

Spring 5-22-2020

Forgotten Diary

Heather J. Richardson

University of New Orleans, New Orleans, hoppin4@hotmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.uno.edu/td>

Recommended Citation

Richardson, Heather J., "Forgotten Diary" (2020). *University of New Orleans Theses and Dissertations*. 2769.

<https://scholarworks.uno.edu/td/2769>

This Thesis-Restricted is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It has been brought to you by ScholarWorks@UNO with permission from the rights-holder(s). You are free to use this Thesis-Restricted in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/or on the work itself.

This Thesis-Restricted has been accepted for inclusion in University of New Orleans Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UNO. For more information, please contact scholarworks@uno.edu.

Forgotten Diary

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts
in
Creative Writing
Poetry

by

Heather Jennings Richardson

B.A. Mary Washington College, 2001

May, 2020

Acknowledgments

I would like to show my warm thanks to Professor John Gery for his time, feedback, and encouragement. Also, I would like to show gratitude to Professor Kay Murphy and Gina Ferrara for their time and effort in serving on my committee.

Table of Contents

Abstract	iv
I. Preface: Masks and the Self	1
II. Almost	
Lost Inheritance	7
Forgotten	8
Carrot Cake and Cursive	9
Evening	10
Almost	11
We Wear the Mask	12
My Investigation	13
Tidbits	14
Thin Ice	15
Choices	16
Fading into My Self	17
Landscape	18
III. Across the City Line	
Knowledge: Fourth Grade	20
Professional	21
My Child	23
Genderlect: A Lounge Study	24
Acorn	26
Pitstop	28
Ordinary	29
The Rewards of Human Milk	30
Daughter	31
Celebration	32
Works Cited	33
Vita	34

Abstract

“Forgotten Diary” is a collection of poetry in which identity plays an important role. The poet explores the roles she fulfills as a mother, daughter, poet, teacher, and survivor through a variety of lenses. Each poem is an answer to the question of who we are and unveils numerous masks that are worn in the quest for self-fulfillment.

Keywords: poetry, identity, role, mask

Preface: Masks and the Self

One of the first poems that I can recall reading and remembering was Paul Laurence Dunbar's "We Wear the Mask." The words of the first stanza echoed in my ears for hours after reading it:

We wear the mask that grins and lies,
It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes,--
This debt we pay to human guile;
with torn and bleeding hearts we smile
and mouth with myriad subtleties. (Dunbar 71)

Dunbar's poem has an obvious racial thread. Written from the viewpoint of a black man who had endured years of discrimination, it is hard to miss its reference to the myth of the happy darkie. The mask grins in order to fit a certain persona, in this case that of the polite and gracious African American. As Dunbar is careful to show it is the mask, not the person, that is smiling. The "torn and bleeding hearts" are hidden by the trained distortion of the face. The hurt is only revealed to those within the black community, and it is only through the poem that the world is given a glimpse into what lies beneath the mask.

I believe that all people wear a variety of masks to conceal their true feelings, even if not for the same racially motivated reasons that Dunbar refers to. As he is writing, Dunbar wears the mask of a poet. Even as he writes about the mask that he wears, he has created a persona that is then displayed through poetry. Through the selection of certain words, topic choice, details, and point of view, Dunbar is choosing to express himself in a guided manner. He makes choices as a writer to reveal only feelings and ideas that fit his purpose, and the use of specific poetic devices and features are carefully selected to make sure his poem is reflective of one part of himself.

In order to be able to reveal what is behind the mask, certain personae must be adopted. Many people only reveal their true feelings to those closest to them, and they hide their darkest desires, tender thoughts, and most painful moments from the public eye. According to the

Oxford English Dictionary, the Latin origin of the word ‘persona’ meant “mask” and later it became synonymous with a character played by an actor. It is not our authentic selves that are displayed publicly, but rather a face that we can put on or remove as we see fit. This persona, or role, that we play is so common that many of us may not even be conscious that we are merely accepting a part in set circumstances. For example, a fire fighter may become so used to being in the role of hero and rescuer of others that he is unwilling to accept help from others and is reluctant to show vulnerability.

A related meaning of persona can be attributed to the psychiatrist Carl Jung’s studies. Jung believed that in order to understand the human mind, he should look at dreams, myths, art and psychopathology. People’s lives can become unbalanced if they concentrate too heavily on science and logic, so Jung believed they should explore the unconscious in their lives by learning to reconcile the broader world with the individual’s consciousness. Looking beyond the ego, to the symbolic world, is needed to individualize oneself and can be accomplished by investigating dreams, art and religion and how a person operates within society. In his 1928 essay, “The Relations between the Ego and the Unconscious,” Jung identifies the persona as involving

a complicated system of relations between individual consciousness and society, fittingly enough a kind of mask, designed on the one hand to make a definite impression upon others, and, on the other, to conceal the true nature of the individual. (305)

When we face the world, each of us adopts a persona. It has a dual role in that the mask can both hide ourselves and display certain characteristics that we hope will guide others toward seeing us in a certain light. The problem with this system is that it is possible, according to Jung, for us to lose sight of our true natures. An example of this behavior would be someone who relates so heavily with the persona associated with her job that her identity becomes synonymous with her

profession. The expectation of what the person who holds that job should be like can coerce that employee to try to meet or exceed those expectations. In a world where appearances are so vital, it is not an exaggeration for Jung to say in *The Archetypes and the Selective Unconscious*, “the persona is that which in reality one is not, but which oneself as well as others think one is”(Jung 123). As I balance my own roles as a mother, daughter, wife, teacher, and poet, I cannot deny that I am constantly balancing the expectations of each role and shifting my own behaviors, choices, and attitude to conform to what I believe is expected of each of those roles. I am constantly on guard, adjusting and shifting within moments, and often forgetting the person that I was before.

Art as a form of expression can reflect the inner self, but it is not entirely free from its own form of a mask. The artist often chooses the message she wants to send, what form she wants to use to send it, and how she wants the work of art to be received. I believe that when a person decides to write a poem, if the poetic process becomes overly logical or scientific, then the heart of the poem can become buried beneath piles of theory and intent. It is for this reason that the poet should strive to silence her inner critic when writing. One way the poet can do this is to start to write without planning where the poem will go, or how others will see the poet. However, this can become a difficult task if the inner self has been so long guarded that the poet believes her persona is who she is. If the poet has lost sight of her inner self, then it is nearly impossible for the poem to be more than a reflection of her persona.

The poet must not look outside for reassurance; first the poet must look within. If she is overly influenced by criticism, then her poetry may become derivative of others' works. The early twentieth century poet Rainer Maria Rilke gave advice through letters to budding poet Franz Xaver Kappus. In “The First Letter,” Rilke advises Kappus that he should not compare his

work to others, get upset by publishers' rejections, or ask whether his poems are any good.

Instead, he must look inside himself. Rilke suggests, "Go into yourself. Search for the reason that bids you to write." (18) According to Rilke, if the poet looks within herself and sees that she must write, then publication and the opinions of others will not be the judge of whether it is worthwhile poetry or not. Poetry that is "sprung from necessity" is good (Rilke 20). The search for oneself and finding of the inner voice that speaks to the poet may be a key step in locating the true self, if there is such a thing as a "true self."

My own collection of poetry is a cross-section of the roles I play as I attempt to reveal what is hidden behind those roles. Each poem shows a side of myself, selected and created out of my own necessity to write. The poems reflect the masks I wear but none represents entirely my authentic self. For example, the poem "Rewards of Human Milk" reflects on motherhood in a humorous light, poking fun at the way that caring for an infant can bring about the unexpected. However, the poetry I write about suicide and loss derives from a much darker part of myself which I often conceal when wearing the mask of nurturing mother or teacher. As I organized this collection of poetry, I thought of the different masks that I wear and how certain poems seem to be closely tied to others by a certain similarity. The poetry collection shifts in focus from the deeper held secrets and often hidden emotions to the poems tied to the world beyond and outside of myself. Yet every experience is filtered through my own viewpoints, emotions, and reflections, then crafted into the written word. It is possible that somewhere along the way, I have lost the ability truly to identify who I am. Or perhaps, as Alan Murray argues in his essay, "The Lyric I: Poetry and the Self," maybe there is no true self. He asks what "if the self were just a kind of illusion or a notion that we have invented to make sense of an otherwise bewildering and incoherent mass of impressions?" Maybe the lyric I of the poet does not exist at all. Instead,

the self may be a construct that we use to talk about our experiences and the ‘I’ could be a simplified way of using language to refer to our shared experiences. It is hard to say that one true self exists, especially as time passes and we are filled with multiple experiences and contradictory information.

I have begun to identify myself according to how others define me and have become unsure who is buried beneath the closets of masks. Is there a single definition of who I am, when that person is always changing? The self who wrote poetry in my voice of fifteen years ago is hardly who I am today. When I look in the mirror, for a moment the reflection staring back at me is the face that I so often conceal beneath a mask. However, as soon as I start a dialogue with myself, I put the mask on again. It may be impossible to explore my identity, describe the world around me, and talk about my experiences without wearing a mask. Maybe this collection is just a glance at the collection of masks I have created over the years; like light through a prism, I have looked at my life and scattered my thoughts and experiences onto the pages. As Robert Frost wrote in a 1916 letter to Louis Untermeyer, a poem is “a reaching-out toward expression; an effort to find fulfillment”(Plimpton 68). This is my attempt to fulfill my desire to write, which seems to come from somewhere within. Rather than deny that I wear a mask, I have chosen to accept that I wear many masks and each one is an important part of who I was and who I am today. Although I may hold no single, identifiable role in the world, this collection has allowed me to display through my role as a poet the multiple selves that comprise my human experiences, or at least to masquerade as such.

i. Almost

when i write i erase these dark halls
lone subway stops the car followin
too closely how cd i presume
to address my self
-Ntozake Shange “who am I thinkin”

Lost Inheritance

The red asbestos shingles peel, wrinkled
from fifty summers. Oak leaves pile
into green and yellow sandcastles on the roof.

On the kitchen counter, she's left behind
stacks of sales circulars, articles about self-help,
deceased friends, and yellowed recipes never made.

The pink floral French china, crystal vases,
and dusty photographs lie littered among 10-cent specials
and mismatched garage sale fixtures on the table.

In her bedroom closet hang blouses and slacks, stretched
by Jim Bean and cheese-ends. Her daughters will box them
for charity, as her husband's were years before.

In the hall, a grandfather clock stands silent,
pendulum hung stoically, casting a shadow
over the tiny box, a treasure stashed within its frame.

Forgotten

The wet spots in this carpet
never dry, the dampness clinging
like tiny tears, invisible
beneath its crushed brown fibers.

The odor of crushed cake and cardstock
hovers between the sloped ceilings
and the smattering of mate-less socks,
souvenirs, and dusty wedding albums
strewn across the floor.

The once-white walls are adorned
with black, red, and blue trails
of markers, crayon, pen, and paint--
streaks, lines, and loops curled above
lopsided letters whispering
secrets and childhood tales long forgotten.

In one corner, stands a closet, six by two,
fitted with a bulb and chain
that hangs over the slightly
yawning door, and a dead-
bolt that dangles from the frame
like a mouse's tail.

On the walls, blue paint is layered
like clouds glossing over empty sky.
It cannot conceal the age-old shadows
of small handprints, hieroglyphs
that press through the pigment.

For years, the door to this room
has been kept closed, like a forgotten diary,
locked, its key now missing,
ceiling fan whirring a gentle lullaby
to make the dust dance,
while outside on the roof
the snow cloaks the day
in silent white.

Carrot Cake and Cursive

Where coils should rise, my DNA,
twisted in shadows
of gray, dipped too slightly,

written in swirls of gray on blue stone,
clasped by gold fingers
on aunt's ring, left to be forgotten in a dusty box.

The chain around my neck pressed my chest breathless
for weeks until I retired its weight
with her death note and loose change for my future

birthdays long since spent, pizza and arcade dates
digested in sullen celebration.
Beneath the pull-cord of a bulb, dangling

in the basement, waits a box
of grandfather's seashells, a hand-carved model boat
with newsprint still loosely twisted around each item

prepared and mailed to me.
In shaky cursive curls, he wrote: *Keep what you may.*
We ate his last carrot cake, frozen from the box,

squeezing crushed cream
cheese icing from a gallon bag onto each slice.
Toward this self-destruction, my DNA

turns, still missing the part
that will make me whole, like the cordless television
and telescope with no lens

my uncle left me. Before middle age,
he checked his empty suitcase
for the Carolina beach and departed.

Evening

My skin crawls
with yesterday,
each hair on my arm
pulling upward, hands
and feet tingling as if
electricity flows through
my veins, my scalp itching
with bugs only I
can feel. My heart
confused, this panic comes
in quick beats as I lie,

waiting, beneath weighty covers
for sleep. Each minute
on the glowing green
numbers clicking on,
counting towards morning. My feet
twitch. My fingers rub cloth
back and forth—chill and heat,
on and off, until hours from now
the gray light of dawn
will creep across the floor
and my feet will, tentatively,
touch down on the hard
wooden boards.

Almost

To live in a world of almost
is to catch sight of the finish line
but never quite cross it,
or to idealize the mannequin's outfit
but pulling it on, only to find
the zipper doesn't quite zip.

I carry my dreams in a jar,
where through the foggy glass,
I can watch over them. Fingerprints
and little fingernail scratches
mark my feeble attempts to break in.
The metal rim is rusty
with years of tears and sweaty frustration,
and I wonder if the top will ever open
to let my dreams escape. It seems unfair
to leave them in the world
of almost, trapped like fireflies, blinking
more and more dimly, fading
into a purgatory of doubt.

We Wear the Mask

We wear the skin: another guise.
It blushes our cheeks, shadows our eyes.
This debt we owe our fading style--
with glossy teeth bleached white, we smile,
with lips of collagen subtleties.

Why should observers recognize
our valleyed wrinkles, saggy thighs?
No, let them watch us, all the while
we wear the mask.

We sigh, swallow deep, and hide the cries
of the souls we've madly fragmentized.
We smile, but the starvation lies
behind our eyes with tears of bile;
Still let them see another guise
that blushes our cheeks, shadows eyes.
 We wear the mask!

My Investigation

Is it wrong to hope
for murder? To cast some
prayer so blame
will fall elsewhere?
And that I may punish
the one who held the guns
that shot them both?

To hope to hear a stranger say
he's guilty of their murder,
leaning the pair of limp bodies,
like scarecrows, gazing
from a wooden bench
at the sunset over water
as the blood dried around
their blinded eyes?

I told my optometrist it remained
unsolved: waiting for answers,
unable to work. I was too busy
thinking about their deaths
to sit still, until the truth
paralyzed my vision: the killer
was only their wishes
fulfilled, the guilt now my own.

A promised Easter visit I didn't take,
and holiday thank you cards written
but never sent. And as they loaded
the guns, watching the birds dart
across the bay, did they
still believe I'd never come?

Tidbits

Savoring a portion
of my dreams today,

each bite tastes sour
as I waste away.

I know I shouldn't
but anyway--

I'm eating tomorrow
today.

Thin Ice

Lightheaded, I have
shuffled through my days,
my nights then curled in blood-
soaked sleep. Now, the end seems easier
than my own reflection in the mirror.

Before agreeing to go to the rink,
I researched the risks of exercise
in the first weeks, finding plenty of assurances
of safety, a cushion of fluid for the tiny bunch of cells
nestled inside me. My daughter begged us
to do this for her birthday, so I pulled
on our skates, tying them tight
to both my feet and Peyton's.

Leaning over, I grabbed my child's tiny
mittened hands, my rented skates slicing
the ice, as we glided together, and guided
her princess skates between my legs. A shadow
of red coat darted in,

in front of us, a sudden cut,
and my daughter's small frame, like a picture
from a shelf, tipped sideways, tilted
before me, she wavered, arms and hands, mother
and child, twisting, clinging-

pressing her
small hands up as my own legs and back
crashed into the hardness.

Lights above, somehow staring upward into
the eyes of the child who stood over
my body splayed on the ice.

Weeks later, when time comes, on the top
shelf I spy the bottle of pain killers,
never taken. I touch my stomach, wishing
for the soft rise of skin over skin.
I pause. The bottle dares me
to lift it, still full, to my lips, to sip,
then swallow the last month away.

Choices

At 3:15, the bus screeches to a stop.
I watch through the kitchen window
as the children climb down
like wobbly penguin chicks
beneath their oversized packs.
I stare at the smallest ones
while your fingers grasp my thumb.

“Pro-choice” was what the yellowed posters
proclaimed, as if any woman has one.
Sitting in the corridor signed “Waiting Room”
flipping brochures touting birth control
and women’s rights, I never thought
of fingers or toes. Does my mother
still have the credit card statement, five years old:
Richmond Planned Parenthood: \$350.00?

I could stand outside with you, bundled in the blanket
grandma knitted for me, and wait for the kindergarteners
to clamber down the steps. We could wave, as I’d shake
your little palm at the bus. Instead, the children find their parents,
scurrying to warm SUVs and doorsteps while between the kitchen
blinds, out we peer, as if to stake out another life.

When he raped me, I didn’t cry, nor when I scheduled
my appointment, nor when the nurse rubbed
cool gel on my belly, never saw the picture
of the three-week-old silhouette, nor even felt it
being sucked away. I bled a little, but not enough.

Your silhouettes are framed in the living room,
grainy evidence of your evolution inside me.
When the doctor told me to reach down, touch your hair
as your head peeled back my skin, I rubbed the wet
like a hatchling’s plumage. I felt nothing
as the doctor pried you out of me
and placed your body onto mine.
As you clung to me, together we cried.

Fading into My Self

I touch my hand against
the curl of the bark where vertical
ridges end in a bulls-eye
like the patch left from a fall,
unwelcome on the otherwise
rippling, beautiful trunk.

Scars fade from the surface,
absorbed inside, hardened,
broken skin where they ache
sometimes: The mention
on the nightly news of rape,
another woman walking home
grabbed in the park and shoved
into him, within her. The smell
of his breath, mint and cigarettes,
will be scrubbed from her mouth
but months later she will gag
on mouthwash, spitting his semen
from her lips.

I touch the tree trunk and feel
the smoothness where the branch
once reached for the stars,
watching the ants march around
the weakness and search
for a hole to crawl inside.

Landscape

The dew beads on fur, resting on whiskers
and gliding in uneasy strides, bringing
the familiar dampness of a new day.

In the garden of misery, sleepily, slowly
they settle into the mud, as if inviting
the sun fully to swallow the sky.

Among the crisp stalks of yellow-green
grass, pressed to comb across his fur, winds the cat,
a low purr vibrating his half-bent whiskers.

II. Across the City Line

“Everything’s got a moral, if only you can find it.”

The Duchess

– Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland*

Knowledge: Fourth Grade

The Nazi's were evil.

They nailed Jesus to the cross
and fought the Jews in a bloody war.

That is why we have Christmas.

I know all about Hitler from *The Producers*.

Hitler was gay. He
wasn't brave.

He took a pill and died.

No, he had a wife. He shot her.

Hundreds of years ago
they didn't have guns,
did they?

Professional

I try on a skirt, measure it
against the uncovered rounds
of my knees, and in the bedroom mirror,
survey my buttocks' curves.
Satisfied, I pull on neutral stockings,
flat beige shoes, and a striped turtleneck
like a desert over my own scarred terrain.
In a final glance, behind my ears
I smooth the loose hair and conceal my lips
beneath a shimmer of gloss.

On the interstate, when the traffic slows
to a line of brake lights, I shift my stockings
into alignment, then tug up my slipping bra-straps
onto my shoulders. Across the city line,
I pull into the nearly vacant school lot,
slide out of the car, and gingerly attempt
to balance my purse, ID-badge, cup of coffee,
and bag lunch against my chest
before hurriedly teetering across the lot.
I catch my harried reflection in the glass
before I grip the tiny, pixelated
version of my face and across the door frame
skim it like a flat stone. A muffled beep,
and the door unlocks. From down the hallway,
Ms. Smith yells, "You have legs."
I nearly drop every drip
of coffee, full cup sloshing in my shaking
hand, as I stumble, narrowly escaping
into the teachers' lounge. Mid stride,
inside, I meet the daily sarcasm:
"You don't have John today, do you?"

In my head, I calculate the date,
recall his class schedule and mine:
I do. Against the stockings' mesh
I feel the hairs on my legs press
and my cheeks burn pink.

Two hours pass. When I enter room 201,
two girls, hair in cornrows, eyelids covered
in eggshell blue, comment "cute skirt."
I smile cordially, then hear his voice,

“Yeah, you look--” “No, you
may not comment
on what or who I am.” “Damn!”
I hear from the Maybelline cluster, as John
goes silent. My eyes seek an escape
in the hashmark lines of the linoleum floor,
but instead I find it in the desk’s bent metal legs,
my own reflection, distorted as if held
beneath shallow water.
The crooked smile is barely visible
behind my loosened hair.
Shielding my blushed cheeks, I straighten up,
pull my hair back into a stern bun,
and begin passing out the red-marked papers.

My Child

My child wouldn't
be the prankster
to pull a mailbox

down, strike a mirror
from the car,
steal a pizza, then

on the sidewalk, stoop over to
eat it, or pour glue
over the classroom knob and wait,

watch, then post to 4,000
followers on Instagram
a shot of the teacher

stuck.
No.
Not mine.

Genderlect: A Lounge Study

I. Report talk

Two men loudly enter carrying
foot-long subs, kettle chips,
and a case of cola. Feet up,
leaning back, jockeying:
“I deserve a raise
cuz’ I worked so hard.”
“You do nothin’
compared to me.
The door is hanging loose
and the alarm went off again.”

II. Rapport talk

At a nearby table, diet sodas,
where salads abound as two women chat.
Cooperative overlap:
“The kids are crazy.”
“I know.”
“Joe licked his desk today.”
“Yuck!”
“Is it a full moon?”

III. Intersection

Two tables engaging in discourse.

“Sorry, let me move my big butt
so you can see.”

“Honey,
you don’t have a butt.”

“I like girls with curves.
You need something to hold onto.”
“My fifth wife’s got some junk in her trunk.”

“I’ve always been told
my butt is proportionally large.”
“Now I have a big butt, but you
are just straight up and down.”

IV. Miscommunication

A table for two--a day later:

“I been thinking about
what I said.”

“Are you mad at me?
Why aren't you talking?”

“No, not mad.
Just tired.”

“When you wore
that skirt the other day,
it changed my thoughts.
It looked good,
tight and all, so I could see
stuff I didn't before.”

“Uh, thanks?”

“So, this is the last thing
I'll say. You should
wear stuff like that
more often.
The tighter the better.”

“I teach middle school
boys, so the more I can hide,
the better.”

“We should get married?”

Acorn

When they talk
about home
it isn't about
homecooked meals
or big oak tree's
roots that stretch
like gnarled fingers through
the grass, curling
through the dirt,
pushing up
the shaded sidewalks. tripping
young baseball players.
Nor about trips
to the beach where the gulls
steal giant slices of pizza
from plates on the Jersey
boardwalk and kids wait
hours to boast they survived
navigating the Ghost Ship,
while at least one sibling
sniffles in regret. Instead,

they talk of what used
to be, before
their feet touched this pavement.
They've heard
of a department store, clean parks,
playgrounds. They know parents
once tended gardens of gardenias
on small, green postage-stamp lots.
It used to be nice, they say,
before gangs aligned
after one basketball game, boiling
tempers overflowed—an uncivil war
broke out. Born here,
now each of them fills a corner
and block, each a part of it.

Sitting around the lunch table,
they swap tales of shot-up cars.

Nibbling, they share the fear
that waits for darkness creeping
across their shaded stoops,
the nightly chorus of sirens
screaming outside. Between bites
of free fish sandwich and Cheetos,
they recount the funerals and lockups,
and the Friday night touchdowns.

Around this table,
dreams are detailed, sketched,
painted by layers of hope--
tales of escaping
through an open crack
between the row homes
and a corner store. Then,
following a dirt path
past the dealers and skeletons
of burnt-out buildings,
across the city line,
or in stripping
this place to a past that lies
just beneath the crumbling stucco
and Victorian shutters, where maybe
one day a tree might just grow
to catch the toe of a passing child
strolling by on his way home.

Pitstop

With their truck crumpled and alone on a rural road,
the straw-like grass reflecting lines across its scarred body,
among the rows of corn the elderly couple calls for help,
the man madly waving his cell phone in search of a signal.
He doesn't say a word but instead offers her the thermos
full of cold coffee, as they wait for a passing car.
They will drive home to Carolina, he decides.

Then, weeks from now, once she stops shaking,
she will start to forget.
He will climb behind the wheel of a new pickup,
pack her in next to him, and rumble toward New York,
leaving behind the still waters of the inlet,
their garden full of tomatoes, to search
for the light of recognition to grace
her glassy eyes.

Ordinary

In the trenches of attention, each person etches
herself with edicts and formulas, sharpening
minds like blades, armed only with ordinary pencils.

At the front, the chalk dust settles
in the fingertips of one,
a yellow white film settling
across each extraordinary groove.

The Rewards of Human Milk

Breast milk is highly digestible.
-babycenter.com

Mid-diaper change, as I sigh
in contentment at my wiping handiwork
and prepare to exchange the old diaper
for a new one, I hear the warning toot.
No time to drop her ankles.
Her elevated buttocks are an apt launching pad:

her arc perfect, as it curves over
the pine end rail, all across the table
she sprinkles an orange path,
filling the honeycomb holes of the mesh diaper dispenser,
kissing my arm with mustard before leaving a Dada
pattern across the white bedroom door. Her grand finale:
stripes of sweet potato dripping onto the beige carpet
as she proudly kicks her chubby bare legs,
a Renaissance cherub smiling admiring her own work.

Daughter

Her thighs, round, dimpling, pressing
at the edges of her diaper
with a smattering of holes and ripples
like the sand at the tide-line.
Her fists and cheeks redden
in frustration, but quickly ball
around my fingers in an instinctual truce.
Our faces briefly touch in the circular
plastic mirror suspended above,
and she coos with delight.

Now before the bathroom mirror,
her thin legs curving into thighs,
as her chest hints toward
a ripple beneath her t-shirt, her dimples
long since smoothed by soccer games
and squats, a clear gloss shimmers
from her tinted lips that open and press
closed, teasing her reflection
with a kiss. My open hand
clutches the frame of the bathroom door,
as I watch her make peace
with the curls around her ears
and the easy blush of her cheeks.
In the distance, behind her smile
the glass reflects my own.

Celebration

For years, they planned the party,
every detail inscribed
in her careful hand, each cursive letter wavy
like a scallop shell.
The music selected, classical tracks, *Ode to Joy*
opening their soundtrack.

For brunch, they would serve ham quiche,
whiskey sours, baked brie,
and spring mix salad from their favorite
ocean-front restaurant. He'd make
the carrot cake, assuring each slice
measured perfect by memory.

As they wished, they were mixed together
in a white plastic bucket, carried
across the salty marsh by their son
to the cries of grandchildren and gulls,
and songs of Susan Boyle, left
to float briefly on the ripples in the water,
then sink to the muddied bottom,
to rest among the quiet clams and nervous crabs
to the fading sonata echoing from shore.

Works Cited

Adler, Gerhard and R.F.C. Hull, editors. *Collected Works of C.G. Jung, Volume 7: Two Essays in Analytical Psychology*, by C.G. Jung, Princeton University Press, Princeton NJ. 1966.

Dunbar, Paul Laurence. *The Collected Poetry of Paul Laurence Dunbar*. Joanne M. Braxton, ed. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993.

Jung, Carl. *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, Volume 9, part I of *The Collected Works*, Princeton University Press, 1990.

Murray, Alan. "The Lyric 'I' Poetry and the Self." *Poetry Philosophy Psychology*, 24 Nov. 2014, alanmurraypoet.com/2014/11/24/the-lyric-i-poetry-and-the-self/

Oxford English Dictionary. Oxford University Press, 2006.
www.askoxford.com/concise_oed/persona

Pilmpton, George. Ed. *The Writer's Chapbook*. New York: Viking 1989.

Rilke, Rainer Marie. *Letters to a Young Poet*. Joan M. Burnham, trans. Novato: New World Library, 1992.

Vita

Heather Richardson was born in Babylon, New York. She earned a Bachelor of Arts in English from Mary Washington College and an MFA from the University of New Orleans. Today, she resides in Media, Pennsylvania with her husband and three daughters.