

POETRY

A Handwork of Legacy

My Grandmother's dresser scarf made from a potato sack
with threads removed is handwork of a delicate design:
the material, thick, has some undiscernable letters in black.
My Grandmother's dresser scarf made from a potato sack
was folded carefully when I moved and the last to pack
its invisible hems still holding, a heritage life line.
My Grandmother's dresser scarf made from a potato sack
with threads removed is handwork of a delicate design.

Carol Smallwood

DROPPED STITCHES

After Emily Dickinson

She rose to His Requirement---dropped
her stitches on the floor----
Left there gathering dust and dither
Never stitched again to form a core

While he rode off to conquer status
sheen and pistols by the score
she crept back to mother's pantry
wrote her heart behind the door.

Donna L. Emerson

Silhouettes

Five Holstein heifers clomp to the top
of the far hill. They climb in a straight
line. Where spring grass meets sky.

Then down the other side, one follows
another, carefully lifting their ankles,
so not to heave forward.

The sky against the hill, they make their
way, delicate silhouettes, like rivers that
demarcate the edges of states,

like Grandmother Florence and her sisters,
Bertha at the end of the line, walking
into church. Heavy bodies, thin ankles, damp

from the walk downtown, solid shapes against
stained glass windows. They mark where
everything important meets. Then we sing...

Donna L. Emerson

Of Good Fences

In the renewing season when flowers suffice,
as I dig and stumble into reenchantment
at the tiny red-green dahlia prong
pushing its life out through the earth,
I must stop my groundwork
working up my spirit,
for our old fence has decayed,
and mother earth's gravity arms
are beckoning it back
as she bears away the boundary, that weight
upon our knitted together, overlapping gardens.

What's ours what's the new neighbors'
refuse in spring's lengthening and healing light.
Responsibly, we order a new fence,
neighborly, we knock on their door.
But where the fence falls, neighbors ignite—
"That fence has been way, way off
the property line!" "How can that be?
We put it up. It's been years, maybe 33!
This cherry, this holly, this crepe myrtle
we nurtured from twigs. They can't be moved!"
"I want what is mine!"
"This underground sprinkler head
has been right here for years!"
"I want what is mine!"

We dig out old documents, surveys, and deeds.
They whip out new documents, surveys, and deeds.
We hold our bizarre diagrams up to the light,
the figures and angles as arcane as cosmic dark matter
and the deep recesses human property lines make in the mind.
"I'm getting a lawyer!" "I'll get a surveyor!"
Acid stomachs and 2 all-day surveyors later,
3 stakes for \$800 get planted with hammers,
and a nail is shot through the old pine tree,
to reify with authority that imaginary line between
whatever yours and ours mean
for making a good neighbors' good fence
that will fall through the seasons of our flesh
toward the interweaving grass above and beneath.

So we have kept our cherry, our holly, our crepe,
but they've stacked up like dead soldiers in the road,
the sawed down arbor vitae faithfuls
we'd fed and shaped and sat with for decades.
The cypress has been yanked up by its gold threads,
and they've left a row of grey cinder blocks
to replace the yanked up lavender and pink impatiens
I've planted for peace on our common ground.

Though we don't know the words yet,
our lives get tuned by the wind's great song
of coming blizzards and bedazzling beauty,
and the riled dust has settled down now
from the new fence, with holes in the basketweave
interthreading our views and vibrancies,
the raucous joy of their baseball game with their boys
passing through, as I read the Dalai Lama's
Daily Advice from the Heart,
with the rising passionflower spirits' fragrant amplitude.

Gayl Teller

Grill Op

After a year of waitressing,
they gave me the cook's job
at Waffle House, you know,
Scattered, Smothered, Covered—
All that. And I loved the loneliness
of it. The cleanliness of bone white
plates stacked above me, across
stainless steel shelves and the dark
maw of the grill before me, the heat
and the damp. I saw in its orderliness
the silhouette of ossuaries.

I have no clue why, except I loved
working with my back turned, dependent
upon sounds of enterings, exitings, orders shouted
at my left ear, then my right. And the clinking
and clicking of plates, spoons, mugs, fountain pens,
fake nails on the giant register's plastic keys.
I reveled in its cleanliness: the preparation, scraping,
serving, and my line—it was so *simple*.
When my voice echoed into the cave of the grill
before deflecting outward the *Order Up—*

And everyone there, they said it so often, that it
*suit*ed me; it matched my personality (which,
a customer once said, was *as sterile and*
neatly packaged as fake sugar.) He reminded me
of Johnny Appleseed in his Carhart coveralls and
wood cane, but he had a wallet leashed to his pocket
by a thin metal chain that clinked against the plastic booth
each time he sat down. I think sometimes, decades later,
I would still know his voice, even with my back turned.

Alana Merritt Mahaffey

***On the neighbor
killed by a .38***

In the week before she murders him
we try to fix their running toilet using
my husband's tools. It's December.

We kneel with directions and new parts.
Unsure how to begin, we splay the foreign
tools across the floor. When done, water

still spits. Each leak is worse than
before and so she borrows a book and
my husband's tools, waves to me

from the bathroom floor. That Friday
he brings home a fifth and they drink
together to a new house, a toilet that
springs like dark fountains in foothills.
They unwrap a box of tinsel.

In an hour he is crawling backward past
the empty tree, pushing wet feet and
palms into broken ornaments, retreating.

She cowers in our kitchen, begging for
us to save him, *save him*, and so I slip
into her home, gliding on polished floors

to the spot where he kneels over a white
cup of skull, embracing the still-running toilet
and bleeding all in a bowl that is reflecting her face.

Alana Merritt Mahaffey

History

More tunnel than room, in her childhood mind the cellar was a giant snake, a long black constrictor prone to swallowing and squeezing unruly children to mush. She remembered it by its odors. Near the door it was mossy and damp, sweet almost: a richness turning in the draft. But further in the air thinned and soured and bit at the nostrils, the mouth seam, the lungs. Prying its way in. She had known to be careful from the first step down. And the floor was uneven, cracked and buckled like concrete suddenly pushed up by water. And in some places it was just pounded dirt or mud. She had waited for her eyes to adjust, marrying darkness as the pressure behind them subsided. Still she could see nothing but darkness. Her eyes swathed in absence even as the rest of her body was alit with sensation.

She didn't know what about the guide had reminded her of the cellar. It was something about the way he stood behind them at every destination, his massive frame: square, dark and heavy like a fortress door.

He had taken a special liking to, a special interest in her "sister," as he had called her, what they let him think as it was easier than explaining the relationship between them: "It's complicated," in whatever language one might have on hand.

She had no Arabic, had forgotten most of her French and even in English it was, well, queer. She was not her sister. She was not a traveling companion, really. She was not a colleague. Not a friend. How they had been thrown together. She didn't even know if she liked the woman but they had mutual friends, similar backgrounds and interests and it had seemed convenient. It was just as well. They did resemble one another.



"That's one thing I won't miss."

"I know: they drive like maniacs. Crazy traffic circles. That's why I spend most every ride with my eyes closed."

"Not the traffic, the soldiers. In camouflage, stationed at every street corner with those steely eyes and assault rifles in hand. Even the women."

"Kind of sexy. Always ready for action...."

"Most of them are just kids really."

"Correction: youth: 18-35. What do you suppose they'd do if they knew you had photos of them?"

"Even with the shots foregrounding those bootleg Santas hawking massage cream and anti-bacterial lotion from a tricked out Range Rover trolley, I'm not sure they'd listen to my explanation....

"Commercial culture at its best. And right in front of the national museum."

"...They'd probably confiscate my camera. And with my luck—or my "passport"—they'd detain me again. Who knows when I'd get to go home.

"Oh, come on. I doubt they'd hold you indefinitely. Though I would have to get to Ali and Hussam asap and haul ass to the Embassy. And we'd have to mobilize forces, rally our contacts at the university.

"You've really thought this out, huh. You planning to turn me in? Manufacture a "happening" for a little press?" Don't act like you haven't done it before."

"Different circumstances. Sounds like we're a little paranoid, though, don't you think? I thought you said your whole family was military, anyway. And didn't you live on base growing up?"

"No. My dad was in the Navy before I was born but I never lived on base and only one of my brothers joined the military."

"Are you sure? I could swear you said your whole family—"

"I think I ought to know how and where I grew up.... Look, I'm just ready to get back to the States or at least to Europe. Somewhere where they have city maps, postal addresses, cardinal numbers I can read, and metered cabs. I'm tired of haggling with hand signals and dirty looks. And the soldiers."

"You've been complaining the whole time we've been here."

"I've been here six weeks. You've been here two."

"Even more reason. You should be better acclimated by now."



The mothers disappear into the fathers' names
And the throats of dreams are splayed in the road.



"The newscaster said the rebels "combed the air with their machetes." The image stuck in her mind. She kept thinking of that Brooks poem about the two sisters: the one who hid from life and the other who went through it with a fine-toothed comb. Then of the children attacked in the square, he said "wounds covered them like sores." She thought first of lepers and neuropathy. And then

she thought *sores are wounds of a sort*. The injured flesh, raw and painful, broken. And just as she thought that, she saw his face tighten and contort as if he just then actually imagined the obscenities he was reporting, saw them, sensed them concretely and he became a different man, some earlier version of himself: bloody forearms half inside the heifer as his father calmed her, boyish hands reaching in to turn the calf.



Ecstatic craft of the living body
A skeleton hides in the flesh they rummage
Newly shrouded in particulars
Its 200 bones intuit an essential
Humanness in those who kill
For killing
Exuberant and dutiful
Righteous



Memory, an intimate thought, worn under the outer garments, typically next to the skin. In one instance a singular pairing, beige and fouled at the crotch. A weapon. Hidden and of an uncertain instability, dry form. A white crystalline powder with a distinctive acrid odor. Susceptible to heat, friction, and shock. An instability greatly altered by impurities. Not easily soluble in water. More stable and less sensitive when wet.



Brooklyn. Spring or early summer. There had been a crime, committed perhaps by a serialist. A rape, near the condominium grounds. Maybe out in the open. The police sent plainclothes to investigate. They strolled into the laundry room, chewing gum and stroking their badges. Her wash was done. She was folding clothes at the aluminum table facing the door. She preferred washing here because it was always clean, almost sterile. And she rarely encountered anyone even though the condo boasted over thirty units. At first she had been afraid, sneaking her laundry in off the street but no one watching seemed to mind. They

said they had a few questions. It wouldn't take long. One was short, bulky & black, all eyes. The other was lean, pale, over six feet, flipping through the facts. What had she seen? Where had she been today? Did she work? Why was she doing laundry in the middle of the afternoon? They liked her underwear, they said, and fingered the waistbands as they went out.



"Good morning, Beirut, or should I say good afternoon."

"Hey."

"How are you? How'd you sleep?"

"I'm fine. I slept well, I think. How about you? How are you?"

"What can I say: it's Christmas in the Middle East."



Umar (Arabic: عمر) is an Arabic name, most commonly transliterated as "Omar." It is also sometimes transliterated as "Omer," "Omero" and "Omur." The word is derived from the tri-consonant Arabic word for "life" and could be understood to mean "living." The name itself means disciple, firstborn, or famous.

The most well known historical figure to be named Umar was Umar ibn al-Khattab, the second Caliph of Islam, whose armies conquered territories from both the Byzantine Empire and Persia. This conquest was responsible for the spread of Islam to North Africa, the greater Middle East, Asia Minor, the Caucasus region, and India.

In recent history a Nigerian citizen, Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab (also known as Umar Abdul Mutallab and Omar Farooq al-Nigeri; and popularly referred to as the "Underwear Bomber") attempted to detonate plastic explosives hidden in his underwear while on board Northwest Airlines Flight 253, en route from Amsterdam to Detroit, Michigan, on December 25, 2009. He was subsequently charged on six criminal counts, including attempted use of a weapon of mass destruction and attempted murder of 289 people.[≤]

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عمر فاروق عبد المطلب (مواليد 22 ديسمبر 1984 في مدينة لاجوس، نيجيريا) هو نيجيري مسلم حاول تفجير طائرته نورث آير لاين 253 المتجهة من أمستردام (هولندا) إلى ديترويت، ميشيغان (الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية) في يوم عيد الميلاد 25 ديسمبر 2009، وقد وجهت إليه تهمتين وهما وضع متفجرات علي طائرته مدنية ومحاولة تفجير طائره، وذلك من قبل محكمة شرق ميتشجن في 26 ديسمبر 2009، وقد أضيفت تهم أخرى من قبل هيئة المحلفين وهي محاولة قتل 289 شخص هم مجموع من كان على متن الطائرة، ومحاولة استخدام سلاح دمار شامل. وأولى جلسات محاكمته في 8 يناير 2010.

الشرطه الأمريكيه تبقيه في سجن فيدرالي في ولايه ميتشجن وإذا اعترف بالتهم الموجهة إليه فسوف يواجه عقوبة السجن المؤبد بما لا تقل عن 90 عاما.

The boy's name Umar \u-mar\ (رمع) means "thriving, flourishing, to live long and prosper." Umar has 3 variant forms: Omar, Omer and Umer. To give the name Umar is to bestow a blessing. Expressed in the most basic verbal form, the infinitive, it is eloquent and well spoken, an enduring wish against death.

Names that sound like Umar are Amir, Emir, Amer, Ammar, Amr, Amor, Jamar, Jimar, Jemar, Jomar, Omarr, Omari, Umer and Ymir. A variation of the name for mother (mom) in Korean pronounced Uhm-ma also sounds like Umar and is a term of endearment.

Who will lift this word
'Til it stands as a man to its full height?
Who will lift this word:
Blunted witness made flesh by flesh unmade?



"How soon do you think we can stop. I'm famished."
"Probably not until noon. You could ask Ali but to make all of the sites we'll need to hustle."
" Ugh."
"What are you digging for in there?"
"I thought I had a ginger chew or a butterscotch. Here.... No..., this is a cough drop. Damn."
"Why are you so hungry? Skip breakfast again?"
"I had tea. My stomach was still queasy from last night."

"Though you were warned: beware the street carts no matter how friendly the vendors. Ah, so."

"Who would think fruits and vegetables could be so dangerous."

"Knowing what would befall you, the man thanked you effusively, bewitching you with his sunny face and long fluttering lashes."



It was close to 11 pm. Warm and breezy, the night air loosened with the smell of rain moving eastward and traffic was light. She was tired, mussed. Wadded up and tossed onto the back seat, her scrubs sweat in a flimsy transparent take-out bag. Catching the air the plastic bag rustled even at the stoplights filling the car with the faint odor of iodine and bleach. Its cheaply inked THANK YOU had bled, staining her hands red. She drove imagining she was already home scrubbing it all off, dissolving the memory of work in the lather of almond oil soap.

I pull up, she thought, and the street is quiet, layered in the shadows of branches, leaves, and budding flowers. Ki has the stoop lights burning, watching for me from the front middle window, his face cut into yellow slithers by the slats of mahogany shutters. He meets me at the car to carry my bags, his hazel eyes blackening and shining to match the darkness. He has already finished his homework, run my bath, washed Papa's dinner dishes. The guys are playing Nintendo at Otto's—can he go? His dizzy words tripping over themselves in the rush of adolescence. He knows she will say no. No. She is afraid for him. Tall, lanky, caramel colored boy with pursed lips and auburn hair kinked into defiant locs, the thick fuzz on his face veiling his innocence. The police will not care that he is his mother's son when they break open his head as if cracking the shell of a nut to taste the meat. No, not tonight. Ki had called her at work, anxious—rage, sharp and brimming from his body, barely restrained by his newly straightened teeth. His school let out early in anticipation of the Rodney King verdict. And the police were also out, little mobs of them with helmets walking their beats, gripping their nightsticks and guns, ready to force feed the vomit of rage back into the throats of restless lanky boys.

It was late, close to 11pm. Home was only blocks away. The newscaster's voice crackled through the car radio static. Rioting in Harlem. But Brooklyn was quiet. In the rearview mirror, she could see a grayish car, following too close behind. The glare from its brights cut her vision. She slowed down. The two black men in the car waved their arms, gesturing. A white man was dragged from his truck and beaten in Los Angeles. Everything there was on fire. Red flashing lights spun reflections in her mirrors. The car lurched forward and rode her tail, hard.

She pulled over to let it pass. The two black men stopped beside her car, jumped out, screaming, yelling, flashing badges in the high beams and red lights spinning. Cussing and yelling obscenities. They were detectives. I haven't done anything wrong, she thought, I'm almost home. The four police officers charged in the beating of Rodney King were found "not guilty" and the National Guard had flooded Los Angeles to calm public unrest. She shut off the engine. The radio went dead. The engine fan whirled. The detectives banged on her driver's side window, screaming about the blinking brights, the lights flashing—Don't you know what that means, lady! It means pull over, goddammit! She pushed the loose strands of hair from her face, searched with clumsy fingers through her purse—But officers, I haven't done anything wrong, her lips trembled, her throat constricting, the syllables were dry concrete blocks. She slipped her license over the top of the window, through the narrow crack. A squad car screeched to a halt, then another. The blue uniformed police jumped out, gripping their sticks and guns, slapping hands. They peered into her car. The two black detectives danced around, their trench coats flapping, their brown faces glowing purple in the light. Screams. She fumbled for her registration papers. Through the crack. She held back tears. More squad cars. The traffic piled up behind her. Passersby stopped on corners. People watched from windows stone-faced. What did I do, officers, she asked through the crack. They did not answer, were busy slapping backs, filling the night with their big voices. She counted 14 policemen, a blur of blue and silver loitering around her car, glaring through the glass.

It was after 11pm. 11:30. 11:45. Her son peeled the narrow street for their small blue sedan. Her bath water turned cold. She was shaking. The detectives eased into the grayish car and sped away. Ran the red light and were gone. A paddy wagon blocked the street. The red police lights spun. They told her to get out of the car with her hands up over her head. They searched the trunk and the back seat, found her soiled work clothes, laughed to each other, emptied her purse into the street. Everything shattered. Her favorite lipstick, a Christmas present from Ki, rolled under the car.



And the blood rolls back into the wrists. That's where the color goes. Up through the elbows and bends of flesh, all the extremities ashen, a rush up to the thickening heart bunched and purple like a dense cluster of grapes. Up to the tight clenching heart.



At a large university gallery, the first tour of the morning stopped alongside an enormous photorealistic painting of a hippopotamus with a human face. Aloud, she marveled at its resemblance to a woman she imagined she knew. "Uncanny," she said to no one in particular but sensing she held the group's attention she frowned and stepped closer to the canvas. Another beat to clinch the deal. Now: "The features are a bit exaggerated but this could be a portrait of a researcher who works on my floor, just down the hall. Quite perfectly, her name is Prudence. Or is it Penelope? Regardless, she has the same oblong tuberlike head and floating eyes that drift towards her clipped ears and down her sweat darkened neck to sloped shoulders." She traced the outline of the hippo's massive bulk in the air with the flattened tips of her fingers, her clinical gaze and touch, deepening in intensity as if she was an attending physician inspecting an engorged torso during Grand Rounds. "When she waits at the elevator, her thick middle rises between her breasts and rises higher when she sighs and wheezes, breathing, rasping. A human river horse. Hmph." Another beat. "Uncanny and truly unfortunate." She turned on one heel, sighed, and smiled, cueing the group to move on.

The young attendant changed her position and stood by the painting. She watched the group depart and isolated the woman's retreating back as the rays of winter light went blunt against her form. She took it all in: from the tiny nubby head to the sludge thick nylon ankles and narrow heels. She traced the silhouette in her mind.



Bitterness swells inside, a tank in the belly.
The ego flares: an enlarged nostril.



She couldn't leave because of the boy, her son. There was a law forbidding it. As if they knew she wouldn't come back. She needed her husband's permission. She had not seen him in four days. She had no milk, no money.

She took a chance and climbed into the *service* and waved him up the hill toward the Armenian cemetery. The boy was listless. His arms dangled from her lap. She knew a maid at the Sadi building, Aini. Yes, Aini. She was from her village. But would she tell her husband? The driver darted toward the curb to pick up more passengers fatigued by the steep hill. Two American girls with knapsacks

and sports sandals. Barefaced and smiling until they saw her and the boy peering back at them from front seat.



Fear is like death, they work alongside one another, eat off each other's earnings, mourn each other's losses. She saw them both, beating the air, gyrating in wild colors around them.



He asked if she would come work for him. Take care of things around the house, run things. While he was away there would be no staff, there'd be no need. No, she could manage alone: there'd be no one to cook for, no guests, just light maintenance. Opening mail. Dusting. Running the vacuum. As if she had gotten a JD, PhD, to be a glorified maid. Only in America, she used to think. She could hear Genet, see the players' mocking fever: *What is a black? What is its color?* Her kitchen kinked into a fist. *Litany of the livid*. The project they call America has no borders. Just look around.



Cities of discard.
Onliness shatters outward, magnets back in.
That tension. Incidents staring down other incidents.
The knowing subject dead.
The object (incidence) buried far off (alive and speaking to its Kind
the language of its Kind, speaking a gesture toward unknowing) becomes
unknown, permeable.

A shrinking stomach. Mucous. A flesh-colored bruise.
The body pushing out from the interior through the skin.

An inscription unstitched by scars:
When you find me in the darkness, you will find only darkness...
I am the gate you contain.



That night a friend called, a cop, saying she needed help. "I just had a fight with my ex-lover," she said. She seemed calm. But what happened? Was she all right? The story came out in starts, as if beginning again in fits of memory. What first seemed to be a spat, a minor scuffle was more. Had she punched her, hit her in the face? Was she bruised or broken? "No, not my face. My body is sore and purple," she said. The gun surprised everyone. "Go home," was the urging, but she could not leave: she didn't know where she was. They were in a drafty house. Dark paneled wood. Two floors, a lot of land and trees. They had driven. Maybe to another state. "I couldn't keep my eyes open," she said, "like I was drugged." For about an hour the ex had been locked in the bathroom with the car keys and the .25 automatic she had pulled. "She's pretty quiet in there. Still, I don't have my gun," she whispered. They had struggled for the .25, wrestled in the doorway, at the foot of the bed. Of course it was loaded. They were lucky nobody had gotten killed. It was 9 o'clock there. And it was snowing. The first flurries for the New Year. "Don't do this again, baby," the words formed then fell down into the garden through the fire escape grid. The lamb's ears looked more plush, softer in the dark.

Duriel E. Harris