

## WISING UP ANTHOLOGIES

ILLNESS & GRACE, TERROR & TRANSFORMATION

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LOVE AFTER 70

DOUBLE LIVES, REINVENTION & THOSE

WE LEAVE BEHIND

VIEW FROM THE BED: VIEW FROM THE BEDSIDE

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THE KINDNESS OF STRANGERS

SURPRISED BY JOY

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RE-CREATING OUR COMMON CHORD

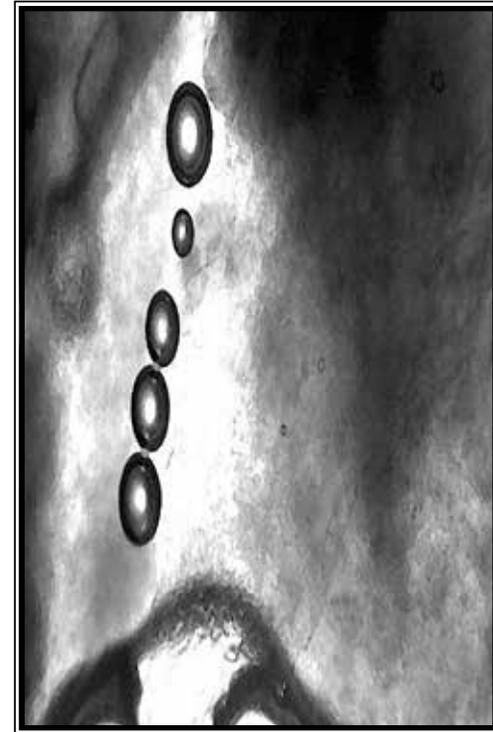
GOODNESS

FLIP SIDES

ADULT CHILDREN: *Being One, Having One &  
What Goes In-Between*

THE POWER OF THE PAUSE

## WHOLENESS



*Heather Tosteson & Charles D. Brockett*  
Editors

Wising Up Press



## CONTENTS

HEATHER TOSTESON	
<i>INTRODUCTION: WHOLENESS</i>	1
<b>I. ARC OF LIFE</b>	
LAURA APOL	
<i>HANNA ON THE MONKEY BARS</i>	12
<i>THE GIFT OF YES</i>	13
<i>LIGHT, WATER, BONES</i>	14
THEA HEARD	
<i>A GIRL NO ONE CAN TRUST</i>	15
WILSON R. M. TAYLOR	
<i>CROSSING THE LAGOON</i>	17
DEIDRA SUWANEE DEES	
<i>FRAGMENT: NEGOTIATING IDENTITY IN THE SOUTH</i>	25
ISABELLA OJEDA-AHMED	
<i>ALL THE PIECES</i>	27
BETH CHRISTENSEN	
<i>PART, PART, WHOLE</i>	32
CYNDY KREY	
<i>PROMISES</i>	39
<i>FINDING YOUR WAY</i>	41
PATRICIA CANNON	
<i>WILD HEART</i>	43
<i>INSPIRATION</i>	46
JASON A. NEY	
<i>THE LIFE OF THE BLOOD</i>	48
YESSENIA GUTIERREZ	
<i>THE KIDNEY QUEEN</i>	50
MAISIE MCADOO	
<i>AT WATER'S EDGE</i>	53
MARIAN MATHEWS CLARK	
<i>JOURNEY OF ALOHA</i>	61

JAMES WYSHYNSKI			
<i>WOMB</i>		74	
<i>AT THE CARWASH</i>		75	
<i>CATASTROPHIC MOLTING</i>		76	
<i>INTERIOR DIALOGUE</i>		77	
JEN WEBB			
<i>WORLD WILDLIFE FUND</i>		78	
<i>THE LAST OF THE FUTURISTS ARRIVES IN THE SUBURBS</i>		79	
<i>ON BEAUTY</i>		80	
<i>ON LOVE AND LOVERS</i>		81	
<i>THAT "FORMAL FEELING," EMILY</i>		82	
RANJANI RAO			
<i>THE OPPOSITE OF PERFECTION</i>		84	
GABRIELLE LEMAY			
<i>NIGHT PEEPERS</i>		91	
<i>NIGHT TRAIN</i>		92	
<i>PROM NIGHT</i>		94	
LISA HOCKSTEIN			
<i>A LOVE STORY IN EIGHT SHORT ACTS</i>		96	
ELLEN BIRKETT MORRIS			
<i>WHERE I'M FROM</i>		100	
<i>REEL TO REAL</i>		102	
KESHAWNA MOONEY			
<i>A PREDICTABLE CRISIS</i>		104	
GEETHA NAIR G.			
<i>TESTING TIME</i>		116	
JEANETTE MILLER			
<i>MY MOTHER, MY CHILD</i>		121	
SHERRY SHAHAN			
<i>JOINING MY MOTHER FOR BREAKFAST AT A DOWNTOWN MOTEL</i>		129	
RICKS CARSON			
<i>JUST TO LET YOU KNOW</i>		132	
<i>AND AFTER DINNER, A BOOK</i>		133	
<i>MY FATHER, IN HEAVEN, IS SORTING</i>		134	
SHARON LASK MUNSON			
<i>GLIMPSE INTO A MARRIAGE</i>		136	
<i>GRACE</i>		138	
NORITA DITTBERNER-JAX			
<i>PARK POINT, DULUTH</i>		140	
<i>HIGH UP: SUNRISE</i>		143	
RANDY MINNICH			
<i>LATE WINTER SOLILOQUY</i>		144	
<i>SOMETHING LIES BEYOND DEMENTIA</i>		145	
<i>THEN YOU WALKED IN</i>		146	
<i>THE COLORS OF THE WORLD</i>		147	
<b>II. SOCIAL CONTEXTS</b>			
LAURENCE SNYDAL			
<i>THRIFT STORE</i>		150	
<i>THE WHALE LINE</i>		151	
C.P. SURENDRAN			
<i>INVITATION</i>		152	
<i>SURPRISE</i>		153	
<i>SELF PORTRAIT WITH BANDAGED EAR</i>		154	
SARA BROWN WEITZMAN			
<i>RODIN'S "THE HAND OF GOD"</i>		156	
<i>ADAM</i>		157	
<i>WHAT'S MISSING</i>		158	
<i>VAN GOGH'S ROOM</i>		159	
<i>ECOSPHERE</i>		160	
DANIEL M. JAFFE			
<i>ENCHANTED</i>		161	
LARRY LEFKOWITZ			
<i>THE PERFECT WOMAN</i>		168	
BRIAN MICHAEL BARBEITO			
<i>BREATH</i>		174	
MEERA JACOB ELAMATHA			
<i>HONOR AMONG WOMEN</i>		180	
GAYE D. HOLMAN			
<i>THE ELUSIVENESS OF WHOLENESS</i>		184	

CHARLES BROCKETT & HEATHER TOSTESON			
<i>ANTHONY</i>		187	
NANCY WERKING POLING			
<i>INTRUSION</i>		205	
EISHA A. MASON			
<i>VIGIL FOR CHARLEENA LYLES</i>		211	
<i>HOW TO WALK ON HOT COALS</i>		214	
LINDA QUINLAN			
<i>BABYSITTING DANNY</i>		216	
<i>FATHER TOM</i>		218	
JOHNNY TOWNSEND			
<i>REPARATIONS, ONE FAMILY AT A TIME</i>		220	
<b>III. MYSTERY OF THE MOMENT</b>			
TED MILLAR			
<i>GPS NEVER WORKS (IN MY DREAMS)</i>		224	
<i>ONE KIND FAVOR I ASK OF YOU</i>		226	
<i>FIVE MILLION YEARS</i>		228	
MARY KAY RUMMEL			
<i>WELCOMING NIGHT</i>		229	
<i>EIGHTY AUTUMN MOONS</i>		230	
SUZANNA C. DE BACA			
<i>EVERYTHING IS A SHADOW</i>		232	
<i>EVERYTHING IS A GRAVE</i>		234	
<i>MORTUARY BEE</i>		236	
HEATHER TOSTESON			
<i>MARY SALAAM</i>		240	
SARAH ROSENBLATT			
<i>EPHEMERAL MATTERS</i>		249	
<i>RESILIENCE</i>		250	
<i>TO HAVE LOVED</i>		251	
<i>AGAINST ALL ODDS</i>		252	
DEIDRA GREENLEAF ALLAN			
<i>NOMAD</i>			254
<i>FARMHOUSE, MOUNTAIN LAKE PARK</i>			255
<i>AFTER A LECTURE ON THE NUMINOUS, MONTPELIER, VERMONT</i>			256
<i>WHAT SHE HEARD THE ROOM SAY</i>			257
<i>WOKEN</i>			258
RICHARD SCHIFFMAN			
<i>MELTING TIME</i>			260
<i>EDEN IN THE A.M.</i>			261
LOUIS FABER			
<i>CARRYING</i>			262
<i>NOT SPEAKING</i>			263
<i>QUANTUM ROMANCE</i>			264
CHRIS ELLERY			
<i>EVERY BEAUTIFUL NAME</i>			265
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS			270
CONTRIBUTORS			272
EDITORS/PUBLISHERS			280

## HEATHER TOSTESON

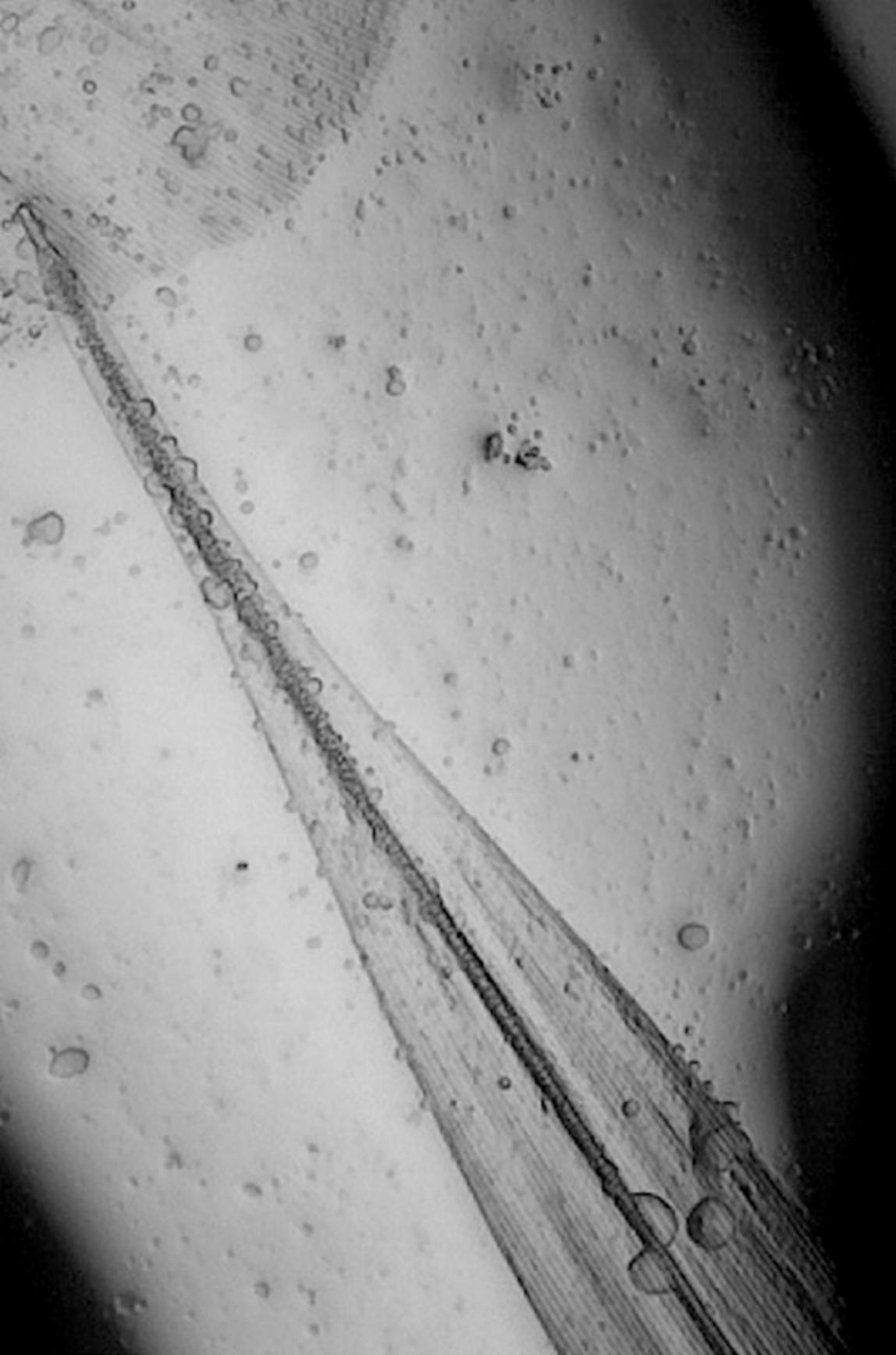
### *INTRODUCTION: WHOLENESS*

I've been brooding over—and exploring broadly but intuitively—the experience and concept of wholeness for several years now, so the prospect of pulling some of those thoughts into a persuasive logical structure, rather than intuitive, pointillist jolts of recognition was daunting. So I stalled, rationalized, read more as an evasive maneuver. But just before leaving for an out-of-town overnight to see our grandchildren, I felt, with the help of William James, I was beginning to feel an evolving *communicable* coherence. I left my handwritten notes neatly stacked on the far side of my desk. My blue cloth-bound volume of his collected writings, 1902-1910, set a little closer to the corner. I was ready to begin—in all seriousness—as soon as we returned. In anticipation, on our way back from our visit, I read a favorite section of James' revelatory experience with nitrous oxide aloud to Charles in a Starbucks in Flowery Branch when we stopped for coffee on our return route.

But when we pulled into our drive, we saw that a very brief but intense storm the night before had ripped the tin roof off our house. Sheets of metal lay on the lawn and drive. Most specifically, the wind had attacked the roof right over my study. Large trees had broken in half or were uprooted and entrusting their enormous weight to their more securely grounded neighbors. There was no time to brood.

I raced upstairs to assess the damage. But the ceiling in my study was dry, the desk top dry. I pulled out my laptop, began making calls. Went down to reinspect the damages. It was only later, when I came back to the desk, that I discovered my notes—and *only my notes*—for this introduction were soaking wet. Nearly illegible. The entire desk was dry. The volume of James a foot away was perfectly dry. There was no sign of water on the ceiling above. But all *my* notes were drenched. I sat there oscillating between my symbolic/superstitious and scientific minds.





I

ARC OF LIFE



## LAURA APOL

*HANNA ON THE MONKEY BARS*

When is she ever more beautiful than this:

shining, as hand over hungry hand  
she crosses the ladder of sun  
swinging herself forward  
into day, willowy arms strong,  
shoulders taut,

so in love with her own body  
I can hardly bear it.

Now she grasps every bar, now every other,  
her reach lengthening,  
forward, back.

I have drifted naked in a bayou,  
run marathons mile after mile,  
burrowed toes into fine white sand,

but I have never loved my body like this.

She glides easy through this dance,  
drops to the sawdust  
and climbs to cross again, again, again.

My eyes follow as, clear-winged, she rises  
and soars.

*THE GIFT OF YES*

I tell my mother I want to  
go to the lake, waterskiing with friends,  
instead of to Sunday service

and this time she does not say,  
*Laura, you know how we feel about this.*

She does not say,  
*You can make up your own mind.*  
*But you know how we feel about this.*

She does not say,  
*My parents would never have let me go,*  
*but you can make up your own mind.*  
*And you know how we feel about this.*

Instead, she says,  
*Yes. Have a good time. And here's some money*  
*for ice cream—*

and in that moment

her own father opens the car door,  
her mother hands me suntan lotion and a hat,  
her sister tosses me a towel,

and with her gift of yes, my mother  
climbs in beside me in the back.

## BETH CHRISTENSEN

### *PART, PART, WHOLE*

#### Libby

At first, they didn't want me to talk. They didn't seem to want to know anything about what I was thinking or feeling, or anything about what I knew that could actually help her. How could they even begin to understand her without understanding me? I thought that the absurdity of this was obvious: I had known her much longer, decades longer, than any of them. Why didn't they want me to talk?

Have you ever done a jigsaw puzzle, a really big one with a couple thousand pieces, and found out at the end of it that there are pieces missing? You look everywhere: under the furniture, in that little trove of toys and old socks that the dog keeps next to her bed, in your pockets (although why would you ever put them in your pockets?), between the sofa cushions—everywhere. If you can't find the missing pieces, your puzzle is never going to really be complete. It might be recognizable, but the holes will never cease to bother you. You might as well throw the puzzle away, but then you think, as soon as I throw it out, those missing pieces will show up. Isn't that how it always happens?

I'm one of the missing pieces. The picture of her life could exist without me, but there would be holes. Important, substantial holes that only I could fill. I had the general information, as did she by this time, as to what had happened. But I had more than that: I had all the human responses to that information that any normal person would have. I remembered the humiliation, the fear, the confusion. I remembered the experience of being chased by a shadowy man, and I remembered the feeling of him raping me when he caught me, as he always did. I remembered the sound of the heavy metal door closing, as one of the people who had possession of the keys (certainly not me) would close it, hard, so it would be sure to lock. I remembered the sound of that door closing as it echoed along the cinder-

block walls of the psych ward. I remembered it as the sound of hopelessness.

It's not that they didn't believe in my existence. There were people, some of whom knew me, most of whom did not, who didn't think I was real, but *these* people had to know I was real. They had diagnosed me, after all. They had told her she had dissociative identity disorder, and that the many holes in her memory, the gaps in her story of herself where she just went blank, were actually occupied by me and a couple others who ran things when she just couldn't do it anymore. We operated the machinery of her mind during some of the worst times. We each remembered things that she could not yet bear to remember, and held the feelings that would have threatened her precarious hold on sanity. It was with the help of them—the therapists, the hospital staff—that we all began to become aware of each other, and for each of us to slowly come to know what the others knew. But we were only supposed to speak through her, using her voice, answering to her name.

This was not the same hospital, or the same staff, that had presided over my original incarnation, the cinder-block ward with the heavy metal door and the shadow rapist. In that hospital of long ago, I had been declared schizophrenic and the hopeless feeling that came over me whenever the door slammed shut was not unrealistic. I was told that my insanity was likely to be a lifelong condition. I knew that meant a lot of doors would be closing, and as far as I could tell very few would be opening.

No, this hospital, the new one, specialized in treating people like me, people whose rapes and other traumas had lurked in shadows for years, some of whose brains had created auxiliary staff to help with the overload. They knew that I was real, but they would only acknowledge me as a *part*. As I understood it, I was not considered to be a person, just as a steering wheel or a radiator is not a car. I, of course, felt otherwise. When I was in charge of the body, I felt whole. I felt young, energetic. I knew the body was forty-something years old, but when I was in charge it felt seventeen. When I looked in the mirror, I saw myself, not her.

To tell the truth, I didn't like her, not at first. She was old and fat and kind of frumpy. She didn't smoke and hardly ever drank. She drove a station wagon. As far as I could tell, she didn't do anything interesting or fun. I had dropped out of high school, but she made perfect grades in college and grad school. She had stopped playing the guitar and writing stories. She had stopped painting. There were at least a couple dozen oil and acrylic paintings of mine that had just disappeared; she said she did not know what had

**MAISIE MCADOO***AT WATER'S EDGE*

*Woe is me! Ah, woe is me!  
I have seven bairns on land,  
And seven in the sea.*

—from "The Selkie Girl," a Celtic tale

I remember those days, stuck on a small patch of beach, splashing in the same little waves, confined to a tiny space bordered by the baby, the snacks and the seaweed line. If I swam out any distance at all, I would hear urgent cries of "Mommy! Mommy!" and I'd have to return to address some small, imagined crisis.

I would gaze down the length of beach, out to the ocean depths, and ache to go there. I always came back to my true self in the water.

The ache was more than restlessness. I married too young. My first children came so fast. My husband was gone all the time. It was worse when he was home. I had three lovely bairns, but inside me something was terribly wrong.

That final morning, I woke with my teeth clenched. I heard the baby whimpering, and Ronan, the oldest, trying to talk to him. A little boy felt it his job to calm the baby, because he knew his mother was not able to do it.

Meara, my fierce second, was always agitated. I hear her now, her high voice escalating— "No, Ronan! Don't touch that! That's mine! I need it right now!"

I was afraid to get up. If I could have had a few moments to myself, I might make it through the day. But I heard Meara headed for my bed. The baby's wails increased. I felt a roar inside my head.

"Mommy, you didn't listen to my song. You said you would!" Meara planted herself beside me and stared accusingly as I struggled to sit up.

"Mommy, I'm so hungry. I can't wait any more," from Ronan, just behind Meara.

Screams from the crib.

I tried to smile. Any other mother would be glad to see her children in

## JAMES WYSHYNSKI

### WOMB

Waves from that amniotic ocean crashed against you every time your mother rose from her chair. In that dark salt water,

you birthed yourself, cell by cell, thought by thought. Don't believe them, those who talk up the quiet, the calm and safety, who

hold it out as a harbor. Instead, fill a tub, add salt. Kill the lights and lie back. Never again will you face yourself

with nothing between you and you.

### AT THE CARWASH

The moment comes, past the *your-car-is-soaking*, when the windshield is dotted—a geography of bulbs spread out like the Midwest from a night flight. Make of these not cities or even single,

lit rooms, but souls shrunk into a diorama of rapture, an experiment in salvation's viscosity. Let the overhead vacuums swing into action, huge cones stuttering under the current, before they begin

their appointed task—specimens whole one second, comfortable in their bodies, the next sucked into a higher atmosphere. Others take the shape of comets as if wrestling with their appearance in the *Book of Life*. Now

they too are gone, lifted outside recognition. Here are the unchosen laid out on a slide dissected by sight. What to make of this? Explore this darkfield illumination. Go past drop, atom, muon—what of those who stay, who

turn down nirvana? Do they remain to lift others up? Where in the world are you now, you scientists of intercession? Who will launch these in orbit, spin them into a new mercy? *Drive forward.*

## RANJANI RAO

### *THE OPPOSITE OF PERFECTION*

It's a warm evening in Singapore, as most evenings are. There is a full moon somewhere, hiding behind the trees, or amongst clouds that move languidly overhead. I unroll my purple yoga mat in an open field inside the Singapore Botanic Gardens, a UNESCO World Heritage site. The springy grass tickles my bare feet as I sink onto the mat and look up at the slowly darkening sky.

In this gorgeous place, I am just one spoke in a circle formed by a dozen or so women, gathered for our full moon circle meditation. We meet here once a month, a diverse group ranging in age from 30–70 years, who have arrived here from different countries, speaking multiple languages, and holding vastly different life experiences that have marked us, made us who we are and brought us together on a tiny island that lies one degree north of the equator.

Stephanie, my colleague, and good friend, lays out a handful of battery-powered candles at the tips of the long-stemmed roses arranged in a circle in the center. The yoga mats form another circle around the roses. Soon we will begin our meditation in the presence of the full moon as our witness.

How did I get here?

Not just to this circle of moon sisters, but to this bubble of a city-state in Southeast Asia which has now been my home for a decade.

When I first left India for the United States as a twenty-two-year-old newlywed, my hands bore faint stains of bridal henna. My eyes held visions of a happily ever after in a foreign land where I believed all dreams could be fulfilled. Not once did I imagine that in the distant future, I would once again leave India for an unfamiliar country with a new husband, boldly hoping to unite a new blended family of four, with each of us bringing one child to our union.

But all that is not on my mind as I look up at the night sky with

crisscrossing silent clouds that shield the moon. The air is warm and still. A few birds chirp as daylight dims. Only the faint glowing tips of the candles mark our space in the darkness. I close my eyes as Stephanie leads tonight's meditation.

There are many reasons why I attend the monthly moon circle. But the most important reason is because I feel a sense of wholeness in this space out in the open in the presence of a full moon that watches without judgment.

The circle is a simple representation of the cycle of life, a system without hierarchy. In this safe space I am finally able to honor my journey to this serene moment—the result of many detours, delays and debacles. So many decisions, some taken lightly, some with great thought. So many paths traversed, some filled with joy and others with pain.

The decades of life have been eventful, although not always kind. Every time I felt I had arrived; I knew that there was more ahead.



#### **When wishes come true**

As a young bride, I was convinced I was the luckiest girl in the world. The most important decision of my life had been made. In India, getting married is considered as being "*settled*". A single person is a square peg who sticks out and makes everyone uncomfortable. By getting married, you become part of a unit that is considered complete, a stable building block of society.

My parents had introduced me to an almost-perfect potential spouse, a young man who lived and worked in the United States. At our first meeting, I expressed my desire to pursue higher education. He didn't object. I agreed to the wedding.

As a student, a recent immigrant, a bride, I was fascinated by everything: wide open highways, ATMs, free public libraries. I lived in the Washington DC metropolitan area. I joined tours of the Capitol and the White House and took pictures outside the Jefferson Memorial when the cherry blossoms were in full bloom. One cold December night, dressed in a saree, I walked in the first snow of the season (and my life) to the Lincoln Memorial.

Life was perfect.

What more could I want? I naively believed that if you stayed positive and visualized the life you desired, things would slide into place.

My miscarriage was my first jolt of reality, an introduction to loss of a magnitude that I was not prepared for.

## KESHAWNA MOONEY

### *A PREDICTABLE CRISIS*

Ernestine had started thinking the only way to really determine if she wanted to leave her husband was to have an affair. But when she woke up that morning, and looked over at Jerrold, a brown starfish floating in a sea of blankets and throw pillows, she thought that was a preposterous idea. Not just because she didn't need another man to leave him—though it would have been nice to have a reason—but because he looked so innocent sprawled out the way he was that she felt almost tender toward him. He would be a helpless fool without her.

Before they met, some fifty odd years ago now, it pained Ernestine to remember, she had been senselessly, out of her mind infatuated with another man; a smooth crooning musician who left one night to play a gig with his band and decided Ernestine wasn't enough reason for him to return. She was inconsolable before her mother lifted her chin and told her to quit all the crying. "A man is like a train. Miss one, catch the next," she said with a wink. And catch the next is what Ernestine did.

Jerrold was the next man who came sniffing around, and when he asked her to marry him she said yes only because he was off to Vietnam. She thought if he was going to run off and die, then maybe letting him think he had a girl waiting for him back home was something nice she could do for him. But then the dullard jumped off a wall carousing with his fool buddies and got both feet broken. Having no use for him, the military discharged him and within the month, before she could give it proper consideration, or much thought at all really, they were husband and wife.

Even though Jerrold's drinking was a third partner in the marriage, he seemed to really love Ernestine. He wasn't a mean drunk. If anything, he was more affectionate, following her around everywhere, pawing at her at all hours of the day. So, it was no surprise when their son, Paul, came along. Jerrold was so happy he quit his drinking for a time, and it wasn't long before

their daughter, Lisa, followed. Ernestine settled into her little life almost effortlessly. She spent so much time cooking meals, scrubbing stains, and shuffling children back and forth, forty years had passed before she looked up and realized she had been feeling empty for a long time. She wasn't sure if that was Jerrold's fault, and when she saw him sleeping like this she always felt sorry for blaming him. He wasn't her first choice, but she didn't mind him most of the time. But then again, peeling herself away from the wall on her side of the bed, doing her routine frontwards crabwalk to climb over him rankled her insides enough that she thought she might like to be without him for just a little while.

She moved into the kitchen for her morning phone call to her sister, Irene—a habit they developed in their early twenties when Irene was newly married and Ernestine was a new mother and both had lots of questions to ask and household predicaments to complain about. Now at seventy and sixty-seven, with Ernestine being the senior, the habit had endured this long, Ernestine thought, only because Irene's husband went and crashed himself up after a night of drinking, leaving Ernestine to look after yet another person who depended on her. Ernestine stood at the wall telephone, a relic of times past, lighting up and puffing on a cigarette which was just one more thing in her life that had gone out of style. When Irene answered with her raspy, "Hey," Ernestine took a puff of her cigarette and blurted out, "I'm leaving him, 'Rene."

"Yeah, what he done now?"

"Nothing, that's the problem. I'm sick of looking at him. I'm a get me a new man. I ain't found him yet but I'm going to go ahead and find one. Let Jerrold fend for himself for once."

"You know that man would die without you," Irene sighed. "Hell, he'll probably die soon anyway."

"With me right behind him, and then what?" Ernestine chewed her lip and flicked her cigarette into the sink, cradling the receiver between her ear and shoulder. She heard the thump against the side door meaning the paper had arrived. She noticed there was a note attached to the blue bag telling her it was going to be the last one and that next month she would have to "find them online," whatever that meant.

"Everyone moving on to somewhere," Ernestine said quietly as she pulled the paper out of the bag and threw it on the counter.

"Check the numbers," Irene said.

**RICKS CARSON***JUST TO LET YOU KNOW**To Jane Carson, 1925-2013*

I'm standing by the river  
 that unwinds, like one  
 silver measure of time,  
 over bending reeds  
 and flickery trout,  
 wearing at stones of years.

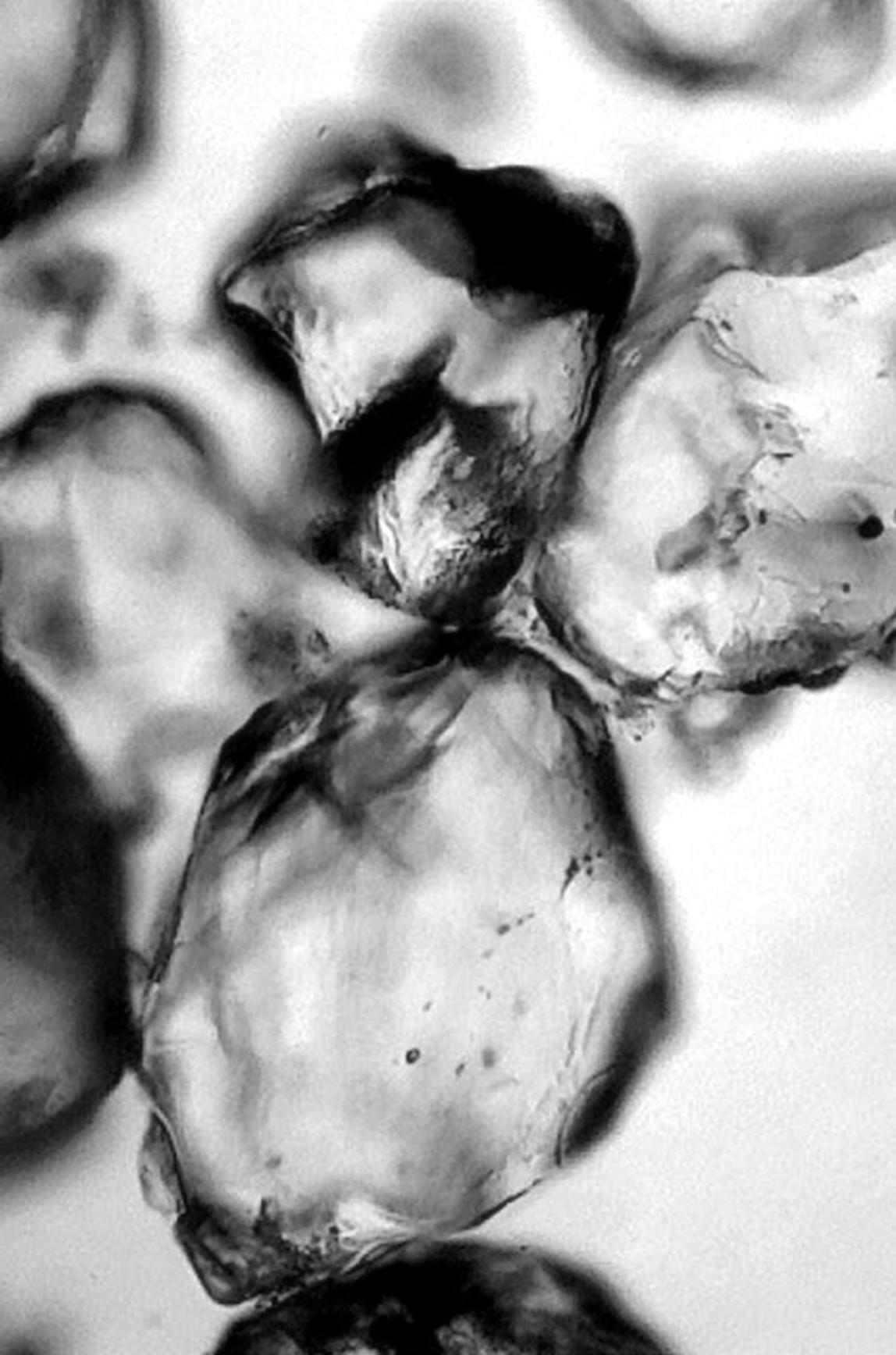
I'm not all that far away  
 from your spirit raking leaves  
 under that October hickory  
 so tall, I used to climb  
 into what seemed, to a child,  
 to be heaven's gold.

I watched you yesterday  
 smoothing icing with a frosting  
 knife on the cake cooling  
 on the rack. You always  
 bake me one when  
 you know I'm coming  
 back home. You look up.  
 No, don't worry about the cake—  
 I'll be there soon.  
 It won't have time to stale.

*AND AFTER DINNER, A BOOK*

Maybe it is two boys,  
 one slumped at each shoulder,  
 up since dawn, school all day,  
 soccer practice till dinnertime,  
 homework undone.  
 Maybe it is the clock's nine chimes,  
 or the wood stove's heat shivering the air.  
 Maybe it is the heroism of Reepicheep,  
 a bold mouse crestfallen when his tail  
 was cut off in battle, but his pride  
 restored when Aslan breathed on it,  
 like God did on clay figures in Eden.

This reading is like a prayer to  
 my father, who never read to me,  
 never breathed on my bruises and fears.  
 And so we drift in and out of  
 words, my sons' heads nodding,  
 my tongue sleepwalking  
 toward the page where the brave mouse  
 knows it is his time and, stout of heart,  
 strokes his canoe to the edge  
 of the known world and on through  
 the curling-back waves,  
 and *Narnia*, like old resentment,  
 slips through my fingers.



II  
SOCIAL CONTEXTS



## LAURENCE SNYDAL

*THRIFT STORE*

Salvation Army, St. Vincent de Paul,  
 Goodwill Industries. Emporia where  
 Discards, detritus, are scattered asprawl  
 Sheet metal shelving, where the very air  
 Breathes disillusion. But it cheers me up.  
 I find the duck puppet, bone-handled knives,  
 The brazen ape holding the candle cup.  
 Survivors, witnesses of other lives.

Shades of dissatisfied desire lie side  
 By side with memories of wasted weeks.  
 Here is a mute museum of things tried,  
 Later found wanting. Perhaps he who seeks  
 Novelty here or joy could better find  
 Them in the longer aisle, the deeper shelf,  
 The fuller line of merchandise, the kind  
 Of bargain bins, bizarre, inside himself.

Still on my mantel stand the brittle bits  
 I've salvaged from a multitude of pasts,  
 Backward glances to where my poor heart sits,  
 Stunned with the certainty that nothing lasts.

*THE WHALE LINE*

*"the upper end of the line is taken aft . . . resting crosswise upon the . . .  
 handle of every man's oar, so that it jogs against his wrist in rowing, and  
 also passing between the men. . . Thus the whale-line holds the whole boat  
 in its complicated coil. . . All men live enveloped in whale-lines."*

—Melville, *Moby Dick*

These lines I write tonight lead me to think  
 I can escape the whale-line of my life,  
 My house, my garden, and the way I drink  
 The summer into fall. While my dear wife  
 Prepares for bed, I take my pad and pen  
 And scribble out my thoughts. These are not years  
 Of discontent but rather hours when  
 I right all wrongs and smother all my fears.

Melville laid his whale-line to jog the wrist  
 Of everybody in the boat. A rope  
 That could twist, twine and turn into a fist  
 That gathered all together into hope.  
 Melville understood this hope, this tightening  
 Web of word and world. He knew how the whale  
 In his broad breaching, brought us the frightening  
 Three words he then assigned to poor Ishmael.  
 "I alone survived."

So far as I know

No one survives alone or wants it so.

## LARRY LEFKOWITZ

*THE PERFECT WOMAN*

Barry, who came to see Dr. Blau, a psychoanalyst, suddenly spotted a woman in his waiting room. "It's her. *Her!* Do you understand? *Her!*"

"Who?" asked Dr. Blau.

"*Her! Her!*"

"Miss Goldfarb?"

"I don't know her name. The Embodiment."

"Miss Goldfarb? Of what?"

"Of all!" exclaimed Barry.

Doctor Blau tried to calm him. "I would hate to have to resort to a straightjacket. It's so passé."

Barry calmed down. "It will not be necessary—I wouldn't harm my All."

"Miss Goldfarb is here in connection with a patient of mine."

"In connection with—I accept that. Obviously, she couldn't be a patient herself."

"Why do you say that?"

"Perfection doesn't need a psychiatrist. The two concepts are irreconcilably opposed. You see, Doctor, she is the Embodiment of the perfect woman. I am an artist. To paint the perfect woman, one must find her. I began my search by studying the most famous paintings of women. The ample forms of Rubens, Degas' leggy ballerinas, and so forth. I studied every painting or sculpture with 'Woman' in the title: Soustine's 'Woman and Child,' Lipschitz' 'Woman and Gazelles,' Fontanesi's 'Woman at the Spring,' Rembrandt's 'Woman Bathing in a Stream' and many more. Then, Doctor, and only then, did I begin to catalogue in my mind the perfect parts of the female form—the eyes of the girl drying herself in Renoir's 'Bather,' the breasts of Adele in Rodin's 'Torso of Adele,' the legs of the girl in Burne-Jones' 'The Depths of the Sea.' Are you familiar with any of these, Doctor?"

"Unfortunately not, my taste runs to"—he gestured toward a painting on the wall—"Lichtenrobbe."

"A pity."

"And when you find the perfect woman, you will paint her?"

"Paint her—and possess her."

"And you believe Miss Goldfarb is your perfect woman."

I don't know," sighed Barry. "I thought so before, but now I am not sure. You see, it was her lips—not her lips—the lips of the girl in Renoir's 'Bather' that caught me. Your untimely intervention prevented me from knowing that—I didn't get past her lips. I mean, to Adele's breasts, or The Depth of the Sea's legs. There were her eyes and nose and other parts yet to be compared."

"So why did you cry out that she was the Embodiment?"

"Because I got a glimpse of her ankles."

"Her ankles were—unusual?"

"Doctor, her ankles were perfect. They reminded me of nothing so much as the ankles in—"

"Spare me the references. My artistic knowledge is largely limited to the Lichtenrobbe on my wall. The gift of a patient."

"Very well. *The* ankles. Is that sufficient?"

"And from Miss Goldfarb's ankles joined to her lips you built your perfect woman. Like a Picasso I once saw."

"Doctor, when you have been searching for *The* woman with all the attributes, Miss Goldfarb is the first to possess *two* attributes, and hopefully all of them. Until I saw her, I had reached the point of despair, of breakdown, of total collapse. That's why I came to you."

"You had concluded that the search was an impossible one."

Barry sighs, "I had gotten to the point where I had started to believe that it was what the great paintings of women *hid*, rather than what they revealed, that would provide the solution. That I had not found the perfect woman because I had been following false trails. If, to take one example, I could only see the face of the naked woman in Degas' 'The Tub,' I would find her living counterpart."

"And did you?"

"Doctor, the naked woman in 'The Tub' has her back to the viewer."

"So how could you possibly see her face?"

"I tried to look in *back* of the painting in the museum in order to see

## MEERA JACOB ELAMATHA

### *HONOR AMONG WOMEN*

Fifteen-year-old Sheila frowned at the scene unfolding on the TV screen in irritation. Surrounded by relative luxury in her family's cosy front room, she started to curse the impulse that had made her pause in between channel-surfing, on this channel. She liked to watch old Malayalam movies from the 1980s and 1990s, when the world appeared more innocent and real. She may be a daughter of the latest century, but her soul was an old one. However, over the past half hour, she was slowly coming to the realization that maybe her soul was not all that old.

It was an old movie, starring her favorite actor Mohanlal, along with a pretty actress which she thought was the famous Parvathi. God only knew the name of the film, and now, she was just so disgusted with the plot-twist that she simply turned off the TV and scowled into the distance. Her mother walked into the room and ruffled her hair, which she tried unsuccessfully to avoid. It also made her grumpier.

"What's with the long face, molu?"

Sheila the teenager just rolled her eyes, quite sure her mother would never get it. As though reading her mind, her mother simply chuckled and tweaked her nose.

"I'm here if you need help." The older woman walked off to the kitchen, her aim a steaming cup of chai. She took a deep breath; she could smell the thunder in the air. It was the perfect weather for chai.

Left to her own devices, Sheila mournfully contemplated the darkening skies outside. She got up and walked out on the veranda and sat down on the top step leading outside, and stared at the sky. The thunder clouds were so dark, they looked blue. A cold wind began to blow, and Sheila wrapped her arms around her body and hunched in on herself.

*It was so wrong!* Her conscience made its presence known. *Stupid movie.*

"Here you go." Her mother walked up and handed her a steaming cup.

Inhaling the familiar aroma, Sheila felt a bit consoled. That was when it began to rain. At first in drizzles, then with a vengeance. She looked at her mother who was sitting on the wicker chair, her eyes closed in bliss as she enjoyed her tea. Her mother loved the rain, and she loved to watch her mother enjoying the rain.

"If I get raped, will you and Chachan make me marry him?" The question was out without conscious thought.

"Hmm . . . what?" Sheila could see her mother wrench her mind from somewhere far off and give her a strange look. She waited patiently while her mother looked at her like she had sprouted a third eye and webbed feet.

"Of course not!" she replied at last. "What an idea!"

Something in Sheila calmed and she settled back against the wall behind her and took a sip of her tea. Her mother still watched her curiously. The rain blocked out the world, cocooning mother and daughter in an invisible veil of comfort.

"In that movie I was watching, the hero's sister got raped by the son of an important businessman." Sheila said after a while. "He then insisted that the guy marry her, in order to preserve her honor."

She turned and looked at her mother, "Why would he do that?"

For a long time, her mother did not say anything. She simply stared out at the rain, coming down in torrents and debated how to answer her child. With an insight borne of motherhood, she knew her answer would be a turning point for Sheila, the point where she would bloom and spread her wings, an adult in spirit, if not quite in body. She had been waiting for this moment since her birth, but she still felt so inadequately prepared, to help her daughter's metamorphosis, so to speak. But she had to try.

Sheila was still waiting patiently, uncharacteristically so for a flesh-and-blood teenager.

"For a long time, people associated a woman's honor with her virginity." Her mother began, a bit hesitantly. "You know all about patriarchal society, how women are oppressed etc. etc."

Sheila nodded to show that she was following.

"Women were seen as weak creatures who should always be protected under a man—her father, her husband, or her son. She was never free because she was always vulnerable. Her virginity was her gift to her husband; it denoted her loyalty and love. Therefore, if a woman was found not to be a virgin at the time of her marriage, she was said to have no honor because she had given

**NANCY WERKING POLING***INTRUSION*

Partner, that's what Pastor Alice calls the lady who lives with her. As if they're cowgirls or work together on *Law and Order*. Clarisse is the partner's name. She has a job teaching English lit at the college.

"What a waste," Dallas Hines said about Clarisse. Only to the old timers, though. She's real pretty, Clarisse is, blonde, with a stately posture. If he were fifty years younger, Dallas says, he'd bed her and change her mind about liking women. That's what he claims.

Thelma tries to imagine what two women do in bed, as there's no Tab A to insert into Slot A. It occurs to her that she never gave any consideration to whatever kind of knicky-knacky Pastor Bill and his wife, Marsha, engaged in. Homosexuals are different, though. Whatever they do, it's unnatural, disgusting.

Dr. Hessinger, head of the college biology department, chaired the search committee. A strange looking bird, he is. Around his bald spot a circle of long hair is pulled back in a ponytail with a curl at the end. He testified to Pastor Alice's skills as a preacher, counselor, and administrator.

Word of the church hiring a lesbian pastor has spread in the community. There's been so much curiosity that local TV channels gathered outside the church on Pastor Alice's first Sunday. When Thelma watched the evening news on TV, she saw that the only people interviewed were those who think Pastor Alice is the cat's meow. Nobody asked Thelma. She would have told them that she knows a thing or two about sin, and homosexuality is a sin and she prays every day that Pastor Alice will repent and sin no more. That's what Jesus would say. Like he told the woman at the well: "Go and sin no more."

There have also been "Letters to the Editor" in the local newspaper denouncing the church for going against God's laws. A lot of Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve remarks. The whole business is an embarrassment.

Willard Hapwell, who works for an advertising firm, designed a logo:

## LINDA QUINLAN

### *BABYSITTING DANNY*

Danny and I met for the last time  
at a Fifth Street bar  
two doors down from his mother's old haunt,  
where I ran numbers for her  
to the bookie joint across the street.

My hand reaches for him,  
then retreats.  
He is a tear waiting to fall on my cheek.

I taught him to steal at Woolworths.  
He emptied his small pockets  
and delivered his haul  
to older girls he wanted to please,  
balloons, eye liner, and candy lips  
that bled into our mouths.

His mother was forty-three  
when she was found dead,  
empty pill bottles beside her,  
no last words  
in an apartment above Katz Bagels.

I wanted to steal something for him,  
to give him his mother's laugh,  
the way she held a martini  
and a cigarette.

I paid for his beer  
and offered nothing more.  
He lagged behind me.  
My car door opened and shut.

Six months later he's dead.  
Beer bottles on his floor.  
California sun on my face  
when I get the call.

A gun in his hand.  
No suicide note.  
A lone picture of his mother  
on his nightstand.



III  
MYSTERY OF THE MOMENT



**TED MILLAR***GPS NEVER WORKS (IN MY DREAMS)*

I had that dream again last night.  
 I'm in a car, a bus, a plane.  
 Eventually I'm on foot trying  
 to reach some undisclosed location  
 that never seems attainable  
 but nevertheless feels important.  
 Sometimes I encounter familiar  
 landmarks that in any other ordinary  
 sojourn would be reassuring,  
 but instead serve to disorient  
 and prolong my frustration.  
 Family, friends, even celebrities  
 make occasional appearances  
 as fellow travelers, never navigational  
 assistants. Like my childhood  
 optometrist driving with me through  
 the Pacific Northwest when I went  
 around knocking doors looking for  
 "our house." Then I was alone  
 for a little while until I ditched  
 the car in a pond into which I rolled  
 backwards when the brakes failed.

It never occurs to me to open GPS  
 on my phone, as any rational  
 contemporary human being today  
 with a smart device would do.  
 I'm just a pinball bouncing  
 through the game until my alarm  
 wakes me with "Can't Find My way Home."

I wonder what Freud might have had to say  
 about all this, or Carl Jung. Hell,  
 even Doctor LeNorby, the therapist  
 I saw on and off for ten years who looked  
 like what we think of when we imagine  
 cool high school science teachers.  
 He'd probably cock his head to the right,  
 glance past me at the clock  
 when I'm looking away, and announce,

"Time's up."

**SUZANNA C. DE BACA***EVERYTHING IS A SHADOW*

Everything is a shadow around me on the path.  
 I see you everywhere, hiding in the dim light of dusk,  
 in the fog of dawn. You are the space beneath the hedge,  
 the line cast by the tall tree, the mask of the moon.

I know a story about fear. I thought it was you,  
 a primitive witch, unformed and untamed, who reflected  
 ugliness and greed and loathing and shame, who whispered  
 that my needs were better unexpressed, unmet and denied,  
 who plunged me headlong into the depths of the forest,  
 who told me to hide my face from the world.

I know a story about collective shadows, the blind spots  
 outside of the light of consciousness, the contaminants  
 that infect our hearts, that cause us to descend into madness  
 and rage, spew our hatred like bile. Because when we cannot  
 see the darkness, we become it.

But as I go inward, a small flicker ignites,  
 and what has been concealed is enlightened.  
 Once illuminated, I see that you are not the danger,  
 not the trap, not simply the darkness. You are the warning,  
 the searchlight, the cool haven, the harbor.

You were hidden for so long. But life can turn quickly.  
 I see you now, emerging in the dim light of dusk,  
 in the fog of dawn, in the space beneath the hedge,  
 the line cast by the tall tree, in the umbra of the moon.  
 I thought you were a shadow but you are a shelter.  
 You say come sit by me, in me, and I will comfort you.  
 Come out of the darkness and I will give you rest.  
 For everything is shadow. Everything is shade.

**DEIDRA GREENLEAF ALLAN***NOMAD*

To be totally alone in this world chasing the moon  
in your custom van down a desert highway

To drive your metal envelope through the night  
serenaded by bouncing dishes the tidal slosh

of toilet water chattering forks and knives  
steering toward a future

freed from obligation as you've freed yourself  
from the need to possess to enact a purpose

Is it shameful to be so untethered windblown  
as a tumbleweed?

Motel signs call from the side of the road  
neon lights buzzing like giant red mosquitoes

They long for your company for an exchange  
of money words the handing over of a key

as if there were some secret to be unlocked  
some unknown worth knowing

that can't already be found in the dizzying arms  
of this star-studded night

*FARMHOUSE, MOUNTAIN LAKE PARK*

*for the Haynes family*

Light slides over your face and strikes your hair, flare  
of red, then green, and you, busy with chores, oblivious  
to this moment.

But I am swept away,  
along with these paneled walls and fly-specked windows,  
hay barn shuttered in perpetual gloom,  
sagging porch beside the tracks that squeal a lonesome  
train song all night long.

How can I explain—  
this feeling that we're all flowing together, I don't know where,  
the dead, the living, this house, this yard. Swept along  
as if we were nothing—as if we were a river of light.

This is what I'm about to tell you, but a curtain moves,  
you look up,  
and it's gone.