



“Embodiment (detail),” *image by Lisa Naas*

MY BODY IS NOT YOUR POLITICS

*... each body a lion of courage, and something
precious to the earth.*

---Mary Oliver

*...at times
the blood sings all night long
and nobody sleeps, nobody dares.*

---Mercedes Lawry

*This is the time when I am all prayers and incantations,
and I'd do anything to break
the fortress of my skin.*

---Beverly Lafontaine

Why My Body*By Antonia Clark*

Because I've made it a temple
and worshipped at its altar.

Because I've stuffed it with secrets
and let it make me sorry.

Because it can't follow directions,
a slave to delay and meander.

Because I've tried to conceal it,
desiring the bodies of others.

Because I've scraped and scarred it,
teaching it needless lessons.

Because it's the seed of my father,
freighted with silent mutations.

Because it's the flesh of my mother
and nothing can please or appease it.

Because it burns up my ambition
and expels the ashes of failure.

Because it grows soft and loose-fitting,
mocking my ministrations.

Because of the rust and the scratches,
the ominous knock in its ribcage.

Because of the thorn in its rouged cheek,
the taste of blood in its mouth.

Because I'll always resent it
and always have to love it.

A Number of Blue Women

By Anita M. Barnard

I

They cannot help it;
 they were painted like that,
 nude, in that unshrinking shade.
 Their bodies round, revealed,
 as ripe as the red and yellow
 fruit around them, vibrant.
 The air quivers clear between them,
 the curving bodies of the fruit and the women.
 This one in the corner, near us,
 lounging, displays her round and ample backside.
 The shades of blue arcing in it
 seem ready to curve her thighs apart,
 fall open, lascivious.
 But perhaps that is what you thought
 when I said *blue*,
blue women.
 What is the meaning of blue?
 What is its nature?
 In these halls
 the Virgin Mary wears it.

II

Tonight I would join these women.
 There are no children with them,
 no husbands, no lovers,
 unless, perhaps...
 Many possibilities exist for these women.
 I would shed my clothes
 and lay my body down among them.
 Wrap my lips around
 one impossibly golden pear.
 Lose myself in color.
 I too would display my rounded thighs,
 let the paint reveal my healthy buttocks,
 supple belly. Wanton,
 revel in my blueness.

Before We Met

By Zehra Imam

there is a booth at my college campus where i am stopped one day,

“good afternoon!”

one of the people at the table say.

“our organization is here to raise awareness
about the depiction of women in media
and standards of beauty imposed on them.”

“here. take a thumbtack,”

another continues.

“put it anywhere on the cardboard body silhouette.
anywhere where you don’t like your body.”

i look at it.

i look at all the thumbtacks already pierced through
like bullets on the cutout cardboard person.

“you can take more than one,” they offer.

i pause to consider.

i hold the thumbtack and then slowly say,

“but, i love my body.”

i remember flashing a smile then

and my eyes must be shining because i mean it.

“it’s not perfect but i think it’s beautiful.”

i remember the people at the booth are taken aback.

“we’ve done this many times before, but no one ever says that.”

My Body is Not Your Politics

By Hannah Bonner

My body is not your politics.

On the bus, in the Laundromat,
in the classroom, on the stained

mattress, stuck in line for groceries,
pressed together, like petals

in a book, waiting for the sign “walk”
in green, my body is not your politics.

In the dark tunnel of the alleyway
building with the tumult

of a March wind, among the blue
fissures of the call light on the college campus,

between the arms of his embrace
mussing the ink on the page

of the last word in this sentence –
my body – as vast as the silence

stretched between the man and the woman
in the poem – my body – the spring sky, blown

clear of clouds, the small indentation
of last night’s moon, still

present and virtuous – as my body,
my body filled with longing, longing

then relief, still churning, still declarative,
shaking like the Lilacs lining the street,

all blossom, blossom
and bark.

How To Love Your Body

By Kelly Cressio-Moeller

1. Polish a bronze moon-disc, see yourself reborn through Egyptian eyes.
2. Marvel at how the shape of your ears resembles handles of a porcelain cup.
3. Recall night swimming—the first time tight-laced limbs learned buoyancy in the dark.
4. End the day on a sleigh bed for adventure while dreaming, dip sheet corners in jet—trace *arrows, fire, and flowers* on your wrists instead of scars.
5. Share it with someone worthy, yet err on the side of orgasm.
6. Forgive its trespasses & those who have trespassed against it. Know temptation lives in your shoulder's cup.
7. Adorn it with pattern, ink, & polish—stud it with jewels & millinery.
8. Grow a crown of silver.
9. Let your hands be raven-winged, the wood thrush play your throat like a harp.
10. Honor wildness—raise the ocean in your blood.
11. Remember the stars in your veins, your plumed ribcage.
12. Remember you are a rare bird.

Note: *arrows, fire, and flowers* taken from Pablo Neruda's poem "La Poesía"

The Photographer's Model*By Jeannette Miller*

The hard, round lens moved toward me,
its eye growing smaller
the closer it came.

You pictured me until the numbers wouldn't escalate
to hang on a white wall,
a row of trophies, their corners

pinned securely, the image you desired.
Drinking wine from paper cups
people will walk along the frames

studying them for meaning or beauty. A figure,
I'm without invitation
like the glass-eyed doll I loved

in childhood. She sat upright and still
until
I laid her down.

Inside her muslin chest: a sound box
of involuntary cries
someone sewed into her heart.

Molding

By Sokunthary Svay

“...the apsaras always appear on the stone in the same pose derived from that of a flying figure...standing isolated from the world on a lotus blossom or flying in the open air, they are the divine symbols of joy.” -Maurice Glaize, *Angkor: A Guide to the Angkor Monuments*

Cambodian girls
in roadside salons
idolize them in curls.

The eternal female
sculpted for worship,
protector of the temple city, Angkor.

Communist bullets
graze stone nipples.

Humanized by the King,
royal court dancers poised
in gleaming headdress.

In twilight, an apsara costume
slumped beside the royal bed.

Storytelling hands and feet
reminiscent of lotus
unfurling beside the Buddha,
ancestral mudras.

Foreigners cup their breasts
shiny from years of exploration,
hold them captive
in their viewfinder
to retrieve pleasure
in future moments.

Daughter, They'll Use Even Your Own Gaze to Wound You

By Beth Ann Fennelly

1. Chicago, IL

My high school teacher loved that I loved libraries, so she promised she'd bring me to her alma mater's. One Saturday, we took the train in and she donned white gloves to turn manuscript pages while I roamed the stacks, inhaling that dear dusty library funk. Wait: did I hear footsteps? When I was sure I'd been mistaken, I pulled out a heavy tome. There, thrusting through, a tube of flesh. Years later a librarian would tell me paraphilic activity is quite common in her place of work. Just in case you're wondering if I was special.

2. South Bend, IN

My college roomies and I were three beers in, walking from campus to Brigit's, a bar so seedy that, after graduation, it'd be condemned. A Tercel pulled over and the interior light flicked on to halo a man consulting a map. Good Catholics, we inquired if he needed directions. *Can you show me where I am on my map?* So we stepped closer and discovered where he was on his map: through the center, dickly. I'm guessing it was Denise who began laughing, or maybe Beth, but in seconds we were all hooting, we could barely stumble away, shrieking and pounding one another. He screeched through the intersection, the light still red.

3. Fayetteville, AR

From dawn till noon I'd reviewed Wordsworth, cramming for my comp exam, and now as I ran through the park, sonnets metered out my pounding feet. A bicycle came from behind, a man swiveling to see my face. At the top of the hill, he stopped, turned, and coasted back toward me. I could see his fist gripping something low on his belly. What zinged through my head: a bouquet. But that was no bouquet. I didn't even slow as he passed, just averted my eyes.

I'd run nine miles that day with one to go.
I guess I'd learned by then what women know.

There Is More Light Every Day (A Song for Uneven Fingernails)

By Anna Hundert

there is more light every day
and it is helping me to see
my edges, see where my body
ends and the world begins you
see, this separation (here I,
there world) is needed for the
infant mind to grow and I
am just learning

 there is more light in
my eyes and on the ends of
my eyelashes on days like these
when I am glad to have edges
and I am glad to have them
broken only every so often
I ask for love or ask for
forgiveness or ask you
to make love to me, to break
my edges, I ask every now
and then

 somebody breaks
my edges I have not asked, I
cannot say a thing, it is
strange to me (how odd, how
sinister) that another body
within my edges can make me
feel less whole, sometimes.

(you see, I cannot stop biting
my nails for this reason:
sometimes it helps to have
control over my own edges,
to show the world that only
I decide where I begin and
end, I chew them raw)

Tijuana

By Holly Norton

Southern California unwinds like a filmstrip
Unreels when we cross the border in the mint green Edsel
Men run into the street to meet my father and me
Wave their arms and say, "Senor! Senorita!"
He gets out to make a deal
Fifty dollars for new upholstery
Twenty for a new set of rims
He ends with a joke about us getting married
They laugh. I look at the ground.

On the street I look at the pinatas and sombreros
Embroidered with the name of the city
Serapes woven with yarn in colors not found in nature
My father sees a purse like his cowboy boots,
Ostrich skin with dimples where their feathers were plucked
Like the pimples pushing through my skin
And the hairs above my lip that I'm starting to pull out with
Tweezers like tiny forceps.

He sees me eyeing a silver bracelet inset with abalone flowers
Says to the cashier, "She'll take this one,"
Slams it on the glass counter
I flinch
He pays for it
Clamps it onto my wrist.

We walk past darkened bars
Disinfectant wafting from open doors
But my father buys his tequila on the street
Where we eat tacos full of meat and beans
Let the juice dribble into the wrappers and down our arms
And don't speak.

On the way back we see a man
With no hands and no feet
He sits on a cart with a can that says, "Please"
I reach down, and my bracelet sounds like
Money in his cup
My father walks on.

My Brother

By Katharyn Howd Machan

My brother lives in a box of cigars.
Each day every day
he lifts the lid to peek at the world
and hopes the world won't notice.
Bristles grow on his face and throat.
He smells, fears soap.
He never throws his loose hairs away
but carefully keeps them, dirty and dark,
in the teeth of a green plastic comb.

Long ago he spent years committing incest.
I survived but we never mention it.
He's thirty-five now and still lives with our mother.
My favorite joke when I visit is to talk
of the time I stabbed his thigh with a fork
and sent him screeching around the table
for ruining my first perfect crayoned picture.
We pretend to laugh and the scar
does not go away. Migraine headaches
take me back to the fork, to the fort
he built under cool pines
where he wouldn't let me visit
unless I would...and I did.

Now he does his best to repel.
He rots his teeth, sucks his cigars,
growls and belches and grows fat.
Each night every night
he grows a little smaller inside.
One morning my mother, weeping,
may find he's flickered out at last,
a small gray heap in an ashtray.
I'll visit, leave the jokes behind,
bring instead a perfect crayoned picture
to wrap around his coffin.

Kim says, *It's like I'm still suspended,*
 when Jenny asks her to recite it.
 Each year it's harder to believe.
 Which doesn't mean they can't remember.

Leigh keeps talking about horses, their wide
 infantile eyes. Kim brings old photos,
 where even grown-ups look so starchy,
 squeaky clean. Like those school uniforms

he stuck his hands up while he talked
 of disconnected things, like your dead dog
 or first lost tooth, and like he wasn't
 really there, or like his fingers weren't

the ones inside your flowered underwear.
 Who would believe that he's so old now?
 The news says he's eighty-three and living
 like a recluse in a West L.A. retreat.

What do his neighbors know, asks, Jenny?
What do anyone's know, I say?

They toast to Kim's divorce, and to eternal friendship,
Non Omnis Moriar. Leigh's quit everything else, except
 those equestrian Vietnam vets. She's found God
 with circling horses. Jenny dreams of losing all her teeth.

We order more mojitos. Forgiveness means let go.
 Which doesn't mean they can't keep secrets. But Kim just can't
 get past Step Three. Leigh says trust is like those muscles
 how their fullness moves and flexes. (Eques, Feques, Neques)

I want emptiness and stillness. A silent house with breath
 of watered plants. The last time Kim saw him at the black church,
 preaching some bullshit homily, was long after police came
 around St. Anthony's (but not about the three of them)

and years after Kim's mom was called
 and she first got suspended

for her third grade limerick, which read:
There once was a man named Rucker...

Won't You Be My Valentine*By Elizabeth Hoover*

By now you are just the space
my lover touches me around, his care
unwittingly conjuring you. You left
an opening to talk to me—your voice
speckles through—but I miss you
when I feel unknowable, a tongue
too swollen to tell. My body is a dream
I once had of freedom, a foreign
thing that eats silver and loves spiders. How
can I tell my lover of my craving for metal,
how will he understand the watchful
eye of the spider. I long for you—
my only witness—no one else
knows me in that particular
crisis. Not even me. Only you
can tell me what my face becomes,
which animal I sound like, only you
can embroider the scene—the doe gutted
or the doe leaping away.

What Sets Her Apart, Asks Jayne, After Reading Another Guinevere Poem For Me In Massachusetts

By Tania Pryputniewicz

(Poet to Jayne)

The company she keeps: Arthur, his sorcerer sister,
their bastard son. Merlin. Her view of the rain stippled Severn,
orchard's apples rinsed silver by dawn, the blue smoke

of burning peat. Hair framed by candleflame, cobalt
iris of eyes, flecks of cinnamon. Her position,
middle star of Orion's belt, between Arthur and Lancelot

more brothers than lovers, lure of Grail to assure
they'd abandon her for days alone in the Tower
with a rapist. The tear in the veil we share. I prefer

to stay with her those hours, brutal, chivalrous.
Easier than here where I dream of the acned face
of a soldier heaving into me at the bottom of an ancient

church in church's ancient time. To repeat
when I'm fourteen with a seventeen-year-old kid up the street.
Which sets me apart. *Be my parable, I'm teachable:*

You still had it all: husband, lover, convent.
Embroidered sleeves tip backs of your hands,
girl nested in woman like pit to peach.

What Sets Her Apart, Part II

By Tania Pryputniewicz

Looking at Käthe Kollwitz, Women and Art, UC Davis

In *Raped*, trampled leaves, vines. Käthe left one bloom intact. Black center tethers one unified petal. Viewer stands at girl's bare feet, skirt taut over thighs, white flare

where naked breasts disintegrate under sun's sudden path unobstructed where missing soldier stood up to run. Girl's chin to sky, hair strands bled into ground. No reason

to believe she's dead. My boyfriend cheats on me. I fail my final. Enroll in Women's Studies. In an unlit room a professor who calls herself Merline projects

thirty nine backlit circles bearing portaled flowers, winged seams. *Sappho*, *Artemisia*, *Woolf*, Merline's husky voice, *assemble for Last Supper*, as we writhe in slick, elated

revulsion. Behind her bedroom door, my twelve-year-old daughter sleeps. Soon she will rise and enter the now in which still exist Chicago's plates, Glastonbury's Tor.

What We Call Love Is Seldom What We Fall Into

By Sandy Gillespie

what we call love is seldom
what we fall into

*falling free is frightening
even in a dream*

I drive home with my hand between my legs, unaware that I am holding my breath again. Legs laced closed, a gift for someone's blessing. But that was years ago, the cords long severed, never any blood, no hymen, hi men, no gush of virtue -- given to my horse or maybe the blade of my ice skate the time I fell on its shaft, I fall into the shaft, let go and seek the well, the caverns of water, but I am hooked by a root, spinning into vertigo, which way down? or up? Fear pricks my tongue, dry and rough, and the walls close in, there is no up, no down, only in. In here.

*when you step into the sky
at 5000 feet you expect to fly*

I watch my niece make her first jump. From the single engine plane 5000 feet above me, she plummets like a Peregrine falcon, wings sucked tight to her body til the last possible moment, when the rainbow opens over her, catches her in the updraft, and swings her in silky spirals toward the earth. And I want to feel the thousand feet spin by in seconds but I feel instead the weight of the instructor's body, harnessed to my back, and I forget how to breathe, the air rushes in but I don't know how to suck and I feel force fed, like an infant when the milk lets down, and I couldn't believe when he opened my knees, old enough to be my father, pressed his palm between my thighs, smiled, and I didn't close my legs.

*how can you tell five hours
falling into hell*

He said he had a gun and a knife. He put her in his trunk. For an hour-and-a-half he drove around. She was nineteen, my daughter's friend. Leaving her dance recital silver-sequined like the night, she is gone. He'd grabbed her right outside her apartment, her family inside. Said he was going to kill her and forced her into his trunk. In a small mountain town he pulled her out, threw her onto the back seat. *Take off your clothes.* When she said no he clasped her throat, began to squeeze. *I'll kill you now.* When she was naked he forced his penis into her mouth. He put his hands and tongue into her vagina. All over her body. Her body. She can't remember everything. He drove her home. *I'm really a nice person. I don't usually do such things.* Dropped her a block from the parking lot, said he deserved for her to tell.

*the fall of man becomes
the fall of woman*

I want to be the one to press the blade against the rapist's groin or throat, carve the names of every girl I know into his back, then send him to the bottom of the sea where fish can gnaw his gut, trailing his intestines like some giant turd. I don't give a fuck that he is crazy, violated as a child. I only care that he has raped this girl and changed her forever, and it could have been my daughter, could be some other night, or day--one moment as good as another to destroy a young girl's life. My son could be the victim, his body ripped by a violent penis, and if it were a pattern or his own father, he might learn to be a rapist, and what could I do but cry for his life and send him to the bottom of the sea.

Body Parts

By Margaret Stetler

Leg lies on the rug like a dog's gnawed bone.
Arm against the bookcase.
Foot in its slipper beside the chair.
Under table glass, head with blood-matted hair.

The house is dark, vulnerable to sky and earth
the way the sleeper is to wakeful, watching ones.

In the dream I ride with a stunt driver, a man I love.
He speeds to the edge of a cliff, has seconds to brake.
I count on him, he fails, the car flies forward into air.
Down in the mall, shoppers pick through the pieces.

A murderer is still in the house.
Let me reconstruct the crime:

I rise up tall and proud in my young body.
Each part belongs: arms, legs, hips, belly, thighs, head
and moves as a whole.
Even my breasts, too large, surely not mine, are lovely.

I leap, turn, lift arm and leg in arabesque.
The intruder raises his arm.

I am not dead.
I still have my best parts: my voice, my sex, my heart.
Only I cannot carry them on legs, reach out with hands
Or hold with arms, my self or another.

I cannot see who remains in the dark.
But I know he is weeping.

The Untenable

By Cynthia Reeser

A rusted gash in a frigate's flank. Her screaming mouth. Rope uncoiling from tree. His tightening grip around her throat. Her pregnancy a hint of a lump. Rotten Easter eggs, unfound in July. His red swollen face, a Goya of anger. Spine of redfish, played like a xylophone. Her head hitting the floor, unconscious. The hot press of the mattress. The thrum and thrum and thrum of pumping blood.

Comfort Woman

By Tanya Ko-Hong

On August 14, 1991, in Seoul, a woman named Hak Soon Kim came forward to denounce the Japanese for the sexual enslavement of more than 200,000 women during WWII. They were referred to as “Wianbu” in Korean and “Comfort Women” in English.

1939, Chinju, South Kyangsan Province

Holding tiny hands
fingertips
balsam flower red
colored by summer’s end

ripening persimmons
bending over the Choga roofs
fade into distance

When the truck crosses the last hill
our hometown is the dust
Soonja kicks off her white shoes

1941, That Autumn

that night, Japanese
soldiers wielded swords
dragged me away
while I was gathering

Pine needles
fell from my basket
filled the air with the scent
of white blood.
When you scream in your dream
there’s no sound.

Grandma made Song Pyunon. The maru,
asked mom, *Is the water boiling?*

I feel pain
there—

They put a long stick between my legs—
Open up, open, Baka Chosengjing!
they rage, spraying
their sperm

the smell of
burning dog
burning life

panting
grunting on top of me—
Under my blood I am dying

1943, Shanghai, China

One night
a soldier asked all the girls

Who can do one hundred men?

I raised my hand—
Soonja did not.

The soldiers put her in boiling water
alive and
fed us.

1946, Chinju Again

One year after
liberation
I came home
Short hair
not wearing Han Bok
talk without tongue
Mother hid me in the back room

At night Mother took me behind the house
and washed me
Hot steel scars like burnt bark
like roots of old trees
under the crescent glow
She always smiled when she washed me

Your skin is white jade
She bit her lower lip
washing my tummy softly like a baby's
but they ripped opened my womb
with the baby inside

Mother made white rice and seaweed soup

put my favorite white fish on top
—but, I can't eat flesh.

Mother hanged herself in the granary that night
 left a little bag in my room
 my dowry with a rice ball.
 Father threw it at me
 waved his hand toward the door

I left at dusk

30 years
 40 years
 forever
 mute

bury it with me

*They called me, wianbu—
 I had a name*

1991, 3:00 AM

[That night
 the thousand blue stars
 became white butterflies
 ripped rice paper
 flew into my room

Endless white
 the web in my mouth,
 unhealed red scars,
 stitching one by one—
 butterflies lifting me
 heavier than the dead
 butterflies opening my bedroom door
 heavier than shame]

At
 dawn,
 I stand

What Is the Medicine for Rape*By Trina Porte*

last week at the acupuncturist
while tiny needles helped my qi unblock
the doctor told me that the chinese
view the inside of the body
as a garden with a waterfall flowing through

next week i want to ask him
do the chinese have a word for rape
what is the character for it and
does a spot in the garden die
or does the waterfall wash it away

Survivor's Guide to Sex

By Elizabeth Hoover

Two days before the declared frost, cold snap.
You wake to find the fields a bank, stalks
lost to morning light. Walk through wheat,
stems snap, brittle with cold. Look
into an ear: each kernel is brushed white.
You notice details like that more often
now—how, when wheat bends under the weight
of ice its hair catches in the frozen mud and
can't yank free, even in a strong wind.
Look into the swallow-less sky. Calculate
the acres of ruin, the acres of what
can be saved. Then return. He is just finishing
his toast. Or return and find him still asleep or
do not return. Go into the field. When you walk
over the spiculated ground, it will be like
walking over the tiny bones of your own
inner ear. As you walk, you will recite
your litany of at leasts and add one more.
At least take off your shoes, feel the blades
of frost opening your skin like relief.

Not Always

By Denise Miller

Remember stones skipped across man-made lake. Remember tall grass browned by sunlight. Remember bouldered footsteps against linoleum. Remember town— city's antithesis. Remember the bodies of buildings only one story high balanced on basements taller than their skeletons above ground. Remember rock and stone and wood.

Remember aluminum and that streetlight bouncing off it like a clock face. Remember time— go in for the night. Remember cow bell. Remember slammed door. Remember scream. Remember the crest of fear— its collision against the wall of your stomach.

Remember creek and listen to it— ear to water, heart to current. Then, let it soothe you. Listen. It's not always what you assume. The motion of feet pounding against pavement or the movement of dark at the corner of your eye isn't flashback turned to forever. Remember, water isn't always metaphored tears— and tables aren't always overturned— and glasses aren't always chipped or broken— and your reality isn't always man-made.

The Distance Between*By Maureen McQuerry*

You tell me to lean into sorrow
as a horse leans against a fence,
day after day, believing
in time his weight will topple it,
like a child leans into her mother,
forehead to breastbone, the twin press of despair
and hope.

Tonight the air is charged with wanting,
electric blue. The distance between
a question and answer is a skitter of light,
the long ache from gravid sky
to snow.

For the first time in months
there's a trill from the locust tree.
When did I become so rusty
at hope? I have been traveling
years to find you.

Friend, here is the secret
science won't tell you: we are each made of longing,
the smallest particle ever detected,
the shimmy in the heart of each atom.

How Big the Sky

By Anna Hundert

1. he steals my darkest lipstick, the one I never wear, and holds me tightly from behind although I do not struggle, I shake as a steady hand writes his name across my back in my darkest lipstick, the one I never wear, which isn't very dark but dark enough to look like blood. I push him away and then let him draw me close again and then wonder if this has happened to every woman. I look out the window and wonder, how small am I / how big the sky.

2. there was once a boy who practiced his signature everywhere, loopy letters in the corners of textbooks and takeout menus, in the stalls of girls' bathrooms, in red lines carved into his skin that faded to shiny white. when we shared a pew he took the tiny free pencils they put out for prayers and pledge cards (the ones with flat ends instead of erasers because you can't erase anything from god's sight) and he scribbled the name on service leaflets and hymnals, on the announcements pamphlet, beneath a reminder to bring nonperishable foods for the drive, on the wider flat end of palms on palm sunday. he wanted to make the name beautiful but it was never beautiful because it was the wrong name. when he told me that he was a boy I held him close and repeated his more beautiful name into his ear and hoped that he would write it on every flat surface he could find, Peter Peter Peter Peter Peter.

3. my name folds in on itself until you cannot hear it, please do not say it, if I ignore you then you will only say it to get my attention, if I let you into my body then you will only say it for the effect.

4. when it is all over I will use warm water to wipe the lipstick-name from my back and when I look down at the washcloth in my hand, it is like a used pad soaked with the iron drawn out of my body by gravity and cyclic time. like the harsh redness that follows people who have too many empty spaces, it follows me and it follows Peter. it follows Peter in an even more sinister way, when his body opens up every twenty-eight days.

5. have you ever seen someone's handprint on your own skin? it is like a name, it is more than a name. have you ever looked up and wondered, how small am I / how big the sky. my name folds in on itself. is there a way to take a very deep breath without becoming more round at the middle? where can my air go but to fill my body, to grow me?

Bet You Thought You Saw the Last of Me

By Rachel Durs

I used to think that I hated the person I was.
 I used to think that I left her to die and became someone so much better,
 But now I know I reached into the past and grabbed her out of there
 And left all her hang-ups behind.
 Now I know I didn't become me by ousting her, but that together we're the hero of this story -
 She just happens to be me, pre-transformation into a bionic superpower.

Once, back then, I unzipped my dresses,
 Pulled my skirts off over my head,
 Wore hats worn by other people -
 And somewhere in between wearing someone else's clothing
 And walking around completely naked
 I found a stamp on my body that said my name in every language known to man,
 And then somewhere on my bookshelf I found a book where I was every hero.
 Somewhere after a dozen years walking hunched over, I unfurled
 And somewhere after another half a dozen years floating over houses
 I found the middle ground, and I'll be damned if it wasn't my own body.

And now I walk a happy medium and say to passers-by:
You aren't the first to pass this way and you will not be the last.
 Now with this mouth I retell the evolution stories
 Until they all proclaim the secret of loving even the most brazen inconveniences of our flesh.
 Now with these feet I learn to dance around the old memories I wanted to kill
 And with these hands I learn to revive the younger girl from times past
 That I tried to bury under a torrent of learning and knowledge.
 I like her look when she comes out of the dark,
 I like the way she takes my criticism of her in stride.
 So now I'll walk hand-in-hand with the self I tried to drown,
 And I'll take her to people who haven't seen her for ages
 And enjoy how big their eyes get when they see her again,
 Since they believed they had seen the last of her ages ago.
 And right then and there I'll decide it's time to love my own history like I love everyone else's.
 So now they'll call me Wonder-who-that-Woman-is
 Or Super Man-don't-you-wish-you-could-be-like-her,
 And one by one the former versions of myself will all reconcile in each other
 While I walk familiar pathways and replot the furrows that have obviously been plowed before.

Inside Frida Kahlo's Body

By Mercedes Lawry

Wildfires are burning, children
are returning to the womb
and birds are having their wings plucked
slowly, feather by feather,
keeping silent. The old rich men
would never understand.
Shadows will eclipse the heart
but something else is missing.
Pain is a career and the interpretation
fills canvas after canvas.
Love is an echo of that pain.
Where does she put it all,
the fire and the knives? At times
the blood sings all night long
and nobody sleeps, nobody dares.

Lupus Outwits Me, Declares Martial Law*By Susan Eisenberg*

Who would dream to awaken from fevered sleep
stun-gunned into paralysis by their own
ruthless doppelganger:
power stations overtaken in a pre-dawn coup;
from every organ of the body
a triumphant, unfamiliar flag!

Who wouldn't be humbled
by their double's brazen brilliance? Or,
begin at once to plot in whispers
the first frantic steps of resistance?

Leap

By Susan Austin

Wind roars home after a windless winter. I listen to its long-haul howl, wonder how spring birds weather a force that tips thin-rooted aspen, rattles windows in their casings, doors in their jams, as if the wind is an intruder, or someone lost, or someone lonely.

For a time I lived in a homestead cabin built by two brothers from St. Joe: craftsmen, bakers, one a fiddler who snowshoed four miles to play music at the dance hall Saturday nights. My closest neighbor lived three miles down an unplowed road—ferocious blizzards, blinding blizzards spun me around more than once on the long ski home.

Illness creates its own kind of weather, one that leaves you standing in a house you no longer remember.

**

Words rear up on their hind legs, toss their heads, the wild wiry hair of their manes and gallop off down a windswept ridge into the creek bottom, cross mountain ranges in inclement weather until they reach a desert.

**

Cells have a memory. Hearts have a memory. Even a heartless sheet of paper has a memory.

**

I remember the pearl diver off the Izu Peninsula in Japan. I remember the fisherman and a fishing bird fishing together. The fisherman ties a string around a gangly cormorant's neck; since the bird can't swallow, it spits the fish out. The old fisherman assures me with hand gestures and a few broken words of English, "The bird cares for me and I care for the bird."

A few wet strands of black hair fall across the pearl diver's face. She isn't a young woman. She does not smile. I am gaijin, a foreigner, watching her from the dock. Her eyes peer into my heart and pry it open the way she pries open an oyster shell. She digs into the muscle of my heart and uncovers the pearl hidden beneath all I thought I was supposed to be, then tosses her catch into a woven basket floating inside a black inner tube. She takes a breath and disappears into deepening blue water.

I want to follow the pearl diver. I want to dive with the cormorant, offer my fish to the fisherman.

The pearl diver surfaces again. She cracks open an oyster with the blade of her knife and hands me a glistening white pearl. It's an act of trust. To trust in the miraculous healing engine of my body.

**

Once I sailed out of a beating wind into the center of a Pacific high, the calmest ocean I've ever encountered. A pod of spinner dolphins escorted me. I believe when I have forgotten nearly everything I will remember the spinner dolphins spinning and twirling and leaping out of the still night sea, a cascade of brilliant blue bioluminescence showering down from their godly bodies, birthing stars.

Stef's Request*By Abigail Licad*

The night before the surgery she hands me her Nikon
and asks me to photograph her naked hips and thighs --
the only parts of her body left unscarred by the accident.

In a trailer transporting horses from her mother's farm, her beautiful
twenty-two year-old body snatched by the collision's conflagration,
third-degree burns across seventy-percent of her skin, a permanent redness,
part of her left ear lost, a slight limp, and bluer eyes.

And now, ten years later, unable to turn her head to meet the face
of a friend who calls her name or look up toward the sky,
she faces the scalpel-edge again to trade pain for pain:
plant skin grafts from her body's unburned parts,
new striae of tissue to soften the leather below her jaw.

I try to get out of it -- the nakedness
behind the nakedness, as I chased long-winded excuses
in my head, raised to believe in the female body shared sparingly
and in suffering silenced into prayer.

Who owns the body? Does sharing relinquish
or reinforce its ownership? Choose -- I tell myself.
Relinquish, I decide.

But her blue eyes search until I reluctantly accept the camera
and ready it as she undresses. As her hand trembles, my cowardice
falls away like the silken drift of her robe to the floor. Silently, she begins
to pose. On her stomach. On her side. Crosses and un-crosses her legs.
Standing, she pushes against the wall. Arches her back.
Extends her long limbs. Thrusts her body toward the lens.

I map the contours of her flesh, the question mark of her sinuous
back's profile, the meetings of inner folds her future husband's tongue
would trace. Into the night, we work like witnesses bearing testimony,
before the carving of freshly hewn grooves onto her body's new geography,
which up close appear as a sky-view pictorial of mountain peaks and desert.

When You've Been Sick for a Time

By Susan Austin

The surgeon threaded the catheter
through my superior vena cava, let it dangle
just above my heart.

The young assistant scrubbed
until I felt like pudding—
Strange not to feel

pain, only meaty burrowing.
Sometimes the catheter rubs
and my heart hiccups.

When you've been sick for a time
you give up all your secrets, you give up
lies.

I liked building puzzles
as a child, the constancy
of the card table set up in the den.

I almost stayed at the Denio bar,
paid rent for a trashy trailer out back
because cowboys still hitched

their horses to the rail.
It doesn't take long to turn a *creek*
into a *crik*. I think about going back.

I take my catheter to the grocery store
and to the county dump
where a man named Dirty Dale guides me

through TV dinners and bags of dirty diapers
to listen to Maria Callas sing
on a transistor radio. *Ascolta, ascolta.*

Listen, listen.

*The little things gather
that I have left scattered about.*

Small Talk at Evanston General

By Beth Ann Fennelly

And what is it you do? he asked, after a moment of silence. My mother was in the bathroom exchanging her dress for the cotton gown.

I had the sense that he was asking to fulfill some kind of med school training: *Engage the patient's loved ones in conversation.*

Five outlandish occupations pinged through my head, all lies. But I knew I shouldn't mess with him. I needed to get him on our side and keep him there. *I'm a writer*, I said.

A rider? A light turned on in his eyes, suddenly as blue as his scrubs. He put his fists up and bounced them: a cowboy bounding over the plains.

No, I said. *A writer.* Which now seemed to require a gesture, so I held up my imaginary pen and wiggled it.

Oh, he said, all business again as my mother came out of the bathroom. *Well*, he said, *me too.* He untied her gown with one hand and slipped the black Sharpie from his pocket with the other, clamped it between his teeth to remove the cap, then drew dashes on my mother's naked chest, indicating where his scalpel would go.

After the Cut

By Mai-Lon Gittelsohn

I take a shower differently now
I used to stand under the shower head
a font of water splashing down my back
coursing over my breasts
now I sit on a shower bench
hold a hose in my hand
let it spray over my flat chest
inscribed now with scars
I let the water spray against the pits of my arms
prickles teasing numb skin
after the cut, what?

The Tattoo I Did Not Get

By Felicia Mitchell

Bloodroot sends up leaves,
angel wings on earthen flesh.
A flower comes next.

My right breast, hollow,
is the opposite of spring.
It has bloomed and gone.

I look for flowers
that grow on the sides of trails,
my path a journey.

My left breast likes sun,
flesh flushing as winter wanes.
Its nipple blossoms.

Where the sun falls first,
a bloodroot will bloom early,
its leaves a blessing.

I do not need ink
to replace what cancer took,
no nipple tattoo.

A scar is plenty,
its track like a bird's scratching
on something hidden.

A bloodroot roots deep,
even deeper than earthworms.
I kneel over it.

When They Ask About My Face*By Nancy Carol Moody*

I will say something
about snow, the skittered tracks
of a hare just prior to the hush

I will say wind bores
salt into sea-boards,
taut rope burns a furrow,
leaf rust in spring autumns elms

Hoarfrost bit by hob nail
meadow after the scythe
the dory's barnacled hull

a peppermint held
too long against the palate

When they ask about my face,
I will say that even a trodden carriage
leaves wheelmarks in the stone,
that shrapnel can flare
a staggering tattoo,

that left to their own devices,
sparks of midnight fireworks
will carve ferocious trails
into the black wax of the sky

Coming Back

By Beverly Lafontaine

The rosemary thirsts. The brown rice is mealy.
A spider spins a universe between a leg of the piano
and a shadowed corner of the living room.

Get sick, stay in bed and that's what happens.
You become a ghost in your own life.

Bits of me are floating back like moons to their
mother planet. No one else has this exact memory
of honey on toast or this bitter echo of a child lost.

I water the rosemary, sweep away cobwebs, let light and sound
stitch my wounds, healing across time and space.

At the Yoga Shanti Class for Cancer Survivors

By Cheryl Buchanan

We stand in Mountain Pose, *Tadasana*,
a giant step back with the right.
Bend the left leg, left thigh parallel
to Mother Earth. We lean,
prayer-hands connected.

The Sanskrit *Yoga* gives us “yoke,”
of the self and the divine.

We look like any class,
but for the socks and headwraps,
We need to minimize exposure
among the diagnosed and staged.

Feel the ground beneath
you. Everything will pass
and change...

In meditation I replay the burglary.
I'm on my mother's back porch
making her list of missing jewels.
Neighbor women gather in the kitchen.
Lilliana lives next door.
She only grows what will bear fruit.

Avocado, pomegranate, mango,
grapefruit blossoms and banana leaves.
The detectives think it's gypsies
from Miami. It is 85 degrees.

1. The wedding ring made into a necklace
after the divorce, 2. A charm bracelet of silver
booties from her grandchildren, 3. An heirloom
string of pearls.

One hundred years ago,
Dr. MacDougall weighed six bodies
before and after death. *The New York Times*
announced, “Soul has Weight, Physician Thinks.”

The word *Rei* means miraculous. *Ki*
means gas or energy...

Feel the ground beneath you now.

You are a warrior.

You are a tree.

Crone Hands

By Molly Howes

Her large hands bear bony knuckles and uneven, cracked fingernails. An array of rounded patches holds the history of warts. Thin scars line her fingers, the result of working with too much speed and not enough caution. Her hands are functional, not things of beauty.

When she was a child, their unloveliness stood out more. By her teens, her hands resembled an ancient witch's: worn and wrinkled, with misshapen fingers. Never graceful nor suited to adornment, she would have looked absurd with polished nails. She envied friends' delicately tapered fingers and clear, unlined skin. She dreamed of slipping her slim hand into a handsome Prince's larger one.

After being badly dislocated, her left ring finger retains an odd lump at the first knuckle. Her fingernails have grown perpetually cracked from endless long strokes through swimming pools. Recently, they've begun to develop the vertical ridges that grace elders in her family. But, also, across many seasons, she has learned to love the magic in her strong, unpretty hands. They can whisk egg whites and cut sheetrock and soothe a baby. They can pleasure a lover or herself. They have taught her to trust them.

In her middle years, she surprised herself by loving a man with twinkling eyes and tall stature, but smallish hands – for a man's. His were as capable as hers, if not more so, but they foretold other differences between them: His aesthetic was more graceful; hers, plainer. She marveled at his economy of motion; he marveled at the depth of her engagement.

She was prepared when he proposed, romantically, with roses, but was startled by a fabulous, sparkling diamond ring. Later, she confessed, "I'm just not a big ring kind of person."

He replied, "The ring means I want to marry you."

She understood, but had trouble wearing the ring.

Which he noticed.

"Why don't you wear it?" he asked with hurt in his not-twinkling-right-then eyes. "Are you saying No?"

She didn't know how to tell him. The unlikely gem was a masquerade for her, like Cinderella in a ball gown. When people saw it she cringed, thinking they also took in the worker's hand – and lumpy finger – on which it would ride. Then she felt disloyal to her hands, which had served her well. Why should they play the role of ugly background for this expensive bauble?

She tried to explain. "I don't have the right hand for this ring."

He looked in her eyes. He took her hands in his, which are almost exactly the same size. Hers didn't feel too big.

"I love your hands," he pledged. "Yours is exactly the hand I want to wear this ring."

She said Yes.

She still takes the ring off when spreading grout or mixing meatloaf. But now, when she looks down at the lovely, contradictory ring that adorns her working hand, she sees the grace of his love, as well as the alchemy of the relationship they're building and the sturdiness of the older woman she's become.

Hungers

By Catherine Moore

She breathes deeply; it's one of the few intrusions her body enjoys now, and she meditates fullness. Her husband left thirty-five years ago. She has as many years without him as with, more if one counts the years before college. Which she does because life started at their first date. And if she feels utterly mournful, she pulls out the Carmen Ash and wears satin for an afternoon. Not many seventy-year-olds can still wear sleeveless, or contoured waist. Her daughter-in-law is jealous. Makes a point of reciting the items in her refrigerator— cottage cheese, crackers, and Jell-O—under the guise of something for the grandkids to eat.

“But that's what the Little Debbies are for,” she tells her daughter-in-law.

Still, the damn girl whispers *'eating disorder'* behind her back to everyone in the family. It's not believable. She knows the children won't listen; it's not like she is some coed vomiting in a dorm bathroom. And she is healthy, well, usual aging stuff—sinking skin, bone-density. Her children's questions are squelched with the mother's eye. The real nuisance is the kudzu of hair that covers her. Thick cottony down all over. She shaves more and more: face, arms, across her shoulder blades. Frustrating. And the muscle-spasms—tremors that take away yoga classes, cramps that keep her from morning walks—it's maddening.

Some days pass without a stretch of meal. It seems pointless to fuel a futile body and there's the paunch of her belly that troubles her. She'd rather stop talking to the doctor, so she had her grandson teach her how to google pharmaceutical solutions instead. If she remembers where those research notes are. The Post-its have covered her walls like damask paper and yet, everything seems somewhere out of sight. She dare not make a call to re-inquire. Calling makes the emptiness true. Calling provokes questions.

“Wait, what made you upset?” She pauses and doesn't know the answer. It's just that it is all falling away, she cries over the phone. “Have you eaten today?” that irritating girl asks again. She honestly can't remember.

The Pink Hairbrush

By S.J. Eaves

Wear your hair long and straight and hanging to your waist. Brush your hair one hundred times a night with the pink hairbrush until it glistens like silken dark thread. Let lovers tangle fingers in your hair, whispering words of appreciation, some of them lies. Set your pink hairbrush on your dresser beside your cinnamon scented perfume.

Now that your daughter is small, store the pink hairbrush in a drawer. Take it out and use it once before leaving the house for the grocery store, your work, or to take your daughter to school, gymnastics, dance class. Your hair is shoulder-length, the cut simple, but it is still full and dark. Brush your daughter's pale hair with the pink hairbrush while she is seated on her fairy princess bedspread. Tell her bedtime stories by lamplight as you brush. After your daughter is asleep, carry the brush back to your own bedroom and place it back in the drawer without brushing your own hair. You are too tired to care.

Throw the pink hairbrush into a suitcase along with some hastily assembled clothing the day your husband hits you on the jaw. Borrow twenty dollars from a friend for gas money, then pick up your daughter from daycare. Drive to your parent's house to think. "Give him another chance. He didn't mean it," your father says. So you do give him another chance, but it only delays the inevitable. Move the pink hairbrush along with the rest of your things on the day you know for certain that you and your daughter must leave.

Don't use the pink hairbrush at all the morning of your daughter's wedding. Hire a professional to fix your hair in honor of the occasion. Do your hair up in a poufy style you hope is appropriate. Smile as your ex walks your daughter down the aisle. After the wedding cake has been cut, the bird seed thrown, after your daughter has been launched into a new life, after the guests have gone home, you can barely rake the pink hairbrush through your teased and plastered hair. Lay it down on your dresser next to the lily of the valley corsage your daughter made for you by hand. Wonder if you will ever wear that tight, sequined, mother-of-the-bride dress again. Think about joining a health club.

Now your hair streaks with gray and is shorn to just below the chin. You are crinkled in some places of your body, puffy in others. No one seems to care whether or not you use the pink hairbrush. Sometimes you feel invisible. Wonder where the pink hairbrush will end up after you are gone, in a box somewhere perhaps. In a dumpster. Rather it be thrown into the ocean. Rather it race nobly, defiantly, freely, with seahorses.

My Skin Is Not Enough to Keep Me Warm*By Beverly Lafontaine*

The sky is thick and heavy with clouds.
A neighbor's dog barks. A yelp from a cartoon.,
Behind closed eyes I see his body shudder with every bark,

A car roars its presence, eager not to be
ignored. Never complete silence.
In this building, something always whirs,

simpers. Walls moan against the weight
they've borne for years. Water's ceaseless
songs flush through pipes. All the sounds

of the day gather together, a congregation.
The refrigerator hums, reminds me,
You're a body, just a body. A tongue, eyes,

nose, arms, legs. A body chilled by the cold,
warmed by the sun. A body definite in time and
place, destined one day to be a memory

conjured up by three notes on the piano
or a whiff of baking bread, then laid to rest
among seeds of wild grass.