



“Acts of Bravery (Day 1 & 3),” image by Lois Bradley

SISTERHOOD OF THE BARBED WIRE MUSEUM

*...we should have lassoed ourselves together
lashed down to weather the storms.*

---Carrie Nassif

That pain in her eyes? It's in mine.

---Louise McKinney

*The concentration of
wife mother woman left untouched
her mysterious hankering
for solitude.*

---Rebecca Ruth Gould

Today I feel centered and time is a friend instead of the old enemy. It was zero this morning. I have a fire burning in my study, yellow roses and mimosa on my desk. There is an atmosphere of festival, of release, in the house. We are one, the house and I, and I am happy to be alone—time to think, time to be. This kind of open-ended time is the only luxury that really counts and I feel stupendously rich to have it.

---May Sarton

*...do I need to say
your voices are searchlights?*

---Susan J. Erickson

we should have*By Carrie Nassif*

we house collections of prickled of connections
this, the sisterhood of the barbed wire museum

once wound tight over driftwood wires
long since uncoiled yellow polaroids ago

these twisting pointed links
thumb and elbow grease crafted

from fence-mending callouses
smoothed away with time

water over rocks
under bridges

we should have lassoed ourselves together
lashed down to weather the storms

built pulleys and lifted our souls
cantilevered the clouds

we can only display these remnants
and inventory our fragments

of ingeniously knotted wires
blackened with age

that we used to raise
to hold back the baked earth

and wax a kind of nostalgic comfort
buffing white-wealed scars from when we got too close

rubbing fractious aches
from standing at such a distance

Before the Show

By Donna J. Gelagotis Lee

Under the lone light bulb like a fluorescent moon,
with the smell of wood, concrete under our feet.

Clip clock. The snap of the crossties to
the halter. I comb the mane until it's silky

& you separate the thin strands of hair and cross each one
to form a braid, sewing it into the horse's mane.

How long will it take? The first hour. The stillness
of evening, then night. The horse's nickers, stomp.

Your shrug of the shoulders to stretch. The horse's ponderous
neck. I shift my weight from foot to foot.

While you continue. Hour after hour. Ten braids. Fifteen. You
don't give up, give in. The farm is still.

The night lit only by the moon here. And we
have only to dawn, when we'll return

to load the horse onto the trailer and head to the show.
How beautiful, the thoroughbred's sleek neck.

How beautiful you are as a friend.

Delores (Part One)

By Esther Cohen

My friend Delores
she's 82 beautiful
missing a few body parts
doesn't let that get in her way
makes money cleaning houses
handsome lover named Jim
one good leg that's enough for me
said Delores she got a big turkey for 8 dollars at Shoprite
invited some people made 3 kinds of cookies
including pumpkin oatmeal
my friend Delores says she's grateful
for what she has for what she imagines tomorrow will be
for the time she danced with Rudy Vallee
cute cheap bastard she said grateful
for dancing with Jim on Fridays when he can come to visit
his one good leg is better than some people's two said Delores
for her leopard skin coats she found
when she cleaned out an empty house
for her five children some of them call her
for the dollar store she found her favorite biscuit mix just a dollar for her mother god was she fun
said Delores she had a bar in Harlem five husbands maybe six her mother danced every day of her
life.
So does Delores.

Delores (Part Two)*By Esther Cohen*

My daughter Josephine
some family I have
they are a reality show
I love every single one
my daughter Josephine
I have six children
baby is 52 that doesn't qualify
for baby unless
you're her mother
my daughter Josephine
she is sixty this year
still a wild card she's the smartest
one of all of them. Had
a baby when she was 17.
My first grandchild. She married Tom
a handsome guy panhandling
on the street in Catskill New York.
The funny thing is I can
imagine that. I saw him the first time
and I said to myself Josephine's
going to marry Tom.
Everyone's
got to have
a first husband.

“Third Platoon Learns Cover & Concealment”

By Karen Skolfield

Our hair smelled of canvas and green.
Alexis sat cross-legged and touched
my cheekbone with one finger.

She paused as she scanned my face:
“light in the valleys, dark on the hills.
I swear, you look good in green.”

I wove leaves into her helmet, tried
to stay still and shivered as she softened
the lines from brown to green.

We learned to move like shadows.
Muzzles pointed into the brush,
our small blackened hands flashed signals –

enemy ahead, take cover. Alexis
appeared beside me, whispered
“we’re setting up an ambush.”

Three women melted into the brush
on my right and panted slowly,
half drowsing in the June heat,

their eyes blinking beneath the leaves.
I wanted to tell her green could be painful,
how the ripeness of forests could crumble to earth.

Her hand rested inches from mine. Around us,
the smell of leaf mold curtained the forest,
and we waited for rain, or the footsteps of women.

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Sista-Girl

By Louise McKinney

“ . . .and in between it’s nicotine and not much heart to fight. . .”
—Sonny Burke

She and me we complain rarely
but sometimes softly and then only to each other.

So as not to get on anyone’s *last nerve*
feeling like—maybe just feel like giving up the fight,

or if strapped for cash
could just hit the juke for some jazz.

One night I might mutter
to her (matter-a-fact) Girl, those quarters and dimes

on the bar sure look like stars—
must be yours.

I don’t even mind when she borrows, then returns
the pure-white light-wool worsted skirt

with a brilliant-red ribbon of wine ebbing,
wending ’round the hem of it:

worn on her bender in a bend by the river,
c’rousing down in the Quarters—

white fabric rose (world turned upside down)
dunked into a goblet, then blotted on the sidewalk.

When she sings “Black Coffee”
she gets down, gets soulful

down on her knees, writhing ’round. Why?
Behaves just like a woman scorned,

doesn’t have to try imaging it, knows No
(with the back of a hand), knows how to survive it.

Sista Mary, when she comes to the door
shopping bag in hand, has chicken to be “smotha-ed”

stands by the gardenia bush, waiting to be
greeted—comes to fix a meal not our first communion.

Knows just where I been. . . .
There's pain in her eyes I can show you.

She Whispers Korean in My Ear

By Tanya Ko Hong

We were drinking homemade wine
when my blonde friend told me
*Once I had a Korean boyfriend—
his mother hated me
but how I loved her food...*

She knew a bad Korean word—
Whisper in my ear, I said

Jajee, she said
and her face bloomed red as a bong soong ah—
my face cooled sub zero.

Only a whore can use that word—
horny women
dirty women

That's not a bad word, I replied,
It's just a part of the body, isn't it?
But I think
Who does she think she is
to say that word
a man can say that word
but not a woman—not even to her husband.

When referring to the penis, a Korean doctor says
songgi—a Chinese word.

Come to think of it
I never pronounced that word,
with my mouth—

I'd look down and say
there,
(Jagee)
penis, I can say
but using *ㅈ (gioat)
I never said it

*“ㅈ” (gioat) , is a Korean alphabet that is phonetically equivalent to English alphabet, “J” for the word “Jagee”

Bracelets

By G. Evelyn Lampart

Sophie is wearing bracelets – I can hear them jangling. I can't take my eyes off her face to look at them because she'll think she isn't interesting. That would break her stream of confidential *I am special* speak. She is talking non-stop again. About herself. Herself as a woman who is jealous of younger women, the 25-year-olds, with privilege, and with trust funds.

I understand. I tell her over and over that I understand. I have been telling her for years that I understand. But she doesn't feel special enough. Her eyes are asking for confidence. Her mouth is telling me how many people she's recently met who say she is special.

Sophie has been special for all of the forty years that I've known her -- brave, unique, caring, and lovely. She was brave to leave the Brooklyn of our youth, and part from her friends and our familiar ways. I would like to see if she is wearing the bracelet I gave her when she first left for the Southwest -- a country of sunsets that never fade, she boasted. I am afraid to take my eyes off her tulip-like face that is always in bloom and take a good look. I can hear several bracelets jostling each other. They are probably silver and copper bangles, maybe a multi-colored and delicately beaded one tied around her wrist with a leather string, and the heirloom with semi-precious stones. Without taking my eyes off her face, I finally say: "What about me?"

Sophie casts her eyes, strong and gripping, upon me, and says: "Tell me."

I begin. I know I shouldn't, but it's like a game. I'm doing this... I'm doing that... all good stuff -- writing, art, cooking, yoga. Sophie lifts a hand to her mouth in a gesture to silence me, and to tell me that she was always so jealous of me. And there it is on the plate of the gluten free pizza between us that we are sharing in a trendy mid-Village restaurant.

The bill will arrive, and I will offer to pay. It is my fault. For sharing. For having more. Sophie lowers her hand and they are all new bracelets that I've never seen before. One is thick and wide and embossed, handcrafted silver. Sophie's eyes seek mine and see where, and how far, mine have traveled. She carefully removes all her bracelets, one by one. They don't make any noise in coming off.

"Here," Sophie says to me. "Don't be jealous." And she hands me the boldest bracelet of all.

Unity Orders

By Kate Simonian

Hot stuff. Just-what-the-doctor-Orders. Five-foot-ten at twelve-and-a-half years old, with a body to be reckoned with, a body with curves we had just learned to describe as convex. Unity would have been memorable for her name alone—a *sentence unto itself*, one teacher said—but over the summer she'd developed a larger-than-life sex drive to boot. Libido had left her crooked. Her lazy eye had got lazier, as if set free in her body's general riot. Still, Unity was the prettiest girl with a not-normal eye I knew.

At lunch times, Unity lay on the benches with her skirt yanked up, thighs juicy like two burnt offerings. We watched with fascination. How, when a male staff member finally walked past, he'd stop, his ears pinking hard. There would be something in his voice—*Cover yourself, Miss. Orders*—that meant more than it said. Unity would follow such requests with her confronting rendition of Kylie Minogue's "I Just Can't Get You Out of My Head."

Unity told us about the men she'd had over the summer. She sucked their peens right out of their pants. The boy in her apartment block, a friend of her father's. *They all taste different*, she said. *But mostly bad.*

On a field trip once, she took out a pink razor shaped like a Pringle and raked it up her legs, leaving bloody scratches. She pressed her cleavage against the bus windows. Her bra was blue. We saw too much altogether of Unity Orders.

It may have been the stories we carried home to our parents. It may have been what she did with the school's creepy clarinet teacher (known to students as, Mr. *Woodywind*), or the time she cornered the headmistress's son, or when she drew a cock on the overhead projector so detailed that she should have got biology credit, but whatever it was, the school intervened. Our grade was made to attend breakout role play sessions, in which we were asked to imagine a peer who was aggressively sexual to fathers, teachers, innocent commuters. We prayed for this girl and her poor, beleaguered decency.

That didn't end the fascination with Unity. She still had pride of place in the canteen line. People still wanted to sit next to her; it was like straddling a smoking crate of fireworks. I was one of the few who distanced myself. In eighth grade, church had become a thing for me. I went to bible studies and got high on Jesus. At school, I walked around muttering, *sin sin sin*. I didn't like to touch pencils. I was sickened by the skin of things. And Unity? She was so dirty, it burned.

One day, Unity opened her locker to show us a beer that she planned to drink in the bathroom at lunch. I convinced a friend to tell the Dean. Unity was expelled. She moved to another school and we forgot all about her.

As for me, I stayed religious until I went to college and discovered *mauvaise fois* and the twilight of the idols and that all religion was crud on the bottom of the thinking woman's boot. I got wild. It became *de rigueur* for me to screw a couple of guys each weekend and sip vodka from a water-bottle during class. Things sped up. I got pregnant and married the guy and eight years

later I moved with my kid back in with my parents and nothing happened for a very long while. I was thirty-two and finishing my associate's diploma. I tried not to think about my life.

I was shopping with my mom one day when we ran into Melanie Orders, and her daughter.

"Unity's visiting from London," her mother said. "She's got a legal practice out there."

Unity was thinner. She didn't have a lazy eye. I must have misremembered or she'd got it fixed. Unity unclipped and re-clipped her coif and peered at my face, trying to place me.

"What are you up to now?" she asked.

"H.R.," I said. I spun some half-truths until our mothers ran out of talk and we pushed away from one another.

At the cashier, my mother whispered, wasn't that the pretty girl at my school who'd been expelled?

"So much has happened since then," I said. "I can hardly remember."

Coming in Second

By Ruth Sabbath Rosenthal

Body chilled by years of neglect,
my twin lies in a hospital bed

trying to grasp how she's come
to this. The sum of my fears

she's the one person I dread
I could be, save for some kink

in our link of genetic fiber.
Struggling not to catch her death

of cold, I've steered clear of her
notion that our birth was not just

conceptual happenstance. Yet
at times, I find myself more

akin to that than sanity
permits, and though I fall

into the black hole of her undoing
so far I've managed to climb back

out — into the asylum of my life.
Out, according to my twin,

much the same way I exited the womb,
climbing over her in order to be first.

Black Swans: A Poem for Voices

By Katharyn Howd Machan

We are the black swans,
the women who swim.
Who fly at night.
Who are the night.
Our golden feet touch
quiet water, skim
shining surface, plunge deep
to make currents in dark weeds.
We come and go.
We know each other's
names, each other's dreams;
we dream each other.
Dream the flight
past ragged moon,
past singing stars,
and it comes true.
Dream the telling,
the shapes of rain
and frogs and light,
and it comes true.
We are the wings.
We reach for wind
and make it ours;
we become the wind.
Our words are swan words,
black and full.
We go distances,
return, endure.

(This poem is dedicated to the Women's Writing Workshops [which became the Feminist Women's Writing Workshops, under my later direction, the national summer program founded in 1974 by Beverly Tanenhaus.]

Some Secrets

By Debbie Urbanski

Outside this window there used to be a tree. This is the first secret. Now all I can see is the sky which, today, lacks personality, a plain blue streaked with predictable clouds.

My neighbor cut the tree down. Is this the second secret? Let's say, for now, that it's not, that it is more a continuation of the first. This neighbor of mine plans to cut down more trees soon, or all of them, to make room for his decorative flower garden. As the trees root on the other side of my property line, there is little I can do about this. The violence of his solution: the men with their safety vests and chainsaws—I seem to be the only one who cares.

My kids insist they're glad the tree is gone. They never wanted to play outside anyway. Sometimes I dragged both of them outside the house, because I did not want to be the sort of mother whose kids never played outside, then I ran in and locked the patio door—this is really the second secret, okay?—against whose glass my girl would press herself, crying, while my boy slouched around the yard ripping leaves off the tomato plants.

I have a collection of secrets—this is the third secret—as secrets beget secrets, or at least they attract other secrets to them. My collection started when I turned 10. Don't worry, I'm not about to spill all of them now. There isn't room here.

This is the fourth: a girl in grade school who I barely knew, the girl with the cuts on her cheeks, came up to me and softly said, "I have a secret but you can never tell." I was thrilled by that at first, to be a secret's keeper. And then, in deciding whether or not to hold on to it, I let her secret be lifted into the breeze of the fan in the lunch room where it settled upon every table and exploded.

Small Bodies

By Alexandra Reisner

A six-year-old child's eyes are set only about three feet off the ground, which is probably why the girls saw it first. We were coming from the tennis courts when I noticed two or three of them crouching. "What is it?" I asked as I knelt to see what they saw.

It was a mouse—a baby—on its side in the grass. Its head was touched with blood, but still its sides rose and fell with breathing. "We need to save it!" shouted Rebecca*, a thin yet surprisingly muscular spider of a child with long bronze hair and long bronze legs she used to climb all over my back.

We made a circle around the mouse while the girls shouted "Help!" and I looked on half-serious so no one would mistake it for a real emergency until someone important showed up and radioed for a maintenance man. He came, a teenager steering a golf cart with garden-gloved hands. The girls looked up as I explained: 1) we found a mouse 2) it is living and it is hurt and 3) is there anything you can do, please? The boy looked bored. Without a word he lifted the mouse, its thread of tail pinched between his thumb and forefinger, and flung it into the trashcan on the back of his cart.

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I worked at this summer camp only once, between freshman and sophomore years of college. Among the girls, Corey and Emma were our group's de facto leaders. Already cliquish at six, they spent free time brushing their hair. Another girl, Alexa, was beautiful but quieter in it, with a hum of a voice and gentle presence. She shied away from the other girls, clinging to my co-counselor Diana and me. I worried that she wasn't going to make friends so I pulled away, but she only cleaved to Diana ever more fiercely.

•

I don't remember how we found out. I do know that instead of releasing our campers to their buses that day, we each delivered a few girls into the care of the drivers. I took Alexa last because she wanted to hold my hand the longest. By the time we reached her bus, the driver was pacing. She grabbed the child up in a hug and swung her onto the bus. "I was so worried!" she said to both of us, and then only to me, "I heard it was a little girl."

It was a little boy. As another group sat under a tree, a several-hundred-pound limb—appearing healthy but rotted within—dislodged itself and fell. It scraped up a few children, including an eight-year-old girl. It killed her brother, seated beside her, age four.

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The following morning, we awaited the arrival of a grief counselor. There was a man with one sleeve of his shirt pinned up, empty, but he was only another counselor's boyfriend, dropping off the lunch she had forgotten at home. We were asked to ask the children to draw something they remembered from the previous day at camp. Some of our girls drew what they had not seen: a child pinned beneath a broken tree. They drew red for blood. Most of them drew the swimming pool or tennis balls. Rebecca—and I wanted to take her up in my arms then—drew (soft grey and curled fetal) the poor, living mouse.

* *Children's names have been changed.*

You Accompany Parents Through Winter*By Alice Cone*

As you tend to your father this winter,
when the surface is white, the sky smudged glass,
may your breath swell and rest like the river

as it courses through shadow and silver,
trusting forward and chanting the chorus
that will carry your mother through winter.

When the air is so cold it would splinter
and your muscles so taut they would collapse,
may your breath swell and rest like the river,

the susurrus of current a sister
to that pulsing of blood through umbilicus
when Mother conducted you, one winter.

If her heartbeat's now listing, off-kilter,
the routes of his nerves noncontinuous,
may you rest and crescendo, a river

resolving the chords struck at source, a singer
of canticles honoring the passages.
You accompany parents through winter.
May your hearts swell and rest, trust the river.

Tortoise

By Naomi Westerman

Extract from the full-length play.

Setting: A secure psychiatric hospital ward.

ISOBEL, 30s, a fragile woman with bandaged wrists, hides inside a fort made out of bedding. She is alone. She sits in silence for a long time. Finally (for the first time in the play) she crawls out of her fort.

ISOBEL

When I was five, I had a stray tortoise. We found him in our front garden, a runaway, a throwaway, no one ever knew. Other families find stray cats, we had a stray tortoise. We didn't know anything about tortoises, so we let him live in our back garden. He was so shy, he barely ever stuck his head out of his shell. Relatives used to say he was the perfect pet for me because I was exactly like him, and I pretended to laugh, but I didn't really think it was funny. In May it started to get hot, the start of one of those endless hot summers that only existed when you were a child. I was walking home from school one day, sweat dripping down my back inside my uniform, and I saw my tortoise walking in the opposite direction. With great force and purposefulness. We were half a mile from home and he must have crossed several roads; I don't know how he wasn't killed. So I had to pick him up and walk all the way home with him in my hands, grunting and marching his little legs in the air the entire way, dying on the inside of the mortification of drawing so much attention to myself.

This Houdini routine became a regular occurrence until we put up reinforced fencing. Then autumn came, and we put him in a box with loads of newspaper and tucked him away, to hibernate, because that's what Blue Peter told us to do. The next night we were watching television and we suddenly heard this THUMP, THUMP noise. We listened but it went away. Then it started again. THUMP. THUMP. Then ... [does grunting impression] THUMP. GRUNT. THUMP THUMP. GRUNT GRUNT. We went into the mudroom and there was the box, one little scaly leg sticking out of one corner, bumping and grunting as it spun in impotent circles. [Puts one hand down and twirls around it] We took the tortoise out of the box straight away and put him back in the garden. The next day he hid inside a bag of potting compost, and hibernated. [Pause] I may be in my shell but that doesn't mean anyone gets to put me in a box.

Anne Frankenstein

By Deborah Thompson

When I open my journal, Anne emerges from her hiding place to hover at my shoulder. Does this happen to all female Jewish writers? I began to keep a journal at age 11 after reading *The Diary*. I named my journal Anna. "Dear Anna," I'd write, and then describe my pre-teen travails to Anne Frank in her voice.

"Terri Goodman whispered to Amy Bloom in the temple carpool that my hair looked greasy," I wrote.

"I still believe that people are good at heart," Anne replied.

It was hard to compete with the holocaust.

After I was bat mitzvahed at 13 I abandoned temple, along with much of Judaism. I've forgotten how to read Hebrew, and can't even get through the alphabet beyond aleph-bet-gimmel. But I still fast on Yom Kippur. And I still instinctively scan friends' homes for possible secret annexes.

I am now in my fifties, and have been keeping a journal for 40 years. I don't call it Anna anymore; it's nameless. I write about the stabs of arthritis and of colicky colleagues, about my personal traumas and small-scale unutterable losses. But no monstrosities can compete with my progenitor. Anne, eternally 13, has left my shoulder and now burrows under my greasy scalp, the final hiding place.

Wild Faith

By Karla Morton

All angels, good and bad have the power of transmutating our bodies

- St. Thomas Aquinas

This is how we claim life –
a little wild yet,
transformed by drinking rain
from wolf prints.
We are pack stalking.
We are women walking.

There is not much difference
between woman and wolf,
the love of the hunt,
the steady cadence,
the stare of black-lined eyes.

Even the square of day
seeps its borders;
the thin line of dreams,
a dark edge to feminine thoughts.
We are pack stalking.
We are women walking.

What women believe
charms the saints,
softens the den,
shoulders the night.
Four-legged angels on every side.

We are blue beauty and white holy strength,
Earth trembling underfoot,
lupin eyes looking up into
the great grey of faith.
We are pack stalking.
We are women walking.

Woman Warriors: Babae/Babaylan

By Aimee Suzara

Babae = girl or woman

Babaylan = a shaman of ancient times who is usually two-spirited

Dalaga = a young woman

Diwata = a spirit of nature and the trees.

Babae Babaylan Dalaga Diwata

Women are the healers mothers sisters and daughters

Lorde Angelou Kingston and Assata

Words to nourish nations like mecca and water

Babae Babaylan Dalaga Diwata

Women are the healers mothers sisters and daughters

Lorde Angelou Kingston and Assata

Words to nourish nations like mecca and water

Listen to the voices you can hear the wisdom burning

Alighting minds and hearts to the revolution churning...

Babae Babaylan Dalaga Diwata

I often wonder bout the state of the nation

Why we don't spend every moment in celebration

Of our mothers and our grandmothers too

They the ones who raise us up and carry us through our

Struggles and often with no reward

Living and feeling all kinds of wars

But do much of this in the details

When I turn on the tv all I see is

White man ruling or women objectified

It's time to rewrite the canon of life...

Makes me wanna flip the script and revise

So this world will wake up and realize that

The women warriors are walking in our midst

The women warriors are walking in our midst

Babae babaylan dalaga diwata

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 Women are the healers mothers sisters and daughters
 Lorde Angelou Hong Kingston Assata
 Words to nourish nations like mecca and water
 Listen to the voices you can hear the wisdom burning
 Alighting minds and hearts to the revolution churning...
 Alighting minds and hearts to the revolution churning...

I often worry bout the state of our nation
 Every day policemen killing our black brothers
 And sisters dying behind metal bars
 Angels who fall to system's race wars
 Raising our fists we say Black Lives Matter
 Women lead the movement say Black Lives Matter

We fight with stories we stand in solidarity
 We use our voices and break down apathy
 It's time to rewrite the canon of life...
 So this world will wake up and realize that

The women warriors are walking in our midst
 The women warriors are walking in our midst
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 Alighting minds and hearts to the revolution churning...
 Babae babaylan dalaga diwata

The Woman Who Picked Me Up

By Antonia Clark

had slammed on the brakes
of her rusty Dodge, deciding
to pull over, after all

had streaked hair and muddy boots,
a lazy eye and, once in a while,
a wistful look

had a gallon of milk and a six-pack,
a torn map, and a hammer
on the seat between us

had to have been under 30, but
claimed she was no spring chicken
in dog years

had her radio tuned to country
and tried to sing along, but didn't
really know the words

had a way of asking questions, then
not waiting for the answers, in a breezy
inoffensive way

had two kids back at her mother's,
one that cried all the time, one
that never did

had just got out of someplace,
I don't know what or where,
but it changed her life

had seen the light, turned
a corner, put the past behind her,
and a 4-day drive ahead

had me thinking, when I got clean
I'd buy a pickup, drive hard and fast
to someplace I've never been.

Blue Goddesses

By Laura Chaignon

I was not born cross-legged
Or blue
Not like Shiva or Amma
But I will give you my love
I will put my lips on your wounds
Swallow the puss
Gorge on your pain

I am no saint
I do not preach
You do not need to kneel

Oh, I will kneel
And liberate you
From the suffering

I will hug the demons out of you
My love is a roaring river
Melting ice, unstoppable
Raging

It does not hum whisper purr
It flows and breaks open
It sings at the top of my lungs

My love is power
Because of my nature
Because it only flows the one way
The one pure way
From me, to you

My arms are wide open
They will multiply to hold
All my sisters abroad
With their hair wet with tears
Cheeks hot and weary
I will embrace your hearts
And my palms on your soul
I will proclaim my love

Boundless universal immortal
Meet me where the sun sets.

Dada Does Dominoes

By Glenda Reed

Washy is so drunk he's unable to hide his cheating. After slamming down a legal play, he attempts to slip a second domino near my end of the table. His fingers fumble the delicate procedure. I look to Raz, but he's studying his own hand too closely to notice. Not wanting to leave the errant domino squatting for long, I snatch it up, "No you don't," and hand it back to Washy.

"Ah, tryin' to cheat again?" Raz says as he and Kool Aid shake their heads.

Before coming to the islands I hadn't played much dominoes, and when I had, never took the game seriously. In the Caribbean players mean business. Money exchanges hands amongst players as well as spectators during betting games in South Caicos, though tonight we're playing for pride.

George, the captain of the sailboat I'm hitching a ride on, is three sailors deep in conversation on the bar's balcony, while at the domino table I only just begin to understand that strategy has something to do with counting. "How many of each number are there?" I ask.

"Seven," Raz says. "Now that one's catchin' on." And laughing, adds, "Watch out boys." I'm not sure how to use this information. Mindful of the five six-dotted dominoes currently resting on the table, I play the double six in my hand to make sure I can play it at all.

Kool Aid knocks on the table to pass. Raz looks at me and winks. These Caribbean men accept me more than my fellow American sailors on the balcony whose interest in me is inversely proportional to their age; the older the man, the less he cares what I have to say. Rather than fight to be heard in a conversation about rough passages and anchorages with bad holding, I lay down a domino without reproof, accepted at the table just for my willingness to play.

After shuffling and reshuffling his hand, Raz triumphantly slams down his play, popping dominoes into the air and scattering the long backbone of our board. Kool Aid and I straighten the table. While we all wait for sauced-up Washy to put two and four together, Raz leans back and says to me, "Y'know, all the people around here have two names, but nobody goes by their government name."

As an outsider, I'm not sure I should ask, but Raz offered. "What's your government name?"

"Terraz. That's Jaime," Raz nods to Washy, "and Clarence," he says in Kool Aid's direction.

Washy draws a tile from the boneyard. I scan the open ends of the board for a play. "What would my second name be?"

"I dunno." Raz consults the four dominoes standing on-edge before him. "I know. I have an aunt named Glenda we call Dada. That's you, Dada."

For the rest of the night it's, "Good one Dada," and, "Come on, Dada."

Tomorrow I'll help George sail across the shallow waters of the Caicos Bank but I won't tell him my name.

A version of this story was originally published in the February 2015 issue of *Word Riot*.

The Jugular

By Karla Morton

You laughed when I said I got out of the truck,
pocket knife in hand, looking for the horse I just hit.
“And what would you have done with *that*?”

I would have wanted to end his suffering; to cut his throat.
“As *if* you ever could.”

I hope I could have done it, if I needed to;
if he hadn't scampered off;
if he'd lain there, barely breathing in the ditch.

I hope I could wring a chicken's neck if my children were hungry;
or wedge a rifle in the soft round ear of a calf,
half-mauled by coyotes;

or stand by your grandmother's bed, like your grandfather did –
fighting the rest of the family's riot for feeding tubes,
because *she* didn't want them.

I'll admit, I've grown up soft.
My poultry comes plucked and quartered from the grocery,
or fried up in the drive-through;
hot water flows at my touch.

But I can tell you, I like the sound my boots make
when they scuffle.
I pack a knife in my garter, a compass in my purse;
my phone holds the lunar calendar and Morse-code apps;
there's a shovel under my back seat.

So, perhaps it's time to reconsider; reassess,
even though I stand 60 pounds less beneath your chin.

Step back. Take another look.
Size me up *again* and decide
if I could find my way to the jugular.

My South

By Wendy Carlisle

On the left, the Atchafalaya, so black, so burnt inside,
silent as a pot. Down here, my lips equal silt and common bliss.

Down here, I carry my grave folded in my pocket,
a cardboard hunger, a box and shards.

The woman beside me in this food line wears, a skintight skirt,
has a back-door man. Down south we have the right

to costumes and gossip, to numbers and pawn.
Down south, we observe the bendable rules that stand in for bone.

Below Arkansas, we have a chicory bias.
Low blues and *Jolie Blonde* are the national anthems.

Down here, I learned acoustics from Professor Longhair, religion
from the Mardi Gras Gods, persistence in February's saxophone wind.

Like Buckwheat and the Meters, I adjust my heartbeat to the pulse of the tune.
Despite the hunter, I am the snake half of the gator.

Despite the fact of jazz, I'm as romantic as a bad house band.
I still think of salvation every time.

Night Train. Sugarcane. Soufflé. Etouffé.

The key to muddy silence is under my tongue.
Where your world gapes open, darlin,' mine shivers in.

Note: Atchafalaya, pronounced Chaffalya is the largest wetland/Swamp in the US. As you drive down on the big road to Lafayette from Arkansas, it will be on your left. The Meters & Buckwheat are Zydeco musicians; Night Train an impossibly bad red wine.

Grip

By Lauren Camp

Sure, I was afraid of the perfunctory *fucks*
of the person standing in grief
with a hand on the subway pole of the 3 train.

In my soft life, I don't hear
such a dispatch
of crisp pitted slurs. The least thing I have

is disaster. After that, exposure.
Thugs trump love at these angles and cornices
where everyone knows the arc of exhaustion.

The train was confronted
with her spectacular angers, the cuff
of strange humor, her strutting language.

On Lenox toward 124th,
I emerged above ground, passing lamplight
and brick. I saw pigeons climb into holes.

Bags of garbage lay restless at curbs.
We do not choose what comes around to meet us.
Food smell and sewage in the half dark,

the wet heart of shoving and love in a place
filled with lashes and gates.
There is nothing more silencing

than the roar of each room
of this city. Every noise long, sharp,
doubled over, and I'm quiet but walking.

Indra's Net

By Ji Hyang Padma

In Zen, one image we use to describe our interdependence with each other is Indra's Net. Imagine a net: its horizontal threads representing time, the vertical threads representing space. Where each of these threads meet, there is a crystal which is reflecting, not only every other crystal, but every reflection of every other crystal. In this way, we are intricately connected to each other: we are composed of reflections of each other.

This was vividly brought home to me on one ordinary day. On that particular day, I had a clear sense of making connections—the kind driven by a tight schedule. Leaving the house to catch the 7 am bus from Kendall Square, Cambridge to Wellesley College. Arriving at 8 am at Wellesley, preparing program materials and making the delivery, catching the 9 am bus— and arriving in Kendall Square at 10 am, right on schedule. Now I was right where I needed to be, to catch the subway downtown, for a stress reduction class I'll teach at lunchtime, in the Financial District.

This is where the universe provides a new lesson.

Stepping out of the subway train, I momentarily look down, adjusting the two bags I am carrying, and the box of Xeroxes. Rebalancing. In that moment, I hear something, a brief chorus of sound. As I look up, I see someone has fallen backward on the escalator. The man is, in fact, still falling, head first: his head bumps each steel step— with each lurch downward, my stomach jumps. This moment seems expanded, as if time has stopped. His falling down the “up” escalator seems to defy laws of gravity. At that moment, for a moment, I pause. There is a man up the escalator, near his pants, who is stopping his fall by grabbing his leg. To my side, there are a bevy of passers-by who have decided it is a good day to take the elevator. In that moment, the illusion of a neatly constructed agenda hovers— and disappears. This is the connection I need to make.

Even as I run up the escalator, a second man is struggling to pull him to his feet— or at least away from the teeth of the stairs. I lean, and push from behind; as the man's form caves backward, I see a place to give a focused push, the kind learned in volleyball. The second man catches his body, anchors it forward— and the man finds his feet. We arrive at the top of the escalator.

I checked in with him “Are you okay?”

Yes, he was.

A woman said, “You hit your head.”

That's okay, I don't keep much in it.

He was, no doubt, ready for a chiropractic appointment the next day, but no other injury occurred. This wake- up call had helped me step out of my own way, see the connection, and respond. At the end I felt more alive, and more authentic, more myself. So, did I help him, or did I help myself?

Is there a difference?

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No Milk Over Tea

Detroit, Michigan

By Zehra Imam

They tell me that if you drink milk your skin turns white.
They tell me that if you drink tea your skin turns black.

I do not know how to convince them that the
pigmentation of my skin has no bearing on the beauty of my soul,
the toughness of my character, or my unabashed laugh.
I have the soul of a warrior
the toughness of a tiger
and merriment inside like a warm home
that is lit up on the outside during holidays

I do not know how to tell them that they are beautiful
but that this distracts.

Freshman

By Sue Churchill

She stood through the whole club meeting—
the officers all announcing themselves--never
spoke, as if not entitled to a word or a chair.

She was small and slim—fawn-like
still, where the seniors, now
they were does, and they knew it.

She'd had her hair streaked grey, an odd
shade for a fawn, the color of ash,
or a boat hull-up in the sun.

She looked out and away, thinking
of where she'd rather be, but where
was there a thicket safe enough,

tight with thorns, blurred in fog,
a spot hollowed with the high
wild frequency we hear as silence?

Agoraphobia*By Susan Austin*

Don't paint summer the color of blue flax
then the color of goldeneye, paint
two broad black strokes a river
dammed at the end of the porch,
a rhomboid tilted by the tenacious lure
of dandelions, and if there must be
a figure, paint the figure
a triangle woman with childish arms, her hair
a chaos of wildflowers, the whole of summer
falling through her hands.

Woman Finds Her Face

By Lois Marie Harrod

when she unfolds the tablecloth
and then the stains of her bones, scapula,
radius, pelvis, and she realizes
she has been thinking about sorrow again.
How she doubles it around herself,
belly and back. What she can't change,
punctures circling forehead and scalp.
It's cold outside, ice sheets the gouge
down by the river, 30-degree drop
into hardness, her swollen face,
the telltale wounds of a Roman scourge,
the heart swells and loses elasticity.
Whom can she forgive? The boy who left
her daughter for Aspasia? The pedophile
who was her brother-in-law?
Or is it the old woman who demands
another invitation to dinner?
Everyone's hanging around the skull
like a Renaissance painting. No reciprocity.
Tit for tat. If she has the shroud,
what need crucifixion? Today you will dine with me
in paradise. Suppose someone
tested the image and said it goes back
to the beginning. No lie.
If ice didn't swell as it melted,
no one would be here. True too.
Her daughter said there are some things
we can't forgive--and others, what say the priests?
Something dirties the linen?

Persephone

By Elizabeth Moller

“I thought how unpleasant it is to be locked out; and I thought how it is worse, perhaps, to be locked in.”

- Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*

We are on the road to recovery.

No more shock therapy, no more round-the-clock supervision, no more being surrounded by other crazies who got pulled naked and homeless off the streets and wrested into hospital gowns that don't close. And, yet: we aren't expected to be *normal* either, which is a great relief. There are those among us who wish we could stay in this state forever, half-sane.

On the outside, they said, “Let your freak flag fly!”

This is what they taught us in kindergarten; but we learned fast that they didn't mean it.

What they meant was, *Let your freak flag fly, but not too much. Just enough so that you are interesting but politically correct. OR Be yourself as long as you don't make us uncomfortable. OR Let your freak flag fly, but only if you are talented enough, and it will make you famous.*

Be polite to your teachers and fit in at school. Avoid provocative comments. Don't stand out unless your laugh is candy-coated. Say thank-you but graciously deny the potential truth in any compliments you receive. Don't be so sensitive. Don't take things so personally. Get over it. Write your thank-you notes. Don't steal other people's boyfriends.

Don't pull your skirt up above your waist, even, *especially*, if it is lined with silk, and the rub-rub play feels good. Don't show people your undies. Don't touch yourself.

But we do.

“Beauty, the world seemed to say...To watch a leaf quivering in the rush of air was an exquisite joy. Up in the sky swallows swooping, swerving, flinging themselves in and out, round and round, yet always with perfect control as if elastics held them; and the flies rising and falling; and the sun spotting now this leaf, now that, in mockery, dazzling it with soft gold in pure good temper.

- Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*

Persephone – our Persy – is the first to leave. She is just twenty, and “well enough” to go back to school.

She is not the only one to make it outward onward upward against the rush of the odds. Some of us finish college and find jobs.

We mix with the Normals, and we are convincing in our disguises, sipping martinis and joking about our bosses and sex. On spring days we feel peace.

Other times we must work hard to avoid the dark mole world below, swallowing tequila shots until our nerves have been transfigured into flying dots of light, until we have convinced ourselves that our youth makes us beautiful, and we are titillating and titillated, and we dance dance dance before having Erica Jong sex into the morning.

“As long as she thinks of a man, nobody objects to a woman thinking.”
- Virginia Woolf, *Orlando*

Persy is the first to get married.

We attend, and cry, while she and her boy-man covenant love and ownership of one another's sexual organs. We remind ourselves of our good fortune, our light skins and our twenty-first century western freedoms. Isn't that, after all, how we made it this far?

Old Lady McGee's grandmother got electroshock therapy back in the 50s, and it broke her back. She died a year later. Life is good, we tell each other.

The wedding is at the botanical gardens. When it rains, we are moved inside.

On the dance floor Persy glides away from us, follows her new husband into a square of Normals who are white hip thrusting to the Macarena.

Water drips down the greenhouse panes.

“But I'll always have my poetry,” Persy whispers to nobody, unpublished, a writing workshop of one.

Bipolar Girls on a Manic High Are My Addiction

By Stephanie Heit

look for the bipolar girls sexy if you can get them
manic god-like confidence and unlimited energy till
they hum rubbing on streetpoles pure libido oozing
out crotches a slippery invitation those bipolar chicks
will surprise you stripping off clothes without an
invitation not even caring what your name is just that
you are fuck ready bipolar chick like an animal randy
in heat hit that if you can if you are brave enough to
mess with crazy

This Poem Will Refuse to Confess

By Emily Regier

That I have been drinking far too much wine
for years probably. What are
the guidelines? Never mind.
They keep changing and I
keep staying the same.

So I have been thinking,
if this lawyer thing doesn't work out
I am going to buy a vineyard, with rows
and rows of sensational
vines—

Ripe black fruit, intensely structured,
strong on the nose.
That full mouthfeel!
The unmistakable terror in all of it—
I mean *terroir*.

But in truth there is fear
with spires like a cathedral.
And by the time you're able to live in it,
you're too drunk
to notice.

Lines*By Yania Padilla Sierra*

I cannot see
 See beyond the fluffy lines of euphoric dismay
 See past the smoky whiskey
 Warm in its dismissal
 of everything.
 I lick my fingers savoring the bitterness.
 My work.
 My work is done.

My veins, tired from pumping diesel,
 From accepting poison, tremble
 Blue with age.
 My heart an old horse drawn cart
 Huffing slowly over
 A pock marked road.

Another line, another vision- Mother in a black dress,
 The dirt of consecrated land whirling
 About her. An open earth wound, oh flesh of my flesh.
 The only eye is the mind's eye.

I will gouge it out with these lines.

Crimson droplets form on the table as I inhale the now
 Pink douser of flame. Waste not, want not.
 I drink from bottled Styx-forget me, sot.
 The promise of yesterday now
 A wizened crone of yore, maiden nevermore.

Shut, eye, damn you! Shut!
 No more of anthems and pledges of secrets and death.
 One more,
 One more.
 Should help me
 Forget.

Ace of Pentacles

By Roxanna Bennett

What is before you: Party dresses twisting on thin wire hangers. Japanese river stones painted with runes. Pill bottle shaking with baby teeth and a polished brown squirrel skull my brother found in a potter's field. Lapis lazuli pendant. Curl of grey hair folded in a comic strip. What is behind you: 999 Carlaw Street. \$825/month. One and a half bedrooms and a bathroom in the hall. Second floor veranda, wood warped with wet weight. Where lost I laid a planetary spread. Balconies thick with tomato vines, laundry lines, dishwasher sunlight. Wan ruin of June. Garden of cracked clay pots, holes punched in the bottom for rain to run out. Purple carrots, sugar snap peas, tiny cherry tomatoes. Soil trundled home in a child's red wagon. Maybe birdsong but smoke detectors, sirens, car alarms. How to make him believe leaving was his own idea. How to defend. After. Wrapping the cards in a torn pillowcase, throwing potential in the trash. And how the garden died wholesale after being transplanted to the suburbs.

What comes next: What is before you: Fear of travelling. I must leave this place. The hospital without memory. Woe from whom we woke. No one open all morning. Do not think of the future's great formula of art. Where caged, a bride is a burden to god. Fear of speaking to strange men. For miles blue lights, empty air. Blue lights, empty windows, how many miles of answers. Who will protect me from voices. To die is to leave the ugliness of summer. Sometimes I dream a warm room filled with words, intention. I sit on the bed in ragged silk. Dark hours rise, one love bird sings at sunset. Cover me with leaves. Blue lights. Empty. Stars. A body and the quiet trees hurt. To assume love where none exists is a weighty object. Alone in a hospital bed. But you return with your lover and I have grieved ever since. Pressed flowers bound together.

What is behind you: Fear seeps under the door like gasoline fumes from that long hot summer up five flights of stairs, straps from the backpack full of food bank cans cutting my shoulders, skin slick with sweat. Weeping in the bathtub, sluicing cold water over my swollen belly. Fear for a child to be out and better than this empty apartment, sleeping bag on the floor and a five inch black and white TV from the alley outside the liquor store. Collect call once a week from a piss stinking phone booth. Silence where congratulations should have been. It is the last day. I have nowhere to go. No one to see. No one comes here. No one comes back.

What comes next:

Stealin' from the Dead

By K. Bruce Florence

Mommy moved in with us about a week ago.
Seems the coal company boys is about tired
Of the widow women filling up all the houses
Along the dusty row moving on up the holler.

I had to take her to the doctor today, but
When we got back that thievin' Bobby Ray had
Filled his truck with Orville's tackle box and fly rods.
Orville thought the world of his precious gear.

They was about all he had left of his daddy's things.
And he never lived long enough to stop missing
His daddy and all the fun they had together.
Them rods and flies always made him smile.

So good old Bobby Ray thinks he can just
Walk in here with my back turned and help
Himself to the best memory Orville ever had.
Killing is a mortal sin, but I swear if I coulda
Got my hand to a gun right then, it would
Have taken more man than that sniveling
Bobby Ray to keep me from killing him.

The Bobby Ray's of this world are very bad
Fooled if they think being a widow has made
Me a simpleton just waitin' to be walked on.
Orville might have been the man in this house,
But he kept it a big secret that right behind him
Was about the meanest woman he ever knowed.

The world wants to make me out to be a strange
New person who can't make butter with sweet milk.
But deep inside me is the same woman who
Slept with her man, loved him, bore his kids,
Tended crops and kept all of us decent.

If you see or hear tell of that sneaking rat, it
Might be good if you warned him to get off
This mountain and stay for good. Being dead
Lasts a good long time and his tombstone would
Be a fine example for anyone else's trifling ways.

Stones

By Michel Wing

Virginia walks into the river with stones
in her pockets. Smooth stones, river stones,
small enough for hands.

I drive to the ocean with nothing
in my pockets. No name, no wallet,
no place to put my hands.

She knows the river,
she knows why she is there.

I am somewhere near the Pacific,
a cliff, a highway. Why am I here?

Fatigue, that's all it is. Enough.
She writes, *I can't fight any longer*,
then steps out the door.

At the payphone alongside
the highway, I dial 0, ask
for the crisis line.

She is walking through the water now, ankle
deep, then higher. The river swirls
around the hemline of her coat.

Hello? May I help you?
I crouch under the phone, ocean salt on
my cheeks. *I want to die.*

The eddies grow stronger, colder,
as she forges forward, hands still
wrapped around the stones.

Have you thought of going on a walk?
Or maybe a nice bubble bath?
I drop the phone, let it dangle.

Untitled [*the dark knows this*]

By Jennifer Patterson

The dark knows this (1), the lap-fuls of minutes 'til eyes shut, the way the throat feels blocked and gutted at the same time. Deep in the belly of a well.

There is an absence fingers know, a leaving.
Fingers try to grip.

Where it's wooded,
where it's windowless,
where the quilt has weight,
where a body lies,
where a body leaves.

Where a lake is still
until
water is broken (punctured) by an oar.

Where knowing means not.
Where letting go means standing still.

A deep well,
A dark hole.

Skin that doesn't know fingers anymore.

I can't find you.
I don't want to.

(1) Linda Hogan, *Dark & Sweet*

Her American Life*By Sokunthary Svay*

She prays to her altar, says God
but means something else.

The incense hangs in the room
like her ancestral spirits.

Cambodian karaoke blares through the steel door.
In the hallway, neighbors mistake it for Chinese.

Down the elevator, Spanish speakers
pretend she can't understand "Filipina."

Jehovah's Witnesses ring on weekends.
She holds her breath until their voices fade.

Fearless German roaches dot the kitchen,
the walls coated yellow from past deep-fried dinners

A frozen bird defrosts under a trickle of water.
Home from work, a plate of dismembered meat.

Sequined and puffy sleeves old as her adult daughter
are tucked away in the closet.

Boys play basketball late.
The windows only keep out the bugs.

She kisses her husband goodnight to separate beds
in the lonesome room where their sons once slept.

The Siege of Ennis

By Eileen O'Leary

Bernard and his daughter, Cathy, are visiting his childhood home. He has decided he wants the place. His sister, Agnes, lives here. His sister, Marian, has traveled here and wants it for herself. This excerpt is Bernard and Agnes in ACT II.

BERNARD

You're going to throw it all away. The last bit of it. The last crumb. Could you not be satisfied to leave me a goddamn crumb? I started my life in this house. Nowhere I can go will change that. Nothing I do will give me different blood.

I'm not letting some bitter, angry woman throw the last of it away.

What do you think, Agnes? Maybe all the years...down through the centuries it was one man come home refusing to let the thing die? Refusing bitterness? That man comes home. And keeps it alive.

AGNES

You want it.

(BEAT)

BERNARD

Cathy wants it.

AGNES

Cathy.

BERNARD

I want it.

AGNES

You do.

BERNARD

I want it.

AGNES

Ah.

BERNARD

It would play your hand against Marian.

AGNES

Oh, there's nothing like politics when it hits blood!

BERNARD

You won't stop me. I'll have the papers drawn up.

AGNES

Has it crossed your mind that it's mine by possession? That's legal.

BERNARD

Until you're pushed down the stairs, dammit.

AGNES

And don't think I won't come back for a thousand years in a cloud of light in the upstairs hallway and you'll wake up screaming for what I'm still about. Papers. Documents. Deed of assignment. It's mine!

BERNARD

No.

AGNES

I'll tell you what will be done here and what won't.

BERNARD

You don't love it. You don't love your family, either...your own brother. I could help us all live together.

AGNES

You'll take over is what you'll do.

BERNARD

If you'd just....

AGNES

Listen! (LONG PAUSE) Listen. (LONG PAUSE) Silence. That's what's here. That's what joined me...kept me company. The shutters...the cows...the rain...sometimes I'd hear them.

But what was here...really lived here after everyone had gone...was silence. (PAUSE)

Some places...the back end of the universe dips down...and lives there. That's what the universe is made of...silence. Listen. (LONG PAUSE) Nothing.

If you can live with that....you can live with God. You can stand the prison of your own skin. You want me to let you hammer some nails into the shingles on the roof? It seems to me that would bother the silence. And the silence has been here forty years...while you had your life...in a noisy world. No idea what's out there past the heavens. That silence moved in here...and it's my companion. I say...let the place rot. That's the planet we've found ourselves on. I am rotting down...so are you...and I am happy moving toward the earth. Because if I wasn't...if I used this place for profits...pushing for noise and the hammering of nails...the silence would fight back. And win.

Mrs. Ramsey

By Rebecca Ruth Gould

Meaning suddenly suffused
the subway on her way
to pick flowers freshly cut
for her son's graduation.

She became symbolical,
a representation
lingering in London's dusk
while the onlookers

concluded their business,
closed their shops,
said goodbye to colleagues,
headed home.

The concentration of
wife mother woman left untouched
her mysterious hankering
for solitude.

She Shall Soon Find a Way

By Julie Babcock

Gingerbread after an exile. After the funeral pyre has smoked down and the last bread crumbs stolen. How sweet now to have found this forest

house, ground cinnamon and ginger, spiced bark and root, a revival. Of course she eats it. Life belongs to whoever can find it, to whoever

keeps walking and trying. Children know this. That eating one door leads to another. That when captured. . .

She grabs a handful of gingerbread cake, lines her pockets with crispy cookies, licks icing along a window. She is what she does. She is

a molasses-dark shape in the trees.

Wanting for Grace

By Donna J. Gelagotis Lee

The mist over the olive grove lifts through
 the cypress trees and I can taste the olive's
 pungency, the heat rising off sunburnt twigs.

I yearn to drink. Fully awake, the sun spun out,
 I step vigorously along the coastal road,
 where the sea spits and the sunlight shimmers

on my arms in full swing. As I buy today's sundries,
 I become brethren to the landscape, not to
 the tourists' stores or the cyclist's fumes

but to the Aegean's fierce breath, hundreds of cobblestones
 underfoot, the sun beating on 114 steps to heaven,
 on the Greek woman's flourishing

geraniums. I have planted myself where no one
 will come for me. I might as well
 wash my stoop, forage for herbs,

hoe the garden. I am drenched with the island's
 giving. Do not look for me. I am stumbling
 up church steps, wanting for grace.

All eyes, once turned to me, look elsewhere,
 the new tourist coming, the villager intent
 to sell. Where are the saints painted

in the ancient Orthodox church? Why does
 the village priest ignore me? Why does the breeze,
 instead, take my arm, while the sea, if I let

it, would carry me to some distant destination?
 All this, I contemplate. All this, I know
 each morning when I rise alone and

the house rattles with the sun's heat,
 the mountain's easy exhale, this life
 far from complete.

Final Crescent

By Jane Schulman

Think of me on bruise-blue nights when
the moon wanes to a wisp
and you scan the eastern sky, wondering.
And think of me as a crocus,
cracking through matted leaves.

For I was born on ebbing days
of Adar, when winds blew out-of-tune
and the moon was a final crescent.
My soul makes its way through the world
with hesitant footfalls.

Two of my sons were born in the month
of Nissan, prankish as lion cubs,
with hearts of honeycomb and voile.
I know my soul more
by what it is not.

Note:

Adar is the 12th Hebrew month that comes at winter's end.

Nissan is the 1st Hebrew month that comes as spring begins.

Rapunzel Brings Her Women's Studies Class to the Tower

By Susan J. Erickson

The setup looked so innocent. Like a rustic
LEGO estate. Before you ask, the ivy escape route
now clambering up the walls was tended
by an apprentice of Edward Scissorhands.
The Government was reclaiming this tract
for a planned wilderness. It was so quiet

I could hear my hair grow. Occasionally
a crazed scientist would wander by, eyes
to the ground, mapping endangered four-leaf clover.

I was endangered too, but had signed on to relinquish
the rib of victimhood. I thought life could be arranged
so only my favorite pineapple LifeSavers came up
in the assorted roll. One sleeve at a time, I slipped
out of my coat sewn from sackcloth and shadows

to wear the skin of solitude.

Each day I recited that line from Rilke:

Let this darkness be a bell tower and you the bell.

When I came down from the tower, the media wanted
a country western song. Everyone would hum,
wipe away a tear, then sing aloud the verse
where Wrong crashes its vintage pickup. Instead,
I uncoiled my crown of braids, cut the ties and loosened
the strands that held my story captive. Every day

new towers of darkness rise. Do I need to say
your voices are searchlights that can sweep the horizon
to reveal fault lines and illuminate passage?

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