuff, her teeth or whatever item we had hidden while she was in the bathroom.

We were.

It is hard sharing a room with a giggly 5-year-old and a heckling 7-year-old when you are in your 70s. But, if you are 70 years old and you find yourself living one block away from the ocean in Atlantic City with the half-sister you tortured through childhood, it really is a small price to pay. Maybe that's what my grandmother thought when she told Aunt Cliss she would be sharing her large bedroom, stuffed with four plump twin beds, with my sister and me on weekends, holidays and summers. Gran ran a guest house in her six-bedroom, pink and white doll-house-like home, complete with basement apartment. There was usually at least one other room vacant.

Then again, maybe Lorraine and I were the rent.

Mumbling what we later swore were incantations, Aunt Cliss (we never referred to her second-generation status) would eventually peer around the room one last time. We could feel her staring at one then the other of our backs before turning in a whirl of annoyance, menthol and a faint hint of alcohol (rubbing sometimes, drinking others), pausing at the door in one final grace before swooping downstairs to tell Gran on us. By then our delight should have turned in to shame, we should have slid off the bed, uncovered her glasses, her teeth, or whatever, admitted our wrong doings and apologized.

We didn't.

Some days we pretended to still be asleep; other days we didn't bother. We let her huff down the stairs to tell our grandmother. There were days we barely had enough time to crush a few tiny Ex-lax pills into a fine powder (to later slip into her orange juice) before heading downstairs to join her.

Of course, this could not have been the case every Saturday morning for the 576 or so Saturdays we spent at Gran's house until I turned 17, or until Aunt Cliss died when I was 14 or 15. I doubt we could have gotten away with it for that long, or been persistent enough to have continued the torture. Besides, we had other things to focus on.

My grandfather was a great-grandfather by the time I was born in 1971. His marriage to Ruth in the 1930's was his second, her first. Edward, a music teacher, was a generation older than his most celebrated student, soon-to-be bride. Edward's children from his first marriage were older than my

grandmother. Together, Ruth and Edward raised four children: Louis, Jr., Joyce, Raymond, and Karen. By the time my sister and I started spending weekends, then summers in Atlantic City, only one of their children had come back home.

By the time she was 14, Karen had fallen in love with a man in his twenties. By the time she was 16, she was the married mother of one. By 18, she was the mother of two. I don't know how old she was the first time he hit her. By the time she was 22, Karen was divorced. The move from Philadelphia to her parent's pale-pink, five-story, Victorian home was determined by her mother, who packed Karen, her young girls, and her adulthood in neatly labeled cardboard boxes, sealed with shiny strips of silver duct tape.

Gran was always saving something, or someone.

Sneakers, radio knobs, shiny metal refrigerator door handles, people—all things could be held together with a slathering of silver duct tape, by force or by will, at least for a little while. Gran believed in second chances, but she didn't believe in thirds. When these things threatened to break in spite of her repairs, sneakers, radio knobs, shiny metal refrigerator door handles and people disappeared.

We didn't live with Gran for long before moving to her green and white house around the corner. Monday through Thursday nights, my sister and I lay in the bed we shared, listening to our neighbor's arguments or imagining their conversations, fed on scraps of voices we overheard through the window. We were tantalized by their bold strings of curse words, often punctuated by the scraping of rushing feet, often accompanied by the sounds of two little girls holding their breath.

My sister and I were the markers of my mother's adulthood. Everyone else called her the "baby." We called her "mom." Growing up, I felt frustrated at my mother's status of perpetual little girl, but I couldn't quite blame her. Gran loomed over her life, her decisions, her children. Years later, when we moved from Gran's house at 116 (she referred to each of her four houses by its address) to a townhouse in Somers Point, the first house we lived in that Gran didn't own, my mother decided we were going to be vegetarians.

"We aren't going to eat meat anymore," she said.

Lorraine and I glanced at one another during her "saving the animals" speech. It lacked the impact it would have had if our mother hadn't been fond of soft, leather jackets, multi-colored leather purses, and high-heeled leather, never patent, shoes.

"I'm not buying meat," she declared.

So that was the bottom line.

"Gran," we cried into the phone.

It's hard to remember which one of us initiated the call; we were often co-conspirators. "She won't buy any more meat..."

I don't know why Gran took the eating of meat so personally, or how we knew that she would. Within that week, Gran had gone to the butcher's and stocked our freezer full of fresh cuts of beef, pork and chicken, wrapped in white paper.

My mother could have told her to take it back, to keep her meat at her own house. She could have stood up for her right to raise her vegetarian family.

She didn't.

No one thought she would.

In 1976, Gran didn't believe Aunt Cliss' stories; she was on the wrong side of Gran's affections.

Growing up, Lorraine and I were the only ones who listened to Aunt Cliss. At night, with the lights off, we lay in our beds drunk on whispered, late-night tales of our Aunt Joyce begging Gran to buy food for her children, to pay her rent or her electric. No one spoke of Aunt Joyce during the day, unless it was in a hushed tone (the one usually reserved for dead people).

Years later, Aunt Cliss told us about our father. She told us how he used to beat our mother, and during the divorce when the judge raised the issue of child support, how he declared: "I'd rather never see them again than to pay a dime in child support."

And so it was.

Gran was the most powerful woman in our lives. She had the ability to save people, or not. Gran had "disowned" her oldest daughter, Joyce, at least three times that we knew of, and each time her forgiveness seemed less and less likely.

To exist without existence: to be disowned.

It seemed impossible, unbelievable, fantastic.

Aunt Cliss never liked Gran. She told stories about my grandmother to anyone who would listen: neighbors, drunkards, renters. We didn't know that then. In 1976, we were just two little girls, grabbing hold of snippets of adult conversations.

Thanks to Aunt Cliss, these were the fairy tales on which we fed.

* * *

When we were kids, Grandpop was sick and slept on a squishy bed made of at least three mattresses perched on top of a box spring. He slept downstairs in the front room, a room surrounded by windows, a piano, an organ, a black and white TV, a couch and a portable toilet. His room was too far from my grandmother's to be of any comfort, especially after Lorraine and I slipped in through the sliding wooden doors and began sprinkling his bed with sugar granules. After spreading them in a thin coating near his pillow and at his feet, or where we imagined his feet would be, we slipped out of the front room, skipped into the foyer, through the dining room and giddy with excitement, we tumbled into the kitchen.

Gran always asked what we wanted for breakfast. We always wanted whatever we smelled cooking, only modified. I asked for bacon so crunchy it crumbled between my fingers and crackled like dried twigs in my mouth. Pancakes, French toast, fried potatoes and onions, grits with melted butter or cheese or sugar, whatever else she made never quite mattered as much as a thick, salty, crispy slice of bacon. Bacon and a cold cup of milk, in my favorite pale-yellow Donald Duck cup with the built-in straw, could keep me busy far longer than it should have.

At Gran's table, I sat on a stack of Bell Atlantic phone books on a tall wooden chair that had a thick, plastic, red cushion with dull gold buttons along the edges. My long legs dangled, and I kicked them back and forth, bumping the bar underneath the table, never too hard, but hard enough for my grandfather and Lorraine to notice. We were synchronized kickers, my sister and I. The result was a non-stop gentle bumping, which was enough to go unnoticed if you were busily cooking, but enough to drive you mad if you weren't.

Grandpop wasn't.

He had the misfortune of sitting to my left, directly across from Lorraine. We were mannerable children anywhere else, but at Gran's, across from Grandpop, and when Gran wasn't looking, my sister and I chewed with our mouths open.

The crackling of bacon, the slurping of milk (Lorraine was a slurper), the gurgling of milk bubbles (I was a bubbler), and visions of spittle, mixed with bits of food, often set Grandpop's mouth to forming wide toothless O's. The louder we chewed, gurgled or bubbled, the faster his mouth worked.

"Ruth, make them stop!" He would growl.

"Edward," she would sigh, patiently at first then sounding slightly annoyed. Finally, her brow crinkled, she'd say, "They are just eating."

"Do they have to eat like animals?"

Gran's bacon clattered on my plate like silverware.

Breakfast had a distinct sound: the clinking of bacon, the scratching of fingernails on china, the scraping of metal-bottomed chairs on hardwood floor. Lorraine and I mastered them all.

Grandpop hated all of them, probably as much as we thought he hated us.

Most mornings after breakfast, my sister and I raced to the front porch, some days to enjoy the sight of the ocean, or people walking to the beach, or the jitneys ferrying people here and there. For weeks, sitting on the front porch was a matter of position, it was easier to listen to Grandpop shuffle into the front room.

Sometimes I imagined him gingerly resting on the edge of the bed, shaking his head, slipping off his slippers, swinging his legs up, slithering underneath the cold sheets and being instantly bothered by grains of sugar (granulated and then powdered) digging into his skin. No matter how I imagined it, he never seemed to notice the sugar in his bed.

Because Lorraine and I had been let down by the effects of sugar, as well as sugar substitutes, we eventually decided that salt, with its cubic design, would be more noticeable to a man who spent more time in bed than anywhere else, except maybe in the bathroom. Indeed, Grandpop immediately noticed it. If he knew it was us sabotaging his mental health, he didn't tell. Perhaps he was protecting us from Gran's anger, or perhaps he knew she wouldn't believe him. Instead, he suggested she wasn't keeping his bed clean enough. The specks of black on fresh linens (our salt and pepper seasoning masterpiece) were his evidence that Gran was not a good housekeeper.

Sudsing hard-wood floors, polishing banisters, and washing walls meant nothing. A few sprinkles of salt and pepper and her husband questioned Gran's ability to manage her household and her career. Even worse, she believed him. Gran was suddenly human.

Despite her ability to fashion a family out of ingredients and to whisk two little girls into a protective web devoid of actual physical contact that I can recall, Gran was a woman. Just like my mother, just like my aunt, just like two little girls she tried to protect, Gran was only as powerful as the man in her life allowed her to be.

Gran's anger with Grandpop manifested in Lorraine and I being given the chore of dividing his weekly medications into plastic holders labeled Monday through Sunday, lest he forget which days he had to take the little blue pills, little white pills and little pink pills. The compartments were color-coordinated to match the tabs Gran put on the aluminum foil covered plates neatly stacked in the freezer for during the week when she was at her apartment near her work 90 minutes away. For Grandpop, being on Gran's bad side meant two little girls dispensing medications based on charts they couldn't read and directions they didn't remember.

Our culinary torture ended.

In time, Lorraine and I forgot what we learned about Gran's mortality. Only now, years after her death, does the shiny duct tape threaten to reveal the cracks. In life, Gran made choices I can neither understand nor judge. She made mistakes, she carried grudges, she coveted pain. Gran was not succinctly bad or pristinely good. Gran was a woman: just like me; just like my mother; just like my daughter. We are a complex jumble of realities and misperceptions: all of us human, all of us imperfect—perhaps, this is our rent.

THE PEACH FUZZ ABOVE HER LIP

The peach fuzz above her lip
That never really went away, just like
We thought we would stay
In her bed, or mine, forever –
With the door locked and the cracks stuffed –
Or until our parents came,
Demanding our kindness.

We sat on her swing,
Or her see-saw,
Or her stones
Gossiping or laughing,
Plotting the day
When we'd tell our crushed we
"hearted" them.

Her thighs, round in orange tights,
Orange capris and three quarter sleeves,
Making secret languages,
Or codes,
Or maybe just eye-signals,
Hand-signals.
Maybe she would kick me
Or ask me if I farted,
Maybe I would slurp a little too loudly,
But we didn't care,
Not really.

She drank soy milk,
I drank whole.
She ate chicken,
I ate pork,
Or beef –
We didn't like duck.
The tasteless rubber in our mouths
Was far too boring to try
Or talk about
Or even put on our plates.

We didn't like my brother either,
Or my cat,
Taunting them both with
Nicknames and hisses,
Closed doors and whispers;
This was our time.

Later, we made amends –
The cat died, we grew older,
And we both realized that my brother
Was not as disgusting as we had imagined.
But we split, both of us confiding
In the same person but not in each other.

In sixth grade, when we tried
Making other friends and
Branching out,
We were too busy getting ready for
Middle school dances that
We forgot to understand the other.
She and I were no longer a dot,
But two lines moving away
After joining together.

Her sweat was blue-green,
And mine was pooling
On someone else's skin.
We no longer carried each other's scars,
But remembered them fading on our bodies
Into the thin air
Of the dance floor.

ELIZABETH BENNETT



ON WINTER NIGHTS

I sometimes still long
to know you again
as I knew you
when I was a child
wrapped in certainty
that not even a sparrow
falls unknown
– *you are of more value than many sparrows* –
when you warmed me
through nights of fear,
until I asked *why fear?*
and the image
I had been given of you
vanished.

It was two sparrows,
two sparrows foraging
beneath an ancient oak
that gave me
those first flashes
of what of you
lives in me,
two sparrows,
their intricate weaves of feathers,
their bright and wary eyes,
two sparrows foraging
beneath an ancient oak,
their images vivid,
alive in me.

POLISH

His left hand wears the shoe,
turning it first one way
and then another in the slant
of sun through the kitchen window.
At his elbow on the scarred tabletop
the black and gold tin of Kiwi polish,
between his feet on the linoleum
the other shoe, toe and heel scuffed.

From the doorway we watch
the stained chamois caress
the cheap leather, a circular massage.
He frowns, his brows drawn so fiercely
as he works the polish into
the re-sewn seams that we
are afraid to come closer.

Last, he takes up the brush
with the black bristles
so soft against the skin
and buffs quickly, back and forth,
bringing out the dark gleam
in which we could see our faces
if we dared interrupt this furious shine.
One done, he picks up the other,
starts all over again.

TABLETOP RADIO

I found it side-up in a box
at a tag sale, the carton labeled
“make me an offer.” They didn’t
even have FM in those days,
just a dial like the face of a clock
with one hand sweeping from 550
where the seven should have been
to 1600 at the mark of the five.

I plugged it in, the vacuum tubes
lighting up like somebody’s bright idea
except for the one dead as cold memory,
until I closed my eyes and all the old stations
in New York signed on with the top 40
Rock n Roll hits, Payola included,
WINS, All the News All the Time,
and Don McNeil’s *Breakfast Club*
sponsored in part by Sweetheart Soap.

Then, summers, the Yankees, Giants and Dodgers each with their own jingled
tunes:

My beer is Reingold the Dry Beer, think of Rheingold whenever you buy beer.

Schaefer is the one beer to have when you’re having more than one.

Hey get your cold beer, get your ice-cold Ballantine Beer.

And my father, dreaming to the sounds
of *The Make Believe Ballroom*
with Frank and Duke and Rosemary
all the while circling the want ads
from the Daily News and my mother
gazing out the window at the clotheslines
that tethered the opposite apartment building
to ours, remembering when he returned in ‘45
fresh in his shore-leave Navy whites, telling her
how much he loved her, promising how everything
was going to be now all right with the world.

JOHN MCNAMARA



THINGS THAT MAKE MY MOTHER CRY

1. Everything

My mother is no native stoic, no rock of ages quietly eroding in the wind. She is an ever-welling spring, a generous and life-giving marsh of quiet ponds. There is the occasional dampening of spirits. This is her humor, in medieval terms: water. She is more water than anything, except maybe warmth. I suppose we could synthesize these and say her humors are a cup of tea. A warm bath. The steam that skims the lava. My sisters and I have a scalding wit that has nothing to do with my dad; it's not his style (he's more likely to freeze you out)—When we make mom cry, dad becomes furious. His very dark eyebrows become even darker and his eyes glisten frighteningly. When something else makes her cry, a commercial maybe, or the same chick flick that always gets her, we tease her without mercy and she shakes her head, delivers the universal parental curse—*someday you will sit where I sit, and when you do, may God bless you with children just like you.*

2. Me

Nothing unnerves me more, sets me shivering more deeply than my mother when she's wounded, with the shocked glance of betrayal, a look that says *how could you hurt me so, when all I am and all I do is for you?* because she's right, she's always right, we know it, but she fights *dirty*, and it's hard to overlook injustice when you're young, you haven't been trained right yet. It starts with childhood guilt which evolves to adolescent resentment, and that resolves to mixed feelings, someday replaceable by knowing appreciation. It's something I largely forget the pangs of, the intense shame in the face of Mom's deeply personal hurt at mostly impersonal acts. When I do recall, it stabs quick through me like an arrow through the gut, an agony, I remember how my young mind equated my mother's hurt with Jesus on the cross, and how I felt the evil in me which made me bad, and wanted to beat it out of me, wanted to punish it *why oh why can't I just be good.*

3. A Bared Behind

A friend of a friend, we don't even know that kid, one of those no-good neighborhood boys with baggy pants and a fledgling criminal record, sensed in my combed and stolid parents the antithesis of himself. Perhaps fearing annihilation (or perhaps my mother asked him to pull his pants up, it's hard to remember the details), he dropped trou and bent over as my father pulled up to the intersection. My mother, a captive audience (no rolling stops or five-overs for my dad), was predictably horrified. *Every impure thought or image we experience or see, she told us once, becomes etched in our hearts and minds and cannot be erased. Ever. Bad things you see will come back at you at the worst times.* When she told me this I had seen some bad things, and ne'er a sordid flashback had haunted me. At the time I did not think much of this.

4. Moony Girls in Dreamy Landscapes

Anne of Green Gables strolling near her Lake of Shining Waters. A Jane with poofy era-hair on a picnic blanket, basking in the fond attention of some handsome, earnest man who leans over her in nervous tamed desire. Women in Europe rediscovering the feeling of the sun on their skin, eating apples luxuriously and with spiritual eyes. People reawakening to life. My mother often talked about her conversion to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, at sixteen, as her personal reawakening to life. And she did take great joy from it, from what I could see. I never knew much about her history before she converted but what little I heard painted enough of a picture to explain my mother's hair graying in her early twenties. One of the happiest times of her life, besides raising us of course, was her church mission to Paris, France. She often talked about going back, seeing the people she'd converted to Christ; decades later it remains a dream.

5. Great heights

Our heedless trespass of an overcautious guardrail leads her to retreat to the station wagon, where she will sobbingly terrify herself with gruesome imaginings of our deaths. This woman has imagined her entire family dead enough to kill a stadium full of us. This is what she suffers in her love. In our love we tease her to tears when the Sky-Fari stops midway. We jostle it boldly to and fro, though every solitary tremble makes her pale. We tell her, *it's okay, Mom, it's safe, they have inspections and regulations and things, they wouldn't put people in it if it's unsafe.* My sister keeps rocking the tram while my mother whimpers breathless through her tears, *Please stop, please please please,* and truthfully I'm a little nervous too, of a sudden, and I tell my sister to stop it. She goes grouchy; this secretly worries me.

6. The Children She Might Have Had

My parent's religion, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, believes that we are literal children of God; they call him our heavenly father, and consider Jesus a heavenly brother. They also believe in a heavenly mother. Not much is known about her—she's shielded from human view, shielded from their profanity and hatefulness because God and Jesus want to protect her.

Mormonism holds family above all else, which is not to say above God and Jesus, since they are family too. This is part of what draws so many people to convert—the promise that families can heal society, that they can stay together after death, the assertion that keeping close to your family is the most important thing to get right in this life. My mother takes comfort from a promise that all of the young ones lost in this world will be restored to their parents in the afterlife. My two sisters and I sometimes contemplated solemnly the prospect of nine-odd additional siblings. It was bad enough sharing our parent's affection three ways, being pestered and annoyed by two extra tenants. We wondered if any of them were boys. Friends with brothers told us to be glad we didn't have any. The last hope before the hysterectomy didn't take; like the others, it never saw the second trimester. Unlike the others, it turned out to be twins. Maybe they were both boys. Mom would have named them Asher and Aaron.

7. Laughter

One of my favorite traits of hers, a trait handed down to her own three girls, is the ability to be rendered completely helpless by hysterics. This is too much of a temptation to resist, even now, even as an adult. When I came to visit two Christmases ago, she was standing on the counter decorating the cupboards and I trapped her there, held her captive for many minutes, tickling her side with a long branch of spruce. She could do little more than squeal *oh no! stop! Oh no! oh no!* and dance and swat feebly at the branch, and the two of us squinted at each other's blurry images, mother and daughter, open-mouthed and joyful and weeping.

FOUR EIGHTY

I can still hear the jukebox in the 480 Bar. It was well within walking distance of my grandmother's house, but my father always drove us there. An old silver Buick, navy blue seats laden with the smell of cigarette smoke, and the kind of windows you had to manually roll down. This was the back and forth of my childhood.

The 480 Bar sat on the corner of Pearl Road and Bader Avenue. It had a great oak bar with a giant, shellacked lip that was meant to support the elbows of old men, of desperate women, and of myself, and my father.

I saw him on many weekends; each one involved at least a few hours at 480. In the warm months, the screen door would open, squeak, slam over and over as the regulars came marching in like ants who had given up on working. Otis, Uncle Madge (he wasn't my uncle), Eddie Ott, Dicky Yanks, Kimmee, Mary, and everyone and everyone else.

One by one they took to their stools. My daddy and I always sat far away from the door, near the TV, near the bowling machine with its fold up pins and palm sized balls, near the pinball machine, in front of the pickled eggs.

My dad drank Windsor and Coke. I took my Coke straight out of the can with a slender red straw. There was a lot of Beef Jerky. Beef Jerky brand jerky. It was divine and flat and less than 6 inches long. It had the texture of gods. Slim Jim can't hold a candle to it. But I can't find it anymore. And, believe me, I'm still looking.

There were often hard-boiled eggs, laid full in their shell on a square napkin. I'd methodically peel, discard the yellow, eat only the white (yolks are unbearably dry to an 8 year old). There were games of dots scrawled upon so many bar napkins. Dot dot. Dot dot dot. A grid of dots. Daddy makes a line, I make a line. Daddy makes a line, I make a line. Whoever makes a box puts an initial in it. Whoever makes the most boxes wins.

I would make necklaces out of straws. Bend and bite the ends so they'd slide into every other straw. It was hardly entertaining.

There was pinball. A parade of machines from 1984 - 1991. Twilight Zone, Circus, Rock N Roll, maybe PlayBoy. The taller I grew, the more leverage I gained. And although I was so well-practiced, I got a lot of tilts.

There was a claw machine; a glorious and endless pit of cheaply stuffed friends. All the men gave me quarters; I cannot remember ever going without. A large fuzzy die, a purple elephant, and a misshapen doll with hair of yarn. I threw them tea parties in the Buick's backseat.

Then there was the bowling. The bowling was my favorite. The pins, aforementioned, would flip up when hit; they could never fall down. The balls fit comfortably in my hand (probably the size of softballs) and were brown with white marbling. They were returned on a wooden wave that I'd often pretend was

a rollercoaster. Instead of actually bowling, I'd spend hours sending the balls back and forth. And back. And forth. And back.

I hated the cigarette smoke. I made frequent trips to the bathroom for no other reason than to get away from that smoke. The ladies' bathroom was no bigger than a refrigerator. I don't know how ladies fit into it. At eight, while on the toilet, my knees were less than 2 inches from the door. It's my first claustrophobic memory. I can't imagine what a grown woman would have felt in there.

After the ladies' room there was the men's and then a screen door that let out to an alley, to the breeze. I'd often look out of it and clap and gently slam the door, an unfulfilled amusement; perhaps I always wished we would leave.

What I remember most out of all the bars, all the stools, the countless Cokes and eggs and quarters, was that everyone knew my father.

Every entry was greeted "Hey, Gary!"

Every entry was greeted "Hey, Jilly!"

480, Ample Club, Hop Inn, Grey Wolf, Sports Inn, "Hey, Gary! Hey, Jilly!"

And I spun, on each of my barstools.

At 7 and 8 and 9 and 10 I spun. And sometimes I stood next to the barstool and spun, pushed my face close to the seat, watched the duct tape turn into a swirl and a dream.

Everything a spin...

Like a bar stool, like a bowling ball, like a quarter near the great lip of a bar.

"Hey, Gary!"

"Hey, Jilly!"

*

You lean against her thigh
as if this gravestone
no longer smells from grass

longs for a dry riverbed
not sure you can undress her
even in the dark

though its lettering is stranded
sheltered and your embrace
still breathing in her name

her just-another-word-for-loving-you
that lets you sweat
without moving your lips

still covered by an overnight longing
pulling them apart then emptied
to remember your only hope.

*

These shelves are used to it, pruned
the way stress will age the branches first
-you can hear the tree struggling

bend though each board is already empty
and there's no pillow or water
you can force under to grow as wood

not yet smoke or dust scrambling up
as if all these horizons would collapse
and the charred rag opens over you

making room for distances and moving closer
-what you stack is absences, her arms
worth keeping, her mouth even in traces.

*

It's a short step from winter and the bed
yet you can't hear its sheet narrow, become
the stream pouring from each stone fountain

and graveyard, can't touch her breasts
now that every handful turns to powder
smoothed over the way a motionless cloud

is tracked drop by drop -you count
backwards though every room in this place
is taking on water -what you hear

is the last drop falling through her arm
as a single word -*Mickie!* louder, louder
and you hold hands, go on drowning.

*

With a sudden glow one leg
begins to bend though your heart
creaks, each step growing sunlight

from rocks the way mountains
flower just by breaking apart
though inside nothing moves

waits to brush against these dead
-they know what happened
write down the place, have the lock

and you walk by as the same few days
or weeks or now and then
a put-aside-half shows up

just for the view, slowly, as if you
are no longer alive, left as you were
face to face for a long time.

*

There's no shore though all armies
are used to orders, wait to be led
at attention as if this great lawn

was always here, theirs for the taking
would honor their dead the way all statues
begin their slow march to the sea

and nothing change -your mouth
still bleed, gnaw on a single block
left standing for every day use

-you don't shrug or inhale or going down
unveil your broken teeth already inscribed
with the only chance to know you're back.

*

Before this door had a chance
your eyes crushed it though the thud
infected only one lid, staggers across

as if its fever was enough to burn down
your forehead trying to stay open
for the fire with nothing in it

and lift you from beneath
-it's a small place, a few walls
a mountain hanging from a sheet

stained by snow, by corners
each day colder, a valley deeper
cleared for whoever the bed

can carry -your legs pitted from winds
all day scanning your skull
for its madness, for what's left

where your cheeks opened
for sunlight and melting ice -a nothing bed
the kind you find only with X-rays

when the film dries, shows one side
left in darkness, the other
infected with despair and falling.

EULOGY

for Grandpa Bob

Now I begin the long process of converting
Your bones, skin, lips, teeth, eyes, hair,
To words that will never read exactly as I mean them
Until I've taught myself to transcribe the oaky
Undertones of your laugh, the sandpaper kiss
Of your skin.

I cannot continue to fold you away
In my wardrobe quite yet – I am transfixed
By the memory of a seder plate centered
On a table loud with love.

We will eat bitter herbs
This year and remember you, and we will drink
The salt of our ancestor's tears and remember
You, and we will taste the sweet *charoet*
And remember you.

One day my children
And my sister's children will search for the *afikomen*;
They will know you as they know God –
A distant voice that whispers to them in dreams.
Some days they will pray; others, merely listen.

And here my future fades into the sand,
Washed away by the waves of our past
That threaten and promise drowning.

We walk on a beach where one cannot ever be sure
If the sun is rising or setting, and your hand holds
The strong fingers of your wife, fingers
That will braid together the loose ends
Of our family in the long winter to come.

I exhale warm clouds against the glass
Through which I still see your face,
Scrawl my love on the windowpane,
Forgetting you will see each letter backwards.

No, I have told myself not to be sad,

Not today, when I'm sure you are listening,
Ear pressed close to the keyhole crack
Between the sky and the ground.

Today is a day for squeezing my mother's hand
For stroking my grandmother's cheek –
Today is a day you have set aside,
So we will all love each other a little bit more
Than we ever thought we could.

These thoughts blow out like matches
In a wind that tastes of your breath.

You have stolen the words I hid away
In a deep, dark place, for times such as these –

So be it. Keep my words.

And I will keep
The memory of your wrinkles,
Criss-crossing my eyelids,
Like miles of highway that lead nowhere
And everywhere.

ALEX KUSTANOVICH



BUILDING BARNS

The nail holes are wallowed out
in the rafters of my brother's old
barn with a lean-to built off the back.
Birds' black bodies sit heavy
on the rails,
where dad tied horses.
Cotton round rope,
halter, quick release
knot.

My hands see elder days.
My fingers run against
memory's knotty grain.
My brother stands at the loft's height,
new on old hay all around his feet.
He condescends
an arm to help me up.
Our father yells out,
indiscernible over his skillsaw's squall,
save the obscenities.
We scale frames,
watch sawdust christen the mud,
dance around him as if he were some dirty faced deity.
He wields a hammer
and kicks at pestering dogs.

My father passed and passed
the decaying barn to my brother.
But brothers
also grow old,
half their faces go stiff,
what makes them happy is to see
their own sons after lapsed years.
So barns go to rot and lofts fall away.
Memories and meaning stay shut up
in invisible stables.

TEN YEARS AFTER

He stands alone in the door of his house
to say the good-byes he couldn't, before.
Come melody unbroken, liquid-slow.

To his wife, who drowned in her wandering womb,
You never grew up, still, we danced across floors.
He stands alone in the door of his home.

He beckons his son, now past full-grown.
You have your mother's temper, broken moorings and doors.
Sing the melody unbroken, deeply so.

He seeks out his youngest girl, chanting with stones.
You can't find peace until you find whiter shores.
He leans against the frame of his home.

He kneels in back garden's black-red loam,
Oldest girl muddy, wet to the core.
Come melody, unbroken, quick-then-slow.

You will tell stories, all alone, show what shone.
You will remember what I tried to stand for.
He stretches up in the door of his home,
Sings all the songs, deep, clear, and slow.

LOST AND FOUND

A box of tie tacks and collar stays.
A Party card, a corporate Zippo, a shilling.
How many generations are here?
Connections crystallize and sublime
A combat ribbon and a clown nose.
Memories drift in my drawer:
my father's pipe collides with his father-in-law's watch
tangles with a chain and my old wedding ring;
my memories
snarl with my education.

A shelf fills up:
my father's tea basket,
this broad-nibbed Parker,
mugs and inkwells and old pocket knives.
Lifetimes of accumulation and learning,
discovering, striving.
Shelves' contents slip away
at yard sales or into the trash.

Amassed knowledge has the weight of air.
My father's hard-won erudition dispersed
with the books my mother sold,
but his legacy
lay elsewhere.

A small box of pictures:
He is in uniform, against anonymous backgrounds.
On the backs: *August 1944*
or *visiting MI-6* or just *Lausanne*.
Meaning gone with him.

Should I be busy with labels and explanations?
All those images of travel and life and lore,
All fading in my hands.

There's nothing
important in my own junk drawer.
Should I dump it all?
Jewelry I never wear.
The replacement nib
for a pen long vanished.
Old keys to forgotten locks
What will fall in here?
What will I lose?
What will my daughter find?

ROBIN'S EGG BLUES

At dinner with my mother
at her old folks home,
I admire her beads
(she crinkles and blooms),
and they do become her at ninety-two,
a robin's egg blue,
like a shell you picked up
from the sidewalk,
fresh as spring sky,
the chick hatched,
the delicate, serrated edge an uneven rivulet
 circling back to itself,
and you look up for the nest,
but the fledglings have flown.

"I got them at the Opportunities Outlet,"
which is what they call the store
where they sell the personal effects
of those who have "moved out."

I squirm in my seat.
At the neighboring table they must be saying,
"Isn't that Joan Smith's necklace on Elizabeth?
It looks better on Elizabeth," or thinking,
Can't remember where I've seen those beads before.
Here the reaper is the familiar face poking out next door,
and going to a memorial service, the day's social event.

In her apartment, after she died,
I found on the kitchen counter
a rye cracker with peanut butter, half-eaten,
an oatmeal pan unwashed in the sink,
an empty bowl on the table,
and a still-full cup of tea.
On the shelf by the door,
along with her keys and glasses,
was the necklace,
in one of the plastic containers she used
to bring home leftovers from the dining room,
now half-unstrung,
the beads turned loose,
the string limp, waiting.

I wear it now.
The style is timeless,
the eggs unhatched.

JIM HARNEY, DYING

*Wait without thought
So the darkness shall be light, and the stillness the dancing*
T S Elliott

To wait in the long hours
where breath takes its time,
snowing down its chant:
posibilidad, posibilidad.
A piano plays somewhere,
the beloved hands on the keys,
your heart open now, ready.
Angels wait, too, whoever they are,
maybe *campesinas* in *milpas* near Guazapa,
maybe wise women near Izalco
carrying babies and *pupusas* looking for
you everywhere and clever enough to
avoid the borders, the *migra*, the market.

Near the box cars in Mexico you waited with
with Honduran and Salvadoran youth huddled
against cold, pale light brushing
everything white. Always the Hidden amongst
the lost people, those on the run, the terrified,
the haunted who burden our safety.
What is unbearable we refuse.

You just could never manage it---comfort, I mean,
how it indicted you. So you kept
vigil with the suffering ones, waiting,
helpless, too, but not passive, no,
like a new born, vulnerable,
needing us, needing everyone to go deeper.

Someone who stayed awake while we slept,
who waits now in light, only light.

JIM HARNEY'S WALK WITH THE DEAD

Here are the furies: Jaime is dead;
Mexicans, Hondurans march past
blue arroyos and sing *rancheros*
through cracked lips, their thirst
humming its own hymn...a requiem.

Their silence annoys Minutemen, their legs
stretched on ranch porches, boots propped
on rails like jack-rabbit ears listening
wanting a reason to flick the release
and line the crosshair on

these ragged *campesinos* impudent with
hunger which they accepted gradually like a steady
rain that washed away the crops, the animals,
ejido, all they had left.

Ravaged farmers step smartly around *sugaro*
until they are delirious and float
through a desert-flung magenta, their
ghosts sneaking through purple sage,
headed for an American rainbow.

Jaime walks with them breathless, catching up.
They advance unseen past the *Migra*, past
vigilantes because they are dead
but they continue pilgrimage in order
to return their hunger to the sender.

VENERABLIS

Hac sunt in fossa This grave contains
Beda—(blank)—ossa the—(blank)—Bede's remains

Delilah, when you died, I was like the scribe
who needed a four-syllable word
for the epitaph of Bede, the scholar monk.

I too wondered what you were to me:
Totem, prophet, priest. Like that scribe,
I went to sleep in the blank space.

The sleeping scribe's quill became strings, a lyre
an angel removed from weary hands that had
continued, in the dark, to count *one, two, three, four*.

When morning came, the scribe rubbed his eyes to see
the Latin filled in, his job done; the angel's revelation this:
what you and I were, a perfect couplet.

LITTLE ELEGY FOR MY SISTER

The fern wraps its fiddlehead
and the sky nests
the thrush--
Lie down, here in the leaves.

The wind allows the reed
and the oak permits
the mourning dove.
Lie still and breathe.

Remember the dragonfly
and the moon
with its modest scarf.
Lie as if it is noon.

All those little strokes
in the pond,
don't you see?
Now the surface, smooth at dusk.

The earth forgives us
for leaving, always
our fiercest fibs.
Lie here and sleep.

APRIL, FIRST WITHOUT YOU

Mouth of April,
yellow crocus

pops open overnight just as
every year every child

is tipsy with yellow,
every generation stained

with indelible
hope and desire and rage.

Lawns laden with transients—
cherry blossoms, plum blossoms

cling three days then turn
to tissue-thin delicacies

pink feather and flutter down
obscuring the greenest grass.

I want no pity.
I want you only

to know April
takes courage,

makes me
speak in tongues.

PALINDROME

In we come: soft, sucking air,
reaching out
to the unknown;
dressed, fed, washed;
guided;
gaining confidence, friends, and partners;
taking and giving;
giving and taking;
losing partners, friends, and confidence;
guided;
washed, fed, and dressed;
reaching out
to the unknown,
soft, sucking air, out we go:

FLOWERS GIVE THE DEAD PRECISELY WHAT THEY DO NOT NEED

Flanking my casket, please,
no dying flowers but
living birds –

Cardinals, Canaries, Crows,
Finches, Flickers,
Bluebirds, Budgies,
Raptors, Robins, Red-winged Blackbirds,
one solitary Snowy Owl (or two,
if a second is available) –

singing hymns
confounding every silence
shouting down the preacher – Amen! –
and flying free as the dirt is shoveled over the dust
that was me. At the last, lots of precious noise. The quiet
is so long, you see. Flowers give the dead
precisely what they do not need.

(And, oh, if a pair of Nightingales would roost
in the overlooking branches. . .)

FRAGILE IMAGINING

Even in January, green spills
from the earth in a half breath
and there will be bloom.
Tempestuous rain collides with window
as I search for the interim, the place
between wild gloom and what I need
to hope, no false assumptions or clouded
thought. I take up words like loose bones
to learn of shape and matter,
fretting at the urge to just sleep
and pass the troubled hours, coddling
the notion of death in the abstract.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE NEREIDS

If it happens that desire should
seize me—stones in the pockets,
a step off the prow—or even
an accident of undertow, limbs
failing, don't ferry me up
to the surface or drag me to shore
like a weary hero; let your arms
fall from me, your faces erased
in the sun's bald stare, let me swallow
all that glitter, and retreat, retreat
until your gentling wake turns the sea
to marble, and the azure door closes.



LYN LIFSHIN

ENHEDUANNA

IN A BREEZE OF DATES AND OLIVES, 4000 YEARS BC

The first poet we know to have signed her name to what she wrote, she lived 2285-2250BCE. High priestess in the Sumerian city state of Ur. After her death Enheduanna continued to be remembered as an important figure, perhaps even attaining semi-divine status.

in the shadow of a
white glowing house,
a young woman moves
thru reeds and barley.
Her hair shimmers in
the hot light like
ripples on the Euphrates.
In the distance, the
soft sounds of a
stringed instrument.
Children singing to the
Oud. She is Enheduanna,
daughter of Sargon.
Sun turns her copper breasts
fire. How can she know
this man who brought her
berries in a clay dish
is not only the founder of
one of the first empires
in history, a reign that will
last long after his
daughter is no longer
stunned by the majesty's
terror and is wild
to carve her heart's
words, chisel stone with
her fierce passion, a
world grounded in
desire for gods and
goddesses, but is her father.

She feels braided to her life
with irresistible power
and ripeness. Birds no
one now living can
see dart thru brambles
but Enheduanna hardly
sees them, already
humming, burning
lost in the rifts of love,
carving her breath
and heartbeat into clay
tablet with a small knife
like a stylus that might
as well be part of her
body, seething and wild
to become the first writer
in recorded history to
sing her name to
what she wrote

ENHEDUANNA

The first poet whose
name we know, there
under palm leaves
with her tablet of
lapis lazuli, deep as
her eyes. A true woman
in the shade of the
holy potash plant,
moving like a young
cat. The goddess
of writing, learning,
the harvest. "My king,"
she almost sang,
"something has been
created that no one has
created before." The
light must have had a
tangerine cast to it,
ribbons of sun braiding
with the onyx hair
of Edhenduanna, a
shrine in a pure place

FROM HER MOTHER, THE SUMERIAN

history and religion with
their goddesses and
temples more dazzling
than sun beams with
lustrous lapis lazuli beads
glistening and fiery in the
light. Mornings before the
dew dissolved and goats
moved in a wave of
hooves across the plains,
Enheduanna contemplates
the radiance of the
goddesses, imagines Inanna's
dazzling, irresistible
ripeness, radiant, as perfectly
shaped fresh fruit. Some
where else, someone is
shaping mud and reeds into
a house that will have its
own glow. Enheduanna,
years before Sappho, shivers,
feels her skin on the verge,
a gasp at the mystery of
breath, breathtaking as the
story she writes of creation
itself, how a temple platform
rises to split heaven and earth.
In such a parched land,
water is magical to Enheduanna
as the heat of a lover's tongue,
startling as his fingers, her
story of a sweet water ocean,
the abzu, with earth floating on
top. She is holding her sharpened
reed pen, bending into clay
as a breeze blows from
the Tigress, catches dry petals

as if they were butterflies
and sends them west
while Enheduanna forgets to
eat, so wild to praise
Inanna, the amazing goddess,
who gave birth to all life from
her water, that life emerging from
teaming waters, her heavenly womb
and Enheduanna, bursting with
passion, stamps the clay
cuneiform, signs her name as
no one ever had

THE DISC OF ENHEDUANNA

first writer to sign her name to what she wrote

after a long trip, after the canals
between the Euphrates and the
Tigris. After she was chosen
by the moon god to be his
human wife, Enheduanna got
her name. Before she was
chosen, while reeds were
shaking in a wind of lilies and
almonds, renowned seers read the
stars, extracted the liver from a
spotless sheep to check the
slim long haired girl, to predict
her worth from intricate shapes,
hills and valleys to see if she
is the one, the star of harvests,
fertility, queen of animals
and the wealth and happiness
of all human subjects. Then,
Enheduanna inscribed, in her
own handwriting on the back of
an alabaster disk, that she was
the true lady of Nana, never
imagining thousands of years
later someone would find
that alabaster broken into pieces,
her text in fragments but luckily
copied by a scribe in the old
Babylonian period, 500 years
after her birth. Depicted as the
moon in front of a stepped edifice
she walks with robed, clean shaven
priests. One carries a drink from
the altar, the other a frond or
sprinkler and the last, a pocket.

She wears a floral robe, a
thick head band with her long
hair falling down the back and in
braids down the side of her face,
calm and beautiful-- you can
only imagine her dreams
and wild yearnings

WHILE EVERYONE ELSE IS STILL SLEEPING

Enheduanna braids her
long black braids. Behind
her eyes, temples grow
out of cosmic mist,
lift their necks to the sky.
Sometimes she longs
to be small enough
to play in her mother's
quilts and weavings.
Sometimes she feels over-
whelmed by life's mystery
and fear, its terror and
dread, it's beauty and
desire. Think of her as a
torch singer, belting
out what scorches and
what can calm, her songs
carved into hard clay that
will dance, a wild jazz
scat. Her skin smells of
saffron and sun, the music
of the Euphrates in the
back ground, she scatters
her stories in the rushes.
Images flutter in and
out of the palace walls until,
like an ink tattoo, she
pierces the clay like skin
and tells the wild story

ENHEDUANNA'S DREAM # 72

something skitters in
the palm trees then
slithers thru reeds but
Enheduanna is in a
dream, is in the zone.
She is spinning words
to the goddess who
carried ruined roses,
wove across many
centuries to stand
against the ransacking
of sacred places, the
wild an impetuous.
mother of ritual. Sky
goes raspberry, color of
Enheduanna's lips,
still she's lost in her own
lush words, an amalgam
of poetry, howls and
jazz, praising the
goddesses' brilliance
that melts two suns and
a full moon the dips
to earth like fine oil

SOMETIMES UNDER THE LAST RASPBERRY LIGHT

Enheduanna drifts into
stories of the grain goddess,
sister of the cattle goddess.
She half dreams of dark
caves before they knew
how to eat bread. Dates
drop to the pale sand. She
fingers her woven red
threads, can imagine dark
sun on bodies that knew
nothing of clothes. She's
lost in the myths, the tales
of a wonderful balsa
flowing from a goddess
whose face was radiance
adorned with precious stone.
In her lap, a green lion with
blood flowing from his
side. She was crowned with
a diadem and set as a star
in the highest heaven

ENHEDUANNA ON INANNA'S POEMS

she can turn a
man into a woman,
a woman into a
man, make any
one desirable.
Gain, profit, and
great wealth
and success are
at her mercy. She
can make men
virile, send
guardian
angels but if
you displease her,
that's another
story

WHEN SHE PRESSED HER WEB SHAPED REED INTO SOFT CLAY

it was as if the words
and symbols were
fingers, each shape
glowing with the
ambiguity poetry
demands. Her arms,
saffron perfumed, her
hair in a clasp of
reeds. Could she
have dreamt
her explosion of
words, layers on top
of layers, the bottom
images showing thru
like pentimento
in art where
images painted
over another one
eventually seep
thru, would, 500 years
later stun and
astonish, intense as
the scarlet bird in the
date tree. In her own
spell, Enheduanna
braided her life with
the goddess Inanna. She
signed her own
name to what could
have been a torch
burning, the first poet
to do so, as if she
had a choice

WHEN SHE LEANS INTO HER DREAMS

When she's the instrument of
a song to Inanna. When she
doesn't know how to be
calm and the reeds
and shimmery winged
things keep dancing. When
she fears mountain
water will turn to ash. When
she pleads to the one who
wraps her heart in
evening's scarlet ashes and
plays the evening rain
like a sacred heart.
Enheduanna, her anklet of
lapis lazuli playing it's
own riff, her father,
the king's voice in her
ear like thunder, when she
stamps in clay her
prayers, her loyalty, her respect
for those who make earth
beautiful all on their
own. She writes of their
powers over desire, writes
of flowers, joy, of the
stars and the sea
and its dark waters

UNDER HER ALMOND SCENTED BRAIDS

under dust wind in the
palm trees, Enheduanna
mingles her life with
the goddess she is
obsessed with. Both are
wild and beautiful,
powerful, clever and
ready to fly thru
the universe, a cyclone,
tsunami. Fierce as
dragons or tigers, each
dreams the terror of
being stripped of power.
Inanna's blood mixes
with her blood to give
birth to her song.
Stripped of everything
except the creation born of
an empty page, her skin
on the skin of stone,
holding, breathing rules,
making images as
astonishingly beautiful as
Inanna, she is wild to
go where no one has come
back from in her flowing
red rope, necklace of
lapis and carnelian vest,
pleased with what
she made, to what she
brought forth like
any birth so she signed
her name

IMAGINING ENHEDUANNA SINGING SCAT IN A KARAOKE BAR

showing off her new ink.
Let her father do what
he has to being leader,
in control, doing his
kingly duties. Today no
woman is as wildly
passionate, a headstrong
beauty, a lyrical torch
singer who would be as
happy not being out
with the crowds.
Ambivalent and fearsome,
her voice a jazz blues
riff, feminist jazz
humming. And would
you expect less from
a woman who couldn't
sleep and walked out alone
under the stars and could
not keep what was
pulsing inside her, dug
her feelings into clay
and signed her name as
no one else had before

AS IF WORDS WERE SHAPES

you could finger and touch,
Enheduanna's skin soothes
and varnishes the passion
seething inside her. It's not
enough to be the daughter
of a king and sit calmly in
the castle when what burns
inside her howls for a way
out. It's not enough to learn
history as it happens, not
enough to be the first woman
to hold the title of EN for
high priestess, early spouse
of a deity. Not enough
to be fed exotic fruits and
plum wine, have dates
on glistening platters and
shawls of scarlet and soft blue
wool when all that matters
is that she save Inanna,
that her tears and verbs and
weeping, her moaning
and prayers keep her strong
so Inanna can be strong
and beautiful and
hold Enheduanna in the
cove of love

ENHEDUANNA, AFTER YEARS IN THE COVE OF THE TEMPLE

in the stillness of
stories of wars and
love and music,
easy in the green
wind of dates and
clay jewels. Night
birds and then,
suddenly, like a
hawk pouncing on
doves, she is exiled
from the temple.
Dark blue in the
haze, in the
bread. Everything
ransacked. Now
Enheduanna is being
raped, left to
wander the hills.
Everything rose
and gold is
smashed, every
thing living that
can't still be
what it was,
abandoned, with
no one to help,
as far as she
could be from the
ones who once
protected her,
she calls out
"Inanna," wild for
the goddess's
epic journey to the
land of no return
to soothe her
own banishment
from power

BECAUSE INANNA IS SO WILD, SO BEAUTIFUL

because she is famous
in the stars, in the
earth, in the earth's
clay and flowers
and fearless enough
to hurl herself over the
hills like a dragon,
abandon everything
to see what it was
like in the Netherworld,
in the Land of No
Return, when
Enheduanna writes
about the terrors, the
horrors, she mingles her
life with Inanna's. No
one else's life
parallels hers so vividly.
Both stripped of
their powers, left ruined
and helpless in the
hands of their enemies
like diamonds and emeralds
smothered in mud

ALMOST LIKE A YOUNG GIRL

with a crush on an older
woman or a child idolizing
a big sister, Enheduanna's
astonishment, devotion
to Inanna can hardly be
contained. You can feel
your skin prickle as hers
surely did wanting to cage
and store a moment of
grace, still entranced by a
goddess so good at being
reckless. Even before its
bright, Enheduanna
half tastes the scents of
the fig trees, remembers
dreams of being transformed
to trees. You might think
there were glass balls
in her fingers, that she knew
Daphne turned into a pine
tree, a laurel, a yew. She
calls Inanna sister, wants some
artist to make her a soothing
brew for this spirit who
comes from the place of palm
trees and sweet melons,
from the place full of saffron
and fragrant oils and begs
her, the one who knows the
mystery of birds, whispers in
red grass for them to come to
quiet her shattered soul

**NOT LIKE SOME DISTANT ABSTRACT GOD, NOT LIKE SOME
TERRIBLE SCAR**

For Enheduanna, devoted to
capturing the lush Rose of
Jericho with its rolled into a
tight ball curves, as some nights
she feels and then so like
certain terrors in the wake of
Inanna's blessing, like the
plant she breaks loose from
its root, her skin fluttering.
They enter the sweet heat and
then until rain falls, plant
branches that uncurl to protect
the center of the plant that
could be her heart. She waits for
Inanna, waits for seeds to
generate long new roses
to grow white as snow she
may never see but will
note in her hymn to Inanna,
hopes her gorgeous song
will melt moon and stars
and drip on to earth
like the rose balm

FLAMINGOS AND PELICANS

outside the palace
on the way to Siberia,
to Africa, teals and
reeds and warblers
seem code for
Inanna. Enheduanna
rubs night from her
eyes. The Sacred Ibis
and African darter
sing of a strange wind
no light can grown
in. Nothing like the
sun Inanna threw out
like dandelions
skimming over chaos
in her wild red hair

SOME MORNINGS, ENHEDUANNA DRESSES IN FLAME

like Inanna, clutching
longing like the
sharpened reed she
will plunge into
clay. Years before
"feminist" appears on
anyone's lips, she
is flying under long
hair, danger braiding
the rain, wild to
appease Inanna, bring
her laughter and
light, a cove
she can thrive in
like marshes in the
desert reaping
gold petals

ENHEDUANNA'S DREAM OF INANNA

How she tosses her hair,
brings sun like yellow
dandelions out of a
basket. How can
Enheduanna sleep
longing for Inanna's
safety. Only a goddess
knows the arts of
giving birth and the
healing and magical
medicinal powers.
Only they have power
over desire, flowers,
stars and the sky
and dark waters. Only
the goddess truly
knows the cycle of
life and death, only
Inanna, always a mystery,
spitting poison, brings
forth flowers, the
brightest stars and lilies.
Enheduanna plucks
stalks of Pusckinia, the
blue white flowers,
feels she is like the
plant, tolerating drought,
waiting and waiting

PAST SACRED MOUNTAIN AND THE SACRED TREES IN THE DESERT

wild fruit trees Enheduanna's
head dress will mirror with
its cluster of gold pomegranates
and fruits hanging together,
shielded by their leaves
as she is shielded by her poems,
their wild praise for Inanna.
Gold stems and fruit on pods of
gold and carnelian. Enheduanna
hears red birds in willow branches.
Before night water is licked
from all the leaves, she drifts
in poems of love for Inanna. In the
myth, the mystery of what
Inanna could be thinking, in the
Sycamore, a clue to the sun in her
eyes, the shudder at someone
who, like Inanna, visits the world of
the dead and still returns, Enheduanna
wraps the green leaves closer,
strokes the Ished, a fruit bearing tree,
that loves only the waters of certain
rivers. She shakes, wonders, who will
want her, grey as dusk, dark
as the tree that returns the dead
person to the sycamore wood

IN THE SHADE OF MYRTLE AND OAK

in the light dusky
as olive branches
Enheduanna twists
her long hair into
loops of jasper
and onyx, hair
ribbons of gold
leaf. On her wrist,
lapis lazuli and
agates. When she
moves thru night,
her multi chain
of carnelian and
ivory, anklets
of silver darting
thru darkness
like stars

**ROUND BLUE POLISHED BEADS ENHEDUANNA MIGHT BE BORED
WITH**

and dark copper
shells might follow
Enheduanna into
her tomb: metal,
petals, a tiara
of gold, polished
beads. Can she
imagine her jewels
and gold rosettes
mingled with
dried bone? The
gold hairnet tangled
with her own
burnished hair?
Will she dream
what is, even as it
presses her skin,
astonishes, priceless
as gold diadems
embellished
with blue green, red
and white enameled
flowers will, at
her death be
untouched for years,
never return to
her home

UNLIKE HER WORDS, HER BLUES RIFT TO INANNA

sealed in clay, recited
500 years and then
resurrected almost
6000 years later. Her
jewels untouched for
years and years.
People who knew
where treasures were
were slaughtered
or taken captive,
never to return to their
houses. The secrets
of the jewels' location
died with them like
what Enheduanna
dreamed nights going
to sleep with the
night birds and sand
birds in the tamarisk
poplars and licorice
close to the music of
the Tigris
and Euphrates

WHEN THE ONE YOU LOVE AND WORSHIP

is like a sister, not
a faceless, voiceless
wonder. When even
July birds dissolve
in pale heat and
the temple gold blurs.
The people go in
side to worship at
their private altars,
receive prayers
as they twist
and untwist strands
of sadness and
light as a date palm
in the fruit wind
dangles dark globes
in bunches until,
like prayers, what's
longed for is
harvested

I THINK OF ENHEDUANNA'S WORDS

in the fruit of
date palm trees

just out of reach.
Stone will hold

her words long
after the dates

bloom for ages,
beckon like

the trees in the
scorching summer

wind. They seem,
like her words,

precious

ENHEDUANNA

before sun scorches brick
and date palms, she lets
the almond wind warm
her hair, her poet's beauty is
in the ordinary, catches
what glistens. She dares
to imagine what is behind
human sight and knowledge
on a stone tablet. Soap
and water for ritual
cleansing, "why is life
so full of hardship," she
sighs pressing precious
oil from a tough, unyielding
hill of barley, praying to
all creation that what
she writes will be
alive as her skin

YEARS BEFORE JESUS

Sargon must have held
this baby daughter,
palm date fronds
blowing in an olive
wind. His pale jewel.
Lutes in the distance,
small stringed
instruments. Under
the house, bones
of dead families
wrapped in maps and
carpets, dead children
in clay jars with
precious objects: cow
lamb, turtles, jars
of rich food
and barley with the
hope that the
spirit may be re-
born, come back to
then in the flesh again

WHEN THE MOON WAXES, THEN WHEN THE MOON WANED

Enheduanna played
the afternoon shadows
like a piano, a harp
made for a pocket
of air like a singer
belting the blues.
She chiseled words
in clay, sucked up
from each equinox
For the solstices,
metal and copper
anklets, love rings,
exotic weavings
from Anki, the
Sumerian word for
the universe which
refers to their god
of the sky

BETWEEN THE EUPHRATES AND THE TIGRIS

when stars still
dribbled light
on the sand,
before dawn
she lets her
hair unravel,
the roses she
carries drop its
petals. Will
she dance with
the god of
the moon?
Early before
wet clay
hardens she
presses the
stylus, gives
birth to what
explodes from
her heart

ENHEDUANNA

a last light
leaves slashes of
scarlet ribbon

She can't let
the day go, she
is obsessed,

she is carrying
the embryo of a
poem in her fingers

Soon it will
be dark but while
the temples are

blazing, as if the
light came from
the crude clay

bricks, she can't
stop pressing
clay as if

each word,
each image
was exorcism

SOME DAYS HER HEART FEELS NO RELIEF

the grape arbor
feels like exile.
Stars, chunks
of ice. She won't
be taboo in spite
of rage and pain.
"Under her
tasseled shawl,
her heart bangs."
Her eyes make
holes in the
afternoon light,
eyes startling
as Lapis Lazuli.
Can you still be
a poet priestess
when your skin
wants a flesh man?

ENHEDUANNA

mysterious as the
taste of fruit no
longer growing.
Years from when
she picks wild
Iris and the wild
flower she uses
for bathing, she
walks thru Joshua
trees and dark
blue thistle

IF SHE HAD KNOWN

she would be remembered
as the earliest known
poet. And if she knew
hymns to Inanna would be
praised as the first to use
a first person narrative,
would she have changed a
word? Been less mysterious?
Written more about being
the wife of the moon god
Nanna? Told us more
of her father Sargon?
Written more about her
mother's dreams and fears?
Written with the same
gut ripping honesty?
And tell how in the palace
she pulled from her heart
and blood such as some
say, "psychological,
sophisticated insights that
make her a sheer genius
unparalleled even by
Shakespeare"

WHEN I THINK OF ENHEDUANNA

loosening her hair,
then binding her hair.
And the way she turned
chaos into cosmos.
Long dark strands
like the goddess's
nets and knots. I can
imagine the sweet
wind of dates blowing
thru the reeds, her
skin tawny, her
mind racing, wild to
make and capture
a woman's suffering
and redemption
in words so close to
flesh you can imagine
the verbs turned
flesh, see how
the word for "woman"
in the Sumerian
language and the
word for enchantment
are the same

ENHEDUANNA

no one else had ever
written about them
selves or their feelings
about the deities.

Mornings in the
shade of the palms,
lost in her new poems
to the goddess Inanna,
lost in the passion,
the terror and love
for one she sees her
self in so clearly.

Maybe, in the shadow
sculpture of Inanna,
before clay became
fragments and her
long braids dusk
she shivers, senses
these golden mornings
can't stay. But for the
moment, every inch
of her sings the great
news of Inanna, a chant,
a hymn where she
promises she is hers.

"My Lady, I will
proclaim your great
news and your glory"
and beg as doves and
desert bees fill the
clean air, Inanna's
"heart cool off for me"

ENHEDUANNA

listened to stories of
her father's journey
from Kish, how the
camels lurched
toward the temple
of the moon god.
Desert flowers dot
the pale sand. She
braids the stories of
grandfather brought
up by a water thrower,
a magician, god of
sweet waters,
wisdom. I think of
her, a young woman,
maybe dreaming of
boys, carving her
passion, her terror
and love into shapes
in clay, in awe of
strong beautiful
goddesses but esp.
Inanna, who glows like
a jewel, a crystal ball
Enheduanna nearly
can see herself
in, a mirror she can
almost tell what's
ahead for her. Her
skin still smooth and
clear. I think of
her probably not even
knowing she is
the first author in
world literature to

sign her name to what
she has written. A
young girl in sandals
and a sash of woven
grape leaves carrying
in the morning light
a masterpiece, vivid,
glistening, still damp
and the clay braiding
rhetoric, structure and
sacred testimony
with clues about her
creative process 2000
years before Homer

I THINK OF ENHEDUANNA

rising from the couch
of dream divination.
I can imagine her
wondering, not
sure she wants this
role as priestess,
wanting to walk
among the blue
flowers lost in day
dreams, a boy she has
a crush on. Maybe
she wonders why she
can't live like an
ordinary girl, not
follow her father's
orders. Why should
she have to write
to secure her family's
hold on the country he
took over. Sure she
speaks the Sumerian
tongue but why does
she have to have
this burden? Maybe
she watches the
desert birds become
black specks in
the tangerine sky and
longs for their freedom,
years before she'd
understand she was
her own person and
would discover her
inner values and exalt
them as knowledge
and wisdom, as a
law and a faith
and joy

THE DREAM IMAGE OF ENHEDUANNA IN THE SUMERIAN NIGHT

smelling of olives
and dates and oil.
Stars rest on her
eyelids, her skin
luminous, color
of sand under a
full moon. She
could be dream-
ing of Inanna, her
fierceness, her
beauty. Behind
eye lashes thicker
than ferns she is
wild for Inanna's
healing touch.
Vines sprout
from her cheek
bones against
a black sky, her
forehead a green
maze of what
grows. Pale hills,
ivory shadows
and a milky sliver
moon. So much
that's green as
the words and
images left in clay
of Enheduanna's
passion, words
that glow from
4000 BC, still

palpable as skin
or a glistening
orange or blue
and fawn flowers,
symbols, shapes
that as Sappho
wrote later "some
one I tell you
will remember us"

HER EYES, ENORMOUS

burning coal. From her
temple, Enheduanna
watched the stars, the
moon, the mover of
lights in the black velvet
seas. In one sculpture,
her eyes tear a hole in you,
kohl rims a fiery glare.
Words and symbols she
pressed into clay real 500
years after she died

ENHEDUANNA

ornament of the
house and sky. Emerald
vines sprout from
her forehead
and temples. In a dream
she smiles slightly.
Her eye lids pale blue,
iridescent as the
blue petals open and the
green leaves grow
toward heaven
like flowers under earth
so long they can't
help but break
free, pulsing, alive,
luminous in
darkness as Enheduanna's
poems, her words,
intense as those flowers

WHEN I THINK OF ENHEDUANNA

I imagine flowers and
vines sprouting from
her hair, green vines
in a dream where her
brain sends up pale
flowers and moons
and fish and all seeing
eyes, up into the sky.
I think of her skin
under pale cotton in
the July sun, her words
green as the flowers
and lilies she prayed
would thrive and they
did. To some, she was
the most important
religious figure of the
day but I think of her
hand warming as she
clutched her tablet of
lapis lazuli, half wonder-
ing if she isn't just too
young to be entrusted
with all this

ENHEDUANNA

was it her passion? her
lips dark as pomegranates
that made men listen?
Or how she opened
her mouth, luminous as
her tablet of lapis lazuli
reflected the sky,
soothed the frazzled
and lonely. You can see
her in a field of potash
and stylus reeds, born to
teach and delight

ENHEDUANNA CREATING SOMETHING THAT NO ONE HAS BEFORE

for those who want her
more down to earth,
more sensual, flesh
and hair you can
run your fingers thru,
think how she advises
when servants let the
flocks loose, when
cattle and sheep are
returned to their
pens. Then Enheduanna,
like the nameless poor,
wears only a simple
garment, the pearls of
a prostitute are placed
around your neck
and you are likely to
snatch a man from the
tavern then hurry
to the cattle where 7
nymphs share the
bed with you

WHO KNOWS IF ENHEDUANNA

Created autumn and
winter 4000 years
ago. Who can ever
be sure how to
translate anything
from a 4000 year old
dead language written
in cuneiform with
out even a Rosetta
stone artifact that
relates cuneiform
to a language like
Hebrew? But when
these texts are
long and not very
simple, so are there
really enough artifacts
with a broad enough
vocabulary to
decipher a text?

THE PLEASURES OF THE BOOK

[This essay is adapted, in part, from my introductory comments at Kathryn Stripling Byer's reading at St. Francis College in March 2013. She was the inaugural poet in the Spring Reading Series sponsored by the college's Women's Poetry Initiative, of which I am the director.]

I want to share with you a few thoughts on the beauty and grace of Kathryn Stripling Byer's work and what that work has come to mean in my life.

Nearly ten years ago, as I was starting to find my way toward a doctoral dissertation on women's poetry, my dear friend and colleague Brother Owen Sadlier asked me if I was familiar with Byer's work. I had to confess that I was not; Owen's response was to go right up and get his copy of *Black Shawl* so he could show me the poem "Mountain Time."

I was immediately smitten. There is no other way to describe my reaction. I devoured *Black Shawl*, then Byer's other works. "Here," I thought, "is a poet who speaks to me." Despite (or I like to think because of) the fact that I grew up in Maine and she grew up in Georgia, Byer's poetry strikes deep chords within me.

This is not "easy" poetry, but that is not to say that it is too complicated, or too difficult, or too anything. What I mean is that Byer's work is rewarding, that it will give as much to the reader as the reader puts into it -- more, even. Byer does not flinch from difficult subjects; she does not write only about the pretty and dainty. She writes about real people (often women) dealing with real life. Yet the reader is always ready to make whichever journey Byer proposes because she knows that she is in the hands of -- no, in the care of -- a generous poet. A poet who tells the truth, who values beauty, who trusts her reader.

Since that day a decade ago when I first read a Kathryn Stripling Byer poem, her work has been part of the warp and weft of my life. And now is the perfect time for you to make it a part of your life, if it isn't already.

In 2012, Byer's newest collection of poetry, *Descent*, was published by Louisiana State University Press. This year, her first collection, *The Girl in the Midst of the Harvest*¹, has been reissued by Press 53. Taken together (along with all the wonderful collections that came in between -- *Wildwood Flower*, *Black Shawl*, *Catching the Light*, *Coming to Rest*) we see a talented, thoughtful, exuberant poet grow in power and voice.

This is not to say that *The Girl in the Midst of the Harvest* is somehow less realized than Byer's later work. On its publication, this collection announced the debut of a writer with a fully-developed poetics, a writer who had already discovered many of the themes -- family, woman's work, the Southern landscape, motherhood -- that she would return to throughout her career.

¹ Originally published in 1986 by Texas Tech Press in the Associated Writing Programs Award Series.

Byer has always had a keen eye and a good ear. What in a lesser poet's hands would be a caricature becomes a moving, multifaceted portrait of a living, breathing human being. While describing the lingering death of her father's mother in "My Beautiful Grandmother," from *The Girl in the Midst of the Harvest*, Byer gives us glimpses of the woman her grandmother was, a woman whose "mind was as quick / as the stitch of a sparrow's wing. / Coming and going, / she made sure her petticoats rustled." That phrase "made sure" is what makes this woman come alive for us, helps us see a little of the "flirt, and a good one" she was when she was younger.

In *Descent's* "Drought Days," we find a young Byer (or, at least, a young Byer as represented by the speaker of the poem) making due during the dry season: "When the pond dried up, / my cousins and I filled oil drums / with my grandfather's hoses // and pulled on our bathing suits, / climbed in like daughters of lawyers / or bankers. . .," a charming image that becomes slightly comical later: "We hauled // ourselves out, feeling // silly and shriveled, our skin flecked / with rust, knowing we were still stuck // on the farm."

It is these "small" moments (rendered with a clear-eyed compassion), as much as the larger questions of love and guilt and duty, that illuminate Byer's work, bringing to life the everyday experiences of ordinary people who become, in Byer's poetry, extraordinary.

Descent is the work of a poet at the height of her power, examining what it is that makes us human, and how that humanity (with aspects both good and bad) manifests within us all. I urge you to make Byer's work a part of your life, as I have made it a part of mine.

INFORMATION ON CONTRIBUTORS

Colleen Abel is a former Diane Middlebrook Poetry Fellow at UW-Madison's Institute for Creative Writing. Her work has appeared in numerous journals, including *The Southern Review*, *West Branch*, *Notre Dame Review*, *Mid-American Review*, *Rhino*, *Cimarron Review*, *The Journal*, and others. She is Poetry Editor at *cream city review* in Milwaukee. Her chapbook, *Housewifery*, is forthcoming this winter from dancing girl press. Her website www.colleenabel.com features more information and poetry.

Stories by **Rachel Adams** have appeared in *A capella Zoo*, *Corium*, *PANK*, *Parcel*, and *Uncanny Valley*. She currently teaches sixth grade in California.

Krissie Kubiszyn Allen is a creative writing teacher, attorney, and Catholic mother of four living in Birmingham, Alabama, where she writes poetry, essays, and short stories aimed at glorifying God. You can read her essays monthly at newevangelizers.com or visit her personal blog at choosinggod.wordpress.com, where she offers her personal commentary on life from a Catholic perspective.

Maureen Alsop, Ph.D. is the author of the full-length poetry collection *Apparition Wren*, and several chapbooks. Her poems have appeared in various journals including *Tampa Review*, *Typo*, *The Laurel Review*, *AGNI*, *Blackbird*. She presently leads creative writing workshops for the Inlandia Institute and The Rooster Moans.

Philipp W. Aurand was born in W. Berlin, Germany but was raised predominantly here in the States, in the Northwest corner. He has always enjoyed sketching and illustrating. More recently he has allowed himself to seep into other forms of expression, particularly poetry. He currently lives in Seattle, WA. When he's not tending bar he is avidly studying Spanish and painting, and trying to let poems find him.

Peggy Aylsworth is a retired psychotherapist living in Santa Monica, CA. Her poetry has appeared in numerous literary journals throughout the U.S. and abroad, including *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *The MacGuffin*, *Poetry Salzburg Review*. A poem of hers was nominated for the 2012 Pushcart Prize.

Originally from New Jersey (South) and most recently a resident of Baltimore, Maryland, **Yvonne Battle-Felton** has been moved by words ever since she can remember. Yvonne received her MA in Writing from Johns Hopkins University where she focused on her interest in the psychology of character and character influence on plot in both literary fiction and creative nonfiction. As of today, she lives, teaches, and writes near Baltimore, Maryland where she is an adjunct instructor (professor and lecturer) at CCBC, AACC and UMUC. By the New Year, almost 20 years after failing to fully commit to Maryland, Yvonne, a self-proclaimed perpetual student, is off to pursue a Creative Writing Ph.D. at

Lancaster University (UK) where she will research diaries, memoirs and other writing and craft a work of historical fiction reflecting women's struggle to rebuild family after the emancipation.

Hugh Behm-Steinberg is the author of *Shy Green Fields* (No Tell Books) and *The Opposite of Work* (JackLeg Press). He teaches writing at California College of the Arts in San Francisco, where he edits the journal *Eleven Eleven*.

Eleanor Leonne Bennett is a 16 year old internationally award winning photographer and artist who has won first places with National Geographic, The World Photography Organisation, Nature's Best Photography, Papworth Trust, Mencap, The Woodland Trust and Postal Heritage. Her photography has been published in the *Telegraph*, *The Guardian*, BBC News Website and on the cover of books and magazines in the United States and Canada. Her art is globally exhibited, having appeared in London, Paris, Indonesia, Los Angeles, Florida, Washington, Scotland, Wales, Ireland, Canada, Spain, Germany, Japan, Australia and The Environmental Photographer of the Year Exhibition (2011), amongst many other locations. She was the only person from the UK to have her work displayed in the National Geographic and Airbus Run See The Bigger Picture global exhibition tour with the United Nations International Year Of Biodiversity 2010.

Richard Biscayart writes: I have taught English as a second language in Spain, Taiwan and Canada. I am now in Milford, Delaware where—as the school website says—he "brings a wealth of both multicultural and linguistic skills to the Milford School District." More of his work can be viewed on an innovative participatory site called "La Fovea."

Jillian Brandt is a writer living in Columbus, Ohio. As a librarian at Ohio Wesleyan University, she not only teaches research skills, but leads writing workshops both in and out of the classroom. While this is her first creative publication, her scholarly work appears in *Informed Transitions: Libraries Supporting the High School to College Transition*. She draws inspiration from personal history, her daughter, Annie, and her writing partner, Beth.

R. Joseph Capet is a poet and theologian whose work in multiple languages has appeared in magazines and journals as diverse as *decomp*, *The Montreal Review*, the *American Journal of Biblical Theology*, and *Sennaciulo*. He currently lays up treasures on earth teaching English to students across Latin America and treasures in heaven teaching Esperanto to anyone willing to learn, as well as serving as poetry editor for *P.Q. Leer*. More of his work can be found at www.rjosephcapet.com and in forthcoming issues of *Interrobang!?* and *Hitherto*.

Ann Cefola is the author of the poetry chapbooks *St. Agnes*, *Pink-Slipped* (Kattywompus Press, 2011) and *Sugaring* (Dancing Girl Press, 2007) and translator of Hélène Sanguinetti's *Hence this cradle* (Seismicity Editions, 2007). She received a Witter Bynner Poetry Translation Residency at the Santa Fe Art Institute and the Robert Penn Warren Award judged by John Ashbery. For more on Ann's work, see anncefol.com and annogram.blogspot.com.

Judith Cody, poet and composer, has won national poetry awards from *Atlantic* and *Amelia* magazines as well a national award in music. A poem and its historical archives is in the permanent collection of the Smithsonian Institution. Three of her poems were quarter-finalists in the Pablo Neruda Prize in Poetry; her poetry was put forward for the Lyric Recovery Award's Carnegie Hall reading; and poems were cited for honorable mentions by the National League of American Pen Women. Her poems have appeared in over sixty journals such as: *Stand*, *Nimrod*, *New York Quarterly*, *South Carolina Review*, *Texas Review*, *Confluence*, *Fugue*, *Carquinez Poetry Review*, *Distillery*, *Cumberland Poetry Review*, *Rio Grande Review*, *Fox Cry Review*, *Louisville Review*, *Madison Review*, *Phoebe*, *Quiddity*, *Primavera*, *Poet Lore*, *Poem*, *Xavier Review*, *Bathyspheric Review*, *Eureka Literary Magazine*, *Phantasmagoria*, *The Binnacle*, *Soundings East*, *Westview*, *Caduceus*, *Chaffin Journal*, *Arabesques Review*, *Central California Poetry Journal*, *Language and Culture*, *Lost and Found Times*, *Androgyne*, *Ginosko*, *Rattlesnake Review*, and others. Her work is anthologized in: *Oakland Out Loud*, *Words Upon the Water*, *Anthology of Monterey Bay Poets*, *Meridian Anthology of Contemporary Poetry*, and others. She is currently the editor of a PEN anthology and is the editor for a NASA division history. She wrote the internationally noted biography of composer Vivan Fine, *Vivian Fine: A Bio-Bibliography* (Greenwood Press), and *Eight Frames Eight*, a collection of poems. Her poem *Deer Road* was published by *Quiddity International Journal*; this poem and audio with music Cody composed is at: www1.ben.edu/springfield/quiddity/issue04-2/index.html and visit www.judithcody.com which is Cody's authorized homepage.

Lydia Dale grew up in Norwood, NY. She is currently working towards her Bachelor's Degree in Graphic and Multimedia Design. In her free time, she enjoys painting and writing stories in the creative nonfiction genre. Her art has appeared in both North Country Community College's 2009 magazine and on the Art Instruction School's official website. To view more of her art, find her on Facebook.

Darren C. Demaree is living in Columbus, Ohio with his wife and children. He is the recipient of two Pushcart Prize nominations, and his first full collection, *As We Refer To Our Bodies*, will be published this winter by 8th House Publishing House.

Gail Eisenhart, a native of St. Louis, Missouri, currently lives in the Metro-east in Belleville, Illinois. She is a long-time participant and former Board member of the St. Louis Poetry Center. Her poems have been published this year in *Diverse Voices*, *Alive Now*, *The Centrifugal Eye*, *South Florida Arts Journal*, *Tipton Poetry Journal*, *Qarrtsiluni* and *Found Patrick Anthology*. Her chapbook, *Dip in the Road*, was runner-up for the 2013 Mary Ballard Chapbook Prize awarded by Casey Shay Press of Austin, Texas. A retired Executive Assistant, she currently works part time at the Belleville (IL) Public Library and travels in her spare time, collecting memories that eventually show up in new poems.

C. W. Emerson is a licensed clinical psychologist in Los Angeles, California. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Diverse Voices Quarterly*, *Forge*, *G.W. Review*, *Poetry East*, *Quiddity*, and *The MacGuffin*.

Donna Emerson divides her time between her home in Petaluma, California, and her family homestead in western New York. She is an instructor at Santa Rosa Jr. College and a clinical social work consultant. Donna's recent publications include *The Place That Inhabits Us*, *Poems of the Bay Area Watershed*, *The Paterson Literary Review*, *Phoebe*, and *Eclipse*. She won the *Tiny Lights* Flash competition, 2010, among numerous other awards. Chapbooks include *This Water*, 2007, *Body Rhymes*, Finishing Line Press, 2009, nominated for the California Book Award, and *Wild Mercy*, 2011, by Finishing Line Press. Her forthcoming *Following Hay* will be published in November, 2013. She is also Events Chair at Marin Poetry Center in San Rafael, California.

Doris Ferleger is the author of three volumes of poetry, *Big Silences in a Year of Rain*, *When You Become Snow* and *As the Moon Has Breath*, and winner of *New Letters Poetry Prize* and the *AROH CNF Prize*, among others. Her work has been published in numerous journals including *Cimarron Review*, *L.A. Review*, and *The New Guard*. She holds an MFA in Poetry and a Ph.D. in psychology, and maintains a mindfulness-based psychotherapy practice in Wyncote, Pennsylvania.

Maureen Foley is a writer, teacher and artist who lives on an avocado ranch by the sea with her family. Her writing has appeared in the *New York Times*, *Caesura*, *Santa Barbara Magazine*, *Wired* and elsewhere. Her novella, *Women Float*, is a coming-of-age story set in Carpinteria, California, and was just published in June 2013 by the Chicago Center for Literature and Photography. She is currently writing and illustrating a story inspired by her baby girl. For more information, visit: www.maureenfoley.com.

Jeanne Lyet Gassman holds an MFA in Writing from Vermont College of Fine Arts and has received fellowships from Ragdale and the Arizona Commission on the Arts. Her novel, *Blood of a Stone*, is forthcoming from Tuscany Press in the spring of 2014. Her flash fiction, "Haboob Season," won first place in the WOW! Fall 2012 flash fiction competition and was published in the March 2013 issue of WOW! Jeanne's work has appeared in *W.I.S.H.*, *WOW!*, *Switchback*,

Barrelhouse, and *LQKK*, among others. In addition to writing and freelance editing, Jeanne also teaches creative writing workshops in the Phoenix, Arizona, metropolitan area. She has a personal website and maintains a blog, *Jeanne's Writing Desk*, where she regularly posts information on calls for submission, contests, grants, and awards for writers and artists. Her website and blog: <http://www.jeannelyetgassman.com> <http://jeannelyetgassman.blogspot.com>

Mark Goad is a poet now living in the Boston metro area (USA). Born in Ohio, he has lived and studied in Chicago, Geneva, Switzerland and Boston (with sojourns in Connecticut and rural Nebraska). Undergraduate and graduate studies have been completed in English Lit., German language, theology and philosophy. His work has been published previously in *analogpress*, *BAPQ*, *epiphany*, *Blast Furnace*, *Bluepepper*, *Decanto*, *Extracts* and other literary journals. His interest in working in poetic form comes after years of writing and publishing short fiction and non-fiction. What can be said in one hundred words, he'd like to say in ten (perfect words, of course). Looking for those words has been a pleasure. Favored poets include Dickinson, Rilke, Kenyon, Milosz.

Renny Golden's poetry book *Blood Desert: Witnesses* published by the University of New Mexico Press won the Women Writing the West (WILLA LITERARY AWARD) 2011, was named a Southwest Notable Book of the Year 2012 and was a Finalist for the New Mexico Book Award. Her book of poems *Benedicite* was a White Pine Press Finalist in 2010. Poetry Published in: *International Quarterly*; *The American Voice*; *Literary Review*; *Americas Review*; *Borderlands: Texas Poetry Review*; *New Mexico Poetry Review*; *Explorations*, *University of Alaska*; *Wisconsin Review*; *Dogwood*; *West End*; *Calyx*, *Sin Fronteras*, & *Malpais Review*. Featured in *Irish American Poetry from the 18th Century to the Present*, ed., Daniel Tobin (Notre Dame Press, 2007).

Kathleen Gunton is a writer/photographer who is never quite sure if photos feed her writing, or if words invite the picture. In either case, she is happy to be involved. She believes one art feeds another. Her images have recently appeared on the cover of *Arts & Letters*, *Inkwell*, and *Thema*, to name a few. *Something Untamed*, a collection of her poems and images, was published in 2000. She is now completing her second book, *Going After Bells –a memoir in poetry, prose, and photography*. She lives in Orange, CA.

Thérèse Halscheid's most recent poetry collection *Uncommon Geography* (Carpenter Gothic) won a Finalist Award for the Paterson Poetry Book Prize. Her poetry and prose have appeared in such magazines as *Bellevue Literary Review*, *Connecticut Review*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *Dos Passos*, *Natural Bridge* and *Rhino*. Recent awards include 2nd place in *New Delta Review's* Creative Nonfiction Contest judged by Eula Biss and 1st place in *Tiferet's* Poetry Contest judged by Marie Howe. New work is forthcoming in *Tampa Review*. She is recipient of fellowships from NJ State Council on the Arts and the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, and teaches for Atlantic Cape Community College in NJ. For

many years she has lived simply as a house-sitter which has allowed her to write in and of rustic settings. Unusual journeys include a stay with an Inupiaq Eskimo tribe in the far north of Alaska, as well as teaching abroad in Russia. Her photography chronicles her journey to write, and has appeared in several recent juried shows. See her website: ThereseHalscheid.com.

Pamela Hammond was born in Chicago and grew up in Southern California. She earned a bachelor's degree in art education from UCLA and a master's degree in fine art from California State University (CSU) Northridge. She became an exhibiting artist and taught art in high school and community college. Writing about art began to absorb her time and interest, first working for an art magazine in Los Angeles, *Images and Issues*, then developing her own short-lived periodical, *Eye International*. She became a Los Angeles-based critic for *Art News* in New York, reviewing exhibitions for more than a decade. Her early-on love of the outdoors led her to seek experiences in nature, traveling often to Northern California, and other places - Alaska, the Southwest, Hawaii, and New Zealand's South Island, where she lived for a time. For years, she wrote poetry but it was not until she retired as publications director at CSU Dominguez Hills that she focused on developing a collection, completing two chapbooks, *Encounters* (2011) and *Clearing* (2012), produced by Red Berry Editions, Fairfax, California. In 2012, her work has appeared in the journals *Foliate Oak*, *Forge*, *Broad River Review*, and *Tulane Review*.

Maryanne Hannan has published poetry in many print and online journals, including *111O*, *Rattle*, *Sentence*, and *Gargoyle*. Her website is www.mhannan.com.

James Hannon is a psychotherapist in Massachusetts. He returns occasionally to Vermont to remember and renew himself. His poems have appeared in *Blue Lake Review*, *Cold Mountain Review*, *Soundings East*, *Victorian Violet Press*, *The Wayfarer*, and other journals and are forthcoming in *Gathered: Contemporary Quaker Poets* (Sundress Publications, 2013). His website is jameshannonpoetryplus.com.

David M. Harris, who until 2003 lived all his life within seventy miles of the Assisi offices, now lives in Middle Tennessee with his wife and daughter, and assorted animals and a 1972 MGB. He is a recovering book editor and college English teacher. His MFA is in fiction, but now he mostly writes poetry, with modest success. He is also trying to sell his middle-grade fantasy novel. On Sunday mornings, he hosts Middle Tennessee's oldest and best radio show about poetry, *Difficult Listening*, which can be streamed at www.radiofreenashville.org starting at 10 am Central time.

William Wright Harris writes: I wake up for poetry. My poetry has appeared in fifteen countries in such publications as *Poetry Salzburg Review*, *The Cannon's Mouth*, *Ascent Aspirations*, *generations* and *Write On!!!* A graduate of the University of Tennessee- Knoxville, I have studied poetry in workshop

settings and am currently enrolled in a graduate program in writing and publishing at DePaul University. As a hobby, I collect places I have been published. In my work I juxtapose concrete images with abstract notions, often write in structures such as non-rhyming couplets and triadic verse, stress economy, and utilize such literary conceits as the ecphrastic poem, parallel structure, the epigraph, and the incorporation of mythology within my work.

Lois Marie Harrod's *Fragments from the Biography of Nemesis* was published by Cherry Grove Press in March 2013. She won the Tennessee Chapbook Prize 2012 (*Poems & Plays*) with her 12th manuscript *The Only Is*. Her 11th book *Brief Term*, poems about teaching, was published by Black Buzzard Press (2011), and her chapbook *Cosmogony* won the 2010 Hazel Lipa Chapbook contest (Iowa State University). Her chapbook *Furniture* won the 2008 Grayson Press Poetry Prize. Previous publications include the chapbook *Firmament* (2007), the chapbook *Put Your Sorry Side Out* (2005), *Spelling the World Backwards* (2000), the chapbook *This Is a Story You Already Know* (1999), *Part of the Deeper Sea* (1997), the chapbook *Green Snake Riding* (1994), *Crazy Alice* (1991) and *Every Twinge a Verdict* (1987). She won her third poetry fellowship from the New Jersey Council on the Arts in 2003. Over 500 of her poems have been published online and in print journals including *American Poetry Review*, *Blueline*, *The MacGuffin*, *Salt*, *The Literary Review*, *Verse Daily* and *Zone 3*. A Geraldine R. Dodge poet and former high school teacher, she teaches Creative Writing at The College of New Jersey. Read her work on www.loismarieharrod.com and elsewhere on the web.

Shira Hereld is a rising junior at the George Washington University, studying Political Science, Theater, and Creative Writing. Her poetry has appeared in *The Baltimore Review*, the print copy of *Teen Ink*, Choate Rosemary Hall's *The Lit*, and has received an award from the National Council for Jewish Women.

Daniel John was raised in Saskatchewan, Canada. He is a dancer, movement & massage therapist, poet, writer, actor, and playwright. He has ten children. He is a garden and landscape designer by trade and teaches Intuitive Gardening for Brookline Adult Education. His poems, stories, and essays have appeared in, among others, *Diverse Voices Quarterly*, *Apalachee Review*, *The Amherst Review*, *The Comstock Review*, *Descant*, *Drumvoices Revue*, *Epiphany!* *Hiram Poetry Review*, *Mindprints*, *Ocean City*, *The Owen Wister Review*, *Passager*, *Phantasmagoria*, *Phi Kappa Phi Forum*, *Pig Iron Press*, *Rio Grande Review*, *Soundings East*, *The North Dakota Quarterly*, *Thin Air*, *Griffin*, *Concho River Review*, *MARY: A Journal of New Writing*, and *Valdosta Voice*. His essay, "Dust to Dust, Ashes to Children" was one of the winners in the Campbell Corner Essay Competition sponsored by Sarah Lawrence College. He was a finalist in the Ruth Stone Hunger Mountain Poetry Contest, the Comstock Review Annual Poetry Contest, and received honorable mention in Passager's Annual Poetry

Competition. His plays and monologues have been produced by the University of Alabama at Troy and by TYG Productions at the Boston Playwrights Theater at Boston University. Five of his short plays were produced at the annual Provincetown Theater Reading Series.

Monty Jones is a writer in Austin, Texas. His poems have been published in *Southern Poetry Review*, *Clapboard House*, *Arcadia*, *Albatross*, *Christian Science Monitor*, *Texas Observer*, and elsewhere.

Len Krisak's latest books are *Virgil's Eclogues* (2010) and *Ovid on Love* (2013), both University of Pennsylvania Press, and Rilke's *Neue Gedichte* (2013), Boydell & Brewer. His *Afterimage* will come out in 2013 from Measure Press. The recipient of the Robert Penn Warren, Richard Wilbur, and Robert Frost Prizes, he has work in *Agni*, and in the *Hudson*, *Sewanee*, *Antioch*, and *PN Reviews*. He is a four-time champion on *Jeopardy!*

Sophia Kumin currently lives in San Francisco. She has been published in several online and print journals, and primarily writes poetry. She is, however, working on a novella and enjoys short fiction. She loves cats and traveling and hopes to one day find herself in New Orleans.

Alex Kustanovich is a Digital Services Librarian whose interest range from existential syncretism to behavioral patterns for albino chinchillas. He can eat three chili peppers without breaking a sweat.

Corey Latta is assistant professor of Literature and Theology at Victory University in Memphis, TN. He has published several poems and two books: *Election and Unity in Paul's Epistle to the Romans* (2009) and *Functioning Fantasies: Theology, Ideology, and Social Conception in the Fantasies of C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien* (2010). Corey received his Ph.D. from the University of Southern Mississippi.

Mercedes Lawry has published poetry in such journals as *Poetry*, *Rhino*, *Nimrod*, *Poetry East*, *Seattle Review*, and others. She has also published fiction and humor as well as stories and poems for children. Among the honors she has received are awards from the Seattle Arts Commission, Hugo House, and Artist Trust. She's been a Jack Straw Writer, held a residency at Hedgebrook and is a Pushcart Prize nominee. Her chapbook, *There are Crows in My Blood*, was published by Pudding House Press in 2007 and another chapbook, *Happy Darkness*, was released by Finishing Line Press in 2011. She lives in Seattle.

Ophelia Leong is a wife and mother who enjoys writing stories and poems. She studied history, writing, and Asian Studies at University of the Pacific and during the summer of 2010 she spent six weeks in Japan. She was published in the University of the Pacific's literary magazine, *Calliope*, and wrote for the campus newspaper, *The Pacifican*.

Lyn Lifshin's *Another Woman Who Looks Like Me* was published by Black Sparrow at David Godine October, 2006. (Also out in 2006, her prize winning book about the famous, short lived beautiful race horse, Ruffian: *The Licorice Daughter: My Year With Ruffian* from Texas Review Press.) Lifshin's other books include *Before it's Light* published winter 1999-2000 by Black Sparrow press, following their publication of *Cold Comfort* in 1997, and *92 Rapple* from Coatism; as well as *Lost in the Fog* and *Barbaro: Beyond Brokenness* and *Light at the End: The Jesus Poems, Katrina, Ballet Madonnas, Tsunami as History, Lost Horses, Drifting Mirrors*. For other books, bio, photographs see her web site: www.lynlifshin.com. *Persephone* was published by Red Hen and Texas Review published *Barbaro: Beyond Brokenness*. Most recent books: *Ballroom, All the Poets (Mostly) Who Have Touched Me, Living and Dead. All True, Especially the Lies*. And just out, *Knife Edge & Absinthe: The Tango Poems*. In Fall 2013, NYQ books will publish *A Girl Goes into The Woods*. Also just out: *For the Roses: Poems Inspired by Joni Mitchell*. Just published: *Hitchcock Hotel*. Also forthcoming: *Malala, Secretariat: The Red Freak, The Miracle, The Tangled Alphabet: Istanbul Poems* and *Luminous Women* and an e-book of *Marilyn Monroe*.

Maya Litauer is a student at San Francisco School of the Arts, where she majors in Creative Writing. Her preferred genre of writing is poetry because she feels she can express herself fully.

Richard Lufitg is a past professor of Special Education and Educational Psychology at Miami University in Ohio. He was named a recipient of the Cincinnati Post-Corbett Foundation Award for Literature and a semi finalist for the Emily Dickinson Society Award. His poems have appeared in numerous literary journals in the United States, internationally in Japan, Canada, Australia, Europe, Thailand, Hong Kong and India and have been translated into Japanese, Polish, German and Finnish. One of his published poems was nominated for the 2012 Pushcart Poetry Prize.

Betsy Martin's poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Helix, The Alembic, Pirene's Fountain*, and *Magnapoets*. She works at Skinner House Books in Boston and has advanced degrees in Russian language and literature. She lived in Moscow for a year studying at the Pushkin Institute. In addition to writing she loves bird watching and playing classical piano.

Tim McLafferty lives in NYC and works as a drummer. He has played on Broadway in *Urinetown, Grey Gardens*, and many other interesting places. His work currently appears in many fine journals, including *Forge, inkscrawl, Painted Bride Quarterly, Pearl*, and *Portland Review*. timmclafferty.com

John McNamara is a Professor at St. Francis College in Brooklyn, NY. He received his Bachelor's and Master's degrees at the University of Alberta in Canada, and his Doctorate in Kinesiology from Temple University in Philadelphia, PA. He is currently a Certified Strength and Conditioning

Specialist® and NSCA-Certified Personal Trainer® with distinction from the National Strength and Conditioning Association (NSCA). He is also a Certified Sport Performance Coach with USA Weightlifting, and a Certified Physical Best Health Fitness Specialist with the National Association for Sport and Physical Education. His research focus is training theory, flexible nonlinear periodization, nutrition, and exercise program creation.

Marissa McNamara writes: I have been teaching English to community college students for 17 years. My hope is that people read my work and see themselves somewhere in it. Currently, I live in Atlanta with three geriatric dogs and one boyfriend. My work has appeared in various publications including *RATTLE*, *StorySouth*, and *Future Cycle*.

Alan Meyrowitz received his Doctorate in Computer Science from the George Washington University in 1980, and retired from the federal government in 2005 after a career in research. His poetry has appeared in *California Quarterly*, *Deadman's Tome*, *Death Head Grin*, *Diverse Voices Quarterly*, *Eclectica*, *Existere*, *Eye to the Telescope*, *Folly*, *Forge*, *Front Range Review*, *The Griffin*, *Lucid Rhythms*, *New Departures*, *River Oak Review*, *Shroud*, *Schuylkill Valley Journal*, and *Star*Line*. The Science Fiction Poetry Association nominated his poem "Wishing It Were Otherwise" for the Dwarf Star Award 2012, and the poem was published in a chapbook of nominees.

Anne Britting Oleson has been published widely in the US, UK and Canada. She earned her MFA at the Stonecoast program of USM. She has published two chapbooks, *The Church of St. Materiana* (2007) and *The Beauty of It* (2010). Another book, *Counting the Days*, is scheduled for release next year.

Laura Pendell began writing poetry in college and participated in the Poetry Project at St. Mark's Place in New York City in the late seventies. She moved to California in 1998 and entered the MFA Program at Mills College, studying poetry and book arts and earning her MFA in 2001. Her artists book, *Hibernation*, has been in three nationally juried book arts shows. Her poetry has appeared on the web and in *Limestone* and will be in forthcoming issues of *Talking River*, *Soundings East*, *Jelly Bucket* and *The Tulane Review*. She lives in the Foothills of the Sierras where she raises ponderosa pine, oak and manzanita when not writing or making handmade books. If you click on womanrisingbooks.blogspot.com you can read her rare and occasional musings.

Simon Perchik is an attorney whose poems have appeared in *Partisan Review*, *New Letters*, *The Nation*, *The New Yorker*, and elsewhere. For more information, including his essay "Magic, Illusion and Other Realities" and a complete bibliography, please visit his website at www.simonperchik.com.

Andrea Sloan Pink is an American born poet-playwright of European descent. An MFA graduate of UCLA's School of Film and Television, she has worked in film and theater for more than twenty years. Her produced plays include *The Physiology of Solar Flares*, *Origami*, *Ode to Provence*, *Light*, *Les Hollywood Hills*, Warner Bros., *The Golden Age*, and *Horse Latitudes*. Her play, Warner Bros., is published in *The Best American Short Plays 2011-2012*. Andrea also wrote and produced a televised film festival, *The Best and Brightest*, featuring the early short films of significant contemporary filmmakers. Andrea earned a Juris Doctorate from UCLA School of Law and is the author of a seminal legal commentary published by the UCLA Law Review focusing on copyright infringement on the Internet which has been cited by legal scholars around the globe. Andrea is currently working on a play, *Anaïs*, based upon her original research conducted on the holographic diaries of Anaïs Nin and editing a book, *The Poetry of Playwriting: Playwrights on Creating Breakthrough Theater*. Andrea is the great granddaughter of Countess Friederika Augustza von Waldeck. Andrea lives in California with her husband and three children.

Ken Poyner has been appearing in the alternative and small presses for 40 years or so, and is now out and about on the web. His real avocation, however, is being awful eye-candy at his wife's powerlifting meets, from which she holds multiple world records. *Menacing Hedge*, *Corium*, *Eclectica*, *Asimov's*, *Frostwriting*, *Gutter Eloquence* and a host of others have been tongue tied with his work of late.

Marilyn Ringer writes: Born in Oklahoma, I now reside in northern California. I received a BA in Social Sciences and an MA in Experimental Psychology, both from Southern Methodist University. I have been a chef and restaurateur, a poet-teacher with California's Poets In The Schools, and a teacher of adult creative writing workshops. During the summer, I spend extended time on Monhegan Island in Maine where I write with a group of women who are artists, teachers, Gestalt therapists, and gardeners as well as writers. My work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Nimrod*; *Drumvoices Revue*; *Eclipse*; *Left Curve*; *Red Wheelbarrow Literary Magazine*; *Sanskrit*; *Porcupine*; *Wisconsin Review*; *The Evansville Review*; *Cairn*; *Bayou*; *decomp*; *The Cape Rock*; *ellipsis*; *The Hurricane Review*; *Limestone*; *The MacGuffin*; *Mochila Review*; *Oregon East*; *Phantasmagoria*; *Poet Lore*; *Reed Magazine*; *poemmemoirstory (PMS)*; *River Oak Review*; *Westview*; *Willard & Maple*; *Folio*; *The Griffin*; *RiverSedge*; *Willow Review*; *The Binnacle*; *Diverse Voices Quarterly*; *Chico News & Review*; *Slant*; *Studio One*; *Eclectica*; *Quiddity Literary Journal*; *Clackamas Literary Review*; *Xavier Review*; *Watershed*; *Iodine Poetry Journal*; *ByLine*; *California Quarterly*; *Milk Money*; *Pisgah Review*; *Schuylkill Valley Journal*; *Sierra Nevada College Review*; *Squaw Valley Review*; *Pearl*; *Taproot Literary Review*; *Tar Wolf Review*; *Poet's Cove*, *An Anthology: Monhegan in Poetry, 2000-2002* (New Monhegan Press, 2003); *The Art of Monhegan Island* (Down East Press, 2004); and *Chico Poets, A Calendar for 2005* (Bear Star Press, 2004). My chapbook, *Island Aubade*, was published by Finishing Line press in 2012.

M.S. Rooney lives in Sonoma, California with her husband, poet Dan Noreen. Her work appears in journals and anthologies, including *Bluestem*, *The Cortland Review*, *Earth's Daughters*, *FutureCycle*, *Main Street Rag*, and *3:AM Magazine*.

Jay Rubin teaches writing at The College of Alameda in the San Francisco Bay Area and publishes *Alehouse*, an all-poetry literary journal, at www.alehousepress.com on the web. He holds an MFA in Poetry from New England College and lives in San Francisco with his son and Norwich terrier.

Joan Roberta Ryan is a professional writer living in Taos, New Mexico where she indulges her lifelong passions for writing poetry, skiing, hiking and Mediterranean cooking. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *The Atlanta Review*, *Roanoke Review*, *Taos Journal of Poetry and Art*, *Off the Coast*, *Concho River Review*, *Prick of the Spindle* and other journals, as well as the anthology *Poems for Malala Yousafzai* (FutureCycle Press).

April Salzano teaches college writing in Pennsylvania where she lives with her husband and two sons. She recently finished her first collection of poetry, for which she is seeking a publisher and is working on a memoir on raising a child with autism. Her work has appeared in journals such as *Poetry Salzburg*, *Convergence*, *Ascent Aspirations*, *Convergence*, *The Camel Saloon*, *Centrifugal Eye*, *Deadsnakes*, *Montucky Review*, *Visceral Uterus* and *Salome, Poetry Quarterly*, and is forthcoming in *Writing Tomorrow* and *Rattle*. The author also serves as co-editor at Kind of a Hurricane Press.

Abigail Schott's poetry has been published in several journals, including *San Francisco Peace and Hope*, *Snakeskin*, and *Crashtest*. She is the winner of the 2011 and 2012 Poetry Out Loud competitions for San Francisco. She attends the Ruth Asawa School of the Arts in the Creative Writing department, where she is one of the editors of the literary journal *Umlaut*. Abigail is in her second year on the editorial staff of the Best American Nonrequired Reading series. She lives in San Francisco.

Marian Kaplun Shapiro is the author of a professional book, *Second Childhood* (Norton, 1988), a poetry book, *Players In The Dream, Dreamers In The Play* (Plain View Press, 2007) and two chapbooks: *Your Third Wish*, (Finishing Line, 2007); and *The End Of The World, Announced On Wednesday* (Pudding House, 2007). As a Quaker and a psychologist, she writes poetry which often embeds the topics of peace and violence by addressing one within the context of the other. A resident of Lexington, she was named Senior Poet Laureate of Massachusetts in 2006, in 2008, in 2010, and 2011. She was nominated for the Pushcart Prize in 2012.

Joseph Somoza retired from college teaching (New Mexico State University) some years ago to concentrate on his own writing. He has published four books and four chapbooks of poetry over the years. A new book of love poems, *Miraculous*, with illustrations by Louis Ocepek, will come out in 2013. He lives in Las Cruces, New Mexico, with wife Jill, a painter.

Daniel Ureche writes: My poetry has appeared in *Ascent Aspirations Magazine*. I am also the founder of the *Exilé Sans Frontières* movement in Amsterdam, which refers to the driven out, immigrants, expatriates and anyone who had to find or make a new home for themselves (or is still trying).

Peter Vanderberg served in the US Navy for four years and received a MFA in Poetry from CUNY Queens College. His work has appeared in *Hunger Mountain*, *Cratelit*, *Ozone Park* and *Modern Haiku* among other journals, and is forthcoming in *Newtown Literary*. Peter teaches at St. John's Preparatory School, Hofstra University and Nassau Community College, and is a member of the *Oh! Bernice Writers Collective* which hosts a reading series in Sunnyside, Queens.

L.A.-born and Ohio-educated, **Cait Weiss** leads writing workshops for at-risk teens, runs a social media company and wrestles (figuratively most days) with revising a novel. Her work has appeared in the *L Magazine*, *Amethyst Arsenic*, *Red Branch Journal*, *Metromix*, NY Writers Coalition's *The Narrator*, and the twittersphere. She lives in Brooklyn and drinks too much coffee.

Robert West's poems have appeared previously in *Able Muse*, *Assisi*, *Christian Science Monitor*, *Pembroke Magazine*, *Poetry*, *Southern Poetry Review*, Ted Kooser's *American Life in Poetry*, and other venues. He's the author of three chapbooks of poems, the latest of which is *Convalescent* (Finishing Line Press, 2011). Two of his poems will appear in *The Best American Nonrequired Reading 2013*, edited by Dave Eggers. Originally from the western North Carolina mountains, he is now an associate professor in the Department of English at Mississippi State University.

Lawrence Wray is a graduate of the Master's program in English at Duquesne University. After leaving Duquesne, he was a community organizer with the Thomas Merton Center, and was active in local social justice campaigns from Beyond Good Intentions: an Anti-Racism speaker series to economic inequality workshops, which he conducted at high schools and universities. Before coming to Pittsburgh, he received a Master's degree in Comparative Literature at Binghamton University, and studied as an undergraduate in the writing program at the University of Arizona. Lawrence's poems have been published in online and print journals, including *Naugatuck River Review*, *Weave*, *qarrtsiluni*, *Cider Press Review*, *Blood Lotus*, the Scottish journal *Dark Horse Review*, and *Prime Number*, among others. New work is forthcoming at *Innisfree Poetry*

Journal and *Sin Fronteras/Writers Without Borders*. For several years Lawrence has been involved in the local homeschooling community with two daughters, and teaches writing classes at the independent education cooperative, PALS (People Always Learning Something).

Janet Yoder was nominated for the Pushcart Prize in 2008. Her work has appeared in *Chautauqua Literary Journal*, *River Teeth*, *Tusculum Review*, *Passages North*, *American Literary Review*, *The Baltimore Review*, *Evansville Review*, *Passager*, *The Massachusetts Review*, *Ellipsis...*, *The Texas Review*, *Raven Chronicles*, *Bayou*, *Fugue*, *Left Curve*, *Porcupine*, *Forge*, *Rio Grande Review*, *The Binnacle*, *StringTown*, *HistoryLink.org*, *The MacGuffin*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, and *Pilgrimage*, as well as in the books *Enchanted Companions: Stories of Dolls in Our Lives* and *Sunday Ink: Works by the Uptown Writers*. Her story “Four Hands” received first prize in *Crucible* in 2006.

Changming Yuan, 5-time Pushcart nominee and author of *Chansons of a Chinaman* (Leaf Garden Press, 2009) and *Landscaping* (Flutter Press, 2013), holds a PhD in English and tutors in Vancouver, where he co-edits *Poetry Pacific* with Allen Qing Yuan (Poetry submissions welcome at editors.pp@gmail.com). Recently interviewed by *PANK*, Yuan has poetry appear in *Barrow Street*, *Best Canadian Poetry*, *BestNewPoemsOnline*, *Exquisite Corpse*, *London Magazine*, *Threepenny Review* and 700 others across 27 countries.

James K. Zimmerman, a Pushcart nominee, is the winner of the Daniel Varoujan Award from the New England Poetry Society, the Hart Crane Memorial Poetry Award (twice), and the Cloudbank Poetry Prize. His work appears or is forthcoming in *anderbo.com*, *The Bellingham Review*, *Rosebud*, *The Atlanta Review*, *Nimrod*, *Passager*, *Vallum*, *Two Bridges Review*, and in the anthology *Being Human: Call of the Wild* from *Editions Bibliotekos*, among others. In addition to the oddly numinous pursuit of the poetry muse, Dr. Zimmerman is also a psychologist in private practice, and was a singer/songwriter in a previous life.

