



storied objects

the 2010-2011 anthology

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Lastly, we would like to thank the strong and amazing women who inspired these poems: we would not be who we are without you.

Preface

Clare Goulet

*How can we know what we will carry with us,
what will endure?
Ramona Lumpkin*

Last spring I entered for the first time a shabby white house at the edge of campus; just inside was a tin-roofed lounge with the ghost of a fireplace and windows that still spilled light—in this case, onto a wooden table left by Alexa McDonough; her post-card-sized note spoke to the political women’s work, the conversations, held there. The room felt derelict but lit with possibility, and I kept returning to sit at that round table, that storied object. What if there were a place for women from this campus to gather in an artful, meaningful way—a place to weave speaking and listening, craft and truth, to write with intent in a more intimate setting than, say, a classroom? Some place for deeper speech and silence.

As the Institute for Women, Gender, & Social Justice found its feet over the past year, so too did the Voices Project: a baker’s dozen of women—Mount staff, students, alumni, faculty, and administration—who met monthly to tell their stories in poems and prose, to chat with well-established writers from the community, to think cut cook sew perform revise create and generally engage in what poet Don McKay calls “the work, work, work of art.”

What you hold in your hands is the result of one focus our collective explored this year: an object that has some connection to a significant woman or women in their life. Their response not only fills this chapbook but is this handmade woven object itself, while the corresponding pieces are on permanent display in a room and for an Institute that these writers helped bring back to life.

Winter Door

Rosemary Drisdelle

The French door salvaged from my mother's house—saved in panic before the excavator came—evokes fall and winter. Fall in the wood, the brown and highlight of fallen oak leaves decaying on the forest floor. The smell of wood, and rot, and age inhaled.

Exhaled.

Winter in the panes, in the fern patterns, in the glint of reflected light that makes the glass three-dimensional like a frozen pool with ice so clear you can see down through to the beginning.

On one side the glass is rough. I feel the pattern with fingertips, trace hard edges of those frost ferns. I long to scrape, dig with fingernails, get into the cold, feel the bite of ice shards under nails. Like brush strokes left by Jack Frost on childhood windows, the leafy patterns stir my imagination, make me believe there is something revealing, something beautiful. But fall has rotted into winter, and what was possible in childhood is unreachable now. This door won't let me through; I can't see the pool's depths.

In that unreal place, she resides. Every bubble, every swirl of water frozen in the midst of turning. A life suspended. A key lost. The door unlocked yet impenetrable as winter ice. The leaves are off the tree; ice crystals under fingernails melt. She doesn't know; she doesn't know—the door is off the hinges.

No.2 Folding Autographic Brownie Camera

Kathy Kaulbach

Exposure 1: Pauline, elbows tucked tightly to the sides of a freshly pressed house dress; two grey braids wound, wound, round, round her head; long slender fingers with garden dirt beneath the nails, evidence of an interrupted moment among the phlox; head down, she evaluates the viewfinder.

Exposure 2: generation by generation, shoulder to shoulder; black corners secure the documented moment in time; inscription in Pauline's hand: *Thanksgiving, 1962.*

2 Exposure 3: Pauline on her knees in the soft dug soil, using her garden voice to speak to the foxglove, the phlox, the funereal white glads; avoiding the family of grackles in the front room of the house.

Exposure 4: cousins stand among the stocks of perennials holding airplanes self-crafted from workshop scraps; stalled momentarily for Pauline's click before continuing round, round, up and down.

Exposure 5: generations of stories emerge from between the coffee and the fresh blueberry cake; Pauline stands, floured apron, breathing between those conversations; her stories lie elsewhere, in another voice, click, click.

Exposure 6: Pauline in front of the camera; reluctant, shy, head down, slightly angled; elder sister's hands on her shoulders,

one on each, a forced appearance; there is only this single exposure.

Exposure 7: my child-like presence in a wheelbarrow with cousins running, pushing; we are moving too fast for the No.2 Folding Autographic Brownie; Pauline stands on the verandah, behind us, in the shadows but all around, all around.

Exposure 8: time after time, the front room of the house fills with those familiar grackles; noise saturates the room but still leaves space for silence; Pauline sits, knees together, hands on lap, her words have e.va..por...at....ed.....

Exposure 9: over-exposed.

Exposure 10: the dark rooms of the house, empty; silence fills the space completely; the frost has taken the phlox; the birds have all gone south, Pauline no longer breathes, in and out, in and out, out, gone.

Exposure 11: black bellows, tinted grey from gathered dust, sits on the shelf above the buffet; my fingertips explore the levers; levers for exposure and lens opening; head down I evaluate the viewfinder; put pressure on the shutter; a surprising clear, clean click; Pauline's voice at 1/25 of a second.

Exposure 12: I return to Exposure 1.

Forgotten Reliquary

Lesley Carson

My mother's only sister gave me a stylish tea-light holder years before she decided I was blasphemous. I thought the multi—in dull purples, oranges, and pinks—coloured round, fragile dish of a candle holder was unique until I saw one the same for sale on the Internet. After owning it for several years, with a serving of necessity and a measure of disdain, the glass tea light holder transformed into an ashtray.

4 The necessity came first. I left with few possessions from an overstuffed apartment I shared with an abusive alcoholic I loved at one time. My guitar, my baseball glove, my bear, some clothes, and my books and journals came with me. I left the Tolkiens he treasured even if he didn't read them. Didn't take them out of spite. Don't even like Tolkien. Ashtrays were one of the items he hoarded, and he hoarded butts in those ashtrays. I didn't want any of them. I didn't want anything he liked. His favourite ashtray was eight inches in diameter. Always full. Looked like the Starship Enterprise on cancer.

I moved into a sparse, new, efficiently built, small cabin that came with a tin can on the porch. But I had a dainty and quaint tea-light holder that could make smoking beautiful again. I could share my smokes with a sparkly circular glass receptacle that let the light of the sun, hitting my miniature porch on my miniature house, glint through its different coloured squares—instead of puffing away in a dirty room getting ashes on the bed

sheets. I changed its occupation from candle-holder to ashtray because I didn't light as many candles after I got the power turned on in my new place. I turned it into an ashtray because the aunt who gave me the gift wasn't talking to me.

The holder became more useful, but less pretty. Of course, it was still very catching and dashing for an ashtray. Until I let it fill up. Winter hit and water expanded and contracted its insides until it cracked at the base and drew my blood when I finally got around to dumping its contents. The bitter receptacle! Way station! Harboured! How I snicker that it has become uglier and that my aunt would not approve of it now being used for an ashtray. She picked one of the most difficult stages of my life to stop talking to me. She became ashamed of my comments against God on Facebook, but that is not what embarrasses me the most.

I am embarrassed because I smoke. Sometimes it's a nice kind of person to be . . . when collecting with other shunned ones on porches, having the best conversations and wondering where the butts are going to go. We're as polite as we can be. We ask before we butt out in a plant (or we hide the evidence under a rock, or in our pockets if we don't mind the smell) unless an ashtray gives us freedom. Few ashtrays are as pretty as my gift. In a sea of PartyLite candleholders, this containing holder is in competition. But in today's race of ashtrays, butt-stops, sidewalks, this reliquary is a pageant winner. No longer are ashtrays a marketable commodity; children don't make them out of clay as gifts for their parents anymore.

Most times, being a smoker is being a pariah. We cringe from perceived and real dirty looks. Sometimes—a lot of times—we're the minority in a room, the only ones more focused on break time than the moment. The more healthy must think we beg them to remind us, as if we're ignorant, of how nasty our habit is. The cigarette—that friend who will never lend us money.

Oh dear Auntie! I hope you will forgive me—especially if I can get away from the nicotine and quit using your candle holder for an ashtray. Maybe then we can give up on guilt and the silence can break.

Grammy Sibley's Rocker

Corinne Gilroy

It's a skeleton of a chair. Brittle, raw, and porous. So much DNA in and of these lathed and planed cellulose bones. Long, dark, polished, palmed—gnawed at every end by the anxious little beasts the women in my family are prone to collecting—coddling. Hosting, even. Decades of high-strung, downy little dogs gnashed the backs of these rockers raw. Their dainty white needle-teeth made quick work of the finish—rubbed-on mahogany bruises turned to two pale saliva-and-sawdust stumps covered in mangled, jagged blond pox.

The chair never gained immunity, either—no reprieve through time, distemper, or close encounters with speeding cars. The enzymes and proteins in the dogs' secretions—their territorial piss-spots, the debris of their maulings—have leeches into the wood and given it a sour, complicated ground-level bouquet. And through this olfactory sediment, each and every precious, masticating rat-pup invites his deranged, inbred successor to that same marrow from beyond his shallow shoebox grave.

Far up from the long bones—at the chair's gently bowed clavicle and scapulae—a green, feral-looking bird spent a decade pacing, beating batshit inverse Braille into the glassy varnish. The parrot spelled out territorial lines in Morse, rattling the hooked black weapon on his face, tracing a national border in faeces dropped

in a chair-shaped outline on the kitchen floor. Snot-white ribbons of uric acid spiralled down the spindles, or, to the bird's primal delight, straight into the electro-teased fur of a squealing, startled dog.

Always a human animal in the middle of the chair—the ribs, the spoon of the pelvis. Liniment-rubbed dishwater palms knead the arms caramel-light and soft, primed for the distracted etching of restless nails. Smaller, stickier hands stucco the woodgrain with bits of thick green mucus. Rocking, tossing the parrot like a log roller, pinching at the dogs like cysts, sedating children, bracing the humming heavy living bones of mothers.

Worry Stone

Crystal Vaughan

I wear this ring on the middle finger of my right hand. On the left it itches, sits heavy, feels out of place like the hand is trying to tell me something, or maybe

the ring.

Curving, bending, it rings with sound: resonant.

"Do you want this ring?" my grandmother asks. She hands it to me, her skin soft, translucent. The bluish-green veins that pop out of her pale white skin remind of rivers, streams, flowing, the passage of time. Like her ring, her hands will be mine one day.

"It's my wedding band from when I was married to your grandfather," she says. "It's just been sitting in my jewellery box all these years. It's yours if you want it. At least I know it will mean something to you." The ring feels cold in my hand:

a sharpness—precious metal no longer precious. Ring: sound. Band: bound. To tie the knot—it tethers. Cooking and cleaning and four children. Cooking and cleaning and four children. He cheated again,

again. A circle has no beginning, no end, like a ring, like a story, around, round,

bound. You can't squeeze tears from metal and so hands clutching the wheel, knuckles white, he threatened to drive them off a cliff with the children in the backseat as she screamed for him to pull over and he yelled, begged her not to leave him. A screeching halt—

it's over. My grandmother—now an old woman. And me.

My hands not so soft, veins not so visible. Not yet. Light reflects off the ring like a mirror as I rub my thumb against it, turn it slowly around my finger like a valve. The metal stops at the knuckle. Glare—a distorted reflection. And

circular. I wear this ring on the middle finger of my right hand, like a bandage—not for my grandmother, but

for me.

Quilt

Courtney Jollymore

a collection of cloth swatches sewn together

Two tones of brown with
pinches of purple
(brown like maple trees
in early spring,
see my quilted purple jacket
bobbing behind and
in between).

Summer bumblebee colours
buzzing
by the wild rose bush

vibrant pink and green.
Yellow hues and burgundy too;
remind me of
fall, the leaves crisp,
the air sharp,
cheeks red while stuffing
crunchy leaf litter
down the back of someone's jacket
—light blue.

Blues, there are those colours too,
and teal, the colour of the truck
used to get firewood
before those long cold
winter nights when
snow falls,
white like her hair,
in the darkness,
black like mine.



- 12 But the texture of the quilt is rough, the patches not soft and smooth across my skin. Rough as the maple trees that caught my purple quilted jacket. Rough like the women in my family and like the woman who made this quilt. Women roughened by the same elements that score the tree bark, and by the daily toil behind and in between the evergreen.

A quilt made to stave off the inevitable insanity of winter when she can't break free of house and home.

She does it because it was always done.

A quilt made long ago with its crisscrossing yellow red seams used on cold winter nights, then stored away in an attic, forgotten and waiting. Still in its fabric folds, a slight musk known only to those who have smelled wood heat, wood smoke, rising through floors on those nights while waiting for spring when the ice recedes.

The blue edging of the quilt is deep and dark like we would
imagine a river,

running off the edge of the earth,

tumbling off the edge,

falling off,

but where we land is

soft. Hidden away, the backing, what no one ever sees, is soft
and warm. Softness hidden, like the women in my family, like
the woman who made this quilt.



Late summer, the quilt is removed from the attic in preparation
for winter, which eventually always arrives; winter, which is dark
and cold, and which sometimes makes it seem as though a new
spring is still far off for those rough and soft women. The quilt
will serve to blanket me, protect me, shield me from the world
when they no longer can, while we all wait for spring. These bits
and bobs of brightly coloured cloth, each piece a piece of them,
each piece a piece of me, bound together by crisscrossing red
yellow thread.

My Ash Basket

Anna Nibby-Woods

I never saw my grandmother's bare legs or feet until her eightieth birthday. I was up early that morning and had just about finished getting everything and everyone ready to leave for my grandmother's, around noon, when the phone rang.

"Hello!" I screamed into the receiver because the ringer blasted me out of concentration.

"Hi, Tu's?" my mother said. "Can you come right away?" It wasn't really a question but more of a directive and I could tell that the frustration I heard in her voice was tempered by her good manners.

"Yeah, sure Mom—what's wrong?" I heard a long intake of air and then a longer silence that made me hold my breath until finally we exhaled together.

"Well, it's your grandmother—she won't let me help her get ready for the party and she refuses to do it herself. . . . She won't even wash her face."

"Okay, Mom. I'll leave right now and the kids can follow later."

The reserve is cut in half by a red ribbon of dirt road and bisected again by a brook with meadows stretching out from either bank. The far meadow gradually creeps into a sharp hill. . . . Granny's house, a bright yellow box, is the last house on the lea approaching the brook. It's a warm summer evening.

A breeze is blowing up from the brook and I can smell the grasses between it and where I sit on the floorboards of the back porch next to my grandmother's feet. Her legs are clad in high, thick, flesh-coloured stockings rolled down to just above the hemline of her print dress. She's wearing another pair of ankle socks on top of the long stockings and her well-protected feet are fixed neatly inside worn slippers.

When I arrived at Grammy's an hour later, Mom was sitting in the kitchen alone. She lip-pointed toward the living room without moving her head. I raised my eyebrows in acknowledgement and walked straight into the living room to find Gram in her rocking chair with a big smile on her face.

"You're not ready for your party. . . . Do you want some help?" I asked.

"I sure do. I'm glad you're here, Tu's," she replied. I extended my hand and she used it to pull herself up. We disappeared together into the bathroom and emerged some time later with Gram washed, powdered and coiffed in a fresh kerchief and decked out in a newly pressed print dress. She even asked me to apply a little powdered blush to her cheeks. She was beautiful and ready for her party.

I'm gathering wood shavings that are falling from Granny's lap where she's scrapping strips of ash. She's preparing her splints. . . . There's a cloth folded over and over into a thick pad that she places on her thigh. Across the pad she holds the end of a thin, narrow strip of pounded ash. With her free hand she places the crooked knife on top of the piece of wood and presses the

blade down against the wood and the pad. She begins to pull the strip of wood toward her so that the sharp edge of the knife scrapes along the six-foot length of wood. This action sends little ringlets of wood up and away from where it grew. Soon she flips the strip of wood and repeats the action on the other side. When she's satisfied with the smoothness of the splint's surface and its thickness, she slaps the strip onto a pile of like splints. In a few days she'll have enough to begin making baskets and the shavings I'll have collected for starting the fire will last for some time. Nothing is wasted.

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Everyone showed up for the party and we were all greeted by a happy and gleaming Gram. Mom quietly orchestrated what turned out to be a fabulous day for all of us. We all enjoyed Gram's special day and each other. It was the last time we were all together like that. . . . Gram died a few months later.

I feel a strong hand gently pat my hair and tug my braid: "It's time for bed, Tu's."

I have an ash basket that my grandmother made long before I was born. It was made for my mother when she was about ten years old. Over the years it has held many things, from the mundane to the precious. At times it has kept Mom's sewing goods all in one place: thread, needles, buttons, and scraps of cloth. At other times the basket kept Mom's letters and personal notes, almost like a diary. And at other times the little basket has been a sort of safe where Mom deposited money she was saving for something special.

This little basket is silky smooth; it has developed a reddish-brown patina from being handled over the years, almost the colour of my grandmother's hands. It's solid, sturdy and strong, and doesn't show its age—not unlike my grandmother. When I pick it up, it's light as a feather, as if I'm holding air.

Watching Granny's hands move over the strips of wood is like watching a pianist composing music. Artistry and technical skill converge and she guides the strips into place. . . . The wood bends and twists as if by its own will or memory and before you know it there's a basket where once sat just a pile of kindling. "Take the finished baskets outside to dry in the sun; we have to have everything done for tomorrow. We can't sell wet baskets," Granny says. I lay the baskets out in neat piles according to size and function, accidentally creating mini rainbows that from a distance look like ribbon candy. The baskets are spread out all over the back steps and verandah in the bright sun. Granny and I stand back with hands on hips and admire our work. She looks down at me, "Good job!" I look up at her, "Good job!" and we both smile.

An elder once told me that when we cut a living tree, the breath of our ancestors is released to us. That has to be honoured and respected, but mostly we have to listen—listen for their teaching. The little basket given to me by my mother could still be a utilitarian container for all sorts of things, but I prefer to keep it for the memories it holds. I think about the past lives of my little basket and appreciate its ghosts. If I'm quiet and still, I think that I can hear them, see my granny, and she's smiling.

Guardian I

Enid Schaller

You sucked at your teeth, hissing at me to come closer
*Tell them not to speak to me as though I am a child,
too stupid to turn the lights on in a room too dark
to see. Tell them*

*Their voices can't wake the sun in me.
I have already drawn the shade.
Let me be*

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We bring her raspberries from her garden
dipped in sugar that spills white on the sheet.
I brush her hair, gently, lest I tug off the mask,
of the girl hiding from the dark.

Guardian II

Enid Schaller

A box of lace collars, forgotten wedding photos, my Grandmother Schaller's painting case, Nanny's movie star scrapbook that I snuck out of her house after she died.

These are things I'm not supposed to have, things I couldn't part with and can't bear the thought of anyone else having or giving away.

I am the keeper of these things and others. I take them, guard them, protecting them from their owners, connecting through them to their owners. *I want to know you*, I whisper to Nan as I put on her hat, her bracelets. I read her books trying to see her in those stories. I have many of Nan's books, some she gave me, some she left me and some I took. I hold them, touching the soft skin of their covers, the pages feathery with age, feeling her hand under my fingertips, hearing Mom's voice telling me to be gentle.

Nan wasn't always single and no-nonsense. She used to be Mamie, Mrs. Charles Hill. When my mother was nine there was a call, phone in the hall ringing late at night. Tell your mother that Charlie is gone.

Nan played sports, travelled, went dancing and to dinner. She knitted, baked, collected canned goods and stuffed her fridge.

Her house built by her man, our Poppa Charlie, smelled of mustiness: potatoes in dirt and stale cereal.

Alone in the house since the sixties, she tried out each decade in the curtains and the recipe book. She called her rooms for her children—the boys' room, Lloyd's room, Marie's room. Muriel slept in Nan's room. Nanny's room. Door open but entry discouraged. Her dresser covered in makeup and jewellery. Her fat bed squatting on dusty pink carpet, flanked by towers of books. When a book was ready for lending she made an 'M' in the front cover. M for Mamie. Books, being communal objects, like knowledge or fun, were shared.

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When Nan was young her books were heavy. Arriving in the mail they were made ready for lending—her name in the front: *Mary Agnes Taylor* and a home-made card in the back: Name, Date, Comment. *Fran, April 1, 1942, Grand*. It was so Grand that Fran read it twice. No comment was needed later on, when her books became romances: stories of forbidden magic, coerced marriages and pirate threesomes filled the Sobeys bags she toted from one Ladies' Lunch to the next.

When she visited, your bookshelf was plundered. The normal ritual of borrowing was skipped, your book would simply poke out of her purse as she walked out the door. She would tell you when you could expect it back. Your books would be returned with her mark etched onto the front page, a whisper of the initial carved into the beech tree on the village common. A "good read" would have the marks of her friends as well. Your book now told two stories—the one typed onto the pages and the one of the journey it swirled within, moving from one gal

to another. Your book could be gone for years, turning up one summer at the family compound in the cookhouse, cover softened, wrinkled by those who left their marks on the front page. *I have been here*, says Shirley's dot, Kaye's capital K, Gwen's GS. *I have been here too, and know what you are reading.*

Her books were always stories of women, guides for her and her friends. They were records of reading habits, friendships and predilections that changed, lightened as Nan did.

Nan died on a hot night in July. She needed too much help to keep living, more help than she was interested in having. She said she was done, wasn't interested in watching from the sides. I don't remember if we read to her or not. There is a memory I'd like to have—the good granddaughter reading Nan her favourite book as she munched on her favourite treats, no longer worrying about the sugar killing her. But I didn't read to her, not then. She talked and I listened and wrote and recorded: who made the best pies, how Gertie lost her eye, where her father grew up, about the man next door who beat his wife. We did this for days as we waited. Then she didn't talk anymore. I put down my pencil and closed her book. She didn't talk and it wasn't us she was listening to.

Mom and I sat in the dark, our own chests hollow as we waited, listening to her slowing breath. We sat there, watching her and each other until that empty moment when the pause between her slow breaths was not broken.

Ink Well

Susan Drain

My grandmother's pen is a Waterman. Made in Canada.

*As compact and sturdy as a midshipman, blue-barrelled,
brassbound, all ship-shape and navy fashion. But weathered.
Well-used. Brass a little worn, a touch corroded. Ink-smudged,
finger-blurred. Pockmarked as if time had tried its teeth on it.*

Words like seaweed borne in the current. Rooted but moving.

Long lines of ink, drifting above invisible lines on paper,
poised to lift. Kelp blowing, bowing, breaking in waves and
eddies, being beautiful just being on paper.

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*Not just workmanlike, this Waterman, not just a ferryman,
delivering thoughts to dry paper. Sign here, please. Bosun's
whistle and the shopping list. Aye, aye, sir.*

Rhythm of line and loop and curve,
chasing the invisible line, scratching silence,
sculpting silence into—
what? Blue words on a white page, bluecaps on a white ocean.

*Blue barrel, quicksilvered and streaked. Currents shift just
under the surface. How many blues in the ocean? Bind them
with brass all you like, the depths are charged.*

How many words in the wind?
Leaning away from the breath of memory, skimming the
silence. Sounding.
Sounding. Sounding the depths.

Doff your brass-ringed cap, Waterman. Your old gold nib is ink-stained, with the red iridescence of a scarab carried from some distant tomb.

My grandmother liked nice things. She had precious few of them. The gold-nibbed pen was one, the nib shaped to the pressure of her hand. Once broken in, it wrote beautifully for her, remembering just how she liked to make her loops and crossbars, etching copperplate on everyday paper.

The ink sac is rubber, I suppose, and shrunk or perished by now: no point dipping the nib and pulling the plunger. No more words will issue from that womb.

Waterman, ferryman, I want to sound the depths.

23

Nib dips, spits, sputters, strokes.
Carves a channel in the white empty,
a gutter for the run-off, the overflow, the blood spilled
and the secret spat into the street.

Ink well, wellspring, word spring, words spring, catch, hang,
spill
Seep and sear.
Soar.

untitled

jessie burke

maybe a mirror is a difficult thing to write about. maybe you just end up writing about your own face and all the ways it disappoints you

entire worlds are imagined in there, alternate lives, new ways of being—in the clear rectangle of the hallway mirror, i am the heroine of the story . . . but there's no there in there

there's no there, just sand spun into glass at the tops of towers by rows of identical folk tale princesses and liquid silver from the nozzles of factory robots

24 there's no there, just flecks of mascara from standing too close in the morning. the cloud of your breath, from the familiar o of your mouth, stretching your eyelashes toward the sky. more practical than morning prayer is to worship at the alter of a reflection well-crafted

my mother loves mirrors. her home is full of them. in fact, the last time i counted every mirror in her three-bedroom split-level bungalow, she had forty-three, some of which she's had since before i was born

i remember being held up as a small child to the large square mirror in the upstairs hallway of the house that i grew up in and being told, "look at that beautiful girl!" and how easy that was to believe then, and how important

i've realized, in my small apartment, with only four mirrors, that i feel safer when i can see my reflection moving through a space. that it anchors me to where i am

strangely, although i always throw spilled salt over my left shoulder, and believe that a fallen broom means company is coming, broken mirrors do not incite in me any superstitious fears

that we do not want to grow into our mothers is a sitcom cliché and i have always faithfully reproduced it. lately, however, moments hold themselves up to me like mirrors

and there she is

i find myself speaking to strangers' children, complimenting them on their manners, and it's my mother's voice, my mother's words, that I find in my mouth

or i think of the time she came home tipsy from drinks with her friends and i was lying across the bottom of her bed watching television

her eyes were bigger than usual and greyer because of the smudged rings of blue eyeliner i'd taught her to apply

even though i have my father's eyes, my friday night drunk is sometimes suddenly sobered by catching sight of my reflection, my eyes bigger and bluer than usual because of the smudged black eyeliner i taught myself to apply

and sometimes when i can do nothing but sleep and sleep and sleep

and the edges of my vision blur, my hair towers in tangles that moment is a mirror and there is just me and my reflection.

Digging in Dirt

Alison DeLory

On a summer day in 1936 my mother and her sister play in the yard behind their Sydney, Nova Scotia apartment. The girls, two and three years old, sit on the ground pressed up against a rough fence. They are scratching lines into the dirt. It is the era of the Great Depression and like so many, the family has few resources. The sisters don't have toys, gardening tools or even an old spoon with which to dig: just their chubby dimpled hands.

My aunt sits on the left, an impish look on her face. Her eyes and the way she purses her lips embody mischief. Ringlets frame her delicate face and mask her protruding ears, a cursed family trait. She appears to be stifling a giggle and there is no foreshadowing on her face of the struggles she will later face.

My mother is on the right, more tomboyish but a chubby darling nonetheless. She wears an outfit matching my aunt's, hers askew with a Flashdance-style strap slipping off her shoulder (she was before her time). Her hair looks like it was cut with a bowl and her face, arms and legs are smeared with dirt, which doesn't appear to concern her in the least. I see my own, my sister's and my children's brown eyes in hers, their shape and inquisitiveness.

I hear birds chirping in the background and perhaps the photographer directing the girls to look at his lens. I feel the grittiness of the ground on which they sit and the scratchiness of the wood pressed against my mother's back, and I smell their little-girl sweetness like milky breath.

I wonder what the girls are thinking as their neighbour pulls out a camera—on an ordinary day, not a special photography-worthy occasion like Christmas. His efforts certainly were not appreciated by my grandmother. She was so ashamed of how grubby her girls looked she hid this picture for decades. My aunt discovered it and persuaded my grandmother to give it to her. When my mother saw it she had reprints made for many of our family members and now the same print hangs in at least four of our homes.

Now seventy-seven and seventy-eight years old, the sisters remain close, although they've lived on opposite sides of the country for their entire adult lives. Their relationship is complicated and has been tested. They've disapproved of each other's choices and not kept these opinions to themselves. Yet they share a love for beaches, holidays together in Florida, summers in PEI. Their births were followed by those of two brothers, one with special needs, who consumed much of their parents' attention pretty much from the time this picture was taken onward.

The word "photography" comes from "photo," which has at its roots both "light" and "to shine." I notice a light shines on my mother's right shoulder, while my hunched aunt appears to be her counterpart darkness. It makes me think that while they are different, they are each other's match.

Handkerchief

Ramona Lumpkin

for Dorothy

Fine cotton the blue of Devon's sky
the rare day the sun shone that year.

A square edged with cut-work lace,
scores of white stitches, each tiny as a heart
squeezed by its longing for home.

28 Each week I went shyly to your drawing room
where you poured tea
and leaned in to listen,
attentive to an awkward girl's words.

Near stranger,
regal old woman, you gave me credence, comfort,
far more than you knew.

Guessing the devotion your kindness had stirred,
your daughter sent me this token soon after you died.

Forty years later the handkerchief sits framed on my desk.

How can we know what we will carry with us,
what will endure?

