



“Generativity,” image by Marsha Rosenzweig Pincus

MY BONES ARE IN YOU

There will be intrigue, murder, illness, sorrow; there will be mystery and there will be questions, so many questions. There will be silences.

---Edvige Giunta

She was the whole thing; Talland House was full of her; Hyde Park Gate was full of her. I see now, though the sentence is hasty, feeble and inexpressive, why it was that it was impossible for her to leave a very private and particular impression upon a child. She was keeping what I call in my shorthand the panoply of life—that which we all lived in common—in being. I see now she was living on such an extended surface that she had not time, nor strength, to concentrate, except for a moment if one were ill or in some child's crisis....

---Virginia Woolf

My whole life you never know who I am.

---Sokunthary Svay

*You are coming into us who cannot withstand you.
You are coming into us who never wanted to withstand you.
You are taking us into places never planned.
You are going far away with pieces of our lives.*

---Adrienne Rich

No Love Letters

By Helen Casey

There were no love letters to my grandmother.
She could not read. I would be making it up
if I described thin blue sheets of words
binding them. Or roses. He was, as she was,
from the old country, the man who would be
my grandfather. Without money. It was 1919.
He came to return a gun he had used.
Your children need a father. Mine need a mother.
She might have liked more of language
simmering with love that steamed, and spice. Or,
embraces. Hard times ahead is what they both knew.
Too much of not enough. Could she have refused
such a man—a gun, an offer, so few words—
all of them indelible, reeking only of fact?

Legacy

By Carol Smallwood

My grandmother pinned hairpin lace bibs
on grandfather's bathing beauty calendars,
crocheted jelly glass holders for Queen Anne's Lace.

Her flour sack scarves—hemmed to look like
they had no hems, have hourglass patterns echoing
her figure unfamiliar with backs of chairs.

As the neighborhood midwife she whispered:
“garçon” for a boy, “jeune fille” if a
girl to keep such delicate things from children.

Aunt Lily said with uplifted chin, “I
never saw her apron dirty or saw her cry;”
my mother with shaking head,
“She looks at the hats in church.”

She died from complications of tight corsets,
combs holding her Gibson Girl hair and
handkerchiefs folded in fans.

The Button Box

By Rebecca Olander

I loved combing through my grandmother's
box of buttons,
picking favorites to keep.
I thought it wonderful to say
I liked something
and have it given,
thought she didn't notice
how I pulled her like taffy,
she ready to give the cake
from her plate, the Wedgewood
itself, neck scarves, nail polishes,
and any buttons I chose,
the Bakelite aquas and corals,
the silver ones studded
with fake jewels.
I was Golem, or the dragon Smaug,
hoarding my sparkling charms
in a plastic vault.
She let me
think they were worth it,
and never made me feel the thief.
From her vanity drawer,
generous spill of champagne
stockings, twinned gloves, satin
slips from another era,
lavender scented and unsecreted,
there for the taking.

The Saint of Memory: The Peas

By Linda Ravenswood

She came from the West
where rain
measures the hours
in drops
against the house,
where land
breaks into great crags
along the coast of water.
Her high, gothic façade
of radio hollowly sings
through the sitting room
where she's been waiting
against the window panes;
it's raining
down the garden rows,
and the trellis
is beating the overhang
like a metronome.
The apples sweat
in the lane
above the soaking smudge pots;
in the beds
the lettuce leaves
are ripped and drizzling,
and mushrooms bauble
in the mud,
but the peas,
she says, against the panes,
the peas are safe.
In their fibre boats
they are lolling
in the trickle,
their greenness un-muted
by the wash.
In the dawn of that day
she flung some out
of their shells,
sweetly plinking into a bowl,
a ghostly memorandum of spring;
the house was clean and agile then,
the basins white-shining
and the wood well-rubbed.
1930 in the fall

was before money and moving;
 her people were plumbers and farmers,
 but she married well
 and took to tea and touring cars.
 I never knew her that way;
 as she was aging
 she sloughed superfluous finery
 and became an Oregonian,
 old and mindful in the window.
 In the dusk of that day
 she was so old
 in her bed,
 her daughters about her
 against the tapestries
 like Bayeux matrons.
 There, in the spinning,
 I saw that even in
 death she was more alive
 than those stiff keeners,
 she was real and oaken
 and pirating the bed.
 She was tilting
 and wet, but she managed to say
 her words

put me where the peas are

and she was fast away.
 In the years beyond
 I pull them
 from the bins
 in the market,
 all green and wonderful.
 They are holy, these slim
 vegetables, a legacy of will,
 a trust of spirit
 endowing more than
 any stick of Louis Quatorze
 or stretch of oil.
 They are of the good
 lathery soil, like her—
 green and sure,
 forward in the window,
 watching the garden in the rain,
 long ago days when she was living
 with her whistle

and her custard
and her canvas shoes.

Flight Theory
By Alison Adair

Gorlice, 1908

*Wstawaj, don't
speak, he will
wake, and come
for you. My hand
over your mouth is
our goodbye.*

You turn off the lights this time and
lie still, a body shifting from its country,
climb gaunt gray waves into a sky built
deep within the fat matter of memory. Stirring
his tongue, he slips into your wet speech,
dismantles you quietly, rot threading plaster.

*His black
feathers stir, no
wind, oil upon
oil, his long beak
shines. Take this,
I have saved*

Organs are everywhere: on the workbench outside
animals left unskinned. Empty socket stuffed with
a dirty rag, only you know about the snake
pushing through high grass. He'll slough until the world
offers an indifferent body. (Who can be choosy?)
This, your life – what is a stepfather for? For emptying

*it all slowly in
a shoe, zrób co
mówię, lodge it
in the gathers
at your waist and
never exhale.*

a ribcage, the warm meat of your parts lost as
his hands undo – your mother will say wings, whispering, but
in truth – you lose yourself under a loud human neck,
its gulping skin stretched over bones, over low vowels
you pray no one hears, not even you. These voices, glottal,
they travel with you, to Kraków, Hamburg, Cuxhaven, Nowy Jork,

*Run, road to station
to the dim nodding ship.
Szybko. You will know no
one. If you hear me
calling you, moja
córka, close the*

to the factory where you cart bobbins in a skirt, again and again
arriving full, departing empty: sound rimming the lip of a bell.
Windows too narrow to let the light in. Dark swells
in your quiet inner room, like a mushroom sponging into root.
New world daughter threaded with horsehair worms, their
small farm sprouting even under your fingernail. Once you had a

*door to us. Run
until dark birds
hang, shoreless,
aimless, land
disappearing like salt
in a stirred glass.*

past: the tremoring kerosene lamps, the hard stone roads still
come for you. But now shadows buckle into static, a man sent to
the distant tin-foil moon, doing nothing but walking, without gravity.
As if ours were a small world, well lit, the sounds you hear only footsteps
across the dust of a slackening galaxy; you, a mass of ice slow-spiraling.
Your young son flaps from the screen, *what is it like, Mamusia, to float
away?*

Post-Post-Traumatic Stress

By Samantha Lamph

Trauma is passed
down, inherited
from past generations
like heirloom jewelry
or black and white
photographs of family
we'll never meet;
it is a recessive gene
waiting to be
expressed.

I hear her screaming,
that ancient woman.
I feel the thrash,
the flood of adrenaline
that left her soul
in ruins
yet preserved her body,

so we both could survive.

In my pulse,
she still taps out SOS.

The Suitcase

By Rinat Harel

1.

Lifting the lid, she said,
"Bonbons for my girls";
ghosts in her German accent
floating about.
"Dollhouse table," my sister declared.
"A sofa, and this chair."
Collecting the wrapping paper,
I inhaled Granny's flowery perfume, and imagined
her house in London.

2.

The drifting desert sand, Mother removes
from Granny's gravestone once a year.
I pulled out the suitcase waiting
in the boidem, dusted it off.
My diary packed, small can-openers,
some scarves—waving good-bye,
I moved to another country.

3.

On snowy days, I look to the East—
my hair as grey as Granny's
on her visits long ago—and think
of the Desert and the Forty Years,
asking, *Where is Home?*

Great-Grandmother Annetta

By Lisa Lutwyche

Once I learned to watch her hands
I forgot to be afraid of her whiskers.
Twisted driftwood fingers

tied with the blue ropes of her veins.
Skin like draped patterned silk,
or spotted wax, melted, crinkled,

folded over sinewy bands.
Quick machines, those deft fingers
snapped green beans like cold jade,

“pop-clink, pop-clink, pop-clink”
into a thick white bowl with chipped edges.
Smiling, she murmured responses

to my breathless little-girl questions.
“What was it like back then?”
Her hands stilled, crossed on her apron.

She sighed, eyes closed, remembering.

Las Mujeres

By Gerda Govine Ituarte

Mothers watch daughters who listen with their eyes
whose voices bloom they flower between rain drops
weave their lives inside dreams
with grandmothers' breath
future awakes
in mouth
of now.

Remember This

By Darlene Taylor

“There’s no certain time to things,” I remembered mama saying as she reached for the canisters of flour, sugar, baking powder, salt and set them on the counter top. She sprinkled water in the flour and seasoned it with a dash of salt and baking powder. She didn’t use spoons. Her fingers were brown, the color of maple syrup with rounded nails. Working hands. She dug into the doughy mixture. Hands made things right.

Up to her elbows in flour, she balled the dough up in her hands, pulled and squeezed it. The veins rose up in her hands, slightly dusted. Blue green waves under her skin. She sprinkled water from a cheap tin she reused over and over. An empty lard can. The paper wrapper peeled off. Lard cut into flour was to make it rich, she said. The flour was as white as the sheets that dried on the clothesline, bleached in the sun.

The dough rolled up in a loaf, she separated it into two balls. She flattened the balls smooth and pressed the bottom crust in the roasting pan and along the edges with her thumb.

“Remember this,” she used to say, looking over her shoulder to see that I paid attention.

A young girl, it fell to me to pick the berries, wash them in well-water, and drop them in the mixing bowl. I sat on a high stool to see inside the mixing bowl. The bowl was just big enough for one pair of hands. When I thought mama wasn’t looking, I sneaked berries and licked the purple-black juice from my fingertips.

Mama lifted the bowl of blackberries, checking the weight. She knew.

She poured sugar and dashed vanilla and nutmeg on top, then dragged her hands in the berries. Cupping them in the palms of her hands, she let them fall into a purple-black syrup. The kitchen and her fingers sweetened.

The top crust stretched over the pan, she set the blackberry cobbler in the oven, trusting her hands got it right. I fidgeted, pulling at the potholder loops as I watched the stove glass window and clock.

“There’s no certain time to when the cobbler’s done,” she said, knowing I wouldn’t leave. “Just keep watch. And, if it’s not quite right, if things aren’t quite right, make it better next time.”

It seemed I mostly saw her hands covered. She wore gloves to church on Sundays. White gloves in summer. Beige in the cooler months. Cotton gloves with pearl buttons that fastened at the wrist bone. She carried irises and lilies to the family church graveyard and leaned the stems against tombstones.

“Tend the church graves. Pull the weeds to make room for flower blooms. Your daddy loved flowers,” she said. “Remember the springtime scents when the winter comes. Write your name and the children’s names in the family Bible...and the children’s birth dates too. Keep it in a place where it’s handled right.”

I remembered as I pinned a lily to my collar.

Interloper

By Berwyn Moore

Like a hand, insomnia covers her mouth.
She thinks of chores and spills and bills unspent,
of Gertrude's cough and fourteen weeks of drought.
The attic shakes. Her body bristles. The misspent
night she wills to light and fuss, to the chaos
of breakfast, laundry, kids with gifts of earth
between their toes, diversions from the loss
of sleep, the jangled nerves, the doubtful worth
of tangled dreams: A sprig of fire on a blue
lapel. The charm of wormwood in a cup of tea.
A tiger singing. Bones nestled in the dew.
A detached hand waving a skeleton key.
Love wears her out and lugs her to bed.
Love wakes her up, demanding to be fed.

Leah

By Lee Ingram

There is sadness in
the movement of my mother's hands,
a hesitation in the way she
wraps her arms around my shoulders.
There always has been.
That hesitation dogs her steps,
even basic movements like breathing,
like sleeping.
She walks gently so as to not disturb
her sister, sleeping in the other room.
She always has, like quiet
is all she knows how to be anymore.
We have the same whiskey eyes,
but that's all we have, the only thing
tying us together.
I am nothing, and yet everything,
like my mother.
She is a woman with weak eyes
and a weaker grasp
and a face that others
never notice.
But every so often,
I creep into the kitchen
and see my mother
dancing in her nightgown,
the navy-blue satin swirling around her ankles.
She dances with that hesitation,
that same pause she's always had,
like someone watches her even now.
And I realize that she
is a woman who knows
that she will never be beautiful,
not even to me.

A Crown of Crows

By Melissa Coss Aquino

I

Upon her return she will be different.

They gave her a clean slate, upon which
to write a new life, for herself and me.
New and transformed, no shadow
of unmet hunger in her eyes; gone the bony grip,
insatiable in its seeking and want.
She will be clean and new and all things shiny
like the plastic beads I used to love to wear in second grade.
Will I be a reminder of all that
she is supposed to erase, to get her clean slate?
Am I the chalky residue clouding her fresh start
with all that I witnessed, suffered, longed for by her side;
the ephemeral tide insistent in its nature,
destined to drag her back out to sea, to deep and dangerous waters?
Wasn't I the one who dragged her there in the first place?

II

Wasn't I the one who dragged her there in the first place?

Wasn't it the high pitched wail of infancy's never-ending
want and need she could not satisfy,
that set her off in search of need she could meet
by following a trail away from me on tracks along her arms.
To our neighbor she would say, "Kids are
nothing but problems." She had three
abortions, to avoid more problems. Of
four possibilities, I, the only survivor,
because she didn't notice till it was too late, or so she said.
When in the mood to tell me stories of my childhood,
she would repeat stories I had told her,
since she could never remember them herself.
I would have liked a big brother to protect me or little sister to keep my secrets.

III

I would have liked a big brother to protect me or a little sister to keep my secrets.

One before me, and two after, I'm flanked
on either side, by unborn babies, bodyguards in the spirit world.
I wear them like a crown of crows.
I would have to be stupid not to wonder

why I was chosen to survive. Singled out
 to fight my way through drug-infested birth waters,
 maternal ambivalence, narrow hips, and
 a cord around my neck, warning enough
 that this would not be easy, and maybe
 I should have called it quits early on. I
 would have liked a sibling who could bear witness
 with me, to the cold of being the only fruit
 hanging from the branch of a dying tree.
 Then again had there been one, I would not have been the only fruit.

IV

The only fruit hanging from the branch of a dying tree.

A fruit so exotic, even bitter tastes good
 when you're hungry. The call that she was finished,
 ready with her clean slate to return for me,
 came in the middle of midterms. She has
 no idea what I am in her absence. Nor I, her.
 My social worker called, I have had one since I was born
 with traces of her drug-filled blood, to urge me to try.
 I took everything good she had with me,
 I am the wound that never healed
 and threatens to kill us both.
 My teacher loves my poems. I feel naked when
 she says I have potential. She says I have promise.

V

She says I have potential. She says I have promise.

I have never met a promise that wasn't
 broken. I am guessing the same will be
 true of me. I wonder if a teacher ever
 told my mother she had potential.
 What was her potential? What did teachers see
 in her meticulous handwriting and neat rows of math?
 A future secretary? A book keeper? She laughed at me
 when I said I wanted to be a doctor.
 "Girls like you and me don't become doctors."
 Do teachers ever see the potential for evil and
 destruction? Or do they see it, but never tell.
 How do you write on someone's report card:
 Shows great potential for self-destruction.

VI

Shows great potential for destruction.

For Mother's Day, our teacher had us do
 a poem about our mothers. She told us to
 avoid clichés, to my great relief rich white kids
 hate their mothers even more than I hate mine.
 They use words like estranged, distant, cold,
 manipulative, and withholding. I use words
 like devastated, destroyed, demolished,
 and demoralized. I searched for all the d words
 I could find that wouldn't give away the d word
 I was looking for, but would never use: drug addict.
 They would love that. Of course a few would chime in,
 my mother is addicted to oxycontin, valium, and vicodin.
 How could they know my mother, like theirs, is a cliché where I come from.

VII

How could they know my mother is a cliché where I come from?

Drug addicted, unwed, teenage mother
 living on welfare, hating child and self,
 in need of recovery, rehabilitation. Does it
 get more cliché than that? Only if you throw
 in the particulars. But you don't say these things
 in front of the white folks. They are too focused on how I
 defy all the stereotypes and it would get them too excited
 to hear I come from the 'types, am them, none the less. I too am cliché:
 High achieving daughter of fucked up mother,
 so good in every way, at least while you're looking, it hurts your teeth.
 Straight A's, free ride to prep school, a smile to light up the room.
 A daughter any mother would kill for except the one who had her,
 who would have killed her had she had the chance.
 Cliches, both of us. Devoid of real.

VIII

Clichés, both of us. Devoid of real.

In plastic frames from the 99-cent store you could
 place pictures of strangers that know each other better than we do.
 How can you know someone who doesn't know themselves?
 How do you love them? The mystery of the love
 is strong like sour milk. Disappointingly real.
 Like clichés are always a little true, we are also a little
 real. Born from between her legs. Only her agony allowed me to live,
 as she tried and failed to do the thing her body told her she could do
 just because it could.
 Motherhood is not biology.
 Forced violent reckless love was all we could claim

but it was still love. She remembers and so do I. Blameless love.
First love. Innocent. Mother and child.
Every child a hungry monster. Every mother a terrified source of food.
How do they cope when they can't feed themselves?

At Lock and Dam No. 10

By Kathleen Kelly

Twenty-two minutes without Coppertone, the first warning sign, a pinking around the eyes, the ears. The skin shimmers, opal-white. I stay afloat, my face lifting toward Iowa skies. A beginner. I was once afraid of the water, the skimming dragonflies, territorial mallards. A quick kick of my ankle jetties me farther. Away from shore. Farther away from her. Earlier, her sleepover friend, the postmaster, laughed at me. Called me *little man, a boy*. Forgetting herself, she laughed too. At Lock and Dam No. 10, his clove cigarette dilutes her signature scent. Decanted musk, a faint rose accent. My mother attends to him, fluffs his curls. His pick crimped in her hand. A prince with a bad permanent. A careful trim. So different than her earlier handiwork: scissors like pinking shears razing, zigzagging my once-straight bangs: a sheared-ewe girl, a stern Dutch boy. My aunties never tire of family lore: *she carried youse so low, we was right sure youse gonna be a boy*. Blue crocheted booties, an airplane mobile. My biological slight: a dual X chromosome. Baby oil licks her sun-brown skin, drips between her pin-up breasts, under her pert chin. Miss Allamakee County 1961. Her beauty shop hair: pin-curved, backcombed, perfectly-set. How I imagine Pallas Athena's helmet. Peace before the war. The third-degree burns set in: blistering welts swell. Like smelt on my left cheek. My slightly bent nose. My only likeness to her.

At Least Prostitutes Bring Home Money

By Sokunthary Svay

Why you come home late in the dark
You wear the dress and stupid big boot no job

Where the money you want me save?
At least *prostitute* bring home money

What you want for dinner—noodle again?
Yeah you like your big noodle

Don't worry about freckle American men like that
Go to college get marry then work bring home money

I bring home money from hotel tip
You see my shoe only ten dollar on sale at Macy

Hey your period not come yet
Don't worry we *take care of it*

Your Daddy say he so sad when you not sleep in your room
Why you go out?

Your brother visit work on his day off
He not even bring home money!

My whole life you never know who I am
I work too hard but all my children hurt me

And your daddy send his family all the money I bring home.

The Tulip-Flame

By Chloe Honum

My sister's painting this: a hill, a lane
that winds around the hill, and a wide field
of tulips with a centered tulip-flame.

She rolls her brush through gray and adds the rain
in tiny flicks, glinting arrows of cold.
My sister's painting this: a hill, a lane.

Last year our mother died, as was her plan.
It's simpler to imagine something could
have intervened. The centered tulip-flame

startles the scene; the surrounding ones are plain
pastels, while this one's lit with a crimson fold.
My sister's painting this: a hill, a lane

of cobblestones, a watery terrain
of dripping flowers. Her strokes, elsewhere controlled,
flare out and fray around the tulip-flame

as if it were an accident, a stain,
a blaze in the midpoint of a wet field.
My sister's painting this: a hill, a lane,
a tulip field, and one astounding flame.

1981 Yellow Dodge Colt

By Kristine S. Ervin

After the police gutted my mother's car, my father, not wanting us to lose something else we loved, asked me and my brother if we wanted it back. I was eight then, and I didn't yet know what had happened inside.

If we had said, "Yes Dad, bring the car back home and put it back into the driveway," my father knew what could happen—every time he walked to or from the car, his muscles might tense, fists close, ready to punch whatever was behind him, because he could when she couldn't. If he sat in the driver's seat, he would be in the murderer's position, hands on the wheel, rearview mirror tilted down. If he turned to the backseat, he might see her body, bruised and shaking, curled in sweat and rapid breaths. Instead of the radio, he might hear her scream.

When I looked up at him and answered no, I didn't realize the burden my father had offered to take.

I didn't know love meant the willingness to suffer.

My decision had been a practical one—the police said they wouldn't put the car back together and how can you drive without seats.

Maybe someone revived it, installing new seats, new ashtrays, disinfecting its windows and glovebox, and maybe it sat in a used car lot, until a young woman said, This is perfect for my needs, and I can't believe it is *this* cheap. Or maybe it went to a scrap yard, had many men's hands around her engine and frame, and if it still exists at all, only a skeleton remains.

But memory and the imagination keep it whole, intact, fingerprintless, bloodless, clean. The steering wheel is still wrapped in yellow vinyl and punctured with holes, Mom has one hand on the wheel, the taut sleeve of her brown leather blazer reaching for her wrist, her other hand holding a Salem cigarette, its filter stained pink with the semicircles of her lips. We're driving back to the wallpaper store to look for her sunglasses, even though they're really on the floorboard, under her seat. Through the untinted window, I'm staring straight at the sun, a lavender and green disc oscillating in a cloudless sky, as we sing the lyrics of Air Supply: *I'm all out of love, I'm so lost without you.*

Autumn Melancholy with Birds

By Margaret Chula

Morning rain is tender, inviting me to slow down. How it taps the leaves before their final fall. Distant mountains obscured by fog are still there, even though I can't see them.

Will Mother die in autumn, hands nested in her lap, knuckles veined and buckled like the leaves of sugar maples? The bird feeder outside her window is empty.

Once she told me she dreamt of dancing in her wedding dress to a Glenn Miller tune. She woke up to cricket song. I have given away all her slippers.

Tonight, while picking white hairs from my brush, I think of Yu Xuang's mother who was troubled because her daughter talked to flowers. Not *my* mother.

Together we mimicked bird songs, ridiculously happy when they called back—robins, chickadees, and even a bittern hidden in cattails. From the front porch, we mocked its deep-throated gurgle.

Childhood summers, a screech owl slipped its lullaby through my open window. I leaned out in my nightgown to reply, but the owl was too far away to hear.

I learned the mourning dove's song when I lived in Japan. Its cooing on rainy afternoons sounded like damp futons, clammy and musty. Always in pairs, what could they be mourning?

I know what I will mourn. The lost birds, their songs forgotten. My mother's voice that I could never imitate. The blue glass bird she gave me on my window sill, earthbound and mute.

Advice from Mother on Your One Less Day*By Les Bernstein*

skip obligation's inescapable sins
wiggle out of pigeonholes
enjoy happenstance and flux
don't forget to floss

clog the clunky machinery of belief
refuse templates of self
ignore persistent memory
elbows off the table

airbrush your self portrait
invite farcical pratfalls
avoid hard labor's invitation to bruise
shoulders back stand up straight

one day a chill seeps into bones
clouds will scud at dusk
adventures of a single consciousness
turn to particle and ash

until then
navigate by lightless stars
hand write thank you notes
rsvp yes to everything

Vision

By Jill Boyles

She saw her mother at a garage sale on a spring blue morning chatting with a woman behind a card table. She closed her eyes and saw her mother's eyes: translucid gray irises and lids bordered by brown eyeliner. The skin on her face soft and slightly fuzzy. She opened her eyes and saw her mother holding up a white blouse and imagined her saying to the woman, "Only a dollar for this?" and then to herself, With a little bit of bleach, it'll look brand new.

She saw her mother leave the garage sale on a spring blue morning with blouse in hand and purse over shoulder, elbow pressing it against her side.

She saw her mother that spring blue morning step into a glaucous, gelatinous moment. Her movements thick and gradual. She imagined her mother saying, "I am real. As real as my elbow is pressed against my purse is pressed against my side." She would scratch her head to prove it, fingers nervously rubbing against skull. Extending from her vagina hung withered umbilical cords and she would wonder about her children and conclude, "They're nebulous."

I see my mother's body wearily gather itself
to move through this moment. She turns toward
me. A malignant tumor branched in her lungs protrudes
from under her shirt. I scream to her but there's no
sound and soon I'm standing at the edge
of a river with my hands cradling ashes. I cast
her into the air like an offering. The wind sifts,
blowing finer ash back into my face as
bits of burned bone drop
and descend down river
smoldering in the water
filtered sun.

She saw her mother emerge back into a spring blue morning. An essence of displaced realness lingered in the back of her mother's mind. What was I thinking? she imagined her mother asking herself and then shrugging off the question. At the next garage sale, she smiled a hello to the woman behind an old, wooden desk with a tattered crayon box on top. Her mother would be sure to let her know about the bargain blouse she bought next to nothing across the street.

Mother's Wishbones, No Doubt

By Ruth Sabbath Rosenthal

furculae with not a fragment
of dried-up flesh or sinew

to despoil their luster —
the slew of them ranging

in size from Cornish hen
to turkey. Funny,

I'd never noticed Mother
extricate any, let alone

strip them clean,
secrete them somewhere

long-forgotten. I stumbled
across those old bones —

took possession of the best
of them, pried

loose some of my own from
birds broiled, barbequed, fried;

primed each, applied gold leaf.
Made more of them

than she could ever have
conceived — the guilt,

over those generations of bones
brittling whole, striking

beneath the wait of wishes.

Afterlife

By Cassandra Lane

The Lynched Man's Widow

Mary feels the baby curling inside her, tighter and tighter, unbearable pain. She closes her eyes and prays for the coiled mass of limbs to dissolve. She and Burt had promised to raise this man-child together. Now, that Burt has been lynched, murdered, buried, his promises of a better future ring hollow. Mary wishes the fetus would stop feeding off her; she has no more to give it. She wishes it would shrivel to a seed and disintegrate into nothingness.

But nothingness, like hope, holds itself just out of Mary's reach.

Wife of the Lynched Man's Son

Avis pushes her first baby's body out into the world and knows right away that she had borne a dead thing.

"Let me hold him," she pleads with her midwife. She wants to smell his baby hair and baby skin.

As the midwife washes him up, fear suddenly tears at Avis. *Will he smell like death?* And, if so, would she ever be able to scrub the stench from her nostrils, or would it follow her the rest of her life?

When the midwife places the baby in Avis's arms, Avis cups him to her neck. He is a doll baby, beautiful and lifeless.

Avis has eight children after her stillborn. With each pregnancy, she waits for death to beat her over the head again. She sinks her nose into each baby's hair, searching for the lost scent of the one who did not live.

The Lynched Man's Great-Granddaughter

At 16, Sand swore off ever becoming a mother. As the eldest of her mother's five children, she felt like she had already walked that path. When she was 17, she aborted the fetus that was growing inside her without shedding a tear.

When she discovers she is pregnant again at 36, something in her is soft and ready. She watches water births on YouTube and includes this preferred method of delivery into her birth plan.

On her day of labor, the doctor tells her that her risk of infection is too great for a water birth. Defeated by the contractions, she does not fight him. She waddles into the hospital bed to dilate more centimeters and wait, lasting half an evening before the contractions break her.

"I can't do this naturally," she cries over the phone to her mother. "I feel like a failure."

“You have to be very still,” the anesthesiologist tells her, but the more she tries to stop trembling, the more violently her body convulses. A nurse eases her back into a prostrate position and covers her with blankets she cannot feel.

After she gives birth to her son, she falls into a dead sleep. When she awakes, she is convinced that the afterbirth is still inside of her, some parcel of flesh that the doctor had not seen. She had read somewhere that this can happen. She presses down on her swollen abdomen, obsessing over the definition of afterbirth: *when the placenta and fetal membranes are expelled from the uterus after the birth.*

She had not felt a second wave after her son was born. She imagines that she has afterbirth stuck inside of her, floating around, unable to find an opening.

Is it alive? she wonders.

Is it the past or the future, or both?

The Ashsong

By Kristi Carter

No fever brings the strange hands to place this bit in my mouth,
it is the cold metal weight on my thin voice that brings me to fever.

The sorrel waved its fleshy leaves at me as my sisters disappeared
over the hill into the holler below. They are not the first to choose silence

over change. Over the chance that an oratorio might burst forth from us
with enough tremolo to hang the notes on a black shiver in mid-air

before their descent into the ears of the men. Before the notes cast a cloud
of fever over those who said they had come to fill us with their white gift of life,

whether or not we might accept it. One of the women runs her hand through the hair
of a son whose father is nowhere. No stag carried him into the horizon streaked

with the residue of old gods, no. He was a nightmare trilling off into the lightning storm
that follows his frail frame—the easier to slip through you. But my sisters forbade me

from singing the battle aria, from marking my cheekbones with the ash of animals
who had eaten from my hands only months before the drought. Do not sing of war,
of death, of the ones who brought us this life we did not ask for. Do not sing.
Lie down on the still earth, and hear the song already continuing.

Ash Ash.

Bite down on your song lest you bite all our tongues from our mouths.
Ash Ash Ash. Bite down on the fever of this pale, dry morning
called motherhood.

At the Abortion Clinic

By Katharyn Howd Machan

White poinsettias,
drained of all their blood,
adorn the waiting room table.
Walk in, take a seat, pick up a magazine.
On its cover pose a man and woman
laughing into a book.
Glance at the pictures on the walls.
Study the frames, the webs of dust
clinging to the corners.
Near the window stands a Christmas tree
draped with silver tinsel.
You remember your childhood, quickly
turn away, consider tomorrow instead.
Look at the women who wait with you,
some awkward with the swelling
they cannot hide beneath loose shirts.
No one speaks. No one smiles.
Some keep their faces blank, wish
to erase the creases of sleepless nights.
Some sigh. Some stare. Some play
carefully with rings and fingers.
Notice one woman holding back tears;
they push at the edges of her eyes,
very bright, and you think
She is the loneliest woman in the world.
Gaze at the clock awhile;
make up stories about the numbers,
the long wand sweeping around.
At some point in the next two hours
your name will be called.
You will stand, pick up your purse,
walk down the hallway of little green tiles.
The other women will watch you go.
They will know exactly what you're feeling
and be completely wrong.

Wanting

By Molly Beer

The boy in purple moonboots thumps up to the gate howling “¡Mami!” for hello. My boyfriend— “Mommy” to this orphan boy who knows no men—avoids my eye.

We first came to this *hogar*, to Ecuador, to teach English: I want; you want; the boy wants; we all want.

We were not expecting, or wanting, babies. We were not ready for such gaping need, for hunger at once wholly repulsive and irresistible. But for six months, by reflex or biology or the programmed magnetism of a child’s oversized eyes, we endure the retching induced by the seep from rationed diapers and the sour smell of yucca gruel, and we come each day to hold the *hogar*’s babies. We come although neither the stench nor the drifting ash of sadness like *ceniza* from Tungurahua, the nearby volcano named for an open throat, will wash off in a cold rooftop shower.

“Which do you love best?” the director asks me, my lap full of babies.

This is my chosen translation: The verb for “love” and “want” is one and the same in Spanish.

“I love them all,” I manage, with a magnanimous smile. “I love them all equally.” I do not mean to want.

My university students, most of them parents already, want to know: am I lonely without a family? The *hogar* cook wonders with a wink, will we take home an Ecuadorian *recuerdo*? A souvenir? But I cannot want the babies. I cannot want them in the same way I cannot, if given a scalpel, cut out my own heart. Not Pedro with his mop of dusty hair or Soledad with her grave rage or the newborn without a name found under a parked car in Quito. Most of all, I cannot want the boy in purple moonboots who calls my lover mother.

When the ache rises in our own throats, we decide to get away. We put out a thumb, hitch a ride in a truck-bed through Amazonia, climb through the Andes, cross a sea of salt that looks like sky, watch flamingos flap over a red lake, burn our mouths with coca. But however far afield we range, the babies cling to us, polyps, barnacles, the worms that now infest in our bellies too.

In the gold mines in Bolivia, I meet a woman who has adopted an infant vicuña. The creature came in from the wild with her herd of alpaca: who adopted whom is up for debate. Fluff aside, the vicuña’s neckbone is as slim as thumb and finger can encircle, but its eyes are the size of fists. As she introduces me, her baby butts up under her bustled velvet skirt, wanting what’s not there.

I am no one’s mother.

Back in Ecuador, when I carry babies on my hip, I swat their kneading hands away from my breasts, wean their sucking mouths off my skin.

“Amiga,” I tell them when they call me *mami*. “Soy tu amiga.”

My boyfriend sets the boy with purple moonboots on the parquet floor.

And we leave wanting.

Birthday

By Shelley Blanton-Stroud

“No,” the doctor says when I ask, “Is everything all right?”

His shiny bald head rises between my wide-spread knees, a perfect red balloon over the ball of my belly.

Like a movie, I think, Demerol having its poetic effect.

Numb below the waist, foggy above the neck, I watch grim-faced professionals race around the fluorescence, like ants disturbed, rolling machines, fetching tools, kneading my belly, stitching my softest skin. One punches buttons on a metal tree, down which slithers a gray tube onto my arm and hand, teeth biting into my vein.

“No,” he says again, blue eyes watering. “I don’t think everything will be all right.”

I stare at the two deep furrows inching like caterpillars up his brow.

My baby is already gone. I haven’t touched him.

Nine pounds, fifteen ounces, a big, red bruise, my son Bates has choked on his own meconium long before I squeeze him from the dark warm place grown too small almost a month before. For weeks he has taken black glue into his fresh pink lungs, so that when I finally push him out, he cannot gulp, his lung sacks full, unable to contract.

He knows how to breathe, expects to breathe, after all that practice inside me, but is punished when he does what is natural. The shock to his body when the oxygen doesn’t come. He has finally pushed out of the fluid to the land world, where he drowns.

Hours later, I cradle his warm weight, attached to an oxygen-pumping device, surrounded by a circle of strangers, eyes downcast. I touch his cheek with my rough finger, ashamed of my cracked nail polish. I like the lanugo on his shoulder, shimmering under blue light. Below the shoulder, he’s tucked into a quilt I taught myself to make out of our old clothes, with tiny precise stitches in unruly patterns, like what my grannies made, but not.

The Demerol dulls me, like numbing cotton on an open wound, so that I don’t cry or despair. I observe. The perfectly shaped baby, thick, ready. The shocked professionals. The husband, lips swollen, red. Through the Demerol I see what emotion wouldn’t allow.

I nod and a teal-costumed man flips a switch and my son’s feet kick, kick, kick and then drop. I shake his body once but he does not answer. I hand him to a tan, blonde nurse with a wet face. Holding my son with both arms, she wipes her dripping nose on the shoulder of the nurse next to her and I laugh. I see that is wrong when my husband vomits on the floor behind me. Teal people scurry to help him, rags, bags, chair.

The snake in the tree drips the Demerol into my vein and I want it to drip forever.

Movement

By Deborah Staunton

I watched her eyes as they focused on the screen,
her head, mannequin still,
her lips a strained line.
her body, motionless,
mimicking my tiny lifeless unborn baby,
willing her to move,
just the flick of a finger, the drop of a shoulder, a barely discernible breath,
just one sign that the small form on the screen could somehow reciprocate,
the gift of movement, any movement.

Instead, she stood,
refusing to make eye contact,
to release the breath we had both been holding.
The heaviness in the tight, airless room
twisted time into an eternity of frozen life.
Just tell me,
Just say the words,
break the agonizing silence
and make the waiting stop.
My baby may be dead, but I'm not.

Birth Marker

By Gerda Govine Ituarte

Newborn son
two days of life

tattoo needle dips into
ink and his ashes

burns "ADAM" on to her
arm skin stings

babies gone from here
sing lullabies to her.

The Birth

By Linda Ravenswood

The ones on four legs
ran away.
Her screams
were a shock
even to her.

Though the mate
had mated
previously,
he too kept in the
outback.

When the little one
fell out
from between her legs,
she had no reason
to smile
and carry on with
all of that laughing
like she did,
but she did it
anyway.

She picked him up;
brought
her mouth,
over his nose,
sucked out
the clog,
jettisoned red streams
from his nostrils,
through
the flute
of her tongue,
onto the earth.
She had no idea why she did it
but she did it anyway

She rolled over in the leaves
nestled her backside in the grass
and cupped him against her.

Stars were up

Shushed*By Rebecca Roth*

The first person
I
(Shush!)
is myself.

We're trying, I might say.
But I *can't* say. I could lose
My job. So, I depend on you. On your public, privileged wars.
And still more: on your private battles, private losses.

Silence any open-eyed fear.
Keep a white-knuckled lid on joy.
Keep still: wait til you can't deny;
until then, *deny! deny! deny!*

[The secret no one tells you, you riveting Rosie, you Wonder Woman you, is the closer children are together, the more dangerous; also, that women of a certain age pose a danger, too. This is coded as remorse: *if only you'd tried earlier*. You can't talk openly about your life changing.]

You could *use* a nanny state. It would be helpful.
Brotherhood is a cozy community as thick as thieves.
Motherhood is a singular experience.

You return to work (magically for deadlines, other duties as assigned,
occasional overnight travel required) and the babies disappear...
re-emerging for Bring Your Daughter to Work Day.
Until then, door closed, pump pumping.
Heart beating in there.

Shush, don't cry. Not here.
Or, if you must, crying it out isn't cruel. You have to
learn to soothe yourself to sleep.
Sink or swim, baby.
Sink or swim.
Hush now. Hush.

Always, Every, Only

By Susan Sarver

It only takes a half-hour three times a week to stay fit and a few vitamins every day are good plus a check-up every year, teeth every six months, unless you have kids with braces then it's every four, sort of like smoke-detector batteries that were always every six months unless you track down the ones you only need to change every five years except when you have a child afraid of fire then its every night and therapy every week until soccer starts then it's only every other week sessions that are long enough to get to the shop to check the warning light on the car or slip over for one of those every six-week hair cuts or a mani/pedi but only if you always get those things and waxing is every some time or other but only those who do that know for sure, because every time there's a moment to do the research there's something like the dog's monthly heartworm and flea prevention that's always overdue and walks, which are only twice a day but always take time though they offer the chance to plan for every thing ahead like booking the every-other-month exterminator treatments to keep the scorpions out, the weekly trip to the grocery, the dry cleaners, and the bank, and in the summer, the farmer's market to make sure to always buy local though there are usually lines that are a good time to always think and consider cleaning out the inside of your purse, recommended by the Simple Living column that comes out every month and advises root stimulator every week for the newly planted perennials, which is always easier than the twice-a-week watering of the lawn, if it doesn't rain and you're not concerned about the world's water supply, which should always be on our minds, but letting the grass go is always better than missing a hepatitis B shot for the kids or the one for meningitis, which is every some time or other, but that's an opportunity to refill prescriptions before vacation, which is only two months away and always requires a deposit to hold the cottage but it's only half the rent now and half two weeks before but that's always easier than the last minute chores of boarding the dog, setting the light timers, emptying the fridge, buying snacks, floaties, sunscreen, washing and packing the clothes, gassing-up the car, paying the kid next door to mow, holding the mail and paper, picking up the work file from the office, gathering the chargers and portable smoke detector for the child always afraid of fire, and though every year the traffic gets a little thick only an hour from the beach, it's always worth it once you're there inhaling sea air, sunblock, and beer, searching between the greased bodies for a patch of sand to lay back, breathe deeply, and remember every thing you left behind.

Margie's Monologue

(Excerpted from the full-length play *Cookies for Prisoners*)

By *Thelma Virata de Castro*

MARGIE

(White housewife. Sixty.)

When I got pregnant with Jude, I was so happy. Larry and I had already given up on having kids. Larry didn't want to go to any hocus-pocus fertility doctors. I hit forty and I thought, "That's it." No baby for me. Our lives kept us busy, but I always thought, I assumed, I'd be a mother. And then it happened. I was with child. I felt like goddamn Mother Nature. I did everything right. I didn't know if I'd get another chance. I ate healthy foods. I exercised. I meditated. And then, I took it too far.

When Jude was inside me, I tried an advanced form of meditation. I breathed in all the pain in the world, and I breathed out healing. I felt so . . . superior. But it turns out, that meditation was more dangerous than smoking.

All the pain of the world got trapped in Jude. Oh, and he knows it! The littlest thing can set him off. There's no pleasing him. The truth is, Jude didn't want to be born. He was perfectly happy living off me. He was two weeks overdue and he pooped all over my womb. I ended up having an emergency C-section. They didn't want him to cry when they finally yanked him out. All the crap had to be cleaned up first. The doctors were worried he was going to breathe it in and infect his lungs. When they were ready for him to take his first breath, they spanked him. You know what that little fucker did? He kept his mouth shut! Larry was distraught. I couldn't take it anymore. I yelled at the brat. "Cry!" He did. But he's been shitting on my life ever since.

Kymopoeia

By Tina Pocha

They cut my breasts off. They want me to love, but they cut my breasts off.
They gave me one earring. How can I be fair with just one earring?
They say smile. I smile. They say smile. I smile. They say you are not smiling. I say, this is my smile.

My son thinks I love his brother more.
But I tell the Ayah to draw his bath and lay out his clothes.
My son thinks I love his brother more.
But I sent him to the best schools.
My son thinks I love his brother more.
I do. I love his brother more.

My husband left me with boxes of tea and grandfather clocks.
I stir and wind, stir and wind.
My husband left me with land and tenants.
I pay his debts. I pay his debts.
My husband left me my sarees and jewels.
I take them out. I wipe them clean. No daughters. No daughters.

I am cold.
I am cold.
You know why I am cold.

Premonition

By Faith Holsaert

When I return, my car motor labors up the rise. Our shingled house hunkers into the green woods, the blue and white sky snapping like bed sheets on a line. I am putting the car in gear and setting the brake, gathering purse, books, and a bag of groceries from the IGA. The brown dog leaps barking off the porch, and the shepherd mix hurries toward me, ready to put his body between me and danger, but all I see of danger is the collapse of August's Joe-Pye Weed into its own pungency. The front door slams open and my children run toward me over the hummocks and rabbit holes, their bare feet missing their lost jacks scattered in the grass. She is in her favorite sun dress from last summer – the red one – and he is in jeans and a paisley shirt sent by his grandmother. The brown dog is steadily barking. The children are shouting, *Mommy. Mommy.* I drop to my knees and open my arms, books and milk and hamburger be damned; the children run into me and I let them roll me back into the grasses, the back of my head pressed to the ground. Seed heads burst into our hair. The brown dog can't stop barking. The hill looks upside down. I breathe in the smell of my children, cherish their thrashing limbs and their high voices. They cry, *Mom. Mom. Guess what?*

The brown dog. The shepherd mix. They snap at one another, struggling to reach us. My daughter cries out, *Mom*, as the brindled one grazes her with his teeth. *Mom*, she cries and the dog runs off, head slung low. *Mom*. The whites of his eyes.

“premonition” appeared online in ROAR, 8/14

At Precisely the Corner*By Faith Holsaert*

at precisely the corner
a woman with wild eyes
as you are turning
a kind of wildness
as you are turning
turn wall-eyed terror

another whom you knew
and now, look
and now, not whom you thought
and look again
and you will see
another

she is walking close to the wall
no room for a shadow

a dog follows
a feist dog who fits inside her shadow

you know these dogs
know them from back home

The Disappointed Women

By Celeste Helene Schantz

These are the tssking women;
the women who glance sideways at my son.
These are whispering women,
who talk behind their hands;
who wait for the bus with their precious brats,
little rats with normal brains,
mimicking my boy as he talks
to the wind, to the robins;
speaks in signs with small fingers
flying fast as hummingbird wings. He tries
to join their circle, flaps and smiles; they move away.
We'll attend another sort of school today;
at this ugly curb; the bus diesel and pesticide
mist the petalled morning. This is the classroom;
this is where we learn a perfect hate.
It blooms and snakes beneath our well-groomed lawns—
the light and shadows arranged, fancy as the sympathy bouquet
you hold out to every mother of a unicorn child.
We choose to hate among these flowers.
I've finally learned to deadhead this pain you offer;
but at 40 it was all unbearable.
At 40 I tried to run away.

At 40, dear neighbor,
I was an old woman who wanted to die.

Boy Child*By Gerda Govine Ituarte*

Boy child what could I have done differently
 Boy child where does the blame live

Boy child quiet
 Boy child did not bother anyone

Boy child shy
 Boy child withdrew at fourteen

Boy child scared to talk on phone
 Boy child wanted to be a neuroscientist

Boy child isolated
 Boy child attended college

Boy child never hurt anyone
 Boy child communicated by email

Boy child visits home slowed down
 Boy child disappeared

Boy child bought guns
 Boy child stockpiled body armor

Boy child mass murderer
 Boy child my own son.

Boy child what could I have done differently
 Boy child where does the blame live

Boy child if I had known
I'd be crawling on all fours to get to you

Boy child
I didn't realize that your loudest cry for help was silence.

*La Ganga, Maria L., *Los Angeles Times*, 7/30/2015.

Outside Modern Myths: Waiting in the Car While the Teens Battle on Game Night

By Rebecca Olander

My son and his geek friends are beautiful, with their Magic cards and D6 dice, their plastic-sheathed comic books and revelry in their own stink in the backwoods of gaming stores, huddled around tables like Tolkien's fellowship round a fire. Sometimes, they role-play in forests, becoming weekend healers, totem animals the raven, the hare, or warriors, attempting beards and clanking medieval weaponry, all cloaks and flasks, all lamb-on-a-spit and flower remedies. Some gamers aren't even adolescent. There's green-velvet-skirt-and-leather-headband woman, and the man at the counter with his golden snake choker and hobbit hair. I almost wish I could inhabit a cunning dwarf or a high priestess, not find it silly to speak in grand terms, to fight for love.

Instead, I sidelong glance in the rearview mirror, arrange my hair, suck in my stomach, second-guess my words. How refreshing it would be to sink teeth into a leg of mutton, to wear wings, to call myself another name, Morgana, Ethereal, or Storm Cloud, and have someone – maybe he'd wear a maille breastplate, or strap his sandals three times around his shins – call me *heart's delight*, feed me marzipan, mount a steed by my side. We'd weave each other tansy and goldenrod crowns, drape the kingdom we created with starlight, deer antlers, coniferous red-berried boughs. Dangerous to unmake the known world, though, house of cards that it is, yet just once I'd like to let the weight of self drop, puddled cloak at my feet, and play by calling out the rules as I go.

The Bones of His Face*By Jan Lewbin*

I invited
My son
Glorious and brilliant
Yet so adrift separate distant
From me
In that painful precarious place
Between boy and man
To approach
And come close

He laid his head in my lap
Rested his shoulders on my thighs
And nestled his lean body
Along the length of mine
So that
I could soothe
The taut skin between his brows
Circle my finger tips
At his temples
And stroke
The bones of his face
In a way that allowed him
To heavy back into me
To soften with me
And close those eyes
Which can flash vicious black shards

I could have easily bent down
To brush his nose with mine
In an Eskimo kiss
But I didn't
As it was
This return of my son
Was nearly all I could bear
Without my own tears
Splashing onto
The bones of his face

Spear Maiden to Persephone

By Geri Lipschultz

All superheroes are violent, so do not marry one, but all who are not superheroes are also violent. A discovery made by one of the female explorers.

Empty pages, my life has been that for a while. I've stepped into someone else's book. I've skated on their pages. I've relinquished my religion and my height. I've given up my hair for a good cause. They must pulverize, snip off the tips of my daughter's fingers. This will make the bees sing again. Birds will flutter at our windows again. Cicadas will stop preparing for war.

Just a small sacrifice, and the snow falls on the buds of the magnolia, what is left after the great storm. The land has sued the sky for divorce. We walked on the side of the roads, trying not to look at the torn fences, trees fallen. A dry earth, the biologist said, that longs for its herds. We must eat the animals, round them up according to schedule. Tie them to a hook in the earth's core, where the elders lie.

Her fingertips have grown back. Even the whorls. Her little ridges. I lick them, watched by the cat, whose very tongue is a ridge. His eyes like those of owls. He curls around my daughter's fingers and stares.

How a daughter came to this world, I will tell you. I don't have the permit, so do not repeat what I say. I caught her, wrestled with a squirrel for her. He was atop the maple, chewing buds, and she was up there, as well, had climbed up to see the world. She didn't want to come down. I thought to send my cat, but he lives indoors. His purrs inflate the house. I didn't want to come home to a sinkhole, didn't want the house to lose its balance, to tip.

My fingers bleeding, my tongue full of blood. My eyes dry for the collection of tears that I gave to the Jehovah's Witnesses. Yes, you can have them, I said. You have lovely wool that was last seen on a drove of sheep. Dolly gave up her coat, and I gave up my tears.

It's a long story but must remain short. Otherwise, court-martial. Otherwise, prison. Otherwise, the degree stays in the file, and the file will be deleted. I will have to be observed. I will have to show my registration. A small box of index cards with the information written by hand. A relic of my twenty years of labor, for which I was paid a teaspoon of sugar. It adds up. My daughter will tell you. I will send her out into the world with all her whorls reborn, on a berth of roses, her rosette of gardenia, her garden of Eden, her evening posies. Wave goodbye and smile.

I buried a blade under her arm. It's a virgin knife, passed down, like the Bible we all carried down the aisle.

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Unwinding

By Anita Barnard

Broad and capable, still brown
from the long gone summer,
they carry you through the joyous
whys and whats of your days.
Had destiny given us a different setting,
my intrepid daughter, you would
not be running now
through our overgrown garden.
The binding woman would come.
I would wrap my arms around
your fragile limbs, stiffen
against your pain
as feet were folded, bound, broken.
So you will be beautiful to men
with the allure of your suffering
and your helplessness,
the women do this to their little girls.
Like the aunts and grandmothers
on the hot savannah
who sharpen rock, close you up,
scrape away your pleasure.
Ideal, powerless, dependent,
you hobble through your life,
beautifully broken.
Imagine being free of all the bindings.
I am taking your small foot in my hand.
I am unwinding, unwinding.
I am kneeling for forgiveness
at your feet.
Imagine I am pouring the
most expensive oil.
I am wrapping your feet in my hair.

There's a Tornado in My Mind

By Ann L. Carter

It comes and goes
but lately it's been lingering.

Sometimes it wrecks the house,
leaving us to stand amidst the piles,
and how do I find the energy
to put everything back together?

Sometimes it takes my daughters,
with me a shell of memories,
desperate to find their photographs.

Sometimes I alone am swept away,
doubting that those remaining can ever find
forgiveness for the one who left.

Kansas tornadoes often come late afternoon,
a twisting tail to a still dog day.

But mine arrive past midnight,
telling me to touch
the sleeping child beside me,
to check her sister in the other room,
to stay still and close by
to all that may fly away tomorrow.

Maternity*By Sue Churchill*

My daughter has a job interview
so I am bargaining with God
recklessly trading away all pearls
of happiness, the ones I sought so long
in the dark depths, holding my breath
to bursting.

It's not just one or two I concede,
it's all and any and ever.
I throw in the ewes,
the lambs I looked for early and late,
the one I fished for in the wet darkness
of the mother, its clammy form
a lump of death, then quickened like Lazarus.

She can go, I decree, without hesitation.
But I give a backward look at that one—
clambering through a gap in the gate
her mother on the other side, bleating, bleating, bleating.

Orbit without Gravity*By Page Lambert*

Once, daughter, in keeping with the turning
of the moon—nine times we felt it turn
during those months when we shared blood

and breath, when the iron-rich beef I ate
became the flesh that filled the hollows of your
soft bones, before the nurse cut the cord

and we began that long journey away
from each other, once, daughter
you needed me.

Now, twenty-one years later, the last particles
of your DNA sift from the veins of my blood
and once more the moon turns and

because it is a new day and
because it is the way of things, you
seek solitude, self, autonomy, while I

strain to board the vessel, the lifeboat
which once gave ballast and purpose
to belly and breast, yet even so

because it is the way of things
like a sailor suddenly adrift in a dark ocean
I wallow in these new waters
 with their unsteady
 tides
 and moonless
 nights.

On the Eve of a Daughter's Fortieth Birthday*By Laurie Klein*

Little fist of a plum
on the chipped yellow plate,
your heft—mottled
violet, tinge of blue—defines
awkward: Smooth skin
girdles the bloom of pulp.

Youth is a membrane,
poised to tear,
spill seed. Little plum,
sealed tight, were you a door
hinged to my fieldstone wall,
where would I open?

A New Theology*By Sheila Bender*

For Seth Bender, 1975-2000

Who has no likeness of a body and has no body
is my son, now five months dead
but in my dreams, my dreams he brings the peace in gardens.

And I see him in his smile and he is hardy
in the rolled up sleeves of his new shirt, well-fed
when he has no likeness of a body and has no body.

I see him next to me in conversation at a party
and I believe that he is fine because this is what he said,
because in my dreams, my dreams I sit with him in gardens.

The nights he comes, the cats moan long and sorry.
I believe they see his spirit entering my head,
he who has no likeness of a body and has no body.

In my life, accepting death comes slowly,
but the midwifery of sadness and of shock bleeds
afterbirth, dreams that bring the peace in gardens.

I know that he is far and he is here and he is holy.
Under sun, I feel the energy it takes to come away from God
who has no likeness of a body and has no body
who is in my dreams, the dreams that bring me gardens.

Identity

By Gerda Govine Ituarte

What do you call a woman who is married?

wife

What do you call a woman whose husband died?

widow

What do you call a woman who was married?

divorced

What do you call a woman who never married?

single

What do you call a woman whose child dies before she does?

Breathing Room

By Holly Norton

What must it have been like to wake up breathless
 Not with anticipation
 With lack of oxygen
 The panic sets in
 You call 911
 Gasp for breath and wait for them to come.

Medics arrive
 Place a mask on your face
 Take you away without a change of clothes
 No siren, only the sound of wheels on the road
 Take you to a place where you know you will have to do
 what they tell you.

Then to a room with a bed on wheels
 Fluorescent lights buzz, dilate your eyes
 Vicks Vapo Rub wafts through the air
 They take you out of your t-shirt you slept in
 Put you in a gown that you can't tie around you
 Help you crawl under the sheets pulled so tight
 You wonder if you will stop breathing again

It's morning and another inmate comes in
 Pleasant enough, with talk about the weather
 Her daughter coming to visit her
 Only later do you learn her reason for being there
 Chronic incontinence
 You eat the flavorless meat and pudding that only those with no choice
 will tolerate in this salt- and caffeine-free facility
 You finally coax a shaker and a diet cola from a sympathetic nurse

They let you go and now you tell me
 There's no place like the hospital to make you appreciate home
 The nurse comes a few times a week, and
 Your meals are on wheels
 I imagine you trying to catch them, gasping for air,
 Helpless, as I am now.

Windy

By Annita Sawyer

I was born at Winter Solstice on a mountaintop. I came out howling with the wind. “Here’s Windy,” the shout went up, while my dear Mama cried. Old Mrs. Dooley cleaned me off with freezing handfuls of white flakes. My blood showed scarlet on the snow. Once they’d bit and tied the cord, Mama herself held an icy ball against the knot. All the sheepskins, wool coats, down quilts they piled on couldn’t take away the chill. “You screamed yourself blue,” Mrs. Dooley told me when I was two, after I’d begged her for the millionth time to recite again the story of my birth. “Warn’t no warmth got through to you.” A miniature child with blue skin and red hair like me lived on forever in my mind.

Mama needed help at home—there was just her and me—so I never went to school. I couldn’t read, but I learned to sew and weave and how to make things grow. We raised corn, all sorts of beans, and squashes, too, yellow, green, and orange. Tomatoes red as blood on snow overflowed their garden stalks. Watermelons sneaked through the fields like insurgents in guerrilla war. We surrendered, let ‘em come, then passed the feast around.

Warm breezes kissed us summers on the mountaintop. From far and wide folks came to share our endless Solstice Day. “Sing to us, Windy,” they’d call, and melodies moved through my feet till they flowed out my mouth. It wasn’t really me. Mama would smile and squeeze my hand; I just set them free.

My midnight birth in winter’s dark forever left its mark. In the cold I suffered spells so bleak I retreated to a cave, Mama and our neighbors leaving food for me to eat. While other children learned in school, I built fires that wouldn’t burn. I hid near bats, and slept with bears to feel their warmth. Occasionally, I roused a cub, which made a wicked fuss. I had to climb a tree outside the cave, he’d eat my food, and I’d be stuck till spring’s light changed my perspective. Then I’d head for home, bringing Mama armfuls of forsythia and daffodils I gathered along the way.

As shadows lengthen earlier each day, dear Mama’s voice grows weak. Since summer’s peak she’s stayed indoors, afraid she’ll take a fall. Her fears have multiplied ten fold—first snakes, then mice, then poison food, now devils in disguise. I smell snow blowing in the dark; I race the clock. “I’m Windy,” I remind her, “your blue girl with red hair.”

I wash her worried face; I brush her disappearing, wispy curls. Each day more of them depart her scalp for the pillow where she rests her head, first sham I’d woven on my own, after she taught me how.

I squeeze her blue hand tight in mine. Cold wind blows fierce. A howl rises from earth’s core, through Mama, out the midnight sky. It’s my time to cry.

Previous version published in *St. Anne's Review* in 2010.

Tissue

By Berwyn Moore

for my mother, Connie Moore

As though to convince us she's still game,
my mother pulls from her coat pocket
a lemon, blue with mold, and tosses it,
a perfect serve, to the ceiling. Her eyes
glimmer, for just a moment, and she's

back on the court, thirty-love, muscles
poised to swing, but the lemon thuds
to the floor, and she falters, then crumples
to her chair, here but not here, the threads
of her brain tangling into hard knots.

She arrives at the table singing *Jesus loves
me* and lavished with every necklace
and bracelet she owns – pearls, garnets,
silver charms twinkling on her chest
and arms – but no skirt over her worn slip.

She shushes us, her conniving daughters,
for whispering secrets behind her door,
then for two hours she stands at the sink
and scolds us, scrubbing the disposable pan
we used and tossed in the trash to save time—

nothing goes unclean in her kitchen.

Now, she occupies herself with toilet paper,
gently tearing off each square, folding it first
in half, then in quarters, and stacking them,
hundreds of pink and green squares, corners

painstakingly aligned in five-inch pillars.

She arranges them in bowls and wicker baskets,
on window sills and under her bed. She assembles
them like sentries next to the china teacups—
for special occasions, she says, never certain

when the king of Nepal may show up for dinner.
We leave the stacks, undisturbed, grateful
for what she hasn't lost: her need for order,
the folding of grace in her lap, the gifts
her hands still know how to make by heart.

Poem for My Mother*By Mary Elise Bailey*

There'll be no cups of coffee here,
no rituals, no book-talk—this time,
even our voices will be new.

There'll be no mother-daughter,
here, where memory has slipped away
and hidden, like a stubborn child

we won't follow: let her go.
Just give us a goldfinch, somewhere
not too distant,

a bright shade of blue, our feet
together, walking a path whose details
we won't notice. Our words

will tumble out, unfettered,
unclaimed, we'll share the very centers
of our stories, not even knowing how.

Just walk with me, today,
in this bright, new quiet, on this simple
path: just the finch, the summer sky.

Just the motion of our union, slowly,
slowly, forward, the light, determined
thudding of our unfamiliar shoes.

Honey

By Margaret Chula

I dream that I visit Mother in the last days of her life as she lies in bed naked, comfortable being naked as she never was when she was alive, her back tan and supple like Katherine Hepburn's in *The Philadelphia Story* and I'm naked too as we compare bellies—how our fat is below our belly buttons, not above like a shelf that can fold over things and hold them fast, and she looks down to see how much pubic hair I have left, but I cannot bring myself to look at hers and then she smiles at seeing the raised skin tag, brown like hers and in the same place—the fold of her left thigh—discovered one golden afternoon sunning together by the pool never imagining winter or old age or even this dream, years after she's gone, where she's offering me a jar of honey saying *Rub this into your skin. It will keep you young.*

The Daughter Walk*By Sheila Bender*

For Kathryn Kent

We live on a circle, our mothers'
houses just to the west of our own.
We carry casseroles to them, newspapers,
print outs of family email, prunes to stew,
brooms to sweep out the corners. Our feet
crunch over their crushed gravel driveways
as the sun rises behind us, sets in front of our eyes.

The Dreaming

By Ruth Thompson

The princess Briar Rose, her mother the Queen, and all the court fall into sleep with the pricking of a finger. The crone, the dark fairy, also sleeps. They dream.

1. The Queen's Dream

When her daughter was born the queen vanished.
Now she stands in her husband's hall.
She opens her mouth and flames pour out.
All the court burns; the king goes up like kindling.

Ah, I'm a dragon, she thinks. But where is my gold?

She uncoils up the stairs in the ochre gleam of torches.
My daughter is my gold, she thinks.

But her daughter is not there. Only a pale doll
of stuffed silk.
Down its skirts, a tracery of blood.

In the shadows, an old woman, turtle head sunk
upon her breast.
Darkness glimmers from eyefolds.

"You've a long journey," she says. "Don't forget to write."

The queen walks out of the castle. The thorns blow
and bow before her.
She takes a blood rose and puts it in her hair.
This is mine, she says.

Naked she walks into the river.
It carries her between golden willows and pink granite.
The sun pours into her belly.
The antlered trees bend down to her.
She takes a red stone and puts it on her sex.
This is mine, she says.

Before her is a caravan, red and yellow,
and a black horse waiting.
Inside the caravan are dresses embroidered with birds.
This is mine, she says, and takes up the reins.
Now I shall find my daughter.

2. The Princess's Dream

The princess steps out of her carcass
out of its golden hair and the soft white flesh
of being careful.

She steps out small, thorny, brown,
wearing a crown of oak leaves
with a cluster of acorns like small penises.

She drops to all fours and climbs out the window
down through the thorn hedge
and there is the forest, leaning against the castle.

His skin is bark, his arms are branches,
small bright eyes peer from the green foliage of his hair.
She walks right into the forest. She climbs up
and climbs down.
When night comes she dances.

Her eyes are round wells of moon, mouse-fall, bird-fly.
The antlered trees bend down to her;
the forest shapes himself to suit her.

In the morning, her mother comes riding a black horse,
sun-gilded and apple-ripened in her dress of birds.
You are my daughter, she says.
I am, says the girl.

3. The Crone's Dream

But what of the dark fairy, the wisewoman, the crone?
She has given the gift of all this dreaming; what now?

At the edge of dark water
galaxies streaming in and out of her eye sockets
she stands so long that weeds
grow and bloom and dry
between her finger joints.

At last she wades out into moonfall.
Everything is shining and invisible.

Oh, she goes far in her dream, this one.
In the end she knows nothing at all.

Then all around her is laughter and the calling of whales.

Ochre light opens her eyelids.

She walks out of the sea and becomes a man.

She walks out of the river and becomes an apple tree.

She walks out of the story and all the clocks begin to chime.