



Tiferet

LITERATURE, ART, & THE CREATIVE SPIRIT

WINTER 2015



ARTWORK ©2015 RICHARD STOCKER

POEM

THE MAP of LIGHT *by Rachel Dacus*

PHOTOGRAPHY

STILLNESS *by Therése Halscheid*

STORY

PERILS *by Nahid Rachlin*

ARTWORK

WOMAN of THOUGHT *by Michal (Mitak) Mahgerefteh*

POEM

SAY WHAT YOU WILL *by Joyce Kornblatt*

EXCERPT *from* DINER MYSTIC

SPIRITUAL DEMOCRACY *by Peter Noterman*

POEM TRANSLATION

Ян Вермеер, “Молочница”

(JAN VERMEER, “THE MILKMAID” *by Gennady Katsov*) *Translation by Alexander Cigale*

ARTWORK

DESCENT *by Nancy Wait*

STORY

SHANGRI-LA DOES NOT EXIST *by June Calender*

POEM

TALKIN' KUAN YIN BLUES *by Dennis Kline*

ESSAY

EXOTROPIA *by Goldberry Long*

POEM

WORDS MAKE PONDS *by Madeline Tiger*

ARTWORK

ALIEN BEAUTY *by Howard Berelson*

BOOK REVIEWS

“I ATE the COSMOS for BREAKFAST” *by Melissa Studdard • Review by Adele Kenny*

“YOGA of the IMPOSSIBLE” *by Diane Frank • Review by Leila Fortier*

>SUBMIT YOUR WRITING or AD

WINTER 2015



THE COLORING WELL

RICHARD STOCKER & CATHY SHAP

The Coloring Well provides coloring art for healing and self-awareness on an adult level. We design beautiful products and experiences for people who want to find clarity and calm.

Coloring is a nonjudgmental, non-aggressive, mind-body activity, and we see it as a western form of moving meditation. It is ideally suited for anyone dealing with stress, anxiety, illness, and other challenges because it is also familiar. We've never met anyone who has not enjoyed peaceful moments coloring as a child.

Through more than eleven years of bringing our coloring art to cancer wards, hospitals, prisons, senior centers, and disaster relief areas, and through collaborations with teachers, social workers, and relief organizations, we've learned that coloring has a very positive effect on people physically and spiritually. It relieves physical tension and refreshes the spirit. When people make something beautiful in the midst of challenge or a moment of stress, it becomes a great offering to themselves and those they care about.

The Coloring Well was founded by artist and healer, Richard Stocker, and poet and teacher, Cathy Shap. Learn more about their work and The Coloring Well at www.thecoloringwell.com and visit us on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/thecoloringwell>.



RICHARD STOCKER an artist and body worker, was born and raised in Detroit, Michigan. He studied art at the Vancouver School of Art, York University, and the Art Institute of Chicago. He is a certified Rolfer (Somatic Body Worker) through the Rolf Institute in Boulder, Colorado, and he has maintained a private practice for more than 30 years. With his partner, Cathy Shap, a writer and teacher, he is also the co-founder of The Coloring Well, a company that brings the healing benefits of coloring into the adult world. Richard and Cathy live in Clarkston, Michigan.

Take a closer look at Richard's artwork [HERE](#).

THE MAP of LIGHT *by Rachel Dacus*

One bird outside my window repeats Sweet, Sweet, Sweet,
and another answers Rock, Rock, Rock, Rock.

So I guess I'll soon go to a place called Sweetrock.

I googled and it turns out to be a farm in Portland

where they grow herbs, bake artisanal bread,

and make Swiss pastry. This is how my day proceeds,

by poetry and association, as if I were still five

and asking Mom how my oatmeal

is named by birdsong. A chain

of associations dangles my every day.

When I learn that my breakfast comes from the town

where I went to school on the top floor of a firehouse,

it inclines me to bounce along.

It makes me feel signs calling out to me,

their beaks full of verbs and nouns,

pulls and tugs. I'm familiar now with the subtle snap

of a tether that pulls me through the woods,

between ancient mossed limbs soaring



like obelisks because they too are pulled—
and yes, this is how I navigate.
My day is strung on a web of words
appearing on box flaps and phone poles.
I shouldn't confess that I feel them ringing
tones in my bones, or that spider-silk connections
riffle through me like a stream,
watery ribbons of inkling leading me
out of the woods and past the stop signs.
Or that I let myself hopscotch hunches
and skim the soil. Or that I like walking
this way, lifting from a logical stride
to shimmer into the sky's map of light.



RACHEL DACUS is a poet and writer whose works include the poetry books *Earth Lessons* and *Femme au Chapeau*, as well the recent *Gods of Water and Air*, a collection of poetry, prose, and drama. She has written on a variety of subjects, from travel in Italy to growing up a rocket scientist's daughter during the race-to-space Cold War era. Her poems, stories, essays, reviews, plays, and interviews have appeared in *Atlanta Review*, *Boulevard*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Rattapallax*, and many other anthologies and journals. Read more at www.racheldacus.net

PUBLISHER
Donna Baier-Stein

EDITOR
Donna Baier-Stein
& Diane Bonavist

DESIGNER
Monica Gurevich-Importico

FOLLOW US!
JOIN
in the
DISCUSSION



Your Ad Here!
ADVERTISE
with



Please follow this link
to our media kit to
learn more.



THERÉSE HALSCHEID'S new collection is *Frozen Latitudes* (Press 53, 2014). Her other collections are *Uncommon Geography*, *Without Home* and *Powertalk*. She received a Greatest Hits chapbook award by Pudding House Publications. Her poetry and essays have appeared in such magazines as *The Gettysburg Review*, *Tampa Review*, *Sou'wester*, *Natural Bridge*. Since 1993, she has been an itinerant writer, by way of house-sitting. Simplicity has connected her to the natural world and has been the focus of her art. Photography from her series *River Towns* has appeared in juried shows and chronicles her nomadic lifestyle. "Stillness" depicts the quiet canal that runs alongside the Delaware. Visit her online at www.theresehalscheid.com

PERILS by Nahid Rachlin

In the middle of the night I woke to Niloufar's crying and went to her room. "Go back to sleep, honey. It's too early to get up."

"Mommy, is daddy still dead? Is he going to come back?"

I sat at the edge of her bed, caressed her hair, kissed her cheek. "Well, he's with us, isn't he? We remember all the things we did together..."

Finally her eyes grew heavy and she went back to sleep. I couldn't sleep and made myself breakfast. Loneliness struck me as I sat at the table, eating.

A year after Mansour's motorcycle hit the lamppost, it still wasn't easy to shake off eight years of interdependency. But worse was the gnawing question; was the accident my fault, because I withdrew from him?

It was a few days before the accident that he had shocked me with a confession. One night he came home from *Farda* Radio station, in Queens where we had both found jobs and settled. He plopped himself on the sofa, looking distraught.

"Did something happen at work?"

"I asked Peyman to transfer me to the midday program."

"I thought you liked the late afternoon..."

"Let's not talk about it."

After we had dinner and I put Niloufar to bed, we sat on the sofa to watch the evening news. But he was distracted. I turned off the TV. "What is it?"

He then told me about Ariana, an Iranian girl he met at work. "It happened only twice." Tears filled his eyes. "I love you and Niloufar so much. I'll never see her again. That's why I asked Peyman to change my hours."

A range of emotion-- astonishment, anger, sadness-- rushed through me.

"But why..." I mumbled.

"Can't explain it. Please... will you forgive me?"

"I don't know..." For days to come I tried to understand what had happened. I thought of us being so happy together. He kept assuring me that it was an aberrant slipping out of control. He had been alone with her in the newsroom and she was crying because her boss scolded her. It was out of compassion that he held her to himself to comfort her. But then he went too far.

I could believe him at some level. It had been his compassionate nature that had drawn me to him initially. I could vividly recall how we met. My car had broken down on a dark night on an empty street in Madison, where I was going to graduate school in design. My cell phone was out of charge and there were no public phones in sight. I would have to start walking and knocking on doors to seek help from someone. I started to cry, with my head over the steering wheel. I heard a soft knock on the window. I looked up. A young foreign looking man was standing there. "Can I help you?"

As he called the police for me and then sat with me waiting for them to come I continued crying. In my bewildered state all my losses crowded my mind. My mentally retarded sister had jumped off a high floor in my parents building and killed herself; my brother had been forced to leave his high school for a semester, having been caught in plagiarism. Mansour listened intently, with compassion. We were at the same university. We were both studying communication, but we had never met before. That chance meeting was the beginning for us.

After his confession, I withdrew from him emotionally. Ever since we met he had periods of depression and I was always able to pull him out of it by lavishing love and attention on him, but now I had suddenly become cold towards him. I hadn't threatened to leave him, something I couldn't really cope with, but it couldn't be the same. He was the only one among his five brothers and sisters who had come to the US to study. Once here he rarely saw any of his family members and that was always a source of regret and sadness. Loneliness, misunderstandings of things, had become the landscape of his life in the US. After the accident his parents couldn't get visas to come here for his funeral. His mother kept repeating on the phone, through sobs, "We sent him there to escape the danger of the universities here and see what happened."

Niloufar came out of her room, holding the rag doll that Mansour's parents sent to her from Iran. I gave her breakfast and



THE TIFERET TALK

INTERVIEWS



Melissa Studdard

speaks with

JULIA CAMERON	ROBIN RICE
EDWARD HIRSCH	MARC ALLEN
JUDE RITTENHOUSE	FLOYD SKLOOT
ARIELLE FORD	JEFFREY DAVIS
ROBERT PINSKY	ANTHONY LAWLOR
BERNIE SIEGEL	LOIS P. JONES

Special introduction by Donna Baier Stein

CLICK HERE TO ORDER

*The Tiferet Talk
Interviews*



after we dressed I took her to Parson School, where she was in the second grade. Then I went to my part time job at my office, where I made designs for a fabric company—mainly floral and paisley designs—Persian influenced.

In the afternoon, after picking her up, I took her to a pet shop and bought two guinea pigs for her, one gray and one orange and a cage to put them in. We put the cage in the kitchen. Every time someone opened the refrigerator door the guinea pigs squeaked. They sat close to the edge of their cage, their noses pressed to the meshed screen, squeaking.

Then I took her into the backyard, we shared with five other couples and their children, in the one level building. Children were playing in the sandbox or were taking turns on the swing and their mothers were sitting alone or together in different spots on plastic chairs, keeping their eyes on the children. A paper-Mache bear the children had made peered vigilantly from under its hat. A black bird flew down to the grass, pecked a few times and left.

I pulled a chair near three women, all single mothers like me. Hamideh, from Lebanon, lost her husband in war and had immigrated to America with her eight-year-old son. She was overweight and had a bitter face. Janis, originally from California, was divorced, moody and had a ten-year-old daughter. Sophia, from Italian parents, was a big-boned woman with massive dark hair; she had two children, eight and ten. I had moved to this smaller, cheaper apartment in a multi-cultural enclave after Mansour died.

As I sat with the women, we focused on all the potential dangers surrounding children. A child could be pushed off the swing and shatter its brain. A baby could crawl under the fence and go out into the street. A nine-month-old infant in the neighborhood had drowned during the few moments that her mother had left to open the outside door to someone. Then there were all the natural hazards, meningitis leading to blindness or deafness-- a child of one of the women's friends had been miss-diagnosed with flu and she had gone deaf. A rare kind of brain tumor had killed one of the women's five-year old son.

Then they began to talk about their own personal problems. More and more I was aware that the people in the building were struggling as I was. Marital disagreements over how to raise a child, that had led to divorce, feeling cheated for having stopped developing their careers while the ex-husbands went on with theirs. No one led an ordinary life if you looked at them closely, I thought.

The children had started to cry, whimper, as it grew darker. At this hour Niloufar was at her worst too, screaming for everything or walking about in an aimless, dejected way, dragging along a blanket or a doll.

I took Niloufar inside, facing the loneliness of the long evening ahead.

It was lunch hour for Niloufar and I waited for her in the apartment. I had started letting her walk the four straight and residential blocks home after she complained, "Sue goes home by herself, so does Linda." She walked home with the children in our block. But it was now ten minutes after twelve and

she wasn't home. What was holding her up?

Another five minutes went by, slowly, slowly. I jumped up and went out looking for her, going in the direction of the school. A few children were coming in and out of Parson's pink brick building, some walking alone, some accompanied by a baby sitter, a parent, or with other children. But there was no sign of Niloufar. Hurriedly I went into her classroom on the first floor. Its door was open and I found three children inside, eating from their lunch boxes. I knew all three, Alex, Erica, Javad. Javad had an Iranian mother and Australian father; he sometimes came home with Niloufar. The two of them could be brother-sister, with their similar coloring, dark hair and blue eyes.

"Have you seen Niloufar?" I asked them, going inside.

They looked at me in a distracted way and shook their heads.

"Was she here all morning?" I asked, the panic in me intensifying.

"She was here, she helped me pin up the paintings," Javad said.

"Do you know if she left by herself or if she was with someone?" My voice was coarse; I began to cough.

"I don't know."

The other two looked at me blankly.

I left to look for Jennifer Baluchian their teacher, in her office a few doors down. On the hall's wall I noticed several water color paintings tacked to a bulletin board. One had Niloufar's name on it. It was of a stone two level house surrounded by trees, not unlike the one we lived in before moving. I Jennifer in her office.

"Niloufar didn't come home for lunch." My voice cracked. "Did you see her going away with one of the children?"

"I think she went home with Iris. Do you want me to call there?"

"Yes, I'm really worried."

"No reason to worry yet." She pulled out a card from an index box on her desk and dialed the number. But she didn't reach anyone. I decided to return home and see if Niloufar was there by now.

I walked speedily on 80th Street, crowded with pedestrians, mainly students from the nearby college, heading for cafes and fast-food restaurants, going in and out of shops. There was a scratchy feeling in my throat, my knees felt weak. Then I thought Niloufar could be standing by the door of the apartment, locked out. Alas she wasn't there. I went into the yard and walked by the other apartments, looking inside through the windows but no one seemed to be in. Still I knocked but no one responded. I got into my car and went slowly through the surrounding streets. I couldn't brush aside the terrible pictures going before my eyes-- Niloufar caught under a tree, at the bottom of a construction pit, in the automobile junkyard not far from the school, in some stranger's car. I was shivering. After circling the streets a few times, I got out to look in the candy store, the ice cream parlor, the stationery store. "Have you seen a little girl with curly dark hair and blue eyes, wearing a blue and red overalls and a red jacket?" I kept asking, tears,



blurring my vision.

I couldn't wait any longer. I called the police from my cell phone. It rang and rang. Finally someone answered. I told the policeman, breathlessly, what had happened. He took down all the information I gave him and then asked questions about Niloufar's physical appearance, how old she was, and exactly how long she had been gone. Finally he gave me a complaint number and took my phone numbers. The process was taking so long; they should be looking immediately.

I went home and waited. It was 2:30, 2:31, 2:33. I sat on the sofa, unable to focus on anything, sinking into a blob of gray, spongy confusion. Nightmarish pictures of kidnappers, child molesters, plagued my mind. I thought of all the people I knew, wondering if any of them could have done it-- a baby sitter, the strange man who had exposed himself when we were pulling out of the parking lot of The Great Wall supermarket, one of the janitors at Parson?

I plopped myself into the sofa and began to cry with the same helplessness and despair as I had felt when I heard about Mansour's accident. "It's too late," the nurse from the hospital had said. My thoughts kept racing. Whoever it was must have watched Niloufar's comings and goings, passing her by in a car when school got out or standing in a doorway or behind a window looking.

No messages were coming to my cell or home phone. I couldn't bear it any more. I called the police station again and gave the policeman who answered the complaint number.

"The officer you spoke to isn't here right now. Let me take a quick look at his report."

Someone was calling. I pressed the call waiting. A woman's voice came on. "Mrs.Masnavi?"

"Yes."

There was only a hum in the phone now. Niloufar must be hurt, at a hospital. Fear made me faint. I leaned against the wall.

"I have Niloufar..."

"She's with you, an accident?"

"No, no. She's fine."

"Who is this?"

"I'll tell you when I see you. I'm bringing her to you in a few moments. We're around the corner." She hung up.

I was confused and relieved at the same time. I had gotten disconnected from the police station. I went outside and waited. An old banged-up MG was coming towards the building and I could see Niloufar and a young woman inside it. The woman pulled into the driveway and helped Niloufar out. Niloufar was holding an unfamiliar doll under her arm. She looked dazed. I picked her up and kissed her over and over again.

"What's going on?" I asked the girl, trying to sound calm.

"Ariana. You don't know me."

I knew the name. She was the girl that Mansour said he had "slipped," with. I looked at her with



shock, puzzlement, and a rush of unfocused anger. My relief of having Niloufar back was marred by knowing who this woman was.

"Can I come in? I want to talk to you."

We all went inside and I called the police to tell them Niloufar was back. "Yes, she's doing fine," I said to the policeman. "I'll call back."

Niloufar ran into her room. I followed her and said, "Didn't I tell you to never go away with a stranger? Talk to me, honey, tell me what happened?"

"She bought this for me," she said, holding the doll tightly.

"You should never have gotten into her car."

She became distracted putting the doll in the doll house in the corner of her room. When I returned to the living room, Ariana looked nervous. She shifted in her seat on the sofa and kept pushing her fingers through her long dark hair. She was quite attractive; I had to admit in spite of the pain and anger churning inside me.

"I was devastated by what happened to Mansour," she said. "I can't stop blaming myself. I thought if I could be with his child for a few hours... I got up my nerve today to take her. I told her you sent me for her. We went to a luncheonette and I got her a sandwich and chocolate ice cream. Then I bought her the doll. I was going to take her to my apartment overnight-- but I got frightened."

It was like I was standing at the edge of a cliff, looking down. I got up to feed the guinea pigs to give myself respite from the conversation. I took out some lettuce from the refrigerator, the sight of which threw them into loud squeaking. They quieted down as they began to take tiny bites from the lettuce I put in the cage. I returned into the living room. "Well, at least you brought her back. I could press charges against you, you know."

"I'm sorry. I won't do it again." Her eyes went to the photograph of Mansour on the side table. In the photograph he was standing in the backyard of our house under the mass of morning glory streaming down on the fence. Then she lowered her eyes and said, "I'm so sorry. I hope you'll forgive me."

"Just leave or I'll report you to the police right now."

The truth was I didn't want to blow this out, to involve the police. She had brought back Niloufar on her own; obviously she didn't mean to harm her.

She got up. Then I burned with a question. "Did you or anyone at work detect anything about Mansour, something that might cast light on... was it really an accident? Sometimes he sank into a dark mood and stayed in it for days," I asked. I went on inwardly: and then he felt so guilty about what happened between him and you.

She lowered her face and when she raised it, tears were streaming down her eyes.

"No, I don't know."

She looked so much like women in miniature paintings—willowy, with almond shaped eyes, long



wavy black hair, a narrow waist.

Then she just walked out. I called the police station again and told them everything was resolved, fine. Obviously the police had a lot on their hands and weren't too eager for me to involve them any further. I stood by the window and looked at the hazy sunset; I watched the sun drop behind the row of closely-spaced spruce trees on the other side of the street.

Bright vivid spring flowers and green grass were visible everywhere. A butterfly would alight on a bush in the backyard and then dash away, prompting a child to run after it.

With spring coming Niloufar seemed more cheerful. Her eyes had a luster to them, her cheeks were pink. She would run to me to ask questions or get a hug and kiss. Her room had a look of gaiety with the sun shining brightly into it, and stuffed animals and dolls pecking from every corner, the watercolors she had painted herself covering some of the walls.

But still there was that loneliness in her, and of course in myself, hard to overcome. She had started asking about her father again.

"Isn't he ever coming back?"

"I'm sorry honey, that's what it means to die," I finally said and repeated, "But he's with us... we both remember all the things we did together."

"Amber never came back."

Amber, a flat faced-long haired Persian cat, we had when we were still living in the house, had gotten sick and died. We buried her together in the house's backyard. Yet neither that burial, nor her father's burial in the graveyard, made death real to her.

I tried to comfort her by reading her a book she never got tired of, *Are You My Mother?*

On an unusually hot June afternoon, I went to pick up Niloufar from her recreation program at the arboretum. I took her there and brought her back myself to save the bus fee. The car seat was so hot; it stung me through my skirt. When I reached the camp, the children weren't out yet. Parents, baby sitters, were standing around waiting. Ducks were eating bread thrown by people into the lake or with their wings tucked in they floated on the surface like sailboats. Then children began to rush out. I spotted Niloufar and, holding her hand, led her to the car. The buckle on one of her sandals was open and she was dragging herself. I knelt down and fixed it while she chattered about this and that. As we were approaching our building my heart gave a squeeze seeing the banged up MG parked in our apartment's driveway and Ariana sitting in it. Then I thought, I knew we would meet again, that she would come back. If she had been compelled once to steal Niloufar, then she wouldn't let go so easily.

"Can I talk to you for a moment," Ariana said as we all got out of cars. Niloufar leaned against me and stared silently at Ariana.

As soon as we entered the apartment, still standing, Ariana said in a pleading tone, "Please hear me through."

"Sit down," I said and then made a snack for Niloufar, over the squeaking of the guinea pigs and let

her sit in the corner of the room and watch Power puff Girls on TV.

"I lost my job at the radio station and can't keep up with my rent. I have a proposition. Can I live with you and baby sit while you're at work? I'll sit as many hours as you'd like. You'll be able to come and go as you please."

"For one thing there's no extra room in the apartment," I said, startled by her proposal.

"I'll sleep in Niloufar's room, or on the living room couch."

"I'll think about it," I said curtly and then showed her to the outside door. When I came back to the living room, I was all torn inside.

It has been a year now since Ariana moved in and amazingly it has been working out. We put a bed and some of her belongings in the area of the living room where the dining table used to be. We moved the dining table to the kitchen, where it just barely fits.

Niloufar has developed a strong bond with her. Ariana has been teaching her Farsi, reading her Farsi books and letting her watch a Farsi children program on TV, what I had neglected to do. It filled me with regret that I hadn't tried to master the language and teach it to Niloufar. Mansour tried at times to encourage me to speak in Farsi with him and with the growing baby. Alas I always fell back on English. I wondered now if his reaching to Ariana, even for a brief period, was a symptom of his underlying resentment of me or more, maybe being with her connected him to what he missed about his homeland, certain things I couldn't possibly understand. I remembered how lonely and isolated he looked when he was on the campus with its almost uniformly American student body.

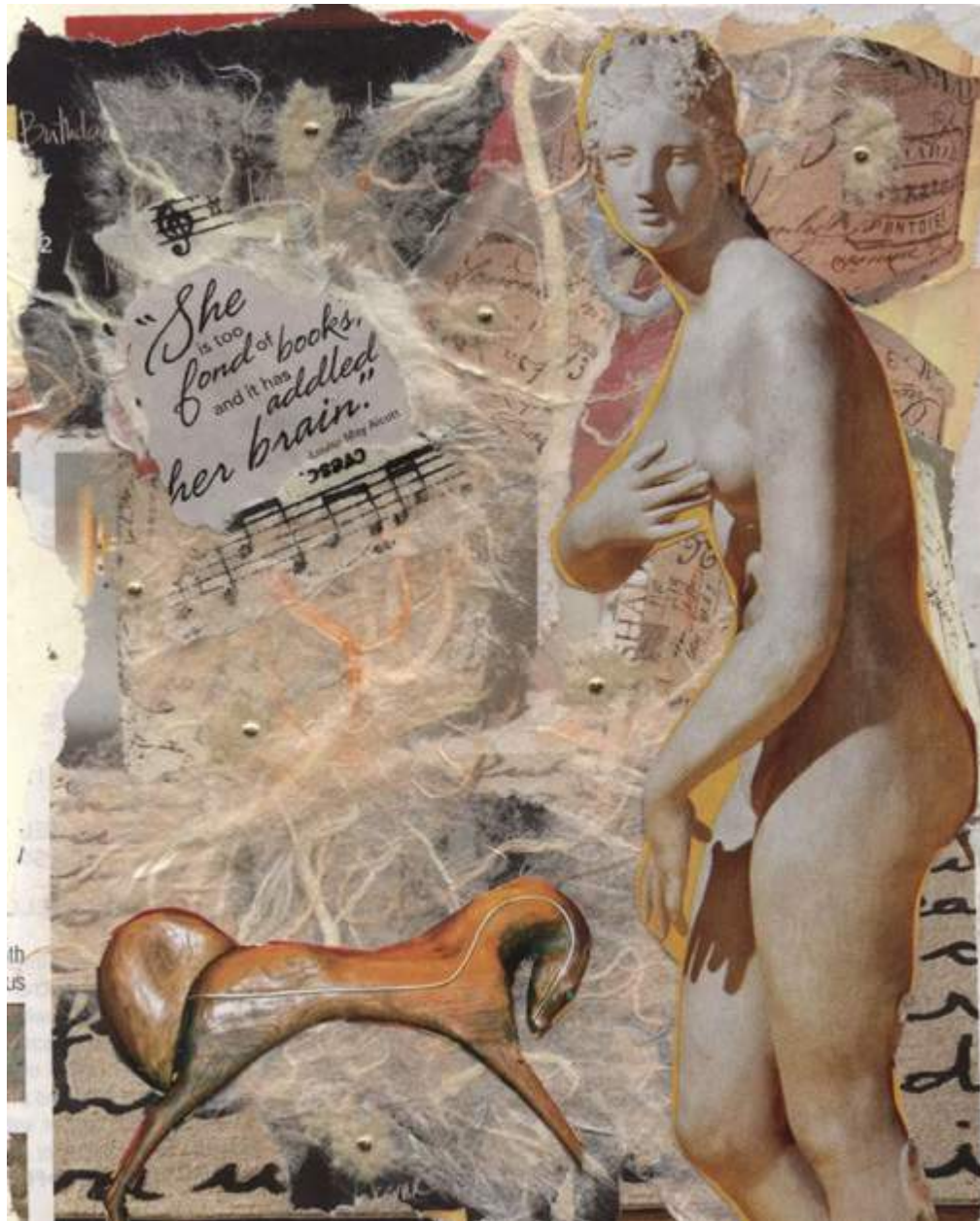
Maybe when the visa situation becomes easier I will take Niloufar to Iran to see her grandparents; they have been pressuring me to do so. They want me to introduce the child to her father's heritage and for her to get to know them.

Ariana goes out two nights a week; she has a boy-friend she says she isn't serious about. As for me, I haven't even tried to form a relationship with a man. I am still full of grief, regret. But having Ariana has created a harmony in the household that goes beyond what I can put into words.



NAHID RACHLIN is the author of the memoir *Persian Girls* and four novels, *Jumping Over Fire* (City Lights), *Foreigner* (W.W. Norton), *Married to a Stranger* (E.P.Dutton-Penguin), *The Heart's Desire* (City Lights), and a collection of short stories, *Veils* (City Lights). She has been interviewed on NPR's "All Things Considered" (Terry Gross) and in *P&W* magazine and the *Writer's Chronicle*. She has written reviews and essays for *New York Times*, *Newsday*, *Washington Post* and *Los Angeles Times*. www.nahidrachlin.com

Woman of Thought



MICHAL (MITAK) MAHGEREFTEH is a poet, editor, publisher and artist from Virginia. Her art work has been published in print and electronically, most recently in the *Catamaran Review*, *Numinous Review*, and *Petrichor Review*. Michal is author of four poetry collections and editor and publisher of *Poetica Magazine*. www.michalmahgerefteh.com

SAY WHAT YOU WILL *by Joyce Kornblatt*

Say what you will, the dead disturb
our disbelief, open our books
and whistle across the hearth
those cold nights no fire can warm.
When she died, my mother's heart
stilled against my palm, that last beat
shocked my hand and left me
burned beyond thought.
How the clock in my sister's family room
stopped dead the moment our mother
expired twelve miles away.
Open the books, open the books!
Say what you will, the subject remains
wide open, and research offers nothing
conclusive. How my mother appeared
to me at the meditation retreat
where I had come to grieve. Many said
they saw an elderly white-haired woman
sitting beside me, smiling, and then—as she would—
getting up to do a little impromptu dance.
This helped me know what I could not know,
and vow to continue not knowing.
Say what you will. There were witnesses.
The dead disturb our disbelief.



JOYCE KORNBLATT is a novelist (NOTHING TO DO WITH LOVE, WHITE WATER, BREAKING BREAD, and THE REASON FOR WINGS), short-story writer, essayist and poet. She currently lives in the Blue Mountains, near Sydney, Australia, where she writes and teaches.

SPIRITUAL DEMOCRACY *by Peter Noterman*

EACH OF THE WORLD'S great religions, over time, eventually has devolved into a derivative religion. Maybe that's why today many people feel a fresh need to experience God directly. An individual experience of God, however, by its very nature, has to be democratic. In truth, no matter what the established religions assert, it's just not possible for someone to have a relationship with God for you – not even Jesus himself. All they can possibly do is to demonstrate for you how it's done – by pointing you in the right direction and providing you with a model you might want to emulate.



Slowly, surely, over long stretches of time, the world has experienced ever greater democratization – politically, socially, economically – and, more recently, spiritually. Political democracy, since its origin in Athens has steadily become more desirable and acceptable to people throughout the world. When it first commenced, however, many believed that they would be taking a huge risk in establishing a political democracy – traditionalists arguing that common people didn't have sufficient education, economic interest, or the emotional stability to successfully participate in a democratic government. Economic democracy, arising almost simultaneously with political democracy, also has steadily gained wide acceptance throughout the world. People now take it for granted that they should have the legal right to take their own personal financial risks, as well as to engage in economic activities that, formerly, were restricted to specific classes of people. As for social democracy, Americans long ago dissolved the rigid social classes that had been so deeply embedded in European culture so that, today, affluent scions wear jeans and generally avoid overt displays of wealth. That's not to say that wealth and power don't still influence, and in many cases control, American politics, or that, behind this egalitarian façade, the wealthy don't consider themselves better than other people. The point is that there's been an accelerating trend in modern/postmodern society of accepting widening social democracy. The sole exception to this democratization trend has been in the spiritual realm. For some reason, many people still believe that spiritual concerns are too important to be left in the hands of ordinary people. Catholics still receive instructions as to which of their beliefs are spiritually acceptable from a direct descendant of the Roman Emperors – the "Pontifex Maximus." Protestants, for their part, believe that each person is able to reach God on their own, but repeatedly warn that this is only safe when following the guidance of professionally-trained, denominationally-sanctioned ministers who preach a solidly orthodox theology . Whether worshiping in a worldwide

church with tens of millions of members or in a three person prayer group, almost everyone thinks it might be dangerous, spiritually, to be out on your own.



God desires a direct relationship with each individual, and that's what each of us in our heart of hearts desires. No one should ever be satisfied with a mediated love where they don't meet their lover face to face, nor do people desire a professional in bed with them while experiencing their most intimate moments. After all, aren't our moments with God, the most intimate kind of relationship we can have? All religions assert they were originally established, at least in part, to serve the people, especially the poor and vulnerable, but, once they become institutionalized, they generally become opposed to any major substantive changes in the world's existing economic, social and political structures responsible for keeping people in that state . A "real" God – the God of the prophets – would never serve as a spiritual band-aid to camouflage the suffering of the poor. A "real" God demands freedom and a good life for all human beings – and so will always be seen as highly subversive to unjust political and economic institutions . A religion that uses the name "God" as a justification for its existence, and then compromises with, or even worse, actively supports contemporary worldly institutions of power and privilege, will always end up as a spiritual nullity. This is true, no matter how pure its original founder. Only spiritual democracy can short-circuit this unfruitful cycle. Instead of having a single "child of God" at the pinnacle of each religion – Jesus, Buddha, or Mohammed, as the case may be – there now needs to be innumerable "children of God " spread all over the world. This would be a peaceful revolution, but also one in which everything has to be risked – especially our conventional lives – i.e., the very ground under our feet. It's time, as Paul once said, to give up being children. God has provided us with spiritual freedom, but left it up to us to take the risks required to carry out God's work of making our human potential actual. Isn't it time, now, to finish what God has begun so very long ago?



As I've stated, a direct personal experience of God is mystical in nature – by definition. Derivative experience, whether through Bible stories, sermons, or the lives of saints might be instructive, but are one or more steps removed from God. There's only a limited amount of spiritual "juice" in derivative experiences. That's why each of us needs to open ourselves up to a direct personal relationship with God, otherwise there just won't be sufficient spiritual energy to fix everything that's inevitably going to go wrong in our increasingly complex postmodern world. Seven or eight billion hard-nosed little "gods" running around – whether sanctioned by religion or not – simply constitute too much ego for the world to support. We need to start moving towards a spiritually democratic world of " nobody mystics," each with his or her own individual love relationship with God – the kind of people capable of living in God's

reality instead of remaining stuck in personal or societal fantasies. When this happens, the established religions will increasingly start being left behind – discarded chrysalis’ out of which human beings may be born into infinitely greater spiritual freedom – the kind that’s traditionally been promised to us by God. All our social, economic, and political structures obviously would also need to stretch and bend to allow room for the Spirit of God as consciously lived by millions or tens of millions of people. It’s not that everyone will become Jesuses, Buddhas, or Mohammeds – the promise is, simply, that they’ll be spiritually free enough to become their true selves.



The world, presently, has too many institutions justifying their existence by providing people with an identity – especially vis-à-vis God. If these organizations, particularly the religious ones, began to disappear, there would be a lot more spiritual freedom in the world. When this happened, all the useless dreams and fantasies we’ve been captivated by for so long, together with our artificial egos, would suddenly come to an end. That’s when, living as our true selves, we wouldn’t fear meeting God face to face – in other words, we’d no longer be afraid of facing reality.



CLICK BELOW:

- [To buy the book](#)
- [To the Diner Mystic blog](#)



PETER NOTERMAN: In the book, *Diner Mystic*, there is a chapter, “Being Nobody Provides You With the Freedom to Become Your True Self”. That’s who I am today. The photograph on the cover of the book was taken 30 years ago in Tasty Diner, Silver Spring, Maryland. At that time, I was an attorney for nonprofits and artists, a performance poet, and a choreographer of small movements (to fit with my poetry) and an about to be father (see Mary’s smile).

Ян Вермеер, “Молочница”

(JAN VERMEER, “THE MILKMAID” by Gennady Katsov) Translation by Alexander Cigale



Jan Vermeer, “The Milkmaid” (1658)

As when the wind carves in sands cities-mirages,
Water hones stone, returning it to arc-shaped dune –
It means centuries have fled, like sand and water,
Conserved in an hourglass: damp traces on the surface.

Reading gravestone and crypt you risk not understanding
Clio is more sentimental than history's serial butchers:
Perhaps because playful, cowardly (or simply a bitch).
That tendency toward cheap effects, derivative crap.

No date to match this canvas. With attention, labor, ease,
Solitary, in groups, wearing contact lenses, suits, saris:
In the museum goers' moments the thin quiver of milk
Will never touch clay nor fill the pail nor ever sour.

New York, May 10, 2011

(cont'd on next page)

Когда ветер вырезает в песках миражи-города,
а вода точит камень, возвращая его барханам –
Это значит, столетия ушли, как песок и вода,
Сохранив себя конусом, влагой сухой в стаканах.

По надгробиям и некрологам рискуешь не сразу понять
То, что Клио сентиментальней серийного живодера;
Оттого ль, что игрива, коварна, (либо попросту блядь) -
Эта склонность к аффектам да сплошь повторам.

Несть числа подходящим к холсту - с интересом, с трудом, легко,
В одиночку, группой, в контактных линзах, в костюмах, в сари;
Соглядатаев мига, в коем тонким дрожащим сверлом молоко
Не коснется керамики. Не наполнит сосуд. И веками не прокисает.

Нью-Йорк, 05.10.2011



ALEX CIGALE'S own English-language poems and translation have appeared in *Cimarron, Colorado, Green Mountains, New England, and The Literary Reviews, Literary Imagination, Modern Poetry in Translation, PEN America, Two Lines, World Literature Today*, and in a previous issue of *Tiferet* (Akhmatova miniatures). He is a 2015 NEA Literary Translation Fellow, for his work on the poet of the St. Petersburg "philological school" Mikhail Eremin.



GENNADY KATSOV (b. 1956), one of the organizers of the seminal Moscow club "Poetry" (1986), emigrated to New York in 1989, where he continues to work as a journalist in Russian radio and television. His book *Slovosfera* contains 180 ekphrastic responses to seven centuries of fine art. His recent books, *Between Floor and Ceiling* and *365 Days Around the Sun*, made the long list of the Russia Prize 2014 and short list of the Voloshin Festival.

SARAH'S
essence®

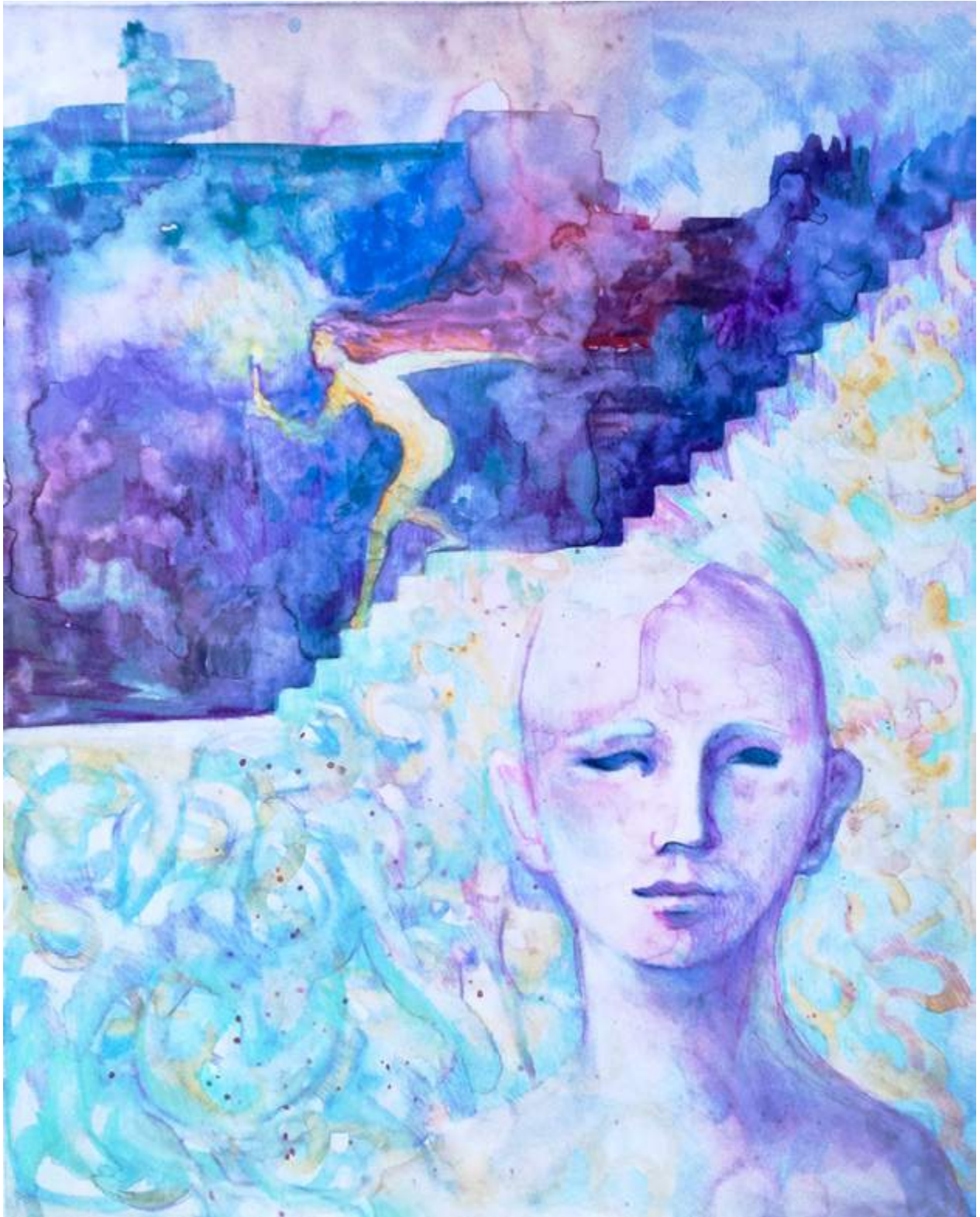


AROMATHERAPY
MIST
www.sarahsessen.com

Your Ad Here!
ADVERTISE
with



Please follow this link
to our media kit to
learn more.



DESCENT



NANCY WAIT is an American artist and writer who began her journey into art in the late 1970s after an earlier career as an actress in the UK under the name Nancie Wait. During the 1980s she had a successful free-lance business as a commercial artist painting portraits and architectural renderings. Links to the show, her books, and her long-running blog, many pieces having to do with art and painting, and her you tube channel, can be found on her website: www.nancywait.com

SHANGRI-LA DOES NOT EXIST *by June Calender*

HE WAS LYING FLAT ON HIS BACK ON A NARROW BED.

He never slept on his back but he was comfortable. Sounds awoke him, steps passing by, faint mechanical ticking, distant voices, occasional buzzing. He started to roll over to his right side. He could not move the lower half of his body. His left hand was attached to something. He sank back into sleep.

He heard the steady drone of an airplane; he was inside. His head rested against a pillow, another head was on the same pillow. Wisps of hair brushed his cheek. His neck was stiff; he moved his head. A hand patted his forearm. "Another pill?" whispered a woman's voice. The droning was pervasive, he saw to his right, a few feet away the jitter of a video screen.

After a moment he said, "No."

The hand held his forearm lightly for a moment. "No pain?"

He was slipping into sleep. "No," he murmured.

Strong hands moved him onto the bed. He cried out, not from pain but because he expected pain. A man's voice said, "Sorry." The bed rolled like a vehicle on rubber tires, smoothly, silently, through a dim tunnel or hallway. A soft whisper of wheels, he was safe.

"Passport. ... Your passport."

"Credit card, there's a fee. Always a fee."

Bright lights, people flowing around him. He sat as if he were a stone in the channel of a river. People hurrying, murmuring voices, no one stopped, no one noticed. He was waiting. His eyes were nearly closed. Very sleepy.

A woman stooped besides him. "Can you sign?"

The pen seemed to move automatically; it made the long upward flourish he always used at the end of his name.

The rolling woooosh of curtains being pulled on metal ball bearings. A woman holding his wrist. He did not have his clothes on but was covered by a blanket. Something was wrapped around his

upper arm, it grew tight, not distressingly, in a familiar, caressing way, then it loosened. He knew what it was but did not know the name just then. It was harmless, comforting, assuring him he was cared for.

The woman holding his wrist was manipulating his hand, rubbing, rubbing, tapping as if her finger were a blind man's cane. Something pricked. Did she say "shit"? ... rubbing, tap-tap-tapping ... Another prick. "Shit," she mumbled. The woman's voice right beside him, called, "Janine! Come. Help me." Movement. Rubber soles on vinyl. "I can't get a vein." Soft voices. Hands holding his. Tap, tap, tapping on his hand.

"Good luck!" said a woman, stooping beside him in the middle of noise, light, movement, streaming bodies, voices in another language. "A delayed United flight, I think we can get on it."

The drone of the airplane. His neck was stiff but he did not want to move his head. A body moved quietly past him, cloth brushed his hand. The flickering screen had disappeared; a hat was beside him, on a woman's lap, a straw hat with artificial roses on the brim. He knew that hat. Yes...he had walked behind it, looking at the roses, sat behind it looking at the roses, white roses, silk perhaps. Some time, not so long ago.

The sun was hot. Many people were walking up and down the steps to the gorge—Tiger Leaping Gorge. The rushing water was so far down he could not hear it. No, no one wanted to walk all the way down and all the way back. Just to the first viewpoint. The hat walked down in front of him. Below it hung a braid of white hair against a blue shirt. A blue ribbon was tied at the end of the braid. The narrow ribbon made a small, neat bow. So child-like on the gray hair, it made him smile. He had thought many times during the last few days of tugging on that braid. His hands remembered the feel of tugging on a girl's braid—Ellie Carpenter's brown braids. Ellie Carpenter, hmm, hadn't thought of her in, god knows, fifty years and still he remembered pulling her braids. The solidity of plaited brown hair in the palm of his right hand. Memory's a funny thing. Her head turned, she hissed, "Stop it."

A bed in a dark room, his mouth was dry, there was a pain, he lay on his back, he could not move. Faint light against the ceiling above him. He was not alone, he was guarded. "Please," he said. Someone was in the room, someone was near. Had he spoken out loud? "Please."

"A pill?" said a woman's soft voice.

"Please."

Movement in the dark. "Open." A capsule touched his lips then the quiet sound of a cap turning on a water bottle. Water on his chin was wiped away.

People were leaving the plane, the lights were bright. They flowed past brushing against his shoulder. Eager people but patient. Civilized, he thought. The woman beside him had the hat on, the hat with the flowers. "We have to wait," she said. Funny, he could not focus on her face. The hat, two round gold earrings, no face. He knew the face, but could not remember. Her name? He could not remember either although he had used it when he offered her some nuts he had purchased from the vender at Tiger Leaping Gorge. And he had used it many times in the days before. She was not Ellie Carpenter. No, not at all. He knew little about her. She was eager to drive up into the mountains. To Shangri-la. The

Chinese guide pronounced it Shangri-la. As if it were two words. Maybe it was two words. The Chinese guide and the driver especially emphasized the la. The woman in the hat laughed and shook her head. "A joke," she said. "They think we're so gullible. *Lost Horizon* was set in Pakistan."

"Never read it, never saw the movie."

The guide told them, "Three mountain towns petitioned the Tourist Department to change their names. The one we're going to won because it has the fine monastery – although it's in the town, not inaccessible like the Hilton story."

"At least most of the people are Tibetan," she said. "A town with history."

He was lying on a table under a whirring machine, large and gray and old. An X-ray machine. She was standing near-by. "Go away. It's dangerous," he said. "X-rays are dangerous." He did not want her to be burned by the ancient X-ray machine. She laughed.

So many hands moved him. He cried out in pain, or more often in anticipation of pain that did not come, when they lifted him from seat to wheelchair to stretcher. They took his clothes off in the chilly room. Then they covered him and he fell asleep lying on his back.

He was not allowed to sleep. Why didn't they let him rest? A tiny beam of light was aimed at one eye and then the other. Voices murmured. "What is your name?"

"Jonathan Lafferty."

"What year is it?"

"2004."

"Who is President of the United States?"

"George Bush Number Two."

"Thank you."

"Don't thank me, I didn't vote for him."

A soft chuckle. "Why are you here?"

"Where am I?"

"St. Christopher's Hospital."

"In Chicago?"

"Yes. You don't know why you are here?"

"I have pain."

"You don't remember?"

"Pieces. Just pieces."

"What pieces?"

"I fell on the stones. I was in Shangri-la."

"You were in Shangri-la?" The soft chuckle.

"It's a joke, like Disneyland."

"In China?"

"Yunan."

The hat was walking in front of him on a rugged path beside a rough stone wall. The braid hung down against a red shirt and the bow was red. Her voice was saying in rhythm with her steps, "*Om mani padme hum.*" Slowly, breathlessly. He gasped for breath, and his head hurt. A dull ache had been with him for hours, he was not sure he could walk further up the boulder strewn path to the end of the wall... He wanted to hold the braid like a guide rope or the rein on a horse. His feet were heavy; he stopped. The hat moved slowly on. He gasped for breath, his heart was pounding, his head was pounding. The path tipped a little left, a little right. The braid and hat were nearly out of sight, a spot of red turning a corner. He had to hurry. His feet were clumsy on the rough path. He was dizzy; he should stop. He stumbled.

He lay uncomfortably with sunlight in his eyes. Stones were uneven under his back. He was shivering in the bright sunlight, his teeth were chattering. "It's shock," a man said.

She lay besides him, almost on him, her arm across his chest, a hand rubbing his arm, rubbing the shivers away. Her body was not heavy; it was a warm blanket.

In the night, in the dark room, she held his head up, shoved a pillow behind his head, touched a plastic bottle to his lips. "Sip." The water was wonderful, even as some spilled down his chin, onto his chest. She wiped it with the sleeve of whatever she was wearing. "More water." She tipped the bottle against his mouth again. More water spilled as he drank. He was a small boy with chicken pox; his mother gave him water wiped his chin with her apron.

The airport with the etched glass, Kuming. But he did not remember an airport in Shangri-la. He remembered Kuming airport waiting room, people flowing around his wheelchair like leaves floating on a fast stream. And he remembered Beijing. The guards wanted him to get out of the wheelchair and walk through the metal detector.

"No," she said. "Hip is broken. Cannot walk." The guards talked to one another, she walked through first, a guard pushed him through. No bells.

"We were afraid it was a stroke," the man said. "Probably just altitude sickness. I Googled it, you were over 13,000 feet."

"Only two hips," he said.

"You're feeling better," the man said.

"No, but clearer. Where is Annie?"

"Who is Annie?"

"She was with me."

"You arrived at the hospital alone."

"A woman with a long white braid. She came with me."

"Your wife?"

"I'm not married. She was with me."

"She must have gone home."

"She is from California."

"I can't help you. You arrived here alone. We have you scheduled for surgery at 7:30 tomorrow morning."

"A woman with a hat and a braid?"

"No one. You can phone your family."

The nurses cranked the bed up so he could eat lunch. The curtain was pulled aside so he could see out a window but it still hung between him and the other patient in the room. He should call his office, the nurses had come with forms for a television and a phone and he had signed. "You didn't have travel insurance?" one said. "You could have been air evac-ed if you'd had travel insurance."

"I don't believe in it."

"I'll bet you do now."

"No, even less. A guardian angel brought me here."

"Oh?"

He told her about Annie, the woman with the braid and the gold earrings and the hat with roses. He did not remember her face. Other memories came back, Li Jiang, the graceful old city, reconstructed after an earthquake. DaLi, big hotel, little city. Three pagodas. Spicy food and good beer. Tiger Leaping Gorge, John Rock's house. Only little scraps of memory after the fall. The pills, he thought. Morphine.

"Pain killers," Annie said. "So he can go home. No aspirin. Strong ones."

Annie ate the hottest Sichuwen food and drank beer with it. She was at least ten years older than he. She had been alone too, and then the couple from Idaho who didn't like Chinese food and often ate hiking food that they had brought with them, food they reconstituted with hot water from the thermoses in Chinese hotels meant for making tea...or that godawful Nescafe. Oh, and a silly young couple from Arizona who chattered in New-age-ese and bought souvenirs everywhere. Annie laughed a lot but did not talk much, kept to herself. She was not attracted to him; he was not attracted to her. They were each loners, they agreed on that as they went separate ways in the Miaow village.

A rasping noise woke him. He felt rasping throughout his body. He could not move, he was wedged in some soft vise. Something was abrading bone, his bone; no pain but a momentary vision of flesh cut open, bone white against red, his flesh, his bone being abraded with a file. Could it be? He lay on his stomach within some kind of tent above his shoulders and head. He was shivering as he had been in Shangri-la. A small motor whirled, warm air filled the little tent. Above a green surgical mask eyes met his. Above the dark eyes were arched black brows with a red dot between them. "It's okay. Everything's okay. You'll go back to sleep in just a bit."

His mother would give him a Band-Aid, an aspirin, red Kool-Aid, "Everything's okay, Jonnie. It's okay."

He fell asleep again after lunch then awoke and lay listening to the noises, voices, footsteps, nurses taking vital signs, visitors talking quietly to the patient next to him that he could not see.

She was the one who helped him in the airports, sat beside him on the long flight from Beijing. Why would she do that? She was from Monterey. Did she come to Chicago with him? Maybe the pills made him fuzzy. He didn't know her last name. They had been introduced but the name was gone as soon as he heard it, evaporated like names usually did. The tour company would know. He could find

out later. He finally opened his eyes and stared at the gray skyline out the window. He lay inert, aware but not thinking; then he roused himself and made phone calls. “It happened in Shangri-la,” he said and laughed. Sometimes he had to explain Shangri-la.

After a rehab session he returned to his bed. He walked stiffly with a walker like an old man. He was determined to exercise as the Orthodox Jewish therapist said, her voice full of authority, her face, without a touch of makeup, intense with professional sincerity and plain as bread dough, her hair hidden by a tan scarf. All these women who helped him and he’d never know any of them. Except his mother, dead only two years.

A vase with white roses stood on the bedside table. A note. “They will last. I do not believe in cutting living flowers. If anything deserves to live a long full life it is a flower. You too. You are a brave man, be well, live long. Namaste, Annie.” He hauled himself into the bed and sat back against the pillows holding the note. “Namaste,” she had said—when, where? Before the medics took him off the plane.

She had been chanting, “*Om mani padme hum*,” walking meditatively beside the wall. She wanted to see the lamas in the monastery and hear them chant. She had said, “I love the chanting. That is why I came on this trip.” They were to go into the shrine when they had walked around the outer wall. But she did not leave him after he fell. She went to the Chinese hospital with the old, old X-ray machine. She stayed in his room that night. Where did she sleep? On the floor? She gave him pills and water, like his mother.

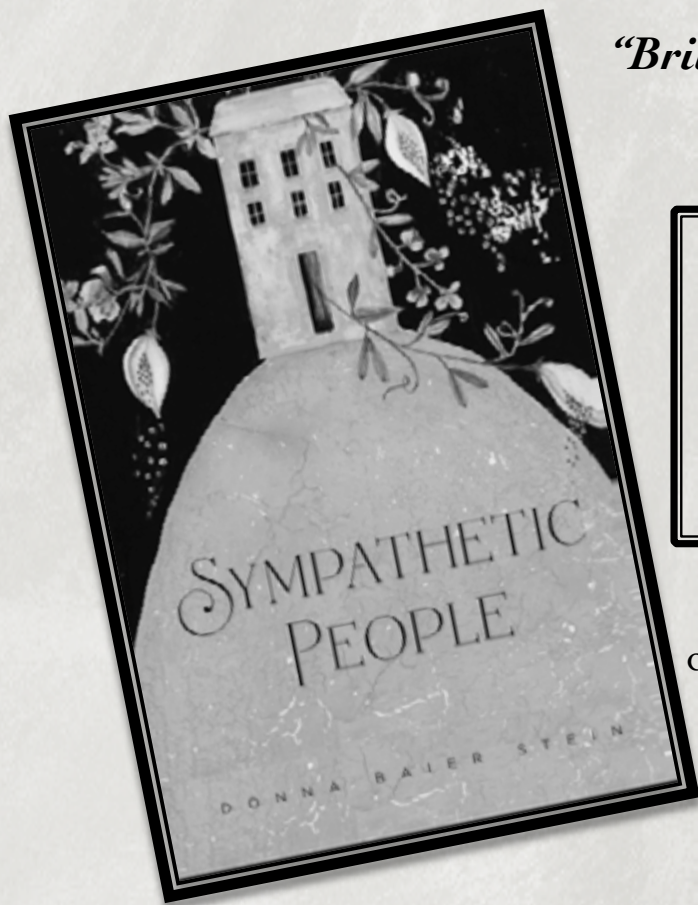
He leaned toward the roses; they were beautiful, he smelled their scent. He touched a rose, it was silk but the odor was real. I must send her something, he thought. I must give her a gift. He could see the straw hat, the white braid...he felt her body warming his shivering body. He saw two round gold earrings...he saw two eyes, brown, sparkling as she shook her head laughing, but accusing, “Greedy Chinese think they can fool us. Shangri-la does not exist in this world.”

“It happened in Shangri-la,” he told his colleagues.

“You’re a riot, Jonathan. Welcome back to work. We missed you.”



JUNE CALENDER spent 30 years in NYC studying playwrighting and seeing her plays produced off-Broadway (sometimes as far off as Alaska). She was invited to three national playwrighting conferences where her plays were workshopped. Six years ago she retired to Cape Cod to finish writing a book about the culture of Tibet as reported in a daily diary by Theos Bernard, the only person ever invited to the "forbidden city" as a religious scholar. She is looking for a publisher. She writes poetry, short stories, and travel essays. She teaches writing at the Academy of Lifelong Learning at the Cape Cod Community College.



“Brilliantly edgy”

“A profound accomplishment”

SYMPATHETIC PEOPLE

A new collection of short stories by Donna Baier Stein
Now available on Amazon.com
from Serving House Books

Both the beauty and frailty of human connections are seen in this collection of thirteen beautifully-written stories. Here you'll find men and women struggling to find love, meaning, happiness in marriage, adulterous affairs, art, meditation, and even the passage from life to death.

Praise for “Sympathetic People”

“... Her deceptively mild story-telling veers swiftly into the savage but often unacknowledged discontent of suburban life ... all explored with language that engages and surprises.”

- C. Michael Curtis, Fiction Editor, *The Atlantic*

“Ms. Baier Stein’s stories are powerful in both language and character ... she balances a fierce wish to love and be loved with the hard reality of loss and failure, yet the yearning does not diminish. A profound accomplishment.”

- Elizabeth Cox, author of *The Slow Moon*, *The Ragged Way People Fall Out of Love*

“Donna Baier Stein uncovers the sometimes heady glint of danger in relationships in a brilliantly edgy collection of stories that gets under your skin as even as it illuminates love, lust – and everything in between.

—Caroline Leavitt, New York Times bestselling author of *Pictures of You* and *Is This Tomorrow*

“Donna Baier Stein writes with the grace and precision of a poet ... here is a writer who trusts not only herself, but her readers, who will be skillfully guided into coming to their own satisfying conclusions.

—Elizabeth Berg, New York Times bestselling author, most recently of *Tapestry of Fortunes*

TALKIN' KUAN YIN BLUES *by Dennis Kline*

I read my daily lesson, doing my exercise
listening to Moola Mantra, eating custard pie
Oh, Kuan Yin, this is life
Mercy mercy mercy mercy mercy-
Oh, Kuan Yin, Bodhisattva of Compassion
I love to have coffee with you
Your blue smile, a cup held
in each of your thousand hands
you have come to me in the forms
of multitudes of lovers
In each letter, in each word I speak,
hear or write Sh'ma Yisrael
Adonai Eloheinu Adonai Ehad
Open the door and allow
the clean Spring breeze
to fill the house with
Emerald Green Tara
bare breasted blessings/yes
Oh, the faithful wrap the street lamps
with flags of fire and eyes of silk



DENNIS KLINE Born in Ohio, Dennis Kline is an Interfaith Chaplain. He received his BA degree at Florida Atlantic University and his ordination at the Esoteric Theological Seminary. Dennis has had poems published in Headwaters Creative Arts Magazine and other literary publications. He resides in Asheville, NC with his wife Donna.

EXOTROPIA by Goldberry Long

You stand there wobbling on your big small feet, and though you have been walking two months already, since you were nine months old, you totter like these are your first steps, with your wandering eye and your infected inner ear, the water behind it confusing your sense of up and down and sideways. You spot the birds at the feeder just outside the window, and you point to them and “Oh! Oh!” Oh, your word for the world, for wonder and surprise, astonishment, for warning and accomplishment – earlier, diaperless, you called from the other room – “Oh! Oh!” and came to get me, “Oh,” and took me there, “Oh,” and pointed to the puddle you had made with your own body “Oh!” All at once it says, *Look*, and *See*, and *Did you see too?* As if the world could be contained in one gasp, one small snatch of sound that is, maybe, not a word at all. Wobbling in your moccasins with the train pictured on them, one foot the engine, one the caboose, your knees bowed, as if your legs cannot support the weight of your astonishment. “Oh,” you say, your finger to the bird feeder where the sparrows devour sunflower seeds.

And earlier, you stood outside and peered at me through the window. “Oh,” you called, which meant, *I am doing something naughty.*

I asked what you had in your mouth, and laughing, you showed me the seed clamped between your front teeth, small chips of white, two up, two down, clamped. Your word was laughing: “Oh,” a word pronounceable even while chuckling, while holding a seed between the teeth.

You stand there tottering on your bowed knees, your toes pointed to your midline as if the knees pull for the world and the toes say *No, stay*. You extend your finger, the four others folded into the palm, the economy of the one finger and all its vocabulary, saying *Give me that*, saying *Look at that*, saying, *I made this*, *They made that*, *Let's go there*, *Who is that*, and then the word, *Oh*, rising to confirm that we are alike, that the world is there and we are here, together, speaking. You see something, and you tell me to also see so that I can name it for you. *Do you have a seed? Did you make a peepee?*

Your belly over your waistband reminds me of the man you will one day become. I wish for you the names of everything.

Tottering on your bowed knees, you point to the birds and you say, “Oh.”

I answer, “Are the birdies eating?”

“Oh,” you say. *Yes, indeed.*

Your wayward eye so stubbornly sees me. It fixes on me, and when you turn back to the birds, it won't stop looking at me. The clear circle of blue is trapped in the corner, and I want to cry *Turn away!* In that moment I know you are seeing double. Your mother overlaid on the birds. The doctor told me this, as if it is possible to see two things at once, when in fact you see neither exactly, and that is why you wobble, losing your way.

Will it go away? I asked the doctor. No, he said. But you'll always know when he's upset, the doctor said, as if this is a good thing.

Lately, you have taken to closing the eye that fixes on me, but I know this robs you of depth, of the far away and the middle and the near.

You stand there wobbling, one eye on me, and one on the birds at the feeder. "Oh?"

I take you in my arms and slowly, I bring my pointed finger to the tip of your nose, so you will cross your eyes. Crossed, they remember each other, and then, working together, they turn away from me to the window.

"Oh!" you cry, pointing at the birds, who hear you and take flight, and you watch them rising, skimming across the water and above the sycamore, moving to the middle distance, rising beyond, until there is only blue and the specks of black moving ever farther away, and you know the limitless sky, the distance and the size of it, you see how small the birds become, farther and smaller they rise, and you understand the distance available to you, and you raise your finger, pointing away from me.

"Oh," you say. "Ahhh."



GOLDBERRY LONG is the author of the novel *Juniper Tree Burning*. Her forthcoming novel, *Miss O'Keeffe's Lover*, is under contract at Simon and Schuster. Her work has appeared in *Colorado Review*, *New Orleans Review*, *Bayou Magazine*, and *Poetry International*. She lives in California with her family, where she teaches fiction writing at the University of California, Riverside.

WORDS MAKE PONDS by Madeline Tiger

(after Staring at the Morning Pond)

Reflections
may hold: words
fly over the earth
making ponds
where they stand
still

Words
tell pond, grass,
woods, sky
lifting, floating

They hold a true
scene: a world dazzling
down

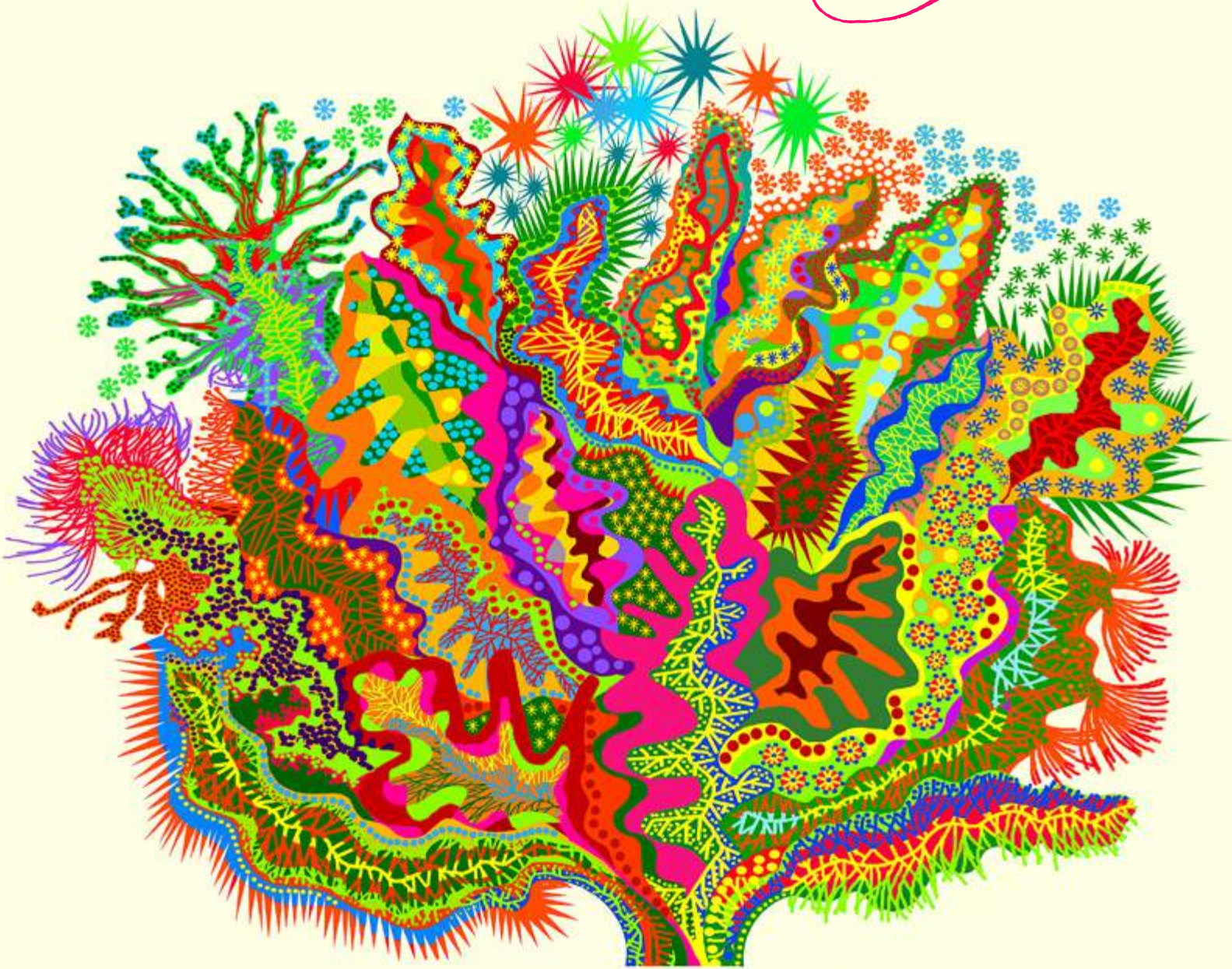
*Circles in
the still shine —
wings overhead.*

— from "Morning Pond"
in *Gradually the World*
by BURT KIMMELMAN



MADELINE TIGER'S recent collections are *Birds of Sorrow and Joy: New and Selected Poems, 1970-2000* (2003), *The Atheist's Prayer* (2010), and *From the Viewing Stand* (2011). She teaches poetry and memoir writing, and has been a Dodge Poet since 1986. She lives in Bloomfield, NJ and turned 80 last fall.

ALIEN Beauty



HOWARD BERELSON is a visual artist as well as a poet. Awarded Honorable Mention in the 2103 Allen Ginsberg Poetry Award, his publication credits include: *The Paterson Literary Review*; *The Great Falls, An Anthology of Poems about Paterson, New Jersey*, and *Lips*. His visual images can be seen at www.howardberelson.com

Published with permission of the artist, Howard Berelson, www.howardberelson.com

A KIND of DELICIOUSNESS: *I Ate the Cosmos for Breakfast* by Melissa Studdard

Book Review by Adele Kenny



I Ate the Cosmos for Breakfast

By Melissa Studdard

St. Julian Press

\$18.00 U.S.

ISBN-13: 978-0-9889447-5-6

ISBN: 0-9889447-5-8

Every now and then we have the delight of discovering a book that is completely unique and unexpected. From the cover image, a face that is hauntingly like the poet's (though not the poet's) to poem after poem graced with perfect syntax and rhythmic modulation, this collection by Melissa Studdard amazes with its rich content and the striking imagery.

What you mistook for a person
is really a country
with a dark and sacred history
and no scholars to explain away the confusion.
Just burn the archives down.
Everything we have to know
we learned from a picture of dreaming.
Everything we need to remember
can fit on a scrap of paper
smaller than your hand. (5)

The tone is hungry and erotic, rich and filled with nuance and innuendo.

Sometimes
I feel so hungry, so thirsty,
I don't want to die.
This desire to butter and eat the stars. (22)

These poems, which suggest the techniques of painting (and include some superb ekphrastic poems), are filled with references to the body and its hungers, its needs and satisfactions. There is a kind of metaphorical deliciousness that speaks to the reader's sense of what must be savored, as well as to the spiritual hungers we all experience.

Because the sun hangs in the sky like a small, folded hand,
I count the brush strokes leading into evening. There are

so many ways to bathe a night in darkness, to wrap the indigo
of memory around a porch swing, to place a hound dog

like a river of mercy at someone's feet. Because the dog's
foot twitches when he is dreaming, I paint a chapel in the distance,

and people spilling down a tulip-dotted hill. I paint
their laughter, that forgiveness, into the flicker of a street lamp, (24)

These poems also contain elements of mystery or surprise—and Studdard leaves plenty of space for the reader to make personal connections and associations through wordless communication in the spaces between lines.

There are so many things you want
to do. You're a bloom of bones
and sacred blood. You're the one whose sleep
throws itself into rivers
waiting to be born,
the one whose fear scales mountains
when it could be picking locks.
Inside you, there's a shipwreck

and survivors
swimming towards the shore.
Inside you,
a sleight of self
still tries to open the doors. (27)

Studdard takes a risky plunge and succeeds because she dares to re-create the universe in her own terms—she “paints” a new picture of what we already know, takes on philosophical issues, speaks of God as a “trickster soul” and in the “feminine tense,” and engages the reader in a fresh look at the ordinary.

And in the other room—the clothes in the washer,
round and round they went, a spinning universe,
and next to them, a parallel world, the dryer,
connected by the same outlet,
humming away.
This life is anything but ho-hum,
with all this motion and noise.
Hell, I can hardly hear over the buzz of my phone,
which I have cursed for interference,
which I have indignantly nicknamed,
that silver piece of shit,
which I have threatened to replace (like it cares),
and which was really Om all along.
Washing clothes, I’ve since learned, is an act of prayer. (28)



Studdard ramps up language’s natural music with alliteration, assonance, consonance, and anaphora. Edgy and sometimes with a nod to the surreal, these poems are compressed and contain a lyrical quality in their movement away from the linear progression of narrative poetry.

Have some compassion.
It’s like a swamp in this desert.
The caskets are at sea level
and always rising. See—
there you go, floating by, mouth full
of music and death.
I guess this means they finally told you:
You are the corpse in this off-key song.

And my words are a pilgrimage
bearing gifts. I brought you flowers.
Is it too late? Are you hungry?
I'm planting a casserole
in the grass. (48)

These poems rest at the balance point of everyday life and the spiritual world. They are intensely focused poems of new life, rebirth, awareness, and realization.

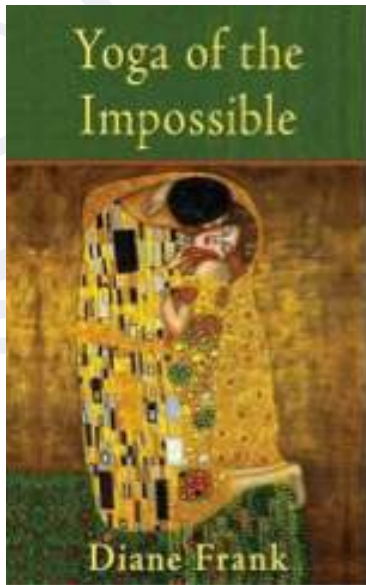
... The Dogwood that fell—
was it a fable? How the tree didn't understand endings?
The rot and flourish? The procession
of petal? The breeze
hosting the body that steals residence.
Like a lover
uprooted at the shore.
I'll grab my mocking canoe and smartass
oars and row. I'll lean my dead self to the ground
and bloom. (58)

Studdard articulates the emotional and spiritual cornerstones of her life (cornerstones that many of us share in one way or another) to create a collection that is multidimensional and cohesive at the same time. Beginning with Studdard's dedication, "For Everyone Who Has Chosen Love Over Fear" to her last poem "The Soul is Swaddled in Body," there is a mystical quality in this collection—a sense of mystery, and a sense of the profoundly spiritual. Studdard's name is not new to poetry, and *I Ate the Cosmos for Breakfast* is a brilliant first collection of her work.



ADELE KENNY is the author of twenty-three books (poetry & nonfiction) with poems published in journals worldwide, and in books and anthologies from Crown, Tuttle, Shambhala, and McGraw-Hill. She is founding director of the Carriage House Poetry Series and poetry editor of *Tiferet* Journal. Among other awards, she has received poetry fellowships from the NJ State Arts Council, the 2012 International Book Award for Poetry, and the Distinguished Alumni Award from Kean University. www.adelekenny.com

YOGA of the IMPOSSIBLE Book Review by Leila Fortier



Yoga of the Impossible

By Diane Frank

1st World Publishing

\$17.00 U.S.

310 pages

Most everyone is familiar with that old Buddhist proverb that states, “When the student is ready the teacher will appear.” I believe that for writers and lovers of literature, the same can also be said of the inspiration we discover in books as if by some serendipitous destiny. This would be how I would discover Diane Frank just over a year ago, quite by accident. Uninspired and thirsting for a book that would send me back into the throes of literary ecstasy, a slim little novel fell from a tower in front of my feet. Typically, as a poet, I am far less drawn to read fiction. But there was something in the very title of Diane Frank’s little book, *Blackberries in the Dream House* that lured me into its pages.

I know now why Frank’s work speaks to me: because it punctures the veil that exists between fiction and poetry as well as dreams and reality. The entire book read like a long, sensuous, exhalation of poetry. I was taken in an instant. Inspired, I began to write. Not long after finishing her first book, I learned of the coming release of her next novel, *Yoga of the Impossible*. Any lover of literature knows that feeling of urgent anticipation I experienced in those months to come. Once again, the title in and of itself called to me: *Yoga of the Impossible* ... *Yoga of the Impossible*.

Yoga in itself is a practice exhaustingly misunderstood to be a mere series of stretches and contortions of the physical body. The word *yoga* originates from the Sanskrit root *yuj*, which literally means “to unite.” The divine union of yoga is the science of spiritual, mental, and physical self-transformation. It is pivotal to recognize this significance when entering the world of *Yoga of the Impossible* because the book pulls from every possible crevice of existence from the mundane to the exalted; from east to west; entwining dreams with reality. *Yoga of the Impossible* is a whirling vortex of physical, mental, and spiritual experience through the perplexed, yet free-spirited, Katarina.

Perhaps most of us live our lives according to certain prototypes, genres, and preferences. We teach ourselves to repeat patterns, associate ourselves with certain circles; discriminate between our personal interests and attitudes to that of others. We separate that which is like us from that which isn't. But here, Frank illustrates the illustrious awakening of eclectic experience. Like a Zen koan, Katarina's trajectory gathers to unite all of life's paradoxes and contradictions. There is no limit to geography, time, or space and there is nothing she is unwilling to explore to unravel her own mystery.

Musicians, artists, and dancers commune in every possible form and expression. Knowledge and wisdom are divined as readily from the *Kabbalah* as *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. Insights are gleaned from the cornucopia of dreams, astrology, mythology, and symbolism. Understanding is cultivated though interaction as much as isolation. The very breath of life is found in the language of birds, nature's mountains, streams, umbrella magnolias, and catalpa trees. The pulse of life vibrates in jazz cafés; through flutes, banjos, or violins, or caravans of dancing gypsies. Only a poet could introduce such a plethora of sensory diversity, and Frank never loses touch with the voice of poetry, which carries the story seamlessly in and out of every possible realm:

My inner life was a collage of quiet strength and intense vulnerability, with edges so open the beauty and pain of the world were constantly speaking to me. My art was a fusion of real world images and wild abstraction, a personal universe finding its form. At night I sometimes heard music and played it on my flute. Melodies came from I don't know where, woven with intricate harmonies. For the first time in my life, I was able to play and remember these pieces. I wrote them on rice paper, and they rippled through my art (Ch. 62: Not on a White Horse).

Katarina's journey of self-discovery is one we all engage in to one extent or another. Yet, somehow, Frank illustrates to the reader the beautiful disaster of our lives—how each step, like a waltz, whether forward or backward is part of this cosmic rhythm of life—part of the universal whole. As Thomas Merton once said, “We have what we seek. It is there all the time, and if we give it time it will make itself known to us.” Katarina's story is not mine to tell, but for the reader's to discover. It is no wonder to me that Diane Frank is an award-winning writer. Her stories pulse through her very being and sing through the heart of her own experience. She lives as she writes—with passionate diversity, which is why her novel *Yoga of the Impossible* transforms into something entirely *possible* for anyone who remains open to experience.



LEILA A. FORTIER is a Pushcart Prize nominated poet, artist, and photographer residing in Okinawa, Japan. She is a member of the Alpha Sigma Lambda National Honor Society; pursuing her BFA in creative writing through Southern New Hampshire University. Her sculpted poetry is often accompanied by her own multi-medium forms of art, photography, and spoken performance. Known for her contributions to humanitarian causes through the arts, selections of her work have also been translated into French, Italian, Spanish, Arabic, and German in a growing effort to foster cultural diversity and understanding through the voice of poetry. She has most recently initiated the venue *Poetic License* to support other writers through book reviews, feature interviews, articles, and inspiration. Her work in all its mediums has been featured in hundreds of publications globally in print and online. *Numinous* is her second book of poetry newly released through Saint Julian Press. A complete listing of her published works can be found at: www.leilafortier.com



Tiferet

LITERATURE, ART, & THE CREATIVE SPIRIT

SUBMIT YOUR WRITING

FOR POSSIBLE PUBLICATION IN TIFERET.

We are always on the lookout for well-written, engaging, and hopefully consciousness-raising poetry and prose. Our editors carefully review each submission and selections are chosen for five digital and one print issue a year.

We read regular submissions from **JUNE 1 – DECEMBER 31** each year.

Tiferet is accepting submissions for our annual Writing Contest from **JAN. 1, 2015 – JUNE 1, 2015**.

Awards of \$500 are given in each of three categories: Poetry, Fiction, and Nonfiction.

Visit <http://tiferetjournal.com/2015-writing-contest> for submission guidelines.

We look forward to reading your work!

SUBMIT YOUR AD

FOR EXPOSURE TO AN EXTENSIVE SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM & DATABASE.

Our readers, fans, followers and friends are interested in writing, spirituality, and promoting tolerance.

If you would like to advertise a product or service that is appropriate and relevant, please contact Lisa at lisa@tiferetjournal.com. She can tell you more about the opportunities available to you in our print and digital issues, newsletter, Facebook and Twitter promotions, radio show hosting, and more.