

THE

MOBILELIBRARY

Volume 3

Issue 4



Volume 3 Issue 4

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MISSION

The Mobile Library Magazine provides a multi-digital exhibiting experience for artists and writers to showcase their work during the pandemic closures. Each publication is unique, pairing 6 artists and 6 writers together at different stages in their career to build a collaborative experience.

This year, Volume 3 explored the four stages of life. Issue 4 sought work that explored memories, moments, and experiences of seniority. The works in this issue span from visual and digital art, poems, and fiction told through intergenerational artists and writers from around the world.

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CALLING ANCESTORS

Poems by Diana Raab, PhD
Artwork by Aslan Selçuk ARIK

hello all of you out there
we need you to guide us
show us the way.

I hear you're more alive now
sweeping up wisdoms
whispered in ears by angels
as we wait for day light
to pull us out of this darkness.

War where everyone hates
and lifelines are pulled
in more than four directions

we sit patiently awaiting your reply
wondering if time will heal
all that we lost
or bring with it rainbows
of confusion
this many days before
the beginning of a new year.

Amen.



Rise of The Phoenix, 2023
Transmission steel, metal plates, mig welding; 50 x 30 x 25 cm



Akhenaten's Childhood, 2022

Transmission steel, metal plates, mig welding; 105 x 57 x 30 cm

OUR HISTORY

As I sit on my lonely terrace
during this closing chapter of my life,
I ponder all our shared memories
which began on a balcony now destroyed:
the one that held flames of everlasting love.

My mind slithers back
through the soil of my memory
to those sensations of new love
and wonder about the magic
to re-ignite their ambers
without setting aflame to the rest.

I shiver through my optimism
which hangs on the distal hooks of my mind
twisted beneath some rock
which I hesitate to lift
in fear of those worms

which hide for cover
like I do on my own balcony
when the dark
is brighter than the light
and I want to be saved
from all that lies ahead.

THE JEWELS OF MY CREATION

As I make a cup with my hands
I caress the small basket of people
who matter in my sextagenarian years
and all the memories
distill down to what I have created
in the womb of my heart
from the textures and medleys of the love
which caresses me and my soul mate
squeezing out the juices into
a new creation which we cannot
stop loving for the rest of our lives.

WHAT DEATH TEACHES US

Tonight I think of how death
teaches us how to live—
woven with images
of distant names and accomplishments
on illegible tombstones—
a hint to enjoy life's simple pleasures.

Perhaps this is a reminder
left behind by the dead,
like Socrates who professed that death
has no place in our lives.

By my bed sits a Buddhist book,
earmarked pages saying there is no end,
and praising the power of living.

It describes the power
of living in the present moment:
gears fixed in slow motion,

like time spent setting a dinner table,
watering flowers, walking in gardens
or engaged in quiet meditations.

I ache with melancholy
as my favorite aunt is put to rest
and leaves no legacy.

Life continues to remind me
to stop and feel its joy
over and over again,
with no regrets
but just...permission to live.



Zaqar, The Dream God, 2023
Transmission steel, metal wire, mig welding; 40 x 25 x 25 cm

WISDOM 65

1. Remember that you are how you live
2. Do what you love, love what you do
3. Give unconditional love
4. Love others in order to be loved
5. Cherish each day
6. Maintain a positive spirit
7. Give love from your heart
8. Follow your bliss
9. Practice gratitude
10. Make kindness your spiritual practice

11. Focus on positive thoughts
12. Remember that today may be your last
13. See the light through the darkness
14. Smile at strangers
15. Go for a walk instead of watching TV
16. Take work breaks
17. Go to the gym
18. Make love not war
19. Nurture friends who make you feel good
20. Crush your inner self-critic

21. Be creative every day
22. Adopt a pet
23. Create an altar in your home
24. Be a seeker
25. Journal on a daily basis
26. Write letters to friends who are far away
27. Tell loved ones how you feel about them
28. Make regular wish lists
29. Nurture a passion
30. Engage in hobbies
31. Laugh like a child

32. Eat a clean diet
33. Indulge in an ounce of chocolate each day
34. Always use a strong reading light
35. Refrain from eating sugar
36. Smell the roses
37. Push the envelope
38. Travel to new places
39. Be lustful
40. Always dress nicely
41. Drink only after you eat

42. Take photos of special moments
43. Drink a glass of lemon water each morning
44. See a holistic physician
45. Always get three surgical opinions
46. Wash your hands before you eat
47. Travel with safety pins and a needle and thread
48. Practice loving kindness
49. Meditate daily
50. Be kind to your neighbors
51. Release toxic people from your life

52. Send thank-you cards
53. Say please and thank you
54. Pour sake for others and then yourself
55. Put the toilet seat down
56. Drink 8 to 12 glasses of water daily
57. Give to your favorite charity
58. Practice the Golden Rule
59. Spend time with your beloveds
60. Read everything you can
61. Visit your dentist regularly

62. Celebrate the good times
63. Do one scary thing each day
64. Honor yourself
65. Thank your parents for your life



Minoan Serpent Queen, 2023
Transmission steel, metal plates, mig welding; 38 x 24 x 22 cm

IRIS

Fiction by Irene Cooper
Artwork by Rodion Voskresenskii

A week had passed since the elephant tore through downtown Lansing, since the police shot and killed her with eight bullets. Martin and Iris sat on her parents' porch, looking at the photographs Martin developed in the darkroom he'd built in his basement. The camera—a sweet Leica M—he'd had to give back, after the incident. The deal was, he bought the film at a discount and used a loaner from the department store to take portraits of kids at the shopping center circus. He kept half the money, but now there'd be no money, as there was no more circus.

"You should send these to *Life*. I bet they don't have any pictures as good as these. I mean, it's terrible, what happened. But just look!" Iris ran a finger under the photographed eye, bulged in terror. In another photo, Rajje—the twelve-year-old Asian elephant, a creature out of time amid the neat, concrete grid of the city—had her head under the driver side door of a cherry red '63 Chevy Impala, tilting the car toward the sky as if to flip an old mattress. Still other snapshots captured young men and boys clustered in packs after the pachyderm, waving and baring their teeth. When it was over and the animal lay dead in the street, Martin returned to Arlan's to take a few pictures of the decimated men's and sporting goods departments. Iris considered the glittering pools of smashed glass, the tie racks and display carousels felled like brush under a machete.

"No, I won't send them anywhere. I thought maybe you'd want them."

"Seems a waste. I don't know that I'll look at them very often—so sad. And ugly."

"Iris?"

"Hm?" She was studying the photo of a group of people shouting in the direction of the policemen, who held their rifles at their shoulders, in readiness.

"I'm leaving."

"But you just got here! What about the matinee? I've waited all week to see *Charade*."

"No—I'm leaving Lansing. I don't have as much money saved as I wanted, but between the portraits and the gas station, I've got enough to set out."

Iris made a neat pile of the photographs and lay them atop their large envelop. She didn't look up. "I don't understand. I have a whole year of high school

left. Martin, I thought you were going to wait until I graduated."

"Iris, you're headed to college. I don't know when or even if I'll manage that, unless I enlist. I've got to find my own way, away from here. If I wait, I'll be working on an assembly line the rest of my life."

Iris had known Martin seventeen years—all her life. He'd been preparing her for this moment, she knew, but would not admit. They'd been like siblings in childhood and a constant to one another through the comings and goings of school pals and teammates. At twelve and thirteen they'd planned their world tour—see the pyramids, explore the Amazon—live as adventurers. At fourteen and fifteen they decided they'd mispend their lives as expats in Paris. At sixteen and seventeen, at the beginning of the summer that would end days before the killing of Rajje, they'd kissed. It was a disappointment for both of them.

Martin had sat back and smiled. "Well, at least now we know."

"What do we know?" Iris stared at her lap, annoyed.

He laughed, took her hand, raised it to his lips and said, "That our passion for one another is other than carnal, my lady."

"I might hate you right now."

"You don't. You love me."

He loved her, too, Iris knew, but he could leave her.

* * * *

She wore a sleeveless dress of ivory raw silk with an intricately beaded bodice that shimmered like water in sunlight under the chandelier candles as she descended the staircase. It had been her coming out dress for the debutante ball the previous spring, cut to cocktail length and refashioned for this winter formal. Iris had resented the bridal weight of it, the skirt a cumbersome fortress for her presumed virginity, ripe for the unveiling. It had been a pleasure to take a pair of scissors to it.

In the foyer stood a man who made all the other attendants of the party look like children dressed for church.

"Ma'am, you don't mind my saying, you put that angel 'top of that Christmas tree to shame. Do me the honor of a dance?"

"You must be Nancy's cousin, visiting us from the wild, wild west...South Dakota, is it? She didn't mention how charming you were, Mr...."

"It's Gunner. Gunner Gerard. I don't know I'm all that charming. Fancy myself honest. Though I reckon most men do."

"Iris Vogel." She extended her hand. He took it firmly in both of his, shook it once, gently, and held it. "I don't really enjoy dancing, Mr. Gerard."

"We could talk, then. Or you could, and I can listen."

A nearly full moon poured its cold light into the sunroom at the back of the house, behind the kitchen. Iris lay across the lining of the shearling coat Gunner had lain over the splintered white wicker chaise. His hands were warm and large and rough at the fingertips and around the palms. She felt profoundly held, suspended, as though the only thing between her body and a bottomless plummet were these two hands. The pain was sharp before her body opened and the pain fell away, like a thin pane of glass, leaving nothing between sensation and self.

He wrote her surprisingly long letters from South Dakota, and she heard his voice in them, though he'd spoken so little that night. He told her about his father's ranch, how he made the decision to build oilwells rather than herd cattle. He told her what it was like to stand under an endless sky, to hear but seldom see the rustle and screech of the other creatures that staked their livelihood on the prairie.

She wrote him in February to tell him she was pregnant. They married in Lansing in April, with a service at Trinity Lutheran and a banquet reception for 200, including family, friends, and Iris' father's colleagues from the university. The notice in the State Journal announced that the newlyweds would make a honeymoon tour of European capitals before settling on the groom's family ranch in Sioux Falls. In reality, the couple drove slowly across the Midwest in a 1955 black Cadillac Coupe Deville, Gunner's father's one material concession to prosperity, which he'd bought to drive the family to town on Sundays. They stopped for a few days to stroll with their heads tucked into the wind on the lakeshore in Chicago. From there, they motored across the grasslands to South Dakota. From within the thick barricade of the heavy vehicle, Iris could yet hear the uninhibited wind, smell the lifted earth in its gust. In northeast Iowa they drove toward a storm they could see from miles off, smelled the scarred air before the bolt flashed and cut the horizon.

She assumed she'd experienced weather in Michigan—biting winters, hot, sopping summers, heraldic bloom of spring, fiery elegy of fall. Extreme, sometimes, but, she realized now, utterly reliable in their cycles. Recountable. Despite the plotted acres, despite the domestic freckle of a red barn or a field of fat, lowing heifers, this land they drove into now was embodied will, un beholden to pattern, holding and also refuting all memory of itself.

The baby kicked. She drew Gunner's hand from the wheel and placed it on her belly. She could live like this, full in the moment, in motion, porous, flesh contained and containing.

Lansing Gerard was born and they three lived happily for three good years. Gunner was gone for stretches, at work in the field. Iris and the baby were delighted with one another in his absence, and content to have him back when he returned. Each day was full with the certainty that the future was only a concrete extension of their happy present, like the solid riser that meets your foot and



Colonel's Daughter, 2021
Oil on canvas; 67 x 84 cm

bears your weight as you drop to the next step down the staircase.

The first miscarriage was sad, but not catastrophic. The fifth, as Iris's body expelled it, took something fundamental to her with it, ripped the ligature that had, before, invisibly connected flesh to purpose.

There were no days or weeks between bleeding and not bleeding. She told a doctor that sex had become unbearably painful. He told her that her female parts suffered from disuse, likely due to her husband's work schedule and prolonged periods away from home. She was twenty-nine years old in 1974 when another doctor diagnosed fibroids and recommended a hysterectomy. It was highly unlikely she'd be able to conceive and carry another baby to term. They'd leave the ovaries to prevent early menopause. Her husband would find her as youthful and vivacious as ever.

When the hot flashes began, her doctor suggested hormone replacement therapy. In other areas of the country, women were questioning the universal safety of HRT, but in Sioux Falls, Iris' circle of women friends carried copies of *Forever Feminine* and quoted passages to one another like scripture. Not the part wherein the good doctor/author declares all post-menopausal women "castrates," but—and *ad nauseum*—the promise that with copious estrogen supplementation, "...breasts and genital organs will not shrivel. She will be much more pleasant to live with and will not become dull and unattractive," will be less likely to lose her naturally virile husband's attentions to a riper, younger specimen.

Gunner had suffered to see his wife in pain. After the operation, sex had been possible again, and if the earth no longer moved, he didn't complain. "Don't take something you don't want to on my account. I ain't wanting anything I ain't got."

And so, she replaced nothing, and lived in and with the absences and recesses of her life and body, until, at thirty-seven, she became a widow. Gunner, forty-seven, collapsed in an oilfield on the other side of the state and died almost instantly, she was told, from a pulmonary embolism.

She entered a tunnel of some months, seeing no one except Lansing and Patricia, the woman who'd been cooking and keeping the house since before Iris lived in it. She emerged into the too-bright light to find her life much as she left it—her knitting still on the needles, a painting she'd half-finished on the easel, pots in the shed filled with soil, waiting for the seeds she'd ordered and never opened. She was flooded with sadness—her first recognizable emotion—when she realized that Lansing, almost eighteen, had put away his camera and pencils and was preparing to leave for college, with plans, after, to take up his father's business. She imagined she should be proud.

She lost the shape of things. She held nothing and nothing held her.

"You're not forty! And Gunner, bless him, left you plenty well off," said one

of the friends she'd been ignoring. "You could find someone nice."

One blind date was a banker who pressed upon her the need for someone she could trust to handle her investments. Another, the director for the School for the Deaf, a recent widower whose own wife had been deaf, said the thing he expected to miss most was watching her talk, but in fact it was her perfume.

A retired US Army colonel, after four or five glasses of bourbon, confessed he'd been instrumental in developing training techniques for special forces, had run experimental programs for *interrogation optimization* in a certain overseas detention center. Very top-secret stuff, manipulating memory. *Operation Olfactory Hallucination*, he slurred. *Didn't come to shit, though. The idea was, it was...Machia..Machia...it was fucking brilliant...we'd hobble our enemies with SUPER empathy, inject memories into their brain...the stench of a massacre from the nose of the massacred...didn't come to shit, though...*

Iris stood one afternoon in her sunny studio, staring at her terrible painting, wondering why she bothered. Patricia came in to tell her there was a Martin Beck on the phone. She laughed out loud for the first time she could remember, and picked up.

"Sorry about your cowboy, Iris."

"Oilman, Martin. Me, too."

"How about you come all the way west and visit me in San Francisco? I've got plenty of room, or we'll book you a suite at the St. Francis, some place appropriate to your wealth and status. You could meet my son, and my boyfriend."

"Goodness, Martin. A son!

"And a boyfriend."

"I heard. Are you happy?"

"I'd be happier if fewer of my friends were sick and dying. But yes. Come out. Give me a chance to be a tourist in my own town. We never did take that trip together."

Over a rainless early spring weekend, Iris and Martin toured the de Young in Golden Gate Park, stuck their noses into jars in the herbalist shops in Chinatown, barked at the sea lions at the Embarcadero, and watched the sun set from the Presidio. At the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, they viewed a 30-minute made-for-Canadian-TV film of Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party*, in honor of the fifth anniversary of its premier exhibition at MOMA. Thirty-nine place settings on a triangular table forty-eight feet long on each side, each setting composed of a goblet, silverware, and a sculpted, unequivocally vulvic plate atop a runner embroidered with the name of a renowned woman in history. Nine hundred and ninety-nine additional names were inscribed in the golden Heritage Floor beneath the table.

"It was a madhouse," said Martin.

"You were here?"

"Yep. The artist gave a talk, too, though my head was so full of butterflies-slash-vaginas, I don't remember anything she said. I heard later, she took a lot of shit for displaying Emily Dickinson's lady garden for all the world to see. I presume, it being porcelain and all, it was intended as metaphor."

On her last night, Martin's boyfriend, David, cooked dinner. They laid a blanket on the roof of their building and made a picnic of it.

"This all feels quite...idyllic," Iris said.

David laughed. "Is that your dry, Midwestern way of thanking me for dinner?"

"No! I mean—yes...It's just that this world, this life of yours seems so... intentional."

"Well," said Martin, "we've had to create what wasn't—isn't—available to us, if that's what you mean."

"I'm not sure what I mean. Sorry! I'll leave it at *thank you*."

Martin put his arm around her shoulders. "We can talk more about authenticity and artifice next visit, eh? Leave a thread hanging, something we can pick up later."

The next day, before they drove to the airport, Martin took Iris for a drink at Camera Obscura, a club off of 18th and Collingwood in which he had part-ownership.

"Art director, nightclub owner—you lead a glamorous life, Martin."

"The road's been less than glamorous, I can assure you. I'm on rotation to clean the bathrooms in this place, so...Listen, I'm sorry you didn't get to meet Tom. He's got a lot on his plate. Apologies to Judy Chicago."

"Please, neither Judy nor I need your apology. I'd like for you and Lansing to meet one day, too. He take photographs, or used to. Do *you*, still?"

"Occasionally, mostly to document stuff not typically covered by the straight press. Sometimes I film performances here at the club. Makes for kind of a living scrapbook. Next visit, you should see a show."

* * * *

Iris went home and put away her paints. She didn't know if artmaking wasn't her thing—but she couldn't leave it. She subscribed to art magazines and planned trips to Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles around exhibitions she thought looked interesting. She picked up on the lingo. Women in particular, she thought, were doing interesting things: the sparse dry point etchings and massive spiders of Louise Bourgeois, the economic activism of Erika Rothenberg and Barbara Kruger, the graphic clarity and dark humor of the Guerrilla Girls.



Dark Waters, 2023
Oil on canvas; 160 x 100 cm

In a New York gallery, Iris experienced the earth-body work of Cuban-born artist Ana Mendieta from *Body Tracks (Rastros Corporales)*, a short film in which the artist dips her hands and forearms into a mixture of tempera and animal blood, presses her hands and arms to a large piece of white paper fixed to the wall, slides to the floor, then stands up and leaves. Iris learned that the details of Mendieta's death at thirty-six were fuzzy: the neighbors heard her and her husband—sculptor Carl Andre—arguing, and then she was dead, having fallen, as Andre claimed, from a window thirty-three flights above the roof of the deli she landed on, or was pushed, as subsequent protesters maintained after Andre was acquitted of her murder. The gallery owner had one of the cards that protesters has distributed at a retrospective of the Andre's work at the Geffen Contemporary Museum: "Carl Andre is at MOCA Geffen. ¿Dónde está Ana Mendieta?"

Mendieta, Iris read in her subsequent research, had been plucked from her native Cuba at twelve to live out her adolescence in foster care and orphanages in Iowa. She found art, and ritual, and used blood and her own body to consider violence against women, before violence erased her. But the art—the art is indelible, Iris thought.

Cleaning out what had been her studio, Iris came upon the large yellowed

envelop of Martin's photos, and called him. "What are those people yelling at the police? You remember, in the elephant photographs?"

"How could I forget? They shouted, *Murderers! Murderers!*"

At the time, Iris had been glad she hadn't been there, but now wished she'd witnessed the fear and suffering of the elephant, the blood lust and protests of the people on the street, and the police as they shot the animal. She wondered at the surety of the protesters who cried murder, their undiluted sense of justice as they identified, immediately, a capital crime. It didn't stop the killing. But they named it.

Murderers! Murderers!

What would have been different if she'd been there, if she'd seen the elephant in its moment of suffering? Iris had pitied the terror in her photographed eye from her cozy porch in the late September sun, but the scene had been a done thing—over. If she had seen Rajje, would she have felt elephant's terror in her own body? What did she know of terror or truth in her own body, even now?

She felt herself waking up after a long, dreamless sleep. The numbness of the year following Gunner's death, and earlier, was giving way. She cancelled all her art subscriptions, except one. High Performance, a quarterly, told her everything she needed to know about who was doing what and where to see it, right as it was happening.

In October 1987, Iris stood and watched an artist set up near the door at Franklin Furnace in New York for the 100th birthday of Marcel Duchamp, a celebration dubbed "a performance art extravaganza."

The artist placed atomizers atop bedazzled lazy susans, which in turn sat upon an electric belt which ran the circumference of a round banquet table. A large fan stood behind it all. In front, a sandwich board read: *How Does the Avant-Garde Smell? A Corosella, for Drella, à la Serge.*

Iris approached. "Excuse me, what time do you perform? I don't see you on my program."

"Well, hello! I don't have a performance slot—I'm Serge. I'm here to provide continuous alternative atmosphere. Like so." They toggled a switch and the belt began to move. They squeezed the bulb of one of the passing atomizers, then another.

Iris recoiled slightly, expecting an affront, as at the cosmetic counter, before relaxing into the scent. She smelled coffee, and paper, and something animal but faint. It made her laugh. "Is that what the Avant-Garde smell like?"

"Mm, maybe the elderly among them...I'm warming up, darling! It's been a while...Oh! Haha...I guess I could turn on the fan!" They turned back to the carousel and moved quickly, then, playing the atomizers like keys on a large, complex instrument.

Iris lost the details, but inhaled something like energy itself. A thrilling sense of anything- can-happen almost lifted her off her feet. "Wow!"

Serge grinned. "That's more like it."

They met again later, at the bar. Iris bought Serge a drink.

"Overwhelming, isn't it?" Serge asked. "All this living *art* in one place. I was kind of shocked to get the call for this gig—the clubs are more my scene. But, with Mr. Warhol dying, it was a chance to pay a little tribute. We never met. I didn't think that was odd—that we didn't meet before he died—but now I do. I know he had a thing for scent. And that's my thing, darling."

* * * *

Back home, Iris couldn't shake her jet lag. In the doctor's office she saw a tiny ad in Prevention Magazine for Aromory Scent Adventures & Spa: Hormonal Balancing Aromatherapy & Consciousness Enhancement. She sent for a brochure, not knowing what either of those things might be. She'd been to a health spa once, after the hysterectomy; her friends thought a relaxing week at a spa would "restore" her. She recalled a lot of salads and vodka.

The last question on the questionnaire designed to *tailor the guest experience to one's needs and desires* asked, "Are you experiencing moments of memory loss?" Iris booked a stay.

She spent her first two days in not-unpleasantly humid rooms, wrapped in towels infused with essential oils: *clary sage, lavender, bergamot, chamomile, ylang ylang, cedarwood, geranium, and fennel seed*, the info-card said. She breathed them in, and did, in fact, feel as relaxed as she could ever remember feeling. On day three, she met the therapist in charge of enhancing her consciousness.

"I'm Hugo Madrigal. I understand you are losing your memory."

Iris had not heard those words spoken so frankly, not even by the neurologist who rendered her diagnosis—*Early-onset Alzheimer's*. "You're making quite a leap, aren't you?"

The therapist shook his head. "We've found that the women who are suffering from the natural side effects of menopause and hormone imbalance seldom answer the question about memory loss in the affirmative, even if their memory is occasionally compromised. When people check the "yes" box on that one, it's fear overriding vanity."

He described the memory work they were doing there, related to but distinct from the aromatherapy side of the retreat. Enhanced consciousness therapy for *select guests* involved, among other treatments, the clinical use of LSD, psilocybin, and amphetamines.

"Are you an actual doctor?"



Fading Tenderness, 2022
Oil on canvas; 70 x 120 cm
25

"Physician-therapist. I worked for the military before starting this practice."

Iris told Madrigal about her dinner with the drunken army colonel and his *Operation Olfactory Hallucination*. "I'd assumed he was delusional as well as drunk."

"Unfortunately, no. This is a discreet practice, but I prefer to be as transparent as possible. At the facility where my research was tested, the aim was to power-boost paranoia and aggression in soldiers. For detainees, we'd hoped to instill the deepest pain imaginable without inducing death. Memory is an excellent tool for torture—incisive and efficient—especially if you can draw from a larger pool of consciousness than that of a single individual."

"You tortured people. I'm curious why you'd share that with me, a potential patient."

"In my experience, the line between torture and cure can be so thin as to be invisible; but it's infinitely thicker than the line between so-called knowledge and ambition. I wanted my research funded, and the military funded me. That's an ethical sinkhole I'll never climb out of, but I can try, now, to be mindful of the line."

Iris took a deep breath, inhaling a trace of something green and citrus from her luxury spa robe. "So, if I have this right, your treatment is going to hurt me, and also, you haven't developed it sufficiently to cure me."

"It might retard the symptoms. And there will likely be some discomfort. Your participation will, hopefully, teach us something we can apply to future treatments. And your fee will pay for someone else's pro bono care."

Iris sat, hands folded in her lap, legs crossed at the ankles. Finally, she looked up. "You'll tell me what I can expect?"

"As far as I am able. Subjects experience therapy in their own ways."

Subjects. She gathered he felt the need to keep some clinical distance, even on this side of cure. "OK, then. When do we start?"

"Next visit. We'll send you home with information. You'll sign a waiver. Even therapeutically, many of the substances we use are not strictly legal. If you agree to treatment, your discretion, as I've indicated, is mandatory."

"No need to worry about that. I won't be telling anyone."

* * * *

In 1991, Martin's partner David lay in a hospital bed, eyes closed. Iris sat by his side. Lesions mottled the skin of a body that barely raised the sheet off the mattress. An attendant came in and removed a bedpan. At the faint sound of sloshing, David turned his head toward Iris and recited:

I will arise and go now, for always night and day
I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore;
While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements grey,
I hear it in the deep heart's core.

"Martin loves Yeats. Nostalgia for idyllic Michigan summers and first loves, no doubt."

"Martin doesn't love me, David. He loves you."

"Don't be so boring, Iris. Think I didn't love people before Martin and I were one and onlies? We weren't even exclusive. Not at first."

"Martin and I weren't attracted to one another. We never had sex. We kissed once, if you could call it a kiss."

"And what, that you couldn't find the beat meant there wasn't any music? Iris, darling, you're looking at a man who values bodily pleasures in almost religious proportions, but as I live and die on this bed, if I thought an erect penis and a lubricated place to put it was the only way to experience love in this world, I'd be pretty depressed at this point."

"You mean you're not?"

"What, depressed? I'm terrified, to be clear. And angry. I mean, if those Franco-American quacks would just develop a cure instead of shaking their dicks at each other while I and my people reach our expiration dates...But I am not," he coughed into a tissue tucked into his palm, "depressed. Maybe I should be. Maybe I'm in some kind of pre-death euphoria. Maybe I'll be depressed later today."

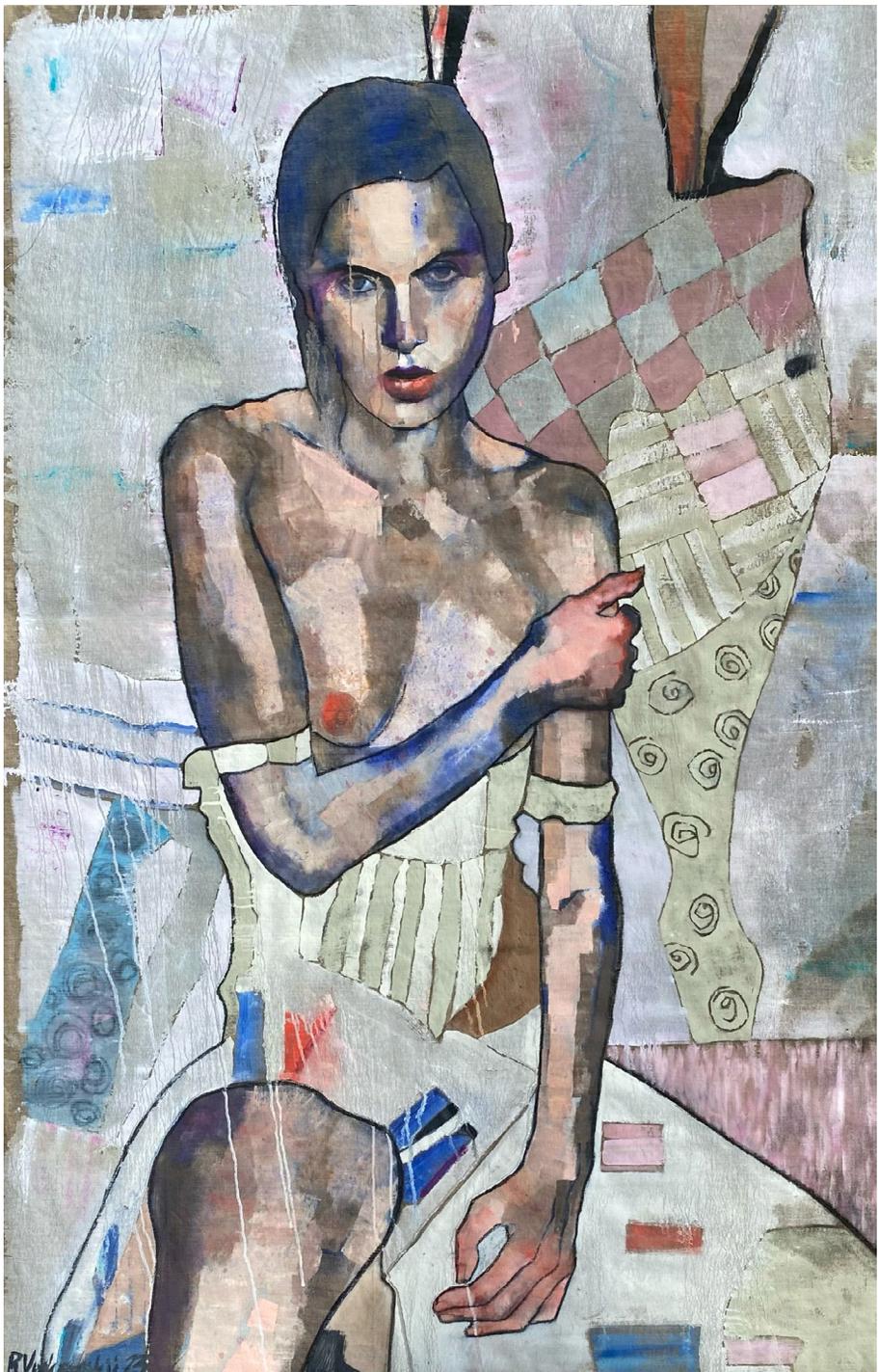
"Right now I'm thinking of how Martin likes to quote poetry, but never remembers the words, how he gives away too much free booze at the club, how he's brought me a cup of coffee in bed almost every day I've known him...and how I know he loves me better because he loved—*loves*—you. Why be so quick to erase yourself? What's that called when something is written over something else, but the first thing doesn't quite disappear...?"

Martin was back with three coffees and a King-Sized bag of M&Ms. "A palimpsest? Geez, the conversation's gone very high-brow in my absence."

"Yes, we're talking about poetry, and *love*. And sex! Only the big topics from here on out." David stuck a bony hand in the bag of candy. "Until *The Golden Girls* come on, and then you can all shut it."

* * * *

They wore blood red ribbons at the memorial service, and afterwards drank Bloody Marys at Camera Obscura. Iris went into the stall and sat to pee. The body is a vessel, she thought, a cracked and leaking vessel, contained and contain-



Spring. №1, 2023
Oil on canvas; 100 x 160 cm
28

ing, filling and emptying. She thought of her own blood, traveling the highways of her body, decreasingly able to nourish her tangling brain. Maybe her body wasn't fragile enough, she thought as she wound a bandage of toilet paper around her hand—her body had grown calloused and insensate, unable to receive. When she was young—when Lansing was a baby and Gunner was alive—she'd imagined aging as a kind of reward, a slow and generous place of arrival, a softening: rockers on the porch, sunsets, the downy sweet pate of a plump grandbaby. Now here she was, not past forty-five, cold and dark and empty as a cave, missing what she'd never had, desperate for she knew not what. Sorry for it all.

David was dead. She was alive. The drug treatments she took every four months at Aromory had done little, she thought, to stem her memory loss. The psilocybin, she had to admit, had eased her fear of dying. That wasn't nothing.

The other work, the induced olfactory hallucinations—well, it was building muscle she'd never use. More sensorily in tune with her environment than she thought possible, she felt, still, like an interloper in her own experience. Serge's performance at Franklin Furnace had had greater impact than all the physician-therapist's dark experiments.

What else, she wondered, sitting on the toilet in the shabby stall, is possible when the body stops asking forgiveness for being a body? What else could she do, besides be sorry, sit still, and wait for death?

* * * *

Iris stared at a photo from Karen Finley's exhibition, *A Woman's Life Isn't Worth Much*. The picture captured the line, "I'M MORE THAN A HOLE," and Iris thought, *That's it*. She laughed out loud, to finally understand. *The hole. The holes! I am/am not the holes in my memory. I am/am not the hole of my husband's death. I am/am not the hole where my uterus lived. I am/am not the hole of my abandoned self. That's where I begin.*

She performed her first show in San Francisco—SoMa—in a building set for renovation on Folsom near 16th. She'd found the venue in the classifieds of the weekly arts and entertainment paper. She announced the show in the same classifieds section, where it sunk beneath the noise and weight of hundreds of other ads for stuffs and services. The textile artist who was moving out of the space, a couple of neighbors from the street, and a slightly drunken couple looking for Zuni Café comprised her audience.

"I am etheL," she began. "Join me on my journey of forgetfulness."

Iris composed several variations of her performance before she told Martin what she was doing. She wanted to be surer of herself, and also, she hadn't yet told him about her diagnosis.

"Iris! Wow! Performance? But why didn't you tell me? I'd have booked you at the club!"

"That's exactly what I didn't want. Until now. I want to ask Serge to do a show with me."

"Serge the Scentsational? A real club phenom, back in the day! Played CO once. Are they even working now?"

"Your answer is yes, then?"

"Of course! But, you know, I never book a show without a taste."

About fifty people besides Martin showed up to the final performance at the Folsom space, including a young woman from SF Weekly. Iris went around the room and chatted with the audience as they drifted in. Zoe, the textile artist whose studio it had been, took Polaroid snapshots of various audience members, and wrote down their addresses in a notebook. Little plastic cups of white wine were lined up alongside a tray of water crackers and cubes of orange cheese stuck with toothpicks.

The overhead lights were extinguished. The room remained dimly lit by a few table lamps spaced around the perimeter. A spotlight came on, illuminating a circle in which twenty oversized playing cards had been placed in five rows of four. Iris stepped into the spot. She had changed from her black sweater and leggings into a tan wool skirt and blouse, pantyhose, low-heeled pumps, a trench coat, and a felt, brimmed hat with a spray of pheasant feather arcing from the band. A handbag hung by a strap from her shoulder.

"I am etheL. Tonight, you'll join me on my journey through forgetfulness, which may be quite short or very long, I can't remember." Several people in the audience laughed, lightly. "I can't remember, because since I was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease at age 44, just a little while ago, I've been losing my mind, or pieces of it."

"We will play a game you might remember from childhood: concentration. I will have one minute to look at all the cards, face up. On half the cards are pictures of some of you, and your names. On the other half are the addresses that correspond to the pictures. My task is to match the face and name with the correct address. If I fail to make a match, the cards are flipped back over, and an audience member must remove an article of my clothing." Another ripple of laughter.

"If I make the match, I move onto the next. Let's begin."

Zoe flipped the twenty cards one pair at a time, so that etheL could see the placements in the grid of the face and the numbers and street names it was attached to. etheL read aloud the name of the audience member, and recited the address. When they were once again face down, etheL entered the grid and turned over her first card.

"1325 NW Ogden, Walla Walla." She considered the nineteen remaining

cards, and proceeded to turn over the second card from her left, on the bottom row. "Paul."

"Correct," Zoe said, and removed the pair from the floor.

"Too bad for me!" Paul said, jovially, "I was looking forward to taking that hat!"

etheL missed the next two. Joanna removed the felt hat from etheL's head and tossed it to Paul. Donovan strung the purse, messenger-style, over his chest, and bounced back to his spot.

etheL made a match, and missed another two. Chelsea removed a shoe. Allison took etheL's trench, stepped back into the circle, and draped it, carefully, over her arm.

etheL took her time. She turned over a card. "903 Cordova Ave, #4B, Santa Rosa." She picked up another. "Phillip."

"Correct."

"80016 S. Magnolia St, Sacramento. Helena."

"Incorrect." Helena hesitated to leave her position in the darkened circle. Finally, she stepped into the spotlight and said, "I guess the pantyhose?"

"You must remove them from me yourself, Helena."

"No, I don't think I can...I'd have to reach under your skirt..."

"You have to remove something."

Helena took the other shoe. Terry removed the skirt. Several audience members now cleared their throats or made some other noise when etheL looked as though she were reaching for a card.

She straightened and thrust her hand out like a traffic cop. "NO HINTS!"

When Stuart pulled the pantyhose from etheL's waist to her hips, her panties came with, revealing, at eye level, the dark horizontal crease of her hysterectomy scar. etheL kept a hand on his shoulder as he removed the hose from one leg, and then the other. Next turn, Carmella kept her eyes, brimming with tears, on her task as she unbuttoned etheL's blouse.

etheL stood in the spotlight in her bra and panties. At 48, her pale skin was still reasonably smooth, her stomach flat, her breasts firm. A few age spots dotted her arms and upper chest. A blue vein or two threaded her calf. Her shoulders stooped at a slight angle. She was a well-kept woman heading gracefully into middle age until an observer got to her eyes, glassy and skittish.

etheL stood still as Zoe collected the cards and took them away. She returned with a sign on a thin chain, which she hung around etheL's neck. The sign said, "etheL. 2013 Folsom St., San Francisco." With a loud click, the room went black.

The performance with Serge at Camera Obscura two weeks later was standing room only, a very mixed crowd for the neighborhood, thanks to the small but positive review in SF Weekly. Martin stood with Iris In the liquor closet that

doubled and tripled as dressing room and green room.

"You know, you could have just told me," Martin said as Iris became ethel.

"I forgot."

"Not funny."

"It's probably good you didn't see the staircase performance. I stood at the top of thirty-three steps, wearing a truly cumbersome elephant head. I had to remember a series of numbers that told me where the risers had been removed. Got a good sprain that night."

"Jesus, Iris. No pratfalls tonight, ok?"

Iris joined Serge on the little stage, closed off from the bar with a black curtain. Serge smiled at her and said, "You look positively beige, darling. It's horrifying." He bent over the sound board and fiddled. "Iris" he said as he turned on the big fan, "was the Greek goddess of the rainbow—said to have brought freewill to mortals on earth. Interestingly, that beautiful, showy flower has almost no smell. It's all in the roots." Serge nodded to Martin, who pulled open the curtain.

"I am ethel." The audience erupted in a series of whoops and whistles. "Tonight, I will not ask you to join me on my journey of forgetfulness. Tonight, rather than attempt to capture and hold onto the past, you and I and Serge will set it free. Welcome to the premier and ultimate performance of *Obsolescent/Prescient*."

Later, people who had been there tried to describe their experience. Months after the fact, Martin sat at brunch with a friend who had attended the event, and wanted to talk about it. "It was crazy, right? Like, remembering the future before it happens...I mean, everyone in the room—*everyone*—felt what it was like to be, I don't know, on the other side of something. It felt good, right? Really, really good. And then so sad." He drained his Bloody Mary. "I'm still a little sad, if I'm honest."

* * * *

By 1996, Iris had long stopped traveling, and required full-time care to navigate even once-familiar territories. She didn't always recognize Lansing, but was pleased when he showed up. "Where's the older one?" she'd ask, after Martin, who'd died the year before. "He's funny, that one! Last week he filled the room with forget-me-nots, of all things!"

She was not often unhappy, and always happiest with her scent book, a gift from Serge. Her favorite scentscape was a combination of benzene, mink oil, and wet hay. She'd take a big whiff, throw her head back, and sigh. "Smells like tomorrow," she'd say, and laugh.



Renunciation, 2023
Oil on canvas; 160 x 100 cm





SILHOUETTE

Poems by Rebecca Faulkner
Artwork by Ildiko Nova

Did your hands grieve the open window fumble
broken blinds from the safety of the 34th floor
can you forget that night upstate bumper slick
with sinew the elk's black eyes scrape of antlers
when you moved the body to the blistered verge
I scrubbed blood for years as the bridge filled with smoke
did your conscience bristle on that barren stretch of highway
or when you watched me fall through a feverish sky
glass twisted in the sheets telling the cops half-truths
your breath impossibly loud I know pain craves firmer ground
my hair still wet in cement on Mercer Street

Ildiko Nova (Pp. 34-35)
Bird, 2023
Digital illustration

MUSE

I meet my mother in a dream, in the gleaming morning of my decision. As the harbor breathes beyond the hangar, an iridescent Cessna purrs on the tarmac. She grips a single orange tulip in her liver-spotted hand. With my pocketknife I stab peaches packed for my trip, watch blonde tendrils escape her silk scarf as she gathers the broken skin of my belongings. A paintbrush case with a bone clasp, my small bottle of ink; souvenirs from weeks of winter. Over the propeller I hear my name intoned a shoreline of voices imploring me to wait. My mother my daughters, women I have never met arrange envelopes of worry between clouds and listless carp. Across a folded paper ocean the old loneliness returns. I hold it in my palm a kernel too dry for planting. Shield my eyes from the glare the engine roars. I climb atop the wing to claim myself.



Whispering Deer, 2023
Digital illustration



Grandma, 2023
Digital illustration

PRIM

Better to leave the party first, craving
the drama of an open window, solitude

of a blank page. Spaniels at my heel, we stomp
up the overgrown path, smothering the promise

of June. I ignore peals of laughter from the patio
dodge the murky pond where I drowned

childhood playthings, stagnant water reflects
all I won't miss. Father's disapproval, thinly

veiled in a cigar fog of billiards & single malt.
Mother's quivering ostrich feathers mocking

me with that hateful nickname. My brothers' filthy
fingers staining sketchbooks with redcurrants

& equations. I scuff sensible shoes against drains
clogged with expectations, clasp my No 2 pencil.

This is the real me - champion sprinter, slowing
at the turnstile to curse my unforgiving brogues.

Refusing to bide time in England's yellow kitchens,
dreaming of great love affairs, secret betrayals.

Not Prim but proud, slamming the clumsy gate
striding through neighboring brambles, fearsome

warrior, my brown hair unkempt in jodhpurs
& waistcoat, taming green parakeets atop marble

pergolas, mounting thoroughbreds with celestial
manes. I listen for hyenas chattering in French.

By autumn I'll prove the party wrong.
The spaniels howl as I unlace my shoes.



Plant Medicine, 2023
Digital illustration

THE CAMEL YARD

By April I'm restless the war is over & I have lost
another child born too soon

with cloven hooves horns atop his fontanelle
the doctors say I must start again get more rest

drink my rooibos without milk instead of anointing
plastic princes with cement crowns perfectly suited

for a cantankerous spinster *unwed* they whisper perplexed
unloved undone by drought & hunger for a child that lives

in base of my spine made from coal tar & quiver tree fists
barefoot she will pick blackthorn briars from falcon feathers

tease green turtles their shells cool as pantry glass she will remind me
it's not too late mama for new worlds beyond the dusty velt

the fatherson&holyspirit rancid musty prayers I swallow hard
mark my place facing East travel through time to an empty yard

solitude my only instrument

RHODODENDRONS

Incurably insane
they tell me

at the sanatorium
in Santander

where doctors forbid
sharp pencils

& branches nose
the window

of my barbed wire dreams
from a padded cell

I listen to the wireless drone
the war the war the war

incessant scribbling
it all reeks of death

& even the balcony is off limits
for fear I'll bolt

like the old mare stabled
near the wisteria

at dusk I spy on whitecoats
patrolling the perimeter

as refugees throng the border
quiet as thumbtacks

when I'm well I shall lie
among rhododendrons

search the bed for snails
crush their hard grey shells

against the mattress
my fingers know

you won't be back fled
with some blonde & I left

half my mind in Madrid
pink & purple petals the soil

bone dry you'll see
out the occupation

in a Parisian basement
the boulevard rouged

with Swastikas are you afraid
to drift into complicity

fucking instead of fighting
will she barricade the door

load the ammunition
I make memory thin

in my straightjacketed limbs
as swallows circle

over & over over & over



Horses, 2023
Digital illustration

RECYCLABLE GLASS

Story by Mark Blickley

Artwork by Leslie Cruz

The 8:22 a.m. Kennedy Boulevard bus paused at the red light on the corner of Bentley. While staring at the line of idling cars in front of him, and without turning his head, the driver honked his horn and threw a mechanical wave.

This gesture of recognition was directed at an old man making his way down the street. As the light turned green the bus operator glanced in the old man's direction. The driver smiled and shook his head. For the past six years, at precisely this time, the senior citizen always appeared. It amazed the driver since it was obvious the old man had suffered a stroke. He moved as though his ankles were bound by slave bracelets.

As the bus zoomed past, the old man halted. By the time he had lifted his head he was waving his walking stick in a cloud of black exhaust fumes. Coughing seized him for a few moments, but he was pleased by the driver's show of camaraderie.

A thick blanket of humidity flattened Jersey City. In retaliation, the old man loosened his tie and unbuttoned the vest concealed under the stained sports jacket. He pushed forward.

After a few minutes, he succeeded in reaching the end of the block. Checking vigilantly before crossing, he decided to make his move. Everything seemed to be in order: the light was still green, but more importantly, the DO NOT WALK sign was not flashing underneath it. He had at least sixty seconds to execute the crossing.

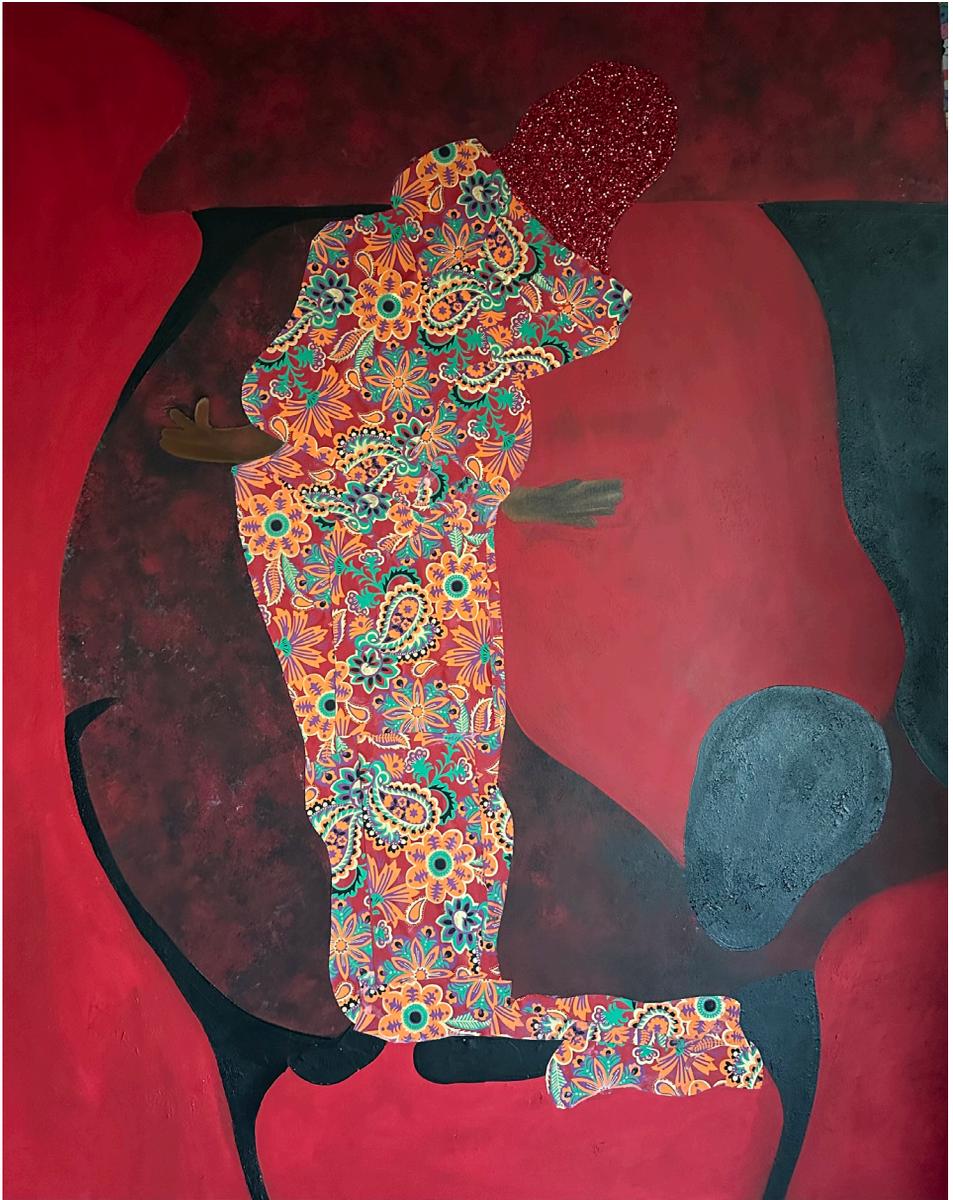
In the past the old man had this street crossing down to fifty-six seconds. Now the government had decreased his time by making it legal for cars to turn right on red lights. This called for more caution. Since his retirement nineteen years earlier, he learned car horns replace brakes when drivers compete with pedestrians for space. Halfway across the street he panicked. The light clicked amber.

Horns screamed. The old man froze. Directly in front of his outstretched walking stick (a cane was for old geezers), a battered Lexus screeched past. "Get the hell outta the way, ya old fart!"

A young head popped out of the back window. "Why don't you die?" it



gold teeth, 2023
Mixed media; 48 x 60 in



red code, 2023
Mixed media; 48 x 60 in

shouted before disappearing into traffic.

Three other cars whizzed by him. A fourth car released him from by stopping long enough for him to arrive at the opposite corner. Smiling at the driver, he did a playful hop over the curb. The old man felt good. At least a half-dozen would pass before permitting him to proceed. It was not unusual for him to be trapped in the street until the light once again turned a comforting green.

What disturbed the old man most about his daily journey was the block on which Martinez & Sons Glassware Company was located. The store took up nearly half a block with mirrors lining their storefront windows. No matter how hard he fought the temptation, it was impossible not to glance at his image as he crept along.

His reflection was an obscenity to him

The day was really looking up. The store, which usually opened promptly at 9 a.m., was closed. This pleased the old man because the iron gate was strung across the huge display windows. He looked at his reflection and giggled. His likeness looked as though it had been captured and jailed, peering back at him through thick metal bars.

The old man threw back his shoulders, disregarding the ache. Picking up his pace, he reminded the reflection that his birthdate fell in the same year as Robert Redford's.

"That's right. 1936. Good Lord, the girls knew it, too." He pointed an accusing finger at the gated mirror. "Maybe I forget the exact day, but I'll never forget all those women."

The old man and took a seat on a bench; overhead hung a sign, BUS STOP. On the end of the bench sat a young girl dressed in frayed blue jean cutoffs and a tee shirt that read 'Shit Show Supervisor.'

"Mister," she asked, "can you lend me a dollar so I can catch the bus?"

No reply.

"Excuse me, sir, do you have a dollar I can borrow?"

The old man reached into his pocket and produced a fistful of change that he dropped into her hand. The young lady leaped off the bench.

"Gee, thanks! Wow!" Seconds later she disappeared down the street into a candy store.

The old man checked his watch. He was fifteen minutes behind schedule.

"Oh my God, I'm going to be late." After pulling himself up from the bench, he cursed the once strong arms that had made him New York Local 638's number one steamfitter.

After conquering four more blocks he arrived at his destination. It made him feel good to watch the busy activity associated with the morning opening of the Post Office. He looked up at the flag dangling limply from the mast, as if suffo-

cated from a lack of breeze.

Inside the building were the usual hoard of people in lines, mostly immigrants and mothers with young children. The passport section was mobbed. Twenty minutes late, he feared the worst. Gradually he inched towards the wall lined with post office boxes.

"Why, Mr. Goldshlager, I was worried. I thought something terrible happened."

"No, Ma'am. I guess this humidity took more from me than I had anticipated giving. Kind of you to wait, though." The aged woman who reminded him so much of Colleen, the wife he buried shortly after his retirement.

"Well, after all, Mr. Goldschlager, today's my turn to buy the coffee..."

"And I the donuts."

"Correct."

"Have you received your check yet, Mildred?"

"Yes. I saw them put yours in, too."

The old man went over to his mailbox and withdrew the envelope.

"Life sure plays some strange games on us, Mildred. Funny how we both decided, on the very same day, mind you, to put an end to all those stolen checks every month. Scary how accustomed we had become to missing them."

Mildred nodded. "And you can't trust direct deposit because the banks are all so corrupt."

"You know something? Losing those checks is the best thing that's happened to me in six years."

Mildred pretended to dismiss the flattery, but the added wrinkles at the corner of her lips gave her away.

"Colleen always thought I was too angry with banks. I can hear her now, saying, 'Horace, you shouldn't resent what happened in the past. It's dangerous.' She was some woman, my Colleen."

"She certainly must have been, Mr. Goldschlager."

Strolling around the corner to the diner gave the old man a thrill, as it had most mornings. It felt good, it felt natural, to be with a woman. The few times Mildred hadn't shown up it always made the rest of the day melancholic. The small table to the left of the grill was reserved for the elderly couple. Josh, the proprietor, issued strict orders not to seat anyone there until after nine-thirty.

As they were led to their seats Horace contemplated Mildred's appearance. She wore bright red lipstick which showed telltale signs of extended coloring past the outline of her lips. In fact, it reminded the old man of the happy smiles painted around the mouths of circus clowns. The red lipstick made a striking contrast to the black hat pinned to a thin crop of platinum curls. Her eyes were a sparkling gray.



peakcock driven, 2023
Mixed media; 48 x 60 in

Those eyes reminded the old man of something his father had once told him about his great-Aunt Kathleen:

"Horace, whenever you meet an old woman, say like your Aunt, never forget that despite the years she's still got a young girl's vanity. I know it's hard and I

brought you up not to lie, but listen, the one safe thing you can compliment them on is their eyes. Leave the wrinkled skin around them alone. Just tell them how beautiful, or lively, or even better, how sparkling their optics are."

There was no need to falsely charm Mildred, or her eyes. What an attractive woman she must have been, mused the old man. Her face, now caked with powder, was probably as smooth and clear as Colleen's.

During their coffee and donuts each spent about a half-hour bringing her husband Ted and his Colleen back to life. Neither one would pay much attention to the other; after six years of repetition, it didn't matter. Yet missing these weekday interludes was unthinkable. The old man loved the chance to relive his youth. While talking (or listening), a vivid portrait of himself and his wife materialized.

Horace had to think seriously about settling down and raising a family. This was a tougher decision than most fellows were faced with since young Horace was engaged to two girls at the same time. One of his fiancées lived in Hoboken, and the other was a burlesque dancer in Union City.

While mulling over the choices before him at his favorite Brooklyn bar, in walked the bartender for the upcoming shift with his handsome daughter. It was lust, later love, at first sight.

Colleen's nut-brown hair offset a cute turned up nose. Her pale green eyes sent an inviting message over to his stool. Such a petite figure who filled a sweater rather nicely.

"And Ted would pick me up and throw me into the pool right in front of all the children. I pretended to be angry but I loved it!"

The old man took his last gulp of chilled coffee and signaled for the check. "Would you like anything else, Mildred?"

"No thank you, Horace." She watched his eyes following the progress of the waiter. "I really enjoyed myself this morning, dear."

The old man nodded. "Yes, but it's so hard to keep track of time these days. So much to be done. Isn't that so?"

Mildred smiled. "Don't I know, Mr. Goldschlager! I detest all the running around I'm forced to do in order to keep up with this crazy world. I get exhausted just thinking about it."

With this last remark they concluded their visit and returned to their respective schedules: she to a park bench in nearby Bayonne, he to the bus stop across the street.

When the bus arrived, the old man was visibly upset. Hector was not driving. The doors flung open and the old man was shoved aside by boarding passengers.

After everyone had paid their fare and secured a seat, the driver waited impatiently for the old man to complete his attack of the high steps leading to the

fare box.

As the old man strained to maintain his balance via the walking stick, two thoughts flashed. One was to fall forward should his legs fail him. The second was how differently he was treated when Hector was behind the wheel. Hector made sure no one pushed him around and always helped him up the steep steps.

On reaching the top step the old man fumbled for the Senior's discount pass inside his sports jacket. As he turned to find a seat a swarm of indignant glances greeted him. He gave pleading looks to the men seated directly behind the driver. They in turn, almost as if on cue, rotated their heads and fixed their eyes on some object outside the window.

The bus lurched forward before the old man could get a firm grip on the overhead strap. He was flung to the other side of the bus. His back smashed into the knees and packages of a pair of horrified women shoppers.

Unable to control himself, the old man let out a cry. It was a soft cry, but it lingered.

Upon the scolding of the women shoppers, two men raised up the old man. One sacrificed his seat. Laughter broke out from the rear of the bus.

Perspiration beaded on the old man's bald spot. It dripped onto his sports jacket as he tucked his chin into his chest. Once again, he drifted off to that first encounter with Colleen.

Outside his apartment building children were jumping rope and an impromptu soccer game was in progress.

"Hi ya, Mr. Goldschlager! Wanna play with us?"

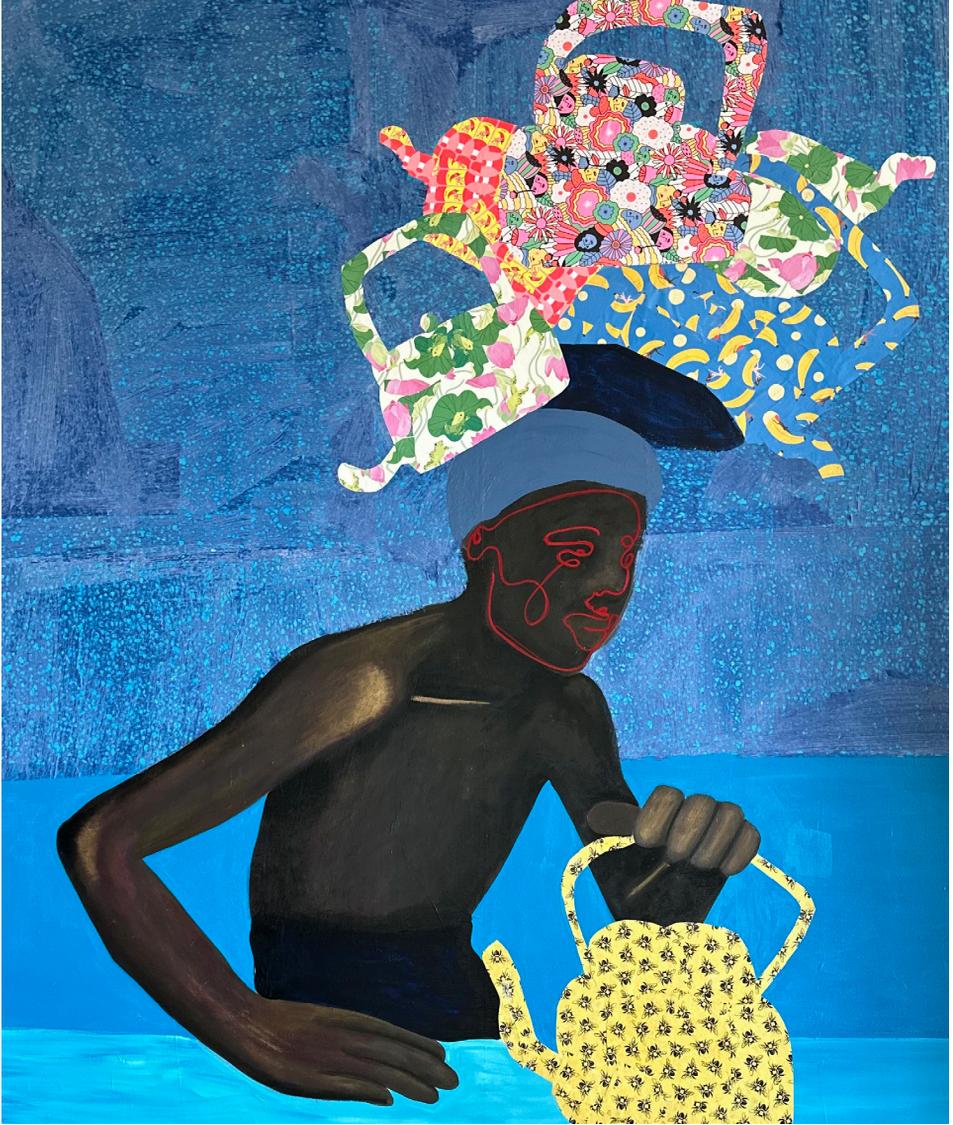
"Sorry, kids. I've had a rough day. I think I'll go rest these tired old bones, if you don't mind?"

The children giggled.

The old man enjoyed children and children liked him. But he knew how defensive most parents were these days, and he was embarrassed by their reactions whenever he stopped to speak to their kids.

The old man was appalled by the fear he generated whenever he spoke with kids at the playground. Or stopped a young couple to congratulate them on producing the beautiful child they were wheeling in their stroller. His attempts to shake an infant's hand or stroke underneath a baby's chin with his finger usually made the parents irritable, and they would quicken their pace. Being around children began to make him feel dangerous and dirty and he hated that feeling. He comforted himself by imagining that one day these parents would understand the desire of the elderly to once again feel the smooth flesh of youth.

Touch was a superior memory to any childhood photograph. The old man refused to stop his attempts at making contact with fresh life. Yet despite the humiliation of parental disgust and annoyance, he would always mouth a silent pray



lost tea, 2023
Mixed media; 60 x 72 in

that none of these parents would ever experience his horror of outliving his child.

The elevator ride to his eleventh-floor apartment was noisy, slow and as frightening as always. It took him a few minutes of fumbling with his keys, but eventually he gained entrance to his home of forty-seven years. The odor of stale air escaped into the hallway as the door closed behind him.

The first thing he did was throw off his sports jacket and switch on the television. He surveyed the apartment. It was filthy.

"I will give you a good going over this weekend," he promised the living room.

The old man hobbled into the kitchen to prepare his daily staple of corn-flakes and milk with fresh fruit. After eating, he left the dishes on the table next to yesterday's plates and lunged for the bottle of cognac propped up on the kitchen counter. He shook it and was upset.

"Did I drink that much last night?"

The old man phoned the liquor store around the corner to order another. The shopkeeper refused to send it until the previous bills were paid in full. Horace apologized and promised to pay when his overdue pension checks arrived. The ploy did not work.

Clutching the cognac, he passed from the kitchen through the living room to his bedroom. He paused to raise the volume of his television set. Although he disliked watching it, its voices replaced the music that once echoed through his apartment before the radio shorted out. The babble was comforting.

The old man balanced the bottle of cognac on a dusty night table and walked over to a closet. He pulled out a large cardboard box and dragged it over to the bed. The old man was surprised at how light the box was becoming.

He dipped his hands inside the cardboard box. The clinking of glass accompanied his search. When his fingers locked around a heavy piece of crystal he smiled and pulled up a large, ornate goblet.

The old man carefully poured cognac into the crystal goblet. He swallowed it and poured another. And then another until he drained the cognac. He dropped the empty bottle on the floor and it rolled under the bed.

Horace stared at the fancy goblet and fingered its engraved designs. When he realized he had no more cognac to pour into it he tried to soothe himself by pressing the cool crystal against his cheek.

Sorrow gave way to anger and he heaved the heirloom with all his strength. It crashed into the wall, splintering into pieces of jagged, dangerous glass.

About forty minutes ahead of schedule, the old man passed out.



rage thoughts, 2023
Mixed media; 48 x 60 in

THE TRAIN SONG

Fiction by Nelly Shulman

Artwork by Allen Vu

Her heels tapped on the marble floor. Tap. Straighten the back. Tap. Hold the crocodile skin purse in the crook of an elbow.

The golden sunset shines through the vast windows of the train station, the cathedral of arrivals and departures, and an altar of meetings.

She came to meet them, and she intends to be on time.

Tap. The hem of a silk dress skims the knees, and the narrow belt cinches the waist. Her breath is steady even when she sees the other woman embracing her husband. This other is short, and her shapeless summer coat adds pounds to her stocky frame.

The tall blonde with a purse sucked in the dusty air, full of creosote and tobacco smoke. She has always loved the railways and travelled with her husband all over the country, waiting for him while he built the tracks and bridges.

Having consulted the train timetable, she decided those two wanted to take a coastal flyer and escape to some beach village. She praised her vigilance. First, she intercepted a strange letter in the mail, then caught a whiff of cheap perfume on his clothing, and today she overheard a phone call.

Her husband, ever elegant, held a travel bag. He fed her a story about some urgent engineering work on the line.

Ten years ago, she met her future husband the tea dance, where he tried to lead her. Taking the initiative, she smiled.

"I am a dance instructor."

He blushed, and she added, "What do you do?"

"I take people places," he replied. "I can take you if you want."

Her soft hair tickled the smooth cheek, and a suede-gloved hand went to the purse. Standing in the middle of the station, those two kissed, and the gunshots hit their heads.

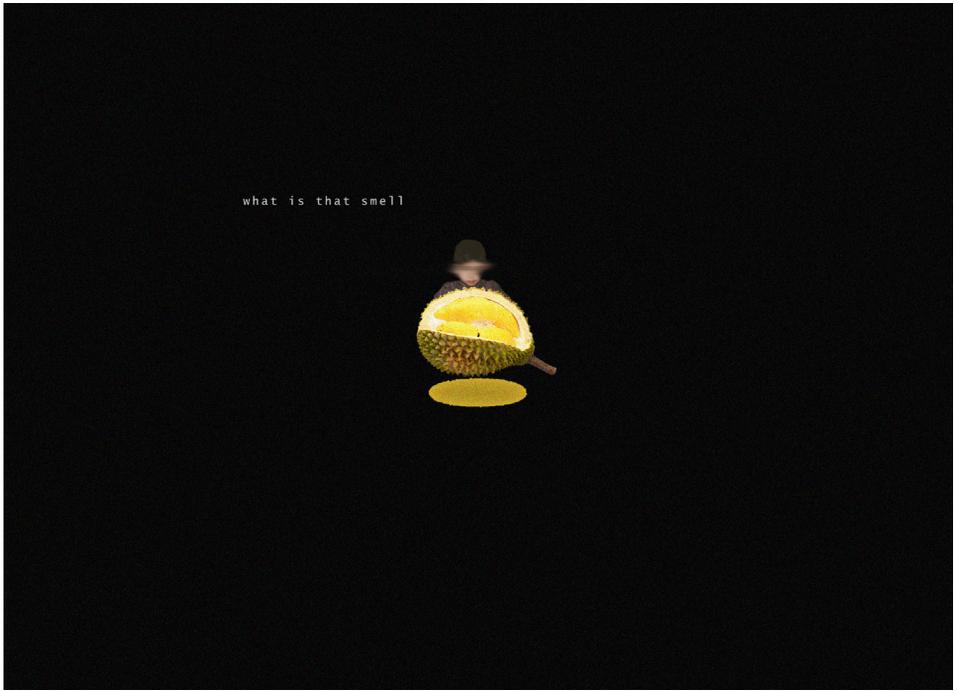
People screamed, and she put a Colt to her temple. The pomegranate blood reddened her flaxen curls, and she sank to her knees, prostrating at the great altar where the train voices sang over her the last song.



Time Machine, 2023
Glossy archival inkjet print; 8 x 10 in



Time Machine (What Are We Doing), 2022
Glossy archival inkjet print; 8 x 10 in



Time Machine (Durian Kid), 2023
Glossy archival inkjet print; 8 x 10 in



Time Machine (Cloud Baby), 2022
Glossy archival inkjet print; 8 x 10 in

THE LAST CRESCENT

The watermelon cracked open, and the chunks of the red flesh flew across the freshly painted room, still smelling of plaster.

The house stood almost on the edge of the surf and the waves pounded the coast, reflecting the golden-red light of a late sunset, already changing to vermillion and purple. The sound of waves grew louder, and the wind sang in the empty jack-o-lanterns on the terrace. The green fireflies hung in the damp saltiness of the night air.

Sitting on a wooden floor, we shared the sweet scarlet crescents of the watermelon. He crushed the last chunks into the glasses, bringing the vodka and lime from the kitchen. The situation called for the toast, but we had no idea what to say.

Draining his glass, he glanced at the watch.

"Will you walk me to the beach? You don't have to. I can go alone and you will drive home."

I busied myself with cleaning up, knowing he would appreciate the last minutes when he sat on the porch, listening to the waves, looking at the pale crescent of the moon, following the sparkling spirals of fireflies. His hand stroked the orange skin of the last jack-o-lanterns we carved together.

We left the house when the darkness enveloped the bay and the rocks turned into the pale clouds above the sea. On the way down, he stopped for a moment.

"People will decide that I gave up," he said. "I always thought you had to leave at the right time. Was it a good watermelon?"

I smiled.

"The best. Remember how you taught me to choose the ripe ones?"

He drew me nearer.

"You were fifteen. We went to the market on the way here," he pointed to the top of the cliff. "That was thirty years ago."

On the beach, embracing him for the one last time, I stood on the edge of the surf. My father entered the water. He wanted to leave like this when his pain turned worse and when it was clear that he would not last until the end of the year.

The moon left a silver shimmer on the ocean. He swam away, shouting something. I could not make out his words, carried away by the wind, but could hear the ting of joy. His head disappeared in the open water and the surf threw the salt drops into my face.

Wiping the tears, I went home.

THE DAUGHTER OF THE TIDE

The shells on the deserted beach always reminded Sean of pearls. Sometimes, fooled by their otherworldly whiteness, he picked up a singularly beautiful one, only to hear the crush of fragile walls enclosing a glimpse of shining brilliance. The dark green, azure, and gold lay in her palm, and Sean unclenched his fingers, dropping the fragment to the mercy of a hissing tide.

He came here every day, searching for a singing shell.

When his daughter was dying in a hospital, tortured by her splintered, imperfect bones, she asked Sean to bring her the music of the sea. Niamh could see the bay only when Sean carried her to the window, enveloping her tiny body in the strong embrace of his coarse hands.

Sean Maguire, a builder by trade, was used to the rough stone and sticky cement, the simplicity of blueprints, and the smell of fresh wood dissected by the saw. In his book, life was clear and straight, just like the lines of the houses he built, following the nature of all McGuires, who lived here, on the cliffs above the bay from time immemorial.

Sometimes he wondered which saw was used by the unknown master, who crafted the coffins of his wife and daughter, buried together, although Niamh outlived her mother by almost a year.

Catriona returned from the swim in the bay as a bloated body, nibbled on by fish and abused by stones, and Niamh perished in the heap of broken bones.

Sean could never remember the name of a disease that killed his daughter, but he still wanted to bring a singing shell to her grave. Niamh often asked him to open the ward window.

"I won't move, Daddy," she whispered. "I just want to listen to the sea."

Niamh could not read because the doctors feared her finger bones and wrists could snap from handling book pages, so Sean spent days after days sitting next to her bed, choking his tears, reading her stories and poems, legends, and fairy tales.

Rarely, when the doctors pumped her veins with yet another injection, Sean could take her cold hand or even lift Niamh up and carry her to the window where the winds and the waves were singing their perpetual song.

Sean was listening to it now, walking across the grey pebbles to the hissing waves. The coming tide caressed the shells in a cool embrace, and Sean picked

up an especially beautiful one, longing to save it from the dark oblivion of the ocean.

"It does not sing," said the female voice behind him. Sean could swear that a mere second ago, the beach was empty. Her white dress billowed in the wind, and she held a shell.

"This one does," she looked at the sea, "or at least I can hear it."

She extended her hand, and Sean accepted the shell that reminded him of pink roses covering the small casket Niamh was buried. He put it to the ear, and the girl smiled. The tide swelled at their feet, and Sean listened to the call of the sea inside the shell.

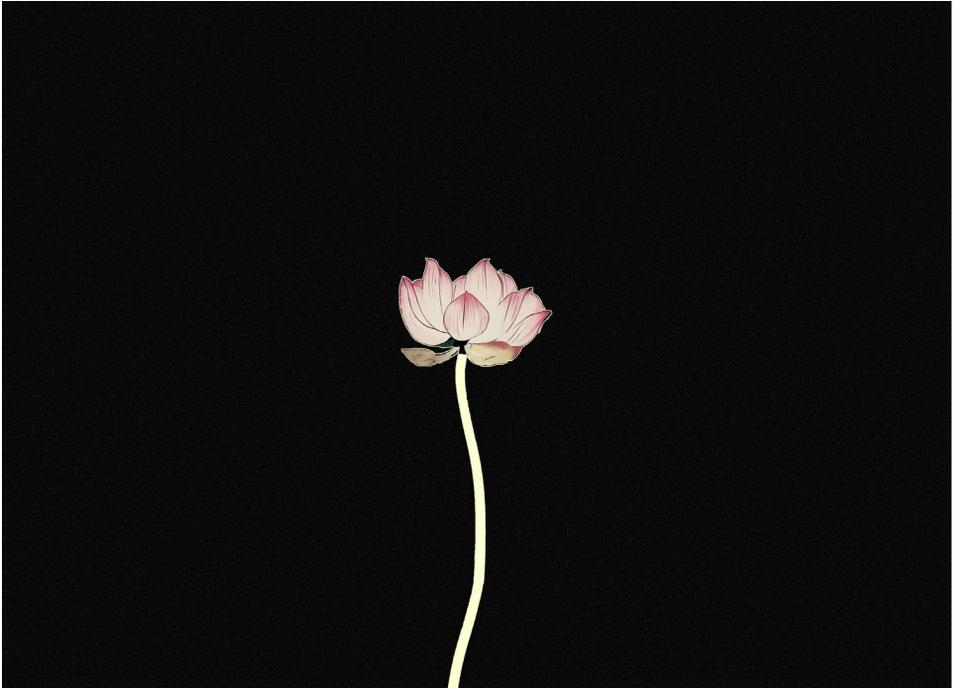
He was startled by the tender touch of her hand, smooth and supple as if possessing no bones. Her face was saddened.

"Sometimes the daughters of the sea are born to humans," she said. "They suffer greatly and die young, but they are resurrected in the depths," she turned to the darkening bay. "You can see Niamh now, Sean."

The waters accepted her, and Sean heard from the shell a quiet voice.

"Daddy, please come to me," Niamh said. "Mummy is also here, and we miss you so much."

Fiery sunset painted the bay in gold and vermillion, and Sean could barely make out the outline of the girl almost covered by waves. Clutching the shell, he went after her, opening his mouth, breathing in the sweet poison of the tide.



Time Machine (Lotus), 2023
Glossy archival inkjet print; 8 x 10 in



ANGEL IN A WHITE PARKA

Short Story by Mark Donnelly

Artwork by Diana Naccarato

The red roses on the back seat of the car were frozen. I hadn't brought them inside the house yesterday, but had left them in the car, next to the small box wrapped in blue paper containing the black earrings with the silver borders, and a paperback copy of *Leaves of Grass* by Walt Whitman. The book was wrapped in a Barnes and Noble paper that was a montage of vintage book covers of classics like *The Grapes of Wrath*, *The Great Gatsby*, and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. I liked that wrapping paper, as those books were three favorites of mine, by three of my favorite authors.

It was December 27, Maureen's 45th birthday, around two p.m., as I sat in my car in the lower parking lot between St. John's Church and the Fish Hatchery in Cold Spring Harbor. I sat there not knowing what to do.

I had been with her and her teenaged daughter, Cecilia, Christmas Eve for a small dinner at Maureen's mother's house. We exchanged presents later when we got back to Maureen's house. I had given her daughter a hardbound notebook. She writes poetry, and I knew from what she told me that she also kept a journal, so I figured she could always use another notebook. I write poetry myself at times, so I know what it's like to want to have paper handy.

I had given Maureen a new novel called *Mr. Ives' Christmas* by Oscar Hijuelos. It received excellent reviews. I hadn't read this one yet, but I did read *The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love* by Hijuelos and really liked it. I thought the movie was good, too.

The other presents I'd given Maureen were two music CDs – One by the Irish band the Cranberries and the other by Emmylou Harris. Maureen had given me a beautiful Irish fisherman's sweater – I knew from the box that it was from the Irish imports shop in town.

My mom and I spent Christmas Day at a gathering of cousins on my father's side. Even though my dad was gone a little over three years now, we still went to these cousins as tradition.

Maureen and her daughter were going to dinner at her sister's house for Christmas. I knew this ahead of time, so I called Maureen in the morning to wish her a Merry Christmas. I said I would call the next day to set up a plan to celebrate

Maureen's birthday. I never called. I can't explain why. What does come to mind are lyrics in the Paul Simon song, "Slip Slidin' Away" - 'You know the nearer your destination/The more you're slip slidin' away.'

I had called Maureen about noon to wish her a Happy Birthday and to apologize for not calling the day before to make plans.

"It's too late. My sister called me around 10. When she asked me if I had any plans, I said no, that I'd never heard back from you. So, she's taking me to dinner for my birthday."

"But I was going to do that. I was going to take you out for your birthday."

"No...I already said you're too late."

"But I have presents to give you."

"Keep them. What you gave me for Christmas ... not very romantic for a woman you've been seeing nearly two years."

"But you love reading and listening to music."

"That isn't the kind of love I'm talking about ... At my mother's Christmas Eve you didn't even hold my hand while we sat on the couch. You never even touched me there except to help me with my coat."

"I'm not very affectionate in public."

"This isn't public...this is my family."

"Still, I'm not very comfortable with it."

"You can sleep with me, but you can't touch my arm or look at me closely when I'm with my family."

"I'm sorry."

"Too many sorrys...I'm sick of them."

"But Maureen..."

She hung up. And this was the conversation I was playing back in my head as I drove over here. And it kept playing in my head as I sat there at the steering wheel, the car shut off. I had come because I liked to look at the pond by St. John's Church. It was often a place of escape for me. I figured the pond would be frozen, given the string of below freezing days we'd been having. I had been here many times in my life. Sitting there in the car was doing me no good. I might as well at least come see the beauty I remembered.

I made my way up the set of wooden steps to the pond and church area. I stood on the snow-covered grass between the white wooden church and the frozen pond. A mother was seated with her two children, a boy and a girl, on a log below where I was standing. She was helping them put on their skates.

As I looked out on the pond, I saw a few girls skating in the north section. I flashed back to a memory of Maureen skating there in that section years ago when we were in the eighth grade. She was there with Margaret Walsh and Janet Pacelli on a Sunday in January. They were all in the other eighth grade class at St.



Inside Echo (3), 2023
Pencil on paper; 6 x 9 in

Helen's. I only knew Margaret and Janet by name. I knew Maureen mainly through her older brothers, who I'd been on Little League teams with when we were younger. To me, the Reardon family was like the Kennedys. I don't mean wealthy, I mean classy. The boys were handsome, and the girls were pretty.

And Maureen looked especially pretty that day in a short white ski parka, her shiny black hair standing out against the white hood. It seemed like she had even more of a shine around her in the afternoon sun. I had gone over with Maureen's cousin Tom to the pond to go ice skating. I was glad to see her, really glad. I had a crush on her from when we were just children lining up in church for special occasions during school. I remembered how in warmer weather when the girls wore short-sleeved white blouses under their blue jumpers that I would look across the aisle as we were lined up. I would look over and imagine myself gently touching the peach fuzz on Maureen's arms, picturing it feeling soft like I was petting a fawn.

Tom was a good talker with the girls, I wasn't. And I stood a little behind him, not feeling that comfortable. How I wished I could be there now, back in time. Perhaps I could say more. But who was I kidding. The middle-aged me couldn't talk that easily to Maureen thirty years later.

Maureen's husband, Bill Finnerty, had died in 1991 from pancreatic cancer. I came to learn from Maureen that his death had been pretty quick. Bill had been complaining of back pain that winter. He tossed it off to pulled muscles from working out. By the time he went to see his doctor a month later and tests were done, they revealed the cancer. He was dead by September. I never knew Bill. He had grown up in Nassau County, Maureen said. He was only in his early 40s.

I ran into Maureen and her daughter in Munday's, a luncheonette on Main Street, one Saturday morning in January three years later. I hadn't seen her since high school, but I certainly recognized her. She still had that shiny black hair.

I had been sitting at the counter up front alone. I had just finished breakfast and got up to pay my bill when Maureen and Cecilia came in. I recognized Maureen and said hi. It was a fairly brief conversation, but she told me she and Cecilia liked to start the weekend off with blueberry pancakes – Munday's was famous for them. She mentioned rather solemnly that her husband had died, but then Maureen brightened when saying that Munday's was now a regular treat for her and her daughter, who I took to be around fourteen.

"I'm sorry to hear about your husband, Maureen."

"Thanks, I appreciate that...Oh, Johnny...this is Cecilia, my daughter." Then she turned to Cecilia.

"Cecilia, this is Johnny Dunne. We went to St. Helen's together. He was friends with my brothers."

Cecilia and I shook hands. Then I asked Maureen how the rest of her

family was. She said everyone was good, but that her dad died in 1990. And then with her husband's death the following year there was a double blow. I expressed my sympathies again. She asked how my family was. I said my dad had passed away also, but that my mom, brother, and sister were okay.

"You have a family of your own, Johnny?"

"No...I never married."

"Oh...seeing anybody?"

"Not right now, no." I felt a bit embarrassed about that. I was kind of sensitive about not having a good history with relationships.

"Maybe we could stay in touch, Maureen...it was nice running into you like this."

"Sure. I can give you my number. You have anything to write it down on?"

I pulled out a small pad and pen from inside my jacket. I always carried these to jot things down.

Maureen gave me her number and I said I'd call her. We said our good-byes and I left as they went towards the booths. I called Maureen that Monday night and we set up something for Friday. Since I knew she liked Munday's and they had expanded their menu to include dinner, I suggested we meet there. And that's how I began seeing Maureen.

We caught up with each other's lives, at least in a general sense that first night. I mentioned how I'd followed my younger brother Tim out to L.A. in the 1980s. Then when I returned home, I'd gotten a job working at the Huntington Arts Council as a publicist. Maureen was teaching fourth grade at St. Patrick's Elementary School in downtown Huntington.

Now I turned my head and looked south to the far end of the pond. I eased myself down onto the ice to the right of where the mom and kids sat. I got a feeling for the ice in my work boots and started to walk towards the far end. I wasn't thinking too much, I just headed in that direction slowly. My feet felt heavy, my whole body felt heavy.

I passed a group of older teenagers who cautioned me about going too much farther.

"The ice is kind of thin down there, Mister," one of the boys said.

I heard him but didn't hear him. What I thought I did hear was Maureen calling out my name. I turned around, but of course she wasn't there. I kept walking. I was walking towards the end of the ice. There was creaking and cracking as the ice showed black water below and I was not planning yet letting go and down into the blackness enveloping me and wanting it maybe, but hearing my own voice call "Help" and "Maureen, Maureen" and I was suddenly submerged below, and then my arms reaching for the ice rim and the teenagers forming a human chain and the grip of two guys under each of my arms as I grabbed that ice rim.

This chain was a mix of bodies on knees or lying on their stomachs.

"Mister, we told you about it, we warned you," said one of the guys who'd reached me.

Then one of the girls said, "Leave him alone, Bobby, just let's get him up."

And they pulled me out and dragged me to safe ice and then carried me over to the east side of the pond. This was all done with them on ice skates and me being dead weight that they hauled along. They really pulled me over. Above there I could hear a car go by.

I was shivering. My legs wet and heavy, the peacoat so wet and heavy on me, and there was a group of logs in a circle and a place where there'd been a fire.

"Start that fire again," said the girl I'd heard a moment before, or what seemed like a moment before.

And the guys got me seated on one of the logs. Another guy pulled some branches over from the bank of the pond and another girl put some newspaper on top and pulled out some matches and lit the fire, then lit a cigarette from a pack that had been in the same pocket of her jacket. I saw it was the red and white Marlboro box with the flip top...they'd been around so long ... going back to the days when I used to smoke.

"You want a drag?" she asked.

"No thanks...thank you all for getting me...for pulling me out."

"We didn't want anything to happen to you," said the guy the girl had called Bobby.

"We'd kept an eye on you when you walked by us."

"You seemed like you were in a trance or something ... then when you fell through the ice and called for help you yelled the name Maureen. Who is she... that your wife?"

"No...a woman I see...was seeing..." I didn't want to say any more and I think the girl picked up on that. I lowered my head.

"We don't mean to pry, Mister. Just glad you're safe now. Why don't you take that wet coat off. I'm Shirley, and that's Sue." She pointed to the girl who had offered me a cigarette.

"And this is Bobby and Sam," she said, pointing to the two guys who had pulled me over. "And this is Joe...he helped too." Joe was seated on a log by himself off to my left. He nodded when his name was mentioned.

"Thank you again ... thank you all," I said. "I'm Johnny ... uh, John."

Shirley and Sue helped me unbutton my peacoat and take it off. They laid it down next to me on the log. I had on the fisherman's sweater Maureen had given me as a Christmas present. I was grateful for it. I knew it had gotten wet, but sitting there as the fire went higher, I felt the wool drying. At least that was how



Soul Away (3), 2023
Acrylic and charcoal on paper; 6 x 8 in



Reflections, 2023
Pencil on paper; 6 x 9 in

I sensed it. Bobby threw a few more sticks on the fire. I could see the sun was getting lower. I felt somewhat hypnotized by the flames of the fire. I didn't want to think about anything. My boots were soaked, my pants were soaked. I was not happy, but I was happy. Happy to be sitting there feeling the good of the fire and noticing the faces of these teenagers.

Sue went over to Bobby and offered him a drag on her cigarette, which he took. She sat down next to him and put her arm around his shoulder. I turned to look over the west side of the pond and saw the sun just above the treetops and the church steeple. Then I went back to concentrate on the fire and getting warm.



Weaving (1), 2023
Pencil on paper; 6 x 9 in

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