



# YOUNG RAVENS LITERARY REVIEW

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# ***Young Ravens Literary Review***

***Issue 17  
Winter 2022***

## **Editorial Staff:**

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Elizabeth Pinborough

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## *Table of Contents*

<i>Cover Art</i>	<i>Matina Vossou</i>	
<i>Introduction</i>		4
Eve Celebrant	<i>Merryn Rutledge</i>	5
Violet in the Trailer 1	<i>Wendy Lou Schmidt</i>	6
When Mother Took Her Hair Down	<i>Sigrun Susan Lane</i>	7
Small Town Girls	<i>Elizabeth McCarthy</i>	8
Wanderlusting	<i>Kersten Christianson</i>	10
First Bloom	<i>Alix Brobbey</i>	11
In the Garden	<i>Mary Alice Williams</i>	12
Consecrated Ground	<i>Ariel Mitchell Williams</i>	13
Joan's Testament	<i>Merryn Rutledge</i>	14
I am Big	<i>Sharon Lopez Mooney</i>	16
Aria for Imbolc	<i>Mary Alice Williams</i>	17
Am I a Woman	<i>Ann M Lawrence</i>	19
The Lunatic of Étretat	<i>Lauren Cox</i>	20
In My Element	<i>Karla Linn Merrifield</i>	21
Photo 125	<i>Richard Hanus</i>	22
from eden	<i>Chloë Rain</i>	23
Permanent Colors	<i>Colette Tennant</i>	24
Mother and Child	<i>Anne Whitehouse</i>	25
Post-hysterectomy Dream, 1959	<i>Elizabeth Cranford Garcia</i>	27
Thursday	<i>Holly Day</i>	28
One Day You Finally Say Yes	<i>Darlene Young</i>	29
Violet in Summer	<i>Wendy Lou Schmidt</i>	30
Umma's Brown Bread	<i>Sigrun Susan Lane</i>	31
Self-Portrait in Cookies	<i>Liz Busby</i>	32
Thanksgiving Evening in a Friend's Kitchen	<i>Robin Wright</i>	38
Pretending	<i>Holly Day</i>	39
Image 025	<i>Richard Hanus</i>	40
At Age 50, She Buys Pink Roller-Skates	<i>Darlene Young</i>	41
My Friend's Marriage is Failing, But		

I'm Not Supposed to Know	<i>Darlene Young</i>	43
Being Old	<i>Sandra Salinas Newton</i>	44
Outside the Snow Globe	<i>Nancy Machlis Rechtman</i>	45
Portrait of a Woman with Sun and Dog	<i>Dorothy Johnson-Laird</i>	47
Designs for Life	<i>Merryn Rutledge</i>	49
Bridge club	<i>Adrienne Stevenson</i>	50
For Gloria.	<i>Kersten Christianson</i>	51
Her Reflection	<i>Ariel Mitchell Williams</i>	52
My Quan Yin	<i>Diana Raab</i>	54
Altar of Motherhood	<i>V. Bray</i>	55
Hard Sugar	<i>Sigrun Susan Lane</i>	56
Esther, Revisited	<i>Alix Brobbey</i>	57
High Maintenance	<i>Adrienne Stevenson</i>	58
Witch Queen of Angmar	<i>Christa Fairbrother</i>	59
Incongruity	<i>Adrienne Stevenson</i>	60
Flutter	<i>Holly Day</i>	61
A Not Admitting of the Wound	<i>Shirley Harshenin</i>	62
Eve	<i>Alix Brobbey</i>	65
Vision is the Keyhole of Oblivion	<i>Matina Vossou</i>	66
<i>Contributor Biographies</i>		67

## *Introduction*

For our seventeenth issue, we are thrilled to share the works of authors exploring womanhood. Womanhood is not a monolith. Rather, it is filled with multitudes—possibilities, contradictions, pains, and powers. Our authors trace these complexities in the lives of historical figures, Biblical characters, myths, and real women of all ages.

Colette Tennant reaches back to women's origins, asking, "Were our mothers' wombs brushed with the same color/ from generation to generation, all the way back to our first mother?" ("Permanent Colors," 24). In Sigrun Susan Lane's "When Mother Took Her Hair Down" (7), we experience the layered wisdom of a mother's hair through the eyes of the child narrator. Elizabeth McCarthy tenderly holds the liminal space of being a teen in "Small Town Girls" (8). Darlene Young encapsulates what it is like in middle age to feel the youthful nostalgia of a pair of pink roller skates ("At Age 50, She Buys Pink Roller-Skates," 41), while Christa Fairbrother imagines this "gradual slide into invisibility" in the figure of the Witch Queen of Angmar ("Witch Queen of Angmar," 59).

Sandra Salinas Newton and Adrienne Stevenson ("Bridge club," 50) muse on the delights of "Being Old" (44). Lauren Cox urges us to see anew the forgotten women, like "The Lunatic of Étretat"—"My garments are soft with age,/ and they bear the stuff of living" (20) Alixa Brobbey ("Eve," 65), Merryn Rutledge ("Eve Celebrant," 5), and Chloë Rain ("from eden," 23) reimagine Eve and Eden. Elizabeth Cranford Garcia and Ariel Mitchell Williams powerfully convey the terrible losses women face.

No matter how you engage with this issue—all in one sitting or over a few days—we hope you'll be as inspired by these thought-provoking pieces as we are. Thank you to each of our wonderful contributors for making this an unforgettable issue!

Happy reading,  
Sarah Page and Elizabeth Pinborough

## ***Merryn Rutledge***

### **Eve Celebrant**

*Encountering Marianna Pineda's "Eve Celebrant"  
in deCordova Sculpture Park*

As though she burst from earth's belly fully formed

Eve strides boldly across the hillside

raised foot making air a solid step

certainty in her clairvoyant gaze

No temptress

she offers two gestures of counsel

One hand tenders a pomegranate

jewel of possibility

She thrusts her other arm forward

hand upturned to say

*Do not pass by before you consider*

*that you will know sweet juice and ruby-bitter seed*

*You too were wax*

*molded for beauty's sake*

*cast in strength*

*Miss all mystery if you impose a snake*

*Celebrate what you cannot predict*

*Wendy Lou Schmidt*

**Violet in the Trailer 1**



## *Sigrun Susan Lane*

### **When Mother Took Her Hair Down**

When Mother took her hair down  
in order to wash it, we gathered round  
to see it fall nearly to her knees—

the strangeness of it.  
She was an ancient sorceress,  
her hair fell in wondrous waves.

We imagined what could live there  
in the dark curtains, small animals,  
fairies perhaps, ladders for *huldufolk*

who built homes in her tresses.  
We played peek-boo through its drapery  
until she shooed us, so she could wash it.

Then she sat before the fireplace  
to let it dry, bent forward so it cascaded.  
We could see the fire through it

as she brushed. We huddled  
close to her feet for warmth.  
She brushed and brushed.

We asked to help, but our small hands  
did not have the strength  
to handle its thickness, its body.

Then she gathered it up and braided  
it in that funny way of hers.  
She held a strand in her mouth,

fixed two thick braids then wound them  
round in the style of her Icelandic mother.  
She looked old fashioned and regal,

like a visitor from a faraway country  
where nature is cruel  
and a woman is prized for the hair on her head.



## *Elizabeth McCarthy*

### **Small Town Girls**

*for Kathy J. and Holly*

Walking barefoot into summer nights,  
under a watchful moon,  
we roamed our small town roads.

Feral girls not ready for life with  
bras and boys to hold us tight.

They called us tomboys—  
but who were they to know  
what a girl could ever be when  
all she wanted was to run free

from homes we never spoke of  
as we carried the broken shards  
within our happy young facades.

Little lies let us wander alone—together  
like the homeless nomads we aspired to be.

Past the old south cemetery encircled by  
stone walls that slumped and leaned as if  
overpowered by the weight of all its dead.

Up and through the hillside orchard,  
its apple filled rows still heavy with fog  
from farmer's poison spray that hung  
like ghosts awaiting our arrival.

Then around the bend into town where  
the brick school building echoed hollow  
as we climbed in through the loosened vent  
just to leave our sets of dusty footprints.

Onward, down Main Street past the church,

a parade of three young virgins marching  
before the holy statute of Mother Mary  
waiting patiently and barefoot in the dark.

Cold and tired, we strolled back  
to camp as dawn began her slow  
    pink ascent into another day  
where young girls walk  
    the lighted path of other's expectations.

***Kersten Christianson***

**Wanderlusting**

woman, willful  
in your worthiness

to take up space,  
wonder work

wholehearted joy  
into walls, confused

for sky, boasting  
painted eyes of

glimmer & glam,  
of prism & sea.

## *Alix Brobbey*

### **First Bloom**

Sixth grade, you pack your favorite  
bathing suit. Before it tastes chlorine,

womanhood arrives, dotting  
your thighs with thick molasses.

The air is sticky with droplets,  
heavy with your own pride.

You sit poolside, with a pod  
of hushed girls, pondering

puddles and pads and cotton poles.  
The cups will come later.

Today, in the bathroom,  
you overhear C teach H

how to stuff herself full,  
and realize you fear

the curves of your own body.  
G enters the water anyway,

fearless. And you gag  
in disgust and envy. The boys

splash around for hours,  
inviting you in, oblivious.



## ***Mary Alice Williams***

### **In the Garden**

Apples bend the branch,  
glisten, redden base layers  
of green and yellow skin,  
striations of a dawn sky  
ripening into perfect orbs  
rounded to fit  
the smallest of hands.  
She wants to reach, touch,  
bite into hidden flesh  
stand naked  
in the morning dew  
tart juices in her throat,  
pose a thousand questions  
about taboos.

## *Ariel Mitchell Williams*

### **Consecrated Ground**

Wood and springs shift under our weight, creaking like an old ship in the dark. Waves lapping the sides while timbers settle. My toes lengthen and release. Legs tense then relax as we rock back and forth. You are cradled in my arms. Sometimes still, sometimes squirming, sometimes cooing or biting, crying or looking into my eyes seeking comfort, connection, acknowledgement, understanding. Hours spent in twenty minute increments. Preparing a lifetime, finding respite from another.

Or confusion.

Day after day. Same time. Same place. We creak back and forth. The wooden armrest presses into our sides. It bonks elbows and heads, acting as a platform for searching little feet naively feeling their way to push off into a dive to the floor. We sit in the same place, in the same chair my mother sat before me. There are years of milk, formula, sweat, tears, smiles, and snores stored in the cushions. They stain the wood.

Alone. Together. Thoughts shift back and forth. Mother and child. Mother or child. I am one. I am both. (I am neither). Thoughts come. Confusion. Peace. So much change in the same place. Conversation. Quiet. Railing back and forth. Questioning. I listen to what no one else hears.

I am nothing. I am everything (to you).

I feel Her close here.

Heavenly Mother,

Are you really there? Sometimes it is hard to tell. Few (in this life) recognize you. Talk about you. Acknowledge you. How do you do it? How do you exist in a vacuum? Your children constantly sucking up all the love you can, do, will give freely. How do you give (with no reservations)? Does the need ever get too much for you (like it does for me)? Do you need a time out? Fresh air? Some chocolate? I do. Too often. You are Mother to every single person that has, is, and ever will be. You are what it means and yet, where are you?

Consecrating. Every. Moment. Every inch of your being and brain space.

How do you keep everything straight? Everyone. And how do you hold everything in your heart? Alone. Together.

We share this moment. Me holding you. Her holding me. You. Us.

The chair creaks as I hum and lay you down to rest.

## ***Merryn Rutledge***

### **Joan's Testament**

My saints spoke to me of my body, too.

Strong. A boy's muscularity.

The stamina of a woman in labor.

A maid, yes,

then out of bounds of my estate.

After I walked many leagues, for months,

all bleeding stopped.

Instead of babes,

I would bear armor.

My breasts molded to brace

a crossbow.

Legs poised to guide my horse.

Out of reach of hungry, tired,

can't-push-on-ahead.

My men calling me small

only made me smile.

What is small?

Dreams cut down by limitation.

Horizons that end with sight—

Why not seek the King?

Still, it was never just about winning

but some theurgy in motion.

I was made to cross over.

The flames, the ire of paltry men.



***Sharon Lopez Mooney***

**I am Big**

my legs stand against the sky  
my feet make their way through mountain peaks  
i throw handfuls of stars into the heavens  
i massage the heart beat of the earth  
with the rhythm of my walk  
i am strong  
i pleasure at my image in the ocean  
i shawl my shoulders with clouds  
cover my hips with rain storms  
the sun freckles my back  
and i shadow the mushroom and fern  
i am in the middle of life  
neither new nor finished  
the color rises in my cheeks with the sun  
my skin is smooth across firm muscles  
my eyes are mountain ponds  
clear and open  
my voice is heard in the call of the eagle  
i am serpentine  
i stand steady with myself

## ***Mary Alice Williams***

### **Aria for Imbolc**

I make soil  
tillable,  
reeds pliable,  
lambs to drop  
on greening ground,  
great oaks  
to bud.

I guide the poet  
plucking strings  
creating lore,  
the smith in  
crafting gold  
to clasp  
the royal cloak.

I steer the final  
melting snows  
to coursing rivers,  
quicken sacred springs,  
stir holy wells,  
bestow the vernal dew

that heals.

I am unchanged  
by foreign waters  
sprinkled  
on my shrine,  
my feast, my name,  
by all attempts  
to tame, to shame.

I make room  
for your saint,  
but know this—  
when dawn breaks  
when spring arrives  
it is I, dispelling  
darkness, casting fire.

I am Brid.

*\*Brid is an Irish goddess from pre-Christian ages known for her wisdom, poetry, healing, protection, blacksmithing, and is associated with domesticated animals.*

## ***Ann M Lawrence***

### **Am I a Woman**

Power tools in the dining room, knitting needles  
in the bedroom. Did my voice catch  
when I responded to your insult,  
what kind of woman am I? Did I threaten  
your femininity with the calluses  
on my hands and chipped polish  
on my finger nails? I was not threatened  
by your immaculate home, perfect parenting,  
polished children. The thin coating of sawdust  
on my skin and wood chips in my hair  
does not diminish your powdered cheeks  
or your smooth curls.



*Lauren Cox*

### **The Lunatic of Étretat**

Eye contact and a firm handshake.  
Now will you take me seriously?  
Look at me. Look.

I draw my own water.  
Barefoot goddess  
that you refuse to pray to.

Hope clings to me and I  
will guard it from you.  
What do you know of sacrifice?

Whose knuckles bleed on the washboard  
that yours may hold this graceless brush?  
My calluses carry multitudes.

My garments are soft with age,  
and they bear the stuff of living.  
I dust my feet on your doorstep.

Take your shoes back to whomever polished them.  
Send me the woman who fetches your water.  
Do you know her name?

Carry your lunatic woman  
to the gilded parlor of smoking men.  
They will avoid my eyes.



Merle, Hugues. *The Lunatic of Étretat*. 1871. Image courtesy of Arnot Art Museum on Facebook.  
Wikimedia. [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hugues\\_Merle\\_-\\_The\\_Lunatic\\_-\\_Arnot\\_Art\\_Museum.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hugues_Merle_-_The_Lunatic_-_Arnot_Art_Museum.jpg).

## *Karla Linn Merrifield*

### **In My Element**

I am Quicksilver  
    my poetic persona  
        nom de plume  
            alias

I am mercurial  
    Virgo of ruling planet Mercury  
        body now in retrograde  
            solar system amiss

I am oft disguised in cinnabar  
    throughout this world  
        known to Hatshepsut  
ancient Egypt's great queen

I am Element 80, née hydragyrum  
    from the Greek  
        hydra/water  
            argos/silver

I am oft labeled Hg  
    in your iambs  
        rhyming my rhombohedral crystals  
            ever your heavy metallic liquid muse

I am here in my native element for you  
    line's atomic weight  
        stanza the atomic radius of my stanza  
            poem's primordial classified occurrence

∴ Quicksilver

*Richard Hanus*

Photo 125



## *Chloë Rain*

### **from eden**

an ant from eden

-everything i miss,

all of those angels,

how i loved you most of all,

he always said to me,

was it you or was it god?

eden never could humiliate

her[self] into staying.

## *Colette Tennant*

### **Permanent Colors**

What was the color of my deepest ancestor's womb?  
Were our mothers' wombs brushed with the same color  
from generation to generation, all the way back to our first mother?  
The truth of my deepest ancestor's womb is hidden with her  
deep and secret as the deep veins of midnight.

I try to remember the color of my birth mother's womb.  
I wish I could recall what she sang for those months.  
Surely she sang since there was  
one month for each choir of angels.  
If she sang a lullaby, was it "I See the Moon"—  
its refrain full with wishes?

Did my mother's mother touch her daughter's stomach?  
Did she feel the beat of my pulse and bless me somehow?  
Did she lay her hands on me  
through skin and walls and blood and color,  
me secret and deep, floating and quiet.

## *Anne Whitehouse*

### **Mother and Child**

A gray mid-March day:  
the bare branches lean  
across the blank sky.  
All colors moved indoors

where my daughter and I  
play with her toys  
laid out on the rug:  
rattles, dolls, and trucks,

nesting plastic bowls,  
a flock of yellow ducks.  
Shakily she stands,  
her tongue darting like a snake's

between her pink gums,  
she smiles, claps her hands,  
and bangs the shell table  
made by Great-grandpa

of rare wormy chestnut.  
Its submarine treasures  
are sealed under glass.  
Her palms leave sticky smears.

She reaches for my face,  
her hands stroke my ears  
and clasp round my neck,  
her cheek against my skin.

I breathe her mild scent,  
I take it all in.  
My baby pulls me hard,  
she is so insistent.

She turns to press  
her forehead against mine,  
and the world seems to shrink  
as if it held just us.

Now in my arms she lies,



her mouth at my breast.  
She clutches me, and then  
relaxes into sleep. The minutes

spin away in the dark.  
Now I'm forgetting this;  
I must have dozed off, too.  
She sucks in dreamy bliss,

as her sweat gilds my arm:  
matted hair, cradled head.  
Love flows in me like a  
river in a muddy bed

that roars around stones  
shedding mist and spray,  
and swells to meet the sea,  
forever carried away.

Ephemeral baby  
whose growth will replace you,  
shadow and memory  
till time will erase you,

To show you as you were,  
my quicksilver daughter,  
I fix you on this page:  
Claire, eight months of age.

***Elizabeth Cranford Garcia***

**Post-hysterectomy Dream, 1959**

*—for Doris*

You slip through my arms  
like a bar of soap, a slick colt  
just burst from her mother  
still membraned, a yolk

tumbles over the shell, you fall  
into fire and flame up,  
shrivel to a raisin  
i pull you out, whole and plump

now you are dirty, you need a bath  
*where is a basin*  
*where is a bowl*  
*where is the water to clean my baby*

you are asleep on a slab  
of marble, a stone cherub  
*where is a towel*  
*where is a blanket for my baby*

outside, a lake in the road,  
there is mama and papa  
there is your dad  
*here is our baby, my baby*

*where is the boat to get across*  
*how will i swim and hold you*  
*i will sink in the water and choke*  
*how can i leave you*

*i won't*  
*i won't*

## *Holly Day*

### **Thursday**

The sun comes out and things are growing but the world is dying so I don't care.  
The tips of tulips are poking through the piles of dead leaves, dark green and purple-edged  
the red tips of peonies are stretching up and out towards the sun  
but even these signs of life can't convince me that there will be a tomorrow.

Inside, my daughter yells at her computer, something about how her online school sucks  
the dog paws at the door to come out and sit with me on the porch  
and I let her out and hug her because I can't get sick from hugging my dog  
I can't get my dog sick by hugging her.

Flocks of sparrows and goldfinches flutter around the birdfeeder  
oblivious to the end of the world, untouched by the end of the world.  
I reach into the bag of bird food and toss more and more handfuls out to them  
finding temporary amusement at their delight. Rabbits and squirrels fight over  
the crocus bulbs hidden under the melting snow, I don't chase them away from my garden  
because this is their world now.

*Darlene Young*

**One Day You Finally Say Yes**

After years of trying, wedging  
    straw into gaps, frosting

                    over the cracks

one morning enough  
reveals itself as enough

you rub your eyes, open  
    your palms finally  
                    to kit  
                    and kitty      meat  
                                    and bone ear  
                                    and earwig

your crows' feet, cobwebs in corners,

are lace, your body  
    a substantial claim      dimpling space      -time

                    satisfyingly

so that grandbabies  
    and morning birds  
        and parking-lot kindnesses

                    succumb in their orbit

                    to your pull—

*Wendy Lou Schmidt*

**Violet in Summer**



## *Sigrun Susan Lane*

### **Umma's Brown Bread**

All the elements are here—  
earth, wind, air and fire.  
From the oven the loaves come

brick-shaped and heavy.  
The first slices coated with butter,  
we eat by the warm wood stove,

our mouths full of grain.  
No talking. We negotiate  
coarse lumps, grind them with our teeth.

We can only chew and chew and chew  
the dark substance, tasting of earth,  
rye, wheat's long golden grasses,

roots burrowed in darkness, soil and rain.  
My grandmothers down through generations  
baked this bread. They taught me

this food can save your life.  
Their hands kneaded the moist dough,  
loaves for those that dragged

themselves a thousand winters  
across frozen landscapes  
inside their own bodies.

This aching hunger. You will be lonely,  
This is the hardest bread,  
but it will keep you alive.

*Liz Busby*

## **Self-Portrait in Cookies**

In fourth grade, my 14-months-younger sister did a Famous Americans report on Debbie Fields, founder of Mrs. Fields' Cookies. She made cookies to give out after her report, which made her a smash hit. In the months afterward, she would work her way through every recipe in the Mrs. Field's Cookbook—lacey oatmeal cookies, windowpane cookies, lemon drizzles—each one turning out delicious.

It was her thing, and I was happy to eat the results. But somehow her success in this area translated to defining myself as the one who couldn't cook. I suppose it's the casualty of having a sister just a year younger than you: we were always defining ourselves at opposite ends of everything. My sister took French for her language requirement because it was the language of food and continued to work her way through fancy pies and homemade rolls. I took practical Spanish and stayed out of the kitchen except on my required night to help with dinner. Any mistakes made, I blamed on my innate character as someone who couldn't cook.

The first thing I made on my own was macaroni and cheese. It was the first time I had been assigned to babysit my younger siblings while my parents were out. I felt grown up and determined to do everything right. How hard could it really be?

What came to the table was more like a soup: limp noodles floating in pale yellow water. I had no idea what I had done wrong until my sister pointed out one tiny word nestled between longer sentences:

“Drain.”

These feelings were made worse by the tasks assigned in the Young Women's Personal Progress program. Bake a loaf of bread and take it to someone. Learn how to plan meals for your family. One sister taught us how to make a box cake mix taste better by using Sprite instead of water. My feminist-minded best friend complained that we should be learning woodworking and how to change a tire like the boys. I didn't enjoy these activities myself, but I thought that was because I was innately bad at cooking. Deep down, I knew that my eternal progression didn't hinge on my baking skills, but sometimes, it sure felt like it.

#

There's a legend in our family of the time Mom took us to the library just after she had put cookies into the oven. Weekly library outings were one of my favorite parts of the summer, a chance to pick out new adventures. My mom had an MA in English and loved reading as much as we did, so we would usually spend hours at the library.

We returned home to smoke billowing out of the oven and the fire alarm going off. The forgotten cookies retrieved from the oven looked like charcoal briquettes.

From then on, I don't remember Mom ever making cookies. In fact, my dad soon became famous for his chocolate chip cookie recipe—his secret was creaming the sugar and butter by hand, never with a mixer. To look at my dad, you would never guess that he loved to flood every place he visited with warm chocolate chip cookies. His six-foot-four frame towered over the kitchen cupboards. His face sported a gruff beard below a balding head. I spent much of my childhood watching him break up fights while refereeing church basketball games. Yet he would frequently tie on an apron and armed with only a bowl, a fork, and a baking stone, churn out dozens of cookies in an afternoon.

Mom had never really been much of a cook anyway. Our family meals were mostly box dinners and canned chili and tacos with plain ground beef and ketchup. Perhaps this is why I was content to define myself as someone who couldn't cook. I was a scholarly woman, like my mom. Of course I couldn't cook; my time was absorbed with better things. Cooking was reserved for those who were girly girls, like my cousin who sewed her own clothes and went to all the school dances with a large group of friends. Those who focused on grades, who wrote quirky poetry in small notebooks, who solved math puzzles for fun didn't need to understand the kitchen.

#

The strange thing is I never saw the conflict between my non-cooking identity and my enjoyment of Pie Night.

Pie Night was an official family event the night before Thanksgiving at my maternal grandmother's house. All of my aunts and female cousins would meet to order takeout and make the pies for tomorrow. We would crowd around the long white melamine island of her kitchen, mixing up pie crust in a long assembly line.

No, assembly line is much too orderly to describe what happened: Bowls being passed from person to person, and being abandoned to watch a song from *White Christmas* or grab a slice of pizza. Flour and shortening being slid across the counter to the next person who needed them. Batches that had to be started over because no one knew whether the salt had been added or not. We'd just keep churning out batches of dough until someone did a count and found that we'd made 4 more than we needed.

The dough was a simple shortening-based recipe from the 1950s. First, make a paste of ice water and flour. Then cut in the shortening into the remaining flour seasoned with salt. Combine the two mixtures by hand until just crumbly; never overmix or the crust won't be flaky. Divide into two clumps. Beg someone whose hands haven't been turned into pie crust clubs to pull out two plastic wrap sheets. Lay one ball on each, carefully extracting your hands. Wrap and flatten slightly and add to the stack in the fridge.

We'd roll out crust after crust, filling glass dishes, ceramic dishes, old tins from Marie Calendar's, and the occasional tart pan. Edges were crimped or marked with a fork, lattices were braided, and extra pie crust was made into pie crust cookies dusted with cinnamon sugar. Giant batches of pumpkin filling would overflow the largest bowl available. Dozens of apples were



spun through an apple slicer by children's arm power, and they'd go away with a long string of apple peel to munch on.

Mixed through all this was laughter, discussion of plans for the Thanksgiving morning, movies and shows we'd watched, shopping tips, and catching up on each other's lives. I was shocked when as a young adult I heard on a cooking show that pie crust was difficult to master. No one had ever told me that what we were doing was hard. Though I had come to my first pie night with a little trepidation about whether I'd mess it up, all fear was soon forgotten in the camaraderie, the festivity of doing it together. Though my sister was still always the one proposing we make a French silk pie or try a more elaborate lattice, I felt competent at Pie Night. There wasn't any room to question whether I was good or bad at cooking: everyone helped, period, and the credit went to us all.

#

I first determined I would need to learn how to cook in my second year of college. When I moved out of the dorms with their never-ending cafeteria buffet to a run-down apartment building, I knew I would have to face my fear of the kitchen. I couldn't imagine how anyone had the time to cook three meals a day. My days were packed with classes and two part-time jobs; how was I going to find the time to make food? But I also couldn't afford to eat out, so something would have to be done.

I came at cooking sideways with my nerd skills. I made spreadsheets. I found websites where you could enter the ingredients you had and it would spit out something to make with them. My roommates educated me in some things, like the graduate student who taught me that ground beef can be cooked in ways other than in a large bowl in a microwave. (None of them successfully taught me to do my own dishes though, which I still feel guilty about 15 years later.)

My mind's dichotomy between the domestic and the academic finally broke when I came across the television show *Good Eats* on our apartment cable. Alton Brown's cooking show is in the vein of *Bill Nye the Science Guy* with the wacky demonstration models and scientific explanations. That's when I realized that cooking wasn't un-similar to the reactions I was managing in organic chemistry. It was all about measuring, understanding why things worked the way they did, and what mattered (or didn't) to the outcome. Cooking wasn't a magical gift for Disney princesses and perfectly quaffed housewives. Baking was a replicable result, one that could be learned and managed through attention to detail.

After I got married and graduated from BYU, I started a systematic study of Alton Brown's work, watching grainy pirated episodes of *Good Eats* on YouTube while feeding our newborn. Season by season, I learned about the Maillard reaction that makes both browned meat and muffins taste so good, why washing mushrooms was not only just fine but necessary, the differences between the muffin method and the cookie method, and how to spatchcock a chicken. Gradually many of the previously canned or frozen products I'd once used were replaced with fresh produce and from-scratch sauces.

When we left Utah for Seattle to follow my husband's work, the food I missed the most was my dad's chocolate chip cookies. On visits back to Utah, I tried to get his recipe, but it was annoyingly vague in the way that ancestral recipes are. "Two scoops of brown sugar. Blend. Add flour and baking powder." The main thing I gleaned was the importance of blending the butter and sugars by hand with a fork (something that seemed impossible, due to my impatience at waiting for butter to come to room temperature) and using half dark and half semisweet chocolate chips.

I set about applying my dad's techniques to various cookie recipes but to no avail. Even Alton Brown's extensive tutorial on how to produce three different types of cookies didn't unravel the mystery. The infographics of various cookie troubles on Pinterest couldn't diagnose the problem either. To this day, I still can't make a chocolate chip cookie to match the one in my childhood memories.

#

As a stay-at-home mom, I assumed that baking with my kids was part of the job description, a homey activity where my kids would learn about math, nutrition, chemistry, and family traditions all while finishing with a delicious snack. I undertook it almost as a revenge against my mother for not teaching me how to bake properly. "See? I will do motherhood correctly!" I had visions of my son standing by my side on his little kitchen stool, patiently pouring flour and licking spoons happily but neatly.

Turns out, baking with toddlers is nothing at all like that.

He would plunge the measuring cup into the flour bin, and white powder would suddenly be all over the counter and floor and the air and my dark red shirt. The cup would always be too full or too empty and half of it wouldn't make it into the bowl anyway. He couldn't stand the loud noise of the mixer and fled the kitchen in terror. And I couldn't handle the mis-matched sizes of his cookie dough balls and ended up sneakily re-rolling them myself.

It took twice as long as usual and he was asleep before the first batch had cooled enough to eat.

Only after many more years of experience—and the resultant tempering of my perfectionism—I was able to actually bake with my kids without yelling at them.

#

Now, when we would travel "home" for the holidays, the food my mom cooked no longer seemed adequate. The food that they so often ordered-in would make my stomach hurt. I would gently question the types of food we were eating and be pushed aside because it was the holidays, so who cared. When we finally moved back to Utah, I was excited to exert some control again over the food at family gatherings.'

So I spent the month of December making a different kind of cookies every few days and freezing them in plastic bags to be brought out for the holidays: gingerbread decorated by the

kids, snowball cookies, pressed cookies in the shapes of little trees and wreaths, hazelnut cinnamon cookie sandwiches with caramel-filled cut-outs.

On Christmas Eve, I arranged the cookies on a platter and proudly placed them on the family buffet. My sister brought in her homemade eclairs. As she stacked the pastries high on the tiered silver serving dish, we nodded acknowledgement of each other's efforts, like two competitors shaking hands before the final scores were shown. Then Mom came over and began making a fuss over both of our contributions. "I'm so proud my daughters both turned out to be such good cooks. It's good you're here to bake these things that I could never make."

This phrase made me squirm. Why did it make me so uncomfortable? I wanted to say anyone could do it, that she could do it if she really wanted to. That being able to cook is a choice. It's all learned skill. But saying that downplays the amount of work I have put into learning how to bake bread in the shape of a star or make homemade yogurt. I should be proud of my efforts and be grateful that she appreciated me.

Maybe it's because her words felt like a condemnation of her own worth as a mother. Maybe it's because deep in my heart, I had agreed with that condemnation. I resented other kids who grew up with fabulous homemade memories while we got by with hamburger helper and frozen chicken. Maybe it's a manifestation of the same old perception that those who make the time to cook from scratch are more morally virtuous than others. A perception that I thought I'd scrubbed from myself but keeps reappearing like an old laundry stain.

#

Cooking has experienced an elevated status in recent years, culminating in *The Great British Baking Show* as mainstream television. Families cheer together as middle-aged mothers, young college students, and zealous engineers scramble to bake perfect sets of shortbread cookies or a three-tier cake themed after their hometown. My kids have seen so much of the show that they will tease me that my bread is "under proofed" when I bring it to the table (though it is most definitely not) and check for soggy bottoms on their Thanksgiving pies.

The thing that shocked me out of the constant escalation came out casually one Sunday night on the weekly family phone call with my in-laws.

One of my nieces had decided to go vegetarian, and it had made life hard for her mother, a stay-at-home mom a little younger than me. "Ordering meal kits has made it so much easier to find meals that all of us can eat. And I only have to pick up a few things when I go shopping, which makes it much easier to get done with a baby and toddler. It's really reducing my stress a lot." My sister-in-law, about to start her job as a professor in the fall, agreed, "Yes, I don't know how we'd get dinner on the table without it."

I hesitantly stepped in, "Isn't it tons more expensive?"

"Not really," they both chimed in, and began comparing the notes on the merits of various brands they had tried. I kept grasping at straws trying to figure out what was wrong here. It made sense

for my professional sister-in-law to buy meal kits, but how could it be justified if you were at home all day. It seemed morally wrong somehow not to plan your own meals for your family, like cheating at motherhood.

It took me months to admit the real problem: I was jealous.

Even all these years after my sister's Famous Americans report, I was still basing my worth and the worth of other mothers on their food. If a family we invited over for dinner brought a store-bought side dish, I wondered what was wrong at home. I sneered at the Costco cookies at the church party. I had become a food snob.

And yet, I was so tired of all of it. I've been a stay-at-home mom for 13 years, years I worked on perfecting the craft of cooking, of making a meal with no pre-made sauces and only fresh vegetables, because it seemed the only thing to do. The right way.

But does virtue really come in making your own pasta sauce over buying one ready-made? I could make homemade naan to go with the butter chicken I've cooked and veggies I've chopped, but would the outcome be worth the time and mess? Even after all the cookies I've made over the years, my husband still prefers Oreos to almost any other cookie. And I was exhausted, spending an hour cooking dinner every night, only to find that at least half of my kids found it completely inedible. Why was I doing it? Who was I proving myself to?

And so I begin the work again of unwinding my self-worth from cooking. I cross off the elaborate meals that require preparing three recipes simultaneously. I buy the flatbread and the tortillas and the baguettes that I am perfectly capable of making myself. I allow myself to make a boxed mac and cheese for my kids' lunch. I buy the occasional meal kit.

I feed my kids the store-bought cookies.

## ***Robin Wright***

### **Thanksgiving Evening in a Friend's Kitchen**

*In Memory of Debbie Tingley*

The dishwasher hums, the house nearly empty now. Those still here are napping or watching TV in the next room. Deb and I sit at the kitchen table, talk about her granddaughter's chubby cheeks between bites of pecan pie and sips of coffee from mugs painted with flowers and balloons. Her son walks into the room wearing the mask he sleeps in for his apnea. *Attractive* we tell him and laugh, though we shiver like cold air has gripped us by the shoulders when we think of him not breathing. This table we sit at has been around longer than the twenty-five years we've been friends and has held holiday turkeys and hams, garlic eggs and hash browns, the slap of cards during games of Spades, tears that fell after her husband's sudden death. When Deb's granddaughter awakens with a cry, she brings her into the room, sets her on the table. The baby pats the surface and smiles. We're delighted it now holds the weight of her new life.

## *Holly Day*

### **Pretending**

There's a girl on stage and she's so engaging, everyone's laughing at her jokes  
and for a brief moment, I imagine I could be like her, I could also perform  
I could stand up there on stage and speak loudly and clearly and call out  
various people from the audience, make jokes about their careers or hair or dates  
or just say something really amazing and profound that would make people  
nod their heads and scratch their chins and go home and think about the things I said.

Instead, it's me going home and I'm pretending that yes, I really could do that  
if I practiced in front of the bathroom mirror or to the cat, I could climb up on stage  
wave my arms and say deep or funny things, wear something ridiculous  
that would fold itself seamlessly into the act and just be someone  
someone that other people notice.

*Richard Hanus*

Image 025



## *Darlene Young*

### **At Age 50, She Buys Pink Roller-Skates**

OK, OK, it was cliché—  
the Mormon housewife budget version  
of the mullet and Harley, the dramatic career change.  
Which is to say, midlife crisis.  
But it was something else, too.

For one thing, it was spring.  
After an ugly winter, a winter of ugly  
politics and ugly disease, and ugly  
politics about the disease,  
and diseased politics and chronic unease,

the eye yearned for light, for bright,  
and so when she saw that black was out of stock  
she knew that pink was fate, kismet,  
exactly what the universe intended.

Bright pink, with lemon laces, looking  
like candy, those Laffy Taffys in the bottom bin  
at the 7-11 she'd passed every day on the way  
home from school, 3-for-a quarter and 3  
would last until she got home,  
mouth sticky with sunshine,  
those days before she'd lost "play"  
because play had become her job.

These skates would feel like candy, she thought,  
and clicked to add-to-cart the bright  
pink wrist guards and knee pads, too,  
knowing she would be a Spectacle in her suburban  
cul-de-sac but daring herself like a teenager  
at a stop light on Main, 10 p.m. on a summer night,  
a car of cute boys in the next lane.

A week later, her teenagers held up  
cameras, laughing, as she skated  
around the kitchen island to disco tunes  
like a breeze from a new direction in May.  
They remembered  
that she used to sing at the top of her lungs  
sometimes. They remembered



that she was pretty.

## *Darlene Young*

### **My Friend's Marriage is Failing, But I'm Not Supposed to Know**

Two women doing lunch.  
A partial list of things  
I'm supposed to know about being a woman:  
how to wear a scarf, how  
to enjoy salad, how to walk in heels,  
how to reach across this table  
and touch her hand.

Someone across the room  
would think we are close—  
are we close? She hunches  
under her burden but bounces  
her voice brightly, all bubbles,  
and polk-a-dots. Nausea  
makes my fork heavy. Stupid salad.

I read an article yesterday claiming  
people in conversation modulate the music  
of their voices: major and minor keys accord-  
ing to the topic, according to their love.

Love is my bringing her here—  
though I knew it was simply a front-  
row ticket to a performance—and love  
is her coming. Which of us is  
doing a favor? When I drop her off, watching

her back as she unlocks  
her lonely front door, I glance  
into my rearview mirror, see  
spinach stuck between my two front teeth,  
which she must have noticed  
and didn't mention.

## *Sandra Salinas Newton*

### **Being Old**

No longer the cheerleader  
Smiling so hard it hurts  
Who twirls and somersaults  
To gasps of delight  
Nor the player on the field  
Shrugging off pain and fatigue  
Knowing only the taste of victory  
Trailing glory.

My great delight today  
Is to applaud the efforts of others  
To be the cheering section  
To yell with hoarse enthusiasm  
To be cozy and secure  
In the stands.

## ***Nancy Machlis Rechtman***

### **Outside the Snow Globe**

I've always thought  
That I hated winter  
Because of the stinging cold tentacles  
Spreading through my veins until my blood stopped moving  
Every time I stepped outside.  
The vicious winds would seek me out  
And rip right through me  
And after a few steps I would freeze in place  
Like Lot's wife  
But she was salt  
And I was ice  
Either way, I became a pillar.

It has become so easy  
To close my door  
And close off my life  
From the world pounding outside my window  
And instead, curl up by the fireplace  
With my book  
And a steaming cup of chamomile tea  
As my cat makes sounds like a motorboat at my feet.

Sometimes I still dream of a man to curl up with  
Under the blankets  
But I've realized that having no one to talk to  
Or be with  
Is preferable to the pain  
That once buried me like an avalanche.

There are times I do have to venture out  
When contact with the outside world is necessary  
And I can't avoid getting knocked around in the snow globe  
But usually those occasions are fleeting  
And they are the moments when I understand  
Why I hate winter the way I do.  
And I promise myself that one day I'll move to a place  
Where the sun always warms the soul  
And palm trees dot the landscape like hands raised in supplication  
And the rhythm of the ocean tide is my prayer.

I notice the fire is dying

And I need to find another log to resuscitate it  
And I need to find another blanket to burrow under  
Feeling safe only when it's wrapped around me  
Like I'm newly born  
And I can forget for a moment  
That I will soon have to face the world again.

## ***Dorothy Johnson-Laird***

### **Portrait of a Woman with Sun and Dog**

Standing in the pale green grass,  
The sun glints in her eyes.  
It makes a delicate pattern of light on her feet.

Looking up,  
The rays come to rest on a tall evergreen tree's leaves.  
She folds her arms across her stomach, pausing in the large, green field.  
She comes to rest near the blue lake.

The dog plays at her side, not able to stay still.  
He gnaws frantically at a bone in his teeth,  
Then pulls it out of his mouth, tugging at it with his two paws.  
The dog is not that hungry, but the bone is tantalizing,  
He wants to get more meat out of it,  
Nothing is coming.

As she looks at him, the dog spots her eyes.  
He is a russet dog, a golden retriever, not a baby, yet not old.  
He smiles up at her  
And forgets the bone for a moment,  
it drops down by his two front paws, hidden in the tall grass.

She stands closer to him, pats a hand to her hip,  
He understands to move near her.  
For a moment, he glances back to the bone,  
scratching a paw in the glistening grass.  
Then he moves forward.

As she gestures to the sun,  
The dog pauses by her side.  
Looking upward, he wonders what his owner points to.  
He sees an orange round shape in the distance.  
He is not that interested.  
Gradually, he rests his head down on his two forelegs  
Stares at a yellow bird perched just a few feet ahead of him.

The clouds fold together from white to yellow to gold.  
They weave as a quilt in the sky,  
They too are not content to stay still.  
The sun beckons.

The dog is now asleep at his owners feet.  
Gone is the frenetic energy of a few moments ago.  
He pauses. realizing that the woman needs silence.

A streak of red, then another moves out across the sky,  
A brilliant orange - sunset.  
The woman sits down on her deckchair to take in the sight.  
The dog rests next to her as the sun lowers,  
Until it becomes a whisper above the blue water.

## Merryn Rutledge

### Designs for Life

When my mother roused her treadle to sew, I flew  
to my dress-ups to don the dress she was married in—  
eyelet, the color of heliopsis. She greeted me  
the southern way, as *Missus*, and spooled out questions  
I used to stitch my stories cut from clouds  
she billowed with fulsome *aah* 's and *is that so* 's  
she used when other housewives came to chat.  
From ingenuity and the fabric of circumstance,  
we improvised our days. Later, while on a hike,  
a handsome stranger and I pieced together  
scraps of conversation that we quilted into love.  
Now he is gone and I grow old, asking  
what new fancies will arise?  
What dress will daybreak wear to play with day?



## Adrienne Stevenson

### Bridge club

eight women meet for fifty years  
skip dinner so we can feast  
on finger foods provided by each  
in rotation, every other Thursday

we draw for partners  
divide into groups of four  
spend a few hours bidding  
and playing our hands

clubs, diamonds, hearts, spades  
with no-trump highest rank—bidding  
systems come and go, so do players  
but table-talk always continues

now age begins to take us  
some with fading memory  
others with trembling hands  
we persist, as good sports should

no competition here for master's points  
no grand finesses, no money changes hands  
a purely social event between women  
we revel in our old girls' club

## **Kersten Christianson**

### **For Gloria.**

Arty Woman,  
you wear your batik on your sleeve  
and splash your walls  
with whimsy and warmth,  
answering the call of a northern Goddess divine  
who doesn't speak of moderation,  
but instead generates a wild tempest  
of color—marigold and wine—and creativity.  
This alchemy of stitchery in silver and gold,  
a fusion of found items and fibers,  
natural elements—feathers and sea glass—and creative fire.  
There is no mediator between goddess call and inspiration,  
so answer the call—in moonlight or sun—  
share your soul on the page,  
your temple of art.

## *Ariel Mitchell Williams*

### **Her Reflection**

*To my mom, on the 5th anniversary of her death*

Her eyes smile at the corners. Her whole face is a smile. Even at rest, she exudes joy. Contentment. Comfort in her own skin. Her fingers expertly search the counter for deodorant, toothpaste, a hairbrush. These are the items she uses daily, quickly, to prepare to face another day. She's half dressed, leaving her shirt until the last preparations have been finished. Almost imperceptibly, she takes the smallest moment to check her appearance in the mirror. Her eyes dart from her brushed out wave of curls to her chest where a long maroon scar peeks from her bra. In one fluid movement she pulls her shirt over her head and leaves the space swirling. The strange stillness a distant memory erased by the nonstop momentum that will fill her day.

...

She lies down on a surgical table. Her right breast carefully placed and compressed through an opening under her. She holds her breath as they take picture after picture, making completely sure she is in perfect position. Her face is turned to the plain white wall. Her eyes are closed. She imagines herself lying on a warm towel in the soft sand, the relentless comfort of ocean waves greeting her ears as the medical aide allows her to hear the device that will shoot the tiny titanium clip into the place in her breast that could be cancerous. So she won't be surprised or scared. It's like the plosive scoff of a petulant child. She is not alone. She allows the tears to fall onto the table that cradles her face and prays for herself. For her children.

...

"You look just like your mom." She studies the face in the profile picture. A face framed by defined curls, a painted ocean wave in the background. Spurred by one typed comment, she searches the picture for the familiar face of comfort in her own. The smile of the eyes, the mouth, her whole face. But all she sees is the tired pull of time and loneliness, her face lifted in a grin that doesn't know its own happiness. She sees the similarities in the slope of the nose, the length of the hair, but mostly she sees the commenter's desire for her to be the woman who isn't. The woman they no longer can see because she's passed on. Who they need her to be. How can she be? She is herself.

...

They will leave in the clip if it's benign. It won't be. It can't be. Not with her family history. Just like her mom. She's convinced of the result before the doctors conclude the biopsy. Her grief stricken resignation is contagious. They allow the tears to fall as she dresses and leaves, carrying the burden of her life and fears alone. They move on to another cameo in another patient's story. She sits in the airy hospital lobby. The sunshine streams in. Every corner of the room is filled with life and people living: a caregiver helping an elderly patient to her seat; a man pushing quickly through the people only to have to wait for his Uber; another man sits at a makeshift cafe table office talking on the phone about the intricacies of the constitution. All the time people flow in and out, like dust on the air. She waits for her ride too. Nearby, a pianist glories in the music she makes. Sound amplifies the space with the echoes, bouncing from window to window. The tune is mysterious, familiar, then known. "It is well with my soul. It is well. It is well with my soul."

...

She enters her room like a sigh. What has been held in is now released as she is greeted by familiar surroundings. Her bed. Her pillow. Her safety. She is alone. She allows herself to cry. She wills it. She needs to free the empty, gasping sobs, compressing her heart and lungs. She lays still. Time passes. After eternity she stands. She's not wearing the right bra. Zero to one hundred, she sweeps into constant movement. Her comfort now is taking care of what needs doing. As she goes about her business, her shoulders reluctantly raise towards her ears. She goes to the mirror and carefully investigates the damage. She looks at her reflection. Unsupported. Unprotected. Unencumbered. Face splotchy, hair frizzed, she looks directly into her own eyes. Her gaze drops. She allows her focus to rest on her wound. She sees her mother's scar, long and maroon. She remembers. She sees the same invisible pause, the same flurry of action, the same sudden awareness of her mortal flaw. She carefully dons the sports bra and goes to the kitchen for an ice pack.

Days later the bandages will come off and she will see clearer. Her wound is small, a centimeter long scar, red purple almost invisible, camouflaged by the bruises that surround it. She'll look up at her own face. The lips pursed in worry, the lined forehead, the soft searching eyes. The curls framing her face. The sloping nose. This body is not her mother's. She looks at herself. She allows herself to be. to imagine her own scar: one speck healing, an unobtrusive mark on otherwise healthy, aging, calcifying breast flesh. She imagines living years with her family. She imagines watching them grow and growing with them. She imagines doing. Being. Living. The scar is proof. She knows in that moment that her life is hers. She looks into her own eyes. Her reflection.

Whatever time is left for her, she will live it.

## ***Diana Raab***

### **My Quan Yin**

When I think about my Quan Yin Buddha  
who reclines outside my office door  
on the long Tibetan table, I wonder  
about her journey to me,  
who created her and where she was born.

During the course of one day, I must pass her  
a dozen times or so, on my way somewhere:  
to the kitchen or the bathroom or to my car for errands.

She patiently watches and only on rare moments like this,  
do I stop and stare into her eyes and thank her  
for being in my life and reminding me  
of the importance of compassion.

How many times during the course of a day  
do we pass objects in our homes,  
without offering acknowledgment or thanks?

I decide to bring this new ritual into my life,  
a thank you, a nod, a bow to this object  
who represents all that is important  
in this world we inhabit  
during both dark and light times.

Amen.

**V. Bray**

## **Altar of Motherhood**

The woman at the cashier winks at me,  
gestures to her friend.

*I thought she was talking about planting THAT seed.*

She chuckles, expecting me to care  
about a stranger's fertility or lack thereof.

Family fables dance  
on the altar of motherhood;  
a figure mocked in sitcoms and memes  
but nevertheless, a part of the club  
to which I will not be admitted, as if

I will never know what it means to be real  
like the Velveteen Rabbit, who needed a child's love  
to make him come alive.

Why must I wait to come alive?

I walk into the sharp, clear sunlight.

## *Sigrun Susan Lane*

### **Hard Sugar**

Hard sugar cubes gripped  
between their front teeth,  
three grey haired women pour

hot English tea to a saucer,  
sip the brew with noisy gusto,  
suck the sweetness through.

In the kitchen's steamy warmth  
they grin, savor this ritual impropriety.  
I sip my tea from a cup.

When they sailed from Reykjavik  
for Halifax on the *S.S. Cameons*—  
it meant six weeks in airless steerage,

six week of sea sickness.  
They left behind the old ways,  
where serving girls, curtsied

before the gentry  
in their drawing rooms.  
They backed out of parlors, just so.

Aunt Briet leaps to her feet  
mimics the posture—  
her back, her head bent

impossibly low,  
she bows out of room,  
and out the door.

They fall about laughing,  
their bitter laughter sweetened  
only by the hard sugar in their teeth.

## *Alix Brobbey*

### **Esther, Revisited**

And who knows but that your hands  
have calcified, yellowed with wisdom,  
wrinkled in water, and flaked polish,  
for the yeast scenting your fingertips,  
and the water bottles in your trunk,  
and the key loose in your palm, and  
the bag of fabric (splitting at its seams),  
and the band-aids in your purse, and  
this letter in its plain envelope. For the  
neighbor, still stinging from stitches.  
For the thirsty stranger by the red light.  
For the college student without holiday  
plans. For the young mom in dangling  
threads. For your daughter hunched over  
the toilet. For the least of these we forget  
but still exist. For such a time as this.



## *Adrienne Stevenson*

### **High Maintenance**

You're in the high-risk group, they said  
first in line when vaccinations come  
for everything from shingles to pneumonia  
and now coronavirus, but enough of that

you need to get things checked, they said  
blood pressure, weight, hearing, vision  
make sure your working parts still work  
but don't worry that things might go wrong

just like a car that's spent too much time  
in a body shop, my structure has produced  
signals that I can't ignore, but can't get help  
for either, in a collapsing health-care system

why didn't you ask about this before?  
I tried, but you weren't listening  
She's just a scatty old woman  
nothing to think about but aches

my maintenance requirements may be high  
but no virtue lies in lengthy endurance  
early treatment application more beneficial  
than attempts to repair widespread decay

## ***Christa Fairbrother***

### **Witch Queen of Angmar**

Being a woman over fifty  
is a gradual slide into invisibility  
that doesn't happen overnight,  
but something you fade into gradually  
becoming a specter of your former self.

Now as a wraith,  
I'm exploring the shadow world,  
past other people's approval,  
and appraising gaze.

Hungry  
not for your soul,  
but for the time and space  
to seize my own.

## ***Adrienne Stevenson***

### **Incongruity**

*Women Making Shells, by Mabel May (Canada) 1918*

women, making shells, in 1918  
the ultimate irony, while the men they cared for  
drowned in sodden trenches  
or fell like modern Icaruses from fragile kites  
in a war that glorified empire

bent to their tasks, did they ever look up  
from the factory floor, and wonder  
whose brother, son, father, husband, beau  
might be obliterated by their labours' products  
and whether women on the other side did the same?

a war that barely stopped before its successor began  
and kept on erupting long after, like pox or pimples  
on diseased skin, in places not deemed worthy of support  
against the despoilers of their substance  
in which women, as always, had the worst to bear

## *Holly Day*

### **Flutter**

With increasing haste, we spread ourselves out among the stars  
like the scattered seeds of a dandelion head  
fleeing from a planet that finally gave up on itself,  
  
on us. We speak of the promise of adventure  
loudly, as if we really don't care that we can't live here anymore  
say there are other planets out there so much better than this one  
  
but in hushed tones, and behind closed doors  
we talk about things we could have done to save the world  
promise we'll do better  
next time around.

## *Shirley Harshenin*

### **A Not Admitting of the Wound**

#### *Cento*

#### I.

There are no curses  
only mirrors upon a shifting plate,  
like a revolving door—  
the eye of a little god, four-cornered,  
faces and darkness separate us over and over.  
In every place we look we see our stare,  
even that much-consulted mirror on the wall  
couldn't tell all, though it couldn't help telling the truth.  
A miniature window,  
that anyone who stands in front of it feels  
the bruising darkness.

#### II.

Close to the door in my dream, the small signs,  
portraits on everything imaginable,  
then hold them up like mirrors.  
They are illusions, reflected dreams,  
but move in a common rhythm  
that fades like tide drying on a beach.

I am terrified of this dark thing that sleeps in me—  
a not admitting of the wound until it grew  
so wide, I think it is part of my heart.  
But it flickers, perceives without a mirror in the hands.  
Into that rushing beast of the night,  
the curl of my lips, bright as the blood red edge  
of the moon, stared back at me a half-familiar face.

There are so many roots to the tree of anger,  
so murderous in its strangle of branches  
that sometimes the branches shatter  
before they bear—  
these are the isolate, slow faults that kill.

#### III.

The view of vast water stretching before me,  
on a shore that is wide for the tide is out,  
and the trade winds soft through the sighing trees,  
and the weedy rocks are bare to the rain,  
my right hand was holding my left hand  
which was holding the tree which was filled with stars  
and the soft rain—  
the soul's hunger is small, but precise.

Fringe of a mirror with wisdom on it,  
held up to the souls of gods and mortals,  
that all my Life had entered it,  
the rain spoke to me  
slowly, saying,  
*A wound is the place where light enters you,  
and when the blessed dawn again—  
beautiful and faithful and ancient, like a rainbow  
bearing up such speechless bounty,  
joy will reveal itself.*

#### METHOD:

“A NOT ADMITTING OF THE WOUND” is a cento poem consisting of lines taken verbatim from 26 poems written by 19 female poets.

#### SOURCES: Alphabetical by Poet

“Phenomenal Woman,” “On the Pulse of Morning,” “Caged Bird,” by Maya Angelou; “Last Days,” by Anne Bronte; “Poem in Praise of Menstruation,” by Lucille Clifton; “A Not Admitting of the Wound (1188),” “Fame is a Fickly Food (1702),” by Emily Dickinson; “Trio in a Mirror,” by Dorothy Donnelly; “I Have Been a Stranger in a Strange Land,” “Demeter’s Prayer to Hades,” by Rita Dove; “Objects in Mirror Are Closer Than They Appear,” by Alice B. Fogel; “Stellar Jay,” “Hatchling,” “Upstairs in the Study,” by Heidi Garnett; “Father’s Mirror,” by Miriam Goodman; “Mirrors,” by Elizabeth Jennings; Selections from “The Sun and Her Flowers,” Rupi Kaur; “Who Said It Was Simple,” by Audre Lorde; “Dream,” by Eileen Myles; “Last Night the Rain Spoke to Me,” by Mary Oliver; “To Be of Use,” by Marge Piercy; “Elm,” “Mirror,” by Sylvia Plath; “The Starry Night,” by Anne Sexton; “Departure,” by Edna St. Vincent Millay; “The Tree of Life Has Fallen,” by Alice Walker.

SOURCES: By Lines

SOURCES			
Part / Line #		POET	POEMS
I	1	Dove, Rita	Demeter’s Prayer to Hades
	2	Dove, Rita Dickinson, Emily	Demeter’s Prayer to Hades Fame is a Fickly Food (1702)
	3	Kaur, Rupī	The Sun and Her Flowers
	4-5	Plath, Sylvia	Mirror
	6	Jennings, Elizabeth	Mirrors
	7-8	Donnelly, Dorothy	Trio In a Mirror
	9-10	Goodman, Mirian	Father’s Mirror
	11	Angelou, Maya	On the Pulse of Morning
II	12	Myles, Eileen	Dream
	13-14	Fogel, Alice B.	Objects in Mirror Are Closer Than They Appear
	15	Garnett, Heidi	Stellar Jay
	16	Piercy, Marge	To Be of Use
	17	Goodman, Miriam	Father’s Mirror
	18	Plath, Sylvia	Elm
	19	Dickinson, Emily	A Not Admitting of the Wound (1188)
	20	Dickinson, Emily	A Not Admitting of the Wound (1188)
	20	Plath, Sylvia	Mirror
	21	Plath, Sylvia	Mirror
	21	Jennings, Elizabeth	Mirrors
	22	Sexton, Anne	The Starry Night
	23	Angelou, Maya	Phenomenal Woman
	23	Clifton, Lucille	Poem in Praise of Menstruation
	24	Clifton, Lucille	Poem in Praise of Menstruation
	24	Jennings, Elizabeth	Mirrors
	25	Lorde, Audre	Who Said It Was Simple
	26	Plath, Sylvia	Elm
	27-28	Lorde, Audre	Who Said It Was Simple
	29	Plath, Sylvia	Elm
III	30	Walker, Alice	The Tree of Life Has Fallen
	31	St. Vincent Millay, Edna	Departure
	32	Angelou, Maya	Caged Bird
	33	St. Vincent Millay, Edna	Departure
	34-36	Oliver, Mary	Last Night the Rain Spoke to Me
	37	Garnett, Heidi	Hatchling
	38	Myles, Eileen	Dream
	39	Dove, Rita	Demeter’s Prayer to Hades
	40	Dickinson, Emily	A Not Admitting of the Wound (1188)
	41-42	Oliver, Mary	Last Night the Rain Spoke to Me
	43	Garnett, Heidi	Upstairs in the Study
	44	Bronte, Anne	Last Days
	45	Clifton, Lucille Kaur, Rupī	Poem in Praise of Menstruation The Sun and Her Flowers
	46	Dove, Rita	I Have Been a Stranger in a Strange Land
	47	Kaur, Rupī	The Sun and Her Flowers

## *Alix Brobbey*

### **Eve**

The oldest daughter has  
her mother's hands, soft

as she braids strands:  
fig leaves into dresses

in the morning, blankets  
for loved ones at night.

She has her father's tongue,  
tasting shapes into being.

With sour bites turns seeds  
into bouquets of baby breath.

She builds an altar  
with her godly hands,

brown as the ground she tills,  
planting roots in loose dirt.

She has her mother's eyes.  
She's the apple attached

to the tree's hip. She sees  
a more fertile garden.

She takes her love's hands,  
once silken soft. Coats them

with sweat and dust. They cleave  
and blush. Dig and trust.

All she knows is this; and somehow  
this is more than enough.



*Matina Vossou*

**Vision is the Keyhole of Oblivion**



## Contributor Biographies

### V. Bray

V. Bray has been a writer since childhood and still has a box filled with her first “books,” usually illustrated with markers and bound with yarn. She writes in many genres, from speculative and historical fiction to poetry. Her work has been published in *About Place Journal*, *Halfway Down the Stairs*, *Multiplicity Magazine*, and *The Writer* magazine. Learn more at [authorvbray.com](http://authorvbray.com).

### Alix Brobbey

Alix Brobbey spent portions of her childhood in The Netherlands and Ghana. She has a BA in English from Brigham Young University, where she won the Ethel Lowry Handley Poetry Prize in 2020. Her work has been published or is forthcoming in *The Blue Marble Review*, *Segullah*, *Inscape*, *The Albion Review*, *The Susquehanna Review*, *The Palouse Review*, *Exponent II*, *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, and others. She is currently a law student at Brigham Young University.

### Liz Busby

Liz Busby is a writer of speculative fiction and creative nonfiction, as well as book reviews and other literary criticism, particularly about the intersection between Mormonism and science fiction/fantasy. Currently, she is a stay-at-home mom who enjoys long-distance running, knitting, and escape rooms. Liz recently moved from Bellevue, Washington, back to her home state of Utah, where she lives in Highland with her husband, George, and their four children.

### Kersten Christianson

Alaskan Poet, Moon Gazer, Raven Watcher, Northern Trekker, Teacher, Kersten Christianson derives inspiration from wild, wanderings, and road trips. Kersten is the poetry editor of *Alaska Women Speak*. She authored *Curating the House of Nostalgia* (Sheila-Na-Gig, 2020), *What Caught Raven's Eye* (Petroglyph Press, 2018), and *Something Yet to Be Named* (Kelsay Books, 2017). Kersten lives with her daughter in Sitka, Alaska.

### Lauren Cox

Lauren is a twenty-two-year-old bisexual woman from Columbus, Ohio. She is currently working her way through art school by teaching ballet to all ages at a local community arts center. She loves all things art and creativity. She views her writing as a way to detangle her thoughts and emotions into something tangible and succinct. At present, her work revolves around her wrestle with religion, sexual orientation, and her journey into an unknown chapter of life.

### Holly Day

Holly Day's writing has recently appeared in *Analog SF*, *The Hong Kong Review*, and *Appalachian Journal*, and her recent book publications include *Music Composition for Dummies*, *The Tooth Is the Largest Organ in the Human Body*, and *Bound in Ice*. She teaches creative writing at The Loft Literary Center in Minneapolis and Hugo House in Seattle.

### **Christa Fairbrother**

Christa Fairbrother is a Florida-based author who lives with a chronic illness. For her day job, she teaches yoga in the pool. In that capacity, she is a published non-fiction author of *Water Yoga* (Singing Dragon, 2022). As a poet, she writes about universal themes such as health, motherhood, and locatedness.

### **Elizabeth Cranford Garcia**

Elizabeth Cranford Garcia received the 2022 Banyan Poetry Prize and the 2021 Byron Herbert Reece prize from the Georgia Poetry Society. Her most recent work is slated for *Tar River Poetry*, *Portland Review*, *CALYX*, *Chautauqua*, and *Tinderbox Poetry*, and has recently appeared in *Anti-Heroine Chic*, *Prometheus Unbound*, and *Mom Egg Review*, and has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net. She is the author of *Stunt Double* and serves as the current poetry editor for *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*. Read more of her work at [elizabethcgarcia.wordpress.com](http://elizabethcgarcia.wordpress.com).

### **Richard Hanus**

Had four kids but now just three. Zen and Love.

### **Shirley Harshenin**

Shirley Harshenin writes from her home in the Okanagan Valley, British Columbia. She believes in angels, caffeine, and the human spirit's extraordinary resilience. Her work has been published in *Room Magazine*; *Contrary Magazine*; *Unlost Journal*; *Crab Fat Magazine*; *Haiku Journal*; *The Journal of Compressed Creative Arts*; *Entropy: Woven*; *Nailed*; *Crack the Spine*; *The Nasiona*, and others.

### **Dorothy Johnson-Laird**

Dorothy Johnson-Laird is a poet and social worker who lives in New York City. She received a B.A. in creative writing from New School University and an M.F.A in creative writing from Sarah Lawrence College. Dorothy also works as a music journalist with a passion for African music. She has published journalism with [www.afropop.org](http://www.afropop.org) and [www.worldmusiccentral.org](http://www.worldmusiccentral.org). Recent poetry has been published with BeZine, Fresh Words Magazine, Last Leaves Literary magazine, among others. More of Dorothy's poetry can be found at: <https://www.facebook.com/Dorothy-Johnson-Laird-Poet-106451582140735>

### **Sigrun Susan Lane**

Sigrun Susan Lane lives in Seattle, Washington. She is the author of two chapbooks, *Little Bones* and *SALT*, which won the Josephine Miles award for excellence in 2020. Her poems have appeared in *Crab Creek Review*, *Malahat Review*, *Seattle Review*, and many other national and international journals. She has won awards for poetry from the Seattle Arts Commission and the King County Arts Commission.

### **Ann M Lawrence**

Ann M Lawrence is a graduate of Knox College with a bachelor's in creative writing and a master's in school counseling. She lives in her hometown of Homewood, Illinois, with her husband and son. She has been previously published in *Catch*, *The Poet*, *Caustic Frolic*, and *Tigershark* magazines. She is very interested in objects and what we decide to leave behind and what holds meaning for us.

### **Elizabeth McCarthy**

Elizabeth McCarthy lives with her husband in an old farmhouse in northern Vermont, where they raised two children. Retired from teaching in 2019, she turned to poetry in 2020 when the pandemic closed the world down and time became a windfall. Her manuscript, "Digging Potatoes," was shortlisted for the Hunger Mountain: VCFA May Day Mountain Chapbook Series in 2021, and her chapbook *Winter Vole* was published by Finishing Line Press in November 2022.

### **Karla Linn Merrifield**

Karla Linn Merrifield has sixteen books to her credit. *Hernewest My Body the Guitar*, recently nominated for the 2022 National Book Award, was published by Before Your Quiet Eyes Publications Holograph Series. She is frequent contributor to *The Songs of Eretz Poetry Review*. Website: <https://www.karlalinnmerrifield.org/>; blog at <https://karlalinnmerrifield.wordpress.com/>; Tweet @LinnMerrifield; Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/karlalinn.merrifield>.

### **Sharon Lopez Mooney**

Sharon Lopez Mooney, poet, is a retired interfaith chaplain from the "end of life" field, now living in Mexico and part time in California. Mooney was given a California Arts Council Grant to establish a rural poetry series. She also co-published a regional anthology, co-owned an alternative literature service, produced poetry readings, and facilitated poetry feedback workshops. Mooney's poems are in numerous publications like *The Blotter*, *The Avalon*, *Galway Review*, *Adelaide International*, *Ginosko*, *NewVerse News*, *Glassworks*, *Roundtable Literary Journal*, *Tipton Literary Journal*, as well as the anthologies *CALYX*, *Cold Lake*, *Strong Words*, *Smoke & Myrrors* (UK), and many others nationally and internationally. More of her poems are found at [www.sharonlopezmooney.com](http://www.sharonlopezmooney.com)

### **Sandra Salinas Newton**

Sandra Salinas Newton is a Filipina-American professor emeritus of English. Her published works include introductory texts, fiction, and arts reviews. Her poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *Apricity Magazine*, *Brushfire*, *Cerasus*, *Decadent Review*, *Ekphrastic Review*, *Exchanges*, *Etched Onyx*, *Evening Street Review*, *Fauxmoir*, *Hawaii Pacific Review*, *Library Love Letter*, *Midwest Quarterly*, *Multiplicity*, *Native Skin*, *Neologism Poetry Journal*, *New Note Poetry*, *Oberon Poetry Journal 2021*, *OPEN: Journal of Arts and Letters*, *The Poeming Pigeon*, *Poetic Sun*, *Ponder Review*, *Provenance*, *Slab*, *Vita Brevis Press*, *Vultures and Doves*, *The Woolf*, and *Wrath-Bearing Tree*.



### **Diana Raab**

Diana Raab, PhD, is an award-winning memoirist, poet, blogger, speaker. She is the author of ten books and is a contributor to numerous journals and anthologies. Her two latest books are *Writing for Bliss: A Seven-Step Plan for Telling Your Story and Transforming Your Life* and *Writing for Bliss: A Companion Journal*. Her poetry chapbook, *An Imaginary Affair*, was recently published in July 2022 with Finishing Line Press. She blogs for *Psychology Today*, *Thrive Global*, *Sixty and Me*, *Good Men Project*, and *The Wisdom Daily* and is a frequent guest blogger for various other sites. Visit: [www.dianaraab.com](http://www.dianaraab.com).

### **Chloë Rain**

Chloë Rain is a writer of portals, among other things.

### **Nancy Machlis Rechtman**

Nancy Machlis Rechtman has had poetry and short stories published in *Your Daily Poem*, *The Whisky Blot*, *Grande Dame*, *Impspired*, *Trouvaille Review*, *Fresh Words*, *The Writing Disorder*, *Discretionary Love*, and more. She wrote freelance lifestyle stories for a local newspaper, and she was the copy editor for another paper. She writes a blog called Inanities at <https://nancywriteon.wordpress.com>.

### **Merryn Rutledge**

Merryn Rutledge's poems have appeared widely, for example, in *Pure Slush*, *Open Door*, *Speckled Trout Review*, and *Mass Poetry*'s "Hard Work of Hope" series. A poetry collection is forthcoming from Kelsay Books. Merryn has taught literature and creative writing, run a US-based leadership development consulting firm, and continues to work for social justice causes. She teaches poetry craft, writes poetry book reviews for several journals, sings, and dances from her home near Boston, USA.

### **Wendy Lou Schmidt**

Wendy Lou Schmidt, lives in Appleton, Wisconsin. She is a published author and mixed media artist. Poetry/fiction/art pieces published are listed in her LinkedIn profile and found @lulubirdart on Instagram.

### **Adrienne Stevenson**

Adrienne Stevenson (she/her) lives in Ottawa, Ontario. A retired forensic scientist, she writes in many genres. Her poetry has appeared in more than forty print and online journals and anthologies in Canada, the USA, the UK, and Australia. When not writing, Adrienne tends a large garden, reads voraciously, and procrastinates playing several musical instruments.

### **Colette Tennant**

Colette Tennant is an English professor in Oregon. She has two books of poems, *Commotion of Wings* and *Eden and After*. Her most recent book, *Religion in The Handmaid's Tale: A Brief Guide*, was published to coincide with Atwood's publication of *The Testaments*. Her poems have

been nominated for the Pushcart Prize and have appeared in various journals, including *Prairie Schooner*, *Rattle*, and *Poetry Ireland Review*.

### **Matina Vossou**

Matina Vossou is a self-taught artist living in Athens, Greece. She uses acrylics and a toothpick, a technique which she learned by her father, who was a naïve painter. She paints faces like perfectly unfinished mosaics of emotions and ideas. The skin is depicted cracked and light is illuminated from the inside. She believes that every face is a journey and probably looking at them is going to be our longest, most adventurous and knowledgeable trip. Her most recent participations were in Onboards Biennale in Antwerp, Belgium, in Emerging Scene in Dubai, UAE, in Artbox, (Urbanside Gallery in Zurich, Tana Art Place in Venice, Swissartexpo, also in Zurich) and in Expo Metro in the collective artwork, Downtown Los Angeles. She has exhibited her artworks in MADS Gallery in Milan. She has been featured in various art magazines. Except from painting, she also loves writing; her play “The Nothing of People” (a dystopian comedy) was published in Greek in 2018. You can see more of her artwork at:

[www.instagram.com/matina\\_vossou](http://www.instagram.com/matina_vossou)

### **Anne Whitehouse**

Anne Whitehouse’s poetry collections include *The Surveyor’s Hand*, *Blessings and Curses*, *The Refrain*, *Meteor Shower*, and *Outside from the Inside*, the last three from Dos Madres Press. She is the author of a novel, *Fall Love*. She has published essays and lectured on Longfellow and Poe. Her chapbook, *Frida*, about Frida Kahlo, is forthcoming from Ethel Zine and Micro Press. She is from Birmingham, Alabama, and lives in New York City and Columbia County, New York.

### **Ariel Mitchell Williams**

Ariel Mitchell, playwright, hails from an island in the Chesapeake. BYU and NYU alumnus, New Musical Inc. 2017 New Voices Project Finalist, Dramatists Guild 2017 Baltimore Footlights Reading Series Feature, and storyteller to two inquisitive sons. Other plays include *A Second Birth* (THML Theatre Company 2019 NYC Premiere, Harold and Mimi Steinberg 2013 National Student Playwriting Award, 2013 David Mark Cohen Award, Samuel French publication), about an Afghan girl who was raised as a boy, and *The Shower Principle* (2018 NY Winterfest), a two-person experiment in the isolating existence that is new parenthood. For more see <https://www.arielmitchellwriter.com>.

### **Mary Alice Williams**

Mary Alice Williams, a native of Providence, Rhode Island, writes in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Winner of the Dyer-Ives Poetry Contest judged by Conrad Hilberry, she is published in on-line journals including *Potato Soup Journal*, *Shorts Magazine*, *WordCityLit*, *Panoplyzine*, and *Ekphrastic Review*. She has a poem in the Fall 2022 River Paw Press anthology, *Sunflowers: Ukrainian Poetry on War, Resistance, Hope and Peace*. Since retiring from human services, Williams has focused on honing her voice as a poet.

### **Robin Wright**

Robin Wright lives in southern Indiana. Her work has appeared in *The New Verse News*, *Last Stanza Poetry Review*, *Bombfire Lit*, *Sanctuary*, *The Drabble*, *Rat's Ass Review*, *As It Ought to Be*, *One Art*, *Olney Magazine*, *Young Ravens Literary Review*, *Muddy River Poetry Review*, and others. She is a Pushcart Prize nominee, and her first chapbook, *Ready or Not*, was published by Finishing Line Press in October of 2020.

### **Darlene Young**

Darlene Young's poetry collection, *Homespun and Angel Feathers* (BCC Press, 2019), won the Association for Mormon Letters prize for poetry. A recipient of the Smith-Pettit award for Outstanding Contribution to Mormon Letters, she teaches creative writing at Brigham Young University. She has served as poetry editor of *Dialogue* journal and *Segullah*. Her work has been noted in *Best American Essays* and nominated for Pushcart Prizes. She lives in South Jordan, Utah.