



Tiferet

LITERATURE, ART, & THE CREATIVE SPIRIT

SUMMER 2014



"COBWEB CONCERTO *with* COBRA LILY"
FRAN PELZMAN LISCIO/PUNKS AND ROSES

DOG and DIFFERENT FIELDS by *Therese Halscheid*

2014 Tiferet Poem-a-Thon Poets:

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DOG and DIFFERENT FIELDS *by Therése Halscheid*


I WANT TO TELL YOU OF A DAY NOT LONG AGO – it was late morning, actually – when I spent an hour releasing you from my limbs; and that I had help in this matter and that this matter was hard. I was bare. Just lying on a massage table with a sheet draped over; it covered my shoulders down to the toes. Every part of me was quiet: the legs, the arms limp at my sides. Only my mind was active, aware of the music, sensing its calm. I did not know the flutist and had no names for the wild birds I heard, but the music was of those two main sounds: different bird calls, a flute that could lure the hardest stories from a person, similar to a snake being charmed. Like a serpent uncoiling out of a vessel, unraveling without resistance, into the very air we breathe.

There was music playing, as I said. It was soft. The room was square, rather small. I noted the walls' complexion as being similar to the sacred ground of New Mexico, or of any place out West where the land continues, untouched. For miles, just vast stretches of this reddish-orange, seamlessly endless. It was like that in the room, its color felt penetrable, expansive as the ochre earth.

A table stood where two walls met. Upon it, a lamp with a shade. Its light shone like a dim sun. The bulb, a little sun wrapped in a gauzy haze. A fountain was also upon that very table. The kind you plug in and water is then cycled through and through. Trickle down miniature slabs of grey slate made to look like the larger, natural formations I have seen in active brooks, where water cascades nonstop, is falling always from stone to stone, rushing from tier to tier to tier. Something about the sound of the fountain along with the music of the flute and the birds – that relaxed me enough to where I could tune in to my inner thoughts. There were several beneath layers of skin. Many were of you, my father, in a place inside, a clandestine world. You, with my uncle and aunt. There were thirty years to be exact. There is an art to memory-making. When a person calls forth stories, maybe it is wisdom

that determines what gets revealed or concealed. Something other than intellect that knows what should never flush up, a protective device that determines what is best kept in the unconscious versus parts to be made aware, and if so, just how. How to edit, to surface it safe.... A memory can also slide onto a person's face, creating a readable expression. The face is an ever-changing portrait of emotion, and it was there that the masseuse began. When Josh planted his hands over my eyes, I felt my jaw loosen its grip, my mouth went slack. My expression gave way. It relinquished something locked in its tight look. The sensation was of wide open water parting across my forehead, sliding along the temples, washing the high ridge of each cheek down to the eroded chin. Hands smooth from lavender oil. Flowing like current, like two fragrant streams.

What I began to see, I did not plan. They were random scenes that surfaced. I just let them happen. Memories would flash or float across the mind's eye, while breathing in and out. Some offered sudden insights, while others lingered. One took place before I was born. It was a told memory. A scene of you, when well – a father anyone would have wanted to be raised by. The memory also involved a young stray. A black mutt that started coming around the rail yard at 30th Street Station in Philadelphia, where you worked as an engineer of cargo trains. You, in a blue-and-white striped cap, driving the locomotives whose boxcars were lined with hay, stacked with wooden crates. It was an old story, passed down, set in the mid-1900s. It involved the railroaders naming the pup Mike. It involved the men bringing him scraps from last night's dinners. Of Mike's coming around the boxcars, always out in the frosty wind, the dark cold – along with your growing concern about his enduring such harsh winter nights. There was something about the story –that gave life to early years, to the original you. Especially the part when you entered your and Mom's first apartment with a brimming smile, clutching the straggly pup in your arms, saying he had jumped in your car. That you finished the shift and were walking to your car and the dog followed. Must have jumped right in as you opened the door, must have chosen to go with you. A simple tale; but one that held a large heart within its few sentences. Heart that would need surgery, and from that, a damaged brain....



When Josh massaged my neck, his palms flattened against each shoulder then swept around and drew up in a clasp at the base of the skull. Then again, from the chin down around the shoulder blades and then behind to the nape of the neck only, this time, he paused for a moment, cradling my head as if cupping a nest. And then, a third time, rounding to the back of the shoulders up to the nape – sweeping wider, pressing deeper – hands parting and coming back together in swirls. The circular motion began to unravel another memory needing attention. A scene so well-kept, it maintained its original feel. Through it I could envision the day you left our house; simply opened our door and somehow shuffled down the street and disappeared. I could sense how frantic we were, my friend Tom, and me....

I see our nearing the field. Approaching the place our legs finally led us to. Having scouted the neighboring streets that led to the gully where our feet slipped from under us and sent us skidding sidewise, downward, across the sandy slope. The yellow sands have dusted our jeans, and we do not care. We have slid by a fort I made for myself, five years earlier, when the days went well, and a child's life was concerned with play and the play was about my becoming a cliff dweller, having cleared a ridge, having formed hand-dug holes to store what I brought there on a given afternoon. And though I do not recall too much about such a place, I know it was a secret, except for the one time I took a friend. That day, I brought a watermelon along with a pocket knife so we could stand on the ledge

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spitting seeds. All afternoon our cheeks puckered with air. Our mouths like sudden gusts, to see how far a seed could go. We have passed that fort. Slid by without noticing anything other than what we sought. And crossed the low waters of the gully, our arms parting everything in our way – the stiff reeds; the milkweed with pods partially open, their silky parachutes still harnessed inside. For hours, my friend and I are in a clueless search, on foot. While the police zigzag our neighborhood, peering through their windows, not sure what to look for, other than Mother's description of you, adding that her husband would not know who they are; that he no longer knew where he lived. *Dad! Dad!* I am yelling into the wind, into the wind that whips about, repeating itself. That comes and goes from us. That comes at us but cannot knock us down. *Dad!* As we scale the incline, rise from the gully onto the asphalt of the church's parking lot, our eyes squinting to that very place where the lot ends and the field begins. To where a lone figure appears far away, small as mountains do in the distance when they dim like hills.

This is the story. How we run for what we long to find, before we can even be sure. Our legs in flight, our legs leaping as wild animals over the waving grasses, our arms going before us, outstretched. *Dad! Dad!* I am yelling at the man who seems lost. Whose back is towards us but, even so, the look of him there, makes it obvious he is confused. He is caged in that place, tangled in wild brush. His pant legs have burrs. And we're running, Tom and me, towards this person, who is definitely you. You, near-blind, brain-damaged.... *Dad!* And you turn. And you turn lucid, slowly, pivoting. Something has triggered, and my voice lifts into someone you know. I see your eyes trying to focus on that which you hear, but cannot see. The grasses part as I come forward. I take you to me. I take to you, like the stray you took home. I say, *Come on!* My hand grasps yours. It is the only language we have. I lead you out and we leave that field without a sound.

The poet, Alberto Rios, writes of cities inside us, in one of his poems. Secret cities, he says – with unmarked streets, I add, and houses not numbered, and all that happens within them that is never to be disclosed. Things observed that have no where to go, so the body takes them in. *This is where/They went. They did not disappear,* says the poet. *We each take*

*a piece /Through the eye and through the ear. / It's loud
inside us, in here, and when we speak /In the outside world
/We have to hope that some of that sound / Does not come
out ...*

The music was of birds. Wild birds, free to fly out of a song, out of the player that caged their sound. I imagined them dipping and soaring amongst the spaces between leaves; flitting from one emerald tree to the next in the vibrant forest of my mind. Some encircled the hills and valleys of my body as I lay beneath these imagined birds, orbiting above. Birds perched on branches, I did visualize. So many circling, gliding, perched while singing, singing while filling the room.

I am not sure why Rios's poem came to me but I rather liked his notion, and I knew how things can build inside, a desolate world. How, over time, the body creates thicker walls to make these cities, like fortresses. An impenetrable place, hidden so, the body will never share. Not a clue through daily speech or postured language, not even the eyes hint at these things a person endured. Still, there can be a way to discern a deeply hidden life – especially with those who are highly sensitive, who wear the gift of touch. I have heard about it from some Natives, that their elders' hands could access knowledge. Some have been capable of even reading stones. They could hold a stone in their palm and discern its truth, the records in its rock-hard body. And I have spent time in Alaska, once with an Inupiaq tribe on a mountain in the far north, and once by the Kachemak Bay, where the black stones wash ashore – and it was told to me



Melissa Studdard

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there, the ancients could divine their markings, the lines of white granite coursing through. I felt Josh was like this. In certain respects, the way his hands followed the lines of my skin, seemed he was reading me. There were years inside to be explored. Thirty consumed by three who were ill. Hours that hardened inside. They felt petrified.

When dementia struck, it came unannounced. This was caused by a lack of oxygen during open-heart surgery when, at some undisclosed moment, something in the operating room went amuck, and the vital air was cut off, and then there was only silence inside you. The unattended mind went blank. Like a tornado, I imagine, destruction raced along a determined path, wiping out the borderline zones before penetrating to the centralized regions of the brain, shattering memories. Only fragments of the past were left, scattered like ruins, forming a mindscape that made no sense. We could not piece your life back together. You had no short term memory. That too was irreparable, blown down. Which meant you could never be present; never again would you process the daily world. If there is a place in the brain where future reigns, I will say now, that too, was gone. After this surgery, after one month in that hospital, you came home to live with us, my father, but you were not ever again yourself.

The music with the birds in it, was leading me back. If my eyes were open, I would have seen a room with red-orange walls. I would have seen Josh massaging the right side of my neck – turning my face to one side, spreading the skin taut. His hands moving outward until the flesh felt torn in all directions, and a gulf widened between the tilted jaw and shoulder, and the opening became an invitation from which anything unwanted, inside me, might leave. The neck was a vent through which things could escape – pent up energy, or a distressed thought my body housed, that was willing to go. After, he lifted my right arm out from under the sheet. Beginning at the shoulder, he massaged downward to the fingertips. I know about the healing arts, having been trained, so I was aware of the trust needed to forfeit control, and let my arm grow limp, the body weightless, pliable, as a rag doll. And then he began again, holding my arm in his hands, working it down. If the body was a world, flattened out, my arm would be a narrow road with underground waters. Veined rivers; carrying the stories of a life.



Mike lives within; roaming there across a highway of bones, his paws leaving tracks easy to trace. I picture his lunging into the foreground, wagging his dark tail. I follow him along a scenic path into the past where – as a toddler – I am sitting on a rug in the living-room of our first home. I am small-bodied, especially with Mike nearby, double my size. You are also in the image, in a flannel robe, your arms out with presents. Mom is taking pictures. It is Christmas morning. My mouth is open in amazement at these boxes brightly wrapped. We are near to the decorated tree, Mike and me, in this moment that arises, in part, from the black-and-white photographs in our family album. My arm is raised high as it can go. Pale little arm in a gesture of joy.... It is this sheer joy that I watch and want. It is a snapshot that I keep, that I keep reprinting in the darkroom of the self.

The body is the keeper of our stories. Although some would say these stories are only housed in a region of the brain. Certainly, it could be the brain is a container for the mind's personal history, but it could also be that the mind flows. *Mind-flow* is a term I have heard that relates to this notion of meandering thoughts. It has also been theorized that memory exists in our cells. Darting cells, miniscule, yet they capsule everything about us. They behave like the stars above, whizzing about in their own intelligent galaxy, in a dark inward sky that has never known the real moon and sun. If one can imagine such an inverted universe, one will sense the singular self as a vast being, with cities inside as Rios said, but also with cells like stars aligned on our inner walls. Knowing-cells – simple yet complex, mysterious for their way of retaining all the records of a life within its microscopic size.

It is an impossible task to take the life I have lived with you and examine it like a swab of cells upon a Petri dish. To look long, enough to magnify anything sure.... To then conclude from the study: *This is my father. Or: Here is my father's life. This is what he does.* And this is because there were no consistent variables. In a damaged mind, time vacillates. There are shifts in personality and visual disturbances, along with behaviors that seem impossible to give over to words. States of being I have not spoken much of, because I feel protective. Even now, there is some need in me, to dignify you. This stems from my early upbringing, in having had an admirable father. Qualities that were short-lived but ever-lasting: your kindness, your simple way

of saying so much. The wisdom you imparted that I would find myself drawing upon, as to overcome any deranged event – to remind myself that anything you were doing, was not your fault. There are many ways of you still in me, many faces of the father. Particularly the first few years when your state of mind was in flux; like a pendulum, time swung between hours of lethargy and sudden restlessness.

When Josh completed massaging both arms, he parted the sheet back to expose one leg. His hands were oil-slicked, and so they slid easily along the path from the upper thigh down to my toes. Again, and again, and then he kneaded each muscle – beginning with the thigh, then to the calf, to the thinning ligaments of the ankle and finally, the heel. It was all to mend. As if the body was being loved to get at its life, as if I was there for that reason. It was then that I caught another scene lifting off the dark notion of mind – of a second uncombed place you set off into, the first year of your brain damage. A field you entered but would not ever join, like Mark Strand in his poem “Keeping Things Whole.” *In a field*, he writes, *I am the absence /of field. /This is /always the case. / Wherever I am /I am what is missing....*

After this field parted to accept your passing through, hours later, our relatives called, they sent back news that the police had taken you to Green Street, which means you had given them the address where you lived as a boy. It was an old house they pulled up to, rather large, painted white, where your sister, my Aunt Marie, still lived with her husband, Lester. She was home when the officer emerged from his car and walked to the porch and knocked. She said she peered out to see your blank face in the back window, your eyes out – I suppose – at some boyhood scene you believed to be there. When the police came, they pulled up slow, Marie added, and then your brother, Melvin, appeared, because he and Aunt Lorie lived in a smaller house, next door, at the time. It was day’s end with sky darkening. It had been a long day of your being lost. When they called, Mom’s stoic armor softened into a look of relief. Her voice cracked. Her small body gave way in a chair.

When they found you, it was more that they did not find you. Rather, you appeared at a gas station, having emerged from the field on your own, where railroad tracks cut through and it seemed then, you had been walking a long while along the ties. For three or more hours

they figured, after leaving Olive Street, heading towards the tracks, not knowing where you were or that there was a search. Your clothing was coated with thistles. Bits of straw clung to your socks. The way the attendant tells it, he saw you stagger while nearing the pump and knew right away that something was not right. *You could just tell*, he said, *so I called the police....* This was some distance from the daycare center you walked from soon as they left you unattended, thinking you were occupied with a set of wooden blocks. *Can you build something with these?* they asked. And you had nodded or said something to indicate yes. This is the story – of a facility, in Westville, not staffed to handle dementia. But as no other day-centers were willing to take out-patients with your limitations in those years – they agreed to a two-week trial. And this was largely based upon Mom’s urgent need to situate you somewhere during the day, that she could then find work. *Can you build something....* And they placed a block in your hand. After, they moved on to others who were physically inept but mentally alert.

In the car, in the police car, they said you were polite but not able to answer many questions. They had doubts about the address. There was mention of an uncertain look about you. I guessed it was your glazed expression, that distant stare – which is the face’s way of saying the mind’s not right. There was no identification. Nothing but the *Green Street* you gave to them, which was about twenty-five miles from the center, and another ten from our house, where the police wanted us to stay, in case you showed. No wallet. You simply walked out of the facility in a moment no one seems to recall. Vanishing; into the clear wind that left behind no hint of you.

Sound of the flute, song of the birds. It becomes the music for the mind and body. The trickling fountain. This is what leads me to former years, to pieces of the past that swim openly in blue streams of blood. There was a scene that came to mind of a trip to Canada, when I was three. A hazy memory, but I could make out the mists and the platform and the railing we three clung to, when level with the waterfalls. High up, and the wind coming so fast you could see it passing by. I entered those hours and found other moments within: a quaint cabin somewhere along the way; a place with gentle animals where I had to overcome fear in

hand-feeding a speckled fawn. I saw us returning to New Jersey, and re-entered that scene.... We are nearing home. Having come from this place of rushing waters, where a show of colored lights shines on them, at night. We have driven long hours and are now entering the town of Somerdale; are now turning onto our street, Fairview, approaching our weeping cherry upright like an open umbrella whose petals shower upon a new lawn each spring. I am in the back of our white Chevy, next to soft blankets: one is pink and one blue. The car is red inside, and we have been in this red all day, and we have just pulled into the familiar driveway, and we have just entered the house where Mike is sure to spring on us. We expect his straggly tail to wave about, dust-mopping the air.

But the moment does shift and an awful quiet takes his place. There is a phone call to Mom's sister, who explains she let Mike in the yard after a feeding, and when she returned a couple hours later – he was nowhere to be found. The way it is said, seems he jumped the fence because he had been missing us. Most likely he bolted to where the street ends in a T, and a stitch of railroad tracks runs perpendicular. Seems, there are always trains that snake through our lives. Always the metal rails that narrow to a V, spill over the impossible horizon. You can tell the tracks go to there, to that never-ending place, where Mike may be. This is what becomes of our long summer vacation. The end, the start of a search! That quickly unravels, is laid out long into the night and I watch that too, nighttime, and the dark middle of our street where you are not giving up. Calling his name; cupping your hands to your mouth. *Mike! Mike!* I have climbed out of bed. My face presses against the screen; my little face at the window like a quiet moon looking down upon you. This is the power of memory. That I see you still; that I hear your voice.

There is a field long gone, that is now an avenue with the name Mount Vernon. With paved sidewalks, and curbsides lined with large maples that arc to create a tunnel of varying color in spring, summer and fall. There is a family tale of Mom's sister, Dee, and her husband, Mario, buying a plot six years or so after they married, and settling there. For a short time, theirs was the only home – a two-story surrounded by wild brush – before the natural land began to clear and builders raised many other similar-looking houses. It would come to be, when I was

around eight, that you and Mom would buy a Cape Cod on the same street, three blocks away. It is all true. The area upon which my aunt and uncle raised their house, the placement of the house where I was raised, was once a field.

I have yet to fully comprehend the odyssey that weighed upon our two families beginning when I was fourteen – let alone come to terms with how long these successive tragedies lasted, two of which had no cure. Some of this has slipped from me going then, past states of recognition, down through levels of consciousness, into the secreted self. I do not complain. What cannot be grasped, I just do not know. And anyway, not-knowing can keep things safe. Were I to force realizations, I might become overwrought. I might sink into an awful awareness that works like quick-mire or dark marl or some other bottomless trap, only to discover the memory is not meant to rise. Perhaps it is best to offer statements that work on a surface level. Something general like: *Dementia did rule our lives....* I can say this much. I can say I have spent more time living among the sick than with those who are well. And I can say since your and my uncle's passing – I am searching for something to be cast in normal light. I am seeking normalcy, I mean. I mean I am trying to do this one thing, breathe myself back into a common world.

You can turn over, Josh said. And I did. My body behaved like a long stretch of water, slowly folding over – a human wave flipping upon a solitary shore. There was a donut-looking cushion attached to the table that I was asked to put my face through, while the sheet was draped over me. After, my body settled. I breathed like tide. This is the naming of the present.... A sheet, turned down to the buttocks. The shoulder blades, arched like sides of an open book. Pages of skin, layers of flesh.... I could be read like this. I could feel Josh's hands set off, across my back, as if he had let them go.

It was only six months after your tragedy, when Uncle Mario started to forget how to do the simplest tasks. One day, he could not tie his shoe. Another, he became lost on a local errand. Much was kept from me at first. It was more that I learned through observation, by walking into their house after school. It was an autumn of seeing things I could not say, and who is to blame? Who could tell a child who had just lost her father to dementia, that

something was now wrong with her uncle's mind as well? Who could explain the diagnosis: *Inflammation and arthritis to the arteries of the brain*. Or the fact that Pennsylvania Hospital, in Philadelphia, described his condition as unusual and wanted him for a case-study. So rare, they said, and gave him a year or two to live. Two at most, but actually, in the end, we were witness to a steady decline that lasted twenty-seven years. Almost three decades of a brain self-destructing; like a control board whose switches flick off one by one by one, shutting the nervous system. You could not see it happen, but you could certainly tell when a nerve became threadbare, its end so frayed that life was losing its grip. You could see the whole of his body react in spastic gestures. Standing up, sitting down. Reflexes going haywire, repetitive movements. Along with chopped speech: *I go out? I go out?* Or some small phrase his mouth would get stuck on and utter for hours: *I get up. No? I go. I go out. No?* Which contrasted with your ability to speak but because you did not share our reality, your clearly-formed sentences rarely made sense. And this justified my turning inward to silence, which differed from my aunt's afternoon slur, which took me awhile to figure out. My aunt who meant well. Who so willingly gave of herself but was becoming undone. This was after the daycare catastrophe in Westville, when she offered to care for you, that Mom could try working.

There is a poem titled "Power" by Adrienne Rich, that talks about Marie Curie and how *she must have known she suffered from radiation sickness / her body bombarded for years by the element / she had purified*. I know this poem as an example of my mother, and how a rare strength was cultivated through her loss. And how, as Rich said of Curie: *It seems she denied to the end the source....* She would never give up. Steadfast, both sisters, in fact, remained determined to care for their husbands. My mother would say things like: *I'll do it as long as I can....* And I could not compare. There were days when I thought you should be placed in a nursing home. Even after a decade, even after twelve, thirteen years, did I feel this strain between our family's loyalty and a desire to carve a life for myself. Wanting to be away from it; wanting it away. But that it kept going on, it kept on short-changing our lives. No, it is not like that either. It was just that our lives had those kinds of lessons, the kind that one would never think of. In the end, your wife cared for you at home for fifteen years. *Denying her wounds*, Rich said of Curie. As Rich said, *her wounds came from the same source as her power*.

It was both a tender and troubled truth. And it was short-lived. How it was the autumn day I came in through the door of Aunt Dee's to walk you home, that my uncle and I faced each other in the living-room, with no one around. We shared no words. Only a stunned look came from our eyes that shone how we saw into each other, the danger of our sicknesses. He seemed alerted to my dwindling figure from having stopped eating. And I sensed his brain throbbled like a beating heart or pulsing wrist. Swelling, pressing against his skull.... And then the moment let go and the day resumed. We each returned to being unaware of the threats plaguing our health. It was the last time I ever remember his looking that far into me, although we certainly faced each other many more times.

There is a certain danger in loosening this way – in sharing like this. In the telling of the heart. In the baring of the body. In the naming of each life. In the claiming of the self. In the unveiling of the strange. In the worryment that follows. In the silence that comes after. In the kneading of the flesh. In the letting go of sorrow. In the lightness that can follow, in the opening of my eyes.

In Viktor Frankl's book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, he tells of a gray day that involved a bird. He pictures for us life in a concentration camp in the Bavarian woods where everything was in that color – the dawning sky, the snow on the ground, the rags of the prisoners. All gray, like gloom, and there was Frankl, set to work in a trench. He had been fraught with notions about his wife, questioning whether she was dead or alive, but on that very morning his mind grasped another understanding, which is that love is just as alive when reflecting on the beloved. And in his realizing this, he felt her presence as if he had reached his hand out to hers. She was there. *Then, at that very moment, he writes, a bird flew down silently and perched just in front of me, on the heap of soil which I had dug up from the ditch, and looked steadily at me.*

Perhaps this is the purpose of winged creatures – to pierce the air, to reach those we love and flutter back with a knowing look in their dark soft eyes. To mediate between earth and after-life, offering signs through gesture and song. I remember a bird singing once, with all his might on the branch of a holly tree. Song that he put his whole glorious self into, that I had to stop what I was doing and listen, because it registered as more than an ordinary chirp. I think

he knew of the cat in hiding, ready to spring. I think he accepted his fate before it happened and was giving his all, singing his way out. Because it wasn't sad, really; it wasn't sad where he was going next, and it wasn't that different either, except that he couldn't sit in that particular tree. He'd have to be near in the way of Frankl's wife, unseen yet felt.

Eventually, everyone moved into the Veterans Home. You were bound to a geriatric chair, your body cast back, having become dead weight after a fall in which you broke your hip. My uncle was upright in a wheelchair, as was my aunt who was on oxygen. There was a particular Christmas that I remember resisting, having grown weary of holidays where we gathered in the solarium, streaks of winter sun pooling in the same places along the floor. Sun spots that we would push you into, to warm your chilled bones. It was early afternoon when the trays came and I sat down before you – although time did not need counting in such a place. Mom was spoon-feeding Mario. Dee was eating in a slow way, but taking care of herself. Even the meals had lost their hearty appearance, having gone from solid to diced to puréed over this long stretch that would cover fifteen more years. There was some coaxing on my part, there was my saying *Dad open*, so I could slide an orange swirl of sweet potatoes into your mouth – that had no teeth – into that small cave with so few words inside, to echo off its dark walls. *Dad open your mouth....* And you did. The spoon slipped through. I felt a tug that put life back into your expression; a slight pull like you wouldn't let go yet, were still anchored to earth.

The fields come and go. There is one that I enter while house-sitting for a family in New Mexico, whose adobe is close to a Native reservation. One of my jobs is to walk their dog through a field. Wild horses come at us, the dog and me, to see what we will do. I am frightened by their large size, their nostrils, the way they seem to sense my fear – that reduces me to a corner of field where I stand helpless against a corral, until the woman who lives down there, sees me afraid. She has other horses. She is a horse expert. She comes to tell me that I should bring a plastic bag and let the air fill it like a windsock, then puff it in their face. From then on I do this, and begin to enjoy the walks. The dog and I, we move freely now as wild horses. We part the fields. We cross the low waters of the Rio Grande, to where the land breaks open on the other side, which is the Native's territory. I move cautious but am also struck by the quiet, when taking the thin trail of parched earth that cuts through the ochre hills lining

both sides. We do not stop and we never seem to near the pack of coyotes that hide wherever they hide; nor do we disturb any rattlesnakes coiled in dry brush. Instead, we keep to the steep path of the arroyo that leads to the flat-topped mountain. The dog races ahead and circles back to me, while I maintain a slower pace, leaning forward, into the incline, into the thin air. I carry nothing but the knowledge that my father is dying. It is Christmas Day, and Mother has just called to say you have taken a turn for the worse. My feet are the only thing leading me as the rest feels numb. And the dog surges ahead and circles back, to make sure I am keeping up. And the dog circles back, to check that I am sure-footed, going safe along this sacred trail that is little-known. *Las Barrancas*, The Badlands: where almost nothing survives its hard conditions, only slow-growing cacti and rabbit-brush, sage and yucca. And up, up past the sun-bleached skull of a wild dog we go. Up through the winding path up to the mesa with its pygmy forest and scattered pinyon – where we are looking over the land at last, the dog and me, beyond where the old mountains physically warm my soul. I am so small amongst this great beauty. I can only stare out to where the snow-capped crests collide with the clouds. Clouds wind-blown as the fields that look snow-laden in winter....

You are in the hospital. A decision has been made to remove life-support. I seek a place of solace on a nearby ridge where a rock is painted blue. Some Native painting it on a particular day for a special reason I will never know. This is where I went to think of you. This is how I spent Christmas – on a blue rock set between the lower ground and sky. Thinking of my own vision of death and what can occur – whether death will actually return you to wellness; whether my hand in its reaching out, will feel your invisible clasp. On the rock, it feels like your passing will bring you back to me; that we will have a way of speaking to each other. Like air, perhaps you will be more like the air – paramount, clear yet felt. Ever-moving, never again lost. You will be like wind hovering above the very fields that part open and close back, that I still move through.



THERÉSE HALSCHEID is author of four poetry collections, *Powertalk* (1995) and *Without Home* (Kells, 2001), and *Uncommon Geography* (Carpenter Gothic, 2006). *Uncommon Geography* received a 2007 Finalist Award from the Paterson Poetry Book Prize. She also won a chapbook award by Pudding House Publications, as part of their 2007 *Greatest Hits* series. Visit her online at www.theresehalscheid.com

2014 Tiferet



Poem-a-thon

STEPHANIE PIETKIEWICZ

HAZEL SAVILLE

MARY MONROE

LOIS P. JONES

BRIDGET NUTTING

PHILIP MARLEY

ANNE WOODWORTH

UDO HINTZ

LIN OSTLER

TRACY BROOKS

ALEXIS QUINLAN

AMBIKA TALWAR



MIDWINTER SPRING *by Stephanie Pietkiewicz*

I had stayed too long.
Pluto's arms were cold but calm
And the thought of the climb
And return,
The grit in my mouth
And the dirt,
And the uncertain birth...
With this pomegranate in the dark
Giving solace enough
(Six seeds not yet grown
A taste of life on the tongue
And the cold burn of a jeweled sun)
To drowse drown
The echo of
The pain
Of my mother's calling down
The winter gloom.

This tomb this womb,
This moment of choice:
Remain as if dead
Or stillborn?
The umbilical strangling the neck
at the root and aborting the climb.
Or to find that tight cage canal
And let the life urge push up
And along?
Let the green fill my veins again,
Still drunk with dark fire.
The withering seed
With sweetness enough to lull
The latent power

Of Pele Persephone,
Burning deep in dark blood.

Sharp rumbles and flame cracks
Churning and sparking the ground.
Here in this stasis
There's solace.
This rich silence
Windless.
Care less
For earth's winter
Than this heavy caress.

Do they even want me?
Those children of the dark
Afraid of their light.
Can they hear this silent
Forming spring
In them?
To yearn for my return
And dance
Around the Beltane pole
Is good,
But can't they see the seed in them,
Their growing green,
Not urgent need?

One day I'll find
Before I come
Spring will have already
Returned.

And my Dark Lord
Will rise again
To give each one
The jewels
Of their crown.



STEPHANIE PIETKIEWICZ Since 2011, when she had a near-death drowning experience, Stephanie has been writing poetry as a daily spiritual practice. She sees writing as 'vocation' in its deepest sense and believes as Rumi says, "you must become the pen in the Sun's hand..." Stephanie lives in Wellington, New Zealand.

BIG TUJUNGA *(for Alice)* by Lois P. Jones

The wind is humming in your red dress.
The wind is humming in your red dress
and the moon and stars do their slow
tambourine dance to praise this universe, so Rumi says.

There is a glory in the way you stand
as if your body wants to move in a quick arpeggio –
bouncing on a soul spring, letting the ground raise you,
breeze lifting your skirt as you walk the wash

and let your mind tango with the creosote
and mesquite. This is where the Tongva slept
in their huts made of willow and tule reed -
right here at the edge of the creek you love

to watch run pure and free once the desert
has rolled up its parched tongue.

Anything could appear to you now –
ghost moths fluttering in the shadows,

ravens startling the jack rabbits
in the deerweed and sumac. Some spirit
rushing past you like tumbleweed.

The sun is staking its claim, turning your skin

to gold leaf. Time makes you thirsty,
hungry for what really feeds you -
clear skies and days of tall sunflowers.
You're hoping the bees will show

will hum you with their clear wings
will honey you and take you home.



LOIS P. JONES is a host of Pacifica Radio's "Poet's Café" (KPFK 90.7 FM), and co-hosts the Monday series in West Los Angeles. Publications include *Narrative Magazine*, *The Warwick Review*, *American Poetry Journal*, *Nassau Review*, *Askew* and *Antioch's Lunch Ticket* with upcoming work in *Eyewear*. 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, the 2012 Liakoura Prize and is featured in *The Tiferet Talk Interviews* which includes Robert Pinsky and Julia Cameron with host Melissa Studdard. She is a recipient of an award from the Arroyo Arts Collective for their 2014 Poetry in the Windows Project. Lois is the Poetry Editor of *Kyoto Journal* and a multiple Pushcart nominee.

THAI HOOPER

by Anne Woodworth



He rolled around inside the hoop
as if Leonardo's diagram had come alive.
A man inside a circle making circles
inside a circle inside a square
in the middle of town.
The circles took us with them
under a magnificent sun that centered us
until we felt a stinging in our arms and legs,
yours and mine, four arms four legs together,
dizzy with air that swirled love
and made us know the earth's pull.



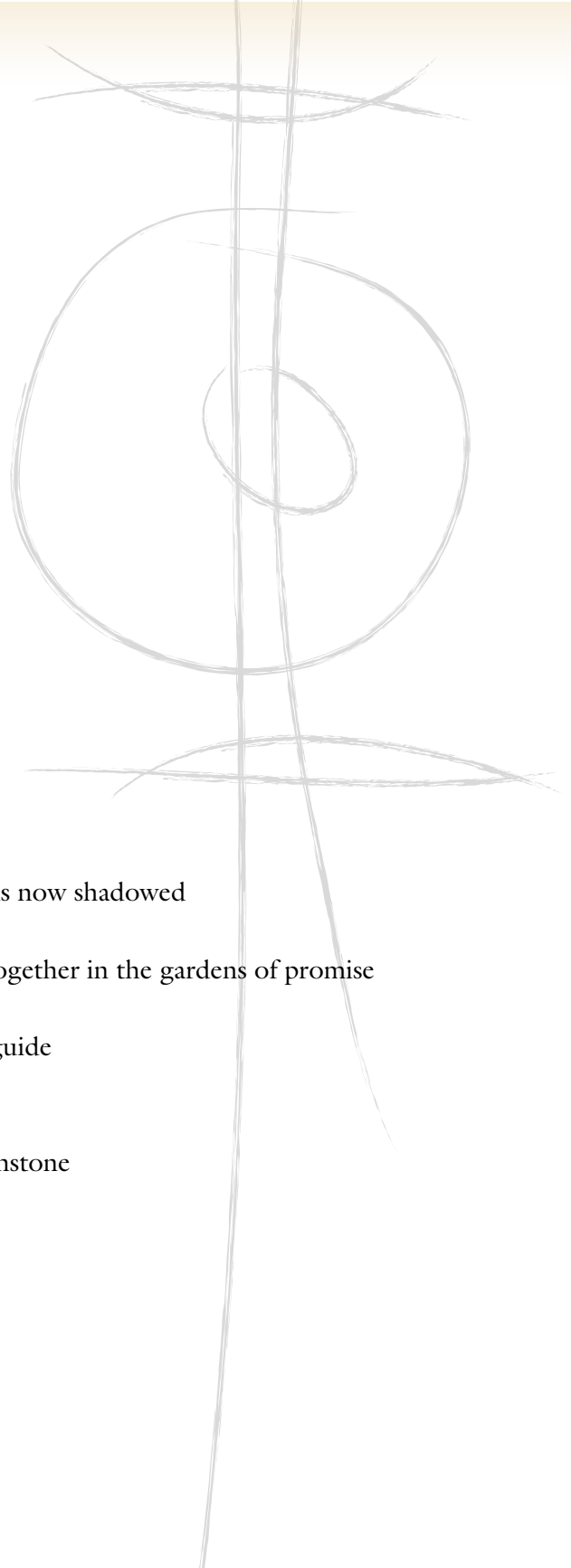
ANNE HARDING WOODWORTH is the author of four books of poetry with a fifth, *Unattached Male*, coming out in April 2014. She also has two chapbooks, with another, *Herdling*, appearing in late 2014. Her work is published widely in journals (including *Tiferet*) and anthologies in the U.S. and abroad. She has an MFA in poetry from Fairleigh Dickinson, where she studied with Renee Ashley, and she sits on the Poetry Board of the Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington, D.C. Visit her at www.annehardingwoodworth.com

BE 1

MERGE *(for my parents)*

by Tracy Brooks

Bigger than most
smaller somedays
stronger than any could see
Softer than this world
outstretched beyond life
the reason the kingdom didn't collapse
From another era
love moved simpler
songs felt sweeter
heartfelt entwining unspoken
Conquering the fears with a heart that was now shadowed
a symbiotic type of breath
life may not harden the ones who come together in the gardens of promise
Merge as if the bold will now whisper
together as if the invisible will somehow guide
given to travel upon the broken spaces
breakdowns and barren places
what was unfathomable was also the touchstone
In your brokenness came the promise
and in the dying
your love lives on



TRACY BROOKS is a lifelong writer, eager to “write out loud!” When not writing she is busy homeschooling her children, teaching yoga to young people, and offering various spiritual practices to others. Visit her at www.tracybrookswriter.com



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WHEN LOVE IS
NEW BORN WHAT
SORROW CAN
THERE BE

by *Hazel Saville*

I've been so far from where I'm safe...
home calls to me, but exile takes
me to a land of strangers,
to city roads with anxious comings,
with loud goings that silence the birds
and dim the wider blue.



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I dream of green and in the chill of autumn
come to a house with oak beams stained with smoke
from more than two hundred winters.
In the dream the sacrificial hare,
a life freely given, hung there from the rafters,
gifting me with sweet elixir.

Time rides me roughshod until I claim my prize.

Death is the door, surrender the key—
it is not a way to choose lightly.
Yet when love is new born
what sorrow can there be
in the soft space carved into the heart?



HAZEL SAVILLE has been writing poetry since her early teens. She has worked as a social worker and since 2000 as a hypnotherapist/psychotherapist. Amongst other things, she is a visual artist, a songwriter and plays the Celtic harp. She particularly enjoys the musicality of poetry and exploring ideas in her work. Her poems have been published in a number of UK magazines and anthologies.

I WANT TO SAY

by *Bridget Nutting*

Before day is done and sun sets one final time
I want to say I was here
I loved the changing of each season
Spring's possibility
Summer's intensity
Autumn's perplexity
Winter's finality yet to come
I want you to know before I leave
that I liked our day-to-day routines forged by years
of learning each other's dance
I loved the safety in your arms
the comfort and warmth in your embrace
I came to completely love my life with you
fell in love with the beating of our hearts
the unending mingling of our breath

Let me say
I loved weekends
the gentle rustling of our sheets
lazy arousal in each other's arms
I loved morning coffee in our favorite mugs
and our ritual pledge to health and happiness
I was thankful for each night together
the moon that danced just beyond our reach
Before I leave this whole world of family and friends
I want to tell you I loved dancing together in the rain
saw more rainbows than I thought possible
than most care to see in a lifetime

I shared communion at your table
soft-centered and rock-hard crusts of bread
and was nourished not hungry whenever served
I supped the finest wine from your cup

Know I loved you completely no reservations no regrets
know there will not be our two white roses in spring
wherever I go
the fragrant lilacs
and your Queen Anne's lace



UDO HINTZE is a mudlogger and poet. He first began writing poetry his senior year of high school. He won the 1999 Words Alive! Contest for Houston International Festival. His poems have been published in *The 21st Century*, *Bewildering Stories*, *The Criterion*, and *Inkling*. One of his plays has been performed at his college. When not working in the oilfield Udo likes to read books.

MY LOVE, MY LIFE, MY LOBSTER

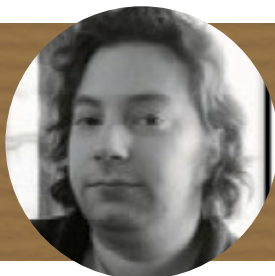
by *Udo Hintz*

I didn't notice you were gone until I looked
you went like you came –sideways–
leaving your graffiti all over the beach
of my heartland. You threw the chips at me
and I said “thank you” even though
you weren't there anymore.
I was surprised by how quickly
you disappeared.

And so nights became day-night days.
where I'm back at school, getting a degree
and learning my lessons.
There's opportunity everywhere
you just have to flip them over and around
So I'm not leaving yet. Not until the final score
is announced.

For now, this is a plot point where ex-position
leads to enrichment of the characters'
story and background; where a small detail
gets dropped and over looked – an empty seashell
for example, something of no use that grows
into something much bigger and beautiful beyond
its usefulness.

Oh yes, it was you
buried in the sand.



UDO HINTZ is a mudlogger and poet. He first began writing poetry his senior year of high school. He won the 1999 Words Alive! Contest for Houston International Festival. His poems have been published in *The 21st Century*, *Bewildering Stories*, *The Criterion*, and *Inkling*. One of his plays has been performed at his college. When not working in the oilfield Udo likes to read books.

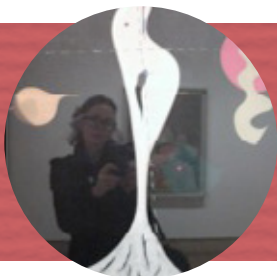
TEA. TIME.

by Alexis Quinlan

So I said to Jerome I said Jerome what
do you mean, the breath. The tea was strong
that afternoon & when I say strong I know
you know. Once I had a job writing
about dream analysis & all the other books
had already said water symbolizes emotion.
So I wrote it down.
This is the expression they speak of.

This the self. I like Zen as much as the next
white lady & I'll say the Alps were
fine & once Lake Tahoe punched its fist
in my gut but for me it will always be the desert
on the way to Aswan, a bus stop
where a grizzled man sold sips of it
in a battered tin cup. It was milky & sweet &
filthy, like almost everything, & I looked
up to see gold upon gold out there, far,
camels on sand led by people like long
white flags in the breeze.
But no breeze.

Oh definitely interested in the moment,
I told Jerome, it's just that the one
he's asked me to mind is no match
for the old hag knocking night & day,
hell-bent. Put on the pot.



ALEXIS QUINLAN has been writing poetry for many years. Last spring, Exit/Strata in Brooklyn published a chapbook of her latest project, a series of interventions on and responses to Sigmund Freud's essay, "Mourning and Melancholia." Her poems have appeared in *Denver Quarterly*, *The Paris Review* and *Drunken Boat*. She is the recipient of the *Spoon River Poetry Review* Prize. Visit her at abchaospoesis.blogspot.com

OUR REFLECTION *in the* BLOOD MOON

by *Mary Monroe*

The blood moon
is sailing tonight
we are the shadow
mother catching
the bent light of
our own sunrises
and sunsets
all of them
at once ablaze
(the very rim
of earth on fire).

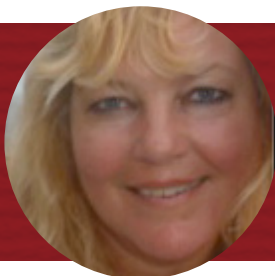
We are the blood,
we are the rising tide,
we are the lost boat
of lies and prayers,
if we are to mourn,
it is now,
when the moon
casts back our heart,
when the night itself
is red with sorrow.

"You have set the powers of the four quarters of the earth to cross each other. You have made me cross the good road, and the road of difficulties, and where they cross, the place is holy. Day in, day out, forevermore, you are the life of things."

—BLACK ELK, OGLALA SIOUX

"Good words will not give me back my children."

—CHIEF JOSEPH, NEZ PERCE



MARY MONROE was born on a farm in Minnesota and has spent her life as a journalist, writer and editor. Her poems explore love, loss and the sacredness of everyday experience. Her poetry has appeared in the L.A. Times and can be seen in the upcoming issue of FR&ED. She is a student of tai chi, raja yoga and Andean shamanic arts. She lives in Eagle Rock, California

THIS SIDE *of* THINGS

by Philip Marley

behind the fence
at bethel lowell,
his green house sits
 with the same window left open
 upstairs

and it lets the late Spring snow in
and it enters all the rooms
and it pardons the dust
 on the picture frames.

his bed is elsewhere,
with a brother now
in Artmesia Township--

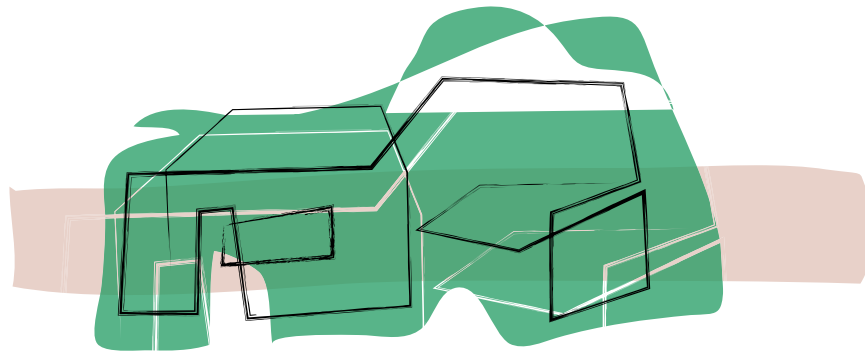
his brother's sleep
reminds him
that it is all just less
than a grace

that there are fewer of them
that hymns to faith only
need a heartbeat.

still, on this side of things,
he allows a weight to bear him
into the future

he twists the loose thread around his finger
from the arm of the chair,
sometimes tightly
and each day,
sometimes borrowing a coat,
he wanders
toward the house,
sure that he must
return to close
a window.

after Ghassan Zaqtan's "A Picture Of The House in Beit Jala."



PHILIP MARLEY works as a writer and poet in Toronto, Ontario. He has sat on the editorial board for the literary journal *Descant*, written book reviews for Canada's National Post, the magazines *Quill & Quire* and *Canadian Notes & Queries*, and briefly for the film magazine, *Montage*. His poetry has been shortlisted for the *Arc Poetry Magazine's* "Poem of the Year;" *Malabat's* "Far Horizon's Award for Poetry;" and *Contemporary Verse 2's* "Two Day Poetry Contest." More recently, Philip was the recipient of a fellowship for the SLS Writer's Program in Vilnius, Lithuania. Two of his poems and a brief interview can be found here: <http://tinyurl.com/l45189f>

WHAT A TRIBE WE ARE *by Lin Ostler*

this clan of poets:

streaking

ochre and white riverbank mud

on our bodies,

in our hair

sneaking

into swamps at dawn

to practice our arias

mixing

palettes of unidentified hues

that might be voiced only

once a lifetime

crashing Feng shui soirées

and supernovas before twilight sets in

surprising our landlords with murals.

Sometimes we dance all night

before beginning to tag each other.

Never do we include those things
on our Resumés, nor are we paid
for our invasions.

We have been known to egress
majestically

like the Aurora Borealis

or root deep into the silent earth

with no sound at all.

Yet, like identical twins

we develop our own signage,

Adamic languages

and discernible gait.

Whenever there is

a sonic boom

we nod

and smile inscrutably.



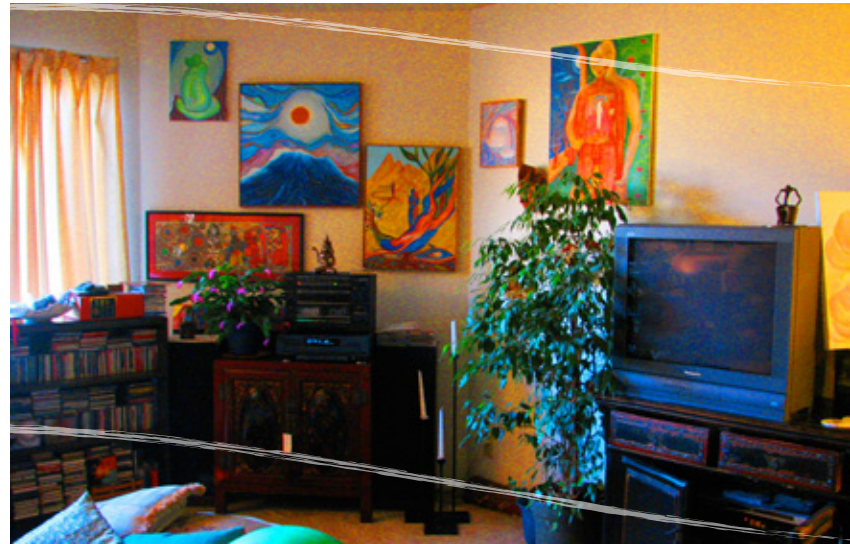
LIN OSTLER of Salt Lake City, Utah, has followed her poetic voice to the rim for over 50+ years, frequently selected for the annual arts festival readings, First Night Celebrations, & the City Art Poetry Readings. She won in the Utah Art Festival's Iron Pen project 3 times, and placed 2nd in Utah Original Writing Competition. Her work appeared in Poetry of Yoga, Vol II. Lin's poetry is full of elemental references — natural landscapes and phenomena, lunar and seasonal ceremonials, women's passages, from childbirth to crowning, with rich, resourceful inter weavings with her children.

A BEGINNING

by *Ambika Talwar*

We sat close by the fire, downwind. As the ritual continued, smoke drove us to cover our faces. Embers flew around from time to time, falling anywhere driven by blind force. Larise's skirt became holy. I got a few on my arm, my face, one almost in my eye. Recitation of ancient verses kept us in place; we became *smoked* beloveds. We watched flames change so rapidly a million images must have arrived in the two nightly hours on Saturday under the beautiful majestic tree: was it a *figus*? We celebrated each other as *That*; velvet night became spattered with stars. We each shone radiant as though we had just been cleansed of demons and shadow selves to emerge resolute—maybe kissed by innocence?

wood roses words fire
black night disappears
moonlight on our faces...



AMBIKA TALWAR is an educator, poet and artist. She has composed poems since her teen years. She has authored and published *Creative Resonance: Poetry—Elegant Play, Elegant Change; 4 Stars & 25 Roses*, and others. She is published in *Kyoto Journal; Inkwater Ink, vol. 3; Chopin with Cherries, On Divine Names; VIA, Poets on Site collections, Tower Journal, St. Julian's Press, Pirene's Fountain, Enchanted Verse* and others. She has published an article on creativity in *Radiance Magazine*, on peace education in *Journal of Indian Research and Catalyst*, on creative wellness in *NAMAH Journal*. She also made an award-winning short film. She resides in Los Angeles and teaches English at Cypress College.



THE CROW

by Jane O'Shields-Hayner

*There is a balm in Gilead
To make the wounded whole
There is a balm in Gilead
To heal the sin-sick soul.*

(traditional African American spiritual)

The Hebrew root for the word sin, means to miss. The Greek word hamartia (ἁμαρτία) is often translated as sin in the New Testament; it means to miss the mark or to miss the target.

THIS MORNING, AS I DRESSED, A PAIR OF CROWS LIT ON THE BRANCHES of the Cottonwood tree a few feet outside my window. They seemed to be stripping the branches with their beaks, after insects, I thought; or since it's spring, after nesting twigs. They cawed and flapped as they struggled to balance, claws gripping the slender, bending branches that pitched them on a seesaw ride while the mass of the huge tree stabilized their dance. The Cottonwood isn't their tree of choice. They usually prefer sparring with a resident hawk for the highest branches of the tallest Eucalyptus behind our home. I thought, as I often think, that on this day they were there for me.

Crows speak to me. They always speak to me, sometimes directly, shrieking calls that announce my presence, or cautioning me to respect theirs. Sometimes I hardly acknowledge their cries, but other times they speak to me with messages that demand hearing. Today was like that. I had never seen crows in the cottonwood tree before, the tree that belongs to the finches and the doves; but I knew why they were here today, because today was the day I would write our story.

Years ago, I wished for a crow. I had lived with parrots as pets and had enjoyed their friendship. In fact, one parrot had become a beloved companion. He died as a result of living in a climate foreign to his needs. The fuel oil furnace in my Connecticut home went out one winter night and the respiratory disease he developed as a result assaulted his delicate, aged body. I heard that crows, like parrots, were highly intelligent birds, and shared the parrot's affinity for human companionship. Since they were indigenous to North America, and its climate, I imagined myself living with a crow.

My former husband worked as a landscaper. Trimming and removing trees was part of his daily job. One day he arrived home with a box containing five baby crows, their yellow-ringed mouths open and protruding from the cardboard in a clear demand for food. He told me that the tree that held their nest was cut down and the babies had been taken. I had a new human baby at that time, Rebekah, my first-born child. As I kept up with her feeding and care, I kept up with the crow babies' needs, as well. Once they were past the critical stage, my husband found homes for all the crows but one. I named him Icarus. He was my pet crow.

Icarus was noisy and friendly and he seemed happy. He ate from our hands and appeared to enjoy our company. As time passed he matured, but it became obvious that he didn't care for our two young daughters. It is typical for birds that become pets, I learned, to bond with one or two family members and to dislike others, whom the bird may consider rivals. So it was for Icarus.

My husband cut the feathers that allowed Icarus the skill of flight. Since we had a dog and a cat, my husband built Icarus a cage to protect and keep him. It was in the shape of a cube on stilts, about four feet in all directions and made of chicken wire and plywood. It sat in the center of our flat, grassy back yard. Our home was built on what had once been a hay field with a stand of trees at the back and an old, muddy stock pond beneath them. Icarus' cage was a quarter mile from the trees and pond, but he called out to crows that sat in the tops of those trees, and often they called back.

When we were in the yard, we took Icarus out of his cage and let him hop about freely, but for his protection and to keep him from pecking the children, it was inside his cage that he remained most of the time.

One day Icarus was out of his cage, sitting overhead on the metal track of our garage

door, when my husband raised the door and Icarus' foot, caught in the mechanism, was mangled. He survived and healed from the injury, and hopped about on one leg, always holding the injured foot in a kind of small, black fist. Our neighborhood veterinarian attempted to repair Icarus' clubbed foot, but the surgery was unsuccessful.

Icarus would caw when wild crows flew near. He would caw when he saw the people he knew, coming out of the house, driving up or driving away. He lived in his four-foot cube in the Texas seasons, in the summer heat, in the ice storms that blew in from the north in winter and in the violent wind and rains that came mostly in the spring and the fall. Over the years, I watched as Egrets flew from the stock pond and darted for cover, as the sky turned a greenish-grey and the air grew still and heavy, as it did before tornado winds and hail assaulted the land. When the storms were the most frightful, I would put my children in the empty bathtub packed with pillows, and pull a mattress down the hall to cover us. Icarus rode the storms out from his perch in his four-foot cage.

After five years my marriage had clearly reached an end. I took our two young daughters away from home one day, with the understanding that while we were gone my husband would take everything from the house that he wanted. At that point I didn't care what I owned. I simply wanted life to make sense. We hadn't talked about the animals, and when the girls and I came home that evening, half the furniture was gone and so was Icarus. Later on, when I asked about him, my husband told me he had been given to someone living on a farm who could provide him a good home. I didn't know where the children and I were going or where we would live with a dog, a cat and a crow, and so I made no effort to retrieve him. My life had become strange.

As the years passed, our lives were rearranged. I moved with my children to California and I remarried. My new husband, Bill, my two daughters, Rachael and Rebekah and I began a new life with great hope and a new foundation. Unexpectedly, I began to find Icarus an increasingly compelling memory, invading my present as well as my past.

Crows called to me everywhere. Every crow that cawed had his voice. At first this came as a welcome reminder of pleasant memories, but as time passed the thoughts and questions evoked by the call of the crows became more difficult to hold. Was Icarus still alive? If he was not, how had he died? The hardest question I faced was: how had Icarus' life really been when he lived, kept by me? In my heart I knew the answer. If I were the

person I thought myself to be, one who loves and respects all life, how could I have been so careless? I came to realize how much I grieved for him but now the grief was greater than the experience of loss. I now held the grief of regret, for I grieved over acts that could never be changed.

I grieved for denying Icarus the companionship of his own kind. I grieved for robbing him of his flight. I grieved for locking him in a cage and denying him adequate shelter from the cruel sting of the Texas weather, and I grieved for contributing to his mutilation and his pain. Finally, I grieved for allowing him to disappear into an unknown fate, where he was taken, once more, against his will, from the only companions and family he had ever known and delivered into I knew not what.

I am a visual artist, and at that time I began to be mentally occupied with images of crows. I felt led to represent the image of the crow, of Icarus, repeatedly, in my work. I searched libraries and read books on crows. I searched the Internet. I stopped on the roads and picked up the bodies of crows killed by automobiles to take home and use as models for drawings.

I learned more of the habits of crows and ravens, their intelligence, their family structure, their symbolic place in mythology, crossing all cultures. The line dividing concepts of intelligence and spiritual commonality between humans and “lower” animals became increasingly thin. When two of my close friends died, I incorporated my grief and my loss of them into my grief for Icarus. The images I made began to speak of the persistence of spiritual presence and the language of mortal form. This form and spirit took shape in the images of feathers and claws and the intelligent blue-black eyes of a crow.

I am a practicing Occupational Therapist specializing in home health. Several years ago I was visiting a homebound patient in the course of my day. This woman was amazingly brave and patient, although profoundly disabled with a painful, progressive neuromuscular disease, which had taken the life of her mother decades earlier. Despite her difficulties, she was raising two teenage boys alone; one was autistic. Her front lawn was grown deep with unmown grass. I don't know if the family owned a lawnmower. I parked and left my car under a tall sycamore tree in this shady, quiet neighborhood, and began to walk through the grass from the street to her front door.

The long grass moved and black feathers fluttered. In a single instant, I knew what I

saw. It was a disabled crow. I would save it. I would nurse its wounds and give back its flight. The entire plan formed immediately in my thoughts. I saw black wings taking to a turquoise sky as I released it from my hands. I had almost stepped on it, walking through the tall grass, a situation I would normally avoid, having grown up in Texas, where any grass-covered footstep could result in a snake bite. Yet here I had stepped and, incredibly, here it was!

I rushed to my patient's front door and asked for a box. Her oldest son came out to help me and he brought a box and a towel. I was slow and the hobbling, hopping, frightened crow was faster. After several minutes of futile pursuit it went into the yard next door and became part of a strange, heavily overgrown garden of semi-potted plants so thick they formed a sort of horticultural hedge. Neighborhood cats were taking eager notice of the crow's plight and a chorus of crows now cawed and shrieked from the branches of the palm trees overhead. The injured crow disappeared under an old car parked in the midst of the tangle. I got down on my knees and poked and looked, then finally gave it up for lost.

I resumed my professional role and went into the house to focus on my patient's needs. I worked with her on strategies to bring some pain relief and quality back to her life. I led her in wheelchair Tai Chi and we brainstormed a strategy that enabled her to hold a syringe, so she could give herself prescribed injections. We had a good session, but all the while the crow was also on my mind. I knew it wouldn't live through the night, with all the neighborhood predators around. Just as I was leaving my patient's home, her son came in and said to me: "The crow's back out in the open. I think we could get it now."

Back we walked into the yard with the towel and the box. I speeded up my steps and successfully overcame it, throwing the towel around it and placing it, flapping and lunging, into the cardboard box.

The crow looked terrified and its body contorted with fear. The fear leaped in my heart, as well, but soon became awe. I brought it home in the back seat of my Honda, and finding Bill and Rebekah there, I presented the crow to them. They watched in amazement, while into a house with images of crows on many walls, this injured bird entered as a long-awaited guest.

I imagined the weeks ahead unfolding, as I transformed my grief and guilt through the nurture, the healing and the release of this beautiful flesh and feathered animal. It was calm

now. I gave it birdseed that we kept to feed wild birds: millet and corn. It ate the corn and looked content.

I called a veterinarian specializing in birds who suggested I make an appointment and bring it in, while my family planned where it would live while it recovered. We even gave it a family name, Bertie, after a particularly adventurous great aunt. By this time we had all decided she was female.

The veterinarian explained that she had been attacked by a predator, possibly days before, and that her wing was broken. He said they could bind it to protect it and help it heal, but she would never fly. “You can keep her as pet”, he said. “Otherwise the kind thing to do is euthanize her.” These were cold words to hear and my heart sank.

This was not the outcome I had imagined. I was being asked to keep another caged, flightless bird; the alternative of which was to end this creature’s life, here and now. I briefly conferred with Bill and Rebekah. We told them to bind her wing and to inject her with antibiotics and we would give her a home.

She was taken into the back room at the vet’s and came out with white tape binding one wing and her beautiful jet-black tail. I stroked her now familiar feathers and we placed her back into the box and drove home.

The weather was mild, and we stopped to eat dinner on the way, leaving windows open and our van well ventilated for Bertie, our convalescing crow. We had a cheerful meal, discussing how we would meet her needs, and what kind of enormous cage we could possibly construct on our small patio.

Afterwards, I walked eagerly to the back of the van to see how she was doing. Animals that come into our family are with us for life, and we had adopted her into the clan. The back of the van was dark and I squatted beside the cardboard box that Bertie rested inside. I could barely see her dark form. She was lying with her face down. I placed my hand on her body. She was motionless and cold. She was dead.

Rebekah cried. Bill drove down the street for a block, then pulled to the side of the road, placed his head in his hands and cried. I sat in cold confusion and in silence.

The vet’s assistant told me confidently that it was likely an infection from the initial wound that killed her, or injuries from the predator’s assault; or, she said it could have been shock. I listened to her words but I felt sure I knew what it was. It was the fear of

human hands, the tape that strapped her wing to her body, and the stick of the hypodermic needle that stopped her heart and ended her life. I felt confused and sorry with the pain of committing a foolish and fatal judgment. I felt complicit again, in the death of a crow.

Fate had seemed to choose me, or so I had thought, to give me one more chance to be a wiser companion to another wild bird. Was I the fool to have considered this encounter more than one of life's random, and possibly meaningless events? Had I caused this crow's death by seeking help to save her? Would her life have ended more simply and gently, there in the tall grass, under the palm trees, in the jaws of a neighborhood cat and beneath the screeching alarms of her family? Had I increased the pain because I interfered? It was beyond me.

We decided to bury her in the wild foothills of the Santa Ana Mountains, in the mouth of a canyon, just a half mile from our home, where we often went to walk. It was dark and far too late to travel into that wild land by the time we came home with her limp body in the same box in which she had arrived. The box waited on a shelf in our garage all the next day, while we entertained a house full of guests. It was getting dark again when our last guests left and Bill and I hurriedly grabbed the box and a shovel and headed out.

We walked into the tangled growth at the mouth of the canyon, about twenty yards in. I counted steps past a tree, which we would later use as a landmark to locate the grave. Bill dug a hole. Under the vegetation and dry crusty surface, the soil was brick red, the color made rich by the deep shadows of twilight. We lay her body into the red earth, her beautiful violet and blue-black feathers, and wings bound with white tape. Her head fell to one side and her beak and face were in profile. I felt suspended in the beauty present in that moment, and I can summon that beauty still, in clear detail, in my mind's eye. It was an image never to be forgotten.

We hurried to cover the grave and mark it with a stick. We were mindful that this time of day, the coyotes and the mountain lions begin their hunts, so we finished the burial and left.

The next day was Sunday and we were anxious to see if the little grave had survived the night. It was a warm, cloudless spring day with a clean, blue sky. Bill and I with our dog Pearl headed down to the mouth of the canyon to walk. We found the spot where we had dug the grave and walked in. It was intact, with the little stick still marking the place

where Bertie the crow lay. The air was a welcome temperature to our skin, the way it often is when you first notice spring. A pair of crows circled above us and called to one another as they flew over. We breathed in the fragrance of the sweet, wild sage that grew there. Flowers were opening into yellow, orange and blue blossoms. The sun was high.

As we left the tangled growth and walked into a clearing we realized that we were surrounded by small, fluttering white-winged creatures. We were suspended in a cloud of butterflies and they were all around us, above us, behind us, and to all sides. As we moved, the cloud parted to allow us passage. They floated like animated tufts of cottonwood, dipping and rising, but altogether flowing in a continuous stream out of the canyon where we stood, down the next hill below us, and following the canyon's cleft, farther than we could see. They filled the space from the ground to the tree-tops over our heads, and moved like water, pouring out of the tangled growth, over the wild sage and thorn trees, and passing over the crow's grave.

In the morning sun, with the touch of the warm air on our skin, we were walking as though we were swimming, in a river of butterflies that washed us with the baptism of their new lives. We knew we had stepped into something remarkable.

I knew that butterflies unfold their wings and fly for a brief time only, sometimes just one week, before their lives as butterflies are over. Later I learned that the butterfly has symbolized change and transition in cultures throughout history, and primarily this has meant the transition from death to rebirth. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, the physician and pioneer of thanatology and work with the terminally ill, adopted the butterfly as her symbol as have countless others before and after her. I didn't need knowledge of butterflies to illuminate my experience that morning. Ten thousand Phoenix rose there from the red clay and I had walked among them.

This story and the day of the butterflies stay fresh in my memory. I've told it to people who have called it a miracle. It was miraculous for me, yet like all the miracles of my life, it was an ordinary day and we walked into a natural event. It guided me through a struggle I couldn't define and it gave me an answer to a question I had not known to ask. After walking in the river of butterflies I no longer grieved and my confusion was stilled. The crow's story smiled on me that morning.

I still walk in that canyon. The stick no longer stands over the crow's grave, but I know

where it is. It is one of earth's holy places for me. For several years, I occasionally saw the older son of my patient who helped me catch the crow. We would meet by chance at musical events. It seems we had a common affinity there. His mother died several months after she left my service. "Her body was just worn out," he told me, when I last saw him. "She just had to give it up." He was still living in their home, caring for his autistic brother. He said he had known he would see me again. "I thought you were alright," he said, "teaching my mother Tai Chi and rescuing a crow."

The most significant events in my life leave me with questions, although they often arrive as answers. Because I am human, I generate questions endlessly. They nag me and keep me restless; and, as it is with humans, they both serve me well and lead me to distraction. I am grateful for the path that leads me to recognize the gift of answers that arrive in their own time and speak their truth in a language I can best describe as beauty.

I know without question that this beauty is pure grace; the crow's black wing, the river of butterflies. Beauty, as truth, is the balm I've found in Gilead. Its language and its gifts heal my soul and they endlessly reveal my story.



JANE O'SHIELDS-HAYNER is a writer and visual artist living in southern California. She writes poetry and non-fiction and exhibits her art. Jane has Bachelor's Degrees in studio art and teaching and a Master's Degree in occupational therapy. She has taught art and practiced occupational therapy throughout her life. Jane and her husband have two young children and two adult daughters. Her creative works are an expression of her spiritual journey and of her deep love for humanity and the natural world.

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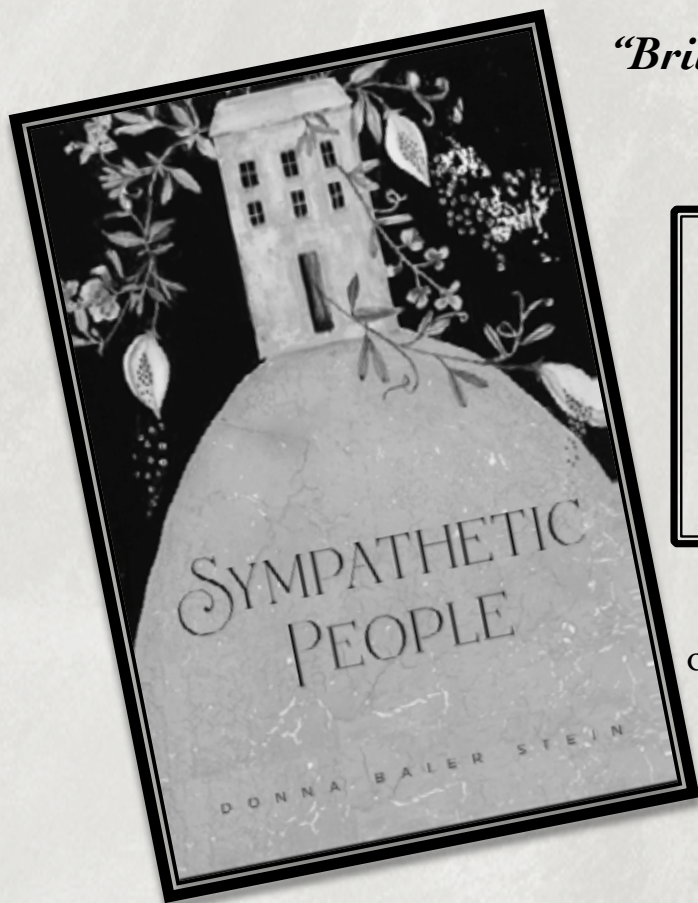
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THE STORY of JACOB by William O'Daly

It came to pass, the young men cut down the trees
to feed the campfire and the cookstove, to barter
for wares or wives, to make arrows and bows, clubs
and spears — they built the temples and great bonfires
as a gift to the gods; but in later years, they wearied
of wandering a desert of their own making, erected
houses and frivolous corrals for horses and sheep.
And the birds, having no place left
to rest or nest, to preen or sing a lullaby
to their young, tuned their chords to the same key
and leapt from the shores of Canaan
into the Mediterranean Sea—forsaking life
in Hebron and Shechem, Dothan and Kadesh,
prophecies of greener pastures in the land of Ramses.
Holding fast to the sunlit waves,
they learned to waggle their rapid tails,
kept still their featherless wings
and rose not from branches or rooftops
but from the floating world—tilting to catch the breeze,
eluding the Man-of-War, the Great White.

They multiplied, migrated, soared among the reefs
of Barbados, leapt to spy the umbrellas, bikinis
and hats encrusting the beaches of Miami;
they mastered the instruments of evasion
and belief, and took on the hues of the rainbow,
seeking to experience land again and the depths,
but like the serpent renounced their bodies for ease,
indulged a cradle of surrender, settled in their ways—
half formed on an atoll of stones, they awaited
conversion, marooned and longing for more.
Angels in their own right, they lived in a sexual era
and by a conspiracy of turtles, a shuddering patience
where the stones wrestled with silence,
the artichokes with their armor, the pharaoh
with his generosity toward those wont to die
in their own country. Who can blame the exiled bird
become a fish? Who can blame men for their fascination
with fire and seeking a small bowl of soup
after a day plowing the borrowed field? Stones
are little more than flesh when eyes open on possibility
and the clock—the danger of ceaseless sowing or acid rain,
the shepherd's staff and half notes of endless lament,
magic on the half shell, grace sequestered in the grape
or in the underworld shape of inimitable fear.

Even catfish of the muddy river open to the scant moon.
In our tongues and our hands we live, talismans of
forgiveness, embracing faith simply as *faith*—
in everything or in nothing.
When we awaken to the bird's spirit,
we would rather kiss a fish than draw blood.
Rising from our bed to inexhaustible light, we aspire.



WILLIAM O'DALY is a poet, translator, fiction writer, and editor. His publications, in addition to those in magazines, journals, and anthologies, include eight books of translation of Chilean Nobel laureate Pablo Neruda and a chapbook of poems. A National Endowment for the Arts Fellow, O'Daly was a finalist for the 2006 Quill Award in Poetry. With co-author Han-ping Chin, he has completed a historical novel, *This Earthly Life*.



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

INVISIBLE *to* SUBMIT by Jennifer McCharen

Small, plump finches—males with black heads, females with grey—step so quietly across the lawn that even Huck, the squirrel-obsessed Visla, ignores them. He lounges in the sun on the brick landing outside the back door, chestnut fur shimmering, dopey golden eyes studying the foliage of the overgrown camellia bush near the back fence: searching.

Observing from the kitchen, I turn back to the bay of windows over the sink where I can see the birds. Their beaks are a pinkish pale grey, and I focus on these tiny triangles—especially the males' beaks, highlighted against their dark head feathers—watching as they drop to pluck grass seeds, one by one. Pluck, pause, march. Their silent shapes, plump and gracefully tapered, are sweet to my eyes even though they are undoing hours of work I have spent in the past month trying to grow grass in the beleaguered backyard. How many seeds have they eaten? How many grass seeds can each tiny fat bird eat in a day? Why even have dogs if they can't control the wildlife?

"Huck," I say through the side window. He looks up, surprised to hear my voice, "Birds!" Huck stares up at me with his vacant golden eyes and sniffs in my direction. "Look. The yard is full of birds." I point but he doesn't get up. I sigh. He looks away.

The flock of finches has proceeded by now almost all the way across the mostly still bare patch of earth we have for a backyard. The soil is grey, darker than the feathers of the female birds, not as dark as the males'. Even from here I can see that it is still compacted, dead in the spaces between tufts of optimistic winter rye grass. Once again, an idiom proves itself incorrect: watching this grass grow is extremely engrossing. I wonder again, how many? Of the thousands of seeds I have planted, how many have they eaten? Grass *growing* is what I want. I crave the thrust of green upward from the parched soil.

I take another sip of coffee and rest the mug on the counter, letting the warmth seep into my fingertips. I recall an article that said holding a warm mug in your hands releases as much oxytocin as a hug, and I remember that I am alone. After five years of struggle to keep one relationship alive, and the sudden dissolution of the brief love affair that followed it, I am here with coffee, a handsome if not brilliant dog, a yard full of finches and a few thousand struggling blades of grass.

I crave the grass growing because it represents hope in such a simple straightforward way I hesitate even to put it down on paper. Forgive me if you've heard this before: the perennial, the resistant, grassroots, rebirth in the springtime, renewal after long times of drought and fasting. Here, it is only winter rye grass planted in the backyard of a house in a Los Angeles suburb, but the thin leaves are unfurling toward the sky in the darkness of their green and, unseen below, their roots are reweaving the soil together, knitting a mesh there that life will fill. It's not just the grass I want, it's the healthy soil grass can build as it grows: a matrix primed for life to thrive in.

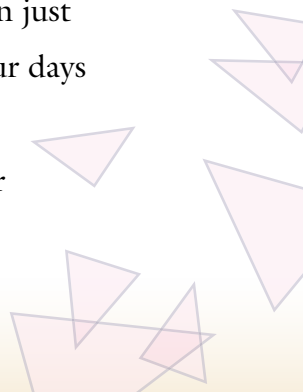
My fingertips are warm now, and I wrap the entire length of my hands around the mug, interlacing my fingers to fit them all against the ceramic. When the last lover left he said we were too different. He accused me of believing that life had some sort of ultimate meaning, something he couldn't logically prove, and therefore he couldn't agree. How could our futures align, he wondered. Should he try to convert me to nihilism, tell me to raise children with no faith in anything? I didn't know what to say. He stood beside his car and I studied his hazel eyes for some hint of the tenderness I was used to seeing there. His posture resisted the softness of my gaze, my begging hand on his wrist. Impossible to change his mind. But a tiny surge of courage lifted my eyes to his and I said, *I'll prove it.* He rolled his eyes, pulled his arm away, shook his head, stepped into his car, and left.

I would prove that life had some meaning. I meant that I thought I would write something so pure and true that even a professional nihilist could not ignore it. Something like Rilke's Elegies, so wild and potent and full that he'd know I was right. But right about what? That night I spoke not out of courage but arrogance and fear. Fear that he might be right, and what that would mean. *What you say cannot be true*, I thought, *so I must prove you wrong.*

This morning, instead of a hug I have warm coffee, and as I watch the birds undo my grass I am not so sure.

There was a time I believed there was a far more elaborate myth of meaning than just life. In fact, I went so far as to believe wholeheartedly in a story. It happened for four days around Easter when I was fourteen years old.

For months I had been wondering if the stories I heard in church were true. For the first time, I had realized they might *not* be true, that they might only be stories,



insubstantial smoke rising from the ancient fire we have always gathered around against the blackness of night. But that year, after asking and asking, I opened my eyes before dawn on Easter morning, in the lower bunkbed in the room I used to share with my sister. My eyes absorbed the almost total darkness of the room, and inside my heart I asked the question again, *is this real?* And unlike the countless other times I had wondered, in the dark that early morning I knew the answer was yes. Jesus was the son of God, and he died for my sins: this is a thing that happened.

My mother and I went to the dawn service at the small wooden church we attended, out on an island off the coast of Northeast Florida. In the precious moments of dawn that day he was supposed to have risen, we passed flame from the large candle on the altar from hand to hand, between tiny candles we all held, filling the small chapel with warmth and golden light. Once all the candles were lit, we sang, and the church bell tolled. Outside, between the shaggy shapes of the palm trees and the small round leaves of the live oaks with their waving shawls of Spanish moss, dawn was filling the sky with soft blue. In those moments, as I took in all the grace and beauty of the ritual, I felt warmth and peace in my heart. I knew that it wasn't just a show. The story we were participating in wasn't just a futile weapon against nothingness, it was real the way my skin is real, the way food is real in the mouth and gives sustenance once it is swallowed.

For a few days in a row I awoke enveloped in the comfort of the truth of the religion I inherited from my parents. I remember the sweetness of that knowledge, how grateful I was each time I thought of it. Like healthy soil filled with roots and life, to share in that collective belief was to be safe, as part of something resilient and transcendent.

Then, some subsequent morning, I awoke and I wondered. I once again wondered, just as deeply as I ever had: was that story true? The question rang with a sinking sensation in my heart. The warmth was gone, the safety of connection gone.

Belief had arrived one day like gentle weather, and just as mysteriously as it arrived, my belief in the primary foundational myth of my culture—the facticity of the life and resurrection of a young philosopher from Galilee who was put to death for his profoundly disturbing worldview—left me.

I cannot prove anything to you. I study the warm tan hue of my cooling coffee. Trace the circle of the rim of the mug with a warm fingertip and note the curling pattern of lines

across my skin. A fingerprint: just one more of this world's beautiful accidents.

There's a saying I carry with me from the Bible, from Isaiah: *all flesh is grass*. In its original context, the statement provides a metaphor showing that God is eternal while earthly things are fleeting. Flesh is like grass in that it is always passing away. God, being made of some other, more durable material, is not fleeting, not flesh, not grass, will always be; you've heard this. But if you've ever tried to eradicate grass from a garden bed you know what I'm aiming at here. Grass, while fleeting on a superficial level, is effectively immortal, propagating itself endlessly through sneaking rhizomes and omnipresent seeds. Some grasses can regrow from less than an inch of root that you forgot as you pulled the rest away from your tomatoes.

Grasses achieve immortality through quantity and timing, as if by embracing their very vulnerability they overcome it. As some grass plants are dying some are just beginning to germinate. There are always so many that there will always be some. I hope all flesh is grass because if this is true then flesh must be more persistent than Isaiah realized. I would rather be grass than flesh.

Systematically immortal, eternal as if by algorithm. Soil, water, seeds, air.

If this is all the meaning my life contains it has to be enough: that when water, soil, seeds and air combine something more is created in their midst, and that this precious thing—life—is worth fighting for. Life, and *being alive*—even if only once—matters. Stripped of all the trappings of Christianity, from the word *God* itself, this fact, that life arises from nothing and grows in complexity: this is all I ultimately believe in. That flesh, in the end, is god. That grass is god, and that there is no god but grass, flesh, life, always dying away and always regenerating again. There is no proof I can give: only belief, flimsy and changeable, but persistent.

And so, in the dry climate of Southern California where grass has no ecological right to exist, I have decided to plant some, and because I need to participate in this belief-in-action, I fight for this grass to survive. Like so many beliefs, this one has led me to ethically tenuous territory. What does it mean that I have to hand water this grass, monitor the dryness of the soil, plant layer after layer of seeds, envy the tiny birds their constant presence and their holy hunger? Here where I moved for a love that has vanished. A land full of vanishing love that threatens to take my belief away with it. And hungry finches who have more right to the grass seeds I plant than I even have to plant them.

“What am I doing?” I ask my coffee. Outside on the patio, Huck sighs. The coffee is silent,

and its warmth is fading.

The foes we have to fight to maintain belief are the ones that are ever-present and nonmalicious: the mundane erodes belief at a steady pace. There is no devil, but there are birds. No ultimate tormenter even though there is plenty of torment. And the real fight isn't against something abstract or imagined, like Satan. It's against the daily, the laundry, the slings and arrows. Belief isn't an edifice, it's a garden. And a gardener knows you have to kill in order to create space for life. Kill bugs, kill fungus, kill weeds. And you use whatever allies you can.

So I decide to do it. We humans aren't the only ones who believe in stories that might not be true. There's a simple story I can tell Huck to bend his simple-minded will to my own ends, and get him to clear the yard of finches for a few minutes.

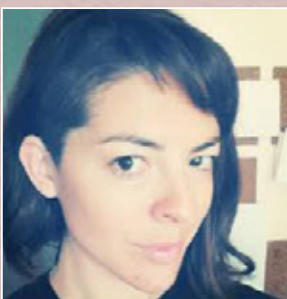
"Huck!" I say again through the side window. He jumps to his feet, ears straining forward in response to the excitement in my voice. I look into his eyes and say it, the lie that always works. He's waiting for it. His beautiful muscles are already tense, rippling under his glossy coat. In the beginning, there was the Word:

"Squirrel!"

I snap my head to the right, toward the camellia bush in the back, pretending to see the squirrel. He springs off the landing, down all four brick steps at once, off across the yard.

I return to the other window as he leaps, and watch the dozen finches become a spray of flapping wings, a leaf-fall in reverse, scattering to the four corners of the tiny yard and leaving the grass alone for a moment. I shake my head and smile.

"I'm sorry, guys," I tell the dog I lied to and the terrified birds. Huck stares up into the foliage of the camellia and whines. Searching.



JENNIFER McCHAREN writes nonfiction and poetry, including translation. Her video work has appeared on MSNBC, and her writing has appeared in the *Tampa Monocle*, *Elan Magazine*, and is forthcoming in the anthology *MOTIF-4*. She currently serves as Translation Editor for Lunch Ticket, and resides in Montgomery, Alabama where she works to fight voter suppression.

FEEDING *the* BIRDS

by Niles Reddick



MARY POPPINS, the film based on the novel by Australian writer P. L. Travers was, without a doubt, one of Walt Disney's greatest successes when it first debuted in 1964, and its five Academy awards (thirteen nominations), Golden globe awards, Grammy awards, and astronomical sales at the box office are proof; it's still one of the highest grossing films in history (1). Of all the films Disney made, he was totally consumed in making it. Disney was also consumed with the song, "Feed the Birds." The deeply spiritual song can be viewed as a metaphor for the entire movie and illustrates themes such as love and charity. The song was also one of Disney's favorites, one which the Sherman brothers were often called to play for Disney on Friday afternoons in his office. Disney felt that the song related to his life and work. He even had tears in his eyes when he heard it played. As Parfitt notes in an interview with Richard Sherman, "He [Walt Disney] loved that song and knew it was the heartbeat of the whole movie" (7).

However popular and important, very little has been written about the main character Mary Poppins, played by Julie Andrews, about the song "Feed the Birds," eloquently sung by Andrews, or even about the story. The continued popularity of this film and its impact on modern culture warrant another look, especially in light of its recent presentation on Broadway and with the debut of *Saving Mr. Banks*, a film based on Travers' life and the making of *Mary Poppins*, which offer viewers a biographical account of Travers' own personal tragedies. As a paragon of the most popular art form in modern times, *Mary Poppins* offers a plethora of opportunities to view Judeo-Christian themes and ideas.

Despite the surface-level magical fun through which the *Mary Poppins* narrative is presented, its story-line, its central character, and even concepts expressed in its evocative song, "Feed the Birds", may be regarded as subtexts for Christianity, theistic messages illustrating God watching over his flock, being present for them, and meeting their

emotional needs. While Poppins could be viewed as a heroic archetypal figure, she can be defined more precisely as a female Christ figure, the first actually, in American film. Guomundsdottir has identified the earliest female Christ figure in the French silent film, *Jeanne d'Arcs Lidelse og Dod* (1928). Another source notes the Italian film *La Strada* (1954) as having a female Christ-figure (Jesus and Christ-Figures...). Mary Poppins meets the majority of the structural characteristics of the cinematic Christ-figure (Kozlovic, 2004), and her presentation of "Feed the Birds" can be seen as a plea for Christian love that reflects charity. Her presentation also reflects the ancient practice of gazing, or scrying, transporting viewers from the snow globe into her own imagination or a heavenly realm where snow white doves fly about the statues of saints and apostles at the cathedral, and the old bird woman feeds the birds. Poppins' delivery of "Feed the Birds" is also reminiscent of Christ's parable about the birds and lilies of the field, and rather than investing in capitalism, the Banks children choose charity, and Mr. Banks is ultimately reunited with family. Through divine intervention, Mary Poppins "saves" the Banks family and the Christian message of charity is revealed through the song "Feed the Birds." Even Dick Van Dyke professed "Feed the Birds" was one of the most touching musical scores in film history and admitted he still cried upon hearing it. Most viewers would definitely agree that Disney was able to send the simple message of "what it's all about" to viewers, leaving them with the sensation that there is hope for the love and family in a world of greed.

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