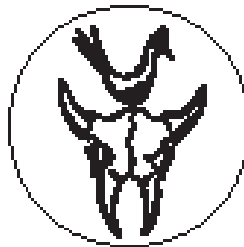


# **SOUTH DAKOTA REVIEW**

VOLUME 57  
NUMBER 1



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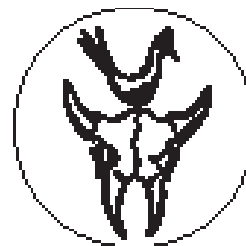
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*Mardith Louisell*

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## A Fabric of Memory

*“... even as a child...the colours of the (duck’s) plumage, in particular the dark green and snow white seemed to me the only possible answers to the questions that are on my mind.”—W.G. Sebald*

At forty-two years old, in the exact moment when autumn vanished in a Minnesota blizzard, my younger sister died from a brain tumor. For ten years, in Minnesota and California, I wrote about her dying, which lasted three and a half years. The unrelenting grief as I wrote about it was only marginally less painful than her actual dying. People said the writing must be therapeutic but it wasn't. Enough, I finally said. I will no longer relive, reimagine, or rewrite more meaning into that tragedy. I was finished with death. I needed light and fun, and I turned to scarves and color. Scarves are filled with light and unlike death, they take little and give much.

In a world of short Jewish girls in Worcester, Massachusetts, my mother was tall and slim. Though she had lemon-shaped brown eyes and wavy auburn hair down her shoulders, she didn't think herself pretty, but her father had been a garment buyer and after high school she'd lived in glamorous cities—Boston and New York. She *knew* she had style.

During World War II, she married my father, a Navy lieutenant she met in Boston, and in a heavy blizzard landed in his hometown of Duluth, Minnesota. There she adopted the uniform of a 1950's housewife—white anklets, blouse, skirt, apron, and, twice a week, prepared her getaway from her six kids. As she tugged on the flesh-colored elastic of her girdle, rolled up her nylons and fed her legs in, I sat breathless on the

bed, watching her wiggle into a green wool dress, strain for the back zipper and sigh when it caught. Only the clip earrings with their snap like a hard slap were free of frustration, but to me the transformation seemed effortless. Finally, from a plastic bag in her dresser, a scarf appeared. I studied my mom. She was different from my friends' moms—opinionated, funny, from the East, Jewish in a world of Catholics. None of that registered on my eight-year-old self—it was the scarf that gave her flair.

In the mirror, she checked the finished product. Satisfied with her metamorphosis, she smiled at me and without a backward glance launched herself down the stairs and out the door.

Scarves aren't what I would have chosen as my art form. I'd rather be Niki de Saint Phalle and sculpt giant blue and green ceramic goddesses with milk bars in their breasts, dissect French chemist Chevreul's circles of complementary color, and appreciate why the meaning of white obsessed the painter Pierre Bonnard. When I put clothes in the closet, I consider which blouse looks best on which color hanger. I place laundry on the line so adjacent colors complement each other. I plan on writing thank you notes to neighbors who paint their houses a mint green that lights up the San Francisco fog and convey the opposite to those who choose a gloom-spreading butterscotch.

But as a child on Lake Superior where maples blew scarlet leaves into a blue October lake, I could never have conceived of

a quest for something as insubstantial as color. In the middle class in Northern Minnesota, no one I knew considered being an artist. Artists didn't learn—they were born. I could be a teacher, a nurse, a secretary, even a lawyer, but that I could spend my life on crimson and sapphire, no, that wasn't possible. Besides, every year in grade school I collected only a C in Art.

Instead I persuade myself that in my work as a scarf curator, I'm like the Dutch Still Life Masters who painted oysters and lemon peels in infinite shades of yellow and gray, minute differences portraying the unlimited—and overwhelming—variety of the everyday world, a bounty these newly rich Calvinist merchants could now buy. Although, if you look closely, in each of the still lifes of sideboards laden with cheese and bouquets, a fly buzzes or a barely visible worm slithers. *Memento mori*, they whisper, everything must die.<sup>1</sup>

The large house where I grew up was noisy and explosive. My mom kept a hairbrush on top of the refrigerator to comb our hair and use as a weapon. When three kids were fighting, another teething, and a milk bottle crashed to the floor, we raced to the sidewalk, believing ourselves out of reach because it was public property. But every year at the end of August when she and I rode the bus downtown to buy school clothes, we both smiled—she, because she escaped the house and kids, and I, the oldest, because I had her to myself.

What is the *ur*-dress? Is it not what my mother and I found on Oreck's third floor, my mother content in the quiet of the venerable Duluth store, a reminder of her beloved clothier father?

I was chubby but my mother and the saleslady gazed at me with such beatific smiles that I believed I was beautiful. Oh, to be young, buttoned into a shirtwaist dyed a royal blue that deserved the name, to stroke the satiny cotton, to face the corner chair on which my mom rested, to be kissed through a

high, dusty window by the golden light of an approving sun.

In fourth grade, we left Oreck's with a dress of pineapple yellow in satin and cotton stripes. "Yellow," Van Gogh said, "a color capable of charming God." I was nine years old, a time when my skin welcomed every color graciously. It was the first and last time I was successful in yellow. The memory of that yellow dress evokes years of my mother and me fumbling with fashions in Duluth, Minneapolis, and New York, examining the fit, fabric, and cut of dresses dragged into crowded or spacious dressing rooms, asking each other's opinion, my mother refusing to wear any hint of purple, seizing half-price designer jackets with a Cheshire cat grin, and voicing a touching belief that everything looked good on me.

It's decades since that yellow *ur*-dress and I no longer expect to find its descendant down the street. But a scarf, ah! A scarf is not dependent on creamy skin or a flawless body. You have a lifetime to work with scarves, quietly waiting in the drawer, hopeful for a new role in the world.

Italian Anna Magnani, American Elizabeth Taylor, Swedish Anita Ekberg. *Artists and Models, The Rose Tattoo*. Women's breasts spilling out of torn blouses on posters outside Duluth's five movie theaters, two labeled "Adult." It was 1955 and I was eleven years old. With my grade school allowance, I bought *Modern Screen Magazine* and parked myself at Nelson's soda fountain. The same women shown in the posters now lounged around pools, their bodies in Capri pants, pert red scarves sharp against white blouses, collars thrust upward. Sexy. I decided that when I grew up, I too would flip up my collar and wear a red scarf. But I had lingered too long at the drug store and my Kotex pad had overflowed. I trudged the nine long blocks home with blood-soaked underpants chafing my thighs.

Today urbanites want to escape noise and pollution and live in places of harsh natural beauty like Duluth with its Boundary Waters and Great Lake, but when I grew up, people

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<sup>1</sup> In gratitude to Mark Doty's *Still Life with Oysters and Lemons: On Objects and Intimacy*, Beacon Press, 2001.

didn't want 20-below temperatures and skin-numbing winds. The glory was in escape. "Get out of Duluth! See the world!" my mom said. I believed a red scarf was my ticket. *Mademoiselle Magazine* said you must have a long neck for a scarf. Gazing in the mirror, I saw that I did.

10:55: N-Judah Streetcar in seventeen minutes. Climb into jeans, grab pink sweater. Which scarf? The pale green chenille a friend knitted? The blue Provençal print bought with Carole? The paisley wool my sister forced me to buy? On the shelf above my bed four piles, fifty-eight scarves; another twenty slip through the shelf's brackets, blue spectrum on the left, red on right.

Rubbing the slight friction of cotton against my palm or catching a rough patch of skin on the mostly-from-my-mother silks, color floods my eyes as though a cup of espresso had coursed through my veins. To know that if I obsess enough, one scarf, possibly even an ugly scarf, can achieve perfection paralyzes me; a minute later, another might be better.

Fifteen scarves scattered on the bed. The N-Judah streetcar rumbles by. I snatch the orange cashmere.

Hours, days, lost, but losing myself in this alpha state is so satisfying as to render being late justifiable and when I hear about people who spend three hours a day on the freeway, it's clear I could waste even more time on color than I do.

Obsession is an abundance of choices, a scarcity of time, and the fear that nothing will be right. As a twelve-year-old Catholic girl, I obsessed over how many mortal sins I committed when I thought about sex and whether I'd land in hell if I died. I washed germs off my hands until they became raw. My mother was no help because she was Jewish and incapable of understanding the perils of mortal sin. After reading *Ladies Home Journal's* advice to housewives, I slathered my hands at night with petroleum jelly, sprinkled on baby powder and slid them into white gloves. The realization that an obsession for perfection can focus on color and scarves rather than sin has

been an enormous relief.

After grad school, I worked in Child Protection, primarily with poor people who might lose their children to foster care. In Minneapolis, some female social workers dressed down to display solidarity with clients. Others barricaded themselves in brown minks; some wore running shoes, others, three-inch heels. These questions preoccupied us: "Should I dress to show I'm an agent of the law or imply I'm sympathetic?" "I don't have kids. Should I try to look older so parents will listen?" "Are heels safe in dangerous neighborhoods?" Meanwhile, our clients asked each other, "Why does she wear those cheap clothes when she has money?" "Who does she think she is in that coat?" and other comments we were lucky enough not to hear.

Myself, I chose middle-of-the-road, neither Goodwill nor mink, and added an unassuming scarf from my mom's discards, unassuming except that a scarf by its nature is not. Simply by its presence, it draws attention. Maybe I hoped a scarf from my mom with her now seven kids would console me as I sat in my car, weeping after a painful interview with a child's mother.

I'm sure clients called my colleague "The Mink" and the social worker with ripped jeans, "Goodwill." As in "Goodwill's coming today," or "I got The Mink as my worker," or "The Scarf's bound to check the refrigerator today. Be sure there's milk."

Years later, a work colleague said, "You always wore scarves. I thought there was something wrong with your neck."

Every summer at my mother's apartment in Duluth, I soothed my eyes with Lake Superior's blue water or, in the winter, the steam fog that floated off the lake. Sometimes I saw the eagle that flew outside the bedroom window where my mother and I invariably performed a ritual in which she tried to bequeath her clothes to me. "This is good-looking," she said when I was forty years old, referring to a blazer plucked from the closet. It *was*—a subdued beige plaid composed of checks,

crafted by designer Max Mara and bought at two-thirds off.

I wasn't a trained color consultant but I *knew* my mom was an *Autumn*. From an auburn-haired teenager to a seventy-year-old with white hair in front and gray in back, my mother's skin had welcomed all the difficult shades of beige, gravitating to the Autumn spectrum just as Seasonal Color Analysis advised. SCA insists a dark-haired, olive-skinned Winter can dress in purple but not beige, a Summer blonde, the opposite, and a fair-skinned Autumn redhead in brown, beige, and rust.

My mom instinctively refused purple. Until she didn't. One day in the brilliant light of Lake Superior's expanse—a light that generates the city's stark color as much as the fog in San Francisco generates its grey sheen, she spotted an expensive Eileen Fisher jacket marked more than half off. "What do you think?" she asked. It wasn't quite purple, but close. What color did she think it was? Still, the jacket was half-price, fit well, looked good. "Yes," I said. After cataract surgery a year later, she removed the jacket from her closet. "Why didn't you say it was purple?" she gasped. But to her before surgery, it hadn't been: with cataracts, objects appear yellowed. With the cataracts removed, the jacket showed its true color.

The plaid blazer flattered my mom but I wasn't an Autumn, I was a Winter. On me, with my blue eyes and dark hair, the jacket was a "taker," claiming every particle of light and giving nothing back.

"Mom, I can't wear beige."

"You're crazy," she objected. "The color's fine. Use a scarf to perk it up."

Under duress, I carried the jacket 1,500 miles west to San Francisco where I tried to perk it up with every scarf I owned, tried and failed.

#### *Why Women Wear Scarves (or Don't)*

- A perfectly chosen color scarf takes off years. It's as good as putting on makeup. If it doesn't work, use it to decorate a

wall. (ESL teacher)

- They're easy to buy, inexpensive and I don't have to worry they won't fit. (Retired social worker)
- When a tourist gets cold and buys a sweatshirt with a stupid picture that says "Zambia" or "Manila," it's tacky. A scarf looks elegant and keeps me warm. (International public health worker)
- A scarf changes how I feel about myself, brighter, more conspicuous. That can be good or bad. (Painter)
- They're cumbersome, slippery, odd appendages that make me uncomfortable. In fact, I might get rid of a few this week. (Nurse)
- Scarves pull together an outfit that otherwise looks mismatched. (Administrative assistant)
- I buy them but I don't wear them. I design my clothes by layers and they complicate things. (Systems consultant)
- At the gym I wear a bandana that covers the wrinkles in my neck. (Construction site administrator)
- The front of the neck feels vulnerable. My scarf is a sort of swaddle, in psychoanalytic terms, a transitional object like the proverbial blankie; it provides a bit of maternal caretaking that we can fondle, or fondles us. (Psychoanalyst)
- I love your scarves but I can't tie them. (Stranger at party)
- Alone at night I worry that a serial killer could strangle me so I bunch it up in my purse.

"Your scarf is okay," said our host, a male seismologist, "not too ostentatious. But, oh, how I hate those Hermès scarves!" Luckily, I had chosen a plain red pleated scarf for our pork dinner on a foggy San Francisco night. "The designs are nineteenth century," he continued, "and they scream money and horses. They have labels. I hate labels." I was surprised that a seismologist had paid so much attention.

My mother loved beautiful clothes. If they also symbolized high couture and money, so much the better. Maybe I saw a gold-trimmed blue scarf with a bridle and horseshoe in her



drawer, but she would never pay full price on an Hermès scarf. What I saw would have been a knockoff. My mother's taste was classic, mine, a rebellion against hers and I didn't understand the Hermès' attraction.

From the Hermès website I learned that bridles and horseshoes referenced the company's origins as a riding goods company. Hermès screamed not just money, but aristocratic money, Jackie Onassis, Princess Grace, Texas oil matrons, *equi-page*. But its pages of scarves lured me down the internet rabbit hole: surrealistic forests in red transposed to forests printed in yellow, which I didn't recognize as the same scarf. Then graphic silkworms in blue, transposed to green. I clicked compulsively. Again and again my eyes focused on a scarf in Color A and blurred on a scarf in Color B. When B snapped into focus, I laughed at what seemed a great optical joke.

Suddenly, seemingly out of place, a scarf materialized by an artist unknown to me, Kermit Oliver. "Faune et Flore du Texas" transported me to 17<sup>th</sup>-century Dutch still life as well as to the psychedelic posters of my hippie days. Giant butterflies fluttered with pink morning glories, fish lounged in one bird's nest, oversized swans swam in another.

Six blocks from where I grew up, the A.M. Chisholm Museum housed cluttered cabinets of curiosities that were probably mementoes from some adult's world travel. I walked there Saturday mornings in what must have been winter since I remember the dry heat of the old mansion. At the entrance, I grabbed a mimeographed page of items to locate—a stuffed duck, a Chinese ceramic, an Italian puppet—and began ferreting around for faded objects in the dusty still air.

The odd tableau in Oliver's scarf felt like that museum, strangely out of scale objects in a dry landscape. I poked around the image just as I had searched the museum, trying to distinguish among the flood of objects. In the center of Oliver's scarf, a wreath of the fruit, flowers, and animals of Texas surrounds

an imposing turkey, as if the scene were staged for Thanksgiving dinner. But this turkey stands very much alive, the other animals miniscule and posed like people in a Breughel painting, few attentive to the mystery, most burrowing about their business. The tableau floated with a stillness that was either peace or death, a stillness I never expected to find in an Hermès scarf.

As a child, I collected holy cards and the wildlife here is like my grade school holy card of St. Francis of Assisi surrounded by animals. It's Oliver's turkey as St. Francis, or "The Last Supper" painting at Holy Rosary School, only presiding at the head of the table is not Christ, but a turkey. To integrate that image, I force a realignment of everything I thought I knew and am reminded of everything I didn't, don't, and never will know, an unsettling and peculiar pleasure of new knowledge.

That Oliver is African American pleased me. I imagined wealth passing from a rich Hermès buyer to an African American artist who until retirement had worked at the post office and was now enshrined in the very corporation my friend detested. I was also pleased to find an artist whom no one else knew.

I probably won't ever own an Hermès scarf but I might paw around a used clothing store bin for "Les Ailes de la Soie," a riotous orange, blue, and pink graphic of a silkworm's wings. The lowly laborer silk worm, thousands of which I heard murmuring like rain on a roof in a Chinese silk factory, is my idea of an icon befitting Hermès. Hermès could remind us that before the adult moths emerge from the cocoon, they're boiled in water or pricked with a needle, like Christ pierced with nails.<sup>2</sup>

"I didn't wear scarves," my mother said one day. I was shocked. How could an accessory that captured me in grade school, that made me who I am in terms of style, be unremarkable to her?

On a mild winter day in Duluth with only two feet of snow on the ground, I tiptoed around twin beds and into my

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<sup>2</sup> Silkworms are killed before they leave the cocoon so the cocoon can be unraveled as one continuous thread, which allows a stronger cloth to be woven.

parents' room. Cocking my ears in case the back door opened, I fingered boring waist-high panties, nylon stockings, the girdle's unevenly stretched elastic, and the perfume bottle, its lightly acidic smell lingering from the night before. But I was intent on the dresser drawers where in neat piles she stashed her silk scarves.

She did have scarves, but I thought the accessories were *her*; maybe they were only an accident of fashion. Maybe she didn't *wear* scarves—she merely bought them to cover her hair or pull an outfit together. We truly are alone in this world. The scarves were important to me though, one of the small details a daughter seizes upon and makes, from a part, the whole. I was being like and yet different from her.

For decades, I've resonated to artist Raoul Dufy's pianos and violins floating on their own notes in washes of yellows and blues. But only now have I learned that around 1915, he revolutionized the French silk industry with his fabric and scarf designs of eye-popping green skies and red grass. Since then, Bianchini-Férier in Lyon has manufactured Dufy scarves almost continuously.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps my mom even owned one. Regardless, I found the perfect Dufy for her on the internet—a red and white geometric blitz of a 1920's tennis scene—tennis, the only sport my mom played. Women wear horizontally striped dresses, men vertically striped jackets; racquets and net are drawn in crosshatches, tennis ball and shadows in polka dots. The riot of red and white lines under a late afternoon sun and the tilted angle of the scene conjure up the giddy heat and pleasure I felt as a kid during long summers on the red clay of Longview's public tennis courts, running, contorting my knees, and refocusing on the circle springing up and out of my field of vision. My mom, stuck as far from Paris as you could get, would purse her lips with satisfaction at a French silk scarf designed by a French artist, purchased for a pittance of a painting. What a bargain! Wait, I forgot—that red and white

Dufy is for me. My mom's colors are its black and beige twin.

A few months before he died, Dufy painted *Nature morte au violon, hommage à Bach* (1952). Casually sketched leaves almost rustle on the raspberry and orange canvas painted with a lightness of touch I wish I could transmit when I play Bach fugues; color spills as though staying within the lines were too slow for Bach's partitas, and for Dufy's hand. The background pattern, reproducing a curtain Dufy designed twenty-five years earlier, offers a second homage, this one to Dufy's decades-long friendship with the now dead Charles Bianchini, the man who hired him as a designer when he was young and broke. Inserted into the flaming background is what I like best, a startling violet strip of fringed fabric. Possibly a scarf?

Among the silk scarves my mom has given me, I recently saw one with which I had unsuccessfully attempted to “perk up” her beige plaid blazer. In one corner is an imprint I'd never noticed: Bianchini-Férier Paris.

I too pay homage to friends, with scarves. My fiery sister in her pink velour jumpsuit—how could so adamant a feminist wear pink, and so often? “Do I have to live in black?” she countered. “A feminist can have fun, Mardi. Guys love this.” To the outfit, she added a cherry, gold, and teal striped scarf, patterned in complementary colors.

Touching this scarf now sets her in motion, just as using my mother's old aluminum tablespoon animates her slapdash measuring of sugar or pounding my father's hammer revives his stubby fingers on the handle. It's the hands, I think; objects that need a hand produce movies, not statues.

Touching my sister's scarf, I see her fingers unfold and arrange it, I see her walk with the fabric swinging from her neck, then turn her head. Like a ghost transporting joy, she appears in my side-view mirror, cruises with me for a mile, then takes an exit I don't. For that second, my being is subsumed in her clothed body but so fleetingly that it barely registers.

<sup>3</sup> <http://dufy-bianchini.com/intro.php>.

Sometimes I can't remember which scarf was mine from the start and which hers. Is this what people mean when they say about a dead person, "They live in you"?

When I moved to California, my new boss wore the same scarf, which irritated, then pleased me, because it showed a mentality like my sister's, although I believed my sister wore it better.

Opera-loving designer Kari floated in a light-filled, sea-happy scarf, its silken fringe rippling like her laugh. She bought the scarf in San Francisco, wore it for two months in Minneapolis, and decided it was more "me" than "her." I liked the idea that there was a "her" and a "me," and that she thought she knew the difference. A few years later, she died of breast cancer.

Carole never wore scarves but one day we both bought the same navy knit suit at a Minneapolis boutique. I also bought a matching scarf of tightly pleated, heavy silk with a web of calligraphy in raised white paint. The suits with their diagonally hemmed skirts are long discarded, the boutique is gone, and Carole herself has died. The scarf, formerly the repository of nothing more than a delicate beauty, now reminds me of that day of shopping. Carole didn't wear prints, chose only beige heels to extend the line of her leg, and was a great lover of coats. I longed to show her Dufy's coat design in a woodblock pattern so large it dwarfed the woman who wore it. It would be like reading her poetry, which she didn't like—coats were her poetry.

Linda lives two bridges away, a driving distance of one to two hours. A consummate scarf giver, she apprehends exactly who I am—my style, the fabric I prefer, the colors flattering my skin, the quality of the light where I live. She's short, I'm tall, she favors suits, I don't, she's practical, I'm obsessive, but she has given me three perfect scarves. The fourth, worthy of Tallulah Bankhead, chenille strands of midnight, cascading in dread locks made my head ache. I gave it to my friend Erin.

"Do you wear the scarf I gave you?" asked Linda at my party

a few months later.

"Yes," I lied.

"Where is it?" she asked, eyes alert to my dissembling. "You gave it away, didn't you?"

Pause. "I would never give away anything you gave me." She smiled angelically and I knew no more impeccable scarves were coming my way.

I turned to Erin, "Tell Linda how much you like the scarf." "I gave it away. It didn't feel good."

I told my mother about lying to Linda. "When I die," she said, "you can wear the scarf Linda gave *me*. That will make her feel better." That scarf had been a gift to Linda from a woman she didn't like but she couldn't toss out a brand-new scarf, or perhaps couldn't turn her back on the thought behind it. It would look great on my mother, Linda decided, mailed off the scarf, and my mom never knew.

Some items refuse to let us toss them in the trash. They are the "orphaned belongings," Mark Doty writes, "(that) must be placed, settled, in order to keep the world aright." This must be why my friend Beth lugged a trash bag of scarves to a small Silicon Valley café where its height on a chair reached our shoulders. She hoped I would carry them home and put them in the bin because she couldn't, just as Linda was compelled to mail her scarf to my mother. I culled thirteen from Beth's bag including three for my granddaughter.

I rejoice in the portability of a scarf's meaning, but I wonder if my scarves will grow heavy over time, making it difficult to cope with their physical and emotional mass—their increasing height and weight on my bedroom shelves, the too many choices, the burdens presented, the heaviness of sad stories. Will I toss the lot of them into the garbage, just as I've wanted to toss the furniture and clothes inherited from father, sister, and mother? I almost scrapped the glittery scarves but my four-year-old granddaughter spreads them for picnics on my bedroom floor.

Ever since I was old enough to buy presents, I have been

unsuccessful with gifts for my mother. When I went to Paris one year, besotted with scarf plenty, I decided a scarf would be the perfect present and spent hours at the ancient department store BHV, fixated on finding *the* scarf. What possessed me?

After two weeks of daily visits, I settled on a long scarf, one panel ecru, one taupe, and the third, tiny checks of both. It had no more fringe than my mom could handle and would be an elegant, understated, unusual addition to her black and beige coats. Not her favorite, silk, but a soft muslin-like material, easily arranged on the body. I had nailed it.

In May, as lilacs perfumed every Duluth living room, I presented the scarf.

"It's beautiful," she said. "But it's possible, I won't be able to wear it."

"Just drape it around your coat collar and let it hang," I said.

"Well," she hesitated, "I don't have anything to wear it with."

"It's beige. You can wear it with anything, black, blue, rust."

"I don't have any blue," she said. "I don't like blue." This was typical of her, to seize on a casual point in an argument rather than address the bigger question.

"Red, black, brown, beige," I pushed.

"But I have scarves for those," she said. My mother didn't obsess about which scarf to wear. She bought a scarf to match a specific outfit so she knew which scarf to wear with what. As additional insurance, she banked one in the pocket of each coat so she didn't have to search for the right one before she went out.

On my August visit, the scarf, still in its packaging, had migrated to a dining room chair where my mother kept items she didn't know what to do with.

"This is the perfect time for the scarf," I said as we left her apartment the next day.

"No, not today."

After we returned home, we sat in front of the television.

"I'm eighty-nine," my mother began, "The scarf is heavy, there's a lot of fabric, I don't know how to make it drape well. I appreciate it, but give it to a friend."

"Okay," I said. "I'll take it with me next time."

At the end of September in a magnificently colored autumn, which surpassed any scarf ever made, I visited.

"I see the scarf's still in the dining room," I said.

"You don't understand," she said, "I can't manage it. You can wear it. You're tall." It *was* long, six feet, but I didn't see that as prohibitive.

A month later, she got sick; ten days later she died. When my siblings and I cleared out her apartment in the quiet that marks a dead person's home, neatly arranged piles of scarves rested on two closet shelves. On the chair in the dining room in its plastic bag lay the Paris scarf. Her window overlooked a frozen lake, its boardwalk treacherous with ice and snow

On the way to the airport, my mom's black wool coat warmed me in the freezing January cold. Burying my hands in the pockets, I felt something—a scarf. This navy scarf with three patterns dancing together she had worn to protect her hair from the wind after the hairdresser. I lifted the scarf to my nose and the scent of her perfume wafted up.

I brought the Paris scarf home and placed it on the shelf with the others. When I caressed its smooth material, I regretted that my mother never wore it. How smart she would have looked!

A few years later, I looked at the scarf. Although my mom had mentioned too much fabric, I hadn't listened because it wouldn't have posed a problem for me. Now I understood that the geometric oddity of the panels meant my mom had to decide how to hang it. For me, it was soft, would lie flat, didn't matter which of its six sides you displayed, was easy, but for her, coping with how to hang what should have been a simple scarf was one more conceptual problem than she needed, one more physical dimension than she wanted to manage.

I was wearing the BHV scarf and my mom's gray cashmere cardigan on a June evening in San Francisco. My mother would have been pleased that I was wearing the knee-length sweater with its soft mandarin collar. She'd liked its elegance

and how it suited the cold Duluth climate, just as it now suited the brutal San Francisco summer. Finally, after years of rebelling against her style, I was emulating the classic taste that had prompted my friends and hers to consistently comment on how smart she looked.

Which is why, when a male friend complimented me on the outfit, I responded, “It was my mother’s.”

“What?” My friend was at a loss.

“Your friend has good taste,” whispered my mother’s voice in my ear.

“It was my mother’s,” I repeated.

The attribution flew out of my mouth without thought. He didn’t know my mother or anything about her. Later, I understood. I thought about the possessions of the Dutch 17<sup>th</sup>-century merchants, the oysters and lemons they ate, the melon rind, the tables where they sat, all beckoning with eye-catching light, all suffused with intimacy. Some Dutch merchant chose

these objects as evidence of who he or she was, had been, or hoped to be, and the artist in turn made the silver so reflective and the fruit so ripe that I wanted to take a bite.

But my connections to possessions aren’t shiny goblets and lemon rind. They’re a print of Notre-Dame before its façade was cleaned from my parents’ first trip to Europe, my sister’s well-marked copy of Bach’s *Well-Tempered Clavier*, and scarves from friends gone or far away. Winding one around my neck, I remember the scarf’s provenance.

As I was telling my friend about my mother’s scarf, I saw my mother walking in front of me. She paused before opening her front door and her pale, graceful fingers reached into her coat pocket. In that moment, I contained her and *vice versa*, a phrase I learned from her. In that moment, I attended to our relationship and from the corner of my eye, calculated the distance between me and the encroaching worm. ❁

## CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES

**SEAN CHO A.** is the author of *American Home* (Autumn House 2021) winner of the Autumn House Press chapbook contest. His work can be future found or ignored in *Copper Nickel*, *Prairie Schooner*, *The Massachusetts Review*, *Nashville Review*, among others. Sean is a graduate of the MFA program at The University of California Irvine and a PhD Student at the University of Cincinnati. He is the Editor in Chief of *The Account*.

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**ANA MARIA CABALLERO** Ana Maria Caballero is the recipient of the Beverly International Prize and Colombia's José Manuel Arango National Poetry Prize. Nominated for a Pushcart, a finalist for the Academy of American Poets Prize and the Kurt Brown Prize, among others, her work explores how biology delimits our societal and cultural rites, ripping the veil off romanticized motherhood and questioning notions that package female sacrifice as a virtue. She believes poems are works of art and cofounded web3 poetry gallery theVERSEverse.com to make it happen. [anamariacaballero.com](http://anamariacaballero.com)

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**JAMES CIHLAR** is the author of *The Shadowgraph*, published in 2020 by the University of New Mexico Press. His previous books include *Rancho Nostalgia* and *Undoing*. His poetry chapbooks are *A Conversation with My Imaginary Daughter*, *What My Family Used*, and *Metaphysical Bailout*. His writing has appeared in *The American Poetry Review*, *The Threepenny Review*, *Lambda Literary Review*, *The Gay and Lesbian Review*, *Nimrod*, *Painted Bride Quarterly*, and *Smartish Pace*. He earned his BA in English at the University of Iowa, where he studied in the Writer's Workshop, and his MA and PhD in English at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln. He lives in St. Paul with his husband and cats, and is the publisher of Howling Bird Press in Minneapolis. His website is [jamescihlar.com](http://jamescihlar.com)

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**ELOISE KLEIN HEALY**, the author of nine books of poetry, was named the first Poet Laureate of Los Angeles in 2012. She was the founding chair of the MFA in Creative Writing Program at Antioch University Los Angeles. Her forthcoming book, *A*

*Brilliant Loss*, will be published in 2022. A note on Eloise's poetry: In 2013, Eloise, the former Los Angeles' poet laureate, developed aphasia, or the loss of the ability to understand and express speech, due to encephalitis. Through poetry, Eloise attempts to reconnect with the world.

**CHARLES HOLDEFER** is an American writer based in Brussels. His stories have appeared in the *New England Review*, *North American Review*, *Chicago Quarterly Review*, and in the 2017 Pushcart Prize anthology. His novel, *Don't Look at Me*, about Emily Dickinson, basketball, and the persistence of literature in a post-literary age, will be published in October 2022. Visit Charles at [www.charlesholdefer.com](http://www.charlesholdefer.com).

**RICHARD HOLINGER'S** books include *Kangaroo Rabbits and Galvanized Fences*, humorous essays about surviving life in suburbia, and *North of Crivitz*, poetry focusing on the rural Upper Midwest. His prose and poetry have appeared in *The Southern Review*, *Witness*, *Boulevard*, and have garnered four Pushcart Prize nominations. Degrees include a PhD in Creative Writing from UIC. Holinger lives west of Chicago in what's considered country.

**GAIL HOSKING** is the author of the memoir *Snake's Daughter* (U of Iowa Press) and a book of poems *Retrieval* (Main Street Rag Press). MFA from Bennington Writing Seminars. Essays and poems have appeared in such places as *Waxwing*, *Post Road*, *Reed Magazine*, *Lillith Magazine*, *Consequence Magazine*, and *West Trade Review*. Several pieces have been anthologized. Three essays were considered "Most Notable" in *Best American Essays*. Three Pushcart nominations. Hosking is currently at work on a collection of poetry, and a memoir.

**LJ KESSELS** (she/her) is a writer based in Berlin, Germany. She has an MA in Philosophy from the University of Amsterdam and has worked for various (film) festivals, events, and whatchamacallits across Europe. Her work has previously been published in *Stadtsprachen Magazin*, *Elsewhere: A Journal of Place*, *Goat's Milk Magazine*, *OF ZOOS*, and more.

**MARDITH LOISELL** has published fiction, essays and memoir in *Solstice Literary Magazine*, *Persimmon Tree*, *Smokelong Quarterly*, *Sleet*, and *Redwood Coast Review*, and in the anthologies, *Italy*, *A Love Story*, *The House on Via Gombito Street*, and *Best Travel Writing*. Lake Superior in Duluth, Minnesota, where she grew up, continues to affect everything she does, as did her work as a child welfare social worker. Her current project is *Beside Myself*, a book of flash fiction with a single narrator. "Had They Learned about Jayne Mansfield?" (*Solstice Literary Magazine*) is her favorite title.

**JENNIFER MET** lives in a small town in North Idaho. She is a nominee for the Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net anthology, a finalist for *Nimrod's* Pablo Neruda Prize for Poetry, and winner of the Jovanovich Award. Recent work is published or forthcoming in *Cimarron Review*, *the Museum of Americana*, *Nimrod*, *Ninth Letter*, *Superstition Review*, and *Zone 3*, among other journals. She serves as an Assistant Prose Poetry Editor for *Pithead Chapel* and is the author of the microchapbook *That Which Sunlight Chases* (Origami Poems Project) and the chapbook *Gallery Withheld* (Glass Poetry Press).

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**DANA SALVADOR** grew up on a family farm in northeastern Colorado. Her work has appeared in *Prairie Schooner*, *Fourth Genre*, *The North American Review*, *Water-Stone Review*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *Flyway*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, among others. She is the recipient of a Vogelstein Foundation grant and the recipient of the Patricia Dobler Poetry Award.

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