

A black and white photograph of a woman with dark hair, wearing a polka-dot dress with a white collar, looking upwards and holding a large sign. The sign is tilted and has the title 'Southern Women's Review' written in a cursive font. The background is a vibrant, colorful floral pattern with various flower shapes and colors like red, yellow, blue, and green. The woman is holding a dark pole for the sign. In her left arm, she is holding several books or magazines.

# Southern Women's Review

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# SOUTHERN WOMEN'S REVIEW

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Wishing you success in all your creative endeavors,

A & H



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## FRIEND REQUEST

*by Lauren Slaughter*

Palm fronds slice  
(Montego?) the gulf

blue behind you  
and your lovely captives.

Twins! Congratulations,  
each smile is a game show

called Denial. She's beautiful  
as a wife in an apricot bikini

floating endlessly toward  
you. Love Christmas

at your mom's, all those gifts  
ripped open. Great you splurged

on a bouncy-house birthday—  
those kids were really ricocheting!

Our hangovers boomed  
as we burned on the jetty,

getting whipped by wave-tips  
that morning. The Wawa

powdered doughnuts  
and my favorite violet sundress

were too sugary  
for you. *Under the Bridge*

blared as I failed  
to peel out in my junky Geo.

But did you click  
to see my own two blue-eyed boys?





## KING CAKE BABIES

*by Lauren Slaughter*

In the junk drawer of receipts,  
sour corks, and used prescriptions  
a Ziploc keeps her stash  
of airless prizes: the brown one  
with no eyes, the yellow baby  
beaming like a salesman.  
Babies, rows and rows of them  
cook inside clear beeping boxes.  
The sandy-eyed parents in the NICU  
know better but linger before triplets  
born at twenty-two weeks—trinkets  
in afghans grandmothers stitched.  
The hummingbird's nest  
is made of lichens, spider-webs,  
and soft leaves stowed above a stream  
to guard against hawks. Each moment  
is a lesson in smallness.



## Last House Water Lore

*The last house on the northern end of Holland Island  
has fallen into the Chesapeake Bay.*

Kim Hairston, "Chesapeake Bay Island Vanishes."  
*Baltimore Sun* October 21, 2010

*by Sarah Ann Winn*

Tenants in the last house  
need a new word for flood,  
for slow motion swirling dust  
eddies around the living room,  
the not-quite-tumult knocking  
over the porcelain figurine,  
the small disturbance which  
could uncover a plate  
from the Titanic's last meal.

*Was it set for breakfast?  
I can never remember.*

It's like that here.  
Nobody remembers  
the last time they ate,  
whether the plates  
turned in their sleep  
and fell to the floor,  
or if we put them down  
carefully, before we knew  
hunger, before we knew  
only currents breaking stillness.

You might ask  
*How much of us is alive?  
How much is swimming?  
How much is only borne along?  
How much — you might ask —  
can we stand before the pressure  
of being too deep is too much?*





Here where sound is felt, the song  
of whales disrupts the vibrato of a house  
scraping its hull against the bottom.

Later others will ask  
*What do the formulas*  
*written on the windows mean?*  
*What is the moss trying to say?*

I've come so far without a map,  
using a compass whose ordinal directions  
are blue black green grey.  
Never noticed til now how much  
the ocean needed a legend.



## Again in Summer

*by Devon Miller-Duggan*

If I were a southern summer's day, all wet  
and dog-tongue, peach-juice-drip, cicada-whine,  
as un-precious as mosquito bites,  
I could drip myself into  
the complicated, sloppy air  
that hesitates before it fills  
the pair of spongey bags, the lungs—  
if I were a sussuration,

then I'd be the fly—  
all fret and bang against the screens,  
at night, all moth-dust  
desperation for light to drown in.  
I'd make my whole life  
out of stars, marshy, loose sheets,  
a typewriter, and my fingers slipping off  
intended keys, writing instead of my story  
those of owls and every thing  
which needs the night to find its footing  
or its food.





## Concert In a Baroque Church on the Corso in Rome

*by Devon Miller-Duggan*

Not a particularly famous one,  
but still baroque, with some cardinal's shield above the door  
on a busy thoroughfare.

Two side altars covered in silver heart Milagros,  
speakers painted gold to blend with gilding.

A woman in the pew in front of us  
sits, listens while  
holding a red balloon. It has no string or ribbon,  
but sits upright, filled with helium,  
as is the young soprano's voice now and again.

Two young singers, three Ave Marias.  
One hopes the young baritone learns to keep  
his whole voice in his head where  
it is lovely, not  
fisted in his throat, where  
he hits his notes, bluntly.  
One hopes he learns not to allow  
over-emoting sopranos (even Italian beauties)  
to sing over him through every piece.

The red balloon does not float on the ceiling with the putti.  
The woman wears a red coat and elaborate red barrette—  
like the balloon, red as Presence Lights,  
which glow in every chapel.  
Eight chapels, eight saints (two seem  
particularly prone to healing hearts),  
one red balloon, filled for flight, but  
stands, as if ready to sing, holding its song,  
itself held in a woman's fist.



## Surprise Lily, Resurrection Lily, What We Called Ghost Lily

*by Angie Macri*

From the south of Japan after the Civil War,  
the bulbs were as wide as a woman's palm,  
likewise crossed with lines of life, for most, a life so long  
they lasted till my time. At the end of August,  
they sprung across the yard in heavy dew, the kind  
you could drink if you had half a mind to, pink  
as spring but full like flesh, thick under the moon,  
all bloom. Magic lilies, some called them, or surprise.  
Naked ladies was another name, but that never  
seemed to fit. Who had ten heads each, or legs from here  
to there? We called them ghost. They were sudden  
in the grass, even in drought, cousins to the box my uncle  
brought back from the war, a jewel box  
of black wood harder than coal, with a bit of painted silk.



## Violet World

*by Angie Macri*

This is how we skip:  
one foot in front  
of the other,  
a flat stone  
a violet word,  
perfect in the hand,  
taken off the face  
of the land.  
You are as smart  
as a whip,

my girl.  
The stone smacks  
the surface, cracking  
the violent world  
of still water  
(which runs  
deep and is hell  
at the bottom,  
my mother  
always swore).



## Accidental Tomato

*by Joyce Kelley*

I promised my daughter we'd plant a garden  
but summer grew green while we were away  
and when we came home, there was only this—  
an accidental tomato.

Perhaps some bird feasting in a neighbor's yard  
mislaid the red eyeball seeds  
and up branched sparking silky spines with pungent breath,  
blossoms like tiny yellow hands.

I watch its oblong, stretch-marked fruit weigh it to the ground  
and I try to aid with twine and sticks  
but it resists me, twists away,  
embracing horizontal positions,  
spraying up defiant new blossoms on every limb.

My daughter caresses it,  
conducts a wild tomato dance with chants and stomps  
to make the pale green fruit turn red  
and it purrs and sways with feral pleasure.

July burns hot on my face  
as I pour water on its roots,  
and sweat in the mosquito-drenched heat, watching  
the tomatoes slowly bake into ripeness.





## Doxology

*by Lana Austin*

The sparrow seems more  
    than a sparrow today  
        with its gossamer warble crescendoing

to a coronet trill gleaming straight to my center  
    and the oak tree dazzles as matador,  
        flourishing its burnished copper and claret cape

and the spiced cider you brewed  
    in that old cast iron kettle melts luxuriously  
        on my tongue like manna and the Patsy Cline song

on the radio really does make me want  
    to go out walking after midnight where I can hear  
        those night blooms still whispering even now

and where the wood smoke smells of memory,  
    smells of my children's honeyed first days,  
        a startling thought that bursts out my finger tips as light

and there's a single firefly that doesn't seem to know  
    it shouldn't still be in the backyard  
        and my three-year-old says, "I think that bug

might stay with us forever." Yes, that one  
    firefly might just go on  
        with its magic trick glint forever.



## Horses

*Athens, Georgia 1980*

*by Joanna Grant*

That was the year of the family album. The church brought in a photographer  
Who set up shop in the library, the one I owed for the enormous picture book  
Of horses running jumping feeding sleeping, the one I never returned.

They gave me a necklace to wear for our family's shots. A bird I lost in the brush.  
When the directory with the family snaps came back I spent hours studying over names.  
Scruggs Barrentine Bruce. Family groups. Mothers daughters sons. Composed. Just so.

Those were the years of watched. When I always sat trying. Following. Note taking.  
I tried hard. But all the time in the back of my mind was what I'd find out back, behind  
The Fellowship Hall, over the retaining wall. Oh it took all my strength to get myself over.

Because part of me didn't want to want. I was always so small and never so strong. Clay  
On my socks, scrapes on my shoes, twigs and spiderwebs in my hair. Mud and barbed wire.  
And there of a sudden where the horses run free, the muscle and ripple and musty reek of

Pastureland. Of unwashed flesh. Of animal. Through the hole and swung up on a mare's back  
I'd gallop bareback fists full of mane Sunday skirt hiked up so my knees could grip. Never mind  
Rips in the lace. Whatever they might have wanted of me lost for now. In the rush and the blur.





## VISIT TO A WARMER PLACE

by Janie Dempsey Watts

I survive the gloomy days of winter by remembering warmer places I've travelled. One of my favorites is the Greek Temples in Agrigento, Sicily, where I visited a few years ago.

On a pleasant May afternoon, my family and I followed our guide, Giovanna, through the ruins where she played as a child. A slender woman, Giovanna wore a hat and sunglasses to protect her eyes from the intense Sicilian sun.

"The rectangular shape of the temples and columns suggest the Greek, patriarchal culture," she said. She pointed to a collection of broken columns that are part of the 2,000 year old ruins called the Valley of the Temples.

I followed her into the ruins of the Tempio di Ercole (Temple of Hercules). Back in the day Hercules was the national hero of both Agrigento and Sicily, she explained, their version of Superman.

Standing between the 32-foot tall columns and looking down at the fields below, and beyond that, the Mediterranean Sea, it was easy to see how foreigners arriving by water might have been intimidated by the power and wealth these temples represented.

Founded in 589 B.C., Agrigento was known as Akragas and was at one time the richest city in the Mediterranean, a trade center. Today Agrigento is not so wealthy as then, but the temples which once intimidated potential invaders now lure tourists from all over the world.

My group followed Giovanna past groves of almond and olive trees, stopping to view the Temples Concordia and Juno. At the stadium-sized Temple of Zeus, a 25-foot tall stone telamone figure lay among the ruins looking like a humongous sunbather. This stone giant represented Atlas, who supported the world on his shoulders.

Seeing all these giants and supermen left me pondering the lives of ordinary folk, and especially females.

"What would life have been like for women in the days these temples were used for worship?" I asked.

"You could have been a wife, and never gotten to go out much except to worship. Or a mistress, or a prostitute," Giovanna answered. She did not look happy as she said it. Back then, life must have been bleak if you happened to be born female. Giovanna caught my eye.

"Perhaps you'd like to see the Temple of Castor and Pollux?" she asked. I wasn't so sure. I was beginning to feel I'd seen enough of these big boy columns--until she elaborated.

"Before it was known as the Temple of Castor and Pollux, it was the Temple of Demeter and Persophone," she said. "Next to the Temple of Castor and Pollux is a pair of altars used in the worship of Demeter and Persephone." These mother and daughter goddesses are two of my favorites, Demeter being known as the goddess responsible for agriculture in Sicily, and Persephone being her daughter who was snatched away to the dark underworld by Hades for part of each year. Like Persephone, during the dark days of winter, I pine for the return of spring.

Well out of the shadows of the tall-columns, we approached an area of flat stones laid out in a circular pattern. This rounded arrangement evoked a softer mood. Giovanna invited those in my group to take a seat on the stone "benches" and began to tell us about a yearly festival where only women were allowed.

"In the fifth century B.C., married women gathered at this place to honor Demeter, the goddess of fertility and patroness of marriage," she said. She explained that in this ancient version of a three-day slumber party, the women danced and ate special foods such as phallic-shaped breads. One of the days was devoted to fasting—and cursing at one another. A round altar with a hollowed-out area was used for offerings of live piglets. She pointed to a nearby square altar used for sacrificing animals. The stone altar bore a reddish tint, the mark of ancient fires. The sacrificial remains were later buried in the crevices of rocks, trenches or pits only to be removed the following year to be mixed with seeds. Once planted, this mixture was believed to ensure a plentiful crop.

As Giovanna spoke, and I felt the warmth of the sun-bathed stone bench underneath, I imagined my sisters of long ago sitting in this very spot. They would have savored their happy time away from their men, their children, and the responsibilities of





their daily lives.

Running my hand along the ancient stone seat, looking at the surrounding groves of olive trees, I thought about the three-day slumber party held at this place. I wish I could have been there to party along with the women. I would have loved the dancing and the special foods, but not the fasting. I would be cursing too if I hadn't eaten all day. Then again, if I got too hungry, I would have sneaked away from the other women to escape into the olive tree grove.

There, I would prop my back against a tree trunk and savor one of those funny-shaped loaves of bread. I would enjoy my time away, not in the shadow of another imposing column, but in the cool shade of an olive tree with the sound of my sisters' laughter lilting on the breeze.



## MOONFLOWERS

by *Daun Daemon*

"Right there." Karen points to a clump of weeds at the corner of a stone foundation. "Aunt Lureen grew moon vines on the south side of the smokehouse."

Ava shakes her head. "No. That wasn't the smokehouse. That's where the greenhouse stood. She grew trumpet vines on the greenhouse and purple clematis on the smokehouse, which stood there." She points with the trowel she is holding to another small square foundation, also overgrown with weeds, about thirty feet beyond the first one.

Karen frowns at Ava, who is thirteen years younger and always sure she is right. "No. You're wrong. Remember? We used to sit on the screened porch at night, sip Lureen's homemade grape juice and watch for moths in the moonlight. We thought those big white blossoms smelled like candy." She looks behind her, to the wreckage where the house once stood. "The moon vines had to be here on the smokehouse. Otherwise, we wouldn't be able to see them or smell them."

Ava snorts. "Lureen didn't grow moon vines. Ever. Besides, we didn't visit at night. We came on Saturday afternoons with Mama to pick strawberries in the spring and tomatoes in the summer. Lureen gave us fresh-squeezed lemonade, and we ran from the honeybees that swarmed the trumpet vine."

They stand quietly for a few moments, a breeze lifting Ava's long bangs and fluffing Karen's shoulder-length, graying curls. Karen shifts the canvas tote bag she is carrying from her left hand to her right. She peers into the bag. "This box is so light. I didn't expect that."

Ava looks away and then begins to walk the perimeter of the house, bulldozed last week and soon to be hauled away by dump trucks. On this Sunday afternoon, they are trespassing on land that once belonged to their favorite great-aunt and her husband. The property is now owned by a developer who promised to let all the structures stand while he built a community advertised as "luxury family homes situated in the charming North Carolina foothills" — on Lureen and Dade's 65 acres. He didn't keep his promises. All the buildings have been knocked down: the 1920s bungalow, the smokehouse, Lureen's greenhouse and potting shed, the ancient barn, Dade's workshop. Unpaved roads reach like roots into the woods; swaths of trees have been felled.

"Hey," Ava shouts to Karen. "Come over here. I've found the gardenia!"

Karen steps over boards and broken glass and joins her sister. She bends and peers at the remaining stems of a shrub mostly crushed by the fallen siding. "No. That's not the gardenia. I don't know what that is, but it isn't the gardenia. The leaves are too small."

"Are you sure?"

"Yeah. And besides, it would be dangerous to move this siding." Karen pauses, glancing toward the newly paved road running in front of the property. "Maybe we should leave. This doesn't feel right — someone might see us and call the developer. The last time I talked to him, he told me to stay away."

"Really?"

Karen nods.

"But he told us we could visit the property until the lots were sold. What happened?"

"All he said was that we should stay off of his property."

Karen looks past the ruined house to the acres of weed-choked gardens where Lureen had planted beds of iris and tulips, herb gardens, drifts of annuals. Next to the long driveway, Dade had put in a spectacular perennial border of butterfly bushes, black-eyed Susans, peonies and so much more. In back, Lureen and Dade had grown every type of vegetable imaginable in terraced beds. Fiery radishes, sweet white corn, enormous cabbages. Beyond it all were the magical woods: ancient trees with their canopies knitted together like a cape, the cool creek fringed with ferns, the mysterious hidden spot where Lureen claimed to have cultivated rare native orchids.

Most of it was gone now.



"We said we would do this, Karen. We promised." Ava reaches for the tote bag, but Karen pulls it close to her chest, cradling it like a baby. Ava taps the trowel against her bare thigh. Karen is wearing a long cotton dress and low-heeled sandals, but Ava refused their mother's pleas to look nice on such an unseasonably steamy June day — she's wearing shorts, a t-shirt and sneakers. "Mama expects us to do this. If we wait until she feels strong enough to come out here, we might never get it done. These houses will be built sooner than she thinks."

Still clutching the tote bag in her left hand, Karen shields her eyes with her right hand and looks beyond the house, into the several acres of woods standing intact. She squints, then blinks several times. "You're right. Of course."

"Karen, not now."

"I'm sorry, OK? But it's hard sometimes to be the one who stayed here and took care of everyone. You're hundreds of miles away, and we've always had to wait for you to come home before we could do family things." Karen's voice is edged with bitterness.

Ava takes a slow breath. "Well, Karen, I'm here right now, I'm leaving tomorrow, and I can't come back until Thanksgiving. We can't wait another five months to do this."

"We shouldn't have waited as long as we have. It's already been three months . . ." Karen's voice trails off. She picks something from the hem of her dress and flicks it away. "Beggar's lice."

Ava frowns at her sister. "We promised Myra we would do this. She asked us to go ahead with it even if the land was ripped up, even if the gardens were gone."

Karen sighs. "All right. But not here at the house, not under a bush I am sure isn't the gardenia. And we can't agree on where the moon vines were."

"Or weren't." Ava pauses, watching Karen wipe sweat from her forehead. "OK. Then where?"

"I'm not sure yet. Myra specifically requested we do this where the gardenia or the moon vines used to grow, so I don't know what else she would want." Karen slips the tote bag down to her side, letting it hang from her fingertips. "I'm hot and feeling a little queasy. Let's walk down to those trees and see if we can find a shady place to rest for a few minutes."

"We should have come this evening instead of right after lunch," Ava says as they move down the red clay road. "I wish you wouldn't always give in to Mama so easily."

"She was worried that you wouldn't go through with it if we waited. You know how, well, how contrary you can be."

Ava remains quiet until they reach the shade of the trees. She puts her hand on Karen's arm, stopping her. "I am not contrary. I'm just not like you. I don't always do everything anyone asks me to do. I'm not like Myra either."

"I didn't say you were." Karen thrusts the tote bag toward her sister. "Here. I can't carry it anymore."

Ava takes the bag and places the trowel in it, with the box. "Look — there's a path. For some reason, those jerks didn't mow down this part of the woods. Let's see where it goes."

"I don't remember ever going that far in," Karen says.

The sisters follow the narrow path deeper into the trees, the cool shade comforting them. Birds flit through the understory, chirping and fussing. In spots, the path is so overgrown with groundcover that the women must look down to make their way through it.

"Oh my god." Ava stops dead and holds out her arm to bar Karen's way.

She is standing a few inches from a vast spider web spun across the path between two hickories. Through the web, Ava can see a mossy glade next to a trickle of a creek and dots of yellow and pink. But right in front of her face what she sees is a dying luna moth. It is caught in the web, its delicate green wings mercilessly rucked and entangled in silk.

"What?" Karen asks and then spots the web. She covers her mouth with her hands and backs up the path a little before stopping. "Where is it? Where's the spider?"

"I don't see it anywhere." Ava thinks for a moment. "We need to figure out how to get under the web."

"Under it?" Karen exclaims.

"Yes, under it. I think we've found our spot, just over there." Ava looks beyond the web.



"I'm not going under that. Or around it or over it or anywhere near it."

Ava throws down the tote bag and clutches her head with both hands. "For a 50-year-old woman, you are so damned childish. I know you're afraid of spiders, but I'm going to explode. I am simply going to explode! I'm doing the best I can here. Help me out, for god's sake."

"Ava, please don't . . ." Karen's voice trembles.

Ava stomps the few yards back to Karen, screaming: "This isn't easy for me either, OK? But we are going to do this! If I have to rip down that web and kill the moth myself, we — are — going — to — DO — this!"

Karen is weeping now and looking at the tote bag crumpled on the ground. "But why over there?"

Ava turns away and points beyond the web. "Lady's slipper orchids. At least forty or fifty of them. That's why this part of the woods is still standing. The developer must be waiting to see if they're protected. I'm not sure myself if they are."

"Lady's slippers?" Karen wipes her eyes, squints and nods. "Yes, those are lady's slippers. This must be the place Lureen would never tell us about."

"Yeah," Ava says. "She didn't want us trampling them or telling anyone where they were. She didn't trust even us. She probably stole the original plants from a preserve up in the mountains. You know how she was, always pinching stems and taking them home to root in the greenhouse."

"Should we wait to find out if this plot of woods will be saved?"

Ava sighs. "It doesn't matter. All this land will be developed eventually, like the other wooded areas of Caldwell County. We knew that when Myra asked us to do this. She knew it. Didn't matter to her that the land would be plowed under and paved, as long as we got here first. That's what she cared about."

Karen nods, takes a few tentative steps closer to the web. She looks from side to side at the trees, in the web's far corners. The moth struggles. "We can't kill this moth — it's too big. I can't bear the thought. It's sickening."

"It won't live, Karen. Its wings are too ripped up. We'll have to kill it or leave it to die . . . slowly and painfully." The sisters look into each other's eyes for a long moment, and then Karen turns away. Ava searches the ground near the path, bends and picks up a large stick. "I can knock down the web with this and then crush the moth."

Karen grows very pale. "Oh no. No. Not again."

"Again? What are you talking about?" Ava cocks her head to the side. "I've never done anything like this before."

Karen's eyes widen. "Of course! Of course you wouldn't know about the moon vines. You weren't there. It was Myra. Oh why didn't I remember that it was Myra?"

"I don't understand."

"The summer you were born, Mama sent Myra and me here several times, sometimes for a whole week. When you were an infant, you cried all the time. Then you got sick, and Mama got sick. She couldn't handle all of us." Karen wipes her eyes. "Myra and I would sit on Lureen's back porch and wait for the moonflowers to open up at night and for the moths to come. You weren't . . ."

"And you never saw the trumpet vines," Ava interrupts. "You were away in Chapel Hill for summer school. But Myra was still here. We drank lemonade and ran from the bees."

"Can't we get anything right?" Karen asks. She picks up the tote bag. "Myra would set us straight."

"Middle sisters do try to make peace," Ava says. "But I still don't know why you said not again."

"Because I was thinking of Myra. She killed a moth, that summer you were born. She didn't mean to," Karen says, shaking her head. "But one night she tried to catch a luna moth that was sipping moonflower nectar. She had gotten a canning jar from Lureen's kitchen — and a lid. She thought she could put the jar over the moth and then screw on the lid. She was only eight."

"It didn't work, did it?"

"No. She crushed its wings to pieces and then cried and cried and cried after Dade made her put it out of its misery." She stops. "He gave her an old brick and a lecture and then stood over her until she did it."

"My god."

"It was pretty awful, but Dade thought he was teaching her something about compassion. You know, the old hills and





hollers' way of educating."

"She never told me about that. I wonder why?" Ava asks.

"You looked up to her when you were a child, thought she could do no wrong. Why would she tell you and ruin that?"

Karen shakes her head. "I guess that whole ugly scene was why Lureen never grew moon vines again."

They both look at the tote bag. Ava says, "I'm ready."

After Ava clears the web and kills the moth, she and Karen move into the dappled light. They step carefully among the native orchids, looking for the perfect place to bury their sister's ashes.

"There," they say in unison, pointing at exactly the same mossy spot beside the only pink and white lady's slipper in the glade.

They laugh together.

"That's a lovely flower," Karen says. "I think Myra would approve."

Karen hands the trowel to Ava.

"I *know* she would approve." Ava kneels to the forest floor and holds out her hands for the box, which Karen opens and then gives to her. "I just know it."

Karen watches her sister work the soil — then whispers, "Of course you do."



## THE SPINSTER RING

*Dacula, Georgia 1986*

*by Joanna Grant*

You are thirteen and your sister is eight. Sometimes your mother lets you open things—the mysterious oak chest of drawers, the one with all the pulls and cupboards she got for her housewarming all those many years ago.

You play with the old blonde switches and falls and other arcana your mother has to tell you the names of, prancing around the bedroom with crazy blonde shocks stuck on top of your heads, all warped and crimped from twenty-odd years wadded up behind the piles of slips and stockings.

Sometimes if you are very lucky she lets you dump out her old jewelry box. The only nice thing your father ever gave me, she said once. And then of course he broke it. One night when he was mad. She's never fixed the ripped-off hinge. She just lays the lid on top of the box. Unless you get right up close on it, you really can't tell, she says.

Something about that knot of necklaces keeps you coming back. Hours you must spend unwinding the tangles, coaxing each chain and length of beads free of the clump. They just get dumped back in again, but even so. It feels so good to unravel it all.

Your sister has just rooted out what looks to be a diamond ring, one with a warp in the hoop that goes round your finger, one that makes it odd and uncomfortable to wear.

My great-aunt Flora gave me that ring, your mother says. Sometimes she gets in a recalling way, and you never know what she might say. Why'd she do that? Your sister asks. Was it a reward? Did you do something extra special good?

No, your mother says, that was her engagement ring. She gave it to me when I was fifteen because she said I'd never have one to call my own otherwise. You and your sister stare at the little thing in its old-fashioned setting. Your sister takes to wearing the ring, filching it out of the jewelry box and hoping Mom won't notice. She's only eight and the ring is so pretty—she turns and turns it in the sun. Loving the sparkle and the glint.

But you don't. Not you.

Because you know. From what they've said and not said. The way they look at you when they line you up with the others. The cousins who are taller smaller blonder better. Oh Evelyn she looks just like you. Over and over so many times. As long as you can remember. She's just like you but shorter, they laugh. Shorter. Smaller. That's you. A not so good copy of your not so good mother. And you even like books, too. Not for her and not for you, then, the pretty things the pretty ones get, the ones who by their pretty right get pretty everything. No. For you the lesser gifts, you start to learn. Like all the ones who've come before, the ones who've had to take what gifts are left. The ones with strings. With dents and stings. Broken things.

Go out into the world, then. Go out and change your name. Have your adventures. Make lots of money. Buy sacksful of pretty pretty things. But still. In some drawer of the mind, always there, ready to turn up again, that dented ring.



## CLEARING OUT

Pascagoula, Mississippi-Mobile, Alabama, 2005

*by Joanna Grant*

He is dead now. The first dead body you've ever touched. You can't help it. Your hand reaches out as if of its own accord. Your father's forehead is cold, embalmed, a clammy cold. Smell of the many hothouse blooms, there in the funeral home, with a tinge, the chemical, Freon smell of a refrigerator's inside. You remember this for weeks. Every time you go in the kitchen to fix a meal and open the freezer doors. You try to forget so you can eat until the worst of it wears off.

Everywhere relics hauled up from the past. You watch them carry out his things—old sweater vests and sport coats to Goodwill. That ratty sprung old easy chair off to your brother's moving van. So many old cards in all your different hands. Shaky little kid block print. Careful first experiments with cursive swirls. Not too many after that—by then you'd gone to chucking all his letters to you in the trash. Unopened.

At the back of a drawer some old photos from some old kind of camera they don't even make anymore. Your mother. In a white negligee, one of those *recherché* late sixties polyester sets your sister loved to filch from your mother's bottom drawer and wear herself. You guess it's from the wedding night. What next, you think. And then a strange small box.

It's your mother's wedding rings. The missing ones, the ones he made off with from her bureau after the divorce. Holes in the gold and little empty prongs from where he'd had the diamonds out and reset them for his second wife.

It's the holes. More than the pictures you find wrapped up with them. It's the holes. In the rings.

She had to get them cut off of her swollen wedding finger, you remember. There at the Kay's at the old Gwinnett Place Mall. The jeweler had to cut them off. She'd gotten bigger. You were sixteen, seventeen then. Couldn't picture what kind of tools could do this thing, not without taking the finger with it. She said the jeweler welded them back together for free. Didn't even charge for labor. Said not to worry—he'd had to do it so many times. No trouble at all.

It must have been later that year that they went missing, the rings, after your father's visit, along with some old photos your mother said she kept in back there in her closet. Those wedding night pictures, it must have been. Although she didn't say so.

Nothing then of wedding nights, of lover's gifts, the kind you tear to bits but always keep. You know the kind all too well now. Don't we all just have a few.

Now it's past your time to go. Your mother and your brothers are packed up in the minivan. The rings—well. An unexpected thing. Last minute. For various reasons we'd all half-hoped they'd come to light. Or not.

You can leave those here, your grandmother says, your father's mother who never liked you very much. She hated your mother, and you look like her, you see. You can leave those right here with me.

It's the holes, you think in retrospect. You mean to leave them in the box there on the counter. That's what you tell your brother. You do. But somehow your hand again—like at the funeral home it won't let go, won't do the things you want it to, won't let loose the sad snagged things warming in your grip.

And so you slip them in your pocket and you walk on out the door. As your mother pulls the van out of the drive you calculate. Six or seven hours back to Atlanta, three or so to Mobile. If you can just get halfway your mother will most likely keep on going.

Mobile is so beautiful in the spring. In another life, you think, I might be happy here, in some old wooden house with some wraparound screen porch under some grey-green Spanish moss on these wide flat streets with their sidewalks made of oyster shell.

You're just past the city limits when you hear the ringtone.



## YOU SCAN

by Sheryl Cornett

I'm in the first checkout slot, where I keep an eye on the new computerized U-Scan machines, when in walk these three dudes in nothing but bathing suits. It's the slow time of day, mid-July afternoon and the heat index is one hundred ten. At first, since I'm wishing I'd done my nails last night and thinking about tomorrow's eight o'clock world lit test, I don't see them. Instead of heading straight away for our produce section like most customers coming here to the Ridge Food Liner, these dudes swing by the pharmacy-health-beauty-aids section. The tallest dude, I see on the security camera, puts a blue-green box of Trojans in his carry basket. Then I see them, alongside the cola products, the chips-dips-nuts-snacks aisle. The one that catches my eye first wears surfer swim trunks, the kind with big tropical flowers. He's the next tallest, medium height, catches my eye quicker than quick—not just because he's got that beach-boy-blond look and peach fuzz-colored hairy barrel chest, either—but because I'm always on the watch for the boys who aren't too tall, since I'm a flat five feet. People say my name matches my size: Pia, after my Swedish grandmom—I have her blue eyes and white blond hair—who came over on the boat inside her momma. It happens: you can be conceived in the old homeland, born in the new one.

The U-Scan alarm jolts me out of my head. The daydream zone, my boss Rouge calls it. Its blue light blinks on-off indicating some product slipped by the scanner, bar code unread. A space-age voice comes out of the machines and says: unknown item in bagging area. It happens all the time. I look up to see a leftover hippy of, say, age fifty-five, a gray pony tail snaking down his back. Did he really think I wouldn't notice him sneaking a frozen pizza? Not a cheap store brand either, but a gourmet four-cheese. I walk over from my register perch between the two U-Scanners, and run his pizza through again—I'm doing him a favor!—and he starts giving me hell, cussing me out as if I'd been the one stealing it. I cuss right back at him, tell him to get a life.

At this point Rouge our assistant manager comes out of her glass cubicle to smooth the hippy-feathers. But first she reminds me of my mission as head cashier: Customer Service. "Pia," she says to me quietly. "You know the drill." Before she can say anything to the hippy, he's got his pizza-Slimfast-prune juice in paper bags, not plastic, and is out the automatic sliding doors. Every time these open they let in an oven-blast of heat from the parking lot.

By now the dudes in bathing suits are over in the beer-wine-light bulbs aisle. That's when I really notice Stud, leader of the pack, shortest of the three and therefore also just my type. Probably only five-five or so, he's got this gold-tan hairless chest. Clearly, he's the pretty boy in charge. He's used to it, being in charge. Confident. Shoulder length hair that flips back in just the right Owen Wilson way.

He's cool-smooth, alright. He's the center of everything, walking with that straight ahead look in his brown sugar eyes. Hairy Barrel Chest and Tall-Dude walk behind Stud a little to the right and left of him like body guards forming a "V." You have to wonder what a stud like that is thinking, walking along behind his leader, in formation. Do studs have brains? Or just a mini, unfeeling PC clone on auto-pilot humming inside their heads?

Anyway, Stud must've felt me and Rouge looking him over as he's selecting beer. European-style domestic. I know she's thinking "born-sometime-after-1991" questions, but what she says shocks me: "Oh sister. Oh sister Pia. I'm drooling. I'm drooling all over everywhere." She tucks her arm into mine. You know, its one thing to have these dudes-in-bathing-suits at the pool or over at the lake-beach and quite another to have them in here bare-chested, au natural as God made them. Even clueless househusbands in their sweats and Durham Bulls baseball caps perk up and stare at them.

"Oh sister," Rouge says again. "Hold me up here. I feel so faint."

"You bet," I say. "That's some sweet-daddy."

"You can say that again."

I'm happy to prop up Rouge. She knows what's what when it comes to guys, and I take notes. Rouge has had three husbands already, and three hell-raising little boys—one by each hubby—and she's only twenty-five. I'm already twenty and





still get antsy after three months with the same guy, and she's three-for-three when it comes to husbands. But since the last one was went to jail, Rouge got religion instead of a new man. She's always asking me to go with her to The Church of the Wayfaring Stranger, and I admit I've been a time or two. It's kinda exciting; revs you up and all.

All of a sudden Rouge pulls herself up and says, as if she were talking to these dudes and not to me: "No shoes, no shirt, no service. We must enforce store policy."

"Ah come on, Rouge—" I say.

"I'll handle this, Pia." She smoothes her curly red hair and says again: "We have to enforce store policy." Now she's got on her preacher voice, her hazel eyes flaming as if reflecting her hair. "Gentleman," she says to me, practicing, "we are ten miles from the lake-beach, and three hours from the ocean." She breathes deep, stands up straight, un-tucks her arm from mine and marches up to my guys.

I call after her before she gets to them. "Yeah, we're ten miles from the lake, but we did have a full scale hurricane blow inland here to Ridge, all the way from Cape Hatteras. Back in '96, remember?"

"Oh, Lord, yes." Rouge stops and looks for a sec like she might let them off the hook, but bucks up and goes on with it. When she turns back to find them, they've disappeared down the gourmet-ethnic-couscous-pasta-rice aisle and I start to feel sorry for them.

Now here comes the sad part of this whole brou-ha-ha. At least my momma thinks it's sad for a girl trying to put herself through college by working the Food Liner U-Scan. "You'll never find a better boss than Rouge," momma's always telling me. "She's pulling for you to do things she never did."

Out of nowhere, in a flash, the dudes rendezvous at the U-Scan. Rouge walks right up to them. "Excuse me." She talks directly to Stud, leader-of-the-pack. "Store policy states no shoes, no shirt, no service." She's got this high and mighty voice going, her freckled face uplifted, her chin thrust out, waiting for their response.

Stud doesn't miss a beat, flashing his pearly whites. "We just stopped in for some—unexpected essentials." I see Rouge eyeing the contents of the carry basket: the Trojans, the six-pack of Carolina Pale-Ale, some blue corn tortilla chips.

"Be that as it may," Rouge preaches, "no shoes, no shirt, no service." She turns sharply and heads into her glass-walled cubicle, where the phone is ringing. As she goes, she's giving me the nod: you take it from here. Rouge wants me to have her job someday, after she moves onto the corporate office. I'm left here, up close, with these three dudes in nothing but bathing suits.

They look right at me and I feel taller than I ever have, though my knees may give out any minute what with all this heat running through my joints. I'm sweating all over when I say, "May I see your ID?" No sooner do I say this than I'm wondering where the hell he's going to get ID from or, for that matter, money? No pockets in that swim suit, no wallet in sight.

Stud reaches slowly down to loosen his lace-up fly and, oh-my-oh-my, you can see the line of white skin where the sun has not tanned his bikini area and he pulls out a twenty wrapped around a driver's license, hands it over to Tall-Dude without taking his eyes off mine. Then he hands me—our palms brushing—his ID: born in 1987. Praise the Lord! He's of age. His hands have got to be as smooth as that chest of shiny pectorals. Now he's giving me one of those half smiles that guys smile when they're letting you in on a secret, like they're doing you a favor.

I'm thinking, *oh sister, oh Rouge, I feel so faint.*

Meanwhile, Barrel Chest scans the condoms, beer, and chips. Pretty Boy waits for me to hand back his ID which I almost forgot to do. Tall-Dude gets the items bagged—plastic, not paper—in no time. Stud winks at me, white lights go off in my head, and they're gone, out the automatic sliding doors, into the summer glare-off-asphalt. I stand there behind the U-Scan watch-post, sweat sliding down my legs and I feel so lost. Oh Rouge, where are you now? I need your shoulder to lean on.

I told you Rouge doesn't miss much. Before I know it, she's slipping out of her cubicle, right beside me and in my



face. Before I've even got my eyes off those sweet-daddy-backsides.

I can hear the flowery fabric of their swim trucks swishing back and forth as they walk away. I believe I will hear this for the rest of my life.

"Pia." Rouges stares me down. "Pia." Her curly hair and hazel eyes don't feel sisterly anymore.

"Pia, I feel about you as if you were my own baby sister," she says, putting her arm around me. I smell her peppermint gum. "Let this serve as a warning. If you ever disregard store policy again—"

"I won't, Rouge," I say, standing on tiptoes. "I quit."

Rouge's eyes—so recently flaming—go watery. "You'll be sorry if you do that."

"I truly hope not," I say. I don't say: maybe this is my chance; I'll take what I can get. Strike while the iron's hot, my grandmom used to say. I say: "Thank you for everything you've done for me schedule-wise and all."

"You'll regret this for the rest of your life," Rouge says as I hand her my name-badge. "Don't do it, sister," she lunges to hug me, but I turn to get my bag.

"You'll be sorry," she says again. I let her hug me this time. "You'll never do better for working your way through college. I give you first pick of the shifts."

"I know it," I say and mean it. "But I have to go."

I hit the parking lot—which is so hot it shimmers like a mirage—just in time to see my dudes pulling out in their Jeep, windows down. "Brown Eyed Girl" pulses from the CD player's trunk speakers.

"Wait, wait!" I holler. But they can't hear me over the bass.

The Jeep rounds the corner to leave the shopping center, and I feel a hot white stab in the middle of my forehead, a stab that's telling me just how hard my life could be from here on out.





## Field of Purple Thistle at New Echota

*by Nancy Correro*

Beyond the reconstructed  
print shop and council house,  
the Cherokee farmed.  
Now, purple thistle crests the grasses,  
leans east in the wind toward light.  
West would be towards darkness—  
toward Oklahoma.

Under the swollen sun,  
finches, the color of corn,  
swish and dart through the thistle,  
their favorite food,  
the same thistle once used  
to make blowgun darts  
for hunting small birds.



## Nesting

*for my brother, Michael*

*by Nancy Correro*

I never gave much thought  
to the gathering of crows—  
in the yard or on power lines.  
Fussy and arrogant,  
they strut in their little dark suits.

For a birdwatcher,  
they can be a nuisance,  
scaring songbirds from feeders.  
But you enjoyed watching them,  
and told me they were families,  
not flocks. They grouse  
until someone listens,  
or scythe the sky  
in dark plumage.

When we found your things,  
papers, loose ends,  
empty pill bottles  
nestled in the trash,  
I realized it never occurred  
to you to call out—  
loud and obnoxious—like a crow.

Instead, you chose to burrow deep,  
and gather the past into a single nest  
where you grew even quieter by the year—  
until there was only silence.



## Cove Road on Tuesday Night

*by Marleah Blades*

My headlights frame the universe  
three feet tall and ten feet wide.  
Rabbits running up the ditch  
flash into life and out again;  
darkness saws the oaks to stumps  
and echoes with the streaks of resting fireflies.

Last fall you turned the music up,  
curled your lips around the words.  
The reckless highway sun  
painted your neck  
a canvas of orange shadows,  
dappling as you sang.

I heard that song again today.  
*[you talk too much you said  
it's time  
I don't want to go]*  
It's June now. The air that rushes by  
leaves my arm damp.

I drive the world forward in its low halo.  
The eyes of deer shine briefly  
and I do not see the way  
the vines that lace above the road  
recall your hair,  
the limbs my hands.







## Even a Song

*by E. Kristin Anderson*

Bursting, she melted and played on top  
of the world. Just in case, her mission  
embraced enemies, happy to put  
the suburbs—the stars—in one  
of those quiet, swept-under-the rug  
cherries.

A name for herself raised eyebrows,  
her dance the sole genius  
in the ocean. Want it.

The coolest girl in the room, untouchably real:  
Her warm water, copying splendor  
at a moment's notice, her spearhead  
is true, dragging the bullet, telling you:

This is the spark,  
the star,  
sugar and spice.

*\*This is an erasure poem. Source material: "Summer Music Special" by Caitlin Brody & Megan Angelo. Glamour, August 2014, pages 137-140.*



## Thread Counts

*by Kristin Berkey-Abbott*

She sleeps between sheets  
made of eucalyptus. She cherishes  
the thread counts and breathability,  
the lack of dyes, the natural beauty.

We sleep between sheets worn  
to softness. I have patched  
the seam that separates  
when we pull the corner tight.

He wraps himself in the quilt  
his grandmother made of scraps  
from clothing she sewed for the whole  
family, no piece gone to waste,  
no matter how small. Before he sleeps,  
he finds the scrap of lace  
from some lingerie looted  
from Europe after the war.  
He recites the prayers of childhood.



## Paul's Prayers

*by Julia Nunnally Duncan*

Often the preacher asked my uncle Paul  
to lead us in prayer,  
and our Baptist congregation grew still.  
But when Paul's baritone voice filled the sanctuary,  
those compelled by the Spirit exclaimed *Amen*.  
Paul proclaimed our gratitude for God's blessings  
and begged protection for our boys in foreign fields,  
the Vietnam War having spilled the blood  
of some from our community.  
Two decades before,  
Paul had been a young man  
serving in North Africa in another war  
that mangled his shoulder with shrapnel.  
For weeks he lay in a VA hospital  
and then fell back into his dissolute life.  
But one day he found salvation  
and thus began to pray for himself  
and for all the rest of us.  
Paul knew how to do it well.



## Creation Myth

*by Kathleen Taylor*

Are you alive? Well, of course. But are you  
something else? Entirely. A mixture of pig  
iron, doldrums, and magnifying glass.  
Anachronistic ancient astronauts  
with drops of air around their heads descended,  
discarded you, hot dump, with us, then left.  
We mimed for you, were inarticulate.  
Eventually, assimilation-soaked,  
you spoke. We couldn't help choking  
wetly when you said *hangman*, not because  
that's what we were playing, but because your  
accent blew out all our loves. I haven't  
washed a crinkled, bronze umbilical cord  
of yours, but I have held you in my mouth.



## Folie à Plusieurs

*by Kathleen Taylor*

One lunar phase, and very late, a quark  
alights on accident. The vagrant state  
becomes vehicular. Delusional,  
not unpathetic, bodies understand.  
Encounters matter. Fractional, and most  
electrical, the guest undoes the host.

The human sleeps through. It leaves no mark,  
except on documents regarding case.  
This surface thing invokes the luminal –  
candlelit, honest medicine be damned.  
In other incurables, an unearthly guide  
exists. But this reality goes blind.

When disturbances advance without direction,  
untenable professionals prescribe suppression.





## After Renovation

*by Jane Blanchard*

Oh, my! A second worthless specimen!  
The problem cannot be my recipe.  
The oven? Could you calibrate again?

I have made pound cakes since . . . well, God knows when,  
And never had a single casualty  
Till that, then this no-can-do specimen.

So, in the trash both go, but not the yen  
To make a pound cake fit for company.  
That oven! Calibration done again?

Now, if you would, hand me the sugar bin;  
And, once the butter softens, let us see  
If I can make a worthy specimen.

Another failure! Should I count to ten?  
This pound cake is unfit for family!  
Please calibrate the oven once again.

My next attempt will surely be a win.  
Why should a new appliance better me?  
I must make some worth-my-while specimen—  
Is calibration over yet again?



## 5 Under 6

*by Melanie Graham*

How my mother told of her nursing days,  
a family of children, 5 under 6 years old, patterned  
  
in suspicious ways, one broken, brought in,  
then, all of them x-rayed to reveal healed lines, small bones  
  
in conversation about the young mother, who was comforted,  
drawn out by the coffee extended in my mother's long-fingered,  
  
harmless hand - a shoulder, a friend - herself,  
a beaten child, now, queen of the Pediatrics ward,  
  
waiting to report to authorities any admission. How the woman  
said, "Every day, I, when I walk down the hill to the mailbox,  
  
I just want to scream... (fists)( clenched), (children  
safed away, at least today)...as loud  
  
as I can." How I nodded, remembering the night my own  
cried and cried and would not be put down,  
  
and wouldn't let me sit, and wouldn't let me sleep for the second  
night of fever, blisters hatching in her throat like tiny alien pods  
  
of pus, her small, flat tongue with no language  
to answer my wheel of questions, "What is it? What  
  
can I do? Tell, Mommy," and we paced the floor like people  
in Patsy Cline songs from the 50's, a patch nearly forming from my feet's  
  
bare worry and for one moment, one cold star in the sky  
of that desperate night, I could have  
  
hurled her against the wall,  
just like that, her decorated  
head that I've kissed  
a thousand times, gone  
to mush, her life



gone with mine, my hands,  
life, redefined. How  
there in the dark  
3 a.m. bedroom,  
my husband's sleep  
a soft purring,  
I saw what I am, what  
I could be. And you  
can say

it was an exhausted  
thought, a horror very human,  
not acted upon, no harm,  
no foul, but I tell you  
how the handcuffed man  
with the bloody hands,  
the woman at the mailbox  
turned, and saw into me.  
And I saw, too.



## Poetry in the Dirty South

*by Salaam Green*

Poetry in the dirty south is a women's passage way to life

The feminine carousel that tells the storied truths of her muddied existence

Existences that rival night air pockets on mosquito front porches with torn screens for doors

You will find paper cuts on the soiled fingertips of women who write in the south

Using medieval trowels as writing tools; digging into the earth's coated soot

Looking for red clay dirt to eat while pregnant with young growing poets whose taste buds yearn for the Monroeville dirt heaps

Lost scrapes of chipped polished fingernails land in the sand of Mobile Bay

Where sharpened rocks have been used as erasers to wash away the faded marks from the lined creases of emptied notebooks

Dirty muddy hands in the dirty south is a women's way of life plotting map quotes on the spoiled ink of her failures

Welcoming spotty rain showers as pond sludge for poems collected from mud holes in Marengo County's condemned artistry forests

Her poetry is her garden, the weeds are her unkempt treasures, the fertilizer of her whispered past

All shined to perfection as the Cahaba Rivers overflows her waist deep on well-laded patios

Writing dirty with muddy hands in the dirty south is a way of life

Where female dreams are knifed licked by the batter of refinery words punched out by cycles of gross raw sewage onto the marbled kitchen counters of adorned homes in Birmingham

Poetry in the dirty south is a women's passageway to life it's her country fire where trash becomes her soirée of popularity

Lying next two Junior and Senior misters whose hands craft justice bars and scale piano keys in smoke filled night clubs on the edge of the Alabama Mississippi line

Whose song of salvation savors the brew of coffeehouses that sit in small towns like laboratories for minced researchers walking down new streets with old signs for names

Poetry in the dirty south sweeps her lovers off their feet waltzing them to dance halls over ragged bridges in the balked at Black Belt where tiny homes behold well-crafted dreams



As her anthologies cling to her ripped filthy homely clothes like murky memoirs penned from the resurrected grave spirits

Women of the dirty south fall into soggy leaves leaving imprints of stenciled phrases that find their racked over substances in the decomposed pile of the south's colorful tree mounds

The daring women whose voices makes up the dirty south's poetry revolutions are reservoirs of love that stand barefoot with their toes stuck in the murky quicksand of life holding their laced gloved hands over the Alabama's sky screaming Shea sounds of sweet release to the South's tortured Girl Gods

Poetry in the dirty south is a women's passageway to life leaning into the sons and daughters birth-rite she paid the bounty and price for with her musty soiled palms sifting her hands into the life giving land

Planting her earth poetry wherever it may need to be found growing her words for a generation of women from Fyffe to Georgiana to the State's White House and then some and even more to come

Preparing petals of softness from the decayed grounds in the Diasporas formed from the coiffed poetry of the south wherever there once was none



## **why it is a sin to kill a mockingbird**

*by Dawn Leas*

They say, daughter,  
that children should be seen – not heard.

I say, daughter, speak up! Let them hear  
your voice rattle the windows of Main Street.

They say, daughter, listen to your teachers  
and their chalked-caked books.

I say, daughter, get your own hands dirty. Read a book,  
newspaper, magazine, no matter your age.

They say, daughter, girls wear dresses  
not brother's hand-me-down overalls.

I say, daughter, dresses or britches,  
pressed or patched, do not make the person.

They say, daughter, you are unschooled,  
unpredictable like a thunderstorm, a tornado.

I say, daughter, you have been more rock  
than shriveling stream, sturdy oak than willow.

They say, daughter, shield the child  
no need for her to see the ugly side of town.

I say, daughter, open your eyes – from courtroom  
balcony to Radley front porch to tense street

on a summer afternoon to a dark October  
night. These are the places you will learn

why it is a sin to kill a mockingbird.





## Can I Open My Eyes Now?

*by Dawn Leas*

A spider-veined grandma  
answers with a shower of sunscreen  
but the auburn-haired girl remains patient,  
scratches her belly sticking out  
under ruffled hem of striped tankini.

When her grandma turns attention  
to towels and chairs and umbrella,  
the little girl bends at the waist  
and rubs from ankles to thighs,  
pauses over a Band-Aid flapping at her knee

before ripping, dropping and burying it.  
There is little time on a spring Saturday  
for dwelling on old wounds. She knows.  
She was born knowing beach rituals.  
Must have been practicing them since she was old  
enough to wander from family blanket  
into the crowd and not look back.

The little girl is an old soul. Stands at the edge.  
Looks beyond green Gulf to the other side  
very few are willing to see. Drags a pail  
to higher ground. Builds a temporary home.  
Pushes sweaty hair away from eyes  
with back of pudgy hand.  
When work is done, she bends to watch  
seaweed curling around her ankles, plunges  
hands into a breaking wave,  
setting old wounds free into the spray.



**E. KRISTIN ANDERSON** is a poet and author living in Austin, TX. She's the co-editor of the *Dear Teen Me* anthology and her poetry has been published worldwide in many magazines. Kristin is the author of eight chapbooks of poetry including *A Guide for the Practical Abductee*, *Pray, Pray, Pray: Poems I wrote to Prince in the middle of the night*, *Acoustic Battery Life*, *Fire in the Sky*, *She Witnesses*, and *We're Doing Witchcraft*. Kristin is the Special Projects Manager for ELJ and is a poetry editor at *Found Poetry Review*. Once upon a time she worked at *The New Yorker*.

**LANA AUSTIN** A finalist for the James Wright Poetry Award, Lana K. W. Austin's poems and short stories have recently been featured in *Mid-American Review*, *Appalachian Heritage*, *Sou'wester*, *Columbia Journal*, *Zone 3*, *The Pinch*, *The Chariton Review*, *The New Guard*, and *Switchback*. Also a journalist, she has written for numerous newspapers and magazines. Austin's poems and short stories have made it to the finals and semi-finals of multiple national competitions, including the aforementioned James Wright Poetry Award, The Machigonne Fiction Contest, and The Crab Orchard Review First Book Award, amongst others. She has an MFA from George Mason University (2008). Her chapbook, *In Search of the Wild Dulcimer*, is from *Finishing Line Press*.

**KRISTIN BERKEY-ABBOTT** earned a Ph.D. from the University of South Carolina. She has taught at many colleges, and she is the Director of Education at the Hollywood (Florida) campus of City College. She has published 3 chapbooks: *Whistling Past the Graveyard* (Pudding House Publications), *I Stand Here Shredding Documents*, and *Life in the Holocene Extinction* (both published by *Finishing Line Press*).

**MARLEAH BLADES** is the founder of The Arts Collective Jacksonville, working to support and build the arts community in Jacksonville, AL, by bringing artists of all stripes together to share and create. She holds a BA in English from Penn State and writes poetry and short fiction.

**JANE BLANCHARD** lives and writes in Georgia. Her work has appeared previously in *Southern Women's Review* and recently in *Blue Unicorn*, *The Dark Horse*, *The French Literary Review*, *The Rotary Dial*, and *U.S.1 Worksheets*. Her first collection, *Unloosed*, is available from *White Violet Press* of *Kelsay Books*.

**HOLLIE CHASTAIN** is an artist living and working in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Following studies in both fine art and business she spent several years in marketing and design before taking the leap in 2009 to launch a career as an artist and illustrator. Hollie works mainly with paper, mixing vintage and found images with modern colors and compositions to create work full of originality and narrative. As well as various publications you can see her work in galleries and art boutiques both in the US and abroad.

**SHERYL CORNETT** currently teaches at North Carolina State University in Raleigh. She has also taught high school French in Kenya, East Africa, homeschooled her own kids, and conducted creative writing workshops in the public schools. Her recent poems, stories, and essays appear in the *North Carolina Literary Review*, *Image*, *Pembroke Magazine*, *Mars Hill Review*, and *The Independent Weekly* among other journals, magazines, and anthologies. She holds an MFA in Creative Writing from *Seattle Pacific University*.

**NANCY CORRERO** holds an MFA from *McNeese State University*, and is pursuing a PhD at *Georgia State University*. She resides near the *Chattahoochee Watershed* in Roswell, GA and finds inspiration while hiking the *Big Creek* trails. She is the recipient of the *Joy Scantlebury Poetry Award*, and her work has appeared or is forthcoming in such publications as, *I-70 Review*, *Rougarou*, *Bird's Thumb*, *Sadie Girl Press*, and other journals.

**DAUN DAEMON** received a master's degree from NC State, writing a creative thesis under Lee Smith's direction. She has published some short stories over the years, most recently in *Fiction Fix*, as well as a number of poems in the *Haiku Journal*. Her story "Moon Flowers" is set in *Caldwell County, NC*, where she grew up. The characters are fictional, but the setting is not. The land she described was the magical place of her childhood: Aunt Verlee and Uncle Bunk's beautiful patchwork of gardens and woods. The destruction of that land, sadly, is also accurately represented.

**JULIA NUNNALLY DUNCAN** is a North Carolina poet, fiction writer, and essayist. Her new poetry collection "A Part of Me" is forthcoming from *Red Dirt Press*. Her essay collection "A Place That Was Home," released in 2016, has been nominated for the 2017 *CSPA Book of the Year Award* in the *Nonfiction: Biography* category. She lives in *Marion, NC*, with her husband Steve and their daughter Annie, a college freshman.

**JOYCE KELLEY** Originally from Norman, Oklahoma, Joyce Kelley is an associate professor of English at *Auburn University* at *Montgomery*. She has recently published a book on the women modernists with *Ashgate* called *Excursions into Modernism: Women Writers, Travel, and the Body*. She is currently the poetry editor for the journal *THAT Literary Review*.

**DAWN LEAS** is the author of a full-length collection, *Take Something When You Go*, (*Winter Goose Publishing* 2016), and a chapbook, *I Know When to Keep Quiet*, (*Finishing Line Press*, 2010). Her work has appeared in *Literary Mama*, *Southern Women's*



Review, San Pedro River Review, The Pedestal Magazine and elsewhere. She spent a brief time as a child living in New Orleans, an experience that has stayed with her throughout adulthood. She received an M.F.A. in Creative Writing from Wilkes University. Currently, she is the assistant to the president at Wilkes University.

**MELANIE GRAHAM** holds a PhD in poetry from the University of Lancaster, UK and an MFA from Sierra Nevada College. Poems have been published in *Drunken Boat* and *The Mailer Review*, and as a finalist in *The Southeast Review*, *Split This Rock*, and *So To Speak*. Her poem "Nip of Teeth" won the Kakalak Poetry Prize, 2016.

**JOANNA GRANT** has published widely in multiple genres, including literary criticism, poetry, and creative nonfiction. Her doctoral dissertation, *Modernism's Middle East*, appeared in 2008 from Palgrave Macmillan. She has published a chapbook of poems entitled *My Far-Shooting Apollo* in *The Chapbook Journal*, and her first full-length collection of poetry, based on her time teaching in Afghanistan, among other places, is forthcoming from All Nations Press. .

**SALAAM GREEN** Author, Social Health Activist and Speaker. Founder of the Literary Healing Arts Foundation, promoting the healing power of words. 2016 Poet Laureate for Innovation and Entrepreneurship, Honored as Women of Wisdom 2016, International Women's Day Poet for Mayor William Bell's Administration. Member of Sister City Connection Spoken Word Troupe & Women Writing for a Change, See Jane Write Member of the Month. Member of the International Society of Poetry Therapy Facilitators, Contributor to The Black Female Project. Published in the *Birmingham Times*, *Al.com*, *I am The F-Bomb*, *Bad Ass Biz Women* featured author in the books *My Second Story* and *I am Women:15 Stories of Triumph* and more... founder of @beautifulblackpoetry.

**ANGIE MACRI** fell in love with Arkansas, first attending and then teaching college there, and then marrying a sixth-generation Arkansan. She is the author of *Underwater Panther* (Southeast Missouri State University), winner of the Cowles Poetry Book Prize, and *Fear Nothing of the Future or the Past (Finishing Line)*, and her recent work appears online at *Arkana*, *Terrain.org*, and *Waccamaw*. An Arkansas Arts Council fellow, she lives in Hot Springs.

**DEVON MILLER- DUGGAN** has published poems in *Rattle*, *Shenandoah*, *Margie*, *Christianity and Literature*, *Gargoyle*. She teaches Creative Writing at the University of Delaware. Her books include *Pinning the Bird to the Wall* in 2008 and a chapbook, *Neither Prayer, Nor Bird* in 2013. *Alphabet Year*, will be published by Wipf & Stock in 2016.

**LAUREN SLAUGHTER** Slaughter's first collection of poems, *A Lesson in Smallness*, was recently released and her poetry and fiction has appeared in many publications, including *Five Chapters*, *Drunken Boat*, the *Chariton Review*, *Hunger Mountain*, *Blackbird*, the *Kenyon Review Online*, and *Verse Daily*. She is also a fiction editor at the online magazine, *DIAGRAM*. She lives in Birmingham with her husband and their two young children.

**KATHLEEN TAYLOR** comes from a small town situated alongside the Susquehanna River and Chesapeake Bay in Maryland. She obtained her B.S. in English with a concentration in Creative Writing from Towson University. She attends the University of California, Riverside's MFA program, specializing in poetry. Her hobbies include journeying through dictionaries and thesauruses to unearth infrequently used words and obsessively reading biographies of her favorite poets.

**JANIE DEMPSEY WATTS** has two novels out; the second one, *Return to Taylor's Crossing*, (2015) won first place in the 2015 Knoxville Writers Guild Novel excerpt contest and was third place winner in the Frank Yerby Literary competition. Her first novel, *Moon Over Taylor's Ridge*, (2012) was featured in the Appalachian Writers Series and also was a finalist in the Frank Yerby Literary Competition. Her short story collection, *Mothers, Sons, Beloveds, and Other Strangers*, will be published in the spring of this year.

**SARAH ANN WINN'S** poems, flash fiction and hybrid works have appeared in *Massachusetts Review*, *Quarterly West*, *Tupelo Quarterly*, among others. Her chapbooks include *Field Guide to Alma Avenue and Frew Drive* (forthcoming Essay Press, 2016), *Haunting the Last House on Holland Island* (forthcoming Porkbelly Press, 2016), and *Portage* (Sundress Publications, 2015). She's lived a breath south of the Mason Dixon in Northern Virginia for twenty years, which is longer than she's lived anywhere else. She is currently a free-range librarian in Manassas, Virginia. Visit her at <http://bluebirdwords.com> or follow her @blueaisling.







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