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nature inspires art • art reveals spirit • spirit changes the world

VINTAGE





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Christine Brooks Cote, Editor

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www.shantiarts.com
info@shantiarts.com

193 Hillside Road
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207.837.5760

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TABLE OF CONTENTS	
FROM THE EDITOR	
Christine Brooks Cote • <i>Vintage</i> _____	4
CONTRIBUTORS AND IMAGE CREDITS _____	
14	
CALLS FOR CONTRIBUTORS / UPCOMING ISSUES _____	
16	
CONTRIBUTING WRITERS AND POETS	
Susan Moldaw • <i>Counting Down</i> _____	18
Molly O’Dell • <i>Mandala</i> _____	28
Jennifer Lou Chapman • <i>Found Objects</i> _____	34
Maria Odessky Rosen • <i>The Red Dress</i> _____	36
Lori Erickson • <i>We Do Not Speak of the Trolls</i> _____	40
Mara Miller • <i>The Vintage Garden</i> _____	54
Gloria Heffernan • <i>Yellow Roses</i> _____	66
Kira M. Tjomsland • <i>Inheritance</i> _____	68
Carole Greenfield • <i>Evidence of Affection</i> _____	76
Karen George • <i>Black and White of Dad’s Early Twenties Birthday</i> _____	80
Jay Simons • <i>No Music But the Wind</i> _____	84
Juanita M. Smart • <i>Piemaking—Yarmouth, Maine 1964</i> _____	94
Jane H. Fitzgerald • <i>Footsteps Overhead</i> _____	96
Diane Roberson Douiyssi • <i>The Button Box</i> _____	102
Kresha Richman Warnock • <i>Cashmere by the Generation</i> _____	104
Joanne Durham • <i>Interference</i> _____	110
Mord McGhee • <i>The Summer I Ruined</i> _____	112
Elisabeth Harrahy • <i>What’s in a Coat</i> _____	122
Kaila Schwartz • <i>Verisimilitude</i> _____	124
CONTRIBUTING ARTISTS	
Maura H. Harrison _____	38
Alexandra Schwarz _____	52
Wendy Lou Schmidt _____	82
Carolyn Schlam _____	108



VINTAGE

Christine Brooks Cote

THE LARGE BRICK DOUBLE house that sits at 159–161 Park Row in Brunswick was built by brothers Alfred and Samuel Skolfield between 1858 and 1862. Their father, George, had purchased the land in the center of town so

that his sons would be among the community’s social elite. George, along with other family members, ran a highly successful shipbuilding operation about four miles out of town on Harpswell Sound and was the wealthiest man in Brunswick.

Photos courtesy of Pejepscot History Center



from left: Alice Whittier, Martha Harward Skolfield, Eugenie Skolfield Whittier, Charlotte Whittier (on lap), Isabel Whittier

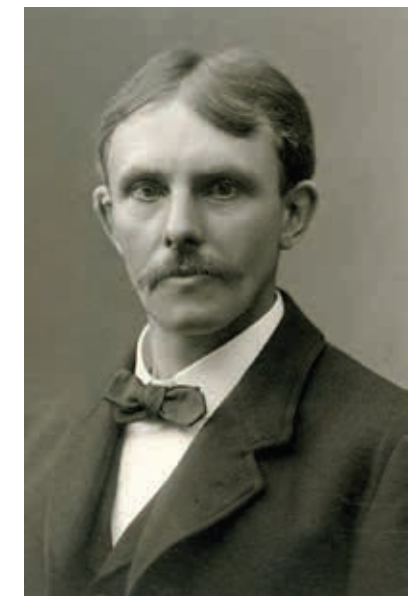
Once the house was completed, each brother lived in one side of the semidetached structure. Alfred’s side remained in the family until 1994. Samuel lived in his portion until his death in 1916, then leaving it to his children, who eventually sold it in 1939.

In 1858 Alfred married Martha Harward, whose family lived in Bowdoinham, a small town about ten miles from Brunswick built on the shores of a freshwater tidal bay known as Merrymeeting Bay. In 1866, following the Civil War, Alfred moved his wife and daughters, Eugenie and Augusta Marie, to England. The end of slavery in the US brought a major change to the family’s shipbuilding business, which prospered largely because their ships transported goods like cotton and tobacco, produced by enslaved labor, to factories in the North; Alfred was a Confederate sympathizer. With the end of slavery the business shifted its focus on the building of sailing vessels, which it continued to do until around 1885. While in England, Alfred worked in the shipping industry as a businessman.

For the next twenty years, Alfred grew his



Eugenie and Augusta Marie Skolfield



Frank Whittier

Tremendous thanks to Larissa Vigue Picard, Executive Director of the [Pejepscot History Center](#), for her assistance with this piece and for providing images.



Alice Whittier



Isabel Whittier

wealth and acquired many valuable objects and artworks that he took with him when, in the late 1880s, the family moved back to the US and to their half of the large brick house on Park Row. Prior to her marriage, Martha had attended Ipswich Female Seminary, well known for its rigorous curriculum designed to prepare women for employment and an active role in their local communities and broader society. Martha was reported to be a strong-willed, principled woman who carefully managed household affairs for the Park Row house and guided the education and refinement of her daughters.

Alfred and Martha's oldest daughter was Eugenie, born in 1860.

Though women of her era did not attend college, she was schooled in England and throughout her life maintained an active and curious mind by joining clubs and participating in organizations and community events. In 1895 she married Frank Whittier, a graduate of Bowdoin College and the Bowdoin College Medical School. After completing his education, Frank stayed at his alma mater to become the college's physician as well as a professor of pathology and bacteriology. He also served as Cumberland County health commissioner and Brunswick's milk examiner. Little is known about Alfred and Martha's middle daughter, Augusta Marie; she never married and died at the age of thirty-eight. Their

Photos courtesy of Pejepscot History Center



Dr. Alice Whittier

youngest daughter, Evaline Blanchard, died when she was only two.

Frank and Eugenie also had three daughters. The eldest, Isabel, was born in 1896. She attended local public schools and went to college at Bryn Mawr, followed by graduate work at the University of Pennsylvania, the University of Wisconsin, and Oxford University. She taught history at Hunter College and Brooklyn College,

traveled throughout Europe, and authored several books and articles. She was active in politics and was a close friend of Margaret Chase Smith, Maine's first female senator.

Frank and Eugenie's middle daughter, Alice, was born in 1898. She, too, attended local public schools and went to Bryn Mawr for college. She graduated from Yale Medical School in 1925 and eventually settled in Portland,



Maine, to practice medicine as Maine's first female pediatrician.

The youngest daughter, Charlotte, was born in 1903 and died tragically in 1912 when her clothes caught fire in the house's kitchen.

Neither Isabel nor Alice married. Their father, Frank, died in 1924, after which the house on Park Row was used only for summer vacations. Their mother, Eugenie, died in 1951. Isabel died in 1976 and Alice in 1994.

The Park Row property, now known as the Skolfield-Whittier House, was donated to the Pejepscot Historical Society by Alice. In the years between Frank's death in 1924 and Alice's death in 1994, very little changed in the house. The structure, systems, and fixtures of the house were untouched, and furnishings, textiles, artworks, and objects remained, for the most part, in their



original location. The house is now a museum, part of the Pejepscot History Center, which occupies the side of the house in which Samuel and his family had first lived. Restoration work has been ongoing since 2015 with the purpose of keeping the house a time capsule of Victorian America.



Located in the center of town, only a few miles from where I live, I recently spent a most enjoyable afternoon walking through the Skolfield-Whittier house with a knowledgeable and generous tour guide. I listened to her incredible stories about the house and the generations of people who had lived within its walls. In my mind I pictured residents from long ago sitting in the comfortable drawing room, visiting with guests in the stately dining room, and drinking tea



from one of the dozens of antique cups stored in the house's china closets.

The large house is filled with furnishings and objects from another era. There is an old wood burning cook stove in the small kitchen—not all that uncommon in Maine, but they are now more often used to warm the house than to cook meals. Sitting on top of the stove are several metal pots and kettles that surely date from the turn of the last century. Several closets are nearly overflowing with dishes, silverware, glassware, tea cups, salt and pepper shakers, and other assorted items. Scattered atop a dresser are framed photographs of family and friends. In what may have been a children's playroom are a couple of dolls with painted-on faces. And on another old dresser sits an old bottle of Jergen's lotion, while in a bathroom are bottles of mercurochrome, rubbing alcohol, bismuth formic iodine, and a box labeled Helena Rubinstein's Estrogenic Hormone Twins, a youthifying skin treatment first sold in 1931 that included a day cream (twin 1) and a night cream (twin 2).

The house is an experience of vintage, notably different from antique, old-fashioned, retro, or second-hand. The term vintage of course describes things that take us back in time—a time we actually experienced or one we completely imagine, or most often, a combination of the two—a time

we have created from actual stories and images that are enhanced with our imagination. Items we refer to as vintage are cherished today because they were cherished yesterday. They are an example of an era's best quality and workmanship, made to be useful and to last for a long time. But what really sets vintage objects apart is the rush of emotion that comes over us. An experience of vintage often results in a sudden recollection of a person, place, or event that carries weight and meaning enough to make our face flush and our heart melt.



I believe in the power of stories—our own stories. No two people have the same story, and stories are meant to be shared and meant to be heard. It's the reason people write, paint, design, sing, perform. Our story takes a lifetime to reach its conclusion, and we work on it every second of every day.

Remembering is the starting point for telling our story, but we don't always remember things perfectly and completely. Instead, we remember bits and pieces, and like an archaeologist, we have to figure out how those pieces fit together and then make some guesses about the pieces that are missing, until one day, possibly, we find that missing piece. Vintage plays an important role in the writing of our stories. It's one of the reasons we keep

things from an earlier time—to help us remember.



The Skolfield-Whittier House is filled with beautiful and interesting objects, rich with stories and memories, and some of them crossed paths with mine. One of the photos I saw on a dresser is of two young girls with big fashionable bows in their hair, identical to the bows in a photo I have of my mother and her sister when they were very young. On the same dresser is a handheld mirror with a wooden handle that made me think of the mirror I still have that my mother used every day of her life.

But aside from individual objects, the house as a whole made an impact on me. It was clear that the house was built and occupied by people who were wealthy, educated, and well positioned in society. It's a very large, beautiful house right at the center of a lovely New England town, which itself is rich with stories and memories. Joshua Chamberlain's house is just across the street—his is much smaller and more simple—and the college he taught at and presided over after the Civil War is just a few hundred yards up the hill. The house where Harriet Beecher Stowe lived while her husband was teaching at the college (Bowdoin College) is a ten-minute walk away, as is the church where Stowe was inspired to

write the novel (*Uncle Tom's Cabin*) that changed the country forever.

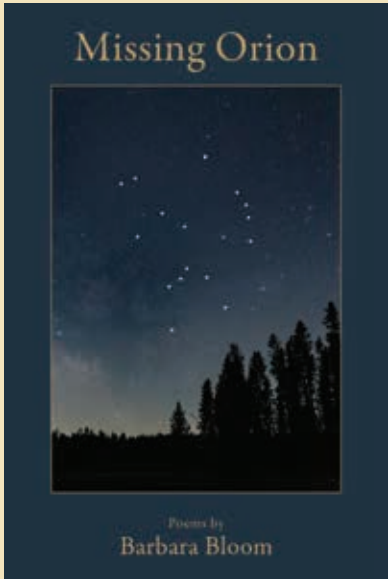
During those hours I spent at the Skolfield-Whittier House, I was transported to another era, an unfamiliar era because my roots are a study in contrasts. My ancestors came from Prussia in the mid to late 1800s and settled in and around Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Farmers and then factory workers, men worked ten-hour days, six days a week. Women also worked in the factories until they married and became housewives. Their small houses were in crowded neighborhoods and not filled with expensive furnishings and objects. In the early 1900s, Milwaukee was a major industrial and brewing center and one of the largest cities in the country—certainly not a quaint, clean, and quiet small town in New England.

That's my story—at least the beginning of it. Both my story and that of the Skolfield-Whittier family are part of our shared history as Americans, and there are millions of other stories swirling through this country that deserve to be heard and pondered. They all start with the act of remembering, sometimes triggered by objects and experiences that take us back in time. Such is the value of vintage. ✨

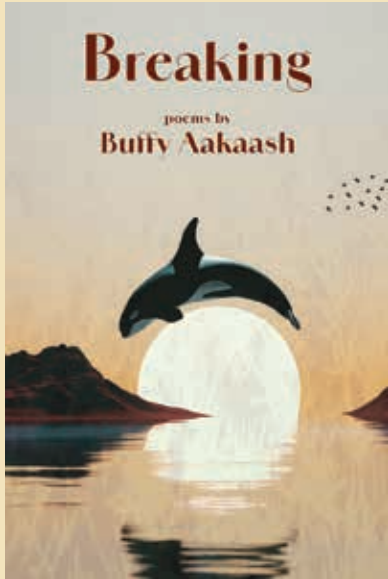
CHRISTINE BROOKS COTE founded Shanti Arts in 2011 to revel in nature, art, and spirit. She has called Maine her home for the last thirty years.

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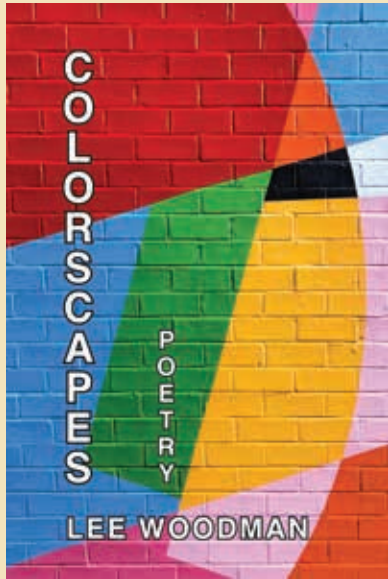
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Barbara Bloom
poetry



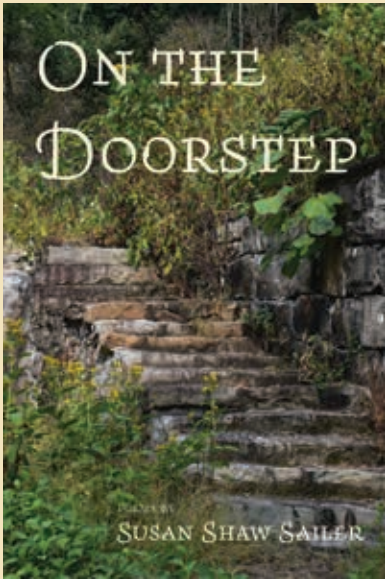
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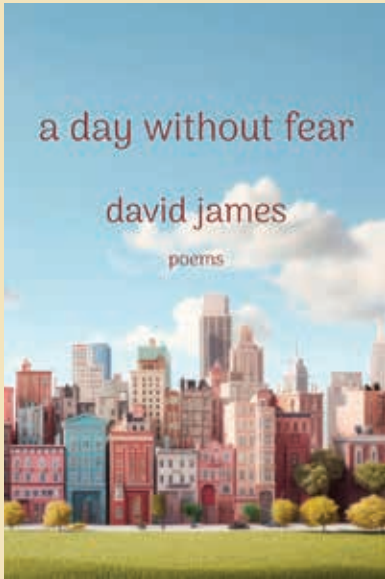
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Jacqueline S. Redmer, M.D.
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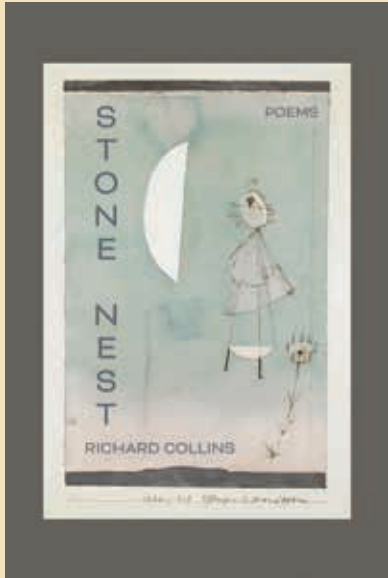
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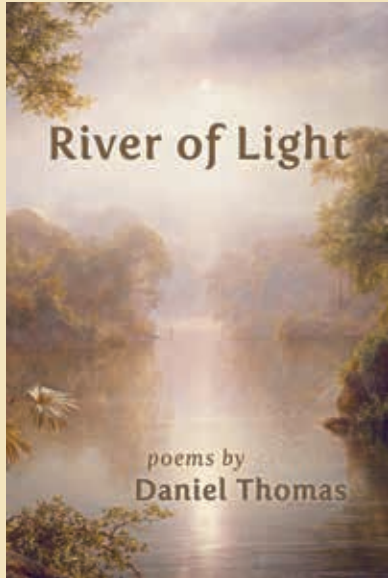
A Day without Fear
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poetry



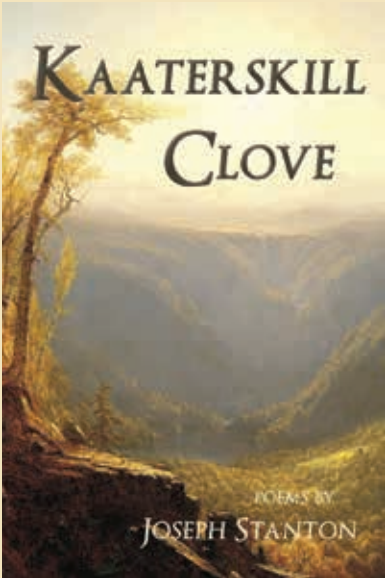
About to Disappear
Robbi Nester
ekphrastic poetry



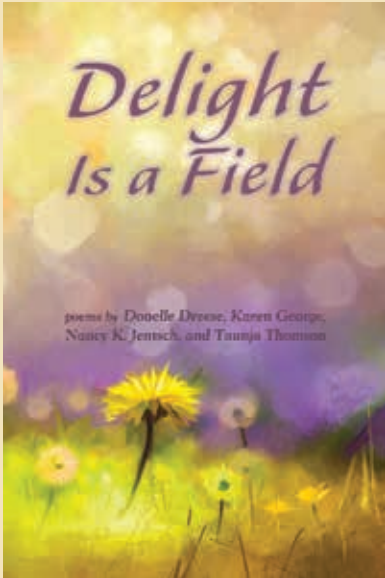
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Richard Collins
poetry



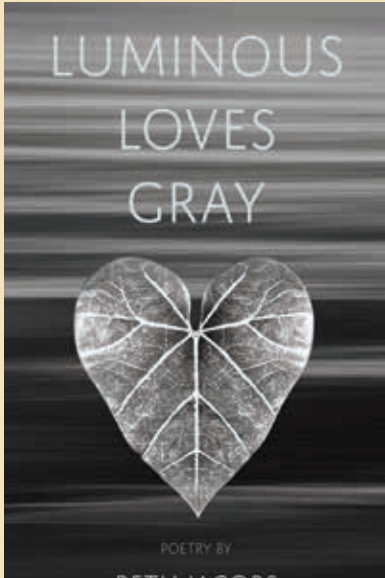
River of Light
Daniel Thomas
poetry



Kaaterskill Clove
Joseph Stanton
ekphrastic poetry



Delight Is a Field
Donelle Dreese, Karen George, Nancy K. Jentsch, and Taunja Thomson
poetry



Luminous Loves Gray
Beth Jacobs
poetry

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS
AND ARTISTS

- (34) **JENNIFER LOU CHAPMAN** rediscovered writing during the pandemic. Her novel, *Dying For a Second Chance*, was published by Woodhall Press in 2023.
• jennchapman.ag-sites.net
- (102) **DIANE ROBERSON DOUIYSSI**’s first poetry collection, *Desert Heart*, will be published by Shanti Arts in early 2026. She is the founder of Inner Wisdom Wayfinding.
• www.innerwisdomwayfinding.com
- (110) **JOANNE DURHAM**’s *To Drink from a Wider Bowl* won the Sinclair Poetry Prize (Evening Street Press, 2022). She also won the Miriam Chaikin Poetry Prize and was a finalist for the Lascaux Poetry Prize.
• www.joannedurham.com
- (40) **LORI ERICKSON** is a retired theatre artist. Her fiction has been featured in several publications.
- (82) **JANE H. FITZGERALD** is a retired middle school history teacher who loves to write about people and nature.
• janespoetry.blog
- (80) **KAREN GEORGE**’s award-winning work has been widely published. Her collections include *Caught in the Trembling Net* (2024) and the collaborative *Delight Is a Field* (2025).
• karenlgeorge.blogspot.com
- (76) **CAROLE GREENFIELD** teaches multilingual learners at a public elementary school. Her work has appeared in numerous publications.
- (122) **ELISABETH HARRAHY**’s poems have been nominated for Best of the Net. She is a biology professor and environmental toxicologist at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater.
- (38) **MAURA H. HARRISON** is a writer and artist from Fredericksburg, Virginia.
• mauraharrison.substack.com
- (66) **GLORIA HEFFERNAN** is the award-winning author of four poetry collections, most recently *Fused* (Shanti Arts).
• www.gloriaheffernan.wordpress.com
- (112) **MORD MCGHEE** has been nominated for the Maya Angelou Book Award and Bram Stoker Award.
- (54) **MARA MILLER** has been in love with gardens, textiles, pottery, and vintage of all kinds since childhood. She has published *The Garden as an Art* and is currently finishing *The Philosopher’s Garden* and *The Sky in the Garden*.
- (18) **SUSAN MOLDAW**’s work has appeared in numerous journals. She is a member of the Threshold Choir in the San Francisco Bay Area.

- (28) **MOLLY O’DELL**’s published collections include *Off the Chart*, a chapbook, *Care Is a Four Letter Word*, a multi-genre collection, and *Unsolicited: 96 Saws and Quips from the Wake of the Pandemic*.
• www.doctormolly.net
- (36) **MARIA ODESSKY ROSEN**’s poems, short stories, and essays have appeared in newspapers, magazines, and anthologies. She spends her time writing and communing with nature.
- (108) **CAROLYN SCHLAM** is an artist and author of four books on art including *The Creative Path*, *The Zen of Art*, and *The Joy of Art*. She lives and has her studio in the Hudson Valley of New York.
- (82) **WENDY LOU SCHMIDT**, lives in Appleton, Wisconsin. She is a published author and mixed media artist. She is on Instagram at lulubird1957.
- (124) **KAILA SCHWARTZ** runs an award-winning high school theatre program in the San Francisco Bay Area.
- (52) **ALEXANDRA SCHWARZ** is a visual artist creating analog collage in Iowa. She is on Instagram at schwarz_papercraft.
- (84) **JAY SIMONS** teaches college composition and literature. He has published short fiction, scholarly articles, and a book on Ben Jonson and Renaissance satire.
- (94) **JUANITA M. SMART** is assistant poetry editor for *River Heron Review*. Her work has twice been nominated for Best of the Net and she won first place in The Fieldguide Poetry Magazine’s inaugural contest for best animal poem.
- (68) **KIRA M. TJOMSLAND**’s award-winning work has been published in numerous national journals. @kiramtjomsland.author
- (104) **KRESHA RICHMAN WARNOCK** is writing a memoir contrasting her days as a campus radical to her current role as the mother of a police officer.
• kresharwarnock.com

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(86) Otto Miller-Diflo, *Winter Landscape*, c. 1925. Oil on canvas. Private collection. [WC PD](https://www.wc-pd.com)
(89) Desire Thomassin, *Deer in a Winter Landscape*, 1933. Oil on cardboard. 11.8 x 15.9 inches. Private collection. [WC PD](https://www.wc-pd.com)
(90) Valerius de Saedeleer, *View of Tiegem in Winter*, 1935. Oil on canvas. 39.3 x 45.2 inches. Private collection. [WC PD](https://www.wc-pd.com)
(93) László Mednyánszky, *Rimy Forest (Windy Daybreak)*, c. 1890. Oil on canvas. 78.7 x 53.5 inches. Private collection. [WC PD](https://www.wc-pd.com)
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(104) Images generated using Adobe Firefly from the prompt “1950s woman wearing turtleneck sweater.”
(107) Image generated using Adobe Firefly from the prompt “three generations women wearing sweaters 1950s.”
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SPRING 2026 ISSUE



Crafting a Life

Homemade and handmade—crafting a life.

Selected artists and writers will have their work featured in the Spring 2026 issue of Still Point Arts Quarterly.

SUBMISSION DEADLINE: January 1, 2026

austin-ramsey, anastasia
zhenina, nadya-spetnitskaya
on unsplash.com

SUMMER 2026 ISSUE



Influenced by the nature, art,
and spirit of East Asia

—for example, tall mountains and long rivers; brush painters, calligraphers, and ikebanists; and the wisdom of Confucius, Lao Tzu, and the Buddha.

Selected artists and writers will have their work featured in the Summer 2026 issue of Still Point Arts Quarterly

SUBMISSION DEADLINE: April 1, 2026

hi Chikuto (Japanese, 1776–1853)

FALL 2026 ISSUE



The Many Meanings of Photography

“Today everything exists to end in a photograph.”

—Susan Sontag

Selected artists and writers will have their work featured in the Fall 2026 issue of Still Point Arts Quarterly

SUBMISSION DEADLINE: July 1, 2026

George Eastman House, c. 1880

WINTER 2026 ISSUE



Bridging the Insurmountable

“The impulse to think, to philosophize and spin beauty and brilliance out of mind and soul, is somehow the offspring of resistance—of an effort to overcome an apparently insurmountable obstacle.”

—Eric Hoffer

Selected artists and writers will have their work featured in the Winter 2026 issue of Still Point Arts Quarterly

SUBMISSION DEADLINE: October 1, 2026



COUNTING DOWN

Susan Moldaw

image credits

BEFORE MY FATHER DIED, before my small boys became young men, before the green glider swing in my parent's yard turned into a haven for a nest of rats, my father and I spent an afternoon cocooned on the then-new glider while my sons played in the pool, talking and swinging, back and forth, amidst light breezes and children's laughter, shrieks of joy, sun splashing bright ripples on the pool. When I put the boys to bed that night, I lingered in the hallway listening to their quiet breathing hush, trying to keep hold of the day.

Years later, after my father's death and my mother's move, my sister and I put the house up for sale.

In my mind's eye, the green seat still sways, the same sun gleams, the afternoon has no beginning and no end.

A few years after we sold my parents' house, I came across the writings of philosopher Henri Bergson and what he called *la durée*—time felt as a flow of experience rather than fixed moments. I thought of the afternoon with my father and the sometimes generosity of time, stretching beyond what is measurable.

Bergson influenced Florine Stettheimer, an artist whose solo exhibit I once hurried through at the Jewish Museum. I remember she painted scenes of herself and her social circle that I'd dismissed as frivolous, merely decorative. Why hadn't I slowed down and really looked?

At a recent group exhibit, Stettheimer's *Portrait of Myself* calls to me. In her painting Stettheimer is floating in space, wearing a large red cape and a transparent gown, loosely holding a flower bouquet. She looks ephemeral, a goddess or divinity that might float away, beyond space, beyond time. Her name is painted in the top left center, barely discernible in off-white on a white cloud, as if it too will vaporize and disappear.

The narrative paintings I'd passed over years ago were described in Barbara Bloemink's Stettheimer biography as "continuous, unfolding, intimate, visual documentaries of an era and class . . . like the experiential flux of moving through time."

In another painting, *La Fête à Duchamp*, Stettheimer repeats the same figures throughout the canvas in asynchronous events—seated at a table for lunch, lying on the grass, in conversation under a tree, entering the garden. The viewer enters the flow and spirit of the afternoon, embodying Bergson's idea of time not as a "measurement of duration," but of "duration itself." Duration, he says, "is what one feels and lives."

By the age of seventy-two, Stettheimer would be dead from cancer, the age I am now.

Dying in one's seventies, while relatively young, would not be considered the same kind of tragedy as dying in one's fifties or younger, as

did my father's best friend who died from a heart attack on the tennis courts at thirty-nine, simply dropped dead in tennis whites on a green court. He left three young children and a wife, who died ten years later.

I was sleeping on a cot in a corner of my parents' hotel room over a weekend during college when a 3:00 a.m. call brought the news. My father bolted upright and answered tersely. My mother jerked up next to him, her hair pressed into short, irregular tufts. "What's wrong?" she cried. I startled awake, unsure of what to say or do.

My father asked the caller a few questions and hung up. In the shadows he turned to my mother. "Thirty-nine years old." My father was six years older. "Those poor children," my mother sobbed. My father held her. I asked what happened, and my father snapped at me, "Go back to sleep."

More than fifty years later I can still hear the jangle of the hotel phone before my father yanked the receiver midring, instantly awake.

My father was thirty-five when his father, sixty-three, died of a heart attack. After his father's death, my father feared his own, but it wasn't until his friend died that he began making lifestyle changes. He became a proponent of the Pritikin diet, a low fat, low salt, low cholesterol regime with an emphasis on fruits, vegetables, grains, and lean proteins. The diet addressed my father's certainty that he'd die

of a heart attack, like his father, like his friend. In fact, he died of bladder cancer. When our family went to a restaurant for dinner, ordering became a lengthy lesson in heart health and a history of my father's cholesterol levels. He'd like the fish, dry, bread but no butter, a plain baked potato, salad dressing on the side. He'd always order first, while the rest of us waited, a little embarrassed.

He held to Pritikin and other low-fat programs for as long as I can remember, convinced that through diet and exercise he could outsmart death. He didn't eat steak again until his eightieth birthday. He knew his key daily metrics and more—how long he exercised and at what intensity, his weight, the sales volumes of every retail enterprise he invested in or ran, his running golf scores, how his age compared to the ages of those in that day's obituaries.

I don't know what it was about his own death my father feared. It may have been leaving his family without his protective care, perhaps letting go of the life that he loved and lived with vitality—maybe both. When death was near our family each had a moment at his bedside. I held his hand, looked into his eyes, as past and present coalesced simply into the fullness of life.

When I was thirty-five—my father's age when his father died—I became pregnant with triplets. The pregnancy was termed high risk, "geriatric,"

due to advanced maternal age and because I was carrying multiples. Fear of losing the pregnancy and of preterm birth punctuated my excitement. I organized meals and snacks so I ate the prescribed nutrients. I refused even a drop of wine. I committed to heart a baby's development for each week of gestation. Thirty-four weeks was the goal, when babies are born small but healthy.

each meal—a small lemon yogurt for breakfast, a grilled cheese sandwich and a handful of grapes for lunch, tiny pieces of meat and broccoli for dinner. I worried about getting enough nutrients, but my doctor assured me I was getting what I needed. In between meals I counted forty-five minutes to turn from one side to my back, another forty-five to rest and consider my next move, forty-five to turn to the other side.



By week twelve I knew the pregnancy was viable. Twenty weeks and I steeled myself for an amniocentesis. Three days following the procedure the greatest risk of miscarriage passed.

Week twenty-six and I started home bed rest, where I counted contractions. Week thirty I had too many contractions and was transferred to the hospital. Days passed in the hospital from breakfast to lunch to dinner. I took one hour to eat

I spent hours in the hospital with the nurses on duty, some of whom sat by my side or held my hand while we talked about the limits of what we can control. By then I understood that no matter how many nutrients I consumed or what I did or didn't do, the pregnancy would follow its own course.

Thirty-five weeks the team said I was ready, and I delivered by caesarian

section. As each baby was lifted from me and I heard their otherworldly wails, slow tears fell down my cheeks. I felt lighter in body, in spirit. I had done my job the best that I could. I had given everything I had to give. I'd carried the pregnancy for thirty-five weeks. A great peace enveloped me, a peace that stopped time completely.

As a mother I experienced other moments when it felt as if time

the dog lying on her back spread between our laps; gently brushing out tangles after the bath. I didn't recognize the expansiveness of those times until now, when I have less time left.

Thirty years after giving birth I'm still learning to practice the art of appreciation, of presence. One day, coming home from the gym, I saw three monks going in the opposite



stopped: bedtimes nestled together holding picture books; pointing to and sounding out words and reading stories; slow walks to preschool, finding rubber bands and other treasures in doorways; squished into my big yellow chair, yelling songs from the *Boy Scouts Songbook*—"I'm bringing home a baby bumblebee / Won't my mommy be so proud of me"—sprawled on the kitchen couch,

direction on our street. They said they were living in a house at the end of our block with Thich Nhat Hahn—also known as Thay, or teacher—the spiritual leader, poet, and peace activist born in Viet Nam, while he got treatment at UCSF after a stroke. I asked if I could join their daily meditation and they invited me to come mornings.

The next morning, I sat on a pil-

low, listening to the rustle of monks arranging their robes, the sound of wheels creaking as two monks led Thay in a wheelchair down a short ramp leading into the room. A gong sounding brought me to attention. I followed my breath and sometimes was able to harness the thoughts, plans, and ideas that floated through my brain. For thirty minutes each morning I'd periodically forget about time, trying to settle into my body.

Everyone stood when the meditation ended and put their hands together in prayer as Thay was pushed up the ramp and from the room. Eighty-eight years old. I imagined he would credit his longevity to his calm mind, his ability to live in the present, his community, love—to a lifetime of awareness, of practice. How did he hold on to the moment when every moment brings its claims, its pulls, its pressures? I thought how I'd never spoken to Thay directly, or many of the monks, yet in their presence, as if by osmosis, I'd sometimes experience what I now think of as lived time.

At home I sat at my desk and closed my eyes, opening them to a quote by Rumi that I'd hung on a bulletin board next to my computer—"What you seek is seeking you."

After my parents' house sells I drive by one last time. Everything seemed as it once was, plans and permits most likely not yet begun. I idle on

the street, looking at the large oaks shading the front, the ivy covering the gate. I remember the "Slow, Children at Play" sign my parents posted as my sons and I began spending boundless afternoons at their home, the children racing from one end of the house to the other, splashing in the plastic wading pool, playing bumper cars in the driveway.

Now that two of my sons are engaged, planning weddings and families, I find myself counting down—wondering how many years I'll have with future grandchildren before I die. If the first grandchild is born in two years and I live to the age of my mother, now ninety-five, I'll have more years than my father had with my children. If I live to my father's age, that will get me to my grandchild's elementary and middle school years.

I think now my hope for as many healthy years as possible reflects my fear of dying before I know and am known by my grandchildren, that it reflects more than just my desire for life.

Do we always leave wanting more?

To know and be known—

The desire for life—

I want both, and this too—I want to feel lived time, the quality of time that slows to encompass the past, the present, and future longings, time that is felt, remembered, endures. A green swing swaying, the sun bright and warm. ♪



image credits



MANDALA

Molly O'Dell

WHEN I WAS TEN, I FOUND MY GRANDMOTHER'S TRUNK IN THE ATTIC. I wasn't supposed to be in the attic because, according to Mom, it was too messy, but to my ten-year-old way of thinking, all that mess was mysterious and exciting, particularly the stuff from my grandparents' house that had been stored up there since Grandma moved into a small apartment.

image credits

One summer afternoon while Mom was napping, I tiptoed up the steep, rickety stairs, stepping carefully around the clutter of old sweaters, shoes, and *Reader's Digest Condensed Books* to do some exploring. At the top of the stairs, the air under the unfinished wood frame was hot and dusty with an earthy smell. There was no shelving, only piles of discarded clothing and one jury-rigged clothes hanger that held an old pink Sunday-school dress stained with silly putty, a black fur cape, and some of Grandma's clothes. I worked my way from one corner of the attic to the other, inspecting the piles, and in the middle of the room, buried beneath a mountain of my brother's old clothes, I found an old, battered, metal-clad steamer trunk. I knew that trunk with a dome top, wood straps, and leather handles! It was Grandma's, the one she brought back from China. Grandpa had been in China working with his chemical engineering colleagues to make soda ash from salt at what would become China's first chemical plant, Yungli Chemical Industries. My dad (who was a baby when they arrived) and his three older siblings spent seven years in China before Grandpa settled Grandma and all four children back in the states around 1928. Grandpa followed several years later. I never asked Grandma why she came back to the states before Grandpa, but I now know the reason was a combination

of the Sino-Japanese War, Chinese politics, and the education needs of four children. After settling his family in Virginia, Grandpa worked in China for long stretches, leaving Grandma to run the house and raise their children, until 1948, when his work kept him closer to home. I also never asked Grandma if she missed him while he was gone. Now, I wish I'd asked her.



Born in 1885, Grandma transformed her life as a farm girl from Washington County, Virginia, to a college-educated woman who taught school, married a chemical engineer, lived in Kansas and New York, and traveled to China with four young children. She then returned to Virginia with three teenagers and my dad. While working abroad without her, Grandpa was accidentally struck on the head by a piece of equipment at the plant and suffered amnesia for over a year. He apparently knew his work but did not recall his family or life before China. The plant director kept Grandma apprised of his condition until, luckily, he regained his memory. Despite such dramatic challenges, Grandma always played bridge, read, sewed, mothered, went to church, practiced yoga, canned fresh food, paid her bills, and cooked silver dollar-sized pancakes. She grandmothered my cousins, siblings, and me by creating conditions that generated joy.

Grandma kept the trunk in the closet of her spare bedroom where I spent many weekends. I loved the treasures she had brought back from China. My favorite was the mahjong set. We played mahjong with those smooth bone and bamboo pieces stored neatly on trays in a brass-fitted wooden case inlaid with abalone.

tiny, talkative, and capricious mother, Grandma was tall, silver-haired, and gentle. Though she rarely grinned, she exuded contentment. Grandma was curious about me and eager to teach me whatever I wanted to know. She loved to cook, and I loved to watch her cook and can. She pulled a smock over her clothes when she was in the



Grandpa always said, "mahjong is Chinese poker" as he set out the tiles.

I loved being at my grandparents' home. In those days, I wanted to spend time at their house because they actually paid attention to me. Being the introverted middle child with two older and two younger siblings, I often invited myself to their house because it was so peaceful. Plus, unlike my

kitchen, and when I was there, she put one over my clothes too.



That afternoon in our attic, as I stood over the trunk, my heart raced. When I opened the trunk, its patterned paper lining fell like confetti inside the trunk. The contents smelled part musty, part savory. On top were

Grandma's sewing tools: a darning egg, a yellow Whitman's candy box filled with lace removed from other garments, rolls and various lengths of new lace and rickrack, and ivory and lace fans. Beneath were clothes, family photographs, papers, an old perfume bottle, photos of Yungli Chemical plant, children's drawings

the photograph to be the same one she leaned beside the dresser in her bedroom. I never recalled seeing her open it. As I carefully opened this jewel of a find, bamboo spines held delicately painted portions of stretched silk. This lovely item of daily use enthralled me. I immediately adopted this parasol. It became



signed by my aunt, dad, and uncles. At the very bottom of the trunk was a parasol. I picked up the black lacquered handle, unhooked the clasp and was astounded to open what had to have been Grandma's sunshade from China. I had seen pictures of her holding an umbrella as she was carried on a rickshaw in China, and I always considered the umbrella in

mine—my secret treasure from China, and a gift from Grandma. I fastened its clasp, closed the trunk and quietly crept back down to my room, careful not to wake Mom. I told no one I'd removed it from the trunk.

For a while the parasol laid under my bed, then on the top closet shelf beneath my pocketbooks. In my college dorm it lived in my suitcase.

I packed it with my clothes when I moved into my first apartment for medical school. All those years, I just opened the parasol and enjoyed the symmetry of the spines, natural silk, and the rich earthy colors of red, blue, and muted greens. I twirled it round and absorbed its beauty, remembering the peaceful and grounded feeling I'd experienced with my grandparents. I always closed it carefully.

During my third year in medical school, stress from school and training exposed enough cognitive and emotional dissonance (aka family baggage) to prompt me to seek counseling. During those sessions I figured out that my mother was an alcoholic. About the same time, I noticed minuscule tears on the parasol where the silk pulled away from the bamboo. To get to my classes at the Medical College of Virginia, I either rode my bicycle or, in bad weather, the bus. The bus stop closest to my apartment in Richmond was on North Robinson Street in front of the Fan Frame Shop. Waiting for the bus, I often chatted with the owner, whose name I learned was Bill Parker. As I came or went, I sometimes encountered him outside taking in fresh air, and we became acquaintances. Bill stood tall and professional with a head full of brown hair. He was confident and friendly, and his blue eyes invited curiosity. We often talked about the uniquely framed medals, paintings, or shadowbox items

in the window and how he managed to do things with such precision.

One day, as I descended the bus steps, I thought to go into Fan Frame Shop and ask Bill if he knew of some way I could preserve my parasol. "Bring it in," he said. So, I did. The parasol was fragile, Bill told me, and recommended removing the handle to preserve its artistry and framing the open parasol flat. He'd remove the top and resecure it once the parasol was splayed on the matboard. It would need UV light protection glass. We spent days selecting the color for the back mat and finally landed on brick red. Price was never mentioned, and I did worry how I was going to pay for it, but at the same time, I knew I had to get this done, and somehow, he seemed to understand how important it was for me to frame that parasol. He was all in on my behalf. "It'll take weeks to tinker with this project," he said, "because it has to be just right."

One day, some months later, as I stepped off the bus, there it was—Grandma's parasol hanging in the window of Fan Frame Shop! It was stunning. It hung in a place of high visibility, well shaded from the sun by the awning over the front window. I slipped inside to find out what I owed him. "You pay me what you can when you can, and when you've paid for it, I'll let you know. Meanwhile, you can see it whenever you like and others will enjoy it. I've already received

several comments since I hung it this morning.”

I don’t recall the actual price for the work, but I remember the invoice he showed me some eighteen months later. On the back was a list of my payments, dates paid, all totaling the amount due on the front of the invoice. For fifty years, through births, addiction, divorce, adolescent rebellion, cancer, celebrations, and death, that parasol has influenced eleven different homes as its colors sparked warm inspiration for any new rug, couch, upholstery, or paint, and its placement always defines the heart of my home. Today, that parasol has been hanging on the wall in my study for fifteen years, and whenever I see it, I’m forever grateful to my grandmother and wonder about her attachment to that parasol and what it meant to her, propped beside her dressing table. The word *mandala*—meaning circle, wholeness, unity—comes from Sanskrit. That parasol contains all the goodness from times with my grandmother. She used the parasol and then kept it close, with its beauty and memories, beside her dresser. Once I took possession of her parasol, Grandma’s example guided me to become a vital participant in the world around me, and every so often, when I eschew external appearances on behalf of my own well-being, I catch one of her gentle smiles. ❧

image credits



FOUND OBJECTS

She creates beauty with other peoples' cast-offs.
Vintage pieces discarded from well-lived lives
positioned throughout her home beckon you
to see them in new light; to notice they exist
as they function together in a new surrounding
creating a still life never before seen.

Remnants of old memories planted throughout
her wild garden join flowers strewn from last years
seed pods she picked along the river.
With pebbles and rocks from beach walks she winds
a path throughout her world. Colored glass on a windowsill
is used to catch rays of morning sun
saving them for stingy days of winter.

The mosaic of her tile creations
reveals her life has not been simple;
she has learned the value of following the good road.
With her hands she makes miracles
of found and broken objects
things rejected, of use no more.
With her heart she does the same for people.

A builder of spirit, she is one who knows
nothing good can come from hands
tied to the side by caustic criticism
that drips like battery acid on the soul.
She recognizes the creative urge in others,
heaped under the heart, long ago surrendered.

Ever so gently she inspires, shares her way of working
reminding the voyagers who come into her life
that they are not finished yet; their vintage selves
hold significant value. She encourages them
to open their hearts to the creative force within
to share their inherent qualities.
In this process they become builders.
They, too, become found objects.

JENNIFER LOU CHAPMAN



image credits

THE RED DRESS

Maria Odessky Rosen



Paul Cézanne, *Madame Cézanne in a Red Dress*, c. 1889

image credits

MY PARENTS WERE traitors. When they sewed my mother's red wool dress in 1984, they became part of the Resistance. By then they had been out of work for seven years, fired from their government jobs because they had applied to leave Russia. Branded as traitors to the Motherland, they could never hope to obtain another job in the country they had betrayed. This would have been tolerable for them if they had been allowed to leave, but it would be another year before the Soviet Union finally let its people go. And since we all had to eat before that life-changing day finally came, my parents were forced to become creative and even a little criminal.

My mom was a piano teacher and was able to make a little money teaching some neighborhood kids privately. My father got odd jobs restoring cupolas of old churches, which he loved doing. Unfortunately, these businesses were inconsistent and part time. My parents wracked their brains, trying to come up with a way they could have a more steady source of income to support the three of us. At the time, they had no idea whether or not the Soviets would ever let us go. And so, after much thinking and talking, they decided to invest in a wool sewing machine. It was the size of a piano keyboard and came with various attachments they could use to create novel designs. This was way before you could look up how to

do almost anything on YouTube or TikTok, so they read the instructions and practiced—a lot. They made knitted dresses and shirts and sweaters and skirts and anything else people would pay for. They bought their wool and sold the clothes on the black market.

I don't remember most of the clothes my parents sewed. I was little, and the clothes didn't stay at our apartment for very long. My parents were really good at designing and making clothes, and they sold out each time. I only remember one dress—the one they made for my mom. It was a red, below-the-knee, A-line dress with a v-neck and beautiful geometric blue patterns on the $\frac{3}{4}$ inch flared sleeves. They made it as soon as they learned that the government was finally allowing people to emigrate, and my mom wore it to celebrate our last New Year's Eve in Russia.

The color red, of course, was the color of the Soviet flag. Red represented workers' blood spilled during their struggle for emancipation. The documentary *Dressing the Resistance* explains the role clothing and fashion have played throughout history as powerful tools of social change. I'm not saying my parents were extremists, like the Russian artist [Petr Pavlensky](#), who sewed his mouth shut to protest the arrest of the Russian activist performers Pussy Riot. But every time I look at my mom's dress hanging in my closet, I don't think their choice of color was accidental. ✍



Slow Burning Film Only



Striking Geometry



Accidentals

MAURA H.
HARRISON



WE DO NOT SPEAK OF THE TROLLS

Lori Erickson

AUNT RUNA TAUGHT ME HOW to spit. It was the Fourth of July, 1963, the summer I turned six. She was fifty-nine years old, technically my grandaunt, younger sister of my maternal grandmother, and she was the only adult I knew who acted more like a kid than any kid I had ever met.

Four generations of my mother's family had come together to celebrate the Fourth at "the farm," the Gunnarsson homestead in Kripplebush, New York, not far from Kingston. Aunt Runa found me curled up in a ball behind the barn, sulking, my face streaked with tears, my lower lip thrust out in petulant annoyance.

"*Vilket ansikte!* What happened, kiddo? You're sporting the mug of a puffer fish," she said as she squatted down in front of me, resting her crossed arms on her knees. "Come on, let's have it. What chased that smile I love off your face?"

I wiped my wet face with the palm of my hand and looked up into her sparkling, sky-blue eyes before the words came spewing out, "Kyle and Scott had a spitting contest, and when it was my turn, I couldn't do it right, and the spit drooled down my chin and they called me a 'drooling baby' and said I had to go eat my baby food and take a baby nap in my baby crib." As I think of it now, I don't know how she didn't laugh, but Aunt Runa shook her head and frowned. Then she gazed off into the field and spat an incredible distance.

I must have looked at her like she had lightning bolts for hair. "Put your eyes back in your head, champ. We've got work to do." She always referred to my brothers and me as kiddo or champ or pal. "How 'bout I teach you the Runa Method? Then, before the fireworks tonight, you can challenge those wisecrack brothers of yours to a rematch. Whaddaya say to that,

image credits

huh?” That evening, Kyle and Scott stood gobsmacked as their baby sister out-spat them both in three straight contests. Best Fourth of July—ever.

Aunt Runa also taught me how to skip stones across a pond, how to cross my eyes, and how to bait a hook. She exuded energy, laughed loudly without inhibition, and she could put

York City and later by operating her own dance school. Her siblings and their spouses referred to her as “Crazy Runa,” “the oldest living tomboy,” “an odd duck,” and “nutty as a fruitcake.” They dismissed her as foolish and criticized her as unladylike. I idolized her. She always made me feel seen, heard, understood, and important.



two fingers in her mouth and produce the most piercing whistle imaginable. She tried to teach me that, too, but I never could make a sound like hers. Unlike any other Gunnarsson female of her generation, Aunt Runa preferred dungarees to dresses, drove a car, never married, and made her own living, first as a dancer in New

Gunnarsson gatherings at the farm became a tradition when my mother was a baby. For as long as I can remember, we drove to the farm two or three times a year from our home in New Jersey. I think I was four when we started playing a game we called Who Lives There? to amuse ourselves on the two-hour drive. My mother

inadvertently invented the pastime by musing, “I wonder who lives there,” as we passed a quaint farmhouse, one of the many tossed along the rolling hills of the Hudson Valley. My father responded by creating a lengthy and absurdly comical story about a family of circus performers who traded two trained lions, a dancing bear, and a unicycle for that quaint farmhouse and the surrounding property. The family of three clowns, a stilt-walking fire-eater, and a lion tamer sought to exchange the bright lights of the big top for a simpler rural existence. We all laughed until our sides hurt and spent the rest of the trip pointing at houses and shouting, “Who lives there?” Each time, Dad obliged by fabricating a new farcical fairy tale filled with eccentric characters and slapstick hijinks.

The next time we drove to Kripplebush, Dad decided to add some variety to the game by altering the format. He dropped his trademark comedic style and instead told an eerie ghost story. When he finished, he pointed to an ivy-covered cottage and said, “Hey, Beverly, who lives there?” catching Mom by surprise and forcing her to improvise the next yarn. From then on, the storyteller chose the next home and dictated who would tell its tale. Over time we generated a multitude of stories and characters across a spectrum of genres. I tried to imagine another family traveling

the same road and making up a story about the Gunnarsson farmhouse and the characters who lived there. Could anyone create a character as zany and lovable as Aunt Runa? I doubted it.

The real history behind the Gunnarsson household was typical of many in the region. In 1899, my great-grandparents, Stellan and Anika Gunnarsson, immigrated to New York City from Sweden with their three young sons, Magnus, Anders, and Victor. Soon my grandmother, Lovisa, was born, followed by Aunt Runa and Aunt Elin, and finally, Uncle Samuel. In 1922 Stellan purchased the farm as a gift for Anika, who missed the quieter country life she’d grown up with in Sweden. By that time, Magnus, Anders, Lovisa, and Elin had married and lived in Albany, Poughkeepsie, Queens, and Kingston, respectively. Uncle Victor had moved away after a falling out with the family. No one ever discussed what happened, and as far as anyone knew, Victor never contacted anyone in the family again. That left Aunt Runa and Uncle Samuel to move upstate with their parents. Soon the farm became a meeting place for weekend getaways, holidays, and special occasions.

The farmhouse, a two-story clapboard dwelling built on a stone foundation, dated back to the American Revolution. The property also included a barn, a large creek-fed pond, and a field once used for farming, but long

image credits

since overgrown with wildflowers, all set on several acres of undulating countryside dotted with sugar maple, American beech, eastern hemlock, and two varieties of apple trees. An idyllic location, worthy of a Norman Rockwell illustration.

Aunt Runa almost single-handedly transformed the property from its functional but neglected state at the time of purchase to an attractive and modern, for the time, homestead. She repaired and painted the farmhouse inside and out, made curtains, dug a well, landscaped, planted flower and vegetable gardens, converted the barn into a workshop, built a chicken coop, and with the help of a friend, installed indoor plumbing.

Gunnarsson family get-togethers at the farm were enormous affairs routinely numbering forty or more attendees. Held outdoors if the weather permitted, the events overflowed with laughter, lively conversation, and abundant food and drink. Each meal featured a massive buffet atop a makeshift table constructed of wood planks traversing sawhorses and covered with plain white cloth. An equally massive dining table, or rather a train of several tables, stood nearby, handsomely set with “Nana” Anika’s blue and white Gustavsberg tableware carefully arranged on embroidered table linens. A series of mismatched chairs, including every four-legged chair from the cellar to the attic of the

farmhouse and some folding chairs brought by various aunts and uncles, surrounded the chain of tables. Vases of wildflowers from the field and cultivated blossoms from the garden provided an appealing bouquet of fragrances. From a distance, the entire set up looked like a giant colorful caterpillar.

When we weren’t eating, the adults amused themselves with small talk, card games, chess, and horseshoes, while groups of children could be found playing in the barn, bounding through the field, splashing in the pond, or climbing trees. All my relationships with family members, other than my parents and brothers, took root and blossomed at these festive celebrations.

When the crowd began to tire or overwhelm me, I would slip away to explore the nearly 200-year-old farmhouse, the inside of which was as still and silent as the outside was chaotic. Crossing the threshold was like stepping back in time. Although neither ornate nor extravagant, the walls, furniture, light fixtures, everything evoked a more formal and refined era. Even the air felt antique. I wandered reverently, listening to the polished wood floors groan and creak, articulating age-old secrets. Often I envisioned myself as one of those little girls with ringlets and bows, wearing a lace-trimmed dress, a girl with a name like Emmeline or Millicent, a girl

like the ones whose portraits hang in museums. I fantasized about having lavish parties with scores of finely dressed girls, all of us giggling and enjoying cookies and lemonade served on fancy china plates. My imagination soared in that old house.

Great-Grandpa Stellan died at the farmhouse eighteen years before I was born, and Nana Anika passed away

don’t remember anyone telling stories about Great-Grandpa Stellan. The mere mention of him elicited an exchange of icy looks among my aunts and uncles, and a quick headshake or raised hand as if to say, “Don’t go there.” I once asked Uncle Magnus why no one talked about his father. He leaned down to my level, held me by the shoulders, and said, “*Vi talar inte*



there the winter following my Fourth of July spitting triumph. I remember Nana’s hugs felt like being wrapped in a warm pillow, and her whole body shook when she laughed. The rest of what I know of her comes from the many stories family members told of her early life in Sweden, her quiet strength, and her love of cooking. I

om trollen.” His deep, kind, baritone voice was solemn as he repeated his answer in English, “We do not speak of the trolls.” I did not mention my great-grandfather again for years.

By the time Nana died, families within the family were already scattered across the country, and fewer members of the clan made the

trip to Kripplebush with each ensuing get-together. Aunt Runa hosted family gatherings at the farm through Labor Day weekend 1967, at which time the tradition abruptly ended.

That Labor Day we drove to the farm unaware it would be the last time we did so as a family. After a couple of rounds of “Who Lives There?” my brother Kyle brought our road trip storytelling ritual full circle with a circus-themed tale. His take on the theme bore no resemblance to the uproarious comedy with which Dad had begun the tradition. Kyle, then a teenager and thus preferring the macabre to anything merry or mirthful, wove a dark sci-fi account of a lonely and despondent man living in a world of perpetually cheerful circus performers. The man was forced to dress in bright baggy clothes, paint a smile on his face, and pretend to be a jovial clown, to gain acceptance and avoid banishment. We hung on Kyle’s every word, waiting to discover if the man could possibly overcome his miserable situation. None of us was prepared for the story’s heartbreaking and disturbing ending. Several minutes of stunned silence followed until Mom suggested it might be time for us to find a new travel pastime.

The final Gunnarsson family weekend at the farm began much like the others. The meals were, as always, events in themselves. Sunday dinners had suffered a bit since Nana’s death;

her recipe for Swedish meatballs having accompanied her to the great beyond. She never wrote down her recipes, and we all regretted that no one had thought to try to get that one on paper until it was too late. Labor Day morning featured a softball game in which my generation bested Mom and Dad’s generation, mostly thanks to the athletic prowess of some of my older cousins and the fact that we were all faster than the adults. My brother Scott was named MVC, Most Valuable Cousin, for scoring the winning run by stealing home in the bottom of the ninth.

Following the game, I made my way into the farmhouse for some quiet time before we had to leave for home. After so many excursions to Kripplebush, every inch of the Gunnarsson homestead was as familiar to me as my own bedroom, or so I thought. I strolled through the first floor without a destination in mind and paused at the foot of the staircase to run my fingers over the intricate carving in the newel post before deciding to start up the stairs. That’s when I caught sight of something new, something I had never noticed on the countless occasions I had climbed and descended that staircase. There, halfway up the stairs, on the landing, I could make out the outline of a door. Upon closer inspection, I could see how I had missed it. The angle of the light made the door’s thin outline

nearly invisible on the wood plank wall. Instead of a doorknob or handle, a recessed latch blended seamlessly into the wood grain. My heart danced in my chest as I reached for the latch and pushed the door open.

Soft streaks of sunlight spilled through a lace-curtained window, illuminating the otherwise dim area. I had stumbled upon an oddly shaped room tucked between the first and

a small side table with several books on it. A daybed with rectangular head and foot boards, pale green linens, and an assortment of pillows filled the alcove on the left, which also had a door to what I assumed was a closet. The lone, lace-curtained window was in the largest alcove, the one opposite the entryway, and looked out over the back yard. That meant the room was above the kitchen.



second floors of the farmhouse. Instead of four walls, this hideaway boasted eleven. An angled wall extended from either side of the entry hall expanding into a space with a trio of three-sided alcoves. The alcove on the right was furnished with an overstuffed armchair and matching ottoman in a faded floral pattern, a brass floor lamp with a cream-colored glass shade, and

The air in the space was cool and crisp and smelled like sheets dried on a clothesline in early fall. Next to the window, a dark wooden, drop-leaf secretary desk sat between two bookshelves with beautiful beveled-glass doors. The drop-leaf that formed the desk’s writing surface lay open, revealing more than a dozen cubbyholes and drawers. Each cubby contained

a small item on display, among them a silver bell, a miniature spinning wheel, a coral-colored cameo, a tiny doll in a blue dress, and a Swedish Dala horse—a traditional carved wooden statue of a horse, painted with bright colors. Other cubbies held porcelain figurines of a cat with a ball of string, a goose, a mouse on a piece of cheese, and a beautiful Dutch clog painted gold.



As I picked up the little gold shoe to admire it more closely, I heard the kitchen door open and shut followed by voices engaged in a tense conversation. The sound came from the door I believed was a closet. I placed the shoe back in its cubby and cracked open the door to discover a dark, narrow staircase winding down

to the kitchen. The voices belonged to Aunt Runa and Aunt Elin and her husband Max, but I could only make out fragments of their conversation.

Aunt Elin tried to reason with Aunt Runa about “townspeople talking.” Aunt Runa angrily shot back with something about “busybodies wagging their tongues” and accused Elin and Max of being “gossipmongers,”

a word I did not know. Several garbled sentences followed as the fury intensified until Uncle Max exploded in an attack on Aunt Runa. He spat a series of words at her, the meanings of which I did not understand, words like “repugnant,” “abhorrent,” and “perversion.” Then, he called her a “stain on the family name.”

Aunt Runa and Aunt Elin must have moved closer to the door at the bottom of the hidden stairwell because I could clearly hear every word from then on, starting with Aunt Runa roaring, “*Dra åt helvete*, Max!”

Aunt Elin gasped, “Runa!”

“If you’re going to defend him, sister o’ mine, then you can go to hell with him. And if you happen to run into that *skit-stövel* of a father of ours, you can tell him I said . . .”

“Enough!” Aunt Elin cried out. “Just stop, Runa.”

I could hear my heart pounding in the silence before Aunt Runa ended the conversation.

“Get out of my home. Both of you.” The ice in her voice stung my eyes. I don’t know how long it took me to summon the will to creep back to the secret room’s entrance and escape on to the landing and down the stairs.

The moment I stepped off the last stair Aunt Runa rounded the corner and jolted when she saw me. “*Jösses!* You startled me there, pal. What are you doing inside all by your lonesome?” I stood paralyzed, unable to speak, motionless except for the tears surging down my cheeks. Aunt Runa’s gaze shifted from my face up to the landing where the door to the hidden room remained ajar.

“Ah, I see,” she said. “You found my secret hideaway, eh?” I lowered my head. “And maybe you overheard my little chat with Elin and Max?”

“Some of it,” I mumbled. “I didn’t understand a lot of it, but I know Uncle Max was being mean.”

“*Jag är ledsen, lilla barn.*” She brushed back some hair that had fallen in my face and continued, “You know, I don’t think your Uncle Max and I have ever agreed on anything. Hey, what do you think of my secret hideaway?”

“I like it,” I said, still sniffing, but beginning to recover. “There’s a lot of neat stuff in there.”

We sat on the stairs and Aunt Runa explained that the room served as the housekeeper’s apartment long before her parents purchased the property. It had been bolted up and forgotten until she discovered it while renovating the house. Over time, she filled it with furniture and some of her favorite things and used it as a quiet retreat for thinking, writing, and reading.

“And sometimes,” she said, “I went there to hide when my father was on a rampage.”

“Was your father a troll?” I asked.

“Ha! That’s one way to put it. You’re not the first person to refer to him that way,” she said.

Outside, my mother called for me and my brothers. “Sounds like it’s time for you to skedaddle back to New Jersey, kiddo.” I threw my arms around her and buried my head in her shoulder. She held me and whispered, “*Du är en duktig flicka.*”

That was the end of the Gunnars-

son family gatherings at the farm. The following year Dad was transferred to Charlotte, further limiting the amount of time we spent with our grandparents, Aunt Runa, and others in the family. Rumors and conjecture about Aunt Runa, Great-Grandpa Stellan, Uncle Victor's departure from the family, and Uncle Max's contempt for his sister-in-law sometimes floated in and out of conversation whenever several Gunnarssons gathered. The stories varied, but facts remained unknowable to all but those involved. I never told anyone about the argument I overheard between Aunt Runa and Uncle Max, nor did I mention the secret hideaway concealed between the first and second floors of the farmhouse.

Aunt Runa died at the farmhouse at the age of eighty-five. Several months later, I received a box from a law firm in Kingston. The accompanying letter stipulated that Runa had bequeathed the enclosed items to me. Inside the box I found the gold-painted Dutch shoe, the Swedish Dala horse, and several other trinkets from the desk in the hidden room along with an early edition of Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, a well-worn copy of Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, and two envelopes.

The first envelope contained old photographs of Runa, including one of her behind the wheel of her 1923 Gardner Model S sedan. In others she was in costume backstage after dancing in a musical revue, or

pushing an old, wooden single-wheel cultivator plow in the garden at the farm, or sitting with her feet up on a porch swing with a scruffy little dog curled up next to her, and my favorite, holding me in her lap and looking at a picture book with me when I was not yet a year old. In each black-and-white image, her colorful personality shined through in her carefree smile and twinkling eyes.

On the front of the second envelope was a simple "R," written in ink with the leg of the R extended to form a circle around the letter. That envelope held a hand-written letter from Runa's brother Victor, dated July 1918:

Runa,

How appropriate that your name in Old Norse means "secret lore."

I fear if I remain any longer the repercussions would be ruinous. Know that I will land on my feet and perhaps even prosper. Wouldn't that be the sweetest revenge? As for you, my dear sister, you are stronger than you know and deserve better than you've been dealt.

Do not allow the troll to diminish your light.

Forever your champion,
Victor



Others in the family have drawn their own conclusions about Runa, Victor, and Great-Grandpa Stellan, but I choose not to dabble in such foolishness. There is no need. I've known everything I need to know about Runa Gunnarsson since the Fourth of July when I was six and she taught me how to spit. ⚡

Swedish words and phrases:

Vilket ansikte! | What a face!

Vi talar inte om trollen. | We do not speak of the trolls.

Dra åt helvete | Go to hell

Skit stövel | Shit boot

Jösses | Geez

Jag är ledsen, lilla barn. | I'm sorry, little one.

Du är en duktig flicka. | You're a good girl.

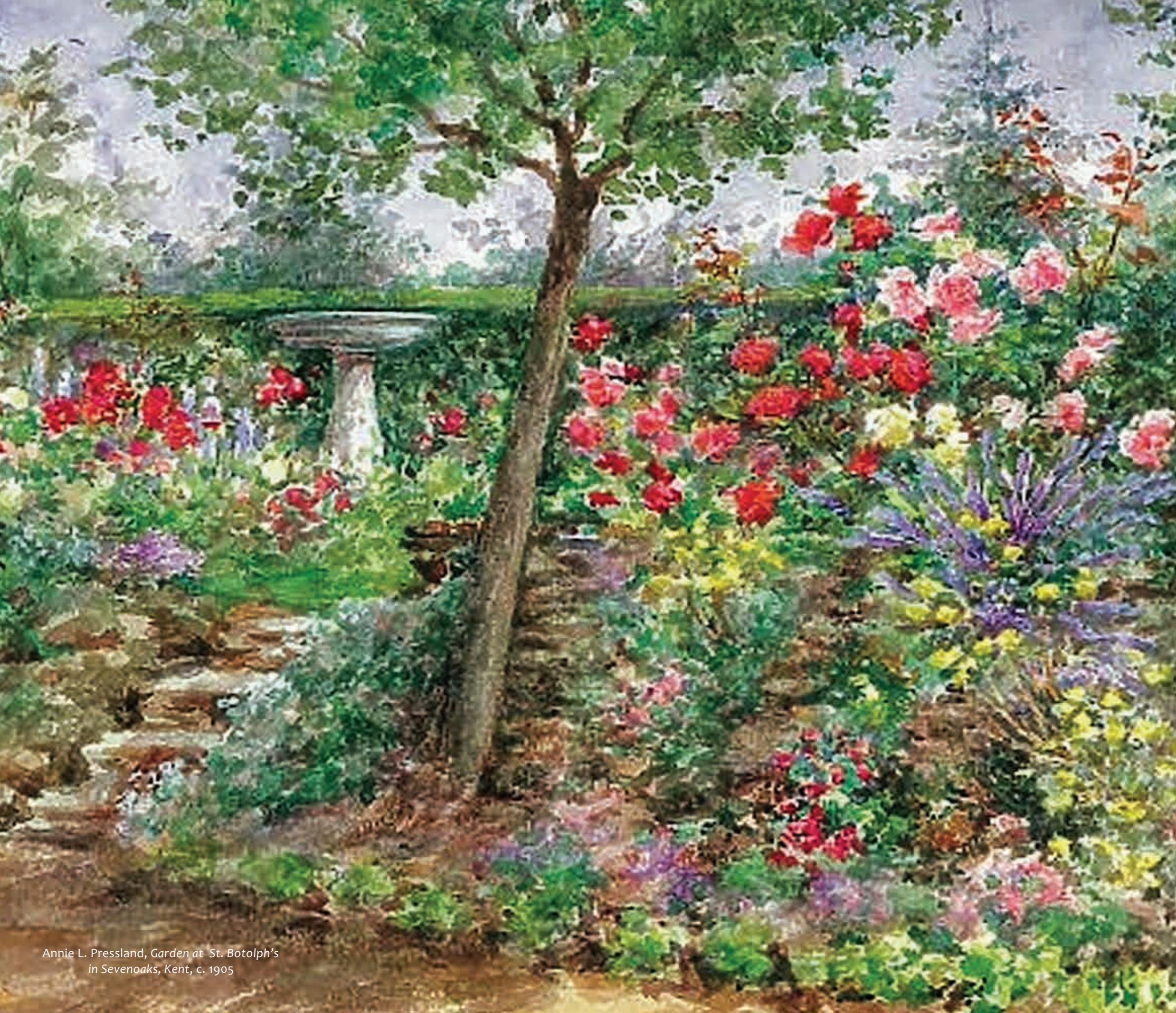
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Apollo



Raisin Ploy #6



THE VINTAGE GARDEN

Mara Miller

WHEN I PICTURE VINTAGE gardens, it is mostly their components I see. The white picket fence from *Tom Sawyer* figures prominently, along with various white arbors covered with red roses. Immense and stately deciduous trees, the elms, the chestnuts nearly wiped out by blight. And especially certain flowers: the larkspur of Nancy Drew's *Password to Larkspur Lane*, and the delphiniums, hollyhocks, sweet Williams, bachelor's buttons, cornflowers, and forget-me-nots.

But aren't these things just old-fashioned? Don't they just arouse nostalgia, the bittersweet pleasure of yearning for the past? The pleasures of vintage seem distinctive. Vintage is something more and something quite different. Its pleasures deserve

special attention on their own. Philosophers call the pleasure from physical things—be they objects, performances, or environments—*aesthetic*.

This would seem to make vintage a category of the *aesthetic*. Yet putting it in this category poses some problems. At least until recently—recent by philosophical standards, which in both Europe and Asia go back 2,500 years—philosophers of *aesthetics* have concerned themselves primarily with art and, during some periods, nature, and with feelings they call *pleasure*. Over the past thirty years or so, the field of everyday *aesthetics* has developed into something in which vintage would seem to fall quite easily. In *The Extraordinary in the Ordinary: The Aesthetics of Everyday Life*, philosopher Thomas Leddy introduces the notion of *aura*, an understanding of *aesthetic* as an experience in which the *aesthetic* object takes on “‘aura’ within experience,” a phenomenological characteristic of the object-as-experienced, “an almost inexplicable mixture of significance and *pleasure*.” Although vintage is a special kind of everyday, the *pleasure* we get from vintage is more than just *aesthetic*.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* tells us that vintage means “relating to or denoting wine of high quality.” This makes sense, given other words related to wine: *vine*, *vineyard*.

Although not many gardens grow wine grapes, interior design magazines and movies love to feature gardens with luscious purple grape vines draping from arbors, glistening in sunlight that dapples an al fresco dining table in Tuscany or California. So it would seem we are off to a secure start for vintage gardens.

The Oxford definition goes on to note several factors for wine: high quality, being grown and produced in the same year, and coming from the same place. But outside a wine store, this is not how we usually use the word *vintage*.

For our nonwine purposes, the *Cambridge Dictionary* gets closer to the point. It says vintage is “used to describe clothing, jewelry, etc. that is not new, especially when it is a good example of a style from the past.”

Not new is crucial; business usage specifies twenty years old or older, differentiating it from *retro*, which some say designates items less than twenty years old, but which I suggest also refers to items and styles deliberately chosen for their noncurrent and, in some sense, renegade connotations of rebellion against fashion and commercial interests. When something identified as vintage has been valued continuously since its first appearance, either through its continuous use (Barbie Dolls), storage and preservation (Wedgewood),

or its reissue (The Regal Beagles), it is more likely to be thought of as *classic* or *traditional*.

Vintage differs also from *antique*, which U. S. Customs officially regulates as one hundred years old or older. Oxford also says antiques are collectible, which gardens rarely are. Russell Wright’s original dishware was immensely popular, suggesting that many found their design and bright, cheerful colors pleasing. It also points up one of the differences between vintage and antique: the latter are not only older but more rare, largely due to less mass reproduction in earlier periods, but also to the ravages of wars, fires, and simple breakage. Good design is good design, though, and people have loved this dishware enough that California’s Bauer Pottery is now making them again, by hand, in both the original and new colors. Whether such reissues can be considered true vintage is debatable.

When you are trying to sell something, vintage sounds so much better than *used*. But why? What is it about vintage things that makes them superior to second-hand items? The term *used* can refer to anything—whether good or bad design, a good or bad example, in good shape or not, fifty years old or two months old—without implications of quality. Used or the slightly more reassuring

designation, *lightly worn*, found in some consignment shops, can include the shabby, the shoddy, or merely out-of-date.

As with wine, vintage in regards to clothes or housewares carries a sense of inherent value; they are not just useful but enjoyable for some reason, often *aesthetic*, whether for the gustatory and olfactory pleasures they give or for their color and design. Hence we have styles from a previous era that are reissued commercially, whether by their original company (Russell Wright dinnerware) or newcomers, and, in spite of being new, are dubbed vintage in their ads or by design magazines.

The Cambridge definition stresses the object’s age, but it, too, seems to miss something important. Design aside, vintage suggests a sense that something is highly valued for more than *aesthetic* reasons; vintage items are highly valued now because they were highly valued in the past. Yet vintage goods differ from what we usually mean by antique in being newer than an antique; less elite and therefore less expensive; representative of a specific era but now ignored, such as a fabric once popular—seersucker, taffeta, voile—or a type of decoration no longer popular—appliqué, cross-stitch, or smocking; by being more likely to be handmade as opposed to mass-produced; and less rare, therefore, less collectible.



Abbott Fuller Graves, *In the Garden*, c. 1900

VINTAGE, TIME, AND THE PAST

Vintage also carries sets of connotations regarding not just the quality of the design but the pleasures of the past. This past is complicated. Its pleasures may seem relatively superficial, but vintage of many different eras douses us in visual and tactile enjoyment that may have become rarer today, such as visual delight in the colors and styles themselves: the joy of a swirl of neon colors from Cream’s album covers, the paper dresses, and the Peter Max era of psychedelics; the translucent sea-green of the jadeite glass cups and saucers, made by several companies and popular from the 1930s through the 1960s; or the intimate blend of similar shades of purples, lilacs, and wine reds

in a paisley shawl. In this sense the past is the vehicle for access to the peculiar pleasures of that time.

The result is that in some cases one might not even like the aesthetics of the vintage items, yet like it, enjoy it, crave it for its past, which brings different kinds of pleasure. In the 1960s, I disliked my Aunt Grace’s drinking glasses with stripes of forest green, chartreuse, and maroon; I still do. But I very much liked certain aspects of being in her home. Today when I see glassware with those stripes, I feel heart-warmed.

Like the antique, vintage establishes associations with the original users or their era, linking us to them. If this is often in an impersonal way, as opposed, for instance, to inherited items, it is the more powerful for that, embracing us within a wider world, one we may or may not have ever experienced but of which we are now, somehow, a part.

Before moving on to the subject of gardens, it is worthwhile discussing another example of an entire environment that is vintage—diners. Both their original designs—counters with swiveling stools allowing fast access for servers, long Formica counters, leatherette booths—and business concept were ultramodern at the time, and they offered convenience and a variety of both fast and comfort foods. A few still survive in their original form; others, like that in King’s Alley,

Waikiki, are created anew. In either case, they revel in what feels at our current distance like up-to-date modernity and innocence—including no worries about trans fats and red meat—and summon a lively sense of joy. Eating at a diner today places us with those feelings and a camaraderie with our forebears as well as our co-diners.

But they are not always only positive. Edward Hopper’s 1942 painting *Nighthawks* takes advantage of our shared familiarity with diners’ exuberance to show us another side, reminding us of the utter existential aloneness of each human being, perhaps especially during war time. In spite of the physical closeness of the couple seated at the counter and their apparent conversation with the counterwoman taking their order, it conveys one of the most vivid depictions of loneliness in visual art.

The fundamental composition asserts a conflict between the dark-green diner and the red-brick building across the street. The curved front corner of the diner suggests a trolley car in motion, and it juts across the midline as if set to collide with the red-brick building. It establishes a coterie of loneliness we can all identify with via its empty streets, the razor-sharp lines and repeated verticals, and the right angles of the architecture being sabotaged by the dangerous slant of the diner that has



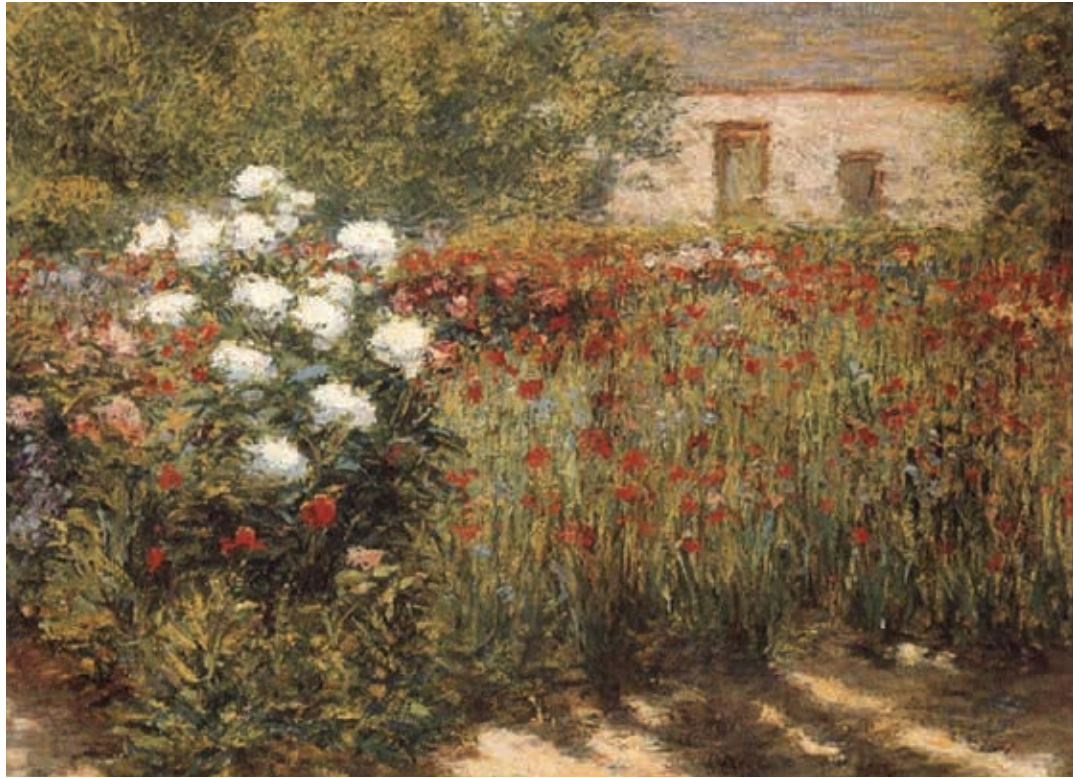
Helen Allingham, *Cottage Garden*, 1894

it sliding down to the lower right corner and almost out of our presence. The loneliness here (not solitude!) is not limited to the four people in the diner. In spite of the woman’s red dress and the brightly lit interior—but such harsh lighting! such bare walls and cold décor!—the loneliness leaks out to the street, past the frame of the painting to the viewer. Not all vintage is warm and cozy.



Summing up, we can identify these essential components of vintage:

- It is “a good example of a style from the past”; the design itself was and remains good;



John Leslie Breck, *Garden at Giverny*, 1890

- It was used previously, but not continuously;
- Its use was widespread;
- It was cherished;
- It was enjoyed, in a whimsical, spontaneous way—not coercive, enforced, or subject to social pressure; and
- It bears positive connotations of various kinds and historic reverberations from the past.

ON TO GARDENS

The Cambridge definition suggests a problem for gardens: must vintage refer only to things that are manmade?

Although they are rarely completely artificial, gardens by definition have been shaped by human beings. They are thus *third nature*—hybrid environments combining nature and human intervention—distinct from *first nature*, which is untouched landscape, and *second nature*, agricultural or industrial landscapes. I suggest that vintage gardens function much like other types of vintage items; if they are to some degree old or replicate gardens of a previous era, we can imagine that they might be classified as vintage.



Marie Spartali Stillman, *A Lady in the Garden at Kelmscott Manor, Gloucestershire*

TYPES OF VINTAGE GARDENS

Surely, vintage gardens would employ design that is both good and from the past. But vintage gardens have much to do with the kinds of plants, and although they are most typically those of the temperate zone—roses, sunflowers, daylilies—for those in tropical climates or deserts, it is the birds-of-paradise, bougainvillea, coconut and royal palms, jacarandas, and mango trees, or pencil cactus, yucca, and Joshua trees that are more relevant. Items other than plants might adorn a garden, as wicker,

Adirondack, and wrought-iron chairs serve to evoke the past in gardens on the east coast, and ristras of drying chiles and woven blankets do so for those in the southwest.

Design is also important. Flowers may be confined to beds along winding paths, in front of houses, or skirting grass. Small urns on stoops and hanging baskets along porches belong, as do trellises with climbing roses or cascades of bridal veil spirea. Flower boxes, whether in Saugatuck or on Mackinac Island, Cape Cod, or Whidbey Island, also fit in. But English cottage gardens, flower boxes,



Berthe Morisot, *Roses Trémières*, 1884

and hanging baskets, like those photographed for travel brochures for European cities, suggest that gardens are a more international form of vintage than some other entities.

Like antique furniture and art, gardens may be prized for their craftsmanship, their age, and the individuality of their design. But unlike grand gardens such as those at the estates in Newport, Rhode Island, vintage gardens are cherished for their ability to be recreated almost anywhere, by almost anyone. They do not require exorbitant amounts of financial investment or professional artists to design. They should have been popular (to at least some extent), widespread, and loved during their time, wherever that time took place.

Gardens differ from many other categories of vintage in being so multi-sensual. It is not only the visuals—the flowers and trees—but the fauna, the hummingbirds, robins, jays, cardinals, or mourning doves and their songs, the crickets and cicadas, the squirrels, chipmunks, deer. When they inhabit our vintage gardens, they create a whole world, if only in miniature, which is less easily created with the fully artificial objects of our normal vintage items. We have less control over the presence of birds and insects.

Another component of the appeal of the vintage garden is that it summons up a shared past rather than the personal past of individual memory. The value of vintage sometimes lies in the way it characterizes its era, offering a specifically temporal experience of the differences in our lives between then and now, or in ourselves, what we experience, how we feel, what we are aware of, what we know now.

The vintage garden may be the garden of one's own home or childhood, or other personally beloved place, or a garden one knows only from illustrations in old books like Robert Louis Stevenson's *A Child's Garden of Verses*, Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden*, and the animal stories of Beatrix Potter. A passage from Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the*



Władysław Podkowiński, *Children in the Garden*, 1892

Willows would make a good model for a vintage garden:

[Mole and Rat] disembarked, and strolled across the gay flower-decked lawns in search of Toad, whom they presently happened upon resting in a wicker garden-chair, with a pre-occupied expression of face, and a large map spread out on his knees.

Occurring toward the opening of the book, this passage illustrates several of our themes so far: the agreeable flowers and grass, the comfortable accessories

(wicker chair), the potential for both convivial social sharing and personal engagement, as well as the suggestion of the exotic and adventure to come.

PROBLEMS FOR GARDENS: THE COMPLEXITIES OF TIME AND TEMPORALITY

Gardens, however, have a particular problem for vintage in that they change so much—both continually and continuously. My mother's kitchen dishes during my elementary school years—after she had forsworn the yellow-and-brown plaid Organdy

pattern and we replaced them, piece by piece, with a blue-and-white set whose wide rim borders and center designs were taken from Currier and Ives lithographs of nineteenth-century village life—like the former, broke piece by piece and were eventually replaced by a set of more modern design. Each set fit into a particular period of my life.

Gardens, on the other hand, change constantly. They change through the seasons (in most climates): fall colors, the grays and whites of winter, then delicate early snow drops, spring beauties, and narcissus, giving way to the brighter, bolder tulips, hyacinths, roses, poppies, and eventually to black-eyed Susans and chrysanthemums. Those lucky enough to have fruit trees see a similar rotation. And all these changes are repeated, cyclically! They take our emotions on a ride with them.

And many gardens, especially in regards to flowers and birds, change throughout the day. The mourning doves in Ypsilanti, Michigan, and in Honolulu cry only in the mornings; later in the day we might get crows. Fireflies and crickets emerge in the evenings.

Then there are the changes we make—changing species when one doesn't work out well, or moving or pruning to increase shade or the number of blossoms. When I once moved a rose bush from one corner to the edge of a fence, it went in one year from six flowers to eight hundred, and from

lavender to bright red. That house was over a century old, but its small wooden deck recalled California of the 1970s. The arbor a local artist created for us was brand new, though of rustic design. The stone pavers we put down reminded us of the eons of the earth's existence.

Rocks are relentless time-keepers. New England yards and gardens retain the stone walls built when earlier householders cleared their fields of stone for crops. Chinese and Japanese gardens inscribe rocks with literary and historic quotations that may be either vintage or antique. Gardens of modern design in places as diverse as Honolulu and Washington, D.C., employ local rocks for their gravitas, reminders of the age of the earth.

A final temporal dimension of vintage gardens is the style. Knot gardens, peristyle gardens of abbeys, paths meeting at right angles in the middle with a fountain or sundial carry atmosphere similar to the vintage.

Given gardens' enormously complex relation to time and the near impossibility of recreating one existing garden elsewhere, it may be silly to argue that such things as vintage gardens even exist. Although we often lose track of changes that weather enforces and that on-the-ground gardeners must make, all gardens change over time. While they may bear resonances of vintage, completely vintage gardens may not be possible. ♪



Edvard Munch, *Garden in Kragerø*, 1909



Vincent van Gogh, *Flowering Garden with Path*, 1888

image credits

YELLOW ROSES

It peeks out from an assortment of
mismatched dishes on the fifty-cent table
like a time-traveler that journeyed from
a tenement in Jersey City
to a yard sale in Syracuse—
a voyage not of miles but decades,
and still in full bloom.

Two yellow roses curve on the edge of the plate—
identical to the ones my mother
piled high with mashed potatoes and meatloaf
in the kitchen on Duncan Avenue
more than sixty years ago.
No nicks or cracks to betray its age—
only a few scars from knives
dragged across the petals.

Uncovering the roses was the reward
for cleaning our plates,
and woe to child who failed to finish
in our waste-not, want-not home.

For half a dollar, I ransom memories
more nourishing than all the meals
this plate has ever held.
I consider hanging it on the wall
over the kitchen table,
but reject the notion.

Instead, I slide a fried egg onto the plate
while my tea steeps on the counter
and I wait for the toast to pop up,
just as my mother did
on countless Saturday mornings
when she called us to the table
for breakfast in a garden of yellow roses
blooming on a vinyl tablecloth.

GLORIA HEFFERNAN

image credits





Harry Willson Watrous, *The Red Portfolio*, 1900

INHERITANCE

Kira M. Tjomsland

MY MOM HOARDS FINE china. With thirteen sets (and counting) of antique dishes, the nooks and crannies of her home harbor vintage dishes of varying condition.

I remember the glass-door cabinets of my childhood in which breakable dishes were safely displayed out of arm's reach. There was the Yuletide set brought from Norway, hearts and pines bordering the edges meant to nest Grandma's meatballs and lingonberry jam after the Christmas Eve candlelight service. Next to those was the Easter set edged with silver bows and daisies—the dishes Papa brought back from Vietnam for his mother. I grew up with Mom's promise that, one day, these pretty dishes would be mine.

My first college gift came wrapped in packing paper and bubble wrap, nestled into the trunk of my car next to boxes laden with thrifted copies of Plato, Aristotle, and a book I didn't yet know titled *Entering the Conversation*. Careful folds protected the chipped edges of a red and once-white china set, each plate and teacup painting a picture of a castle from across the sea—a good-luck charm for an English major dreaming of fantasy novels. Mom said they were a hand-me-down from an alumna who'd spent her first year in the same dorm room as mine.

As the semesters passed, afternoon tea became a daily ritual shared with friends over fiction and philosophy. We contemplated Augustine's *Confessions* with tentative uncertainty, sharing family staples of honey-sweetened raspberry blends and steamed milk in chai. We asked each other questions in class and in our rooms, such as what did Augustine mean when he said, "I will plant my feet on that step where my parents put me as a child, until self-evident truth comes to light"? I drank in the conversation despite my confusion. With each passing semester, my bookshelf grew heavier with authors' footprints. But each break was the same: I came home to yet another set of dishes—beautiful, antique, gilded with dust—that my mother couldn't possibly use.

Three years into the conversation of strange philosophy and stranger tradition, I flew overseas for a semester abroad at The University of Oxford, entering into what I thought would be a different conversation—one into the worlds of Lewis, Tolkien, and the fantasy I adored. But with each book I read, I only heard more echoes of the conversation I thought I had left behind. For a few months, I could live in the same city as fantasy giants. I was supposed to be at home amidst ancient libraries with other scholars living their

image credits

bookwormish dreams. Down these cobblestone streets, I was supposed to find elves or faerie; dragons, ents, or fauns. But what I found instead as I explored lantern-lit pubs and the late-autumn twilight of botanical gardens was just another pilgrim. And this pilgrim was all too familiar.

As I sat in a candlelit teahouse overlooking High Street, I sipped on Lady Grey and flipped through pages.

The highway is not a blank slate; it is a network of channels laid down where many others wore a path before. The irony is that even when you're alone on the open road you're following somebody. To answer the call of the asphalt is to follow them.

Something in me clicked. I now read in Lewis the same ache I'd read in Augustine. The self-dubbed Most Reluctant Convert had been preceded by another prodigal academic centuries before. I saw them become friends, though they'd never met. One with his Ambrose and one with his Tolkien, both academics who reached their goals and realized it was not enough. I saw them, two writers on the same pilgrimage, engrossed and delighted in their own conversation as one followed the other.

Friendship...is born at the moment when one man says to

another "What! You too? I thought that no one but myself..."

—C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*

And as I realized their friendship, I became friends with them too.

I returned from Oxford with a rekindled fire—a bachelor's looming on the horizon and not nearly enough time for all the conversations I ached to enter—to find my old home overrun with boxes of dishes. Each set of marketplace castaways—some whole, some barely salvaged—had been rescued from the endless abyss of online giveaways. I began to wonder if my mother's affinity was not a poorly disguised addiction. Each new set came with the excuse that no one else would appreciate them in this age of lattes-to-go. She treasured each teacup, some edged with pale blue or gold, others painted with roses of fiery red and flushing fuchsia hues.

During my last semester break, Mom paused my rereading of *Confessions*, asking me to join her in a new collector's quest. I shook off my daydreams of missing British tea, somewhere between amused and exasperated, as I accompanied her to the home of a complete and utter stranger.

I had to admit this new addition was too beautiful to miss. I reverently fingered the raised edges of pristine porcelain painted with clusters of vines and violets. These were the kinds of dishes that belonged in the antique



Wilson Irvine, *The Tea Party with the Artist's Daughter, Lois*



Childe Hassam, *French Tea Garden*, 1910

image credits

austerity of an Oxford tearoom. Their owner followed my gaze, her eyes filming over with age, and fought-back tears.

“We can’t possibly take these,” my mother breathed. “They’re priceless.”

My voice joined my mother’s in shared protest. She couldn’t just throw away a tangible memory like that, but the woman shook her head.

“I only had sons. And their wives would throw these away.”

I looked at my mother and finally understood. The marketplace wanderings, the boxes of overflowing dishes were rejected by all but one who took the mantle of treasuring these memories that would otherwise be thrown away.

And men go abroad to admire the heights of mountains, the mighty waves of the sea, the broad tides of rivers, the compass of the ocean, and the circuits of the stars, yet pass over the mystery of themselves without a thought.

—Augustine, *Confessions*

We took the set.

Now, my one-bed apartment has little room for collectibles. The two bookshelves I have are bursting with books, filled with centuries of scholars, philosophers, and fantasy authors whose conversations layer over each other in contemplations of the good, the true, and the beautiful, each asking and attempting to answer

what it is to be just, what it is to be human, what it is to value inheritance. I add my voice to the pages with every dog-ear and annotation, leaving room for the notes of whoever will own these books after me.

I have the usual no-occasion dinnerware for ordinary nights—pristine and white, fresh off the registry—but each evening is always laden with recipes stretching back to Norwegian fields, from before Great-Great-Great Grandpa Truls ever saw Ellis Island.

Despite what little space I have, one cabinet is reserved for the start of my collection. A white-and-gold four-piece and teapot marks my only *new* set. On the next shelf sits the red castle dishes that I pull out weekly for a writers’ guild tea. A teapot painted with Jane Austen titles sits proudly in a space of honor; the souvenir I carried in my arms through airports still holds memories of my Oxford term. For now, they’re all I can fit until I find a house of my own.

One day, I will share my inheritance with my children. I will read them stories of Aslan’s country while sipping from Great-Grandpa’s silver teacups. I will read them stories of pilgrims becoming unlikely friends while we snack on Great-Grandma’s krumkake. They will follow the road I followed myself through stories and through tea sets steeped in memory. Until then, I am content with my inheritance as I turn another yellow, marked-up page. ✍



Lilla Cabot Perry, *A Cup of Tea*, c. 1900



John Robert Dicksee, *The Waitress*, 1872



Giuseppe Tominz, *Three Ladies of the Moscon Family*, 1829

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EVIDENCE OF AFFECTION

Carole Greenfield

OF ALL THE THINGS I MISS FROM MY YOUTH AND ONWARD through my twenties—that era before Internet, smart phones, email, and social media—the art of letter-writing makes the top three. I miss everything inherent in the practice: the seeking out of beautiful stationery, finding just the right card or paper design, to say nothing of intriguing stamps from all parts of the world. I miss the varicolored pens I used—peacock, orchid, emerald, burgundy—as well as the colors that distinguished different friends (T. always wrote in purple ink, for instance). Most of all, I miss the time—both for the crafting of words and the waiting for a response—that writing letters required. I do not belong in this age of speed.

I grew up in the days when we wrote letters on some kind of stationery—even if, as in the case of my dad, it was on yellow legal-sized paper—as that



was the most practical way to communicate. Long-distance phone calls cost too much, there was no such thing as email or texting, and telegrams had long gone out of fashion. All those years living in Colombia, I wrote letters to my friends back in Sudbury, to my grandparents in Brookline and West Roxbury, to my cousins in northern California. After I left South America to return to the U.S. for university, I wrote letters to my Nana R. who had by then moved to Jerusalem, to my high school friends who'd scattered to various states for their college education, and to my parents, still living in Bogotá, who wrote me while working at the international school I'd attended, my father in his illegible scrawl, my mother with her distinctive looped letters.

The upside/downside (double-edge?) of letters written on stationery was that you could keep them. You could hold them, reopen the envelope, and unfold the pages that held the touch of a loved-one's hand—proof of love, of caring, that might in the interim have faded or vanished altogether. I have kept some of those, preferring to retain the evidence of affection, even though it still hurts to know it's gone. I have a few cards and letters from lovers and friends who have slipped out of my life the way stationery has disappeared from most people's existence these days. Stationery stores themselves may soon become extinct, I fear.

Sometimes I believe I want to bring back stationery as much as I wish to bring back the love that infused those handwritten words. My mourning is for a time of greater patience and care, not only for the crafting of words and the choosing of paper and beautiful cards, but also for those vivid souls who once peopled my life—the people whom I loved and who loved me back, at various times, with equal or even greater passion. They are nearly all gone, as irrevocably, it feels, as the typewriter, fountain pen, cream-laid paper, and matching envelopes, vanished with the days of licking an envelope and pressing it closed, choosing a stamp, finding a mailbox, opening the door and letting your words drop down.



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I'm thinking of my Nana R. and the letters she wrote on pale-blue airmail stationery. She had distinctive handwriting, but didn't everyone back in the days before email? You could tell who the letter was from by the look of the handwriting; you didn't even need to glance at the return address. Getting a letter was a thrill. Think about how long you had to wait for it.

I remember how carefully I'd consider what news to share with my Nana and what to hold back. She'd often write, "How proud your dear grandpa would have been." Then she'd add the Hebrew letters after his name, the letters you put after the name of a deceased loved one. When she died, my first thought was that I won't be able to write letters to her now. There was no one else who cared the way she did, and as our relationship at that point was exclusively based on letters, losing her meant losing a correspondence, a connection, a vital presence with whom to share a particular part of my existence.

Yes, you can save emails. You can go back and reread them. It's not the same. With letters handwritten on paper, you can go back and unfold them, tenderly touch and perhaps even smell the paper, and know that someone's hands touched the same page, folded it along the prescribed edges, wrote out your name and address, and in the case of my Nana, walked down ten flights of stone steps to the sun-baked pavement below and found her way to a postbox to send your letter on its way across the ocean. There is nothing in today's electronic communication that even approaches the care, patience, and love that went into centuries of letter-writing. It simply does not carry the same emotional resonance—at least not for me.

I'm trying to come to terms with it, the vanishing of a world I cherished. Sometimes I think that is my purpose now, more than anything—to write an elegy for the parts of my world that are fast disappearing, if not already gone: stationery, telephones attached to walls, typewriters, phonographs, chalk. Find a moment or two to consider what we love, what we've lost, and what we want to remember, going forward. ♪



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BLACK AND WHITE OF DAD'S EARLY TWENTIES BIRTHDAY

Karen George

MOM, HANDS IN HER LAP, WEARS AN EYELET MIDRIFF HALTER. Seated next to Dad, maybe only his girlfriend so far, they face the camera, he in a white short-sleeve cotton button-down, the curved edge of his undershirt peeks from the v-neckline. Mom's wavy auburn hair clasped off her face with a long barrette. Dad rests a knife against a white-iced cake—his July sixth birthday.

They sit at a kitchen table covered with a cloth, checkerboard pattern interspersed with flower baskets; coffee cups, sugar and cream containers, an urn one-fourth full, a globe of Earth on a stand; table and chair legs ornately turned. A wall with layers of wallpaper peeled halfway loose looks wet and moldy. Dad once said his childhood home held a wall that iced up every winter, but I believe this is my uncle's old farmhouse.

Behind my future parents, an open wooden door and a screened aluminum one filters a breeze from the porch. It's years before air conditioning. Their foreheads shine.

Now, they're only accessible in photos. I see myself in her wide face, his thin one, their shy smiles. ∞



image credits

Wendy Lou Schmidt



Belle Fleur



Sally's Room



Curlicue

NO MUSIC BUT THE WIND

Jay Simons

Willem Maris, *Winter Landscape*, c. 1875

IT HASN'T ESCAPED MY NOTICE THAT THE SMALL ROOM IS OUTFITTED much like a prison cell. A sink of yellow-stained porcelain juts out below a square mirror with a crack separating the top half from the bottom. To the left, a plain wooden bench rides low against the off-white wall. On the bench is a thin volume of Romantic poetry—Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley—beside which my blouse and blue jeans are folded in neat rectangles. Not that I needed to go to the trouble. Any minute now, my bridesmaids will be crawling over one another to make sure nothing is amiss, that nothing can possibly go wrong.

image credits





Otto Miller-Diflo, *Winter Landscape*, c. 1925

I partially zip up my makeup case and place the hard blackshell on the edge of the sink, where it strikes a trembling balance. I glance to the left of the mirror. Above the bench, a narrow window halfway up the wall looks out on a winter landscape veiled by the bare white branches of birch trees. I shiver as I lean forward to apply eyeliner. The furnace is out, and the freezing outside air continues to seep into the small church.

Of course, I'm the one who insisted on a December wedding. I thought it would be crisp and clean and beautiful. Somehow, though, this day hasn't quite lived up to

my memory of childhood winters. It's cold, to be sure, but in a hard, unfamiliar way. It doesn't evoke sprawling holiday revelry; it feels like the hands of a stranger pressed against my face and neck.

I flip my veil down to protect myself from this cold intruder. Maybe, though, the veil is the problem. Not the one in the cracked mirror, the one behind which my forehead blurs and bulges in a fractured reflection and seems to separate from the rest of my face. No. A less tangible veil, composed of the accumulation of years, built up, layer by layer, to obscure my view into the inner wonder of the world.

I sigh. The sudden puff of air pushes the champagne-colored lace away from my face for a moment before it again hangs motionless. Not long enough, a moment, to show one where or when she began to change. As a child, I found joy in so many things. Not least of which, I tell myself, was my name. And now, I'm about to lose it forever, to let it fall from me and fade into my past. Serasso. Such a mellifluous name. Sara Serasso. A name like the whisper of the wind. Or the wings of a lone tern skimming the surface of the sea at sunset. Not the rough chunk of stone crashing into the ocean that is *Ungkersch*.

Why did I agree to change it? Because I knew that's what he wanted, what they all expected. There's a soft knock on the door behind me. I ignore it. If I were younger, I would have put up some resistance. Not that I'm old—I just turned thirty—but half a lifetime ago I would have quailed at the obliteration of such delicate beauty.

I look out the window at branches bending in the wind. Amid this gentle motion, my eyes are drawn to something affixed to a low-hanging limb—an icicle, isolated in its fragile rigidity.

Meanwhile, the knocking continues and is soon accompanied by a chorus of concerned voices.

"Sara, how's it going in there?"

"Honey, the string quartet isn't here yet. What do you want to do?"

"Can I come in?"

But I am transfixed. The icicle flashes in the filtered light of the

afternoon sun, and conscious thought falls away like the last of the leaves in late autumn. I am stripped bare. I allow myself to be absorbed into the mute tranquility of glittering memory, to be transported back . . .



I am fifteen years old. Though long and gangling, my body feels heavy, and my steps are slow as I follow a winding sidewalk toward the woods. Between steamy exhalations, the frigid air aches in my lungs, a frosty echo of the loneliness in my heart. My family has just moved, and I'm at a new school in a new town with no friends. I don't play sports, nor do I wear makeup and go to dances. I rarely speak in class, and when I do there's silence for several seconds afterward. I can tell that even my teachers think I'm strange.

It's late afternoon, and the wind is picking up. I thrust my hands deeper into the pockets of my dark-pink parka. Band practice ran long because Mr. Burke made us practice basic scales until the bell rang. Then he wouldn't let us leave until we'd tidied up the room. That's typical—rote scales and busywork. I've been thinking about quitting. I'm the only oboe, but they got along fine without one before I came along. If it weren't for the clarinet player at the end of the row, I would have quit weeks ago. His name is Derrick, and he's the only boy in the woodwind section. He's in my English lit class too.

He's never spoken to me, but in band I sometimes catch him stealing a glance in my direction. Though I'm half a head taller than all the girls between us, he leans forward to look down the aisle. I like to think that he's looking at me. Anytime I work up the courage to lean forward to meet his gaze, though, I pull back before my eyes have found his and nervously flutter my fingers over the keys of my instrument.

As I pass the first pair of trees split by the path, two tall oaks, the scene becomes muted. The woods are quiet. The sense of physical isolation is not absolute; there is ample space between the surrounding trunks, and light filters through the tree-branch lattice overhead. On the other side of this woody stretch, the path links up with the cul-de-sac leading to my house.

I have taken only a few steps past the oaken sentries when my eyes are drawn to a reflective glint in the scanty canopy above. Something flashes, and I wonder if it wasn't just a piece of ice catching the light of the lowering sun. But then, scanning the branches stretched across the sky, my eyes meet with the object.

It's a column of burnished brass dangling by an invisible length of string from a branch above me. A wind chime. Like everything else, it's thinly dusted with frost, and I can see ice crystals clinging to the long metallic tube. A gust of wind pushes it one way, then the other, and as it silently sways, a sadness sweeps

through me, gradually sweetening into a sense of companionship.

Like the chime, I'm suspended . . . somewhere . . . and make no sound. The cold condensed in the cylinder's silent center is the same frigid air compressed in my lungs. Its metallic tinge tempers my palate as the soundless rhythm of respiration fills the space between us. A slow breath in followed by a long exhalation. Slow breath, long exhalation. Over and over.

From that day forward, I would endure the confinement of school to partake twice daily in this communion. To revel in the lightness of the bright chime unsounded and in its depth. Whenever I passed through those woods, the world expanded, and the fresh affection of winter would fall like snowflakes on my upturned face.

Every time I see the chime, I feel less alone. In the morning, its mute beauty aches in my imagination. It's in the afternoons, though, that it captivates me most, when the sun hangs just above the horizon, and the chill of the evening has yet to set in. There are sounds, mysterious sounds that herald darkness. But none will come from the chime. As I pass through the woods in the afternoon, no thought rings through my head, unless it's the notion that night is a still wilderness. Overgrown with dark weeds, covered in a colorless blanket of cold air, it pulses with the longing to be smaller without diminishing. The seat of this stark ache is the silent chime. Knowing it can hold no



Desire Thomassin, *Deer in a Winter Landscape*, 1933

more of emptiness, it communicates the dormancy of desire in my own breast.

One day after school, I'm waiting in the bone-colored box of a band room for practice to begin. A literature anthology lies open in my lap. I've begun reading the poems assigned as homework for my English lit class, beginning with "The Eolian Harp" by Samuel Taylor Coleridge. By the time I silently mouth the final line, my fellow woodwinds have fallen into place, and Mr. Burke, the band director, has raised his arms. When I look up at him through tear-bleared eyes, he's glaring down at me. I scramble to set the book aside and bring the end of the oboe to my lips. No one asks if I'm okay. Out of

the corner of my eye, I see Derrick leaning into the aisle, clarinet plastered to his face like an inflexible elephant trunk.

All through practice, my thoughts keep wandering back to the poem I've just read. It's with relief that I finally place my oboe in its case and rush out the door before anyone else. If Mr. Burke wants to yell at me, he'll have to wait until tomorrow.

Once outside, I walk slowly as I reread the poem. I hold the book in both hands, my oboe case tucked under one arm. I try to imagine the "soft-floating witchery of sound" of an eolian harp, but I'm adrift in abstraction, wafted along by one evocative description after another. I



Valerius de Saedeleer, *View of Tiegem in Winter*, 1935

decide that I don't like the final stanza, in which the speaker's wife—named Sara, a coincidence that incited an initial thrill—calls him away from his inspired, ever-expanding reflections with her narrow-minded religiosity. I can't identify with "pensive Sara." I would never reprove my spouse for such uplifting, lyrical musings, and I hope that he would likewise allow me the music of my soul.

These thoughts have brought me into the woods, and I look up from the book to behold my beloved chime. The late-afternoon sunlight ricochets off the slender metal column and into my heart. With none of the randomness

of the eolian harp but all of its mystery, it hangs alone while the invisible hand of the musician caresses the strings stretched tight across my soul. I thrill to the touch, swaying in unseen arms. The same wind engendering the music of the eolian harp now pushes the suspended chime impotently through space. No glittering swells. No melodic drops commingling into tinkling cataracts of sound. No music but the wind.

I am disappointed when, the next day in class, we run out of time before getting to "The Eolian Harp." It's Friday, so I pin my hopes of a discussion of the poem on the other side of the weekend.

I feel compelled to talk about it, to praise the sentiments of the speaker and denounce the chastening glare of Sara. No matter if everyone is silent afterward. In fact, I hope they will be.

After band practice, as usual, I leave the school alone. My oboe case hangs at my side; within it lies a mere stick of metal-studded wood with no memory of the melody blown through it. The silent wind leaves a vacant ache within, and I think ahead to the quiet encounter awaiting me in the woods. I'm in such a deep meditative state that I jump and nearly drop my oboe case when I hear my name ring out.

Before I can compose myself, Derrick is beside me, complimenting my musicianship. He is empty handed and, for a while, his arms remain anchored to his sides as he walks, pressed against his sleek black puff of a coat. I blush when he begins asking me about myself. I am hesitant at first, halting—we both are—but soon I have grown comfortable enough to mention my desire to quit band. To my surprise, he reveals that he shares this desire, as his parents have pressured him to follow in their musical footsteps when he would rather be tearing up the turf with a football under his arm. As we talk, his arms gradually loosen until they are swinging freely with each slow step. After a few minutes of conversation, there's a lull, and I'm emboldened to share my thoughts on "The Eolian Harp," glad to get out the feelings I thought would remain clogged

in my breast the whole weekend. Derrick listens quietly. As I'm announcing my disdain for "pensive Sara," insisting that I would never treat my spouse in such a way, I realize that we're approaching the mouth of the woods. In that instant, I decide to tell Derrick about the chime.

We enter the woods, and in the sudden semidarkness, I stop and stare up at it. Derrick follows my gaze. As I reach for the right words to convey the depth of my feeling, the boy beside me reaches for a rock embedded in the hard ground by the sidewalk. Before I can speak, he informs me that he hasn't read the poem; then he straightens up, pulls back his arm, and hurls the rock toward the tree-branch canopy.

I look on in mute horror as the rock misses the chime by mere inches. It strikes the supporting branch with a heavy thunk, causing its scraggly offshoots to shake as though frightened. My breath catches in my throat. The chime is jostled but remains chaste, silently pleading with me. The next stone, though, could be the one to shatter the silence, to demolish illusion. Derrick has pried another free and is walking forward, arm half-cocked. He stops almost directly beneath the chime.

My chest tightens, and my vocal cords seize up. Unable to yell, I rush forward and dive toward Derrick. I hit him before he releases the rock, right as his arm starts moving forward. Parka and puffy coat collide. The muted contact feels dull and subdued, and he makes an

ugly sound as we tumble to the ground. I roll off him. At first, he's too surprised to do anything. Then he starts shouting and pounding his fists in the dirt, shouting and pounding, shouting and pounding...



A cacophony of muffled voices and pounding fists pushes me back to the present. I struggle to bring my breathing into a regular rhythm, eyes still fixed on the icicle outside. I have, from time to time, brought to mind this memory of the chime, but no real emotion ever accompanied the recollection. Until now. I suddenly understand why I shiver at the sight of a chandelier, why I breathlessly listen for the sound a swinging earring makes. This icicle has rekindled feeling. It has brought these events back to me in the full splendor of their original complexion. I have relived them for the first time.

"She won't open the door."

The muffled rumblings rise and fall again behind me, and a single voice rings out. At first, it serves up a singsong plea. "Sa-ra. Saa-ra." Then it becomes more insistent.

"Sara, it's Derrick. Open up, will you? Sara!"

My fiancé's voice crashes through the door and begins flooding the room. As the volume increases, my breathing again becomes irregular. I'm drowning.

I fling my arms outward, a swimmer desperate to reach the surface. My right arm pushes the makeup case off the sink, and it clatters to the floor. I step out of

my pumps and clamber onto the bench. My fingers find the latch at the top of the window. A moment later, I'm moving through the glass and into a dream (all of animated nature... organic harps diversely framed... tremble into thought). I'm being guided by the arms of winter toward the chime-like icicle, silent and waiting. Something brushes against my face and ears. I reach up and throw off the veil and thrill to the cold thickening in my bones.

I look up at the icicle, watching as the ice sloughs away to reveal a single hollow cylinder swinging freely in the wind. I feel my spirit rising to it, borne aloft an aura of reflected light on a late afternoon in winter.

Through the white noise of memory, out of amorous imagination, the music comes. The long-distance lovers interlock their limbs at last, clanging and clinging together, jangling in a wild, violent release of suppressed sound. Newlyweds intertwining in the wind, we ring out across the woods of winter, over the years, pushing outward against the bounds of space and time.

But my spirit cannot remain aloft forever. Eventually, exhausted, I return to the frozen ground, a reluctant snowflake floating down alone. Part and parcel of the winter, I look back at myself and smile. In my reflection, the resonance lingers long after the last syllable of sound has faded away. Outside, there is nothing but the whisper of the wind. ❧



László Mednyánszky, *Rimy Forest (Windy Daybreak)*, c. 1890

image credits

PIEMAKING—YARMOUTH, MAINE 1964

Apple picking season, the other-worldly image
of my grandmother, always returns, ghosting
crimped corners of my grown-up mind—
her beehive hair, her creased hands, mixing
air and light with Crisco & plumes of Gold Medal flour.

Woodsy, citrus scents of Fels-Naptha soap—
laundry snapped like pirate flags
from the sagging rope of Garmie's clothesline.
A grainy, black and white photograph anchors
Garmie's farmhouse in another place and time.

Inside the house, inside the photo, inside this poem,
I'm nine years old, testing one foot at a time
as I scootch down the chilly attic staircase, hugging tight
the bulky waist of a sweetgum basket. Face
pressed against blushed cheeks of Northern Spies,

McIntosh, Black Oxfords, or maybe Jonagolds, I carry the cold,
tangy breath of Garmie's apple orchard in my arms.
Apple basket settled on her checkered linoleum floor,
I drag up a chair, watch the whirr of spinning cogs
and gears—spellbound by Garmie as she cranks

the wooden handle of her cast iron apple-peeling
machine. Come fall, red peelings forever kite-tail
through my memory and imagination. Unbroken
curls of apple skin still dangle childhood magic
from the end of Garmie's chrome-edged, kitchen table.

JUANITA M. SMART



image credits

FOOTSTEPS OVERHEAD

Jane H. Fitzgerald

A PROUSTIAN MOMENT suddenly awakened my senses when visiting an old house. Footsteps echoed loudly overhead, and once again, I was a small child, on my yearly visit to see my grandparents. Theirs was a world apart, back to past generations. I loved going there.

My grandparents, Mabel and Burt, lived in one of the many row houses that were placed like long ribbons on either side of the street. Each house held two families—one down, one up—and were narrow, close together, with open front porches that faced the sidewalks. My grandfather called the houses *railroad flats* as one room led into another with a hallway running alongside that ended straight ahead

in the kitchen. My little bedroom was right next to theirs in the row of rooms.

My grandmother's sister, Millie, occupied the upstairs with her husband, Vernon, who walked with a distinct thumping limp. I could trace their movements by the noises of creaking wood. "Millie and Vernon are up, I'm going to see them." I'd call to my grandmother as I raced up the steep shiny steps. They were childless, so my presence was a special gift, just as their sweet love was to me.

On the outside of their kitchen window was a clothesline on a pulley. Millie pegged the clothes on the line, one piece at a time, way up high. I was always worried they would fall, like flying leaves lost in the wind. My fears were never realized, as the clothes



image credits

swayed gently until pulled back in, smelling fresh from the sun. Another object on a pulley was a dumb waiter used for taking goods up and down between floors. I begged, "Please let me ride in it." Vernon replied firmly, "Absolutely not, it's not made for people, it's too dangerous."

Vernon trusted me with the responsibility of feeding his large bowl of colorful guppies. I was mesmerized watching the tranquil tiny fish swim endlessly around and around to nowhere, pretending I was one of them, gliding under the little bridge and through the weeds. Sun rays slanted obliquely across their living room illuminating the simple mantel where stood a tiny bronze horse, possessing a mane, saddle, and reins. He was so flawlessly detailed, I didn't dare touch him. I told Millie and Vernon, "I wish he was mine to gallop wildly over hills and through green fields." They bestowed a feeling of complete acceptance that encouraged my imagination to blossom freely.

Downstairs my grandmother washed clothes in a big tub that hooked up to the kitchen sink. After the clothing swished back and forth in the water, she put each piece through a ringer that she turned by hand. I found this process intriguing, never dreaming it was hard work, making her hands red and achy. I asked, "Grandma, may I please do that too?" She replied, "You can help by handing the clothing

up to me to put in the ringer." "I want to do that," I replied. This job made me feel important.

Like Millie, my grandmother had a rope pulley that was attached to the same tree at the far end of the garden. She leaned down to the basket and reached up to the rope again and again. She asked, "Would you like to be a big girl and hand up the clean pieces in the basket?" "Oh yes," I said. "That's fun!" Then I would race in and out among the fluttering sheets. In the winter the sheets hung stiff as boards, making the job very difficult.

When not doing housework, my grandmother played cards with me and even sat on the floor to play Jacks. She took me to the nail salon, where the lady asked, "Would you like pink polish?" I nodded yes, never having had my nails done. The smell of nail polish still reminds me of that day. After the salon, we stopped at a toy store and my grandmother let me pick out a doll. I'd never had such treats, but I think it was mutual as she had raised two boys and was now enjoying a little girl.

At Christmas special festivities were planned with everyone participating. For several days Millie and I made ornaments out of pine cones, ribbons, and paper cutouts; Vernon made garlands using cranberries; and my grandfather set up a tree in the living room. He also had to string the lights, which was not an easy task. My

grandmother kept repeating, "Burt, be careful, come down now!" We all held the ladder while he put the star on the top. It took us a long time to hang each piece of tinsel.

At night we turned off all of the lights except those on the tree. Millie and Vernon came, and we sat in peaceful silence with just the sound of the wood crackling in the fireplace. This was the magic of Christmas. We were all together, feeling a strong bond, speaking not a word. On Christmas Eve my anticipation was intense. When I woke up the house was dark and still. Only a slight light from a street lamp reflected in my room. I wanted to get up so badly, but thinking of my grandparents, I laid back down. The clocks ticked endlessly. Finally, I heard voices and bolted out of bed and raced into my grandparents' bedroom, jumping up and down.

"Hold on, hold on, just a few more minutes, my grandfather uttered, yawning. "Run upstairs and get Millie and Vernon."

I fled away yelling, "Millie, Vernon, come on, come on, we are going to open presents." In a few minutes we were all in front of the tree. The first thing I saw was a shiny red tricycle with a huge bow on it. I couldn't believe it, exclaiming, "This is just what I dreamed of getting. I love it! Please, please, Grandpa, can we go outside, I want to try my new tricycle."

He replied, "Be patient, as soon as we open the other gifts and eat breakfast, I'll take you." It was bitterly cold with ice on the trees. I had to put on my galoshes and snap them shut plus wear my wool pea jacket that scratched my neck. My grandfather stood on the steps, holding onto the railing, while I raced like the wind along the sidewalk shouting, "Thank you so much for the best present ever!" He called back, "Don't go so fast. Watch where you are going!"

Later in the day, we all sat down to a big turkey dinner prepared by Millie and my grandmother, delicious pumpkin and apple pies, and cranberry sauce made by Vernon, which he had sent down in the dumb waiter with beer just for himself and Burt. My contribution was snapping the ends off the string beans. My grandmother spoke first, "The best Christmas present for me is having us all together." We agreed, held hands, and sang, "We Wish You a Merry Christmas," and then enjoyed our bountiful dinner.

The basement was my grandfather's domain, and it was from here that he kept the house warm. There were two slanted doors that opened out to the street. This was the chute where coal came sliding down into the basement. My grandfather used a big shovel to throw it bit by bit into the open door of the burning furnace. He arose before the first light to keep the fire

going, allowing warmth to spread through the chilled house. Years later, I realized that I was saved from harsh winter dawns by my grandfather's unselfish labor of love. Every once in a while he had what they called a spell. He felt weak and had to lie down on the couch. The blinds were drawn and the house was hushed. I heard my grandmother and Millie talking about a mild heart track and early retirement. I wondered what that meant.

In fair weather, my grandparents relaxed on the front porch. As daylight slowly faded, I sat on the stoop and watched the noisy kids as they played games in the street—jump rope, stick ball, hopscotch, and roller skating. I leaped up excitedly at the sound of bells and joined the jostling crowd, reaching up to the window of the ice cream truck. The grown-ups talked across rows of open railings, sharing their daily lives. I heard my grandparents' calling, "It's time to come in, it's almost dark."

My grandfather had a long narrow garden in the back with fences on each side. At the end was the big tree to which the clothes pulley was attached, and behind it was another building. This created a secret garden that was only accessible from the house. We worked side by side in our beloved patch of green. Tiny tomato plants were staked with great care, hopes, and prayers. It was exciting to watch the garden grow and eat our

homegrown food. When not in the garden, my grandfather took me to the park and never walked too fast. He pushed me on the swing high up into the blue and let me skip home ahead of him, avoiding every crack in the sidewalk. In winter he pulled me on the sled to the park. I screamed with delight as the sled sped like lightning down to the bottom of the hill.

Except for one time, the house always had an enticing familiar smell as my grandmother cooked my favorites, such as lamb chops, puddings, and cakes. They worried about my thinness, so everyday an eggnog was carefully prepared. I took a dim view of this loving gesture. The concoction smelled like decaying leaves. I tiptoed into the front hallway and quickly and fearfully poured the drink into the big green urn. This went on for quite a while until noxious fumes wafted through the rooms. Noses were guided to the scene of the crime. I was in tears sputtering, "I'm sorry, really sorry, I just couldn't stand it." My grandparents expressed dismay but patiently understood.

My grandmother sewed soft colorful dolls for me, life-size renditions of Raggedy Ann and Andy. They both slept in my bed, and we had long conversations before falling asleep. We talked about faraway lands and having adventures on a tropical island. I didn't fully realize then just how special was my own row house island.



Railroad flat memories are unique, especially at night, as I felt safe sleeping close by, connected by soft voices and steadily ticking clocks. The house was a wondrous world of senses, with delicious smells and tastes of cakes, sounds of clocks and creaking floorboards, all of which were telltale guides to the special sights, sounds, and love to be found upstairs and down.

The row house is like an intricate painted canvas that reveals more and more each time it returns in my memory. When I look back, it becomes clear that my grandparents' quiet, unassuming love helped build the character of the woman I was to become. They made me feel like the brightest star, creating a perpetual glow that scared away the darkness, giving me the strength needed to face adult life with all of its challenges, joys, and sorrows. ❧



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THE BUTTON BOX

Diane Roberson Douiyssi

MY MOTHER'S BUTTON BOX is a dented, beige tin stamped with sable-colored roses. Both of my daughters loved to run their hands through the buttons, skimming the surface delicately or digging two-fisted through them. Ripe with possibilities, it was a pirate's shimmering box of treasure, filled with jewels and gold coins, or it was an ocean, rolling with waves and hiding schools of exotic fish.

They'd open their hands and then let the buttons run and spill through their fingers. Buttons clacked onto the floor, rolling crazily across the linoleum. The girls laughed wildly, running to catch them before they disappeared.

The buttons inside were pulled from old clothes. Some were handed down by my mother's mother or her mother. Others came from yard sales or sewing project extras. Bright colored buttons from old aprons and fancy

dressess mix with sturdy metal buttons from work shirts. There are many white buttons, ones of cotton and clouds, and those with shades of past decades. Simple, utilitarian buttons hide the rare ones, like a brass jacket button or an iridescent genie-green square.

I pick up a plum-colored button. "That's from a skirt I made when you were in junior high. Do you remember?" my mother asks. A burgundy brushed-corduroy skirt comes into focus. I felt so grown up wearing it. There are others, like a button from my white-eyelet first communion dress. I wore a crown of fabric daisies and, after the ceremony, rode my bike up and down the block, my auburn hair blowing in the wind. I see a bulky magenta button from the cardigan my daughter wore when first learning to ice skate. A

sculpted, dainty black button from one of my grandmother's dresses whispers of elegance and youth, an echo of her life before I knew her.

There are pearl buttons too. Shimmery, they speak of my hometown's history. In the early 1900s, residents clammed up and down the Mississippi, dragging the muddy bottom for oysters. Broken shells with empty hole punches still turn up in gardens and gravel

driveways there. Raw and elegant, pearl buttons are weightier, hinting of a quality from a more substantial time.

The other day, I saw buttons for sale in a craft store. The cards hung neat and expensive, perfectly manufactured, and ready for someone to buy. When I mentioned this to my mother, she said, "Why on earth would anyone buy buttons?"

She's right, I think. In past generations, women darned socks and patched jeans. People wore shirts until the collars frayed. Then they detached the collars, flipped them over, and reattached them to mend

the shirt for further wear. When a piece of clothing was finally too worn out to repair, they'd save any buttons and cut it up for rags.

I don't have a mending basket, and I don't darn socks either. But I do sew on buttons.

My mother taught me how to thread a needle and carefully push it through fabric, looping tightly up and down through the holes until I fastened it securely. And so, in some small honor of that legacy, I've begun to save buttons too. Someday, I hope my collection will hold as much as her button box does, becoming a caretaker of family stories and imagination, a treasure of creativity and endless possibilities. ♪



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CASHMERE BY THE GENERATION

Kresha Richman Warnock

WE FOUND THE ROBIN'S-egg-blue, cashmere sweater neatly folded in Mom's closet when we were cleaning out the house after she died. It was too small for me, not the right style for the granddaughters.

When I was a kid, Mom helped keep the world going round by fulfilling her civic duty. At different times, she chaired the County Democratic Party, wrote grants for the War on Poverty, organized citizens to work for better schools for all. Educated middle-class ladies like her mostly didn't work for pay in the 1950s. During the day, she was home with the kids, doing the ironing, baking bread. But after our 5:30 dinner, she'd change out of the jeans she wore to do her housework and come down the stairs in one of the pleated skirts she'd sewn herself, the waistband showing off her waist, still slender after three children. She'd grab

her car keys, kiss my dad on the cheek and go off to do her important work. If it was wintertime, she'd be wearing one of her cashmere sweaters.

My grandfather's parents had immigrated to America right before he was born at the turn of the twentieth century, fleeing Russian pogroms, settling in the tenements of New York's lower East Side. Grandpa quit school in the eighth grade and somehow joined the Army. By the time his oldest daughter, my mother, was born in 1924, he was building a career on Wall Street and became one of the first Jews to build a home in the newly growing suburb of Scarsdale, New York. Mother was raised in relative comfort, went to college, and in due time, married a nice Jewish boy, about to work on his Ph.D. at Harvard. Grandpa, with true Jewish immigrant sensibilities, admired and loved my dad. But grad students were poor.

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Even when Dad got his first teaching job, a full-fledged assistant professor of philosophy in Oregon, we had no income for luxuries.

Grandpa helped out. When he visited our house in Eugene, he was annoyed to walk through the two-car garage on a rainy day and see the family's laundry strung up on clotheslines overhead. I was only six years old then, but I still remember the whirr of the clothes dryer he bought us, the comforting warmth and fresh smell of the clothes piled in a laundry basket, ready for ironing. On his next visit, he bought us a television set for the den so we children could watch *Mighty Mouse Playhouse* on Saturday morning cartoons, and Mom could watch her favorite *Gunsmoke* after we went to bed on Saturday nights. As the first born, sometimes she'd let me stay up with her to watch the handsome Marshall Dillon save the day.

It was also Grandpa who kept Mom in cashmere sweaters, various muted shades—dusty red, dark blue, a beige sweater set. I thank him for that. How else would I still have the memory of the soft brush of the fine knit on my cheek as I cuddled next to Mom on the couch, breathing in the faint, dark, carnationy smell of the perfume she wore?

By the early 1960s, when I was

a young teen, Dad gave me the responsibility of buying Mom's holiday gift. We were in Seattle by then, and Dad was a full professor. I took the bus downtown to the elegant seven-floor department store, Frederick and Nelson, by myself. I proudly walked in through the revolving door, past the perfume counter selling Chanel #5 and Arpege, past the fine leather purses and silk scarves on the main floor. At Christmas time, the store glittered with lights and garland. I went up the escalator to the third-floor woman's sweater department where I found the robin's-egg-blue cashmere. It was kitten soft, with a gentle turtleneck, a bit more modern than the older cashmeres Grandpa had bought. Mom wore it with a blue and green rough tweed pleated skirt she had stitched herself from Pendleton wool and aqua glass beads given to her by an artist friend. I know Dad was proud he could pay for that sweater.

Now, so many years later, both parents long gone, I own one cashmere myself. It's a ribbed, baby pink turtleneck, also kitten soft. Mom picked it up on one of those big tables in Costco. I'm sure she didn't get the irony; it was still a luxury gift to her. Years ago, I dribbled coffee down the

front when drinking from a travel mug while driving to work. Even a good dry cleaner couldn't get the stains out. I can afford to buy a replacement, and I see pretty ones each time I look through the Lands' End catalogue, but cashmere

in my Goodwill bag. But I can't. It sits folded in my closet, along with my more practical winter tops. I'll leave it to my own daughter to figure out what to do with it when I'm gone. It would be baggy on her, and she doesn't wear



would be a bit much for meetings of my book club or with writer friends. In the wintertime, I wear cable knit sweaters, synthetic or cotton, which I do buy from Lands' End.

I should stuff the pink cashmere

pink; she doesn't even wear sweaters. And she won't know its story. She will have other fond memories of me, I'm sure, but it won't be hard for her to drop the soft, stained sweater in some charity box. ♡

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HAT STOP

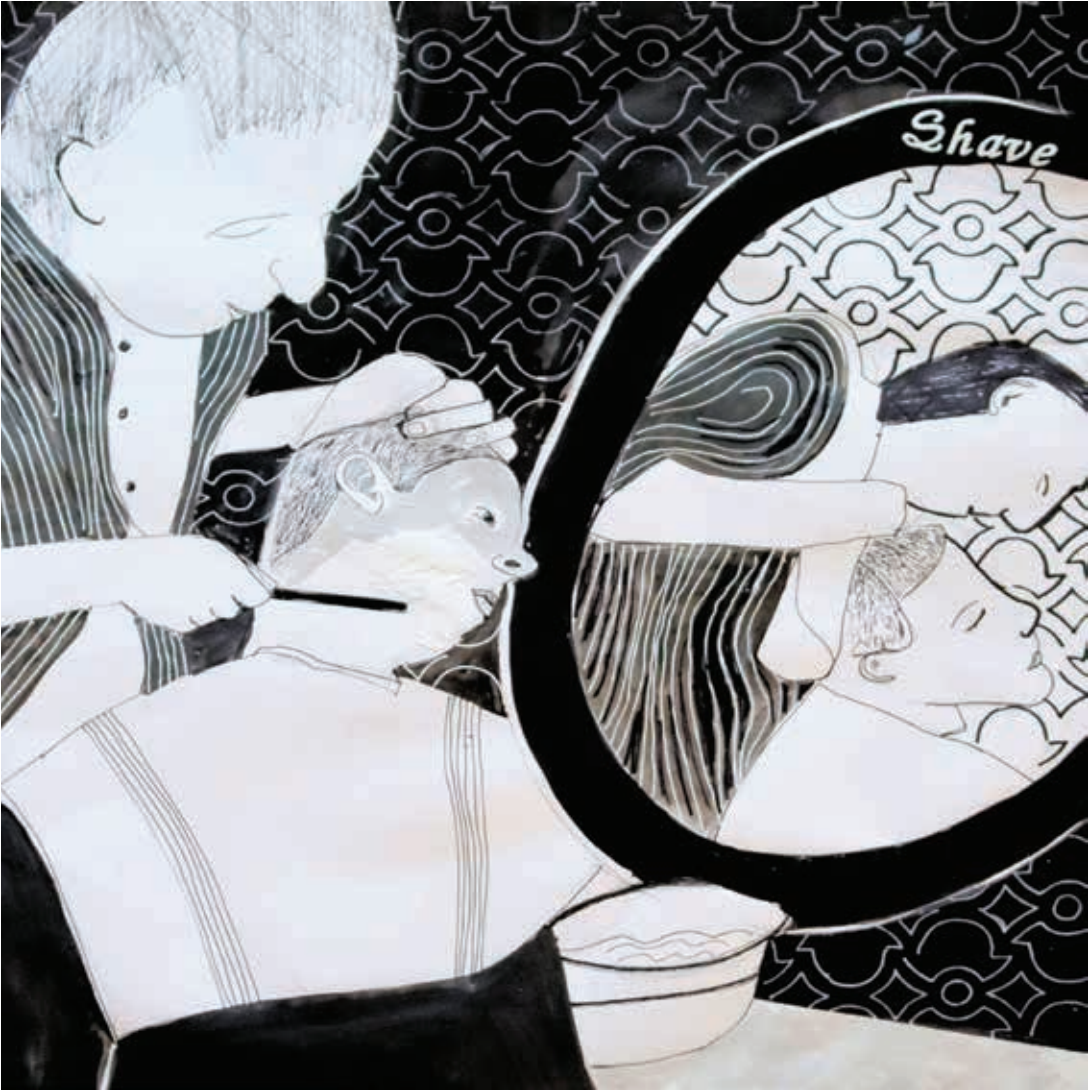
Men commonly wore hats until well into the twentieth century, both for protection from the elements and to signal social status. The decline in hat wearing is often attributed to President John F. Kennedy’s decision not to wear a hat at his 1961 inauguration. In addition, the 1960s saw the beginning of the era of casual fashion, hats not required.

CAROLYN SCHLAM



TAILOR

Ready-to-wear clothing that fit well and was of good quality was widely available by the turn of the twentieth century. Tailoring of custom suits is a luxury that is still available for those who can afford it.



SHAVE

Barbershops were extremely popular from the 1880s to 1940s, serving as a weekly, or even daily, social destination for men. This changed with the invention of the safety razor in the late nineteenth century when at-home haircutting and shaving kits began to be sold. Also, the Depression of the 1930s meant that men didn’t have money to spend on the luxury of visiting a barbershop.



INTERFERENCE

I can still trace the crinkles around the eyes
of Robert Young, the father in *Father Knows Best*,
who never lost his temper, arrived home after work

eager to settle each family crisis. Wednesday nights,
late 1950s, Mom, Dad, my sister and I watched
on our black-and-white TV with its stiff rabbit ears.

Almost every scene took place inside the home,
teenage daughter who flung herself across her bed in tears,
mother aproned in the kitchen. If the camera strayed

as far as the malt shop, we only saw vanilla
faces, able bodies, pony-tailed girls in shirtwaist
dresses. No shadow of polio or the hydrogen bomb.

Jim Crow held the camera steady, not even
a glimpse of Black kids playing tag on the other
side of town. Those images hovered behind

horizontal lines called *interference*
that would suddenly distort our view.
We all squirmed on the couch while my dad

fiddled with the antenna, unscrewed the pressboard
back and tightened tubes, until Father and son Bud
came strolling out of the garage, wiped grease

off their hands and smiled. It took me years to learn
to adjust my own signals, to clear the static,
the white noise, to listen with open ears.

JOANNE DURHAM

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THE SUMMER I RUINED

Mord McGhee

IN AUGUST 1980, TEN DOLLARS was a fortune to me, and it was during that summer that I inadvertently brought about ruin. My intentions were never malicious, yet the outcome was inevitable. Compounding the situation, our family teetered on the brink of financial collapse.

Despite our parents' tireless efforts, they often reminded us of the three jobs our father juggled to meet the high costs of raising us. Among the most cherished household items were batteries, essential for powering remote controls, calculators, smokeless ashtrays, cassette players, radios, answering machines, and a myriad of

other vital gadgets. At nine years old, I believed I understood their worth. But was I correct?

That morning, I was roused from sleep by the sound of Dad returning from his grueling night shift. His rotating schedule was a cruel routine, depriving him of baseball games and school events. As he trudged up the stairs, Mom descended, clutching the battery-powered fan that Dad kept by his bedside.

The summer months of June, July, and August were sweltering, and we all relied on fans to keep cool. At my immature age, I had little understanding of the toll shift work

took on the human mind and body. Reflecting on it now, I shudder at the thought of what my father endured, always striving to remain even-tempered.

After hastily pulling my sheet over the bed in a semblance of tidiness, I grabbed my baseball mitt and ball and headed for the door.

"Wait, Reeno."

I looked back at Mom, blurting out what was on my mind. "Does Dad have to work on my birthday again?"

"What? He has no choice." It was no secret. August was also shutdown month at the plant. Fourteen days with no paycheck. "He doesn't want to miss your birthday," she said.

"Mom . . . Jimbo's waiting."

Jimbo, my friend from across the street, was my age, while his younger brother matched the age of my own sibling. Though three years our junior, the four of us often reenacted Saturday night professional wrestling matchups in the backyard. We had mastered all the signature finishing moves. Jimbo and I took on the roles of the heels, Andre and Hulk, while our little brothers embodied the world champions, Backlund and Superfly. They weren't specifically waiting for me, but the odds were high that they were out there, ready for action.

"He can wait a little longer," she said. "Need you to do something."

"Me? Why me? J.P.'s home."

"Need you to go to Halboth's," she said, naming the drugstore at the top of the road. Too far for my brother to go alone.

"Aww, why?"

"Here," she said. "This is important."

"What for?" I asked, whining a little.

"Batteries."

"Batteries?"

She exhaled a stream of cigarette smoke from those menthols, then carefully placed it onto the lip of her smokeless ashtray, which was not running. "Your father's fan needs batteries. So does the ashtray. And we're just going to need them. You know."

"Sure."

Mom did all the cooking and cleaning, and we didn't have air conditioning. Therefore, she occupied her regular spot on the couch beneath a large window. Here the sun shined, and a gold haze of smoke dispersed to a rotating floor fan. There used to be another house blocking the light, but it burned down when I was five, and Dad borrowed money to buy the empty lot.

"Here's the list," she said, handing me a slip of yellow paper. Then she opened a cigarette case, a sequin bag with a metal clasp, pulling something out from it. She dragged another stream of smoke, and into my hand

she placed an Alexander Hamilton. "Come right home after. Don't tell your father about the money or the batteries. Got it?"

"Okay." My answer was mechanical, and I didn't want to do it. I read her list and a breath caught in my throat.

"What?" she asked.

"It's a lot," I said.

The list included AA batteries, Triple As, Bs, Cs, nine-volt squares, and even the granddaddy of batteries, Ds! Deep inside, something sparked because I knew that toys required Ds. Toys, and with my birthday arriving soon! The sudden feeling that this mission had more at stake excited me.

She picked up her beer and sipped, eyeing me curiously. "And don't buy any baseball cards," she said. "Mean it."

"No, right," I replied. Hurt she would think such a thing! I liked baseball stickers. I collected the books, the stickers, and the stick gum. I had a drawer filled with the stuff.

"Just bring the batteries right back," she said. "You'll need the change for lunch."

Ugh. I didn't want school lunches. Even so, my obsession with foil images of ballfield heroes had to rest. But my birthday was coming! Think . . . with all the batteries on her list, there wouldn't be much change from a ten anyway. "Of course," I said. "Wouldn't ever." And I stuffed the bill into a

pocket and started toward the door.

"Reeno?"

"Huh?" I turned.

She again had the money in her hand.

"How did you . . ."

"Use the pocket that has no hole," she said with a worried frown.

Next, the only thing that lay between me and victory was a short walk. I went for my portable cassette player, and ironically, its batteries were dead. "Aww, man." Without the comfort of ACDC, I went out the door.

Bentwood Avenue. The street I grew up on. At the border of the city of Pittsburgh and Aldwin Township. A small town in America with its own mayor, its own police, its own emergency medical services. We lived on the farthest street yet within the borough limits, which not only meant I had to walk a long distance everywhere I had to go, but also that I had to face city kids. You know . . . city kids.

One side of the street stood high atop flights of stairs while the other was level to the curb, and no matter which way one walks along Bentwood Avenue, it's uphill. I didn't often go to Halboth's because technically, it was in Pittsburgh. The stretch up there had establishments my father frequented. Anjos Pizza, Isaly's, Papa Bear Restaurant, Hartman Realty. However, the

most common type of business was taverns. With terrible reputations too.

At the top of Bentwood Avenue lies Brownsville Road, an old route with a storied past going all the way back to colonial days. Behind it is an alley we kids called Red Dog. I don't know the origin, but my guess is that someone saw a red dog one day and the label stuck. One day I heard news of a fight that ended in a fatal stabbing, no doubt two people who had grown up city kids. Avoided it when I could, though with the battery mission this side road played no small role.

I reeled as soon as I heard a yell, and realized an older kid, a city kid, was coming at me on a bicycle. He slid sideways to a stop, a little too close to my feet. "Where you going?" he demanded. "You can't go this way. This is our turf."

"You're not from Bentwood," I said. Behind him, another older kid on a bike rolled into view. He stared at me without speaking. Then the two glanced at one another. The city kid in front of me chuckled menacingly.

"Do you have any money?" The boy's eyes flashed mischievously.

"No," I told him. "Where would I get money?"

"I don't know," the kid growled. "Allowance or whatever candyass shit you suburbanites get." The kid's lips curled.

"Come on," the other city kid said. "Let's go."

"See you around, dickweed," said the city kid in front of me, and he sped off through Red Dog Alley. At once I pounded the pavement. Passing across the intersection, four streets merged—Bentwood, Maytide, Brownsville Road, and Sankey. Halboth's was straight ahead. There was a lull in traffic, so I darted across the way and pushed inside.

Back then, drugstores weren't what they are today. You could find anything a kid could want. There were shelves and aisles narrow and overstocked, displaying games, puzzles, toys, candy, gum, and fireworks. At the front counter, there was an ice cream freezer and beside it a refrigerator with cans of cola. My eyes went to a row of trading cards and baseball stickers and, as I drew out the money, I also drew out the note with the list of batteries. Sighing, I plucked the first package off its hook.

A young woman approached from behind the counter. "Please don't touch the merchandise if you don't intend to buy it," she said.

"Mom sent me to buy these," I said, showing her the note. She scanned it and opened her mouth, but before she could say anything, I set the Hamilton on the counter, smoothing it clumsily.

"We keep the D batteries back here,"

she said, disappearing for a moment, placing four packs on the counter. "Go on get the rest yourself. Serious number of batteries."

I was proud and she could see it. Batteries assembling, the quest was at its penultimate moment. Triumph was at hand. She played with the register keys, and its cash drawer popped. A second later, she handed back four quarters, a dime, and a penny. "Unless you also want baseball stickers today," she said.

"No," I replied, though it pained me to do so.

She shrugged and I hurried out the door. The light was red, traffic buzzing past, so I waited, cradling the paper bag under my arm. Just then, I heard the last thing I wanted to hear, and it was coming from Red Dog, directly ahead. "Hey kid, come here!" It was them . . . city kids. They were waiting for me, watching too. I looked for a quick solution to my problem, and here it was that I slipped into the arcade—Future Games.

When a kid walked into an arcade in 1980, it was an intoxicating immersion into a dreamscape of magic and electronics. Bells, whistles, gaudy machines, teenagers across the range of social groups—punks, preps, jocks. Everywhere there was big hair and the fragrance of hairspray and smoke. Space Invaders, Lunar Lander, Asteroids, Galaxian, Gun Fight, Super

Bug—every imaginable pinball.

Best of all, considering my circumstances, a harasser couldn't really follow me inside. Even if they tried, there was no way to pick me out of that dense crowd. It was the perfect plan if I could kill time until they grew bored. And there I was, surrounded by the glory that was the arcade. Right in front of me lay my absolute favorite game, Pac-Man.

A palm found the pocket change. "One game, stall a little," I said. "She wouldn't want me beat up either." And I patted the bag of batteries and strode forward. "What could be better than to use the time wisely?" I asked aloud.

Sure, I would be spending a quarter, but it meant I got to go home in one piece. Like my father and his rotating shifts, I was making the best out of a tricky situation. As I approached that magnificent machine, multiple players were waiting for a turn. Six quarters lined the edge of the screen, this the universal placement declaring a spot in queue.

A teenager with spiked red hair and leather gloves ran the helm, but he wasn't any good at the game so soon he stepped back in defeat. Next up was a girl about my age. She stepped in and glared at me. I backed up a step.

"Six plays, can't you count?" she said.

"No, I saw."

“Saw what?” she scowled.
 “Six,” I said, innocently.
 “Going to be a while,” she said.
 “Don’t you have something to do other than breathe down my neck?”
 “Sorry,” I said. “Mind if I watch?”
 Her eyes narrowed, and a smile slowly spread over her lips. Glossy lips . . .
 “Don’t talk, don’t move,” she said.
 I offered a quarter. She glanced at it, brows crushing slightly.
 “After you,” I said.
 “Sure, squirt,” she laughed.
 Squirt? How dare she? If she noticed my indignation, it didn’t show. However long her gameplay, I hardly noticed time passing. I was absorbed in how she smelled—like strawberries. I found my eyes caressing the soft crease where her shirt wrapped her arm, longing to know what was behind the fabric.
 Suddenly, she released the joystick and retrieved three unused quarters. “No sense in wasting,” she said smugly, then backed away to reveal she made the high score. “Go on, squirt. You’re up.”
 In I went, pleasantly surprised to find the joystick hot and slightly damp in hand. I wanted to tell her she was a talented player, and I wanted to tell her how pretty I thought she was. What I said went more like this: “Watch and learn.”

She grinned, winked, then walked away.
 Head floating, I turned to Pac-Man.
 Had a decent play but nowhere near her level, and while I moved through the maze, the punker set a quarter on the edge. A ghost squashed my yellow semicircle, and I looked over my shoulder at a dozen unimpressed faces. “Quit hogging,” the returning punker said to me. “They want to see me take the high score back.”
 “Let him have a turn, Rick. He isn’t done.”
 Strawberry came back! I quickly produced another quarter and fed the slot. Unfortunately, the coin went down the drain to the shortest game session ever. The punk chuckled, and Strawberry said, “Better luck next time, squirt.”
 “Reeno,” I muttered, and her eyes widened for a moment while she pinched my rump!
 I was mortified. Frozen in place as she melted into the arcade-goers, laughing raucously. I made for the door with burning cheeks. From there I checked for bullies. Red Dog was clear, and I almost bolted before realizing I’d forgotten the most important reason I was there. “Aw shoot, the batteries!”
 I’d hidden the bag next to Pac-Man, between machines. The punk was still at the controls, so I crept in without catching his attention. At

least until I cursed, because the bag wasn’t there.

I searched over those many faces convinced everyone was guilty, though nobody even acknowledged me. I almost said something to them but instead drove towards the front counter. “Excuse me,” I asked a man sitting behind the counter where they kept Skee Ball prizes.

He shook his head and shrugged.

I was lost. I was dead! Mom was going to kill me. I ambled blankly for a while, all of them were laughing at me. Especially the punk. I sank to the floor in the corner, covering my head because I felt tears swelling. I hoped Strawberry would rescue me, but I never saw her again.

After I finally got home, Mom was sitting in her spot, waiting for delivery of the goods. She knew before I said a word, reading my face no doubt.

“I’m sorry!” I cried out, bawling now.

Her face lost all color, and her eyes flickered angrily. “Honest to God,” she growled, “I ask you to do one simple task.” And a minute later, I was on my way to my room, chased by the sting of a plastic spoon. Sobbing, I closed my bedroom door.



Forty years later, the gravity of foolishness and failure continues to punish me. Now, in my fifties, I’m lucky

enough that Mom is still with me. Texted her just now, told her I was drafting stories from my childhood and sending them into magazines for consideration. Mentioned the day I lost ten dollars in batteries and sent a laughing emoji.

Even after all this time I’m afraid of that wicked spoon and thought it might suddenly come whacking right through the phone. My brother too; he told me over a beer one day not long ago. Anyway, Mom’s reply to my text didn’t relieve this anxiety—“We had lots of ups and downs,” she wrote, followed by an angry emoji. It’s where the conversation ended. That summer of 1980 ever ruined.

This led to some introspection about the *real* cost of losing the batteries that summer I ruined. It’s not ten dollars, it’s far more intangible, more enduring, more human. On the surface, the cash was substantial, yet the functional value outweighed this. These weren’t luxuries; they powered items central to daily life in our struggling household. But that’s just the toll’s tip.

Emotionally, guilt and shame have plagued me since then, and oh how I’ve felt the full weight of parental disappointment. “I’m sorry!” has grown into a lifelong echo. And then there was the fear of discipline, her plastic spoon, which still haunts me decades later so that I will own nothing reminiscent of it in my own kitchen. I’ve even thrown away gifts because of this.

So, even forty years on our unresolved tension lingers, and a simple emoji from Mom reopened that old wound. Our relationship, though intact, remains shaded by unspoken hurt. All in all, I'd say it's the fracture in connection that's worst. That summer becomes *ever ruined*.

Not just a memory of a lost errand, but a metaphor for a time when fragility within our family—emotional, financial, even physical—was painfully exposed. And the child in me can't forget the simple grace that could've saved me. If only Strawberry had rescued me again, but I learned, instead, that sometimes people don't come back, and some mistakes aren't soothed with rescue.

Today, the event is no longer about batteries. It's a symbol of perceived failure and of moments none of us can take back. Especially me. Although, as odd as it sounds now, maybe the summer I ruined is a twisted badge of how deeply we care. Since even trying to laugh about it with a joking emoji doesn't erase its impact.

Mom's response shows that wounds from scarcity and exhaustion don't always fade with time. So the real cost? It's a lifetime of trying to make peace with a small mistake that carried the disproportionate burden of a family's hardship, a father's fatigue, and a mother's last nerve. ✍



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WHAT'S IN A COAT

I am listening to the podcast *It's the Pictures that Got Small* when the host recounts how the style of the '40s adorned the films of the '70s, and I am reminded of the winter coat of my dreams.

For my thirteenth birthday
my mom took me inside Lerner's Fine Apparel
where we had only ever window-shopped,
and on the mannequin in the middle of the store
was a white, double-breasted wool coat with large
square shoulder pads, satin lining, pearl buttons,
and a tailored waist to show off the hourglass silhouette
I had not yet developed—
a coat fit for Joan Crawford
or any other of the majestic women of the big screen
I liked to watch in black and white
in the middle of the night after sneaking downstairs
to catch *The Great Entertainment* with Frank Avruch.

My mom put the coat on layaway and estimated
it would take six weeks of the tips she earned
at the Chinese restaurant to pay it off
while I prayed to God it would still be cold by then.

But before she could make another payment,
my dad came home after a day at the bar
and a stop at Spags General Merchandise—
that fire-trap warehouse with no carts or bags, only boxes
and free tomato seeds with each purchase—



image credits

and handed me a coat with a tag that read \$10.00
in black marker hanging from its sleeve, saying
“Your mother told me you need one of these.
Go try it on.” My mom raised her hand to her mouth
before looking down at the floor
as I walked by and tried not to cry
on my way to the bathroom mirror to view myself
in the dark brown, fake fur coat
with its tiger-striped hem, pleather wide belt
and three wood button and rope toggle fasteners.

As the podcast's host continues his review of *Eyes of Laura Mars*,
he mentions Faye Dunaway's later performance
as Joan Crawford in *Mommie Dearest*.

At this, I walk to my closet
pull out one of five vintage '40s coats
and try it on in front of the bathroom mirror.
This one is olive green boiled wool
with real mink running round the collar
and down the center to the hem.
It has broad, padded shoulders and three-quarter sleeves
to allow it to be worn with long satin gloves.

I pull the coat closed over my chest
fasten the hidden hooks
then smooth my bare hands down the fur
and contemplate the power of a coat
to cover who we really are.

ELISABETH HARRAHY



VERISIMILITUDE

Kaila Schwartz

NORMAN WAS NOT A TYPICAL BOY. HE DIDN'T SPEND COUNTLESS hours forging paths through the woods, hunting for treasure, or wading through the muck in search of mud puppies. Norman spent all of his time in his room trying to shut out the imperfections of his life. His parents, he was certain, did not love each other. He wondered if they were forced to marry and hoped it wasn't his fault. Though he feared it was.

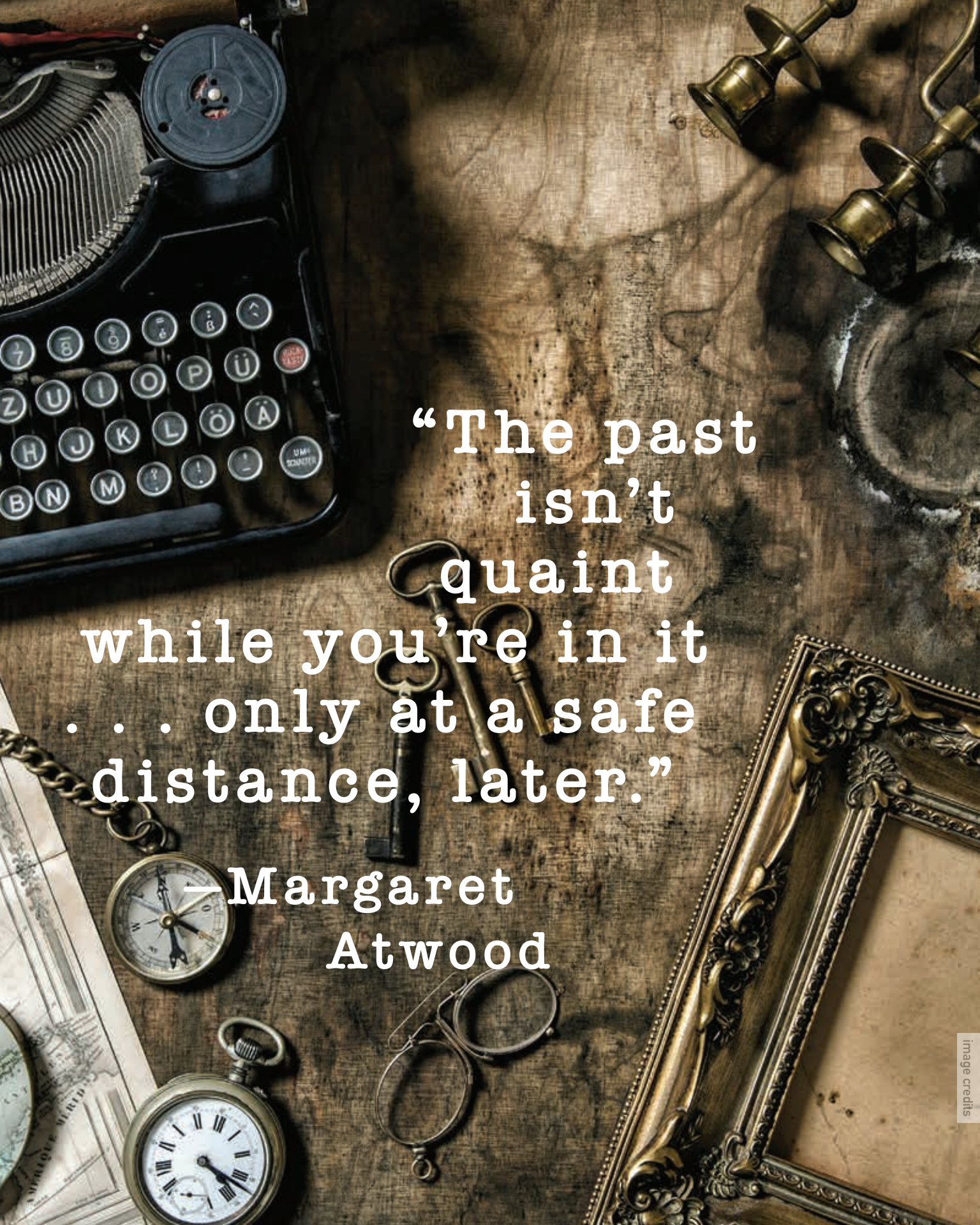
Norman squeezed his eyes shut to erase the horrors manifesting before him every time the shouting began. Fists opening onto skin, clawing nails, knees and feet and arms and hair all clambering to fight back. When the images wouldn't go, he'd force himself to remember what it used to be like.

Years before, when he was still learning to talk, the family would gather for regular dinners. His grandmother would come to the table with a big roast and set it down in front of his grandfather to carve. They were always partners that way. She would cook and he would serve. Then they would both clean up. Every meal at that house was heavenly. Norman couldn't remember the taste of the food, but he did recall being surrounded by smiles and laughter.

How was he to know that the smiles from his parents had been forced; that they silently seethed beneath the veneer they presented—all for the sake of family. ❧



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“The past
isn’t
quaint
while you’re in it
... only at a safe
distance, later.”

—Margaret
Atwood

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