





LESLIE HARRISON

[ That ]

That this is the morning in which nothing much  
that the sky is still there and the water dresses  
accordingly that only at night does the water rest  
vanish from sight that the stars are too small  
too far to be reflected recorded there that all our  
names too are writ invisibly on water that abiding  
requires more hope than I can possibly acquire  
that hope is not a thing with feathers that hope is  
a thing with a fist a species of violence that hope  
is a thin crust sketched over oceans that hope is  
what despair uses for bait come in hope says  
the water's fine that hope is the blood with which



you write letters that start dear sea dear ocean

stop asking so fucking much that hope is a telegram

delivered by stiff men in uniform a telegram that says

missing stop that says once again presumed lost stop

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The poem references Emily Dickinson's poem, usually counted as number 314, which begins: "'Hope' is the thing with feathers – /that perches in the soul –" The poem also references words etched into the gravestone of the poet John Keats.



ANNA JOURNEY

## On the Back of a Flying Fish, Dear Sister

The sound of a flying fish, mid-glide, over waves off Catalina Island resembles the corrugated whirr of a hummingbird or the stutter of a playing card tacked to a bicycle's spokes. I located a vintage postcard online of a small watercolor of a flying fish mailed back in 1908. I bought the weathered blue and yellow memento for my husband, as a reminder of the tiny California island where we'd married just one year before. Where, the night after we said our vows, we climbed aboard the World War I-era *Blanche W.* and sat on the open deck as the wooden vessel sped out to sea, the waves at 8:45 p.m. an even black. The tour boat's 40 million candlepower searchlights enticed the flying fish to leap from the water and coast through the air, parallel with our movements, their silver bodies and ladies'-fan-wings ticking past, lit in the white beams.

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The front of the postcard features a single flying fish poised mid-air, its fluted yellow-washed wings spanning, tip to tip, the width of the painting, the background a smooth, pastel blue. The postcard's ocean lies untroubled, unbroken. No waves or foam break or froth the surface. The flipside of the postcard contains



the painting's opposite—a ripple of turbulence, a hinted-at mystery. I transcribed the spidery, minute, Edwardian-looking script, preserving the letter's irregular spelling, lack of punctuation, and grammatical idiosyncrasies:

Los Angeles Cal

Oct 21—1908

Dear Sister

Well how is the little Girl to Night siting home I s/  
pose like all good girls I received your welkem letter all  
Ok and was glad to hear from you when I told you to be  
good I did not think you would take it the way you did  
for I did not mean it that way hoping you are all Ok a  
gain and don't raid on the cars to much are you mite get  
killed I will say good Night  
yourer Old Friend Mrs. M.B.

If I'd known Mrs. M.B., writing from Catalina Island to her friend Miss Lillian Schafer in Toledo, would bring up a fraught misunderstanding (*when I told you to be good I did not think you would take it the way you did*) or write that casual yet spooky warning about riding in automobiles (*you mite get killed*), I would've picked a different vintage postcard to present my husband on our first anniversary. But this one had an image of a flying fish, and it seemed deliciously archaic, a great find. When it arrived, I shivered reading Mrs. M.B.'s enigmatic tonal jabs. Passive aggression, I thought, must be equally old as love.

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My husband and I like to imagine the nature of Mrs. M.B.'s now-ancient snafu with Miss Lillian Schafer. The joking phrase, "Be good," when told to an unmarried woman in 1908—the precise launch year of the widely affordable Ford Model T—must have come across in a knowing tone, as unseemly advice, something like: "Don't be a loose woman who goes on joy rides alone with Ohio boys in their Tin Lizzies." No wonder Miss Lillian was pissed. An old friend who was close enough to call her "Sister" just insinuated she might be tempted to go for wild rides all over Toledo, courtesy of Henry Ford's newfangled, electric sex wagon. *Be good—wink, wink!* Or is it that Miss Lillian had a habit of taking things personally?

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In my experience, close friendships between women often fall into two categories: sisters and rivals. Rivals take your good news (career-related, romantic, scholastic) as a comparative slight. They keep score. They stifle their resentments. They eventually explode, walking away from your life. Sisters joyfully participate in your successes, their sense of humor matches yours exactly (their laughs never miss a beat as you speak), and they keep picking up the phone, even when you're in tears. Sisters love you without judgment. Sisters love you the way they're able to love themselves. Of my closest two friends, one was a rival and one was—and still is—a sister. The rival was a bright, talented artist who remained in my life for five years in graduate school and stopped speaking to me abruptly in the middle of a misunderstanding. The sister—a visionary



architect and interior designer, intrepid mother of a delightful four-year-old, and the most hilarious, gracious person I've ever met—has been my best friend for fifteen years, since we were freshman dormmates with wavy hair down to our elbows, when I was going through my vegetarian phase which involved eating mostly cheese pizza and when she advised me, good naturedly, not to take a woodworking class because she knew that I'd saw off one of my hands. *You mite get killed*, warned Mrs. M.B.

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I can't tell from the old postcard if Mrs. M.B. and Miss Lillian Schafer were sisters or rivals. The tea-colored letter is brief, like a flying fish's skittering glide through a searchlight, and the language opaque, like black waves lapping at the sands of Catalina and the beaten sides of the Blanche W. What an odd gift to give one's husband to mark a first anniversary—someone else's human drama performed and miniaturized, in three by five inch dimensions, paid for with a Benjamin Franklin one-cent stamp. I'd like to believe that, because Miss Lillian Schafer saved the postcard from her old friend Mrs. M.B., she decided to forgive the slight, and that she might have decided to sit down and write a reply that began, *Dear Sister*.



STEPHANIE DICKINSON

## Mae Anna Whose Dough Always Rises

1919

*Honeylet and I wash in the creek. The thickness of quaking aspen causes a green wind to blow against our skin. She tells me soon she will feel good in her flesh; a baby will be born belonging to her and she to it. No matter if the father is a prairie dog or warrior ghost. The Sisters think she has gone astray, shilly-shallying on her chores and letting a barn boy or one of those clumsy oafs who spread manure on the vegetable garden touch her with more than his glance. Someone has used Honeylet's body like a field. "Who is the father?" I ask my friend. "The older boy who milks the cow Flossie? Is he the father?" She bows her head. She doesn't know. They cornered her. The older boy and another boy. "Mae Anna, will the baby have a third eye in its forehead? Will a horn grow from its nose?"*

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"Father, may I talk to you?" I ask in my quietest voice. "Father Eden, may I have a moment?" I turn to him not only with my mouth but my eyes. He won't refuse me—Mae Anna, his favorite kitchen girl, the one whose shyness reminds him of an antelope. He'll notice the pale sun torching the black of my hair. How pretty she is, he'll think, although he'll catch himself, pretty, yet they smell different, these Lakota girls, like clay or rain on rust, like snow brushed off a rake bearded with dirt—



that is the odor of red skin.

He's standing in the doorway watching us, the three kitchen girls, prepare his and Father Chappy's noon meal. The morning he's spent adding long columns of numbers—up to his ears in Sisseton, South Dakota, Mission Residential Indian School receipts—the yellow bits of paper like shredded rapeweed. I believe he finds it soothing to watch his food being touched by young hands, his buttermilk skimmed from the jug, each ladle flecked with grass fat? He likes how I understand the wood-burning cookstove, knowing when its heat must be kept even and when to fan its embers. I act as if I am happy learning the white ways of dough, its rising and falling, as I wait to slip an egg into my apron pocket. It might be bread sopped in bacon lard I take or raisins. For the hungry little ones who cry at night from the long rows of beds. My red hands are allowed to handle what will enter the priest's white body. My day in the kitchen is like a dream, but not the dream where I can levitate, where I can lift the ceiling and fly through it.

Father Eden's face flushes. Has he only imagined that I've spoken to him? I am cutting potatoes. The tuber's white eyes wink from its smooth purple skin. *See me. See me.* I would like to steal this whole potato and not just its peels. Honeylet runs cold well water over the boiled eggs. More than once he has instructed us about eggs. Let them cool in the palms of our hands, and then run water from the hand pump over them. Honeylet picks bits of brown shell from the egg white.

Some feign not to see her belly, how it grows like a giant tortoise between her pelvic bones, how it fills her schoolgirl dress and apron, how she staggers under its weight. The Sisters



refuse to look at her when she enters the chapel where we take our dawn devotions; there is a change among them, an intake of breath, before their eyes slam shut in prayer. Sister Agatha has questioned her, refusing to take Honeylet's silence for an answer. *Who is the father? One of the older boys?* All the Sisters want to know what we students turn away from; knowledge is dangerous to obtain and hold inside. How pretty Honeylet is—her black plum eyes and lips, her narrow chin, her hair that falls to her knees when unbraided. I've heard Sister Agatha say that her features are white. Awinta, the third kitchen girl, plain and scrawny as tumbleweed, is a listener. Like a star-nosed mole she can snatch food and eat quicker than the eye can see. Two years ago her sister's belly swelled and she was sent away no one knows where. That was before Father Eden came. There are Lakota students who carry tales to the Sisters. I am sure that the flat-nosed Awinta is one of them, a listener.

“Father Eden, may I talk to you?” I repeat, setting aside the potato peeler. The kitchen stops. Only the vat of boiling water keeps talking, keeps bubbling along.

The listener girl goes still. Everything about her poises in readiness.

Does his face show surprise? His eyes are different than the ones the Sisters use for their watching. He laughs when he eats marmalade and oat cakes. His hands are the warm color of a carp taken from the fire wrapped in husks. Father Eden isn't used to a student addressing him directly. How old is this girl? Fourteen? Fifteen?

My chin goes up and my gaze meets his. He's a big man and his blond head and broad shoulders tower over his brother



priests. I am four feet nine inches at the last marking. We kitchen girls clean the priests' rooms with vinegar rag and elbow grease. We learn things. We are the Lakota children the Church has saved from the brutality of the Reservation, teaching us to read and write the white language, and giving us a trade. I am learning the cookstove. Its char and scorch.

In the rectory dining room, the pendulum clock strikes noon. My ears follow the brass bob's swing from side to side, tick-tock, tick-tock, and then the shiver of the chimes striking the hour. Lakota people tell time by the sun, the same way the *pispiža*, and *čhápa* divide the day, the prairie dog and the beaver. When the chimes sound I flinch twelve times.

“Of course, my child, you may speak,” he says, finally. His white collar constricts his pink throat. The gold cross glints against his black cassock. What has this to do with his potato soup and hot bread? Like a hunter listening to the brush, he is cautious.

*My child.* He hides behind those words.

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*I am washing Honeylet's hair, so heavy it feels like rope. I work the braid apart, dividing and loosening it. Because her body is changing, Honeylet tires easily. I tell her to kneel beside me, so we can see ourselves in the river. My eyes, always darting, are like the quick moving water. The true water is inside us, I tell my friend, the clear streams of where we came from and will return to. If you can throw your face into the water and have it look back, your future can be foretold. Sunfish and minnows school around our wrist, rubbing against our fingers with their fins, nibbling.*

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His eyes move to the peeled egg, pristine and white, resting on the countertop in its innocence. “What is it, Mae Anna?” he asks. I feel heat spread in my cheeks. He has put my name in his mouth. I am more than a kitchen girl. “It is something you’d rather speak of in Confession? Something best left between you and God? Some private sin?” Mae Anna, one of the few students who speaks Lakota, and many times has been punished for it.

My back is to the window and shafts of sun strike me. “It’s not my sin, Father. Not Honeylet’s either.” My hands drop to my sides. I smell the soap he rubbed against himself this morning, the wash water’s musky clove. The same soapy clove water I sponged myself with before throwing it out. In the three places Sister Agatha says a girl needs to wash to be clean. Face, underarms, and between the legs. The water he leaves in his drinking glass I finish. I am gathering bits of Father Eden’s power. And I know what there is to be known about him. That he wanted to become a doctor; that his mother had no husband and could not afford to feed him. Brought up in a Catholic Orphanage, he entered the priesthood and before ordination he’d mastered seven languages. They called him The Translator. The majesty of Latin, each phrase a seven-flamed candelabra, he loves. I know what there is to know about him by the etchings left on his writing tablets. The contents of the letters he’s penned leave a trace like tracking a trail of broken twigs. He, too, knows my language. Lakota. He thinks that is his secret.

“Father, soon Honeylet will give birth.”

“A birth not sanctified by holy matrimony,” he says, nervously.



Lakota belief says the child chooses his mother. The child is not only a gift from the spiritual realm but sacred. Honeylet peers warily out from under her bangs, her black eyes piercing like a muskrat's. Yes, he sees birds in her hair too; he again smells rain over rust, the good odor of earth.

“Who will help her deliver?” I ask, thrusting my chin out. “The Sisters?”

His eyes flash: a bolt of blueness off on the horizon. This is not a subject for a girl of tender age even if she is but a generation removed from savagery. “There is nothing to fear in the infirmary,” he says. “The Sisters are good nurses.”

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*Honeylet and I laugh about the mothers of priests and nuns. Who are they? It seems impossible they have human mothers. We guess the Sisters are the offspring of rocks; born craggy and old. In the shade of the black locust, we dangle our feet in the creek. We play with our leaf girls and sew them new dresses from leaves of the silver ash. Their war bonnets we trim with waxwing and dipper feathers. We watch the ants awakening in their tiny forests of grass. We giggle. No white person has ever seen us smile. The Sisters do not believe our faces know how.*

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Father Eden knows he's spoken a lie. The Sisters pretend to care for those in the infirmary. Tuberculosis is rampant and the lungers cough, two to a cot. Boys burn with fever and girls with measles. I know about the notes he makes. His writing tablet contains the etching of sentences he's already sealed into envelopes. The archdiocese expects his monthly reports.



BRUCE SNIDER

## At the Sperm Bank

For fifty bucks you sat there never thinking  
what you'd sold—your mother's green eyes,  
your father's head for math, his heavy  
drinking. Some part of you hadn't lived yet  
might not die, abandoned on a day with so much  
you'd forget—the time, the shirt you wore—  
though you recall blushing as you handed  
the nurse your cup with its small embarrassment  
of riches. And you can see her face. And you  
remember driving home, how your body hummed  
the urge of damp soil: ferment, thorn  
and hay, how all of April moved through you,  
ragweed tossing pollen in a pale froth, leaning  
at the fence break, just giving it away.



JERICO BROWN

## Atlantis

What I stole I took with ease  
Though the sun is the eye  
Of regret that burns on women

Who bend for wages they make.  
What I lost holding my breath  
While those women wallowed

In the name of Jesus underwater,  
I watched from this new land  
Of waxed legs, where God's good

Eye beams, all our teeth white, all  
Our canyons right, sand and sea  
Shimmering like some evening

Gown of a wealthy woman with  
No noticed want, no reason  
To believe the work a grudge

And good distance can do once  
You leave a dangerous city  
Of women below sea level alone.

What I remember about New Orleans  
I never touched—the women,  
Even the youngest call you baby.

