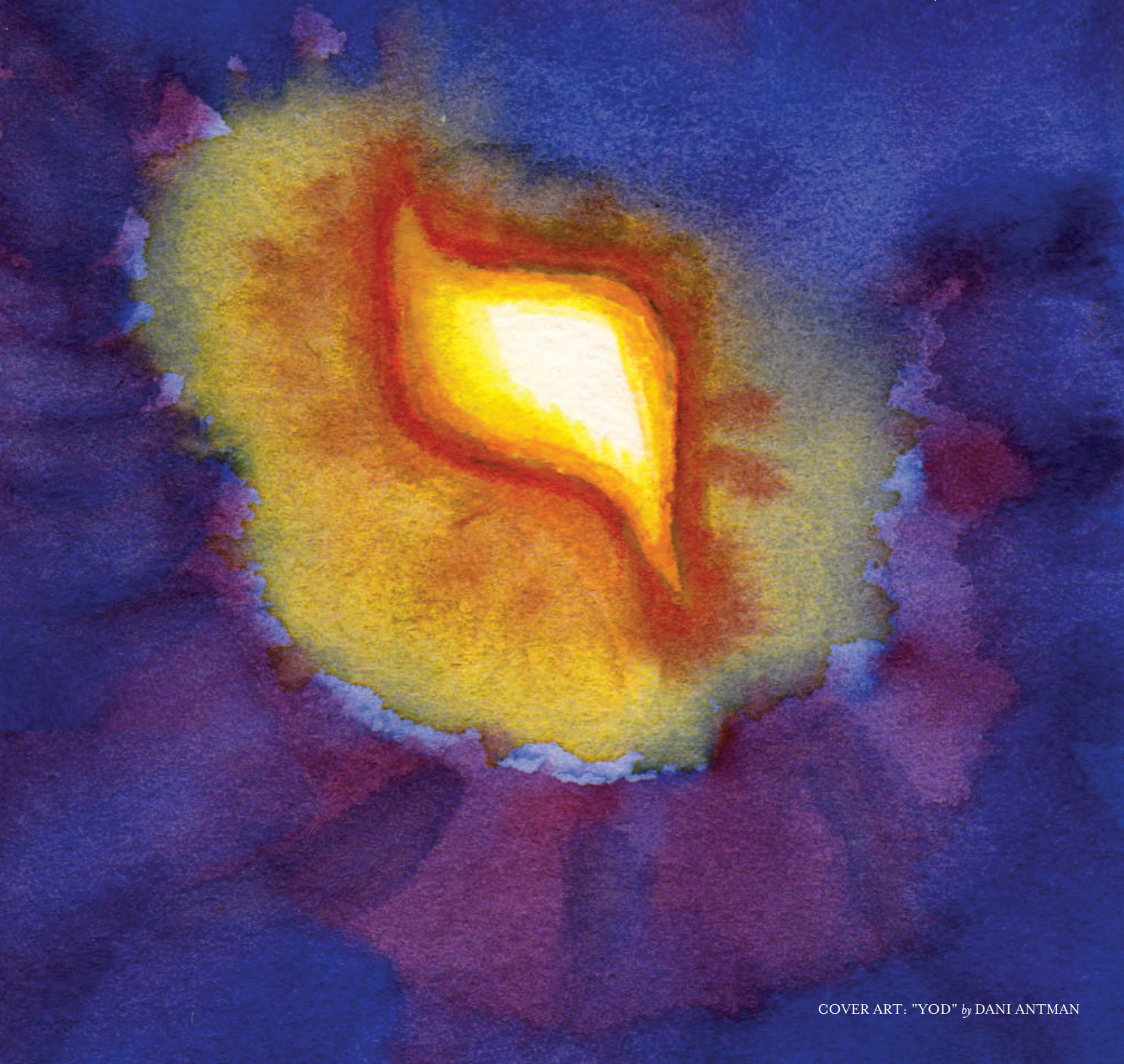




Tiferet

LITERATURE, ART, & THE CREATIVE SPIRIT

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Tiferet

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– MOLLY PEACOCK, former President of the Poetry Society of America

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Words From the Editor

“Attention”, the birds of Pala cry in Aldous Huxley’s novel *The Island*. They remind the inhabitants to pay heed to what is in front of them, to *Be Here Now*. Our world is a cacophony of siren songs—every tweet and feed promises to glitter more than our present state as we are called to Be There Then. I’m not blaming electronic distractions for my struggles with being mindful. It has always been a sweat-equity practice. After numerous years of trying to be awake and in the moment, of yogic, Buddhist, and less philosophy-specific pointers to help me be present, I don’t feel I’ve progressed much more than an atom or two in that direction. Something I recently read said it takes about ninety seconds for a new thought to rise as the previous one subsides. So if we let the thought waves rise and fall, without riding them like a compulsive surfer, we can pull ourselves back to the moment. I thought of this when I read the lines —

as if God were a vessel that fills

as it empties and empties

as fast as it fills.

They are from Jean Nordhaus’s featured poem “On The Road To Qumram” winner of this year’s poetry prize in the *Tiferet* annual writing contest.

One of the many beauties of the printed word are absent links and likes; no immediate gopher holes of data reality to fall down and take us away from the present. So read on, enjoy, sink into the pleasure of masterly poetry and prose, and the visual delights of *Tiferet* print. Our graphic artist, Monica Gurevich-Importico, whose has created our recent dazzling and powerful digital issues, displays her exquisite work here in a new print design for *Tiferet*.

Diane Bonavist

Editor in chief

The Sleep of Solomon

by Chard deNiord

She woke him to a dream in which he slept
awake for a thousand years ruling the world
with his queen, Gazelle. He lay in the fields
of Hebron for all this time as the King
of Love until he tired in his sleep and woke
from his spell of so much sleep in which
his heart was awake. In which his beloved
lay beside him beneath the quilt in his heart.
He searched the hills in vain for her and then
the sky with open eyes that failed him
in a way his dream had not. In a way
that made him wise despite his appetite.
Only the clouds remained from his sleep,
playing a music that carried her leaps
from lyric to lyric across the sky:
*My beloved put in his hand by the hole of the door,
and my bowels were moved by him. I rose up
to open to my beloved; and my hands dropped
with myrrh, upon the handles of the lock.*
The angels sang along as they carried him
down on his throne to the ruined city.



Prayer

by Chard deNiord

I pulled weeds on my knees in the garden
and prayed as I pulled, asking for bread,
forgiveness, and deliverance, but nothing
else—no intervention, miracle or sign.
I was floating on the ground with dirt
on my knees and blood on my hands
from pulling thorns. A snake slid by
with a cold clear eye I took as mine to see
myself with so little time. My wife called out
from the porch with nothing on for me
to leave my trowel and join her for lunch
beneath the elm that is so tall it sweeps
the sky with its vernal broom. That is
so ancient, hollow, and large a crowd
of creatures make it their home, including
an owl who sings till dawn about the hole
in the sky that is the sky. I was so hungry then
at noon, for how long had I been in the dark
wet dirt without an answer? What it was
that said, “Listen to the leaves that ruin paradise,”
I’ll never know but did, kneeling down
to feel the tongues of the blessed weeds
against my ear. Standing up to hear the silence
above the traffic of worms and flies.

god as the between of i and thou.

by Hune Margulies

god is not in heaven nor on earth. god is not above nor below. not within nor without. not in the soul or in the flesh. god is not an entity anywhere. god is the between of an I and a thou. we live our lives in search of lost-betweens, and we find salvation in the practices of the sacraments of the neighbor.

the only claim we can commit to in regards to the identity of god is what moises heard in the desert during his dialogue with a burning bush: god, or the ineffable, or the buddha, or the source of being, or the one poem that contains all poems, is “whatever it shall be”.

(היהא רשא היהא). in other words: god is a poem we enact in the between of i and thou. the gods that have chosen to live in the desert are devotees of the sacrament of the neighbor, with all its myriad ways and forms by which it can be made manifest. i write my poems to escape from my words, but, so it seems, only in the desert we can read our poems to a burning bush. a moment of genuine i-thou encounter is akin to an existential ritual, for life, like you, is beautiful and willing. only our whole-being can say thou, so we must teach it to seek deeds of encounter, for relationship is the essential sacrament of life.

by will and by grace we enter into moments of inception of the in-between, and irrespective of their length in time, these moments are eternal, and without regards to the magnitude of the space in which they enact themselves, their embrace is infinite. but we need to guard the paths of our hearts: moments of inception, like making love with our beloved, or writing our poem, or drinking our wine, or you, cannot be reenacted, they can only be lived anew.

all life is dialogue: we create the being that creates all being, we create the reality that makes us real. we create god and god creates the universe. we create ourselves and everything else that creates us. in the manner of god’s favorite poet, baruch de spinoza, who spoke of natura-naturata and natura-naturans, all life originates in the unfolding of the between of

an i and a thou. like my own favorite poet, martin buber, used to say: at the beginning it was the relationship. the truth of being is that dialogue precedes existence and existence precedes essence.

we have no human experience of anything being created ex-nihilo, from nothingness, or ending its existence in-nihilum, to nothingness. in different forms of existence, nothing has ever began nor will it ever end. there is no human experience of nothingness, there is only the word we use to describe an absence. but we cannot understand the concept of the absence of absence. the absence of absence is presence, and that brings us back to relationship as the core of existence. the writers of genesis understood this well: at the beginning the god of the bible did not create an individual, he created a relationship.

in the manner of negative theology we can say that the best definition of god is that “god is none of the above.” but even to claim this betrays an understanding as to the nature of the divinity that is not given to us by any means of human comprehensibility. from an dialogical perspective, the existence of god is neither affirmed nor denied by either intellectual discourse or through psychological experiences. we don’t know what spirits are and therefore we cannot affirm to have had experiences of the spirit. our whole-being, in moments of exuberant encounter, experiences the grandeur of the ineffable and names it god. but the true god is a way of relationship between i and thou, not a belief proposition. the mind is only capable of inferring an idea of

a god, but a concept for which there is no correspondent reality outside of itself is a delusion. it is only in the relationship that god is a word we are permitted to use, for god is the between of i and thou. we experience the presence of god in the embrace of the neighbor.

consider the issue of rituals and sacraments: life, like you, is beautiful and willing. a moment of genuine i-thou encounter is akin to an existential ritual. we must teach our whole-being to seek deeds of encounter, for relationship is the essential sacrament of life. by will and by grace we enter into moments of inception of the in-between, and irrespective of their length in time, these moments are eternal, and without regards to the magnitude of the space in which they enact themselves, their embrace is infinite. but we need to guard the paths of our hearts. if in response to our encounters with the ineffable, those i-thou dialogues we sometimes poetically refer to as god, or buddha, or the source of being, we perform today the same devotional rituals as we did yesterday, which are the same as we will repeat tomorrow, we are denying ourselves the myriad ways and forms by which the whole-being in us can be made manifest. if the rituals we perform are deemed to be sacraments, i will lovingly turn away, for the ineffable requires none, and i am a devotee of the sacrament of the neighbor with its myriad ways and forms by which it can be made manifest. if our rituals give comfort to others, we are obligated to perform them, but at the same time we should help others open their hearts to the myriad ways and forms by which the whole-being in them can be made manifest. moments of inception, like making love with our beloved, or writing our poem, or drinking our wine, cannot be reenacted, they can only be lived anew.

the god of the bible did not laugh. the only references to god laughing are found in the psalms, but that was not a laughter of joy and happiness, it was a laughter of scoff and sarcasm.

jesus never laughed in any of the gospels. he cried and felt sorrows, but laughter is something he did not do nor preached.

i must admit that if i were the god in charge of this world, i wouldn't laugh much either. but here is the point: laughter heals as no other human practice can. a god of laughter would have had us saved from the beginning of genesis.

yes, i'd rather laugh than pray. i'd just as soon laugh than meditate. i'd even rather laugh than make love. (or maybe not). but at least i am comforted by the knowledge that more than once i have caused a partner to laugh at my decrepit skills. (just kidding).

it is interesting to observe that we all believe and worship the one single god, but we have given it ten thousand different faces to suit every taste. the faces of god look very much like our own, especially during days of spiritual bad hair. to get along with each other and with our gods, we diligently apply makeup on our souls, our minds, our bodies and on god's too.

but perhaps it is not the real god the one we have believed in all this time. i mean, the laughter-deprived god. we may have missed the target by an unholy number of miles, for a god that doesn't laugh, what claim can it have to the throne of heavens?

i say we should embark on a renewed path of discovery! the new age of exploration should be directed to the discovery of the real god, the one we have so passionately sought since the genesis of life, but have so sadly and ineptly missed. i am talking about the god of laughter. as for me, i'm on it now, and have been since the dawn of my discernment. as i search, one infallible clue i follow is this funny truth: at the beginning it was the dialogue, and the dialogue was laughter.

the seeds of the dialogical intuition are embedded within all religions and spiritual systems.

when pope francis writes that “faith grows through the encounter with a person” he is expounding on his principal teaching of the need to create a “culture of encounter”. in different formulations this same teaching goes back to a more radical religious affirmation advanced by liberation theologians in the first half of the XXth century, the teachings of the “sacrament of the neighbor.” when considered outside of religious or theological encumbrances, the culture of encounter can be understood in the terms espoused by poet-philosopher martin buber. buber beautifully argued that “at the beginning it was the encounter, and all real life is meeting.”

our spiritual habituations urge us to follow our “inner-bliss”, but we must awake to the existential fact that the way within passes through the way between. j. krishnamurti said it well: “we are concerned with psychological revolution, and this revolution can only take place when there is the right kind of relationship between human beings.”

it is my view that the dialogical intuition present in all genuine spiritual paths becomes somewhat suppressed by the insistence on practicing a spirituality oriented to its goals through theological beliefs and religious sacraments. the god we seek is not above nor within, it is in the between of i and thou. no beliefs or sacraments are required to meet the god we seek other than the will and grace of being present with each other.

for the existing historic religions, a new humanistic hermeneutics needs to be agreed upon. we need to interpret scripture only in the service of life and peace and justice. not everything in scripture should be taken literally. fundamentalism is a danger to the creative spirit embedded within the bible. whenever a passage contradicts basic human rights the passage must be interpreted differently. we must affirm that nothing in the word of god gives legitimacy to war or oppression. we must firmly adhere to the basic teachings that calls on us to seek peace and to pursue it. non-violence and reconciliation is what we ought to stand for and never renounce.

we search for lost-betweens. we search for the grace of giving love. for what good is a love not given? grace is to love, even when not being loved, for we cannot control the world around us. grace is to give love, for we do have the ability to chose some imperfectly beautiful world within us. we can only give imperfect love, and no grace is more perfect than this! but there is war and strife all around us. this we must do: in our search for love, we should never worship a god who by his name or in his name a human life has been taken. for what good is a life not given?

my friend said to me about the poet machado: “there are poems that save you. you learn that someone else felt before what you’re feeling now. you realize you’re not alone... you are out on a journey, but you will never arrive until you have lost everything...” i said: “yes”. i often think that we are that between where memories and forgettings meet each other. the between of passings and remainings. All the poetry we right and all the gods we create are our attempt at learning how to grief.



On The Road To Qumram

by Jean Nordhaus

This is the desert

I've always imagined.
I feel my own skin
parching as I stand,
the aquifers drain
from my body.

A Blunder

Your son? I ask, although the hair
is parted in the fashion
of another era and the smile
has bled to sepia.

My first husband, she
corrects me. Killed in '48.

The Garden Tomb: Jerusalem

Here is a cave where there is no
body. And here a rock which might
look like a skull. And here
the stone rolled back. And there
the body in its white shroud,
pierced and washed and missing.



Miracles

We, too, eat fish by the shore
by tens and thousands, also olives
and fresh dates gathered from red
flowers of the date palm. And bread
baked daily. Cast from shore,
haloed by gulls, we, too, walk
on the sea, a tenuous skin
of wood between our feet
and the moving waters.

Old Rivalry

A splay-legged, white-muzzled
bitch barks and barks
at an enemy dog
in a neighboring house.

Young Woman Smelling Basil at the Western Wall

The fragrance of the Lord
enters the body through the ramparts
of the nose, essence like an ecstasy
of bells. She lifts the trembling bundle,
shakes it like a tambourine,
then passes it along.

Cisterns and Prayer

as if God were a vessel that fills
as it empties and empties
as fast as it fills. They are
mending a house
that will never be done.

Outside the Museum

of the Diaspora, a stork
circles to land, its wings charred
black against the sun.

For This Is My Own Tribe

Dark men with *payess*
and hats, my father's
olive skin stretched taut
across their cheekbones,
Cousin Norma's tremulous voice
and Slavic eyes, fierce women
who'd have hidden in their sleeves
a cherished spoon, a dented
grater for the journey.

Danger

is a small lapse
of attention: a missed
ramp, a left turn
instead of a right,
a closed face, an open
gate, sundown,
a torn map.

At the Spring of Banias

The pagan gods are powerless,
but they still haunt. Water
slips down the face
of the rock. The spring
still flows. The old gods
weep for valleys sown



with mines. They call us,
but their shrines are few
and difficult to find.

The Dead Sea

It's true, you can't sink,
but you can't swim either.
Bobbing in the brine,
I long for living water
I can drink or drown in.

On the Road to Qumran

I feel my own skin
parching as I stand. The aquifers
drain from my body.
I am becoming dry and holy,
immortal as a book, brittle
as a parchment scroll stored in a jar.

It Is Evening on Bialik Street.

The house of the poet
has closed for the day.
A soldier carries a baby
in his arms, its fat legs
straddling his gun.

(end of On the Road to Qum'ran)

Three short sections of this poem have appeared separately online: "Old Rivalry" on Jewish Literary Journal (March, 2014) and "Danger" and "At the Spring of Banias" on Blue Lyra Review (June, 2014.)

In Sorrow (The Seeds of Change)

by Susan Jackson

We carry the sorrow
of the mothers
who came before us
we carry the sorrow
of those mothers
and their mothers
the sadness of the old
grandmothers
who tried to carry it alone.
We carry it in our bodies
in our hearts
in our heart's body

the sorrow of those whose babies died and those whose mothers died in childbirth,
the woman who grieved for the child she couldn't heal or the child she couldn't have,
those whose husbands went to war, those whose husbands beat them, those who
had no power, those whose power isolated them or caused them to be burned as witches,
those who couldn't read or write, those who wrote in secret or took a man's name for a pen name,
those who were silenced, those who would not get off the bus or sit in the back of the bus,
those who could not vote or own property or were owned as property, those who tended the farm,
birthed the children, whose men were in the mines, the ones who watched history being written,
whose ideas became laws, those who were kind and those who became locked in their own grief,
travelers from far places who never saw home again, women who didn't speak the language
where they lived, women who wrote the language and the songs, those who sang the songs,
those who wanted more or had more, who watched a child starve or could not find clean water
for her family, those who went to the well and drew the water and baked the bread and cradled
the child and spun the yarn or learned to drive when driving was punishable by law, those who prayed,
those who swore or cursed, stoned or were stoned, women whose lives were hardened by loss,
deformed women, beautiful women, women behind the veil, the widows and the brides

we carry the sorrow
of the mothers
who came before us
we carry the sorrow
of these mothers
and their mothers

the sadness of the old
grandmothers
who tried to carry it alone
we carry it in our bodies
in our hearts
in our heart's body
but if we release
the secrets, let
the small seeds
pass into sunlight
if we bless them
as they go
we free the long line
of our women
a whole lineage
so we are free
to be ourselves
and love the world
as it is.





Cathedral

© Will Cares

The Village of Butterflies *by Stephanie Dickinson*

THE FISH SWIM SLOWLY BY THE ROOF OF THE VAN BUT NOT CLOSE ENOUGH FOR ME TO CATCH. The fish are more dead than alive in the black water. The oxygen must have been eaten by the poisons, and there is no air for them to breathe. I lie on my stomach and reach out. My hands make a net. Like I am a girl again in the forests of Truong Son. The net catches the fish that is covered in sliminess. A sunfish. The fish is swimming at a snail's pace, almost falling out of the water, its eye frozen wide in the heat. I knot my hands around the fish. It took years, but the fates have finally come for me in the form of a hurricane.

"Elders, first," my nephew Huy told me yesterday when the boats came to evacuate Viet Town. New Orleans East. I waved him away, pointing to his wife and two children. Since when did he care about tradition? Hadn't he named his son and daughter carelessly--Jimmy and June Huynh? The boat filled; another boat would come back. The levees had been breached, and Lake Ponchartrain was filling the cup of the city. "Ma Lang come on, you're a weed. We have room for a weed." The boat had already gone when the voice reached my ears.

I have the fish in my fingers. Silvery, darker on its belly. I feel its fright, its terrified eye meeting mine. Its lips are fleshy. There is a split in its dorsal fin. Forgive me, I must harm you. I set the fish on the van's roof where the sun shines hardest. Sun is death to the fish without clouds of water for shade. I watch the gills take in this glare. It gulps only for a few beats of my heart and then its life ends. Now the tin roof and the sun will bake its flesh.

No, I rightly refused the boat, first the children, and then the parents and lastly the old ones. Patience should have been the only thought in my head while I waited, but I worried about The Flying Fish restaurant my nephew owns. I feared for the rice steamer and knives, the mortar and pestle, the spice grinder. A good knife makes a good cook. The Flying Fish's kitchen is my pride and I tied up my skirt and waded. The black water pushed between my legs, forced my flip-flops off. Soon up to my shoulders in the dirty lake, my bare feet struggling, and feeling for the bottom. The straps of my evacuation pack twisting around my arm, filling with water. Then I stepped on a half lifted manhole, some slippery foulness squished between my toes, but I went on, no longer knowing where I was going. The streets were gone. When I neared the roof that might belong to The Flying Fish, my heart pounded. Floodwater had beaten me. Suddenly, the black poison struck me from behind, knocked the air from my lungs, and swept my feet out from under me. I no longer touched the bottom. But I was lucky. The evil genie had forgotten I know how to float and I paddled to the nearest high thing. The roof of a van.

I crouch here among the big trees. The leaves are green fleshes that grab hold of the sun and drink it. The creeper vines catch it in their twining. It is a struggle between the sun and the trees to see who is stronger. Down here in the fallen leaves it is cooler. I watch the butterflies. My sister is jumping trying to seize them. She is younger than me and much prettier. Hair of black silk. Brows of black lacquer. The noon heat chases us. Our aunt shouts "Lang! Cam!" Work to be done. Lucky butterflies, it's easier for them. Dê cho tôi yên. Higher up the monkey watches the butterflies too. The red-shanked douc tries to pluck them from the air. Look at his red legs in the heat against the green. Look at his grayish vest, his blue eyebrows, and his ruff. We want to drink green sun. We want to climb and live in the village of butterflies.

I eat the head of the fish. It would be wasteful to throw it away and an insult to the fish. Madam Lang or

Ma Lang as they call me in The Flying Fish kitchen is unashamed to be squatting here on this van roof with black water all around, barefoot and showing long curly toenails, wearing for days a sleeveless orange shift. Lang means sweet potato. Like those orange blisters on my legs from the sun. Ma Lang, not even five feet tall, with wrinkles like irrigation ditches along her upper lip and furrows in her forehead, an old scar on her left ear. Yet my hair is black still without a white thread and when my hairpins are unfastened it falls to the back of my knees, but only for my grandnephew and grandniece are the clips unclasped. Always work to be done. Ma Lang can do the work of three. Chopping vegetables, garlic, onion, jellyfish, chopping all day, telling the busboys what tables to clear and which to set. Afterwards, sweeping and mopping. As a girl my favorite pastimes were sleeping and doing nothing. It makes me ache to think of the water in the kitchen, the snakes swimming over the counters. Tourists from all over America come to taste Ma Lang's Dipping Sauce.

I am still chewing, trying to swallow the fish. Is it the eyes that refuse to go down my throat into my gullet? I'll have to take another swallow from the water bottle. Precious swallows. Nine small ones left in the quart. Three and a half large ones. My lips are glued together and my tongue is dry. To chew food you need saliva. I try to make my mouth water by picturing a grilled fish seasoned with chilies and onion and Nuoc Nam. No meal is complete without fish sauce. The mosquitoes begin to bite. I slap them in the stagnant air. From around the next stand of roofs comes the steady hum of an outboard motor. Perhaps it is my nephew coming for me. His Ma Lang, the only mother he's known. First I chew the soft bones, and then rinse my mouth with them. The hum of the outboard grows distant and then fades away.

My sister loves to tempt the jungle, but she's afraid of its clutching creepers. I go with her. Her beloved waits for her in a puddle of sunlight under huge dark leaves. His name is Trung, loyalty. Son of the ear cleaner, the richest man in our village. We are the highland peoples near the border with Laos. People of the Truong Son Mountains where the forests of the North and South meet. His father thinks he can do better than Cam, a girl with both parents dead, niece of a midwife. I watch Cam go to him; her eyes are drops of dew, her slender orchid arms. Trung says his father is weakening. Soon he will give his permission for their marriage. Trung takes her fingers in his. They lag behind, tell me to go along. Leave them be. High up I see the langur's long white tail sweeping the leaves. The monkey king knows I too like the ear cleaner's son, the thin boy with the narrow handsome face. The boy and Cam look at each other through the heat and shifting sun shadows. They eye kisses. The monkey swings down to look at us. Red-shanked douc most colorful of all creatures. Little pot-bellied leaf-eater.

Night air is stifling. The fumes rising from the floodwater burn my eyes. A shot rings out from a few rooftops and streets over. A boat is moving, carrying loud voices and flashlights, throwing big beams into the dark that seems darker than the faraway village. The village is nestled in the humid night of long ago. The jungle breathing against its neck, no electricity or running water. Thoughts crowd my head but I refuse to think about the past. My insides burn, my tongue is swollen, but I must save the water for when the sun comes up. I squeeze my eyes and make myself see into the kitchen of my nephew's house. "Ma Lang is here, Ma Lang is here. Make us Banana Sago Cream," chants my grandniece June. Her dark eyes like her grandmother Cam's. Already the language of her ancestors is lost in the child. "Say Che Chui Chung and I will make it for you." The little girl stamps her foot, shakes her head. "No." I pretend I'm mixing all the ingredients, heat and simmer four ripe bananas and cups of coconut milk and coconut cream, add sugar and pearl sago, keep stirring. After it cools it will be delicious and refreshing. That way I make myself sleep. All night I toss half awake listening. In the jungles the bats fly, they drink the blood from the leaves and the monkeys asleep on branches.

Near first light another boat approaches, this one a quiet flatboat with oarlocks and paddles. I hear the

dip of the oar and the pull. Dip and pull. Should I call out? No, never call out in the dark to what you can't see. I think of my younger self. A short wandering girl, a daydreamer who has a misshapen ear from being dropped as a baby. A lazy girl. My aunt worried no one would marry a girl marred. She knew how to help babies enter this world even when they turned themselves around fighting to stay in the womb. When the women's water broke they sent for my aunt. Her words coaxed them out. Auntie tried to teach me the coaxing words. I pretended not to understand. I didn't want to be her, dragged from sleep, from this birth to the next. I was selfish. My younger sister was a good helper, better in every way. I was drawn to the forest, the dense vegetation, and the trees upon trees, one feeding on another.

I listen to the dip and pull. Could it be swimmers? Then the dipping stops and something glides toward the roof of the van. Figures of mist. Auntie in her cone hat and pajamas. Then Cam in her red wedding dress rises out of the black water, tangerine-lipped Cam whose name means mountain sunset. I hear her voice inside my head. "Why don't you remember me to my son? You don't burn incense before my portrait. You don't bring my name up before my grandchildren. You have dishonored me." Her hips like marzipan, long-waisted, graceful. She turns onto her side, swimming slowly like the fish.

Then the figures dissolve. There is something floating out there.

I watch the old man in his black robe, a joss stick smoldering in his fingers, leading the wedding party. His robe made from shadows casts itself over the procession winding through the paths of our village. Trung and Cam. They each make a verse. My leaf, he calls her. My green leaf. Ache, she answers him, my ache. Like the rib for its blood. Their happiness doesn't last. Cadres from the North appear, asking Trung and the other village boys to join the struggle for liberation. From the South arrive flyers teasing young men into their army, with promises of red envelopes of money, enlistment pay. Trung and Cam talk long into the night after licking each other on the face and neck. I see them love each other like that. There is worry. Fires in the night. Over the forest with its green canopy and elephant vines planes carry strange mists. Rain grows sticky and scorches the skin; rain wilts the leaves causing them to shrivel. The forest's tiny deer turn into skulls. Odor of excrement seeps from the earth. I kneel before the altar of my parents; I burn ghost money and incense. Two months after their wedding, the cadres surround our village; demand that all young men be ready to leave immediately. Trung refuses. They beat him. His hips are kicked, slammed, his ribs broken. When he raises his right arm the pain frightens him. He tries to whistle his birdcalls, make the sounds of barking deer, his mimicry that drew Cam to him, but nothing. No choice. Trung has decided to snatch the red envelope. Fate is pulling him to the South to join the Army. But first he will give Cam a belly, and then he will leave. He embraces her, tastes her perfect ears. I imagine him kissing my melted ear; hear him whispering "I love the fault." But it is not to be.

A helicopter overhead wakes me. I jerk, shiver, curl into a ball, trying to hide myself. Wave if you're trying to save your skin. I can't, I'm afraid of the helicopter. The sky is broken by the chitchat of whirling blades and loud male voices. Surely they saw me and soon they'll come back. I am U.S. citizen and this is not the village. This is New Orleans. Huy will be sure to send a boat back. The boat that carried him off with his wife and children two days ago will return for me. No one seems around. It is like our village after the bombs fell, but little by little the alive things showed themselves. I roll onto my side, lift my dress and pee. Then I kneel on the other side of the roof; dip my hand into the black water, wash. Everything smells like the forest of long ago. The day the bombs fell where people were hiding and Auntie was killed.

The helicopter has not come back. I'm dizzy. Hungry. Sluggish fish swim by little by little as if this were the leisurely Perfume River. I slip my hand in the water. A fish quivers into my fingers. I want to lift it to my dry mouth and run my tongue over its living gills to wet my lips. The corners of my mouth have split. My

lower lip is beginning to crack. I am sure the helicopter saw me. The pilot could tell I was Vietnamese. He went to find Americans to help instead. I hear Cam's voice and slowly turn my head. "You didn't call out. You're only good at being invisible. Hiding, you hid. You didn't stand up. You abandoned me." Why is Cam so angry at me? Unlucky girl. Was it because I carried my nephew across an ocean in a sling and not her? First Huy and I settled in Lake Charles in the refugee community, and then in Viet Town's Little Versailles, New Orleans. I worked in kitchens twelve hours, six days, and I saved until Ma Lang was able to make a down payment on The Flying Fish. My nephew has no pictures of his mother, and I wish I could draw so he could see how she was. In the water Cam loosens her black hair from its wedding pins and kicks free of her red gown.

Some fish float on their sides. My tongue protrudes from my mouth. I reach into the water and grip another slow moving fish. It gives a jerk, a futile motion, to escape my hands. I thank you, silvery thing, with a stripe under your gill. I set the two fish in the patch of hottest sun. When they have cooked I will take one swallow from the water bottle. I'll save the eight small swallows. A single sip, otherwise it is too hard, not enough saliva. I take another bite of fish, try to wet my mouth with its flesh, drink it down. Ca-Kho, raw fish.

I need to talk, to push away the past. "I'm Ma Lang," I tell the fish digesting inside me. "In America all I know is kitchen. In The Flying Fish we have cook, cook helper, salad boy/bus boy, and Ma Lang. We serve Ma Lang's specialty chicken stock with crab meat and mushroom and asparagus. Our lunch features Ma Lang's sticky rice with crawfish and Huy's Catfish Po'ah Boy. All utensils available: chopsticks and flat spoon and a bowl held under the mouth, fork, knife, napkin. Modest prices."

"Shut up, Lang, with your stupid kitchen. Who do you think cares?"

I doze off in the heat, a dullness spreading through me. I think I hear barking. In my doze an animal must have swum to the roof of the Hoagie House. The tops of the tree that grows between the Hoagie Shop and King Grab Take-out poke out of the water. In the sleep I can't wake from I hear the dog race from one end of the roof to the other, his nails tapping the tin. The sun is cooking me like the fish. I open my eyes expecting to see a mangy yellow canine on the roof opposite, but only the sun is beating down without shade.

Nothing on the roof but in the water many things float: an enamel box, mother-of pearl chopsticks, dust-covered espresso machines and blender, cutting boards, a tea pot. There's a large object moving up and down, bobbing. I cup my hands to my eyes, squint. A chaise lounge and a crate seemingly tied together. Like those chaises my nephew has in his backyard, one for himself, one for Thuyen. They stretch out nicely in the backyard evenings. "Ma Lang, sit with your feet up," my nephew's wife always pleads. "Stay out of the kitchen. You are the guest of this house." Yet for all her pleadings I never sat on her chaise lounge. But I could use it now to make shade, build a little lean-to. The blisters are breaking on my feet because I feel the pain on my face. Why "because"--?

Without luck and a lunar calendar you are nothing. I shift my body to the edge of the roof, concentrate on reaching out far. I gesture to the bobbing backyard chair and use Auntie's coaxing words. It comes to me and I grip and pull the lounge and crate onto the roof with me. Even today is an auspicious day. I will use the lounge to make shade and shadows. I settle the chair in the center of the van's roof and untie the crate. Something is looking at me from between the slates, something is alive in there. I hesitate, and then I lift the lid and peer in. I can't breathe. The trembling starts, from my feet to my fingertips. The fates are playing with me. They've sent me this. Hardly alive, it whimpers when he sees my face. Long and skinny, sitting with its knees up, a red-shanked douc langur. I rub my eyes, pinch my cheek and look again. Maybe the monkey is no

more real than Cam, a figment of thirst and heat. But the langur is still crammed into the tiny crate and too weak to raise his arms. I've never seen one up so close. Its black eyes with blue eyelids stare out of its reddish yellow face and framing his cheeks and chin is a white ruff of hair. I've heard bus boys in The Flying Fish talk of smugglers and the enormous sums the rich will pay for exotic animals. Some poacher of endangered beings has brought the most beautiful monkey on earth to New Orleans and crated him.

The smoke rises in the forest and a blue mist is wisping down from the wet trees and patterns of leaves. Trung has been home only twice since his son Huy was born. He must never wear his ARVN uniform of South Vietnam. Uncle Ho's cadres are closer. Cam watches for him slipping into our village in the ragged pajamas of a rice farmer. It's been two months since we last saw him. Cam has thrown up lately, but tries to hide it from me. She speaks sharply to Huy, who is the most well behaved baby the village has seen. Never an extra cry out of him. Cam's face is smudged with tears. She's afraid of her belly getting big again. The war is everywhere. I hear Cam talking to her stomach. Daughter, I hope for a girl who will grow up and not have to fight. The war goes on for lifetimes. She worries that her husband might have a war girl in Saigon. The girls are everywhere like Zippo lighters. Motorbike prostitutes, Americans, Vietnamese fermenting together like fish sauce. They are silencing our ancestors. Cam declares that she does not have luck either. Beauty, yes, but taking Trung for a husband was unlucky. Thuy Le, Trung's father, the ear cleaner, sees to Cam and Huy's needs. Farmers journey from neighboring villages to sit in his chair or Thuy Le travels to them. Whisperers say he works as Dan Cong, civilian labor for the VC. If insects leave a leg or whisker inside, the tiniest feeler causes fierce pain. Then Thuy Le blows water into the ear through a glass tube and suctions it out with his lips. Thuy Le went into deep forest to clean ears for soldiers from the North and has not returned.

The douc langur pants. Carefully I lift him from the crate. A young monkey, his chest is gray, his buttocks black and his legs maroon. Poor thing, his belly feels sunken. The costumed monkey, he too is from Vietnam. Now I understand why I saved the eight swallows. I tear a piece of my dress and soak it in water and moisten his lips. His tongue tries to lick the dress rag. I hold him in my arms and pour the swallows into his mouth. He's left his excreta in the crate and on himself. I'll clean his bottom with floodwater. He must be starving. It dawns on me. The langur can eat only leaves and stems, berries. No human food. Fish would make his belly sick. It might kill him.

The monkey wants to drink more and now the bottle is empty. Nothing but the filthy floodwater. Can I feed him the remains of this fish? His hands are like mine only his fingers appear longer and hairs sprout on their backs but his palms are hairless. He is panting, trying to gulp the air. Like the sad fish lifting its lips from the swill. My body trembles with heat and nausea. I raise my head and thrust out my chin. Vomit spills into my mouth but I make myself swallow it down. That too would be an insult to the fish. I might shake apart. And when I turn my head Cam is holding onto the roof of the van and pulling herself out of the water. "You look hot, Lang. Swim with us." A little girl crawls behind her. This is the child who the fates didn't allow to be born. Again, I hear my sister's voice. "You know who this douc is, don't you?" I tear off another length of my dress for shade and now that I've freed him from the crate, the monkey clings to me. He can't keep his head up.

I hold him close for it is him. I feel his heart, a rapid weak beating. His eyes are dull from thirst. In the forest the douc langur rarely drinks from puddles, he stays high in the canopy and chews the green. His shoulders shake and shivers wrack his maroon legs. We can't stay here. I must swim us to the Hoagie House's roof that a tree overhangs.

It is difficult for him to close his mouth. Should I put him back in the crate? Or is it better to make a sling

from the straps of my empty evacuation pack and tie him to my waist. Then I will swim us to the roof of the Hoagie House, to the tree whose limbs still have leaves. One roof is all the same for Ma Lang, but for the douc langur the tree is a meal.

I take the baby Huy to play in the forest with the butterflies. His mother tires now that another baby is starting inside her. How he laughs when I show him the Striped Ringlet, its black and white bands, the many eyes staring out of its wings. When he claps his hands they fall and fly, and when he stands still the Ringlets light on him and fold their wings. The tawny ones with spots of yellow and blue circle a vine of sunlight. Huy smiles and jumps. "Where have you taken him?" his mother calls. "Huy! Lang!" I put my finger to my lips, shush. I am teaching Huy how to be quiet. How to hide. Then we break into giggles and show ourselves to Cam. When she glances at me something passes between us. The hairs rise on my arms and a chill stabs through me. Then a butterfly lands on her hand, her left, the second finger. Beating its wings as if it wants to lift Cam by her knuckle into the clouds. Cam is sure that is a sign from Trung.

It is better to have the crate. If the boat comes, the monkey has his little house. When I squeeze him back into the crate he whimpers, reaches feebly. Don't worry, my friend. His people are gentle creatures, who spend most of their time digesting their green food, dozing and burping and leaping through the branches high up as skyscrapers. Who would want to harm the harmless? I weave a strap through the crate and tie it around my waist. The crate feels almost as tall as me. We are going now. We may drown even if the roof of the Hoagie House is close. I lie on the roof of the van and slowly float out. Leaning my chest against the black water, I kick like a frog, kicking like my sister taught me. The water is thick as the leakage from a grease trap and tries to push us back no matter how I use my hips and stomach to kick. The monkey weighs little but the crate drags me down. I put my face into the water that smells like a body. I spit.

The sun burns whatever it looks upon. I wish I wore the cone hat, the one Huy warned me I must not wear in this country, not even in the kitchen of The Flying Fish. As I frog-kick through the heavy water I make believe I am in The Flying Fish. Nicer there. Customers are Vietnamese and American. Many tourists. We have peace. There are lacquer trays on the walls and tables with glass tops. When customers finish eating we scrape the glass and the next customer sits down. I prepare menus of the day's specials. My nephew's wife Thuyen writes them on the blackboard in Vietnamese and English. I can see the half-erased chalked dishes. Jumbo Shrimp Tu Do. Bo Xao Salad. Thuyen wears her favorite hostess dress, a sleeveless burgundy shift. Her tiny arms hardly bigger than the wire basket holding bananas and oranges beside the cash register. Last week a fat white woman in a red sweatshirt and bare feet entered the restaurant. She pointed to the fruit beside the cash register and demanded a banana. "You won't give me a banana? I'm handicapped." Thuyen took the chopstick out from behind her ear and bit on it. When she does that she is determined. "No shoes. No service." The heavyset woman did not look handicapped. We don't owe her a banana. "My stomach is hungry," she wailed until all in the restaurant heard. "My stomach is hungry," she kept repeating in her huge voice. I did not care if her big stomach was hungry. I sent her away without a banana. Perhaps the fates are making me pay.

My sister sits in the middle of the hootch. She's brought her birthing chair. "My husband," she moans. Her knees are up and she rocks herself back and forth. I hold her son Huy who knows nothing. "I want you to hide my son if the VC or Americans come," she insists. "If they surprise you, stay standing. Only if you run they shoot you. I tell you not to run. The bullet is faster than your feet." Yesterday we found Trung lying in the forest in old leaves. At first Cam thought he was a soldier from the North because of his sandals, the rubber peeled off a truck tire and glued onto their soles. The body's fingernails and toenails were blackened nails and sores blotched his legs. His mouth stayed open and ants traveled in and

out. Mouth that once took Cam's flushed pink kisses. Trung wore filthy black pajamas. He must have crawled here. His feet looked wrinkled like an old man's, a hundred year old one. Cam picked up his cold hand. The coldest thing in the teeming canopy. Cam lifted him and pounded her fists on his chest. "You're not dead. You're not." We trembled in the heat of the day. Had he deserted the ARVN? Above us the douc langurs were eating. They shook a thousand leaves down. Then we saw a monkey staring at us through the leaves. Such wise eyes. Cam was sure Trung's last words were heard by this douc. Her husband's spirit had been swallowed by a monkey. Why else would he stare at her?

I pull myself and the crate up on the roof. I lie still and breathe in and out. Before I free the monkey I splash floodwater over the tin to cool it. The treetop sends its branch over the roof of the Hoagie House. I rest the crate on the side and open the lid. "Little friend, we are here. There are leaves." The monkey stays still in the crate, skinny arms folded over his chest. Oh, no. Look there is a treetop. I nudge the red-shanked douc. I think of Cam beating Trung. You're not dead. From here I can see one boarded up restaurant after another. The sun pours into the dark water making little jittering suns. I rest my head against the crate and sob. Then I see the long black fingers try to grip the side of the crate. The little man is alive. Do you hear Cam and Trung? The Flying Fish is alive too.

First I pick the leaves that have begun to wilt, some are yellowing but most still keep their green. Then I take him into my lap and feed him leaves and rock him. Because his mouth is so dry the first leaf is the hardest. Slowly, he chews the moisture in the leaves. I pick more leaves. I look out across what they call Versailles, Little Vietnam. I love the spiral of the Lady's Church. The Lady with her long black hair, her lips parted just so.

Cam must be hiding in the forest. She likes to be alone. She hardly shows a belly but it is her sixth month. Our village is disappearing yet we stay behind. Trung's father might return and Cam must tell him of his son. Cam searches for the monkey who has Trung's spirit. The red douc teases her, breaking sticks and sending her leaf messages. Then suddenly he peers out at her from the lid of a creeper. "He's always smiling. Trung is happy inside the monkey," my sisters says. I carry Hug or he stands and squeezes my hand and we walk. Cam has little time for him.

Dusk. The sun is dropping, about to close its red eye. I think of walking with my nephew and the children, through dry then wet neighborhoods. Hurry, Lake Pontchartrain is spilling and about to swamp the whole city. I forget where I was. Not New Orleans. It was the village of my youth and the smoke from cooking fires kept rising in white puffs above the green. Following my nephew through Versailles, fleeing the water overtopping the levees, the poison water from the Industrial Canal, the back of Huy's head could have been his father Trung's. In my arms Jimmy, my grandnephew, a little hooded tree sprite, could have been Huy. It was that other escape. The blisters are breaking on my feet because I feel the pain on my face. It is almost dark but my little friend has eaten nicely and now he sleeps. Lawn chairs laze on a soggy carpet and drift in the dusk. Flotillas of plastic bags. Like empty throwaway heads.

There are a single file of them in the forest. Men from the land of giants. The American War will never end. What do they want? The tall loud men who burn villages and give away chocolate bars. They can't keep silence like the Viet people can. I hear them stomp through the undergrowth. I hold Huy against me, put my finger to my lips. We will think ourselves into a creeper, become that green vine with its tendril. The butterflies are flitting, drifting through the air. I see the red-shanked monkey sitting in the branches. Why is he always alone? Not with his family group. The costumed monkey in the branches is giggling and eating. Leaves filter down in bands of sunlight. Danger, little man. Stay up there. The giants push their guns this way and that. They see with the eye of their weapon not the ones in their head. Smell of burning cigarettes, the little fires they carry in their mouths. The monkey leaps from branch to branch, curious. He's never seen an American.

Down down he swings to look at them. So curious, he thinks danger is beautiful. His red legs like colorful birds. "Holy shit, look at the slope monkey." The soldiers raise their weapons, aiming at yellow red face. Boom. Boom. Cam shrieks when the guns fire. The monkey cries out like a human. I hold my hand over Huy's mouth. Hush, little boy. We're in the village of butterflies. Be silent. More shooting. I hear the monkey drop like ripe fruit to the forest floor and the men cheering. I hear Cam running from her hiding spot to the monkey. "Trung. Trung," she is shrieking. Then the men surround my dark-haired sister and I cover her son's ears so not one sound enters his mind. I have to listen to their laughter and Cam's screams as they rape her. Afterwards silence, then a boom.

I hear a boat. The douc langur's eyes go wide and he cowers. A motor boat is rumbling, and the monkey buries his head against my chest, clutching me. I must resemble his mother. I look out and I see them come into view. Not the boat that took my family away, a different one. There are two men in the boat and they cruise around the other side of the Hoagie House. A drawer that had been pulled by the storm out of its cabinet bobs in the boat's wake, every utensil battered and thrown, a bloom of red plastic spoons.

I squint and try to see the faces of the men more clearly. They wear tee-shirts and baseball hats. Giants. The big man seated in front of the boat holds out a life preserver. He has a round pink face with the brim of his cap level with the bridge of his nose.

"Don't shoot," I shout. The words leap out of my mouth. I pray they do not carry.

Now it is a water bottle and a smile the man holds out. Soon I am facing two giants, the man in front and the one gripping the throttle, two sets of dark eyes.

"Ma'am, is that a monkey?" the pink faced man asks.

"Yes. This is Trung," I say.

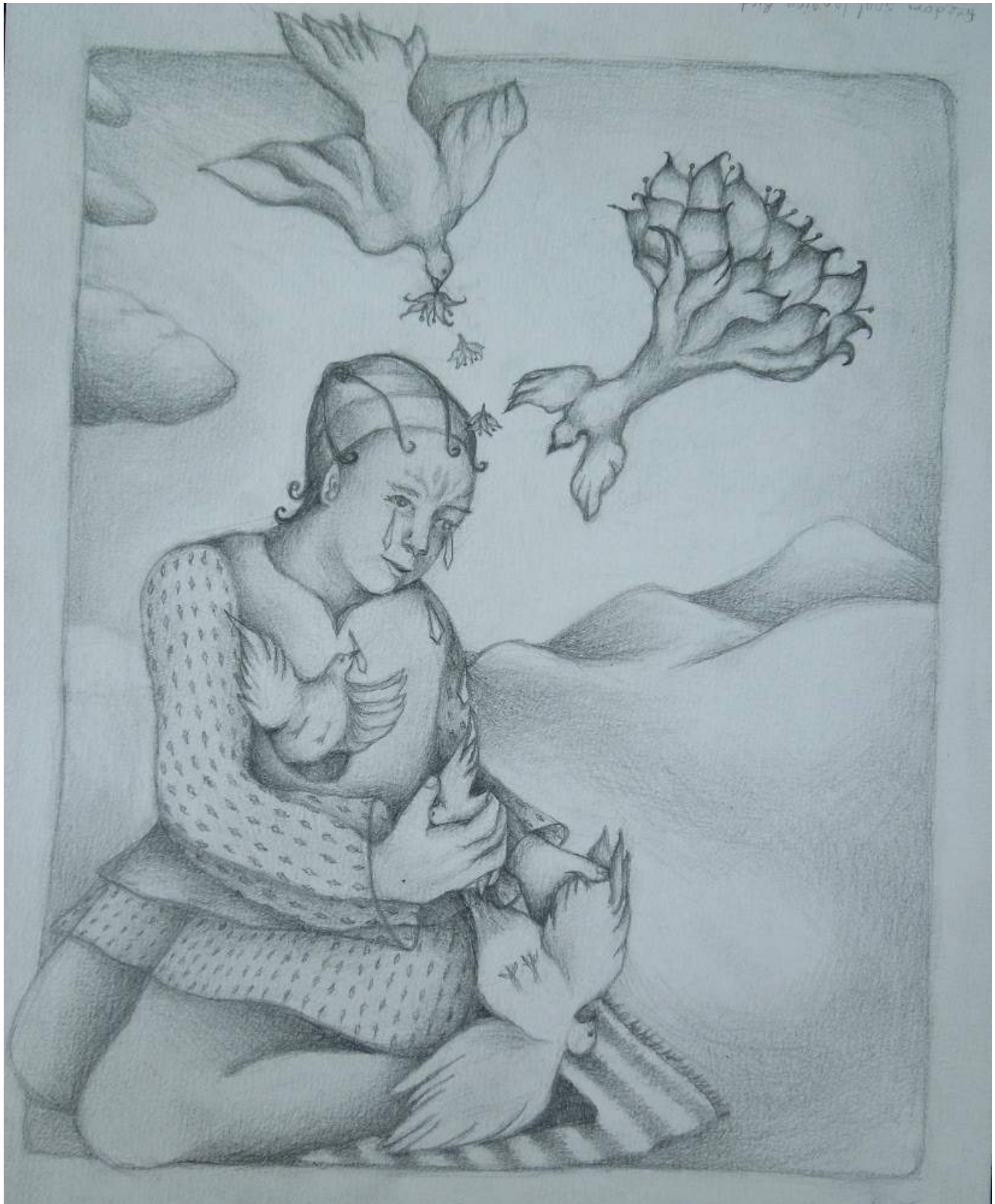
"We'll take you in to the Convention Center but you'll have to leave the animal."

I shake my head. No, I won't go with them, I won't leave the monkey.

Words pass between them, and they nod. "Okay, both of you carefully get in the boat."

We are on our way. There were a few old people for the escape boats in that faraway melting place. Children and their parents first, the old can wait, death is closer to them. Now I know the old love life too. A truth. A selfish one. Cam swims behind the boat, frolicking, legs and arms flashing, her tangerine lips smiling. The city of New Orleans is like a gigantic melting water flower.

Stephanie Dickinson story "Village of Butterflies" first appeared in Green Mountain Review in 2009, Volume XXII, No. 1.



Tears into Flowers

© Marla Faith

Freda's Truth *by Angela D'Agostino*

SOMETIMES IT'S CLEAR TO ME WHY I LIE. Like the time my boss asked everyone to share the most heroic thing we've ever done during one of his group therapy team meetings. Heroic? Does opening a really stuck lid of grape jam count?

The guy right before me, Steve from accounting, recounted the time he saved his two year old from drowning in their outdoor hot tub. Everyone oohed and ahed over that close call, that feat of paternal heroism, pumping the water out of those little lungs, careful not to crush Sarah's fragile chest. All I could think was why hadn't he protected her so she didn't wander into that death trap in the first place? It reminded me of that sicko disease where moms feed their kids poison so they can be heroes nursing them back to health. I was trying to remember the name of that disease when Jim called on me for my story. Well this was a pickle. How does one admit to her boss and colleagues that one has done absolutely nothing heroic in all of her twenty-five years on earth? Not only has one not done anything remotely heroic but one has actually fallen prey to cowardice on more than one occasion.

"One time I decided to take the stairs to my apartment," I invented. My apartment is on the eleventh floor. I would no sooner walk up those stairs than run a marathon. "As I was walking down the hallway toward our door, I heard shouting. Someone yelling help. It was coming from the elevator. Turned out there was a mom and two small boys stuck between floors and the door had jammed open by about a foot. The mom was panicked because one of the boys was having an asthma attack and didn't have his inhaler. It was a little dicey but I convinced her to squeeze the other boy through the opening and lower him down to me. We went to their apartment and got the inhaler and a baseball bat so I could pry open the doors. Just as they were stepping down to safety the maintenance guy shows up. Figures, right?"

Everyone applauded my bravery and quick thinking. I was impressed myself. The real story was the boys, who were hearty strong teenagers, had helped me when I was stuck in the elevator. Stupidly I forgot my story a week later and had mentioned the incident while chatting in the break room when a person who had been in the meeting said:

"Wow, you too? They really need to get that thing fixed."

Other times it's not as clear why I lie. A friend in high school once told me it's an addiction but I prefer to think of it as a condition, like Tourette's. I just can't help the stuff I blurt.

"I'm a virgin!" I blurted to Dave the first time he made a move. Okay, maybe it was just nerves, and I wasn't ready to go down that slippery slope. But why keep up the farce these three married years later? It's not like he sees it as a badge of honor or anything. Truth be told I think he'd feel better knowing I had a few under my belt. Pun intended.

Sometimes it's like that George Harrison song when you don't see that big black cloud hanging over you. Or like that kid in Peanuts whose always walking around totally unaware there is dirt flying up everywhere. You don't even realize that somewhere along the line you became the dirt ball.

It started when my best friend JoAnn was reading a tweet someone had forwarded.

"Confirmed Atheist Enters Heaven," JoAnn read. "He's talking somewhere in New Jersey. We have got to hear this." JoAnn grew up in a religious house so she'd always had this halfcocked spiritual side when it

served her purpose, like praying for good grades or a date to the prom but then she'd be too hung over for church and pretend she had the flu. She'd quote stuff you'd see in knickknacky stores that would sell needle point throw pillows and incense – 'Everything happens for a reason'; 'God doesn't give us more than we can handle'; those cloying sayings that are essentially excuses for crap getting dumped on us by a loving and benevolent god.

"It's just another light at the end of the tunnel story," I said and waited for the familiar refrain.

"Except with our luck, it's the headlights of an oncoming train!" JoAnn didn't disappoint and we both laughed half-heartedly. The joke had lost its punch now that we were in our twenties, supposedly settled into a life of bright future and promise in the greatest city on earth. No one to blame but ourselves and all that. And yet we still did look for someone to blame for that impending doom hurtling toward us in the dark. Withholding parents, shitty economy, relentless weather patterns. There was always someone to blame.

"But seriously," JoAnn said, probably sensing a shift in mood. "This one is different. The guy was a genius mathematician or something who thought everything could be explained logically. And then boom, he has an accident and goes into a coma. The family yanks the plug and after all his vital organs are kaput, he sits up and begins a monologue about heaven."

"No doubt captured on YouTube at the moment of the miraculous resurrection."

"You are so cynical. Come on, what have you got to lose?"

"The price of admission?" was my response. JoAnn was quick to point out to me later when we arrived at the meeting center in the middle of no-whereville, New Jersey, on a deserted and frigid pre-snowstorm night in late February that the admission was free.



There was no question I had to go without Dave. He was one of those who equated talk of the afterlife to fairy tales or sci-fi movies. Interesting and imaginative but patently untrue.

"I have to go on a business trip," I told him. JoAnn and I had decided to make a girls' weekend out of it. JoAnn's reasoning was that if one had to take a train to New Jersey, one would need to find light at the end of the tunnel even if it was from a TV set in a ramshackle motel.

"Why you?" Dave asked. It was a reasonable question. I was just a low level designer in a marketing department for an insurance company. There would be absolutely no reason for me to go anywhere except my cubicle.

"You know Jim. He's got a wacky idea about a team building trip. We're going to fall into each others' arms and such. Bring out all our creative juices to help us make more money. Although you know he wouldn't be that crass about it. It's all about the greater good of humanity, just so long as he's raking in the dough in the meantime."

Dave was used to hearing my Jim stories so he bought this hook, line and sinker. He even met Jim once at a dinner he had for all of us at his mansion in Westchester where he made us tell two truths and a lie as an ice-breaker. Everyone was sure Dave's lie was that his mom thought he had Down's syndrome when he was born, but the lie was that he believed in God.

I met Dave in a figure drawing class my sophomore year of college. For me it was a requirement. For him, an excuse to look at naked women. He was a senior at that point and, though he didn't admit as much, I gathered had had trouble getting laid. It wasn't that he was bad looking but he was one of those guys that you

only notice if they are walking too slow or you need to get around them. Which was why I noticed him. He was lingering by the little cubbies where we stored our supplies at the end of class, no doubt trying to get in a few last glimpses of Fatima as she closed her robe.

"You might want to close your mouth now," I had said a bit cheekily I admit.

"Desperate times call for desperate measures," he'd said. I thought that was kind of funny so I agreed to a coffee.

Turned out he had a good personality though he would cringe if he heard that. As if it were a response to what he looked like. That wouldn't be too far off. At five foot seven he was only two inches taller than me which meant no heels ever. He admitted to being twenty pounds overweight which meant it was probably closer to forty and had short frizzy dark hair that was receding fast and would eventually turn into something resembling that semi-circle most popularly worn by clowns. That is not to say he isn't attractive. Just that you need to get close enough to see it. Without his glasses his eyes are so brown and round they remind me of those malted balls. When we finally made love he was so grateful that it broke my heart. No one had ever thanked me like that in my life.

He insisted on taking a cab with me to the train station even though I told him I'd take the subway. He was kind that way and it made me feel guilty.

"Be good," Dave said when we arrived. I hugged him hard. I don't know what he was thinking when he said it. Probably nothing. But he had that sad puppy face that always killed me.

"Why don't you go out with Eric? See a movie or something."

"I'll be fine. Got some work to catch up on." Dave was always working on something completely unfathomable to me. Something with computers is all I could say to people who asked. I was a terrible wife. "Whatever you do, look before you fall," he said. I had no idea what he was talking about but I smiled and nodded. It was only after I was on the train looking for JoAnn that I remembered the lie.



We'd rented a car since there was no way to go two feet from the train station without driving. There were no sidewalks and no street lights. Living in New York for the past seven years I'd forgotten what it was like to be literally in the dark. And I have to tell you it was scary as hell. All I could think was what was going to jump out at us. It was like every horror movie I'd ever seen. Thank god JoAnn talked nonstop or I would have told her to drive us back to the station. Stars, schmars. I'll take light pollution any night.

"So peaceful and calm," JoAnn was saying. "The snow must be three feet high out here. Gorgeous." JoAnn was always seeing beauty everywhere. It could be really irritating sometimes.

"You're lucky Dave is so understanding to let you go away for the weekend," she said.

I didn't tell JoAnn the story I fed Dave. I looked out my window and tried not to imagine a guy with an axe running toward the car.

"I bet most guys would make a stink." JoAnn was not in a relationship so she loved to ponder the mysteries of guy-hood. I tried to tell her it was nothing special but it was sort of like telling a little kid that growing up is not all it's cracked up to be. You can't know it until you're in it.

"That must be it," JoAnn said. We were driving up this very long steep hill and at the top sat a squat building with a white steeple that was illuminated with flood lights. I was so grateful to be going toward something bright that the significance of it didn't hit me until afterward.

“Don’t you wonder,” she said. “Why are we here?” For a minute I thought she meant literally here in this car and I was about to say I was going to ask the same thing. But then I realized she meant Here. JoAnn loved to ponder Deep Questions.

“No.” I noticed a small cemetery off to right of the building we were approaching. The height of the snow had covered all but the most elaborate of tombstones and statues. The tops of angels and crucifixes broke through the top of the snow as though rising above the clouds leaving their poorer stumpy headstone brethren buried behind.

“I wonder all the time,” she said. “This can’t be all there is.”

The bitchy side of me thought that an overweight single woman in New York had to hang on to some hope but I really did love JoAnn, my closest and dearest friend from childhood, and even without god I recognized an uncharitable thought for what it was. At least sometimes.

Smiling middle-aged people greeted us at the door. They were wearing paper name tags that curled up along the edges as though desperate to disengage from the polyester shirts or knit sweaters they were foisted upon. Dottie (in red magic marker) welcomed us and asked us to fill out a tag. Without thinking I wrote Freda. When we were little, JoAnn thought Aretha Franklin was yelling “Freda!” instead of “freedom” in the song “Respect” and forever after that became our catch-all phony name. JoAnn snorted when Dottie asked her and Freda to follow her into a large musty-basement smelling room with dozens of round tables with white tablecloths.

“What’s with the tables?” I asked JoAnn, but Dottie answered.

“That’s so it’s easier to have small group discussions after the talk.”

I eye-rolled JoAnn, who ignored me. She’d made up her mind this would be Worthwhile.

The speaker walked to the podium. He was a short, slightly stout man with square dark-rimmed glasses. Overall he looked like someone a cartoonist would use as a model for the nerdy professor. I could tell the way JoAnn slumped slightly that he wasn’t the oracle she was hoping for.

“How many of you believe in Heaven?” the man, who introduced himself as Saul Rosenfeld, asked the crowd. His voice was meek and nasally, again spoiling any hopes for a commanding presence.

Almost everyone in the audience raised their hands. Not that surprising, considering we were in a church.

“My story will be confirmation for you. And I am grateful for your presence. But I will be directing my comments to those of you who did not raise your hands.” He lifted his arms as though embracing the crowd. “This is your lucky day.”

I let out a noise that was half chuckle, half cough drawing the attention of JoAnn on one side and an elderly man on my other.

“Sorry,” I said. “Tickle in my throat.”

“You’ll be tickling all over when Saul is through,” the man said.

I was a little insulted by this but smiled and turned back to Saul, which I knew was a biblical name but wasn’t sure if he was a good or bad character – ‘are you a good witch or a bad witch?’

“I know what you are thinking. Heaven is a fairy tale made up by and for desperate people. Religion is a business like any other except it’s based in hope for things yet to come, the ultimate high risk investment if you think about it. Would you invest in a company that won’t show you any return on investment until you’re dead?”

There was a pause where someone in the front of the audience said something.

“Okay, smarty pants, life insurance aside. That gives your loved ones a return. Not you!”

Everyone laughed. I was bored already. I took a deep breath through my nose and noticed a mildew smell that was worrisome. I’d read just the week before that mold could be more toxic to lungs than smoking. Fabulous. I imagined the headline: ‘Skeptic Dies Trying to be Saved!’

“The fact is, there is one fundamental reason why religion is a multi-billion dollar industry. Why otherwise intelligent, sensible, hard-working human beings would part with their cash to support institutions that are known to be full of liars, murderers, warmongers, pedophiles. Why despite the complete lack of evidence, they believe in something they can’t see, hear, smell, feel or touch.”

He paused for dramatic effect. His delivery was gaining speed.

“That reason, my friends,” here Saul hesitated, and I could have sworn he looked directly at me, “is because it’s all true.”

At the word ‘true,’ something weird happened. I looked at JoAnn to see if she felt it but she was still staring rapt at Saul. My thoughts started spiraling through all the lies I’d ever told. I don’t mean just the recent ones either, but all through my life, the garden variety ones to my parents (yes, I brushed my teeth; no, I didn’t have anything to drink), the white lies to protect the innocent (no, you don’t look heavy; yes, I loved your story); to lies for gain, to mislead, to make me feel better about myself. For a dizzying moment, I couldn’t figure out what true even meant anymore. It was one of those words that the more you stare at it, the stranger it looks to the point that it’s just letters with no meaning.

Saul recounted his story at length which, as I expected, was a familiar one. Overcome with warmth and love, a kind guiding presence, seeing deceased relatives and being reassured, all while his brain, tethered to various monitors, registered zero activity. What was different was hearing it live and the joy and confidence this little man exuded. It was like he was floating, slowly transforming into the large commanding presence I was expecting. But what was more astonishing was that, when my attention wandered, he seemed to sense it and directed his focus squarely on me just like the proverbial fisherman casting out his line.

“I don’t know why I was chosen,” Saul said, answering the question in my head. “All I know is that what I experienced cannot be explained through science. And the rest of my life will be devoted to leading others to the truth.”

There was a short break after Saul was finished where we could get little paper cups of soda and store-bought chocolate chip cookies. Beside the ‘tickle’ man, there were two really old ladies who looked like they would fall over with a pinkie push (I uncharitably thought Heaven might call any minute), a middle-aged man in a Rutgers hoodie whose handsome youth you could spot and couldn’t help but mourn (a going to seed Robert Downey Jr.), and a thirty-something woman who was the fishiest fish out of water in the place.

Her name tag said Candace. She wore a bright yellow top and had an asymmetrically cut short black bob. A ring looped through her right nostril, and a vine-like tattoo snaked up her neck. She had one of those pouty staring expressions where you’re not sure if she’s terrified or furious and you don’t want to find out. Amazingly, she spoke first.

“I don’t know if you can really appreciate what heaven feels like if you haven’t hit rock bottom.” We all looked at her expectantly. “I know what this guy is talking about, even though I didn’t die. I wanted to die, but in the end, God reached me before it was too late.” For the next fifteen minutes, Candace spoke non-stop about her abusive father, her unsupportive mother who turned her from the house at sixteen, the drugs, shelters, and an alcoholic husband who almost killed her, first with his fists and then with his car wrapped

around a tree.

“I don’t know what made me walk the long way to the bus stop that day. I never go that way and I remember I was thinking that maybe I should just step in front of the bus, get it over with. What was the point?” She paused, her eyes glistening with the memory. “That’s when I saw the sign outside St. Anthony’s:

Can a mother forget her infant,
be without tenderness for the child of her womb?
Even should she forget,
I will never forget you

I walked up and rang the bell and this woman opened it and before I could say anything, she led me inside and sat me on a couch. She asked me if I needed help, and I just started crying. I couldn’t speak. And she gave me this hug that I’ll never forget. It was the warmest, most loving hug I’d ever gotten in my life, and I cried for what felt like hours. All the time she just hugged me, didn’t say a word. I didn’t even know this woman, but I will never forget that feeling. It’s like nothing you can even put in words. Pure love and joy.” She picked up a napkin and dabbed at her eyes. I saw JoAnn was also tearing up. “God is real. You don’t have to wait until you die to experience it. He’s all around us, right here. And He loves us for who we are even if we don’t.”

She smiled then and it transformed her from scary punk girl to sweet kindly neighbor. She finished her story telling us how the woman, Catherine, introduced her to people at the parish who got her a better job, helped her find a new apartment and even paid for her to get the therapy she needed to let go of her rage at the world. She wasn’t raised with any faith but converted to Catholicism and decided to volunteer at a runaway shelter.

We didn’t know what to do when she finished so we all started clapping. After that, the rest of the table started sharing their stories, and I thought for a minute that I really was in some sort of team-building exercise. But it was different because everyone was so real. We’d probably never see each other again so what would be the point in just saying stuff to impress a bunch of strangers. When they got to JoAnn, she started crying.

She told them she was lonely and didn’t understand why there was so much evil in the world. I was a little embarrassed for her but she didn’t seem to mind that she was crying in front of a bunch of strangers. Candace rubbed JoAnn’s arm which made JoAnn cry harder.

Then all of a sudden, it was my turn.

I thought about telling them a story about a guy I once knew whose dead mother had spoken to him through a medium. Except I would pretend it was my dead mother. The guy was convinced the medium was legit because she knew about a cross the mother had given him that he wore under his shirt. They would be in awe and grateful for my story, and would go home confirmed in their belief in Heaven and that we would all be joined again with our loved ones. The guy had sworn all up and down that there was no way the medium could have known about the cross. I didn’t believe him for a second but pretended I did. I thought I had lied to protect him but it hit me looking at the faces of these earnest strangers, so genuine in wanting to help other people, that my lies were to protect me.

“I want to feel what you’re describing, but I never have,” I said. I told them my father’s infidelity split up the family when I was eight and that my mother had to work two jobs to support us and didn’t have time for hugs and motherly kindnesses. I told them I didn’t feel sorry for myself; it was what it was. I told them they

all had really nice stories but I didn't see how it applied to me. I told them I had never felt real love and warmth in my life.

"What about Dave?" JoAnn asked.

I was about to say something snarky like what did Dave have to do with anything. JoAnn could never leave well enough alone. Love I guess was what she meant.

I remembered a close friend of Dave asking me one night after he'd had too much to drink 'how did he get you?' and wondering the same thing. I recalled sitting in the back of the car with Dave's mother on the way to our engagement party staring at the back of Dave's frizzy head, a bald spot the size of a silver dollar on his crown, thinking once he lost his hair he would be even uglier. I heard him thanking me for allowing him to make love to me one night after his boss gave him a bad review and wanting to hit him so he would stop being grateful. I pictured him picking me up at the station, his heartbreaking 'I'm so happy!' smile where his eyes crinkle almost to nonexistence, and felt so desperately sad. He had been nothing but kind to me and riding along on his happiness had seemed liked a good idea at the time. I had no idea what I wanted to do with my life but pretending to love someone while I figured it out suddenly didn't seem like such a great idea.

"I tend to lie a lot," I said and felt tears sting and then slide down until they were clinging to my jawbone. JoAnn and Candace reached out and placed their hands on my arm and shoulder. A fluttering, like a curtain blowing in a gentle breeze, spread through my chest. I then and proceeded to give a mini confession about a few choice lies over the years. Candace laughed at some of them which made me feel absolved in some way. It was a relief to be completely honest, but then I knew, the way you know about clouds gathering or trains arriving or hearing something you know is true even if you aren't ready to accept it, that this was only the beginning.



Sara's Song

by Elisabeth Murawski

The child I cannot have
is yours.

We welcome it.

We see it like a city
we have always wanted to see.

We look into its eyes
transparent as a sailor's wife
listening

for his footstep on the stair.

Those eyes make us one
turn of the heart.

We burn the icehouse
where God used to live.

It's as if we'd set finches
loose from their cages,
we have so much light to protect.

Eutychus Propped on a Windowsill Listens to Paul

by Elisabeth Murawski

Drowsy, you close
your eyes in sleep, topple
from your perch

and fall
three flights down
into an alley.

You cannot see the torches
flood the stairs
or feel Paul's weight

pressed lightly as a sheet
on your flesh. You cannot
hear him singing

from the dark road.

Paul is
pin and ointment, out

of the body, a flower
on the fracture, praising
for the grass,

the sleepy town of Troas.
He breathes into your skin
a pinkness, soothing

the fearful: *His life*
is in him still.
By morning he'll be whole.

Luke weaves your story
into Acts, homely,
lacking the show-stopping

power of Lazarus walking.
Ours to imagine you
waking, stretching, talking,

recalling nothing
of the fall from a windowsill,
the weight of Paul.

Flemish

by Alfred Corn

Low raincloud suspended from pale cobalt.
At sea level, pollarded, archetypal
Plane trees flank a sopping polder,
And leaf clatter from a line of poplars
Fends off the wind from Germany.
At intervals, a huddled town,
Pricked out with the odd steeple and turrets
Surmounted by bristling thorns of stone—
Intricate, ornamental, the tendrils of an initial
Capital in an illuminated missal.

Flanders will verify every gold thread,
Each emerald and ruby Van Eyck
Set into the Virgin's robe;
The cork-heeled slippers tossed aside
In his indoor wedding portrait
Whose reversed view fills a convex mirror;
Or the realist's gaze he managed to catch
From his wife's humanly aging face.

Background orchards send forth Memling's
Pear-shaped maidens, whose high foreheads
And gauzy veils wait for a betrothal, not expecting
To see the gaunt Christ lowered from crossbars down
To a collapsed mother and widening shockwaves of grief.
What stronger deposition could be made
Against goatlike sinners at the Last Judgment?

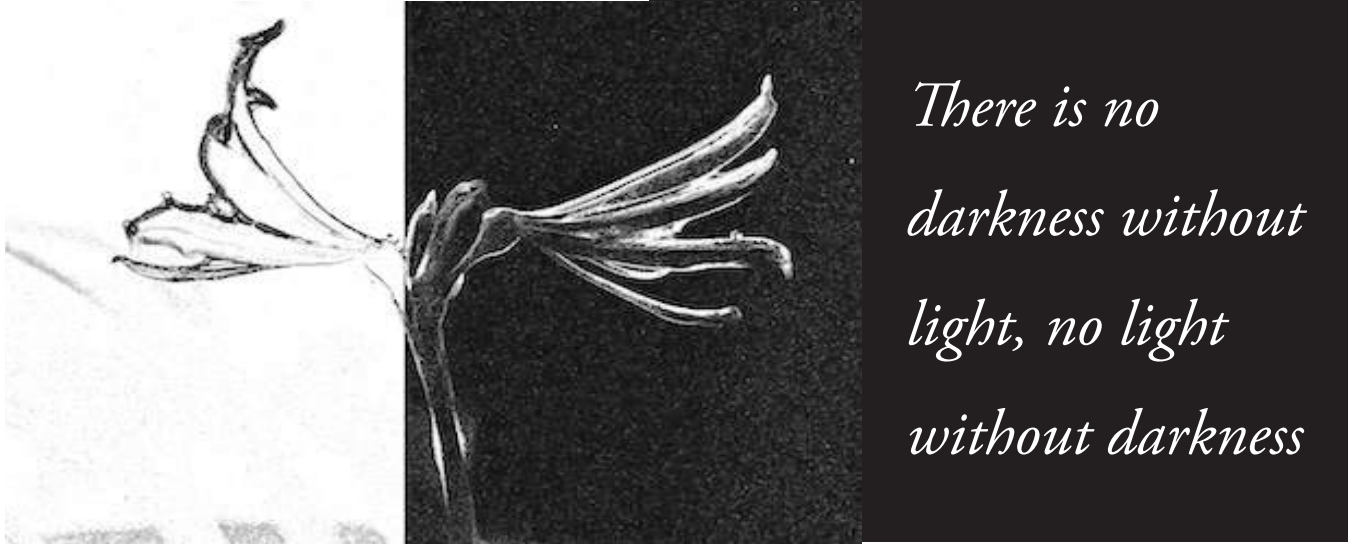


Bosch has prepared a place for them:
 Cauldrons and grottoes with lizards and lunatic
 Devilry, eager to lay hands on sadists,
 Frauds, layabouts and boozers, fodder
 For a carnival spree of gourmet torture.
 Elsewhere the lamblike elect, blessedly
 Naked in Heaven's bubble, contemplate
 A perpetual holiday suckled on honey
 Among fountains, lilies and apples,
 Where sun never sinks into chaos and night.

At Bruges, during my long dream, a Flemish
 Angel appeared wrapped in glowing linen,
 His dignity benign and open to questions.
 Why, in Flanders, did they always adorn
 Their saints, cups, plates, vestments, and architecture
 With pearls, gold, jewels, lace, and tracery?
Artistry embodies a finer reverence,
Ocular proof of the gratitude felt
For every perceived aspect of deity.
All things partaking of the Creator
Witness to beauty. Wherever you find it,
Holiness is found, and worship follows.

He turned to go. I woke among remnants
 Of his dream, angelic streamers still whispering
 As I packed and left. On the road to Den Haag,
 Open fields, green expanses divinely
 Embroidered with myriad poppies, all blood-red.

Poetry Myth and Vision *by George Jisho Robertson*



Grass and Dew © George Jisho Robertson

‘CREATIVE AWARENESS’ (sometimes I call it Poesis and sometimes Samantabhadra) is our pure innate original nature that excludes nothing and excludes no one. Ever responsive and responsible, it interweaves the lights and shadows, appearances, and possibilities of our senses, thoughts and dreams into a dynamic field of vision or mandala of energies and intelligences we call self or world. We experience the world as we see it mirror to mirror dancing. To release these energies we must again and again surrender our hard-won self-world vision to allow a new and immediately responsive sense of what is present to pour through, transforming us as it transforms. This is the way of child’s play, of adventure, a courageous dance of sense, perception, feeling, thought and mind into the realm of the new; it is discovery, it is awakening. In this dance, birth, growth and bereavement join hands and dance in a round, like night and day, delusion and enlightenment. We are each moons to one another’s sun, suns to one another’s moon. Moon draws our waves and sun illuminates them. In this, dream and awakening are partners in their dance and each moves within the other. This is the way of Love.

Creative awareness is the real meaning of what the Buddha calls mindfulness, which is so often confused with attentiveness; attentiveness selects in order to focus, where mindfulness opens and includes; it is the energetic source of how we see the world *of* the self, see the world *as* the self and take responsibility. Here nothing is fixed. The mandala of energies is always transforming, has its shadows and mysteries, and is a web of inclusive relationships where the light and the dark, the joyful and the sorrowful, the cruel and the tender may be related and harmonised. Many ancient myths, creative artists, shamans and shamanic cultures present their mandala as a community of presences, such as totems, avatars, spirits, incarnations, angels, gods and sacred messengers. These take a form and speak with a voice given by the dream intelligence (which does not only operate in sleep, but in samadhi and even in waking and hypnagogic states for many, and for the

natural child). Creative artists may draw on these sources to develop their own mythic vision or on their own experience. In music, song, sculpture, painting, poem, dance and drama, these mythic, archetypal, historical, real and invented presences, even a stone, a house, a road or a drop of dew, present the wisdom of our intelligences, awakening the readers to conscious active life, challenging denial, suppression and complacency.

Among these, Trickster is a crucial perspective, visualized as an avatar, or deceptive emanation of a wisdom energy that has a mocking, penetrating intelligence whose core insight is that nothing is what it was, nothing is what it will be and nothing is just what it seems to be. Using a Buddhist term, Trickster reminds us that *anitya*/transience is not a concept we can stabilize in verbal analysis but the dynamic immediacy and flow of each uniquely transformative moment. Our present delusion is our present reality: move on! In such a perspective, including universal forces that are beyond our choice and control (biological, organic, evolutionary, chemical, physical, and culturally inherited), Trickster's challenge is directed against our conventions, certainties and beliefs. Trickster challenges our complacencies.

Trickster challenges us to abandon and renew without loss or gain – just being present. If the bird decides to stay in the nest for fear she will lose it if she flies, her chicks will fall on one another and then starve. Playful, seductive, grotesque or penetrating, obscene or elegant, gentle or terrifying, Trickster pricks the bubbles of self-certainty. Whatever secure attitude idea or relationship we get stuck in, Trickster will present an experience that is irreconcilable to that perspective: a treasured child will break that treasured vase, mildew will blight that rose; palaces and tombs alike will drown in the shifting sands; cancer will carry our loved one or our own life away. Out of these crises, we have the potentiality to rise again, renewed in awareness and vitality. The True Self, the Original Face is inexpressible because it is in every moment new, newly responsive to the ineluctable changes of circumstance.

I have thought of Orpheus and Eurydice, like Dumuzi and Inanna, as shape-shifting emanations of Trickster. If you cling to life they tell you of death; if you celebrate intimacy, they tell you of separation.

Orpheus returns from the shadows of hell to teach all creatures to sing the Beloved's return in spring, but though winter did not prevail, spring will not endure.

A lightning bolt! A peal of cosmic laughter! The Cosmic Clown rips off his mask – only to reveal another!

Orpheus on his return was scattered: now his song is heard in a wind chime, a cricket, a whale calling, a mountain torrent, a deep throb in the Earth's shifting crust, the buzz of a foraging bee, the whisper of a falling leaf. Loss is the very ground of renewal. Then how everything sings, how the moment dances! The moment is unique: then it has gone.

In this light the meaning of a poem is not the poem, and not even the poet's intention, but how the reader awakens wherever it is heard. Poem is Trickster. The essence of Poem is Love as the most sacred Trickster, ever challenging, never static, ever becoming. Love in its fullest presence excludes nothing, excludes no one. Ever responsive and responsible, it interweaves the vivid appearances of lights and shadows, sense and feeling, the holy and the obscene, all possibilities and dreams into the mandala we call self or world to reveal the sacred presence of all things, all beings, all places and all times. Love challenges and then challenges again. And all that is what Poetry is here to do.

All our learning and received wisdoms are nothing unless we address our circumstance with individual authenticity in the intimate circumstances of our life. Discord and harmony are not just equal and opposite truths: they are, as in the Yin/Yang symbol, each within the other sounding the depths of human feeling, both the dark and the light; each challenges and stirs the other.

*A green lacening rested in the palm of your hand:
I have instructed its shadow to lead me forward*

*We are changing lights, we are shifting shadows
Transient apparitions of her being*

*Our veins and skeins of light crystallize
in the play of her intelligences:
there is neither time nor horizon in this dance*

*I hear the chant of the Edda –
“The man who can see all creatures in himself
himself in all creatures, knows no sorrow –
pin your faith to the seed of nature
stumble through the darkness of the blind
stumble through a darkness deeper still...”*

*Within the deepest darkness lies
the delicate treasury of her eye*

*I offer these transient images to dance with you:
and so, my dear, we shall dance and rest and die*

Modim *by Linda K. Wertheimer*

MY ARMS FELT HEAVY, MY MOUTH PARCHED AS I DREW THE FLUTE CLOSE TO MY LIPS.

It was a regular Friday night service at temple, and only 50 people sat in the sanctuary. I was about to accompany the cantor on a song, something I had done many times. Yet I was petrified and feared collapsing into tears.

I was 43, and three weeks before, was diagnosed with postpartum depression. I was anxious about my health, anxious about my baby boy's welfare, anxious that my husband of two years would think he married a fraud rather than a competent, upbeat, successful journalist. Around the time our son was six weeks old, irrational fears and thoughts overtook me. I could not sleep when the baby slept. I was often nauseous. One night, I lay in bed thinking I was having a stroke. Every limb tingled. I did not want to be left alone. I would not let my sleep-deprived husband rest.

But there was so much to be thankful for in my life even as it unraveled. A decade ago, I had no husband, no child. Faith was a bit player. I lingered on the sidelines of Judaism, singing in a temple chorus but never taking the step that would make the music mean more than a string of notes. Five years in a row, I sang in High Holy Day services, rejoicing in the harmony but rarely understanding enough to find a way to connect to God. It was as if I were performing in a concert rather than participating in a spiritual moment.

Perhaps a dozen years ago, I first encountered Robbie Solomon, the cantor who now stood to the left of me. But our meeting was superficial, a brief conversation between a star and fan. It was the mid-1990s and Robbie was performing with Safam, a folk group famed in Jewish circles since the 1970s. He led us in his signature song, "Leaving Mother Russia," and moved many of us to tears with the song's famous line, "When they come for us, we'll be gone." It was a tribute to the Jewish refuseniks who tried to leave Russia so they could finally be free to be Jews. After the concert, Robbie signed the Safam music book I bought. I loved his voice. I loved the sentiment of his songs. But that was not a spiritual moment. Back then, I never would have imagined that one day I would stand next to Robbie on the bimah in such a show of faith and connection to the Jewish community.

Not until my 30s did I try to make Judaism more than a social vehicle. I had joined choirs as a way to mix singing with socializing with Jews. I camped and biked in Jewish outdoors groups in search of a beau. But when I moved to Boston in 2004 at age 39, I started attending services for more reasons than to sing in a chorus. A rabbi at a temple I frequented sensed in me what I found so difficult to express, a yearning to know more about my faith and a yearning to understand Hebrew so I could sing the prayers infused with spirituality rather than just enthusiasm. I had quit Hebrew school at age 12, disinterested in liturgy and disconnected from Jews in general because I lived in a small Ohio town with few Jews and came from a non-religious family. This soft-spoken rabbi at a suburban Boston temple invited me to join an adult bat mitzvah class, and for the next two years, I studied Hebrew, learned how to chant lines in the Torah, read the Old Testament, and received an education on what the prayers in our tradition meant. I finally learned the meaning of the Kaddish, the Mourner's Prayer, which I had heard many times but never understood. Each line praises God. The prayer was both simple and complex in my view. Don't you need to believe in God for the prayer to help heal? At my adult bat mitzvah, my mother draped a prayer shawl, a tallit, around my shoulders, and I blessed

it with a few lines of Hebrew. An image of the biblical Miriam was painted on the cloth, the figure dancing on yellow sand, shaking a timbrel and guiding women through prayer and song. Like Miriam, I led others in prayer and song during the ceremony. I was center stage, but this was not a performance. At age 41, I was starting to find faith's place in my life. But two years later, could my growing attachment to my religion act as my savior?

Unbeknownst to me during my nearly blissful pregnancy, I was a prime target for postpartum depression. Fertility drugs, past episodes of depression, complicated pregnancy, recent major life changes. I could check off those boxes on lists of risk factors for the disorder. I had just married and bought a house for the first time. I was dealing with a newly discovered health issue that affected the pregnancy. At age 40, after minor knee surgery, I developed two blood clots. The clots were partly caused because I was genetically prone to blood clotting, something I had never known. Daily, through the pregnancy, I injected a medication into the fatty part of my stomach to prevent clotting and knew I had to continue the shots for a short period after my baby was born. It was another stress, though at the time, I saw it as just another step en route to motherhood. After giving birth, I made another huge life shift. I took a year's leave from *The Boston Globe* and stepped off the career path for the first time in two decades. Around the same time, my husband was laid off.

But it was my past that put me most at risk: In 1986, my 23-year-old brother was killed when he fell asleep at the wheel, and his jeep rolled down a cliff in rural Utah. I was 21, finishing my last year of college. Kevin, my big brother and best friend, was gone. Grief bit back. I had episodes of depression near the first and second anniversaries of my brother's death. In my 20s, I kept a distance from my Jewish faith. Religion could offer no solace. The depression that struck near the second anniversary came with scant warning. Though if I thought back, the signs were there, especially in February 1988 when I went to a funeral home to implore relatives to talk to me about the loved ones they had just lost. A new reporter for the Cincinnati Enquirer, I walked into the funeral home. They loomed large, four dark rectangular coffins. I edged closer. An 18-year-old had set fire to an apartment killing three children and two adults. The survivor was a 13-year-old girl, who escaped when she heard her mother shouting, "Everyone, get out!" The funeral was for the girl's brothers, ages 2 and 10, and her parents. The fifth victim was the girl's best friend. Hushed voices and sobs echoed around me. I expected mourners to push me away, but few did. They seemed intent on wanting the world to know their anger and pain. The arsonist set fire to the apartment's curtains after a spat with his girlfriend.

"This morning, we realize a family stopped short," the minister said, adding that it was impossible to know why such things happen. "We pray for the daughter and the healing she needs at this time."

The girl was a younger reflection of me at my brother's funeral. She appeared sad, alone. She had lost much more, and yet when I approached her after the burial service, the girl smiled. She held up roses she clutched and said she took them from her parents' caskets. Her pain was at its raw beginning. My grief, I thought, should be long over, yet hearing the minister took me back to my brother's funeral and the rabbi's words about death: "There is nothing more certain than death, nothing more uncertain than the time of dying. Thus, we are always surprised by death, always overwhelmed by death, always fearful of death."

As March beckoned, grief again stretched out its powerful arms and clasped me too tight. Images of the four coffins at the funeral home disturbed my sleep. My brother Kevin rolling down that cliff in his jeep then supplanted the coffins. I envisioned him dying and then saw him dead with that bump on his forehead in the coffin, a memory of my last view of him the day of his funeral. That invisible fist reappeared, grinding,

jabbing, poking my gut. Why did I suddenly feel like I was dying inside? My symptoms were physical as much as psychological, and I sought an easy fix. My head, back, and stomach hurt, but a doctor found nothing wrong in a physical. I began losing touch with reality and became obsessed with my age. How, I wondered, could I be 23 if my brother Kevin were only 23? He was two years older, and now I was overtaking him in age. In a sleep-deprived, angst-ridden state, I became unsure of the year. I was in a time warp, stuck in 1986, not 1988. I started to refuse to believe that I was 23, the same age Kevin was when he died. If I were 23, he could not be 23. He had to be 25. But I knew he died five months before his 24th birthday. Death made him forever the same age. Now, for the first time, we were the same age, and it was too much to comprehend. If I believed it, I had to accept that Kevin was gone.

I saw a counselor, but found no comfort from him. As March progressed, I called my parents frequently but never could describe what was wrong. A cousin came to visit in late March, early April 1988. She saw my empty refrigerator, listened to my sometimes incoherent thoughts, and called my parents and told them they should see me in person. Despite the timing, neither my parents nor I directly connected my state to the second anniversary of my brother's death. How could this be the effect of a two-year-old loss? None of us knew anniversary reactions to a loss could sink a mourner into deep depression. My parents and I met with the counselor I previously saw, and he referred me to a psychiatrist who recommended that I be admitted to a hospital psychiatric ward for depression. At the same age Kevin died in a car accident, I was sure that I was about to die. How could anyone feel this bad and live? I was sad, furious, embarrassed. I was mad at the counselor, at the psychiatrist, at my parents, and myself. This was wrong. I was not crazy. I was not suicidal. I was just lost.

Alcohol and disinfectant permeated the air in the long corridor of the Cincinnati hospital. I fought back tears as I was led to a room with two twin beds; the other bed was occupied by a woman in her 60s who mumbled nonsensically. She looked at me as I walked in, then kept talking to herself. A nurse walked in and gave me a shot of lithium. I asked what for? She said it was for depression. Shortly afterward, it was as if I were in a haze. My tongue felt thick, double its size. My life went into slow-motion. I was on anti-depressants a short time after the first anniversary of my brother's death but did not feel like this. Every day, I sat in a room with a psychiatrist, a round-faced, spectacled man who did little more than nod to whatever I said. "How do you feel today?" he asked. I said little, except, "Ok." How did I feel? Terrible. This psychiatrist never mentioned grief. He asked about my childhood and probed for a deep-rooted cause to my depression when the answer was closer to the surface. My brother died in a car accident, and in one moment, life changed. The drugs numbed me into nothingness. My parents soon believed that the hospitalization was the wrong move. They consulted a psychiatrist who had seen me briefly at her office after my much smaller bout of depression more than a year before. She told my parents that she believed it was wise to get me discharged, bring me home with them and let me see her. She did not buy that after 21 years of normalcy, I had something chronic that required long hospitalization.

Within weeks of coming home, I was smiling more again. Weekly, I met with the female psychiatrist whose soft voice with a touch of an Indian accent was comforting. She offered that she had not lost a sibling and did not know what it was like. She put me on anti-depressant medication until we both agreed that the pills were no longer necessary. She concluded what others had missed: anniversary reactions to my brother's death had caused the problem. The first grief reaction showed itself as sleeplessness and anxiety. The second one was a serious clinical depression but the symptoms were not part of a chronic disorder. There were still

dark moments after the return to my parents' home in the summer of 1988. I remained in pain over the loss of my brother and worried that it was a disease without a cure. I let myself feel, the scariest feeling of all when you have lost someone. The anniversary of Kevin's death hung like a specter. I had to learn how to conquer March.

Exactly when and how I never knew, but March once again became a month of hope. Eight years, nine years, a decade passed, and I no longer acted as if a "bereaved sibling" badge was pinned to my chest. I was finding ways to live in peace without my brother and still remember him. I inched toward more Jewish traditions, annually lighting a memorial candle, taking comfort in the light that flickered for 24 hours. As the 11th anniversary of my brother's death neared, I traveled to Israel. The main reason was to take a 250-mile bike trip with a Jewish outdoors group, but before we started biking, we had four days in Jerusalem. Then 33, I was more willing to attend a Shabbat service than in my 20s and more curious about the meaning of the prayers. By this time, I had moved to Orlando to work as an education reporter for The Orlando Sentinel. I gingerly took steps closer to my faith. When I saw an advertisement for the bike trip to Israel, called Biking through the Bible, the timing was perfect. I was searching for all types of personal fulfillment. Would God become more real to me in the Holy Land?

One of my first days in Jerusalem, I strolled down the steps of the Old City toward the Western Wall, humming "Yerushalayim Shel Zahav," or Jerusalem of Gold, a folk song by Israeli singer Naomi Shemer. Just a few months before, I sang the song during a benefit at the Orlando Jewish Community Center. The song, written in the 1960s before the six-day war that led to the liberation of the Old City, was an unofficial anthem of Israel, a haunting, passionate melody. As I walked toward the western wall, the holiest place in the world for Jews, I heard strains of Jerusalem of Gold. Just below me, a toothless man played the tune on an electronic keyboard, and below him, dozens of men and women, separated by a barrier, prayed in front of the western wall. The man smiled as I approached and kept playing the song. Had he heard me humming? I stood for a few moments, listening, then walked down a series of steps toward the praying Jews. I slipped a piece of paper in a crack in the wall, a small note I wrote in memory of Kevin. Nearby the golden Dome of the Rock on Temple Mount glistened from the sun. I composed a silent prayer: "Let me remember my brother always. Let me, though, have a full life without him. Make my life not about death, but about living." For one of the first times in my life, something spiritual and serene swept through me as I stood side by side with women who beseeched God to hear their prayers.

The cantor, Robbie, a tallit wrapped around his shoulders and his guitar cradled in his slender arms, gave me the slightest of nods. We began playing the introduction to music he composed for Modim Anachnu Lach, a prayer that asks us to "learn to live in gratitude." As I played, Robbie strummed his guitar and sang in his rich tenor voice: "For the gifts of beauty, joy and light, modim anachnu lach. For the laughter and the tears besides, modim anachnu lach. For all that's kind and good and true, modim anachnu lach."

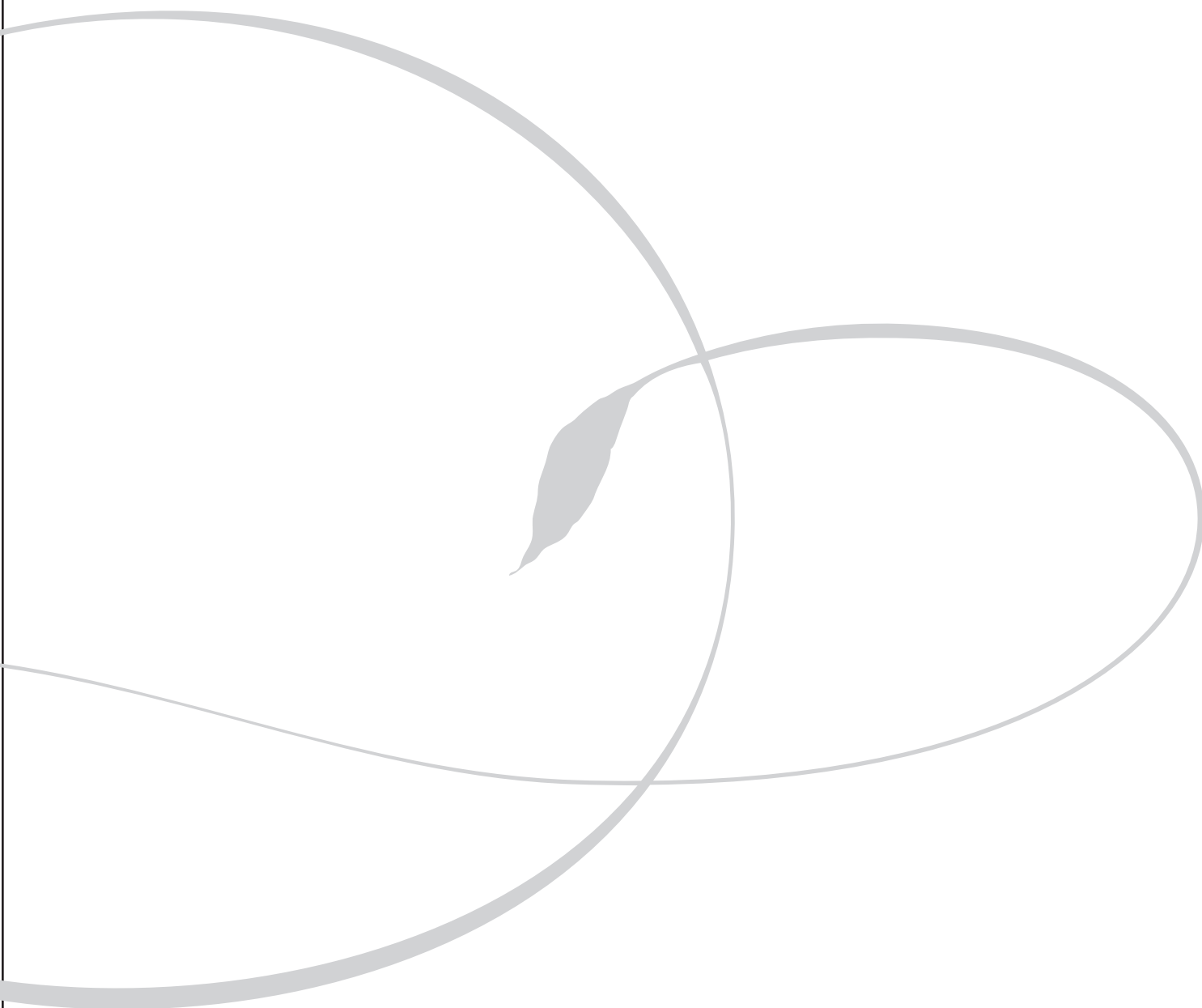
Joy over the birth of my son mixed with sadness at the eeriest time. My son was born just weeks before the 22nd anniversary of my brother Kevin's death. The post-partum depression episode began so close to that period, too. It hit me hard at the onset, but the anxiety, moments of irrationality, and sleeplessness disappeared in less than a month. Anti-depressants helped. So did the savvy counselor who was able to connect the dots between my long-ago grief episodes and the present. So did my husband. But maybe too there was something else helping me, something I could not quite explain.

"Mo-oh-dim," Robbie sang. On the flute, I parroted back the same tune. The tone of the silver flute I

had owned since eighth grade was breathy on the first notes. But with each line of music, the notes sounded clearer, stronger like the realizations I now had about the past and present. The melody was pure, sweet. My stomach, taut with the stress of the past weeks, began to settle.

“For the chance to learn and love and give... modim anachnu lach...”

A mother. A wife. An increasingly observant Jew. I was in a place I once thought impossible. It was as if my life were beginning anew. My husband Pavlik sat in the second row in the sanctuary. He, like I, was terrified when I seemed to lose touch with reality for a spell after being so grounded and happy during the first weeks of our son’s life. Perched against Pavlik’s broad chest was our baby, Simon Kevin, who watched me with eyes the same shade of blue as mine and who in the darkest moments gave me reason to smile. Gifts were all around. The music flew easily from my fingers and lips as the song glided to its gentle close. Maybe my gratitude was for what I finally had—faith.





Totem

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Al Chet *by Catherine Klatzker*

IT WAS ALMOST ROSH HASHANAH, barely a few months after that year's family reunion. The holidays still brought up old longings for connection that reunions never fulfilled and I wanted to call my parents on the phone from the safety of my home in LA the day before Rosh Hashanah. On the phone with my father there were long inevitable silences, and my mother rarely knew which daughter I was. I just wanted to hear their voices. My father had cancelled their long-distance service a few years earlier and my mother could no longer call her children or her sisters routinely. My mother could only return my call if she still had time on phone gift cards from her kids.

There was no answer and a nagging feeling pulled at me. I kept calling. No answer. I was used to being told by family from a very young age that what I observed was not true so I seldom credited my intuition because I didn't trust my family perceptions, except this time. This time I just had a feeling, not that something was wrong, but that I must get through and hear their voices, so I kept calling, kept trying to reach them. The feeling was too insistent to ignore.

Finally I left voicemail for Peter and Irene, my sister and her husband, who lived in the main house on the same property in Northern California. "I have been calling Dad and Mom all afternoon and now I'm worried that no one answers or calls back. Will you please go check on them? It's probably nothing, but just in case. Thanks."

The callback came that evening: "Catherine, this is Peter, call me back. It's about your parents."

When Peter found them, my father had fallen and inadvertently knocked my mother down with him. His "help" button was across the room where he'd hung it by the door and neither of them could get up. They lay there in their cottage for five hours. My mother had three broken ribs and her pulmonary and cardiac problems were exacerbated. She was very weak and taken to the hospital in Walnut Creek.

I was at shul when the ugly thought snuck in. I noticed it. It said, *now they know what neglect feels like*. Except she didn't really, she'd had no short-term memory for the last twelve years of her dementia. I imagined how frightened Dad was on the floor, unable to get up, drifting in and out of what he called "sleep," unable to get to his help button, unable to help himself; very aware that Mom was also down and unable to rise, and both of them helpless. Dad told Irene he had been profoundly frightened. I kept imagining their pain and fear. And I wanted to take it from them. I practiced tonglen, the Buddhist meditation of taking suffering from another for myself. And I kept noticing a niggling feeling of satisfaction at my father's suffering. Mindfulness spotlighted my conflicts. In the Days of Awe I was exactly that Jew with a compassionate Buddhist practice alongside my Al Chets, a practice of empathy for the suffering of living beings. Plus, I was also my own opposite.

I did not want anyone to know the level of fear and helplessness I knew. At the same time that I wanted to take suffering from my father, I took comfort that he had tasted it. Then guilt for thinking that, for wanting him to know what he did to me, to his children, the bullying and mean-spiritedness and betrayal, what it felt like and I repeatedly pounded my chest in Al Chets in shul that holiday. Who was that real part of me that thought such thoughts and suffered such guilt, which co-existed with my desire to take away my parents' suffering? I sorted through my multiple identities and it was clear. It was real and it was me, that shadow: not

another dissociated identity.

September and October were consumed by road trips from Los Angeles to the East Bay Area and Walnut Creek where my mother remained hospitalized after her fall. I was the one who could talk to doctors, and Irene who lived next door to my parents, was the one with medical power of attorney for both parents. Irene and I and the doctors were in constant communication. I was the family RN and I took charge, always consulting Irene. I kept thinking, *if not me, who?* Always, I hoped my parents would change, they would not be who they had always been. They would suddenly be the dreamed-of good parents. My father would apologize. My mother would know me.

It's common knowledge that falls often herald a downward spiral in the frail elderly. After my mother transferred from hospital to skilled nursing facility and back to the hospital, she was in far worse condition than originally. Her COPD and congestive heart failure put her at special risk and her prognosis was guarded.

When my husband Steve and I were not working we were on the road in our aubergine four-door Saturn. "We can put this car on autopilot, it knows the way," I half-joked as we traveled yet again up the I-5, making our regular stops for coffee and gas. Steve taught in a year-round inner city school and was off-track that fall. My twelve other siblings managed to carve their own increments of time and travel until very near the end. My father was drinking. I gave him reports of Mom's condition. I thought, *Please be different. Please care.* He grunted. He refused rides to the hospital to see her. He was suspicious that "she is seeing other men, why should I leave home to see her." It was the gin speaking, I thought. Maybe it was always the gin. How else to explain his mood swings from sane and depressed to crazed and delusional? When he was sober, he did not even remember what he said and did when he drank. He denied his cruel words and actions. "I have not ever broken even one of the Ten Commandments," he told me, bragging. I rolled my eyes.

I was aware of an inner Darkness that followed my time with my parents. I awakened from deep sleep with several severe esophageal spasms. In my dreams I was pursued by someone trying to hurt me. Steve protected me, but the attacker plunged his hand out, found an opening, stabbed me with a knife. Other dreams featured unfamiliar shapes of things invading me, enlarging and receding, sprouting tentacles and threatening me, invading my space, trying to destroy me. I tried to find complete darkness to get away from them, so I wouldn't see them, but they always found their way into the darkness and they caught me. Then I had to wake up or be destroyed. *This is only a dream*, I told myself, waking up.

Back home in LA, Dr. D, my therapist, tentatively suggested that no matter how remote the possibility, perhaps I might consider the opportunity to forgive my mother. I felt unheard; he was not grasping my situation.

"For what?" For not protecting me; I knew that, but I asked anyway in case there was another answer.

Dr. D fixed his steady gaze on me.

"I don't understand forgiveness," I told him. "To me, it feels like an accusation, like I'm accusing her of something she has to admit, before she can be forgiven. No. Why would I want to do that? She has dementia, her memory is gone, she cannot comprehend what she did. Her old self disappeared with her mind. It's too late for forgiveness." I spoke from the conflicted place of caregiver for a mother who, at best, failed to protect me and decided to not see my father's heinous behavior.

I could not see beyond my mother. If I had opened to the idea of forgiveness, would that opening

have helped *me*? Maybe forgiveness wasn't just about her. The whole discussion circled disturbingly close to concepts of a wrathful God, very much like my father, and I just wouldn't go there.

Wednesday morning my brother Billy showed up early and Steve, Billy and I went together to drop our lab-mix, Tasha, off at the kennel on our way out of town again, back up to see Mom in Northern California. We stopped only twice along the way, going directly to the hospital in Walnut Creek. We found my older sisters Harriet and Mary Lou, with children and grandchildren, saying their goodbyes to Mom. They all had to return to the Pacific Northwest the following day. They had been out to see Dad at the house as well, and he still wouldn't visit his wife of sixty-seven years.

My youngest brother Paul drove ninety minutes after working all night to see Mom in the early mornings and to help with her care, bathing and cleaning his mother before going home to sleep. He may not have known he was her favorite, but all the rest of us did, and he was our favorite, too, the thirteenth and last child, the one who did not have to move aside for the next one.

Friday morning my daughter Jess surprised us by taking a cab from BART to the hospital. She was living in Oakland and "I just had a feeling I should come this morning, not later, not to wait for a ride," she announced. She took time from teaching at the Jewish preschool in Berkeley where they totally understood. "Go," they told her. "Go to your grandmother." Mom was doing poorly and I called my six absent brothers and sisters to come say goodbye to her in her hospital bed.

Minutes after making the calls, those already present gathered around her. My sisters Ruthie, Sharon, Linny, and Bethany with her husband Vince, my daughter Jess, and my husband Steve and I formed a spontaneous circle around my mother, arms around each other. Jess began to sing to her, the others followed. Strong, deep feelings flowed from person to person around the circle, skipping me. I saw this happening and I did not feel it. *I hope I don't break the circle.* Tears ran down Bethany's face, and Jess's. Their hearts were full. They felt something that bypassed me entirely. It felt inauthentic to me and I detached, or vice versa. They said the room was filled with love, they felt it. I still did not. I noticed Ruthie was involved and she was also watching me. My eighty-five year-old mother said she saw her mother and her father; her face was beaming. "I feel joy," she said. Lack of oxygen, I thought. Hallucinations occur when the brain is deprived of O₂. Not that I didn't envy the artificial bliss of all the others in the room... They were deluded, but I was the broken one; my feelings were detached from me. I felt empty. Steve and I had talked about how much more I dissociated and "went away" around my family, but *why now*? When more family arrived, I thought to myself, *I need to talk to my people, my Parts*, my alternate identities, as I left my mother's bedside for a break.

My alternate identities, or Parts, had my feelings, not me, and now I wanted them, now I saw what I was missing. *I was missing.* But who would be clinical, who would advocate, who would be sure the right things were done in hospital if not my detached self? I used my medical position to expand my baseline detachment. Maybe that had something to do with why mother didn't even know my name.

I shoved that thought away, too, forgetting it.

A new specialist was at Mom's bedside when I returned and he began discussing Mom's cardiopulmonary compromise with me, in front of her as she drifted between pain and sleep. She had a hemothorax on top of her COPD and CHF and her broken ribs. She was filling up with fluids.

"I want to take her to surgery to place a chest tube," the doctor said, when I inquired why he reduced the diuretic she needed for her congestive heart failure as well as for the fluid in her lungs. He would only place the chest tube in the OR under general, not local, anesthesia.

"Do you think she'll tolerate general anesthesia for surgery?" I asked.

He looked uncomfortable. "Well, it could go either way..."

"Do you know that my mother has an Advanced Directive on file?"

He looked even more uncomfortable. "No, I didn't know that."

"Maybe you should consider what my mother wants," I began, barely concealing my contempt for his assumptions. My angry Part, Cat, was out and I was about to say something insulting that I might regret. I tempered my remarks, "You know how painful a chest tube is. Would it be a stop-gap, or would it help her get better and go to a skilled nursing home?" I could hear the volume of my voice rising.

"Well no, she's still going to d-"

My mother opened her eyes and interrupted both of us.

"Shut up!"

The doctor and I turned to her in her bed, surprised. She looked directly at him and said, "Shut up and listen to her!"

He looked stunned. I was shocked myself. My mother's language was invariably ladylike; she never said "shut up."

He excused himself and said he was going to check her chart and would come back to tell us his plan of care.

He did not return. A nurse came back instead and told me that the specialist had reinstated her diuretic, ordered "comfort care," morphine as needed p.r.n. for pain, and he signed off her case to the hospitalist on call.

My sisters, brother-in-law, and Steve applauded that news. I was less elated. My mother was dying. I wasn't sure I was helping her, I questioned whether making the distinction between prolonging her life and prolonging her death was really useful to her and I questioned my own intentions at every crossroad. In the end it was her own Advanced Directive that was honored.

Everyone agreed that was Mom's final lucid day before her lapse into semi-consciousness.

My sister Ruthie and I took turns sleeping in the cot in Mom's hospital room, being with her 24/7. We were the ones who stepped forward, responding to a gut feeling that we didn't want Mom left all alone, especially overnight. It was obvious that if we did not do this, no one would. The deeper reason was very deeply buried: maybe I would find a way to connect with her before she died. *If I'm a good girl, my parents will love me.* Throughout my mother's roller coaster of alternating pain, fear, agitation and joy I was planning mundane details of timing. Would she die tomorrow or the week after next? Would I be back at work for my professional development meeting? Would I sit shiva at home? Which things would have to be put on hold? My planning mind was comfortably unfeeling, unemotional.

Mom's supplemental oxygen didn't relieve her pain, it wasn't intended to, but it could relieve her air hunger. She cried continually, "Someone help me, please, help me!" because of her pain. The nurses told me they were used to patients crying for help in their delirium all day and night. Their complacency appalled me. Irene and I asked repeatedly, "Isn't there something to help her?" I pushed a little. "She has real pain. What pain scale are you using?" They were not giving the p.r.n. morphine that was ordered "as needed." I insisted and she was started on a continuous morphine drip and no longer cried out incessantly in pain. When she cried out now, it was for Leo, her husband. "Where is Leo?" Instead of "Help me, Help me," it was now "Leo, Leo, Where is Leo?"

Early Sunday afternoon I phoned my father from the hospital cafeteria and told him that Mom was on continuous morphine for pain and we had family members to drive him in to see her. Out-of-towners were going back and forth between Mom in the hospital and Dad at home anyway. I held my hand over my free ear to shut out the commotion and blare of the hospital cafeteria. I wasn't used to cell phones yet, and this one was borrowed from Bethany.

"I said she was crying day and night with her pain and nothing was helping, Dad, that's why they started the morphine drip."

"You're killing her, she doesn't need morphine. You're killing her, Catherine," he said loud and clear. I felt like he'd whacked me in the head. From behind. *What the hell?*

I thought, *you've* been killing Mom slowly for sixty-seven years, beating down her spirit, destroying her soul. You accuse others of what *you* have been doing. But I didn't say it.

"No one is killing Mom," I answered.

I saw everyone at my table turn to look at me as I said those words. I felt the color drain from my face. I inhaled. "J-just come see her, Dad." I stuttered. "She's asking for you now. You can talk to her doctors yourself. We have drivers here and our cars are big enough to drive you in." I wanted to get off the phone. I hated him.

"I don't need to talk to anyone and I don't need to see Mama. I know what I know," he said. My eyes were starting to roll back in my head. I pushed my yogurt away from me, fiddled with a napkin.

"No, I will not visit her, she means nothing to me," he said. I heard him swig a sip of something before speaking again. "You are killing Momma," he repeated.

I swallowed hard. "Do you want to be kept informed of what's happening? It sounds like you don't," I said. I hung up the phone without hearing his answer.

My color returned and my face flushed hot as I reported our conversation around the cafeteria table to my family. "That asshole, how can he sit there and spout that shit!" Steve vented and then stopped himself. Privately, Steve had been raging about my father for over one week and I could not hear him without hearing my father's assaults. The yelling brought back my "Bad" Dad, which made me "go away" somewhere, which was not helping me. My kids, Sofia and Adam, as well as Max, our future son-in-law, began deflecting some of that and telling Steve he needed to ventilate to someone besides me, maybe even outside the family. But he wasn't able to stop. He kept going on about how abusive my Dad was, repeatedly.

In his anger, Steve realized if he continued cursing my father he risked alienating his own children, who only saw that their father was calling Grandpa hateful names. I had let our kids believe their contemptible Grandpa was harmless. Now our children were adults and they would come to their own conclusions. I knew that protecting them had been necessary when they were growing up, that Parts of me were convinced their ignorance would leave them unscathed. *If I hide it, it will go away.* I created that quandary. Peter also had been ranting about Grandpa for days. "That asshole calls up all the charm and manipulation of a lifelong alcoholic," Peter said, "and he uses it on Irene, who falls for it every time." Both men were speaking from hearts of love for their wives.

My alter Katie still had the delusional hope my Dad would turn around and be a mensch. The downside of Katie, my openhearted child Part, was that she pushed me to find and see Good Daddy when it no longer had survival value. Katie pressured me behind the scenes and I told Steve I'd decided to try to talk to my father one more time, to stop by his house later after having dinner with Linny. Steve detoured directly to the

front house, to Irene and Peter's. He would no longer step foot in my father's home. I entered the backyard cottage alone. I sat in my mother's overstuffed chair in the dark. The only light came from Dad's ever-present television.

My father was in his recliner to my left, drinking. He wore a white undershirt and boxer shorts, barely covering his oversized belly. He propped his swollen, reddened left leg on a footstool. He muted the TV. He shook his head, refusing to hear any information I had for him. He denied any need to be with Mom, to console her. "Just stop, Catherine. Stop! There is nothing you can tell me. You are killing Mama! You have nothing to say to me!" He wasn't yelling, it was worse; he was spitting his words at me. "I know what I know. You are killing Mama!" My throat constricted, Katie receded and I became unable to speak. His words were daggers. He twisted them and went off on a rant.

"Ginny never loved me, she always wanted someone better." He slurped his martini and some of it dribbled onto his shirt. "You are killing her and she doesn't need morphine, she doesn't need to see me, she doesn't mean it when she asks for me, she probably has some handsome doctors taking care of her, that's what she wants." He sputtered. I listened to his madness. I remembered wishing they would both die when I was a little girl, my "orphan" fantasy.

If he had shown one kindness, said one word of encouragement or even changed the tone of his voice to reflect some compassion; if he had agreed to be at Mom's bedside for her, however minimally he could manage it, I was ready to believe he was Good Daddy and that all I went through did not really happen. That fantasy could have been sustained. But his monstrous words splattered like spittle throughout the small living room; I could almost see them bounce off his silent television across from us, ricochet off my glasses onto my fake suede pantsuit and drip down his walls and under our feet; body fluids.... I realized that love and sex were the same to my father.

When I was in sixth grade, I had no conscious memory of my father's nighttime explorations of my body in Moline, Illinois. We'd moved to California and although sex permeated our new home, I was sexually ignorant and not very curious in my pre-teen years. My body was changing in alarming ways that I didn't want to know.

I was puzzled one day when my mother accompanied my sister Harriet upstairs to my bedroom to talk to me alone. No one else was in my room. They sat on my bed. My mother cleared her throat, her fingers tapped her knees through the fabric of her cotton housedress, as if she had a keyboard balanced there. Her legs were shapely; even after eleven children she never had varicose veins and she was still petite. Her deep brown eyes darted between Harriet and me.

"Catherine," she started, "did you tell the neighbor girl, Florence, that Harriet has a friend who had a baby without being married?"

I realized there was something prim and proper about Florence and her family, and I liked them, they seemed predictable. One evening her parents came calling, to welcome our family to the neighborhood. They were clearly inspecting our home, our life style. Very pleasantly, they toured everyone's room, noted the huge dining room table, the dormitory appearance of my bedroom, deciding if it was appropriate for Florence to visit and play with me. We passed the test.

My mother and sister looked at me with that unmistakable expression of expectation – I better get this right.

"Well, uh, yeah. In Moline, Judy, she did have a baby, right? I heard you talking about it," I said.

“Is it a secret?”

“Mom, tell her,” Harriet urged. She sent a pleading look to Mom as she brushed a wisp of strawberry blonde hair from her freckled face.

“People think things about you if you have friends who get pregnant when they’re not married,” my mother said. “They think you’re not a good girl if your friends do things like that.”

It was 1957.

“Like what?”

No one had ever said “sex” to me or explained what it was. In this house that reeked sex, I had no idea what they were talking about.

“Do you know how pregnancy happens?” Harriet asked, and I said, “A man and a woman love each other.”

My mother smiled a small bemused smile and my sister rolled her big blue eyes.

My mother said, “Do you know what the man and woman do to make a baby?”

“Do?”

A long moment passed before my sister told me, in my mother’s presence, “The man puts his penis in the woman’s vagina.”

My mother said nothing. She bit her lips. Her hair was a little disheveled, strands of dark chestnut hair escaped over her forehead. She lowered her gaze, cleared her throat.

“Yes. And they’re supposed to be married and they sometimes aren’t,” Harriet said.

“No.” I felt nauseated. *In her pee pee?* A very frightened, very young voice broke through inside me. *Cathie*. My hands searched behind me, under my pillow where I kept my threadbare teddy bear.

I felt a sickening sensation build in my body. I wanted to throw up. My stomach hurt, I was sweating unaccountably and I was starting to cry as I felt the sweat trickle down my back and I tasted something sour when I coughed, and I gagged.

They did not appear to notice.

I thought about the game I used to play with my little sisters in Moline, hiding under the blanket on the top bunk when we finally got bunk beds, guessing if our panties were on or off. It was a guessing game I made up. All three younger sisters joined in the game. It seemed innocent at the time. Games aside, I wondered, what *did* happen to my panties in the night back before we made a game out of a distant memory? Then I refused to think about it. I tried to push my alter Cathie away where she held those things, those memories, sequestered from consciousness for such a long time.

We were still sitting stiffly on my bed. My hands clenched and unclenched the body of my teddy bear in my lap. I wondered if Mom and Harriet really saw me. They seemed oblivious to my nausea, my sweat, my gagging. Did they think I was simply *embarrassed*? I was not embarrassed. I could not understand my flashback or what filled me with such shame.

“Look, these are just the facts of life, Catherine,” Harriet said. “I didn’t know you didn’t know. It looks bad when you talk about my friends doing it because then people think I’m like her – so you should know what you’re talking about, that’s all. Good girls wait.”


My mother nodded her head approvingly. She was supportive with Harriet and it was clear I had done something very wrong. It seemed like more than just talking to Florence. It felt like I was bad deep down. I choked back tears and bile. I hid my face with my arm and I turned away from them. The mattress lurched

when they stood up and I heard the door click shut as they left without saying another word.

Something was wrong with me. With no clear memory to hang my sensations on, my feelings were signs of madness, and that I was bad.

I dashed to the bathroom when they left and I locked the door. I ran the shower over my tall little girl body and I hit my head against the blue tile walls again and again on purpose, crying, for a feeling of recognition that was still amorphous. I washed and washed myself but the shame remained that I was bad, and that I hadn't known.

Before I could know where those thoughts were leading, Cathie went back into hiding. I locked my feelings away and refused to think of it again. I didn't know they held clues I would search for many years later, searching for what was wrong with me, what *did* happen? I didn't know that incest itself isolates its victims, separating me from the rest of my family.



My heart hardened and I made myself stay seated next to my father, despite my history of "going away." I let his rage flow over me. Bad Daddy was out in full force, accusing me of murder, accusing his frail dying wife of who-knows-what. My neck stiffened. I stayed to hear his whole insane ramble. Cat wanted out. I felt my jaw harden, keeping her back, thinking *this is only reactive anger, not real courage*, holding her in. A burning feeling blazed through my abdomen, punched me in my groin. I shuddered. An internal voice whimpered, "Don't hurt me," and I shushed her. Cathie joined us. I was unaware that three Parts had joined together, supporting me. What I felt was a gathering strength where Baby's fear might ordinarily tip the balance in my father's direction. But my alter Baby stayed cautiously in the background, my terror was out of reach.

"What about ME, what about MY needs?" Dad said. "My mother loved my brother more, she wished I was dead."

My words pushed slowly, carefully out into the dim room, barely a whisper. "Your mother cannot tell us what she did or didn't wish, Dad. What you can do now is go back to the hospital for Mom. She needs you."

"Her family should apologize to me! They always thought I wasn't good enough for her. I'm just a big dumb *immigrant*. Well, I'll show them. I'll show them all. And YOU; you're sitting there thinking the same thing about me. But I've always loved you."

I was this close to knowing the end of the riddle, for the pieces to fall into place. In his mind he had always loved me. This was where he always took me hostage. He had "loved" me in his mind and that was his justification. I gasped at what the instantaneous flashback evoked: terror rose up in my throat. My chest pounded. Baby joined us now, terror held in check by Cat, and I could only think that a little girl should be able to kiss her father goodnight safely. He should not do the secret overwhelming things. Good Daddy should not become Bad Daddy, if there ever was a Good Daddy. I slowed down my thoughts. How did I stop him back then, when even now I could barely speak, I was so afraid...?

Back then, the little girl who was me peed, and he stopped.

Connections vaulted into awareness, the sense of regression, the terrified little girl peeing on her father... I felt seasick. I wanted to numb out and disappear. It was intolerable to even think about what my father stopped doing when Cathie took over and I "went away" so long ago. Back then, I went into the wall. So many times... finding the torn wallpaper and scrunching into the wall. The memory instantly retreated, I pushed it away.

Sitting by Dad's side in his cottage, I felt an abyss of sorrow. I hated him. In the shadows, he could not see that my face was wet. I had nothing more to say anyway. Since I was a little girl he had not seen me cry and he would not see it now. I had been only hazily aware of my Parts in this interaction, aware of their felt-sense in my body. I rose from Mom's chair in the gloomy, TV illuminated room and I saw myself out.

I drove Steve to our motel and I returned to the hospital to my mother.

Switching Parts, remembering, and pushing memories away – it was all exhausting. I was weary. Maybe the safest memories were buried in brains that could no longer remember, I thought when I approached my mother's bed. Mom did not know me, and I felt that I did not really know her. Our connection, when it came, happened at a level beneath our names. When I asked my mother if she knew my name, a child Part was setting her up; and once she gave the feared answer – she did not know my name – I unexpectedly learned that my Catherine self was less important because our interactions were real. Our connection was not based on a mother-child bond we would never have, but rather on my entering her present moment.

She knew she was dying. "How do I do this? How do I let go?" she asked me. Our faces were inches apart. There was desperation in her voice. Her eyes implored me. I had a lot of answers but I did not have her answer. I could have told her it's the easiest thing she would ever do, to say yes to death, to drop away from the living, but it didn't look easy for her. I held her hand to my face. Her skin was absurdly soft. She would never allow this intimacy if she were fully rational. She would shake me off, turn away, change the subject. Or maybe I would push this intimacy away myself. Feelings were so difficult. I thought about what Dr. D suggested about forgiveness and it seemed irrelevant.

We seemed connected in a larger sphere, players in something bigger than Catherine and Virginia. At the very end, my mother and I were both guileless and wide open, all parts of me. I surrendered to the pleading expression in her eyes. I did not push it away. I trusted it.

Who are you, I thought, feeling my way, feeling her heart.

Ruthie and I both knew that our goodbyes to Mom were complete at the same time. We had each said, "I will not leave her," and after those six days I felt an unshakeable certainty that my mother and I had concluded everything we could with each other. I could return home. Ruthie reported an identical certainty. Back home, I knew I could only grieve what had been gone for a long time already with my mother.

From Los Angeles, I phoned Irene daily for reports and found that Mom was moved to an appropriate hospice-care room on the same floor in the hospital. She rarely seemed conscious. Her fingers often seemed busy on an invisible keyboard.

After eighteen days the grandchild who had stayed away out of fear, Billy's daughter Amanda, showed up and Mom opened her eyes and said "Amanda." They sat together and smiled. When Amanda left the room briefly, she returned to find that Grandma had died.

"What was the wisdom of your mother's life?" the rabbi asked me in my shiva house. I had no ready answer. *Doesn't he know I can't talk about that?*

I wanted to believe she did the best she could.

Andrew *by Chuck Tripi*

How easy it is to conflate the little stream
still going by the monastery where he lived
his canonical hours, for sixty-five years,
with the Paulinskill River, to see it as one,
his vespers and complines, his matins
and lauds, his twenty-five minutes a day
with Shakespeare and Francis Thompson.

We walked in the evening, aware of spring,
of the dying out of his confreres one by one,
peered a little into the infirmary window
at all of the inevitabilities, at those frail,
wasting men, and I asked him a question:
Seventy monks when you came, only nine left,
does it trouble you, Andrew? He said only *no*.

The river goes by the Millside Cafe in Lafayette
and is gone, making its way through concrete
bridge abutments, postulates and pine forests
to the Delaware. A table next to the window
can still be had most mornings at breakfast,
over the torrent where Andrew goes by now,
gone and becoming, becoming and gone.



Buddha

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Haiku

An Introduction by Adele Kenny

Haiku describe things in a very few words—they never tell, intellectualize, or state feelings outrightly. They never use figures of speech (similes, metaphors, etc.) and should not rhyme. Brevity is key, along with a sense of immediacy and often a sense of relationship between nature and human nature. Some haiku poets feel that one measure of a haiku's success is its ability to be read in a single breath. Most will agree that a successful haiku is characterized by crystal-cutting clarity and in-the-moment presence. Haiku are about spiritual realities, the realities of our every-day lives, and the realities of human and natural world relationships. Most importantly, haiku honor the inside of an experience through attention to the outside.

Two nights,
a robin on the roof—
I come home.

—Bob Rosenbloom

The cold wind stings—
a new name
etched in granite.

—Linda Radice

We walk the cedar bridge,
the mailbox
still empty.

—Basil Rouskas

Seedlings take root
in cold ground—
I wait.

—Nancy Lubarsky

Forsythia sways
unkept promises
linger ...

—Wendy Rosenberg

CONTEST WINNERS

Last spring, in observance of Arbor Day, the Carriage House Poetry Series and *Tiferet Journal* hosted a poetry contest in association with the Fanwood, NJ Shade Tree Commission, offering a cash prize and publication in *Tiferet*. Submissions were to be poems in any style or form, previously unpublished, and containing reference to a tree or trees (not necessarily poems *about* trees). The judges looked for entries characterized by technical proficiency, striking imagery, and strong sound quality. Over 700 poems were entered from poets throughout the United States and from Canada, Ireland, France, India, and Nigeria.

Andrena Zawinski's winning poem appears below, followed by those of the three finalists.

Singing Bird Haibun *by Andrena Zawinski*

“Sitting quietly, doing nothing, spring comes,
and the grass grows by itself.” —Basho

It is not a steely-eyed egret nor heft of pelican but just a singing bird that catches my fancy
from a balcony perched across from pines lining the marina. Here I make watch of another
shifting sky, distant buoy sounding swells in the bay, common robin chiming in on the wind.

resting in my palm
it might pulse at the heart line
practice its pitch

But this bird makes its roost in the forked trunk, where branches droop heavy with cones.
Like this robin, I try to perfect a voice in the intimate language of birds, call back at it,
parroting the rise and fall of its wistful warbling, practicing the melodic whistling.

the robin carols
in a cathedral of pine
all feather and trill

Everything readies for something - above, wide wings of dark crows fan the horizon. Below,
a ray steers clear of a row. A dog splashes into the water, his boy crying for a lost oar.
Twilight settles on tapping riggings and masts, breeze in the tinny chimes, spring in the song.

the clouds feathering
disappear into sunset
the bird still singing

Closed for Renovations *by Andrea Potos*

Keats House, Hampstead

I loitered by the gate
until a man from the Heath Library
came up and mentioned the gap
in the wrought iron fence:
But you didn't bear that from me, he winked.
I slipped through
in a misty drizzle

to the other side
where Keats sat enthroned
in a May evening, among the grass,
the thicket and the fruit-tree wild.
All week the nightingale
called him to come out with his pen,
his loose scraps of paper.
Darkling I listen he told it, beside
the plum tree long replaced

by another, the mulberry
still melodious with green, winding past
the near meadows, over
the still-stream, his absence
around me as clear
as presence, a notion
he would have nodded to.

A Walk in the Fields

by Elizabeth Drewry

My father has gone ahead
down the gravel path to the gate,
culling from the pantry

a treats sack for his cows--
stale saltines, rubbery carrots,
half head of iceberg.

At the first field's edge,
I scuff at dry dirt under corn stubs,
a brown so plain, necessary relief

for white of tornado-wrenched oak,
split to the root ball. The cow path
crooks through pastures of alfalfa

mown and dried, rolled for winter feed.
My white-haired father,
with his stick and feedbag,

is visible now among black cows
that gather for no one else.
It is four o'clock,

the hour of low sun and the nimbus
over baled hay, and I do not call out,
do not raise my arm.

The First Time

by Ellen Kombiyil

In a dry expanse, before there was grass, the
thought of a body open and warm -- it was the Lord's
invention after all, thought into being -- hands
wrapped around his own arms, interlaced thumbs and
his face to the sun, feet
in the air, for he was lonely with
no one to kiss, only emptiness. The
day he created clouds he scraped his nails
down his back, a struck match, and lightning hammered
again and again. Though it sparked through
him it was all for them,
the seedlings that sprang like dewdrops
out of condensation of breath, that ripples on
ripples shook concentric circles, and the first tree lost its blossoms.

*Note: The last words in each line, read vertically top to bottom,
are a haiku by Seishi Yamaguchi*

A Ghalib Poem

by Sunil Uniyal

Reprinted from Sunil's book of translations, Tears of Blood- Selected Verses of Ghalib. Mirza Muhammad Asadullah Khan 'Ghalib' (1797-1869) is acknowledged by many as the King of Urdu Ghazal. He belonged to a period when the Mughal Empire in India was on its way out and was ultimately replaced by the British power. The ghazals in his *Diwan-e-Ghalib* mirror the vulnerability of Man, his grief and sense of loss, and his soul's longing for eternal beauty and love. The strains of Sufi thought are clearly discernible in his poetry and he remains, to this day, the most oft-quoted poet of Urdu language and literature.

In the world the Beloved has manifested Himself uniquely
If His Beauty wasn't Self-seeking, we wouldn't be existing

At each place and time is the cacophony of 'is' and 'is not'
Madness and self-possession have, in the mirror, no meaning

Knowledge is not all, nor is the fruit of worship known
Last drops are World and Faith in the cup of unknowing

Must-Have Books for Your Poetry Library:

Five Mini-Reviews by Adele Kenny



Midwestern Memories by Nancy Scott
Aldrich Press, 2014, 65 Pages

Nancy Scott's *Midwestern Memories* is a multidimensional collection of poems that explores the author's journey toward the truth about her early life and her family, the truth about love, and the truth about herself. She examines her past through reflections on her parents' divorce, a cousin's death and, among other things, what it was like to be a child during the Second World War. Painful memories, sometimes touched with wry humor, speak to such themes as infidelity, emotional abandonment, and the places memories take us. Nancy's skill with understatement and subtle irony blend with her aptitude for compression to create a cycle of complex poems that stay with the reader as if the underlying story weren't only Scott's but somehow, strangely, the reader's own.

From "Battle":

After twenty-five years, Dad finally walked out,
but a glitch in the law prevented divorce.
With his ragged heart barely pumping, he paraded
his red-haired mistress. Only by his dying

was Mother victorious. ...



Hurt, The Shadow by Carole Stone
 Dos Madres Press, 2013, 70 Pages

Edward Hopper had a single model for his art, his painter/wife Josephine (Jo), with whom he shared an unconventional lifestyle. Sadly, after Hopper died in 1967, Jo left her husband's and her own artistic estates to the Whitney Museum, which disposed of most her work and has not shown any of it since her death in 1968. Unlike her husband, who remains widely appreciated, Jo has fallen into obscurity, eclipsed by the man who when asked, "Isn't it nice to have a wife who paints?" replied, "It stinks." Jo herself wrote in her diary, "No one ever called him handsome or attractive when I married him. It was the long, lean and hungry that got me." In this collection, Stone articulates Josephine Hopper's long, lean, and hungry journey. The poems are perceptive and skillfully written—brilliant insights into the life behind the life, the woman behind the man.

From "Hotel By A Railroad, 1952"

... Those tracks
 go somewhere,

but I'll be here forever,
 older than in the last painting.
 The mirror

in the silver-gilt frame
 is cloudy.
 I'm not in it.



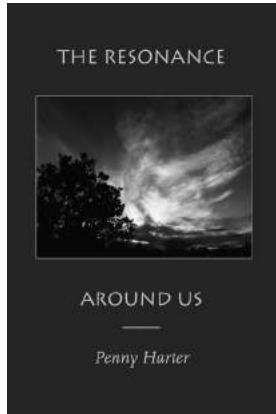
Jackleg Opera: Collected Poems, 1990-2013 by BJ Ward
North Atlantic Books, 2013, 259 Pages

BJ Ward is a poet and teacher whose work has earned numerous publications, prizes, and a deeply felt respect among both colleagues and readers. It's pure pleasure to find the poems in Ward's earlier books collected in this volume, along with thirty-five new poems not previously published in book form. Along with a straightforward style, one of Ward's most striking gifts (and there are many) is his ability to create rich emotional centers that take us to the heart of the experiences they describe with deep poetic sentiment that never stumbles into sentimentality. There is always clarity of form, style, and expression as Ward looks through the fissures in everyday events to show the universal richness of life as it is. Ward's poems do what poetry does best: they tell us that although the specific details of our experiences may be different, we're not alone.

From "Development":

Karen and I made love
on the front lawn of the mansion
one cul-de-sac down,
four feet away
from what would be
a window cracked
open to allow the outside
in.

But the houses
were just fields then.
And we were wild.



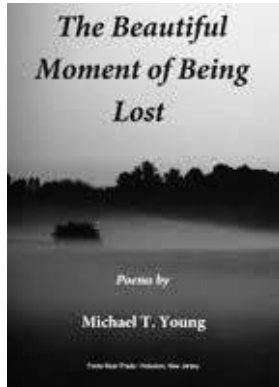
The Resonance Around Us by Penny Harter
Mountains and Rivers Press, 2013, 77 Pages

Compressed and compelling, the lyric poems in this collection are touched by the spiritual awareness that is a signature quality of Harter's work. Her incorporation of nature and human nature shows us our place in the world and whispers of our connection to the divine. Containing both free verse and a series of haibun (a genre of Japanese poetry that combines prose and haiku), this book is powered by the author's observations of daily life and her reflections on losses and love, all underscored by Harter's devotion to the particular and an ineffable sense of something mystical. Technically impressive and filled with the inner music that Harter always achieves in her work, these poems present intimate treatments of reality and being. They tell us that even loss is a gift—that what we had, we will always have. Such poems resonate in the reader's consciousness long after the reading is done and the book is closed.

From "The Great Blue":

Let us praise the heron's motionless poise, the weaving dance of sea grass, the quicksilver
glimmers of tiny fish, the scribbles migrating pelicans give to the sky. They need no translation.

young again
in last night's dream
a shooting star



The Beautiful Moment of Being Lost by Michael T. Young
Poets Wear Prada, 2014, 77 Pages

Michael T. Young is a wordsmith of the highest order who dazzles his readers with imagery, sound, and mastery of line. The poems in this, his most recent collection, are informed by Young's sharp eye and sensitive ear, as well as by the immediacy he creates through memory and imagination: his poems tell us that the ways in which we remember the past give us ways to imagine the future. Rich in narrative and depiction, these poems are generous and expansive, blessed by an essential honesty and by Young's unconditional acceptance of life's contradictory nature. Insightful and intricately tuned to world and to spirit, Young's work is intelligent, focused, and fluent. Graced by the poet's sensibility, this collection wakes the mind to new realities.

From "Crickets":

I thought, *this is how a mind works*,
even in the dark, when bats come out
feeding on what floats to the surface of a day
because that is what night is:
the thin line at the top that bends light
and changes everything. ...

Contributors

DANI ANTMAN is a Kabbalistic healer, spiritual counselor, artist and ordained Interfaith Minister. She is a graduate of the Barbara Brennan School of Healing and A Society of Souls, a three year training in Integrated Kabbalistic Healing, where she was senior teacher for 9 years. Dani has a certificate in Somatic Experiencing, the work of Peter Levine, which is used to treat trauma and PTSD. She teaches Kabbalistic meditation and classes on The Tree of Life throughout the United States and Europe. Dani has a full time healing practice in Santa Barbara, California, and is also available as a wedding officiant. For more info: www.daniantman.com or www.divinewrapsody.com

MARCIA BILYK is a photographer, writer, hospice volunteer, spouse, and part-time pastor. Her MDiv. degree is from Drew Theological School. Her favorite learning environments - besides life - are the Iowa Summer Writers Festival and Maine Media Workshops.

WILL CARES was born in Meadville, PA in 1964. He is a self-taught piano improviser and composer, novelist, art teacher, and artist. He holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from Eastern Michigan University in Ypsilanti, MI and a Master of Fine Arts degree from Wayne State University in Detroit, MI. He lives in Ann Arbor, MI with his wife and two sons. See more of his work at www.willcares.com.

ALFRED CORN'S tenth book of poems, titled *Tables*, appeared last year with Press53. He has also published a novel, titled *Part of His Story*; two collections of essays; and *The Poem's Heartbeat*, a study of prosody. His work as a poet brought him the Guggenheim fellowship, an Award in Literature from the Academy of Arts and Letters, and one from the Academy of American Poets. In 2014 Barrow Street Press will publish his eleventh volume of poems, titled *Unions*, and Eyewear will publish his second novel, *Miranda's Book*.

ANGELA D'AGOSTINO lives in Maplewood, NJ with her husband and two daughters. Freda's Truth is her second story to be published.

CHARD DENIORD'S poetry collections include *Asleep in the Fire*, *Sharp Golden Thorn*, *Night Mowing*, and *The Double Truth*, as well as a collaborative project, *Speaking in Turn*. DeNiord was the founder and director of the Spirit and Letter Workshop with Jacqueline Gens in Patzquaro, Mexico and the founder and director of the New England College MFA Program in Poetry. He currently teaches English and Creative Writing at Providence College. In addition to teaching writing, deNiord has also taught comparative religions and philosophy and holds a Master of Divinity from Yale. As well, deNiord has conducted many interviews with senior American poets. Many of these interviews are collected in the book *Sad Friends*, *Drowned Lovers*, *Stapled Songs*, which also includes essays. To learn more about Chard deNiord please visit: <http://charddeniord.com/>.

STEPHANIE DICKINSON lives in New York City. Her novel *Half Girl* and novella *Lust Series* are published by Spuyten Duyvil. Her work appears in *Hotel Amerika*, *Mudfish*, *Weber Studies*, *Nimrod*, *South Loop Review*, *Rhino*, and *Fjords*, among others. *Port Authority Orchids*, a novel in stories for young adults, is available from Rain Mountain Press. Her fictional interview *Heat: An Interview with Jean Seberg* was released as part of *New Michigan Press's* chapbook series. She received the Dr. Neila Seshachari Fiction Award given by *Weber: A Journal of the Contemporary West*. Her new novel *Love Highway* is just out from Spuyten Duyvil.

ELIZABETH DREWRY'S poems have been published or are forthcoming in literary magazines, including *Arkansas Review*, *Broad River Review*, *Kakalak*, *Naugatuck River Review*, and *Yemassee*. She was a finalist for the Joy Harjo 2012 Poetry Competition, and runner-up for the 2013 Pocatigo Poetry contest. She has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize. After a long newspaper career in New York and California, she now lives and writes in the foothills of the Blue Ridge mountains.

MARLA FAITH, an artist and art educator living in Nashville, teaches art and art history at Harpeth Hall School. From Chicago and New York, she has worked in schools and art museums, while continually creating paintings, drawings, and collages. Art is a mirror to the soul, and it has been Ms Faith's spiritual path for as long as she can remember. She also writes mystical poetry, meditates, and is replenished in nature.

SUSAN JACKSON is a New Jersey poet moved to Wyoming. "In Sorrow (The Seeds of Change)" first appeared in the chapbook *All the Light In Between*, Finishing Line Press 2013. Her first poetry collection *Through a Gate of Trees* was published by CavanKerry Press in 2007. Susan is currently working on a new book, *Relocation, On the Headwaters of the Snake River*.

LOIS P. JONES is a host of Pacifica Radio's "Poet's Café" (KPFK 90.7 fm), and co-hosts the long running Moonday reading series in Los Angeles. Some publications include *Tupelo Quarterly*, *Narrative Magazine*, *The Warwick Review*, *American Poetry Journal*, *Nassau Review*, *Askew* and Antioch's *Lunch Ticket* with upcoming work in *Eyewear* and *Texas Review Press*, housed at Sam Houston State University. Her work won honors under judges Fiona Sampson, Kwame Dawes and others. *New Yorker* staff writer Dana Goodyear selected "Ouija" as 2010 Poem of the Year. She is the winner of the 2012 *Tiferet* Prize and the 2012 *Liakoura* Prize. She is the Poetry Editor of *Kyoto Journal*.

ADELE KENNY, founding director of the Carriage House Poetry Series, and *Tiferet's* poetry editor since 2006, is the author of twenty-three books (poetry & nonfiction). Her poems have been published worldwide and have appeared in books and anthologies from Crown, Tuttle, Shambhala, and McGraw-Hill. She is the recipient of various awards, including two NJ State Arts Council poetry fellowships, a Merton Poetry of the Sacred Award, and the 2012 International Book Award for Poetry.

CATHERINE KLATZKER lives and writes in Los Angeles where she is a recently retired pediatric ICU RN. She was a Ragdale Foundation writing resident and her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Emrys Journal*, *The Intima: A Journal of Narrative Medicine*, and in mental health anthologies, among others. *Al Chet* is adapted from her memoir-in-progress. She has coordinated mindfulness retreats for ten years for professional health caregivers coping with death.

ELLEN KOMBIYIL is a poet, writer, and writing teacher. Her work has appeared in *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *Poemeleon*, *Revolution House*, *Spillway and Spry*, and others. She is a 2013 Pushcart nominee, a 2012 Best of the Net nominee, and a Founding Poet of The (Great) Indian Poetry Collective (www.greatindianpoetrycollective.org). Ellen is originally from Syracuse, New York, is a graduate of the University of Chicago and for the past decade has made her home in Bangalore, India.

NANCY LUBARSKY writes from Cranford, New Jersey. She has been an educator for 30 years and is currently a superintendent in Mountainside, New Jersey. She has been published in various journals, including *Edison Literary Review*, *Lips*, *Poetry Nook*, *Poetica*, *Stillwater Review*, *Impact: An Anthology of Short Memoirs*, and in *Great Falls/Passaic River Anthology*. The author of *Tattoos* (Finishing Line Press), she takes inspiration and support from her membership in the Westfield Poetry Workshop group.

HUNE MARGULIES is a poet and philosopher. He is the founder and director of the Martin Buber Institute for Dialogical Ecology. Born in Argentina, Hune has resided in New York since 1980. Margulies has a Ph.D. from Columbia University, and currently teaches at FIT in New York City. He created the concept of “Dialogical Ecology” which he defines as the point of encounter between Martin Buber, Zen and other philosophies of dialogue.

ELISABETH MURAWSKI is the author of *Zorba's Daughter*, which won the 2010 May Swenson Poetry Award, *Moon and Mercury*, and two chapbooks. Hawthornden Fellow 2008. Publications include *The Yale Review*, *The Alaska Quarterly Review*, *FIELD*, and many others.

JEAN NORDHAUS has published six books of poetry. Her most recent collection, *Innocence*, was published by Ohio State University Press. Her previous collection, *The Porcelain Apes of Moses Mendelssohn* from Milkweed Editions, is a set of linked poems about the grandfather of the composer Felix Mendelssohn. She has directed the poetry programs at the Folger Shakespeare Library and served as President of Washington Writer's Publishing House. She is Review Editor of *Poet Lore*.

ANDREA POTOS is the author of four poetry collections, including *We Lit the Lamps Ourselves* (Salmon Poetry) and *Yaya's Cloth* (Iris Press), both of which received Outstanding Achievement Awards in Poetry from the Wisconsin Library Association. Her poem “Closed for Renovations” is part of a larger poetry manuscript entitled *Pilgrim*, which Salmon Poetry will publish in 2015. She lives with her family in Madison.

LINDA RADICE is poet and essayist whose work has been published in numerous journals and anthologies. She was the second place recipient of the 2007 Allen Ginsberg Award, and is a member of the Fanwood Arts Council. She is the author of *The Crabby Lady Chronicles*, and invites you to visit her there at www.CrabbyLadyChronicles.com. Linda resides in North Plainfield, NJ with her husband Sam, a cat, a dog, and an irreverent muse.

GEORGE JISHO ROBERTSON is an 80-year old poet and photographer who lives in South East London. He was a Senior High School Principal for 18 years and then a Zen priest. He now devotes himself to writing and photography, and to family and friendship. The core of his work is about the nature of creativity and how it informs our lives and has informed human culture.

WENDY ROSENBERG is a poet, teacher, certified creativity coach and practitioner, and Reiki master. She is a founding member of the Westfield Poetry Group and the recipient of a Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation teacher scholarship. Wendy is the author of *In the Waiting* (Finishing Line Press). Her poems have appeared in *Lips*, *US 1*, *Exit 13*, *Edison Literary Review*, and *Tiferet*. Wendy lives in Westfield, New Jersey.

BOB ROSENBLOOM is a certified civil trial lawyer who lives in Bound Brook, NJ. His poetry has appeared in *Paterson Literary Review*, *Edison Literary Review*, *US 1 Worksheets*, *Exit 13*, *Big Hammer*, *Stillwater Review*, *Tiferet*, and *Lips*, among others. Finishing Line Press published his chapbook, *Reunion*, in 2010. He is co-director of the Somerset Poetry Group reading series based in Bridgewater, NJ and a charter member of the Westfield Poetry Group.

BASIL ROUSKAS has authored two poetry collections: *Redrawing Borders* and *Blue Heron on Black River* (both from Finishing Line Press). A third collection of his (*The Window That Faces South*) was quarter finalist in the 2014 Mary Ballard poetry Chapbook Prize (Casey Shay Press). Basil has worked in corporate and not-for-profit organizations in the roles of executive, entrepreneur, consultant and leadership coach. Basil has also lectured on leadership development at Cornell University since 1994.

CHUCK TRIPI, a retired airline pilot, is founding partner of The Paulinskill Poetry Project, a boutique press and community resource for poets of the Upper Delaware River Region. Recent poems have appeared in *The Midwest Quarterly*, *Poetry East*, *Sonora Review*, *Spillway*, and in his collection *Carlo and Sophia* (Cyberwit, 2013).

SUNIL UNIYAL, from India, has been writing poems and haiku for the last 30 years and many of these have appeared in e-journals like *Muse India*, *Kritya*, *Notes From the Gean*, *A Hundred Gourds*, *Poetica*, *Sketchbook* and the *Ghazal Page*. He is also engaged in the translation of Hindi, Urdu and Sanskrit poetry. His publications include *The Target is Behind the Sky—Fifty Poems of Kabir* (Low Price Publications, Delhi, 2012) and *Tears of Blood- Selected Verses of Ghalib* (Partridge Publishing, July 2014).

LINDA K. WERTHEIMER, a veteran journalist from Lexington, Mass., is the author of the forthcoming *FAITH ED, Teaching about Religion in an Age of Intolerance* (Beacon Press, August 2015). This essay stems from a memoir she is writing about losing her brother and finding her Jewish faith. She won an honorable mention in the 2011 Tiferet nonfiction writing contest for “*Jew Girl*.” Her website is www.lindakwertheimer.com. Follow her on Twitter @lindakwert. She teaches journalism part-time at Boston University.

ANDRENA ZAWINSKI lives on the city island of Alameda, CA and teaches writing in Oakland. Her full collections of poetry are *Something About* (Blue Light Press, San Francisco)—a PEN Oakland Josephine Miles Award recipient, and *Traveling in Reflected Light* (Pig Iron Press, Youngstown, OH)—a Kenneth Patchen Poetry Prize. Chapbooks include *Greatest Hits 1991-2001* and *Taking the Road Where It Leads*. Andrena is founder of a Bay Area Women’s Poetry Salon and Features Editor at PoetryMagazine.com.

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