

“Divorce Journals,” *image by Martha Donovan*

IF HE, IF SHE WOULD ONLY

...a man is terribly hampered and partial in his knowledge of women, as a woman in her knowledge of men.

...Then I may tell you that the very next words I read were "Chloe liked Olivia..." Do not start. Do not blush. Let us admit in the privacy of our own society that these things sometimes happen. Sometimes women do like women.

---Virginia Woolf

I had envisioned love a place I could map.

---Rita Anderson

*All this gold and we couldn't
find it.*

---Meghan Giles

*From behind he cannot see
feathers sprouted on her brow.*

---Sandy Gillespie

*Praise the scratches on the young man's knees and the young woman's back
Praise the broom that sweeps the cracked linoleum on the faded kitchen floor.*

...

Praise the holy yoke of youth that allows their loud unbridled joy.

---Sally Bellerose

Lovers in the Age of Airmail

By Kelly Cressio-Moeller

There is a reason it is called longhand.
Writing takes time to winnow out

the artifice in blue-black script.
You write each other page after page,

month upon month, year after year;
your cursive cross-stitching the Atlantic,

soaring over slate rooftops
through the open windows

of each other's lives, entwining
yourselves as Chagall's lovers.

You learn patience in narrow beds,
the ache of missing someone

you've never met. Standing near
the water's edge, you watch fireworks

burst and fade, a snowfall of hot stars
dissolving on separate oceans.

And then, nothing more
can be said with ink and paper.

As he swims to your shore—brace yourself.
There is no turning back

from this desire, a quickening
like rivulets of water gliding

off the blades of his shoulders
when he steps from the sea.

The Geography of First Kisses

By Karin Cecile Davidson

Compass Points

The first was Leon. A small, muscular boy. A midshipman at the academy. He knew about compasses, easterly winds, how to bring the boat about on white-capped seas. I went for his blond hair and his deep voice, both like honey, thick and golden and crowded, the waxen chambers, the echo in my chest.

Summer grew brighter, and I refused to go back home to New Orleans, nearly sixteen, without that first kiss. *Sweet sixteen and never been*. We never said it aloud. Those of us who stayed in the corners at dances, at our own tables. All girls, all the time, not too shy, but not quite pretty enough.

For the month of August I was away from that southerly place, where algebra notebooks got left behind and streetcars rumbled past and boys sat on the cafeteria steps, smoking because they could get away with it, and girls sat by them, the kind of girl I wanted to be. In that northerly summer spot called Castine, where the great aunts played games of Hearts and Gin in the afternoon, where the berries were small and bright blue, where the beaches were covered with rocks and sea glass and broken pottery, the rules seemed different. I dared myself to walk near the academy and its giant ship, moored by the town's public dock, and when I did, the boys appeared. And then, even when I returned home, they kept appearing.

Leon with his bright curls. He had an arrow in his glance and shot me through the heart. My heart had room for so many more arrows. Little did I know.

Geoffrey with his roaming hands. Small, sweet hands that like to untie things. Apron strings, kerchiefs, the little gold clasp that held on my bikini top. His eyes were dark pieces of eight that blinked hard, sizing me up and then down, putting me in my place. "You baby," he'd say, reaching out to pinch me.

Buzz with a laugh that broke apart the stars. He liked to drink and do it in his car. He took me to drive-ins and ordered iced cokes in paper cups that he laced with Jack. The smell of whisky on his breath and his breath against my neck. The only film I remember half-seeing is *Lipstick*, Margaux Hemingway looking down and me looking up through the strands of Buzz's long hair, the vinyl seat pressed against my bare back, the twist of double-braid lashing around my ankles.

North

On the beach of rocks and glass and pottery shards, Leon's hand in mine, I walked away from hair ribbons and shy smiles. He kissed me just around the bend from the gray house where the great aunts lived. I leaned against the splintering bulwark and felt his mouth on mine, warm and surprising, and closed my eyes. The weather was gray and coastal, like the great aunts' house, like a cool hand on the back of your neck, but over Leon's shoulder, when I opened my eyes again, the hills were blue and red, and I felt distracted. Robert Lowell had once lived in the house

just above the bulwark and I could feel his lingering presence, in the crooked shutters and pale, weathered shingles, all coming apart and falling down the hill like so much poetry. And then a seagull went for us, two blonde heads too close to her nest in the tall lilac spikes of untended lupine. She drove us down the beach just in time to save us from the rising tide.

Leon's letters arrived in the same way that the seagull's young must have, too late in the season and demanding unimaginable things. I spread the pages over the flowered spread of my twin bed, so unlike the pale white coverlets in Castine, and read words like *trace* and *lips* and *undone*. Embarrassed, I put the letters away in the bedside drawer where later my mother would discover them. She said she didn't read them, but I wouldn't have cared if she did.

Around the edges of the lake, where bleached oysters shells were heaped, the metallic breeze carried traces of brackish water, diesel fuel, rubber boots. I had turned sixteen, saved from being all too sweet, but still sweet enough. I thought about sailing alone, then decided to sit on the shore and watch the shrimp trawlers head out, the dusk pink and violet and falling around them like the shellfish they'd soon catch. Leon was up north in that summer place where the sky was thinner, hued with blue-gray lines, and the sea carried the musk of gulls and lobster traps. For him, the summer place had become year-round. That autumn he wrote his letters, describing in slanted lines how he stood on the bridge of the training ship, still moored, going nowhere until spring, and through field glasses he looked out to the beach where we'd kissed, the gray house a smudge on the horizon.

South

The official end of summer and school a month in, I arrived at a friend's birthday party too early, and the boy hosting it opened his front door in cut-offs and bare feet. A boy from the cafeteria steps, a boy with hands that gestured and lips that curved. He smiled and invited me in to a windowed room, where the floor was wooden and covered with record albums. He asked me to choose one and put it on the stereo. He went to change into jeans, another shirt, and I chose *Blue*. Joni's voice headed into the slow evening like smoke and envy and wishing. When he came back, I realized not only was I early but that it was his birthday, too. I had only one gift, but he said he didn't need anything, that my choice in music was enough.

The days grew shorter, but our shadows never seemed to diminish. The birthday boy with hands and lips and approving nods in my direction – due south – walked under the eaves between classes. And during classes. Simply leaving the building in the middle of biology, his dissection kit untouched, his partner unfazed. He bent the rules and I wished I could do the same. I noticed him more and more and stared at him out the window of our geometry class. Mr. Lê Lâm Trung chanted obtuse and isosceles in Vietnamese-French intonations and seemed not to notice my inattention.

Swimming and sailing on hold, Christmas crept in and then came the debutantes and their dates. I thought of Leon, how strange this would all seem to him. How he was buried in maritime studies, while I could barely fathom the inner life of a mollusk, the pearly insides so slippery and revealing. Did he count the days until summer? Did he counterweight the months by imagining

his bed covered with more than a cotton sheet, a few wool blankets? Did he walk down to the shore, now covered with snow and wonder where the baby gulls had flown?

East

“Reveal more,” Geoffrey said. He sat behind me in homeroom. My last name began with V, his with W. He pulled a barrette out of my hair one morning. I found it later on the floor in front of my locker with a curl of white paper in its teeth. In blue ink, two words – *your shoulders*. Once we kissed in a closet under the stairs where chemistry supplies were stored, the crushed box of glass beakers, bunsen burners, and scales the only hint we’d been there. And a sweatshirt on the floor. Really, it was more than a kiss.

Out on Lake Ponchartrain, moving slowly to Lake Borgne, the shrimp trawlers pushed the blue-brown water apart. The seawall – barely a wall – more like a concrete staircase, led down into the water, rather than up. I stood on the top step and considered entering the lake, but it was February and far too cold. Instead, I walked along the rise, marked by topographical city maps as below sea level and somehow stretching even with the horizon. I wondered if Mr. Lê Lâm Trung had anyone out there, an uncle or a brother who searched for shrimp and threw back the bycatch of shimmering little swimming crabs and baby bluefins. Someone who had lasted the trip from Vietnam to Thailand, who had traded the boat crowded with countrymen for one covered in nets bursting with pinks and browns and reds. Someone who each day spied the battered docks and ancient cypress trees of Shell Beach and maybe even stroked the bright black hair of a son born here, in this place of Assumption and Lafourche, bayous all around.

Sometimes when the sun rose, it had a dirty color, like oyster shells lining a parking lot, like pottery pieces littering a northern beach. Other times I slept and didn’t see how the colors reached, rose-gold and rich, desperate to find a ceiling or a way out. I’d bury my head beneath my pillow, wishing the morning would disappear. And then I’d be late for school.

The streetcar swayed along its tracks, and I leaned against the closed window and tried to read *Romeo and Juliet*. Inside, the row of wooden benches, the smell of sulfur and dirty sneakers, the way the driver sang the blues. Outside, standing up, pedaling a bicycle too small for his long legs, birthday boy spotted me. He tried to keep up, pedaling faster, and then rode past. Way ahead. His hair, like mine, was straight and shoulder-length and flew out behind him. I knew he’d seen me watching him. He played basketball and dated cheerleaders. Girls who, aside from yelling and bouncing at afterschool games, were pretty and elusive, who didn’t seem to see him at all. I made this up, this not seeing him part. I imagined they saw plenty of him. Arm in arm, hull to hull.

Spring raced in with wild colors. Azaleas of pink and lilac, red and white, lacey and bright and reaching, outside front porches and in the park. In front of our apartment building there were only hedges, dark green and tinged with dirt. For Mother’s Day I went for flowers and ended up with a small bubble-shaped terrarium. My mother thought it sweet and just her style – no maintenance, a miniature ecosystem that would take care of itself. Until it didn’t. Rabbit tracks and moss and a small clump of maidenhair fern were the only plants that survived. The curved

sides of the bubble encouraged condensation, drops cascading over greenery, and I thought of emerald and teal prom dresses caught in a downpour.

West

The phone rang and Buzz was on the other end. Talking dirty into the receiver. In English class he'd had some ideas about Shakespeare that our teacher, Mrs. Newell, didn't appreciate. Not embarrassed by words like *fuck* anymore, I listened with interest. He wanted to take me to the drive-in and peel off my panties. I wanted to let him. I wanted to hear a car radio, maybe his, so that it sounded like the inside of my mind, crazy and careless and not quite right. One of Lowell's love-cars might pull up and parallel park next to my desire. The moon would surely refuse to shine.

In World History class Mr. Fernandez peered through his glasses at all of us. He had wide eyes and black brows and white short-sleeved shirts. At lunch he'd play chess with the freshman boys. But in second period he leaned over his desk and told us about Catherine the Great and her penchant for stallions. We'd made our way through Eastern Europe into Russia, and before I even considered the horses, I thought of the word, *penchant*. The liking, the longing, the wishing, the preference for dark hooves and fetlocks, the stretch of the cannon widening up into the hock, the shuddering stifle, and the warm dusty, grassy air all around. I thought of how the moon must have swung down over the stable doors, lighting up the way. How the latch on the stall must've caught and then slid open with the slightest pinch of metal against wood. But I didn't go any further than that. I'd been far enough myself.

In *Word Power Made Easy* there was this word with several meanings. We all hated this book, but Mrs. Newell made sure it was on everyone's desk in her afternoon classes. "Mark it up, commit to it. Your SATs will be all the better for it." She enunciated each *it* so that the t's flew over our heads and out the windows. Outside, the days were sunny and new, breathless. Inside, I stared at the list of words on page 212. *Obstreperous, belligerent, bound, cantankerous, unpropitious, bellicose, inimical*. I focused on the little one-syllable word, crowded in by bullies. Bound by the nylon dock line in the back of Buzz's beat-up Chevy. Bound for glory, for that closet under the stairs, for a rocky beach where scraped knees were traded for kisses. Bound to end up with more homework and detentions and trouble than I'd ever be worth. Without any limits we might leap through the open windows into all that boundless blue. I considered my options, all of them out of bounds and stupid, and then realized birthday boy was leaning in through the doorway, his hands on the doorframe. Behind me, Geoffrey breathed down my neck, asking for the answers to numbers 7 and 9.

On the lake directions were like sins, cardinal and complicated. The wind came at me, warm, south by southwest, up from the oil rigs out in the Gulf. If I ever sailed there, would a roughneck dive from his platform and swim parallel to my boat? Some boys liked land better than sea. Would the one who leaned in through the doorway finally loop his arm in mine? I'd only discover his feet on solid ground, landlocked, guided by the edges of a court, call it tennis or basketball. Games geared to gardens and gymnasiums. There were clear boundaries on land. Out on the water, they weren't so clear. Joni's words cluttered my mind – *sea and sail and song and sinking*. Though I thought I'd known, I'd lost sense of all I wanted. I'd lost all sense of direction.

At the drive-in BUTterfield 8 was showing. The coming attractions lit up the night and Buzz spilled a good portion of his Jack Daniels when he pushed me into the back seat. By the time Elizabeth Taylor had written *No Sale* in red lipstick across the bedroom mirror, I had rope burns around my wrists and ankles. I thought about how it all started with lipstick, and how it kept on going that way. Above me Buzz had his eyes closed, his breath tight and insistent. The Chevy's ceiling was torn, as ragged as the feeling inside me, as rough as the nylon wringing my hands. I thought of boating knots. Rolling, clove, Lighterman's hitches. A round turn and two half hitches. A bowline. But Buzz only knew about the bitter end of the rope, the one he held in his teeth. I stared up at the screen and listened to Liz, her voice sweet and melodic, how she sounded lonely even though she pretended she wasn't.

Leon long ago gave up writing letters. I never answered, and his last note was short, never questioning, simply giving in to give up and maybe even forgive. I doubted that last bit, but went ahead and gave myself permission to keep on not responding. To keep on looking past corners into the odd light of winter and then spring, green and airy, and then summer, vast and muffled and loaded with free time. Geoffrey had taken up with a freshman girl who wore her hair in pigtails. I didn't know whether to wish her luck or pity her. And then, right after the last day of school, I broke my right arm. "Fractured, honey," my mom reminded me. Right after birthday boy waved to me from his too small bicycle and pedaled into the dusty, maze-like traffic and I waved back and thought about him the whole ride home. At my stop, I stepped off the streetcar and tripped. The driver who hummed the blues acknowledged me. First time ever. Face down on St. Charles Avenue and I hear, "You all right, baby?" I sat up in the middle of the paved road and tried to gather my scattered books, the junk that fell from my open satchel, and realized I couldn't. I thought of halyards gone astray, bouncing off the mast, instead of pinioned tight. That was my arm. Or whatever held it together. "Well, honey, that's just your second mishap in life." My mother was clueless. She remembered my green-stick fracture, how at the age of barely a year I'd been reluctant to nap and jumped out of my crib. She had no idea then and she'd no idea now that her daughter was bored beyond dreaming. Until the doctor asked about the marks around my wrists.

Due North

Why is there no such thing as north by south or east by west? Why does direction turn only slightly, instead of leaning full tilt into another place, another time, another anything? I wished for an island to occupy. Only the North Star, or a magnetic pole, to show me where I'd landed. Without doctors or mothers or boys. I ended up on a peninsula with great aunts. I supposed that was good enough. The ship was still there, hulking, its heaving sides a battled hint of gray. I walked down to Castine's town dock and studied the slackness in the cabin cruisers' hitch lines, how they looped through rusted cleats, and the tension in the bowlines that might fall around a girl's ankle just so. My arm was in a sling and a tall midshipman, *Stanley* stenciled onto the back of his blue work shirt, stopped to admire my cast. His smile was too much, and like an idiot, I smiled back. There was no more poetry to Lowell's hill, to the house that slowly fell down its slope, to the kisses that happened one summer ago. And there was nothing as pink and transparent as skinny little shrimp to catch in these waters, their currents too cold and secure for such fragile fish, shell or no shell. And in the boats heading out to sea, there were no promises. I

wasn't allowed out on the water anyway. I looked back at the tall midshipman and his smile. "You play Hearts?" I asked. "Sure," he said. And we walked down Water Street, just above the rock-covered shoreline, a half moon rising into the early evening, its direction set and sure.

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<http://aroomofherownfoundation.org/the-geography-of-first-kisses-by-karin-davidson/>

Recognition

By Sandy Gillespie

We open the window to the lapping bay
and laze beside the fire. Overnights are rare
for grown women, uninterrupted hours

delicate as artichoke petals, from which we scrape
soft flesh with gentle teeth. The Cabernet is an eighty-five,
and children don't exist for us tonight. Tonight we are women

talking about our lovers. Yours is new, and he moves
in such a way that you've found secrets in your body; mine
has been my husband for sixteen years and sometimes

in our comfort we forget what passion feels like.
You stretch on the rug, lean on one elbow, head back.
When have we laughed this hard? I feel like what I never was--

a woman unafraid of her desires. Fire snaps
your hair, one strand slipped loose and dancing
on your breath. The fire burns to embers.

We fold back blankets, crawl into flannel sheets.
Spoon-like you curve into me, breasts against my back.
I can't remember ever feeling breasts, except my own.

Your hands spin silk. Silence rushes
through us, carried us toward a future
whose wealth and cost we only guess.

We let it go and slide together into sleep.
I tell myself I would not love you
better if we kissed.

Postcard from Sissinghurst

By Denise DiMarzio

I. My hand hesitates, hovering above
the clean white rectangle, the small space wide open,
waiting, years unwritten.

Having a great time. Wish you were here.

Vita would never hesitate.

*In the white garden, I wanted to kneel down with you,
anchor my hands in your dark curls, grow roots
and wrap them around us like wild bindweed.*

II. The red deer wander. Shapely ghosts follow,
one in jodhpurs, one in silk.
I trail after, looking for you.

*I think I found their tree, wide enough
to cradle Violet's creamy back, the bark
scoring ragged lines on her satin-smooth
petite frame, Vita's wanton hands pinning her
down, down, gratefully down.*

Inside, the fireplace, hearth and heat.
The sofa where she ravished a willing Violet,
shaking the books on their blushing shelves
'til their Edwardian bindings came
so magnificently loose.

Their perfume scents the air still.

Vita's writing room, up and up
the long tower passage, my hand trailing
along the dark worn railings
writing and rewriting.
On an easel, Violet in oils.

Do you ever think of me?

III. I put the stamp on first, wasted,
the Queen's unbendingly proper profile
serene, oblivious. Torn into a dozen pieces,
blank, it looks like nothing
left behind for the maid to find.

Moby Dick and the Beginning of the End

By Ingrid Jendrzejewski

He says Melville was stupid because he constantly refers to Moby Dick as a fish. Moby Dick is not a fish. Moby Dick is a whale. Everyone knows that whales aren't fish and fish aren't whales; ergo, Melville is not worth reading.

She tries everything she can think of. She discusses poetic language. She suggests that it is Ishmael, not Melville who calls the whale a fish. She asserts that even if *Moby-Dick* does contain an inherent factual inaccuracy regarding fish and whales, there are many reasons that it is still worth reading. Eventually, when she is tired of arguing, she asks why a whale can't be a fish and why a fish can't be a whale in the context of a novel: a novel is a work of fiction, after all.

None of it works; he is not convinced. He can't get past the whale/fish issue and she can't get past the fact that he can't get past it. He accuses her of being out to sea; she retaliates that it is he who is missing the boat. For better or for worse, they are, on this occasion, able to come up with enough nautical puns to hold off the inevitable sinking that is quietly being prepared for them by the roiling sea.

Persephone Tells All

By Ruth Thompson

Persephone carried off (faintly protesting)
 by Big Beard the Muscleman,
 her weeping mother searched
 round and round
 but did not go down-
 town. Which is where she was.

But Big Beard
 down there in the lamplight
 in the altogether
was altogether
 so large, so loud,
 and the latesummer heat so oppressive,
 Persephone got tired of it
 (though liking the Harley okay)
 so she took a hike.

“I wanted a big man,” she says,
 “someone who took up the space –
 someone who knew what he thought,
 so I didn't have to,
 you know....”

It was cool I guess
 with the jewels and zombies and all that –
 but after a while the oxygen
 was running short
 with all that hot air
 and after a while he got heavy –
 like *I* could ever be on top –

and after a while you notice
 how they are always
 going on and on and on
about themselves,
 know what I mean?”

Self-Portrait as a Message From Rapunzel to the Princes Trying to Rescue Her

By Michalle Gould

Build me a city, or burn it,
I do not care.
If you don't stop trying to save me,
I will cut my hair.

Without Turning*By Sandy Gillespie*

She feels him curve
against her back. She knows
he is awake, his hand
moves with purpose, traces
hip, thigh. Settles.
She feels his beard
on her neck; she wants
to roll toward him, offer
breasts to hungry eyes.
The weight of her beak holds her.
From behind, he cannot see
feathers sprouted on her brow.
He breathes greedy accusations.
She opens her mouth but doesn't turn to him,
her beak too finely honed for kisses.
She feigns sleep—he will not notice
open eyes, eyes black
enough to see through ceilings into space.
She savors the tingling
in her arms, the promise—
fine-boned wings,
talons that will crack the walls.

There Is This Wildness*By Molly Scott*

there is this wildness in her
that he touched
and then retracted
fed on
like forbidden game
and then
redacted

The Promenade*By Toni Loefler**—after the painting by Marc Chagall*

After their walk
and decanter

of vino she's
flushed

from the
strappings

of love.
Mauvish

folds of her
dress billow in

the geometric
sky—she is

staring
into the

horizon
absentmindedly

but she is
still

there. Soon
he will

lead her
floating

body to the
pastel
chapel
by the deep

ravine,
and they'll

marry so
she can never

get away.

Diner

By Jackie Davis Martin

You would have lied, too. You would have promised the manager to work the entire summer when you applied for the breakfast shift at the diner which had you arriving in the parking lot at 6 in the morning in a brown nylon dress and white oxfords, to set up the creams and sugars and ketchups, shine the counters, all the easy part until the doors opened and people demanded their eggs over light, over for at least a minute, poached firm, scrambled soft, egg whites only, hash browns, home fries, bacon, make it sausage. You stand there, pen in hand, smiling at fat women who want extra gravy, stringy women who cringe at butter, sliding into padded booths, hour after hour so early--where do they all come from?

You need the money, driving in the next morning in your washed brown nylon dress, your polished white oxfords, ready to ready the counters, wipe the menus. More coffee? Decaf? Juices? Can't substitute a milkshake, sorry. They slide in, slide out. It's almost mid-August, six weeks you've done this, and your boyfriend who doesn't love you as much as he once did is impatient. *Are you coming with me or not?* You're going to London with him, but you're also going to the diner, morning after morning. He's paying for London; you are paying for your kids' food and clothes and rent. You tell him yes, yes, I'll be quitting any day and you arrive again in your limp brown nylon dress and scuffed white oxfords thinking I must tell the manager I won't be back, that---that what?--you're scheduled for three more weeks, maybe tell them you have to have surgery, or you've contracted something contagious, anything but that the man you love who doesn't love you the same will cancel your trip, will return to the woman he had an affair with, tell them anything but that your life will be over if you don't quit tomorrow. You need time to pack, to please him once again, yes, okay, eggs barely flipped for you and sunny-side for you, I got it, no, no muffins, just three kinds of toast, and all the while, what will you do, what will you do as you gather quarters sometimes dollars from under saucers, wipe down the tables, take off your apron and say to the boss with the oily scalp, I'm sorry I won't be back tomorrow, my uncle needs rides to the hospital and I'm the only one—I'm so sorry--but, you don't have an uncle, and you walk to the car, tears streaming with humiliation, a job you cannot return to next summer and you say to the boyfriend, it's okay, I'm ready, and he says good then, let's go, and even though you don't know where you're going beyond London, you say yes and never go into that diner again, not even for a cup of coffee.

Co—

By Jennifer Campbell

so much depends upon

a kinetic personality
white space

if he would only

cower couple collapse
will of a melted spoon

since woman was created last

from a wing of white
a caged bone

it would seem that

man is a host for woman
man lives for woman to live

when one thing leads to another

third parties always deconstruct
snake || ache

once it has happened

there is no blame
only the shifting of tectonic plates

just so long as

one remains —dependent

Schrodinger's Wife Sells the House*By Jennifer Campbell*

I am ready, a locomotive hurtling
a star already shooting
a lunar eclipse set in motion

He is stuck in a half-state
the house with dwindling half-life
all there and not-there, at once

It's all I can do to find a box
that's just a box. And the cat's
been holed up in the wall for days

I'm thinking outside of it now
The house is a box and we
are Matryoshka dolls lined up

Unboxed, we may be packed
and stacked, the matter being
our traces of matter

Problems bring us closer together
Come, care for my eventuality
Fill the box with gilded frames,

photos of those alive and dead,
at once. Let us begin
packing the box that is a box. At once.

I Promise I'm Always Careful

By Alethea Alden

Jess throws her phone across the bed. It's midnight and her husband's phone has been going to voicemail for two hours.

Sam texted earlier saying he had to work late, so when he wasn't home at ten, she wasn't surprised. When his phone had gone to voicemail, she'd wondered if he took the tube instead of riding his bike since it was raining, but normally he'd text her before leaving work.

He must still be at work. Or he's biking home, slipped on the wet roads and hit his head. Or got hit by a car and is lying dead by the side of the road...

She texts and emails him, again.

Thinking about Sam dying brings up memories of her mother dying. She tries to stop herself from thinking about it, shaking her head to shake away the memory, but her chest tightens.

"Why is he doing this to me?" Jess wonders out loud.

Jess calls again and hears his voice say, "Sam," followed by an automated, "can't take your call right now, leave your message after the tone." She refreshes the email on her phone, the icon swirls a few times. Nothing.

She goes to the kitchen. Opening the window, Jess screams "Where is he?!" out into the night. Pulling the window closed she leans her forehead against the glass. She's not going to get a reply from the street. Watching her mother die continues to play on a loop in her head. The clock on the stove says it's 12:45 AM. Shuffling to the bedroom, she turns on the TV, looking for new images to push out the unwanted ones.

An hour later Jess hears the key in the lock. Sam appears in the bedroom doorway.

"Where *were* you?!"

Sam peers into the room. The light from the TV hits Jess's contorted, tear stained face. Confused, he takes a step back, surprised by her anger.

"Whoa. What's going on?"

"Why didn't you let me know where you were? Your phone went to voicemail for hours. I thought you were dead in a ditch!"

"I did let you know, I sent you an email around ten that my phone died and I was going to be at work longer than I thought."

Jess breathes heavily and hiccups. She hits refresh on her email again, the icon swirls and registers a new email from Sam.

"Fuck. My phone. It didn't show your email, even though I refreshed it... I'm sorry I yelled at you."

Sam sits down next to her. "I'm sorry you were worried, baby."

Feeling ashamed of her outburst, Jess allows herself to be pulled down onto the bed.

"If you died..."

"I know baby. I promise I'm always careful," Sam says drowsily, wrapping his arms around her.

Moments later he's asleep. Despite the comfort from his arms and steady rhythm of his breathing, she still can't let go of her fear. She knows Sam can't promise her what she most wants to hear.

No one can.

When a Ghost Touches Your Body

By Kristi Carter

We wanted what any young couple wants:
to have sex and for everything to be simple.
But it wasn't so. The river freezes over in winter
and the washcloth dries twisted, like a ghost,
after it touches your body—coiled in dermis
and soap. I'd like you to have a picture of me
looking the way I caught myself in the mirror
today—my hair askance as if under clear water,
the mole on my right ear over-pronounced,
and my face, caught off-guard but not surprised.
The same way I must have looked pinned
under the men my mother prophesized,
the ones whose shadows casted so far and long
that even your fluorescent smile couldn't
dispel them. My love, what we wanted, we wanted
a lie. A dream sold to us by movies
and the smell of the ocean coming in through
the curtains. Where *fuck me* and *I love you*
are both copasetic. Where the dishes, the laundry,
and our unborn children can all wait, wait, wait
until we are dead and then, we are satisfied.

Café Des Artistes

By Sally Taylor Tawil

her first sips of the Chateau Margaux surprised—
slid velvet down her white throat
edged with tinier, whiter pearls.
finest vintage ever produced, he promised—

what are promises but the succulent
heady swollen majestic fullness
of the purple grape
before it is ravaged from its vine

broken squeezed compromised entirely
unrecognizable
as the one she promised herself to—
beautiful still, but changed, changed.

Anatomy of a Lighthouse
By Rita Anderson

We preferred our dreams to our lives.

: There is *something to be said* about change
for change's sake, fresh sheets on the line
crisp as wafers in the thrashing wind. Somehow,
the outdoors is trapped in as I press my cheek
against the fabric and breathe in the surf.

. . . And about *contradictions* because although I enjoy
swimming I seldom do. In so many faulty ways
we credit ourselves *due*, claiming health because, once,
every day for a month, we rode a bike, sighing
nostalgically now whenever cyclists pass.
We think we *belong*. Deaf to their laughter
and how their fit bodies navigate inclines up
a flowering seaside cliff, we still imagine
an effortless glide among them. In the end,
there is no reality to it but much comfort.

During a landlocked Midwestern winter
where steel firms but corn farms survive,
the ocean is a hope I could hurt myself with,
a cruel illusion that spoils the good I may hold
in my hand. --Besides, what do I know
of the ocean except that it houses whales and Red Tide?
What peace do I believe would rise from a landscape
where water gnaws at the edges? (*So why, then, do I*
seek refuge in you, from dreams that remember
but cannot console?)

I have read that waves run in patterns
and only in the ocean, where lighthouses line the shallows,
a reach out through fog. But why these wave-swept beacons
over and over again--so many years after the wreckage? And why,
when *you* never liked the water, does the image recur
of you as a lighthouse? *Mine*. Something solid
and protective, a foreign role for us both.

And why do I deliriously render myself a widow,
a pouting statue affixed to the rooftop? (Does being lost and
finding a way out make us survivors--even if we still do not see the world as it is
but as we are?) I had envisioned love a place I could map, a continent that
drowned with you. A boat I floated on that thinned to a raft before falling
apart, when faith in your faithfulness--like the dark air around me--grew
too heavy to carry, a light too faint to follow.

Riding Past the Museum of Natural History*By Ruth Sabath Rosenthal*

seeing the steps I first took toward
infidelity — how far I descended.

My lover is history, has been
for some thirty-odd years, yet,

I remember the nervous excitement
still — how unashamed and

unnaturally good I'd felt. How beyond
stupid, thinking I would scale those highs

unscathed — so sure I was just
stepping into my husband's footprints —

impressions he made long before
I ever thought of venturing

to make hurt go by going
the ways of wayward flesh —

before I knew what I know now:
the crawl space one could carve

in a marriage preserved
for the children's sake.

Sustenance

By Sarah Russell

When glacial bogs blush with berries
it'll be a hard winter, folks say.

He is cutting down a dead pine near the cabin,
beetle-killed by drought last summer.
His chainsaw knows the hearth's width
without measuring.

I went to the orchard on Route 5
and bought peaches for canning.
The kitchen smells of sweetness,
furry skins sloughed off with blanching,
floor juice-sticky.

He comes in for lunch,
fills the room with flannel and sawdust.
"A lot of work," he says.
"Yes," I answer.
We eat warmed over stew.
He cleans his plate with bread crust and pushes back his chair.
"Back at it," he mutters and opens the door.

A cold wind makes gooseflesh on my arms
as I set the pint jars of preserves
in steaming water to make them sterile.

Unanticipated Effects of Altitude

By Jennifer Steil

Before you moved to La Paz, you were warned about the dizziness and nausea. You were told not to eat on the plane and to drink coca tea as soon as you arrived. Rest, everyone said. No exercise at all for the first few days. You took these recommendations seriously. Twelve thousand feet demand respect. When you descend into the Andes, all three of you—your husband, your small daughter, and you—feel okay. No one faints or vomits or has a cerebral hemorrhage. But no one warns you about the infinite ways in which altitude subtly erodes. The skin around your nails dries and cracks just enough to admit bacteria that plump your fingers into unbendable sausages. Your nose bleeds. You develop anal fissures, ventricular arrhythmia, eye infections. An angry rash crawls across your scalp. Paper cuts and mosquito bites take weeks to heal in the oxygen-poor environment. Despite daily exercise your spine crumbles and you take drugs for nerve pain. You are too tired to work. You lose your sense of humor. You lose hunger. When you drink more than one glass of wine you wake up sick. You cannot stay up past 9 p.m., yet you cannot stay asleep for more than two hours. You lie in the dark resenting your husband's dreamless slumber. He begins to suspect you of hyperbole and hysteria. He does not feel the things you do. His heart beats steadily and his skin is soft. He and your daughter are adaptable beings, beating you in a Darwinian contest. It's not that you want them to suffer. It's that you've begun to feel about the relentlessly healthy, the way infertile people feel about the pregnant.

When you travel to sea level for work you are stunned to find you can make people laugh. You can run for miles and stay up until midnight. Pain ebbs. You can drink three glasses of wine and feel perky the next day. You remember what it's like to feel human. You perform puppet shows for your daughter over Skype. When you tell your husband this he is silent, interpreting it as an accusation: *You have taken me to a place that has stolen my humanity.* Perhaps he is right. Because he is a kind man, he offers to leave his post. But you will not allow this martyrdom. You will not be the reason he is forced to leave work he loves. You steel yourself for the final year of the four-year posting. Just twelve more months. You can endure.

In your final year, your husband tells you he has the option of extending his post. He assumes you won't want to stay and this assumption, though correct, makes you sad. You do not want to stay nor do you want to be the reason to leave. A chasm has opened like a moat around you. Your husband can no longer cross it. You are not sure he can even see it. Funny that you can stand atop a mountain with this much air around you and feel so much like you are in prison.

Body Memories, Keening, Scars

By Erin Pushman

Once, when I was twenty, injured, and coveting a married man, I sat on the grass in a park that edged up to a lake. Kevin faced me, under a sky deepening to twilight. The beginning of summer. Purple shadows, the infrequent, semi-distant sound of mosquitos. Kevin's khaki shorts bagged open under his legs, and from the way he was sitting—facing me, with his knees bent up and his arms draped over them—I could see inside his shorts to his thighs and the legs of his underwear, which I could tell were white boxer-briefs.

Kevin moved then, shifted toward me, put one finger on my right hand, just at the place where my skin puckered into a purple half-moon from a puncture wound. He rubbed his fingertip back and forth over the pucker of that scar—back and forth. My throat tightened like it did before crying. He touched the next scar and the next one. I watched his fingers, the way my skin moved beneath them. He touched each scar on my hand, then reached to my right leg and the swath of scars there; he paused at each mark—the one on the plane of my tibia, the two above my knee, the one with the piece of bark still inside.

Kevin moved to my left leg, ran his finger over the entirety of my long worm-scar, then touched the impression of each puncture.

When he stopped at the last one, small and half way up my thigh, our faces were close.

“There’s one more, isn’t there?” Kevin asked, moving one finger to the edge of my forehead. A short snatch of hair was growing back there. Kevin smoothed it. “Erin?”

I turned away.

#

Once, when I was twelve, barefooted and quiet, I passed by a crack in my parents’ bedroom door. Lamplight poured out with their voices. Something in them held me, stopped me, drew me right up to the opening in the cedar wall.

I looked.

My mother sat on the bed, one leg folded before her, one dangling down, knee hooked over the mattress. She was naked, bald. Where her right breast should have been, her chest was concave, rib-shadows visible beneath the reddened skin and purple scars. In the lamplight the bruises around her arm veins softened. Her shoulders slumped. Her back curved. Her remaining breast fell toward her belly. The fingers of her right hand kneaded the quilt. But she was looking up at my father. I saw the moisture gathering beneath her eyelashes.

To avoid my mother’s tears, I looked at my father. His body faced hers, but he was not touching her. He was naked too. I looked away from him.

Low in my stomach, a squeamish tightening. I knew I should not watch. They were *not* having sex, and the *not* I understood, was a wrong thing.

“Come on, Bill,” my mother said. Her voice keening. I felt that pain beating from her like a pulse.

The Bronx: A Love Story (excerpt from a memoir)

By Melissa Coss Aquino

The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes but in seeing with new eyes
- Marcel Proust



Whilst the media are saturated with stories of victims, unhappy families, disasters, the family records we keep for ourselves seem to be decidedly lacking anything more than celebrations.

Why is this so?

Jo Spence

My father is a child of seventeen in this picture, my mother nineteen: two Puerto Rican children in The Bronx, and a third one on the way. All three of us full of hope and promise. It is 1969. I am a collection of cells inside her body. She is astonishingly beautiful and slipping from our grasp even as we cling to her: me from the inside and he from without. They are also, both together and apart, slipping away from me. I have no memory of us together, happy, whole

except for what this picture tells me must have been their intentions, even if they were never realized.

In 1977 the Bronx, and my family, were in a tailspin together. Within a six week period I found out my father had another daughter, with a woman that was not my mother, who was already six months old, and my grandfather died, leaving me and my grandmother alone with my mother and “el problema.” After his funeral I learned, without knowing how, that my mother was not “nervous” or “sick” as my grandmother would often tell me, but instead was a drug addict. I watched her, at my grandfather’s funeral where grief kept everyone distracted, doze in and out of a half- awake sleep walking dance that I had seen on the streets in my neighborhood constantly. When I asked my aunt about the “falling people” she had explained by saying, “Those people take drugs. Don’t ever do those things. They live terrible lives.” My mother lived a terrible life. I suddenly understood.

I would come to learn that 1977 was a year that almost crushed my father. I never lived with him in the way I did with my mother, so his life was a slower reveal. It turns out that in 1977 he had two daughters (not just the one he told me about) born within nine months of each other to two different women, he had me lingering in the atmosphere of my mother’s downward spiral, he lost my grandfather who had been a surrogate father for him and for me in his absence, and he was in the throes of battling his own addictions.

He was also a South Bronx boy watching his childhood world, which he had loved, burn around him. 1977 was a hard year in The Bronx and in some ways became associated with The Bronx forever. The image of Howard Cosell proclaiming that The Bronx was burning in the middle of his broadcast of a Yankee Game echoes endlessly in the repeated statistics about the south Bronx being the poorest district in the country. This is not a story about dysfunction or addiction or despair. It is a love story that tries to understand how the same Bronx streets that made me strong had instead devoured my parents. How had our love of The Bronx, a still unifying pride we share, had such different repercussions for each of us?

Asian Woman

By Tanya Ko Hong

“Isn't it about time Chosŏn (Korean) women lived like humans?” – Na Hye-sok

This is what you do with your life:

Take what your father gives you
 food, care, shelter
 Learn to be a wife
 cook, sew, maintain your household
 Obey orders, serve your family, command
 servants

This is what you do with your life:

Take what your husband gives you
 food, care, shelter
 Bury the jealousy of his concubines
 be their big sister
 Bear sons or you are useless
 raise them to be fine young men
 never take your eyes off them
 Never tempt a lover

This is what you do with your life:

Take what your sons give you
 food, care, shelter
 make your son's wives obey
 Demand your son's wives bear sons

This is what you do with your life:

Teach your daughters:
 to be like a song

three years deaf
 three years blind
 three years mute

teach
 them to be
 like you

Breathing Fee

By Tanya Ko Hong

Talk about the wood
stacked high in the living room
and what it costs
to breathe in my home—
raw wood, oak
so long and thick—
like a dead elephant stretched wall to wall.

He said *to acclimate takes time*
and more money—heartwood
slow to open, to breathe—
one week became a month and more.

I couldn't breathe just looking
at the pile of planks—
unusable, forlorn—
it had to go.

I wanted to speak my mind
instead of smile— be nice—
nice girls don't speak their minds
or question men—
that would be cheap.

How dear it is to breathe.

Reception

By Meghan Giles

Liquored, you drive us
while the other couples
are honeymooned in their hotels.
That rose bouquet I caught,
dying, already, and we
pass the spot where you pulled over
and hit me, hit me
next to wildflowers and tar.

How my tin can bruise
has bloomed like bluebonnets
outgrown of soil skin, a handful
of bluebonnets, a yellow yarrow,
two prairie larkspurs, pressed
between tissue, a tattoo raised
on my thigh, there, peeking
out beneath the cotton
foliage of my dress—a gift.

Aura

By Ginny Rachel

I was perhaps four when I first saw the colors and stood in the gigantic spiral-shaped sprawling church lost someplace deep in my past. A haloed glow hovered around plain-robed priests. I asked and was told, “We don’t discuss the lights.” These men glowed white from no source, and were shadowless. The wide-open space was dim, like the murky depths of thick muddy water. Heads blurred into the background above pews silent beneath the gloom of a bewildering, lonely place. Should they be good men?

The auras came and went until I became the fish frozen in ice, trapped in a bowl, and strung on a trout line unable to escape. I learned marriage made the world dull to my eyes. In this state, new experiences evolved that carved and shaped the scars left behind on my body and mind so I would never forget. Some men gave their ladies flowers or jewelry, or perhaps even a kind word of care and support—just a daisy a day. Not.

Instead, what I knew was the crimson-centered, purple-black pattern of five neat encircling fingerprints left on my arms like tattoos. I knew there was no escaping the miasma of wrongness—all was my fault—which was illogical, but made perfect sense. There was no love, only survival of the fittest. I didn’t know that then, but gradually a day arrived, an hour, a minute when I realized I intended to endure, and be the fittest. Because he was not.

Already he was sick and dying. A thick greasy black light returned to hover around him at times, with prodding fingers that checked him out for size, as if the body might be only a suit, or pinched him, to prepare for the time he’d be devoured with ripping teeth. The end came without fanfare; no love lost, only an unburdening of intense, smothering pressure.

Immediately the lights became a striated conglomeration woven around people, and sounds increased to supernatural levels. A simple act of driving on the same road, in the same truck became otherworldly without direction or any recall of familiarity. The guilt of what I had thought of doing, even though I never acted, became my shroud. I bore this cloak and still bear it as I muddle through memories to grasp an understanding of how I erred.

A day arrived when I stepped closer into the shoes of a whole person. I was fully satisfied not to take care of another being and worry about when the eggshells would crack wide open.

Had I been the smart, tough little girl, I’d have snuffed the one who stole my young life away, who commandeered my being, who removed my identity, and who only wanted a replacement mother to ensure that I could never be one to an actual child. The marks he left run deep, as if a sign on the forehead that attracts the few who will ever stalk my fractured being.

The Cage Is Open

By Margaret Chula

and Billy and Coeey are flying around the upstairs room
in our Kyoto house—parakeets entrusted to us
by an English couple leaving Japan.

The birds are lovers and we awaken to their crooning
in the small tatami room. Lovers, too, we lie beneath
layers of futon, snow dusting the roof tiles.

Parakeets are birds meant for sunshine
and palm trees where all day they dart in and out
of shadows, like lineated jewels.

Japanese would have nightingales, *hototogisu*.
Their song from Hokkaido forests is heartbreaking,
like the trill of a flute in a Noh play

when the ghost of a lover appears,
white and gauzy, face hidden
behind kimono sleeves.

On this morning of sunshine, Billy and Coeey
swoop and flutter, and land on my cherry wood vanity
with mirrors that fold in and out—

and then there are four parakeets, a choir,
perched alongside pendants and pearls
that clatter against the mirror when they fly away.

By afternoon there is only Coeey, huddled
in the open cage, bill tucked beneath her feathers.
Her chirps sound like weeping.

Snow drifts in through the open window.

So

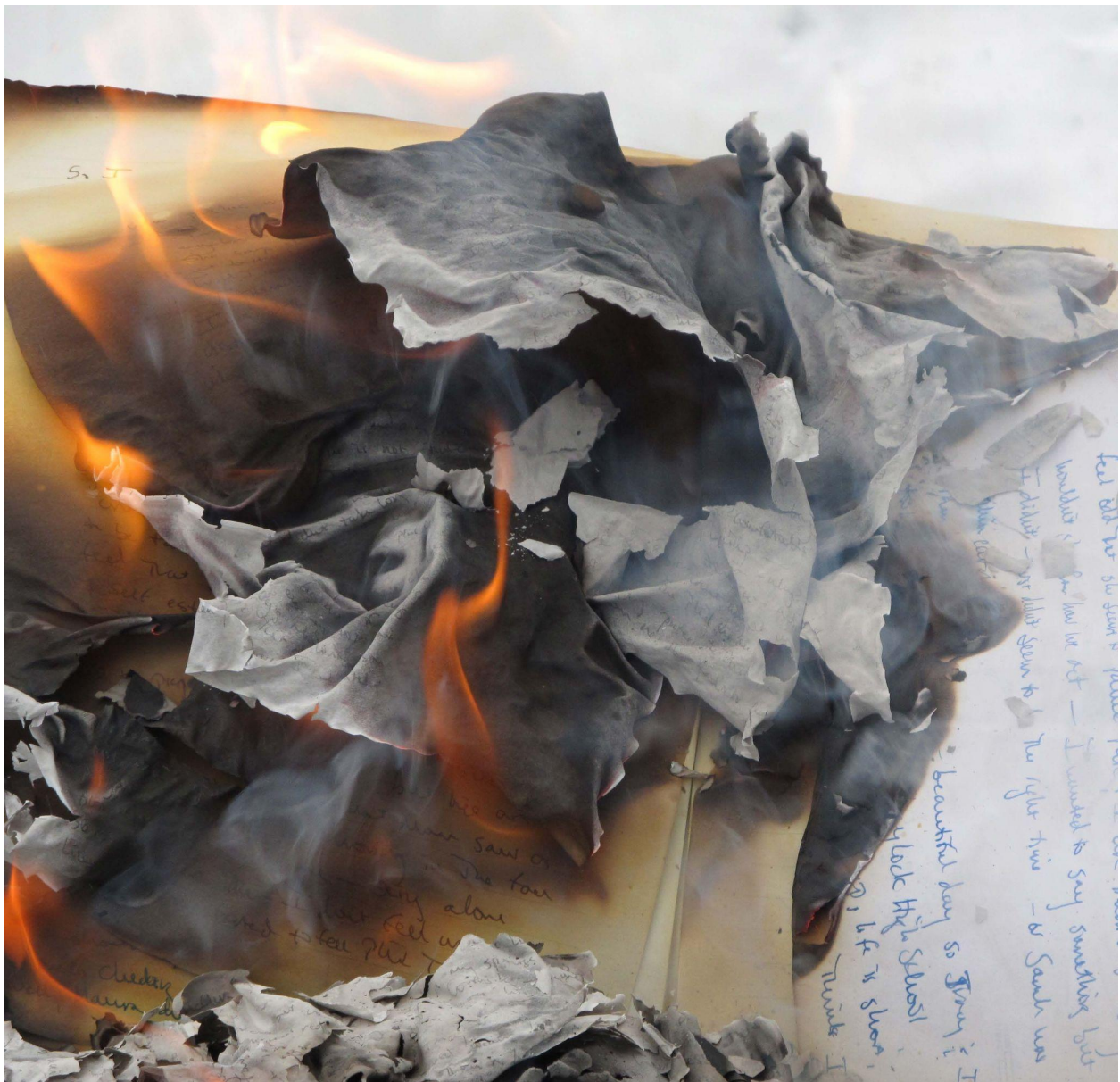
By Martha Andrews Donovan

After Shauna Osborn's Carved Skin

*And I have so many words—
—Maxine Hong Kingston, The Woman Warrior*

I.

“Divorce Journals,” image by Martha Donovan



Here, in the high desert, I am finding my way back to language. I will carry these words on my back. So. I.

II.

Dear Shauna,

I keep circling — how to enter? I have decided to write this as a letter to you. Unformed. Still forming.

Four years ago, in 2011, my marriage began to dissolve. My husband announced his unhappiness.

Let me start again.

The image I invited you to “carve” on my back is a photograph of one of my divorce journals in flames. Last winter I fed twenty-three journals to the flames — three years of daily writing during the seemingly sudden but long dissolution of my marriage when my then husband revealed his deep unhappiness, claiming I had excluded him from a writing life, one of many grievances.

I was stunned into silence.

If writing had destroyed my marriage, then I no longer wanted to write. In the absence of clarity or confidence, this was my reasoning. And so my public writing — which had been fruitful and blossoming at that time — came to an abrupt end. The only language I turned to was the stunned voice in my head — and it was this voice that found its way into the pages of twenty-three journals. The only way to get out of bed in the morning was to write my way out. The only way I could find to lie down each night was to write my way down. This private writing sustained me through those days of confusion and anger and grief.

But this language was never meant for anyone else — and eventually I grew tired of the story. There were moments of lyricism, moments of insights, even moments of beauty — but mostly it became a very tiresome story and I grew bored. So I stopped writing and put the journals away.

They sat on the floor by my bedside. Then they sat on my bookshelf. Then they sat in storage, a few miles from my home. And then, last winter, they sat in my car and traveled across the mountains and into a valley where a friend and her husband built me a fire. And I fed my writing — journal by journal, page by page — into the flames.

In a certain way, my divorce was a cliché — the long-married couple whose marriage ends in divorce when a child goes off to college. In a certain way, all divorces are clichés — the end of any marriage, in our times, a common and likely

story — and who, in their right minds, after all, would willingly accept such terrible odds? And yet, somehow, still, I am glad for the faith I see in friends who choose — and choose again — to marry. It is possible that I will find my way to such faith again.

Meanwhile, the writing in those journals began to haunt my living. This language was no longer helping me to breathe and words became stones in my mouth. This language belonged somewhere else. It was time for me to find my way to a new story.

And so, like the woman warrior, I will invent a new self out of words.

Open or Safe

by Laura G. Schmidt

When she decided to go back, it opened again. The stitches popped in response to that final thought, that, I miss her more, moment.

She went to the hospital the next day. She needed to be closed before she could make that phone call and she wanted to be sewn up before she began to pack herself back in.

The doctor fingered the would-be scar. "This is a strange happening," he murmured into her back. She felt his air against the hollow but ignored it. She tried to think of the daffodils she would buy later. She tried to think of painting her insides new. She thought the red should go.

"I have to open it to close you." She heard the click of ceramic and stone and saw his hands in the mirror across the office. He had left them behind while he went to fill in some paperwork and they were sterilizing her tools with a great and slow care.

He pulled her apart. He slid one hand and then another inside of her. "You will need to get used to this," he muttered into her dark. He pulled at some hanging strings and she found herself in tears. "Enough of that," he said with a yank and she stopped.

"I do not want to be opened to you."

"I am a professional, young lady. I am searching for medical purposes." He paused as he fingered the keys that ran down her ribs. "What was she after when she went in, I wonder."

She felt a great pressure, a need to exhale, a desire to expel. Then with a "hrmph" and a clamor, he was out and sewing.

She sighed. She liked being closed.

"I am using memories this time," he said as the needles clicked through her. "They are sometimes stronger than string. They will dissolve if you forget them." He turned her around. "If you forget too soon, you split open like a sack of sawdust. I cannot sew you up if you insist on being open. You must decide.

"Would you rather be open or safe?"

Parallax

By Jeanette Miller

Here's where we part. Without question
you walk your same, sure pace
into the dark, its walls a comfort. Alone
in this difficult light
I'm stumbling
without familiar boundaries.

In the distance ivy adheres
to a wall, an insistent cover of green.
Did you assume I'd continue
to walk beside you, providing
a shadow? I lean into mine as if
it were water. Each movement changes
the shade's configuration. How
we fed each other's hunger for the dark.

Denouement

By Sarah Russell

The movers are here this morning.
Only things with yellow post-its,
I tell them. I find my long lost earring
behind the couch. Probably landed there
that night we couldn't wait to get upstairs.
I put it in my pocket, wonder
if I kept the other one.

I divide the sterling service for eight
into two sets of four –
Solomon solution of no use
to either of us for dinner parties. Outside,
the garden needs tending – stalks of gray and brown;
withered blossoms in a winter without snow.
I reach for the pruners, then put them back.
The roses are his now.

Tonight I fix a curry with stuff from the fridge,
and we make small talk – my new job, his vacation.
Afterwards, we clean up in choreography
perfected through twenty years of meals together.

I feign tiredness and ask if he'll be around
tomorrow before I leave.
No, there's an early meeting, he says
and turns back to TV.
In the guest room, the sheets smell stale.
The old cat comes and curls into the crook of my knees –
an exquisite kindness.

Dogs and Men in Bed

By Marcia Meier

in the early morning silence
Aussie's stub tail moves rapid-fire
angles her body

scrambles to get onto the bed
our bodies a nest for her wiggling legs and paws
head bobbing as you croon "relax"...

my chest fills
I look out the bedroom window, see the long-needed pine
feel the shelter of this moment

remember the lie once told
"You ain't nobody"

Company

By Muriel Nelson

*. . . from what could we weave the boundary
Between within and without, light and abyss,
If not from ourselves, our own warm breath . . . ?*

— Czeslaw Milosz

Where thought & thoughts associate,
potencies are shelved like kitchen knives,
where every finger's safe, where choirs sing right notes
and someone tells the singers how to feel,
I grew. Later, I helped
a grandmother search for dresses —
used ones, but beautiful, so the child would feel good. When I found
small tights in red, yellow, and pink, the grandmother said,
It don't matter. If they don't match we just pretend.
I've seen a chickadee flit upside-down, in the light at the tip
of a twig — an impossible flight, but that didn't matter;
and a wild squirrel dive off our upper roof, make a small tree quake,
wave his tail, then touch noses with our old dog.
I've known a place so dark all boundaries
are felt, not seen, where loves fade beautifully
on paper — and then flare
as love & loves associate —
where you became my Company.

Blue Moon and Bright Mars

By Sandy Coomer

Now that I have you back,
even your early morning footsteps
seem blessed, and eggs scrambling
in the skillet, the aroma of relief.

I watch you from the doorway,
your clothes hanging on your body,
your hollow face busy in thought, until
your eyes lift and burn me with light.

We learned how to say love without words
when the hospital nights sank their teeth in
and the days chewed slowly on your flesh.
We learned how to say pain,

even the desperate kind that leaves you
rolled out flat and dirty.
And though we haven't yet admitted this –
maybe we never will – we learned

that fear sits in a sacred chamber
and uncoils the minutes of our lives
like the skin of an apple
peeling off in one long red helix.

Last night, we sat on the back porch
and watched the moon – a rare blue moon,
twice full in a month – curve
above Mars, low and bright.

To say your eyes are like stars is trite, I know,
but when I look in them I feel weightless,
moving fast across our lives,
the dizzying spin of all our plans bundled

like atoms in a molecule, barely contained.
We continue our habits, glad
for the repetition, the safety of the familiar.
Everything is the same,

except when you hold me and I feel the tremor
in your arms transparent as breath. It is no good now
to use words to explain ourselves, so we sit down

for breakfast. We eat our fill.